

MUHL 588: Special Studies in Music: Irish Music

Scott Spencer

University of Southern California

Thursdays 4:00-5:50 MUS 303

scottspe@usc.edu

Draft Syllabus (version: August 24, 2022)

Over the past two centuries, Irish music has flourished despite some of the most dramatic societal changes in the history of mankind. Traditional music and modern musical genres working within the trope of nostalgia have served as markers of cultural identity throughout the Irish diaspora, and have anchored a wide variety of fundamental movements within music - from early Christian chant to the Folk Revival to World Music to Riverdance. This course will view Irish music through a historical survey of musical genres, and will use these examples as a window into fundamental paradigm shifts in music, performance practice, audio technology, and cultural message over the past two hundred years.

Throughout the course, music will be investigated as a mouthpiece for the human condition. As the late Irish balladeer and historian Frank Harte often said, "Those in power write the history, and those who suffer write the songs." Irish music has been a forceful tool in the documentation and personal expression of suffering - from songs written during humanitarian and political struggles, to forms of music being adopted as tokens of sentiment, markers of political views, or performative expressions of solidarity. Our readings and guests will bring us firsthand examples of music being used as vehicles for personal expression - both in the compositional process and through ongoing acts of commodification.

Our analytic lens will also incorporate the music of Irish America and the Irish diaspora, in part to survey the global impact of particular genres and ongoing migration of musical culture, and in part to bring local practitioners and musical scenes to the classroom. Throughout the course, we will use the importance of music to its practitioners and consumers to investigate aspects of the human condition, the expression of self and identity through the arts, and the role of cultural commodification in communications between homeland and diaspora.

The course will begin with an overview of early Irish traditional dance music and song, and will quickly move to early sea shanties, ballads and bawdy songs from maritime Ireland and the seaports of the American east coast. We will move chronologically through cultural upheavals in Ireland and America and accompanying paradigm shifts in media, learning about penny sheets on Broadway and Irish influence on the stages of New Orleans, Boston and New York in the early 1800s. We will hear songs about the Great Famine in Ireland in the 1840s, and hear the stories and sufferings put to music by those who escaped in the greatest mass migration in modern history. The course will cover Broadway and the Irish-American songsters at the turn of the century, as well as the composers writing on Irish themes during the heyday of New York's Tin Pan Alley. We will cover the legendary singers of the early recording age, following Billy Murray and John McCormick from the days of shouting into giant horns to create acoustic 78rpm records through the invention of the electric microphone, radio, shellac and vinyl platters.

We will learn of Captain Francis O'Neill's collection efforts as Chief of Police in Chicago at the dawn of the 20th century, and will follow the early fiddlers such as Paddy Killoran and Michael Coleman as they revolutionized instrumental music in the recording studios of New York, artistically and culturally influencing a homeland struggling for political freedom. The course will delve into the American dance bands of the 1920s, and the showbands and county organization orchestras of the 1940s and 1950s. We will look into the ballad revival, and tease out the reasons why the Clancy Brothers made it onto the Ed Sullivan show and were catapulted to international fame. The course will investigate the entrenched traditional music session scene in The Bronx and Philadelphia, the transition of Irish music into bars in the 1960s, and the various concert series and Irish music camps instituted in the 1970s and 1980s and continuing today. We will investigate the rise of the Irish rock ballad bar tradition, and see bands like U2, the Cranberries and the Corrs take America by storm and revolutionize stadium concerts.

Finally, we will look into the international Riverdance and Lord of the Dance sensations, and will try to contextualize puzzling Celtic Music and New Age Celticism phenomena. The course will end with a look into the new Celtic Rock and Gaelic Hip Hop genres and will discuss St. Patrick's Day, film soundtracks and recent digital trends as well as the recent Fair Plé movement for gender equity in trad music - all as dynamic expressions of Irish and Irish-American identity.

Our analytic window is ideal: the Irish have embraced traditional arts as a form of cultural identity despite the country having shifted from an agrarian to a post-industrial society, gained independence and become a member the European Union, having achieved media access to the greater world, and lead the globe in technology use and production - all within the past century. Irish America has been a model for academic treatises on modern economic transformation, issues of post-colonialism, and examples of the post-modern condition. Traditional Irish-American oral culture has faced massive cultural upheaval as practitioners have embraced a new globalized society and an unprecedented incorporation of technology. Yet, traditional and nostalgic culture has continued and even flourished as a vital marker of identity.

Evaluation

Evaluations will be determined through Readings Responses and/or Field Essays (for a total of three); and one Final Project. The Readings Response and/or Field Essays will count for 50% of the final grade, and the final project will count for the remaining 50%. There will be no in-class exams. Due dates for assignments are noted in the syllabus. Projects can be emailed to the instructor at the above address, or brought to class on or before the due date. Please note that citations are necessary in all work. Aspects of writing expectations will be covered in class. An archival project will be discussed in class, participation in which could offset one or more of the assignments below.

Readings Response

This project will be discussed in depth during class. Intended to exercise analytic and academic writing skills, it will involve selecting a reading covered in the course, analyzing the materials and ideas, cross-referencing the theory within the reading with at least two other readings (from the class or outside readings), and applying the ideas to a particular performance, recording or style of music. This project is intended to encourage active engagement with readings and theory and

promote awareness of cultural aspects of music. A Readings Response should be relatively brief and concise – not more than 5 pages including quotations and any examples.

Field Essays

Field Essays are personal field notes of a musical happening. A Field Essay should include descriptions of the event, reactions to the event, and any follow-ups on the part of the researcher to better understand the event in its cultural context. An event could include a concert on campus or in town, a rehearsal, jam session, dance party or any other live happening involving Irish music. The researcher should share temporal space with the event, or justify the mediated nature of the event (online composing, international synchronized iPod event, online concert). An ideal essay would include a write-up of the researcher's plans and previous knowledge of the music or musicians; a detailed description of the event including time, place, people, crowd, reactions, collective responses, and surprises; further research after the event into what happened and why it happened, which could include interviews with musicians and audience members or further directed readings. Remember to cite references, including personal interviews.

Important note to all fieldworkers: Allow extra time for these projects, as things **will** change in the field. People will be late or will not show up. Events will be cancelled. Be flexible and forgiving. Musicians are usually helpful and cooperative, especially if you approach with respect and interest. Always ask before documenting – especially with video or audio recording devices.

Final Project

A final project will be developed in consultation with the instructor. I am open to a variety of platforms for final projects, provided each reflects a rationalized theoretical grounding and incorporates materials and/or fieldwork appropriate to the proposed study. Citations are necessary. Final projects should be developed and pitched to the instructor by the third week of the course. We will discuss parameters of this project in class. Make efforts to tailor your final project to your own personal interest and/or larger research.

Selected Readings

Our course is inherently interdisciplinary, and will reference selected readings from authors in fields throughout the Humanities. There is no course book. A full list of required and supplemental readings can be found in following pages.

Classes:

Week 1 (August 25)

Introductions, overview, expectations, development of syllabus, basics of Irish music.

Readings:

Breathnach, Breandán. *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*. Chapter 2, "The Structure of the Music"; Chapter 7, "Musical Instruments"; Chapter 3, "Song-Airs and Songs".

Week 2 (September 1)

Songs of the sea, sea shanties, ballad tradition, diaspora. The fields of Ethnomusicology, Musicology, and Irish Studies; writing; fieldwork.

Readings:

Milner, Dan. Unpublished PhD dissertation, "Introduction".

Milner, Dan. Liner notes to *Irish Pirate Ballads*, Smithsonian Folkways.

Ní Bhroiméil, Úna. "The Creation of an Irish Culture in the United States: The Gaelic Movement, 1870-1915."

Week 3 (September 8)

Vaudeville in Irish America and (eventually) Ireland

Readings:

Simmons, Chris. *Vaudeville Times*, V, 4 (Winter 2002-2003). Articles on Harrigan and Hart.

Simmons, Chris. *Vaudeville Times*, VI, 4 (Winter 2003-2004). Articles on vaudeville.

Snyder, Robert. W. *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*. Reprinted

in *Making the Irish American*, (2003).

Week 4 (September 15)

Song sheets, Captain Francis O'Neill, Patsy Touhey, wax cylinders.

Readings response or Field essay suggested due date.

Readings:

Williams, William H. A. *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920*. (1996). Selections.

Carolan, Nicholas. *A Harvest Saved*. Selections.

Carolan, Nicholas and Jackie Small. *The Francis O'Neill Cylinders* cd liner notes. (2010).

Week 5 (September 22)

The recording industry. Early wax cylinder and 78 recordings, Atlantic migrations.

Readings:

Spencer, Scott. "Transatlantic Migrations of Irish Music in the Early Recording Age." *The Irish in the Atlantic World*. David Gleeson, Ed. (2010). 53-75.

Week 6 (September 29)

Irish Catskills, NYPD bagpipe band.
Readings response or Field essay suggested due date.

Readings:

Dolan, Brendan. *Irish Catskills*. Master's Thesis, NYU, 2009. Selections. Spencer, Scott. NYPD Emerald Society Bagpipe Band (forthcoming)

Week 7 (October 6)

Local music in New York City - sessions, concerts. Eagle Tavern / Mona's

Readings:

Moloney, Michael. *Live at Mona's* cd liner notes
Condon, Eileen Mary. "Green Linnet Records: Music for a Changing World." *Journal of American Folklore*, 108:427 (1995), 78-92.

[No class on October 13 – Fall Break]

Week 8 (October 20)

Clancy Brothers to Riverdance

Readings Response or Field Essay suggested due date.

Readings:

Clancy Brothers **TBD**
Casey, Natasha. "Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish-American." *New Hibernia Review* 6.4 (2002) 9-25.

Week 9 (October 27) World Music, New Age Celticism, U2, "Celtic Rock". St. Patrick's Day.
Readings Response or Field Essay suggested due date.

Readings:

Chapman, Malcom. "Thoughts on Celtic Music." *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes. (1994), 29-42.

Week 10 (November 3)

Festivals, competitions, Irish weeks, Irish music camps, *féis*, identity through performance.

Readings:

Moloney, Michael. "Irish-American Festivals." Unpublished manuscript, 2004.

Spencer, Scott. "Traditional Irish Music in the 21st Century: Networks, Technology and the Negotiation of Tradition." *Performing at the Crossroads: Critical Essays on Performance Studies and Irish Culture*. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh, editors. (Dublin: Palgrave, 2009).

Week 11 (November 10) Guest – Gilly Roswell [This class may change]

Modern social commentary: Commitments.

Readings: Watch *The Commitments*, and *Once*, and *The Corrs*

Week 12 (November 17)

Today: Rubberbandits, HipHop, Rap, Rave scenes, boy bands, Fair Plé

Readings:

Whelan, Bill. "Globalising Irish Music," UCD Scholarcast 1 (Spring, 2008). University College, Dublin.

Find YouTube examples of modern groups and songs in Ireland.

[No class on November 24 – Thanksgiving]

Week 13 (December 1)

Student projects and presentations, wrapup.

All Projects must be in around now.

Selected Class Reading Resources (available on the Blackboard site)

____. *Paddy's Resource, Being a Select Collection of Original and Modern Patriotic Songs*. (New York: Wilson, 1798).

Ní Bhroiméil, Úna. "The Creation of an Irish Culture in the United States: The Gaelic Movement, 1870-1915." *New Hibernia Review* 5:3 (2001), 87-100.

Breathnach, Breandán. *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*. Cork and Dublin: Ossian, 1981. Chapters 2, 3, 7.

Carolan, Nicholas and Jackie Small. *The Francis O'Neill Cylinders* cd liner notes. (Milwaukee: Ward Irish Music Archives, 2010).

Casey, Natasha. "Riverdance: The Importance of Being Irish-American." *New Hibernia Review* 6.4 (2002) 9-25.

Chapman, Malcom. "Thoughts on Celtic Music." *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*, ed. Martin Stokes. (Providence: Berg, 1994), 29-42.

Clark, Denis and Lynch, William J. "Hollywood and Hibernia: The Irish in the Movies." in *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views ethnic Groups*. Ed. Randall M. Miller (Englewood, N.J.: Jerome S. Ozer, 1980), 98-113.

Condon, Eileen Mary. "Green Linnet Records: Music for a Changing World." *Journal of American Folklore*, 108:427 (Winter, 1995), 78-92.

Dolan, Brendan. *Irish Catskills*. Master's Thesis, New York University, 2009.

Felter, Maryanne and Daniel Schultz. "James Mark Sullivan and the Film Company of

Ireland." *New Hibernia Review/Iris Ireannach Nua*, 8:2 (Summer / Samhradh, 2004), 24-40.

Ní Fuartháin, Méabh. *O'Byrne DeWitt and Copley Records: A Window on Irish Music Recording in the U.S.A., 1900 to 1965*. M.A. Thesis, University College Cork, National University of Ireland, 1993.

Gedutis, Susan. *See You at the Hall: Boston's Golden Era of Irish Music and Dance*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004).

Gibbons, Luke. *Ireland Into Film: The Quiet Man*. (Cork: Cork University Press).

Greene, Victor. *A Passion for Polka: Old-Time Ethnic Music in America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

Gronow, Pekka. "The Record Industry: The Growth of a Mass Medium." *Popular Music* Vol. 3, Producers and Markets. (1983): 53-75.

Hamm, Charles. "Old Folks at Home', or, The Songs of Stephen Foster." Chapter 10 in *Yesterdays: Popular Song in America*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company)

Harlow, Ilana. "They once were "lost" but now are found: The Chief O'Neill Irish Music Cylinders." Eventually published in Library of Congress newsletter. [file: Smithsonian Wax Cylinders]

Hew, Sheaukang. *Irish Music in Central Oklahoma: An Ethnographic Study*. PhD dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2006.

Kearney, Richard. "The Fifth Province: Between the Global and the Local." *Migrations: The Irish at Home and Abroad*, ed. Richard Kearney. (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1990), 109- 122.

Kenny, Kevin. "Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study." *Journal of American History*, June 2003, 134-162.

McCullough, Lawrence. *Irish Music in Chicago: An Ethnomusicological Study*. PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1978.

McLoone, Martin. *Irish Film: The Emergence of Contemporary Cinema*. (London: British Film Institute). Chapter 9: "Cultural Identity: The American Friend and the European Neighbor."

Meade, Don. "The Composition of Irish Traditional Music." (*Current Musicology*), 289-298.

Meade, Don. "'Kitty O'Neill and Her "Champion Jig.": An Irish Dancer on the New York Stage." *New Hibernia Review* 6:3 (2002), 9-22.

Meade, Don. "Muldoon: A Solid Man." <http://www.blarneystar.com/Muldoon6.4.11.pdf>

Merriam, Alan P. "Ethnomusicology Today."

Miller, Kerby. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

- Moloney, Michael. "Irish-American Festivals." Unpublished manuscript, 2004.
- Moloney, Michael. *Live at Mona's* cd liner notes. 2003.
- Moloney, Michael. "Irish Dance Bands in America" *New Hibernia Review*: 2:3 (1998); 127-138.
- Moloney, Michael. "Irish Music on the American Stage." Sean O'Riada Memorial lecture. Cork: University College Cork, 1994.
- Moloney, Michael. *Irish Music in America: Continuity and Change*. PhD. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1992.
- Moloney, Michael. "Irish Ethnic Recordings and the Irish American Imagination." in *Ethnic Recordings in America*. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1978.
- Morton, David. *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2000).
- O'Connor, Nuala. *Bringing It All Back Home: The Influence of Irish Music*. London: B.B.C. Books, 1991. 91-131.
- O'Neill, Francis, ed. *Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby*. (Chicago: 1910).
- Simmons, Chris. *Vaudeville Times*, V, 4 (Winter 2002-2003). Various articles, Harrigan and Hart.
- Simmons, Chris. *Vaudeville Times*, VI, 4 (Winter 2003-2004). Various articles, vaudeville.
- Snyder, Robert. W. *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*. (New York. Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Spencer, Scott. "Wheels of the World: How Recordings of Irish Traditional Music Bridged the Gap between Homeland and Diaspora." *Journal of the Society for American Music* 4:4 (2010). 437-449.
- Spencer, Scott. "Transatlantic Migrations of Irish Music in the Early Recording Age." *The Irish in the Atlantic World*. David Gleeson, Ed. (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2010). 53-75.
- Spencer, Scott. "Traditional Irish Music in the 21st Century: Networks, Technology and the Negotiation of Tradition." *Performing at the Crossroads: Critical Essays on Performance Studies and Irish Culture*. Sara Brady and Fintan Walsh, editors. (Dublin: Palgrave, 2009).
- Thompson, Emily. "Machines, Music, and the Quest for Fidelity: Marketing the Edison Phonograph in America, 1877-1925." *The Musical Quarterly* 79, 1 (Spring, 1995), 131-171.
- Whelan, Bill. "Globalising Irish Music", UCD Scholarcast 1 (Spring, 2008). University College, Dublin.

Williams, William H. A. *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).