YOUNG COMPOSERS IN IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC C. 2004 – 2016:
COMPOSITIONS, PROCESS, AND TRADITION

A dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Arts
by Tadhg Donncha Tomás Ó Meachair

Supervisor: Dr. Aileen Dillane
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Dedication

Do mo thuistí,

Neasa agus Timmy.
Abstract

This dissertation is an examination of the compositional styles and imperatives of young composers locating within the Irish music tradition from the years c.2004 – 2016. Over the course of this paper, four case studies investigate two sample compositions each by four identified composers of Irish traditional music, aged between 14 and 28 during this time period. Analysis of these compositions as well as in-depth interviews with the selected composers inform the bulk of the findings of this thesis. Interviews touch on the composers’ respective motivations, approaches, and attitudes towards composing. Personal satisfaction, commerciality, and education each emerge as motivational factors to varying degrees for the young composer in undertaking composition. In terms of approach, the role of harmony in composition emerges as a particularly important aspect of the process for these composers. Following on from this, the study discusses issues surrounding the composers’ own understanding of what it is that comprises ‘the composition’. Varying attitudes are uncovered whereby predetermined harmonic accompaniments can be seen as an equal constituent part of the composition at times, while at other stages remain secondary to the melody. Composers’ adherence to certain traditional expectations, especially in terms of the overall structure of compositions, is a key trend uncovered in this study. While innovations in terms of rhythmic patterns and time signatures emerge that stray beyond those commonly found within the traditional repertoire, the standard structure of the tunes, or ‘the round’ (Ó Súilleabháin 1990), is retained with little exception. In addition to this, the impact that choice of instrumentation has on the compositional process becomes evident over the course of this dissertation. At times, an instrument’s limitations and/or possibilities can impact an idiomatic compositional process, while in other instances, these can be deliberately ignored in the quest to compose a tune. In all, the young composer emerges as an agent of tradition and innovation in his or her own quest to create new repertoire.
Notes on Transcription

Transcriptions in this study are used as a visual portrayal, in staff notation format, of an agreed ‘basic’ representation of a composition. This representation is of a single iteration of each (typically eight-bar) part of the tune, which, in performance, is subsequently subjected to ornamentation and variation in line with traditional performative norms. These representations are agreed upon after consultation with each composer. Precedence in regard of this format of transcription is found in historic (Petrie 1855), and contemporary (Carroll 2010) collections of Irish traditional music as well as in academic studies (Harvey 2010) dealing with composition. Further to this, transcriptions are also used to emphasise certain features or aspects of compositions. In order to aid the illustration of these features, coloured arrows and boxes are used to highlight the relevant notes or segments of a tune.

Transcriptions have been compiled using the MuseScore 2 program, with the exception of figures 3.2, 3.3, and 5.15. Figure 3.2 is an image of the tune ‘Tripletocity’ as supplied by the composer Martin Tourish. Figure 3.3 is an image of the tune ‘619’ as supplied by the composer James Harvey. Figure 5.15 is an image from June McCormack’s *Fliúit: Irish Flute Tutorial* (2006) book. These are included with permission from the authors.
Acknowledgements

I dtosach báire, ba mhaith liom buíochas ó chroí a ghabháil le mo theaghlach. Gan mo thuistí, ní bhéinn tar éis tabhairt faoin dtionscamh seo in aon chor. Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht an gcúnamh agus an tacaíocht ar fad. Buíochas mór chomh maith le Déirdre beag agus Déirdre mór, mo dheirfiúr agus m’aintín, a thug cabhair dom i gcónaí. Huge thanks also must go to my fiancée, Joanna, for her constant support and assistance.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This study focuses on young composers of Irish traditional music, those between the ages of 14 and 28 actively creating and circulating tunes. Approaches to composition, motivations for composition, and attitudes towards the role of the composer figure in Irish traditional music are investigated over the course of the following chapters, while analysis of compositions by a selection of young composers forms the core of the work. At the juncture of Irish music studies and ethnomusicology, this study aims to shed light on the growing phenomenon of the young composer figure in Irish traditional music.

The domain of Irish traditional music studies has seen a dramatic shift in the last number of years in how the role of the composer is perceived. While key writers from the mid to late 20th century, such as Breathnach (1971), Ó Canáin (1993), and Carson (1986) spoke of a composition’s journey towards acceptance by the community and its conformation to perceived requirements, little notice was taken of the compositional process outside of this “transformation from composed piece to community property” pointed out by ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman (1988, p.9), or indeed, of the composer figure. Therefore, in Irish music studies literature, it seems that little attention is paid to the motivations that a performer might have to compose or, indeed, to the process of composition itself. More recently, Dowling (2011) acknowledges social and commercial considerations acting as the catalyst for the creation of a tune\(^1\), while Dillane (2013), Harvey (2010), and Holohan (1995) are all examples of a growing interest in the

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\(^1\) The term ‘tune’ in Irish traditional music circles refers to an instrumental piece of music, as distinct from a ‘song’ that has vocals/lyrics. See Ó Súilleabháin (1990) and Cowdery (1990) for further discussion on terminologies used in describing Irish traditional music. See Vallely (2011) for further explanation of the commonly occurring tune types in the Irish music tradition.
composer figure in academia. Allied to this, the emergence of an award category - *Gradam an Chumadóra*\(^2\) - at the prestigious TG4\(^3\) *Gradam Ceoil* music awards, illustrates a growing awareness and recognition in recent times of both the individual composer themselves as well as their motivations and functions within this ‘community’.

Despite this more recently expressed interest in composers of Irish traditional dance music more generally, very little attention has been given to young composers in the tradition. The advent of tune composition competitions and classes at youth-centred Irish traditional music summer camps (e.g. *Meitheal, Ceol Lab*), as well as the emergence of young new commercial bands performing self-composed traditional music (e.g. ‘Beoga’, ‘Moxie’), points to a growing trend of youth composition, and consequently, the emergence of an important individual figure; the young composer.

Given the oral/aural nature of the Irish music tradition, composers, inherently, are also performers, however a correlation between any perceived standard of one’s performance and the standard of one’s composition should not be inferred. Furthermore, the utilisation of the term ‘performer’ here is not without its complications. Generally speaking, in vernacular usage, the ‘performance’ of music (and other associated forms of the term) implies a concert performance or similar setting for the music. The term more generally used is ‘playing’. This encompasses ‘playing’ for one’s own enjoyment, with or without other musicians, regardless of an audience, as well as performing in a concert setting. For the purposes of this study, however, where a concert performance is implied, it shall be made explicitly clear, and the term ‘performance’ shall retain its more general meaning of carrying out the task of, in this instance, making music.

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\(^2\) Composer’s Award.
\(^3\) The Irish language TV station.
Similarly, various terminologies appear throughout this study, especially during the course of informal interviews, which may not be immediately evident as to their meaning within the tradition. For example, there is a range of terms that can be used almost interchangeably which, in essence, mean, ‘to compose’ or ‘to come up with’ a tune. However, one noteworthy term is, simply, ‘to write’ a tune. It is of note because it does not necessarily refer to physically writing anything down on a piece of paper, but can mean to merely compose and retain through memory and repetition.

Another important and re-occurring term is ‘the tradition’. It is a term that carries with it complex layers of functional, musical, and political connotations in the sphere of Irish traditional music. On the one hand, it can act as an overarching term to describe the various styles of folk music outlined by Breathnach (1971), Ó Canainn (1993), and Carson (1986). However, beyond that, the adjective ‘traditional’ can be utilised within the broader Irish music community as a barometer to compare the stylistic musical features of a given performance, performer, melody, arrangement, etc., to a sometimes intangible, ‘authentic’ version. Consequently, within more conservative circles, this can extend to describing the legitimacy of a performance, performer, etc. The weight which the term carries has led certain scholars to capitalise the first letter of the word ‘tradition’, however for the purposes of this thesis I shall retain the lower case ’t’ as a matter of personal preference, without in any way intending to diminish the importance of the term.

While the young composer figure in Irish traditional music is the primary focus of this study, it is important, at this point, to establish certain parameters surrounding this thesis. The following section lays out the parameters of this research in an effort to contextualise this study within the broader expanse of Irish traditional music.
1.1 Parameters of the Research

The primary subsection of Irish folk music that is the focus of this study is the instrumental dance music tradition of Ireland. Historically, such music has acted primarily as an accompaniment to various folk dance styles, but has since developed to a point where it functions as a listening music, as well as existing for the purposes of dancing to (Vallely 2011, p.vii). Aside from this, the overlap between the dance tune tradition and the harp music of Carolan⁴ and other harpers also needs to be taken into account when observed through a modern-day prism, despite contentions from older, established scholars such as Breandán Breathnach that their compositions “by definition…cannot be regarded as folk music” (1971, p.34). These contentions arguably no longer carry the same weight or represent the lived reality of the music today. Similarly, while certain composers have utilised elements of Irish traditional music forms within more orchestrally based Western art music-style compositions⁵, this is not the main focus of this thesis. However, the increasing role of homophony in terms of harmonic arrangement and accompaniment of dance tunes makes it increasingly difficult to delineate a boundary between these musical processes. This increasing role of harmony, particularly as it pertains to young composers’ tune composition, is a recurring theme throughout the following chapters and perhaps reflects Bohlman’s observation of folk music traditions undergoing a process of “classicization” (1988, p.134).

Throughout the course of this thesis, references to ‘young composers’ imply those between the ages of 14 and 28 at the time of writing, who are actively composing and circulating tunes in the style of Irish traditional dance music. This research explores the approaches utilised by four young composers in inventing their compositions, their

⁵ E.g. The Riverdance Irish dance show (1994). See page 13 for further discussion.
motivations for undertaking a compositional process, as well as taking a musicological perspective on the resultant product or ‘sound object’ (Quigley 2010) in comparing their compositions with the broader Irish traditional music canon. Central to this is also the exploration of the composer’s own sense of their compositions with regard to the tradition, and of influences both from within and outside of the tradition which impact their innovational tendencies during composition.

Various motivational forces, creative processes, and the impact of numerous structural aspects of Irish traditional music emerge as factors in young composers’ work as this research project unfolds. The following thesis investigates motives for composition ranging from the impact of competitions on tune composition, to composing as a means of learning musical techniques, while also exploring the role, if any, which commercial performance contexts play in enticing the young composer to undertake the composition of a tune. Other performance contexts are also outlined in which composition is incentivised, while self-expression emerges as a core factor in the young composer deciding to compose.

In terms of the processes utilised by young composers in creating their tunes, various methods emerge among the key informants. Central to these compositional processes are two features in particular. Ethnomusicologist Colin Quigley’s suggested concept, ‘melodizing’, a particular improvisational process which shall be discussed in detail later in this chapter, is a phenomenon which rears its head again and again, while the previously alluded to homophonisation of Irish traditional music can play a significant role in sketching an architectural outline for the young composers’ compositional process,

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6 This notion of “tension between music and the marketplace” is referenced in Chris Smith’s ‘Reclaiming the Commons’ (2006, p.12) and is addressed in further detail in chapter 6.
although the young composer is not limited to a singular approach to composition, as is demonstrated in subsequent chapters\footnote{From this point forward, I shall refer to the concept as ‘melodising’. Expanded upon further on page 26, ‘melodising’ is an academic term and would tend not to be used by musicians. Various terminologies arise throughout fieldwork interviews that denote an improvisatory process while retaining the goal of the creation of an eventual, definable composition. One such example is, ‘to faff around’.

\footnote{The term ‘bar’ is used both by scholars and by musicians in this study, and is synonymous with the term ‘measure’ which is more commonly used in the U.S.}

\footnote{Again, due to the composer being performer as well, it follows that this idiomatic composition will occur ‘on’ a musical instrument, almost without exception.}.

Certain structural aspects of Irish traditional music are also discussed throughout this research as they pertain to highlighted compositions. The modality of tunes, their time signatures, their form, their structure in terms of number of bars\footnote{The term ‘bar’ is used both by scholars and by musicians in this study, and is synonymous with the term ‘measure’ which is more commonly used in the U.S.}, and the degree of internal repetition found in tunes are all analysed in examples of compositions by young composers in the following chapters. The impact (or non-impact) of the young composer’s physical interaction with his or her own musical instrument\footnote{Again, due to the composer being performer as well, it follows that this idiomatic composition will occur ‘on’ a musical instrument, almost without exception.} upon the compositional process is also examined, while the trope of ‘communal re-creation’ as a feature of vernacular music (see Breathnach 1971; Bohlman 1988; Ó Canainn 1993) is discussed and, to a certain degree, observed in later chapters. However, before engaging with such detailed analysis, it is important, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the subject at hand, to outline the broader context for the processes of composition featured in this study.

\section*{1.2 Contextualisation}

Innovation, at various stages in the history of Irish traditional music, and in particular since the second half of the twentieth century, has been a contentious yet extant feature of the discussion around Irish traditional music. Irish music studies scholar Robert
Harvey, in his Master’s dissertation on the compositions of John Brady\(^\text{10}\), explains that “a new movement of composition swept through traditional music in the 1960s which created a certain pride for musicians to create their own tunes” (2010, p.102). This ‘movement’ is indicative of shifts in the overall Irish traditional music landscape over the course of the latter half of the twentieth century, and highlights composition as a component in that. Revivalist movements, aesthetic developments in arrangement practices, and newly emerging outlets for performance place innovation to the fore in this discourse. An overview of these developments follows here with the aim of detailing some of the wider context within which a growing awareness of the role of the composer figure emerges in Irish traditional music circles. This contextualisation aims to further understanding of the development of the role of the composer, and consequently, as is particular to this research, of the young composer.

1.2.1 Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann

In addition to Bohlman’s aforementioned idea of classicisation, institutionalisation is another central response to cultural change commonly found in folk music traditions (Bohman 1988, p.134). Arguably the most influential example of such institutionalisation in Irish traditional music circles is the establishment of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ, often referred to as ‘Comhaltas’), an organisation founded in 1951 aiming to promote Irish traditional music and culture. Comhaltas established regional and national competition structures called ‘Fleadhanna Ceoil’, and at grassroots level organised music classes throughout the country as well as further afield. Local and international branches flourished while its ‘hierarchy’ retained and promoted a

\(^{10}\) A flute player from County Offaly in Ireland and a key composer figure in Irish traditional music.
conservative attitude towards the music among its constituency. This conservative, traditionalist mentality is still prominent within the organisation today, although differing opinions are present within its membership. As the anthropologist Adam Kaul points out, “to this day, opinions about CCÉ and the competitions can sometimes be bitter” (2013, p.51). Whilst on the one hand, Kaul cites Ó hAllmhuráin (1998, p.123), Curtis (1994, p.17) and Henry (1989, p.69) in outlining positive results of Comhaltas’s work, claiming that they “in many ways it helped promote Irish music to a wider audience and even saved it from possible extinction”, he also points to negatives and acknowledges attitudes among musicians which are dismissive of the organisation (2013, p.51). The following chapters include references to fieldwork interviews conducted with prominent Comhaltas figures, and many of the musicians quoted throughout this study have had some degree of interaction with Comhaltas structures at various stages of their musical lives.

One direct impact that Comhaltas has had on composition is in relation to aforementioned competition structures. Comhaltas-organised dance tune composition competitions, recently re-introduced in 2011, give a direct incentive for musicians to compose. Further to composition competitions, other competitions for solo performance on a given instrument or in larger ensembles also create a need for composition. Harvey refers to “incredibly complex…exhibition tunes” (2010, p.102) composed explicitly for the purpose of showing off a musician’s technical skill in competition: “Competitions, such as the Fleadh and the Oireachtas, led to a need for more difficult tunes to show off the virtuosity of the performer, and so musicians such as John Brady, Seán Ryan, Paddy O’Brien, Paddy Fahy, and others, composed music to fill this void” (Harvey 2010, p.102). This illustrates the effect which competition plays in the development of compositional processes in Irish traditional music. This is not restricted to the era in question here either,
and competition emerges over the course of the following chapters as a contributory factor for the undertaking of composition among young composers today.

1.2.2 The ‘Ballad Boom’

Although Comhaltas generally promotes a relatively conservative ethos with regard to Irish traditional music, its role in helping to conserve the music also played its part in facilitating a wider folk music revival in Ireland which subsequently gave rise to more contemporary innovations surrounding traditional music-making practices. The 1960s saw the emergence of “the Irish ballad group boom [….] An offshoot of the American urban folk revival which had preceded it by several years [,] there were also strong connections with the English Folk Revival which was spearheaded by Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd” (Moloney, 2011, p.42). In their adaptations of Irish folk songs, The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem “created a new approach to the music with a distinctive hybrid sound of lusty vocals accompanied by guitar and five-string banjo” (Moloney 2011, p.42). While ‘The Clancys’ spearheaded the revival of ballad singing groups, the popularity of certain other emergent groups such as ‘The Dubliners’, who interspersed ballads with music from the dance tune tradition, arguably brought this music into the realm of mainstream popularity associated with the revival.

This combination of dance tunes - music that was deemed to have been in need of conservation by Comhaltas just a decade previously - with popular ballads led to a certain cross-pollination of musical ideas. As Moloney points out, the guitar was deemed as “mandatory” in these ballad groups (2011, p.43). Subsequently, the group ‘Sweeney’s Men’ introduced the bouzouki, a Greek instrument, to the fold (Moloney 2011, p.43). These predominantly accompanying instruments, now coming into contact with dance tunes as well as songs, inevitably led to a trend where the generally unaccompanied
melodies of the dance tunes began to be accompanied by rhythmic, harmonic accompaniments on guitar and bouzouki. As Kaul explicitly states in reference to ‘sessions’ - informal settings for the playing of Irish traditional music - “the acoustic guitar came in to the sessions straight out of the Ballad Boom” (2013, p.60). This was a seminal change in the performance norms around Irish traditional music and the resultant normalisation of homophonic performances of the music is a major factor in the development of compositional processes among young composers today, as is made clear over the course of this study. Furthermore, this performance context provides an outlet for the performance of the dance tunes for a listening audience as opposed to a dancing audience. This aspect of the overall shift in performance practices “began to separate the dancing from the music” so much so that “music became an art form in its own right” (Kaul 2013, p.59).

1.2.3 Seán Ó Riada

This shift in performance norms for dance tunes is also mirrored in the work of collector, composer, and scholar, Seán Ó Riada. Drawing on his study of Western classical music and theory, Ó Riada arranged traditional music for the Ceoltóirí Chualainn ensemble in the 1960s. In the process, he “introduced an element of harmony” (Meek 2011, p.530) to the music, although in a different setting to the ballad groups mentioned previously. Ó Riada’s association with the Abbey Theatre11 and Western art music traditions (Meek 2011, p.530) gave a sense of ‘high art’ to these particular performances of Irish traditional music. However, it again highlights both the development of new performance outlets for the music, as well as a growing interaction between traditional dance tunes and harmony and accompaniment within the tradition.

11 A theatre found on Abbey Street, Dublin, Ireland.
As Kaul puts it, Ó Riada “introduced a fundamentally new idea into Irish music: that one could experiment with its form, its melodies, and its arrangement” (2013, p.54).

Ó Riada’s work also impacted upon the music in other ways. His utilisation of the bodhrán\(^\text{12}\) in *Ceoltóirí Chualainn* opened the door to bodhrán accompaniment to dance tunes. Ever since, the playing of this instrument has developed dramatically and the impact of percussive accompaniment of dance tunes is referenced in chapter 4. It is again a feature of a gradual move to arranged performances of Irish traditional music, featuring percussive and rhythmic accompaniments, which in turn impact upon the compositional processes of young composers, as will be demonstrated later.

One other impact upon the music, discussed in chapter 5, which can be traced back to Ó Riada’s influence is the crossover of the previously mentioned harp music tradition and the dance tune tradition. In his selection of repertoire for arrangement and performance, Ó Riada “included pieces from the corpus of the harper–composers” (Meek 2011, p.530). This emergence of musicians who were dance tune players now performing harp music in Ó Riada’s arrangements, to a certain extent normalised the crossover of repertoires for traditional musicians more broadly. During the course of this research it is argued that a furthering of this crossover becomes apparent, manifesting in certain compositional processes discussed in chapter 5.

### 1.2.4 Growing Recognition of Composers

Along with John Brady who was mentioned earlier, other composer figures began to emerge in the second half of the 20th century, and their exploits as composers gained fuller recognition as the century wore on. Brian Ryan, in the foreword to his collection of

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\(^{12}\) Irish frame drum which has emerged in recent times as a percussive accompaniment instrument in Irish traditional music circles. See Cunningham (2011) for further reading on its history as well as more recent developments in playing styles.
the compositions of Seán Ryan, a fiddle player and composer from County Tipperary, states that by the mid-1950s, Seán Ryan’s “reputation as a composer had spread” (1994, p.6). However, it is notable that it was not until the late 1980s that a collection of his tunes was published. Without discounting the notion that a written collection of compositions from an oral/aural tradition might not be, or have been, necessarily deemed an appropriate acknowledgement of his prowess as a composer, the stated goal of the collection is to celebrate Ryan’s accomplishments as a composer (Ryan 1994, p.6). I feel that this points to a gradual and growing awareness and recognition of the composer figure in Irish traditional music over the course of the latter half of the 20th century.

While recognising this wave of composition in the 1960s as a particular development in the perception of the composer figure, it is not to suggest that composition did not occur previous to, or indeed in the aftermath of, this period. Both in Ireland and in the Irish diaspora, musicians did compose and circulate tunes. Ed Reavy, a fiddler from County Cavan in Ireland who emigrated to Philadelphia in the United States, composed tunes from the 1930s onwards and his compositions are performed widely among traditional musicians (Moloney, 1995). A collection of his tunes was published much later in the century in 1995. This is, again, perhaps indicative of a heightening awareness of the composer figure. Liz Carroll, a fiddler of Irish descent from the Chicago area in the U.S., has composed an abundance of tunes from the 1960s onwards, beginning at nine years of age (Dillane 2013, p.11). The 2011 winner of the Gradam and Chumadóra composer’s award (discussed on page 16), Carroll illustrates a constant presence of the composer figure within Irish music circles over the course of the last century, even if widespread recognition is perhaps a growing phenomenon. Furthermore, Liz Carroll’s composing at such a young age points to the existence of the young composer figure, and
speak to the heart of this study. A collection of Carroll’s compositions entitled *Collected: Original Irish Tunes* was published in 2010.

1.2.5 University of Limerick

More recently, the musician, composer, and scholar Míchéal Ó Súilleabháin established the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance13 at the University of Limerick in 1994, which subsequently introduced both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Irish music and dance - the first of their kind (Vallely 2011, p.713). Having previously studied under Ó Riada at University College Cork, Ó Súilleabháin established the Academy with the aim of fostering the pursuit of both performative and academic study of Irish traditional music, as well as other courses of study. It has played a significant role in innovation and education in Irish traditional music circles. Courses in the Academy incorporate both traditional and more contemporary aspects of the tradition in its curricula, whereby study of Western art music theory and fusions with other genres of music are conducted alongside both historical and performative study of more traditional styles of playing. It must also be acknowledged that not only am I, myself, a graduate of the Academy, but many of the informants for this study have also studied there at some point. Therefore, it is important to recognise the role that the institution has played in the shaping of this research. However, it should also be noted that an even bigger - and often overlapping - majority of the informants for this research have participated in *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* structures throughout their musical lives. Some individual examples of the direct effects of these institutions on the compositional exploits of young composers arise over the course of the following chapters.

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13 Initially named The Irish World Music Centre, it changed its name as its remit broadened to include dance, festive arts, and other courses of study.
1.2.6 Riverdance

1994 also saw the phenomenon that is Riverdance take flight and bring Irish music and dance to a wider audience than ever before, almost overnight. This stage performance of Irish step dance draws hugely on the Irish dance competition scene whilst also incorporating elements from dance genres such as Flamenco and American tap-dance. Meanwhile, the musical accompaniment, composed by Bill Whelan, mixes traditional and orchestral instruments and sounds whilst drawing on outside influences such as rhythms and time signatures more closely associated with Eastern European music. The maiden performance for Riverdance was as an interval act for the international song contest, Eurovision. Subsequently, it was expanded into a ninety-minute show that went on to tour the world extensively (Foley 2011, p.578). As ethnochoreologist Catherine Foley puts it, it is “its particular combination of dance, music, sound, lighting and costume – all on a ‘big stage’ – which assisted in bringing Irish step dance to a level acceptable to popular culture” (2011, p.578). This played a huge role in bringing Irish music and dance to a global audience, whilst Whelan’s compositions introduced new rhythms, sounds, and ideas to the traditional music soundscape.

1.2.7 Crosbhealach an Cheoil

A key moment that sparked discussion on innovation and tradition was Ó Súilleabháin’s A River of Sound television series that was broadcast in 1995 on RTÉ¹⁴ and BBC¹⁵. The series presented a contemporary image of Irish traditional music by including examples of innovations such as fusions with other genres and the utilisation of

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¹⁴ Raidió Teilifís Éireann - Ireland’s national broadcaster.
¹⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation.
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instruments from other musical traditions. “Central to it was specially commissioned music by Ó Súilleabháin and Dónal Lunny, including ‘River of Sound’ with chamber orchestra, bodhrán, harp, keyboards, saxophone, harmonica, bouzouki, fiddle and kora (African harp)” (Vallely 2011, p.577). When an episode of the late night RTÉ talk show, The Late Late Show, was dedicated to A River of Sound, nationwide debate intensified as participants in the show expressed their opinions on the tradition and its portrayal in such a manner. One particularly vocal participant was the musician and scholar Tony McMahon. Subsequently, Crosbhealach an Cheoil was called to “debate the issues of ‘tradition’ and ‘change’ in the world of Irish traditional music” (Vallely et al. 1999). McMahon and Ó Súilleabháin were the two keynote speakers. The conference articulated the often-unspoken ideas and ideologies underpinning traditional Irish music, and generated the discourse in a space that was open to many. Interestingly, CCÉ did not participate in the Crosbhealach and Cheoil conference.

1.2.8 Other 1990s/2000s Developments

By the 1990s and into the following decades, commercial bands were emerging that, as part of their repertoire, performed self-composed tunes. ‘Flook’, established in the mid-90s, performed and recorded compositions by members Brian Finnegan and Sarah Allen, whilst the concertina player and academic Niall Vallely had his compositions performed by bands and performers like ‘Buille’, ‘Lúnasa’, Sharon Shannon, and Michael McGoldrick (Vallely 2011, p.729). Such trends, would in turn, strongly influence the composers examined in this study, as many of the key informants for this study pursue both performance and compositional outlets in a similar vein - through the establishment of their own commercial bands. This plays out over the course

16 The Crossroads Conference.
of the following chapters with particular references to the bands ‘Beoga’\textsuperscript{17}, ‘Goitse’\textsuperscript{18} and ‘Moxie’\textsuperscript{19}.

The 2000s saw the both the composer figure and composition receive much overt recognition as well. The \textit{Gradam Ceoil} awards, run by TG4, introduced an award for the composer of the year - \textit{Gradam an Chumadóra} - in 2001. This gives explicit recognition to composers of traditional tunes on a national platform and arguably bestows a level of esteem on the composer figure perhaps not widely afforded previously, at least in officialdom. In 2004, an Irish music residential summer school called \textit{Meitheal}\textsuperscript{20} was established. Composition was included as “one of the core classes” (2015, pers. comm.) as Ernestine Healy, one of the key figures in the establishment of the school, explains. The fact that this summer school is aimed primarily at 13- to 18-year-olds means that composition in this scenario is being encouraged in young musicians as a core aspect of Irish traditional music. The study of past composers, as well as the undertaking of the process of composing a tune, place composition to the fore in the mind of young musicians attending the school. Thus, following on from \textit{Gradam an Chumadóra}, a system of national recognition for the composer figure, a sense of recognition of the existence of the young composer also emerges in this decade.

\textsuperscript{17} ‘Beoga’ is an Irish traditional band based in County Antrim in the north of Ireland. For further reading see their website at www.beogamusic.com.

\textsuperscript{18} ‘Goitse’ is an Irish traditional band that emerged from the Irish World Academy in Co. Limerick, Ireland. For further reading see www.goitse.ie. Further discussion on the role of this band in McGeeney’s composition arises in chapter 3. It is a point of note that I am also a member of the band ‘Goitse’, and issues pertaining to this are discussed later in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{19} ‘Moxie’ is a band from County Sligo that incorporates elements of Irish traditional music along with other genres in its music. For further reading see www.moxiemuso.com.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Meitheal} is an Irish word that means a group of people who come together to do communal work. The summer school which bears its name was established in 2004 with a focus on composition, arrangement, and performance of Irish music for musicians aged 13 years and older.
1.2.9 Undertaking This Study

Over the course of the following chapters, one can observe the impacts that some of these events have had on individual instances of composition among young composers today. The influence of *Comhaltas’* competition structures on young composers, the effect of compositional pursuits within the BA in Irish Music and Dance on young composers, as well as the enduring impact of the dance competition and dance show scene, all emerge as factors in the composition of traditional dance tunes by young composers. However, it should also be stated that the topic of this research has been inextricably linked to my own path as an Irish traditional musician. Throughout the various aspects of my interaction with the tradition - as a performer, arranger, learner, student, composer, fan, listener, teacher, adjudicator, consumer, and researcher of the music - there has been an ever-present interest in composition.

As Irish traditional dance music is a music in which an emphasis is placed on improvisational elements - often referred to as ‘variations’ - during performance, there is a common overlap between the ‘in the moment’ employment of these improvised variations and the compositional process. As musician and scholar Tomás Ó Canainn explains: “the emphasis placed on variation in Irish dance music implies a certain compositional ability in good performers” (1993, p.91). This undeniable link between composition and performance has been a constant in my musical experience and this, coupled with an auto-ethnographic sense of my own compositional journey through my teens, into my college years, and into my later twenties, has led to the desire to undertake this study in investigating what it is that young composers are composing, why they are composing, and how they feel about their compositional experience more broadly. Interviews with young composers within the tradition play a central part in investigating these questions, however, before addressing these first-hand sources which are at the core
of this study, an overview of some of the key literature drawn upon during the course of this research is outlined.

### 1.3 Literature Review

This research is at the juncture of Irish music studies and ethnomusicology, and literature informing this study draws from these areas. While this study is focused on composition in Irish traditional music, an awareness of parallel processes in vernacular musics more generally is also necessary. It is in this regard where texts dealing with the study of ethnomusicology more broadly prove particularly useful - in outlining common patterns across vernacular musics, by providing explicit examples of composition from other traditions, and also by giving outside perspectives on Irish music specifically. Furthermore, this body of literature also informs approaches to fieldwork and aspects such as interviewing techniques.

In terms of much of the Irish music studies literature - especially in earlier writings - composition is often only briefly referenced. Cumulatively, however, these brief references can be used to illustrate some of the attitudes, whether historic or current, to composition within the tradition. Similarly, certain attitudes and values can be ascertained from prefaces and footnotes that can be found in collections of compositions by Irish traditional music composers. More musicologically focused analysis of melodies can also be aided by utilising standardised patterns of representation of compositions which are found in these collections. This point shall be addressed in further detail later in this section.
1.3.1 Irish Music Studies

My thesis draws from a number of different disciplinary and methodological perspectives, but I deliberately begin from within the domain of Irish (traditional) music studies to first engage with understanding the tradition and its associated practices and discourse. The term ‘traditional’ itself is understood to have different meanings for different people who operate as practitioners and academics within Irish music studies. Broadly speaking, traditional music is acknowledged “to denote the older dance music and song in Ireland” (Vallely 2011, p.687), however, “it is impossible to give a simple definition of the term [as] different people use it to mean different things” (ITMA 1991). For instance, the Irish Traditional Music Archive21 (ITMA) express the view that Irish traditional music is a “music which is conservative in tendency” and where “change only takes place slowly, and in accordance with generally accepted principles” (ITMA 1991). However, Niall Keegan, Associate Director and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the Irish World Academy in the University of Limerick, points to a diversity of views of the tradition. In an article dealing with the topic of ‘style’ in Irish traditional music, Keegan states that any set of parameters which he outlines with respect to style in the tradition “will exclude some sounds out of ignorance or a sense of traditionality as [he is] sure some aspects included will seem to others to be untraditional” (Keegan 2010). Thus, Keegan acknowledges that one person’s idea of what is or is not traditional may not tally with someone else’s. This ambiguity around what is deemed fundamentally traditional is worth noting when approaching various Irish music scholars’ views on composition and, in fact, speaks to the heart of this thesis. Whether an attitude towards composition more

21 The Irish Traditional Music Archive – Taisce Cheol Dúchais Éireann – described on their own website as “a national reference archive and resource centre for the traditional song, instrumental music and dance of Ireland” (ITMA 2017).
broadly is being discussed, or a more specific analysis of a particular compositional
technique or feature is questioned, a multiplicity of traditional ideals and the broad
spectrum of opinions that make up this particular musical landscape emerges.

For instance, ethnomusicologists Hast and Scott, in their 2004 study of Irish
music, and Irish music scholars Breathnach (1971), Carson (1986), Cowdery (1990), Ó
Canainn (1993), and Williams (2010) each offer particular interpretations of what the
essence of the tradition is. Through this prism, attitudes towards the role of composition
and the composer can be examined. Hast and Scott claim that: “Irish musicians use the
term ‘traditional’ to distinguish the older repertory and styles from more contemporary
and commercial productions” (p.16). Whilst this would imply a direct impediment to
newly composed tunes being deemed to be traditional, they also acknowledge that
“defining ‘traditional music’ is an increasingly complex task” (p.17), thus leaving the
door open to a certain degree of ambiguity with regard to the term. This ambiguity stems
from the fact that the transmission of tunes in today’s world can happen at a much more
rapid pace than in former times given recent technological advances. The knock-on
effects that this has on the re-working of material by traditional musicians, especially by
musicians other than the composer themselves, is that this process - referred to earlier and
often classed as ‘communal re-creation’ - can happen at a faster pace and among a larger
number of people, arguably speeding up the process by which ‘older’ tunes become
traditional.

Common consensus is difficult to come by in ascertaining whether or not a newly
composed piece may immediately be deemed to be traditional. A 1991 pamphlet issued
by the ITMA entitled What is Irish Traditional Music? states that “most new
compositions are not accepted into the tradition”, however, often there exists a sort of
self-contradiction in literature whereby certain scholars may acknowledge that a
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A traditional musician may be capable of composing a traditional tune themselves, but simultaneously maintain that until a tune has been somehow vetted and re-created by ‘the community’, it cannot be deemed traditional. For example, while Breandán Breathnach maintains in the 1970s that, on the one hand, newly composed tunes “obviously…cannot be described as traditional” (1971, p.119), he also acknowledges that:

If a piece has been composed in a traditional form by one totally immersed in the tradition, and if it is accepted and played by traditional players as part of their repertoire, it has a claim to admittance which cannot be refused.

(Breathnach 1971, p.119)

Ó Canainn takes this a step further when he explains that “the music has certain features of melody, rhythm, style, structure or, perhaps, even of phrasing which put it […] into the traditional category” (1993, p.1). He goes on to argue that certain tunes can be ‘recognised’, therefore, as traditional without the need for re-working or re-moulding by the community. The tunes have “dispensed with the years of moulding and reshaping that are a part of oral transmission and have taken their place in the living tradition” (1993, p.1). This concept acknowledges that communal re-shaping or re-working is not a necessary step in the evolution of a tune from newly composed to traditional, and reinforces the legitimacy of the composer’s own work within the tradition. Again, this concept plays a huge role in the subject of this thesis, and further exploration of the layers of complexity around this follows in later chapters, in particular with regard to specific examples of the re-working of tunes that occur with the consent of the original composer (see chapters 2 & 3).

Although writer and musician Ciaran Carson, returning to Breathnach’s assertion, stresses the importance of this undetermined body of people who decide on the validity of a tune with regard to the tradition when he explains: “Whether or not these tunes survive into the future will be determined by the community” (1986, p.6), there does seem
to be a shift towards accepting that the individual composer is, in fact, just as valid an agent of this community as any other. This is evidenced in more recent work by Irish music specialist and ethnomusicologist Sean Williams when she states outright that included in what is referred to as Irish traditional music, are “newly-created melodies that fit virtually and seamlessly with tunes of several hundred years ago” (2010, p.234). Making this a central tenet of my study here, I pursue musicological analysis of new compositions with reference to older tunes, acknowledging that one can examine the features to which Ó Canainn makes reference - melody, rhythm, style, structure, and phrasing - as well as any other potential features in these newly composed tunes. Thus, I make comparative conclusions without needing to simply dismiss such tunes as not traditional due to them not belonging to a mythical “bottomless past” (Williams 2010, p.234).

A crucial aspect of approaching the analysis of compositions is deciding upon an agreed visual representation of the composed tune. While this is revisited in greater detail in later chapters, the basic premise is that any performance of a traditional dance tune is based upon repetitions of, most commonly, two separate eight-bar parts. These are subsequently varied and ornamented in line with the expectations of the tradition. Consequently, written depictions of tunes tend to consist of a single iteration of these two parts, represented in staff notation format, without specifying ornamentation or variations for the most part. Precedence in this regard is found in how traditional melodies are portrayed visually in historic collections of Irish traditional music such as in Petrie

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22 ‘Part’ is a commonly used term, however the use of other terms (e.g. ‘verse’) is also noted. See Ó Súilleabháin’s The Creative Process in Irish Traditional Dance Music (1990) for further discussion on other nomenclature.
23 Although published collections tend to use staff notation, it is common for traditional musicians to make use of ‘ABC’ notation in other instances, whereby the name of a note is indicated by its corresponding letter-name, along with a series of lines and symbols indicating duration, octave, etc.
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(1855) and O’Neill (1903); in more contemporary tune books listing the compositions of modern-day composers such as in Reavy (1995) and Carroll (2010); in academic studies exploring composers over the last half-century such as Harvey (2010); as well as, crucially, among the informants of this research who each elected to represent their compositions in such a format, as will be illustrated in subsequent chapters.

Central to this understanding of the structure of dance tunes is a phenomenon called ‘the round’, which is outlined in one of the key texts which informs my research; Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin’s *The Creative Process in Traditional Dance Music* (1990). Ó Súilleabháin explains how these “basic eight-bar units…form an important part of the conceptualisation” (p. 117) of the music for musicians. These units combine to form what is referred to as ‘the round’. Although “the round itself is inaudible”, as Ó Súilleabháin points out, it “informs every aspect of traditional dance music performance” (1990, p.130). Certain Irish music scholars have challenged the notion of ‘the round’ in the past - for example Ó Canainn claims that such “a unique set of notes constituting the tune” is something that the musician has “no concept of” (1993, p.44). Nonetheless, it remains broadly accepted that the idea of ‘the round’, and the consequent representation of a tune (or composition) as being made up of eight-bar parts upon which variation and ornamentation is based for performance, is a legitimate one.

James Cowdery, author of *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland* states: “notations are not detailed transcriptions which prescribe every element of phrasing, ornamentation and so on - rather, they tend to be simplified settings which musicians feel free to interpret in their own ways” (1990, p.10). This is echoed by ethnomusicologist Charles Seeger when he explains that notation more generally “does not tell us as much about how music sounds as how to make it sound. Yet no one can make it sound as the writer of the notation
intended unless in addition to a knowledge of the tradition of writing he has also a
knowledge of the oral (or, better, aural) tradition associated with it’ (1958, p.186).

While this is hugely important to acknowledge in a performance context, the crux
of this study focuses on the composition of ‘the basic tune’ that is subsequently subjected
to the expected performance techniques associated with this particular tradition.
Consequently, throughout this thesis, informants’ compositions are portrayed as
representations of the basic tune, as agreed after consultation with the composers
themselves. Ó Súilleabháin’s notion of ‘the round’ is important not only in validating
agreed representations of the music, but is also a useful tool for direct comparison of
certain structural aspects of tunes. This mode of comparison informs part of the analysis
of compositions outlined in the following chapters. Taking such a fundamental idea as
‘the round’ as a basis for an initial comparison for newly composed tunes with regard to
the tradition more broadly gives some insight as to whether or not the tune fits neatly
within common expectations, is closer to the edge of what is deemed ‘acceptable’, or lies
beyond traditional norms - even though these concepts are not necessarily hard and fast,
definable parameters.

1.3.2 Broader Ethnomusicological Considerations

While a gradual shift towards recognising the role of the individual composer as
an agent within the tradition is perceivable in Irish music studies literature, it is pre-
empted in critical literature on composers in traditional, folk, and vernacular musics more
generally. Ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman’s The Study of Folk Music in the Modern
World (1988) clarifies some of the more contentious issues encountered throughout the
course of my research. From the outset, Bohlman recognises the role of the individual
tune musician and their importance when he asserts: “I persistently call attention to the
importance of the individual folk musician as an agent of change and creativity” (p.xix). Similarly, he draws attention to how newly composed folk music today is just as relevant as in any perceived “bygone golden age” for “the origins of the folk music in the present are just like those of the past” (p.3). During the course of this study, evidence of the individual composer’s role in creating new material is discussed while examples of the re-working of materials by the individual composer during performance are also observed. Of equal importance is an investigation of the subsequent effect on what is considered to be ‘the composition’. This highlights the role of the individual composer as a re-creator as well. This is another facet of the role of the young composer which is examined in later chapters, and emphasises that the “public acceptance or rejection” to which Alan Merriam (1964, p.165) insists new compositions are subjected to, very much comes down to the role of the individual, and that the composer’s own role in such a process cannot be discounted.

A key ethnomusicological and vernacular music studies publication that informs my research is Colin Quigley’s *Music from the Heart* (2010) in which Quigley investigates the compositional process of the Canadian fiddler, Emile Benoit. Although the study draws upon a musical tradition outside of the Irish tradition, given its location in vernacular and folk music, there are obviously many noteworthy parallels to be found. Quigley, critically, maintains a strong focus on the role of the individual and recognises “the creative process of the individual composer [emerging] as the ‘primary alembic’ of tradition” (p.105). I draw extensively on Quigley’s work in approaching the topic of creative process. More specifically, Quigley introduces the previously mentioned concept of ‘melodising’ which proves to be a particularly useful term. In acknowledging a

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24 The word ‘alembic’ generally signifies a device used in the distillation of liquids, however in this context it refers to the refining of musical ideas.
compositional process that occurs through improvisatory techniques performed on an instrument, Quigley recognises that, in fact, ‘improvisation’ is unsuitable as a term for such a process. Thinking of improvisation as a process which expands outward from an initial musical idea, the process which Quigley outlines as ‘melodising’ in fact begins in an improvisatory exploration of musical formulas and ideas, but then zeroes in on core motifs which, after some repetition, eventually become the composition. Niall Vallely, giving the 2015 Ó Riada Memorial Lecture in University College Cork, reiterates the importance of Quigley’s terminology:

Quigley’s use of a distinct term to describe this process is appropriate – the improvisation that is involved is of a very specific kind – it generally involves ideas and motifs from within the particular tradition in question and is aimed specifically at the composition of a tune.

(Vallely 2015)

Specifically, Quigley compares Benoit improvising in public performance with subsequent private practising sessions where his melodising is what condenses the musical ideas from the performance context into a format deemed suitable to be ‘a composition’:

By transferring this improvisatory technique out of the performance milieu to a private situation, however, Emile was able to harness it for his compositional ends, disciplining his melodic inventiveness to polish his creations into more finished and memorable form.

(Quigley 2010, p.86)

This concept has proven incredibly useful in describing some of the compositional processes that are encountered throughout the fieldwork for this study, particularly given my focus on individual composers.

Other scholarship in the realm of folk and traditional music more broadly has also proven useful. For example, Cadden (1996) writes on the role of the composer with regard to Scottish pipe band music and notes “architectural similarities between phrases in new
compositions [that] are as prevalent as those in so-called traditional tunes” (p.124). This echoing of the existence of musicological features that can define a tune as conforming to a tradition’s expectations is noteworthy, especially in relation to a music that shares similar characteristics with Irish music. However, what is also notable is Cadden’s discussion on the idea of harmonic and percussive elements of composition being deemed a part of a compositional process that has, historically, generally been accepted as being a melodic process only. Composers Cadden interviewed for his research “do not, however, often think of harmonies while composing the original tune; in other words, harmony is not an initial or structural factor in composition, but, rather, a performative aspect” (1996, p.130). Cadden goes on to acknowledge that in modern times, there is a “growing number of tunes in which harmony and percussion orchestration were paramount at the time of composition” (1996, p.130). This is hugely relevant to much of the forthcoming discussion on the role of harmony and arrangement with regard to young composers in Irish traditional music. Central to this study is an exploration both of the influence of harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments on the compositional process, as well as investigating the importance of harmony as a constituent part of the end composition in the mind of the young composer. These manifest themselves in a number of different ways and raise interesting notions surrounding the construction of melodies during the compositional process. This, combined with subsequent performance contexts in which harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments are employed, whether prescribed or improvised, raise the potential of a dynamic-shift in the relative importance of harmony versus melody in composition and, perhaps, even going so far as to challenge what is commonly acknowledged as ‘the composition’.
In terms of more contemporary compositions adhering to traditional roots whilst taking on board contemporary aspects, a compelling discussion can be found in Bithell’s (1996) assessment of new styles of indigenous Corsican music. Bithell states that:

> Today’s groups are consciously striving in their new compositions to find an appropriate marriage of tradition and modernity that will allow them to explore their own creativity and give expression to contemporary concerns and values while remaining faithful to their roots.

(p.57)

The discussion throughout the following chapters investigates whether or not this sentiment is mirrored in the minds and motivations of young composers in Irish traditional music. While the aforementioned idea of the role of harmony in a primarily melodic tradition is one aspect of this, discussions with young composers uncover other areas of interest where this perceived ‘marriage of tradition and modernity’ may or may not be the case - both in terms of musical features as well as in terms of artistic ideals and aspirations.

### 1.3.3 Fieldwork and Methodology

Wider ethnomusicological writings also play a significant role in informing fieldwork practices for this study, particularly relating to interviewing techniques, discourse around participant observation, and negotiating the duality of my own ‘insider’ role as both an agent of the Irish music tradition as well an investigator of it. In particular, literature from Jackson (1987), Nettl (2005), and Spradley (1979) underpins the approaches taken to fieldwork over the course of this study.

In his now canonical book *Fieldwork*, Jackson outlines an introduction to fieldwork practices and gives a broad understanding of the undertaking involved. Whilst covering much of the basics of fieldwork, beginning with outlining the three phases of fieldwork as ‘planning’, ‘collecting’, and ‘analysing’ (1987, p.19), Jackson also draws attention to the inevitable influence of the researcher upon the fieldwork. He
acknowledges that recognising this impact upon the collection of information from the field has been a difficult task previously:

I don’t know of any folklorist whose introductory remarks about the collecting tell it all. Some are embarrassed to write so much about themselves; some don’t want to tell the truth; some don’t know it; and some don’t remember it; some never paid enough attention to their own presence to have anything to say about it; some would have so much they’d like to say about themselves there wouldn't be room left for the material found in the field.

(Jackson 1987, p.13)

Similarly, ethnomusicologist Jos Koning, in his writing on the concept of the fieldworker as a performer, which pays particular attention to his study of Irish music, highlights the challenge of maintaining an awareness of one’s own role as researcher of a culture in which one participates. For example, he states: “It has taken me even longer to become aware of the position this process had put me in, and of how this position affected the results of my fieldwork” (1980, p.424).

Consequently, being aware of my own role within this study is a significant point to address. Nettl outlines the complexities of recognising hard boundaries between insider and outsider experiences in modern society, especially in relation to outlining one’s ‘backyard’ in a modern society:

It’s a complex concept, because the first question has to be, what actually qualifies as your backyard? The idea that the world consists of a lot of easily distinguished societies, each with its distinct culture, and that you can tell easily which one you belong to and are an insider of, while being an outsider to all others [...] has had to be abandoned.

(Nettl 2005, p.186)

With regard to certain ethnomusicologists who came to study popular music, having identified previously as performers of the same music, Nettl acknowledges that “they may be considered to be working ‘at home’” (p.187). However, Nettl also acknowledges that “studying almost anything in culture and nature requires one to make it in some respects
into an ‘other’” (p.186). It is through this prism which I view myself as an ‘insider’ within Irish traditional music more generally, whilst also acknowledging that a certain distancing from the topic at hand is also of vital importance to the integrity of the research.

One positive aspect of being an ‘insider’ is in the ability to perform the music in question, as well as understand some of the social structures pertaining to the music. Koning explains how, previous to his study in Ireland, he had played some Western classical music as well as having learned some traditional Irish and other folk styles in the Netherlands (1980). Whilst he acknowledges that this experience might help him in understanding the music itself, he also recognises that that does not necessarily translate to understanding the relationships and social structures around the music. From my own point of view, I would hope to have an understanding of both the musical processes and the relationships and social structures involved. On the other hand, there are bound to be instances where being an insider may potentially cause a “possible distortion” (Koning 1980, p.429) or blind me from seeing something that may be totally obvious to an outsider. I can merely strive to compensate for this by, as Nettl suggests, observing a sense of ‘other’ in the music.

On balance, I believe that my perspective, based on experience, enhances the study. As Koning suggests: “I believe that both the overall completeness and the efficiency of any ethnomusicological research into a music culture will nevertheless benefit greatly when the researcher is thoroughly, actively involved musically within that culture” (1980, p.428). In a similar vein, Kaul explains that when observing as a participant in a culture, a greater understanding is achieved of the observed culture: “The key anthropological method called participant observation has at its core the assumption that experiencing a culture firsthand, actually participating in it, gives us a unique perspective about what the society is ‘really like’ even though we remain outsiders”
(2013, p.ix). Although coming from the point of view of an ‘outsider’ entering into a
culture, the crux of the point is still valid in that participation in a culture does give a
unique perspective on it. I hope, over the course of this study, to share that perspective.

One obvious example of the impact of my relationship with the Irish traditional
music community is in the choosing of informants. When identifying people from within
the traditional music community as potential informants for this research, my knowledge
of the tradition, as well as contacts I have made through various avenues, play a central
role. Drawing on my own experience as a student of the music at various levels, I identify
key figures in regards the teaching of the music for their input into the research. Similarly,
my interaction with Comhaltas structures and the Irish World Academy inform my
decision to interview key figures from those institutions. Connections made through
informally playing music with other musicians, as well as hearing commercial recordings
by other musicians, lead to an awareness of those musicians’ compositional exploits, and,
consequently, aid the selection of key informants.

One particularly noteworthy example of this is in relation to the selection of Áine
McGeeney as a key informant. Due to the fact that both McGeeney and myself are
members of the band ‘Goitse’, tour in this band for extended periods of time, and have
formerly been classmates in the University of Limerick, it follows that I have spent a
greater period of time with her than with other informants. My interaction with her
compositions through arranging and performing them in a band context, as well as the
extended periods of time while touring in which I have had opportunity to discuss the
topic at hand with her, leads to a level of contact that has not been attainable with other
informants. However, one’s relationship with each informant is different from the last,
and as such, a complete and total sense of objectivity is surely unattainable.
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Jackson (1987) and Spradley (1979) both give insightful accounts of the interview process during fieldwork that inform the approach taken to interviewing in this study. However, one point Jackson makes in relation to conducting interviews resonates here in particular. Whilst acknowledging that the ultimate objective of the interview is to “get information you don’t already have” and not to merely engage in conversation (p.81), he also points out that this cannot be achieved by suspending the reality of pre-existing relationships with informants: “Real life is full of stories and sometimes stepping out of real life to document other people doing it isn’t the smart, decent, useful, or even satisfying thing to do” (p.87). Therefore, the style of interview conducted with each one of my informants will, to some degree, be dictated by the various relationships I have with each of them. While striving to retain a degree of objectivity in the pursuit of “getting information I don’t already have” (Jackson 1987, p.81) is one aspect of the interview process, as Kaul points out, it is also important to acknowledge that “a truer objectivity can be achieved if we wholly embrace the fact that ethnographic writing is always in the first instance derived from the subjective experiences of the ethnographer” (2013, p.ix).

Another aspect of fieldwork methodology to which I wish to draw attention, is with regard to the length of time spent in the ‘field’. Kaul (2013) and Koning (1980) each spent extended periods of time in the localities that were the subject of their studies. Interviews with informants, therefore, could occur over a sustained period. Similarly, in Quigley’s investigation into the compositions of Emile Benoit (2010), an extended period of time spent in the presence of his key informant was a crucial aspect of the study.

With regard to the research in question in this thesis, such extended periods of time spent with informants were not as attainable, other than, arguably, with McGeeney. However, in that instance, the focus of time spent together was not necessarily the pursuit of this research explicitly and focused on various performance tasks to hand. As Spradley
(1979) details, the scope of one’s investigation is a crucial aspect of any research project. The scope of this study is perhaps too broad to incorporate such extended periods of time with each of my chosen key informants. As Quigley points out with regard to his study of Benoit’s compositional practice: “A research perspective focusing on Emile’s compositions, the ‘sound object’, alone would not serve well as an investigation of this man’s music” (p.x). Therefore, in line with Sloboda’s (1985, p.102) methods of enquiry, as adapted by Quigley, an ideal investigation into the full compositional experiences of these young composers should include an observation of live composition. However, as mentioned, the extended period of time that Quigley spent in Benoit’s company enabled him to observe many instances of composition in real time. This is not something that was practical to recreate over the course of my research. Whilst extended interviews with the informants uncovered much in terms of discovering the informants’ own thoughts on composition more broadly, as well as their recollections of their own personal compositional practices, at no point did it seem appropriate to demand that they undertake a live composition in my presence.

Furthermore, as this study is primarily based on research gathered from four key informants, I decided that two\textsuperscript{25} compositions by each should be analysed and, in conjunction with interviews, form the basis for any conclusions drawn. To draw any definitive conclusions in terms of consistent, unquestionable patterns of composition from such a small sample of compositions is probably unwise, however it does give a snapshot of examples of compositions by these young composers as well as some background as to what informs their compositional practice. Furthermore, it must be noted that neither compositional practices nor views expressed in interviews throughout

\textsuperscript{25} In certain instances, referring to further compositions aided greatly in the illustration of specific aspects of the composers’ work.
this research are to be assumed as definitive or final. Just as composers and musicians develop techniques over time, so too do views shift and reshape, and are not “static and unchanging” (Kaul 2013, p.ix). As Kaul eloquently puts it, “I make no universal claims about the music, although I think what is described here might be recognizable elsewhere” (2013, p.6).

1.4 Chapter Summaries

The bulk of this thesis is based on four individual case studies. Four young composers act as the key informants for my research, whilst extensive interviews, as well as a musicological exploration of two of each of their compositions, act as the basis for these case studies. The four composers are dealt with chronologically, beginning with the oldest. The topics addressed in each chapter are dictated by the examination of different issues encountered by the young composers, as evidenced in both the tunes and interviews. Chapter 2 focuses on Seán Óg Graham (1985-), a multi-instrumentalist and composer from County Antrim who has performed extensively with his band ‘Beoga’, among other projects. Certain aspects of his compositional experiences shed light on the role of the aforementioned concept of ‘the round’ in Irish music, the role of harmony during the compositional process, as well as the re-creative impact of the composer and of a band in an ensemble arrangement scenario. Chapter 3 deals with the compositions of Áine McGeeney (1989-), a composer, fiddler, and singer from County Louth who has extensive performance experience with the band ‘Goitse’. Again, harmony and structure play a part in the analysis of this chapter, while alternative motivations for composition also emerge. Chapter 4 looks at the compositions of Jos Kelly (1993-), a multi-instrumentalist from County Sligo who has studied both classical and traditional styles of music whilst retaining a keen interest in jazz and popular music genres. The utilisation of
his compositions by his band ‘Moxie’ points to new relationships between ‘the round’ and the role of harmony in composition in this chapter. In turn, questions arise about perceived lines between what is deemed to fall within the realms of the tradition and what falls beyond. The final case study, chapter 5, relates to the youngest of the four key informants, Diarmuid Faherty (2000-). Faherty, a multi-instrumentalist from county Laois, gives a unique viewpoint on the boundary between perceivable ‘older’ and ‘more modern’ styles of composition. The role of competition in the compositional process is a feature of this chapter, whilst notable connections to the harp music tradition appear, as well as an offshoot of Quigley’s ‘melodising’ concept.

Beyond these four case studies, two further chapters bring the thesis to a close. The first, chapter 6, deals primarily with motivational aspects of the compositional process. It explores the reasons why young composers compose and investigates ideas around inspiration, whilst also touching on the act of titling tunes. Conclusions in this chapter are drawn from across each of the case studies, as well as with reference to older composers. Although one may argue that the idea of motivation should precede other chapters, (and, where appropriate, certain issues pertaining to motivation do arise in the case studies), recognising motivation for composing (as well as titling a tune) in this study was something which seemed to come later in the process for the composers, after the creative process. Hence, the structure of the thesis reflects this. The final chapter, chapter 7, draws together conclusions made during analysis done in the previous chapters as well as pointing to new avenues of exploration for further works in this area.

In addition to the literature mentioned thus far, in-depth interviews with key role-players in the tradition also inform arguments and conclusions in this research. One of my informants, Paddy Ryan (1937-) is a long-time volunteer of the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann amateur Irish music organization, who has experience not only in performing,
teaching, and adjudicating Irish music, but also plays a significant part in the oversight of Comhaltas-run teaching and adjudication courses. His role as head of the Coiste Ceoil\textsuperscript{26} in Comhaltas, means he was central to the reintroduction of the composition competition to the Fleadh Cheoil competition line-up and so plays a role in contextualising certain aspects of this study. Gary Lynch (1978-) is a teacher and adjudicator of Irish music who is also a Comhaltas volunteer at national level who studied for an MA in Irish Music Performance at the University of Limerick, and therefore has multiple insights into the tradition. Lynch is also the founder of a youth summer camp for Irish musicians called Ceol Lab, which provides him with unique perspectives on the compositional (and other) activities of young musicians within the tradition. Similarly, musician and educator Ernestine Healy (1978-) has been involved with both the University of Limerick and Comhaltas for nearly three decades. Healy is also responsible for running two Irish music summer camps for a number of years; the youth focused camp Meitheal and the Blas\textsuperscript{27} international summer school. Composition plays a crucial role at the core of the Meitheal ethos, and so Healy’s input into this study is invaluable in that regard. Niall Keegan, in his role as Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Limerick, coordinates composition modules for the Irish music degree, and so has a unique awareness of the topic. Another informant is Niall Vallely (1970-), a well-known virtuoso concertina player and composer whose compositions tend to be noted as on the more experimental end of the tradition. Vallely has also recently been an artist in residence in University College Cork, and his extensive knowledge of composition gives another viewpoint on the topic at large and helps to paint a broad picture of attitudes towards composition.

\textsuperscript{26} Music Committee.
\textsuperscript{27} Blas is an Irish word meaning a taste or style. The summer school was founded in 1996 and focuses on music tuition as well as lectures and other reflective aspects of Irish traditional music, song, and dance.
Furthermore, being a composer himself, Vallely gives another comparative reference when trying to understand the compositional practices of younger composers today. Finally, a composer of Irish music who has a strong connection to the harp music tradition is Michael Rooney (1974-). Rooney’s perspectives on the Irish dance tune and harp music traditions has much to offer this study, particularly with reference to issues raised in chapter 5, especially dealing with the crossover between these two traditions in recent times.

Interviews with these figures from the tradition, as well as the literature outlined previously in this chapter, provide context for many of the points raised in the following case studies. The first of the case studies commences in chapter 2, where two compositions of Seán Óg Graham’s are analysed, and various aspects of his experience as a composer are discussed. The role of harmony and the structure of ‘the round’ in Graham’s compositions are examined, while the process of re-creation of tunes and the role that dance plays in informing Graham’s compositional process are also addressed.
Chapter 2

Case Study A: The Compositions of Seán Óg Graham

In this chapter I focus on the compositions of County Antrim composer Seán Óg Graham (1985-), analysing two specific tunes. Graham is a multi-instrumentalist who specialises in button accordion and guitar. Having grown up attending his local Comhaltas classes, Graham went on to study Irish music at third level and graduated from the BA Irish Music and Dance in the Irish World Academy at the University of Limerick in 2007. Graham has recorded and performed alongside numerous renowned performers of Irish music, including Chicago fiddler Liz Carroll. As well as being an accomplished performer, Graham is a prolific composer of tunes, many of which have been recorded and performed by his band ‘Beoga’ as well as by other artists including the well-known piano accordion player Karen Tweed. Graham takes a keen interest in a wide range of musical genres and also has a background in Irish dance, having studied it into his teens.

Whilst drawing on my own knowledge and experience of Irish traditional music composition to inform much of the analysis, my reading engages primarily with the ideas and analytical methods from Harvey’s (2010) analysis of the compositions of John Brady, and Quigely's (2010) investigation into the compositions of Canadian fiddler Emile Benoit. Ó Súilleabháin’s (1990) conception of ‘the round’ in Irish traditional music is central to my analysis as my aim here is to illustrate how Graham navigates between ‘innovation and tradition’ through his compositions. By introducing Ó Súilleabháin’s graphic and processual conceptualisation of the basic structure of a two-part Irish dance

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28 This binary between tradition and innovation is a commonly recurring theme in discussions in Irish traditional music, as evidenced by the previously mentioned Crosbhéalach an Cheoil conference that took it as its central theme. I draw on this binary as discussions with Graham make reference to it, however, one must also be aware of the challenges of such a simplification of multifaceted topics.
tune, I illustrate how Graham adheres to certain long-held norms and expectations, while also breaking away from such norms in his compositions. Influences upon his composition include his dancing background, his interaction with the music as a harmonic accompanist, and the effect of resultant rhythmic and harmonic possibilities\textsuperscript{29}. The first tune I wish to draw attention to is entitled ‘Waterboogie’.

2.1 ‘Waterboogie’

Fig. 2.1. ‘Waterboogie’

\textsuperscript{29} The role of harmony in the compositional process is a key feature throughout these case studies. Consequently, there are a number of terms that appear throughout the course of fieldwork interviews that do not necessarily retain a consistent definition across all informants. While this is addressed at the appropriate times, it is worth noting that terms such as ‘the riff’, ‘the groove’, ‘the backing’, and ‘the pattern’ all refer in some way to either the imagined or audible harmonic and/or rhythmic accompaniments to the composed melody.
‘Waterboogie’ is a slip jig - a dance tune in nine-eight timing - composed by Seán Óg Graham in 2001. While there is much to discuss and analyse within the tune in terms of its melodic and rhythmic features, it is important to firstly address the overall structure of the melody within the broader framework of Irish traditional dance music in order to gain a deeper understanding of some of the processes and artistic innovations at play in Graham’s composition of this tune, and his composition in general.

The basic framework of an Irish traditional dance-tune is set out in Ó Súilleabháin’s *The Creative Process in Irish Traditional Dance Music* (1990). Ó Súilleabháin outlines how “Irish traditional dance music, with very few exceptions, is constructed from basic eight-bar units” called ‘parts’ (p.117). “The standard dance-tune consists of two different parts, each being ‘doubled’ (i.e. repeated with or without some modification)” and results in a thirty-two-bar ‘round’ in the form AABB (Ó Súilleabháin 1990, p.118). However, it is also explained that there are certain tunes that are ‘singled’ (i.e. not repeated) and therefore result in a sixteen-bar ‘round’ (Ó Súilleabháin 1990, p.118). Although it is stated that these sixteen-bar tunes are an occasional exception and usually appear in ‘reel’ form (i.e. dance tunes in four-four or two-two timing), the issue of the ‘singling’ versus ‘doubling’ of reels informs the understanding of the same issue with regard to the slip jig.

In their more recent study of Irish traditional music, Hast & Scott (2004) refer to the subdivision of these eight-bar parts into two- and four-bar phrases which feature motifs that repeat and therefore result in “this inherent predictability of form [that] is the backbone of the dance tune tradition” (p.60). The degree of repetition can have an impact on whether or not a tune is singled or doubled. An example of the first part (or ‘A’ part) of a well-known ‘double reel’ called ‘The Traveller’ can be seen in figure 2.2.
The fact that bars one to three are mirrored exactly in bars five to seven, as can be seen above, suggests that this eight-bar part can be subdivided into two four-bar phrases that are repeated with some modification. In contrast to this, figure 2.3 shows an example of a widely-performed ‘single reel’ called ‘Tommy Peoples’.

In this tune, the repetition of the motif from the first bar in bars three, five, and seven, suggests a subdivision into four two-bar phrases, and therefore a higher degree of repetition than in the double reel, ‘The Traveller’. Although it is not intended as a hard and fast rule, this is a representation of the degree to which repetition within a tune can

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30 Tommy Peoples is a well-known fiddle player and composer from County Donegal. For further reading on Peoples, as well as a printed collection of his compositions, see his book, Ó Am Go hAm: From Time to Time (2015). For the purposes of clarification, it should be noted that the tune referred to here is not attributed as a composition of Peoples’, rather a tune associated with his playing.
result in either the singling or doubling of a tune. This is perhaps even more clearly illustrated by observing the second parts (or B parts) of these tunes. Figure 2.4 shows the B part of ‘The Traveller’, while figure 2.5 shows the B part of ‘Tommy Peoples’’. Both tunes share a common motif that can be seen in their respective first bars. However, while this motif is repeated in bars three, five, and seven of ‘Tommy Peoples’’ (the single reel), in ‘The Traveller’ (the double reel), it is repeated only in bars three and five. Note that bar seven introduces a new melodic idea.

Fig. 2.4. ‘The Traveller’ - B Part

In terms of the historic function of the music as an accompaniment to dancing, it is worth noting that the dances themselves progress in eight-bar sections. Whether a tune manifests itself as a four-bar tune that is doubled, or an eight-bar tune that is singled, has no material impact in terms of the dance’s progression. Therefore, this has no bearing on
the “understood socio-musical agreement among the musicians which has its origins in the past interaction between music and dance in the Irish tradition” (Ó Súilleabháin 1990, p.118).

The relevance of Ó Súilleabháin’s observations to the case study in question here revolves around the tune-type at play, the slip jig. A glance through the section dedicated to slip jigs in *O’Neill’s 1001: The Dance Music of Ireland* (1907) - a hugely influential collection of Irish traditional dance music - reveals the slip jig as being, the vast majority of the time, made up of either single eight-bar parts or repeated four-bar parts. Significantly, this is also how Graham’s tune ‘Waterboogie’ is represented. However, while discussing the tune with him, in terms of whether he conceptualises the parts as single eight-bar parts or four-bar parts that are doubled, some ambiguity arises. He states: “I think of it as eight bars. Although I sort of think of it as two As and two Bs too” (S. Graham 2016, pers. comm., 26 Apr). Crucially, Graham’s understanding of dancing - he studied Irish dance until his late teens and played music for dancing competitions regularly - seems to inform his compositions, which he sees as connected. He notes: “I’d say a lot of that comes from dancing actually. I used to dance right up until I was seventeen or eighteen. And then, well there’s eight bars in the lead around and all the steps” (S. Graham 2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar). While the ‘lead around’ and ‘steps’ are eight-bar segments of the dance, these are mirrored by the eight-bar groupings in the tune.

Although the correspondence between the eight bars of dance and eight bars of music has long been established, this becomes more noteworthy when ‘Waterboogie’ is placed alongside another one of Graham’s slip jig compositions, ‘Soggy’s’, composed in 2002. Incidentally, the two were recorded alongside each other on a track from *A Lovely

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31 Just one of the forty-five slip jigs listed in *O’Neill’s 1001* contains an example of a repeated eight-bar part. There was no example of a slip jig that comprised of two, doubled, eight-bar parts.
Madness (2004), the debut album by Graham’s Band, ‘Beoga’. Figure 2.6 below shows the ‘A’ part from ‘Waterboogie’ and figure 2.7 shows the ‘A’ part from ‘Soggy’s’.

First and foremost, it is immediately apparent that a major structural difference between the two compositions is that ‘Waterboogie’ is divided into single, eight-bar parts (or four-bar parts which are doubled) whilst ‘Soggy’s’ is divided into eight-bar parts that are doubled. As was illustrated in the examples of the two reels above (figs. 2.2-2.5), a similar pattern of repetition can be found in these tunes. The opening bar of ‘Waterboogie’ reoccurs in bar three, five, and seven, implying that the eight bars are comprised of four two-bar phrases. The first bar of ‘Soggy’s’, on the other hand, is only repeated in bar five. Thus, two four-bar phrases are implied. Therefore, we find a similar phenomenon as was outlined in the reel examples above, in that a higher level of repetition is found in the tune more likely to be single, whilst less repetition is found in the tune more likely to be doubled.

Fig. 2.6. ‘Waterboogie’ - A Part
What is noteworthy, however, is that, as was previously mentioned, the existence of eight-bar slip jig parts which are doubled is, historically, a relatively uncommon phenomenon in the Irish music tradition, as evidenced by the dearth of doubled, eight-bar slip jig parts in *O’Neill’s 1001* (1907). Therefore, it is fair to say that ‘Soggy’s’ follows a framework that is, at the very least, uncommon in the context of the broader traditional Irish music canon. Meanwhile, ‘Waterboogie’ follows what could be described as a more traditionally common framework for the construction of a slip jig. Both frameworks, however, are clearly informed in part by Graham’s grounding in Irish step dance and awareness of the needs of dancers from playing for step dancing competitions. As Graham puts it, “I just thought that way because [of] playing for dancers” (2016, pers. comm., 26 Apr). However, Graham is also embodying a dichotomy within the Irish music tradition between “the inherent predictability of form” to which Hast & Scott refer to as “the backbone of the dance tune tradition” (2004, p.60) and what Dowling refers to as a more contemporary desire to explore the “full melodic possibilities of the eight-bar structure” (2011, p.154). This, it must be said, is despite Graham not consciously deciding beforehand to initiate composition with the goal of creating specifically either a ‘single’ or ‘double’ slip jig. As he states: “I never sat down thinking, you know, I’m going to do
this one in [this particular framework], it’s just the way it happened’ (S. Graham 2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar). In this small but significant way, Graham exemplifies here the young composer innovating both within and outside of traditional structures, without necessarily a particular agenda or even full consciousness of what it is he is doing.

2.1.1 Innovative Rhythms

Having discussed Graham’s slip jigs with regard to their overarching structure, it is worth analysing some of the rhythmic features that appear within the tune. As part of his undergraduate thesis on composition, Roche (2015) created a rhythm bank by logging all of the rhythmic patterns which appear in individual bars of the various dance tune formats throughout the previously alluded to O’Neill’s *1001* (1907); thereby assembling an inventory of commonly found rhythmic patterns within the Irish traditional music canon (p.90). Whilst the majority of rhythmic patterns which appear in the tune ‘Waterboogie’ also appear in the section of Roche’s rhythm bank dedicated to slip jigs, certain patterns do not. Specifically, patterns found in the second bar of the ‘B’ part of ‘Waterboogie’, in its repeat, and in the last bar of the part, do not conform to those outlined in O’Neill’s (see figs. 2.8, 2.9).

Fig. 2.8. ‘Waterboogie’ - Bar 7 Syncopation

Fig. 2.9. ‘Waterboogie’ - Bar 11 Syncopation
Instead, deliberate, syncopated gestures are found. Syncopation is defined by the Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music as a “device used…in order to vary position of the stress on notes so as to avoid regular rhythm” (2007, p.740). In fig. 2.8 above, the tied quavers cause the deliberate upsetting of the pulse or ‘underlying motor rhythm’, as Ó Súilleabháin (1990) puts it, which can be seen in fig. 2.10.

Fig. 2.10. Slip Jig Motor Rhythm

Syncopation, in such an overt and deliberate form, is generally deemed not to be a traditional feature of Irish traditional dance music. For example, scholar and fiddle player Liz Doherty, in her contribution to The Companion to Irish Traditional Music (2011), points out that “syncopation is a feature of a number of recent compositions in the Irish dance music repertoire” (p.673, emphasis added), implying that such rhythmic passages tend not to appear in older tunes. Interestingly, while Doherty’s comment refers to melodic structure, she also goes on to cite syncopation as being a feature of the accompaniment of Irish traditional music. As a consequence, Graham’s own experience as an accompanist must be noted when contemplating the source of such syncopation in his tune composition. However, this overt use of syncopation once again places ‘Waterboogie’ at a junction between traditional and contemporary innovations of Irish traditional dance music. Common traditional rhythmic patterns coexist with non-traditional rhythmic patterns within a traditionally sound framework. This, again, shows
Graham as a composer who seamlessly navigates the supposed binary of tradition and innovation.

2.1.2 Re-creation

The syncopation present in fig. 2.9, whilst similar to fig. 2.8, raises another point of note in the analysis of Graham and his compositional process. Although fig. 2.9 is presented here as the final bar of the composition, during the course of conversations with Graham, he informed me that originally, the final bar of the tune was different, as illustrated here in fig. 2.11:

![Fig. 2.11. ‘Waterboogie’ - Original Ending](image)

Graham ultimately deemed this version to be unsatisfactory; as he recalls: “It just didn't sit with me. It’s just too, kind of, perfect or something you know? It’s just a feeling…I think, in my head” (2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar). The implication here is that despite Graham deeming the original ending a suitable one, however, he felt compelled to compose an alternative ending because of a desire to create a final bar that did not conform too ‘perfectly’, as Graham sees it, to what might be obviously expected of a traditional tune.

This indication of a desire to innovate in an attempt to avoid an overt conformation to traditional norms is worth investigating in terms of the surrounding circumstances that impacted on this compositional decision. This, in turn, leads to a further understanding of some of the approaches and influences involved in Graham’s compositional practice.
Graham explains how the alteration of this bar occurs during a recording process with his band, ‘Beoga’: “It probably happened in the studio actually. I wasn’t feeling it so somebody said, ‘Will we just end it there and just leave it at that?’” (2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar).

This also illustrates how the final decision on the composition of the last bar of the tune is decided upon as part of a collaborative process of arrangement. The tune was to be recorded as part of an arranged track, performed by ‘Beoga’, and as a result, the prospect of the tune being performed by the band impacted on the compositional process. However, what is at play here is a revisiting of the final bar of a tune that has already been composed. Therefore, this may be read as a concrete example of the processes of the communal re-shaping and re-working of tunes (see Breathnach 1971; Bohlman 1988; Ó Canainn 1993), but with some notable differences. Rather than changes occurring over a long period of time with the result being a tune which becomes ‘the property of the group’, the period of time is so insignificant in this example, there is still a direct connection between the original composition, the original composer, and the reworking of the composition. The other key difference is that the process at play here has to do with ruptures and resistances rather than with what I term as ‘communal smoothings’. Whilst Irish music studies scholars tend to refer more to “tunes which have been consciously altered to suit different instruments” and tunes which have been altered through error in transmission (Ó Cannain 1993, p.7), the key motivation for re-creation at play here is still a desire to innovate beyond certain “patterns or clichés of the tradition” (Ó Cannain 1993, p.40).

Furthermore, whilst it is commonly accepted that an altered version of a tune which achieves a degree of permanence through performance is referred to as a particular ‘setting’ of the tune (Ó Súilleabháin 1990, p.120), the version of ‘Waterboogie’ which
Graham proposed as a representation of his composition included this reworked ending (fig. 2.1). This is noteworthy in that it acknowledges the composer’s own role in the reworking of tunes. Graham’s role in this process, as well as the role of his bandmates, illustrates a degree of fluidity between the processes of composition and reworking or recreation.

The potential impact that the role of an arrangement (collaborative or otherwise) has on the compositional process for Graham is apparent. Whilst on the one hand, Graham states that his compositions are “not at all” written with the band in mind as the ultimate performers of the tune, he does state that “most of the stuff [he] write[s] inevitably ends up in Beoga’s repertoire” and acknowledges “absolutely” a degree of fluidity between both the compositional process for a tune and the process of arrangement of a tune (2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). This shifting boundary between composition and arrangement is also evident with regard to the impact of harmonic structure on the melodic line of a composition. A discussion developed when attempting to ascertain Graham’s perception of the relationship between the underlying harmonic structures of a tune and its melodic line. Next, I examine the influence of harmony on Graham’s approach to composition, and how that approach developed over time.

### 2.2 Arrangement, Harmony, and Approach

In certain instances, Graham outlines a very distinct, set harmonic accompaniment for the performance of his compositions. When a composition in which he has a clear sense of its harmonic structure is brought to his band as part of a collaborative arrangement, he explains how he might “record a tune and put down rough chords with it […] on the guitar or piano” before letting the band hear it in order to get his harmonic “idea” across (S. Graham 2015, pers. comm., 15 Nov). However, in other instances,
Graham actively seeks out harmonic interpretations of the melody line by those with whom he plays:

Sometimes I might take stuff to the band and Liam\textsuperscript{32} \[and\] I’d purposely not let him hear what I’ve done on guitar just to see what he comes up with. It depends on the tune I suppose. Sometimes it’s probably really obvious what chords should be there. Or I might think that. Obviously if someone else does it they might have a completely different approach.

(2015, pers. comm., 15 Nov)

Whether or not Graham seeks to establish his own preconceived chord structure as the basis for the performance of one of his compositions seems to be, at least to a certain extent, contingent on the role that that structure plays in the compositional process for the tune. Graham openly acknowledges a shift in his approach to the compositional process over time:

I suppose that has evolved over years as well. At the start, I would have just sat down with the accordion, probably just seeing whatever comes out naturally. It might be a phrase or two phrases and, sort of, putting them together like a big puzzle you know? And then after that I started playing a lot more guitar and getting into chords more. So, then I might have started approaching the tunes from a chords background […] But I’d say now I’m very much aware of what chords I’m going to put with the tune as well, whereas at the start I probably wasn’t. It was just putting strings of notes together and see what sounds nice to my ear.

(2015, pers. comm., 15 Nov)

This gradual shift in approach to composition, initially centred on the assembling of melodic phrases and gradually moving to the use of predetermined chordal patterns, is mirrored by Graham’s development as a guitar player and accompanist. In terms of his compositional approach, Graham describes how he can “put down” a chord pattern on a recording and “loop it […] and then try to work a tune around it” (2016, pers. comm., 4

\textsuperscript{32} Liam Bradley is the piano player in ‘Beoga’ and is known for his jazz- and pop-influenced style of accompaniment.
Mar). Although the process of assembling a melodic line occurs regardless of whether or not a chordal structure is in place, the existence of an underlying harmonic accompaniment during this aspect of the compositional process is clearly a development in Graham’s approach. In reference to the two slip jigs identified in this case study, ‘Waterboogie’ and ‘Soggy’s’, Graham explains that:

The first one, [Soggy’s], is probably written a little bit with the guitar because I was just sort of starting out playing the guitar then. I kind of had that first little intro down in my head and then I went from there. The second tune, [Waterboogie], was just purely playing the box.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

In other words, ‘Waterboogie’ was not composed whilst consciously having a preconceived harmonic structure in mind, but ‘Soggy’s’ was. This is outlined in figure 2.12 above. It is noteworthy to consider that whilst ‘Waterboogie’s’ framework sits
comfortably within the traditional framework for the slip jig, ‘Soggy’s’ utilises a more expansive foundation. Furthermore, Graham’s original ending for ‘Waterboogie’ is reworked at a later stage because of its overt conformation to traditional norms. Therefore, a pattern emerges whereby Graham’s challenging of traditional norms, whether conscious or unconscious, is mirrored by the development of Graham’s own compositional practice over time. By Graham’s own admission, his very first compositions “probably sounded like a lot of other trad tunes” (2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). That comment suggests that Graham's initial forays into composition conform to traditional expectations. This conformation is something he now actively seeks to avoid as time goes on. As he puts it when referring to traditional tune structures, “I try to cut outside of [traditional tune structures] sometimes, [and] I have been venturing outside of [them] even more so recently” (S. Graham 2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). Therefore, drawing a preliminary conclusion from this small sample, there appears to be a correlation between Graham’s development as a guitarist and accompanist, the extent to which harmonic accompaniment impacts his compositional process, and the level of non-conformity to traditional norms found in the resultant “sound object” (Quigley 2010).

2.3 ‘Kick’n the Box’

‘Kick’n the Box’, shown in fig. 2.13, is a reel composed by Seán Óg Graham as part of a college assignment during the course of his undergraduate studies in Irish music in the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance at the University of Limerick, from 2003 to 2007. In terms of its musical features, the final two bars of the composition, shown in fig. 2.14, are particularly striking for a number of reasons. Firstly, the rhythmic pattern utilised does not appear in Roche’s (2015) rhythm bank, and therefore, it is probable that the pattern here is not indicative of the wider Irish music canon. This, again, reinforces
the fact that Graham shows willingness in his compositions to look beyond the rhythmic patterns usually associated with the Irish traditional music canon in order to create his tunes. This employment of a pattern not commonly found within reels from the tradition echoes the syncopated rhythmic innovations illustrated previously in ‘Waterboogie’.

Secondly, Graham comments that the function of this section of the tune is merely operating as a link by which one can move from the key of the second part of the tune - E dorian - to the key of the first part of the tune - A dorian:

At that phase, as well, I was trying to write a lot of tunes that were changing key in the B parts as well. And I couldn’t figure out a way to link them so I just went - [plays link on accordion] - so that was really it just.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)
Fig. 2.13. ‘Kick’n the Box’
This statement, in conjunction with an analysis of the two-bar phrase in question, demonstrates a number of components of Graham’s compositional practice. For instance, it can be observed that Graham has a clear awareness of the key/mode\(^{33}\) of his tunes, and, in certain instances, actively strives to utilise alternating keys as part of the composition as a conscious musical decision. This is evidenced by the fact that he consciously attempts to create tunes which change from one key to another in the second part.

Furthermore, the chromatic nature of this phrase is perhaps indicative of the impact of Graham’s instrument on his compositional process. Whilst the chromaticism displayed in fig. 2.14 is relatively accessible on a button accordion, it is perhaps not so on other traditional instruments. The most commonly used accordion system in Irish music is the B/C system, where an outside row of buttons is tuned to the scale of B major, and the inside row tuned to C major. Whilst the D sharp and B flat notes shown in fig. 2.14 would be less commonly found in Irish music than the other notes, on a B/C accordion, these notes are sounded by using the same buttons as the more commonly found notes C sharp and B, respectively, and by simply switching the direction of the bellows. However, it could be argued that such a passage of notes may not have been as

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\(^{33}\) Irish traditional music generally falls within the ionian, mixolydian, dorian, and aeolian modes, with a high proportion of tunes comprising of scales with one or two sharps. The dorian and aeolian modes are typically referred to as ‘minor’ by practitioners, while the ionian mode is referred to as ‘major’. The mixolydian mode is referred to in a variety of different ways, including sometimes as ‘modal’. However, a growing sense of Western music literacy among musicians has led to mixolydian tunes being referred to as ‘mixolydian’, or ‘mix’. For further reading on the topic of modes in Irish music, see Ní Chathasaigh (2011).
obviously appealing to a whistle player’s compositional process, given that, because the whistle tends to be designed for the scale of D major, a technique of half-covering holes would have to be employed in order to achieve these accidentals. Therefore, it can be argued, to at least some extent, that Graham’s interaction with his instrument has a tangible impact on his compositional practice. Below, Ó Canainn explains this idiomatic composition:

In an instrumental tradition where the tunes are not written down but are actually composed on the instrument itself and transmitted orally, it is clear that to a large extent they will carry something of the character of the instrument on which they were composed. The composer will automatically favour certain movement and passages which are either easy on the particular instrument or are in some way typical of its use in the tradition, or may perhaps be considered uniquely a property of the particular instrument and not available on others.

(1993, p.1)

What is noteworthy here, however, is that while the passage in question of ‘Kick’n the Box’ does, as Ó Canainn describes, feature movements which are arguably both ‘easy’ on the instrument on which it was composed, and ‘not available’ on other instruments, Graham’s interaction with the button accordion in this instance in fact facilitates the use of movements which are atypical of its use in the tradition. Once again, Graham’s compositional practice exemplifies both long-held norms within the tradition as well as certain adaptations that lead to the creation of melodies not entirely idiomatic of the tradition, whilst existing within its broader structures.

2.3.1 Harmonic Structure, Arrangement, and Syncopation

As observed previously in ‘Soggy’s’ slip jig, one aspect of Graham’s innovation as a composer is the conception of harmonic structures as a precursor to the creation of a melody. With regard to ‘Kick’n the Box’, Graham recalls how his approach to composing
this tune involved establishing a clearly defined harmonic framework for the tune, conceived and articulated through his guitar playing, before deciding on a definitive melodic line:

I was definitely using the guitar at the time. Just playing kind of funky chords on the guitar. A minor, C, D7. So, I’d say I came up with them first. Which is the way I do a lot of stuff. Now not all of it, but I definitely was working with the guitar at that point. Getting the vibe first. And then trying to work a tune around it I suppose.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

Fig. 2.15 outlines the harmonic structure Graham employs during the compositional process alongside the melody so as to illustrate their relationship. As to how he came up with this particular chord structure, Graham also recalls actively listening to and searching for music from across a range of genres around the time he composed ‘Kick’n the Box’.

As he put it:

[I’ve] no idea where the chord structure idea came from, I was listening to a lot of different stuff back then, I used to go to the library and get out three or four CDs every week and we were all sharing our iPod music around the college.

(S. Graham 2016, pers. comm., 20 May)

This indicates the potential for Graham’s compositional process to be influenced by ideas from other musical genres. For instance, the use of a IV7 chord (the D7 here) is commonly associated with Blues music. It is not beyond plausibility that musical features from genres other than traditional Irish music, clearly a part of Graham’s musical soundscape at the time, may have played a role in his efforts to innovate beyond the boundaries of Irish traditional dance music. This is something Bohlman recognises as a part of the role that outside influences have on the introduction of new material to a musical tradition.

Bohlman notes:

Musical change often rests on the ability of a tradition to tolerate new elements entering individual pieces […] Just as style changes, so too do musical repertoires admit the
possibility of new origins, which may be either internal or external to the group.

(Bohlman, 1988, p.5)
As well as illustrating another innovative aspect of his composition, Graham’s decision to consciously build a melody around these chords also reinforces the existence of a harmonic component in the music, something that is not articulated in much of the literature that discusses the structure of an Irish dance tune. Bohlman acknowledges how “harmonization not only imposes a new vocabulary on a traditional folk melody, it forces a restructuring of the melody’s syntax”, when referring to the effects of the “basic patterns found in much European art music of the 18th and 19th centuries” (1988, p.75). Similarly, the impact of harmonic structures from other genres on Graham’s compositional innovations furthers this process.

In conjunction with its innovative harmonic structures, ‘Kick’n the Box’ also features instances of syncopation being used as an innovational tool. As can be seen from fig. 2.13, the first note of bars two, four, six, and thirteen of ‘Kick’n the Box’ are tied with notes from the bars previous. The result is a syncopated effect not too dissimilar to that found in ‘Waterboogie’, as previously outlined. It can be inferred from this that syncopation in the melodic line may be a recurring feature in Graham’s compositions. This deliberate deviation from the basic motor rhythm associated with this tune type (fig. 2.16) is one very obvious innovation explored by Graham.

![Fig. 2.16. Reel Motor Rhythm](image)

Also noteworthy, is that the timing of some of the instances of syncopation in ‘Kick’n the Box’ correlates to chord shifts in the established harmonic pattern for the
tune, as illustrated by the C chords in bars one and five in fig. 2.15. This suggests that there is more at play here structurally than simply a preconceived harmonic framework during the composition of the melody. Additionally, there is interplay present between the rhythm and harmony in terms of how they engage with, and essentially generate, the melody. This relationship between a broad harmonic and rhythmic accompaniment, and the composed melody, implies that the overall arrangement constitutes an important aspect of Graham’s compositional practice. In other words, there is a sense that both the melody and the accompaniment are part of one composition encompassing the wider rhythmic and harmonic arrangement as well as the melody. The interrelatedness of composition and arrangement in Graham’s tunes is most clearly acknowledged when Graham is asked whether or not a separation is to be made between the composition of the melodic line and the composition of the underlying chordal structure. He states that for him, “it’s all one” (S. Graham 2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar).

This alignment of melody, harmony and rhythm could be perceived as a peak in Graham’s development as a composer - not necessarily in terms of any aesthetic judgement on standard of composition, but in terms of following an imagined arc from melodic composition informed by the assembling of phrases, as evidenced in ‘Waterboogie’, to a gradually increased relevance of underlying harmonic outlines, culminating at a point whereby melody and arrangement achieve both a unity of purpose and importance. However, this development in Graham’s compositional practice, whereby harmonic and rhythmic underpinnings both inform the composition of a melody and constitute an equitable component of the final ‘composition’, is not without restrictive implications. It is fascinating to note Graham’s musings in this regard, where he acknowledges the constraints placed by harmonic thought on his own compositional practice:
Back when I wasn’t using the guitar, I’d say I was a bit freer melody-wise to do whatever came out. Whereas now I’m subconsciously always thinking, ‘Well that’s not going to work’, or ‘it is’. Instead of just going, ‘Just make up a melody’, rather than thinking about structure and chords and arrangement. Whereas I can’t do it now without thinking about that.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

This raises some very important considerations. Graham’s statement counters the notion of any perceived developmental curve plotting the expansion of Graham’s approach to his compositional practice, as though it is aiming towards a final peak of harmonic and melodic equitability. In fact, his statement brings the arc full-circle in such a way that it places melody-making clearly at the forefront of his goals for composition. In his yearning to create a melody without a harmonically and rhythmically structured arrangement informing its creation, Graham alludes to a perceived musical hierarchy within the Irish traditional idiom which places melody firmly on top of accompaniment, but which has been dispensed with in the context of at least some of Graham’s compositions, such as ‘Kick’n the Box’, where the accompaniment and melody achieve an equivalence, or, as Graham puts it, are “all one”.

It is important to contextualise this apparent dichotomy by considering another musical process. Ensemble playing and accompanied performance of melody is an integral part of Graham’s musical landscape. This is evidenced in his engagement with ‘Beoga’; in his composition of melodies whilst playing along to a looped, pre-recorded accompaniment; and in his own accompanying of melodies on guitar. In an ensemble where it is decided to arrange an accompaniment to a melody, a dynamic, improvised process generally occurs. Among various other decisions on instrumentation, tempo, and so on, specific harmonic and rhythmic patterns are carefully and deliberately chosen to accompany the melody. The result is ‘an arrangement’. Whilst this process can place the
melody at its core, and whilst harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments are utilised to enhance or adorn the melody, it is worthwhile comparing this process when considering a tune arrangement based on pre-composed set harmonic structures.

In discussion with Graham on the topic of ensemble arrangement, he explains how he might create an audio recording of his ideas for the arrangement of one of his tunes before presenting the tune, in any format, to the band. While he expects the others in the band to make improvements to his arrangement, it is with the caveat that the basic harmonic structure is not to be altered. However, in certain instances he does acknowledge that this occurs, as illustrated previously in terms of the final bar of ‘Waterboogie’. When asked whether or not he would deem a suggestion to alter the melody as more or less of an alteration in comparison with a suggestion to alter a chord choice, Graham reiterates that he would deem them one and the same. However, he also acknowledges that this may not be the attitude of the majority of composers, and that an alteration to the melody of many composers’ compositions would, in fact, be a more drastic action than an alteration of a chord choice. The conversation is transcribed below and begins with my question, how rigidly Graham would expect the piano player in his band to adhere to a rough piano accompaniment idea that Graham himself recorded:

Ó Meachair: And how rigidly does he need to stick to your arrangement?

Graham: Hopefully not too rigid because I don’t want it to be as [bad] as that.

ÓM: But in terms of harmonic structure, you’d expect him to play the same chords?

G: Oh yeah, the same chords and everything yeah. And no, I’m not completely stuck in my ways either, like, if he comes up with something I’ll go with it because probably, if it’s good like, that’s just being in a band.
ÓM: And has it ever happened that you’ve written a tune and he’s come along and just kind of said, ‘Actually I hear this chord here’, and it’s a different interpretation of the tune?

G: Yeah. Sometimes I’m not fully delighted about it but, again, that’s part of the process. It’s a collaborative effort and all that.

ÓM: But do you feel, is that interfering with your composition more so or less so than, say, if someone said, ‘Why don’t you change these three notes in the tune?’

G: Well I don’t think, no he’d never do that, whereas he might chordally try and do something. It’s funny, even with Damien’s tunes, I find myself changing them. And he’s well up for it like. That’s because I’m thinking more in an arrangement sense. You know, ‘this needs to go here because we can do this in the backing side of things’.

ÓM: So it’s a very fluid line between composition and arrangement?

G: Absolutely.

ÓM: And do you think messing with the melody is any more or less composition than messing with the chords? Like is one closer to composition and one closer to arrangement? Or is it all just a fluid line?

G: For me anyway it’s all one. But I’d say most other people [would] probably be thinking melody. It’s just everybody’s different I suppose you know?

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

34 Damien is the other accordion player in ‘Beoga’.
2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have performed a close, contextual reading of two compositions in particular by composer Seán Óg Graham. I have looked at the tunes in terms of their framework and rhythmic patterns, and how they conform, or do not conform, to the broader traditional canon. I have also explored the role of harmony and arrangement on Graham’s compositional process. What emerges is a picture of a composer of Irish traditional music who, whilst adhering to certain core aspects of the idiom’s basic framework and norms, also toys with certain historical expectations of the tradition through melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic innovations, some of which stem from other genres of music. Harmonic influences from outside of the tradition, the use of syncopation, and a willingness to explore musical possibilities afforded by his instrument, comfortably coexist within Graham’s compositions, alongside traditional eight-bar structures, recognisable tune types, and rhythms and motifs consistent with traditional norms; thus, portraying a composer who embodies both innovation and tradition through his creative compositional process. For this particular composer, a complex relationship between composition and arrangement is also apparent. In certain instances, a composition may comprise solely of a melodic line, while in other instances, an imagined, wider arrangement based around preconceived harmonic structures which informs the creation of the melody, is an equal constituent of the composition.

In the next chapter, I examine the work of fiddler Áine McGeeney. Both similarities and differences emerge in terms of compositional process and attitudes towards composition. A similar method of analysis is utilised whereby topics that arise in conversation with McGeeney, as well as various features of two of her compositions, shall be discussed in detail. Harmony, arrangement, rhythmic innovation, and the role of education all feature as discussion points in the following case study.
Chapter 3

Case Study B: The Compositions of Áine McGeeney

This chapter focuses on the compositions of Áine McGeeney (1989-) - an accomplished performer, composer, teacher, and a graduate of a Bachelor of Arts in Irish Music at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance. Having initially studied whistle and flute, McGeeney began studying the fiddle at age eight. Learning traditional fiddle and song in her local school, McGeeney also attended both private classes and Comhaltas-run classes on the fiddle. Developing an interest in composition in her teens, McGeeney further explored this aspect of her musicianship in university and went on to perform and record many of her compositions with her band, ‘Goitse’. McGeeney’s other musical activities have included performing with various dance shows and teaching individual and group classes on a regular basis.

In this chapter, McGeeney’s place within, as well as her changing sense of, the tradition, is discussed. These discussions are based on extensive interviews with McGeeney during 2014 and 2015 and on detailed readings of her tunes. In particular, two of McGeeney’s compositions are subjected to close analysis, whereby their individual content is considered in relation to historical forms of Irish traditional music, and in terms of newer forms and styles of composition that have emerged in recent decades. This textual analysis is contextualised within the broader questions of motivation, approach, and individual agency within the community. My analytical approach draws upon Harvey (2010) and Quigley (2010), as well as my own experiences as a performer and composer. Irish music scholars such as Ó Canainn (1993) and Breathnach (1971) are also drawn upon in locating McGeeney’s tunes in the broader context of the Irish music tradition from which she comes. Throughout the chapter, the role of McGeeney’s band, ‘Goitse’,
emerges as an important factor in her compositional experience in terms of technical possibilities and peer influence. Issues such as rhythm, harmony, structure, and instrumentation are addressed, whilst the notion of educating oneself on a musical technique or feature also appears as a reason to undertake the act of composition. Further to this, McGeeney’s sense of what it is exactly that constitutes ‘the composition’, is explored with particular reference to the role of harmony in the compositional process.

3.1 ‘Transformed’

Áine McGeeney

Fig. 3.1 - ‘Transformed’
An investigation into McGeeney’s tune entitled ‘Transformed’ (represented in figure 3.1) illustrates both an approach to composition as well as a motivation hitherto not widely documented in Irish music literature: the utilisation of composition in order to further understanding of a particular musical feature. Through conversations and interviews with McGeeney, it was made clear to me that integral to her motivation for the composition of this tune was a desire to gain a better understanding of the complexities of playing and composing in seven-eight time. The notion of writing a tune in order to, at least in part, solidify or further musical understanding of a certain concept or technique is not uncommon among young composers. For example, through informal conversations over the course of this research, piano accordionist and composer Martin Tourish’s35 ‘Tripletocity’ tune (shown in fig. 3.2) came to my attention. This is a tune that was inspired by a newly learned technique of performing chorded triplets on the piano accordion. Another composer, James Harvey - a banjo and mandolin player - composed his tune, entitled ‘619’, based around a ‘II7b5 - V7b9 - i’ chord pattern which he learned about whilst studying for a jazz improvisation class (see fig. 3.3). These tunes exemplify young composers incorporating newly learned musical techniques and chord sequences into compositions which, broadly speaking, conform to the structural norms of the tradition. This is done as a means to further their understanding and ability of the particular technique or sequence.

In explaining her motivation for composing ‘Transformed’, McGeeney sets the scene as follows, from her time in a workshop held in 2009 in the University of Limerick with key composers/arrangers in Ireland:

35 Martin Tourish is a piano accordion player who performs and composes extensively. Born in County Donegal, he has recorded a number of albums with various projects including with the band ‘Altan’. He also studied classical music on the piano accordion as part of his degree in the Dublin Institute of Technology’s Conservatory of Music and Drama.
We were at a sort of a workshop thing with Dónal Lunny and we were all just playing tunes and arranging stuff and coming up with ideas and one of the tunes that was picked was a seven-eight piece by Mike McGoldrick. That was ‘Waterman’s’ [...] Some people knew it and some people didn’t so everybody went over it and we learned it [...] A lot of people, even though everyone was doing an Irish music and dance degree, a lot of people were tripping up on the seven-eight part [...] We all knew the tune I’d say from listening to it but when it came down to really learning the tune and figuring out what notes were in what bar, everybody was sort of tripping over playing something slightly different. So then that got me sort of thinking [...] ‘I’d love to come up with something for me to write that was really interesting first and foremost as a tune, not as a seven-eight piece, but I wanted it to be in seven-eight.’

(2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug)
Fig. 3.2. ‘Tripletocity’
Fig. 3.3. ‘619’

Around the same time, McGeeney had been listening to the music of the Scottish band ‘Lau’ who make use of various asymmetric and alternating time signatures. She commented about the experience of listening to ‘Lau’ by saying:

It was like listening to a trad album that I couldn’t tap my foot to. And I couldn’t understand why. And that really annoyed me why I couldn’t understand why. Because the tunes were very catchy and I could sing a lot of them back to you, but I could never, I could never tap my foot or couldn’t make sense of it. So, for a long time I sat and just, tune by tune, went through, discussing it.

(Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

36 ‘Lau’ is a Scottish trio who make use of traditional Scottish music as well as more contemporary compositions in creating their music. They are noted for their inventive arrangements. More information can be found at www.lau-music.co.uk.
It was the result of these experiences of discovering rhythms which were different to anything she had performed throughout her musical experiences thus far, that McGeeney realised her desire to fully understand the mechanics of seven-eight time signatures, and so decided to enlist the help of bodhrán player, percussionist, and fellow band member Colm Phelan to show her exactly “what seven-eight was - to properly explain it” (Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). With Phelan, she proceeded to explore the various possibilities for seven-eight groupings:

He broke it down in three and four or whatever - and I was like: ‘Ok, but do I have to keep that pattern the whole way through the tune? If it’s three and four, does it have to be three and four in the next part?’ And he was like: ‘Well, no.’ Ok so what other patterns could we come up with? So, we dabbled around three and four, four and three, and then not even like a three but in a long note as opposed to three single notes - just messing around.

(Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug)

Thereafter, McGeeney used this newly acquired knowledge to map out a rhythmic structure for the tune, which can be observed in figure 3.1.

The result is that the first eight-bar part of ‘Transformed’ is made up of bars of seven quavers broken up into an initial group of three followed by a group of four. In the second part (bars 10-17) this is reversed to produce an initial group of four quavers followed by a group of three, while the third part (bars 18-25) is the most rhythmically complex. The subdivision of an initial four-quaver section followed by a three-quaver section remains steadily for the first six bars (bars 18-23), although the four quavers are replaced at various points by a minim (bar 22), two crotchets (bars 19, 23) or a dotted crotchet and quaver (bar 18). Finally, the first part’s rhythmic structure reappears for the last two bars of the third part (bars 24, 25).

Tunes in seven-eight time are a relatively new phenomenon within the Irish music tradition. Bouzouki player and singer Andy Irvine is widely credited with introducing the
idea of asymmetric rhythms to Irish traditional music after spending some time in the Balkan region in the late sixties (O’Regan 2011, p.365). Some tunes from this area were performed and recorded by him in various ensembles such as ‘Mozaic’ (Keegan 2011, p.53) and ‘Planxty’. Later, in 1994, Bill Whelan incorporated some Balkan influences in his show, Riverdance (Dowling 2011, p.23), which played a major role in the globalisation of Irish music. However, seven-eight timing would not be widely seen as part of the tradition at all. For example, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, the organisation who run many Irish traditional music events and classes across the world, do not include tunes in seven-eight time in their list of accepted competition or examination pieces (Comhaltas 2017). However, McGeeney’s construction of the melody around these rhythmic structures, whilst being a conscious effort on the one hand to explore beyond the realms of the tradition as had been imparted to her up until this point, was also undertaken with a clear awareness of, and reference to, the tradition. This is a crucial aspect of McGeeney’s compositional practice, and places it at the aforementioned ‘crossroads’ between tradition and innovation. In ‘Transformed’, a clear adherence to the structure of ‘the round’ is apparent. Despite the time signature of the piece not corresponding to any of the traditional tune types referred to above, the repetition and structure associated with those dance forms is retained. Figure 3.4 highlights the repetition of phrases in the first part of the tune, in line with the traditional eight-bar structure of parts throughout the tradition.
This notion of maintaining a relative sense of the tradition in her composition is reflected in McGeeney’s own thoughts on the subject as well. Although recognising the desire to explore seven-eight timing as being at the core of the motivation for the composition of this tune, McGeeney maintains that “it’s more about the melody than the rhythm” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov) and that although this novel rhythmic structure is a huge aspect of the tune, it is the melody that is of primary importance:

[Although] the rhythm is…obviously a big part of the tune…The tune is the core. The melody is what makes it…and not for it to be weird for the sake of being weird…I’d hope that it’s the melody that stands out.
(Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

McGeeney’s desire for the melody to be paramount, and for it not to sound ‘weird’ despite its novel rhythmic structure, would seem to speak to some extent to an intent to conform, at least in some ways, to the traditional expectations of the listener.

McGeeney demonstrates how she uses the compositional process as a means to broaden her musical knowledge. Further, by consciously mapping out a rhythmic structure in the beginning, McGeeney utilises an approach that is not widely documented in Irish music literature; and finally, despite striving to explore beyond commonly found tune types in the Irish music tradition, McGeeney simultaneously draws heavily from
facets and building blocks of that same tradition during the compositional process as this is her generic, musical home.

While rhythms and time signatures are one aspect of McGeeney’s compositional innovations, harmony also plays an important role in her tune writing. Next, I introduce another one of McGeeney’s tunes in order to explore her attitude towards harmony in composition, and how that manifests itself in the generation of her tunes.

3.2 ‘A Like for All but Love for None’

The second tune of McGeeney’s to which I wish to draw attention is a slip jig entitled ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ (shown in figure 3.5). The role of harmony during the composition of this tune is a very interesting study in itself. First and foremost, McGeeney maintains that while engaging in the process of composing this melody, she had an idea of the chord pattern for the tune in her head before any of the melody came into existence. This may seem similar to the process discussed in the previous chapter with Seán Óg Graham’s compositions ‘Soggy’s’ and ‘Kick’n the Box’. However, it is important to underscore that the chords were not something McGeeney played or recorded; rather she heard them ‘in her head’ and they subsequently dictated the choice of notes for the melody. As she puts it:

> Whenever I’m writing the tune, the backing is almost in my head before the tune is written. Ok so, not all the time. Sometimes I can just faff around and, you know, whatever comes, comes. But a lot of the time I would have a pattern in my head and it could be more of a chord pattern or it could be a little riff. So, it could be chords and rhythm, but I haven’t even started on writing the tune yet.

(Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

This statement is particularly striking in that it distinguishes between composing a melody with and without a pre-conceived chord pattern in mind. Literature dealing with composition in traditional music alludes to the existence of certain recurring motifs or
formulas that enable the traditional musician to compose. These are small groups of notes that commonly run together in melodies within the tradition. As the ethnomusicologist Colin Quigley explains in his analysis of the fiddling of Newfoundland fiddler Emile Benoit, Benoit “acquired familiarity with the melodic formulas of his idiom in the process of learning his repertoire” (2010, p.218). In a similar manner, Tomas Ó Cannain refers to the “clichés in variation or composition” that can serve as “building-blocks” for the composer (1993, p.3). While McGeeney may sometimes compose a melody without set premeditated harmonic structures in mind by ‘faffing around’ as she puts it, in other instances she points out that she does have these structures in mind. Therefore, the notion of these ‘building blocks’ is cast in a new light in this regard. On the one hand, they exist in a ‘linear’ sense where they are assembled side-by-side in order to create the melody. However, given predetermined harmonic outlines for the melody, these blocks can also exist within a broader harmonic context, where they are assembled with due regard to both their linear placement in the melodic line, but also with reference to the harmonic prerequisites. Figure 3.6 outlines the harmonic structure employed by McGeeney when composing the tune. This is the pattern submitted by McGeeney in her undergraduate final year vocational project.

A clear correlation between the chords and the melody can be seen in how each stressed note that coincides with a chord change corresponds to the outlined triad. Figure 3.7 highlights the close triadic relationship in second part of the tune between the melody and the chord choices. Therefore, in ‘A Like for All but Love for None’, McGeeney composes a melody which is based around, and is closely related to, a particular chord

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37 This is a practical project that is undertaken by students of the BA in Irish Music and Dance in the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance during their final year. For her project, McGeeney compiled a collection of her own compositions. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ was included as represented in fig. 3.6.
pattern which she has not performed or recorded, but merely retained ‘in her head’. This compositional strategy is a recurring theme throughout these case studies and emerges as one of the approaches utilised by young composers in the composition of Irish traditional music.

Áine Mc Geeney

Fig. 3.5. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’
Fig. 3.6. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ - With Chords

Fig. 3.7 - ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ - Triadic Passages
3.2.1 The vi-IV-I-V Chord Pattern

As for the particular chordal structures McGeeney had in mind when composing this tune, it is at this point that I wish to direct attention once again towards the second part of ‘A Like for All but Love for None’. The chordal structure employed in accompanying the second part of the tune, as highlighted in figure 3.7, is based around a vi-IV-I-V chord pattern. This pattern is what McGeeney affectionately refers to as “my four chords” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). From discussions with her, it appears that this particular chord progression is a recurring theme in her compositional process: “I’ve patterns in my head - a lot of them are the same […] the tunes could be totally different but it’s still those four chords that end up backing them” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug).

Significantly, this four-chord sequence is widely acknowledged as a commonly occurring feature within the pop music genre. This has been famously highlighted by the Australian musical comedy act ‘The Axis of Awesome’ who performs a mash-up of numerous famous pop music numbers along to the accompaniment of a constant repeat of the aforementioned chordal pattern (Raskopoulos 2009). When discussing possible musical influences on her own composition, McGeeney points out that she does not “have that many influences outside of trad…apart from obviously popular music” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). McGeeney acknowledges here the impact of mainstream music that she hears on a daily basis from radio and other sources upon her musical soundscape, and subsequently upon her composition. This gives an interesting insight into at least one outside influence on McGeeney’s compositional process, and potentially, by extension, to other composers with a similar amount of engagement with the world of pop music. Whilst the particular aforementioned chordal pattern’s correlation with ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ is noteworthy in highlighting the potential impact of the pop music
genre on the composition of traditional Irish dance music, next I take a deeper look at the role of harmony more generally in McGeeney’s compositions, and in particular, her attitude towards harmony in tune composition.

3.2.2 The Role of Harmony

In explaining what she had in mind during the composition of ‘A Like for All but Love for None’, McGeeney claims that her thoughts were very much centred on the chords she wished to utilise. When asked what it was that was to the fore in her mind, she responds: “Chords. Chords, chords, chords. Like it’s a basic tune” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). Even though McGeeney makes the point that it is not necessary that a harmonic structure be in place in order for her to compose, describing a process reminiscent of Quigley’s (2010) notion of ‘melodising’ when she says that she can “faff around” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov) in order to compose a tune, in other instances it is very much the fact of the matter that a preconceived harmonic framework is at play before the melody’s construction begins. McGeeney explains: “But a lot of the time I would have a pattern in my head and it could be more of a chord pattern or it could be a little riff. So, it could be chords and rhythm, but I haven’t even started on writing the tune yet” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). McGeeney makes it clear that the ‘tune’ is what comes after the chord pattern. It is worth noting here, in the context of the varying degrees to which harmony can play a role in McGeeney’s compositions, that there is a clear distinction made between harmony and melody in what it is that constitutes ‘the composition’ in the mind of the composer. This is true, regardless of whether or not a preconceived harmonic structure is employed in the construction of the melody. Although on the one hand there is a widespread acceptance of ‘the tune’ or ‘the composition’ as a melody in certain circles, on the other hand, harmony, in certain instances, plays a central role in the
compositional process for McGeeney. Therefore, while she fully acknowledges the role that harmony plays in the compositional process, there is still a distinction made whereby the melody line alone is what is deemed to be ‘the tune’: “The tune is the tune, because of these chords…The tune was written this way because of these chords…Now the tune is itself” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug).

The utilisation of preconceived harmonic structures in the composition of a melody also relates to the issue of technology and harmony. Given that modern-day technology such as microphones and recording equipment is so readily available, the musician is now afforded the opportunity to record himself or herself playing and then, in turn, to play along with the recording afterwards. This was touched on in chapter 2 where Seán Óg Graham recorded a series of chords, looped them, and subsequently played along to these loops in order to compose a tune. McGeeney references this process in the context of describing how she goes about coming up with harmonies and counter-melodies for a composed tune: “It’s what I do all of the time…if I’m arranging anything. That’s how I make harmonies, how I make counter-melodies” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug).

However, this does not seem to be a strategy that McGeeney employs when undertaking the composition of a melody. Although the possibilities for chords are quite limited on the fiddle\(^\text{38}\), McGeeney did study piano “for a few months” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug) during her childhood, as well as to a certain extent throughout her undergraduate studies where basic keyboard skills was a part of the curriculum.

\(^{38}\)The technique of double-stopping, where two strings are played at once, is one example of the fiddle being used for harmonic effect in Irish traditional music. Scholar and musician Aileen Dillane outlines in detail the various ways in which instruments in Irish traditional music typically create harmonic effects during performance in her MA dissertation, *The Ivory Bridge* (2000).
Therefore, it is notable that despite the option of such an approach potentially being available to her, for whatever reason, it is not undertaken.

In this case study, the varying degrees to which harmony can play a role in the compositional process come to the fore once again, whereby in certain instances a harmonic idea can play a clear role in dictating the assembling of a melodic line, especially with regard to triadic patterns, despite its remaining inaudible during the composition of the melody. This sense of the inaudible harmonic structure impacting upon the construction of the melody is mirrored somewhat in Ó Súilleabháin’s assertion that in performance, the “basic structural format” of Irish traditional music is “the partially inaudible structural model against which the player improvises” (1990, p.129).

Now, I analyse ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ with regard to internal rhythms, as well as to its overall structure.

3.2.3 Structure and Rhythm

With respect to the various rhythms employed in the tune, when analysed with reference to Roche’s (2015) rhythm bank, one can observe a number of bars of rhythm in McGeeney’s tune that do not appear in Roche’s indexing of the slip jig rhythms found in O’Neill’s 1001: The Dance Music of Ireland (1907). The examples of bars that do not appear in Roche’s rhythm bank are highlighted in figure 3.8. However, as slip jigs in most instances are comprised of bars of nine-eight timing, which subdivide into three equal groupings of value equivalent to three quavers, the bars are generally made up of varying combinations of dotted crotchets, crotchet-quaver groupings, and three-quaver groupings. Therefore, although the groupings highlighted in red do not feature in Roche’s rhythm bank, they do not signal a radical departure from what might be expected. However, the bars highlighted in blue present an interesting innovation on McGeeney’s part in her
employment of a tied, dotted crotchet and quaver; resulting in a note-length of equal value
to four quavers.

This deliberate use of a tied note occurring ‘across’ a stressed beat creates two
effects in particular which shift, ever so slightly, the melody away from the expected
norms of the slip jig. First, the simple fact that a note of this length is not usually found
in such circumstances creates an unanticipated durational effect in itself. However,
perhaps more notably, the joining of the second stressed beat of the bar to the note
previous to it briefly suspends the expected rhythmic pulse of the melody before its
subsequent restoration, and creates a brief moment of suspense for the listener (see fig.
3.9). The effect created by moving from three stressed beats in a bar to only the first and
third being obviously stressed, before returning to three stressed beats once again, is
enhanced by the fact that it is in the final bar of each part in which this temporary
suspension of 'the underlying motor-rhythm’ - a term utilised by Ó Súilleabháin (1990) -
occurs. The restoration of the motor-rhythm is mirrored by the restoration of the melody
at its point of origin.
In this exploration of rhythmic possibilities within the slip jig structure, McGeeney displays a desire for innovation that is realised within the structure of a traditional dance form, having previously, as shown with ‘Transformed’, displayed a desire to shift beyond the expected dance tune forms. Even in relation to the choosing of the starting note of this...
tune, McGeeney points out that she felt as though once she had decided to compose the tune in A major, the obvious thing for her to do was to begin on a high A\(^{39}\), and therefore deliberately went in search of a different starting note. As she put it: “I picked the key as I usually do: ‘A’. [It] usually starts on high A, so I’ll start low for the craic\(^{40}\)” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). This deliberate attempt to avoid the obvious demonstrates not only her desire to create something different, but also shows how a relatively simple concept can act as a vehicle for innovation, and thus shows the varying parameters within which the pursuit of musical innovation can take place.

When the overall structure of the tune is observed, the importance of ‘the round’ and commonly found patterns of repetition within the tradition comes to the fore. First and foremost, it is noteworthy that McGeeney, in outlining her motivation to compose a slip jig - something that is touched upon again in chapter 6 - cites the slip jigs of Seán Óg Graham as a major source of inspiration. As she puts it: “slip jigs went a completely different direction when it came to Seán Óg” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). This influence of Graham’s is particularly evident in the fact that ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ (fig. 3.5) is comprised of two eight-bar parts, echoing Graham’s composition ‘Soggy’s’ (fig. 2.12), as distinct from the more historically-commonplace four-bar part (see chapter 2 for a fuller explanation of the significance of this). However, more significant than the fact that the parts are made up of eight bars, is the distinct lack of repetition to be found in the tune, particularly in the first part. As can be observed from figure 3.5, each bar in the first part (bars 1-9) contains a bar of music which is not repeated anywhere else in the tune. While the first two bars of the second part (bars 10-11) do

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\(^{39}\) Irish traditional musicians tend to refer to ‘high’ notes as those that are in the octave above the note C, which is itself one octave above middle C. E.g., the ‘high A’ referred to here is the second A above middle C.

\(^{40}\) ‘Craic’ is an Irish term meaning fun.
repeat two bars later (bars 14-15), the endings of each part also differ from each other, and so the vast majority of the tune is unrepeated within the context of a single utterance of a part. Of the four case studies, this is perhaps the most obvious example of Dowling’s notion of the “full melodic possibilities of the eight-bar structure” (2011, p.154) being explored in that it is an example of an entire eight-bar part being made up of wholly unrepeated bars of music.

However, despite the lack of repetition of melodic motifs in the first part of this tune, it is worth noting that the chord structure, as outlined by McGeeney, does show a degree of repetition in that the chord choices assigned to the first seven beats of the tune repeat in the second line (see fig. 3.10). Therefore, whilst on one level the tune could be said to be moving away from the expected patterns of repetition found throughout the tradition, perhaps an argument can be made that it is the harmonic influence upon the tune, or the harmonic implications of the tune’s construction, which maintain a connection to these patterns of repetition, and by extension, ‘the round’.

This complex relationship between harmony, structure, and ‘the round’ is further evidenced by remarks made during the course of fieldwork for this study by McGeeney with regard to a countermelody for the second part of ‘A Like for All but Love for None’. The countermelody, which was employed in the arrangement of the tune for a recording made by McGeeney with her band ‘Goitse’, is shown in figure 3.11. It was even referred to by McGeeney as: “probably my favourite thing I’ve ever written” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). While her approach to composing the counter-melody involved playing along to a recording of herself playing the melody, and clearly conforms to the harmonic structure also outlined for the melody, what results is a sixteen-bar melody and not an eight-bar melody. This is another example of a shifting relationship between these new
compositions and their respective accompaniments across four, eight, and sixteen bar passages. This topic arises once more in chapter 4.

Fig. 3.10. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ - Repeated Chords

Fig. 3.11. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ – Second Part Countermelody
3.3 Instrumentation

The effect of instrumentation upon McGeeney’s tunes is another aspect of her compositional process worthy of remark. McGeeney explains that although her initial forays into the composition of tunes began on the tin whistle, she soon found this medium to have its drawbacks: “For a good two to three years I wrote everything that I wrote on the tin whistle - which is very limiting” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). Frustrations with the limitations of the D tin whistle, especially in terms of accessibility to the full chromatic range, led McGeeney to begin composing on the fiddle. However, when composing on the fiddle, McGeeney makes a conscious effort not to fall into more obvious finger patterns stemming from her performance, and strives to find the ideal melodic combinations in order to compose a tune, regardless of their accessibility on the instrument: “The way I write a tune, it always seems to be, it has to be what my ear wants to hear…even to the extent that it’s uncomfortable for me to play certain patterns in this tune” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). She cites examples of intervals and passages in both of the tunes observed in this case study where this plays out to be true. For example, in the second part of ‘Transformed’, as highlighted in the bar shown in figure 3.12, the movement from the note B, played with the first finger on the A string, to the note F, played with the first finger in a different position on the E string does not come across to McGeeney as a natural movement during her playing. As she puts it: “That’s not a normal thing for me to do. It’s not in most tunes that I would have been associated with playing” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). A similar situation occurs in ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ in the first bar where a jump from a low C sharp to an A, skipping the D string entirely, occurs (fig. 3.13). McGeeney acknowledges the added complication in this, given its occurrence at the beginning of the tune: “That’s your opening thing. The
thing that you’d usually think, you know: ‘This has to be clear’” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug).

Fig. 3.12. ‘Transformed’ - Bar 14, Non-obvious finger pattern

Fig. 3.13. ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ - Bar 1, Non-obvious finger pattern

Therefore, as quoted in the previous chapter, although Ó Canainn explains how composition of traditional Irish music will tend to “carry something of the character of the instrument on which they were composed”, and that “the composer will automatically favour certain movements and passages which are either easy on the particular instrument or are in some way typical of its use in the tradition” (1993, p.1), it is significant to observe, in McGeeney’s tunes, two opposing views on this statement manifest. On the one hand, in the tunes observed in this case study, McGeeney composes melodies that contain G sharps, F naturals, and notes below the D above middle C. These are all either challenging to generate or physically impossible to produce within the range capacity of the tin whistle - her former instrument of choice for compositional purposes. Therefore, one can argue the clear impact in terms of melodic possibilities that her switch to fiddle has had on her compositions. However, on the other hand, clear examples have been highlighted of McGeeney striving to avoid falling into certain movements that may be
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3.4 Locating the Individual Composer in the Community

Historically, a constant trope is the apparent need for approval from ‘the community’ in order for a piece to be accepted. When speaking of newly composed tunes within the Irish music tradition, collector and scholar Breandán Breathnach states, as was quoted in the first chapter, that “obviously these compositions cannot be described as traditional. They have not been re-shaped and re-created by the community” (1971, p.119). Despite this, Breathnach does also acknowledge that “if a piece has been composed in a traditional form by one totally immersed in the tradition, and if it is accepted and played by traditional players as part of their repertoire, it has a claim to admittance which cannot be refused” (1971, p.119). However, it must be remembered that this ‘community’ is made up of individuals, a certain number of whom are careful and deliberate composers to begin with. During my research for this study, one instance recalled by McGeeney illustrates this very clearly in describing her compositional process for ‘Transformed’. Figure 3.14 shows an image of the original notes, written in ABC format, from which McGeeney worked. McGeeney outlines how at one point in the aftermath of having composed the tune, she played it for another musician while relying on these scribbled notes and her memory of what she had composed. In her own words:

I had it written down in this little note - piece of paper - that I still have. It was really squashed and I took the paper in with me and I sat down and I played it for him but it was so small and so squashed that I kept making mistakes and I couldn’t see what it is.

(Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug)
McGeeney ended up improvising over some of the passages she could not either remember or make out from the notation. She says: “So the more I tried to get it across, I was improvising to make it sound good at the time” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug). But as she kept playing, it reinforced this new version of the tune. There are some clear discrepancies between this and what had been originally composed. For example, figures 3.15 and 3.16 show the fourth bar of the tune transcribed according to the ABC notation in figure 3.14, next to the same bar in the finalised version as supplied by McGeeney. However, this adaptation was the version that she continued to play beyond that point. As she says in her own words: “when I actually went back to it, [the tune] wasn’t what was written down. But it was adapted at that stage so I just had to go with it” (Á. McGeeney 2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug).

Fig. 3.14 - ‘Transformed’ - First Draft
This is a concrete example of the re-working and re-shaping of a tune by a composer (see Breathnach 1971; Bohlman 1988; Ó Canainn 1993), and highlights the role of the individual in this process.

3.5 Conclusion

In summation, this chapter shows the compositions of a highly competent musician and composer that exemplify a wide range of ways in which to innovate, both within the confines of existing traditional norms by seeking out subtle differences in expected choices of pitch and rhythm, as well as through an exploration of different time signatures and tune structures. The impact, or non-impact as the case may be, of instrumentation upon McGeeney’s compositional process is multifaceted, as it can play a role in the formation of tunes, especially in terms of range, whilst also being deliberately ignored in the pursuit of desired melodic passages. Influences from other genres, as well as a desire to broaden one’s musical knowledge, have also been shown to play their parts in the construction of new tunes for McGeeney. Finally, just as the individual composer composes music, the individual composer has also been shown to re-create music, and thus plays another important role in the broader ‘community’.
The next chapter focuses on the compositions of Jos Kelly, a multi-instrumentalist from County Sligo in Ireland. Whilst analysing his compositions with regard to their overall conformation to traditional expectations, some notable similarities and differences also appear in comparison with the compositional process of McGeeney, especially in regard to the effect of predetermined harmonic patterns on the overall structure of the tune as well as the relationship between the harmonic choices and the resultant melody. Jos Kelly, therefore, illustrates yet another way in which young composers in the tradition are finding their own voices and techniques to great effect.
Chapter 4

Case Study C: The Compositions of Jos Kelly

In this chapter, I investigate and analyse two compositions by the musician and composer Jos Kelly; born in 1993 in County Sligo in Ireland. Primarily a traditional button accordion player, as well as being a composer, Kelly is also an accomplished traditional and classical piano player, having studied classical piano up to grade eight over the course of his upbringing. His keen interest in other musical genres, including taking some jazz lessons during his teens, led to the formation of his band ‘Moxie’, which draws on a range of musical flavours including Irish traditional music. How ‘Moxie’ informs and impacts upon Kelly’s composition is one aspect of the following analysis of his tunes, especially with regard to the envisaging of the eventual performance of these tunes.

Throughout this chapter, the manner in which Kelly’s compositions interact with and are generated from the Irish music tradition is explored, with my observations concentrated on the modality, structure, rhythm, and motivic movements of these tunes, as well as on understanding Kelly’s particular approach to composition more generally. A specific emphasis is placed on the complex role that harmony and arrangement play in his compositional process, whilst other elements such as instrumentation and outlets for performance are also investigated. Analysis of the overarching structure of Kelly’s tunes draws on Ó Súilleabháin’s (1990) discussion on ‘the round’, as well as on Dillane’s (2013) investigation into a composition by Irish American fiddle player Liz Carroll. Some key observations with regard to certain passages in Kelly’s tunes are made with reference to Irish music scholar Tomás Ó Canainn (1993) and, from a broader ethnomusicological perspective, to the writing of Philip Bohlman (1988). Interviews with Kelly, as well as
my own knowledge of the tradition also inform a large part of the study. A unique approach to prescribed variations becomes evident as a factor in Kelly’s composition, whilst both similarities and dissimilarities to previous case studies also emerge throughout this chapter. Kelly’s use of harmony during the construction of melodies echoes that of McGeeney’s and Graham’s. However, my analysis shows that a less direct relationship between chordal choices and melodic passages emerges in Kelly’s work. On the other hand, similarities to Graham’s compositional experiences emerge when considering Kelly’s development as an accompanist of Irish music as well as the role of his band in shaping compositions. I begin by analysing one of Kelly’s tunes, ‘Hugo's Jig’. References to its structure and modality are made, while syncopation and the role of harmony in the tune’s construction are addressed in further detail.

4.1 ‘Hugo's Jig’

‘Hugo's Jig’ (fig. 4.1), Jos Kelly’s maiden composition, composed in 2010, is a jig in six-eight timing which conforms to the basic framework for Irish traditional dance music, referred to as ‘the round’, as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin (1990). In terms of its modality, however, the tune departs from the norm in Irish music. While ‘minor’ tunes\(^{41}\) in Irish music usually adhere to either one of the dorian or aeolian modes (Ní Chathasaigh 2011, p.457), this tune employs both a raised and un-raised seventh degree (see fig. 4.2). While there are instances in Irish traditional music where the switching of modes does occur within a tune, particularly in relation to the seventh degree of the scale (Ní Chathasaigh 2011, p.457), it is not usual to encounter this in a tune which features the lowered sixth degree. As a result, the presence of both B flats and C sharps in this D

\(^{41}\) Nomenclature doesn’t actually reflect a tune as ‘minor’ in the Western art music sense, but it does, to a traditional practitioner, typically imply that a tune is in the aeolian or dorian mode, or in some cases the mixolydian mode.
‘minor’ tune fosters certain intervallic passages perhaps not as common in the Irish traditional music idiom. These coexist in ‘Hugo's Jig’ alongside more commonly found traditional passages. Kelly’s study of various forms of Western musics undoubtedly plays a part in creating the space for these possibilities within his musical soundscape. This interaction between long-held norms and what might be seen as deviations from said norms, places Kelly at a perceived innovational crossroads.

Fig. 4.1. ‘Hugo’s Jig’
4.1.1 Harmony

The compositional process for this tune, as recalled by Kelly, inspired by his dog’s “antics, chasing motorbikes up and down the road” (2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar), involves the initial composition of a ‘riff’ before the melody takes shape: “I was just practising my tunes normally and just started playing this random D minor riff and started going from there” (2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb).

When pressed on what it is that constitutes a ‘riff’, Kelly explains, in relation to his fellow band members:

> Sometimes a riff would be even the accompaniment to the tune - what I’d imagine Paddy and Ted playing or whatever Cillian and Darren\(^\text{42}\). Just for the band. I think of it as a band sound more than a solo sound.

(2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb)

Whilst this implies a vision for the composition’s eventual performance that encompasses an arrangement involving both predetermined harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments, it also illustrates the direct impact of these preconceived harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments on the assembling of the melodic line. The outlining of an accompaniment for the melody as a precursor to the assembling of the melody line seems to be the standard modus operandi for Kelly in composing: “I usually go chordal based when I’m composing. Just to kind of base it around the chords and then go from there and see what happens” (J. Kelly 2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb).

\(^{42}\) Paddy, Ted, Cillian, and Darren are his co-members in the band ‘Moxie’. 
This is similar in many ways to Graham’s approach to the composition of certain tunes as outlined in chapter 2. A direct relationship is evident between the ‘riff’, as portrayed by Kelly in field recordings, and the eventual performance of the melody by Kelly. Figure 4.3 outlines a representation of the riff upon which ‘Hugo's Jig’ is based, while figure 4.4 highlights the relationship between the chordal structures employed in the construction of the composition and the melody itself by including the chords used by Kelly during the performance of the tune during field recordings. Whilst Kelly does not play every chord utilised in the riff when accompanying himself playing the melody, when he does employ chords\textsuperscript{43}, he adheres strictly to the pattern outlined in the riff. For example, while bar 3 of figure 4.4 does not feature the A minor outlined in the same bar of figure 4.3, the pattern resumes in bar 4. Similarly, when the rhythmic ideas used in the riff are observed - in particular the syncopated effect created in the first two bars - Kelly retains this rhythmic motif when performing the melody. Thus, it is readily apparent that the initial riff which Kelly constructed in the composition of this tune bears a huge significance on his performance of the tune, and illustrates the crucial relationship between predetermined harmonic and rhythmic structures and the construction of the melody.

Even more noteworthy, however, is the relationship which emerges when the chordal component to the riff is examined with regard to the melodic motifs built upon the various chords, as well as, perhaps even more significantly, with regard to the notion of ‘the round’. The first part of ‘Hugo's Jig’ is an eight-bar part that is repeated, or doubled, in line with common practice within the tradition. However, when the overall

\textsuperscript{43} Due to the physical interaction between a musician and his or her instrument, certain physical terminologies can come to have musical connotations. This is particularly relevant to the piano, harp, and accordion players in this research. The convention during performance is that the right hand is used to play the melody on these instruments, while the left hand tends to perform an accompaniment. Therefore, at times, one may find the terms ‘left hand’, ‘accompaniment’, ‘bass’, or ‘chords’ being used interchangeably.
structure of Kelly’s riff is observed, its 16-bar structure does not repeat in the same way. What results is a phenomenon whereby the same melodic motif, for example the one highlighted in figure 4.5, is accompanied by one particular chord choice on its first two iterations, but by another in the repeat of the part. Bars 1 and 5 of figure 4.4 show the motif in question accompanied by a D minor chord, whilst bars 9 and 13 of figure 4.4 show the same motif accompanied by a G minor chord.
Fig. 4.3. Riff for ‘Hugo’s Jig’
While this harmonic structure is clearly very much to the fore of the composer’s mind during the construction of the melodic line and therefore deliberately impacting upon its construction, clearly, the motif highlighted in figure 4.5 is not directly tied to one
particular chord choice. It is therefore possible that these two entities which are at play within the composition - melody and harmony - are in fact sufficiently independent of each other that a shift in one does not impede the second; or else, the melody is deliberately constructed in such a way for it to be ambiguous enough to be deemed suited to two different chord choices. This point is addressed in more detail later in this chapter in relation to another one of Kelly’s tunes, where I argue that the construction of harmonically ambiguous motifs may be the more likely of these two scenarios. However, for now, it is worth acknowledging the potential for layers of complexity in the relationship between a harmonic outline and the resultant constructed melody.

Allied to this, the fact that Kelly constructs a repeated eight-bar melody part but an accompaniment pattern that develops over sixteen bars is noteworthy in itself. Reminiscent of McGeeney’s sixteen-bar countermelody for ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ in chapter 3, this can be perceived as a slight deviation from, or at least a toying with, “the inherent symmetry of the thirty-two-measure round” (Dillane 2013, p.18)\textsuperscript{44}, in that the symmetry of the first part and its repeat is contrasted by its somewhat non-symmetrical, unrepeated accompaniment.

\textbf{4.1.2 Syncopation and Rhythmic Patterns}

In terms of its rhythmic structures, all of the rhythmic patterns found within the melody of ‘Hugo’s Jig’ fit comfortably within the traditional patterns found throughout the tradition as demonstrated by Roche’s (2015) rhythm bank, which compiles a list of commonly-found rhythmic patterns from a major collection of Irish music. Although syncopation does not feature explicitly in the melody of ‘Hugo’s Jig’, it is highlighted by

\textsuperscript{44} Dillane’s \textit{Composing Identity, Fiddling with Post(Ethnicity)} (2013) documents a Liz Carroll composition that truncates the 32 bar ‘round’ to a 24 bar construction, again featuring challenges to traditional expectations.
Kelly as a core part of the compositional process for the composition. When describing the composition of the initial riff for the tune, Kelly lilts a guideline of the rhythmic accompaniment envisaged for the tune:

I didn’t know what I was going to do with the bass line. I kind of liked the idea of - *lilts riff and clicks rhythm with thumb* (see fig. 4.6)- I had the drummer Paddy in mind when I was composing it. That’s kind of how I compose.

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

While the clicking finger outlines a steady rhythmic pulse with an emphasis on the second beat of each bar, Kelly lilts the syncopated rhythm that is at the core of the accompaniment, and which emphasises the quaver immediately preceding the second bar. This effect is clearly audible in the riff as performed by Kelly and outlined in figure 4.3 and is what is retained in Kelly’s mind as he composes the melody.

While in Seán Óg Graham’s compositions (see chapter 2), syncopation plays a part in both the melody and in the accompaniment, ‘Hugo's Jig’ represents the role that syncopation can play on the compositional process without necessarily manifesting itself in the melody line as such. This also reinforces the suggestion that syncopation is a tool that may be utilised in a number of ways for the purposes of further innovating within the wider strictures of the Irish music tradition, whilst drawing on outside ideas.
4.2 ‘Death of the Den’

‘Death of the Den’ (fig. 4.7) was composed in 2012 and is one of Kelly’s compositions that clearly makes use of syncopation in a more overt sense. Figure 4.8 highlights one instance of such syncopation within the tune. With reference to Roche (2015) and the lack of syncopated rhythmic sections that appear in his rhythm bank, it could be suggested that ‘Death of the Den’ might well point to the more rhythmically experimental and less traditional leanings of Kelly’s composition. Furthermore, it could be argued that the tune might not fit neatly at all within the broader categorisation of Irish dance music tune types as put forward by, for example, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann’s rules for Fleadhanna Ceoil (2017). In fact, Kelly himself does not identify the tune as a particular tune type nor as having been composed in order conform to the metric demands of one. When asked if he would consider it as a certain tune type, or indeed in any particular time signature, he responded:

I'm actually not quite sure to be honest. I think it's four-four time but to be honest the melody just came to me. I didn't have any particular time signature for the tune.

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 6th Sep)
Fig. 4.7. ‘Death of the Den’
This statement underscores ‘Death of the Den’ as having been composed comprising of rhythms that have been shown not to be commonly found within the Irish traditional music idiom historically, and not intending to emulate any particular type of tune from that tradition. However, the tune can still be demonstrated to have a basis within that tradition’s expectations. For example, looking at the structure of the tune, as represented in figure 4.7, one can easily observe the parallels with ‘the round’ as discussed previously. Figure 4.9 highlights the reappearance of the phrase from bars 1 and 2 in bars 6 and 7. This repetition is largely consistent with a huge proportion of the music found within the tradition, as discussed in relation to chapter 2. Allied to this is the fact that the parts are constructed as eight-bar parts in and of themselves which are, in turn, repeated in line with Ó Súilleabháin’s (1990) explanation of ‘the round’. These facts
point to the inherent impact of ‘the round’ on Kelly’s composition, even when the music being composed is not intended to fall within any specific dance tune categorisation. While it is the historic function of the music as an accompaniment to dance that has necessitated the inherent predictability of eight-bar parts, even in the absence of any desire to conform to such requirements, the notion of ‘the round’ still impacts Kelly’s compositional process. Drawing attention back to Ó Súilleabháin’s point that “the round itself is inaudible and yet informs every aspect of traditional dance music performance” (1990, p.130), it is clear that this ‘inaudible round’ plays a crucial role, not only in the performance of, but also in the composition of Kelly’s music.

Fig. 4.9. ‘Death of the Den’ - First Part Repetition

Whilst this role that ‘the round’ and expected laws of repetition play on Kelly’s composition in this instance is compelling, one addendum to that point relates to a particular variation that Kelly includes in solo and band performances, as well as in the ‘Moxie’ (2014) recording, of ‘Death of the Den’. One phenomenon which is common
within the tradition is for a tune to have a slight variation included as part of the composition, for instance, in order to better link the parts together for a smoother continuation of the melodic line back into the first part for a further iteration of the tune. It may also be the case that the variation is in fact a little more developed and could last for the duration of a few bars. See figure 4.10 for an example of this in the second part of the well-known traditional tune, ‘Green Fields of America’. In this instance, bars 5 to 7 are replaced on the repeat of the part by what has been notated as bars 13 to 15. However, the variation included by Kelly, represented in figure 4.11, has been designed to be included *only* during the final iteration of the part. That is to say, if the tune was to be performed twice through, the overall form of the performance may be presented as in table 1. In this scenario, the variation from figure 4.11 would only be performed in the eight-bar section that is referred to as C4. Similarly, if the tune were to be performed a third time through, the variation would *only* appear in the section that would then be C6 (see table 2). Its purpose is to highlight that the tune is coming to an end. In Kelly’s own words: “I think it signifies the end of the tune nicely so you could say that it's a part of the tune only to be played at the end” (2016, pers. comm., 8th Sep).

This notion of a prescribed variation as part of the composition which is not intended to appear in each iteration of the tune is a unique phenomenon and is representative of Kelly’s personal navigation of the tradition’s perceived established norms and his own innovative musical instincts. ‘The round’ and its ‘laws’ of repetition clearly inform and underpin Kelly’s composition of ‘Death of the Den’, and yet a slight deviation from this long-held norm highlights his personal willingness to transcend its limits and expand his scope for creative output.
Fig. 4.10. ‘Green Fields of America’ - Second Part, Repeated, with Variation

Fig. 4.11. ‘Death of the Den’ – Variation
Table 1 - Form of ‘Death of the Den’ - Twice Through Tune

First time through tune:       Second time through tune:
A1  A2                         A3  A4
B1  B2                         B3  B4
C1  C2                         C3  C4

Table 2 - Form of ‘Death of the Den’ - Three Times Through Tune

First time through tune:       Second time through tune:       Third time through tune:
A1  A2                         A3  A4                         A5  A6
B1  B2                         B3  B4                         B5  B6
C1  C2                         C3  C4                         C5  C6

4.2.1 Melody and Modality

In similar vein, ‘Death of the Den’s’ modality represents a parallel manoeuvring by Kelly between the adherence to long-established traditional expectations and the desire to transcend these perceived limitations. The first two parts of the tune are very much in a major tonality, in line with a majority of tunes within the Irish music tradition, while the third part of the tune moves to a minor tonality. As mentioned previously with regard to ‘Hugo’s Jig’, minor tunes within the tradition usually conform to either the dorian or aeolian modes. However, the third part of ‘Death of the Den’ does stray beyond the confines of either of those two modes. Figure 4.12 highlights the second bar of the third part of the tune (bar 19). The use of C sharp here in a minor key which also utilises the lowered sixth tone is, once again, not indicative of tunes found within the broader Irish traditional music repertoire. The melody in this bar outlines two triads - an A major triad moving to a D minor triad. This would indicate that the C sharp’s function in this instance
is to outline a five-to-one, dominant-to-tonic chord movement, where we treat the D minor as the new tonic. This interpretation is consistent with the harmonic choices outlined in the ‘Moxie’ recording of the tune on their album, *Planted* (2014) where the accompaniment also plays an A major chord followed by a D minor chord in accordance with the outlined triadic movement in the melody. Further to this, bar 21 (shown in fig. 4.13) of the tune features an F sharp and E flat, indicating even further deviation from the original scale, and which again does not reflect common practice within the Irish music tradition. Therefore, just as the structure of the tune encompasses traditional and non-traditional features, so too does the modality of the tune swing from the commonly found to the more experimental.

![Fig. 4.12. ‘Death of the Den’ - Bar 19](image)

![Fig. 4.13. ‘Death of the Den’ - Bar 21](image)

A logical consequence of moving outside of the typical modes associated with the Irish music tradition is the possibility for the resultant melodic phrases and motifs to be potentially non-conforming in relation to the “formulas” (Bohlman 1988, p.16) or “traditional patterns or clichés” (Ó Canainn 1993, p.41) commonly found within the tradition. An example of this can be seen in the bar highlighted in figure 4.12. However, just as much as Kelly’s experimentation with the modality of his tune opens up the
opportunity for the creation of new patterns to act as building blocks for the construction of tunes, so too do many more of his melodic passages conform rather seamlessly with current traditional patterns. Despite ‘Death of the Den’ not strictly being categorised as any particular tune type, one can observe many features that are shared with tunes from the tradition. In the final bar of the first part of the tune, outlined in figure 4.14, there is a predominantly stepwise run of triplets which leads the melody back towards the starting point of the tune again. This is a commonly occurring feature of various tune types within the tradition - particularly in hornpipes, flings and strathspeys. For example, figure 4.15 shows a triplet run from bars 4 to 5 of the traditional tune ‘The Galway Hornpipe’, while figure 4.16 shows a similar effect in the last bar of the traditional tune ‘Clarke’s Fling’.

![Fig. 4.14. ‘Death of the Den’ - Triplet Run](image)
Similarly, in terms of its key motivic movements, clear comparisons can be drawn with other tunes from the tradition. Compare the opening passage from ‘Death of the Den’, for example, with the opening passage from the traditional jig ‘An d'Tiocfaidh tú Abhaile Liom’\(^{45}\), as outlined in figure 4.17, and some clear similarities are evident. Kelly’s tune opens with an octave leap, while the second stressed beat is on the seventh degree of the scale. The next beat is on the third degree of the scale, the next on the second, and the tune resolves to an outline of the tonic triad by the second half of the second bar. While the jig outlined here is far from an exact mirror image of Kelly’s tune,

\(^{45}\) I have transposed this jig into the same key as Kelly’s tune for ease of comparison. The title translates as ‘Will You Come Home with Me?’
one can observe an opening leap that, although not a full octave, still remains within the same tonic triad. The second and third stressed beats of the jig land on the same degrees of the scale as Kelly’s. The fourth beat of the jig outlines the upper three notes in the dominant seventh chord, before resolving to the tonic. The red lines in figure 4.17 highlight the opening leap in both tunes. The blue arrows point to the second stressed beat of the tunes, landing on the seventh degree of the scale. The brown arrows point to the next stressed beat on the third degree of the scale. The green arrows highlight the notes from the dominant triad in the next beat of the tunes. Finally, the orange arrows highlight the resolution to the tonic in the melodies.

![Fig. 4.17 - ‘An dTiocfaidh Tú Abhaile Liom’ and ‘Death of the Den’ - Opening Passage Comparison](image)

The opening passage of ‘An dTiocfaidh Tú Abhaile Liom’ is displayed on the top line, and compared to opening passage of ‘Death of the Den’, which is displayed on the bottom line.

Therefore, I would contend that it is not illogical to suggest that key features of the opening passage from Kelly’s tune have very obvious similarities with this traditional tune’s opening passage. Furthermore, rhythmic ideas such as the triplet runs referred to
above show Kelly’s tune’s roots within the traditional repertoire, despite its venturing at other points beyond certain long-held traditional expectations. It is clear therefore, that rhythmic and modal experimentations co-exist in this tune alongside traditionally expected patterns of repetition and motivic building blocks ingrained in the folk musician as explained by Bohlman (1988, p.16).

### 4.2.2 Instrumentation

Instrumentation is another factor that plays a role in informing and facilitating certain aspects of Kelly’s compositional process. One initial and obvious impact that Kelly’s choice of instrument has on the composition of his tunes is simply in terms of range. Figure 4.7 shows Kelly’s ‘Death of the Den’. When one observes the third part of this tune (bars 18-27), one can see that the melody travels beyond the second B above middle C\textsuperscript{46}. Although instruments such as the flute and fiddle are indeed capable of producing such notes, the notes are not quite as easily accessible as they are on the accordion or piano. For example, to produce these notes on the fiddle, it would necessitate a positional shift that is not a common feature of Irish traditional fiddle playing. In contrast, there is no additional technique required to produce these notes on the accordion or piano. It is therefore plausible to assume that their relative accessibility on the accordion and piano can play a part in their likeliness to appear in Kelly’s compositions versus those of a fiddler or flautist.

Beyond this, it is interesting to note Kelly’s reasons for his choice of instrument for composing upon. Given his tendency to compose using harmonic structures as a basis, the limitations of the accordion in this regard have caused him to be more attracted to utilising the piano as his go-to tool for composition. With the piano, he explains:

\textsuperscript{46} Commonly referred to as ‘high B’.
You don’t have to worry about which chord is going to work with the press and which chord is going to work with the pull. Because you know you can’t do some chords on the accordion - you can’t do a D major chord on the accordion in the right hand because your F sharp is in and your D is out. So, you can only do - plays open D chord - a modal chord. It’s very annoying.”

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

The piano offers Kelly the ability to clearly define an unrestricted accompaniment in the left hand and melody in the right hand, while the accordion restricts him in certain instances due to the nature of single-action instruments, where the push and draw of the bellows produces different notes and therefore leads to situations where the desired chord in the left hand may not be available when playing a particular note in the right hand. The ability “to hear the chords in the left hand and write the melody in the right hand on the keyboard” (J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar) is essentially what draws Kelly to the piano ahead of the accordion.

4.2.3 Relationship Between Melody and Harmony

Although Kelly’s approach to composition, as mentioned previously, tends to involve an initial outlining of a harmonic structure, ‘Death of the Den’ is one of Kelly’s compositions in which this is not the case, at least with regard to the first part of the tune. Kelly explains:

I wrote actually, for the first part of that tune, I wrote the melody first and just kind of wanted to get a nice flow of a melody going - lilts part of tune - just kind of nice runs.

(2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

Kelly does, however, acknowledge that although there might not have been an established harmonic pattern explicitly laid out for this part of the tune, subconsciously, he may well have been following a harmonic outline. As Kelly puts it:

The chords fitted in then afterwards. I kind of subconsciously, probably, had the chords in my head
because I really do compose chordally-based. That’s the main way I do it.

(2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

It is worth returning to the topic of structure in relation to a theory put forward in chapter 2 when discussing Seán Óg Graham’s compositions. Graham’s slip jig ‘Waterboogie’, which was composed without the use of a preconceived harmonic structure, had a higher rate of motif repetition and conformed more obviously to the traditional form of the slip jig than his tune ‘Soggy’s’ which was composed with the aid of guitar chords and held less rigidly with expected repetitions. It is noteworthy, therefore, that in the first part of ‘Death of the Den’, which Kelly composed without a consciously-stated, predetermined chord structure, the opening motif from the first bar repeats in bar 5 of the part (see fig. 4.9 above). However, when the second and third parts are observed, in which Kelly does make use of particular, predetermined chord choices, one can observe a lower level of repetition. This is evidenced by the fact that the opening motif in the third part, for example, does not repeat in bar 5 (see fig. 4.7). Therefore, this part does not hold as rigidly to traditional structural norms as the first part. Obviously given the small sample size, it would be unwise to draw any definitive conclusions from this, however it is worth noting that both Graham and Kelly show examples of an inclination to hold more rigidly to traditional structural norms when composing with a predominantly melodic mindset than with a more obvious conscious harmonic thought process.

Further exploration of the complexities of the relationship between harmony and melody can be made with reference to the recording of ‘Death of the Den’ on the ‘Moxie’ album Planted (2014). On the repeat of the tune on this recording, the first notes of the opening two bars are altered from their original notes to the note D, as portrayed in figure 4.18. Meanwhile, the accompaniment for these bars change from F major chords, which are used to accompany the first iteration of the tune, to their relative minor. Clearly, the
relationship between melody and harmony in this arranged, performative context is one that is hugely intertwined. The alteration of one necessitated the alteration of the other. This relationship between melody and harmony in an arrangement and performance context is indicative of Kelly’s own views on this relationship more generally throughout his composition. For example, when asked how he would feel about an alternate set of chords being put to ‘Death of the Den’, he replied to the effect that he would not be opposed to the idea. However, he would doubt the plausibility of such an exercise:

I don’t mind but the tune is written to the chords. If you know what I mean. So, you’d have to kind of decipher the tune and maybe change a few notes you know? Because I’ve C sharps in the second part - plays segment of tune - and it just kind of - the way I write my tunes is kind of very chordal based and it’s leading to the next chord. That’s how I kind of write my tunes.

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

Fig. 4.18. ‘Death of the Den’ - D Minor Variation

This seems to suggest that Kelly would not be totally averse to the notion of the chordal choices for the accompaniment to be varied. However, he suggests that that might necessitate the adjusting of the melody line - seemingly echoing what occurred in the recording for the *Planted* (2014) album.

In terms of the process of arrangement within ‘Moxie’, Kelly outlines the process for the assignment of chords to a melody when someone else might have an alternative chord choice in mind for one of his tunes:

With ‘Moxie’ for example - when we’re doing tunes sometimes you’d have an idea of what chords you’d want
and then - well actually it’s me and Cillian; I play piano obviously and Cillian plays guitar - so sometimes we’ve different ideas for chords but we always gel them together. We always kind of just sort out what exactly we want for each phrase and for each bar. And like it differs like.

(2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb)

Therefore, whilst it is clear that Kelly has strong ideas about what chords should be used in the accompaniment of his tunes, it is possible for alternative opinions to be reconciled within a collaborative arrangement scenario. Furthermore, while the adjustment of a few notes of melody may be necessary to facilitate such a harmonic adjustment, it would appear not to be an inevitability. This bears resemblance again to arrangement processes referred to by Seán Óg Graham in chapter 2. These arrangement processes involved Graham and Liam Bradley, the keyboard player in Graham’s band, deciding on alternative chords to accompany tunes, and Graham himself suggesting melodic adjustments for another band member’s compositions in order to conform to harmonic structures. Furthermore, this conscious thought process which centres on the application of harmonic choices to melody, and vice versa, sheds some light on the relationship between the riff and melody in the ‘Hugo's Jig’ example at the beginning of this chapter. The fact that this process is so heavily considered and reflected upon by the composer suggests that the motif highlighted in figure 4.5, has in fact been constructed in order to suit both of the chord choices from the riff, rather than the harmony and melody existing independently of each other, whereby a shift in one would not impede the second.

This suggests that the strong relationship between harmony and melody is, in fact, multifaceted. Not only can harmony clearly play a role in the construction of a melody, as evidenced by the approach taken by Kelly in the majority of his tunes, but also, once a collaborative arrangement process begins, harmony can clearly have an effect on the re-working of a melody. This is evidenced by Kelly’s suggestion that one might need to alter the notes of the melody in order to concur with alternative harmonic notions, and feeds
directly into the scenario portrayed by Graham where he has gone through that exact process with other tunes. Therefore, clearly the process of re-working and/or varying a melody can be hugely influenced by one’s concept of harmony.

4.3 Composition and ‘The Band’

The influence of ‘the band’ is another significant aspect of Kelly’s compositional practice. It has been outlined already how, in composing the harmonic and rhythmic framework for his tunes, Kelly regularly envisages how his band ‘Moxie’ would accompany the melody that he composes. This was touched on earlier when he explained about the ‘riff’, which can be the first step on the road to the construction of a melody, and how it is in fact entirely influenced by his band’s sound. Kelly goes on to suggest, when speaking about composing, that he often thinks of the final product “as a band sound more than a solo sound” (2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb). Therefore, not only is there the possibility of the band affecting the re-working of his tunes, but the band is also to the fore in his thought process during the construction of these melodies in the first instance.

In delving further into this, I ask his view on the attitude which some composers are suggested to have which places the playing of a composer’s tunes by practitioners of the tradition in the informal session environment as the primary goal for composition of a melody (Moloney 1995, p.iv). Kelly’s response was noteworthy in that, initially, he identified a distinction not between concert performance and informal sessions but between live and recorded music. One could infer that his band’s arranged performance of at least certain tunes of his might be more significant to him than the possibility of them being performed within the ‘community’ beyond that:

Kelly: Yeah when I’m composing I think about the live element of the tune - more so than the recording I’d say. But then you know when
you’re practising with the band, then you sort things out for a recording. You need to have it sounding good for the recording. But yeah, I think about the live element. It’s obviously very important I think. More so than the recording. Just to be live - if you’re a live band - the live element is much more important.

Ó Meachair: But again, it’s still more focused on the band than, say, a session?

Kelly: Oh yeah. Of course, yeah.

(J. Kelly 2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb)

When asked whether or not he could envisage his tunes being performed in a session context at all, the effect of the band on his composition again comes to the fore. He explains that while the two tunes explored in this study could possibly be performed in a session context, the musical direction in which the band is going is resulting in him composing music which is moving further away from what he perceives as ‘the tradition’:

Is my composition going to be played in sessions? I don’t think so. Well, some - maybe those two tunes could. But some of the newer stuff we’re doing with the band […] - I don’t know. It depends on which direction Irish music goes.

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

Kelly’s comment here on ‘which direction Irish music goes’ is significant insofar as it is a complete juxtaposition of the mentality taken throughout the course of this study wherein his compositions are analysed with regard to the Irish music tradition. In this statement Kelly places his own compositions as the fixed point and questions where the development of Irish music will move in relation to them. He goes on to discuss this notion of new compositions generally and their role within the broader Irish music tradition, or indeed the tradition’s role in their existence, with particular reference to the session environment:
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Ó Meachair: Would you play someone else’s new compositions?

Kelly: Yeah, I’d play a lot of people’s new compositions.

ÓM: In a session?

K: Some people frown upon when you play a ‘Beoga’ tune in a session, or some ‘Lau’ tunes. Even though ‘Lau’ aren’t a traditional Irish band, some of their tunes - they’re reels and jigs so why not play them in sessions?

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

While this discussion hints at an awareness of some issues surrounding session etiquette, the crux of his point comes in the next passage:

Kelly: Recently we played Béla Fleck’s ‘Big Country’. I don’t know if you know the tune? - lilts tune.

Ó Meachair: Yeah, yeah.

K: We played that in a session and [it’s] nowhere near Irish music - but we got a jam going. Recently we’ve been kind of playing Irish jam sessions. Which is kind of just, you play tunes and then go into a groove and do improvisation, do solos and then go back into tunes and it’s so much fun. Yeah, we’ve uncovered a new type of session we like doing that, you know, you can’t do that with every kind of trad player. You know they mightn’t have experience in improvisation or in jazz or like - it’s difficult. You can't just sit in any session and do it.

(J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13th Mar)

What Kelly states here, when read in the context of his comment about ‘which direction Irish music goes’, shows an awareness of the inseparability of musician, and therefore composer, from ‘tradition’ itself. This case study began by outlining the effects of the tradition on Kelly’s composition. It detailed the effect of ‘the round’ and modality on his melodies, and similarly pointed out where deviations from long-held traditional norms
are. However, at the same time, Kelly outlines here how a different approach to session playing may better facilitate the broadening of the repertoire of Irish music sessions. Just as much as his compositions are informed by Irish music, his deviation from long-held Irish music norms challenges what in fact long-held Irish norms are. This duality of existence, the inseparability of tradition from traditional musician, and therefore traditional composer, is a highly insightful realisation. It reinforces what Quigley (2010, p.105) also highlights in citing Ives (1979, p.423) and stating that it is “the creative process of the individual composer [which] emerges as the ‘primary alembic’ of tradition”.

4.4 Conclusion

Kelly's compositions have been shown to challenge certain long-held norms of traditional Irish dance music. His experimentation in terms of syncopation, modality, structure, and form give his tunes a certain innovative quality, whilst also satisfying many of the expectations of traditional Irish tunes. The complex relationship between harmony and melody plays a significant role in his compositional process, while the performative outlet that is his band ‘Moxie’, informs his musical soundscape to a large extent, especially in how he envisages the eventual performance of a composition. It is also noteworthy how his gradual movement to the more harmonically facilitative piano for compositional purposes mirrors Graham’s (see chapter 2) gradual progression to guitar as well. It is one of a number of interesting parallels one may draw between the two composers. Kelly’s navigation between adhering to certain traditional customs and experimenting with others culminates in the composition of this music and fosters the potential for further innovation both by himself and by practitioners throughout the traditional music community at large.
The next chapter deals with the compositions of my final case study, Diarmuid Faherty. Also a multi-instrumentalist, this time from County Laois in Ireland, I argue that Faherty’s compositions diverge less from traditional norms than in some of the case studies thus far, and his own perception of his tunes in this regard is examined. At the same time, he evidences a clear sense of innovation and individuality in his composition. The impact of instrumentation upon his composition is also explored, whilst influences from the harp music tradition are observed in his work.
Chapter 5

Case Study D: The Compositions of Diarmuid Faherty

In this chapter, I analyse a sample of compositions by Diarmuid Faherty, a multi-instrumentalist from County Laois in Ireland, born in 2000. Proficient on a number of instruments including button accordion, piano, and céilí band drums, Faherty began engaging with the composition of Irish music from a young age. Learning his music through his local Comhaltas group as well as by studying privately with major performers of Irish music, he also regularly plays with his siblings who are all musicians in their own right. It is also worth noting that Faherty is the youngest subject of these case studies, and was just sixteen years of age at the time of writing. The fact that both Faherty’s compositions and his musicianship are of such a standard at this age points to the emergence of adept and competent composers at younger and younger ages.

As explored in previous chapters, this case study examines the role that harmony plays in shaping Faherty’s various compositions, while his attitude towards the harmonic component of his compositions is also referenced. Certain parallels with previous case studies do appear throughout the chapter, although characteristics emerge in Faherty’s compositions that may arguably lie closer to traditional expectations than in the previous case studies. This point is further investigated with regard to Faherty’s description of some of his tunes as sounding ‘older’, whilst deeming others as more ‘modern’. This perception is analysed with reference to a conformation to traditional structures in his compositions, the function of certain tune types in the Irish music tradition, as well as to

47 Céilí Bands are bands that perform traditional Irish music primarily for dancing to at gatherings called ‘céilí’s. However, the céilí band competition at the Fleadh Cheoil is another major outlet for performance for these bands. See Vallely (2011) for further reading. These bands tend to have a drum kit comprised of bass drum, snare drum, and woodblock. See the self-titled album by ‘The Kilfenora Céilí Band’ (1974) for an example of céilí band music.
the aforementioned role of harmony in the compositional process. Whilst Faherty’s primary outlet for both performance and composition is the button accordion, piano is also utilised in the pursuit of the creation of new compositions. The respective effects of these instruments on the compositional process are explored. One other significant point to note in this chapter is the emerging overlap between ‘dance tune’ compositions and compositions that arguably lie closer to those historically associated with harp music. The convergence of these two traditions is addressed, making reference to known harp music composers. The topics raised in this chapter are dictated primarily by the issues that arise during the course of interviews with Faherty, as well as by the features that emerge in the compositions selected for analysis. As in previous chapters, I draw on writings by music folklorist Brendan Breathnach (1971), musician and scholar Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (1990), and ethnomusicologist Colin Quigley (2010) in informing analysis of Faherty’s compositions.

5.1 ‘Sharon’s March’

‘Sharon’s March’48, shown in figure 5.1, was composed by Faherty in 2014 and named in honour of his accordion and melodeon teacher, Sharon Connell49, who helped him to win the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil competition the previous year. It is apparent that traditional structures found in the Irish music tradition have played their part in the shaping of this tune. Its adherence to a form consistent with ‘the round’, as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin (1990) and discussed previously, can easily be regarded insofar as the tune consists of two eight-bar parts, both of which are repeated. However, beyond this, some

48The tune is transcribed here in the key of E flat major as that was the key in which it was played for me. However, because Faherty was playing an accordion that was tuned a semitone higher than his usual B/C tuned accordion, I have included a version in D major as well (fig. 5.2).
49Connell is a musician and teacher from Co. Galway in Ireland. She is also a graduate of the BA in Irish Music and Dance at the University of Limerick.
of the tune’s other features mirror long-standing traits associated with this tune type, and
result in the tune fitting rather seamlessly alongside much of the canon of marches
performed throughout the tradition.
Fig. 5.1. ‘Sharon’s March’
Fig. 5.2. ‘Sharon’s March’ - Transposed to D major
The march is a form that is typically in four-four timing and associated with the céilí band tradition in Irish music. Originally related to military activities, older Clan marches exist in a variety of time signatures, however today, four-four is most commonly found. The adoption of certain patriotic songs as marches by some bands also played a role in this shift (Vallely 2011, p.428). Not very commonly heard in sessions or recordings, marches today are inextricably linked to one aspect of the Irish traditional music soundscape in particular; namely, the senior céilí band competition at the Fleadh Cheoil. According to the rules for the senior céilí band competition, four selections of music are demanded of the participants. The rules state that the “tunes required are two reels in succession, two jigs in succession and a maximum of two tunes played in succession from each of two other tune categories” (Comhaltas 2017). While jigs and reels are guaranteed to feature as two of the selections, a third selection typically varies between barn dances, hornpipes, slides, polkas, and flings. However, the remaining selection, although technically permissible as any one of a number of different tune types, is almost invariably a march. This is a phenomenon that I have observed over the course of my years in attendance at the Fleadh Cheoil competitions, playing in céilí bands, and following the competition as an enthusiast. As alluded to above, the historic connection to military activities is likely a reason for the connection between céilí bands and marches. There is a historic connection between céilí bands and the brass, reed, fife, and drum marching bands, out of which some famous examples of céilí bands have grown, and of which remnants still exist today. ‘The Kilfenora Céilí Band’, for example, is possibly the most famous of the céilí bands in Ireland, and it traces its roots back to a fife and drum

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50 This competition retains a certain prestige not necessarily associated with all competitions at the Fleadh Cheoil. This is evidenced, for example, by how it is the only competition to which separate tickets are sold once the All-Ireland stage is reached. Not only that, but tickets routinely sell-out despite the venue holding much larger numbers that most other competition venues at the Fleadh.
band in the late 1800s (Cotter 2011, p.390). Another remnant of this historic connection is the routine employment of a drummer in most céilí bands. This is particularly relevant due to the fact that Faherty is also a céilí band drummer himself. Faherty recalls rehearsing for the céilí band and céilí band drums competitions at the Fleadh Cheoil around the time of composing ‘Sharon’s March’, and while he did not “really pick or sit down to write a march as such” (2017, pers. comm., 15 July), he maintains that the fact that he was rehearsing marches at the time influenced his decision to compose a march: “Because I was playing marches at the time, that was just the rhythm that came” (2017, pers. comm., 15 July). This clearly illustrates how competition can indirectly affect the compositional process for the young musician.

5.1.1 Common Features of the March

One of the key identifiers of this style of march is, namely, the last bar of each part. Figure 5.3 shows the first part of a commonly played march from the tradition, called ‘I Won’t Be a Nun’, which displays many features commonly associated with the march in Irish music. Highlighted, is its final bar, which is representative of a commonly occurring rhythmic pattern for march endings throughout the tradition. The ending features three stressed notes on the tonic, while the second beat utilises a dotted quaver-to-semi-quaver rhythm. Figure 5.4 then highlights the same style of ending which is employed in ‘Sharon’s March’. This is a simple, observable example of Faherty clearly adhering to established norms in the construction of this piece.
Another example of this congruence with other marches is found in the opening bar of the second part. Figure 5.5 shows the opening bars of the second part of the same tune, ‘I Won’t Be a Nun’. In this example, the melody of this opening bar is constructed with reference to a triad built on the dominant. This movement to the dominant in the opening bar of the second part is mirrored in Faherty’s tune, as outlined in figure 5.6. Similarly, the use of accidentals within this tune type - in particular the employment of a raised fourth degree - can be observed in the bar highlighted in figure 5.7, and again in Faherty’s tune in figure 5.8. The appearance of these features in Faherty’s tune is evidence that the creation and innovation at play in this particular example of Faherty’s compositions is largely within a framework of rules and expectations widely acknowledged and indeed expected within the tradition. Parallels can easily be drawn with Quigley’s description of the compositions of Emile Benoit where he claims that...
Benoit’s “compositions were clearly generated from musical materials of a formulaic character at several constituent levels; these levels emerge from the disassembling of existing repertoire into musical components” (2010, p.102). Evidently, on some level, Faherty as a traditional musician has taken on board an awareness of the formulaic models of tune construction within the tradition - the “building blocks” to which Ó Canainn (1993, p.3) refers - which, in turn, informs his own composition.

Fig. 5.5. ‘I Won’t Be a Nun’ - B Part Opening, Dominant Triad

Fig. 5.6. ‘Sharon’s March’ - B Part Opening, Dominant Triad

Fig. 5.7. ‘I Won’t Be a Nun’ - Raised 4th Degree
This tune’s perceived conformation to traditional expectations is backed up by two specific events in particular. Firstly, Faherty entered ‘Sharon’s March’ in the Newly Composed Tunes competition at the Fleadh Cheoil in 2012 and came in second place. Therefore, while one must acknowledge the degree to which subjectivity plays a part in any aesthetic judging process, one can assume that the award confirms at least its perceived adherence to the requirement that the tunes “must be traditional in character” (Comhaltas 2017) as well as its reaching a standard expected of a piece of music in gaining All-Ireland recognition. Further confirmation of the tune’s legitimacy in the eyes of practitioners of the tradition comes from the fact that the 2016 All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil under-eighteen céilí band competition featured a band who performed ‘Sharon’s March’ as one of their performance pieces - a clear acknowledgement of the tune’s acceptability. These are actual, concrete examples of the tune’s approval by tangible individuals from the ‘community’ referred to by Breathnach (1971) and Carson (1986). Furthermore, this perceived traditional nature of ‘Sharon’s March’ is also consistent with Faherty’s own view of the tune as having been composed in “the kind of old style” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July).

5.2 ‘Old’ Tunes, ‘Modern’ Tunes, and Harmony

Faherty explains that some of his tunes “would be ‘more older’ (sic) than others” and that other tunes of his would be “fairly modern” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July). When
asked for an example of one of his tunes which he would deem modern, he decided to perform a slide - a tune in twelve-eight timing - called ‘Kathleen’s Slide’ (composed 2015) and declared afterwards: “That’d be one of my more kind of modern tunes I’d say” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July). Figure 5.9 shows a transcription of ‘Kathleen’s Slide’. When pressed on what he felt were the aspects of the tune that he would deem as ‘modern’, his response was to refer to the second part of the tune and to draw a comparison with the performance of slides by the band ‘Beoga’:

I’d say the second verse\(^{51}\) would. The way that’d kind of be a bit - not necessarily - but a ‘Beoga’ kind of style. The way they do their, kind of, slides, they do a few slides - not many - but that’d be the way they do them or, kind of, polkas.

(D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July)

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\(^{51}\) ‘Verse’ is another term used to indicate a ‘part’ - generally eight-bar segments of tunes.
Upon further inspection, ‘Kathleen’s Slide’ would appear to conform rather neatly to various aspects of the standard traditional repertoire. Its repeated four-bar parts are in line with most commonly played slides throughout the tradition, its modality sits comfortably within the dorian mode, its rhythms do not break from those widely anticipated, and the repetition of motifs from the first bar in the third bar of their respective parts is indicative of a tune which sits comfortably within the tradition. This is highlighted in figure 5.10.

However, there is a noteworthy comparison to be drawn between Faherty’s performance of ‘Kathleen’s Slide’ and a ‘Beoga’ recording of a slide called ‘It’s Gonna Tip’ - incidentally, another composition of Seán Óg Graham’s; the composer from chapter 2.

Fig. 5.10. ‘Kathleen’s Slide’ - Repeated Phrases
The common factor to which I wish to draw attention, is a sense of harmonic ambiguity that is present in the first bar of each tune’s second part. On listening to Faherty’s performance of the tune (2015, 8 July), when he employs a bass note on the left hand of the accordion to accompany the melody in this particular bar of the tune, on different iterations of the bar he alternates between an E minor chord - the triad built upon the tonic - and a G major chord, whereby the first note of the part here - a G - is common among both of those chord choices. This alternating between a major and minor sound echoes, in a way, the chords utilised in the accompaniment of ‘It’s Gonna Tip’ by ‘Beoga’ (2011). Although Faherty’s tune is in the dorian mode (with a raised sixth degree), and the relevant part of the ‘Beoga’ tune alternates between dorian and aeolian modes (with both a lowered and raised sixth degree), the initial chord of the part, again, alternates between an A minor - the triad built upon the tonic - and an F major chord, whereby the opening note of the part - an A - is common among both chord options (the relevant sections of both tunes are outlined in figures 5.11 and 5.12.) The resultant effect, essentially a shift from minor to major, which is common among both performances of the tunes, is a factor that could be argued to be a definitively ‘modern’ idea in that it centres on accompanied utterances of the tunes. Furthermore, it is also telling that it is a perceived similarity to the music of ‘Beoga’ that is what Faherty recognises as a clear example of being ‘modern’.

Fig. 5.11. ‘It’s Gonna Tip’ - Opening Bar
While, for the most part, Faherty’s tunes as observed thus far appear to lay relatively easily within the bounds of traditional expectations, the presence of more ‘modern’ features in Faherty’s compositions is not surprising given that he cites Brian Finnegan and Aidan O’Rourke - two composers who would be well-known for their innovations beyond the standard categories of dance tune types - as composers to whom he would look up:

I think I look up to - my compositions wouldn't really be modelled on them as such - but I’d look up to people like Brian Finnegan, Aidan O’Rourke…Just the way it’s really kind of - it’s really different and original and unique from all the other compositions like. Some other people from older styles and generations would - they kind of diss them - but I think from my point of view I think they’re possibly the best.

(D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July)

Despite acknowledging their ability as composers and citing them as among the best, Faherty also points out that his own compositions are not modelled on theirs. He goes on to describe how he perceives that his own compositions are not in any way like the aforementioned two composers’ tunes, as his tend to be simpler tunes in which he attempts to find a subtle way of making them his own:

They wouldn't be in any way like Aidan’s or Brian’s like. Because you couldn't really. Like in fairness it’s just the way they have them. [My compositions] all start of as fairly

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52 Brian Finnegan is a whistle player, flute player, and composer who performs with the band ‘Flook’. Finnegan is noted for his use of syncopation in compositions. See www.flook.co.uk for further information.

53 Aidan O’Rourke is a fiddle player and composer with the band ‘Lau’. O’Rourke often uses asymmetric and changing time signatures in his compositions. See www.lau-music.co.uk for further reading.
simple tunes. Just the kind of twists and turns that make
them unique and special I think…that make it kind of sweet
or different yeah.

(D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July)

Faherty shows an awareness and admiration here of those who express creativity through
exploration of various musical possibilities by toying with inherent structures, whilst
simultaneously recognising the opportunity for innovation within those structures in
search of subtler ‘twists and turns’ in order to express one’s uniqueness. ‘Kathleen’s
Slide’ shows Faherty marrying some more contemporary ideas with traditionally
structured compositions. While this is a similar sentiment as expressed in previous case
studies, Faherty exemplifies a balance that arguably lies closer to the traditional end of
the spectrum. Thus, Faherty portrays the young composer as an innovator that does not
necessarily need to look beyond traditionally accepted norms in order to create new
repertoire.

5.3 ‘Peter’s Tune’

‘Peter’s Tune’, notated in figure 5.13, is a tune which Faherty composed in 2014
in honour of a friend from the locality who sadly passed away. This particular tune is one
in which Faherty was unable to decide whether it was, as he termed it, ‘old’ or ‘modern’.
That is to say that he neither identifies it as falling comfortably alongside the canon of
dance tunes within the Irish music tradition historically, nor necessarily as a
contemporary innovation based upon such tunes. It is, nonetheless, a tune in which
Faherty takes some pride, and he goes as far as to suggest that it is his best composition
to date, without necessarily describing the criteria for such a judgement:

I don’t know how I’d really describe it. But, no I think
that’s my best, at the moment anyway. And ‘Sharon’s
March’ would be around the second best.

(D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July)
Perhaps the ambiguity around whether or not it has a ‘modern’ flavour in comparison to other dance tunes is to do with the fact that it arguably falls outside of the category of tunes to which one could refer to as traditional Irish ‘dance’ tunes and lies closer, in fact, to the type of slower piece that stems from the tradition of harp music and its most famous exponent, Turlough Carolan (1670-1738). Whilst music folklorist Breandán Breathnach points out that Carolan’s music and similar music of other harpers “by definition…cannot be regarded as folk music” (1971, p.34), it is acknowledged elsewhere that much of Carolan’s music has been absorbed by folk music repertoire (Vallely 2011, p.109). In recent years, further overlapping has occurred, and both instrumental dance music and harp music are regularly performed by the same musicians in similar music contexts. For example, the Grúpa Ceoil\textsuperscript{54} competition at the Fleadh Cheoil is one such context where groups regularly play Carolan pieces as well as many other forms of dance tunes alongside each other. Further to this, Michael Rooney, a contemporary harper and composer, is an example of a well-known living composer of both similarly styled harp tunes and dance tunes. I have included an example of a Carolan tune, called ‘Carolan’s Ramble to Cashel’, and a Michael Rooney tune, called ‘Na Maithe Móra’ (McCormack 2006), shown in figures 5.14 and 5.15 respectively, for the purposes of comparison.

\textsuperscript{54} Translated as ‘Music Group’.
Fig. 5.13. ‘Peter’s Tune’
Fig. 5.14. ‘Carolan’s Ramble to Cashel’
Michael Rooney composed this beautiful piece as part of ‘The Famine Suite’ in 1997, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the famine in Ireland. It was composed as a minuet and the title is an Irish word which translates to ‘the gentry’.

The symbol in bars 1 and 3 denote a musical rest. Elongated cuts can be added as indicated throughout the tune. A bounce can be added in the 2nd part (Bar 29).

(McCormack, 2006)

Fig. 5.15. ‘Na Maithe Móra’ by Michael Rooney
On initial observation of Faherty’s tune, a similar pattern of motivic repetition as displayed in the dance tunes (see fig. 5.16) is immediately recognisable. However, although similar symmetry is employed, the parts are twice as long and are comprised of sixteen bars apiece. This doubling in length opens up the opportunity for what could arguably be perceived as a more developed and complex melody to be produced than in tunes that are eight bars long, and mirrors the previously cited process to which Dowling refers in his contribution to *The Companion to Irish Music* (2011) on composition. In it, Dowling references a move away in more contemporary composition from the “repetitiveness” required for dancing to the exploration of the “full melodic possibilities of the eight-bar structure” (p.154). One could argue that an exploration of a sixteen-bar structure in place of an eight-bar structure is an extension of a similar phenomenon whereby the development of a more complex melody is the ultimate goal.

This format of sixteen-bar parts is also reflected in the Rooney tune. However, the Carolan tune takes a different form completely. Figure 5.17 highlights how the opening four-bar phrase in ‘Carolan’s Ramble to Cashel’, rather than reappearing as the third phrase, in fact reappears as the fourth phrase, thus showing how this tune does not bear the hallmarks of the same tradition in that the expected pattern of repetition of the dance tunes is not expected of it. Even more tellingly, the green marker in figure 5.17 highlights a six-bar phrase which is employed in the tune; this surely being the clearest indicator of the historic divergences between these two musical traditions. Therefore, in ‘Peter’s Tune’, there appears to be a furthering of this convergence of traditions. On the one hand, the sixteen-bar nature of the parts gives a broader scope for melodic development than the eight-bar parts of the dance tune tradition do, perhaps similar in manner to the scope afforded to Carolan in not being restricted to a specific number of bars or the same inherent rules of internal symmetry. However, on the other hand, the movement away
from the employment of phrases that are not divisible by four and towards the same patterns of repetition found commonly in the dance tunes, shows the influence of the dance music tradition on these slower, non-dance music pieces.

Fig. 5.16. ‘Peter’s Tune’ - Repeated Phrases
Fig. 5.17. ‘Carolan’s Ramble to Cashel’ - Repeated Phrases, 6-Bar Phrase
5.3.1 Instrumentation and Harmony

Another observation can be made in relation to the role of harmony and instrumentation on the composition of these melodies. Given the nature of the harp as an instrument and its ‘two-handedness’ (i.e. its ability to be played by both hands at once, whilst one hand plays the melody and the other an accompaniment), it is quite probable that a left-hand accompaniment plays a role in the performance and/or composition of such pieces. Although Carolan’s tunes are often transcribed in terms of their melody only, examples such as Rowesome’s *The Complete Carolan Songs & Airs* (2011) include a left-hand accompaniment in their portrayal of his music. For Rooney, a harper himself, there is a clear harmonic component to his composition. He states that ‘Na Maithe Móra’ was “composed along to a chordal pattern” which was predetermined by him (M. Rooney 2017, pers. comm., 15 June). An obvious manifestation of this is to be found in the very first beat of the tune, where there is a rest in the melody. The result of this is the potential for a chord played in any left-hand accompaniment to be the first sounded note of the composition. It is therefore noteworthy that Faherty suggests that the piano, a similarly two-handed instrument, is “more appropriate” for the performance of ‘Peter’s Tune’ (2015, pers. comm., 8 July).

Faherty’s comments on the role harmony can play in the compositional process make for a noteworthy observation. During a personal interview, Faherty makes the point that whilst harmony does not play a hugely prescriptive role in the construction of his compositions, in the sense that he does not map out a preemptive harmonic structure for the compositional process, he does recognise that it does influence his composition in the moment.

Sometimes I think, say, if I was playing piano, because it would happen as well if you were playing...just like jamming around on box or piano. It’d probably happen to you. You just come up with something or parts of the tune.
This description would appear to refer to the process outlined by Quigley that he dubs “melodising” (2010, p.86), where the composer zeroes in on the decided, composed melody, through a process of improvisation and repetition. However, in this instance there is the added influence of an accompaniment that is similarly improvised and repeated, creating a sort of improvisational auto-homophonisation of the melodising process. Faherty describes this in one sense when he refers to composing in a slightly different manner on the piano to on the accordion, due to the broader scope for harmonic possibilities:

Yeah actually…because say on piano, as you were saying, the chords. Because, I don’t know, something - say a D7 or something. That’d come into your head or something and you’d see if you could spread the D7 around a few bars of the tune and then put in stuff to fill that out like. Stuff like that.

(2015, pers. comm., 8 July)

This idea of ‘filling out’ the melody around a chord choice is very evident throughout ‘Peter’s Tune’. Take, for instance, the examples of triadic development in the melody based around Faherty’s left-hand chord choices. Figure 5.18 outlines the chord choices utilised by Faherty in the performance of the tune (8 July 2015), while figure 5.19 highlights the occurrence of triadic movements in the melody with reference to his harmonic choices. Although this is a relatively obvious observation in many ways, it does illustrate quite clearly the relationship between the chord choices and the composed melody, and illustrates the impact of his harmonic thought process on the composition of a melody. Furthermore, one can infer that the choice of instrumentation for composition - if only in terms of how the instrument (in this case piano) facilitates harmonic accompaniment to the melodising process - plays a role in informing the compositional process.
Fig. 5.18. ‘Peter’s Tune’ - With Chord
However, whilst composers referenced in the previous case studies express varying degrees of a connection to conscious chord choices employed during their compositional process, Faherty seems very open to the interpretation of his melodies in whatever way an arranger seems fit; despite the clear correlation between harmony and melody in this instance. When asked how he would feel about someone arranging a harmonic accompaniment to his tune in a way that was totally different to how he imagined it, he responds by saying: “No I wouldn't really mind. Sure, there’s no harm in it” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July). This does highlight the fact that although harmony and melody can influence each other during the compositional process, as shown above, in subsequent performances of the composition, they can be deemed totally independent of each other also. Furthermore, it is noteworthy how this contrasts to previous case studies, where differing opinions are expressed as to the importance of adhering to set harmonic structures in accompanying and arranging compositions. This point shall be revisited in the final chapter.

Aside from the facilitation of harmonic accompaniment of melodies, another impact of instrumentation upon Faherty’s composing is with regard to the keys of his compositions. Whilst the tunes of his which have been examined here have been in commonly found major and dorian keys, Faherty does explain that he does like to compose in some more “awkward” keys, as he puts it, as well (2015, pers. comm., 8 July).
Whilst he has composed “probably nine or ten” minor tunes, he has also experimented with composing tunes in some other keys, for example in B flat major, a key not very commonly used in traditional tunes (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July). Whilst he does generally like for his tunes to be playable on multiple instruments and to fit “kind of universally so that there’s something that’d fit nearly every instrument” (in the Irish tradition at least), Faherty does acknowledge that in certain circumstances, he ends up composing in more awkward keys because “they seem fine on box” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July). This shows a clear example of the influence of a specific instrument’s capabilities on the composition of new material, even where the traditional practice of that particular instrument may not extend to such keys.

5.4 Conclusion

What emerges here is a picture of a young, skilled composer and musician who shows a clear understanding of the musical tradition in which he is immersed. Within this context, certain features emerge in his search to find, as he puts it, ‘twists and turns’ in order to make a tune unique. As a multi-instrumentalist, the impact of instrumentation upon the compositional process is evident in terms of both choice of keys and the various potentials of each instrument for harmonic input into the creation of a new melody. Faherty’s use (and indeed non-use) of harmony in order to inform his melody creation has been explored, including the notion of harmonic ambiguity surrounding tune creation. His understanding of his tunes’ place alongside ‘older’ or more ‘modern’ tunes throughout the tradition is reflective of the impact which traditional structures inform his tune composition, with various features, such as patterns of motivic repetition in his tunes, leading them to fit comfortably alongside ‘older’ tunes. ‘Peter’s Tune’, meanwhile, is an

55 Colloquial term for the accordion.
example of the manifestation of the convergence of two somewhat separate musical traditions; the harp music tradition and the dance tune tradition. Featuring a longer, more complex melody (reminiscent of the harp tune tradition), but following formulaic patterns from the dance tune tradition, ‘Peter’s Tune’ draws on both of these repertoires. Faherty’s tunes have gained a certain credibility or acceptance through their performance by other musicians, as well as through the role of competition. They serve as concrete examples of ‘the community’s’ interaction with new repertoire and reflect a skilled young composer’s navigation of his own journey with reference to the tradition, its long-held customs, as well as its many possibilities.

Moving on from individual case studies, my next chapter reflects on issues surrounding motivations for composition by these individuals. It addresses a variety of reasons that the young composer may have for undertaking the composition of a tune. Drawing on each of the four case studies, conclusions are drawn with regard to the issues of commerciality, education, and self-expression. Further to this, the act of titling a tune is also addressed, examining this process and its connection (or lack thereof) to the compositional process.
Chapter 6

Reflections on Motivations for Composition

This chapter addresses the core idea of what it is that motivates the young composer to undertake the act of composition. It draws on information gathered during fieldwork interviews conducted with each of the four key informants for this study, as well as with other informants identified in Chapter 1 as important contributors to this research. As well as investigating motivations for composition, this chapter also touches on the connection between composition and the act of titling a tune. I draw on Harvey’s (2010) investigation into the compositions of John Brady, and Holohan’s (1995) thesis on the compositions of Paddy Fahey, in order to give a broader context within the Irish music tradition, while Quigley’s (2010) investigation into the compositions of Emile Benoit, gives a perspective from another vernacular music tradition.

During the course of this study, quite a range of motivating factors for composition becomes apparent. Whilst Bohlman acknowledges creativity itself as motivation for change in folk music (1988, p.24), other factors also emerge as possible motivators for composition among the young composers informing this research. For example, the commercial aspect of composition is explored in academic and musician Chris Smith’s article, Reclaiming the Commons, One Tune at a Time (2006). Aside from this, the personal satisfaction found in creativity can be further extended to incorporate the expansion of musical knowledge through composition, whilst various personal responses to musical experiences emerge in addressing what seems to be at the core of why the informants seek to compose tunes. Moreover, although cited moments of inspiration, in conjunction with the desire to dedicate a tune’s title, can occasionally play a role in triggering a compositional undertaking, the process of titling a tune tends to be
a reflexive exercise. There also appears, at times, to be an absence of a determinable compositional process that is distinct from performance. This is especially true when a musician is performing (or ‘playing’) for his or her own enjoyment or for the purposes of rehearsing, and gradually leads into the previously mentioned process described by Quigley (2010) as ‘melodising’. This fluid transition between composition and other performance activities gives rise to the possibility of a somewhat inevitable, unconscious element to the compositional process. Dowling echoes this idea when he describes musicians composing as “the result of a half-conscious process” (2011, p.153). It is also clear that rather than any single motivating factor functioning as the catalyst for tune creation, in fact, a combination of some, or all of these factors often combine to motivate the composer to create.

6.1 An Inevitable Occurrence?

There can be an underlying sense of inevitability at times about the process of composition in so far as that it can be a natural musical progression for the traditional musician. Whilst this attitude does not necessarily manifest in all traditional musicians, among the four primary informants for this paper there is an implied inexorability to the process within the broader developmental process as a traditional musician.

When asked what sparked their first foray into composition, the fluidity of the transition from solo performance - whether for the purpose of practising in order to improve certain musical skills, or for one’s own entertainment - to composition, was almost universally stated in a matter-of-fact way.

Graham described his first attempt at composing as an almost unconscious transition from performing to composing:

I think I was about fourteen and I was in the ‘Crosskeys’ Comhaltas [Irish music] group at the time, and I don’t think
I was really aware of what I was doing really. I was just kind of putting phrases together.

(2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov)

The suggestion that an unconscious, or at least ‘half-conscious’, element to the compositional process exists has some traction here. Graham alludes to the gradual movement from one area of performance practice to composition without making a strict, conscious decision to begin composing at a certain determined point. McGeeney, when asked about her first attempt at composition, also alludes to an indeterminable point in time whereby performance and composition interchange. Rather than the composition of a tune being the primary goal of a process undertaken at a specific point, in fact, McGeeney refers to an intermediate and informal process whereby she was: “always faffing about, just messing around” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). The composition of her first tune was a result of this process, however as the suggestion is made that this process had previously been a common occurrence, it would follow that a resultant product - the ‘sound object’ as Quigley (2010) refers to it - does not necessarily have to be the outcome of the process. While Faherty solely refers to a process which is more directed from the outset, where the ultimate aesthetic goal is to produce this sound object, or what could be commonly described as a ‘tune’, Kelly also alludes to a gradual process that progresses from “just practising [his] tunes normally”, to “[starting] to [play] this random D minor riff”, to a process which he describes simply as having “started going from there” (2015, pers. comm., 6th Feb). It would appear, therefore, that at least in the first soundings of their compositional exploits, these young musicians can engage in a process which is neither strictly rehearsing nor composing. This phenomenon is referenced by Quigley’s (2010) study of the compositions of Emile Benoit, where Quigley outlines how Benoit’s progression to “composing as an independent activity […] apparently evolved out of performing” (p.19). Similarities can be found between Graham’s initial compositional
practice of “putting together phrases” and Benoit “extending […] conscious control of these formulaic units to their intentional recombination into new patterns” (Quigley 2010, p.219). Meanwhile, McGeeney’s ‘faffing about’ is perhaps mirrored by Benoit’s “private” exploration of “rammages” (Quigley 2010, p.86) - another stage of the development of his compositional practice.

It is therefore clear that there is a level of fluidity between the process of composition and other musical practices both for young composers investigated in this thesis, as well as in composers from other vernacular musics. Furthermore, while Dowling’s notion of composition being part of a semi-conscious process does appear to hold true, the fluid movement between composition and private performance is evident whether or not the composition of a tune is a deliberate undertaking, and feeds into the process outlined by Quigley as ‘melodising’.

6.2 Commerciality

Whilst composition has been shown to occur in such non-deliberate fashion, composition is also deliberately undertaken for a variety of reasons. Commercial considerations are an example of one such reason for composition. Due to the fact that three of the informants of this research actively perform in commercial bands which function as an outlet for performance of their compositions, there is an inescapable connection between their compositions and commercial/financial considerations. Whilst none of the informants suggest that it was a primary motivating factor for them to become composers in the first instance, over time a gradual link appears. Graham explains how despite his tunes not being written necessarily for the purpose of performing them in the context of his band’s performances, he does state that “most of the stuff [he] write[s] inevitably ends up in Beoga’s repertoire” (2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). This is despite
the fact that the tunes are “not at all” written with the band in mind as the ultimate performers of the tune (S. Graham 2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). McGeeney’s attitude follows a similar thought pattern. Whilst stating that she “never really thought about” (Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov) royalties as a motivator for composing tunes initially, over time this attitude changes. She admits that composing her own tunes “would be more [of a consideration] now, whenever you’re in the situation of being in a band and this is your livelihood” (Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). This pattern holds true for Faherty’s compositions as well. In response to being asked whether or not he composes tunes with the thought of gaining royalties in mind, his response is an emphatic: “No no. Definitely not” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July). However, an overall awareness of the “need to be prepared…if one of them ever goes famous” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July) is present in the aftermath of having written a tune. It would follow, therefore, that whilst these commercial considerations may not have had much effect on the composers in their initial attempts at composing in terms of sparking the initial undertaking, there is a general awareness of the connection between commerciality and composition.

Another facet of this dichotomy rears its head when Kelly claims that “[He will] have a different picture in [his] head when [he’s] composing for ‘Moxie’ or just composing a tune” (2015, pers. comm., 6 Feb). Whilst the actual effect of this is examined in closer detail in chapter 4, where an analysis of a sample of Kelly’s work is undertaken, it is interesting to note that Kelly acknowledges a deliberate intention to compose in order to facilitate performance by ‘Moxie’: “That’s kind of how I compose. Not for solo but for a whole band sound” (2015, pers. comm., 6 Feb).

Niall Keegan also alludes to the impact of commercial considerations on compositional processes in an interview conducted during the course of this research. He
explains how a musical project may require a tune to be composed within set, given parameters such as the instrumentation available, length of time needed to fill, or rhythm required, for example:

There are more contemporary reasons in that ‘I need to have a set of tunes for this album, or for this band, or whatever else, and we’ve got to gig, and I’ve got to learn this tune, and I’ve got a set of pipes and a viola and a cello and a triangle. How am I going to make something work on those instruments? I need it to be two and a half minutes long.’ Those sorts of things. And that’s important you know?

(N. Keegan 2016, pers. comm., 1 Dec)

Though this is quite a different scenario to the almost accidental compositional process which was outlined earlier, this example of a situation is echoed by Kelly when he refers to ‘having to’ compose for his band: “Well sometimes you have to stop being lazy and go and compose some tunes. And you just have to sit down and do it like” (2015, pers. comm., 6 Feb).

Whilst this lends credence to the role commerciality plays in composition, such considerations are but one facet of a multi-layered set of motivational factors. Nevertheless, the scenario above does outline an, at least, partially commercially driven motivation for composition. Smith references these commercial considerations in his advocating of a ‘commons’ repertoire in opposition to a growing trend of “the ownership of…music…for purposes of profit” (2006, p.12). However, as is outlined over the course of this chapter, these composers’ composition is not a rejection of the commons idea, but rather a personal creative need to which they each want to respond. Smith’s further observation that “making art is deeply satisfying” (p.13) speaks very much to the core of the motivations for composition expressed by these young composers. Moreover, the oral/aural nature of the transmission of tunes in the Irish music tradition, in fact, means that compositions highlighted in this study may, over the course of time, be assimilated
into a ‘commons’ repertoire. Therefore, whilst commercial aspects of composition undeniably act as an incentive and a consideration for composers, this study does not show these considerations as a primary driver for the composition of tunes.

6.3 Personal Satisfaction and Development

A strong factor in the undertaking of composition among the core informants of this research, centres on personal musical satisfaction, self-expression, and development. Graham puts it simply when discussing why it is that he composes:

I really liked the freedom you could have in writing tunes…I started to do a bit more and I just really enjoyed the idea of having no boundaries; of just being able to sit down and come up with something. That’s it really.

(2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov)

This sense of personal satisfaction in terms of both self-expression and reaching an outcome - producing a tune of his own - is echoed by Kelly, whilst also alluding to the notion of commerciality mentioned earlier:

I remember the first time I started composing - it was just having your own tune; it’s such a feeling to be able to compose your own tune and to be able to get it out there and record it and yeah, it’s great.

(2015, pers. comm., 6 Feb)

This sentiment is rather succinctly echoed by Faherty when he states, in reference to composition: “I only really do it for the craic like and see what’ll come out at the other end” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July). Therefore, a recurring sense emerges that both the explorative nature of the compositional process and the end result create a feeling of satisfaction and enjoyment for the composer.

Often, it would appear, this musical exploration can be a personal musical reaction to other aspects of the composer’s musical practices. Both Graham and McGeeney, for example, make reference to composing as a response to tunes already in existence - either
composed by contemporary composers or from the wider canon. McGeeney details how she endeavoured to compose asymmetric tunes as a result of an admiration for the Scottish band ‘Lau’, which commonly performs melodies in time signatures not usually associated with Irish traditional music: “I did admire them, but I definitely felt inspired to try and recreate something like that” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). Similarly, her admiration for Seán Óg Graham’s approach to composing slip jigs enthused her in such a way that she decided, in turn, to compose a slip jig, ‘A Like for All but Love for None’. McGeeney states her analysis of Graham’s approach to slip jig composition:

Slip jigs went a completely different direction when it came to Seán Óg. It wasn’t a little bar repeated, slightly changed, and you play that twice. It was a full tune now. It was a full eight bars of something that really - a sequence that obviously were related to each other but no bars would've been repeated nearly.

(2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

Again, whilst further analysis of the structure of Graham’s compositions can be found in chapter 2, it is worth noting how this musical response to Graham’s composition led McGeeney to decide to undertake a compositional project within set parameters and declare to herself: “Ok you’re going to write a slip jig” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov).

Graham also details how, in the aftermath of composing his first tune, he proceeded to actively seek out other composers’ tunes as a way of informing his compositional practices. He felt that his maiden composition: “probably sounded like a lot of other trad tunes and after that then, [he] started listening to other composers” (S. Graham 2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). This, in turn, led him “to do a bit more” (2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). It appears, therefore, that other composers’ works can both inform and, in fact, act as a catalyst for composition. The desire to expand upon the range and diversity of tunes composed by the composer themselves, and in existence generally, is an integral musical response for both Graham and McGeeney. This sentiment is echoed by Holohan
when she points to the composer Paddy Fahey’s desire to compose tunes which are “distinctive” and “not predictable” (1995, p.96). Whilst in Graham’s first compositional endeavour, his response to composing a traditional sounding tune himself was to seek out other composer’s work in order to inform his own further work, for McGeeney, there was a similar expressed desire to explore beyond the ‘predictability’ of the range of tunes which she commonly performed:

I grew up completely traditional traditional [sic], under the \textit{Comhaltas} scheme. It was just tunes. I learned tunes and I loved to play tunes and there was nothing out of the box. And then, I suppose when you get to a certain age you always want to explore. That’s the next step. 
(2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

McGeeney’s desire to expand her musical horizons is what led her to pose the question to herself: “What could I change to make this a wee bit more interesting for myself?” (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). This desire to explore or expand one’s musical soundscape is clearly a motivating factor therefore.

This can be seen in another light when the idea of composition being used as a tool to further one’s knowledge of a particular musical concept is addressed. The investigation into McGeeney’s ‘Transformed’ composition in chapter 3 illustrates a novel approach and motivation for composition in Irish traditional music. McGeeney explains that she composed ‘Transformed’ in order to further her own understanding of the seven-eight time signature (2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov). Whilst the process itself is discussed in more detail in the case study, the idea of furthering one’s own musical knowledge through composition is an important motivational factor for composition. Furthermore, this is just one educational aspect of composition that arose during the course of this research. Next, I explore some other examples of the influence of educational considerations on compositional undertakings.
6.4 Education

As well as examples arising of education sparking composition among the four key informants for this research, interviews conducted with teachers of Irish music also shed light on the effect of education on composition. Whilst Faherty recalls the encouragement of one of his music teachers as having an impact on him deciding to undertake his initial compositional endeavours (2015, pers. comm., 8 July), the thinking behind such encouragement is backed up by educators of Irish traditional music. It is stated that concepts such as implied harmonic structures or rhythmic structures of tunes can be taught by encouraging a student to compose. Fiddle teacher, Gary Lynch, explains how certain concepts can be explained through feedback on a student’s composition:

I would...encourage them to compose themselves and to bring their tune back in for feedback. Again, it’s structure [that is] probably key for it. Particularly the younger ones wouldn’t have thought about eight bars and eight bars even as a structure. Or then they would compose something that would be rhythmically correct but may, you know, jar in terms of chords or may have one chord the entire way through it.

(2015, pers. comm., 27 Nov)

The merit of educating through composition is also acknowledged by Ernestine Healy, director of the Irish music summer school, Meitheal. In outlining the focus of the compositional aspect of the summer school for one particular edition, Healy mirrors the thought process behind McGeeney’s reasons for composing her tune, ‘Transformed’. 

Whilst acknowledging that encouraging creativity is key to the process, the desired outcome of the process is to further knowledge of particular tune types.

And then another year we used tune types, but it wasn’t just jig, reel, hornpipe or whatever else. We did, like, strathspeys, schottisches, barn dances, polkas – so we kind of picked some tune types that they wouldn’t necessarily play a lot of too, like the schottisches, and like strathspeys

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56 Strathspeys, schottisches, barn dances, and polkas are all traditional dance tune forms in either four-four or two-four timing.
and stuff, so they had to compose in that particular style. And again, it was to kind of get them to think creatively about what they’re doing rather than just composing a tune.

(E. Healy 2015, pers. comm., 8 Jun)

In much the same way that McGeeney composed a melody in seven-eight time in order to enhance her understanding of that rhythmic structure, composition is utilised by Healy in order to further musical understanding of the rhythmic structures of less-widely played tune types such as strathspeys or schottisches. Incidentally, whilst this may have been the motivation behind the composition from the tutor’s perspective, it is quite possible that the students’ engagement with this process is motivated, not by a specific desire to expand on their knowledge of, say, a strathspey, but actually in order to engage with the overall experience of attending the summer school and to fulfil its requirements. Therefore, another motivator for composition emerges when we acknowledge the role of composing when instructed or encouraged to by an educator in a pedagogically driven setting.

The interplay between a composer’s work in a pedagogically oriented compositional project and a composer’s ‘regular’ work is also noteworthy. In analysing two examples of this that arose during the course of fieldwork for this study, a clear impact on the compositional process is present. While perhaps the intent to compose may not be impacted itself, the underlying educationally-driven concerns, at the very least, create parameters that motivate the composer to compose according to specific requirements or in a specific direction. Firstly, Graham outlines a situation whereby he was required to compose a tune for a college project and submit a written analysis of the process. He acknowledges that the tune, ‘Kick’n the Box’ (explored in further detail in chapter 2), was composed specifically for this project. However, Graham also explains that the approach taken in composing this tune is similar to his approach in other circumstances:
That one I actually wrote in college. As a project for Brian Morrissey. And I think, yeah, I was definitely using the guitar at the time. Just playing kind of funky chords on the guitar…A minor, C, D7. So, I’d say I came up with them first. Which is the way I do a lot of stuff.

(2015, pers. comm., 3 Dec)

In a somewhat similar vein to McGeeney’s notion of composing to expand on musical knowledge, Graham explains how he was attempting to compose tunes at the time featuring specific musical attributes. A goal of a number of his compositions from this period in time was to modulate from one key in the first part to another key in a subsequent part. However, while he claims that many of his compositions from this time were created in such a vein, he also acknowledges that this would have been an obvious discussion point for his compositional project in college, and therefore made a point of following this pattern for the purposes of that project. As Graham states on the one hand: “At that phase as well I was trying to write a lot of tunes that were changing key in the B parts as well,” (2015, pers. comm., 3 Dec) but also acknowledging:

Thinking about the key change…because it was a project for [college] and you had to do a write-up about it, that was one of the things that I thought in my head: ‘Oh I’ll be able to talk about that so.’ - about how I modulated into that key or something. So, it’s funny what makes you do these things.”

(2015, pers. comm., 3 Dec)

It is therefore apparent that the motivational impact of the desire to explore a modulating composition, the desire to satisfy educationally centred requirements, as well as any other underlying motivating factors, overlap to a certain extent.

A similar pattern emerges when McGeeney’s ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ (explored in further detail in chapter 3) is considered in the context of her final year vocational project (FYVP) as part of her undergraduate studies. While the project as a whole entailed her composing a set number of tunes, it was a project that was undertaken by her own design and was influenced by her ongoing compositional exploits. As outlined
previously, McGeeney’s ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ was, in part, motivated by a musical response to Graham’s own slip jigs, however, it also fell within the remit of her college project that led to an overarching desire to have a degree of variety among the tunes composed as part of the project. Therefore, whilst the motivational impact of her musical response to Graham’s compositions was present, there was also a motivating factor at play with regard to fulfilling the project’s requirements:

Like the time I did my FYVP on the composing. Ah sure, I had about ten written and that was great and everything [was] flying. But by the time maybe it came to twenty - I had thirty to do - by the time it came to twenty I was like ‘Oh my god if I keep going on this route every tune is going to sound the exact same.’

(Á. McGeeney 2014, pers. comm., 14 Nov)

The follow-on from this train of thought is what led McGeeney to pronounce: “Well I haven’t written any slip jigs yet” (2015, pers. comm., 18 Aug), and proceed to undertake the composition of such a tune. The multifaceted nature of the motivation to compose is, perhaps, what is most clearly emerging throughout this discourse.

Closely linked with educationally driven compositional undertakings, is the role of competition. While there is a clear reward system inherent in competition, it is interesting to investigate whether or not the existence of such rewards, or awards, act as a catalyst for the composition of tunes, or merely act as an outlet for the performance of existent compositions. Both Meitheal and Ceol Lab, two Irish music residential summer schools, include composition competitions as part of their timetable. Although both of these schools run composition classes as mandatory parts of their programmes, the competition is optional and therefore there is no directive to compose for the purpose of entering the competitions. None of the core informants for this research makes reference to composing for competitive reasons, and it is worth noting that in discussing Faherty’s reasons for composing - a composer who himself placed in the All-Ireland Fleadh
Cheoil’s composition competition across all ages - he explicitly states that he “wouldn’t do it for any competition purposes” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July).

6.5 Inspiration and Titling

One of Kelly’s tunes which is subjected to further analysis in chapter 4 is entitled ‘Hugo’s Jig’. Hugo is Kelly’s dog, and the tune was “inspired by his antics chasing motorbikes up and down the road” (J. Kelly 2016, pers. comm., 13 Mar). The act of entitling a composition seems therefore, at least occasionally, to have an interlinked relationship with the inspiration for a tune. From Kelly’s statement, one can infer that the dog’s antics acted as an external stimulus for creating that particular tune. This notion that a particular person or thing can be the motivator for the composition of a tune seems to be an issue that fails to find universality among the informants of this study.

While ‘Hugo’s Jig’ was also composed as part of a gradual progression from practising tunes to composition, a process discussed earlier, the idea that Kelly’s dog was a source of motivation for writing the tune is further backed up when he claims, speaking generally about his composition: “I try and take inspiration from nature” (2015, pers. comm., 6 Feb). However, whether a tune is named in honour of someone or something after its composition, or is composed with that person or thing in mind seems, at times, to bear an insubstantial impact on the association between the tune, its title, and its inspiration. For example, in discussing his tune, ‘Sharon’s March’, Faherty recalls the context for the tune’s composition as being in the aftermath of having won multiple All-Ireland titles in the Fleadh Cheoil music competition:

I think it was the year before, I won four All-Irelands. And then my teacher...Sharon - she teaches me box and melodeon - I just wanted to really thank her for doing that because it’s not easy teaching someone and getting them to that level. So, I wrote the tune in her name.

(2015, pers. comm., 8 July)
While the connection between the tune and the person for whom the title of the tune is dedicated is clear, he then recalls how he in fact had the tune already composed before deciding on naming it in her honour: “Well, the tune came out and then I decided, you know, I’ll name it after her” (D. Faherty 2015, pers. comm., 8 July). The link, therefore, between the subject of a tune’s title and that subject’s impact on composing the tune, seems a difficult one to establish in certain instances. Just as the examples mentioned here outline one instance where the tune’s subject was decided upon before the composition was completed, as well as one where the tune’s subject was decided upon afterwards, throughout the fieldwork for this study, this variability continues. When discussing ideas of inspiration coming from nature, Graham clearly states that he does not believe his tunes fit into such a category: “I wouldn’t say it’s inspired by anything local or anything - mountains or rivers…It’s definitely not the case for me” (2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov). However, Faherty maintains that in certain circumstances, the emotional attachment to the subject of a tune’s title can result in a higher level of satisfaction with the tune composed. In one particularly solemn instance, Faherty speaks about a friend who sadly passed away:

I composed an air there for him and I played it at the funeral. And I think at times like that when it’s emotional…you're more inclined nearly to write a better tune I think. Because that was a very nice tune when I look back at it now like.

(2014, pers. comm., 15 Nov)

While this is an example of a conscious connection being made between the subject of a tune’s title - a hugely significant event itself - and the composition of the melody, the idea of spontaneous inspiration can also seem to emerge from the mundane. For example, Faherty explains how the stimulus for composing a tune often emerges while undertaking regular daily activities: “I’d be going around the house doing a bit of
a job or something and it’d come to me” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July). Furthermore, Graham maintains that he does not compose with anyone or anything in mind, although he does not rule out the possibility of there being a subconscious connection:

No, I never write with a name in mind - or really anything in mind. Well maybe subconsciously I’m doing it but…up until this point, no, I’ve never written for something or about anything really.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

Further to this, Graham details how on the occasion of entitling the tune ‘Kick’n the Box’, the title was, in fact, not proposed by Graham himself, but rather by a bandmate in the aftermath of the tune having been composed. This lack of connection between the composition of the tune and the titling of the tune is a common trait among many of Graham’s compositions. When asked about the title of ‘Kick’n the Box’, Graham states:

I think Éamonn57 came up with it. Like a lot of my tunes…usually I just end up picking something - a story that Éamonn can tell on stage. As I’m sure a lot of people do. That’s why Éamonn comes up with a lot of the names.

(2016, pers. comm., 4 Mar)

This illustrates that in certain cases, there does not need to be a connection between the composer’s compositional process and any title given to the resultant product of that process. However, in other cases, a connection - whether conscious or subconscious - may exist.

The idea of subconsciously composing for a particular person or thing is backed up by Harvey (2010), where an analysis of the compositions of Irish music composer John Brady suggests a subconscious connection between the compositional process and the subject of a tune’s title. It shows how certain recurring melodic motifs appear in tunes associated with particular individuals and demonstrates how motifs which were not “consciously created for specific people” (p.106), appear in tunes whose titles refer to a

57 The bodhrán player in Graham’s band, ‘Beoga’.
particular person. Therefore, although coincidence cannot be ruled out, an implied subconscious connection can be inferred. With regard to this study, however, a broader sample of compositions than is encompassed in this research would have to be undertaken to investigate any similar features in the compositions of Graham, McGeeney, Faherty, or Kelly.

6.6 Conclusion

There are a variety of factors that motivate musicians to compose. Ranging from commercial considerations to educational considerations and following tutor-led directives, oftentimes an overlap of multiple factors may be at play. While the driving force for composition will quite often derive from internal desires to create for personal satisfaction or development, this can be triggered by spontaneous inspiration, whether from overt external stimuli, unknown quantities that occur during the mundane practicalities of life, or by internal musical responses to other musical activities. What is clear is that it is a combination of some, or all, of these factors which is at play in motivating the young composer to create. Furthermore, just as Carson points out in his book *Last Night’s Fun* (1996), that historically, the relationship between a tune’s title and the tune itself is quite often not at all relevant, although there are rare examples where a connection does exist (p.7), this pattern is mirrored across the four case studies in this study.

In the next chapter, I draw together some of the recurring themes across the four case studies in this thesis. In particular, through comparing and contrasting ideas which emerged over the course of my research, I attempt to draw conclusions on issues including the effect of harmony and arrangement on composition, the use of novel rhythmic patterns
by young composers, and the adherence (and non-adherence) to traditional structural parameters in undertaking composition.
Chapter 7

Conclusions

This chapter lays out the main conclusions drawn from the research undertaken for this study, dealing especially with the process of composition, as well as analysis of the final musical product, or ‘sound object’. Similarities and differences between each of the four key informants’ compositional undertakings are laid out, whilst common themes that emerged over the course of the study are discussed. Drawing on writings from vernacular musics more broadly, as well as from Irish music studies literature, compositional trends among young Irish musicians are also contextualised within a wider frame of reference. In particular, the impact of harmony on the compositional process is highlighted here. Tied in with the role of harmony in composition, are ideas surrounding instrumentation, arrangement processes, and the conceptualisation of what it is exactly that constitutes ‘the composition’. Novel rhythmic patterns and young composers’ interaction with traditional structural frameworks, especially with regard to Ó Súilleabháin’s (1990) idea of ‘the round’, all emerge as common themes across each of the case studies, whilst the role of the composer as re-creator is also acknowledged.

7.1 Harmony

Harmony is a crucial aspect of composition for each of the young composers in this study, and impacts the compositional process in a variety of different ways. One of the most evident impacts of harmony upon the construction of melodies is with regard to chordal patterns that the composer determines in advance of, or in conjunction with, the composition of a tune. Graham (see chapter 2) and Kelly (see chapter 4) both detail examples of compositions in which they had, as a precursor to the construction of a
melody, mapped out a chordal pattern for the melody to follow. These chordal structures can be retained in the mind of the composer, or recorded and played back on a loop to accompany the musician as he or she composes the melody. While Graham and Kelly both play melody and accompaniment for Irish music, McGeeney (chapter 3) is not an accompanist herself. Despite this, chapter 3 contends that harmonic patterns retained in her mind are what dictate many of her melodic choices in composition. Beyond this, chapter 5 illustrates how Faherty undertakes composition utilising an improvisational process described by Quigley (2010) as ‘melodising’, but also incorporating a harmonic component ‘in the moment’. The subsequently composed melody is clearly guided by these improvised, harmonic choices. Therefore, one can observe a range of ways in which the young composer utilises predetermined harmonic patterns, as well as improvised harmonic movements, in order to shape melodic composition.

7.1.1 ‘The Composition’

One of the consequences of this close relationship between harmony and melody is a re-evaluation of what it is that constitutes ‘the composition’ in the mind of the composer. Although, historically, the Irish music tradition is recognised as being a melodic tradition (Cowdery 1990), more recent harmonic developments have impacted upon this being accepted as a universally accepted truth. This is particularly evident in this research project, where a variety of attitudes towards the importance of harmonic structures to any composition have appeared. McGeeney maintains that ‘the tune’ is the melody that is constructed, even if it is constructed with chords in mind. However, this attitude does not hold consistently across each of the case studies. For example, whilst Kelly tends to agree with McGeeney’s perception, he also expressed doubts as to whether or not the melody and harmonic structure are, in fact, separable in certain instances.
Furthermore, Graham goes on to suggest that in certain instances of melody composition being dictated by harmonic underpinnings, in fact, the melody and the harmonic structure are equal components of ‘the composition’. Therefore, this evolving relationship between melody and harmony speaks to attitude changes occurring at the heart of the Irish music tradition; defining what a ‘tune’ is.

Beyond this harmonic element of defining ‘the composition’, examples arise in chapters 2 and 3 where the composer’s role in the re-creation of a composition is documented. Graham’s experience of amending the final bars of his tune ‘Waterboogie’ during a collaborative arrangement process, and McGeeney’s improvisation over forgotten passages of her tune ‘Transformed’, are certifiable examples of the composer re-creating and re-working tunes; thus, positioning the young composer firmly as a multi-functioning agent of ‘the community’.

7.2 Structure

Another recurrent theme across the four case studies was the impact of ‘the round’, or traditionally held structural parameters of Irish traditional music on composition. On the whole, the generally expected traditional structure of repeated eight-bar parts holds true in compositions across the four case studies. Although, an emergent phenomenon is the composition of sixteen-bar accompaniment patterns for eight-bar parts that hold varying degrees of importance to the composers. This points to a developing relationship between the melody, accompaniment, and ‘the round’, especially across eight- and sixteen-bar passages (see McGeeney’s ‘A Like for All but Love for None’, and Kelly’s ‘Hugo’s Jig’ for examples of this). Similarly, while traditionally held tune type categorisations are strongly represented across the case studies, there are some noteworthy exceptions. For instance, McGeeney’s composition entitled ‘Transformed’ is
in a time signature not usually associated with the Irish music tradition. Its seven-eight timing echoes Balkan rhythms introduced to Irish music by Andy Irvine in the 1970s. Despite this departure from traditional norms in terms of the time signature, the form and structure of the tune adheres clearly to that commonly found throughout the traditional repertoire. Similarly, Kelly composed ‘Death of the Den’ without necessarily basing it on any particular tune type, yet it follows similar structure in terms of repetition of phrases and parts.

The level of repetition in compositions and the subsequent effect on the length of composed phrases by these young composers, does appear to point to a trend described by Dowling and previously cited as exploring the “full melodic possibilities of the eight-bar structure” (2011, p.154). Chapter 3 showed a composition of McGeeney’s entitled ‘A Like for All but Love for None’ that includes an eight-bar part with no repeated bars at all. Similarly, ‘Soggy’s’, outlined in chapter 2, is another example of a slip jig that is of greater length than those found historically throughout the Irish music canon. Faherty’s tune entitled ‘Peter’s Tune’ also features parts longer than the norm for dance tunes (perhaps influenced by the harp music tradition), whilst Kelly explores the composition of extended variations in his tunes, again exploring expanded melodic possibilities. This process is also signalled by Harvey in his analysis of the compositions of John Brady, an important composer of traditional music in the 1960s, where he states how Brady “tried to avoid [repetition] as much as possible” (2010, p.15).

Therefore, it is apparent that ‘the round’ is an important, and ever-developing, idea that underpins much of the composition outlined in this study. Furthermore, while Harvey outlines how Brady only composed within existing tune type formats (2010, p.15), around the same time as Andy Irvine, Dónal Lunny, and others who experimented more broadly with Irish music, innovations by young composers in this study mirror both
of these phenomena. While examples of compositions by young composers of Irish music that conform to historically-found traditional tune types have emerged over the course of this study, so too have examples appeared of innovations which challenge these traditional norms, particularly in the utilisation of longer, less-repeated phrases.

7.3 Rhythmic Patterns & Syncopation

This mirroring of traditional norms coexisting with more experimental innovations, is also represented in an analysis of rhythmic patterns utilised in young composers’ compositions. Across the four case studies, I made reference to Roche’s (2015) rhythm bank in order to compare rhythmic patterns in these compositions to those found historically. Once again, while a large degree of conformation emerged across compositions by all four composers, so too did examples appear which do not conform explicitly. In particular, examples of syncopated passages occur, especially in the compositions of Graham, McGeeney, and Kelly. Whilst syncopation is cited as a feature of Brady’s compositions in Harvey (2010, p.40), the examples found in chapters 2, 3, and 4 tended to be of a more overt nature. Contrastingly, Faherty did not appear to make use of syncopation to the same extent, whilst explaining that his compositions tend ‘to sound older’, in line with more traditionally held expectations. Therefore, once again, the young composers in this study embody both a continuation of, as well as a departure from, traditional features of the music, varying from person to person, and even from tune to tune.

7.4 Instrumentation

Instrumentation has also been shown to be an influencing factor in the compositional process for young musicians. While the physical limitations and
possibilities of an instrument have been shown to impact the process of idiomatic composition – evident across each of the four composers’ work - the harmonic possibilities of their chosen instruments emerged as having a particular effect on the compositional process. While learning to play harmonic instruments enabled the development of harmonic thought processes in composition for Graham and Kelly, the available range of the fiddle (versus that of the whistle) opened up possibilities for McGeeney in her composition. Chapter 5 highlighted how instrumentation impacts upon Faherty’s composition, both in terms of facilitating harmonic outlines for melodies, as well as by enabling composition in particular keys specifically because of how they suit the accordion.

Despite this apparent effect of instrumentation on the compositional process, both McGeeney and Faherty also express a desire to compose tunes that are not instrument-specific. McGeeney explains in chapter 3 how she finds herself composing tunes which do not necessarily fit obvious finger patterns on the fiddle. Her goal to compose a tune with the desired pitches, as distinct from a simpler finger pattern on her instrument, is clear. Similarly, in chapter 5, Faherty explains how he aspires to compose tunes that can be played on “any instrument” (2015, pers. comm., 8 July), at least in the context of traditional Irish music. Therefore, examples of both idiomatic and non-idiomatic composition have been identified over the course of this study.

7.5 Further Study & Final Conclusions

Further potential avenues of study arise from this research. For example, larger sample sizes of compositions by young composers may give more quantitative analytical opportunities to observe the rates at which different tune types, keys, harmonic patterns, etc., are being utilised by young composers today. Further to this, each of the case studies
raises individual questions which also warrant further study; for example, Faherty’s leanings into the composition of melodies which mirror those of the harp music tradition, in conjunction with his composition of dance tunes, give rise to an investigation into the convergence of these two traditions among young traditional musicians and composers today. Furthermore, collaborative arrangement processes by commercial bands, touched on across chapters 2, 3, and 4 in particular, signal a significant activity in Irish traditional music performance that warrants further documentation and analysis.

In essence, this study has detailed how young composers of Irish traditional music comfortably navigate between an adherence to traditionally held parameters and innovation beyond such norms, thus discounting historical tendencies to present a binary of tradition and innovation. As chapter 6 outlined, motivations to compose range from commercial considerations to educational undertakings, while a personal desire to create tunes lies at the core of why the young composer composes. At times, traditionally held structures and forms are followed in the creation of a tune, while in other instances these are toyed with in order to compose. This constant navigation of innovation which occurs both within and outside of traditionally held norms is mirrored in certain ways by studies of older composers of Irish music (Harvey 2010; Holohan 1995). Just as each of the young composers in this study has been shown to strive for their own innovative qualities in their tunes, whilst maintaining a close relationship with the tradition, Holohan echoes this in stating that Paddy Fahey’s compositions have “succeeded in satisfying all the requirements of traditional style” (1995, p.5), whilst acknowledging features such as “leaps” which can be deemed “uncharacteristic” (p.186). This idea of satisfying traditional expectations while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of those expectations, is very much at the heart of this study. Meanwhile, further afield, studies of younger musicians and composers in traditions in Scotland and Corsica show similar
developments in terms of harmonic developments in melodic traditions, and the goal of marrying traditional aspects of music with contemporary developments (Bithell 1996; Cadden 1996).

The analysis of the compositions of Seán Óg Graham, Áine McGeeney, Jos Kelly, and Diarmuid Faherty details a wide range of processes by which young composers of Irish traditional music compose. I have outlined their respective creative impulses, their formal and informal influences and inspirations, and their varied and sometimes complex motivations, through a close analysis of a sample of their compositions. Graham’s compositional process has been shown to have a large harmonic component, while syncopation features as an innovative characteristic of his compositions. Chapter 3 outlined how McGeeney makes use of novel time signatures in her compositions, although maintaining a traditional overarching structure. Kelly’s work has been shown to be influenced by his band ‘Moxie’, and draws on contemporary rhythms while maintaining traditional structural norms. Chapter 5 illustrated how Faherty’s compositions tend to adhere more obviously to traditional norms and also draw on harp music repertoire.

Ideally, my analysis of the work of these composers illustrates how some examples from these compositions fit seamlessly alongside historical examples of the music, whilst others pull at the edges of traditionally held parameters, offering new ways of moving the tradition forward, keeping it relevant for contemporary composers who also evidence a strong commitment to structures of the past. In this way, I have outlined how tradition and innovation are not part of a binary relationship but something that is recursively sounded out in these composers’ works. The four composers in this study continue to compose and perform their music. In particular, Graham, McGeeney, and Kelly perform with their bands, ‘Beoga’, ‘Goitse’, and ‘Moxie’, whilst Faherty performs
regularly in *Comhaltas* events, and locally with his siblings. More broadly, composition continues in *Comhaltas* circles, in the Irish World Academy, as well as at the *Meitheal* summer school, to name just a few outlets for composition. Whilst the impacts of these individual institutions on traditional Irish music composition may be a study for another day, it is evident that the composing of tunes is a present and integral facet of the overall Irish music landscape, both in expanding the repertoire, as well as in driving innovation and introducing new elements to the tradition.
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