Celts in the Americas

Michael Newton, Editor
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The academic study of Celtic music has come rather late to the ivy citadels of Celtic Studies. Long consigned “below the salt” to the world of collectors, performers and dilettantes, inherited understandings of Celtic music have been epistemologically narrow, ontologically selective and generally divorced from mainstream historiographical research. It has barely registered a perfunctory blip on the raging radars of post-colonialism, post-structuralism and postmodernism of recent times. At academic conferences, it is deployed to create atmosphere when, to quote historian Martin Dowling, “the serious business of demythologizing, revision and deconstruction is done, [and] academics gather to gossip at receptions and dinners, buoyed by cheap wine and the reassuring ambience of Ireland’s timeless music” (Dowling 2010: 146).

In a quirky stroke of wisdom, the English conductor, Thomas Beecham (1879-1961), once quipped that “the function of music is to release us from the tyranny of conscious thought” (Atkins and Newman 1978: 80). It seems to me that this is an appropriate point of departure for any critique of Celtic music, for any theoretical foray that might take us beyond Enya’s synthetic keening, Loreena MacKennitt’s perambulations through the mists of Avalon or, indeed, Celtic Woman touting their syrupy charms on public television. In removing us from the tyranny of conscious thought,
Beecham’s paradigm has found an ideal specimen in Celtic music, a genre for which there are no clear definitions, no precise territorial markers, no detailed chronologies and few musicological taxonomies.

In a manner of speaking, Celtic music is an ethnomusicological chameleon, a sonic ragbag that contains everything from New Age mysticism to saccharine pop music (Quinn 2005: 23; Porter 1998: 205–24). The kaleidoscopic proliferation of Celtic music ensembles in all corners of the globe in recent years features born-again Celts, Anglo-Celts, Afro-Celts, Cuban Celts, Serbian Orthodox Celts, Elvis Celts, Russian-Celts, Sino-Celts and a more recent mobilization of Iberian Celts from Galicia and Asturia who have no linguistic connection to “real” Celts, although they share the same Y-chromosome as the Irish male (Sykes 2006: 162). In music, however, aesthetics are seldom curtailed by ethnic binaries, imagined or otherwise. Celtic music makers today are less interested in minding their Ps and Qs than expanding their own creative portfolios. They have no qualms about leaving the Six Nation reservation to hang with all sorts of contemporary musicians from rock and jazz to techno and trance (Mathieson 2001: 4). Our challenge, therefore, is to unravel the sonic palimpsest that is Celtic music, not least, the role played in this soundscape by Irish and Scottish music makers in North America. This unravelling requires that we first question some pre-existing assumptions about Celtic music in the Old World.

The prevailing wisdom that the six Celtic “nations”—Scotland, Ireland, Man, Cornwall, Brittany and Wales—contain the sonic residue of centuries of overland migration from a mysterious Indo-European or Bohemian homeland appears very much at odds with the prevailing body of musical evidence. Despite a sprinkle of archaeological artifacts (Halstatt lyres found in Hungary and bronze figures depicting naked Celtic dancers in Gallo-Roman France) and a few cursory observations by classical writers like Diodorus Siculus and Polybius, we know nothing about the sound of the music played by ancient Celts, its modes, transmission patterns or tonal features (Megaw 1991).

The historical record was all of 1,100 years into the Common Era before it yielded a single written account about the sound of Irish music, namely, from the pen of the Cambro-Norman cleric, Giraldus Cambrensis in the late 12th century. Given the oral-based maritime histories shared by insular Irish, Scots and other Oceanic Europeans for a millennium prior to arrival of ethnomusicologist Cambrensis, it is likely that the music they shared had as much in common with the music of Scandinavia and North Africa as it had with a select club of Iron Age Celts who fought a rear guard action from the Alps to the Atlantic in the centuries before the birth of Christ. The supposition that each of the Celtic nations shared a common soundscape seems equally spurious. Despite the romantic teleologies and imaginings of musicologists and music journalists, there is still very little
common ground between the P-Celtic musics of Wales and Brittany and their Q-Celtic “cousins” in Scotland and Ireland. While recent pan-Celtic musical exchanges have opened up some melodic portals, vocal and linguistic barriers are still largely intact between the majority of P-Celtic and Q-Celtic performers. Yet, their diffuse worlds are shrouded in a romantic illusion of a single archaic Celtic soundscape.

Defining the Undefinable: The Musical Celt

The origin of this illusion is embedded in the ideological morphology of Celticism that first found its voice in the work of the Welsh polymath Edward Lluyd (1660-1709). Lluyd’s Archaeologia Britannica, published in 1707, is regarded as the founding charter of Celtic Studies (Davies 1999: 90). Inspired by Breton writer Paul-Yves Pezron (who sought to distinguish his countrymen from the French), Lluyd’s opus was written in reaction to the British government’s neglect of traditional Welsh culture and, more broadly, in response to new ideas spawned by the Enlightenment. He was succeeded by other Celtophiles in Scotland and Ireland throughout the 18th century: the former disturbed by the repression that followed the Jacobite Risings, the latter dismayed by the injustices of English rule in Penal Ireland (Davies 1999: 91). As the British imperial plan unfurled at home and abroad in the 18th century, it sparked various strains of cultural and political nationalism, most of which subscribed in some form or other to the radical heuristics of the Romantic movement.

Far from morphing into a simple them and us binary of colonialism and its dialectic opponent, nationalism, Irish Celticism and cultural nationalism developed into a murky ideological battleground in the 19th century, as Anglo-Irish Protestants (some of them evangelists in lamb’s clothing), Presbyterian dissenters and Gaelic-speaking Catholics jostled each other to harvest Ireland’s Celtic artifacts (if not convert their keepers) for nation and empire alike (Whelan 1998; Colley 1992; Chatterjee 1986). This enterprise was not just confined to the remote Celtic fringe. As the British Empire matured into the modern world’s first information society, its insatiable thirst for data was served by legions of map makers, statisticians, linguists and clerks scattered across the globe from Bangor to Bombay, from Inverness to Invercargill (Richards 1993). Some of the most celebrated Celtic scholars of the 19th century (hagiography specialist, Whitley Stokes, for example) acquired their first taste of antiquarian fieldwork as colonial servants of the queen. Reappraising the chemistry of Celtic revivalism in Ireland and Scotland during this period, Dutch historian Joep Leerssen noted that
The period 1760-1845 witnesses a crucial transformation in Irish culture in that the native Gaelic tradition, with pre-modern attitudes, with its historical vision leading back to Ireland’s primal Milesian settlement, with its catastrophic interpretation of history and its Messianic hopes for a deliverance from English rule, is interiorized by a modernizing, urban-centered, English-speaking and essentially Victorian Ireland. A similar process took place in Scotland, with the establishment of Highland Societies and the canonization of kilt, clans and bagpipes; but what in Scotland remained a cultural couleur locale within the imperial context was in Ireland a total political reinvention, a collective psychological de-anglicization. (2002: 24)

Music harvesting too became a key feature of Celtic revivalism. The Welsh harper Edward Jones published his Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards in 1784. His example was followed in Ireland by Joseph Cooper Walker whose Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bard appeared in 1786, and Charlotte Brooke who published her Reliques of Irish Poetry in 1789. They were followed by nineteen-year-old Edward Bunting who transcribed the last remnants of the “ancient music of Ireland” at the Belfast Harp Festival in July 1792. Other music collectors and antiquarians came to the fore in the years leading up the Great Irish Famine in the 1840s, most notably George Petrie, James Goodman and James Hardiman. By then, the published collections from Scotland’s “Golden Age of Fiddling”—especially those of Neil and Nathaniel Gow and William Marshall—had reached new audiences far beyond the Highlands of Scotland.

While music makers continued to perform and composers continued to publish, ideologues embroiled in the colonial debate continued to make tactical use of musical discourse, not least, in their romantic safaris in search of the Celt. For the English cultural critic Matthew Arnold, the Celt was “always ready to react against the despotism of fact” (Arnold 1900: 82). The Celt supposedly had an advanced cultural sensibility but was quite incapable of functioning in the real world. Yet, Arnold’s self-appointed task was to co-opt Britain’s marginal Celts into a peaceful political arrangement with the archipelago’s dominant power. In a series of lectures delivered in 1867 and 1891, he attempted to “flatter the Scots, Welsh and Irish into acquiescence, proposing that they were delightful people possessed of qualities without which the British imperial project could not advance” (Smyth 2009: 85). One of the most enduring ideas to emerge from Arnold’s stereotypical schema was that of the musical Celt, whose function was to provide light relief from the rigours of the real world, or, as historian Gerry Smyth has suggested, “to entertain the English after a hard day at the empire” (Smyth 2009: 86).
The obsession of defining the music of the Celts triggered a cacophony of romantic dross throughout the 19th century. French philosopher Ernest Renan penned this requiem in 1859. Clearly, there was no sadness like the dour musical sadness of the Celt:

Its history is itself only one long lament.... Its songs of joy end as elegies; there is nothing to equal the delicious sadness of its national melodies. Never have men feasted so long upon these solitary delights of the spirit, these poetic memories, which simultaneously intercross all the sensations of life, so vague, so deep, so penetrative, that one might die from them, without being able to say whether it was from bitterness or sweetness. (Storey 1988: 57)

A century and a half later, the enigma of Celtic music still defies the tyranny of conscious thought, or so it seems. Posing the question: “What is Celtic Music?” in her Complete Guide to Celtic Music: From the Highland Bagpipe and Riverdance to U2 and Enya, June Skinner Sawyers proffers the following je ne sais pas quoi:

When all the techniques are checked off, the element that the music of the Celtic lands most commonly shares is something a lot more intangible and certainly less quantifiable – a feeling or quality that evokes emotions of sadness or joy, sorrow or delight. Some of Celtic music’s qualities, it is true, derive from the modal scales of traditional music, but others are hard to pin down. All share, for want of a better word, a Celtic spirit, a unique bond with one another that transcends time, distance, and political units. (2000: 5)

While not exactly removed from the rose-coloured spectacles of Arnold and Renan, Sawyers’s mysterious “something” animates an entire world view of Celtic music, in the Celtic outposts of the Old World, as much as in Celtic diasporic communities in North America and, indeed, among millions of want-to-be, vicarious and virtual Celts, who embellish their candlelight dinners, voicemail and jacuzzis with Celtic music. Much as it grates against the grain of academic criticism, Celtic music appears to be defined by the undefinable, by a transhistorical “something,” a “feeling,” a “spirit,” which has arbitrarily infused an entire soundscape. This oblique therapeutic synergy is the calling card of the Celtic music industry today. Just as Matthew Arnold recruited the Celt “to consolidate late Victorian British identity, so the modern phenomenon of Celtic music performs specific ideological tasks within a global popular market” (Smyth 2009: 87). As Smyth suggests,
“Celtic music” represents a lucrative niche market in which certain unique experiences are offered to those willing to invest—emotionally, certainly, but also financially—in the notion of some inherent Celtic spirituality which is supposedly non-compliant towards the modern world. (2009: 87)

Where then do we place the music makers—the enablers and tradition bearers—and, in particular, Celtic music makers in North America, in this process? A perusal of Irish and Scottish history would undoubtedly shed light on the diaspora that brought this music to the “New World” and, in the process, underline the importance of sanctuaries like Cape Breton, San Francisco, Glengarry and South Boston. Uncovering these inner worlds, or gameinschaften, in isolation, however, will not explain the complex chemistry of Irish and Scottish music in North America. They need to be contextualized within the mainframe of a much broader musical gesellschaft, to use Tönnies’s term, with its legions of media moguls, music industry handlers, festival brokers and overlords who have a direct stake in the health and longevity of these communities. Any consideration of Irish and Scottish music in North America must critique the brittle interface between these two worlds, and the confluence of global currents that bring them together and keep them apart.

Unwrapping the Diasporic Celt: Irish and Scottish Music in the “New World”

The distillation of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and indeed Breton, Manx and Cornish diasporas into one Celtic master narrative in the Americas is, in many respects, a futile exercise in historiographical teleology. The Celtic diaspora is intensely diffuse and is characterized by multiple layers of cultural hybridity and transculturation. Above all, the experiences of its so-called source nations in exile differ radically from each other. The diasporic experience of Welsh-speaking Patagonians in the 20th century was very different from Irish-speaking slaves sent to the Caribbean in the 17th century. Scots-Irish presbyterians who settled in the foothills of the Appalachians in the late 1700s lived in a very different cultural milieu from the yuppie cyber world inhabited by Irish software engineers in Silicon Valley in the 1990s. The Lowland Scot Andrew Carnegie ate from a very different table than fiddler Dan R. MacDonald in Mabou. Yet, they all lay claim to a piece of Celtic tartan in exile. Long before Celtic scholars, genealogists and marketing gurus ushered them all into a universal church of latter-day Celts, Highlanders fleeing the clearances and famine and Irish fleeing hunger saw themselves first as Mùideartaich (Moidart men), muintir Chonamara (people of Conamara) or exiles from whatever townland or clachán dispatched them to the emigrant ship. That
they might be Celts from a long lost Shangri-La of warrior ancestors and obscure pronouns mattered less than their ability to survive in the New World. What is significant, however, is that these disparate Highland and Lowland Scots, Gaelic and Anglophone Irish, and Scots-Irish spawned several heteroglossic soundscapes that contributed to virtually every genre of mainstream music in North America during the past two centuries (Mathieson 2001: 5).

While sharing some ethnic traits, these soundscapes had no exclusive genesis before coming to the New World. That said, it should be remembered that music is a nomadic art that spans time and space easily. Prior to crossing the Atlantic in the mid-18th century, for example, both Irish and Scottish soundscapes showed signs of “other” musical residue. By then, Italian violins and cellos had made their way to both countries, augmenting indigenous instruments like pipes and harps. Discarded French flutes and German concertinas would flow into Ireland a century later and would, in turn, be transported by emigrants to the New World. If Gaelic songs, pìobaireachd and fiddle tunes were the mainstay of Scottish music and sean nós and piping the sonic stables in Ireland, these “core” elements were augmented by a bricolage of Baroque tunes, English hornpipes and ballads, Bohemian polkas, French galops and Polish mazurkas that were “indigenized” by Irish and Scottish performers throughout the 18th century. Vernacular dances from the high art salons and courts of Europe were also grafted onto Irish and Scottish repertoires, especially in the sattelzeit period from 1760-1840, which saw the demise of the ancien régime and the emergence of the post-Napoleonic nation-state. Both Ireland and Scotland had nations-in-waiting on the European mainland in the 18th century, which explains, to some degree, the intense traffic of Irish and Scottish dancing masters travelling back and forth to the mainland before the 1840s. The transition from minuet to quadrille dancing, for example, had a profound impact on dance music in both countries during this intense period of cultural transformation (Raviart 1990: 53-70; Szwed and Marks 1988: 29-36; De Garmo 1875).

How then can we unwrap these soundscapes and track their diffusion in the New World? For an ethnomusicologist, it would seem convenient to adapt an ethnomusicological approach. After all, there is a century of fieldwork and theoretical riches to draw on, from evolutionism and functionalism to phenomenology and postmodernism. The rhizomorphic girth of Scottish and Irish music in North America, however, calls for something more comprehensive, a periodic table of elements that embodies the historical past and the contemporary present, the traditional gameinschaft and the global gessellschaft, in short, a framework that interrogates the local, translocal and transnational in a soundscape that oscillates across a broad spectrum of living traditions.

To do this, I will refer to a model developed by Indian anthropologist, Arjun Appadurai, whose research on global cultural flows offers a vista of
new perspectives on historical as well as contemporary cultural change. Eschewing oppositional tropes like centres and peripheries, tradition and modernity, Appadurai critiques the lives that people live in the context of a world that is becoming increasingly deterritorialized. Rationalizing the breakdown of old master narratives fueled by the Enlightenment (rationalism, evolution, the nation-state), his thesis challenges the simplistic binary between homogenization and heterogenization (Appadurai 1996: 33). To explore these disjunctures, he devised five conceptual lenses to explore cultural flows: ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes and financescapes. These are not objectively weighted concepts as much as constructs inflected by historical, linguistic and political scenarios orchestrated by different actors: nation-states, transnational companies, diasporic communities, subnational groups and movements (Appadurai 1996: 33). Given the global cultural flows that impact Irish and Scottish soundscapes in North America today, it is instructive to view them through Appadurai’s panoptic model. As well as bringing multiple perspectives to bear on a subject that is often critiqued in contextual isolation, it will also allow sufficient latitude to peruse the complex transatlantic relationship between these diasporic soundscapes and their former homelands in Ireland and Scotland.

(i) Ethnoscapes

Appadurai defines an ethnoscape as a shifting cartography of farmers, industrial workers, immigrants, refugees, civil servants, teachers, tourists, etc., who people the world in which we live. He underlines the importance of movement and stability as prime factors in all ethnoscapes, opposite sides of the same coin, so to speak. The dual paradigm of movement and stability is particularly evident in the diasporic histories of Ireland and Scotland. Perched on the edge of the “Old World” in the 17th century, both countries were on the edge of the New World a century after. The globalization of cod, tobacco, cotton and spice combined with the scramble for New World colonies by Old World powers had radically altered the older alchemies of the Atlantic.

Among the masses of soldiers, crofters, servants and missionaries dispatched across the Atlantic by war, colonization and new markets were Highland and Lowland Scots, Gaelic Irish, Scots-Irish and a cohort of Anglo-Irish. Settling in an arc from Newfoundland to the Carolinas and inland along the Appalachian spine, these diasporic communities were marked by a constant interplay of mobility and stability after settling in the New World. In so far as one can make broad delineations in settlement history, it seems that the Irish who fled to America in the wake of the Great Famine were unique in abandoning their rural lifestyles to live in cities along the industrial corridor from Boston to Baltimore and, later, in the upper midwest. In contrast, Highland Scots dispatched to the
New World by the clearances generally settled in rural communities in Atlantic Canada, Québec and Ontario. Similar rural-urban contrasts do not mark the histories of the Scots-Irish in Kentucky and Tennessee, nor the Irish who settled in the outports of Newfoundland in the 18th century. What does distinguish all of these communities, however, is a history of out-migration to other parts of the U.S. and Canada, a practice that has continued in varying degrees to the present day, resulting in hybridity, transculturation and ethnic fade across the entire Celtic spectrum in the continent.

In contrast to the macro effects of ethnic fade, geographic isolation has often been a key factor in preserving older musical traditions—assuming geographically isolated communities are capable of sustaining viable economies. Situated in a liminal space between two former colonial projects, Cape Breton has had a perplexed sense of its own isolation, animated by a volatile industrial culture and a history of out-migration from the island. Yet, this “isolated” place has maintained one of the most enduring Scottish soundscapes in North America. There are multiple reasons for this, some of which will become clear in Appadurai’s other parameters. From the perspective of Cape Breton’s indigenous ethnoscape, its music, song and dance were embedded in an unbroken Highland world that was transported across the Atlantic and buttressed until recent times by a Gaelic-speaking gameinschaft. Its music makers were also willing to share their traditions with neighbouring communities of Mi’kmaw, Acadian, Irish, English, American and African descent. Despite the decline of Gaelic and the deracination that comes with language loss, the island’s web of extended musical families indigenized a lot of musical change that came from without and compensated for the effects of out-migration by passing on its dance music to successor generations of younger performers. Similarly, local folk composers continue to flourish in Cape Breton.

Ironically, Irish Gaelic song in the U.S. has not fared as well as its Gàidhlig cohort north of the border. Although Irish-speaking immigrants from Conamara huddle together in south Boston and north Chicago to listen to sean nós songs sung by their ancestors, the language of their music is seldom sustained by their American-born offspring. Irish Gaelic, in word or song, has not been a survivor in the New World, at least, in urban America where the Irish have had a history of rapid integration. Short of being a classroom curiosity, or an academic commodity, Irish continues to die with the immigrants who bring it to America. With the exception of isolated communities in the Beauce and in Pontiac counties in rural Québec, where Irish survived as a vernacular until the 1950s, its longevity as a carrier of music in Canada has not been impressive either.

Irish dance music in America has had a radically different destiny, as has Irish step dancing. The success and longevity of Irish dance music in America are largely attributed to the ability of its hereditary keepers to
adapt quickly to changing circumstances in their new urban world and their capacity to reach out to new audiences and performers. In its history of perpetual motion since the mid-19th century, Irish dance music burst its ethnic banks very quickly in America and climbed the ladder from the shanty and the street corner to fandango houses, minstrel shows, vaudeville and, eventually, Hollywood. Many Irish musicians left Ireland as anonymous “musicianers” and finished their lives as professional celebrities in America, even those who followed their bedraggled patrons after the famine of the 1840s. Uilleann piper William Connolly was a classic case in point. Born in Miltown, Co. Galway in 1839, Connolly played the professional circuit in the U.S. in the 1850s before crossing the Canadian border to play on steam packets playing the St. Lawrence. At one stage before the end of his life, he paid a visit back home to Ireland. On arriving at the edge of the village of Miltown where he was born, he hailed a young lad and paid him to walk in front of him through the village carrying his pipes. He wanted his old neighbours to see how well he had done for himself in America (O’Neill 1913: 226).

While isolated enclaves of Scots-Irish music in the Appalachians, the Ozarks and Texas spawned the high lonesome sound of bluegrass, old-time and Texas swing, equally isolated enclaves of Irish music in Newfoundland, New Brunswick, the Ottawa Valley and Quebec have sustained and renewed themselves for two centuries after arriving in the New World. The rhizomorphic nature of these soundscapes dispersed music, song and dance across multiple social, sectarian and ethnic milieux and, in the process, exposed repertoires that were once isolated and exclusive to new music makers, performance settings and modes of transmission. A similar disposition marks Irish music scenes in modern urban settings in the U.S. and Canada. Even since German-American John J. Kimmel (1866-1942) recorded the first Irish dance music to be put on disc in America in the 1920s, non-Irish performers have been a vibrant, if unacknowledged, part of the Irish American musical ethnoscape. This transcultural milieu has an eclectic caste of global villagers: Asian American fiddlers like Dana Lyn and Tina Leck, Jewish American bodhrán player Myron Bretholz, Greek American and Mexican American dancers Miriam Adrianowich and Samuel Satuyo, African American bassist John Goodman, Canadian Austrian guitarist Reinhard Goerner, Canadian Polish dancer Nathan Polanski, as well as Franco-Ontarian, Athapaskan, Cree and Métis fiddlers, Québécois gigueurs and Irish exiles who apparently speak with an accent.

(ii) Ideoscapes

Appadurai defines ideoscapes as “concatenations of images” (1996: 36). Frequently political, they can relate to the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements “explicitly oriented to capturing state
power or a piece of it" (1996: 36). Euro-American master narratives derived from the Enlightenment yielded a formidable crop of these ideas, terms and images—popular concepts of freedom, civil rights, social welfare, sovereignty, representation and that most controversial ideoscape: democracy. Music has acted on behalf of ideologies for centuries, especially nationalism that manifests itself across a vast geopolitical spectrum from legal patriotism to illegal terrorism. Couched beneath the rambling contours of cultural nationalism, for example, are sacrosanct codes about musical identity and authenticity, rights and ownership and that most troubling of sins to cultural nationalists: musical change and how to broker it.

Irish and Scottish music in North America have not been spared these forces. Thomas Moore, for example, brought Irish romantic nationalism to America with his airs and songs in the early 1800s. Described as a “musical snuff box” by the poet William Hazlett, Moore’s melodies still occupy pride of place on the piano stand in thousands of Irish American homes today (Ó hAllmhuráin 1999). Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, formal ideas of Irishness and Scottish were reinforced all over North America by the Gaelic League, Highland Societies, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, An Comunn Gàidhealach, The Royal National Mòd and An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha. In marking out their musical turf in exile, they copper fastened notions of what was “authentic” Irish or “authentic” Scottish music with a great deal of nationalist pride and an occasional relapse into nationalist xenophobia. Irish tunes played in Scottish competitions, or Scottish tunes played in Irish competitions can still ruffle the feathers of official game-keepers today.²

While the communal prosaic of the marketplace determines the external aesthetics of Celtic music, much of the internal aesthetics of Irish and Scottish music and dance in North America is driven by competitive norms prescribed in the Old World and exported across the Atlantic. These are based on a pyramid system of set standards that are designed to weed out the majority of players (who fail to measure up) and make Grand Masters and World Champions of a small cohort. Nowhere is this exercise in skewed cultural preservation more evident than in competitive Irish step dancing, which underwent major globalization in the wake of Riverdance. This expensive cultural “sport” is governed in the U.S. and Canada by the powerful North American Feis Commission who dispatch thousands of kids to the World Irish Dancing Championship every year where they compete against children from Europe and Australasia. Decked out like little divas, children compete in an arena where every single detail of their performance is rigidly codified, from their triple batter down to the cosmetic minutiae of wigs, eye shadow and fake tans. The transformation from old quadrille sets danced in the kitchens of rural Ireland to the glitter of a Vegas-style extravaganza has added much more than mere colour to the ideoscape of Irish dancing.

Informal hierarchies of instruments also prevail in Irish and Scottish
music scenes. Ask any bodhrán player found guilty of breaking and entering a “quiet session” of Irish music without an invitation. Guitar players too are suspect. Once decried as purveyors of “jungle music” by diehard nationalists, they are still “barred” from Irish ceili band competitions, be it in New York or Rosmuc. Ironically, the buzouki, which arrived in Ireland from the Balkans in the 1960s, has fared much better in the ideoscape of Irish music, its seedy Arabesque origins in the brothels of Istanbul having managed to elude the gatekeepers of Irish musical purity (Stokes 1992).

After enduring jazz in the 1930s, and the British and American folk revivals in the 1950s and 1960s, Irish traditional music experienced a series of recurring identity crises in the 1970s and 1980s, as new genres stormed the battlements and the alchemy of globalization focused new attention on the dischord between culture and economics. In the 1990s, Irish musicians on both sides of the Atlantic underwent a musical inquisition in which the binary aesthetics of tradition and innovation were pitted against each other in an effort to make sense of the cultural challenges thrown up by the Celtic Tiger (Vallely et al. 1999). Now that the said beast has been deprived of its claws, Irish social discourse is focusing on the tribulations of a fiscally tattered nation whose music makers are again taking flight to foreign shores.

(iii) Mediascapes

In Appadurai’s coda, mediascapes refer to the capacities of private and public interests to select, produce and disseminate information and the resulting images of the world created by these media. Mediascapes are elementary forces in all music environments in that they influence internal transmission and preservation, as well as external dissemination. Like other ethnic genres in the Old World, Irish and Scottish music were oral arts sourced historically in a common Gaelic culture that stretched from Cape Clear in the southwest of Ireland to the northern tip of Lewis. Both soundscapes arrived in the New World carrying their oral repertoires with them. Their engagement with New World mediascapes, however, shifted their music into a radically new matrix. Sedentary Scottish and Irish communities in rural Canada and in rural parts of the U.S. maintained oral traditions much longer than their homologues who settled in rapidly changing urban environments. Both soundscapes were also marked by different degrees of musical literacy. Scotland’s Golden Age of published fiddle music coincided with the early clearances from the Highlands. Hence, many immigrants arrived bearing the published collections of Neil and Nathaniel Gow and William Marshall with them. Others arrived having learned the rudiments of musical literacy as pipers and drummers with Highland regiments in the British army. The Scots continued to nurture a tradition of musical literacy in exile. In Atlantic Canada, for example, local
folk composers showed a formidable grasp of musical literacy, composing tunes in a range of keys, styles and tempos. Their compositions continue to find their way into print media today.

The Irish and Scots-Irish, on the other hand, brought very little musical literacy with them. Marginalized by what Benedict Anderson termed “the age of print capitalism,” in particular, by commercial music publishers in metropolitan hubs like New York and Chicago, the majority of Irish musicians in the New World had no means of recording or preserving their own music in print (Anderson 1983). What little we know of their early dance music and song is gleaned from popular lyrics and music scores issued by Tin Pan Alley and consumed by piano-playing upper and middle classes in urban America (Williams 1996). In 1882, however, New England collector, William Bradbury Ryan and his mentor, Elias Howe, published Ryan's Mammoth Collection in Boston. This single volume is one of the most important repositories of 19th-century American music (Sky 1995: 14). It contains music created by singers, dancers and blackface minstrels, much of which would develop into country music, blues and ragtime by the early 20th century. It also contains instructions for contemporary social dances like the lancers, gallops and walk-arounds, many of which were cognates of quadrille sets taught by dancing masters in Ireland and Scotland. Much of Ryan's work was liberally incorporated into Captain Francis O'Neill's Music of Ireland, published in Chicago in 1903. This latter volume was so highly regarded by Irish performers that it was referred to as “the bible,” or “the book” until recently, thus excluding all other collections before or since.

This print mediascape changed radically, however, after Thomas Edison invented sound recording in 1877 and the first ethnographic recordings of music were made at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. Music now entered what Nicholas Carolan has termed its Second Age, during which “the link between performance and the old lived reality was broken. Now it became possible to put a musician in a box, to listen to the dead, to make the piper on the record play the tune over and over and over, quickly or slowly – and now, he played it exactly the same every time. Space had been abolished along with death, time and human interaction” (Carolan 2006: 138; Bohlman 2002: 148). By the end of the 1890s, Irish musicians in the U.S. had joined the technology nexus and were recording their own music on wax cylinders, among them, celebrated vaudevillian piper, Patsy Touhey (Carolan 1997: 37). It was only a matter of time before Scottish performers followed suit, first, in industrial hubs like Detroit and the “Boston states” that had vibrant enclaves of Cape Breton fiddlers and, later, in settings closer to the source of their tradition in Atlantic Canada.

Irish and Scottish soundscapes underwent other pivotal swings with the arrival of radio in the 1930s and television in the 1950s. While propagating new stars and styles (particularly along the Appalachian chain in
the U.S. and Canada, where Nashville became the new mecca), these new mediascapes led to an increased privatization of leisure, as families gathered around radios and TVs to enjoy the passive modern entertainment of Don Messer and Ed Sullivan. Adaptations of these media continued to impact Irish and Scottish performers in North America until cyberspace and the Internet projected them into a brave new virtual world in the 1990s. During the past two decades, musical borders have continued to collapse and the lines between fictional and realistic landscapes have been blurred irrevocably by a hyper chemistry of print, celluloid and electronic media. In the resulting fetish of Hollywood emporiums, Irish and Scottish music have aided and abated a fantasy world of tartan superheroes, Celtic dance lords and leprechaun ninjas, just as much as they have functioned as portals into diasporic worlds in the past.

(iv) Technoscapes

Appadurai’s technoscapes are ever-changing global networks of mechanical and informational technologies. From musical instruments to iPods, humanly generated tunes to iTunes, technoscapes are breaching all kinds of previously impervious musical boundaries (Appadurai 1996: 34). The history of Irish and Scottish musical technoscapes in the New World runs the gamut from the most rudimentary instruments like Jew’s harps, fiddles and tin whistles to the most sophisticated audio-visual studio equipment today. While Highland and uilleann pipe makers flourished in the New World, their instruments were often pitched to a very select clientele. In the U.S., uilleann pipes (especially, concert pitch sets developed in Philadelphia by the Taylor brothers in the 1890s) were expensive and, hence, beyond the means of the vast majority of performers. Fiddles, flutes, accordions and even pianos were far more accessible, especially in the Irish soundscape. In the Scottish milieu, the fiddle enjoyed major prominence, followed by Highland pipes, small pipes, church harmoniums and, later, by guitars and pianos that were distributed across North America via ubiquitous Sears-Roebuck mail order networks.

With the age of recorded sound came wax cylinders, Victrola gramophones, 78 rpm flat discs, 45 rpms, LPs, magnetic tape recorders, cassette machines and the Walkman, the quintessential music accessory of the 1980s. The transition from analog to digital code radically altered the range of recording and editing possibilities and brought an unprecedented level of pristine quality to music that previously languished beneath the hiss of crackling needles and ruffled tape. Digital recording also created an obsession with mechanical correction (the sonic “cut and paste”) that Celtic musicians and engineers have become so adept at, with the result that modern Celtic recordings, like those of other contemporary genres, have become sterile and “dirtless.”
The availability of cutting-edge technology, however, has not made for easy coexistence between music makers, technology owners and market moguls. Accessing a marketplace where 650 million CDs a year were sold (in the period 2000-2005 before MP3s and iTunes caused another seismic swing in the market pendulum) has been a herculean challenge for Irish and Scottish musicians. As Irish sociologist Kieran Allen remarked:

Music has become an industry dominated by a handful of corporations who hamper access to new forms of creativity. Five companies – Warner Music, EMI Group, Universal Music Group, Bertelsmann Music Group and Sony – have taken over vertical and horizontal control of almost every aspect of the industry. They control virtually every known label, 80 percent of all titles produced in the US and comparable percentages elsewhere, most of the major distribution companies, and much of copyrighted music. Real existing capitalism – as distinct from the propagandistic fantasies about a “free” market – leads to the creation of great oligopolies. (2005: 4)

While a tiny minority of Irish and Scottish musicians have been fortunate to make it through one of the five pearly gates, others circumnavigate the road block by creating independent labels. This trend became widespread in the U.S. and Canada in the 1990s, especially in Cape Breton, Newfoundland, Québec and California.

(v) Financescapes

Financescapes, the final concept in Appadurai’s coda, are fiscal flows that pass through a vast nexus of currency markets and trading forums around the world. Financescapes have cast a long shadow on the history of Irish music in America. The journey across the Atlantic for many Irish musicians marked a fiscal crossing of the Rubicon, from a traditional rural world of free communal house dances to the cash economy of variety theatre, vaudeville circuits and the “take it or leave it” world of record companies, where every man took care of himself. Few, if any, of the Irish-born players who recorded during the Golden Age of Irish Music in America in the 1920s were equipped to deal legally or fiscally with the bevy of companies who put them on disc. Lump sums “paid up front” were generally chosen over royalties by most musicians who recorded—even stars like Michael Coleman, James Morrison and Paddy Killoran, all three immigrants from Co. Sligo on the northwest coast of Ireland. In New York, they were glad to find work recording music and seldom considered the long-term royalties they might accrue from their records that are still selling today, almost a century after they were first recorded.

Royalty and copyright ethics continue to raise eyebrows among Irish
and Scottish music makers. Mired in a limbo between a “free-for-all” public domain and a legally-protected private domain, most Irish and Scottish musicians in North America are men and women of no musical property, at least no musical property in the eyes of the law. Apart from sporadic compositional or mechanical rights, they have little or no legal control over the common musical heritage, or *patrimoine*, they share with thousands of their cohorts. In the absence of adequate folk copyright law, virtually no royalty or copyright returns are paid to collective music communities whose heritage is expropriated by “big name” stars, or music industry moguls. Warnings about cultural property violations raised by international forums like UNESCO and the World Intellectual Property Organization are consistently ignored by big business. Hence, musical plunder continues unhindered, not least in the vast viscous world of Celtic music.

After numerous folk revivals, media swings and bouts of pan-Celtic resuscitation, the financescape of Irish and Scottish musicians in North America today looks very different from that of their predecessors two centuries ago. Despite the monopolies and oligopolies of the recording industry, Irish and Scottish super stars and groups working professionally in the U.S. and Canada have access to a menagerie of competing music festivals, from Cape Breton's Celtic Colours that showcases music in small community halls to Milwaukee's mammoth green circus where kitsch knows no shame. Their portfolios also brim with Grammy, Academy and Juno Awards, all of which add to their competitive edge in the marketplace. Their professional circuits are also governed by the whims of the tourist industry, as “trad music” is now a key asset in the promotion of roots tourism—from tartanism to shamroguery—at both ends of the diasporic curve (Kaul 2009; Basu 2007). While financescapes impact all sorts of Celtic performers from stars whose careers “max out” after ten years to anonymous session players who are nonchalant about making big fortunes, its synergy reached epic heights in recent years in the dance extravaganza and the global surge of Irish pubs that are now new temples of the Celtic soundscape.

The *crème de la crème* of success in the Celtic music industry in North America is the dance extravaganza *Riverdance* and its spinoffs, Michael Flatley’s *Lord of the Dance*, *Feet of Flames* and *Celtic Tiger*. Since it began touring in 1995, *Riverdance* has grossed over £1 billion (GBP), (€1.25 billion, or $1.94 billion Canadian). With three shows touring, by 2008 it had been staged on four continents, in thirty-two countries, at 280 venues; performed more than nine thousand times; and seen by almost twenty million people (Ó Cinnéide 2000, 2002; Yoshida 2008). While shows like *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* create a synthesis between tradition and innovation and enable dancers to foster creativity, there is also a school of thought among traditional performers that is perturbed by the ideological impact of chief priests like Michael Flatley who rationalize their success.
with invidious quips like “nothing exceeds like excess” (O’Connor 2003: 122-41). Such ostentatious individualism fits poorly within the philosophy of a soundscape that has traditionally been communal and inclusive.

Celtic music is also central to the commercial invention known as “the Irish pub,” where it functions largely as sonic wallpaper, or “aural carpet,” as musician and producer, Tony MacMahon more cuttingly describes it (MacMahon 1999: 112-20). Modeling their products on architectural styles drawn from Ireland’s 8,000 old-style pubs, several companies are now exporting Irish pubs all over the world. The Irish theme bar, or “pub-in-a-box” is a thriving global industry. In the past decade, over 1,600 have opened for business in cities from Berlin to Beijing. Working in tandem with Guinness, the Dublin-based Irish Pub Company describes itself as the largest supplier of Irish pubs in the world. Its catalogue includes options to suit every nostalgic taste, from small country cottage pubs to the classic wood and glass pubs of Victorian Dublin. These boxed sets come complete with Irish-born bar staff with real “brogues,” kitsch furniture, Irish musicians (of various pedigrees and degrees of proficiency) and tailor-made training courses in “the craic” (the Irish art of fun and conviviality) that act as an introduction to Ireland for drinkers unfamiliar with the island, or its social idiosyncrasies. Hence, music has become a form of what Fintan Vallely calls “Gucci-Paddy kitsch,” highlighting the Irish pub as a magnet for tourists and a major source of revenue for Irish drink companies throughout the world (McGovern 2003: 83-103).

Conclusion

Before closing, I should like to stress again that this paper was intended as a panoptic critique of two Celtic music diasporas in North America, rather than a detailed travelogue through them. In drawing on cultural flow theory, I have attempted to chart the complex coordinates of the Irish and Scottish soundscapes in North America within a macro historical and contemporary global context. What is abundantly clear in this transdisciplinary synthesis is that both soundscapes shaped and were shaped by vast flows of musical currents in and out of the New World for centuries: from the initial expulsion of unwanted Celts from the Old World to the recent co-option of Celtic music by neo-liberal myth makers and World Music industry moguls.

Despite this ubiquitous profile, the academic role of Celtic music in the New World still remains dubious and selective. While independent schools and institutions from Cape Breton to California undertake exemplary work teaching and preserving Celtic music, it is untenable that this soundscape receives so little attention from the upper echelons of Celtic scholarship in North America. Buried beneath a hubris of staid text-based
epistemologies, Celtic Studies in the U.S. and Canada has taken its research and pedagogical cues largely from its Old World homologues. This genre of old school research has already felt the ire of forward-looking scholars in Europe and North America. In his 1977 exegesis of text-based historiography, French historian Jacques Attali, for example, noted that “for twenty-five centuries, Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for the hearing. It is not legible but audible” (Attali 1985 [1977]: 1).\^4 For Attali, music is not simply a unidimensional reflection of any given culture but a harbinger of change, a metaphor for a broad historical and cultural vanguardism. Anthropologists, cultural geographers and ethnomusicologists like Keith Basso, Yi-Fu Tuan and Martin Stokes have echoed Attali in their criticism of vision-based scholarship and have called for consideration of the other senses in exploring the cultural patterning of perception.

Regrettably, as a crucible of cultural memory (real, imagined or forgotten), Celtic music in the New World has been consigned to what Jacques Le Goff termed an “indefinable residue of historical analysis” (Le Goff 1974: 77-79). This is hardly surprising given the stark statistics of formal Celtic scholarship in North America. In a continent that boasts over seventy million people of Celtic ancestry, there are fewer than twenty-five chairs of Irish, Scottish and Celtic Studies in the U.S. and Canada. Of these, fewer than ten offer courses in Celtic music or ethnomusicology. In the quest to educate the Celts of North America, it is clear that the “score” between Harvard and Hollywood is a very uneven one indeed. Today, most North American Celts learn more about themselves, their history and their music from Mel Gibson, Sting, *Riverdance* and the Irish pub-in-a-box than they do from Celtic scholars labouring away over the annals of the past. The Irish proverb *An t-iomard nach feictedear, is é is mó a goilleann* (the wound that is unseen is the one that hurts most) seems to add disturbing weight to the truth of this paradox.

As a nomadic and polysemic art that has consistently travelled ahead of written perceptions of the past, Irish and Scottish music is inscribed in what Pierre Nora terms *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) on both sides of the Atlantic (Nora 1989: 7-24). In excavating these sonic footprints, it is time to re-centre the trajectory of the Celtic music diaspora to North America within the mainframe of broader cultural flows that changed the ethno-histories of the Atlantic since 1492. A critical point of departure in this remit requires scholars to emerge from the cocoon of a unidirectional music diaspora. This antiquated binary has blinded scholars to the abundance of the cultural traffic that has crossed the Atlantic in reverse to the Old World in the past two centuries: from Dan Emmet’s *Virginia Minstrels* who brought the banjo to Ireland in 1844 to the Cree fiddlers from James Bay who brought forgotten music back to Orkney in 1978, from Buddy MacMaster’s trip to Lochaber in 1993 to Seán McKiernan’s
return to Carna as a child in the 1950s, not just as a future piper but as a native speaker of Irish born in Boston. It is imperative to treat the Celtic music diaspora in North America as an all-encompassing rhizomorphic phenomenon with multidirectional roots and routes that have spanned the Atlantic and its bordering landmasses for centuries. Not to do so is to fail to comprehend the synchronic and diachronic processes of tradition making, musical hybridity and transculturation that continue to mark the abundant soundscape of the Celts in the Americas.

Notes
1. By the time the Irish and Scots began to arrive in North America in large numbers in the late 18th century, the quadrille had ensconced itself along the eastern seaboard from Newfoundland to the Caribbean and was being indigenized by multiple hybrid soundscapes.

2. As an adjudicator at the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil (Ireland’s World Championship forum) in 1998, I was quietly tapped on the shoulder and told by a rules “guru” to disqualify a young musician because he had played a “Scottish strathspey in an Irish competition.” Rather than undermine his confidence after a long summer of qualifying competitions, I invited him back to play a reel instead of the strathspey. Our game-keeper didn’t seem to mind that he came back and played “Lucy Campbell,” a Scottish reel that, like scores of other sin-ful Scottish tunes, has enjoyed currency in Ireland for over two hundred years.

3. 1,400 dancers have taken part in this show to date, its Grammy-winning CD has sold over 2.5 million copies and its video sales exceed $9 million.

4. Attali notes that music is “prophesy. Its styles and economic organization are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code” (1985 [1977]: 3).

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29-36.


