

# Dancing in Southwest Donegal: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Conor Caldwell

## Abstract

Southwest Donegal has experienced a revival in interest in two-hand couples' dances in recent years. The Donegal fiddle advocacy group *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* has promoted these dances in tandem with its music education programme, allowing musicians to gain a deeper understanding of the style required to play for dancers. This essay examines the practice of country dancing in Donegal from both an historical and a contemporary perspective, while exploring the nature of musical experience for those involved in the current revival. The study argues that traditional music can be better interpreted by a dance-literate community and concludes with some observations on what lessons can be learned by the Irish music community at large in an era when dance and music inhabit very different spaces and social spheres.

**Keywords:** Donegal, Dance, Fiddle Music, *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí*, Glencolmcille, Revival.

## Introduction

Alternating eras of revival and stagnation have defined the narrative of Irish traditional music since the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The idea that Irish culture in general has been "prone to revivals" is well-established in existing research (McCann, 1995: 51), and such revivals have been observed in Irish literature, language, industry and politics amongst other forms of cultural expression. Scholarly discussion of revivalism within the context of Irish music has been most thoroughly addressed by Fintan Vallely (1986) and Martin Dowling (2013 and 2014a). Dowling identifies three distinct revival movements over the last three hundred years.<sup>2</sup> The first of these, which came to prominence in the 1790s, focussed on resurrecting the music of the itinerant harpers who had played an important role in Gaelic society until its collapse in the early modern period. It was initially inspired by the growth of the United Irishmen and their attempted rebellion of 1798. This revival's most prominent figures included Edward Bunting and later George Petrie (see also White, 1998), although Bunting had conceded defeat in his objective by 1840. The music of Thomas Moore, in part cultivated from the results of Bunting's collecting trips, would come to represent Irishness on an international stage in the Romantic period. A second revival began largely as a result of late nineteenth-century European Romanticism, which swept across the continent, and was supported in Ireland by, amongst others, such cultural revolutionaries as Douglas Hyde (1860-1949).<sup>3</sup> Hyde viewed music as an integral component of a new Irish society, built upon an indigenous culture and the rejection of all things Anglo-Irish. This movement would come to be defined by organisations that still exist today, such as the Gaelic League and the Feis Ceoil Association (Dowling, 2014a). The third and most recent revival was that of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the sustaining legacy of which is clearly visible around Ireland, and indeed, the world. The awakening of a generation of Irish people to their own musical voice is attributed to numerous artists in this period, including *The Dubliners*, the Makem, McPeake and Clancy families, as well as the radio broadcasts of *Ceoltóirí Chualann*, an ensemble formed by the composer Seán Ó Riada. This revival has continued to engage both with modern technology and commercialism, allowing this revival of Irish traditional music and dance to be brought to a mass global audience, as Susan Motherway (2013) has observed.

Discussion of revival movements within Irish music and dance are inevitably framed by a wider discourse of stasis and innovation which has energised scholarship since it was instigated by the television series [A River of Sound](#) (RTÉ, 1995). So intense was the debate following this series' broadcast that a landmark conference, *Crosbhealach an Cheoil* (The Crossroads Conference) was held the following year, attracting a large ensemble of scholars, musicians and critics from a variety of viewpoints.<sup>4</sup> Tamara E. Livingston (1999)

observes that this debate is a natural phase of any music revival but that it can often lead to the very break-down of the movement. However, in many ways this phase has not been detrimental for Irish traditional music and has served to strengthen academic debate by creating what can be seen as the first modern point of contention for scholars in this field. While general agreement appears to confirm that innovation and change are innate and essential components of Ireland's thriving traditional musical culture, the debate concerning the tension between tradition and experimentation often resurfaces with the appearance of new boundary-challenging ensembles on the concert circuit. Evidence suggests that funding is increasingly available to those who are willing to develop an internationalised approach to their music making, experimenting with musicians from other traditions.<sup>5</sup> This pursuit of 'for listening-only' forms of Irish Traditional Music only serves to facilitate the further de-contextualisation of forms of Irish dancing from their musical forms, a phenomenon identified in *A River of Sound* and one which has been in effect for more than a century. A generation of musicians is now emerging which has little or no experience of playing for dancers; even those who do play for dance find their major performance outlets are dance competitions which require an increasingly stylised and homogenous musical aesthetic, one which relies upon the application of mechanically-enforced, uniform *tempi*. Meanwhile, dance music is played at increasingly disparate *tempi* in sessions and concert halls, further serving to de-contextualise its practice from the actual experience of dancing itself.

Until relatively recently the morphology of dancing in Ireland has been somewhat neglected in academic discourse. The emergence of a macro scholarly narrative, with both historical and ethnographic research foci, has been marked by the publication of several books, for example Helen Brennan's *The Story of Irish Dance* (1999) and more recently Barbara O'Connor's *The Irish Dancing* (2013), an examination of the construction of identity through dance in twentieth century Ireland. Similarly, heterogeneous surveys in this field are only beginning to emerge, such as Catherine Foley's *Step Dancing in Ireland: Culture and History* (2013), an ethnochoreological examination of step dancing in Ireland with special consideration of its development in county Kerry. Other works in this vein include Mary Friel's *Dancing as a Social Pastime in the South East of Ireland* (2004) and Nigel Boullier's *Handed Down*, a taxonomy of music and dance in north Down (2013).

It is in the context of revival, stasis, innovation and the separation of constituent elements of Irish traditional music more generally, as well as the development of heterogeneous modes of discussion relating to Irish dance that this essay addresses the current revival of forms of country dancing, specifically the practice of two-hand couples' dances in southwest Donegal. This study, while examining the revival through local, regional and trans-regional lenses (Slobin, 1993) and drawing from more than a decade of learning and living in the area, aims to highlight the processes that have facilitated the Donegal revival and to extend current work on music revivals, particularly the discourse developed by Livingston (1999 and 2014), Rosenberg (1993), Jeff Todd Titon (1993) and Peter Narváez (1993). More specifically I hope to foster further discussion on best practice within Irish Traditional Music for the protection and development of regional forms of cultural practice.

This study begins with a discussion of the history of dancing in Donegal, before illustrating some of the common dances that are found both historically and in the most recent revival. In pinpointing a time period in which these dances declined, I will examine the social and economic reasons behind their gradual disappearance. The current revival is then discussed through analysis of interviews with its instigators and practitioners, as well as through reflection upon my own experiences. This revival is focussed upon the tradition of two-hand dances, which until the mid-twentieth century were commonly practiced in the southwest Donegal. These dances are simple in nature, with participants generally refraining from 'stepping' in the manner of solo dancers. The gentleman leads with his left (outside) foot while the lady mirrors this movement with her right foot. The dances follow the structure

of the music with most of the repertoire having two distinct parts, often contrasting forward or lateral movement in the A part with a 'round the house', circular pattern in the B part.

## History of Dancing in Donegal

Scholarship in this field has thus far been limited to four central publications, authored exclusively by outsiders. The fact that the native population has not thus far developed its own discourse in this field reflects the fact that traditional forms of music and dance have been subject to the same harsh realities of fashion as any form of popular music over the last 150 years.<sup>6</sup> Dance instructor Connie McKelvey, in an interview for this study, found it difficult to explain this apathy amongst a particular generation who are now between the ages of 30-50 in southwest Donegal. McKelvey suggests that dancing is not seen as "cool" in the area and that the modern world offers people a greater variety of pastimes from which to choose.

However, the four major publications on music and dance in the region (Allen Feldman and Eamon O'Doherty, 1977, Caoimhín Mac Aoidh, 1994, and Alun Evans/ Dermot McLaughlin/ Vincent Campbell, 1997), and the comparatively less well-known, but equally important, essay by Damhnait Níc Suibhne (1995) arising from her postgraduate research in the area, have gone some way towards a study of what has been described as one of the "richest and most exuberant" manifestations of Irish popular culture since colonisation (Dowling, 2014a).<sup>7</sup> Contextualising this movement, which lasted from the time of the Great Famine (1845-1852) until the mid-twentieth century, is difficult as it existed in a community with (then) low levels of literacy, plagued by emigration and the later famines of the 1870s and 1880s ('M', 1883), blights much more devastating in this region than their better-known predecessor (Tucker, 1999). Few written records remarking upon the specific music and dance that was practiced in this region exist before the early twentieth century, a fact that is lamented, more generally speaking, by Barbara O'Connor (2013: 6) when she notes the "dearth of cultural analysis in early Irish sociology". One possible explanation for this "dearth of analysis" is that the most popular regional dances and music were considered so prosaic and quotidian that they were not worthy of discussion. It was only with the erosion of such practices as Ireland modernised through the twentieth century that these customs began to be discussed, often in retrospect or with reference exclusively to older members of the community.

Mac Aoidh's thorough account of dancing in Donegal (1994: 106-119), constructed from his experiences in the region, offers an excellent introduction to the large dance repertoire that was in common practice in Donegal over the last two centuries. Feldman and O'Doherty (1977) also published several useful resources as part of their 'Northern Fiddler Project', including a thorough typology of the fiddler John Doherty's repertoire. Doherty was perhaps the most important single musician to emerge from the region and his repertoire, as we will see later, provides many clues as to the make-up of the dance repertoire in the early twentieth century. An essay by Evans, McLaughlin and Campbell (1997) on Doherty, published in the journal *Ulster Folklife* provides further insights into the context of dancing in rural Donegal, while Nic Suibhne's essay 'The Donegal Fiddle Tradition: An Ethnographic Perspective' (1995) organises musicians, tunes and dances into paradigms and typologies, informed by ethnomusicological theory.

European dance forms, such as the many extant versions of the quadrille and cotillion, had been popular in urban Ireland from as early as 1815 (Dowling, 2010: 147). Dowling has described these forms as having "infiltrated" the countryside after their establishment among the upper classes in London and Dublin. The dances were mainly cultivated and taught by travelling dance masters working in tandem with musicians, although according to Mac Aoidh (1994: 107), the reach of these dancing masters was

limited in Donegal. While Dowling (2010) also argues that a peak in music and dance activity occurred after the Great Famine, it is not clear that this was the case in southwest Donegal. This region's close proximity to the sea, and thus to a supply of fish, as well as its isolated geography meant that the Famine did not impact this area of the country in the same way as it did elsewhere (Taylor, 1980: 175). Remarkably, there was not a single recorded death from hunger during the Famine period in Glencolmcille, although thirty one families did receive a form of state aid (Tucker, 1999: 102). We have no accounts of dancing in Donegal in this early part of the nineteenth century, but it is most likely that local practices, broadly speaking, reflected those common in the rest of Ireland, while also demonstrating a strong Scots influence. The social, cultural and economic links between Donegal and Scotland have been outlined by Anne O'Dowd (1995) amongst others and can be traced to cultural exchanges between sixteenth-century fishing communities, particularly those from the historic fishing port of Teelin.<sup>8</sup> Later, practices of seasonal migration to Scotland would sustain the county's economy and entire parishes would empty in search of harvesting work in Scotland and other parts of Ulster (O'Dowd, 1995). Cultural boundaries between Donegal Irish and Scots (*Gàidhlig* speakers in particular) became blurred in this period and a close relationship with the Donegal Irish diaspora in Scotland persists today.<sup>9</sup> Some Donegal musicians, including Kilcar native Francie 'Dearg' O'Beirne, spoke of their experiences working in Scotland and how they felt that the general experience of the migrating population influenced music in the southwest of their native county.<sup>10</sup>

The assertion that the Donegal and Scottish fiddle traditions – and by extension their dance traditions – developed along similar lines from circa.1800 (Mac Aoidh, 1994), is supported by a coherence of repertoire between the two areas throughout the nineteenth century. For example, a significant number of tunes contained in the 'Country Dance' sections of *Kerr's Merry Melodies*, a series of Scottish publications from around 1870 ('Patronella', 'Staten Island', 'My Love is But a Lassie Yet', 'I Lost my Love', 'The Wee Wee Man' [or 'Bundle and Go'] and 'Pibroch of Donald Dhu' to name but a few) are found in the repertoires of Donegal fiddle players today.<sup>11</sup> Scottish *strathspeys* transmogrified into *highlands* in Donegal, with the strict 'scotch-snap' rhythm that defines the former tune type being largely erased in the development of the less rhythmically complex highland tune form. Similarly, Scottish reels, the earliest recordings of which demonstrate a punctiliously rhythmical aesthetic, informed by the art music training of the nation's most prominent composers and performers, were adapted by Donegal players and imbued with what we now consider to be the characteristic rhythm of Irish dance music.

In the midst of the second national music revival outlined by Dowling (2013), *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) banned so-called 'foreign' dances at its céilidhs.<sup>12</sup> Such dances included quadrilles, highlands and other dances popular in Donegal. In their place *Conradh na Gaeilge*, with financial backing from its wealthy London chapter (Brennan, 1999: 32), set about spreading the newly invented céili dances (Brennan, 1999: 132) which we still see today in parts of Donegal (McKelvey, 2014), such as 'The High Caul Cap', which is somewhat ironically danced to a Scottish tune. However, it appears that the *Conradh na Gaeilge's* influence was not felt as decisively in southwest Donegal as in other population centres. Again, we can refer to the county's geographical isolation from Dublin as well as to the fact that there was no need for a language revival in southwest Donegal at this time. Irish (*Gaeilge*) was still the common tongue of the region, although its disappearance from Glenties had been observed as early as 1876 (O'Cathain, 1876). While representatives of *Conradh na Gaeilge* were welcomed in Glencolmcille on at least one occasion in 1907, its main focus was on the redevelopment of formal Irish language education in the national schools of Kilcar, Carrick and Teelin (MacCuinneagain, 2002) rather than on the sort of large-scale revivalism that was necessary in regions where Gaelic had disappeared.

The practice of music-making and dancing across southwest Donegal in the early twentieth century encouraged folklorists and collectors to begin a gathering exercise. One of

the earliest ethnomusicological reconnoitres into the region were the visits of the composer Herbert Hughes, from which he published a collection of songs and tunes entitled *Songs of Uladh* (1904 under the pseudonym Pádraig Mac Aoidh O'Neill). This collection is notable for containing a tune for the cotillion, a European dance to 6/8 jig time which MacAoidh (1994), through linguistic analysis, argues had long been assimilated into the southwest Donegal repertoire by this point.

Grace Orpen's *Dances of Donegal* (1931), a short instructional guide which contains transcriptions of some fourteen dances with "suitable" music, shows that a wide range of dances were in common practice at the Marble Hill mansion house, Dunfanaghy. The larger space for dancing in the mansion house allowed céili-style dances, such as 'The Waves of Tory' to be practiced alongside two-hand forms, such as 'Shoe the Donkey'. Connie McKelvey (2014) cites the Glenties fiddler Jimmy Campbell as having theorised that the dominance of the two-hand forms in the southwest was due to the small size of kitchens, the preferred venue for dancing. Céili dances, which required larger numbers, could simply not be regularly practiced in this space. Since most dances took place in the winter, while seasonal migrants were home (Vincent Campbell speaking on *The South Donegal Fiddle*, 2005), the outdoors was not a practical performance space. Daithí Kearney (2008) has observed that "Irish traditional music is shaped by the spaces in which it is performed, and by those who perform, collect, listen to, and patronise it." The dominance of two-hand dances in southwest Donegal is a clear illustration of this theory in practice.

Barbara O'Connor (2013) has identified three distinct stimuli for dance in a community: ritual, pastime and performance. A night of house dancing in southwest Donegal, known locally as "a big night", coheres with our understanding of "pastime" dancing and usually took place in the kitchen of a rural dwelling with a flagstone floor (Galvin, 2010).<sup>13</sup> Outside of the winter months, dancing also took place on festivals and feast days, such as St John's Day Eve (23 June), a community celebration to mark midsummer and the final night at home for migrants. This event, which included bonfires and was generally celebrated outdoors, is one of the last remaining practices in southwest Donegal that we could understand as ritual in nature. Meanwhile, performance dancing was very much a part of the house-dancing era, with soloists appearing at various times during the night. An example of this is found in a 1949 recording of the fiddler Mickey Doherty who accompanies a step-dancer for the tune, 'Maggie Pickie'. Mickey's brother John told of the Teelin native Tom Tailor (whose name is now indelibly linked to the 'The Teelin Highland'). John quipped that Tailor struggled with one of his legs when dancing "but the good leg was very active!" (John Doherty, recordings made between 1968-1974)

When possible, the music was led by a travelling professional, such as one of the Doherty family, whose unannounced arrival in a particular townland would inevitably be a catalyst for a night of dancing. Nic Suibhne (1995) conceptualises the fiddle players of southwest Donegal in a tri-partite paradigm, with such professionals at the top. "Local fiddlers" could provide musical accompaniment in the absence of a professional, while "house fiddlers" would not have the repertoire or skill to fulfil this function. Lilters, who sang dance tunes using vocables or simple quasi-improvised songs, filled the gap when no instrumentalist could be found (Robinson, 2009). According to the late Míin na Croise fiddler James Byrne, the musicians would continue to play while the dancers rested between sets, and often a singer would fill the musical interludes with a song. Around eleven o'clock a break was taken:

*And then about eleven o' clock: tea time. All would sit around, and they would start smoking and ...there was a hanging table...that would be taken down with one leg on it. And then there would be eggs or whatever the best thing in house and a big feed, and then away again after that...until about 6 [o'clock] in the morning (Jimmy Campbell speaking on The South Donegal Fiddle, 2005).*

The whole event was a community led interaction, as well as a place to meet a potential partner or simply to have conversation with neighbours and friends.

## Decline

Dowling (2010) asserts that what we call 'traditional' music today was the result of the process of filtering elements of a "Victorian pop-culture stew" (Dowling, 2014b) into a product that could be used in the cultivation of an Irish identity. He attributes this filtering process to organisations such as *Conradh na Gaeilge* and *The Feis Ceoil Association* in the early twentieth century. Daithí Kearney (2008) has extended this theory, arguing that *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann*, from its establishment in 1951, has served a similar function. In understanding the main reasons why two-hand dances in Donegal largely disappeared between 1930 and 1950, it is important to note that the "vernacular" music culture, as it existed in southwest Donegal, had not yet been subject to the same process of filtration before mid-twentieth century changes in popular music tastes almost erased traditional forms of music making in the region. Donegal's introduction to the modern world in the wake of Irish partition, especially through the proliferation of radios, had a monumental effect on the county's musical tastes. Not only were musicians like the Doherty's hearing recordings of [Michael Coleman](#) and Frank O'Higgins, but they were also hearing jazz and swing music from America for the first time. The evidence suggests that jazz and swing had an immediate impact on social dancing. John Doherty recalled several ragtime and swing tunes which his family, as professional musicians, were required to learn for dances at this time. These included 'Hi Johnny! Ho!' and the now infamous minstrel piece '[Yes! We Have no Bananas](#)', both of which Doherty adapted for the fiddle with a very definite Irish character and style.

The now much contested Public Dance Halls' Act of 1935 appears to have had little impact upon the house dancing scene in southwest Donegal, as dances continued all over the countryside.<sup>14</sup> While the impact of the legislation was negligible on rural dance practices in the area, we do see the emergence of two distinct dance narratives from this point, that of the traditional kitchen dance and that new economic phenomenon, the dance hall. Peter Campbell's house in the Croaghs above Glenties is an example of a dwelling that remained active for house dances, and was one that the Dohertys frequented (Cherry and McLaughlin, 2010; Campbell, 2012). However, Eddie O'Gara (cited by Galvin, 2010) recalls that younger people in Glencolmcille were already beginning to reject the traditional house dance, where they felt embarrassed to talk to members of the opposite sex in front of family and friends, and instead would gather at a place on the mountainside called Ard na Pléisiúr ('The Height of Pleasure') a not particularly well-veiled pun! Dance halls were erected in many areas, including Teelin and Glenties, and served to offer a more diverse range of dances. It was in this atmosphere that the Dohertys, with their array of new and popular dance tunes, originally flourished. "Old time" dances, as the couples' dances came to be known (McKelvey, 2014), originally dominated the dance card, but their prominence was soon eroded by the thirst for the new fashions, eventually leading to a preference for larger ensembles and orchestras that had been touring the countryside even before partition.

The late 1930s are the crucial years in understanding why the dances ceased to be practiced. No single factor led to their disappearance, but rather a range of social, economic and cultural changes were at play. The changing musical tastes of the youth, the growth of the dance hall, urbanisation, the erosion of the Irish language, the end of migratory labour practices in favour of more permanent relocations to England, Scotland and America as well as the onset more generally of modern tastes and behaviour would all help to erase the traditional forms of dance that had been at the very centre of social life in southwest Donegal.

Efforts at retaining the two-hand dances were apparent in the mid-1950s. Fr James McDyer, who was appointed parish priest of Glencolmcille in 1951 revitalised the parish during his time in the area. In 1967, his most noted project, the [Glencolmcille Folk Village](#),

was completed. This remains a tourist attraction and venue for music and dance events today (McGinley, 2010). McDyer was a charismatic figure who actively promoted older ways of life, and who lamented what he called the "'five curses' of his community - lack of good roads, lack of electricity, lack of piped water, lack of jobs and lack of social activity" (Hegarty, 2010). In 1955, McDyer employed John Doherty and his brother Simí to play for a dance held in the newly-built parish hall, Halla Mhuire (also constructed by McDyer, something which the records indicate was a reasonably rare occurrence at this time. James Byrne's description of the evening as an 'old time' dance gives an indication of its quasi-revivalist agenda, and also shows McDyer directly addressing the "the lack of social activity" mentioned in his list of blights upon life in the community at this time.

However, events like these were relatively anomalous, especially as changes to the musical landscape of the late 1960s and 1970s took hold and the traditional music session – exemplary of Ireland's third musical revival – grew in popularity. While sessions primarily took place in public houses, these venues were not as conducive to dancing as kitchens and halls as they had to be cleared of tables and chairs in order to make enough room. Mairéad Ní Mhaonaigh has acknowledged that the dancing tradition was completely dead by this point (Ní Mhaonaigh speaking on *The South Donegal Fiddle* 2005). And, when asked if he observed any evidence of dancing in Donegal at this time, *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* founder Rab Cherry states "There wasn't much of it."<sup>15</sup> Figures like John Doherty emerged as custodians of the region's music, but the further separation of music from dance was encouraged by a younger generation, typified by figures like the Belfast fiddler Sean Maguire, who were not interested in simple highlands and barndances, but in complex reels and hornpipes that Doherty often played for visitors.

Many of the dances practiced at 'the big nights' have long since faded from memory as a result of changing cultural tastes through the twentieth century. Among those now lost in their colloquial forms from southwest Donegal are the sets, such as 'The Lancers' (a four-part quadrille), its predecessor 'The Cotillion' (so often practiced in the area that its name became gaelicised to 'An Cotilán' and also known in English as 'The Petticoat Swish') and 'The Breakdown' (sometimes danced to finish the evening). However, a range of dances survived in the memory of a few and these include 'The Highland' (in both two hand and [three hand](#) forms), ['The Military Two Step'](#), 'The Barndance', ['The Pride of Erin Waltz'](#), ['The Corn Rigs'](#), ['The Marine'](#), ['Shoe the Donkey'](#), ['The Stack of Barley'](#) and ['The Mazurka'](#), amongst others.<sup>16</sup> This compares interestingly to the remnants of the country dancing tradition in other parts of Ireland. The musician Michael Tubridy has described the paucity of dance variety in rural county Clare as he was growing-up in the 1950s, with only one set, 'The Caledonian', being regularly danced (Tubridy, 1986-2001). Conversely, Nigel Boullier's (2013) account of country dancing and music in county Down gives evidence of a similar variety of dances surviving until the present day in the quite unusual setting of Orange Halls. Whether this is evidence of a confluence of dance types surviving across Ulster for longer than they remained in southern counties will be the subject of further research. It is possible that these dances remain in county Down simply because, as a mostly Protestant community, the practitioners were not influenced by *Conradh na Gaeilge's* cull of 'non-Irish' dance forms in the early twentieth century céili-dance movement.

## Revival



**Figure 1 - Still image from a video of a dance in Cashel, Glencolmcille (2012). Video recorded by the author.**

In the summer of 2012 after a night's music to close *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí's* annual summer school in Glencolmcille, twelve dancers and four musicians took part in a impromptu, outdoors dance at the top of the main street in Cashel town. Lasting over fifteen minutes, the group danced through an entire repertoire that only a few years previously had been completely forgotten. The group, which included members of the local community, people with familial ties to the area and regular visitors, had all learned their dances through *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí's* workshop programme, now in its tenth year at the school. In the midst of this flashback to an older time, cars arriving for the town's agricultural fair were rerouted around the dance so as not to interrupt its progress. The passing parish priest even stopped to acknowledge the crowd before heading off on his duties. This event was the result of an intense revival effort on the part of *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* in the area, a revival effort that has been successful through careful planning, excellent pedagogy, and a process of internationalisation that has made participants aware of their place within the context of a wider European folk-dance movement.

Music revivals in general have become increasingly theorised since Tamara E. Livingston's ground-breaking paper 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory' (1999). The practice of reviving extinct or threatened forms of cultural expression has been subject to numerous studies with specific foci ranging from the blues to English folk song and period performance of Baroque and Renaissance compositions. Livingston uses her own research on the revival of the Brazilian *choro* to demonstrate that such movements aim "(1) to serve as cultural opposition and as an alternative to mainstream culture, and (2) to improve existing culture through the values based on historical value and authenticity as expressed by the revivalist." She further categorises the "basic recipe" for a folk revival as:

- (1) an individual or small group of "core revivalists"
- (2) revival informants and/or original sources (e.g. historical sound recordings)
- (3) a revivalist ideology and discourse



- (4) a group of followers which form the basis of a revivalist community
- (5) revivalist activities (organisations, festivals, competitions)
- (6) non-profit and/or commercial enterprises catering to the revivalist market.

All of these ingredients are observable in the efforts of *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí*, beginning in the mid-1970s which ensured that the area's traditional music survived and began to grow once again. The 'core revivalists' (Rab Cherry, Caoimhín Mac Aoidh and Dermot McLaughlin to name but three), working alongside 'revival informants' (Con Cassidy from Teelin, Danny O'Donnell from The Rosses/Ballybofey and Francie 'Dearg' O'Beirne from Kilcar, while James Byrne can be viewed as both a revivalist and a revival informant), formed the basis of a 'revivalist ideology and discourse' which is described by the organization's mission statement:

- (1) strengthen Donegal fiddle playing at its roots
- (2) improve standards of fiddle playing
- (3) promote participation in all aspects of Donegal fiddle music
- (4) encourage the transmission of the Donegal styles and repertoire.

With a 'revivalist community' growing in strength throughout the 1990s, the workshops and musical infrastructure provided by *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* enabled a new generation of musicians to learn repertoire from the region, while simultaneously generating a new sense of self-worth amongst the older generation of fiddle players.<sup>17</sup> At first, students tended to be outsiders, but as the twentieth century drew to a close, it became apparent that the grass-roots work instigated by *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* and Byrne, now working with his wife Connie under their own banner, had re-established traditional music and dance within the local community. It was in the context of a now thriving traditional music community of locals and visitors that dancing was reintroduced. Rab Cherry has stated (Cherry, 2014) that the initial motivation for reintroducing dance at the organisation's festivals was in response to an increasingly homogenised performance aesthetic that was emerging in the session scene in the mid-1990s. Cherry places the beginning of the reintroduction of dancing as occurring between 1994 and 1999:

*People who were learning [music] were really sort of ... losing the gist of the whole thing. If they didn't really know anything about dancing then all the tunes were a bit sort of homogenised; you know, it was a bit hard to know what was a highland and what was a hornpipe and what was a reel. ... What kept the music in its structure was whether or not people could dance to it. ... We weren't particularly interested in wagging the finger at someone and saying 'No, no, no. You have to play it like this', but we were interested in perhaps letting people know the difference, and ... if it occurred to them that they could adopt playing tunes so that dancers could dance to them, that's fine, and if they said, 'Well actually, this is just sort of [an] esoteric mental exercise for me, I just want to play music and interpret it how I want', sure, you know, nobody was going to stop them.*

This view is supported by Connie McKelvey (2014) who believes that musicians were by then playing at an unreasonably fast tempo for dancing. McKelvey, who had grown up in a musical home in Fintown where he learned to dance under his mother's tutelage, was engaged by *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* as a teacher along with his dancing partner Anne Connaghan of Glenties. The problem at this stage was that couples' dances were now so long out of common practice, that even active dancers like McKelvey had forgotten them. A collecting trip into the Croaghs was arranged where an elderly lady (whose name McKelvey is now unable to recall) was able to re-teach the dances to him and Connaghan. McKelvey recalls that his initial engagement with *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* was to teach a small group of musicians in Glenties as part of the organisation's winter workshop programme.<sup>18</sup> While he taught dancing to one half of the group in the morning, Vincent Campbell taught tunes to the others, before the groups swapped workshops for the afternoon session. The collaboration of the Campbell brothers, Vincent and Jimmy, as well as Jimmy's son Peter, has been an

essential component of the revival from its beginning. Their style, defined by its steady tempo, perfectly suited to dance, and their repertoire of dance-specific tunes (such as 'The Marine'), as well as an ability to break-up the dancing with moments of virtuosic solo playing, make them integral to the success of the revival.

The next challenge for *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* was to reintegrate these dance classes on a larger scale, and their annual summer school in Donegal would prove to be the best opportunity. Although Cherry states that there was "no overall strategy as such", great thought and consideration was given to the selection of the best place within the festival's schedule for the dance classes, with Thursday eventually chosen. Cherry rationalised that:

*[At the fiddle week] you do classes every day, and we picked Thursday [for the dance classes], because it's towards the end of the week, so that it doesn't interrupt your playing classes quite so much. It gives the classes a few days to get established, lets the teachers make a good bit of progress, if there's any class swapping [moving students to more or less advanced classes commensurate with their ability] to be done it's done and gone before Thursday.*

Interestingly, this format reflects the common practice of the eighteenth-century travelling dance masters, who taught by day and facilitated dances by evening (Carleton quoted in Lyons 2012: 160).

At first it was something of a novelty for musicians, but the organisation's persistence with the dance workshops paid dividends and by 2008, the year of [James Byrne's death](#), a new generation of young enthusiasts was dancing two-hand couples' dances that had not been seen for several decades. Cherry notes that musicians gave very positive feedback to the initiation of the dance classes and they reported that "learning the dances helped put the music in a bit more context." He also states that the few students who decided not to participate in the dance classes still benefitted from observation and from joining the 'core band' on stage during the lessons and evening dance.

At this point, criticism could be levelled at the revival effort, particularly since it appears subject to the very process of filtration, discussed earlier in this essay, that southwest Donegal's music initially avoided in the early twentieth century. The focus on couples' dances might seem narrow given that, according to McKelvey, both céili and set dancing have remained popular in southwest Donegal throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. One might ask why these forms are not also incorporated in the current revival.<sup>19</sup> However, this argument can be countered by the fact that this particular revival has attempted to incorporate dance forms that have survived in the community's cultural memory. While 'The Highland' and 'The Barndance' survive in this way, dances such as 'The Waves of Tory' do not, due to their convoluted form which switches between 6/8 and 4/4 time. Indeed, 'The Waves of Tory' requires instruction from teachers upon each occasion that it is danced, whereas 'The Highland' and 'The Barndance' are now considered so commonplace that only brief instruction is given at the evening dance at the *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* Summer School. In that they were learned from tradition bearers by younger members of the community, the couples' dances belong to a continuous tradition. That such dances have been reintroduced, and not reconstructed, signifies a crucial element of the movement's authenticity. Furthermore, with the contribution of the Campbell family (as well as Paddy McMEnamin of Ballybofey), the movement has musicians at its heart for whom such dances continue to be a lived experience, albeit no longer in the rural kitchens of their native county. Consequently, the dance revival has avoided, for the most part, what Rosenberg (1993, quoted in Livingston, 1999) calls "transforming the tradition", wherein revivalists create a new style that reflects only their current values. However, since such values are always changing one can only evaluate from a specific point in time and it is possible that this may change in the future.

## Pedagogy

The pedagogical techniques utilised by McKelvey and his teaching partner Anne Connaghan are familiar to musicians as they are rooted in established methodologies associated with Irish music and dance. Dances are deconstructed into a series of short sections (just as tunes are broken into phrases in the fiddle classes), which are repeated several times until the students can walk their way through the section. These sections are then reconstructed in a linear order until the complete part of the dance is known. Finally, an eight bar introduction is given by the musicians and the students perform the steps to the music. This process is repeated for the second part of the dance.

Most of the dances have two distinct parts, again much like a tune, but this is not always the case. 'The Barndance' for example is built on an eight-bar repeating pattern, while 'The Highland' follows the pattern of a standard dance tune (AABB):

**Table 1 - Structure of 'The Highland' and 'The Barndance'**

<b>Bar</b>	<b>Highland</b> (waltz hold/arms around waist)	<b>Barndance</b> (arms around waist)
<b>A1</b>	Stand on the heel, then the tow	Hop on inside foot, three paces forward
<b>A2</b>	Walk forward three paces and turn 180 deg.	Hop on inside foot and retreat three paces
<b>A3</b>	Stand on the heel, then the toe	Hop on inside foot and three side-steps away from partner. Clap on fourth beat.
<b>A4</b>	Walk three paces to original place and turn	Four side-steps back to partner
<b>A5</b>	Repeat as per A1-A4 in A5-A8.	Around the house in waltz hold
<b>A6</b>		Around the house in waltz hold
<b>A7</b>		Around the house in waltz hold
<b>A8</b>		Around the house (short) four steps in cross shape.
<b>B1</b>	Around the house	Repeat A1-A8 in all parts of the tune.
<b>B2</b>	Around the house	
<b>B3</b>	Around the house	
<b>B4 :  </b>	Around the house (short) four steps in cross shape	

The dance hold used by current practitioners is somewhat debated. It is thought that after the passing of the Public Dance Halls Act participants in public dances were required to adjust their stance to avoid unnecessary contact with members of the opposite sex. The 'closed hold', an intimate waltz hold, that had been necessary to create more room in the confined space of the rural kitchen was replaced with the 'open hold' we see today (Foley, 2013: 278). Both open and closed holds, as are seen in Figures 2a and 2b, are observed with the former used in formal pedagogy, while the older members of the community retain the latter.



**Figures 2a and 2b - Anne Connaghan and her daughter Tara teaching open and closed dance holds. Courtesy of *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí*.**

Strict adherence to the older template is not essential. Steps can be improvised by the current generation of dancers, although there are very few static moments in the couples' repertoire, in which they might 'batter' (step dance) on the spot, as is often seen in set dancing. One common improvisation is the introduction of a slide-step, replacing the three side-steps, in bar A3 (see Table 1) of 'The Barndance'. In the future we might see further variations creep into performance of these dances.

The relationship between the musical forms that accompany country dancing in the revival and the dance steps themselves is clear to see for those with knowledge of both practices. For example, the most commonly played highland (see the following table for dance structure), 'Green grow the Rushes Oh', mirrors the placement of the heels and the toes of the dancers, as is indicated in Figure 3. The rising and descending scalic passages of bars two and four also mirror the three steps that the dancers take at these stages of the dance:



**Figure 3 - 'Green Grow the Rushes, Oh!' (a) simplified dance version (b) solo version for listening. Transcribed from the author's playing.**

But has the revival had the desired impact upon the musicians who, it was observed, were struggling to adhere to danceable rhythms in sessions? Connie McKelvey (2014) states that it has had some effect, however certain types of tunes, particularly hornpipes, are still played too fast. It is notable that this dance has never been taught at the classes. The reintroduction of dancing has seen musicians develop the ability to play at more steady tempi, with less ornamentation and with the benefit of knowing how dances are danced. This development can be understood in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* (1979 trans. 1984) and the theory's critique by Jacques Ranciere.<sup>20</sup> Ranciere posits that humans are more complex than Bourdieu suggests and that they can utilise "masks" (1983 trans. 2004: 81) to disguise themselves within or displace themselves between "class habitus" (Bourdieu, 1984: 81). In this way, some musicians in Donegal's dance revival are seen to step out of their musical habitus to play for dancers. In doing so they shed (or cover up) their own solo performance aesthetic in favour of the communal tempo and characteristics that are required for this function. But if so many musicians mask their default style for this purpose, does this not in fact create a new habitus that musicians occupy when required? Such a question can only be answered with further research in this area. However, this new habitus or "group mask" remains distinct, as I will now examine by illustrating the differences in stylistic approach between musicians involved in the revival.

I have previously contrasted the styles of brothers Mickey and John Doherty, with the former renowned as the better player for dancing, and the latter as the better for listening (Caldwell, 2010). Some musicians who either live in southwest Donegal, or have spent a significant amount of time there, such as Mick Brown, Ronan Galvin, John Byrne and Derek McGinley, retain, as an inherent component of their style, the necessary qualities for playing for dances. Their styles are informed by many years of association with James Byrne and musicians of previous generations in southwest Donegal. An example of this mode of performance is seen in Brown's setting of '[Con Condys Barndance](#)' shown in Figure 4. Brown's setting of this tune is sparsely ornamented, typical of his playing style. He uses long, sweeping bow motions with the notes mostly played on separate bows. The tempo is  $\text{♩} = c.125$ , a steady pace for dancing, while there are no substantial melodic variations.

(♩ = c.125)

The musical score for 'Con Condry's Barndance' is written in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a 4/4 time signature. The melody features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes marked with a 'w' (wavy line) above them, indicating a wavy or 'scotch-snap' rhythm. The second staff starts with a measure rest labeled '5'. The third staff starts with a measure rest labeled '10'. The fourth staff starts with a measure rest labeled '13' and ends with a double bar line. The overall style is a traditional Scottish strathspey.

Figure 4 - Mick Brown's setting of 'Con Condry's Barndance'. Transcribed by the author.

Similarly, John Byrne's version of the highland ['Stirling Castle'](#) is similarly reflective of a stylistic idiom that is more suited for dancing with no single instance of ornamentation observed in his rendition of the first part. It further demonstrates the earlier point concerning the removal of the more pronounced 'scotch-snap' rhythm found in strathspeys as those tunes were converted into highlands in Donegal.

(♩ = c.165)

The musical score for 'Stirling Castle' is presented in two parts, (a) and (b), in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). Part (a) shows the strathspey version, consisting of two staves of music. The first staff has a measure rest labeled '4'. The melody is characterized by a steady eighth-note pattern with occasional dotted rhythms. Part (b) shows John Byrne's setting, also consisting of two staves of music. The first staff has a measure rest labeled '4'. This version features a more rhythmic and dance-oriented feel, with many triplets (indicated by a '3' below the notes) and a consistent eighth-note pattern. The second staff of part (b) has a measure rest labeled '6'.

Figure 5 - (a) 'Stirling Castle' as a strathspey and (b) John Byrne's setting of 'Stirling Castle'. Transcribed by the author.

However, other musicians, such as Martin McGinley and Ciaran O'Maonaigh, both noted for their highly developed solo aesthetics, must adapt their style in order to play for dancers. O'Maonaigh sacrifices little of his ornamentation (in fact by some measures his settings of the more simple dance tunes contain elements of ornamentation that would not be seen otherwise in his wider repertoire) but he makes significant changes in the selection of appropriate tempi. For example, his setting of '[Shoe the Donkey](#)', derived from his grandfather's playing, is highly embellished and defined by a complex approach to ornamentation, such as is seen in his use of the roll across two full crotchet beats several times:

(♩ = c.140)



Figure 6 - Ciaran O'Maonaigh's setting of 'Shoe the Donkey'. Transcribed by the author.

Students of the fiddle school have observed the differences between the solo/session and dance performance approaches. Indeed six visiting students, all studying with Martin McGinley in the most advanced class who were interviewed at the 2014 summer school, stated that they recognised the need to adjust their approach when playing for dancers.<sup>21</sup> In particular they commented upon the benefit of learning dances for informing their rhythmic approach to dance tunes, such as mazurkas and highlands. In addition some mentioned the need to adjust ornamentation and tempo. Although this is a small sample size, it illustrates that advanced-level students are able to discern the necessary differences between the solo/session and dance-accompaniment modes of performance, affirming that current pedagogical methods employed in the revival are successful.

## Internationalisation

*Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* has been prominent in its establishment of international links between itself and similar organisations and individuals in countries that have related cultures of fiddle playing. In recent years, links with Norway and Scotland have been particularly fruitful, and numerous exchanges have occurred. As dancing has become more established within the organisation's programme of events, further cultural exchanges have been possible. For example, Connie McKelvey (2014) recalls a recent trip to Poland where he observed 'The Mazurka' being danced in what he termed a more "flamboyant" manner than the Irish version. Such links and exchanges help to generate a greater understanding of where dances and music which are considered native to southwest Donegal originated. It is perhaps in these interactions that Donegal's dancing revival has stretched the conventional boundaries for revival movements. The publication of an instructional [DVD](#) on couples' dances from Donegal has also helped to widen the reach of the revival, as well as fulfilling a further criterion of Livingston's revival paradigm ("commercial activities"). This DVD has served as a useful teaching aid, and I have myself used it to inform teaching both at home and abroad. Many other musicians involved in the revival, including Aidan O'Donnell,<sup>22</sup> have

deliberately included aspects of dancing in their teaching programmes when abroad in an attempt to help students understand, to use Cherry's phrase, "the gist" of the music.

Visits by delegates from *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* to Cape Breton, Canada, have further served to establish Donegal's music and dance outside of Europe. My own teaching has spread the revival to communities in the United States, particularly in Missouri and Minnesota where strong Irish music communities exist. In actively promoting and teaching the dances around the world, the Donegal dance revival is not limited to a single parish, county or even country. It is growing into a movement which has the potential to act as a counterbalance to the highly stylised and modern projections of Irish culture to which we became accustomed during the years of the Celtic Tiger.

## Conclusion

The revival of forms of traditional dance in southwest Donegal provides a template upon which similar efforts can be based in the future. Although *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí's* motives in reviving the couples' dances once common in the region were initially rooted in a desire to help musicians differentiate between categories of dance tunes, the results have been a spectacular success for the organisation and the community it serves. Its efforts have seen the emergence of a habitus in which musicians can explore the stylistic differences between developing their own voice in the context of the wider Irish tradition, and that of the functional, dance-literate 'local fiddler', defined by Damhnait Nic Suibhne. It is clear, from the testimony of both organisers and participants, that the learning of dances and the interaction with dancers has had a positive impact upon music making in southwest Donegal, and that reuniting music and dance is welcomed by musicians and dancers alike. Success is rooted in the engaging pedagogical methodologies employed by the teachers and the selection of appropriate musicians for dance classes, such as the Campbell family from Glenties. This allows students and experienced musicians alike to observe the stylistic traits required to play for dancers. The fact that the dance repertoire now practiced is drawn from the memory of older members of the community and not reconstructed from books or recordings gives it a powerful authenticity in the twenty-first century. The publication of a DVD of the dances by *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* is just one of many ways in which the organization has attempted to extend knowledge of its music and dance outside of its geographical and cultural borders and foster relationships with other groups and individuals. With the practice of dance now well-established again in southwest Donegal, musicians and dancers can once again enjoy the company of one another.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay I will use the word 'traditional' in reference to the practice of music-making and dancing in Ireland. Dowling observes that 'traditional' is a late nineteenth-century addition to the musical lexicon and was used as part of the construction of an Irish cultural aesthetic in the Gaelic Revival. In my extensive field work in southwest Donegal, I have rarely encountered practitioners from the older generations who refer to their music as 'traditional'. Instead, the terms 'country' and 'old time' are often used by these musicians to describe their art and the former has been utilised by Nigel Boullier (2013) in his historical survey of music and dance in north Down. I have also observed the use of this term while playing for dance competitions organised by the Festival Dance Teachers Association (FDTA). It is most often employed in this context to describe a musician (usually a fiddle player) who appears not to be classically trained, in the same way that the term 'traditional' was used to refer to singers who were not trained in the revivalist competitions of the early twentieth century (Ó Laoire, 2013). I have opted to use the words 'country', 'old time', 'rural' and simply 'Irish' where appropriate, especially where it reflects the language used by informants or sources.



<sup>2</sup> The American and English folk song revivals of the 1950s and 1960s (in particular a number of its most important collectors and performers including Pete Seeger, Alan Lomax, Peter Kennedy and even Bob Dylan) intersected with the Irish tradition at various points. Danny Diamond, the Irish Traditional Music Archive's Field Recordings Officer and I have discussed Seeger's interaction with Irish musicians at length in a series of public talks in 2014, while Kennedy's role in the collecting of Irish music has been the subject of wide discussion See: Caldwell, 2013 for more on this.

<sup>3</sup> Hyde was the first president of *Conradh na Gaeilge* and later became the first president of the nation in 1938.

<sup>4</sup> A volume of proceedings was also published under the same title.

<sup>5</sup> Mairead Ní Mhaonaigh's 2014 tour with Scottish/American string duo Alasdair Fraser and Natalie Hass, an example of musical exploration within related traditions, was funded by Music Network, while the Donegal-based ensemble *Fidil's* collaboration with the Senegalese *koro* player Solo Cissokho was funded by Improvised Music Company and The Errigle Arts Festival.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Conall Mac Cuinneagáin's otherwise thorough parish history of Glencolmchille (2002) does not contain a single reference to fiddle playing or country dancing, despite its important role in the area.

<sup>7</sup> The extent of casual music-making in south-west Donegal has been quantitatively researched by Ronan Galvin (2013). It is thought that more than 300 fiddlers lived there at the beginning of the twentieth century, with a fiddle hanging in every home, normally above the fire-place. This musical movement, as it has been described by Mick Brown (Caldwell, 2013), was complimented by lilters and melodeon players, allowed complex variations in style and repertoire to develop from sub-region to sub-region, the effects of which can still be seen today.

<sup>8</sup> Teelin appeared on some of the earliest maps of Ireland, illustrating its importance at this time. According to Taylor (1980) Teelin fishermen worked the seas mostly for subsistence but also rowed regularly to Killybegs to sell herring at the markets there. Teelin men combined their fishing with subsistence farming and did not enter the high seas, pursuing cod and ling by way of line fishing instead.

<sup>9</sup> The journalist 'M', writing in the Catholic periodical *The Irish Monthly* (1883) about her six-day aid trip to southwest Donegal, remarked how the Donegal people were a "proud race with a good deal of the reticence and independence of their Scotch character." This demonstrates how accepted the links between Donegal natives and Scotland had become at this point.

<sup>10</sup> O'Beirne hypothesised that the fiddle itself had been introduced to Donegal via this route.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Ronan Galvin (2010) has argued that some of these tunes may have been popularised after their recording on 78rpm in the 1930s but has also stated that the Scottish connection is yet to be fully investigated. My own investigations into much of this repertoire finds that, while many of these tunes were recorded in the 1930s, the fact that in many cases only one tune from a medley of three or four survives does not cohere with the repertoires of Donegal fiddlers in this period. Musicians in Donegal at this time tended to "canonise" (McLaughlin, 1992) whole medleys and not extract single tunes from longer sets.

<sup>12</sup> Established in 1893 by Douglas Hyde, *Conradh na Gaeilge* was a major organisation, along with the Gaelic Athletic Association, in the Gaelic Revival of the late nineteenth century. Its main focus was on reviving the Irish language but its influence spread throughout all areas of Irish cultural life.

<sup>13</sup> Galvin states that this does not appear to have been the case in the Bluestack Mountains.

<sup>14</sup> The Public Dance Halls Act was a controversial piece of legislation passed by the Irish government in 1935. The act banned the hosting of unlicensed dances when a fee was charged by the hosts. Its effect was varied across Ireland with a number of instances arising of gardaí breaking up dances in private homes. It was common place for a small entry fee to be charged at house dances, which

permitted the hosts to provide tea and food for the quests. Junior Crehan from Co Clare is often cited as the authoritative word on the decline of house dances due to the enforcement of the act (see, for example, Ó Rocháin, 1998). However, the impact of the legislation was very localised and relied upon the willingness of local constabulary and clergy to pursue house dancers.

<sup>15</sup> *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* ('Friends of the Fiddlers') was established in the late 1970s to support musicians in southwest Donegal. The advocacy group's work will be explored in this article.

<sup>16</sup> Readers should note that these videos do not contain any of the accompanying tunes that are commonly played by fiddle players in southwest Donegal. For more detailed instruction with the historically correct accompaniment, see (*Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí*, 2007). The following transcription is a tune played by John Doherty for 'The Military Two Step' and recorded by Alun Evans:

The image shows a musical transcription of a tune in G major (one sharp) and 12/8 time. The notation is presented in five staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 12/8 time signature. The melody is written in eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff starts with a measure number '4'. The third staff starts with a measure number '7'. The fourth staff starts with a measure number '10'. The fifth staff starts with a measure number '14'. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fifth staff.

<sup>17</sup> A general observation is made by Martin Hayes (*Folk Hibernia*, 2006) in this regard. Hayes states that during the revival of traditional music in the late 1960s that older musicians in county Clare were empowered by the growing numbers of visitors to the west of Ireland.

<sup>18</sup> Although McKelvey states in his interview that this was about six years ago, I can recall attending a similar workshop in 2004, which concluded with a very well-attended public 'old time' dance in a local hall. Cherry states that revivalism has been actively pursued for between fifteen and twenty years.

<sup>19</sup> In practice, most of the dances staged by *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* do incorporate some elements of these two genres.

<sup>20</sup> *Habitus* is defined by Bourdieu as "a durable, transposable system of definitions" acquired initially by the young child in the home as a result of the conscious and unconscious practices of her/his family (1992: 134). As the child grows older these experiences continue to impact upon their development but other societal factors also contribute to their "restructuring" through each phase of their life.

<sup>21</sup> Vincent, Sophie and Michelle Lefevre from the Netherlands are regular visitors to Donegal to attend workshops and classes and spoke about the difference of approach required. Abraham, Darragh and Perri were three American students on their first visit to Glencolmcille in 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Video of Aidan O'Donnell dancing a highland on the stage of the Milwaukee Irish Festival in 2011. *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* had an exposition at this festival.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Rab Cherry and Connie McKelvey for giving of their time to be interviewed as part of the research for this essay. I am also indebted to Professor Moyra Haslett (QUB) for her help in proof-reading and Jason O'Rourke (TypeWright.co.uk) for helping me to organise the bibliography. Finally, I am grateful for the continuing support of Dr Martin Dowling (QUB), Mick Brown, Ciarán Ó Maonaigh, Danny Diamond (ITMA) and Caoimhín Mac Aoidh. My research would simply not be possible without their generosity and challenging critiques.

## Bibliography

- Bithell, Caroline and Juniper Hill ed. (2014) *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revivals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bolger, Pat (1995), 'The Congested Districts Board and the Co-ops in Donegal'. In William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy Eds. *Donegal History and Society*. Dublin: Geography Publication: 649-674.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Translated by Richard Nice). Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press.
- Boullier, Nigel (2012) *Handed Down: Country Fiddling and Dancing in East and Central Down*. Belfast: Ulster Historical Society.
- Brennan, Helen (1999) *The Story of Irish Dance*. Dingle: Brandon.
- Bunting, Edward (1840) [\*The Ancient Music of Ireland, arranged for the Piano Forte. To which is prefixed a dissertation on the Irish Harp and Harpers, including an account of the old Melodies of Ireland.\*](#) Dublin: Hodges and Smith.
- Caldwell, Conor (2010) Unsealing the Lips of Old Country Folk: An Analysis of John Doherty's 'The Four Posts of the Bed'. *Spéis* no. 1
- Caldwell, Conor (2011) Banished to the Barn: John Doherty and Bonnie Kate. *Ulster Folklife* Volume 54: 27- 44.
- Caldwell, Conor (2013) *The Life and Music of John Doherty*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Queen's University, Belfast.
- Cherry, Rab and McLaughlin, Dermot (2010) CD Liner notes to Vincent Campbell, *The Purple Heather*. Cairdeas na bhFidilíirí.
- Crane, Joseph (2009) James Byrne: Donegal musician who kept alive the art of the traditional Irish fiddler. *The Guardian*, 11 February.  
<http://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/feb/11/obituary-james-byrne> Accessed: 30 May 2014.

Dowling, Martin (2010) '[From Vernacular to 'Traditional': Music in Post-Famine Ireland](#)'. In MD Nie & S Farrell (eds), *Power and Popular Culture in Modern Ireland: Essays in Honour of James S. Donnelly, Jr.* Irish Academic Press: 145-171.

Dowling, Martin (2013) 'Traditional Music Revivals'. In Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds) *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press: 1000-1002.

Dowling, Martin (2014a) *Traditional Music and Irish Society: Historical Perspectives*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Evans, Alun, McLaughlin, Dermot and Campbell, Vincent (1996) John Doherty. *Ulster Folklife*, Volumes 43-48: 1-25.

Evans, Alun (1996) CD Liner notes to *The Floating Bow*. Dublin: Claddagh Records.

Feldman, Allen and O'Doherty, Eamon (1979) *The Northern Fiddler*. Belfast: Blackstaff.

Foley, Catherine (2013) 'Dance in Ireland'. In Harry White and Barra Boydell Eds. *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*. Dublin: University College Dublin Press: 278-280.

Foley, Catherine (2013) *Step Dancing in Ireland: History and Culture*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Friel, Mary (2004) *Dancing as a Social Pastime in the South East of Ireland 1800-1897*. Dublin: Four Courts.

Galvin, Ronan (2013) 'A Musical Landscape: South-West Donegal'. *Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí* Website. <http://www.donegalfiddlemusic.ie/musicallandscape.htm> Accessed 2 March 2015.

Glencolmcille Parish Website (2013) Fr. James McDyer <http://www.glencolmcille.ie/frmcdyer.htm> Accessed: 13 January 2014.

Hobsbawm, Eric and Ranger, Nile Eds. (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, Reg (1994) 'Irish Music and Dance in London, 1890-1970: A Socio-Cultural History', 2 vols. PhD. University of Sussex.

Hall, Reg (2011) CD Liner notes to Michael Gorman, *The Sligo Champion*. Rutland, England: Topic Records.

Hegarty, Fr. Kevin (2010) Champion of the marginalised: a voice for social and economic opportunity. *The Mayo News*, 5 October. [http://www.mayonews.ie/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=11009:champion-of-the-marginalised&catid=28&Itemid=100004](http://www.mayonews.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=11009:champion-of-the-marginalised&catid=28&Itemid=100004) Accessed: 30 May 2014.

ITMA Website (2009) Grace Orpen's *Local Donegal Dances* <http://www.itma.ie/digitallibrary/print-collection/donegal-dances-1931> Accessed: 19 December 2013.

Kearney, Daithí (2008) Crossing the River: Exploring the Geography of Irish Traditional Music. *JSMI* Vol.3: 127-139.

Kerr, S. (1870) *Kerr's Merry Melodies Vols. 1-4*. Glasgow: s.n.

Livingston, Tamara E. (1999) 'Music Revivals: Towards a General Theory'. *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Winter 1999): 66-85

M (1883) 'A six days' trip in the Donegal Highlands'. *The Irish Monthly* Vol. 11 No. 199: 264-277.

Mac Aoidh, Caoimhín (1994) *Between the Jigs and the Reels*. Manorhamilton: Drumlin

McCann, May (1995) [Music and Politics in Ireland: The Specificity of the Folk Revival in Belfast](#). *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* Vol. 4: 51-75.

Mac Cuinneagán, Conall (2002) *Glencolmcille: A Parish History*. Dublin: Four Masters.

McGinley, Liam (2010) *The Story of Fr McDyer in Glencolmcille – 'A Revolution on their Hands'*. Donegal: Self-Published.

McLaughlin, Dermot (1992) *Donegal and Shetland Fiddle Music*. O'Riada Memorial Lecture Vol. 7. University College, Cork: Irish Traditional Music Society.

Moloney, Mick, Morrison, J'aime and Quigley, Colin Ed. (2009) *Close to the Floor: Irish Dance From the Boreen to Broadway*. Madison, WI: Macater Press.

Motherway, Susan (2013) *The Globalization of Irish Traditional Song Performance*. Surrey: Ashgate.

Narváez, Peter (1993) *Living Blues Journal: The Paradoxical Aesthetics of the Blues Revival*. In Neil V. Rosenberg ed. *Transforming Traditions: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 231-257.

Nic Suibhne, Damhnait (1995) 'The Donegal Fiddle Tradition: An Ethnographic Perspective'. In William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy Eds. *Donegal History and Society*. Dublin: Geography Publications: 713-742.

Ó Cathain, Prionsiais (1874) *Essay on the Present State of the Irish Language and Literature in the Province of Ulster*. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy: MS12 Q13.

O'Connor, Barbara (2013) *The Irish Dancing: Culture Politics and Identities, 1900-2000*. Cork: Cork University Press.

O'Dowd, Anne (1995) 'Seasonal Migration to the Lagan and Scotland'. In William Nolan, Liam Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy Eds. *Donegal History and Society*. Dublin: Geography Publications: 625-648.

Ó Laoire, Muiris (1996) 'An Historical Perspective on the Revival of the Irish Language Outside the Gaeltacht 1880-1930 With Reference to the Revitalization of Hebrew'. In Sue Wright Ed. *Language and the State: Revitalization and Revival in Israel and Eire*. GB: Short Run Press Ltd.: 51-64

Ó Maonaigh, Ciarán (2009) CD Liner Notes to *Fidil 3*. Own Label.

O'Neill, Padraig (1904) *Songs of Uladh*. Belfast: W. and G. Baird Ltd.

Orpen, Grace (1931) *Dances of Donegal*. London: D.M. Wilkie.

Ó Rocháin (1998) 'Farewell to Junior Crehan'. *Junior Crehan 1908-1998*.  
<http://www.setdancingnews.net/wcss/wcssjc.htm> Accessed: 02 March 2015.

Robinson, Michael (1999) 'James Byrne: Carrying on the Donegal Traditions' in *The Fiddler Magazine*. <http://www.standingstones.com/jbyrne.html> Accessed: 13 January 2014.

Rosenberg, Neil V. (1993) *Transforming Traditions: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Slobin, Mark (1993) *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West*. London: University Press of New England.

Strachan, John and Nally, Claire (2012) *Advertising, Literature and Print Culture in Ireland, 1891-1922*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Taylor, Lawrence J. (1980) Colonialism and Community Structure in Western Ireland. *Ethnohistory* 27/2: 169-181.

Titon, Jeff Todd (1993) Reconstructing the Blues: Reflections on the 1960s Blues Revival. In Neil V. Rosenberg ed. *Transforming Traditions: Folk Music Revivals Examined*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 220-240.

Tubridy, Michael (1986-2001) Memories of Dancing in West Clare and Beyond. *Irish Folk Music Studies* Vols. 5-6: 7-16.

Tucker, Vincent (1999) 'Images of Development and Underdevelopment in Glencolumbkille, Co Donegal, 1830-1970'. In John Davis ed. *Rural Change in Ireland*. Antrim: W and G Baird Ltd: 84-115.

White, Harry (1998) *The Keeper's Recital: Music and Cultural History in Ireland, 1770-1970*. Cork: Cork University Press in Association with Field Day.

Vallely, Fintan (2005) Authenticity to Classicisation: the Course of Revival in Irish Traditional Music. *The Irish Review* (1986-) No. 33. Global Ireland: 51-69.

Vallely, Fintan, Hamilton, Hammy, Vallely, Eithne and Doherty, Liz Ed. (1999) *Crosbhealach an Cheoil*. Cork: Ossian Publications.

## Discography

### Commercial

Doherty, Mickey. 1949. *The Gravel Walks*, Irish Folklore Commission, 1990, Ireland.

Various Artists. 1995. *The Fiddle Music of Donegal Vol. 1*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí, Ireland.

Various Artists. 1997. *The Fiddle Music of Donegal Vol. 2*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí, Ireland

Various Artists. 2000. *The Fiddle Music of Donegal Vol. 3*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí, Ireland

Various Artists, *Traditional Music from Cape Breton*, Nimbus Records 1993 (Track 10, Natalie Mac Master).

### Non-Commercial

Doherty, John. 1968-74. Field Recordings made by Alun Evans in Glenconwell, Co.Donegal.

## Videography

British Broadcasting Corporation. 2005. *The South Donegal Fiddle*, prod. Ian Kirk Smyth.

British Broadcasting Corporation. 2006. *Folk Hibernia*, dir. Mike Connolly.

Brown, Mick. 2012. *Mick Brown - Video 2 - Con Condý's Barndance*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF3m\\_R2ySI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF3m_R2ySI4)

Byrne, John. 2012. *John Byrne - Video 3 - Stirling Castle (Highland)*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcyUZYR5Mnw>

Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí. 2007. *Damhsaí Cúplaí Thír Chonaill/The Couple Dances of Donegal DVD*, dir. Eoghan MacGiolla Bhríde

Galvin, Ronan. 2010. 'Music Traditions of Southwest Donegal' from *Na Píobairí Uilleann Notes and Narratives*

<http://source.pipers.ie/Search/SearchResult.aspx?searchTerm=notes+and+narratives&startRowIndex=24&pageSize=12&mediaId=24076> Accessed: 19th January 2014.

Ó Maonaigh, Ciarán. 2012. *Ciarán Mooney - Video 1 - Shoe the Donkey (Mazurka)*, Cairdeas na bhFidiléirí

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTa5MaBE9g>

Raidió Teilifís Éireann and British Broadcasting Corporation. 1995. *A River of Sound*, (episodes 1-3), Hummingbird Productions.

### **Personal Communications and Interviews**

Brown, Mick. 2012. Personal Communication [email].

Campbell, Vincent. 2012. Interviewed by Conor Caldwell.

Cherry, Rab, 2014. Interviewed by Conor Caldwell.

Dowling, Martin, 2014b. Personal Communication [email].

McKelvey, Connie, 2014. Interviewed by Conor Caldwell.

Ó Maonaigh, Ciarán, 2011, Interviewed by Conor Caldwell.

### **Author Biography**

Conor Caldwell currently works at Queen's University, Belfast where he is a research fellow on the AHRC-funded project, 'An Historical Typology of Irish Song' ([www.irishsong.qub.ac.uk](http://www.irishsong.qub.ac.uk)). The project aims to develop a database of examples of song in Ireland from the earliest examples of medieval chant through to pieces from the modern Irish tradition. His Phd, supervised by Dr Martin Dowling and awarded in 2013, was on the Donegal fiddle player John Doherty. He has published several articles on Doherty and is currently co-writing a monograph on Doherty's life and music. Conor chairs the interdisciplinary research society **New Crops** and is currently editing the society's first publication, which will be published by Peter Lang in early 2016. Away from academia Conor plays with the Belfast traditional music group Craobh Rua with whom he has recently recorded an album entitled *I'd understand you if I knew what you meant*.