Institutional and Social Teaching, Learning and
Performing of Irish Traditional Music
in Ennis, County Clare 1961-1980

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Supervisor: Dr. Aileen Dillane
This work is dedicated to my parents Eddie and Dympna Cotter, my husband John, and three children Meadhbh, Cillian and Oisín.

Le grá mór.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION....................................................................................vi

ABSTRACT .........................................................................................vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.........................................................................viii

LIST OF FIGURES................................................................................x

LIST OF APPENDICES.........................................................................xiv

Chapters

1. Introduction.....................................................................................1

2. Identifying the Matrix: Ennis in the 1950s.................................37

3. The Institutionalisation of the Transmission of Irish
   Traditional Music in Ennis ..........................................................86

4. Practice as Learning.................................................................143

5. Knowing and Practice.............................................................210

6. Practice as Meaning...............................................................247

Bibliography..................................................................................318

Appendices A to H.................................................................340
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by me, that it is my own work and that it has not been submitted by me for any other degree or professional qualification.

_________________________________                                  ________________

Geraldine Cotter                                                                                Date
ABSTRACT

Ennis, County Clare in the west of Ireland, is now considered to be one of the principal strongholds of traditional Irish music practice in the world. During the 1970s, traditional music practice became a ‘living tradition’, becoming increasingly relevant to Ennis musicians and to the life of the town in general. However, prior to 1961, music practice in the town appears to have been limited to a few musicians, many of whom had roots in rural areas. A history of unbroken effective teaching since then has contributed to this transformation.

In this thesis, I address the emergence of the formalization of the transmission of traditional music through educational means i.e. the setting up of the first institutionally led class in 17/4/1961. I examine the conditions which led to it, looking at the ideological foundations which underpinned the introduction of this formal structure. I focus principally on the institutional bodies through which it occurred; namely the Clare Vocational Education Committee and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. This class was particularly significant in that it was the first such class for the teaching of traditional Irish dance music to be recognized by the Department of Education. Since then there has been a steady increase in the number and diversity of class contexts, to meet the demands of growing student numbers and changes in society. I trace the connections between it and subsequent classes in Ennis and its hinterland.

Formal classes in the 1970s were primarily concerned with teaching the fundamentals of music theory and practice. I examine the pedagogic strategies employed by the teachers. In addition, as students progressed and became more accomplished in their instruments and their interest increased, it was inevitable that opportunities to perform would follow. I examine the music teachers roles, as bridge builders between the community and the classroom; and in facilitating learning by experiencing and taking part in a living tradition within the community, looking at the ways the formal classroom based learning of a tradition became a gateway for less formal experiential learning within the community. Therefore, focussing on both the formal and informal transmission of knowledge, I examine how, why and what type of musical knowledge was formally taught, and what knowledge was taken for granted.

While opportunities to participate in established community practices could be anticipated, changing economic and social conditions, the emergence of cultural tourism, together with the growing numbers of musicians in Ennis, became a stimulus for the development of new performance contexts and practices, which in turn contributed to the reshaping of the identity of Ennis, from being a place largely devoid of traditional music to becoming a place internationally known and recognised as a major hub of the tradition.
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LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Map of Ireland, p.2
Figure 1.2: Map of County Clare, p.2.
Figure 2.1: Dr. Solon T. Kimball, p.49.
Figure 2.2: The Fergus Céili Band, p.61.
Figure 2.3: Ernest DeRegge, p.63.
Figure 2.4: Cathedral Choir 1955-56, p.63.
Figure 2.5: Seán Reid, p.69.
Figure 2.6: Notice for An Tóstal, p.74.
Figure 2.7: Official opening of An Tóstal, p.75.
Figure 2.8: Member so of the 1956 All Ireland Fleadh Committee, p.78.
Figure 2.9: Dr Rodgers Bishop of Killaloe opening the Fleadh at Cusack Park, Ennis, p.79.
Figure 2.10: Fleadh Programme, p.79.
Figure 2.11: The combined Tulla and Kilfenora Céili Bands, p.80.
Figure 2.12: An advertisement by Ernest De Regge, p.83.
Figure 3.1: Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann headed note paper 1959, p.100.
Figure 3.2: Some members of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in County Clare around 1956, p.104.
Figure 3.3: Members of the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann circa 1961, p.105.
Figure 3.4: Advertisement for music classes in Clare Champion, p.113.
Figure 3.5 Commemorative plaque to Jack Mulkere, p.119.
Figure 3.6: Pupils from Toonagh National School, p.123.
Figure 3.7: Members of the Coláiste Muire–St. Flannan’s Céili Band, p.129.
Figure 3.8: Enrolment forms for Tom Barrett’s classes 1972, p.138
Figure 4.1: Map of Ennis, p.153.

Figure 4.2: Cover of Batt Scanlon's Tutor, The Violin Made Easy and Attractive, p.166

Figure 4.3: One of the opening pages of Batt Scanlon's tutor, p.166.

Figure 4.4: Preface of Batt Scanlon’s tutor, p.167.

Figure 4.5: Page 1 of Patrick O’Loughlin’s Music Manuscript, p.169.

Figure 4.6: Page 2 of Patrick O’Loughlin’s Music Manuscript, p.169.

Figure 4.7: Jack Mulkere, p.170.

Figure 4.8: Section of Page 1 of Patrick O’Loughlin’s Music Manuscript, p.171.

Figure 4.9: P.3 of Music Manuscript, p.172.

Figure 4.10: One of three version of The Foggy Dew (Scanlon 1923, p. 29), p.172.

Figure 4.11: Patrick O’Loughlins Music Manuscript p.3. Mulkere version of The Foggy Dew, p.173.

Figure 4.12: Scanlon version of An Chuilfhionn, p.174.

Figure 4.13: Jack Mulkere’s version of the Coulin. O’Loughlin Manuscript, p.174.

Figure 4.14: A photo of Brendan McMahon with some of the pupils of his class in Ennis, p.186.

Figure 4.15: This photo is of the first St Flannan’s Céilí Band, which won the All-Ireland Fleadh in 1971, p.188.

Figure 5.1: Sample of Frank Custy’s letter notation: the reels Pigeon on the Gate and the Foxhunt, p.217.

Figure 5.2: Ennis musicians in the early1970s, p.225.

Figure 5.3: LP Sleeve from Music and Song from the Medieval Banquet, Bunratty Castle, Ireland (HMV CLPC32), p. 230.

Figure 5.4: LP Sleeve from A Night at Durty Nellie’s Live DN1, p.231.

Figure 5.5: An advertisement for Seisiún, p.232.

Figure 5.6: Set List for Seisiún 1973, p.235.
Figure 5.7: Ennis Seisiún Group performing in the Teach an Cheoil in Carrigaholt, p.236.

Figure 5.8: Advertisement for Scoraíocht Producers Course, p.239.

Figure 5.9 (a) and (b): Rules and Regulations for Scoraíocht, pp.240-241.

Figure 5.10: Ennis Scoraíocht Group 1970s, p.243.

Figure 6.1: The official opening on St. Patrick’s Day 17th March 1983, p.258.

Figure 6.2: Commemorative plaque honouring Seán Reid, at Cois na hAbhna, Ennis, p.264.

Figure 6.3: St. Michael’s Villas Céili Band, p.268.

Figure 6.4: Advertisement for concert in Toonagh, p.273.

Figure 6.5: Advertisement for concert in Kilmaley, p.275.

Figure 6.6: Music session at twenty first birthday celebration, p.276.

Figure 6.7: Poster for traditional group Alltraighe, p.281.

Figure 6.8: Poster advertising traditional group Alltraighe in Donnerstag, in Germany, p.282.

Figure 6.9: Members of Stockton’s Wing with the Ceol ’78 trophy they won in Limerick, p.284.

Figure 6.10: Stockton’s Wing on stage in Dublin with Sammy Davis Junior, p.286.

Figure 6.11: A thronged O’Connell Street during one of the fleadhhs in 1977, p.287.

Figure 6.12: Fleadh Nua Programme, p.289.

Figure 6.13: A float from the Fleadh Nua parade, depicting people attending Mass, possibly at a Mass Rock, p.290.

Figure 6.14: A float from the Fleadh Nua parade, depicting threshing; a farming activity, p.291.

Figure 6.15: Members of the Liverpool Céili Band performing on a float during the Fleadh Nua parade, p.291.

Figure 6.16: An advertisement for fleadh package holidays, p.295.

Figure 6.17: A music session at the O’Connell Monument in the Square in Ennis, p.299.
Figure 6.18: Coláiste Chríost Rí, Cloughleigh performing at the Square during Fleadh Nua 2013, p.315.
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Secretary’s Annual Report 13/10/1957……………………………..340

Appendix B: Register of attendance at the inaugural meeting of Comhaltas in Ennis,1/4/1954……………………………………………………………..342

Appendix C: Agenda for Comhaltas Clare County Board Meeting 12/7/1958…….343

Appendix D: Press Release issued by Comhaltas Clare County Board……………344

Appendix E: Notice of Comhaltas Meeting concerning music classes 17/5/1969 ……………………………………………………………………………345

Appendix F: Register of pupils for Ennis music classes………………………….346

Appendix G: Claim form……………………………………………………………348

Appendix H: Musicians and others interviewed and referred to…………………..349
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

‘To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the place one is in’

(Casey 1996, p. 18)
Fig. 1.1 Map of Ireland highlighting County Clare (Courtesy of Cillian Boyd).

Fig. 1.2 Map of County Clare (Courtesy of Cillian Boyd).
LOCATING ENNIS: HISTORICAL, GEOGRAPHIC AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Ennis, County Clare in the west of Ireland, is considered to be the ‘mecca’ for Irish traditional music performance and reception (Vallely 2011, p.132). It is possible to hear Irish traditional dance music performed every night of the week at informal pub sessions and at other venues in the town.¹ It is the home of two annual Irish traditional music festivals- the Fleadh Nua held in May, and the Ennis Trad Festival held in November. It is also home of the local radio station Clare FM which devotes two hours to Irish traditional music five nights a week, Custy's Music Shop which is devoted entirely to the sale of products related to Irish traditional music, and Maoin Cheoil an Chláir, a music school where Irish traditional music is taught alongside Western Art music.² The town is also the capital of County Clare, a county that has for some time occupied a central place in the discourse of ‘authentic’ and natural locations for high level music practice (Vallely 2011, pp 132-133). Traditional Irish music is such an integral part of the fabric of the town’s culture today, that for many people it is difficult to imagine a time when it was not popular (t)here. Perhaps it is not surprising therefore, that for the past ten or fifteen years, based on this reputation, a considerable number of traditional musicians from all corners of the world have been attracted to living in Ennis. However, this level of participation and practice did not always exist and even more significantly (and surprisingly, to those who believe that Irish traditional has always been central to the town), up to the

¹ A session is an informal gathering of musicians with the intention to play traditional music together. Payment is sometimes received, but not always. For further reading see Vallely (2011, p. 610).
² A second music shop, the Knotted Chord was run by my brother Ciarán until his death in 2005. This also dealt exclusively with products related to Irish traditional music.
1960s it did not share the same social significance in Ennis as it did in the rural areas of the county.\(^3\) In fact, very little traditional music was even performed in Ennis in the 1950s. Furthermore, there is considerable evidence, that at that time there were few traditional musicians who were natives of the town itself; the majority of the identified traditional musicians living in the town had family connections in rural areas, and they were first generation ‘townies’.\(^4\)

The central concern of my research here is in understanding the dynamics of how the town changed, in the space of a couple of decades, into what is now a recognised international site for Irish traditional music. This change came largely as a consequence of an institutional moment, where a cultural/musical organisation, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, joined forces with the County Clare Vocational Educational Committee, a state-funded educational structure, in order to create the first formal classes in teaching traditional music, which then had a domino effect in creating a community of practitioners and audiences. The thesis therefore is about identifying the particular conditions which led to this institutional moment. In particular, it is about the dynamics which incubated a particular culture of traditional preservation and transmission in Ennis town in such a short timescale, essentially just a few decades. In telling this story, one of the contributions this research makes is in critiquing the discourse of the naturalness of traditional music in places such as Ennis, by exploring and looking at historical and other evidence such as extensive interviews and documentary data. Significantly, a different, more complete picture emerges that tells us much about authenticity in relation to the perceived naturalness.

\(^3\) This fact is repeatedly pointed out by a significant number of interviewees and will be referred to throughout the thesis.

\(^4\) The term ‘townie’ and the degrees of ‘towniness’ are discussed later in this chapter, but basically it refers to the working class people whose family roots were of the town. As will be seen the term transferred to the first generation children born to rural migrants to the town.
of places, and also the tacit acceptance that traditional music has been transmitted orally/aurally (which, as I illustrate here, was clearly not the case). But perhaps what this thesis is really about is the power of people acting as a community to effect change, given a particular set of conditions which I explore at length. At the core of my analysis in an explication of the work of key people as they engaged in creative ways inside and outside institutions and organisations, in order to help to forge the Ennis of today, by creating a learning environment for the transmission of traditional music.

**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

The purpose of this thesis is to trace the institutional and social teaching, learning and performing of Irish traditional music in Ennis, from 1961-1980. Firstly, I address the formalisation of the transmission of traditional music through educational means, from the setting up of the first institutionally led class in April 1961, through the collaboration of the Clare Vocational Education Committee (a State-sponsored educational model) and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (a grass-roots, Irish music, cultural and language organisation). These institutions, henceforth the VEC and Comhaltas, were critical in creating a structured model for transmitting Irish traditional music in schools.

As well as focussing on the structures that enabled classes to happen, I also focus on the workings of individual classes. In addition to examining the diverse pedagogic strategies employed by the teachers, I also consider the ways that the

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5 Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is an organization which promotes Irish traditional music, song and dance and was founded in 1951 and the VEC schools were created in 1930 to provide technical and continuation education to teenagers. I discuss both at greater length in chapter three.
formal classroom based learning of a tradition became a gateway for learning through social practice within the community. Crucially, the combination of changing economic and social conditions, the emergence of cultural tourism, and the growing numbers of musicians in Ennis, became a stimulus for the development of new performance contexts and practices, which ultimately progressed the transformation of Ennis, in terms of its engagement with traditional music. In particular, I explore the role of individual actors and communities as they interacted within and outside of their communities and institutions. I also consider the extent that the dynamics of cultural nationalism, community formation, regional pride, and individual passions, played in motivating people within their communities. I maintain that while the perception might be there that Ennis has always been a bastion of traditional music practice, such a simplistic understanding belies the complex dynamics at play here. It also an example par excellence of, how history is reinterpreted or reimagined, through the lens of authenticity. In other words, while tacitly accepted as a truism, on careful examination it is clear that there has been no long continuous and uninterrupted line of practice of Irish traditional music in the town of Ennis, as has been imagined and understood in everyday discourse and indeed in the marketing of the town itself. In reality, the limited traditional music practice that was present in the 1950s was maintained largely due to the fact that Ennis was a market town, and host to visiting musicians. Traditional musicians from the hinterland of Ennis and beyond regularly visited and frequented certain public houses (chapter two).

In reality, the transformation of Ennis to a rich site of traditional practice occurred as a result of progressive-minded key individuals, organisations and institutions, who acted together not only to sustain but also to permanently incubate
and then spread the practice that barely existed in the 1950s. As a consequence, during the 1970s a reciprocal relationship developed between the Ennis musicians and those in the rest of the county and beyond, which led to an increase in traditional music practice among young people – the key to incubating longevity in a cultural practice. This story – the experiences of these musicians and the teachers who taught them - is the centre piece of this work.

I have a vested interest in telling this story, and I have a particular, even unique, perspective on it. Ennis is the place of my birth and where I have lived for most of my life. The transformation in Ennis happened during a significant and formative stage of my adult lifetime. My recollection of the 1970s is that although very few of my school friends played traditional music, I had a network of friends who did play, therefore personally it was not particularly out of the ordinary to be playing Irish traditional music. However, now in hindsight, I realise that I did have a privileged position, and the recognition of this ultimately brought me to this study. My experience of being in the centre of a growing and embedding tradition was in stark contrast with people of earlier decades. I have always known that traditional music simply was not in the town in any significant way prior to my youth, and that it had changed dramatically during my teenage years; that the generation of musicians I grew up with were a transition generation, at the cusp of a change.

It was my view and that of my contemporary ‘townies’ that it was a providential time to be growing up in the town as a traditional musician. This generation became the first large group of young people to play Irish traditional music in Ennis. Up to then the age profile of musicians had been getting older (made up of migrant rural dwellers) and numbers of practicing musician amongst the younger age bracket had been diminishing. As a result, there was a great sense of
excitement and optimism among older traditional music enthusiasts, when young people demonstrated an interest in playing the music they loved, a practice they had thought was dying out. I recall how my friends and I were encouraged and promoted to perform, to learn, to enjoy. It is hard not to feel that this was a golden era. Young musicians were given platforms on which to perform – concerts, TV performances, opportunities to travel etc. For older musicians, these young musicians represented hope for the future of Irish traditional music and, most surprisingly, this new generation were ‘townies’. Of course, the concept of a golden era is also a seductive concept, and in my research the last thing I wanted to do was replace one kind of overtly positive perspective with another. I discuss my approach in order to circumvent this ‘trap’ later in this section, where I outline strategies for locating the self critically in the research project.

That said, without doubt the experience of growing up and learning traditional music in Ennis during this time has significantly influenced my own musical journey. Understanding that from my perspective now is an essential part of what I am aiming to do here. In my research I was interested in finding out the processes that were involved in creating the matrix that allowed people to play in their tradition; in discovering who had an opportunity to play and why, and to what degree these things were formalised, embedded in the home or in people’s personal pathways. As I began to ponder these issues and speak to many people around me, I realised the incredible interplay of structure and agency of a town that had the capacity to accommodate these new developments, because if it’s historical, geographical and cultural configuration. Although I contextualise Ennis of the 1950s

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6 I recognise that there are musicians who did not have the same, positive experience, and I acknowledge this in chapter five.
in chapter two, the real starting point of this thesis is 1961, the year that the first class for Irish traditional music, a collaboration of Comhaltas and the VEC, was held in the Ennis Technical School\(^7\). My research finishes in 1980 because the decades which followed, saw a new phase in the process of transmission in Ennis, as realised in the opening of the local radio station Clare FM, the school of music Maoin Cheoil an Chláir, the art centre Glór, an increasing non-national population who arrived with their own music and dance traditions, and many new technologies and Ennis became the Irish music ‘session capital of Ireland’ (Keegan 2008, p.641).\(^8\) It also marked a new stage in the development of Comhaltas in Ennis, as a result of the building of Cois na hAbhna (literally beside the river), a headquarters for Comhaltas in County Clare.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the key thematic areas, my theoretical and methodological concerns. It concludes with a summary of chapters two to six.

**ENNIS(NESS)**

Ennis is at the centre of this thesis. However, it is a model of Ennis that is not simply town boundaries delineated in a fixed geographical space. Ennis is a hub. It is the relationship of the town to its hinterland; it is about the movement of people in and out of Ennis. At times it is the geographical town, other times it is the hinterland because of, for example, music sessions in Toonagh, a small area about six miles

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\(^7\) This was subsequently named the Ennis Vocational school and is now called Ennis Community College. Locally, the pupils attending the classes here called it the Tech.

\(^8\) Clare FM, the local radio station began broadcasting for the first time in 1989. Prior to that there were a number of pirate stations in operation including West Coast Radio in 1984 (Byrnes 2010, p. 250). Maoin Cheoil an Chláir (music treasure of Clare) was opened by the then President Mary Robinson in 1994. It was the first music school in Ireland to include both classical and traditional music on an equal basis in its constitution. Glór (voice), Irish Music Centre was officially opened on 2001 by the then Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Síle de Valera TD.
outside the town, and key centre for the transmission of traditional music from the
1970s onwards was directly connected in practice to Ennis. The meaning of Ennis is
continually in flux; in and out of the town, in different parts of the town as it
accommodates the movement of people as they interacted within inside and outside
of institutions and community organisations. This approach has been influenced by
such writers as Aileen Dillane (2009) who, drawing on William Cronon (Natures
Metropolis 1991), considered that Chicago was not ‘a bounded city entity, but rather
a nodal point in a region, something generated, created and maintained (and
changed) by its relationship to its hinterland’ (Dillane, 2009, p.17). But of course
Ennis is a lived experience too – temporally located as much as it is geographically,
and its residents and visitors understand it as a particular place to experience, ‘in
time’.

Ennis from 1961-1980 was also a town near the western seaboard that
experienced a period of massive economic cultural and industrial change. Therefore,
even though the story of music in Ennis in this period is a local story, in the sense
that it relates to local specific historical, political and social conditions, it is not
parochial, but rather addresses larger issues of music and community found
throughout Ireland, and also more broadly found in ethnomusicological literature.
This work is ‘an ethnography about radical social change, shifting traditions and
meanings, and cosmopolitan reorientations caused by constant intercultural
interaction’, as Adam Kaul has argued in relation to a village twenty-four miles north
of Ennis (2009, p.6). Kaul also contends that even though a global/local dialectic is
frequently referenced in anthropology and related disciplines, it is not generally
articulated with fine-grained ethnography (2009, p.7). My work here is, in part, a
response to this call. Kaul refers to the work of Vered Amit (2002) and Anna Tsing
(2008), who critiqued the ‘current obsession with all things global for the way that it disconnects globalising processes from real lives’ (Kaul 2009, p.7). Globalisation occurs locally somewhere, and effects local lives. For this reason, Kaul maintains that we must embed our studies in ethnographic specificity, in a particular ‘global situation’ (2009, p 7), which is what I endeavour to do here. Therefore, one goal of my research here is to very specifically contribute to this discourse by focusing in a nuanced way on Ennis as a ‘global situation’, as much as an account of local history.

The question of people’s identity, their perceptions and affiliation with places, and indeed constructs such as Ennis and County Clare, are also central to this thesis. County Clare’s status in terms of traditional music practice has long been celebrated, as considered by Niall Keegan:

‘It would not be an exaggeration to state that county Clare has more musicians and performance events than any other county in Ireland and that the music plays a larger role in the economic, social and aesthetic life of the county than any music anywhere else on the island’ (Keegan 2008, p.642).

Irish traditional music was certainly vibrant in rural areas. Nonetheless, the fact that it was highlighted to a wider audience through the national airwaves, by RTÉ broadcaster Ciarán MacMathúna as well as by Seán Ó Riada in his 1962 radio series *Our Musical Heritage*, added to the county’s reputation. Crucially, traditional music practice has been long-standing, but until the 1970s it related to rural parts of the county and not to Ennis.⁹ Although Ennis did not have a lineage in terms of Irish traditional music as the rest of the county, from the mid ‘50s onwards, because of movement of rural musicians in and out of the town, it built upon the reputational and cultural capital of the county as a whole.

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⁹ Urban centres such as Kilrush, a small town in the west of the county and many villages such as Kilfenora, Tulla, Kilmihil, Feakle and others were vibrant centres for traditional music practice. (See Fig. 1.2)
It is a complex dynamic, and one I felt personally. Growing up in the town, I consciously drew on my rural roots because I wanted to be considered authentic. Consequently my sense of having an Ennis identity did not emerge until my adult life. During the 1970s, many traditional musicians in Ennis, as will be outlined in chapter four, identified themselves by their rural roots rather than those of Ennis, where they lived. However, in the course of time their Ennisness, their urban identity, become equally important, and one which was understood to be as valid as a rural one. This lived reality illustrates the complex nature of belonging, and being perceived to be legitimately within a tradition – something so central to the belief system in Irish traditional music which still persists today. Irish traditional music style has been defined in relation to place and has been the subject of much discourse; for example Ó hAllmhuráin (1990) discusses concertina playing in County Clare, while Kearney (2009) focused on the Sliabh Luachra an area covering parts of Counties Limerick, Kerry and Cork, and Collins (2013) looks at the Sliabh Aughty region of East County Galway.

The traditional musicians and other agents who are represented in this study, and who lived in Ennis up to the 1960s had migrated there from rural parts of the county. A number of them came from other counties because of employment. Their children became the first generation ‘townies’. The term ‘townie’ in my experience

10 Among the musicians who are central to this thesis is musician, Seáan Reid, who had an enormous impact both in Ennis and throughout County Clare, moved to Ennis when he was appointed an engineer with Clare County Council. Other examples include fiddle player Tom Barrett, originally from Listowel in Co. Kerry, lived for many years in Clonmel, County Tipperary and was posted to Ennis by the army. He taught traditional music in for many years. Concertina, whistle and fiddle player Sonny Murray, originally from Kilmihil, emigrated to London, moved to Ennis and worked for the Mid Western Health Board as a carpenter. Fiddle player and music teacher, Gus Tierney, originally from Kilfenora, emigrated to England, moved to Ennis and worked with Clare County Council. Flute player and manufacturer Brendan McMahon originally from Miltown Malbay, emigrated to England and returned to Ireland when he obtained work in Shannon Industrial Estate. He was one of the first teachers of traditional music in Ennis. These and a number of others are referenced throughout this thesis.
was used to describe the working class people who were deeply rooted in the town, and who lived in particular housing developments. In more recent years the term appears to be used by a larger constituency. Certainly in my recollection, the term was used in an almost derogatory fashion by those from outside the town, just as people from rural areas were called ‘culchies’ or ‘boggers’ by ‘townies’. In Ennis the term ‘townie’ marked the divide between the long-term Ennis populace and those who migrated to the town. This separation was maintained through demographic trends; ‘townies’ and the newer settlers lived in different housing developments. The community who lived in housing estate in Hermitage, built in the 1930s to replace the rundown houses in the lanes, following their demolition, was deeply rooted in the town. On the other hand, St. Michael’s Villas, built in the 1940s was occupied primarily by people who migrated to Ennis from its hinterland (figure 4.1). The way that the new residents adapted to town life, and how that connected to traditional music practice is discussed in chapter four and five. Essentially, the label ‘townie’ implied an inherent emic positioning i.e. the length you lived in the town. It did not relate to professional standing, since, for the most part, both communities were working class. In my personal experience people from different areas of the town did not mix socially, and I certainly had very little social interaction with people from other parts of the town, except at school. This was due largely to a tacit acceptance that I would not leave my own neighbourhood without permission from my parents. I lived in an area of the town primarily occupied by people originally from outside the town. In addition, I was as a rule discouraged from engaging in any activities that my parents deemed ‘townie’. In more recent years however, the term

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11 The terms ‘culchie’ and ‘bogger’ were pejorative terms to describe rural people and were diametrically opposed to urbanites.
has been used as a badge of honour, and traditional music has been a key part in the transformation of its usage.

In this thesis I use the term provisionally to describe the new generation of Ennis born traditional musician; mindful that a true townie has a long lineage of living in Ennis. Given the notion that community affiliation is central to this research, and in order to separate my own recollections with a more object view of identity politics at the time, and how that related to music, I sought to establish a theoretical framework that would inform, and also help me interpret and frame my memories and those of my informants, my historical data and my ethnographic work. The particular community under focus is the Ennis branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, which operated as a Community of Practice. The concept of ‘communities of practice’, a social theory of learning, was first brought into focus by Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in their discussions of apprenticeship. Their phrase ‘community of practice’ relates to ‘the community that acts as a living curriculum for the apprentice.’

THEORISING COMMUNITY

Wenger (1998, pp. 6-7) introduces the concept of a Community of Practice as being central to our daily lives; that we belong to several which change through our lives e.g. at home, at school, at the workplace and in our hobbies. Each one develops its own practices, habits etc. He differentiates between this and the concept of community; one can be a traditional musician in Ennis (a member of the community

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of traditional musicians) without being a member of the community of practice that is the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Éireann. Although relatively small in number, the musicians living in Ennis were generally aware of each other, and while they did have occasional music sessions together, they did not however form part of one specific community of practice. The characteristic that separates the two concepts is that it is not simply a matter of having a shared interest but that the practice itself needs to be shared. In addition, a community of practice interact regularly and develop activities to further the practice. The Ennis Branch of the organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóiri Éireann operated as a community of practice, as they focussed initially on the preservation of the music practices, and over time developed new practices in order to attract new membership as well as promote the continued practice of the tradition. One means by which they did this was by engaging with the VEC, an established educational institution, (usage of the term institution and what it meant for Comhaltas is discussed in greater detail in chapter three).

Individual people, many of whom I interviewed, operated within and outside of this community of practice, and contributed to the transformation of the town. These included musicians, music teachers, and active members of the Comhaltas organisation, in particular Jack Mulkere (1900-1982), Seán Reid (1907-1978), Brendan McMahon (1927-2007), Tom Barrett (1923-2002) and Niall Behan (1933-2009). Many of these musicians and teachers had already passed away by the time I undertook this research, but I was privileged to have known them all, and was able to access interviews through secondary sources. In addition, I was able to gain personal perspectives from family members. Through the generosity of the Barrett family I gained access to their father Tom’s private papers, and Seán Reid’s son, also called
Seán, and Jack Mulkere’s sons Brendan and Enda, who each provided personal insights into what motivated their fathers. Significant data was provided by the national piping club organisation, Na Piobairí Uilleann, in Dublin who gave me access to Seán Reid’s private papers. These documents, Tom Barrett’s private papers, combined with the minutes of the VEC meetings from 1956-1990, allowed me to not only to fill gaps in the narrative, but also gain an insight into how individuals operated in particular ways within the framework of an institution, especially in adapting to the practices of the institution such as the VEC. I discuss in detail the collaborative approach if Comhaltas and the VEC and how these classes formed in chapter three.

FOR THE LOVE OF IT: CULTURES OF VOLUNTEERISM

It is impossible to discuss the contribution of these individuals without referring to the culture of volunteerism which existed. Throughout this thesis I describe the level of commitment and drive of teachers, musicians, and other key players inside and outside of Comhaltas, as they worked for the general good of the community of which they were part, a community that was shaped by nationalist and religious ideologies in some part, but that were also very local and individual in their expressions of those things. I refer to the level of commitment, and even personal sacrifices made by individuals such as Seán Reid and Jack Mulkere, who sacrificed time with their families, who worked hard and who volunteered for the ‘common good’. They had talents and skills and, possibly in conscience, were driven to help in any way they could, affected by this ethos even if unconsciously so.
In chapter two I discuss the dynamic between community, nationalism and the Catholic Church. In this regard, Gabriella Hanrahan has found in her research, that the culture of volunteerism was a cultural reality in Ireland, and that it was deeply connected to Catholicism. The Catholic Church teaches subsidiarity; not to depend on the state apparatus, but rather to promote the belief in developing the good in people locally. This means, in effect, that there was a divergence between the state and ‘voluntary Ireland’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013). In the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2005) published by the Catholic Church subsidiarity is ‘among the most constant and characteristics directives of the Church’s social doctrine’ (Catholic Church. Pontificium Consilium de Iustitia et Pace 2005, p.185), and that there is a corresponding need for ‘the encouragement of private initiative so that every social entity remains at the service of the common good, each with its own distinctive characteristics’ (Catholic Church. Pontificium Consilium de Iustitia et Pace 2005, p.187). The implication of this philosophy is that ‘Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good’ (Catholic Church. Pontificium Consilium de Iustitia et Pace 2005, p.189). Freda Donoghue (2001) maintains that volunteering involves ‘the expression of the civic self, that is the self who is public, associated with the community, or at local level…the impetus to enter into such relations may be idealism, the need to help’ (Donoghue 2001, p.11). In addition she refers to the Irish traditions of meitheal which were essential part of the social fabric of Irish society up to the 1960s. The spirit of meitheal is evident in the way the community joined

14 Gabriella Hanrahan is a Community Liaison Officer in the University of Limerick. Her research relates to disability policies and practices in the 19th to the 21st century. She is from the St. Michaels Villas area of Ennis, and took part in many of the practices referred to throughout this thesis.
15 A Meitheal (translation, ‘working party’) was when neighbours in rural Ireland would join together in cooperation to complete seasonal farm tasks.
together to erect the music centre Cois na hAbhna during the late 1970s (discussed in chapter six). Although, as will be demonstrated in chapter three, Comhaltas as a national organisation did not totally exemplify this philosophy of subsidiarity, because of its hierarchical construct, it certainly did operate in this way at local level. I would argue that this was and remains to be, the key to its success in Ennis.

MUSICAL PATHWAYS: TOWARDS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In chapters four and five, I focus on learning – on what was chosen to be transmitted, and how that was done, both formally and informally. Chapter four primarily relates to learning in the classroom, while chapter five focuses on learning through social participation within a community. I consider the role of the family, the *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), the social conditions and lifestyles that influenced music choices. At the core of the transmission process was the aspiration of Comhaltas to secure new membership, and to promote Irish traditional music to young people. In this respect I apply Wenger’s theory of *Community of Practice* (1998) to Comhaltas, as it refined its practice to this end. I also apply Wenger’s theory of learning as a practice of social participation. Rather than viewing it as something confined to a classroom, Wenger considers learning in the context of lived experience, and not simply as a result of teaching. Learning in this way produces meaning and constructs identity (Wenger 1998, p.4). Nonetheless, Wenger allows for moments when learning is intensified and it comes into focus. He notes: ‘learning is an emergent, ongoing process, which may use teaching as one of its many structuring resources. In this regard, teachers and instructional materials become resources for learning in much
more complex ways than through their pedagogical intentions’ (Wenger 1998, p.267). In order to participate in the Comhaltas structure as musicians, a level of performance skill was required. In Ennis, the basic skills were acquired in the formal classroom, and are explored in considerable detail in chapter four.

Although teaching and learning first took place in a formal institutional context, the Ennis Technical School (the Tech), the modus operandi of the teachers was relaxed and in many ways replicated many aspects of the informal modes of social learning (McCarthy 1999). As a result of acquiring this knowledge many young musicians followed a ‘pathway’ (Finnegan 1989) from the classroom to participation within a community context, where learning continued. In chapter five, which continues to draw upon Wenger’s social theory of learning, I examine the new social contexts for music learning and music making, by deploying Thomas Turino’s models of performance, the participational and presentational (2008, pp.90-91). The participational mode is a community orientated musical performance involving a level of audience participation, while the presentational style involves performance for a listening audience. The formal classes in Ennis provided the basic requirements to participate in these community activities, and in turn it was through these activities that the finer details of the tradition were learned or ‘passed on’ (Mc Carthy 1999). In chapter four, as part of my exploration and critique of the mechanisms of tradition transmission, I nuance the generally accepted view of the ‘aural’ nature of its transmission. In chapter five I describe how the skills obtained in the classroom became the basis for learning by participating socially in community events.
In my research I draw upon many published sources which relate to the study of Irish traditional music. Niall Keegan (2012, pp.162-165) outlines five forms of sources; anecdotal, educational, musicological, journalistic, and that related to cultural studies. *Treoir* the magazine published by Comhaltas since 1968 was used by the organisation to circulate news concerning local and national musical events but also musical knowledge (Ní Fhuartháin 2011, p.247). *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (Vallely, 2011), is a comprehensive work presented as an encyclopaedia covering biography of people, history, instruments, regions.

However, this work is not simply about Irish traditional music. It is about the transmission of Irish traditional music within a community context.\(^{16}\) Prior to the formalisation of transmission of this music through the class structures established in the 1960s it is evident from Breathnach (1971, p.2) and McCarthy (1999, pp.173-175) that the music was primarily passed on informally by social and cultural practice in the community, and semi-formally via dancing masters and travelling teachers. In my research, however, a more complex picture has emerged. In the environs of Ennis, there was an overlap of aural and literate forms of transmission in use, prior to the institutionalisation of the transmission of traditional music. While an informal system continued, over time the balance between formal and informal transmission changed. Prior to the 1960s the primary means of acquiring the basics of traditional music practice was through informal means. By 1980, following the development of classes for traditional music, the balance moved towards a more

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\(^{16}\) I am using the term ‘traditional’ music as employed by the Irish Traditional Music Archive, in its pamphlet *What is Irish Traditional Music*, (Vallely 2011, p.687) as it relates to the repertoire transmitted in Ennis during the time frame of this thesis. For further discussion on the categorisation of Irish Traditional Music see Dillane (2009, pp.4-7) and Keegan (2012, pp.225-235).
formal model of transmission. Central to this change is the part played by music teachers. In her research considering the transmission process in Irish traditional music, Kari Veblen focused on the role of teachers as community resources, tradition bearers and facilitators (1991, p.xii). She maintains that the framework provided by organisations has accentuated the role of teachers and has extended their influence in the community (Veblen 1991, pp.181-182). Certainly, without the structure of Comhaltas and by extension the Comhaltas/VEC classes operated by the particular group of teachers, I doubt that Irish traditional music would have flourished in Ennis in the way that it did. This pathway into pedagogical positions is therefore explored, in particular in chapters four and five.

In his lecture The Use of Notation in the Transmission of Irish Folk Music (1986) Breandan Breathnach refers to the use of staff notation in the transmission process. Similarly Niall Keegan in Literacy as a Transmission Tool in Irish Traditional Music (1996) put forward the term ‘directional’ as more representative of the notation used by traditional musicians. Ultimately, the notation served as a mnemonic device. Such discussions are vital and in chapters four and five I reveal the ways that the teachers Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon and Frank Custy employed their unique and personal styles, to connect the actual music with the notation, evidencing their entrepreneurial approach to teaching as well as their ideological position on literacy and tradition.

Wenger maintains that we can assume that learning takes place and that even when apparently failing to learn what is expected in a given situation, that something different is learned (1998, p.8). I remember sitting at the back of a classroom in order to avoid being asked to play. I could not see the blackboard clearly, and as a result, had difficulty transcribing the notes onto my manuscript. I waited for my teacher
Brendan McMahon to play the tune, and proceeded to transcribe the notes by ear. In this way I inadvertently learned a new skill which in my professional life of music has been invaluable. Many of my peers had similar experiences. In terms of the iconic processes central in the learning of a traditional form referred to by Turino (2008, p.7) e.g. recognising patterns such as structures, typical rhythms, melodic motifs; in my experience, as described above and generally in the 1970s, these elements were not formally focused on in class, but were learned aurally.

MEMORY AND POSITIONING THE CRITICAL SELF

By its historical nature, this thesis has been mediated by my memory along with that of the interviewees. Mairéad NicChraith (2012, p.2) suggests that memory is often considered in a linear fashion, chronological and as an eye witness account. However, as outlined by Plummer (2001, p.402) memory works at various levels e.g. narrative, collective, generational and popular. Regardless, any ethnography is a product of the interaction of the past with the present ‘a product of the interaction between the then of the time of the narrative and the now of the narrating present’ (NicCraith 2012, p.127). Building on Maurice Halbwachs's idea that memory, like language, is a social phenomenon as well as an individual one, Jan Assmann argues that memory also has a cultural and social dimension, and that:

‘its contents and the use we make of it are determined by our intercourse with others, by language, action, communication, and by our emotional ties to the configurations of our social existence…in the act of remembering we do not just descend into the depths of our own most intimate inner life, but we introduce an order and structure into that internal life that are socially conditioned and that link us to the social world’ (Assmann 2006, pp.1-2).
In the personal interviews people drew attention to the deeply ingrained memories which were linked to the configurations of their lives. Writer James Baldwin once said ‘People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them’ (1955, p.119); history makes subjects and subjects make history. Thus, the combined memories and recollections of those I interviewed provide the narrative around that which this research has been based. Ultimately, ‘what the narrator remembers and values, and how he or she expresses memory and value, takes precedence over validity. Thus, the ‘certitude’ of historical events is less important than the phenomenological interpretation of such events’ (Madison 2012, p.35).

Nonetheless, combining documentary and other evidence with my own and other peoples' voices, which were part of the narrative, ensured a balance between the narrative and the theoretical. Ken Plummer considers that one of the values of life stories is that they ‘help establish collective memories and imagined communities: and they tell of their concerns of the time and place…What matters to people keeps getting told in the stories of their lives’ (Plummer 2001, p. 395).

In terms of this thesis, it is through the collective memories of the interviewees, recalling the events, people, experiences which were significant in their lives, that the historical shift in relation to Irish traditional music in Ennis is revealed. When I began my research, I considered my position as both simple and complex. On the one hand as an ‘insider’ I had easy access to the basic information to begin, while on the other hand I was conscious that both mine and the memory of those I interviewed could be inaccurate or biased, because of being close to the subject. From the outset, I have been aware that focussing to this degree on the historical narrative was potentially problematic e.g. to what extent could nostalgia, memory etc. colour my judgement? My own personal position in relation to the
project obligates close inspection, not least because of the issues raised in relation to memory.

On first glance I am an insider in relation to this project. My position is subjective by nature of my engagement and interaction with the people I interviewed, and even the topic itself. Not only is Ennis County Clare in the West of Ireland, the place of my birth and where I have lived most of my life. It is also here I primarily learned to play music, classical as well as traditional.17 It is here that I learned how to perform, learned how to be part of a community, where I made friends. In point of fact I am part of the story which I am telling, because I am an Ennis ‘townie’ playing traditional music and, although I did, I did not have to move outside of the town to learn it. It is also the place where I now live and play most of my music.

I am first generation townie, born in the town of parents who had migrated from Kilmihil, a village twenty miles west of Ennis. This distinction is important in an urban area connected to its hinterland.18 As already stated, during my teenage years and even for a number of years afterwards, I did not acknowledge my Ennis roots in favour of my rural heritage. In time I realised that being a ‘townie’ was a privilege because, being ascribed that identity meant that I was in a particular time

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17 I began learning the piano aged four from my mother Dympna Cotter (nee Lernihan). She obtained an ALCM Diploma from the London College of Music and taught piano throughout west Clare, travelling on the legendary West Clare railway or travelling by horse and trap driven by her father. When she got married and moved to Ennis, she continued to teach and pupils travelled from throughout the county to learn from her. Her sister Mary was also a piano teacher. Subsequently for many years, I attended Sr. Albeus in the St. Zaviers Convent of Mercy, and for a short while Miss Lenihan in Coláiste Muire, Ennis. When I moved to Cork to pursue my music degree in University College Cork, I also attended Cork School of Music and was taught by Bernard Curtis and Ronald Lees. I did not receive any tuition on traditional music specific to the piano. My style evolved from my engagement with traditional musicians that I came in contact with. I also play the tin whistle and fiddle. Similar to that described in chapter four, I acquired the basic skills at the Comhaltas/VEC classes taught by Brendan McMahon and Tom Barrett. I also learned socially in the way outlined in chapter five.

18 Similar to others whose parents were from the ‘country’ (rural areas), family life revolved around pursuits outside of the town. This topic is discussed in chapter four.
and place, which for me is very precious, but also gives a broader understanding of how music gets passed on.

After a time doing this research, I realised that the term ‘insider’ did not fully describe my position, so where should I align myself? Since my research relates to Ennis, my initial view was that, of course I was an insider. In addition, I had participated in many of the practices outlined in this thesis, I personally knew all of the people referred to, was taught by, performed with, or grew up with all whom I interviewed. However, as I began to ponder more deeply about what it meant to be an insider, I realised that my position was not as clear cut as it first seemed. I concluded that my position was dependant on whose perspective I viewed it from.

Yes, I live in Ennis and I am part of the community of Irish traditional musicians who live and perform there. Since I have known them for most of my life, my interaction is not bound by time and space in the same way that it might be for an outsider, whose fieldwork begins and ends at certain points; a position which from my perspective has been ideal, in terms of carrying out research.

However, in many ways this is where my ‘insiderness’ ends. My interpretation of the historical period of which I was part, has been influenced by the broadening of the horizons of my life, beyond the specific context of this thesis. My personal memories are of my teenage years growing up in Ennis, but in undertaking this study I reinterpreted them from an adult perspective, and from the perspective of a person who had for many years lived life outside of Ennis, and away from the community under discussion. While I am clearly part of the historical narrative of this thesis, moving out from the places and spaces referred to, has earned me a degree of ‘outsiderness’. Specifically, I am no longer a member of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas), an organisation central to this thesis, nor have I been
since the early 1980s. Therefore, from the perspective of Comhaltas, I am now an outsider. In addition, although I was born in the town, my parents were from Kilmihil, a village twenty miles west of Ennis, so from the perspective of Ennis people, whose roots were grounded in the town for longer - I was not a real ‘townie’. However at the same time, from the perspective of fiddle player Martin Hayes, someone living outside the town, I was considered a ‘townie’. (Personal Interview, Jan 2013) In conclusion therefore, positioning is clearly very subjective. Nonetheless, I had to consider it, and even decide to what degree it even mattered - whether I was an insider or outsider. Ultimately, the important thing was to acknowledge the distinction and to endeavour to represent as impartial a picture as was possible.

Although Bruno Nettl (1983, pp.259-269) has always argued for an outsider’s perspective, and there is a considerable base of literature in ethnomusicology which reflects this approach, there is however, less literature in ethnomusicology which documents from an insider’s perspective. In ‘Experience and Fieldwork: A Native Researcher's View’, Chiener Chou (2002) writes from the perspective of being a native of Taiwan, but who is learning nanguan, a Taiwanese genre of ensemble music, for the first time. Similarly, Rosenberg (1995) describes learning the banjo and his emersion into bluegrass music. In both cases the musical genre was new to them.

19 For further reading on the insider- outsider dichotomy see Mellonee Burnim (1985) and Rice (2008, pp. 101-120).
20 Chiener Chou uses the term ‘native’ as opposed to ‘insider/emic’ which she defines as ‘researchers who are themselves already experienced musicians within the tradition that they subsequently choose to investigate ethnomusicologically’ (2002, p.458).
21 Rosenberg’s background is similar to mine, in that he was a musician first and subsequently became a researcher. Rosenberg’s background is similar to mine, in that he was a musician first and subsequently became a researcher. For further reading see Nketia (1988) Berliner (1994) and Titon (1985).
As a tentative insider, I am aware of the challenges I face from studying my own music, but on balance, consider that as a native of the town growing up during the 1960s and 1970s, in many ways I am well placed to trace this transition. There are obviously advantages and disadvantages to both positions, and I have been critically aware of where memory and nostalgia could affect my research both in terms of actual fieldwork and the interpretation of it. However, in terms of the narrative, my position has been advantageous. I experienced firsthand a great deal of what is represented here. I remember, I sense and feel what my interviewees expressed in relation to this period in Ennis. I remember the people, the energy, the sense of excitement, details of particular sessions and events. I was there. I remember being aware that a change was taking place, and that I was part of it. I also served what I now consider a musical apprenticeship with musicians that are recognised as icons of the tradition. In essence, I belonged, unlike Nettl, who, when learning Persian music, was told by his teacher ‘you will never understand this music’ (1983, p. 259). I appreciate that he was aware of this himself, and that that he expected to learn something different, although his teacher dismissed this as unimportant. From my perspective this is a significant difference. While I obviously accept an outsider’s perspective is valid, it is equally important that the things that matter to the communities themselves are also represented. My position allows me to do just that, albeit generating a different set of challenges and potential outputs.

Having attended one of the first classes for Irish traditional music held in Ennis, I have been in a position to provide a personal viewpoint. In addition, my approach has involved qualitative research based on the shared experience of a group of Ennis musicians, within a historical and social context. It has been necessary to apply a multi-disciplinary approach to collecting the required and relevant
background material. In general my aim has been to achieve a balance between ethnography, theoretical frameworks and original insights. In order to ensure that I remained objective, but at the same time did not lose the richness of lived experience and of deep insider knowledge, I put particular strategies in place and approached my research deliberately. Certainly in relation to fieldwork my position has been advantageous, making it easy to access local information. In terms of pre fieldwork, I was ideally positioned to identify and interview pertinent musicians, teachers and others.

By doing intensive fieldwork, my aim has been to provide as complete a picture as possible, for as wide an audience as possible. In order to balance the position that I am not a neutral observer, and to secure as truthful a narrative as possible, I adopted a ‘thick description’ approach (Ryle 1971, Geertz 1973 pp. 5-6, 9-10). Norman K. Denzin, ascribes the following characteristics to the concept of ‘thick description’:

1. It gives the context of an act; 2. it states the intentions and meanings that organize the action; 3. it traces the evolution and development of the act; 4. it presents the action as a text that can then be interpreted. (Denzen 1989, p. 33)

Joseph G Ponterotto expands on the concept to include ‘thick interpretation’:

Thick description refers to the researcher’s task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behaviour) within its particular context...Thick description leads to thick interpretation, which in turns leads to thick meaning of the research findings for the researchers and participants themselves, and for the report’s intended readership. (Ponterotto 2006, p. 543)
MATERIALS and METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The disciplines that inform my approach to this study are many and varied including ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music, and the relationship of music and people, Turino (2008) Kaul (2009); Irish music studies works such as NíFhuartháin (2011), Breathnach (1986) Ó hAllmhuráin (1990) and Vallely (2011); Sociology Wenger (1998) and Bourdieu (1977). I also draw on Irish historical work of Spellissy (1996, 1998, 2001, 2003) and Ó Dálaigh (1995, 2012). My career as an educator informs my approach, and given the focus on pedagogy, I also draw on McCarthy (1999) and Veblen (1991). I am less concerned with specific disciplinary alignments and am more interested in what life experiences and different disciplines can bring. The primary materials I used, which supports the thick description approach, includes materials from a variety of sources, including many hours of transcribed interviews with teachers and others who are at the core of this. I have accessed documents such as personal papers, original teaching materials, archival research, library assisted research work and transcriptions; collecting data from newspapers, photos, films and minutes of meetings from institutions central to the research i.e. significantly from the minutes of VEC meetings for the period April 1956– December 1990. Throughout the thesis I draw on a large group of people, including national and international musicians, broadcasters and local people. I have included a list of these in Appendix H, which can be referred to at any point.

My starting point was in locating the key players in the establishment of the initial class of 1961; the mediators such as members of Comhaltas and the VEC at that time, along with former students of the initial classes. I conducted over twenty interviews with people who were well known to me, while also drawing on my own
personal knowledge and experience. In preparing for this I did a good deal of advanced planning and personal reflection, which played a huge part in my preparation for the interviews. My pre-fieldwork included selecting a group of people who would represent a cross section of each stage within the timescale of the study. In due course, I made casual approaches to the musicians I grew up with in Ennis. Many of these, like me, have a musical lineage which leads back to the class of 1961, in that their teachers were also students in the first class. Many informal meetings took place at sessions and other informal gatherings. Conversations about growing up in Ennis in the 1970s and 1980s ensued and many anecdotes were told. As a result of these relaxed conversations, arranging more formal recorded interviews was very easy. I also conducted many informal interviews and corresponded with musicians who were regular visitors to Ennis during the 1970s and came to realise how unique this time in Ennis was. Although living in centres such as Cork (a city in the south of Ireland), Dublin, the capital city; Kerry, London, Liverpool and many other places which had reputations as vibrant centres for Irish traditional music, these musicians pointed out that it was necessary for them to travel in order to have sessions with others their own age. In contrast, in Ennis, young musicians were neighbours and had to make very little effort to get to a music session with others of the same age.

The interviews were conducted in natural, informal settings such as kitchens, hotel lobbies, public houses. My principal aim was to gather information and understand perspectives which would provide me with a focus and a foundation for

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22 Significantly a number of these pupils continued performing and some became music teachers themselves. Consequently, this time was pivotal in the process of change, in terms of the various expressions of Irish traditional music in Ennis. A list of my interviewees is found in Appendix H.

23 The special position of Ennis at this time is remarked upon by a significant number of key figures who are interviewed and will be referred to in more detail later in the thesis.
examining teaching and learning in the timeframe of my thesis. Although I had a certain amount of predetermined information prior to interviewing, the interviews themselves were largely exploratory. I was mindful not to impose any possible bias I may have had, and endeavoured to be open to any unexpected direction. This approach led to very informative interviews, which were often more in the nature of informal and enjoyable conversations. Although I was interested in getting specific information from all the people I interviewed, I was not very prescriptive in my style of questioning. I prepared a broad range of questions which, although quite general, were specific to each person being interviewed.\footnote{The questions were often more in the nature of prompts than clear questions which might seem to suggest leading the interviewee. However, if a person did not wish to pursue a prompt, I certainly did not push. An example of a prompt is ‘do you remember the night we played in the Clare Inn and got the $100 tip from Bernard McDonagh from Dromoland?’} These initial questions provided me with a loose structure, which in turn led to further layers of questions and information gathering; the follow up questions often providing more interesting information. Although time intensive, the interviews or relaxed conversations were open ended and in-depth. I regularly used photos or other media to generate or stimulate the conversation.

Being a local has also allowed me to engage more freely with people when approaching them for interview. In many cases because of a shared history, there was a reciprocal relationship between us. Recollecting my personal experience often led my informants to do the same; not only was I enthusiastic about this period in the history of Ennis, but they also became increasingly so. I found that over time, a sense of nostalgia emerged from them, and a realisation that they felt very lucky to have had this experience. In this way, I have attempted to uncover as much as possible of each individual musician’s musical experience. Unfortunately, however, a few of the
people central to my research were deceased; therefore it has at times been necessary to rely on secondary sources.

Like Adam Kaul (2009, p.5) who subscribed to what Paul Sillitoe called ‘ethnographic determinism’ (2003, p.3) I allowed the ethnographic material to determine the theoretical model. In terms of reaching an overall understanding, I considered Timothy Rice who applied Ricouers hermeneutic approach to his own fieldwork in Bulgaria, where he describes the ‘hermeneutical arc’ as starting with a pre-understanding of the music, and then goes through a process of ‘distanciation’ and ‘appropriation’ to ‘re-appropriation’ (1994, p.7). For Rice he was endeavouring to get a deeper understanding of the ‘other’. In my case I reflected in reverse, in effect mirroring Rice; my horizon is the deep intimacy that I have tried to deconstruct.

‘Even so called ‘insider ‘ethnomusicologists, those born into the cultures they study, undergo a productive distanciation necessary to the explanation and critical understanding of their own cultures...the productive distanciation is not only characteristic of outsiders and scholars; individuals operating within tradition continually appropriate their cultural practices, give them new meanings, and create their own sense of ‘being in the world’ (Rice 1994, p.6).

Apropos Ellen Herda maintains:

‘Hermeneutic reflection and determination of one’s own present life interpretation calls for the unfolding of one’s ‘effective-historical’ consciousness’ (Herda 1999, p.63).

Although written in a different context, Hortence Powdermaker’s description of her approach to fieldwork also points to the distanciation necessary: ‘stepping in to societies and out of them’ (Powdermaker 1966, p.15).

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25 Her description related to engaging as a participant observer as an outsider, where her fieldwork began and ended at a certain point ‘joining in but remaining apart….is there but not there; engaged
Ultimately, I acknowledge Clifford Geertz’s claim that ‘anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third ones to boot….They are, thus, fictions: fictions in the sense that they are ‘something made’, ‘something fashioned’ (Geertz 1973, p.15) which can ultimately only represent ‘partial truths’ Clifford (1986, p.7). Likewise, according to D. Soyini Madison oral history does not function as factual or objective evidence, nor are they fictions of history. Instead they present a history that is remembered through a particular subjectivity (Madison 2012, p.35).

My role is as a cultural interpreter of a narrative of which I was part. As a writer of this dissertation I needed to find a process of dealing with those feeling, and to channel them into my analysis. In the writing of this, methodologically I have also had to bring in a certain rhetorical strategy to distinguish between what might be my deepest emotion about this, and then to step back and talk about this critically. Methodologically I had to historicise myself as another person, mindful that I cannot be fully objective- and at times I did not have want to be. I did this by using different tonal registers. According to H Lloyd Goodall, ‘voice is the personal rhetorical imprint of who we are and on what we write’ (2000, p.139). My personal voice, and my voice as interpreter are both represented, and I used this rhetorical strategy in order to maintain an objective critique. Sometimes I am aware that my voice takes on a subjective tone; I use that register, because I am dealing with recollection, and oftentimes with my interviewees it was those shared moments that led to findings and great insight. For this reason, the intimacy and the shared recollection was a huge advantage of being an insider. Sometimes I take a more formal approach, more

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but distanced.’(Key Themes in Qualitative Research: Continuities and Changes 2003 Alta Mira Press: California by Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey, Dr Sara Delamont.)
objective, more distanced, other times my prose in the chapters takes on a more subjective tone. I do not consider subjectivity negatively, and my approach is not uncritical, but has been deliberately done as part of my writing strategy. When I suspend my critical apparatus for a moment, I am filled with warmth and nostalgia for the times I spent in Ennis, and obviously there are times when I want to live inside the personal role. The musicians I grew up with articulate how lucky they felt to be part of this period in Ennis, and admittedly I did too. It was precious and privileged. My role here now however, is not so much to revel in nostalgia, but to critically investigate why these impressions linger. Ultimately I am saying that on balance I believe my position enriches rather than detracts from the study.

Having introduced the themes and theoretical foundations for this work I conclude with a brief outline of each chapter.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In chapter two I introduce the town of Ennis in the 1950s, focussing in particular on how there was no long line of authentic traditional music practice evident in the town. The purpose of this chapter therefore, is to introduce the town as it was prior to the 1961 moment, geographically, historically and socially. Focussing on the influence of cultural nationalism and Roman Catholicism in particular, I do this through the prism of two significant people and two events which formed the historical matrix central to this thesis. In presenting these people and events, I uncover a particular openness to more broad scale music production and reception, and argue that a culture of receptivity to other genres of music, over time, created a space for the incubation of formal traditional music lessons in Ennis.
Chapter three is about the initiation of a new scheme for the transmission of Irish traditional music in 1961 through the partnership of the cultural music organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Clare Vocational Education Committee. It also examines other new contexts of transmission which emerged as a consequence, and it looks at the institutional processes which were part of this new scheme, revealing the interplay between the formal and informal processes involved.

Chapter four focuses on the acquisition of the foundational skills learned both in structured and unstructured contexts, prior to and subsequent to the first Comhaltas/VEC class held in Ennis. I focus in particular on the explicit musical knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge in the structured classes, which were centred within the educational institutions that people attended. Here, teachers introduced novel pedagogies pertaining to literacy and performance.

Chapter five deals with the next phase in the learning of Irish traditional music i.e. the learning of Irish traditional music in a social context, demonstrating how basic skills enabled budding musicians to continue learning, through performing and actively participating in existing and the new social contexts, which emerged in line with the growth in cultural tourism.

Chapter six outlines the meaning that traditional music had for Ennis from three perspectives; firstly, for Comhaltas as it continued to develop during the 1970s, through a culture of volunteerism, secondly, for a group of former pupils of the early Comhaltas/VEC classes, revealing how music became part of their social as well as their professional lives; thirdly, through the prism of the Fleadh Nua, where I trace the emergence of Ennis as a major destination for Irish traditional music.

The purpose of this thesis therefore, is to trace the institutional and social teaching, learning and performing of Irish traditional music in Ennis from 1961-
1980, examining its role in the transformation of the town into what is now perceived as a major hub of tradition, revealing the complex set of social, economic, geographic, historical and communal factors that has led to this development.
'Our experience and our world shape each other through a reciprocal relation that goes to the very essence of who we are. The world as we shape it, and our experience as the world shapes it, are like the mountain and the river. They shape each other, but they have their own shape. They are reflections of each other, but they have their own existence, in their own realms. They fit around each other, but they remain distinct from each other. They cannot be transformed into each other, yet they transform each other. The river only carves and the mountain only guides, yet in their interaction, the carving becomes the guiding and the guiding becomes the carving' (Wenger 1998, p. 71).
The town of Ennis, now known far and wide as a hub of traditional music practice, referred to in chapter one did not exist in the 1950s. In particular, there was no long line of authentic traditional music practice evident in the town at that time. Although the transformation reflected in chapter one happened relatively quickly, it was during the course of this decade that the conditions which produced a receptiveness, accessibility and general awareness of traditional music practice, motivated some of the people of Ennis to begin to think about Irish traditional music. Niall Keegan describes the term transformation as ‘a new existence rooted in the original, but existing anew outside of the context and perhaps even some conceptions of the original’ (Keegan 2012, p.41). The purpose of this chapter therefore, is to introduce and contextualise the town as it was in the 1950s, geographically, historically and socially. In particular, I identify the significant people, events and community groups which formed the historical matrix central to this thesis. These are of significance not only to an understanding of the town of Ennis during the 1950s, but also to uncovering the motivating conditions for the many changes which occurred there subsequently.

The picture that emerges of Ennis through the 1950s, although complex, is predominantly framed by two forces; cultural nationalism, which dominated the early decades of the founding of the Irish state, and the Roman Catholic Church, whose influence pervaded the practices of the musical genres represented in the town. The cultural nationalist model is significant in the context of musical life in Ennis, because it informed not only the rise in the popularity of traditional music in the town, but it also informed Roman Catholic practice through classical art forms, evidenced for example through the arrangements of traditional airs for choirs. The culture of
volunteerism which existed was also reflective of the Roman Catholic ethos of subsidiarity which promoted civic involvement over that of the state.

In this chapter I draw from Adam R. Kaul’s (2009) ethnographic study of Doolin (a village in County Clare). Kaul (2009, p.5) who refers to the work of Wilson and Donnan whose approach was to study ‘from the terra firma of locality, from the perspective of those who live and work in the marshland of the bog, on the shop floor, in the government office, and at the IT workstation’(2006, p.167). Kaul’s study, researched between the years 2002-2003, describes the radical change in an Irish village, where he focused on local lived experience of the locality, aiming to ‘present as true as depiction as possible’(2009, p.5), which is what I am attempting here. Ruth Finnegan (1989) focuses on local music in the new town of Milton Keynes in the 1980s. She refers to both amateur and professional music making in many genres, focussing on the practice and the many pathways that musicians take, providing a model of engagement for me in this work. I also draw from the anthropological work of Arensberg and Kimball, who visited Ennis during the 1930s (Arensberg 1940, 1968 and 2001), particularly in regard to their discussion of the town’s relationship with outlying areas. In relation to the influence of cultural nationalism and Roman Catholicism I draw on historical literature of Hutchinson (1987), McCarthy (1999), Spellissy (2003, 1998) and Roman Catholic Church literature, in order to build a more nuanced picture of the kinds of practices and ideologies at play in how people operated within their communities. My ‘Ennis’ materials are from a variety of sources including the local newspaper the Clare Champion, interviews particularly that with Ennis born academic and musician Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, who provided insights on the historical context of the town.
The structure of the chapter is as follows. Firstly I address the issue of identity, referring to the concept of cultural nationalism and of Roman Catholicism. Secondly, I introduce the town of Ennis from historical, geographical and social perspectives, focussing especially on the variety of musical practices in the town during this period. The third section relates to the significant motivations and motivators for change in the musical landscape of the town though a close study of two individuals responsible for musical education in the town: Ernest De Regge, for his work with church music, and Seán Reid for his contribution to the development of Irish music in the town. I also look at two cultural events An Tóstal (pageant) and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 1956 – the first Irish music festival that came under the workings of the key music cultural organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Eireann. By examining these two festive occasions, I argue that they set in train a movement that led people to consider Ennis as a centre of traditional music practice.

Section 1

Principles of Identity

The growth of cultural nationalism in Ireland from the end of the 19th century gave rise to a literary revival, a renewed interest in the Irish language, Irish mythology and sport, resulting in the establishment of new organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) and the Gaelic League. Nonetheless, following the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, Ireland went through what Marie Mc Carthy describes

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1 The Gaelic League was an organisation set up by Eoin O’Neill in 1893 to promote the restoration of the Irish Language. Douglas Hyde was its president from then until 1915. The Gaelic Athletic Association was founded in 1884 by Michael Cusack for the development of Irish sports and pastimes and to counter the spread of the English Amateur Athletics Association.
as an ‘identity crisis’ (1999, p.108). She examines the issues of identity and culture and discusses Irish people’s fears, referring to the dominant positions of the Irish language and Catholicism, and their connection to nationalism. Likewise, in *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*, historian John A Murphy comments on the 1937 Constitution, where the ‘special position’ of Roman Catholicism as the religion of ‘the great majority of the citizens’ is recognised, and through which the ‘concept of a state grounded upon Catholic social teaching’ is expressed (1989, p.90). Similarly, Terence Brown in *Ireland a Social and Cultural History 1922-1985*, refers to the link between Catholicism, nationalism, and the revival of the Irish language (Brown, 1981).

McCarthy refers to the cultural policy of the new State, which aimed at achieving a cultural unity, where cultural boundaries separated Irishness from otherness (1999, p.108). Likewise, Hutchinson in relation to cultural nationalism states:

‘The essence of a nation is its distinctive civilisation, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile’ (1987, p.13).

This point is reiterated by Terence Brown:

‘cultural life in the new state was dominated by a vision of Ireland, inherited from the period of the Literary Revival, as a rural Gaelic civilisation that retained an ancient pastoral distinctiveness’ (Brown, 1981, p. 98).

It is clear that from the outset that the political leaders of the new Irish state aimed to establish a national identity separate from that of England. This approach was founded upon the aspirations of earlier leaders, scholars and artists for example Douglas Hyde, the first President of Ireland. He was a scholar and founder of the Gaelic League; an organisation founded in 1893 to promote the use of the Irish

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2 Marie McCarthy is the author of the seminal book on the history of music education in Ireland, *Passing it on: the Transmission of Music in Irish Culture* (1999). The ways that this impacted on musical development and the transmission of music in Ireland will be addressed later.
language both spoken and written. The leaders focused on language and religion as significant indicators of difference. Brown (1981, p.181) connects the significance given by the state to the Gaelic traditions, language and religion, with Clifford Geertz theory, in which he refers to the tension for new nationalist states:

‘To move with the tide of the present, and to hold to an inherited course gives new state nationalism its peculiar air of being at once hell-bent toward modernity and morally outraged by its manifestations’ (Geertz 1975, p. 243).

Much has been written about the conservatism of the State in the early decades following independence (Lee 1975, Hutchinson 1987, Brown 1981). The particular status afforded to Roman Catholicism in the Constitution (Article 44) determined much of this conservatism, where ‘it enshrined its teachings on the family, marriage, education and property’ (Hutchinson, 1987, p.322). The political leadership of Eamon De Valera was founded on this conservatism.³ In a speech broadcast on radio on St. Patrick’s Day, the 17th of March, 1943, on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Founding of the Gaelic League he articulated his vision for Ireland as:

‘The Ireland that we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as a basis for right living, of a people who, satisfied with frugal comfort, devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of sturdy children, the contest of athletic youths and the laughter of happy maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. The home, in short, of a people living the life that God desires that men should live’ (Lee 1989, p.334)

In order to create a separate identity, the nation was identified with these ideals which provided an enemy which acted as a ‘negative reference point’ (Hutchinson, 1987, p.306). There were many examples of campaigns aimed at restricting threats from

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³ Eamon DeValera (1882-1975) was a very significant figure in Irish history of the 20th century. He was a revolutionary figure during Ireland’s quest for independence, a member of the Gaelic League, a founder member of the Fianna Fáil Party in 1926; was elected Uachtarán na hÉireann (President of Ireland) in 1959, which role he retained until 1973.
outside. The GAA, which was openly nationalistic in its outlook, excluded members of the British army or police force from membership. Members were also forbidden from playing ‘imported’ games such as soccer or rugby.\(^4\) Another example is in 1940 when the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs banned ‘jazz and crooning’ from the airwaves because of its threat to the Irish heritage (Gibbons, 1996, p.75). Similarly, Johanna Duffy (2009) outlines the vigorous campaign against jazz and modern music on moral grounds, which reflected the censorship climate in Ireland. The anti jazz campaign of the 1930s was led by the Catholic clergy and the Gaelic League, who were attempting to stop the tide of new influences on Irish society. This campaign led to the Dance Hall Act of 1935.\(^5\)

In terms of how people generally led their lives, the Catholic Church was omnipresent and clearly evident in the activities in Ennis. Although it relates to Catholic practice from 1925-1960 in Limerick (a city twenty five miles from Ennis), Síle De Cléir’s outline of the central role that religious practice played in people’s lives, was replicated in Ennis of the 1950s. She describes Catholics’ obligation to attend at religious ceremonies:

‘The liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church overlaid a kind of ritual year on these obligations: Advent, Christmass, Lent and Easter marked the winter and spring periods while the summer season had the feasts of Corpus Christi and the Assumption’ (2010, p.5).

In terms of social practices, one of the effects of religious devotion was that during Lent, a period of fast and abstinence, there was limited social activity. My mother, piano teacher Dympna Cotter recalls that ‘there were no dances held in the Dance

\(^4\) The GAA’s Rule 42 was relaxed in 2005.  
\(^5\) The Dance Hall Act of 1935 required the proprietor of a public dance to have a licence. This led to the decline of house dances since they were considered to be public dances.
Halls. It was a very quiet time’ (Personal Interview Cotter 2007).  This was reiterated by PJ Curtis: ‘during Lent, courtesy of the church, the world stopped turning’ (Personal Correspondence Jan 2013).

The Catholic Gaelic Ireland philosophy is also exemplified in the activities of the organisation An Réalt (the star), a Catholic organisation. The weekly branch meetings, which concluded with Céili dancing to, significantly, LP records, were held in the Maria Assumpta Hall, owned by the Ennis Parish (The inclusion of Irish dancing reflects the emerging acceptance of traditional music among the townspeople of Ennis from the late 1950s onwards). Although set dancing was common then, it was not allowed at these gatherings; only céili dances were allowed because, according to Pádraig MacMathúna, set dancing was frowned on at that time; considered ‘inappropriate.’ Another example of Catholic representation of identity was in the building of Marian Shrines at the entrance of many housing estates. This could be seen as a desire to mark the boundaries of the communities in a way that represents the community as a whole (De Cléir 2010, p.13). There were many everyday instances of the strong Catholic ethos in society. It was customary for prayers to be said, and for blessings to be given by Priests, at the start of concerts,

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6 During the six weeks of Lent the local bands including the well known Kilfenora and Tulla Céili Bands toured the UK and the USA, as did many bands.
7 PJ Curtis is an award winning broadcaster, record producer, author and musicologist from Kilnaboy, a village ten miles north of Ennis.
8 This organisation, a branch of the Legion of Mary, founded by Frank Duff, operated ‘as Gaeilge’. In his meetings throughout Ireland he became aware that there were many people in the community who recited their prayers through Irish, so he established An Réalt to fulfil that need.
9 The entertainment pages of the Clare Champion from the 1950s onwards reflect a growing interest in céili dancing throughout the county.
10 A brother of musician Séamus, Pádraig moved to Ennis from Cooraclare in the early 1950s. Although his main interest was in the GAA and Irish language, he was very active in An Réalt and at a later stage in Comhaltas. Highly disciplined céili dances were favoured by the Gaelic League (a nationalist organisation founded in 1893 for the promotion of the Irish language) rather than the local traditional quadrille sets (Vallely 2011).
11 This occurred in 1954, the Marian Year, a year dedicated to devotion of Our Lady. Examples were at St Michaels Villas, Connolly Villas and Hermitage areas of the town (Fig. 4.1).
matches and other events. These connections between the community and the church were nothing out of the ordinary, and were very representative of Irish culture at that time. This of course was linked to a sense of nationalism and the promotion of an Irish Ireland. I have a very strong memory from the 1970s, of seeing audiences standing to attention and singing the National Anthem at the end of concerts and other events, even at the end of informal sessions. Similarly, although the Irish language was not the first language of the people of Ennis, it had a dominant position at formal occasions, and as will be demonstrated in other chapters, much of the official business of organisations and institutions was regularly conducted ‘as gaeilge’ (through the Irish language), and it was also common practice for people to use the Irish version of their names. As will be outlined later in the thesis local religious nuns and priests were among those who contributed to the musical transformation of Ennis.

The way the forces of Nationalism and Roman Catholicism manifested their influence locally in peoples’ lives is well documented in the Clare Champion, the local newspaper for the county. It was common practice for civic functions to be conducted by the Bishop or other clergy (a number of examples are included later in this chapter). The role of a priest was all encompassing as exemplified in the life of Fr Seán Saunders (1921-1982). He had a life-long interest in music and was chairman of the Clare County Board of Comhaltas for many years; was also active backstage with the Ennis Musical Society; he was Chairperson of the Board of Management at the Mercy Convent Holy Family National school; was the Spiritual Director of the Ennis Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and was Chaplain to the Ennis Community Centre. In all of his positions he regularly expressed strong opinions on social issues.

12 In my experience the National Anthem is very rarely performed nowadays at musical events, although it is still a feature at sporting fixtures.
13 In my view this was also used by musicians to formally mark the end of the session and that there would be no more tunes played.
Similarly, Canon P. J. Vaughan acted in the role of Chairman of the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) from 1932 until his death in 1961 (Power 1980, p.56). The influence of Roman Catholicism and nationalism is a thread which runs throughout this thesis. In particular the subject of subsidiarity, a principal tenet of Catholic social teaching, referred to in chapter three in relation to the promotion of a culture of volunteerism, filters through all remaining chapters of this thesis, particularly in relation to the dedication of volunteer teachers and community organisers who devoted their lives to the promotion of Irish traditional music.

Section 2
Foundations and Motivations for Change

Ennis: A Geographical and Historical Perspective

The town is located in the centre of the county, situated on the mouth of the river Fergus which flows into the Shannon (see Fig. 1.2). It has a population of 24,253 (Census, 2006, Central Statistics Office). In 1956 the population of the town was 8,292 (Census, 1956). It is currently a thriving active busy market town, well known for its narrow streets. It contains many landmarks such as the courthouse, a monument to Daniel O’Connell in the central square, a market place, the Francisan Abbey, St Peter and Paul’s Cathedral and St Columba’s Protestant Church in Bindon Street, Erasmus Smith House in College Road now home of Maoin Cheoil an Chláir.14 Newer landmarks include Glór built in 2001 and Cois na hAbhna, a performance and

14 Daniel O’Connell fought and won an election in County Clare in 1828 and thus became the first Catholic to win a seat in the British Parliament. This win led to the granting of Catholic Emancipation in 1829. Maoin Cheoil an Chláir, opened in 1994, is school of music where traditional music and classical music are taught side by side.
teaching space, the county headquarters of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, opened in the early 1980s, which are committed to traditional music.\textsuperscript{15}

There are six Primary schools and five secondary schools, two schools of music, numerous sporting facilities including Cusack Park, where the national games of hurling and football are held, organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).\textsuperscript{16}

The town’s origins can be traced back to the thirteenth century, when Donnchadh Cairbreach O’Brien, King of Thomond, moved his capital from Limerick to \textit{Inis Cluain Rámh Fhada} (the island of the meadow of the long rowing). In the winter of 1240 and 1241, he gave Franciscan Friars permission to establish a friary here. The town developed around the abbey from the late 1200s onwards (Spellissy 2003, pp. v-viii), and was granted the status of county town of County Clare in 1584. Its position as a market town dates from 1609 when it was granted permission to hold a weekly market and two fairs a year (Spellissy 1998, p.14).

Through the centuries there have been many accounts of travellers to Ennis, County Clare, recording their first hand observations.\textsuperscript{17} More recently and particularly pertinent to my study in terms of the period was one in 1954, when Dorothea Lange, a photographer from California, spent time in County Clare on assignment for Life Magazine, documenting life and leisure throughout the county. She was accompanied by her son Daniel Dixon. Her photographs, along with an essay written by Dixon,

\textsuperscript{15} This centre will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. The organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCE or Comhaltas as it is generally called) was formed in 1951 and is the largest body involved in the promotion of Irish traditional music song and dance e.g. through organising classes, Fleadhanna Cheoil, Concert tours and other events. It is organised in a network of branches both in Ireland and throughout the world. The development of Comhaltas is referenced throughout this thesis.

\textsuperscript{16} The primary schools are the Holy Family National School, Ennis National School, Gaelscoil Mhichíl Cíosóg, Cloughleigh National School, Ennis CBS and Ennis Educate Together. The secondary schools are Coláiste Mhuire, St. Flannan’s, Rice College, Ennis Community College and Gaeliallais the Chláir.

\textsuperscript{17} An anthology recording four centuries of accounts of visitors to County Clare is presented in \textit{The Strangers Gaze: Travels in County Clare 1534-1950}, (Ó Dálaigh 1998).
were published in Life magazine in March 1955. During this trip she took over 2,400 photographs, many of which were published in the book *Dorothea Lange’s Ireland*. A common factor of all visitors’ accounts was the acknowledgement of the poverty, and the dependence on agriculture for survival.

**Ennis: a Social Perspective**

In the early 1930s two American anthropologists, Conrad Arnesberg and Solon Kimball, lived in County Clare as part of the ‘Harvard Irish Study’. This study, which was directed by Professor Earnest Hooton of the Anthropology Department, took place between 1931 and 1936. It was three stranded; involving archaeology, physical anthropology and social anthropology. The social anthropology strand was lead by the above, under the direction of William Lloyd Warner, who had been greatly influenced by the British School of Anthropology of Bronoslaw Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe Browne. Warner focused on developing a framework for the examination of the relationship between individuals within communities, rather than on individuals (Arensberg, 1940, 1968, 2001). In this study Arensberg and Kimball saw County Clare in the 1930s as being in transition, from a traditional to a modern society.

Following their two year stay, Arensberg and Kimball documented their observations. In this they described Ennis as a town of shopkeepers, clearly linked to its rural hinterland. Because of its position as a market town, there was a co-dependence between the rural and urban communities, principally for economic purposes, but in addition, a degree of social co-dependence also existed. They

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19 The status of this text is addressed in the introduction of the 3rd edition published in 2001.

20 The chapters related to Ennis were not included until the 2nd Edition in 1968.
reported that around 40% of the townspeople’s fathers and 50% of their mother’s formerly lived in the country areas outside the town. The townspeople had died out except for the ‘lowest class of all’ (Arensberg 1968, p. 329). As a town, Ennis at this time was very socially divided in terms of its class structure; although not so much by class as by occupation. There was a landlord ascendancy class, a professional class, shopkeepers, tradesmen and then the labourers. This was also fixed geographically:

‘One’s residence is no matter of choice; it is in the section of the town filled by other members of one’s class...The scale of class is fixed - and fixed in the geography as well’ (Arensberg 1968, pp. 330-331).

They describe the upper class residents of Bindon Street, the ‘upper middle-class burghers’ living in the shop district or in the greenbelt around it, the lower middle class, living and working along the streets, and finally the back lanes where no member of the other classes lived. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, traditional musician, author, originally from Ennis and current holder of the Johnson Chair in Quebec and Canadian Irish Studies, at Concordia University, Montreal suggests, that this was a self perpetuating pattern and that the class structure in the town had not changed substantially in the 1950s:

‘The same people who had money in Ennis in the ‘30s and ‘40s still had money in the ‘50s and into the 60s’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

Similarly Marlyn Silverman in relation to her study of Thomastown, a town in County Kilkenny (Silverman 1993, p. 207) found that the ‘class based structuration of space’ established in the mid nineteenth century continued to be reproduced into the twentieth century.

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21 The Ascendancy were members of the Anglo Irish who enjoyed access to political power in Ireland during the 17th and 18th centuries.
While Ennis developed slowly in the first half of the 20th century, from the 1950s onwards the change became more accelerated. The 1950s was a significant period in County Clare, as the post war depression of the 1940s and early 1950s began to fade. These had been years of considerable emigration out of County Clare, but especially out of working class Ennis. Musicians from all areas of the county emigrated; mainly to the large urban areas of Great Britain and the US.

The Lemass Whitaker plan was already in place in the 1950s, and culminated in a Programme for Economic Expansion in 1958. This included many incentives to attract foreign investment to Ireland. Shannon Development, a state company formed in 1959 with a remit to promote the Midwest region, was instrumental in the rejuvenation of the area both in terms of industry and tourism. Here, following the emergence of Shannon Airport Duty Free Zone in the early 1950s, an industrial estate was built in Shannon and other factories were built in Ennis and other locations. The

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22 Seán Lemass (1899-1971) was a founder member of the Fianna Fáil Party and Taoiseach (Prime Minister) from 1959 to 1966; Dr T K Whittaker (b 1916) was an economist and civil servant.
23 Shannon Development was originally called Shannon Free Airport Development Company Limited (SFADCO).
The effect of Shannon Development on the progress of Ennis is explained by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin:

'It was not until the 1960s that the town started to industrialise, and the factories along the Clonroad, the Carpet Factory and Gardisette, broke through the Braids bubble' (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

By the 1960s the economic success which followed, led to an increased sense of optimism and confidence and a ‘strengthening of the national morale’ (Murphy 1975, p. 144). Although unemployment had been a major problem in County Clare, as a result of combined factors; the rural electrification scheme (1947-1979), the opening of Shannon Airport (See map of County Clare Fig.1.2) and the local availability of technical training through the Vocational Education Committee for prospective industries combined; there was an increasing sense of optimism for the future.

As jobs became available in the new factories in Ennis and Shannon, the physical appearance of the town of Ennis also began to change. The demolition of the lanes began, and the families were relocated to the newly built housing estates of St. Michael’s Villas, Hermitage and Connolly Villas in the town. Ennis continued to spread out as the population expanded. New housing estates continued to be built in

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24 Braids Factory, a cotton and braid mill established in 1935, was a major employer, particularly of women.

25 The population of Ennis fluctuated a little through the 1950s but through the 1970s it increased significantly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>5871</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>6097</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>5741</td>
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<td>1961</td>
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<td>1966</td>
<td>5834</td>
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<td>1971</td>
<td>5972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>6279</td>
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the Lifford / Corrovorin area; the old Turnpike was knocked down and was replaced by McNamara Park. The workhouse was knocked and St Joseph’s, a new hospital and home for the elderly, was built.\(^{26}\) (See Map of Ennis Fig. 4.1)

**Ennis: Musical Practices**

Although the class barriers and the social position of the population, described by Arensberg and Kimball in the 1930s, were still largely the same in the ‘60s, as the town started to industrialise and factories were built, it then began to change in this respect.\(^{27}\) Ruth Finnegan speaks of the general assumptions made as regards social class and their musical preferences:

> ‘The musical organisation, artistic forms, and personnel associated with classical music in the broad sense of that term were widely, if rather vaguely, assumed to be bound up with many privileged institutions and values of our society: the educational system, church and state functions and the generally accorded status of ‘high art’ (Finnegan 2007, p. 41).

Generally, this finding could be successfully applied to the Ennis of the 1950s. Although Ernest De Regge, the Belgian born organist and choirmaster appointed in 1923 by Bishop Fogarty, was very influential in the town, his work was generally, although not exclusively, an understanding founded on his Parish work. By and large, in terms of musical preferences, the various genres were represented by traditions practiced by the separate class structures of the town i.e. distinct traditions were evident in the old corners of the town, Bindon Street or in Upper O’Connell Street, while traditional music was played in certain working class areas such as the

\(^{26}\) The appearance of the town continued to change through the following decades, as new businesses and industries emerged as a result of the Urban Renewal Scheme introduced in 1990. The scheme first introduced through the Urban Renewal Act in 1986 was extended in 1990 to include Ennis.

\(^{27}\) The carpet factory, the spectacle factory and Gardisette on Clonroad were among the first new industries established in Ennis.
Turnpike, Old Mill Street and the lanes leading to the Fergus. (See Map of Ennis Fig.4.1)

In contrast however, Ruth Finnegan, in terms of all the music genres (including classical music) that she came in contact with during her study in Milton Keynes, found that this was not the case; that the musicians and singers here, were from mixed social backgrounds, and that a person’s class was not an indicator of musical preference (Finnegan 2007, p. 45). In this study, done between 1980 and 1984, she found several hundred functioning musical groups, based and performing in the Milton Keynes area. Many of the groups had their origin pre the building of the town in the 1960s. Although built originally as a new town, to relieve industrial and social pressures in London and the SouthEast, it incorporated a number of villages and three towns. This mix of the old and the new development brought together the already established traditions of these places. She refers to the planned nature of Milton Keynes with new neighbourhoods and an influx of new population that could not be considered a ‘community’ in the sense of people living together bound by interpersonal ties or a sense of belonging together or in terms of music making (Finnegan 2007, p.300). In this respect, I see Ennis as developing along a different trajectory.

In ‘A Town I knew so Well’, Brian Dinan (1990), depicts social life in the town during the 1950s and refers to the many musical activities in the town e.g. Clem Browne, a saxophone player, who taught jazz in the Military Barracks; there were a number of piano teachers; two dancing schools, the Bella Costello Dancing School and the White School of Dancing, choral societies and a light opera society. The

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28 During the following decades pupils from all areas of the town were introduced to Irish traditional music when it was included into the local school curricula. I refer to this in chapter four in particular.
Friary Choral was formed in 1953 under the directorship of Fr. Eunan OFM, the name changed in 1959 to the Franciscan Musical Society (it is now known as the Ennis Musical Society). There was a Brass Band; a pop band ‘Sweet Rhythm,’ containing two saxophones, drums, piano, an accordion and a fiddle. Paddy Con’s Hall, one of the principal venues in the town, derived its name from a former owner (and the building contractor who built it) Paddy Con MacMahon. The significance of this venue is outlined by PJ Curtis:

‘It does seem that the cultural heart of the town in the 50's and '60's were the Gaiety Cinema, and Paddy Con's Ballroom...here the weekend dances featured the famous show-bands of the period, The Clipper Carlton, The Maurice Mulcahy Showband, the Donie Collins Band, the Royal Showband, The Dixies Brendan Boyer and Joe Dolan. They drew literally thousands...it was normal of a Sunday night dance to see 800-1,000 people at the dances...Solo singers such as Bridie Gallagher were also big draws there...their hit songs were being played on Radio Éireann at the time….It has been said that most of the marriages in the county began on couples meeting at Paddy Con's Dancehall in Ennis in the 50's and 60's (Personal Correspondence, Curtis Jan 2013).

Brian Dinan describes the popularity of skiffle bands among young people and draws a distinction between two popular venues; the Queens, an older venue and the New Hall (formerly Paddy Con’s) a modern dance hall:

‘A novelty at that time were the skiffle group competitions held on Sunday afternoons in the New Hall. At least five skiffle groups competed in the contests...For the more sedate dancer the Queens was the place where one could waltz to the groovy music of The Coasters. Noted members of this excellent combo were the O’Mahoneys (fiddle players) and the McMahon Brothers who could play most instruments with commendable skill’ (Dinan, 1990, p. 196).

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30 The hall was subsequently called the New Hall and the Jet Club Paddy Con MacMahon provided employment to many musicians including Joe Cooley, Sonny Murray, Jimmy Ward and Joe Ryan.
31 PJ recalls seeing his first real Rock N Roll Band there in ’58. He also remembers the American superstars Jim Reeves, Roy Orbison, The Everly Bros, Chubby Checker and many others appearing there in the early 1960's (Personal correspondence Jan. 2013).
Traditional musician, Johnny McCarthy recalls his experience performing with the local band *Sweet Rhythm*:\(^{32}\):

‘I played with them a couple of times. There was a fellow who was from Ennis in the training college with me Hugh Ensko from Connolly Villas; he was a singer and they’d be playing Gort\(^{33}\) on Sunday night in the summer, I’d go to play for a set or a Siege of Ennis.\(^{34}\) And he used to do the singing…Jimmy Kelly was the driver but he also played the sax, do you remember Denis Wylde used play the piano, Christy Mc Allister was on the trumpet, Clem Brown was on the sax but if Jimmy Kelly was on the sax he used play the fiddle I think…Tony Mahoney used play the fiddle and Micheál Wynne from one of the small lanes down Parnell St, used play the drums…It was called modern music that time. Glen Miller stuff and all that sort of stuff and that was before the big impact of rock and roll… they played occasionally in the Queens…I’d play where there was a set or a Siege of Ennis’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).\(^{35}\)

This provided Johnny with experience which was very different from that of other traditional musicians who lived in rural areas. Many of the musicians referred to by him played traditional music, but also performed other popular genres. While this may not have informed his choices in terms of musical genres, it did encourage him to continue developing his craft as a musician, and introduced him to an arena of public performance.

Although Ennis at this time was not a vibrant centre for Irish traditional music practice, generally as a county, Clare has long been considered a major stronghold of traditional Irish music and this was the case even during the 1950s. There are many factors which have contributed to this popular view of the county. Certainly the amount of traditional music played there has contributed to this reputation. The tradition has been unbroken, although much stronger in rural areas of the county until

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\(^{32}\) Accordion player, Johnny McCarthy was a Primary Teacher and Principal of Ballynacally School from 1960 until he retired in 1994. He is father of accordion player Conor McCarthy.

\(^{33}\) Gort is a town in the neighbouring County Galway and is about 20 miles from Ennis.

\(^{34}\) The Seige of Ennis, *Ionsaí na hInse*, is a popular céilí dance.

\(^{35}\) The inclusion of ceili dances is possibly due to the presence of a number of dancing schools in the town i.e. the Conlan, Costello, White and Kearney schools and from the 1960s the O’Rourke School.
the late 1960s – early 1970s. The strength of the tradition in Ennis and County Clare generally is discussed in detail in Vallely (2011, pp.131-138).

Unquestionably the outside broadcasts, particularly those of RTÉ’s Ciarán MacMathúna in the 1950s, added weight to this opinion. In his radio programmes *Ceolta Tire* (1955-70), *A Job of Journeywork* (1957-70) and *Mo Cheol Thú* he turned Clare musicians such as concertina player Mrs Crotty and fiddle players Junior Crehan and Paddy Canny into household names throughout Ireland. In particular, the concertina itself became strongly associated with Clare music; most houses were reputed to have had a concertina, and in fact the architecture of the country houses included a nook beside the open fire for the concertina. Ironically, even non-musical houses in West Clare had concertinas. My father who grew up in Kilmihil, a village in the west of the county, remembered that it was important to have one available, in case a musician visited the house. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin reiterates this point:

‘As important as a clock, kitchen utensils and other household goods, the instrument was kept in waiting for a neighbouring musician who might come in on *cuaird* and be asked to play a few tunes for a set’ (Ó hAllmhuráin, 2007).

They were very cheap instruments and could be bought in hardware shops. Throughout most of the 1900s the concertina was played by women and was often called ‘bean chairdín’, women’s accordion. Although primarily associated with women, it was Clareman Paddy Murphy who first introduced the concertina into competition at the All Ireland Fleadh in Cavan in 1954; in a miscellaneous competition, surprisingly, considering how popular the instrument now is. He was considered to have been very innovative in his playing. While most concertina players

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37 Translation of on *’cuaird’* is ‘for a visit.’
of the time played on single rows, he crossed over between rows, facilitating his ornamental style. He was very influential on many musicians including well known musician Noel Hill, who was a pupil of his.

A major factor which has contributed to the popularity of traditional music in Clare was the significant impact of céili bands in the county. According to Niall Keegan there are records of over fifty céili bands in the county, the most prominent being the Tulla and Kilfenora (2008, p.647). Both were highly successful bands at the All Ireland fleadhanna and the rivalry between them is legendary. Since the first All Ireland Fleadh held in Ennis in 1956, bands from County Clare have been awarded the largest number of first prizes.

Another instance which points to the reputation of Clare traditional music was the fact that the first LP of traditional music produced in Ireland was recorded by Clare musicians PJoe Hayes, Peadar O’Loughlin, Paddy Canny and piano accompanist Bridie Lafferty in 1959 (Keville 2000). This recording was so highly regarded that it was remastered and reproduced in CD format in 2001.

However, as already stated, the county town Ennis has not had a long line of practice in Irish traditional music and Ennis of the 21st century is far removed from that which existed in the 1950s. The town is now considered to be one of the principal strongholds of Irish traditional music practice in the world, a place where musicians from outside move to live because of the vast number of opportunities available to

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38 A ceili band is a group of musicians organised together to provide music for dancing. Typically consists of a group of ten; eight musicians playing the melody, accompanied by piano and drums. They play in unison, starting and finishing together.

39 Clare musicians generally had been particularly successful at subsequent Fleadhanna Cheoil (plural of fleadh).

40 The original title was Al Ireland Champions-Violin (1959), reissued in 2001 as An Historic Recording of Irish Traditional Music from County Clare and East Galway. The revised title is considered by Helen O’Shea (2008) as relocating the music as local music rather than as national, and reflective of the increasing interest in specialisation in addition to revering music that is old and historic.
play, listen and learn Irish traditional music. Considering the prominent position that traditional music now has in the town, it is very hard to imagine that it was not widely practiced or appreciated in what is the relatively recent past. According to well known musician Peadar O’Loughlin:\footnote{Peadar O’Loughlin (1929), an acknowledged icon of the tradition, is from Kilmaley, a village about eight miles west of Ennis. He plays flute, fiddle and pipes.}

‘Ennis wasn’t a great town for music…in the early ‘40s except Kellys, and when Joe Cooley\footnote{Accordion player Joe Cooley (1924-1973) was a charismatic person, originally from Peterswell, County Galway. He worked in Ennis for a time in the 1940s and was a member of the Tulla Ceili Band. He emigrated to the US in 1954 but returned in 1972, just before his death. During this final year people travelled long distances to hear him play. This will be referred to later chapters.} came in 1946, but before 1940 you wouldn’t be welcome with your instrument at all in Ennis’ (Personal Interview Peadar O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

Prior to 1961 music practice in the town appears to have been limited to a few musicians, many of whom had roots in rural areas. The urban rural co-dependence, referred to earlier in relation to economics, was significant in relation to the preservation and continuation of traditional music in the town, particularly up to the 1970s.

In addition, as a result of the increasing employment opportunities referred to earlier many people, including traditional musicians, returned to Ireland from abroad. However, instead of returning to their original homes in the countryside, they relocated to the newly built houses in the town of Ennis. Musician Sonny Murray, referred to above, emigrated to Cricklewood in London in the 1940s. When he returned to Ireland in the early 1950s he settled in St. Flannan’s Terrace in Ennis. His perception was similar to the above, but does recall playing with other musicians from out of town:

‘There was never much traditional music in Ennis…Christy Rochford (from County Galway) and myself we used go down where Record Rack is, that was Hickeys Pub .We used go down there on a Saturday afternoon the two of us,
and another chap the name of Tom Power (from County Galway) who used be playing music there in Hickey’s pub, just to amuse ourselves. There was no music in Ennis. They used play the fiddle’ (Personal Interview Sonny Murray Jan 2007).

While there were areas of the town where traditional music was being played, the tradition largely appears to have been maintained primarily through its position as a market town, when musicians from other places visited Ennis in this context. Sonny Murray (Personal Interview Jan 2007) remembers music sessions with Paddy Murphy (a concertina player from Kilmaley, about eight miles from town) and Mickie Hanrahan (a flute player also from Kilmaley). In chapter four I discuss how the movement of rural based traditional musicians affected the transmission process.

Many of the town pubs became associated with specific rural communities and were places where regular music sessions were held. According to the Proprietor PJ Kelly, traditional music has been played in the pub in Carmody Street since at least 1945 when his parents John Joe Kelly and Bridie Kelly (nee Clancy) bought it. This pub has the longest record of having traditional music performed in it (Personal Interview Kelly Mar 2013).

Among the musicians who visited Ennis, from outside the county, during the 1940s and early 1950s were accordion players Paddy O’Brien (1922-1991) from neighbouring County Tipperary and Joe Cooley (1924-1973), from neighbouring County Galway, both icons of traditional music. Paddy O’Brien regularly performed in Ennis as a member of the Tulla Ceili Band. He was also a frequent visitor of the

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43 Prior to this it was owned by Kate Poynton, a fiddle player and aunt of Bridie’s.
44 In terms of clientele it is frequented by people from Lissycasey, Kilmaley and Kilnamona; places associated with the owners and around eight miles west and north west of Ennis.
45 Button Accordion player Paddy O’Brien is credited with developing a legato method of playing the B/C pitched accordion which has become the standard since the 1960s. He also composed over 100 tunes. See Vallely (1999, 2011), O’Brien (2009) and Ni Chaoimh (2010). Button Accordion player Joe Cooley played the played the D/D# accordion which was very rhythmic style, involving more bellows movement than that required by the B/C instrument. He was also a very charismatic figure. See Vallely (1999, 2011) and Ni Chaoimh (2010).
McMahon family and along with Joe Cooley had a deep influence in Tony’s accordion playing. Peadar O’Loughlin recalls the music sessions with Joe Cooley:

‘Joe Cooley came to Ennis in 1946 with the Tulla Band and he lived in Ennis, and he worked for Malachy Burke Contractors from Galway, up in the houses in Circular Road, Hermitage…and he stayed with the garage Coffeys across the road from Paddy Markhams (pub) … if you met Cooley coming out from the dinner, out from Coffeys, he’d probably turn back in to get the accordion, and go across to Markhams, and not go back to work at all. But we had great nights tunes like that inside in Paddy Markhams. There was an audience of a kind, but they were regular drinkers going there...Joe that brought the music in there… That was one good thing I suppose that the scattering of musicians did is that, they brought their side of the world to us’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

Ennis born accordion player and teacher, Johnny McCarthy, although only a child at the time, remembers his uncles attending these sessions in Markhams pub:

‘My father and my uncles, anyone who was into traditional music, would go to hear Cooley at night. He had an awful impact on the whole area while he was there’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny McCarthy originally lived in Mill Street until his family moved to the newly built Hermitage area in around 1949. He recalls that his parents were interested in traditional music; his grandfather played the concertina, his father played the drums with the Fiach Rua Ceili Band and his uncles played the fiddle, and were also involved in the Brass band. He recalls having nothing in common musically with his friends. The only other musician his own age was accordion player Tony McMahon. Although he does have memories of Céilís being held for children in the Queens Hotel, his memory of secondary school in the early 1950s was, that his friends were more interested in Rock and Roll and the music of Elvis Presley:

Tony, accordion player, broadcaster, television producer, retired from RTE in 1998, lived in Upper O’Connell Street in the Turnpike, Ennis until he left in 1957 when he moved to Dublin to train as a primary teacher. Both of his parents were from the Parish of Kilmaley. His mother played the concertina and his brother Brendan also played the accordion.

People were re-housed in Hermitage, when the houses in the Lanes leading from Parnell Street to the river Fergus were demolished.

46 Tony, accordion player, broadcaster, television producer, retired from RTE in 1998, lived in Upper O’Connell Street in the Turnpike, Ennis until he left in 1957 when he moved to Dublin to train as a primary teacher. Both of his parents were from the Parish of Kilmaley. His mother played the concertina and his brother Brendan also played the accordion.

47 People were re-housed in Hermitage, when the houses in the Lanes leading from Parnell Street to the river Fergus were demolished.
‘One other experience was, there were children’s céilís held in the Queens Hotel about 1953 maybe, and all the kids went down- just a year or so before Bill Haley and the Comets and that stuff’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

He remembers the Fergus Céilí Band (Fig. 2.2), a band which played at the Maria Assumpta Hall every Sunday night. A few of its members were from the town and Johnny, even though he was only a beginner at the time, recalls performing with them:

‘I used go down playing there that time with an old friend of mine from Hermitage called Tony Mahoney who used to play the fiddle…Flan and Michael McMahon. Flan used to play the sax and he had a lovely box… Michael played the piano accordion…They played kind of Scottish music and played a lot of what was called modern music but they wouldn’t be able to manage the reels or that. They wouldn’t have the insight into the music but they did a lot of playing’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

This section has described Ennis historically, geographically and socially as it was in the 1950s. The following section focuses on two key figures who were at the core of the musical and cultural fabric of the town of Ennis, namely Ernest DeRegge and Seán Reid. Although Ernest DeRegge was influenced by gaelicism and Catholic culture, his music practice was grounded in classical art forms, which he advanced in Ennis through organising festive events, performing and teaching. Seán Reid’s approach was directly involved in the promotion of Irish traditional music and athletics. Both of these men made significant contributions to the music-cultural life of Ennis, paving the way for future developments, particularly traditional arts performance and reception.
Section Three

Motivators and Motivations: Agents of Transformation

Ernest De Regge

Ernest De Regge (1901-1958), was a major influence in the development of Church Music in Ennis and the Diocese of Killaloe.\textsuperscript{49} He was an accomplished musician, organist and composer, and much of his music was performed by the choir and broadcasted nationally on Raidió Éireann, the national broadcaster in Ireland. De Regge was also instrumental in setting up the annual Church Music Festival, which

\textsuperscript{48} Although the band was known locally by its English title, the Irish version ‘Oirfidigh Chéilidhe na Fearghusa’ is emblazoned on the bass drum using an Irish typeface, reflecting a cultural nationalist ethos. ‘Oirfidigh’ translates as ‘practitioners’ - clarified in an email by Deirdre Ni Chonghaile 12/5/2013.

\textsuperscript{49} There were two Belgian born organists associated with the Cathedral, beginning in 1859 with Charles Louis “Mons” Nono and Ernest De Regge, who was appointed in 1923.
was held in Ennis in the 1930’s. Bishop Fogarty appointed him as Music Professor at St. Flannan’s College in the town and organist-choirmaster in the Cathedral of SS Peter and Paul. In his role in St. Flannan's College he instructed future clergy of the Diocese of Killaloe in musical literacy and Gregorian Chant. Broadcasts on Raidió Éireann included Sacred Concerts 1930, 1933, 1935, 1946 (Diamond Jubilee of Bishop Fogarty), and 1947 (Mass in honour of Blessed Oliver Plunkett), in addition to concerts such as the An Tóstal in 1953 (DeRegge 2008). He had a profound influence both in terms of Church music and as a composer. The new Irish Republic was very eager to acquire and publish new Irish music and in the early 1930's De Regge, along with Micheál Ó Siochfhradha, Fr. Joseph Rogers, and Sr. Mary Albeus worked for several years adapting old Irish airs for school choirs which were published by An Gúm, the State publishing company. He also composed almost 200 works for choirs of mixed voices, songs based upon English and Irish texts, masses, motets, piano, and organ pieces. His profile grew as he won national competitions. With Ó Siochfhradha, De Regge also published a textbook *The Rudiments of Music* (1953) in both Irish and English on the teaching of music as a subject for secondary schools in the early 1940s.

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50 Ó Siochfhradha was a primary school inspector based in Ennis and a skilled violinist and tenor who won the John McCormack Medal in the Dublin Feisceoil, Fr. Rogers was Irish Professor at St. Flannan's College and Sr. Albeus was a member of the Sisters of Mercy, Ennis. An Gúm was set up in 1926 to publish Irish Literature and educational materials. It was part of the Department of Education until Foras na Gaeilge was set up in 1999. The Irish word Gúm means plan or scheme.

51 He received the Composers Competition Milligan Fox medals in 1939, 1942 and 1946; Dr. Annie Patterson Medals in 1943, 1953 for composition, and first prizes in An tOireachtas Ceol: 1943, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1947, and 1956 (De Regge 2008).
Fig. 2.2 Ernest DeRegge. (Courtesy of Ghislaine DeRegge)

Fig. 2.3 Cathedral Choir 1955-56. (Courtesy of Ghislaine DeRegge)
The highlights of the church calendar were the Midnight Mass and the High Mass at Christmas, Easter and, of course, St. Patrick's Day. Talented local singers received extensive training in the Cathedral choir, which had a major position in terms of its part in religious ceremonies, while also serving as an important social outlet for people of all ages. The choir, which often had over a hundred members, was a focal point for the young people of the town which highlights the way that Catholicism manifested itself culturally, outside of religious rituals. Although he had no direct involvement in the Ennis Franciscan Musical Society, many of its members were trained by him in the Cathedral Choir. When I interviewed former member of the choir Ita McNamara, she had this to say:

‘De Regge was very strict but he had no trouble with the kids around Ennis. We had a great time and we learned a lot. It was a great opportunity’
(Personal Interview MacNamara Dec 2011).

De Regge’s daughter Ghislaine recalls:

‘He was a second father to his students and young choir members, and always nurtured their talents; money was never a barrier to someone who had talent. He had special time for those who had to emigrate, perhaps remembering his own times in the twenties, and often took time to write to them to help them through those first lonely weeks, usually in England’

He taught piano and organ to many, who subsequently became teachers themselves; my own biography is connected to him, (my mother Dympna Cotter -née Lernihan

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52 Talented local singers received extensive training and in particular the voices of Eva Meehan (alto), Amby Costello (soprano- mother of Grammy nominated singer Maura O’Connell), Pearl Tierney, John Murphy, Aiden Tuttle (both tenor), Stephen Touhy, George Meehan (both bass) and Liam Walker (alto) were highlights of this era.

53 The Cathedral and Friary Church choirs did not only serve to provide music for religious ceremonies, but also acted as a club where people socialised, attended functions, went on day trips.

54 Ita MacNamara née McMahon, from Tulla and originally from Upper O’Connell St in the Turnpike area of the town, is from a well know musical family. Sister to accordion players Tony (lives in Dublin) and Brendan (lives in County Waterford). She is mother to concertina player Mary and accordion player Andrew.
and my Auntie Mary O’Neill -nee Lernihan, from Kilmihil, a village about 20 miles west of Ennis, were both students of Ernest De Regge’s). His daughter Ghislaine recalls:

‘From May onwards Ernest gave piano lessons in his study in Ashline, whereas in winter he taught in a studio over Nono’s Printers in O’Connell Street. Mary Lernihan came by bus from Kilmihil to Ashline for lessons… studying for the ALCM Diploma, and her licentiate from the London College of Music… Dympna, her younger sister … came in from time to time. She also received her ALCM Diploma. When De Regge was considering starting a music school, he encouraged Dympna to become a music teacher there. Dympna hesitated, knowing that when a girl got married she wouldn’t dream of going to work. At that time a wife’s having a job was an awful insult to her husband, implying that he wasn’t able to support her. My father argued that babies were not expensive until they reached nine or ten, but after that stage she would be glad of the additional income. Later on when she had an established clientele of music students, Dympna was happy to have taken his advice, because she enjoyed teaching so much’ (Personal Correspondence De Regge, Mar 2013). 55

Clearly, De Regge was not only Dympna Cotter’s piano teacher, but he was also a mentor, whose advice motivated her to pursue piano teaching as a career option. She recalls this experience:

‘I remember him as a person who understood and loved children. I looked forward to my weekly lessons and was quite prepared to put in the hours of practice he demanded; partly because I enjoyed music, but also because my liking for him helped me to try to please him. I admired him greatly and hoped I would someday be able to play the way he played. He was a very dedicated teacher and was very encouraging and generous with praise when he met with cooperation. He was generous in other ways too; gave me a small money gift at the end of each term for the best performer in each grade. I especially liked playing the grand piano in Ashline as we approached exam time. The offer of fruit for the journey home on a warm June day was most acceptable’ (Dympna Cotter cited in Personal Memoirs Ghislaine DeRegge, Mar 2013).

55 Dympna Cotter nee Lernihan taught piano in her home from 1957 until 2011. Before she married she taught throughout west Clare (Kilrush, Kilkee, Spanish Point, Miltown Malbay, Kildysart) travelling on the West Clare Railway or by horse and trap driven by her father James. Many of her pupils were traditional musicians e.g. Angela and Ita Crehan, daughters of musician composer Junior Crehan, the Culloo and Corry families from Tulla.
De Regge contributed in many ways to the general life of the town. When he lived in Ashfield House in the Kilrush Road he kept hens. He taught piano both here and also in Nono’s in O’Connell Street. During the 1950s De Regge opened a jewellery shop in O’Connell Street, Ennis, and a music shop in Limerick to supplement his income. He combined his passion for collecting paintings and antiques with trips to the Dublin auction houses, where he bought pianos for refurbishing and resale. He was among the eight who were tragically killed when the floor collapsed at a furniture auction, organised by him, in Carmody’s Hotel, Ennis in January 15th 1958. This tragedy was a major event in the town and many families were touched by it. In the context of music De Regge’s death was a significant loss to the town. However, his legacy remained and most crucially, through his work he created a network of music teachers and ensured that receptivity to musical activities in the town, as well as inclucating a desire for music and music learning in the town.

Seán Reid
Seán Reid (1907-1978) was born in Castlefin, in County Donegal but also lived for many years in Castlederg, County Tyrone. He was a piper, fiddle player and piano player, and a catalyst for musical and sporting activities both at local and national level. He played a very significant part in the preservation and promotion of piping and had a pivotal role in the formation and development of national organisations such as Cumann na bPiobairí (the old Pipers Club), Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Na Piobairí Uilleann and Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy. Seán Reid was also a founder of Shannon Imports and The Ennis Trading Company (Spellissy 1996, p.58). Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy (Willie Clancy Summer School) was founded in 1973. It is dedicated to the memory of the piper Willie Clancy following his death in 1972. It is held annually in July in Miltown Malbay, County Clare and is the biggest and the longest running event dedicated to the transmission of Irish traditional music.
member of the Tulla Céilí Band.58 His contribution to Irish traditional music has been described as phenomenal and according to flute player and member of Na Piobairí Uilleann (The Uilleann Piper’s Association), Mick O’Connor ‘He was a human dynamo, involving himself in a myriad of activities, not all exclusive to Irish music, and his talents were diverse’ (O’Connor 1991, 125). His interest in furthering communication between musicians from outside County Clare is evidenced particularly in his encouragement of Northern Irish fiddle players, Protestant Orangemen, (the Derry and Antrims Fiddlers Association) to become members of Comhaltas, which was quite radical at the time (Vallely 2011, p.575). He was committed to the possibility of Irish traditional music as a bridge across political divisions and in order to maintain inclusivity he promoted and fought to maintain the organisation as non political. Regretfully for Seán Reid, Comhaltas changed in this regard during the 1970s (Private Reid family recordings of Seán by Barry Taylor 1975), and this topic of alignment of Irish traditional music with republican concerns is referred to in chapter three. Acknowledging Seán Reid’s contribution, In 1993 then Uachtarán na hÉireann (President of Ireland) Mary Robinson paid tribute to him, as she launched Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy (Willie Clancy Summer School):

‘One of the people who reconciled all the traditions in this country, North and South, Protestant and Catholic, Nationalist and Unionist, by means of music. He did it with the fiddle in one hand and pipes in the other’ (Clare Champion 9/7/ 1993).

He was one of the most important influences on traditional musicians not only in County Clare but also nationally until his death. This view is supported by Gearóid Ó hAllmhrúin:

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58 The Tulla Céilí Band is one of the most popular céilí bands; established in 1945/6. A céilí band is a dance band comprising of up to ten musicians (Vallely, 2011 pp. 45-49).
Reid’s inspiring vision, in-depth knowledge and uncompromising tenacity contributed to a myriad of cultural movements which influenced the course of Irish traditional music from the 1930s to the present day’ (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998, p.156).

Reid lived in Ennis from 1937 when he began working as a Civil Engineer for Clare County Council. Along with his musical interests he was also heavily involved in athletics in County Clare, and was an avid reader and book collector. Prior to the setting up of Comhaltas in the county in 1954, there was a lot of musical activity, particularly as a result of Seán’s relocation to Clare. He began to organise sessions, and because he owned a car, he was in a position to bring musicians from the East and West of the county together; sometimes even bringing them to Dublin for recording sessions. Piper Martin Talty, from Miltown Malbay in the western coastline of the County recalls:

‘In the 1930s musicians who lived twenty miles apart might never have met each other due to lack of transport…I remember him taking Willie Clancy and myself to Bodyke to meet Martin Rochford and Paddy O’Donoghue, pipers for whom he great respect and he felt that we should get to know each other, even though we lived fifty miles apart. From his home in Ennis he acted as a voluntary co-ordinator for all the musicians in the county’ (Talty 1978, p.118).

Similarly, Séamus Connolly, fiddler player, teacher and now the Director of Irish Music and Dance Programmes in Boston College recalls Seán Reid collecting him in Killaloe to bring him to sessions and on other occasions driving him to Fleadhanna, or to perform with the Tulla Ceili Band (Personal Interview Connolly Jan 2008).  The

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59 Reid was one of the founders of both the Ennis and County Clare Community Games, and was involved in the Marian Athletic Club. The Community Games Organisation a voluntary organisation, operates in local communities throughout Ireland, providing opportunities for children and young people to develop in a healthy and safe environment through experiencing a wide range of sporting and cultural activities [http://www.communitygames.ie/index.php/about-us](http://www.communitygames.ie/index.php/about-us) accessed 17/5/2013, at 12.11pm.

61 Reid was the principal person to communicate with Raidió Eireann in relation to the radio broadcasts with the Tulla Ceili Band, of which he was a founder member.
significance of the role that Seán Reid played in organising sessions and bringing musicians together is also highlighted by musician Peadar O’Loughlin:

‘Seán Reid, I suppose, the man who kept it alive Lord Rest him’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

Fig. 2.4 Seán Reid pictured with his morris minor in Miltown Malbay, County Clare.

Séamus MacMathúna, flute player and singer, originally from County Clare now living in Dublin, was very active in Comhaltas in Ennis during the 1960s where he served as Runaí (Secretary) of the Clare County Board of Comhaltas. He acknowledges the determination and huge contribution made by Seán Reid in bringing musicians from the East and West of the County together before Comhaltas was formed in County Clare, which he maintained was possibly the principal reason why Comhaltas was not established in Clare until 1954. He recalls Seán Reid as:

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62 Séamus MacMathúna (1939) worked for most of his career as Timire Cheoil (Music Organiser) for Comhaltas at their headquarters in Dublin.
‘…a kind of a man who organised everything in Clare, not just in the start of Comhaltas, but before Comhaltas started…of course he had a car and he was mad for music…he would have told the lads in East Clare about Willie Clancy and made the connection…he was in touch with the Pipers Club before Comhaltas meetings at national level…he was like one of the twelve apostles…he was there from the start…getting musicians together’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

Although the tradition would appear to have been flourishing, in fact it was in a vulnerable position, as the economic climate had taken its toll. Musicians from all areas of Clare had emigrated, particularly to the large urban areas of Great Britain and the US. Seán was involved in actively encouraging people to be involved in Comhaltas. Séamus also maintains that the approach of Seán Reid and the Clare musicians essentially represented the ethos of Comhaltas through the 1950s:

‘The crowd that came from Clare, like Seán Reid and the lads from Milltown-(Martin) Talty, Jimmy Ward and them, they were the essential core of what Comhaltas was about’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

Fr. John Hogan, a fiddle student of Jack Mulkere, referred to in chapter four in his role as organiser of St. Flannan’s Céilí band, recalls that the first time he ever heard of Comhaltas was when Seán visited a class of Jack Mulkere’s in Crusheen (a village about eight miles outside Ennis). Fr. Hogan was a student of Mulkere’s in the late 1930s. His part in promoting traditional music, particularly in St Flannan’s College is discussed in chapter four.

Seán located sets of pipes for promising pipers, and his generosity of spirit and encouragement of musicians is evidenced in a special way to musician Peadar O’Loughlin, when he gave him gifts of two sets of pipes after he noticed his potential to be a good piper. Peadar describes his first attempt to play uileann pipes:

‘I put on Reid’s concert pitch pipes and I knew ‘twas not much different to a flute anyway. There is a big difference doing the right thing, but the notes

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64 Fr. Hogan was a student of Mulkere’s in the late 1930s. His part in promoting traditional music, particularly in St Flannan’s College is discussed in chapter four.
were the same, except the note in the back for the thumb, but I started some bit of a tune, and I was making a mess of it, but knowing I was doing a mess, but ‘twas coming around and Seán Reid turned over to me and said ‘you’ll play pipes’…Poor Seán believed in everyone’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

He gave him the second set of pipes, as a wedding present when he married Beta.

Seán’s message on the wedding card was, ‘I hope you’ll both be very happy; I mean yourself and Beta (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008). The almost missionary role and personal cost to Seán Reid is borne out by Peadar O’Loughlin:

‘Music cost him a lot. He was always going somewhere and if you mentioned such a one somewhere, you had to be brought there…He was all his life doing that, even up to a short time before he died he would be doing it…Reid was an amazing man. Only for Seán Reid we’d never have got anywhere’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

This level of commitment cost him financially, professionally and personally throughout his lifetime. He was denied the opportunity to be County Engineer because of the attitude of his employers. His musical activities were frowned upon by his employers who objected to him ‘in his exalted position as acting county engineer playing with a céilí band,’ questioning how he could have control ‘when he is meeting every Tom, Dick and Harry at the crossroads’ (Private Reid family recordings of Seán by Barry Taylor 1975). Seán recalls travelling with the Tulla Céilí Band, and in order to comply with a directive from the Clare County council not to perform with them, he therefore sat at the back of the hall. Nonetheless, the County Manager heard that he was present, and reprimanded him by denying him the position of Acting County Engineer:

‘He made another man Acting County Engineer instead, which was a heavy financial loss to me anyway and it certainly was an eye-opener to me…The manager told me that the inspector told him that he certainly can’t play with the Tulla Céilí Band and be County Engineer…it’s doubtful if he can even retain his position as Chief Assistant County Engineer and play with a Céilí
Band...I wasn’t sacked and the band went from strength to strength and we won championships and so forth. That was 1949’ (Reid in a Private Reid family recording made by Taylor 1975).

Along with outlining the professional and economic implications of his involvement in traditional music, this points to a very strong bias against Irish traditional music during this period. Furthermore, his family life was surely hindered by the constant flow of musicians coming and going from his home. Séamus MacMathúna, referred to earlier in this chapter, cited by Mick O’Connor, recalls having access to a room in the Reid home:

‘For four or five years there were two keys. I had one and Seán had the other. I had access to this room, his wife and family weren’t allowed in. It was literally cramped. You got inside the door and squeezed in. There were pipes, pieces of pipes, old gramophones, piles of records, and, of course, an incredible collection of books…There were people coming at different times learning…I remember one particular fellow who wasn’t good, and Seán wasn’t interested in accordions at all. Really, I think he found it nearly impossible to turn down anybody who was interested in music or sport’ (O’Connor 1991, p. 131).

Throughout his lifetime, Seán Reid worked tirelessly for the promotion of traditional music. In a tribute to him following his death in 1978, Mick O’Connor reflected:

‘His sudden death on the Whit weekend of 1978 removed an influential and gentle personality from the community of traditional musicians. Seán was the catalyst for musical and sporting activities at local and national level. His humanity, tolerance and vision were greatly appreciated by his many friends and acquaintances. He was a shy, humble man with unending energy who from his house in Ennis acted as a voluntary co-ordinator for all the musicians in the county. Seán was a delightful character, with almost saint-like qualities, and many people, particularly in County Clare, still recount numerous anecdotes testifying to his popularity’ (O’Connor 1991, p.131).

65 This is in stark contrast to the present position of the Clare County Council e.g. through the Arts Office, it initiated a concert series in 2005 called the Riches of Clare. It also granted civic honours to a number of traditional musicians from the county including in 2008 fiddle player Martin Hayes, 2009 accordion player Sharon Shannon, 2010 singer Robbie McMahon, 2011 the Kilfenora Céili Band. In addition the Clare County Library has created an interactive on line resource focused on traditional music of County Clare. It also supports many festivals held throughout the county.
Though it would appear that their paths did not cross to any degree, the drive of DeRegge and Reid, in distinct ways working along with the community, promoting two key events, An Tóstal and Fleadh Cheoil 1956, helped stimulate the transformation of Ennis, a core point of this thesis. The significance of these two events is expressed by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin:

‘There was a sense of cultural energy that was generated by those two events, particularly by the All Ireland Fleadh. I think in the years after the All Ireland Fleadh, there was a sense of anticipation and self awareness, particularly in terms of music and dancing’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin, July 2008).

An Tóstal

An Tóstal (pageant) was the name of a series of nationwide festivals which were inaugurated in 1952 by Seán Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce.66 The aim of these festivals was to improve the national economy and to increase prosperity. In January 1953 the Clare Champion, the weekly newspaper for County Clare, included an announcement about the ‘Ireland-at-Home’ festival which was to start on April 5th. The events in the weeklong countrywide festival were immersed in the prevailing culture of the time including:

‘pageants, games, marches, military and other displays, musical festivals, decorative effects, drama, horse jumping and a number of other features’ (Clare Champion 3/1/1953).

66 Although it gave rise to many festivals including the Cork International Choral Festival, founded in 1954, and the Dublin Theatre festival (Pine 2005), Drumshambo, County Leitrim is now the only centre where An Tóstal survives.
This was the first mention of An Tóstal; a national event to promote tourism through Fógra Fáilte, the State tourism agency. While its aim was to boost the economy, it also aimed to give a significant boost to morale throughout the country.

Fig. 2.5 An advertisement for An Tóstal (Clare Champion 3/1/1953).

Events were held as fundraisers for the main event e.g. the first official Tóstal dance was held in Ennis at the New Hall on the 11th of January, 1953. The Clare Champion reported on the arrival of the courier who brought ‘Tóstal Tidings to 56 cities, towns and villages throughout Ireland’. When the courier arrived in Ennis the Tricolour (the Irish flag) was flying on the Courthouse, and ‘strains of Irish music were heard from

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67 Fógra Fáilte was replaced by Bord Fáilte Éireann (Welcome Board of Ireland) created under the Tourist Traffic Act 1955, to promote and develop tourism in the Republic of Ireland. It is nowadays called Fáilte Ireland (Ireland’s welcome).
the Escort car fitted with amplifying equipment and musical records,’ (not live music as would be typical for public events in Ennis since the 1970s). This was Clare’s first official Tóstal ceremony.

This example of the link between the nationalism, Irish language and Catholicism was further demonstrated later on that day at a ‘Legion of Mary Dance and a social in the New Hall.’ According to the local newspaper 68:

‘Two bands performed and the Choir from the Cathedral sang carols and choruses. At the end everyone knelt for the rosary’. (Clare Champion 10/1/1953)

The following image was taken at the official opening of an Tóstal in Ennis. As part of the ceremony, performed by Bishop Rodgers, he blessed the flags. Also in the image are Fr. Queally and Fr. Cuddy and three local altar boys.

![Image of the official opening of An Tóstal](image)

Fig. 2.6 The official opening of An Tóstal (Clare Champion 11/4/1953).

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68 The Legion of Mary is a lay Catholic organisation founded in Dublin in 1921. [www.legionofmary.ie](http://www.legionofmary.ie)
Ernest De Regge was chosen as Chairman of the Arts and Cultural Section of an Tóstal in Ennis. He organised the first Celebrity Recital by Cork classical pianist Charles Lynch. In line with the general nationalist spirit of the time, April 23rd was designated an All Gaelic Day, when everyone was encouraged to speak Irish and to attend a special Céili. Ironically, in contrast, as these events were being promoted, there was a campaign against holding unlicensed house dances.69

Again, the pervasive influence of Nationalism and Roman Catholicism is clear in the way the festival came to an end: ‘with the celebration of solemn High Mass in the ruins of the old Franciscan Abbey, followed by a colourful procession through the town and the taking of the salute by An Taoiseach, Mr De Valera from a specially constructed platform at the top of Parnell Street’ (Clare Champion 3/5/1953). The report also refers to the attendance of other clergy and politicians who attended. In his speech DeValera expresses surprise that tourism was becoming an important industry for Ireland and an Tóstal emerged as a result of this realisation. In the report it states:

‘The feature of the festival that pleased him most was what it had done for the people it had given them a feeling of confidence in themselves and showed what could be secured by cooperation’(Clare Champion 3/5/1953, p.1).

The success of this festival paved the way for what was to be a pivotal moment in the Comhaltas movement in County Clare and in Ennis in particular; Fleadh Cheoil 1956.

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69 Following the passing of the Public Dance Halls Act in 1935 people were summoned and fined for holding house dances without a licence, or even merely for attending them. Up to this time, music was principally performed in houses and at crossroads dances. Following this Act it became necessary to obtain a licence in order to hold a dance. Violation of this resulted in criminal charges.
Fleadh Cheoil 1956

The second major event to have an impact on the general reception of Irish traditional music in the town, was the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil (music festival) of 1956.\textsuperscript{71} It was organised by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas), a national organisation formed in 1951 for the promotion of Irish traditional music. Since then it has been very influential in this regard, promoting Irish music and dance culture not only to Irish audiences but worldwide.

The 1956 fleadh held in Ennis was the first major gathering of traditional musicians at any single event, and it attracted musicians and lovers of Irish traditional music from all over Ireland. From this point forward Ennis began to garner its reputation as a prime centre for traditional music and in terms of traditional music, by the 1960s there was a creative energy and buoyancy.\textsuperscript{72} The following lyrics from the song *The Fleadh Down in Ennis* written by Robbie McMahon (1926-2012) capture the atmosphere of the fleadh:

‘They came from the North and they came from the East,  
From the West and the South ‘twas a thriller to see;  
With fiddles and bagpipes and piccolos too,  
And drum sticks to keep them in order’ (Robbie McMahon).

\textsuperscript{71} A Fleadh Cheoil translates as *festival of music*. Nowadays, the Fleadh, organised by CCE, revolves around competitions in music, song, language and dance at the local County, provincial and All-Ireland levels. It also includes music sessions, concerts, céilí and set dancing. The location changes every two years and it now attracts competitors and spectators from all corners of the globe.

\textsuperscript{72} In 2011 up to 12,000 performers participate at the Fleadh, with estimated attendance of over 250,000 people. \url{http://comhaltas.ie} It attracts people from all corners of the globe.
It would appear that the principal positions in the fleadh committee were held by local businessmen, and not by the rank and file members of Comhaltas. Locally at least, it would appear that Comhaltas were willing to engage with people who had the expertise necessary to organise a festival of this size. In the related newspaper article, the fleadh was titled ‘All-Ireland Musical Festival’ rather than Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, possibly pointing to the novel value of this event (this was just the sixth such fleadh).

The Fleadh Committee comprised of a number of sub committees; Finance, Parade, Pageant, Concerts Committee, Accommodation, Decorations, Advertising and Ladies Catering. In addition, the Patron of the Fleadh was Dr. Rodgers, Bishop of Killaloe, who performed the official opening of the event (Fig. 2.9). The three day Fleadh took place on Whit Weekend 1956 (19-21st of May) and comprised of competitions for
traditional instruments, open air dancing, céilís, concerts, a historical parade, a pageant a lecture and concerts (Fig. 2.10).

Fig 2.9 Dr. Rodgers Bishop of Killaloe opening the Fleadh at Cusack Park, Ennis
(Clare Champion 26/5/1956, p.5)

Fig. 2.10 Fleadh Programme (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.6).
The highlight for many including Bridie Byrnes, was the céilí band competition. She describes the occasion:

It was lovely, just outside of Cusack Park, the two bands played on top of a lorry (Tulla and Kilfenora). It was just unbelievable’ (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012).

There was some discussion surrounding the inclusion of set dancing, which had a very strong tradition in the county. An article contained in the Clare Champion on the 19/5/1956, refers to allowing set dancing to occur on a limited basis during the fleadh. The ethos of the Gaelic League which frowned upon set dancing, considering it foreign in origin, instead, favoured choreographed dance forms, is clearly reflected in this attitude i.e. limited permission was granted allowing sets to be danced at two of the five céilís and also at the outdoor events:

‘as a concession to the people of Clare and Galway, the bulk of whom are not familiar with the standard ceilidhe dances as taught by Conradh na Gaedhilge, but are ardent votaries of an endless variety of sets as danced in country houses. The National Executive (Comhaltas) have ruled that this is not to be taken as a precedent for future fleadhanna, and are emphatic that no music is
to be played for waltzes as this would be contrary to our national dignity on the occasion of a great festival specially dedicated to our native music and culture. An Chomhaltas does not object to waltzes as such, but feels that there is a time and a place for everything and that Whit Weekend 1956, Ennis, is neither the time or place’ (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.3).

Nationalist spirit came strongly to the fore in an article written by P S Ó Moinseall, Honorary Secretary of Comhaltas. In an item titled *The Value of our Musical Heritage: Few People are Aware of it* he states:

‘The primary purpose of nationality is to inspire, combine and elevate the people of a nation for their common good and their common protection. It is only by utilising what is best and most noble in National language, history, tradition, music, literature, art, games, material effort and other national factors and elements that nationality can do this. These forces contain the chief connecting records that nations have with their past. Each of them in itself and in its own way, can be mad to play and definite part in promoting national cohesion’ (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.6).

He promoted a nationalist spirit but in addition continuing on a defensive tone, he was anti what he perceived as the promotion of ‘internationalism’:

‘What an all embracing term. But it is a simple altruism that we cannot be international unless we are national first’ (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.6).

Following on, referring to ‘the twin virtues, the two fundamental forces of humanity; religion and nationality,’ Ó Moinseall uses very inflammatory language, and is very anti-British and anti-American culture. He speaks about tyranny, suppression, ‘nationality being brutally attacked’ and criticises those who considered Ireland as being dependant on England saying that ‘Ireland in the past always had her soldier sons ready to die for her when the call went out.’ He continued the article making the call ‘All of us, however, at this present moment can play our part in the work of undoing England’s spiritual conquest, and save the soul of Ireland from eternal damnation’ (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.6). In a similar article in the same edition
of the newspaper, Brian Ó Gealagáin Leas-Cathaoirleach (Vice Chairman) of
Comhaltas referred to the threat to Irish traditional music of being:

‘submerged under the cheap superficiality of so-called modernism and become
part and parcel of the English way of life or the 49th state of America’ (Clare
Champion 19/5/1956, p.4).

Both Ó Moinseall and Ó Gealagáin were from the Ard Comhairle (National
Executive) of Comhaltas, and their views were far removed from what was interesting
Comhaltas at local level. The report in the Clare Champion in the week following the
fleadh, written by Kevin Vaughan, Chairman of the Fleadh committee, contained
none of the rhetoric of the Comhaltas officials of the previous week. He simply:

‘…praised the people of Ennis, who, he said had created the proper
atmosphere for the Festival with their friendliness and good will. No
committee could create this atmosphere, it had to come from the people
themselves. Ennis had proved itself to be a hospitable town’ (Clare Champion
25/6/1956, p.3).

Speaking about the effect of the Fleadh in Ennis Peadar O’Loughlin maintains the
‘Fleadh brought a lot of people into the town and I think the taste it left behind them
stayed there (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008). He also valued it as an
opportunity to meet new musicians: ‘That was one thing that the early fleadh did. You
met great players and they weren’t there for competitions; they were there to meet
people’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

There were obvious economic benefits in holding the fleadh. According to
local County Waterford newspaper the Dungarvan Leader, Ennis was reported as
having had 15,000 visitors who spent £60,000 in the town (6/6/1956).\(^73\) In the same

\(^73\) The article was primarily focussed on a meeting between the local Comhaltas organisation in
Dungarvan with the County Council to garner their support in holding the next fleadh in Dungarvan.
Their bid was successful and Fleadh 1957 was held there.
newspaper a discussion of the aftermath of the fleadh in Ennis, which took place at the Comhaltas Convention in Longford, is reported:

‘This was the most successful…an outstanding event culturally, socially and financially, and was a headline for all future fleadhanna’ (Dungarvan Leader 6/6/1956)

Ref. 2.12 An advertisement by Ernest De Regge promoting his music shop for the weekend of the Fleadh (Clare Champion 19/5/1956, p.6).

Another positive impression comes from PJ Curtis. He recalls his experience, mentioning key musicians who would soon be in the national eye:

‘My own first contact with traditional music in Ennis came when as a twelve year old lad. I cycled to Ennis to see some of the now famous Fleadh of 1956. While there I witnessed my very first set of uilleann pipes; being played by Seán Reid; and I was stunned by the sound and the instrument itself. That's a memory that has never left me. I also heard Paddy Canny play and of course a very young Tony McMahon’ (Personal Correspondence Curtis Jan 2013).

It was against this backdrop that the organisation Comhaltas was formed and progressed in Ennis. The Fleadh benefitted from the success of an Tóstal, and was considered a triumph both culturally and economically, and paved the way for a positive future both for Comhaltas and for the town of Ennis. Clearly, change did not

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74 The Ennis Branch itself was not formed until 1958. This topic is dealt with in detail in chapter three.
just come about by chance, but was triggered by conditions which were created over
time.

In this chapter, focussing upon two key people and two key events, I
contextualised Ennis historically, socially and musically, revealing the conditions
which spurred on change in terms of the reception and practice of Irish traditional
music in the town. I also demonstrated how embroiled the two forces of Nationalism
and Roman Catholicism were in the social practices in Ennis. This is especially
important for the coming chapters because though the ideology of Comhaltas and the
Roman Catholic Church obviously shaped the experiences of those setting up and
delivering Irish music classes, there is clear evidence that individuals operated in their
own ways within such organisations and belief systems, particularly someone like
Seán Reid, who saw music as transcending religious affiliation and did not want to
exclude those from Northern traditions.

In chapter three I examine the two key institutions, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí
Éireann and the Clare Vocational Education Committee, focussing on their roles,
independent and joint, in furthering the practice of traditional music in Ennis,
particularly through the transmission of musical knowledge in a structured way. I
look at how the classes were formed, the nature of the teaching and learning, and the
motivation behind these models of transmission, which in time would lead to a public
performance context for traditional music, through a new wave of young musicians, in
the town of Ennis.
CHAPTER THREE

THE INSTITUTIONALISATION OF THE TRANSMISSION OF IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN ENNIS

‘So many men who were geniuses worked away in solitude and their hard-won knowledge and skill died with them. If we are to succeed this must not be allowed to continue’.1

In chapter two the cultural organisation Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas) was presented in the context of its role in the Irish traditional music festival, Fleadh Cheoil 1956. This chapter deals with a new phase in its growth, its conscious strategic development in the town of Ennis, and the manner in which it was responsible for the initiation of the transmission of musical knowledge in a structured way. As will be outlined, the age profile of this organisation’s members illustrates that it did not as yet include many young musicians. The approach of setting up formal classes therefore, became a vehicle not only for the transmission of musical knowledge, a key objective of Comhaltas, but it also became a significant mechanism for increasing youth membership, which in turn facilitated a movement from the initial aspirations of preservation and revival towards one of promotion. This goes some way to answer the question posed by Kari Veblen (1991, p.188) as to why an organisation would assume the role of transmitting traditional music rather than the formal education system.

In this chapter therefore, I look at a new and innovative structured approach taken by the Ennis branch of Comhaltas to secure new membership, brought about in cooperation with the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The VEC model of education, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly, provided a state system of continuation and technical education, primarily offering courses of a practical nature. The cooperative approach between the Comhaltas and the VEC was the first of its kind, and was subsequently replicated in other counties. In general up to this point, similar classes were established in other counties following the success of those in County Clare. In Kerry Nicky McAuliffe was appointed to teach traditional music in 1970, and has been doing so since then. This was as a result of an approach by Jerry Keane, Reactaire (Administrator) of Comhaltas at the time to the VEC in Kerry. Although this was done through the Adult Education system it was not confined to adults or night classes. Following on the example set by County Clare classes were held in primary schools sometimes during the School day or after school hours (Personal Communication McAuliffe Dec 2009). A similar scheme was established in County Tipperary in the early 1970s, where classes were taught by accordion player Paddy O’Brien, later joined by his daughter Eileen (Personal Interview Eileen O’Brien May 2013).
traditional music had been transmitted in a less structured way outside of the classroom. In terms of Irish traditional music practice, as experienced by the members of Comhaltas and others, learning was largely done in a social context and locally. I conclude that the Comhaltas /VEC scheme, while based in school buildings, and embracing elements of institutional practice, was not rigid and sealed, and both the teachers and the VEC developed a modus operandi that allowed them to function together, without involving any major compromise on either part. The VEC, whose raison d'etre was education, and Comhaltas who over time became increasingly conscious of this form of transmission, worked together, adapting along the way, and thus created a successful model which was widely adopted.

In relation to the particular Comhaltas/VEC collaboration, I draw on the work of Miller (2011) and Olstrum (1995) who examine the concept of institutional structures, Henry (1989), Fleming (2004) and Ní Fhuartháin (2011) whose work relates specifically to the Comhaltas organisation, and McCarthy (1999) whose work relates to Irish educational institutions, particularly as they related to the transmission of music. I consider how Comhaltas, particularly the teachers who were Comhaltas members, negotiated the demands of the VEC institutional processes. In relation to Comhaltas itself, I draw on Wenger’s concept of Community of Practice (1998), and conclude that while the organisation at national level functioned in many respects like the VEC, at local level it operated more as a Community of Practice. In line with Wenger’s concept, the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas was a social community, which not only shared a common interest, but also engaged in and developed shared activities. It emerged during the 1950s, and was sustained as a result of meaningful practice.

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3 Examples of formal and informal systems will be referenced later in chapter four.
4 This topic is outlined in chapters four and five. In the wider county, as the scheme developed, national school buildings were also used where there was no VEC school in the locality.
which in the first instance was aimed at preserving Irish traditional music. Although at national level, from 1968 a number of people were employed in fulltime paid positions, at local level in Ennis, it was run entirely by volunteers, and so was constantly in flux. In this respect alone it was different to the VEC, who were in paid positions. The Vocational Education Committee comprised of fourteen members including local elected politicians, and a Chairman.\(^5\)

In this chapter I draw from primary materials from a variety of sources; interviews I conducted with teachers and member of Comhaltas, from documents such as personal papers and diaries, and in particular from the rich archival resources of minutes of meetings from County Clare VEC. I also draw from Seán Reid’s private papers, given that Reid was a central figure in the promotion of traditional music in County Clare and nationally (see chapter two). These documents bring the historical moment to life in giving an insight into the workings of the partnership with Comhaltas and the VEC, and in establishing the key protagonists and drawing attention to their agendas.

The chapter is divided into three sections dealing with moving towards the classroom, the movement in and out of school classrooms and facets of institutionalisation respectively. Section one, which deals with the establishment of the classes, is divided into three parts. Firstly, I examine the contexts for the teaching and learning of traditional music which existed prior to the Comhaltas/VEC class. Secondly, I introduce the two institutions which were principally involved in the transmission of traditional music through formal educational means. Thirdly, and

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\(^5\) The 1960 committee consisted of the Chairman Rev. PJ Canon Vaughan, nine members of Clare County Council, two members of Ennis Urban Council, one national teacher and a member of the Christian Brothers religious order (VEC Minutes 8/1/ 1960).
finally, I examine their respective roles in the setting up of the first formal class in April 1961.

In section two, I examine two developments which stemmed from the success of the Comhaltas/VEC classes. Firstly, the work of the school teachers, who attended these classes, is investigated. These teachers in turn generated new music programmes in their respective local primary and secondary schools, providing access to traditional music practice to their students, many of whom would unlikely have heard traditional music in their homes. Secondly, I highlight the emergence of new teaching and learning contexts, including irregular classrooms such as pubs and musicians living rooms.

Section three relates to the institutional processes that were an essential part of the VEC educational system. I first discuss the training programmes which were initiated for the teaching of traditional music, which arose over time as the demand for classes grew with a corresponding need for more teachers. In addition, I consider the administrative duties and new aspects of classroom management, which the traditional musicians had to undertake as part of their teaching positions.

I conclude by arguing that the emergence of the formalisation of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis through educational means, although given State support through the VEC, was in fact a community led development, rather than one imposed from outside. This joint approach of Comhaltas and the VEC was the first of its kind, in terms of the promotion of Irish traditional music.$^{6}$ By facilitating a learning experience for the community, the initiative also inspired school teachers to

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$^{6}$ Soon after its foundation in 1900, Cumann na bPiobairí (the Pipers Club) Dublin held classes for the teaching of traditional music and song. Classes were also carried out by the Pipers clubs in Cork and Limerick (Ó Súilleabháin 1981, pp. 34-5).
teach in the institutions where they were employed, a move which had an effect far beyond the classroom.

Section One: Moving towards the Classroom

This section describes the movement of transmission of Irish traditional music from the existing contexts, to a new classroom based system within an educational institution. It also presents the two bodies, Comhaltas and the VEC and outlines their roles in the initiation and progressions of the scheme in Ennis from 1961 to 1980.

Existing Contexts for the Teaching and Learning of Traditional Music

Music in Ireland published in 1952, edited by Aloys Fleischmann was published on the suggestion of the Music Teachers Association in Cork. The purpose of the book was to document the condition of music in Ireland. It addressed the subject under three headings; music and the institutions, the profession of music and music and the public. He drew attention to the lack of availability of general music education in schools. In considering the introduction of new contexts in the teaching of Irish traditional music, it is important to reference the contexts for transmission of musical knowledge which existed in the period leading up to this. Marie McCarthy (1999) details the educational and various other systems and structures which existed in Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. She also details the challenges of developing a system of music education during the already challenging process of

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7 The book does not reference Irish traditional music as an instrumental tradition but in terms of choral arrangements of Gaelic songs. The value of ‘folk music’ is discussed by Seán Neeson, lecturer in Irish Music at University College Cork (1952, pp. 54-58).
constructing a new nation state. McCarthy, outlining how the nationalist agenda emphasised the revival of the Irish language and the promotion of Catholic Church music, argues how this is evident to varying degrees in the music curriculum of both Primary and Second level schools (1999 pp.108-138). Although singing, particularly in the Irish language, was promoted in schools, in terms of instrumental music there appears to have been a discriminatory indifference with regards to traditional music, in that the educational institutions and academies were seen to actively promote European Art music, to the neglect of the indigenous music of Ireland. McCarthy outlines the key issues:

‘Although traditional music was legitimised in official policy and education in the new state, social and economic factors acted against its full integration and acceptance in Irish society. The fact that its transmission had not been organized formally in schools and institutions in colonial society (perhaps with the exception of the pipers clubs) meant that no infrastructure was in place to support its transmission when socioeconomic and demographic conditions changed in the middle of the century’ (McCarthy 1999, p.135).

Following the emergence of Ireland as a modern industrial nation during the 1960s, and its entry into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, education began to be viewed as a means of developing a skilled workforce (McCarthy 1999, p.139). McCarthy maintains that Ireland’s entry to the EEC also ‘brought about a new consciousness about Irish identity and the role of musical heritage and its transmission in forming that identity’ (1999, pp.185). In 1966 the secondary school music syllabus was broadened, as was the primary education curriculum in 1971, with *An Curaclam Nua* (the new curriculum) which reflected:

‘a nation that had progressed from the insecurity of early independence to a post-colonial confidence…knowledge about and appreciation of Irish cultural traditions, past and present, were accepted as basic to primary education rather than as functional to establishing national identity’ (McCarthy 1999, p.148).
McCarthy outlines the components of the new curriculum and identifies the emphasis placed on music literacy, which was in contrast to the rote system of previous generations (1999, p.149). The influence of this on the transmission of Irish traditional music in schools will be considered later in this chapter.

In terms of Irish traditional music there are many historical references to music teachers such as Arthur O’Neill, and Pádraig O Keefe (Crannitch, 2006). McCarthy identifies two types of master teacher in the transmission process; someone identified from within the locality, to whom, pupils were sent for lessons, and itinerant teachers who travelled around to pupil’s houses (1999, p.101). Although traditional music was transmitted to a great extent within the home, there were also many such music teachers in County Clare, for example, in the west of the county Stack Ryan taught concertina in his locality in Kilmihil, Paddy Poole and Mike Cooney were well known music teachers in the Tulla region of East Clare, where they lived. There were also travelling teachers such as George Whelan and Pat Barron who taught throughout west of the county (Ó hAllmhuráin, 1990, p.223). In the eastern side of the county the blind fiddler Paddy McNamara, a travelling teacher taught

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9 In the Ancient music of Ireland (Bunting 1969, 1840, p.60) there are references to the harp teaching of Arthur O Neill and his role in the revival of a dying harp tradition. ‘The 3rd attempt at reviving our music, was the formation of the Belfast Irish Harp Society, instituted for the support of a teacher, and the tuition of a number of boys, from the age of 10 years, among the blind and indigent who were supplied with lodging and board. It was conducted with much zeal at its commencement in 1807; and it terminated, in consequence of a decline of pecuniary supplies in 1813. From that time Arthur O’Neill, the blind teacher, was paid an annuity of £30 till his death by a few members of the society, in consideration of his abilities and good conduct in the school. The affairs of the society were under the government of a committee, treasurer and secretary, yearly chosen by the members at large. For some years the number of subscribers fluctuated between 100 and 120, the greatest some being paid in one year being £150. During the six years of its existence the expenditure amounted to £950. The Society had the credit of preserving the Irish harp from being perhaps forever lost; as it appears that 6 years afterwards the ‘new’ society instituted in 1819 by the bounty of friends in India discovered no harpers in Ireland, save those who derived their education from Arthur O’Neill, master of the first school.’ Arthur O’Neill is also referenced in Irish folk music: a fascinating hobby with some account of allied subjects including O'Farrell's treatise on the Irish or union pipes and Touhey's hints to amateur pipers’ (O’Neill 1977, p.269).
traditional music at the end of 19th century.\textsuperscript{10} In the early 1900s, Martin Clancy, a travelling fiddle teacher (who used staff notation), spent time in Tulla and Newmarket-on-Fergus, a village about fifteen miles south, and also in Ennistymon in the northern part of the county.\textsuperscript{11} Jack Mulkere was a well known music teacher in County Clare and throughout neighbouring County Galway, prior to being the first teacher to be employed to teach Irish traditional music in the Comhaltas/VEC class in 1961.

It was the Pipers Clubs of Cork (established in 1888/1889), Dublin (established in 1900) and Limerick (established in 1904), which focused on the formal transmission of traditional music in an organised way.\textsuperscript{12} However, these clubs were outside of the school system (McCarthy 1999, p.104). In addition, Leo Rowsome (1903-1970) taught pipes in the Dublin Municipal School of Music from 1920, when he was just seventeen years of age, until his death in 1970 (Rowsome, 2002).\textsuperscript{13} In County Cork, Pilib Ó Laoghaire was employed by Cork VEC as Timire Ceoil (Music organiser) from 1950 until 1974, but his focus was primarily on choral classes. However, according to former Director of County Cork School of Music John Fitzpatrick, from the late 1960s until his death in 1976, Micheál Ó Riabhaigh, through

\textsuperscript{10} Paddy McNamara, who lived near Feakle travelled throughout East Clare as a professional musician and was reputed to have taught Pat Canny, father of the well known icon of the tradition Paddy Canny (Hughes 1978, p.113).

\textsuperscript{11} According to Seán Reid, he was born around 1842 in the Newmarket area, and was a professional bandmaster in the British army and, ‘he was an accomplished professional musician in both the classical and traditional moulds…He went to the States where he met Michael Coleman and James Morrison (both iconic fiddle players who emigrated to the US in the early 1900s)...Michael Coleman named a jig after him, Martin Clancys Jig (Hughes 1978, p.114).

\textsuperscript{12} It was also the pipers clubs which laid the foundation for the formation of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. Discussions were held at the regular Pipers Club sessions held in the home of Jim Seery in Dublin (O’Brien 2009, p.8) which led to the initial meeting of Comhaltas in Mullingar in 1951 (Vallely 2011, p.147).

\textsuperscript{13} Leo Rowsome was the third generation of pipers and inherited the family pipe making and repair business. He reinitiated the Dublin Pipers Club in 1936. He was also involved in the musicians gathering in Mullingar, which led to the inauguration of Comhaltas (Vallely 1999, p.323). The Dublin Municipal School of Music and Cork School of Music were affiliated to the VEC following the Vocational Education Act of 1930 (McCarthy 1999, p.132).
Cork VEC, taught pipes in the Cork School of Music (Personal Correspondence Fitzpatrick Mar 2009).

As is clear from the following correspondence in 27th November 1954 to P. S. Ó Moinseall, Árd Runaidhe (Honorary Secretary) of Comhaltas, from Seán Reid, Honorary Organising Secretary of Comhaltas in County Clare, Comhaltas was conscious of a need for teachers from the outset:

‘At the last general meeting of An Coiste Chondae (County Committee), consideration was given to the problem of providing an adequate number of competent teachers of Irish traditional music. There are a considerable number of good musicians in this county but very few who are competent to teach it’ (SRF37 D20).14

Despite the fact that the motivation existed, the idea did not gain momentum until the late 1950s and in addition, the first class did not take place until 1961.

The Institutions Comhaltas and the VEC

In the previous section I referred to the state agendas as they related to the education system. In this section, I focus on two ‘social institutions’, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann and the Clare Vocational Education Committee. Although the term ‘social institution’ is imprecise in that there are multiple theoretical approaches, nonetheless, it is used generally to refer to ‘complex social forms that reproduce themselves, such as governments, the family, human languages, universities, hospitals, business corporations, and legal systems’ (Miller 2011, p.1).15 Similarly, Raymond Williams maintains that ‘in the twentieth century institution has become the normal term for any organised element of a society’ (Williams, 1976, p.169). Miller discusses the

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14 References for example SRF 37 D97 indicate material sourced from by Na Piobairí Uilleann Archive i.e Sean Reid File XXX.
15 For a broad view of the theory of institutions see Scott (2005), Miller (2011) and Ostrom (1986).
general properties of social institutions i.e. structure, function, culture and sanctions, and states that institutions consist of ‘an embodied structure of differentiated roles…defined in terms of tasks and rules regulating the performance of those tasks…and their relations to one another can be referred to as the structure of the institution’ (2011, p.4). Institutions have similarly been described as:

‘enduring regularities of human action in situations structured by rules, norms, and shared strategies, as well as by the physical world. The rules, norms and shared strategies are constituted by human interaction in frequently occurring or repetitive situations’ (Crawford, Olstrom, 1995, p.582).

Both the VEC and Comhaltas, albeit to varying degrees, and allowing that they each maintain quite separate orientations, encompass the facets of institutionalisation referred to above, particularly as regards administrational structures. The VEC schools in County Clare were administered by a fourteen member Committee who were answerable to the Minister for Education. Both organisations held and continue to hold regular structured meetings that are run by elected officers. At local level, as well as regular members, Comhaltas was directed by a committee, responsible for managing and generally acting as an advocate for the organization, and which met on a regular basis to discuss the goals and to make decisions. Certain positions of responsibility had defined roles e.g. Chair, Secretary and Treasurer, which also entailed communicating with the regular members. For example, in his role as Comhaltas Secretary in County Clare in 1956 Seán Reid presented his annual report to the members at an AGM held in the Queens Hotel (SRF 37 D97). He addressed the meeting formally; Mr Chairman, Rev Father, Ladies and Gentlemen, praising the work of the members throughout that year highlighting the success of the fleadh in

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16 The Vocational Education Committee consisted of elected members of the County Council and other representatives selected by the County Council. The scheme was financed through state grants and contributions from the County Council.
Ennis. Seán Reid’s enthusiasm and passion for Comhaltas is very evident. Using his position he motivates members, praising their efforts while at the same time urging them to work harder. It is also clear that there was still an element of doubt regarding the future and that preservation is still a relevant issue:

‘Now that things are settled down again we must get down to a bit of spadework and lay a really sound foundation for our traditional music and song so that it will really flourish and gain a secure place in the lives of the people for at least this generation …One thing is certain and that is that it was historic and marked the culmination of a period of doubtful struggle which was to determine whether or not our native music was going to stand or fall before the foreign music. Now the future of our music is assured if we just continue to work away peacefully and steadily and harmoniously, as we have been doing’ (SRF 37 D97).

In a separate report (Appendix A) as Secretary of the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas he maintains a similar role as motivator. He commended their work but cautioned them as regards the challenges of the future, saying ‘it is up to Ennis to hold its own and more than hold its own with the other centres in Clare, where the Gaelic ideal and in particular our priceless traditional song and music is being vigorously and effectively fostered.’ In this document he also demonstrates his enthusiasm and generosity in making a number of sets of pipes available for anyone interested. In this Seán Reid not only exhibited his passion for Irish traditional music practices, but he also disclosed his leadership qualities as he endeavoured to inspire enthusiasm in the members. Apart from the content of both of Reid’s reports it is evident that that the functions, roles and tasks identified by Miller (2011, p.4) were part of Comhaltas practice by 1956.

In terms of the institutional infrastructure of Comhaltas as a national body, Edward O. Henry describes the four levels i.e. Branch, County Board, Provincial, the Central Executive Council. It has a hierarchical structure with a headquarters,
Cultúrlann na hÉireann, in Monkstown, County Dublin. It oversees branches which are located throughout the world (Henry 1989). While Comhaltas adopted many aspects of the ‘institution’ as described, it is more nuanced in relation to personnel, particularly between the central office and local branches. Since 1968 the central office has employed a Director General and other fulltime staff, but at local level the officers are volunteers. This factor also distinguishes it from the VEC, although the actual committee itself comprises of unpaid members, the regular personnel such as teaching and administration staffs are fully funded by the State. While they both were and remain national bodies, the VEC is distinctive in that it is not totally independent, being ultimately accountable to the State through the Department of Education. Although the individual branches are part of a larger organisation, Comhaltas is independent of the state, and as a single unit is autonomous. In addition, Miller contends that there can be competing cultures within a single organization:

‘The culture comprised of attitudes and norms that is aligned to the formal and official complex of tasks and rules, might compete with an informal and ‘unofficial’ culture that is adhered to by a substantial sub-element of the organisation’s membership’ (2011, p.5).

As will be revealed, at local level, unofficially Comhaltas and the VEC found ways of overcoming the constraints of the bureaucratic system which were in place. Certainly, as is typical of an organization comprised of volunteers, there were regular competing points of view within Comhaltas itself, a subject discussed in chapter six.

In relation to the VEC and Comhaltas, I am particularly interested in what Miller highlights as institutions that are organisations, i.e. ‘organisations that have a

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17 For further reading see Ní Fhuartháin (2011) and Fleming (2004).
18 Senator Labhrás Ó Murchú has been the Ard Stiúrthóir (Director General) of Comhaltas since 1968. For discussion on his role in shaping the organisation see Fleming (2004), Vallely (2011), and Ni Fhuartháin (2011).
central and important role to play in, and for a society.\textsuperscript{19} Being central and important to a society, such roles are usually long lasting ones; hence institutions are typically trans-generational’ (Miller 2011, p.4). While both the VEC and Comhaltas are organisations in this sense, I am particularly interested in tracing how a new organisation like Comhaltas became trans-generational in a place like Ennis, which was not a perfect site of Irish traditional music practice when it was formed. This is one of the central topics of this thesis.

In addition, it is my contention that in many respects, certainly at local level in Ennis, while Comhaltas adopted many institutional practices, to a greater degree it reflected the elements of a community of practice as outlined by Wenger. Wenger differentiates communities of practice from institutions in three ways. Firstly, they negotiate their own enterprise, though they may at times construct a conforming response to institutional prescriptions. Secondly, they arise, evolve, and dissolve according to their own learning, though they may do so in response to institutional events and thirdly, they shape their own boundaries, though their boundaries may at times happen to be congruent with institutional boundaries (1998, p.241). While I acknowledge that over time Comhaltas evolved to include more and more elements of institutionalisation, certainly at local level during the timescale of this thesis it operated as a community of practice.

\textbf{Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann}

Comhaltas is the largest body involved in the preservation and promotion of Irish traditional music; see Ni Fhuartháin (2011, p.2) and Vallely (2011, p.144). As stated,

\textsuperscript{19} Miller distinguishes between institutions that are organisations and those that are not e.g. although he classifies the English language as an institution, it is not an organisation. So, in the context of this work, I focus on institution as organisation.
the organisation has a hierarchical structure which oversees hundreds of branches located throughout the world, from the headquarters, Cultúrlann na hÉireann, in Monkstown, County Dublin. The organisation was formed in 1951, following a meeting in Mullingar, instigated by the Dublin Pipers Club, led by musicians Jim Seery, Jack Naughton and Leo Rowsome.

The principal focus of Comhaltas in the early years was on the preservation and revival of a tradition that was generally considered to be at risk of dying (Curtis 1994, Ó hAllmhuráin 1998). This aim was achieved initially through the promotion of music through organising music sessions or group playing contexts for Irish music. Although the focus of Comhaltas has primarily been on traditional music, song and dance, it also addresses other aspects of Irish culture, particularly the Irish language.

In the view of Fintan Vallely it was about ‘promotion of what was universally considered to be the ‘National’ music of the island of Ireland, and happened with no particular directive from the state- but was an approved complement to the aims of the state’ (2004, p.2). Edward O. Henry gives an account of the structural outline and goals of Comhaltas, and refers to these goals as having their roots in the nationalistic expressions of the early state and Eamonn De Valera’s vision of Ireland. ‘This idealization of peasant life is most clearly seen in the staging of shows by CCE (Comhaltas) such as those at Cultúrlann’ (1989, p.69). He also comments on the use of the Irish language, ‘Comhaltas officers use Irish for at least a portion of their remarks in any official event. They also use Irish titles for their positions, and the Irish spellings and Irish versions of their given names’ (Henry 1989, p.82). Similarly,

21 Comhaltas was originally called Cumann Ceoltóirí Éireann.
22 Now the organisation promotes traditional music through teaching, fleadhanna cheoil and other festivals, international concert tours, its magazine Treoir, recordings etc.
Seán Reid (occasionally called by John, the English version of his name) regularly signed documents using the title *Runaí Onórach* (Honorary Secretary). Another example of the use of the Irish language is in Comhaltas headed paper:

![Comhaltas headed note paper 1959 (SRF40 D15).](image)

The title incorporated the Irish language and a motto expressing a nationalist sentiment ‘*Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Coisde Co. an Chláir*’ (Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Clare County Board) with a motto *Do chum glóire Dé agus onóra na h-Éireann* (for the honour and glory of Ireland). Furthermore, Comhaltas chose a traditional Irish typeface which was based on Celtic half-uncial calligraphy founded on the Book of Kells and associated manuscripts. 23 Musician and calligrapher John Boyd maintains that Irish typefaces, such as this one, were favoured by the Gaelic League, and were an indicator of Irish identity (Personal Interview Boyd Apr 2013).

The commitment to Irish language identity is further evidenced from the register of people who attended the inaugural meeting of Comhaltas in County Clare at the Queens Hotel, Ennis on the 11th of April 1954 (See Appendix B). Although the print is very faint, it is clear that the majority of people listed, signed using the Irish version of their names. This is a clear example of how people invested in cultural

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23 The Newman Irish typeface was prepared by George Petrie (1790-1866), an antiquarian artist and archaeologist. It was commissioned by John Henry Newman (later Cardinal) rector of the Catholic University of Ireland in 1857 (McGuinne, p.118). A more simplified Irish version of the Roman was adopted in later years. For further reading on the Roman versus the Irish type see McGuinne (1992, pp.163-193).
nationalism, illustrating the level of cultural nationalist sentiment that was present at the time. Among the signatories at this meeting were Buadhach Tóibín, who managed Coláiste Eoghan Uí Chomhraidhe, a residential Irish language summer school in Carrigaholt, musicians Caitlín Bean Uí Lionnáin, Séamus Mac An Bhaird, Máirtín Ó Tailte, Pádraig Ó Murchadha, Antóin MacMathúna, all better known now as Kitty Linnane, Jimmy Ward, Martin Talty, Paddy Murphy and Tony McMahon.  

Although Comhaltas had been formed in 1951, it did not begin in County Clare until 1954. Musician Peadar O’Loughlin recalls that the first meeting in County Clare was in Tulla, a small town about twelve miles East of Ennis, instigated by County Tipperary accordion player Paddy O’Brien, who was a member of the Tulla Céilí Band at the time:

‘Paddy O’Brien told me one night, when Comhaltas started…he was married to Jim Seery’s daughter and Jim Seery said ‘Paddy, you better start up something down in Clare,’ and Paddy introduced it to the Tulla crowd, and started a branch in Tulla, but later on, in April of 1954, that is when the County Board was formed, before there was even a branch, except Paddy O’Briens one, which had maybe died out’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Jan 2008).

Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, whose work deals specifically with Comhaltas, refers to this as St. Mochulla’s Traditional Music Club, which was set up in Minogues (a small family run hotel) in October 26th 1951. She states that the members were from throughout counties Clare, Tipperary and Galway, with regional committees which eventually

24 Coláiste Eoghan Uí Chomhraidhe was founded in 1912. Originally a coastguard station, a Vocational School was opened in the building in 1934 and all teaching was done through the Irish language. Irish was spoken widely in the Carrigaholt area until the 1940s. According to MacDara Tóibín, who succeeded his father in 1997, it is one of the oldest Irish Colleges in the country (Clare Champion 19/7/2012).

25 In a publication The Humours of Tulla, produced by the Tulla Branch of Comhaltas, the 4th of September 1957 is listed as the date of the first Comhaltas meeting; based on the minutes of the meeting (2007, pp.43-46).
became involved in Comhaltas (2011, p.93). This is also corroborated by Pat Liddy, a dancer and long term active member of Comhaltas. According to Pat:

‘There were a number of constituent units in that club, groups in Maghera, Kilmaley, Miltown and so on, with someone in charge of mobilising each group… Seán Reid was asked by the National Executive (of Comhaltas) to convene a meeting of those clubs. That happened on the 11th of April 1954 in the Queens Hotel and from that meeting established the Clare County Board. That quickly led on to the ’56 fleadh which again was pushed by Seán Reid. The ’56 fleadh put Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann on the map. It was regarded as the fleadh’ (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).

The Fleadh in 1956, as already discussed in chapter two, was a huge success from many perspectives and it marked a significant turning point in the general reception of Irish traditional music in the town. This perceptible shift in attitude may have been a reflection of changing tastes, or may have been brought about by a growing awareness of associated economic benefits. Nonetheless, the 1956 Fleadh Cheoil, festival of music song and dance, generated a new urban audience, and had a significant impact in creating the conditions for Comhaltas to progress, particularly in Ennis.

In his annual report as Comhaltas Secretary referred to earlier, Reid commented on the perceived change in attitude of the Ennis population towards traditional music, an attitude which also gives the impression that Comhaltas members were outsiders, set apart from the townspeople:

‘Neither can we ever forget the people of Ennis whom some of us thought rather cold and indifferent but rallied to the occasion like one man and gave this Fleadh and County Clare a reputation for warm hearted hospitality that will never be surpassed’ (SRF 37 D97).

As already stated there were very few Ennis born traditional musicians. However, one of them, Johnny McCarthy supports Reid’s view that the Fleadh had a positive impact:
‘I think the All Ireland Fleadh in 1956 had a huge impact, and the fleadhys for the following years had a huge impact on peoples’ perception of traditional music. Seán Ó Riada was beginning to surface as well around that time, and the attitude to traditional music was beginning to shift…I think the whole public perception and the whole public acceptance and appreciation began to shift…there would have to be some groundswell, and the VEC are all public representatives, and they would be mirroring the ideas of the constituents, and I’d say that the groundswell was beginning to move, particularly in the rural areas…Comhaltas; there were a lot of local people involved in that…and they began to be seen as a growing organisation, and one that was good and should be supported’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).  

Based on the information in the Seán Reid’s Annual Report October 1956 (Appendix A) it would appear that the Ennis Branch existed in the town from July 1955, prior to the fleadh.

The Ennis Branch of Comhaltas became a social community, which not only shared a common interest, but also engaged in, and developed shared activities. The initial group was comprised primarily of people who lived in the town of Ennis, but who, by and large were not natives; they had either relocated from outlying rural areas or had returned from the United Kingdom, having originally emigrated from rural parts of the county. For example, with the exception of Tony and Brendan McMahon, none of the people in Fig.3.2 were originally from Ennis. In many respects they took the rural habitus they were rooted in, and reconfigured some of its elements in the urban setting of their adopted town e.g. they gathered socially, frequented certain public houses and in terms of sporting allegiances often aligned themselves with their original home places, rather than with the town teams.

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26 Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971) was a composer, academic and an influential figure in the revival of Irish traditional music during the 1960s. See Ó Canainn (2003) and Vallely (2011)

27 In an interview Ita McNamara a sister of Brendan and Tony recalled that although they lived in Ennis, their parents were from Kilmaley, about eight miles from the town, and similar to the others in the photo, their lives were rooted in their parents’ home places (Personal Interview McNamara Dec 2011).

28 The theory of habitus was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu in his book Outline of a Theory in Practice. He described the earliest experiences of people sharing a habitus: ‘The habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences…and the habitus transformed by schooling…in turn
Likewise, in relation to the huge attendance at cèilís in the Dublin Mansion House, Méabh Ní Fhúartháin maintains that they allowed for ‘an urban experience while validating an imagined rural past through, repertoire, style and movement’ (2011, p.62). In addition, she contends that Comhaltas filled the ‘cultural vacuum created through societal dislocation’ (2011, p.62) by providing people with a medium through which they could express the cultural and social practices of their roots. For the new residents of Ennis, Comhaltas became a site where they could connect with others with similar backgrounds and interests. In addition, being in an organisation empowered them.

underlies the structuring of all other experiences…and so on, from restructuring to restructuring’ (1977, p.87)

The above photo (Figure 3.2) of the Comhaltas members reflects the focus placed on music making, the central practice of the organisation at the time. Among the many well known and respected musicians, a number of whom are deceased, are concertina player Paddy Murphy flute player Paddy O’Donoghue, Peadar O’Loughlin, Seán Reid concertina players Mrs Crotty Sonny Murray Ennis musicians, brothers Brendan and Tony McMahon, and flute player Michael Preston.
The Ennis branch of Comhaltas might be usefully interpreted, through the lens of Wenger's *communities of practice*, which he defines as ‘groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly’ (http://www.ewenger.com/theory/ accessed 21/5/2013 4.26 pm). According to Wenger, we can belong to several communities of practice at any given time; at home, school, at work, in organisations etc. In addition, he differentiates between a *community of practice* and *community*, and considers ‘practice’ as the source of coherence of a community. He identifies three features, the domain, the community and the practice, as characterising the relationship between the ‘Community’ and ‘Practice’ (Wenger 1998). Therefore, while Comhaltas and the

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30 The Domain: The members share an area of interest. They show commitment to it and value competence, although this may not be valued by people outside the group members. The Community: Interaction is fundamental. Members engage in joint activities, help each other, share information, and build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. For Wenger, regardless of geographical proximity, membership of a Community of Practice is a matter of mutual engagement and not just a question of belonging socially to a community (1998, 74) The Practice: A community of practice is not just a community of interest - members are practitioners who develop shared repertoire, experience and tools. It is social practice; it is ‘doing’ in a historical and
VEC were part of the Ennis community and had many shared interests and aims, they did not constitute a community of practice as outlined. In the same way, all of the traditional musicians living in Ennis were not members of the same community of practice. Although, they were part of a community of traditional musicians who happened to live in the same town, and who may have played at occasional music sessions together, they did not constitute a specific community of practice as defined above. Meetings were held in a house in Francis Street, but apparently it was a very cold venue and therefore in 1958 the venue changed and for many years took place in the home Bridie and Martin Byrnes (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012). Regular Comhaltas (music) sessions were held there every Tuesday, and were attended by a regular group of musicians, dancers and singers, largely the new residents of Ennis, who were united in their interest in Irish traditional music. Bridie recalls the sessions of music which took place in her home:

‘We had some great sessions here in the house...The meetings started here in ’58, even a discussion. Seán (Reid) and Séamus (MacMathúna), there was a John Sullivan, Peadar O’Loughlin, Tom Eustace often came in, Joe Cooley, Paddy O’Brien. He played with the Tulla Band that time; he worked in Clare so he came here every Tuesday night…Great sessions…There was more music than discussion really’ (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012).

Music was at the centre and even incorporated into official meetings where set agendas were followed. For example in the agenda for a County Board Meeting to be held on the 22nd of July 1958, item number 4 was ‘Music,’ with an additional comment added: ‘As may be seen, the agenda has been curtailed to leave the greatest possible time for music, so don’t forget your instruments’ (SRF37 D86). It is clear that at these meetings although official business was conducted, the music sessions

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social context, thus giving structure and meaning to what is done. It is also a learning process for any emerging community of practice. In this chapter I focus in particular on the learning process by which newcomers were enabled to join the community. Chapter four and five relate to the sharing of the ‘tools’ of that practice i.e. the transmission of musical knowledge.
were at the core of what the organisation was about. This was reinforced in a letter
dated 1st of May 1954, written by Seán Reid in response to an enquiry from Michael
Griffin about forming a branch of Comhaltas in Ballynacally, six miles from Ennis:

‘A club in name is no use if regular meetings are not held at which music is
played or sung or talked about and the young people should be brought in and
taught their own Irish traditional songs and music’ (SRF37 D29).

Reid was aware of the importance of maintaining continuity through attractive
younger membership. At any rate by their nature, membership of a community of
practice is not fixed, in that people move in and out; therefore as a consequence, a
community of practice cannot depend on fixed membership. Long-lasting practice,
therefore, is dependent on the integration of new practicing members (Wenger 1998,
p.99). This was the nub of the problem for Comhaltas at this time. As recalled by
musician and broadcaster Séamus MacMathúna, there was a consciousness by the
Ennis Branch members at this time that young people were not attracted to Irish
traditional music. He recalls:

‘There was Johnny Galvin and myself as young lads, and Michael Butler was
around, and it was mature people mostly from 35 or 40 up to 60 or 70… was
21 in 1960…There was a gap. I would have been about ten years younger than
the likes of JC Talty and Michael Falsey and those…Willie Clancy was about
25 years older. There was a generation of what the youngest was Peadar
O’Loughlin…I suppose we all knew that we weren’t bringing the young ones
with us at that stage’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

In fact, as evidenced from the following letter dated 27/11/1954 (SRF37 D20) to P Ó
Moinseall, Árd Runaidhe (General Secretary) of Comhaltas, Seán Reid was aware of
the importance of teaching as early as 1954. In addition, Reid, in identifying the
problem and offering a solution, was approaching it as a national issue that warranted
attention from the Department of Education, and not just a specific issue for Ennis
and County Clare. Furthermore, by writing to the national headquarters in his position
as ‘Honorary Organising Secretary’ of An Coisde Chondae (Clare County Board of
Comhaltas), he drew attention to the hierarchical nature of the organisation.

‘A chara dhill,
At the last general meeting of An Coisde Chondae consideration was given to
the problem of providing an adequate number of competent teachers of Irish
traditional music. There are a considerable number of good musicians in this
county but very few who are competent to teach it. It was decided that the
Department of Education should be requested to send teachers to various
centres for the purpose of training persons who are already good performers
in the traditional style on one or more than one instrument, or that they would
have an opportunity of qualifying for the Teachers Certificate issued by An
Comhaltas. In this way a body of teachers would be formed who would not
only ground their pupils in the correct method of holding and playing their
instruments but would see that they were able to read and write music and
above all play it in the traditional style.

It was decided to request An Comhaltas to ask the Department of Education to
send down instructors for the above purpose.

Mise le meas mór, Seáín Reid
Hon Organising Secretary.

(SRF37 D20)

At local level there are references to Seáín Reid’s endeavours in encouraging
Comhaltas members to continue the work of promoting and teaching traditional
music.31 As Rúnaí (secretary) of the County Board of Comhaltas in 1958, he wrote to
the branches of the organisation throughout the county:

‘I know that for a variety of reasons some branches find it hard to keep going
and feel that they cannot do much worthwhile. I wish to assure these branches
that they are much more important than they realise, and the mere fact of their
moral support means a great deal to the movement. Even if they only met a
few times a year, played a few tunes and had a talk or made suggestions in

31 Despite the reference to teaching I have not been able to clarify that any formal teaching was done
officially through Comhalta. It is clear that musicians did come together at meetings and played music
and exchanged repertoire, but no structured system seems to have existed prior to the VEC classes. In
Kilmaley about eight miles from Ennis, musicians gathered at Hughdie Doohans house. Hughdie who
was able to read from notation regularly played tunes from O’Neills ‘Dance Music of Ireland:1001
Gems’, and the other musicians learned new repertoire from his playing.
writing for the consideration of the County Board they would have more than justified themselves. I am aware that some branches are doing magnificent work by way of teaching young musicians, procuring instruments for them, running Gaelic concerts etc but big, small, active and not so active are needed, as the fight to save our native music and song is not yet won by any means’ (SRF 37 D86).

Particularly following the success of the Fleadh 1956, the climate was changing in relation to societal attitudes towards traditional music and it seemed that it would be possible to get support for a class for traditional music in Ennis. Séamus MacMathúna recalls discussions at national level which centred on authenticity. He recalls:

‘There was a discussion going on, an argument that ‘could you teach music to people who hadn’t it already, or then when you went outside Clare could you teach music within a town that never had a note of music, or could Dublin lads be expected to bring the real thing. That thing was going around’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

To some extent this attitude is surprising since the first Comhaltas/VEC class was initiated in a town, and in particular considering that there was a very strong Irish music tradition in Dublin, especially in the Liberties area of the city. In addition, the first traditional musician to be appointed nationally by the Department of Education was Dublin piper Leo Rowsome, who in 1920 was appointed to teach part-time in the Dublin Municipal School of Music (Vallely 2011, p. 583). The issue was discussed at national level around this time. However, the idea was advanced in Ennis when members of Comhaltas in the county approached the VEC with a proposal to set up formal classes for the teaching of traditional music in Ennis.

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32 In 1940 the Fiach Rua Céilí Band borrowed money for instruments from the local Parish Priest, Fr Roche. They purchased fiddles, flutes, concertinas and a kit of drums in Crowleys Music Shop in Cork. They repaid Fr Roche by playing for local parish functions (Ó hAllmhuráin, 2007). In the same document Reid offers to supply staff notation of traditional tunes to any Branch interested.
The Vocational Education Committee

The Vocational Education Act of 1930 provided for a state system of continuation and technical education. Continuation education was considered that which built on what was provided in primary schools. Unlike the fee paying secondary schools, who provided a more academic education, the Vocational schools offered courses which were of a practical nature. While the primary focus was on practical subjects e.g. woodwork, domestic economy, shorthand, rural science there were also a large number of Irish language classes, which coincided with the state’s nationalist policy and the strength of the language revival movement at the time. In his assessment of music in Vocational Schools Bernard Curtis, Director of Cork School of Music (1936-1973) stated, ‘When the teaching of singing was made compulsory in the primary schools in 1931 it ranked as a continuation subject, and as such was added to the curriculum of vocational schools day classes’ (Curtis 1952, p.45).

Although teachers were appointed by the VEC, it was the Department of Education who sanctioned these appointments. From the very early years of this system, both day and evening classes were provided. Although courses were being held in a number of centres in County Clare, the first actual VEC School building did not open in County Clare until 1936 in Kilrush, a neighbouring town about twenty seven miles away, followed by Ennis in 1938. By the 1950s there were vocational schools located in many of the towns and villages of the county and across the republic (Power, 1980).

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33 Up to the mid 1960s the Secondary and Vocational Systems of education were separate. The Vocational System, run by the Local Authorities, were non fee paying and trained people for employment in local industries, trades and business. Secondary schools focussed on an academic curriculum leading to higher education or public service employment and were attended by those who could afford to pay the tuition fees. The secondary schools which were largely run by religious orders had a very strong tradition of promoting western art music particularly through choral work. See McCarthy (1999, pp.127-132 and 179).
As mentioned previously, educationalist Marie McCarthy provides a profile of the provision of education, including music, in the various educational institutions in Ireland. In respect to the VEC, along with its remit with regard to the teaching of the Irish language, McCarthy also notes the social orientation of the system:

‘Its function was to teach the Irish language, to enrich community life in rural areas, and to develop a sense of place in young people and thus to arrest the flow of immigrants from the countryside’ (McCarthy 1999, p. 134).

In addition, its community orientation was underpinned with a more inclusive foundation than what existed hitherto. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin maintains that ‘the vocational system broke the class barrier in many respects for a lot of people who would not have had a secondary education otherwise’ (Personal Interview July 2008). The fact that Comhaltas had already built up a relationship with the VEC, having on a number of occasions received support from them during events such as the All Ireland Fleadh held in Ennis in 1956, combined with the VEC system’s community ethos and focus on practical subjects, made it an understandable choice for Comhaltas when they were considering establishing traditional music classes. This view is supported by Marie McCarthy:

‘The rural vocational school was the ‘people’s school, the folk school of Ireland’. Thus it was not surprising to find that Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, whose goal was to promote Irish traditional music, later held classes in vocational school’ (McCarthy 1999, p.134).

There were apparent paradoxes in the VECs approach, however. On the one hand the VEC, whose role and mandate was to bring educational opportunities to areas and to people who would not have had them, did not view the music as worthy of inclusion.

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34VEC schools also developed many new courses and introduced new subjects. In fact in 1952 the first extramural (outside the physical campus) University course in the country was held in Ennis in conjunction with University College Galway i.e. a Diploma in Social Science (Power 1980 pp.36-37). Similarly in September 1976 Clare became the first county in Ireland to establish a pilot literacy scheme (VEC Minutes 21/10/1976 Item 16).
in the curriculum, while on the other hand, they recognised the changes in society as an opportunity and cooperated fully with businesses who sought their support.  

Since art subjects generally were not serious contenders for inclusion on the curriculum of the VEC schools in County Clare, it was not a foregone conclusion therefore that there would be support for the provision of classes in traditional music. The fact that traditional music classes did not finally come about until the 1960s in part, points to their reticence.

Significantly, there was not a permanent appointment of a music teacher until the late 1970s and this post was for general music teaching. The minutes of the VEC meetings at this time record contain many instances where the ‘arts’ were set aside. Aloys Fleischmann (1910-1992) Professor of Music at University College Cork recognised the potential effectiveness of the Vocational Schools for the promotion of music education and he campaigned widely to this end (McCarthy 1999, pp 133-134).

As early as 1957, Professor Fleischmann wrote a letter to Clare VEC requesting the establishment of a scholarship scheme for the training of County Music Supervisors (VEC Minutes 5/11/1957 Item 18). He requested that the Committee make provision for the award of such a scholarship, when preparing the Annual Scheme for Financial Year 1958/59. No award was established. There are many other references in the VEC

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35 Marie McCarthy (1999, p.114) refers to the low level of support for the arts being as a result of the association of the arts with colonial culture, made by nationalists. There are many examples of the VEC response to developing industries in County Clare at this time e.g. in 1951 in order to develop the quality of hotel service Brendan O’Regan, who was Catering Controller at Shannon Airport, approached Mr Jennings, the CEO of the VEC with a view to setting up a training programme in the catering department of the airport. This eventually led to the establishment of the Shannon Hotel College, which was the first of its type in Ireland. Other examples of this support include the employment of German Diamond cutters to train local people to work in the Diamond factory in Ennis, and the provision of training in Wilton Loom Weaving for the local carpet factory (Power, 1980).

36 Although a few members of the Committee were in favour of introducing Art as a subject in the curriculum they were met with opposition. From 1961 Mr. Honan, who later became a Senator, began petitioning for an Art teacher and Peadar MacNamara was appointed to teach Art in Ennis in 1971 (VEC Minutes 16/7/1971 Item 32).

37 Similar fates were met by An Chomhairle Ealaín in relation to support of the Arts, the Department of Education in relation to the teaching of Arts, and Caltex with reference to the new Art Competition (VEC Minutes 5/6/1956 Item28).
minutes of Professor Fleishmann renewing this request, but to no avail. Finally, in 1964 County Clare VEC Committee adjourned ‘indefinitely, consideration of this matter’ (VEC Meeting Minutes Sept. 1964 Item 45).

Although the conditions in Ennis were becoming more favourable for the establishment of a class for Irish traditional music, nonetheless it was challenging for Seán Reid et al as they canvassed the VEC to this end.

Towards a new context: the Ennis classes begin.

Following a protracted campaign involving much discussion and negotiation, an advertisement finally appeared on the local newspaper, the Clare Champion dated April 15th 1961. It announced that Comhaltas classes for violin and tin whistle would take place at the Vocational School in Ennis, the only reference to the VEC. Although the date is listed as Saturday the 15th the newspaper went on sale on Thursday the 13th.

![Figure 3.4](Clare Champion 15/4/1961)

Although this did not give much notice, nonetheless, the class, the first of its kind, took place on the 17th of April 1961, in the Ennis Vocational School. The path to its establishment and realisation was not easy, as is reflected in the VEC Minutes

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38 Originally the school was known as the Ennis Technical School, abbreviated by people to the ‘Tech’. The school is known now as Ennis Community College.
(8/1/1960 Item 4). It states that on 6/10/1959 a ‘deputation’ from Comhaltas, led by its secretary Seán Reid, approached the VEC through Mr Jennings, the CEO, with a request to introduce classes for traditional music in Ennis and Miltown Malbay. This approach was significant enough to be reported in the local newspaper the Clare Champion, under the headline Widespread Demand for Irish Music: Clare Co. Board C.C.E (Comhaltas) request to Vocational Committee (October 10th 1959, p.5). The ‘deputation’ included Seán Reid who presented a letter from the County Board of Comhaltas. The letter requested the inclusion of the teaching of traditional music on the curricula of Vocational Schools in County Clare. In the same newspaper report P. Ó Maoileoin, Rúnaí (Secretary) of the County Board of Comhaltas is reported as espousing the value of traditional music to strengthening the spirit of the nation:

‘The dictum ‘non scholae vitae’ (not for school but for life) applied to music more than other subject on the school programme and in music would build up a spirit of self-reliance as an asset to national progress in all its phases’ (Clare Champion 10/10/1959, p.5).

Mrs Elizabeth Crotty, (1885-1960) a household name as a concertina player, who was regularly broadcast on the national airwaves and President of the Clare County Board of Comhaltas, is also reported as writing:

‘The Board is anxious that there should be classes for Irish traditional music in the technical schools in Clare. I am sure that you will give us all the assistance you can and help a most worthy cause’ (Clare Champion 10/10/1959, p.5).

In addition, Seán Reid is reported in the Clare Champion as proposing a curriculum:

‘It would be a big step forward if the teaching of Irish traditional music was put on the school curriculum …The syllabus would include (A) History of traditional music, (B) Musical theory and (C) Mastery of various instruments’ (Clare Champion 10/10/1959, p.5).

Miltown Malbay, is a town west of Ennis and home of Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy (Willie Clancy Summer School), established in 1973 in honour of the piper Willie Clancy. It is a very famous week long summer school and another venture which has contributed significantly to the life of traditional music in County Clare.
Mr K.P. Jennings CEO of the VEC suggested ‘that the names of the teachers be submitted to the Committee and a detailed account of their qualifications. Then, he would submit those to the Department and ask them to approve of it’ (Clare Champion 10/10/1959, p.5). The VEC response, issued on the 7th of December 1959 (Minutes 7/12/1959 Item 4) outlined their support, on condition that Comhaltas would provide names of teachers and under the proviso that ‘CCE [Comhaltas] would agree to recoup to the Committee any expenditure involved’ (VEC minutes 7/12/1959 and again in 8/1/1960). This is also substantiated by musician Séamus MacMathúna, who was part of the ‘deputation’:

‘We got a letter back, I remember, saying…there wasn’t enough money for putting up for the teaching of a traditional music class, but seen as we considered Mr Mulkere was available, willing and qualified, and if Comhaltas would agree to pay the salary for the first term anyway, that was for three months…the Vocational Committee would provide the venue and the structure, in other words we had to guarantee that the class would be well supervised’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

The approach of Comhaltas was two pronged; bolstering their submission with the written support of Mrs Crotty, and presenting the letter through Seán Reid, an engineer with Clare County Council and Séamus MacMathúna, who worked with Clare County Library. Clearly, then, what was important to the VEC from the outset was, although they were willing to support the initiative, that there would be no financial implications for them. In this respect the VEC reflected, that as a state funded institution, they were subject to rules and regulations regarding the assignment of public funds, while Comhaltas on the other hand was approaching this from a pioneering perspective and was confident and determined that it would succeed.
This was to be the start of an ongoing relationship, which in County Clare at
least continued until the late 1970s. The class finally commenced on April 1961, over
a year after the press report. Significantly, it was also one of the first classes to be
recognised by the Department of Education, and according to his son Enda, Jack
Mulkere’s appointment as the first teacher was a major event, warranting mention on
the national radio station 2RN’s news bulletin (Jack’s work as a pedagogue is
discussed in detail in chapter four). Being heard on the national airwaves was a form
of validation at the time. This medium played a significant part in the national
transmission of the Irish traditional music of County Clare.

The classes, which will be discussed in detail in chapter four, were held on
two nights per week and were attended by thirty students for the violin (not fiddle)
classes and twenty-eight for the ‘flageolet’. The fee per student was 2/6d. In a VEC
report at the end of the term ‘the Committee approved of these classes and the
arrangements for conducting them and expressed pleasure that they had been so
successful’ (VEC Minutes 16/6/1961 Item 28). In response to this praise, Comhaltas
then requested that the VEC consider taking on full responsibility for the payment of
Jack Mulkere. Although the VEC decided not to undertake this at that time, they
agreed to review it in the future. There was further correspondence from Comhaltas
requesting that the VEC take over the financing of the class if they continued to be a
success, and that they were considered satisfactory by the Department of Education’s
inspectors. This regulatory element was essential to the VEC, but unimportant to

40 The national radio station of Ireland, Raidió Éireann was originally called 2RN. For further
discussion see Pine (2005).
41 Although many traditional musicians use the term violin, the more common term is fiddle. The use
of the term by the VEC however may possibly be more reflective of a prejudice, the term Violin more
cultured and being associated with classical music. The precursor to the tin whistle as we know it is the
‘flageolet’. For further reading see (Vallely 2011, pp.748-749).
42 This communication is referred to in a letter dated 3rd July 1961 from Séamus MacMathúna to Seán
Reid (SRF38 D33).
Comhaltas who appeared to be happy with the operation of the classes from a pedagogic point of view, and did not require this form of validation at this time. Over time as the scheme grew, and as a consequence so too did the demand for teachers, Comhaltas considered the issue of teacher training. This is discussed later in this chapter. Finally, at a meeting on 5/12/1961 as a result of a favourable report from the inspectors, the Committee decided to appoint Jack Mulkere as a part time teacher of Irish traditional music at 10/9d per hour. In his report the CEO, Mr. M Considine stated:

‘that the Department’s inspector has visited this class and while he was not an authority on music, he was very much impressed with the organisation of the class generally. He thought there was excellent work being done in a proper fashion and that it was a very good thing to see the youth being trained to play traditional Irish music on the flageolet and violin’ (VEC Minutes 5/12/1961 Item 30).

In February Séamus MacMathúna, Runaí (Secretary) of the Clare Branch of Comhaltas formally wrote to the VEC thanking them for agreeing to be responsible for payment and ‘offering to cooperate in every way possible to make the classes a distinct success’ (VEC Minutes 6/2/1962 Item 22).

Jack continued to teach in Ennis for many years and there is a record of his position as a VEC teacher up to 1977, though it is not clear when he actually finished in the Ennis centre. Certainly, in 1969 flute player and manufacturer Brendan McMahon (1927-2008) began teaching in Ennis on the recommendation of Mairtin Ó Dubháin, Rúnaí (Secretary) of Comhaltas, who also at the time referenced Jack:

‘With reference to the appointment of Mr. Mulkere, part-time teacher of traditional music; stating that Mr. Mulkere considers himself unfit for the work due to age, and asking the Committee to appoint Mr. B McMahon, Lifford, Ennis in lieu of Mr. Mulkere. Stating that Mr. McMahon is an
accomplished musician who has appeared on TÉ and is a capable an efficient teacher’ (VEC Minutes 14/1/1969 Item 25).43

In 1970 there was a brief cessation of classes because of a dispute with the Department of Education and this is referenced in a press release dated 3/11/1970, written by Máirtín Ó Dubháin, Rúnaí (secretary) of the Clare County Board of Comhaltas. The following extracts from a press release from the Clare County Board of Comhaltas reflects the ethos of Comhaltas at the time.44 It highlights the importance of education to Comhaltas members and the frustration and strength of feeling against the cutbacks by the Department of Education:

‘One of its principal aims (of Comhaltas) is the provision of facilities for teaching traditional music to our youth…Due to financial restrictions imposed upon the VEC by the Department of Education, the present position is that all traditional music classes in the county have been closed down, with the exception of the Ennis Technical School class, which it appears will operate under a restricted time allowance…we call on all men of good will to support our demand that traditional music classes be restored immediately by the Dept of Education in this county; the Cradle of Traditional Music, the last Bulwark against the Forces of Pagan Culture’ (Appendix D).

Although representing Comhaltas, Ó Dubháin spoke for people regardless of their affiliation to the organisation, outlining the frustration of parents who had purchased new instruments for their children, and also the disappointment of the pupils, who ‘have been so harshly dealt with by the Department of Education, in regard to the Cultural aspect of their education’ (Appendix D). The press release also refers to being ‘on the side of Irish Youth who seem eager to become good Europeans, by learning to become better Irish Men and Women first’ (Appendix D). The reference to Europe was reflective of the debate which was occurring at the time regarding

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43 TÉ was Teilifís Éireann the Irish Television Network the precursor to the present national broadcasting authority Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ). Appearing on the national TV station was a validation of his status as a musician in the same way as the radio was for Jack Mulkere eight years earlier.

44 See Appendix D for the full Press Release.
Ireland’s entry to the European Union (EU), then the European Economic Community (EEC), which Ireland joined in 1973, signalling a broader awareness of the significance of cultural practices in European identity. In spite of the threat to the future of the music classes, they flourished and continued for many years under the auspices of the VEC and with the support of Comhaltas.\footnote{The classes continued in Ennis and in 1972, Tom Barrett, a fiddle player originally from County Kerry, succeeded Brendan McMahon as teacher for the Ennis class. Tom Barrett also taught in Corofin, a village 8 miles north of Ennis and Gortbofearna National school about 10 miles north west of Ennis.}

Fig. 3.5 A commemorative monument honouring Jack Mulkere in his home village Crusheen (Courtesy of John Boyd).
During the 1960s and 1970s Comhaltas expanded, and people of all generations and backgrounds became members. The organisation developed, and new branches were established throughout the county, and consequently, music classes were initiated in many other places. An outreach scheme was established and increasingly musicians themselves become more actively involved in teaching. Kari Veblen maintains that the organisations such as Comhaltas accentuated the teacher’s role ‘making it more formal, more explicit, more professional. Through the organisations efforts, individual teachers reach more students and extend their musical influence in the community more widely’ (1991, pp.181-182). In this case Comhaltas worked in tandem with the educational structures which were in place. For example there is a reference in a report dated Jan 1974 (SRF 38D66) by Pat Liddy, Rúnaí (Secretary) of Bord Chontae an Chláir (the Clare County Board of Comhaltas) to national teacher Frank Custy holding seminars for potential music teachers, and acting in the role of coordinator of an outreach scheme. In terms of the particular arrangement with the VEC, by the end of the 1970s the end of an era was flagged, as Comhaltas developed their own structures and became increasingly engaged with teaching children directly.

The music classes continued to flourish through the 1970s, but the VEC involvement in them decreased over time. There are a number of reasons for this; in particular, the increasing youth membership gave the members of the Ennis Branch of

46 As well as nationally, in due course Branches were also formed internationally. For further reading see Vallely (2011, pp.144-149).
47 This also coincided with the appointment in 1979 of Seán Conlon to a fulltime position of Adult Education Organiser. Although the classes for traditional music continued to flourish the VEC involvement in them decreased over time. However the VEC supported the traditional music community in other ways; through their Youth and Sport Grant they donated £500 euro annually from 1981 until 1986. They also allowed the use of the schools and halls for traditional music events. Other musical genres were supported. In July 1971 George Tweedle was appointed to establish a Brass Band. Clem Garvey, Leonard Sheridan and Kathleen Touhy were also appointed to teach music as a subject within the School Curriculum in Shannon Comprehensive School and in Ennis Vocational School. In due course other schools followed (VEC Minutes 24/7/1979 and 18/10/1979).
Comhaltas a confidence in the future, to the extent that it became possible to consider the building of a headquarters for Comhaltas in Clare. Between 1978 and 1983, Cois na hAbhna was built. The development of Cois na hAbhna, which will be referred to in more detail in chapter six, was the primary reason that the VECs involvement in traditional music classes decreased and ultimately came to an end.\(^{48}\)

**IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM: Traditional Music in Ennis Schools**

In this section I discuss the significance of the Comhaltas /VEC classes in terms of teaching Irish traditional music in local schools and other contexts. Until the 1970s the repertoire taught, particularly in the primary schools in Ennis, consisted primarily of Irish language songs.\(^{49}\) As a result of primary teachers attending the classes, traditional music gradually became part of the school curriculum in many schools. In addition, from the mid 1970s onwards, further new spaces for the transmission of traditional music emerged in Ennis to meet the demands of growing student numbers. The key point I wish to make here is that greater access to classes meant that more people were facilitated in experiencing traditional music, something which created the potential of furthering Comhaltas’ aims.

A significant feature of the Comhaltas/VEC classes was the attendance of local primary school teachers who as part of their teacher training were taught Tonic

\(^{48}\) In 1990, however, there was a proposal by the VEC for a school of Irish Traditional Music in Ennis and by 1993 Maoin Cheoil an Chláir was established which recognised traditional music and Western Art Music equally.

\(^{49}\) Musician and school teacher Johnny McCarthy and musician and broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan were members of Christian Brothers school band during their time as pupils there. This was in existence prior to the VEC/Comhaltas classes and was part of the promotion of tunes based on Irish ballads popular from the 1930s onwards. Tin whistle bands were promoted by musician, composer and arranger Carl Hardebeck (1869–1945). For further reading see McCarthy (1999, pp.119-120) and Neeson (1952, p.58) However, the repertoire did not include the Irish traditional dance repertoire.
Solfa. Partly as a result of changes in the *Curaclem Nua* in 1971 many of these teachers wished to learn to read staff notation, and decided to attend the VEC classes. These teachers were also inspired by Frank Custy, who as principal of Toonagh National School successfully incorporated traditional music into the school curriculum from the 1960s. Frank Custy attended the initial classes in 1961 and was taught by Jack Mulkere. He was not motivated from a personal need to perform traditional music and up to that point he had not expressed any interest in music. In actual fact, it had been pointed out to him during his training as a teacher that he had no musical talent and he always perceived himself as not particularly deft. In fact he had been classed as a ‘crow’ (without singing talent) in teaching training college. Remarkably Frank had a profound influence as a music teacher, and the fact that he had not been considered musical while attending teacher training college did not in the end prevent him from being one of the most effective teachers of traditional music in the area, as attested by his many students. Hundreds of students attended his classes both during and after school time, including well known musicians such as fiddle players Siobháin Peoples, James Cullinan, accordion player Sharon Shannon and many more a number of whom are referred to in chapter five.

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50 In addition Brendan McMahon helped a number of people prepare for the entrance exam to become primary teachers.
51 For further reading on developments in Primary school music Education see McCarthy (1999, pp.150-151).
52 Similarly, Johnny McCarthy as Principal of Ballinacally National School, in a village located about 10 miles from Ennis Although the population of the village was 208 in 1971 (Census 1971), the school draws from a wider catchment area. He incorporated traditional music in the school curriculum and taught many musicians from the early 1970s onwards.
53 Frank Custy taught music in Toonagh, Gortbofearna and Corofin National Schools, all schools within ten miles of Ennis. Many members of his own family are well known musicians. His daughters Mary, Francis, Nóra and Cathý are well known musicians and music teachers and his son Tola tours with the groups *Blazing Bows*, *Guidewires* and *Calico*. Francis, along with her husband John O’Connor runs Custys Music Shop in Ennis, which is dedicated to Irish Traditional Music.
As a trained teacher he always considered that it would be possible to teach any topic (Personal Interview June 2007). It was his response as principal, to the needs of his students, which led him to start learning traditional music and ‘passing it on’ to his students. He recalls:

‘Maybe I have an advantage above other people as far as teaching music, because I wasn’t a musical person, and I had no music when I was young...First of all, I failed singing in the training college. I was one of the few teachers who came out of the training college without Ceol (music) in my CV; which is funny afterwards because I often found myself giving talks to teachers, and I would be the only one in the room who hadn’t Ceol in their CV’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Frank Custy maintained that it was his training as a teacher rather than his skills as a musician which had a bearing on his success. In an interview with Niall Behan,

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54 This photo was taken on the occasion of the official turning on of the new water scheme in the nearby village of Ruan. Toonagh National School did not have a policy of wearing school uniforms and on this occasion the pupils wore their best clothes. Many of the girls wore their Communion veils, which would indicate that they had recently made their First Communion. Likewise, a number of the boys wore a Communion Medal on their lapel. Playing for the public in this way was part of Frank Custy’s teaching strategy of making music part of social life. This topic is discussed in chapters five and six.

55 This is a generic term to describe transmission from generation to generation.
Entertainment Manager with Shannon Development, his former teacher, Jack Mulkere recalls his surprise and pride that a former pupil would teach.\textsuperscript{56} Jack noted:

‘I will always remember and I’d like to go on record without any… hesitation in saying that one of the greatest achievements I’ve had in my lifetime, was that particular class in Ennis…I can say now what Frank has done. I can say that I never thought the day would come, where I’d see one of my pupils doing what he has done’ (Collins 2003, p.66).

Jack’s pride in Frank Custy’s teaching of traditional music was founded on an awareness of the advantage that Frank had as a school principal, in having close contact with children during their formative years in school. Frank Custy recalls:

‘He (Jack) expressed a happiness that he had come across a teacher that was enthusiastic about teaching the music and he kept on to me the whole time…he did inspire me to tell you the truth, and it encouraged me…and he did have his wish’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

One of the teachers inspired by Frank Custy’s success was Sr. Stephanie.\textsuperscript{57} She was aware of the fact that Frank had not been a consummate musician before he began to teach and felt that she could also follow his example (Personal Interview Sr. Stephanie June 2007).\textsuperscript{58} However, unlike in Toonagh where Franks Custy was school principal, music was not incorporated into the school curriculum of the Holy Family School where Sr. Stephanie taught, so for many years her music classes were held during lunchtimes and after the school day. She recalls:

‘At that time teachers would be adamant they wanted it done and were thrilled when it was done, but they didn’t want disturbance. I had learned to fit it in. So I sacrificed my sos (break), my coffee break, and the poor children did too,

\textsuperscript{56} Shannon Free Airport Development Company Ltd; (Shannon Development) was established in 1959 to develop Shannon airport and to promote tourism and industry in the area. Niall Behan’s role in the development of new performance contexts is discussed at greater length in chapter five.

\textsuperscript{57} Although she studied music in training college and played a little on the tin whistle, Sr. Stephanie had limited performance experience. Her love of Irish traditional music was founded on her background; she was from Kilfenora a well-known area for Irish traditional music, and members her family were traditional musicians. Her brother JJ Conway is a flute player with the Tulla Céilí Band.

\textsuperscript{58} Similarly national teacher Mrs Philomena Nugent taught music in Knockanean National School. This pattern continued and was replicated in many other schools in the following decades.
but they didn’t mind. They never seemed to mind anyway, they were great. That went on from '76' (Personal Interview Sr. Stephanie June 2007).

Those teachers who taught music in their classrooms were motivated to teach through staff notation and it would appear that there was no particular challenge in this for them. When they returned to their own students, they taught their students what they themselves had learned, thereby in addition, introducing traditional music to children who may otherwise not have experienced it. This certainly was a major factor in creating the conditions to effect a change in the general reception of traditional music in the town of Ennis.

A third factor and key point is of course, that Comhaltas, in an effort to expand the VEC classes, quickly recognized the potential for expansion through school teachers and made a concerted effort to include these teachers in their plans. This is evidenced in the document circulated from the Rúnaí (Secretary) of the County Board, Máirtín Ó Dubháin, to a specially formed sub-committee to consider the potential of this expansion (see Appendix E). The document was forwarded to twelve people including seven Teagascóirí Cheoil (music instructors). It drew attention to the problems of extending the scheme to other Technical Schools (former name for the Vocational Schools) and suggested the inclusion of National primary schools through the cooperation of National schoolteachers who were already conducting school band classes. It was proposed to ‘integrate these classes into our Traditional Music class system, by enlisting the help of the teachers, and by doing all we can to help them in return,’ (Appendix E). As Marie McCarthy noted, this movement in schools was ‘the coming together of the formerly polarised worlds of school music and traditional music in educational settings’ (1999, p.185), and Ennis was right at the centre of this actualisation.
It is clear in this document that Comhaltas were not only taking ownership of the scheme but were also taking responsibility, and an active part in furthering the scheme. The aim was to widen the scope, build on the success of the existing classes by actively recruiting more teachers in the project. This scheme went hand in hand with the development of new branches of Comhaltas in the county. Based on his experience as Principal in his own school in Toonagh, Frank Custy was appointed as a volunteer coordinator of the scheme. How this operated in practice and the part that the young Ennis musicians played in this campaign is highlighted in chapter six. Pat Liddy, Runaí (Secretary) outlines the rationale behind it:

‘When Frank (Custy) started teaching, teachers were scarce, parents did not have the money to pay anyway, so classes like you have now, couldn’t have happened in the early ’70s. And Frank’s philosophy was to develop Branches... We formed branches everyplace and people started teaching music in the schools. That was the theory behind it… Franks felt as we all did at the time, that nothing would happen in isolation’ (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).

Pat Liddy maintained that having an affiliation to Comhaltas provided teachers with a structure and a sense of not being alone. In his promotion of Comhaltas, Pat Liddy maintained that ‘the purpose of having a local branch was to coordinate the talents of that particular area… to promote, find and create new talent’ (Liddy 1975, p.14). In sum, these and other primary school teachers in the town and its hinterland provided tuition in the tin whistle, and over time introduced new instruments. In addition, these schools established ensembles such as marching bands, céilí bands and grúpaí cheoil, which regularly performed in concerts and in parades at Fleadhanna and other public occasions. 59

59 In the town, teachers such as Sr. Stephanie a teacher in the Holy Family School and Seán McDermott, a teacher in the Boys National School established school bands, which participated regularly in community events such as the Fleadh Nua Parade, a subject in chapter six.
In terms of traditional music in the secondary education system in Ennis, the only school to engage in it in a meaningful way was St. Flannan's College, a secondary school for boys. Fr. John Hogan, a former student of Jack Mulkere in Crusheen, a village eight miles north of Ennis, played a very significant role in encouraging young musicians in St. Flannan’s College (St. Flannan’s), where he taught Latin from 1955 until he became President of the College from 1971-1976, when he was appointed as Administrator for the Ennis Parish. During his time there, Fr. Hogan became aware of the number of traditional musicians who were pupils, and established a céilí band in the school. He engaged Frank Custy in the first instance, and subsequently Gus Tierney, a well-known fiddle player with the Kilfenora Céilí Band, as band trainers. However, other than at St. Flannan’s College, no other Ennis secondary school promoted traditional music in any significant way. Girls did not have the same opportunity in terms of Irish traditional music in a secondary school setting. In the Catholic secondary school, Coláiste Muire (the Coláiste) girls got the opportunity to be in choirs, and those who could play instruments were involved in the school orchestra, but there was no opportunity for traditional musicians in the early 1970s.

However, a key moment in the development of traditional music in the secondary schools came in the early 1970s when music teachers in the Coláiste, Sr. Paul and Sr. Flannan, and through Fr. Hogan in St. Flannan’s collaborated in order to

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60 St. Flannan’s College is a secondary school for boys, at that time also a boarding school, a Diocesan School.
61 Fr. John Hogan attended classes from Jack Mulkere at Durra House, near Crusheen village. He began classes in 1939 and remembers being at a class the night that World War Two broke out and he recalls the discussion among the adults present. He learned the fiddle through staff notation and copied tunes onto a manuscript which was supplied by the teacher.
62 ‘Coláiste Muire’ translates to English as ‘Mary’s College’, and is a girl’s secondary school run by the Mercy Sisters It is important to acknowledge the input of the Sisters of Mercy in Ennis particularly in developing choral education in their convent schools. Many of the sisters also taught piano including Sr. Albeus, who taught me for many years and whose work with Ernest DeRegge is referred to in chapter two.
get a Department of Education grant to buy instruments (this is described in more
detail in chapter four). Nonetheless, at the same time, in my experience as a pupil in
Coláiste Muire, my dual engagement in both classical and traditional genres was
accepted but only tacitly. I have a personal memory of being absent from school
without permission, on the Friday of the first Fleadh Nua in 1973. When I returned to
school the following week, one of my teachers, a Mercy Sister, quietly acknowledged
to me that she knew where I had spent my time, but she chose not to tell either my
parents or the principal. This is important because while not openly advocating
‘mitching’ (slang for skipping school), by backing me up, she accepted that it was
important and of value, at least to me, that I would take advantage of the experiences
of the fleadh, a major festival of Irish traditional music. She also knew that if it
became known by the school principal, she would certainly have been far from
understanding.

Following the success of the orchestra, the Coláiste and Flannan’s musicians
collaborated again and formed a band which won the All-Ireland competition in
Slógadh 1974.63 Run by Gael-Linn, an organisation that promotes the Irish language,
it was a competition to promote music, dance, drama, and storytelling through the
medium of Irish. Competitors generally entered through their schools and it was held
during term time with the national final held generally in late Spring.

The semi formal photo (Fig 3.6) includes ten boys and three girls dressed in
school uniforms. The orchestra and this band were the only musical collaborations
which took place between the two schools during this period, although the musicians
regularly performed together outside of the context of school, and many of them still
do to this day.

63 In English Slógadh translates to mobilisation.
Certainly, all the schools in the town had a relationship with Comhaltas, particularly during the Fleadhanna (music festivals) when school buildings were used for concerts and other fleadh events, but it was primarily St. Flannan’s College and the local primary schools who actively engaged in practice. Overall, the integration of Irish traditional music into the primary school curriculum was a major change, causing a ripple effect which, as will be discussed in chapter six, contributed to change in ways far beyond traditional music practice.

Irregular ‘Classrooms’

From the 1970s onwards, as musicians became more engaged in teaching, new and occasionally novel centres, at least for the time, were used, including community halls, public houses, musicians’ own living rooms, none of which bore the hallmarks of a conventional classroom i.e. they did not have blackboards, desks etc. Although not in the context of an institution such as a school building, nonetheless these classes
were a spin off from the Comhaltas/VEC classes. Even though the lessons were not held in school classrooms, the classes functioned in the same way in that teachers formally applied their individual pedagogies in the transmission of Irish traditional music.

In her work examining the musical pathways of musicians who were teachers, Ruth Finnegan found that in Milton Keynes, a musicians’ home was often the first place that he or she taught (1989, p.17). This same pattern of teaching is found replicated in Ennis, where a number of musicians began teaching privately in their own homes. This was in response to a demand from pupils for more individual attention, which was almost certainly connected to the rising interest in performing competitively. In contrast to the Comhaltas/VEC classes, the pupil teacher ratio was small. Sometimes one to one tuition was given by musicians on their specialist instruments e.g. local flautist Eamonn Cotter was the first to teach flute and tin whistle from his home in Ennis, as was Michael Butler, a renowned box player, who taught the accordion. In the late 1970s, fiddle player Gus Tierney, a member of the well known Kilfenora Céili Band, taught for a number of years in his home before establishing traditional music classes in the Maria Assumpta Hall in the town. There, he taught most instruments, although his primary instrument was the fiddle (and his work as a trainer of céili bands which will be detailed in chapter four). Vincent Griffin, a fiddle player from Feakle in East County Clare, taught fiddle for many years at the Greengrove, a pub in the outskirts of Ennis. Although these classes were outside of the remit of either Comhaltas or the VEC, the musicians were members of Comhaltas, and there was a tacit acceptance of this practice by the organisation. This fact is reflected in a report by Pat Liddy, Rúnaí (Secretary) of the County Board of Comhaltas in 1974, in which he referred to classes continuing ‘on a private basis and
those responsible for organising same are to be complimented’ (SRF38 D66).

Although they were working independently, the musicians transmitted musical
knowledge which enabled newcomers to become participatory members of
Comhaltas, a point clearly evident to the organisation.

In summary, although at the outset of this scheme Comhaltas played the role
of coordinator, as the scheme advanced, this role became more direct. In her
comprehensive work on Comhaltas as a national institution, Méabh Ní Fhuartháin
argues that ‘Comhaltas failed to develop any key role in the education during the first
two decades, even though within its institution, passing on traditional music was
imperative for the organisation’ (2011, p.335). While this may have been the situation
from a national perspective, in my view it was not the position locally in Ennis, or in
County Clare generally. It is clear that Comhaltas were very proactive in the area of
transmission through education.

FACETS OF INSTITUTIONALISATION

As maintained by Marie McCarthy, it was during the late 1960s –early 1970s that the
transmission of traditional music outside of the formal education system began to
incorporate some of the practices of school (1999, p.185). Teacher training, and
elements of administration, which were part and parcel of the system in an
institutional context, became further layers of experience for the new teachers. Earlier
in this chapter I referred to Miller’s work on the general properties of social
institutions, in which he relates the ‘tasks and rules regulating the performance of
those tasks’ to ‘different levels of status and degrees of authority’ (Miller 2011, p.4).
In this section I discuss the adoption of institutional practices by the new teachers in
the Comhaltas/VEC classes; the participation in teacher training courses, and the adoption of administrative practices which were part and parcel of the VEC educational system. In this context, the VEC prescribed the practices. However, while systems were put in place, ultimately the institutions were peopled by humans who, while using the institutional framework, were not averse to occasionally bending the rules, particularly where such modifications suited local practices and expectations.

Teacher Training

Teacher training in this context relates to training of two groups. Existing trained professional primary teachers were enabled to teach the basic instrumental skills in Irish traditional music to pupils in their respective schools, and existing traditional musicians who wished to teach were provided with basic teaching skills.

Douglas Hyde, President of the Gaelic League, the organisation founded in 1893 to promote the Irish language, promoted the idea of a training school for pipers as early as 1892, which led the establishment of pipers clubs (McCarthy 1999, p.104). The pipers clubs were the first formal schools to organise and provide instruction in traditional music in urban areas (McCarthy 1999, p.104).\(^{64}\) McCarthy also refers to teacher training courses in the Ward Method of music teaching established in 1966, which was rooted in the traditions and culture of the Catholic Church (1999, p.154).\(^{65}\) All in all, however, there was an absence of resources for the teaching of traditional music.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{64}\) The oldest Pipers Club was started in Cork in 1898 and in Dublin in 1900 (Vallely 1999, 2011).
\(^{66}\) McCarthy also refers to training in the Kodaly Method, an international method which became popular in Ireland in the early 1980s (McCarthy 1999, p.155).
There were references to discussions among members of Comhaltas about teacher training as early as 1954. In a letter dated 27/11/1954 (SR F37D20) from Seán Reid, Honorary Organising Secretary of Coisde Condae an Chláir (County Clare Branch), to P. Ó Moinseall, Ard Runaí (General Secretary) of the national executive of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Reid refers to a proposal made at a Comhaltas meeting in Ennis to contact the Department of Education, requesting them to provide training to potential teachers of traditional music. He offers the following justification, raising interesting questions about ‘correct’ pedagogy:

‘In this way a body of teachers would be formed who would not only ground their pupils in the correct method of holding and playing their instruments, but would see that they were able to read and write music, and above all play it in the traditional style’ (SRF 37 D20).

It is clear that even at this early stage the notion of being literate was considered important in the successful transmission of traditional music. It also was reflective of a perception of a need to legitimise the project or even to validate Irish traditional music. Of course it also broadened the traditional musician’s access to written resources, something in which many musicians were interested (and this is discussed in chapter four). As already referred to earlier in this chapter, one of the conditions for the employment of teachers by the VEC was that they would be musically literate, and this was a primary concern of the regular school teachers. Ní Fhuartháin refers to a report in the Anglo Celt (12/6/1954) of the Comhaltas Annual Convention 1954 where there was a suggestion of initiating a college of traditional music (2011, pp.142-143). The article also referred to a motion passed by Executive Council to

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67 The Anglo Celt is a weekly newspaper, published in County Cavan and founded in 1846.
‘issue diplomas to suitable musicians, who are in the council’s opinion, competent to teach Irish music.’

In late 1968 Comhaltas reported in their publication Treoir that there were discussions with the Department of Education regarding ‘the extension of traditional music in our education system’ (1968 No 4, p.1). In the Minutes of the Munster Council Meeting of Comhaltas 1/5/1969 reference is made to the Department of Education ‘favouring’ instructing primary teachers during their training ‘as (it) will enable them to teach music’ (SRF 41D63). In 1969 the Department of Education, in response, arranged an ‘official Cúrsa Ceol (music course) for selected National teachers in Ennis. Máirtín Ó Dubháin Rúnaí (Secretary) of Bord Contae an Chláir (Clare County Board) of Comhaltas wrote to fifteen musicians throughout the county, inviting them to attend a preliminary meeting to select a panel of musicians for a Traditional Music Symposium for the proposed event. Séamus MacMathúna, in his role as Oifigeach Cheoil (music officer) of Comhaltas, was invited to act as Chairman. It was proposed that the selected panel of musicians would ‘be on stage for short demonstrations and explanations’ (SRF38 D11). As referred to earlier, this was a strategic move on the part of Comhaltas. Teachers were seen as having a ready audience, who could be nurtured and motivated to play Irish traditional music and possibly add to the membership of Comhaltas. In addition, gaining the support of the Department of Education added weight and prestige to the project.

68 However, it appears that nothing came of this until in 1980, when Comhaltas in collaboration with Micheál Ó hEidhin, Music Inspector with the Department of Education, instituted a teaching diploma, Teastais Teagaisc Cheol Tíre (TTCT). Providing such a course was seen as important for establishing standards in the teaching of traditional music, as well as ensuring the transmission of traditional music. (McCarthy 1999, p.168) In addition to providing a teacher training course, in 1998 Comhaltas, in conjunction with the Royal Irish Academy of Music (RIAM), established a graded Irish traditional music examination syllabus. The RIAM withdrew from this in 2003 (Vallely 2011, p.149).
The music teachers who operated under the VEC scheme in Ennis were not professionally trained in the sense that school teachers were. They were musicians of a high standing in the locality, who were either approached to teach or who were personally motivated to teach. Teaching was not part of their ‘day job’ but was engaged with outside of their regular work.\(^{69}\) As the classes and the interest in the classes grew in Ennis, Comhaltas recognised the importance of maintaining the momentum, and focussed increasingly on the teaching of Irish traditional music. It became clear that a supply of teachers was going to be needed to fill the demand for prospective classes, and that training of existing and prospective teachers would be required. Comhaltas wanted teachers of the same traditional calibre to continue to draw upon their own skills and further develop them.

In 1970 the VEC gave approval to a request by Comhaltas to cover the cost of attendance at a course in Birr for teachers of traditional music (VEC Minutes 13/2/1970 Item 6). It was attended by Brendan McMahon referred to earlier, and Martin Talty a renowned piper and music teacher in Miltown Malbay about twenty miles west of Ennis. In 1978, for the same reason, Mairtin Ó Dubháin, Runaí (Secretary) of Comhaltas requested the VEC to establish an annual scholarship to a student to do a BMus degree in University College Cork (VEC Minutes 16/2/1978 Item 17). However, this was considered impossible and not granted.\(^{70}\) Although it did not materialise, it was a very progressive idea, which showed that the traditional music fraternity were cognisant of their need for it, as a core part of their training. Since it was something proposed by Comhaltas rather than imposed, there was no

\(^{69}\) Although these teachers were paid, because of the tax system in place at the time it was not a lucrative occupation (Personal Interview McMahon Jan. 2007).

\(^{70}\) As early as 1957 Aloys Fleishmann, Professor of Music in UCC, had written to the VEC requesting them to establish a Scholarship Scheme for the training of county music supervisors. Although Professor Fleishmann wrote regularly to the VEC until 1965 repeating his request it was not taken up.
sense that it would conflict in any way with their concept of authenticity. It is clear that Comhaltas were proactive in promoting training not only among their teaching members but also among the school teachers.

**Administration Duties**

Many practices which were part and parcel of the organisational routines of the classroom became incorporated into the Irish traditional music classes held in the schools. Since the attendance numbers were large, as evidenced from the class list (Appendix F) the teachers applied the systems they were familiar with in their own experiences at school. These went hand in hand with the administrative elements e.g. classes were timetabled to begin and end at a certain time, students were formally enrolled and their attendance was recorded. In terms of pedagogical rituals, the blackboard was used for transmission and homework was assigned and checked. To a large extent the teacher was also seen as an authority figure by pupils. However, the boundaries between teacher and pupil roles were not entirely fixed. This is something Miller describes as the implicit and informal dimension, the institutional culture which relates to the manner in which rules and tasks are undertaken. He contends that there can be competing cultures within a single organization:

‘The culture comprised of attitudes and norms that is aligned to the formal and official complex of tasks and rules might compete with an informal and ‘unofficial’ culture that is adhered to by a substantial sub-element of the organisation’s membership’ (Miller, 2011, p.5).

This is evidenced in the way the music classes operated in practice. The explicit and implicit to an extent existed even within the VEC establishment itself. Although the
structures were in place and deemed necessary, in the opinion of former CEO Jim Lyons, they were not rigidly adhered to. He notes:

‘You had to have an effective class- you had to have twelve class members in attendance and there was a fee involved, and we had a reduced fee for some classes for the Gaeilge and Comhaltas and the music; because they were seen as really traditional...there was never a problem over fees. A rule came in later that they (the classes) had to be self financing ...I never checked on who paid, once there was an effective class there’ (Personal Interview, Lyons Mar 2007).

Accordingly, the teachers were also relaxed and laid-back when it came to fees and attendance, in a sense reflecting the relaxed culture of the time. This is exemplified in the experience of music teacher Brendan McMahon, as he recalls the irregular class numbers:

‘At bingo night I’d have about six extra. There were about six in some families and they’d be only two of them registered’ (Personal Interview, McMahon Jan 2007).

However, the easy attitude regarding class enrolment did not stretch to all areas of administration. Brendan McMahon describes the level of class related administration which had to be done in relation to teaching in this new context, and outlines some of the non-teaching work that was required of him as a teacher in an institution like the VEC:

‘I used have to do the roll...I had about one hundred and fifty (pupils) altogether, between forty, fifty, and sixty, and maybe there would be bigger classes one night and smaller another...I didn’t have to collect anything...I had to put in all the hours, the hours they missed, and they were all different hours and I had to send that in. Three or four different forms maybe, spend an hour a week doing that, and hand them in to the Vocational School’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

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71 Jim Lyons, from County Mayo, was appointed as Principal of Ennis Vocational School in 1967 and became CEO of the VEC in 1975 until he retired in 2002.
Examples of the forms which needed to be completed by teachers include enrolment forms, logging attendance, filling up time sheets for the hours they taught, etc. The following are two examples of the enrolment forms filled in October 1972 by teacher Tom Barrett; one for Kieran Hanrahan, musician and broadcaster who is referenced throughout this thesis, and another for my brother Ciarán Cotter (1964-2005). As is evidenced from these forms, by this time the enrolment system had evolved to allow for beginners and advanced levels.

Fig. 3.8 VEC Enrolment forms. (Courtesy of Kerry Barrett)

It is evident from the list of students registered for Tom Barrett’s Class in Ennis Vocational School, October 1972 (Appendix F (a) and (b)) that student numbers were high and that there was a tradition of families attending; Queally, Cotter, Hanrahan, Cosgrove, Roche, McInerney families are registered. A number of nuns from the Sisters of Mercy order, teachers in the Holy Family Primary School; including Sr. Stephanie referred to earlier in this chapter, Sr. Dominic, Sr. Mona and Sr. Patricia,
are also listed. The significance of the attendance of primary teachers in such classes is discussed more thoroughly in chapter six. As related in earlier chapters these families and others who attended were first generation townies, i.e. children of parents from the hinterland that moved into the town of Ennis. Although a number of those registered were from outlying areas, the majority of those registered cited addresses in the town and were in a position to walk to the classes, which provided an added social dimension to attending.

There were also financial factors associated with availing of tuition through this system. As already mentioned, fees of 50p were paid by the students to the VEC, which were used to fund the class. The emergence of the notion of paid formal relationship between the student and teacher is documented in relation to travelling teachers (Cranitch 2006, p.183) but in addition, there has been a tradition of the traditional arts being passed on in informally outside of a financial context. Whereas the word ‘class’ may not have been used in the context of travelling teachers, there was a certain degree of formality. In the case of Pádraig O’Keefe, although he was a national school teacher, he taught music outside of the formal school system (Cranitch 2006, pp. 183-188). The exchange of money, nonetheless, became a part of the transmission in this context and by 1968 the part time teachers in the VEC classes were being paid 16/- per hour (VEC Minutes 22/11/1968 Item 22). In 1969 the pay increased to 22/6 per hour of actual teaching (VEC Minutes 14/5/1969 Item 8) and in 1971, as a result of decimalisation, the rate increased to £1.32, increasing further to £2.40 per hour by 1975 (VEC Minutes 22/11/1975 Item 19). In 1969 the pupils paid a
fee of 5/- per term (VEC Minutes 4/2/1969 Item 20) which increased to .50p in 1972 (Fig. 3.8) and to £1 in 1973 (VEC Minutes 14/11/1973 Item 30).

The claim form (Appendix G) filled in by music teacher Tom Barrett for classes he taught both in Ennis and in the outlying areas of Gortbofearna and Corofin, shows the amount of bureaucracy which was required in order to get remunerated for the classes. Combined with the rolls and the enrolment forms, this was a level of administration which was unrelated to the actual job of teaching music. The commitment shown by the teachers to their classes and to Comhaltas is clear, in particular considering the poor financial reward, as described by Brendan McMahon:

‘Paying sixty three pence in the pound, and I had a load of work to do here (at home) before going down, and I’d do two hours below’ (Personal Interview, McMahon Jan 2007).

It is clear that although there was a level of flexibility applied to some levels of the administration, nonetheless, it was an added dimension for the teachers, one which had not be there in the contexts which existed hitherto.

In conclusion, the emergence of the formalisation of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis through educational means, although given State support, was a community led development, rather than one stringently imposed from outside. A joint approach, the first of its kind, was led by the community, as represented by members of the new, ideologically motivated organisation Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, and the state, through the Vocational Education Committee. The initiative not only facilitated people in learning, but in addition it facilitated teachers to teach in the institutions where they were employed. This in turn led to a change in the musical practices of the primary schools in particular. In addition, these teachers inadvertently

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72 The figures are read as shillings and pence until February 1971 when Ireland’s currency was converted to decimalisation.

73 This refers to the government income tax rate of the time, an unprecedented 63% of gross earnings.
played their part in the preservation of traditional music. Though there was evidence of systems clashes between the formal VEC structures and the more informal Comhaltas-led models of teaching, which, in essence were being created, in process individual teachers and communities found ways to make things work. The classes proved to be rich sites for the transmission of music skills, materials, and cultural knowledge. Therefore, in the next chapter, chapter four, I focus on the musical knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge in the structured classes within the educational institutions referred to in this chapter.
‘The two-way interaction of experience and competence is crucial for the evolution of practice’ (Wenger 1998, p.139).
While chapter three related to the initiation and structuring of classes for the transmission of traditional Irish music in new formal contexts, this chapter is focused on the transmission of explicit musical knowledge in these classes, which were largely centred within an educational institution, the Ennis Technical School (the Tech) that people attended on a weekly basis from September to June.\(^1\) Here, teachers transmitted knowledge, which was initially focussed on the basic skills necessary to play an instrument. Over time, this was adjusted to accommodate an emerging competition culture created through Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas).\(^2\) In this regard, teachers introduced novel pedagogies pertaining to literacy and performance, and in particular revealed their individuality in terms of class management; Jack Mulkere’s storytelling and soft nationalist agenda, Brendan McMahons use of dance, Gus Tierney’s disciplined approach as a band trainer, and Frank Custy’s warmth, patience and egalitarian approach in wanting to give everyone a chance.

At the core of this chapter, also discussed in chapter three, is the aspiration of Comhaltas to secure new and younger musicians for its organisation. Ennis during the 1950s and 1960s had undergone intense socio-economic and cultural change, which in turn mobilised Comhaltas to focus on issues of teaching and learning, in order to maintain and guarantee the existence and continuation of its traditions. Wenger (1998) maintains that concerns about learning become more intensified when the world changes in an accelerated way, which often means refining its practice in order to ensure new membership e.g. there are times when learning is intensified such as in classrooms, through textbooks, teachers etc. (Wenger, 1998, p.8). He also maintains

\(^1\) These classes, run by the Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) in collaboration with Comhaltas Ceoltóirí (Comhaltas) were initiated in 1961. See also chapter three.  
\(^2\) Competitions are central to the Fleadh Cheoil (literally feast of music). At these music festivals people of all ages compete in various categories and age brackets for awards. For more detail see Ní Fhuartháin (2011) Vallely (2011) Comhaltas has been referred to in chapters two and three.
that social practice is a shared history of learning which has to be considered in the context of joining a community of practice such as Comhaltas, where a kind of catching-up is required i.e. developing the key skills necessary to allow us to participate and experience the world in a meaningful way. As a result of these classes, Comhaltas, in many respects, became a container in which traditional music was encouraged to survive. In addition, by promoting these classes, which provided access to fundamental musical knowledge, Comhaltas facilitated aspiring musicians to acquire a level of proficiency to take part in traditional music sessions and other activities, ultimately allowing the organisation to grow and develop, as well as creating a generation of proficient musicians for the town. In this way, as will be shown in this chapter, a symbiotic relationship existed between Comhaltas and those who attended these classes.

In addition to the transmission of musical knowledge within an ‘institution’, I also consider the significance of less formal ways that musical skills were acquired, both prior to and subsequent to the formation of the first formal class. I am particularly interested in how the people who ultimately taught music in a formal way, learned to play Irish traditional music themselves. In this regard I draw from Ruth Finnegan (1989), who in her study of musical activity in Milton Keynes introduced the concept of ‘musical pathways.’ Finnegan focused on how the diverse pathways taken by musicians shaped their musical practices and experiences. In addition, I am interested in how family background effects personal experience, and influences community practices. In relation to this, I apply Bourdieu’s theory of Habitus (1977) in which he examines the structures and practices that influence human behaviour.

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3 The concept of Community of Practice (Wenger, 1998) in relation to the Comhaltas organisation is discussed in chapter three.
While the focus of this chapter is primarily on the institutionally mediated transmission of traditional music, and it may seem that I am setting up a binary opposition of classroom-formal and community-informal, my intention is to show that these contexts were not fixed, but were far more adaptive and nuanced. In his discussion of knowledge and ‘knowing’, Wenger recognises that if knowledge is considered to be pieces of information, it makes sense to have it transmitted in a classroom, but in addition maintains that it is only part of ‘knowing’ and that it also involves active participation in a social community (Wenger 1998, p. 10). Accordingly, the explicit knowledge taught consciously and formally in this classroom setting i.e. the basic knowledge necessary to play an instrument, became a significant stepping stone on the pathway towards being able to participate more actively within a community, thus allowing further learning to occur through social practice; the subject of chapter five.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In section one, I first consider family background i.e. the *habitus* of the family, as a motivating force behind musical choices, particularly when choosing to practice Irish traditional music, and in influencing a sense of identity. Furthermore, and in order to contextualise how traditional music was learned in the Ennis of the 1950s, I examine the learning experiences of two traditional musicians, Johnny McCarthy and Michael Butler, who learned before the formal classes in the Tech were instigated in 1961. While both of these men attended the classes there for a short period as adults, primarily they both learned, albeit in different ways, to play traditional music in their homes, without any planned formal instruction. Subsequently, in very different contexts, they became teachers of traditional music; Johnny as part of his role as a school teacher and
principal of a primary school and Michael, privately in his own home. This section draws from extensive interviews conducted with them in 2007 and 2008.

Section two is concerned with explicit and tacit musical knowledge and the process of its transmission in the new context of the classroom i.e. ‘what is said and what is left unsaid, what is represented and what is assumed’ (Wenger 1998, p.47). I examine what that knowledge was founded on, in particular looking at how the teacher’s own pedagogies were personally orientated, and the extent that the institutional ideologies discussed in chapter three underpinned them. I examine why and what type of musical knowledge was formally taught, and what knowledge was taken for granted. I also identify what practices and knowledge were maintained, overlooked or neglected and how the content and repertoire was altered and adapted to suit new conditions. Through the lens of former students I focus in particular on the initial classes held in Ennis i.e. the Comhaltas/ VEC classes taught in the Tech by Jack Mulker and Brendan McMahon. I also consider the role of Gus Tierney as a trainer for St. Flannan’s College Céili Band, whose involvement was founded on his membership of the iconic Kilfenora Céili Band. In this section I also consider the use of notation in the classroom. The recollections and commentaries of former students provide a rich textual narrative and commentary, evidencing the pedagogic practices, and revealing how the classes worked. Additional primary sources include private music manuscripts, Seán Reid’s private papers, Tom Barrett’s private papers, books and minutes of VEC and Comhaltas meetings; all providing additional pedagogic information and experiential perspectives.4

4 One such manuscript is owned by Patrick O’Loughlin, one of Jack Mulkere’s first students in the Tech in Ennis in 1961. Tom Barrett also taught in the VEC and will be discussed at greater length in chapter five.
The final section of the chapter focuses on two issues. Firstly, I examine musical instruments from a number of perspectives. I consider the use of the tin whistle as a gateway instrument to playing other instruments. I also look at the acquisition of new instruments, particularly looking at the motivation behind the instrumental choices made, including the role of parents in those choices, and the innovative ways that funding was found to purchase them. Secondly, I explore some of the unsystematic ways that musical knowledge was acquired both inside and outside the classroom, illustrating that some of the practices which existed prior to the organised classes continued, and that the sharing of musical knowledge was not totally dependent on formalised structures. This in turn illustrates the dynamic interplay between organisational/institutional structures and more informal methods of learning, but also reflects on the notion of institutional learning being social, and informal contexts having their own structural underpinnings.

**Section One**

**Identifying the Habitus**

Prior to the formalisation of transmission through the formal class structures established in the 1960s, it is evident from Breathnach (1971) and McCarthy (1999) that Irish traditional music was being passed on informally by social and cultural life in the community, and semi formally through dancing masters and travelling teachers. In this section, I first introduce two musicians Johnny McCarthy, from Ennis, and Michael Butler from Barefield, a village four miles from Ennis. In examining their musical ‘pathways’ (Finnegan 1989) I not only contextualise how music was transmitted prior to the founding of the Comhaltas/VEC class in the Tech in Ennis,
but in addition, I acknowledge their experiences of learning in a social context, and
draw attention to the variations in their experiences, which in turn informed how they
chose to teach.

First of all, and in line with Wenger’s argument that the knowledge received in
the classroom is only part of learning, I acknowledge the unconscious cognitive
knowledge acquired prior to attending the classroom. It is widely accepted that
knowledge is transmitted and received from birth onwards and indeed even before
this. Children come under cultural influences from the time they are born. In his book
*Outline of the Theory of Practice* (1977) Bourdieu examined the structures and
practices that framed and influenced human behaviour and recognised that the *habitus*
acquired in the family influences the structuring of the experience at school, and in
turn shapes later experiences:

‘the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school
experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specific
pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself
diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g.
the reception and assimilation of the messages of the culture industry or work
experiences), and so on, from restructuring to restructuring’ (Bourdieu 1977,
p.87).

In the first instance, I am applying this concept to a group of people who relocated
from rural parts of the county into the town of Ennis. As a result of the economic
growth of Ennis referred to in chapter two, there was an increase in the migration of
people from rural areas of the county into the town. While people were drawn by the
prospect of employment, the new housing estates which were being built, added to the
attraction of settling in the town. Although not a fixed group, they shared a *habitus*
largely based on a rural way of life. Rather than adapting to a different lifestyle, they
held on to many aspects of a rural way of life, leading to the reconfiguring of a rural
habitus in this new urban setting, e.g. they gathered socially, frequented certain public houses and in terms of sporting allegiances often aligned themselves with their original home places, rather than with the town hurling and football teams. This pattern also carried on to the next generation. In the case of my family, most weekends were spent in the countryside, particularly visiting relations or attending events in Kilmihil, in West Clare, the birthplace of both my parents. Although I was born in the town, until I was in my early twenties I considered myself from West Clare rather than from the town. It was largely influenced by the attitude of my parents, who rarely socialised in Ennis, and who despite living in the town for fifty six years, still consider themselves from Kilmihil. In terms of their attitude as parents to the teenage culture of the town, I was permitted to attend any type of event held outside the town, but I found it difficult at times to get permission to attend social events in the town. For example I was not permitted to join the youth club or go to the cinema because it would be full of townies. Certainly, the fact that I was the eldest of seven children was part of the equation, particularly since the experience of some of my younger siblings was reflective of a more relaxed attitude towards urban culture; getting permission to go to the cinema, attend ‘hops’ (dances) or the Friary Hall youth club was a little easier particularly for the boys. Furthermore, in my memory the term townie was to some extent derogatory, reflecting a degree of rural urban tension. In practice, although born and bred in the town I did not consider myself from the town instead I felt a deeper affinity to my rural roots, which was no doubt largely

5 This is further supported by the early activities of Comhaltas in Ennis, previously outlined in chapter three. In regard to sport, Gaelic football and hurling are promoted by the national organisation, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) founded in 1884. These are amateur sports. For more regarding GAA activities in Ennis and County Clare see Byrnes (2010 and 2007).

6 This is referenced further in chapter one. A link was implied between townie activities and townie behaviour. I remember regularly being denied permission by my parents to even walk down town on a Saturday, in case I would end up ‘polishing the monument’-wasting time sitting on the steps of the Doric column in the Square, a landmark in the centre of the town, built in honour of the political leader Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847).
influenced by the outlook of my parents. Certainly this was my position until my adulthood when I finally embraced my ‘Ennis’ identity.

This was also a dichotomy for many of my contemporaries who had rural born parents. The prevalent view was that authentic traditional music was rural based; associated with a rural way of life. Clearly as young traditional musicians we aspired to be accepted, and since traditional music was not expected to have, or even acknowledged as having the possibility of, an urban dynamic at that time it was natural that we would draw on our rural roots. Vincent McMahon a young fiddle player from St. Michael’s Villas commented:

‘We were from the town…from an early age I always associated music (traditional music) with the country…At that time people had to believe that you got the music from someplace. So, we were taken a bit more seriously, because the rural adult traditional music world could trace our music to our parents or grandparents’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

Vincent McMahon revealed that the majority of those who lived in his locality, St. Michael’s Villas, an area which produced the largest concentration of young musicians in Ennis during the 1970s had rural backgrounds; people who had relocated from rural areas of the county or as returned emigrants, including the Coffey family, and the Hanrahan and the Roche families (who were cousins). At the same time, he also acknowledged the Skeritt family who were ‘townies,’ but that they were related to the Conlan’s, who had a long established dancing school in the town (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007). In drawing attention to their link with an Irish dancing school, he implied a connection through traditional music that may not have existed otherwise. Gabriella Hanrahan, who also lived in St. Michael’s Villas, observes that:

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7 Allegiance to parental birthplaces also stretched to sport. For example musician and broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan, was loyal to the team in Clarecastle, the birthplace of his father, rather than the Ennis team, Éire Óg.
'One of the dynamics in Ennis which created this rich music scene was that in
the area St. Michael’s Villas to Connolly Villas and over on to the Clare Rd;
the link in the musicians was they had rural parents. As children we were
country children living in town and we had this tradition that was at odds with
the mainstream tradition of rock and roll, and everything else in the
town’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

My brother Eamonn’s perception of identity is more subtle, in that he considers that
living in the particular area of town made a particular difference in terms of
involvement in the rock culture of the town (see Map of Ennis Fig. 4.1). He explains
that:

‘Maybe it was the side of the town I grew up in. We weren’t in the
enclave… You were kind of out of the loop… we were the first generation
townies’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).

During the 1970s in Ennis, families still lived in the town centre above family
businesses, and I certainly had a sense of having a very different background from
those who lived on the main streets above shops.

Although being from Ennis, as regards traditional music Kieran Hanrahan was
more conscious of his Clare identity than that of Ennis and very aware that it had
value or symbolic and cultural capital. He reflected that:

‘Once you told people you were from Clare you had kudos you know. The
people would say “aw sure ‘twas no wonder you had the music”. I don’t know whether
that was a mythical thing or not’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Over time, as will be related in chapter six the perception of Ennis changed,
and it became recognised in its own right as a vibrant centre for traditional music
practice. In recent years the term *townie* is proudly used, and in my experience it is
now by and large considered a badge of honour. The move of traditional music from
the periphery to the centre was the key to this.

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8 St. Michael’s Villas, St. Flannan’s Terrace, Clare Road and the Turnpike area.
Since the practice of traditional music had largely been a rural based practice, it was natural that over time, this too would be part of the reconfiguration. In the first instance it began as a result of the relocation of people to the town. Among the many musicians to relocate to Ennis from rural areas were banjo player Jimmy Ward, accordion player Joe Cooley and fiddle player Joe Ryan who were all three, employed by Paddy Con McMahon, who was a significant employer of tradesmen. In addition, many musicians returned from abroad at this time, having emigrated to the large urban centres of the UK or the US. They settled in Ennis, rather than in their original localities e.g. concertina player Sonny Murray who returned from London and instead of returning to Kilmihil in West Clare, settled in St. Flannan’s Terrace. Similarly, Brendan McMahon, originally from Miltown Malbay, a town about twenty miles west of Ennis, and Gus Tierney originally from Kilfenora, a town about fifteen miles north of Ennis, settled in the town and subsequently became music teachers there. Many of these musicians were regular visitors to people’s homes e.g. the home of musicians Tony and Brendan McMahon, whose parents were originally from Connolly, a village eight miles from Ennis, was regularly visited by accordion players Paddy O’Brien and Joe Cooley. As described in chapter one, the reconfiguring of the town continued, new housing developments were established. As these new settlers to the town had families, the next generation began to demonstrate an interest in traditional music.

9 Joe Cooley (1924-1973) was an iconic figure in traditional music, particularly as an accordion player. He was from Peterswell, County Galway. For a time in the 1940s, he worked in Ennis and spent a good deal of time in the McMahon household in Upper O’Connell St; where he influenced Tony and Brendan in particular. The sessions that he played in at Markhams Pub in Parnell St. are the stuff of legend. For further reading on Joe Cooley see Ó Chaoimh (2012, pp. 245-252) and Vallely (2011, pp.162-164)

10 I refer here to Brendan, the accordion player, who was from Upper O’Connell St. as opposed to Brendan referred to later in this chapter, a flute player and manufacturer, originally from Miltown Malbay who was a teacher of traditional music in Ennis.
In terms of demographics, as has been referred to already, there was a significant concentration of young musicians who lived in the western side of the town; in the St. Michael’s Villas, St. Flannan’s Terrace and the Clare Road area. (See map of Ennis Fig. 4.1) Musicians such as RTE national broadcaster, Kieran Hanrahan whose parents were from Clarecastle (father) and Ballynacally (mother), Paul Roche, a cousin of Kieran’s, parents Clarecastle (mother) and father (Ballinacally), Vincent McMahon, whose parents were from Maurices Mills (father) and Tubber (mother), Kevin and Helen Murrays were from Kilmihil (father) Ballynacally (mother), and both of my parents were from Kilmihil.11

11 St. Michael’s Villas, which was a tightly knit community, produce an exceptional concentration of talented musicians in the 1970s. This list is merely a sample and is not comprehensive, either in terms of the families who attended or family members who attended the VEC classes. An exception to that was the Skeritt family, whose roots were in the town, and who were linked to the Conlan School of dancing. Oliver, dancer and piano player and Peter, accordion, guitar and saxophone player were well known performers locally and nationally.
In my research I conclude, that although the pupils who attended the classes in ‘the Tech’ were young teenagers from the town of Ennis, they were largely children of rural born parents who tended to be lovers of traditional music. These pupils therefore were more likely to be aware of and receptive to Irish traditional music as a genre. While parents influenced a sense of identity, they also actively encouraged their children by providing access to the music classes, purchasing instruments, and subsequently by facilitating them to attend community events such as fleadhs and other events organised by Comhaltas. In this way parents were not simply a stimulus in terms of habitus, but in addition, as experienced by Ruth Finnegan (Finnegan 1989, p.308), they played an active role in determining and supporting a particular musical route or pathway. Likewise, Lucy Green found that it was more likely that popular musicians came from musically interested families (Green 2002, p.24). The centrality of music as part of the social life of these families ensured music was promoted.

In terms of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis, as outlined earlier, during the period leading up to the class of 1961, the tradition was maintained primarily because of the position of Ennis as a market town. It was into this background that musicians Johnny McCarthy from Ennis, and Michael Butler from Barefield, a village four miles from the town, were born.12 While accepting that in the past traditional music was primarily transmitted orally and informally, as borne out by the experiences of both these musicians, their experiences are more nuanced than that. Although just a small sample, they give an insight into learning in this way at this time in the Ennis area, exemplifying how music was an intrinsic part of life in both their homes, in relation to their families active engagement in music making, and in

12 Johnny was educated in the Christian Brothers School. He did his Leaving Certificate in 1955 and then trained as a primary teacher in St. Patrick’s training College, Dublin.
encouraging them in a variety of ways, ranging from providing access to instruments, to helping them to develop technically as musicians. Significantly, musicians were regular visitors to both of their homes, which was a significant factor in determining their progress as musicians.

Johnny grew up in a household steeped in traditional music; both his father (on drums) and his grandfather (on concertina) played with local bands, the Fiach Rua Céilí Band and the Fergus Céilí Band (Fig. 2.2), and his maternal uncles were also musicians. Johnny’s experience is significant in that as an adult, along with other professional teachers in the town, he attended the classes in the Tech in order to learn to read staff notation. He subsequently taught his own students using this form of notation.

Johnny’s earliest memory was of listening to gramophone recordings of Michael Coleman, Hughie Gillespie, Sonny Brogan, William Mullally and the Aughrim Slopes. Michael’s musical background was quite similar. His mother (Catherine O’Donoughue) played flute and his uncle played fiddle and uilleann pipes, while his maternal grandfather played the concertina as did his paternal grandmother. Both of Michael’s parents were from Kilfenora, an area renowned for traditional music and dancing. Johnny has memories of his two uncles playing marches, waltzes and jigs on Clarke’s tin whistles before they emigrated to England. He did not receive any basic guidance on the accordion, the instrument he now principally

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13 Although the Irish title is written on the bass drum, the band was known locally as the Fergus Céilí Band. The term steeped is often used to describe musicians who have a strong family background in music; family members regularly perform. It is part of performing their lineage when introducing them in a performance context, so I am deliberately maintaining this vernacular word here.

14 These 78rpm recordings are regarded as iconic within the tradition. Shellac recordings were produced by companies such as Decca, Victor and Columbia in the 1920s -1940s. For further information see Spottswood (1990).

15 Kilfenora is the home of the Kilfenora Céilí Band which has a tradition dating back to 1870 (Vallely 2011, p.390).

16 These Clarkes Tin whistles were in the key of C. They were very commonly used and mass produced instruments (Vallely 2011, pp. 748-750).
plays. Neither, he recalls, did he feel pressured or led in any way to start playing an instrument. Although he had access to tin whistles in his home, his first instrument was the accordion, a Hohner Black Dot accordion, which one of his uncles brought back from England. Johnny recalls seeing his father ‘messing around with it.’ He describes being drawn to it himself from that time:

‘I begged and plagued my mother to get me an accordion and eventually they did…there was a shop in Parnell Street…They ordered it there; it took about ten years as far as I was concerned, but I suppose it was two months. So I got it eventually, and I took it upstairs to my room and started playing away there’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

The lack of basic guidance in becoming proficient on the instrument caused some difficulty for him:

‘I was playing away for a while and I thought I was getting on great, and I wouldn’t let anyone come up to hear me playing …eventually they said to come down and play a tune, so I said no, but I’ll go over to Pappa, my grandfather…I played whatever few tunes I had…a waltz or two and a march. My father asked him how I was, and he said ‘he’s making progress anyway, but are you going to let him play it upside down for the rest of his life!’ My father was hopping mad. He hadn’t spotted it himself…so I had to start all over again then’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny had the good fortune, according to him, at a later stage to come in contact with two musicians who showed him how to play the accordion in concert pitch. He describes the visits of concertina player Paddy Murphy to his grandfather’s house:

‘Paddy Murphy on Saturday would always call into my grandfather, and they might play a few tunes together when he was going home, after being in town for the day, and I remember Peter O’Loughlin saying he was in there a good few times as well, but anyway Paddy Murphy and my father says ‘John is learning the accordion’…and he (Paddy) took it up and I will never forget, the reel ‘Maude Miller’ (he tilted the notes d’c#agf#adf#adf#e…) I was amazed that a concertina player could play the accordion; not only that, but he was playing in a completely different key, and that’s when I first got an idea that I was playing everything in the wrong key. So I said to him ‘how’re you playing that, ‘ah that’s a C inside…play in the inside and when you want to get certain notes go to the outside.’ It was a revelation, a complete accident, but that’s how things happen…That was the first time I realised that…in order to play in
concert pitch you had to do a certain type of fingering. I started all over again’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

This incident illustrates the consequences of not receiving guidance at an early stage. It is in direct contrast to the experiences of those who were later to attend classes such as those in the Tech, whom were guided through the process.

A few years later the idea of using the bass and playing in different keys was reinforced when Johnny was introduced to Johnny Pickering, an accordion player with Malachy Sweeney’s Céili Band, on the night they were playing at a Céili in the Queens Hotel, a major hostelry in the town. He recalls:

‘He sat down and played with me for about ten minutes, and showed me things which were very useful to me; how to balance the box, to use the left hand and have some bit of harmony. He gave me about ten or fifteen minutes of his time and it was very intense and I learned a lot from it’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny himself is very conscious of the impact of meeting these two influential musicians. However, it nevertheless draws attention to the obstacles which can face a potential musician struggling to learn an instrument without direct guidance from a teacher. He is very conscious of the chance element of these encounters, noting:

‘just by accident, not by design. Paddy Murphy was out drinking with my father and my father said ‘come up and have a bite to eat before going home or something’, and Johnny Pickering just happened to walk into the Queens Hotel’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

Johnny’s experience was similar to others of his generation, in that formally arranged teaching was not common. As corroborated by Johnny and unlike for future generations of children in Ennis, the tin whistle or music in general was not taught in school, as he insisted when I asked him about it:

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17 A céili is a social gathering where people dance Irish traditional dances to music played by groups of musicians known as céili bands (Vallely 2011, p. 116).
‘No, absolutely not; anybody who was interested in playing music had to do it outside of the school. They had to do it at home’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

This was to change, and from the late 1960s onwards, as will be outlined in the final section of this chapter, all the children attending Ennis primary schools were given the opportunity to learn the tin whistle as part of their schoolwork. Growing up in the 1950’s, Johnny was one of the few traditional musicians of his age living in the town. Although there was another accordion player his own age, Tony McMahon, but lived in another part of the town, so they did not meet each other until they were teenagers, and did they have many opportunities to perform together. Tony was the only other contemporary musician referred to by Johnny; the other musicians he referred to in the interview were older than him. He draws attention to the difference between his musical interests and those of his peers during his time attending the Christian Brothers Secondary school:

‘When I was going to school, doing my Leaving, all the boys in my class were into Elvis Presley and Rock and Roll, Bill Haley and the Comets…I was more interested in traditional music, but I would be completely cut off from them musically. We had nothing at all in common. ‘Twas strange; anytime I was ever travelling anywhere, to fleadhhs or anything, I was with people at least a generation older, and if I was doing something good on the accordion, they were the only people who would know what I was doing’ (Personal Interview McCarthy Jan 2007).

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18 Tony McMahon was from Upper O’Connell St, Ennis; near the area called the Turnpike. He is a well known musician and broadcaster with RTE. His home was a place where legendary musicians such as Joe Cooley and Paddy O’Brien visited. His older brother Brendan also plays the accordion. Both parents were originally from the Kilmaley area about eight miles west of Ennis. In a personal interview Tony’s sister Ita McNamara nee Mahon, recalled the importance of traditional music in their home. Their mother played the concertina and their father the fiddle. Of the six in the family, she played piano for a number of years, Tony and Brendan played the accordion, and Chris played the mouth organ. As well as Paddy O’Brien and Joe Cooley she also recalls that their home was regularly visited by musicians Seán Reid, referred to throughout this thesis, and concertina player Sonny Murray (Personal Interview McNamara 2012).

19 The Leaving Certificate, commonly called the Leaving or the Leaving Cert, is the final examination in the Secondary School system in Ireland.
The importance of Ennis as a market town and as a centre of employment is evident in Johnny’s story; Paddy Murphy on his way to or from Connolly, Joe Cooley working for Paddy Con, Peadar O’Loughlin dropping in on his way from Kilmaley, Johnny Pickering doing a gig in the Queen’s Hotel.

In some respects Michael Butler’s experience of learning the basics differed to Johnny’s. Similarly, Michael’s parents had strong musical roots in Kilfenora, a well respected centre for traditional music. Michael’s mother, Catherine (nee O’Donoughue) played the flute and although his father didn’t play an instrument other members of his family did. Unlike Johnny, he began playing traditional music on the tin whistle before moving on to the accordion, the instrument he is best known for performing. Again, unlike Johnny, Michael received some direction from his mother. He remembers liking the instrument, and ‘blowing into it and making notes,’ when he was just four or five years old. He also recalls at a later stage sitting opposite her and copying her fingering as she played tunes on the tin whistle. For him, this experience was natural; his mother played the tin whistle and had the capacity to teach him, even if informally. This experience gave Michael the opportunity to progress without having to overcome the type of obstacles faced by Johnny. Although Michael subsequently played the button accordion, he first played a piano accordion, which he got on loan from his cousin for a few weeks:

‘I spent every waking hour of the following week trying to bring tunes out of it…(in terms of keys and the use of the black keys) I’d get my mother to play the tune with me so I’d have the same. I didn’t realise what I was doing, but that’s how it was’ (Personal Interview Butler Jan 2008).

20 The practice where beginners learn the tin whistle before moving on to play other instruments is now a typical teaching method and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
Michael did not begin playing the button accordion, his principal instrument, until he was twelve or thirteen, when he was given a Hohner Black Dot accordion. Again he learned this by trial and error allowing his ear to guide him. As a young teenager his father brought him to the early Comhaltas sessions. 21 Here, joining in with the older musicians, he increased his repertoire and developed as a musician. He describes being gently reprimanded by Martin Byrnes, one of the dancers, for playing too fast:

‘He told us to slow down and ‘watch our feet (the dancers feet) and watch the rhythm and play to that’ (Personal Interview Butler Jan 2008).

This section has pointed to the experiences of two key musicians who would later become teachers of Irish traditional music. Although in different ways for both of them, musical knowledge was transmitted orally and informally, outside of structured interactions, through simply doing and observing. 22 This account of their background and their informal learning experiences, provide a backdrop to understanding the similarities and differences as the transmission process changed. Their experiences give an insight into learning at this time in the Ennis area, and exemplify how music was an integral part of life in both their homes. In both cases, the incentive to learn an instrument was personally motivated. Significantly, both musicians had access to musical instruments and to regular traditional music sessions in their homes and outside. In addition, following on from a period of experimentation with the instrument, reminiscent of what Tim Rice described as

21 The Ennis Branch of Comhaltas was started in 1958 and meetings were held in Bridie and Martin Byrnes house and subsequently in the Landmark Room in the Queens Hotel, as discussed in chapter three.

‘noodling’ (Rice 1994, p.68) they both received some guidance, even if purely on an
ad hoc basis.\(^{23}\)

**Section Two**

This section concerns the transmission of musical knowledge in the new context of
the classroom. Through the lens of former students I focus in particular on the initial
classes taught by three teachers, Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon (the first two
teachers in the classes in the Tech), and Gus Tierney who was a band trainer in a local
boys secondary school, St. Flannan’s College.\(^{24}\) I examine their appointment as
teachers and look at how their musical backgrounds influenced their modus operandi
as teachers. I discuss how the classes operated, the adaptive processes that they took,
particularly in teaching some aspects of musical knowledge. In this regard I examine
the use of notation systems and the interaction between oral and literate approaches, a
crucial facet of the transmission process.

**Jack Mulkere**

On the recommendation of Seán Reid, whose significant role as musician and
coordinator has been referred to in chapters two and three, Jack Mulkere (1898-1982)
was appointed as the first teacher in Ennis.\(^{25}\) It was noted:

‘…the instrument on which he is specially qualified is the violin and in
addition to being a competent performer, he can teach pupils to read and write

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\(^{23}\) Rice (1994, p.68), observed a young boy ‘following’ the gaida playing of his grandfather, through
which he learned but with no clear teaching. Rice described this as *noodling*, ‘following’ someone’s
playing, mimicking their movements, without understanding the melodic, metrical or ornamental
structures of the music.

\(^{24}\) Gus Tierney also taught in a parish hall, the Maria Assumpta Hall and was one of the first musicians
in Ennis to teach in his own home.

\(^{25}\) There is reference in the same Minutes (4/11/1960 Item 23) of a delay in the commencement of the
classes the previous term despite the sanction for them from the Department of Education. The delay
appears to have been in selecting a teacher. From Crusheen, a village a few miles outside Ennis, Jack
Mulkere had an established reputation as a teacher of traditional music in his own locality and in South
East Galway.
music and to write down tunes or airs as they hear them played or sung...He has been teaching the violin all over south-east Galway and parts of Clare since 1924 and is mainly responsible for the high standard of traditional music in these areas’ (Reid, VEC Minutes 4/11/1960 Item 23).

The emphasis placed by the VEC on a literate approach to music education was also a phenomenon encountered by Ruth Finnegan in her work. She maintained that ‘what was written was to be valued and analysed; and what was not written was not worthy of scholarly study’ (Finnegan 1986). This, together with the fact that Jack Mulkere was a well-known traditional musician and teacher, made him acceptable from both the perspective of the VEC and Comhaltas. In the view of Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Ennis born academic and traditional musician, Jack Mulkere was well regarded for both his ideological as well as his pedagogical background:

‘When Comhaltas emerged in Clare in the 1950s Jack Mulkere would have been seen as an ideological figure, a pedagogical figure, just as the same way Seán Reid was an ideological figure’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

Jack Mulkere was an active member of the cultural nationalist movement, the Gaelic League. In choosing someone like him, they were confident that there would be no challenge to their nationalist ethos. In *Class, Codes and Control* (1971) Bernstein argues that power is in the strength of the boundaries as opposed to within the frame, which ‘refers to the strengths of the boundary between what may be transmitted and what may not be transmitted, in the pedagogical relationship (Bernstein 1971, pp. 205-206). Although it was the teacher who ultimately dictated the repertoire, what was taught and the actual transmission process itself, in essence the power rested in the hands of those who chose the teacher.\(^{27}\)

\(^{27}\) The VEC Committee in 1960 was Chaired by Rev. Canon P.J Vaughan, and the members included another Priest, a Senator and members of the local authority; an all male committee.
Originally from Kiltartan, County Galway Jack moved to Crusheen, County Clare in 1938. In addition, through his father Pat Mulkere, he had links to the Gaelic League and had a strong sense of nationalism as a result of his father’s involvement in the revivlist movement (Collins 2003). In an interview with Niall Behan (Collins 2003) Jack recalls many meetings both in his own home and in Coole Park with Lady Gregory, Jack Yeats and William Butler Yeats, and the fact that his father taught Irish to Lady Gregory (Collins 2003). Jack’s background fitted in with the ethos of both Comhaltas and the VEC and hence, Jack Mulkere was a natural and strategic appointment as first teacher on the new scheme.

Jack as pedagogue

In this section I look closely at the teaching practices of Jack Mulkere. Focussing on how he taught using staff notation, and referring to manuscripts and interviews with former students. My overarching aim here is to establish how his classes operated both in terms of the transmission process itself and in terms of the pedagogic materials of his classes such as Jack’s use of books, the blackboard, and live performances with visiting musicians. I view his approach as being multi-modal and deeply influenced by his own musical background as well as by his strong sense of nationalism.

Jack was well known both as a musician and teacher prior to commencing teaching in Ennis. There were many musicians in his family. His mother played

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28 This movement relates to the revival of interest in Ireland’s Gaelic heritage and the growth of Irish nationalism from the 19th century.

29 Lady Augusta Gregory (1852-1932) of Coole (outside the town of Gort) was an author, playwright and poet, actively involved in the Irish Literary Revival and had a keen interest in folklore and the Irish language. With others she established a branch of the Gaelic League in Kiltartan, the main aim of which was to restore the Irish language. She was also along with poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) instrumental in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1904 (Grey 2000, pp. 223-236). Jack B Yeats (1871-1957), a brother of William was a painter.
concertina, his father was a singer and his uncle played the fife. He was largely self-taught on the fiddle, encouraged by both his parents and later by a schoolteacher Miss Barry (Collins 2003). In 1922 he joined the Gort Fife and Drum Band where he learned to read staff notation under the tutelage of Pat Salmon, a retired British Band Master. He taught throughout County Galway from the early 1920s and was one of the founding members of the Aughrim Slopes Ceili Band, who had broadcast regularly on 2RN, the national radio station of Ireland. When he married Angela Fogarty in 1938 and moved to Crusheen, he expanded his teaching practice into many parts of County Clare, including Crusheen, Barefield, Corofin, Toonagh, and Ruan. Father John Hogan, a student of Jacks in Durra House, Crusheen recalls his first class of 1939. He notes:

‘We had a class the night the war broke out, because they used to do a lot of talking by the fire. That was 1939’ (Personal Interview Fr. Hogan June 2007).

Fr. Hogan remembers his early lessons in which Jack’s teaching appears to be very formal and formulaic. He recalls how they began with the:

‘…rudiments of music; EGBDF and FACE and then ‘the first finger on the E string is F’ and that; he taught it that way…everyone had a manuscript…I’m sure they got them in Ennis, a sheet with five lines and four spaces….he taught us (by) jigging it’ (Personal Interview Fr. Hogan June 2007).

Fr. Hogan also remembers being shown how to play vibrato, a technique whereby a more pulsating tremolo effect is created. It is a common technique used in classical music but which would not generally be considered favourably from the perspective

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30 Gort is a town in County Galway, a few miles from Kiltartan, where Jack lived.
31 Since then the radio station has been renamed Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ).
32 Fr John Hogan; fiddle player and teacher in St. Flannan’s College, Ennis where he also attended as a student before entering the seminary in Maynooth.
33 ‘Jigging’ is another word for lilting or dydling, the manner in which the melody of a tune is sung to a vocable. See Vallely (2011, p.403)
of an Irish traditional music aesthetic, although some fiddle players use it when performing slow airs:

‘I remember he trying to get us to do the vibrato as he called it…he’d be telling us to practice it on the table ‘put your hand down on the table and do this vibrato’…he used to encourage us to go in front of a mirror to practice with the bow, to keep it straight…he would have known about the long bow’ (Personal Interview Fr. Hogan June 2007).

The use of vibrato reflected the music to which Jack listened and played. Jack’s son, Brendan recalls hearing him playing Fritz Kreisler’s ‘Liebesleid’ and other classical pieces, for which he had staff notation.34

Jack’s use of staff notation was apparently inspired by his use of Batt Scanlon’s Tutor, The Violin Made Easy and Attractive (1923) indicating his connection to the global flows of Irish music publications. The book contains many tunes which Batt Scanlon had transcribed from George Whelan, who had taught music in North Kerry and South West County Clare at the turn of the 20th century. The book was self published in San Francisco, California and was priced at $1. The book begins with a tutorial system rather like that used by Jack in his classes. It also contained a number of slow airs, which Jack loved. He received the book as a gift from a friend of his, Frank Fahy, Ceann Comhairle of Dáil Éireann (Chairman of the Parliament) at the time. Frank was secretary of the Gaelic League and Jack had supported him when he was running for election in South County Galway.

34 Brendan Mulkere, Director of the Irish Music Programme in the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith, London has been an influential teacher for many years. He has taught hundreds of students in the London area, many of whom are prominent recording artists and performers.
In one of the opening pages, Batt Scanlon refers students to another publication, O’Neills, which was published in 1903 and contained 1850 tunes organised according to tune type.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35} For further reading on Capt. Francis O’Neill and his popular collections of tunes published in Chicago, from 1903 onwards, please see Carolan (1997).
The preface written by Carl Gilbert Hardebeck (1896-1945), Professor of Music in University College Cork, not only gives a general introduction to the tutor, but in addition refers to George Whelan, Batt Scanlon’s teacher, commending his teaching methods, which are represented in this book. As will be evidenced later with Patrick O’Loughlin’s fifty year old manuscript, Batt Scanlon’s book in effect, links the teaching of George Whelan with Jack Mulkere’s. In addition, the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) states that is was:

‘...hardly by accident, Scanlon’s book was published in the opening years of the new Irish Free State. It seemed to have been influenced by a Gaelic League spirit and by the publications of his fellow-Munsterman Capt Francis O’Neill of Chicago. Scanlon dedicates the volume to another Irish activist, the famous San Francisco-based priest. Rev. Peter C. Yorke’


36 Prior to this appointment in 1918 he was an organist, teacher, collector and publisher, originally from London. Although blind, he used a Braille board, frame and stylus when collecting songs (Vallely 2011, pp. 324-325).

37 In addition, the ITMA contradicts the assertion made in the book that George Whelan was from County Clare, but instead refers to local Clare sources who have stated that in fact he was from County Kerry but taught in County Clare.
In addition Batt Scanlon was later a music teacher in the San Francisco area and operated the Scanlon School of Music during the 1920s.

The eighty eight pages of Batt Scanlon’s book contain fourteen pages of the *Rudiments of Music* e.g. the basics of staff notation, holding and tuning the violin, on bowing, tone, scales, and a chart of the fingerboard, including third position. It also contains over 120 tunes including airs, marches, jigs, reels and hornpipes. Patrick O’Loughlin, a student of Jack’s in Ennis, has a record of similar information in the manuscript which he has retained for over fifty years. As can be seen from Fig 4.5, Page one is dated 20th April 1961, the date of his first class. It is also headed *The Rudiments of Music*. This reflects Fr. Hogan’s experience of Jack’s modus operandi; the notes of the stave are outlined, both as 5 lines and 4 spaces and as a scale passage, including leger lines. He also identified the positions of the notes on the four strings of the fiddle. The scales of C, D, and G are written in two registers. Note values are also written from semiquaver to demisemiquaver, a semi demisemiquaver which is more commonly called a hemidemisemiquaver. He explained terms such as slur, tie, and triplet, pause, dotted notes, signs for up and down bows and wrote out three bars of the rhythm of a reel (Fig. 4.6).

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38 In addition, the ITMA contradicts the assertion made in the book that George Whelan was from County Clare but instead refers to local Clare sources who have stated that in fact he was from County Kerry but taught in County Clare.

39 As in the title of the book the term Violin was used as opposed to the Fiddle.

41 According to Patrick, Jack insisted on them writing the date on the manuscripts so that they could assess their own progress, and according to the VEC records the first class was early that week on the 17/4/1961.

42 In his tutor, Batt Scanlon included from Semibreve to Demisemiquaver and also uses the American terms based on fractions e.g. whole note (semibreve) to thirty second note (demisemiquaver)
Fig. 4.5 Music Manuscript pg.1 (Courtesy of Patrick O’Loughlin).

Fig. 4.6 Music Manuscript Pg.2 (Courtesy Patrick O’Loughlin).
Musician and broadcaster Séamus MacMathúna, recalls Jacks bowing and the emphasis he placed on producing a good tone when even just playing a basic scale:

‘You’d see him bowing the scale with great vehemence and artistry. Some people used to say that even the scale could sound great if played right, compared to what was happening all around…The emphasis was more for the fiddle than for anything else, and there was a good few there learning the fiddle’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

![Fig. 4.7 Jack Mulkere (Clare Champion 22/2/1974, p.7).](image)

Both Séamus and Patrick remember Jack using the blackboard a lot in his teaching and recall that there was always something written on the board. Patrick O’Loughlin notes:

‘that’s the way he wrote it on the board- marked in the positions of the notes on the 4 strings- and the D with the 4th finger. He used terms like crotchet and quaver’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Feb 2010).

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43 Jacks son Brendan, is a well-known teacher of traditional music in the London area where he has taught for over forty years. John Boyd, a former pupil of his from (1977-1983), recalls that he did not use the blackboard but instead provided sheets, copies of tunes notated on manuscript. Occasionally he copied pages from books such as O’Neills 1850 (Personal Interview Mulkere Apr 2013).
In the tune *The Wearing of the Green* dated 1st of May (Fig. 4.9), some notes which could be played on open strings are marked to be played using the 4th finger of another string. In the tune *The Foggy Dew* dated 3rd of May, in addition to the above, Jack also inserts bowing.

Patrick O’Loughlin describes the approach that Jack took when teaching a tune, evidencing the VEC’s somewhat relaxed approach to teaching, as discussed in the previous chapter:

‘He’d play the tune and we’d play it, and we’d play individually, and he’d correct us; bit by bit, maybe a bar at a time at the start, but as you got it you’d do half the tune, and then he’d move to the next person...he’d get around to everyone...about 20 in the class...Some parents came in with their children. The children might not have been good to pick it up, but the parents did. There was a man, Chandler, a plumber and he came in with the daughter, and he learned to play the fiddle’ (Personal Interview O’Loughlin Feb 2010).
Fig. 4.9 Music Manuscript, pg.3 (Courtesy of Patrick O’Loughlin).

Fig. 4.10 One of Batt Scanlon’s version of The Foggy Dew (Scanlon 1923, p. 29) (There are three versions of this in the book.)
In comparing the two versions of the Foggy Dew (Figs 4.10 and 4.11), it is clear the Jack is influenced by this book. The bowing is much the same and he suggests using the 4th finger on the D string instead of the open A string. In terms of repertoire, Jack had a great interest in slow airs and liked to know the history behind the airs in order to represent them better. He once explained this approach while adjudicating at a competition, and suggested to the competitors that they play ‘part of it softly, more of it rather loudly and maybe some parts of it rough’ (Collins 2003, p.79). His son Brendan also recalls Jack’s air playing:

‘My memories of his playing, they are scant, except the memory of him playing when we would go to bed and supposedly sleep, which we didn’t…his playing of slow airs was very delicate…very emotive and very powerful…I have memories of him playing set dances, hornpipes…..the Blackbird was a great favourite of his…I do recall that his bowing was very strong, positive, vibrant sound’ (Personal Interview Mulkere Jan 2013).
He taught the slow air, An Chúilfhionn or the Coulin (Figs 4.12 and 4.13).\textsuperscript{45}

Considering his love of the Irish language it is curious why he used the anglicised title rather than the Gaelic one, but perhaps he simply used what was the more common spelling.

There are many similarities between the two versions, the inclusion of terms associated with Western Art music, such as Diminuendo, Ritardando, bowing and phrasing.\textsuperscript{46} There are some differences also. Batt Scanlon includes pauses in bars eight and sixteen, more fingering than Jack, and a direction to play ‘with soul’.

\textsuperscript{45} This is a well known air based on a song of the same name. This air is often favoured by classical musicians such as well known Irish classical violinist Geraldine O’Grady.

\textsuperscript{46} These terms the addition of bowing and phrasing are certainly from the Classical music tradition. ‘Diminuendo’ means to gradually play softer and ‘Ritardando’ means to gradually slow down.
His love of airs dates back to his childhood. Jack recalls an occasion at primary school when Lady Gregory, School Manager, visited and asked him to sing an Irish song for artist Jack B. Yeats (1871-1957), poet William B. Yeats (1865-1939) and Douglas Hyde (1869-1949) founder of the Gaelic League and first President of Ireland. He remembered singing *Grá mo Chroí mo Chrúiscín*. He also loved the singing of John McCormack and the sean-nós singers from Conamara.\(^{47}\) In this respect Mulkere emerges as a cosmopolitan teacher who, albeit indirectly, created a link with Art music. This, combined with the fact that he was musically literate, was referred to when his name was proposed as a teacher of these classes in the VEC notes. It was used to justify employing him as a teacher. He in effect was a transitional teacher, who used classical music approaches to teach traditional music. Yet although, as referred to earlier in this chapter, it appears that he was open to other styles of music, this openness did not stretch to jazz. As recorded in an interview of him by Niall Behan, the growing interest in jazz in the 1920s and the fear that it was overpowering Irish culture, was a motivation for him to commence teaching:

> ‘In the early days of 1923 or 1924 jazz music was sweeping Galway, and I decided that there was only one alternative to it, because I was very interested in all Irish things including the language, the games…we were up in arms against foreign influence sweeping us, sweeping our Gaelic heritage away from us…..so I decided that I’d take classes here and there, although at the particular time, for little or no money’ (Collins 2003, p.18).

Although staff notation was the primary means used by Jack, it is clear that he did not totally rely on it as a true representation. As Séamus learned to read staff notation, he remembers a trick that Jack used, to teach the 6/8 rhythm of a jig:

\(^{47}\) John McCormack (1884-1945) was a world renowned Irish tenor who performed operatic works as well as popular Irish songs such as those composed by Thomas Moore. Sean-nós meaning ‘old style’ is a style of singing in the Irish language (Vallely 2011, p. 627).
‘What I remember best was, for the jigs to think of the word ‘merrily’. They came up with ‘rashers and sausages’ since and various other things but this thing was just to think of ‘merrily’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

Likewise, musicians frequently visited the class, thus providing further guidance on what the music should sound like. While these musicians did not necessarily play the repertoire being taught, they did play popular local repertoire. Séamus recalls the comings and goings of some of these musicians to the class:

‘Jack regularly brought in musicians to play for the students in the class- for example John Joe Casey (fiddle) would be there, and John Joe would maybe have a couple of the beginners over in the corner (helping out)...Peter O’Loughlin, Seán Reid, Gus Tierney, and he would say “that’s the way you’ll be”’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

Séamus also refers to the fluidity of the student numbers:

‘My recollection is that there were always a few people giving a hand. I was given a job calling the roll (attendance). There might be two children and maybe two parents there as well...And maybe for the twelve that enrolled there might be another twelve’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).

Séamus continues his description of the atmosphere and the general operation of the class:

‘…a mixum-gatherum of fiddles, flutes, couple of accordion players. I can’t remember now, but there always seemed to be a mixture anyway...different age groups...fairly hectic in fairness, and there were children who were slightly out of control. It was great fun and you’d come out of it saying, that was hectic. A lot of us had a new tune going home, and he was fond of the airs too, and of course he was very passionately proud of the music. This was a time that there was always was idealism about the music; that it was important, nearly holy. I remember one man saying to me ‘that’s next to God’...a lot of the old people had a very strong conviction about what was good and bad, what belonged and very close to that would be this conviction about the importance of the music and how important it was to play it well’ (Personal Interview MacMathúna Jan 2007).
Séamus’s descriptive narrative of the class draws attention not only to the gentleness of Jack’s pedagogic approach, but also highlights the passion that existed for Irish traditional music at the time. Another student of Jack’s was Frank Custy, principal of Toonagh National School, who was the first school teacher to attend the class in Ennis.\(^{48}\) The first class he attended was on November 22\(^{\text{nd}}\) 1963, the day that US President John F Kennedy was killed (Ó hAllmhuráin 1974, p.4). Frank had a strong interest in sport, but had no background in music. He decided to attend Jack’s class, because he wanted to provide a music programme in his school. He remained just one step ahead as he taught what he had learned in Jack’s class to his pupils. Frank recalls his experience of being in Jack’s class:

‘Jack was an inspiration. Here was me coming out of the training college with all these things, I knew everything about teaching…but to see Jack working was an inspiration. The atmosphere he had in his classroom and the way he inspired people to do things, affected me, more than the actual music to tell you the truth...He had a major affect on me as a teacher’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

It is interesting that while the VEC required that a teacher of traditional music would ideally have a teaching qualification, Frank, who had one, found that he learned from Jack who did not. Despite his professional qualifications as a teacher, Frank was in awe of Jack’s approach, because of the feeling he created:

‘Even if you never wanted to learn music, you’d go to his class because of the happy atmosphere that was there….and remember he had a very mixed class now, because he had every age group. He had children and he had middle…I was in my early twenties and he had older people there’ (Collins 2003, p.55).

Frank has a very vivid memory of storytelling as part of the class, although Patrick O’Loughlin, who was in the same class, does not remember this, which highlights the variation in individual recollections, especially in terms of the personal nature of what

\(^{48}\) Toonagh is an area about four miles north of Ennis.
creates an impression from person to person. Frank recalls that he told stories and that ‘he was a kind of a seanchaí.\textsuperscript{49} He talked about the fairy whitethorn bush, the Black and Tans and the tune in between (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

After a short while Jack became aware of Franks credentials as a teacher and saw it as an opportunity to further the cause.\textsuperscript{50} Frank recalls that ‘He was fantastic but when he discovered I was a teacher he had me doing the blackboard work for him…Mulkere was a professional music teacher’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007). Frank continues emphasising that Jacks focus was not on perfection but on encouraging his students:

‘He had a skill of not making people feel embarrassed because of the quality of their music. He was a perfect example of how things should be...it wasn’t just the music that meant a lot to me, he meant a lot in my attitude towards the school and towards teaching’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

His methods and attitude to teaching were in contrast to the formality that Frank was trained in at teacher training college. He considered him ‘an inspiration, especially to me because of my teaching background...His classes were very formal, even though I said they were very good; they were very organised (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Despite the dispute with the Department of Education regarding cutbacks, Jack continued to teach in Ennis and other places for many more years. Jack’s legacy as a teacher lives on through his son Brendan in London, a regional connection to Ennis. There is also a direct link from Jack’s to Frank Custys teaching in particular in Toonagh, a village four miles from the town. (Frank’s teaching is discussed in more detail in chapter five.) The teacher who succeeded Jack Mulkere in the Tech was

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\textsuperscript{49} A seanchaí is a storyteller.

\textsuperscript{50} The cause in this context is generally considered to reference the promotion of Irish culture and generally a nationalist agenda, not always with equal passion.
Brendan McMahon, and in many ways continued to honour Jack’s legacy while also developing and honing his own teaching practice.

Brendan McMahon

As in the case of Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon’s appointment was sanctioned by the VEC on 14/1/1969 on the recommendation of Mairtín Ó Dubháin, then Secretary of the County Board of Comhaltas. The minutes state that: ‘Mr Mulkere considers himself unfit for the work due to age’ (VEC Minutes 14/1/1969 Item 25).^51

Brendan was a flute player and flute and harp maker, and just returned to County Clare from London. He was originally from Ballyvaskin, Miltown Malbay, and emigrated to London in 1949, returning to live in Ennis in 1962. He began teaching in 1970. Akin to Johnny McCarthy and Michael Butler’s experience, Brendan was surrounded by traditional music both in his home and in the community. He has a clear memory of being fascinated by Willie Clancy’s flute playing.^52

Brendan notes of Willie Clancy:

‘He used to send me out to dip the flute in the barrel, and I’d be sitting there waiting patiently ‘til he’d ask me. I think he used to send me out when it didn’t need to be done at all. I remember falling asleep with my elbow left on his knee and my hand under my chin, and he was playing at eleven or twelve at night, and I was so taken in by the flute that I was falling asleep, and I didn’t want to go to bed at all, but I fell asleep eventually down on his knee and my mother put me to bed. I was probably only eleven or twelve, very young at the time’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

He also has vivid memories of social events such as country dances, swarees, wren dances and visiting his neighbours the McKee’s.^55 He recalls:

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^51 At that stage, Jack Mulkere was aged 71.
^52 Willie Clancy (1918-1973), a piper and whistle player, an icon of the tradition. Scol Samhraidh Willie Clancy was established on his honour following his death.
^55 Country Dances were dance parties held in rural Ireland in peoples’ homes, prior to the enactment of the Dance Hall Act in 1935. For further reading see (Vallely 2011, pp. 195-200). Wrens Day (La an
‘When I started playing, I used go over to McKees, up the hill, to McKees of Dromin. Joe McKee played the flute, his mother played the concertina, Jimmy played the violin...a lot of people used to come on cuaird there as we called it and you’d have Mrs, she’d play for the sets and she’d be dying laughing at the lads battering with the boots. The lads would come in with the hobnailed boots and they’d be knocking sparks off the floor with the boots...I learned a lot of tunes, but my first few I learned from Joe’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

These experiences inspired him to learn to play, and he recalls learning his first tune, ‘Miss McClouds’, from Joe McKee and then the reel, the ‘Heather Breeze’. His description of learning from Joe is similar to Michael Butler’s description of sitting opposite his mother, listening, watching her fingering and copying what she did:

‘I became left handed you see, because the two of us had two sugán chairs (seats made from woven straw), and we’d sit opposite each other, facing each other, and you see the way he held the tinwhistle. I’d be the same, but it’s a mirror image I was getting, so where he had his right hand, I had my left hand, but it made it a lot easier for me to learn, because the fingers were the same. But that’s how I learned. He’d move his fingers and I’d watch his fingers and I’d pick up. ‘Twas slow...He slowed down to zero and started with just each note and as I was picking up he kept a bit ahead of me but we’d finish up playing it together’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Maybe he was just impatient but, unlike others of his generation, Brendan found it difficult to learn by ear and decided to learn to read staff notation. However, he did this through a very circuitous route. Using sheet music, Tacair Port (collections of

Dreolín) is traditionally held on the 26th of December. The celebration involves dressing up in strawsuits or colourful clothing and parading through the countryside or the streets accompanied by bands of musicians. See Aoife Granville (2012), Vallely (2011, p.758). Money collected by the Wrenboys, in County Clare at least, was used to fund a house party called a swaree a corruption of the French word soiree. The food and drink left over from this party was used at another called a Scrap Dance. The tradition of the Wren still exists and is generally used as an opportunity to fundraise for local charitable organisations. Swarees died out in County Clare during the 1980s.

Going on cuaird means paying a social visit; storytelling, song music and dance were common activities associated with this practice.

In my experience these are far more difficult than one would expect a complete beginner to attempt to learn. I think that he has possibly attempted simpler tunes in advance of this.

He recalls that the Clarke’s Tin whistle in C was used, fiddles were tuned down a tone and the German concertinas were also in C.
tunes), a Comhaltas Publication, which was given to him by Willie Clancy, Brendan learned to read the notated version of McCloud’s Reel, a tune he already played, by painstakingly working out the relationship between the notes on the stave, and the sound of them on the tin whistle. He describes the enormous effort he made:

‘He (Willie) just handed me the sheet without playing them...it was staff notation…I had heard about that. I’d put the sheet down and play the tune and stop at a certain note, and follow the bars of music …I’d mark down the notes, and go on and stop at another note, and that one down, and I made out the scale, but I had no lines of course; I had the notes and the number of fingers…I learned the jig off and Willie was amazed that I could learn it from the book without being taught the music’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

All of these experiences, his love of traditional music, dancing and his knowledge of staff notation were significant in his practice and shaped Brendan’s pedagogic approach.

**Brendan as pedagogue**

Brendan’s classes were attended by a huge number of town and country children. The classes included musicians of all standards, of all age groups who playing a variety of instruments. Typically however, beginners started on the tin whistle and then many progressed to the fiddle or the flute and occasionally the button accordion. Over time, as the demand for classes grew, students were graded and separate classes became available for specific instruments. In a method not dissimilar to Jack Mulkere’s approach, he describes beginning by teaching the scale of D:

‘I taught all instruments because I used to teach from the board. I felt that if you show them the scale; I used to mark the scale on little strips under the strings so they’d know where the fingers were for the different notes. I’d get them all to play it and I’d know if someone was playing a wrong note and I’d go down and correct them’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).
In her research Kari Veblen found that the majority of the teachers that she interviewed were from ‘musical families, where one or more of the family members sang, played or danced’ (Veblen 1991, p.58). Tara Diamond cited in Veblen maintained that people whose family were musicians learned without realising it (Veblen 1991, p. 85.) Although the tin whistle was the first instrument taught in the music classes, in the case of my younger brother Eamonn, he does not recall being actually shown how to hold the tin whistle noting that he ‘never had an individual lesson; I picked it up at home and learned the tunes at the Tech’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008). This is I expect because he had access to a tin whistle at home and had no doubt ‘noodled’ (Rice 1994, p.68) prior to attending his first class. Regardless, this type of instruction- formal instruction- was not readily available to those who wished to learn other instruments.

Once his pupils were able to identify the notes of the scale from staff notation, Brendan quickly introduced tunes, which he largely taught by pointing out the notes on the blackboard. In this way he felt he could teach instrument which he did not necessarily play himself. He describes the following:

‘I used to play the tin whistle and I felt if I could teach the tin whistle without playing it…from the board, I should be able to teach every instrument from the board, because I felt that it was up to the individual themselves to put in their own input into it once they have the basic notes and timing right’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Brendan also considered it easier to keep a large group playing together if they were following the pointer on the board, and that otherwise they might play at their own individual paces and not listen to those around them.
Brendan McMahon was determined that all his students would learn to read music. Although pupils copied down the music into their manuscripts from the blackboard, but he also on occasion provided photocopied sheets. He describes:

‘I used get them to write the music down to the manuscript, but I used also photocopy for them. At the time we had an old Gestetner and used get a sheet for every one of them, but I’d make them write it down while they were at the class, and give them a while writing the music…Id give them the flyer and tell them to copy that…They’d have started it in their books but a lot of them wouldn’t have it finished…by copying it they learned how to write it as well…they didn’t have tape recorders’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

The work of teaching was not confined to what took place within the classroom. In order to alleviate some of the work, he developed a labour saving device which saved him time writing the tunes on the blackboard each night.59 He recalls:

‘I used to do a lot of work before I’d go down, I’d have to have the sheets ready. I had a flip board and it was handy. I’d have all the tunes written out, and I had a piece of piping with felt on the end of it, and an ink pad, and I’d do the dots (note heads) with that, and fill in the things afterwards, the crotchets’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

In terms of repertoire Brendan McMahon always got students to both sing and play the Irish National Anthem. Knowing this piece of music was important for any musician at the time, since it was regularly performed at the end of concerts, in a show of national pride for some, and simply as the thing to do for others. Like Jack Mulkere he too was a lover of slow airs, and taught Róisín Dubh, a very popular air at the time.60

59 Although not for writing on a large scale, piper Ted Furey developed a similar system for writing notation when he transcribed the music of piper Johnny Doran. He ensured the consistency of the size of the note heads by drilling a hole in a piece of perspex and using it for writing out the notes (Fegan and O’Connell 2011, p.131).

60 Róisín Dubh was one of the traditional pieces orchestrated by Seán Ó Riada in his musical score for the film Mise Éire. For further reading on O’Riada see Ó Canainn (2003).
‘I used to start them with simple tunes that sound nice…I used teach Róisín Dubh, and then I used to start off with things like the Belltable Waltz or Lord Inchiquin and then we went on with a nice jig, one that was easy to play’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).  

Brendan also taught the standard local repertoire of dance tunes, and although he also regarded these as simple tunes they were complex for people who could just play a scale. Nonetheless pupils did manage to learn them in time. Once his pupils had learned a few tunes, instead of selecting tunes himself, Brendan allowed them to choose from a number that he would play himself for them. It was also one of the ways that he maintained his pupils’ interest. He explains the necessity of sustaining their interest:

‘The most important thing is to keep their attention…I wouldn’t teach them what I thought they should learn. I’d ask what tune they’d like, and I’d say ‘which of these would you like to learn’ and they’d mostly ask you for the one they knew themselves’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

Although he also refers to teaching ornamentation, in my own experience of being a pupil in his class in the early 1970s, I have no recollection of this. Given that he continued to teach for many years I conclude that he adapted his methodology based on his teaching experience. Brendan describes including the ornamentation in the notation:

‘I used to write grace notes and all that for them. I’d put a bar of music on the board and fill in the grace notes…those pip notes, and get them to play those’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

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61 The Belltable Waltz was composed by Maurice Lennon, fiddle player with the group Stockton’s Wing, a popular Irish music group of the 80s that was formed in Ennis; two of the members had been part of the music classes in Ennis in the early 1970s. Since this tune was composed by Maurice following their performance in the Belltable Theatre in Limerick in the late 1970s, it was obviously one which Brendan taught later in his teaching career rather than in the classes which I refer to in this chapter.
Another significant feature of his classes was the connection he made between the music and set dancing. As both a set dancer and a musician himself, he was concerned that pupils would connect both aspects of the tradition. Jack Mulkere’s approach differed in that he connected the music he taught with other aspects of Irish culture. In addition, he did not face the same challenge in controlling large class numbers. As well as connecting music and dance, because of a strategy of starting each two hour class with set dancing, the excess energy of younger pupils was used up, which helped with class management. Brendan explains:

‘I used do an hour of dancing first, and then an hour of music. Two hours I used do, and of course by the time I had the dancing done, they’d all sit down. Jim Lyons (CEO of the VEC) came in one night….he said ‘Brendan, how do you do it? How do you keep such order?’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

This strategy was particularly important for him on nights when the class numbers were extra large. He explains that:

‘at bingo night I’d have about six extra, there were about six in some families coming in, and they’d only be two of them registered…I had sixty four or sixty five there…it was a pure cod for me. I was doing it for Comhaltas’ (Personal Interview McMahon Jan 2007).

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62 Set dancing is a social dance-form which originated in France as sets of quadrilles. Different versions of the dances are danced to music of local areas. For more information see (Vallely 2011, pp.193-195).
63 The relaxed, malleable way that teachers and the VEC operated is referred to in detail in Chapter three.
In the above image Fig. 4.14, the pupils are concentrating, all looking up at the blackboard, with the exception of one who is being guided by the teacher. The variety of instruments includes a melodica, two piano accordions, a banjo, a mandolin and the remainder playing the tin whistle. The relaxed atmosphere was similar to what was experienced by pupils in Jack’s class, though achieved in very different ways, for though these men were successful teachers and encouraged their pupils; Jack enthralled them with stories, while Brendan engaged his pupils in dance.

Over time pupils became more interested and motivated in improving their technique and in increasing their repertoire, and the demand increased for private one to one tuition, especially from well-known icons of the music tradition. One such musician was Gus Tierney. Although he did not teach in the VEC classes, he did teach on a one to one basis in his home, as well as in the classroom, firstly as a trainer for St. Flannan’s College Céilí Band and subsequently in the Maria Assumpta Hall in

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64 The caption for the photo Fig.4.14 read ‘Ag Déanamh Ceol i gContae an Chláir (making music in County Clare)- part of the Traditional music class of 64. The teacher is Breandán MacMathúna (the Irish language version of his name) is Chairman of Clare County Board’ (Treoir 1970 Vol. 2 No 6, p.5).
Ennis. While his work illustrates the changing nature of the transmission of Irish traditional music, in particular it exemplifies a new way that older musicians were more formally integrated into the process.

**Gus Tierney**

In the opinion of writer and educationalist Stephen Cottrell, ‘the idea of establishing some connection with a perceived tradition seems often to be important to musicians’ (Cottrell, 2004, p.40). This could certainly be applied to Gus Tierney (1922- 2004), as he was well known for his repertoire of unusual tunes and many people attended lessons from him as a consequence of this, and the fact that he was a leading fiddle player with the renowned Kilfenora Céili Band.

Gus was a reluctant pedagogue and had to be persuaded to teach. This experience was not unusual. Tim Rice found that in his research in Bulgaria that ‘tradition was learned but not taught’ (1994, p.65), and found that most musicians he came in contact with, had never taken a lesson themselves and had no idea how to give one. This was not exactly the case for Gus, since he had received tuition from fiddle player Jim Mulqueeney, who introduced him to staff notation.

**Gus’s role as a band trainer**

St. Flannan’s Céili Band was very successful under his guidance. The initial band laid the foundation for a succession of bands and All Ireland Céili Band awards were won by bands in 1971, 1976, 1978 and 1979.
A céili band consists of ten musicians playing a variety of instruments e.g. three fiddles, two flutes, an accordion, a banjo, possibly a concertina or another accordion, piano and drums. The rhythm is provided by the drum, and the piano which also provides a harmonic accompaniment. The remaining instruments play the selection of tunes in unison, with occasional use of octave playing. The performance begins with introductory taps to set the tempo, sounded either on the block or alternatively as chords struck on the piano. The melody instruments then start together and continue together until the set of tunes is complete. It is a very structured and disciplined style of performance. Gus Tierney, because of his vast experience playing with the Kilfenora Céili Band, was considered an expert in terms of training bands in this style.65

I use the term ‘train’ in this context, to differentiate from the instrumental teaching which took place in the VEC classes and elsewhere. Although individual

65 Gus Tierney also trained the Naomh Eoin and St. Fachnan’s Céili Bands through the 1980s. These were also successful in both Slógadh and Fleadh Cheoil competitions.
tuition was occasionally required, in general the guidance given related to how to
operate as a band. Band members generally had reached a certain level of
performance before being asked to join the band i.e. they were all able to learn new
repertoire without too much difficulty, or without needing a great deal of personal
guidance. Former band member, Vincent McMahon describes Gus’s focus when
training the band in St. Flannan’s College:

‘Obviously you’d play the tune as he had written or was agreed; that there was
a balance across the instruments; that the accordion wasn’t too loud; drums
giving a decent rhythm and a consistent rhythm and tempo; and like all bands
now, the fiddle being strong…Gus Tierney was very good to put together a
ceili band. He had a great ear and if any of the instruments were playing
different notes he’d pull you up straight away…he was great to get the balance
right’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

This is reinforced by Eamonn Cotter who recalls the concentration involved, and
outlines the scope of the Sunday morning practices:

‘They were long enough, fairly intense…just play over and over, practicing
the finishes. He’d move people around. I suppose it was getting the optimum
sound out of the instruments. If some instrument was too loud he’d shift them
back to the back line…everyone playing the same version of a tune and starting
on time and finishing on time; keeping an eye on each other. Gus didn’t
believe in people going into the foetal position when they play. That’s the one
thing that any seasoned band player tends to play maybe not the best posture,
but certainly a straightened posture. As a band player, his belief at the time
was that you watched, you stayed awake- you didn’t close your eyes and go
into a trance…The tuning, playing in an ensemble you have to make sure your
instrument is in tune….In the band you got a broad variety of tunes. You got
the whole spectrum- jigs reels hornpipes marches. You developed your
repertoire. I suppose similar to a class but with the band you had concerts,
competitions It put the whole thing in perspective’ (Personal Interview Cotter
Jan 2008).

Eamonn continues, outlining Gus’s thoroughness:

‘He was a stickler for detail. It was all- we’d start and then back again. We
might practice the starts. It was all about the competition more than the
music…The starts were important, tuning was very important, speed, drive’
(Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).
Gus expected his pupils to practice, and used the term ‘practice’. The element of
practice is associated with the formal transmission of music. Turino refers to ‘the shift
in thinking of musicmaking as a social activity to music as an object’ (Turino, 2008,
p.24). Although he links this to the rise in the recording industry, however, at the
eyear stages of learning, music is often objectified i.e. pupils practice their music; they
are told by their parents to ‘go and do their music’ in the same way as for their school
homework. While this was an aspect of formal transmission, as will be outlined in
chapter five, in the case of the transmission of traditional music in Ennis, it did not
preclude social activity. The objectifying of elements of musicmaking was a stage of
learning; part of the pathway to becoming a musician i.e. gaining the competence in
order to participate socially.

The Use of Notation in the Classroom

‘In a way, every notation is intelligible only to those who are initiated in the
particular style of music for which it has been developed…a notation may be
deceptively simple yet can in fact function very efficiently for those familiar
with the musical style it represents’ (Gen’ichi 1986, p.253).

Although the general perception exists that Irish traditional dance music has been
transmitted aurally and I agree that in the past this may be so, it is also clear from
what has been revealed through this chapter that there was far greater use of notation
in the transmission process than has been commonly appreciated. In addition, over
time, an increasing overlapping of aural and literate systems continued in the
transmission process in Ennis and no doubt in other centres.

While traditional music was largely transmitted aurally, staff notation was also
used, albeit by the minority. Paddy Murphy and Peter O’Loughlin learned much of his
repertoire through fiddle player Hughdie Doohan. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin refers to
the introduction of the reel called the *Moving Cloud*:

> `(The Moving Cloud) was learned aurally from the fiddling of the local
> postman, Hughdie Doohan, who had a rare ability to read music from O'Neill's
> Music of Ireland, which was published in Chicago in 1903 and enjoyed
> biblical status among Irish music communities by the 1920s and 1930s.
> Doohan, who was a key member of the local Fiach Roe Céilí Band, made well
> sure that his cohorts (whose skills of musical acquisition were primarily aural)
> would not want for access to the largest data bank of traditional Irish dance
> melodies in the world at the time’ (Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin in
> http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/music/heartland_clare_concertina/new
> found_wealth.htm ).

In his lecture *The Use of Notation in the Transmission of Irish Folk Music* (1986)
Breandán Breathnach mentions the influence of in British Army bandmasters as one
reason for the use of staff notation:

> ‘Musical literacy among traditional players was more frequent than one might
> expect, a fact attested by the many manuscripts collections that have survived.
> In some cases this ability to read music has been acquired when the scribe had
> served as a bandboy in some regiment in the British army’ (Breathnach 1986, p.4).

Martin Clancy, a travelling fiddle teacher (who used staff notation), spent time in
Tulla and Newmarket-on-Fergus, a village about fifteen miles south, and also in
Ennistymon in the northern part of the county. According to Seán Reid, interviewed
by Harry Hughes, a Director of the international music school Scoil Samhradh Willie
Clancy, Martin Clancy was born around 1842 in the Newmarket area near Ennis, and
was a professional bandmaster in the British army:

> ‘He was an accomplished professional musician in both the classical and
> traditional moulds…He went to the States where he met Michael Coleman and

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66As already referred to, Jack Mulkere learned to read staff notation as a member of a Fife and Drum
Band in the nearby town of Gort.
James Morrison…Michael Coleman named a jig after him, Martin Clancys Jig\(^{67}\) (Hughes 1978, p.114).

In particular, knowledge which had been for the most part transmitted aurally, began to be increasingly transmitted through literate means in the classroom, although it was adapted by the teachers to suit their pedagogic styles. Moreover, it was not relied on in isolation; a sound source was always available and in addition, notation in this case was not as fixed, to the degree that it is in Western Art music:

‘The score in the world of classical music is both an accurate model for performance and a model of performance and plays a major role in the economy of that music. In classical music, notation is used primarily in an operational role (in its use by both performer and composer) but it also has a representational aspect in that it can represent the music for the purpose of analysis or even in the common practice of following a score in performance’ (Keegan 1996, p.338).

As already outlined, Jack Mulkere was introduced to staff notation in this way, but over time adapted it to suit his pedagogic aims. He provided details such as ornamentation, phrasing etc. to his students. However, in general, the term ‘directional’ notation, as put forward by Niall Keegan is more representative of the notation that Jack Mulkere, Brendan McMahon and Gus Tierney used; which was:

‘a signpost in the processes of transmission, providing essential information for the traditional rendering of a tune (that is the basic outline of the tune) but only being a small part of a transmission process’ (Keegan 1996, p. 339).

This type of notation provides the basic information required to play the tune rather than details such as phrasing, variation and ornamentation. The transcriptions are written by insiders for insiders and include only the information that is basic to the particular tune. Variations, ornamentation and phrasing were rarely part of these

\(^{67}\) Fiddle players, Michael Coleman and James Morrison, who emigrated to the United States in the early 1900s, were iconic figures whose 78rpm recordings have been highly significant effect in the transmission of repertoire throughout Ireland.
transcriptions. Although tunes were written on the board by teachers and copied into manuscripts, there was also an element of aural learning as tunes were demonstrated by the teacher as well as by local musicians who performed for the class.

**Notation: In Practice**

Ultimately, the notation served as a mnemonic device, and students’ engagement with notation varied. As related earlier, both Jack and Brendan used staff notation as part of their pedagogic approach. I already described Brendan’s tortuous introduction to the system. Jack, on the other hand, had an easier passage. As I mentioned in chapter one, I remember sitting at the back of a class in order to avoid being asked to play in my own. I could not see the board sufficiently and instead learned to transcribe the tune from the teachers playing. I relied heavily on my aural skills, in order to avoid being singled out to play. I remember another instance of someone being asked to play a tune from a music book the teacher put in front of him. He wrongly assumed that it was the tune written on the board, which the teacher had been playing. He played it perfectly, but of course, confirmed the teacher’s suspicions that he had not been learning from notation at all, but by ear. This particular teacher, Tom Barrett, the successor to Brendan McMahon in 1970, was determined that his pupils would all be proficient readers of staff notation. In my case by default I picked up a new skill to compensate for my shyness to play in front of the class. The other pupil honed his aural skills in his attempt to avoid learning literacy skills.

However, despite the emphasis placed on notation by the teachers, my brother Eamonn reckoned that most students depended on ‘picking up’ the tunes aurally:

‘If you didn’t have the good ear, you probably by default had better reading skills…you often see people; they carry the books but they tend to be slow learners in terms of picking it up’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).
In the classes during the 1960s and throughout the ‘70s traditional music was taught through staff notation, even though Tonic Solfa was the system utilized by many teachers in the educational system at the time. Other notation systems, e.g. graphic systems, letter systems, which later became commonplace, were not used by the Ennis based teachers during this period. Many primary teachers used Tonic Solfa to teach traditional music but adapted it to suit. Tin whistles in the key of D were used, therefore when all six holes were covered, the note D sounded. The notes D, E, F#, G, A, B, C remained Doh, Ray, Me, Fah, Soh, La, Te, Doh, regardless of the key the tune was in. For the purposes of reading a tune, Doh was fixed on D, even if a tune was in the key of G. Frank Custy recalls his introduction to tonic solfa:

‘I had seen people doing tonic solfa. The first couple of tunes I got off Martin Mullins (a neighbouring musician) who lived up here, and who was a great old musician who could write down tunes in tonic solfa- everything in the key of G- noting C# for tunes that were in the key of D but he didn’t change the doh which an awful lot of people especially nuns and people like that changed the Doh around so they’d talk about the key of D and they’d talk about the key of G and get kids all mixed up. He never mentioned keys but wrote it down’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Kieran Hanrahan had the same experience as a student as a student in Ennis CBS Primary School:

‘It would have been all doh, ray, me at school…when we went to the Tech afterwards, it was ABC and the staff notation…I think initially Doh Ray Me meant where the fingers were on the whistle, because, it was a C whistle, so when we went to the learn from the VEC we were equating Doh Ray Me with ABC…there was only one Doh, and that was all fingers down in the whistle; it didn’t matter what key it was’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).
Frank Custy, Principal of Toonagh National School, and a celebrated teacher of Irish traditional music in his school, was a former pupil of Jack Mulkere. Like Jack Mulkere, he initially adopted staff notation as his preferred system, but in due course, mainly because of his experience as a primary teacher, he created a lettering system which has been taken up by many since. He was particularly concerned that students with learning difficulties would be discouraged from playing, if they had to negotiate a complicated system such as staff notation. In addition Frank considered that because of the aural nature of the music, grouping of letters would be sufficient for people to learn from. Regarding students who were academically weak he said:

‘Staff notation would turn them off straight away. That’s why I changed to letters and then I started organising the letters so that they wouldn’t be higgledy piggledy. You see some people teaching through letters and except you knew the tune you couldn’t learn it. They didn’t put in the structure. So I put in the same structure as staff notation but I discovered that some of my weakest kids academically were my best musicians which I was very proud of’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Adapting to the needs of students is part and parcel of being a teacher, and it was clear to Frank that it was necessary for him to revise his use of notation. He describes that the idea developed through:

‘…expedience and experience. If I gave it to them in staff notation they’d spend half the day writing it down, which I couldn’t afford and then they’d spend another half day converting it in to letters so I said what’s the point and do it direct and at least I would have it right’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

The Scope of the Classes

In this section I examined how music was transmitted in the classroom. Up to this point the teaching of traditional music had largely been outside of the structures found

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68 Frank’s work as a pedagogue is highlighted in chapter five. He has taught thousands of pupils, adults and younger people, among them Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche, Sharon Shannon, Seán Conway, Mary Custy, Tola Custy who have all gone on to perform as professional musicians.
in schools. On entering the formal setting of a classroom, it became re-contexualised from its original setting and modes of transmission absorbing some of the pedagogic rituals inherent to the classroom and to Western Art music., evidently traditional music was not greeted here under its own terms. In terms of pedagogic processes theoretical knowledge and scales were taught before tunes, but once the scale was mastered, pupils were quickly introduced to repertoire. A new tune was introduced at each lesson and over time pupils increased their repertoire. The first tunes tended to be marches and slow pieces but as pupils became more proficient, Irish traditional dance tunes such as jigs, reels, hornpipes and set dances were introduced. In general, the tunes taught were part of local repertoire, and were generally transcribed by the particular teacher. In the 1960s and 1970s the number of written resources was limited; nonetheless some teachers copied tunes from collections such as O’Neill’s *Music of Ireland* (1903) or *Ceol Rince na hÉireann*, Breandán Breathnach (1963).

In the initial classes the focus was on the basic learning of an instrument i.e. fingering the notes correctly, while all other aspects of the music tradition were acquired elsewhere. In addition, during the 1970s there were no specialist classes for individual instruments, and teachers were prepared to teach instruments that they did not necessarily play themselves. The large classes were made up of pupils of different levels of experience, every age group and various instruments. Over time, as the demand for classes grew, they became standardised according to instrument and level of experience. As classes continued to flourish, new ones were created and by the 1980s classes emerged for specific instruments, particularly as students became

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69 Captain Francis O’Neill’s book *Music of Ireland*, published in Chicago in 1903 contained 1850 tunes and was a popular source of tunes for traditional musicians in Ireland (Dillane 2009). Similarly, tunes collected by Breandán Breathnach were published in Four Volumes from 1963, by An Gúm, the Irish state publishing Company. Two more volumes of his collections have been published since his death in 1985 (Vallely 2012, pp. 83-84)
interested in being taught technical skills or learning new repertoire in preparation for competitions at Fleadhanna Cheoil. Specialist classes for specific instruments emerged as the demand grew e.g. Eamonn Cotter taught the flute and Michael Butler the accordion. In these classes elements such as ornamentation, variation, phrasing, breathing, bowing etc which had not generally been part of the process of transmission in the classroom became part of the structured transmission process. The notion of learning by simply picking it up through being present among practitioners became more remote, as aspiring musicians tried to fast track their development through formalized teaching mechanisms.

In addition, Irish traditional dance music, which had been for the most part transmitted orally, now began to be increasingly transmitted through literate means in the classroom. Kari Veblen found that teachers placed a great emphasis on memory development and ear training, and that they introduced tunes by ear in the first instance and then followed up with some form of notation (1994, p.26). Music, in the Ennis classes during the 1960s and 1970s, however, was taught through staff notation, even though Tonic Solfa was the system utilized by many teachers in the educational system at the time, Other notation systems e.g. graphic systems, letter systems, which later became commonplace, were not used by the Ennis based teachers during this period. Although some teachers notated details such as ornamentation, phrasing, in general, the term ‘Directional notation’ (Keegan 1996, p.339) is more representative of the notation provided by them.

Frank Custy, although he used staff notation initially, over time he changed to a lettering system and created charts of all the tunes he taught. In this method instead of writing the notes on the stave, he wrote the letters out and barred and grouped them as they would be in staff notation. This adaptation of staff notation was to suit his policy as a teacher, which was to make music accessible to everyone regardless of ability. He had found that staff notation was an obstacle to pupils who had difficulty reading, and had also observed that his students were already writing out the letters under the notes so he decided that he would bypass the stave altogether. In due course other teachers followed.
Stylistic elements of performance in traditional music are personally interpreted, and are not part of the notation. In this regard, the transcriptions given to pupils were written by insiders for insiders and provided the basic information required to play the particular tune, rather than details such as phrasing, variation and ornamentation. In terms of the iconic processes central in the learning of a traditional form referred to by Turino (2008, p.7) i.e. recognising patterns such as structures, typical rhythms, melodic motifs; in my experience in the 1970s these elements were not formally focused on in class, but instead were learned aurally. While the tunes were notated on the blackboard and copied into manuscripts by the pupils, there was also an element of aural learning, as tunes were also demonstrated by the teacher and on occasions by visiting musicians to the classrooms.

The pedagogic model was put in place by Jack Mulkere, however, the teachers during the 1970s employed their own unique strategies and methods e.g. Brendan McMahon, a set dancer and a musician, was concerned that pupils would connect both aspects of the tradition, therefore, began each music class with set dancing or Frank Custy by adapting staff notation to suit the needs of his students.

Section Three

This section focuses on two subjects. Firstly, I consider musical instruments from two perspectives. I examine the use and status of the tin whistle as an instrument, and the acquisition of other instruments, looking at the motivation behind the choices made, the role of parents, and the innovative ways that funding was found to purchase them. Secondly, I explore the unsystematic ways that knowledge was increased both inside and outside of the classroom. My purpose here is to illustrate that transmission was
not confined by the new contexts and that it continued to occur in the way it had done in the past.

Instrument Preferences

It was not unusual for people to play two or three instruments well, however, the tin whistle was, and still is, a gateway instrument to playing other instruments. In the case of all the musicians referred to, the tin whistle was the instrument of choice to begin with, possibly because it was inexpensive to purchase, but also because it an easy instrument to learn to a basic level. In her research on the transmission of Irish traditional music through teachers, Kari Veblen found that seven of the fifteen teachers she interviewed, taught tin whistle in conjunction with other instruments. It was the most common instrument due to its ‘ready availability and affordability’ (Veblen 1991, p.60). In addition she found that it was the preferred starter instrument, because it allowed the student to gain facility with tunes, in particular providing a natural progression to flute and uilleann pipes (Veblen1991, p.67). Well known concertina and fiddle player Sonny Murray (1920-2009) remembers receiving his first tin whistle from Santa when he was seven or eight (Personal Interview Murray Jan 2007). Likewise, although Kieran Hanrahan’s principal instrument is now the banjo, like most of his contemporaries at the time, he began playing traditional music on the tin whistle. He recalls:

‘We played the tin whistle; you know those aluminium whistles, they were generally in C…When we came up in the world, then we got Generation D whistles. When they arrived they were the big deal. Before that you had the aluminium ones, and the Clarke’s wasn’t that long gone’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

71 Sonny was originally from Kilmihil, about twenty miles west of Ennis. He emigrated to London in the 1940s and returned in the late 1950s and settled in Ennis.
72 He also plays the mandolin and harmonica.
73 For further reading on the tin whistle see Vallely (2011, pp.748-750).
Tin whistles were mass produced so their quality varied from one instrument to the next. Music teacher Brendan McMahon, referred to earlier, was also a flute maker, and was regularly asked to refine tin whistles by his students. Although tin whistles were cheap to purchase, they were not discarded unless they could not be fixed. Again Brendan came to the rescue and repaired the damaged tin whistles. Kieran recalls an incident where Brendan was able to repair a badly damaged one:

‘One of my longest memories; we used go down past O’Halloran’s in Ard na Gréine when we’d walk from St Michael’s to the Tech. The (our) parents weren’t running around taxiing like we do, so we’d walk, and Rochie (Paul Roche) and myself would generally go together, and Mike (Kieran’s brother) and whatever other members of the family were going. I remember going one day and he (Paul Roche) had the tin whistle up the sleeve, but slipped in the ice, and bent the tin whistle with his elbow...Brendan Mc Mahon was the one man that could repair tin whistles at the time…it was new technology to us, the fact that he could actually straighten a bent tin whistle...he used to run a piece of metal through it and sort out the bore as well. They were dear whistles as well...you couldn’t be going weekly for a new whistle that’s for sure’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).74

Acquisition of Other Instruments

Although not everyone ventured through that ‘gateway’, those who did progress to other instruments appear to have gained more opportunities to perform socially (the subject of chapter five). Choices of instruments were sometimes made based on personal preferences, and other times initiated by parents or other adults. Economic reasons played a large part in deciding if a new instrument could be purchased in a family situation. At times budding musicians were attracted to an instrument as a result of trying out someone elses. Having the opportunity to play in a band also increased the chances of accessing a new instrument, where instruments were chosen

74 At that time it was possible to walk to the classes. There was no sense of it being dangerous at any level. Nowadays, children are driven to and from classes by their parents or other adults. It is also common practice to travel distances for private lessons from musicians with particular expertise. This is a subject for future research and not within the scope of this thesis.
and purchased to fill a need in a band. For example Patrick Nugent, learned the accordion, because it was considered by his parents that it would blend in well with the instruments being played by other members of his family. His older sister Mary played the tin whistle and later the flute, his older brother Michael and his sister Josephine played the fiddle. In a personal interview (Sept 2008) Patrick recalls, if they wished to play in competition together, it was considered important that one of them would learn the accordion and he was selected. Choice in this case was based on aesthetic considerations.

The parents of students attending the classes in the Tech were people who loved listening and dancing to Irish traditional music, although they were generally not traditional musicians themselves. Similarly Lucy Green (2002) noted that, it was more likely that popular musicians came from musically interested families. While the role of parents in the domain of *habitus* has been outlined, and it is obvious that facilitating the attendance of classes is fundamental, parents encouraged in other ways, such as purchasing instruments. 75 Ruth Finnegan emphasised the importance of parents in terms this type of support:

> ‘If a school child was to learn an instrument seriously either at school or privately then parental support was of the essence. Quite apart from the cost of lessons, parents had to provide facilities for practicing (no light imposition on family living), and finance for sheet music, for equipment like music stands, and eventually the instrument itself’ (Finnegan 1989, p.308).

This type of parental support was also maintained in Ennis. The parents of musician, Kieran Hanrahan bought him a banjo when he expressed an interest in it, having heard Enda Mulkere (Jack’s son) playing it. Similarly, my parents were always willing to supply instruments to any of us, at any time. They purchased a flute for my brother

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75 I referred earlier to the role of the parents of Johnny McCarthy, Michael Butler and Sonny Murray in purchasing instruments.
Eamonn from Paul Davis, a well known instrument dealer from England. It was a big occasion collecting the flute from the home of the Lewis family in Spiddal, County Galway. Guidance was sought from musician Peadar O’Loughlin, who inspected the flute in order to make sure that it was up to standard. Similarly, my sister Eimear recalls getting her first fiddle, a 1/4 size, from Santa. This had been purchased from fiddle player John Kelly (1912-1987), who had a shop in Capel St, Dublin. Over time the cache of instruments grew in our home to include an accordeon, two fiddles, a concertina, two pianos, a mandolin and numerous tin whistles.

The funding of instruments for school bands was occasionally an issue. As described in chapter three, local primary and secondary schools established school bands, primarily as a result of teachers attending the initial classes in the Tech. While many of the pupils possessed their own instruments, sometimes creative ways were used in order to obtain the necessary funding to purchase extra instruments for céilí bands. Sometimes this was related to aesthetics and reproducing the instrumental line up of well known céilí bands such as the Kilfenora or the Tulla Bands.

76 The Lewis family are well known performers of traditional music. Liam plays fiddle and banjo and now lives outside Ennis. His sister Patsy plays concertina and now also lives near Ennis.
77 John Kelly, fiddle and concertina player was originally from Rehy, Kilbaha in the Loop Head peninsula in Co. Clare. He was a member of the Castle Céili Band, Ceoltóirí Laighean and Ceoltóirí Chualann, an innovative irish traditional ensemble formed by Seán O’Riada.
78 It was natural that pianos would be purchased. According to my mother Dympna Cotter nee Lernihan, a piano was the first piece of furniture bought by her parents when they returned to Ireland having lived in New York for many years. She and her sister Mary Mary O’Neill nee Lernihan were encouraged to learn the piano and subsequently became piano teachers. Dympna taught for over sixty years in Ennis and throughout the west of the county. She prepared her pupils for examinations with the Royal Irish Academy of Music, which for many years were held in our home in Ennis. Her sister was also a piano teacher. They were both former pupils of DeRegge referred to in chapter two. The willingness to purchase instruments did not stretch however to the purchase of a guitar. One of my sisters recalls that as a teenager she had a wish to play the guitar, but my parents while not actually refusing, did not buy one. This was possibly because of their association of the guitar with popular culture.
One innovative approach involved the collaboration of St. Flannan’s College, a boy’s secondary school, and Coláiste Muire, the girls’ secondary school. At that time the Department of Education offered a grant towards the purchase of orchestral instruments. However, in order to qualify for the grant, certain marks had to be achieved in the state orchestral examination. The grant was solely for the purchase of orchestral instruments. However, St. Flannan’s College didn’t have an orchestra and Fr. Hogan, the bandleader, wished to purchase flutes and fiddles for the school céilí band. A solution to his dilemma was reached when the boys in the céilí band joined forces with the Orchestra in Coláiste Muire, under the direction of Sr. Paul and Sr. Flannan. The grant was given and the money was divided between the two schools. It was as a result of this that my brother Eamonn first began playing the flute. He had already been learning the tin whistle in the classes in the Tech, but when he began as a secondary school student in St. Flannan’s College he was asked to join the school céilí band, something he had been hoping for. Flute players were needed at the time, so Eamonn was given his first flute as a result of this orchestral exam.

Unsystematic or undirected Learning

While dependant on the personal motivation of the person being taught, it is reasonable to assume that learning occurs in a classroom. However, in line with Wenger’s concept of social learning (1998), it also occurs in other ways and in other contexts, even when obstacles suggest otherwise. In this section therefore, I show how

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79 Mingling with the opposite sex was actively discouraged at the time, so the collaboration of two single sex schools was very unusual then. The attitude softened nevertheless from then on, particularly in the context of musical events. I remember playing piano with St. Flannan’s College Céili Band on a number of occasions, as did my sister Eimear, on fiddle; although she recalls on one occasion being in disguise as a boy.
learning occurred in random ways, revealing that while obstacles sometimes existed, they did not necessarily inhibit learning.

As well as purchasing the banjo for him, Kieran Hanrahan’s parents arranged for him to meet another banjo player, Jimmy Ward. However, as recalled by Kieran, this was just in order to tune it for him. Kieran recalls this meeting:

‘My father arranged to meet up with Jimmy Ward outside Kelly’s pub, on his way home from work, to tune the banjo. We brought it up in a black plastic bag, sat in the car with the legs out the door and tuned it up and said ‘there you are now’ and back in the plastic bag and down home and out to Frank Custy’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

At a later stage Kieran visited Frank Custy but, as described by him, this experience was also casual. He recalls:

‘I still remember in the kitchen of the house, and he stood up, and he put his leg up in the stool, and he put the banjo up, and he said ‘why don’t you try Paddy’s Return’ so he said ‘try that tune’; and of course we were familiar with Paddy’s Return because we had learned it in the classes, so that was it’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Sometime later he had the good fortune to be introduced to Barney McKenna’s banjo style through Seán Horan, who happened to be visiting a neighbour of Kieran’s. He recalls:

‘He understood Barney McKenna’s playing. He was able to tell me. So I went up to him for a bit maybe on a Tuesday night and do a bit. He was living in Shannon’s house and when he’d come back visiting- he was about for about six months I’d say. But he gave me the basic rudiments of the banjo’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Importantly, the easy access to sound sources was a basis for what Matt Cranitch refers to as ‘latent knowledge,’ knowing what the music should sound like, or at least

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80 Jimmy Ward was a well known flute and banjo player from Miltown Malbay, who was a regular performer with the Kilfenora and the Laichtín Naofa Céili Bands.
81 Although Frank had learned the fiddle as a pupil of Jack Mulkere, he also played banjo, now his principal instrument to perform on
82 The jig Paddy’s Return is a very popular tune.
when it sounded right (Cranitch 2006). This was undoubtedly the case for Kieran, and despite the hurdles he had to overcome, he became an accomplished banjo player. Similarly, my first experience of attempting to play traditional music on the piano was fraught with stumbling blocks. I had already played piano for many years, initially taught by my mother and subsequently by Sr. Albeus, who taught in St. Zaviers Convent of Mercy. On the occasion of a County Fleadh being held in the town, my mother, a piano teacher, was approached and asked to encourage her students to enter the piano competition. I did, and as a consequence was invited to join the Gortbofearna Céili Band, because they were advised they needed a piano player. I had no idea how to play in this context, and one of the band organisers Flan Garvey, Principal of Gorbofearna National School, delivered a reel to reel tape recorder to my home and told me to practice with it. At that time I had limited experience of playing Irish traditional music on the piano and had no idea how to approach vamping. The fact that Flan Garvey was not a musician certainly did not help and when I asked him what I should play, his instructions were simply to ‘go oompah, oompah.’ In due course I figured it out myself, but not without the added pressure of having to transpose up a semitone, because our piano was not in concert pitch. In addition, the piano in Gorbofearna National School, where the practices were held, was even further out of tune, so the only occasion where I had the opportunity to play in concert pitch was at the actual competition itself. It was an overwhelming experience.

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83 At that stage I had progressed through all of the Royal Irish Academy of Music piano examinations and many grades of London College of Music Theory examinations.

84 Gortbofearna is a townland about ten miles west of Ennis. At that time the band rehearsed in the local national school, which closed in 1974 when it amalgamated with Inagh village national school four miles away.

85 Vamping is a style of piano accompaniment used in Irish traditional music. For further reading see Cotter (1996, pp 33-45) and Vallely (2011, pp. 541-544).
My experience was not unusual. My brother Eamonn recalls that he did not receive any tuition geared specifically to the silver Boehm system flute, which he was given as a result of the Department of Education instrument grant referred to earlier.

Eamonn recalls this experience:

‘It was probably 1973 or 1974; I was playing that heap of rubbish. Sure like everything else in those days, you were handed an instrument and told to ‘go away and learn it’. There was no such thing as one to one’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).

Eamonn also recalls a funny incident where another flute player in St. Flannan’s Céili band was puzzled because he couldn’t produce a good tone from the new flute. Nobody had noticed that he was trying to play with the cleaner still stuck in the flute. All of these examples illustrate the type of problems faced by young musicians at that time, not far removed from the experiences of earlier generations.

In addition, in my experience during this time, it was common that aspects of traditional music practice such as ornamentation, variation etc. were not part of the discourse among traditional musicians, or, as already referred to, part of the formal transmission process. As a teenager, a friend demonstrated the technique of playing the ornament, which I later learned was called a roll. I remember her playing a popular reel called the Earls Chair. Similarly, Eamonn recalls learning to play a roll from an older student, Michael Coffey. In this way, although relating to a different genre, Lucy Green found in her research, that young popular musicians learn from their peers through ‘Peer observation, imitation and talk’ (2005, pp. 91; 27).

In this manner, young musicians who were able to produce ornaments such as rolls, cuts etc. passed it on informally to those who were not. Similarly, Mary Nugent,

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86 A roll is a common ornament used in Irish traditional music. In fact, although I used ornamentation in my playing, and as a classical pianist I was aware of the terminology used in classical music, I did not become aware of the actual terminology until I began studying music as an undergraduate in University College Cork.
learned how to do a ‘roll’ from a prominent local musician Peadar O’Loughlin, who happened to be visiting her uncle when she was there (Personal Interview Nugent July 2009). 

Formal and Social

These experiences illustrate that although the transmission of musical knowledge was becoming more formalised in the classroom, it was not consistently so and to a certain degree serendipity continued to pertain to how some people acquired musical knowledge. Whereas prior to the 1960s, the primary means of acquiring the tradition had been through informal means, by 1980, following the development of classes for traditional music, the balance moved towards a more formal approach, and attendance at formal classes became standard practice. Here, the fundamentals were learned and other musical knowledge was acquired more informally and socially. While the organised transmission of traditional music in the classroom was happening, an informal process similar to that referred to earlier by Johnny McCarthy and Michael Butler co-existed. At the outset their experiences were largely informal, with minimal intervention. The experience of the next generation however, was principally formal to start with, and informal subsequently. It is clear that while there are key differences in how musicians of different generations learned the basic skills of playing traditional music, certain elements continued to be transmitted the same way. This is in line with Finnegan’s concept of musical pathway where she maintains that pathways are ‘already-trodden.’ Furthermore, they were:

‘…abiding routes which many people had taken and were taking in company with others…nor could they survive without people treading and constantly re-

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87 Mary Nugent is a well known flute player, teacher and academic, sister of Patrick Nugent who was referred to earlier.
forming them; new paths were hewn out, others again to be extended and
developed through new routings by the individuals and groups who patronised
them’ (Finnegan 1989, pp.306-307).

While the pathway to learning traditional music in Ennis may have been constant for a
long time, it was re-formed as a new pattern emerged, whereby, a period of classroom
based learning preceded learning through social practice. Through focusing on
musical knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge in this chapter, I have
examined the musical pathways taken by a number of musicians of different
 generations. I can conclude that while transmission was institutionally mediated, that
it was not fixed, and that transmission also continued to occur in random ways outside
of the classroom. This knowledge provided a stepping-stone to being able to actively
participate socially. In chapter five, I will examine learning from another perspective;
through participation in musical activities
CHAPTER FIVE

KNOWING AND PRACTICE

If knowledge is considered to be pieces of information, then it makes sense to have it transmitted in a classroom, but this is only part of ‘knowing’: ‘knowing’ also involves active participation in a social community (Wenger 1998, p.10).

Art worlds consist not only of their most seasoned and single-minded members, but of a large support system made up of individuals with different interests and varying degrees of talent and knowledge (Berliner 1994, p.7).
This chapter deals with the next phase in the learning of traditional music i.e. learning in a social context. As already outlined in chapter four, there were social elements in the classroom, and similarly as will be revealed in this chapter, there are formal elements in the social. Therefore, while chapter four focused on the acquisition of the basic skills learned in a structured context, this chapter demonstrates how these basic skills, in a sense a tool kit, enabled budding musicians to continue learning through performing and actively participating not only in existing community based contexts, but also in the new performance contexts which emerged in line with the growth in cultural tourism.¹ In effect this chapter is about the integration of theory and practice i.e. putting into practice what was learned in the classroom. In addition it relates to the ongoing development of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas) as a community of practice (Wenger 1998), identifying how its activities created links with the community at large, and how individuals within that community engaged with those structures in their own particular ways, leading music groups, negotiating with public authorities, and with financial institutions and business organisations. I am focussing in particular on the performance contexts during the 1970s, in the environs of Ennis. There were two community oriented practices, i.e. the sessions held at Toonagh Hall and in Ennis at what is known locally as the ‘Old Folks’.² I also examine two distinct formal staged show performances, seisiún and scoraíocht.³

¹ For a discussion on the rise in tourism in County Clare in the 1970s and 1980s please see Sweeney (2004) and Callanan (2000).
² Toonagh is a small village in the Parish of Ruan, situated four miles from Ennis. It comprises of a National school, a shop and the former school which was converted to a community centre. The Old Folks is the name given locally to the nights of entertainment for the elderly, held every Monday night since 1966, in the Community Centre (originally called the Catholic Young Mens Society Hall (CYMS) in Ennis.
³ The term ‘seisiún’ (session) generally relates to informal music sessions, but in this chapter it specifically relates to a type of stage shows performed for tourists. Scoraíocht is the name given a staged dramatic production through Irish traditional music, song and dance. As a competitive event it originated in County Wexford in the early 1960s and to this day is a core part of competitive culture at the Ennis Fleadh Nua (Ó Dufaigh 1968, p.6).
Victor Turner stated:

‘Cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances…a performance is a dialectic of ‘flow’, that is, spontaneous movement in which action and awareness are one, and ‘reflexivity’ in which the central meanings, values and goals of a culture are seen ‘in action’, as they shape and explain behaviour’ (Schechner 2002, p.19).

Whether it was performing at the ‘Old Folks’ nights in Chapel Lane, or on stage in a scoraíocht, the opportunities presented to develop new skills, provided the conditions for ‘flow’, thus inspiring greater participation.  

In addition, Turner maintains that:

‘a performance is declarative of our shared humanity, yet it utters the uniqueness of particular cultures. We will know one another better by entering one another’s performances, and learning their grammars and vocabularies’ (Schechner 2002, p.12).

The performances of the ‘70s and ‘80s allowed for such a sharing. They had meaning both for the audiences many of whom were exposed to expressions of Irish culture for the first time, and for the performers as they engaged in them. At the same time, the participants themselves experienced ‘a special sense of social synchrony, bonding and identity’ (Turino 2008, p.48). The stage performances were ostensibly an expression of a rural identity, being that the thematic content was generally in relation to aspects of rural life and dwelling. In reality this staged identity was at variance with the reality for the young musicians on stage, who were urban born and raised, and although they visited relatives they themselves were not from a rural background, as was the case for traditional musicians heretofore. Therefore, what it meant to perform

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4 The term ‘flow’ was originally introduced by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who contends that it is important that there is balance between the challenges and skill level of the player. He maintains that if the challenges are too low it will lead to boredom, but if they are too high it leads to frustration. If the balance is right the player will keep returning leading in turn to increased skills (Turino 2008, p.5). For further usage of the term ‘flow’ see David Elliott (1995).

212
these themes and how that shaped identity and discourse of traditional music authenticity is central to this chapter.

In relation to performance, which is at the heart of this chapter, I draw on Turino’s model of participational and presentational performance, as presented in *Music as Social Life: the Politics of Participation* (2008, pp.90-91).⁵ Both of these musical fields relate to live performances, but have different orientations. In participational performances the emphasis is on social interaction, with little separation between the audience and musicians. In presentational performances there is less attention to social participation, and the focus is on the staged quality performance from an audience perspective. Some of the performances referred to in this chapter were clearly participational or presentational. Other performances however, although staged and encompassing the elements of a presentational model, at the same time were participational, in that they involved elements of audience participation.

In this chapter, alongside Turino’s participational, presentational I also deploy Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning, where the primary focus is on learning as social participation. Wenger places learning at the centre of doing, becoming, experiencing and belonging (Wegner 1998, pp.4-5). These elements were part of the pathways taken by some young musicians in the timeframe of this thesis i.e. learning as becoming musicians, learning as experience in real situations, and learning as belonging and interacting as part of a ‘community of practice.’ Through these steps and social experiences, young musicians in Ennis at this time not only learned competencies, but also what was valued by the community, which ultimately created meaning for them and helped them understand the cultural and social functions of

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⁵ The remaining fields relate to recording music and studio audio art (Turino 2008).
their practice. In addition, stage performances marked a potential entry into music as a profession, and indeed many of the musicians discussed have gone on to have productive careers in music.

The chapter is divided into two key sections based on Turino’s performance models which I use to trace the *pathways* (Finnegan 1989, pp.305-311) taken by musicians following a period of classroom based learning. Section one relates to participational practices i.e. the music sessions in Toonagh in the hinterland of Ennis and the community organised get-togethers for the elderly in the centre of the town. Here, the distinction between the audience and performers is not clear, and in many situations, even though the musicians are at the centre of the performances, the audiences are also active participants. In addition, the focus is on the expression of community, rather than exclusively on the aesthetic value of the performances. Both the sessions held in Toonagh Hall by teacher Frank Custy, a former pupil of Jack Mulkere’s (the first teacher of traditional music in the Comhaltas/VEC scheme) and the ‘Old Folks’, regular Monday night entertainment for the elderly, held at the Ennis Community Centre, in distinct ways exemplify participatory performance.\(^6\) Section Two relates to Presentational practices i.e. formal staged performances, namely, ‘seisiún’ which were seasonal concerts for tourists, organised each summer by Comhaltas and supported by the Irish tourism industry through the Irish Tourist Board, Bord Fáilte, and ‘scoraíocht’ shows, which were competitive themed staged shows, part of The Fleadh Nua programme, held in Ennis at the end of May each year.\(^7\) Although both of these productions were organised by Comhaltas, and the

\(^6\) The initiation of this class, collaboration between Comhaltas and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC) is dealt with in detail in chapters three and four.

\(^7\) The Fleadh Nua is an annual music festival organised by Comhaltas, held in Ennis since 1973. Unlike other fleadhanna, although there are some competitions held, it is less competition orientated than other fleadhanna. Fleadh Nua is referenced in detail in chapter six.
focus was on the provision of entertainment by performers for a largely non-participating audience, their primary functions differed. The scóraíocht was oriented towards winning in competition, and seisiún was a tourism product. In different ways, each performance context nurtured socio-cultural understanding through the sharing of experiences and repertoires.

In each section I describe the performance contexts, identifying the motivation and the motivators involved, looking at the ideologies behind choices made in staging and repertoire. In this regard I propose Wenger’s use of the term community repertoire, which he defines as including:

‘…routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice’ (Wenger 1998, p.83).

The teachers, parents, and others, who were all volunteers, incorporated young musicians into existing and new performance contexts and provided opportunities which not only gave meaning to the individual musicians themselves but also to a wider community. The recollections of the musicians and other interviewees I draw upon reflect the significance of these experiences.

Section One: Learning as participating

Sessions in Toonagh: Frank Custy’s Modus Operandi

In chapter four, I outlined the role of teacher Frank Custy in incorporating traditional music into the school curriculum in Toonagh National School, where he was

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8 The wider issue of meaning is discussed in chapter six, but briefly what I mean is how through their practice, traditional musicians and others contributed to the transformation of the town of Ennis and its hinterland in relation to the reception of traditional music.
principal. In addition to teaching music as part of the school curriculum, Frank later held classes/music sessions on a Friday night, to which young musicians from Ennis and other parts of the county and further afield attended. These were by and large aimed at building repertoire and were not intended for complete beginners. In this sense they were transitional, more akin to controlled sessions than classes. However, Frank Custy did stream pupils into groups of similar standards. His general aim was to boost repertoire and to build confidence. In order to make it as easy as possible Frank adapted staff notation, and created charts of notated tunes which he placed on a purpose built display stand. The tunes were written in letter notation and here he describes these charts and how he used them:

‘I got these calendars…and put them together with two pieces of timber and a portable stand. We started with the ‘GGG, G-B, D’BG (he lilt the tune ‘This is the way we...’) started that every night and go on to Nil na Lá, Bheir mé Ó, so that progressively getting harder, but every night the class would start at the first tune, and to the second, add one or two each night but keep going back’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

In this way his pupils gradually learned new tunes while at the same time learning this form of notation. His pedagogic approach was inevitably influenced by his professional background as a primary teacher. During his teacher training emphasis was placed on constant reviewing of material (athrá), and as he states here, he applied this methodology to the transmission of music also. In addition, he comments on the difference between his approach and those of other teachers, who may not have had the experience of formal teacher training:

‘That’s one of the things that impressed strongly on us in the training college-‘athrá’ (repetition) was the word for it. In other words, to go back before finishing the lesson; to go back to the beginning, and start the new lesson the following day and link it up with the day before. I applied that to music too, to

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9 A session, is a gathering of traditional musicians to play Irish traditional music, generally dance music. For further reading see Vallely (2011, p.619).
tell you the truth now, things like that were a help. I see people give a new
tune each night, and they hardly ever go over the tune that they gave the night
before’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

His aim here was to equip his pupils with the skills to participate socially, through
playing in a music session and he considered that ‘one advantage of the charts and the
book was that you could have a decent session’10 (Personal Interview, June 2007).
This was because a common repertoire was built up. Frank chose his repertoire with
this in mind, selecting tunes- local standards, particularly that performed by the
Kilfenora and Tulla Céilí Bands.11 The following is a selection of popular reels played
by throughout the county, the reels ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ and ‘The Foxhunters’
were associated in particular with the Tulla Céilí Band.

In the example (Fig.5.1), the quavers are grouped in fours, and crotchets stand
alone. Although there are no barlines, it is aligned in such a way that the bars and tune
parts are implied; clearly ‘The Pigeon on the Gate’ is a two part reel, and ‘The
Foxhunt’ has five parts i.e. it has five distinct verses or parts of melodic material.
Although in practice the parts of these particular tunes are repeated, there are no
repeat marks included which points towards a certain amount of tacit knowledge on
behalf of the students (and teacher).12

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10 During the 1980s he produced a book which replicated what was on the charts.
11 Kilfenora is a village about fourteen miles from Toonagh, home of the famous céilí band which was
founded in 1910. For further reading see Vallely (2011, p.390).
Tulla a small town about fifteen miles east is home to another iconic céilí band founded in 1949
12 For a discussion on the structure of Irish dance music and the ‘round’ see Ó Súilleabháin (1990).
By teaching popular local tunes, especially those associated with the popular céilí bands, pupils were likely to have had a sonic reference prior to learning the tune on an instrument, which was a reflection of Frank’s own experience. In addition, using community repertoire affirmed the locality while generating a new group of musicians. Frank himself performed these sets of tunes as a member of the local Dysart Céilí Band. He notes:

‘Everybody knew the same tunes and we’ll say, after a while then we’ll say, in the second book certain tunes were linked together like the ‘Kilmaley’, ‘Reevey’s’ and ‘Rakish Paddy’. Kilfenora played them like that. There are other combinations Kilfenora played, and we kept that kind of combination so that when somebody said what tune would we play ‘play ‘Kilmaley’, everyone knew that ‘Reevey’s’ and ‘Rakish Paddy’ was after it’ so that there

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13 Dysart is the name of the local parish.
was no difficulty changing or to shout and give a whole list of instructions’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

In addition, as a teacher Frank was aware that people learned at different rates, but as he recounts, his mode of teaching allowed for this:

‘They were also getting a certain amount of confidence from the fact that they could do half of it, ¾ of it or whatever you like, and the ones then who finished it who were able to finish it that night, were moving on and would have a new tune the next night. Remember they would also have to go back and play from the very beginning the next night, and play over and over again, so that at the end of a year they’d have played a tune 30 nights in a year- 150 times in the year, you know what I mean, so that they repeated a lot’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

He had a different set of charts to suit the standard of each class group. As already stated, some pupils did not grasp complete tunes, and he was very careful not to highlight this. Conscious that people learned at different rates, he developed a way of examining, which did not draw attention to those who were struggling. Through an innovative call and response approach he was in a position to observe pupils progress. Frank describes how this operated:

‘I wouldn’t like to show up a kid in a class being weak, but what I did do; and it worked very well; was ok: the first line –GGGBDBG- you did that and the class answered; you did the next line and they answered you; you know what I mean? You did that down along. Then sometimes all the fiddle players would do the first line and the rest would answer them. You’d get to know who was able to do it without actually saying ‘can you do that’…Also they had to listen because if they didn’t listen they wouldn’t be able to come in, in the line. I believed an awful lot in that. One of the advantages of that was it kept the whole class active’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

In addition, Frank was conscious that many of the pupils may only play during class time. Therefore, he deliberately pushed his pupils to play as much as possible while they were in the class:

‘In a music class in particular the class was very short so you have to try to make them play as much as possible knowing that they wouldn’t do much
playing for the rest of the week so at least if they played for 3/4 of an hour hard which is what they did because they were playing the whole time; there was no taking down notes; there was no writing this; there was no explaining’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Although the above descriptions appear to encompass many aspects of formal classes as described in chapter four, these classes were however very different in many significant respects, and contrasted in particular with the daily school experience. Held on a Friday night, when the work of school was over for the week, it was time out, and as described by musician and academic Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, it was far removed from the experience of learning in school which he describes thus:

‘It was hardcore maths, reading, Irish, English, History, Geography, and that was it…a hardcore, academic, rigid, almost Victorian national school experience…The last three years in the school was really a hardcore, ‘dáirireacht’ (serious) experience, where we were all being prepped for the real world, the no-nonsense real world of academia’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

Gearóid further highlights the difference between the two experiences:

‘What was interesting was there was the kind of counter-voice to the Boys National School (Ennis), because for the last three years there, I went every Friday night to Frank in Toonagh. That was the antithesis of the National School of Ennis, if you like, because everything that was absent in one environment was alive and well, and everyone could talk to the teacher, in Toonagh. He talked to everyone, there was a radical difference in communication, we had a great time’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008)

While the nights in Toonagh were social occasions, they also provided the opportunity for young budding musicians from Ennis to move out from the town, facilitating the coming together of rural and urban teenagers:

‘There were a whole load of people coming out from the town; there were the Collins’, the drapers in the Market, the Houlihans, Brian and Kevin. In a sense, the doors of the school opened wide. There were no high walls around Toonagh school, it was a new school, even though, in fact, it was the old schoolhouse, the old Victorian schoolhouse which had girls upstairs and boys
downstairs; that was where the classes started originally, before we moved down to the new school. It was just pure magic’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

In addition, Frank, an avid sportsman, recalls that many of the Ennis boys played football with Toonagh boys while they were waiting for class. This also allowed Frank to connect with them at a different level and illustrates the cultural proximity of music and sport:

‘They used to look forward to coming out because ‘twas a night off for them, and they’d have this racket with the lads here and they’d be out playing a bit of football or something. That never worried me because I often felt, that if there was anything, I could create rivalry between young lads from Ennis who would have met in hurling’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

The critical point is that Frank was very conscious that these sessions were an important motivator for pupils to continue playing. In his experience, he found that if pupils experience was solely confined to school, they were inclined to give up playing. They needed to be motivated beyond the classroom or just pleasing their parents. In his experience he found that:

‘90% of what I had in the Primary school gave up too. Except they get good enough that they can join in a session, they’ll give up’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Therefore, the creation of a relaxed social atmosphere conducive to learning was important to him. Frank’s role as a teacher went beyond the classroom, and he endeavoured to create an impression that would be lasting. He describes the scene:

14 As outlined in chapter one, many parents of musicians did not engage themselves in or encourage their children to participate in activities which were considered ‘townie’. Since Toonagh was out of town, parents were more willing to allow their children to go there. Gabriella Hanrahan recalls being restricted in terms of town based events, but being allowed to attend events when ‘they were in the country’ (Personal Interview Feb 2013).

15 Not having developed the skills to progress to playing in a music session is clearly an obstacle to flow. See Turner in Schechner (2002, p. 19). Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow (1990, 1991) is also discussed in chapter six.
‘It was fantastic, because there was a huge fire down- there was no central heating at the time so there was a big open fire. It’s a building that was built in 1845…the classes were in the tearoom. There was no echo…The tearoom had a marvellous atmosphere. We had the big open fire, and parents sat below around the fire, and that created atmosphere, and you’d hope that they wouldn’t talk too loud’ (Personal Interview Custy June 2007).

Through these sessions traditional music came alive and became relevant, and above all was decisive in determining the pathway for many musicians. For the Ennis teenagers the sessions also linked the music they were playing to a world which was very different to the classroom in Ennis, which was for them somewhat disconnected and out of context. As outlined in chapter four, many of these young musicians were conscious of their ‘townieness’, sensing that to be an authentic traditional musician meant having rural roots. Attending the sessions in Toonagh gave them a rural experience, connecting them to older rural practices; maybe giving them a sense of where they had come from, while also offering a direct and important stepping stone to more social activities. This was reflected on by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin:

‘Instantly you were kind of pulled into a social scene, because when the class finished, there was a little session in the old school, and the old school was almost like something in a William Carleton novel, an old Victorian stone building with a massive fireplace and there would be a big fire lit, and people would make tea. The old characters, parents were there, and there was set-dancing. Old musicians like Martin Mullins would be invited in, and ‘the Yank’ Cullinan…There was a sense that you weren’t just living inside the written tune, there was a sense of the music being an integral part of the communal world, and that was very important…You had a definite sense of the epistemology, for want of a better term, where the music belonged to a living organic, dynamic world, that it wasn’t an abstraction’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008)

Toonagh, particularly because of the social dimension, was a significant stepping stone for many people on a pathway to a lifetime of engagement in Irish traditional music practices.
One of the first places young musicians from Ennis performed during the 1970s was at the ‘Old Folks’ nights, which took place every Monday night. According to Fr. Brendan O’Donoughue, who was actively involved at the time, the ‘Old Folks’ first started on 8/12/1966. The session is still held in the Community Centre in Chapel Lane today. At that time it was called the Catholic Young Men’s Society Hall (CYMS). The Red Cross was involved as well as members of the local community (Personal Interview O’Donoughue Nov 2009). Here young Ennis musicians served an apprenticeship; learning by ‘doing’ in context, in a ‘real’ situation (Werner 1998, p. 100), interacting with the community while learning both musical and social skills. It was functional entertainment which fostered a sense of community and inclusiveness, while providing the opportunity to improve playing. From my recollections and those of others, it was very inclusive, a place where everyone had a role. The young people who attended played music, danced, served tea, chatted, brushed floors, washed dishes – whatever was required. Music teachers such as Tom Barrett, Gus Tierney and Frank Custy created the link between the classroom and the community, with the added support of parents. Among the young musicians to attend were the 1971 St. Flannan’s College Céili Band, pictured in chapter four (Fig. 4.16) and referred to later in this chapter, who were encouraged to attend by their parents, teacher Frank Custy and band organiser Fr. Hogan, who considered it a good way to sustain their interest while also inculcating another level of the culture of volunteerism (chap two).

This initiative, in line with Turino’s participational model, was intergenerational, very inclusive, and had people contributing in different ways. Everyone

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16 An Irish proverb meaning, praise the young and they will come.
17 Fr. O’Donoughue was a priest in the parish of Ennis from 1966-1988 until he was transferred to Shannon, a town about twelve miles away.
present played their part e.g. musician Karl McTighe, a charismatic figure who owned a minibus, collected and returned home the elderly people who wished to attend.\textsuperscript{18} Mrs Peggy Kearney, who worked in the local O’Connor’s Bakery, was involved in the catering. Many musicians played there, including Mike Fitzgerald (fiddle), Johnny McCarthy (accordion) referred to in chapter four, Sonny Murray (concertina) Pakie Doohan (drums), and music teachers Frank Custy and Tom Barrett (fiddle).\textsuperscript{19} It was here that many young musicians enjoyed their first opportunity to perform, and as such it was a significant stepping-stone in the progression from the classroom.

Tom Barrett (1923-2002), a fiddle player, originally from a place called Bedford, outside the town of Listowel in nearby County Kerry, moved to Ennis as an Army Sergeant in 1970, and lived there until 1977, at which point he returned to Clonmel, County Tipperary, where he had lived for many years (O’Keefe 2001).\textsuperscript{20} Tom began teaching traditional music for the VEC, initially in Ennis and subsequently in outlying areas of Gortbofearna and Corofin. Having been a founder member of Comhaltas in Clonmel in 1956 he continued as an active member in Ennis. When Tom first moved to live in Ennis, the transformation in relation to traditional music in the town had begun, and young musicians were becoming active participants in Comhaltas. This was very apparent to him. When talking about his pupils in Ennis,  

\textsuperscript{18} Karl McTighe was a charismatic figure who also played the fiddle, bodhrán and was well known for dancing the Gabhairín Bui, described by Helen Brennan as a virtuoso solo dance involving dancing ‘intricate steps while negotiating a ‘grid’ produced by various trappings’ (2004, p. 79), which in this case was a fiddle with the bow laid across it. For a number of years, he also organised weekend trips in the summer to the Inishmore, one of the Aran Island, for the young teenage musicians who helped out at the Monday night entertainment for the ‘Old Folks’.

\textsuperscript{19} Mike Fitzgerald is originally from Brosna, County Kerry.

\textsuperscript{20} Tom lived most of his life in Clonmel, County Tipperary. He started playing traditional music at a young age, firstly guided by his Uncle Mike and subsequently by a neighbour, Dan Twomey. He joined the army and was stationed in Ballincollig, County Cork, in Kildare, and at in the 13\textsuperscript{th} Battalion Pipe Band, Kickham Barracks in Clonmel. During his time in the army, he learned to play the pipes and joined the army band, eventually being promoted to Band Sergeant.
Tom noted the following, without any real sense of untruth but a typical stylized manner of speaking that might be seen as exaggeration but was not intended as such:

‘The children in Ennis, they were born playing instruments. They don’t need anyone to teach them. They are playing before you know it’ (O’Keefe, 1997).

Tom’s view reflects the perception of a kind of golden age of Irish traditional music transmission in Ennis, showing how quickly Ennis musicians earned credit for lineage – a narrative and belief that persists today. Tom encouraged many of his Ennis music students to attend the ‘Old Folks’ nights and in this way not only created a link between the classroom and the community, but in particular supported young people and the elderly to get to know each other in a relaxed setting. In addition this was a space to gain experience performing and it was accessible to anyone interested in being there. Most of all, it was about helping the youth on their way to developing more than just musical competencies. The young musicians who attended had the opportunity to play the tunes they already knew, and to learn new tunes, from experienced musicians in a social setting. Ennis musician and music teacher Vincent McMahon recalls:

‘At the time it was one of the main sessions of traditional music in the town because we were youngsters from school, but then adult musicians like Gus Tierney, Michael Butler, Michael Fitzgerald, Johnny McCarthy used also play there for few sets and some waltzes’ (Personal Interview McMahon Apr 2007).
As suggested by Turino, access to this type of experience was valuable in the musical and social development of the young musicians. Turino notes that:

‘Participatory music has the potential to make artists of us all, even the shyest of individuals, and for social synchrony and bonding and fun’ (Turino 2008, p.92).

Likewise Colin Quigley in his study of fiddle player Emile Benoit noted that:

‘Long, intense hours spent with others in a mutual pursuit and setting of communitas, such as is characteristic of the dance events in which Emile apprenticed as a performer, have also been identified as providing a crucial opportunity for the developing artist’ (Quigley 1995, p.208).
Ennis musician and broadcaster, Kieran Hanrahan, who attended regularly on Monday nights as a teenager, describes learning by doing, reflecting on how this tacit form of transmission operated in the context of a live performance:

‘You’d go there and you might have two tunes, and if you only had the two tunes they all played them and they might play them again and play them again, before the end of the night. There was that sort of help. There was John Joe Cullinan (fiddle player) from town. There was a load of people like that. We had access’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan, Feb 2008).

In addition, it was an easy introduction to playing in public. Although for novice musicians it may have felt like a presentational performance, in fact because of the other activities taking place any nervousness could be concealed and the focus shifted from performance. Flute player John Rynne, who attended these nights as a child in the late 1970s, describes his experience:

‘What I really learned I think, is that you’re playing away, and there’s twenty or thirty people out there, some of them are listening, some of them are dancing, more of them are talking, and just that you wouldn’t be self-conscious about it, because I would have been shy going in to it’ (Personal Interview Rynne, Mar 2008).

He continues, outlining the all encompassing experience that was Monday nights at the ‘Old Folks’ with its rich blend of performing music and being part of community:

‘I was quite young going there…I would have to go with Anthony McMahon…We were packed down (sent by parents) there, we were learning set-dancing and sweeping in the kitchen at that time’ (Personal Interview Rynne March 2008).

21 Although John Joe Cullinan lived in the Cornmarket area of the town, like many more of his generation he was not originally from Ennis.
22 Flute player, John Rynne is the Director of the Ennis Trad Festival which was founded in 1994.
23 His friend flute player, Anthony McMahon, who is now a curate in Nenagh County Tipperary, is a member of a well known family of musicians. His brother John is a piper and concertina player and his brother Séamus plays fiddle and flute. They are first cousins of fiddle player and well-known recording artist Martin Hayes and Christy McNamara, best known as a photographic artist.
The two distinct fields of participational music making described were part of the musical pathway of many young musicians. They learned, through the ‘Old Folks’ nights, through a complete immersion in a real context involving a wide community of unpaid volunteers. Toonagh, on the other hand was an incubatory site, which included elements of pedagogic management, while also drawing in elements of a music session environment.

**Section Two: Learning as Performing: Theatres of Instruction**

In this section I describe two fields of performance which correspond to Turino’s Presentational model (Turino 2008, pp.51-65). The two shows, Seisiún and Scóróid, organised by Comhaltas, although with some different points of reference, are illustrative of this model which focuses on learning through the act of adjudicated performance, both adjudicated formally in a competition, and in terms of an audience with certain aesthetic expectations of the standard of a show. The original objective of introducing the concept of scóróid was simply as an activity for Comhaltas members ‘including non musicians, and to encourage their initiative in providing entertainment to a high standard. The competitive aspect is, or at least should be secondary only to that of presenting traditional music to as wide as possible a public in as attractive as possible a form’ (Ó Dufaigh 1968, p.6). However, performing groups became competition oriented very quickly, as the Fleadh Nua, the locus of the

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24 Lancaster schools were developed by the British educator Joseph Lancaster, where the focus was on educating large groups of children. Monitors or advanced pupils were placed in charge of every ten children, which enabled large numbers to be taught. Following a visit by him to Ennis, one of these schools was set up there and also in the nearby village of Corofin. He called the classrooms Theatres of Instruction. For further reading see Ó Dálaigh (1998, pp.156-157). Here I am using the term ‘theatre’ more in relation to staging contexts. However, in future publications I will explore the monitorial potential of this term.
competition, gained in popularity.\textsuperscript{25} The seisiún on the other hand, while also providing an activity for selected Comhaltas members, was a product, developed in response to a growth in tourism in the region. In distinct ways these two new shows provided entertainment for an emerging audience interested in hearing traditional music. They also fulfilled Ruth Finnegan’s three-prong definition of a musical expression as performance i.e. the participation of a wider audience than the performers themselves, the framing of the event itself, and some element of prior preparation (Finnegan, 2007, pp.152-154).

In presentational shows, one group performs for an audience in a concert format. There is a separation between the performers and the audience. The music is listened to closely, therefore, the preparation and presentation and the expectations of the music are very different to that described earlier in relation to the participational model.\textsuperscript{26} In line with Finnegan’s description of framing, these shows were advertised to begin at a certain time, they were a prescribed length, costumes were worn by the performers which distinguished them from the members of the audience, and there was an MC.

In terms of performance practices, adjusting from a participational to a presentational type performance involved acquiring new skills. Seisiún and scoraíocht provided new challenges and experiences for the Ennis musicians, including for older established musicians. Learning to perform, learning stagecraft, awareness of an audience, developing a programme with an audience in mind, were all new skills which had to be developed and honed. Niall Behan, an employee of Shannon

\textsuperscript{25} The Fleadh Nua was originally held in Dublin but Ennis has been its permanent home since 1973. It is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

\textsuperscript{26} That said, many pub sessions can have the appearance of being participational, and indeed people can joining in, but there are rules and etiquette involved and in more professional, paid sessions in bars, it is generally only those hired to play that actually perform. For further discussion see Vallely (2011, pp. 610-611).
Development, and the organisation Comhaltas were the driving forces behind this.  

In particular, seisiún was created as a result of cooperation between Comhaltas and Shannon Development, the regional industrial authority that was responsible for economic development in the Shannon region.

Seisiún

In 1968, as tourism began to grow, Brendan O’Regan, a visionary employed by Shannon Development, set up the ‘Rent an Irish Cottage’ Company.  

Using clusters of self catering thatched cottages to rent to visitors, the Cottage Project was designed to help to stimulate the economy of local villages and small communities, and to meet the demands for accommodation around Shannon Airport (Callinan 2000, p.65). A Teach a’ Cheoil or ‘The Music House” was developed at each village where there was a cluster of cottages. Niall Behan, an employee of Shannon Development, played a central role in realising O’Regan’s vision. Niall was involved in producing shows at Bunratty Medieval Castle, where music was performed during medieval banquets. In sum, Shannon Airport, Shannon Development and key figures such as Brendan O’Regan and Niall Behan were part of a strategic cultural-economic plan that revamped Irishness for the tourist market, while at the same time raising the profile of Irish traditional music and staged shows locally.

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27 Niall Behan born in Dundalk, he spent many years in Waterford, worked for Shannon Development as an Entertainments Manager, with responsibility for shows in Bunratty Castle. He was an Irish speaker, very involved in amateur dramatics, and a lover of Irish history. At that time the company was known as Shannon Free Airport Development Authority SFADCO and was later renamed Shannon Development.

The mono LP (Fig. 5.3) produced in 1966 by Shannon Development was part of their promotion of the region, and in particular the Medieval Banquet at Bunratty Castle. Designed as a ‘souvenir record’, the back cover expresses the hope that it will bring back happy memories of visits to ‘Bunratty Castle, near Shannon Airport, Ireland’ noting that, ‘If, however, you have not visited Bunratty this may give you a foretaste of what is in store for you and your friends on your next visit to Ireland’ (HMV CLPC32).

The sleeve for the LP Durty Nelly’s (Fig. 5.4) reflects a different concept of tradition, recalling the country house dance and the pubs origins as a sheebeen (an illicit bar). The musicians performing in Bunratty were classically trained musicians and singers performing an arranged programme, in comparison to the informal sing-a-longs in Durty Nelly’s pub.

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29 The banquet was part of a 24 hour package tour designed by Shannon Development to entice travellers en route to and from the US to Europe to stop off and ‘sample Ireland.’ (sleeve notes) The Bunratty Singers were praised and reference is made to performing for JF Kennedy and Cardinal Cushing of Boston; clearly aimed at appealing to Irish Americans. (HMV CLPC32)

30 Durty Nelly’s, established in 1620, is a pub located beside Bunratty Castle, named after the owner, who was keeper of the toll bridge over the river outside (Sleeve notes DN1). It is still a major tourist attraction and alongside other new shop developments is a major attraction for tourists who fly into Shannon.
This LP was a live recording made in 1975. The sleeve features three sketches; Bunratty Castle and Durty Nelly’s, a music session in country kitchen, and a group of traditional musicians (one of them playing the piano which, incidentally, would not have been associated with a session in a country kitchen given pianos were parlour instruments for the more well-off (see Dillane 2000). This recording was instigated by Durty Nelly’s pub and the Medieval Banquet in Bunratty by Shannon Development. Clearly traditional music was now being considered marketable for tourism purposes.

The Rent an Irish Cottage scheme was designed to develop tourism in the wider mid-west region. Niall Behan (1933-2009), in cooperation with Comhaltas, produced shows called seisiún for the Teach an Cheoil (houses of music) which were part of the scheme.\textsuperscript{31} They were described as housing ‘the native traditions of Ireland presented in an attractive and relaxed atmosphere. The traditional musicians, singers and dancers of the area gather at the appointed venue and re-enact the old-house céili’ (Treoir 1978, Vol 10 No 3, p.10).\textsuperscript{32} The shows, designed with the motive to

\textsuperscript{31} It means ‘session’ in the Irish language. The initial shows were called ‘Oíche Céili’ (a social evening) (Personal Interview Liddy June 2013).

\textsuperscript{32} Treoir is a magazine produced by Comhaltas since 1968.
boost local economies, used Irish traditional music as a cultural product in Ireland, aimed generally for foreign tourist audience but however, also included local residents and Irish holiday-makers. They were also seen as having the function of ‘maintaining interest in the local traditions of an area’ (Treoir 1978, Vol 10 No 3, p.10).

Fig.5.5: An advertisement for seisiún in the Comhaltas magazine Treoir\(^{33}\) (1973 Vol 5 No.3, p.28)

Although tourism concerns dictated the model and structure of the staging, to a large degree, the cultural-musical organisation Comhaltas accepted this. It provided Comhaltas with the opportunity to promote Irish traditional music to new audiences. In addition, it introduced a level of professionalism in that the musicians were paid for performing. Labhrás Ó Murchú, Ard Stiúrthóir (Director General) of Comhaltas,

\(^{33}\) Nationally, the seisiún entertainment scheme was organised by Comhaltas in Cooperation with Bord Fáilte, initiated in 1971 as a pilot scheme, which was extended in 1973 (Treoir 1973 No5, p.12).
confirmed that a major portion of the funding for the shows was initially given by Bord Fáilte (Personal Interview May 2013). According to Pat Liddy, who has been involved for many years, this is now funded by money paid by the audience plus that which was allocated by the Head Office of Comhaltas (Personal Interview Liddy June 2013).

Since the young Ennis musicians had developed the adequate musical skills and confidence, they were given the opportunity to perform in these presentational shows, which were highly arranged and directed, focused on entertaining an audience through Irish traditional, song and dance. Through these shows they learned how to be on stage, and how to perform to an audience, as opposed to playing for themselves, and how to be part of a tourist enterprise. Thus, they became aware of an aspect of professional performance, in which the audience was what ultimately mattered. Kieran Hanrahan comments on Behan’s influence on the musicians, particularly in relation to the notion of performing for an audience:

‘I think the biggest influence in all of that was Niall Behan, because stagecraft certainly was a huge thing with him, and the understanding of where you were on stage and what your relationship was with the audience…Just the fact that you might be with a group on stage, your relationship was as a group with the audience. An internal relationship should only be musical…the audience was what you were there for. There could be no ‘in’ jokes…I learned so much from that. That was a hugely important part of my learning’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Each summer during the 1970s, seisíúns were performed in County Clare villages including, Corofin, Lisdoonvarna, Carrigaholt, Kilkee, and Lahinch (see map of County Clare fig. 1.2). The following set list (Fig. 5.6) outlines the seisíún programme followed during the summer of 1973. The performers followed a set programme, where individual talents were showcased, primarily performing commonly played local dance tunes, airs and songs. Tunes from the harp repertoire
were also incorporated into the shows e.g. item 3 in the second half is ‘Planxty Irwin’, a composition by the blind Irish harper, Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738). Typical of presentational music, the shows were scripted, with organised beginnings and endings e.g. the first half ended with what Niall called a ‘montage.’ A montage is a cinematic technique whereby a number of images are juxtaposed to form a single image, but in this context it was an arrangement involving solos, duets, the full ensemble, and dancing which was always used for very dramatic effect at the end of the show. This montage was a high energy performed item which, mainly because of the percussive dancing, had a wow factor, which regularly prompted a standing ovation, something which certainly helped maintain flow for the performers while also keeping the audience happy.\(^{34}\)

The musical arrangements were primarily based on the arrangements of Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Chualann, incorporating solos, duets, trios with the full ensemble.\(^{35}\) Niall Behan also encouraged the use of harmony, and joining in the song choruses. In the above programme, the performers included Mary O’Halloran, Tim Lyons- Vocals, Paulette McCarthy, Oliver Skeritt- dancers, Sonny Murray- Concertina, Dermot Lernihan- Accordeon, Deirdre O’Brien Vaughan, Geraldine Carrig- Harp and Vocals, Kieran Hanrahan Banjo, Paul Roche, flute and tin whistle, Vincent McMahon –fiddle.\(^{36}\) I also performed in this for a number of years, playing the tin whistle, fiddle and piano.

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\(^{34}\) The dancers in the early seisiún shows were Oliver Skeritt, Paulette McCarthy, Jackie Scanlon, Mary Touhy and Mary Keane.

\(^{35}\) Ceoltóirí Chualann was a seminal professional ensemble formed by Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971) towards the end of the 1950s. His arrangements were innovative and incorporated the music of the Irish harpers of the 1700 and 1800s. The group was widely promoted on radio. For further reading see (Ó Canainn 2004, pp. 83–84).

\(^{36}\) Deirdre O’Brien Vaughan is a well known musician particularly on the harp. Originally from Limerick, living in Newmarket-on-Fergus in County Clare for forty years, she is the Director of the Irish Traditional Music Institute, a school which she established to promote the teaching and learning
In the following image (Fig. 5.7) the audience was seated in close proximity to the performers, who were dressed in costumes, which reflected a rural past and aimed to create an illusion of a country house party. As can be seen from the following of Irish Traditional music and song. In addition since the 1980s she has produced and directed ensembles who perform throughout Ireland and abroad.
image the instruments were varied including fiddle, banjo, tin whistle, button accordion and wooden flute.

In terms of preparation, since shows of this nature were scripted, choreographed, and had set musical arrangements, they did not happen without a significant amount of practice and rehearsal prior to the actual performance. Practice in this context relates to a learning method, through repetitive preparatory work and rehearsal, as opposed to a social theory of practice. Ruth Finnegan distinguishes between the general practice which is ongoing, and the intense practice leading up to a specific event. In her investigation of various types of performances, she found that regardless of the variations between musical genres, that there was an underlying pattern, which was:

‘…an expectation that the performance event would be preceded by some musical as well as organisational preparation and that the performance was not just part of a seamless process of musical activity but a culmination of it’ (Finnegan 2007, p.154).
In terms of both seisiún and scoraíochts both types of practice were required. Prior to group rehearsals, personal practice was essential in order to learn the specific tunes, songs, dance steps etc. which would be incorporated into the shows. At this stage the young musicians had enough skill to be able to learn the tunes without guidance, one of the criteria in choosing the musicians for the shows. In addition, the participational experiences referred to earlier provided ample opportunities to learn and practice new repertoire. Full rehearsals were held during the weeks prior to the public performances. These focused on the specifics of the musical arrangements, choreography, creating a flow between the items, artistic movement and general stagecraft. Fr. Pat Ahern, who was a regular producer of Comhaltas shows, emphasised the importance of preparation and practice, and pointed out the difference between playing on stage and in other contexts. His use of the word ‘artist’ adds weight to this, implying the creation of something of aesthetic value:

‘The artist should take his entrance and exit in a very definite manner… Carriage, poise, posture and position are essential in presentation…sitting …is static and allows for little or no movement’ (Ahern 1969, p.11).

The group rehearsals were generally held in the Maria Assumpta Hall in the town, or in one of the local school halls. Many of these venues were parish owned, and managed by the local Catholic Church authorities. Through the music classes referred to in chapter three and four, contacts already existed between Comhaltas and the Sisters of Mercy, who ran the Holy Family Hall. Fr. Hogan, referred to in chapter four, a parish priest and teacher, was regularly approached in terms of the use of the hall in St. Flannan’s College and the Maria Assumpta Hall. As has already been described in other chapters, from the 1950s onwards a good relationship had been

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37 Fr. Pat Ahern is a founder member of Siamsa Tire, the National Folk Theatre established in 1973, located in Tralee, County Kerry.
nurtured between Comhaltas and the VEC, so obtaining a practice venue was never difficult.

Scoraíocht

A scoraíocht, according to the explanation by Comhaltas member Pádraig Ó Dufaigh in the official Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann magazine ‘Treoir’ is:

‘a half hour programme of traditional Irish music, singing and dancing based on some central theme, usually linked by a suitable script and presented in dramatic form’ (Ó Dufaigh 1968, p.6).

Described as the brainchild of Tom Dempsey, the concept was first introduced in 1963 at a Féile Ceoil (music festival) in Buncldoy, County Wexford. Following its success there, according to Ó Dufaigh (1968, p.6) it was organised on a provincial basis in 1965. Scoraíochts were also competitive themed shows, aimed at providing a new activity for Comhaltas members. They were similar to the pageants which been held as part of the early Fleadhanna of the 1950s and during An Tóstal (both of which were referred to in chapter two).\(^{38}\)

Fr. Pat Ahern, referred to earlier, was a regular adjudicator of the Scoraíocht competitions during the 1960s, and advised Comhaltas as regards the production of the shows. In an article in Treoir he outlined his approach to stage production, particularly drawing attention to the role of a producer. In relation to artistic movement on stage he emphasised the importance of awareness of the audience:

‘Playing an instrument is one thing, presenting yourself to an audience is another…the number one consideration is the audience. It is they who ultimately dictate what goes on stage’ (Ahern 1969, p.11).

\(^{38}\) A pageant in this context was a drama based on an historical theme.
Comhaltas, in support of his recommendation, advertised a course for producers a few months later:

![Advertisement](image)

Fig. 5.8: Advertisement (Treoir 1969, No 11, p.12)

The following document outlines the rules and regulations and the purpose of the competition. It also outlines the marking system used by the adjudicators. Although the shows themselves were presentational, because of the wider involvement of Comhaltas branch members including non-musicians it was also participatory in nature. It describes two categories of show, one more elaborate in terms of lighting, costumes and sets. It outlines clearly that it was aimed exclusively as an activity for Comhaltas members, the duration of the show should be no longer than thirty two minutes and that an effort should be made to include little known repertoire, songs in Irish, and dancing in order for it to be distinctive. The more elaborate category of show was required to have a central theme. Marks were allotted for music, singing dancing, production and variety. Similar to Comhaltas’ Fleadh competition system, winning groups progressed from county level to provincial and the All-Ireland final, which was held in conjunction with the Fleadh Nua at the end of May.\(^\text{39}\) The regulations point towards the increasing level of control being applied e.g. disqualification for including non members and penalisation for going over time.

\(^\text{39}\) Ennis became the permanent home of the Fleadh Nua in 1973. See chapter six for further detail.
Fig. 5.9 (a) Rules and Regulations for Scoraíocht. (Courtesy of Kerry Barrett)
Through the 1970s, Niall Behan was the producer of both the seisiúns and the scoraíochts. In addition to his position with Shannon Development, he had a long involvement in amateur dramatics and won awards for acting, which ideally positioned him for his role as producer. His wife Mary described his great interest in the Irish language and that his ‘head was full of history’. She also remembers meetings being held in their home when the shows were being planned and she recalls often being involved in the making of costumes. Even though she was not a member of Comhaltas, Mary was willing to volunteer her skills (Personal Interview Behan Oct 2009).
Scholar of Comhaltas, Méabh Ní Fhuartháin states that the historical themes of these shows ‘attempted to narrate and streamline a shared history, concentrating on moments of political and historical importance’ (2011, p.192). Ní Fhuartháin also refers to new writing and material being incorporated into the pageants which ‘recreated a legendary past and aligned the ancient with the modern’ (2011, p.196). Appealing to a rustic romanticised Ireland was commercially convenient, being what tourists expected, and it also tallied with the view that Comhaltas propagated as being ‘authentic’. The themes of both the seisiúin and scoraíocht shows were in one sense at odds with the growing link between Irish music, commerce and modernity that was emerging through engagement with local industry. The shows had the appearance of reproductions of something rural or from the past, which did not, on the surface, reflect current times. The Ennis shows always reflected a rural lifestyle: Meitheals, Fair Days, scenes in farmhouse kitchens, strawboys (bachachs), wren dances. Many of the shows were based on significant historical themes e.g. na Buachaillí Bána, or Máire Rua, or the poet Donncha Rua MacConmara, which is pictured below (see figure 5.10). Neither did the shows in any way reflect the urban background of the

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40 A meitheal is an Irish rural tradition where neighbours gather together as a community to complete farm work at harvest time. A Fair Day was a market day where cattle were sold. Strawboys (also known in County Clare as Bacachs) was a wedding custom whereby people dressed in disguise, often using straw and would gatecrash a wedding for a short while and play music and dance with the bride and groom. Wren dances took place following the Hunting of the Wren, a tradition held on St Stephens Day, 26th of December, a tradition whereby people disguised in straw would parade through the towns and countryside, gathering money for the dance. Further reading see Vallely (2011, p.758) Granville (2012).

41 The White Boys were a secret Irish agrarian 18th century organization which used violent tactics to defend tenant farmer land rights. Their name derives from the white smocks the members wore, during their nightly raids. Wikipedia (2013) available: ‘White Boys’ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiteboys accessed on 11/5/2013 18h 44.
Máire Rua (1615-1686) was a formidable character who lived in Lemanagh Castle in North Clare. In 1664 she was granted a royal pardon on murder charges brought against her two years previously. These charges related to her supposed involvement with her husband Conor O'Brien's raiding parties in the 1640's. Many legends abound, about her treatment of her third husband i.e. she is believed to have thrown him out of the top window of the castle. Clare County Library (2013) available: ‘Máire Rua’ http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/people/ruadh.htm accessed on 11/5/2013 19h 12.
young musicians performing in them. Despite the fact that as ‘townies’ they played traditional music, they were very far removed from the scenes that were recreated and reinforced by the costumes which were worn on stage. Instead they presented a kind of idealised romantic past, which, of course, proved how savvy Comhaltas and Shannon Development were and also how complicit they were in creating this kind of image. Similarly, Rachel Fleming observed the stage setting for seisiún shows in the Cultúrlann (the head office for Comhaltas in Dublin and the place where shows are staged):

‘with farm cottages amidst green hills painted on the backdrop, idealised the pastoral context of the instrumental music, dancing, singing and comedy that took place. An old hand churn was incorporated into the act; a young man danced in place as he mimed the butter churning. Except for the master of ceremonies/comedian (whose humour elicited probably more laughs than groans) the performers were in their twenties and played and danced quite skilfully and precisely. One wonders if the young people find the nostalgic staging compelling’ (Fleming 2004, p.240).

Fig. 5.10 Ennis Scoraíocht Group. (Courtesy of Bernadette Barrett)

Donncha Rua MacConmara (1715-1810) was a poet originally from Cratloe in County Clare (Spellissy 2003, p.94).
The image fig. 5.10 features many of the people referred to in this chapter.
Front row left to right: Peter Skeritt, Vincent McMahon, Kieran Hanrahan, Oliver Skeritt, Jackie Scanlan. Middle row left to right: Mary Keane, Mary Touhy, Hilda Queally, Deirdre O’Brien Vaughan, Bernadette Barrett, Gabriella Hanrahan, Clare McMahon, Marion McMahon. Back row left to right: Niall Behan, Brendan McMahon, Johnny McCarthy, Fr. John Hogan, Robbie McMahon, Tom Barrett and Karl McTighe.

In particular, as regards both of these types of shows, Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, makes the point that at the end of the day:

‘Comhaltas created new platforms to fill the performance gap and afforded musicians reconfigured spaces in which to play together. In this reconfiguration traditional music and its performers were valued highly. This spilled over into non-Comhaltas zones and Comhaltas brought traditional music making into the public sphere’ (2011, p.338).

As traditional music became more popular, new opportunities continued to present (chapter six). Through the 1970s young Ennis musicians, who had progressed from the Tech and other classrooms, continued to integrate into the community of practice, by participating in existing practices, and playing their part in the creation of new performance contexts, many of them tourist driven.

In the performances referred to in previous chapters, the link between Irish traditional music practice, nationalism and Roman Catholicism continued. This was evidenced through the themes in the shows, and the culture of volunteerism, which existed in the participational and presentational practices described. Although the performers in Seisiún were paid, other related work such as the making of costumes, catering, providing transport etc was done on a voluntary capacity and for the ‘greater
good’. A new dynamic entered, as increasing globalisation and a growing tourist industry as a result of closeness to Shannon Airport, provided new opportunities for traditional musicians. As a consequence, tourism and commercial interests began to mediate and create Ennis as an authentic and rich locus of tradition.

In this chapter, I outlined some of the steps taken by young Ennis musicians following a period in the classroom. The three performance models introduced here contributed to maintaining a state of flow for them, motivating them to continue and influencing the musical pathways they took. In chapter six I discuss the meaning that Irish traditional music continued to have for individual musicians, for Comhaltas as a community of practice, and for the town of Ennis as it began to change in relation to its reception of Irish traditional music, up until the 1980s and briefly, beyond.
‘If one could awaken all the echoes of one’s memory simultaneously they would make a music, delightful or sad as the case might be, but logical and without dissonances. No matter how incoherent the existence, the human unity is not affected’ (Baudelaire 1980, p.71).
The previous chapters referred to some of the ways that Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Comhaltas) developed as a fledgling organisation in Ennis, providing a matrix for the promotion and learning of traditional music, in collaboration with other institutions. Initially comprising a group of individuals, motivated by a unified purpose of preserving and promoting the practice of traditional Irish music song and dance, over time, this branch of Comhaltas grew and developed as a formidable organisation, which impacted in ways far beyond its initial motivations. In chapters four and five in particular, I examined approaches to the transmission of traditional music initiated by the Ennis Branch in partnership with institutions such as the Clare Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and Shannon Free Airport Development Company (Shannon Development). Chapter five also looked at the intersection of traditional music, commerce and community, which led to the transformation of the town. This chapter draws all these strands together, and from three perspectives, considers the meaning of it all; in essence the reciprocal relationship between experience and the world as they shaped each other (Wenger 1998, p.71). Firstly, I look at the continued growth and development of the Ennis branch of Comhaltas in the 1970s, through a culture of volunteerism. Secondly, I examine the broadening of horizons for a group of young Ennis traditional musicians, as Irish traditional music performance became part of their social lives as well as a professional option. Finally, through the prism of the Fleadh Nua, I close the circle which began with musicians from outside, moving into Ennis, and continued with movement of musicians in and out of the town, which ultimately led to the establishment of Ennis as a destination recognised in itself as a centre for traditional music.

Throughout this thesis the meaning of Ennis has been flexible, revealing a different sense in each chapter – sometimes it was an urban geographical space, other
times it was town and hinterland. However, people have been at the core of its meaning throughout, highlighting both through individual and collective approaches, the potential for change that can be effected to a town and community given favourable conditions, which in this case were created as a result of events held in the town along with the entrepreneurial spirit of key individuals. In this chapter, Ennis emerges as a centre for Irish traditional music, with its own unique identity; a place recognised as a distinct destination rather than purely as a place that people passed through on their way to or from somewhere else. While the perspective of Ennis people is important in recounting this Ennis, I also include the voices of people from outside Ennis and County Clare, who visited the town as young musicians during the 1970s.

In this concluding chapter, once again I draw upon Turino (2008) and Wenger (1998), particularly as the work relates to the ideas of participation and meaning. As outlined in previous chapters, Comhaltas maintained and developed new practices, which for many new members became a context for learning through interaction and experience in the classroom, in sessions, and in shows. These practices and experiences became a vehicle through which student musicians developed their skills, and were introduced to new challenges. Of course this also had a reciprocal effect for Comhaltas, in terms of the organisation’s promotion through the many activities of these musicians. For many musicians, Irish traditional music became part of their social and professional lives. Drawing on Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow, I consider the musical pathways (Finnegan 2007, pp. 305-311) followed both by those who continued to practice as musicians, as well as acknowledging that flow was not maintained for all. Turino argues that in order to sustain flow and keep focused, there should be an ever expanding ceiling of challenges, which must have potential for
immediate feedback. In addition, the challenges should be time bound, in order to
differentiate between the everyday activities and those special ones (Turino 2008,
p.5). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi defined flow as ‘the state in which people are so
involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so
enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it’
(1991, p.4). Flow state is inhibited however, if skill level or ability does not match the
challenge (1996, p.90), a plausible argument as to why everyone who began classes
did not continue to play or have the opportunity to play in shows.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section one relates to the continued
growth and development of the Ennis branch of Comhaltas in the 1970s, through
volunteerism which is reflective of a culture of subsidiarity, a core tenet in Roman
Catholic social teaching (chapter one) which culminated in the building of Cois na
hAbhna, the headquarters of Comhaltas in County Clare in 1983. I reveal how the
experience gained through engaging in participational and presentational models of
music making enabled the young musicians to become active participants in
Comhaltas, and in particular in the formation of new branches of the organisation in
County Clare, spreading the institutional structure, activities, and music. In addition, I
consider the appearance of divergent perspectives, which created a tension between
Comhaltas at national and grassroots level. Section two outlines the meaning that Irish
traditional music had for a group of young Ennis traditional musicians, who were
former pupils of the early Comhaltas/VEC classes. In particular, I outline how, for the
Ennis traditional group, Stockton’s Wing, music became part of their social as well as
their professional lives and how Comhaltas structures ceased to be as important for
them as they moved in new circles and helped create another sense of Ennis as a
source of high calibre musicians. In section three, through the prism of the Fleadh
Nua, and from the perspective of the general public of Ennis as well as that of visiting musicians to the town, I trace the changing position of traditional music in Ennis itself, and beyond, as the town emerged as a major destination for Irish traditional music. The influence of Roman Catholic and nationalist agendas on the emergence of a rooted music tradition in the town has been discussed in earlier chapters. Through the 1970s, as a result of entering the European Community in 1973, a fresh awareness about identity was aroused.¹ The approach by Shannon Development and Bord Fáilte, the Irish tourist board, in considering elements of Irish culture as a valid promotional resource exemplifies this (chapter five). While the proximity of Ennis to Shannon Airport was a major factor in stimulating the region economically, Anne Kelly also identified that ‘entry to the EEC helped to overcome Ireland's geographic isolation and provided obvious economic benefits’ (1989, p7).

Section One: Comhaltas Reaching Out

Through the 1960s and 1970s Comhaltas, the largest organisation for the promotion of Irish traditional music, expanded nationally and internationally, and people of all generations and backgrounds became members.² It continued its commitment to the preservation of the music practiced by its members, who were motivated by a shared goal of, in the first instance, participating in, and over time in actively promoting their music and traditions in new and innovative ways. Through maintaining original practices, along with developing new ones such as the presentational forms of seisiún

¹ For further reading see McCarthy (1999, p.139).
² In addition, a second branch of Comhaltas, the Cloughleigh Branch, was formed in Ennis. Comhaltas today boasts hundreds of branches in fifteen countries on four continents. http://comhaltas.ie/ accessed 27/5/2013 at 15.05pm. Further references to Comhaltas as a national body can be found in chapter four.
and scoraíocht (chapter five), the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas succeeded in its aim of attracting new membership, ultimately preserving the traditions which the members valued. The branch was particularly successful in attracting young people and during the 1970s, it was very vibrant and young musicians were increasingly included into the branch activities. Regular music sessions continued to be held in the Queens Hotel, classes continued to be organised, and from 1973 Ennis became the permanent home of the Fleadh Nua. In addition, the Munster Fleadh was held there in 1974, and the All Ireland Fleadh was held in Ennis in 1977, which all attracted huge crowds to the town.³

The relationship between Comhaltas and the VEC continued, and as Comhaltas members became more involved, many musician members became actively engaged in teaching. As a result of the success of the Ennis classes, an outreach scheme was introduced and by 1968 new classes funded by the VEC, and staffed by teachers recommended by Comhaltas, were being taught in Ennis and outlying towns and villages such as Knockanean, Crusheen, Milltown Malbay, Connolly, Kilrush, and Kilfenora.⁴ In October 1973 Comhaltas called on the VEC to further increase the number of centres in the county to eighteen.⁵ There was a lot of

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³ This Munster fleadh is focused on competitions. Musicians who qualify at their County Fleadhanna, progress to the provincial, and if successful there, on to Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (the all Ireland fleadh). Ireland is subdivided into four provinces; Ulster, Leinster, Connaught and Munster which comprises of the counties of Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork, Waterford, and Tipperary. The All Ireland Fleadh is primarily focused on competitive events, as opposed to the Fleadh Nua which is largely non competitive. Musicians compete in their own county fleadhanna and if successful progress from there to a provincial fleadh and then to the All Ireland, the venue for which changes regularly.

⁴ Following a request from Fr. Minogue CC, Jack Mulkere, the teacher of the first class in Ennis in 1961, referred to in particular in chapter four, began teaching in his local village of Crusheen, situated about six miles from Ennis. Initially it was started as ‘an experiment on not more than two evenings a week’ (VEC Minutes 3/3/1962 Item 31). Even though there wasn’t an actual VEC school in Crusheen, the Committee began an outreach scheme here which was to lead to similar developments throughout the County. By 1972 there were additional classes being held in Scariff, Gortobofearna, Corofin, Ballyae, and Connolly (VEC minutes 12/4/1992 Item 18).

⁵ As result in 1973/74, in addition to Seán Reid and Marian Mc Mahon in Ennis, other new teachers were employed by the VEC, including well known musicians whistle and flute player Micho Russell who taught in Doolin, fiddle player Vincent Griffin in Feakle, and fiddle player John Byrt in
discussion about this and eventually it was approved, provided that the fees, paid each term by the students, covered the cost of the teacher. This flexibility and cooperative approach demonstrated a unity of purpose by the VEC and Comhaltas, in the promotion of Irish traditional music with Comhaltas members providing the expertise in teaching, and the VEC creating a structure and pathway to classes.

As always, the approval for the appointments of all traditional music teachers had to be sought from the Department of Education, highlighting the divergent institutional approaches at national level and local level, (the VEC worked with Comhaltas is facilitating musicians who were interested in teaching and who did not have the qualifications required by the Department of Education). In addition, music also had become part of the school curriculum in a number of VEC schools for the first time.\(^6\) These advancements evidence a positive relationship between the VEC and Comhaltas. However, it was the development of Cois na hAbhna, a headquarters for Comhaltas in County Clare, that was the primary reason that the association between Comhaltas and the VEC vis-a-vis traditional music classes, gradually decreased and ultimately came to an end.\(^7\) Once Comhaltas had its own space and infrastructure it no longer needed those of the VEC for classes, although during fleadh events school buildings were used.

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\(^6\) By 1969 there were six music teachers being employed by the VEC throughout the County- four of them teaching traditional Irish music (VEC Minutes 9/7/1969 Item 22). However, of a total of over 800 hours of music tuition only 186 were for the teaching of traditional music, while the remainder were towards the teaching of Western Art music i.e. music appreciation and choral work. Nevertheless, by 1970 the allocation had increased and of the paid 1,449.75 hours of music teaching, 728 were towards the teaching of traditional music (VEC Minutes 8/7/1970 appendix).

\(^7\) In 1990, however, there was a proposal by the VEC for a school of Irish Traditional Music in Ennis and in 1993 Maoin Cheoil an Chláir (musical treasure of Clare) was established which recognised traditional music and Western Art music equally.
Hand in hand with the establishment of music classes was the setting up of new branches of Comhaltas throughout the county. What started as one class in the small town of Ennis in 1961, hosted by the VEC and spearheaded by Comhaltas, not only guaranteed a new generation of traditional musicians but, in effect, also became the catalyst for a country-wide shift in the transmission of Irish traditional music. This drive could be viewed as a reciprocal action, considering that traditional music practice in Ennis prior to 1960s had been largely dependent on the contribution of musicians from outlying areas. Significantly, the Ennis branch became a model for other branches, particular because of their success in attracting young membership (Personal interview Liddy Mar 2013). Consequently, the young musicians who had successfully progressed from the classroom to social functions and to the stage, were seen as paragons of excellence in terms of promoting Comhaltas. In addition, many of these musicians regularly won awards at county, provincial and national fleadh competitions. Using the performance skills learned through stage shows such as those directed by Niall Behan, they performed concerts which not only showcased their talent, but also inspired parents to encourage their own children to try traditional music, and thus they became a mechanism for the promotional drive to be part of Comhaltas in Ennis and in one's own branch elsewhere.

Two of the principal Comhaltas members behind the promotional campaign in and around Ennis were Pat Liddy and Martin Byrnes; both of whom were dancers. They not only contributed endless hours of time and skill in a voluntary capacity to promote Comhaltas, but in the process gave confidence to the young musicians whom they took under their wings. Popular group Stockton’s Wing’s Kieran Hanrahan recalls being part of what he described as ‘Pat Liddy’s crusade to open branches of Comhaltas everywhere’:
‘We were lucky growing up, because there was a special group of musicians growing up around the town at that time….I’ll never forget it. We were brought around the county to open branches of Comhaltas and more or less say ‘Your young lads can be like this.’ We did all the west Clare halls; Cree, Doonbeg…They brought us everywhere. Of course Martin Byrnes was also central to all of that’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

The demand for concert performances throughout the county is also recalled by fiddle player Vincent McMahon:

‘On one night we were in such demand. We were playing…I don’t know was it with St. Flannan’s (school band) or who we were playing with. But we were playing in Lissycasey (a village ten miles west of Ennis) at a concert maybe, and the same night we had to play in Corofin (about twenty miles away)’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

Gabriella Hanrahan, a sister of Kieran’s referred to above, also describes what it meant for her as a teenager, to be part of this campaign:

‘When you would arrive at the place, you were the outside coming in, you were elevated there, because you were great to come, and everybody appreciated the fact that you did’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013). 8

Significantly, there was no financial benefit for performing at these events, but no doubt the experience of performing regularly for audiences who validated them by giving them positive feedback, contributed to a sense of ‘flow’ (Czikszentmihalyi,1991), and encouraged the young musicians to continue their involvement. In addition, because of such successes it also motivated the non musicians in Comhaltas to continue their volunteer activities and be part of a wider support community for such socio-cultural activities.

The promotion of new branches was part of a strategy to increase the level of teaching. Once established, Pat Liddy then encouraged the local primary teachers to

8 Gabriella Hanrahan is a former pupil of Tom Barrett, and currently a doctoral student in the University of Limerick whose research relates to access and disability.
teach Irish traditional music in their classrooms, influenced by the example given by Frank Custy, in Toonagh National School (see chapters four and five). Frank argues:

‘When you form the branch (Comhaltas) and get the local teacher involved and get them to start teaching music in the schools...you need just be one step ahead of the class you are teaching...get the Branch going to give them a base, rather than getting music on its own with no link...providing a structure with the classes going on, eliminated that sense of isolation at the time when traditional music was not popular’ (Personal Interview Custy Mar 2013).

The establishment of new branches was one element of the work done by Comhaltas members. As in the 1950s and 1960s the work of Comhaltas was dependent on the willingness and availability of volunteers not just for large events such as fleadhanna and concerts, but also in day to day promotional work such as described above. Not only did this involve a significant level of work, but also entailed personal expense for many e.g. in terms of the promotional drive to establish new branches, Pat Liddy and many others incurred expenses which were not reimbursed by Comhaltas, nor did they expect that they would be; a contribution typical of the culture at that time (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).  

Without doubt, one of the biggest endeavours of Comhaltas in Ennis during the 1970s was the building of Cois na hAbhna (Beside the River), a headquarters for Comhaltas in County Clare. Motivated by the increasing youth membership as a sign of a bright future, the confidence of Comhaltas locally was strengthened to the extent that it became possible to consider the building of such a headquarters. This was a mammoth undertaking by a voluntary organisation, and it involved dedication from all members, musicians and non musicians alike, in order to bring the project to fruition. It was built between 1978 and 1983, under the auspices of the Clare County

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9 In my recollection parents and Comhaltas members who owned cars were regularly co-opted to drive groups of musicians to events throughout the county and further afield.
Board of Comhaltas, and was achieved as a result of a great deal of campaigning and fundraising, generating considerable community commitment and voluntary work at each stage. Support was also received from the state training authority ANCO. The County board of Comhaltas was responsible for decision making but there was also a degree of overlapping between the Ennis Branch Committee and the County Board in relation to Cois na hAbhna. The funding for this venture was done locally and not from the Comhaltas Headquarters, illustrating just how much a local project this was.

Demonstrating an extraordinary level of selflessness and confidence, in order to complete the building, a group of members applied for a bank loan. Pat Liddy outlines the context:

‘In 1980, we had been fundraising quite a lot and ANCO were involved in the building of the place, so the money that was coming in was being used, and progress was slow, which suited our purpose, because didn’t need all the money together... In order to get the place finished we had to go to the bank, and we got a loan of £55,000 at the interest rate of 17 ¼ % … The Ulster Bank wanted guarantors, so Larry Blake, myself, Frank Custy, Francie O’Halloran and Dan Liddy (Pat’s brother) each gave personal guarantees for that money, which was our houses. That guarantee was individually and collectively, not just collective, and each one was liable for the full amount’ (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).

This risky undertaking by a few demonstrates a distinct level of volunteering, one which was not informal, but which bound the individuals concerned to Comhaltas, at least until the debt was cleared. Mindful of their personal vulnerability, Pat Liddy devised an innovative plan to clear the debt, which involved spreading the responsibility for the debt to Comhaltas branches throughout the county. He reveals:

‘The plan was to get each branch to take out a loan of £1,000 on their own branch current account, and that was transferred into the Cois na hAbhna account...Fundraising was done locally, support was greater and you could also have a lot more activity on at the one time, you could have ten events on

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10 An Chomhairle Oiliúna (AnCo) was the state agency with responsibility for helping the unemployed find employment. It was succeeded by the National Manpower Service and Fás.
in a weekend or two. I called it the £1,000 loan scheme’ (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).

In this way the debt was cleared completely in one year. This not only demonstrates the ingenuity and generosity of the members who borrowed the initial amount, but also evidences how goals can be achieved when a community works together – in this instance, community was not just one based in the town of Ennis, but was also across the county, where the town was seen as the capital and hub. The willingness of branches throughout the county to contribute was based on the understanding that it was a centre for the entire county, and not just Ennis, so they recognised that they would have opportunities to use Cois na nAbhna. In terms of ownership it is registered under the national trustees, but it cannot be disposed of without local approval. Finance is generated through hiring the space for classes, céilíthe and to public organisations who wish to hold meetings there. They also receive grant aid from the state (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013).

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11 In recognition of another activist Seán Reid (chaps two and three), there is also small plaque dedicated to him, located outside Cois na hAbhna in Ennis. The teaching of traditional music has always been one of the primary activities at Cois na hAbhna, and it became a centre for the teaching and learning of music not only for the people of Ennis, but also the larger community of County Clare. Many musicians have taught there since the late 1970s including Fergus McTaggart, a fiddle player from County Fermanagh who moved to County Clare at the start of the Troubles in the North of Ireland, and Martin Connolly who exclusively taught the accordion. The building, which was refurbished and relaunched in 2009, comprises of a hall where céilís and concerts are held, a space modelled on a traditional Irish kitchen, where lively weekly sessions are held, a number of smaller rooms used for teaching traditional music, and an archive in the Library which is dedicated to the memory of Seán Reid.
In the opinion of Gabriella Hanrahan, the level of volunteerism involved in such a campaign was not confined to Comhaltas alone, but was typical of Irish culture, and reflective of Catholic social teaching, which teaches subsidiarity, a principle where things are handled locally or by the least centralised authority. She maintains that:

‘The Catholic Church didn’t believe in the actual state apparatus, because it believed in developing the good in people locally, so that you respond locally within their traditions… That made for a very powerful local community, and that’s why you have this absolute divergence between the state and the voluntary (sector) in Ireland’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

In this regard, while Comhaltas maintained a hierarchical structure, in terms of local practice the control was maintained locally. Subsidiarity was manifested in Comhaltas activities, through the local activists such as Seán Reid, Jack Mulkere, Pat Liddy and the others who took financial risks, along with the many committed members who contributed hours of unpaid labour, who were driven by a motive to do what they could for the greater good. In terms of her own father Jackie’s contribution, Gabriella maintains ‘he hadn’t a choice in a lot of things he did; because of his conscience…He had to be involved. That generation were involved in so many voluntary things’
(Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013). She has strong personal memories of the work done by Comhaltas members, particularly during the Fleadh Nua and remembers being given permission to be absent from school during this time. She worked regularly with women volunteers making sandwiches and soup for the visitors to the town, a clearly delineated roll for women. She recalls:

‘Women were always catering. There were very clear lines. The women did the catering, the men did bunting and all that and the hard labour. The women sewed the bunting and hand made it’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Etienne Wenger, who created a framework for examining community social practices, maintained that:

‘Peace, happiness and harmony are therefore not necessary properties of a community of practice…Most situations that involve sustained interpersonal engagements generate their fair share of tensions and conflicts…A community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island of intimacy insulated from political and social relations. Disagreements, challenges, and competition can all be forms of participation. As a form of participation, rebellion often reveals a greater commitment than does passive conformity’ (1998, p.77).

The Ennis Branch of Comhaltas, as a Community of Practice, was not a utopia, and bore, in the opinion of Gabriella Hanrahan, one of the typical characteristics of a community organisation, which was to fight for position. In terms of the organisational processes and structures in the Ennis branch of Comhaltas, some elements were in place, such as officers and agendas but in her experience of attending Comhaltas meetings during the 1970s, she found that people had not developed a meeting style and that very often there were heated discussions, full of emotion, about forthcoming events. Nonetheless, when it came to the actual events themselves, the arguments were put aside and the focus was placed on making the

12 The concept of community of practice (Wenger 1998) is referred to throughout this thesis but in particular in chapter three.
event a success e.g. she recalls squabbles regarding issues such as the positioning of the bunting:

‘They were so dedicated and proud to have it absolutely perfect, and they were proud of their town, and in terms of my father’s group, there was a status in the fact that they were all pulling together doing this thing. It was this great sense of community. Whereas in the meeting before, they would kill each other, once it got off the ground there was camaraderie with each other and a community. I never remember a fight during the fleadh, but I do remember the great sense of camaraderie’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Getting payment for work introduced a different set of values to volunteerism, and led to a change in Comhaltas. In Gabriella Hanrahan’s opinion ‘people began to reflect on the amount of hours that they put in, when people began to get paid’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013). This change was manifested in a small way during the 1970s when meal vouchers were introduced. She recalls:

‘I distinctly remember the first time there was a meal voucher given out. People didn’t know what to do with it. They thought it was a disgrace, that how could Comhaltas afford that, because they had never had it…The competition culture crept in then as to who got the vouchers- comparing the amount of work done. That also effected a change in Comhaltas. There was no criteria as to who got the vouchers; it was not based on the amount of hours given. The giving out of them was hierarchical, and based on who you knew’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Gabriella continues: ‘there is always that divide between the people that get paid and the volunteers; in all voluntary groups’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013). Other bones of contention included debates about bureaucracy. Prior to becoming a board member Pat Liddy recollects his frustration attending meetings where the focus was on ‘rules and regulations and trophies,’ when he felt that it should be on ‘teaching music, teaching dancing, getting younger people involved’ (Personal Interview Liddy Mar 2013). He recollects that a few Comhaltas Board members were over-zealous when it came to what he described as ‘trophies, cups and rules’. One officer in
particular had a reputation for sticking rigidly to such things, and I personally recall his intransigence and almost militaristic manner that he adopted from time to time. Nonetheless, his approach was highly efficient and orderly, which at times was important.

Comhaltas was run by volunteers, people described by fiddle player Martin Hayes, who felt that they were ‘on a mission, because the idea of preserving the music was a completely valid notion at that point, and it was a complete necessity. If you cared for, and loved it, it wouldn’t have seemed an extreme act to start volunteering and be part of it’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013). In addition, and in line with the way that Pat Liddy focused on eliminating isolation, he continued:

‘There was a feeling of being in a minority position, that there was only a sliver of the population who supported it…When people started doing that (volunteering) it started to create a community, and people got attracted to that…It was a very successful response, because the bulk of what we are listening to today, was the result of that explosion in the 1970s’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013).

The 1970s marked a change in the ethos of Comhaltas, certainly at national level, when professionalism was signalled in 1968, following the award of a government grant of £10,000 to the head organisation. This was used to ease the financial burden on Comhaltas, and to employ Labhrás Ó Murchú (Director) and four Reachtaír (Controllers); Diarmaid Ó Catháin, Breandán MacEachrán, Eamon Ó Rodaigh and Manus Ó Domhnaill. In 1969 Séamus Mac Mathúna, referred to in chapters two and three, was appointed Timire Ceoil (music organiser) and was responsible for collecting music and building a library (Ní Fhuartháin 2011, p.162). In the opinion of Méabh Ní Fhuartháin 1968 signalled not only professionalisation of the management structure but also an entrenchment of a conservative position (Ní Fhuartháin, 2011, p. 335). Disagreements have arisen from time to time in relation to
stances that have been taken by the fulltime staff and the grassroots members. In what was titled a ‘Self Portrait,’ Seán Reid expressed his concern about the changing structure of the organisation, commenting: ‘It is more rigid, more elaborate, and there is a danger that its principles may be lost in the regalia of rules and regulations’ (Reid 1975, p. 93). Very significantly in 1971, in a move that he considered political, the All Ireland Fleadh which was to be held in Listowel, in neighbouring County Kerry, was cancelled as a result of the growing tension in Northern Ireland. A nationalist agenda was to the fore and this was viewed as alienating the Northern Protestant musicians. Seán Reid and other County Clare musicians had been proactive in meeting the County Antrim and Derry Country Fiddler Association in 1956, the year that the All Ireland Fleadh was held in Ennis. This organisation was considered by him to represent Ulster’s traditional musicians, and it was not exclusively Protestant, and also contained Catholic members. In his opinion it confirmed a long held belief that:

‘music does not naturally recognise political and religious divisions. The many protestant musicians I met were on the same wavelength music-wise, and there were many of us in Comhaltas who believed we should establish strong relations’ (Reid 1975, p93).

A relationship had been established and remained until 1971 when the All Ireland Fleadh was cancelled. Seán Reid opposed the decision on the grounds that ‘it was a sectarian move, not likely to improve relations between North and South (Reid 1975, p93). He believed that Comhaltas should maintain a non-political non-sectarian position.

Although showing a different level of understanding, many young musicians in Ennis during the 1970s were uncomfortable as political agendas became more obvious. I personally recall my unease listening to the speeches made by the Ardstiúrthóir of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Labhrás Ó Murchú at the Fleadh Nua
each year. Fiddle player Máire Ní Chaoimh, from Tralee in neighbouring County Kerry also recalls hearing these speeches at the Fleadh Nua:

‘As many of my best friends in Dublin at the time were Northern musicians and many from the Protestant community, I used to find this highly offensive and several of us at the time used to make a big deal about walking out, but sure no one noticed us except ourselves, but we felt good about doing it, as most young musicians of our age at the time didn’t consider it right to link Irish music, which belonged to all the Island of Ireland, to one community or religion or belief. His speeches at the time were really outrageous and insightful and incendiary’ (Personal Interview Ní Chaoimh Mar 2013).

That perspective coincided with my own, that the speeches were far removed from the music and the sessions that I felt the Fleadh was supposed to be about. Gabriella Hanrahan also maintains that when politics became part of Comhaltas discourse that:

‘people actually felt it, they were nervous about it…they didn’t know how to say they were uncomfortable, and not be supporters of the tradition…Because Labhrás Ó Murchú was such a brilliant orator there would have been very few people who could have answered him…The majority of the people weren’t educated to a level that they could articulate and challenge’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

Moreover, Martin Hayes maintains that:

‘Musicians were pawns because they (the Senior Executive of the Comhaltas organisation) had a grander political design here. At some point it wasn’t about the music…There was a strong understanding politically and culturally of the significance of the music to the cultural identity, and that’s what they were focused on, but they weren’t actually focused on the music’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013).

Ultimately, as they began to feel alienated from it, many musicians began to question what it meant to be a member of Comhaltas. Certainly this period marked the start of a divergence of opinion between grassroots musicians and those in higher positions within the organisation.13

13 For further reading see Ní Fhuartháin (2011) and Vallely (2011, p. 148).
Nonetheless, at local level, the activities, practices and the relationships between the musicians and other members continued as before. Connections between the old traditions were maintained, even though new trends in the music were emerging, such as exemplified in the Bothy Band and evidenced later in Ennis by the formation of the band Stockton’s Wing.\textsuperscript{14}

Fig.6.2 The commemorative plaque honouring Seán Reid erected outside Cois na hAbhna. (Courtesy of John Boyd)

\textsuperscript{14} The Bothy Band was formed in 1974, and although only staying together for a few years, it was one of the most influential and highly acclaimed bands in contemporary Irish traditional music.
Section 2: A Generation in Transition

The momentum achieved as a result of the classes might not have been maintained without further input from somewhere. Musician and broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan, comments on the importance of the access to the older generation:

‘I think our generation were lucky...we were lucky to have such an overlap of the older generation. The likes of Gus Tierney, Johnny McCarthy, Michael Fitzgerald, Sonny Murray, all of these people...There were a load of people like that. We had access...the Kilfenora and the Tulla (céilí bands) used to both play in Paddy Con’s (dance hall) and you’d be called up there to sit in or you’d be asked if you had an instrument. You’d be called to sit down near them to listen...There was great respect. Talk of Kitty Linnane, if you played at all she had respect for you. They always respected young lads playing’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Fiddle player Vincent McMahon, reinforces this view:

‘We were into that adult music world very quickly...If you hadn’t all those other people we wouldn’t have been playing as much’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

In my personal memory, musicians such as concertina player Sonny Murray, a regular visitor to our home, always appeared to be surrounded by young musicians and he did not seem to mind playing the same tunes over and over. I also have great recollections of Peadar O’Loughlin bringing me to music sessions in Tulla with PJoe Hayes, Paddy Canny and Paddy Murphy, musicians who were household names. There were very few young piano players who engaged in traditional music, so I was encouraged and supported by them. It was an amazing time for me as a young musician and it was my good fortune to have had these opportunities. On a similar note Martin Hayes comments:

‘I think that in Clare if you examine the music of Clare you would find that there was a degree of ambivalence about the modern development in music as well. Most of the kids here didn’t jump on board with that readily, we were
still going to listen to Sonny Murray (concertina, fiddle and whistle player), we were still going to listen to Micho Russell (flute and whistle player), we were still going to connect with that as well, and I think that to this day this makes a difference’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013).

Wenger considers that the turnover of members in a community of practice and the generational discontinuities are part and parcel of them. In this way over time relative newcomers become relative old-timers and although new perspectives can be forged ‘as the generations interact, some of the history of the practice remains embodied in the generational relations that structure the community. The past, the present, and the future live together’ (Wenger 1998, p.90). Certainly this was true in the context of the lives of young traditional musicians in Ennis in that, over time, they forged their own identities from their own perspectives, which were founded on knowledge acquired through those they encountered along the way. In my own I experience believe that my piano style derived from the time spent playing with older musicians, incidentally none of whom were piano players.

The people who learned to play Irish traditional music in the Comhaltas/VEC classes were at the cusp of change in the transformation of Ennis in terms of the reception of Irish traditional music. They were a transition generation, who in effect linked the past, the present and also generated a new future for traditional music practice in the town. For many of them, including me, traditional music became part of their lives, both social and professional.

The importance of music as social life is linked by Turino to an interplay between the ‘possible and the actual;’ the actual being the regular day-to-day practices, and the possible relating to hopes and the special things that might be

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15 In Wenger’s research related to claims processors, he maintained that discontinuities occurred naturally through retirements and death, and thus made room for new generations of members (1998, p.90).
achieved. It is this interplay which adds meaning and further inspiration and motivation to continue i.e. success breeds success (Turino 2008, pp.16-20). In chapter five I described some performance possibilities which were available to many of the young musicians of Ennis, subsequent to their early learning in the classroom. A regular calendar of events through the 1970s maintained flow and provided the motivation to continue for a significant number of young musicians, presenting an ‘ever expanding ceiling of challenges’ (Turino 2008, p.31), which at first were merely ambitions to aim for, but which over time became part of their actual lives.

Furthermore, the challenges presented in the realm of presentational stage performances allowed some musicians to even consider the possibility of performance as a career option.

The role of parents and other significant adults in stimulating young musicians has been outlined hitherto. In addition conditions for many of them to continue were at their optimum. Not least of these was the fact that there were sufficient numbers of their peer group who were similarly motivated. This is particularly exemplified in the experience of a group of neighbouring boys in St. Michael’s Villas, when they established a band of their own, without any direction from parents or other adults. They were personally motivated to do so. The band was made up of the three McMahon and two Hanrahan brothers and their cousin.

16 Without doubt ‘flow’ was not maintained for all. It is not within the remit of this work to analyse the reasons why in detail. However, I draw a few provisional observations which can be developed in future research. Firstly, pupils who did not progress to other instruments do not appear to have had the same access to perform socially. In addition, the role of parents and other significant adults was central in gaining this access and the people who have been part of my research were children of people who joined Comhaltas. In addition, the majority of the musicians who continued to perform into their adulthood had considerable success as competitors at fleadh events. This in itself provided them with opportunities to perform in public, while at the same time giving them a personal sense of achievement. Furthermore, Turino maintained that the presence of others of the same level allowed people to feel comfortable (2003, p.31). This in fact gave an advantage to the growing number of Ennis musicians who were successful in competitive events, but made it more difficult for others less experienced to gain access, in particular as the gap in experience widened.
The St. Michael’s Villas Céilí Band (Fig. 6.2) included: back row from left: Kieran Hanrahan, tin whistle, Vincent McMahon on fiddle, Mike Hanrahan; front row from left: Paul Roche (a cousin of the Hanrahans), John and Patrick McMahon. (Kieran, Mike and Paul were later to form the highly acclaimed group Stockton’s Wing, which is discussed later in the chapter). These musicians formed the group themselves and entered for the Clare Fleadh competition in Ennis in 1970, which was the first time that any of them had entered a competition.

Musician Martin Hayes attaches huge significance to the fact that traditional music was supported in a secondary school. He was from Feakle, an area with a longstanding tradition and just eighteen miles East of Ennis, but none of his peers at secondary school were musicians. From his own experience attending secondary school in Gort, a town in neighbouring County Galway, he considered that it was remarkable that a secondary school would embrace Irish traditional music in the way that St. Flannan’s College in Ennis did. He recalls his impression:

17 While none of his peers in secondary school in Gort were traditional musicians, he regularly played traditional music with his peer group in nearby Tulla.
‘From an early age I was aware of St. Flannan’s and the Flannan’s Céilí band, and all the musicians who had come through there...I remember there was a secondary school in Ennis that fostered traditional music. I hadn’t heard of that before. Certainly that was not my experience in school, from my point of view, so I always thought that was an amazing thing (it was a boarding school as well) There would have been lots of music programmes in school but they were not traditional...When I went to school, it was not part of the reality and it did feel like a minority and a fairly marginalised thing...Actually we kept it quiet. I would try to avoid having the fiddle in there at all costs’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013).

The Actual: Music as Social Life

The regular calendar of events through the 1970s generated new experiences and became part of the ‘actual’ lives of those who continued playing Irish traditional music. Similarly, Tim Rice examined music in relation to seasonal work and ritual in his study of music in Bulgaria, and found that each season was marked by particular musical and ritual practices, determined by ecological and economic conditions:

‘The economic, cognitive, aesthetic and emotional experience of music, song and dance typically played itself out during the course of a year, changing from season to season as work and ritual activity changed’ (Rice 1994, p.127).

For the Ennis musicians the seasonal events included winter and spring time concerts, rehearsals for scoraíocht, seisiún or céilí bands, scór, and slógadh competitions.¹⁸ Summertime was the ‘Fleadh season,’ beginning with the Fleadh Nua at the end of May, and continuing through the summer months with county, provincial and All

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¹⁸ Scór is a competition established in 1969 by the Gaelic Athletic Association for music, dance, recitation, storytelling, novelty acts and question time. [http://www.gaa.ie/](http://www.gaa.ie/) Accessed 27/5/2013 at 4pm. Slógadh (meaning ‘festival’) was a competition organised by Gael Linn in 1969 to promote music, dance, speech, storytelling through the medium of the Irish Language. The music competitions were not confined to Irish traditional music and many genres were represented. Participants largely entered through their schools. Gael Linn was founded in 1953 to promote the Irish Language, which it does largely through the arts.
Ireland Fleadhanna. The fleadh season represented completion, but in addition it also meant movement out of the town. Since fleadhanna were not fixed, this meant travelling to new places each time.

**Going to the Fleadh**

Thus, the traditional musicians of Ennis began to travel outwards. Involvement in fleadhanna also necessitated travelling out of the town. One of the major outings was to Listowel for the All Ireland Fleadh, which was held there on a number of occasions through the 1970s. The first step in getting to this stage was to qualify at the county and the provincial fleadhanna, which for Ennis and County Clare musicians was the Munster Fleadh. Once success was gained at these, a day trip to the All Ireland Fleadh was assured. Many of my family played traditional music, and I distinctly remember the excitement when one of us qualified for the next level. It did not matter after that if any of the rest of the family qualified or not. Once someone in the family did, we knew that we would be travelling to the next fleadh, and that is all that concerned us.

Travelling to Listowel involved driving west to Killimer, crossing the river Shannon by ferry from there, to Tarbert. The ferries ran only once an hour, and missing the ferry was always a risk and a major disappointment. Once on the ferry, traditional music could be heard. People would practice the tunes they planned to perform in their competitions. On some occasions the tunes were even decided at that late stage. Picnics were prepared in advance. In the case of my family, stews were made at home.

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19Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann was held in Listowel, County Kerry in ’70, in Dublin’72 following the cancelation of Listowel in ’71 for political reasons, Listowel again in ’72, ’73 and ’74, Buncrana, County Donegal in ’75 and ’76, Ennis in ’77, Listowel again in ’78 and Buncrana again for ’79 and ’80. Other events which became part of the Ennis musicians summer calendar were An Tionól Ceol (music gathering), held in Gormanston College in County Meath (organised by Comhaltas headquarters, the Cultúrlann, in Monkstown County Dublin), Fleadh Cheoil Cill Mhíchíl, held in Kilmihil, County Clare in August each year, Scoil Samhradh Willie Clancy, Miltown Malbay, County Clare and the Lisdoonvarna Folk Festival also in County Clare.
and reheated, or sausages or burgers cooked in a pan and cooked by the oxy-acetylene blow torch that my dad used for welding oil tanks! Having arrived in Listowel, cars were parked on the side streets and it was common to see people standing by their cars eating their packed lunches of sandwiches and drinking tea from flasks. I remember that local people served tea and sandwiches from their homes, and often set up tables in their living rooms. Money was not plentiful, and eating in restaurants was prohibitive and was not considered by many people. I include these vivid recollections here because such images are shared by many of my counterparts and provide an kind of ethnography of the past which, far from being merely overly romantic or nostalgic, exhibit the deep and affective connection between musical life and social memory and ‘they make links across life’s phases and cohort generations revealing historical shifts in a culture’ (Plummer 2001, p.395).

Out and About the County

Musicians from County Clare were particularly successful at the fleadhanna and many prizes were won. Kieran Hanrahan recalls:

‘Well, we used to win a fair bit but my father was always saying, ‘you’ll always meet somebody better than you’, but they were only a big thing because they kind of kept you playing and focused’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

The success at the fleadhanna not only drew attention to the growth in traditional music practice in Ennis, but also contributed to the promotion of traditional music in places in the county that hitherto had been more strongly positioned in this respect. During the 1970s concerts were a regular feature throughout the county, and the young Ennis musicians were regularly invited to perform. These concerts aimed to provide entertainment, but also had an added social function as fundraisers to support
local activities. Both the performers and the organisers were volunteers and there was no remuneration given or expected. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin chronicles the halls throughout the county where these concerts were held:

‘We played in Toonagh, Gortbofearna, Inagh, Maurices Mils, Kilnamona, Doonbeg, Cooraclare, Kilmihil, Kilrush, Cross, Kilbaha. On one occasion we met Henry Blake, the seanacháist after winning the Oireachtas. We were in Carrigaholt…Kilfenora, Ballyvaughan, all over East Clare; Feakle, Tulla, Scariff, Broadford, O’Callaghans Mills, Kilmurry. We discovered all of Clare’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

Flute player and manufacturer, Eamonn Cotter highlights the community and entertainment aspects of these concerts:

‘They were variety concerts as much as anything else, because you had Tom and Pascal (comedians from Limerick, Tom O’Donnell and Paschal O’Grady), Seán O’Shea (singer and raconteur from Cork) or Eamonn Kelly (actor and storyteller from Kerry)…I remember playing in Corofin one night with Tommy Peoples and Matt Molloy…I remember a concert in Doonbeg with the Sands family. Concerts would have been local parish concerts, every Parish had something; Kilmaley, Lissycasey, Doonbeg, all the West Clare parishes, Tubber, Toonagh’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).

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20 Henry Blake was a seanacháist (storyteller) from Kilbaha and was one of the last Irish speakers in the Loop Head peninsula in south west Clare.
21 Oireachtas na Gaeilge is an annual event held in October, organised by Conradh na Gaeilge. It focuses on music, song and dance, and is particularly celebrated by the Irish language communities. For further reading see Vallely (2011, p.517).
22 Fiddle player, Tommy Peoples originally from County Donegal moved to County Clare when he married Marie Linnane, daughter of Kitty Linnane, leader of the Kilfenora Ceili Band. Flute player, Matt Molloy from Roscommon lived in Ennis for a number of years in the 1980s. Both were members of the innovative Bothy Band. The Sands family were a ballad group from Newry, County Down. They were frequent performers in County Clare during the 1970s.
The advertisement (Fig.6.3) for the concert in Toonagh is typical of the time. It was a mixture of traditional music, popular ballad singing, dance and the very popular comedians Tom (O’Donnell) and Pascal (O’Grady), from Limerick city twenty five miles away. This type of programme was aimed to provide entertainment to a general audience. Clann Lir was a group of traditional musicians formed by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, a teenager at the time. I was a member and I recall performing shows similar to the seisiún described in chapter five. We performed throughout the county for concerts, such as that advertised in fig.6.3, but also for tourists in hotels during the summer months, for which we were paid.

From a musician’s point of view the concerts also had a subtext. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin considers that in creating these events, the organisers created an environment which would stimulate our interest further:

‘I would see them all as being integrated in some way because there was always a spontaneous spinoff some way or another there would be a session after a concert, or a couple of tunes preparing for an event, which happened almost by accident’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).
In addition to local performers, musicians from outside County Clare were also invited to perform, and lifelong friendships were made. Fiddle player from neighbouring County Tipperary, Eileen O’Brien, was a frequent visitor to County Clare with her father, accordion player Paddy O’Brien. Her earliest performances on stage were at concerts organised by musician Peadar O’Loughlin. My friendship with Eileen dates from this time. Eileen comments:

‘The most notable of these concerts were the concerts organised by Peadar O’Loughlin in Kilmaley. In fact these concerts were probably my earliest performances on stage…Concerts were the platform for musicians, singers, dancers and storytellers’ (Personal Correspondence O’Brien Jan 2013).

The concert advertised (fig. 6.5) was an annual event organised by musician Peadar O’Loughlin on behalf of the Kilmaley Gaelic Athletic Association (Irish sporting club). This particular concert featured many musicians who were leading lights of Irish traditional music and song including fiddle players Seán Maguire (County Antrim) Paddy Canny and Séamus Connolly (both from County Clare) and Paddy Glackin from Dublin who was a teenager at the time, accordion player Paddy O’Brien, piper Tommy Reck, whistle and flute player Micho Russell, Kilmaley concertina player Paddy Murphy, sean-nós singer Seán MacDonncha, and very popular Irish traditional dancers Celine Hession and Donacha Ó Muineacháin. I was also regularly invited to perform at these concerts, as piano accompanist and to play the tin whistle and recall them being intense, professional and enjoyable affairs. Seán Óg Ó Tuama was Fear an Tí (MC, although it translates as ‘man of the house’) and he introduced items, kept up a ready stream of banter, and provided continuity.
Traditional Music as Social Life

Plummer maintains that personal narratives help to establish collective memories and that they ‘bridge cultural history with personal biography….what matters to people keeps getting told in the stories of their life’ (2001, p.395). In reflecting on my own experience in the early 1970s, there appeared to be a novelty element in seeing so many young people performing Irish traditional music to a high standard. I observed as I read my own teenage diaries that there seemed to have been at least one event to attend every weekend, even in the winter months. I certainly had more activity in my social calendar as a teenager than many of my contemporaries who were not traditional musicians. Through the many events traditional music became more and more part of my life and that of my peer group of musicians in Ennis. I recall my
twenty-first birthday party, attended by people of all ages, but significantly many of them were traditional musicians my own age. We played tunes all night long and at dawn sat around the swing in the garden, still playing and watching the sun rise.

Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin also recalls this occasion to me: ‘I particularly remember your birthday party, where we finished the evening with an extended all night session in your back garden (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

![Image of the party referred to above by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin](image)

Fig. 6.6 The party referred to above by Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin. The musicians included from left to right are myself on concertina, Dermot Lernihan on accordion, Vincent McMahon on fiddle, Eamonn Cotter on flute and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin on piano accordion.

Trasna na dTonnta\(^{23}\) (Across the waves)

Outings ‘at home’, within the town of Ennis, were not the only social activities in which musicians too part. Outside of the trips around the county and to fleadhanna, the budding Ennis musicians were also given the opportunity to travel further afield. The contribution that they made by attending the ‘Old Folks’ nights was repaid through Karl McTighe, a musician and one of the volunteers involved. As related in

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\(^{23}\) Trasna na dTonnta is the title of a song which I learned in primary school, and is one which was important for all school goers of my generation.
chapter five many young people served a form of apprenticeship there. For a number of years in the 1970s, Karl organised weekend trips to Inishmore, one of the Aran Islands, for young Ennis musicians. These were very memorable, particularly because the teenagers were being allowed away for the weekend without their parents, who were generally very guarded as regards where their children could venture. Karl was a charismatic character and was able to persuade parents that their children would come to no harm under his supervision, something not so easily achieved today. These trips were an acknowledgement of their contribution to the ‘Old Folks’ nights, and also motivated young musicians to continue playing music. Musician, Eamonn Cotter describes the trips as ‘a cultural exchange of some sort’ and recalls the role of Karl McTighe:

‘Karl was like the Svengali of traditional music…bringing us around to different places in his Mini bus- to Lisdoonvarna….in St. Joseph’s Hospital (for the elderly) at Christmas…. I went off on Day trips with the old folks’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).

Gabriella Hanrahan recalls the excitement of setting off on these trips:

‘I remember the absolute excitement of going into the minibus and heading off, and no sign of a parent. Karl was a beautiful man, he had an amazing way with young people. He was as witty as could be. I was amazed to be let go, because my parents were quite strict on me as a girl. I dint have the same freedom as the boys. It’s an amazing thing because I wasn’t let go to many things…I think it was because my cousins the Roche's were going, the McMahons were going, it was considered a family were going’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

At a micro-level, the concerts, the parties and the trips to the Aran Islands, although not organised by the organisation itself, nonetheless came about as a result of work of Comhaltas. On a broader scale, Comhaltas and the fleadh attracted a new audience and brought musicians together through Irish traditional music, and consequently
created new performance outlets for performers, which in turn generated other outlets, which were unrelated to Comhaltas. This is highlighted by Méabh Ní Fhuartháin:

‘Comhaltas created new platforms to fill the performance gap and afforded musicians reconfigured spaces in which to play together. In this reconfiguration traditional music and its performers were valued highly. This spilled over into non-Comhaltas zones and Comhaltas brought traditional music making into the public sphere’ (Ní Fhuartháin 2011, p.338).²⁴

Winning at the fleadh also became a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977), and for the Ennis musicians it earned them credibility amongst their peers, who hitherto had no regard for traditional music. It was a significant indicator of a change that was beginning to take place in terms of the reception of Irish traditional music. This also coincided with new developments that were taking place in the larger arena of music nationally. Fiddle player Vincent McMahon recalls the occasion the popular groups the Chieftains and the Bothy Band performed in Ennis:²⁵

‘To my great amusement, the first two or three rows were the long haired denim, really cool guys around town, which was a major shock, and then (on another occasion) when they saw The Chieftains and later the Bothy Band, and in fairness to all that crowd, they were serious about music. They had great regard for us immediately. We were playing fairly straight traditional music. We were only youngsters, but in fairness to that crowd, who would have been the very trendy people around town 19/20 year olds, an thinking back to Flannan’s (boys secondary school), to the guys like that who were aware of Horslips,²⁶ they had great regard for us at a time when the majority would have thought the whole thing silly’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

²⁴ Among the non-Comhaltas zones where traditional music was performed were at the Clare Folk Club run by Joe Galligan in the Highway Inn, Crusheen, and in Ennis, and the Irish Traditional and Folk Music Festival in Lisdoonvarna which ran from 1978- 1983.
²⁵ The awarding winning and internationally recognised traditional group the Chieftains was formed in 1963. They are known for their innovative arrangements and in more recent years for collaborations with popular musicians of many genres. For further discussion see Vallely (2011, p.123). The Bothy Band was formed in 1973 and although it disbanded in 1979 it influenced many contemporary traditional bands. Known for their high energy performances, people who had no roots in traditional music, especially young people, were attracted to their music. For further discussion see Vallely (2011, p.79).
²⁶ The Horslips was a celtic rock band that combined traditional tunes with rock backing. For further reading see Vallely (2011, p.352).
Horslips, a nationally and internationally recognised band, was very popular among Ennis teenagers, and although their interpretation of traditional repertoire was different, Vincent recalls the discussion after the gig, and the unintentional inspiration that he and flute player Paul Roche experienced as a result:

‘I remember Paul Roche being at the Horslips gig...Certainly it strengthened our interest. We were there, the place was full of a trendy crowd as we saw it; Jim Lockharte played the flute, playing it very badly- Toss the Feathers, (a popular dance tune) or something, and if Paul Roche went up there he could have taken it off him, and just lifted the place (given a more authentic performance to animate the crowd)... I remember the two of us looking at each other and thinking, if these fellows can get away with this, we should stick at the trad’ (Personal Interview McMahon Aug 2007).

The Possible: Music as Professional Life

For a number of musicians, through an ongoing engagement in regular practices, Irish traditional music became not only part of their social lives but also their professional lives i.e. they received payment for performing. Performing in a céilí band was usually remunerated (because the band played for dances and there was a charge at the door), but otherwise traditional musicians were generally not paid for performing. However, through the 1970s in Ennis, a number of opportunities to get paid arose. One of the first experiences for many young musicians was passing an audition to perform on the national airwaves on an RTE programme called the ‘Young Entertainers’. I personally recall playing Chopin’s ‘Nocturne in Eb’ on the piano and a slow air on the tin whistle on one occasion, a conscious nod perhaps to a heritage forged by my mother, DeRegge and Reid (chapter two). My brother Eamonn also recalls his experience:

‘I remember the Radio Auditions for the young Entertainers...I remember getting my first cheque...probably £10...playing the whistle...that was broadcast around three o’clock in the afternoon’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).
In particular, the presentation models of music making described in chapter five, triggered professionalism by creating new possibilities. This type of experience is acknowledged by Turino; ‘Successful artistic experiences and performances draw special attention to this interplay, wake us from habit, and thus provide that temporary sense of a life more deeply lived’ (Turino 2008, p.18). In this respect along with Seisiún, which provided summer employment for a number of musicians, other opportunities emerged which allowed some musicians to widen their aspirations. Performing on national television programmes such as Ag Déanamh Ceoil (‘Making Music’), presented by Tony McMahon, Ennis born broadcaster and accordion player, taking part in the after dinner entertainment at Bi Linn (‘be with us’), or being part of a group to entertain tourists in the Old Ground Hotel and The Clare Inn, all added to a sense of possibility.27

Subsequently, Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin joined forces with my brother Eamonn, Vincent McMahon, Eugene Daly, Ernie McNulty, Michael Garry and Pat Quinn, and formed a group which they called Alltraige, named after an early Irish tribe. They began to travel outwards to France and Germany, following the footsteps of groups like the Bothy Band and Planxty.

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27 Bi Linn, a winter series cabaret, was introduced in 1971 and ran for a number of years. It was a joint venture by Comhaltas and the GAA in County Clare, and was held in the West County Hotel in Ennis. The after dinner entertainment was provided by local as well as musicians from other parts of Ireland for which they were remunerated. From the 1960s onwards dancing schools, the White School of Dancing and subsequently Scoil Úi Ruairc (the O’Rourke School) provided entertainment for tourists in the Old Ground Hotel. During the summer months an Ennis based group called Clann Lir had a residency at the Clare Inn hotel, which again was frequented by tourists.
The poster (Fig. 6.7) which they used as part of their promotional material, includes very basic information; the name of the band, highlighting the fact that they were from the west of Ireland, performing music from County Clare. Clearly the poster was not professionally designed, but nonetheless it shows an awareness of elements of Irish identity e.g. the letter style loosely based on an Irish alphabet, incorporating a version of a Celtic knot into a few letters, and even integrating the uilleann pipes into the letter ‘A’. At the time of this trip, none of the musicians in the band were well known. It was a very strategic attempt to benefit from the success of other musicians who had been successful on the continent, such as County Clare musician Micho Russell from Doolin, the Bothy Band, the Dubliners, the Fureys and Planxty. Flute player and manufacturer, Eamonn Cotter describes the European trip which the group made in 1977:

‘In ’77 we went to France and Germany for about three weeks…it would have been more folky. Traditional arranged tunes, mostly string. We had Gearóid on the concertina, and he’d play a solo on the pipes, and a kind of Séamus Ennis type of performance or like Eamon Kelly (seanchai-storyteller from county Kerry), and the rest went to the bar! We had mostly strings that time-
Eugene on mandolin, banjo, Michael on bouzouki and Vinney on the fiddle, Pat Quinn on the bodhrán’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).  

![Ferdi's Pizza Pinte Folk Concert poster](image)

Fig. 6.8 A poster advertising one of their gigs in Donnerstag, in Germany. (Courtesy of Mike Garry)

The varied programme of popular folksongs, traditional stories along with traditional dance music, aimed to appeal to a wide European audience. Alltraige parted as a band, but the musicians continued performing as individuals.

**Stockton’s Wing**

The most significant success during the 1970s, in terms of entry to a professional performance zone, was the group Stockton’s Wing, who formed in 1977. For this group of musicians, winning an All Ireland medal opened doors to new opportunities. The band was formed in Ennis in 1977 by four All Ireland Champion musicians Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche, Maurice Lennon and Tommy Hayes. In the early stages of their formation this was significant factor for them in terms of securing professional engagements. The first guitar player was Tony Callinan but in 1980 he

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28 Séamus Ennis was a master piper, whistle player, storyteller, singer, music collector, broadcaster and generally an authority on Irish traditional music. Eamonn Cotter is referring here to the fact that fellow band member Gearóid contextualised the music with stories and other background information.
was replaced by Mike Hanrahan, Kieran’s brother and cousin of Paul.\textsuperscript{29} Indicative of their urban roots and their awareness of contemporary music, the band took their name from a line in a Bruce Springsteen Song, ‘Slow dancin’ in the dark on the beach at Stockton’s Wing’ (Springsteen, 1984).

First cousins Kieran and Paul both lived in St. Michael’s Villas, Ennis and had attended music classes in the Tech as children. Musician and broadcaster Kieran Hanrahan remembers the embryonic stage when he first met County Leitrim fiddle player Maurice Lennon and County Limerick percussionist Tommy Hayes during the Fleadh Nua. The first rehearsals were held in an upstairs room over Brogan’s pub, in O’Connell Street.

The first major public venture for Stockton’s Wing was performing in nearby Limerick city in March 1978, at a Guinness sponsored talent competition called Ceol ’78. They won the traditional section of the competition, and the rock section was won by the now world famous U2. As a result of this competition they secured a recording contract with Tara Records and released their debut album, Stockton's Wing. The prize also included £500. It was sponsored by the Irish Press national newspaper and Guinness Brewery.

\textsuperscript{29}In 1977 along with Ennis born singer Grammy nominee, Maura O’Connell, Mike Hanrahan began performing professionally in a duo called Tumbleweed, singing a mixture of American Country songs and a few of Mikes own compositions. Tumbleweed toured the Irish Folk Circuit and appeared at the first Lisdoonvarna Music Festival in 1978. She performed for a number of years with the Galway based group DeDanann. PJ Curtis recalls hearing Maura perform in Ennis and his role in broadening her horizons: ‘Hearing Maura O’Connell at that time and being knocked out by her innate talent...as you know I took her first to Nashville and produced her debut album’ (Personal Communication PJ Curtis Jan 2013).
The return to Ireland of PJ Curtis award winning broadcaster, record producer, author and musicologist, coincides with this period. His recollections of his early visits to Ennis following his return to Ireland in 1974 coincide with the opinion of Vincent McMahon stated earlier, and are in contrast to his experience of Ennis in the 1950s described in chapter three:

‘It was not till I began to visit Ennis to hear Stockton’s Wing did I realise, there was now a vibrant trad scene in the town, with Brogans Bar in O’Connell Street being the centre as far as I could see; if only that it was there the Wing rehearsed, and it was there I would sit in on those rehearsals to prepare myself for producing Light in the Western Sky and Take a Chance (both released under Tara label)’ (Personal Communication Curtis Jan 2013).  

PJ Curtis is from Kilnaboy in County Clare. He has worked for many years as a record producer, producing in excess of 54 albums. He travelled extensively and returned to Ireland in 1974. As a producer for Altan he was awarded two National American Independent Record Distributors (N.A.I.R.D) Awards, in 1992 for the album Harvest Storm and in 1990 for The Red Crow. Since his professional broadcasting career began in the 1980's he has secured numerous prestigious awards for his radio documentaries; notably in 1980 for the ground-breaking ‘The House of R&B’; the first programme on Irish radio to regularly feature authentic Blues, Cajun, African and World Music. Other award winning programmes include Reels to Ragas, Rhythm & Roots and Personal Best. PJ is a published author of four books. His awards for writing include Winner of the Bram Stoker Dracula Gothic Short Story Competition in 2004 and in 2000 the International Regional Magazine Association International Award of Merit for Written Essay. In 2005 the National University of Ireland awarded him an Honorary Master of Arts Degree. The citation read: ‘For outstanding work and achievements since the 1970s as Broadcaster, Record Producer, Author and Music Historian. For further reading see http://www.oldforgebooks.com/pagex.asp?bioid=2061. Accessed 20/5/2013 at 1.35 pm.
PJ describes their virtuosic skill and enthusiasm and willingness to engage with him as producer, being happy to ‘mould their sound to being a band following the band-model already forged by the Bothy Band and De Dannan’ (Personal Communication Curtis Jan 2013). He remembers their openness to new forms of presentation of traditional music and willingness to engage with the audience in a style akin to contemporary music. He comments ‘They also had a deep appreciation of other musics of the period and they presented their stage shows as would any pop or rock band of the period’ (Personal Communication Curtis Jan 2013).

PJ Curtis produced two albums with Stockton’s Wing; ‘Light in the Western Sky’ and ‘Take a Chance’. He describes the level of work that went into the production of one single track, contrasting with the recordings made by bands in earlier decades, which were recorded in a single recording session. He comments:

‘Personally I am very proud of Light in The Western Sky as a production studio work. Tracks such as ‘Golden Stud’ were technically way ahead of their time in terms of production values...backwards tape loops et al...It took almost forty hours to record and mix that track alone’ (Personal Communication Curtis Jan 2013).

Stockton’s Wing gained superstar status, and have shared a stage with a host of world renowned artists including, Frank Sinatra, Liza Minnelli, Sammy Davis Jr., Stephan Grapelli, Michael Jackson, as well as performing and appearing in the acclaimed Irish film, ‘The Field’ (1990), which featured Richard Harris, Sean Bean, John Hurt, and Tom Berenger amongst others. The Ennis-based band members would attribute much of their success to the instrumental grounding and playing opportunities they received in the town.

Outside of the actual musical arrangements and as already mentioned their choice of name, by replicating the performance style of a rock group, they
immediately set themselves apart from the familiar styles of ensemble playing in Irish traditional music. This, along with their youthfulness attracted a new and young audience. In Ennis young people began to attend the sessions in Brogan’s Bar in order to see and hear them play. For themselves this affirmed and motivated them as musicians, which is a key point here.

Fig. 6.10 Stockton’s Wing on stage in Dublin, with Sammy Davis Junior, as part of his world tour with Frank Sinatra and Liza Minnelli. (Courtesy of Mike Hanrahan)

Even though in Ennis, everyone who attended music classes did not continue to practice as a traditional musician and for them flow was not maintained in the same way, nonetheless, an ever increasing number of people were receptive to listening to traditional music, and became the audience for those who carried on playing. Vincent McMahon considers:

‘Going back along there was always a few people of our go (age) who weren’t playing but fairly early on were interested, and even encouraged us a lot. Even having a small number of people like that, who were a year or two older, who appreciated music, who if they saw you playing somewhere they’d be delighted to know you’ (Interview McMahon Aug 2007).
The next section relates to traditional music in the context of fleadh time, when a concentration of more mainstream traditional music could be heard in Ennis. The combination of local and visiting performers and the growing Ennis audience boosted the standing of Irish traditional music there, something that has persisted and grown to the present day.

**Section Three: The Fleadh Nua**

*The multitudes, they flocked in throngs
To hear the music and the songs.
Motorbikes and Hi-ace vans,
With bottles - barrels - flagons - cans.
Mighty craic’ (Moore, 1984)*

![Fig 6.11 A thronged O’Connell Street during one of the fleadhs in 1977. (Courtesy of Fiona O’Sullivan)](image)

In this section, I use the Fleadh Nua festival in Ennis to illustrate other ways that traditional music became meaningful for the musicians in Ennis, and for the wider

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31 Lyrics of a song called Lisdoonvarna, which celebrates the folk festival held there from 1978-1983, written and made famous by singer Christy Moore.
community. The first Fleadh Nua was held in Dublin in 1970 organised by the national headquarters of Comhaltas, and it continued to be held there until it moved to its permanent home in Ennis in 1973. From the outset, although encompassing impromptu sessions and other participatory types of performance, unlike other fleadhanna which were competition oriented, the focus of this fleadh was principally on a presentational form of performance. This is evidenced in the following extract from an item titled ‘Stage set for Fleadh Nua’, promoting the first Fleadh Nua in May 1970, published in the Comhaltas journal Treoir:

‘The Fleadh will start on the Saturday night in Coláiste Mhuire, Parnell Square, with a colourful presentation of set dances from Kerry, Clare, Galway and Wexford. Each group will be costumed by Miss Maura O’Driscoll, designer of Dana’s costume for the Eurovision Song Contest. Each set dance will have its own musical accompaniment of a quartette, which will also give independent recitals. There will also be well-known guest artistes...The production of this event will be in the capable hands of Fr. Pat Ahern (chapter five) who has made his mark in the traditional field of entertainment with his Tralee based group Siamsa’ (Treoir, 1970 Vol. 2, No.3, p7).

It is clear from this that Comhaltas were endeavouring to attract a new audience through the presentation of staged events, which were reconfigurations of a musical genre, generally not staged. In addition, the Scór-aicht competition which had been in existence since 1965, became a cornerstone event in the Fleadh Nua. As outlined in chapter five, the themes of these shows represented a version of Irishness which was rural based, historical and nationalistic, far from the urban environment in which they were being performed. Nonetheless, in terms of Ennis, creating new performance contexts such as Seisiún, Scór-aicht, and even the Fleadh Nua itself, in effect brought traditional music to the wider public, and contributed significantly to the transformation of the town of Ennis, which occurred through the 1970s.

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32 There were however competitions included for set dancing were and for Scór-aicht shows.
33 The singer Dana won the Eurovision Song Contest in 1970.
As can be seen from the Fleadh Programme of 1974 (Fig. 6.11) it comprised of formal events such as concerts, céilithe, and many free events. In general, unlike other Fleadhanna, which were typically competition based, except for scoraíocht and pléaracha stage show competitions, this particular music festival focused on non-competitive events. Street stages positioned in central locations of the town formed the core of the outdoor entertainment, and were a focal point for the crowds, who listened and sometimes danced. The Aos Óg (young people) concert, held on Friday nights, involved traditional music performed by young musicians only. In addition, by the late 1970s workshops were also included in the programme, encompassing music performances from well known céilí bands.

34 ‘Céilithe’ is plural of ‘céili’, which were organised participational Irish dances featuring live music performances from well known céilí bands.
classes, set dancing, storytelling and lectures. On the Saturday and Sunday of the Fleadh, large crowds thronged the streets, as can be seen from the following image, necessitating them being closed to traffic, which was arranged with the Gardai and local authorities. This indicated significant buy-in from the Town Council and other authorities as the event could not happen otherwise. A core event of the Fleadh was the parade held on Sunday afternoons. As reported in Treoir, from a review by Seán Turnbull of Hot Press magazine:

‘On Sunday an estimated 30,000 day visitors arrived for the afternoon’s events beginning with a parade which took over an hour to pass through the narrow winding streets of Ennis before ending beside the tent-village in the town’s Fair Green. There the people were treated to the best of the Saturday night show as well as some more formal ballyhood and speech-making’ (Turnbull 1978, p.12).

The parade was always full of pageantry, including pipe and brass bands, school bands, and floats which reflected historical, rural based themes, usually generated by Comhaltas branches or by local industries. Frequently they reflected a current political event or person, and were very often humorous.

![A float depicting people attending Mass, possibly at a Mass Rock](image)

35 Ireland’s national police force is called An Garda Síochána, abbreviated by people to the ‘gardai’ (plural of garda, which literally means ‘guard’). In fact sometimes people even call them ‘the Guards’.

36 During the 17th century Mass Rocks located in isolated places were used as altars for Mass, when attendance was deemed illegal.
The parade commenced by the court house and weaved its way through the narrow streets of the town, generally finishing up in the Market Square, having passed by a review stand, where adjudicators, Comhaltas or local dignitaries, awarded prizes to the best floats. Speeches were made, always with some political reference to a united Ireland and maintenance of an ‘Irish Ireland’ which reflected the political stance of Comhaltas, a move that was not popular by many musicians. It indicated a movement
away from the core matter of Irish traditional music. Fleming refers to the ‘alienation’ that Comhaltas members have felt because of ‘what they see as publicly visible associations of traditional music with particular political and religious views’ (2012, p.240). In contrast, following the speeches, entertainment was provided by a Céilí Band; the members of the Liverpool Céilí Band were regulars during the 1970s. They played the role of resident musicians for the weekend, performing at arranged events as well as impromptu sessions.

Tourism: Flow: In and Out of Ennis

Kieran Hanrahan maintained that one great thing about the Fleadh Nua was that ‘it brought people to town’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008). In fact, through the 1970s Ennis increasingly became a place that people visited from Ireland and abroad, to hear and perform Irish traditional music. Although Irish tourism has been the subject of research (O’Connor and Cronin, 1993 and 2003) there has been little which focused specifically on cultural tourism in the region, particularly in terms of Irish traditional music’s role. While Adam Kaul (2009) examines the relationship between the traditional Irish music sessions in Doolin, and the development of tourism in the area, there, the tourist ‘experienced local culture’ as part of their holiday. Even though themes were local and even parochial, the networked flow of people in and out of Ennis from across Ireland and the UK, connects with Kaul’s idea of a particular ‘global situation’ (Kaul 2009, p.8). However, in general, the tourists in Ennis were different, in that for the most part they were already aware of that culture, but were excited by the prospect of experiencing traditional music in a new context.

John Boyd, now living in Ennis but originally from Liverpool, recalls his first time at

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37 For further reading on tourism in County Clare see Ó Dálaigh (1998) and Callinan (2000, pp 58-81).
the Fleadh Nua, in 1978. He was living in London at the time, and regularly played banjo and guitar in music sessions there e.g. at the Hibernian, a dance hall in Fulham Broadway, West London. John also attended Brendan Mulkere’s adult music class. He heard about the Fleadh Nua from musicians from County Clare and other places, and decided to make the long tedious trip to Ireland. John describes what that entailed:

‘It was very difficult to get to Ennis from London. Fares were prohibitive so I couldn’t fly. The options were the ferry, the train or Slattery’s Bus, which only went to Limerick. I had to get from Limerick to Ennis, and it took ages because it stopped everywhere. I travelled thirty hours from Victoria Coach Station to Ennis, but it was worth it. It was the best Fleadh Nua I have ever seen, and I have lived here since 1986. I remember the buzz, it was alive; a vibrancy. The music was amazing and I knew what good music was, from the sessions in London’ (Personal Interview Boyd Apr 2013).

Liverpool native Mick Coyne and resident in Ennis for over twenty years, a piper and member of the Liverpool Céili Band recalls a similar experience; which is vividly recounted here:

‘In the seventies it was the smell of turf everywhere. You could smell it two miles out on the ferry coming from Holyhead. Then the lack of cars and decent roads made it a long trip. But when you got to Clare, it was the cheerfulness of the people everyone said hello to you, whereas in Liverpool you kept your head down, and didn't make eye contact. Also the space; leaving Dublin there was twenty miles between every town. e.g. Dublin to Naas, Naas to Portlaoise to Roscrea to Nenagh to Limerick to Ennis. The amount of space, and lack of buildings was a real eye opener’ (Personal Correspondence Coyne Jan 2013).

Hearing traditional music in the context of the Fleadh Nua was new. John Boyd, describing his first impression of Ennis, reflects on the atmosphere of the town:

‘There was music everywhere. There was energy and youthfulness in it. The Fairgreen was packed, people camping all over the town, up the Turnpike, the Bishops Field, anywhere there was a green space. I remember going in to town

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38 John Boyd is one of hundreds of musicians who have been taught to play Irish traditional music from Brendan Mulkere, son of Jack Mulkere who is a central person in this thesis (see chapter four).
39 Brendan is a son of Jack Mulkere referred to in earlier chapters.
for breakfast at 8am, and as I walked past O’Dea’s pub, Mrs O’Dea ushered me into the back, where there was a session still going on from the night before. There was smoking that time, so there was a big haze, a cloud of smoke. I remember there was no accommodation to be had- it was very difficult to get’ (Personal Interview Boyd Apr 2012).

Although there were a number of hotels in the town, they were on the whole frequented by overseas visitors, who came largely as a consequence of the proximity of Ennis to Shannon Airport. As can be seen from the following advertisement (Fig. 6.16) which was placed in the Comhaltas magazine Treoir, by 1976 traditional music was being seen as a marketable product for those involved in the tourist industry. The package holidays listed were expensive and also aimed towards visitors from abroad and not for the wide range who had limited resources. In general, the infrastructure necessary for the large numbers of people who visited for the Fleadh Nua did not exist, and the range of accommodation was also very limited. Hotels were expensive, but a number of pubs did offer accommodation. At that time accommodation such as Bed and Breakfast in guesthouses was not that common, and efforts were made by Comhaltas members to provide accommodation for people; mostly in private homes. A similar situation was detected in Doolin by Kaul who notes, ‘there was a lack of infrastructure in Doolin to accommodate this new class of tourist, or even an easy means by which to travel to the village’ (Kaul 2009, p. 55). Similar to that described by John Boyd, ‘Tents in cow pastures became a common sight. Locals were very accommodating and they were well aware of the business opportunities that had, quite literally, arrived at their doorsteps’ (Kaul, p.56).
Come to the
Fleadhs 1976
organised by
SILVERDALE TRAVEL DUBLIN

Fleadh Phadraig Galway
March 12—14th
8 Day Package Holiday from U.S.A.
Cost per person £199.00
which includes the following:
1. Airfare from and to U.S.A.
2. Hotel Accommodation, dinner bed and breakfast, based on twin occupancy.
3. Touring in Luxury Motor Coach.
4. 2 days in Dublin, 1 day in Limerick.
5. Medieval Banquet and Irish Traditional Evening.
6. Entrance fees to Fleadh Events, All Government taxes, service charges, and porterage.

Fleadh Phadraig
4 Day Package Holiday from Britain
Cost per person £71.50
which includes the following:
1. Airfare from and to London.
2. Hotel Accommodation, dinner bed and breakfast, based on twin occupancy.
3. Transfers by Luxury Motor Coach from Shannon to Galway and return.
4. Entrance fees to all Fleadh Events. All Government Taxes and service charges, and porterage.

Fleadh Nua, Ennis May 28th—31st
8 Day Package Holiday from U.S.A.
Cost Per Person £199.00
which includes the following:
1. Airfare from and to U.S.A.
2. Hotel Accommodation, dinner bed and breakfast, based on twin occupancy.
3. Touring in Luxury Motor Coach.
4. 2 days in Dublin, 1 day in Limerick.
5. Medieval Banquet and Irish Traditional Evening.
6. Entrance fees to all Fleadh Events. All Government Taxes, service charges, and porterage.

Fleadh Nua, Ennis May 28th—31st
5 Day Package Holiday from Britain
Cost per person £82.50
which includes the following:
1. Airfare from and to London.
2. Hotel Accommodation, dinner bed and breakfast, based on twin occupancy.
3. Transfers by Luxury Motor Coach from Shannon to Ennis and return.
4. Entrance fees to all Fleadh events. All Government Taxes, service charges, and porterage.

TRANSPORT FROM CITIES OTHER THAN
MENTIONED ABOVE CAN BE ARRANGED
BY AIR, SEA, OR RAIL ON REQUEST. FOR
ALL DETAILS CONTACT

Silverdale Travel Ltd
31, Exchequer Street, Dublin 2
Tel: 775905/775905. Telex 4427

Fig. 6.16 (Treoir 1975, Vol 7 No. 5, p. 24)
A more personal arrangement is recalled by accordion player Martin Connolly, ‘my accommodation was kindly supplied by the late Francie O’Halloran and family. A great time was had by all (Personal Correspondence Connolly Nov 2012). Tommy Hayes, although after he joined Stockton’s Wing he spent a lot of time staying with the Hanrahan family, recalls a less salubrious arrangement ‘I had a Morris Minor van in those days, so could put the mattress down the back and camp out to my heart’s content’ (Personal Correspondence Hayes Jan 2013).

Personally, I recall in my home that every space available was occupied, including the front and back gardens, where tents were pitched. Sometimes the guests were friends and relations, but I also recall on a number of occasions people knocking on the door and asking if there was floor space for them to sleep. An abiding memory of my mother’s is being woken up at 3am in the morning by two girls from Derry. They had nowhere to sleep and asked for floor space, which she duly provided. In the morning she gave them breakfast. As a thank you they gave her a gift of a cruet set (a matching set of containers for salt and pepper), which she still has. She regularly recalls the story, but has no memory of their names. This was not unusual and many visitors were welcomed into people’s homes.

Comhaltas was conscious that paying commercial rates for accommodation was not a viable option for many people, who would wish to attend the fleadh, therefore, they organised a committee to arrange an alternative. Bridie Byrnes was given the task of coordinating this, and she recalls the difficulties that she had during the first few years of the Fleadh Nua. Some people were reticent to allow strangers to

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40 Father of Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Francie O’Halloran, a local business man and a Comhaltas activist was also a major financial sponsor of traditional music events. His particular contribution to the completion of the building of Cois na hAbhna has already been referred to in this chapter. Francie was also among the many parents who provided transport to concerts and other events.
stay in their homes. They were also fearful based on the stereotypical association of traditional musicians and alcohol. She describes her early experience:

‘I would walk around and some people wouldn’t let fleadh people into their house: ‘Certainly not’, others ‘Sorry, I have to ask my husband’ others would say ‘I haven’t enough room, I haven’t the furniture.’ I used to say that the furniture doesn’t matter. I used to knock on the doors and ask, and some of them used to be amazed that I’d be asking people to keep ‘fleadh people’. They all believed that anyone connected to Fleadh was a drunk. I had to educate them and explain to them that the people looking for accommodation were people who were used to good homes, and it took me three years’ (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012).

Based on the positive experience that people had, she found that it became easier each year to approach people:

‘The first year was awful and I remember that there were 10,000 people expected in Ennis. There was nobody left out (everyone who needed it was accommodated), and the second year it was bad enough, the third year it was getting better’ (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012).

She did not have a telephone therefore, arrangements were made through the mail. In addition, while families offering accommodation during the fleadh were occasionally inconvenienced, nonetheless, it offered them an opportunity to make extra income. She describes this:

‘I had no phone that time, but by then (after the first few years) they (locals) used to get in touch with me offering me accommodation, because anyone who did it, they were delighted with their few pounds, and I know my sister-in-law with ten children put them (all the children) in the same room, and she was delighted with her few pounds. They got in touch with me and they were chasing me, and then over time people weren’t contacting me anymore, they knew where to go themselves (Contacts and friendships had been made and kept over the years)’ (Personal Interview Byrnes Nov 2012).

In the view of Gabriella Hanrahan, the involvement of the community in volunteering to accommodate visitors in their homes, was an added dynamic in the success of the fleadh. She contends that:
'there was no money at the time, so it couldn’t have happened without families hosting and being prepared- not just talking about putting up the flags; you’re actually talking about opening their home to people, which was amazing commitment, and nobody ever batted an eyelid’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

I personally remember the level of catering which was involved in feeding people. Although there were rarely set meal times during a fleadh, my parents provided the food; sausages, boxes of burgers and burger buns, which could be cooked anytime anyone got hungry, even if that was in the middle of the night after playing at music sessions all day. Gabriella Hanrahan describes a similar experience:

‘Thinking back on it, my parents must have been saving for that time, so that they could cover the cost of everything. It was food, tents out the back, tents out the front. It was through this that we got to know all the Dublin musicians. I know that when you’d get up on the morning of a fleadh, there would be bodies everywhere in our house, and there was complete trust’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).

While the Fleadh Nua contributed to the development of cultural tourism in the town, as described by Gabriella Hanrahan, for the young Ennis based teenage musicians it also provided many opportunities to make new friends, and to play in informal music sessions with visiting musicians. It became a core event in the traditional music calendar. Accordeon player Martin Connolly recalls:

‘I well remember leaving the Height41 Tuesday morning at 3.00am after playing a session with Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche, Tony Cullinan and about fifteen more musicians. This was a time when nobody thought about going home. We all played music because we loved it so much, and couldn't play enough of it. I wish those times could be reinvented’ (Personal Correspondence, Martin Connolly Nov 2012).

41 The Square is often called the Height. A monument honouring Daniel O’Connell (1775- 1847), a political leader who fought for Catholic Emancipation, is sited there.
Eamonn Cotter recalls a similar experience, describing the nature of the friendships:

‘I can recall big mad sessions with twenty and thirty musicians…I recall meeting musicians there. I wouldn’t put names on all of them, but even to this day, when you go away to a festival or fleadh, you meet someone new. You sit in on a session, and maybe you’re playing with three or four strangers, and by the end of the night you have a lifelong friend…it’s an on and off thing. You might meet them at a festival in Germany or something, and twenty years later you meet…it’s not a continuous friendship, but you can call on it’ (Personal Interview Cotter Jan 2008).

One of the memorable sites for late night sessions was outside the Cathedral, opposite the Old Ground Hotel. Not intending any disrespect, we sat on a wall outside the church and played without interruption until the wee hours. The session leaders were regularly members of the Liverpool Céili Band who were joined by others. Gabriella Hanrahan also recalls:

‘The greatest place was sitting up on the wall of the church, I have memories, years and years of memories, everyone going up there at maybe one or two o’clock in the morning, after being at the concerts, and you’d be hoping that they’d all gather there…it would go on until three or four o’clock in the morning. The Liverpool Céili band used to be here…it was unmanaged, it just happened, and then it became ‘the’ place you’d look for, and you’d dance the set out on the street, and walk home without any problem’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2013).
Her brother, Kieran Hanrahan also recalls interacting with the members of the Liverpool Céili Band:

‘It actually brought people from right across (Ireland and abroad), and there were loads of céilís and the Liverpool Ceili band were huge… They would invite you to go up on stage and play with them… that was an acknowledgement of you. All very positive…Eamon Coyne (fiddle player and a founder member of the Liverpool Céili Band) would give you the wave of the bow (a signal to join the band). That was fantastic…That is what was great about the Fleadh Nua. It opened up a whole new front on the traditional music scene’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

The members of the Liverpool Céili Band were resident musicians for the weekend.⁴² Member, Mick Coyne, who has lived in Ennis since the 1980s, recalls his experience in Ennis and what motivated him as a musician in the band:

‘Ennis was the biggest thing on the traditional calendar for the lads of the Liverpool Céili band. Not only because of the great music and craic, but it was like coming home. We knew everyone on the trad scene in Ennis, and most of the great ones in County Clare. We were treated like Lords, as we were the only band that was invited over from England. Also you have to remember, we were on our holidays when we arrived; we were there to enjoy ourselves, and that came out in our music, and the joy of playing in the country of our father and your blood. It still is a great feeling when someone comes up to you and says ‘didn't you play with the Liverpool Ceili Band, I remember your father well. We danced all night to that band and never wanted to go home’ (Personal Correspondence Coyne Jan 2013).

Mick Coyne continues, describing the agreement between Comhaltas and the Liverpool Céili Band, outlining the conditions surrounding their engagement as resident musicians for the Fleadh Nua:

‘Kit Hodge (fiddle player), who was the leader of the Liverpool band when she was in Liverpool, had gone back to Dublin to live, and was now the secretary to Labhrás Ó Murchú the head of CCE⁴³ (Comhaltas). So she must

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⁴² Piper Mick Coyne, whose father was one of the founding members of the band, is resident in Ennis since the 1980s. Another founder member, fiddle player Seán McNamara, whose father was originally from Kilmihil in west Clare, was a regular visitor to the county.

⁴³ Labhrás Ó Murchú has been in the full-time permanent position of Ard Stiúrthóir (Director General) of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann since 1968.
have put it to him (suggested) that the big named ‘Champions Twice’ Liverpool Céilí band was free, and mad for road and tunes.44 So we got the gig…We mostly stayed in the Queens Hotel. Part of the gig was keeping a session going in the hotel bar, and with free drink in those days, it was no trouble keeping it going. Myself and my two brothers, who also were over playing with the band, would play for an hour or so until the session was going, then we would sneak off to find the younger lads, and get flying into a session with our own age…CCE (Comhaltas) paid for the boat trip over and the hotel and food, and I think we got a few bob spending money also’45 (Personal Correspondence Coyne Jan 2013).

While the fleadh had obvious economic benefits for the town, it also had distinct meaning for each person who attended. For the musicians, friendships were made and nurtured, as the mixed generations practiced and performed together. John Boyd, although originally from Liverpool, did not have the opportunity to play with the Liverpool Céilí Band when he was growing up there, because he did not begin to play Irish traditional music until he moved to London in his late teens. However, an opportunity to reconnect with his Liverpool roots arose, when he was invited to join them on the gig rig at the Square, and for a céilí in the Jet Club, a dance hall and one of the principal fleadh venues.

Among the many young musicians who regularly visited Ennis for the Fleadhanna during the 1970s were well known fiddle players Eileen O’Brien, Martin Hayes, Máire Ní Chaoimh, harper Máire Ní Cathasaigh, pipers Mick Coyne and Máire Ní Ghráda, her brother flute player Conal Ó Gráda and percussionist Tommy Hayes. Each of them describes their experience and the significant moments in their musical lives which took place in Ennis.

Piper Máire Ní Ghráda, originally from Ballincollig, County Cork, recalls the reason for her first visit to Ennis:

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44 This refers to the fact that they won the All-Ireland two years in a row, 1963 and 1964; they subsequently recorded an album by that name.
45 Mick Coyne’s brother Eamon plays fiddle and Terry plays flute and whistle.
‘I have a distinct memory of being in Ennis for the Fleadh Nua in my very early teens. That was probably my first time in the town. I was there with my family to take part in a concert being choreographed by a priest from Kerry whose name now escapes me.\textsuperscript{46} We went there as members of Comhaltas, and though our primary allegiance was to the Cork Pipers’ Club, I recall that the organisation played quite a big role in our lives too’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Ghráda Feb 2013).

She describes her first impressions and her amazement at the opportunity to connect with so many celebrated musicians:

‘My memory of that first trip to Ennis was of being quite overawed by the excitement of this new experience. Ennis seemed a big place, and the sense of music and celebrity was everywhere. Names familiar from radio and TV were likely to be glimpsed and heard, in the various venues, pubs and concerts. The day long rehearsals for the concert gave me a chance to watch and take it all in, and of course we darted in and out of all the pubs, and kept a tally of all the big names at the sessions that were always in full flow. We loved it all’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Ghráda Feb 2013).

Although her visit to the town was as a result of being invited to perform in the Aos Óg concert, it gave her the opportunity to meet many musicians her own age who have been lifelong friends since then. She recalls:

‘Ennis was where I became aware of the ‘young guns’ of traditional music, and names like Cotter, Roche, Murray, Hanrahan, Skerrit go all the way back to that time. Over the years we would meet and hear one another many times, and often met as fellow competitors at regional or national level of the Fleadhanna Ceoil. The young Ennis musicians of that era had a virtuosity that impressed us greatly. Allowing for shyness, and maybe even a certain level of awe at first, we got to know one another well, and there is great affection and regard in those relationships to the present day’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Ghráda Feb 2013).

Similarly her younger brother, flute player Conal Ó Gráda recalls his impressions, and the diverse locations for music sessions:

‘The trip to Ennis was a real highlight for me at that age. The crowds seemed huge and there was music everywhere. The trips were a huge opportunity for

\textsuperscript{46} This was the Aos Óg concert, which showcased talented young musicians, which was directed by Fr. Pat Ahern. Both are referred to in chapter five.
me to play with new people, in an entirely different setting to what I was used to; pub sessions, on walls, in chippers etc. It also impressed on me that the standard of playing, young & old, was extremely high, and it was great to feel part of what is a vibrant tradition’ (Personal Correspondence Ó Gráda Feb 2013).

He humorously refers to developing his palate for Chinese food in Ennis as a way of competing against what he deemed as a head start for the Ennis musicians; whom he saw as cosmopolitan:

‘Interestingly also, Ennis was where I first tasted Chinese food...I thought it was some weird local stuff that had to be consumed if you wanted to play reels with the proper 'lift', and being ultra competitive, had no problem swallowing vast quantities of the stuff...thought it was a great mix of Swallows Tails, Eel in the Sink, Old Grey Goose, Hare in the Corn and Mountain Lark, served on a Copper Plate and washed down with a Cup of Tea\textsuperscript{47}...an essential rite of passage for a young budding musician trying to negate the Clare advantage’ (Personal Correspondence Ó Gráda Feb 2013).

Although music was performed in pubs during the fleadh, generally this did not happen at non-festive times. Eileen O’Brien recalls this, and describes the informal sessions she participated in during the fleadh:

‘My first real introduction to 'the informal session’ probably happened during the Fleadh Nua. Up to that, it was mostly performance on stage in a formal setting...My main stomping ground for sessions was at the Old Ground Hotel outside on the front lawn. I did not go to pubs at that stage of my life, as it was not something that I would be allowed to do by my parents. Also, I was not used to going to pubs with my parents, as they did not drink. Maybe that was why I used to go to the hotels in Ennis. I also played in the Queens Hotel during the Fleadh Nua...At this time in the early 1970’s, there was no ‘pub scene’, or music sessions in pubs that are in existence today. The culture and way of life was totally different’ (Personal Correspondence O’Brien Jan 2013).

Significantly, further highlighting the changes which were beginning to take place in the general acceptance of traditional music in Ennis, the Old Ground Hotel, owned by the O’Regan family, was a place associated with the middle classes, and certainly not

\textsuperscript{47} All of these are titles of popular Irish traditional dance tunes.
a place frequented by traditional musicians.\footnote{References to Brendan O’Regan, in his role promoting industry and tourism in the Mid Western region, were made in Chapters two and five.} It was particularly associated with Shannon Airport, and air crews regularly stayed there, as well as the American tourists who flew in and out of there. However, it became the central venue during the fleadh, a place where informal music sessions were held; throughout the hotel in every available space, including the stairs and the lawn.

As already referred to by many informants, one of the highlights for young musicians visiting Ennis, was the opportunity that it presented to play with musicians their own age. Being the daughter of the iconic accordion player Paddy O’Brien meant that Eileen O’Brien already had many opportunities to perform with musicians, but not with those her own age. She recalls the young musicians she performed with at these sessions:

‘These visits to Clare in my formative years as a young musician ensured, that I met and played with other young musicians singers and dancers at that time. People like Kieran and Mike Hanrahan, Geraldine and Eamon Cotter, Geraldine Carrig, Gearóid and Mary O’Halloran, Paul Roche, Jackie Scanlan, Peter Skerritt, Dermot Lernihan as well as musicians from other parts of Ireland. Through my father I was introduced into a circle of his musical friends and peers at musical gatherings in various parts of Co. Clare…Travelling to Clare also gave me the opportunity to meet some of the great names from other parts of the country. For example, it was in Kilmaley that I first met Paddy Glackin (fiddle player from Dublin), Eamon O’Kelly (actor) Seán Potts (whistle and uilleann piper), Celine Hession, Donncha O Muineachain (dancers)’ (Personal Correspondence O’Brien Jan 2013).

Likewise, Mick Coyne refers to the importance to him of engaging with musicians his own age:

‘We were very conscious of the young music scene in Ennis and Co. Clare in general. The Hanrahan, Cotter and McMahon families were just some of the young musicians of my age that were leading the way on the young trad scene then\footnote{He is referring to the McMahon brothers, John (concertina and uilleann pipes) and Séamus (flute and fiddle), cousins of Martin Hayes. They were a few years younger than the Ennis musicians referred to in chapters four and five.}…It was like a drug to us Coyne’s, to be where they were, and to be
learning the tunes and styles that they were playing at the time, and take them back to Liverpool and frighten all the Brit musicians who were starting to infest the Irish sessions in the Liverpool Irish Centre’ (Personal Correspondence Coyne Jan 2013). 50

Martin Hayes, who lived about twenty miles east of Ennis, was particularly aware of a small pocket of the town, where a number of young musicians lived. 51 He recalls:

‘the area of St. Michael’s Villas, which you saw from all fleadh programmes; the Cotters were just around the corner from that, so there was a big gathering of music in those couple of streets, that I was very aware of right from the beginning. I wouldn’t know any other streets in Ennis…but I knew where St. Michael’s Villas was, because I wanted to know where all these musicians were living. I wanted to know where that street was, and I wanted to know where Sonny Murray lived’ (Personal Correspondence Hayes Feb 2013).

Similarly, fiddle player Máire Ní Chaoimh recalls her impressions of traditional music in Ennis, and the attraction of meeting musicians her own age there:

‘Growing up in Tralee we had a great Comhaltas branch...there were about five teenagers including me and my sister who played music, so Ennis was a major magnet – almost a Holy Grail, as so many young musicians our age were playing music. I think that was possibly one of the most important attractions. It was so different to what we were used to at home at the time, where you certainly didn’t let anyone at school know that you were playing the fiddle…I remember a session in the Old Ground hotel one afternoon. I only knew every twentieth tune, but it was exhilarating to be sitting in the middle of this great music, with about twenty musicians my own age around me, and all so helpful and encouraging…Ennis was a microcosm for me and my sister, as so many young musicians the same age as us were playing music’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Chaoimh Mar 2013).

Máire’s experience of being self conscious as a traditional musician was far removed from the general experience of young musicians from the mid-70s onwards. Her observation also draws attention to the changing perception of the town in relation to...
traditional music, from the perspective of someone from outside the county. In my personal diary of 1973 I also noted the growing acceptance of traditional music by my peers: ‘a lot of the town crowd are becoming interested in traditional music’ (Personal Diary, May 1973). The isolation described by Máire Ní Chaoimh faded when she came to Ennis and met other musicians and others interested in hearing traditional music. Likewise, harper Máire Ní Chathasaigh recalls that:

‘Fleadhs were therefore the highlight of our social and musical year. Meeting and playing with lots of musicians our own age was an extraordinarily heartening experience and of course Ennis was Heaven’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Chathasaigh Jan 2013).

Conal Ó Gráda describes his experience of building a network of friends, many his own age, who played Irish traditional music:

‘Hanging out with people my own age from all around the country gave me a feeling of belonging…My lasting impression is of the friends I met of my own age. This social aspect was a huge motivator to keep playing music, and many of the people I met back then are still good friends to this day. I met up with two main gangs, the Clare Crew and the Dubs. The Clare crew included yourself and Eamonn, and the Ennis bucks, Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche etc. The Dubs (people from Dublin)were made up of the Glackins, whom I stayed with in a caravan at the All Ireland Fleadh, the Kennys, the McKeowns and a plethora of other individuals who didn't have the same family numbers to bolster their presence’ (Personal Correspondence Ó Gráda Feb 2013).

Many of the musicians who visited Ennis in the context of the fleadh came with their families and met other families who were equally interested in Irish traditional music. Máire Ní Chathasaigh, who regularly attended the Fleadh Nua during the 1970s, recalls:

‘I remember playing at a number of the Fleadhanna Nua, including the first Fleadh Nua held in Ennis in 1974. We always came to Fleadhs as a family, staying in our caravan on whatever campsite was provided. Several families used to do that at the time. I remember the Glackins being campsite neighbours on a number of occasions…There were only a relatively small

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52 He refers here to the All-Ireland Fleadh held in Ennis in 1977.
number of families playing traditional music in the Cork area in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, among them the Ó Grádas and the Ó Riabhaighs, and we were all involved in the Cork Pipers’ Club’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Chathasaigh Jan 2013).

She also describes the attitude to traditional music in her hometown of Bandon in County Cork; not dissimilar to that in the Ennis of the 1950s, which was described in Chapter three.

‘My siblings and I grew up in Bandon, a former garrison town and a very anglicised place, and I vividly remember being laughed at for playing traditional music – until about 1971 when everything suddenly changed, the most deeply unfashionable form of music imaginable’ (Personal Correspondence Ní Chathasaigh Jan 2013).

Her experience was similar to that of Tommy Hayes, who recalls his impression of traditional music in Ennis, comparing it to his experience in his native Limerick at the time:

‘Ennis was quite special to me because of the link to Stockton’s Wing, and because in (comparison to) the Limerick trad music scene it had a touch of the holy grail about it. Feakle was also a place that I went to a lot, because of Martin Rochford, whose fiddle playing I absolutely adored…Many happy days steeping myself in the music, as where I grew up the music scene was nonexistent, and to get to the real deal, one really had to head for Clare’ (Personal Correspondence Hayes Jan 2013).

He also recalls the general welcome which was afforded to traditional musicians during the fleadh. Although benefitting the pub owners themselves, it was also reflective of a welcoming community spirit:

‘Pubs that took care of musicians with food and drink were always more favoured, and were also natural meeting places, as you would be sure of a welcome which was not found in many places if you played Irish music in those days’ (Personal Correspondence Hayes Jan 2013).

Martin Hayes also recalls thinking that Ennis had a strong tradition. This opinion was founded on his own participation in fleadh competitions. He considered Ennis a
‘powerhouse of music’, a place where traditional music was accepted. On recollection he considers that:

‘I probably came in to Ennis with some naivety, not really realising that there was ever any real division against it…You might not be into traditional music if you lived here, maybe, but it still wouldn’t be totally alien to you. You’d have heard of the people, you’d have known somebody who played, you’d have heard some of the names’ (Personal Interview Hayes Feb 2013).

Visiting Ennis during the fleadh afforded young musicians the opportunity to meet well known and established traditional musicians in a relaxed setting. Máire Ní Chaoimh remembers first meeting iconic musicians such as Bobby Casey, Tommy Peoples, Micho Russell and Aggie Whyte in Ennis. Decades later she still recalls the specific encouragement she received from a number of these:

‘I met Aggie Whyte before I knew who Aggie Whyte was. She was playing outside the Old Ground Hotel leaning on a car…I wasn’t playing the fiddle that long at all, and she saw my fiddle case and asked me to play a tune. I did, after some persuasion… Tommy Peoples was my hero at the time. I think he was a lot of fiddle player’s hero, due to that first Bothy Band album. I went to a craft fair…and lo and behold, there was Tommy Peoples in the flesh, selling concertina lamps that he had made himself. I introduced myself, very cheeky, and asked him about a tune that he played called Kit O’Mahoney’s Champion Jig. He offered to write it out and send it to me, which he duly did. I couldn’t believe it when a few days after the Fleadh Nua, it arrived in the post’ (Personal Interview Ní Chaoimh Mar 2013).

Likewise, Conal Ó Grada recalls meeting older musicians:

‘…local players like Chris Droney, Seán Reid, Paddy Murphy and the late Robbie McMahon. The appearance of musicians from abroad, the Liverpool Ceilidh Band and musicians from Coventry, Birmingham, London, Manchester, was a real eye-opener’ (Personal Correspondence Ó Gráda Feb 2013).

As a result of the number of occasions afforded musicians to visit Ennis through the 1970s, a pathway was created to the town as musicians connected through practice. They returned year after year for the Fleadh Nua, and thus it became a
significant meeting place for them. Conveniently, it was held annually at the end of May to coincide with the English Bank holiday weekend, which facilitated those travelling from Britain. The weekend also marked the start of the Fleadh season, so an air of expectation and excitement existed following the winter months, when little or no travelling took place between counties. This pathway was also reinforced when the competitive orientated Munster Fleadh was held there in 1974, and the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 1977. Máire Ní Chaoimh’s experience visiting Ennis through the 1970s was the start of a regular pattern of visiting Ennis and County Clare. She explains that:

‘She couldn’t wait to get there, and that lasted right through the eighties, when I got a car and was working in Dublin. I would go off to the Fleadh Nua religiously, and down to Ennis and anywhere in Clare on any sort of excuse’ (Personal Interview Ní Chaoimh Mar 2013).

As a result of the music classes and the encouragement and motivation of the people referred throughout this thesis, ‘flow’ was maintained for a significant number of young musicians in Ennis. Furthermore, the connection made between the classroom experience and other experiences; practical and connected to real life, facilitated a feeling of group identity and allowed for transformation, not just of individual lives, but also of the community at large. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin credits the merging of various agendas as a core motivation in the maintenance of ‘flow’ and maintains:

‘In terms of agendas coming together, you have the pedagogical agenda, explicit, the tourist agenda and the competitive agenda, you have the sense of performance plus pedagogy plus iconography and all creating a massive matrix of multiple agendas in a whole lot of settings, that really open up a world that 95% of the kids growing up in Ennis didn’t have in their life. We were a very unusual bunch of people, a bunch of kids’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).
Likewise, Kieran Hanrahan who considers the value of the overall experience:

‘It was the whole thing of getting to the fleadh…the rounded thing of learning your music, doing a bit of set dancing, performing, scoraíochts and all that. I think we were so lucky’ (Personal Interview Hanrahan Feb 2008).

Conclusion: From Transition to Transformation

While the new practices were established (chapter five), at the same time continuity of practice was maintained by young musicians, who grew up participating in the same styles, which Turino maintained ‘allows people to form similar habits of style that facilitate musical synchrony and thus the deep feelings of identification that musical-dance performance can create’ (2008, p. 9). Furthermore, Wenger argues that education goes beyond socialisation, and views it as a reciprocal process between individuals and communities, and to consider it:

‘…in terms of rhythms by which communities and individuals continually renew themselves…it is an investment of a community in its own future, not as a reproduction of the past through cultural transmission, but as the formation of new identities that can take its history of learning forward’ (Wenger, 1998, pp. 263-264).

As outlined in earlier chapters, prior to 1960 traditional music practice was largely maintained by outside visiting musicians, because of the town’s position as a market town, and the music culture itself, on the whole, was not well regarded in Ennis. In chapter four I discussed the issue of identity for young Ennis traditional musicians who felt the need to call on their rural roots in order to be considered authentic. Through the 1970s, traditional musicians not only reconciled this position as they became identified for their Ennisness as much as Clareness, but consequently Irish traditional music was no longer seen solely as a rural pursuit, but also authentic in an urban context. Hitherto, in Ireland outside of that related to the Pipers Clubs in
Dublin and Cork, the discourse in Irish traditional music largely centred on rural locations as ‘the’ authentic sites of practice. However, the comments of young visiting musicians to the fleadhanna clearly viewed the Ennis of the 1970s as an important and real and therefore in this sense ‘authentic’ site of traditional music practice.

Furthermore, through the 1970s in particular, the town changed dramatically in terms of the general acceptance of Irish traditional music. This transformation, generated through the development of cultural tourism which was a result of successful initiatives and cooperation between interested groups such as Comhaltas and Shannon Free Airport Development Authority (Shannon Development), is exemplified through the Fleadh Nua, held each May from 1973, and is a validation of Ennis as a hub of Irish traditional music. Nonetheless, the success has been based on, and even dependant on, the availability of a regular core of traditional musicians being available to perform in both paid and unpaid capacities. As a result of the new contexts of transmission which emerged subsequent to the first Comhaltas VEC class, there has been a steady stream of musicians on hand to agencies focussed on the economic and social development of the town and therefore the continued culture of volunteerism of a particular kind takes on new forms.

While this thesis has centred on traditional music in Ennis, and about the development of Comhaltas in Ennis up to 1980, it is at its heart, about people who interacted within and outside of Comhaltas, to effect a change beyond their initial aim of preservation. In the promotion to a new generation, of a lifestyle in Irish traditional music, they set changes in motion. From another perspective, Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin acknowledges the significance of the link between the older musicians as mentors to the fledgling group that they nurtured:
‘Most of that cohort are not at all bureaucratic types, they don’t see themselves as being part of an administration that was deemed to be necessary to drive the music, because the music had an organic life of its own, that fed all of us. When you consider, that I could be gone for twenty years, and come back and still be able to ‘connect’ to the same group of people. We can still connect to the elderly druids, if you like, who inspired us when we were kids. Sit down like we did last night with Peadar O’Loughlin. That sense of connectedness is still very much part of our lives, thirty years afterwards. That’s the ultimate work of any curriculum, because all you are doing is returning to your own pedagogical source, it’s a great experience’ (Personal Interview Ó hAllmhuráin July 2008).

In her research on music related tourism in Liverpool, Sarah Cohen found that music tourism had been welcomed as a ‘means of preserving local music traditions, promoting local identity and pride and contributing to local economies’ (2007, p.179).

From the perspective of Comhaltas, the fleadh was a means of preserving local traditions as well as generating new ones, and it certainly promoted local identity and pride, while also contributing to the local economy. The number of fleadhanna held in the town during the 1970s played a major part in Irish traditional music becoming a fixture in the town. There was no expectation or concentrated effort made to effect this, or to change the perception of traditional music in the town per se. It was something that happened progressively over time. One implication of creating this festive culture in Ennis through the Fleadh Nua was that visiting musicians forged connections there which in turn triggered a regular pathway to the town.\(^{53}\) Over time, particularly because of the nature of the Fleadh Nua, which incorporated a significant number of free public events, ‘the fleadh’ created meaning for people who would arguably be unlikely to experience traditional music otherwise. Obviously the town benefitted enormously financially so welcomed it, in spite of the inconvenience for

\(^{53}\) In addition, in 1994 the Ennis Trad Festival was initiated by a group of Ennis traditional musicians who were unaffiliated with Comhaltas. This is held in November each year and involves concerts, céilís, music sessions in the majority of pubs, a trad disco, a novel event, and it is attended by musicians from Ireland and overseas. The céilí band competition is the only competitive event at this festival and substantial money prizes are awarded, illustrating a pragmatic approach by the organisers.
traffic, overcrowding, and possible public disorder. This was alleviated by engaging with local authorities e.g. Ennis Town Council and the Gardai were contacted when parking restrictions needed to be applied to ensure the smooth running of open air events, such as parades and concerts. For some people, Irish traditional music has aesthetic value, and for others, it represents potential to commercially benefit the local economy. Nonetheless, the Fleadhanna of the ‘70s generated a new audience in the town, and as a result traditional music became a facet of urban culture there.

In this thesis, I have nuanced the story of Ennis as a perceived historical bastion of tradition where Irish traditional music was perceived as being practiced naturally and consistently for a long time. I traced back and revealed the material reality of its embedding and growth in the town, and presented the processes which led to the transformation of the town in the space of a few decades. In particular, the impression created in the 1970s allowed people to believe that Irish traditional music had longevity in the town, so fulsome was its tradition at that point – something that owed its success to the partnership between Comhaltas and the VEC. Moreover, I have revealed that the tradition in Ennis was mediated through people, as they operated within and outside the cultural organisation Comhaltas, the VEC a state educational institution, and Shannon Development, a state institution focussed on industry and tourism. Each agent operated in a dynamic and fluid way through a grassroots movement, and consequently the Ennis that values Irish traditional music emerged.

As I complete this thesis, Fleadh Nua 2013 is being launched for the fortieth time in Ennis. While the programme is much broader, involving more events held
over a week as opposed to a weekend, the format is largely the same. The programme is in booklet form and is also available on line http://fleadhnuai.com/. In conclusion, there are three elements I feel need highlighting. First, not only has people’s experience of traditional music in Ennis been mediated through Comhaltas, but a new celebration of Ennis has been created, the town has become a place of festive culture, in May through the Fleadh Nua and in November through the Ennis Trad Festival. Second, along with engaging in actual practice, Comhaltas has erected a permanent monument, a working space for musical practice in Cois na hAbhna, where classes, concerts, céilithe and other events are held, a building which in effect has changed the topography of Ennis. Third, I ponder what the pioneers would think of Ennis now, considering that in the 1950s Irish traditional music was not popular. I imagine that it would have been beyond their wildest dreams; for Seán Reid as he facilitated musicians in the county to meet and have music sessions, or when the early Comhaltas sessions were held in Martin and Bridie Byrnes house, or when Jack Mulkere, began teaching in Ennis in 1961 at the Ennis Tech. As one of the principal Fleadh Nua 2013 events takes place, ‘A Gathering Celebration’, a concert honouring Brendan Mulkere, I am mindful of the pioneering spirit which he inherited from his father Jack, referred to in chapter four. Brendan is a musician who has played a major role in the transmission and development of Irish traditional music in London since the late 1960s. In this concert many of his pupils past and present will share the stage with him, and in a way, it will be a kind of reverberation of the work of his

54 According to Micheál Ó Riabhaigh, Cathaoirleach (Fleadh Chairman) there were no Scoraíocht competitions since 2010 and neither was there an Aos Óg concert in 2013 (Personal Communication May 2013).

55 The Gathering is a tourism-led initiative in Ireland, aimed at mobilising the Irish diaspora to return to Ireland during 2013, to be part of specially organised local events. It is a government supported initiative, driven primarily by Fáilte Ireland, the National Tourism Development Authority, and Tourism Ireland. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Gathering_Ireland_2013 Accessed on 18/5/2013 at 1pm.
father Jack. There is then, an unbroken lineage at play in Ennis. It is just a more recent one than some might suppose.

The cycle of musicians which began with those from outside moving into the town, and which continued with Ennis musicians moving out, is maintained by a constant flow of musicians in and out. The impact of the fleadh on the local musicians has been acknowledged by Comhaltas itself. In a recent bid by Ennis to hold Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2014 (All-Ireland Fleadh), reference was made to this:

‘The impact of this seminal event on the prevailing traditional music landscape was profound. It inspired a whole generation of artistes who continue to be at the forefront of the transmission of our Cultural Heritage including Kieran Hanrahan, Paul Roche, Eamonn and Geraldine Cotter, Vincent McMahon, Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, John and Séamus McMahon, Carol Talty, James Cullinan, and Mary and Josephine Nugent’ (http://www.thefleadhdowninennis.com/index.php/tradition accessed on 8/5/2013 at 12.07pm).

Fig.6.18 Pupils of Coláiste Chríost Rí, Cloughleigh performing at the Square during Fleadh Nua 2013. In their midst accordion player Michael Butler and Frank Custy who have been referred to throughout this thesis. Courtesy of Shona McMillan.
The pioneers featured in this thesis are not present to enjoy what is arguably the fruit of their labour – traditional Irish music being taught and learned, incorporated and practiced, in the school curriculum. There has always been movement in and out of Ennis – as time progresses, as evidenced in fig 6.18, new cultures and generations enjoy their contact with the practice. That, of course, is a story for another day.


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APPENDIX A

Secretary’s Annual Report, p. 1. - SRF37 D57

(Courtesy of Na Píobairí Uilleann)
APPENDIX B

Register of attendance at the inaugural meeting of Comhaltas, Ennis, 1/4/1954

SRF37 D2 (Courtesy of Na Piobairí Uilleann)
APPENDIX C

Agenda for Comhaltas Clare County Board Meeting 12/7/1958 -SRF37 D86.

(Courtesy of Na Píobairí Uilleann)

COILEAN COORDINÉ IOMAIR C. C. E.
Gort Road,
Ennis.
12th July, 1958.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

A Chlarch.

A general meeting of the Co. Board will be held at the Temperance Hall, Tulla on Tuesday the 22nd inst. starting at 9.00 p.m.

AGENDA:

1. Minute.
2. Chairman’s and Secretary’s report re Annual Convention.
3. Final arrangements re Co. Fleadh.

May be seen the agenda has been curtailed to leave the greatest possible time for music so don’t forget your instruments.

I wish to take this opportunity to remind the secretaries of those branches that may not yet have affiliated this year that they should do so without delay and send the affiliation fee – 6/- per member, to Mr. Michael Connolly, Drumteeboy, Kilmovee and send me the names of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary for 1958/59.

I know that for a variety of reasons some branches find it hard to keep going and feel that they cannot do much work while. I wish to assure these branches that they are much more important than they realize and the mere fact of their moral support means a great deal to the movement. Even if they only get a few times in the course of a year, played a few times and had a talk or made suggestions in writing for the consideration of the Co. Board they would have more than justified themselves. I am sure that some branches are doing magnificent work by way of teaching young musicians, preserving instruments for them, running music concerts, etc., but all branches, big, small, active or not-so-active are needed as the fight to save our native music and song is not yet won by any means.

MANUSCRIPT MUSIC.

I intend to write out tunes from my manuscript collection and have them duplicated on foolscap sheets exactly the same as this page. I will issue them to the branch secretaries from time to time, one or two sheets at a time according as I get them done and will make a nominal charge (payable to the Co. Treasurer) to cover cost of paper, postage and duplicating. If you are interested, please let your branch Secretary know so that he can let me know how many copies his branch will take.

FEIDH LEOR TIORRADH ABHAINN.

The above Fleadh is taking place at Cahirc, Co. Tipperary (S.R.) on Saturday and Sunday, 19th and 20th July and should be supported by any Clare musicians who can conveniently do so.

Is mise, le mo leas or,
S. REID.
Rumé.

P.S. Please let me know if you want a copy of the Constitution.

343
APPENDIX D

Press Release issued by Clare County Board of Comhaltas -SRF38 D120

(Courtesy of Na Piobairí Uilleann)

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Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is a National, Cultural, Voluntary Organisation; having as it's chief task the promotion of Irish Traditional Music. One of it's principal aims is the provision of facilities for teaching Traditional Music to our Youth. In furtherance of these aims, we have striving for many years to have Traditional Music Classes established at Centres within this County, where our local Branches, or other interested Groups have indicated a demand for such Classes. With the active encouragement of the First Music Class was held in the 1961-62 Season, at the Ennis Technical School. At the conclusion of last year's Season, the number of Classes, held at various Centres, had increased to seven. However, due to financial restrictions imposed upon the V.E.C. by the Dept. of Education, the present position is that all Traditional Music Classes in the County have been almost down, with the exception of the Ennis Technical School Class, which, it appears, will operate under a restricted time allowance.

We are keenly aware of the anger & frustration of the many Parents who had expended considerable sums of money in the purchase of Musical Instruments, only to find that, due to the strikes of a bureaucratic pen, they may now have to store these Instruments safely. We are also aware of the disappointment felt by the Students, who have been so hardly dealt with by the Dept. of Education, in regard to the Cultural aspect of their education. Well over 200 Students attended the Traditional Music Classes last Season, with an average of over 40 Students per Class. The genuine interest taken in the Classes, by Parents and Students alike, is beyond question, and is in fact, a source of pride & strength to us, who labour voluntarily to promote Irish Traditional Music. Membership of An Comhdháil or participation in Fleadh Cheoil, is not a condition of enrolment in our Music Classes; all who are interested in learning Irish Traditional Music and Dancing are welcome.

The was, even here in Co. Clare, long noted for it's wealth of Tradition, with the Traditional Musician being到处 among all walks of life, the Kitchen, the Street, the pub and the Church, where he was generally treated as a second class citizen by the self-appointed bosses, who easily strove to uproot all things Gaelic & Traditional. However, to the Honour & Glory of the Banagher County, he proved indefatigable, and proved to possess a spirit which was irreconcilable. There is every indication that the Youthful Traditional Musician of today will not be put-off by lip service, or be content with second class treatment in regard to the Cultural aspects of his education. As matters stand, these aspects of the education of our Youth are neglected, in the main, to ones or twice weekly night-class which in many cases are held on cold, badly-lit, poorly-handed, and generally neglected Halls. It is poor consolation for such enthusiastic Youthful Groups within the County, to have it pointed out to them by our Officers, that due to the hard & ruthless restrictions imposed upon the V.E.C. by the Dept. of Education, we are not in a position to facilitate in the provision of a Music & Dancing Class.

We are firmly on the side of Irish Youth who see music to become good Europeans, by learning to become better Irish Men & Women first. In fact we see no good reason why Irish Traditional Music & Dancing should not be integral of the formal education of our young citizen. To the ordinary citizen, there seems no limit to the funds available from Hard Earned Pounds and its Satellite Organisations for the provision of Bedrooms with baths, and superlative entertainment, etc., whereas, the Dept. of Education is seen by the man-in-the-stratt as giving lip service to the ideal of 'self education of the whole Person'. That mere lip service it proves to be, is shown by the fact that in wishing it's economy way, the Dept. cut down our Music Classes, whilst bed & baths continue to provide both the Uniformed and Carnivals alike. If, and only if, we are not a part of the Dept. be taken as a yardstick to measure how far the Nation has strayed from the path envisaged by An Phoblacht, it's Free & noble but Gaelic as well, we greatly fear it would measure many a mile.

In the name of all who hold our Culture and it's Traditions sacred, we protest against this latest injustice to our Youth, who are being denied, under the cloak of economy, of any opportunity to learn Irish Traditional Music & Dancing. We call on all men and women alike to support our Demand that Traditional Music Classes be restored immediately by the Dept. without restriction as to time or duration, a Permanent Feature of the Vocational Education System in this County, the Cradle of Traditional Music, the last Bulwark against the Forces of Pagan Culture. Both Be or on Dec-embair.
APPENDIX E

Notice of Comhaltas Meeting concerning music classes -SRF38 D51

(Courtesy of Na Piobairí Uilleann)

A Chúrsa,
At their Meeting held on the 5th inst., the Co. Board decided to
form a Sub-Committee to study the problems involved in the proposed extension of the present Technical Schools Evening Classes to other Tech. Schools, &/or Halls; and in the formation of such Classes in National Schools (during the normal School hours), with the co-operation of the N.S. Teachers.

At present, Traditional Music Classes are held at Teampall & Kilfenora Halls; also at Miltoom & Ennis Tech. Schools. These classes are being conducted by Messrs F. O'Flaherty; J. C. Talty; & B. MacMahan; nominees of the Co. Board who have been appointed Part-time Teachers by The W.E.C.C. P. J. Crotty has been recommended by the Co. Board for such an appointment at the Kilrush Technical School, and he has been requested to submit a report on the matter.

Throughout the County, there are many N.S. Teachers conducting (School Band) classes during & after normal School hours; it is proposed to integrate those classes into our Traditional Music Class system, by enlisting the help of the Teachers, and by doing all we can to help them in return.

You will please note that your name is included in the Membership of the above Sub-Committee; and you are invited to take an active part in the good work involved. This Sub-Committee will submit a report to An Rúnai, setting out the problems, and recommending a Plan of Campaign designed so as to have the most suitable system in operation before the Schools re-open next Sept.

Your attendance would be appreciated at a meeting of the above Sub-committee at the Queen's Hotel, Ennis, at 8.45 p.m., on SATURDAY, 24th May. Should you be unable to attend, please submit any suggestions you may have, together with the Names & Addresses of N.S. Teachers whom you think are interested in this project.

RATH DE AR BHR SHARE RINNE.

[Signature]  7/5/69.

[Handwritten Notes]
APPENDIX F (a)

Register of Pupils for Ennis Music Classes.

(Courtesy of Kerry Barrett)
APPENDIX (b)

Register of Pupils Continued.
APPENDIX G

Claim form

Courtesy Kerry Barrett

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</table>

Carried Forward 41

Total No. of hours of instruction 42

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the above particulars are true abstracts from the Registers kept by me for the dates mentioned.

Signed:
Instructor in Lead Irish Dance

Countersigned
Date

(FOR OFFICE USE ONLY)

Total No. of hours of instruction given
Rate per hour
Total Remuneration due
APPENDIX H

Musicians and others interviewed and referenced.

Tom Barrett (1923-2002) was fiddle player and music teacher, originally from Listowel in County Kerry. He moved to Ennis as an Army Sergeant in 1970 having spent many years in Clonmel, County Tipperary. He taught music for many years in Ennis.

Niall Behan (1933-2009) born in Dundalk, was employed as Entertainments Manager for Shannon Development. He lived for many years in the Ennis area during which time he was involved in producing many stage shows involving Irish traditional music. He was the principal producer of the seisiún shows for the Rent an Irish Cottage Scheme in the Clare/ Limerick area.

John Boyd (1950) is a guitar and banjo player, traditional sign writer and calligrapher, from Ennis, and originally from Liverpool. He lived for many years in London, where he was a pupil of Brendan Mulkere.

Michael Butler (1949) an accordion player from Ennis, has performed with the Kilfenora Céilí Band, Liverpool Céilí Band and Ceoltóirí na Mainistreach. He is a Former Director of the Ennis Trad Festival. He also taught accordion for many years in the Ennis area and was an adjudicator at fleadhanna cheoil for many years.

Martin Connolly (1951) an accordion player and music teacher from Ennis, is originally from Killaloe, twenty miles south east of Ennis. He has also been manufacturing handmade accordions since the mid 1990s.

[www.kincoraaccordions.com](http://www.kincoraaccordions.com) Séamus is his brother.
Séamus Connolly (1944) is a fiddle player originally from Killaloe, now living in Boston, where he is Boston College's Sullivan Artist-in-Residence. He is the founder and director of the Gaelic Roots Music, Song, Dance, Workshop and Lecture Series. He has earned numerous awards and honours including the All Ireland fiddle competition for an unprecedented ten times.

Eamonn Cotter (1959) a flute player, teacher and manufacturer, originally from Ennis, he now lives in nearby village of Kilmaley. He has recorded two solo albums, *Traditional Music from County Clare* and the *Knotted Chord*. He is a long term member of the group Shaskeen.

Mick Coyne (1956) who plays uilleann pipes and tin whistle, is originally from Liverpool and a member of the Liverpool Céilí Band. He is a member of Na Píobairí Uilleann, the organisation which is dedicated to the promotion of the uilleann pipes. He has toured widely and recorded a number of albums. He has lived in Ennis since the early 1980s.

PJ Curtis (1944) born in Kilnaboy in County Clare, he is an award winning broadcaster, record producer, author and musicologist. He has worked for many years as a record producer, producing in excess of 54 albums including a number for the Ennis group Stockton’s Wing. He travelled extensively and returned to Ireland in 1974. In 2005 the National University of Ireland awarded him an Honorary Master of Arts Degree. The citation read: ‘For outstanding work and achievements since the 1970s as Broadcaster, Record Producer, Author and Music Historian.’

Frank Custy (1939) is from Toonagh in County Clare. He plays banjo and fiddle and as a teacher has inspired generations of musicians including his own family, those whom he taught as a school teacher and through classes and music sessions which he
organised. Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, Siobháin Peoples, Sharon Shannon and James Cullinan are among the thousands who have benefitted from his teaching.

**Ernest DeRegge** (1901-1958) was a Belgian born organist, choirmaster, composer, arranger and music teacher who moved to Ennis in 1923 following an appointment by Bishop Fogarty. He composed and arranged works for choir, piano, organ and motets for which he won many awards. He was also an antique dealer and it was during an auction in Carmody’s Hotel in Ennis in 1958 when the floor collapsed that he lost his life with seven others.

**Kieran Hanrahan** (1957) is a banjo, whistle and harmonica player originally from Ennis and now living in Dublin. He was a member of the groups Inchiquin, Stockton’s Wing and the Templehouse Céilí Band. He is a presenter on the RTÉ Irish traditional music programme Céilí House and is also a teacher in the Irish Music Studies programme in Dublin Institute of Technology.

**Martin Hayes** (1962) is a world renowned fiddle player from Feakle in East County Clare, son of P Joe Hayes (1921-2001) who was fiddle player and leader of the Tulla Céilí Band. He has won many awards including the prestigious Gradam Ceoil, Musician of the Year award in 2008. He has recorded many solo albums and collaborated and recorded with many musicians most notably with guitarist Dennis Cahill.

**Tommy Hayes** (1953) is a renowned percussionist. He has recorded and toured widely including with the group Stockton’s Wing, of whom he was a member. He has also composed music for film and collaborated with the Limerick based Daghda Dance Company. In recent years he has worked as a music therapist.

**Fr. John Hogan** (1928) is a former pupil of Jack Mulkere’s in the 1940s. In his role as teacher in St. Flannan’s College in Ennis he established the successful St Flannan’s
Céilí Band. During his time as Administrator at St. Peter and Pauls Cathedral in Ennis he was particularly active in the Ennis Branch of Comhaltas and in the Comhaltas County Board.

**Pat Liddy** (1945) has been an activist in Comhaltas since the 1960s and an officer in many boards e.g. Ennis Branch, the County Board, the Fleadh Nua Committee, the Cois na hAbhna Committee. He was particularly involved on the development of new branches of Comhaltas in the county and played a very significant part in the completion of Cois na hAbhna.

**Séamus MacMathúna** (1939) is a flute player and singer originally from Cooraclare. He has lived in Dublin since his employment with Comhaltas as Timire Cheoil at its headquarters in Cultúrlann na hÉireann, where he was instrumental in setting up an archive. He produced a number of very significant recordings of musicians that he recorded.

**Johnny McCarthy** (1939) is an accordion player and teacher from Ennis. Until his retirement as Principal of Ballynacally National School, he taught and influenced many musicians. He has recorded a number of CDs and was a member of the Ennis Seisiún and Scoraíocht groups in the 1970s.

**Brendan McMahon** (1927-2007) was a flute player and manufacturer and music teacher, originally from Miltown Malbay. He lived in Ennis from the late 1960s following a number of years spent in London.

**Tony MacMahon** (1939) is an accordion player originally from Ennis, now living in Dublin. He has recorded widely and worked as a producer and presenter for RTÉ from the 1970s until his retirement. Other musicians in his family include his brothers Christy RIP and Brendan, his niece Mary McNamara (concertina) and nephew Andrew McNamara (accordion).
Vincent McMahon (1957) is a fiddle player and teacher from Ennis, born in St Michael’s Villas, an area that had a particularly strong concentration of young traditional musicians during the 1970s. He was a member of the St Flannan’s Céili Band in the early 1970s and the group Alltraighe. He performs regularly in music sessions and teaches fiddle at the Scoil Samhraidh Willie Clancy.

Frank ‘Karl’ McTigue (1917-2001) was a charismatic figure from Ennis, who played bodhrán, whistle and fiddle. He was a volunteer with the Old Folks Association and was particularly associated with the Lana Knit Wrenboys.

Jack Mulkere (1900-1982) a musician and pedagogue, originally from Kiltartan in County Galway, he moved to Crusheen in County Clare when he married singer Angela Fogarty. He had a distinguished career as a teacher throughout County Galway and in County Clare. His legacy as a teacher is one of the principal subjects of this thesis. He was also one of the founding members of the Aughrim Slopes Céili Band.

Brendan Mulkere (1947) son of Jack he moved to London in the late 1960s. He has taught traditional music in the Greater London area since then and many of his former pupils are well known recording artists. He is a Director of the Irish Music Programme in the Irish Cultural Centre in Hammersmith and is a fiddle player and a member of the Thatch Céilí Band.

Sonny Murray (1920-2009) originally from Kilmihil, he lived for a number of years in London before moving to Ennis. He was a well known concertina, whistle and fiddle player, who performed on many Comhaltas Tours in Ireland, the UK and the US. He was particularly known for encouraging young musicians.

Máire Ní Chaoimh (1959) born in Tralee, is a fiddle player, teacher and academic who has performed and taught throughout the world. She also worked for a number of
years as a presenter on Irish traditional music programmes on ClareFM and the national station RTÉ. She was director of Fleadh na gCuach in Kinvara for many years and in 2007 established the Joseph Browne Spring School of Traditional Music in memory of a former pupil.

Máire Ní Chathasaigh (1956) is a harper, singer and music teacher originally from Bandon in County Cork. She has performed at festivals throughout the world both as a solo artist and with guitarist Chris Newman and has produced many albums and publications. She was awarded the TG4 Gradam Cheoil Traditional Musician of the Year 2001.

Máire Ní Ghráda (1959) is a piper and whistle player from Ballincollig in County Cork, a former pupil of Micheál Ó Riabhaigh at the Cork Pipers Club. She has performed and taught widely throughout Ireland and abroad.

Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin (1955) is an anthropologist, historian, ethnomusicologist, author and traditional musician originally from Ennis. He has taught and performed throughout the world, both as a solo artist on pipes and concertina, as well as with others. He has held many academic positions including since 2009 the post of Johnson Chair in Quebec and Canadian Irish Studies, at Concordia University, Montreal.

Eileen O’Brien (1957) fiddle, piano player and author from Nenagh is daughter of the legendary composer and accordion player Paddy O’Brien (1922-1991) and granddaughter of musicians Dinny O’Brien and Jim Seery, one of the founding members of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. She has performed and taught throughout the world and is a teacher at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance in the University of Limerick

Conal Ó Gráda (1961) (brother of Máire) born in Ballincollig in County Cork is a flute player, teacher and author taught by Micheál Ó Riabhaigh at the Cork Pipers
Club. He has performed and taught throughout the world both as a solo artist and with other musicians including the group the Raw Bar Collective.

**Patrick O’Loughlin** (1939) is an accordion player from Kilnamona in County Clare and is a former pupil of Jack Mulkere’s in Ennis in 1961.

**Peadar O’Loughlin** (1929) fiddle, flute and uilleann piper from Kilmaley in County Clare, he has performed throughout the world both as a solo artist and with others. He has been a huge influence on many musicians. He has recorded many albums including in the 1960s, six tracks with County Galway fiddle player Aggie White. He was awarded the TG4 Gradam Saol in 2005.

**Brendan O’Regan** (1917-2008) born in Sixmilebridge in County Clare, he was a visionary and major developer of industry and tourism in the mid west region. He was instrumental in the setting up of Shannon Free Airport Development Company, the College of Catering in Shanon, and the first ever duty-free shop at Shannon. He was also a promoter of Peace through Cooperation North and the Peace Institute in the University of Limerick. He won many prestigious awards including an Honorary Doctorate of Laws Degree from the University of Limerick.

**Seán Reid** (1907-1978) originally from County Donegal, he moved to Ennis in 1937 when he was appointed as an engineer by Clare County Council. He was an uilleann piper, fiddle and piano player, and a member of the Tulla Céilí Band. He was a key figure in the transmission of traditional music in County Clare, particularly prior to the formation of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann there. He was involved in its formation and also of Na Piobairí Uilleann.

**Gus Tierney** (1922-2004) born in Kilfenora, was a fiddle player with the Kilfenora Céilí Band. He won many awards both as soloist and as a member of duets and the
band. He taught traditional music in Ennis and Kilfenora and was a band trainer for the Naomh Eoin, Naomh Fachtna and St. Flannan’s Céili Bands.