IRISH MUSIC INSTRUMENTS

HARP

BARDIC HARP



-dates from the 8th or 9th century

-consists of 3 parts:
- **-the neck** (the curved top of the frame),
- **-the pillar or upright part** (straight in a modern harp but curved in the Irish harp)
- **-the lower part** which connects the pillar and the neck

-has metal strings and the harper plays with their fingernails
-has a bell-like quality to its sound
-the metal strings resonate more more than nylon strings so damping techniques are used
-the oldest surviving Irish harp is the 15th/16th century Brian Boru Harp, which is housed in the Trinity College Old Library
-In 1792, the collector **Edward Bunting** wrote about the Belfast Harp Festival, where **Dennis Hempson** was the only harper who played “in the old style, with long & crooked fingernails”
-the old metal-string harp had declined by the early 19th but much of the music played on the instrument and the techniques that were used were noted by **Bunting** in his book The Ancient Music of Ireland, 1840

NEO-IRISH HARP

-the harp most commonly played today
-it is more slender than the Bardic harp
-it has nylon strings (usually 34) and is played with the fingertips



THE HARPING TRADITION

In Early Medieval Ireland, harpers had a high social status. They were closely associated with poets, who played an important part in the political life of early Irish society. Harpers were the only musicians mentioned in the Brehon Laws, who had independent legal status, and their rank in society was close to that of the lower aristocracy.

The English & Welsh invaders enjoyed the music, but they gradually adopted an anti-Irish attitude and developed legislation against harpers. By the 16th century, very severe laws against harpers were instituted by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. This led to the final collapse of Gaelic society in the wake of the defeat at the Battle of Kinsale (1601). It had serious consequences for harpers as the entire system of patronage that had supported them disappeared.

The next 200 years saw a serious decline from which harping has never fully recovered. Harpers such as **Turlough O'Carolan** (1670-1738) barely eked out a living by travelling the countryside and securing some patronage from the landed gentry.

TURLOUGH O'CAROLAN BIOGRAPHY

O'Carolan came from Meath. He moved to Roscommon and lived under the MacDermott-Roe family. He contracted smallpox at the age of 21 and became blind. Mrs MacDermott-Roe paid for him to get harp lessons. He became a travelling musician and performed around the country. He was influenced by Baroque composers such as Vivaldi. He dedicated his works to his patrons (planxties).

His most famous piece was **O'Carolan's Concerto**.

Throughout the 19th century, the harp had little significance in traditional music compared to the uilleann pipes and fiddle, and its decline was accelerated by the rise in popularity of the piano.

The harpers from Early Medieval Times to the late 18th century were not 'traditional' musicians in the sense that we would understand today. They were members of a social elite rather than musicians who lived among the peasantry. Their music was not dance music but music composed for the aristocracy.

THE HARPING REVIVAL

The second half of the 20th century saw a revival in harping. Harpists/singers like **Kathleen Watkins, Deirdre O'Flynn** and **Mary O'Hara** emerged in the 1960s. A new society called **Cáirde Na Cruite ('Friends of the Harp')** was founded in Dublin in 1960 and still exists. It's aim is 'to restore the harp to its former place of honour and to further interest in harp playing and composition.'

The 1960s and 1970s also saw the emergence of traditional groups in which the harp was a central element, either playing melody or acting as an accompaniment instrument for dance music or song. These groups included **The Chieftains** and **Clannad**.

In the 1970s and 80s, **Máire Ní Chathasaigh** developed new techniques for playing dance music on the harp and has even played bluegrass on the instrument (video). Also at this time, albums devoted exclusively to the work of Turlough O'Carolan were recorded.

Despite these developments, many traditional musicians would not see the harp as a traditional instrument. It is only rarely found in pub sessions, largely because of it's size and the problem of portability. For many, the harp still carries associations with an ancient, aristocratic past and a repertoire that is quite different to dance music.

UILLEANN PIPES



-often referred to as 'Irish bagpipes'
-from the Irish word uille, meaning 'elbow'
-developed in Ireland in the early 18th century

Parts of the Instrument

Chanter - fitted with a double reed (like the oboe) and sounds when air from the bag is supplied at the right pressure.
Bellows - the bag is supplied with air by the bellows, which is strapped to the player's right arm, just above the elbow.
Bag - which the top of the chanter is fitted, and made of leather, plastic or rubber.
Main Stock - through which the drones and regulators are supplied with air, is attached to the bag.
Drones - there are three drones: tenor, baritone and bass. They are wooden pipes of cylindrical bore, each fitted with a single reed or quill. Each regulator has four or five metal keys that produce individual notes when pressed. They are set up to enable the player to play simple dominant or tonic chords while the melody is played on the chanter.

Piping was at it's peak before the Great Famine (1845-49). Emigration, death and lack of patronage drastically reduced the number of traditional musicians in Ireland, and piping suffered. Also, the decline in its popularity was due to the increase of brass brands, and the increasingly popularity of the melodeon and concertina. A revival took place within the Gaelic League (founded 1893); the Cork Pipers' Club (founded 1898); and the Dublin Pipers' Club (founded 1900). Piping competitions were organised as well. The revival was not sustained and popularity dipped again. The Dublin club was revived in 1934 and the Cork club in 1963.

Famous Pipers:

One of the most famous and influential pipers of the first half of the 20th century was **Johnny Doran. Doran** was from a family of travelling musicians and spent most of his life travelling the country and playing music. Numerous pipers say they were influenced, directly or indirectly, by Doran. These include **Willie Clancy** and **Finbar Furey**.
Willie Clancy started a famous summer school for Irish traditional music in Clare.
Finbar Furey is an accomplished traditional musician, and part of the group **The Fureys**.

Paddy Moloney of **The Chieftains** is another famous piper.



FIDDLE



-a four string, bowed instrument
-traditional musicians call it a 'fiddle' but it is the same as the classical violin
-one of the most popular traditional instruments since the late 17th century
-never lost it's popularity during the 19th & 20th centuries (easy to get & travel with)

Regional and Individual Styles

Regional styles of fiddling are very obvious, and usually defined in terms of bowing technique, ornamentation & rhythm.

Donegal - lean heavily on the bow; producing a loud & harsh tone; rhythm evenly spaced; sparing use of ornamentation; often imitate the drone of the uilleann pipes.

Sligo - flowing and ornamented; bowing is generally slurred; rhythm slightly accentuated; fiddler os Sliabh Luachra are renowned for the rhythmic vitality and simplicity of their style.

Famous Fiddlers:

Martin Hayes, Tommy Peoples (Bothy Band), **Zoe Conway and Sharon Corr**

Hayes & Peoples have contrasting styles:

Martin Hayes is renowned for his unique style, which owes something to the traditional musicians of east Clare where he grew up. He also spent many years playing different types of music (including jazz & Estonian music) in the US. His style is **delicate** and **expressive**. He often plays dances at a far slower tempo and incorporates lovely variations in ornamentation, melody & tone.

Tommy Peoples has a rugged style and an edge to his playing that makes it quite a contrast to that of Hayes.





TIN WHISTLE (FEADÓG)



-date back to prehistoric times in Ireland
-mentioned in early Irish myths & legends
-Brehon Laws mention whistle players as early as the 9th century
-physical remains of whistles that from the 13th century (made of bird bone) found at Christchurch Place, Dublin
-a cone-shaped piece of brass with a mouthpiece (now made of plastic)
-usually in the key of 'D'
-handmade wooden whistles can also be bought
-included in many groups including **The Chieftains (Paddy Maloney), Planxty** and **The Corrs**

LOW WHISTLE



-a large tin whistle that is usually an octave below the tin whistle
-it sounds more like a flute than a tin whistle
-Low whistles became used by The Fureys in the 1960s

Song: 'The Lonesome Boatman' (The Fureys)

FLUTE (FLÚIT)



Traditional and Classical Flutes

-most common type of flute in Irish traditional music is the 'simple system,' 'open-holed' or **wooden** flute
-consists of a tube with 6 finger-holes and a mouth-hole
-the wooden flute has a range of 2 octaves whereas the classical flute has 3 octaves
-**Pól Ó Braonáin** from **Clannad** plays the classical flute
-first appeared in traditional music in the 18th century but became more widespread in the 19th & 20th centuries
-novelist **Oliver Goldsmith** was among the earliest flute players in Ireland
-personal styles vary: the way the tunes are phrased; the extent to which tonguing is used; degree of breathiness in playing; degree of rhythmic emphasis; way ornamentation is used

Famous Flautists: Matt Molloy (The Chieftains), **Frankie Gavin** (De Dannan), and **Michael Flatley**





ACCORDION



History:
-along with the concertina & harmonica, the accordion is a type of **free-reed** instrument
-developed in Europe in the early 19th century
-it produces sound when air pressure is applied to it from a bellows (accordion, concertina) or the player's breath (harmonica)
-each reed plays a single note, the precise pitch depending on the length & thickness of the reed
-there are three types: **melodeon, button accordion** and **piano accordion**
-right hand plays the treble keyboard, while the left hand controls the bellows & plays the bass
-Inside the casing are pairs of free reeds, each producing a single note when air from the bellows causes it to vibrate
-the piano keys or buttons open valves allow air to flow to the desired reed
-some have **single action** which means a different note is sounded when the button is pressed or drawn
-others have **double action** which produces the same note of the draw and the press

MELODEON

- a single-action button accordion with one row of 10 buttons on the right side and 2 spoon-shaped keys to provide bass on the left side
-usually pitched in C and could sound over 2 octaves
-popular in the 1880s and 1890s, and rose when the uilleann pipes declined because it was more readily available and easier to play
-suitable for polkas, waltzes, mazurkas, flings & barndances
-first recording was in 1903 by New York melodeon player **John J. Kimmel**

BUTTON ACCORDION

-a single-action instrument, that replaced the melodeon in the 1920s
-has a second, outer row of keys pitched a semitone above the original notes
-fully chromatic and a variety of pitches
-became very popular in the 1950s and 1960s

Famous Players: Sharon Shannon, Máirtín O'Connor

PIANO ACCORDION

-popular with céilí bands
-double-action instrument which makes it difficult to produce the traditional articulation
-larger & heavier than the button accordion

CONCERTINA



-like the accordion, it's a free-reed instrument
-first patented in 1829, in London and came to Ireland in the late 19th century
-smaller than the accordion and hexagonal in shape
-its keyboard of melody notes is extended across the casing on both sides of the bellows

English and German Concertinas
There are two main types of concertina is use among Irish players. The English concertina has double action (same note on press and draw). The more common is the German concertina which has single action (different note on press and draw). The number of keys on the instrument can vary. It is lighter and more portable than the accordion. The sound is light and sweet so it blends well with other instruments, especially the uilleann pipes and the fiddle.

Famous Players: Sharon Shannon, Dympna O'Sullivan and **Micheál Ó Raghallaigh**

BANJO



-two types of banjo are used in Irish music: **Tenor or 4-string** and **5-string**

5-String Banjo

The Americans have used a 5-string banjo since the early 19th century. Irish-American musician Joel Walker Sweeney played this instrument and probably brought it to Ireland on a tour with the Virginia Minstrels. Another early banjo player was John Dunne, who toured Ireland with a fiddler called Thompson in the 19th century. At the time, the 5-string banjo was used mainly for accompaniment of songs or dance tunes, as it is today, although the strings were made of gut and plucked with the fingers. Frets were added in 1878, and steel or nylon strings replaced the gut. The 5-string banjo became popular as a folk instrument in the US, especially int he Appalachians.

Tenor Banjo (4-String)

The invention of steel strings heralded changes in the way banjos were made and played.
Banjo players became influenced by the mandolin and started to experiment with using a
plectrum and tuning the instrument in fifths. Many players removed the short fifth string,
and soon 4-string banjos were produced. The tenor banjo dates from around 1915 and were first used to play Latin-American dance music in the US.

BANJO IN IRISH MUSIC SINCE THE 1920S

Mike Flanagan of the Flanagan Brothers was the most renowned Irish tenor banjo player in the US in the 1920 and 30s, and made numerous recordings. In Ireland, from the 1930s, the banjo was used in many Irish céilí bands. **Barney McKenna** and **Luke Kelly** of **The Dubliners** have been the most influential banjo players since the 1960s.

The 5-string (or 'Appalachian') banjo came to prominence after World War II. The Irish singer **Tommy Makem** introduced the banjo into **The Clancy Brothers** and **Bobby Clancy** became an accomplished banjo player.



MANDOLIN, BOUZOUKI

Although their origins are very different, there can be a considerable overlap in Irish music between instruments of the mandolin family (mandolin, mandola, mandocello), the bouzouki and other stringed instruments.



THE MANDOLIN FAMILY

-the mandolin appears to have come into Irish music in the late 19th/early 20th century and originated in Italy
-a small instrument with four pairs of strings tuned the same as a fiddle
-related larger instruments mirrored the string section of an orchestra in their size and tuning; the mandola tuned the same as a viola; the mandocello shares the same tuning as the cello; the mando bass tuned the same as the double bass
-the mandolin is the most popular in Irish music
-sometimes used for rhythm accompaniment but more commonly used to play melody or counter-melody



THE BOUZOUKI

-Greek in origin
-only started to be used by Irish musicians in the 1960s when **Johnny Moynihan** of **Sweeney's Men** and **Planxty** started to play it
-can have 3, 4 or 6 strings
-most Irish players play the flat-backed instrument and is referred to as the 'Irish bouzouki'
-players like **Andy Irvine** and **Dónal Lunny** have played a vital role in adapting the bouzouki to suit the style of must they play, and have developed new versions of the instrument
-though relatively recent to the Irish scene, the Bouzouki and related instruments have had a large impact on Irish traditional music
-since the 1960s, the bouzouki in combination with the guitar and mandolin have added a distinctive sound to the accompaniment of Irish music and song; this combination is heard in **Planxty, Sweeney's Men, De Dannan, Altan,** and **Dervish**

THE GUITAR IN IRISH MUSIC



-not until the 1950s and 1960s that it became popular in Irish music on both sides of the Atlantic
-**The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem** incorporated guitar into their arrangement of Irish songs, and the use of the guitar by ballad singers became widespread during the 'ballad boom'
-gradually the guitar became more commonly used in accompanying instrumental music & playing the melody
-in the 1970s, **Paul Brady** made outstanding contributions to the development of the guitar in Irish music

Developments since the 1950s

Guitar playing has come a long way since the 1950s, the acoustic guitar can be heard played percussively (almost like a bodhrán), with a rock-style rhythm, as a harmony instrument or, occasionally, as a melody instrument.



PIANO

-in the 18th century, the decline of the Irish harp was paralleled by a rise in popularity of the piano
-Collectors such as Edward Bunting, O'Farrell, George Petrie & R.M. Levey arranged their music for piano
-many of the earliest recordings of traditional music with piano accompaniment (Michael Coleman) had accompaniment described as 'vamping' or 'driving'
-since the 1970s, pianists began to approach Irish traditional music in a different way; and were influenced by jazz & classical music; **Micheál Ó Súilleabháin** is one

HARPSICHORD

-the harpsichord is an old metal-string keyboard instrument where, unlike the piano, the strings are 'plucked' instead of 'struck'
-this gives it a harp effect
-**Seán Ó Riada** recorded a whole album of traditional and O'Carolan music on the harpsichord just before his death, because he was creating the sound of the old Bardic harp

SYNTHESISER

-In the 1980s and 1990s, it was used much more by many musicians to provide backing and create atmosphere
-for **Clannad** and **Enya**, the use of synthesisers with vocals has been central to creating a 'subtle, other-worldly' atmosphere
-from the 1990s, the **Afro Celts** used keyboard & drum synthesisers on their recordings to create **fusion** music with a modern blend of Irish, Breton, African and English music





PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

BODHRÁN

-a shallow drum consisting of an animal skin (usually goat) stretched over a round wooden frame
-earliest written reference to the instrument dates to Medieval times
-held vertically with one hand while the other is used to beat the instrument, usually with a cipín ('little stick')
-before the late 1950s, the bodhrán was little used in traditional music
-bodhráns are made much more professionally nowadays and some are even tuneable

The Bodhrán in Irish Music since Ó Riada: The bodhrán's widespread use in traditional music today is due largely to the influence of Seán Ó Riada, who preferred its sound to the snare drum used in céilí bands at the time. Since Ó Riada used the bodhrán in his group Ceoltóirí Chualann, it has become widespread among groups and session players. A good player can get a great variety of rhythms from the instrument and can vary the tone by pressing on hand or the fingers against the back of the skin. Many players will also beat the stick on the wooden frame from time to time. Now players often change the type of stick or even use brushes to create different tones.

Famous Players: Peadar Mercier and **Kevin Conneff** of **The Chieftains, Tommy Hayes** and **Colm Murphy** (who released an entire album of the bodhrán).

BONES

- traditionally made from the rib-bones of cows, sheep or goats
-but wooden or plastic types are used today
-two bones are held between the thumb, index and middle fingers
-played in a similar way to castanets
-provides a clacking, rhythmic accompaniment



SPOONS

-produce a similar percussive effect to bones
-domestic spoons were traditionally used
-unlike bones, they are usually banged off the player's knee or other surface to produce their distinctive sound
-many bodhrán players also play bones or spoons (or both)



PERCUSSION FROM OUTSIDE THE IRISH TRADITION

In recent decades, percussion instruments from other musical traditions have been used in Irish music. The **bongos**, which originated in Cuba, have been used by Clannad, Moving Hearts and Afro Celts. Also used are the **congas**, the **djembe** (an African barrel drum) and **full-drum kits**.

IRISH MUSIC GROUPS & TRADITIONS

ALL NOTES TO BE EXPANDED ON AND PRESENTED IN CLASS WITH MUSICAL SAMPLES

CLANNAD

A major Irish traditional group that emerged in the 1970s and continued to perform well into the 1990s. The members came from Gweedore in Co Donegal and they contributed to 'Celtic New Age' music. Adopted an original approach to their performances of songs (many of them sung in Irish) and instrumentals. In their early years, the group's sound was acoustic and they often developed songs through jazz-style improvisations, as in their arrangement of the song 'Níl sé n Lá.' After their success of their theme song for the TV series Harry's Game, they began to experiment with a more electric/synthesiser-based sound. In 1985, they had a hit with the single 'In a Lifetime,' where the group's main singer, Moya Brennan, shared the lead vocal with Bono of U2. Moya continues to perform and compose with her own band and her sister Enya (who was also a member of Clannad from 1979-82.

SEAN Ó RIADA (1931-1971)

Born in Bruff, Co. Limerick, he played the traditional fiddle and the piano. He studied music at UCC and in Paris, where he was involved with jazz and Greek musicians.

In Ireland, he was appointed Musical Director of the Abbey Theatre and also worked for Raidió Éireann. Ó Riada became a national celebrity after composing for films. He took Irish traditional music in new directions, both in terms of arrangement and audiences.

In 1959, Ó Riada formed the group **Ceoltóiri Chualann** and it allowed him to apply his concepts of the ensemble playing of traditional music. **Variation** was used in his compositions and careful consideration was given to instrumentation. He chose the uilleann pipes, whistle, fiddle, flute and accordion as lead instruments with bodhrán and bones providing percussion. The use of the bodhrán was unique as at this time most céili bands were using drum kits. Ó Riada himself played the harpsichord which he felt was close to the sound of the bardic harp. On their first album, the jig 'An Long fé Lán-tSeol' (Ships in Full Sail) typifies the group's approach. **Paddy Maloney** was a member of Ceoltóiri Chualann before forming The Chieftains. Their song 'Mairseal Ri Laoise' (King of Laois) is typical for the group and includes the harpsichord.

Ó Riada's sudden death in 1971 was a tragedy for Irish music as a whole. He increased the audience for Irish traditional music, and his development of ensemble playing inspired many groups that followed including The Chieftains.

THE CHIEFTAINS

The Chieftains are one of the best-known and most popular traditional Irish groups. Their style evolved from **Ceoltóiri Chualann.** The leader of the group, **Paddy Maloney**, who plays the **uilleann pipes** and the **tin whistle**, was an original member. The Chieftains followed the performance format invented by Ó Riada, which was playing arrangements of traditional tunes which allowed each member of the group to play a solo.

Past & Current Members of The Chieftains:

- Paddy Maloney (uilleann pipes & whistle)
- Derek Bell (harp)
- Matt Molloy (flute & whistle)
- Martin Faye (fiddle, bones)

The Chieftain's emphasis on instrumental music was unique as, in the 1960s, the interest in folk music was generally on singing groups. The Chieftains travelled the world and collaborated with classical musicians (**James Galway**) and rock/pop musicians (**Van Morrison/Mick Jagger/Sinead O'Connor**). This is a type of **fusion** (two styles of music mixed).

THE CLANCY BROTHERS & TOMMY MAKEM

The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem started performing Irish folk songs with all four singing (often in harmony) with guitar (Liam Clancy) and eventually Appalachian/5-string banjo (Tommy Makem) accompaniment. The singing and arrangement of the songs owed more to American folk groups than to Irish tradition. They were very popular with Irish-Americans.The music was largely vocal and they opened the way for groups like The Dubliners and The Fureys.

THE FUREYS & DAVEY ARTHUR

The Fureys are an Irish folk band of four brothers - Eddie, Finbar, Paul & George from Ballyfermot, Dublin and are of Irish Traveller heritage. The brothers joined up with Davey Arthur. In 1981, they released their most successful single 'When You Were Sweet Sixteen' which became a worldwide hit. They followed up with 'The Green Fields of France' which gave them an Irish number one record. They featured the low whistle in 'Lonesome Boatman' and the mandolin in 'Green Fields of France.'

SHARON SHANNON

Sharon Shannon is an Irish musician from Co. Clare. She is best known for her work on the button accordion. She also plays the fiddle, tin whistle and melodeon. Her 1991 album Sharon Shannon is the best selling album of traditional Irish music ever released. She experimented with many different musical styles (fusion) including reggae, cajun music, Portuguese music and French-Canadian music. Her career began in 1989 when she joined the band, The Waterboys. She was with them for 18 months before going solo. Songs: Cavan Potholes (written by Dónal Lunny); The Galway Girl (with Steve Earle originally and re-recorded with Mundy).

THE DUBLINERS

The Dubliners formed in 1962 and have had many different members.The central figures were **Luke Kelly (vocals and banjo)** and **Ronnie Drew (vocals and guitar).**Other notable members were **Barney McKenna (banjo)** and **John Sheahan (fiddle).** They brought ballad singing to the forefront of Irish entertainment and made the banjo a staple Irish instrument.

Luke Kelly had a solo career as well, and made many songs his own. This includes Irish composer Phil Coulter's song **Scorn Not His Simplicity** which is a song about a child with Down's Syndrome. **Raglan Road** is another song Luke Kelly made his own, and is a poem by Patrick Kavanagh. After Kelly's death, Ronnie Drew sang Raglan Road regularly.

SEAN-NÓS

Sean-nós literally translates to **old style**, and it describes the traditional Irish singing tradition. The songs are usually sung in the Irish language. Modern performances of sean-nós music often are songs sung in both English and Irish -- these are **macronic** songs.

FEATURES OF SEAN-NÓS:

UNACCOMPANIED - usually solo with no instruments.

REGIONAL STYLES - the styles of sean-nós would differ throughout the country. This is because Irish music is an aural tradition (handed down by ear). Each region had it's own style. **Examples:** In **Connemara**, a lot of ornamentation is used **(Seán Mac Donncha)**. In **Donegal**, the use of ornamentation is sparse **(Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill)**.

ORNAMENTATION: Decorating the Notes

NO DYNAMICS: No use of dramatic effects such as dynamic changes.

<u>NASAL TONE</u>: The singer sings through the nose.

<u>GLOTTAL STOP</u>: This is using vibrato and a sort of 'gulping' throughout the song.

<u>FREE RHYTHM</u>: There is no set beat or steady rhythm. The rhythm and tempo relies on the words of the song.

<u>WORDS</u>: The music song tradition is linked with the Irish storytelling tradition. The words are most important in sean-nós, not the music.

IRISH SONG TRADITION

There are many different types of songs in the Irish song tradition. It is an **aural** tradition (handed down by ear). The categories are (and many songs could be in more than one category):

- **LOVE SONGS: Make up the majority of the repertoire**
  - can be either serious or fun
  - many are about unrequited love
  - **Example: The Black Velvet Band (The Dubliners)**
  - **Example: When You Were Sweet Sixteen (The Fureys)**
- **LAMENTS:**
  - Slow tempo, sad mood
  - About loss through death or emigration
  - **Example: There Were Roses (Cara Dillon)**
  - **Example: Green Fields of France (The Fureys)**

- **LULLABIES:**
    - Soft and gentle with a rocking rhythm
    - **Example: Too-Ra-Loo-Ra-Loo-Rai (Bing Crosby)**
- **DRINKING:**
    - Celebratory in nature with a lively rhythm
    - **EXAMPLE: Seven Drunken Nights (The Dubliners)**
    - **EXAMPLE: The Wild Rover (The Dubliners)**
- **HUMOROUS:**
    - Funny lyrics, happy mood, memorable tune
    - **EXAMPLE: Seven Drunken Nights (The Dubliners)**
    - **EXAMPLE: Finnegan's Wake (The Clancy Brothers/The Dubliners)**
- **WORKING SONGS:**
    - Strong and steady beat, help keeps a rhythm for working in the field or in the kitchen
    - **EXAMPLE: Amhrán na Cuiginne (The Churning Song)**
- **PATRIOTIC/AISLING SONGS:**
    - Political (Rebel) Songs that encourage pride in Ireland
    - **EXAMPLE: Fields of Athenry (Paddy Reilly)**

- **RELIGIOUS SONGS:**
    - Songs for Church services or Carols for Christmas
    - **EXAMPLE: The Wexford Carol**

IRISH MUSIC IN NORTH AMERICA

There has been a strong Irish influence on the development of music and song in Canada and the United States. **Michael Coleman** was a legendary figure in Irish music. He came from Co. Sligo and emigrated to the US in 1914. He recorded Irish music in New York and had an influence on Irish music in North America. He was particularly talented at improvising and arranging tunes.

Areas of Canada had strong links with Ireland and developed Irish-Canadian music. These areas are the provinces of **Newfoundland** and **Nova Scotia** (**Cape Breton** in particular).

Séamus Creagh was a fiddler from Westmeath. He moved to St John's, Newfoundland in 1988 and spent over five years collecting tunes and songs from the Irish-Canadian tradition. He also performed regularly there. One tune that he collected was **Sonny's Dream**. It is a Canadian folk song that was recorded by **Christy Moore**.

The Navigators are one of Newfoundland's most energetic and entertaining new Celtic groups. They formed in 2000 and are regularly performing all over Atlantic Canada and Quebec. The two lead singers have bass voice and the band incorporates the tin whistle and the bodhrán. They sing Canadian folk songs **(The Islander)** and their own fusion songs **(The Rights of Man)**.

Great Big Sea are an award-winning modern band from Newfoundland. They are best known for performing energetic rock interpretations of traditional Newfoundland folk songs that draw from the Irish tradition. **Song Example: The Night Paddy Murphy Died.**

Nova Scotia is a province in the east of Canada and **Cape Breton** is an island that is part of the province. There is a strong dance tradition and fiddling tradition in Cape Breton. Fiddlers have developed their own 'Cape Breton' style of fiddling. The best-known Cape Breton fiddlers are **Natalie MacMaster ("The Volcanic Jig")** and **Ashley MacIssac ("Devil in the Kitchen).** MacMaster has performed all over the world, and plays traditional music. MacIssac is also internationally known. In addition to traditional music, he has experimented with other styles (fusion).

Irish-Canadian music is not just confined to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. One group that comes from the province of Ontario is **Leahy**. Leahy has 8 members, all siblings, and have been internationally known since the early 1980s. They are instrumentalists and set dancers. **Song Examples: Call to Dance, B Minor (which they performed with The Chieftains)**

IRISH DANCE MUSIC



DANCING AND DANCE MUSIC

Most of the instrumental music played today is dance music.
It is relatively recently that dance music started to be played and recorded on its own, as opposed to being played strictly for dancing.

-dancing would have existed in Ireland in prehistoric times
-the 18th century saw the development of **solo step dancing**:
    -the jig
    -the reel
    -the hornpipe

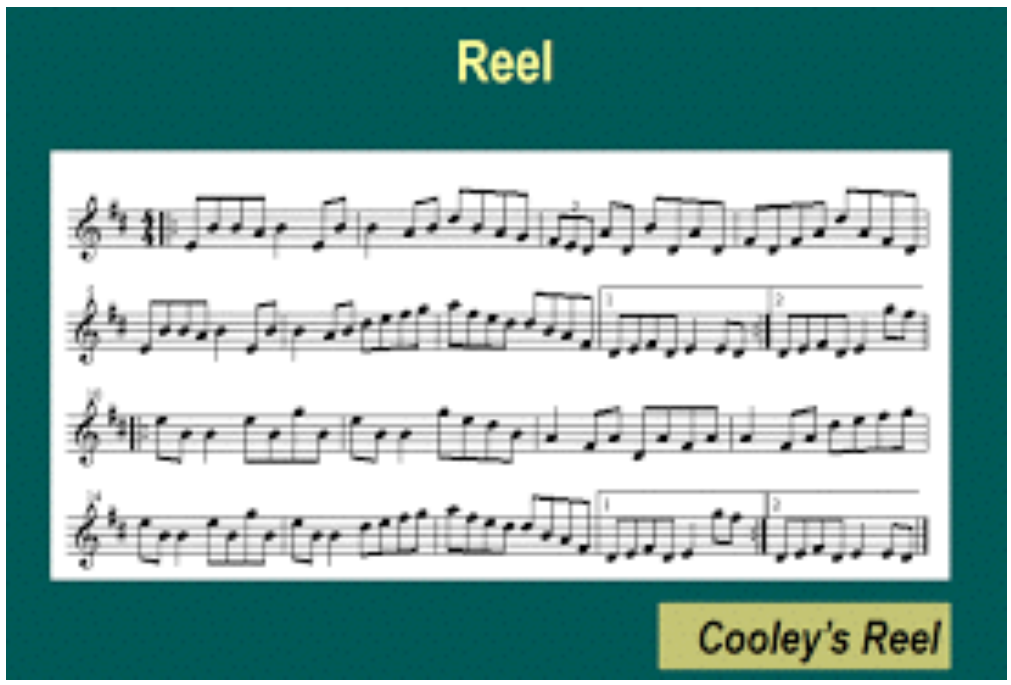
-set dancing involves four couples who dance as partners, either face-to-face or side-by-side
-they were adopted by the **dance masters** who travelled around, teaching 'sets'
-the development of **céilí dancing** from the late 19th/early 20th century, and set dancing was denounced as 'foreign'
-the Gaelic League tried to bring in strict rules governing the movements, costumes and footwear to be used
-other forms of European dance and dance music -- such as **polkas, mazurkas, waltzes and schottisches** were adopted by Irish dancers and musicians
-recent years have seen a phenomenal rise of Irish dancing on the international stage
with productions like **Riverdance** and **Lord of the Dance**

THE FORMS OF DANCE MUSIC

REEL

-most popular type of dance tune
-in **4/4 time** and usually has two groups of four quavers in most bars
-**"black-and-decker"**
-normally played in a **fast**, flowing style

Examples: My Love is in America / Cooley's Reel



JIG

There are three types of jig:
1)the **double jig**
2)the **slip jig** (sometimes called the **hop jig**)
3)the **single jig**

The **double jig** is the most common type of jig and is the one that's simply referred to as the 'jig.'

The Double Jig

-in **6/8 time** and is made up of bars that have two groups of three quavers
-**"rashers-and-sausages"**
-can be played at a fast or slow tempo

Example: The Irish Washerwoman



SLIP JIG

-in **9/8 time** and usually takes the form of three groups of three quavers with crochet/quaver or dotted crochets breaking up the rhythm in places
-ten to just have 8 bars in each part
-the 9/8 timing is the main characteristic by which you can distinguish the slip jig from other types of jig

Examples: The Rocky Road to Dublin / Coleman's Slip Jig



HORNPIPE

-like the reel, it is in **4/4 time**, but the rhythm is more broken than the reel
-played at a **slower tempo**
-there is a **strong accent** on the first & third beats of each bar
-often written out as groups of four even quavers, they are played as **dotted quaver and semi-quavers alternating**
-**"humpty-dumpty"**

Example: Flowers of Edinburgh / Within a Mile



POLKA

-originated in Bohemia (present-day Czech Republic) in the early 19th century
-in **2/4 time**, with a combination of **quavers and semiquavers**
-fast, driving rhythm
-popular in Cork & Kerry and strongly associated with set dancing
-has come up on mocks but never on the 'actual' LC Exam to date

Example: The Kerry Polka



SETS OF TUNES

Musicians playing traditional dance tunes will usually play between two and four tunes together as one 'set.' The tunes that comprise the set are generally all of the same type – 'a set of reels,' for example, or 'a set of jigs.' There has been a tendency in recent years however, for musicians to mix tunes of different types together in one set. Students should be aware that mixing different dance tune types in one set is a feature of traditional music today.

ORNAMENTATION

-most Irish traditional instruments will use ornamentation
-the degree to which it is used and the types of ornamentation which are favoured can very greatly from musician to musician

THE CUT:

The single grace note or **cut**, where the main note being played is graced or cut by a higher note, and is a common form of ornamentation. It can be used to provide an accent or to separate two notes of the same pitch.



CASADH OR 'TURN':

A double grace note, often termed a **casadh** or **'turn'** by traditional musicians, involves playing the main note as a grace note, followed by a higher note and a return to the main note.



THE ROLL:

The **roll** comes in two forms, the **short roll** and the **long roll.**

In the **long roll**, the main note is played first and then 'cut' by a grace note that is higher. After returning to the main note, the player then 'tips' a grace note below it, returning rapidly to the main note. A long roll usually takes place in the time value of a dotted crochet.



The **short roll** can involved exactly the same sequence of notes as the long roll but usually without the main note being played at the start of the sequence. The short roll is played over the value of a crochet.



CRANNING:

Cranning is a form of ornamentation particularly associated with the **uilleann pipes** but also used by flautists, whistle players and even some fiddlers. It is similar to the roll but is usually used on the bottom two notes of the chanter on the pipes (usually D and E). It consists of a series of grace notes of different pitches which link a series of D or E notes in rapid succession.



VARIATION AND STYLE

Variation is a central feature of traditional music. Dynamics are not normally a feature in traditional playing or singing, but it can be significant in variation. Ornamentation can be used in different ways in different rounds of a tune, or not used at all in one round but used in the next. Changing slightly the emphasis of the rhythm in certain parts of the tune is another common form of variation.
The melody itself can also be varied. Some players will also vary the articulation of the notes -- using a run of staccato notes then to a legato style.

The fact that most Irish dance music is based on a repetition of the same basic melody means that variation is an important element in maintaining the interest of the listener. Variation is also a significant part of the musical expression from the musician's point of view.

Also significant in the regional styles -- most importantly in the tone and phrasing, which are vital stylistic elements.

STRUCTURE AND FORM

Irish traditional dance tunes are constructed around **eight-bar sections called 'parts.'** The vast majority of these tunes have **two parts:**
Part A = the 'tune'
Part B = the 'turn'

Generally the tune is mostly in the lower octave while the turn tends to have more higher-octave notes.

A form of **AABB**, where each part is 'doubled' (16 bars) is common to most dance tunes.
But many slip jigs and some reels are played with just 8 bars in each part.
One **'round'** of a tune consists of Part A played twice, and Part B played twice where the parts are 'doubled.'

Dance tunes are normally played in **sets** with two or more tunes strung together and at least two rounds of each tune being played before going into the next tune.
While dance tunes with two parts are by far the most popular there are some dance tunes which have more parts.

TEXTURE

Although many traditional musicians would not be familiar with texture as a musical term, it can be useful in describing Irish music. The three main types are **monophony** (single line of melody); **homophony** (a melody with chordal accompaniment); and **polyphony** (combining of two or more independent melodic lines). Most common in Irish music are monophony & homophony, but more recent Irish music could be described as polyphony.

AIRS

Although most of the tunes played in sessions & concerts today are dance tunes, there are some other tune types in the instrumental repertoire. There are many wonderful **slow airs**, some derived from songs in Irish (Róisín Dubh) and some from songs in English (Carrickfergus).

Slow airs can be in a variety of time signatures, and can played in a regular rhythm but are best played in free-time. This allows the player the maximum freedom for variation and expression.

Turlough O'Carolan is a harper/composer that wrote many Airs.

If they ask you on the LC Exam for the "type of tune" – the answer is usually 'Air.'

Sligo/Leitrim/Roscommon

In terms of style, Sligo music is of the utmost importance because of its huge influence on traditional music in the 20th century. When we talk of the Sligo style, we immediately think of the recordings of three major fiddle players, Michael Coleman, James Morrison and Paddy Killoran. These musicians were all from South Sligo and were recorded in America in the 1920s and 1930s. Collectively, these recordings were the most significant event in the history of traditional music. Michael Coleman alone was a powerful influence for beyond his native Co. Sligo and this influence is still in evidence today. Not only fiddle music, but all instruments involved in traditional music came under the spell of this extraordinary musician. It was effectively the first time that other regional and local styles came under intense pressure from the accessibility nationwide, of one particular regional style. To a large extended, this South Sligo style, particularly that of the fiddle, became the dominant style. To many, this dilution of other regional styles was regrettable.

Putting this phenomenon aside, however, let us look at the main features which distinguish this particular style. **There are three basic elements in Irish music which together make up the style of a region: ornamentation, rhythm and variation.** The Sligo style is profusely ornamented, probably more so than any other part of the country. This involves the use of rolls, trebles (triplet on the same note with the same bowing) and triplets (three different notes). In this type of ornamentation, great skill is required with regard to bowing technique, particularly in the execution of triplets and trebles. The tempo and rhythm are fast and flowing and the bowing smooth, many notes being played with a single, long bow stroke. The music is rich in variation and lends itself to solo rather than group playing. There is great drive and excitement in the rhythm and overall the music gives an impression of great flamboyance and exuberance.

The flute is an instrument also very popular in Sligo and could be said to have been influenced by the fiddle playing of the area. Consequently, it has much in common with it. Again, the pace of the music is fast and heavily ornamented with much ‘rolling’ and variation. The rhythm is very distinctive with a great sense of urgency about it. The phrases are usually long with skillful breath control, and flute players rely mainly on the finger work to produce the sound rather than the use of the tongue, which gives a more puffing characteristic to the music. A favoured instrument combination in Sligo is that of flute and fiddle, and there are many fine examples of this type of duet playing, most notably that of Fred Finn and Peter Horan. Well-known Sligo fiddle players include Philip Duffy, Declan Folan, Seamus

O'Dowd, Peter Horan and Verona Henry. There are many flute players in Sligo today and indeed outnumber that of the fiddle. These include such people as Seamus Tansey, Matt Molloy, Peter Horan, James Murray and Harry McGowan.

Leitrim/Roscommon

The music tradition of Leitrim/Roscommon is to a large extent a flute-playing tradition, although there are many fine fiddle players within it. The Leitrim style of flute playing was popularised by the recordings of John McKenna in the 1920's and '30's. His style and repertoire was taken from an older generation of flute players, and like Coleman, set a high standard for later generations to follow.

It is less ornamented than the Sligo style, the main difference being much more use of the tongue to produce a puffing effect. The rhythm is strong and driving and variation consists more in local settings of tunes than in overall use. The phrases also tend to be shorter than that of Sligo. Famous flute players associated with this style include Pakie Duignan, John Blessing, Michael MacNamara and John Lee.

Co. Mayo

Another important area in East Mayo. The part which borders South Sligo held an extraordinary high concentration of very fine fiddle and flute players, and was of great importance in the development of the distinctive style associated with the musicians of the pre Coleman era. East Mayo was also home to a unique style of melodeon and concertina playing. The stylistic integrity of this region is well represented today by such people as flute player, Joe Beirne, accordion player Dermot Grogan, and the fiddle and flute music of the Waldron family.

Clare

Clare is a country long associated with traditional music and has certainly made an enormous contribution to that tradition. Clare differs somewhat to such counties as Donegal and Sligo in the variety of instruments played. Pipes, concertina, fiddle, and flute are equally represented in this most musically rich area.

Clare flute playing has much in common with that of Sligo in so far as it is a highly ornamented rolling style as described earlier with relation to Sligo. It is slower in pace and rhythm with long phrasing. Again, the repertoire was influenced by tunes made popular in the 1920's and '30's.

Fiddle playing style in Clare has a deeply melodic quality rather that a pronounced driving rhythm or pace. The bowing is flowing and smooth with much

ornamentation of both left and right hand used. There are some very famous and influential fiddle players from Clare including Bobby Casey, Paddy Canny, Joe Ryan and Martin Hayes.

The pipes have for long been associated with Clare, the most well known musician being the late Willie Clancy. The Willie Clancy Summer School in Milltown Malbay has been a huge popular success both nationally and internationally, and has a large attendance at all its music classes. Clare has, of course, led the field in concertina playing, producing some of the finest exponents of this instrument over the years.

Donegal

Of all the regional styles of music, Donegal has perhaps succumbed least to outside influence in the 20th century. It is almost exclusively a fiddle tradition, its distinctive sound being immediately recognisable. The most important feature of this style lies in the bowing, with single strokes giving a very staccato character to the playing, many players using a single bow stroke to each note. Ornamentation such as rolls would rarely, if ever, be used. The heavy use of the bow gives a rich, ringing tone and the tunes are played at a fast and lively pace. The repertoire of Donegal is also very much its own and there is a larger range of tune types generally than found elsewhere. There is a strong Scottish influence in repertoire and style, but the Donegal fiddle players have, undoubtedly, brought the music much further than its source of influence, producing such great virtuoso players as John Doherty, Frank Cassidy, Tommy Peoples, Danny Meehan, Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh and many others.

Sliabh Luachra

This area, which straddles the Cork-Kerry border, is famous for its repertoire of slides and polkas. It is, in the main part, a fiddle tradition, with the accordion featuring to a lesser extent. The music of this area has a very distinctive rhythmic style, found in no other part of the country. It is a fast and lively dance music with an open string technique producing a drone like sound. The repertoire of slides and polkas is extensive and the unique style of bowing and rhythm used in them can also be heard in the playing of reels and other tune types. There have been some great exponents of this style from the region, particularly such well-known names as Padraig O'Keefe, Denis Murphy, Julia Clifford and Johnnie O'Leary.

East Galway

The music and playing style of East Galway has had a huge influence on traditional music countrywide. The fiddle music, with its strong emphasis on melody, has much more in common with Clare than it would with a style like South Sligo. The pace is slow and thoughtful, and overall the music has an intensely lyrical quality to it. The style also, of such individual musicians as Joe Burke on accordion, and Paddy Carty on flute, has had a profound influence on musicians countrywide since the 1960s. The compositions of fiddle player Paddy Fahey are among the most beautiful in the entire repertoire. East Galway also contributed a unique style of Céilí Band playing with bands such as the 'Aughrim Slopes' and the 'Ballinakill.' These bands had an approach to playing not generally practised at the time.

The above information on Regional Styles is a very general and broad outline of a number of well-known and recognised regional styles. The geographical boundaries of these styles, are, however, very indistinct, and to a certain extent it could be said that each county has, to a lesser or greater degree, its own style. Styles may vary even within the counties themselves; for instance, there are significant differences between the music of West Clare and that of East Clare. As mentioned earlier, all these regional styles are now very much dispersed and diluted, and the tendency is towards a uniformity of style, which contains within it a number of outstanding personalised styles of individual virtuoso musicians.

IRISH MUSIC SAMPLE ESSAYS

SEAN-NÓS TRADITION

Sean-nós literally translates to '**old style**,' and it describes the traditional Irish singing tradition. The songs were usually sung in the Irish language. Modern performances of sean-nós music often are of songs sung in both English and Irish -- these are macronic songs.

The features of Sean-nós music are as follows:

It was usually sung **solo** and it was **unaccompanied** (no instruments). The styles of sean-nós singing would differ throughout the country. This is because the Irish music tradition was an aural tradition (handed down by ear). Each **region of the country would have its own unique style**. For example, in Connemara a lot of ornamentation is used. One such singer is Seán Mac Donncha. In Donegal, the use of ornamentation is sparse. Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill is a sean-nós singer from Donegal.

The singer uses **ornamentation** throughout the melody, generally there was **no dynamics** in the music or any **dramatic effects.** The singer sings with a **nasal tone** and uses **glottal stop** (gulping & vibrato in a guttural style). There is the use of **free rhythm** and the tempo could be described as **Rubato** (robbed time). This means that the tempo is not steady, and it is dependent on the words being sung.

The **words of the song is most important in sean-nós singing.** Every song told a story, and that is what was important.

IRISH SONG TRADITION

The Irish song tradition can be classified into different types.

Love songs make up the majority of the song repertoire. Most of these songs are notable for their lyrics, and a lot are sad songs about unrequited love. "The Rose of Tralee," "Danny Boy," and "Ride On" are three popular love songs.

Laments are songs that are slow in tempo and sad in mood. They are usually about loss, death or emigration. "The Mermaid," "There Were Roses," and "The Green Fields of Canada" are examples of laments.

Drinking songs are songs with a lively rhythm, have catchy and memorable lyrics and are celebratory in mood. "The Wild Rover" and "Whiskey in the Jar" are popular drinking songs.

Working songs have a strong and steady beat. They help keep a rhythm to working on the field or in the kitchen. "The Churning Song" is a song about churning butter and is an example of a working song.

Humorous songs have funny lyrics, are happy in mood and have a memorable tune. "Seven Drunken Nights" and "The Holy Ground" are examples.

Political or Aislings are songs that deal with political themes, and encourage pride in Ireland. They are also known as rebel songs. Political ballads played a large role in the nationalist movement in the history of Ireland. Groups like The Dubliners and The Wolfe Tones popularised these songs. Some examples of these songs are "Only Our Rivers Run Free" and "The Fields of Athenry."

IRISH DANCE MUSIC

Most of the Irish instrumental music played today is dance music. The most important and popular dances are:

-the Jig
-the Reel
-the Hornpipe

There are three types of jig: the double jig, the slip jig and the single jig. The **DOUBLE JIG** is the most popular. It is in 6/8 time, and is made up of bars that have two groups of three quavers. It can be played at a fast or slow tempo. A popular jig is **The Irish Washerwoman**.

The most popular type of dance tune is the **REEL**. It is in 4/4 time, and it usually has two groups of four quavers in most bars. It is normally played in a fast, flowing style. One example of a Reel is **Drowsy Maggie.**

The **HORNPIPE** is like a reel, in 4/4 time, but the rhythm is broken up. The rhythm is written as groups of four quavers but they are played as **dotted quavers and semi-quavers alternating.** There is a strong accent on the first and third beats of each bar, and it is played at a slower tempo than the reel. **The Harvest Home** is an example of a hornpipe.

Note: you should include a sample bar of rhythm for each dance

ORNAMENTATION

Most Irish music will use ornamentation. It can be defined as “decorating” the notes of the melody. The degree to which it is used and the types of ornamentation varies from musician to musician, and from region to region.

THE CUT is a single grace note. This is where the main note being played is cut by a higher note.

THE TURN is a double grace notes which involves playing the main note as a grace note, followed by a higher note and then a return to the main note.

THE ROLL is a sequence of notes that includes a “cut” to a higher note, a return to the main note, and then the played “tips” to the note below the main note. It ends with a return to the main note.

CRANNING is a form of ornamentation that is associated with the **uilleann pipes**. It is similar to the roll but usually occurs on the bottom notes of the chanter. It consists of a series of grace notes of different pitches in rapid succession.

IRISH INSTRUMENTS

ACCORDION

The accordion is a type of **reed** instrument that came from Austria. The sound is produced when air pressure is applied to the reeds from a bellows. Each reed plays a single note and the pitch depends on the length and thickness of the reeds. There are button accordions and piano accordions.

The **Button Accordion** is most popular in Irish music. It is a **single-action instrument.** This means that a different note is sounded with the button is pressed or drawn. The keys on the instrument are fully chromatic and there is a variety of pitches. The instrument became very popular in Ireland in the 1950s and 1960s.

A famous player of the button accordion is **Sharon Shannon.** Shannon's most popular song is "Galway Girl" which she performed both with American cowboy singer Steve Earle and Irish pop singer Mundy.

BANJO

The banjo came from the Appalachian mountains in America and it probably was brought to Ireland in the 19th century by an Irish-American musician, Joel Walker Sweeney. There are two types of banjo used in Irish music: the Tenor 4-string and the 5-string banjo. The tenor banjo is the most popular. Originally the string were made of gut and plucked with the fingers. Steel or nylon strings eventually replaced the gut and frets were added to the instrument.

The banjo became used regularly in Irish music since the 1920s. In the 1930s, the banjo featured in Irish céilí bands. The banjo is used mainly for accompaniment of songs or dances. The most influential Irish group is The Dubliners. They made the banjo a common instrument in Irish popular ballads. Two people played the banjo in the group - Luke Kelly and **Barney McKenna.** The Dubliners song "Dirty Old Town" and 'Raglan Road' features the sound of the banjo.

MÍCHEÁL Ó SÚILLEABHÁIN

Ó Súilleabháin's work in playing, arranging and composing music has straddled different worlds including those of traditional, jazz and classical music. By doing this, he developed fusion in Irish music. He is a composer and a pianist.

On 'Brian Boru' he plays the very old traditional 'Brian Boru's March' on piano (with bodhrán accompaniment). In this piece, he varies the basic melody and in the middle of the piece, it goes into a full improvised section (accompanied by bones). After the improvised section, he gradually brings the tune back around to the traditional tune with which he began. This use of variation and improvisation is a fusion of **jazz technique** with traditional Irish music. He calls his music 'Hiberno-Jazz' music.

In 1994, Ó Súilleabháin established the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance in the University of Limerick. It was developed to research and develop innovation in Irish and Irish-related music world wide.

CÉILÍ BANDS

The first céilí bands were probably formed in response to the Gaelic League's creation of the céilí dance in the early years of the 20th century. The typical céilí band consists of a large group of musicians, playing specifically for céilí or set dancing. The instruments used are generally fiddle, flute, accordion, piano, bass and snare drum with woodblock, banjo and occasionally saxophone.

As the venues for this type of social gathering changed to larger commercial and parochial halls, so did the need for greater volume from the band to be effective in such large spaces. The quality of the music often suffered as a consequence of this. The céilí band was often the only type of traditional music played on radio and by the 1950s and 1960s these bands dominated the commercial end of traditional music. Many bands adopted a Scottish type sound, introduced by Scottish accordion player, Jimmy Shand, who toured Ireland with his band in the 1950s and '60s. They were, however, largely displaced by the huge popularity of the 'showbands' of the 1960s and this, combined with a revival of interest in more authentic forms of traditional music, resulted in their gradual disappearance from the centre-stage position which they once occupied.

Some céilí bands stand out for the standard and quality of the music they performed. These include 'The Aughrim Slopes,' 'The Tulla,' 'The Kilfenora,' 'The Castle,' and 'The Coleman Country.' In recent years, with the revival of set and céilí dancing, there has been something of a comeback for céilí band type groups. These are more specialised than the earlier bands and all the members are first rate traditional musicians. There is also a movement towards 'listening' to céilí bands with the emphasis on the music alone.