An Examination of the Creative Processes in Competitive Irish Step dance

Orfhlaith M. Ní Bhriain
An Examination of the Creative Processes in Competitive Irish Step dance

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Orfhlaith M. Ní Bhriain

Supervisor: Dr. Catherine E. Foley
External Supervisor: Dr. Colin Quigley
Dedication

Do Máirín agus Jack, faoi dheireadh!
Special dedication

I would like to remember three special people who passed away recently and who would have loved the opportunity to discuss and debate this dissertation. I gcuimhne George Fitzpatrick, oide agus cara, Seán Ó Conghaile, Gael agus moltóir agus Patrick McHugh iarmhacléinn, rinceoir, ceoltóir agus scoláire.

Solas na bhFlaitheas oraibh uilig.
Abstract

This dissertation examines creative processes within competitive Irish step dance. The primary objective of the study is to investigate whether it is in fact possible for one to be creative within this dance genre. Based on the evidence produced, it is argued that, despite the highly regulated nature of competition culture, competitive Irish step dance is nonetheless conducive to creativity. Following consideration of the historical and institutional context for the development and regulation of competitive Irish dance, the research findings presented in the thesis place particular focus on the World Championships in Irish dance held in Belfast in 2006. Events such as the World Championships are where the best dancers compete against their peers and where new movements and steps are showcased and are either accepted into the idiom or eschewed.

The analysis presented outlines the development of competitive step dance, with particular emphasis on developments during the post ‘Riverdance’ and ‘spectacle era’. Through ethnographic methods, it explores the social and cognitive processes of Irish Dance, examining in detail the winners of the 18-19 ladies’ and gentlemen’s competition at the World Championships 2006.

Building on research carried out in the relatively new field of Irish Dance studies, the thesis argues for the inclusion of Irish dance in more general fields of Dance Studies and indeed of Irish Studies. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to anthropological studies, dance education, ethnomusicology and ethno-choreology incorporating methodologies such as transcription, labanotation and fieldwork from an insider perspective in the post-spectacle era of Irish dance. It strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice and it is hoped that it will encourage other Irish music and dance practitioners to engage with academic research and reflection.

Ultimately, it is advanced that creative opportunities within competitive Irish step dance are many, as the restrictions imposed by the regulatory nature of competition challenge the competent dancers to be more daring, push the boundaries without losing the sense of Irish dance aesthetic that will be accepted into the tradition.
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Chapter One

Competitive Irish Step dance: An Evolving Art

Introduction

In 1994, *Riverdance*, which was first performed as the interlude act at the Eurovision Song Contest, was to change the perception of Irish dance for millions of people all over the world (See Foley (2001), Hall (2001), Wulff (2007), Ó Cinnéide (2002)). It was a significant moment in the evolution of Irish dance as a performance phenomenon. However, the question remains as to whether or not competitive Irish step dance was significantly altered by this pivotal event. In consideration of these issues, the time frame I selected for this project is the post-*Riverdance* era, extending from the 1995 World Irish Dancing Championships to the 2006 *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* with specific focus on the latter event.

This thesis provides an investigation of the creative processes in competitive Irish solo step dance. It is an exploration, through ethnographic methods, of social and cognitive methods of making Irish dance, examining in detail the winners of the 18-19 ladies and gentlemen’s competitions at the World Irish Dancing Championships 2006\(^1\). It outlines the development of competitive step dance and emphasizes in particular developments in the post *Riverdance* and spectacle era. The term spectacle era refers to the proliferation of professional Irish Dance shows which were established in the mid 1990s and which continue to be popular today.

Drawing inspiration from twentieth century Irish literary figure Seán Ó Riordáin\(^2\) whose poems *Saoirse*\(^3\) and *Daoirse*\(^4\) emphasize the apparent dichotomy between freedom and restriction. ‘Ná tabhair don daoirse saoirse. Is tabharfar saoirse duit\(^5\)’. (See appendix 1 for further texts and translations), the analysis places particular focus

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\(^1\) The terms World Irish Dancing Championships and *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* are interchangeable. For consistency and clarity, I will use the English language term throughout the dissertation.

\(^2\) Many of Ó Riordáin’s poems have underlying themes pertaining to cultural nationalism. This was not uncommon in twentieth century romantic poetry.

\(^3\) The poem Saoirse meaning freedom was published in *Eireaball Spideoige* in 1952.

\(^4\) The poem Daoirse meaning slavery or restriction was published in the collection Brosna in 1964.

\(^5\) Own translation; *Do not release the restriction, and you shall be liberated.*
on the tension between freedom and restriction as negotiated through creative processes within the competitive Irish step dance genre.

I propose to examine the role of the teacher and the performer and indeed the music itself in the creative process leading up to the performance at the competitive arena. The competition per se is perceived as the culmination of the anterior roles alluded to above and the immediate parts played out by dancers, adjudicators, musicians and indeed the audience who also are players in this event. I intend to establish what is the specificity associated with each of the performers which makes their contribution to the event so unique. I will endeavour to identify the socio -geographical, historical, political, cultural and relational factors which impact on the creative processes that culminate in the course of the competitive event. To this end I will examine the performances of 10 dancers, 5 male, 5 female, their respective teachers / coaches / choreographers and the persons charged with the task of officiating at the event namely the adjudicators and musicians

**Surveying the Field**

The theoretical analysis of creative processes within competitive Irish step dance is approached and investigated from within the discipline of ethnochoreology and acknowledges my own insider status within the Irish step dance community, as Gramsci observed:

> The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing thyself as a product of the historical processes to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces without leaving an inventory (Gramsci 1971:324).

This statement resonated with me in several respects. In the first instance, I was very much aware of my own biography and personal background, which inevitably influenced my view and interpretation of issues relating to competitive Irish step dance. Secondly, it became apparent from an early stage of the investigation that an understanding of the historical and contemporary issues pertaining to creativity, an area of research with which I was unfamiliar, coupled with an understanding of Irish step dance and competition culture, areas in which I had extensive prior knowledge.
and experience, was a prerequisite to any close investigation of my chosen research project.

In light of the research presented here from an insider’s perspective, my work is in line with the view expressed by Rice when he writes:

> Even so-called insider ethnomusicologists, those born into the cultures they study, undergo a productive distanciation necessary to the explanation and critical understanding of their own cultures (1994:6).

As an insider in the field, how can I detail the process of (my) ‘productive distanciation’, and what are its potential effects, positive and negative, on my research’?

My research is both complicated and complemented as a result of my membership of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha and by the multiple roles I have experienced within competitive step dance over a period of almost forty years. These include assuming the role of competitor, teacher, spectator, musician, adjudicator, mentor and researcher. In some respects, the research has become almost an extension of a family relationship embracing all the creative tensions and challenges associated with such a degree of familiarity.

This particular project, however, required an approach representative of the multiplicity of roles I have experienced within the world of competitive Irish step dance. Inspired initially by an inherited respect and passion for culture and fuelled by a desire to record for posterity and further study the philosophy and understanding I have applied to Irish step dance, the research required continuous reflection and a re-choreographing and re-consideration of my relationship to the creative processes within competitive step dance.

This thesis is being written for an academic audience. The general purpose of my project is to investigate the creative processes in competitive Irish step dancing and to establish what are the definitive elements that enable it to be labeled as Irish Dance. My intention is to make an original contribution to the increasing corpus of scholarly work pertaining to Irish culture in general and competitive Irish step dance in particular.
I will critically examine the creative processes in competitive Irish solo step dancing since 1994 with a view to identifying and categorizing the factors which have influenced this process. John Blacking stresses that studies of musical creativity are fundamental to our understanding of any music:

If the value of music in society and culture is to be assessed, it must be described in terms of the attitudes and creative processes involved in its creation, and the functions and effects of the musical product in society (Blacking 1973:53).

The value of music is to be found in terms of the human experience involved in its creation and music that enhances human consciousness music that is for being is art, no matter how simple or complex it sounds, and no matter under what circumstances it is produced (Blacking 1973: 50).

I intend to extend this insight and apply it to competitive Irish step dance.

**Irish Dancing**

Irish Dancing has been the focus of much media attention since the inception of commercial shows, but there is a paucity of research pertaining to the movement systems contained therein. Significant works to date include the theses of Foley (1988), Hall (1995), and Brennan (1994), but all of these predate the impact of the global recognition achieved as a result of the commercial shows.

Competitive Irish step dance, in its present manifestation as a skilled, technical and physical art form, has in recent years been subject to inexorable changes regarding movement, style, rhythmic patterns, tempo for musical accompaniment and configuration of motifs. An increased emphasis on competition culture, necessitating constant renegotiation and innovation, has been a major driving force behind this evolution and change.

Broadly speaking, step dance refers to dances composed for presentation by individuals or groups where the emphasis is on the footwork. Key elements common to Irish dance are the upright vertical body stance with restricted arm movements and very limited expression featured in body, head or face. Included in the range of
dances are those requiring soft shoes where grace and lightness are salient features, and the more percussive dances requiring hard shoes with an emphasis on acoustic sound complementing the accompanying music. Examples of the former include the light reel and slip jig, while the latter includes the slow heavy jig, the hornpipe and the solo set dance. Success in Irish Dancing is determined by whatever particular construction of the dance form is ‘winning’ at any given time. The dances are composed from a range of culturally approved and potentially available motifs. Teachers, dancers and, significantly, adjudicators, are the key points of reference for appropriate aesthetic values.

The foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 was central to the development of Irish dancing. Dancing in Ireland became Irish Dancing as a result of the rules and regulations established by the League. (See Foley (1988 and 2001), Hall (1995), Brennan (1999). The League sought to establish a canon of authentic Irish dance, which would portray a positive image of Ireland. In the 1920s the League set up a Commission of Enquiry to establish guidelines for the conduct of step dance competitions. The imposition of these guidelines, whatever the motivation, touches on a vital aspect of creativity in the dance form, namely the issue of freedom and boundaries in the creative process. In this context, Hall’s thesis entitled *Irish Dancing: Discipline as Art, Sport and Duty* (1995) has been particularly influential in the development of my work. Written from an anthropological as well as a dancer’s perspective, and my first encounter with such research, my academic auditions were excited by the fieldwork conducted by Dr. Hall in my home in the early 1990s. I would concur with Hall’s contention that:

> Without the effect of restrictions, the freedom to create is meaningless and ineffective with respect to the form. In order to create within the form, and in the process to further shape the form, the rules and restrictions must be mastered (1995:85).

This is supported and further developed by Spalding who writes about the centrality of the creative agent and emphasizes the critical role of choice in the production of old time dancing:

> Rather than passively receiving and transmitting something called tradition, individuals make creative choices every time they dance, whether they do it consciously or not. These choices are based upon
aesthetic standards which the individuals within a community agree upon,
albeit usually tacitly Spalding (1993:9).

Within the competitive Irish step dance arena, the choreographer pre-determines
many of the significant choices prior to the dance event. However, during the live
performance, the dancer continues to make choices regarding, energy, movement and
interpretation. These issues will be discussed in detail in chapters four and five.

The Irish Dancing Community

Irish Dancing far from being a community-based study is an ethnography
of people brought together by an activity. Irish dancing is a phenomenon,
which, as a system of movement, varies little from locality to locality,
region to region (Hall 1995: 20).

To a degree I concur with Hall in this latter observation, as competition culture has
removed many of the stylistic variations associated with different regions. Foley, in
her analysis of traditional dance in North Kerry, also attests to this (1988). More
importantly, I accept that the Irish dance community is a social rather than a
geographical construct. However, I also propose that the Irish dancer of the twenty
first century has access to a more global moral and physical body as well as a broader
world-view than in any previous generation. The contemporary competitive Irish step
dancer experiences a more permissive climate of affirmation of body movement and
general physicality in performance than was traditionally accepted within this genre.
There is a multiplicity of reasons for this development. Sophisticated media images
are now available in the Western world, and, the resulting increase in the media
penetration of audio, video and other influences has been significant. Furthermore the
more liberal mores of twenty-first century Irish citizens have opened up more body
experiences of a dance and physical nature.

The institutionalisation of Competitive Irish Step Dance

This section identifies and analyses the various factors that have contributed to and
facilitated the institutionalisation of Irish step dance. The primary focus shall be on
organisations that have shaped the structure and development of the transmission
process in this art form over the last century. The formation of initial and subsequent organisations such as An Coimisiún and An Chomhdháil will be evaluated from historical, cultural and social perspectives.

Historical Background: Cultural Nationalism

In a European context the terms folk music and/or folk dance are often linked to nationalistic ideologies. This modern European ‘nationalism’ stemmed from the influence of nineteenth century poets and intellectuals associated with the Romantic movement (See Plaff 1986:53, quoted in O’ Henry 1989:68).

In the Irish context, one of the key outward manifestations of nationalism was negotiated through the medium of Irish Dance. (See Foley (1988), Hall (1995, 2008), Brennan (1999) and Wulff (2007). During the early 1900s, an attempt was made to create a canon of Irish Dance. Central to the development of an Irish dance canon was the establishment, in 1893, of Conrath na Gaeilge. As an organisation, the Gaelic League provided insight into an Irish manifestation of cultural nationalism. The League had an impact on various aspects of Irish culture - language, music, song and dance-, from an historical, cultural and social perspective. Its initial involvement in Irish Dance was peripheral; its primary aim was to promote and foster the Irish language. However, it soon set out the rules that must be complied with for those wishing to organise step dance competitions. It legislated for the control of the dance repertoire performed, the costumes and footwear permissible and the music acceptable for dance accompaniment.

Step dance performed in Ireland became ‘Irish dance’ in 1893. As it developed as an art form, Irish dance was organised around the competitive process with an emphasis on rules, roles and structural organisation. Commensurate with its increasing popularity was its overwhelming emphasis on, and the significance attached to, competition. This aspect was not in line with other developing national dance forms but was consistent with the evolution of sporting activities in Ireland and Britain (See Hall 1995:2008).

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6 An organisation founded in the 1930s to investigate Irish dance practice in Ireland.
7 A breakaway organisation founded in 1969.
8 Irish language term for the Gaelic League founded in 1893.
This was later confirmed in comments made by Seamus Mac Conuladh in 1987:

A feature of Irish Dancing is the extent to which it is competition oriented as compared with the national dancing of other countries. It is said at times that competitions are far too frequent and extensive and there is probably a degree of truth in the allegation. However, competitions are seemingly much in demand by teachers, pupils and parents alike and it cannot be denied that competitions have played a very significant part in bringing our national dancing to the high stage of development it has attained today (Mac Conuladh 1987:1, quoted in Hall 1995:113).

It is difficult to separate Irish solo step dancing from its competition culture, although the competitive model has shifted somewhat from an informal to an institutional setting with the emphasis moving from local to national to the global in scale. Even in the era of the dancing masters during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a competitive element was present, with rival masters competing for the right to control a particular territory. Dancing competitions were also a feature of fairs and pattern days in nineteenth century Ireland. (See Foley (1988), Fairbairn (1994) and Brennan (1999).

**Origins of Competitive Irish Step Dance**

Competitive Irish step dance competitions fall into two categories: the Feis and the Oireachtas. In ancient Ireland, the term feis was synonymous with a political gathering of chieftains summoned by a king to review and enact laws. This political spectacle was followed by music, song, dance and general merriment and celebration (Cullinane 1988). The Gaelic League adopted the term Feis in 1899, utilising it to promote a pure canon of Irish culture. It concentrated its energies on organising competitions to promote aspects of culture accepted by Gaelic League members as authentically Irish, namely, language, music, song and dance. The first Feis, based on the rules and regulations of the Gaelic League, was held in Macroom in County Cork in 1899 and such events soon became a familiar part of the cultural revival movement. In 1929 a commission of enquiry was established to monitor Irish step dance competitions. In the early 1930s, The Irish Dancing Commission assumed responsibility for the development of Irish dancing in Ireland. (See May (1986), Tynan (1998) and McElligott (1999).)

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responsibility for controlling Irish Step dance competitions. Today, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*\(^\text{10}\) is only one of a number of similar organisations that monitor, regulate and legislate for Feiseanna\(^\text{11}\) in Ireland, England, Scotland, Wales, Canada, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Recently, the competitive scene has expanded to include mainland Europe, South America, Russia and Japan. The Oireachtas is a more formal competitive context than the regular feis. There are regional *Oireachtas* which are structured hierarchically with participation and qualification at regional Oireachtas being a condition for eligibility to compete in the World Championships in Irish Dancing.

**Irish Dance under the auspices of the Gaelic League**

In Irish dance, rules were imposed in a very deliberate effort to create a dance form that was compatible with an acceptable middle class identity. These related to dominant notions of dignity and decorum but the rules are constantly being negotiated as Irish dance is very much a living tradition (See Hall 1995). Consider Hobsbawm’s Invented Tradition which refers to; ‘A set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm, 1983:1). In its efforts to create a civilized representation of Irish society, the Gaelic League selected dances that reflected an image of perceived respectability and rejected those dances, which its members considered gauche or unacceptable.

The great debate as to which dances were acceptable and which were not raged in the columns and letter pages of *An Claidheamh Solais*, the newspaper of the Gaelic League.

‘Those figure dances were brought to Dublin from London and the city of Limerick and foisted on the Gaelic League as genuinely Irish by some enterprising individuals who saw with their keen Anglicised commercialised vision their opportunity of making money’. Gaedhal. *Western People* August 27 Aug. 1904.

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\(^{10}\) the Irish language term for the Irish Dancing Commission.

\(^{11}\) Plural of *feis*, term used for Irish dance competition.
It matters not that Irish dances were originally of French origin; they have now centuries of occupation in Ireland; they have been assimilated and moulded into their present form by Irish minds and Irish natures, and they are now as typical of Ireland as the erstwhile Roman but now prescribed Irish alphabet- ay- even more so.’ An Claidheamh Solais 24 Feb. 1906.

Einri Ó Muirgheasa.

A further attempt to sift ‘alien’ from native dance forms was set in train with the establishment, in 1929, of An Coimisiún le Rinci Gaelacha. The first dancing schools under the auspices of the Gaelic League were established in the 1920s, with young children as pupils. The League sought to further tighten its hold on the developing field of Irish Dance with its insistence that all dance teachers be registered with it.

Their requirement that all teachers be Irish speaking ironically excluded the older layer of dancing masters, who had attended school before Irish was on the curriculum. A canon of dances, which were acceptably Irish, was drawn up and published as Ár Rincí Fóirne12, the Gaelic League’s dance handbook in 1939. Various movements and elements of style, which were regarded as unacceptable, were excluded. By setting up an institutional practice of Irish Dancing as competition, An Coimisiún was following a model which had been developed in Britain in the Victorian era: the model of modern competitive sport. Salient features of this model included the following: a codification of rules, a hierarchical structure of competitions based at local, county, provincial and national levels, as well as an ascription to the activity of high moral purpose both as education in, and expression of, national ideals (See Mandle 1973, 1983 quoted in Hall 1995).

Irish dance, therefore, developed in a fashion similar to sporting practices, such as football, in a period where the national dances of other countries were being archived and preserved. The emphasis on competition required a tremendous commitment in terms of time and money in order for students of dance to compete at the higher levels. Indeed, among the Irish Diaspora and further afield, the investment of time, money and energy at the present time continues to be highly significant.

Competitive dancing is a tough world guided by rules and regulations. Rules and traditions keep the system operational. Influencing creativity in organisations involves

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12 These dances were published in 1939, 1943 and 1969 and are currently available in one handbook which is considered a key text book for Irish step dance teachers seeking certification with An Coimisiún.
two conceptually independent challenges; facilitating creativity and constraining routines.

Structured organisations that promote the teaching of Irish Dance

Outlined below are some of the key organisations identified with the institutionalisation of competitive step dance. It is not the purpose of this section, nor the intention of this author, to document the histories of these organisations in detail, but rather, to trace the evolution of Irish dance as successive organisations emerged in our changing society and to acknowledge the significance of these institutions in the establishment of competition culture within competitive Irish step dance. The number of organisations is significant in itself and indicative of the currency of competition in competitive step dance.

*An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha,* is Irish for the *Irish Dancing Commission* and it perceives its role as the central administrative and regulatory authority and arbiter of standards in the field of Irish dancing. It was established in 1929 for the purpose of preserving and promoting Irish Dancing. It was initially a commission of enquiry into how dance events in Ireland were being organised but after a short period it was charged with taking responsibility for the organisation and running of dance competitions. It is still run under the auspices of the Gaelic League and the governing body consists of a balance of membership nominated by *Conradh na Gaeilge* and representatives elected by registered dancing teachers. Registered members of *An Coimisiún* are fully qualified teachers and adjudicators of Irish Dancing.

In 1969, forty years after the establishment of *An Coimisiún, Comhdháil na Múinteoirí Rince* parted ways with the Gaelic League and established *An Chomhdháil* as an independent organisation. This split has not yet been documented in detail but dance historians have alluded to aesthetic and ideological differences compounded by a ‘political concern’ with the lack of substantial representation of practicing teachers on the board of *An Coimisiún,* advanced as an important part of the explanation (See Carty 1987:29). In line with a similar system of qualification and registration as
utilized by the Irish Dancing Commission, members of an An Chomhdháil are also fully qualified teachers T.C.R.G. and adjudicators A.D.C.R.G. of Irish Dancing.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1982 Cumann Rince Náisiúnta was founded by Ita Cadwell. She had been active in An Coimisiún and An Chomhdháil prior to the establishment of C.R.N. The ethos of C.R.N. is always to promote and encourage the art of Irish dancing whilst protecting Irish traditional ways and values worldwide. In terms of repertoire the preservation of traditional set dances is considered of paramount importance to the members of this organisation.

Festival Dancing refers to Irish step dance competitions that take place throughout Northern Ireland, in particular under the auspices of the British Federation of Festivals for Music, Dance and Speech and F.D.T.A.- the Festival Dance Teachers Association.\textsuperscript{14} In 1971 the F.D.T.A. was established. In the first years after its establishment, the F.D.T.A. was known as the Nine Glens Association\textsuperscript{15} because of the geographical location of the dancing schools involved in the Association.

Stylistic influences from the world of ballet, and a strong dialectical relationship between music and movement, inform the choreographic process. Festival dancing represents a movement aesthetic, which, while remaining within the limits of what is recognisable as Irish dancing, possesses a distinctive style of its own. One of the strongest influences upon the formation and development of the Festival dancing aesthetic has been the work of the late Patricia Mulholland, musician, dancer, choreographer and teacher. According to Una Scullion\textsuperscript{16}, it is primarily the relationship between music and dance that has led to the development of the Festival dance style as it is represented today. My contention is that the music/dance relationship is highly significant for all the step dance associations. This will be explored in detail in chapter five with regard to the World Championships in Irish dance run by An Coimisiún. Other organisations which deal with competitive Irish step dance include Cumann Rince na nGael, The World Irish Dance Association

\textsuperscript{13} TCRG or dance teachers diploma and ADCRG, or adjudicators, diploma.
\textsuperscript{14} The British and International Federation of Festivals for Music, Dance and Speech had become an institution in 1921, having evolved from a preceding organisation called the Association of Competition Festivals, set up in 1904. Its activities are based on the principle of open competition.
\textsuperscript{15} The Nine Glens refer to the glens of Antrim, located in the north east of the county and are protected by the National Trust.
(W.I.D.A.) and Cumann Rince Deamhea.( See Ni Bhriain (2007) for further details)

All the groups organise competitions using similar structures and regulations. Dancing events are also run under the auspices of cultural organisations aimed at preserving and promoting the living tradition.

Organisations concerned with revival and preservation.

In the 1950s, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, an organisation with the primary purpose of preserving traditional music, promoted set dancing through competitions. This revival through competition was further advanced in the 1970s through the rubric of Scór, a local/national competition of traditional arts, incorporating music, dance, recitations and ballad groups, organised under the auspices of the Gaelic Athletic Association. Set dancing workshops were extremely popular at cultural events such as the Willie Clancy Festival. They were open to the population at large who were not necessarily served by music or song workshops and catered to dedicated dancers and cultural enthusiasts.

1997 was the centenary of the first formal céilí and Cúirde Rince Céilí na hÉireann (Comóradh an Chéid) was formed late in 1996 to commemorate this event and to reactivate and reinvigorate interest in the native céilí dancing throughout Ireland during centenary year. Classes and events were organised throughout the centenary year and as it drew to a close, the committee decided to continue the campaign to promote non-competitive céilí dancing.

The Feis Community

Competitive Irish step dancing is only minimally shaped by location. Its cultural site is constituted as a network of people from across the globe drawn together by the activity of Irish dancing rather than a study of an actual community in a particular location (See Hall 1995).

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17 This form of social dancing evolved from the quadrilles and cotillions in the 18th and 19th centuries. See Lynch 1989 for further details.
18 This is Ireland’s largest summer schools held annually in Miltown Malbay in County Clare to promote the teaching of traditional Irish music, song and dance. It was established to commemorate the legendary piper, singer and dancer Willie Clancy following his death in 1973.
19 The term Céili originally referred to a social gathering. Here it is used to describe a social dancing event organised by the Gaelic League.
Irish dancing is a phenomenon, which, as a system of movement, varies little from locality to locality, region to region, country to country. *Feiseanna* are held throughout Ireland, Britain, Canada, North America, Australia and New Zealand, with essentially the same repertoire and range of step dances. In addition, the competitive *feis* scene is extending through Europe in EU and non-EU countries and the practice is also gaining momentum in Japan and China. Teachers are also registered from countries such as South Africa and Argentina. Furthermore, as noted previously, there are a variety of organisations, each with its own philosophy and ideology and emphasis with regard to how the step dance competitions should be structured and administered.

The precise function of the competitive Irish Dancing institutional matrix was examined with specific regard to the *feis* context and colourfully outlined by Meyer who alludes to the *feis* as follows: “a micro-cosmic construct of a utopian Gaelic culture, every aspect of the *feis* mirrors the important and essential values of the system. The gathering of the *scoils*, like the old clan system, brings all factions together on key calendar days” (1995:25-39). Moreover, he acknowledges the versatile role of Irish dancing not only as a dynamic art form, but also as a kind of cultural preservative in a certain kind of cultural continuum, with its governing body, *An Coimisiún*, still under the presiding auspices of the Gaelic League.

From this wide-ranging practice, the event I have selected for close analysis is The World Championships in Irish Dance, organized under the rules of the Irish Dance Commission. There are many reasons for this choice, primarily the fact that *An Coimisiún* was the first organization to take on the organization of a competition of such global dimensions. In addition, it is the organization to which I am affiliated and as such was the most obvious choice with regard to logistics, a priori knowledge and access to key informants.

Spradley asserts that ‘fieldwork is the hallmark of cultural anthropology’ (1979: 3). Acknowledging the importance of fieldwork as a primary methodology, I traveled to the Waterfront Hall in Belfast in April 2006 for the World Championships in Irish dance. *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* 2006 constitutes the primary focus of my research.
Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne

Since its inception in 1970 this event has come to be regarded as the jewel in the crown of *An Coimisiún*. From humble origins in *Coláiste Mhuire* in Parnell Square in Dublin, it expanded to change location to the home of Dublin city’s Lord Mayor, The Mansion House. Such was the rate of growth and expansion of this event that very soon, even this prestigious location was soon no longer large enough to house the championships. Another development occurred in the 1980s when the event was held outside the capital city for the first time. Leisureland in Galway was afforded the honour of hosting the *Oireachtas* in 1988. Subsequent years saw further changes as Limerick, Cork and Malahide acted as host venues for this high profile event.

The millennium championships in 2000 represented yet another highly significant development in the history of the World Championships. Belfast’s Waterfront Hall was the venue for the 30th *Oireachtas* and this marked a significant watershed in the story of competitive Irish step dance. This would not have been possible in previous years, due to the troubled political climate in Northern Ireland. In 2002, Glasgow’s National Events Centre successfully hosted the championships for the first time at a venue outside of the island of Ireland. Some participants who attended that year expressed dismay at not coming home to Ireland for Easter- since the event has traditionally been held during the Easter break- but for most people this relocation reflected the global nature of competitive Irish step dance. The 2006 *Oireachtas* was once again held in Belfast’s Waterfront Hall and adjoining British Telecom Studio.

This event was an important choice for me in several respects. In the first instance, most previous academic research of Irish dance was carried out before this period (Foley (1988), Hall (1995), Brennan (1999)). Moreover my own involvement as teacher/adjudicator/musician afforded me the opportunity to carry out fieldwork through several different lenses and I had both the objective and the opportunity of keeping abreast of the changes and developments in dance, music and presentation as they occurred.
Multiple Roles

Researcher as Insider

This particular ethnography can play a significant part in raising issues for further rigorous investigation since the researcher is well known in the competitive step dance community. It is not unique for practitioners to investigate their own dance interest areas. (See Foley (1988), Cullinane (1987) Flanagan (1995)).

Although very much aware of my own cultural background, I did not enter the field with a pre-determined agenda, but maintain that;

In certain ways my past involvement has provided me with the distinct advantages afforded an insider, and yet my chronological separation, my formal educational experiences and my present geographic distance provide me with the necessary objectivity to insure the academic validity of the project (Kathleen Flanagan 1995:14).

I share the insider status experienced by Kathleen Flanagan in 1994 during her research on Irish Dancing in Chicago. While I concur that my formal educational experiences have illuminated and informed my research initiative, I have deliberately continued to be actively involved in the competitive dance scene throughout this research. This current involvement enabled me to keep myself informed of current trends in competitive step dance. To gain some degree of distance and to facilitate reflective practice, I did however relinquish my role of musical accompanist and that of teacher and mentor to my own students during 2006, concentrating my focus on the task at hand, the completion of the research.

I contend that playing a multiplicity of investigative roles will serve to enrich the research focus, so long as every effort is made to frame the inquiry objectively and within an academic context. This is emphasized by Jackson who states: ‘A fieldworker doesn’t merely observe a context; the field worker close enough to observe it becomes part of it’ (1987:16). From my perspective, as the multi-layered experience has taken place over a period of more than thirty years, the challenge lay in unravelling some of the complex issues and searching for deeper meaning.

My own sense of self is inextricably linked with this research since it has become an integral part of my life. It is my intention to document and analyze the research data,
taking cognizance of the fact that certain personal biases and preferences will colour it to an extent. My own multiple overlapping identities will complicate the analysis but enrich it, never the less. I will outline below some of the roles I have experienced within the context of competitive Irish step dance.

**Researcher as spectator**

Coming from a family that has been immersed in all aspects of traditional Irish culture since the early 1900s, I have been attending these events with my parents since I was a young child. Unconsciously, my role as a participant observer began long before I became aware of its significance.

**Researcher as competitor**

As a competitor I participated in *Oireachtais* in team and solo events. I was on several occasions a member of award winning teams at the world Championships although never a serious contender as a solo performer. Nevertheless, I had experienced the hours of work in class, rehearsals, nervous tension before competitions and having my performance assessed by the adjudicating panel. Moreover, I had also enjoyed the experience of participating and competing in front of large audiences.

**Researcher as musical accompanist**

Always a traditional music exponent I had competed at major music competitions for many years. I particularly enjoyed playing for dancers in a *Céili* band context. Thus when I was invited to play at the World Championships in 1984 in Galway I did so with pride and enthusiasm. This aspect of my involvement gave me many insights into the psyche of the Irish dancing community as, in the role of the musician, one was privy to the vulnerability of competitors/adjudicators and audience reactions at all stages of the event. Watching unobserved from the wings, the researcher/musician was well placed as an independent observer. The opportunity to observe the dancers in the important moments prior to and immediately after their performance, as well as the expressions of the adjudicators during the dance performance and as they noted their marks for each dancer was one I relished and recognized as a privileged glimpse
into the private engagement of these players with the performance. The general perception of the dancing public was to view the musicians as non-partisan participants and one was less compromised in this role than in other available roles. Teachers, for example, would be in supportive role for their own pupils and adjudicators would be charged with the responsibility of selecting the winners.

**Researcher as teacher/coach/choreographer**

I had attended dancing classes in Limerick since I was a young child, where I was taught by my mother and aunt. Due to my aunt’s untimely death in 1988, I was in a situation where I was obliged to take my T.C.R.G\(^{20}\) without preamble or much advance warning to acquire the certification necessary to register as a teacher with An Coimisiún. I have been a certified teacher for the last fifteen years even though I had assisted in a voluntary capacity for many years prior to that.

When I became a senior partner in the *Uí Ruairc*\(^{21}\) dancing class, the role of choreographing new material was assigned to me. This was particularly challenging given that one of the students in the class had just won the World Championships prior to my aunt’s\(^{22}\) death. The dancers had respected my aunt as a dancer and mentor and were now working under the guidance of someone who had here-to-fore been perceived as a fellow dancer. This turn of events launched the creative/choreographic phase of my dancing career.

**Researcher as adjudicator**

In 2001, I sat my adjudicator’s examination. (A.D.C.R.G). In some respects, this is a logical progression in terms of being a recognized practitioner in the field of competitive step dance. It afforded me yet another lens through which to view the dance world. All spectators at these events are would-be adjudicators, in the sense that all form their own judgments on the merits and faults of the winners and losers.

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\(^{20}\) The certified qualification required before you can register with An Coimisiún.

\(^{21}\) *Scoil Uí Ruairc* was established in 1929 by my later grandmother Úna Ní Ruairc along with her sisters Mary and Margaret.

\(^{22}\) Áine Ní Thuathaigh was a champion Irish dancer and an adjudicator and examiner with An Coimisiún.
Becoming an adjudicator gave me access to the best seat in the house from which to view the dance competitions. It also gave additional responsibility to adjudicate fairly and with integrity and demanded more rigorous reflection on my criteria of evaluating merit/excellence in performance of Irish step dance.

**Researcher as researcher**

Perhaps the most difficult role to define is my current role as a dance researcher, as it succinctly combines elements of the other roles. I have been on the inside track. The new challenge is to distance myself sufficiently to reflect on the vast amount of information I have been privileged to gather. To this end, I opted not to play at the *Oireachtas* in 2006, as I felt it was more appropriate to embrace the research role exclusively.

**Reflexivity and Reciprocity**

Important here is not only the researcher’s background, training and relationship with those whose cultural norms are under study, but also the ideas that fieldworkers gain from earlier ethnography in their areas (See Noll 1997:163). Furthermore I recognized the need to contemplate the point of intersection of life and scholarship and to examine the extent to which I became a part of the transmission process I was endeavouring to document. (See Kay Kaufman Shelemay 1997:197)

**Entering the Field**

To the uninitiated, on first experiencing a session of traditional Irish music, an initial impression may be that the musicians are playing the same tune all night. Indeed, inherent subtleties are often lost on the neophyte! My contention is that those genre-specific subtleties tend to elude those who give competitive Irish step dance no more than a cursory glance or superficial consideration. It is my intention to explore the nature and extent of variation, innovation and creative possibilities within the competitive step dance genre insofar as the scope of this dissertation permits.
I opted to study a tradition I had encountered first hand but one often cast in a negative shadow by critics who portray it as artificial. (See Breathnach (1971), Brennan (1999) and Wulff (2007). The issue of the location of self was of paramount importance to me in the context of this dissertation. Conscious of my own prejudices and presuppositions due to my insider status, and cognizant of the responsibility of portraying the competitive step dance community in as comprehensive and objective a fashion as a snapshot of partial truth allows, I was conscious of Geertz’ caveats pertaining to pretensions to fairness.

He warns against five pretensions to fairness in ethnographic representations outlined below:\(^2\)

1. Ethnographic Ventriloquism: the claim to depict from the inside point of view, the point of view of the informant.

2. Text positivism: ethnographer in the role of broker simply passing on texts or knowledge of the informants.

3. Dispersed authorship: the pretence that the informants speak alongside the ethnographer in a more or less equal role.

4. Confessionalism: the ethnographers experience is the primary one examined.

5. The minimize assumption: that the ethnographer can minimize his impact in the representation by much self-inspection for bias.

I needed to exercise caution in not engaging in this type of ventriloquism even though I would be perceived as an insider by many of the informants. Moreover, the expectation of academic authority and the ensuing responsibility was also a consideration, given the important status accorded by my informants to the research project. While mindful of the personal subjectivity informing the background to this research, the issue of ‘confessionalism’ was to be avoided. The issue of involvement and distanciation is constantly being negotiated and mediated throughout the process of this research project.

To date, the role of the researcher has been examined by many scholars, and its significance acknowledged. Dumont refers to the fieldworker as a ‘heuristic device’ and describes fieldwork as ‘a dialectic process wherein the I and the they transform each other’ (1978: 12). The significance of the researcher is further emphasized by Margaret Mead who writes that ‘there is no such thing as an unbiased report upon any social situation. An unbiased report is, from the standpoint of its relevance to the ethos, no report at all. It is comparable to a colorblind man reporting on a sunset’ (Mead 1949:299).

Plummer refers to the continuum between little or no involvement on the part of the researcher, through being a stranger and then an acquaintance, to a friendship role. While the researcher /subject interaction can be a source of bias, Plummer suggests that to purge research of such sources of bias is to purge research of human life. My work is informed by a multiplicity of experiences and viewpoints, which have consciously been mediated to varying degrees. I eschew the prejudice that being an insider in the field and having insider relationships will lead to subjective views and agree with Narayan (1993) when he says:

We must focus our attention on... the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views and dilemmas- people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise (Narayan 1993:672)?

I contend that it is the mutual respect we share for each other and their breadth of knowledge and experience dynamically balanced with mine, that allowed objective research take place.

**Methodology**

Fieldwork is no longer viewed principally as a process of merely observing and collecting but as experiencing and understanding music (See Titon 1992(1984):xvi.) The new fieldwork leads us to ask what it is like for a person (ourselves included) to make and know music as lived experience. (Titon 1992:87) The works of Dilthey,
Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gadamer and Ricouer have all contributed to theories of knowledge based on understanding rather than explanation.

This philosophical tradition involves mainly two kinds of perspective: phenomenological and hermeneutic. The former, Phenomenology, emphasizes the immediate, concrete, sensory life world, and it attempts to ground knowledge in the world of lived experience (see Ihde (1986,1977). Hermeneutics originally developed as a way of interpreting the Bible but has come to be recognized as a method for interpreting texts in general.

Ricouer attempted an amalgamation of the two into what he terms phenomenological hermeneutics. Rice (1997:119) refers to two hermeneutical arcs that mediate between method and experience and between explanation and understanding by moving through time. This mediation between method and experience resonated with the methodology I was utilizing.

Gadamer proposes that since understanding takes place only in the context of an existing tradition, every act of understanding already presupposes a certain amount, essentially our own presumptions or prejudices, an essential aspect of our being in the world. I endeavoured to discover aspects of my own presuppositions or prejudices and to evaluate how they might impact upon the research project.

We all grapple with the ‘problem of welding the disparate strips of observation into a finished work of analysis’ (Slobin 1992).

Personally I consider it a positive value that I can draw on a host of intensely familiar experiences. My own research is an engagement with my own past, heritage and ancestry but also part of the future tapestry of my cultural inter-weavings. People in the field did not need to ask who I was or why I was intent on analyzing this particular dance genre. Most appreciated its value for posterity noting what an honour it would be to be featured in the archive- a word used with a tone akin to reverence even if occasionally with a hint of irony.
A multi-layered approach

The disciplines of ethnomusicology and ethnochoreology have always combined multi methodologies. Rice (1997:102) notes that although no single theory predominates, ethnomusicologists currently work with many theories and have woven a polyphonic theoretical fabric. Thus, a number of research strategies and methodologies are combined for the purpose of illuminating this dissertation. These include ethnography, participant observation, recording, library work, notation and transcription.

I conducted formal interviews using mini disc, mainly for eliciting my consultants’ models of the competitive events, controversial issues, and their views on the creative process as it applies to competitive Irish step dance.

As I had elected to concentrate my research on the eighteen and under 19 ladies and gents section, I surveyed the top five dancers in each of these sections in the weeks and months after the competition. I selected this age group as these competitors were adults and would also have had many years experience in competitive Irish dancing underpinning their thoughts and opinions. Moreover, this choice also acknowledges the significance of the 10 year rule to achieve mastery of a particular domain (See Gardner 1993:371). It is also the oldest age where any top class performers compete prior to leaving the competitive arena to take part in the spectacle shows as professional dancers.

I also undertook to carry out interviews with their teachers, mentors, coaches, and choreographers as I endeavoured to unravel the complex web of relations involved directly or indirectly in the evolution of the creative process in the context of competitive step dance. Further interviews were carried out with the adjudicators and musicians who officiated at the Oireachtas in an attempt to provide as comprehensive and holistic an analysis as possible.

Additional interviews were conducted with leading choreographers and performers in the realm of Irish step dance to investigate the impact of spectacle show dances on competitive Irish step dance and also to continue to interrogate and investigate the varied perceptions of the continued evolution of the creative process in operation.
within this genre. In addition, I considered the corpus of general literature relating to dancing and music in Ireland.

Labanotation, together with verbal descriptions is the system adopted here in documenting and analysing competitive step dance. As a notation system it is a useful documentation tool, universally used by dance ethnologists and can successfully be adapted to the documentation of Irish step dance (See Foley (1988), (2007)). As such, it can also contribute to comparative studies in dance ethnologies. The use of labanotation to record and transcribe dances performed by winning competitors was also a key tool in deepening this analysis of Irish step dance. It allows for the identification of key motifs a determination of floor patterns and the identification of combinations of structures used effectively by successful competitors.

I also used video recordings and photographs as an extended memory device. I requested permission to film the designated competitions. My application to An Coimisiún to video record the 18-19 championships was denied as filming and photography is not permitted according to the regulations of An Coimisiún. The reasons cited are child protection and also issues of copyright. It should be acknowledged that dance teachers are very protective of the dance steps they create and do not want them easily accessed via digital media. However, I was given access to the official recording taken by An Coimisiún during the said competitions. This, while helpful and appreciated, was not ideal as the camera was stationary and not all the dancers’ movements were clearly discernible as they would have been had I been permitted to record the event myself. A further complication which developed was that the sound feed was not always available. This was very challenging when doing percussive transcriptions and the process will be described in detail in chapter five. Moreover, I was required to write to all participants in the ladies and gents 18-19 competitions to acquire their consent and that of their teachers’ for my work24. I was struck by the wave of goodwill and co-operation that was forthcoming from my fellow dance teachers who recognised the importance of my work and more significantly the value of their contribution to it. The structural analysis is therefore based on a video recording made at 2006 World Championships in Irish dance.

24 See sample letters attached in appendix 3.
I have decided as a researcher to adopt a phenomenological orientation for this study as it enabled the focussing of attention upon personal experience. Within this context, it was also necessary to consider approaches to tradition and innovation that are often presented as polarised.

The first of these is described by Veblen as one ‘which considers tradition as a passive immutable force in society’ (1991:6), while the second perceives tradition as an active creative force. Nettl offers a compromise in the form of what he terms modernisation.

Modernisation is the process whereby… A music retains its traditional essence but becomes modern- that is part of the contemporary world and its set of values… the traditional music is changed in order to remain intact in the modern world (1978:10).

And he expands with the suggestion that:

We may view a musical system as consisting of a core… and a surrounding superstructure. The role of the superstructure is somehow to maintain the core intact, at the expense of changing itself…. The superstructure has been flexible and adaptable, while the core has remained relatively stable. Had the core changed greatly, one could perhaps speak of the death of a tradition (1978: 179-180).

Kay Kaufman Shelemay contemplates how this issue of tradition is dealt with by historical musicologists and muses that the researcher can play a key role in this development:

The central polemic among historical musicologists vis-à-vis the act of performance and their own role in transmitting (and even reinventing) tradition seems to center largely around the area of authenticity versus creativity in the act of musical construction and performance practice (1997:190).

She also alludes to the ways in which the fieldworker is most frequently implicated in the process of transmission: preserving tradition, translating tradition and memorializing tradition and mediating tradition. Thus, using this inter-actional model, I perceive my role as a field worker to preserve, memorialize and mediate, through documentation, analysis, work in the field and reflective practice.
Dwight Conquergood (1985) identifies varying types of attitudes toward the ethnography of performance. He refers to the approaches of the custodian, the enthusiast, the skeptic and the curator. Against all these he champions the fifth stance—Dialogical performance— which aims to bring together different voices, world views, value systems so that they can have a conversation with each other. The result sought is an open-ended performance, resisting conclusions and seeking to keep interrogation open. I contend that the *feis* is an opportunity for dialogical performance where movement systems are presented and traditional boundaries are constantly renegotiated.

My contention remains that since competitive Irish step dance is continuing to evolve and develop organically, it is very much a living tradition; thus constant creative inputs and innovations are possible.

**Chapter Outline**

Chapter one introduces the topic of this thesis from an historical perspective and justifies *Oireachtas na Cruinne* as a significant site for informing the research question. It also clarifies the relations between the researcher and the cultural matrix under investigation.

Chapter two will focus specifically on issues of defining creativity and its possible application in the context of the competitive step dance genre. Chapter three will deal specifically with the description of the dance event under review, namely *Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne* 2006, while chapter four will be devoted to a structural and contextual analysis of the step-dance categories for female and male competitors in the under 19 age group. Chapter five will speak to the significant relationships that have informed the creative processes in competitive step dance throughout this research. The findings and general conclusions will be summarized in the concluding chapter and areas for further academic enquiry will be suggested.
Chapter Two
Historicizing the Creative Process

The need for a deeper understanding of creativity has inspired a significant amount of research. In recent decades in excess of 10,000 research articles in creativity have appeared in numerous journals and periodicals. The 1990s saw an increase in the publication of texts pertaining to the issue of creativity (Sternberg 1999). This proliferation of research confirms that creativity is a concern in numerous fields, including all of the arts and sciences. The research is multidisciplinary in nature, and is being carried out by individuals in diverse disciplines. These include psychology, the health sciences, the arts, education and business. The analysis that follows considers the relevance of the creativity question for the performing arts in general and for competitive Irish step dance in particular.

I have been attending step dance competitions for more than thirty years. Over the course of time, I have had occasion to witness many wonderful, inspiring performances of Irish step dance. I have always been excited by virtuoso performers seeking to introduce nuance and change to their dance material. I am intrigued by dance commentators who have attributed terms such as ‘gifted’, ‘genius’ ‘remarkable’ to top class exponents of Irish dance. Eminent performers and choreographers have been labeled ‘creative’ within this genre. Given that competitions are often maligned for their possible negative impacts on self-esteem and individuality, I consider it appropriate to examine how the notion of creativity is interrogated within the competitive Irish step dance genre.

This chapter, therefore, explores the complex nature of creativity and highlights the importance of the creativity question in Irish dance performance. It examines attitudes to and perceptions of the creative processes from the Golden Age of the Ancient Greeks to the twenty first century. It also considers a variety of cross-disciplinary approaches to interrogating the creative question and seeks to investigate interpretations of and efforts to define the term creativity. Finally, it proposes to establish the prerequisites for establishing a creative environment and examines the extent to which creativity is facilitated within competition culture in general and with
regard to the competitive Irish step dance arena more specifically. Firstly, it interrogates existing definitions of the term creativity before going on to historicize the evolution of the creativity question. Secondly, it examines contemporary academic discourse surrounding the issue of creativity, with particular emphasis on the models proposed by Amabile (1982), Gardner (1993), and Smith-Autard (1996, 2001). The concluding section seeks to establish a working definition of creativity within the more specific context of this thesis. Building on how the term creativity evolved in the nineteenth century and drawing extensively on existing research by Foley (1988) and Hall (1995) within the field of Irish dance, I will propose an analytical framework for application to the competitive dance arena. This will include a working definition of creativity as it is applied within the domain of Irish step dance. More specifically it will consider the Irish step dance competitive event as a potentially creative environment and examine the complex web of relations that need to be in place to facilitate this process. My analysis will identify those involved in the creative process, the defining characteristics they possess, and the manner in which the products of their creativity can contribute to the development and further understanding of Irish dance as a creative art form.

However, in order to examine the relationship between creative processes and Irish dance, it is necessary firstly to problematise the concept of creativity. To this end, the section that follows contains a brief historical overview of creativity as both a term in and of itself, and as a broader, if more abstract construct which seeks to define and theorise artistic ability, talent, potential and above all, success.

What is ‘creativity’?

Creativity is multifaceted and represented in different ways in different domains. This multi-disciplinarity renders the term itself somewhat elusive, given the plethora of definitions proffered by specialists in a variety of fields. It is, however, possible to identify a number of key elements common to all such definitions that invariably return to the epistemological roots of the term itself by stressing the notion of ‘creation’ or ‘invention’.
The term creativity originates from the Latin verb *creare*, meaning to produce. [Oxford dictionary 2001] Some of the synonyms presented include inventiveness, imagination, innovation, originality, individuality, artistry, inspiration and vision. This somewhat rudimentary definition of the term serves to identify two of the main attributes upon which all subsequent definitions of creativity are contingent: novelty and value.

Thus, minimally, creativity consists of the capacity for or act of bringing something into being. Indeed, these attributes are commonly proposed as prerequisites to any further or future definition of creativity. As early as 1913, Poincaré maintained that ‘to create consists of making new combinations of associative elements, which are useful’. (1913:386) Similarly Rothenberg and Hausman (1976), defined a creative response as ‘one having both newness and value’, sentiments later echoed by Amabile (1983) and Robinson (2001:118)\(^25\).

In 1996, Csikszentmihalyi sought to provide a more expansive definition of creativity when he suggested that the term ‘creative’ could be applied not only to new creations but rather to ‘any act, idea or product that changes an existing domain or that transforms an existing domain into a new one’ (1996:28). This understanding of the creative process presupposes a certain knowledge and level of expertise in the field. Thus, Czikszentmihalyi (1996: 6) proposes that ‘within this ‘familiar’ creative field, the interaction of three key elements is essential to the fulfillment of the creative process: 1) a culture that contains symbolic rules, 2) a person who brings novelty into the symbolic domain, and 3) a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation’. It is within this framework proposed by Czikszentmihaly that I propose to analyse the creative processes within competitive Irish step dance, identifying the *feis* as ‘a culture which contains symbolic rules’, the competitor/choreographer as ‘a person who brings novelty to the symbolic domain’, and finally, the broader Irish dance community - teachers, musicians, adjudicators and audience – as ‘a field of experts who recognize and validate the innovation’.

\(^{25}\) Robinson (2001:118) refers to creative processes as ‘imaginative processes that produce outcomes that are original and of value’, and suggests that creativity can best be thought of in terms of accomplishments, achievements that are original and make a meaningful contribution to culture.
Consequently, my analysis of creative processes in Irish step dance will identify what is new and considered to be of value within this competitive arena. Drawing on this definition, I will consider the step dance competition, which has a set of codified rules and requirements, and examine how the panel employed to adjudicate on the performance assess the performers. Furthermore, I will examine the creative processes utilised by those winning performers and their mentors.

**Creativity through the ages**

Prior to the nineteenth century, little was written about the nature of creative thinking. Although there had been extensive theorising about other human capacities, the origins of creative productivity were not analyzed intellectually, due to a contention that creativity was too obscure a concept to allow for this type of analytic scrutiny. People believed that the human mind was possessed of two separate chambers. This concept was referred to as the bicameral mind. The first of these chambers, in which new thoughts are conceived, was controlled by the Gods. The purpose of the second chamber of the mind was to express inspiration through the more ordinary mechanisms of reading and writing (Jaynes: 1976). Perhaps the first to challenge the concept of the bicameral mind was the philosopher Aristotle in the fourth century BC. Although he agreed with his predecessors that inspiration involved madness, he suspected that great insights begin as the result of a person’s own thoughts, through a process which has become known as ‘associationism’.²⁶

Until the Renaissance, it was widely believed that all desirable innovations were inspired by the Gods or by God, or, depending on the creator’s religious orientation, by a higher divine order. During the Renaissance, this view began to give way to the idea that creativity is a matter of genetic inheritance, a view that prevailed until well into the nineteenth century.

In 1767, the first major inquiry into the creative process took place. William Duff in his work entitled *Essays on Original Genius* was one of the first to write about the qualities of original genius as distinct from talent, which is considered productive but

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²⁶ This concept was later developed by Galton (1879) who, building on Darwinian principles and insights on Evolution, developed the significance of ‘recurrence’ and ‘free association’ of ideas.
not ground breaking. Duff proposed that the combination of imagination, judgement and taste were fundamental to genius. In the wake of Duff’s seminal work during the eighteenth century, there were numerous noteworthy milestones, which made an impact on the discourse pertaining to creativity. Foremost amongst these were the establishment of the British Royal Society, the publication of influential texts and the growth of social and philosophical opposition to Church and state authority (See Dacey 1999:316). Mark Runco and Robert Albert (1997:26) summarise the four main constituents of eighteenth century debates on creativity, acknowledging the centrality of human agency to the notion of creativity and recognizing the capacity for creativity in all individuals. It also distinguished between talent and genius as distinct entities and signposted the potential role of societal factors in the development of creativity.

Throughout the nineteenth century, a major shift in the conception of the creative act occurred. With the renunciation of divine inspiration as the only cause of creativity came a transition to the opposite extreme: great men are great because they have inherited a serendipitous combination of genes from their ancestors. Many decades would pass before the capacity of women for genius was acknowledged. Thus, Galton in 1879 argued that mental capacities are inherited and refused to believe that early experience or indeed the immediate environment played much of a role in the creative act. He strongly contended that genius resides in those persons who are beneficiaries of exceptional inheritance, especially of brain cells (See Dacey 1999:318).

William James, writing towards the end of the nineteenth century, was the first to subscribe to the idea that the interaction of the environment with genetic inheritance was of import to defining creativity. He believed that the condition of one’s upbringing, including parental philosophy, was more important than genes. James (1880) concurred with Galton and Freud concerning the extent to which the ability to get in touch with one’s unconscious ideas was vital to giving birth to originality.

As studies on creativity developed throughout the 20th and into the 21st century, four key frameworks of analyses considered applicable to the creative process came to the fore: psychoanalytic, humanist, behaviourist and cognitive (Craft 2000, Starko 2001, Cropley 2001 and Chapell 2006).

27 Amongst the significant texts which contributed to this debate are Francis Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* and Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations*.
The psychoanalytic method of analysis, as applied by theorists such as Freud, Jung and Kubie, views creativity as stemming from the preconscious or the unconscious mind. Humanistic theorists on the other hand - Murray, Maslow and Rogers, relate creativity to a conscious act by the individual in his or her quest for self-actualisation. Behaviouristic theories perceive creativity as a responsive act resulting from specific and primarily external stimuli. (Skinner, 1957). Methods of analysis at the core of cognitive psychology focus on mental processes such as how humans think, perceive, recall and learn.

Despite the differences between these various frameworks they each offer valuable insights into the creative process. The cognitive approach encompasses visions contained in the other approaches but with a broader remit. It differs from psychoanalysis through its use of scientific methods to examine mental processes and from behaviourism through its concern with internal mental states, as opposed to focusing solely on those behaviours that can be externally observed.

Another highly influential research approach to creativity was developed in the middle of the twentieth century. Placing particular emphasis on the question of who can be creative and what particular prerequisites are required and/or conducive to the emergence of a healthy, creative environment, this approach is based on biographical enquiry. The main exponents of biographical enquiry include Galton, Guilford and Torrance. While Galton’s work established a firm link between creativity and the concept of hereditary genius, Guilford and Torrance went on to further interrogate the multidimensionality of the human mind. Within this context their work has identified key components of divergent thinking such as flexibility and originality which are still of major import in creativity studies today. The significance of multidimensionality pertaining to creative processes, is further advanced by Gardner (1993) who strives to understand creativity in terms of a more expansive definition of intelligence. He identifies six domains of creativity, designated as intelligences, which include the verbal linguistics, musical, logic mathematical, visual spatial, bodily kinaesthetic and social personal.

These domains of creativity are useful in the consideration of the creative processes associated with dance composition, given that they refer to visual spatial, social personal, musical as well as bodily kinesthetic intelligences, all of which are utilised
by choreographers and dance artists. I will be placing particular emphasis on the musical, visual spatial, bodily kinaesthetic and social personal intelligences in this thesis.

This historic overview serves to highlight the diverse accounts of creativity and the manner in which the first frameworks of analysis for the creative process came into being and were developed. However, it is necessary at this point, to examine in more detail some of the major analytical approaches, which are more commonly applied to studies of creativity in contemporary academic circles.

**A theoretical perspective: Approaches to the study of creativity**

Given the multiple definitions and perceptions of the term creativity outlined in the opening section, it is perhaps unsurprising to note that academic/analytical approaches to the study of creativity are numerous and varied. The most common framework applications include a consensual approach, a social systems approach and, an approach that investigates creativity through analysis of traits of individuals considered to be creative.

The consensual assessment technique is a tool for measuring creativity in which appropriate experts evaluate creative products. The technique was developed by Amabile in 1982 to compare works created under diverse motivational conditions.\(^{28}\) In this approach judges who are considered to be savants in the domain under study, are instructed to use their own subjective definition of creativity as they rate creative products relative to one another rather than against some ultimate norm.

Mac Kinnon (1962), Getzels and Csikszentmihalyi (1976), Amabile (1983) and Sternberg (1985), have all successfully used groups of judges to evaluate products in terms of creativity. What is of importance however is that such procedures generally involve experts using their own standards of creativity, thus avoiding the thorny issue

\(^{28}\) For further information see Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
of objectively defining specific criteria. In terms of competitive step dance, while there are agreed norms and conventions in terms of posture, footwork and musicality, the level of subjectivity which adjudicators can employ is further evidence of the extent to which the criteria for creativity are open to interpretation within the competitive step dance arena.

Indeed, the notion of subjectivity is central to the creative process, as demonstrated by the fact that both the social systems and personality approaches are also reliant upon subjective characteristics and criteria. In the case of the social systems approach, for example, Csikzentmihalyi (1994) and Starko (2001) propose theories that approach creativity as an interaction between the individual and the outside world (See Chapell 2006:52). The contextual and social influences on creative behaviour include such things as physical environment, culture, group or organisational climate, time/task constraints, expectations, rewards/punishments and role models. Taken together, these are the elements of the environment and social setting in which the creative act takes place and, as such, have the potential to contribute to or detract from individual differences in creativity. Contextual and social factors can therefore facilitate or hinder creativity. Gardner (1993) further expanded this perspective to examine creativity as a phenomenon resulting from an interaction of field, domain and individual. In terms of competitive step dance, the *feis* is the site under review and the players who practice Irish dance are the individuals who engage with this domain.

While continuing to focus on what can be considered ‘subjective’ criteria, the final approach of import within the context of this work focuses specifically on one central criterion: ‘the creative person’. Thus, this particular approach touches on one of the central questions being addressed by this thesis: who can be creative? How can we identify creative people? Cropley (2001) asks if certain personality traits facilitate creativity. This is further examined by Shallcross (1981) and Brolin (1992) who extrapolated, from relevant literature pertaining to creative personalities, a list of the most typical characteristics that distinguish a creative person. The traits include strength of character, a sense of purpose, the ability to be open and flexible, an ability to challenge convention through risk and an ability to take novel approaches. A successful Irish dance choreographer or virtuosic performer is required to demonstrate a strong focus and sense of purpose and, in order to stand out, will have to challenge
competitive conventions through risk and novelty in terms of delivery of exciting new choreographic moves. As Royce observes:

Great performers continue to emerge, defying all attempts to constrain, restrain or define them. In them the work is embodied and has its only albeit ephemeral existence (Royce 2004:60).

Wallack (1985:129) stated that ‘creativity may be best understood as what constitutes the work done at the cutting edge of a given field by those who have mastered it’. Simonton (1976) wrote extensively about eminence, outlining what makes eminent performers stand out, thus setting them apart from others in their field. In the field of competitive Irish step dance, eminent performers who spring to mind include Michael Flatley, Jean Butler, who achieved much recognition for their performances with Riverdance, Colin Dunne and Breandán de Gallai who performed leading roles with Riverdance but sought afterwards to continue their development as professional Irish dance performers and choreographers. Moreover, since the inception of the world championships in Irish dance, many winners have gone on to perform in professional spectacle shows or to further their dance experience by setting up their own shows, thus showcasing their own creativity in a context other than the competitive arena.

Despite the importance of eminence and the need for individual virtuoso performers, analysis of the creative process cannot and must not be confined to analysis of this singular trait in the creative individual. Indeed, it is important to point out that the visibility of eminent performers guarantees their inclusion within the ‘creative’ category and their success reminds us that they are in fact at the pinnacle of their ‘creative’ careers. However, it is necessary to return to the origins and various phases of their ‘creativity’ if we wish to gain a better understanding of the actual creative process.

Wallas (1926) proposed a phased model of creativity, identifying the key stages of, preparation, incubation, intimation, illumination and verification within the creative process. Fryer (1996) and Claxton (200329) were critical of this phased approach as they considered the process to be more cyclical. However, I suggest that if we adapt Wallas’ proposal in a cyclical manner, we have a model of creativity that functions optimally within the Irish step dance genre. This is in agreement with Craft (2000)

who emphasises the importance of multiple layering of cycles and processes within creativity.

Within this context, it is important to acknowledge the multiple factors, both internal and external to the creative individual that influence the creative process. Building on research carried out by Amabile, the following section will therefore examine factors such as skills, motivation, creative environment and evaluation.

Prerequisites to creativity

Skills

Amabile’s components of creativity comprise domain relevant skills, creativity relevant skills, task motivation and evaluation. The first set of skills she examines are domain relevant skills which depend on innate cognitive abilities, inate perceptual and motor skills and formal and informal education. She then discusses skills relevant to creativity which depend on the training received, the level of experience in the generation of ideas and, of course, the personality characteristics of would-be creative people. Regarding the issue of task motivation, she examines attitudes towards the task and perceptions of self-motivation for undertaking that particular task. She stresses the importance of intrinsic internal motivation and eschews the positive effect of extrinsic constraints in the social environment.

Let us apply these domain skills to the dance genre under consideration. The competitive Irish step dancer will possess a certain degree of cognitive ability and a level of kinaesthetic intelligence needed to learn and perform the required dance movements and is most likely to be receiving formal dance training. The development of creativity relevant skills is then a possibility contingent on the personality and skill of the dancer and teacher and the extent to which ideas are engaged with in the creative process. This raises the key issue of motivation. Why is the dancer or teacher creating the piece and performing it within the competitive arena? Specificity of motivation in Irish dance will be discussed further in chapter five. However, more general theories and frameworks examining motivation must first be considered.
Motivation

The variables that discriminate between creative and non-creative people are motivational in character. Because creative activity is thought traditionally to be intrinsically motivated and personalised from the depth of one’s unique self (Ghiselin 1952), it is a contradiction to this notion that imitative or trained behaviour be considered creative. In a summary of the research literature on the social and environmental factors influencing creativity, Amabile examined the topics of evaluation, rewards, modelling and training. Among the conclusions from her review of the research, was the finding that the expectation of evaluation tends to undermine creativity. With respect to rewards, there is considerable research support for intrinsic motivation as facilitating creativity (See Kohn 1983). An extrinsic reward tends to be detrimental to the creative performance to the extent that it can lead others to view motivation as external.

Amabile (1983a,b1985) showed that intrinsic motivation is important for creativity. Intrinsic rewards are those that arise from performing a task that is interesting and pleasurable in itself. External rewards are those that come from beyond the domain of the task, e.g. being paid or praised for working on the task. She maintains that creativity is enhanced by intrinsic rewards and decreased by extrinsic rewards. Several theorists, including notably, Crutchfield 1962 and Rogers 1954 have argued that freedom from external pressure or control and a warm, supportive environment are necessary or at least quite helpful for creativity. In the context of the competitive step dance audience, the feis public- could they be viewed as supportive?

Let us consider these findings with reference to competitive step dance. I am suggesting that the dancer, in an effort to be awarded 100 points or top ranking by an adjudicator, will use this extrinsic external motivator, to fuel or further channel their own creative impulse to conceive of a winning performance. Can we infer that the limits and restrictions imposed by regulatory bodies on Irish Step dance events are informational in nature? To a certain extent they are. The duration of each performance is pre-determined according to the number of bars of music that each dancer will perform. Moreover, attire and footwear are prescribed as are the genre of dances to be performed.
The creative impulse

Prospects of material reward, especially in the arts, are rare and coveted. Artists often risk public apathy or ridicule, and creative work can also yield dissatisfaction, frustration, anxiety and lack of funding. This begs the question, why do we continue to be creative? In terms of musical creativity, Mantle Hood (1960:193) suggests that ‘composition is a search to find something which is far away, an effort to climb unscalable heights, or plumb the depths, all at the same time’. From a dancer’s perspective, Jacqueline Smith Autard claims that ‘creativity is a quest for order. When we create we aim for completeness and logical design. Every part of the whole should seem necessary and inevitable (1996:31)’.

Over the course of time, a multitude of reasons have been proposed in response to the question ‘why do we create’? These include, wish fulfillment (Freud), escape from the ordinary life (Einstein) and such conscious motives as a quest for wealth, fame, success or the desire to express or communicate something.

Evaluation

Objectively measuring artistic performance of individuals is difficult, and most domains have developed and refined standardised methods for assessing levels of achievement. Thus far, efforts to develop a creativity quotient of an individual similar to the intelligence quotient IQ have been unsuccessful.

In the arts, sciences and some sports events, a panel of experts or judges ascertains the quality of individual performances or specific achievement. There exists, within a variety of modes of artistic expression, a continuum from ‘interpretation’ to ‘innovation’. In the past, convention has dictated that there are creative performers such as dancers, actors and musicians who interpret creativity, allowing writers, composers and choreographers freedom to express creativity. In the context of dance, is the dancer merely a conduit for the choreographer’s ideas? This question is central to the current research and will be examined further throughout the thesis.
For practicing professionals, evaluation, whether by collaborators, critics or audience, is a constant prospect, so that those who cannot produce their best work in such circumstances will not survive for long.

**The Creative Environment**

The spatiotemporal context in which creative persons operate has consequences. It is essential that creative persons be in the right place at the right time. The significance of the creative environment is emphasized by Csikszentmihalyi who argues that:

>Certain environments have a greater density of interaction and provide more excitement and a greater effervescence of ideas; therefore they prompt the person who is already inclined to break away from conventions to experiment with novelty more readily than if he or she had stayed in a more conservative, more repressive setting (Csikszentmihalyi 2001:129).

David M. Harrington (1975) described the creative environment as the physical, social and cultural environment in which creative activity occurs. In the case of Irish Dance, this creative environment comprises several milieux: the dance class, the home environment of the student and choreographer, the hall or auditorium where the feiseanna are staged. Furthermore, much debate vis-a-vis competition culture takes place over the world wide web through the vast network of internet fora which deal with issues pertaining to Irish dance.

The difficulties of defining and measuring creativity are such that it is difficult to establish firm conclusions on the relative importance of genetic and environmental factors, featured in the nature versus nurture debate. In the world of human creativity, no single environment best suits all creative people or projects; some blossom in competitive settings, others thrive in collaborative situations. It is therefore necessary to examine the complex interrelationship between society and creativity.

Shallcross (1981) has written on strategies for setting a climate conducive to creative behaviour that take into account physical, mental and emotional strategies. Physical strategies relate to providing a suitable space for the creative activity to occur. Mental determinants pertain to fostering the artist’s self esteem, while emotional
considerations refer to the provision of a secure environment where the artist is not threatened financially or politically.

Can the *féis* public be described as empathetic? In the context of competitive Irish step dance, the audience is largely comprised of those connected to or with a vested interest in the Irish dance scene. For the most part, the performers will be well received in a relatively safe environment, even if they are being evaluated. Every spectator will make value judgements based on their opinion of a particular performance by a particular dancer, yet the predominant atmosphere emanating from the audience is one of support, despite the existence of groups of supporters from rival schools.

**Creativity and pedagogy**

Smith-Autard theorizes the framework within which creativity can take place. She attests that, ‘In the arts, to compose is to create, to make something which, for each particular artist, has not been in existence before (1996:v).

She also observes that there are rules or guidelines for construction, which need to be part of the composers’ awareness when making dances. Although she was referring to modern dance, I will adapt some of the principles and strategies she puts forward in the context of Irish dance. According to Smith-Autard, the basis for success in composition depends upon 1) the artistry and intuitive inspiration of the individual, 2) a wide vocabulary of movement as a means of expression, and 3) knowledge of how to create the shape and structure of a dance. She suggests that stimuli for dance compositions can be auditory, visual, ideational, tactile or kinesthetic. I contend that the first three of these are highly significant for the composition in Irish dance while the last two are seldom utilized.

When responding to an auditory stimulus such as music, the choreographer is provided with a highly structured framework in terms of time and rhythm. Visual stimuli can provide a freer, more fluid approach to choreography although in step dance, the rhythm of the accompanying music is always considered to some extent. This will be examined further in chapters three and five. When composing set dances,
an ideational stimulus can be the point of departure. An example of this would be in the composition of a set piece, for example, in The Three Sea Captains or Kilkenny Races, choreographers may use imagery associated with the story depicted in the title to assist with the development of motifs.

Furthermore, the methods of construction outlined by Smith –Autard can also be adapted and considered in relation to features of Irish Dance Choreography.

1. Motifs
2. Repetition
3. Variation and contrasts
4. Climax or highlights
5. Proportion and balance
6. Transition
7. Logical development
8. Unity

She explores the use of improvisation in the process of composition and considers the relevance of limited improvisation:

Limited improvisation is the more usual approach in dance composition. Here, in my view, creativity can be greater than in a free improvisation situation because, with boundaries defined, there seems to be more depth to penetrate. This brings to mind the maxim that total freedom is no freedom at all (Smith –Autard 1996:85).

This resonated with my own contention that without discipline there can be no freedom and the acknowledgement that the challenge for those choreographing within the Irish step dance genre is to achieve that depth within the boundaries of the structure. Redfern (1973:20) insists that to be imaginative in the aesthetic realm demands knowledge and understanding of the standards and techniques peculiar to the art form in question. Consequently, the level of skill and knowledge of the Irish dance aesthetic required to excel in that art form, is demanding and exacting in time, commitment and expertise. I also concur with her assertion that ‘creativity is a quest
for order. When we create we aim for completeness and logical design. Every part of the whole should seem necessary and inevitable’ (Redfern 1973:20).

To date, the role of creativity in dance composition has not been accorded due attention by dance scholars. This is highlighted by Alma Hawkins, who notes that:

Our interest in good technical performance has caused us to emphasize movement and to neglect creativity. We are constantly tempted to give value to technique as an end in itself rather than as a means to an end…Comparatively little thought and time have been given to the phenomenon of creativity and its relationship to the study of choreography (Hawkins 1988:vii).

Once again her area of expertise is the field of modern dance but I argue that Irish step dance practitioners also concern themselves with creative processes within their dance genre. Hawkins goes on to differentiate between constructing and creating. My contention is that while the average performer of Irish dance may perform constructed material, the virtuoso performer will perform a masterpiece that has been created by a talented artist:

Choreographing means more than assembling movements. The artist is concerned with what results from the organization of movement rather than with the mere arrangement. As a craftsman, the dancer may construct a sequence of movements, but as an artist, he creates an organic entity. Constructing and creating are two quite different processes (1988:5).

Hawkins argues the point that creativity thrives on freedom and is best nurtured in an atmosphere that is permissive but further notes that:

Permissiveness does not imply a complete lack of structure. Some framework is essential to protect the freedom as well as the psychological safety of the individual. Within this framework, the learner should be free to select and develop his own ideas. He should sense that boundaries are flexible not rigid. (1988:17)

Although she is an advocate of psychological freedom and the importance of expression rather than a formulaic approach to choreography, Hawkins repeatedly acknowledges the inherent values of structures and systems within the creative process.

True creative work does not follow any set formula… There are certain basic concepts however, such as functionality, simplicity and form, which
the mature choreographer knows are significantly related to the making of dances.

In her study of aesthetic standards in old time dancing in South West Virginia, Susan Spalding refers to the role of the active creative agent in the production of these dances. Spalding’s work is a significant marker as she was also dealing with a dance genre perceived as traditional, although it is not negotiated in the competitive domain, as is the case with Irish dance. I eschew the either/or presence of tradition and innovation within this step dance genre and propose that an understanding of the tradition can enrich the ensuing creative process, contributing to a dance form which, as Hall notes, is now Irish rather than not Irish:

The concept of individual creativity and cultural tradition working interdependently provides guideposts for documenting and interpreting folklore that take into account the collective precedent as well as the particular special performance... Innovation is based on an understanding of traditional precedents (1992:1,3).

To provide a creative environment to allow creativity to flourish, Blom and Chaplin (1989:209) emphasise creating an atmosphere of trust, while continuing to honestly use expertise to give constructive critical feedback; establishing an open rapport with students, stressing that playfulness is carried out within a structure that has purposefulness and a sense of obligation to those with whom students are working. To apply this to the context of Irish dance, the relationship between the dancer and teacher must be open and forthright if a creative relationship is to blossom. However, the extent to which the competition itself allows for constructive critical feedback is questionable. This and other significant relationships will be debated further in the concluding chapter.

Creative inspiration is only possible when an individual has made the necessary mind and body preparations and is open to being transformed. Louis Pasteur highlighted this when he remarked; ‘Did you observe to whom the accidents happen? Chance favours only the prepared mind.’ (Louis Pasteur, quoted by Edwards Betty 1988:64)
The element of chance

To date I have considered various approaches to creativity. I now propose to examine the role which can be played by incidental occurrences due to blind luck or chance. The element of chance also plays a role in the creative process. This is emphasised by Austin (1978:xii) who notes that ‘We are all creative but only to the extent that we are lucky’. Csikszentmihalyi (1997:46,47) supports this stance claiming that ‘luck is without doubt an important ingredient in creative discoveries’ and extolling the significance of an artist ‘standing in a propitious space/time convergence’. Chance, as described by Austin (1978), can be considered under the following categories:

- **Chance 1.** This can be described as ‘Blind Luck’, where nothing is attributed to the individual.

- **Chance 2.** This is more a question of serendipity. According to the Kettering Principle, chance favours those in motion.

- **Chance 3.** This third element is attributed to sagacity and involves the Pasteur principle which proposes that chance favours the prepared mind.

- **Chance 4.** This follows the Disraeli Principle, and favours individualised action which can be interpreted as the quality of prompting good luck as a result of personally distinctive actions.

Aspects of all these characterisations of the role of chance in creativity can be combined to account for some prowess in creativity as it relates to Irish step dance. This will be clarified further and discussed in more detail in chapter five. In the first instance, one can be born with limbs which are attractive to behold and which will flex and arch without any effort on one’s part. Additionally, a person may reside in an area which has really good tutors and this may increase the chance of experiencing

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30 Charles Kettering was an automotive engineer who emphasized the importance of adding motion to blind chance. ‘Keep on going and the chances are you will stumble on something when you are least expecting it. I have never heard of anyone stumbling on something sitting down’. (Quoted in Austin 1978)

31 Pasteur maintained that chance also involves receptivity and discernment and proclaimed that ‘Dans les champs de l’observation, le hazard ne favorisé que les esprits préparés’. (also quoted in Austin 1978)

32 Disraeli claimed that ‘we make our fortunes, and we call them fate’.
success. Alternatively one can keep one’s options open and select a dance studio which you feel will help you in your quest for excellence. A dancer may transfer from one class to another if she feels that this move will increase the prospects of success.

The character of adjudicators who are officiating at an event is also subject to these kinds of chance contributions to a dancer’s performance. As an example of the first consideration, they may be selected by lottery. Secondly an eminent adjudicator might happen to be in town when the event in question is being organised. Some organisers will choose adjudicators whom they admire and respect and who they feel will give their students careful consideration. Based on the theory of political back scratching, an adjudicator may find themselves evaluating the students of another teacher who will at a later stage be judging some of the former students. I can note with certainty, however, that at the events organised by An Coimisiún, all adjudicators will be selected on the basis that they have acquired certification to be adjudicators, thus assuring a certain level of competence. Thus, the selection of adjudicators may have implications for success but not for creativity.

A certain level of skill acquisition and drill and repetitious practice is necessary if one is to achieve mastery in any field. Only when one can clearly identify the boundaries can one truly strive to journey beyond them. This is emphasized by Royce (2004:189) who posits that: ‘there are conventions agreed upon by composers, performers and audiences that define the genre although there are always individual works that challenge the conventions.’ If the guidelines act in an informing role, they can be viewed as enabling and clarifying rather than restricting. Our attitude to perceptual, cultural and emotional barriers very much depends on our acceptance of the permanency and infallibility of rules and regulations. Participation in competitions of any kind at a high level can lead to many types of expenses being incurred. How one addresses the challenge of financing one’s chosen area of specialization can stimulate further innovative and adaptive approaches to creativity.

Competition may be perceived by some as potentially inhibiting creativity. I will now examine how competition can be a positive motivator within the competitive Irish step dance genre and generally in arenas where competition culture exists.

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33 This will be further discussed in the analysis chapter.
**Competition**

In the arts, competition is a fact of life whether it is through audition or for the winning of awards. The issue at stake in such competition is that an external validation of quality is required. The product is being assessed for the purpose of rewarding one product above another.

In many creative pursuits, especially in the arts, solutions are evaluated by non-absolute value judgements- no work of art is beyond question- first by the creators themselves and later by others, such as critics and the general public. Contests can play a significant role in shaping public attitudes to arts expression. The dance competition can thus be viewed as a significant organizing rubric for Irish step dance. The competition is a site where traditional dance forms are constantly renegotiated. As it developed as an art form, Irish dance was organised around the competitive process with an emphasis on rules, roles and structural organisation.

The adjudicator is at the centre of the process that turns competing dancers into winners and losers and is part of a complex web of social and structural relations. The interplay between tradition and innovation is played out in the competitive arena. This is highlighted by academics such as Hall (1995), Matthews –De Natale (1995), Larsen (2001) and Trew (2000), all of who have written about the influence of competition on tradition:

> Ironically it is often a confrontation with change that helps us clarify the essence, importance and meaning of our traditions. Folk dance as well as folklore in general must continually change in order to keep up the needs of the people who engage in it. We are constantly figuring out which new cultural options we will embrace or reject (Matthews–De Natale 1995:116).

The significance of the competitive arena in this renegotiation of tradition is further highlighted by Larsen who notes that the significant changes are sometimes presented at the competitive event:

> The analysis of a competition provides us with an understanding of how the changing values and aesthetic variations are accepted by the governing
body and the community itself. Prestigious value is directly placed on
groups and individuals when adjudicators judge dances and dancers and
post rankings. When a choice is made to reward certain groups or
individuals, a message is sent to the participating community of the
movement characteristics most valued at that time. It is often at a
competition that the trends for the coming year are showcased (Larsen
2001:4).

Indeed with reference to the Mountain Dance and Folk festival, Larsen suggests that
the competition causes the changes to take place, such is the desire to win.

Interestingly enough it was the element of competition that allowed even
encouraged innovation to occur within certain limits. Because the nature
of the festival was competitive, something interesting occurred. Groups
began to change things slightly so that they would have a better chance to

The connection between competition and change was also significant for Hall in his
earlier study of competitive Irish stepdance and he postulates thus:

    Competition is central to the excitement, dynamics and change in Irish
dancing. It is the competitive frame which encourages dancers to
elaborate the form. And it is the competition which draws the involvement
of dancers and students beyond the beginning classes. (Hall 1995:167)

I concur with the above sentiments on a number of levels, from the perspective of the
competitive Irish step dance genre. The world championship is the context in which
tradition and innovation are re-presented in a winning format. It is where new moves
are showcased and either accepted or rejected by the adjudicators. In fact, it is this
keen competitive drive that constantly keeps the dancers on their toes, striving to be
the best. If competition was only about participation, this killer instinct and ensuing
refining of standards and improving techniques would be absent. This is what
transpired when the Rocky Mountain competition gave awards to all competitors to
create an ambiance hospitable to creativity:

    Even though the new format of the competition left everyone feeling
warm and good about themselves, the quality of the dancing itself
suffered, as evidenced by the lack of innovation that has occurred
recently. This supports the claims that dance skill and accomplishment is
directly proportional to the challenge of cutthroat competition. The
reputation of and participation in the Competition have suffered because
of its new friendly format (and lack of killer drive) (Larsen 2001:133).
Edwards (1988), on the other hand, denies the positive impact of competition on creativity: she posits that,

> Competition lies at the root of much creative blockage. As artists, we must go within. We must attend to what it is our inner guidance is nudging us towards. We cannot afford to worry about what is in or out. (Edwards, Betty 1988:173)

However, I find this unconvincing and would rather contend that the function of the creative artist consists of making new laws, thus stretching and challenging existing regulations not in following laws already made and maintaining the status quo.

Some research suggests that creativity is enhanced when authorities set limits, explicitly structure the task, set up competitions, spell out criteria for evaluation, and render judgement upon individuals’ performances. (Sternberg and Lubart 1995) The role of limits in relation to the phenomenon of creativity is also highlighted by May (1975:115), who posits that, ‘creativity itself requires limits, for the creative act arises out of the struggle of human beings with and against that which limits them’.

In stressing the significance of the tension between spontaneity and limitations, May continues, referring to Heraclitus:

> Conflict presupposes limits and the struggle with limits is actually the source of creative productions. The limits are as necessary as those provided by the bank of a river, without which the water would be dispersed on the earth and there would be no river; that is, the river is constituted by the tension between the flowing water and the banks. Art in the same way requires limits as a necessary factor in its birth’.

Paul Valery (1940) postulated that artistic discipline, working within a clearly defined canon was advantageous to the creative artist, suggesting that,

> These formal rules offered a further facility to those who wished to produce works. Very strict and even very severe conditions relieve the artist of a number of the most delicate decisions and of many responsibilities in the matter of form, while they sometimes excite him to discoveries to which complete freedom would never have led him.

The significance of rules and structure is also highlighted by Koestler who acknowledges the import of spontaneity within a structured environment.
Although both art and play have a necessary element of spontaneity, both are also concerned with order and with form. Organised games have rules to which the players must adhere, and a game is spoiled if the rules are broken…works of art are similarly concerned with order. Although the great creators are often distinguished by their propensity to break rules, there are always rules for them to break. A work of art without any order or arrangement is inconceivable (Koestler 1964.151).

Robinson also stresses the importance of working within formal constraints:

Creativity involves a dynamic interplay between generating ideas and making judgements about them…creative achievement does not always require freedom from constraints or a blank page. Great work often comes from working within formal constraints. Some of the finest poetry is in the form of the sonnet, which has a fixed form to which the writer must submit. Japanese haiku similarly makes specific formal demands on the poet, as do many other forms of poetic structure. These do not inhibit the writer’s creativity; they set a framework for it. The creative achievement and the aesthetic pleasure lie in using standard forms to achieve unique effects and original insights (Robinson 2001:133).

In the context of step dance competitions, the challenge is paradoxical. One is required to stand out in a fashion appropriate to the event and tradition while simultaneously appearing to hover on the edge of the prescribed boundaries.

**Application of theoretical perspectives to the competitive step dance arena**

Having discussed key ideas about the nature of creativity generally, I will turn now to a theoretical analysis of the creative processes within competitive Irish step dance, approached and investigated from within the discipline of ethno-choreology and at the same time, acknowledging my own insider status within the Irish step dance community. Consequently this section follows two significant pathways, on the one hand, the data gathered from ethnochoreologists and cultural anthropologists, and on the other, the research carried out in the area of Irish dance and culture.
Ethno-choreological perspectives.

The anthropology of dance began to emerge as a distinct sub-field in the early 1960s. Kurath, Kealiinohomoku and Royce were among early notables researching dance from anthropological perspectives, followed by Kaeppler and Williams. More recently, this study has been expanded by such scholars as, Jane Cowan, Susan Foster, Sally Ness and Cynthia Novack.

Royce provides a narrative of the development of dance anthropology through evolutionary classification as explained by Morgan, Frazer and Tylor, through cultural integration as proposed by Boas and through detailed description of dancing in culture as portrayed by Mead.


Creativity and Tradition

The issue of compositional practices and creativity as utilised by traditional musicians and dancers has already been the subject of rigorous academic scholarship and examination.

work, there is a paucity of documentation pertaining to the performance of step dance in Ireland up to the end of the eighteenth century. The scholars named above, researched developments in Irish dance events in Ireland and abroad throughout the twentieth century. My study is a contribution to the expressed need for good descriptive and analytical studies in the field of Irish dance since the increased interest in Irish dance worldwide, following the success of Riverdance and other successful shows.

A seminal study in the area of step dance analysis is Foley’s (1988) structural and contextual analysis of step dance in North Kerry. As well as explaining and introducing the Irish dance terminology, it also introduces labanotation as a tool for documenting, recording and analyzing Irish step dance. In the context of this dissertation, labanotation is utilised to depict the range of motifs performed by the dancer. Dances are not notated in full although rhythmic patterns are also notated on a musical stave.

Foley highlighted the necessity for an empirical approach and stressed the importance of participant observation. Given that scholars emerging from fields such as history, folklore and music were responsible for most preceding research, Foley’s ethnochoreological approach, combining her own experience as a musician and dancer with scholarly application, serves as a valuable model for this research. This current dissertation does not seek to rehearse the findings of these named scholars but rather to build on them and apply them to competitive Irish step dance in the twentieth first century.

**Contexts for the performance of Irish step dance**

While establishing formal and informal contexts for the performance of step dance, Foley concentrates on the vernacular traditional genre. For the purpose of this dissertation, I will be referring to her treatment of competitive Irish step dance. She acknowledges that the competitive context has developed and is a major motivating factor in learning Irish step dance, and asserts that what wins in competition sets the standard which subsequently influences creations of step dances for the next competition. This sentiment is echoed in Hall (1995, 2008).
I concur that these competitive events have altered the aesthetics of step dance. Indeed, with the increased frequency with which major feiseanna are now held, innovations are constantly being incorporated into the Irish step dance movement system. However, the lack of rest and reflective periods between these events may interfere with the quality of these movement initiatives. This will be explored further at a later stage.

Arising from these competitions, Foley raises a number of issues in the context of the performance of competitive Irish step dance.

- The slowing down of the dance music tempo
- The standardization of traditional set dances
- The issue of performances lacking variety
- The importance of spatial movement in the performance
- The relationship between music and dance

Additional issues for consideration, which arose in the course of this research include;

- The duration of each performance and the number of steps performed
- The staging of the event and related issues pertaining to costume and presentation

In the early twentieth century, the introduction of dancing schools and the shift of age profile from predominantly adult male to performances by young children has also influenced the form to a great extent (See Foley 1988:151).

In recent years, this has been further exaggerated due to the availability and use of larger venues, light weight material used in costumes, and dedication by many teachers and students of Irish dance of time, resources and energy, normally attributed to professional sporting activities. Step Dance is described by Foley (1988:9) as a solo dance genre which emphasizes the work of the feet more than any other part of the body and is divided into four main categories: Reel, Jig, Hornpipe, Slip Jig which are further sub-sectioned as light shoe and hard shoe dances. The set dance music may be in jig or hornpipe tempo and is danced in hard shoes.
According to Foley:

Step dance as the name implies, concentrates on the art of intricate stepping in harmony to music...One of the outstanding features of this dance type is the swiftness with which the feet move in and out of positions and gestures. Good positions of the feet are basic requirements in step dance. The posture or carriage at all times remains erect and is always admired by observers, especially those who understand the principles of Irish step dance. The hands are held loosely by the sides (1988:13).

I would concur with these observations, as they pertain to posture and the importance of footwork, but would contend that the perceived principles of Irish step dance need closer examination in the context of modern step dance competitions. Furthermore, the dance is now concentrated on the leg rather than in the feet, although neatness and precise footwork must also be maintained.

Foley identifies stylistic features of traditional Irish step dance in North Kerry as outlined below:

- Vertical body attitude
- Attitude to space. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the talented dancer danced on the spot. The absence of movement was perceived to be a characteristic of an excellent step dancer.
- Existence of a personal stylistic idiosyncrasy
- Movement may be the same quality of movement but may change with age, physique health and technical ability

I will utilize these features and examine their relevance for current trends in competitive step dance. I will place particular emphasis on the first two stylistic features, as they have more relevance for this study.

Another key text that has informed this dissertation was Colin Quigley’s (1987) dissertation dealing with Creative Processes in Musical Composition and focusing specifically on the compositional process of French-Newfoundland Fiddler Emile Benoit. This study acknowledged the view propounded by Hopkins (1976) that ‘Individual musicians are the active agents of the creative process’ For the purpose of
this study, I will examine the role of individual dancers and choreographers as active agents in the creative process. In following Quigley, I will utilize the social, psychological, componential model of creativity proposed by Teresa Amabile (1983), based on a consensual definition of creativity. In this view “a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative’” (Amabile 1983:31). Quigley also identified a preliminary cross-cultural survey of compositional processes proposed by Merriam (1964:165 -184), who identified composition as part of the learning process, which is shaped by public acceptance or rejection, learned by individuals who practice it, and which contributes to music change and stability (Quigley 1987:46). He reinforces the importance of this acceptance by referring to Stekhert who notes that:

Creativity involves the developing, changing or re-ordering of material by the artist – manipulator to achieve a desired effect upon his audience. Whether the product of this creativity is good, bad, beautiful or even art, depends on the particular group aesthetic of the observer (Stekhert 1965:37).

In Irish dance, the genre is constantly being renegotiated and redefined in the competitive arena in which the adjudicators and the witnessing public are arbiters of the developing traditional form. Owen, quoted in Quigley (1987:21), asserts that we need to seek out ‘the most innovative and creative participants’ in order to examine the ‘limits of acceptable artistic creativity within a tradition’ (Owen 1980: 59). Ives concurs emphasizing that ‘it is through acceptance of such new forms, created by individuals with distinctive personal styles, that tradition changes and develops’. (Ives 1979: 423)

Accordingly, I sought out some virtuosic performers and creators of Irish step dance for their views on the significance of key players in the renegotiation of tradition.

Brendán de Gallaí, lead dancer with Riverdance, former champion step dancer, and currently a PhD candidate in Arts Practice Research at the University of Limerick, contends that periodically, gifted choreographers emerge within the competitive arena.

What you need is somebody in competition who just has a very unique facility, like a genius arrives, somebody once every twenty years comes and it doesn’t matter what anybody is doing around them they’ll just do
something that’s mad and it will all start again. They’ll start, the people will start saying, They’re not doing the technical stuff, they are not doing this whatever, Like Sesame street; one of these kids is doing his own thing (personal communication June 2006).

**Impact of Competition Dancing on Style**

Hall (1995) concurs with Foley (1988) that in the competitive context a narrowing of style occurs. I prefer to consider it a deepening of style whereby changes are of a more subtle kind:

The process of competition adds its own dynamic to the development of Irish dancing. When an aesthetic form such as dancing is placed in the framework of competition a narrowing of style takes place. It is not a mysterious process. Winners are imitated. Imitation of winning form is one force, which narrows the range of style in Irish dancing; the other force is consistent selection of a set of formal characteristics by adjudicators. The defining characteristics of the form as they have been developed by the adjudicators’ decisions, tend to harden and admit less and less variation (Hall 1995:58).

He also deals with the issue of winners and losers and the importance in this context of being noticed:

The competitive aspect of the dancing forces the issues of change in that winners are those who excel at the form, those who stand out from the others. Creativity in performance is certainly one way of calling attention to oneself among other competent movers (Hall 1995:20).

I concur with Hall’s observation that the competitive process rewards innovators who manage to combine new and eye-catching variations in movement, timing and use of space, which fall within the acceptable limits. Consequently dancers are always striving to push the boundaries. In order to achieve this, one must first understand and master the rules:

In order to create within the form, and in the process to further shape the form, the rules and restrictions must be mastered. Highly skilled play with the form of Irish dancing thus reinforces, even as it challenges, its identity (Hall 1995:85).

Hall’s analysis explores features of choreography separating the material from the performance. In this analysis the performance itself is also analyzed to determine if
and how it impacts on the adjudication. Regarding the steps or material performed by
dancers, Hall contends that material taught to beginners tends to reflect a normative
level of choreography whereas a champion’s dance is more personalized to highlight
the strengths and camouflage suggested weaknesses of a particular performer. This
research will deal solely with champion dancers, focusing as it does on the top five
performers in their grade at the World Championships in Irish Dancing.

In a subsequent publication, Hall (2008) alludes to two types of spatial relationships
taken into consideration by step dancers. The first of these he terms gestural space-
the space surrounding the body through which all parts can move individually or in
combination and the second he refers to as co-ordinate space through which the
dancer moves on a path.

In the competitive step-dance arena, this issue of co-ordinate space is challenging for
the first two rounds of a competition because the competitor is sharing the physical
performance space with one or possibly two other performers. Only in the recall or set
dance rounds do dancers have the exclusive occupation of the performance space and
the undivided attention of the adjudicators and the spectators.

Hall questions the existence of fundamentally new movements in Irish dancing,
deeming them to be a rarity but notes that variety can be achieved as follows;

- Changing the ordering of a limited number of movements
- Changing how they are performed in time
- Changing how they are pieced together in path movements, turns and
  orientation

Cefkin (1993), borrowing from Flett (1964,1979), refers to applications of canons to
dance traditions in Northern Europe. These are pertinent and sharply relevant to
Competitive Irish solo step dance and will be discussed in detail when dealing with
the dance material performed by champions or aspiring champion dancers.

**Northern European Canons**

- Verticality, Elevation, Upliftedness
• Elongation of Posture and gestures of Arms and Legs
• Narrow stance, turnout
• Symmetry
• Silence (accented by sound)
• Dancing to the Music
• Spatial Design
• Evenness of Flow
• Deportment, Manners, Etiquette
• Sequential Variation

Foley (1988) proposed that the morphology of Irish traditional step dance is closely linked to that of the accompanying music. I contend that this is no longer the case and that recent trends and embellishments to the structures of the music and the dance have led to the emergence of a sub-genre which I shall refer to as *feis* music. This will also be expanded in chapter five.

Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of personal and interpersonal variations of dance steps; she shows what is danced through structural analysis and identifies the motifs available to and created by the dancers based on the creative processes of Jeremiah Molyneaux and other traditional dance masters in North Kerry. I propose to examine the various factors which combine to influence the composition of steps for modern competitive Irish step dancers.

In the context of systematic structural analysis, Foley made an invaluable contribution to Irish dance scholarship by compiling an inventory of basic Irish dance movements to facilitate the use of Labanotation in the field of Irish dance research. She identified seven categories of movement detailed below as follows.

1. Positions of feet
2. Stepping movements and movements which change levels without stepping (toe and heel drops)
3. Leaping movements
4. Hopping
5. Jumping
6. Kicking and striking
7. Gestural movements

Regarding the use of notation for this dissertation, the Foley structure was of great assistance although some symbols had to be adapted to allow for current innovative developments within the Irish step dance genre.

Johanne Trew examines the evolution of fiddling and step dance within a competitive context in the Ottawa Valley and concludes that,

The influence of the contests on fiddle style has been one of homogenization and the resulting development of the contest style of playing and repertoire (2000:138).

She also alludes to the impact of the competitions of the dance style and draws parallels between Irish step dance and step dance in the Ottawa Valley.

Like Irish dance, Valley dancing has greatly changed in recent years, probably due to the influence of the competitions, which have encouraged the tendency to develop flashy and technical styles, often borrowing movements from other popular dance forms such as jazz and tap (2000:152).

However, she acknowledges that video cameras are utilized with increasing frequency at Ottawa Valley step dance competitions for the determined purpose of acquiring new steps. In the realm of competitive Irish step dance the recording of any performances during competitions is strictly prohibited.

Trew asserts that in recent times researchers have tended toward a more performance-oriented approach (Blacking, Kealiinohomoku 1979; Seeger 1987) and notes that some have carefully examined specific performance events (Quresgi 1987, Sugarman 1988), acknowledging that the context of performance is in itself highly meaningful and has an affect on the music being produced. Using the World Championships in Irish dance 2006 as an example of a specific dance event, I propose that the Irish step dance aesthetic is publicly negotiated in the competitive arena specifically at the World Championships where the community bears witness to the actions of the
adjudicator. The importance of systems of adjudication and procedures for selecting adjudicators will be examined in more detail in chapter 4.

Trew (2000) also deals comprehensively with the issue of competition communities focusing on the importance of the main event but also highlighting the significance of the ancillary events occurring on the fringe. I apply the notion of the competition as the main event in the competition under review here but also recognize the significance of the other social and cultural events, which combine to create an holistic Oireachtas. These include vending stations, bars, cafes, costume outlets and practice areas.

In his dissertation on *Fiddle, Motivation and Community at Ashokan camp*, Andrew Dabczynski refers to Adler’s *Dueling Banjos: Overt and Covert Competition in Amateur Bluegrass Performance* (1975) where Adler states that ‘we should recognize competition as an omnipresent impulse in American culture and a potential aspect of every kind of performance’. (1975:15) Dabczynski also investigates what he terms the ongoing tension between fiddler’s maintenance of tradition and acceptance of change (Blaustein (1975), Spielman (1975), Adler (1979), Garfias (1984), Swift (1989) and Veblen (1991)). This has implications for the competitive genre under review here as competition is inextricably linked with the development of Irish step dance and the changing contexts for performances thereof. Moreover, the tension between tradition and acceptance of change is a significant consideration in the competitive Irish step dance form.

Dabczynski also investigates the possible co-existence of communal performance culture and the competitive mode. I contend that not only is the partnership possible within competitive Irish step dance, rather it is integral to its continued evolution and development. This will be explored further in the concluding chapter. I contend that despite the structure associated with competition, subtle spontaneity is still possible.

**Justification of Feis as a site for Investigation**

Dorothea Hast (1993:22) notes that in the experience of contra dance in New England:
The dance event involves preparation, participation and interaction...creativity, competency, social interaction and the transmission of tradition.

Viewed in these terms, the World Championships in Irish dance can certainly be considered a dance event. Dancers train and rehearse throughout the summer, autumn and winter months to realize their dream of competing at the World Championships.

Novack contends that to study dance we must take into account:

- ‘the art” (the choreographic structures, movement styles and techniques of dancing)
- The institutions (local, national, global) in which it is practised and performed, and
- The people, who participate in it as performers (Novack 1995:181)

Using Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne as the dance event under investigation, I have described the art, identified the institutions and players who participate in this event and in the next chapter, I will analyse some of the issues raised.
Chapter 3

Introducing the Variables: Players in the Competitive Arena

In this chapter, I will identify the flexible, mercurial elements that influence the creative processes in competitive Irish step dance. I will focus on the institution of competition itself as the constant and concentrate on the flagship event of An Coimisiún as the mechanism through which all operating factors can be examined. The dance event selected in order to showcase the creative processes in Irish dance is Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006, The World Championships in Irish Dance, organised by An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. The choice of this event as a focus of analysis is significant for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, despite the fact that previous academic research in the field does not accord specific attention to this event, (Foley (1988), Hall (1995), Brennan (1999) and Wulff (2007), it is nonetheless considered the pinnacle of a competitive career for many Irish dancers and therefore represents a privileged site of investigation for creative processes within the competitive arena.

Moreover, from an ethnographic viewpoint as a member of An Coimisiún, familiarity with previous staging of this event and its attendant rituals enabled me to contextualize the event richly and with assurance. My involvement as teacher, adjudicator and musician afforded me the opportunity to carry out fieldwork through several different lenses and I wished to observe the changes and developments in the dance and music repertoire as they occurred.

Finally, although various other institutions involved in the structured organization of Irish step dance competitions also involve All-Ireland and International events, An Coimisiún was the first organisation to host an event on a global scale. This global nature of the event is doubly significant, given the deliberate choice as case study of a recently staged (2006) Oireachtas which facilitates an analysis of competitive step dance post-Riverdance and at the height of the spectacle era. However, before taking a closer look at the 2006 Oireachtas and more specifically the importance of the
institute that is ‘An Coimisiún’ as a constant in the processes of creativity, a brief overview of the event’s history is required.

As previously outlined, the World Championships are an annual event organized by the dancing body known as An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. Accordingly, in order to comprehend the workings of creative processes within the framework of this specific event, it is necessary to highlight that each separate element and protagonist involved in the staging of the World Championships, is, to some extent, governed by the institution that is An Coimisiún. In other words, An Coimisiún remains the constant factor around which numerous variables revolve, each contributing to the creative dynamic. The primary objective of the investigation that follows is to identify the creative variables at work within the context of the World Championships, while also highlighting and interrogating the nature of An Coimisiún’s influence upon these factors, both individually and collectively. To what extent, for example, can it be said that the rules and regulations elaborated and imposed by the governing body impede or indeed inspire creativity? Before attempting to answer such questions, it is important to understand some of the basic aims, structures, rules and regulations associated with An Coimisiún.

An Coimisiún

Mission Statement

The main objective of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha is the preservation and promotion of Irish Dancing, including step dancing, céili dancing and other team dancing. While of course its main function is the promotion of Irish dance, An Coimisiún is proud of working in association with Conradh na Gaeilge in promoting all aspects of our culture including the use and promotion of the Irish language (2006:3).

Thus, perhaps surprisingly, the primary objectives of the organization do not refer to a competitive culture. Neither do they reflect the global nature of the institution and its consequences for the evolution of the art form. Instead, these opening lines of the mission statement stress the importance of its historical links with Conradh na Gaeilge and the promotion of the Irish language and culture more broadly. Moreover, particular emphasis is placed on the notion of ‘preservation’ with regard to the
promotion of Irish Dance. The use of such a term is significant in that it is closely related to terms such as tradition and evokes something that is and should be maintained in its existing state. Thus, it is possible to identify one of the main challenges facing An Coimisiún: how to promote Irish Dancing and culture worldwide while also seeking to preserve them? Within the context of this work, the more specific question might be: how can one be creative within an art form while also ‘preserving’ it as a tradition?

With regard to the first of these questions, it must be acknowledged, for example, that despite continuous efforts on the part of An Coimisiún to maintain strong links with Conradh na Gaeilge and promote the use of the Irish Language\(^ {34}\), the significant increase in the registration of teachers and adjudicators from outside of Ireland and the diasporic community has significantly diminished the erstwhile pivotal importance of cultural nationalism throughout the step dance arena. Similarly, the evolution of the art form due to external and more specifically global influences, both artistic and cultural, has led the organization to elaborate a series of rules and regulations in an attempt to control the pace and extent of this evolution, thus ensuring both promotion and preservation. It is the manner in which those involved in the World championships seek to negotiate this dynamic and transcend the boundaries put in place by rules which will form the essence of the fieldwork analysis in chapters four and five. However, let us firstly outline in more detail some of the structures, rules and regulations of An Coimisiún that have an impact upon our case study.

The institutionalization of the dance form: An Coimisiún rules and regulations

The Oireachtas are organised by one of the many sub committees of the main organization, An Coiste Oireachtaí.\(^ {35}\) Its members are elected from elected members

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\(^ {34}\) One reflection of the abovementioned Gaelic League connection which still exists is the stipulation that ‘An Coimisiún shall issue an official version of these rules in English and in Irish, but should any variation in meaning arise between the text of the rules in Irish and the text of the version in English any necessary decision shall be taken on the basis of the Rules in Irish’ (2007:1.1.7).

\(^ {35}\) The Oireachtas committee is the sub-committee with responsibility for organizing the All- Ireland and World championships.
of An Coimisiún at its Annual General Meeting in May. Thus, even though An Coimisiún as an institution remains constant, the membership varies annually as additional teachers qualify and register and others allow their registration to lapse.

The election process with regards to membership on committees represents a further variable in the mix. Membership on committees is significant as it introduces a variable element that may in turn alter or indeed destabilize the constant itself. Francis Curley from Dundalk, himself an established teacher and adjudicator of Irish dance chaired this committee for the 2006 Oireachtas.

As with many competitive events, the competitive Irish dance event is bound by many rules and regulations some of which are detailed below. The rules are influenced by the history of the organization and its association with cultural nationalism (See Foley, (1988, 2001), and Hall (2008).) and by evolving social and cultural mores within the global community that may threaten what is perceived to be ‘traditional’.

It is necessary to enumerate some of the rules and regulations pertaining to competitive Irish step dance competitions as they can impinge upon the creative process in terms of what is permissible or not within the competitive genre. Generally the ruling body makes rules in terms of structure, costuming and the organisation of events. The rules deal with issues relating to certification of teachers and adjudicators and examination syllabi. Matters pertaining to attendance and registration at dancing classes are also legislated for, as are issues associated with insurance and child protection as well as a system to facilitate the transfer of dancers from one school to another. There is also a section on rules for dancing, clarifying who can adjudicate and officiate at competitions. (See appendix 4)

Prior to 2007, rules were communicated to teachers and adjudicators through the post after they were ratified at committee level. In 2007 An Coiste Rialacha 36 presented the updated rules to all registered teachers and adjudicators in booklet form. Members are notified of additions or changes to rules via email and post in the aftermath of meetings of An Coimisiún.

36 This refers to the Rules committee one of the sub-committees of An Coimisiún. This is the working group that liaises with An Coimisiún and prepares documents pertaining to rules and regulations.
Legislating for dance.

Much of the legislation pertaining to Irish dance is directed at the institutionalised structures. It is noteworthy that in terms of legislation regarding the actual dance form and the movements allowed in the dance, one of the few rules An Coimisiún made was in relation to the number of clicks permissible.

This issue was also raised by Dr. Cullinane in the course of our communication.

Coming back to the reel- there’s very few movements and things that the Commission has legislated for in Irish Dancing- it legislates for everything except the dancing- and one of those is the clicks (John Cullinane, personal communication August 2006).

Clicks

Steps must not include ‘‘triple clicks’’ or clicks of an order higher than triple.

Double clicks are permitted when completed in isolation but a series of successive double clicks is not allowed.

Teachers, when composing steps are encouraged to include traditional foot movements such as crosskeys, drums, boxes and rocks (see appendix 4).

The only other regulation pertaining to movement deals with the issue of toe stands and health and safety for younger dancers.

- No block, en-Pointe, movements, stationary or moving, can be performed for all ages up to and including the under 12 age group.

Other regulations included in the collection of rules published for the first time in one folder in 2007 deal with the composition and dimensions of dancing shoes, the use of artificial carriage aids, and what is permissible in costuming and make up.

Costume and presentation

Modern day step dance competitions receive much negative media attention due to the extravagance and expense associated with costumes. The use of wigs adorned with expensive tiaras and body adhesive to prevent socks from falling down has been
criticized in the International media. The style and fashion at the *Feis* has been compared to the pageant queen arena. *An Coimisiún* has endeavored to halt this expensive facet of Irish dancing, but to date has only made recommendations rather than hard and fast rules. There are rules regarding the wearing of make up by young children competing in graded competitions and rules referring to the length of dresses and the type of fabric used but these are difficult to enforce without the co-operation of parents, teachers and indeed those who make and sell the dancing costumes. (see appendix 4 for details of these regulations). This kind of extravagance is also evidenced in outfits worn by young children who present for religious ceremonies such as first communion and confirmation, it reflects on issues of fashion and style on a bigger social scale.

This recent debate on costumes has to be considered in historical context. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the revival in Irish Dancing, the distinctively Irish costumes that were worn as an expression of nationalism were also worn for dancing. Previously dancers had traditionally worn their Sunday best to dance but women attending *céilíthe* organised by the Gaelic League were encouraged to express their sense of national identity by wearing green skirts (Robb 1998:14)37. In the 1920s and 1930s, the female costumes occasionally featured motifs comprising a simple celtic design. At one stage in the 80s, scenes from Irish legends were featured on the dresses.38 Designs were applied to the dress using embroidery or appliqué. Additional embellishments using diamante or rhinestone were also common. (Robb 1998:28-32) At the turn of the century costumes were made from wool, *báinín*, linen and poplin. Green, saffron or white were the favoured colours. With the introduction of synthetic fabrics in the 1940s, some of the traditional fabrics went into decline. Trevira, gabardine, velvet, raw silk, glitterball, and terylene have all been used to make Irish dancing costumes. Contemporary costumes appear in an array of colours and fabrics. There is much debate surrounding the importance of costuming in the competitive step dance arena. While the importance of good presentation is highlighted many people eschew the extravagance of today’s costumes and question their connection to Irish dance.

37 See also *Irish Dancing Costumes, their Origins and Evolution*. Cullinane. 1996.
38 During this period the stories of the *Children of Lir*, or *Táin Bó Cualnáin* were sometimes embroidered on the costumes.
The Gents costume

In 1901, Padraic Pearse was influential in having the kilt adopted as a national costume for men. By the mid 1940s, male dancers were wearing kilts, jackets, tie, shirt, knee socks and brat or type of shawl when competing at feiseanna. Nowadays kilts are rarely worn. In the 2006 Oireachtas all the men and boys wore black trouser and colored shirt and tie ensembles with waistcoats. In some respects the competition judging can focus more on the dancing in the male categories, as there is no fuss with wigs and accessories.

In the past, costumes have also been carefully crafted to camouflage perceived carriage flaws by having wide sleeves to hide a hand fault or a shoulder pad to compensate for a dropping shoulder. Therefore, for aesthetic and practical reasons the costumes have a key role to play in the creative process in competitive step dance. This is highlighted by Deirdre Mulrooney in an interview with Colin Dunne.

He grew up in a world where girls at Irish dancing competitions would literally sew the arms of their Irish dancing costume onto the bodice to prevent their arms from flailing about involuntarily. Dunne recalls a pad being put on his own left shoulder to balance out an apparent unevenness that emerged as a result of one piece of intricate footwork (Dance Magazine Nov. 2003).

In terms of footwear, there are numerous specifications set out by An Coimisiún pertaining to size and dimensions of shoes. (See appendix 4). Consequently, a range of light shoes and hard shoes has been developed for female and male dancers. These shoes vary in regards to shape, support and the material from which they are made. Shoe technology has also influenced the type of sounds which can be achieved, with the nails of olden times now giving way to light weight wood and or fiberglass composites.

Constitutive variables of the event

I have emphasized that issues relating to costume and general presentation can be classed as aesthetic variables. In the following section, I will examine a more dynamic and ever-changing variable, the dancing public. There are many protagonists participating in this event, including dancers, teachers, choreographers, musicians,
adjudicators, family, audience, vendors, sponsors and dressmakers. Of primary importance in the creative process under analysis is, the relationships among the dancers, their teachers and the musicians, and how the adjudicators view the product of this relationship on the day of the performance. All of these players are bound to a greater or lesser extent, by the various rules set out by An Coimisiún.

**Competitors**

In terms of age restrictions, the youngest age group eligible to compete in solo competitions at the World Championships is the 10-11 category. There are separate competitions for boys and girls from this youngest bracket right up to the over 21 section for senior dancers. There is no upper age limit, although most competitors withdraw from the competition scene once they reach their mid-twenties. In the group classifications the youngest category is for teams under 12 and the oldest or senior category is for over 16 dancers. Sometimes the minor teams have members as young as six years or age and the senior teams and dance dramas could potentially have competitors of any age.

Competitors must qualify at their regional or National *Oireachtas* for the privilege of competing at the World Championships. These regional qualifying events are generally held in October and November and dancers and teachers are under considerable pressure throughout the qualifying rounds. There is also an opportunity to qualify for the World Championships from the appropriate National *Oireachtas*. For example, dancers in Ireland have a secondary qualifying from *Oireachtas na hÉireann*, dancers in Britain on alternate years have the opportunity to qualify from either the British National Championships, organised by the North Eastern teachers, or the Great Britain Championships run by the London regional council. In Australia, the State Championships assume this role, while in North America the North American National Championships held in July determine qualifiers. A recent addition to the qualifying rounds has been *Oireachtas na h-Eorpa* which caters for the aspiring dancers on mainland Europe. As the dance form becomes more global, additional competitions have been added to the already congested Irish dance calendar. This is a testament to the continued increase in dedication and commitment to the art of competitive step dancing. However, it also means that there is no longer a
rest period in the Irish Step Dance competitive calendar, which might allow for reflexivity in the context of performance and practice. This potential lack of reflexivity could hinder the degree of new dance repertoire created for each performance, given that dancers need time to embody new movements and perform them with style. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In the history of the event it has not always been necessary to qualify to take part. At the outset, it was left to the discretion of individual teachers to enter only those dancers they deemed to be of a sufficiently high standard to participate. This practice was also employed during the Oireachtas at City Hall in Cork in 1986 but, such were the logistical challenges in terms of numbers and standards of participants, with the ensuing scheduling and organisational issues, this practice was abandoned in favour of the qualifying system.

The role of the dancer can be considered on a number of levels. Firstly, the dancer must take the stage and deliver a good performance as a conduit for the choreographer’s creations or simply recreating material they themselves have helped construct. In this thesis I have purposely distinguished between participants and competitors by focusing on the top dancers. The motivations to compete are many and varied. A dancer who qualifies in the last place at their regional Oireachtas is unlikely to feature among the prizewinners. Nonetheless, everybody strives to attain a personal best in terms of achievement. The good step dancer should have a good carriage, good turnout, nicely extended limbs, good placing and the ability to interpret the music and execute the material with style and skill. A really good dancer should also have some distinctive quality to enable them to stand out from the general line-up. This x – factor or sine qua non is often what tips the balance when ranking dancers in order. This affective performance will be analysed and discussed further in chapters four and five. Though the competitors represent the most public manifestation of the creative product, it is imperative that we also take note of the role played by other agents active in the creative process; namely teachers/choreographers, adjudicators and musicians.
Teachers / Choreographers

An aspiring T.C.R.G. or dance teacher registered with An Coimisiún must have passed the teacher’s examination. To be eligible to present for this examination, dancers must be at least in their twentieth year and provide references from a dancing teacher and two other character referees. The syllabus for this examination is extensive and requires an expansive dance repertoire, a knowledge of the music played for step dances, a familiarity with the Irish language for those wishing to teach in Ireland and a comprehensive knowledge of the thirty Céili dances contained in Ár Rinci Fóirne. Candidates are also required to demonstrate a proficiency in a performance of up to eight dances selected by the examining panel39, as well as an ability to teach solo and team dances as requested by the examiners.

Entries for competitions run under the auspices of An Coimisiún le Rinci Gaelacha are only accepted from teachers who are registered with An Coimisiún. However, in solo competitions at Oireachtas na Cruinne, only dancers who have already qualified at their regional or national Oireachtas may be put forward by teachers.

The effective teacher needs to fulfill a variety of roles. These include the more obvious ones of dance teacher and mentor and coach and secondary roles of confidante, supporter and of course outside eye and role model. Teachers obviously need to have competent dance skills and a range of other skills pertaining to discipline, understanding, communication and motivation of the students in their care. In most cases, they choreograph the steps performed by their students, thus fulfilling a central role in the creative process. Consequently, their ability to relate well to their students is also paramount. The significance of this relationship will be interrogated further in chapter five.

Adjudicators

In competitive Irish dancing circles, aspiring adjudicators are required to pass their A.D.C.R.G before they can adjudicate officially registered events. To present for this examination, candidates must be at least 30 years old and must have held their

39 During examinations applicants are examined by a panel of three examiners. There is also a qualifying examination to become an official examiner. Only those who have their adjudicator’s certification for more than ten years are eligible to apply for the examiners’ examination.
teaching qualification for at least two years. For many years, An Coimisiún has sought an optimum system for the selection of adjudicators for the World Irish Dancing Championships. Strategies and procedures have varied from random draws from among those in attendance who are qualified and not prohibited from officiating at the competition in question, to carefully selecting one adjudicator from each of the Irish provinces, two from Britain, one from America/Canada or Australia/New Zealand. Various systems have been tried in organizing the judging panels. They can range in size from three through seven. The panel is sometimes changed for each round and, in yet another system, the same adjudicating panel is retained for all three rounds of the competition. Models in operation in ice dancing and ballroom dancing competitions have also been employed following their practice of discarding of the judges’ highest and lowest scores. Some teachers voiced concerns that only non-active teachers were effectively in a position to put themselves forward to adjudicate at the World Championships. There is however a counter argument that any adjudicator who has passed their adjudicators examination should be eligible for consideration. To a certain degree, it can be argued that individual adjudicators are but part of the adjudication process as they are obliged to abide by the specific points systems elaborated by An Coimisiún.

The Points System

Over the past four decades, the points system in operation has also been the focus of much debate. In the early days of Oireachtas na Cruinne, the adjudicators were only required to place the first three competitors of their choice, awarding twelve points to their winner and five and two points to the runner up and third prize winner respectively. Currently adjudicators are required to mark each dancer upon the completion of each dance. This is an onerous task, given the large numbers involved in the competitions, the fact that as many as three competitors at a time may be sharing the stage, and last but not least the increasingly high standard of performance at step dance competitions. When the marks are tabulated at the end of the competition, the points system is then applied to each adjudicator’s results as follows; the highest placed competitor is awarded 100 points, 75 points for second and 65 for third (see appendix 5). In recent years, the judges have been asked to sit on stage while their marks are displayed to the audience in an effort to create as fair and
transparent a system as possible. Result sheets (see appendix 6) are also sold at the conclusion of each competition so that each competitor can see the mark awarded to them for each dance by each adjudicator. There are, however logistical difficulties with to this process in so far as the current system facilitates the placing of only the first 50 competitors. Therefore any dancer not featuring in an adjudicator’s top fifty will be deemed to have zero points irrespective of the mark they were given by that adjudicator. This process is currently under review by the Oireachtas Committee charged with the organisation and administration of these competitions.

**The Selection Process for the 2006 Oireachtas**

The following rules governed the 2006 event. The previous summer all adjudicators registered with An Coimisiún were asked to submit their names if they wished to be considered to officiate at Oireachtas na hÉireann or Oireachtas na Cruinne (see appendix 7). The submissions were then brought to a meeting of An Coimisiún where the adjudicators were selected through a voting process. By opting to officiate the teachers were forfeiting their right to enter competitors for that particular Oireachtas, although substitute qualifiers were allowed to participate when a dancer from a school under a conflict of interest ruling attained a qualifying place and was unable to compete. This was to ensure that the regional representation would not suffer due to teachers from that region being invited to adjudicate at the Oireachtas. Significantly some high profile teachers and adjudicators have opted to officiate at the event and have precluded their students from taking part that particular year. In some respects this has offered a rest period to dancers who are catapulted from one large competitive event to the next. Moreover, it offers a wider choice of adjudicators and ensures that active teachers with competing students are not excluded from the process by which the aesthetic is negotiated and evaluated at its highest level.

Fundamentally the task of the adjudicators chosen as arbiters and evaluators of the competitive step dance aesthetic is to rank the competitors in order hierarchically and

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40 If an adjudicator is selected to officiate at the World Championships, the qualifiers from the class taught by that adjudicator may be replaced by the next in line from their region and the students of the adjudicating teacher can carry their qualifying place forward to the following year.

41 See appendix 8 regarding rules of association.
determine winners and losers. The adjudicators who officiated at the 2006 event accounted for their role as detailed below (see appendix 9).

- To give a good, honest opinion and not just go with the flow or the trend at the time of the competitions

- To place dancers in order of merit on their performance in the competition, to give constructive advice if called on

- To identify the best overall performer in the competition, taking into account all the basic requirements of a good Irish dancer and then deciding which style/execution of the dance is to the adjudicators’ favour

- To be attentive, respectful and fair to all who come in front of you regardless of standard, rank or grade

- To judge the dancer on the day, on presentation, to point out where improvement is required

- Not alone to decide the order of merit of the competitors but to also offer constructive criticism so as to help the contestants achieve a higher standard (see appendix 8 re adjudicator’s questionnaires)

To be an adjudicator in the first place assumes familiarity with and expertise in the field in question. A good adjudicator should be able to differentiate between a good dancer and a less talented performer. Honesty and integrity are also essential components, as is the ability to have the courage of your convictions and stand by your decisions and results. One cannot however legislate for integrity and each individual adjudicator must take responsibility for his own decisions. This is emphasised by dance historian John Cullinane, who states that:

You can’t legislate for honesty and you can’t legislate for a good adjudicator. We may have some adjudicators up there whose adjudicating is not so good, but it was honest. I think people were prepared to accept that. But what they weren’t prepared to accept was this blatant dishonesty, or the blatant dishonesty when people sat down, you could look across the panel and predict who was going to get what from whom. You know! (Personal communication August 2006).
Therefore, the role of the adjudicator as a variable constituent within the creative process is further complicated by concerns regarding subjectivity and creativity. Similarly, feis musicians must constantly acknowledge the importance of impartiality and/or subjectivity while contributing to the creative process.

**Musical Accompaniment**

In the feis scene, the musicians are selected and scheduled by the organising committee. They are located on the periphery of the performance arena but can potentially have a powerful influence on the performance through their choice of repertoire and interpretation of a tune. They are not necessarily familiar with the material performed by the dancer even though it is pre-choreographed and therefore the live performance is the context in which the relationship between the music and dance is negotiated. Musicians need to maintain a professional impartiality throughout, in respect to maintaining the agreed tempo and playing well for each performer. There is a tacit mutual respect between the musicians and the step dancers. This is acknowledged at the end of the performance by a bow or other physical gesture.

The Coiste Ceol agus Rince has drawn up a list of dance accompanists they deem suitable to officiate at major Oireachtais. These musicians are approached in the preceding summer period and asked to indicate their availability and desired musical partner for the next year’s events. Rosters are then drawn up by the Oireachtas Committee and two teams of musicians are employed for each day of the Oireachtas. Contracts are issued to musicians chosen to play at these events. The musicians are required to be competent on their instruments, familiar with the feis repertoire, particularly the required set dances, willing and able to play to the specified metronomic speeds. There is a required dress code in which respectability is key and generally the musicians are accorded high status at these events (see appendix 10). Remuneration is the same for musicians and adjudicators at all events except Oireachtas na Cruinne as the adjudicators are not eligible to officiate at any other competitions for a six month period preceding the event. This restriction cannot be

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42 The sub-committee of An Coimisiún with responsibility for music and dance.
applied to musicians, as there are not as many dance accompanists who are willing and able to play for feiseanna throughout the dance world as there are qualified adjudicators.

The Role of the Feis Musician

There are many paradoxes associated with competitive step dance, not least the one describing the role of the feis musician who has responsibility for playing lively, steady music that will inspire the dancer and entertain the audience. Many of the musicians I encountered were conscious of the complexity of their role as accompanists, entertainers, part of the support structure for the dancers and important members of the team of people required to make the dance event a successful experience.

This is an account of how the musicians themselves described their role (see appendix 11).

- To play good music that is suitable for dancing to and enjoyable to listen to
- Providing quality accompaniment at a steady pace to the dancers
- Building rapport with the dancers to help them relax and make the feis more enjoyable for all
- To provide the best possible music for the dancer
- Communicating the spirit of the music to the dancer, to provide the music that makes the dancer want to dance, to provide music as entertainment and promote Irish traditional music to the audience.
- Accompany the dancers in competitions, play correct metronomic tempo, work with the adjudicators as part of the team
- To provide lively music at the proper speed so the dancer can dance to the best of their ability
- To provide suitable music which will bring out the best in the dancer.
• To accompany the dancer and compliment their dancing, keeping the timing perfect to enable them to perform well

• To provide a solid musical accompaniment and to inspire and invigorate the dancer where possible. I also believe that we have to help motivate the dancer by being friendly, positive when they make mistakes, provide the music they want if possible etc.

• To serve as a connection to tradition in so far as dancers get the opportunity to perform to live music rather than dancing all the time to recorded music.

The importance of the musical accompaniment in the construction and delivery of a dance performance was also highlighted by the adjudicators who were interviewed.

If there was no music? What then- surely the music is the very heart and soul of dancing, without music any dance would only appear as miming (Seán Ó Conghaile personal communication August 2006)

My fellow musicians were asked what they felt were key attributes desirable in an aspiring feis musician. Some of the key issues that emerged are outlined below (see appendix 11).

• The ability to play good tunes well and at the required tempo

• To provide lively, joyful, even soulful music

• To have an appreciation of Irish history and culture

• To play consistently at a steady pace

• Reliability

• Personable- with all the intensity of modern competition, it is often possible for the musician to inject a sense of levity into a feis.

• Timing! Timing! Timing!

• Knowing the repertoire of set dance tunes

• Patience and an appreciation of Irish step dance
• Laidback; musicians need to be able to get on with fellow musicians and staff at the event

• Someone whose music complements the dancer and who doesn’t take centre stage

• Patience and discipline

• To have a repertoire of good tunes that are popular with the dancers

• Reliability, punctuality, respect for participants, consistency

• Have a love for Irish Dancing

It was also postulated by some musicians that the feis musician is not just an accompanist for dancers but is also catering to the aural aesthetics of the audience.

… they really must be able to play to a metronome (which isn’t easy) and be prepared to put in some time learning new tunes etc… This is necessary to improve your repertoire so that when playing large competitions (e.g. 100 + dancers) you give a good variety of good tunes – remember, your music is not just for the dancers – for each dancer there are usually parents, siblings, grandparents etc. and as they are not as involved in the dancing side of things, their interest is also a concern, so listening to repetitive, dull tunes (sometimes the same tunes) all day is not conducive to overall fulfilment!! (personal communication Gerry Conlan 2007).

Thus, in adhering to the rules of tempo, whilst also attempting to cater to aural aesthetics of audience and competitors, musicians develop what might be termed a specific feis repertoire.
The Development of a Feis Repertoire

In some respects, feis music has developed as a sibling of traditional music. Musicians who are highly renowned in traditional circles make a point of distinguishing between what they play at feiseanna and what they would generally play for a listening audience. They are however conscious of the need to serve the dancers’ needs and those of the audience when playing at a dance competition.

One particular musician noted that he preferred to play tunes that he liked, and that he endeavoured to avoid tunes dancers might have difficulty with. This same musician also eschews those tunes such as the Sticky Note or Bin Laden (see appendix 12) that are obviously not Irish tunes. This raises an entirely different question of what we consider appropriate to the music and dance tradition and how our choices affect what becomes accepted or rejected.

Another musician who plays at many large competitions emphasized the importance of having an extensive repertoire. He stressed that to avoid endless repetition and to keep the music interesting for all participants, it was important to keep adding new tunes to the existing repertoire. Interestingly some mature musicians had built up an extensive traditional repertoire through playing at many feiseanna over the years. A second group of younger musicians also had a vast repertoire of tunes gathered from recordings and compositions by acclaimed practitioners in their field. Furthermore, still a third group of musicians sought to combine traditional tunes with new compositions, all the time mindful of the need to provide lively music for the dancers which the audience could enjoy listening to.

Basically, my repertoire is a combination of *Comhaltas* sessions, Scottish variations and self-composed melody …the majority of my influence is Irish – with tunes from many of the “oldies” appearing throughout. Unfortunately, in my opinion, too many of the modern feis musicians simply copy what’s already there, with the exception of the “good” Irish musicians who do use a lot of great traditional and contemporary stuff! (Gerry Conlan personal communication August 2007)

Another musician responded that he liked tunes he was comfortable with, and also indicated that he liked to exchange tunes with other feis musicians. A piano player expressed a preference for following the lead musician’s repertoire and urged that the musical pairings at competitions should ideally remain constant indicating that
‘Phrasing, rests, accents chord progressions etc are generally much tighter when a duo has years of experience of playing together. Similarly, the duo will have a wide-ranging repertoire as a pair rather than trying to combine two very different lists (Brian Grant personal communication August 2007)

Another accompanist who is also a registered dance teacher noted an additional factor. He considers the recordings by more experienced musicians as hugely influencing the responses of teachers, who had these selections ingrained on their auditory memory. This notion of musical osmosis or absorption could also be applied to music from dance shows such as Riverdance and Lord of the Dance that are slowly but surely finding their way into the repertoire. The compositional skills of highly acclaimed professional musicians who are full time artists and who also play for feiseanna can also infiltrate and influence the development of the feis repertoire.

This was reinforced by feis musician and dance teacher Francis Ward who notes,

New bands such as Beoga, the five member band of whom three are experienced feis musicians, influence the repertoire with many of their own compositions recorded on their albums at step dance friendly tempos in an attractive jazzy style with much lift. (Francis Ward personal communication August 2007)

Ward goes on to stress that the geographical background of individual musicians can also be an influential factor in the establishment of a feis music repertoire. The tendency of a high propensity of Scottish tunes was evident from the established Scottish accompanists, and the influence of the Céilí band repertoire on musicians from Munster and Leinster who contend that their repertoire is coming from the tradition. Many U.S based musicians cited O’ Neills 1001 as a significant source for their music.

With an increase in the number of younger generation traditional musicians now playing for feiseanna, current trends reflect the inclusion of tunes from contemporary Irish recording artists such as Beoga and Flook. This point was emphasised by several musicians in their responses. In the past repertoire would definitely have been drawn from Céilí Band Records, and Irish step dance practice recordings. However, in the last few years, the music is drawn from a much wider repertoire including bands such as Flook, Beoga, and French Canadian Bands.
Issues of Creativity for the Musicians

The general consensus among feis musicians was that far from restricting creativity, playing to a strict metronomic tempo challenged them to play with feeling in an unhurried fashion and with flow, highlighting the dynamic and phrasing options within a particular tune. They did, however, make the point that not all tunes are suited to the exaggerated slow steady beat enforced by competition culture when it comes to the playing of jigs and hornpipes. Many remarked that they felt they could be musically creative within the framework of a steady tempo.

Although it appears to be very restrictive, there are ways to be musically creative. The melody of all the tunes except the sets can be varied as you please, as can the harmony. Sometimes I particularly enjoy the challenge of playing the same set dance five times, as it challenges me to vary the harmony, but within the framework and stability for the dancer of the same rhythm, tempo and melody more or less. This is where I discover a lot of new harmonic tricks, experimenting when playing for dancing (Francis Ward personal communication August 2007).

Another musician concurred with this notion of enforced creativity.

The repetitive aspects of the feiseanna force me to be creative in my music (otherwise it'd drive one insane!) i.e. composing new tunes on the spot, changing keys for the fun of it. No … if anything, it’s actually improved my playing. In earlier years I would play at fleadhhs and the music would be racing – fitting as many notes and ornaments into the tune as possible … playing at a regular metronomic speed has actually made me appreciate the content of the tunes and it also allows you to comfortably experiment with variations, ornaments, harmonies etc (Gerry Conlan personal communication August 2007).

While arguing for the fact that tempo does not necessarily restrict or prevent creativity, musicians did note that the limited duration of each musical selection did pose a challenge. The fact that one was only required to play 40 or 48 bars of a particular tune did not give the musician much time to settle into a particular tune. I recollect the observations of one accordion player from Tipperary who played for one step dance competition in his career. He was incensed and insulted when the adjudicator rang the bell causing him to cease playing in the middle of his favourite tune, he vowed he would never do it again (personal communication Willie Fogarty 1988).
Musicians also stressed that when one was familiar with a dancer’s style, one could sometimes accentuate the pauses and accents in their steps particularly during the set-dance round when there is only one dancer on stage at a time. Another musician underscored the importance of subtle understated musical creativity, which should enhance rather than dominate the dancers’ performance. In concluding this section, it is important to note how personal opinions and individual personality traits can affect the creative process. One musician emphasised that one needs to be in the mood to be creative and another musician who is also a teacher and adjudicator championed caution within musical experimentation, given the pressure that dancers, teachers and musicians can find themselves experiencing in the ultra-competitive step dance world.

The attending public

Generally the audience in attendance at step dance competitions is directly connected to the participants. It comprises mainly relatives, friends and supporters of the competitors and of course the large community of teachers, adjudicators, musicians and their entourages. At major feiseanna, there are some walk-up audience members but this is the exception rather than the rule. Therefore the Irish step dance audience is largely an element that supports the artistic endeavours of the dancers.

In recent years major sponsors have been sought to offset the significant costs involved in organizing an event of this magnitude. There are a number of options with regards to sponsorship of the event. For example a major sponsor donating in excess of 10,000 euro would be featured on the outside cover of the programme and their logos would be prominently displayed throughout the event. The main sponsors for the 2006 event were Celtic Tiger, the spectacular show choreographed by Michael Flatley, and Belfast City council. All eleven girls’ championships were also sponsored, as were nine of the eleven boys championships. These events are costly and could not run without significant financial support and backing.

It is increasingly common to see vendors and stall holders at step dance competitions. There is a tremendous demand for costume accessories and audio and video recordings at these events. Stall holders pay a fee to An Coimisiún to be allowed sell
their products at these events. In addition some vendors also sponsor competitions as a way of acknowledging the ongoing financial support they receive from members of the competitive Irish step dance community. It can therefore be argued that vendors, stall-holders and the general public each represent a relatively significant variable in the creative process, as they themselves are ‘creators’ of ambiance and receptors of the creative product. However, it holds true that the central players in the creative processes of competitive Irish step dance remain the competitors, teachers/choreographers, adjudicators and musicians. The aim of this chapter was to introduce these multiple categories as constituent variables that revolve around and interact with the institutionalised constant of the creative process. The institution of competition itself was identified as the constant, the mechanism through which aesthetic and human variables can be scrutinized. Dancers, teachers, adjudicators and musicians were presented as key protagonists within the competitive process. In the following chapter the focus will be on the personnel involved in the 2006 Oireachtas. The dance performances by the top five ladies and gentlemen 18-19 at Oireachtas na Cruinne 2006 will be described in detail and analyzed through identifying recurring themes and motifs and examining the movement rate and patterns.

I propose to examine the role of the teacher and the performer and indeed the choice of music in the creative process leading up to the performance at the competitive arena. The competition *per se* is perceived as the culmination of the roles alluded to above and the immediate parts played out by dancers, adjudicators, musicians and indeed the audience who also are players in this event. I intend to establish what are the specific and unique contributions of each to the competitive Irish step dance event. I will examine the varying degrees of freedom they experience within the institutionalized arena of competitive step dance. I will endeavor to identify the socio-geographical, historical, political, cultural and relational factors that affect the creative processes, which culminate in the course of the competitive event. To this end, I will examine the performances of 10 dancers, 5 male, 5 female, the input of their respective teachers, coaches and choreographers and the persons charged with the task of officiating at the event, namely the adjudicators and musicians.
Chapter 4
Performance: The Creative Product

Section One: Staging the event

By 2006, the World Irish dance Championships, in its 36th year, had reached a significantly elevated level of professionalism, enjoying global status and worldwide recognition as a prestigious event. It is within this contemporary context that I have chosen to examine the creative processes. In the first instance, I will give specific information pertaining to the 2006 Oireachtas in terms of location and key players. I will then describe the staging of the event before describing and analyzing the actual dance performances. I will identify the significant variables that contribute to the creative processes in choreography for competitive Irish step dancing. I will concentrate my investigation on the five highest-ranking dancers in the ladies and gents categories in the eighteen to nineteen age groups. I will discuss the performances by these individual dancers and note the contributions of their respective dancing schools.

Global Event

The 2006 Oireachtas was held in Belfast’s Waterfront Hall and adjoining British Telecom Studio. Situated on the river Lagan in County Antrim in the North East of Ireland, Belfast, has experienced a surge of growth and development in recent years. The city centre has many hotels and facilities to offer those traveling to the championships and an excellent infrastructure of rail, road, sea and air transport to facilitate those traveling from overseas. Furthermore, the continuing peace and prosperity enjoyed by the citizens of Belfast is reflected in the warm hospitality shown to visitors to the event. Since it was first opened in 1997, The Waterfront Hall has become a significant landmark in Belfast. It is a multi purpose venue, which can host conferences and concerts and boasts a range of technical facilities to suit a

43 The event was canceled in 2001, due to an outbreak of foot and mouth disease.
diversity of events. Depending on the configuration, the auditorium can seat from three hundred and eighty to two thousand, two hundred and forty five delegates and the complex is fully equipped to the highest specification in terms of sound, lighting and staging. The design of the main theatre allows excellent views of the performance area from every section of the auditorium. Thus, it is ideal for a global event of the scale and status those of us involved in the competitive Irish dance arena have come to associate with *Oireachtas na Cruinne*. One of the additional advantages of this venue is the inclusion of the adjoining British Telecom studio among its available facilities. This theatre can seat three hundred, and is ideal for the set dance or recall rounds of the competition. Having this second venue allows for an un-interrupted continuation of the competition, thereby leaving the main auditorium available and set up to proceed with the next age group while the recall round can take place in the more intimate venue. It minimizes time wastage and maximizes the use of adjudicators’ and musicians’ time. The event has increased in size and popularity since its introduction in 1970. The increasing number of competitors and competitions requires a very detailed timetable to ensure efficiency in terms of time and money, as venues of this size have a significant cost factor.

The 36th *Oireachtas* attracted almost four thousand competitors, representing three hundred and fourteen schools from twelve countries worldwide. Alongside entrants from Ireland, Britain, North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, there were participants from Germany, France, Austria and Hungary. The event attracted significant funding and notably its main sponsor was Michael Flatley, famous for his roles in *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance*. This level of funding is further evidence of the global significance of the event for Irish dance enthusiasts worldwide. The level of participation and success in competitive Irish step dancing by dancers from outside of Ireland is also strongly evidenced by the results. Out of a total of twenty-two solo championships at the 2006 world championships 41% of the winners came from the island of Ireland, the remainder from Britain, USA and Australia.
Figure 1. Chart depicting residential location of champions

Figure 2. Chart depicting residential location of female champions
Figure 3. Chart depicting residential location of male champions

The importance of the World championships for the development of competitive Irish step dance has been acknowledged by Irish dance historians and commentators including the following; (Hall 2008), Wulff (2007) and (Cullinane 1997) who states:

While raising the standard of Irish dancing worldwide, this event has greatly heightened the competitive aspect of dancing. In an effort to win, dancers go to extreme lengths to learn the approved material (dance steps and movements) To a large extent, the World Championships set the trend for Irish dancing world-wide and this has led to a great homogeneity of style of dancing (Cullinane 1997:211).

Cullinane claims that many of the innovations and borrowings are coming from diasporic lands rather than from anything in Ireland and the statistics regarding the country of residence of winners would seem to support this claim. However, many high calibre dancers and teachers from Ireland are also playing a significant role in contemporary developments in competitive Irish step dance.

Irish dancing is continuously evolving with the introduction of new movements, pieces of steps and ideas with ever increasing emphasis on syncopation and balletic movements. The enormous amount of contact now in existence means that these evolutionary changes are popularised worldwide within weeks if not days of their introduction. In fact the majority of these evolutionary changes originate outside Ireland. While maintaining its historical links, Irish dancing is continuously changing,
and it is perhaps this that makes it more popular and widespread now than ever before. Competition offers that challenge which necessitates improvement, and more spectacular performances (Cullinane 1997:211).

This issue of style has been much discussed in the light of the debate as to whether a narrowing or erosion of style takes place in competitive settings. Style can be tenuous and intangible and somewhat difficult to quantify, yet we have certain parameters that assist us with definition. These relate to posture, musicality, use of limbs, ease of movement, articulation of motifs and the sine qua non of overall performance impression. Teacher and choreographer Kieran Jordan commented thus:

I think when I was growing up I could tell- that’s a Schade dancer, that’s a Golden dancer, an Inisfree dancer, that dancer must be from Ireland, that dancer is clearly from the Southern United States and not from the New York area, so I think there used to be a lot more style within competition and then, I think it was when people started having workshop teachers coming from Ireland, the styles became more watered down (Kieran Jordan personal communication July 2006).

Colin Dunne concurs and states as follows:

I think styles have converged, material has just converged and you know all the funny jumps now they do in soft shoes? Well once one person does it and now its just part of the lexicon and no-one ever questions is it actually even nice or is it just because somebody did it, and they did it well and they won with it, then everybody is doing it (Colin Dunne August 2006)

The suggestion is that the regional styles, once easily identifiable, have become blurred, due to the sharing of teachers and technique using multi-media and workshop classes. I agree that for the vast majority of competitors, this is the case, with many of them trying to conform to an imaginary idealized competition style. Today, the style is more identifiable with the teacher, rather than being ascribed to a geographical area. However, I contend that the top placing dancers, while achieving technical virtuosity, can also express that individuality that makes them remarkable in terms of style, as well as content. The format for all solo competitions is the same, with dancers commencing with the hard shoe round, continuing with the light dance as per the syllabus (See appendix13). These rounds are danced in twos and then one

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44 Workshops are now common in that teachers travel to classes outside their own region to provide steps or coaching for another school.
third of the competitors is recalled to perform their solo set dance. The youngest age
group eligible to compete at the World Championships is the under eleven category
and there are solo competitions for every age group from that to the senior category.

I chose to investigate the eighteen to nineteen age group for the following reasons.
Firstly, the competitors are adults and thus able to articulate their opinions in relation
to dance composition. Moreover, they have all been involved in the competitive dance
scene for a significant period of time. Finally, as the competitors in this age group
would be just completing second level education, the standard of the age group would
not yet be as affected by an exodus of top dancers to perform in spectacle shows as
would be the case among the more senior competitors.

**Ladies 18-19 Championship**

**Background of participants**

A total of ninety-three competitors from fourteen different countries were entered for
this event. Ireland was represented by dancers from each of the four provinces;
Munster, Leinster, Ulster and Connacht. Significantly, a high percentage of the
dancers in this section came from overseas. There are a number of possible
explanations for this fact. In the first instance, there are now more Irish dancing
teachers throughout other parts of the world than on the island of Ireland. Therefore,
in terms of scale, it is not surprising that the increase in the popularity of Irish step
dance worldwide is reflected in the competitive arena.
Geographical distribution of competitors in ladies 18-19 2006

Figure 4. Chart depicting residence of winning female dancers 18-19.

USA 31%
Canada 13%
Scotland 6%
England 23%
Leinster 4%
Munster 4%
Ulster 9%
Australia/New Z 7%
Connacht 1%
Mainland Europe 2%
Figure 5. % of dancers from outside and within Ireland.

18% were resident in Ireland
82% were from outside Ireland

There are now more dancers from outside Ireland who continue to compete in the older age groups. Competitive Irish step dance is now so intense in terms of the commitment of time and money required, that dancers in Ireland are competing less and less at the top levels. The parish halls and local community centres are no longer suitable incubation centres for excellence in Irish dance when compared to mirrored studios available on a greater scale in other countries.

The top five performers

I did not pre-select the particular dancers for inclusion in this case study, preferring to let the result determine which dancers would be included as I opted to study the five highest placing dancers in the ladies and gentlemen’s categories eighteen to nineteen. I chose to do this because in competitive Irish step dancing, change, I suggest, is determined by the winners. Movements become an accepted part of the lexicon if dancers of note achieve success through including those movements in their performance (Hall 1995:2008). In the ladies competition, the winning dancers considered for analysis were as follows: Leanne Curran Scoil Rince Mona Ni Rodaigh
Dundalk; Ashley Smith, Smith-Houlihan Academy Boston MA; Frances Richmond, Maguire O Shea Academy London; Siobhan Hackett, Aaron Crosbie Irish Dance Academy London; and Caoimhe Doherty, Doherty-Reid School Belfast.

The first round

This competition was scheduled for a 10.15am start at the Waterfront Hall on Friday 14 Apr. 2006. The competition syllabus prescribes the performance of a hornpipe for the hard shoe section in this age group. Dancers must dance a forty bar hornpipe sequence in 4/4 time at a metronomic speed of 113 bpm. The first round, which was the heavy round, in this instance, the hornpipe, commenced at 11.20 a.m.\(^45\) with competitors 40 and 42. A draw was made for the start numbers for each round to incorporate some element of chance. The dancers competed for forty bars of music, dancing two at a time. Eighty-three of the ninety-one dancers entered actually completed the first round. The announcer for the first two rounds of this competition introduced the adjudicators and musicians and then requested that the musicians play a sample of the music.

Each evening a draw took place to select the adjudicators for the competitions scheduled for the following day. From the official panel of fourteen adjudicators employed to officiate at the Oireachtas the following seven were selected to adjudicate this particular competition. Eugene Harnett, Dublin, Marie Casey, Cork, Mairead Casey, Cork, Breda McInerney, Limerick, Elizabeth McConomy, Derry, Sean O Conghaile, Down, Vourneen O Connor, Belfast. Notably, all of the above panel were members from the island of Ireland and there was no representative from overseas included. The musical accompanists for this competition were Kevin Joyce from Dublin and Anthony Davis from Birmingham, alternating on piano and piano accordion. The role of announcer for this particular competition was shared between Mary McElroy from Dublin, who introduced the first two rounds, and renowned dance historian and scholar Dr. John Cullinane from Cork who presented the set dance round. The role of the announcer is to officiate at these competitions, and

\(^45\) The scheduling is extremely tight at these events, due in no small way to the very large numbers of competitors in the girls’ competitions. One incident, such as a dancer tripping, or a technical glitch can cause a delay which can hold up the entire event. It is not unusual for these competitions to run behind time although every effort is made to keep the event running punctually.
ensure that the rules and regulations of the organizing body are adhered to and thus regulate the actual performance of the dance. They ensure that the competitors dance in order and maintain the attention of the audience. Prior to the commencement of any competition, the announcer requests that the musicians play a sample of the music. The purpose of this is two-fold. It is part of the pre-performance ritual and assures the dancers that the tempo and volume of the music are correct. The metronome was clearly audible in the introductory sound mix. The volume of the accordion was quite loud in comparison with the piano, which was barely audible. This was the line that was linking directly to the video recording and was not problematic for dancers as both instruments could be clearly heard through the speakers in the auditorium.

The competitor numbers were not identifiable from the video recording. Fortunately, detailed field notes combined with a familiarity with the dancers and personnel involved assisted with identification and labeling of key protagonists in this instance. Midway through the hornpipe round, there was a pause during which the recall for the previous girls’ competition was announced. This break afforded the adjudicators a valuable few moments to take stock of their marks thus far. It also changed the dynamic in the audience as a significant number of people then left the auditorium to participate in the recall in the hall next door. This interruption gave me the opportunity to reflect on the issue of order of performance and consider some of the many questions that were coming to the fore as the competition progressed. Firstly, I was curious as to how the numerical order for the program was determined. On investigating this with the office of An Coimisiún, I was informed that once the entries are received, the dancers are divided up so that dancers from the same school will not be dancing together. Sometimes, they use alphabetical order of competitors’ names, although this was not done in this instance. Of late, the programme order and draw for starting numbers has been determined at random using computer software. Furthermore, I questioned whether or not the musicians were following a predetermined set list or how indeed they were choosing which tune to play for each group of dancers. Generally, the accordion player selects the tune and communicates the key to the accompanying pianist.

So what is random and what is not? Dancers don’t know their number order until the day of the competition. Moreover, they cannot predetermine if all the dancers will be
present; if a dancer withdraws due to injury or some unforeseen circumstance, the last dancer may dance alone. This means that they will not have to compete for the adjudicators’ attention. However, it also means that the dancer will be subject to a more rigorous critique, given that all adjudicators are focused on one dancer for the entire duration of the performance. In terms of performing the choreographed material, the dancer has more options regarding use of space if not sharing the stage.

Is it of import whether dancers compete early or late in rotation order? This will have an impact upon the length of the rest time dancers get between rounds. There was a ten-minute intermission at the conclusion of the first round, so that the adjudicators could complete their marking sheets.46 (see appendix 14) Those who had to leave their table were accompanied by members of An Coiste Faire.47 The adjudicators are not allowed to discuss the competition while it is in progress.

The second round

In this competition, the requirement for the light shoe component is a soft shoe reel. The dancers must dance for a forty-eight bar interval to reel music in 4/4 time at a metronomic speed of 113bpm. In the soft shoe round only 82 danced as one competitor had to withdraw due to injury. The first two rounds concluded just after 2 p.m with an imperceptible break between rounds to allow for the collection of marking sheets from the adjudicators. At the end of the soft shoe round the marks for the second dance were input in to the computer and only thirty-one dancers were recalled for the final round.

Recall Round

The set dance or recall round was performed in the smaller British Telecom Studio adjacent to the Waterfront. This change of venue for all recall rounds was highly significant, as the sound from the dance floor was much clearer than in the larger

46 The adjudicators award each dancer a mark out of a hundred and the marks are then converted to a points system with one hundred points being awarded to the competitor in first place, seventy-five to the competitor in second, sixty five to the dancer in third etc. Thus with a panel of seven, the highest score possible is seven hundred points if all the adjudicators award first place to the same dancer.

47 This professional conduct committee is a sub committee of An Coimisiún, which liaises with adjudicators during competitions.
auditorium, thus punishing those dancers who may have been rhythmically challenged. Conversely, it was advantageous to those dancers with clear, strong rhythmic beats. Moreover, the adjudicators were looking down on the dancers in this setting whereas the stage in the larger venue was above eye level. The recall was filmed from the back right hand corner of the auditorium. At this stage, those recalled are invited to perform individually. This offers the audience, and particularly those charged with the responsibility of ranking these top class dancers in order, an opportunity to reflect on each performance. The dancer now has the stage to herself and the undivided attention of the entire audience focused on her. In certain respects, this is when the dancer must seize the opportunity presented and impress the audience. Champion dancer and choreographer Breandán de Galláí confirms this:

But I remember a time when the whole thing about set dances for example, as your kind of show-off dance, as kind of the piece where you really did what kind of summed you up. Now it was a very exciting time so you would kind of look out for certain people and what they were doing and what was in vogue and the whole thing was- there was always a push on to do something new (B de Galláí personal communication June 2006).

De Galláí also differentiates between rhythmic patterns which excited from an auditory perspective and new visual eye-catching motifs which were briefly and tantalisingly introduced.

And in my mind there were two things. There was something that was rhythmically really exciting or different and would just send a chill down your spine and I think that was what a lot of people focussed on and still do, but for me, there was the other side which was visually very, very exciting. So say for example if you didn’t have butterflies and somebody came up with a butterfly, it would take your breath away because a, you weren’t expecting it… you wouldn’t understand on first viewing what exactly it was and you couldn’t repeat it. So there were times when I remember that you know them happening for the first time (B de Galláí personal communication June 2006).

As the hard shoe round consisted of a dance in hornpipe time, the syllabus requires that the set dance be in jig time by way of contrast. Competitors may choose from an official list of permitted set dances and must submit their metronomic speed (which may not drop below a specified point) to the attending side stage personnel who will in turn notify the musicians (See appendix 15).
The set dance round commenced, again in accordance with the system of random selection, with competitor number 11. The seating was limited in the recall venue so the interested parties were standing in line to be assured of a good seat. The dancers performed in turn and the audience viewed respectfully and acknowledged the achievement of each dancer in reaching that stage of the competition with warm applause, while the panel of adjudicators made notes and added to their score sheets for the final time. The choice of tune for the set dance performance is significant in that the dancers sought to perform the more lengthy jig settings with only one dance (The Story Teller) adhering to the regular 8 bar step, 16 bar set setting. The assumption is that better dancers are capable of performing longer more complicated choreographies to the tunes of longer duration.

The dancers in the ladies under 19 recall performed the following jig time set dances.

![Chart Title](chart)

Figure 6. Set dances performed in ladies 18-19 recall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Drunken Gauger</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Funny Tailor</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackthorn Stick</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planxty Drury</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48 The Funny Tailor and the Drunken Gauger are actually different names for the same set dance tune.
The Three Sea Captains 7%
The Story Teller 3%

**Men 18-19 Championship**

On Saturday 15 Apr. the gentlemen 18-19 took to the stage. There were twenty-nine participants registered in the official programme. Of these only twenty-six participated in the competition. The competitors were drawn from Ireland, Britain, U.S.A. and Canada and the geographical distribution was as follows.

**Background of participants**

Geographical distribution of competitors in gents 18-19 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of Residence</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Chart depicting residence of winning male dancers 18-19.
Despite the surge in the popularity of Irish dance, the number of male dancers participating is still significantly lower than that of ladies. There are always more girls than boys at beginning levels of all dance classes and many parents will channel their sons into team sports rather than dance activities. Even though the popularity of Irish dance increased in the post *Riverdance* era, the increase in the number of male dancers did not keep pace with the number of females. In the under nineteen competition only 21% of the male competitors were from Ireland.

In this competition, the announcers’ role was shared, with Dan Armstrong from Belfast presenting the first two rounds and Dr. John Cullinane announcing the recall round, and the competition was sponsored by *Magic of the Dance*. The competition moves at a very quick and snappy pace when Dan is announcing whereas Dr Cullinane conducts proceedings at a more leisurely pace. This can influence the amount of rest and recovery dancers get between rounds particularly in a gents’ competition where the numbers are smaller. The adjudication panel drawn for this event was as follows: Anne Marie Greaney, Galway, Annette Doolan, Dublin, Isabella Fogarty Dublin, Miriam McCarthy, Drogheda, Maria Casey Cork, Brid McInerney, Limerick, Elizabeth McConomy, Derry. Here we note the all-female panel drawn exclusively from the four provinces of Ireland. The musicians, as for the previous day, were Kevin Joyce and Anthony Davis. Since both Kevin and Anthony play accordion and piano, they occasionally alternate instruments, thus further adding to the dynamic possibilities in regards to their musical accompaniment.

As there are fewer numbers competing in the gents’ competitions it is much easier to sit through the entire competition and get a sense of the overall standard. In the 18-19 gents’ competition, there were some excellent individual performances. It is also noteworthy that as with most of the boys competitions there was a complete absence of kilts, with most of the gents opting for dark, tailored trousers and some rather flamboyant coloured and patterned shirts.

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49 *Magic of the Dance* is a dance production celebrating aspects of the history of Ireland. *Magic of the Dance* has been viewed by in excess of a million people in the last ten years.

50 The spectacle shows have probably contributed somewhat to the demise of the kilt although the debate re the suitability of this borrowed Scottish attire for Irish dance had prevailed for almost a century prior to *Riverdance*. Now that all gents are wearing trousers, one cannot see the shape of the limbs at all.
Plate 1. Presentation Ladies 18-19 World Championships 2006


(Courtesy of John Egan Feis Pix)
The wearing of trousers has influenced the creative process in terms of performance by gents as one can no longer discern the shape of the limbs and good tailoring can compensate for physical shortcomings in terms of the defined shape of the leg. It is more difficult to do this in the ladies competitions, as the legs are clearly visible, even when dancers are wearing tights one can easily see how the calf muscles etc are accentuated.

The top five performers

The winning gentlemen considered for analysis are as follows: Stephen Brennan, McGahan Lees Academy Essex England; Andrew O Reilly, Sean-Éireann McMahon Academy based in the Midlands and directed by Rose Ellis and Gordon McMahon; Stephen Carolan, Árd Rialla Academy in County Louth; Benedict Devlin, Ó Griofa Ní Loinsigh Academy in Surrey; and Ziggy Gacca, Scoil Rince Céim Óir in London.

The first round

In the first round, all competitors performed forty-eight bars of a jig to music played at the slow metronomic speed of 73 beats per minute. This can be challenging in the extreme for those providing musical accompaniment, as many dance tunes drawn from within the tradition tend not to be suited to this slow metronomic speed. Consequently, musicians opt for Carolan compositions, which are tuneful and melodic even at this tempo, as well as regular tunes from the repertoire traditionally accessed by traditional musicians. Waltzes and songs are sometimes adapted in this context also.

The second round

The gents changed into soft shoes and danced forty-eight bars of reel in twos. The male dancers, in their soft shoe round displayed a high degree of skill and athleticism, reminiscent of high calibre gymnasts. Dr. John Cullinane commented on the high standard of reel dancing by males,

You know the boys are now doing material in reels, which is really, it’s incredible, fantastic! And some of the movements that they are doing!
But at the same time they have a good manly style in the dance like (personal communication July 2006).

Recall Round

Once the marks had been tabulated, it was announced that only ten dancers were recalled to perform their set dance round. Again the dancers, musicians, adjudicators and all their supporters relocated to the adjoining British Telecom Studio for the recall round. Dr. John Cullinane presented this section of the competition. This time the set dances were required to be in hornpipe tempo to contrast with the jigs performed earlier. This is effective in theory but in practice once hornpipe tunes are slowed to a tempo of 76 beats per minute they incorporate more jig time rhythm than hornpipe time material. (See attached transcription in appendix 16).

Unfortunately, the video recording does not have an accompanying audio track as one of the technical crew disconnected the audio feed. This rendered the task of analyzing the set dances challenging in the extreme. However, as I am familiar with the musical components through my role as a feis musician and with the dance elements as a teacher and adjudicator of competitive Irish step dance, this obstacle was not insurmountable. A greater variety of set dance tunes were evidenced here as opposed to the ladies section of the competition. The dances performed in this recall were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set dance choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downfall of Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The piper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planxty Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ace and Deuce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonaparte's Retreat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny Races</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Set dances performed in gents 18-19 recall.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downfall of Paris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Piper through the Meadow</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planxty Davis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ace and Deuce of Pipering</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonaparte’s Retreat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lodge Road</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilkenny Races</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six of the competitors danced their set piece to a metronomic speed in excess of 100 bpm, which ensured a hornpipe feel to the material they performed. The other four chose a 76 speed, which is the minimum speed permitted by An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. This choice enabled them to pack the audio and visual components very densely. This is illustrated in detail in the transcriptions provided in chapter five.
Section Two: Choreography

I have already suggested that the highest placing dancers are crucial to the addition of new movement patterns and motifs within the competitive step dance genre. An examination of the results of the competitions under analysis, namely the ladies and gents eighteen to nineteen category, indicates that the panel of adjudicators favoured different dancers for different reasons in different dances and the overall result is achieved by combining the results of all seven adjudicators. This is instanced by examining the results in the different rounds of the competition. For example, in the hornpipe round, three of the adjudicators placed Leanne Curran, who eventually emerged as the winner, in first place. A further two adjudicators placed Ashley Smith, the runner up, in first position in the hornpipe. The two remaining adjudicators each had a different dancer lying in first place at the end of the heavy round, so the outcome was still very undetermined. This shows that each dance is important in the evaluation process. In the soft shoe round, Ashley and Leanne each had two first places, Frances Richmond, who was placed third overall, also had also had two first places while the last first place went to yet another dancer who was in a medal winning position outside of the top five. At the end of the third and final set dance round, Leanne won the set from four adjudicators, Ashley was awarded first place by two adjudicators and Frances got the nod from the remaining adjudicator. Thus overall, four of the adjudicators awarded 100 points (see appendix 5) to Leanne, two adjudicators gave their 100 points to Ashley and the final adjudicator gave his preference to Frances. Although Leanne won comfortably, one adjudicator did not have her ranked in his top ten places. This indicates the subjectivity and margin for personal preference of the entire adjudicating process and is one of the reasons that a panel of adjudicators is employed. As the panels will vary from event to event, the choreography is not influenced by the vagaries of individual adjudicators, rather by what is tacitly accepted as good dancing by those qualified to adjudicate competitive Irish step dance. These differences of opinion were also evidenced in the analysis of the gents’ competition. In the heavy jig round, five of the adjudicators had Andy O Reilly in first place with the remaining two first places going to Stephen Carolan and Benedict Devlin. In the reel round Stephen Brennan, the eventual winner, was awarded three first place marks and one joint first with Andy O Reilly, who also was placed first by another adjudicator. The remaining two adjudicators had Benedict
Devlin and Ziggy Gaca in first place. The set dance round further refined the result, with four of the adjudicators awarding their first place to Stephen Brennan and the remaining three going with Stephen Carolan. Thus, overall Stephen Brennan received one hundred points from four adjudicators, two adjudicators stayed with Andy O Reilly and the final adjudicator gave the 100 points to Stephen Carolan.

I have identified the winning dancers and examined the adjudication process that led to their being ranked in the top five. I will now identify and analyze the movements and motifs they included in their steps and consider what set them apart from the other dancers. It should be acknowledged that the creative processes in competitive dance consist of several layers. The most obvious of these layers is the creativity in composing the steps and then the creativity involved with the performance. The variables of movement, motifs and style are three important elements in the creative process as observed in the competitive context. Movement and the use of travel steps on stage have been significantly influenced by the shift from local to global competitive events and the consequent change in the scale and size of the performance arenas.

The following section examines in detail the movement patterns identified from the floor plans. It notes the trends for the ladies and gents in each of their three rounds and then discusses similarities and differences.
### Commentary on Movement Rate Ladies 18-19

#### Round One: Hornpipe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Siobhan Hackett</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Ashley Smith</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Leanne Curran</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caoimhe Doherty</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Frances Richmond</td>
<td>57.50%</td>
<td>42.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
<td><strong>35%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Commentary on movement in ladies’ hornpipes

#### Round Two: Reel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Leanne Curran</td>
<td>85.50%</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caoimhe Doherty</td>
<td>85.50%</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Frances Richmond</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Siobhan Hackett</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Ashley Smith</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>89%</strong></td>
<td><strong>11%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Commentary on movement in ladies’ reels
### Round Three: Set Dance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caoimhe Doherty</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Frances Richmond</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Siobhan Hackett</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Ashley Smith</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Leanne Curran</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
<td><strong>48%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11. Commentary on movement in ladies’ set dances

In the hornpipe round, the average rate of movement on stage for the ladies was 65% with only 35% of the material being performed in place. Leanne Curran traveled for significantly more than this average, recording a travel rate of 80%. The advantages of traveling on stage are that you expose your dancing talents to each of the adjudicators and it is also a strategy to detract their attention from the other dancer on stage with you.

In the soft shoe round, an average movement rate of 89% was recorded with all top five ladies traveling for more than 80% of the reel music. Indeed, one dancer moved about the stage incessantly for the entire forty-eight bars of reel music.

The relationship between time spent moving on stage and performing complex footwork in place was significantly different in the set dance round, with dancers averaging a 52% movement rate and a 48% result for dancing in place. I suggest that there is not the same onus or urgency to cover ground in the recall round as the dancers are performing solo and do not need to compete for the attention of the adjudicators.
**Commentary of Movement rate Gents 18-19**

### Round One: Heavy Jig

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ziggy Gaca</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Stephen Brennan</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Andrew O Reilly</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Benedict Devlin</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stephen Carolan</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. Commentary on movement in gents’ heavy jigs

### Round Two: Reel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Stephen Brennan</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Andrew O Reilly</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Benedict Devlin</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stephen Carolan</td>
<td>87.50%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ziggy Gaca</td>
<td>62.50%</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Average**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13. Commentary on movement in gents’ reel
### Round Three: Set Dance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>% Travelling</th>
<th>% in place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Andrew O Reilly</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Benedict Devlin</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stephen Carolan</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ziggy Gaca</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Stephen Brennan</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14. Commentary on movement in gents’ set dances

In the heavy jig round, the relationship between travel steps and performance in place was equal, with dancers dancing in place for half the performance and traveling on stage for the remainder. Display of strength and producing a loud sound are important strategies for attracting attention in the gents’ competitions, so perhaps the issue of traveling on stage is not as pertinent. Moreover, the jig is executed at a much slower pace of 73 bpm, thus affecting an entirely different dynamic from a more up beat hornpipe tempo.

In the reel round, the amount of traveling was significantly higher than the jig round, with an average movement rate of 77% recorded. Again the lively reel music played at a tempo of 113 bpm inspires this energetic movement flow. Furthermore, the gents are vying for the attention of the adjudicators in a dance performance that is brief in duration. The dancer is required to make an impression in less than a minute and a half, while sharing the stage with another dancer.

In the recall round, the travel time is slightly greater than the time spent on the spot. One possible explanation for this is that the hornpipe, when played at an upbeat tempo, inspires traveling movements. However, two of the competitors danced very slow dances, so this would have militated against a possibly higher travel average. In
competitive dancing, the hard shoe performance is privileged, with two of the three required dances being performed in heavy shoes. However, this does not influence the creative processes for competition until the recall stage, as dancers have to perform one hard shoe dance and one soft shoe dance to claim a place in the recall and final stage. Indeed, the syllabus does not require that the set dance be performed in hard shoes but to date the established practice has been for all set dances to be performed in heavy shoes. Maybe future innovations could include a soft shoe interpretation of the set dance music?

**Points of Convergence and Divergence**

It is difficult to make comparisons between first and third round performances, as the syllabus required dances in different tempos from the ladies and gents. However, we have established that in the first round, the ladies traveled more frequently and that traveling movements were a strong feature for both ladies and gents in the reel round. The set dance round was less significant, in that in both instances there was a fairly equal distribution between the amount of time spent dancing in place and the amount of time spent moving about the stage. I can therefore establish that travel steps and good use of the stage are of primary importance for the dances where there are two or three competitors on stage simultaneously. The dancer must ensure that all the adjudicators on the panel can view her performance. Thus the size of the competitive arena is a factor that contributes to the creative process in the context of competition as noted by Kieran Jordan:

> I think the actual staging of the choreography has a lot to do with it too like if it’s a competition step you want that bit that moves fast up towards the front of the stage and then you want a fancy intricate ending right there in front of the you know judges and then if you’re going to like take your traveling step and your big front click you want that right in front of the other girl who is hopefully behind you and stuff like that and the fact that you’re on stage is it two at a time now… (Kieran Jordan personal communication July 2006)

Movement and travel steps are complemented by more intricate footwork made up of a variety of motifs, which brings us to the second key-element of the artistic performance, which facilitates the study of creativity in choreography. Recurring or
dominant themes in literary or artistic works are referred to as motifs. Motif writing is described by Guest as pertaining to the most salient feature of a movement (1977:11). Foley (1988) and Hall (1995: 2008) have notated recurring motifs within the Irish dance idiom. One of the challenges presented in the context of analyzing significant movements found in Irish dance is that the genre does not have a set vocabulary where movements can be defined universally. Dancers have a general understanding of what the important movements are but they describe them differently and there are several possible interpretations for each motif. These differences pertain to position of feet, level, degree of extension, and of course, musical timing in which the movement is performed.

The analytical term motif is borrowed here from Foley (1988) who devised a system for analyzing traditional Irish step dance. The structural analysis used and developed by Foley (1988, and 2007:281) was largely based upon the work of Adrienne Kaeppler and the IFMC Study Group in Ethnochoreology 1974. The following terminology was applied: An ‘Element’ refers to the smallest structural movement while a ‘Cell’ is made up of two or three elements. A ‘Motif’ is made up of one or two cells and has meaning for the dancers. There are two degrees of phrases, a ‘Minor phrase’ made up of elements, cells and possibly motifs; generally two bars long in easy step dances and a ‘Phrase’ made up of elements, cells, and motifs, generally four bars long in easy step dances. All of these components lead to a ‘Step’ made up of elements, cells, and motifs; generally an eight bar structure. I chose the term motif rather than minor phrase as most of the movement inventories I identified were less than two bars in duration. In steps performed by champion dancers, several motifs can be combined within a two bar duration. In her work Foley outlined that,

However, past some twenty motifs it became difficult to distinguish between variations of existing motifs or new motifs. In varying or improvising a step, some of these step dancers combined steps and elements from their repertoire and put them together to their own liking to fit to the music…it was found that the possible cells and elements in forming motifs were infinite (Foley 2007:283).

---

51 For example the terms batter, treble, rally and shuffle are broadly interchangeable but can change if they are preceded by a hop or executed at a quicker or slower pace. For further details, see Ni Bhriain 2008 The Terminology of Irish Dance. Macater. Madison.
At the time of Foley’s research, specific motifs were listed as belonging to a particular genre. In the world of competitive dancing today, this no longer applies. Any motif can appear in any dancer genre. Examples of this include the grind step (skip hop back hop 1234) once associated with the double jig, now seen in the slip jig and drum movements appearing in boys reel steps. In the motifs depicted here, I observed ‘rocks’, ‘entrechats’ and ‘bicycles’ featuring in light and heavy shoe routines.

The report of the I.F.M.C. states that ‘... the motif represents an absolute creative factor; it is an expression of artistic creativity and is fixed in the awareness of the dancer’, (I.F.M.C. Study Group for Folk dance Terminology 1974:129). The infinite possibility for reconfiguring motifs within Irish step dance is further testimony of the creative potential when composing material.

Having reviewed the video recording of the competitive event repeatedly, I have extracted the common motifs performed by the winning dancers, as these are the performers who can influence what is accepted in the lexicon of the competitive Irish step dance repertoire. These motifs are notated in Appendix 5. In terms of nomenclature, I have utilised the vocabulary used in Scoil Ui Ruairc to describe these typical motifs. They are intended as descriptive indicators and do not seek to prescribe performance practices or claim that these are the only possible interpretations of these particular motifs. Although some motifs are repeated in both hard and soft-shoe dances, I have only included one representation of each movement. Furthermore, where motifs have been derived from a combination from other notated motifs, I have not included the combinations as the possible permutations exceed the scope of this study. (see appendix 17).

---

52 The International Folk Music Council I.F.M.C. is now known as the International Council for Traditional Music I.C.T.M.
53 The school of dance founded by my grandmother in 1929 and based in Limerick and Clare, Ireland.
Motifs Employed by ladies 18-19

In the ladies championship, the motifs utilized are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>S Hackett</th>
<th>A Smith</th>
<th>L Curran</th>
<th>C Doherty</th>
<th>F Richmond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jump &amp;click 23</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrechat</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switch jumps</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pause on toes</td>
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<td>▲</td>
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<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hitch kicks</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bicycle</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Snatch treble</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hop treble</td>
<td>▲</td>
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<td>▲</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turn on toes</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
<td>▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batter hop toe 234</td>
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<td>Batter and stamp up(2)</td>
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<td>Crab walks</td>
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<td>Stamps</td>
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<td>Triangle on toes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off beat raleighs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turn lifting back foot</td>
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<td>▲</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15. Motifs included in ladies’ hornpipes
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>S Hackett</th>
<th>A Smith</th>
<th>L Curran</th>
<th>C Doherty</th>
<th>F Richmond</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrechat</td>
<td>🟡</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kick out23</td>
<td>🟡</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skip jump back</td>
<td>🟡</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long out 23s</td>
<td>🟡</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
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<td>Twists</td>
<td>🟡</td>
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<td>Turn 123</td>
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<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
<td>🟠</td>
</tr>
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Figure 16. Motifs included in ladies’ reel
### Set Dance

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<th>L Curran</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cut up</td>
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<td>Treble step &amp;stamp</td>
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Figure 17. Motifs included in ladies’ set dances
Commentary on motifs performed by ladies 18-19

The material performed by the top five dancers in the hornpipe round was created from a total of twenty-seven significant motifs. Individual performers displayed a range of movements ranging from eleven to fifteen motifs. Only three motifs were common to all performances, thus confirming the variety and diversity in their choice of movements. The shared elements were as follows:

- Off beat trebles
- Long clicks
- Treble hop toe two three four

The following eight motifs were used by individual dancers and not repeated by any other high placing dancer.

- Jump and click 23
- Switch jumps
- Toe behind
- Batter and stamp up and stamp up
- Spin
- Back clicks
- Triangle on toes
- Rock

The number of motifs identified in the soft shoe reel round was significantly lower with a total of nineteen motifs recorded. The movement range for the dancers was between seven and eleven motifs and only two movements were performed by all five ladies, namely the entrechat and the over two three. The following nine motifs were performed by one in the top five and not featured in the performances by other dancers.

- Kick out 23
- Up down jumps
- Point kick back
• Slice kick
• Jump flick 23
• Double hops
• Rocks
• Points
• Pivot turn

The set dance round contained the widest variety of motifs with an impressive thirty-one motifs recorded. For most dancers the range of movement was between eleven and fourteen but one dancer drew from seventeen different motifs. Only three common movements featured in all five performances. These are as follows:

• Travel on toes
• Hold on toes
• Trebles

The total number of motifs particular to individual dancers is also noteworthy with thirteen specific motifs as follows:

• Twists
• Spin cut
• Bicycle
• Toe behind and drum
• Clip click side
• Crab walk
• Drag back
• Turn on toes
• Treble step and step
• Raised knees
• Drum in place
• Heel click
• Hop and toe and toe
Identification of Motifs employed by gents 18-19

The following motifs were recorded in the three dances performed by the gents 18-19.

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<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Z Gaca</th>
<th>S Brennan</th>
<th>A O Reilly</th>
<th>B Devlin</th>
<th>S Carolan</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Stamp stamp</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Hitch kicks</td>
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<td>Turn back foot up</td>
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### Hop and toe and toe

Figure 18. Motifs included in gents’ heavy jigs

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Figure 19. Motifs included in gents’ reels
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<td>Flick 23</td>
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<td>Crab</td>
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<td>Hop back</td>
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<td>drag heel</td>
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<td>Rising step v</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batter hop toe 234</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flick out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clip click side</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20. Motifs included in gents’ set dances
Commentary on Gents motifs

There were thirty-one motifs in total recorded in the gents’ hard shoe round. The movement range of dancers ranged from eight to eleven motifs although one dancer included fifteen motifs, significantly more than his co-competitors. Only two motifs were common to all five dancers, the hitch kicks (travel kicks) and a variety of rallys or batters. The number of movements particular to individual performances was as high as fifteen, outlined below.

- Drum around
- Treble step and kick
- Treble step and stamp
- Clip clicks side
- Off beat stamp
- Cuts
- Hold clicks in the air
- Dig toe
- Toes back
- And toe and toe
- Weight on toe
- Jump turn
- Double clicks
- Bicycle
- Hop and toe and toe

In the gents’ reels, a total of twenty-seven motifs were recorded. The range of movement spanned from seven to ten motifs per dancer and significantly, there were no motifs common to all five performances. The motifs specific to particular individual performers totaled seventeen, as detailed below.

- Drum across
• Drum around
• Kick out
• Hold over 23s
• Turns
• Turn on heels
• Spin
• Turn back foot up
• Twist on heels
• Cut clicks
• Double clicks
• Drums in front
• Jumps
• Pause
• Off beat turns
• Hitch kicks
• Step back movement

In the recall round, there were thirty-two motifs recorded for the top five performers. In general, the movement range spanned from eleven to fourteen motifs although one dancer incorporated as few as eight motifs. There were only three motifs common to all five dancers, namely:

• Drums across
• Double clicks
• Variety of trebles

There were fifteen motifs in all, which were specific to individual performances. These are listed below.

• Batter hop toe 234
• Flick out
• Clip click side
• Dig toe
• Reverse toe
• Rock
• Stamp
• Treble step and stamp
• Hop toe and toe
• Back click
• Turns
• Rising step
• Flick 23
• Drag heel
• Crab walk

Comparison

The similarities and differences between the ladies and gents competitions are highlighted in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ladies’ Hornpipe</th>
<th>Gents’ Jig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Round One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>40 bars</td>
<td>48 bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of motifs</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement range</td>
<td>11-15 motifs</td>
<td>8-15 motifs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Motifs</td>
<td>3 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motifs specific to individuals</td>
<td>8 (30%)</td>
<td>15 (48%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In certain respects, comparisons in the first round dances would appear inconsequential given that they differ fundamentally in terms of rhythm, time signature and duration. The ladies dance a forty bar hornpipe in 4/4 time and the gents perform a forty-eight bar jig in 6/8 rhythm. However, we can establish the following patterns and trends. The range of motifs used by the ladies was fewer than in the gents’ competition. The percentage of motifs common to all top five performers was quite low in both instances with the ladies shared motifs registering at 11% and the
gents at an extremely low 6%. Furthermore, a significant 30% of the motifs were specific to individual performers in the ladies section and this percentage was even higher in the gents’ category, where 48% of the motifs were specific to individual performers.

Dancers in both categories performed the light reel in soft shoes and while the females drew from a palette of only nineteen motifs, their male counterparts utilized twenty-seven motifs. The ladies displayed a low rate of repetition of movements by all five dancers, registering a mere 11%, while the gents had no motifs at all in common. The gents also have the option of incorporating rhythmic elements into their soft shoe dance as their light shoes have a heel attached for that purpose. Also, the ladies recorded a high 47% in terms of motifs specific to individual dancers and furthermore the gents recorded an astonishing 63% of motifs unique to individual performers. A high level of creativity and individuality was evidenced in these performances.

The set dance rounds are again difficult to compare. All ladies were required to dance set dances in 6/8 time and the gents had to perform hornpipe set dances. The latter can be written in 2/4 or 4/4 time signature and can vary in terms of metronomic speed between 76bpm and 113bpm. Both ladies and gents had a high number of motifs for this dance. In both sections, the average range of movements spanned between eleven and fourteen motifs. However, one performer in the ladies section performed as many as seventeen motifs in her set piece and one of the gents as few as eight in his. In the ladies competition, only 10% of the motifs were common to all five dancers and 9% in the case of the gents. Furthermore, 42% of the motifs identified in the ladies performances were specific to individual dancers and 47% of the material danced by the gents was specific to individual dancers.

One of the significant themes emerging from this study is the importance of the individual dancer. Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the perceived demise of regional styles, which were replaced by competitive styles associated with particular schools of dance, even though these were not necessarily framed by geographical boundaries. Within these schools, there is a generic repertoire for the open dancers of the class, but in the case of potential world champion challengers, the anatomical
attributes of individual dancers are considered in the composition of steps (See Wardtrope 1997:19).

Teachers who participated in this study emphasized this point. (see appendix 18). They considered choreographing for the top dancers paramount in their creative endeavours. Francis Curley stressed the importance of considering the individual strengths and capabilities of the top dancers in the dance class and tailoring the material accordingly. Colin Dunne confirmed this referring to his own experience as a teacher:

I taught a dancer who could do 5 things, and she could do them beautifully and do them really well - she could move really well- so in terms of 5 moves say and you just- I would do other moves on her and they just wouldn’t look right or suit her. Maybe you didn’t have time to work on it because there’s always something coming up so you stick with the things that she could do and do well- that make her look good. (Colin Dunne, personal communication 2006)

This also highlights the issue of time constraints and the extent to which they can affect the creative processes in competitive Irish step dance. Typically, the dancers and teachers are always preparing for another major event and once they have found a winning formula, they tend not to stray from it. The dancers, however, are always excited by the prospect of new moves. (see appendix 19).

There are always new moves and new rhythms to learn. It’s just up to the teachers to make them up (Stephen Carolan personal communication January 2008)!

Fellow competitor Andy O Reilly concurred, noting:

I love to make up new steps and new combinations of moves. It naturally comes in to my head when I dance during class (Andy O Reilly, personal communication February 2007).

Ziggy Gaca stressed the importance of attracting the adjudicators attention noting:

When learning/making up new competition steps, emphasis is also put on to what extent it will catch the adjudicators attention (Ziggy Gaca personal communication February 2007).

Thus far, I have considered key elements such the amount of movement and the on the spot footwork performed by the dancers in this competition. A variety of motifs
and combinations which are included by winning step dancers in their performances have also been considered. Therefore these variables will be further scrutinized in the following section, which examines the individual performances by the winning dancers at the World championships 2006.

The Individual Performances

Ladies 18-19

Competitor 85, Leanne Curran

Ulster Champion Leanne Curran is a very stylish dancer. Leanne was listed as competitor 85 in the ladies competition and wore a brand new black and red dancing costume made by Gavin Doherty in Belfast.\textsuperscript{54}

Her hard shoe performance is very typical of an Ulster style\textsuperscript{55} associated with Scoil Rince Mona Ní Rodaigh combining grace and elegance with power and rhythm. In her hornpipe Leanne traveled for 80\% of the forty bar performance. Some recurring motifs, which featured significantly in her performance, were an abundance of turns and copious travel steps \textit{en pointe}.

In her reel she continued to move about the stage throughout the lead and first step, confining her in-place movements to the last sixteen bars. Overall she was traveling through the space on stage for 85\% of the reel performance.

In the recall round Leanne performed the set dance The Drunken Gauger at a metronomic speed of 69 bpm. Her teachers at Scoil Rince Mona Ní Rodaigh choreographed this dance. She took centre stage confidently and gave a very convincing performance. Notably she traveled far less frequently in her delivery of the set dance performing a significant 58\% of the dance in place. There are a number of possible explanations for this development. Firstly, the dancer is alone on stage and therefore does not have to negotiate the sharing of the performance arena with any

\textsuperscript{54} Gavin, together with his sister Shauneen runs a highly successful costume manufacturing business listed as \textit{Éire} designs. Gavin and Shauneen are also teachers at the Doherty Academy Belfast.

\textsuperscript{55} Mona Ní Rodaigh associates the following characteristics with the Ulster style: ‘good carriage, very lively and at the same time smooth and elegant’. Indeed these are the attributes of any good step dancer in the Irish dance idiom.
other dancers. Secondly, there are considerably less variables involved in a recall performance. The tempo and the tune and spatial patterns are all pre-set. Finally it is an opportunity to show case what you can do as a dancer since you have the full attention of the audience and the adjudicators.

This jig set is written in 6/8 time and is also known by the name The Funny Tailor. Both the step and set sections comprise fifteen bars although the step section has to be repeated on the right and left foot. The music and rhythmic transcriptions are considered in detail in chapter five.

**Competitor 51, Ashley Smith**

Ashley was wearing a white and black dress designed for her by Jackie Kennedy of Elevation Design. In her hornpipe, Ashley included varied turning movements and lots of travel *en pointe*. She was traveling about the stage for 62.5% of her rendition of this dance and completing in place footwork for the remaining 37.5%. She had a slight trip in the lead around, where she momentarily lost her footing and again in bar three of the first step. However, she recovered quickly and not all the adjudicators penalized her. Ashley is a strong hard shoe dancer and she used the space well and concluded her performance centre stage.

In her reel, traveling and motion were more significant as she covered ground on stage for 92% of the performance, remaining in place for a mere 8% of the reel music. Again her material contained a lot of turning steps and another recurring motif of note was the tendency to step backwards.

For her solo set piece Ashley chose to dance Planxty Drury at a metronomic speed of 69 bpm. Significant features included movement *en pointe* and a lot of repetition with variation, particularly of a rhythmic nature. In her performance of the planxty, she was traveling for 50% of the music and performing steps in place for the remaining 50%

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56 Jaqueline Kennedy Bohill, also a teacher and adjudicator of Irish Dance is also Ashley’s coach.
This planxty was composed by Turlough Carolan⁵⁷ and is to be found in several of the early printed collections of Irish Dance Music notably Bunting, (1796) and O Neill (1907, 1913). It was originally known as Mr. John Drury.

**Competitor 27, Frances Richmond**

In her hornpipe round, Frances traveled for 57.5% of the forty bars and performed in place for the remaining 42.5%. For the final eight bars, most of the dancing is performed in place. She has a lovely bouncing quality to her dancing and one of the motifs, which works well for her in all dances, is the rock.

In her soft shoe dance, she displayed the same energetic and elevated style and traveled for 83% of the music played. She performed on the spot footwork for the remaining 17% of the bars.

Frances danced the Black Thorn Stick at a metronomic speed of 69 bpm. It was a sharp and stylish piece of work choreographed by members of the Maguire O Shea family. The density of the material was such that 60% of the dance was performed on the spot with the dancer traveling for only 40% of the bars of music.

**Competitor 45, Siobhan Hackett**

Siobhan commenced the hornpipe on the upbeat and traveled on the stage for 70% of the performance. Significant motifs displayed by her included a lot of long clicks, very effective entrechats and much motion en pointe. Another choreographic device employed by her teacher is the use of repetition with variation. Her rotation order was very early in the competition so she needed an impressive start to ensure she made a lasting impact.

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⁵⁷ Turlough O’ Carolan 1670-1738, was a harpist, singer and composer who was born in County Meath. Blinded by small pox, he made his living by traveling through the Irish countryside entertaining the wealthy and noble Irish families with his songs and musical compositions.
In her reel, Siobhan traveled constantly for the entire 48 bars of the music. She covered a lot of ground and again used entrechats and complex footwork that displayed the toes bows effect sought by her teacher were very much in evidence.

For her recall piece Siobhan performed the Drunken Gauger at speed 71 bpm. Her teacher Aaron Crosbie choreographed this dance. Recurring motifs of note in this dance included long clicks out and repetition with variation in terms of movement and rhythm. In terms of travel, she was moving for 66.6% of the dance and performing on the spot footwork for the remaining 33.3%.

**Competitor 24, Caoimhe Doherty**

In her hornpipe, Caoimhe presented as a strong solid heavy dancer with a striking amount of ankle work and complex manipulations of rhythm. She moved about the stage for 55% of the performance and danced in place for the remaining 45%.

In her reel she traveled with much greater frequency, particularly in the lead and final step, where she traveled incessantly. She experienced one uncomfortable moment in the early bars of the lead around, where she collided with the other dancer on stage. However, she recovered her equilibrium and went on to perform with confidence for the remainder of the reel. Overall, she was in motion for 85.5% of the reel music and only dancing in place during certain bars of the first step.

In the recall round, Caoimhe performed a strong and powerful rendition of the Drunken Gauger at a metronomic speed of 69 bpm. She moved about the stage for 58% of the bars of music and danced in place for the remaining 42% of the performance duration. Caoimhe was also wearing a dress made by Gavin Doherty who incidentally is her brother and one of her dance tutors.
Gents under 19

Competitor 28, Stephen Brennan

In his heavy jig performance, Stephen utilized a lot of travel motifs and was moving about the stage for 81% of the lead around. This traveling element was less evident in the performance of the two steps where he performed much complex footwork on the spot. In his hard shoe material, Stephen dances off the beat frequently and is noted for his use of syncopation.

In his soft shoe round, the movement motif was again prevalent with a high 77% traveling frequency recorded. Stephen has a propensity towards overlapping phrases in terms of musical response. He does not adhere predictably to regular two bar phrases but often carries the movement through to the next eight bar section. This is a common feature in boys’ reels.

Stephen performed a hornpipe setting of Bonaparte’s Retreat at a metronomic speed of 110 bpm. This set dance has an eight bar step which is repeated on the right and left legs and a twenty bar set section and thus requires a tremendous level of skill and fitness.

This piece of choreography was so densely packed in terms of material that it required the use of the slow motion video feature over a period of several days to enable the construction of floor plans and counting of musical bars. Moreover, as there was a lot of rhythmic complexity in the piece 48% of the dance was performed without any significant movement path. This is another long dance published in O Neill’s (1913) as Craoidheadh Bonaparte. There is an eight bar step section, which the dancer must perform on the right and the left side and a long twenty bar set section, which demands energy and stamina in abundance.

Competitor 14, Andrew O’Reilly

In the heavy jig, Andrew incorporated many traveling motifs such as skip clicks and turns during the lead and first set. In the final step, he concentrated on the complex footwork and remained on the spot for 56% of the final sixteen bars. There are a
number of possible explanations for this. He could have been conserving energy coming towards the end of a forty-eight bar performance. He may have achieved a good strong centre stage position by this point and tried to maintain the adjudicators attention with some tricky eye catching ankle work.

In his soft shoe reel, he traveled through 100% of the music during the lead and first step. In the final sixteen bars he continued his previous trend and opted for fancy on the spot footwork for 44% of the last step. In terms of musical phrasing, Andrew also demonstrated the use of a lot of overlapping phrases.

Andrew enjoys collaborating with his teachers to come up with exciting material. He executed the Downfall of Paris at a metronomic speed of 76 bpm. The interpretation of hornpipe music at such a slow tempo encourages the inclusion of many rhythm patterns borrowed from a slow heavy jig in 6/8. In terms of pathways, in the step of the set he mirrored his floor path on the right and left foot. It was equal also in terms of the length of music spent traveling or in place.

This hornpipe setting is also found in O Neill’s and has four strains. Generally in competitive step dance, the A Strain is repeated twice after the introduction and the B strain is played once through for the set section. At a speed of 108 bpm, it affords the dancer the opportunity to illustrate a strong sense of hornpipe rhythm. When performed at a slower tempo of 76bpm, the rhythms are closer to those found in a waltz or a very laboured double jig.

**Competitor 17, Stephen Carolan**

In his heavy Jig, Stephen moved about significantly in the lead around but performed 50% of the two steps in place. He utilizes repetition with variation as a choreographic device and interprets the music tastefully.

He moves about far more in the soft shoe dance traveling for 87.5% of the forty-eight bars. He incorporates a significant amount of overlapping of musical phrases and also leans towards the use of reverse movements. These were performed very deliberately and with confidence. As the dancer may not be aware of the position of the other
dancer on the stage, the onus is placed on the dancer moving forward to avoid the unsighted dancer traveling in reverse.

Stephen danced Planxty Davis at a metronomic speed of 108 bpm. This is a lengthy set dance which requires much stamina and fitness as the musical setting is sixteen bar sequence repeated four times, three of which are performed by the dancer, the first sixteen being an introduction. He commenced the dance on the upbeat or anacrusis and traveled for just over half the music. The tune setting is printed in O’ Neills in the hornpipe category. It is attributed to O Conellan the composer and harpist who preceded Carolan and who reputedly was responsible for in excess of seven hundred compositions, few of which have survived to the present day. A version of the William Davies was brought to Scotland by Conellan’s brother and is found in what O Neill terms a very inferior setting under the title The Battle of Killie Crankie. It is written in 2/4 time and only has one strain. It is a long set piece as the sixteen bar melody section is danced three times in the form of a repeated step and one set section.

**Competitor 16, Benedict Devlin**

In the heavy jig lead, Benedict traveled through 69% of the music. The rate of travel frequency decreased in the ensuing steps. Significant motifs included drums and elaborate ankle work and much rhythmic variation.

Overlapping phrases were again evident in the reel performance, where he was traveling constantly for the lead around and for a total of 73% of the entire reel.

Benedict presented The Piper through the Meadow Straying at a metronomic speed of 76 bpm. This setting played at this tempo also facilitates the layering of jig rhythms onto hornpipe tunes. At this speed it is a slightly longer and more challenging dance than it would be were it performed at a more upbeat hornpipe tempo. In his set dance, Benedict only performed in place for 21% of the dance music, opting to travel using drums, clicks, turns and side heels for the remaining 79% of the tune.

Regarding the interpretation of the setting, some teachers chose to take inspiration from the title and melody of the tune, whereas others indicate a preference for
interpreting the melodic or rhythmic structures. Consequently, the musicality and proficiency of the musical accompanist is paramount.

**Competitor 21, Ziggy Gaca**

In his hard shoe dance, Ziggy demonstrated a strong rhythmic drive. His movement was limited to 40% throughout the entire dance. Significant motifs employed by him include, click turns, drums, rallies and stamping movements.

In his reel, Ziggy moved on the beat traveling for 62.5% of the dance. In terms of phrasing, it was clean and regulated, falling comfortably into two bar phrases.

His performance of The Downfall of Paris at a metronomic speed of 108 bpm demonstrated a strong sense of hornpipe rhythm. He started on the upbeat and delivered a musical performance traveling on stage for 56% of the tune.

**The successful schools**

I will consider the winning schools from the following perspectives, history, ethos, location, and number of teachers who teach in the class. I will examine whether or not gender, age, or diaspora issues have had any impact on the composition of these classes or the work ethic of the students who attend them. In schools where two or more teachers were registered, one teacher completed the survey on behalf of the teachers in the school.
Figure 24. Age of schools

Of the ten schools included in the analysis, 30% had been existence in their current composition for less than ten years. However, some of these classes had teachers with more than thirty years teaching experience. A further 30% of schools had been operational for between eleven and twenty years, with one school established for between twenty and thirty years. The remaining 30% of the schools had been in existence for more than thirty years. Thus, the teachers and choreographers are players with a long-term commitment and dedication to the art of Irish dance.

It is worth noting that increasingly the modern Irish *Scoil Rince* is composed of more than one teacher/choreographer. Of further significance is the intra-generational range of teachers. This blend of experience and youthful exuberance and energy can also be a contributing factor to the way in which material is created. This will be investigated further in chapter 5. Another striking element is the extent to which family relationships can be significant within the competitive Irish step dance class. 50% of the schools included in this survey were run by a combination of husband/wife or parent and child teams.
70% of winning schools comprised male and female teachers with only 30% consisting of only female teachers. 80% of the winning girls schools had male and female teachers while 40% of the winning gents’ schools were taught by females only. The composition of the teaching staff of schools thus varied in terms of age,
gender and expertise, allowing for multiple layering of relations between dancers and teachers. This relationship will be examined further in chapter five.

**Location of Schools**

![Map showing the distribution of winning schools](image)

Figure 27. Location of winning schools

Irish step dance is popular not only throughout Ireland, but has also spread throughout the diaspora and in many other countries since the inception of the World Championships in Irish dance. The London region was very significant to this study, as 50% of the top ranking dancers in this study were based there, with a further 10% coming from the midlands in Britain, and the USA. The remaining 30% were attending schools in Ulster. This is indicative of the high level of skill, dedication and commitment these dancers and teachers invest in their competitive endeavours.

**Surveys**

Questionnaires were distributed to teachers and adjudicators to elicit what they perceived to be the most influential factors when composing material. Their responses are presented below.

**Influential Factors when composing Material: The Teachers’ Perspective (see appendix 18).**

Of the winning schools surveyed, 90% responded to my survey and I have presented the findings hereunder.
1. Footwork (although one teacher insisted that this was not a consideration during the choreographic process as long as it could be drilled at the rehearsal stage.)

2. Rhythm

3. Music/Tune (some teachers like to interpret particular tunes when composing steps for their students.)

4. Movement (lift and elevation were significant for several of the teachers surveyed in this regard, although, in general, the term is used to describe travel and use of space on stage)

5. Traditional elements were not terribly high on the agenda in the context of choreography.

6. Spatial patterns were not an important feature in the composing of material and steps. However, the use of space on stage was factored into the drilling and rehearsal phase.

7. One teacher did allude to the fact that she disliked repetition of motifs and bears this in mind when creating new material for her dance students.

Influential Factors when composing material: The Dancers’ Perspective (see appendix 19).

1. Music, Rhythm and Movement

2. Rhythm for heavy dancing and movement for soft shoe steps

3. Current trends

4. Tricky footwork

5. Style

6. The extent to which it will catch the adjudicators attention
Influential Factors when evaluating material: The Adjudicators’ Perspective (see appendix 9).

By combining the results of the responding adjudicators the findings were as follows:

1. Rhythm / Timing
2. Footwork
3. Music- how it was interpreted by the dancer/choreographer
4. Movement
5. Traditional Elements
6. Spatial Patterns
7. Other (although in this section two of the adjudicators specifically emphasise the importance of carriage and posture).

What is significant?

I asked the teachers and adjudicators to rank in order of importance what was significant for them in composing and evaluating material. The dancers’ opinions were sought in a questionnaire and the results correlated through considering the frequency of responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order of Importance</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Dancers</th>
<th>Adjudicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Footwork</td>
<td>Music/rhythm</td>
<td>Rhythm/timing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Rhythm</td>
<td>Footwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Music/Tune</td>
<td>Current trends</td>
<td>Music</td>
</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Movement</td>
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<td>Movement</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Trad elements</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spatial patterns</td>
<td>eye catching</td>
<td>spatial patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>No Repetition</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carriage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 28. What is significant?
Significant movements and spatial patterns have already been considered at length in this chapter. (see appendix 20 for floor plans with reference to performances by the top five dancers). Many teachers emphasized that the issue of spatial patterns was considered at the level of drilling for performance rather than the early choreographic phase. The teachers and adjudicators did not perceive incorporating traditional elements into their choreography as essential. The dancers did not refer to traditional motifs at all. Nonetheless, there were a number of dancers who included rocks, which are considered traditional motifs in their dance routines. Some traditional motifs are difficult to execute well and at this top level, dancers strive to perform material, which shows their technical proficiency in the best possible light. The agreed consensus among dancers, teachers and adjudicators alike pointed to the significance of rhythm, timing and musicality of the performances. Current trends and eye-catching movements were also highlighted for consideration.

To date, I have identified the variables that teachers, dancers and adjudicators consider significant when composing material to perform at competitive Irish step dance events. In this chapter, footwork, as evidenced through the notated motifs as well as movement and spatial awareness as presented in the floor plans, has been examined in detail. The next chapter will consider the music dance relationship and the web of complex social relations that add to the creative processes for the performance of competitive Irish step dance.

58 See example of labanotated rock movement in appendix 17.
Chapter 5

Creative collaborations: A Complex Web of Relations

Art expression, like form created by a shifting kaleidoscope, is forever changing, forever new. The myriad of geometric designs that one sees in the kaleidoscope are all made from the same elements, variously shaped pieces of coloured glass but as the relationships of these coloured objects to each other are changed, new forms ensue (Hayes 1955:1 quoted in Smith Autard 1996:32).

This kaleidoscope metaphor was central to the construction of this thesis. The elements that contribute to the creative processes are only significant in regard to how they interact with the overall picture. I have already identified a variety of elements that interacted prior to and during the dance performances at Oireachtas na Cruinne 2006. This chapter further interrogates the relationship between process and product, effort and outcome and indeed between performance and result within the competitive step dance genre. It focuses on primary and secondary variables that contribute to the creative processes within competitive step dance. I consider the human relationships to be paramount in this regard, and institutional practices secondary, as these are constantly renegotiated and reconfigured. Analysis of data relating to these variables and their influence upon the overall outcome will serve to inform our perceptions and understanding of creative processes within competitive Irish step dance. Within the arena of competitive Irish step dance, there is a plurality of relationships at play with regard to creativity. The creative processes are dependent on many variables, each of which is related to the other in a specific way. These relationships extend from human interactions, to aesthetic elements, to institutional practices governed by rules and regulations.

Human Relationships

Due attention must be accorded to the plethora of human relationships that contribute to creativity within competitive Irish step dance. Central to this complex web of creative relations is the pupil/teacher relationship. Other significant connections refer
to relationships between teachers, parents and adjudicators. The status of players in these roles is fluid, as on a social level, the teacher is pivotal in terms of social networking, while in terms of evaluating the aesthetic, the adjudicator is foregrounded. The adjudicator can also act as a bridge or point of connection mediating between the performers on stage and the spectators present in the auditorium. The dancer is the main focal point during the performance although the musician must also be acknowledged as a key player in this regard. The dancer is, in some respects, dependent on the musician to provide musical accompaniment, which will be steady in terms of tempo, defined in terms of rhythm and which will act as a stimulus for them to interpret the music in a lyrical and inspirational way.

The teacher / pupil relationship

The importance of this relationship is significant not only in Irish dance but in many other dance genres and indeed sporting relationships throughout the world. This is evidenced by comments made by many teachers and choreographers.

I cannot teach a child to any high level if I cannot make a relationship with them first. I have to believe in the child and they have to believe in me (Frances McGahan personal communication 2007).

In regard to the dancer teacher relationship you must have mutual respect and maintain a professional distance (Jacqueline Kennedy Bohill personal communication 2007).

It is a phenomenon that I have experienced first hand as a teacher of champion dancers and its importance in the creative process cannot be overstated. This is also acknowledged by former world champion dancers who note as follows:

I think it’s fundamental to it, central to it from my own experience. I mean I was able to be creative, but everything always came down to Marion\(^59\) and what she thought and what she felt. She would argue as to whether a piece should be in there – she was all for kind of- oh that’s a really strange piece of – that’s great lets put it in but you know if there was something she thought was too strange but she wouldn’t be able to articulate why or what that was, no that’s too that’s just too risky- whatever that would be. Looks too weird and people aren’t going to get it…(Colin Dunne personal communication 2006).

\(^{59}\) This is a reference to his teacher Marion Turley whom he always acknowledged for her skilful ‘outside-eye’.
I had a great relationship with my teacher, which was instrumental in my personal success and the success of the school. I think if the relationship is good, then the pupil will perform better, be more confident and carry this confidence into other elements of their lives and also into adulthood and future careers (Carol-Leavy Joyce 60 personal communication 2007).

Therefore, the teacher/pupil relationship is crucial in this artistic exchange. They have to believe in each other, there must be a mutual sense of trust and confidence, in order to create a secure environment where a creative exchange can occur.

The relationship between teacher and parent

A level of trust and respect must be established and maintained if this relationship is to be fruitful. By electing to send their child to a particular class, the parent acknowledges their belief in the competence of that teacher to help the child develop his/her full potential as a competitive Irish step dancer. Initially, parents may select a local class that is convenient in terms of time and location but those parents who wish their children to experience Irish dance at a very competitive level, rather than at a mere participatory one, will make a more deliberate choice in their selection of dance class, in terms of ethos, technique and successful track record. Once the family has been exposed to the competition circuit, they may opt to transfer their children to a different class. However, moving between classes does not always best serve the interests of the dance students, as the new style may not suit them. On the other hand, a change of school and style might add a new dimension to their level of interest in competitive dance. Parents who are committed to experiencing the competitive arena will often travel, inter county, inter state and sometimes internationally to access what they consider to be the optimum opportunities for the children in terms of dance tuition and coaching. The time and money invested by parents can cause tension in the relationship with the teachers, if their desired goals and targets are not being attained. The ambitious parent will also try to help children rehearse and carry out dance drills at home between classes. In this respect, it is essential that the parent and teachers co-operate and communicate effectively so that the roles and boundaries between their inputs are not confused and the dancers receive complementary rather

60 Carol Leavy-Joyce, World champion dancer and Irish dance choreographer was taught by Mona Ni Rodaigh, who also taught Leanne Curran, the 2006 champion 18-19.
than conflicting advice. Wardrope⁶¹ issues a caveat on the potential for damage when parents confuse learning goals and winning goals:

Parents can greatly hamper the work the teacher and dancer are trying to accomplish if they do not understand the difference between learning and winning goals (Wardrope 1997:11).

Borrowing from Wardrope, I refer to the significance of the dancer’s pyramid in establishing a solid basis for creativity and cooperation in preparation for competition. She notes:

I also believe in the dancer’s pyramid. In this pyramid the dancer is always at the top or peak and the parent or teacher form the base of the pyramid. The focus is always up towards the peak and developing the potential in the dancer to a level that satisfies them (Wardrope 1997:11).

As this particular research project focused on mature dancers, the parental involvement was not paramount at this stage. However, due credit must be given to the years of time and money parents of these dancers invested in the competitive scene to enable their children to attain this high standard of step dance performance competence.

Moreover, as some parents teach their own children, there can also be multiple roles for parents as tutors and coaches as well as fulfilling the normal role of the supporting parent. This was evidenced in this study by collaborations between Ashley Smith and her parents and teachers Michael and Noreen. She acknowledges that her parents, who are also her teachers, have influenced her dancing significantly. Her dad in particular creates a lot of the material she performs.

When my dad is creating a new step for me, he will combine things he came up with and things he knows I do well. But if I am ever fooling around and doing a cool new move, he always tells me to work on it, so that we can add it in to the step (Ashley Smith personal communication February 2008).

⁶¹See Wardrope’s work in relation to competitive Highland dancing. According to Wardrope, learning goals are those that promote the development and mastering of basic building blocks whereas winning goals on the other hand are concerned with performance outcomes compared to others.
The relationship between teacher and adjudicator

Teachers and adjudicators registered with An Coimisiún have all successfully taken the T.C.R.G and /or A.D.C.R.G examinations in order to be licensed to enter their students or officiate at competitive events sanctioned by An Coimisiún. Many will have formed friendships and alliances over the years by having attended the same dance school, competed in the same region, married into each others families or worked professionally in the spectacle shows. Adjudicators may have a particular preference in terms of style, which may result in their constantly selecting dancers from a particular school. Furthermore, the politics of association are often debated via the Internet and international media and this may sometimes influence the results. However, in terms of the creative processes, steps are not choreographed to account for stylistic preferences of particular adjudicators, as the turnaround times between events does not allow for this. Furthermore, an adjudicator is not permitted to assess any dancers he or she may have taught or coached in the previous two years. While this relationship could potentially have significance in terms of results or outcome, its affect on the creative process is only influential in terms of permitting or vetoing the movements in the steps that are presented to them.

The Performer / Audience Connection

In the context of competitive Irish step dance the audience is largely comprised of those connected to or with a vested interest in the Irish dance scene. For the most part the performers will be well received in a relatively safe environment even if they are being evaluated. Every spectator will make value judgments based on their opinion of a particular performance by a particular dancer; yet the predominant atmosphere emanating from the audience is one of overwhelming support despite the existence of rival competing groups.

Social facilitation is based on the notion that the presence of an audience of one or more spectators can facilitate the performance. Based on drive theory, as an explanation of audience effect, Zajoncs 1965 model proposed that the presence of an

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62 The issue of association is complex as teachers are not permitted to adjudicate any relations or dancers they have taught within the previous two years- see appendix 8 for clarification of the ‘association rule’.
audience has the effect of increasing arousal/ drive in performing subjects. This idea can be usefully applied to competitive Irish dance because there is no interaction until the applause at the end. Moreover, studies have shown that better performers can have their overall performance enhanced due to the presence of an audience while those who are less technically proficient may in fact be inhibited or hindered by the presence of an audience (see Zajonc 1965) At major step dance events, the audience accord a respectful degree of attention to all performers. However, when the more skilful dancers take the stage the silence and respect are palpable. Therefore, the audience can influence the delivery of the performance by supporting the dancer but does not have a role in creating the material to be presented. Much of this pre-competition creativity occurs in the dance class or studio or while traveling to class. Teachers acknowledge that they sometimes come up with conceptual ideas for steps while travelling to class by car, train or plane or while engaged in a random domestic chore. This is exemplified by Colin Dunne who observes:

> Conceptual ideas sometimes come in the car- the hooks for a dance- the movement itself is coming through actually dancing (Colin Dunne personal communication July 2006).

The composition process is constantly refined and reviewed, the first draft of these steps will go through a series of revisions and some of the creative impulses may never be viewed outside of the studio. Often what we view on stage at a major event will have been tried and tested at smaller competitions to allow for the amendments and adjustments made to achieve the overall affect the teacher and dancer are striving to create.

**The Music / Dance Relationship**

A key variable which can be considered under aesthetics, institutional practices or human interactions is the music / dance relationship. This will be interrogated at length in this section. This chapter also investigates the music and dance connection within the context of off-stage and indeed on-stage creative support. The significance of the music/dance relationship has been much discussed and debated since the late sixteenth century.
In 1589, *Orchesography*, the first reliable source of dance history in Europe was published. The author Thoinot Arbeau constantly emphasised the importance of musicality in a dancer and the dependence of dance upon music. Francis O’Neill (1913)\(^6\) also gave great credence to the importance of the relationship between the music and the dancer:

> Music and dancing being in fact dependent the one on the other as cause and effect, it requires little or no argument that the Irish who are so sensitively alive to one should excel in the other.

Thus, for many decades, there has been an acknowledged significant relationship between Irish dance music and Irish dance. In the Irish context, the music and dance traditions were closely intertwined until political factors in the 1930s heralded the disassociation of the music from its primary function- to accompany dancing. Of keen significance in this regard was the introduction of the Public Dance Halls Act in 1935 (Fairbairn 1994:572).

Furthermore, the development of the recording industry in America impacted acutely on the popularisation of Irish Dance Music as a listening music genre. Irish Music was now removed from the live context of providing accompaniment for step dancers and as Fairbairn notes, social events and indeed musicians were no longer compelled to adhere to the prescriptive rhythm often desired by dancers:

> From the mid 1930s, a number of factors contributed to the disappearance of the house dance. As in so many other parts of the world, traditional music suffered the effects of technological revolution and the subsequent domination of media and market forces. Radio and gramophone opened up a new world of entertainment and created a much greater consciousness of town culture among young country people. The media installed new aspirations and suggested alternative lifestyles and value systems. The cultural life of the community fell into dissolution as it was rejected for urban and cosmopolitan models (Fairbairn 1994: 573).

Prior to the advent of competitive step dance events the relationship between musicians and dancers was negotiated during every performance. Social dances and step dance displays were features of the social fabric of life in rural Ireland. The function of the musician prior to the development of recording technology was to provide lively music at a suitable tempo for the dancers. The art of listening music

\(^6\) Francis Roche also commented on the significance of the music/dance relationship in his introduction to the Roche Collection.
was less prevalent before music and dance reached a degree of separation. Feis music developed as an independent branch of the Irish traditional music idiom. For several decades, dancers and musicians agreed upon the appropriate tempo through a series of hand gestures where the palm and fingers were held facing upwards if the pace was to be increased and downwards if deceleration was required. In the early years of major feiseanna, teachers were frantically gesturing from the audience in an attempt to ensure that the pace of the music was suitable for their dancers. Then in the eighties, the process changed dramatically with the introduction of the metronome. This allowed the organizing body to agree and predetermine speeds they considered appropriate to the competitive step-dance genre. The tempi are now regulated for all Irish dance competitions, so the speed of the music is no longer a variable.

Not for the Feet: dissociation of music from dance

The listening/dancing music dichotomy can be approached from several perspectives. It was not unusual to have eminent musicians who were also very fine step dancers and who displayed an empathic sensitivity when playing dance music. This is particularly true in the case of the legendary piper Willie Clancy. However, since the 1930s, there has been an increasing trend towards listening music as an independent entity. The famous Clare piper, Garret Barry reportedly enunciated that ‘My music is not for the feet but for the soul’ (Dal gCais, Willie Clancy, The Man and his Music). Peadar O Loughlin reiterated this sentiment in his description of the music of Willie Clancy:

The best music Clancy played you wouldn’t even think of dancing to it, it was too good for that. He was a great piper but his dance music might not have had the floor value of less gifted musicians. The same could be said about Bobby Casey. It would be a pity to use such great music for dancing (Dal gCais, 1993).

The subsequent evolution of the music as a solo art form further alienated it from the basic requirements of dance which, according to some, had previously exerted an extremely conservative influence on the music. Much debate and discussion surrounds these issues.
Michael Tubridy asserts as follows:

The fact that a lot of musicians do not play for dances any more releases them from a lot of constraints. They do not have to pay the same attention to phrasing and they can put in notes and decorations wherever they will fit (Tubridy 1991:89).

Virtuoso musician and fellow Clare man Micho Russell concurs and draws a clear distinction between dance music and listening music adding that:

Playing for listeners and playing for dancers are two different things. I think myself that people should more or less choose their company wherever they go. They have different ways of thinking (Russell 1992).

Helen Gannon was acutely aware of the dilemmas confronting those in the world of Irish Music and Dance. She was expressing concern at the urgent need for musicians who are willing and equally important, able to play for the modern Irish dancer:

As the innovation of steps has brought Irish Dancing to such a fantastic level and while the standard of traditional music was never higher, each has grown apart from the other (Gannon, 1994).

Breathnach insists that competition driven dancing has rendered the role of the music subordinate and contends that the music is now playing a peripheral role in competitive Irish dancing. (see Breathnach 1983:49-52)

In 1988, An Coimisiún acknowledged that the slowing down process had gone too far and introduced metronomic speeds for all feiseanna. The purpose of this was twofold. Firstly, it served as a means of standardizing dance tempos for all feiseanna and more significantly, it was an effort to ensure that the character of the music and rhythmic vitality was not further threatened.

Prior to the advent of competitive step dance events, the relationship between musicians and dancers was negotiated during every performance. In some respects, it is only through examining the perceived disconnect, that we can see how strong some of those connections were in the past.

Live music contributes to the performance during competitive Irish step dance events. Some musicians stimulate dancers with their music, while others do not or cannot.
Furthermore, from a musician’s perspective they can play music for the feet or for the soul. Both musicians and dancers can make the choice to connect to the other or not. Whatever the genre, sensitive virtuoso performers can enjoy fruitful mutual symbiotic connections should they so desire.

Recorded music is also central to the creative processes in advance of the competition. Some teachers take their rhythmic inspiration from particular settings of tunes available from an expanding array of feis music recordings. Even at the competitions, many dancers are seen sporting i-pods and rehearsing their dances with the music being relayed through their headsets.

For major competitions, two musicians are usually scheduled for each competition or round of a competition. They are selected and employed by the organising committee and generally consist of an accordion player accompanied by a pianist or keyboard player. The same musicians play for all the competitors and the musicians determine the repertoire of tunes. Occasionally, a dancer may request a particular tune if they are familiar with the repertoire of the musician in question. The musicians strive to play an expansive array of tunes to ensure variety and diversity for the dancers and audience. Knowledge of certain popular competition tunes can render a musician more desirable and therefore employable at prestigious events. The metronomic speeds that obtain are outlined in Figure 1. I have also included sample transcriptions of jigs and hornpipes at various tempos to illustrate how the change in metronomic tempo can alter the rhythmic structure of the tune.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dance type</th>
<th>Time Signature</th>
<th>Traditional tempo</th>
<th>Competition Tempo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reel</td>
<td>4/4</td>
<td>$\approx 100-130$</td>
<td>$\approx 113$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slip Jig</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>$\approx 105-130$</td>
<td>$\approx 113$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Jig</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>$\approx 110-130$</td>
<td>$\approx 115$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy Jig</td>
<td>6/8* (see Fig 2)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$\approx 73$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hornpipe</td>
<td>4/4* (see Fig 3)</td>
<td>$\approx 130-150$</td>
<td>$\approx 113$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 29 – Common dance types, the tempi at which traditional musicians perform them, and their agreed tempi for Irish dance competitions.

(a)

Haste to the Wedding - Light Jig

(b)

Haste to the Wedding - Heavy Jig

Figure 30 – Haste to the Wedding, a popular Irish jig, notated as it used for (a) the light jig and (b) the heavy jig. Note that as the tempo is slowed down, the jig rhythm approaches that of waltz rhythm.
Figure 31 – (a) A traditional hornpipe ‘Kitty’s Wedding’. (b) The ‘Kilfenora Jig’. (c) The ‘Kilfenora Jig’ as a hornpipe. It is not unusual for musicians to take established melodies and play them in another time signature as a different tune type.

In the *feis* scene, the musicians are selected and scheduled by the organising committee. They are located on the periphery of the performance arena but can potentially have a powerful influence on the performance through their choice of repertoire and interpretation of a tune. They are not necessarily familiar with the material performed by the dancer even though it is pre-choreographed and therefore the live performance is the context in which the relationship between the music and dance is negotiated. Musicians need to maintain a professional impartiality throughout in respect to maintaining the agreed tempo and playing well for each performer. There is a tacit mutual respect between the musicians and the step dancers. This is acknowledged at the end of the performance by a bow or other physical gesture.
The Coiste Ceol agus Rince has drawn up a list of dance accompanists they deem suitable to officiate at major Oireachtais. These musicians are approached in the preceding summer period and asked to indicate their availability and desired musical partner for the next year’s events. Rosters are then drawn up by the Oireachtas Committee and two teams of musicians are employed for each day of the Oireachtas. Contracts are issued to musicians chosen to play at these events. The musicians are required to be competent on their instruments, familiar with the feis repertoire, particularly the required set dances, willing and able to play to the specified metronomic speeds. There is a required dress code in which respectability is key and generally the musicians are accorded high status at these events. (see appendix 10) Remuneration is the same for musicians and adjudicators at all events except Oireachtas na Cruinne as the adjudicators are not eligible to officiate at any other competitions for a six month period preceding the event and this restriction cannot be applied to musicians as there are not as many dance accompanists who are willing and able to play for feiseanna throughout the dance world as there are qualified adjudicators.

Today, the effect of music on dance composition is two-fold. In the first instance, the teachers work with recorded music to devise steps with their dancers. Then secondly, there is an opportunity for the dancer to connect with the musician during the course of the live performance on stage.

**Music for the Feis**

In the first two rounds of these competitions, the dancers perform two at a time so the opportunity to connect in a special way with the musician does not present itself to the same extent as it does in the recall round when the dancers perform solo to a melody of their own choosing. However, some dancers still deliver a very musical performance in terms of timing and interpretation even when they are sharing the performance arena. The musicians are off stage and are very much in the background from a visual perspective. However, although they are adhering to a set tempo, they determine the choice of tune for the first two rounds, so effectively they can have a

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64 The sub committee with responsibility for music and dance.
real impact on the performance through subtle nuance and use of dynamics or indeed empathy with a particular performer.

In the recall dance, the dancer selects the tune from a canon of approved set dances and tempo within the agreed parameters set by the organising body and the dance is choreographed to interpret the music. Set dance tunes can be differentiated from jigs and hornpipes due to their unusual musical structures. They are not tied to the eight bar structure which is the norm in the Irish dance music repertoire. On this occasion, a very intimate connection between the dancer and musicians is possible and is achieved by competent dancers and musicians.

The music dance connection for the 18-19 competition at the World Championships 2006

The accompanists for the ladies and gents section of the 18-19 age group were Kevin Joyce on piano accordion and Anthony Davis on piano. In the heavy rounds of the ladies and gents, dancers started the dance on the upbeat or anacrusis. In the soft shoe dances, they usually commenced on the downbeat; in the set dance round they started on the upbeat at the end of the introductory bars. Most dancers stood still for the initial introduction and pointed their toe in preparation to dance. One dancer used the introduction to his set dance music to walk towards the front of the stage so he would be better placed to commence his set piece. As already discussed, the tempi were set for the first two rounds and the dancers chose their own tempo for the recall round. In the ladies competition, the choice of set dances was limited to those in 6/8 or 9/8 time, the tempi ranged between 69 and 71 dotted crotchet bpm. The range of tempi was higher in the gents’ competition than in the ladies. In the gents’ competition they picked their set dance from those hornpipe set dances listed in 2/4 or 4/4. The tempi ranged from 76 bpm (crotchet bpm for those in 4/4, quaver bpm for those in 2/4), the minimum speed permissible for a hornpipe set dance, to 110 bpm (again crotchet bpm for those in 4/4, quaver bpm for those in 2/4). Thus hornpipe set dances allow for more variety and diversity in terms of tempi and rhythmic variations.

The teachers and adjudicators also consider musical accompaniment to be of paramount importance for the delivery of an impressive performance.
One adjudicator noted that ‘music and dancer should be like hand in glove’, and yet another commented as follows;

Accompanying music is an integral part of Irish dancing competitions. It inspires dancers on stage to perform to the best of their ability. From an adjudicators’ point of view, watching a beautiful dancer perform to amazing music is an awesome experience (World adjudicator 2006).

Many of the teachers interviewed concurred with this and noted that music may really influence a performance. For example, Mona Ní Rodaigh notes that many adjudicators are influenced by presentation although she herself contends that music will really govern the performance. Aaron Crosbie concurs and highlights the importance of the music in the composition of dances.

I like to emphasize variation of a tune when designing a step. I choreograph the step to reflect highs and lows, light and shade of music in an endeavour to interpret the music (Aaron Crosbie personal communication February 2008).

The significance of the musical accompaniment for the actual performance was also fore-grounded by another teacher.

If a child gets a nice tune it can make them dance better. It gets them excited and gets the adrenalin pumping. (Gavin Doherty personal communication February 2008)

Dancers also stressed the importance of lively music to complement their performance. It should be noted that this study deals with the top dancers in their class and that at lower levels of competition, this musical awareness is not always developed to this high degree. When composing new material Ashley Smith’s main considerations are music, rhythm and movement.

I love when a step fits perfectly to the music. I am a stickler about timing. I also love to pick out music for my set dance and create a rhythm that flows beautifully with the tune. As far as movement goes, I think it is good to move around the stage so you don’t look lazy but it is also nice to stay and show off footwork (Ashley Smith personal communication February 2008).
Siobhan Hackett enjoys performing to the *Glasgow Reel* and finds it hard to dance to dull music. Stephen Carolan also enjoys collaborating with his teachers to compose material and insists that, in terms of choreography, the music and rhythm are of paramount importance.

My main consideration would be mainly rhythm. I feel that rhythm and timing are 90% of Irish dancing. Every beat/tap should be heard clearly and precisely and should fit to the beat of the music (Stephen Carolan personal communication February 2008).

### The relationship between presentation and performance

Chapter three detailed the origins of Irish dance costumes. These have evolved considerably in the past few decades. Competitive Irish step dance events have received much adverse publicity in recent years due to the increased use of wigs and accessories, whacky fabrics and colours associated with pageant contests. This debate has been played out in Ireland and internationally on radio, television and in print and multimedia.

There is a lack of consensus among teachers and adjudicators as to the extent to which costuming and presentation is taken into account when marking a performance. The results however, speak for themselves. The successful dancers were all impeccably attired in very expensive outfits and accessories in terms of hair adornments etc. *An Coimisiún* has tried to legislate for an appropriate dress code, in consultation with costume makers but it appears that parents are willing to pay huge amounts of money, to do everything in their power to get their child noticed. Therefore, while *An Coimisiún* wants to control costume length, materials used, cost etc., parents and dressmakers are willing to ignore these rules in an attempt to create the ultimate unique costume and get their child noticed. Teachers also put pressure on the parents of a talented dancer to ensure that the overall effect or ‘package’ or ‘look’ is right.

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65 This reel, included in the appendix, is often requested by dancers and is a popular example of a *feis* tune. Many traditional musicians really dislike playing this and other favourites from the *feis* scene.

66 Prime time TV and Radio programmes on Irish networks such as *The Late Late Show*, *The Joe Duffy Show* and *Kenny Live* have discussed this issue on numerous occasions following major *feiseanna*. 
The data gathered from the teachers and adjudicators surveyed for this thesis reflected the diversity of opinion with regards to this debate. Some adjudicators noted that they found some of the current style trends offensive to the point of being vulgar.

In referring to the present style I am not impressed whatsoever. Now we have feathers. What next? I do not consider them Irish or Celtic- more like designs and material from eastern or Arab countries or Siam or China (Sean Ó Conghaile personal communication 2007).

Others insisted that while the presentation was important with regards to creating a positive initial impression, under no circumstances should it supersede the dance performance itself.

Some of the costumes are off putting and a distraction I would prefer the simpler style. To me dancing is what counts (Anne-Marie Greaney personal communication 2007).

Teachers however consider that the presentation of a dancer can have a significant impact on their performance and also note that the adjudicators seem to be influenced by the costume. Some of the teachers of award-winning dancers surveyed in this research placed great emphasis on the question of appropriate costuming and presentation:

• ‘it has to stand out, suit the individual, fit correctly’
• ‘costuming seems important at the moment’
• ‘judges are very big into presentation’

Notably, female teachers made these observations. Some of their male counterparts commented as follows:

• ‘costuming is of secondary importance, dancing first’
• ‘don’t think costuming is particularly important- focus on the number- notice colour’

I am not claiming that for all female adjudicators, presentation is more significant than it is for their male colleagues, merely pointing out that in the case of the officials adjudicating this particular event, these were the opinions that emerged. Furthermore,
some of the teachers also run businesses as costume designers and they insisted that
the costume had a key role to play in the development of a champion dancer.

Being a costume maker I feel it is an extremely important part of winning.
I have seen first hand the difference a costume makes in my own kids’
results (Gavin Doherty personal communication 2008).

The director of Elevation Designs, Jacqueline Kennedy Bohill concurred.

Costuming is essential because in a discipline like Irish dancing, you can
compliment the body shape, interpret personality, acknowledge theatrical
element while retaining Celtic influence (Jacqueline Kennedy Bohill –
personal communication 2008).

Thus, costume designers can be creative with regards to how a dancer is presented.
Good body features can be highlighted through clever use of colour, fabric and
design. Certain physical features can be highlighted or a talented outfitter can create
illusions of length or width. In terms of creating a winning image, the costuming or
packaging of the performer can be of extreme importance. Lightweight materials are
used to allow dancers to achieve maximum elevation and bounce. In chapter three,
brief reference was made to using the costume to cover up perceived carriage flaws or
failings. However, although the choice of outfit does not directly affect the
choreography (i.e. content) itself, it can alter the delivery of the performance (i.e.
technique).

The relationship between spectacle shows and competitive
step dance

The development of spectacle show dancing has been highlighted in the discourse
surrounding traditional Irish step dance. Accordingly I wished to evaluate the
dancers’ perception of the significance of the shows for their performance practice.

Significantly, the female dancers did not highlight the importance of this connection
in their responses, nor was it of much import to teachers and adjudicators. The

67 The manufacturing of costumes and accessories is a significant industry within the World of
competitive Irish step dance. The manufacturers referred to here are mentioned because of their
connection to the winning dancers in these competitions.
gentlemen, however, stressed its significance for them, often noting that the advent of the spectacle shows such as Riverdance and Lord of the Dance coincided with their introduction to Irish step dance.

Riverdance was the reason why I started dancing, so it impacted on me greatly. Also Lord of the Dance, really enthused me to keep working hard, as I loved the atmosphere and moods created in the show by dance (Andy O’Reilly personal communication November 2007).

Dancer Stephen Carolan, who acknowledges Michael Flatley and Colin Dunne68 among his influences, and also highlights the extent to which he was influenced by the stage shows, concurred.

It was around the same time when Riverdance started that I began dancing. They (the shows) really are masterpieces in their own right and continue to be powerful influences in the dancing world (personal communication January 2008).

Ziggy Gacca is also an admirer of the dancing of Colin Dunne and acknowledges being significantly influenced by spectacle shows particularly by the rhythmic numbers such as Distant Thunder, Heartland and Planet Ireland69.

The relationship between discourse, performance and reflection

Consideration has been given to how interconnected this relationship between discourse, performance and reflection is in the context of the competitive Irish step dance arena. It is a dynamic rather than a static relationship that is negotiated politically and aesthetically in the competitive arena. There is consensus with regard to what is permissible from the point of view of posture, attire, steps and connection to and interpretation of the accompanying music. There are also contradictions in terms of when these elements can be changed, to what extent and by whom. Since development in Irish dance is driven by competition, the currency for change is

68 Colin Dunne is a leading figure in the world of traditional Irish dance, best known internationally for his performances and choreography in Riverdance and Dancing on Dangerous Ground.
69 Distant Thunder and Heartland are rhythmic dance routines from Riverdance and Planet Ireland is a dance routine featured in Lord of the Dance.
success. Dancers and teachers can suggest and attempt new movements or new combinations of old movements and these may or may not be rewarded by the adjudicators. Musicians can introduce new tunes to the reel, jig and hornpipe categories but must adhere to the set list of set dances. Designers can present new and innovative costumes and all the time An Coimisiún seeks to regulate and control. The competitive arena is the setting where the status quo is constantly questioned and challenged, particularly at major events.

The relationship between creativity and the performing arts

I will briefly consider the significance of the relationship between creativity and the performing arts, with a view to examining Irish dance within this broader context.

The arts of music, dance and theatre are ones that exist as designs in space and time. They are manifested in performance, interpreted by performers who have mastered the techniques of the genres. Meaning resides both in the intrinsic qualities of the form and the extrinsic qualities of content and context. One must speak of meanings, however, rather than meaning. There is the meaning intended by the creator, the meaning interpreted by the performer and the meaning that results from the interpretative process of the audience (Royce 2004:12).

There are a number of issues consonant with the above quote and this dissertation. The first is the consideration of competitive step dance as performance art. Secondly, the statement proposes an acknowledgement of the importance of mastering the technique before artistic meaning is possible, perceiving virtuosity as a prerequisite to artistry. Finally, the plurality of possible meanings, and the processes through which these meanings are conceived are central to the issues addressed throughout.

The technical ability of champion Irish dancers has previously been established and acknowledged (See Hall 1995; 2008, Wulff 2007). The dancers who are the focus of this investigation are excellent technicians, as this is a given if you wish to succeed at the highest level of competition. The importance of technique is acknowledged by Boas who notes; ‘When we speak of art, we have to bear in mind that all art implies technical skill (Boas 1955:535)’. This is reiterated by Royce, who writes as follows:
To be able to perform consistently at the highest levels, performers in all genres must have mastered the techniques of their art to the point where they are freed to think about interpretation and perhaps transparency (Royce, 2004:6).

Thus, assuming Irish dance can be classified as Art (see Hall 1995) and admitting that technique must be mastered before individual style can be considered, we must then identify and examine the processes utilized to achieve meaning on various levels.

The relationship between creativity and competition

In chapter two, I outlined the importance of a secure environment to foster creativity. I discussed the necessity to develop intrinsic affirmation and motivation in order to bring creative ideas to fruition. Competition does not suit all temperaments nor serve everybody’s creative urges well, particularly those who rely solely on the competitive system as a source of motivation and self-confidence. It does, however provide a platform for the honing of skills and presentation of new steps and creative ideas. Even dancers and teachers who dislike the competitive arena acknowledge this fact:

Like you hone your skills and you get that drive- that competitive drive to beat your last best place or to beat someone else-that gives you motivation. You know if you’re striving towards perfection, your dancing is going to improve (Kieran Jordan personal communication 2006).

The focus of this research has been on elite dancers who, in my view, have transcended the need for external rewards in terms of awards and trophies. Their agenda is to be as good as they can be, seek further personal development and showcase their progress to an audience which appreciates a high standard of Irish dancing. This concurs with Wardrope’s assessment of how top class Highland dancers utilize competition to further elevate their standard of dance:

Competition as we know it caters to the elite dancers. Competition is the place where they have an opportunity to test the mastering of skills against their peers. These individuals have developed the skill of goal setting and are motivated to spend endless hours perfecting a single movement and then they move on to the next. They know and apply the skill of self-competition. They work to improve on their last performance.
They have been taught how to use competition to sharpen their skills and perfect their art. Champions are made in the studio and in the basement, not just born with talent. They have developed the talent and potential they were born with through endless hours of practice. Competition is their test after the practice. These dancers are not motivated by acquiring any more medals and trophies, their motivation is intrinsic. They have internalized the rewards and realized the association between effort and outcome. They want to test their skills against the best, in their quest for their goal (Wardrope 1997:16).

It is abundantly clear that there are restrictions placed upon dancers in a competitive context. The challenge is to evaluate the extent to which they are capable of pushing boundaries within these perceived limitations. Some of these restrictions allude to use of space, instrumentation, array of movements allowed, arrangements and the expectations of those involved in the competitive step dance arena. The dancers and teachers who succeed in crafting subtle and beautiful choreographies, transcending these restrictions are excellent exponents of Irish step dance. Dancers whose performances have been considered in this project employ subtlety and choreographic craft to overcome these restrictions.

I think it’s more subtle. I think there’s a beauty to it and a craft to it and an art to it but I think you have limitations- like its – you’re limited by tempos, and types of tunes- you can’t say I’m gonna do a strathspey for example for a solo set dance, you know what I mean? … then in live competition you’re limited by instrumentation and arrangements so and you’re limited by just what’s expected on stage in the competition (Kieran Jordan personal communication 2006).

The relationship between preservation and promotion

The competitive step dance event provides the matrix where the tradition is constantly renegotiated. This tension between cherishing and contesting perceptions of tradition and modernity has been the centre of much debate (See Foley (1988), Wulff (2007), Hall (2008)). Depending on one’s perspective with regard to the discourse it can be viewed through very diverse lenses.

In a debate on tradition and modernity; we need to consider that one person’s tradition is another persons modernity: from the perspective of Riverdance, the competitive dancing community represents tradition,
while those who do sean-nós and set dancing as part of the recent set dancing revival at Céilís all over the island, regard the competitions and the schools that provide them with Irish dancers as modern (Wulff 2007:30).

Is the onward progression of innovation through time related to how traditional something is perceived? Is in fact Riverdance now becoming traditional (it is no longer a novelty, it is now very established) while bicycles, ice skater spins and cheer leading figures are nouveau? These moves and therefore the competitive genre now have the edge of modernity.

In terms of choreography, Hall (1995) has commented extensively on the reordering of old movements or the adding of two movements together to create something new. One of the teachers surveyed for this thesis described his own material as ‘traditional with tricks.’ This illustrates that the teachers are aware of their responsibility in handing on the tradition but also need to consider this in tandem with their desire to create motifs that are exciting, current and eye-catching. This leads me to the analysis of the choreography and the artistic choices made by teachers, musicians and dancers during the 2006 competitive event.

The artistic choices examined in chapter four pertained to footwork and balance between performing on the spot and traveling through the available space on stage. Thus, while more visual stimuli for choreography were the focus of that investigation, I will now consider the auditory stimuli relating to rhythm and general musicality inherent in dance performances by award winning dancers at the World Championships 2006.

Regrettably, there are many step-dancers, who ignore the melody or any musical nuance once the introduction has been played, as they are focused on the articulation of their steps. Some would not have any memory of the tune that was played for them. In the course of this research however, I found that the dancers and teachers involved appreciated the importance of maintaining the music/dance connection and incorporating that relationship into the choreography and performance of their dance material.

During the course of the competition, it was not possible to measure the music/dance connection in a meaningful way during the first two rounds, as there were two
competitors on stage simultaneously and the separation of the performances was not possible. However, in the set dance or recall round, since the performers were dancing solo, I decided to transcribe the melodic accompaniment in Western stave notation and illustrate the dance rhythms as a percussive line. The ladies recall round was fairly straightforward as I had the live sound feed from the performance on the day, so the music is representative of how Kevin Joyce played the set-dances. The gentlemen’s competition was challenging in this respect, as there was no audio track on the recording as someone had unplugged a cable. Fortunately, as I was familiar with the tunes of the set dances they performed, using standard settings as the musical accompaniment I was able to reconstruct the percussive element of the dance performance from the video footage. This would not have been possible had I not been trained both as a musician and step dancer. The music for the gentlemen’s competition reflects how I represent these tunes when playing for competitors at major competitions.

The use of music transcriptions highlighted some interesting issues. Historically, considered to be an oral tradition, the Irish music tradition has been adapted for the literate societies using written systems such as western stave notations, ABC notations70 and various combinations thereof. These written representations are an approximation indicating the content rather than the style and really only serve to assist those who are already well versed in the traditional idiom (See Nettl 2005:294). The transcriptions contained in this dissertation are descriptive, given that they depict what Seeger (1958:184) terms a post hoc representation of how the music was played. Although, they are written from the perspective of traditional musicians who are very familiar with the feis music idiom, they are sufficiently detailed to be easily understood by musicians outside of this tradition. Nettl describes the notation as ‘only another written musical artefact, not something to be revered and treasured above other music’ (Nettl 2002:296). Thus, I took the liberty of representing the music using different time signatures as the compound rhythms better illustrated the swing rhythm I was trying to highlight.

70Both western stave notation and ABC notation can represent notes, bar lines, durations and structure. However in ABC notation, musical features such as dynamics, timbre or articulation are not notated. Furthermore, there is no agreed standard of ABC notation, each tutor has his/her own personalized form. (See McCarthy 1999:101)
The jig set dances are all normally written in 6/8 time and the metronomic bpm represents a dotted crotchet. However, the hornpipe set-dances are written in 2/4 or 4/4 signature. This use of straight rhythm is suitable as an aide memoire to musicians who are already familiar with the traditional idiom and who understand traditional Irish music. Thus, it relies on the musician’s prior knowledge to fill in the blanks regarding how the style and groove are to be represented. Therefore I chose to represent the hornpipe set-dances in 12/8 time, a convention often used in swing music in an attempt to more accurately represent the rhythmic dimension of the music. This facilitated the notation of the complex syncopated rhythms performed by the dancers and illustrated in the percussion line. It also allowed for the comparison between set dances performed at the minimum speed of 76bpm and those danced at a pace in excess of 100 bpm. Essentially, the ‘hornpipe’ set dances can be represented in 12/8, and therefore are closer to compound time than common 2/4 or common 4/4 time.

Certain motifs are emphasized in the percussion score to assist with understanding how the dance performance relates to the music. Here under is the legend I devised for the motifs represented in the transcriptions.

- □ = stamp
- ▽ = en pointe
- × = silent lift
- 🌚 = click sound

Three of the ladies 18-19 performed to a setting of the Drunken Gauger. In Leanne Curran’s rendition of the set, it was rhythmically punctuated. There was continuous sound and it was quite trippy with a number of rhythmic phrases which overlapped the bar lines as evidenced in bars one, two, three and four and again in bars nineteen and twenty.
Siobhan Hackett also danced to the tune of the Drunken Gauger and her performance incorporated lots of toes (bars one, two and nine) and clicks (bars three, four and twelve) and some interesting rhythmic phrasing where the musical nuance overlapped the bar lines (bars three, four, ten eleven and twelve) in the step section and bars seventeen to nineteen and twenty-eight and twenty nine in the set part.
Phrases carried over the bar were also a feature of Caoimhe Doherty’s rendition of the Drunken Gauger. This is evidenced in bars three, four, twenty four to twenty-six and bars twenty-eight to twenty-nine. There was also an exact repetition of the same rhythm pattern in bars two and six. In this set dance all the beats, stamps and toes were clearly articulated.
Even though three of the dancers danced to the same tune, when we overlay the three percussive lines we can see that their interpretation was quite different despite their use of similar musical phrases. Siobhan Hackett incorporated far more toe work and her musical interpretation was quite staccato and contained within the bar lines. Caoimhe Doherty used a lot of strong movements such as stamps and drums and repeated motifs for rhythmic effect. Leanne Curran used the same tune setting with a variety of lyrical, musical phrasing moving between slow and fast movements and varying from rhythm patterns on the beat to more syncopated patterns.
The Drunken Gauger
Kevin Joyce

Step Right Foot

Siobhan Hackett

Caoimhe Doherty

Leanne Curran
Figure 35. Comparative transcription of Drunken Gauger by three dancers
The tune structure of The Blackthorn Stick as danced by Frances Richmond is similar to that contained in the Drunken Gauger, with a fifteen bar step which is repeated, followed by a fifteen bar set section. Both these tunes only have one part, which is repeated three times during the performance of the dance. Richmond’s material was densely packed and very syncopated as evidenced in the mix of quavers, semi-quavers and demi-semi quavers seen in the bars depicted below.

Figure 36. Excerpts from Blackthorn Stick performed by Frances Richmond

Planxty Drury, as performed by Ashley Smith, was extremely complex, containing difficult motifs such as the bicycle, entrechat and double hop. Many phrases were held over the bar line and there was much variety between very densely packed rhythmic sections and contrasting passages with space and room for light and shade.
Examples of this contrast are to be found in bar one and bar three and also bar four and bar five.

Bars 1-5

Figure 37. Excerpts from Planxty Drury as performed by Ashley Smith

Bonaparte’s Retreat as performed by Stephen Brennan, featured a lot stamps, clicking movements and repetition of rhythm with visual variation. For example bars one, two and three sound very similar but comprise different visual representations. His dancing also contains a significant number of lifts. The rhythmic phrasing is mostly contained within the bar line and the movements all begin on the beat.

Bars 1-4

Figure 38. Excerpts from Bonaparte’s Retreat performed by S Brennan
The performance of the Downfall of Paris by Andy O'Reilly is material that is very packed in terms of the musical phrasing. This is a common feature of set dances performed at this tempo. The proliferation of demi-semi-quavers indicates the dense texture of the dance composition in relation to the music. (See bar one for example). He also incorporates toe work and stamps at the beginning and end of phrases. A number of rhythmic phrases are repeated during the dance. Examples of this are the treble step and stamp motif in bar three, the drum motifs in bar four and the treble toe and drag motif in bar seven.

Stephen Carolan’s Planxty Davis displays great variety in terms of rhythmic patterns. The significant number of rhythmic phrases carried over the bar line created a syncopated feel. The phrasing was delicate and subtle- and only a very musical dancer can deliver this type of subtle interpretation. There are a number of clicks as evidenced in bars eight and thirteen. There is a lot of elevation and the dance is not at
all predictable. It is engaging and exciting with a lot of flow in terms of music/dance connection. The music and clarity of beats was something of which Stephen himself was aware, during the process of creating and performing the dance.

Ben Devlin’s performance of The Piper was also busy in terms of the number of beats per musical phrase. All of the rhythmic patterns were contained within the bar lines. The same drum motif as utilized by Andy O Reilly is found in bar 7. This material does not feature a lot of elevation and is really grounded. There are a significant number of double clicks with the motif being repeated three times in the space of eight bars (bars two, five and seven).
Figure 41. Excerpts from The Piper as performed by Benedict Devlin

The up-tempo Downfall of Paris danced by Ziggy Gacca does reflect the internal phrasing of the tune and is mostly segmented into two bar phrases. The rhythmic patterns do overlap the bar lines in bars. The material is quite repetitive and uses lifts and stamps effectively.
From earliest times there seems to have been a distinctively Irish aesthetic, with a deep impulse towards ornament, and the exaltation of the subtle over the obvious, expressed in all art-forms (Vallely 1999:173).

In terms of the competitive step dance idiom, its subtleties can escape the attention of the uninformed or those unfamiliar with the art form. For example, on a superficial level three settings of a performance of the Drunken Gauger might seem similar, but as we have seen from the transcriptions of the dances, they are in fact quite different in terms of percussive elements and dynamics. Furthermore, the proliferation of motifs identified indicates the capacity for variety in constructing new movements or variations of old ones.

I have concluded that competitive Irish step dance is conducive to varying degrees of creativity. This creativity is facilitated through the combined interaction of human, institutional and aesthetic creative practices. In this chapter, the interpersonal relationships were examined in detail, with the pupil/teacher relationship identified as the most central to the creative process. The contribution of other significant...
participants, including parents, supporters, and officials was also acknowledged. The centrality of the music/dance relationship was also highlighted in terms of how the music interfaces at the choreographical stage, as well as in the course of the performance. The roles of objective organisational variables, seen through the lens of the institutions charged with the responsibility of legislating for dance in terms of rules and regulations were also interrogated as was the influence of the spectacle shows on this particular group of dancers. This was prefaced by a discussion of creativity in relation to the performing arts in general and applied to competitive step dance in particular. Finally, the creativity principle was applied to Irish dance and the criteria for creativity were extrapolated from the questionnaires answered by teachers, adjudicators and dancers. Transcriptions of individual dances and their connection to the accompanying music were provided. The range of rhythmic variety illustrated, combined with the range of motifs identified in chapter four further serve to substantiate my claim that creativity can be achieved by top performers within the competitive Irish step dance idiom.
Conclusion

This dissertation examined creative processes within competitive Irish step dance. The dance genre is often perceived as overly institutionalised, as a result of the prescriptive nature of its competition culture, and thus restrictive within the creative context. The primary objective of the study was to investigate whether it is in fact possible for one to be creative within this competitive context. The evidence and analysis presented throughout this thesis supports the view that, despite the highly regulated nature of competition culture, competitive Irish step dance is nonetheless conducive to creativity.

Within this context, the plurality of processes is key. There are a number of stages in the creation of step dance material. Firstly, there is the conceptual stage where the teacher, dancer, musician has an idea. This can be quite random and can occur while driving, walking, engaging in a totally different activity. This provides the hooks upon which the dance can be structured and supported. For some choreographers, this is closely related to music and rhythm. For others, it is rooted in movements that they think will suit the anatomy and capabilities of a particular dancer. The second phase occurs in the studio where dancers experiment with different combinations of movements. At this stage, dancers are using recorded music and the issue of costuming is not a factor. The next stage is a refining process as the steps are tried at competitive events in preparation for the major competitions. The World championship event witnesses the culmination of all the different elements that have been combined to create a top class dance performance. Thus the first stages of creativity typically involve the teacher, dancer and the music and movement. The performance itself requires the dancer to recreate the piece, interpreting the work of the choreographer while engaging with live music and the players and protocols involved in the competitive event.

The configuration of evidence, analysis and exposition in this thesis may be characterised as choreographic. Using the kaleidoscope metaphor, the various component parts were assembled, rearranged and reconfigured, being viewed from different perspectives until a structure was arrived at that was sufficiently fixed for
stability in the argument, yet flexible enough to allow the arguments and ideas to breathe and grow. Mindful of the constant tension between freedom and restriction within the competitive stepdance genre and the ephemeral nature of dance, I wished to present my argument adopting a multi layered approach, consonant with the approach used when choreographing material for performance within the competitive Irish step dance idiom.

The research presented places particular focus on the world championships in Irish dance held in Belfast in 2006. Events such as the world championships are where the best dancers compete against their peers and where new movements and steps are showcased and are either accepted into the idiom or eschewed. My contention is that this is the level where creativity is primarily fostered amongst top class dancers in the upper echelons of the competitive genre. In chapter one, I outlined how Irish dance evolved into competitive dance due to the importance attached to dance within the Gaelic revival movement and the degree to which it developed within the parameters and confines of competitive events. I also introduced the key protagonists who participate in the competitive event and who exert influence over the creation of material to be performed in this context. Central to my methodological approach was the fact that my involvement was informed by my experience of competitive step dance from a multiplicity of perspectives. This facilitated a multi layered investigative approach combining my educational and ethnochoreological training with my expertise in teaching, accompanying and evaluating Irish dance within a competitive arena. In chapter two I considered approaches to defining creativity and identifying prerequisites conducive to a creative environment within dance in general and within Irish dance in particular. Chapter three examined the structural and organisational variables that contribute to the making of the competitive dance event. The key organisation here was An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. The rules which govern the competitive events were evaluated and their significance with regards to creativity within the idiom was examined. Chapter four provided a detailed structural and contextual analysis of the step dance categories for the female and male dancers in the eighteen-nineteen age group. Key motifs were identified and notated. The significant elements of dance choreography identified by dancers and teachers were rhythm, footwork, movement, musicality, eye-catching and new. Chapter five addressed the significant relationships which informed the creative processes in competitive Irish
step dance. Human relationships and institutional practices were central to this chapter. The relationships between dancers, teachers, parents, adjudicators and musicians were examined in detail. From among these, two relationships in particular stood out; the pupil teacher relationship and the music/dance relationship. Data in this thesis does not indicate that the commercial dance phenomenon, associated with *Riverdance* and its choreographic progeny, has had a demonstrable and transformative influence upon key movement patterns among mature competitive Irish step dancers. The costume art, dramatic stoppages and hand movements associated with these shows have not yet been absorbed into performances within the competitive idiom. There is, therefore, as yet no clear, demonstrable relationship between commercial shows and creative processes employed by ‘winning’ teachers and dancers.

Thus, using the World championships in Irish dance as a case study, I have observed that the stringent rules act as a catalyst for performance virtuosity rather than as a deterrent to creativity and inspire teachers and dancers to come up with new moves to impress the adjudicators. Winning dancers in the 2006 World Championships had already internalised their intrinsic creative motivation and were not competing simply for trophies but rather to showcase their own prowess as dancers. The key players involved in the event all combined to contribute to the creative process prior to or during the course of the performance. The style of individual performers or particular schools affected creativity during performance as the dancers were required to reinterpret the steps each time they performed on stage.

My own involvement in the competitive arena continues: I continue to train highly competitive students of my own to participate in top-level competitive events. Only over time will it become clear to what extent my own creative processes or those of my teaching colleagues have been influenced by the arguing, reflection, discussion and debate about the creative dimension of competitive Irish step dance that has been ongoing within this group for the past few years.

This thesis builds on pioneering research carried out in the relatively new field of Irish Dance studies and argues for the inclusion of Irish dance in more general fields of Dance Studies and indeed of Irish Studies. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to anthropological studies, dance education, ethnomusicology and ethno-choreology,
incorporating methodologies such as transcription, labanotation and fieldwork from an insider perspective in the post-spectacle era of Irish dance. It strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice, and it is hoped that it will encourage other Irish music and dance practitioners to engage with academic research and reflection. The work also aims to provide useful information for practitioners, researchers, and non-specialists regarding the complex issues surrounding creativity and competition culture. It ought to function as a springboard for further discourse around the interactions between creativity and a competition culture.

Studies of this nature also reveal how sites of cultural practice can act as a lens through which our understanding of wider socio-political and historical developments in Ireland and worldwide may be enhanced. Given that competitive step dance was used to construct a sense of Irishness in the twentieth century, it is interesting how this identity has expanded into a European and worldwide context in the twenty-first century. Consider, for example, the effects of Globalisation on the Irish step dance genre and the significant role of the Diaspora in the development of the genre. Throughout the dissertation the key issues that constantly re-emerged pertained to the concepts of innovation and change versus preservation and tradition. These are of prime importance throughout as they concern the genre, the global influences, the notion of identity, communities and individuality, fitting in and standing out, partaking in an institutionalised competitive event and creating something new and ‘original’. This complex web brings us back once more to the notion of a kaleidoscope. Creativity implies uniqueness and yet within the context of Irish Dance it only becomes possible through a complex web of relationships, which may seem, before closer investigation, to be inherently inhospitable to the notion of the ‘individual’.

The creative opportunities within competitive Irish step dance are many. The restrictions imposed by the regulatory nature of competition challenge the competent dancers to be more daring, push the boundaries without losing the sense of Irish dance aesthetic that will be accepted into the tradition. I invite subsequent scholars to
investigate the development of creativity within Irish dance outside of the competitive realm or to focus on the creative processes of particular Irish dance choreographers seeking to push the boundaries of Irish dance in other contexts. This dissertation makes brief reference to some of the similarities and differences in female and male performances, but gender in Irish dance performance remains an area that scholars might address. The thesis acknowledges the importance of the globalization in the development of the competitive step dance phenomenon. This also needs further investigation.

The findings of this study indicate that ‘winning’ dancers, through a complex interplay of relations with teachers, parents, music and presentation can be and indeed must be creative within competitive Irish step dancing.
Appendices
Appendix 1: Saoirse le Seán Ó Riordáin

Saoirse

Seán O'Riordáin (1916-1977)

Raghadh mé síos i measc na ndaoine De shiúl mo chos Is raghadh mé. síos anocht.

Raghadh mé síos ag lorg daoirse Ón mbinibshaoirse Tá ag líú anseo:

Is ceanglód an chonairt smaointe Tá ag, drannadh im thimpeall San uaigneas:

Is loirgeod an teampall rialta Bhionn lán de dhaoine Ag am fé leith: Is loirgeod comhluadar daoine Nár chleacht riamh saoirse, Ná uaigneas: Is éistfed leis na scillingsmaointe, A malartaítear Mar airgead:

Is bhfearfadh gean mo chroí do dhaoine Nár samhlaidh riamh leo Ach macsmaointe.

Ó fanfad libh de ló is d'óiche, Is beidh mé íseal, Is beidh mé dílis, D'bhur snabsmaointe.

Mar do chuala iad ag fás im intinn, Ag fás gan chuimse, Gan mheasarthacht.

Is do thugas gean mo chroí go fíochmhar Don rud tá srianta, Don gach macrud:

Don smacht, don reacht, don teampall daoineach, Don bhfocal bocht coitianta Don am fé leith:

Don ab, don chlog, don seirbhiseach Don chomparáid fhaitíosach, Don bheaguchtach:

Don luch, don tomhas, don dreancaid bhideach, Don chaibidil, don line Don aibitir:

Don mhórgacht imeachta is tíochta, Don chearrbhachas istoíche, Don bheannachtain:

Don bhfeirmeoir ag tomhas na gaoithe Sa bhfómarh is é ag cuirmhneamh Ar pháirc eornan:

Don chomhthuisinct, don chomh-sheanchuimhne, Do chomhionpar comhdhaoine, Don chomh-mhacrud . Is bheirim fuath anois is choiche Do imeachtai na saoirse, Don neamhspleáchas.

Is atuirseach an intinn A thit in iomar doimhin na saoirse, Ni mhaireann cnoc dar chruthaigh Dia ann, Ach cnoc theibi, sainchnoic shamhlaíochta. Is bionn gach cnoc diobh lán de mhianta Ag dreapadóireacht gan chomhlíonadh, Nil teora leis an saoirse Ná le cnoca na shamhlaíochta, Ná nil teora leis na mianta, Ná faoiseamh Le fail.
Appendix 1: Saoirse le Seán Ó Riordáin

Liberty (English translation)

Seán O'Riordáin (1916-1977)

I will go down amongst the people on foot and I will go down tonight
I will go down seeking bondage from the venom liberty that howls here:
and I will tie the pack of thoughts that snarl around me in the solitude:
And I will seek an ordered temple where people congregate at a set time;
And I will seek out people who never practised liberty or solitude:
And I will listen to the shilling thoughts that are exchanged like money:
And I will give the love of my heart to people who never imagined other than second
hand.
Oh, I will remain with you day and night, And I will be lowly And I will be faithful to
your stub-thoughts.
Because I heard them grow in my mind, grow without control, without moderation.
And I gave them my heart's love fiercely to the thing that is bridled, to every copied
thing:
To discipline, to law, to the peopled temple, To the poor and commonplace word, to
the set time:
To the abbott, the bell, the servant, to the hesitant comparison, to cowardice:
To the mouse, to measurement, to the tiny flea, to the chapter and the line of the
alphabet:
To the majesty of going and coming, to gambling at night, to salutations:
To the farmer measuring the wind in the autumn as he thinks of a field of barley:
To co-understanding, to co-tradition to co-behaviour of co-people, to the co-copied
thing.
And I bestow my hatred now and forever on the doings of liberty on independence

Weary is the mind that has fallen in the deep trough of liberty, no hill erected by God
exists there, only abstract hills, the particular hills of the imagination, and each hill is
full of desires climbing, unfulfilled, liberty is without limit, so are the hills of the
imagination the desires are unlimited, and there exists no release.
DAOIRSE

Dá labhróidh bean leat íseal
Ná híisleofá do ghuth?
Dá mbeadh an bhean réasúnta
Ná réasúnófaí tú?
Ach gheobhair san íisleacht uisleacht
Mar uisleofar do ghuth,
Is tabharfar sa réasúntacht
Míréasúnú duit:
Dá mhéad a ghéillfir uaitse
Is ea is lú éileofar ort,
Ná tabhair don daoirse diúltamh
Is tabharfar saoirse duit,
Mar domhan is ea an tsaoirse,
Is tír gach daoirse inti,
Is níl laistigh d’aon daoirse
Ach saoirse ón daoirse sin.
Appendix 3: Letter to competitors and teachers

Caisléán Oir
17 Sheelin Road
Caherdavin
Limerick
Ireland
25/01/2006

Dear competitor,

My name is Orfhlaith Ni Bhriain and I am currently completing a doctoral dissertation on competitive Irish solo step dance at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick. I am also a registered adjudicator and teacher with An Coimisiún le Rince Gaeltachta.

With a view to furthering my current research project, I have applied to An Coimisiún for permission to film the under 19 solo competitions at Oireachtas na h-Eireann and Oireachtas na Cruinne 2006.

As you may know, video recording is not habitually permitted by An Coimisiún. However, in acknowledgement of its educational value for future generations, An Coimisiún has kindly agreed to facilitate my research by granting me access to the official video for analysis. It is in this regard that I am requesting your consent in respect of your performance.

The footage will not be used for anything other than academic educational purposes and will not be shown in public. Segments of it may be submitted along with the written dissertation. I believe this project to be of considerable importance, as it will serve as a testimony to the manner in which Irish Dance has developed and become increasingly popular in recent years. I sincerely hope that you will consent to participating in this venture and would much appreciate it if you could fill in the attached consent form and return it to me in the envelope provided.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Beir Bua

Orfhlaith M Ni Bhriain

Orfhlaith.nibhriain@ul.ie

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Appendix 4: Rules for dancing

Rules for Dancing Teachers and Adjudicators
An Coimisún le Rinci Gaelacha

Issued 2007

"This is the first time that all the rules have been compiled and published together in one binder - Gerry Keane, Chairperson Coiste Rialacha

Mission Statement

"The main objective of An Coimisún le Rinci Gaelacha is the preservation and promotion of Irish Dancing, including step dancing, céilí dancing and other team dancing. While of course its main function is the promotion of Irish dance, An Coimisún is proud of working in association with Comraidh na Gaeilge in promoting all aspects of our culture including the use and promotion of the Irish language."

(2006, 3)

1.1.7 An Coimisún shall issue an official version of these rules in English and in Irish, but should any variation in meaning arise between the text of the rules in Irish and the text of the version in English any necessary decision shall be taken on the basis of the Rules in Irish.

Regional Councils
Irish Dance Teachers Association of North America
North American Feis Commission
Australian Irish Dancing Association
Traditional Irish Dance Association of New Zealand

Introduction

Rules of An Coimisún le Rinci Gaelacha
Rules for Dancing Classes
Rules for Dancing
Rules for Adjudicating and workshops
Other Publications by An Coimisún relevant to teachers/adjudicators
Rules for Registered Competitions 1993
Rules for Regional Councils October 1998
Appendix 4: Rules for dancing

Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (June 2003)

Child Protection Policy July 2003

Rules and Directives in relation to all competitions at Oireachtas Rince na hÉireann/na Cúirme

Ar Rinci Fóirne book

Ar Rinci Fóirne CD

CLRG Examination pack

3.6 Photography at Feiseanna (16)

Any form of unauthorised photography which has the capability to capture a dancer’s image whilst in motion, using electronic or manual means e.g. mobile phone, standard camera, video camcorder, commercial film, with or without enhancement, is expressly forbidden in competition.

4. Rules for Dancing (17)

4.1 Clicks

4.1.1 Steps must not include “triple clicks” or clicks of an order higher than triple

4.1.2 Double clicks are permitted when completed in isolation but a series of successive double clicks is not allowed

4.1.3 Teachers, when composing steps are encouraged to include traditional foot movements such as crosskeys, drums, boxes and rocks.

4.2 Composition and Dimensions of Dancing Shoes

4.2.1 The heel and its top piece must consist only of leather, leather composite, plastic or fiberglass, or a combination of these materials

4.2.2 The heel and its top piece must not contain any metal components or attachments other than nails or screws to attach the heel to the shoe or the top piece to the heel.

4.2.3 Where nails are used to attach the top piece to the heel, they must not exceed 25% of the total surface area of the top piece.

4.2.4 The maximum permissible height of a heel from the surface of the top piece to the point where the heel joins the upper of the shoe is 1.5 inches. This height
Appendix 4: Rules for dancing

includes both heel and top piece and is measured to the back of the upper of the shoe).

4.2.5 A certain amount of tapering from where the heel joins the upper of the shoe to where it joins the top piece is permissible (i.e. the heel may be broader at the top than at the bottom) but such tapering must be at a constant angle, i.e. the side of the heel must not be curved and no protrusions form the side or back of the heel is allowed.

4.2.6 It is possible, indeed probable, that in the future new construction techniques for shoes will evolve and/or new materials become available which will require a review of these directives. However, at no time in the future should new materials other than those listed above be used in shoes or any divergence from these directives be introduced without prior authorisation being sought from An Ceimiseann.

4.3 Artificial Carriage Aids

4.3.1 Any competitor found to be using artificial carriage aids and subsequently refuses to remove same, will be subject to disqualification from that particular competition. Medically prescribed apparatus (proof of which may be required) will be exempt from this ruling.

4.4. Costume Rules

4.4.1 Costumes must consist of a full front and back section i.e. cut away styles are not acceptable.

4.4.2 Materials must be of an equivalent weight to that used in the more traditional costumes e.g. dress velvets, taffeta, gabardine, wool mix etc.

4.4.3 Skirt length - the maximum skirt length is not more than four inches above the knee level. It is hoped that this rule will eliminate the excessively short lengths.

4.4.4 Neck lines must be of collarbone level or above. This does not preclude the use of alternative fabrics e.g. lace, as an inset.

4.4.5 Where chiffon or lace material is used as sleeves, the sleeves must start at the shoulder line and end at the cuff.

4.4.6 Appropriate underwear must be worn. Where tights are worn they must be of a denier of not less than 70.

4.4.7 Dance-drama costumes must be in keeping with the theme of the story portrayed and conform to the rules above for solo and team competition in the areas of fabric, hem and neck lines.

4.5 Make-up.

4.5.1 Make-up will not be permitted for any dancer in the first two grades (Bungrád and tusgrád or equivalent) up to and including the under 12 age group worldwide.
Appendix 4: Rules for dancing

4.6 Toe Movements

4.6.1 No block, en-Pointe, movements, stationary or moving is allowed to be performed for all ages up to and including the under 12 age group.

4.6.2 However dancers who are moving into the under 13 age group in January will be permitted to do block/en -Pointe work from September 1st of the year prior to this date. For regions in the Southern Hemisphere a different date may be applied in the case of the rule, on the advice of the appropriate authority.

4.7 Metronomic Speeds

4.7.1 As and from April 1st 2006, the following speeds will be played at all registered feiseanna organised by An Caimisiún le Rínci Gaelacha throughout Ireland on a tria basis with a view to introducing them globally.

| 1. Reel | Bungrád | 128-130 |
| 2. Light Jig | Bungrád | 116 |
| 3. Single Jig | Bungrád | 124 |
| 4. Slip Jig | Bungrád | 124 |
| 5. Heavy Jig | Bungrád | 96 |
| 6. Hornpipe | Bungrád | 144 |
| 7. Reel | Túsgrád | 116-118 |
| 8. Slip Jig | Tusgrád | 120 |
| 9. Heavy Jig | Túsgrád | 82 |
| 10. Hornpipe | Tusgrád | 130 |
| 11. Reel/Slip Jig | Méan/Ard | 113 |
| 12. Hornpipe | Méan/Ard | 113 |
| 13. Heavy Jig | Méan/Ard | 73 |

Traditional Set Dances

| Blackbird | 144 |
| S Patrick’s Day | 96 |
| Job Of Journey work | 138 |
Appendix 4: Rules for dancing

- Garden of Daisies: 138
- King of the Fairies: 130
- Three Sea Captains: 96
- Jockey to the Fair: 90
Appendix 5: Points system utilised by An Coimisiún

“100” Points System

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See Explanation Overleaf

Guidance on the use of the “100 Points” System for the A.D.C.R.G. Exam

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Appendix 5: Points system utilised by An Coimisiún

At a normal competition at which you are the sole Adjudicator you might give a Result somewhat similar to the following: -

1st No. 12
2nd No. 6
3rd Tie No’s 4, 7 & 11
4th No. 5
5th Tie No’s 2 & 3
6th Tie No’s 1, 8 & 9

For the purposes of the Maths Test at the A.D.C.R.G. Exam you should show that Result as follows, so that it is quite clear that you understand and know how to allocate the Points: -

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Explanation: 1st place gets 100 points and 2nd place 75. As there is a three-way-tie for 3rd place the points available for 3rd, 4th & 5th places i.e. 65, 60 & 56 are added together giving a total of 181 and this is divided by 3 giving 60.33 to be given to each of the three competitors. The next available place is 6th who gets 53 points. Next there is a two-way-tie for 7th place. On the same principle as outlined above for the three-way-tie you add together the points for 7th & 8th i.e. 50 plus 47 giving 97 and divide by 2 giving a total of 48.5 points each. The next available place is 9th. As there is a three-way-tie for 9th, you add the points for 9th, 10th & 11th, which are 45, 43 & 41 giving a total of 129 and divide this by 3 giving a total of 43 points each. If you were giving a further place the next place would be 12th.

If you had a four-way-tie you would add the points available for the four specific places and divide the total by 4, if a five-way-tie you add the points available for the five places and divide by 5, and so on.
Appendix 6: Results sheet

Oireachtas Rince Na Cruinne 2006

Comp #23 - Ladies 18-19

Adjudicators

Brid McInerney Garrard
Mairead Casey
Vourneen O'Connor
Séan ÓConghaile
Elizabeth McConomy Hegarty
Marie Casey
Eugene Harnett

Marks
## Appendix 6: Results sheet

### Oireachtas Rince Na Crúinne 2006 - Recall for Ladies 18-19 (#23)

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<th>Entry</th>
<th>Brid McInerny/Garrard</th>
<th>Mairead Casey</th>
<th>Voureen O'Connor</th>
<th>Sean O'Conghaile</th>
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### Appendix 6: Results sheet

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Oireachtas Rince Na Crúinne 2006 - Marks for Ladies 18-19

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Séan O'Connell
Elizabeth McEconi Hagerty
Eugene Hannett

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Appendix 6: Results sheet
Appendix 6: Results sheet

Oireachtas Rince Na Cruinne 2006

Comp #3 - Men 18-19

Adjudicators

Brid McInerney Garrard
Annette Doolan
Miriam McCarthy
Ann Marie Greaney
Elizabeth McConomy Hegarty
Marie Casey
Isabella Fogarty

Marks
# Appendix 6: Results sheet

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Appendix 7: Notice to adjudicators

REMINDER

An Coimisiún Le Rinci Gaelacha
6, Harcourt Street, Dublin 2.
Ireland

21st September 2005

Special Notice to All Adjudicators
Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006
The Waterfront Hall, Belfast, 9th – 16th April 2006

A chara,

An Coimisiún would like to employ a set panel of adjudicators for the full duration of Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006. It is hoped to employ a total of 15 adjudicators. Each solo championship is to be adjudicated by a set panel of adjudicators with the same panel judging all three rounds.

If you wish to be considered to adjudicate at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 to be held in the Waterfront Hall, Belfast, 9th – 16th April 2006, please sign the enclosed form and return it to the office of An Coimisiún prior to Wednesday 19th October 2005. Names received after this date will not be considered.

Please ensure you meet with all the criteria for the judging of this event and note carefully the closing date is 19th October 2005 as this date will be strictly adhered to.

Thanking you,

Is mise, le meas,

Francis Curley,
Cathaoirleach
Coiste Oireachtas.
Appendix 7: Notice to adjudicators

AN COIMISIUN LE RINCI GAELACHA
Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006
Criteria for Adjudication

1. It has been decided by An Coimisiún that for 2006 there will be set panels of adjudicators who will judge all three rounds of the various solo competitions. An Coimisiún is therefore looking for adjudicators who may be interested in submitting their names to adjudicate Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006.

2. An Coimisiún will be seeking 15 full time adjudicators who would be employed for the full duration of the event, 9th – 16th April 2006, and each adjudicator must be eligible to judge all competitions on the syllabus.

3. If employed as an adjudicator An Coimisiún will offer paid accommodation for the duration, €30 per day food allowance, €300 per day adjudication fee and up to a maximum of €300 towards travel expenses.

4. An adjudicator who wishes to submit his/her name for selection to judge at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 should do so by completing and signing the attached volunteer form, and return it to the Office of An Coimisiún as soon as possible and not later than Wednesday 19th October 2005. Before doing so however, you are asked to read carefully all the conditions of adjudication as set out in this document.

5. An adjudicator selected to adjudicate Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 must not submit any entries to the competitions. Neither may any school or teacher associated with you through amalgamation of classes or associated by way of workshops submit entries if you are chosen to adjudicate. Any current World Champions or current medal holders from Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2005 either taught by you or having connections to you through amalgamation of classes or associated by way of workshops cannot submit an entry if you are selected to adjudicate.

6. An Coimisiún feels that any World Champion from 2005 or World medal holder from 2005 has earned that position for their region. Therefore, if because of any of the connections with an adjudicator as listed in 5 above is reason for a dancer not competing at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 his/her qualifying region is allowed to use that place to send another dancer in their place.

7. If you are a practising teacher as well as an adjudicator wishing to judge Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006, An Coimisiún would strongly encourage you to enter your dancers at your qualifying event. However, if you have any dancer who achieves a qualifying place at your regional they must forfeit that place to the next placed dancer at their qualifying event if you wish to adjudicate at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006. As with 6 above these would be the only instances where substitutions would be allowed to take place.

8. The onus is entirely with you as the adjudicator, if you have any qualifiers, be they last years World Champion, a medal holder at last years world championship or a qualifier from a regional qualifying, either from your own class, an amalgamated class that you are associated with or from a class that you have given workshops to within the last two years, to inform them before you volunteer your services to adjudicate Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 that they will not be eligible to compete if you are selected to adjudicate.

9. Adjudicators must be available to judge from the start of the Oireachtas on Sunday 9th April 2006 until their services are no longer required on Sunday 16th April 2006.
Appendix 7: Notice to adjudicators

10. An adjudicator who agrees to adjudicate at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 must not judge any competition whatsoever, including class competitions, from the time of receiving the written offer, other than a Qualifying Oireachtas for which the adjudicator has already been contracted, until after Oireachtas na Cruinne 2006.

11. As all adjudicators engaged for the Oireachtas must be free to judge all events on the syllabus, an adjudicator cannot request to be left off a competition so that a dancer whom that adjudicator is not eligible to judge because of any of the provisions of 16 below may take part in that competition. Such requests, if made, will not be entertained.

12. An adjudicator must be registered with An Coimisiún two years immediately prior to Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006 to be eligible to adjudicate. A newly qualified adjudicator must also have judged at least one registered major feis, which included judging as a member of a panel of three or more adjudicators on a championship event.

13. An adjudicator must not have adjudicated at Oireachtas Rince na hÉireann 2004, Oireachtas Rince na hÉireann 2005 or Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2005 to be eligible to adjudicate at the event.

14. Each adjudicator must ensure that he/she has a detailed knowledge of each of the Ceili dances on the Oireachtas syllabus and refresh that knowledge in advance of the Oireachtas.

15. It is the responsibility of adjudicators (and not stage officials) to ensure that dances performed in a competition are those prescribed in the syllabus. Adjudicators must also ensure that movements of ceili dances are danced in the order in “Ar Rinci Foímen” and otherwise performed in accordance with that book except where instructions issued in advance may otherwise direct.

16. An adjudicator is not eligible to judge at the Oireachtas if in any competition the competitors include:

- The adjudicator’s son or daughter, niece or nephew or first cousin either as a solo or team dancer;
- A dancer or a team taught by the adjudicator’s husband or wife, son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister, mother-in-law or father-in-law, brother-in-law or sister-in-law, or by a person acting on behalf of any of the relatives listed;
- Any dancer (solo or team) who the adjudicator, or a person acting on his or her behalf, has in the previous two years taught or coached (either in person or by video or other means) other than a workshop open to all classes and organised by An Coimisiún or by one of its subsidiary bodies;
- Pupils (solo dancers or teams) of a teacher who either himself or herself or a person acting on his or her behalf, has in the previous two years taught or coached (either in person or by video or other means) pupils, either solo dancers or teams, of the adjudicator;
- Pupils of a class whose members the adjudicator has in the previous two years assessed (either in person or by video) other than at an official Dancer’s Certificate examination of An Coimisiún.
- Any dancer (solo or team) who the adjudicator himself or herself has taught in the previous two years. This is to include all dancers who are no longer being taught by the adjudicator for whatever reason.
- Any dancer (solo or team) whose teacher has in the previous two years assessed (either in person or by video) pupils of the adjudicator other than at an official Dancer’s Certificate examination of An Coimisiún.
Appendix 7: Notice to adjudicators

> Any pupil of a school where the adjudicator forms part of a partnership, regardless of whether or not the adjudicator has at any time provided tuition to that dancer.
> Any pupil of a dance class attended by the adjudicators son/daughter while he/she is attending that class or for two years after the son/daughter has left the said class.

17. The onus is on a person invited to judge the Oireachtas to ascertain as far as possible if any dancers who might affect his or her eligibility to adjudicate the Oireachtas are likely to be taking part in the Oireachtas and to notify An Comisiún accordingly.

18. The responsibility to enter only dancers eligible to compete in front of the official panel rests with their current registered teacher.

The final date for receipt of the form below is 19th October 2005.

Adjudication at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006

I ________________, having read and agree to abide by all the criteria for adjudication at Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006, wish to submit my name for selection. I fully understand that if selected I cannot submit any entries for the Oireachtas nor can any dancer who I have had connection with, be it through class amalgamation, workshops, video work etc. enter for the Oireachtas. Any such connections have been informed by me of my intention to forward my name for selection to adjudicate Oireachtas Rince na Cruinne 2006.

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___________________
Appendix 8: Rules of Association

Amendments to Rules for Dancing Teachers and Adjudicators

2.1 Transfer of Pupil rules.

2.1.8 Where a Bun grad/Beginner dancer is one month or less in a class the Transfer Rule (6 months) does not apply.

2.1.10 A Pupil is not subject to the Transfer Rule (6 months) where there is a change of status within the school i.e. where a new or another teacher commences teaching under the name of that school or where a teacher leaves a school. In this situation, the pupil will have ONE opportunity within a One-month period to decide on their choice of dancing school. If a child leaves the class of one registered teacher, and goes to the class of another registered teacher, and later returns to the class of the original teacher, the Transfer Rule (6 months) applies, as this is considered to be two moves.

2.1.12 Where a pupil leaves the class of a registered teacher, joins the class of an Irish Dancing teacher not registered with An Coimisiún, and later returns to his/her former teacher, the Transfer Rule (6 months) does not apply. However, where a pupil leaves the class of a registered teacher, joins the class of an Irish Dancing teacher not registered with An Coimisiún, and subsequently joins the class of another registered teacher, that pupil must not be entered in any registered competition until six calendar months have elapsed following the date of receipt of written notification by the Regional Council or other appropriate authority. Where a pupil has been 12 months out of dancing i.e. has not attended any class or competed in any competition, this rule does not apply.

4.1.2.1 A registered ADCRG may not adjudicate at a competition that is not registered with An Coimisiún except where An Coimisiún has given express permission for this to happen.

4.1.2.2 An ADCRG, Examiner, TMRF, TCGR or a person granted Associate, Conditional or Temporary registration or any other member of An Coimisiún or Regional Council or a dancer who is a pupil of a registered teacher, may not adjudicate, officiate or otherwise give support and credibility in any capacity to any other dancing organisation e.g. conduct teacher and adjudicator examinations, grade examinations and workshops. A breach of this rule will be deemed as an act of gross misconduct and will render a person found to be in breach of the rule liable to disciplinary action.

4.1.2.3 Class competitions i.e. competitions involving pupils of one school registered with An Coimisiún and certain competitions organised by bodies with similar cultural aims of An Coimisiún eg. Scór are exempt from the provision of this rule.

The above Rule revisions have been given temporary numbers, pending the issue of a comprehensive Rule Book by An Coimisiún in Spring 2006.
Appendix 9: Questionnaire for adjudicators

Questions for Adjudicators

Name:

School:

Section A

Background Information

1. Why are you involved with Irish dancing?

2. How long have you been adjudicating?

3. Do you enjoy Irish Dancing Competitions?

4. Are you an active teacher?
 Appendix 9: Questionnaire for adjudicators

Section B

A question of style

5. What do you look for in a dancer? ------------------------------
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6. Describe your ideal soft shoe dancer.----------------------
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7. Describe your ideal hard shoe dancer.---------------------
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8. Do you have favourite motifs in soft shoe dances?---
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9. Do you have favourite motifs in hard shoes dances?----
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Appendix 9: Questionnaire for adjudicators

Section C

Influences

10. Who are the dancers you admire and are influenced by?
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12 Have shows like Riverdance or Lord of the Dance impacted on Feiseanna?
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13. Do you think you can be creative within competitive step dancing?
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14. When evaluating material which of the following factors influences you most significantly (rank in order of importance from 1-7 one being the most important)

- tune,
- rhythm,
- spatial patterns,
- traditional elements eg rocks and crosskey
- footwork
- movement
- other

Appendix 9: Questionnaire for adjudicators

15. Have you had lessons in any other dance genres? If so, what are they?

16. To what extent is costuming important?

17. To what extent is the accompanying music important?
18. In your opinion what is the role of the adjudicator?

19. What defines a good adjudicator?

Any other comments?
Appendix 10: Musicians’ contract

An Coimisiún Le Rincí Gaelacha

Contract for Musician

1. The dates and times of my duties will be as per official time-table. No alteration of this timetable will be permitted without prior consultation and agreement with An Coimisiún.

2. Accommodation will be provided the night before and up to and including the night you finish playing. Remuneration will be €230 (two hundred and thirty) euro per day or stg equivalent.

3. A meal allowance will be provided on days and times of engagement only i.e. €50 per working day (or stg equivalent)

4. You will be required to make your own travel arrangements and a copy of your itinerary and cost of same should be sent along with this contract. Receipts of travel expenses must be given to the Chairperson on arrival.

5. Musicians shall be available side stage at least 15 minutes prior to their allotted starting time and have completed any sound checks prior to the scheduled starting time.

6. Dress and demeanor shall be appropriate to the event.

7. While you are entitled to and deserve an opportunity to relax following a days work, An Coimisiún expects musicians to retire at a reasonable hour so that they may be able to function at their maximum capability the following day.

8. Where the allotted time includes a figure dance competition, musicians will only be required to play for teams who specifically request such accompaniment and who supply copies of the music required in advance. Copies of such music will be supplied to all musicians concerned and the musicians should be prepared to make themselves available for any reasonable rehearsal time sought in advance of competition.

9. This signed contract must be returned to An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha on or before __________ otherwise the next available musician will be appointed.

10. All travel/health insurance and any instrument travel costs will be at your own expense.

11. Payment will be normally by cheque only. Requests for cash payments should be made in writing to the Chairman of the Oireachtas at least two weeks prior to the event.

12. Regardless of payment method, all individuals will be required to sign for receipt of remuneration. An Coimisiún will provide the requisite paperwork to be completed.

13. I enclose a passport photograph and short resume which will be published in the official programme.

I fully accept the conditions as laid out in the above contract. And will officiate at Oireachtas Rince Na Cruinne ________

Signed: ………………………………………………………………

Date: ……………………………
Appendix 11: Questionnaire for musicians

Questions for Musicians

Section A

Music and Dance Background

Name----------------------------------------
Instrument-----------------------------------

1. How long have you been playing for feiseanna?-------------------------

2. How did you get involved in playing for Irish dance competitions?---

3. Did you ever dance yourself?-----------------------------------

Section B

At the Feis

4. What aspects of playing for feiseanna do you enjoy?------------------

5. What do you not enjoy about playing for feiseanna?------------------

6. Do you ever watch the dancers?----------------------------------
Appendix 11: Questionnaire for musicians

7. Do you ever listen to the dancers? ------------------------------------------

8. Do dancers request particular tunes? ---------------------------------------

9. Do you facilitate their requests? ------------------------------------------

Section C

Feis Music

10. Do you ever feel restricted by playing to a regulated metronomic speed? --------------------------------- 

11. Do you regularly play with another musician? ----------------------------- 

12. How is the feis musician’s repertoire determined? -------------------- 

13. Have you made any recordings for step dancers? --------------------------
14. What are the attributes of a good feis musician?

Section D

15. What is the role of the feis musician?

Any other comments

Appendix 12: Transcriptions of sample feis reels

Glasgow Reel
Sticky Note / Ian Mc Phail's Compliments to the late Gordon Jamieson

Ian Mc Phail
Appendix 12: Transcriptions of sample *feis* reels

Salamanca Samba
### Appendix 13: Syllabus for Oireachtas na Cruinne

#### OIRECHTAS RINCE NA CRUINNE 2006

(Competitors must have the dances below prepared.)

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<td>Fir, siné as cionn 21 Senior Mens over 21</td>
<td>Cor, Port, Rince Leithléach in am 2/4 nó 4/4 Reel, Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1984 nó roimh anois earlier</td>
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<td>Fir 19 – 21 Men 19 – 21</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
<td>1985 - 1986</td>
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<td>03</td>
<td>Fir 18 – 19 Men 18 – 19</td>
<td>Cor, Port, Rince Leithléach in am 2/4 nó 4/4 Reel, Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1987</td>
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<td>04</td>
<td>Fir 17 – 16 Boys 17 – 18</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>05</td>
<td>Buachaillí 15 – 16 Boys 16 – 17</td>
<td>Cor, Port, Rince Leithléach in am 2/4 nó 4/4 Reel, Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<td>06</td>
<td>Buachaillí 15 – 16 Boys 15 – 16</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>07</td>
<td>Buachaillí 14 – 15 Boys 14 – 15</td>
<td>Cor, Port, Rince Leithléach in am 2/4 nó 4/4 Reel, Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1991</td>
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<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>Buachaillí 13 – 14 Boys 13 – 14</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>Buachaillí 12 – 13 Boys 12 – 13</td>
<td>Cor, Port, Rince Leithléach in am 2/4 nó 4/4 Reel, Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Buachaillí 11 – 12 Boys 11 – 12</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Buachaillí 10 – 11 Boys 10 – 11</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiope, Rince Leithléach in am 6/8 Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time.</td>
<td>1995</td>
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## Appendix 13: Syllabus for Oireachtas na Cruinne

### Ladies & Girls

#### Craobhchomórtais sa Rince Aonair

#### Step-Dancing Championships

**OIRECHTAS RINCE NA CRUINNE 2006**

Ní mór do iarbhóirí na rincí laistíos a bheith réidh acu. (Competitors must have the dances below prepared.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Com.</th>
<th>Craobhchomórtas (Championship)</th>
<th>Rinci (Dances)</th>
<th>Blainta Breithe (Years of birth)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mná, sinsir os cionn 21 Senior ladies over 21</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiepa, Rince Leithleach in am 6/8 nó 6/8 + 9/8, Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 or 6/8 + 9/8 time</td>
<td>1984 nó roimhe / or earlier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Mná 19 - 21 Ladies 19 - 21</td>
<td>Port Luascach, Port Trom, Rince Leithleach in am 2/4 nó 4/4, Slip Jig, Heavy Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1985 - 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mná 18 - 19 Ladies 18-19</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiepa, Rince Leithleach in am 6/8 nó 6/8 + 9/8, Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 or 6/8 + 9/8 time</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Mná 17 - 18 Ladies 17 - 18</td>
<td>Port Luascach, Port Trom, Rince Leithleach in am 2/4 nó 4/4, Slip Jig, Heavy Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Cailini 16 - 17 Girhb. 16 - 17</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiepa, Rince Leithleach in am 6/8 nó 6/8 + 9/8, Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 or 6/8 + 9/8 time</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Cailini 15 - 16 Girhb. 15 - 16</td>
<td>Port Luascach, Port Trom, Rince Leithleach in am 2/4 nó 4/4, Slip Jig, Heavy Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Cailini 13 - 14 Girhb. 13 - 14</td>
<td>Port Luascach, Port Trom, Rince Leithleach in am 2/4 nó 4/4, Slip Jig, Heavy Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Cailini 11 - 12 Girhb. 11 - 12</td>
<td>Port Luascach, Port Trom, Rince Leithleach in am 2/4 nó 4/4, Slip Jig, Heavy Jig, Set Dance in 2/4 or 4/4 time</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Cailini 10 - 11 Girhb. 10 - 11</td>
<td>Cor, Comphiepa, Rince Leithleach in am 6/8, Reel, Hornpipe, Set Dance in 6/8 time</td>
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## Appendix 14: Sample marking sheets

### Oireachtas Rince

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Láirbhóir</th>
<th>Rince Dance 1</th>
<th>Rince Dance 2</th>
<th>Iomlán 1 &amp; 2 Total</th>
<th>Rince Dance 3</th>
<th>Iomlán 1 &amp; 2 &amp; 3 Total</th>
<th>Aith Placing</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
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Moltóir
Adjudicator

Déta
Date
### Appendix 15: List of set dances permitted by An Coimisiún

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fonn/Tune</th>
<th>Am/time</th>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Set</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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2006
<table>
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Measure</th>
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<th>Time</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Rodneys Glory</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>The Hurling Boys</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>Planxty Davis</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Rub the Bag</td>
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<td>King of Fairies</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Hurry the Jugs</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Downfall of Paris</td>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Drunken Gauger</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Ace &amp; Deuce of Piping</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Blackthorn Stick</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>4/4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>6/8</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Humours of Bandon</td>
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<td>The Roving Peddler</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
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<td>The Deep Green Pool</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Is the big man Within</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Fiddler Around The Fairy Tree</td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
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</table>
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Drunken Gauger
Kevin Joyce / Leanne Curran

1. Start of set

2. Double hop

5

9

13

17

22

27
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Drunken Gauger
Kevin Joyce / Caoimhe Doherty

\( \text{\( \text{
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Drunken Gauger
Kevin Joyce / Siobhan Hackett

\( \text{\textit{j}=71} \)

Step 1

\( \text{\textit{d}=71} \)

5

10

14

17

22

27
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Drunken Gauger
Kevin Joyce

Step Right Foot

[Sheet music with musical notations and dance steps]

Siobhan Hackett
Casimhe Doherty
Leanne Curran

Double hop

[Sheet music with musical notations and dance steps]

Kevin Joyce

heel

[Sheet music with musical notations and dance steps]

1.
2.

[Sheet music with musical notations and dance steps]
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

2

Set dances transcriptions are shown in the image.

1. Set
2. Rock
3. Bicycle
4. Drag
5. Double hop
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Blackthorn Stick
Kevin Joyce / Frances Richmond
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

Planxty Davis 12/8 Version
Stephen Carolan

\[ = 108 \]

Planxty Davis 12/8 Version
Stephen Carolan

\[ = 108 \]
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

Downfall of Paris 12/8 Version
Ziggy Gacca
Francis Ward
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

Downfall of Paris 12/8 Version
Andy O'Reilly

Francis Ward
Appendix 16: Transcriptions of set dances

The Piper 12/8 Version
Ben Devlin

$ = 76$
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs

Laban B

Turn 1, 2, 3

and skip, jump back

long out 2, 3

step back

bicycle

rock 2, 3
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs

Crab walk
jump & click 23
extended flexed
switch jump

trotchat
jump flash, 2, 3
double hops
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs

Laban D

Long click 2, 3

Hop treble

Snatch treble

Better right hop
back stamp brush,
brush box

Up down jump
change

Spring points
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs

Laban E

[Diagram showing different Laban notation motifs]
Appendix 17: Labanotated motifs

Leban F

Pitch lines

Drums

Cut

Treble

 Raised knee

Dig the
crosskey
Appendix 18: Questionnaire for teachers

Questions for Teachers

Name

School

Teachers

Section A

Background Information

1. Why are you involved with Irish dancing?------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------

2. How long have you been teaching?-------------------------
   -------

3. Do you enjoy Irish Dancing Competitions?------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------
   -------------------------------------------------------------------

4. Are there any disadvantages?-----------------------------
   -------
   -------
Section B

A question of style

6. Does your school have an identifiable style of dancing?

7. What words would you use to describe your style of dancing in soft shoes?

8. What words would you use to describe your style of dance in heavy shoes.

9. Do you have favourite motifs in your soft shoe dances?

10. Do you have favourite motifs in your hard shoes dances?
Section C

Influences

11. Who are the dancers you admire and are influenced by?

Appendix 18: Questionnaire for teachers

12 Have shows like Riverdance or Lord of the Dance impacted on your dancing class?

13. Do you think you can be creative within competitive step dancing?

14. When composing material which of the following factors influences you most significantly (rank in order of importance from 1-7 one being the most important) :
   - tune,
   - rhythm,
   - spatial patterns,
   - traditional elements eg rocks and crosskey footwork
   - movement
   - other
15. Have you had lessons in any other dance genres? If so, what are they?

16. To what extent is costuming important?

17. To what extent is the accompanying music important?

18. In your opinion how important is the dancer/teacher relationship?

Any other comments?

Appendix 19: Questionnaire for dancers

Questions for champion dancers

Section A

Background.

Name  ---------------------------------------------------------------------------

School  --------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Why do you do Irish dancing?--------------------------------------------------------

How long have you been dancing?-----------------------------------------------------

Number of teachers in current school?-----------------------------------------------


Section B

Competitive Step Dance

Do you enjoy competitive dancing? ____________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

How does it benefit you? ___________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Are there any disadvantages? _______________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

How many classes per week do you attend? _________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

How many hours per day/ week do you practice? ____________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

Appendix 19: Questionnaire for dancers

Section C

A question of style

What words would you use to describe your style of dancing in soft shoes?__________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What words do others use to describe your style? _____________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
What words would you use to describe your style of dance in heavy shoes?

Do you have favourite motifs/moves in your soft shoe dances?

Do you have favourite motifs/moves in your hard shoes dances?

Section D

Influences

Who are the dancers you admire and are influenced by?

Have shows like Riverdance or Lord of the Dance impacted on your dancing?

Do you input into the composition of your competition steps?

If so what are your main considerations (music? Rhythm? Movement?)?

Any other comments you would like to add?
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Leanne Curran, Hornapipe
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Leanne Curran, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Leanne Curran, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ashley Smith, Hornpipe
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ashley Smith, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ashley Smith, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Frances Richmond, Hornpipe
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Frances Richmond, Reel

1 - 3

9 - 16

23 - 24

31 - 32

40 - 46

4 - 8

17 - 20

25 - 28

33 - 37
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Frances Richmond, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Siobhán Hackett, Hornpipe
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Siobhán Hackett, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Siobhán Hackett, Set Dance

1 - 2

3 - 4

7

10 - 13

16 - 17

18 - 19

22

25 - 27

31 - 33

36

37 - 40

41 - 45
Appendix 20: Floor plans

_Caoimhe Doherty, Hornpipe_
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Caoimhe Doherty, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Caoimhe Doherty, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Brennan, Heavy Jig
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Brennan, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Brennan, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Andrew O’Reilly, Heavy Jig
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Andrew O’Reilly, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Andrew O’Reilly, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Carolan, Heavy Jig
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Carolan, Reel

1 - 12

13 - 14

15 - 19

21 - 22

23 - 28

30 - 32

34 - 39

40

42 - 44

45 - 47
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Stephen Carolan, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Benedict Devlin, Heavy Jig
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Benedict Devlin, Reel
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Benedict Devlin, Set Dance
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ziggy Gacca, Heavy Jig
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ziggy Gacca, Reel

1 - 4
7 - 12
15 - 16
17 - 19
21 - 23
25 - 28
30 - 31
36 - 38
40
44 - 46
47
Appendix 20: Floor plans

Ziggy Gacca, Set Dance
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