Student’s Name

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Subject

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 The Culture of Irish Musicians

**Introduction**

A country’s history and culture can be traced through its music. Therefore, musicians play a significant role in perpetuating the culture and history of a particular society. Singers and bands in Ireland have endeavored to continuously uphold the spirit, history, and culture of the country through traditional folk tunes and modern rock. The Irish traditional music has been passed down from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions, and the outspoken musicians and bands have significantly contributed to the popularity of the Irish traditional music. To date, the practice is still encouraged in Ireland, as the students of traditional Irish music are still motivated to pick up any traditional tunes they may come across (Leonard 515-529). Moreover, formal music classes in Ireland still provide traditional music notes to the students, and the literature on traditional songs are still preserved.

The traditional music played by the Irish was brought to the country by the Celts thousands of years ago. The harp has remained the most popular musical instrument. It was introduced by chieftains who used to employ harpists to play for them as well as create music for nobles. The chieftains later fled the country under the threat of invaders and the harpists were left travelling around the country playing their harps where they could. However, traditional Irish music has grown popular throughout the world because of its prolific nature, which has captured the attention of listeners across the globe. It is worth noting that Irish music began gaining international recognition barely a couple of decades ago. The origin of the music is attributed to the arrival of Celts in Ireland approximately two thousand years ago. Such a renewed interest in the Irish music and culture prompted them into embracing the more traditional veins of their rich culture.

**History of the Irish Music and Culture**

Irish traditional music came up as a result of an oral tradition passed on from one generation to the next through listening and learning. Currently, the practice is still encouraged in order to keep the songs as relevant as possible (McCullough 83-95). Moreover, many formal classes are still teaching Irish traditional songs. It is important to point out that the current traditional Irish songs were brought to the country by the Celts two thousand years ago. It is believed that the Celts were significantly influenced by music from the East, particularly from Egypt. The traditional Irish harp is considered to have been originated in Egypt. The harp constituted one of the most outstanding elements of ancient time Irish songs. The harpists were employed in the ancient times by chieftains who used to control Ireland. The harpist used to entertain the chieftains as well as create music for nobles during that time. This was contributed to the steady growth of the harp by harpist who at that time were considered as professional musicians, and they were well respected by the society. The tradition thrived significantly and became popular in the whole country under the arrangement of chieftains. However, they fled Ireland under the threat of the Viking invaders. This made the harpist travel freely across the country to entertain people. The event was a great blow to the harpist who had considered music as their lifetime profession, as the chieftains had employed them under a system of patronage. Moreover, the departure of the chieftains signified a threat to the tradition as well.

The traditions of the Celts significantly influenced the music and culture of the Irish people. The Celtic traditions have considerably evolved in Ireland as compared to Scotland and Wales. It is in Ireland where the traditions began by Celts has evolved more articulately and more persuasively. It is considered that the arrival of the Celts and the Vikings played a significant role in influencing the Irish traditions of storytelling using songs as a medium. The songs presented a perfect medium through which the traditions would be passed from generation to generation. The practice is still evident in the present time meaning that the Irish people were serious about their traditions and, consequently, valued them a lot. The Irish people realized that songs can easily be memorized, and they used the ones to preserve their history, values, ideals, and traditions.

The Celtic Rock Group Horslips highlighted the Irish tradition and culture by recording a song about the arrival of the invaders. The song was inspired by a Celtic marching tune and playing of two electric guitars. The blend of the rock and the Irish traditional music began to be popular. Moreover, the song renewed the pride, sense of identity and interest in Irish music. The people began to intensely embrace the Irish music in a livelier way. Currently, the Irish homegrown superstars still embrace Irish music, and all their songs reflect the Irish culture. This shows that the traditional Irish songs are still significant, both in Ireland and on the global arena. The Horslips band communicated their Irish identity in their songs and served to preserve the Irish traditions by highlighting the themes of British occupation and the famine that struck Ireland in the 1800s. The band joined the cultural heritage with rich musical fusion the echoed across the globe, and their popularity soared significantly. They toured many different places and made the Irish traditions popular all over the world. Their blend of traditional Irish music and Rock became a charm to many people because the band controlled their own graphic design, stage presentation, as well as concert promotion (Leonard 515-529). The Horslips band also became popular with the Irish teenages because they considered the band as their native one. Similar to the Irish tradition, the band passed their message to the next generations. The way the band embraced and represented the Irish traditions was commendable.

The first written collection of the Irish music was published by the Neale brothers in Dublin, 1762. The written collection contained forty-nine airs after which Edward Bunting made the most significant notation of the Irish music during the Belfast harp festival 1792. The two manuscripts, therefore, are some of the most significant documents in the history of the Irish culture. Thus, the efforts made by the Neale brothers and Edward Bunting were commendable as they assisted in preserving the traditions of the Irish people.

Just as the chieftains affected the Irish harping tradition, the actions of the colonial system affected the Irish culture in the years that followed the initial invasion. That was completed partly because the majority of laws introduced by the British crown were intended to crush the Irish culture. Moreover, the penal laws instituted by the British ensured the participation in any traditional and cultural activities. This meant that people could not move freely and exchange their cultural values from a social perspective. Prohibiting of the association of people amounts to social suicide. It is considered that some of the laws instituted by the British facilitated suppression of the growth of music in Ireland during the times the laws were being enforced.

Several people died in the famine that occurred in 1840s. As such, it is believed that much of the traditions were lost due to the large number of deaths that occurred. A significant portion of the traditions in the form of songs, stories, and tunes are believed to have died with them. Large-scale emigration followed the deaths from famine, marking a devastating period in the history of the Irish people (Kaul 703-719). However, the experiences are considered to have contributed to the richness of the music traditions as the events constituted the themes of the songs. Most of the Irish nationals emigrated mainly to the United States of America and Australia. In the US, the Irish people settled mainly in New York, Boston, and Chicago. These immigrants brought Irish songs, music and traditions there. During the 1920s, Irish songs had begun to be recorded in the United States. The recordings of Irish Musicians such as Michael Coleman, Patsy Tuohey, and Paddy Killoran were being done in the US that time. The Irish musicians were the most notable fiddle players who contributed to the spread of the Irish music and traditions across the globe. When the songs that were released in the US by the Irish musicians came back to Ireland, they influenced the music traditions of the country as the existing musicians in Ireland began to use the piano as an accompanying instrument and speeded up the tempo of their music unlike before.

Through to the 1960s, the Irish music was traditionally played in houses and pubs. Sean O’Riadas involvement in the Irish music traditions marked a turning point of the Irish music. His wide knowledge of the Western Art Music and awareness of the Irish traditional music influenced his teaching career at University College Cork. His interest in the Irish music and traditions grew as he learned more about them, and he explored them in greater depth. As a result of his experience with the Irish traditional music, he set up a band of traditional musicians called Ceoltoiri Chualann in the 1960s with a primary objective of creating a new music based on the Irish traditions. In his creation of music, he utilized many Classical music forms available at the time. Therefore, his band made use of many classical music forms made up of the fiddle, uilleann pipes, flute, bodhran, and accordion. Moreover, the band came up with a technique of playing solos within the group. O’Riadas music was played mainly to be listened to but not to be danced to. This brought Irish music to a social divide, as the songs were no longer associated with rural settings and poverty (Michael 83-87). O’Riadas contribution to the Irish music led to the idea of arranging the music, hence creating an Irish music ensemble.

The period of the 1900s marked a period characterized by traditional music revival. This is because the 1970s earned the title the golden age of traditional music, since the traditional music underwent a period of great popularity and innovation. Much of the people’s attention was focused on traditional music, as they learned to embrace the originality and richness of the traditional stuff. The traditional Irish music has remained vibrant despite the potential influence of the global cultural forces. Despite the British invasion, the famine, and the emigration, the music has curved a niche in the international sphere. Moreover, Irish music has kept many of its traditional elements and has influenced most of the music forms such as the country and roots music of the US. Moreover, Irish traditional music has also influenced modern rock music. Irish traditional music has been successfully fused with punk and roll, rock and roll among other music genres. It is worth noting that fusion artists have attained mainstream popularity and success, both locally and abroad.

Over the recent decades, Irish traditional music has been very popular in many different genres internationally. Rock and traditional fusion are some of the most outstanding Irish music genres with performers such as The Cranberries, Bothy Band, Celtic Woman, and Horslips etc. Bothy Band, in particular, was formed in 1975 by Planxty and Donal Lunny. The band was comprised of a group of professional musicians that was characterized by a powerful core of pipes, fiddle with a driving accompaniment and flute making the band achieve one of the most exciting combinations of traditional Irish music talents ever gathered in the history of traditional Irish music. The band was very successful in its contribution to the popularity of the traditional Irish music. The band used occasional independence and great harmony of instruments, which made the music appealing to audience leading to their success and popularity on a global scale. Their master musicianship as well as their explosive voices made them stand out among other musicians in the same genre making their performances win the imagination of a new generation all over the world (McCullough 85-95). The influence of the band from their former days to the present ones has been very sufficient.

Irish traditional music comprises several kinds of songs ranging from drinking songs and laments and ballads. Therefore, the Irish songs were inspired by different events and emotions among a variety of elements that were considered by the composers and performers of the various kinds of Irish traditional music. The traditional dance music in Ireland involved reels, jigs and hornpipes, and they served to entertain people during relaxation after hard work, especially accompanied by heavy drinking. However, there are various types of dances that were later adopted in the Irish culture which include mazurka, which involved the use of the fiddle, the flute, and the uilleann pipes to facilitate the performance in form of accompaniments. The accordion and the concertina became common during the time that was characterized by a revival of Irish traditional music around the turn of the twentieth century. The Irish step dance was performed at organized competitions where local and itinerant musicians were invited to show their skills. Patriotic organizations and the Irish education system immensely supported Irish dancing, and the dances involved very poetic songs in Irish language.

Classical music was also common in Ireland traditions marked by the existence of the polyphonic choir that was established at Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin during the early 15th century. Musicians were employed in major cities and towns and they performed during celebrations. The composers also contributed considerably to the history of the Irish traditional music. They were mainly associated with Dublin Castle. One of the most prominent composers was John Stevenson who is legendary for publishing the Irish melodies with the help of Thomas Moore. Additionally, Thomas Moore was actively involved in the writing of operas, catches, odes, glees and religious music. Therefore, these types of music contributed significantly in the shaping of the rich Irish history of traditional music. Charles Stanford is among the most outstanding musicians who contributed significantly in Irish music by blending a late romantic musical language with the Irish folklores (McCullough 85-95). Therefore, it is worth noting that the significant role was played by many composers in Ireland.

Catherine Hayes became the first Irish woman to perform a note at La Scala in Milan, Italy. She was an outstanding singer and served to popularize the Irish music traditions all over the world. Catherine became the most celebrated woman in Ireland because of her unique talent that led to her great popularity throughout Europe. Choral music is another aspect of the Irish traditional music. It was commonly performed in large churches in Ireland. The University of Dublin Choral Society played a significant role in shaping choral music in traditional Ireland. The band Anuna was known for their immense contribution to River dance; they also played a significant role in the development and popularization of choral music in Ireland during the 1990s. One of the greatest moments of their career is when they were nominated for a Classical Brit Award in the United Kingdom.

During the late 1940s, performers of popular music began their emerging in Ireland. Delia Murphy is considered to be one of the most talented popular music performers, and she contributed much to popularizing the Irish folksongs, and even recorded some of them. Popular music performance became widely known in Ireland, and most of the performances were featured in television programs. They were very popular among a big number of people. The popular music performers of Ireland became internationally recognized pop stars, and they represented the Irish culture on the global stage. Show bands also became a significant force in the field of popular music in Ireland. They performed in dance halls and comprised standardized dances. The show bands danced to pop music hits that ranged from country and jazz to rock and roll. Their ability to learn and perform songs very well was a key factor that led to the their success in Ireland. The show bands could also incorporate traditional Irish music in their performances as well as self-composed songs.

**Ethnomusical Themes**

The traditional Irish music carried with it various meanings. The songs were sung and performed depending on the contexts and occasions. Of major importance is the fact that the songs exhibited ethnomusical themes that the musicians used to relay messages to the audience. The main themes that run through the Irish traditional songs included British occupation, famine, and emigration. The song “Zombie” by The Cranberries together with the song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” by U2 carries the theme of British occupation, which led to immense suffering among the Irish people. The songs continue to tell the story of the Irish traditions, especially during the colonial times. The English settlers imposed harsh laws in the country including banning the Irish language. Moreover, most of the songs from the time of the British occupation had been full of laments against imprisonment of tenants as well as burning of their property.

The failure of the potato crop during the 1800 led to a great famine that led to immense suffering of the Irish people from hunger and starvation. The songs composed at that time carried the theme of the famine that wiped out a greater proportion of the population. The songs serve to remind the people of the suffering that they went through. The tones used in the composition of such songs elicit melancholy signifying the bitter experiences the nation went through. The traditional song “Paddy’s Lament” is infused with homesickness that the Irish emigrants had in foreign lands. The song was sung by the Irish emigrants while they were working in the foreign countries.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, Irish traditional music has withstood the test of time and has remained relevant throughout the years. Moreover, the Irish musicians stuck with the Irish traditions to an extent that they influenced other music genres in western countries like rock music and American country music. It is arguably true that Irish traditional music has grown in popularity internationally. The Irish traditional songs are comprised of several genres that have become popular over time. From the analysis of the Irish musicians’ culture, it is obvious that they are proud of their traditions, and they use music to tell the story of their nation.

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