

**FINDING IDENTITY THROUGH IRISH MUSIC
IN THE APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS**

A MASTER'S THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

BY
MARINA DELORES RAYL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

DECEMBER 13, 2018

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. John Benham whose time, support, challenge, and patience was instrumental in accomplishing the completion of this thesis. I appreciate his willingness and guidance throughout this journey. I am also grateful to Dr. Jeffrey Meyer for being on my committee. His academic expertise and efforts to make me a better student and academic writer are greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank the Mathena Family for selecting me as a recipient of their Ethnomusicology Research Grant which made this fieldwork possible. Also special thanks to Dr. Katherine Morehouse who has been an instrumental part of this process. Her ability to set a high academic bar and supply all the tools to achieve the goal is inclusive of her many gifts and are more than can be individually named in this acknowledgement.

There were several people who I am grateful to who helped pave the way and gave input which led me to my thesis selection. Lori Madden, the director of Blue Ridge Irish Music School (BRIMS) in Charlottesville, VA, was my first local Irish music point of contact and a gateway that started me on this path. I would like to thank Augie Fairchild, my tin whistle teacher at BRIMS. Also thank you to Sophie Condron and her father Barry for spending time with me and sharing their love of Ireland and its music. Special thanks to Alex Caton and Pat Egan who are very fine performers in the tradition and graciously gave me the benefit of their experience and knowledge of music in Appalachia. Pat's encouragement to visit the Catskills was the spark that led me to consider it as potential fieldwork research.

While doing a pre-fieldwork scouting trip to East Durham, New York, a man who sat down at my table turned out to be Donal Gallagher, Executive Director, a central figure in the initiation and the ongoing cultivation of both Irish Arts Week and the preservation of Irish culture in the Catskill Mountains. I am very grateful for his hospitality and gracious door-opening to the community. I also would like to give special thanks to Reidin O’Flynn who is the Artistic Director and the organizer go-to for the event. Her generous willingness to help in any need I had in doing the fieldwork was invaluable.

I would like to thank Mairin Ui Cheide, Kevin Crawford, Vincent Crotty, John Doyle, Rose Flanagan, Cathy Jordan, Joanie Madden, Donal Gallagher, and Dan Neely. The interviews with them were the meat of this thesis and I greatly appreciate their sacrifice of time and genuine familial hospitality which made the process easy and fun.

The most important person in accomplishing this goal has been my faithful and loving husband Randy Rayl. His patience, sacrifice, loving support, and occasional motivational “pep talks” have been crucial in this long journey. Thank you.

Marina Rayl

Abstract

The Appalachian Mountains are filled with remnants of Scot-Irish heritage. The music found in this region includes bluegrass, Old-time, and country music, all created from the blending of Scottish and Irish traditional music with other ethnic sounds. Despite these music variations, traditional Irish music has remained consistent in its original form in the mountain region. This concept is supported by the popularity of two key events occurring in both the northern and southern sections of the Appalachians.

Through fieldwork and personal interviews, the rationales of those who participated were discovered. The research brought to light three people sub-groups revealing the three ways they identified with the Irish culture through traditional Irish music and dance. Each event attracted a different primary sub-group which aligned with the mission and objectives of the individual host organizations. Participants found a way to acquire Irish identity in some form. Although specific motivations of cultural identification were unique to the individual, ultimately the participants attended the events to establish, develop, or sustain connection to the culture. The process of learning and making music together facilitated the accomplishment of that goal.

Chapter 1

Introduction

My first engagement with Celtic music in the Blue Ridge mountains occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia where I discovered an Irish school offering classes for fiddle, tin whistle, dancing, and Irish singing. A deep interest in Celtic music has been something I have carried for many years but had not studied in-depth. While looking for a potential first-generation interviewee for a master's class, I found a young teen who was willing to do an interview along with her Irish-born father. It was an informative and entertaining experience with stories of family and Irish history. I was struck with the generous hospitality and open trust which seemed to be a cultural trait.

Shortly after, I decided to take a tin whistle class to fulfill an academic requirement, but also because it was an opportunity to learn more about the culture and the music. During the eight-week class, I participated in a group practice where we sat in a circle and played our various instruments together. This was similar to an Irish *session*, which is an informal music-making gathering that often occurs in local pubs, homes, or other casual environments. The class setting was different with frequent time given to learning the music and rehearsing specific instrument parts. About the third week of class, my teacher invited me to a real session which occurred weekly following the class. The setting was a local pub in Charlottesville that was working to create an Irish persona. It was this experience that opened my eyes to the popularity and amount of Irish music that existed in the area. I started to notice that many of the musicians, singers, and bands at local venues in the greater regional area performed Irish music. What was

intriguing was that a significant number were from Ireland and had moved here to play their music alongside non-Irish musicians.

I soon discovered this phenomenon was happening in other locations throughout the Appalachian mountain regions with gathering Irish music scenes that included week-long events that attract people from across the United States and Ireland. Although, a historical heritage exists for the mountain regions, it did not explain the current popularity and increase of this musical style. This discovery prompted several questions as to why they would travel here. What about the music-making was appealing and what were the motivations of the people attending these events? Included in this research is fieldwork of two Irish music festivals in the Catskill Mountains of New York and the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina.

The purpose of this research is to determine participant reasons for attending two Irish festivals and how heritage and general background play a role in participation by people of Irish descent. Research will occur in conjunction with two festivals of Irish music in the Catskill Mountains of New York and in the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina.

Statement of the Problem

The Appalachian Mountains have multiple ranges and valleys stretching about two thousand miles and through eighteen states from Canada down into Georgia and Alabama. The area has a rich heritage of *Scot-Irish* culture primarily birthed from the diaspora of the Scots who were relocated to Ulster (a former province of Ireland which now consists of Northern Ireland and part of the Republic of Ireland) by James VI and eventually immigrated to America for religious and economic freedom. In the end about “250,000 people left for America between 1717 and 1800 [currently estimating] 20,000 were Anglo-English, 20,000 Gaelic Irish, and the

remainder Ulster Scots or Scotch-Irish, as they came to be called in America” (Blethen and Wood, Jr. 2016, 20).

This cultural legacy is rooted in the Appalachian region, but this heritage does not explain the popularity, rich musical presentation, and growth of Irish music in the current contemporary setting. Frequent informal Irish sessions occur on a regular basis in assorted venues of bars, pubs, residential homes, business, or school settings in the mountain towns. Visitors come from various locations such as Ireland, Wales, and Scotland and others have chosen to relocate in order to be part of the music. Considering that Ireland has a prominent and expressive music scene, it seems an intriguing phenomenon that natives would come overseas to the Appalachian Mountains for Irish music. However, the attraction is evident in the mountains with an extensive history of regular sessions and music-making events.

Need for the Study

An explosive popularity of Irish music has been occurring on a global scale with musical performances of *Riverdance* and *Celtic Woman*. These events seem to be defining the genre of Irish music; but for many natives they do not paint a true portrait of Irish cultural music. In the United States, Irish music has also seen a growth in status and performance attendance mainly in urban areas like Chicago and New York City, but it is the Appalachian rural expanse that seems to call to both locals and native-born Irish alike. This suggests that there may be cultural aspects involved in the musicking which attract its homelander.

To discover why Irish music is popular in this region and how identity is perpetuated through the music would be a beneficial study. It could reveal important information about Irish identity and the connection between the music and the geography. The research could determine

the qualities of culture that not only live in the music-making, but in the relationships, it has to its surroundings and the rural lifestyle of the area.

To the local Irish nationals that perceive popular and formalized productions as not culturally genuine speaks to elements that are not just about the sound, instrumentation, and style. A person's musical identity is partly defined by their own musical preferences. In his design template, Gilboa's *Let's Talk Music Model*, a person's (or cultural) musical style "contains types of music that the person knows but resists and disregards. The fact that there is a negative attitude towards these types of music implies that the person has an emotional connection to the music" (Gilboa n.d, 4). For some native Irish attendees, the dislike of rehearsed and polished presentations for spectators exposed their deep attachment to the traditional music and to the community-building culture. For many of the Catskill participants, the music "sounded better" because it was played in the context of informality, everyday living spaces, and as a way of creating community.

The music-making at Swannanoa was an environment for people who were curious or wanted to learn how to play Irish instruments. They had little or no understanding about the culture. In this case, there was no negative attitude about the music but primarily a lack of emotional bonding. This was a telling trait of the participants and it initiated the discovery and classification of three identity sub-groups. A positive, negative, or an indifferent emotional attitude to a culture and/or its music can reveal something important about the culture. This is a descriptive dichotomy of what I experienced and observed in the traditional Irish music communities of these two events. To characterize and understand the culture in this framework may prove to be useful in other cultural studies experiencing similar phenomena.

Research Question

Two of the strongest cultural features of the Irish are their ability to adapt and willingness to adopt new ideas which makes it difficult to distinguish Irish culture from other cultures in these locales, so the distinction must rely on other features. What are the markers of identity in the music performance practiced in these various rural locations and how is identity contextualized there? Is identity connected to the history or strictly through the music and festival events? What is the importance of the location for Irish citizens that they would trek over 3,500 miles to participate in these rural gatherings? What other qualities beside musical form cultivate Irish culture and a love for it? These questions are part of my investigation into the Irish culture as it exists in the mountains of eastern United States through two music festivals. These music events can give a concentrated understanding of cultural dynamics that are key to identity in the music and the relationship with the Appalachian Mountains. I hope to answer these questions in ways which can further scholarship about this culture in the context of Appalachia cultural life.

Limitations of the Study

In selecting a best course for fieldwork, a study of two music festivals in the Appalachians was chosen because it gave prime opportunities for interviews and ethnographic observations in a limited time frame. This study does not include the cultural study of Irish natives in Ireland. This prevents comparison of Irish culture between Ireland and the Appalachian region by experience, but through interviews with Irish natives, this comparison was addressed.

Prevalent in Irish culture is a number of musical forms including dance, instrumental music, and song. All of these genres were present during the two events at different degrees, but

not all the specific varieties within those genres were represented. In this paper, I will limit my research to those styles performed during my fieldwork. Also, I will not be discussing the technical components involved with Irish music except in a general way and only as applicable to highlighting character traits related to the ethnographic research in Appalachia.

Another significant limitation of the study is the exclusion of other Celtic cultures. The focus of the research is specifically the Irish culture and those of Irish heritage. At one event, several Scottish musicians were performing but as it was a small portion of the event, including it in the study would result in a skewed and narrow perspective.

The word Celtic has a varied meaning and is used in a number of ways to describe culture, musical sound, and religious belief. In preliminary research, the extensive scholarship on defining Celtic was beyond the scope of this thesis. It was also quickly made clear that among the musicians at these events, the term Celtic was often viewed as offensive in description of the music even when used in a reference to cultural style. For the purpose of this study, the music described and researched is solely Irish.

To research this music in the context of travel to Ireland and lengthy cultural immersion may give a deeper perspective of cultural musical aspects that may not be fully comprehended in the event studies. This potential limitation could be lessened with several interviews of Irish nationals on this subject of cultural differences.

Assumptions

One of the research assumptions is grounded in the increasing popularity of Irish music in the Appalachian Mountain regions. This could be attributed to the global hunger for the genre even in places such as Japan where Williams describes it as, “the Irish music scene is by no means the only subculture active in contemporary Japan; it is not even the main one. Yet it is the

only one for its practitioners, who may travel for hundreds of miles by *shinkansen* (bullet train) to attend a single event” (Williams 2006, 110). Although this assumption seems to be true, one aspect that may impact this assumption is the progressive change that has occurred with Irish music over the recent years. Through technology almost anyone can learn to play proficiently, and some excel to the point of impressing long-time musicians. This growing phenomenon seen in many urban locales in the United States and abroad has been instrumental to changing the world’s perception of Irish music culture. This may or may not have a direct link to the music movement in the mountains.

Another assumption is that the Irish identity is partly, if not completely preserved in the area through the vehicle of music. The myriad of ways people identify is difficult to comprehensively address, but music’s role as a tool and catalyst for creating identity will be discussed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Irish music is a unique cultural dichotomy of oral tradition in the midst of a first world modern society. Many reasons may exist for this, but one significant contributor is the accessibility to music resources of how-to videos and websites like *thesession.org*. Technology has led to the globalization of Irish music, making it a popular, familiar, and an easily identifiable genre in both urban and rural areas. However, the musical style, instrumentation, and vocalization of Irish tradition has remained comparatively true to its origins unaltered by the rise of electronic and computer-generated influences. Instruments such as the tin whistle, bodhran, and harp are acoustic and are considered “Irish”. Max Peter Baumann gives ample discourse on the influence of global media where “musical instruments are still attributed with national qualities...[and] to represent a national entity, it quickly emerges that their numbers [global availability and distribution] have increased in past years due to media activity” (Baumann 2000, 128). Even the marketing can be inclusive of names like “Irish tin whistle” or the “Celtic harp”.

Cultural Identity

The exploration into the creation and development of identity is a significant factor in understanding the cultural dynamics at these two Appalachia events. Stephen Benham gives a clear framework for identity and identity construction as “interrelated and interdependent” (Benham 2004, 25). The observable differences between the two events give weight to this interdependence and how identity was culturally and musically expressed. Michael Dietler gave an important contribution of terminology and categorization in the way identity is created, differentiating among “ethno-nostalgia”, bloodline, and a “global spiritual and

emotional” connection (Dietler 2006, 238). His work was invaluable to my research at the Catskill and Smoky Mountain events, helping to distinguish how the attendees culturally identified with the music and both Irish, and non-Irish people.

Dietler also discusses the social role of alcohol “To establish and define” relationships within the culture (Dietler 1994, 46). The sharing of alcohol seems to have a function in the Irish music culture and proved true in my research as well. The use of alcohol is apparent in both Irish culture and Appalachian life.

Poetry and Religion

Another factor in studying the culture is the qualities of language and word style. Tyler Blethen connects speech patterns found in the Appalachian speech to Ireland (Blethen 1994 67). This is curious to note as it may be a clue to the comfortability of Irish natives in the Appalachian Mountains. Patrick Ryan describes empathetic identity of contemporary storytellers find with the Irish, often based on ideas of non-existent traits and commercialized portrayals (Ryan 2006, 325).

The poetic and artful language aspect of Irish culture is tied deeply to religion and faith. Oliver Davies gives powerful insight into this ideology with his research on Irish spirituality. He holds the view that this cultural style enhances the individual’s spirituality. While there is truth to this, there is an argument that it has opened the door for “stories” to become truth in all their good morals, but lacking biblical truth (Davies 1999, 45). Along these lines, Jennifer Phillips argues the Irish culture is “holistic” and mixes with “undesirables" (Phillips 1998, 569). Culturally, the Irish are more interested in loving than in their own purity being marred by the “impure”. Religion’s role in the Irish culture of Appalachia is not known, but many people attend church or at least have a respect of God.

Musical Identity

Music in culture is the mainstay of identity for many people who are displaced from the original cultural environment or heritage. Marion Leonard in his ethnographic research on second and third generation Irish children who have never lived in Ireland found they had a strong connection to the Irish culture through music and dance (Leonard 2005, 527). Doing music together also creates an interlink for the participants not only to the culture but to each other. The attendees could “see themselves as a cultural group because they act together to create the group [which] is formed by shared understandings that are...known to all participants engaged...(Rapuano 2010, 5). The musicians bond in their music-making, sharing well-known songs, skillful artistry, and for some a similar heritage.

Instrumentation

Distinctions are made between various instruments including the voice and their role in the music-making. Between the two Appalachian events, many of the Irish instruments were represented by aerophones (wooden flute, tin whistle, button accordion, harmonica, concertina, uilleann pipes), chordophones (guitar, mandolin, harp, fiddle, banjo), and a membranophone (bodhran) (Kartomi 1990, 169). Matthew Emmick’s in-depth study comparing the Irish and Appalachian fiddle music was a useful source highlighting the complex ornamentation of Irish tunes (Emmick 1995, 22). In Graeme Smith’s research, accordion playing style is critical to stimulating good Irish dance music (Smith 1997, 434). The accordion is well-loved by the musicians and attendees for its versatility and ability to balance the sound of the whistles, flutes, and fiddles.

Thomas Johnston articulates how the tin whistle and wooden flute are key to making the music “instantly recognizable” as Irish (Johnston 1995, 39). The socio-political role of Ireland’s

folk instruments has evolved through the generations from restrictions implemented by oppressive rulers, national symbolism, and new musical roles with global popularization. Adding to this discourse is Lawrence McCullough's extensive analysis on Irish music. The technical components of making Irish music can aid in building identity but call for improvisation and development of personal style. McCullough articulates the nuances of these technical aspects with detail and practical information about rhythms, timing, style, and breathing patterns (McCullough 1977, 85).

Vocals

Catherine Mullins makes connection between specific music forms and certain sung vowels representing a protocol in the singing (Mullins 2014, 103). The use of the voice gives greater ability to take a culturally expressive music and language to an elevated level of emotional demonstration. The variety of sung tunes have a common feature of relating a story. The efficacious lyrics paint a picture and engage the listeners whether it be sad, joyful, melancholy, or balladic.

"Old-style" traditional singing (*sean nos*) is a difficult and highly ornamented art and the privileged opportunity to hear this music form occurred in the Catskills. I will discuss the details of that encounter in another section of this paper. *Sean nos* singing is a deep-throated, resonant, and nasal sounding style. It is quite emotionally provocative in its expression. Holly Hobbs' ethnography study in Connemara Ireland reveals a revival occurring in Ireland with the best singers coming out of familial training and life-long practice (Hobbs 2011, 589). *Sean nos* is not the primary music style anymore but is greatly valued and appreciated by Ireland's countrymen.

Dance

Irish dance is a large section of the Irish music scene with a number of forms and styles. Forms of dance include jigs, slip jigs, reels, hornpipes, step, and group set dances. McCullough explains distinctions of these dance forms giving a basic understanding of Irish characteristics (McCullough 2017, 46). Dance is similar to the instrumental music as it finds its core identity in the group performance. In essence, the *ceili* is a giant high-energy Irish music barn dance. The point is made by Catherine Foley that the *ceili* dances give construct to “place and a sense of cultural identity” for the Irish in Ireland and America (Foley 2011, 49). The group dances are informal and easy enough to engage everyone and create quick bonds among the participants.

Identity in this ethnography is reflected primarily through the music and artistically expressive structures designed for each week-long event. The source material centers around Irish cultural and musical identity with links to the Appalachia regions in New York and North Carolina. Although there has not been any real study of Irish music in these areas, the references for this study should give ample support for the ethnographic research presented in this thesis.

Chapter 3

Description of Research Tools

The Celtic music culture in Appalachia is an oral tradition, which require tools that are qualitative in analysis. To do any quantitative study would most likely be unyielding of good research information. Even in this modern-age of technology the online search of a song would bring up more than a few versions of words and music and often not the one you are looking for. The *tunes* are sometimes similar enough to be recognized but are unique in style and form that make written music more of a challenge to the musician than a help emphasizing the need for a qualitative approach. Interviews were important to the fieldwork, yet this study held a greater level of phenomenological methodology. In order to understand the music and the culture better, I engaged in the variety of musical events including dance and music-making. Also, I participated in a visual art class with an Irishman who has received recognition in Ireland and the United States. My participation and relation-building efforts did have a personal effect on me and I developed a connected cognition to the Irish identity. Although participation was primary for all my research, the yield of the phenomenological study fluctuated based on the given environment. Of the two events I attended and participated in, the second one gave greater results through the interviews than participation. I found the need to adapt my methodology in order to best serve the research goals.

Fieldwork Procedures

To obtain as broad a sampling as is possible with a limited time frame, I observed and participated in two week-long events in July. The first event occurred in East Durham, New York. This is a small rural town in the Catskill Mountains with a thriving Irish cultural life that

is exhibited through the music. I stayed at the Blackthorne Resort which was one of the larger establishments offering accommodations. The Blackthorne has a large lawn area where musicians gathered and played through the evening well into the morning hours.

I attended midday lectures, concerts, music-making gatherings called *sessions*, and daily workshops which were held in local businesses, restaurants, and outdoors. The reasons for this were both practical and cultural. Practically, there was not a large enough space anywhere to house all the different meetings. Culturally, this was true to the environments where Irish music would occur, in houses, pubs, and casual gathering places.

Immediately following this event, I traveled to the event at Warren-Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina. This event was set-up a bit differently as it was geared towards learning rather than experiencing the culture. It also had full days of music events including workshops and sessions, but not as many. The Catskill event was scheduled to provide more flexibility for the participant. This allowed for ample opportunity for interviews and informal conversations whereas the Swannanoa gathering was more structured although beneficial with practical musical information. These events gave me a broad perspective and understanding of the culture and provided enough data to successfully inform this thesis.

Participants in the Study

The participants in this study were both male and female adults over the age of eighteen of various backgrounds. Interviews were conducted with instrumental and vocal musicians of varied experience. Informal conversations and event participation helped to give invaluable understanding of the culture. Every person approached for an interview was happy to participate and were very engaging in their answers and “stories” which supplied ample data for the study. The risk was minimal, and anonymity was assured to anyone who wanted it.

Methods for Data Collection

Data was collected by observation, interviews, informal conversations, media resources provided by the musicians, and ethnographic study including participation. In examining various methodologies, the value of field notes in ethnographic study was highlighted and stressed in the readings. Brian Hoey expresses the approach and magnitude to continually maintain ongoing field notes throughout the ethnographic research in his writings (Hoey 2014, 5). As this is the main way used to record observational study and process experiences, it is necessary to prepare for this prior to the fieldwork. In this culture, this was one of the key methods used to capture and process the fieldwork encounters. Another important tool was the use of electronic recordings both audio and visual for interviews and music performances.

Chapter 4

Fieldwork Research

Identity presents itself in and through a culture by many unique ways. The composition of what exactly identity is comprised of depends on the components, the value placed on those factors, and how they coalesce to form a cultural identity. These individual facets that make up identity are features of “shared values, beliefs, history, customs, traditions, and learned behaviors” (Benham 2004, 15). However, one very important key to culture is the group or community perspective of themselves. Communally, the behavior of the culture’s membership is exhibited and defined by the “shared understandings that are more or less known to all participants engaged in the collective action” (Rapuano and Fernandez 2010, 5).

Traditional music is a revealing illustration of cultural identity and can be influenced by its environment. It has been “characterized by its development over time as a form of social communication in relatively isolated localities” (Fleming 2004, 227). Traditional Irish music is one such demonstration of a style being adapted to the environment in which it finds itself.

Michael Dietler has done extensive study regarding Celtic identity. Although this study is specific to Irish identity, his classification delineation of how people identify themselves is applicable to this research. For ease of understanding, I have created terminology to distinguish the different people represented at the festivals. The first group (*Irish-ethnic*) are those people who identify themselves as Irish not only by bloodline and genealogy but also with language, custom, geography, and biological ethnicity. The second group (*Irish-conscious*) are those who identify by “a global spiritual connection to the idea” (Dietler 2006, 239) of Irish identity. This faction is one that feels connected to the culture but are not of it directly or ethnically. The third

group (*Irish-related*) are those people who are generationally descended Irish but are not directly connected to the culture in practical living. This group entertains more of a nostalgic perspective of identity but may or may not have any deep personal connection or understanding about the culture.

The Catskill Mountains

The Catskills Irish Arts Week Festival in East Durham, New York was the first event I attended. The event is hosted by the Michael J. Quill (MJQ) Irish Cultural & Sports Centre located in East Durham, a small hamlet nestled in the heart of the Catskill Mountains. Although by all counts, it would be difficult to know you were in a town at all. East Durham is very rural with one small general store, a couple places to eat and no gas station. The attraction for tourists consists mainly of one thing, Traditional Irish music. The purpose of this event is to pass on and preserve the Irish culture primarily through music. This area was a place where Irish immigrants would gather, and in the mid-1900s was the place to go, flourishing with large crowds of tourists and the Irish middle-class. Kevin Crawford, a flute player who taught and performed at both events, sums up the experience by saying,

“the Catskills are like Ireland in the 40s...what makes East Durham work is the people who go there...They make it incredibly special. The place itself: there are no real facilities for teaching, you are in houses and little places scattered here and there...the sessions are in different places all over the town and some are massive distances away. It’s even loose in the way it’s organized but it works. The accommodation... atrocious, the food is dreadful, and it’s hard to get to, but it’s a huge success and I loved it. It is all [because] of the people who come there” (Crawford 2017).

Historically, East Durham has been referred to as the Irish Catskills. The Catskills Irish Arts Week offered courses for both non-musicians and musicians including things such as knitting, story-telling, and painting. It was said of the past musicians who came to this region that they “were widely considered among the best whoever struck a note on either side of the

Atlantic” (Ferguson 2016). Today, this statement is still true with world-class and award-winning musicians coming every year to teach and impart their heritage to the next generations. This also could be said of the non-music teachers who came to East Durham.

The festival is a large event with non-stop music found in almost every nook and cranny of the town. Both commercial venues and residential sites open their doors for performances, presentations, and music classes. The classes occurred in the morning and afternoon and were held in small shop rooms, private homes, and even outside. Instruction of several Irish instruments was offered from beginner level to advanced. Dance classes with options of stepdance and *Sean nos* (old-style) singing were given. Also, *Sean nos*, Gaelic, and English language Irish songs were taught. There were other classes of knitting and painting, and youth programs were available with quite a number of youths participating. The educational lessons were deep and abundant yet relaxed, flexible, and undemanding. Along with the classes were lectures and lunchtime presentations with guest speakers of scholarly and/or artistic renown. In all of these educational opportunities, music was in the forefront but always presented in the context of history and culture. Every night sessions, *ceilis* (community dances), concerts, and “listening room” performances occurred. It was not possible to attend every musical event because they would occur simultaneously in approximately six or seven venues. Every night was a different mix of performers, bands, and groups starting in the afternoon and playing till the early hours of the morning.

The small rural town setting with its not-so-perfect older buildings set the stage. In several interviews with some of the Irish-ethnic teachers and performers, the reference of “this is how the music used to be in Ireland” came up. In probing further into this phrase, I discovered that traditional Irish music-making found its roots of people gathering in small kitchens or living

areas playing together. Or a casual time when people would be sitting on a porch on a hot day and someone starts to play a tune on the whistle. The others would quickly grab their instruments and join in. The informal and intimate atmosphere of homes, small shops, and casual gathering places such as local pubs was where the music happened best. These comfortable easy-going venues created safe havens for beginning musicians to learn playing along while stumbling along the way. In Ireland the government, in an effort to preserve traditional music, initiated programs, tourist performances, and highly competitive music and dance contests. Making music together in the rural Catskill Mountains brings the participants back “home”. Creating music in these environments allows more of a focus and enjoyment of the music-making process without the pressure of performance. The main goal of crafting the music is to engage with the community and help others such as dancers, non-music makers, and the group at large to engage also.

Musical Culture and Identity

The most common music performance comes in the form of *sessions*. *Sessions* occur in both public and private settings and can be found in both urban and rural places across the world. In whatever setting, the players gather in a circle to play, although there may be moments of solo performance, generally everyone is playing in a heterophonic texture with improvisation of both regional and individual shaping. For the Irish-ethnic players, their music and the style they play the tune is influenced by the county or city of Ireland they came from, i.e., the Sligo regional music is “much more decorated, all forms of ornamentation being used” (Johnston 1995, 51). The regional music is easily identifiable to Irish natives but can be a challenge for the novice.

The music style is determined by key factors of “articulation, phrasing, and ornamentation” with less emphasis on tone and rhythm (McCullough 1977, 96). In the process

of learning and developing individual style, that is creating a “new” and “unique” style, it is more a process of appropriation and absorption of other styles and recreating it into something new without disuniting from the old (McCullough 1977, 96). This idea is not only culturally descriptive of traditional Irish music but of both historic and current Irish culture in the Catskills.

Thomas Johnston explicates this concept:

19th century Irish immigrants in America used Irish instrumental music, dance, and song to unify Irish enclaves in New York, Boston, and Chicago. Performances brought back nostalgic memories of idyllic villages nestled in the hills of old Ireland, of long-abandoned farms and homes, of relatives and friends for decades. But most of all it came to symbolize Irish ethnic identity and national heritage in the face of a sometimes-hostile social ambience and an alien cultural milieu. (Double-space between paragraphs?)

...The music of a given society comprises a discreet configuration of sounds unique to that society, by virtue of that society’s distinctive sociocultural history. This configuration of sounds results from and is clearly identified by its particular combination of scales, intervals, melodic contours, and rhythms. More significantly, an accompanying set of learned meanings is attached to those sounds.

During social and biological maturation, an individual must learn both the configuration of sound and the meanings with which various sounds have been imbued. Once learned, the configuration represents not only the musical heritage of a people, but a set of personal, nostalgic flashbacks and a family history. (Johnston 1995, 39)

The deep-rooted connection to culture and history was apparent in almost every musical gathering not only in the music but in the conversation and process of learning. The Irish-ethnic performers acknowledged the origination of the tune(s) they played. They gave specific recognition by name of each musician the tune had passed through to get to them. In both formal and informal introductions, reference was given to the county of Ireland from where they came. John Doyle an Irish guitar player, articulates there is a “need to place its origin [and] in learning an original song, I would always say who I learned it from because they haven’t written it, but they have taken the time to learn it and pass it on...to me and I pass it on to someone else [which is] really important to find the [generational] line.... To have the recognition of the people who are carrying the music” (Doyle 2017).

Traditional Irish music is passed on through oral tradition. This is not a unique learning process for many cultures, but what is interesting about Irish music is how the oral tradition has maintained in a culture technologically advanced. Learning the music in this way is part of the cultural maintenance of the tradition. Although written music can be found, the subtleties and nuances of the music are best grasped and understood in learning with another person or group. Historically, if Irish music had been a written tradition, much of it may have been lost. Ireland went through many struggles such as England's Cromwellian campaign which destroyed the harps and put prices on the musicians' heads (Travis 1938, 451). Traditional song maintained even though the harps were gone for a time. It may be that the weighty worth of music to the Irish has been passed generationally through the centuries as well.

In an interview with Mairin Uí Cheide, a singer who taught the Gaelic singing class, she stated, "what I sing is way more important than I who is delivering [it]...because the songs are so old, the emotions and the language are so beautiful...I always make a conscious decision I am going to be as true to the words that I heard...because I feel it's my duty to preserve and conserve that word which is so under siege because it is old...it is ancient, it's so delicate and fragile and it doesn't take very much to alter them..." (Uí Cheide 2017). Uí Cheide's statement conveys a common theme of thought shared by many of the Irish-ethnic performers and teachers.

Great value is placed on the music, and the musician's role is to preserve the music so that it would not be lost. Upholding the music is not the only goal of the culture, but honoring the musicians who taught them and maintaining the way they were taught is a responsibility to be fulfilled. It is in this oral process of passing and carrying on the music where identity is reflected. The construction of identity is a distinctive mark of the identity as both are "interrelated and interdependent concepts...identity as a concept is integral to, and cannot be

separated from, the process of identity construction” (Benham 2004 25). The Irish-ethnic musicians are more than just music-makers, they are the keepers, historians, transmitters, and the builders of not only the music but the cultural character of what it means to be Irish.

Irish Instrumentation

Another contributing factor the Traditional Irish music is the instrumentation with both melody lead instruments and accompanying ones. The melody instruments are “flute, fiddle, pipes, accordion, concertina, whistle, banjo, all of which play together in unison” while the “accompanying instruments include harp, guitar, piano, and bodhrán” (Johnston 1995, 40). Not all the instruments were used in performance during the fieldwork research but there were several instruments which promoted identity and were common to almost every music-making performance. These instruments included fiddle and flute and/or tin whistle.

Fiddle

The fiddle is an instrument which has made its home for generations in the Appalachian Mountains. Although it has undergone transformation in musical style from its original roots of Ireland, fiddle music still seems to have found its favorite environment in Appalachia. Irish fiddle music is a non-negotiable in most Irish music circles. Playing style is technically dissimilar to the symphonic style of play although it is the same instrument. Fiddlers hold the instrument “under the chin but drops at a distinct slope from and below the shoulder...the left-hand wrist is not held at the swan’s neck...[and] the bow is held rigidly about the nut {making its use} restricted mainly to the upper third of its length (Johnston 1995, 51). Sometimes Irish fiddle music is seen as somehow inferior to classical violin music, as Thomas Johnston describes,

It has been said by some that Irish fiddlers lack technique; this is due to a misunderstanding. There are different realms of technique. While they may lack the symphony violinist’s precise execution high up on the neck, they possessed an unsurpassed technique of rolls, slurs, glissandi, and other embellishment idiomatic to

Irish instrumental music, and possess an unrivalled knowledge of the style and repertoire necessary to accompany all forms of Irish folk dance. (Johnston 1995, 51)

It is in the technique where identity can be found not only of Irish heritage but also regional and local styles. Contributing to these relative markers are components of “direction, strength, duration, and frequency of bow strokes, the amount and area of bow employed and the use of double stops or open strings as drones are additional features which contribute to the identity of fiddle styles” (McCullough 2017, 36). The fiddler is often one of two instrument leaders who subtly lead the group musically and with slight physical gestures of eye contact or nods. The other frequent music-making instrument which often leads the tune is the flute or tin whistle, also referred to simply as the whistle.

Flute and Whistle

These two instruments are probably the most accessible, easiest, and quickest as a means to learn Irish tunes. The wooden Irish flute is thicker and more earthy sounding than the Western style metal flute. Most long-time musicians whose instrument of choice is either the flute or whistle can usually play both. In my research, I discovered there usually was one that was favored by an individual player even though he or she may equally be skilled performing on both. Joanie Madden, a musician who also leads the all-female traditional Irish music band *Cherish the Ladies*, is one such player who has won awards for both her flute and whistle playing; however, her best-loved instrument to play is the whistle. Audiences may be somewhat more familiar with her flute playing which she does often play with her band. The reason for this is the flute as a chromatic instrument is more versatile in tuning and leading. To change key with a whistle requires a different whistle as the instrument is tuned to only one specific tonality.

Irish musicians are usually associated with only one instrument. Technical and aesthetic efficacy are the ultimate goals required to be a master musician. The cultural perspective is this can only be achieved through the concentrated practice of a single instrument. Joanie's father, Joe Madden was an All-Irish national champion on the accordion. When he saw musical aptitude in his daughter, he started her playing on the fiddle because "it went well with the accordion" (Madden 2017). Madden didn't like the fiddle, so she then tried the piano before landing on the whistle. Even though she loved it, she had a burning desire to try other instruments, but her father would have none of it saying, "jack of all trades, master of none, you stick with one and get good at that and that's that" (Madden 2017). This point of view is one held by most musicians if not spoken, apparent in practical application.

Even Madden with all her familial musical heritage, commercial success, and personal popularity as a musician, she still credits the person she believes taught her how to play the whistle. It was through records of Mary Bergen playing the whistle that Madden learned how to ornament, stylize, and perform on the whistle. The tin whistle in Ireland held a similar role in music as the recorder holds in elementary schools throughout the United States. It was simply a child's toy to help introduce young children to instrument playing. Bergen is recognized as the musician who revolutionized and made the whistle to be an integral part of the cultural identity of Irish music by showing the world its versatility and musical virtuosity. Bergen was one of the teachers at the Catskills who taught whistle classes and also performed in various group performances. She is considered a legend and paved the way for many whistle players who followed in her steps and who continue to rise up in the younger generations.

Other Instruments of Irish Identity

The button accordion is classified as an aerophone due to the forced wind action creating sound. It is versatile and can be either a lead instrument or chordal accompaniment. The concertina is a smaller, lighter hand squeeze-box instrument and generally was always an accompaniment instrument. These instruments were present in both events but were not the principals in the music-making gatherings I attended. The guitar, mandolin, uilleann pipes, bodhrán, and harp were even fewer in numbers, but single classes were offered for each. Some of these instruments are not as accessible, more expensive, and are not as typical to session-making music. One reason may be that many musicians were roaming travelers and the instruments they played needed to be small and portable. Even today, traditional Irish music occurs primarily in casual places unlike formal Western musicians who often perform in designated venues such as concert halls or auditoriums.

Irish instrumentation is mostly comprised of “chordophones (fiddle, harp, guitar, banjo), aerophones (Uilleann pipes, flute, tin whistle, concertina, accordion), and membranophones (bodhran)” reflecting a “widely differing historical and geographical [origination of] foreign invasion, migration of peoples, colonial settlement, Scottish immigration, Irish emigration, cultural borrowing, as well as independent invention” (Johnston 1995, 57) . This assimilation of historical events, adaptation, and diaspora has impacted Irish instruments to shape what is viewed as Irish today. The instruments themselves are ones that were made of natural elements, connecting to the environment and some believe can only express well the Irish traditional sound. Metal whistles, amplified fiddles, and other electronic alterations to the instruments are sometimes necessary in modern performances yet still seem as a compromise “sacrificing traditional tone for increased volume” (McCullough 2017, 26). Most of the traditional

instruments seem to carry a common characteristic of having the ability to ornament and express emotion and sentiment in bold and nuanced ways. A main characteristic of the music is “the extraordinary variety of emotional expression which, even in the compass of a few bars, many possess” (Patterson 1897, 93). The instrument in which this most apparent in is the singing voice.

Voice

One of the most intriguing cultural elements of Irish singing whether in English, Gaelic, or *Sean nos* (old-style) is the use of lilting and vocables in the music performance. Lilting is a rhythmic and up-lifting cadence style in Irish singing and is a common characteristic. Lilting is a very improvisational and is “not random” in its presentation (Mullins 2014, 103). Through the lilting style, the communication of emotion and “heart” is articulated even when the words are incomprehensible. In the Catskills, I had the opportunity to participate in Ui Cheide’s Gaelic singing class. She sang several songs for us and taught us a number of tunes in Gaelic. It was more than a learning experience as I found it to be more of an impartation of culture, language, and music. Her deep sensitive connection to some of the songs was apparent as she sang, and it translated emotionally to several of the students upon first hearing and not knowing the background or the meaning of the words. Certain insider patterns of singing are culturally absorbed by the region, family, and personal styles imparted over time to the singer. It is somewhat easier to hear the distinctiveness of style in the singing voice than with the playing of a musical instrument.

***Sean nos* Singing**

Sean nos singing was not a class offering but there was an occasion to hear it sung. As the singer started the tune, I had heard there was someone who could sing well in the style and

was looking forward to hearing her sing. When the moment came, I was surprised and didn't instantly like it. The singing was deeper, gruffer, and more chant-like than some other Irish music I was familiar with. The singing fit the melancholy of the song story yet was full of lilting and humming, drone-like vocables. The lilting was less heavy and felt like the words were being pulled down to the ground by gravity as they left the mouth of the singer. As I listened further, I recognized there was something about this music that seemed to move the Irish-ethnic listeners at a different level than myself and others not familiar with the style.

Besides the musical sounds, the song's lyrics were full of clever, beautiful, and funny language and poetry. The various styles of singing had their own way of manifesting the imagery but the story and how it was sung drew the listener in regardless of cultural connectedness. The Irish at the core are story-tellers and express it whatever medium they have at hand, but the primary ways are music and words. Singing combines both to amplify the emotional expression and story of the culture.

Dance

Another cultural art form of identity was found in the dancing. The dance form was as important as the music-making in the building of identity in the immediate events and long-term particularly for the second and third generations of Irish-ethnic adults and children. The dancing helped to "facilitate social interaction, assist in the maintenance of a visible Irish community and offer a way to connect symbolically to earlier family generations" (Leonard 2005, 527). The fieldwork research I conducted affirmed this concept of "facilitation and maintenance". People became more engaged with other members of the community through the action of dancing. Couples would enter onto the dance floor, husbands and wives, mothers and daughters, sisters and brothers, and any other combination of people needed to make a square set of four pairs. As

the music started to play, the people started to move in corresponding steps. Sometimes there was a caller to give guidance, but not usually. People learned the dances the same way the musicians learned the tunes. It was in the doing of the activity, in the corporate setting, where beginners learned how to dance to a reel or hornpipe. The tradition of Irish dance carries components of “sociological ideas as norm, rule, shared understanding, custom, folkway, all referring in one way or another to the ideas and understandings people hold in common and through which they effect cooperative activity” (Becker 1974, 771). Through the shared experiences of dancing, the culture is transmitted cultivating “Irishness”. In dance, this is represented in several different dance forms but with the maintenance of conventional elements across the various styles.

Step Dance

During the events I attended, two primary dance styles were presented. The first was the step dance performed by individuals often dancing in a line. This is not to be confused with the popular *Riverdance* style that has found global popularity. Step dancing has synchronized dance patterns determined by the music being played. The music tunes related to the step dance performed in both the Catskills and the Smoky Mountains are jigs, reels, and hornpipes. James Travis makes a descriptive distinction between them:

The jig tunes are usually 6/8 or 9/8 time. The typical measure in the double jig consists of two triplets of quavers. The single jig is also in 6/8 time, but instead of a triplet of quavers, each beat is usually composed of a crochet followed by a quaver. The slip- or hop-jig, in 9/8 time, shows much more variety in its figuration than the single or double jig. The reel and the hornpipe differ in pace and accent, though both are dances in 2/4 or 4/4 time containing eight eighth-notes. Such a measure would have accents on the first and fifth notes if played in reel-time; but on the first, third, fifth, and seventh, if in hornpipe-time. No Irish marches are slow-paced. They are usually in 6/8 or 2/4 time, though some are in common time. The originals of many dance tunes were perhaps marches.

Tunes in common time often contain beats made up of triplets. A subtler rhythmic variation is secured by raising, lowering, or shifting expected accents. Dance

tunes offer open with accentual subtleties of this sort which suspend the entrance of the governing rhythm for a beat or two. Where a quarter note in a reel is followed by two eighth notes, the three notes are likely to be given a value and an accent which suggest triple time. Nothing is less mechanical than the still living art of Irish dance music. (Travis 1938, 465)

This is a technical look at the music structure but very few Irish musicians would or could explain it in this way. It becomes a learned understanding developed through listening and playing the music. One benefit about the learning process of timing and rhythmic feel is the repetitive nature of the music phrasing.

Another important component in the dance presentation was the type of shoes worn by the dancers. Depending on the particular dance, the dancer would wear a soft or hard shoe. In all the dance performances in the Catskills, hard shoes were used. Soft shoes (also known as light shoes or *ghillies*) are only worn by women and are similar in look to a black ballet slipper with a string lace-up which wraps multiple times above the ankle. The men's version of soft shoe is the black reel shoe which has metal heel clicks to create sound and looks like a jazz shoe. Soft shoe is used for the reel and all the jigs except the double jig.

In all other dance styles, the hard shoe is used including *Sean nos* dancing. The black hard shoe looks like a thick-soled, thick-heeled tie-up style shoe with a single strap across the front of the ankle. It has reinforced toes that allow the dancer to stand on the point of the shoe. Although the informal nature of the events did not require special dress the dancers brought their shoes. Presentations of the step dancing mostly performed by young females who frequently compete in *feis* (dance competitions). The contests are huge events that happen in both Ireland and the northeast region of the United States. Classes were offered in the Catskills for step dance and one teacher, Donny Golden, is a world-class dancer who has won national awards in the United States and abroad. The students who take his class are grateful to have the benefit of his

exceptional talent, skillful teaching ability, and extensive dance performance experience. This level of skillful talent and professionalism was typical of the teachers and stage performers.

Set Dance and *Ceili*

The largest percentage of dancing that took place at both events was set dancing. This is the common group style of dance and occurred when the community gathered, and music was happening often at the *Ceili*. The set dancing was similar to square-dancing consisting of four couples dancing interactively with the others in their “set”. Sets are “autonomous; an entity in itself, irrespective of how many set-dancing groups were simultaneously on the floor” (Foley 2011, 56). After a set was completed, members would create new sets with other pairs “facilitating“ meeting and dancing with numerous people throughout the event which assisted in constructing a sense of community” (Foley 2011, 56).

The specific dance movements were known to the participants and were based on whatever tune was being played by the musicians. The way to learn the dance was to partner with someone who knew the dances and could help teach you. Knowledge is obtained through body activity and engagement which comes only through actual practice (Wulff 2002, 128). However, once you had learned the dance it was universal and no matter what part of the world you were in, the dance steps would remain the same. Sometimes a caller would be on stage to give direction but to the novice clear interpretation of the next move was not obvious. For both events, the ceilis were a highlight for everyone whether a person was actively engaging or not. The week-long festivals both featured an ultimate ceili referred to as the “Great Barn Dance”. For this occasion, all the performers would be in attendance and typically around one hundred tunes would be played and danced to for this two-hour event. This was true for the East Durham dance, but in Swannanoa the band could only play about eight to twelve tunes because many of

the participants had to be taught the dances. Although the music was similar, diverse approaches and goals to the individual week-long events produced very unique experiences.

The Great Smoky Mountains

Swannanoa is a small town outside of Asheville, North Carolina. This gathering was held at Warren Wilson College, a small private liberal arts school integrated on the side of a mountain. The environment was unique for a college as the campus was densely wooded, steeply hilly, and somewhat rustic with narrow footpaths between buildings. Modern conveniences of air conditioning, elevators, and phone reception were limited or didn't exist. The main component for this event was the educational aspect with all-day classes. In the evenings, some kind of music performance occurred largely in the form of a concert. The schedule was full and well-organized functioning in the way a student might expect to have while attending a residential post-secondary institution.

The Swannanoa Gathering's Celtic Week included music classes from other national forms besides Irish, such as Scottish and Welsh music. The goal of the sponsoring college is for students to learn how to play and sing the music of Celtic nations. The structure of the music performances did include a scheduled time for *sessions* although there were a few occasions where a few people would gather and play informally. The evening performances were quite different than the Catskills with seven or eight options of sessions, ceilis, concerts turned into ceilis, and listening rooms. The structure and foundational premise for the Swannanoa Gathering was quite different than the Catskills event. It was during this second event in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina I saw clearly the deeper purpose of the music-making was to expose and teach the music styles and techniques whereas the Catskills festival was about community-building and cultural impartation through the music.

The concert performances were insightful because they were very formal in nature and not typical to how Irish music is traditionally performed. A few performers were visibly uncomfortable playing the music in this context. It was nice to hear clearly the articulation in the music but culturally it felt disconnected to me. Yet through my study and interviews, I realized the attendees for the two events came for very different purposes and identified themselves differently. The individual history, generational influences, cultural encounters, and social beliefs perceive “real-Irishness’ differently depending on their outlook” (Leonard 2005, 523). This fact came to forefront of my mind while at the Swannanoa event.

New Identities

While the Catskills predominantly attracted second, third, and fourth-generation Irish-ethnic, the Smoky Mountains principally drew in the Irish-conscious. All three categories including the Irish-related, were present at both events, however there was an obvious difference between the sets of attendees. In an informal conversation with another attendee at the Swannanoa Gathering, she expressed a feeling of disconnect with the community at large and the event. It took some time evaluating the research, but I think I understand why this was happening to her. Disconnection can happen culturally in any society when certain cultural features are not shared because according to Stephen Benham,

“collective identities (group and society) are formed by groups of individuals who share common characteristics, beliefs, values, or goals. Accordingly, individuals within a specific group may differ in some aspects of identity, such as gender (i.e., male, female) while sharing other characteristics of the group, such as ethnicity or religion (i.e., Ukrainian, Christian). Collective identity is a cultural phenomenon (Smith 1991) and is created through the actions and interactions of individuals who help to create a dynamic tensesgrity within a specific society that can serve either to change or preserve a culture or way of life. It is socially constructed rather than naturally generated (Eisenstadt 1998). (Benham 2004, 33)

The construct of the festival community was determined by the overarching mission and goals of the hosting institution, the environment, and the individuals of that community. Initially, I felt the Swannanoa event would not bear much research value because the cultural elements beyond music, sound, and style was lacking, but in assessing the research material, I realized the value here was in the composite of cultural identity.

The Swannanoa Gathering is a sold-out event every year and often within a month of open registration. The reference to Celtic in the “Celtic Week” title is a popular catchall phrase. Much of the existing Irish music is classified as Celtic in most countries except Ireland. Cathy Jordan who is a talented singer and musician with the Irish band *Dervish*, tells how she was once told to label their albums “Celtic” to up the sales (Jordan 2017). Technology and the accessibility for world travel has globalized Irish music and helped to create Irish-conscious and Irish-related ways of associating with the Irish people. This cultural global phenomenon has succeeded in cultivating the growing “ethnic identities conceived not as essential, stable, static representations tied to a fixed place, but as a moveable, developing, relational process of identification that links traditions of the past with all the dislocations of the world system” (Jenkins 2004, 3). Music has been the leading pathway to providing that cultural connection and certainly the North Carolina experience provided a venue to help the Irish-conscious connect in a deeper way through the music.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The Appalachian Mountains have a deep-rooted history of Scot-Irish heritage tracing back to the diaspora of the 1700s and 1800s. Families forced to emigrate brought with them their culture and through the music of home cultivated community and made ways to create Ireland in America. Traditional Irish music has stayed alive not only in the cities such as Chicago, Boston, and New York where many Irish immigrants settled but in rural areas such as the Catskills and Great Smoky Mountains. These small mountain towns were the weekend getaways reminding them of home in geography and atmosphere. These places became the Irish music hotspots and through the 1900s a deposit of music was nurtured leaving a traditional legacy that continues today.

Two week-long music events that birthed out of this rich cultural custom are the Catskills Irish Arts Week in East Durham, New York and the Swannanoa Gathering in Swannanoa, North Carolina. To answer the questions about why these places are still main events for Irish and non-Irish visitors, I attended both events, participated, interviewed, and observed what made these festivals so popular. The Catskills event had goals of keeping the Irish culture alive and vibrant in America and imparting the heritage of the Irish musicians who had paved the way in their new homeland. The traditions of both music and culture are important to the organizers, musicians, and scholars who taught and led the various happenings. How they accomplished these goals was not only through the playing and learning of traditional Irish music but in classes of other art forms, hosting the classes in small houses and rooms as the music was played historically in

Ireland. They also hosted presentations and lectures about the music and the people who were important contributors to the tradition. Informal discussions with the legends and celebrated musicians gave insight about the culture that could not be obtained through the music alone. The stories, anecdotes, and experiences were shared. Time was given to telling how the tune came to them and who taught them was as important to the music than the actual playing of it. This was a part of the oral traditional process of music learning which honored the preceding musicians.

The event in Swannanoa contrasted greatly, to the point I thought the research may not be applicable, but I discovered the contrasting differences gave important data which helped to identify attendees' motivations and goals towards traditional Irish music. It revealed a new reason why people come year after year to a small mountain town just to play Irish music. Although a lack of non-musical culture was overt, the music itself was prevalent.

Participants learned how to play Irish instruments, dance Irish dances, sing Irish tunes, and how to do it all in an Irish way. The teachers who were first and culturally immersed second-generation Irish, loved the participants interest and desire to learn. All I spoke with were impressed to the skill level of youth and adults alike who never stepped foot in Ireland but could play as well or better than native-born according to several of the interviewees who came from Ireland. The event held a more rigorous class schedule and a more formal approach to presentation.

This setting structure was designed for the primary goal of giving people the opportunity to "learn" Irish music and traditional tunes. Learning how to play and sing Irish music was the doorway for some to potentially connect with the culture. The interviewees all mentioned their pleasure in people wanting to know the music even if they may never understand or be part of the culture. It was an opportunity and the desire of students to learn was affirming of them and

traditional Irish music. In my own classes, a few of the learners would ask questions about the meaning of words and where the song came from. The music education they were receiving made some curious to learn more. Over several lunches and dinners, the subject of heritage and possible Irish genealogical history in the individual's lineage surfaced in the conversation. Even though some attendees asked questions that could be considered culture-related, the main interest was music-specific and not culture-specific. It is this lack of contextual cultural understanding or concern that reflects the dichotomy of the two events. The Catskills event attracted people passionate about the music because of their involvement in the culture and the Smoky Mountains event attracted people who enjoyed the music and were seemingly apathetic to the culture. In New York, the culture was the access to the music and in North Carolina, the music was the potential gate to the culture. However, although no teaching about the culture itself existed, attendees still felt connected to and identified with the Irish in the process of learning the music. This discovery in the research led to determining and recognizing the three individual types of identity.

Conclusions

The study revealed three distinct classifications of cultural identity in all participants associated with each festival. The members were of various ages, backgrounds, and skill levels but all fell into one of the three categories of Irish-ethnic, Irish-related, and Irish-conscious. This terminology helped to establish deeper aspects of understanding about the cultural engagement, motivations, goals, activities, and viewpoints. Using these ideas, interpretation and correct application about cultural identity and ways of identifying could be determined. The Catskills festival gave the attendees a cultural "experience" by enabling the opportunity to not only learn about the music, but about how the Irish people "do" Irish. For my part, I would be classified in

the category of Irish-related as a second- or third-generation descendent; not Irish-ethnic because I am not directly engaged with or living in the Irish or American-Irish culture. However, the Catskills event connected me to the culture, musically and non-musically, where I felt a sense of belonging and these people were my long-lost family.

Others that attended the event had similar experiences and felt more directly engaged with their “Irishness”. The popularity of this festival lies in the purposes of maintaining continuity and direct link to Irish roots much like the early Irish-Americans sought. The teachers come as preservationists, scholars, and conduits of history, culture, and the music. The attendees came for the communal Irish fellowship more than to learn Irish music. They come for the *craic*, the fun and joy of connecting through the traditions. People come to be part of the Irish community. Experiencing the culture is a significant part of what makes this event popular. Families come to immerse their second- and third-generation children into the Irish music and culture. Participants were enabled through the experience to encounter what it means to be Irish.

The contrasts of the Swannanoa Gathering were important to distinguishing the three sub-groups ways of Irish identification. Although it did not have an Irish culture, it did have a culture of its own through the connection to traditional Irish music. Initially feeling a void of culture after the week in New York, I discovered that what I was actually encountering was a different way of identifying. The Swannanoa event catered more to the Irish-conscious and some Irish-related but for many of the attendees, a cultural disconnect existed with any generational line of early Scot-Irish immigrants who had settled in the mountains. Participants travelled to North Carolina for one fundamental reason, which was to learn how to play and sing the music in a traditional way from traditional Irish musicians. The school setting aided the learning environment and the concerts reinforced the focus on learning rather than community

engagement. Even the “Old Farmers Ball” dance was designed to teach set dancing step by step instead of the traditional way of learning by jumping in and doing it. The teachers come here to teach and cultivate appreciation and value of the music to the non-Irish musicians. The attendees come to learn and hear what Irish music sounds like and how to play it. In some ways the Swannanoa event was more popular than the East Durham one as it catered to the non-Irish whereas the other catered to the Irish and Irish-descended. In comparison, the target audience would be considerably larger since traditional Irish music has become widespread across the globe.

In both settings, the element of atmosphere and geography contributed to the diverse goals of each. The Catskills, with its long historical connection to the Irish immigrants, provided a small-town environment which cultivated community engagement and development. The unique mountainside school in the Great Smokies with its traces of Scot-Irish legacy, provided a scenic and separated environment allowing focused learning and the possibility of musical engagement with others. Irish identity consists of many factors and in both events, all the participants considered themselves to hold some degree of Irish identity whether ethnically or in kindred heart. The way a member identified was unique to the individual and manifested in a myriad of ways. Irish culture was represented differently and yet every participant connected if only in learning how to play an Irish instrument or discovering a new family relation from Ireland.

Recommendations

Further study could benefit and give greater depth to this initial research. Although these two events occur annually, each festival has its own unique characteristics depending on those who come to teach, perform, and participate. The organizers of Irish Arts Week have

progressively been making changes in order to cultivate the cultural aspect of the event each year impacting the event schedule and activities. With the goal of preserving culture, adaptation is necessary to keep up with modern times. The Swannanoa Gathering organizers are more consistent with the structure because the learning goals are generally unaffected by societal development. However, each yearly event is different for both locales and an ongoing study over a period of several years could be quite beneficial.

Another recommendation would be fieldwork research in Ireland which could be valuable for understanding cultural dynamics and the role, function, and use of music in comparison to Irish-American culture. Similarly, attending other Irish music festivals in the United States and Ireland could provide new dimensions regarding ways people identify with Irish culture. It could also serve to determine specific differences about music in Appalachia versus other locations. Investigating the American-Irish community in urban areas such as New York City would give added weight to the research of Traditional Irish music in the mountains. The way a community engages in urban areas would possibly be different than in rural areas of an annual event. Additionally, the Irish community in the rural areas aside from the event could garner understanding the culture in terms of continuity and longevity

APPENDIX

Glossary of Terms

Bodhrán – Irish hand drum. Include a picture and organology classification on all instruments.

Ceili - a social event at which there is Scottish or Irish folk music and singing, traditional dancing, and storytelling.

Craic – Fun conversational back and forth of gossip, jest, news, and banter.

Feis – A traditional Gaelic arts and culture festival.

Hard shoe – A hard shoe like a tap shoe used to perform the reel, jig, and hornpipe which is only performed in the hard shoe.

Hornpipe – A tune with a medium tempo and dotted 4/4 rhythm and accents on the first and third beat causing the beat to swing. I think it would be good to give a notated music example of each of these musical forms.

Irish-conscious – people who are not Irish but identify in an emotional or spiritual way.

Irish-ethnic – people who are ethnically Irish and are directly engaged with the culture through custom, language, and geography.

Irish-related – people who are genetically descended Irish but are not in practical ways engaged with or are from the culture.

Jig – A tune in 6/8 time mostly containing both an A and B part.

Lilting – A cultural stylized lifting of notes while singing.

Pipes – Uilleann pipes. I think it would be good to add something of more descriptive nature on this one.

Reel – A tune in 4/4 timing with 4 beats to every measure.

Sean nos – An old, highly ornamented style of traditional singing unaccompanied by music.

Session – Informal musical gathering of musicians to play, often sitting in a circle.

Set dancing – A popular form of folk dance in Ireland usually in sets of four couples.

Slip jig – A tune in 9/8 time with accents on 5 of the 9 beats counting as “and one two-three four-five, and two two-three four-five...” tapping your foot 3 times in a measure.

Soft shoe – A soft ballet-like shoe used to perform the reel, jig, and slip jig which is only performed in the soft shoe.

Step dancing – A dance in which the steps are vigorous and intricate performed with limited hand movement and erect posture.

Trad – A shortened name for Traditional Irish music.

Tune – Irish song is always referred to as a tune.

Whistle – A tin whistle which is a small thin pipe or low whistle which is larger, longer, and requires more breath control to play.

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