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La crise ? Quelle crise ?

Traditional Music and Irish Society

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pletely achieved, and there is undoubtedly room for many more volumes on the links between politics and music in 19th-century Ireland.

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Martin DOWLING, *Traditional Music and Irish Society – Historical perspectives*, Farnham, 2014, xvii + 350 p., ISBN 978 1 4724 6098 1.

A very personal book by an “outsider” can also constitute an exciting and novel approach to Irish music, combining different disciplines such as history, sociology, musicology, philosophy and, in this case, first and foremost, socio-economics. And this has to be the first book I have read which considers the social history of Irish music in an economic context, with great success and in a very readable style.

Martin Dowling, a fiddle player from the USA, belongs to the soaring number of performers who have gained academic training and gone out of their way to make Irish music a respectable subject in academic circles. As such, he laments in the introduction the almost complete disregard for traditional Irish music in the major explorations of Irish society and culture published in the eighties and nineties by authors such as T. Browne, L. Gibbons, B. Fallon, H. White or R. Pine.

The book then goes on to offer a broad panorama of the musical tradition of Ireland in the making, mostly from the 18th century to today in five thoroughly-researched and well-documented chapters, drawing on painstaking exploration of forgotten archives like the minutes of the Feis Ceoil Executive Committee meetings or the archives of original Gaelic Leaguer Eoin MacNeill.

The first three chapters probably represent the most consistent feature of his multi-faceted research, starting with the reconstruction of a musical tradition by the elites, through a careful assessment of the inchoate nature of the historical narrative of Irish traditional music, then follows an analysis of the impact of the Act of Union on musical practice and class delineations; the third chapter is a minute description of the tensions at work during the cultural revival between the Gaelic League and Feis Ceoil movements, with a general view to explaining how “traditional music evolved as response to [...] economic change and the transformation of social life”.

The last two chapters of the book might not seem as well connected to this initial narrative, but the meticulous and convincing pages on James Joyce’s relationship with music and the revival movement bring to life the actual context of

these formative decades, as did in the second chapter the portrayal of Mrs Delany, a major female figure of the Anglo-Irish elite in the 18th century.

The book closes on the author's personal account and recollections of Northern Ireland's trad scene in the eighties and nineties, and the deep connections between culture and politics that run beneath the surface, in particular in Belfast, where fragmented Protestant identities intensified rather than simplified the challenge of cultural reconciliation after the sixties.

Like most books on Irish music, *Traditional Music and Irish Society* necessarily lies at a crossroads, and appears torn between musicology and cultural studies. What is new here, however, is the feeling that Martin Dowling has gone one step further than his predecessors in the deconstruction of a tradition, with an unembarrassed Marxist approach, the first of its kind for Irish music: the simple juxtaposition of the words modernity and tradition in the introduction will remind us of Hobsbawm and Ranger's classic "The Invention of Tradition" in 1983; freshness also appears throughout the book in the form of an analysis of the class issue, from the reconstruction of the musical tradition by the elites and their speculations on the validity of the peasantry as a reliable source to the more classic study of social classes in Joyce's 'The Dead'; and themes barely touched upon could easily be explored even further, such as the "process of identification based on consumption rather than production", or the distinctively dialectical "culture as both a problem and solution" and the concept of "authentic inauthenticity".

The absence of a general conclusion was my only disappointment when reading this book which nonetheless marks a turning point in the study of Irish music and we can only hope that, following such a significant contribution, academics around the world will prove the author wrong and "really engage with the importance of Irish music in Irish studies".

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Jennifer REDMOND, Sonja TIERNAN, Sandra McAVOY, Mary McAULIFFE (eds.),
Sexual Politics in Modern Ireland, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2015, 190 p.
ISBN 978 0 71653 284 2.

Publié en 2015 par Irish Academic Press, *Sexual Politics in Modern Ireland* est un ouvrage collectif dirigé par quatre universitaires, historiennes des femmes et membres du réseau WHAI (*Women's History Association of Ireland*). Comme