The Ivory Bridge:

Piano Accompaniment on 78rpm Recorded Sources of
Irish Traditional Dance Music
America c. 1910-1945

A dissertation submitted for the Degree of Masters of Arts in Ethnomusicology

by

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To my two grandmothers,

Nora Dillane
and
Eileen O'Shaughnessy
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Conceptual Approach

In the discussion of the musical content of transcriptions, I use a comparative method. While ethnomusicology has, to a certain extent, moved away from primarily musicological approaches, I feel that such a method functions as a helpful tool in my research. I do not want the conceptual aspect of my work to be influenced entirely by the American school for the following reasons. Speaking about a tradition of music from Western Europe compels, even morally obliges me, to look to the European school as well as the Irish academic tradition - both of which tend to be more formalistic in nature. Despite its somewhat isolated location on the north-western tip of Europe, Ireland has been exposed to the musical practices of the continent for centuries, especially since the Baroque era. The use of the comparative method acknowledges this presence of certain musical elements from the European tradition in Irish music. Almost paradoxically, the imposition of structural aspects of Western harmony to a ‘non-western’ melodic music seem to make the use of the comparative method unavoidable if system incongruities and discrepancies are to be highlighted. Therefore, a formalist approach, through the use of the musicology method, proves beneficial, especially when combined with a contextual approach.

Practical Approach

I encountered problems when making the transcriptions for which I was obliged to compensate. While I am happy that the bass line and rhythmic figures of all the examples are accurate recreations of the recorded experience, I must acknowledge that the voicing of chords in the right hand did cause some difficulty. The noise distortion in certain musical examples often made it impossible to hear the true voicing of chords. Where it became impossible to transcribe without any doubt, I drew on my own experience both as a traditional piano accompanist and classically trained pianist as a means of compensating for these technical difficulties. The resultant chords, therefore, are sometimes interpretations as opposed to unequivocally accurate, literal representations. Nevertheless, I am satisfied with my approach since all of these transcriptions are functional illustrations of individual stylistic piano accompaniment techniques.
My thanks must go, first and foremost, to my mother and father whose love and unfailing support guided me through this and all of my journeys - you are the best. Thanks, too, to my sisters Deirdre and Noreen for their encouragement and generosity, and especially to Fionnuala whose conscientious editorial pencil invariably put me on the right track.

I am grateful to my supervisors Prof. Micheál Ó Súilleabháin and Dr. John Morgan O’Connell for their constructive criticism and direction throughout this project, and their support for my future endeavours.

Thanks to all in the IWMC who offered advice and encouragement, especially George (Georgette Mulheir) who kept me going during those dark middle days.

Finally, Nicholas Carolan and the staff of the Irish Traditional Music Archive deserve a special mention for their continual support and assistance. This is where I first met Harry Bradshaw without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Harry was essentially the main informant for this work and his knowledge, wisdom, and insight suffuse the following pages.
This dissertation is concerned with the polyvalent symbolism of the piano and its manifestation in 78rpm recordings of Irish traditional dance music early in the twentieth century in America. Irish dance music was conceived and practised in its original rural Irish context as an unaccompanied, melodic form whose clear purpose was that of accompaniment to the associated dance figure (I). On being introduced to America by immigrant Irish communities, the music did not seem to resonate within this new urban landscape, reflecting the geographical, social and cultural displacement of the music’s practitioners and audiences (III). One way in which the Irish negotiated their ideological space and ethnic identity was through music. Irish traditional dance music was mediated by the piano, initially a symbol of Victorian ideals representing prestige, morality, economic status, and high culture. This symbolism was replaced by a more contemporary interpretation, one that embodied the mechanical complexity of the modern industrial age (II). The addition of the piano to Irish records imbued the music with these associated characteristics. The 78rpm recordings of Irish music with piano accompaniment thus become a social, historical, and musical record of these experiences in 1920s America (IV). Within the three-minute grooves of each recording the manifestations of emigrant experience in this multi-cultural, populist, modern, and capitalist society are encountered (V). The piano, the ivory bridge, is shown to have acted as a mediator between Irish identity and mainstream American culture on a number of interrelated levels.
In order to understand why a music structure exists as it does, we must also understand how and why the behaviour which produces it is as it is, and how and why the concepts which underline that behaviour are ordered in such a way as to produce the particularly desired form of organised sound.

(Alan Merriam 1963:7)
Origins of Thesis Topic

Many years ago, when I first heard a track from an old 78rpm record of Irish traditional music featuring Sligo fiddler Michael Coleman (1891-1945), I was swamped with conflicting feelings. To my ears the sprightly fiddle playing was undoubtedly brilliant if not virtuosic but the accompanying piano vamp sounded terribly wrong, both rhythmically and harmonically. Coleman, one of the greatest and truly revered musicians of the tradition, did not seem to be aware of the cacophony he and his accompanist were making. The unnamed piano player sounded completely unrehearsed, or else appeared to have no real insight into the music he was accompanying. I was truly caught between captivation and utter incomprehension, becoming engaged in an experience, distinguished by Whilhelm Dilthey as something which is formative and transformative in life (Turner 1986:35). The seeds that would later flower into scholarly interest in this shadowy background figure, the piano accompanist, were sown in this moment.

Over the years, I listened to more and more 78rpm records, honing in on the named and unnamed accompanists, each one exciting or inexplicable in his or her own unique way. I began to acknowledge my own limitations in terms of understanding this era and the sound of its music. Gradually, my initial, undoubtedly naive response was replaced by a conscious effort to formulate probing questions - questions that would unearth the meaning and reasons for the inclusion of this very specific piano sound on these recordings. Thus began my exploration in the realm of recorded Irish dance music early this century. The 78rpm records that piqued, oftentimes insulted, my harmonic sensibilities as a piano accompanist became my primary source. Each record represented, as Turner would have it, "crystallised secretions of one living human experience" (Bruner 1985:5) and become the main point of reference and focus in this endeavour for understanding.

Sources

Having chosen this area of interest for academic research, I first had to decide how best to approach this task and delineate my field of study. My 'field' as a tangible space existed in the realm of time now, within the grooves on the 78rpm record. The original 78rpm records to which I listened and studied are housed in the Irish
Traditional Music Archive in Dublin. I was also fortunate to have access to a number of re-mastered 78s in cassette and CD form, thanks largely to Harry Bradshaw who launched his Viva Voce label in 1989 for the specific purpose of making such recordings accessible. Other mainly sporadic re-mastered 78rpm recordings were also accessed, including a number of issues from Rounder Recordings. The 78 Era in itself however, covers a large time span, essentially from 1900 to 1953. I decided to focus primarily on the ‘Golden Era’ of the 1920s. According to Colin Hamilton, whose doctoral thesis focuses on the 78rpm Era, 65 per cent of the entire era’s recordings was made during this decade, with a massive 52 per cent produced in the five years between 1924 and 1929 (1996:137). Associated discographic material which guided my selection process included Spottswood (1990), Vernon (1995), Healy (1970), Ní Fhuartháin (1993), Barr (1992) Hamilton (1996) and others. At this stage, I had identified my primary source material and isolated the time frame I wished to study. The next stage was the formulation of an approach to my study.

**Methodology**

Alan Merriam’s three delineated stages in the work of an ethnomusicologist (Merriam 1963) proved a clear and solid starting point in formulating a methodological approach. Briefly, these stages comprise of the collection of data, the analysis of data, and the application of results - guidelines which I tailored for my own research. First, in terms of the collection of data, my primary source, the actual 78rpm records, were already in existence, precluding the need for collecting in one active sense. The autonomy of the material had many implications for the next two stages of Merriam’s model, something further underscored by its commercial status. Both of these intertwined points were of paramount importance. I had no control over the selection of my data in the sense that I simply had a pool of recordings from which to choose. Further, the random approach often employed to ensure accuracy of representation when collecting data could not be fully fulfilled as I had really only one resource from which to operate and base my judgements. Also, I was unable to ensure that these recordings were representative of the general practice of the time outside of the studio. Therefore, my theories and research techniques were, naturally, coloured by these facts.
Continuing with Merriam's basic model, the second step comprised the collation of ethnographic information into a coherent body of knowledge in terms of culture and society of the time under investigation. In my particular case, I needed to gain an understanding and insight into Irish, Irish-American, and American society prior to and during the first decades of this century from an economic, social, historical and cultural point of view. The piano was my viewfinder. To this end, I employed a variety of source materials concerning the piano including Loesser (1954), and Roell (1989). I also examined publications concerning the Irish Diaspora in America, which included Clark (1984), Williams (1996), Akenson (1991), and Ignatiev (1995). The information from these and many other sources was consolidated in order to create a comprehensive picture and gain a real sense of this era and of the events leading up to it.

But where did the actual accompanists fit into all of this? On a practical level, I had to come to terms with the fact that the accompanists I wished to study were long departed from this world. Who could act as informants in their stead? I recognised the need to speak directly with experts in the field, other scholars of this historical era, and, of course, any relatives or people with an experience, first or second hand, of the time in question. I also needed to understand and appreciate the workings of the recording industry at the time in question. A variety of sources were consulted including Ní Fhuartháin (1993), Healy (1970), Hamilton (1996), McCullough (1978), and many more. Harry Bradshaw proved an especially valuable source. The comprehensive liner notes to his recordings and associated publications contained much information, augmented by extensive comments from personal interviews with Bradshaw. Bradshaw also gave me information from interviews he had conducted over the years that had particular relevance to this period. His contribution to this work cannot be overstated for Harry Bradshaw was my main informant and the human touchstone for much of the historical information with which I grappled. This will be evidenced particularly in later chapters where I quote extensively from both his own interviews and my interviews with him. Thus, from all of these disparate sources, I endeavoured to create as full a picture as possible of the accompanists and their professional lives.
Finally, in keeping with Merriam's third stage, I needed to apply my findings, come up with an explanation, substantiate a theory, and provide an appropriate conclusion in a coherent manner. This process, in clinical isolation, seemed straightforward. However, there were other factors at work and I had yet only dealt with the stages of my work on a theoretical level. I had to be aware of emerging factors beyond the theory, and specific to my case. Therefore, while the three stages outlined by Merriam gave me a starting point, his model proved limited, falling short on one important issue. As Gourlay has pointed out, "the crucial factor in any assessment of Merriam's contribution is his omission of the ethnomusicologist and, by extension, of the performer" (Gourlay 1978:247). I was compelled to acknowledge the liquid variable that is the individual element and personal thought processes of the researcher. Merriam's model had sufficed up to this point in my research as a methodological tool, but now I needed to expand my conceptual framework. I soon found that my overall approach, and in particular the conclusions drawn from my analysis, were profoundly shaped as my responsibilities as a researcher became clearer. Once these were understood, I solidified my conceptual approach.

**Responsibilities: Limitations and Personal Contributions**

While I was engaged in this process of formulating and employing my work practice, I quickly realised my personal responsibilities. As my introductory comments betray, my initial reaction to some recordings of this era was one of distaste, tinged, I am ashamed to say - despite the distance in years of my reaction to the source - with a sense of harmonic superiority. I was facing my biggest problem which, ironically, was in part tied up with one of my greatest advantages. I was a variable in this research. As an active piano vamper in the tradition I had no doubt that my own practical experiences was invaluable in terms of interpreting the music. This proved to be a double edged sword, however. Coming from a modern Western society, I had literally been saturated with the sounds of 'conventional' harmony from birth. I realised that I had to be very careful I did not judge these accompanists with my own musical prejudices, out of time and place. Moreover, as someone from a society of extreme passive music consumption on some levels, the words of popular music writer Simon
Frith’s resonated in a very meaningful way. Writing about the difference in fidelity between recordings today and recordings from early in the century Frith notes:

The collector of 78 recordings had to be an “active” listener, had to use her imagination to hear the sound that was buried in the 78’s bumps and crackles, had to keep jumping up to change the record, which could never be, then, background music.

(Frith 1996:25)

In my position, this kind of understanding and creative listening was vital if I was to uncover what was beyond the average to low fidelity quality of many of these original recordings, and even the re-mastered ones which still cackled and hissed in places.

The work of Pierre Bordieu (1977) proved an inspiration in terms of grasping the limitations, as well as the advantages, offered by my unique insight. Grappling initially with Bourdieu’s approach to ethnography, one of the most important aspects of his work that resonated with me was his concept of *habitus* or set of encoded practices. In order that I might truly understand the music I was exploring, I had to deconstruct my own *habitus* and allow for its reconfiguration as I endeavoured to recreate the past in the present. Only then could I control my innate bias and attempt to see the music for what it truly was. In this way, I endeavoured to accord respect to all and work from within ‘their’ parameters for criticism, and not my own. What was happening on these 78 recordings in terms of accompaniment occurred for one or, more than likely, a variety of reasons. Not only are the sounds of a music shaped by their culture, but, in turn, they are “carried by individuals and groups of individuals who learn what is to be considered proper and improper in respect to music” (Merriam 27). The process is one of filtering and selection. For some reason, the piano was chosen, at least on recorded sources, as an accompaniment instrument to Irish traditional dance music. The choice, however it was informed, was clearly made and that was indisputable. I intended to uncover why this was so.

As an extension of this point, a second responsibility quickly came to light. As I studied the music from the rather sterile environment of a listening booth, I realised that the sooner I discovered information to build up personalities for these accompanists, the more comprehensive and balanced my work became. As I was
engaged in historical research, I did not have what I now regard as the luxury of faces. Nothing inspires respect for one person in another more than personal, one-to-one contact which I would never have. I had to compensate for this and find other means of informing myself. Lack of literary source materials on the accompanists, however, proved the bane of my research. Biographical details were in many cases virtually non-existent. In fact, on many records, it proved a rarity if the accompanist was actually named, and this is similarly true for actual catalogue listings (Spottswood 1990). Harry Bradshaw had little solace to offer stating that even after his exhaustive research into accompanists of the time, "by and large we don’t know anything about them, where they learned their music, or how their styles developed". William Healy echoes this sentiment with the bald statement that to uncover information on the accompanists "one has to look elsewhere" (Healy 1970:121). Unfortunately, there did not seem to be an 'elsewhere' to look. This lack of accessible information in itself was undoubtedly an important aspect of my thesis. I knew the greatest danger that I faced, as a result of this limited, tangible evidence, was that I might slip into the trap of dehumanising the accompanists. These were real people, men and women of particular backgrounds and living in specific conditions at a certain time in history. At every step of the way I needed to remember this in order to do them, and this work, justice. To this effect, the actual musical sound of the 78rpm recording as social record became of paramount importance and any supplementary literary knowledge I gleaned from a variety of disparate sources combined with the music to create a fuller and, I hope, more honest picture. The 78rpm record, then, became more than a mere musical source. I was now viewing it as an aural chronicle of the era and even of the personality of the featured piano vampër. I fully acknowledge that a certain amount of what I gleaned from the recordings is speculative in nature, but I feel that the conclusions I have drawn, where evidence to substantiate is lacking, are highly probable, if not obvious.

Through this very approach a third responsibility soon became apparent. In using the records as my primary source I realised that I needed to pay special attention to the application of my analysis - that is, not to thwart and shape it to my own ends. Again, Bordieu’s ideas proved very helpful, noting that the anthropologist or ethnomusicologist as passive observer is in danger of theoretical distortion and
reductionism (Bordieu 1977:1). While I was not a contemporary nor particularly passive observer, this was still a possible pit-fall as I was an observer removed in time. Further, a very easy and circular trap within which I was in danger of being caught was that of creating theories simply from the sound alone, and using this same aural information to prove and substantiate them. While the 78s sparked off many ideas concerning the piano, the historical, social, and economic context of the era needed to be fully explored and understood. As a human behaviour, music does not exist in a vacuum. Any theories I developed could only be substantiated if they were in agreement with the context of my topic. I had to recognise that my initial suppositions, regardless of how valid they might appear, had to be open for honest and thorough investigation. Merriam states that “music is interrelated with the rest of culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, and other kinds of behaviour” (15). I would add that the process is dynamic and that sound, too, is affected by all other aspects of life. Therefore, musical sound explored outside of its cultural matrix does not disclose enough information in order to synthesise a theory about a specific music. It simply deals with the ‘what’, leaving the ‘who, why, when and where’ out of the equation. The other vital element that warranted inclusion was myself, both as ethnomusicologist and performer.

Solidifying My Conceptual Approach

It is surely true that the personal reasons for undertaking research into an aspect of culture at a particular time and in a particular space profoundly affect the shape and nature of the study. Further, as Herkovtis states, “the conceptual scheme of the student deeply influences not only the execution of a given field problem, but also the way in which it is formulated and planned” (Merriam 40). What was I trying to say, discover, argue, refute, or consolidate? The criteria from Raymond Bowers’ guide to good research proved very helpful. Bowers is an advocate of the “explicit formulation of research objectives” and encourages “methodological explicitness” and “research feasibility” (Merriam 43). However, at this point it became clear I had to supplement Merriam’s basic methodological model and augment the partial conceptual framework that I had constructed from it.
Both Turner’s and Bruner’s articles in the *Anthropology of Experience* (1986) proved a great tool in helping to formulate my conceptual approach, giving me a keen insight into the dialectical and dialogical orientation of my work. Burner is concerned with the relationship between experience and the expression of this experience. In this respect, my experience was confounded by the fact that I was displaced in a temporal sense, a problem experienced by many listeners of records (and in my case the gap was often as much as 80 years). What I was hearing was coloured. It was different from a contemporary listener’s experience. Turner speaks of:

> an anxious need to find meaning in what has disconcerted us, whether by pain or pleasure, and convert a mere experience into an experience...all this when we try to put the past and present together. (Turner 1986:36)

This was exactly what I was endeavouring to do, even though initially I may not have recognised it as such.

Tim Rice’s research model, based on Gadamer’s ‘fusion of horizons’ was also influential (Rice 1994). In simple terms, this involves a process of appropriation, distanciation, and re-appropriation when one engages with a tradition. Rice argues that provisional arcs of interpretation represent the gradual move towards greater understanding of a musical tradition. As more knowledge is sought and found, it is reflected upon and, in turn, used to lead towards a greater understanding. In my case, there were differences between how I could use this hermeneutic approach and how it was employed by Rice. Unlike Rice, I was engaging with aspects of my native tradition and therefore I was coming from within - something which had both advantages and disadvantages. I possessed an unspoken knowledge of the tradition on one hand, yet on the other I could possibly be blinkered and myopic. On two other levels my approach also proved quite different. Firstly, I was concerned with experiences which were located in the distant past but which were being recreated in my present. Secondly, I was dealing with a transplanted tradition, a Diaspora which was naturally informed by aspects of the adoptive country’s culture. Therefore, I had to inform myself of this culture. Yet, in essence, I suspected that the process of
reflexivity implicit in the hermeneutic project would operate in much the same manner as outlined by Rice. Gradually, then, my work was consolidating into a coherent body of writing. The conceptual and practical processes, which were carefully filtered and tailored to suit my needs, coalesced and gave birth to the product that was my thesis.

From Process to Product: Outline of Thesis

The concepts of metaphor, symbol, and image have been of paramount importance in thesis. The addition of harmony in the guise of the piano to Irish traditional dance music always struck me as part of something far greater than the mere musical manifestations imply. This intuition led me to explore the meaning of the piano in Irish and American society. I suggested that this instrument, with its inherent social and economic trappings possessed a multivalent and dynamic symbolism. As this idea was being consolidated, an image began to come into focus. Soon I began to perceive the piano as a bridge of some kind - a passage and a means of connection. The piano in Irish dance music crystallised into a distinct kind of mediating tool, taking musical practitioners and audiences along its ivory keys into a world of perceived wealth, prestige, legitimacy and modernity. I grappled with this metaphor of an ivory bridge for quite some time until I finally realised that in this image I had my answer. This is how it took structural form.

The basic trajectory the thesis follows is outlined below, dividing chapters I, II and III into a macro or background section, and chapters IV and V in a micro or foreground section. The macro prepares the cultural matrix within which the micro discussion of vamping in 78rpm recordings of Irish traditional dance music take place in a meaningful and all-encompassing fashion.

In chapter I, I explore the roots of the Irish dance music tradition from a musical, cultural, historical, and geographical point of view. I examine harmonic precedents within and outside of the indigenous tradition. The conclusion I reach is that this music was conceived and practised in rural Ireland essentially as a monophonic tradition - a tradition with a more modal than diatonic orientation. I argue that the influence of the Western Art music system on Irish dance music, particularly its harmonic component, resulted in the setting up of a new discourse with profound
musical implications. The discussion is guided by an examination of the phenomenon of harmonic consciousness - something which allows me to become fully aware of my own innate biases in terms of acknowledging the difference between the harmonic consciousness of today and the harmonic consciousness of the early 20th century, when the recordings were made.

Chapter II is concerned primarily with the symbolic nature of the piano in 19th and early 20th century America. I trace the evolution of the piano as it moved from being an embodiment of Victorian values to becoming a complex, mass produced, mechanical item of the modern, industrialised age. Gender issues are addressed within this context, focusing on the links between aesthetics and economics. I examine the piano specifically in its American context with the intention of showing how the incoming Irish experienced the piano - as a symbol of prestige and culture, as well as of modernity and economic progress. The piano played an integral role in all aspects of American life, and this, by extension, implies it also became a natural and inevitable part of the Irish immigrant's life.

Having established America's cultural backdrop for the arriving Irish from a pianistic point of view in chapter II, in chapter III, I examine the way in which the immigrant Irish and the Irish-Americans used music (featuring the piano) as a means of negotiating identity and space in their new, urban, American environment. I also trace the gradual change in perceptions of the Irish by the predominantly Anglo-Saxon population, from an initially racist to a more favourable view, as the Irish became assimilated into mainstream American culture. In this respect, the music industry is a fruitful arena of investigation as the Irish participated in a number of contexts, ranging from vaudeville to Tin Pan Alley. The section culminates with an examination of the influence of the popular music ragtime - a piano music genre which linked the Irish and African-American populations on a number of levels. Many interesting social and cultural parallels are traced in this regard, particularly in terms of the appropriation of the piano by both groups to suit their own ends.

In chapter IV, I alter the focus of the thesis to reflect upon the micro or foreground stage - a stage which comprises an examination of the professional Irish
music scene in the 1920s, and of the 78rpm recordings made on the Eastern seaboard of America. With the spotlight on the piano and the piano accompanist, I look at both the live band scene as well as the sound recording industry, paying particular attention to the emergence of a distinctly ethnic ‘Irish’ recording category in the commercial market. Within this discussion, I examine a number of possible reasons for the addition of the piano to Irish dance music from a more practical and less theoretical point of view.

In chapter V, I deal primarily with the analysis of musical examples of selected accompanists. As well as examining these transcriptions, I endeavour to provide as comprehensive biographical coverage of these vampers as possible. I view this chapter as a true culmination and aural manifestation of all that had been discussed in previous chapters - that is, I give an insight into the use of piano as an accompaniment instrument in Irish traditional dance music. The 78rpm records from which I take the musical transcriptions are interpreted as microcosms of contemporary, urban American experience, as well as being musical chronicles.

Finally, the conclusion is a critical evaluation of both my approach and the essential crux of the thesis. It reiterates that the piano truly acted as a bridge on numerous levels when it was introduced to Irish dance music on record early this century. The piano is viewed as a mediator and link, on the most fundamental of levels, between Ireland and America, monophony and homophony, the rural and the metropolitan, Victorian ideals and modernity, traditional and popular music, and so on. Finally, I look at how this thesis has influenced my own style of piano accompaniment. Being a piano accompanist, I have always been curious about the piano’s introduction to the tradition. I acknowledge how this thesis has helped me to understand to what degree I am part of a distinct tradition and to what degree I am part of a distinct piano accompanist lineage.

My journey, then, is beginning. To paraphrase Bourdieu (1977:2), I have to bridge the gulf between the potential, abstract space that will constitute my thesis and the practical space of the journey to be undertaken. In this way I am able to physically experience the final contents of this very personal and academic endeavour. It seems
obvious that the first step in this process is to uncover the structure and meaning of Irish traditional dance music from its inception in its native context. This exploration provides a specific context and reference point for the rest of the thesis, in terms of helping me to understand and appreciate why the addition of piano accompaniment on 78rpm records seems so unusual from a purely aural standpoint. This, as part of many interrelated issues, constitutes the main point I tackle in chapter I.

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1 I never did get the name of that track at the time. However, I do feel that it might be the Coleman/Brennan 78rpm record I analyse in chapter V (see musical example no. 5.7.).
2 'Vamp' and 'vamping' are particularly pianistic terms used to describe the improvisatory act of accompaniment employed in a variety of musics, including Irish traditional dance music. Throughout the course of this thesis, the term 'vamp' is employed interchangeably with the term 'accompaniment', just as 'vamper' is with 'accompanist', 'vamping' with the act of 'accompanying', and so on.
3 I use the terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' keenly conscious of Dilethy's interpretation of 'traditional' as a process of scanning the past until we identify a perceived similar with the present (Bruner 1986:12). However, this still remains too non-specific a definition. The prefix 'traditional' is used to identify and differentiate the body of Irish dance music and sean nós songs from other forms of Irish music, or music made in Ireland. The term 'traditional' carries within its definition a distinct meaning and acknowledgement of coming from this body of indigenous folk music, song and dance that essentially belongs to the people. In this context it implies the non-literate nature of the music. There is also an implication that the repertoire can be traced back over a couple of hundred years. I chose to employ the terms 'tradition' and 'traditional' in this specific context because these are the very words and interpretations used by practitioners of Irish dance music. Using terms to describe a music that the practitioners themselves employ is an approach which Tim Rice advocates (1994). Further, these terms have always formed a natural part of my own vocabulary as a 'traditional', or 'trad' musician.
4 This term 'The Golden Era' refers specifically to the very prolific decade of the 1920s - part three in the five part model of the era delineated by William Healy in his doctoral thesis (1970) which is discussed in greater detail in chapter IV. This was a time when the production and consumption of Irish dance music recordings reached its apex. I am uncertain of the actual origins of the term but it is employed frequently by writers engaged in research in this era.
5 Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as explained in Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977) constitutes the domain of encoded practices or inherited set of rules. Habitus is composed of objective structures which are brought into play in context and reconfigured according to the constraints of this context. Thus habitus is not immutable but something dynamic which informs every act and decision at a fundamental and deeply personal level.
6 I employ the term 'native' in this context to show a point of origin and to locate a process or product which is perceived to originate from the island of Ireland. Throughout this work I use this term 'native' interchangeably with the term 'indigenous' in relation to a specific location and context.
7 It could be argued that Rice himself is indebted to some extent to the writings of Bordieu, especially in terms of the latter's exploration of the three modes of theoretical knowledge. Bordieu breaks down knowledge into the following components - primary (truth), and secondary (constructs objective realism). He proposed a further subdivision of this classification where the limits of objective knowledge are grasped in the context of an adequate science of practice (1977).
SECTION I

THE MACRO - BACKGROUND
IRISH TRADITIONAL DANCE MUSIC

Culture, Landscape, & Tradition

If musical compositions meant nothing more than tunes of sixteen bars long, Ireland could claim some of the greatest composers that have ever lived, for in their miniature form the best Irish folk tunes are gems of absolute flawless lustre.
(Ernest Walker 1952:30)

In the West, music without harmony is acceptable as long as it stays outside the mainstream.
(Bruno Nettl 1983:18)
In this chapter, I explore the origins of Irish traditional dance music, looking at its genesis as a means of understanding how this informs the musical structure. The original practice and function of Irish traditional dance music is also investigated, as well as its basic musical components, in an attempt to establish the fundamental character and sound of the music. I proceed by examining harmonic precedents within and outside of Irish dance music’s history. My aim is to establish whether the wholesale introduction of the piano on 78rpm recordings was a natural and predictable phenomenon, particularly in light the presence of harmony in the tradition today. However, before proceeding with this task, and in order to interpret and comprehend what happened in the past on these 78rpm records, I must first look to the present.

I spoke in the introduction of the concept of one’s *habitus*, those particular and unique set of life conditions within which an individual interacts within the world. Personal and shared experiences naturally inform all aspects of the individual’s life, and harmonic consciousness finds particular resonance within this scenario. In order to uncover the meaning of musical sounds created some seventy years ago, I need to be able to understand and appreciate the general harmonic consciousness both of the present, of my time and generation, and of my own individual harmonic experiences. These elements combine to form a personal musical and harmonic consciousness and, in turn, inform all aspects of my research. By doing this I hope, on one level, to minimise subjectivity and to ensure some degree of impartiality with regards to the musical judgements I make. Conversely, I am aware that I can never fully filter my conclusions to pure empirical and objective reasoning. I would not even want to. My own experiences will always prevent, in some way, complete objectivity. By acknowledging this, I hope to introduce the ‘I’ back into the equation as a tool of unique insight and as something which constitutes my experiences. I acknowledge that this approach can be problematic if one is too indulgent and puts the ‘I’ above everything else. Some sense of distance has to be retained while not denying the validity of the self. It is my hope that I strike this delicate balance in this thesis.

**Harmonic Consciousness**

An important issue I need to address is how people experience harmony today, and what the constituents of this experience are. There is in all of us an aspect of
musicianship that may be called forth depending on context, location, and circumstance. This is our harmonic consciousness. The level of development of harmonic consciousness in the past two to three decades among the general populous is often underestimated. This is especially true for people from the West, as the development of harmony is a particular achievement of Western music. According to Boyle and Radocy, authors of The Psychological Foundations of Musical Behaviour, harmony has become such an important aspect of Western musics that “people often respond to isolated melodies in terms of harmonic expectations” (Boyle and Radocy 1979:121). This is hardly surprising in light of the fact that we are now exposed to music, especially popular harmonised music, through the various aural media daily. While the vast majority of people in the Western world are not trained in the detailed workings of counterpoint and polyphony, people have developed a general awareness at an unconscious level that is surprising in its level of detail and recognition. Many people have the ability to recognise a song by the particular harmonic, or they are able to pinpoint the origin of a chord sequence in a new creation which has been borrowed from an old song. Such skills, often unconsciously learned, are not always readily acknowledged. More importantly, they appear to come from somewhere beyond the conventional teaching of harmony.

I suggest the following reason why people have adapted and developed these skills. The world today is full of noise. This fast-paced, volatile existence is cluttered with sounds of all kinds to the extent that the tolerance level for background interference has risen considerably in the past fifty years. A typical hotel reception is a suitable illustration. Ten different conversations occur simultaneously, telephones ring, computers click, the air conditioner swishes, and of course, piped music invariably sounds in the background. In this environment, people have learned to adapt by filtering out extraneous sounds and by focusing on the task at hand. One important result of this ability, something which has particular relevance for this thesis, is how the filtering process leads to the creation of the inactive or passive listener. The listener subconsciously picks up what he imagines he is not listening to or hearing. Igor Stravinsky laments how progress has promoted this sense of passivity:
Anyone living no matter where has only to turn a knob or put on a record to hear what he likes. Indeed, it is in just this incredible facility, this lack of necessity for any effort, that the evil of this so called “progress” lies...for one can listen without hearing, just as one can look without seeing. The absence of active effort and the liking acquired for this facility make for laziness...listeners fall into a kind of torpor. (Stravinsky 1958:248-9)

This addition of the passive component to an active and attentive listening processes results in a contemporary world that is saturated by sounds in general, and specifically by music and its harmonic component. Even the simplest advertisement on television uses a harmonised jingle to maximise reception of the message by a potential consumer. Virtually all the genres of music played on Western mainstream radio and television stations are of a harmonic orientation, from rock and pop, and classical to folk. Certain select unaccompanied musics may be heard also but these are very much in the minority. Never in the history of Western man (and, indeed, mankind worldwide where influenced by the West) has harmony been such an integral part of life. The net result is that, for the majority, music without harmony of some kind is increasingly perceived as somehow inaccessible or even unfinished. There is an increasing dependence upon harmony as an interpretative tool. As a natural extension of this, harmony has become a commercial necessity as a method of selling music to the saturated majority. Harmony is a cultural phenomenon that has become a cultural fact.

The main constituent of the general harmonic experience today is homophonic as opposed to polyphonic nature. A homophonic texture combines melody with a tertian harmonic framework and considers both the resultant horizontal and vertical dimension of the musical sound in one particular way. This consideration of vertical and horizontal may also be a facet of polyphonic music. However, unlike polyphony, homophony has two distinct constituents - a main melody and accompanying chords. In this way it might be argued that these two entities of melody and chord are more clearly delineated in homophonic music. Charles Hoffer, who has written on the subject of understanding music, states that harmony is the addition of “subordinate sounds to enhance the quality of the main sound” or melody (Hoffer 1971:10). With its capacity for the simultaneous sounding of many notes, the piano is an obvious
vehicle for the expression and practice of the homophonic experience. The piano not
only symbolises but physically embodies the very essence of Western Art music theory
and practice, being equal-tempered and fully chromatic. In particular, the diatonic
scale of this system - so clearly illustrated on this instrument by playing a C scale on
the white notes - has had far-reaching consequences for musical perception and
experience. Western Art music culture is so bound up with this all pervasive system
that any other systems are acculturated (if not usurped by it) when they come into
contact with it. Conventional harmony has become music's yardstick. As psychologist
John Sloboda concludes “music which conforms to the rules of diatonic tonal harmony
is much easier for western listeners to remember than is music which breaks these
rules” (Sloboda 1994:5).

This is the sound world I occupy. Being surrounded by the language and
syntax of popular musics (most of which have their roots in the Western Art music
tradition), Western Art music has had a profound bearing upon the development of my
harmonic vocabulary and consciousness. Within this larger matrix (constituting the
macro dimension of contemporary aural space) my own personal, micro experiences
reside. That is my habitus. As traditional Irish musician I am subject to the sounds of
Irish music. Often, my perception of something as being ‘in tune’ in one tradition
clashes with my perception of this phenomenon in another. For example, certain Irish
fiddlers employ a specific kind of intonation that renders the sound of vamping on an
equal-tempered piano out of place and distinctly at odds with traditional tuning.
Further, if I break down the constituents of my style of chordal accompaniments, I find
I do not following the ‘golden rules’ of harmony. My pianistic vocabulary frequently
includes parallel 5th’s and doubled 3rd’s. As for my engagement with the tradition as a
piano accompanist, I have never been quite sure where my style originated. I never
consciously listen to other practitioners of vamping in order to imitate and emulate
their styles. I have not been taught to accompany traditional music on piano in any
formal or informal manner. My formal piano training comes from a strictly classical
background. I engage with Irish tradition initially as a melody player and this may
have an influence upon my perception of harmony, as I see myself as coming from
within the tradition. Yet in another respect, my classical training must also inform my
approach. I am not alone in having these thoughts. Many piano accompanists are
well-versed in musical traditions outside of the Irish realm. Esteemed contemporary fiddler and piano vampir Charlie Lennon speaks of how he spent time “going through Bach and Beethoven and looking at the structure and learning about the whole series of harmony...and teaching (his) ear to recognise those and know where to put them”. Exposure to ‘classical’ music training in some form or another while simultaneously coming from a traditional background is quite typical for piano vamps. This seems to suggest that the piano assumes the role of a kind of bi-musical bridge spanning two (or more) distinct traditions. The next step, then, is to establish how long the piano has functioned in this manner as part of the dance music tradition.

**Harmonic Accompaniment in Irish Traditional Dance Music**

The piano was one of the first instruments employed for harmonic accompaniment to Irish traditional music on commercial recordings during the first few decades of this century. The guitar was similarly employed but to a lesser degree, as illustrated in Spottswood (1990) and Hamilton (1996). Gradually the piano’s influence spread to Ireland where American 78rpm records were disseminated and received with rapt attention in Irish homes. Many musicians in Ireland began to imitate the line-up of melody player(s) and accompanist featured on these records. This is especially true of the ceilidhe band which gained widespread popularity in Ireland during the 1930s and 1940s. Such bands were based on American counterparts such as ‘The Pride of Erin Orchestra’ and ‘Packie Dolan and His Melody Boys’. The piano was the cornerstone of the ceilidhe band. The piano’s harmonic constituent was obviously important. Moreover, the volume and percussive element supplied by the piano were vital in an era without amplification. The piano provided the basic beat for the dancers who had to strain to hear the music above the din created by their vigorous movements.

The ceilidhe band in Ireland was later usurped by the indigenous and touring dance bands of the 1950s-60s. The repertoires of these bands expanded to include popular and country music and their line-up changed accordingly, moving from the strictly traditional to feature a variety of non-traditional instruments. It was a hybrid which, according to Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, “wasn’t really going anywhere and which history has shown didn’t go anywhere”. These bands enjoyed a fleeting popularity but the encroaching popular music forms from America and England gradually displaced
them. Yet the temporary success of these bands was a clear indication of a the contemporary dissatisfaction with traditional Irish music. The music had been had been experiencing a gradual decline in popularity for quite a while and the public were looking for alternative sounds.

However, matters were soon to take an unexpected turn with a revival of Irish music in the 1970s. During this era, stringed accompaniment instruments such as guitar and the newly adopted and assimilated Greek bouzouki came into vogue. The use of stringed instruments for accompaniment in Irish music reflected part of a wider trend in folk revivals in many counties, including the United States and Britain. Their popularity was partly influenced by the growing use of guitars in rock and pop bands. By establishing links with such musical practices, stringed accompaniment instruments developed a particularly attractive image and symbolic value - in contrast, it might be said, to the rather staid piano. Emulation by up and coming musicians was a natural outcome of this trend. A growing number of bands fusing traditional music with other genres featured stringed instruments more and more frequently, as did the more conservative groups.

It seems that the piano was now somewhat passé in traditional music circles. There were a variety of interrelated reasons that contributed to this trend. The piano was still financially prohibitive for many. It also continued to maintain certain colonial associations that, in light of the indigenous folk revival, were currently undesirable. On a practical level it was simply too cumbersome to transport. The presence of a piano in every venue could not be counted upon, nor could the quality and tuning of the piano itself. Further, it was not particularly suited to the amplified situation of many performances. All in all, it seems that the piano had seen the last of its glory days in Irish traditional music.

When the keyboard instruments began to gain some ground once more in the 1980s it was in the form of the electric keyboard and synthesiser as opposed to the acoustic piano. Even today, the presence of a battery operated Yamaha keyboard is more common than a piano in an Irish pub session. In fact, very few venues even possess a piano. In the few establishments that do, the physical condition of the
instrument is often quite suspect. From a musical standpoint, stringed instruments and keyboard instruments can easily coexist in their roles as vehicles for harmonic accompaniment. Therefore, neither instrument has particularly gained the upper hand. Performance context is a key factor in determining what accompaniment instrument is featured. Indeed, in some cases both guitar and keyboard can be included in one session.

There are a variety of views held by contemporary musicians concerning the validity of the piano’s inclusion in the Irish music. Some traditional practitioners welcome the addition while others express complete abhorrence at its presence.\(^7\) This ambivalence towards the piano is not a new phenomenon and its roots can be traced right back to the 78rpm era (c. 1900-1953). In the 1960s, musician and composer Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971) spoke vehemently against the inclusion of the piano in Irish music. In reference to a recording by Michael Coleman (which he does not specify), Ó Riada argued that the piano, “far from enhancing his [Coleman’s] playing [was a] botch and a blemish on it”. Granted, Ó Riada was operating in a time when much of Irish musical activity was not particularly inspiring. He seems uncompromising on the issue, though, when he stated unequivocally:

The use of the piano to accompany traditional fiddle playing is unfortunately prevalent...this is a scar, a blight, on the face of Irish music and displays ignorance on the part of those who ‘allow’ or encourage it.
(Kinsella 1978:58-60)

In more recent times, fiddler and piano accompanist Charlie Lennon has recalled how he “learned to ignore” the vamping on Coleman 78 rpm records and “longed for the day when computers could be able to identify the harmonic content and remove it totally”.\(^8\) Such views as expressed by both men still linger today, not only in respect to the vamping on 78rpm records but also with regards to piano accompaniment in its present format. While many contemporary vampers are considerably more sensitive, the piano continues to occupy a precarious position in the tradition.
Yet piano accompaniment to Irish traditional dance music persists, as do other harmonic accompaniment instruments. It would seem, then, that harmony is here to stay. Certainly, the vast majority of commercial recordings of Irish music feature harmonic accompaniment of some kind. And yet the ‘other voice’, the solo tradition, maintains its profile. This betrays a disparity between the commercial and the amateur aspects of the ‘grass roots’ tradition. This is a crucial point, for such an incongruity appears even from the earliest days of Irish music recording. As an accompaniment instrument, the piano seems to operate as a bridge into the commercial arena. I will expand upon this important point in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Today, recordings of Irish music with harmonic accompaniment heavily outweigh those without. However, pub sessions regularly exclude harmonic accompaniment of any kind. This may occur because there is no piano present. More often, the musicians themselves want neither piano nor guitar (indeed any other stringed accompaniment) in their sound world. This implies that harmonic accompaniment, or even the percussive aspect of strumming or vamping, is not fundamentally necessary to the structure Irish music.9 I argue that an examination of the origins, practices, forms, and functions of Irish traditional dance music reveals this to be the case. Further, I will endeavour to reveal how the combination of Irish music’s original tonality, with the harmonic tonality of Western Art music, results in an incongruous match, both tonally and structurally. While contemporary ears have become used to the sound of Irish music with piano accompaniment, there are still many examples where this sound combination may grate the ear.10 Going back in the history of Irish music to a time before recordings, when the music was first conceived and practised, proves both compelling and necessary. This excursion offers insight into the reasons for certain jarring sounds on early 78rpm recordings.11

Music, Culture and Landscape

In his book The Anthropology of Music, Alan Merriam proposes that music is truly a social and behavioural construct, stating:
musical sound is the result of human behavioural processes that are shaped by the values, attitudes and beliefs of the people who comprise a particular culture. Human behaviour produces music...the behaviour itself is shaped to produce the sound, thus the study of one flows into the other.

(Merriam 1964:6)

This model is dynamic - socially constructed sound in a sonically constructed society, to paraphrase Blacking - and is now widely accepted. Taking matters a step further, I feel that Steven Feld's approach is also applicable. Feld uncovered much about the Kaluli people by looking at metaphors and expressions from within their culture. Together with the music, he employed these as a method of gaining an insight into much of what was outside the linguistic discourse in this society (Feld 1988). Extending these ideas to Irish dance music, then, I expect Irish music to demonstrate strong links with the social milieu, the cultural space, and indeed the landscape within which it was conceived. Musical systems, like languages, are more than organised sounds, syntaxes and vocabularies. They are examples and instances of the way a specific people understand and relate to the phenomenal world (Becker 1981).

By employing an approached shaped and influenced by these models, I gain an insight into the very essence of Irish traditional dance music. In turn, I use this to illustrate what happens when two musical systems come into direct contact with each other, namely Western Art music and Irish traditional dance music.

We are not, in fact, quite sure when traditional dance music emerged in Ireland. Some authorities date the practice of the music as far back as the 17th century, and even before. It is known, however, to have developed as a rural-based music of a predominantly agrarian society. Undoubtedly, this was the music of social interaction, enjoyment and escapism, a natural outlet for native Irish who were a colonised people under British imperial rule. While, as historian Nicholas Canny explains, the "picture of a dispossessed Gaelic rural proletariat eking out an embittered existence in smoke-filled cabins...is partial to say the least" (Canny 1991:159), there is some truth in this image. There was a decided religious and cultural polarisation between the Catholics who occupied the land and the Protestants who owned it. The activity of music making and dancing, then, must have been a holistic experience. It was very much a part of everyday life and an expression of identity in the predominantly Catholic rural...
communities. Many of the ruling class of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century had little interest in this native form of merry making. As George Petrie (1789-1866) points out in the foreword to his music collection, "they were insensible to its beauty for it breathed not their feelings, and they resigned it to those from whom they took everything else" (O'Neill 1973:102). It is possibly more true to conclude that the majority of the Anglo-Irish class did not come in much contact with the music, or when they did, simply did not understand its structure, meaning, or value.\textsuperscript{13}

The music's practical function was clearly one of accompaniment to the dance forms of the time. The music itself was, to a large degree, inseparable from the dance. Many of the popular forms that took root, such as the jig, reel and hornpipe, found their way to Ireland from other countries. These genres were absorbed, assimilated, and given a new and distinctly Irish flavour, both in terms of the dance patterns and the style and structure of the music itself. Breandan Breathnach (1912-1985), recognised as one of the foremost authorities on traditional music in Ireland, concluded that most Irish step dances were invented by the dancing masters in the last quarter of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century (Breathnach 1996:43). As a form of dance music, its rhythmic component was of paramount importance. Unless a stable tempo and clearly delineated beat was maintained, without too much melodic complexity and phrasing, the music could not fulfil its intended role.\textsuperscript{14} The blend was, and is still today, one of intricacy within a strict cycle. The regularity of beats in a typical reel or jig seems to attract the rhythmic component of the vamp. Yet the wayward melodic line twists and turns to defy being pinned down by any simple harmonic structure, in spite of this framework of a regular rhythmic pulse. Finally, in terms of performance practice during this era, the music was performed in solo or duet format. The styles and repertoires of musicians were defined and delimited by community boundaries. People less than ten miles apart often had completely different tunes pools and preferences for specific dances.

The rural womb which gave birth to this music was (and still is) reflected in the music's actual structure. As a monophonic tradition outside a harmonic consciousness, the music had an aurally open and spacious orientation. It was also a music based on the round or the circle, a structure, which reflects perhaps of the essential insularity of

25
rural Irish society up to the 20th century. Extend these observations to the landscape and many parallels can be drawn. In Our Music Heritage, Seán Ó Riada drew attention to the prevalence of the circle and spiral in Celtic designs - designs which are found in abundance in ancient manuscripts and on ancient artefacts and carvings [pl. 1.1]. Ó Riada explained this poetically by observing the snake curling round to swallow his tail in his mouth - “in my end is my beginning” - an image [pl. 1.2] which he himself felt represented the round15, or cyclic nature of dance music (Kinsella 1982:13).

On another, possibly less obvious level, this circularity could be equated with patterns of agricultural life - a life which was so bound up in the land and the ebb and flow of nature. The wayward orientation of the melodic line could equally represent the way the Irish are famed for speaking - in round-about poetic terms, meandering gradually towards a semblance of a point, eventually saying it obliquely and never in definitive terms. Reverend Henebry, an Irish music theorist and practitioner writing at the turn of this century, spoke of the differences between the Irish and English languages. He viewed this as “an exact parallel with the difference separating Irish music from vulgar music”. He went on to assert that Irish music was “both the accompaniment and complement of language” (Henebry c.1900:7-13). It seems natural to conclude that the structure and syntax of a language would inform the structure of a native music on some level.

Finally, an investigation of the actual tonality of Irish music shows itself to be particularly suited to the round. Traditional Irish dance music (particularly in the case of older tune), is more modal than diatonic in character.16 I argue that a modal tonality lends itself to circularity more readily than a major/minor type diatonicism. One need only listen to selections of old Irish dance tunes to hear their undoubted modal orientation. Many authorities on Irish music, including Breathnach (1996), Henebry (c.1900), Ó Canainn (1993) and Cowdery (1990), have tackled this issue. They have explored the connections between Irish music and Church modes, as opposed to classical diatonicism and chromaticism.
Spirals and circles on stone carvings from Towie, Grampian (right), and Newgrange, Co. Meath (above right). They decorate three bronze scabbards from Lisnacroghera, Co. Antrim (bottom, far right), and to their left, an enamelled bowl handle.

[Pl. 1.1]

Celtic spirals and circles (Zaczk 1995b).
Carpet Page from the Book of Durrow, c.675 AD (Zaczek, 1995a).
The modal sound world of Irish music seems to create a sense of nostalgia and continuity with the past – a more glorious past to which the conquered aspire. This emotive concept is represented in the Irish term *uaigncas*, meaning something more than mere loneliness or longing. It can be heard in much of the dance music (not just the slow airs) and it is described by some as the *neat* in a tune or song. *Sean Nós* singer Joe Heany traces this *neat* to the drone of the pipes – “natures accompaniment” as he terms it – and links this sound to the Irish lament (Cowdery 1990:36). Capt. Francis O’Neill talks about this sense of *uaigncas* (not the term he actually employs), in *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*, tracing its origins back to airs of ambiguous antiquity. He states:

> Even the most rapid Irish tune, when played in slow time, will be found to contain some lurking shade of pathos, and even to possess something of that melancholy luxury of sound which characterises our most ancient melodies. (O’Neill 1973:102)

Rev. Henebry was less interested in this sense of pathos and more concerned with the systematic investigation of scales in Irish music. Responding to a contemporary interest in pitch management and scalic organisation, Henebry’s studies were undertaken prior to the large scale commercial recording of traditional Irish music. As such they are very relevant in terms of establishing how Irish dance music actually sounded during this era. According to Henebry “the great body of our music is constructed on a scale where four of the intervals differ from the modern scale and three coincide with it” (c.1900:10).

In *Irish Music*, Henebry proceeded to explain the presence of four uniquely Irish scales in the native music and he showed how they differed from the diatonic and chromatic scales of Western Art music. He argued that the accidentals used in the representation of Irish music were inconsistent with what he described as the ‘Irish scale’ (by being out of tune by at least a quarter of a tone). He asserted, for example, that in a D scale in G mode, the F# should be played a quarter-tone lower and the C natural (also known as the flattened 7th) was more correctly located ¾ of a tone above B and ¾ of a tone below D. This change of two notes resulted in the difference of 4 intervals, illustrating Henebry’s theory of coincidence.
Breandan Breathnach, in his book Folk Music and Dances of Ireland, was similarly concerned with the fundamental structure of Irish music. He spoke of the flattened 7\textsuperscript{th}, the C natural as being a "highly decorative note, possessing several colours on the pipes" and agreed with Henebry on the location of this note between B and D (1996:14). Finally, piper and scholar Tomás Ó Canainn speaks about note frequency as a means of understanding modes and keys in Irish music. In particular, he refers to the high frequency of this flattened 7\textsuperscript{th} and the manner in which it is intoned (Ó Canainn 1993:33). In accepting these interpretations and explanations of the tonality of Irish music, it is easy to understand how the intonation of an equal-tempered instrument could cause quite a clash. While the intervals of the tempered scale on the piano are almost equal to those of the perfect or natural scale, when notes from the tempered scale are played simultaneously as opposed to successively, the differences are far more audible. This is especially true when the piano is employed to accompany Irish melodies using the scales proposed by Henebry. Obviously there are intonation problems. Further, this problem is compounded by the clash between modally constructed tunes and diatonic-based harmonic accompaniments.

In taking all of these issues into account it would seem that Irish dance music at the turn of the century and before was not particularly suited to the harmonic world of piano accompaniment. Nevertheless, it would be naive to imagine that Irish traditional music did not have any harmonic precedents and that prior to the first commercial recordings, it did not feature any kind of harmonic accompaniment, even from within the tradition. Further, conventional diatonic harmony may not have been a suitable addition to Irish dance music but this does not mean harmonic accompaniment was not employed. In fact, the two musical systems were regularly put together, especially outside the tradition, as I explore shortly.

**Harmonic Precedents within the Tradition.**

Harry Bradshaw contends that the piano made an appearance in the Irish traditional dance music tradition prior to 1900. Examining primary and secondary sources in the National Library, Dublin, in one instance Bradshaw discovered a newspaper clipping from the turn of the century referring to a concert of traditional music in the Sligo region, Bunanadden, in the late 1890s. Apparently an unexpectedly
large contingent of musicians turned up to take part in this particular event. In order to accommodate all of the musicians, the concert had to be extended to two venues. It seems particularly interesting that the organisers of this event had no difficulty in finding piano players to feature in both venues. Not only were two actual pianos available, then, but two piano players were easily accessed, which would imply that there was a practice of piano playing in the area. While Bradshaw concedes that events of this content and nature appear to be rare in historical records, this article does have implications for the perception of the presence and role of the piano in Irish music prior to 1900.

I also conclude that such performances were the exception rather than the rule. Sligo, the nearest town to the Bunanadden area, was a garrison town, and it had a strong military presence. Therefore, it is more than probable that it boasted a military band. If this was so, the teaching of Western music was undoubtedly nurtured, and players of various non-traditional instruments, including piano, were present. An interesting angle on the phenomenon of garrison towns comes from Micheál Ó Súilleabháin. He remarks that during his youth, to play traditional music in his home town of Clonmel (also a garrison town) resulted in the perception of being “different” and “from outside the walls”.19 While many towns around Ireland had garrison status at one stage or another during their history, it seems that military music had had little impact on the traditional musicians of the surrounding rural communities. In light of Ó Súilleabháin’s comment, the seeming lack of welcome for traditional musicians in the town (except for fairs, perhaps?) seemed to discourage any sense of reciprocity or mutual influence between the two music worlds. Yet it is interesting to muse whether Sligo fiddlers Michael Coleman and Paddy Killoran were influenced by such military practices and whether this whetted their appetites for the inclusion of the piano on their 78rpm recordings.20

Looking back even further in time, one can see other possibilities for harmonic precedents from within the Irish music tradition. The art music of Ireland found its expression through the Irish harp. The harp can be dated back as far back as the 12th century and most probably even earlier than that. We know from records and artwork from various sources that plucked stringed instruments were certainly employed quite
a few centuries before the 12th century. The harpist or cruitire occupied an honoured place in Gaelic political and cultural life. His music making was highly prized, but it was also non-literate. Much of the Irish harp repertoire and harping techniques have been lost in time. Nonetheless, research in this area conducted at different stages by Joan Rimmer (1977), Gráinne Yeats (1992) and others, combine to build up a picture of the nature of this ancient tradition, supplementing and challenging the information in the publications of collector Edward Bunting (1773-1843).21

Taking the 14th century Brian Boru Harp as a model for discussing the harp’s structure, its morphology demonstrates the capacity for harmonic accompaniment. Informed speculations made by harping scholars mentioned above suggest that harmony or accompaniment of some kind was clearly possible. This deduction can be made from the layout of the strings which allow for the simultaneous playing of a melody and, at the very least, a drone. Certainly, later harpers of the 17th and 18th century explored this resource, particularly the composer Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738). O’Carolan composed numerous pieces, many of which have survived up to today in printed collections. Dublin was quite a centre for Baroque musical activity at the time and O’Carolan was highly influenced by this genre. Harpers of his time and later adapted themselves to the new social conditions brought about by the destruction of the clan system, by concentrating on popular verse and music in the folk style, as well as seeking other patrons. O’Carolan’s compositions in particular demonstrate a decidedly Baroque influence in terms of musical vocabulary, implied harmonic outlines, certain stylistic features, and choice of compositional forms [ex. 1.1]

To what degree original harp music from the middle ages could have impacted on folk music is impossible to tell. The work of O’Carolan, while popular with the bourgeois class in urban centres, certainly did not impact upon the rural practitioners of traditional dance music. In fact, much of this music only became popular during the middle of this century - that is, through it revival and exposure by Seán Ó Riada.22 For the most part, the Irish harp’s musical practices remain frustratingly elusive. While not strictly part of the folk tradition, at least until the revival of this century in the sixties, the harp was still an important source of musical expression and would have had some influence on the collective musical consciousness of the nation centuries ago.
A more convincing precedent from within the tradition comes in the form of the uilleann or union pipes. The uilleann pipes are a distinctly Irish form of the bagpipes and emerged from an older mouth blown pipe tradition about the beginning of the 18th century. Seen as the most Irish of instruments and coming deep from within the tradition, the pipes have an undeniable claim to the shaping of the dance music tradition. Henebry, Breathnach, and Ó Canainn all conclude that the pipe’s chanter best demonstrates the musical reality of what is termed the ‘Irish scale’. Henebry notes how he “conceived rightly that the chanter of the Irish bag-pipes must sound the Irish scale” (11). Both the C natural and F natural, the prominent notes of this Irish tonality, are obtained by cross fingering and are, according to Breathnach “are two highly coloured notes in piping which if sounded by the key entirely lose their tingling effect” (3). Ó Canainn discusses the influence of this instrument on the shape and nature of Irish music in terms of style and sound. In the case of the former, he deals with how elements of style have a direct impact on the sound produced - for instance, he explains how popping a note changes the “harmonic content” giving it a “quite distinctive sound relished by pipers” (86). With regards to the latter, Ó Canainn argues that a D scale played on the chanter embodies the tonality of Irish music. The pipes, then, seem to embody the characteristics of Irish music in much the same way that the piano epitomises Western Art music. Interestingly, the only other instrument Ó Canainn concedes as to having an impact on the tradition is the fiddle. This instrument, of course, is capable of microtonal inflection and is thus able to pick up and imitate the sound created by the pipes (91).

The uilleann pipes originally consisted of a chanter, two drones, bag and bellows up to the 18th century. O’Farrell’s piping book mentions one in a set around 1800 but esteemed piper and piping scholar Jimmy O’Brien Moran, feels that the first regulator was present since about 1792, with the full set of two established by about 1905. The modern pipes have seen the further addition of a third drone and three regulators. The melody is played on the chanter. Though the chanter can be constructed to be fully chromatic through the addition of extra keys, such keys are not absolutely necessary.
1ST SCALE.

Diatonic:
D E F# G A B C d

Chromatic:
D E F# G A B C C# d

This scale has three modes or endings, the D, the G, and the A:
thus:
D E F# G A B C d
G A B C d e F g
A B C d e F g a

2ND SCALE.

Diatonic:
G A b C d e F g

Chromatic:
G A b b C C# d e F F g

It has only one mode in G. This corresponds in pitch to the G mode of the 1st Scale.

[Fig. 1.1]

Henebry's 1st scale in diatonic form illustrates how the intervals between E and F#, F# and G, B and C, and C and d of the Irish scale differ from those of the conventional diatonic scale. By using different fonts or sizes for the F# and C, he illustrates his theory of interval coincidence (Henebry, 32).

[Fig. 1.2]

This diagram illustrates the harmonic capacity of the uilleann pipes (Breathnach, 75). The regulator keys may be struck by the side of the lower hand when both hands are involved in playing the tune on the chanter. When the lower hand is completely freed from the chanter at certain times during a melody then the fingers of this hand may be employed to press more keys, creating a fuller sound. This is a particularly effective technique for slow airs.
There is a story that this composition (O’Sullivan 1958, 245) came into being as a result of a certain rivalry between Carolan and an Italian musician, possibly Geminiani. Carolan was highly influenced by the Italian masters and this tune displays many Baroque characteristics including the presence of large intervallic jumps (bars 19, 21, & 24), long runs (bars 25 & 30), and use of imitation (bars 9-11, & 20). Bunting commented on the immediately perceptible “imitations of Corelli” in Carolan’s compositions which he believed were “happily copied” by Carolan.
The basic six finger holes and one thumb hole suffice for most tunes from the repertoire. Three drones sound an unchanging D accompaniment. The tenor drone is tuned to the bottom note of the chanter, the baritone one octave below, and the base drone a further octave below that. Whether drones of this nature constitute harmony when played against a melody is a question of interpretation. As for the regulators, at this stage it is sufficient to say that they are arranged on the pipes in such a manner that simple chords can be played by the side palm of the lower hand while the fingers of the same hand simultaneously play upon the chanter holes. Figure [1.2] shows the layout of the keys and the pitches involved. An examination of the diagram reveals that chord possibilities are quite complex, especially if the lower hand becomes free during the execution of a tune.

Ó Canaínn argues that the addition of regulators was simply a move to please 19th century ears and that in fact, in general, they are "unsuitable accompaniment for the highly sophisticated melodic tradition" associated with the pipes (83). It is not clear to whose 19th century ears Ó Canaínn is referring but unfortunately he does not clarify further. Breathnach is also concerned with the regulators, speaking of their overuse today "more as rhythmical than harmonic accompaniment" (76). This is an interesting comment as one wonders whether the regulators were used for harmonic or percussive reasons. In A River of Sound: The Changing Course of Irish Traditional Music, Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin refers to an accordion player from south Kerry named Ó Dálaigh who employed the bass buttons in his accordion as percussion against the dance melody. The harmonic sound produced might be described, according to Ó Súilleabháin, as 'tonal clusters', with no distinct tonal centre (1994). Perhaps this was an approach employed by certain players in the case of the uilleann pipes. Yet it is interesting to note that some uilleann pipes do not have regulators, or even drones for that matter. Further, many pipers with a complete set of pipes will refrain from using the regulators - part of the instrument which often remains redundant. This is not a rare phenomenon. Many instruments used in specific traditions may have a greater tonal capacity and chromatic range than required by the music in question. Nevertheless, much of the musical output in such traditions and on such instruments remains unchanged, in spite of this inherent potential. This is especially true of pentatonicism - and pentatonic tunes are found in abundance in Irish dance music.
Bense Szabolcsi, who has done much work on the history of melody shares this view. He states that "the instruments of any pentatonic region...flutes and pipes in India, Mongolia, Melaneisa and Transdandbia are used for pentatonic music, although they are all capable of producing more notes" (Szabolcsi 1965:29). In Ireland, perhaps Szabolcsi's idea can be extended not only to the chromatic keys of the pipes but also to regulator use. Once again it seems that the solo voice is sufficiently pleasing, being complete and autonomous in its own right. Gradually the pipes, like many instruments, were subjected to the sonorous strait-jacket of concert pitch, especially as group playing emerged. As a result uilleann pipe sets which were originally pitched somewhat lower than concert pitch (referred to as flat sets) are less widely available.

To conclude, long before the first recordings, instruments such as the harp and the uilleann pipes demonstrated certain harmonic capabilities. The past century has seen the growing popularity of such fixed pitch instruments as the button accordion which holds an esteemed place in the tradition but is a more recent addition and hence not as relevant to the form of Irish dance music in the 18th and 19th centuries. In the case of the harp, harmonic accompaniment might have been in the guise of open 5ths, which are tonally ambiguous. The pipes too may have avoided this blatant sounding to the 3rd, hence not harmonically pinning down a tune to a specific key. This type of sound or harmonic accompaniment, which I like to call diffused tonality because of its reluctance to commit to a specific key, can be linked back to language and landscape. It may be interpreted as representing laconic verbal expression of Irish language syntax. It can even, if I am allowed to indulge in some lyricism, be construed as reflecting the luminescent quality and the softness of the Irish light. This influence of language and landscape, in particular, on music is a key concept which will be explored in greater detail in chapter three - a chapter where Irish traditional music is found in an environment quite foreign from its origins.

**Harmonic Precedents from Outside the Tradition**

While there is evidence for some harmonic capacity from within the tradition, there were also harmonic precedents from outside the tradition, within the island of Ireland but from a different cultural source. This influence came in the guise of the works published by Romantic collectors such as Edward Bunting (1773-1843), George
Petrie (1789-1866), Thomas Moore (1779-1852) and others. The motives for the production and publication of these collections varied from genuine preservation for altruistic reasons, to those spurred by economic reward gained through the commodification of cultural products from impoverished rural Ireland. For the printers and publishers of such music, the target audience was clear - the bourgeois, urban dwellers who had the money and the inclination to purchase such products. This amateur audience and social elite comprised principally of members from successive generations of the first settlers in Ireland. It was also made up of Englishmen who made their mark during the reign of Elizabeth and James I, some landowners of Scottish descent, and others of Anglo-Norman and Gaelic origin (Foster 1991:158). Amongst this class one characteristic was virtually universal - a profession of the Protestant faith (Hogan 1966:xiv). From a social, economical, political and cultural point of view, this group was quite separate from the indigenous Irish.

In this respect, the gathering of music from the native Irish had a tinge of imperialism about it. It was collected, even taken from a source without any sense of reciprocity as such collections rarely made their way back to the informants. The gathering of information was often done in a careless manner. Many collectors disregarded sources, names, and even associated texts - especially if there were in the Irish language. Once collected, the music went through a specific pre-publication process. It was first written down in staff notation and in a manner that made it conform to a western mode of musical representation, despite the fact that certain tune structures were obviously at odds with this form of notation. Basically, few if any accommodations were made to suit the nature of the Irish air.

The famous collector Thomas Moore of the original version of Moore’s Melodies (1807) was one of the main agents in this process of altering music to conform with Western Art music principles. Charles Stanford, who published a revised edition of Moore’s Melodies in 1895, is full of criticisms of such practices. In particular, Stanford refers to the song No. 19 ‘Silent O Moyle’. He bemoans the fact that, “Moore destroyed the character of the tune and obliterated its scale by sharpening the seventh” [ex. 1.2]. As can be seen from the music, Stanford also included piano arrangements in his edition [ex. 1.3].
SILENT, OH MOYLE! BE THE ROAR OF THY WATER.

Mournfully.

Silent, oh Moyle! be the roar of thy water, Break not, ye breezes, your chain of repose, While murmuring mournfully, Lir's lonely daughter,

* To make this story intelligible in a song would require a much greater number of verses than any one is authorized to inflict upon an audience at once; the reader must therefore be content to learn in a note, that Fionnuala, the daughter of Lir, was by some supernatural power transformed into a Swan, and condemned to wander for many hundred years over certain lakes and rivers in Ireland, till the coming of Christianity, when the first sound of the Mass-bell was to be the signal of her release.—I found this fanciful fiction among some manuscript translations from the Irish, which were begun under the direction of that enlightened friend of Ireland, the late Countess of Moira.

[ Ex. 1. 2 ]

The inclusion of the g# in Moore's version not only changes the mood of this air but actually alters its tonality from distinctly modal to very much in the key of A minor. Note the difference when the g# is omitted and the melody retains its original modal orientation as in Stanford's version found overleaf [ex. 1. 3]. However, while Stanford's criticism of Moore's arrangement may be justifiable on this particular point, Stanford does little else to maintain the authenticity of this air with his frequent inclusion of chromaticisms in the piano accompaniment part (including g#s). Moreover, the arrangement is very much in a Western Art music format, complete with directions in Italian, dynamics, slurs, and various other literate conventions.
Larghetto con moto.

VOICE.

PIANO.

Silent, oh Moyle, be the

chain of repose; While, murmuring mournfully, Lir's lonely daughter

tells to the night-star her tale of woes. When shall the swan, her

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[Ex. 1.3]

Stanford's version of 'Silent, Oh Moyle'
An expansive subtitle to the collection boasts how the "Original Airs" have been "Restored & Arranged for the Voice with Piano Accompaniment". This was not a rare occurrence. Many collections were published with piano accompaniment, and the reasons for their inclusion varied. Marketing strategies were employed to attract literate musicians who would generally have been trained on piano. Publishers were attempting to elevate the status of the music and make it attractive to the bourgeois. This desire to give music greater value and esteem through the addition of harmony is a common occurrence in musics throughout the world. In Ireland, the piano was not only representative of wealth and prestige, but from a musical point of view it represented a specific kind of culture, one so bound up with practices in Western Art music.

Instrument making and music publishing were important facets of Anglo-Irish musical life. Pianos were made by a number of talented craftsmen. One of the earliest keyboards was produced by William Southwell in Dublin in 1792. Other piano makers of the time included, Kelly, Nash, Murdoch, Sheridan and Boston, Cooke, Warren, Woffington, and these were only craftsmen who concentrated on keyboard instruments. Many other instrument makers, too numerous to mention, also included piano production as part of their output in the various urban centres around the country. Obviously, it was only the rich, namely the Ascendancy, who could afford to purchase such instruments. Pianos abounded in the urban dwelling of the upper classes as well as the country estates of the landed gentry. In this way they clearly marked the divide between the higher and lower echelons of society. Pianos were political, cultural and social symbols, representative of everything the ruling class possessed and the indigenous Irish did not.

Within the upper class context, the piano marked a further divide - this time one between the sexes. Music-making was a particularly female pursuit in Anglo-Ireland. Skilled demonstrations at the keyboard not only reflected their musical ability. They also symbolised the attainment of societal poise and polish. But, besides musical competency, a female was also expected to excel in other such delicate pursuits including embroidery and painting. Such activities were known collectively in Ireland
as "the graces" and they functioned as a badge and marker of a female's position in high society. The piano, then, played an integral part in the cultivation of proper manners by a young lady and thus possessed a potent symbolism that could be tapped into by commercial concerns such as music publishers.

Outside its symbolic trappings, and from a purely musical standpoint, the inherent characteristics of the piano made it entirely unsuitable for native melodies. Its harmonic element limited and pinned down the melody by employing either the major or minor scale, which resulted in less variation. The fixed pitch left no room for subtlety or dealing with the 'Irish scale'. The regular pulse of the vamp organised the basic motor rhythm of the dance structure into fixed patterns. This often proved at odds with the phrasing of the tune which itself could be quite irregular. In this way, the piano seemed to be more a harmonic and rhythmic constraint, demonstrating a lack of musical empathy. Conventional staff notation and, where applicable, the homophonic format, adopted by collectors and publishers were entirely at odds with the native sound. Classical tonality and harmony usurped the inherent structural elements of Irish music. In other words, when the syntax of Irish music was seen to be at odds with the newly imposed harmonic component, it was the melody which was changed to fit the harmony, not visa versa as one might expect. In light of his assertion concerning Irish tonality, it is hardly surprising that Henebry was open in his criticism of the musical arrangements of such collections. Henebry felt many of these collections were unsympathetic to the essence and sound of Irish music, stating that "all of those collectors used the modern staff notation unchanged and subjected their tunes to the whole economy of playing. In reality what they did was to report the Irish interval accurately, where it chanced to coincide with the modern and where it did not to substitute the nearest modern interval"(c.1900: 9-10). Szabolesi might very easily have been speaking specifically on Irish music when he stated the following:

The diatonic differs from all earlier styles not only in character and structure but also because it was written down and preserved in writing. In any culture, the adoption of written records is known to cause a deep crisis, and the slash of opposing forces...what was unusual was that the codifiers of melody were outsiders in time and space and clarified the issues objectively at a much later date. (1965:39)
This is interesting in light of the fact that much of this collected music came to represent a growing nationalist tendency among the upper classes. The dance music component of many of these collections accounted for less of the content than might be expected - Petrie's collection has seventeen dance tunes out of a total of one hundred and forty seven numbers. In fact, harp melodies and old song airs proved far more appealing to publishers, particularly when words were added as in Moore's collection. Where dance music was published it rarely retained its original format. Here, too, piano accompaniment was invariably featured as the following dance tune of Petrie's 1855 collection reveals. “A Munster Jig” [ex. 1.4] demonstrates the inevitable incongruities that appear when this type of dance music is arranged in such a manner.

Not only were tunes published in this manner but also Anglo-Irish composers adapted old Irish tunes to a medley format when composing for Western Art music audiences. As one unnamed critic of the time states, musical compositions of this potpourri style possessed “neither melody nor harmony, but a want of both” (Hogan 1966:94). Again, this seems to imply that adapting ancient Irish melodies to a Western Art music harmonic framework was not an easy task. Yet this type of approach to musical composition was happening, and for more than mere musical reasons. The obsession with the past - as betrayed by the proliferation of words such as 'ancient' and 'antiquity' in the titles of many collections (Bunting's Ancient Irish Music 1796), and by the appearance of indigenous melodies in classical compositions - could be seen as a search for “validation of a specific national experience” as part of the Ascendancy dilemma of identity (Foster 1991:189). Yet this type of nationalism excluded the concerns of the Catholic majority. The freedom longed for was an Ireland for the upper class. The Nationalist ideals of this stratum of society were anti-English but unashamedly Protestant. Even the native music could not avoid being appropriated to help achieve or at least espouse these political goals in an almost nostalgic fashion, as seen in the soft nationalistic tones of Moore’s lyrics which proved hugely popular both at home and abroad.
The following old Munster jig was set by Mr. P. Joyce in 1852, from the whistling of Michael Dineen, a farmer at Coolfree, in the parish of Ardpatrick, and county of Limerick: and it had been learnt in his youth by Dineen, from the playing of James Sheedy, a celebrated Munster piper, who died, a very old man, more than thirty years ago. It is, as I conceive, a tune very strongly marked with a true old Irish character; and though, probably, it is only known now as a dance-tune, its emphatic gravity of sentiment, as well as its peculiar rhythmical accentuation, incline me very much to believe that, like many of our finest dance-tunes, it had a march origin. I regret to add that Mr. Joyce was unable to ascertain its name. As will be perceived, this air belongs to that class of dance-tunes commonly known as single jigs, and of which I have given a description at page 64 of the present volume.

\[ Ex. 1.4 \]

The flattened 6th and the raised 7th in this arrangement place the tune in a tonal realm foreign to its origins. The tune's original tonality obviously proved incompatible with Petrie's understanding of the key in this context and so he chose to write it down in D minor, which the key signature and frequency of the C# illustrate. Petrie does include B naturals from bars 13 onward which hint at the tune's original sound, but in bar 21 he makes sure to re-establish Bb and restore the key, compounding this intent by ending the tune with a resounding C# to D. The C# to D movement proves particularly incongruous in bars 17-19, variations of bars 9-11. Replacing the C# with a natural C gives an insight into how the tune was probably played originally. As a final comment, note once again the use of Western Art music conventions such as slurs, dynamics, etc., in this arrangement.
Conclusion

Within this world of politics and commerce was traditional music's first main encounter with the Western Art music. It was not only a meeting of two disparate music systems, but also of traditional music and capitalism, and traditional music and nationalism, all of which would have far-reaching consequences. The native music was mediated by the piano within a limited cultural, political and musical sphere. This happened on essentially unequal terms, being outside the realm of the traditional practitioner. The vast majority of the native practitioners of dance music were not literate and even if some were, such collections had little impact on them. As for the bardic harp tradition, it was all but extinct. In fact it would be safe to say that until the 20th century, very little of the harp music was heard by the general public (Yeats 1992: 79).

The piano itself was not particularly suited to Irish traditional dance music - not only for economic and cultural reasons, but also from a purely musical point of view. In the Anglo-Irish situation, this unsuitability for musical reasons seemed to take second place to those motivated by political and economic concerns. However, if in Ireland, Irish music and the piano did not meet on an equal footing, America would prove a somewhat different stage. The interfacing of two musical systems in North America had a different outcome. The American piano culture found proved more conducive to the blending of sounds - its cultural, sociological, and economic matrix providing a set of conditions that had interesting musical implications. While the piano was, once again, the mediator, in this case it was from an aural perspective. Literate collections continued to be written and, indeed, the likes of O'Neill's 1001 Gems proved very popular. This time, however, it was through the medium of the record and the radio that harmony and piano accompaniment gained ground within the Irish music tradition, at least from a commercial aspect.

Long before the first recordings, the piano ceased to be simply a musical instrument and started to take on a symbolic importance. While this symbolic value existed in the Anglo-Irish situation, it was limited and did not impact upon the population at large, and hence the music was not unduly affected. However, the piano's symbolic nature developed a greater potency for America's citizens, which
included the immigrant Irish. While the piano did not have any real chance of belonging to the indigenous aural tradition in Ireland for economic and social reasons, emigrant practitioners of the transplanted tradition in the USA had a chance to embrace it. To a limited degree, this happened on Irish terms, as conscious attempts were made by the Irish to embrace the piano. However, the story is a complex one as there was some inevitably about this Irish gravitation towards the piano in America. In fact, any deliberate avoidance of the powerful presence and influence exerted by this instrument would have been exceedingly difficult, as the following chapters reveal.

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1 I chose this word ‘history’ deliberately as opposed to ‘development’ or ‘evolution’, for both of these words carry the implication in this context that the music is somehow incomplete or not fully formed.

2 As mentioned in the introduction, the works of Timothy Rice, Kenneth A. Gourlay, and John Morgan O’Connell, were particularly influential in helping me formulate this approach.

3 These comments come from an interview I conducted with Charlie Lennon in Dublin 1995 as part of my undergraduate dissertation research.

4 Stories abound of people in parishes all over Ireland congregating in the house of a neighbour who possessed a turntable in order to listen to the latest offering from America. According to Harry Bradshaw (1992), people would go without food or other necessities in order to purchase the latest record.

5 The ceilidhe or ceili band refers to a particular line up of instrumentalists (and sometimes singers) who played for ceilidhes or dances in various venues. The first ceilidhe band was formed in London late last century. This band and Irish-American dance bands became models for bands in Ireland. The typical line-up included drums, piano, accordions, fiddles, banjos, and sometime singers. In Ireland of the 1950s, many bands, in imitation of their American counterparts, embraced non-traditional instruments (such as the saxophone) and moved from exclusively traditional repertoires to include popular music songs. These dance bands died out and today the ‘ceilidhe band’ refers specifically to a band format of around ten musicians which invariably includes the following instrumentation - drums, piano, one or two reed instruments such as the button accordion or concertina, a selection of stringed instruments such as the fiddle and the banjo, and wind instruments such as the flute. All of these instruments are recognised as ‘traditional’ in this context.

6 These comments come from a personal interview conducted with Micheil Ó Súilleabháin, Cork 1995, as part of my undergraduate dissertation.

7 This has been my experience of playing the piano in sessions or playing flute in sessions where someone else was vamping on the piano. Views on piano accompaniment often tend to be quite vehement. I cannot isolate any particular age group that solely champions or dismisses the piano’s inclusion in Irish music. Certainly some older musicians like having piano accompaniment as a psychological crutch, whereas younger musicians maintain that they chose the piano solely for the ‘lift’ and energy it imbues in the music. Conversely, many older musicians are antipathetic towards the piano having been subjected to suspect piano accompaniment on 78rpm recordings, while some younger musicians view the piano as unfashionable, opting for guitar or bouzouki instead.

8 Personal interview with Charlie Lennon, Dublin, April 1995.

9 I accept, of course, that many Irish dance music tunes are harmonically influenced from their conception, especially contemporary ones. However, the majority of the repertoire dates back well over fifty years and thus, in light of what is discussed later in the chapter, would not have used harmony as a means of structuring a composition.

10 It is interesting to compare Irish music with such traditional musics as found in the Shetland Islands or Cape Breton where the piano plays an integral role - see Elizabeth Doherty’s 1996 Ph.D. thesis of the fiddling tradition of Cape Breton.
The distinction I am making, thus, is between the major/minor scale. This is to limit its academic connotation positing this view has yet to be published or even formally acknowledged. This round in Irish music, arguing that the term is a construction, a post-modern label. However, there was a number of Anglo-Irish who played the uilleann pipes. These players were known as “gentlemen pipers” during the 17th and 18th centuries. They played dance tunes and airs and even published collections of piping music. However, as many dance tunes find their origins in slow airs or songs, I would conclude that many of the melodic lines from these rich sources demonstrate particular complexities. In this way, such tunes differ from dance tunes composed from scratch with the dance steps in mind, and not adapted from another genre.

There is considerable scholarship in this area, supporting the concept of the round, including numerous works by Ó Riada and more recently Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, as well as the M.A thesis by Johnny McCarthy (1998). There is also an informal school of thought which disputes the idea of the round in Irish music, arguing that the term is a construction, a post-modern label. However, an academic contribution positing this view has yet to be published or even formally debated.

I use the term ‘diatonic’ here to represent the major or minor scale, as opposed to the chromatic scale. This is to limit its usage and avoid confusion as it may well be argued that a mode is itself diatonic. The distinction I am making, thus, is between the major/minor diatonic structure, and a modal one. The former comprises of a distinct hierarchy of tones and I hence visualise its structure as more of a pyramid. The latter seems more tonally ambivalent, and so I assert that this quality of undefinedness lends itself to a more circular feel.

 Granted, this conclusion may be reached more through retrospective analysis as the modal system was superseded by the major/minor one. But the question of perspective is an interesting one. Today, perhaps there is more of a sense of locating modal sounds in the past, attributing them with an ‘antique’ effect and affect. It may be that this same sense of age was not felt at the turn of the century. Then again, perhaps it was and this was something which traditional musicians sought to hold onto.

Personal communication with Harry Bradshaw, 1994.

Interview with Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, Cork, April 1995.

In my interview with Harry Bradshaw, he revealed that Bun naMadden was the heartland of the Sligo fiddling style. In another newspaper clipping dated around 1910, the reporter spoke of a dance where Coleman was in attendance and at which he performed, both as a fiddler and dancer. Again, a piano was featured. Amid this sea of traditional fiddlers, piano accompanists were available. This would indicate that Coleman was already exposed to the instrument. But to what degree the vamping technique used here differed from vamping in America one can only speculate. At the very least, Coleman would have been aware of the possibilities of piano backing.

Edward Bunting was commissioned by the organisers of the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792 to transcribe the tunes played by the handful of competitors at the event. Bunting published these and other tunes in three collections in 1796, 1809 and 1840. In spite of a certain amount of tampering with tune arrangements, these publications are of great significance as they preserve elements of the ancient harping tradition and repertoire that essentially had been lost.

Ó Riada accessed this repertoire through Donal O’Sullivan’s extensive book on the life and works of Turlough O’Carolan. More recent contributions to this area of study include Colette Moloney’s Ph.D. thesis on the manuscripts of collector Edward Bunting (1995).

The other main carrier of the traditional repertoire has been the fiddle - an essentially fixed-pitch instrument which can intone the Irish scale easily. The flute is also capable of certain nuances when a crossing technique is employed (instead of using chromatic keys which may be present). Fixed pitched instruments such as the free reeds (button accordion, concertina, etc.) did not really come into
vogue until late last century and early in this century. This is further proof, perhaps, that the tonality of Irish music is inextricably bound up with instruments capable of different shades of intonation.


25 As mentioned earlier, many pipers of this time were well-to-do musicians of Anglo-Irish heritage, often referred to as gentlemen pipers. Perhaps they were attempting to bridge the gap between the Irish and the European traditions by using the regulators in the same way that the piano was employed at a later date. This lead to an interesting fusion of precedents from within and outside of the tradition.

26 See Maire O’Keeffe’s doctoral work-in-progress - The Role of the Button Accordion in Irish Traditional Music, University of Limerick.

27 See Micheál Ó Súilleabháin’s comments in “Féach an Ghléas” from Donal O’Sullivan’s edition of the Bunting Manuscripts of 1840.
THE SYMBOLIC PIANO
From Parlour to Podium – Victorianism to Modernism

More than any Western instrument, the piano is a machine...no other Western instrument, it seems is so charged with...social associations.
(Steve Whiting 1985: 51)

The universal gift or habit of playing the piano, or playing at piano music, in America is undeniable.
(Louis C. Elson 1904:279)
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The Piano as a Symbol

An understanding of the symbolic nature of the piano informs every aspect of this thesis, especially regarding the piano’s initial appearance in Irish dance music on commercial recordings. While numerous works have been written dealing with the piano as a social, cultural, political and economic symbol in general, my intention here is to ground these ideas specifically in the American and Irish-American context. It is my aim to explain why the piano was added to recorded Irish dance music in early 20th century America. While I have drawn from a number of sources, the following chapter draws from one book in particular, Arthur Loesser’s *Men, Women and Pianos: A Social History* (1954). There are numerous other books to which I am indebted for supplemental historical information including *The Piano in America 1890-1940* by Craig Roell (1989), and Michael Channan’s chapter on the piano in his expansive book on the history of Western Art music (Channan 1994). Finally, Helene La Rue’s article on musical instruments and social identity proved quite helpful (1994). It is my aim to develop the ideas of these writers, in order to provide a more focused and detailed discussion of this topic in an Irish-American context, as found in subsequent chapters. I will show that the piano was truly a polyvalent symbol in early 20th-century America.

From the early decades of the 20th century, America became a significant powerhouse of innovation in Irish traditional dance music. This was in part achieved through the inclusion of piano, a high profile instrument of the time, on 78rpm recordings of Irish music. The piano became the vehicle for fresh creativity and energy in the transplanted tradition which had found, if somewhat uneasily, a new home in urban America. Why the piano in particular should be chosen to fulfil this challenging role may be understood in terms of the following. The assimilation of the piano into the American social and harmonic conscious is inextricably bound up to the development of the nation. America’s unique historical and social conditions coalesced into a specific culture during the late 19th, early 20th century. North East America in particular developed as an arena for innovation and experimentation. In this context, the piano acted as a bridge between the older, colonial days and a more recent epoch, which was marked by the urbanisation
and rapid industrialisation of America. The piano persisted as a cultural symbol throughout the economical and political turmoil experienced by the country from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. The piano carried many meanings within its own wooden frame. This may help to explain why it was such a vital part of the American way of life. In this chapter I will discuss these symbolic meanings, providing a general overview of the society in which Irish music found itself. I will attempt to ground the focused examination of Irish music in subsequent chapters. By gaining an understanding of the role played by the piano in the American psyche I hope to shed light on why the piano found a voice in an essentially unharmonised music tradition.

The history of the piano reflects the historical evolution of the U.S. as it moved from a fledgling colony to an economically and politically powerful nation. Not only does the piano span these changes but it becomes the very embodiment of them, being, on one hand, a complex and multi-layered social symbol and, on the other, a commercial product in a world of increased mechanisation and industrialisation. I will show how the symbolic nature of the piano very much informs its commercial dimension. A mapping of the changes in society’s perception of the piano reveals just how much public opinion was shaped by commercial considerations. The deliberate and clever manipulation of the piano’s image at the hands of increasingly discerning marketing executives cannot be underestimated. I will examine the piano as, in the words of Graig Roell, a “cultural totem”, a marker and embodiment of a society’s culture, in order to explore its production, its dissemination, and consequently its reception in America (1989:xiv).

The piano can be interpreted as symbolic in many areas of life. Each of these interpretations overlap and depend on each other for meaning and coherence. Numerous writers have found it quite a challenge to tackle issues of piano symbolism. Helen La Rue acknowledges these difficulties in recognising that the relationship between instrument symbolism and social identity is “clearly a complex matter” (189). I would take her position a step further by suggesting that relationships exist not only between instrument symbolism and social identity, but also between cultural identity, consumerism,
industrialisation, ritual and numerous other entities. It is therefore very much an organic structure of multi-symbiotic relationships.

Throughout its history, the piano has operated as a symbol of an esteemed and elevated position in society, marking class distinction. Musical instruments, in general, can act as markers of social status in numerous ways. La Rue argues that “the mere ownership of an instrument may be limited to those of high social status and these instruments may in turn become insignia of that status” (189). By exploring this point further one sees the potency of this process of association. Once an instrument is linked to a particular stratum of society the instrument becomes imbued with the very characters of that class. In the case of the piano, the associated group is the upper echelons of society. Understandably, the piano possesses certain physical traits which lend themselves to this type of societal exclusivity. This is especially true in the case of the bulky, earlier square model. The lower classes found this model financially prohibitive as such detailed and ornate productions resulted in an very expensive price tag. Its cumbersome size made it more suited to the larger rooms of bigger dwellings which, in turn, were owned by those in a financially comfortable position. Historically, such abodes housed people of higher positions in society. Status equated power and visa versa, and within this equation the piano became a symbol of power held by the elite minority. The piano carried this symbolism right across the globe, particularly in colonial countries. From Ireland, to the court of any nineteenth-century Oriental potentate, the piano made, as pointed out by Steve Whiting in his essay on pianos, “an effective display of quantitative luxury and of political contact, even without being played” (1985:51). The piano was not just an instrument for the production of music but also a social and political statement. Ownership of this prized instrument was a deliberate declaration.

America, itself a former colony, was no exception to this trend, embracing the piano as a symbol of power and prestige. For many settlers in this new, untamed country the piano not only represented the social position of the owner but also brought the ‘discerning’ musical and artistic taste of the coloniser to a new land. In this respect the
piano was a marker of culture as well as status, both of which are, of course, interrelated. This is a key point in relation to the gradual appropriation of the piano by the lower classes by subsequent generations. As a manifestation of a particular social group, a specific culture's outward, tangible trappings can be imitated or adopted to varying degrees of success by others of a different position in society. In the specific case of America, the piano was gradually appropriated by those from the lower strata in order to appear more cultured and moneyed.

Speaking on the fundamental relationship between social class and the struggle for power, Pierre Bordieu asserts that cultural practices are essentially the markers of underlying class distinction (Swartz 1997:143). Emulating the cultural practices of those from a desired higher social position is a common method of attempting to better one's station in life (if often only a cosmetic one). The actual playing of a music can be symbolic where the music communicates social, cultural or political values. By extension, an instrument associated with the production of a particular type of music may embody this kind of symbolism. In this way, the political and economical symbolism of the piano was appropriated by certain groups for a variety of reasons, including the wish to appear 'cultured' and 'successful' as well as the desire to legitimate heterodox musical practices. By assimilating the piano in this manner, because of its class and economic connotations, the piano acts as an agent of validation. La Rue explains how instruments can "confer status on the high-ranking person with whom they are associated" be they a professional musician or even an amateur (189). This also applies to those of a lower social standing, explaining, in part, why the Irish and the African-Americans appropriated the piano into their musical language. These two groups were subjected to much racial abuse in the United States and adaption of the piano in their respective musics may be viewed as an attempt to gain an element of prestige and respect. But prestige was not the only symbolic facet of the piano. I argue that La Rue's interpretation of the piano as a cultural and social symbol was gradually subsumed into a new and rawer symbolism representing progress, modernity and monetary gain. It was the advent of free enterprise and capitalism which would bring about this transformation.
In Western culture, the piano has come to be seen as the concrete manifestation of power and money, as well as natural marker of capitalism. It may seem curious that, despite being a musical instrument, the piano’s history did not so much “coincide with the development of musical genius”, rather it followed “the development of industry and commerce” as pointed out by Loesser (Channan 206). The piano has always been linked to industry and essentially, as Michael Channan comments, “the piano appears to follow the trajectory of capitalism itself” (207). America undoubtedly began to challenge Britain as a leading economy and political power in the 19th century. Inventions were generally spurred either by necessity or economic opportunity. In retrospect America’s burgeoning population was transformed into a huge consumer market for both of these reasons, particularly where the idea of ‘necessity’ was redefined by clever marketing executives. Tracing the physical development as well as marketing trends of the piano gives a unique insight into the development of America as a capitalist nation. The piano is not only representative of this economic growth, but it is also a symbolic manifestation of it. In essence I assert that the piano is the embodiment of the ideals of a democratic, capitalist nation.

**Piano-Based Culture of America**

From its inception as an autonomous country the piano was very much a part of the American life and culture. Even the earliest of Irish immigrants found that their adopted land possessed a distinctly piano-based culture. This was a natural occurrence for America was a former British colony and the esteem in which the piano was held in the motherland has already been discussed. Settlers from the United Kingdom and Europe naturally brought much of their culture and cultural artefacts with them to their new homes. Imitation of the homeland by colonial inhabitants was a widely-practised phenomenon. However, the Irish found subtle differences as well as fundamental similarities in the way their American counterparts responded to the piano. There were a number of obvious reasons for these differences. While it was also the coloniser who brought the piano to America as he did to Ireland, the social and political conditions were
quite different in both countries. The American ‘white’ population, direct descendants of
the colonisers, formed the majority, holding the political power which allowed them to
control the social and cultural discourse of the emerging nation. In Ireland, the majority,
as constituted by the native Irish, had few political rights and were quite isolated in their
cultural practices. This fundamental difference is of paramount importance. The piano
was, in theory, available to all in America. This allowed for the spread of the pianos
popularity across the nation, ensuring its centrality to American cultural life. This is in
stark contrast to the Irish context where those in the majority were financially and
culturally excluded from obtaining pianos. Thus the piano did not and could not have a
bearing on their music-making in their native country. The musical activity within the
ruling white population of America, however, resulted in the piano becoming an integral
part of this society.

The history of the piano in the U.S. is a history of transformation; a transformation
from an expensive, hand-crafted import from Europe (particularly Germany and England)
to a home industry controlled by immigrants from the afore-mentioned countries.
Colonials who brought keyboards during the first decades of the 18th century included
lords, merchants, generals, judges, commissioners and others from high society. This
occurred first in New York and Philadelphia, and later in Massachusetts after 1771
(Loesser 483). During that century, music making blossomed with many English and
continental musicians offering their services to the American public. By the 19th century
America was teeming with musical activities where the piano held pride of place. During
this period, America still remained a cultural province of England. However, the rise in
demand for home-sung songs and home-grown melodies set in motion the need for
national publishing and pianos crafted in the country. It is no coincidence that
Massachusetts was the first state to produce the instrument on a large scale. The region
had a strong connection with the ‘Old World’ and Boston was a burgeoning, economic
metropolis. But the piano diffused far beyond the metropolitan cities into the large
country estates (a phenomenon akin to the ‘big houses’ in the Irish and Anglo-Irish
context). Indeed, any proud gentleman ensured his daughter had a piano at her disposal
to keep her well occupied. Here again there striking similarities with the Anglo-Irish situation in terms of the ‘graces’ described in the previous chapter.

Arthur Loesser aptly entitles his chapter on this topic as “Rich Colonials have Daughters and Harpsichords” (433). Living in a cultural outpost to the British Empire, it was natural for resident colonists to imitate their ‘superiors’ from the motherland. Though America may have been politically autonomous England continued to exert a powerful cultural influence over it. Interestingly, from a musical point of view, this mantle was largely superceded by Germany when many Germans began to emigrate to America during the 19th century. As an industrious, skilful, and literate people, a large number of whom were trained in Western Art music, these new immigrants employment in the musical circles of high society. Based in every sizeable American city, some of these immigrants aimed to convert American citizens to the high art of music-making. Many took a practical approach, seeing the need for home produced pianos and established piano companies. As a result, piano producers of the mid 19th century were German, including the illustrious Steinway (Loesser 494).

It is crucial to understand to importance of the German presence in America from an Irish context. The Irish and the Germans were the first main ethnic groups to emigrate to the United states in significantly large numbers. In general the Irish were held in much less esteem than their German counterparts. Yet these two groups were brought together in a most telling fashion during the 19th and especially the 20th century. The vehicle to establish this unique musical relationship was the piano. A bridge was forged between the folk tradition of the Irish and the classical and popular traditions of the Germans. This bridge will be illustrated in the chapters that follow.

**The Piano and the Church**

From the earliest of days, then, the piano found a home in America. However, potent forces other than mere emulation were also at work to ensure a place for the piano in society. Religion featured prominently in the lives of many colonials. Music formed an
integral part of the expression of religious fervour in the services of these first settlers and in the lives of the generations which followed. Singing together in praise of God was an expression of solidarity and oneness. As a result, the very act of music-making possessed strong religious associations to such an extent that music-making in the home took on ritualistic undertones. The songs and hymns which were sung vehemently in praise of God at church were also practised at home alongside other genres of music. As a result, the very act of family singing around the domestic piano developed strong moral associations and the ritual of religious practice, so tied up with music, became inextricably linked to musical practice in the home. Within this domestic setting, crucial aspects of Victorian cultural practices became tied up with the piano and music-making. Music developed strong moral associations, with the piano as the natural vehicle for these ideals. As a result, as early as 1730, a steady fraction of the colonial inhabitants were providing the means for their daughters in particular to gain not only a genteel education but also a moral one by having them take piano lessons. This practice became more wide-spread over successive generations to the extent that the concept of female virtue was integrally bound up with music-making and the piano.

The Piano as a Female Instrument

*This is all that women do*
*Sit and answer them that woo*
*Deck themselves in new attire*
*To entangle fresh desire*
*After dinner sing and play*
*Or dancing, pass the time away.*

[Early 17th century verse] (Loesser p. 190)

If it can be said that the history of the piano follows the trajectory of capitalism itself, it can also be said that the “history of the piano and the history of the social status of women can be interpreted in terms of one another” (Loesser 190). An instrument can imply a gender status, becoming tied up with a specific sex. Historically, the piano was associated with the female. The taking of piano lessons was traditionally seen as an
effeminate pursuit for boys. In both England and America, (particularly during early colonial history of the latter), while “idleness of his wife and daughter” was a necessary feature of a “gentleman’s prestige”, simple idleness was a “negative thing that had little ostentative glow” (267). Just as the lady of the Anglo-Irish house possessed her ‘graces’, her American counterpart was similarly obliged to develop and nurture her ‘accomplishments’. These comprised for the most part of ‘trivial’ occupations which included needle-point, painting and, of course, music-making. These accomplishments, together with the cultivation of manners, were accepted as a necessary part of a woman’s role (Roell 1989:13). Not that she had to excel at any of these, for such skills were rarely more than decorative. In the case of piano playing, a typical performance by the average female at the time would be, to comment in the manner of Jane Austin, pleasing, though by no means capital.

During the greater part of the 19th century Victorian ideals were of paramount importance. This crucial cannon comprised of “the interaction of the work ethic, the cult of domesticity, and the moral value of music” (Roell 14). The inert piano formed the focal point in the home. It was not only, as previously addressed, a vehicle to demonstrate the useful skills of the female, in whose domain it resided, but it also held great moral significance. The piano succeeded in keeping the virtue of the female intact by its very morphology. As Channan points out, “the instruments appealed especially to young women... it...enabled women to maintain their decorum and modesty while entertaining themselves and their visitors” (202). In other words, a young lady could sit demurely at the piano, legs and feet together and woo and be wooed by her courtier without compromising her virtue. This ensured the approval of the more puritanical members of society who frowned severely upon dubious moral behaviour. The piano acted as a physical barrier for a young lady’s suitor, yet conversely was also a vehicle for their burgeoning love and path or bridge into her heart. One would imagine the piano was such a respectable instrument that courting in the parlour was one of the few occasions when a lady could be alone with her man as she sang to him, accompanied on the piano - a kind of wooden chaperone, so to speak. In contrast, music itself was seen as something which
might endanger the morals of a susceptible female in terms of rousing her emotions. The piano counteracted these effects on two scores. It provided a means for venting intense feelings through concentrated physical action as demanded by such an instrument. But perhaps more importantly even the most ardent and determined lover would find it impossible to bypass such a large and cumbersome instrument!

Such pursuits around the piano also did much to promote the sense of family unity and solidarity. Once a woman was wooed and married, the next stage in her development was to move from a mere bauble for entertainment and seduction to the creator of a secure and comfortable home. It was the woman's role to make others happy and this was, in part, achieved through the medium of music. Singing around the piano in a quintessentially, whole-hearted American way was a means to keep the nation strong and true. But such activities had more than mere moral significance. In many cases, they became very overt social statements. With regards to the daughter of a family, "her well-groomed hands striking the keys with no unseemly vehemence" became a "symbol of her family's ability to pay for her education and her decorativeness...striving for culture and the graces of life" (Channan 202). The music produced was almost secondary in importance to what the actual act of creating music represented. Music-making was the ultimate achievement and literal embodiment of a well brought up female. As a consequence, much of this musical activity imbued the piano itself with a distinctly female orientation and character.

This is hardly surprising given that Western Art music in particular has always suffered from a bifurcation of discourse into male/female, strong/weak dualisms. In her introductory article to Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality (1991), Susan McClary's theories on the musical semiotics of gender may be applied to the genderisation of musical instruments themselves. According to McClarey, matters of gender are informed by the prevalent attitudes of a specific time. People contribute to such social formations in the manner by which they learn to be gendered through interaction with certain cultural discourses. In Western Art music the gender issue has always been
prevalent. By extension, as one of the main vehicles for this music tradition the piano has not remained unscathed. The piano of the Victorian era was viewed as a female instrument and music in general was viewed as part of the female realm. Such attitudes gave little space for the middle to upper class male to engage in active music making. In fact, as McClary points out:

the charge that musicians and devotees of music are “effeminate” goes back as far as recorded documentation about music, and music’s associations with the body … and with subjectivity has lead to its being relegated in many historical periods to what was understood as a “feminine” realm. (17)

McClarey outlines how many male composers re-appropriated music from this domain by making it rational and objective as demonstrated by such compositional methods as Schoenberg’s serialism. I draw a clear parallel between this assertion and the piano in American society of the late 19th early 20th centuries. The piano entered the male realm only after it become a machine - a true product of commercialisation. Once the piano was associated with economic power as opposed to decoration, it became defeminised and moved easily into the realm of the male.

During the 19th century music in American society was firmly established. Music, in part due to Victorian ideals on the virtue of music, was strongly represented in the school curriculum. The mass publication of easy-to-play parlour songs on the piano also did much to ensure the place of music in everyday life, as did the general tendency of churches of all denominations to have some degree of singing during service. However, in many ways this musical base was somewhat exclusive as it was middle-class and essentially female. Craig Roell argues that the effeminisation of music was caused by the recontextualisation of musical entertainment within the home environment - an environment which was a woman’s separate sphere (16). In this domain it was natural to view the piano in an effeminate light. The process of association was strong. With the piano located at the heart of domestic households it could not avoid having such female connotations. Indeed, even in the hey-day of the 19th century virtuoso, the vast majority
of whom were male, there was still a general perception of a strong element of the effeminate in these men. The male virtuoso of the Chopin and Liszt mould was acceptable by virtue of his genius. However, even then he was looked upon suspiciously in terms of his ability to support his family - the prime male activity of this time. But it was not until the piano truly became the vehicle for musical democracy in the early 20th century that such symbolic associations and stereotypes were overthrown.

The piano moved out of the home into the public sphere, causing great changes in terms of how its role in society was perceived. The transfer of power resulted in the relocation of the piano in the male domain. The piano ceased to be something decorative, both in terms of its appearance and use, and became more utilitarian as it spread across the class strata. For the emerging female professional, this proved a devastating blow as now she was relegated to the peripheries while her male counterpart took over. For women, it was a 'catch twenty-two' situation. In order to compete with male pianists, women were obliged to express themselves with more vigour and virtuosity. But as Channan points out "women pianists...were penalised if they showed too many signs of virility" and as a result "found themselves disadvantaged" (205). The piano departed from the parlour but, alas, the female would have to wait sometime before the same opportunity was afforded to her.

This situation had a further twist. Many females had employed the piano not only for self-expression but also as a means for capital gain. With the increase in piano production and music publication many women found themselves becoming professionals as teachers and accompanists. Besides acting as a moral compass, the piano allowed for the expression of a woman's passions. Music was a liberating experience, almost a sexual one in some cases. The piano was also a means for voicing thwarted emotions and frustration through unmusical and mechanical playing. However, virile playing came second to the question of professionalism which would prove the real bone of contention.

For the male piano players a variety of professional jobs opened up particularly in the entertainment sphere. The mass production of cheap uprights led to the widespread
popularity of the piano in less than salubrious venues including clubs, bars, and brothels. As cheaper upright pianos were purchased for use in these locations, which were essentially sites of male activity, more and more male pianists began to emerge. Ragtime, a piano-based music, had its birth in such venues where females were all but banned (excluding, of course, the ‘ladies of the night’). Music making in such public locations belonged to the male domain, in stark contrast to the domestic environment and haven of morality characteristic of the female practitioner. Naturally, this very different social context saw the piano gain a different, decidedly male appeal. The gender spotlight was refocused. While traditionally females may have constituted the majority in the teaching profession, in terms of commercial players men dominated the market. This switch was not just a matter of economics, however. As the instrument became more of a machine through factory production, its status as a complex technical product increased. The piano gained the appreciation of a male audience in the same manner as a well-designed car. This, in turn, conferred upon the male a justifiable reason for playing the piano, which in no way compromised his masculinity. The question of piano playing being ‘effeminate’ was ignored or dismissed by male pianists. Instead, the focus was placed on the technological and mechanical aspect of the instrument, as well as the piano’s expansion into various decidedly male domains.

This essential switch in gender in the American context was very significant for the recording of Irish music in the early to mid 20th century, where the vast majority of accompanists were male. In Ireland, interestingly, the lack of a parallel industrial boom, with all of its associated social and economic consequences, ensured that females remained the dominant exponents of the piano for much longer. These women moved from parlour to podium after the influential 78rpm records were sold in Ireland (a phenomenon I will explore later). In America, the piano moved gradually from the centre of the home to the commercial stage, with a parallel movement from the female into the male’s domain. The piano, through capitalism and industrialisation, was being de-feminised. The practice of Victorian ideology resulted in the creation of unique conditions to allow for this to happen successfully. It was upon the firm moral foundations of family life that capitalism
flourished. As Arthur Loesser points out, the piano and capitalism were inextricably linked, as “music [through the piano] became an integral part of the process of valorisation of the patriarchal nuclear family which runs deep through the development of capitalism” (Channan 202). As Channan argues, the piano needed a domestic environment as a launching pad in order for it to blossom as a commercial product (199). Within this context, the piano’s place was cleverly reconfigured in a male-dominated musical realm. It seems ironic that this instrument, which in the hands of the female was used to combat the ills associated with the emergence of an industrial society, would in turn be appropriated by the male and consequently become part of that very mechanism against which the family was fighting so hard to preserve.

The Piano as a Machine

When business and the economy in general is undergoing a long term, positive phase, leisure time and the pleasures offered by society are increased. The worker, who has helped the economy come to this stable point, in turn participates and engages with these cultural satisfactions. The process is dynamic, and so the capitalist “searches for the means to spur on consumption, to give his wares new charms, to inspire the consumer with new needs by constant chatter” (Channan 207). In this respect, the piano was exemplary in underscoring Marxist philosophy and theory in relation to class stratification. According to Marx, a class is a group of people who stand in a common relationship to the means of production and the means by which they gain a livelihood (Giddens 1997:244). In contemporary American society the owners of production were the capitalists. They exploited the potent symbolism of the piano by promoting it as a means of gaining prestige through mere ownership, and by mass producing it for consumption by the proletariat. As a pioneering invention of the 18th century, the piano was an integral part of the growing sector of industrial production by the beginning of the 19th century (Channan 198). The piano itself was the one instrument that truly benefited from industrialisation and mass production. It was the ultimate machine, with hundreds of moving parts, making it ideally suited to factory production.
John Broadwood was the first to apply methods of mass production in the manufacture of pianos after the Napoleonic Wars. He utilised results collated from scientific research to provide a competitive edge over his competitors. Sibyl Marcus observes how the development of the modern piano was aided by the industrial revolution pointing out that:

The invention of the telegraph led to vast improvements in wire-drawing, permitting both heavier stringing and an increase in scale. The "newfangled" hot-air furnaces installed in basements of private homes in the US caused perfectly good pianos to curl up suddenly, and the great advances made by metallurgy permitted the casting of plates...to offset the ill effects of the furnaces. (Marcuse 1966:405)

The intense competition between manufacturers played a crucial role in the development of the instrument. The demands exerted on these piano manufacturers by contemporary composers and virtuosos, whose sponsorship the manufacturers sought, drove them to achieve technically superior and faster results in piano production. By the mid 19th century, with technology perfected, North America emerged as the dominant producer and manufacturer of the piano. Makers such as Kimball in Chicago and Steinway in New York increased their scale of production to by-pass their European counterparts. Since these businesses did the vast majority of their trading within the United States, their prices were much more competitive than imported models. Loesser aptly comments, "a piano maker who expands into a factory ceases to be a craftsman, he becomes a business man" (cited in Channan 201). This blurring of craft and profit spreads throughout the whole music industry. The unprecedented growth in popularity of the piano affected a series of trades directly and indirectly related to the piano's production. These included the piano-makers themselves obviously, but also publishers of piano music, piano teachers and piano tuners not to mention music production and recording at a later date. Channan terms this a 'multiplier' effect because it does not remain localised or self-contained (199). Cyril Ehrlich estimates that between 1885 and 1900 the production of pianos world-wide increased by about tenfold (Roell 208). In the case of the piano, as production increased prices fell and as Roell comments:
the music-hungry, class-conscious Americans filled their urban parlours with mass-produced, enormous pianos...as testimony of their increasing wealth, improving taste, and moral superiority. 
(1989:23)

The piano makers were eager to squeeze their products into more and more homes, regardless of the size, in order to meet the growing demands of the lower end of the market. Many poorer families were eager to own pianos, imagining that possession of this most respectable of instruments would in some way rub off on them (Loesser 205). The piano acted, at least metaphorically, as a bridge or avenue into a higher stratum of society for many of the lower class. Mass production of the piano allowed for the acquisition of ‘symbolic capital’ by the lower echelons of society (Bourdieu 1977:171). As a direct result of the industrial process, the piano found itself imbued with a newer symbolism. With mechanical production the piano in America of the 1820s to 1840s was comparable to the automobile in the USA of the following century, because it was a clear statement of one’s personal progress. According to Loesser “to own one, especially one of the latest models, was honorific; it was a badge of successful modernity...a symbol of progressive thought and enterprise” (348-9). The link was complete: from the female vehicle of domestic bliss and from Victorian morality to the quintessentially male, complicated, factory-produced machine of economic power.

Naturally, the piano’s popularity did actually have something to do with the fact that it was a musical instrument and a vehicle for creative expression. However, its popularity could and would not have been maintained without the birth and massive growth of the popular music industry (though whether this provided an arena for true ‘creativity’ is a debatable point). Tin Pan Alley was the main creator of songs which were memorable and simple in character. This phenomenon will be dealt with in the next chapter but I will briefly outline key points here. With the publication of “After the Ball” by Charles K Harris in 1892, an enormous almost frenzied consumer market was created for popular songs. The themes ranged from the comic to the nostalgic. Structurally, these **formular** songs were made up of uncompromisingly homophonic music, or in the words of Loesser “a single all-important line of melody, supported by subordinate
packages of tones called chords” (427). This format sounds familiar, especially when compared with the collections of Irish music discussed in the last chapter. In fact, Moore’s Melodies was enormously popular in the American market. The melodies and lyrics proved extremely attractive and the basic format of the music was accessible to the amateur performer. Even the moderately talented could tackle these arrangements with a good deal of aplomb. However, not everyone possessed moderate talent. As popular songs became more complicated and as ragtime emerged (a form which was technically more demanding) fewer people were able to play the piano even adequately. More and more people seemed reluctant to make the effort to learn.

**Consumer Culture**

As industry in general continued to grow and expand in the United States, more money entered the economy and the need and demand for leisure time increased. The importance of this move in terms of the piano and its associated developments cannot be underestimated for the powerful social changes that were occurring shaped the physical market, if not the very psyche of the American nation. The emerging consumer market was there to be exploited by any entrepreneur, intoxicated by the heady power of opportunity, willing to try and sell his product. In the words of Roger Abrahams:

> an obsession with novelty, accompanied by a fear of boredom...deeply implicated in the almost compulsive need to move on...has been at the forefront of the American agenda since the beginning of our history. (Abrahams 1986:50-51)

In this climate of enterprise - specifically during the period from the late 19th century into the 20th century - it was hardly surprising that a plethora of relatively useless inventions and gadgets were sold successfully across the land. Through slick advertising campaigns, various items were touted as absolute essentials to achieve a better and more luxurious standard of living (so deserved in the hard-working society of the day, of course). Naturally, many such gadgets had short lives, being primarily sold on the basis of being temporary fads or crazes.
The piano proved no exception to this trend. Now more than ever, the piano was becoming a gadget. In a country which looked upon inventions and gadgetry as a true validation of technical superiority the piano was the ultimate symbol. As a direct result of such thinking, the piano was often marketed as part of another utilitarian product - a sewing machine, writing table, tea table - in order to maximise its attraction and usefulness (and, of course, the retailer’s profits). In fact, the sewing machine, the triumph of American engineering, was often commercially bracketed with the piano (and indeed the gramophone). This was not unprecedented as a link between the piano and the furniture industry had already been established in England. This is hardly surprising as both instruments, the piano and the sewing machine, conjured up images of domesticity, productivity and simple household unity and utility. Yet, while the piano may have been the crowning adornment to the American home (as essential and often as non-functional as the fringe on the parlour lamp shades, as one contemporary commentator remarked) to play the piano warranted time and energy to which the newer and more passive market was not willing nor necessarily capable of devoting. Yet there was a growing demand from all sectors of the community for music to be available to everyone. How, then, could the contemporary ideal of “musical democracy”, an extremely marketable ethos, become realised? The answer was by “making music the consumable object available to all without out the need of painstaking elements” (Roell 32-8).

The Player-Piano or Pianola

A new invention entered the scene with resounding success. This creation, the player-piano or ‘pianola’, was originally the trademark of the Aeolian Company of New York. Gradually it was used as a generic term for push-up player-pianos.

*The Pianola is the universal means for playing the piano. Universal because there is no one in the world...who could not learn to use it with but a little effort.*

[Cosmopolitan 1902] (Roell 41)
It was the ultimate machine of musical democracy. Ironically, it also rendered the piano redundant. The wooden structure had a crank-operated wheel and artificial fingers which rested on the keys of the piano. Welte of Germany patented the pneumatic action player piano in 1887. This was perfected by E. S. Votey in America with his pedal-operated 'Pianola'. Patented by Aeolian in 1900, the ‘Pianola’ became highly popular, in part due to the aggressive advertising campaign devised to launch it. It paved the way for further developments as most of the piano makers in the United States were encouraged by its huge commercial success with the American public. As a consequence, a large number of player pianos were produced to such an extent that by 1919, “the players outnumbered the straight pianos and constituted more than fifty-three percent of the total annual output” of such instruments in America (Loesser 583). The ‘Pianola’ was touted as the universal means of playing the piano and advertising became a key factor in the spread of its popularity. This encompassed the relatively brief period from 1900 to 1905. Yet within this short time, the ‘Pianola’ was hugely successful as a medium for the mechanical production of reproduced music. Self-contained piano players gradually took over the market. By 1913 the Aeolian Company introduced the ‘Duo-Art’, followed in 1916 by the American Piano Company’s ‘Ampico’. These versions of the player-piano were far more sophisticated since they worked on electricity. They could also record with far greater sensitivity than their predecessor the ‘Pianola’. As a result more and more piano rolls were created and between 1916 and 1925 almost every concert pianist of any prominence in the United States made record rolls on both of these (Loesser 584).

The invention the pianola had profound repercussions for music consumption by the average person. Basically, the pianola’s automated roll mechanism offered the opportunity to all to sit and listen to the piano as it played itself, or (in the case of later self-contained models) to actually ‘play’ it effortlessly [pl. 2.1]. It is worth remembering that up to this time, American homes housed a million pianos. Not surprisingly, few could actually play the instrument adequately but “the nagging of salesmen and the general democratic craving to be ruled by the pretences of the Joneses” had ensured the piano’s dissemination (Loesser 581). The player-piano offered a welcome alternative, as the
financial extras that went with learning the piano (lessons, actual sheet music, etc.) and the physical and mental effort involved in mastering the instrument were no longer able to act as a barrier to musical production and enjoyment. This particular instrument/machine was ideally suited to a culture that was, in essence, moving from a Victorian work ethic to one that increasingly valued leisure time and recreation. This transformation was characterised by a strong element of passivity while it maintaining connections with Victorian ideals which centred around the family [pl. 2.2]. The pianola also held a certain justifiable appeal for men. Where as indulging in piano playing might have compromised one’s masculinity, the same could not be said for operating what was essentially a machine.

Further, the piano-player was very important for musical appreciation in general. Scores and musical numbers which were either too long or too hard to play by the typical amateur could be accessed. It must be remembered that even at this stage, electric recording and radio were not yet available. Thus, the piano player offered a real inroad into so many musics. Virtually anything could be transcribed onto the perforated roll. This included the extremely popular rag-time which, initially rejected for its African-American and somewhat amoral roots, was appropriated by white, middle-class America into their social life and educational system. In fact, the whole listening process changed dramatically since vocal music, the staple up until then, was challenged (though not superseded) by instrumental music. In its own way, the player-piano too acted as a bridge. The 19th century had seen the rise of the virtuoso who naturally widened the gap between the amateur and professional. This gap was bridged by many illustrious composers and musicians of the day who recorded for certain player-piano makers (Greig, Debussy, Strauss, Respighi and others recorded for Welte10). With the wide availability of such works, amateurs were now able to ‘play’ these great pieces on the player-piano. In every way, then, the player-pianos performed a significant role in the unprecedented dissemination of all genres of music.
Pianola with Gulbransen 'Easy to Play' Baby Trademark
(Roell 1989,117)

Estey advertising their Player Piano for all the family
(Roell 1989,114)
The popularity of player-pianos was sustained for a few decades. They fell out of fashion around the 1920s with the arrival of electrical recording and radio. As cinema turned to talkie and the leisure market became even more orientated towards the passive consumer, the piano gradually fell into decline and disuse. Ironically, the very instrument and invention which helped to develop the art of passive listening contributed in no small way to sowing the seeds of its own redundancy. It some ways this was a fitting end to the pianola which itself had pushed its sister piano out of the limelight while seeking its own fame and popularity. The player-piano as a means of recording and reproducing music was, of course, usurped by the radio and disk: mediums which were much more suited to the task of faithful reproduction on a large diverse scale. As Loesser concludes, “before the end of the 1920s, the reproducing pianos were all but obsolete”(586). Electric recording led the way during the twenties as will be explored in the next chapter.

Conversely, the piano was adopted by the recording industry, ensuring the instrument would appear in most if not all recorded music genres. With the player-piano no longer a real competitor in the efficient and economic dissemination of music, the piano was back. It reasserted its identity as a musical instrument, carving out a niche within the new world of electric recording. If the actual instrument itself had lost its appeal in terms of active music making, the popularity of its sound and its symbolic value did not diminish to the same degree. In the case of Irish music, the piano became a virtually indispensable component of the recording process. The piano - for musical and acoustic reasons, but most certainly for all the reasons discussed in this chapter in terms of social status and emblem of progress - became an integral part of the Irish-American music production. The piano may not have dominated musical production any longer, but it still remained a powerful symbol which retained its potency well into the 20th century. There may be questions surrounding the true availability of the piano, in term of the degree to which it was truly ‘mass’ produced. But there is not doubt that the piano remained vibrantly alive in the American musical and social consciousness long after the hey-days of its production.
Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the symbolic nature of the piano in American culture. I examined how this impacted not only upon the day to day lives of American citizens but also on the collective psyche of the nation. By the late 19th, early 20th century the possession of a piano signified a number of specific social and cultural traits. Some of these were often contradictory in nature. An owner of a piano could be perceived, on the one hand, as a cultured person with traditionalist values, while on the other as a capitalist and modernist with an eye for new-fangled gadgets and a ‘fast buck’. Whatever the perception, which was generally more dynamic that these polar images might suggest, one fact remained unchanged. The piano was an integral part of American music making, both in the domestic and commercial arena.

For the incoming Irish, the omnipotence of this instrument seemed to embody all the contradictions of America’s culture and values systems. They began to view the piano as a true symbol of their adoptive nation. The Irish, too, would fall under the spell and influence of the piano, recognising its symbolic potency. In the next chapter I will examine how the piano became a bridge - a means of acculturation and assimilation for an ethnic group which was transported from a very different physical and cultural space. Issues of modernity and urbanisation are of paramount importance in this context. The unique conditions created with this new environment in turn encouraged particular reactions that help explain a gravitation towards, and the subsequent inclusion of, the piano in recorded sources of Irish music. As Raymond Williams comments (which I slightly augment), the Irish:

passed through this crucible of the metropolis, which was in the important cases no mere melting-pot but an intense and visually [and I would add ‘musically’] and linguistically exciting process in its own right, from which remarkable new forms emerged. (Raymond Williams 1992:92)

In subsequent chapters, I will illustrate how the appearance of the piano in 78rpm recordings of Irish dance music can be interpreted as representing the emergence of one of
these dynamic "new forms". The piano was not only concerned with emulation and prestige but it was also an actual manifestation of all the issues associated with the dramatic geographical and cultural dislocation experienced by the immigrant Irish. As a site of increased mobility and social diversity, the contemporary metropolis set up a specific discourse for the negotiation of identity and space (ideological and physical) by the immigrant Irish. With the music business as one arena for such mediations, the piano would feature as a key player on a number of different levels.

1 Perhaps these groups took a certain joy in subverting the instrument which had long been a symbol of colonial power. By absorbing and assimilating the piano into their music making, both members of these groups made a political statement. That is, they employed the ebony and ivory keys associated with their formal imperialist masters. There was surely a certain joy experienced in creating music on the piano in such locations as public houses, brothels and other venues which were a far cry from the Victorian parlour.

2 The Penal Laws which operated during the 17th and 18th centuries were designed for the wholesale suppression of Catholics in Ireland. Under these laws Catholics were unable to vote or hold a seat in parliament. They could not inherit land nor own a horse of more than a certain value (and if an offer was made for the animal above this value they were obliged to sell it). Such laws left the Catholic majority of Ireland completely powerless and without a voice in a Parliament now representing Protestant opinions only (Forester 1989:164).

3 By this I mean the country estates of the Protestant landed gentry in Ireland which were a source of employment in the locality and thus of economical importance to the community. These houses were finely decorated and a harpsichord and/or piano held pride of place in one of the rooms designed for entertainment. The country house were one of the few locations in Ireland, with the exception of larger towns and cities, where a native in service for the family would have come in contact with a keyboard instrument.

4 The simple, straight-forward harmonic language of service hymns proved influential on other forms of music making, including popular song and even ragtime. This is something worth bearing in mind when discussing the harmonic orientation of various vamping styles in chapter five.

5 The binary concept has been put forward in particular by Levi-Strauss and others. In the chapter which follows further explorations of this idea of the binary are inspired by piano's morphology. The ebony and ivory keys symbolise the colour divide of black and white and the associated race issue.

6 The Victorian film Room with a View (1989) portrays this aspect of music-making admirably. The heroine, played by Helene Bonham-Carter, is an emotionally constrained young woman who has great difficulty in expressing her feelings verbally. She finds a more than adequate vent for these feelings in her impassioned renditions of Beethoven piano sonatas in the parlour.

7 North American makers dominated the home market in the 19th century, usurping the power of European companies who traditionally enjoyed large exports to this vast land. The indigenous companies who led this successful campaign included Steinway in New York, Babcock in Boston and Kimball in Chicago.

8 Disciples of the furniture-maker Zupah made new pianos incorporated within sewing, tea or writing tables - a nice blend of the female and the commercial aspects of this instrument (Loe5er 1954: 245).

9 It seems noteworthy that the Chicago piano manufacturer Kimball and the inventor of the sewing machine, Isaac Singer, were great friends. In this era, the concept of working with one specific product was not yet fully established. Industrialists and capitalists had there finger in every pie, literally.
A German company, its 'Welte-Mignon' piano player was marketed in the U.S. around 1907. It was capable of reproducing the full virtuosic sound of the artist recorded, hence its illustrious catalogue of famous composers and musicians. The 'Welte-Mignon' patented action was later licensed to numerous firms in America who in turn recorded some of the most prolific performers of the era.
NEGOTIATING SPACE AND IDENTITY

Tenements in the Grooves - the 'Other' becomes 'Another'

Skyscrapers may be built because they are expected to provide profit, but the giant buildings also 'symbolise the power of money of the city through technology and self-confidence and are the cathedrals of the period of rising corporate capitalism'.

(Giddens 1997:480)

If Irish-Americans were going to embrace the 'hyphen' they would have to express their Irishness in ways that would easily fit into 20th century popular culture.

(W.H.A. Williams 1996:199)
The previous chapter dealt with American society of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries as the incoming Irish would have found it, with an emphasis on the prominent role played by the piano in both family and business settings. This chapter is concerned with the arrival and integration of the Irish into this social, cultural, political, and economic matrix. I look at how the Irish negotiated a place for their ethnic identity in some of America's larger cities. This negotiation was in part conducted through specific musical practices. In turn, these practices encapsulated the impact of the urban environment on the Irish and, by extension, their musical expressions on two fundamental levels. Firstly, the urban setting of ethnic enclaves, tenements and high-rise buildings had a profound impact in shaping how the Irish viewed themselves, as well as how they were viewed by others, in their new home. The reception Irish immigrants received from Americans influenced their music - from subject matter to performance practice - a situation which was not always under Irish control as will be revealed shortly. Secondly, the physical nature of the ever-expanding city influenced the musical practices of the Irish in a very direct way. This is particularly true of traditional dance music, which required contemporary elements in order to resonate with its new environment. One response to this situation came in the guise of piano accompaniment. But before looking at this particular phenomenon, from a practical and conceptual point of view, the actual negotiation of Irish identity in America is first explored. This concludes with an explanation of how Irish dance music came to represent a specific section of the immigrant Irish community and why the piano became an integral part of its expression.

In this discussion, I demonstrate how popular 'Irish' song forms of the early vaudeville era, which were essentially based on racist stereotypes, gave way to the more sophisticated and less offensive nostalgic ballad of Tin Pan Alley publications. This genre of song expressed romanticised views of the Emerald Isle held by first and second generation Irish immigrants, as well as mainstream America. However, as this particular mode of expression became outdated, and as Irish-Americans sought to become more assimilated into mainstream American culture, Irish traditional dance music came to the fore as a musical subculture. In other words, early Twentieth Century 78rpm records of Irish traditional dance music in America were more an expression of Irish identity than of Irish-American identity. This is a key point, for the
music was played and practised, for the most part, by recent Irish immigrants and the subsequent chapters will focus on this point.

I argue that in the same way that popular ‘Irish’ song could no longer represent the Irish way of life in Twentieth Century America, traditional Irish dance music could no longer be simply representative of Ireland and the Irish way of life either, especially now in its diasporic location. Irish dance music became something different in its new American and essentially urban context. Graeme Smith has written extensively on the topic of early recordings of Irish music in the United States and his ideas inform this chapter. In the article “My Love is in America: Migration and Irish Music” Smith sets out to prove that traditional Irish dance music was not “tightly integrated into the social patterns of rural Ireland, but a music shaped by the integration of rural Ireland into the rest of the world through emigration” (Smith 1994:222). Both the musicians and the public changed the ways and forms in which the music was played and encountered on American soil. However, these changes may not be as obvious, as immediate, or as clearly delineated as Smith might believe. Reg Hall, who has also written comprehensively on the topic of Irish music in this era postulates that, in spite of having to adapt to American urban conditions, the music retained most of its inherent characteristics. In his doctoral dissertation, Hall insists that music of the Irish immigrants preserved specific Irish traits:

The basic rural quality of the music performances remained unaltered, even though the record producers imposed a convention of their own in the form of accompaniment to both singers and instrumentalists. (Hall 1994:237)

Hall views the addition of the piano to 78rpm recordings as a kind of superimposition upon an inherently unchanged music tradition. Smith seems to feel that the piano’s addition should be perceived as only one of a number of differences between the immigrant tradition and that of the native Irish tradition, the former which he feels was not tied to the landscape. I locate my position between these two perspectives, acknowledging their validity but concluding that neither is satisfactorily inclusive, as my analysis of musical examples in chapter V reveals. Certainly, in some 78rpm recordings the piano seems to be simply grafted onto the tune, concurring with Hall’s
theory. Yet other musical examples demonstrate tight integration of the piano as a new musical expression in Irish music initially unique to American 78rpm recordings, as Smith would argue. Whether a case of imposition or integration, either way the piano's inclusion was almost inevitable. Before any of these issues can be tackled, however, the journey of the Irish and subsequent generations in America must be traced in order to understand what Irish traditional dance music came to represent early this century, and for whom this representation was important.

Embracing the Hyphen

By the first decades of the 20th century, the Irish had already a long history of emigration to the United States. At this point it is worth clarifying what the terms 'Irish' and 'Irish-American' mean in the context of this chapter. Unless explained such labels can be reductive and problematic. Akenson has raised this issue in his comprehensive if somewhat controversial book on the Irish Diaspora. He states:

The Irish migrants to the various New Worlds were not all Catholic or Protestant, not all from Connaught or Munster or Ulster or Leinster, not all working class or rural labourers or domestic servants, or all single women or single men. The migrants were an amazingly variegated group and their descendants are equally multifaceted.

(Akenson 1996:217)

It is easy to see how confusion can arise in endeavouring to represent this 'multifaceted' group by simple, all-encompassing terms. However, the migrating Irish (meaning the entire ethnic group) who went to North America can roughly be divided into two distinct groups. The Scots-Irish were the first group to emigrate at the beginning in the 17th century. They were predominantly from the North of the country and Protestant in faith. The second group, the Catholic Irish, emigrated in greatest numbers during the middle to late 19th century. They were generally from a lower social and economic class than the Scots-Irish were. It is with the latter group that I shall be dealing; that is, the Catholic Irish who fled in droves to America during and after the Great Famine of 1845-7 [fig. 3.1]. It is important to note that it is the descendants of this group to which the term 'Irish-American' generally applies, whether correct or not. Akenson warns that such a term should be banned as it is a "code word", referring generally only to Catholics (252). I find this interpretation of
the term helpful in the context of my work as it clearly delineates the group about which I wish to speak. Therefore, the term ‘Irish-American’ is reserved for first generation and subsequent generations born in America. With regards to the emigrating Catholic Irish, from here on I will simply use the term ‘Irish’, using further clarification where needed. I also deliberately employ the pejorative terminology of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries - ‘Paddy’ and ‘Bridget’, terms which denoted the male and female Irish immigrant respectively - to illustrate the oftentimes patronising manner in which the Irish were viewed. As a final comment, for the sake of simplicity I employ the term ‘WASP’ as an umbrella heading for the white Anglo-Saxon population of America who formed the ruling majority, and I avoid the term ‘Yankee’ which seems to be more problematic and pejorative.

On arriving in the East Coast America, the Irish did not move very far from the growing urban centres where they landed, such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia (though some moved further afield to Chicago). Considering that the immigrants were predominantly from a rural and agrarian background, this reluctance to move from the city may seem curious. There are a variety of reasons for this abrupt change from rural to urban environment - a change which embraced a completely different lifestyle. Many of the immigrants had been severely betrayed by the land during the Famine years and were now mistrusting of the agricultural life. Further, the farmers and cottiers among the immigrant group were practised at tending small plots of land and probably did not possess the knowledge and skills to farm the vast expanses of the frontier. Further, most of them had very little money and could not afford to undertake such an endeavour. For the unskilled labourer, the city offered far more employment opportunities, particularly in light of the growing number of industries which required labourers of all types. Finally, the immigrants had come from a predominantly rural country. Up to this time, Ireland had few cities or large towns and even fewer still that welcomed the native Irish within their boundaries, in spite of the presence of ‘Irish towns’ in many cities, and the liberating consequences of Catholic Emancipation. In Ireland, cities were traditionally perceived as “agents of conquest” (Clark 1984:26), places not especially welcoming to the native, rural Irish. In America, however, the city was accessible to all and seemed to present the possibility of great opportunity. Graeme Smith has proposed that for the Irish the
"global metropolitan culture has continually been seen as an alternative to rural life" (226). In the urban centres, an employment pattern was established, as pointed out by Russ Malone, historian and travel guide writer on the topic of Irish-America:

‘Paddys’ built the railroads, mined the coal and dug the canals. ‘Bridgets’ cooked the meals, cleaned the houses and raised the children of the middle and upper classes. (Malone 1994:14)

America’s frontiers were expanding when the Irish began arriving in America in significant numbers. The country was undergoing rapid industrialisation and urbanisation and so the Irish became an integral part of these processes. In fact, during the mid to late Nineteenth Century, so many Irish landed and stayed in the burgeoning cities that the terms ‘Irish’ and ‘urban’ became virtually synonymous. An examination of the popular songs of the time shows a proliferation of urban ‘Paddy’ songs from the 1880s right into the next century.4 Settling in urban enclaves, the Irish formed strong support networks, finding work and lodgings for the new arrivals and even, in many cases, paying their fare. The population of Irish in America swelled over the years, peaking just before the end of the 19th century.

[Fig. 3.1]

<table>
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<th>Number of Irish-born persons living in the USA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1850-51</td>
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<td>1860-61</td>
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<td>1890-91</td>
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(Akenson 257)

The new arrivals seldom strayed far from the city. While the Irish may be criticised for establishing insular enclaves, this tendency could not be truly condemned in light of the reception that many of the immigrants received on arriving upon American soil.
Though there were certain economic opportunities in these urban centres of which Irish could avail themselves, not all had an easy time actually settling in. The Irish were among the first immigrant groups to arrive in large numbers in a country which was predominantly populated by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. The incoming Irish were viewed with a good deal of distaste and suspicion by many WASPs to such an extent that firm racial dividing lines were drawn. As a result of this divide, the Irish suffered socially, economically, politically, and culturally. It was within the strict confines of the WASP discourse that the Irish had to negotiate their place in this new land. Over the years the control of identity resided firmly with the Anglo-Saxon population, shaped by their views, ideas, and even whims. It seems that American WASPs were following the model of 19th century British stereotypes of the Irish: stereotypes that regularly featured in the pages of satirical magazines such as *Punch*. The Irish became involved in a discourse which was controlled and limited by the WASPs and infused with racist and bigoted tendencies.\(^5\) Drawings from contemporary papers and books represented the Irish as being ape-like in appearance, dull-witted, and violent drunkards. An 1899 song entitled “Mick Who Threw the Brick”\(^6\) had as the cover illustration of a “Hibernian apeman” (Williams 1996:189) This, then, was the stereotype around and through which negotiations of Irish identity in America had to be conducted.

The Irish remained initially in the lower echelons of society, firmly held within the grasp of the working class and unable to rise above it. These stereotypes informed contemporary legislation which had serious consequences for the Irish.\(^7\) At one point the Pennsylvania legislative put a tax on citizens who imported Irish servants (Malone 1994:35). The Irish experienced sectarian discrimination for years and they were denied equal civil and political rights by some states until the last quarter of the 19th century (Akenson 1996:264). Of course, the Irish were not the only ethnic group to have been subjected to such injustices. The Irish were treated in the same manner as their black counterparts and this, in part, accounts for the polarisation of the Irish and the African-Americans, two groups which were often found in explosive opposition to each other. The African-American suffered severe discrimination after the Civil War which had supposedly won them ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’. By virtue of their skin colour, among other things, the African-Americans were promoted as an ethnic group.
whom whites should fear. In spite of their difference in skin colour, and in spite of the commonality of their racist experiences, the Irish and the African-Americans were often bracketed together, especially in a pejorative sense. According to historian Noel Ignatiev:

In the early years Irish were frequently referred to as "niggers turned inside out"; the Negroes, for their part, were sometimes called "smoked Irish", a appellation they must have found no more flattering than it was intended to be.

(41)

Cartoonist Thomas Mast captured these feelings of antipathy towards the Irish and the African Americans in a late nineteenth century illustration from a New York newspaper. Further explanation is hardly necessary to convey the sentiment of this St. Patrick’s Day Parade in an ominous urban setting [pl. 3.1].

These two ethnic groups worked side by side, eking out a meagre existence for themselves building America’s infrastructures of road, rail and canal. Yet they engaged in fierce rivalry in spite of their shared suffering and the inherent commonality of their experiences. The image of the keyboard finds particular resonance here, the ebony and ivory next to each other yet separate and autonomous, each scale on black or white notes of a different sound and colour. It seems partly ironic partly fitting that by utilising the piano, both groups attempted to gain some respect, prestige and legitimacy through the medium of music. Perhaps it is not so curious that the only other place these two ethnic groups shared the same space was in the music industry, particularly vaudeville. I draw attention to this aspect of the relationship between the Irish and African Americans in particular, as later it will be revealed that it was the syncretic elements in their respective musics that allowed for, and promoted, reciprocal influences.

The interpretation of the piano as an outward sign of social and economic progress resonates with what some historians describe as the ‘lace curtain’ phenomenon, a metaphor which describes the upward social mobility of America’s society.
Racist Cartoon (Courtesy of H. Bradshaw)
I feel this idea of social mobility may be similarly described in pianistic terms since the piano became something which the Irish aspired to put into their American parlours, decorated with lace curtains. Possession of the piano was an aspiration and a symbol of prosperity in a country still under the potent influence of the Victorian ethos of a genteel lifestyle.

The Irish were seeking to create this ethos and carve out a niche for what would be acceptable to all in American society, even if they had to do this on terms other than their own. And indeed, over time, the Irish and the Irish-Americans did enter "inter-generational socio-economic mobility", to borrow Akenson’s phrase (242). In other words, through successive generations the Irish began gradually to climb the social and economic ladder. This very climb was aided over the years by the influx of more immigrants from other countries. As immigrants flocked to America in greater numbers, the Irish began to look less and less threatening. WASP public opinion began to soften, discerning clear markers of progress and assimilation among the Irish and the Irish, in turn, consciously sought to establish themselves as part of the white majority. By virtue of their skin colour, their language ability, their political acumen, and their ability to coexist in the Anglo-Saxon power structure, the Irish scrambled to the top of the undesirable pile of discriminated ethnic groups. Indeed, by the last decades of the 19th century the divide between the Irish and the WASP populations was less immediately perceptible. Ellen Skerret reiterates the closing of this divide, explaining how Irish and WASPs became undifferentiated for new immigrants from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. As a consequence, she points out that "not only did new immigrants push the Irish up the economic ladder...they made the Irish appear more American" (cited in Williams, 175). While this phenomenon was of undoubted benefit in many senses for the Irish, it had a very negative component. Many Irish people adopted racist attitudes, showing a tendency to become perpetrators of behaviours for which they had long been the victims. As a result, the Irish fostered bigoted tendencies. While the privilege of whiteness helped to consolidate the position of the Irish in this society, it conversely "cemented the subordination of other racial minorities" (Lúibhéid 1997:83). It was, according to Williams:
probably the most race-conscious period in American history. The influx of immigrants from every nation and linguistic group in Europe added to the racial tensions already existing along the colour lines...in such a situation, ethnic stereotyping was inevitable. By 1900 the Irish had been through the worst of it.

(197)

By the 20th century, many of the Irish succeeded in climbing the social ladder, a phenomenon which I will not trace here except to comment briefly with the following. Some of the Irish acquired exceptional political influence in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and later San Francisco. Their highly developed organisations and political skills enabled them to achieve control of city administrations and to leave a notable mark on the style of American politics. Others led workers unions or rose to elevated positions in the Catholic Church hierarchy. It was often a long and arduous battle but the Irish persisted. This process was often conducted and negotiated through music. However, before exploring this important point, I must first acknowledge that ideological space and personal space for one’s identity were not the only ways in which the city impacted upon Irish immigrants. As the following section reveals, urban space was directly manifested in the music itself. This had profound consequences for the development of Irish music in an urban American environment.

**Tenements in the Grooves**

In his book *Postmodernism: A Reader*, Thomas Docherty deals with differences in ideology and social practices in relation to concepts of space and time in various geographical locations around the world. He states:

It is better to think that the world is simply lived at different speeds, in different times, in different places. In short there is no one world (or even three) but rather many; all being lived at different rhythms, none of which need ever to converge into harmony.

(Docherty 1993:18)

The following section looks at how the rhythm of two worlds were brought together as the immigrant Irish in America sought for ways to combine the tempo of the rural Irish life with the new rhythms of an urban American environment. This was reflected, in part, in the evolution of Irish musical practice. As will be shown shortly, the piano appeared in Irish music as a bridge or mediator between these different worlds.

85
On arriving in America, the Irish found jobs in various industrial locations and were quickly ghettoised, being packed into over-crowded tenements with poor facilities. These congested living quarters in high-rise cities were the complete antithesis to the open landscape of the Irish environment. This change of both personal and shared space must have impacted enormously upon the psyche of the immigrant Irish. When writing about this phenomenon eminent geographer David Harvey states that:

Urbanism may be regarded as a particular form of patterning of the social process. This process unfolds in a spatially structured environment created by man. The city therefore can be regarded as a tangible, built environment - an environment which is a social product. (Harvey 1973:196)

As a product of this urban setting, the dance music of the immigrant would also unfold spatially to resonate with this new environment. Music, as a social practice and construct, naturally reflected the new experiences of this community.

The key point is that, if, as Harvey argues, “spatial forms ...are not seen as inanimate objects within which the social process unfolds, but as things which contain social processes in the same manner that social processes are spatial” (10-11) the same could be said of musical expression and its forms. Therefore, I argue that amid tenements and high-rises, these new experiences were audible in the music itself as it was practised by the Irish immigrants. In essence, the grafting of vertical structures (chordal accompaniment) to a hitherto linear, spacious, horizontal music seems to reflect, on the most fundamental level, a move from open landscape to dense, high-rise urban life. As discussed in chapter one, Irish dance music embodied the characters of the landscape from whence it was conceived and practised. The wayward orientation of the melodic line representing the open landscape of Ireland was in stark contrast to the tightly constructed, man-made environment of the industrialised city, represented by the harmonic component.
Many traditional instrumentalists of late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries found that Irish traditional music did not sound or feel the same in this environment. This is hardly surprising. Sociologist Anthony Giddens points out that the development of modern cities has not only impacted upon the modes of behaviour and habits of people but it also has influenced patterns of thought and feeling (Giddens 1997:473). According to one musician and singer Charlie Coen, the whole “tempo of the city” was “out of sync” with Irish Music early this century.\textsuperscript{9} It is interesting that this very word ‘tempo’ was chosen by Coen here. Just as the music and particularly to songs of the Irish tradition did not seem to fit into the new way of life offered by America, neither, it seems did the language. Historians have frequently commented upon the rapid adoption of English by the Irish immigrant community.\textsuperscript{10} In this modern, fast-paced cityscape it seems the laconic Irish syntax and expression did not have a place. Kirby Miller explores this phenomenon positing that the Irish language in its very structure and semantic orientation embodies a sense of dependence and passivity. In Miller’s contestable but interesting view, the Irish language thus helped to shape the Irish worldview (Miller 1985:119). I am more comfortable with the assertion that the Irish were eager to shed the burden of their native tongue because the Irish language had become tied up with a sense of shame and backwardness - a view formed from centuries of imperialistic rule. Any of these opinions might also shed light on why the Irish sean nós song tradition never really found a voice in America, especially in the recorded context.\textsuperscript{11} If Irish dance music needed something to help it synchronise with the tempo of modern urban American life, what chance was there for the metreless, improvised song of another age?

It was clear that something was needed to make the ‘tempo’ of Irish dance music more conducive to its new habitat. The new spatial experiences of the immigrant had to be represented in the music. As a corollary to this point, the multicultural fabric of these urban centres should influence musical production in some form or another if the music was to become a social practice and a product of the environment. I argue that the addition of the piano encompassed many aspects of the immigrant experience. Its inclusion imbued the dance music with a busier, denser Pan-American feel by virtue of the piano being so integral to the American musical and
cultural experience. Further, it added a vertical dimension missing from traditional music.

Piano accompaniment, then, was the unquestionable manifestation of these urban conditions in musical terms. Many recordings of Irish dance music demonstrate the successful integration of spatial, harmonic elements. Yet, it is interesting that the inclusion of piano accompaniment in many other recordings was far from seamless. Perhaps the different responses to the same phenomenon, as enacted through the piano, reflected the ability of some immigrants and musicians to adapt better that others to their new surroundings and cultural space? This will form an important part of the discussion in the next chapter.

In the case of the 78rpm record, Harvey's assertion on the spatial and social dimensions of urbanism has a dual resonance. Not only did the addition of piano accompaniment represent the change in space experienced by the immigrant, but the very space occupied by the music within the physical grooves of the shellac record saw these experiences truncated, metamorphosed into a commercial product and sold accordingly. The significance here is that the space-time continuum was ruptured with the very temporal and ephemeral nature of the music being challenged. The music was captured and pinned down with more subtle consequences than the immediate perceptible addition of harmony. Harmony can pin down a melody in a deliberate way, committing it to a specific aural space. But the very act of recording interferes with the passing nature of a musical performance. Once recorded, the music can be played over and over again and as such has an existence beyond the original rendition. As a result, dance music could dwell outside the realm of its original context. In this way it too became a true product of the industrialised, capitalist environment where virtually everything could be packaged and priced. As Walter Benjamin points out in his essay ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’: art becomes a commodity under capitalism. To preserve the autonomy of art - that is art for art's sake - he argues, divorces art from new technologies and the social being. In essence, what happens is that “art is removed from the realm of ritual to that of politics” (Benjamin 1992:45). Further, there is a clear relationship between autonomous works of art and the concept of authenticity, for to 'copy' an artwork immediately compromises this
authenticity. Committing Irish dance music to a 78rpm record interfered at a fundamental level with the authenticity of musical moment. A once unique performance could be recreated and replayed over and over again through this recorded medium. While the original recording was ‘authentic’ when first made, to make and play copies of this original record undermined this concept of authenticity. Further, the removal of the music from its original function coupled with the addition of the piano in this new context challenged the authenticity of the musical experience. Therefore, to reiterate, according to Benjamin:

The instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics. (46-7)

In this case, the politics were that of imperialistic capitalism: imperialistic both in terms of the creation of an aesthetic of appreciation through the application of piano harmony, and also imperialistic by the modernist truncation of experience into a commercial product. The skyscrapers were not mere embodiments of capitalism, as the opening Giddens quote maintains, but the same skyscrapers were represented two fold in the 78rpm record - both in terms of their spatial dimensions and as seats of the corporate capitalist power, all of which resulted in the creation of commercial recording from original and authentic moments.

The process of urbanisation, then, proved highly influential for the perception of the Irish, framing their negotiations for identity, as well as having a direct spatial impact on the music they produced. Music, then, became a vital tool and medium through which this journey for validation and equality was negotiated. The next section will concentrate on this area, tracing the change from song to dance music, and tracing the change in perception of the Irish as the ‘other’ to simply ‘another’.

**Irish and Popular Music in America**

Irish music has never been a stranger to the commodification process from its earliest days in America. Prior to the advent of the recording industry, Irish music was
heard in various venues all over the country. From the outset, the musical ‘stage’, whatever the context, became a major arena for the negotiating and representation of Irish identity. In this way, Irish music as an art form could be seen to have made a clear move into the realm of politics of intervention and compromise. On one hand, musicians and singers conformed to and even played upon commonly held, stereotypical beliefs about the Irish, essentially reinforcing them, sometimes to their detriment and other times to their cunning advantage. On the other hand, musical practices also became prophetic, an expression of how the Irish wished to be perceived, offering an alternative to the offensive ‘Paddy’ stereotype. Musical means were used to carve out a newer and more acceptable image of the Irish. The piano was an integral part of the trajectory Irish music followed and the subsequent section traces the development of Irish music in America with a particular focus on the role of the piano in this context.

Why, then, did the piano gain such a foothold in the recorded dance music tradition? There are a number of interrelated reasons for this. The piano played an important role in terms of being an aural manifestation of the dense, urban environment’s physical space as discussed above. I will also show how the piano played its role in helping the Irish to negotiate their identity and their social space in America. The Irish possessed the dual aspirations of attempting to preserve aspects of their identity and of trying to blend into their adopted home. On many levels, the piano acted as a mediator between these two aspirations and made a valuable contribution to the carving out of a comfortable and acceptable identity for the Irish in America.

Irish music, both song and dance, has had a long history in the United States. The term ‘Irish music’ however, is problematic as the generic nature of such an umbrella heading hides the complexity and diversity of music making within. While acknowledging this diversity, the broadest possible interpretation of the term functions adequately - meaning Irish song and Irish dance music. From Irish music’s introduction to America’s commercial world, the music business provided a fertile ground for negotiating and expressing identity. Trends in the music business both reflected current attitudes towards the Irish as well as acted as agents of change. The
changing status of the Irish can be traced in the music industry, from Vaudeville to Tin Pan Alley and the early years of recording. The story is inextricably linked with a complex set of values as well as with numerous technical inventions. Irish music was first recognised as part of the popular music genre. It gradually separated from mainstream popular music to move towards a more easily recognised ethnic sound—essentially a musical subculture. This change was encapsulated in the change of focus from popular songs to dance music. This parallels a decided shift in Irish and Irish-American identity, where the former continue to arrive on the American shore, keen to preserve aspects of Irish identity, while the latter actively seek to become subsumed into mainstream American society. The story of the Irish and the Irish-American acceptance into this society unfolds. Within all of these changes the piano plays its role as an integral part of the music business, a vehicle for the expression of Irish identity and as a pervading symbol of respect and modernity.

**Vaudeville**

For many Irish immigrants who arrived in the 19th century, the music business provided a viable alternative to industrial labour. Many immigrants gravitated towards vaudeville, working on the stage or on riverboats, travelling and touring around the country. The piano was always an integral part of this musical context and the piano vamp was an integral part of its sonic expression. In terms of ‘Paddy’ stereotypes, the Irish had to deal directly with vaudeville stereotypes. The vaudeville audience was comprised mainly of the WASPs, so in order to be financially successful, performers had to cater to their tastes. The WASP audience delighted in ‘Paddy’ characterisations and so the performers quickly learned to perfect this stereotype. This was not as distasteful as one might suppose as this was a common practice among various ethnic groups including African-Americans who performed ‘coon’ songs. Further, many ‘Irish’ entertainers were not in fact Irish immigrants, or of Irish extraction. These entertainers were Irish delineators, performers who mimicked audience expectations of the Irish by latching onto contemporary stereotypical formulae.

However, by the late 19th century the Irish vaudeville comic was no longer acceptable, insulting Irish and Irish-American tastes. This change can be understood on two levels. Firstly, with the growing sense of Irish nationalism and cultural sensitivity,
there was a decided distaste for stage Irish comedy. Successive generations of Irish-Americans, in particular, felt that they were not fairly represented by such images. Secondly, and directly related to the previous point, vaudeville was seen as an undesirable form of entertainment. As American tastes became more sophisticated, particularly in light of new technologies, vaudeville was gradually being abandoned in favour of other sources of entertainment. As Malone points out,

The entertainment world helped shape the image of the Irish American, for better and for worse. Some vaudeville entertainers made their living by perpetuating the negative portrait of Irish as lazy, fighters, and drunks, which had been fostered by prejudice. The more successful entertainers offered an image of wit and charm while singing sentimental songs.

(40)

The Irish stereotype was not altogether abandoned - rather its character was modified. A more amicable and mellow Irish fellow emerged and “by the end of the 1890s, vaudeville performers and songwriters were busy scraping off Paddy’s rougher edges” (Williams 1996:204). Yet Williams makes the point that by this stage the Irish and the urban context were so synonymous that the production of a distinctly Irish identity was almost impossible to achieve within the limitations of popular song (209). The stereotypical formulae had been established and the codes seemed immutable. An alternative would have to be sought in this climate of cultural and nationalist awareness. While popular song persisted for sometime, dance music was beginning to establish its position more strongly, particularly as instrumental dance music represented an Irish identity controlled by the Irish, in contrast to the stereotypical or sentimental songs which were essentially WASP or media constructions respectively.

**Black Vaudeville**

The Irish were not the only ethnic group keen to establish and consolidate their presence in America through musical practices. African-Americans also negotiated their identity through music. Much of the music they performed had a profound effect on musicians who played Irish music in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This influence had a precedent in Black minstrelsy. This theatrical/musical genre which came into being after the Civil War actually originated with white performers.
Realising the financial rewards of the music business, black counterparts quickly followed the established conventions of these shows. This essentially involved acceding to racial self-mockery, but also provided a showcase for emerging talent (Berlin 1994:11). The stereotype in this case was the “coon”, the African-American who dressed and spoke in a very specific way.

As in Irish vaudeville, song never ousted instrumental performance in black vaudeville. Like its Irish counterpart, black minstrelsy was seen as distasteful and outdated by 1900. While “coon” conventions continued throughout ragtime years they too were modified somewhat. In many cases, however, black entertainers persisted in satisfying the demand for this racist stereotype and continued to entertain accordingly (Berlin 79). Russell Sanjek recounts how black performer Ernest Hogan justified his hit “All Coons Look Alike to Me”:

When pressed about the racial nature of the song that made him famous, Hogan stated that he felt it was composed at a time when music needed a new direction and its success made the path easier for other black artists to follow. (Sanjek 1991:xii)

The Irish and the African-Americans shared much in terms of the trajectory the themes of their respective musics followed. The performance of their music by people outside their ethnic group was also a common feature. For example most “coon songs” were performed by whites, just as many Irish delineators were not Irish.

Vaudeville did much to configure a sonic and imaginary world - a world in which these racist images of the Irish and the African-American continued to linger, and a world that was reinforced in music publication. With the advent of large-scale music publishing, the artists of vaudeville were gradually subsumed into this new aspect of the business. The stage tradition continued but with a new slant - one that saw music in its published form more widely disseminated than was ever possible before.
Tin Pan Alley

The last chapter dealt briefly with the industrialisation of the music business, the "bourgeois revolution" marked by "the spread of the market system through almost all musical activities" (Williams 1996:181). This was later to be followed by the emergence of a mass culture which ferociously consumed popular musics. The result was the consolidation of the music business around Union Square in Manhattan and this area came to be known as Tin Pan Alley. Tin Pan Alley played a huge role in the dissemination of records and sheet music. Its firms specialised exclusively in popular songs, churning out compositions as purely manufactured commodities. The writing of Irish songs was dominated by Tin Pan Alley writers, many without any link to the Emerald Isle but all clever enough to recognise an entertainment gold mine when they saw one. Some of the most illustrious popular composers were Victor Herbert, John Philip Sousa, and George M. Cohan, all of whom realised the potential monetary gain that writers could make out of their work (Sanjek xi). Together with other 'alley' composers, these men created a formulae or blueprint for hit songs to the extent that a sentimental Irish song could be written by a person of any ethnic background to marvellous effect. It is important at this stage to acknowledge the musical relationship which was established between the Irish and the Germans. I alluded to this in chapter II and this musical collaboration is shown to reach new heights in terms of instrumental Irish music on record in subsequent chapters. 

A formula had been established and these nostalgic Irish songs were carefully and cleverly marketed to an audience which perceived them to be quintessentially Irish. Little did the public realise how manufactured the sentiment was, but perhaps they did not especially care. The result was the creation of songs featuring kitsch nostalgia and sentimentality for the 'auld sod'. These compositions proved enormously popular, and not just with those of Irish decent. Such songs were essentially part of the genre of popular music in the sense that the music was purchased, played, and enjoyed by all. These songs were clever in that they allowed the exiled Irish and Irish-Americans to be portrayed "in a ways that both they and the rest of America could appreciate" (Williams 179). In this way, a sentimental nationalism for Ireland did not in any way affect American patriotism.
Naturally these songs found precedents in the parlour songs of previous decades and the piano was an integral part of their expression. The piano became strongly associated with such nostalgic themes and sentiments, as well as their musical utterance. The mechanical piano rolls were also major disseminators of Tin Pan Alley hits. This was apt considering that the compositional approach and the publishing format of this era were very much based around the piano. The piano was inextricably tied up with such musical expressions. Thus, when instrumental music began to develop in the early 20th century, the piano naturally eased this transition from song to instrument by providing a sound familiar to audiences.

It is no coincidence that the decline of popular songs, particularly those with Irish themes, coincided with the rise in popularity and the recording of traditional dance music. Technology had much to do with this movement. The shift in emphasis from traditional characterisations to more modern themes became evident in the first few decades of the century. Slow to relinquish a winning formula, many songwriters matched themes of Irish origin with aspects of technology for comic effect as in such songs as "My Little Irish Aeroplane". This would seem to suggest that themes of Irish identity were being viewed as old and dated. By inserting and combining aspects of contemporary life perhaps the songs could be modernised successfully. However, this trend did not persist for very long, possibly a year or two at the most. The novelty of such thematic combinations wore off quickly on a public increasingly jaded by this genre of song. Into the second and third decade of the Twentieth Century dance music in general became increasingly popular. Irish themes and their musical sounds seemed to have little in common with pervading, popular jazz rhythms or more contemporary theme. This style of song had run its course and no longer reflected the concerns of newly arriving Irish immigrants or Irish-Americans. Irish-Americans were now moving to the suburbs and were less connected to their native roots than their immigrant forefathers. As Williams notes,

Inevitably, American popular culture began to reflect the interests of the second generation, who may have occasionally hummed "The Old Bog Road" but whose feet were firmly planted on Broadway.

(176)
Incoming Irish immigrants could not really relate to the songs that were essentially commercial products. They were proud to fly the banner of contemporary Irish identity and found that this song genre was no longer an adequate means for expressing their sentiments.

This being the case, perhaps it comes as no surprise that dance music should take up the mantle of establishing “Irishness” in an American context. The irony is, however, that Irish-Americans (those generations born in America) were strangely reluctant to declare themselves musically in this context. The ‘Golden Era’ of Irish dance music recording of the 1920s was essentially fuelled by the activities of Irish-born, recent immigrants to America. The demand for a new image existed among these musicians, whether it was to be a singularly Irish identity or an Irish-American one. There was a move from the song to a complete and autonomous instrumental form. The last profitable year for new popular songs about Ireland and the Irish coincided with the beginning of what is known as the ‘Golden Era’ of Irish dance music recording. Song was subsumed to some extent back into mainstream entertainment and no longer became the all-pervading vehicle for Irish themes as it had been. This move to instrumental music was further consolidated by the dance craze in America during the first few decades of the Twentieth Century. Dance music seemed far more conducive to the rhythm of industrialised America and the soothing movement of the nostalgic ballad seemed to fade away under the encroaching foot-tapping rhythms of the new era.\textsuperscript{14} Vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley were initially complemented but gradually ousted by the recording industry, radio, and cinema in successive decades. In terms of dance music, there are many factors which helped pave the way for its burgeoning popularity. The genre of ragtime, in particular, proved highly influential. Again, the piano played an integral role and this genre was to have profound influence upon many contemporary and future Irish dance music accompanists.

\textbf{Ragtime}

Ragtime was essentially a style of piano performance which found its voice in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century. It originated in America’s black community, a community that was searching for a way to combine the cross rhythms at the heart of
African music with the sounds and influences of American musical experience. In light of the obvious expense of the piano, it might seem unusual that this instrument was chosen as the main vehicle for expression by a racially and economically oppressed group. But the motivation for embracing the piano was surely the same as for the Irish. Just like any other ethnic group, the African-Americans were eager for advancement up the social ladder. In the same manner as the Irish, they too saw the ownership of the piano as a cultural and economic status symbol. Yet in spite of this association with the piano, not everyone viewed ragtime in a positive light. Ragtime mediated between African-American and America musical systems. The first rags were brought to public attention by black entertainers with some education in the Western Art music tradition. Yet, as Edward A. Berlin points out in his Scott Joplin biography, “piano ragtime was widely regarded as reflecting a lower order of the art, a music of saloons, brothels, and lower-class blacks” (Berlin 1994:75).

Like Irish artists, black musicians and minstrels travelled around working on riverboats, minstrel shows and vaudeville. According to jazz historian James Lincoln Collier, piano players were an elite among ragtime musicians - “the ivory tinkling ‘professors’ who moved through the brothels, gambling joints, saloons, and clubs of the big city ghettos, entertaining a clientele that was often racially mixed” (Collier 1978:44). Collier’s use of the word “professor” in conjunction with piano players has particular resonance with the Irish situation also. Literate musicians were often bestowed with this title, including the Sligo fiddler James Morrison. Morrison was a musician who organised his musical ensembles and harmonic accompaniments with great precision and deliberation, as will be seen in chapter V. 15

One of ragtime’s greatest exponents, Scott Joplin (1868-1917), received instruction from a German immigrant teacher named Julius Weiss.16 From the very start Joplin received a solid grounding in the rudiments of Western Art music - a training which profoundly influenced his compositions (Berlin 7). This is of particular relevance to the adoption of piano vamping in an Irish dance music context. Like Joplin, accompanists to Irish dance music also introduced elements of the Western Art tradition into the music, thus opening up a key syncretic space for the two musics. Interestingly, this oral means of harmonisation in Irish music proved far more
sustainable and durable than earlier attempts in literate sources to employ the rules of Western harmony. In many ways, introducing harmonic conventions in this manner resulted in the corruption of ‘correct’ processes of harmonisation. But these adaptations produced musical effects which had an important impact on the overall sound.

In terms of absorption of style, many Irish immigrants must have been exposed to ragtime music in urban enclaves. Noel Ignatiev speaks of the interchange between these groups, especially in terms of the Irish moving into black communities and frequenting “black rookeries” (1995:41). But undoubtedly the real influence came during the ragtime boom in the first decades of the 20th century. Irving Berlin’s ‘Alexander’s Ragtime Band’ was a huge hit with the public, in spite of (or maybe due to?) the dilution of syncopation and other musical features of the original rags. In fact, this composition is generally perceived as marking the take-over of the ragtime genre by whites. Like many cultural products which show a marketing promise, ragtime found itself appropriated by marketing gurus, impresarios and music publishers. The genre was sanitised and packaged for white America in a deliberate attempt to make it palatable for all those white people who originally found it offensive.

In fact, ragtime dominated the popular music scene in America from about 1900 to 1915. This boom was associated with a ragtime dance known as the cakewalk and the American public, so hungry for something different and novel, gravitated towards its music. Many dances of this time, especially ragtime’s ‘cakewalk’ dance, freed the public from the “corset of Victorian rules” (Whitcomb 1973:33).

The impact of this dance and its associated music genre was unprecedented. Competitions in ragtime compositions were launched all over the country. The genre was taught in public and private schools. Vast quantities of ragtime were published in sheet form and ragtime was recorded on disk as well as on the now extremely popular player-piano rolls. There was a price to pay, however, for this dazzling popularity. Many of the ragtime compositions which were churned out for this market had lost their basic vitality. They became simply another subsection of the parlour/popular
music category. Ragtime had moved a substantial distance from its origins, both artistically and ideologically. Parallels can be drawn here with some publications of Irish music during the Nineteenth Century, in chapter I [ex.s 1.1 - 1.5].

From a structural and expressive point of view, ragtime was gradually transformed from an off-the-cuff, improvisatory exercise to a formalised system of playing. Works were composed in a formulaic manner, published and sold. In order to become literate pieces, essentially oral compositions were fixed as notation. As a result, the cross-rhythms were represented as syncopations as the music was made to conform to Western conventions concerning correct modes of musical representation. The translation of the rhythm into a regular pulse with syncopation was adequate but not comprehensive. For the inexperienced but literate player, the notes could be interpreted but the basic swing of the music was not so easily accessible. As in Irish music, the product had to be interpreted from notation. Lack of familiarity with the actual process of playing ragtime resulted in the loss of that element not translatable into literate notation. 

Both genres, ragtime and Irish dance music, showed enough similarities to allow for syncretism [ex. 3.1]. It is significant that the first tunes to be ragged included quadrilles and schottisches - that is, folk dance music with strong, regular metres around which the raggers played [ex. 3.2]. This set up immediately a common ground with folk music in general and traditional Irish music in particular. Peter Van Der Merwe points out that “the genuine folk element” in minstrel and, by extension, ragtime music “was mainly Celtic-Irish, Scottish, or Scotch-Irish” (Van Der Merwe 1989:278).

Both ragtime and Irish traditional dance music were dance music genres. In this respect, regular metre and tempo were of paramount importance. James Collier discusses the basic structure of the piano rag and the similarities with Irish dance music are quite striking:
This strain from Joplin's 'Original Rags' of 1899 (Berlin 1994) illustrates the basic 'oompah - oompah' bass movement. While this is achieved here by the left hand only, the movement is essentially the same as the basic vamp practised in piano accompaniment to Irish music, except in the case of the latter both hands are employed to create this effect [see any example in chapter V].

'The Maple Leaf Rag' (1899-1900) is probably Joplin's most famous composition (Berlin 1994). The basic structure of the rag correlates with the structure of a traditional Irish tune - (4 bar phrases x 4) x 2, i.e. repeated, giving a 32 bar structure. While the bass figure differs slightly in orientation from the previous example its propulsive element remains the same, clearly accentuating 4 quaver beats per bar. Note how the full range of the piano is employed, especially around bars 9-10. This use of the high register is found in the vamping techniques of some 78rpm Irish music vampers [see ex. 5.6].
Most ragtime themes are built up from two-and four-bar figures, which are repeated or varied often enough to make up a sixteen- or thirty-two-bar strain...ragtime is...a four-square music.

(51)

Irish dance music too is a four square music, generally consists of two parts or verses which are eight bars in length each. These are repeated and within each part, phrase length comes in four bars. A typical tune, then, comprises of thirty-two bars, subdivided into eight phrases.

Both genres were also profoundly affected by the advent of equal temperament and fixed-pitch instruments. The blue notes of piano ragtime disappeared as the fixed pitched notes could not sound them (a phenomenon akin to the eradication of ambiguous 4ths and 7ths in Irish music as discussed in chapter one), though it could be argued that crunched notes acted in their stead. The form of instrumental ragtime, consisting of an improvisatory melody over a steady bass with accompaniment finds many similarities with Irish dance music and its accompanying piano vamp. Irish dance music vampers followed the pattern of their ragtime counterparts, the left hand beating out the steady ‘oompah-oompah’ against the improvised melody. However, as Whitcombe comments, “thick German harmonies” kept the “whole exercise well housed”(25). While the suitability of aspects of ragtime vamp for accompanying Irish music will be explored in chapter V, it is sufficient to note that ragtime exerted a decided influence on many Irish music vampers. In spite of the tension between the Irish and African-Americans, Noel Ignatiev points out how “in antebellum America it was speculated that if racial amalgamation was ever to take place it would begin between those two groups” (2). Whether or not this happened on a significant scale in terms of inter-racial relationships, there was certainly reciprocity between the two music cultures right up until the beginning of the 20th century and after.

Ragtime has been lauded as the first truly American music genre. Even so, it began to lose favour with an ever-tiring public by the First World War. In spite of its popularity, ragtime always had opponents. There were those who questioned the influence of ragtime with its suspect roots and associated dance gyrations, fearing for
the morality of America’s youth. It seems ironic that the piano, which a few decades
earlier was responsible for the preservation of virtue, could now be seen as a
subversive vehicle. But more pressing than the morality issue was the public’s hunger
for something new and exciting. This came in the guise of jazz and with its advent
ragtime died out rapidly (or, arguably, metamorphosed into jazz). By this stage,
however, ragtime’s formulae and sound were imprinted on the ears of America and it
is little wonder that the Irish were also affected. In the words of Whitcomb, “in 1900 a
pianist trying out a rag could see before his very eyes the collision between the old and
the new, the old oak replaced by the swaying skyscraper” (25). The same could be
said of recordings of Irish dance music where piano accompaniment became a vital
component. It seems that the piano was employed as an expression of modernity and
progress. The success of piano ragtime surely encouraged many Irish musicians to
adopt the piano vamp into their own music.

Ragtime had a profound effect on the musical language and harmonic
consciousness of the early 20th century. Its potent influence and dissemination were
aided by the sound recording industry and the following section shows just how
contradictory this force was. On the one hand, the sound recording industry promoted
general music consumption, while on the other hand, its commercial activities also
helped in instigating the demise of the piano. As ragtime’s main expressive vehicle and
as an instrument which had long been an integral part of America’s musical expression,
the piano’s reign was coming to an end.

Sound Recording Industry
The development of commercial recording and radio had huge implications for
all forms of music. The piano suffered positive and negative effects from the
development of the record - positive in the sense that the piano was still a popular,
visible medium, but negative in the sense that passive consumption promoted less
actual playing of the instrument. As a result, piano sales were affected. Nevertheless,
even though fewer pianos were bought, the piano enjoyed increased exposure on
recordings of Irish music during early decades of the 20th century. Sound recordings
began to dominate the music business. The popular music market underwent a
fundamental change - a change that incorporated ethnic music in its commercial net.
Since I will be dealing with this issue in the next chapter, it is sufficient to say here that
the Irish were an obvious target audience for recording companies who saw great
potential in the hitherto unexplored ethnic market. The growing popularity of Irish
dance halls which mushroomed in various urban centres resulted in the
professionalisation of Irish music. This had profound repercussions for the recording
industry in general and for Irish music in particular.

Conclusion

Many Irish fled from exceedingly difficult conditions under British rule only to
be subjected to newer, subtler forms of imperialism in America. As cultural historian
Edward Said has noted “imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become 'past' once
de-colonisation had set in motion the dismantling of the classical empire” (Said
1993:341). Imperialism simply took on newer, more subtle forms. In the musical
realm this was manifested in the inclusion of harmony which became integral to the
comprehensibility of any kind of music. It is thus fitting that the most imperialist of
instruments, the piano, should be the primary means for fulfilling this harmonic
prerequisite. These pressures were reflected in the music industry and in its marketing
decisions. The piano and, to a lesser extent, its sister the pianola, came to dominate
the musical sound of the time, with the 78rpm record being, paradoxically, a partial
vehicle and a partial destroyer of this omnipotence. Just as “the general adoption of
the equal-temper followed the conquest of the piano” (Channan 1994:215) in the
Western Art music world, so too did it dominate the Irish music scene early in this
century, at least in a commercial context. This musical conquest of both disc and key,
which was embraced by the assimilated Irish community, might be viewed in a dubious
light. To some extent, musical time, space, and sound embodied or appropriated the
uniformity and genericism of contemporary economic processes - that is, mass
production. Ironically, this dilution of individuality came at a stage when many Irish
immigrants were trying to exert their Irish identity - an identity which was initially
compromised in their attempt to seek acceptance in a new, adopted country.

Yet within this industrialised context of mass production, a distinctive Irish
sub-culture emerged. This sub-culture provided a more realistic representation of the
immigrant Irish than did the pseudo-Irish song constructs of Tin Pan Alley. It is
important to remember, nevertheless, that these songs were representative of another form of ‘Irish’ identity as practised among generational Irish-Americans. In the words of former Irish President Mary Robinson, during her address of the speech “Cherishing the Irish Diaspora” to the House of the Oireachtas (State) in Ireland:

Emigration is not just a chronicle of sorrow and regret. It is also a powerful story of contribution and adaptation...if we expect that the mirror held up to us by Irish communities abroad will show us a single familiar identity, or a pure strain of Irishness, we will be disappointed. We will overlook the fascinating diversity of culture and choice which looks back on us. Above all we will miss the chance to have that dialogue with our own diversity which this reflection offers us.

(Robinson 1995)

Such diversity could only be present in a place of great commonalties and differences - the city. The American City was a powerhouse of innovation, containing great diversity within its geographical limits. Irish dance music had to find a new mode of expression in its urban American context. How else could it be truly reflective of its new environment. The 78rpm record, as artificial as the city, proved an ideal medium for the dissemination of Irish music. Within its grooves, the piano became a natural means of compensation for the loss of spatial dimension, a mediator between the disparate value systems of urban and rural, old and new, and a vehicle for imbuing Irish music’s sound with a Pan-American, modern feel. Raymond Williams asserts that:

The key cultural factor of the modernist shift is the character of the metropolis; in these general conditions but then, even more decisively, in its direct effects on form. The most important general element of the innovations in form is the fact of immigration to the metropolis, and it cannot too often be emphasised how many of the major innovators were, in this precise sense, immigrants.

(Williams 1992:91)

The final clause has a double resonance in the case of Irish dance music vampers who were often immigrants not necessarily of Irish background.

Walter Benjamin has pointed out that “mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual” (Benjamin 1991:46). In this context, 78rpm recordings of Irish dance music may be interpreted as something positive and modernist on two levels. Firstly, the recordings helped preserve a
tradition and cultural practice. Secondly, the gramophone and piano, both mechanical products, took Irish music into a new realm. New contexts replaced old rituals - they had to if the music was going to have a function in this urban context - and this happened as a result of piano accompaniment and music recording. Moreover, as Smith concludes in his article on the topic of emigration and music:

Immigrants have played a large part in Irish traditional dance music, but they have not merely preserved the genre, but reconstructed its meaning. Because they enable the music to be tacitly associated with a cultural nexus of emigration and modernity, it could continue to speak to a broad constituency of players.

(134-5)

The next two chapters explore how this meaning was actually constructed. I examine who the musicians (instrumentalists and vampers) were, and how they interacted with their recording companies. I show, through musical analysis of selected 78rpm records of Irish dance music, that all the issues discussed thus far are consolidated and manifested within the three minute limitation of a disc side. From the potent symbolism of the piano to the expression of identity and space - together with the influential sounds of ragtime and popular music - the 78rpm recording of Irish dance music is a microcosm. It is the ultimate modernist expression of the multi-layered experiences of the Irish immigrant in an urban American context.

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1 This book is viewed by some as quite controversial. Akenson argues that Irish Catholic immigrants of the Famine years must have been in some way well off in order to pay the boat fare to North America. There is an implication, therefore, that this group did quite well in being able to afford the Atlantic crossing (though undoubtedly some migrants had their passage paid for as part of an employment contract). Nonetheless, such a view leads to a possible interpretation of Akenson’s work as playing down the obvious suffering that went with being forced to undertake such a difficult journey in order to survive.

2 The Anglo-Irish also began emigrating at this time but in lesser numbers. Akenson points out that these comprised less than one tenth of the total immigrant Irish population and for this reason have been largely ignored and dubbed the “invisible immigrants”.

3 For example, the city of Wexford banned Catholics from entering its boundaries. Wexford was not exceptional in this sense. For the most part the native Irish Catholics remained in rural areas, subsisting on their own produce and trading in local villages. The majority had little need to visit the larger urban centres where the colonisers had established seats of power.

4 William H.A. William’s book *I was Only an Irishman’s Dream* is an excellent resource for this topic and is extremely comprehensive in its survey of vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley songs.

5 See Bourdieu’s theoretical model on orthodox and heterodox discourses (1977).
Its interesting that the authors of this song were Davis William Cahill and Charles B. Lawlor, men who possessed distinctly Irish names. It seems that such obviously racist songs were less likely to shock sensibilities back then than nowadays. Today, these songs would be deemed completely unacceptable and politically incorrect but at the time of their composition men like Cahill and Lawlor must have felt they were simply filling a niche in the market. This attitude is paralleled in the writing and performance of “coon” songs by African-American performers which also had racist content.

Penal-type Laws were established in various states. These discriminatory laws, generally active from around 1700 - 1780, included the forbidding of public mass celebration, the exclusion of Catholics from provincial militia, the banning of catholic priests from entering the colony, etc. See Akenson (1996) for greater detail on this topic.

Journalist Eithne Lübheid points out that Irish immigrants of the present day learn to be especially afraid of African-Americans even though many Irish people do not know one personally. She traces this racist attitude back to late last century (Lübheid 1997:86).

Coen made this comment to folklorist Mick Moloney on the television programme The Sounds of the Soul: Songs of Six Families. This was an Allan Albert production with Nick Spitzer and Mick Moloney, 1995

It seems the Irish, almost overnight, became English speakers. Of course many immigrants had already learned English in school. However, considering that most of the Irish emigrated from the West coast where the Irish language was still viewed as the vernacular until the end of the 19th century and in some cases into the 20th century, it was a remarkable achievement.

The *sean nós* song did persist in the private home session but it seems that this activity was rarely passed on more than one generation. Having said that, *sean nós* singer and researcher Lillis O Laoire is currently communicating with a second generation Irish-American *sean nós* singer (with a view to engaging in formal ethnographic work) proving that there are exceptions to this generally perceived truth (personal communication with Lillis O Laoire, 1997)

The ‘Tin Pan Alley’ title came into being in the following manner. Writers and performers for various publishing houses worked on musical numbers simultaneously, in different rooms and buildings in the area, creating a cacophony of sound on the streets which some likened to the crashing together of tin pans.

For some reason, many of the composers of Irish nostalgia songs were of German background. Many more Germans were performers of this genre. The popular song “Where the Shannon River Flows” was sung by the very German Hermen Heinlich, a tenor and Irish song specialist who changed his name to Will Oakland. This information was received at the Blas International Summer School Lecture Series 1997 by Harry Bradshaw in a presentation entitled “When Irish Eyes are Smiling”.

Having said that it is important to realise that dance music often included lyrics as the song was never truly usurped by the instrumental genre.

This is on the authority of Harry Bradshaw with whom I conducted a private interview in Dublin 1996. Bradshaw has undertaken ethnographic research over the past few decades with elderly musicians involved directly or indirectly with musicians such as Coleman and Morrison, gathering information otherwise now inaccessible.

This adds a further interesting dimension to the Irish - German musical relationship. Through the application of ragtime’s piano conventions an oblique but real connection was established between the Irish and German communities, mediated by black musicians playing ragtime and trained in aspects of the Western Art tradition.

This is, of course, something which is true of all musics, but it has particular resonance here due to the complexity of the ragtime’s rhythmic structures.

Of course, while these songs were mere media constructs of the time, they were extremely popular and many such songs made their way back to Ireland where traditional singers were exposed to them. These singers performed the songs and therefore promoted them in the indigenous tradition. This is quite ironic on one level, yet on another shows the reciprocity which existed between the two 'Irish' communities on either side of the Atlantic; a relationship which is not always acknowledged. For example, the popular song “My Irish Molly-O” was composed by Jew named Schwartz who wrote the song for a Broadway show. This song became a huge hit in mainstream America. It has subsequently been recorded in relatively recent years by the Irish group “De Dannan” and the song is now perceived by many as quintessentially Irish. This is just one of a number of examples where songs which were originally composed in America have since been passed down through the generations by *sean nós* singers in Ireland.
SECTION II

THE MICRO - FOREGROUND
During the early part of this century, record companies were simply part of the electrical goods industry...they were owned and run by engineers, inventors and stock market speculators...their managers did not seem much interested in music.

(Simon Frith 1989:15)

Recording companies saw possibilities of new markets and responded by producing what became known as race records - 'authentic portrayals' made mainly by immigrants from their own country men.

(Harry Bradshaw 1996a:19)
In the last chapter I looked briefly at the music business of America at the turn of the century as an arena for the negotiation of Irish identity. Manifestations of these aspirations and associated dialogues can be traced to changes in the style, content and forms of musical expression. This chapter concentrates predominantly on the newly-arrived Irish emigrant musicians who established a professional Irish dance music scene in urban areas and who recorded prolifically around the 1920s. As pointed out previously, the promotion of Irish dance music as a means of expressing Irish pride and identity in Irish terms did not negate the influence of external stimuli on musical production. The new emigrants were still subject to cultural pressures in America, and this can be traced and identified in the music.

The reasons for the piano’s inclusion on recorded sources of Irish traditional music may be reduced down to two basic arguments. One, the piano was imposed or somehow forced upon this music and two, the inclusion of the piano was a natural and inevitable phenomenon. In order to represent this activities of era accurately and fairly, I include both views in my argument. Further, I maintain that the seeming polarity between these views is incorrect. The viewpoints are far more dynamic and interrelated, forming part of a continuum of choice. Therefore, the following chapter focuses on the piano’s addition from both vantage points where neither view dominates. Rather, it insists that the issue of choice depended on context and a number of other variables.

But first I will concentrate on the emergence of the term ‘Irish’ in recording catalogues - a term which denotes ethnic Irish dance music recorded by ethnic Irish musicians. This is followed by an exploration of how this music needed to be mediated in order be understood within a new commercial environment, thus further becoming a reflection for the changing conditions. The medium to achieve this on both musical and symbolic levels was the piano. However, I will reveal that the piano was not the only active mediating force. In many cases, the piano accompanist was an equally influential and potent figure. This is especially true of accompanists who came from very different musical and ethnic backgrounds. However, before the musical sounds produced may be truly understood, the cultural context needs to be explored in finer
detail, particularly from the professional music scene and commercial recording point of view.

The Early Recording Industry

The birth and growth of the recording industry greatly affected the way in which music was disseminated early this century. The success of the recording industry had a widespread impact upon other media, such as leading to the gradual decline in the publishing of sheet music. In spite of the decisive shift towards non-literate media as a means of transmitting music early this century, the pianola also suffered at the hands of the recording industry. As each successive milestone in recording technology was reached, from the very first cylinder to the advent of electric recording in the mid 1920s, sheet music publishing was radically phased down and towards the end of the second decade of the 20th century, the pianola’s popularity had radically declined. The first recording machine, the phonograph, was invented by Edison in 1877 and its software of wax cylinders became commercially available by 1890. These cylinders were gradually superseded by the Berliner flat disks for gramophone towards the end of the 19th century. It is on these discs that this section focuses: the 78rpm records. Pertinent sources which I consult for discographic information on this era include Racy (1976), Spottswood (1991), Hamilton (1996), and others.

‘Technical linkage’ (Channan 1994) is a term used to describe the inextricable links between certain commercial items and their production. In the recording industry this concept can be seen clearly in operation since the major record companies were manufacturers of gramophones as well as the actual discs or cylinders. From its earliest stages the sound recording industry was dominated by three giants. These were Edison who recorded on cylinder, Victor who employed disks as their primary recording medium, and Columbia who used both (Sanjek 1991:vii). Once the supremacy of the disc was ensured, record companies tried to find new ways to sell their product, something which profoundly affected the recording of Irish music. The key point is that these early record companies were not simply making music recordings to sell as autonomous products. By providing a plentiful supply of records they were also ensuring that their gramophones would continue to enjoy popular sales.
It has always been a priority for these companies to corner new markets for the consumption of both the soft and hardware. By diversifying into ethnic markets, these companies maintained a high output of both record and player. Moreover, the software market was beginning to expand with many smaller companies competing for the public’s disposable income. The climate was ripe for diversification of the music industry. The result was that the popular music business began to splinter into specific markets with clearly targeted audiences. Irish traditional dance music was one such ethnic music genre which carved out a comfortable niche in the recording market.

**Recording Irish Traditional Dance Music**

Most early recordings of ‘Irish’ music had little to do with traditional Irish dance music practices. Even those recordings that did feature dance tunes were marketed side by side with the vaudeville acts and Tin Pan Alley creations all being packaged as popular music. While the label ‘Irish’ may have entered the taxonomic realm as early as 1891 (Healy 1970:34), ‘Irish’ music was still perceived as part of the popular music genre and marketed as such. At the same time the character of the stage Irish still held wide appeal. However, Irish music moved from a mainstream to a more peripheral audience as the term ‘Irish’ came to represent the indigenous dance music tradition of Ireland. As the meaning of the category ‘Irish’ changed, there was also a decided shift in the ways in which music was produced and marketed. In 1908 Columbia issued a catalogue series for foreign music. Then, in 1912 it established a foreign music department (Healy, 39). Irish music continued to be listed under popular music in other catalogues. The clarification process took some time and as Healy points out, “record companies did not place Irish records in specifically numbered series before the 1920s” (125).

The 1920s were significant for a variety of reasons, particularly because this was the first time that ‘Irish’ music was categorised in its own series. Healy has broken down the 78rpm era into five distinguishable sections:

1. 1900-1914: Irish recordings made primarily by studio musicians and non-Irish performers
2. 1914/15-1922: Significant number of Irish musicians begin to make records
3. 1922-1932: major period of Irish recording, with an almost exclusive use of Irish performers on record (curtailed by the Depression)

4. 1932-1942: decline in the issuing and sales of Irish recordings and increasing reissue of earlier material (includes Depression, World War II and recording ban)

5. 1942-1953: conclusion of the 78 era characterised by a severe decrease in interest on the part of record companies in Irish and ethnic musics.

(Healy 1970)

The Healy model is particularly useful and has gained wide appeal among scholars writing on this and related topics. While I shall be concentrating essentially on what has been dubbed as the ‘Golden Era’ of Irish music recording, I will refer to other periods, especially those immediately before and after this delineated time.

From the early 1920s to the 1930s, the demand dramatically increased for the issuing of ethnic musics on record. This brought about a change in marketing strategy by record companies resulting in the diversification of the popular music scene. Irish dance music, like many other ethnic musics, was now being recorded by musicians who were familiar with their own music and who were probably familiar with purchasing trends of their audiences. The objectives of recording companies shifted from employing a general marketing strategy to cornering specific markets in an attempt to maximise profits. Of course, while these records were intended for specific ethnic buyers, there were other means of imbuing the music with certain elements that might attract purchasers outside the specific target audiences. These elements, such as instrumentation, harmonic component, image, will be discussed shortly.

There are a variety of reasons for the establishment of this specific marketing strategy by record companies. One of the most fundamental reasons was fuelled purely by capitalist gain on the part of both the larger and smaller record companies. By the mid 1910s, patents on the various mechanical means of production were expiring so there was a scramble to set up recording companies and sign lucrative artists. Ronald Pearsall, who has written on the subject of popular music of the early 20th century explains how “the expiration of gramophone and phonograph patents
meant that dozens of companies were joining in the battle for the public's money" (Pearsall 1976:93). In this climate of intense competition, recording executives pondered over new ways of extending their empires. A problem encountered by many newer labels was that most of the major stars of the era were bound by contract to one of the larger, older companies. New popular music stars had to be found or created. Alternatively, new forms of entertainment with their own rising stars had to be cornered and marketed. Recording ethnic music seemed an inspired solution. The city was densely populated and ethnically diverse. It held the promise of a readymade market for many kinds of ethnic musics. Various ethnic groups in the city, including the Irish, Polish, Germans, Jewish and others, preserved their musical traditions with great passion and vigour. These groups were a prime target for the record producers.

The move to record for the Irish ethnic market did not happen quite so simply. The 'Irish' category as it stood in popular music was still lucrative, even though, as discussed in the previous chapter, the themes of its songs were beginning to seem outdated by the 20th century. Interestingly, certain companies already had Irish artists performing traditional dance music in their catalogues. The first recordings of Irish music for commercial use were made by the Edison Company as far back as 1899. These recordings comprised of four, two-minute cylinders, featuring James McAuliffe on uilleann pipes. The first disc recordings were made by German-American accordionist John J. Kimmel in 1907. However, the move to record traditional music by Irish musicians for a distinctly Irish market was instigated by Ellen O'Byrne DeWitt in Boston who aimed to demonstrate the existence of an authentic Irish music market. In 1916 banjo player James Wheeler and accordionist Eddie Herborn were recruited by O'Byrne DeWitt to record for Columbia with the promise that she would purchase the first 500 copies wholesale to sell in her shop. The success of Ellen O'Byrne's venture proved that traditional Irish music could be sold to the newly arrived Irish emigrant or to the first generation of Irish settlers. The Victor label began recording Irish traditional music in 1917 featuring piper Tom Ennis (Healy 1970:131). By about 1921, the Irish traditional music market was truly in existence. The market reached its high point with that decade known as the 'Golden Era' of commercial Irish music recording.
It is important to realise that Irish dance music was only a small category of the recording output of all the companies combined. Ethnic musics in general constituted only a percentage of most record companies business. Nevertheless, according to Hamilton, approximately 40 companies released recordings of Irish music between 1899 and 1942. Of these, three major companies dominated the market, Hamilton concludes, as “around 40 per cent of total releases were for Columbia, 18 per cent for Decca, and 16 per cent for Victor” (Hamilton 1996:90). Okeh was the first company to establish an Irish series in 1921 with their 21000 series. Columbia followed around three years later with their 33000-F series, the letter ‘F’ interestingly standing for ‘foreign’. Much of this series was reissued in Columbia’s 33500-F series during the mid-1930s. 1929 saw the arrival of Victor’s V-29000 series on the market. Some years later Decca launched their 12000 series. It is worth remembering that Decca was not established in American until 1934 and yet still managed to produce many influential records. Decca was one of the latest companies to be set up yet its output was considerable and its catalogue featured Columbia artists from more prosperous days. Other labels including Gennett, Brunswick, Vocalion, Emerson also added ethnic music to their catalogues. Genett established their Irish catalogue around 1925 (Healy 1970:134). Smaller labels often dealt exclusively with Irish music, such as Gaelic Phonograph which was established in 1922. Further labels of this kind include M&C New Republic and Keltic Records (Bradshaw 1997b:19). New Republic issued 78rpm records from the end of 1921, shortly in fact before the opening of the treaty negotiations in London. Their title was obviously chosen as a reflection of the political situation at home in Ireland. New Republic marketed their products using a tricolour label (Carolan 1983).

As more and more companies became involved in recording Irish music there was a significant change in the manner and format in which musical items were recorded. Solo recordings were gradually replaced by group or ensemble settings. Naturally this move was directly related to trends in recording technology. The advent of electric recording in the twenties gave greater fidelity to the product. Further, instruments which, for one reason or another, had hitherto proved unsuitable for older methods of recording could now be reproduced on record. As a direct result, there was a greater variety of instrument arrangements, particularly as the balancing of
sounds in larger groups became easier. But this growing popularity of band and ensemble recordings (culminating in mostly ensemble recordings in the late 20s and early 30s) reflected a wider preoccupation with dance bands. The playing of Irish music professionally was proving to be a lucrative business and this was reflected in the recording industry. As a result, companies recording Irish music during this era released a record every month and large concerns such as Columbia often issued six or seven each month (Spottswood 1991). Maebh Ní Fhuartháin acknowledges the special relationship between recording and professionalism in the music industry:

From c.1900 to the late 1960’s, two important developments were to have long-term ramifications on Irish music on record in the United States: the birth and advances of the recording industry itself and the explosion of the dance hall as a medium for social interaction in all walks of American life.
(Ní Fhuartháin 1993:32)

The next section is a brief exploration of the professional music business and how its success was inextricably bound up with the recording industry on a number of levels. It was the professionalisation of Irish traditional music that promoted the recording of music. Since the standard of performance of Irish traditional music had reached virtuosic levels, record companies were able to choose numerous ‘stars’ from the band scene. Not only were these musicians talented but many also had a popular public following among people who attended dances and who purchased their records. In turn, the act of recording traditional music promoted the professionalisation of Irish music. High standards had to be maintained when issuing recordings and therefore musicians had to be accomplished and competitive to secure recording contracts. It was a symbiotic relationship and professional Irish musicians and recording companies enjoyed a fruitful partnership for some time. As the following survey of the professional music scene illustrates, there was no shortage of audiences in live venues and, by implication, for contemporary sound recordings.

Survey of the Professional Irish Music Scene c.1915 - 1945

During the 1920s, the Irish professional music scene was literally booming. As Mick Moloney points out on the sleeve-notes of Ballinasloe, a selection of 78rmp remastered recordings, “dance halls were by now a major institution in American urban
social life and Irish dance halls flourished in the big cities". There were many dance halls open for several nights a week during the 1920s and in the following decade many more were established. The huge popularity of the dance halls ensured that a plentiful supply of musicians was engaged regularly. Because of this, standards of playing rose, with New York in particular being home to some of the greatest traditional musicians of the era. Harry Bradshaw comments on the real sense of community among the musicians whom were “all living in New York at that time. They were recording for the same companies, playing the same ballrooms and so on”. Dance bands were hugely popular and were commercially viable during the 1920s and 30s. Venues abounded for the playing of Irish music. These included Irish ballrooms, saloons, social clubs and dance halls. The picture overleaf shows a typical band playing in a social club of the era [pl. 4.1]. The immigrant Irish community was very tightly organised and arriving immigrants benefited from the closely-knit nature of the community which allowed for, and strongly promoted, the establishment of valuable contacts. Dance halls and social clubs were prime locations for networking as many halls catered specifically to the needs of emigrants from particular counties.

Harry Bradshaw explains how many of the dance halls, “advertised two separate dance floors featuring two orchestras playing simultaneously” with most venues employing between “four and ten musicians” several nights a week with those who “wished to play the dance hall circuit...sure of an above average weekly wage” (1996b:17). McCullough paints a similar picture to Bradshaw, listing the venues available to the Irish musician, as well as the associated monetary rewards. He states:

Traditional Irish musicians of this period were also very active in the Irish-American communities and performed at various Hibernian social events such as picnics, house parties, balls, concerts, and numerous other formal and informal musical occasions, as well as for Irish dance classes and at neighbourhood taverns... [they were] surprised by both the expanded range of economic opportunities and the increased social status accorded to them in the Irish-American communities.

(McCullough 1977:180-2)

McCullough’s final comment is of paramount importance. Not only did the professionalisation of Irish music prove a profitable endeavour but it also accorded elevated status to these professional musicians. The playing of traditional dance music
in Ireland, while integral to rural life and traditions, was never viewed in this opportunistic light unique to urban, capitalist America of the time. Indeed for many Irish people, there was a sense of inferiority attached to Irish traditional music. At home in Ireland it had often been perceived as the music of the oppressed. In America, however, it came to represent an overt statement of a new confidence and self-respect held by the emigrant Irish musician. Francis O'Neill pointed out:

More and better Irish music can be heard in dozens of American cities than in Cork or even in Dublin. Why? Because it is encouraged, appreciated and paid for, and because the musician's calling is in no way suggestive of mendicancy.

(O'Neill 1973:58)

This new found pride may shed light on why many dance bands of the day employed the term 'orchestra' in their title - a term which was foreign to the Irish tradition and had particular art music connotations. Bands who employed this term included "The Erin Boys Orchestra" and "John McGettigan's Orchestra" from Philadelphia, and "The Pride of Erin Orchestra" [p. 4.2]. "The Pride of Erin Orchestra" encapsulated in its title the pride taken in one's ethnic origins and traditions. By juxtaposing the terms 'pride' and 'orchestra', the pervading emotion of self-esteem was underscored. The careful and deliberate selection of band names seemed to imbue the groups with a sense of professionalism and legitimacy, as well as modernity. In conjunction with this, the band member's dress also promoted this sense of modern, professional musicians, with many opting for tuxedos and dickey bows [p. 4.3]. This was part of a general trend among bands of different musical traditions who were similarly attired, including other ethnic styles as well as classical music and jazz. The sartorial had become as important as the sonorial. In a similar way, the piano was employed by bands as an extension of their orchestral title and orchestral attire. The piano imparted an element of prestige and modernity on the band - a sense of being part of something greater in American terms, yet also quite distinct and special. All of these attributes were found in one wooden frame complete with ebony and ivory keys. In fact, the morphology of the piano itself seems to embody the new-found democratic nature of the instrument as everyone, from black to white, could feature a piano in their music.
Playing at the Leitrim House Social Club (Courtesy of H. Bradshaw).
[Pl. 4.2]

The Four Provinces Orchestra (Courtesy of H. Bradshaw)
The Addition of the Piano to 78rpm Recordings

The question of why the piano was added to recorded sources of Irish dance music was addressed and partially answered in previous chapters. I suggested that the addition of the vertical structures of the vamp to the linear melodic line was a response to and aural manifestation of living in a dense, urban environment. I have also argued that the piano was embraced because it was symbolic of prestige and of modernity. Finally I suggested that the piano was a medium for the negotiation of identity. Now these factors combine to provide a framework for examining professional musicians, their audiences, and the recording companies. In this section I will attempt to explain the piano’s presence in the music business world.

Tony Russell has written extensively on the issue of Irish 78rpm records. He is one of many authors who deals with contemporary attitudes towards the piano. Russell argues that contemporary prejudices against the piano tend to cloud judgements made on historical sources when seeking clarification about the past. He questions whether the “anti-piano taste” of today:

could have been generally shared by the original Irish-American audiences, for most minority musics were recorded with quite careful attention to what the communities wanted from records, and if the piano accompaniment had been unwelcome, neither listeners nor recording musicians would have tolerated them for so long.

(Russell 1978:16)

This is a valid point in many respects. While record companies may be partly responsible for the establishment of taste or aesthetic, there may sometimes be a considerable difference between what the audience wants and what the companies conclude the audience wants. Nevertheless, in terms of the addition of the piano to Irish dance music recordings, surely the marketing executives could not have got it that wrong. It is fair to conclude that at least some of the Irish musicians were eager to embrace the piano. In the next chapter, some of the musical examples which I have selected support this view - with musicians working hard to integrate the piano into their sound world. In this way, it is valid to assert that Irish traditional music 78rpm records would not have enjoyed such popularity had its audience really objected to the piano’s inclusion.
On the other hand, I suggest that the piano was included simply because of its widespread presence, both in the dance hall as well as in the recording studio (and in some private houses, no doubt). Harry Bradshaw asserts this point, explaining how a “circular” model came into existence:

The musicians of that era, mainly fiddle players, which would be the most common instrument, played their music in either dance halls or ballrooms and most dance halls and ballrooms of that era, on the little stage that they'd have, had a piano...when those musicians, then, went into the recording studios, even the early cylinder studios, a piano was a basic accessory in every recording studio. So the instrument was both in the place where the musician played and in the place where the musician recorded. So I think the thing was circular.

It was a natural step for Irish musicians to employ the piano when it was available, particularly when the piano played such an important social, cultural, and, as my next point will illustrate, musical role.

I suggest that the piano gave listeners of Irish traditional dance music an aural inroad into the genre - a genre which was not as immediately accessible in a vaudeville, Tin Pan Alley, or stage Irish context. Further, in its most traditional form as a melodic folk music, Irish dance music was not easily understood, particularly in a country so homophonically orientated. The addition of piano accompaniment to this music imbued it with a familiarity, sign posting it in a particular way, and allowing for easier assimilation. The more people that can relate to a recording, the greater the audience and, by extension, the profits. While audiences targeted by record companies for ethnic music may have consisted primarily of minority groups, the addition of the piano can surely be interpreted as a deliberate marketing strategy to maximise potential listenership. It is a view shared by many scholars, including Meabh Ní Fhuartháin, who makes the following assessment:

Record companies undoubtedly wished to make their discs as accessible as possible to the widest listenership. Ethnic recordings in the overall scheme of things were not hugely profitable, and if adding a piano made a particular track more palatable to a greater number of consumers, they would not apologise for that.

(Ní Fhuartháin 1993:44)
William Healy echoes this sentiment in his thesis stating:

The introduction of instrumental accompaniment may have come at the insistence of the record companies, whose executives might have felt that it would increase the marketability of the records.

(Healy 1970:172)

An important point here is that the companies were not only responding to what they perceived to be the tastes of the public. Often, the addition of the piano was a natural response from within the industry. When the commercial recording process first began, many direct employees of this new field had very little musical background. Thus, they may have gravitated towards the familiar sound of the piano as a means of make the music more comprehensible. Simon Frith examines the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the recording industry and the conditions which helped shape the format of the music to be recorded:

During the early part of this century, record companies were simply part of the electrical goods industry, and quite separate in terms of financial control and ownership from previous musical entrepreneurs. They were owned and run by engineers, inventors and stock market speculators. They had little to do with song publishers, theatre owners, agents, promoters or performers. Their managers did not seem much interested in music. Gaisberg comments in his memoirs that ‘for many years Berliner was the only one of the many people I knew connected with the gramophone who was genuinely musical.

(Frith 1989:15)

This being the case it is little wonder that these executives insisted on including the piano, possibly the only familiar sound to them, on an ethnic recording. If the view is taken that the addition of the piano to Irish dance music was a negative act, the implication is that blame could be laid at the door of these early executives who set a musical precedent with unmusical intentions.

On the other hand, there were a number of notable exceptions to this rule. I argue that a number of discerning record producers made very deliberate decisions based on musical principles as well as good business sense. While records were used
to accompany dance steps where musicians were unavailable, many of the marketing executives were aware that records were sold also for a domestic audience. Reg Hall view echoes these sentiments asserting that in the case of Irish music:

Record producers were aware...that these records were commonly played for listening to rather than for dancing to, and it is clear from the earliest solo instrumental recordings that some musicians were producing programme-music performances. (1994:242)

Record producers may have simply wished to thicken the sound and add greater depth to an essentially melodic music. This seems obvious, especially in light of the fact that the added percussive element of the piano could be interpreted as a replacement for the lost constituent of dance. The music no longer occupied a secondary position to the dance since the dance was eliminated. Now that the visual and auditory elements of the dance steps were no longer present, dance music required an injection of something. The music needed a focus in this new, exclusively aural domain. The harmonic and percussive piano provided this focus, pinning down the music in a familiar manner.

Another very important reason for the inclusion of the piano has often remained unacknowledged. In their new environment there is no doubt that many Irish immigrants developed an American harmonic consciousness. This was a natural occurrence, particularly in light of their consistent exposure to popular genres firmly rooted in harmonic models. Again, Ní Fhuartháin advocates this view, recounting how it was the “wish of the receiving Irish” to make the music they were producing more acceptable to their own ears as “they were becoming more acculturated to the urban fabric of American society” (44). William Healy makes an important assertion in relation to this point:

Audiences were no longer exclusively Irish, and the Irish listeners to whom they played were concerned with American as well as Irish culture. As aliens, no longer members of the dominant culture of their society, they were forced to contend with and adapt to different customs and values...and it broke down some of the values they had previously held. (1970:209-10)
Without a doubt, the widespread presence of the piano in various musical genres had a huge influence on the Irish immigrant community. Not only did popular music prove influential, but so too did the variety of ethnic musics to which the Irish were exposed in nearby neighbourhoods. Within the highly competitive professional musical arena, Irish musicians had to satisfy the eclectic tastes of their audience. In other words, if Irish groups intended to play to diverse audiences, they would have to perform non-Irish song and non-Irish dances. Healy explains this in terms of exposure and economics:

Bands were often required to play non-Irish popular music in addition to the standard Irish repertoire; a relationship did exist between other popular music of the time and Irish music. In addition, a band increased their employment prospects by being able to play at non-Irish, as well as Irish, social functions. (1978:17)

These conclusions suggest that the process of developing a taste for harmony was unavoidable. Musicians were obliged to adopt harmonic accompaniment into their music. While a minority of musicians may have done this grudgingly, it is logical to conclude that in this environment musicians eagerly embraced the opportunity to expand and modernise their musical sound. The precedent for harmonised music was present in America and many Irish musicians were seduced by this. Healy appears to agree. Discussing the circumstances of Irish musicians in America, he explains:

The tastes of their audiences were changing, as were those of the musicians themselves as they were subjected to the same cultural pressures as their audiences. (1970:209-10)

The overwhelming adoption of harmony suggests that this was a wholly natural and inevitable development. The sounds supplied by the piano resonated with the city, the location of the immigrant Irish dance music tradition. Harmonic sounds experienced on a day to day basis were bound to become part of the Irish immigrant’s musical expression.
It is also possible that Irish musicians embraced piano purely because was available to them in a way it had never been in Ireland. Perhaps the Irish felt a sense of legitimisation in their inclusion of an instrument that for so long had been the almost exclusive property of Anglo-Irish society, or at the very least was tied up with their literate traditions. Maybe this wholesale adoption of the piano represented an element of cultural subversion - that is, it imbued the musicians with keen sense of delight in using an instrument so long associated with the "enemy" for their own ends? On this issue of the moulding contemporary musical tastes among Irish musicians and listeners, there is no simple or definitive answer. Did the musicians instigate the move for the widespread inclusion of the piano, or was this done at the insistence of the record companies? One can only speculate but most likely the process was a dynamic and composite one, encompassing all the suggested reasons above to a greater or lesser degree.

Resultant Sounds

The inclusion of the piano obviously had an effect on the musical sound produced, sometimes to the detriment of the melody player. Healy is quite generous in his assessment of certain recordings with highly questionable piano vamping, noting how the accompanists would "use different keys or different chords other than those which would be expected under familiar rules of harmony" (1978, 17). What is particularly interesting is his subsequent comment where he acknowledges that "in most cases, this seems to have had little effect on the soloist's performance" (17). However, Healy and other scholars of the era do not show the musical effect of the piano's inclusion. I will to do this, beginning with the question to what degree the instrumentalist(s) and accompanist were operating as a team. As some examples will illustrate in the next chapter, the concept of mutual appreciation and understanding does not seem to have always been a priority.

As an excuse for "poor" (harmonically incorrect) accompaniment, Healy offers the suggestion that the rhythmic aspect of accompaniment was, simply, more important than the harmonic aspect. I argue that it is more likely those accompanists using, as Healy delicately puts it, "different chords than those which would be expected", were inept at accompanying Traditional Irish dance music. I am not suggesting that these
pianists were incompetent, but rather that they did not particularly appreciate the underlying tonality of the music, as discussed in chapter 1. Being studio musicians, these piano accompanists were certainly practised in the art of accompaniment of many musics, including popular and classical. In this respect, their lack of familiarity with Irish dance music suggests that they were imposed upon the soloists and groups.

It seems curious that many musicians simply continued to play oblivious to the pianist’s ineptness, regardless of what these suspect accompanists did in musical terms. In many instances, the whole process seemed to have “little effect on the soloist’s performance” (Healy 1978: 17-18). At this point it is important to note that Healy does not acknowledge the highly skilled and harmonically correct accompanists of the time - a factor that could be used to refute his central argument that the rhythmic aspect of accompaniment was paramount. Obviously, the percussive element of the vamp was very significant. However, on many records the accompanist was totally off the beat, ignoring the soloist. This also occurred in performances that could loosely be termed as harmonically correct from the accompaniment perspective. In such cases, the soloist rarely, if ever, tried to accommodate the accompanist, regardless of who was going wayward. One would expect the accompanist, by virtue of the clearly defined role encompassed in this designation, to fulfil a secondary role subservient to the soloist or group. In the next chapter I shall explore this particular point with reference to Michael Coleman (fiddle) and Kathleen Brennan (piano) recording [see ex. 5.7 in chapter V].

Of course, I would assert that piano accompanists were not always to blame. Often they were employed at the insistence of record companies which in turn were sometimes obliged to yield to the demands of unions. In this scenario, accompanists were not always given the opportunity to rehearse and could, quite possibly, be expected to record a number of different music genres in one day. At the end of the day, it was the producers and not the musicians who made the final artistic decisions. These decisions were not always clear cut, as Harry Bradshaw concedes, particularly if the decision-makers were unfamiliar with the music being recorded:
There'd be practical problems in that piano tuning hadn't settled down at that stage. 440 wasn't an accepted kind of thing...and if somebody came in with a box [accordion] and...if it was noticeably out [of tune], like a quarter tone or that, with a piano, what did you do? I mean it was out of the question that you'd cancel the session so you just got on with it...the record...didn't notice it because the music must have been strange to them to begin with. So the fact that there was a pitch clash here, they would have seen it and imagined it was very minor. People just accepted this.9

The resulting clash of sound had obvious implications. The mystifying question for contemporary ears is what exactly were these record producers hearing while the music was being recorded, or were they even listening? It is a phenomenon that has puzzled Bradshaw throughout his research into the era. Referring to an unspecified Coleman record Bradshaw muses:

He'd be in the minor tune and [the accompanist] would be haring off in the major key or visa versa! What flabbergasted me was how most of the sessions of the time seem to have had a producer or a musical director. And from what I can gather they were classical musicians...Coleman worked with Sobok...He was Russian but he was classical...so what I couldn't figure out is...how he could sit there and listen to Coleman in one minor key or major key, and his piano player in the opposite. How he could sit through this cacophony of sound is flabbergasting.10

Perhaps Bradshaw has approximately fifty years of cumulative harmonic experience to tap into when he makes this assessment during the 1990s. But it is fair to conclude that one would expect Sobok as a classically trained musician to at least appreciate the major/minor relationship and associated sounds. Graeme Smith questions the actual motivations of record companies, and the degree to which they were concerned with getting things right:

It seemed that recording company executives did little more than call a performer or group into the studio and request them to play for three minutes as they would in a public performance.
(Smith 1994:227)

Still, this gives little justification for the issuing of what Bradshaw terms as “clangers”, musically inept performances by an obviously “educated man” such as Leo Sobok.11
The issue of standards in recording by producers outside the tradition is problematic. However, not all producers proved as inept. This is particularly true of producers who also featured on recordings as accompanists. For instance, Lew Shilkret, Victor producer and brother of the well-known American dance band leader of the 1920s Nat Shilkret, cut some very fine sides with Sean Nolan of Dublin in New York, August 1926.

The piano, then, was added to Irish dance music for a variety of reasons. But before I engage in this musical analysis in the next chapter, some final points need to be addressed in relation to the issue of repertoire and how the piano linked into it. More than ever, in this context the role of the piano as mediator comes to the fore.

Old Repertoire, New Complexion

As a musical manifestation and representation of the era, 78rpm records seemed more concerned with processes of musical addition than of integration. Such a reading of the musical product suggests that the Irish demonstrated a reluctance to quickly assimilate into American society. In spite of the obvious role of the piano as the bridge between the Irish and American cultures, many immigrant Irish did not relinquish their hold on their old traditions, or at least on certain aspects of their traditions. This is clearly demonstrated by the recorded repertoire of certain musicians which was comprised almost exclusively of tunes from the ‘old country’. Harry Bradshaw points out that virtually all of the tunes in Coleman’s recordings had been learned prior to emigrating to America, stating how “his [Coleman’s] brother Jim said that on the records, apart from a few barn dances, Michael never played anything on record that he hadn’t heard him play before. Undoubtedly the addition of piano accompaniment to the old tunes proved highly effective and exhilarating, especially when properly done. Bradshaw acknowledges this point noting that “in good hands the piano adds something really magical” and goes on to explain the effect of Coleman’s recorded music had on people as most “had never heard the music played like that before.” The key point is that even if the addition of the piano gave, according to Bradshaw “a fantastic, modern feel” to the music, it could be argued that the inclusion was in fact a clever superimposition on, as opposed to an absorption and integration by, the music. The view that piano accompaniment was merely grafted
onto tunes finds particular resonance with this position of piano accompanists who were either less accomplished or did not seem to understand the tradition. There is an implication that a musician did not always have control over the decision to add accompaniment, and even where he did, he had little say over what exactly was included. Reg Hall shares at least the former part of this contestable this view, noting:

In spite of having adapted to American urban conditions, the basic rural quality of much of their performance remained unaltered, even though the record producers imposed a convention of their own in the form of accompaniment to both instrumentalists and singers.

(240)

Healy acknowledges the complexity of the issue in a general survey of the music produced, noting:

Some records contain music performed as it had been played for years, while others indicated the changes taking place in the music and the traditional cultures.

(1970: 150)

Unfortunately Healy does clarity this point further, even though he does acknowledge that “in some cases the recordings probably hastened the changes.” In the next chapter I will examine this issue in terms of the breakdown of regional styles in Irish music. Using selected musical examples, I will look at how 78rpm recordings directly influenced issues of stability and change in the Irish dance music tradition, both in urban American and in Ireland.

With regards to the modern condition of Irish music during this period, Raymond Williams offers some interesting insights. Williams discusses the immigrant experience in relation to the modern condition:

Liberated or breaking from their national or provincial cultures, placed in quite new relations to those other native languages or native visual traditions, encountering meanwhile a novel and dynamic common environment from which many of the older forms were obviously distant, the artists, writers and thinkers of their phase found the only community available to them: a community of the medium; of their own practices.

(Williams 1992:91-2)
In this case “their own practices” may be interpreted as the actual practices - in this instance Irish traditional dance music - brought by the immigrants to their new urban surroundings. Naturally, this music was a significant part of their self-expression. However, the immigrant Irish could also lay a valid claim to variety of native sounds in this cultural matrix. Since other ethnic communities were now easily accessible, their sound worlds became part of the musical vocabulary of the urban Irish-American experience. In this sense, traditional Irish music practices and piano accompaniment were combined. The resultant sound of a ‘dressed up’ old repertoire on these 78rpm records does not need to be interpreted as a reluctance towards assimilation, on the contrary, rather as a deliberately crafted conduit into American life - a life which the Irish were navigating at their own pace.

One of the most significant contributions of the 78rpm record was that it allowed for the quick dissemination of music, proving far more influential than virtually any literate source.13 As Healy points out, “a record travels farther, faster, and in more directions that an individual performer, increasing the influence of a particular performer or rendition” (1978:16). The rapidity of dissemination and the fidelity inherent to this medium would mean these recording would have profound repercussions on the playing of Irish music. The implications would not be just in terms of promoting piano accompaniment usage but also with regards to the breakdown of regional styles in the playing Irish traditional dance music.14

Regional Styles, International Sounds

Graeme Smith discusses the specific importance of the “Irish-American Sligo fiddlers” in terms of delineating the position of Irish music “through their skill” as well as by the “bold statements” they were making about “social hierarchies of musical communities back home”15 Smith explains how players, as immigrants in a new land released from the constraints of localised rural Irish society, could circumvent and ignore what he terms as the “limited, conservative traditionality” of the indigenous tradition (1994:228). Through the addition of the piano, musicians redefined the tradition in its new urban context. But the implications of this go beyond the mere dressing up of a melodic music by adding piano accompaniment. As Anthony Giddens
states when examining the conditions created by as city as a host to immigrant communities:

Those...from ethnic communities within cities, for instance, might have little or no knowledge of one another in their land of origin. When they arrive, they gravitate to areas where others from a similar linguistic and cultural background are living, and new sub-community structures are formed.
(Giddens 1997:478)

The implications for musical style are enormous. The city acts as a melting-pot, containing a stew made up of regional styles and repertoires with many flavours. Speaking about early 20th century Chicago, Francis O’Neill points out how “within the city limits, a territory comprising about two hundred square miles, exiles from all of Ireland’s thirty-two counties can be found” (O’Neill 1993:17). This being the case in Chicago, the same conditions must have existed in the major East coast cities such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia - cities which attracted Irish immigrants from certain regions of Ireland.

The wholesale recording of musicians from different regions ensured that their distinctive styles and repertoires were widely disseminated. As a natural consequence of this, musical practitioners and audiences from other areas of Ireland were exposed to and influenced by these recordings. 78rpm records can be interpreted as aural representations of urban American immigrant life in all its complexity and diversity. But the records were more than shellac representation of such experiences. The 78rpm records did more than merely reflect social conditions sonically. They were active agents in constituting these conditions. As Reg Hall points out, gramophone records broke down barriers, exploding the repertoire and the stylistic space defined and limited by rural community boundaries (Hall 1994:240). As discussed in chapter III, space and time become inconsequential as a performance which was once unique now occupies a permanent place beyond the temporal and ephemeral nature of the original, fleeting performance.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the interaction of the sound recording industry and the professional Irish dance music scene. A clear relationship existed between these two entities and it was a union that flourished on mutual promotion. Irish musicians recorded prolifically during an era when the Irish dance band reached the pinnacle of its popularity in Irish-American society. The piano was a key figure on the stage and in the studio. The addition of the piano to recorded sources of Irish music was the direct result of an attempt to make the music more palatable for the public. The piano was often added at the insistence of the record producers who wished to make the music more appealing. In turn, their executive decisions influenced musical practices outside of the studio. But the piano’s inclusion was also a natural consequence of, and response to, living in America’s urban environment with all its diverse and eclectic influences. In this environment, a change in the social fabric and in the musical life of Irish-American society was inevitable. In the case of the latter, this change came in the shape of ebony and ivory keyboard.

While it appears that some Irish musicians seemed simply to tolerate the piano on 78rpm recordings, just as many integrated it into their musical vocabulary. In the next chapter, my survey of piano accompanists active during the 78rpm era demonstrates a great diversity in standards and styles. Each recording discloses vital information - information that expresses the social conditions of the time, chronicles musical influences, and reveals aspects of each accompanist’s personality. Many stories and cumulative experiences are etched in the grooves of the 78rpm record, which I recount in the following chapter.

1 The information for this chapter and the subsequent chapter comes from a variety of sources but in particular from the theses of Healy (1970), McCullough (1978), Ni Fhuarthain (1993), and Hamilton (1996). Harry Bradshaw also provided important information and a unique insight into the era through his Viva Voce sleeve notes, articles, and various interviews.
2 This topic is comprehensively dealt with in Meabh Ni Fhuarthain’s 1993 thesis which concentrates on the Copley - O’Byrne De Witt record label.
3 These figures have been accumulated from numerous sources, including previously mentioned discographic materials, as well as Johanne Trew’s “Treasures from the Attic: Viva Voce Records”, currently in press for the Journal of American Folklore, and sleeve-notes from Dick Spottswood’s and Philippe Varlet’s From Galway to Dublin CD.
This was a stormy phase in Irish history. Ireland was negotiating a peace treaty with the British government for the foundation of a new and independent state. The establishment of this label was a clear statement of support for this cause. More cynically it could be viewed as a deliberate marketing ploy to capture the Irish ethnic market.

Dance halls and clubs for Irish and Irish-American patrons became hugely popular at this time in major American cities. They were an important social outlet and provided a forum for newly arrived immigrants to make contact with others.

Interview conducted by Joanne Trew with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1997.

The Gaelic League had been set up in Ireland in the late 19th century to promote Irish culture, but concerns for the preservation and practice of Irish music came secondary to its main objectives. Its published manifesto stated the two predominant concerns of the League were, firstly, the preservation of Irish as the national language of Ireland, and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue, and secondly, the study and publication of Gaelic literature, and the cultivation of modern literature in Irish. According to Reg Hall “the Gaelic league’s interest in music and dance was essentially a means to an end”. With regards to performance style of Irish traditional music, he concludes that this was “inevitably within the European light-classical tradition” (Hall 1994:84-87). The Gaelic League often placed little value on the concept of authenticity. Interestingly, the piano figures prominently in many of the All-Ireland music competitions run by the organisation, both in singing and instrumental categories.

Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996.

Bradshaw received this information in an interview with musician Hughie Gillespie, a contemporary of Coleman’s in America. Bradshaw also discovered a letter and contract sent to Coleman regarding details of Coleman’s last recording session and the letter was signed by Leo Sobok, producer, which proved that Sobok was, in fact, Coleman’s producer (personal interview with Bradshaw, Dublin 1996).

Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996

An obvious exception to this would be O’Neill’s many collections of Irish music, especially his publication of 1907 affectionately known as the “1001”. A comprehensive study of O’Neill and his collection and publication of Irish tunes can be found in Nicholas Carolan’s A Harvest Saved: Francis O’Neill and Irish Music in Chicago (1997). Other interesting commentaries can be found in Paulette Gershen’s undergraduate thesis (1989). Capt. Francis O’Neill did an enormous amount of fieldwork in Chicago collecting Irish music which he subsequently published. His books had a widespread impact not just on musicians in America but also in Ireland and today his publications continue to enjoy great popularity. Yet, interestingly, in spite of the inclusion of piano accompaniment in certain collections, his books are remembered predominantly for the tunes and not all for the accompaniment provided by James or Selena O’Neill. The inclusion of the piano in later collections does illustrate, however; a perceived need for accompaniment in order to market Irish traditional music. O’Neill obviously felt that the inclusion of the piano elevated the status of the music in some manner - an interesting reflection on the commercial impact of the piano not just in recorded sources but also literate ones. Interestingly, as Carolan notes, these arrangements “do have the virtue of generally accommodating the tunes rather than altering them for harmonic purpose.” He notes that they probably “evolved” due to the player “vamping piano accompaniment by ear” (Carolan 1997:47)

At the end of the day, the 78rpm record promoted piano vamping among traditional players in a way that Anglo-Irish and Irish American literate sources never succeeded in doing.

The concept of regional styles in Irish music is problematic as much bound up with folklore as perceived fact. On a basic level it deals with specific stylistic devices, tune types and even defined repertoires played in specific regions around the country. With the advent of recording technology, the concept of ‘regional style’ needs to be revisited, both in terms of studying musical styles of the past and present. Musicians who are geographically linked to a particular region are often exposed to styles and repertoires from other areas. Such influences may be absorbed into their own playing. A flute player employing the northern style of playing (recognised as being overblown and rhythmically defined) may actually be from the far south of the country. In this respect, the concept of regional style needs to be re-examined and re-defined in this post-modern age. Further, it is important to uncover who in past decided what constituted a ‘regional style’ and why did such delineations come into existence in the popular imagination.

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Smith is referring in this case to fiddlers Michael Coleman, James Morrison and Paddy Killoran, who all hailed originally from the county of Sligo in the north-west of Ireland and who enjoyed extensive recording and promotion of their music. In fact, the 78rpm recordings of these musicians have been viewed retrospectively as prime agents in the ‘breakdown’ of regional styles. Musicians from all over Ireland and America copied their approaches, tune settings, and ornamentations. The subsequent appearance of a more generic, diluted style of playing is attributed to this phenomenon. Naturally, such a view depends on the validity of the concept of regional style as dealt with in the previous footnote.
Expressions are not only naturally occurring units of meaning but are also periods of heightened activity when a society's presuppositions are most exposed, when core values are expressed and when the symbolism is most apparent.

(Bruner 1986:9-10)

There is no such thing as a traditional instrument...an instrument is only a means of an end; in this case, the production of traditional music.

(Carson 1986:11)
78rpm recordings of Irish music are expressions of time, physical location, and contemporary aesthetic. They are also symbolic manifestations. The piano has been touted in this work as being symbolic on a number of levels representing, essentially, both the Victorian ethos and the modern condition. In spite and because of these associations, the piano found its voice in Irish traditional dance music, with varying degrees of success and acceptance. To reiterate Carson’s assertion, there is no such thing as a traditional instrument, per se. It is rather the playing process that makes an instrument sound traditional. This process of rendering an instrument ‘traditional’ can occur regardless of how bound up the said instrument may be with other musical practices. In the case of the piano, however, the influences exerted by other musics, encoded within the instrument’s body, prove particularly potent. Nevertheless, a compromise may be reached and style is a key factor in this process. In the following I reveal how accompanists varied according to the degree in which they understood and interacted with Irish traditional music.

There were many accompanists active during ‘Golden Era’ of Irish dance music recording. The purpose of the following chapter is not to give an in-depth survey of every accompanist on the scene at this time. Rather, I have carefully chosen examples from some of the most prolific vampers in an effort to encompass all the various sounds and styles employed. These selected accompanists played both with the most revered musicians of the era, as well as with the lesser known practitioners. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this analysis is the lack of standardised playing amongst these vampers. Without any precedents from within the Irish tradition, the new piano accompanists to Irish dance music had to find their individual voices and develop their own styles.

Piano Vamping Style

Lawrence McCullough speaks about the constituents of style and the evolutionary processes involved its establishment:

The evolution of a style is cumulative. A style is essentially a combination of elements absorbed unconsciously or appropriated outright from other styles and then reshaped and refined into a “new” style that is distinctive yet never entirely divorces from its predecessors.
or contemporaries. The process is not exclusively eclectic, however, for elements derived from personal creativity of individual musicians frequently forms the basis of a new style. (McCullough 1978:121)

The piano vampers of the 78rpm era were unable to look for inspiration and guidance in harmonic accompaniment from within the oral tradition of Irish dance music. An established style of vamping simply did not exist. A few accompanists did exist but they were not influential. The huge difference between literary representations of piano accompaniment style and the act of spontaneous vamping meant that most accompanists had to look beyond notation for inspiration. Some looked to the oral melodic tradition, paying careful attention to instrumental styles to inform their piano technique. More drew upon their experience of other music genres, including popular music, classical, ragtime and jazz, to formulate an approach towards accompaniment. Sometimes this eclectic approach was undertaken deliberately, while at other times it formed part of an inevitable process associated with the phenomenon of acculturation. In the previous chapters, I looked at the contemporary music scene in terms of its multi-cultural character and its popular manifestation in a dense, urban environment. It is only natural that such activities found within a few city blocks should inform Irish musical practices.

This element of diversity came further into the foreground through the accompanists, many of whom did not possess any Irish links. As mentioned in the last chapter, like the piano, the accompanists became mediators between different musical practices - that is, active agents in bridging the gap between monophony and harmonised music. But before discussing the implications of this, I will examine the constituents of the piano vamp figure to further facilitate a discussion on the topic of style.

**Constituents of the vamp figure**

Rhythm and harmony are the two basic components of piano vamping. As the following section illustrates, each accompanist placed varying degrees of emphasis on these elements. Therefore the rhythm-to-harmony ratio differed greatly from vamp to vamp. In general, rhythmic drive was more significant as these pianists were
accompanying dance music at a time when propulsion and volume were primary, especially in the larger venues. As a result, harmony often took second place. Having said that, there were accompanists who were extremely well versed in conventional and popular harmonies and they employed their skills to great effect. The point is that no two accompanists were the same. Though it might seem reasonable to assume that a basic vamp did not differ from person to person, in fact this was often not the case.

The rhythm of the piano vamp in Irish dance music works on a basic four bar figure (see ex. 3.1 in chapter III). Whether in a jig time of 6/8 or a reel in 4/4, the 4 bar phrases is of paramount importance. Irish dance music tunes are constructed in multiples of this phrase, with the vast majority of tune types composed in two sections or phrases: a repeated eight bar part followed by a second, repeated eight bar part. The vamp figure, the ‘oompah-oompah’, has the ‘oom’ figure in the left or bass hand and the ‘pah’ figure in the right or treble hand [fig. 5.1]. This basic vamp movement may then be syncopated, doubled, or altered in any fashion to various effects. However, its basic pulse undergrids the tune’s motor rhythm and drives the music forward. These were the basic movements employed by the majority of vampers on 78rpm records. However, some interesting variations to this model were also used.

In terms of harmonic content, there are a number of basic figures with which one can vamp. In the major key, the general chord progression comprises various combinations of the chords I, IV and V using any voicing or inversion [fig. 5.2]. While other chords can and are employed, these three are fundamental. In the minor key, the main chords are I, V and VII. [fig. 5.3] Again, other chords may be employed for effect but a typical tune in the minor key can sufficiently be accompanied by various configurations of these chords. Additional chords draw upon the 7th of the scale for colouring, especially chord V. Importantly, the vamp figures do not necessarily conform to the rules of classical harmony. A doubled 5th or parallel movement in both hands are acceptable. In fact, conventional restrictions are of limited concern to the vampers whose primary goal is to propel the music and to be harmonically creative.
[Fig. 5.1]
Basic vamp figure in a reel and a jig.

[Fig. 5.2]
Basic harmonic movement in a major key.

[Fig. 5.3]
Basic harmonic movement in a minor key.
Microcosms

To my mind, each 78rpm recording is not only a musical chronicle, but it is also a social, historical, and even a personal one. I interpret each of the following illustrations as a consolidation and manifestation of the various points made thus far. Within the three minute side of a 78rpm record, all kinds of information, musical and extra-musical, may be uncovered.

Prior to commencing this study I felt ill-equipped to offer an interpretation of the vamping styles of these accompanists. Now that I have reconstructed their social, cultural and economic history in my present time, I am ready to look afresh at the sounds of an era that initially puzzled and disturbed me. It seems logical to conclude that each piano accompanist had a particular story to tell in terms of his or her vamping style. The following section, based on the sounds from within the grooves of selected 78rpm recordings, reveals this to be so. William Healy points out that:

Some records contain music performed as it had been played for years, while others indicated the changes taking place in the music and the traditional cultures.
(1970:150)

Healy does not elucidate by offering examples. I intend to do just that with an analysis of the accompanists, mediated by my own experiences as a piano vamper.

Selected Accompanists

Joe Linder

Joe Linder (1870-1943) was one of the first pianists to vamp on Irish dance music records. He is truly the bridge between earlier vaudeville days and the ‘Golden Era’ of Irish music recording as his career spans three decades from around 1900-1930. Linder was the regular piano accompanist for the first man to record Irish music on disc, namely John J. Kimmel (1866-1943). Kimmel was born in Brooklyn of German immigrant parents. It appears that Linder was of the same ethnicity. Kimmel was affectionately know as the “Irish Dutchman” as he played and recorded so much Irish music. Bradshaw explains the origins of the term - “the Irish Dutchman, Dutch equalling German - so the Irish often referred to the Germans as Dutch, Deutsche.”

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Their musical relationship added another dimension to the German Irish connection that has been traced throughout the history of the piano and Irish music in the States. It was not an unlikely marriage of ethnic groups, as pointed out by Nicholas Carolan in the radio series *The Irish Phonograph* when he states:

The Irish and the Germans were the two largest European emigrants to enter America in the second half of the 1800s. Many of the Germans were also Catholics and the two groups had not dissimilar tastes in food and drink. They shared the same slums and shanty towns in the early years, and even today some of the largest American cities have areas of mixed Irish and German settlement. (1983)

Kimmel's musical background is well documented and, by a process of association, so too is Linder's. Kimmel was a saloon keeper who also performed in the early years of vaudeville. He played with the "Elite Musical Four", which included Linder in its line up from the start. The Folkways album featuring Kimmel and Linder provides an insight into Kimmel's life and musical influences with its comprehensive notes:

In 1906, Kimmel opened a bar in a popular section of Brooklyn...throughout his career as a saloon owner, Kimmel performed and also hired other vaudeville performer...his last bar, named 'The Accordion', was located in Queens. (Folkways LP 1980)

Bradshaw confirms this, giving a possible reason why Kimmel began recording Irish music, stating how "he bought a bar in...an Irish area and that's where he seems to have come across Irish musicians who came in." Interestingly, Kimmel also played the accordion as background music for silent films, a genre of music which undoubtedly influenced his style as manifest in his flair for the dramatic in certain recordings featuring Linder.

Kimmel and Linder [p. 5.1] had a prolific recording career running from the earliest days of cylinder recording to the introduction of electric recording technology. Perhaps the duo are best remembered for their recordings between 1908-16. Kimmel and Linder enjoyed an extensive career, recording with Edison from 1906 - 1929 until it closed down, and also with a variety of other companies including Columbia, Victor,
Emerson, Silverstone, Perfect, Velvet Tone, and Regal. Joe Linder has received many accolades for his distinctive vamping style. The notes accompanying the Folkway recording state:

unlike many other recording artists who were plagued with unsympathetic and untalented accompanists, Kimmel was fortunate to be recording with a pianist who knew his repertory, had a good knowledge of both Irish and novelty music, and apparently also helped with arranging and even composing some of Kimmel’s popular records.
(Folkways 1980)

Linder seems to have been very well versed in contemporary, popular music sounds. One arrangement by Linder entitled ‘International Echoes’ is a clever medley of popular songs of the day. Bradshaw comments on Linder’s obvious musicianship, noting he was “either a pit player or a dance band player, an experienced musician...who’d have no problem in accompanying Irish music”.

Linder was undoubtedly competent and elements of popular music and even ragtime can be heard in his accompaniment style. A particular composition of his, “Homeward March” (1907), displays ragtime elements in terms of harmonic vocabulary and especially rhythms and syncopations.

The example I have chosen to illustrate elements of Linder’s style is from a Columbia recording tentatively dated around 1910 [ex. 5.1]. The tunes, a medley of hornpipes, are played with great gusto and rhythmic accentuation by Kimmel on accordion and expertly accompanied by Linder. The whole effect is one of great bounce and vigour as Linder’s rhythmic figures are highly complimentary. They never interfere with the rhythm of the tune but rather accentuating Kimmel’s playing, such as in bars 20a & 29a in particular.

In terms of harmonic content, the whole effect is one of accuracy. In “The Blackbird” the basic movement in the bass is I-V-I [bars 1-2, 5-6] though the chord above remains unchanged. Linder does employ accidentals or notes foreign to the key signature, such as the Bb in a D major tune [bars 7 & 15]. They are highly effective and their piquant flavour hark back to the established sounds of vaudeville.
[Pl. 5.1]

John J. Kimmel and Joe Linder
[ Ex. 5.1 ] Joe Linder
Of more importance are the accidentals in the second tune “The Rights of Man” for these are structural. The tune is in the ‘key’ of B minor and Linder moves between the raised 7th [bar 1] and the natural 7th [bar 7]. This is an example of where the tonality or modality of a tune is deliberately kept ambivalent and Linder’s placement of the A# and A natural is ample proof of his ability to execute this competently.

An interesting feature of Linder’s style is his subtle accentuation of the tune in certain places such as the opening phrase of “The Rights of Man” [bars 2 & 6]. Another important point is the interference with the basic orientation of the first tune which proves enlightening. “The Blackbird” is a set dance tune designed to accompany very specific dance steps. In other words, the tune has to be played accurately in terms of bar length for the dancer to perform the steps. Kimmel and Linder take the liberty of extending bar 8, through the addition of two crotchet Ds, in order to maintain regular four bar phrases. This actually goes against the original orientation of the tune, where the phrase should actually be three and a half and not four bars long. Thus, bars 7-8 should read: GAGF D D - DEFG. This desire to change a tune and fit it into multiples of the four-bar figure is typical of the era, clearly marking a dependence on regularity. It hints strongly at the influence of ragtime with its adherence to the four bar unit [see ex. 3.1 in chapter III]. Finally, bar 13 is given a slightly different emphasis than it would normally receive with the splayed chord on the downbeat which actually sounds like an upbeat for the minim and crotchet on the third and fourth beat of the bar.

Overall, this particular example shows great balance, familiarity and foreknowledge by the partnership. Kimmel and Linder were professional musicians who knew exactly the sound they wished to create. In this way, Linder, as one of the pioneering piano accompanists in Irish music, leads vamping off to a encouraging start. However, before departing from Linder a point worth mentioning is that both he and Kimmel were operating in a time when the stage Irishman was still popular. Both Kimmel and Linder showed a willingness to exploit this stereotype for effect. I refer here specifically to a 1907 recording entitled “Dim Were the Happy Days” featuring Kimmel on accordion and Linder on piano. According to Harry Bradshaw in a lecture entitled “When Irish Eyes Are Smiling”, there was much “mud-slinging” at the Irish in
this recording which was done in a very “pointed and deliberate” manner (1997). Interestingly, this very piece also shows elements of ragtime in Linder’s accompaniment style.

Linder encompassed much of the contemporary movement in Irish music recording. He came from a German background, outside the tradition essentially (conforming to Healy’s model - no. 1), and he possessed a wide musical vocabulary which he employed to great effect. He was part of the old vaudeville tradition of Irish delineators and also belonged to the new surge of musicians recording dance music. In this way, Linder proves a key figure in the negotiations of Irish identity through music, even though he himself was not Irish.

**Ed Geoghegan (Gagan)**

Ed Geoghegan was another pianist spanning both vaudeville and later popular music styles. Geoghegan, sometimes spelt Gagan on certain record labels, was possibly the most sought after accompanist of the era playing with a wide variety of musicians and singers. Like Linder, he was well versed in many genres of music as is evident from his competent playing. Unlike Linder, it seems he had direct Irish connections by virtue of his name. Thus Geoghegan represents the Irish-American accompanist, placing him a step closer to the dance music tradition. According to Bradshaw he was “highly experienced in professional music” operating as a “pit musician” as well being in “great demand in the studio.” Beyond that, lamentably, very little is known of his personal life. Perhaps his recorded vamping style may be viewed as providing some insight into his.

Geoghegan was an important figure in piano accompaniment circles as he was one of the first pianists to doubled as a band leader. His band, “The Ed Geoghegan Orchestra”, played the dance circuit and recorded numerous 78rpm sides. The use of the term ‘orchestra’ gives an indication of Geoghegan’s view of Irish music and, by virtue of his own role in its production, himself. Geoghegan was obviously an Irish musician who took great pride in the exposure and attention Irish music was receiving in the 1920s. Geoghegan received great respect from other musicians because, besides
having his own groups, Geoghegan also accompanied some of the foremost soloists and groups of the day. For example, he established a partnership with singer and accordionist Frank Quinn early in Quinn’s career, as his almost exclusive accompanist. Geoghegan also recorded with fiddler Packie Dolan and with concertina player William Mullaly. In particular, Geoghegan was associated with the popular group called ‘The Flanagan Brothers’. According to Bradshaw in the notes of the Flanagan Brother’s recording:

Pianist Ed Geoghegan should have been billed as the fourth Flanagan brother. He provided the accompaniment for most of their studio sessions and made an enormous contribution to their sound with his tasteful and sympathetic piano playing.
(Bradshaw CD 1996)

‘The Flanagans’ included stage Irish and vaudeville numbers, as well as traditional dance music, in their repertoire. Such inclusions resulted in an eclectic sound. Bradshaw notes how certain musical items performed by the band harked back to older days, and he points in particular to the “Harrigan and Hart...stage-type” numbers “from around 1880” which formed an integral part of their repertoire.

In terms of stylistic development, Geoghegan seemed to set himself the task of integrating the piano to a more satisfactory degree. For the most part Geoghegan’s accompaniment is strong, rhythmic, and very much in touch with the musician he is accompanying. There are fewer vaudeville-like music rifts in his style, in comparison to Linder. These elements are present but on a more integrated level. In this way, Geoghegan represents the emergence of an Irish music vamping style. As a highly experience arranger and musical director it is likely that, through Geoghegan’s influence, the clarinet was added to the groups sound, “resulting in a blend not dissimilar to Eastern European Jewish Klezmir music” (Bradshaw CD 1996). This is an interesting observation, indicating the disparate influences active upon musicians of the time. In fact, executives of the Columbia label capitalised on the band’s multi-national sound by issuing a 1927 recording of the group for the Polish market. These records were marketed in America under the names ‘Wesola Dwojka’ (The Merry Duo) and ‘Liaudies Orkestra’ (Bradshaw CD 1996).
THE GREEN FIELDS OF AMERICA

THE SWALLOW'S TAIL

[ Ex. 5.2 ] Ed Geoghegan
The following example of Geoghegan is a Columbia recording with fiddler Michael Coleman [ex. 5.2]. It comes from a session recorded in 1927 and comprises of a set of reels entitled “The Green Field’s of America; The Swallow’s Tail”. Coleman did not have a regular accompanist, unlike his fiddling counterpart James Morrison. But when Coleman did record with Geoghegan the sound they produced was highly integrated and exciting. As a result these two musicians enjoyed a fruitful musical relationship for some time.

Throughout the first tune Geoghegan maintains a steady rhythm, accentuating Coleman’s stylistic and interpretative manner. A criticism might be levelled at the harmonic vocabulary for not being in any way adventurous. Conversely, the subtlety of the accompaniment figure could be interpreted as its very strength. Chord I and V feature mainly in the first section of the medley but this simplicity allows the tune to breathe in a way in which a more complex chordal progression would surely restrict. The choice is deliberate - it is not as if Geoghegan did not know what chords to use. He simply made the decision to remain in the background.

Geoghegan’s employment of an A minor chord at the beginning of “The Green Fields”, which is somewhat unusual for a tune in G major, is ample evidence of his ability to recognise and place chords in a complimentary fashion to the melody. The emphatic bass line G to D or G to B underpins the harmonic structure of the tune, outlining the notes of the G chord while the right hand seldom strays from inversions of the tonic chord [bars 2-3 and 9-10]. In “The Swallow’s Tail” Geoghegan also employs the basic ‘minor’ chords effectively by simply moving from I to VII, with a V-I progression at the end of the first part [bar 8].

Perhaps the most dramatic feature of this example is bars 7-8 in “The Green Fields” where the bass climbs in semitones while the right hand pauses, culminating in a syncopated move which emphatically resolves from chord V to the tonic chord. This technique is a typical component of vaudeville and ragtime piano vocabulary. Such moments are used sparingly by Geoghegan and as a result they never dominate the musical sound in the way as similar dramatic accompaniments employed by other
vampers. To conclude with the words of Harry Bradshaw, who is himself a clear champion of Geoghegan’s style:

He was a player who understated and yet could add something in that understatement which immediately set a mood... he just seemed to be able to capture the right level of attack and he never dominated but his contribution...was always just perfect, in my mind.6

This is indeed an apt summary for a pianist who featured most prominently during the 78rpm era. His style seems to represent the integration of the Irish into American society. It is a style which maintains the best aspects of the Irish tradition, blending them with the most popular sounds of American music. Through the medium of the piano, these sound worlds are brought together in a simple but effective manner.

**John Muller**

John Muller was very much in demand as an accompanist during the 1920’s. He played with a variety of soloists including James Morrison, Michael Coleman, John McKenna and others. The name Muller suggests that he was from the German-American contingent of piano players that became interested in Irish music. Unlike Joe Linder, who also belonged to this group, Muller took this German-Irish relationship to a new level and joined ranks with Irish musicians.

Muller is perhaps most famous for his recordings with James Morrison and Tom Ennis in the early 1920s. The combination was a successful one. Harry Bradshaw points out on the sleeve-notes of Morrison’s album that the test recordings in 1922 at Columbia undertaken by this trio proved “obviously popular [and] four subsequent sessions yielded nine sides for Columbia between Nov 1922 and April 1923” (Bradshaw CS 1989). These recordings were very well received everywhere and the trio made such an impact on the public that record companies were obliged to change their policies to ensure the inclusion of the name of both instrumentalists and piano accompanist. This is verified by Reg Hall on the sleeve notes of the Topic recording entitled *James Morrison and Tom Ennis*:

Although a few odd records of Irish music had already come out in Great Britain and Ireland, it was one particular issue at the end of 1924 that hit the jackpot and captured the hearts of a whole generation. ‘Black Rogue/Saddle the Pony’ and ‘Londonderry
Hornpipe’ credited anonymously as ‘Trio: Irish Bagpipes, Violin and Piano’, is said, rather widely to have been in every country cottage in Ireland, and it is also said that so many people asked at the record shops, the company was forced to reverse its normal policy and name the artists. 
(Hall LP 1980)

Acknowledgements rarely featured on recordings of ethnic music at this time. Most Irish musicians were not very well known and record companies may have felt that there was no need to name those featured on a given record. While many musicians did not receive credits, some recordings of the era did, in fact, name the main artists. However, more often than not, the naming of session musicians was done retrospectively, years after the issue of a record. This task was not too difficult as generally the record companies maintained log books of the instrumentalists and singers recorded. The same was not true of the piano accompanist, and numerous ‘piano - unknown’ listings in Spottswood and other discographies are a testament to this. Naming the accompanist on many 78era recordings was often a hit and miss affair, as it depended upon the editorial procedures of the issuing company. This phenomenon implies a lack of interest in identifying the piano player, both on original recording and on reissues during the 1930s where matrix cards were not always passed onto the reissuing company. It seems that in spite of the integral part played by the piano in these recordings, not much attention was given to the actual piano players. I would interpret this as an interesting reflection of the low esteem with which these pianists were held.

Returning to that 1924 recording which I have chosen to illustrate Muller’s vamping style, the ‘Londonderry Hornpipe’ is ample proof of his creativity and competence in accompanying Irish traditional [ex. 5.3]. The four part hornpipe is played by Ennis and Morrison with great vigour and Muller accentuates the pace with a his own rhythmic motif. Instead of employing the typical ‘oompah-oompah’ figure, as many accompanists do for a tune in 4/4 (with left and right hand falling on beats 1 and 3, 2 and 4 respectively), Muller opts for a ‘oompah-pah, oompah-pah’ figure (i.e. left hand on 1 and 3, right hand on 2 and 2&, and on 4 and 4&), as seen in the opening bars 3 & 4, and indeed throughout the piece, giving it great bounce. Grace notes are used in the bass figure for interesting effects as illustrated in bars 9 & 17, where the C
note emphasises the down beat D. Harmonically, Muller employs the basic I-V movement. Within this he changes the voicing of the chords using root position in the first verse and moving to first position in the second, third and fourth verses [bar 9-, 17-, & 25].

The basic I-V movement sometimes includes inflections such as the sounding of the 7th in bars 2 and 4. Finally, the basic D A E A minim movement in the bass (I-V) is varied for effect in numerous places including bars 21-22. This is particularly effective in bars 25-26 and bars 29-30. In the case of the former, the variations include the use of chord I of the relative minor key, B minor. In the latter example, the bass descends the scale while the D chord above remains unchanged. The harmonic movement essentially pivots on D (chord I) yet maintain the sense of the I-V movement found throughout. Muller's ability to vary yet never detract from the tune is exemplified in this example.

Muller's technique demonstrated a great empathy with Irish music. His musical interpretations were less showy than his predecessor's Joe Linder's. Muller's style was influenced by popular music to some degree, naturally. However, as he was active after Linder, it is not surprising that Muller's style demonstrated a greater integration of the vaudeville-like tendencies typical of Linder. Perhaps this is because Muller was performing predominantly with Irish musicians and they tempered his approach. This must have had a bearing on his musical interpretation as the records on which Muller featured were, in general, for Irish audiences and not the general public.

**Dan Sullivan**

Dan Sullivan is one of the characters of the 78rpm era. He was an accompanist who, on record, seemed larger than life, yet in private had a much more sedate personality. In the radio series *The Irish Phonograph*, Nicholas Carolan provides the basic biographical details referring to Sullivan as an American born pianist and son of a Millstreet, Co. Cork fiddle player (Carolan 1983). Sullivan, then, would have had much exposure to Irish music growing up.
According to Mick Moloney:

His exposure as a youth in the Sullivan household to the best Irish musicians in Boston no doubt helped give him a strong feel for the music and established him to become one of the finest piano accompanists in Irish recordings.
(Moloney CD 1998)

Sullivan was employed by Steinway in Boston to demonstrate the company’s piano wares. In order to be able to do his job to the best of his ability and to fulfill the expectations of his employers Sullivan was expected to be well versed in a number of different musical genres, ranging from popular to classical, in order to give the widest possible exposure to the capabilities of the instrument. In this respect, Sullivan was a highly talented, multi-faceted piano player who knew the difference between the black and the white notes. Sullivan’s vamping style for traditional Irish music was bound to be informed by his wide knowledge of a variety of styles.

Sullivan formed a band in the 1920s entitled the ‘Dan Sullivan Shamrock Band’ encouraged by his friend and fellow pianist, Ed Lee, whom I will be dealing with shortly. The band enjoyed great success performing for a variety of audiences, not just Irish-Americans. The band dressed up in tuxedos and bow ties for their audience and their music was always in touch with contemporary tastes, featuring any musical gimmick that was currently popular. Undoubtedly because of this, and his Steinway experiences, there are traces popular music and especially of raucous vaudeville sounds in Sullivan’s sound. Sullivan had a tendency to play to the Irish stereotype and in many recordings spoke throughout the musical performance. Sullivan revelled in playing up to the image of the mad Irish man, no doubt a residual from the hey-days of vaudeville. Bradshaw’s account of tracks featuring Irish banjo player Neil Nolan accompanied by Sullivan on piano is illuminating in this regard:

It’s just banjo and piano and Dan Sullivan provides a great powerhouse but he spends the whole record shouting and doing this kind of stage Irish character and whooping it up and roaring away...but he absolutely ruined this wonderful banjo playing. If he had just played his piano with the banjo it would have been a classic record...It was a stage Irish character presentation.7
Other times the monologue could be more restrained and introspective, typifying the approach of certain jazz musicians to their musical performances. According to Bradshaw:

He [Sullivan] mumbled as well. He was like...Oscar Peterson, that jazz pianist who talked his was through the piece and he mumbles and talks to himself as he's playing.

Bradshaw muses on Sullivan’s possible eccentricity, noting in particular his “insane kind of laughter” on the ‘From Galway to Dublin’ recording, found on a re-mastered CD of the same title. Perhaps a streak of genius lay beneath this undoubted eccentric façade. Sullivan’s very quirkiness made him stand out amongst his contemporaries but even this facet of his personality could not hide his keen ability at the keyboard.

The recording career of the ‘The Dan Sullivan Shamrock Band’ spanned a period of about ten years, with the group moving from the Columbia label to Victor and subsequently to Decca. According to Nicholas Carolan, the band had “many good traditional musicians in its ranks and recorded largely traditional dance tunes” though he acknowledges that “in its vocal items it moved away from traditional material” (Carolan 1983). All in all, the band recorded over one hundred sides featuring a vaudeville-like mixture of music and comedy, presenting a popular form of entertainment.

Sullivan was one of the few pianists of the time who recorded solos. Sullivan’s florid solos give an insight into his vamping style in band contexts where he seemed to tone down on his technique in deference to his role as accompanist. In a band situation Sullivan employed a simplified version of what he did during his solos. In one particular recording, a rendition of the Irish air ‘Cailín Deas Cruite na mBo’, Sullivan plays in a manner more akin to piano accompaniment for silent film. Bradshaw comments:

You’d want to hear it - because it’s as if you’re sitting in a silent theatre and he jangles all over the place and does all kinds of variations and comes back to the melody. And sometimes you think he’s not going to make it and he crashes back down again...[it was] totally at odds with
what he did on his band records...he moved into a different mode...He was exceptional.\textsuperscript{10}

Sullivan, it seems, was something of a showman, full of a dramatic energy which he tended to contain on his band records. But sometimes this energy managed to burst through in the most unexpected manner, as the 1926 example with Michael Hanafin illustrates [ex 5.4]. This example is a reel entitled “Miss McCloud’s”. I have chosen to reproduce only the first verse or part of the first and second round of the tune - repeating it in each case.\textsuperscript{11} Initially Sullivan is quite restrained and employs a steady double octave I to V movement in the bass against a sustained G chord [bars 1-3]. When chord V is employed in bar 4 it is flavoured with the 7\textsuperscript{th} C. The basic vamp which has been emphasising the bass flowers into a highly effective roaming bass figure [bars 9-16] against the simple chord structures maintained by the right hand. However, in the second rendition of the tune Sullivan’s more theatrical side clambers to the fore with the inclusion of a new rhythmic figure reminiscent of vaudeville days [bars 1b]. This continues throughout the piece. The rhythm is not particularly apt, especially the second crotchet beat in the right hand, where the chord is splayed rather dramatically.

Further, the subsequent reiterations of this same chord, now in firm unison crotchets, seem to put somewhat of a drag on the music. Nonetheless, this approach is, at the very least, inventive. Sullivan also uses the upper register of the piano here (moving even higher up the keyboard in subsequent rounds) which is a stylistic feature typical of cinema or vaudeville piano accompaniment. Overall, this piece clearly demonstrates Sullivan’s virtuosity and professionalism. However, it might be challenged on account of its unusual rhythmic propulsion that does not rest entirely comfortably with the basic pulse of the reel.

Many of the pianistic techniques employed by Sullivan were amplified and magnified by his brash recording and performing persona. The result was the production of a sound sometimes disconcerting but always entertaining. Sullivan seems to represent that bridge between Vaudeville and traditional Irish dance music recording but from a different angle to Kimmel and Linder. Sullivan was part of the
Irish tradition by virtue of his birthright but he may also be viewed as belonging to a
virile American musical scene. Some of his innovations were accomplished to the
detriment of the more traditional characteristics of Irish music. However, it must be
said that there has not been a vamper like Dan Sullivan since. Even Tom Banks (with
whom I will be dealing shortly), using similar pianistic techniques, found a more
balanced approach. Sullivan was not the accompanist to be emulated in a quest to
create and shape a generic vamping style. Yet he remains an interesting figure and a
powerful testament to the wide variety of musical styles during this era.

Ed Lee

Ed Lee and Dan Sullivan may have been friends but in terms of styles of
accompaniment they could not have been more different. Whereas Sullivan represents
the brash, dramatic, exuberant style of piano accompanist, Lee utilised a more delicate,
a more subdued and, in my opinion, a more tasteful palette. Like Sullivan, Lee came
from within the tradition being born of Irish parents. However, Lee was not American­
Irish but London Irish and perhaps the difference between the two men in terms of
approach to vamping can be at least partially traced to this fact. Lee’s mother was a
concertina player. His exposure at an early age to the delicate sound of this small reed
instrument undoubtedly informed Lee’s approach to piano vamping. Other musical
members of the family included Frank Lee, leader of the first ceilidhe band in London.
In fact, Lee’s family naturally gravitated towards music and when Lee and his two
brothers emigrated to American they all became professional musicians.

Lee obviously had a deep understanding of the Irish music tradition. Bradshaw
speculates that Lee might, in fact, have started on another instrument before moving to
the piano. This may very well be the case as Lee’s vamping technique shows an
awareness of the music to a level that few piano accompanists achieve. It brings to
mind contemporary piano vamper Charlie Lennon who considers himself first and
foremost a traditional fiddler. Lennon maintains that being a melody player completely
informs his vamping style (Lennon 1996).

Lee took piano accompaniment of Irish dance music to another level. In fact,
his accompaniment almost reaching duet status, as illustrated here [ex. 5.5].
THE IVY LEAF

THE GREEN GROVES OF ERM

[Ex 5.5] Ed Lee
These reels come from a 1926 Victor recording with the concertina player William Mullaly, entitled “The Green Groves of Erin: The Ivy Leaf”. In light of Lee’s exposure to the concertina through his mother’s playing and the obvious respect he had for the instrument, Lee proved an ideal candidate for accompanying Mullaly’s light sound. In fact, Lee’s very original accompaniments suggest that the two were used to playing together outside the recording studios. Within the studio virtually all of Mullaly’s recordings were accompanied by Edward Lee. The notes of From Galway to Dublin proclaim that in these recordings, “Lee...shows remarkable restrained in his accompaniment, voicing his chords to complement the delicate tone of the concertina, and even playing some of the melody” (CD 1992).

Lee opted for the middle and upper ranges of the piano, resulting in a unique sound that was ideally suited to the timbre of the concertina. The opening bars illustrate just how high Lee’s keyboard positions were. To this end, I had to use a treble clef in the left hand in some cases when transcribing the following example.

Lee probably felt (correctly, I might add) that a heavy bass would only drown out the lighter tones of the concertina. An interesting feature of Lee’s vamp figure in the first tune is the way in which he reverses the emphasis - by placing the full chords in the left hand against a single note in the right [bars 3 & 6]. He even reverses the actual vamp with two double octave minimis on the down beat in the right hand, against the offbeat full chords in the left [bar 8]. Finally, the four crotchet chords in the left hand of bar 6 do not hinder the movement of the melody, as can often happen with other vampers. Somehow, being executed so high on the keyboard and being played so lightly means that these chords simply work. All of these vamping techniques are highly innovative and show how proficient Lee is on the keyboard.

It is also evident from this example that Lee is familiar with the tune he was accompanying. There can be a tendency among piano vampers, from the 78rpm era up to today, to employ certain simple harmonic clichés (basic I - IV - V rifts) which prove sufficient but hardly inspiring. Lee is the embodiment of an alternative approach where the vampper possesses first-hand knowledge of the tune and works hard to integrate specific features of the melody into the actual vamp. Such an approach ensures the
preservation of a fundamental tenet of the dance music tradition, that of variation. This goal is achieved through careful musical choice.

The different approaches introduced in the recording by Lee are not just random variation for variation's sake. They constitute subtle changes that are well thought out and expertly executed. Such elements of his style include echoing the melody in the upper register of the first tune, either whole [bars 12 & 14] or in part by emphasising the key note [bar 15]. He also employs a kind of counterpoint in the second round of "The Ivy Leaf" [bars 1 & 3] which is found throughout. In fact, his variations here in the right hand show an almost Baroque-like tendency for sequencing, as found in bars 13-14. Finally, in bar 15 & 16 the unison hands one octave apart are highly effective in accentuating the main notes of the melody. It is during all of these moments of interplay that Lee's accompaniment almost reaches duet level. This is something which most accompanists do not achieve, whether by choice or simply lack of application or ability.13

It is often difficult to ascribe a major or minor key to many tunes in the Irish tradition. Certain tunes hover ambivalently around a number of keys, never quite claiming full allegiance to one. In the case of the Lee medley transcribed here, I have assigned key signature of A minor with no sharps or flats. By implication there should be an accidental G# in the body of the music. But of course there is no G# and there are plenty of other accidentals, including C# and F# which means the tune does not conform to conventional classical tonality. I have chosen to illustrate this example deliberately in this manner in order to point out the difficulties involved for some vampers when approaching Irish music as discussed in chapter I. Lee appears to have no such problems. In "The Green Groves of Erin" Lee's vamp figure moves between an A minor and A major chord, depending on what Mullaly executes on the concertina. Mullaly emphasises C# in the first verse yet omits this important note in the second. Therefore Lee can commit to the A major chord [bars 3 & 5] and the A minor chord [bars 9 & 11] in the first and second verse respectively.

Ed Lee showed a flexibility and familiarity with the music in his vamping technique. What might have posed as problems for other piano accompanists were
competently dealt with by Lee. He seemed to have the keen ability recognise that a
tune is not always in an easily distinguishable key or mode. In this way he took the lead
from the soloist, as all good accompanists should, underpinning the nuances of the
melody maker. There is no doubt that Lee’s style was consistently informed by his
intimate knowledge of the tradition, and that is what made him a fine vapmer.

Tom Banks

Possibly one of the most invigorating and exciting professional music
relationships of the 1920s and 1930s was that forged between the fiddler James
Morrison (1893-1947), the guitarist Martin Christi and the pianist Tom Banks. Banks
was part of a highly organised team and they knew exactly the type of ensemble sound
they wished to produce. Morrison was at the helm and seemed to know exactly where
he wanted to take the group.14 Morrison had two distinct advantages as a professional
musician and arranger. Firstly he was a dancing master and he had a keen insight into
the rhythmic component of the music. Morrison probably recognised the need to
replace this lost percussive element of the dance in purely instrumental dance music
with something special - in this case the piano vamp. Secondly, Morrison was an
educated man who was musically literate. This literacy enabled him to express exactly
what he wanted in musical terms from his band members. It is fair to conclude that the
majority of piano accompanists of the time were also literate. Thus there is little doubt
that Morrison and his accompanist communicated with ease. As Bradshaw points out:

Morrison was such a rounded figure - you know, an intellectual. He
stood out from the musicians of the time. If things had been different
he would have been a teacher. He was a natural teacher.15

Unlike Michael Coleman, who seems to have had a hit and miss relationship with his
various accompanists (a signal that the vampers were imposed, perhaps?), Morrison
worked hard at his arrangements and organised practices in advance of recording
sessions. Accordionist Tom Carmody comments on this rehearsal ethic, noting how
Morrison needed to write down the music of a piece and work at its arrangement until
it was perfected.16 Morrison obviously demanded much from his accompanists. Such
requests to excel were responded to by Banks with great gusto.17
The musical results of this vigorous work ethos are noteworthy in terms of the sheer professionalism of the final product. On a more abstract level, the music seems to epitomise the success the Irish assimilation into modern, urban American society, while still retaining an Irish identity. Bradshaw, in reference to a track entitled “The Wreck of 99”, interprets the off-beats and syncopations of Banks and Christi as belonging to “mainstream America,” tracing Bank’s influence to Joe Venuti and Eddie Lang, stating “Ventui’s jazz; I can hear echoes of it in his [Morrison’s] last few records.” Again, the presence of such an influence is hardly surprising considering that these musicians were exposed to such sounds, not only in city clubs but also on sound recordings.

The following example illustrates these musical influences [ex. 5.6]. It is a Decca recording from 1936 which features Morrison, Banks, and Christi. The sound is uncompromisingly optimistic, with its jaunty rhythmic drive showing a variety of influences. The liner notes in the CD From Galway to Dublin proclaim “the piano and strummed guitar provide a rhythmic swing reminiscent of string jazz ensemble”(1992). Such a comment is hardly surprising, in light of what has been discussed in the previous chapters. This was, after all, the heyday of the Cotton Club and jazz recordings. The Irish could access all type of music, including jazz, in various bars and salons in the city. Irish music produced from the mid thirties onwards was bound to reflect contemporary social conditions which were multi-racial and multi-ethnic. Interestingly, this diversity was not only reflected in the music itself but also in the actual line-up of the musicians.

Through extensive research Bradshaw has concluded that Banks was Polish - ‘Banks’ not being the original form of his surname. As with many accompanists of the time, there seems to be disappointingly little biographical information uncovered. All that is know about Banks is that he died young and was not on the music scene for a long time. Even his musical contemporary Tom Carmody seemed vague about Banks’s background, in spite of the fact that he played and recorded with Banks and Morrison regularly. It seems that Morrison’s tactics in choosing musicians were very deliberate. It is highly probable that Morrison heard Banks playing in the mainstream dance band scene and brought him into the fold. Morrison probably went through the
same process with guitarist Martin Christi who was Italian. It seems that Morrison was keen to absorb the dance band elements into his music. This could surely be interpreted as a desire by Morrison to modernise and legitimise Irish music as well as to embrace aspects of his adopted county's culture. In the professional arena, the dance hall was an important source of revenue, but it was also an arena for the proud negotiation of an Irish identity in an American context. One can only imagine the reception of this group's music with its modern feel yet strong traditional roots.

The following example is a clear manifestation of these desires. It is the second reel in a set of three reels recorded in 1936 entitled "The Turnpike; The Dublin Reel; Miss Thornton's". Bradshaw points out exuberantly how this music was ahead of its time, noting the "overall surge of it" and the newness of the "offbeat syncopation". I view the example as microcosm of contemporary experiences, epitomising the era in which it was produced. In general Morrison and Carmody featured on the melody instruments of unison fiddle and accordion, Banks and Christi provided the propulsion, both rhythmically and harmonically. Bradshaw describes Morrison's musical ideal in terms of a "kind of steam engine...running behind them...that wouldn't take over or dominate the melody." I focus particularly on the mechanical nature of the metaphor because the accompaniment provided by guitar and piano especially was in essence representative of this industrial era. Moreover, this 78rpm side seems to represent, musically, how industrial life was ceasing to dominate - how it was gaining equilibrium with other more natural aspects of life, as represented by the melody.

A sense of this is found in the rhythmic pulse provided by the accompanists Banks and Christi. The Irish element rides above this in the guise of Carmody's and Morrison's melodic playing. Stylistically, Banks draws from an impressive pool of rhythmic techniques. He employs the basic "oompah-oompah" figure but with a decided emphasis on the base line (in fact, the right hand chords are scarcely audible) which he varies from the basic two minim beat per bar to four crotchets [bars 23 & 7b]. Syncopated figures are found throughout, particularly when Banks ceases to play the bass line [bars 9-10]. Here, the right hand G chords falling on the offbeat are far more pronounced. Banks also adds upbeats in the form of grace notes [bars 9, 13, 23, 7b...]

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From a harmonic point of view, these grace notes also function as an emphasis on the tonic G [bars 9, 23, & 7b] and, when it modulates in the second verse, on the D major tonic [bar 13]. The wandering bass figure is possibly the most noticeable stylistic feature of Banks’ performance style - a style which can be directly linked to ragtime and jazz idioms. For example, the opening four bars are quite active in the bass line, followed by another highly effective four bars of descending bass. Finally, Banks demonstrates his interest in vaudeville style by employing high clinking chords up on the top register proceeded by a dramatic double G sustained chord in the bass [bars 17b-24b]. These high voicings are all the more effective when juxtaposed with the open chords of the previous and succeeding verses. Unlike Dan Sullivan, who also had a penchant for the high register, Banks’ use of ‘flashy’ technique is far less intrusive as he never seems to cut across his instrumentalists. With Banks, variety is plentiful but never excessive. This track should be listened to in its entirety to experience the full gamut of Bank’s energy, drive and creativity.

Banks possessed a truly Irish-American style of piano accompaniment. He claimed allegiance to, reiterating Graeme Smith’s assertion:

not a music tightly integrated into the social patterns of rural Ireland, 
but a music shaped by the integration of rural Ireland into the rest of the world through emigration. 
(Smith 222)

Morrison’s dynamic fiddle playing, together with Banks’ vamping style, formed a clear example of how a link between the rural and the metropolitan was established via the piano.

The Female Accompanist

At this point I turn to the women accompanists of the era. There seem to have been more men than women employed as accompanists at this time, which is hardly surprising in light of the discussions of this topic in chapter II. The piano had moved from the domestic realm of the female to that of the male with the advent of mass mechanical reproduction of the piano and with the opening up of the professional music
The scene to pianists. When the piano moved from their parlours to the podium, many women found that they did not make a parallel move into the professional scene. The fact was that professional musicians tended to be male. However, some women continued to fight their corner and established themselves in the professional music scene, particularly as studio musicians. This is especially true for piano accompanists to Irish traditional music. Further, the women listed below all show Irish connections by virtue of their surnames, whether maiden or married. This demonstrates a readiness by females, within or associated with the Irish tradition, to employ their pianistic skills in Irish music given the opportunity.

The reason I highlight gender here is because gender did become an issue in Ireland for piano accompaniment. When musicians in Ireland began to absorb the piano into their sound world - no doubt in part due to the influence of the 78rpm recordings - very few male pianists were available. As a result, women filled the gap and female pianists in Ireland enjoyed prominent positions in many groups and ceilidhe bands: including Kitty Linnane and Bridie Lafferty, members of the Kilfenora and Castle Ceilidhe bands respectively and two of the most revered piano accompanists in Ireland operating from the 1950s.

**Della McMahon**

Della McMahon was a truly accomplished accompanist of the 78rpm era and a good representative of female accompanists of the time. McMahon had quite an extensive career, playing with numerous soloists and bands. The picture here [pl. 5.2] shows her with the Tom Carmody Band, whose line up includes two accordions, two saxophones, two banjos, drums, piano and vocalist. This line-up was quite typical of the time, with the instruments providing a lot of volume and demonstrating the disparate musical genres from which the Irish dance band drew inspiration. I concur with Bradshaw’s view of McMahon as a well-rounded competent musician who “just vamped good chords” and did what was required of her with great ease. According to the sleeve-notes in Bradshaw’s John McKenna tape, Della McMahon was a regular player with flute player John McKenna. Unfortunately, when listing to the contents, Bradshaw does not clarify on which records McMahon plays.
Della McMahon and the Tom Carmody Band (Topic LP 12TS352).
This is because the pianists were not listed on the recordings, according to Bradshaw, who did not want to hazard a guess on which sides she featured. This brings up the question of identifying piano players, especially in light of the phenomenon of the 'anonymous' player who remain unnamed on many records.

As mentioned earlier, sometimes it simply was not policy to name the musicians who featured on a recording. Other times, the vital information was lost during the reissuing process. The following is an example of a Decca re-release [serial no. W4313] of an earlier Decca recording [serial no. 12179] not properly annotated. Featuring Paddy Killoran on fiddle and Jim McGinn on piano, it reads ‘The Boys of Ball Isodarte, Att Henry's Favourite’, but it should actually read ‘The Boys of Ballysodare, Batt Henry's Favourite’. When trying to identify an unnamed accompanist, a close analysis of style can be the key. My study does not attempt this, but my experience of these recordings leads me to conclude that such a task is well within the realms of possibility, and hopefully it will be undertaken at some stage.

Other female who deserve recognition include Eileen O'Shea. O'Shea played with numerous soloists such as Morrison, and Coleman during the late 1920s and 1930s. O'Shea generally proved herself to be a capable and competent accompanist, though there are a few exceptions during her recording career. On the whole, she was a solid, background player who obviously saw her role as strictly supportive and not in anyway hugely creative. Claire Reardon warrants a mention in light of her specific achievements with fiddler James Morrison. Bradshaw notes in his Morrison recording that “with accompaniment on piano by Claire Reardon, this session produced vintage Morrison tracks” (Bradshaw CS 1989). Indeed, it seems Morrison’s experiences with Reardon triggered off his resolve to work with only the most consistent and talented accompanists - a great compliment in light of Morrison’s achievements.

Unfortunately not all the vampers, male or female, proved to be particularly adept at vamping. There was a breed piano accompanist from this era that seemed unable to grasp the character and nuances of Irish traditional dance music. Some of these accompanists were probably studio musicians fulfilling their union quotas. There
are a few accounts of accompanists not rehearsing nor even getting the opportunity to meet with the musicians before a recording session. Many 78rpm records with poor standards of piano accompaniment clearly demonstrate this fact. But the following musician/pianist had no such excuse for her musical interpretations at the keyboard.

Kathleen Brennan

Kathleen Brennan was just one of fiddler Michael Coleman’s many accompanists, and she is memorable for less than complimentary reasons. Brennan was of Irish background and was actually a fiddling student of Coleman, two obviously advantageous traits, it would seem, for an accompanist of Irish music. Brennan was not only a melody player of Irish music, but also knew Coleman personally and had first hand experience of his fiddling style. Yet the Decca recordings she made with Coleman in the mid 1930s are quite dubious. They have dismayed many Coleman aficionados who feel that Brennan’s accompaniment ruined recordings of otherwise of top quality. Though he does not name her, Bradshaw does refer to Brennan, among others, when he makes the following comment on the sleeve-notes of his Coleman recordings:

Over the years Michael recorded with many accompanists. All his commercial recordings had accompaniment: six with a guitarist and the remainder with piano. Some of his recordings were marred by unsympathetic and poor piano playing.
(Bradshaw CD 1991)

Coleman played with a variety of accompanists during his career, including John Muller, Ed Geoghegan, Arthur Kenna, Ed Lee, Herbert G. Henry and Eileen O’Shea.

On many of these recordings, the piano added to and greatly propelled his fiddle playing. Unfortunately, in the case of the Brennan example, this was not the case. I spoke earlier of the problem associated with making value judgements of accompanists from this era. However, even with an open mind I find it is impossible to understand what Brennan was thinking and hearing when she accompanied Coleman on the 1930s Decca recording entitled ‘The Wind that Shakes the Barely; The Lady on the Island’ [ex. 5.7].
The set comprises of two reels entitled “The Wind that Shakes the Barley; The Lady on the Island”. From the beginning, Brennan employs a rhythmic figure which is at odds with the basic motor rhythm of these reels. The quaver movement on the fourth beat of various bars is not in itself incorrect. The problem is that Brennan does not execute it cleanly and therefore drags the tune. Further, what makes Brennan’s general approach sound even more suspect is the manner in which the basic vamp figure is used to accentuate bass notes that Brennan places in a questionable order. The A-D-F figure in the bass does not seem to follow the natural phrasing of the tune as the D would be expected on the down beat of the second phrase [bar 5] where it does not occur. The tonic chord is repeated over and over but the orientation it is given does not suit the tune, particularly as a G chord is clearly required in beats three and four of certain bars [bars 2, 4 & 11]. The whole effect is one of distortion, both harmonically and rhythmically.

In many ways Brennan’s piano vamping is virtually incomprehensible harmonically. In “The Lady on the Lake” Brennan is not only in a different key to Coleman but in a key that is completely unrelated to the tonic D. The bass is seemingly stuck in a B, E, G# groove that Brennan is unable to break. This, in turn, is set against a repetitive E minor/major chord in the treble [bars 3-16]. Curiously, Brennan searches grapples for a new key at the commencement of the second tune - but both the first and second tune of the medley are in the same key.

It is possible that Brennan represents the ‘enforced’ accompanist, an idea posited earlier. This is one feasible answer for the mystery of why Coleman chose Brennan as his accompanist, when so many other fine accompanists were still on the music scene at the time of this recording. Or perhaps there were very specific personal reasons for this pairing. Coleman was known to have alcohol problems. In order to receive money due to him by the record company perhaps Coleman was obliged to record promptly. Maybe Brennan was the only person available to accompany him and simply did it for him as a favour. This particular story has been passed down in folklore, though its origins or its accuracy have never been verified. Whether truth or urban myth, the result is really what is under scrutiny here. At the end of the day, it was the company’s choice to release the recording or not and they chose to do so. The
question to be asked is what musical value judgements were being made here, if indeed any were being made at all? Or perhaps this recording is indicative of the difficulties Coleman was experiencing in integrating into America after initially embracing the move in the previous decade? Whatever the reasons, it may be asserted that these particular Coleman/Brennan recordings seem to be the antithesis of those featuring Banks and Geoghegan, in terms of standards of piano accompaniment.

In this chapter, I surveyed many of the accompanists active during the 78rpm Era. Their backgrounds and accompaniment styles varied enormously. Many were revered as heroes, while others remained unnamed, consigned forevermore to anonymity. Yet each accompanist has not only been woven into the story of harmonic accompaniment on early recordings of Irish traditional dance music in urban America, but also into the larger fabric of the tradition’s history. These pianists made important contributions to the commercial production of Irish music, leaving an indelible sonorous mark, both on and off the record. As the piano went into decline, its sound continued to resonate within the tradition, largely because of the contributions made by such musicians. The commercial face of Irish music was altered irrevocably, but so too was the amateur tradition.

1 Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996.
2 ibid.
3 ibid.
4 ibid.
5 Interview conducted by Joanne Trew with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1997.
6 Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996.
7 ibid.
8 This type of monologue is distinct from the genre of monologue recordings which were also quite popular at this time.
9 Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996.
10 ibid.
11 To recap, each verse or part comprises of 8 bars which are repeated. When the two parts or verses have been play (with repeats) a full ‘round’ or 32 bars have been sounded. The player then returns to the start of the first verse of the tune to repeat the cycle.
12 Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996.
13 Lee’s piano vamping style with Mullaly could be equated with the close musical relationship that exists between fiddler Martin Hayes and guitarist Dennis Cahill - a very popular duo of the 1990s. Cahill has taken the accompaniment of music to another level with his intricate, interweaving accompaniment style. Many commentators interpret his role as being something more akin to representing half of a duet as opposed to the secondary or subordinate role of accompanist.
14 Jim Handley, a contemporary of Morrison and Banks, gave an insight into how these musicians operated in a rare interview with Harry Bradshaw (Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996).
Harry Bradshaw attributes Morrison's high standards to bad experiences earlier on in his career. Morrison's initial recordings are frequently marred by questionable accompaniment, which may lead to speculation as to what extent Morrison had control of choice of vamper in the early stages of his recording career. But by about 1926 Morrison began to establish definite ideas in terms of the type and standard of accompaniment he wanted. During that year he recorded with Claire Reardon, a competent piano accompanist. From then on, it seems Morrison made the decisions about who played with him as he deliberately drafted in the services of Tom Banks (Personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996).

The Italian connection should be no more a surprise than the German-Irish connection discussed previously. As Harry Bradshaw has commented, Baldoni Bartoli the accordion manufacturer had a shop on Mulberry Street. Though this street was in the Italian quarter it had a vigorous Irish music scene in the 1920s. In fact, James Morrison lived only a few streets away (personal interview with Harry Bradshaw, Dublin 1996).
Music [for playing] has disappeared. Initially the province of the idle (aristocratic class), it lapsed into an insipid social rite with the coming of the democracy of the bourgeois (the piano, the young lady, the drawing room, the nocturne) and then faded out all together (who plays the piano today?).

(Barthes 1984:149)
Decline of the Piano

Who indeed played the piano anymore after the 1920s and 1930s? From 1940 onwards, piano production in America, and indeed world-wide, continued to decline as less and less people bought the instrument. Instead, the general public seemed quite happy to listen to their records and radio stations, go to a movie, or watch television. The piano moved from centre stage to the peripheries of the entertainment world, never again to see the glory days of the late 19th century. It became less an instrument of the people and more one of the concert hall virtuoso. As for the pianos in the parlours across America, they functioned more as a means to display the good china and family photographs - their wooden bodies silent musical tombs, gathering dust.

Even so, the piano continued to have a voice in the Irish dance music tradition in America. However, with the establishment of various emigration laws limiting the number of foreigners entering the United States, the number of Irish immigrants dropped significantly by the middle of the century. The practice and enjoyment of Irish music became part of an ever-diminishing musical sub-culture. It was inevitable that the scale of traditional Irish music and dance performance enjoyed in the Irish-American dance halls of the 1920s and 1930s would never be repeated.

For those who continued to play Irish dance music, other influences - especially those brought about in the Folk music revivals of America, England, and Ireland during the 1970s - resulted in an emphasis being placed on stringed accompaniment instruments instead of the piano, as discussed in chapter I. Yet the influence of the piano in traditional music is still being felt today, both in America and Ireland. Essentially, this trend can be traced back to the first 78rpm commercial records. Interestingly, however, the influence of these early 20th century recordings on traditional music-making as a whole went far beyond the mere promotion of the piano for harmonic accompaniment purposes, especially in Ireland.

Influence of the 78rpm Recordings

The 78rpm recordings did have a profound influence for some years on the tradition in Ireland, both from a short-term and long-term point of view. The configuration of a sound world by an American recording industry proved hard to
shake off. The use of piano accompaniment was a potent element of this. The 78rpm records sent ‘home’ were received with rapturous attention, and the presence of the piano in these recordings had an undoubted influence upon music-making in Ireland. When the making of commercial recordings of Irish music began in Ireland, many musicians opted to include piano accompaniment. And there were plenty of pianists available to fulfil this demand, particularly female accompanists who often led ceilidhe bands.

However, the 78rpm records had a more potent and long-lasting influence upon Irish dance music than simply the addition of the piano. These recordings helped to preserve a repertoire that may otherwise have been lost. Further, the records themselves revitalised the tradition by encouraging more people to play and re-explore their native tradition. While piano accompaniment undoubtedly left its mark on the musical language of the dance music tradition, it never fully succeeded in becoming an integral part of the tradition in Ireland, in spite of the huge influence of the 78rpm recordings that crossed the Atlantic divide. Unlike similar folk music traditions which embraced the piano, such as Cape Breton music, or indeed Irish music in America (which needs to be seen, in certain respects, as separate from Eire’s tradition), the piano never really established a firm footing in the indigenous tradition.

While the piano’s influence continues to be felt today, its presence in the tradition is quite precarious. In my experience, it is generally older musicians who like to be accompanied by the piano. Whether this is because these musicians were brought up on the specific ‘melody and piano accompaniment’ sound combination of 78rpm records, or whether it is because they like the security associated with piano accompaniment, is hard to tell. As for younger musicians, in general the majority seems to prefer the versatility of stringed instruments - though, of course, there are obvious exceptions among musicians of all age groups in both cases. Finally, while virtually all ceilidhe band aficionados are emphatic in their support for piano accompaniment, at the end of the day the piano is still generally perceived as being somewhat dated in today’s world.
Healy argues that the 78rpm records from America early this century were models for musical activity in Ireland for many decades (1970:155). But if these records were definitive models in the manner Healy asserts, then surely it is fair to assume that the piano, as a leading character in this scenario, should have persisted as a dominant musical force. It did not. What, then, were these recordings models for, and why did the tune selections they featured persist in the fashion that it did? In other words, it is telling that tune types and tune sets were popularised by the 78s and not so much the instrumentation. This is the case for many sets (and settings) played by Michael Coleman — tune combinations which continue to be played in the same format today.¹

The 78rpm records also influenced music-making from a stylistic point of view. The individual and regional styles of the most revered and popular practitioners, such as Coleman and Morrison, were immortalised. These recordings influenced musicians all over America, Ireland, and beyond. Yet the imitative trends and potent stylistic influences of these records seemed much more limited in the realm of instrumentation. In spite of the pervasiveness of the piano in such recordings, the establishment of an unquestionably permanent position in the tradition for the piano remained unfulfilled. Why, then, did the piano and piano accompaniment not take root in Ireland in the same way that it did in America?

Ireland's Reluctant Piano

The piano was an integral part of the immigration and urbanisation process of the Irish in America early this century. The piano’s introduction to Irish music recordings was inextricably linked to the unique social, cultural, and geographical conditions of America. The musical aesthetic in America determined that the piano was a vital part of most, if not virtually all, musical expressions — especially if they were to become commercially viable. Basically, this aesthetic was determined by economic conditions. In comparison with America, the piano became affordable, and hence available, at a much later date in Ireland. By the time the piano became accessible to Irish musicians in Ireland, ironically (and tellingly) the piano’s popularity had already declined in America. To this end, I argue that the piano never really had a chance to establish itself in an Irish context.
There are a variety of other reasons why the piano did not take hold in traditional Irish music in Ireland. The piano's inclusion in Irish dance music in America was a response to the Irish immigrant's experience of urban American life. Moreover, during the early decades of the 20th century, the piano was a prominent, almost omnipotent facet of American musical and even cultural life. It is little wonder that Irish immigrants should fall under its potent spell. The popularity of a product in such a commercial environment undoubtedly acted as a powerful agent of desire.

Significantly, migration to Irish towns and cities by traditional Irish musicians happened at a much later date - during the 1960s and 1970s predominantly. Irish cities at that time were not multi-cultural venues, and these towns and cities were certainly nowhere as 'foreign' as American counterparts - nor indeed were the incoming migrants. Neither did towering buildings crowd the landscape of Dublin or Limerick as they did in Manhattan. Therefore, even though the general typography of the Irish city was more dense than a rural environment, the experiences of these migrants still did not equate those of the Irish immigrants in America. As a result, the same response to the environment was not elicited. Somehow, the piano did not seem to encapsulate these spatial experiences in an urban Irish context.

From a musical point of view, during these decades of migration to urban centres, there was more of a focus on other harmonic vocabularies and musical modes of expression, such as folk and rock. As a result, more flexible stringed instruments such as guitar and bouzouki took over the role of accompanist. The piano was only a minor, even insignificant character in a burgeoning urban traditional musical scene. Further, the fact that most of the musical activity was taking place in smaller venues as opposed to larger dance halls ensured the popularity of portable stringed instruments. Very few public houses featured pianos, and for the minority that did, these were invariably out of tune. As a corollary to this point, Irish dance music had moved more into a listening context, especially with increasing commercialisation. The percussive element provided by the piano for the dance was simply not needed any more. And even where ceilidhe dances were held, amplification ensured that the piano was no longer an absolute necessity in terms of volume and rhythmic drive.
The key in all of this is to acknowledge that the use of harmony was an inevitable musical consequence of modern Irish life and music-making on one level. However, changes to the sound of traditional Irish dance music in Ireland during the 60s and 70s happened far more gradually than in early 20th century America. These changes were sonorial reflections of a less abrupt transformation in lifestyle from a rural to an urban context in Ireland. Having been conceived originally in the rural Irish setting, Irish traditional dance music continued to resonate within this landscape. But the landscape was not immutable. It too was changing. The key is that whatever changes occurred in Ireland’s geography and typography, these changes happened gradually enough to avoid the jarring effects experienced by Irish music on its initial introduction to urban America. Therefore, the introduction of an harmonic component was a much less dramatic and a much less fixed affair in traditional music-making in Ireland.

I also suggest that, from a politically symbolic point of view perhaps the piano never really lost its imperial connotations for the Irish and Irish musicians. This may account for the piano’s inability to carve out a definitive niche in the tradition. It is possible to read into the reluctance to embrace this instrument wholesale as being a subversive, post-colonial reaction. The social and political symbolic potency of the instrument, exploited for commercial interests in America, may have been the very trait which actively discouraged Irish musicians in Ireland from adopting the piano.

One final important point cannot be overstated. Irish music did not need to be mediated in Ireland in the same manners as it did in America. The types of negotiations that were taking place between the Irish and their neighbours in their new multi-cultural home were simply not a facet of life in contemporary Ireland. In simple terms, a bridge of understanding and communication of this kind was not being sought in Ireland as it was, and needed to be, in America. In both countries, Irish traditional dance music was functioning on different levels. The piano, as part of an Irish-American social, political, and commercial strategy to gain acceptance, did not have the same bargaining value in Ireland as it did in America.
Today, Ireland is more urbanised, more cosmopolitan, and an integral part of the global village. In this context, modern harmony resonates with Irish society and the piano has its place within this context - though obviously not with the same degree of certainty as in the American situation early this century. I conclude, then, that the piano was a bridge at a very specific time in history. It provided a means for the integration of Irish immigrants who employed music as a tool for negotiating their acceptance in American society. In this way, the piano’s addition to Irish dance music was not always the result of purely musical concerns. The following are some of the more deeply rooted reasons for the piano’s inclusion in the dance tradition in America, in particular.

The Context of the Piano as a Bridge and Mediator

The piano was a ‘bridge’ in America on a number of symbolic levels. First, through the 78rpm record the piano forged a link between the Irish in Ireland and the Irish Diaspora in America. The 78rpm record brought Irish traditional music back to the Irish in Ireland, with the piano as an integral part of this process. The ‘Ivory Bridge’ spanned the Atlantic, linking two countries with shared cultural elements. Second, the piano of America stretched across two value systems, finding a purpose and meaning in both. America’s piano was representative and symbolic of Victorian ideals on one hand and of the modern, mechanical age on the other. The piano had proved adaptable to changing conditions in America’s social and cultural life in the same way that Irish music maintained its relevance for Irish immigrants. Third, the piano was also a bridge or a conduit into mainstream American for the Irish and Irish-Americans. The ownership of a piano was a means of expressing economic success and a sign of assimilation into American society. For those who wished to preserve certain Irish traditions while embracing American culture, featuring a piano in Irish music facilitated these dual desires perfectly. Fourth, the piano mediated between the landscape of rural Ireland and urban America. The musical and cultural constructs of the rural Irish landscape found their voice in their new urban context through the intervention of the piano, as is manifest in the music of the 78rpm records.
From a purely musical point of view, then, the piano was truly an ‘Ivory Bridge’. The piano was a stepping stone between oral and literate traditions. Irish music was not written down and neither was the improvisatory act of vamping as found on 78rpm records. Yet the piano has always been seen as the embodiment of the Western Art music system and hence of literate music, appearing in printed collections of Irish music. I have shown that the act of vamping was essentially deeply embedded in the literate tradition. This is clearly demonstrated in the earliest collections of piano arrangements, and in ragtime, whose own roots owe a debt to the Western tradition. A direct consequence of this cross-pollination between elements of Irish and Western Art music was made manifest in and by the piano. Basically, the piano allowed for the homophonic interpretation of a music tradition which was essentially monophonic. Therefore, the piano provided the means of bringing these two musical systems together. In fact, the piano was the very embodiment of this partnership. Since Irish music was also influenced not only by Western Art music but by ragtime and other popular sounds of the day - sounds heavily dependent on the piano - the potency of the instrument could not be underestimated. Through its inclusion of the 78rpm records, the piano proved to be an adequate mediator in terms of getting an aural grasp of an unfamiliar music. In this way, the piano made Irish music palatable and available to a wider audience, and it travelled across the amateur and professional divide. In every way, then, the piano acted as a bridge.

Reassessing Vamping Styles

I reflect on what I have learned from the experience of engaging in this research, especially from a practical point of view. Being a piano accompanist, I have always been curious about the piano’s introduction into the tradition. This thesis has helped me to come to an understanding as to what degree I am part of a distinct tradition and piano accompanist lineage. I recognise that the accompanists whom I study here had no precedents from within the tradition and, because of this, they had to look elsewhere to a variety of sources for inspiration. Some took from outside the tradition, looking at popular music genres (Banks). Others looked to the Irish melodic tradition as a means of establishing a vamping technique (Lee), while many drew primarily from their own experiences of established genres of the popular music
No generic style of the time existed because it could not and therefore there were no real rules at work - only experience and instinct. As Hormoz Fahart notes:

A genuine understanding of any musical tradition can clearly be best reached through the study of the music on its own terms, and not on predetermined notions as to what it ought to be. Rules and theories can be valid only if they are extracted from the life of any given music which is its practice. If the practice displays irregularities of contradictions in the theory, then it is the theory which is at fault; the music can not be adjusted in order to validate it.

(Fahart 1990:22)

Each of the vampers varied in terms of how integrated their styles were with the music they were accompanying. Some stayed with older musical clichés while others moved forward to establish a new kind of sound. In all cases it is important not to judge these accompanists by theory alone, particularly Western Art music theory, but by a variety of other factors. It is my hope that in this work I have done just this.

**Tonality Revisited**

My personal view of accompanying music is obviously coloured by my musical experiences and by my developing harmonic consciousness. I now question much of what I have hitherto taken for granted, especially in terms of applying simple chord riffs to complex melodic structures of different phrase lengths. After exploring the original tonality of Irish traditional music I continue to question whether the piano should be indiscriminately employed in the role of accompaniment instrument. Does it compromise the inherent 'sound' of the tradition? On the other hand, concert pitch and equal-tempered tuning in general have become standardised in many musical traditions across the globe - perhaps Irish music is no exception. But, then, maybe Irish traditional music loses something unique and vital to its expression if such sonorous kinks are ironed out? Yet for music to be truly 'traditional', must it not change, adapt, and accept the input of each successive generation? These are multifaceted questions with no easy answers.

I have vamped with Donegal fiddlers and realised that there was too much of a clash of intonation and so I ceased to play. Perhaps we have not quite flattened out the ‘Irish scale’ yet on instruments whose pitches are not fixed. There is still an
undeniable presence or residue of older sounds in Irish music that is distinctly at odds with the piano. As Henebry concludes in his writing on Irish music “there is no reason why a piano should not be specially constructed to play Irish music, as the advantage of an octave shorter by two notes is not to be despised in playing” (Henebry c.1900:26). It is an interesting thought and avoids the more radical (and to my mind unacceptable) solution of dismissing the piano entirely. The title of this thesis also offers a possible solution of how best to approach piano accompaniment since the music revolves, predominantly, around the white notes of the scale - the notes upon which all the modes may be executed. Thus the ‘Ivory Bridge’ has a potent musical relevance as well as a symbolic one.

**Approaches to Vamping**

One of the greatest lessons I have learned from undertaking this work is that style is context sensitive - context informs absolutely everything. All of the accompanists I study here have something to offer. In their day, each accompanist cast a sonorous hue on the music in a unique and definitive manner. While the sound produced by Tom Banks continues to be appropriate in a cityscape, I feel that somehow his style does not resonate so easily with musicians in a West Clare cottage. With this knowledge and understanding, both from a musical and contextual perspective, the act of piano accompaniment is suddenly filled with choices that, prior to this study, I may not have fully appreciated.

By knowing the context and background of each of the piano vampers of the 78rpm era, inevitable value judgements on their styles become much more informed since the styles themselves are given a greater relevance. This may seem a circular argument on one level, but to my mind speaks much more of a hermeneutic approach as outlined in the introduction (hermeneutics being a somewhat fitting model for the exploration of a music tradition based on the ‘round’). The practice of emulation by successive generations of vampers takes on a whole new meaning, in this respect, as we look back, appropriate, and re-define piano vamping in our own context. Studying this piano accompaniment lineage imbues the act of vamping with an undoubted sense of legitimacy on one level. But, more importantly, it also sensitises an accompanist to
the complexity of a given situation, offering an insight into why some musicians react so vehemently to the piano's inclusion while some readily embrace it.

In terms of the practical application of various elements of the vamping techniques I have studied here, these examples have given me a keen insight into the wide variety of harmonic choices available. The most striking one, personally, is that of key definition. Anthony Hopkins defines harmony simply but adequately as "the combination of two or more sounds of identifiable pitch." (Hopkins 1979:32). The key word here is 'two'. Charles Hoffer states that "while two notes may be said to be in harmony, they can not be committed to a key or tonality without the casting of a third note" (Hoffer 1971:27). Some of the examples in chapter V show that playing on this deliberate ambiguity is highly effective in traditional music. The lack of commitment to the 3rd in a chord leaves the tonality and key of a tune quite open. This is a direct (and I would argue fitting) response to tunes that are more modal than diatonic in nature. There are a variety of other vamping techniques that may be explored but this is a task for another day. For now, playing upon the idea of *diffused* tonality (a concept introduced in chapter I) opens up a multitude of possibilities for the piano accompanist.

**Conclusion**

As I draw to a close I am reminded of Graeme Smith’s words. Smith summarised the reasons that Irish music continues to be performed, linking this phenomenon, in particular, with the immigrant experience:

That Irish dance music is still so vigorously performed and so popular cannot be understood in terms of the persistence of cultural forms and of 'traditions' proving resistant to the destructive forces of modernisation. The music continues to be played because Irish men and women have found it relevant to their experience of the modern, and this relevance has been based in the music's long-standing accommodation with emigration.

(Smith 1994:221)

If the fiddle or uilleann pipes are seen to represent the essence of Irish traditional dance music and the piano the essence of modernism in America of the 1920s, the dividing
line between the concepts of Modernism and Traditionalism suddenly do not seem quite so distinct. In the words of Raymond Williams, modernism is:

strongly characterised by its internal diversity of methods and emphasis: a restless and often directly competitive sequence of innovations and experiments, always more immediately recognised by what they are breaking from than by what, in any simple way, they are breaking towards.
(Williams 1992:89)

So too, I would argue, is traditionalism. Irish traditional dance music in America during the early part of this century had to change and adapt to its new social context in order to maintain life. How else would it have survived? One way in which this was done was through the addition of harmonic accompaniment on the piano. The piano, then, played a role in the preservation of Irish traditional dance music by making it relevant in the modern condition and in this way truly acted as a bridge between old and new.

The ‘Ivory Bridge’ played a pivotal role in the performance of a modern Irish and Irish-American identity on 78rpm recordings of early 20th century America. This in turn affected the indigenous music tradition, though in a different way. Perhaps the piano never managed to occupy the same position in traditional music-making in Ireland but the message it carried made a profound impact. The continued presence of harmonic dimensions in Irish traditional dance music is a testament to the adaptability of this music. Whether in an urban or rural setting, it continues to persist with great vigour. There are many ways in which Irish music is mediated in the post-modern world, and harmony is one of the primary means of bridging the gulfs between mutual understanding. This process, which we take so much for granted, essentially began with the inclusion of the piano during the first stages of the commercialisation of Irish traditional dance music. It initiated a widespread and powerful movement with which the tradition is still grappling. Such forces generate positive tensions which continue to spur on creativity and growth. Each generation makes vital contributions to the life force of the tradition, and the piano - the ‘Ivory Bridge’ - maintains its role in this process.
1 An analysis of tune sets on the 78rpm recordings by Michael Coleman reveals this to be the case (see the discography for confirmation). The preservation of tunes in such sets (and settings) has been further cemented by the re-issuing of these old 78rpm recordings on various labels, such as *Vive Voce*. Musicians of a new generation are not only hearing older musicians play these sets (in both a live music context and on recordings) but they also have the opportunity to access the original recordings for themselves through more modern media. These younger musicians are rediscovering ‘firsthand’ the musical prowess of such figures as Coleman. In a somewhat indirect but nevertheless powerful way, the 78rpm records are still proving influential - enjoying a second wave of popularity. It remains to be seen whether the piano will benefit more from the trend this time around.

2 Even pianist Seán Ó Riada, in the traditional Irish music revivalist group *Ceoltoirí Chulainn*, employed the harpsichord as opposed to the piano. He felt that the harpsichord was far more conducive to the character of Irish music as it sounded like the harp.

3 This is not to say that the piano ceased to be played. In fact, even today, most if not all ceilidhe bands have a piano player. Nonetheless, Irish music is experienced more in a listening context for the vast majority of people of contemporary Ireland. Thus the piano is simply not as necessary any more.
PUBLISHED BOOKS AND ARTICLES


Spottswood, Richard K. Ethnic Music on Record: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893-1942. Vol 5, Mid-East, Far


UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

Lectures
Bradshaw, Harry. “When Irish Eyes Are Smilin’.” Address to the Blas Summer School. Limerick, 1997. (1.5 hr truncated version of original address to the Milwaukee Irish Fest, 1996)

Articles


Interviews


Others

### DISCOGRAPHY

**ORIGINAL 78RPM RECORDINGS (Selected Listing)**

Irish Traditional Music Archive, Dublin

### Aeolian Vocalion m-1077

May 1919

**John Muller** with Tom Ennis (uilleann pipes) & James Morrison (fiddle)

(a) Reels - The Irish Reel Medley  [mx AM 9086]
(b) Jigs - The Irish Jig Medley  [mx AM 9088]

### Columbia A 2951

c.1910

**Joe Linder** with John J. Kimmel (accordion)

(a) Medley of Hornpipes - Bryant's Favourite, Birds in the Tree [mx 79068]
(b) Medley of Jigs - Rakes of Kildare, Devlin's Favourite [mx 79069]

### Columbia 33246-F

Dec 1927

**Ed Gagan** with Michael Coleman (fiddle)

(a) Reels - Green Fields of America, The Swallow's Tail  [mx W 108603-2]
(b) Hornpipes - The Liverpool, O'Neill's Favourite  [mx W 108604-2]

### Columbia 33247-F

Dec 1927

**Ed Gagan** with Tom Morrison (flute) & John Reynolds (Tambourine)

(a) Reel - The Roscommon Reel  [mx 108927-2]
(b) Hornpipe - The London Clog  [mx 108928-1]

### Copley 9-100

c.1948

**Johnny Connors** with Jerry O'Brien (accordion)

(a) Hornpipe - McCarthy's Hornpipe  [mx 9-100-A]
(b) Reel - The Cuckoo's Nest  [mx 9-100-B]

### Copley 9-114

c.1945

**Tom McSharry** with Paddy Cronin (fiddle)

(a) Irish Reels - The Mountain Top, The Galtie Mt. Reels  [mx ACE 9114-A]
(b) Irish Hornpipes - Byron's Hornpipe, Delahunty's Hornpipe  [mx ACE 9114-B]

### Copley 9-115

c.1945

**Tom McSharry** with Paddy Cronin (fiddle)

(a) Irish Reels - German's, The Pretty Girls of the Village  [mx ACE 9115-A]
(b) Irish Hornpipes - O'Keefe's, The Rights of Man  [mx ACE 9115-B]
Decca F 5357
Oct 1934
Eileen O'Shea with Paddy Killoran (fiddle)
(a) Reels - Tansey's Favourite, Heathery Breezes [mx 38901]
(b) Jigs - The Scotsman over the Border, Tenpenny Bit [mx 38902]

Decca F 5358
Oct 1934
Eileen O'Shea with Paddy Sweeney (fiddle) & Billy McElliggott (accordion)
(a) Reels - George White's Favourite, The Lass of Carracastle [mx 38903 A]
(b) Jig - Fitzpatrick's Favourite [mx 83903 A]

Decca F 5428
Nov 1934
Della McMahon with John McKenna (flute) & Michael Gaffney (banjo)
(a) Reels - Colonel Roger's Favourite, Happy Days of Youth [mx 38945]
(b) Barn Dance Medley - The Ballroom Favourite [mx 39856]

Decca F 5430
Nov 1934
Della McMahon with Michael Gaffney (banjo) & John McKenna (flute)
(a) Jigs - The Night Cap, My Stories of Knock [mx 38957]
(b) Reels - Lucky in Love, The Bloom of Youth [mx 38958]

Decca F 5666
June 1935
Eileen O'Shea with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Hornpipe - Murphy's Hornpipe [mx 39635 A]
(b) Long Reel - Job of the Journeywork [mx 39639 A]

Decca F 5667
June 1935
Eileen O'Shea with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Barn Dances - The Banks Medley [mx 39634]
(b) Reels - Crowley's Reels [mx 39637]

Decca F 6218
Oct 1936
Kathleen Brennan with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Jigs - Tell Her I Am, Richard Brennan's Favourite [mx 61304 A]
(b) Reels - O'Rourke's Reel, Wild Irish-Man [mx 61310 A]

Decca W 4040
June 1935
Eileen O'Shea with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Jig - Cherish Ladies [mx 39636 A]
(b) Reel - Lucy Campbell [mx 39638 A]
**Decca W 4054**
Oct 1936
Kathleen Brennan with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Reels - Wind the Shakes the Barley, The Lady on the Island [mx 61305 A]
(b) Reels - The Liffey Banks, The Shaskeen [mx 61307 A]

**Decca W 4118**
Oct 1936
Kathleen Brennan with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Reels - Miss McLeod's Reel, Philip O'Beirne's Delight [mx 61303]
(b) Jig - The Kid on the Mountain [Mx 61306]

**Decca W 4144**
Oct 1936
Kathleen Brennan with Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Jigs - Paddy Clancy's, Trip to the Cottage [mx 61308 A]
(b) Hornpipes - High Level, McCormack's [mx 61309 A]

**Decca W 4182**
c.1937
Jim McGinn with Paddy Killoran (fiddle)
(a) Reels - The Maid of Mount Kisco [Sisco], The Hunter's Purse [mx 62130A]
(b) Polkas - Memories of Ballymote, Curkin Cross [mx 62202A]

**Decca W 4188**
June 1937
Frank Fallon with Eddie Meehan (flute) & John McKenna (flute)
(a) Polkas - Tripping to the Well, The Kiss behind the Door [mx 62176]
(b) Jigs - Cook in the Kitchen, Mist on the Meadows [mx 62179]

**Decca W 4313**
July 1938
Jim McGinn with Paddy Killoran (fiddle)
(a) Reels Medley - The Boys of Ball Isodarte, Att Henry’s Favourite [The Boys of Ballysodare, Batt Henry's Favourite] [mx 64309A]
(b) Jigs Medley - The Humours of Ballinfad [Ballinafad], MacFadden's Favourite [mx 64310A]

**Decca W 4690**
c.1937
Jim McGinn with Paddy Killoran (fiddle)
(a) Hornpipes - Maguire's Fiddle, O'Donnell's Hornpipe [mx 62791]
(b) Reels - The Enchanted Lady, The Holy Land [mx 65265]

**Gennet 5003**
Nov 1922
Paddy Muldoon with Tom Ennis (uilleann pipes) and John Garridy [Gerrity] (fiddle)
(a) Polkas - untitled [mx 8104-A]
(b) Reels - untitled [Miss Thornton's, Merry Blacksmith, Bush in Bloom] [mx 8105]
Gennet 5355
Dec 1923
Arthur P. Kenna with Frank Quinn (accordion & lilting vocals)
(a) Jig - The Cat in the Corner [mx 8689-A]
(b) Reel - The New Found Reel [mx 8690-A]

Imperial 2555
May 1931
Edmund Tucker with Paddy Killoran (fiddle) & Paddy Sweeney (fiddle)
(a) Hornpipes - [McDermot's Hornpipe], Memories of Sligo [mx 1951]
(b) Reels - Mullingar Races, [Boys on the Hill Top] [mx 1952]

Imperial 2928
May 1932
Edmund Tucker with Paddy Killoran (fiddle) & Paddy Sweeney (fiddle)
(a) Reels - A Surely, The Steeplechase [mx 1736-1-A]
(b) Barn Dances - Bat Henry's Favourite, Chaffpool Post [mx 1737-3-B]

New Republic 2333
C.1923
Arthur P. Kenna with Michael Coleman (fiddle) & Michael Walsh (flute)
(a) Reels - Sunny Banks [mx 749-A-2]
(b) Jigs - The Lark on the Strand [mx 749-B-2]

New Republic 2334
C.1923
Ed Geoghegan with Tom Morrison (flute)
(a) The Rising Sun, Limerick Lasses [mx746-A-1]
(b) My Old Clay Pipe, The Cow with the One Horn [mx 747-B-1]

O'Byrne-DeWitt 1005
April 1924
Ed Geoghegan with Frank Quinn (vocals, accordion, & clarinet)
(a) Song - My Old Jaunting Car [mx 20091]
(b) Reel - The Grand Old Dame [mx 20091]

Parlophone E 3023
June 1921
John Muller with Tom Ennis (uilleann pipes)
(a) Hornpipe - Kildare Fancy [mx 4383A]
(b) Jig - Freeze Breeches [mx 4383B]

Regal Zonophone IZ 118
Mar 1936
Ed Geoghegan with W. J. Mullaly (concertina)
(a) Jigs - Jackson's Thought [mx 106415]
(b) Reels - Lady Carbury, The Races of Athlone [mx 106416]
Victor 18207
C.1909
Joe Linder with John J. Kimmel (accordion)
(a) Medley of Irish Reels No 5 - The Floggan [Floggin'], Cup of Tea [mx 18207]
(b) Medley of Irish Jigs No 2 - An Irish Mixture [mx ...]

Victor 18639
Oct 1919
Arthur P. Kenna with Pat J. Clancy (fiddle)
(a) Jigs - Dublin Jig Medley - Tattered Jack Welsh, Dublin Jig, The Rover
[mx B 23237]

Vocalion 14541
June 1923
John Muller with Frank Quinn (accordion) & Michael Coleman (fiddle)
(a) Jig - The Basket of Shamrocks [mx 10313]
(b) Reels - O'Dowd's Favourite Reel Medley [mx 7621]

Vocalion 84157
Mar 1929
Ed Gagan with Peter Conlon (accordion)
(a) Reel - The Fiddler's Delight [mx W 110435-3]
(b) Jig - Contentment is Wealth [mx W 110436-1]

REMASTERED and/or RE-ISSUED MATERIALS

(CS = cassette, CD = Compact Disk, LP = Long Playing Record)

Viva Voce Label

James Morrison: The Professor. Viva Voce 001. 1989 (2 CSs).


John McKenna: His Original Recordings. Viva Voce [no number] and co-published with the John McKenna Traditional Society Drumkeerin, Co Leitrim. 1989 (1 CS).

Michael Coleman 1891-1945: Ireland's Most Influential Traditional Musician of the 20th Century. Viva Voce 004. 1991 (2 CSs); or Viva Voce/Gael Linn CEFCE 161, 1992 (2 CDs + booklet).
William Mullaly: The First Irish Concertina Player to Record. Viva Voce 005. 1994 (1 CD).


The Flannagan Brothers: The Tunes We Like to Play on Paddy’s Day. Viva Voce 007. 1996 (1 CD).

**Miscellaneous**


Milestone at the Gate: Irish Fiddle Masters from the 78 rpm Era, Rounder CD 1123. c.1995 (1 CD).