

The fiddle in a tune: John Doherty and the Donegal fiddle tradition

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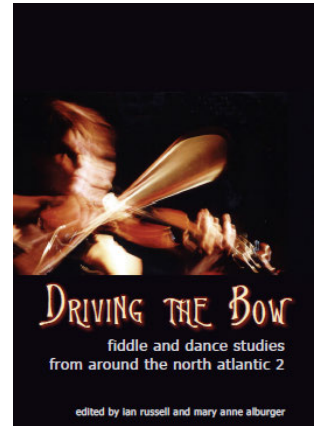
Driving the Bow

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The fiddle in a tune: John Doherty and the Donegal fiddle tradition

EOGHAN NEFF

It is the fiddle's propensity for musical mischief that can instil an abiding concern. For some, the fiddle is a symbol of traditional conformity, while at the same time it is an icon of individual expression. The Donegal tradition encapsulates this dualism, being most persuasively realised during the era of John Doherty (1895–1980) and the travelling fiddlers. This paper initially introduces the fiddle as an instrument that defines Irish traditional music, before outlining a post-revival idealism often at odds with its design. The resulting conflict is explored by means of an ergonomically-based examination of the Donegal fiddle tradition. A considered look at the fiddler's sound aesthetics precedes a detailed analysis of Donegal fiddle music at both a micro- and macro-structural level, revealing an exciting subversion of the established canon.

The fiddle

As the acclaimed Irish music collector, Captain Francis O'Neill observed in 1913, though 'seemingly simple and uniform in construction, fiddles possess marked individuality'.¹ It is this individuality that is poised to erupt into a plethora of distinctive sounds within a traditional milieu; and for this very reason, it seems, the fiddle has adopted a rather confusing role for many in what Hammy Hamilton refers to as the post-revival years of Irish traditional music.²

Tomás Ó Canainn elaborates: 'the fiddle gives the performer the possibility of straying from the tradition and, consequently, its greater flexibility might be considered a disadvantage'.³ However, as Ó Canainn states quite clearly in his opening chapter, the fiddle, together with the pipes, can be considered the two most important instruments in the tradition today.⁴ More significantly, Ó Canainn makes the following assertion: 'it is easier to play traditional music on a traditional instrument than on a non-traditional one and, furthermore, players of traditional instruments have a built-in protection against straying outside the tradition. Their best guide is the traditional instrument itself'.⁵

Despite Carson's very clear declaration that 'there is no such thing as a traditional instrument',⁶ the fact that the fiddle has long been an integral part of traditional music in Ireland secures its position within any definition of that tradition.

One may therefore only assume that the 'best guide' is an instrument unequivocally involved with the tradition that can rely on its own possibilities to hold it within that tradition. This invokes debate on the extent to which one may acquiesce in their instrumental virtuosity within a musical tradition that demonstrates an increasingly rigorous re-imagined set of aesthetics. Though such a subject requires lengthy discussion beyond the scope available here, an attempt will be made nevertheless to provide an introductory argument encompassing a musical ideology – that of Donegal fiddling – at odds with the emergence of an idealized Irish music.

The ideal

Focusing resolutely on the fiddle, this paper will outline the idealized concept as it relates more specifically to this instrument. The fiddling of the legendary Michael Coleman (1891–1945) is widely credited for displacing the regional, and individual, styles of Ireland with his recordings beginning in the 1920s, and it is this legacy that now seems to serve as one of the central manifestos of standardization. A brief look at Coleman's style, and place in time, reveals why this is so. His is the earliest easily available sampling of what traditional music was; something which already denotes value within a regressive musical environment, that is, one obsessed by its own past.⁷ Further inspection uncovers the stylistic attributes that invite the concept of a Coleman ideal. As fiddler Martin Wynne suggested, concerning Coleman's style: 'I think when Michael went to New York, he got influenced by other players and took on what you might call a classical style. There was class in his music and he played with such abandon'.⁸

The paradox of this 'classicism' is that with Coleman it gave him a remarkable ability to take off on virtuosic flights with 'abandon'; however with those inclined toward standardization, it lent itself to a peculiar reproductive quality inherent in classical music. His rhythm, intonation, dynamics, tempo, and drive were all fairly regular, and once mastered by others could subsequently be fabricated. His embellishments were also reducible to a 'catalogue of rolls, cranns, triplets',⁹ so as to form manageable portions to be administered rather than conceived; giving them a permissible recyclability in an effort to manufacture more 'traditional' pieces.¹⁰

Even though the fiddle's endless variety of tones and timbres remain elusive to exact documentation, for the advocates of standardization, the only way of adhering to 'correct' traditional tone is by emulating, or, perhaps cleaning up, Coleman's brilliant tone even further. We now veer from classicism toward 'classicalism'.¹¹ To become great as a traditional performer of the fiddle one is encouraged to tamper with the 'distinguishing mark' of the Irish fiddler by learning precise and brilliant classical tone.¹²

Ergonomics

Sound

The fiddling community in Donegal showed an enthusiastic interest in the varieties of timbral manipulations, most obviously in programmatic pieces. John Doherty's

performance of *Tuaim na Farraige* (or 'The Swell of the Sea'), composed by Anthony Helferty, imitates the sound of waves on the shore, where a steady tempo becomes secondary to the motion of the natural sounds. His brother, Mickey, performs an incredible interpretation of 'The Hounds after the Hare',¹³ where the hunt's every sound is mimicked and the manipulation of tone in the fiddle is a very natural device for the musician to produce this effect in every detail. To be 'guided by one's instrument' again requires that the fiddle amplify its creative palette in ways only instinctive to its constructs.

This also allows the Donegal fiddle tradition to be influenced by both the *Uilleann* and Highland pipe traditions, where droning techniques that utilize alternative tunings, combine with ornamental designs (such as the *craim*) that are more familiar to piping.¹⁴ There is also evidence of influence from an old harping tradition, with John Doherty attributing his use of complicated chordal plucking techniques juxtaposed with regular fiddle bowings to these.¹⁵ Here the fiddle steps outside its more comfortable methodology to mimic other instruments from its own tradition, and yet this is in itself unique to its design. Neilidh Boyle speaks almost arrogantly of the fiddle as a 'perfect instrument', rendering it a superior music tool owing to this very mimicking capability.¹⁶

In Donegal, the instrument was often adjusted, whereby material additions, such as teaspoons, altered the timbral quality enormously. Neilidh Boyle's complex arrangement of three clothes-pegs on his bridge during certain slow-air performances exemplifies such extremes of timbral manipulations.¹⁷ Many of the Donegal fiddlers doubled as whitesmiths and crafted many metal fiddles with distinctive muted tones.

It is important to note here the peculiarities of the fiddle when compared with that of the violin.¹⁸ A flatter bridge with the strings much closer to the fingerboard of the instrument greatly enhances the traditional musician's ability to perform across the range of first position at the rapid tempos demanded by the music genre. The ignorance of many fiddlers today of these subtle adjustments to their instrument puts them at a disadvantage. As craftsmen, the fiddlers of Donegal were in a privileged position to tweak the fiddle so as to further enrich its musical possibilities, becoming thus intimately acquainted with their preferred instrument.

Indeed the range of tune-types found in the repertoire of the Donegal fiddler is seldom elsewhere reciprocated; a proficiency which derives from an encompassing attitude to sounds emanating from places outside of the island of Ireland. Influences from the western art tradition were adopted and transformed freely in Donegal, but it is perhaps of most vital importance that Donegal kept close links with Scotland which not only operated as a resource for work but as a source of music. Both music genres were mutually accessible. The Scotch-snap style of bowing was implemented in Donegal (though somewhat softened during the process of transmission), as well as a healthy repertoire of tune types exclusive now to the Donegal tradition within an Irish context (e.g. the 'highland' and 'strathspey'). John Doherty sums

up this emphatic alertness in capturing sounds emanating from the musician's environment:

The old musicians in them days, they would take music from anything. They would take music from the sound of the sea, or they would go alongside of the river at the time of the flood and they would take music from that. They would take music from the chase of the hound and the hare. They would take music from several things.¹⁹

Micro-structural design

It has often been noted that the Donegal fiddlers used very little by way of left-hand finger ornamentation.²⁰ Though this is somewhat inaccurate, with such demanding tunes, such ornamentation was unnecessary in many cases. Often the melodic contour would shape ergonomically suited patterns that impressed sufficiently upon the listener. The Donegal tradition has been noted for the speed and dexterity of its music. This is made possible through the design (or adaptation) of a tune's melody whereby notable Donegal fiddlers accommodate the instrument thus accentuating its more impressive capabilities. A transcription of John Doherty's performance of the reel 'The Boyne Hunt' (see Figure 1) may help demonstrate the facility of the musician's fingers during particularly quick tempos.²¹



Figure 1 'The Boyne Hunt', John Doherty

The finger patterns involved in the performance of this tune, for instance, though often requiring a certain amount of dexterity, more often follow routes that lie comfortably within reach. The opening passage involves an interchange between the first and third fingers, as can be seen by the numbers above the notes indicating the

relevant finger-stops. The necessary crossing of the strings in this repeating pattern is dynamically suited to an aggressive fast-moving bow, and in his performance, Doherty lets his bow bounce across the two strings thus further impressing upon the listener. He also allows a rather lazy crossing of the strings exposing the concordant sound of the minor-third and perfect-fifth. Doherty incorporates *cuts* and *triplets*, lending an extra heir of virtuosity to this rendition.²² Here the bow does most of the work. The exchange between the first finger (which holds its position on both strings at once) and third finger is deceptively infrequent, as is the latter half of the second bar where the second finger also simply rests on both strings at once.

A similar exchange between the open string and the second finger may also be observed as an ergonomically simple manoeuvre on the fiddle and is briefly illustrated during the opening of bars ten and fourteen. Also of note is the descending scale from the third-finger to the open string on the top string (occurring at bars 13–14) with the second string (or A-string) consistently intervening. Again, this is a feature relatively easily achieved on the instrument. Such leaps can be rendered comfortably on few other instruments and delight listeners when heard on the fiddle, thus serving a purpose similar to that of more ‘conventional’ traditional ornamentation; the fiddle highlighting the tune’s motives in ways only made possible by its very design. What becomes noticeable is Doherty’s reliance on, or cooperation with, his instrument in producing stimulating effects on the ear.

This performance also demonstrates the extremely wide register quite common among fiddle-tunes in Donegal (stretching two octaves and covering all four strings). The melody follows the more accessible pathways for the fingers, strategically positioned to also facilitate such speedy excursions within a relatively short time-span. ‘The Boyne Hunt’ can be heard in alternative keys, and within a more confined register, when performed on other instruments. Michael Coleman also performs this tune in what can be regarded as D major, where the bottom note reaches the open D-string (thus denying the two-octave register), as opposed to the low-A note that Doherty maintains. Doherty’s rendition – in fact being more inline with its Scottish source from late-eighteenth-century Perthshire – is therefore meant exclusively for the fiddle, and thus the instrument lends a defining touch to the Irish traditional repertoire.

The solitude of the soloist may have encouraged this manipulation of a wide register among Donegal players so as to maintain a more impressive texture capable of filling out the sonic spectrum available to them. To note the general absence of wide registers in the Donegal *sean-nós* (or old-style solo song) tradition would imply a fostering of an exclusive instrumental tradition that explores the ergonomic potential of the fiddle. The music is undoubtedly that of the Irish tradition, though ultimately the instrument informs this tradition just as the tradition informs the particular refined use of the instrument. What emerges therefore is a fiddle music developing out of the ergonomic features of its own constructs, and despite some of the aesthetic values entertained during a post-revival present. Fiddler Neilidh Boyle – in his characteristic exuberance – demanded a great appreciation of the singing

tradition by the instrumentalist, and strived to invoke the complexity of the human voice during slow air performances. However, this seemed not to involve a denial of his fiddle's potential as his use of the instrument's register and other stylistic nuances escapes the inherent confines of the voice.

Perhaps more significantly, much of the Donegal repertoire conflicts with the associated dance tradition. It may be observed that during Doherty's return to the first part of 'The Boyne Hunt' that the usual eight bars have been disrupted by a skipping of a beat (here notated as bar 18).²³ This, of course, could become problematic for the dancer. However, instead of concluding that Doherty has made an error, it should be considered that it really would not matter whether the fiddler conforms consistently to the regular eight-bar pulses or not when performing a piece of listening instrumental music.²⁴ The next subsection of this paper demonstrates further inconsistencies through the addition of beats in a part; however, it is useful firstly to point out similar disruptions to the regular dance pulse within the frame of the eight-bar repeats. A wonderful example is found in Con Cassidy's performance of the jig 'The Frost is All Over' (see Figure 2).²⁵



Figure 2 'The Frost is All Over', Con Cassidy – eight bar first part and variations

The customary regular dance pulse emphasises the first beat of every collection of three quavers (the one at the beginning of the bar usually even more so). However, here the melodic progression subverts this rhythmic design in the opening two bars. The final quaver B of bar one gains a rather exaggerated emphasis due to the fall from the preceding high D, as well as by the following return to the high D at the beginning of the next bar. This latter high D serves a more passive function, even though it lies at what usually is the most accented beat of the bar. It is followed by a greater drop down to the note A and, together with the former drop, implies a short sequence shown bracketed in the transcription above. This results in what could be perceived as a change in metre away from the compound one of the double-jig. The high E that immediately precedes this sequence can also claim to be added as part of this compound metre rebellion even though its emphasis also lies within the bounds of 6/8. It is, however, the strength of the B and A notes that

define this destruction of the regular pulse; the high E somehow lending support in retrospect.

Of course, Cassidy's recorded performance on the fiddle further accentuates this apathetic attitude towards the bar-lines that would normally serve to instruct the dancer. Ergonomically, the first-finger note, B, and open-string, A, are much stronger sounding than the relatively dull stoppings by the third-finger for the high Ds, especially due to the inherent descending snapping motion involved. The musician could alter this with some effort of the bow, but Cassidy chooses not to, preferring instead to indulge in the more natural dynamic of his instrument, again highlighting the cooperation between fiddle and fiddler.

The result can prove challenging even to the ear (not only to the feet) that is accustomed to the more regular pulse, and yet Cassidy demonstrates complete comfort in executing such rhythmic anomalies. Included within this transcription are these opening bars as they appear during the initial repeat of the first part of the tune, and again, their first appearance commencing the repeat of the entire tune. These illustrate Cassidy's various approaches when leading into the specific section highlighted here. The initial hearing is quite similar to the third (bars 1 and 9 respectively). However, the upbeat preceding both hearings is different: one, a rapid ascending scale, the other, a more open-sounding quaver. The second and fourth hearings are again quite similar to each other (bar 5 and bar 13), Cassidy only pausing a fraction longer on the initial high D of the first bar for the first of these. However, they are very different from the first and third hearings as they begin with a 'C#' at the first bar instead of the expected high D. This high D appears instead as the second quaver of the opening bar, giving it a rather delayed effect. It never quite fully loses all its weight and thus upsets the bar-lines even further.

The final sample (bars 33–34) presented in the transcription shows a dramatic change at the opening of the first bar. The descending figure from high G through high F# to high E brings us wonderfully back to the first part of the tune after it has been turned (i.e. the second part played through). It momentarily implies a harmonic-like shift away from the expected tonic high D (either delayed or not) that should re-introduce the tune. It is vital that one bears in mind that this shift is not harmonically conceived; my reference to the tonic is solely intent on highlighting the impact of a denial of the normative melodic contour. The facility with which Cassidy approaches this out-of-metre section is remarkable, and the demand of the dancing-beat on the 'traditional ear' must therefore be questioned as something ingrained in the instrumental performer's ear from previous generations.

Macro-structural design

As Hammy Hamilton wrote, 'variations depend for their effect on the contrast that they make with the basic tune, and it therefore follows that this basis must be well known to the listeners'.²⁶ But what is this 'basic tune', and how familiar are the Irish traditional community with its basis? I propose that we have in some unintentional way become over-familiar with what we think is the basis of this music. Ó Canainn

declares, 'there is no art where there are no constraints on the artist'.²⁷ If we accept this as truth, then what should these 'constraints' be? Should their form be represented by notation? If structure were to become the means to this end, then it does seem that there would be a certain redundancy of potential expressive tools as the form takes precedence over individual impulses.

Carson assures us: 'the same tune played by the same musician on different occasions will not be the same tune'.²⁸ But it is the same tune nonetheless. It seems that standardization of macro-structures imposes a decisive regularity by establishing a skeletal fixed frame. It implies a certain construed venture into a confined labyrinth of passageways leading to the same conclusion, that is, the loyal maintenance of the structure. True, the Irish musician, once a desire is met with ability, can decorate the contours of a traditional piece by using a multitude of crafty inflections formed by the tradition and supplied most generously for his amusement at least, or, creative fervour most hopefully. However, can we call these techniques (i.e. ornaments) the essence of individual agency?

When written, an Irish traditional tune typically subscribes to the AABB mode of repetition where each section makes up a total of eight regular bars. However, it is quite prominent, especially among Donegal fiddlers, to conceive of tunes with more than two parts contrary to the linear cyclical model. Examples include Mickey Simi Doherty's rendition of the three-part reel 'The Old Oak Tree' as follows:²⁹ AABB AABB CCAABB AABB. John Doherty manipulates the similarities of two tunes by forming the second tune as some kind of development of the first. 'McFarley's': the first tune has a pattern of AABBAABB, followed by the second tune of AABB, returning to the first tune, AABB, and finally ending with the second tune, AAB. These irregularities even within the standardized time cycle do not serve a purpose for dance. These alterations produce nothing to enhance a pulse for dancing but manufacture interesting designs for the listening ear, and indeed these are very clearly macro-structural designs.

Breathnach cites a minority of purely instrumental pieces in the tradition as we know it today,³⁰ and this in contrast to the qualities of Irish melodies of generations far removed from our own where the magical epiphanies of *goltraí*, *suantraí*, and *geantraí* were manifest.³¹ Breathnach would find it 'wholly fanciful' to apply these terms to our music today, which is more often defined by the associated dance tradition.³² This may be the case, but the suitability for dance of the melodies today should not diminish their role as devices for musicians of this more recent tradition to explore such creativity. It seems reasonable to assume that there has always existed both music for dance and music for listening. This paper does not allow for an in-depth investigation other than the present focus on the Donegal tradition; however, the issues raised are not exclusive to this particular region or time frame.

The Donegal fiddle tradition does seem quite adept at dispensing with the sole concept of the dance music 'round',³³ even contesting these macro-structural norms. There are numerous examples where the 'round' has been disrupted. This

is apart from the many programmatic pieces,³⁴ or the odd tune-types like the brass band marches, or even mazurkas and barn dances with acutely changing metres. It is actually manifested in ordinary dance-tune melodies. Of course, they offer the exploratory dancer some challenging alternatives, and perhaps there were (and are) *sean-nós* dancers who would include these in the more loosely constructed traditional dance form. These appear as 12, 10, 9, 8-and-a-half, or 6 bar first or second parts within a tune where the corresponding first or second part usually remains intact as the usual eight-bar repeat.

Within the community of Irish musicians today, the very implication of actually breaking the structure of the tune itself and its sixteen-bar cycle (the 'round') is problematic to say the least. Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin also notes this whereby, 'the musical essence is clearly within the form rather than being the form itself'.³⁵ Why can this be so? This is in fact the first scheme inherent in the process of standardization. Ever since the creation of the skeletal tune which came about through contact with musical notation, musicians have aspired to embrace a freedom of expression – no matter how deviant – through fleshing out the frame of sixteen bars. Yet, how essential is the sixteen-bar structure? How pertinent is it to defining what a traditional piece is? It is by far the most common configuration of our melodies, due largely to our dancing tradition, but can its rigidity be alleviated for solely musical purposes?

The reel 'John Doherty's' demonstrates a nine-bar first part (see Figure 3).³⁶ The 'turn' (second part) retains the usual eight bars and thus adds further to the asymmetric form. The extra half-bar within the second bar is played twice over with the repeat to conclude as a nine-bar first part.



Figure 3 'John Doherty's Reel', John Doherty – first part

This extra length of a full bar appears unobtrusive to the melodic progression of the tune and is a testament to the solo fiddle tradition whereby such anomalies become fostered by an independent instrumental environment. Attention can only be called to the bar either within the domain of the dance or the ensemble. Though this could not be regarded as a popular or commonly played tune, this nine-bar-first-part reel has persisted in this form.

Possibly most disruptive to the dancer, however, are those tunes that incorporate a half-bar or extra beat, and this is what will be examined next. John Doherty performs an extra half-bar in the second part of his rendition of 'The King of the Pipers' (see Figure 4).³⁷ I have never heard this extra beat reproduced by musicians of later generations. This is a more popular double-jig, and Doherty's addition (whether originally being his or not) has not persisted. This may be in some way due to the standardizing tendency of the post-revival ideal.



Figure 4 'The King of the Pipers', John Doherty

The bar that stands aloof in 3/8 (marked bar 15) at first bears all the trappings of a culprit, being at fault in upsetting the potential dancer. However, this is one of many cases where the notation deceives us, and it is therefore useful to analyse this section aurally, and with the instrument. Doherty's rendition is motivated by the characteristic C-natural note that continually appears at both strong beats of the penultimate bar in every part of the tune, except the second part where it appears once. In fact, both first and third parts of the tune reserve the penultimate bar for any significant appearance of C (it serving only as a passing note elsewhere). Its presence is therefore both obvious and defining of these penultimate bars. The second part of the tune is where we find the extra beat, and also an extra bar when the C note is accented (marked bar 11). Doherty answers the opening four bars of the part with a corresponding, finalizing, four. This would be something commonly found in most tunes where two main phrases per part help define the music.³⁸ The common version of the second part of 'The King of the Pipers' (also known as '*Franc A'Phoill*'), fairly well known throughout the country today, is notated as Figure 5.³⁹



Figure 5 'The King of the Pipers' or '*Franc A'Phoill*' – common setting of second part

The absence of the note C-natural in any important or defining position during the penultimate bar of the second part in this version is clear. The bar made

visually prominent by the 3/8 metre in Doherty's rendition is therefore continuing what elsewhere becomes the beginning of the penultimate bar, and is therefore not relevant as something made from an addition to the part's length. Doherty responds in kind to the third bar of this second part (marked bar 11 in Figure 4) for the penultimate one. However, for him to do so, he needs to bring the melody down within reach after finishing the previous bar in an unsuitable position. It is a very significant ergonomic challenge for the fiddler to leave bar fourteen on the top string (where the second finger stops the string for the final note while positioned beside the first finger), and immediately fall two strings down to a note that requires the same second finger to stop the string at a different position on the finger-board (now lying next to the third finger). And this at the rapid tempo demanded by the double-jig in Doherty's hands.

Therefore, this 3/8 bar, which is similarly conceived as the opening of the penultimate bar during contemporary renditions, aids the fiddler in achieving his preferred rendering of the penultimate bar. Doherty is thus required to slow the melody so as to graft the tune to his musical aesthetic. The ergonomic constraints of the fiddle then inform the final execution of the piece, playing a part in the design of the music. Such a preponderance of evidence suggesting purely musical intent, often borne from the instrument itself, makes Ó hAllmhuráin's observation somewhat untenable:

The renaissance has also witnessed an increased separation between 'performance' music and 'dance' music. Older players, whose sense of rhythm was implicitly linked to set dancing, often felt isolated by younger players who abandoned the traditional dance milieu for the concert stage and television studio.⁴⁰

I must stress here that I'm not intending to imply that Irish music is not dance music. I am merely gathering some evidence to suggest that it was not exclusively so, perhaps even less exclusively so than today. It is interesting to note also that 'the traditional dance milieu' was also contorted by tune arrangements in Donegal. Mickey Doherty's progression from the reel 'The Enchanted Lady' to the jig 'Tatter Jack Walsh' would not be the most typical of tune progression even by today's adventurers.⁴¹ The amount of evidence indicating an extraordinary level of complacency with structure at both micro and macro levels, and its imposing potential standardization, seems indicative of familiarity beyond that which has been subsequently adopted by notions of 'requirement' in an idealized post-revival era. By illustrating the fiddle as having a central role in configuring the musical output of the traditional performer, one may view the present tendency toward standardized performances on the instrument, driven by aesthetic impositions, as something untruthful of the heritage so eagerly sought after.

Conclusion

Often doubling as whitesmiths and handymen, many of the itinerant fiddlers in Donegal were professional musicians. Perhaps there were no concert stages and television studios, but they maintained a professional outlet and indeed a following. They were required to be masters, for it was their ambition to become recognized as musicians capable of dexterity unapproachable by the many other local enthusiasts who could turn a tune quite proficiently. The motivation to exceed mediocrity and succeed financially must have proven a heavy burden in times when people had little to spend on entertainment. The emphasis must be upon individuality. The professional fiddler needs to be recognized as someone unique and extraordinary, and this must have fed the appetite for musical adventure in this corner of Ireland.

Throughout this essay I have documented evidence which helps to confirm the illusion created by forces of standardization, which imply that the basis of the 'sixteen-bar round' is something incorruptible, together with its micro-structural symmetry and metrical unity; that there did not exist a solo instrumental listening tradition apart from the requirements of dance and song; and that this instrumental tradition did not flourish beyond the scope of the associated restrictive aesthetics concocted by well-meaning post-revival enthusiasts. In essence, the 'constraints' controlling the tradition's artists today may not have their bases in the musical past they claim to invoke.

Notes

¹ Capt. Francis O'Neill, *Irish Minstrels and Musicians: The Story of Irish Music* (1917; repr. edn Cork: Mercier Press, 1987), p. 362.

² Hammy Hamilton, 'Innovation, Conservatism, and the Aesthetics of Irish Traditional Music', in *Crossbhealach an Cheoil: The Crossroads Conference 1996* (Cork: Ossian, 1999), pp. 82–87.

³ Tomás Ó Canainn, *Traditional Music in Ireland* (Cork: Ossian, 1993), p. 47.

⁴ In their fiddle tutor, Ethne and Brian Vallely go so far as to suggest that the fiddle is 'the instrument of 20th century Ireland', see Ethne and Brian Vallely, *Learn to Play the Fiddle with Armagh Piper's Club* (Belfast: Regency Press, [n.d]), p. 3.

⁵ Ó Canainn, p. 2.

⁶ Ciaran Carson, *Irish Traditional Music* (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986), p. 11.

⁷ Though earlier recordings do exist, Coleman's remains the most easily accessible early commercial release. See *Michael Coleman: 1891–1945*, Gael-Linn / Viva Voce, CEFCD161, 1991.

⁸ Harry Bradshaw, *Michael Coleman 1891–1945* (Ireland: Viva Voce, 1991), p. 65.

⁹ Carson, p. 22.

¹⁰ This is a list of some of the more conventional ornaments found in Irish traditional music. The *roll* is a fingered ornament usually performed on a single and relatively long note value (or two shorter note values of the same pitch). It divides the main note pitch with a quick progression of three grace-notes: one above the main note, followed by another that returns to the main note pitch, followed by one further grace note below the main pitch, all of which is framed by the main note's beginning and end points. The *crann* is more familiar to the piping tradition and divides a similar note value by a series of descending *cut*-like fingered grace-notes (two or three) above the main pitch, while consistently referencing the main note pitch before, after, and between each grace-note. Incidentally, the plain *cut* simply divides a

main melody note pitch using a fingered grace-note above the main pitch. The *triplet* is then a bowed ornament that divides a main single long note (or a series of three rapidly changing (and usually scaling) note pitches) into a rapid three-note rhythmic embellishment that either uses the more common down-up-down bow-strokes, or the less common alternative up-down-up bow-strokes. See preface to Breandán Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1986), for more detailed documentation on the most common ornaments.

¹¹ I refer here to the western art tradition of violin performance which has often provoked debate amongst the Irish traditional music community due to its varying influence on the Irish fiddle tradition.

¹² Breathnach, *Folk Music*, p. 91.

¹³ Mickey Doherty, *The Gravel Walks*, Comhairle Béaloideas Éireann, CBE0002, 1990.

¹⁴ See note 10.

¹⁵ See Caoimhín MacAoidh, *Between the Jigs and the Reels: The Donegal Fiddle Tradition* (Ireland: Drumlin Publications, 1994), p. 39.

¹⁶ See MacAoidh, *Between the Jigs*, for bibliographical information on some of the most important Donegal fiddlers. Neilidh Boyle was a contemporary of Doherty who embarked on a professional music career, though he was not an itinerant musician.

¹⁷ See Caoimhín MacAoidh, 'The Metal Fiddle Tradition of Donegal' in *Ceol na hÉireann: Irish Music*, no. 2 (Dublin: Na Píobairí Uilleann, 1994), where this process is illustrated.

¹⁸ The differences between the Irish fiddle and western art violin have been much discussed in Irish music literature as they relate to performance practice, stylisation, and overall sound output (see Carson, *Irish Traditional Music*). However, for similar discussions on the physical differences between both fiddle and violin see Linda C. Burman-Hall, 'American Traditional Fiddling: Performance Contexts and Techniques', in *Performance Practice: Ethnomusicological Perspectives*, ed. Gerard Béhague (Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1984), who gives a more detailed examination of this issue as it relates to the American fiddling tradition.

¹⁹ Allen Feldman and Eamonn O'Doherty, *The Northern Fiddler* (London: Oak Publications, 1985), p. 50.

²⁰ See note 10.

²¹ This is a transcription of a complete performance of *The Boyne Hunt* by fiddler John Doherty. See discography.

²² See note 3.

²³ Though it is often difficult to authenticate traditional terminology, I use the generally adopted terms maintained in academic writings on Irish music. One full piece of music (the *tune*) usually consists of two repeating *parts* (and if not repeated, then the divisions are represented by a double bar-line at the end of every *part*). The first *part* is referred to (rather confusingly) as the *tune*. As this makes it difficult to distinguish between an entire piece (*tune*) and the first part of a piece (also *tune*), I reserve the term *tune* exclusively for the entire piece. The second *part* of a *tune* is known as the *turn*. *Tunes* of more than two *parts* will refer to each *part* as 1st *part*, 2nd *part*, 3rd *part*, etc. It is generally accepted that there are eight bars of music per *part*; however, this paper hopefully disputes the apparent rigorous enforcement of this structure.

²⁴ See Damhnait Nic Suibhne, 'The Donegal Fiddle Tradition: An Ethnographic Perspective' in *Donegal: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*, ed. William Nolan, Liam Ronayne, and Mairead Dunlevy (Dublin: Geography Publications,

1995), concerning the definite split between music for dance and music for listening that existed in Donegal among musicians during this time.

²⁵ This is a transcription of sections from Con Cassidy's performance of 'The Frost is All Over'. The opening eight bars are represented here, together with bars 9–10, 13–14, and 33–34 respectively. See Con Cassidy, *Brass Fiddle: Traditional Fiddle Music from Donegal*, various Artists, Claddagh Records CC44CD, 1991.

²⁶ Hamilton, p. 84.

²⁷ Ó Canainn, p. 47.

²⁸ Carson, p. 8.

²⁹ Mickey Simi Doherty, *The Donegal Fiddle*, various artists, RTÉ Music RTECD 196.

³⁰ Breathnach, *Folk Music*, p. 2.

³¹ *Goltraí* was the music that would make one cry, *suantraí* was the music that would put one to sleep, and *geantraí* was the music that would make one merry.

³² Breathnach, *Folk Music*, p. 34.

³³ The 'round' represents one complete performance of a single tune. As every tune is usually repeated at least once, this term also serves the function of differentiating between each subsequent hearing, i.e. 1st round, 2nd round, 3rd round, etc.

³⁴ Examples include the previously mentioned 'Hounds after the Hare', as well as 'The Hen's March over the Midden', etc.

³⁵ Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, 'Innovation and Tradition in the Music of Tommie Potts' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University Belfast, 1987), p. 120.

³⁶ This transcription is a skeletal notation of the first part of the tune, as it is performed by many fiddlers today. John Doherty is perhaps the earliest known source for the tune, and the common title which bears his name suggests that he at least popularised it.

³⁷ This is a transcription of a performance by John Doherty, loosely based on his first round execution only. See John Doherty, *Taisce: The Celebrated Recordings*, Gael-Linn CEFC072, 1997.

³⁸ See also Breathnach, *Folk Music*, chapter 6.

³⁹ This transcription is a skeletal notation of the second part of the tune only, as commonly performed by musicians today.

⁴⁰ Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1998), p. 151.

⁴¹ Mickey Doherty, *The Gravel Walks*.