

A New Model: Seán Ó Riada, Ceoltóirí Cualann and Irish Traditional Music

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Abstract

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This interdisciplinary thesis examines the history of Seán Ó Riada's traditional ensemble Ceoltóirí Cualann and investigates the significance of the new group model for Irish traditional music that Ó Riada developed from 1960-1970. In particular, this study identifies Ceoltóirí Cualann as a demonstration of Ó Riada's methodological approach to Irish traditional music. The history of ensemble performance within traditional music in Ireland is encapsulated by the various groups that emerge over the course of the twentieth century, particularly the varied models that develop from the 1960s onward. It is also a period in which the first generation to be born post-independence are redefining their cultural identity within the Irish Free State. Ó Riada's position within such a generation, and the modes of expression he utilises as part of that process, is a central feature of this study. As part of this thesis, an interdisciplinary theoretical model is employed in which the opening two chapters outline a concise history and chronology of events; which is then followed by an evaluation of both the music and methodology adopted by Ó Riada in the remaining chapters. By identifying the formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a significant moment, this thesis explores the manner in which the group was formed, the direction they undertook, and the wider place of Ceoltóirí Cualann within Irish cultural life. This theoretical framework expands the epistemological field of Irish Studies, as well as drawing from the disciplines of cultural history, music studies and social geography. By adopting such a structure, it paves the way for further research in related fields.

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A New Model: Seán Ó Riada, Ceoltóirí Cualann and Irish Traditional Music

Introduction

Seán Ó Riada's [1931-1971] work within Irish traditional music, and the manner in which he utilised group performance to explore wider debates within the genre, form the basis for this thesis. The aim of this study is to chart the history of Ó Riada's traditional ensemble Ceoltóirí Cualann,¹ evaluate the significance of the new template, and redress the lack of a comprehensive evaluation of Ó Riada's methodological approach towards Irish traditional music. Ceoltóirí Cualann represents the beginning of a period in which ensemble performance within Irish traditional music expanded through modes of production, presentation, and repertoire. By identifying the formation of the group as a significant moment, this thesis argues that the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann represents a demonstration of Ó Riada's methodological approach to Irish traditional music.

As will be outlined throughout this study, Ó Riada engages in two interlinking processes as part of his direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann which form central elements of his engagement with Irish traditional music. Firstly, the development of a distinctive ensemble model for Irish traditional music, as distinguished by Ó Riada's choice of repertoire and production of Ceoltóirí Cualann; and secondly, the manner in which Ó Riada treats his new group template as a medium to express his own musical ideas, rather than operating Ceoltóirí Cualann as a conventional musical band. The changing nature of group performance within Irish traditional music during the second half of the twentieth century defines the variety of new ensembles that emerge in Ireland throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. These group models are defined not only by musical features, such as repertoire and performance techniques, but also by their production on stage and through recorded albums. Defining what

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, the spelling of 'Ceoltóirí Cualann' does not include a séimhiú (Ceoltóirí Chualann). Although a séimhiú is common in secondary material, its exclusion is notable within primary sources. From examining Ó Riada's papers, the use of both is obvious across articles, album covers and newspaper reviews. By not including a séimhiú, this thesis asserts that 'Ceoltóirí Cualann' is an accurate historical depiction of the original development of the group due to the lack of a séimhiú in the majority of primary sources. It is also to be noted that Tomás Ó Canainn, who also referenced primary material from the 1960s, consistently did not include a séimhiú in 'Ceoltóirí Cualann' throughout his published biography of Ó Riada. As such, the use of 'Ceoltóirí Chualann' within this thesis is only included when quoted directly from primary or secondary sources.

constitutes ‘Irish traditional music’ remains a central feature in scholarly discourse when attempting to evaluate the position of these new ensembles within Irish traditional music. It is also important when contextualising their place in wider debates surrounding how individual musicians define their style. Ó Riada’s definition of Irish traditional music, which he explores in detail through his 1962 radio series *Our Musical Heritage*, is presented as a necessary preamble to his subsequent exploration of group performance; a definition in which he encourages a wider discussion amongst musicians about regional styles and musical identity through performance techniques.²

The basis for this study first emerged in 2012 as part of my undergraduate social geography thesis in which regional styles of Irish traditional music were linked with broader regional identities throughout Ireland.³ Although not a direct analysis of Ó Riada, his role in instigating a formal recognition of such matters from the 1960s onward was an obvious feature in the historical timeline. Just as Ó Riada argued for a discussion about style amongst musicians, this 2012 project echoed many of his initial assertions surrounding the definition of Irish traditional music, linking the genre with cultural identity, and recognising tensions that emerge.⁴ Ó Riada’s intervention in 1962 marks the beginning of a broader recognition and analysis of Irish traditional music as a subject, albeit one which is clearly musically acknowledged up to that point already. The opportunity to undertake a much broader analysis of Ó Riada’s work within Irish traditional music arose in 2013, when I commenced a one-

² The formal attribution of regions to particular musical styles is often linked with the work of Ó Riada in the early 1960s. See Timothy Collins, *Music Mountain: Space, Place and Irish Traditional Music Practices in Sliabh Aughy*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2013; For related historical aspects on the role of Irish traditional music within debates on identity, see John O’Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music* (Farnham, 2009); and Adam R. Kaul, *Turning the Tune: Traditional Music, Tourism and Social Change in an Irish Village* (New York, 2009), pp. 23-66.

³ Malachy Egan, *Traditional Irish Music: Linking Regional Styles with Regional Identities*. Unpublished BA Thesis, 2012.

⁴ The format developed by Ó Riada in exploring definitions of Irish traditional music and the role of style in forming cultural identities has formed the basis of many studies on the subject. See Peter Browne, ‘Sliabh Luachra: A Personal View’, in Thérèse Smith and Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (eds.) *Blas: The Local Accent in Irish Traditional Music* (Dublin 1997); John Connell and Chris Gibson, *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (Oxfordshire, 2003); Sean Corcoran, ‘Concepts of Regionalism in Irish Traditional Music’, in Smith and Ó Súilleabháin (eds.) *Blas*; Simon Frith, ‘Music and Identity’, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London, 1996); Niall Keegan, ‘The Verbal Context of Regional Style in Traditional Irish Music’, in Smith and Ó Súilleabháin (eds.) *Blas*; Moya Kneafsey, ‘If It Wasn’t for the Tourists We Wouldn’t Have an Audience: The Case of Tourism and Traditional Music in North Mayo’, in Michael Cronin and Barbera O’Connor (eds.) *Irish Tourism, Image, Culture and Identity* (Buffalo, 2003); Andrew Leyshon, David Matless and George Revill (eds.) *The Place of Music* (New York, 1998); Caoimhín Mac Aoidh, ‘A Voice in the Wilderness, or a Voice of Reason?’, in Smith and Ó Súilleabháin, (eds.) *Blas*; Séamus Ó Dubhthaigh, *Survival: Irish Traditional Music and Song—A View* (Dublin, 2009); Gerry Smyth, *Music in Irish Cultural History* (Dublin, 2009); Fintan Vallely, *Tuned Out: Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland* (Cork, 2008); Kevin Whelan, ‘The Bases of Regionalism’, in Proinsias Ó Drisceoil (ed.) *Culture in Ireland—Regions: Identity and Power* (Belfast, 1993).

year Master of Philosophy in Modern Irish History at Trinity College Dublin. As part of my M. Phil. thesis, I examined the history of the revival of Irish traditional music in the twentieth through a number of mediums; those being emigration, broadcasting, institutionalisation, and innovation.⁵ By examining the revival of Irish traditional music through the prism of musical innovation, the study evaluated how the work of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann transformed the group playing of Irish traditional music and created a new professional approach to its production. It highlighted the key characteristics of such changes, questioned how these innovations instigated heated debate within traditional music circles and attracted a new form of audience for Irish traditional group performance in a national context.

Basis for Analysis: Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann

Historical analysis of a musician or group is often expressed through the chronological outline of their musical output, and as such, is inherently a performance history model. However, by examining Ceoltóirí Cualann on a performance history basis alone produces a historic account of the group that fails to address the nature of Ó Riada's template for group activity, as well as the ensemble being viewed as part of his own broader artistic struggle. Although spanning a ten year period, from 1960 to 1970, Ceoltóirí Cualann's musical output is limited to a set number of performance settings in which the group's music is disseminated; those being radio broadcasts, album releases, and a small number of public performances. The primary aim of this study is to outline a historical account of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann in terms of the evidence that exists, rather than shaping one which is directly influenced by Ó Riada's wider involvement with other genres of music.

In order to evaluate the role of Ceoltóirí Cualann in the changing nature of group performance in Irish traditional music, this thesis will address a number of issues that exist when separating various aspects of Ó Riada's career. The first is the extent to which Ó Riada's work across both classical and traditional music, and the linking of such material, influences how his output within either genre is assessed. By viewing Ceoltóirí Cualann as a manifestation of Ó Riada's struggle to reach a compromise between European, classical, and Irish traditional art forms, the context of his methodology towards Irish traditional music is lost. Kevin O'Connell speaks to such an issue and how it influences the assessment of Ó Riada's career within music. He contends that

⁵ Malachy Egan, *A Melody of Change: The Revival of Irish Traditional Music in the Twentieth Century*. Unpublished M.Phil. thesis, 2013.

By a peculiar Irish circumstance though, he is representative as much in his contradictions as in his achievements. He started with an interest in the avant-garde and European modernity... With the traditional music revival, he took on a new identity and thereafter rode both horses, the traditional and the 'classical'. The problem about this stance, both from his own point of view and that of his listenership, was that the horses were riding in different directions. His classical audience had some awareness of the traditional Ó Riada; his traditional audience for the most part cared little for the classical composer. Here Ó Riada ran up against a wall: in an atmosphere where 'classical' music, tainted with the legacy of west-Britonism, held a questionable place, his very success was suspect, for the better you are at doing something of which people are suspicious, the more suspicious they become.⁶

O'Connell's assertion echoes much of the suspicion that surrounded Ó Riada's initial theorising about Irish traditional music in *Our Musical Heritage*. Although elements of his work within Irish traditional music are referenced by O'Connell later in his chapter, he precedes this analysis by framing how Ó Riada's work is viewed through his broader engagement with music. As a consequence, Ceoltóirí Cualann as an individual entity, with its own historical development and influence, is neglected. Furthermore, Harry White also highlights Ceoltóirí Cualann as a distinct element of Ó Riada's legacy, yet it is evaluated by White in the context of a far wider analysis of Ó Riada's personal artistic struggles. He asserts that Ó Riada

was drawn away from the European aesthetic in a crisis of such magnitude (personal, aesthetic, musical and perhaps even psychological), that it forced a crisis in turn that was to affect music in Ireland for long after his death.⁷

By viewing Ceoltóirí Cualann as part of a wider personal crisis, the representation of the group, and the context for their formation, is skewed. This study will assert that although such matters reflect the overall development of Ó Riada's career, viewing the evolution of Ceoltóirí Cualann through such a prism produces an inadequate evaluation of the group's position within the history of Irish traditional music.

Fintan Vallely puts forward a characterisation of Ceoltóirí Cualann which is a far more coherent and historically representative description of the nature of the group. He argues that Ceoltóirí Cualann

was an experimental radio band in the manner of an Eastern European folk ensemble producing something new each week for the attention of eagerly waiting listeners...

⁶ Kevin O'Connell, 'Getting Into Gear', in Michael Dervan (ed.) *The Invisible Art: A Century of Music in Ireland 1916-2016* (Dublin, 2016), p. 90.

⁷ Harry White, 'The Divided Imagination: Music in Ireland after Ó Riada', in Gareth Cox and Axel Klein (eds.) *Irish Musical Studies 7: Irish Music in the Twentieth Century* (Dublin, 2003), p. 13.

There is not a group in existence today which doesn't utilise the performance palette that Ó Riada was the first to strategically employ. What he did in traditional music was simple, yet revolutionary.⁸

Under Vallely's description, the emphasis is placed on the nature of the ensemble model, both through the significance of its formation and the manner in which the group's music was transmitted. Bill Meek also identifies the specific purpose of Ó Riada's model, contending that Ceoltóirí Cualann was not a touring band and that the ensemble was primarily known through two of Ó Riada's radio series, *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*.⁹ This speaks to a clear misunderstanding of Ceoltóirí Cualann which, as a result, has distorted interpretations of the basis and nature of Ó Riada's group model. It highlights a second issue which arises within historical accounts of Ceoltóirí Cualann; that being the lack of context regarding the template Ó Riada adopted for group performance and how this influences the development of the group throughout the 1960s. Alongside providing a historical account of Ceoltóirí Cualann, this thesis evaluates Ó Riada's template through music and methodology; arguing that both are equally significant features of Ó Riada's model.

The music of Ceoltóirí Cualann represents the first distinctive and obvious feature of the ensemble, as represented through a range of mediums in which they perform. Although Vallely's classification of the group as a 'radio band' is a reflection of Ó Riada's sustained inclusion of Ceoltóirí Cualann as part of his radio broadcasts, it is through recorded albums that distinctive musical features, as well as themes, are presented. Underlining the musical output of Ceoltóirí Cualann is the framework which Ó Riada developed for his template and the methodology he adopted. In tandem, both features define Ceoltóirí Cualann along a theoretical basis; one in which the commercial development of later groups is not a dominant influence. Ó Riada's work across various musical genres and other artistic projects certainly highlight struggles that were both professional and personal, and in many cases, can be linked with the manner in which he worked and developed his ideas. The overall purpose of this thesis is not to dismiss the influence of these aspects of Ó Riada's life, as such issues are raised across all four chapters, but rather it is to question the appropriateness of relying on

⁸ Fintan Vallely, *From Fifth Column to Pillar of Society—Observations on the Political Implications of Popular Revival and Education in Irish Traditional Music in Modern Ireland*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 14 (Cork, 2004), p. 30.

⁹ Bill Meek, *Paddy Moloney and the Chieftains* (Dublin, 1987), p. 37.

such a contextualisation when assessing the historical basis and significance of his key individual projects such as Ceoltóirí Cualann.

Methodology

As part of this study on Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann, an interdisciplinary theoretical model is employed in which the opening two chapters of this thesis outline a concise history and chronology of events; which is then followed by an evaluation of both the music and methodology adopted by Ó Riada in the remaining chapters. By identifying the formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a significant moment, this thesis explores the manner in which the group was formed, the direction they undertook, and the wider place of Ceoltóirí Cualann within Irish cultural life. This theoretical framework expands the epistemological field of Irish Studies, as well as drawing from the disciplines of cultural history, music studies and social geography. By adopting such a structure, it paves the way for further research in related fields.

Based on primary and secondary source material, including evidence within Ó Riada's personal papers, this thesis highlights the scientific manner in which Ó Riada engaged with Irish traditional music and the way in which Ceoltóirí Cualann's development mirrors such an approach. It challenges current narratives regarding the legacy of the group by evaluating Ó Riada's original basis for forming Ceoltóirí Cualann and the way in which he engaged with the group throughout the 1960s. The approach taken in relation to this research project reflects the broad nature of the topic while also focusing on key elements which were viewed as vital to the success of such a study. As the project progressed, approaches and research methods developed and changed in line with the discovery of new material. As such, the methodological approach adopted for this study is based on a set of concrete and pre-established concepts.

This research was undertaken in line with the theory that traditional music in Ireland experienced major changes over the course of the twentieth century and that Ó Riada played a role in such a process. As with any study of this nature, primary sources relating to Ó Riada proved essential in building a concise and accurate picture of events and perceptions during this period. Archival material, in particular, acted as a primary resource for the purposes of this project. As outlined throughout all four chapters, material located within the Seán Ó Riada Collection forms the core basis for establishing Ó Riada's approach to Irish traditional music and the manner in which he developed and structured aspects of both his

professional and personal life. The archive, which is stored within University College Cork, holds the full personal library and papers of Ó Riada and his family.

A variety of secondary sources were also consulted in order to complement and critique primary material and to ensure that the thesis reflects the various elements of the topic in question. Although material exists which examines and assesses various aspects of Ó Riada's career, two central texts form the major biographical studies that exist on Ó Riada to date; those being *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, written by Tomás Ó Canainn; and *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, edited by Bernard Harris and Grattan Freyer.¹⁰ Ó Canainn's book represents the sole biography that exists which accounts for the entirety of Ó Riada's professional life and career. It provides a historical timeline for the majority of Ó Riada artistic endeavours, albeit one which lacks detail and context for elements of Ó Riada's career which warrant a thorough examination and contextualisation. If Ó Canainn's contribution provides the first coherent timeline of Ó Riada's work, then Harris and Freyer's earlier publication provides the first significant piece of work that assesses aspects of Ó Riada's musical output by those who knew him personally. In contrast to many of the sources which are referenced throughout this project, *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada* provides an important counterbalance between the earliest historical account and review of his contribution to music, against more recent analysis, which indicates the manner in which the treatment of Ó Riada has evolved within academic discourse.

Chapter Structure

As already outlined, the aim of this study is to provide a coherent history for the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann and to redress the lack of a comprehensive evaluation of Ó Riada's methodological approach towards Irish traditional music. The structure of this thesis is based upon building a historic timeline over the course of the first two chapters, with the remaining chapters evaluating the music, reception, and distinctive work method adopted by Ó Riada through his production of Ceoltóirí Cualann's broadcast, recorded and live performance material. Chapter 1 examines Ó Riada's broader relationship with Irish traditional music and aspects of his early career which are later displayed through the music and production of

¹⁰ See Tomás Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work* (Cork, 2003); and Bernard Harris and Grattan Freyer (eds.), *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada* (Ballina, 1981). Note: Ó Canainn's biography was originally published in the Irish language; see Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: A Shaol agus a Shaothar* (Dublin, 1993).

Ceoltóirí Cualann. Considering the time in which Ó Riada operated, this chapter considers the social, cultural, and political landscape of 1950s and 1960s Ireland, and contextualises the place of Ceoltóirí Cualann within the cultural environment of the period. It explores the influence of Ó Riada's personality on his work and the way his personal direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann shaped the cohesion and impact of the new ensemble template. Chapter 2 explores the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann by examining the premise of Ó Riada's formation of the group, the development of the ensemble throughout the 1960s, and the various performance settings which Ó Riada positioned Ceoltóirí Cualann during this period. Chapter 3 examines the significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann's music, as witnessed through the group's recorded albums, and the approach adopted by Ó Riada concerning arrangement and production. Finally, Chapter 4 examines an overarching theme present throughout the entire thesis; that being the way in which Ó Riada's methodological approach can be defined as innovative and how reception history towards Ceoltóirí Cualann can be located and evaluated.

The history of Ceoltóirí Cualann is defined by both the music they produced, as well as the method Ó Riada adopted in undertaking such a task. By employing such a framework, this thesis endeavours to put forward an accurate timeline of events which takes account of these interlinking features and contributes to a greater understanding of Ó Riada's work within traditional music as part of wider twentieth century changes in Ireland's cultural and musical landscape. In order to achieve such an analysis, it is necessary to examine the context of 1950s and 1960s Ireland, Ó Riada's position within the period, and his early engagement with Irish traditional music. Chapter 1 now explores such matters and provides context for Ó Riada's later engagement with the traditional genre as a subject for much wider discussion and experimentation.

Chapter 1

Seán Ó Riada and Irish Traditional Music

Introduction

Writing in the immediate aftermath of Seán Ó Riada's death in 1971, Sean Lucy commented that

Genius may be defined as the synthesis of the unpredictable with the inevitable. Its products are endlessly surprising and completely right. This is true of O [sic] Riada's music of which-ever sort.¹

A close associate of Ó Riada, Lucy's comment must be considered in the context in which it was set—a reflection by a friend on a short-lived life and career. Yet, the term 'genius' is one which is used in many of the tributes to Ó Riada following his death, with many failing to address the complexities of such a term.² Throughout his career, Ó Riada engaged with various genres of music within a variety of roles: he worked extensively as a broadcaster of traditional music; he wrote music for television and film documentaries; he received commissions for orchestral and chamber compositions; he composed liturgical settings of the mass ordinary in Irish; and he wrote or arranged traditional music for a host of domestic and formal settings, which ranged from private houses in west Cork to the Gaiety Theatre and University College Dublin.³ Passing away at forty years of age, with a career spanning less than twenty years, tributes and assessments often reflect on his proficiency in such a broad array of areas and explore themes of personality and innovation.⁴ The fact that Ó Riada's career is condensed into such a short time-frame points to a far wider significance for each individual aspect of his professional life. As a consequence, within an eighteen-year period (1953-1971) Ó Riada produced a bulk of work within Irish traditional music and other genres which is shaped entirely by the development of his relationship with music from childhood and throughout his university education. What emerges is a career which is not influenced primarily by a sense of direction from the outset but rather, one which is framed by the

¹ Sean Lucy, 'A Tribute to Seán Ó Riada' in *Ó Riada Collection*, 888 (34), University College Cork.

² See Sheila Iremonger, 'Letters: Sean O Riada', *Irish Times*, 4 October 1971, p. 9; 'Sean O Riada', *Cork Examiner*, 7 October 1971, p. 10.; 'Inside Politics: The Relevance of Sean O Riada', *Irish Times*, 9 October 1971, p. 12; Robert O'Donoghue, 'He Gave Us Back the True Music of the People', *Irish Examiner*, 11 October 1971, p. 8; Treasa O'Driscoll, 'Letters: Sean O Riada', *Irish Times*, 21 October 1971, p. 11.

³ Harry White, 'Ó Riada, Seán', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds.) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁴ Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Section 5.2–5.3.

people and events Ó Riada encountered throughout his life. The result, in the context of Ó Riada's relationship with Irish traditional music, is a strong sense of 'work imitating life' in which the shaping of his earlier theories and ideas surrounding music frame the manner in which Ó Riada expresses himself within later work.

This chapter examines Ó Riada's broader relationship with Irish traditional music and aspects of his early career by contextualising the period in which he worked. Although Ceoltóirí Cualann represent a direct manifestation of Ó Riada's core work within Irish traditional music, such a representation is shaped by wider elements of his earlier career. It is indicative of the cultural and social circumstances of Ireland at that time and the transition from a state of cultural praxis that takes place within Ireland as it enters the second half of the twentieth century. Although the work of Ó Riada is inherently linked with music and the arts, wider societal changes in Ireland coincide with his upbringing and career. As a consequence, the opening sections of this chapter examine the historical context of 1950s and 1960s Ireland, as witnessed through changes in politics, education, and society. Through such an analysis, Ó Riada's position within a distinct generational shift in post-independence Ireland is acknowledged.⁵ The development of political and educational priorities in Ireland during the course of the 1950s and 1960s reflects a key marker when contextualising the historical placement of Ó Riada's life and career; that being his position as part of the first generation to be born into the new state, and the legacy, responsibility and opportunity which that conferred. For Ó Riada and others within this grouping, remnants of cultural nationalism remain a key facet of nation-building through the shaping of identity and the legacy of living memory. Ó Riada's output is as much a reflection of wider societal changes, as it is a product of a single individual and career. Furthermore, this chapter outlines Ó Riada's early life and education, his initial engagement with Irish traditional music and the development of his professional life. His early work within Irish traditional music developed in line with his own theorising on the subject through broadcasting; solo and group performance; the influence of the settings in which Ó Riada works; and the role of his methods in shaping perceptions surrounding his views on Irish traditional music, and his subsequent theory on what constituted an appropriate ensemble model.

⁵ See Richard Pine, *The Disappointed Bridge: Ireland and the Post-Colonial World* (Newcastle, 2014), pp. 443-447.

Politics and Context in 1950s Ireland

German writer Heinrich Böll, while reflecting on a visit to Ireland, overheard a conversation between a young woman and a priest sitting in his vicinity

You should go there, and don't forget on your way back in the port of Dublin to notice what's exported from Ireland: children and priests, nuns and biscuits, whisky and horses, beer and dogs.⁶

A critical reflection of the reality of Irish society at that point, it also reveals the great dichotomy of 1950s Ireland in which Eamon de Valera's rural Gaelic ideal bore little sustenance for those who wanted to earn a basic living and build a solid life for their families. The 'lost decade of the 1950s'⁷ paints a depressing and dismal picture of a young Irish state which strained to both forge a post-independence identity, while also finding a place at the world table. Irish neutrality during the Second World War, euphemistically referred to as the Emergency in Ireland, isolated the country from frontline involvement in the war and had long-lasting implications for an economy already delicately balanced during those early years of the Irish Free State. The idyllic vision of Ireland, where culture and identity bore most importance, created a strange period of flux within Irish society which rarely ran in tandem with world events. As Europe alternated between the Great Depression, the Second World War and the post-war period, the Irish State found itself moving from an early period of positive development to various stages of economic decline and stagnation.⁸ The story of Ireland in this post-war period is as much about a country attempting to catch up with the world around it, as it is about the development of modern Ireland in the twentieth century.

The task that lay ahead of those within the Free State Executive Council in 1922 to build and shape an independent Ireland, both politically and culturally, was challenging enough an undertaking without the many tumultuous events which followed within world affairs during those years. Although the creation of a truly Gaelic society posed its own unique challenges, the young State was faced with a number of world crises which had severe consequences for Ireland, both economically and politically. The period leading up to the

⁶ Heinrich Böll, *Irish Journal—A Traveller's Portrait of Ireland* (London, 2000) [Cologne, 1957], p. 4.

⁷ See Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea and Carmel Quinn (eds.) *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork, 2004).

⁸ See Anne Dolan, 'Politics, Economy and Society in the Irish Free State, 1922– 1939', in Thomas Bartlett (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Ireland Volume IV: 1880 to the Present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 323-348; Philip Ollerenshaw, 'Neutrality and Belligerence: Ireland, 1939– 1945', in Bartlett (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Ireland Volume IV*, pp. 349-378; Brian Girvin, 'Stability, Crisis and Change in Post-war Ireland 1945' in Bartlett (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Ireland Volume IV*, pp. 381-406.

outbreak of the Second World War exposed the Irish Free State to the ramifications of life as a peripheral country on the western edge of Europe and the challenges that external issues posed for the fledging economy in Ireland. The country had been spared the worst effects of the Great Depression, during the years 1929-31, as Ireland continued to export livestock and livestock products at relatively stable prices, while the price of imports dropped sharply.⁹ However, despite this positive trend, by late 1931 Ireland found itself exposed to many of the harsh economic realities of the time. Exports started to decline seriously, as did the prices they commanded, thus creating a volatile political atmosphere in the build-up to the election of 1932.¹⁰

The triumph of Eamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil in the election which followed provided the first major change to the political landscape since the foundation of the Free State and marked the beginning of a period of major turbulence in both Irish and world affairs. Although much is made of de Valera's influence on Irish society, Diarmaid Ferriter is accurate in asserting that social historians should be wary of such an approach in analysing the development of Irish society during those years. While the political context changed considerably with the electoral triumph of Fianna Fáil in 1932, there was also much continuity, and many of the issues associated with maximising cultural and political sovereignty were in practice merely an extension of the solid, if sometimes flawed, state-building of the 1920s.¹¹ If any concrete assertion can be made, it is that de Valera simply reinforced the process that had already been set in train and promoted his vision of a genuinely independent, self-sufficient rural republic.

This hardened approach was evident in the Economic War waged with Britain from 1932 to 1938 in which both nations imposed unilateral tariffs on trade between the two countries. A pre-cursor to the far greater military conflict that would begin in Europe some years later, the Irish Free State bore the brunt of the repercussions which stemmed from such protectionist policies. However, despite the harsh impact of such an approach, the acceptance of such events feeds into a much wider concept of the Irishman versus his great British oppressor. As Sean Williams contends, the expectations that de Valera placed on a kind of 'entrenched traditionalism as the saviour of Irish culture were disastrous in their implication

⁹ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London, 2004), p. 129.

¹⁰ Ibid; See Mary E. Daly, *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-1939* (Dublin, 1992).

¹¹ Diarmuid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000* (London, 2004), p. 358.

for Ireland's economic future'.¹² The sacrifices demanded from the population could be extolled in a crudely nationalistic rhetoric and by the fact that there was in much of the country a deep urge toward self-sufficiency and a conviction that the life of an Irish small farm represented a purity and decency of life that could set Ireland apart from the more commercial societies that surrounded her.¹³

The narrative of Irish history during these pre-war years reflects the challenges faced in solidifying the cultural mores of an independent nation state. Ireland found itself moving from a dramatic era of war and revolution at the turn of the century until 1923, thereafter followed by a period of consolidation and nation-building in the 1920s and 1930s, leading to independent Ireland's ultimate isolation during the Second World War.¹⁴ The policy of neutrality during the war years pushed nationalistic rhetoric to the limit as society struggled to cope with the practical consequences of war time activities. The economy as a whole entered a period of decline with exports falling dramatically and rationing of common goods becoming a regular and necessary aspect of everyday life.¹⁵ However, Terence Brown highlights that despite the obvious economic sacrifices of the time, for the majority of Irish men and women, the years of the war represented scarcely more of an experience of cultural isolation and deprivation than had any of the years that had preceded them. The period of 1939-45, therefore, for most Irish men and women, was not experienced simply as a time when Ireland opted out of history but when her own history and the maintenance of her recently won independence were of primary concern.¹⁶ Such an approach harks back to this idea that the Irish State rarely ran in tandem with world affairs, choosing a path of self-reflection and self-preservation as a means of forging a unique Irish identity. As a consequence, post-war Irish society was more a reflection of purely Irish progress than it was of a society ravished by the effects of war.

Although taking a rather insular path during the Second World War, from 1945 onwards the development of Irish society became much more intertwined with international trends. On the one hand this was a period in Ireland, as in the world as a whole, of unprecedented social and psychological change. Television, the growth of foreign travel, and

¹² Sean Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music* (New York, 2010) p. 161.

¹³ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 133.

¹⁴ Enda Delaney, 'Modernity, the Past and Politics in Post-War Ireland', in Thomas E. Hachey (ed.) *Turning Points in Twentieth-Century Irish History* (Dublin, 2011), p. 105.

¹⁵ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 164.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-168.

emigration on an unprecedented scale to England, were making Irish men and women more aware of the possibilities of affluence and of the problems that lay in the way of achieving it.¹⁷ Ironically, depression in the 1930s and the war in the early 1940s made independent Ireland a fairly desirable place to be in the eyes of people in war-torn and depressed Europe.¹⁸ However, although experiencing obvious woes during the Economic war and the Second World War, this new phase presented a more pronounced challenge to the Irish economy. Inherent in the development of Ireland post-war is the pivotal crossroads it appeared to reach in 1945. The great tragedy of this moment was that, as a political entity, the country did not clearly realise or fully accept the proposition that there was a decision, or rather a series of decisions, to be taken concerning economic policy, foreign relations, foreign trade and educational policy.¹⁹ These decisions, or lack of thereof, have created a somewhat depressing picture of post-war Irish society. The narrative of Ireland in this period is often of an existence so grey, so monotonous and cheerless that economic and cultural stagnation seemed inevitable.²⁰ Independent Ireland had survived politically but the Emergency had seen the stirrings of changes that, in the following period, were to alter the shape of Irish society in significant ways.²¹

Contrasting with expectations during the war years, the steep rise in the cost of living and the crippling effects of inflation instigated a wider public debate from 1945 onwards. Ireland's economy was so dependent on others that when inflation was a world trend it was impossible to avoid at home.²² In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, such issues were not to the fore of Irish social problems as the country experienced a slight growth in economic activity. The initial years of the post-war period resulted in increased consumer spending at home as the austerities of the war years declined and from a rise in exports to Britain.²³ The volume of personal spending rose by about one quarter between 1946 and 1950 and the government introduced a Public Capital Programme which invested considerable amounts in schools, hospitals and housing, as well as roads, airports, and harbours.²⁴

¹⁷ John Whyte, 'To the Declaration of the Republic and the Ireland Act, 1945-9' in John Richard Hill (ed.) *A New History of Ireland VII: Ireland, 1921-84* (Oxford, 2010), p. 261.

¹⁸ Tom Garvin, *Preventing the Future: Why was Ireland so Poor for so Long* (Dublin, 2005), p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 62.

²⁰ Joe Cleary, 'Introduction: Ireland and Modernity', in Joe Cleary and Claire Connolly (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 1.

²¹ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 199.

²² Whyte, 'To the Declaration of the Republic and the Ireland Act, 1945-9', p. 265.

²³ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 200.

²⁴ Brendan M. Walsh, 'Economic Growth and Development, 1945-70', in J.J. Lee (ed.) *Ireland 1945-70* (Dublin, 1979), p. 27.

However, such a situation would be short-lived as Ireland entered the 1950s and its associated social and political disturbances. Ireland suffered the effects of rampant economic stagnation which saw emigration levels spiral and hardship rise for those who remained. However, despite being a period of regression within Irish society, the 1950s also gave rise to the emergence of a culture of inquiry and many of the policies that would shape contemporary Ireland from the 1960s onwards. It saw the creation of a range of public policy bodies tasked with economic and social objectives, with institutional reform, the educational sector, the Irish language and broadcasting. The period bore witness to a huge array of social and political problems which included, a new type of political turmoil with the formation of the first inter-party government in 1948; a range of economic hardships which precipitated a wave of emigration; the increasing influence of the Catholic Church on Irish society; the rise of strict censorship practices to restrain ‘indecent’ publications; and the emergence of an Irish society framed by its own status, rather than a post-colonial phase of state building.

As previously stated, the economic boom of the immediate post-war period was brought to a shuddering halt at the turn of the decade. Adverse external developments compounded by inappropriate policy responses quickly halted any prospects that an era of moderate growth was dawning.²⁵ Although such issues were hardly a surprise within the setting of a Europe that was recovering from a major period of warfare, the sense to which the circumstances were exacerbated by a lack of appropriate intervention perhaps goes some way to explain the perceived bleakness of the 1950s as a whole. As Tom Garvin asserts, the root cause of this situation was a polity in which lay and ecclesiastical elites prevented others from innovating and also prevented each other from embarking on a new departure, resulting in a blocked polity.²⁶ In some ways this was rooted in the orthodoxy of the time and, in another sense, it was invariably linked with circumstances surrounding Irish neutrality. The fact that Ireland had not been touched by war was, in an ironic way, a disadvantage; there was little widespread sense of the urgent need for a new departure in policy. Neither culture nor structures were geared to developmentalism, and forces resistant to change were deeply ensconced in Church, state, the trade unions, business and professional groups, the huge small-farm community of the period and the general population.²⁷ This lack of foresight created an atmosphere where it was both unviable to earn a decent living and disheartening to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, p. 69.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 83.

those who craved a cultural, as well as an economic, evolution. Little wonder that the 1950s sparked another major period of emigration and saw many diasporic communities undertake cultural practices, such as within Irish traditional music, that were not found at home, as well as tools to mark out their affiliation or embody their Irishness.²⁸

The social fabric of Irish society was in a continuous state of flux during the 1950s as younger generations abandoned rural life for prospects in urban areas. The destabilising effects of both internal migration and emigration created an imbalance within Irish society which the government found difficult to address during this period. The rate of emigration over the course of the decade, in both absolute and relative terms, was the highest recorded since the 1880s, and at the end of the period the population of the state had shrunk to an all-time low of just over 2.8 million.²⁹ In the first instance, the issue of internal migration within Ireland posed a significant threat to the overall balance of the economy and to the great idyllic rural ideal which had been heavily promoted since the foundation of the state. Urban growth was not a new concept for Irish society, so much so that by 1951, over 40 per cent of the population lived in cities and towns.³⁰ However, as the trend reached higher levels throughout the decade, it was clear that such changes in Irish social profile was due less to the growth of urban regions than to rural depopulation.³¹ The 1950s posed the first significant economic and cultural challenge to aspirations that Ireland could become a self-sufficient nation with a vibrant rural landscape complementing industrious urban centres. However, the fears expressed about rural depopulation and migration to towns were not unique to Ireland, and the scale of the changes, coupled with emigration, forced Irish sociologists to match their European counterparts in examining the changes in traditional Irish society and suggest remedies beyond the age-old appeal to appreciate the green hamlets and bemoan the morally corrosive cities.³² A key feature of nationalistic rhetoric, the failures of rural self-sufficiency were exposed throughout the 1950s amidst the great irony that England, the coloniser, was now providing many with the option of achieving material self-sufficiency.³³

²⁸ Marion Leonard, 'Performing Identities: Music and Dance in the Irish Communities of Coventry and Liverpool', *Social and Cultural Geography*, vol. 6, no. 4 (2005), pp. 526-527; See James P. Byrne, Philip Coleman and Jason King (eds.) *Ireland and the Americas: Culture, Politics and History* (California, 2008); and Kirby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford, 1985).

²⁹ Gerry O'Hanlon, 'Population Change in the 1950s: A Statistical Review', in Keogh, O'Shea and Quinlan (eds.) *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, p. 72.

³⁰ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 200.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 497.

³³ *Ibid.* p. 498.

The crisis of the 1950s, in which rural depopulation and emigration dominated social and political debate, questioned the entire viability of Irish economic life. Reflecting on the impact of the period on his own native Charlestown in county Mayo, John Healy contends that the late arrival of ‘progress’ in the 1960s exposed the failure to prevent the demise of smaller rural towns such as Charlestown. He argues that the young people who were forced to leave the town for Dublin became ‘faceless statistics, men who in the whizkid jargon of the 1960s, availed of outward social mobility’.³⁴ The crisis in the countryside which was inexorably altering the balance of Irish society posed a challenge to the Irish state of a fundamental kind as to how a sustainable rural-urban balance could be achieved.³⁵ By 1957, unemployment reached a record 78,000 and 54,000 others emigrated. In total, over 400,000 people emigrated over the course of the 1950s, an enormous haemorrhage for such a sparsely populated country.³⁶ Aside from the obvious economic consequences, the cultural and social impact were also all too obvious. Although depriving rural areas of many exponents of Irish cultural practices, migration patterns began a conveyor belt of knowledge between those who remained at home and those who settled in Irish urban centres such as Dublin, and those within Irish communities abroad. In terms of Irish traditional music, such a process would ultimately form the basis of a much wider revival of interest in Irish music which was aided by the influence of musicians and collectors of music within such emigrant settings. This process, which appears at odds with the economic situation, reshapes the dissemination of Irish traditional music through a transfer of both repertoire and performance experiences through the migration of musicians and the impact of their transfer into Irish urban centres and diasporic musical communities abroad.³⁷

Music, Society and Politics

Amid the dark cloud of 1950s Ireland, it is most intriguing to note that Irish cultural practices adapted far more easily than public economic policy to the challenges of the time. It was within this decade that the foundation of key cultural organisations took place, most notably

³⁴ John Healy, *No-One Shouted Stop: The Death of an Irish Town* (Cork, 1968), pp. 60-61.

³⁵ Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002*, p. 200.

³⁶ Fergal Tobin, *The Best of Decades: Ireland in the 1960s* (Dublin, 1996), p. 6.

³⁷ See Paul Brennan and Phalle de Saint (eds.) *Arguing at the Crossroads: Essays on a Changing Ireland* (Dublin, 1997); Reg Hall, *The Social Organisation of Traditional Music-Making: The Irish in London After the War*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 10 (Cork, 1995); David Cooper, *The Musical Traditions of Northern Ireland and its Diaspora: Community and Conflict* (Surrey, 2010); and Nuala O’Connor, *Bringing it All Back Home: The Influence of Irish Music* (London, 1991).

Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in 1951³⁸ and Gael Linn in 1953³⁹, both of whom espoused to foster the development of the Irish language and Irish music and dance practices. The history of Irish traditional music provides a case in point of a cultural practice which entered a far more energetic phase during the high period of emigration of the 1950s.⁴⁰ Though the role and influence of Irish emigrants during this period was undoubtedly strong, it is clear that advancements in technology greatly aided their cause. Irish emigrants in Britain and the United States were living in a time of great innovation within a music industry in which commercial recordings were thriving and radio was beginning to establish itself as a major presence in people's homes.⁴¹

Many musician emigrants returned on trips to Ireland with a variety of instruments which provided those left behind with access to music and songs which otherwise would have been beyond reach in many rural depopulated regions.⁴² However, it is clear that Irish emigrants also returned home with the new technology that was emerging in Britain and the United States, thus allowing those remaining in Ireland the opportunity to listen to the vast array of Irish music that was beginning to be commercially recorded. It is interesting to notice how the presence of wind-up gramophones in Irish homes increased alongside the sharp increase in emigration that peaked in the 1950s.⁴³ Although such new technology was a welcome boost to those who remained at home, economic necessity dictated that such devices were often unevenly spread out throughout the country. The economic stagnation that was prevalent throughout this decade and exacerbated by emigration, was in turn a fuel to the much wider revival of Irish traditional music that would continue to grow throughout later decades. This certainly mirrors the views of other historians who have long argued that emigration was often an opportunity to progress in the world rather than a simple necessity.⁴⁴ A further aspect of note is the fact that Irish traditional music represented an aspect of identity which many were happy to take to their new surroundings.

³⁸ See Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, 'Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann: (Re)shaping Tradition 1951-1972', *PhD Dissertation* (NUI Galway, 2011).

³⁹ 'History', *Gael Linn*, <https://www.gael-linn.ie/en/about-us/history>, accessed 2 November 2019.

⁴⁰ Radio is one obvious example of this energetic period for Irish traditional music. See Breandán Breathnach, 'The Traditional Music Scene in Ireland', in Tim Pat Coogan (ed.) *Ireland and the Arts* (London, 1983), p. 171.

⁴¹ Although commercial recording prospered alongside developments in radio, there were proportionately less Irish traditional music recordings than the 1930s in the United States; See Hugh Richard Sloten, *Radio's Hidden Voice: The Origins of Public Broadcasting in the United States* (Illinois, 2009).

⁴² Ó Dubhthaigh, *Survival—Irish Traditional Music and Song: A View* (Dublin, 2009), p. 9.

⁴³ Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music*, p. 104.

⁴⁴ See David Fitzpatrick, 'Irish Emigration in the Later Nineteenth Century', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 86 (1980), pp. 126-143.

Although the effects of emigration were spreading throughout society and the economy, it was also the emergence of a new political landscape that helped to shape post-war Ireland. The primary issue facing the government at the turn of the 1950s was how to develop a modern Ireland in the face of fast-paced changes throughout Europe. It was clear that the Irish government, or at least its Department of Finance, had little regard for, or real comprehension of, the idea that infrastructural development aimed at helping economic activity, financed from the public purse, was essential if any prospect of long-term growth were to exist.⁴⁵ Despite being a period in which economic turmoil was commonplace, Irish electoral history was relatively stable. Within this decade, Fianna Fáil's sixteen-year reign as party of government was broken momentarily and saw the emergence of Ireland's first inter-party government from 1948-51 and again from 1954-57. Although the temporary alteration in government brought a welcome change in approach, little in terms of political culture was to change until the end of the decade. The new coalition in 1948 included an eclectic mix of parties and independents who coalesced in order to provide an alternative to a dominant Fianna Fáil party. Comprising of Fine Gael, Labour, Clann na Poblachta, Clann na Talmhan and National Labour, it was led by the unity Taoiseach John A. Costello and benefited from the short-lived post-war economic uplift in order to enact many of their ambitious election promises. The election of the new government in 1948 seemed to herald a new questioning of emigration, partly because it had featured prominently in the election campaign as a result of a public statement from the catholic hierarchy in 1947 decrying the number of women emigrating.⁴⁶ However, underpinning the overall developments within Irish society and the economy as a whole was the publication of the white paper, Programme for Economic Expansion, in 1958 by the secretary of the Department of Finance T.K. Whitaker and his officials, and the election of Seán Lemass as Taoiseach in 1959. As J.J. Lee has contended, the rapid transformation of the economy and indeed of Irish society as a whole in the late 1950s and early 1960s constituted a decisive turning point in the history of the Irish state. Politics remained the one static area in a period of widespread change, since the party system remained essentially the same and party policies and personnel mirrored some of the vitality of that golden dawn that was rising as Ireland entered the 1960s.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Garvin, *Preventing the Future*, p. 102.

⁴⁶Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 473.

⁴⁷ John A. Murphy, 'Put Them Out! Parties and Elections, 1948-69', in Lee (ed.) *Ireland 1945-70*, p. 4.

The role of the Catholic Church in Irish society has long formed a major part of the social history of Ireland since the foundation of the state. The post-war period, and in particular the decade of the 1950s, represents the last major period of unquestioned Catholic Church influence and constitutes the high water-mark in Ireland of the Catholic social movement.⁴⁸ Culturally, ‘the 1950s was the decade in which an ethos which tolerated, if not encouraged, the sanctification of deprivation was to be challenged, not just by those emigrating but also by the growing resentment of those left at home’.⁴⁹ Nowhere was this more obvious than through the post-war educational system which shaped the social fabric of the generations that would emerge during the 1960s and 1970s to shape a more diverse and liberal Irish society. Church involvement in Irish education is rooted in the very foundation of the state during a period in which the burden of nation-building became too great for the national purse to bear. Stepping in to fill the breach in education, as well as matters of public health, the Catholic Church became ingrained in key aspects of Irish society and thus took a privileged position in framing social policy and public attitudes. Inherent in Irish educational policy during this period was the fact that traditionally, the goal of education in Ireland was religious, moral and intellectual instruction rather than that of economic growth or the preparation of students for careers.⁵⁰ Like periods before it, it is clear that the 1950s marked a further period of little change within the Irish educational system.⁵¹ However, although no obvious structural changes took place, there was a changing mood emerging as during this period, the numbers receiving primary and secondary education rose considerably. In relation to primary education, increases were being registered throughout the 1950s and by 1960 the numbers had increased to over 500,000.⁵² Figures also reveal a sharp increase in numbers receiving secondary education, albeit within a fee-paying system which would remain in place until 1967. There was an increase from 48,559 in 1950-51 to 76,843 in 1960, combined also with an increase in the number of secondary schools from 424 to 526 in the same period.⁵³

⁴⁸ John Whyte, ‘Church, State and Society, 1950-70’, in Lee (ed.) *Ireland 1945-70*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 464.

⁵⁰ Adrian E. Raftery and Michael Hout, ‘Maximally Maintained Inequality: Expansion, Reform, and Opportunity in Irish Education, 1921-75’, *Sociology of Education*, vol. 66, no. 1, (Jan. 1993), p. 43.

⁵¹ Seán Farren, *The Politics of Irish Education 1920-65* (Belfast, 1995), p. 221.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Education and the 1960s

Educational priorities are also a reflection of economic developments within Ireland at the mid-point of the twentieth century and the ramifications they had on shaping cultural expression through music and other areas of the arts. Sections of a new generation of children born in the Irish Free State, such as Ó Riada, progressed in an educational system that continued to be framed along an ideological basis that evolved throughout the 1950s. The Catholic Church's concentration on the humane disciplines and its endorsement of the classical liberal education tradition resulted in technical knowledge and education being undervalued.⁵⁴ One of the main organisational evaluations of this period was the findings of the Council of Education in 1954. The Council was established in April 1950 by the then Minister of Education Richard Mulcahy, and was given the task of advising the minister in relation to the function of the primary school as well as the appropriate curriculum that should be pursued.⁵⁵ When the report was eventually released in 1954, it brought with it little new ideas or improvements that could be made within the primary school system. At 300 pages, it gave a long detailed description of the function of the primary school and debated the appropriate curriculum that should be taught, as well as giving an outline history of primary education in Ireland from earliest times up to 1950.⁵⁶ One of the most striking aspects of this document is the great importance that is given to religion in not just the education of children but also in their upbringing. One quotation from the report reads, 'The school exists to assist the work of the parents in the rearing of their children. Their first duty is to train their children in the fear and love of God. That duty becomes the first purpose of the primary school'.⁵⁷

With the introduction of free secondary education in 1967, the 1950s can be looked at as the last decade within which access to second level education was restricted to those who could afford it. During this period and in the decades previous, all secondary education was private and fee paying, therefore isolating a great number of people from receiving a high standard of education. The Catholic Church fully supported the majority of these second level schools with little support from the Department of Education. Like the majority of national schools in the country at the time, secondary schools were run by the Catholic hierarchy and

⁵⁴ Louise Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950: The Undoing of Catholicism* (Dublin, 2002), p. 149.

⁵⁵ Áine Hyland and Kenneth Milne, *Irish Educational Documents, Volume II* (Dublin, 1992), p. 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

financed through fees and Church funds. The Department of Education would not recognise any lay secondary school under Catholic lay management unless it was first sanctioned by the Catholic Bishop in whose diocese they were situated.⁵⁸ A further imbalance that existed within the second level sector surrounded the curriculum which placed undue attention on classical, traditional subjects rather than the sciences that were so often associated with creating a high standard within the workforce. One such example is the fact that in 1955, ninety per cent of boys who completed the Leaving Certificate did Latin as a subject while only nine per cent took French.⁵⁹ The great paradox of Catholic social teaching in the post-war period is that although the educational system was framed in such a way as to solidify the status quo, it had the profound counter-effect of creating an atmosphere of contempt within a younger generation that was emerging throughout the 1950s and would herald a much more innovative period in Irish history, both culturally and socially.

The concept that post-war Irish society was paralysed by a form of economic and cultural stagnation, and that the 1960s saw the surprise emergence of a cultural revolution, is one which ignores the great significance of the 1950s in Ireland's social history. As Enda Delaney suggests, such an outlook is a linear and dichotomous model of social and cultural change that lacks complexity, nuance and conceptual rigour.⁶⁰ What defines the post-war period is not so much the changes that took place, but the atmosphere that developed which allowed such issues to fester and emerge from the 1960s onwards. Although economic, political and religious matters influenced much of the cultural stagnation of the period, one aspect of active engagement is visible within the harsh censorship regime that existed and the extent to which it delayed, rather than eliminated, the cultural evolution that followed. Although censorship had long been a contentious issue during the war years, it reached a pivotal crossroads in the post-war era. The 1950s witnessed a collision of generations on both sides of the censorship debate, one of them ageing and reactionary, the other essentially modernising and libertarian.⁶¹ Literary censorship had impinged on many areas of artistic life since the foundation of the state but there was a growing liberalism emerging which saw the formation of an appeals board in 1946.⁶² Although censorship continued throughout the 1950s, there was certainly a profound shift in approach in the second half of the decade. This

⁵⁸ Séamus Ó Buachalla, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin, 1988), p. 217.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Delaney, 'Modernity, the Past and Politics in Post-War Ireland', p. 108.

⁶¹ Brian Fallon, 'Reflecting on Ireland in the 1950s', in Keogh, O'Shea and Quinn (eds.), *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, p. 33.

⁶² Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p. 533.

was done, not by legislation, but by replacing the existing members of the Censorship Board with a more liberal-minded team, a process in which two successive ministers for justice- James Everett of the second inter-party government, and Oscar Traynor of Fianna Fáil- shared.⁶³ This gradual decline in the severity of censorship is one of the major characteristics of post-war Irish society and formed part of the social and cultural foundations which instigated a much more vibrant period from the 1960s onwards.

Although Telefís Éireann was not established until 1961, the proliferation of British media, both television and print, combined with the huge Irish interest in cinema, ensured that the appetite for such entertainment was never likely to waiver. Cinema had a place in Irish social life long before the effects of television were felt and infiltrated many areas throughout Ireland, both rural and urban, even before the outbreak of the Second World War.⁶⁴ The majority of films being shown originated from Hollywood and estimates suggested that by 1954, one in three people frequented a cinema at least once a week.⁶⁵ However, despite a liberalisation of censorship towards other areas of artistic life in Ireland, cinematic productions continued to be subject to strict censorship, with many licentious or sexually suggestive scenes being removed and many conservative critics labelling the pastime a ‘celluloid’ menace.⁶⁶ Reports from the period suggest that British newspapers were read widely in Ireland and that nearly 400,000 British Sunday newspapers were imported every week in the 1950s.⁶⁷ Indeed, some conservative commentators proposed that the government should impose a special tariff on cheap imported newspapers and magazines to protect ‘innocent Irish minds’.⁶⁸ Unquestionably, British media was having an impact on Irish social attitudes throughout this period. Similar to the influence of the British print media, television from across the Irish sea also had an impact on Irish social affairs even before the foundation of an Irish broadcaster. From the early 1950s, it was possible to pick up the signals of the B.B.C. and I.T.V. transmitters in areas near enough to Wales or Northern Ireland, and hence developed one of the most characteristic features of the Dublin skyline in this period - the forest of tall aerials erected to pick up the distant signals of British

⁶³ John Whyte, ‘Economic Progress and Political Pragmatism, 1957-63’, in Hill (ed.) *A New History of Ireland VII*, p. 301.

⁶⁴ See Ruth Barton, *Irish National Cinema* (London, 2004), pp. 34-64

⁶⁵ Fuller, *Irish Catholicism since 1950*, p.40.

⁶⁶ Gabriel Fallon, ‘Celluloid Menace’, in *The Capuchin Annual* (Dublin, 1937), p. 249.

⁶⁷ Richard S. Devane, *The Imported Press: A National Menace—Some Remedies* (Dublin, 1950), p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

transmitters.⁶⁹ Television represented the defining media impact within Irish society in the second half of the century, particularly with the development of Irish sourced material and the establishment of Telefís Éireann in 1961.

As Ireland entered the 1960s, many of the shackles of the past which structured Irish social policy and culture began to fall away. For forty years up until this point, the Irish Republic attempted to instigate a cultural revolution in which the country was to be Gaelicised – it was to turn inward to its own historical resources, to draw on that indigenous culture which had been all but swamped by the presence of the erstwhile imperial power.⁷⁰ However, as the 1960s arrived, such an approach was one which a new generation found impossible to embrace and it was becoming increasingly evident in all aspects of society.⁷¹ In many respects, despite the generational crossover, the contrast between the immediate post-war period and the 1960s could not be greater in terms of social and cultural progression. As Alvin Jackson contends, the 1950s represented the heyday of an Irish Butskellism, in the sense at least that it was an era characterised by an unrelenting party warfare but also by minimal ideological and policy distinctions.⁷² The 1960s brought forward a new type of approach in which a far more industrious and forward-thinking generation of political elite emerged, as epitomised within the economic approach of both Lemass and Whitaker. In particular, a younger population emerged from these societal developments who were eager and willing to embrace the new opportunities that were offered from having a much more open mind towards culture and identity. Although positive economic matters brought a new sense of purpose to Irish society, the cultural transformation that began had a profound impact on all areas of artistic life. As Fergal Tobin asserts, the great achievement of Irish life in the 1960s was to close the gap which had opened up between theory and reality.⁷³ Post-war Ireland attempted to define itself through a narrow and ill-conceived sense of what it meant to be Gaelic. Irish traditional music, like other artistic practices, found a new atmosphere of innovation emerging during the 1950s amongst a generation of Irish men and women who, unlike their predecessors, were born into an independent Ireland. The 1960s would mark the beginning of an era in which music, language, drama and literature would flourish under the

⁶⁹ Whyte, 'Economic Progress and Political Pragmatism, 1957-63', p. 301.

⁷⁰ Tobin, *The Best of Decades: Ireland in the 1960s*, p. 234.

⁷¹ See Tim Pat Coogan, *Disillusioned Decades: Ireland 1966-87* (Dublin, 1987), p. 2.

⁷² Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: Politics and War* (Oxford, 1999), p. 308.

⁷³ Tobin, *The Best of Decades: Ireland in the 1960s*, p. 235.

influence of this new generation and would fill the gap in artistic life which the post-war period had so ruthlessly exposed.

Ó Riada and Contrasting Decades

As Bertram Cohler argues, particular problems are posed in the study of lives since the course of life may be less continuous and predictable than often assumed.⁷⁴ Just as those surrounding Ó Riada reacted to the manner in which he articulated his ideas, Sarah Moser suggests that strangers can often be analysed solely by their unique individual social and emotional qualities - their personalities rather than their positionalities.⁷⁵ In the same way that Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin argues that Ó Riada approached Irish traditional music from the perspective of an outlier,⁷⁶ Tomás Ó Canainn and Paddy Moloney contend that although endearing himself to musicians and a wider audience through the music of his ensemble template, his positioning as an authoritative voice annoyed countless others.⁷⁷ Although Ó Riada can be viewed as a product of his time, so too can his career and postulating about ensemble templates be considered through the lens of societal contrast. The cultural and economic environment of 1960s Irish society contrasted greatly with that which went before it; in post-war Ireland, the economy failed to develop in a time when most other western societies were enjoying the fruits of a post-war economic boom. There were staggering levels of emigration, particularly among younger generations, and the response to these serious social crises from the political establishment was slow and ineffectual.⁷⁸ Although innovation and cultural praxis are key characteristics of Ó Riada's work during this period, such developments are set within an overall context of transition within Irish society. The 1960s presented an economic landscape which enabled the development of a relationship between cultural innovation and social issues; one which shaped the environment in which Ó Riada would find himself as he developed the concept surrounding a new template for Irish traditional music. In this instance, the correlation between Ó Riada's education and career, and an environment of contrasting decades, produces an audience who share the social significance of musical works

⁷⁴ Bertram Cohler, 'The Human Studies and the Life History: The Social Service Review Lecture', *Social Service Review*, vol. 62, no. 4 (1988), p. 552.

⁷⁵ Sarah Moser, 'Personality: A New Positionality?', *Area*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2008), p. 383.

⁷⁶ Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, 'Crossroads or Twin Track? Innovation and Tradition in Irish Traditional Music', in Fintan Vallely, Hammy Hamilton, Eithne Vallely and Liz Doherty (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil: 1996 The Crossroads Conference* (Cork, 1999), p. 177.

⁷⁷ Interview with Paddy Moloney (7 September 2017); Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, pp. 79-84.

⁷⁸ Eleanor O'Leary, *Youth and Popular Culture in 1950s Ireland* (London, 2018), p. 2.

as a result of sharing the same cultural recognition that artists experience within such circumstances. John Blacking remarks that

Music can express social attitudes and cognitive processes, but it is useful and effective only when it is heard by the prepared and receptive ears of people who have shared, or can share in some way, the cultural and individual experiences of its creators.⁷⁹

If the concept of contrasting decades is one which influences cultural production, then Ó Riada's position within such a timeframe provides a critical form of context in which his work can be viewed. His graduation from university and initial musical output coincides with the second half of the 1950s, one in which a number of factors influence attitudes towards Irish traditional music. These forces are both internal and external, and are determined by economic, linguistic, sociological and many other factors.⁸⁰ Although Ó Riada does not engage in a direct challenge to societal issues of the time, the nature of his work presents a cultural representation of an Irish society in transition; one which reflects broader political and economic issues that defined much of the previous decade.

Early Life

Seán Ó Riada was born in Cork on 1 August 1931 to parents Seán (1900-1979) and Julia (1898-1979) Reidy (nee Creedon). Alongside his sister Louise, Ó Riada was raised in Adare, County Limerick where his father was stationed for a period as a member of An Garda Síochána. Although both his parents were traditional musicians, Ó Riada's musical upbringing spanned both traditional and classical genres. As Ó Canainn outlines, Ó Riada's mother regretted she never had professional training in music and, on discovering that her son had music in him, she decided to have him properly trained.⁸¹ Ó Canainn's use of the word 'properly' presents an early indication of the model of musical training Ó Riada was introduced to as a child; one which prioritised classical rather than traditional music as a symbol of musical ability and status. Ó Riada became proficient on piano, organ and violin at a young age, a significant factor in the context of his role within Irish traditional music in the years that followed. However, it must be recognised that despite a history of Irish traditional music on both sides of his family, Ó Riada is, in the first instance, pushed towards classical forms of music; a trend mirrored in the prioritisation that takes place between the English and

⁷⁹ John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (London, 1976), p. 54.

⁸⁰ Ríonach Uí Ógáin, 'Traditional Music and Irish Cultural History', in Gerard Gillen & Harry White (eds.) *Irish Musical Studies Volume 3: Music and Irish Cultural History* (Dublin, 1995), p. 94.

⁸¹ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 4.

Irish language throughout the nineteenth century.⁸² After attending primary school in Adare, Ó Riada was sent as a boarding student in 1943 to St. Finbarr's College, Farranferris, Cork where he completed his secondary education and continued his classical music lessons under Aloys Fleischmann senior (1880-1964) for piano and organ. Although Ó Riada's relationship with music at this time is defined through his classical training, Ó Canainn briefly presents an early indication of the placement of Irish traditional music in Ó Riada's priorities at that time. Speaking about a regular Sunday night concert in Cork arranged by Canon Connolly from St. Finbarr's, Ó Canainn asserts that

Some of Seán's classmates remember that he was playing classical music on the violin until he realised that his listeners were not really paying much attention, so he changed to céilí music and got huge applause.⁸³

As will be outlined through Chapters 2 and 3, Ó Riada's later preoccupation with presenting an artistic representation of a Gaelic and rural way of life through the medium of Irish traditional music, song and storytelling can be drawn upon when evaluating an early event such as that presented by Ó Canainn. Within this situation, Ó Riada is exposed to the visceral reactions of fellow students, many of whom shared a rural background similar to that of Ó Riada, towards the sound of Irish traditional music. In this instance, this is a basic but fundamental example of how Irish traditional music evoked an environmental reaction within an audience and was clearly recognised by the young Ó Riada at that stage.

The role of creative settings within Ó Riada's life is represented in a variety of ways but is perhaps most potent within the setting of University College Cork (UCC), where he both began and ended his career. Entering UCC in 1948, Ó Riada took First Arts with Irish, Greek, Latin, English and Music. At the beginning of his second year, he attained permission to begin a First Bachelor of Music, together with Greek and Latin in Second Arts. However, after failing Greek and Latin during the summer exams, Ó Riada abandoned his BA and completed a Bachelor of Music in 1952. Marrying Ruth Coughlan on 1 September 1953, whom he met as a student in UCC, Ó Riada embarked on what can be described as the formal beginning of his professional life. Moving from Radio Éireann, to the Abbey Theatre, and finally to UCC, an obvious struggle for Ó Riada was his inability, at times, to progress his vast array of interests within the context of managing day-to-day responsibilities. Unless directly related to matters of his work within Irish traditional music, aspects of Ó Riada's

⁸² See Aidan Doyle, *A History of the Irish Language: From the Norman Invasion to Independence* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 107-160.

⁸³ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 9.

personal life are not adjudicated upon as part of this study. However, just as the historical context of the period is relevant to evaluating his career, elements of a personal nature also provide context regarding the early stages of his professional life. Ó Riada's output within Irish traditional music, and other genres, are linked with both his personal demeanour and the environment in which he works; issues which characterise the first section of Ó Riada's career. As a result, the initial period of his professional life is one in which artistic output is limited, but personal and artistic struggles are evident.

Music and Environment

The role of personal and professional environments are factors which underscore much of Ó Riada's work throughout the course of this thesis. However, through an analysis of the history of Ó Riada's early career, the significance of music and environment is evident throughout various stages of his life, particularly within Irish traditional music. A key facet of this process is Ó Riada's uncertainty surrounding his own professional ambitions, including the suitability of his early working environments to match such aspirations. Within this context, Ó Riada's career progression reflects changes in both work and performance settings which are linked to wider environmental factors in music, as well as influencing his personal demeanour in approaching his various musical endeavours. The role of environment in Ó Riada's relationship with Irish traditional music, as well as influencing how his work was perceived within each setting, is reflected in how his personal and professional life moved from a variety of environments throughout his career. However, in viewing Ó Riada's career through such a prism, broader issues surrounding the influence of 'place' need to be explored. The environment in music, both for the musician, as well as for the audience, can often have direct implications for the way in which works are viewed. In his study on the foundations of music history, Carl Dahlhaus contends that

No-one has ever denied or overlooked the fact that works of music have been viewed differently at different times and under different circumstances. The problem is that these changes used to be seen in relation to an 'ideal object' which a work was thought to represent, i.e. they were taken as approximations of a 'real' meaning which might perhaps never be fully disclosed but still represented a goal to be attained by various means.⁸⁴

Anthony Pryer asserts that 'evaluations of musical works do not rest simply on a desire of their composers to be original, but on whether those composers can embody within their

⁸⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 151.

originality, their differentness, a complex bridge which connects “the new” to current expectations and transforms them.⁸⁵ Such an interpretation questions the role of personal perceptions of environment within music and how we identify and characterise such settings, particularly over the course of time. Timothy Rice explores some of this within his examination of time, place, and metaphor in musical experience, in which he proposes a three-dimensional space incorporating these factors. Time and place are often set together, due to their mutual influence on each other but a separation in terms of analysis can prove both beneficial and contributes to a more rounded contextualisation.⁸⁶

Just as Moser highlights the dominant position of personality over positionality in Chapter 1, environment within music hinges on the perceptions of the main characters involved and how they perceive the influence of place within the music they perform, or what they are listening to. Martin Clayton asserts that

Music is meaningful insofar as it offers perceptible affordances... elements and structures are themselves imagined by means of metaphors derived from the relationship between individual and environment.⁸⁷

Focus is placed upon the relationship that musicians have with their environment, due mainly in part to the obvious nature of music and arrangements, and the inspiration garnered from identity and place. The link between audience and environment is not necessarily as clear-cut. Environment in a performance setting is heavily influenced by context and any tensions that may exist between the musician’s perception of the chosen environment and its purpose, versus the perception of the audience. Although this could be adapted to a variety of situations, an obvious example is that of music performed in a public, outdoor setting. As Robert Clark contends, ‘music heard outdoors is music un-shielded from its context, music that as a result can neither be abstract science nor narcissistic aesthetic indulgence.’⁸⁸ This relationship between musician and environment, versus audience and environment, is often linked with issues surrounding identity. As Simon Frith remarks, ‘identity is ultimately a matter of ritual; it describes one’s place in a dramatised pattern of relationships.’⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Anthony Pryer, ‘Re-Thinking History. What Is Music ‘History’ and How Is It Written? Anthony Pryer Reflects on the Problems of Music Historians and on Some Recent Histories of Early Music’, *The Musical Times*, vol. 135, no. 1821 (1994), p. 682.

⁸⁶ See Timothy Rice, ‘Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography’, *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 47, no. 2 (2003), pp. 151-179.

⁸⁷ Martin Clayton, *Music, Time and Place: Essays in Comparative Musicology* (Delhi, 2007), p. 217.

⁸⁸ Robert S. Clark, ‘Music in Its Time and Place’, *The Hudson Review*, vol. 35, no. 4 (1982-1983), p. 602.

⁸⁹ Frith, ‘Music and Identity’, p. 125.

In an Irish context, a link can be made to regionalism within Irish traditional music and the sense of both place and identity that it evokes.⁹⁰ Yet, far from being an organic environment, regional styles of Irish traditional music are also likened to other musical environments which are dependent on time and place and the influence that both have on the individuals involved. Kevin Whelan asserts that

Regions are not just inherited, passive or inert, but are proactive, created by specific people in specific circumstances.⁹¹

The sense that regionality within Irish traditional music has been constructed and shaped over time again has an impact on how performers and audiences interpret their musical environments. Tim Collins also argues that

The concept of the region for example, itself a spatial construct, often informs discussion in traditional music. In particular, the notion of ‘regional style’ is a familiar and important pairing in debates around traditional instrumental and vocal music.⁹²

Therefore, the fluidity of value within environments of regional styles is as dependent on the impact of time and subsequent changes in views, as can be highlighted across musical genres. This is particularly prevalent in the work of Ó Riada in which regionalism within Irish traditional music is a feature of discussion and debate, rather than an instigator and basis for environmental changes as a musician or composer.

Ó Riada and Environment

Environment can act as inspiration for musicians; among other things, it can act as a home for certain works; it can act as a form of authenticating music; and it can act as a setting to commercialise and distribute a work. Although part of a wider framework of contextualisation within music, environment and a sense of place influences several aspects of how music is both produced and received. This in turn can produce a chain of influence which permeates each aspect of the artistic process, from composition and arrangement, to performance and wider public reactions.⁹³ For Ó Riada, much can be attested to his search for a spiritual home to find peace, both professionally and personally, and the representation of Cúil Aodha as such a setting. Over the course of his education and career, Ó Riada moved through a variety of environments which are reflected in the depth of work he produced

⁹⁰ Regionalism is a feature of Ó Riada’s wider discussion on Irish traditional music and is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁹¹ Whelan, ‘The Bases of Regionalism’, p. 26.

⁹² Collins, *Music Mountain*, p. 1.

⁹³ Ó Riada *Collection*, Section 3.1–3.2.2.

within each setting. Beginning as a student in University College Cork from 1948-52; working in Radio Éireann in Dublin from 1953-55; a short period in London and Paris from March-April 1955; back in Dublin working in the Abbey Theatre and living in Galloping Green Stillorgan from 1955-62; and settling in Cork and working in UCC from 1963.⁹⁴

The early parts of Ó Riada's career point to an individual who is deeply conflicted and frustrated by the world in which he was operating. His appointment as Assistant Director of Music in Radio Éireann at the age of twenty-one in 1953 was a path which ultimately hindered Ó Riada's artistic progression and drove him into a state of severe disillusionment with both the professional and personal aspects of his life. Within three years of his appointment, Ó Riada had become increasingly frustrated with the bureaucracy of his role and the space it offered him for his own creativity. Ó Canainn asserts that within the role

Seán found much of his work as Assistant Director inspiring: he enjoyed arranging concerts and details of orchestral performances but there were other aspects of the job which he disliked intensely... It gradually became apparent that Seán was not the most suitable person for this kind of office work. He would set about it diligently but might then drift towards another aspect of the job. At other times he would be attracted by something new and exciting, until he tired of that as well.⁹⁵

Although adept at many aspects of the job, Ó Riada was not suited to such general office work that was also required and he often focused on his own compositional work, which he would submit for broadcast. Radio Éireann in the 1950s had a conservative policy in regard to what music they would accept from composers and they rarely accepted newly composed pieces, especially from their own staff.⁹⁶ The artistic crisis that ensued for Ó Riada would reach a crescendo in early 1955 when his own personal and family life was directly impacted. From personal correspondence, it is evident that Ó Riada developed a plan in which he would leave his position in Radio Éireann and move to London for a year to work on his own compositions and developing his career. Ruth would leave their new-born son, Peadar, with Seán's parents and she would travel to Italy, where she had family ties, to find work. Subsequently, Ruth instead moved to Paris as her own aunt in Italy expressed deep concern at her plan and stated she would have no room to accommodate her and that she would find no work in Italy anyway.⁹⁷ Although hoping to find some sense of contentment in this complex situation, Ó Riada descended into further despair. He failed to find work in which he could

⁹⁴ Ibid., Item 597.

⁹⁵ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 28.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 23.

⁹⁷ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 253.

develop his musical ideas and was forced to take a job in a small bookshop.⁹⁸ It was from London in March 1955 that Ó Riada sends his letters of resignation from Radio Éireann to Ruth in Paris for her to type and forward to Dublin. To Maurice Gorham, Director of Broadcasting, he wrote

I regret that reasons of health, both my own & that of my wife, have made it necessary for me to resign, as well as the fact that I believe I am not a suitable person for the position.⁹⁹

In a further letter to Fachtna Ó hAnnracháin, Director of Music, he outlines the reasons for his departure

Due to various factors which have arisen, including a mild breakdown, I will not be returning to the office, or for that matter, to Ireland, for some time, so I am writing you this letter in lieu of a verbal explanation.¹⁰⁰

The use of the phrase ‘mild breakdown’ is extraordinary in both the manner of its use within the letter, and the wider implications it poses on Ó Riada’s state of mind during this period. In tandem with formally resigning his position within Radio Éireann, Ó Riada expresses personal disillusionment about the setting he was trying to work within, articulating his hatred for London and his strong sense of being spiritually and emotionally paralysed. In a series of letters to Ruth in March 1955, Ó Riada writes in a manner which reflects the extent to which his professional crisis had developed into a much wider personal one. Writing on a section titled ‘Thursday’, he indicates that he was forced to pawn his hat in order to send telegrams as money had practically run out and that he was considering doing so again in order to fund a trip to Paris.¹⁰¹ Writing in a section of the letter titled ‘Friday Night’, Ó Riada states

What I had intended saying but did not get to finishing the sentence is that I HATE THIS FUCKING PLACE with its filthy people living filthy little lives oh my God Ruth I’m just home after my dinner I came home (home!) in the tube & the noise & the awful people nearly drove me mad I sat all the time with eyes closed I was afraid I would go mad if I opened them (did you ever look anyone in the face politely while saying desperately to yourself I hate you fuck you).¹⁰²

Once more, on Saturday, he writes

⁹⁸ Ibid., Item 264 (3).

⁹⁹ Ibid., Item 264 (1).

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Item 264 (2).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Item 264 (3).

¹⁰² Ibid.

I feel an awful lack of permanence in myself and a great need for you... I feel more or less spiritually & emotionally paralysed.¹⁰³

Abandoning London in March 1955 and travelling to Paris to be with Ruth, little information exists as to what he did while in France. It is clear that he remained in poor spirits, returning to Ireland in April of that year.¹⁰⁴

Although presenting the most challenging aspect of Ó Riada's life, this period of discontentment, both personally and professionally, marks the beginning of a transition within his working life that would produce much of the material that would shape his influence within various spheres of musical and artistic life. In light of these factors during the first two years of his career, it is not surprising that the majority of Ó Riada's work, within Irish traditional music and other endeavours, gather pace from 1955 onwards when, on his return from Paris, he takes up the position of Musical Director at the Abbey Theatre. As an independent writer and composer, Ó Riada developed an important working relationship with Gael Linn, one which not only engaged him in a variety of written and compositional projects but also played a significant role in other aspects of his career involving film and television commissions.¹⁰⁵

The final environment Ó Riada worked and lived within was that of the west Cork Gaeltacht of Cúil Aodha, alongside his teaching position in University College Cork. Although much of his previous endeavours overlap with this period in Cork, a key section of his career, that of liturgical music, would blossom through his founding of Cór Cúil Aodha in 1963. Although shifts in environment feature throughout his career, Ó Riada's decision to leave Dublin for a rural Gaeltacht region goes against much of what would be expected of a young composer, who was surrounded by all of the stimulants that a capital city such as Dublin had to offer. However, as Louis Marcus contends, Ó Riada saw his work as being part of a national reawakening; a short-lived Gaelic renaissance that took hold during the 1960s.¹⁰⁶ Writing from Cork, Ruth's father Edward Coughlan mirrors much of the sentiment that was associated with such a move when he urges Ruth to

Tell John when he leaves Dublin he is leaving Ireland. If you leave Dublin you are lost anywhere in Ireland. You are out of touch, no contacts, you know nothing of what is happening up there until you read about it. So unless he has, or is sure, of a good

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., Items 270-271.

¹⁰⁵ Ó Riada's relationship with Gael Linn is discussed more widely in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁶ Louis Marcus, 'Seán Ó Riada and the Ireland of the Sixties' in Harris and Freyer (eds.) *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, p. 16.

job here, stay in Dublin until he is sure. This place is dead, ‘stone dead’ and will remain so.¹⁰⁷

Although forming part of his engagement with Gaelic culture, Ó Riada’s financial difficulties could not sustain such a move without the guarantee of meaningful employment, as borne out by the continuous perilous nature of his finances.¹⁰⁸ Much of this is laid bare in correspondence between Ó Riada and Aloys Fleischmann, Professor of Music at University College Cork and son of Fleischmann senior who taught Ó Riada as a child, who acts as confidant and formal supporter of his application for the position of Assistant in the Music Department. Therefore, Ó Riada’s relocation to Cork signifies a shift that is both personal in nature, while simultaneously a key factor within the dynamic of his work within Irish traditional music¹⁰⁹

Ó Riada and Irish Traditional Music

Ó Riada’s relationship with Irish traditional music incorporates both his own perception about the history and definition of the subject, alongside his practical engagement with the genre throughout the course of his life and career. During his years as a student, there was little to suggest that a significant proportion of Ó Riada’s future career would focus on Irish traditional music, with his reputation as a student forming around his talent as one of Cork’s most promising violinists at that time.¹¹⁰ Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that Ó Riada actually played traditional music at all during his time as a student in UCC, with his main musical activities being either jazz, pop or South American style.¹¹¹ Considering the wide span of musical interests within Ireland during the first half of the twentieth century, Ó Riada’s time as a student mirrored wider changes that were taking place. Traditional musicians such as John Kelly believed that major urban centres such as Dublin were not engaged with Irish traditional music during these years, focusing instead on pop and other genres.¹¹² In light of such circumstances within Irish social life, it makes the development of Ó Riada’s interest in Irish traditional music all the more intriguing. Ferriter suggests that a frustration developed within Irish society during the middle decades of the twentieth century

¹⁰⁷ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 839.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ This is discussed further in Chapter 2 as it pertains to the functionality of Ceoltóirí Cualann.

¹¹⁰ Marcus, ‘Seán Ó Riada and the Ireland of the Sixties’, p. 17.

¹¹¹ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 79.

¹¹² Interview with John Kelly, Feb. 1976 (National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, CO139/CO140).

as there was a clear lack of attention to developing a creative Irish music scene, with the majority of focus on showbands and jazz groups who rarely played Irish music.¹¹³

However, it is within this setting that Ó Riada found an unlikely home within the sphere of Irish traditional music, which in turn is influenced by his broader musical education in classical and other genres. It is acknowledged by Seán Ó Sé, as well as being apparent in Ó Riada's own personal papers, that Irish traditional music was far from his first love but rather it was something he explored with great interest, like so many other areas within the artistic world.¹¹⁴ This distinct interest in varied musical tastes is clearly evident in many of his personal notes, where ideas and compositions are entwined.¹¹⁵ As part of his letters and handwritten notes, Ó Riada devoted innumerable pages to building a repertoire and structure for Irish traditional performances and programming. This included making extensive lists of tunes and songs, outlining the way in which they were to be performed, and structuring a full concert in its entirety. Countless pages contain plans which were started, edited mid-way through and eventually crossed out and abandoned.¹¹⁶ These concepts, like many others within Ó Riada's notes, are often lacking in detail as he moves from topic to topic in quick succession. When encountering one of his notepads, a single space on a page moves from exploring the intrinsic nature of traditional music, to developing ideas for a radio or television programme, to putting together his next class for his students, to composing an opera, or simply drawing out what work he needs carried out on his house.

Speaking about moves to push Irish composers towards a greater degree of European influences in the early 1960s, Ó Riada asserts that there are

no more than 2,000 people here who would pay to go regularly once a week to orchestral concerts for the right reasons. There are, at the very least, half-a-million people who are interested in traditional music to the exclusion of all other kinds, and if we provided them with music which developed out of this tradition, they would listen to it. But we have a tremendous inferiority complex about it all, and people flock to hear Bach, etc., because it is the thing to do, not because they enjoy it.¹¹⁷

As is apparent within his own personal writing, a central theme which Ó Riada explored musically is the idea that Irish traditional music should not be placed within a rigid framework in which it is isolated from outside influence and one-dimensional in nature, but

¹¹³ Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*, p.304.

¹¹⁴ *Ó Riada Collection*, Items 253-346; Interview with Seán Ó Sé (31 Jan. 2016).

¹¹⁵ Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Section 2.5–2.7.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Ó Riada, 'Talking to Sean O Riada', *Irish Times*, 11 February 1961, p. 10.

rather that a compromise is reached between the solo traditional ideal and group practice.¹¹⁸

He argues that

Music should belong to everybody – for instance, if a Mozart Gavotte is played, I'd like to see people get up and dance to it. Instead there's this ritual thing in which you have the celebrant – namely the conductor: and his acolytes – namely the orchestra – and the congregation – namely the audience – assisting. It makes the whole affair so much more remote. People go into a concert, then out, and that is that. They've just listened passively and not taken part in any way.¹¹⁹

Ó Canainn further contends that, within a group context, Ó Riada's aim was to let people hear how Irish traditional music, played by the best players, sounded and to set a standard by which traditional performance could be judged.¹²⁰

Broadcasting

If Ó Riada's views about Irish traditional music are intertwined with a variety of other projects throughout his writings, it is perhaps through the medium of radio that his most coherent and consistent message on this subject can be found.¹²¹ Through programmes such as *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* (broadcast from 1961) and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radió* (broadcast from 1962), Ó Riada engages in a process that is centred on musical production. He actively seeks out performers, both vocal and instrumental, in order to produce a distinct Gaelic production that incorporates various strands of Irish traditional music, song, poetry, and recitations.¹²² However, within his series *Our Musical Heritage*, music and song act simply as tools to emphasise his arguments, with the spoken word representing the core method of communication. Broadcast on Radió Éireann from 7th July to the 13th October 1962,¹²³ the lecture series of programmes explicate Irish traditional vocal and instrumental music and reflect Ó Riada's developing expertise on the subject. As Sean Williams and Lillis Ó Laoire contend, the series was an important landmark in achieving popular recognition for

¹¹⁸ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage* (Episode 13), RTÉ (6 Oct. 1962).

¹¹⁹ Ó Riada, 'Talking to Sean O Riada', p. 10.

¹²⁰ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 79.

¹²¹ This is reflective of the wider influence of radio in society and the role of broadcasting in the development, dissemination, and popularity of Irish traditional music. See Daithí Kearney, 'Radio and Regions in Irish Traditional Music', in Thérèse Smith (ed.) *Ancestral Imprints: Histories of Irish Traditional Music and Dance* (Cork, 2012), p. 128; and Lyn Gorman and David McLean, *Media and Society Into the 21st Century: A historical Introduction* (Chichester, 2009), pp. 49-68.

¹²² Both *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* are explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

¹²³ Following a two-week gap between the first and second episodes, *Our Musical Heritage* was then broadcast weekly on Saturday evenings and comprised of fourteen episodes in total.

traditional music, albeit one in which Ó Riada structured programmes around his own preferred exponents of technique and style.¹²⁴ Thomas Kinsella notes that

The preparation of these talks was part of a process of creative exploration and discovery. It helped him [Ó Riada] to establish a necessary order and settle a strong foundation for his masterly practice.¹²⁵

As part of his opening remarks, Ó Riada explains the reasoning behind the need for such a series,

...my intentions are mainly two: to introduce those not acquainted with it already, the rich and comparatively untouched pastures of Irish traditional music, both vocal and instrumental; and for those who already know the subject, to criticise (to some extent) the present condition of Irish traditional music with a view to suggesting some kind of standard.¹²⁶

His introduction to the series, and the manner in which he lays the foundations for the arguments that followed, are clearly based around a fixed set of definitions which he sets alongside his own perceptions about how traditional music is not a fixed and unchangeable object over time. Ó Riada surmises that

You might compare the progress of tradition in Ireland to the flow of a river. Foreign bodies may fall in, or be dropped in, or thrown in, but they do not divert the course of the river, nor do they stop it flowing; it absorbs them, carrying them with it and it flows onward.¹²⁷

He characterises, from the outset, that ‘traditional’ can be defined as the untouched, unwesternized, orally transmitted music which is still, to the best of his knowledge, the most popular type of music in Ireland at that time.¹²⁸

A notable feature of *Our Musical Heritage*, in the context of Ó Riada’s views surrounding group musical activity, is the emphasis he places upon the recognition of the solo instrumentalist as the historically accurate representation of Irish traditional music and that all further activity stems from such an understanding. Although his method of defining and

¹²⁴ Sean Williams and Lillis Ó Laoire, *Bright Star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish Song Man* (New York, 2011), pp. 30-31.

¹²⁵ Thomas Kinsella, ‘Preface’, in Tomás Ó Canainn and Thomas Kinsella (eds.) *Our Musical Heritage: Seán Ó Riada* (Portlaoise, 1982), p.11.

¹²⁶ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 1, 7 July 1962.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid; In the context of the period in question, it is factually wrong to constitute traditional music as the most popular form of music. In particular, both Méabh Ní Fhuartháin and Rebecca Miller highlight the popularity of Irish showbands in the 1950s and 1960s. See Méabh Ní Fhuartháin, ‘Parish Halls, Dance Halls, and Marquees: Developing and Regulating Social-Dance Spaces, 1900–60’, *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 54, no. 1 (2019), pp. 218-250; Rebecca Miller, ‘Roseland, Jetland, Cloudland, and Beyond: Irish Showbands and Economic Change, 1958–1975’, *New Hibernia Review*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2014), pp. 77–92.

characterising aspects of Irish traditional music fuel many reactions to the radio series, greater degrees of criticism surround Ó Riada's observations about individual performance methods, which he notes alongside each example he draws upon. One such early observation by Ó Riada critiques the style of uilleann pipers and the manner in which they utilise the melodic devices at their disposal.¹²⁹ He notes that

The piper of taste will employ a judicious mixture of all these devices, using them sufficiently to provide constant variety, but not using any device in such a way as to make it seem as if this is the only trick he knows.¹³⁰

At the centre of Ó Riada's broadcast work relating to Irish traditional music is his continued hierarchy of analytical tools; consistently referencing historical facts as the basis of performing and commenting upon style and technique, and his interpretation of such facts as part of his own individual perceptions. In the context of critical analysis, and the role of individual perception, Edward Cone states that

It is the perceived composition that is the object of critical and interpretive thought. The interesting 'facts' about such a work are not those that are simply true, but those that are relevant to our perceptions. Thus, historical data may be correct, analyses may be textually demonstrable; but our opinion as to the applicability of the data, of the significance of the analysis, depends on our perception of the composition.¹³¹

Such a definition fits well in the context of Ó Riada's overall positioning of himself throughout *Our Musical Heritage*, as well as shaping the reaction his views received. Although criticism of the series was based on his own critiquing of individual aspects of Irish traditional music, Ó Riada articulated his views on the basis that they were both factually and historically correct, rather than a broader point of view.

Solo Tradition

Ó Riada's production of *Our Musical Heritage* centred on a consistent formula of critiquing individual instruments used within Irish traditional music, together with the use of various musical examples to highlight both his central points, as well as regional nuances in style. The central premise he builds within his section on instrumental music relates to the centrality of solo expression and its relationship with the singing tradition. He outlines that

¹²⁹ Further examples are included in the next section on 'Solo Tradition'; Also, a discussion on reaction to *Our Musical Heritage* is featured in Chapter 4.

¹³⁰ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 7, 25 August 1962.

¹³¹ Edward Cone, 'The Authority of Music Criticism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 34 (1981), pp. 5-6.

Irish traditional instrumental music is closely related to Irish vocal music, sean-nós singing. Irish music is entirely a matter of solo expression and not of group activity. It is a direct expression by an individual musician or singer. It is a matter of personality – of musical personality. Everything that comes in the way of that direct expression beclouds and confuses it.¹³²

It is within this context that he made some of his most controversial comments when speaking not just about instrumentation, but a lack of historic understanding by musicians. During the conclusion of his segment on uilleann pipe playing on 25 August 1962, Ó Riada states that

there is an extraordinary lack of real discussion of Irish traditional music by the players themselves, whether they are pipers, fiddle players, flute players, or what-have-you. Until the players start to discuss matters of technique and style, as a general and necessary practice, they will be depending on instinct to guide them, and instinct, I'm afraid, is a notoriously unreliable guide.¹³³

This view from Ó Riada, that issues surrounding technique and style are as much attributable to a lack of discourse amongst traditional musicians, as they are about the music itself, is a central context in which his arguments and musical actions should be evaluated. Ó Riada is framing his definition of traditional music around verbalising an orally transmitted genre; one in which he separates the oral transmission of the music from the verbal understanding of its meaning. His reference to 'instinct' as a guide for musicians, albeit put forward in a direct manner, suggests that oral transmission alone is an insufficient process in understanding and expressing an accurate set of stylistic principles that are reflective of Irish traditional solo performance. Ó Riada's focus on the instinct of a soloist, more often based on particular musicians and their influence on other players, is continuously drawn upon during his discussions of various instruments. Speaking about the fiddle, and the influence of Sligo musician Michael Coleman, he notes that

The tragedy is that so many fiddle players nowadays are imitating that highly personal style of his [Coleman] instead of developing the styles of their own areas to suit themselves. An imitation is only an imitation, no matter how good it is, a sign that the player lacks imagination, a confession of failure.¹³⁴

Once more, this plays upon the character of the musician, rather than a simple criticism of the music or performance itself. Within his criticism of the fiddle, Ó Riada most notably questions the entire basis for the use of the piano to accompany traditional fiddle playing. As

¹³² Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 12, 29 September 1962.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Episode 7, 25 August 1962.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Episode 8, 1 September 1962.

with many other aspects of his critiques, Ó Riada places his arguments within historical precedent and the direction taken by musicians over time.

It [the piano] has become a symbol of respectability. The house that has a piano looks down on the house that hasn't, even if the piano is never played. The piano is an excellent instrument, of course, for playing serious European music, but it is not suitable for Irish music. Yet how many houses are there in the country in which you will find a piano, the sole function of which seems to be the support of vases of artificial flowers, china dogs, candlesticks, and other ornaments.¹³⁵

Ó Riada's criticism of the use of the piano in Irish traditional music is distinctive in terms of his own position within such a debate. Unlike the sharp criticism he places upon other instruments during *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada himself is not only a piano player, but he also performs Irish traditional music on the instrument himself in later performances.¹³⁶

Within this broadcast, Ó Riada intertwines both the instinct of the solo musician, alongside the perceived social value of certain instruments, rather than a simple musical distinction. As a result, he is positioning the use of the piano within Irish traditional music as a means of bridging a social divide and thus limiting the performance of the soloist as a result. He recounts how a

traditional fiddle player who insists on a piano accompaniment is falling into the same trap of 'respectability'. He has a suspicion that classical music, which he may dislike, is somehow more respectable than Irish music and he must have a piano accompaniment too. Someone might even call him a 'violinist'.¹³⁷

What is evident from his comments is the fact that Ó Riada places huge emphasis on individual expression by a musician, and any layer of accompaniment or individual mechanisms that may be used to diminish such necessary displays. Discussing the ability of accordion players to express themselves musically, in line with other traditional instruments, he argues that

The accordion player cannot do this [personal expression]. He does not make the notes, they are already there, ready to sound at the pressing of a button, produced in an almost entirely mechanical fashion. He has only to press a button and pull or push the bellows. The tone and intonation of the ensuing note has already been decided for him by the maker. Because of this, individual musical expression becomes extremely

¹³⁵ Ibid., Episode 13, 6 October 1962; See Aileen Dillane, *The Ivory Bridge: Piano Accompaniment on 78 rpm Recorded Sources of Irish Traditional Dance Music in America, c. 1910–1945*, MA thesis in Ethnomusicology, University of Limerick, 1998; Charles Fanning, 'Eleanor Kane Neary and the Piano in Irish Traditional Music', *American Music*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2012), pp. 453-467.

¹³⁶ Gael Linn released the album, *Port na bPúcaí*, in 2014 which contained previously unreleased archive recordings from Ó Riada. As part of the album, numerous piano tracks are included from Ó Riada in which he performs at concerts at University College Dublin in March 1971 and Trinity College Dublin in May 1971.

¹³⁷ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

difficult if not impossible for him. For this reason alone, if not for any other, the use of the accordion as a solo instrument in Irish traditional music is to be deplored.¹³⁸

The extent to which Ó Riada deliberately provokes reaction through his statements is obvious not just through what he directly criticises, but also through his suggestions as to why such circumstances arose over time. However, the tone of his comments are considered by Lillis Ó Laoire as simply being employed by Ó Riada as a means of encouraging wider critical debate on Irish traditional music at that time.¹³⁹ Challenging Ó Riada in later years about his broadcasts and his emphasis on such a combative approach, Ó Canainn states that ‘he commented that to make a point strongly, one sometimes had to overstate the case a little.’¹⁴⁰ Ó Canainn’s questioning of Ó Riada is clearly emanating from the reaction of musicians, such as himself, towards the sharpest of his criticisms about the limitations of certain instruments. Ó Riada’s intimation that it was sometimes necessary to overstate the case a little to get a point across, is at its most potent in this section about the accordion. Throughout the *Our Musical Heritage* series, when speaking about an individual instrument, Ó Riada plays recordings of various musicians playing such instruments, as means of an example. However, in the case of the accordion, he chooses to highlight his points regarding ornamentation on the instrument by playing phrases on the piano himself. The sole accordion player he does refer to and broadcast is Sonny Brogan, as an example of the appropriate use of the instrument. Brogan, who at the time of broadcast was already part of Ó Riada’s new ensemble template, is praised for his understanding of the instrument, when he comments that

He understands the limitations of his instrument, but strives to counteract these, not by wrongly placed ornamentation, but by emphasising the traditional elements... Too little ornamentation is better than too much. We should always be able to hear the tune distinctly.¹⁴¹

Although *Our Musical Heritage* is produced in a lecture series fashion, Ó Riada’s segment on the accordion is far less formal than any other section of the series, due in most part to his tone. Concluding that particular section, Ó Riada’s voice shows clear frustration when stating that

I wish, and indeed I wish again, that all Irish accordion players would drown, muffle, destroy, subdue, or some other fashion, silence the bass of their instrument. I haven’t

¹³⁸ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 12, 29 September 1962.

¹³⁹ Lillis Ó Laoire, *Re-imagining Tradition: Ó Riada’s Musical Legacy in the 21st Century*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 18 (Cork, 2009) p. 3.

¹⁴⁰ Ó Canainn, ‘Musical Editor’s Preface’, in Ó Canainn and Kinsella (eds.) *Our Musical Heritage: Seán Ó Riada*, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 12, 29 September 1962.

yet heard an accordion player who knew the right bass to play, and it's far better to play no bass anyway. It only interferes with the tune and confuses it.¹⁴²

Group Performance

In contrast to Ó Riada's critiquing of solo performance within Irish traditional music, his discussion in relation to group activity presents both a rebuke to preceding models, and a presentation of his own 'ideal' ensemble template. From the very outset of the penultimate episode of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, Ó Riada frames his argument as a direct reaction to the sustained use of the céilí band as a form of group activity within Irish traditional music. The céilí band, which was popularised throughout the first half of the twentieth century, comprised up to ten members, including fiddle, flutes, other traditional melody instruments, piano and drums.¹⁴³ In particular, Ó Riada directed his criticism of the promotion of the céilí band model at Seamus Clandillon, the first director of broadcasting from 1926 at the Irish Free State's radio station 2RN. Clandillon played a significant role in spreading the concept of the céilí band by arranging for bands to be broadcast regularly on 2RN.¹⁴⁴ At the core of Ó Riada's contention is not a questioning of the historical origins of the céilí band model, but rather, lamenting Clandillon's sustained use and lack of development of the template to adequately reflect the origins of Irish traditional music.

As part of his opening remarks, Ó Riada maintains that as Irish traditional music is historically a solo effort, traditional musicians engaging in group activity must ensure that they preserve their 'individuality'.¹⁴⁵ If the intention of *Our Musical Heritage* was to inform and set standards, then Ó Riada's comments relating to, what he terms as 'group activity', are by far the most significant for the purposes of this research. Although forming the shortest section of the entire series, a segment of episode thirteen, his critique of the céilí band model and layout of his own new ensemble template go far beyond the critique and definition model of earlier programmes. Speaking about the progression of the céilí band model, he remarks that

One might expect that, after a certain time, the céilí bands would have managed to work out some kind of compromise between the solo traditional idea and group activity. But instead of developing this kind of compromise, the ceili band leaders took the easy and wrong way out, tending more and more to imitate swing or jazz

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Brian Lawlor and Adrian Scahill, 'Céilí', in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland, Vol. 2* (Dublin, 2013), p. 183.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 182; Also see Fintan Vallely (ed.) *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music* (Cork, 2011), pp. 45-48.

¹⁴⁵ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

bands which play an entirely different type of music and are organised on different principles... the whole idea of variation, the whole idea of the personal utterance – are abandoned. Instead, everyone takes hold of a tune and belts away at it without stopping. The result is a rhythmic but meaningless noise with as much relation to music as the buzzing of a bluebottle in an upturned jam jar.¹⁴⁶

Unlike previous comments relating to individual instruments and musicians, Ó Riada postulates about an ‘ideal’ ensemble, placing emphasis on the significance of variety within such group playing, as expressed through variations in performance. He argues that such a template

must not, therefore, flog away all the time, with all the instruments going at once, like present-day céilí bands. Ideally, it would begin by stating the basic skeleton of the tune to be played; this would then be ornamented and varied by solo instruments, or by small groups of solo instruments. The more variation the better, so long as it has its roots in the tradition, and serves to extend that tradition rather than destroy it by running counter to it. As to the instrumentation of this imaginary ideal band: I think that all the instruments most suited for playing should be represented.¹⁴⁷

Instruments such as the harp and bodhrán are also discussed by Ó Riada in the context of developing a new group template, with both historical background material and the use of both in a more modern context being considered. Regarding the bodhrán, Ó Riada comments that

The random frequencies of the skin are richer than those of even the orchestral bass drum, and thus tend to fill out and even provide the illusion of a harmonic bass for a band... altogether, the versatility of this instrument and the variety of pitch available, make it a most suitable instrument for accompanying Irish music, particularly in a band.¹⁴⁸

Furthermore, he reflects upon the potential of the harp within such an ensemble and the benefit of utilizing the sound of the harpsichord to mimic such an inclusion, a factor that influenced his own ability to assemble such a grouping.¹⁴⁹ He contends that

I think, also, that a harp played in the traditional fashion would lend an edge, and occasional touches of harmony, to this ideal band. The harp, in former times, was our outstanding glory in music. In the work of foreign writers, we find reference time and again to the supreme ability of Irish harpers.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ó Riada’s use of the harpsichord as a substitute for the harp in his ensemble template is discussed further in Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁰ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

An important differentiation to make about this segment of the series is Ó Riada's utilisation of musical examples. Unlike the majority of earlier programmes, in which he used both examples of individual musicians and singers, Ó Riada does not use examples of céilí bands to back up his criticism, or recordings of his own ensemble Ceoltóirí Cualann to translate what he is putting forward in musical terms. Any sense that he is constrained by time within the programme to play such examples is offset by the fact that he chooses instead to play examples of his own piano playing, particularly when discussing the harp and its place within Irish traditional ensemble. *Our Musical Heritage* was published in booklet form in 1982, edited by Thomas Kinsella, with Tomás Ó Canainn acting as Music Editor. Although textually the booklet adheres to the spirit of the programme, with some movement of sections to provide better cohesion for the reader, the listing of tracks played in this instance is somewhat misleading. As outlined by Ó Canainn in the introduction, the marginal notes in the booklet refer to a companion set of LP records containing a selection of musical examples used by Ó Riada and listed alongside the relevant section in which they were played.¹⁵¹ In the case of his section on group playing, they list a track from Ceoltóirí Cualann which would suggest that it was used on that particular programme as an example.¹⁵² Furthermore, a track is also listed beside Ó Riada's piece on Irish harping and its similarities with the harpsichord.¹⁵³ Although the tracks in question are clear examples of such similarities, they were not used by Ó Riada in the original broadcast. In fact, no track of Ceoltóirí Cualann was used during his programme on group playing, with Ó Riada choosing not to use any record for the purposes of criticism or support of his argument. As will be alluded to at various points during this thesis, Ó Riada's positioning of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a separate entity from his own personal identity, is a crucial element that must be considered when evaluating the group's significance. Although Ceoltóirí Cualann were already in existence by the time Ó Riada broadcast the *Our Musical Heritage* series, he deliberately used the format of the programme to build a structure around his group template. As such, he is separating his theory (*Our Musical Heritage*) and practice (Ceoltóirí Cualann) in order for his own group template to be viewed as a culmination of this theorising about ensemble performance within Irish traditional music.

¹⁵¹ See Ó Canainn and Kinsella (eds.) *Our Musical Heritage: Seán Ó Riada*, pp. 13-16.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 74-78.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Chapter 2 will explore other aspects of Ó Riada's professional life which coincide with his ever-increasing interest in group performance within Irish traditional music. However, one of the most significant aspects of Ó Riada's career in the period leading up to his work within Irish traditional music was the music he composed and arranged for the 1959 Gael Linn film *Mise Éire*. Directed by George Morrison, *Mise Éire* was part of a trilogy of films, together with *Saoirse* (1960) and *An Tine Bheo* (1966), which documented the birth of the Irish state through pictures, newsreels, narration and Ó Riada's score. The success of the film, the widespread distribution of the subsequent soundtrack album in 1960, and the national profile afforded to Ó Riada, is a factor which fuels many of the musical endeavours that are outlined throughout this thesis. It also marks a significant transition within Ó Riada's career; one in which his work incorporates Irish traditional music to a much greater extent.¹⁵⁴ Chronologically, it is placed alongside Ó Riada's initial engagement with ensemble performance in Irish traditional music through both the first broadcast of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* in 1961 and, both *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* and *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962. Crucially, as John Glatt asserts, the success of *Mise Éire* helped to create a new interest in traditional music as Irish people began to take a new pride in themselves and proudly rediscover their past.¹⁵⁵

Ó Riada, Method and Ceoltóirí Cualann

The final section of Ó Riada's overall engagement with Irish traditional music as a subject is one which underscores much of his theorising about ensemble performance; that being the methods he engages in and the ensuing impact that it has on perceptions surrounding his demeanour and character. The role of approach and method looms large within any analysis of an individual's personal and professional history, not least when reflecting on legacy, relationships, and overall influence on how each was progressed. Ó Sé has described the 'unique character and spirit of a man who would somehow bring the best out of those around him with his aptitude for music and his warm personality'.¹⁵⁶ What is striking in accounts of Ó Riada, in particular from those who believed they knew him well, is the varied nature of how he was perceived. Ó Canainn comments that

¹⁵⁴ See David Cooper, 'Seán Ó Riada and Irish Post-Colonial Film Music: George Morrison's *Mise Éire*', in Miguel Mera and David Burnand (eds.) *European Film Music* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 100-115.

¹⁵⁵ John Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography* (London, 1997), p. 35; Although *Mise Éire* is not part of Ó Riada's output with Ceoltóirí Cualann, the role of the platform it created for him is referenced across all chapters of this study.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

Seán made a point of showing whatever side of his character he wished, depending on the company and the context. He always had something of the chameleon about him. It was almost an involuntary reaction, but it was always in his own control... Even those who spent a lot of time in his company admitted they did not really know the full Seán – and came to understand that they never would. Everyone knew whatever Ó Riada was prepared to show them.¹⁵⁷

As with the premature death of any figure who is considered significant within their field, much is based upon the memories of others to shape a picture of their life and legacy. Within such a memory-based approach, particularly within a music setting, much is dependent on how memory varies between active participants and the audience. As Sheila Fitzpatrick asserts,

Cultural historians are partial exceptions, since they may be after somewhat different goals, such as recovering forgotten ‘voices’, or analysing how historical events have been remembered and mythologised, represented in different contexts and by different groups. The obligation of accuracy here must be accuracy of reproduction and representation. Historians who focus on memory are perhaps the least committed to the positivist goal of ‘getting it right’, since a certain relativism about the actual past is built in to the exploration of ways people remember it.¹⁵⁸

In this context, the perception of inaccuracy by memory and positionality is overtaken by a sense of authority that is attached to the historical analysis of cultural figures and events. As such an approach would suggest, researchers will not all produce the same findings because they will all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position’.¹⁵⁹ This, in many respects, speaks to the approach undertaken by Ó Riada through his broadcasts, most notably *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962. It is within his concluding remarks that such an approach is most obvious when he argues that

It is clear that the vast majority of Irish people think of Irish music as being of the greatest importance. This is as it should be; it is one of the few things left which we can call our own... The strongest surviving tradition we have is our music. We must not let it go. And it is up to ourselves to keep it. We have too long been looking for help from elsewhere.¹⁶⁰

Taking the views of Ó Riada, both written and broadcast, and the extent to which his opinions were spread across a wide range of topics, it is apparent that both his professional and

¹⁵⁷ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 171.

¹⁵⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, ‘Writing History/Writing about Yourself: What’s the Difference?’ in Doug Munro and John G. Reid (eds.) *Clio’s Lives: Biographies and Autobiographies of Historians* (Australia, 2017), pp. 17-18.

¹⁵⁹ Stuart Hall, ‘New ethnicities’, in James Donald and Ali Rattansi (eds.) *‘Race’, Culture and Difference* (London, 1992), pp. 252-259.

¹⁶⁰ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 14, 13 October 1962.

personal life are mirrored within the way in which these ideas took shape. As already outlined, Ó Riada's notetaking varied erratically, often moving at as quick a pace on the page as it would if spoken in a continuous manner.¹⁶¹ As outlined in the introduction to the UCC catalogue for his papers, the value of such primary material is not only in what they contain but also in the manner in which they were created. They state that the 'Ó Riada papers have been listed and arranged so as to reflect the often disorganised nature of their creation.'¹⁶² Ó Riada's writings, both personal and professional, point to the complexity of linking character and demeanour with the outcome of creative endeavours. Such issues can encapsulate a number of factors, such as reason, understanding, talent, and in some cases genius.¹⁶³ Walter Dorn argues that it is a

knowledge of who you are and a capacity to take a critical measure of your social environment, the possession of an inner sanctum which is your very own but which is never hermetically sealed off against the outside world. It is the product of a continuous interaction between man's native powers and society.¹⁶⁴

In the case of Ó Riada, bridging the gap between secondary and personal narratives, together with primary written and audio material, creates an expansive link between social processes and artistic output. Even assuming shared cultural constructions, social processes are relevant not only in the construction of the personal narrative but also in the interpretation of this narrative at any point in the course of life, using such texts as memoirs, diaries, or autobiographies, as well as subsequent interpretations of these texts across succeeding generations.¹⁶⁵ Although the role of personal experience is central within a cultural historiography sphere, attaining an equilibrium for the purposes of reaching a conclusion can lead to a far more balanced picture of an individual's personality and character. As Joan Scott contends,

When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject . . . becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built, and the constructed nature of experience becomes invisible, along with the given ideological systems in which experience offers itself as pristine and natural.¹⁶⁶

In the context of Ó Riada, many of the accounts from those who knew or encountered him describe him in terms of both the intellect and ability of the man, combined with the nuances

¹⁶¹ *Ó Riada Collection*, Items 1-671/1.

¹⁶² University College Cork, *Bailiúchán Sheáin Uí Riada: Content and Structure* (Cork, 2006), p. 4.

¹⁶³ Walter Dorn, 'Personality and History: The Significance of the Individual in World Events', *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 33, no. 1 (1962), p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Cohler, 'The Human Studies and the Life History: The Social Service Review Lecture', p.567.

¹⁶⁶ Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 17, no. 4 (1991), pp. 777-778.

of his character.¹⁶⁷ Richard Cobb outlines the importance of recognising the quirks of individuality and an awareness that history should be ‘walked, seen, smelt, eavesdropped as well as read.’¹⁶⁸ In order to understand the ‘whole person’, Dan McAdams and Jennifer Pals contend that individual approaches and methods must be viewed as

An individual's unique variation on the general evolutionary design for human nature, expressed as a developing pattern of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and self-defining narratives, complexly and differentially situated in culture and social context.¹⁶⁹

Although aspects of Ó Riada’s professional life provide a detailed catalogue of his research interests and aspirations, it is primary material relating to his personal life which delivers the greatest insight into the shaping of his career. Ó Riada’s engagement with Irish traditional music, and the manner in which he developed a methodology, is perhaps most visceral when his postulation on group performance is put forward in a practical and musical format. Ó Riada’s development of his ensemble template is represented by Ceoltóirí Cualann, a group which not only defines the musical representation of his argument, but also evolves in line with many of the issues surrounding his work methods and perceptions of his character and demeanour. Though the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann altered views on group performance in Irish traditional music at that time, the extent to which the group developed is again a reflection of Ó Riada’s multifaceted approach and method. As a consequence, the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s must be viewed in the context of Ó Riada’s wider relationship with Irish traditional music as outlined throughout this chapter, and the methods he engaged in from the very outset of his theorising on the genre as a subject.

Conclusion

The history of Ó Riada’s work within Irish traditional music is one which is placed within wider social and cultural developments in Ireland at the mid-point of the twentieth century. Although a distinctive argument surrounding ensemble performance emerges at the outset of the 1960s, Ó Riada’s placement within the first of a new generation to be born in a post-independent Ireland, with the economic policies that shaped such a period, ensures that his work is a product of a wider shift in the Irish cultural landscape. Ó Riada’s complex relationship with Irish traditional music through his theorising about the subject is heavily

¹⁶⁷ *Ó Riada Collection*, Section 5.2 – 5.3.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Cobb (ed.), *Tour de France* (London, 1976), p. 179.

¹⁶⁹ Dan McAdams and Jennifer Pals, ‘A New Big Five: Fundamental Principles for an Integrative Science of Personality’, *American Psychologists*, vol. 61, no. 3 (2006), p. 204.

linked with both the role of his approach to Irish traditional music as a topic, and that of his desire to find an adequate environment to work within. As outlined throughout this chapter, issues surrounding Ó Riada's treatment of Irish traditional music and his position within a variety of professional working environments, undoubtedly impacted the manner and cohesiveness of the work he engaged in. However, broader themes are raised throughout the remainder of this thesis which feed into the idea that Ó Riada was always going to treat his ensemble template in such a direct and scientific manner; that being the way in which Ceoltóirí Cualann are unique as a group model; how we define innovation and placing Ó Riada's ideas within such a definition; the manner in which the group evolved through their recordings and broadcasts; and quantifying the significance of reception history in evaluating reactions, both within the group and Irish traditional music circles, and in broader Irish society.

Ó Riada's career entailed a vast and complex array of interwoven themes, both personal and professional, which impact on each role he finds himself in, as well as the environment in which he is placed. Viewed as a single contribution, his forthright views regarding Irish traditional music, and their relationship to his broad musical education and upbringing, are significant in terms of innovation and critical reaction.¹⁷⁰ However, any proposition to put such views into practice suggests, based upon the evidence about Ó Riada that exists, that such endeavours would be far-reaching, difficult to manage and open to interpretation. As has been made clear, despite his ability to put forward strong historical and musical interpretations, a clear lack of primary material from Ó Riada regarding the premise to his work, the methodology behind it and a coherent communication link to those directly involved, leaves a degree of his work within Irish traditional music open to interpretation. Although devoting the smallest section of *Our Musical Heritage* to the discussion of group activity, it is through Ó Riada's framework for discussing the traditional genre, both solo and ensemble, that counters such deficiencies in primary material. By recognising the structure of his overall engagement with Irish traditional music, the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as outlined in Chapter 2, and the role of the group in wider changes within traditional ensemble performance, provides a clear and evidence based picture of what Ó Riada was attempting to create and the process he was pursuing at the outset of the 1960s.

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 4.

Chapter 2

Setting the Stage: Developing the Ceoltóirí Cualann Model

Introduction

Ó Riada's exploration of both individual and group performance practices within Irish traditional music, as well as the manner in which tradition is defined, encapsulates the types of approach he adopted when discussing the genre. Ó Riada's framing of group performance, and the place of his own ideal template within such an understanding, is very much based on a theoretical argument. His development of an 'ideal type'¹ of traditional ensemble is characterised by his discussion on the topic as part of a wider analysis of Irish traditional music, which is then followed by his engagement in a range of mediums to explore such an ensemble template. Throughout *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, Ó Riada dedicates the majority of his broadcast hours to defining and critiquing the art of the individual musician and stipulating that Irish music is

essentially a solo effort, a matter of the individual player or singer giving free reign, within the limits of the art, to his own musical personality. It is not a group activity.²

Ó Riada's criticism of group activity within Irish traditional music, in particular the céilí band model, frames his own conception of an appropriate group template as a reaction to this perceived problem. On this basis alone, Ó Riada's founding and direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann can be viewed as correcting an inadequacy rather than answering any other question. Therefore, the founding and operation of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s reflects the theoretical basis upon which Ó Riada addressed the question of group activity and a scientific approach he undertook.³ As outlined in Chapter 1, Ó Riada's relationship with Irish traditional music manifested itself in a number of ways; through his childhood and education; through his work within the Abbey Theatre; through his compositional work, both personal and professional; through his broadcasting; and finally through his presentation and production of Irish traditional music in his ensemble Ceoltóirí Cualann.

This chapter outlines the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann's formation, its development throughout the course of the 1960s, and the subsequent manner of the group's dispersal in

¹ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

² Ibid.

³ Ó Riada's methodology is discussed further in Chapter 4.

1970. What is clear through an analysis of Ceoltóirí Cualann's developmental history is that Ó Riada did not operate this new group model in a clearly pre-planned manner. Although steering the group into a range of performance arenas, both private and public, the group did not undertake a sustained period of live performances, with Ó Riada choosing instead to channel the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann through a range of mediums. His involvement with a wide range of musical and artistic projects also defines the history of the group's operation throughout the 1960s. This chapter also outlines features of his other musical work, as displayed within his personal papers, that also fit within a timeline of the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann during his period. The chronology of Ceoltóirí Cualann's formation and output, as outlined within this chapter, must be viewed within the context of the group forming part of a wider exploration by Ó Riada of ensemble performance; one which is characterised by the manner of his direction of the new group template and the modes of transmission he utilised over a ten year period.

Ó Riada and the Abbey Theatre: Music and 'An Saol Gaelach'

Announcing the appointment of John Reidy as Director of Music in the Abbey Theatre in July 1955, the *Irish Times* briefly made reference to his position within Radio Éireann, as well as acknowledging his predecessor at the Abbey, Éamonn Ó Gallchobhair.⁴ The understated nature of the announcement does not communicate the chaotic manner of Ó Riada's departure from Radio Éireann in 1955, as well as the personal and professional crisis he experienced in the intervening period in London and Paris.⁵ However, the Abbey Theatre appointment marked the beginning of what became the defining period of his career in which he produced and engaged in a variety of endeavours which broadened his career within music, and provided him with name recognition on a wider national stage. As White asserts, Ó Riada's greatest moment of national recognition came with his compositions and arrangements for *Mise Éire* released in 1959, which earned him a degree of fame hitherto unequalled by an Irish composer in the twentieth century, and more specifically defined an idea of Irish art music that would continue to exert a formative influence in the twenty-first century.⁶

⁴ *Irish Times*, 4 July 1955, p. 8.

⁵ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 253-264.

⁶ White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'; White, 'Ó Riada, Seán [John Reidy]', in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds.) *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, Vol. 2 (Dublin, 2013), p. 804.

Although Ó Riada's career and engagement with Irish music and song, through his writing, broadcasts and ensemble productions, point to his wider interest in Gaelic culture, his appointment as Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre marks a key juncture during this transition. In particular, it points to his increasing interest in leading a truly Irish way of life, or what he termed as 'An Saol Gaelach'.⁷ Outside of his artistic work, an early example of his intentions are displayed through Ó Riada's shift from the English to the Irish form of his name, 'John Reidy' to 'Seán Ó Riada', in the second half of the 1950s. The use of the Irish form of his name is first introduced during this period, appearing on the programme for the annual Christmas show in 1955, *Ulysses agus Penelope* by Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, as well as being included as 'Seán O Riadaigh' on programme notes for *Gearmaireacht Droichid an Diabhail* in April 1958.⁸ The Irish language form of his name features inconsistently on Abbey Theatre programmes until 1960 when it is used on a programme for *The Money Doesn't Matter* by Louis Lynch D'Alton, marking the beginning of its permanent use on Abbey Theatre literature.⁹

The Irish language, which Ó Riada later contends is crucial to the survival of the Irish nation, forms only one element of wider activities engaged by Ó Riada which point to an ever-increasing preoccupation with reinvigorating a Gaelic way of life.¹⁰ Ó Cannain asserts that Ó Riada maintained that the Irish language was central to the future of Ireland, both in the general cultural sphere and in the ordinary life of the people; 'For Seán, this was more than a talking point in academic circles: it had become a reality that affected every phase of his own life.'¹¹ Indeed, Ó Riada's increasing preoccupation with leading an authentic Irish way of life, through language, literature and music, takes place alongside the emergence of his ideas surrounding Irish traditional music and group performance.¹² Therefore, it is not surprising to expect an overlap between these cultural pillars both in terms of Ó Riada's work and the way in which he touches upon such topics. Although he specifically discusses different facets of Irish traditional music, he continuously situates such comments within a broader Gaelic cultural context, creating an obvious link and chain of influence between each branch of Irish cultural life. As will be displayed later in this chapter, this multifaceted

⁷ University College Cork, *Bailiúchán Sheáin Uí Riada*, p. 5.

⁸ *Abbey Theatre Digital Archive*, 'Programme Notes', NUI Galway.

⁹ *Ibid.*; Also, see Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁰ Ó Riada, *Irish Times*, 5 March 1963, p. 8.

¹¹ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 146.

¹² See Sean Crossan, *'The Given Note': Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry* (Newcastle, 2008), pp. 103-104.

approach is most potent within Ó Riada's production of radio programmes involving Ceoltóirí Cualann in which music is a major element, but part of a wider set of Irish cultural practices. During the course of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, Ó Riada states that

What of our traditions do, in fact, survive? Our way of life, and our customs, are being thrown out in favour of an alien materialism. Our hospitality, at least in urban areas, is long forgotten, a joke. Our language is made the excuse for cynical hypocrisy. Our literature is given over mainly to aping foreign models. Our nation that was bought with blood, is being sold, spiritually as well as physically, before our own eyes, by our own people.¹³

Such views are setting the foundation upon which Ó Riada bases his arguments surrounding ensemble performance within Irish traditional music. Throughout the radio series, Ó Riada's mode of communication, through language and format, builds his argument for an ensemble template that is far more suited to Irish traditional music, as he understands it. Ó Riada later writes in 1963 that

The spiritual capital of this country is, after all, London. That is the reason so many people who do not need to emigrate, do so, in fact. Foreign invasions, wars, famines, revolutions, and finally our own mismanagement have brought about the breakdown of our own culture; whereupon we rush to our destruction as a nation by embracing that culture which is most antipathic to us... A third reason, sometimes given in favour of the abandonment of the Irish language, is that in the modern world governed by economics, Irish would hinder our progress.¹⁴

Although a product of its time, Ó Riada's language echoes many of the nationalistic sentiments that gain momentum at the latter stages of the nineteenth century, along with the growth of cultural nationalist groups and a surge in interest in cultural practices that were closely defined with the idea of state building. In particular, similarities can be drawn with the writing of Douglas Hyde who also galvanised support around ideas of cultural suppression and copper fastening Irish identity through artistic practices. Writing in 1892 as part of his lecture, *The Necessity of De-Anglicising the Irish Nation*, Hyde strikes a tone similar to that of Ó Riada seventy years later, one which is both unrepentant in tone and underpinned by Irish identity through language and literature.

I shall endeavour to show that this failure of the Irish people in recent times has been largely brought about by the race diverging during this century from the right path, and ceasing to be Irish without becoming English. I shall attempt to show that with the bulk of the people this change took place quite recently, much more recently than most people imagine, and is, in fact, still going on. I should also like to call attention to the illogical position of men who drop their own language to speak English, of men

¹³ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 14, 13 October 1962.

¹⁴ Ó Riada, *Irish Times*, 5 March 1963, p. 8.

who translate their euphonious Irish names into English monosyllables, of men who read English books, and know nothing about Gaelic literature, nevertheless protesting as a matter of sentiment that they hate the country which at every hand's turn they rush to imitate.¹⁵

However, the context of the time in which both Hyde and Ó Riada articulated their sentiments is also a significant fact; thirty years either side of the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922 and each representative of a generation that espoused an authentic marking of Irish identity through cultural means. As Eileen Hogan asserts, the increasing dominance of the political elite and Catholic hierarchy at the outset of the Irish Free State in shaping the new nation ‘had ramifications for the valuing of traditional music in Ireland’.¹⁶ As outlined in Chapter 1, Ó Riada is therefore part of a post-independence generation that are shaped by a shift to modernity in a young nation state; as opposed to a pre-independence environment in which cultural nationalism was a tool in a much wider struggle.

Song of the Anvil and Reacaireacht an Riadaigh: The Birth of Ceoltóirí Cualann

As explored in Chapter 1, Ó Riada’s appointment as Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre in 1955 marks the beginning of the vast bulk of his artistic work and the point at which it is increasingly apparent that he is becoming preoccupied with developing a synergy of Gaelic cultural practices through a variety of mediums. Ó Riada’s use of Irish traditional musicians for special annual productions within the Abbey Theatre, alongside other plays throughout the latter half of the 1950s, point to a sense of experimentation that he engaged in regarding Irish traditional ensemble music.¹⁷ However, such an approach has led to a distorted timeline of when the origins of Ceoltóirí Cualann can be traced; with emphasis being placed on the formal presentation of the ensemble to the public, rather than the development of Ó Riada’s initial theory on what constituted a group template in Irish traditional music. Ó Canainn identifies Ó Riada’s appointment at the Abbey Theatre as the beginning of the group which became known as Ceoltóirí Cualann, culminating in a debut public concert in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin, in 1961.¹⁸ Similarly, White contends that the concert in 1961 also represents Ó Riada’s first introduction of Ceoltóirí Cualann in a public setting.¹⁹ Although both Ó Canainn and White view these events as the beginning of this new ensemble template, Ó Riada’s

¹⁵ Douglas Hyde, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland’, *Irish National Literary Society*, 25 November 1892.

¹⁶ Eileen Hogan, ‘Music in Ireland: Youth Cultures and Youth Identity’, in Mark Fitzgerald and John O’Flynn (eds.) *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (Surrey, 2014), p. 267.

¹⁷ *Abbey Theatre Digital Archive*.

¹⁸ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work* p. 44.

¹⁹ White, ‘Ó Riada, Seán’.

intentions for the group are a far more accurate reflection of when the starting point of Ceoltóirí Cualann, the concept, can be traced. Writing as part of his personal papers in a piece marked as a ‘research statement’ from the 1960s, Ó Riada states that,

I have engaged in a considerable amount of field research on the subject of traditional Irish music, both vocal and instrumental, and its relationship to the Gaelic tradition as a whole. This has resulted in an analytical survey, published in an abbreviated form through the medium of broadcast talks and lectures.²⁰

Ó Riada’s linking of his work with the performance of Irish traditional music and song, with that of wider Gaelic traditions, points to a methodology centred not on ensemble permutations but rather an array of Gaelic artistic practices, of which instrumental ensemble is one critical element. The first formal attempt made by Ó Riada to bring together a new ensemble template for Irish traditional music took shape in September 1960 as part of Bryan MacMahon’s play, *Song of the Anvil*, which used traditional music as a sustained theme throughout the production. Within this context, MacMahon creates a fantasy within a rural Irish setting

around the valley of Glensharon. The valley is under threat of an evil spell that may be cast upon it at any time by a stranger. Emerging from the mist come a visionary, a failed priest, a magician of the mysterious, two village nitwits and a sex famished spinster. Religious superstition battles it out with the imaginative past of a bygone time in this tale of wonder.²¹

Programme notes for the *Song of the Anvil* list the musicians involved as Vincent Broderick, Eamonn de Buitléar, Sean Ó Ceallaigh, Pdraig Ó Maoldomhnaigh and Seán Potts.²² Ó Canainn also includes Michael Tubridy, Martin Fay and Ronnie McShane as part of the musicians involved, although their names are not included on programme notes that exist for MacMahon’s play.²³ Apart from Broderick, the musicians that take part in the Abbey production in 1960 form the basis for the ensemble that Ó Riada develops in the months that follow, and who take part in the Shelbourne concert in 1961 that both Ó Canainn and White reference. Considering the nationalistic tensions which existed surrounding the Abbey Theatre from its foundation, it is striking that the use of Irish traditional music, performed exclusively by traditional musicians, does not take place until 1960. Up to that point, music

²⁰ Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 596 (43).

²¹ ‘The Song of the Anvil’, *Irish Theatre Institute*, <http://www.irishplayography.com/play.aspx?playid=31382>, accessed 1 August 2019.

²² White, ‘Ó Riada, Seán’.

²³ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 44.

was produced by a resident orchestra, which also performed arrangements of Irish tunes²⁴

Maria McHale outlines that

Music was performed from the beginning of the theatre's life and, in the early days, was provided by a solo violinist, Arthur Darley. However, it was the formation of a small orchestra in 1906 under the direction of G. R. Hillis that established the Abbey as a musical venue. By 1908, the orchestra was under the direction of the composer John F. Larchet who held the position for 26 years... In 1936, Larchet's composition student Frederick May took up the post of musical director. Under May, the programmes often included arrangements of Irish tunes. This had begun under Larchet and was maintained by all subsequent musical directors.²⁵

As Ben Levitas suggests, from the very outset, the Abbey Theatre straddled a contentious line between an Anglo-Irish literati and a Catholic nationalist audience who were hostile to its own depiction on stage.²⁶ The three main pillars of cultural nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century being language, literature and sport, the role of music within such a debate, which was adopted by Ó Riada, once more highlights the particular set of circumstances within which Ceoltóirí Cualann and the potential of group performance within traditional music emerges.

Although there is a clear transition from a concept model to a structured band following Ó Riada's initial production on the Abbey Theatre stage, what is also clear is that he pursued the new ensemble model as part of a wider exploration of Irish traditional music, singing and poetry; one which marks the second phase of Ó Riada's development of a new type of Irish traditional performance setting. The progress of such an approach leads to the first major public broadcasting of Ó Riada's Gaelic performance model through his radio series *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, and as a consequence, the first identifiable performance setting in which the formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a group is confirmed. First broadcast in 1961 on Radio Éireann, the series included musical performances from Ceoltóirí Cualann alongside singing and poetry; although like its earlier iteration on the Abbey Theatre stage, music ensemble remained one of a variety of elements within this artistic structure. Records within the archives of RTÉ list the earliest date of broadcast as 16 July 1961²⁷, but radio

²⁴ Evidence of music performed at the Abbey Theatre is listed on programme notes within the Abbey Theatre Digital Archives.

²⁵ Maria McHugh, 'Music at the Abbey', *Irish Research Council*, <http://www.abbeytheatremusic.ie/?q=music-at-the-abbey>, accessed 14 November 2019.

²⁶ Ben Levitas, 'The Loy in Irish Politics': The Abbey Theatre in the Wake of the Playboy, 1907-1910', *The Irish Review*, no. 29 (2002), p. 38.

²⁷ RTÉ archives are not open for public access. Listings are based on a requested search for material that is available to purchase for research purposes only and does not include a catalogue with broadcast dates. Details provided by RTÉ, 6 December 2019.

listings indicate the earliest broadcast took place on 12 March 1961.²⁸ The programme was thirty minutes in duration and was broadcast on Sunday nights from 1961 to 1962 and Saturday nights from 1963 to 1968.²⁹ Of particular note was Ó Riada's utilisation of certain artists, such as sean-nós singer Darach Ó Catháin (1922-1987), which often formed the basis of musical arrangements with Ceoltóirí Cualann.³⁰

Such a multifaceted approach to productions become a common theme within Ó Riada's work in broadcasting and recordings, as is evident within a variety of projects during the 1960s.³¹ It also mirrored the broadcasts of Ciarán Mac Mathúna (1925–2009) whose first radio series, *A Job of Journeywork*, began broadcasting in 1955, albeit with a much broader remit than Ó Riada's *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*. Indeed, correlations between Ó Riada and Mac Mathúna extend beyond broadcasting work, with both men engaging in wider explorations of Gaelic culture, as epitomised by their concurrent shift to adopting the Irish form of their names in the mid-1950s.³² Although preserved to reflect the disorganised nature of their creation,³³ Ó Riada's personal papers sketch a career which reflects the varied nature of his work with music across a number of genres. In particular, it sketches a professional life of overlapping workflows which coincide with the emergence of Ceoltóirí Cualann and Ó Riada's broadcast and recording work relating to Irish traditional music. Although spread across the timeline in which Ceoltóirí Cualann are active, Ó Riada's commitments to other projects are interwoven with the group's performance history across the 1960s.

Public Performance: Shelbourne Hotel

If *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, the radio series, acted as the second phase of Ó Riada's development of a new type of Irish traditional performance setting, then the subsequent public performance acted as the next significant transition. Staged as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, the concert takes place on 10 September 1961, six months after Ó Riada had first started using the term 'Ceoltóirí Cualann' for the group on radio. Framed within Ó

²⁸ 'Radio Programme', *Nenagh Guardian*, 11 March 1961, p. 3.

²⁹ Radio listings and RTE archival listings indicate that *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* was not consistently broadcast during these timeframes.

³⁰ Format of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* is discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of Ceoltóirí Cualann's musical output.

³¹ *Ó Riada Collection*, Sections 3.1-4.9, University College Cork; This material contains a huge range of items related to the Irish language, local projects in Cork, compositional work, poetry, screenplays, RTE and other artistic projects.

³² Lawrence William White, 'Mac Mathúna, Ciarán' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2015).

³³ University College Cork, *Bailiúchán Sheáin Uí Riada*, p. 4.

Riada's biography as Ceoltóirí Cualann's debut concert, Ó Canainn contends that it represented a significant moment for the new group as a stand-alone performance.³⁴ However, advertising from that period portrays an event far more in line with the model adopted in Ó Riada's radio series in which ensemble formed one element of a variety of performances to be displayed on the night. Advertising in the *Irish Press* on 18 August 1961 records that

Sean O [sic] Riada, composer of the prize-winning "Mise Eire" [sic] score, will be in charge of an additional item on this year's Dublin Theatre Festival programme. He will present and direct "Reacaireacht an Riadaigh", an evening of traditional Gaelic entertainment with poets, singers, pipers and folk orchestra in the Shelbourne Hotel on September 10.³⁵

Similar advertisements appear in the *Irish Times* in August and September 1961 with reference to a night of 'Gaelic entertainment' and no inclusion of the actual name of the ensemble Ceoltóirí Cualann.³⁶ Newspaper reviews point to the novelty of the construction of the evening, with a long programme that incorporated songs, recitations and instrumental music.³⁷ The *Irish Press* describes the 'unusual combination' of Ceoltóirí Cualann, making particular note of the use of both the bodhrán and bones as percussion instruments. The article also describes other aspects of the event, reporting that

Of the soloists one can say that the singing of Aine Ni Ghallchobhair [sic] gives satisfaction-in spite of a little hardness and edge to the tone occasionally. Darach O Cathain [sic] has a pleasant baritone which he uses to good effect-if somewhat restrained emotionally- and Tomas Reck was dextrous on a well-turned set of pipes. It was interesting to hear the poets reading their own work, in particular Maire Mhac a tSaoi [sic] and Sean O Tuama [sic].³⁸

As highlighted in Chapter 1, the inclusion of *Mise Éire* in advertising of the event provides an indication of the way in which the public platform provided to Ó Riada by his involvement in the production fuelled interest in his subsequent work. As such, the use of the reference is appealing to a section of the audience who may be attracted by the name recognition associated with Ó Riada at that point, as opposed to the nature of the concert.

³⁴ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work* pp. 44-46; The Shelbourne Hotel concert was certainly the debut public performance for Ceoltóirí Cualann as a group. However, as has already been identified, it was through the medium of radio where the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann was first publicly introduced by Ó Riada.

³⁵ 'Old Gaelic Songs, Dances for Dublin', *Irish Press*, 18 August 1961, p. 4.

³⁶ 'Belfast Group for Theatre Festival', *Irish Times*, 18 August 1961, p. 7; 'Dublin Theatre Festival', *Irish Times*, 8 September 1961, p. 6.

³⁷ See 'Evening in Traditional Gaelic Style', *Irish Independent*, 11 September 1961, p.5; 'Feast of Good Irish Music', *Irish Press*, 11 September 1961, p.7; 'Traditional Evening', *Evening Herald*, 11 September 1961, p. 13.

³⁸ 'Feast of Good Irish Music', *Irish Press*, 11 September 1961, p.7.

Stephen Cottrell insists that some part of a concert's effects is intended to endure beyond the occasion itself, with the effect more or less determined by prior expectations.³⁹ Such a contention can be easily applied to that of the *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* concert in the Shelbourne, which not only continued a path laid out by Ó Riada in both the Abbey Theatre staging and Radio Éireann broadcasts, but also fuelled far more specific endeavours that followed. One such element of this process was undoubtedly ensemble performance, and specifically the musical output of Ceoltóirí Cualann, which became far more concentrated following the success of the Dublin Theatre Festival staging. Although *Song of the Anvil* was indicative of Ó Riada's initial engagement with the concept of group performance within Irish traditional music, subsequent projects involving Ceoltóirí Cualann, such as *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, involved a much wider exploration of Gaelic culture with music as a major element. It is only from 1962 onwards that Ó Riada developed a hybrid model of transmission in which he continues to include Irish traditional music as part of broader projects, while also creating a format that focuses more heavily on the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann and the nature of the ensemble template he established.

Fleadh Cheoil an Radio and Group Members

Although clearly a key element and a significant starting point for Ó Riada's new ensemble template, it is only in the immediate period after the group's performance at the Shelbourne Hotel that a more 'Ceoltóirí Cualann centric' approach to broadcasts, recordings and performances emerge through *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*. As Ó Canainn states,

When *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* began, Ó Riada wanted to arrange music for voice, harpsichord and Ceoltóirí Cualann. Sean Ó Sé was his choice of singer for that combination, with himself on harpsichord, so that he could more or less direct affairs from his position at the keyboard... the programme, with storyteller Éamonn Kelly as resident seanchaí, proved a great success. It included a series of competitions for various instruments, including violin, flute and singing. At the end of each series, Seán and Ciarán Mac Mathúna would give their adjudication.⁴⁰

However, Ó Canainn's assertion that Ó Riada's intention was to 'arrange music for voice, harpsichord and Ceoltóirí Cualann' further highlights this point. In this instance, he is distinguishing between Ceoltóirí Cualann and Ó Riada not only through the mode of group performance, but also through Ó Riada's use of the harpsichord,⁴¹ which he himself is

³⁹ James Nicholas, 'Music, Performance and Identity', *Anthropology Today*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1995), p. 21.

⁴⁰ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work* pp. 48-49.

⁴¹ Ó Riada's use of the harpsichord is referenced in Chapter 3 as part of a wider discussion on the musical output of Ceoltóirí Cualann.

playing. Although similar in many ways to *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, Ó Riada was now arranging music specifically for Ceoltóirí Cualann at the core of a broadcast series, with Irish traditional instrumental music and singing as the central feature.

First broadcast in December 1962 on RTÉ radio, the programmes were thirty minutes in duration and were recorded at weekends in Dublin's St. Francis Xavier Hall with an altered format from Ó Riada's initial broadcasts with Ceoltóirí Cualann; poetry recitations previously included in *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* were replaced by the storyteller or seanchaí, in this case that of Éamon Kelly (1914-2001).⁴² Like *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, the transmission of the *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* series was inconsistent, being broadcast across different days and representative of the programme being recorded within a condensed schedule.⁴³ Although RTÉ archival records lack an entire listing of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* broadcast dates, radio listings indicate that the programme was in transmission across various dates from December 1962 to 1964, and again from 1966 to 1970. Throughout the entire series of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, the core membership of the group is featured at various stages and all will play a central role in many of the traditional music projects undertaken by Ó Riada throughout the decade. The group was composed of Martin Fay (fiddle), John Kelly (fiddle), Seán Keane (fiddle), Paddy Moloney (uilleann pipes), Seán Potts (tin whistle), Michael Tubridy (flute), Éamon de Buítléar (accordion), Sonny Brogan (accordion), Ronnie McShane (bones) and Seán Ó Riada (harpsichord and bodhrán). Later, as Ó Riada moved towards playing the harpsichord, Peadar Mercier (bodhrán and bones) was invited to join the group. As part of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, Ó Riada also hosted competitions for instrumental Irish traditional music and traditional singing.⁴⁴ One such winner of these competitions in 1964 was a seventeen year old fiddle player Seán Keane, who was then be invited by Ó Riada to join Ceoltóirí Cualann.

Sonny Brogan (1906-1965) was born in Dublin, the eldest of three children born to Andrew Brogan and Alicia Brown. The oldest member of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Brogan took part in Ó Riada's early radio broadcasts and featured in *Our Musical Heritage*, *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, together with the group's first L.P. record release *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* in 1962. As described, Ó Riada was a critic of modern accordion performance techniques, but he contended that Brogan was a notable exception,

⁴² Peadar Ó Riada, in Gael Linn, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh* (Dublin, 2008), p. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*; A regular pattern was to record at least two programmes at a time.

⁴⁴ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 49.

understanding the limitations of his instrument while simultaneously emphasising the traditional elements.⁴⁵ Writing in the aftermath of Brogan's death, Ó Riada noted that

He had a passion for the pure, simple essence of tunes, uncluttered by mistaken ornamentation. He was also, of course, an outstanding accordion player, one of the very few who could make it sound suitable for playing Irish music... As a person, Sonny was – well, he was contentious, convivial, argumentative, loyal, dogmatic, witty, utterly reliable, a tiger when his temper was roused (which was rare), and at the same time curiously gentle and courteous. He was a good friend. I shall miss him.⁴⁶

Éamon de Buítléar (1930-2013) was born in Renmore Barracks, Co. Galway, one of seven children of Colonel Éamon and Nóra de Buítléar. As outlined by Ó Cannain, de Buítléar first encountered Ó Riada while working in a sporting gun shop in Dublin and they soon became close friends; with de Buítléar ultimately recommending many of the musicians that Ó Riada was searching for as part of the early manifestation of Ceoltóirí Cualann.⁴⁷ He features in all of the group's broadcasts, album recordings and public performances throughout the 1960s.

Martin Fay (1936-2012) was born in Cabra, Dublin and was the youngest of four children to Joseph and Ann Fay. Unlike the other members of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Fay was already one of the regular Abbey Theatre musicians. As such, Fay was a professional musician who could read sheet music and was in a position to adapt far more easily to Ó Riada's instructions on melodies, harmonies and ornamentation.⁴⁸ Like de Buítléar, Fay was a permanent fixture of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s. Seán Keane (1946-) was born in Dublin into a family already associated with traditional fiddle playing. Like Fay, Keane was proficient in classical music having attended Dublin College of Music at a young age.⁴⁹ As mentioned above, a young Keane won first prize in the fiddle competition as part of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* in 1964 and was subsequently asked to join Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada.⁵⁰ He features on later broadcasts of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* post-1964, as well as the group's final two albums.

John Kelly (1912-1989) was born in Rehy, West Clare, one of a family of eight, to parents Michael and Elizabeth Kelly. Like Brogan, Kelly's style of fiddle playing is drawn upon by Ó Riada during the course of *Our Musical Heritage* as a support to his articulation of

⁴⁵ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 14, 29 September 1962.

⁴⁶ Ó Riada, 'In Memoriam, Sonny Brogan', *Ceol: A Journal of Irish Music*, vol.2, no. 1 (1965).

⁴⁷ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, pp. 44-46.

⁴⁸ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 49.

regional nuances, in this instance that of West Clare.⁵¹ Moving to Dublin in 1945 and establishing his own business, Kelly was a central figure in the Irish traditional music scene in the city and was a recognised figure within music circles when Ó Riada was forming his early grouping for the Abbey Theatre in 1960.⁵² Kelly was a member of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s and features in all of the group's recordings and public performances. Ronnie McShane (d2017) also worked at the Abbey Theatre during Ó Riada's period as Director of Music, though not as a musician but rather as props manager. Forming a close friendship with Ó Riada, McShane was often a willing participant in a variety of Ó Riada's projects, going far beyond the scope of Ceoltóirí Cualann.⁵³ He features on Ceoltóirí Cualann's first two recorded albums. Peadar Mercier (1914-1991) was born Herbert Peter Mercier in Cork and later moved with his family to Bray, County Wicklow in the 1920s.⁵⁴ Mercier's involvement in the Irish language scene, particularly in Dublin, led him to take up the bodhrán when he was in his late forties, subsequently being invited to join Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada.⁵⁵ He features on radio broadcasts in the latter stages of the 1960s, as well as featuring on the group's last album release in 1970.

Paddy Moloney (1938-) was born in Dublin into a house in which Irish traditional music played a central role.⁵⁶ Enlisted by de Buitléar to join the original manifestation of the group in 1960, Moloney also worked with Ó Riada on aspects of production and repertoire.⁵⁷ He is used as an exemplar as part of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962 during Ó Riada's section on the tin whistle, and later performs in many of Ceoltóirí Cualann's solo arrangements. Moloney features in all of Ceoltóirí Cualann's broadcasts, recordings and public performances. Seán Potts (1930-2014) was born in the Liberties, Dublin in 1930. He was heavily associated with Irish traditional music through his family and was already a friend of Moloney and Michael Tubridy prior to joining Ceoltóirí Cualann. Ó Riada would often give Potts the lead on tin whistle in slow airs because of his distinctive style.⁵⁸ He was also used by Ó Riada to support his points on tin whistle performance during the course of *Our Musical Heritage*. He was a permanent member of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s. Michael

⁵¹ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 9, 8 September 1962.

⁵² Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, pp. 37-43.

⁵³ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ Mel Mercier, 'Documentary on One, Peadar Mercier', *RTÉ Radio 1* [broadcast 10 September 2016].

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, pp. 4-9.

⁵⁷ Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017); Also, see Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, pp. 33-34.

Tubridy (1935-) was born in Kilrush, County Clare. Although his mother played concertina on occasions, the only traditional music he encountered as a young child was through listening to old gramophone records and also through the playing of his uncle who was a fiddle player.⁵⁹ Tubridy was a member of the original ensemble that Ó Riada established at the Abbey Theatre in 1960 and was involved in all of Ceoltóirí Cualann's projects throughout the decade. Finally, Seán Ó Sé (1936-) was born in Cork and although not formally a member of Ceoltóirí Cualann, he was a figure synonymous with the group through his performances with the ensemble. First encountering Ó Riada through their mutual association with Gael Linn, his first singing encounter with the group took place in 1962 when Ó Sé was invited by Ó Riada to take part in *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, eventually becoming the resident singer on the programme.⁶⁰ That same year, his first significant collaboration took place when he recorded 'An Poc ar Buile' alongside Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann.⁶¹ Following this initial success, Ó Sé would go on to establish a permanent association with Ceoltóirí Cualann and sang on subsequent recordings.⁶²

Albums: Developing the Ceoltóirí Cualann Model

The recorded albums of Ceoltóirí Cualann are an integral part of the group's recording history but their inclusion within this chapter is part of building a timeline for the ensemble throughout the 1960s. A more detailed evaluation of all aspects of Ceoltóirí Cualann's recorded work takes place in Chapter 3 as part of an analysis of the musical output of the ensemble and the manner in which Ó Riada produced such records. Although the organisation of practices and performances did not follow a strict regime, certain aspects of Ó Riada's work with Ceoltóirí Cualann did conform to a structure, and one which is highlighted through the group's broadcast and commercial recordings.⁶³

Reacaireacht an Riadaigh, both the name and the concept, are one such common performance setting which Ó Riada cultivates for the purpose of elaborating many of the musical expressions he channelled through the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Although it is not

⁵⁹ Interview with Michael Tubridy (8 June 2017).

⁶⁰ Seán Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile: The Life and Times of Seán Ó Sé* (Cork, 2015), p. 90.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² These subsequent recordings are outlined and explored in Chapter 3.

⁶³ For the purposes of this chapter, I am including albums that were exclusively framed by Ó Riada as Ceoltóirí Cualann records and which pertain to their recording history as an ensemble. Other recorded work, which features the group, is also discussed in Chapter 3.

the first inclusion of the group on an LP release,⁶⁴ it does represent the first distinctive album by Ceoltóirí Cualann in terms of structure and concept. Just as Ó Riada's early radio broadcasts were anchored on the music of his new ensemble template and other aspects of Irish artistic life, so too did this album, released in December 1962, mirror such an approach. Ceoltóirí Cualann's first LP release acted as an album manifestation of early broadcasts which followed such a model, exploring Gaelic themes in which the music of Ó Riada's ensemble played a central role.

Although consistency in performance settings are to be found with both *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, both of which continued to be broadcast throughout the 1960s,⁶⁵ the gap in recorded material between LP records reflects both inconsistency in that respect, but also the evolution of Ó Riada's priorities. Ceoltóirí Cualann's next LP release, *Ceol na nUasal*, was recorded in 1966 and released in 1967. Just as *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* represented a shift away from a more general focus on the group itself, so too did the release of this second album. *Ceol na nUasal* represents a far more concerted effort by Ó Riada to address a central musical idea; that being the revival of the harping tradition and the reintegration of such material into Irish traditional music repertoire. Unlike the previous five-year gap between the release of their first two albums, *Ding Dong* was released in 1967, the same year as *Ceol na nUasal*. The idea of releasing two albums for a music group in quick succession solidifies two key concepts that emerge when viewing the approach Ó Riada undertook in relation to Ceoltóirí Cualann by tying both records together as works of contrasting themes. Firstly, it indicated that his priority was not to conform to convention but rather to put forward albums which showed unity of purpose; and secondly, it further highlighted the scientific nature of his methodology surrounding hypothesis, experiment and result, a significant element of Ó Riada's methodology that is expanded upon in Chapter 4. If Ceoltóirí Cualann's first album can be linked with much of the material which emerged from *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* the radio series, *Ding Dong* can be more heavily associated with the spirit of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*; a transition from the repertoire of Gaelic Ireland to the culture and music of Ó Riada's upbringing.

⁶⁴ Ceoltóirí Cualann are also featured on *Playboy of the Western World*, *Seán Ó Riada agus Ceoltóirí Cualann*, which is also released in December 1962. Details and analysis of this album are included in Chapter 3.

⁶⁵ *RTÉ Radio and Television Archives*, 'Reacaireacht an Riadaigh and Fleadh Cheoil an Radio Listings' (Dublin, 2019).

In contrast to *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, *Ceol na nUasal*, and *Ding Dong*, Ceoltóirí Cualann's fourth album release in 1970 is far more indicative of Ó Riada's final engagement with group activity in Irish traditional music. The Gaiety Theatre concert, arranged to mark two hundred years since the death of the Ulster poet Peadar Ó Doirnín, was advertised as a musical event by Ó Riada rather than a Ceoltóirí Cualann event. The *Irish Independent* notes that

On March 30 there will be an "O Doormen [sic] Concert" in the Gaiety Theatre with the first "one-man show" given by Sean O [sic] Riada, based on the poet's work.⁶⁶

Two days later, the *Irish Press* advertises the event by stating that

On Sunday, March 30, Sean O [sic] Riada will give a special O Doirnin [sic] concert in the Gaiety Theatre.⁶⁷

Later that same Month, the *Irish Independent* includes a longer piece advertising the event with the headline 'Public Concert by Sean O [sic] Riada'.

Sean O [sic] Riada will hold his first full-scale public concert at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, on Sunday next at 8pm. The concert is held as part of the ceremonies commemorating Peadar O Doirnin [sic], the Ulster poet, who died 200 years ago. In addition to renderings by O [sic] Riada of some of the great classics of Irish Music, Niall Toibin will recite some of O Doirnin's [sic] poetry, while Sean O Se [sic] will sing some of O Doirin's [sic] poetry which has been set to music.⁶⁸

On 28 March, the *Irish Times* also make reference to the night with the headline 'New O [sic] Riada Songs for Concert'.

Sean O [sic] Riada has written two new songs for his concert in the Gaiety Theatre next Sunday night. They have been set to lyrics composed in the 18th century by the Northern Ireland poet, Peadar O Doirnin [sic], the bicentenary of whose death is being commemorated this year.⁶⁹

Finally, a brief reference is made to Ceoltóirí Cualann in a piece for the *Irish Examiner* titled 'O [sic] Riada Concert for Dublin'.

Lovers of Irish music and fans of composer Sean O [sic] Riada will have the opportunity of attending O [sic] Riada's first full-scale public concert at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, on Sunday next, March 30 at 8.00pm... added interest will be provided by Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ 'To Mark the Memory of a Louth Poet', *Irish Independent*, 1 March 1969, p. 5.

⁶⁷ 'Honouring an Ulster Poet', *Irish Press*, 3 March 1969, p. 4.

⁶⁸ 'Public Concert by Sean O Riada', *Irish Independent*, 27 March 1969, p.6.

⁶⁹ 'New O Riada Songs for Concert', *Irish Times*, 28 March 1969, p. 10.

⁷⁰ 'O Riada Concert for Dublin', *Irish Examiner*, 27 March 1969, p. 15.

All of these advertisements, although repetitive in nature, are evidence of consistency in how the concert was being portrayed and the sustained depiction of the performance as ‘Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann’. In the case of the concert held in the Shelbourne Hotel in 1961, the place of Ceoltóirí Cualann can be viewed within the sphere of Ó Riada’s early preoccupation with reinvigorating a Gaelic way of life with a number of themes involving music, song and poetry. However, despite the broadening of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s role in the intervening years through their recorded material and broadcast work, the highpoint of their public performance history is subsumed into Ó Riada’s overall position of authority. The concert itself was a multi-faceted event which, much like the dynamic between Ó Riada and the group itself in terms of identity, produced a set list of tunes and recitations that were originally explored to some success within a broadcast setting. Writing in the aftermath of the Gaiety performance in a piece titled ‘Popularity of the Cualann Sound’, Mary Mac Goris writes a review of proceedings which reflect the broad nature of the night.

Anyone who doubted the popularity of the “Cualann sound” had only to try to get a ticket for the concert given by Sean O [sic] Riada and his Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann in the Gaiety Theatre as part of the bicentenary commemoration of the Ulster poet Peadar O Doirnin [sic]. It would have been, and in some cases was, a vain effort. It is, in fact, an attractive sound, if limited in colour interest, for a whole evening’s listening.⁷¹

The opening section of Mac Goris’ review again reflects the distinction made between Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann as ‘his’ ensemble. However, unlike assumptions that can be drawn exclusively from Ó Riada’s actions and accounts from group members, this presents an interpreted view in which Mac Goris is making that conclusion based on both presentation for that particular performance, and the history of the group throughout the decade. Indeed, she solidifies her point further by articulating that Ó Riada ‘himself adds a sophisticated touch-and most of the harmonies-at the harpsichord’. This is a further example of the way in which the event is being consumed through the prism of Ó Riada’s artistic identity rather than Ceoltóirí Cualann as a distinctive model. Mac Goris further describes the evening, stating that

The folk tunes they play, however, though often beguiling in themselves, and the instrumental composition of the group, limit the harmonies and the key changes that can be used.... Some variety came with Niall Toibin’s [sic] rich reading of a group of O Doirnin’s [sic] poems, and O [sic] Riada’s brief and quirky introductions to each piece were entertaining. The two settings of O Doirnin [sic] poems composed by O [sic] Riada for the concert are pleasant, if unmemorable essays in the folk style, but Sean O Se’s [sic] best opportunities came with Do Bhi [sic] Bean Uasal by Cathal

⁷¹ Mary Mac Goris, ‘Popularity of the Cualann Sound’, *Irish Independent*, 31 March 1969, p. 15.

Buidhe Mac Giolla Gunna and the haunting Binn Luisin [sic] Aerach a Bhrogha from Limerick. In a programme which contained almost thirty melodies from all over the country, it could not be expected that all could be great tunes.⁷²

An intriguing element of Mac Goris' review is the manner in which it compares to earlier reactions to Ó Riada's ensemble model. These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapters 3 and 4, but Mac Goris' comments about repetition and how the 'effect has a sameness which quite soon begins to pall', is a revealing counterpoint to consider when evaluating earlier reception history at the beginning of the 1960s in which novelty and uncertainty surrounded the new sound of such a group model. As a stand-alone event, the significance of the Gaiety concert, for both Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann, lay in the evidence it provided for both the public appeal that now existed for both, alongside the identification of the music produced by the group as a recognisable 'sound'.⁷³ As such, the concert marked a culmination of Ó Riada's direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann rather than a justification of its existence, which may have been expected at the outset of the group's performance career. Ó Sé reflects on the sense of occasion that enveloped all of their thoughts in the lead-in period to the concert, as well as on the night itself. He comments that

To mark the importance of the commemoration concert, he [Ó Riada] decided that we should all dress in formal attire. On the night of the concert, a wonderful sense of occasion pervaded. President Éamon de Valera sat to the right of the stage, while the audience was made up of *maithe agus mór, uaisle na tíre* – the great and the good of Ireland. Thankfully, the performance itself matched the expectation. I suppose, of all the times I have ever sung, this was the *buaić phointe*, the high point. Believe it or not, in my mind I always compared it to the transfiguration, when Jesus took Peter, James and John up to the top of a high mountain and showed them paradise. For me, Ó Riada sa Gaiety was my transfiguration moment.⁷⁴

Ó Sé's account, in the context of a written biography where such material is thought-through and edited, provides a particular perspective of the significance of the event. His emphasis on the sense of occasion, Ó Riada's desire for a formal presentation of the group on stage, and their awareness of the public stature of some of those in attendance, signifies the self-awareness that existed amongst the group at the environmental shift that had taken place for a traditional ensemble such as Ceoltóirí Cualann. Also, Ó Sé's reference to the transfiguration is obviously a well-considered analogy in light of the context in which it was made. If both moments share a distinct sense of awe, then it must be considered if Ó Sé's description is of a moment that is a singular and final event; one in which a similar sense of purpose is

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile*, p. 94.

unattainable in any subsequent performance. A considered comparison such as this, if taken in line with what the transfiguration represents, is a personal and professional moment that is unique and not in a position to be replicated in any comparable form.

Although critical analysis of the concert itself provides evidence of the recognition that now existed for the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, subsequent commentary focuses on the significance of the LP album that was released of the concert, as the primary legacy.⁷⁵ Despite the implication of the record's release, Ó Canainn argues that the intention to record the performance on the night was only belatedly made by de Buitléar when he arranged for it to take place.⁷⁶ Within Ó Riada's personal papers, the release of this record is briefly explored, with the title once again mirroring earlier albums. On a printed proposal for an LP by Ó Riada, the proposed title is 'Ó Riada sa Gaiety', with the tenor listed as Seán Ó Sé and accompanied by Ceoltóirí Cualann.⁷⁷

Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann: Identity and Representation

Much like the group's appearance in the Shelbourne Hotel eight years previously, and the sense that they were part of a much wider framework, *Ó Riada sa Gaiety* was shaped more around Ó Riada as an individual performer-composer than Ceoltóirí Cualann as a democratic ensemble. Similar to the event being advertised in newspapers as Ó Riada providing a performance, with the addition of Ceoltóirí Cualann, the album is also framed in a similar manner. White states that *Ó Riada sa Gaiety* testifies to the 'remarkable transformation of the tradition which Ó Riada had effected in eight years.'⁷⁸ Yet, such a transformation in the context of Ó Sé's comments, points to the concert as representing a significant visual presentation of Irish traditional group performance on stage that was comparable to the musical element of the production. The moment, in this sense, is the presentation of an Irish traditional ensemble on stage, in a theatre setting and for the attention of an invited audience comprising leading political and social figures. If the transfiguration analogy is to be used, then such a comparison undoubtedly refers to the setting of the performance before any aspect of Ó Riada's arrangements of Irish tunes were performed.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Chapter 3 for further analysis of albums and reception.

⁷⁶ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 50.

⁷⁷ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 526.

⁷⁸ White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'.

⁷⁹ See Chapter 3 for a wider evaluation of the Gaiety Theatre concert.

This highlights a common thread spread throughout all recorded and broadcast material, that being Ó Riada's consistent separation of his own identity from the public portrayal of Ceoltóirí Cualann while simultaneously maintaining a role as a leader and musician within the group. The visual placement of Ceoltóirí Cualann on their album covers also speaks to such an issue,

1. *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* – Le Ceoltóirí Cualann (Ó Riada's Recital with Ceoltóirí Cualann)
2. *Ceol na nUasal* – Le Seán Ó Riada agus Ceoltóirí Cualann (Music of the Nobles with Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann)
3. *Ding Dong* – Seán Ó Riada, Seán Ó Sé, Ceoltóirí Cualann
4. *Ó Riada sa Gaiety* – Le Seán Ó Sé agus Ceoltóirí Cualann (Ó Riada in the Gaiety with Seán Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann)

The consistent positioning of Ceoltóirí Cualann in this way across all four albums indicates that for Ó Riada, the group represented one, albeit significant, aspect within a wider exercise of exploring group performance templates within Irish traditional music. Undoubtedly, the national prominence that Ó Riada attained through *Mise Éire* in 1959 provided him with an individual profile that proved effective in attaining widespread attention for Ceoltóirí Cualann's initial projects. However, Ó Riada's phraseology on broadcasts, recordings and public performances suggest a far more concerted effort to sustain an individual identity. In this sense, Ceoltóirí Cualann is portrayed as a product rather than a wholly distinctive entity in which Ó Riada was a part of and directed.

Although Ó Riada's work within Irish traditional music continued throughout the 1960s, particularly through radio broadcasts, the full divergence between his concept of group performance, against band members' conception of how such an ensemble might operate, became more apparent. Ó Riada's relationship with Ceoltóirí Cualann is therefore based upon issues far beyond music; the nature of Ó Riada's group template, and the basis on which it is formed, creates a disconnect between Ó Riada's original intentions for Ceoltóirí Cualann, and what group members constitute as the future of the concept. The commitment to developing a commercial ensemble that spanned beyond radio broadcasts and recordings is represented as a natural step which Ó Riada was not willing to take. A key element of this issue surrounds the decision by Moloney to form the Chieftains, in 1963, and the impact that such a decision had on a sense of purpose amongst members of Ceoltóirí Cualann. The founding of the Chieftains by Moloney, which would develop in tandem with that of

Ceoltóirí Cualann from 1963 onwards, reflected the vacuum that existed once Ó Riada began the process of moving to Cúil Aodha. As Moloney asserts, he was more than delighted to have an opportunity to develop his own traditional ensemble and create ‘a different flavour of music with songs and airs’.⁸⁰ However, alongside this, the clear lack of progression regarding the performing opportunities for Ceoltóirí Cualann also played a major role. At the conclusion of Ceoltóirí Cualann in 1970, the majority of the group would continue with the Chieftains – Paddy Moloney, Michael Tubridy, Seán Potts, Seán Keane, Martin Fay and Peadar Mercier. As Ó Sé asserts, the Chieftains were moving into the professional sphere and beyond stand-alone concerts, and this was something that Ó Riada had no interest in undertaking with Ceoltóirí Cualann.⁸¹ Pointing to the lack of a cohesive direction for Ceoltóirí Cualann, Tubridy concludes that the Chieftains came into existence to meet the demand that Ó Riada was unwilling to commit to.⁸² This comment again signifies the divergence that existed between what group members expected and what Ó Riada himself intended to achieve. What Tubridy identifies as a significant point to develop from, which the Chieftains undertook, was instead a conclusion for the ensemble originally envisioned by Ó Riada.

As witnessed through set piece events throughout the 1960s, Ceoltóirí Cualann engaged in a process set out by Ó Riada which adheres to the spirit of the original ensemble structure he first introduced at the Abbey Theatre in 1960. Despite slight alterations in group membership over the course of the 1960s, including the role of Ó Riada himself as part of the musical output of the ensemble, the continued separation by Ó Riada of his own role from that of Ceoltóirí Cualann is situated in the context of a wider dynamic within the group. However, the manner in which Ó Riada positions Ceoltóirí Cualann is comparable in some ways to other types of musical ensembles. In particular, the construction of Irish American dance bands around band leaders, such as ‘Benny Goodman and His Orchestra’, mirrors both what Ó Canainn earlier articulated as his view, as well as what Ó Riada clearly indicates through his approach. The sustained use of ‘Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann’ across both advertising and album material implies that such a characterisation was the desired image that Ó Riada was attempting to convey. Without referencing the issue directly, he clearly makes

⁸⁰ Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, p. 54.

⁸¹ Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile*, p. 95.

⁸² Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile*, p. 90.

this distinction of identity consistently throughout the 1960s; his role as leader and a separate entity alongside the ensemble model he arranged.

As explored in Chapter 1, the manner in which Ó Riada worked ultimately shaped the way in which Ceoltóirí Cualann operated from the very outset. However, Ó Riada's representation of his ensemble model presents an example of an issue which is of greater significance; that being the extent to which members of Ceoltóirí Cualann are aware of Ó Riada's alteration of his own position within the group, together with the identity he constructed for the ensemble. As outlined later in this thesis, such a change in roles is viewed by group members not just in musical terms, but also as a representation of Ó Riada's control within Ceoltóirí Cualann. In the absence of Ó Riada explaining his thought process to group members, basic observations by members of Ceoltóirí Cualann produce a narrative that fails to align itself with an accurate depiction of Ó Riada's intentions, particularly an expansion on what he discusses within *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962.

The Final Performance

Although a defining moment at the end of the group's active period, the Gaiety Theatre concert was not the final public performance by Ó Riada's ensemble. In contrast to Ó Sé's emotive reaction to their performance in 1969, Ceoltóirí Cualann's subsequent concert in 1970 was far from a similar experience and was ultimately the final setting in which they would perform together alongside Ó Riada. By this time, the Chieftains group had been active since 1963 and had produced two albums. The symbolism surrounding the Gaiety concert, regarding both the production and musical presentation of Irish traditional music on stage, obscures the historical timeline. Despite the majority of Ceoltóirí Cualann's output occurring while Ó Riada resided in Cork, the tension surrounding the lack of opportunity for group performance, together with the emergence of Moloney's Chieftains group, resulted in the disbandment of the group at the end of the decade. The final group performance took place in Cork as part of the Turlough O'Carolan Tercentenary celebrations on 28 June 1970. For Ó Sé, the event itself was not a success as it was badly publicised, the attendance was poor, and they were essentially trying to replicate the concert from the Gaiety the previous year.⁸³ The concert itself was advertised as one element in a wider artistic celebration of Turlough O'Carolan. It is striking that in the space of ten years, despite the musical output of the group, the manner in which they are utilised by Ó Riada is equally as comparable to the

⁸³ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

promotion of the ensemble for their debut concert in 1961. Once more, Ceoltóirí Cualann are a distinct entity alongside other acts for a concert ‘given by’ Ó Riada himself. Referring to the evening, the *Irish Examiner* states that

O [sic] Riada will also give the gala O’Carolan concert that evening in the City Hall, which will feature some of the finest of O’Carolan’s compositions. Joining O [sic] Riada on the concert platform will be Sean O Se [sic] and Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann.⁸⁴

Despite not representing an event of similar significance compared to the Gaiety performance in 1969, reaction to the concert indicates a far more positive public response, with both the *Irish Examiner* and *Evening Echo* carrying favourable reviews.⁸⁵ The *Irish Examiner* comments that

The popularity of the Ceoltoiri [sic] Chualann, under the direction of Sean O [sic] Riada, can be measured by the enthusiasm of the large audience. The standing ovation accorded them at the close of the concert was granted only once before in the City Hall, and that time Tibor Paul was the recipient.⁸⁶

The extent to which the memory of the night on the part of group members differed to those present in the audience links back to the impact of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s concert in the Gaiety Theatre and a subconscious belief that the Cork event was trying to replicate that exact sense of occasion. As witnessed in the testimony by Ó Sé, the intense nature of his memory of the Gaiety performance shapes the subsequent memory of the group’s final concert. As outlined by John Rink, the experience of a performer within a live setting and during a particular set of musical works can have far reaching consequences. Rink contends that

A suspension of time and place can occur while performing—the overriding feeling being one of connection and identification with the music (to the extent that concentration remains focused) but also one of disembodiment, disenfranchisement from normal awareness and the outer world... One way of describing this experience is to compare it to living out a dream, in which objects and words loom larger than in real life, in which feeling predominates over rational thought, and after which only a vague recollection of the experience can often be mustered.⁸⁷

Applying Rink’s assertion to events at the latter stages of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s existence is relevant in appreciating the comparisons between the Gaiety and Cork performances, as well

⁸⁴ ‘Cork Plans to Honour O Carolan’, *Irish Examiner*, 16 June 1970, p.9.

⁸⁵ See ‘O’Carolan Concert Gets Enthusiastic Reception’, *Irish Examiner*, 29 June 1970, p. 9; ‘O’Carolan Concert Gets Enthusiastic Reception’, *Evening Echo*, 29 June 1970, p. 6.

⁸⁶ ‘O’Carolan Concert Gets Enthusiastic Reception’, *Irish Examiner*, p. 9; Tibor Paul was a Hungarian born conductor who was appointed Principal Conductor of the Radio Éireann Symphony Orchestra in 1961. He also served as Director of Music at Radio Éireann from 1961-1968.

⁸⁷ John Rink, ‘The Work of the Performer’, Paulo de Assis (ed.) *Virtual Works—Actual Things: Essays in Music Ontology* (Leuven, 2018), P. 90.

as quantifying the influence of other circumstances at that time. Indeed, Ó Sé's 'transfiguration moment' is certainly applicable to Rink's hypothesis, with the overpowering recollection of the experience overshadowing precise details surrounding the timeline of proceedings. Despite mixed interpretations surrounding the concert itself, it is clear that the event was in no way comparable in terms of impact as the Gaiety concert, as the second performance was attempting to replicate a performance that stood largely as a stand-alone event in terms of significance. Tubridy insists that Ó Riada was not someone who ever wanted to create a standard musical group that toured and performed extensively, but rather was far more concerned with the art of music and singular events and projects.⁸⁸ Ó Sé contends that following that performance

The "Chieftain element" looked for their fee straight away but Ó Riada did not have it to hand at the time. It was at this point that Ó Riada made the announcement that Ceoltóirí Cualann had reached the end and would disband.⁸⁹

Speaking about the circumstances in which Ceoltóirí Cualann disbanded, Tubridy describes a conclusion which appears both abrupt, and disconcerting, in the context of the significance of Ó Riada's direction of the new ensemble template.

The end of Ceoltóirí Cualann was very unsatisfactory, I heard it when somebody told me that they heard it on the radio.⁹⁰

Similarly, Glatt outlines an account in which following the publication of Ó Riada's classical work *Hercules Dux Ferrares* in March 1970, Ó Riada announced that he had disbanded Ceoltóirí Cualann during the course of a radio interview.⁹¹ Although the group had spanned ten years by that time, they had made very few live performances in those years and the majority of their output was produced through Gael Linn albums and radio broadcasts.⁹² However, the nature of the group's final stages is far more representative of how Ceoltóirí Cualann operated throughout the 1960s and is a motif that encapsulates how Ó Riada managed production, direction and musical output.

Even though Ceoltóirí Cualann ended on a somewhat anti-climactic note, divergence over the functionality of the group between Ó Riada and certain members was a factor which underlined many evaluations of the way they operated.⁹³ Ó Cannain points to one such

⁸⁸ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

⁸⁹ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

⁹⁰ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

⁹¹ Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, p. 75.

⁹² Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

⁹³ *Ibid.*

example surrounding the release of Ceoltóirí Cualann's first record and the fact that none of the musicians received any form of payment for their efforts.

A blazing row ensued between Ó Riada and the other musicians, bringing some of them to vow that they would never again play alongside him and that the group was finished. Ó Riada was not for turning and was prepared to let the group dissolve over the issue, but peace was eventually restored with Éamon de Buitléar acting as peacemaker and Ó Riada paying a certain few of them.⁹⁴

Such an incident highlighted the precarious nature of Ó Riada's work methods and the key role that de Buitléar played in ensuring a cohesive method was applied to how Ceoltóirí Cualann was operated. Indeed, when Ó Riada later moved with his family to Cúil Aodha, de Buitléar played a vital role in ensuring that the band maintained their practices in Dublin and that Ó Riada's ideas were conveyed on occasions he was unable to attend.⁹⁵ Such accounts emphasise two key features of Ó Riada's structure for Ceoltóirí Cualann: in the first instance, that group members were simultaneously enthralled and confused by the professional operation of the ensemble; and secondly, as will be outlined in Chapter 4, Ó Riada adopted a methodology and approach towards Ceoltóirí Cualann that did not conform to expectations surrounding commercial success and viability. For Ó Riada, it is clear that the relevance of Ceoltóirí Cualann lay in the idea of what the ensemble represented and the message that it conveyed, rather than its commercial success and viability as a group. If such a template was being expressed through the Chieftains alongside that of Ceoltóirí Cualann from 1963 onwards, it is clear that commercial success and comparisons overshadow interpretations by those members who were part of both groups. As a result, what appears as Ó Riada's unpractical treatment of the concept he had developed is actually a subconscious comparison between both groups which serves to obscure Ó Riada's overarching methodology. Kinsella comments that

For Ó Riada the music was as much a means as an end in itself, a means towards cultural integration; language, song and music fitted into, and fulfilling, a way of life. It is an ideal, requiring a very special community (at times, in Cúil Aodha, it seems close at hand...)⁹⁶

Beyond Broadcasting and Recording

The array of significant performance settings in which Ó Riada developed his ensemble model for Irish traditional music is dominated by both radio and album productions. The

⁹⁴ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 50.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Thomas Kinsella, *Peppercanister Poems: 1972–1978* (Winston-Salem, 1979), p. 146.

extent to which Ceoltóirí Cualann are defined by recorded material alone is laid bare in both the timeline of their output in both radio and the recording studios, as well Ó Riada's approach to organisation and management which frustrated members of the group itself. Outside of these, sparse evidence exists to indicate that Ó Riada used Ceoltóirí Cualann on a consistent basis for other performances. Throughout Ó Riada's papers, evidence exists of invitations from various organisations for Ceoltóirí Cualann to perform, but little information confirms if such invitations were replied to or accepted. Evidence that does exist suggests that public performances for Ceoltóirí Cualann, outside of Ó Riada's involvement in other projects, were few and often located in either Cork or Dublin, or linked with another event in other parts of the country. The *Evening Echo* in 1963 reports on a performance in Abbeyfeale, County Limerick, in which President Eamon de Valera was to be in attendance.

It will be part of the town's celebrations on winning the Glor [sic] na nGael prize for doing more than any other in the country to promote the Irish language. The performers will include Sean O [sic] Riada and his folk orchestra, Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann.⁹⁷

RTÉ field recordings from 1964 include material from Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann as part of a concert involving a range of artists at a Fleadh Cheoil in Kilrush, County Clare.⁹⁸ The *Evening Echo* reports on further performances by the group in 1964 and 1966, taking place on both occasions in University College Cork.⁹⁹ As will be outlined in Chapter 4, the environment within which Ó Riada placed Ceoltóirí Cualann was just as significant as the music they were producing. Although both the setting of the Shelbourne Hotel and Gaiety Theatre, with their associated links with formality, represented a clear shift in Irish traditional ensemble performance, an article in the *Evening Echo* in 1967 suggests Ó Riada situated the group in other similar environments.

Sean O [sic] Riada last night presented a concert in the Provost's House at Trinity College Dublin with Sean O Se [sic], tenor, and Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann. Any apparent incongruity in a performance by a folk group in such a setting is explained by the fact that they were playing not rollicking folk music but the gracious highly formalised music of the 17th and 18th century Ireland. Many of the pieces played are featured on O [sic] Riada's latest record for Gael Linn "Ceol na nUasal".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ 'President for Co. Limerick Concert', *Evening Echo*, 26 February 1963, p. 6.

⁹⁸ *Irish Traditional Music Archive*, Item 1310-RTE-WAV.

⁹⁹ 'Tumultuous Ceoltóirí', *Evening Echo*, 9 March 1964, p. 6; 'Capacity Audience at Traditional Irish Concert', *Evening Echo*, 8 April 1966, p. 10.

¹⁰⁰ 'Ó Riada Concert at Trinity', *Evening Echo*, 16 November 1967, p. 10.

Beyond broadcasting and commercial recording, Ó Riada's utilisation of Ceoltóirí Cualann is much less obvious. However, public performance examples, such as those outlined above, indicates a continued sense of purpose on Ó Riada's part for what his new ensemble model represented within Irish traditional music. His own position working within Irish traditional music and the academic setting of UCC is clearly a significant factor. As part of his discussion on classicisation within Irish traditional music, Vallely asserts that Ó Riada 'made his own name legend among traditional aficionados by doing just that: he leapt into the bosom of the ancestors by crossing the ditch that separated them from 1950s certified Irish bourgeois class taste'.¹⁰¹

The performance settings of both UCC and Trinity College speak to Vallely's contention, and in many ways, are symbolic of the manner in which Ó Riada situated Ceoltóirí Cualann in similar environments through their concerts in the Shelbourne Hotel and Gaiety theatre at either end of their performance history. However, the pointed justification by the *Evening Echo* as to why Ceoltóirí Cualann would be performing in such a setting is explained by the fact that 'they were playing not rollicking folk music but the gracious highly formalised music of the 17th and 18th century Ireland'. The contention here is obvious; the 'formal' repertoire of the Gaelic harping tradition is appropriately situated within the setting of Trinity College and overrides any considerations as to why a group such as Ceoltóirí Cualann found themselves performing in 'such a setting'. If, as will become apparent in Chapter 3, Ceoltóirí Cualann's 1967 album *Ceol na nUasal* is representative of a significant transition within Irish traditional music through the means of repertoire and performance techniques, then Ó Riada's positioning of the group in Trinity College to coincide with the album is equally as significant. Similarly, performances in UCC are also reflective of a wider reclassification of Irish traditional music by Ó Riada within an academic setting. As an academic, Ó Riada is utilising Ceoltóirí Cualann to support his own teaching through a process of theory and demonstration. Teaching schedules within Ó Riada's papers in 1970 indicates such a process, with recitals by Ceoltóirí Cualann preceding a class by Ó Riada on 'The Instrumental Tradition, with special reference to the Harp' as part of a summer course.¹⁰² Letters written to the Ó Riada family in 1971 by former students also reference his teaching of Irish traditional music within UCC, with Rev. Nicholas Motherway writing that

¹⁰¹ Fintan Vallely, 'Authenticity to Classicization, the Course of Revival in Irish Traditional Music', *The Irish Review*, no. 33 (2005), p. 64.

¹⁰² *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 630.

‘he certainly gave us a love and respect for Irish music’,¹⁰³ and Rosalind Gordon describing how

I will never forget all that he gave us students in U.C.C. and his brilliant lectures. He passed onto us his great love of our own traditional music, and nobody has ever done more than he, to bring a new dimension and dignity to the music of our land.¹⁰⁴

Through Ó Riada’s continued presentation of his ensemble template within academic surroundings, as opposed to wider public performance settings, he clearly does so for reasons that go far beyond performance rationale. The justification by Ó Riada being that Irish traditional music, through repertoire and the mode of group performance he was expressing through Ceoltóirí Cualann, was appropriately situated within such settings. As he earlier remarked as part of *Our Musical Heritage*,

Let nobody say that our traditions are inferior to those of any other country. They are our traditions, and as such they suit us best. If they had not suited us, they could not have become traditions in the first place.¹⁰⁵

Dublin-Cork Divide

Although associated with a number of projects during the 1960s, issues surrounding continuity of performance with Ceoltóirí Cualann can also be linked to the manner in which Ó Riada managed the group, as well as the expectations he had regarding other members. A key factor influencing cohesion amongst the group was Ó Riada’s relocation to Cork, which occurred in 1963 at what can be classed as the opening phase for the new ensemble. Ó Riada’s resignation from the Abbey Theatre was reported in December 1962, with the *Sunday Independent* stating that ‘no official reason was given for his resignation, but it is believed he wishes to devote more time to composing’.¹⁰⁶ However, Ó Riada was in the process of applying for a position in the Music Department of UCC, a process which clearly worried him due to speculation surrounding his future and any impact this may have on his application for the position. Writing to Aloys Fleischmann in December 1962, Ó Riada confided that

According to one, I was supposed to be going into politics, to another I was taking up a job teaching in Nigeria, but the most common rumour was that I was getting a job in UCC. I believe something to that effect actually appeared in one of the newspapers. Now, I don’t know who is responsible for these, but it seems to me that this last one

¹⁰³ Letter from Rev. Nicholas Motherway to Ruth Ó Riada, 19 October 1971, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 701 (12).

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Rosalind Gordon to Ruth Ó Riada, 4 October 1971, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 700 (17).

¹⁰⁵ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 1, 13 October 1962.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Sean O Riada Resigns’, *Evening Herald*, 1 December 1962, p. 5; ‘O Riada Quits Abbey Post’, *Sunday Independent*, 2 December 1962, p. 4.

could have an adverse effect on the chances of my getting the job, and I wonder if there is anything that can be done to counteract it? I don't know in what paper it appeared, but I'm sure that could be found out, and if so, should I write them a letter to say that this news-item was a fabrication on somebody's part? Or would that make the situation worse? Hoping you can advise me.¹⁰⁷

During this process, Ó Riada wrote again to Fleischmann in February 1963 confirming his permanent move to Cork,

I shall be coming to live in Cork on February 19th, and will be available from that date onwards, should you require me. We are renting a house in Crosshaven for the first three months, while we are looking out for a house to buy. This winter has been very hard on us, as well as on everybody, what with snow, ice, and just the other day a leak which developed in the roof. Cork should be a climatic improvement or we will be very disappointed.¹⁰⁸

Although no direct letters of reply are found within Ó Riada's personal papers, a letter from Fleischmann to UCC management one month later, in which he recommends Ó Riada for the position of Assistant in the Music Department, states

I regard Mr. Sean O [sic] Riada as the most talented student of composition who has passed through this department. Possessing absolute pitch, an unusual degree of facility at the keyboard and considerable creative ability, he started original composition while still an undergraduate... Within the past few years he has created an ensemble of traditional players, the Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann, which he directs, and the new distinctive combination of instruments and his method of writing for them probably represents the most notable advance made in our time in the field of traditional music... In developing a new style of polyphonic improvisation in the folk idiom with his Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann, he may be on the threshold of making a further vital contribution to the traditional scene... I have the greatest pleasure in recommending Mr O [sic] Riada for the post of Assistant in our Music Department.¹⁰⁹

Fleishmann's letter is a comprehensive outline of Ó Riada's career, with further references to his previous positions, his classical work, and the music of *Mise Éire*. However, in the context of Ó Riada's place within the academic setting of UCC, it is striking that Fleishmann places such emphasis on Ceoltóirí Cualann and their significance within Irish traditional music. Just as Ó Riada's placement of the group within similar settings is indicative of the place of traditional music within such environments, so too is it clear that it acts as a direct representation of his own individual identity and validity in discussing and teaching such matters. It also reflects the changing dynamic of Ó Riada's priorities at that time, with his relocation to Cork in 1963 changing the nature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's operation despite Ó

¹⁰⁷ Ó Riada, 'Letter to Aloys Fleischmann', *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 596 (53), 18 December 1962.

¹⁰⁸ Ó Riada, 'Letter to Aloys Fleischmann', *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 596 (60), 7 February 1963.

¹⁰⁹ Aloys Fleischmann, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada', *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 596 (39), 19 March 1963.

Riada's continued ideas about traditional group performance. Discussing issues surrounding the operation of Ceoltóirí Cualann during this period, Tubridy comments that

When Seán moved to Cork, you felt that he expected all the members of Ceoltóirí Cualann to move as well.¹¹⁰

In light of Ó Riada's personal and professional upheaval during this period, it goes some way to explaining the five year gap between Ceoltóirí Cualann releasing *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* in 1962 and *Ceol na nUasal* in 1967, although recording for radio broadcasts did continue during this period, albeit recorded in large sections when Ó Riada visited Dublin.¹¹¹

Artistic Projects and Scores

Ó Riada's appointment as Assistant Lecturer in Music was confirmed on 16 July 1963 when Seamus Wilmot, Registrar for the National University of Ireland, wrote to him confirming the position, as well as the appointment being widely publicised.¹¹² However, within the timeline of both the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann, and Ó Riada's own personal career in the Abbey Theatre and UCC, he undertakes a vast array of separate projects as an independent composer, arranger, and author. Ó Riada's personal papers point to a huge array of artistic projects that he engaged in, both for creative and financial reasons. These projects covered areas such as film and television, poetry, promotion of Gaeltacht regions and Irish language initiatives, journalism, and work on behalf of local organisations across west Cork. Ó Riada engages in a range of commissions for public and private events, as well a variety of advertising campaigns. Examples include various notebooks dated from 1955-1961 that include lists of performers and songs¹¹³; a copy typescript report on 12 June 1964 by [Col Blake] Chairman, Advisory Committee of the Irish Army, on a meeting with Ó Riada to plan a proposed 'Musical presentation' on Irish history, involving music, pageantry and commentary, to be given by the Army at the Cork Showgrounds entitled 'The Story of the Nation – Musical Presentation'¹¹⁴; and a letter on 16 September 1968 to Ó Riada from Austin Bevan of Janus Advertising, Parnell Square, Dublin, inquiring on behalf of Carlsberg Brewery if he could supply them with the music for 4 or 5 traditional 'beer songs' which they want to record for promotional activities¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Seamus Wilmot, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada', *Ó Riada Collection, Item 600 (2)*, 16 July 1970.

¹¹³ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 516.

¹¹⁴ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 518.

¹¹⁵ Austin Bevan, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada', *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 520/1, 16 September 1968.

Ó Riada's archive papers also contain a number of items relating to his work as a composer, in particular scores relating to traditional, classical and liturgical music. Specifically, material relating to the Abbey Theatre indicates the type of musical productions that Ó Riada was directing as part of his work, often incorporating classical music and Irish tunes. Examples include sheet music headed 'Abbey Pantomime 1958';¹¹⁶ pages of music for various stage productions in 1958, along with a running order from an Abbey Theatre production (on the reverse side of 'My Lagan Love');¹¹⁷ material and scores from 1959 relating to 'The Lords and the Bards' (also known as 'The Assembly at Druim Ceat') and including one autograph copy in Ó Riada's hand.¹¹⁸ His records also include numerous references to his own classical compositional and arrangement work, including 'The Shaskeen Reel' in July 1955, with autograph score for strings and keyboard, signed 'John Reidy';¹¹⁹ two musical scores for 'Five Poems by Johann Christian Friedrich Holderin' and 'Four Poems by Friederich Holderin';¹²⁰ a score for *Hercules Dux Ferrariae*, opus 17 in 1957, alongside original printers mock up;¹²¹ multiple copies of orchestral parts for *Mise Éire*;¹²² items dated Summer 1960 for 'Triptyque pour Orcestre Symphonique (Hommage à Renoir, Morisot, Manet)';¹²³ 'Nomos No. 2' score for solo voice, chorus and orchestra, handwritten and printed orchestral parts;¹²⁴ score for 'Military Takeover '43';¹²⁵ and a draft song in Ó Riada's handwriting, beginning 'My old moustache is turning grey; my thinning hair is going away... Quite vanished now, the gay young blade/ I'm getting old, I am afraid'.¹²⁶ These examples are one section of a wide array of material that exists which outlines the breadth of work Ó Riada was engaged in throughout the period in which Ceoltóirí Cualann were active. They are indicative of the nature of his career over the course of a fifteen-year period, from when he was appointed as Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre in 1955, until the latter stages of his professional life in 1970. Although not impinging on the output of Ceoltóirí Cualann directly, it does provide context for the manner

¹¹⁶ Ó Riada Collection, Item 500.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ó Riada Collection, Item 501.

¹¹⁹ Ó Riada Collection, Item 497.

¹²⁰ Ó Riada Collection, Item 498.

¹²¹ Ó Riada Collection, Item 499.

¹²² Ó Riada Collection, Item 502.

¹²³ Ó Riada Collection, Item 503.

¹²⁴ Ó Riada Collection, Item 504.

¹²⁵ Ó Riada Collection, Item 509.

¹²⁶ Ó Riada Collection, Item 510.

in which Ó Riada is received by members of Ceoltóirí Cualann from the outset, through his association with audiences across musical genres and areas of artistic life.

RTÉ

Ó Riada's association with RTÉ, both as Assistant Director of Music at Radio Éireann from 1953-1955 and his subsequent commissioned work, produces a vast array of material within Ó Riada's records from broadcast work to administration and personal financial matters. Examples relating to commissioned work includes 'Slán le Máighe', number two in a suite of airs arranged in April 1955 for small orchestra, signed 'John Reidy';¹²⁷ autograph scores from 1955, signed by 'John Reidy' for a large number of projects¹²⁸; score for 'Slán le Máighe' for mixed choir in September 1955 with autograph score, signed 'John Reidy'¹²⁹; score for 'Overture Olynthiac (opus 7)' in December 1955 with autograph score in hardback manuscript book, signed 'John Reidy'¹³⁰; scripts for an episode of 'The Kings of the World', transmission date 31 October 1966, concerning the music of the ancient Celts; copybook with undated hand written notes, with the title 'Programmes with Dr. [Hans Waldemar] Rosen' [conductor with Radio Éireann Singers].¹³¹ Like his involvement with other artistic projects, Ó Riada's work with RTÉ, both as an employee and as an independent composer and arranger, is spread across a similar timeframe; aligning once again with his appointment at the Abbey Theatre in 1955 and intensifying throughout the 1960s.

A handwritten note of one such plan for a television production by Ó Riada sketches out a running order for a typical programme in which Ceoltóirí Cualann were involved in the second half of the 1960s. The outline for an undated episode of *Ailliliú* opens with the signature tune and opening titles, then followed by Ceoltóirí Cualann playing 'The Boys in the Gap' (reel). Within the notes, Ó Riada clearly constructs the performance of the tune, interchanging between various instruments and the group playing in unison. Ó Riada writes for the performance of the reel

Harpichord

Whole Band

2 fiddles, whistles, drones

¹²⁷ Ó Riada Collection, Item 550.

¹²⁸ Ó Riada Collection, Item 551.

¹²⁹ Ó Riada Collection, Item 553.

¹³⁰ Ó Riada Collection, Item 555.

¹³¹ Ó Riada Collection, Item 593.

Whole Band

Pipes, flute & Whistle, box drones

Whole Band

Whole Band

His design for the performance of the reel clearly reflects his earlier comments as part of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, as outlined in Chapter 1, that his ideal group model would ‘begin by stating the basic skeleton of the tune to be played; this would then be ornamented and varied by solo instruments, or by small groups of solo instruments.’¹³² The opening music is then followed by a reading (unspecified), a song by Seán Ó Sé including music by Ceoltóirí Cualann for ‘The Bonny Bunch of Roses’, and then leading in to the group performing ‘Madame Bonaparte’ (set dance). Again, Ó Riada prepares the performance of the music, writing

Pipes & fiddle chord

Whistle, flute & box chord

Pipes & fiddle chord

Whistle, flute & box chord

Whole Band

2 Fiddles

3 Whistles

Harpsichord

Fiddle, flute & whistle

Harpsichord

Fiddle, flute & whistle

Whole Band

Reading (unspecified)

Once more, this is followed by Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann for ‘The Green Linnet (Sweet Boney, Will I Ne’er See You More)’, leading to the group playing ‘Bonaparte’s Retreat’ (set dance). Ó Riada then structures the latter sections of the programme in a similar format, writing out the instrumentation and arrangement of the group’s performance. The programme

¹³² Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

then concludes with another reading (unspecified), a song including Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann (‘Since Boney is Down’), and the signature tune and titles.¹³³

Conclusion

The structure of these programme notes, although associated with television, correlate with the type of productions Ó Riada first established within the Abbey Theatre and broadcast on Radio Éireann throughout the 1960s. Instrumental music in the form of Ceoltóirí Cualann, intermingled with songs, recitations, storytelling and lore, formed the basis for the Gaelic artistic setting he was attempting to bring together.¹³⁴ As witnessed through the organisation and production of Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada, innovation is as much about focusing on what is traditional as it is about creating something entirely separate. The timeline of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s development from 1960-1970 indicates a process by Ó Riada that focused heavily upon the wider idea he was trying to achieve, rather than the promotion of a new musical group. This is witnessed through the performance settings he selected for the group, the thematic approach he undertook to broadcasting, and the nature of the albums he produced. As discussed in Chapter 1, Ó Riada’s proposition in 1962 for the future of ensemble performance within Irish traditional music is structured in *Our Musical Heritage* as a failure to recognise the individuality of traditional solo performance and sustain such characteristics through an appropriate group template. However, as outlined within this chapter, Ó Riada’s practical engagement with such a model first takes place in September 1960 and is then followed by formally creating Ceoltóirí Cualann as a group and integrating them into a wider exploration of Gaelic culture through *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*. It is only then, following exposure on radio, that Ó Riada articulates his views on group activity in Irish traditional music as a justification for the type of ensemble he is pursuing.¹³⁵ Therefore, it is the case that although *Our Musical Heritage* is a central feature of Ó Riada’s work within Irish traditional music, its place within the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann is to act as the theoretical basis for such a group model, rather than presenting a further setting in which they performed.

The development of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout this period also reflects the nature of Ó Riada’s direction of his new template and the representation of the group’s identity

¹³³ Ó Riada Collection, Item 588.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ó Riada does not mention Ceoltóirí Cualann directly at any point during *Our Musical Heritage*. This is discussed further in Chapter 4 as part of evaluating Ó Riada’s methodology.

throughout all of their performance settings. Through his continued pattern of using Ceoltóirí Cualann to focus upon a set theme within radio programmes and album releases, the timeline of the group's development reflects Ó Riada's utilisation of the ensemble as a tool within his own creative process, rather than a distinct musical group. This process is most evident through the manner in which Ó Riada directed members of Ceoltóirí Cualann, choosing to integrate the theory of his template, as well as expressing it musically through repertoire and ornamentation. Ó Riada's exposure as a student to varying styles, such as jazz and classical music, had a significant effect on his transition into Irish traditional music and instigated a process of experimentation which would sound utterly strange to followers of traditional music at that time. Such a process first involved a re-configuring of group members within Ceoltóirí Cualann and their understanding of Irish traditional music. Indeed, band member Seán Potts openly admitted that he, as well as other musicians, were unaware of many of the features Ó Riada introduced as part of his direction of their performances.¹³⁶ The divide between classical and traditional Irish practices within the group was most visible in the fact that many of the members of Ceoltóirí Cualann were unable to read music and therefore were forced to either learn the new arrangements by ear or follow a system developed by Ó Riada himself. It was often the case that a new piece was played by Ó Riada on the piano, breaking it up into various sections, and repeating until complete, with variations included.¹³⁷

The subsequent release of four albums by Ceoltóirí Cualann adhere to the model of concept albums, in which each adopts a particular narrative or theme. Although *Ceol na nUasal* and *Ding Dong* are representations of such an approach, their proximity in both recording and release speaks more to the structure of Ó Riada's life than any wider strategic reasoning on his part. Likewise, the development, progression and conclusion of the ensemble are influenced by such factors. Ceoltóirí Cualann's initial structure and organisation are witnessed through early radio productions of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, as well as the recording of their LP *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* in 1962. Changes within Ó Riada's personal and professional life, particularly his relocation to Cork in 1963, go some way to explaining the four-year divide between the recording of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Ceol na nUasal*. Although broadcast material continues in the intervening years, Tubridy's contention that Ó Riada's unrealistic expectations surrounding

¹³⁶Interview with Seán Potts, 27 Jan. 1999 (National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, UFP0705).

¹³⁷ Interview with Éamon de Buitléar, in Harris and Freyer (eds.) *The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, pp. 120-129.

the Dublin-Cork divide and what he expected of them all as a group, again reflects the erratic nature of his lifestyle and methods, which in turn, have a direct impact on the way in which Ceoltóirí Cualann operates. Although McShane would move to Cork to work with Ó Riada on a number of projects, musical and otherwise, the remainder of the group were still located in Dublin.

However, as much as structural factors shaped the manner in which the group evolved and produced material throughout the 1960s, the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann remains the primary factor in defining how both Ó Riada and the group were interpreted by a much wider audience. If Ó Riada treats his radio broadcasts as a setting in which to explore the prospect of such an ensemble, then his production of albums represents the core musical statement that is being put forward. In light of the thematic approach which he adopts, it is therefore not surprising that public performances form the smallest section of Ceoltóirí Cualann's history. It is only through the structured nature of recording, which allows such set-piece themes to be explored, that the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann is fully expressed. It is this direct expression that encapsulates the significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a traditional ensemble and represents the next element to define their overall position within musical life in Ireland.

Chapter 3

‘The Cualann Sound’: Recordings and Impact

Introduction

A comment by an *Irish Times* reader in 1967 about the ‘Ó Riada sound’, along with Mary Mac Goris’ use of the term ‘Cualann sound’ in 1969, reflects the integration of Ó Riada’s and Ceoltóirí Cualann’s musical output as a distinct characteristic of Irish traditional music by the end of the 1960s.¹ As explored across all four chapters in this thesis, the history of Ó Riada’s ensemble model encompasses a variety of characteristics, both musical and non-musical, which explicate his contribution to the evolution of concert group performance within Irish traditional music. As outlined throughout Chapter 2, the development and production of Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada incorporated a variety of factors that contributed to the significance of the new ensemble template. Through methods of production, performance, broadcasting and repertoire, Ó Riada’s organisation and management of Ceoltóirí Cualann are significant innovative factors, as will be outlined in Chapter 4. However, the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, which underpins the basis for Ó Riada’s methodological approach to a traditional ensemble template, represents the primary influence upon audiences and critics which shaped reaction to the group throughout the 1960s.

Although Ó Riada’s development of Ceoltóirí Cualann through the Abbey Theatre, the Dublin Theatre Festival performance and concert appearances put forward the more obvious visual and musical elements of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s group model, the primary mode of Ó Riada’s influence remains the dissemination of his repertoire and performance techniques, which reached the widest audience through both radio broadcasts and commercially recorded material. This chapter will examine the commercial recording history of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as heard through five Gael Linn albums which include traditional music arranged by Ó Riada for his ensemble model, in conjunction with singing, recitations and original compositions. During the period from 1962 to 1970, Ceoltóirí Cualann featured as primary musical artists alongside Ó Riada on *The Playboy of the Western World* (1962); *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* (1962); *Ceol na nUasal* (1967); *Ding Dong* (1967); and *Ó Riada*

¹ Douglas Sealy, ‘Letters to the Editor—Our Traditional Music’, *Irish Times*, 2 December 1967, p. 17; Mac Goris, ‘Popularity of the Cualann Sound’, *Irish Independent*, p. 15.

sa Gaiety (1970).² Unlike radio broadcasts which explored themes across various stages of the 1960s, the production of these albums and the timeline they cover expose a thematic organisation adopted by Ó Riada which isolates specific ideas within each individual recording.

Transitioning Ideas: Radio to Recording Studio

Evaluating the role played by Ceoltóirí Cualann within Irish traditional music, White asserts that the group

provided Ó Riada with the means of rehabilitating the traditional repertory as a substitute for original composition. From its inception the ensemble focused the composer's absorption with the ethnic repertory and dominated his thinking about Irish music. It became, in effect, his mouthpiece: a group of traditional virtuosos governed by the composer's projection of Irish melody as a structural chain of variations in which the juxtaposition of soloistic and sectional textures with the whole ensemble sustained the inherent musical interest. Although Ceoltóirí Cualann undoubtedly derived in part from the céilí band tradition, it is no less plausible to argue that Ó Riada had exchanged one type of orchestra for another. The exchange was brilliant and novel: the musicians whom Ó Riada had gathered around him were among the finest executants available.³

In the context of the issues raised in Chapter 2, White's characterisation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as Ó Riada's 'mouthpiece' is particularly apt; it acknowledges that the group was projecting Ó Riada's new template through his direction and production of their musical output. The broadcasting of both *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* presents the most sustained setting in which Ceoltóirí Cualann produce recorded material. However, the production of Ceoltóirí Cualann through LP albums displays a far more concise focus upon shaping both repertoire and style around a set of themes. As such, regardless as to whether the audience has experienced the group sound through radio broadcasts or not, the album allows Ó Riada to shape the recording as a stand-alone contribution to Irish traditional group performance. This acts as an obvious contrast to operating within a more confined setting of a radio broadcast; time constraints and instant audience reaction restrict the extent to which concise musical themes can be developed. Commenting on his mother's initial reaction to listening to the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann on the radio, Ó Sé recalls that

² They also feature on *The Battle of Aughrim*, a series of poetry recitations of the work of Richard Murray. Readings were by Cyril Cusack, Cecil Day-Lewis, Ted Hughes, Niall Toibín & Margaret Robertson, and musical accompaniment was by Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann. It was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 25 August 1968 and released by Claddagh Records (*The Battle of Aughrim by Richard Murphy*, CCT7, 1968).

³ White, 'Ó Riada, Seán [John Reidy]', p. 805.

she was wide awake and eager to talk about the sounds she encountered on Radio Éireann which she thoroughly enjoyed, even if she felt the group were a little mad.⁴

A reaction such as this is indicative of the distinctive nature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's performance settings and the manner in which they are placed within a coherent timeline of Ó Riada's treatment of group performance within Irish traditional music. Consider Ó Sé's memory of his mother's reaction to his comment in Chapter 2, in which he compares his own experience performing with Ceoltóirí Cualann as a 'transfiguration moment'. It indicates that Ceoltóirí Cualann's transition between performance settings sustained the group's impact on audiences through both theme and sound. Writing in 1916, Louis James Block reflects upon the significance of music by arguing that

Music exceeds the other arts in that it compels the listener into a closer intimacy with its enchantments. The rapt hearer becomes the symphony which the orchestra pours into the air around it... while poetry unquestionably has been above all the other arts the light bringer and the healing physician, music has immersed us in the deepest movements of life. A hearing of true music is thus the passage from one typical elevation to another with a closeness, a certainty, a conviction, which can be only actuality itself.⁵

Block's placement of music within a spectrum of personal life experiences, in comparison to other aspects of artistic expression, points to the emotive impact that musical expression can have on a given audience. In the context of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann, the reception of the 'Cualann sound' by listeners, with its uncharacteristic arrangement of Irish traditional music at that time, echoes such an emotive transition between musician and audience. Ó Riada's initial dissemination of Ceoltóirí Cualann's performance template took place within the confines of broadcasting studios through the medium of radio, together with early public performances. Although radio initiated an exposure of Ceoltóirí Cualann's treatment of Irish traditional music, recorded album material presented Ó Riada with a format that allowed a greater concentration on themes and concepts. As outlined in Chapter 2, Ó Riada's continuous framing of his ensemble model as 'Seán Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann' is witnessed throughout the group's performance history and remains a dominant feature of the group's recorded albums. From Ceoltóirí Cualann's first appearance on a Gael Linn album in 1962 to the final inclusion of the group on *Ó Riada sa Gaiety*, which was released in 1970, Ó Riada maintained a central but individual figure, directing from within while simultaneously standing as an individual figure in performance settings.

⁴ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

⁵ Louis James Block, 'The Significance of Music', *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1916), p. 443.

Developing a Concept: Albums and Gael Linn

Programme notes for the Memorial Concert held in honour of Ó Riada in the Gaiety Theatre on 16 January 1972 state

With the formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann Seán Ó Riada brought an exciting new sound into the world of Irish traditional music, without compromising the authentic flavour of the music itself, or the style of the performers, who were all gifted traditional players in their own right.⁶

Such sentiments reflect the structured nature in which Ó Riada used his new group model; choosing radio and recording studios, together with select public performances, to focus upon a thematic structure. The history of Ceoltóirí Cualann's recorded work coincides with a re-evaluation of the role that recording technology had in exploring wider themes and concepts within a single, condensed setting. What emerged was a new type of creative activity in folk and traditional music in which musicians and singers deliberately grouped together tunes and songs on commercial sound recordings of extended duration, familiarly called albums.⁷ However, the historic use of such LP albums within Irish traditional music is one that is situated within a broader set of circumstances in which music is utilised as a tool in a wider cultural context. As Niall McCormack and Ciarán Swan contend, factors such as movements into album production to promote the Irish language 'indicates music's role as a popular cultural form conveying the relationship between modernity and tradition'.⁸ Although the term 'concept album' is inherently a mode of retrospective analysis in this period, it represents a process undertaken by Ó Riada that incorporated a set of particular ideas, as reflected within the choice of repertoire and overall musical production. Despite the term not being in use during this period, the idea of creating an album that was not just a collection of individual sets or tracks had precedents in wider popular- and folk-music culture.⁹ Adrian Scahill asserts that through Ó Riada's work with Ceoltóirí Cualann there is a confluence of a new, deliberately artistic form of ensemble traditional music and a calculated approach to the shaping of the medium of the LP to articulate this artistic vision.¹⁰

⁶ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 714.

⁷ Adrian Scahill, 'The Album and the Musical Work in Irish Folk and Traditional Music, ca. 1955-70', *Éire-Ireland*, vol.54, no. 1 (2019), p.17.

⁸ Niall McCormack and Ciarán Swan, 'Myth, Meaning, and Modernity: Printed Record Sleeves and Visual Representation of Irish Music, 1958-86', *Éire-Ireland*, vol.54, no. 1 (2019), p.48.

⁹ Scahill, 'The Album and the Musical Work in Irish Folk and Traditional Music, ca. 1955-70', p. 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Although the structure and theme of Ceoltóirí Cualann's albums changed to reflect the evolving direction of Ó Riada's new ensemble model, the role of the Gael Linn record label in both the recording and promotion of these LP records is important within the group's recording history. Founded in 1953 to promote the Irish language and cultural activities through a range of projects, the organisation is intrinsically linked with Ó Riada. As Ó Canainn asserts, 'it would be difficult to overestimate the influence Gael Linn had on Ó Riada and equally, the influence Seán had on the organisation.'¹¹ As explored in Chapter 1, Gael Linn's first feature film project, *Mise Éire*, produced a collaboration with Ó Riada that gave him a much wider national platform and name recognition that fuelled interest in many of his later endeavours, musical and otherwise. Ó Riada first developed an association with the organisation when he visited the Gael Linn office in search of Riobárd Mac Góráin, the editor of *Comhar*, a literary and current affairs magazine produced within the organisation. Ó Canainn contends that Ó Riada

wanted to write a few articles in Irish for the magazine, to earn some much-needed extra money. He proposed writing articles on music and Riobárd exercised his right to give an advance payment, as soon as he was satisfied that the articles would eventually arrive. The fee was around £2 an article and two or three by Seán appeared subsequently in *Comhar*, but under a pen-name: it was clear that the author, while he undoubtedly knew his subject, was not yet completely fluent in Irish. At first, Ó Riada and MacGóráin spoke mostly in English but as time went on, the atmosphere of the Gael Linn office had its own influence on Seán and later conversations were always in Irish... When Gael Linn published their first 78 rpm records, Seán asked Riobárd for copies and that was Riobárd's first idea that Ó Riada was interested in traditional music.¹²

Ó Canainn's account speaks to the influence that Gael Linn had upon Ó Riada; one which influenced Ó Riada in terms of language, writing, music and his overall submersion into 'An Saol Gaelach'. Although Gael Linn were involved with a number of cultural projects, the establishment of the Gael Linn record label in 1956 to provide an outlet for recordings of sean-nós singing and traditional music¹³ instigated a link with Ó Riada that overlapped with his subsequent success with Gael Linn's film projects. As Ó Canainn asserts

When Gael Linn decided to make their first long-playing record, Mac Góráin asked Ó Riada to be editor/producer of the recording. It contained songs by Tomás Ó Súilleabháin, arranged by Ó Riada, with his piano accompaniment. On the B side the Radio Éireann Light Orchestra played arrangements of Irish airs by various composers, including Ó Riada. The second Gael Linn LP had Pilib Ó Laoghaire's *Cór*

¹¹ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 32.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 'History', *Gael Linn*, <https://www.gael-linn.ie/en/about-us/history>, accessed 2 November 2019.

Cois Laoi on one side and, on the other, a further series of Irish airs, played by the Light Orchestra.¹⁴

The release of *Ceolta Éireann* in 1958, the first of the full length LP series by Gael Linn (CEF 001), provided Ó Riada with a working relationship in which he would later utilise as a recording partner to produce and promote Ceoltóirí Cualann's music. Like many of Ó Riada's engagements in the latter stages of the 1950s, whether that be his appointment as Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre in 1955, his developing broadcasting work with Radio Éireann, his working relationship with Gael Linn, or his ever increasing preoccupation with leading a more authentic 'Irish way of life', each association provided him with new opportunities. In particular, it allowed him to develop a set of artistic environments in which his theories surrounding Irish traditional group performance moved from theory into practice via the music and visual production of Ceoltóirí Cualann.

Playboy of the Western World

Ceoltóirí Cualann's first commercial recording opportunity, outside of their radio performances, does not align with Ó Riada's thematic approach to the group's musical output. Unlike later albums, in which the concept and theme of the respective LP was centred around the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann itself, this initial foray was not recorded under a conventional album structure, primarily due to the nature of the project. Commissioned to write the soundtrack for the film release of John Millington Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, the music arranged and composed by Ó Riada reflected his individual engagement with Irish traditional music, using Ceoltóirí Cualann as a tool in such a process. As Ó Canainn asserts, 'the music for *The Playboy*, which appeared in 1962, was traditionally based and reflected his involvement with Ceoltóirí Cualann'.¹⁵ Unlike subsequent albums, which are linked with other aspects of Ceoltóirí Cualann's broadcast work, accounts relating to the involvement of Ó Riada with the *Playboy of the Western World* suggest Ceoltóirí Cualann's participation reflects an early lack of cohesion surrounding Ó Riada's overall plans for the new ensemble model. As Ó Canainn asserts, the events leading up to the group's involvement with the project also mirrored such a lack cohesion. Describing the circumstances in which Ó Riada prepared to meet the producers of the film at his home in Galloping Green, Ó Canainn states that

¹⁴ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Seán once told Ceoltóirí Cualann that they might be in line for providing the soundtrack for the film, *Playboy of the Western World*, but that the commission had not yet been awarded to anyone. Seán wanted the job but did not know if he had a chance. However, he sent Ronnie McShane out to Galloping Green, to convert the room downstairs into what would pass for a country kitchen.¹⁶

Although not an adequate reflection of the manner in which Ceoltóirí Cualann were evolving under the stewardship of Ó Riada, it is an early indicator of the way in which Ó Riada utilised Ceoltóirí Cualann as a tool for his own exploration of group performance within Irish traditional music. Recorded in 1961, the album was released by Gael Linn as CEF 012 in December 1962 with the title: *Playboy of the Western World, Seán Ó Riada agus Ceoltóirí Cualann*. Despite the inclusion of the group's name on the album cover, there is no further reference to Ceoltóirí Cualann on the sleeve notes, the musicians are not named, and any references speak of the ensemble as 'the players'. The album sleeve notes state

When Seán Ó Riada was invited by Four Provinces Films to provide the music for "The Playboy," his reputation as a composer of film music was already well established ("Mise Eire" in 1959; "Saoirse?" in 1961)... The players, while they may be grouped in a roughly "orchestral" pattern — woodwind, "brass", wind, strings and percussion — do not form an orchestra in the modern Western sense. The high individualism of the Irish musical tradition is preserved in performance: there are no written parts, each player making his personal contribution to the texture of the music according to a design pre-arranged in discussion with the director... Its strength and freshness and deep popularity (in the real sense of the word) make it the Irish folk-art par excellence: its potential for development may be judged from this recording.¹⁷

These sleeve notes provide one of the earliest indications of the way in which Ó Riada was positioning both himself and Ceoltóirí Cualann within an exploration of a new ensemble model within Irish traditional music. As it is stated that Ó Riada was 'invited by Four Provinces Films' to provide music for the project, it again reflects the position of Ó Riada as an individual figure within the process, apparent also in Ceoltóirí Cualann's later albums. It also provides a platform upon which Ó Riada approaches group performance within Irish traditional music; one which was expanded upon by Ó Riada during the broadcast of *Our Musical Heritage* in the months prior to the album's release in 1962. The description of 'a wildly unconventional and exciting creative treatment of traditional Irish music' echoes the theorising by Ó Riada in *Our Musical Heritage* about his 'imaginary ideal band'.¹⁸ Furthermore, it also points to the primary orchestral comparison that emerges from a 'design prearranged in discussion with the director'. The last line of the sleeve notes point towards

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Gael Linn, *Playboy of the Western World* (Dublin, 1962).

¹⁸ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

the emerging dynamic surrounding Ó Riada's initial theorising about Irish traditional group performance, acknowledging that its 'potential for development' was evident, rather than established, within the *Playboy of the Western World* soundtrack.

That year was also one in which Ó Riada expanded Ceoltóirí Cualann's broadcast work, developing *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* following the earlier success of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* in 1961. Both the terminology of the album notes, along with the nature of the project, suggest that Ó Riada was continuing to engage in an early form of experimentation with his ensemble template. As a consequence, *Playboy of the Western World* is not an album release which focuses around Ceoltóirí Cualann or reflects Ó Riada's radio programmes, but is a film score which was recorded with cinematic factors being considered rather than any future release as an LP record. The album included fifteen tracks structured around the scenes of the play,

1. Túscheol — téama: Mo Mhuirín Bán / Opening theme music: 'My Darling Sweetheart'
2. Scanraíonn Shawn Keogh roimh Christy agus téann ag scaipeadh an scéil / Shawn Keogh is scared by Christy and goes spreading the story — 'Abbey Reel'
3. Christy ag eachtraí do Pegeen ar uaigneas a shaoil — agus ar alltacht a athar / Christy relates to Pegeen about the loneliness of his life and how distant his father is/was — 'Caoineadh An Spailpín'
4. Cailíní an bhaile chuige ... "It's a Man!" / Girls and town exclaim to him "It's a Man!" — 'Port Morrison' (Jig)
5. Christy ag eachtraí do na cailíní faoi mar mharaigh sé a athair ... "Cuir uait iadsan" adeir Pegeen — "chrochfaidís thú!" / Christy relating to the girls how he killed his father ... "Stay away from them" says Pegeen — "they'll get you hanged" — 'The Sunshine Hornpipe/Denver The Dance' (Slip Jig)
6. Téann Christy ar choimú Pegeen / Christy goes under Pegeen's protection — 'Caoineadh An Spailpín'
7. An Tórramh / The Wake — 'Dingle Regatta'
8. Ceol téama / Theme Music — 'Mo Mhuirín Bán'
9. Comhchealg na Baintrí le Shawn Keogh ... tig Old Mahon isteach / The widows conspire with Shawn Keogh ... inside Old Mahon's house — 'Abbey Reel'

10. Christy agus Pegeen ... téann Christy go Páirc na Lúthchleas i dteannta na gcailíní / Christy and Pegeen ... Christy goes to the football field with the girls — ‘Caoineadh An Spailpín’
11. Ar Pháirc na Lúthchleas ... tig Old Mahon arís / At the football field ... Old Mahon's house again — ‘Abbey Reel’
12. Ar Pháirc na Lúthchleas / At the football field — ‘Dingle Regatta’
13. An Rince / The Dance — ‘Rolling In The Rye Grass’ (Reel)/Bhíos-sa Lá I bPort Láirge/One Fine Day In Waterford
14. Christy agus Pegeen / Christy and Pegeen — ‘Mo Mhuirnín Bán’
15. An Gaiscíoch ... An marbh ba mharbh gur beo do bhí. / The Hero "The deadiest dead person there ever was" — Incidental Music

Although Ó Riada's production of the *Playboy of the Western World* soundtrack is not thematically linked with later Ceoltóirí Cualann albums, it is comparable with the setting of the Abbey Theatre in 1960; an opportunity for Ó Riada to test the limitations of his ensemble template within a setting that required a concise musical thread to represent the story being represented. In the case of *Playboy of the Western World*, the result is the use of a traditional ensemble, performing Irish traditional repertoire, but in a completely unconventional manner. As the music is designed to be evocative of the film's emotions, as well as bridging sections of the screenplay, the arrangement of the set list is structured around the storyline. Ó Riada anchors the entire soundtrack around ‘Mo Mhuirnín Bán’, returning to the theme at the opening, middle, and conclusion of the film. Its use at the halfway point of the production is very much a bridge, lasting only fifty seconds and portraying a melancholic tone through the sustained use of the accordion bass notes. Each track is clearly produced, both through ornamentation and quick transition between instrumentalists, around mimicking the scene at play. A particular tool used by Ó Riada is to return to certain tracks at various points in the set list but arranging the tune in a different manner on each occasion. As well as the main theme of ‘Mo Mhuirnin Ban’, the soundtrack is dominated by three other tunes which are returned to at various stages of the film; those being the ‘Abbey Reel’, ‘Caoineadh An Spailpín’ and ‘Dingle Regatta’. A clear example of the nature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's utilisation by Ó Riada in *Playboy of the Western World* is the first performance of the ‘Abbey Reel’; depicting ‘Shawn Keogh being scared by Christy and then spreading the story’, Ó Riada's use of the bodhrán and intermittent playing of the flute imitates the initial encounter between the characters, then increasing in tempo with the addition of further instruments to reflect the spreading of the story.

As a result of *Playboy of the Western World*, *Seán Ó Riada agus Ceoltóirí Cualann* not being released until December 1962, it appeared alongside Ceoltóirí Cualann's next album *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*. Indeed, this latter album is listed with an earlier Gael Linn series number, with *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* as CEF 010. The consequence of this timing results in commentary surrounding *Playboy of the Western World* (CEF 012) being situated in the context of a wider analysis of both records, and the resultant comparisons that emerge. *An Irishman's Diary* comments that

it comes over far more effectively in pure sound than as background for the Brian Desmond film. I particularly commend on this disc the "Caoineadh an Spailpin" [sic] which O [sic] Riada picked up from Sean [sic] de Hora, a folk-singer in Ballyferriter on the Dingle peninsula.¹⁹

Once more, a brief reflection is made on *Playboy of the Western World* in the *Irish Press*, but the extent of analysis is structured as an introduction to a wider discussion surrounding *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*.

The main theme of the score is as all who saw and heard the film know, "Mo Mhuirnin Ban" [sic] there is a special motif for Old Mahon and for the love scenes, Ó [sic] Riada adapted a Kerry song "Caomeadh an Spailpin" [sic] which we heard from the Ballyferriter singer, Sean [sic] de Hora.²⁰

Furthermore, the *Tuam Herald* asserts that 'like his *Mise Eire* [sic] score, the music stands alone.'²¹ However, like many aspects of Ó Riada's musical output, traditional or otherwise, the critical analysis by Charles Acton is far more detailed, compared to other reviews, in evaluating *Playboy of the Western World*. Although clearly structured as a film soundtrack, Acton attempts to treat the album purely as an LP record due to its release by Gael Linn under that structure. However, Acton's criticism draws upon the inability to transfer such music, and its meaning, onto an album without the audience having an awareness of the film itself. Leaving aside Acton's concern for Ó Riada's 'love affair with folk music', he asserts that

Another activity in danger of getting into a rut is Seán Ó Riada's love affair with folk music. The "Mise Eire" [sic] music was brilliant and entirely apt (CEF 002). That for "Saoirse?" (GL 1) sounded like a facile attempt to repeat a success. Then came his Ceoltóirí Cualann, the new style ceildhe band... CEF 012 is the incidental music provided by Mr. Ó Riada for the Four Provinces film of "The Playboy of the Western World". We are not here concerned with its success as film music, but with its permanent value as music on a gramophone record. Qualities which would be in place

¹⁹ 'Irishman's Diary', *Irish Times*, 22 Dec. 1962, p. 8.

²⁰ Patrick Lagan, 'In Rosses for the Christmas', *Irish Press*, 24 Dec. 1962, p. 6.

²¹ *Tuam Herald*, 29 December 1962, p. 3.

in the Doric atmosphere of the play may therefore be entirely out of place on the gramophone.²²

Acton's language towards Ó Riada, in the context of Irish traditional music, is explored in a wider context in Chapter 4. However, Acton's criticism of the *Playboy of the Western World* LP goes far beyond an analysis of the quality of transferring a film soundtrack to an album format. What the sleeve notes term 'each player making his personal contribution to the texture of the music', Acton describes as repetition that becomes 'infuriating'. He argues that

Two particularly irritating ones are utter indifference to ensemble and faulty unisons. A group of players starting a single note at different approximations of together is one thing live – the raggedness is different each time – but on a recording the exactness of the repetition on each replaying becomes gradually infuriating. If all your instruments are playing the tune in unison, exact agreement about pitch is even more important than usual. When to the particularly unpleasing combination of tin whistle and accordeon [sic] in unison are added fiddle, pipes and flute, one or more of which is not quite on the note, the effect is undesirable. While this pitch and timbre trouble only occurs at times on this disc, the raggedness is endemic. So, very sadly, I can only recommend this disc to those who want a souvenir of the film or those indifferent to qualities of ensemble and unisons. CEF 010, called 'Reacaireacht an Riadaigh' is a different entertainment with the same performers plus Darach Ó Catháin, a traditional Connacht singer.²³

Acton's frustration is framed as an intolerance that is somehow an instinctive response to the type of ensemble that the album is presenting, and one which Ó Riada should presumably also share. Yet, such a view fails to consider that the template was part of an aesthetic Ó Riada was trying to develop which was closer to traditional modes of performance.

Ultimately, Acton appears unable to retune his own aesthetic ear to such a process. The review of *Playboy of the Western World* also presents an issue relating to the timeline of Ceoltóirí Cualann's commercial recording history. The release of the album comes at the beginning of the group's career, as opposed to the latter stages in which the characteristics of Ó Riada's new template are well established through album, radio and public performances. Although Ó Riada maintains a separate professional identity throughout Ceoltóirí Cualann's performance and recording history, what is clear is that the commission for *Playboy of the Western World* was far more a reflection of Ó Riada's standing in Irish life than it was of Ceoltóirí Cualann's. Emerging from the national success of *Mise Éire*, Ó Riada uses the group as an early tool in his exploration of group performance within Irish traditional music and together with his early manifestation of a new ensemble model at the Abbey Theatre in

²² Charles Acton, 'The Lighter Side', *Irish Times*, 2 Jan 1963, p.8.

²³ Ibid.

September 1960, represents the initial exploration by Ó Riada of ideas that he developed throughout his lecture series *Our Musical Heritage*.

***Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* (Ó Riada's Recital)**

The release of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* (CEF 010) alongside *Playboy of the Western World*, (CEF 012) in December 1962 represents the second Ceoltóirí Cualann album that formed part of the Gael Linn collection, yet it also represents the first distinctive album produced by the group in terms of structure and concept. Recorded on 23 October 1962,²⁴ Ó Riada's basic premise throughout his radio series, *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, was an exploration of Gaelic culture by aligning traditional music, songs, the Irish language, and poetry within a single setting. Following the release of Ó Riada's record in December 1962, Patrick Lagan comments in the *Irish Press* that

This is a varied tumultuous, incredibly lively recording and Sean O Riada [sic] goes far in it to prove one of his pet theories. He maintains that songs have been preserved in Meath which have been forgotten in Connacht and one of these "An Caipitín O Maille [sic]" is one the record [sic]. And O Riada [sic] also breaks new ground when he brings in the harpsichord to accompany a traditional song: "Peigi Litir Mhoir [sic]". Good listening over the Christmas.²⁵

Lagan's reference to Meath is based upon Ó Riada's inclusion on the album of Darach Ó Catháin, a Connemara born sean-nós singer who moved to Raith Cairn in county Meath as a child. Ó Riada's promotion of Ó Catháin's singing within earlier episodes of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* the radio series transferred onto the resultant 1962 album. While he was performing with Ó Riada he was also working as a labourer on building sites in London and the north of England, later moving permanently to England and releasing an album in 1975 titled *Traditional Irish Unaccompanied Singing* under the Gael Linn label (CEF 040).²⁶ The format of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* copied the template established throughout the radio series; the continued use of the title name (Ó Riada's Recital) speaks to both the framing of the overall production around Ó Riada, as well as its thematic underpinning as a concept album. Ó Catháin's songs were intermingled with a selection of poems or verses read by Ó Riada, along with tracks from Ceoltóirí Cualann. In this instance, *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* is not a

²⁴ *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, p. 2.

²⁵ Lagan, 'In Rosses for Christmas', *Irish Press*, 24 December 1962, p. 6.

²⁶ Mary McPartlan, 'Documentary on One, Dudley Kane: Darach Ó Cathain is here in Leeds', *RTÉ Radio 1* (broadcast 10 August 2008).

conventional musical recording. Rather, as Peadar Ó Riada comments, it is a concept album that explores wider ideas of Irish culture.

Seán was enthralled with rediscovering the ‘Náisiún Gaelach’ or the ‘Great Gaelic World’, the world of Brehon laws and poetry and heroism and legend and language... This was the material that Seán was exploring and inhabiting when he began his series of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* radio programmes for Radio Éireann. He already had the group (Ceoltóirí Chualann) performing in concert and as the mainstay for the radio programme. He had asked Darach Ó Catháin from Rath Cairn to join them. The format used was a mix of arrangements of music; a selection of poems by the great poets and a few songs sung solo by Darach. Thus, one had a flavour of the different formats or representations of Irish culture as it still lived in the remnants of the Gaelic nation of the day.²⁷

As such, the impact of Ó Riada’s musical ideas form only one element of this overall artistic package and must be evaluated in that context. Within a fifteen-track album, Ceoltóirí Cualann contribute six musical pieces alongside five songs by Ó Catháin and four recitations by Ó Riada. The recitations form the smallest section of the album, mirroring Ó Riada’s use of thematic links between tracks which he displays in *Playboy of the Western World*. He recites short composed lines incorporating ideas within the album, often lasting less than one minute in duration; his final contribution of ‘Mo Ghile Mear’ being only four lines and fifteen seconds in length. *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*’s track list features

1. An Long Faoi Lán Seoil (Ships in Full sail, jig) — Ceoltóirí Cualann
2. Caiptín Ó Máille (Song) — Darach Ó Catháin
3. Ní Reacaireacht Gan Reacaire [Caint (Talk)] — Seán Ó Riada
4. An Buachaill sa Bhád (The Boy in the Boat, reel) — Ceoltóirí Cualann
5. Liam Ó Raghallaigh (Song) — Darach Ó Catháin
6. An Té a Mholas an Éigse [Caint (Talk)] — Seán Ó Riada
7. Cuan Bhéil Innse (Valentia Harbour, air) — Ceoltóirí Cualann
8. Port an Deoraí (The Exile’s Jig, slip jig) — Ceoltóirí Cualann
9. Amhrán an Tae (Song) — Darach Ó Catháin
10. Caint na n-Éan [Caint (Talk)] — Seán Ó Riada
11. Ag Scaipeadh na gCleítí (Toss the Feathers, reel) — Ceoltóirí Cualann
12. Sail Óg Rua (Song) — Darach Ó Catháin
13. Mo Ghile Mear [Caint (Talk)] — Seán Ó Riada
14. Spailpín a Rún agus An Lon Dubh (airs) — Ceoltóirí Cualann

²⁷ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, pp. 24-25.

15. Peigín Leitir Móir (Song) — Darach Ó Catháin

A significant feature of the musical element of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* is the production and arrangement by Ó Riada which involves variations, solo contributions, and the strategic use of sound to set a scene within a single track. Ceoltóirí Cualann's release of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* acted as a direct manifestation of early broadcasts which followed such a model, exploring a Gaelic theme in which the music of Ó Riada's ensemble played a central role. The result is a collection of an Irish traditional instrumental repertoire that, in the context of Ó Riada's criticism of the céilí band model, are not performed from beginning to end in unison, but instead incorporated arrangements that merged both solo and group elements throughout. Echoing his evolving preoccupation with 'An Saol Gaelach', as outlined in Chapter 2, the concept of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* links with Ó Riada's hypothesising about what of value was left in Irish culture at all. For Ó Riada, the essential elements of this process were poetry, instrumental music (with specific repertoire more highly valued than others) and sean-nós song. Reflecting the nature of the album which included instrumental music, poetry, and recitations, Ceoltóirí Cualann perform six stand-alone tracks, as well as accompanying Ó Catháin for 'Peigín Leitir Móir'.

Within the reel 'An Buachaill sa Bhád' (The Boy in the Boat), Ó Riada utilises this approach to its maximum effect by both his arrangement of the piece, together with the strategic use of sound to alter the imagery of the performance for the purposes of the listening audience. Rather than a full rendition of the reel in its entirety, each musician is attached a role while at the same time finding unity of purpose as the tune progresses. Opening with a tin whistle solo in which Seán Potts plays the reel in its entirety, the audience is also drawn to the light rhythm of the bodhrán in the background, played in this instance by Ó Riada himself. The bodhrán was an instrument that was uncommon in recorded ensemble performance before this period, particularly with the use of a bodhrán stick. As Ó Súilleabháin asserts, the kind of stick, the way in which it is held, the kind of wrist action required to produce the strokes, and the rhythmic patterns, vary among stick players from region to region.²⁸ Its introduction in the opening of this track has a dual purpose and links back to the evolution of its utilisation, as outlined by Ó Súilleabháin. While providing an obvious rhythmic accompaniment, the beat of the bodhrán player is resonant of the rhythm of a sean-nós dancer in his or her opening steps as they circled the space in which they were going to dance. Following the tin whistle solo, a clear and audible 'whack' of the bodhrán

²⁸ Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, 'The Bodhrán 2', *Treoir* (1974), p. 4.

and change in rhythm beckons all musicians to enter, and once more the reel is performed in its entirety. A further layer of rhythmic accompaniment is introduced through the use of the bones by Ronnie McShane which creates an unusual duel-percussion arrangement alongside the other instrumentalists. Following this section, a short accordion solo follows in which small variations are included, which then lead to the introduction of the tin whistle, flute and bodhrán. Playing the first part of the reel twice, the uilleann pipes and flute then take over as they enter the second part of the tune. At this point, there is a clear sense of anticipation being established and as the pipes and flute reach the last part of the reel, the bodhrán can be heard reaching a crescendo which then heralds the band coming together once more. This is an inherent use of a climax, a classical device by Ó Riada which he has transposed onto an Irish traditional ensemble. Ó Riada does not simply introduce himself on the bodhrán as a percussive accompaniment but rather, his position in the piece throughout is one of conductor. The band respond to his beats instead of the other way around; the percussive instrument, in this instance, is leading the direction of the group.

A further example on *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* which points to the dynamic of Ó Riada's evolving group template is evident within the track 'Cuan Bhéil Innse' (Valentia Harbour). Ó Riada's use of the bodhrán prompts commentary surrounding the track, particularly in terms of the style that is being adopted throughout.

Sean O Riada uses the bodhran, the goatskin tambourine, in two ways: it is beaten to suggest the roar of the waves and scraped to give the impression of the groaning of a ship's timbers. There are no written parts and each player makes his individual contribution according to a pre-arranged design. The instruments used are flute, uilleann pipes, tin whistle, accordeons, fiddles, bone castanets and bodhran.²⁹ [sic]

This early reaction to 'Cuan Bhéil Innse' from the *Tuam Herald* points to a recognition of the manner in which Ó Riada utilises his own playing of the bodhrán, alongside McShane on the bones, at the centre point of the piece. Ó Riada's rhythmic line acts as a counterpoint to McShane throughout the air, relaying to the audience the sounds of rolling waves upon a beach, followed by the retreating sound of sea water being mimicked by the bones. A scene is established for the listener, while simultaneously drawing attention upon the percussive instruments from the very outset and placing the other musicians within that set structure. Commenting on the role of the accompanying musicians within this piece, Acton argues that

²⁹ 'More New Records from Gael-Linn', *Tuam Herald*, 29 December 1962, p. 3.

In continuation of the troubles already mentioned, a piper and a flautist play in “Cuan Bhéil Innse” in just such approximate unanimity that it produces the nastiest supposedly musical sound I have ever heard in all my life.³⁰

Similar to his comments regarding *Playboy of the Western World*, Acton’s criticism of ‘Cuan Bhéil Innse’ is devoid of any recognition of both the aesthetic nature of Ó Riada’s production, as well as highlighting Acton’s inability to acknowledge the traditional basis upon which Ó Riada was situating his group model. Indeed, Acton’s remarks lack any reference to the wider meaning of the track (Valentia Harbour) and the integration of the traditional musicians in putting forward a sense of time and place. Ó Riada’s introduction of the bodhrán at focal points of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s performance is most prevalent within ‘Cuan Bhéil Innse’, and undoubtedly contributes to the mordant nature of Acton’s commentary. However, Acton asserts that overall, ‘the six items played by the band show very clearly that novelty and enthusiasm are definitely not enough’.³¹

Ó Riada’s playing of the harpsichord on this album, and throughout Ceoltóirí Cualann’s recorded and broadcast material, acts as a representation of both his own directing role within the ensemble, as well as the perceived deficiencies he identifies within traditional group performance. Discussed later in this chapter, Ó Riada’s increased movement away from the playing of the bodhrán is evident throughout the group’s commercial recording history, as he moves more towards the harpsichord as an instrument in which he can direct proceedings. In advance of the release of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, Ó Riada outlined his own views on the ideal template for group performance within Irish traditional music, pointing in particular to the deserved place of the harp within such an ensemble. Ó Riada’s positioning of the harpsichord within *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, particularly as primary accompaniment for the concluding song ‘Peigín Leitir Móir’, once more positions his role at the centre of musical proceedings. Described as an innovation by the *Tuam Herald*,³² Ó Riada’s accompaniment on harpsichord for Ó Catháin, together with the tin whistle and plucking from the fiddle, creates far more intriguing questions surrounding the hierarchy within Ceoltóirí Cualann. Indeed, Ó Riada’s dominant position on the harpsichord within the melody of the final track on *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* is an apt motif considering his increased use of the instrument in the subsequent albums that Ceoltóirí Cualann produce.

³⁰ Acton, ‘The Lighter Side’, *Irish Times*, 2 January 1963, p. 8.

³¹ Acton, ‘The Lighter Side’, *Irish Times*, 2 Jan 1963, p. 8.

³² ‘More New Records from Gael-Linn’, *Tuam Herald*, 29 December 1962, p. 3.

***Ceol na nUasal* (Music of the Nobles)**

Consistency in Ceoltóirí Cualann's performance settings are found with the radio series *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*, which continue to be broadcast throughout the 1960s.³³ Ceoltóirí Cualann's second LP release, *Ceol na nUasal* (CEF 015), was recorded in 1966 and released in 1967. Just as *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* represented a shift away from the format of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, so too did the release of this next album. *Ceol na nUasal* represents a far more concerted effort by Ó Riada to address a central musical idea; that being the revival of the harping tradition and the reintegration of harp music into Irish traditional music repertoire. For this album, there are no recitations or sean-nós singing, instead Ceoltóirí Cualann perform a collection of tunes that are again linked to a Gaelic, pre-colonial way of life. However, the role of the singer, in this instance Seán Ó Sé, is intrinsically linked with the type of pieces Ó Riada chooses to record. As a result, the nine-track album includes only three tracks which have Ceoltóirí Cualann performing alone, with the remaining six tracks including the group accompanying the singing of Ó Sé. *Ceol na nUasal*'s track list features

1. Caitlín Triail (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
2. Comhsheinnm Uí Chearbhalláin (O'Carolan's Concerto) – Ceoltóirí Cualann
3. Pléaráca na Ruarcach (song) - Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
4. Planxty Maguire – Ceoltóirí Cualann
5. An Chúilfhionn (song) - Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
6. Thugamar Féin an Samhradh Linn (song) - Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
7. Seán Ó Dighe (song) - Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
8. Tabhair Dom Do Lámh (Give me your Hand, air) – Ceoltóirí Cualann
9. Ag Taisteal na Blárnan (song) - Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann

Unlike *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, which touched upon a wider array of Gaelic artistic life, *Ceol na nUasal* is far more uniform in its identity as a music album by Ceoltóirí Cualann alone. *Ceol na nUasal* is a concept album that emerges entirely from a set theme and musical idea; that being the music of the harping tradition and its representation on an album that is not replicating a pre-conceived format from radio broadcasts. Indeed, the only comparable radio broadcast it can be linked with is that of *Our Musical Heritage*, and only to the extent that the album represents a transition from a theoretical argument in those broadcasts towards

³³ RTÉ, 'Reacaireacht an Riadaigh and Fleadh Cheoil an Radio Listings'.

a musical piece of evidence within the LP album. Yet, despite a greater unity of purpose, the recording creates a new hierarchy. In this case, the message of the album, rather than the ensemble itself, emerges as a core message by Ó Riada. Peadar Ó Riada contends that

In this album Seán wanted to re-acquaint the Irish public with the art music of their indigenous culture. This was the music of a people who were very au fait with what was happening in Europe of the Renaissance. The harpers were the superstars and were only equalled by the poets... Changing political fortunes and the attempt by the English crown to annihilate Irish culture drove the harpers and poets out of the country along with their patrons after the Battle of Kinsale and, indeed, by the 1792 harp festival in Belfast there was scarcely more than a dozen or so harpers left in the country. This is where Seán picked up the pieces as it were and started to play the pieces collected by Edward Bunting at that festival... This LP was about the idea of this music. The ‘planxty’ once again became part of an ordinary musician’s repertoire and songs long disregarded were heard once more.³⁴

Once more, Ó Riada leads the direction of the album, with all nine tracks opening, and being anchored upon, the playing of the harpsichord. What emerges is a record that is both adhering to a set concept model and putting forward a far more coherent musical message. However, the extent to which this musical message is Ceoltóirí Cualann’s alone is far from clear. Within a track list of nine pieces, Ceoltóirí Cualann’s primary roles are within ‘Comhsheinnm Uí Chearbhalláin’, ‘Planxty Maguire’, and ‘Tabhair Dom do Lámh’. Within these three pieces, the group once again are structured around the playing of the harpsichord but engage in the melody throughout. Linking with the period in which the repertoire of the album emerges from, Ó Riada allows only the uilleann pipes to play solo at any point. In many ways a successor to the harp of Gaelic Ireland, Ó Riada’s prioritisation of the uilleann pipes is a reflection, through instrumentation, of that period in history. What was now being presented, as de Buitléar argues, was traditional music in a more dynamic form in which musicians were treating tunes in all kinds of unconventional ways.³⁵

However, despite the significance of Ó Riada’s template in the context of group performance, the major thematic tool he utilises for *Ceol na nUasal* is the repertoire; an album which serves to put forward a Gaelic traditional repertoire through an Irish traditional ensemble. Ó Súilleabháin asserts that as part of this album

Ó Riada was referring to the music of the medieval Irish Gaelic aristocracy – the society which crashed with the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 and the Flight of the Earls in 1607. The music of that class was embodied in the ‘cruitire’ or harper – a high-status hereditary musician within the Gaelic clan system whose work included providing

³⁴ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, pp. 27-28.

³⁵ Interview with Éamon de Buitléar, ‘One to One’, *RTÉ* (21 Nov. 2011).

accompaniment to the Reacaire – or ‘reciter’ – who declaimed the syllabic bardic praise poetry of the File – the clan poet.³⁶

Ó Súilleabháin’s reference to the Battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls speaks to the reconfiguration of Irish cultural life in the seventeenth century with the English conquest of Gaelic Ireland, and the representation of such a tradition through Ó Riada’s production of *Ceol na nUasal*. Indeed, the reference to the ‘Reacaire’ also speaks to the relevance of Ó Riada’s use of the term through *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* as a continued motif throughout the 1960s. The three pieces performed by Ceoltóirí Cualann on *Ceol na nUasal* represent a selection of tunes from a Gaelic repertory that, despite being recovered at the latter stages of the eighteenth century, remained aloof from the Irish traditional repertory of the twentieth century. In particular, they relate to the work of Edward Bunting (1773–1843), whose three published collections - *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music*, 1797; *A General Collection of the Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1809; *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1840 - include tunes that Ó Riada arranges for Ceoltóirí Cualann across a number of platforms. By his own admission, the pivotal episode in Bunting’s career was his participation in the Belfast Harp Festival, from 11 to 14 July 1792, in which he notated the performances of several of the competitors.³⁷ From this emerged Bunting’s first volume of collections in 1797 in which two compositions by Turlough O’Carolan (1670–1738), ‘O’Carolan’s Concerto’ and ‘Planxty Maguire’, are performed by Ceoltóirí Cualann on *Ceol na nUasal*.³⁸ In relation to ‘O’Carolan’s Concerto’, Bunting references the piece in the preface to his first collection, noting clear ‘imitations of Corelli, in which the exuberant fancy of that admired composer is happily copied’.³⁹ As Williams asserts, the influence of Italian composition is a major characteristic of O’Carolan,

Ó Carolan’s harp music compositions were strongly influenced by musical currents of the European mainland, particularly the Italian baroque. In some cases he adapted local melodies to suit his style, while in other cases, he developed entirely new works.⁴⁰

‘Tabhair Dom do Lámh’, the third piece performed by Ceoltóirí Cualann on the album, is included in the final volume of Bunting’s collection in 1840. Alongside an account of the

³⁶ Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, *Ceol na nUasal: Seán Ó Riada and the Search for a Native Irish Art Music*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 15 (Cork, 2004) p. 1.

³⁷ Harry White, ‘Bunting, Edward’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

³⁸ Edward Bunting, *A General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music: Containing a Variety of Admired Airs Never Before Published, and Also the Compositions of Conolan and Carolan* (London, 1797), pp. 23-35.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. iv.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*, p. 58.

composer Rory Dall O’Cahan, Bunting also recounts the history of ‘Tabhair Dom do Lámh’ and its composition in 1603, noting that

Among other visits made by him to the houses of the Scottish nobility, he is said to have called at Eglintoun Castle, now celebrated in the annals of modern chivalry, when Lady Eglintoun, not being aware of his rank, affronted his Irish pride by demanding a tune in a peremptory manner. O’Cahan refused, and left the castle. Her ladyship afterwards, understanding who he was, sought a reconciliation, which was readily effected.⁴¹

The use by Ó Riada of such material, both in *Ceol na nUasal* and in later performances such as the Gaiety Theatre in 1969, are only partially explained by his interest in the revival of an old Gaelic repertoire. It also speaks to issues surrounding cultural identity, as explored as part of Chapter 1, and Ó Riada’s position in a wider process of reevaluating the position of O’Carolan within Ireland’s musical history. White asserts that

By the beginning of the twentieth century, leading figures in the Irish Folk Song Society were inclined to disavow Carolan's achievement in terms of the ‘purity’ of the ethnic tradition, a point of view most forcibly expressed by Richard Henebry, whose *Handbook of Irish music* (1928) resolves that Carolan's tunes ‘show him to be no Irish musician’. It was not until the publication in 1958 of *Carolan: The Life, Times and Music of an Irish harper* by Donal O’Sullivan that this extreme point of view was satisfactorily redressed.⁴²

As such, Ceoltóirí Cualann’s performance of compositions by O’Carolan and O’Cahan are historically accurate representations of Gaelic life and harping, through their origins and the manner of their treatment within the Irish repertory up to that point.

Harpsichord

Ó Riada’s use of the harpsichord as both a representation of Gaelic Ireland, along with his own position within Ceoltóirí Cualann, is the most aurally distinctive feature of the instrumentation in *Ceol na nUasal*. However, Ó Riada’s earlier postulation in *Our Musical Heritage* about the place of the harp in his ‘ideal’ ensemble points to reasons which are also circumstantial in nature. In the absence of a harp, the inclusion of the harpsichord is obvious due to the mechanical action of plucking in both instruments. The harpsichord is also a convenient addition for both historical and practical reasons. Alongside the fact that Ó Riada is a keyboard player himself, the instrument is also a convenient representation of the period in which Ó Riada is channelling this element of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s music; an instrument

⁴¹ Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin, 1840), p. 68.

⁴² Harry White, ‘Carolan, Turlough’ in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

widely used in baroque music, its historical placement coincides with the Gaelic tradition Ó Riada is attempting to project. Ó Riada opens all nine tracks with his own playing of the melody on harpsichord, with the only exception being ‘Thugamar Féin an Samhradh Linn’ in which Ó Riada continues to open the piece with harpsichord but this time as accompaniment to tin whistles. As a consequence, if examined in its totality, *Ceol na nUasal* is an album in which the concept of reviving Gaelic Ireland through the repertoire of the 18th century harping tradition is channelled primarily through Ó Riada himself, with Ceoltóirí Cualann and Ó Sé acting as accompaniment tools within such a process. The manner in which Ó Riada utilised the harpsichord within Ceoltóirí Cualann evolves for both theoretical and functional reasons. Within the original manifestations of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Ó Riada was the self-designated bodhrán player only. However, as de Buitléar recounts, Ó Riada moved towards focusing on the use of the harpsichord for both musical and wider reasons within the group.

There was an element of competition that was growing between Ó Riada and Paddy Moloney. Though Seán had at first given the pipes a special place in his arrangements for the group, it was clear that he intended in future to hold a tighter rein on affairs, from his position at the keyboard, than he would have had if he were still playing the bodhrán.⁴³

The view expressed by de Buitléar that Ó Riada’s shift towards playing the harpsichord was as much about control of the ensemble as it was for musical reasons, is indicative of the way in which perceptions within the group often evolved in tandem with how they judged Ó Riada’s actions as director of the musicians. However, if Ó Riada’s increased positioning of his role on the harpsichord represents internal artistic tensions, his original inclusion of the instrument is based on both practical and theoretical terms. As outlined by Ó Riada when he described the makeup of his ideal traditional ensemble in *Our Musical Heritage*, the use of the harp, played in a traditional fashion, greatly benefited such a template.⁴⁴ Furthermore, he reflects upon the potential of the harp within such a model and the benefit of utilising the harpsichord to fill a perceived gap that lay vacant when no harp was available, as a factor that influenced his own ability to assemble such a grouping. He states that

The only thing traditional about it is the actual instrument itself. Present-day Irish harping is no more traditional harping than [if] a wolf in sheep’s clothing is a sheep... However, though we know very little about traditional harping, we do know that the strings were plucked by fingernails, not by the fingers. This means it must have

⁴³ de Buitléar, in Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 48.

⁴⁴ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

sounded not unlike a harpsichord, whereas the present-day harp sounds more like a guitar.⁴⁵

Two months after the broadcast of this episode of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, Ó Riada writes in the *Irish Times* that

The harp is a cursed bloody instrument. For one thing, it is always going out of tune, a source of much annoyance to me in the last few weeks, during which I've been experimenting with the instrument in the hope of writing something for it.⁴⁶

Ó Canainn suggests that it is difficult to balance Ó Riada's original recommendation of the harp in *Our Musical Heritage* with such sentiments.⁴⁷ Yet, Ó Riada's original placement of the harp within his ideal ensemble template was set within a rigid set of historical and stylistic caveats which he outlines during his broadcast. He briefly explores the impact of an older harping tradition which declined and failed to remerge in its earlier form. Ó Riada contends that

To revive the true harping tradition was impossible. Instead a style of harping was developed which was based mainly on Welsh harping, quite different from the Irish style. The only thing traditional about present-day harping is the instrument itself.⁴⁸

As referenced across this study, the innovation of Ó Riada lies as much in his methodology as it does in the musical ensemble he produces. If *Our Musical Heritage* can be viewed as a hypothesis, then Ó Riada's actions that follow can be viewed as experimenting with such a hypothesis. Indeed, his use of the term 'experiment' in the *Irish Times* indicates that rather than trying to balance his assertions with earlier sentiments, one can be viewed as a continuation of the other. Within his original comments, Ó Riada further solidifies the conditionality of his use of the harp with his ensemble model by stating that

I think it is a pity we do not try to reconstruct a style closer to the traditional style, instead of propagating an invented style which has nothing to do with tradition.⁴⁹

Therefore, Ó Riada's frustration, as expressed in his *Irish Times* article, provides an insight into his own attempts to complete such a task. Not only does he repeat his original criticism of modern harp styles but admits that such issues surrounding the instrument stretch far beyond current practices. After his own brief attempts, he concludes that

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ó Riada, 'The Musical Life and Cows', *Irish Times*, 29 December 1962, p. 8.

⁴⁷ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

One would have thought that the traditional harpers who used brass strings (which they played with curved fingernails – *aduncis unguibus*, as Stanihurst put it in 1584), would not have had to cope with this problem to the same extent. One would be wrong.⁵⁰

Ding Dong

Officially titled *Ding Dong: Seán Ó Riada, Seán Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann* (CEF 016), this album moved away, as Peadar Ó Riada notes, from the world of the ‘Náisiún Gaelach’ to the world of the rural Ireland of Ó Riada’s youth which still existed to a large extent in the more remote areas of the country at that time.⁵¹ The sleeves notes for the album, which are written by Sean Mac Réamoinn (1921-2007), provide a brief outline of the group’s performance history but like previous iterations, Mac Réamoinn identifies Ó Riada as a separate entity in parallel to the ‘Ceoltóirí’.

"The Song of the Anvil", a play by Bryan MacMahon, produced in the Abbey Theatre in 1961, was the happy occasion that brought Seán Ó Riada first into contact with some of the musicians who now form Ceoltóirí Cualann. Ó Riada was at that time the theatre's Music Director, and the new "sound" and style of the Ceoltóirí, their unique combination of tradition and originality which has brought such excitement and brio to the Irish folk-music scene, derives from the brilliant experiment which provided incidental music for that play... The tunes they play are not the cream of our tradition — but who wants cream everyday? This is good robust entertainment in the tradition of the firesides and crossroads and taverns of Ireland.⁵²

Although Mac Réamoinn’s accompanying sleeve notes place Ó Riada at the centre of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s development throughout the 1960s, it is notable that *Ding Dong* provides the most detailed biographical account and acknowledgement of the group as a distinct musical unit. The use of the terms ‘new sound’, ‘excitement’ and ‘experiment’ by Mac Réamoinn mirror themes across all chapters of this thesis and, considering the album was released in 1967, indicates a sustained pattern of reception towards the new group template. The release of *Ding Dong* with that of *Ceol na nUasal* in 1967 points to a link between both albums. The line-up of Ceoltóirí Cualann is unchanged, as well as Ó Sé’s position as singer on both albums. Recorded on 16 April 1967,⁵³ only five months following the recording of *Ceol na nUasal*, *Ding Dong* presents a shift back towards a gathering of traditional instrumental pieces and songs, as heard in *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*. If Ceoltóirí Cualann’s second album can be linked with much of the material which emerged from *Reacaireacht an*

⁵⁰ Ó Riada, ‘The Musical Life and Cows’, *Irish Times*, p. 8.

⁵¹ Ó Riada, *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, p. 28.

⁵² Gael Linn, *Ding Dong* (Dublin, 1967).

⁵³ *Pléaráca an Riadaigh*, p. 6.

Riadaigh the radio series, *Ding Dong* can be more heavily associated with the spirit of *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*. Comprising of ten tracks, Ceoltóirí Cualann perform four as a group, accompanying the singing of Ó Sé for the remaining six.

1. Raca Breá mo Chinn (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
2. Cearta an Duine (The Rights of Man) – Ceoltóirí Cualann
3. The Boys of Kilmichael (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
4. An Tonn Reatha (The Rolling Wave) – Ceoltóirí Cualann
5. Raithineach a Bhean Bheag (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
6. Táimse ar an mBaile Seo (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
7. Rogha Liatroma (Leitrim Fancy) – Ceoltóirí Cualann
8. The Valley of Knockanure (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann
9. Ríl Mór Bhaile an Chalaídh – Ceoltóirí Cualann
10. Ding Dong Dedaró (song) – Ó Sé and Ceoltóirí Cualann

The album moves away from the sensitive arrangements of its immediate predecessor and puts forward an exuberant tone that one could easily place within a concert hall setting. As highlighted in earlier recordings and broadcasts, most notably within *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, Ó Riada's exploration of Gaelic culture is to the fore in terms of theme and concept. Although much of this is echoed within *Ceol na nUasal*, Ó Riada's fourth album with the group returns to a more familiar tone. Mirroring Ó Riada's radio series, *Fleadh Cheoil an Radió*, in which poets were replaced by the seanchaí, *Ding Dong* contains arrangements of instrumental music and songs that bring some of Ó Riada's ideas full circle – from a re-acquaintance with music of the past to a more elaborate treatment of the traditional repertoire. It is an album made up of dance music and songs which reflect the environment of Ó Riada's youth, a further progression of his thematic development from one album to another. The central position of Ó Sé's singing as part of the album, as well as the choice of songs, reiterates the distinct tone of rural Ireland and nationalistic sentiments. The four songs in the Irish language echo romantic visions of Irish life, dealing with issues of love, lamenting for home, and the fun spirit of a rural way of life. The two songs that are performed in the English language, 'The Boys of Kilmichael' and 'The Valley of Knockanure' are much more nationalistic in tone. Commemorating events from the Irish War of Independence in 1920 and 1921, members of Ceoltóirí Cualann can be heard to join Ó Sé in singing the chorus of 'The Boys of Kilmichael', while playing instrumental music throughout both tracks. Within the track, 'Ríl Mhór Bhaile an Chalaídh', this exuberant tone

is evident from the outset. Interchanging between group performance and several solo and duet arrangements (flute, fiddles, harpsichord, uilleann pipes), it epitomises much of what is associated with the sound of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Although the repertoire of *Ding Dong* echoes a transition from the Gaelic Ireland of *Ceol na nUasal* towards a more recognised musical depiction of rural Ireland, Ó Riada's production again makes use of classical devices within the presentation of recognised traditional pieces and songs. Two particular devices utilised by Ó Riada stand-out within the tracks 'Raithneach a Bhean Bheag' and the title track 'Ding Dong Dedaró', which introduce performance techniques that speak to Ó Riada's earlier criticism of the céilí band model in 1962 as part of *Our Musical Heritage*; that being a greater emphasis on solo expression and ornamentation within the group performance. As 'Raithneach a Bhean Bheag' reaches a conclusion there are four seconds of silence, after which there is a dramatic chordal vamp on the harpsichord and tin whistles which is resonant of a classical string orchestral device. Furthermore, 'Ding Dong Dedaró' opens with a repeated set of beats which continues for the entirety of the song, similar to a jazz riff or a classical ostinato. Although the instruments for the album are listed as part of the sleeve notes, the beats involve more than the bodhrán and uilleann pipes, with a sound of a triangle also to be heard.

Despite Mac Réamoinn's interpretation that the recording is a 'good robust entertainment in the tradition of the firesides and crossroads and taverns of Ireland', such devices are not musical characteristics that can be linked to the type of 'light-hearted' approach that he suggests. In terms of a timeline within Ceoltóirí Cualann's recorded work, *Ding Dong*'s release so close to that of *Ceol na nUasal* instigates a discussion far beyond that of commercial intentions. It is a further example of the manner in which Ó Riada managed Ceoltóirí Cualann around the 'idea' of the music, in contrast to any resemblance of professional considerations. The release of *Ding Dong* creates an obvious juxtaposition between it, and *Ceol na nUasal*; two albums with differing themes and representing different historical representations of Irish musical practices. However, when considered as part of a trilogy, with *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, it is clear that Ó Riada is following a chronological repertoire development and adhering to a thematic approach that is distinctly represented within each album. As witnessed through the work of Bunting, Ó Riada was certainly in a position to instigate wider recording projects to bear witness to the bulk of material available from the Gaelic harping tradition. However, each album is far more concerned with

presenting a coherent message and as such, the proximity of Ceoltóirí Cualann's recorded work only serves to solidify the manner in which each work counterpoints the other.

Concert and Album: *Ó Riada sa Gaiety* (Ó Riada in the Gaiety)

If Ceoltóirí Cualann's introduction on the public stage of the Shelbourne Hotel represented a pivotal introduction in Irish musical life, then the group's concert in the Gaiety Theatre in March 1969 would prove to be the significant conclusion to a process instigated by Ó Riada that slowly evolved over the course of the decade. From exploring Gaelic poetry, singing and music, towards a re-evaluation of rural traditional music practices, Ceoltóirí Cualann's concert on the Gaiety stage takes place at the end of a decade in which Ó Riada utilised the group to instigate such a process. Itemised as CEF 027 in the Gael Linn series, *Ó Riada sa Gaiety* is distinct from previous albums as it is a live performance, even though as outlined in Chapter 2 by Ó Canainn, the recording of the event for the purposes of releasing an album was a late consideration. As a consequence, the album released in 1970 is not a reflection of the full concert performance, and only four of the tracks feature the singing of Ó Sé.

1. Marshlua Uí Néill
2. Mná Na hÉireann (song)
3. Planxty Johnston
4. Im Aonar Seal (song)
5. Cnocáin Aitinn Liatroma
6. Marbhna Luimnigh
7. Do Bhí Bean Uasal (song)
8. An Ghaoth Aneas
9. Máirseáil Rí Laoise
10. An Chéad Mháirt Den Fhómhar / Na Gamhna Geala
11. Iníon An Phailitínigh (song)
12. Ríl Mhór Bhaile An Chalaidh

As a result of the album being recorded as a live performance, the LP puts forward an added element of public reception and occasion into the recording, with audience reaction and applause included throughout. Unlike the distinction between *Ceol na nUasal* and *Ding Dong*, the concert incorporates the individual concepts expressed by Ó Riada within one single performance setting, as witnessed by the nature of the concert's set list. In June 1971, the *Evening Herald* considers the album as a stand-alone record, stating that

Traditional music has tended often to be the domain of the solo virtuosity, or for small ensembles of two, three or four musicians. Throughout this album, the music is performed with consummate skill, with some outstanding work from Paddy Moloney, one of the best of the present generation of pipers, flautist Michael Tubridy and Sean Potts on whistle. And of course, O [sic] Riada who uses the harpsichord both as a pleasing solo instrument and in the overall ensemble sound. It has far more subtlety in tone and colour than the piano and is more suited to the melodies played. Sean O [sic] Riada is heard in a solo spot, with two tunes — "An Chead Mhairt de'n Fhomair" and "Na Gamhna Geala", and brings a curiously Elizabethan feel to the sedate "Planxty Johnston" ... The two final tracks on the album make a fitting finish. Sean O [sic] Se [sic] sings "The Palatine's Daughter", which starts off jauntily and then picks up tempo. O [sic] Riada plays a "drum roll" on the harpsichord, and then Ceoltoiri [sic] Cualann swing through the Kerry reel "Ril Mhor Bhaile an Chalaigh", with the musicians each taking a solo.⁵⁴

Similar to interpretations of earlier albums, the *Irish Press* review highlights a number of similar characteristics surrounding the position of Ó Riada within the group, his use of the harpsichord, and the ornamentation and orchestral nature of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an ensemble. Although the album is not a reflection of the entire set list from the concert, the *Irish Press* review indicates as an album, it continues to display a clear progression from start to finish, culminating in Ó Riada's arrangement of 'Ril Mhór Bhaile An Chalaigh'. References to the harpsichord also chime with earlier sentiments in this chapter regarding the use of the instrument by Ó Riada, with him bringing 'a curiously Elizabethan feel to the sedate "Planxty Johnston"'.

Just as time and place are necessary to contemplate the impact of such a new form of performance within Irish traditional music, so too does it have a role when evaluating Ceoltóirí Cualann's final recorded work, *Ó Riada sa Gaiety*, which marks the high point of the group's musical output.⁵⁵ Unlike previous records, this album was recorded during a gala performance by Ó Riada and his group in the Gaiety Theatre in 1969 as part of the Peadar Ó Doirnín memorial concert. Performing a mixture of both traditional and original pieces, the album, much like previous records, explores the various facets of what Ó Riada defines as an ideal traditional Irish ensemble. One such track, 'An Ghaoth Aneas', displays the relationship between individual performance and the type of Irish traditional group model that Ó Riada developed throughout the 1960s. Unlike previous examples where the bodhrán and bones formed an obvious rhythmic accompaniment, the role within this slow air is given to the accordion which adds a soft chordal accompaniment throughout. Opening with a piercing

⁵⁴ 'Harpsichord with Pipes, Fiddle and Flute...', *Evening Herald*, 2 June 1971, p.6.

⁵⁵ See White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'.

note of ‘B’ on Tin whistle and flute, a flute solo plays the slow air in its entirety, which is then replaced by fiddles and harpsichord to play the melody in full; to be replaced again by an uilleann pipes and tin whistle duet with accordion accompaniment continuing in the background. Then Ó Riada himself, on the harpsichord, performs the slow air in full without accompaniment and the performance is finished with the group joining in full. Although like previous examples in which each musician is given a definite role within the music, there is a wider meaning within this type of group template. Despite being presented as an Irish traditional ensemble performance and with the professional visual presentation of the group on stage, the implied influence of the classical genre within the template is at its most visceral within Ceoltóirí Cualann’s music. Here was an Irish traditional music group performing before an audience whose sole intention for being present was to listen. They played an arrangement of a slow air on traditional instruments, alongside a mix of traditional reels, jigs, marches, planxties and songs, and in doing so, reemphasised the precise ensemble model Ó Riada was determined to establish. Inherent in this analysis of Ceoltóirí Cualann’s influence is the perception that their music somehow re-established a link between the Irish nation and its musical heritage. Kinsella, whose work is so often linked with Ó Riada, described his greatest achievement as the

...revival of the old native relationship between Irish traditional music and the Irish community, and his renovation of it for the twentieth century...⁵⁶

Conclusion

Despite what may be interpreted from the recorded albums of Ceoltóirí Cualann, and how it may feed into an overall approach by Ó Riada, it provides little in terms of appropriate language to describe what exactly defined the group’s unique position within Irish traditional music. As this thesis acknowledges, the extent to which a comprehensive analysis of the history and significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an ensemble model can be reached, is based on a variety of factors adopted by Ó Riada throughout the 1960s. Through the adoption of a variety of theoretical and visual elements, Ceoltóirí Cualann form part of a much wider engagement by Ó Riada with Irish traditional music; one in which Ó Riada himself retains an individual identity while simultaneously adopting control within the overall process itself. However, the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as produced and arranged by Ó Riada, presents the most obvious material upon which initial audiences and critics formed opinions surrounding

⁵⁶ Thomas Kinsella, *Fifteen Dead* (Dublin, 1979), p. 59.

the new traditional template. It also presents later generations with evidence of Ó Riada's approach to group performance within Irish traditional music, albeit an inadequate form of analysis if taken as the sole representation of Ceoltóirí Cualann's history. Although music may be intended to instigate a range of emotions, as well as inviting a particular set of responses, the role of music to communicate is impossible to quantify due to the inherent difficulty in assessing reception amongst an audience. J. Peter Burkholder asserts that

The analogy of music to speech is a uniquely powerful one because it accounts for our impression that a piece of music has (or may have) a meaning, which none of the other metaphors can do... The problem is to figure out what music says... If there is an analogy between music and language that goes beyond structural parallels, then it should be possible to "read" at least some pieces of music – pieces for which this analogy holds – as we would read and interpret a poem: that is, with just as much difficulty and just as many disagreements, but with some consensus at least about what the interpretive issues are and with some standards for judging one reading against another.⁵⁷

Burkholder's contention that music may well instigate varying degrees of interpretations is one which can be applied to that of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann. The music of the group is one element of a much wider process undertaken by Ó Riada which, although it can be interpreted to varying degrees musically, can also be evaluated as a much larger process. Just as Chapter 4 will evaluate the methodological approach adopted by Ó Riada, as witnessed through his direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann, the music of the ensemble through their albums can be interpreted as being as much about a process as it was about a musical statement. Despite shifting from early film scores in *Playboy of the Western World*, to an array of Gaelic cultural practices in *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Ding Dong*, and to the revitalisation of the old harping tradition in *Ceol na nUasal*, the process employed by Ó Riada throughout the music remains. As such, the significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann's recorded music rests as much upon its use as a tool by Ó Riada, as it does by the reaction it instigated from an Irish traditional music audience unaccustomed to such a treatment of group performance.

⁵⁷ J. Peter Burkholder, 'On Interpreting Music in an Historical Framework', *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 70, no. 1/2 (1987), pp. 199-200.

Chapter 4

A New Model: Innovation and Reception

Introduction

As outlined in previous chapters, the evolution of Ceoltóirí Cualann is intrinsically linked with the development of Seán Ó Riada's career, particularly mirroring the fluid nature of his approach to a vast array of projects. The model developed by Ó Riada was new; the radio broadcasts involving the new ensemble were new; the albums he produced with Ceoltóirí Cualann were new; and the concerts Ó Riada produced on stage involving Ceoltóirí Cualann were new. The reception that these developments within Irish traditional music received reflects the raw reactions that emerge when encountering such new approaches, both aurally and visually on stage. Classifying the music and presentation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as innovative depends on the methodology adopted by Ó Riada and the reception that Ceoltóirí Cualann received to the music they produced throughout the 1960s. Ó Riada's direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann implies a wider desire to explore the definition and place of Irish traditional music as a modern European art form, rather than any implicit desire to innovate. This process involves an interconnected set of principles which touch upon issues not just related to innovation and reception, but also aspects of wider Irish cultural pillars that define Ó Riada's and Ceoltóirí Cualann's overall position within Irish traditional music.

Wider research studies suggest that historically, innovation across a range of social practices transforms into an intentional objective, as opposed to a spontaneous occurrence over time.¹ Based on conceptions which have emerged throughout the course of the twentieth century, innovation is defined in accordance with specific fields or areas of work, such as in the arts or science.² Under such a definition by Michael Hutter, innovation is invariably linked with both reception and understanding of tradition at a particular moment in time. In this instance, the concept of innovation within music is wholly dependent on both the choice of the performer, whether intended or not, alongside the social acceptance of such work. As explored in Chapter 3, the recorded albums of Ceoltóirí Cualann present the musical

¹ See Michael Hutter, Hubert Knoblauch, Werner Rammert and Arnold Windeler, 'Innovation Society Today. The Reflexive Creation of Novelty', *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, vol. 40, no. 3 (2015), pp. 30-47.

² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

significance of the ensemble template, through both repertoire and design. In this chapter, the term ‘innovative’ is applied in a much broader manner, interpreted through Ó Riada’s process as opposed to his musical product. It will examine how his methodological approach can itself be defined as innovative, and how reception history towards Ceoltóirí Cualann can be located and evaluated, through critical reception over the course of the 1960s.

Innovation and Improvisation

The products of Ó Riada’s process, in this case the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann in conjunction with the methodology he adopted, mark a new departure in the 1960s and highlights the complex relationship between improvisation and innovation. As such, improvisation is a tool which may lead to innovation, but innovation itself is a far wider process which involves not only the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann but also the approach undertaken by Ó Riada. The term improvisation descends from the Latin ‘improvisus’, which means unforeseen or unexpected; it belongs to the realm of what-is-not-yet. Thus, improvisation cannot be described itself, but can be localized as a continuous readiness and an ability to improvise.³ Theorizing about the classification of an individual or event as ‘significant’ within history, Geoffrey Partington contends that a number of factors must be considered as part of such a conclusion.

Importance – to the people living at the time; profundity – how deeply people’s lives have been affected; quantity – how many lives were affected; durability – for how long people’s lives have been affected; and relevance – the extent to which the event/individual has contributed to an increased understanding of present life.⁴ Partington’s first and final points are most pertinent in the context of this chapter, as both the importance and relevance of Ó Riada’s ensemble template are key factors when attempting to quantify the significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a representation of innovation in music and practice.

As outlined in Chapter 1, Ó Riada defines Irish traditional music as an ‘untouched, unwesternised, orally transmitted music’.⁵ He also remarks that it is ‘the most popular type of music in Ireland’ at that time,⁶ albeit a genre which he hopes to increase the status of throughout his lecture series. Inherent in Ó Riada’s definition and approach is his belief that

³ Christopher Dell and Wolfgang Stark, ‘Tuning in to Organizational Innovation-Music as a Metaphor to Understand the Improvisational Field in Organizations’, *IFAC Proceedings Volumes*, vol. 43, no. 17 (2010), p. 294.

⁴ See Geoffrey Partington, ‘History: Re-written to Ideological Fashion’, in Dennis O’Keefe (ed.) *The Wayward Curriculum: A Cause for Parents Concern?* (London, 1986), pp. 63-81.

⁵ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 1, 7 July 1962.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Irish traditional music, both vocal and instrumental, is a comparatively untouched topic within modern discourse; through the presentation of its history, he is critiquing the present condition of Irish traditional music with a view to suggesting some kind of standard.⁷ As a result, classifications of Ó Riada's methodology and the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann as innovative are placed within such a context; one which sought to rediscover rather than redefine aspects of Irish traditional music and as a consequence, produced an ensemble which Ó Riada shaped as a solution to wider problems he identified within traditional group performance. Applying such criteria to any individual or event over time may well lead to a basic classification of significance but it points towards a wider debate surrounding the manner in which an individual becomes significant within their field, whether that espouses the role of an innovator, a revolutionary or a proponent of traditional values. Within a music context, such an approach depends to a larger extent on the reaction of audiences to both the musical output and the methodological approach adopted at that time. Inherent in evaluating such a topic is the manner in which innovation, improvisation and reception history both define, and hinder, how Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann are ultimately assessed. Therefore, in musical terms, improvisation is intrinsically linked with a much wider process; the actions that emanate from such a process can then be classed as 'innovative'. Christopher Dell and Wolfgang Stark classify innovation within music as a set of competing factors in which complexity and turbulence frame organisational mindsets.

Improvisation does not differentiate between thinking and acting but intensifies the movement between the systems of the body. Improvisation therefore acts as a controlling system in the navigation between the difference of intersubjective openness and solipsistic moments of subjectivity.⁸

The use of the term 'controlling system' once again reflects the nature of the relationship between innovation and improvisation. As a tool, improvisation can more readily be associated with those initial reactions on hearing the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann but passing a definitive evaluation on such works will instead produce a classification of innovation. Improvisation, through the medium of control, sits well within an analysis of Ceoltóirí Cualann in light of Ó Riada's own position of control within the ensemble and his self-identification as a separate, yet interconnected, member of the group.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Dell and Stark, 'Tuning in to Organizational Innovation', p. 294.

Tradition and Identity

As already outlined, Ó Riada's definition of Irish traditional music is predicated on the understanding that it is an insulated genre which remains situated within a communal setting that is untouched from outside influence. He argues in 1962 that 'the first thing to note, obviously enough, is that Irish music is not European'.⁹ Ó Riada's definition of tradition is one in which conservatism and historical absorption of outside practices act in tandem to sustain and protect cultural practices. Using the analogy of the 'flowing of a river' when describing Irish traditional music, as referenced in Chapter 1, Ó Riada asserts that

Ireland has had a long and violent history during which she remained individual, retaining all her individual characteristics... Our innate conservatism is responsible for this. This conservatism has maintained the basic characteristics of the Irish language for well over two thousand years. It has maintained the basic characteristics of the Irish literary tradition and of the Irish people. And it has kept Irish music alive for us, its basic characteristics unchanged, with very little outside influence.¹⁰

Ó Riada's early linking in *Our Musical Heritage* of conservatism and a tradition that self-isolated from wider European influences is an intriguing platform upon which to build a case to change the direction of group performance. In particular, his comparison with the flow of a river is an interesting metaphor in the context of his comments surrounding conservatism. Ó Riada's concept of such a river is one which absorbs and assimilates that which 'falls in', rather than rejects and continues in a stagnant form. However, Ó Riada concludes his opening remarks by qualifying his argument in the context of variations within Irish traditional music. He states that

This does not necessarily mean that the musician who does not use variation is a bad one; he is a passive holder of tradition. The musician who makes good variations is, on the other hand, a creative contributor to the tradition. He makes it grow and develop.¹¹

As a result, Ó Riada has attempted to redefine wider conceptions of conservatism within Irish traditional music in which variation, or improvisation, can remain loyal to such a definition if

⁹ Ibid; This is a point that is open to much wider debate. Both Sean Williams and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin outline the historical context of Irish traditional music, including the influence of European settlement. See Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music*, pp. 25-53; and Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Short History of Irish Traditional Music* (Dublin, 2017); Also for earlier references, see William Henry Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music* (New York, 1970).

¹⁰ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 October 1962.

¹¹ Ibid.

used in an appropriate manner. Nicholas Carolan's definition of Irish traditional music incorporates a similar approach, asserting that despite conservative tendencies

[Irish traditional music] is constantly changing through the shedding of material, the reintroduction of neglected items, the composition of new material, and the creative altering in performance of the established repertory.¹²

Carolan's definition, particularly surrounding the 'creative altering in performance of the established repertory', clearly emanates from the type of ensemble that emerges within Irish traditional music over the course of the twentieth century, notably from Ceoltóirí Cualann onwards in the 1960s. However, Ó Riada's use of similar language emerges from a theoretical discussion surrounding Irish traditional music, as opposed to reflecting precedent. Ó Riada's use of such a definition, and the authoritative tone it sets, underpins all of the criticism and ideas he explores throughout the course of *Our Musical Heritage* in which he works on the premise of identifying a problem and articulating a more appropriate action which aligns itself with the overall meaning and sound of Irish traditional music.

Ó Riada's linking of Irish traditional music with Gaelicisation echoes many of the cultural nationalistic sentiments of the early twentieth century and the role of identity when defining aspects of Irish nation building within public discourse, artistic or otherwise. As discussed in Chapter 1, traditional music, alongside the other major cultural pillars of language, literature, and sport, has played a role in the formation of national identity in the Irish state post-1922. For instance, in describing the significance of sport in the formation of identity, John Bale comments

Whether at local, regional or national level, sport is, after war, probably the principal means of collective identification in modern life. It provides one of the few occasions when large, complex, impersonal and functionally bonded units can unite as a whole.¹³

In an Irish context, Bale's prioritising of sport within the formation of identity does not necessarily hold firm when one considers the evolution of nationalism through various cultural spheres of Irish society in the twentieth century. It does, however, mirror community-based definitions within several historical contexts when dealing with broad definitions of traditional and folk music by looking at the role of Irish traditional music in forming a collective Irish identity and uniting people under a common sense of place. This points to the

¹² Nicholas Carolan, 'What is Irish Traditional Music', *Irish Traditional Music Archive: Information Leaflet Series*, no. 1 (1991), p. 2.

¹³ John Bale, 'Sport and National Identity: A geographical View', *The British Journal of Sports History*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1986), p. 18.

idea that music in general is a source of identification, a shared symbol of collectivity, a means of generating and enforcing social conformity, and can often be embedded in the creation of nationhood and common national identification.¹⁴ However, as outlined later in this chapter, Ó Riada's exploration of regionality within traditional music indicates that its ability to form a collective sense of national identity, particularly in a post-1922 context, is much more limited compared to other cultural pillars. As referenced in Chapter 2, Ó Riada's language echoes sentiments of earlier arguments surrounding cultural nationalism, particularly that of Douglas Hyde. Just as Ó Riada points to failures by traditional musicians to follow the correct method of individual and group performance, Hyde states that

Why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is, why should we de-Anglicise it at all? I answer because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory? Besides, I believe it is our Gaelic past which, though the Irish race does not recognise it just at present, is really at the bottom of the Irish heart.¹⁵

Again, comparisons can be made with Ó Riada's closing remarks of *Our Musical Heritage* in which he points to the survival of Irish cultural practices and criticises those who fail to appreciate Irish traditional music as a nationalistic sentiment worth expressing.

There are some who sneer at it; they are the ignorant and stupid, slavish lackeys of foreign traditions, servile lapdogs who lick up the crumbs which fall from the stranger's table... It is precisely because of their [Irish traditions] suitability that they have survived so long, in the face of so much opposition, from our own people and also from our oppressors.¹⁶

Both Hyde's and Ó Riada's positioning of tradition, whether that be language or music, shape the manner in which their overall argument is disseminated. Within this method, tradition can be defined and expressed in a variety of ways, but there is a correct way in doing so which remains consistent with the core foundation of that particular tradition or art form. Just as music practices are shaped by the framing of identity, both at home and abroad, so too can other examples shed light on ways in which innovation and change within traditional music is validated through recognition across the generational divide. As Heather Maclachlan argues

This new, yet traditional, music is relevant to the young people of the community, and it is endowed by the authority associated with the elders of the group. It is thus likely

¹⁴ See Frith, 'Music and Identity'; Connell and Gibson, *Soundtracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*; Leyshon et al., *The Place of Music*; Smyth, *Music in Irish Cultural History*; Vallely, *Tuned Out: Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland*.

¹⁵ Hyde, 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland', *Irish National Literary Society*, 25 November 1892.

¹⁶ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 14, 13 October 1962.

to survive, even as it continues to adapt, and to remain meaningful for members of the community as they negotiate their new identities.¹⁷

The comparison between MacLachlan's assertion, and the initial reaction to Ó Riada's lecture style format in *Our Musical Heritage*, highlights the significant placement of authority within a definition of Irish traditional music and its use as a form of collective identification.

Innovation, Tradition and Regionalism

The place of regional identities within Irish traditional music, and associated community-based practices, influences the manner in which Ó Riada's direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an ensemble can be assessed. Adhering to a community-focused definition, Breandán Breathnach comments that

Folk music, like all other music, is in the first instance the work of some one person, but since it is accepted by - and becomes the property of - the community, and since it is passed on from generation to generation, so that it no longer possesses any features which would link it with particular school or class of writers, we speak of it as anonymous.¹⁸

Breathnach's assertion speaks to some of the issues already raised when examining the nature of tradition and the extent to which it is shaped by a continuous process rather than reflecting the characteristics of an individual. In order to classify something as being innovative, it must therefore be presumed that a set of standards exist within which innovative work can take place or can at least be set against. It reflects how such standards are established, either through a process of gradual change or dictated by a set understanding of the cultural practice, which may infer the term 'traditionalist'. Taking the characterisation in a literal sense, a traditionalist can be defined as

A person who maintains or upholds the authority of tradition; a person who adheres to traditional ways, practices, or beliefs in any field; a supporter or adherent of traditionalism.¹⁹

In the context of Irish traditional music, the matter is further complicated by how traditional music itself is defined, the varying criteria which are linked to such a characterisation, and how new generations of musicians redefine the practice of traditional music within their own performance settings. Alongside such issues, the concept of Irish traditional music as a

¹⁷ Heather MacLachlan, 'Innovation in the Guise of Tradition: Music among the Chin Population of Indianapolis, USA', *Asian Music*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2008), p. 182.

¹⁸ Breandán Breathnach, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork, 1971), p. 2.

¹⁹ 'Traditionalist', *Oxford English Dictionary*, <http://www.oed.com.libgate.library.nuigalway.ie/view/Entry/204306?redirectedFrom=traditionalist#eid>, accessed 5 March 2018.

community-based tradition, as opposed to being associated with certain figures, creates a particular tension when evaluating individuals or groups as proponents, or opponents, to such interpretations. Ó Riada's discussion within *Our Musical Heritage* foregrounds his section on group performance with detailed references to regional styles, as witnessed through the performance techniques of individual traditional instruments and musicians. As a result, the listener is familiar with the community-based nature of Irish traditional music long before Ó Riada engages in a debate surrounding ensemble. Just as Ó Riada's core argument emerges from a debate surrounding conservatism and nationalistic definitions of identity, so too are local based practices fuelling concepts of innovation within Irish traditional music. For Martin Dowling, musicians in the past learned their music by imitating a number of exemplars, and innovation and stylistic development occurred through an isolated iteration of local repertoires.²⁰ Furthermore, musician Seamus Tansey identifies the historic importance of environment and regional terrain in shaping style and producing nuances that may well be classed as locally based innovations. He states that music moulded from different regional locations 'are quite different and meant to be different just like each nation's culture, dress, history and language is different'.²¹

The dividing lines between national-regional-local-individual both serves to define the manner in which Irish traditional music has historically been disseminated, while simultaneously obscuring the origins of such practices. Collins asserts that

Irish traditional instrumental music, as mediated through regional sensibilities such as style and repertoire, as well as through the idiographic nature of tune titles and associated narratives, are also powerful indicators of such a relationship.²²

Yet, the predominance of individuals being set within regional blocks serves to highlight some aspects of community-based practices but neglecting others. For Verena Commins

The central problem created by the term regional style is its arbitrary, artificial sense of identity and unity, which completely ignores differences and individuality. As a cultural construct its use both acknowledges and ignores the history that informs it. On the one hand it pays respect to a line of tradition but, at the same time, this

²⁰ Martin W. Dowling, 'Communities, place, the traditions of Irish dance music', in Valley et. al. (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil*, p. 68.

²¹ Seamus Tansey, 'Irish Traditional Music—The Melody of Ireland's Soul; its Evolution from the Environment, Land and People', in Valley et. al. (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil*, p.212.

²² Tim Collins, 'Tis Like They Never Left: Locating 'Home' in the Music of Sliabh Aughty's Diaspora', *Journal of the Society for American Music*, vol. 4, no. 4 (2010), p. 492.

representation of history inevitably privileges certain musicians at the expense of others.²³

Daithí Kearney comments on the way in which the twenty-first century has witnessed the geography of Irish traditional music being reconstructed through a process of intense regionalisation based on the interpretation of history and memory in response to the challenges of globalisation.²⁴ However, such an approach is similar to that engaged in by Ó Riada himself through *Our Musical Heritage* in which he theorises about Irish traditional music by setting the historical context and linking this to challenges that persist within both individual and group performance. In this instance, history acts as theory and the act of listening represents the practical element of analysing elements of Irish traditional music. For Ó Riada, 'it is best to listen as if we were listening to music for the first time, with a child's new mind'.²⁵

Themes of isolation, remoteness and the survival of the pre-modern are all ideas that are prevalent in community-based gatherings and are echoed by individuals such as Sean Corcoran who categorises such analysis through what he terms 'filters of mediation'.²⁶ However, such themes provide little insight into actual geographic boundaries. Therefore, it must be questioned whether or not regions in an Irish music sense are actually set areas of land or simply an imaginary landscape of emotive styles, as witnessed through the language of Seamus Tansey.²⁷ The emotive styles, in this case, being certain community-based practices as opposed to others which are neglected or do not fit within wider definitions of regional styles. Although Ó Riada continually differentiates between regional styles in the course of his discussions on both Irish vocal and instrumental music, his terminology indicates an acknowledgement that regions within music are too over-arching in nature and smaller community-based nuances in style are far more prevalent, referring at times to minute local characteristics of vocal and instrumental music. Collins asserts that by discussing regionality within Irish traditional music as part of *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada brought the concept to the attention of a wider audience and that despite the limitations of producing a broadcast series, he at the very least is to be credited for successfully presenting a conceptual

²³ Verena Commins, 'A Journey of Found and Lost: The Concept of East Galway Regional Style in Irish Traditional Music', *Béascna: UCC Journal of Folklore and Ethnology*, (2008), p. 148.

²⁴ Daithí Kearney, 'Towards a Regional Understanding of Irish Traditional Music', *Spéis*, (2010), p. 10.

²⁵ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 1, 7 July 1962.

²⁶ Corcoran, 'Concepts of Regionalism in Irish Traditional Music', in Ó Súilleabháin and Smith (eds.), *Blas*, p. 28.

²⁷ Tansey, 'Irish Traditional Music', in Vallely et. al. (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil*.

framework for discussing and critiquing that music.²⁸ Similarly, both Niall Keegan and Daithí Kearney constitute Ó Riada's broadcast discussions on the topic as a significant contribution, contending that *Our Musical Heritage* represented the first direct examination of regional diversity in Irish traditional music.²⁹

As part of his discussion on fiddle music, Ó Riada states that fiddle styles vary to such an extent that differences in style can be identified within every county in Ireland. He states that

Fiddle styles vary from place to place; there is no definite standard style. I doubt if there is a county in Ireland that has not got its own quota of fiddle players and its own tradition – thirty two counties and, you might say, thirty two styles.³⁰

Although rooted in a broad understanding of folk music, the arc of time undoubtedly blurs how definitions of style are adopted to individual cases. While authority and recognition regarding musical outputs and approaches may dilute over time, definitions such as that of Breathnach fail to acknowledge the transformative impact that time may have on the transmission of both music, and its history, to successive generations. In this instance, the concept of acceptance and ownership of Irish traditional music does not sit well within a discussion about how one deals with issues of modernity and innovation, and as a consequence, distorts interpretations of what constitutes as 'traditional'. Acknowledging such changes over time, particularly within audiences, Catherine Curran argues that

The changes which have taken place in Irish society over the past century have given rise to different audiences for Irish music at different times. The changing role of music in Irish society can thus be understood in terms of changing audiences for that music.³¹

Curran's interpretation of an audience for Irish music that is continually in transition sits well within an analysis of the approach adopted by Ó Riada, particularly regarding his production of *Our Musical Heritage*. Despite his lecture style format depicting an authoritative tone that provoked traditional musicians, it can instead be interpreted in terms of the audience it would reach. As a result of being broadcast on Radió Éireann, together with Ó Riada's wider

²⁸ Collins, *Music Mountain*, p. 1.

²⁹ See Niall Keegan, *Language and Power in Traditional Irish Music*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 16 (Cork, 2006); and Daithí Kearney, *Towards a Regional Understanding of Irish Traditional Music*, PhD thesis, Schools of Music and Geography, University College Cork, 2009; See also, Williams and Ó Laoire, *Bright Star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish Song Man*, pp. 27-45.

³⁰ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 9, 8 September 1962.

³¹ Catherine Curran, 'Changing Audiences for Traditional Irish Music', in Valley et. al. (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil*, p. 56.

national profile as a result of *Mise Éire*, the series attracted a section of the listenership that would not normally listen to Irish traditional music. It is within this context that Ó Riada creates a basis for experimentation that underpins the new ensemble template that Ceoltóirí Cualann represented. Lisa Colton and Martin Iddon discuss the place of innovation within music, echoing the dynamic that exists when identifying experimentation through both the language and music of Ó Riada throughout his career. They assert that

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the term ‘new music’ has served as a catch-all for a proliferation of current musical practices - for some, to be ‘new’ has meant a conscious break with past traditions, through the value placed on novelty and innovation in musical language. For others, the appropriation of past traditions, whether ancient or from more recent music history, has been a starting point or catalyst for experimentation.³²

Innovation and Ownership

Yet, despite community playing a substantial role in the development of individual styles and definitions of tradition amongst musicians, reactions to innovative work often hinge on the characteristics of the individual musician and the perceived ownership of any type of work that is classed as innovative by a critic or audience. In this instance, the ‘perceived ownership’ is linked directly with how an individual musician is identified within Irish traditional music and their positionality at the outset of their career. Ó Súilleabháin references Ó Riada when evaluating the career and contribution of Tommie Potts (1912-1988), arguing that

What Potts did, in fact, was what Ó Riada had been trying to do with Ceoltóirí Chualainn [sic] throughout the 1960s. Potts’ secret was that he came to the music from within, while Ó Riada came at it from without. Ó Riada was creatively moving the macro blocks of the music around to create new popular forms of traditional music while Potts was operating privately in his terraced period house in Walkinstown subverting the music from within during exactly the same period when Ó Riada was at his most active.³³

Ó Súilleabháin’s positioning of Potts within an innovative communal setting, and his expression of traditional music from within a community setting, again hinges on an awareness of tradition and how innovation can evolve from such an understanding. Although the positionality of both Potts and Ó Riada differs within Ó Súilleabháin’s assessment, the

³² Lisa Colton and Martin Iddon, ‘Introduction: Recycling and Innovation in Contemporary Music’, *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2010), p. 229.

³³ Ó Súilleabháin, ‘Crossroads or Twin Track?’, in Valley et. al. (eds.) *Crosbhealach An Cheoil*, p. 177.

innovation of their music is first witnessed in how their work emanates from a strong sense of tradition that both are comfortable with from the very outset. Ó Súilleabháin states that

What is highly significant about Tommie Potts is that he is called upon as the epitome of tradition, on the one hand, and as the epitome of innovation, on the other... he is the epitome of true innovation by virtue of the fact that his understanding of tradition was so grounded as to allow him to be primed for the innovation which flowed through him. In this instance, Potts was the epitome of innovation against a personal musical background which itself epitomised the very tradition he sought to subvert.³⁴

The inherent implication of Potts being positioned as working ‘from within’ has implications on how his work is received and how his innovative practices are interpreted in contrast to Ó Riada’s place in such a process. Exploring the sociological elements of how innovation within music is defined, Hugo de Jager contends that the urge to innovate, or the tendency to conform to the rules, are in themselves psychological phenomena. Any argument contending that the time is not yet ‘ripe’ for a particular composition or style, emphasises that social approval and acceptance are lacking.³⁵ The relationship between tradition and innovation is based upon varying definitions of both, which fails to acknowledge that they are mutually exclusive, as well as being conducive to interaction. The fluid interpretation of tradition and history, which again reflects the positionality of those involved, indicates the tension that exists when acknowledging the foundations of a practice while allowing processes of change and variation to occur over time. Henry Glassie considers the oppositional nature of the relationship between tradition and innovation through the prism of historic memory, arguing that

History is not the past; it is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future. In this way, history verges upon that idea of tradition in which it is identified with the resource out of which people create. History and tradition are comparable in dynamic; they exclude more than they include, and so remain open to endless revision. They are functionally congruent in their incorporation of the usable past.³⁶

Glassie’s contention that both history and tradition are ‘open to endless revision’ speaks to the influence of time and place in framing an understanding of how such processes are products of resources within particular locations. His interpretation lays bare the dichotomy that exists between both terms, a relationship that is defined by a tradition that is influenced by the passage of time. It is also a definition that follows a strict interpretation of the limits

³⁴ Ibid. p. 175.

³⁵ Hugo De Jager, ‘Some Sociological Remarks on Innovation in Music’, *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1972), p. 254.

³⁶ Henry Glassie, ‘Tradition’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 108, no. 430 (1995), p. 395.

that innovation may achieve before the tradition itself is diluted or becomes unrecognisable. As such, innovation within tradition is only validated by an audience if change is moulded through references to the 'past'. However, as with the comparison between Ó Riada and Potts, ownership and authority ultimately dictate how changes within Irish traditional music are recognised by other musicians and critics. Again, Ó Riada's interaction with Irish traditional music is shaping the manner in which his views are interpreted, before such views are adequately examined. Gerald Bruns reflects on the position of authority within the shaping of tradition, in particular through the mode of archiving the past. Bruns considers that

What is transferred in the translation of the archive is not just meaning but also authority, which is to say the right to speak and to interpret, that is, the right to rule in matters of discourse, or the right to say how things are, or how they are to be written and understood.³⁷

For Adelaida Reyes Schramm, that ambivalence towards innovation is far more prevalent within cultural studies where such definitions are fluid and diverse.³⁸ In the case of Irish traditional music, and the work of Ó Riada in particular, such a divergence in opinion serves to highlight the conflict that exists in validating such innovations. MacLachlan, in her study on innovation and tradition within the music of the Chin population in the USA, extrapolates from evidence that

Traditions are usually thought of as being unchanging rituals handed down from previous generations that gain their power from their connection to the past. It is clear, however, that traditions continue because they are not set in stone. Their very malleability allows them to adapt to changing circumstances, and thus to survive.³⁹

If innovation within Irish traditional music is a product of an individual or group, until it is then accepted and 'owned' by the community, questions arise surrounding how a definition of something that is 'new' can be uniformly adopted, as well as to whom such a decision of acceptance and ownership hinges upon – critical or popular opinion.

Societal acceptance and organisation of musical practices can, like the emergence of Ó Riada's ensemble template in the 1960s, be linked with the fluidity of definitions of tradition and innovation, as well as shifts within popular culture over time. In every society at any time there exists a body of values and norms, which regulate the behaviour of the

³⁷ Gerald L. Bruns, 'What is Tradition?', *New Literary History*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1991), p. 3.

³⁸ See Adelaida Reyes Schramm, 'Tradition in the Guise of Innovation: Music among a Refugee Population', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, vol. 18 (1986), pp. 91-101.

³⁹ MacLachlan, 'Innovation in the Guise of Tradition', p. 182.

members of that society, including the creation, performance and enjoyment of music.⁴⁰ Although patterns of reception and reaction may also evolve over time, such developments can also be linked with definitions of tradition and the manner in which innovative work is identified from one generation to the next. Leonard Meyer argues that changes in musical style, including innovative practices, are not simply a matter of succession across generations but are rooted in choices that are made within time-specific circumstances. Meyer argues that

The history of an art is the result of the succession of choices made by individual men and women in specific compositional/cultural circumstances.⁴¹

Innovation and Intent

Understanding the case put forward by Ó Riada, both through his broadcasting and the musical output of Ceoltóirí Cualann, is dependent on taking note of the social conditions, as well as Ó Riada's own perceptions of what constituted Irish traditional music at that time. For Ó Riada, as already outlined, his understanding of the distinction between Irish and European musical traditions was the appropriate starting point before engaging in a discussion about what constituted Irish traditional music. Indeed, Ó Riada's views stretch far beyond that of a distinction and are based on the predication that one must abandon comparisons with European music in order to fully understand Irish traditional music. The central role of history and 'the past' upon Ó Riada's concept of what constituted Irish traditional music can be traced through both the repertoire of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as well as the presentation of the group on stage and their production on albums. Lisa Colton articulates the view, as witnessed through a study on the classical music of composer Judith Weir, that it is not only how the past is utilized, but also how this relates to the prevailing understanding of purposes in so doing, in combination with the reception of notions of authenticity in an individual's own style.⁴² By taking Weir as a case study, Colton argues that

Judith Weir's creative work is in constant dialogue with the past. Whether in her choice of subject matter, her crafting of a libretto, her collaborative practices with traditional folk artists or in her manipulation of musical language, Weir's music presents a complex negotiation between old and new, historical and current.⁴³

It is this interweaving relationship between what Ó Riada constitutes as the past misconception of Irish traditional music and the potential to expand a representation that is

⁴⁰ de Jager, 'Some Sociological Remarks on Innovation in Music', p. 252.

⁴¹ Leonard B. Meyer, 'Innovation, Choice, and the History of Music', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 9, no. 3 (1983), p. 517.

⁴² Lisa Colton, 'The Female Exotic: Tradition, Innovation and Authenticity in the Reception of Music by Judith Weir', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 29, no. 3, (2010), p. 287.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

more accurate in nature, that pervades much of the musical output of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Music can both reference the past and reinvent itself in a variety of ways. The frequent association of music with tradition or ritual ensures some degree of continuity with the past.⁴⁴ As part of her study on the past in music, Caroline Bithell examines the tension that exists within music when dealing with issues such as constructed pasts, contested histories and collective memory. Bithell insists that

Unlike items from material heritage, the sounds of the past cannot be put in a museum, where we might look at them, measure them and compare them one with another. We cannot collect a frozen note or a broken chord and preserve it in a glass cabinet. In the absence of a written tradition or a means of recording the sounds themselves for posterity, music is "visible" only in the moment of its performance.⁴⁵

Although Bithell's argument may be applicable to specific examples, certainly in the period before recording technology took hold, it cannot be seen as a viable theory when considering music as both a reflection of the past and as a piece of history to be compared across decades. It is not necessarily a lack of recorded music which limits analysis over time but rather an inability to gauge reaction to such music in exact time periods. The visibility of music in its original performance setting not only applies to the manner in which it is interpreted by audiences but also the impact that such reactions have on shaping intent by the performer. As explored in Chapter 2, Ó Riada's initial exploration of ensemble performance takes place in the Abbey Theatre in September 1960, just under two years before he engages in his theorising about the subject in *Our Musical Heritage*. As a consequence, Ó Riada's process begins with practice (performance choices) before moving into theory as a foundation for the new group template. The performance 'moment', as Bithell describes, is therefore just as influential for the performer as it is for the audience.

As performance choices often reflect changes in styles with a performer's music, an understanding of how musicians devise their innovative approach, and of why they choose some methods rather than others, is central to any account of the nature of music history. The distinction between innovating and choosing is necessary because musicians usually have at their disposal many more alternatives than can be included in their own composition or performance.⁴⁶ Meyer frames his analysis around understanding why a musician makes the

⁴⁴ Caroline Bithell, 'The Past in Music: Introduction', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, vol. 15, no. 1, (2006), p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁶ Meyer, 'Innovation, Choice, and the History of Music', p. 517.

decision to innovate and states that in order to fully answer such a question, one must consider

the personality (whether adventurous or conservative); the specific stylistic/compositional circumstances surrounding the innovation; and the external constraints, both specific (patronage, available performers, acoustical environment, and so forth) and general (cultural beliefs and attitudes, theories of music, and so forth) that may have influenced the behaviour. But unless an innovation is subsequently replicated in some way, whether in another work by the same individual or in works by others it is not historically significant.⁴⁷

Viewing Ó Riada's ensemble template within Irish traditional music against such a theoretical backdrop provides a beneficial reflection of such an approach while simultaneously identifying the pitfalls that emerge as a result of the fluidity of musical authority. Undoubtedly, issues of character, circumstances, and general attitudes during the period in question can quite easily be applied to the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, Ó Riada's method of working does not explain how, or indeed why, group members themselves believed that the music and presentation of Ceoltóirí Cualann could have been classed as innovative by some, and an unacceptable shift by others. However, both sets of opinion can acknowledge that the music and presentation of such group performance within Irish traditional music is innovative, but those who criticise are doing so precisely because it is innovative. In the case of Ceoltóirí Cualann, the acceptance of innovation is predicated on the representation of Ó Riada as an individual artist, and as a consequence, impacts the way in which the music of the group is received. As de Jager states,

By focussing too exclusively on the doings of individuals, one is in danger of underestimating the significance of the social conditions which permit or restrict, stimulate or hamper, innovative behaviour.⁴⁸

Social conditions are ultimately dictated by those in positions of power at that particular time and as such, a generational divide within definitions about what is traditional, non-traditional or innovative emerge. Even within a classical context, Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, writing in 1923, constituted innovation within music as a struggle to define originality

At one end of the range of resources we find the clichés... At the other end we find innovations of all kinds in matter and treatment... the main reason for errors of that kind is that, unavoidably, neologisms and innovations of all kinds begin by looming far too large in our minds; and it is only when the terms in which a work is couched

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 518.

⁴⁸ de Jager, 'Some Sociological Remarks on Innovation in Music', p. 254.

have ceased to strike us as surprising, or unfamiliar, that we may become capable of passing sentence on that work.⁴⁹

Calvoceressi's assertion that the ability to fully evaluate innovation within music is a process that only begins after initial uncertainty is overcome also reflects the changing nature of reception towards Ceoltóirí Cualann over the course of the 1960s. As witnessed in Chapter 3 in which Ó Sé's mother expressed her surprise at the 'mad' nature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's music on first hearing it, the process of classifying such work as innovative is delayed by the natural instincts of surprise and unfamiliarity.

Reception History

In the context of Ceoltóirí Cualann, a central issue in evaluating the contribution of Ó Riada's traditional ensemble model is understanding the reaction the group received during that moment of visibility, or performance, that Bithell describes. In this chapter, the reception history of Ceoltóirí Cualann is linked to three key areas – interaction within the group itself, popular opinion, and critical reaction during the 1960s. As Naomi Cumming states,

The performing musician becomes the first listener to his or her own sounds, somewhat privileged by a knowledge of his or her intentions. Other listeners bring to the moment their own experiences with this or other styles in order to critically appraise what they hear.⁵⁰

Questions surrounding art and reception have often influenced not only the way in which artistic endeavours are engaged in, but also the way in which the success and legacy of such works are measured. Whether it be literature, language, visual arts, or music, the reception of art and the analysis of it over time presents acute difficulties for researchers and critics alike. Indeed, evaluations of reception and artistic value can often diverge over time resulting in acute differences in how reception and success for a work is defined. Although issues surrounding reception history can be located in various aspects of the arts, most notably literature, music presents a particular set of challenges in how the history of production, reception and legacy can be evaluated. While reflecting upon the question of the reception of improvised music, James Dennen draws upon a simple and personal analogy to present the challenges of production and reception

A six-year old girl, playing quietly by herself, hums along with music that her father plays on the hi-fi. As the song evolves into something she no longer recognizes, the young girl stops humming but continues to listen, secondarily, as the tune becomes

⁴⁹ M. D. Calvoceressi, 'Innovation and Cliché in Music', *The Musical Times*, vol. 64, no. 959 (1923), pp. 25-27.

⁵⁰ Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Indiana, 2000), p.9.

strange and dissonant, eventually transforming itself into a concatenation of bizarre squeals and squawks unlike anything she has ever heard. Suddenly, and unexpectedly, the song changes again, back to the song she unconsciously recognizes and, recommencing her humming, the young girl notes a sense of having returned to a place she remembers.⁵¹

At its most basic level, this setting of a young child experiencing change, or innovation, presents an insight into responses that a piece of music can evoke within a general audience. Reflecting on attempts to define the sociology of music, Theodor Adorno comments that most would define it as the relationship of the listener as a social unit to music itself.⁵² However, in attempting to evaluate such a relationship, those who engage in the reception history of music must balance the differences between past and present perceptions. Just as the young girl within Dennen's example may vary her reaction to the same piece of music over time, so too will other individuals; those who experience original music or arrangements and have the benefit of time and outside influences to characterise their own reception to such works. However, when such a balance is attained, there is an inherent value in the overall contextualisation of musical artists. The link with literature, in this instance, is clear; engaging in reception history of the meaning and significance of a writer's work must allow for the connection of historical reactions and interpretations to aspects and details of the literary texts.⁵³

In examining the publishing and reception history of Elizabeth Inchbald, Ben Robertson undertakes an approach that reflects the broader use of reception history. By evaluating Inchbald's reputation, both during her lifetime and in the period which followed, Robertson draws on a mix of primary and secondary sources that represent both examples of her work and of criticisms of her material. Robertson organised his reception study around four main phases in Inchbald's career, which included acting, playwriting, novel writing, and children's production, in order to investigate public responses to her work, as well as her own responses to public criticism.⁵⁴ Other literary examples follow a similar approach, such as studies by Carol Poster on the reception of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the work of Steven Mailloux on expanding theories of reception history, Christoph Irmscher's analysis of Henry

⁵¹ James Dennen, 'On Reception of Improvised Music', *TDR*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2009), p. 137.

⁵² Theodor Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie. Schriften XIV* (Frankfurt, 1973), pp. 179-98.

⁵³ Leon Botstein, 'Music in History: The Perils of Method in Reception History', *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 89, no. 1 (2006), p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ben P. Robertson, *Elizabeth Inchbald's Reputation: A Publishing and Reception History* (London, 2013), p. 7.

Wadsworth Longfellow, and Pauline Fairclough's study on reception in the British press.⁵⁵ Although presenting methods that are suitable only to studies of a literary nature, each focuses on questions of how, and why, interpretations about artistic work take place. In examining the contexts of the reception of Haydn and Bach, Alan Lessem asserts that much can be garnered from how studies of a similar nature have emerged within literary research.

The study of reception, for literary scholars, has to do with how texts are read and understood, and the emphasis is placed on the active role played by readers who, through the process of reading, come to recreate those texts and bring their meaning, or several possible meanings, to realisation. Musical listeners perform acts of interpretation which are similar, in at least some respects, to those readers, and the methods developed in literary reception theory and history can certainly be applied with profit to musicology.⁵⁶

As a means of imitating such an approach in musical terms, the link with literature is more than apparent. Leon Botstein, who is unequivocal in linking a strong tradition of reception history within literary studies to similar works within music, contends that

The attention to past contexts of interpretation in turn requires the writer of reception history to grapple with judgments about how a text might be read and understood. Such criticism intersects with the historical task by explicitly placing a range of readings against those of critics and readers from the past. This enterprise would seem imperative particularly for a history of literature, much less a reading of literature as a constituent element, either reflective or causal, within history.⁵⁷

In line with other examples within the arts, the use of reception history as a tool for evaluating musicians or groups has inherent value in forming a credible view of how musical artists were received and how their music mirrored such reactions. Consideration of historical theoretical sources and the reception history of musical sources may point us toward a web of interpretation and the possibility of extrapolating from this web a convergence on an ideally cogent view.⁵⁸ However, the link between musical developments between artists in varying time periods highlights the manner in which music, and the study of its reception, is dependent on recognising the cross-generational influence that is so pervasive within musical cultures worldwide. Pryer expands on this point by arguing that historic approaches to music

⁵⁵ See Pauline Fairclough, 'The 'Old Shostakovich': Reception in the British Press', *Music & Letters*, vol. 88, no. 2 (2007); Christoph Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux* (Illinois, 2006); and Carol Poster, 'Theology, Canonicity, and Abbreviated Enthymemes: Traditional and Critical Influences on the British Reception of Aristotle's "Rhetoric"', *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 1 (2003).

⁵⁶ Alan Lessem, 'Bridging the Gap: Contexts for the Reception of Haydn and Bach', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1988), p. 137.

⁵⁷ Botstein, 'Music in History', p.1.

⁵⁸ Cristle Collins Judd, 'The Dialogue of Past and Present: Approaches to Historical Music Theory', *Intégral*, vol. 14/15 (2000/2001), p. 62.

research represents far more than a quarry for information and repertory. Pryer argues that it is only through some kind of historical comparison (whether conscious or unconscious) that any individual can arrive at a meaningful yardstick for originality and innovation in music. Moreover, only a knowledge of history can tell us how exactly our present community came to value these things so much.⁵⁹ Although debates surrounding what can truly be classed as musical innovation can stretch this approach to its limits, it also raises further questions surrounding the use of musical ingenuity as a commercial tool, rather than a creative one. Marilee Mouser's case study of reception history within the work of the Italian music printer Ottaviano Petrucci explores aspects of this debate by highlighting both the creative and commercial aspect to his work.⁶⁰

Living Memory

Although bringing with it obvious benefits, the practice of reception history within music raises a number of concerns. Understanding how musical texts are received remains contingent on a grasp of historical performance practices and conditions.⁶¹ As such, music spanning across decades is not alone a product of its time but also it produces an audience of its time, each with their own inherent biases and judgements based on experience. Audiences in different time periods can be linked to music of a certain genre and their reactions are a product of that individual moment. Taking musical artists or groups from the mid-twentieth century onwards, a separate challenge exists in evaluating reception. This presents an audience, which in many cases are still alive, who may be susceptible to influence over time and therefore develop a different opinion of past musical experiences. This attempt to bridge the gap between modern and historic public opinion towards music forms a central obstacle for those engaging in reception history.⁶² Central to this is the problem that arises when aligning mass public reaction alongside immediate critical analysis. Part of the dilemma of musicians is that success is 'measured by public approval in a vague sense of mass

⁵⁹ Pryer, 'Re-Thinking History', p. 682.

⁶⁰ Marilee J. Mouser, 'Petrucci and his Shadow: A Case Study of Reception History', *Fontes Artis Musicae*, vol. 51, no. 1, (2004) p. 19.

⁶¹ Botstein, 'Music in History', p. 2.

⁶² See Maria Rika Maniates, 'The Reception of New Music Today: A Response' *New Literary History*, vol. 17, no. 2, (1986), pp. 381-390.

acceptance'.⁶³ Therefore, a clear dialogue between the empirical evidence of reception history and critical textual scrutiny forms the basis for music studies in recent times.⁶⁴

As is so often the case in many musical genres, translating what was classed as innovative or creative in the past is far more difficult in a modern context. Edward Said argues that musical performances are extreme occasions, where virtuosic soloists intimidate a submissive crowd into a state of angst at knowing their performative inferiority.⁶⁵ Just as Mouser highlights the capitalist elements within the work of Petrucci which ultimately shaped reaction to his work, so too can the same rationale be applied to musicians in shaping their own artistic product in anticipation of the reception it will receive.⁶⁶ The extent to which this, and all other concepts within the theoretical approach to reception history, can be applied to Irish traditional music is just as dependent on the type of artist or group you examine as it is within any genre. In the case of Ó Riada, the extent and variety of his professional life ensures that no single model of evaluating reactions can confidently be applied to his work. Placing a group such as Ceoltóirí Cualann within a wider framework of innovation within Irish traditional music is, in many ways, hindered by the innovation which developed within a variety of groups in the decades that followed its emergence. As Fairclough asserts,

It is highly likely that our own cultural assumptions and agendas will strike later commentators as equally transparent, even if we can't yet see this ourselves.⁶⁷

The pertinence of Fairclough's argument is obvious when analysing the impact of traditional groups that followed Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1970s and 1980s; it is central in both understanding the shaping of living memory regarding the group, as well as influencing concepts of innovation surrounding the music that Ó Riada and the ensemble produced. This speaks to two distinct issues: the position of Ceoltóirí Cualann at the beginning of a timeline of innovative ensembles within Irish traditional music in a national context; and the role of commercialisation in shaping living memory. Ó Riada's ensemble can be seen to represent the starting point for a new wave of ensemble models within Irish traditional music that would emerge throughout the remaining decades of the twentieth century. As such, each of

⁶³ Ibid. pp. 387-88.

⁶⁴ Botstein, 'Music in History', p. 1; See Stephen Hinton, 'Review of *The English Musical Renaissance, 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction* by Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes', *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 67, no. 3 (1995), pp. 710-712.

⁶⁵ Edward Said, *Musical Elaborations* (New York, 1991).

⁶⁶ See Mouser, 'Petrucci and his Shadow', pp. 19-52.

⁶⁷ Fairclough, 'The 'Old Shostakovich'', p. 295.

these groups can be linked with that which came before; that is the influence of time and the interconnected evolution from one ensemble to another. In terms of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Ó Riada's criticism of group performance within Irish traditional music indicates that the Ceoltóirí Cualann template was never intended to be a successor to the céilí band model but rather it was a solution to a problem that Ó Riada believed to exist. He asserted that

The céilí band, at the moment, is badly on the wrong track, and if something is not done, may do great harm to Irish music generally. This is a problem for the public themselves to deal with.⁶⁸

Ó Riada's assertion is an interesting framing of his theory as he is placing the céilí band at the centre of this 'problem', yet he is choosing not to change the model itself as a means of a solution. Instead, the céilí band is part of a wider issue within group performance rather than being the problem itself. The nature of Ó Riada's terminology suggests both his criticism and proposed ensemble template were general in nature, however neither the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann or any reference to the existence of the group is mentioned. The date of this broadcast on 6 October 1962 already post-dates the group's formation and broadcasts on Radió Éireann, as well as being less than three weeks prior to the recording of the group's first major album *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*. As a result of shaping the role of Ceoltóirí Cualann around a deficiency within group performance from the very outset, a vacuum is created in which those who experienced Irish traditional music during this period are subconsciously influenced by the ensembles that followed, rather than the core issue that Ó Riada was attempting to address.

Secondly, the commercial success of later traditional ensembles also obscures living memory regarding Ceoltóirí Cualann, manifested in comparisons to later ensembles which worked under entirely different principles. As Ó Sé commented, Ó Riada gave no indication that he was ever interested in pursuing a similar path to that of the Chieftains involving a coherent plan surrounding income and performance schedules.⁶⁹ Gerry Smyth briefly references Ó Riada when discussing Irish traditional music but situates it within a broader discussion surrounding the lead-in to the Chieftains. Smyth asserts that

Evolving from an informal gathering of musicians associated with the composer Seán Ó Riada, piper Paddy Moloney has led the various musicians who at different times have comprised The Chieftains on a series of international musical adventures over four decades. Professional yet unassuming, fully familiar with the traditional

⁶⁸ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 14, 13 October 1962.

⁶⁹ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

repertoire of styles and tunes yet open to diverse musical influences at the same time, The Chieftains have come to represent the acceptable face of Irish traditional music produced in a commercial context.⁷⁰

The final sentence of Smyth's analysis is central to this issue as the success of the Chieftains is framed within a commercial context. As a result, if such standards are replicated across a variety of traditional ensembles that followed, it fails to address the place of Ceoltóirí Cualann under such terms and the legacy of the group remains obscured within living memory accounts. The emergence of the Chieftains in 1963, during which Ceoltóirí Cualann were only emerging from the release of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* at the end of 1962, also draws issues surrounding commercial success into the timeline at a far earlier point. Helen O'Shea makes a brief mention of Ceoltóirí Cualann as part of an introduction to a section on the Chieftains. She asserts that

Following Ó Riada, the Chieftains introduced Irish traditional music to audiences from different social backgrounds and taste groups as a perennially popular act on the global entertainment circuit.⁷¹

O'Shea's increased focus upon the Chieftains, as opposed to the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann originally, is shaped around the successful operation of the group as a commercial and performing ensemble. In this instance, the historical timeline is distorted from the very outset; analysis is devoted to commercial evidence rather than the basis for Ó Riada's formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann and the select mediums he chose for performance and exposure. Comparisons between both groups shape living memory along a set of standards that fails to address the primary reasoning used by Ó Riada to establish Ceoltóirí Cualann. Assertions, such as those by White in *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, that members of Ceoltóirí Cualann 'regrouped under Paddy Moloney as the Chieftains'⁷² following Ó Riada's dispersal of the ensemble, indicates living memory can be based on an understanding that fails to reflect the factual basis for Ó Riada's model. If the Chieftains are viewed as a continuation of Ceoltóirí Cualann, an obvious consequence is that comparisons between both groups shift living memory away from Ó Riada's initial theorising about Irish traditional music and the position of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a direct manifestation of such a process.

The views and reflections of those who first encountered the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann are drawn from a mix of emotive perceptions from general audiences, alongside

⁷⁰ Gerry Smyth, 'Ireland unplugged: The Roots of Irish Folk/Trad. (Con)Fusion', *Irish Studies Review*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), p. 91.

⁷¹ Helen O'Shea, *The Making of Irish Traditional Music* (Cork, 2008), p. 48.

⁷² White, 'Ó Riada, Seán [John Reidy]', p. 805.

critical responses. The inherent appeal of Ceoltóirí Cualann, both academic and otherwise, lies not simply in their music, but in the representation of their performances as a significant moment within Irish traditional music and the beginning of a period in which innovation was flourishing within traditional and folk genres. Alongside this, the visual presentation of the ensemble during public performance settings adds a further layer which the audience must process. Tubridy and Ó Sé reference the impact on their own memory of the presentation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an Irish traditional ensemble on stage, together with specific dress codes for group members during significant concerts at both the outset and conclusion of the 1960s.⁷³ Performance impact was also influenced by Ó Riada's framing of certain events, particularly in terms of creating a new expectation for audiences. As Ó Canainn recalls, in advance of Ceoltóirí Cualann's first public performance in the Shelbourne Hotel in 1961 at the Dublin Theatre Festival, Ó Riada requested that written invitations be sent to every government minister, thus shaping the performance setting in advance of the group appearing on stage.⁷⁴ When reflecting on the power of performance, and the manner in which it can be accurately gauged, Botstein argues that

Only through individual and collective memory and the translation into descriptive language do accounts of performances survive. We have little else to help correlate the text and past performance. And the "text" is more often than not the particular performance rather than the musical notation.⁷⁵

As a group, Ceoltóirí Cualann did not perform prolifically during their active years, whether it be regular stage appearances or in concert type settings. Therefore, the premise of Botstein's argument, in which 'performance' acts as a medium in ascertaining reception, is certainly appropriate in this case due to the perceived impact of Ceoltóirí Cualann during a select number of events. Ó Riada expressed his views on Irish traditional music extensively through his work in both print and broadcasting, and Ceoltóirí Cualann can be viewed as a direct manifestation of those views concerned with ensemble performance.

The Scientific Experiment

As outlined in Chapter 1, Ó Riada's contention that there is an 'extraordinary lack of real discussion of Irish traditional music by the players themselves'⁷⁶ is an early indication that the premise of his discussion on the topic incorporates criticism of discursive standards, as

⁷³ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017); Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

⁷⁴ Ó Canainn, *Seán Ó Riada: His Life and Work*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Botstein, 'Music in History', p. 2.

⁷⁶ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 12, 29 September 1962.

well as musical. His treatment of Irish traditional music as a wider subject to debate, as opposed to a musical genre to critique on the basis of performance practices alone, is distinctive in and of itself. Although a scientific approach would suggest a process in which a hypothesis precedes experimentation, Ó Riada's initial experimentation with group performance takes place before the broadcast of *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962. However, the methodological discussion that he engages in throughout the series provides a theoretical framework to accompany the direction and performance history of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s. Writing in an undated research statement, Ó Riada states

I have also explored possible lines of future development of Irish traditional instrumental music through ensemble playing; some of the results of these experiments have been broadcast, and others have been issued on gramophone records. The experiments are continuing and show promising results.⁷⁷

Although Ó Riada devoted little time to writing or speaking directly about the mechanics of the group itself, where references are found they represent a far more scientific and methodological approach to music than might be expected. Analysis of Ó Riada's work within Irish traditional music during the 1960s regarding Ceoltóirí Cualann is often viewed through the lens that he developed and operated the group as a conventional traditional ensemble of that time, with associated expectations of how a group such as that should be managed and promoted.⁷⁸ Both Tubridy and Moloney dwell on the manner in which the group operated, referencing the incompatibility between Ó Riada's direction of Ceoltóirí Cualann and their own expectations of developing the group further. The relationship between Ó Riada's scientific approach to discussing Irish traditional music and the cohesiveness of the group's operation, is mirrored in how many band members viewed broadcast work with Ó Riada as the dominant feature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's material.⁷⁹ Tubridy's contention that the development of the Chieftains filled a void that Ó Riada could not commit to meeting,⁸⁰ is an indication of how the development of the Chieftains in quick succession after Ceoltóirí Cualann's establishment shaped expectations and living memory surrounding how Ó Riada's approach was evaluated; a perception that fails to address the

⁷⁷ *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 596 (43).

⁷⁸ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017); Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017); see White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'; see Hazel Fairbairn, 'Changing Contexts for Traditional Irish Dance Music: The Rise of Group Performance Practice', *Folk Music Journal*, vol. 6, no. 5 (1994), pp. 566-599.

⁷⁹ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017); Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

basis for Ó Riada's formation of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as expressed through the language he used to discuss his ensemble template.

The significance of Ó Riada's language is not his desire to address the future of Irish traditional instrumental music but rather the manner in which he appears to approach such a task. By using scientific language and referring to the group as an experiment, as well as describing their music as showing 'promising results', the concept that Ceoltóirí Cualann would operate as a conventional musical grouping is challenged from the very outset of its existence. Within the group itself, Tubridy comments that there was a recognition that 'Ceoltóirí Cualann was not operating under a pattern that could be associated with any type of musical group' but that it was clear that as part of their music, Ó Riada was setting a precedent by starting a conversation about Irish traditional music and how it should be treated.⁸¹ Furthermore, de Buitléar describes a sense that Ó Riada was spearheading a 'change in culture' within traditional music and that this influenced how group members interpreted the new approaches they themselves were attempting to learn.⁸² The views of both men are striking in that they each frame their interpretations on the basis that Ó Riada was verbalising the process he was engaging in through the manner in which he worked. Again, both men reference *Our Musical Heritage* in 1962, a production that Ceoltóirí Cualann were not directly part of, but which forced the group members to acknowledge the nature of the template itself. The concept of theorising about Irish traditional music is set out throughout much of Ó Riada's broadcast work, particularly *Our Musical Heritage*, with Ceoltóirí Cualann forming part of a process of putting theory into practice. Describing his approach to group performance, Ó Riada states

I have given a fair amount of thought to the idea of playing Irish music as a group activity. It seems to me that this is one of the most important ways in which Irish music could develop. Let us postulate, therefore, an ideal type of Céilí Band or orchestra...⁸³

Despite testimony from members of Ceoltóirí Cualann pointing toward a self-awareness on the part of group members that Ó Riada was instigating an innovative way to treat Irish traditional music, it fails to address the underlying significance of Ó Riada's methodological approach. Any views expressed regarding Ó Riada's methods, or his basis for forming Ceoltóirí Cualann, are invariably spoken of in terms of his own character or through

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Interview with de Buitléar, 'One to One', RTÉ (2011).

⁸³ Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, Episode 13, 6 Oct. 1962.

anecdotes.⁸⁴ As a consequence, the innovation of Ceoltóirí Cualann is linked with the impact of their music and production, rather than the nature of their formation, operation and overall purpose. As an example of such an imbalance, Hazel Fairbairn asserts that

Ó Riada's excitement about the textural possibilities of group playing faded as he realized how much expressive power remained locked into the relationship between the player, instrument and tradition.⁸⁵

Despite the lack of primary evidence to support such a claim, Fairbairn's evaluation of Ó Riada's ensemble makes claims about Ceoltóirí Cualann with no recognition of the background to the group's formation and the methodology adopted by Ó Riada. In this instance, a failure to acknowledge the nature of Ó Riada's formation of the group has a direct implication on the interpretation of Ceoltóirí Cualann and the accuracy of the history surrounding their operation and purpose.

Although the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann had a profound impact on Irish traditional music at that time, the extent to which the group developed is again a reflection of Ó Riada's multifaceted approach. The use of the term 'experiment' by Ó Riada, and the impact such an approach had on the management of the group, is a factor which overshadows any concept that the group appears to dissipate before its time. Both Tubridy and Moloney emphasise the abrupt disbanding of Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada as an unsettling conclusion to music they themselves were continuing to explore through the Chieftains.⁸⁶ Fairbairn asserts that 'in Ó Riada's own view, Ceoltóirí Cualann was a failure'.⁸⁷ This assertion, without clear primary evidence, highlights the difficulty in evaluating the ensemble in the context of comparisons with groupings that followed; as opposed to examining the methodological approach adopted by Ó Riada throughout the process. As a consequence, both the influence of groups which followed Ceoltóirí Cualann, alongside opinions surrounding his personality, distort the dividing lines between Ó Riada's methodology, music and underlying theory. As White asserts

Ó Riada's increasing interest in the music of Carolan towards the end of his life coincided with his waning commitment to Ceoltóirí Cualann. His wilful and difficult temperament (exemplified by several episodes involving the ensemble and the film

⁸⁴ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016); Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017); Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017); White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'; Fairbairn, 'Changing Contexts for Traditional Irish Dance Music', pp. 580-581.

⁸⁵ Fairbairn, 'Changing Contexts for Traditional Irish Dance Music', p. 580.

⁸⁶ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017); Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017).

⁸⁷ Fairbairn, 'Changing Contexts for Traditional Irish Dance Music', p. 580.

company which he had established in the mid-1960s) made it increasingly difficult for him to sustain a working relationship with professional colleagues.⁸⁸

Even though both Ó Sé and Moloney acknowledge the sudden nature of Ó Riada's declaration that he was disbanding Ceoltóirí Cualann, they also indicate a sense that he treated the group as a project and one which had fulfilled his original intentions.⁸⁹ For Ó Sé, he believed that Ó Riada 'felt that he had brought the Ceoltóirí Cualann project as far as he could and so he disbanded the group'.⁹⁰ Reflecting on the durability of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Ó Sé also emphasises how many band members envisioned the group moving into the professional sphere, yet Ó Riada did not share such a vision.⁹¹ Despite having success through Gael Linn albums and his radio series, the divergence between experimentation and outputs, versus popularisation and commercial success, becomes ever more obvious. The definition of success, in this instance, proves to be ever more potent in light of what Ó Riada articulated he was undertaking, as opposed to what those around him perceived he was doing. Echoing the sentiments of Ó Sé, Tubridy recounts a similar misunderstanding of the nature of Ó Riada's ensemble model when some group members sought a decision surrounding the future, as well as the professionalisation of the music and the associated impacts on work and family life.⁹² Once more, such opinions are framed in the context of comparisons with the Chieftains, and a clear divergence in how Ó Riada and Moloney envisioned the purpose of each group. Glatt recounts a version of the interview Ó Riada gave in which he disbanded the group, where he states that

Regarding what the Chieftains are doing I can't feel anything but sympathy. The Chieftains are a subsection of my own group and undoubtedly, they would not have come into existence except for the existence of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Therefore, I can't very well, just as a father can't repudiate his own son, I can't repudiate what they're doing. In fact, I admire what they're doing but it has tremendous limitations. They are limited to doing this kind of thing. I can't see any future for the Chieftains, which is why I have disbanded Ceoltóirí Cualann, the parent group. I feel that part of my life is over and I would like to try something new.⁹³

This account, although centred on the disbandment of the group, points towards Ó Riada's divergent view of what such an ensemble template sought to achieve. Ó Riada's complex relationship with Irish traditional music through his scientific theorising about the subject and

⁸⁸ White, 'Ó Riada, Seán'.

⁸⁹ Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile*, p. 95; Interview with Paddy Moloney (7 September 2017).

⁹⁰ Ó Sé, *An Poc ar Buile*, p. 95.

⁹¹ Interview with Seán Ó Sé (2016).

⁹² Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

⁹³ Glatt, *The Chieftains: The Authorized Biography*, p. 75.

his use of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a tool to put such a hypothesis into practice, is heavily linked with both the role of his working methods and that of his desire to find an adequate environment to work within. The narrative that Ó Riada tired of Ceoltóirí Cualann and found little satisfaction with continuing with such a template is often reflected in the sense that he continuously treated his work with indifference after it was completed.⁹⁴ However, such an evaluation ignores the experimental role of Ceoltóirí Cualann which Ó Riada articulated from the very outset. The extent to which Ó Riada adopted such a scientific approach, albeit on a minute scale, is borne out by the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a group; the development of the group being aligned to Ó Riada's methodological approach of hypothesis, test, result, and conclusion. As explored by James Weigand in 1946, the correlation between scientific methods and music, albeit not a widely utilised approach within music, provides musicians with the justification for their methods and the ability to substantiate their claims.⁹⁵ As outlined, issues surrounding Ó Riada's personality and his setting within a variety of professional working environments contributed to such a perception of indifference, on his part, towards his work within Irish traditional music and beyond. As witnessed in both the functioning of the ensemble throughout the 1960s, as well as the manner of its conclusion, much can be garnered to support such claims. However, broader themes are raised which feed into the idea that Ó Riada treated his ensemble template in such a direct and scientific manner – the way in which Ceoltóirí Cualann developed as a group model; how innovation is defined and Ó Riada's placement within such a definition; the manner in which the group evolved through their recordings and broadcasts; and quantifying the significance of reception history in evaluating reactions, both within the group and Irish traditional music circles, as well as in broader Irish society.

Judging Reception

Both the language Ó Riada used to talk about Irish traditional music, as well as the methodology he adopted, influences the way in which reception towards Ceoltóirí Cualann can be judged. Although he applies a methodological approach in grounding his theories in historical context throughout *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada's harsh criticism of certain instruments, as well as the céilí band model, overshadows the major characteristic of his work. For many musicians and observers, including those within the group itself, Ó Riada

⁹⁴ Marcus, 'Seán Ó Riada and the Ireland of the Sixties', pp. 20-21.

⁹⁵ James J. Weigand, 'The Scientific Approach to Music Teaching', *Music Educators Journal*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1946), p. 32.

was entitled to express such opinions because, as Tubridy comments, ‘he had a standing in Irish life which made people listen’.⁹⁶ As a consequence, reception history towards Ceoltóirí Cualann is a reflection of the relationship between Ó Riada’s opinions on Irish traditional music and his ensemble template, rather than an understanding of the links between his hypothesis and subsequent methods. It also places a greater significance on internal reception within Ceoltóirí Cualann, with group members also indicative of an audience which is interpreting this new group model on their perceptions of Ó Riada and his standing in society. In the absence of group members themselves questioning Ó Riada’s methodological approach, the wider audience also interprets Ó Riada’s group model through the sphere of his standing and past opinions.

Judging reception to a group such as Ceoltóirí Cualann, in light of the period in which they emerged and the types of traditional ensemble they are compared with, creates a three-way sphere of reaction which must be separated. In the first instance, reactions from those within the group itself represent an early reflection of how arrangements of this kind would be received within Irish traditional music circles. Although ultimately receptive to the new style of arrangements and the introduction of a more diverse repertoire to Irish traditional ensemble performance, members of Ceoltóirí Cualann were clearly hesitant to adapt. Kelly asserts that members of Ceoltóirí Cualann were well aware about early perceptions surrounding the ‘stop and start’ nature of their performances.⁹⁷ Indeed, older members of the group such as Kelly and Brogan shared such sentiments and would often brand some of Ó Riada’s ideas as being ‘crazy’.⁹⁸ As de Buitléar contends, such confusion was not just isolated to the older ranks of the group, with all members unsure of the prospects and the ‘future for such a brand of traditional Irish music’.⁹⁹ As some within the group articulated, they had mixed views about Ó Riada’s ideas, as well as how it would be received more generally.¹⁰⁰ Speaking in terms of expectations at that time, de Buitléar asserts that

People had become accustomed to listening to groups of musicians playing jigs, reels and hornpipes straight through from start to finish, without ever making any changes in instrumentation or in the particular arrangement of the music.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

⁹⁷ Interview with John Kelly, Feb. 1976.

⁹⁸ Interview with de Buitléar, ‘One to One’, RTÉ (2011).

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; Interview with John Kelly, Feb. 1976; Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017).

¹⁰¹ Interview with de Buitléar, in Harris and Freyer (eds.) *The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, pp. 120-129.

Although some views expressed by group members echo the reaction from audiences, a far greater degree of opinion within Ceoltóirí Cualann touches on their preoccupation with how other traditional musicians responded. In this instance, unsure of Ó Riada's full intentions for his ensemble template, members of Ceoltóirí Cualann are basing their interpretations of the purpose of the group on reactions from other traditional musicians. Kelly, touching in some way upon the possible role of the group within Irish traditional music, states that

Everyone was uncertain about the potential success of such a brand of Irish traditional music which we were attempting to produce. For Ó Riada, it was clear that the céilí band concept promoted by Radio Éireann had failed to seek a compromise between the solo traditional idea and group activity.¹⁰²

Younger members of the group, in this case Tubridy and Moloney, also show self-awareness regarding the purpose of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an ensemble but again, focus primarily on reaction from within traditional music circles in order to reach such conclusions.

Some thought we were destroying the music...we were aware of what we were doing... it meant a lot to us that we were able to turn the tide.¹⁰³

Tubridy's use of reception mirrors Kelly's sentiments, portraying the reaction they received from other musicians as a struggle to overcome initial resistance to accept such a model as a valid expression of ensemble performance within Irish traditional music. Moloney also frames reception through a similar sphere and like Tubridy, who expresses confidence that they knew what they were doing, views early reactions as part of an inevitable transition within the genre. He asserts that

There was a recognition of what was happening...we received a lot of "slagging" from other musicians for what we were doing as it was not what they were used to hearing.¹⁰⁴

Audience Reception

Even though the comments of members of Ceoltóirí Cualann indicate the influence of fellow musicians in shaping their own sense of purpose as a group, Ó Riada's position as a public figure following the success of *Mise Éire* creates a much wider audience in which the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, and his wider views on Irish traditional music, was being received. Yet, much of the audience reaction is channelled through the memories of Ceoltóirí Cualann

¹⁰² Interview with John Kelly, Feb. 1976.

¹⁰³ Interview with Michael Tubridy (2017).

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017).

members, with little reference to primary sources which account for the mix of positive and hesitant opinions that they recount. Correspondence and references relating to public perceptions of the group within Ó Riada's papers are scant and those that do exist all express positive reflections. Sources which do provide an insight into public reactions often express similar feelings of surprise, uncertainty, excitement and intrigue. Although an indication of some views within the wider public, a lack of context regarding authority, positionality and background to many of these views hinders their value as representations of widespread public reaction at that time.

Ó Riada received letters from the public regarding all aspects of his musical endeavours, with the majority requesting material, enquiring about teaching or performances, and adding small comments about his work. Although often not referencing specific aspects of Ceoltóirí Cualann's music, a key element of audience reception within such letters is the manner in which Ó Riada's work in Irish traditional music instigates requests for further information on his views across traditional, classical and liturgical genres. Regarding Irish traditional music, examples include letters from Brother O'Rourke, who comments that Ó Riada is 'advancing fast to a place among the immortals' and asks for him to compose an original 'Gaelic tune' for the Artane Boys Band;¹⁰⁵ Sister M. Magdalene, seeking help with selecting music for her exams, commenting that 'I really feel I'll never make the grade...unless the Lord works a miracle';¹⁰⁶ Patrick Morrissey, who writes of his 'love of Irish music' and seeks the name of a reel that Ó Riada included on a recent radio programme;¹⁰⁷ Father Emmanuel Giblin, seeking 'critical analyses of Irish melodies, from a structural view-point';¹⁰⁸ Séamus Mac Mathúna, requesting the notes for 'Caoineadh an Spailpín', which he heard Ceoltóirí Cualann playing on radio;¹⁰⁹ and Patrick Broderick, asking for the sheet music for the music that Ceoltóirí Cualann performed on radio.¹¹⁰

Written in 1969, albeit at the end point of the group's existence, a further letter makes a direct comment regarding an individual reaction to Ceoltóirí Cualann at that time. Kathleen Lawrie comments that

¹⁰⁵ Brother O'Rourke, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 1, 26 February 1964.

¹⁰⁶ Sister M. Magdalene, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 4, 26 July 1965.

¹⁰⁷ Patrick Morrissey, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 15, [unspecified date] September 1968.

¹⁰⁸ Father Emmanuel Giblin, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 16, 15 October 1968.

¹⁰⁹ Séamus Mac Mathúna, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 23, 3 February 1969.

¹¹⁰ Patrick Broderick, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 43, 18 September 1970.

I have listened with great interest to your Ceoltóirí Cualann group whose music I must admit left me with mixed feelings for a while... However after getting used to this style, it has grown on me more.¹¹¹

Ó Riada's early work within Radio Éireann predated his involvement with major broadcasts and public performances and as such, this period presents material only relevant to establishing the early formations of his career. However, his time working as an independent producer of programming for RTÉ contributes somewhat to the gathering of material for the purposes of assessing public reaction. One such item within Ó Riada's papers is an RTÉ survey conducted in 1967 amongst a panel of audience members for the programme *Songs and Stories*. Featuring Ó Riada and Seán Ó Sé, the series discussed Irish traditional songs, their context, authorship, and musical content, as well as their place in the musical tradition of Ireland and the correct approach to their performance.¹¹² The programme is framed in a similar fashion to broadcasts involving Ceoltóirí Cualann in which the production was built around Ó Riada as a central focus.

Seán Ó Riada's unselfconscious, unaffected, conversational style of story-weaving charmed viewers. By force of personality he held the attention of almost all, so comment was practically entirely favourable.¹¹³

The survey also indicates that like *Our Musical Heritage*, the programme attracted an audience that may not be accustomed to programmes of this nature and frames this around Ó Riada's character and style, a further indication that national profile played a far wider role in broadening his audience base for projects within Irish traditional music. Further comments explore initial audience reactions to the programme, with classifications made on the basis of the occupation of participants.

He suits me down to the ground (local government official); He made the programme worth looking at (housewife); and, people like him and this type of programme do more for our Irish heritage than that vociferous group I normally term the "revivalists" (insurance official)... a housewife wrote: "after this extremely interesting series I may like traditional music now that I understand it better"; and a company director: "An excellent programme well presented, well-illustrated."¹¹⁴

Again, the prevalence of critical reactions towards Ó Riada's work is limited as material such as this RTÉ survey has been included by Ó Riada himself within his papers and does not include items which are negative in nature. Nonetheless, the survey points to a notable set of

¹¹¹ Kathleen Lawrie, 'Letter to Seán Ó Riada', *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 25, 1 April 1969.

¹¹² 'Irish Songs and Stories', *Irish Film and TV Index*, Trinity College Dublin, <https://www.tcd.ie/irishfilm/index.php>, Accessed 2 February 2020.

¹¹³ Programme report by R.T.É. Audience Research Service (1967), *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 575 (1).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

comments in light of the time in which it was conducted; the same year in which Ceoltóirí Cualann released their albums *Ceol na nUasal* and *Ding Dong*. It is a further indication that the audience that Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann reached was entirely dependent on the medium in which they were performing and spanned across several platforms, such as public performances, album recordings, radio broadcasts or television appearances. As a consequence, audience reception is not an adequate reflection when examined within one medium alone.

Critical Reaction and Methodology

Although there is a clear lack of comprehensive sources which reflect wider public reaction, critical analysis and commentary from the period provides the more comprehensive tone of reception towards Ceoltóirí Cualann, albeit a reflection of only one section of Irish life. Ó Riada's broadcasting career, particularly his series *Our Musical Heritage*, set the theoretical basis for his views on Irish traditional music at that particular moment in time, and much like reactions to his musical ensemble, his initial views were often met with a hostile reaction. In the first instance, views from within Ceoltóirí Cualann itself, as well as those who knew Ó Riada, indicates that outside public reaction, the manner in which he presented his views agitated those who commented on such matters up to that point. Moloney states that Ó Riada 'spoke out about Irish music and céilí bands in ways which riled some people'.¹¹⁵ Taking this point of view further, Ó Canainn argues that

Some experts felt threatened by Seán's adoption of a position of authority. Others felt that he was a brash newcomer, with little background in the standard ways of traditional musicians playing almost by instinct.¹¹⁶

Analysis throughout the 1960s reflected a mixed sense of emotions regarding the potential of such a grouping. The prevalence of words such as 'experiment', 'Cualann sound' and 'exciting', particularly in describing the group's emergence, reflects similarities that existed between critical and public reactions. Critical reaction in the early years of Ceoltóirí Cualann's performances contains a mix of emotions on the part of critics, with some taking a neutral stance of intrigue and hope for the future, while others proclaimed a more positive tone from the outset. One such early analysis by Louis Marcus can be found within the *Irish Times* in a piece which also included the subheading 'A New Experiment'.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Paddy Moloney (2017).

¹¹⁶ Ó Canainn, 'Musical Editor's Preface', p. 14.

Ó Riada's latest work is an exciting experiment, featured in a Radio Éireann series called "Reacaireacht an Riadaigh". He has formed a chamber group of traditional musicians – not to be confused with the Céilí Band, invented by Seamus Clandillon in 1926 and since debased by piano and drums into a beat-producer for mass dancing. Ó Riada's group, Ceoltóirí Cualann, comprises tin whistle, flute, chanter, two fiddles, two boxes, bodhrán and bones. In such a combination of traditional musicians, unused to chamber playing, one might have expected serious deficiencies of intonation, but that was not the case. A more serious problem was to reconcile the many versions of a given reel, jig or hornpipe; the final version was sometimes a compromise and sometimes a general agreement on the best available one. After that, the real excitement of the experiment begins. Ó Riada set himself the task of controlling a group interpretation of music that was traditionally solo, or at most for two. His basic gambit, of course, is to vary the combination of instruments at any given moment, thus changing the colour of the piece to suit the development of the tune; although simple when stated thus, the process is capable of endless variety and was handled in the first programme with taste and imagination.¹¹⁷

The significance of Marcus' piece stretches far beyond musical reception; it presents a recognition of Ó Riada's methodological approach from the very outset, using the term 'experiment' to describe both the nature of the *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* radio programme, as well as the process undertaken by Ó Riada. Furthermore, Marcus' reference to Ceoltóirí Cualann as a 'chamber group' presents a further indication of the manner in which the new group model involving Irish traditional music was being interpreted. In the context of classical music, an essential characteristic of a chamber group is the limited size of the performing group employed; it is intimate music, suited to the expression of subtle and refined musical ideas.¹¹⁸ The sustained use by Marcus of 'experimentation' to describe the group also links with his chamber classification due to the association of innovation with such ensembles. Mark Radice asserts that historically

Chamber music ensembles provided the ideal venue for experimentation with new and often difficult idioms. Many of these experimental styles rejected traditional harmony, melody, and meter... Chamber ensembles thus became a testing ground for progressive ideas and novel sonorities.¹¹⁹

The term 'process' is also used by Marcus in the concluding section of the piece which was preceded by the subheading 'Filling the Historical Gap'. Within this article, the reader is being presented with many of the key terms which describe the methodological approach by Ó Riada, rather than the 'sound' of the new ensemble model alone. Although Ó Riada does not discuss his view that a problem exists within group performance until 1962 as part of *Our*

¹¹⁷ Louis Marcus, 'Seán Ó Riada and Irish Music', *Irish Times*, 8 May 1961, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ 'Chamber Music', *Encyclopaedia Britannica Academic*, <https://academic-eb-com.libgate.library.nuigalway.ie/levels/collegiate/article/chamber-music/110132>, accessed 19 May 2020.

¹¹⁹ Mark A. Radice, *Chamber Music: An Essential History* (Michigan, 2012), p. 3.

Musical Heritage, Marcus analyses Ceoltóirí Cualann by speculating ‘as to whether Ó Riada’s idea might do something to solve our dilemma’. He contends that

Irish traditional players have remained orchestrally “frozen” for a few hundred years... That is why, in a sense of cultural importance, “Reacaireacht” is a greater achievement than the music for “Mise Eire [sic]”. The latter was the individual work of a talented man who had absorbed his native sources; but this is a skilful and tasteful attempt to develop those sources in the face of an historical gap and a present chaos. This might well be the process by which the fragments of a disintegrated Western culture will slowly come together again in some measure of organic unity.¹²⁰

Considering that *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* the album was not recorded until October 1962, this review of the first *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* radio broadcast displays a critical analysis that goes far beyond a review of the music being presented. It is an acknowledgement that the process, or the methodological approach, is at the centre of Ó Riada’s new ensemble model and that it displays scientific methods which point to a theorisation about group performance in Irish traditional music. As a piece of critical analysis, it is not influenced by many of the factors which shape later reactions throughout the 1960s. Such events included the broadcast of *Our Musical Heritage*, the formation of the Chieftains, Ceoltóirí Cualann’s subsequent album releases, and Ó Riada’s move to Cork. Marcus accepts the template for what it is, an experiment on the part of Ó Riada that was in response to a particular ‘dilemma’ and not comparable to the céilí band model.

As outlined in Chapter 3, Ó Riada’s ensemble template instigated critical responses that were reflective of the unfamiliarity of Ó Riada’s group model and mirrored broader audience reaction. In November 1967, the *Irish Independent* describes how

The exciting new sound which Seán Ó Riada and his brilliant Ceoltóirí Cualann ensemble have brought to Irish music was being enthusiastically received by audiences¹²¹

However, critical analyses at that time also instigated broader debates surrounding the place of such an ensemble model within the genre and the attractiveness of Ó Riada’s arrangements. Later that same year, a piece in the *Irish Independent* takes a more strident stance on the group, arguing that ‘Ó Riada is probably the greatest living authority on Irish music. He is a purist and makes no concession to the present-day popular ballad craze’.¹²² Once more in 1969, following their performance in the Gaiety Theatre which marked both

¹²⁰ Marcus, ‘Seán Ó Riada and Irish Music’, *Irish Times*, p. 7.

¹²¹ Desmond Rushe, ‘Exciting New Sound’, *Irish Independent*, 21 Nov 1967.

¹²² *Irish Independent*, 19 Dec 1967.

their high point and conclusion, the *Irish Independent* remarks, albeit in a more cautious manner, that

Most of the pieces follow the same pattern, introduced usually on the harpsichord, then repeated by other instruments in turn and eventually by the whole group. The effect has a sameness which quite soon begins to pall.¹²³

An intriguing early criticism can be found within the first edition of the Irish traditional music journal, *Ceol*, in which the editor, Breandán Breathnach, dismisses what he perceives as the premise behind Ó Riada's new ensemble.

[Ceoltóirí Cualann] is being presented to the public as a group of native musicians constituting the new style "céilí band", in contrast to "the misconceived Clandillon type" ... basically there is no difference between this grouping and the céilí band which it is now becoming the thing to deride... such treatment of music can hardly be regarded as a serious effort towards developing a new art music form... In so far as the dance music is concerned this group must be regarded as any other common or garden céilí band, that is leaving the added antics out of account... it fails to attain the "lift" which is the characteristic of all great reel playing, and the overall effect suggests a lack of cohesion.¹²⁴

Breathnach's editorial is a long and scathing deconstruction of Ó Riada's ensemble template, characterising Ceoltóirí Cualann as a failed opposition to the céilí band model, attempting to unnecessarily create an argument that does not exist. At the core of the article, is the criticism of musical aspects of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as witnessed through Breathnach's contention that the group fails to 'attain the lift which is the characteristic of all great reel playing, and the overall effect suggests a lack of cohesion'. Furthermore, Breathnach challenges Marcus's 1961 article in which he argues that

This grouping was considered by one critic as a greater achievement by Ó Riada... In discussing these programmes [*Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*] the progress made by Ceoltóirí Cualann in transmuting the presentation of jigs and reels as played by the ordinary céilí band into a new art form should be assessed. If the experiment has been a success the standards by which this new grouping must be judged would differ from those applicable to the casual group of "musicianers" who have a go together at some reel or other at a fleadh Cheoil. If a radical departure from the usual treatment of dance music has not been achieved, this group with the ordinary céilí band must be judged by how well the melody with all its ornamentation is presented to the listener.¹²⁵

Breathnach's editorial focuses on Ceoltóirí Cualann's radio broadcasts, despite the album *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* having been released the previous year. The piece devotes the

¹²³ Mac Goris, 'Popularity of the Cualann Sound', *Irish Independent*, p. 15.

¹²⁴ 'As We See It', *Ceol: A Journal of Irish Music*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1963), pp. 20-22.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

majority of its attention towards Ceoltóirí Cualann, but it does open with a discussion about the general broadcasting of Irish traditional music on Radio Éireann. A preamble by Breathnach declares that

To avoid misunderstanding – if that is possible – we shall here explain our own approach to the subject. Programmes which purport to present Irish traditional or folk music played in a traditional manner – seancheol ar an seanchaoi – should include only music of this kind and any such music, vocal or instrumental, should be rendered only in a traditional manner and, let us say, by competent performers.¹²⁶

Breathnach's criticism is therefore framed around two key issues; countering the framework applied by Marcus in 1961, and, situating his criticism within a definition of what constitutes 'traditional music'. As already examined in both Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the varying definitions of tradition will always produce dividing lines when variations are introduced. Indeed, as is witnessed through *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada himself defines traditional music as a preamble to his own discussion on solo and group performance. Reacting to Breathnach's editorial, Acton writes in July 1963 that

Such a critical article should be signed, and among much justifiable faulting of Ceoltóirí Cualann's actual standard of performance is a strange ignorance of the spuriousness of the "Clandillon" céilí band and of what Seán Ó Riada's claims are for his intentions.¹²⁷

Acton's retort links back to a key issue in evaluating the historical significance of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann; that being the ability to factually attest to Ó Riada's intentions and processes when engaging with group performance within Irish traditional music.

Charles Acton and Ó Riada

Although the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann throughout the 1960s can be characterised by a struggle to interpret the process they undertook, critical analysis of their musical output, and Ó Riada as an individual musician and composer, is most linked with the writing of Charles Acton (1914-1999). Appointed as music critic for the *Irish Times* in 1955, the same year that Ó Riada was appointed as Director of Music at the Abbey Theatre, Acton reviewed over 6,000 concerts for the newspaper during a thirty-one year career.¹²⁸ Although his work can be associated with an array of issues, including Irish State policy towards the arts,¹²⁹ Acton's position as a permanent fixture throughout Ó Riada's career provides an example of an

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Acton, 'Outstanding Folk Song', *Irish Times*, 3 July 1963.

¹²⁸ Gareth Cox, 'Acton, Charles' in McGuire and Quinn (eds.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

individual who witnessed the premiere of each of Ceoltóirí Cualann's productions throughout the 1960s. Richard Pine describes the relationship between both men as being built 'entirely on Ó Riada's musical tastes, beliefs and ambitions', asserting that

From quite different backgrounds, they had moved towards one another across the terrain of Irish music, stimulated by the topic of Arab music as a source of sean-nós and by the concern for Irish music-making which Ó Riada had made evident in his 1962 radio series *Our Musical Heritage*.¹³⁰

Although Acton was in a position to witness and critically analyse the evolution of Ceoltóirí Cualann through his career with the *Irish Times*, his reviews of Ó Riada's work are often characterised by the direct nature of his commentary; his focus often placed on the individual musician or composer in critiquing a concert or recorded album. Michael Dervan argues that

His writing style inclined towards the polemic. His views on a wide range of topics were so strongly held and closely interwoven that it wasn't unusual for single concerts to provoke a torrent of deeply felt commentary that wasn't always directly related to the music on the programme or the performances on the night.¹³¹

Such a feature of Acton's writing, and the significance of his link with Ó Riada, is evident within a series of open letters exchanged between both men through the pages of the *Irish Times* a few months before Ó Riada's death. Following a scathing review by Acton of a solo performance by Ó Riada on 14 July 1971, a public exchange was instigated which acts as both a culmination of a professional relationship and a premature conclusion to an artistic debate. Acton writes that

Sean O [sic] Riada gave what was called a one-man show in Liberty Hall Dublin, last night, using a harpsichord and a piano... I am afraid I found myself reflecting that here were styles falsified one after another, though the falsity of microphones in a hall that surely does not need them symbolised by the plastic flowers decorating the platform. In fact, the standard was better suited to the private party or the reasonably lubricated cabaret... Gently entertaining though the show was, it seemed to me to be neither professional enough for the variety stage nor of an adequate musical standard to detain a music critic beyond the first half. Sean O [sic] Riada's gifts remain enormous. Is this performance not selling himself too cheaply and indiscriminately in the market place? And is there not a word for that?¹³²

The timing of Acton's review, three months before Ó Riada's death on 3 October 1971, clearly coincides with the deteriorating health of Ó Riada. Acton not only reviews the performance on its merits, but also in consideration of Ó Riada's work up to that point. His

¹³⁰ Richard Pine, *Charles: The Life and World of Charles Acton, 1914-1919* (Dublin, 2010), p. 336.

¹³¹ Michael Dervan, 'Remembering Charles', *Irish Times*, 29 April 1999, p. 12.

¹³² Acton, 'Sean O Riada One-Man Show Lacked Polish', *Irish Times*, 15 July 1971, p.10.

contention that Ó Riada was selling himself ‘too cheaply’ with such an unprofessional performance is a clear reflection of wider tensions that existed at that point between his artistic direction and obvious ill health. However, Acton’s original review was never intended to instigate a public exchange between both men. Yet, on 27 July Ó Riada submitted a piece entitled ‘An Open Letter to Charles Acton, From his Friend Sean O [sic] Riada’, opening with

As you know, and as many of my friends know, it is not my custom to write letters, either private or public. However, on August the 1st, the festival of Lughnasa, I shall be forty years of age; this approaching watershed has induced me to try to write one letter to yourself, in the hope that it will be both privately and publicly understood. For some years now you have been kind enough to take notice in *The Irish Times*, and elsewhere, of my musical activities. So kind, in fact, that I have come to think of you as a sort of well-meaning uncle, sometimes afraid that his black sheep nephew might be about to stray, to fall into error, to do the wrong thing. In other words, you have tempered your praise with admonishment. Admonish, admonish – this is what one’s favourite uncles do. Nephews, unfortunately, rarely live up to their uncle’s expectations, nor obey satisfactorily their admonishings [sic]. And if an uncle may admonish, it is only Christian and charitable to allow a nephew his chance to admonish, in exchange. As you know Charles, I am a lecturer in the music department of University College Cork (as well, of course, as being a composer), a profession which is rather commonly described as “academic”... just as you yourself would, I suppose, be rather commonly described as a “critic. Now, “academics” and “critics” have one duty in common, an obligation to be faithful to the facts. The “critic” may voice opinions, praise, or condemn, but the facts are of premier and paramount importance.¹³³

This opening statement is both a rebuttal to Acton’s claims, as well as a personal display of fragility on Ó Riada’s part. His reference to the ‘approaching watershed’ of his fortieth birthday frames both his response and the context of his performance as a process of reflection on Ó Riada’s part. The paragraph is tinged with Ó Riada’s sarcasm to convey his obvious contempt for both the tone and content of Acton’s original review, as well as legitimising his right of reply. In particular, Ó Riada challenges Acton on a factual basis, asserting that ‘facts are of premier and paramount importance’. The tone of the piece clearly indicates that the opinions of Acton riled Ó Riada to a far greater extent, as is visible through his sustained use of ‘admonishing’ to describe, and validate, the terms of his own response. It forms part of a much wider piece in which he responds to Acton’s original points individually, all within a personal utterance that indicates a clear fragility on his part. Ó Riada’s contention that it was not a habit of his to ‘write letters, either private or public’ is

¹³³ Ó Riada, ‘An Open Letter Charles Acton. From his Friend Sean O Riada’, *Irish Times*, 27 July 1971, p. 8.

not necessarily reflective of the reality of his life. Indeed, his personal papers include various letters written by Ó Riada which relate to both his family and professional life. He later remarks

What have I learned? Very broadly, that there are in this small Island two nations: the Irish (or Gaelic) nation, and the Pale. The Irish nation, tiny as it is at the moment, has a long, professional literary and musical tradition. The Pale, on the other hand, has a tradition of amateurishness . . . Dear Charles, you must forget about the Pale. Come to the Gaeltacht, where we still survive and see and hear the people singing my setting of the Mass, in its proper context. As I recall, you thought it was too difficult, too complex for an ordinary congregation. . . In the heel of the hunt, you are a foreigner: but you are welcome to become one of the natives, should you wish to do so. There's always an open door here. One last word – “amiable” I am not.¹³⁴

Despite responding to direct criticisms of the solo performance and challenging many of Acton's claims, Ó Riada's conclusion is situated in a much broader context; that being his own positionality versus that of Acton. As is explored within the next section of this chapter, Acton's general assertions about the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann are a reflection of Acton's own musical perspective and an inability to acknowledge Irish traditional musical practices within a classical type performance setting. Although the solo performance is the topic in which this correspondence refers, Ó Riada concludes his letter with a tone that suggests earlier assertions by Acton have shaped his views. ‘There's always an open door here’ is far more applicable to a more theoretical divergence between both men than it is to Acton's views regarding his latest public concert. Ó Riada defends himself with both hyperbole and sarcasm that produces an unsettling undertone when studied in context of the period in question. Acton, who was aware to some extent of Ó Riada's deteriorating health having written to him the previous year concerning his recovery from jaundice,¹³⁵ ultimately reciprocates Ó Riada's opening gambit and responds to each of the points raised in ‘A Reply to Sean O [sic] Riada’. He writes

My dear Sean [sic], First of all, may I say how flattered and complimented I feel by your long letter. However passionately a critic feels about the subjects of his opinions, he can, at best, only hope to be an adjunct and auxiliary to the composers and performers of our art. Therefore, when one whom he regards as having potential genius as a composer publicly calls a critic his friend, let alone a sort of well-meaning uncle, the latter must feel warmly grateful. Even though I am surprised at the implications of seniority. . . Sean [sic], what is to be said of you? Do you really think that that rather amateurish entertainment on Bastille Day was worthy of the great composer you could be? Seán, we admire you, we believe in you, we are honoured to know you, but please accept the burden we put upon you. I write in the plural because

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Acton, ‘Letter to Seán Ó Riada’, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 192, 12 February 1970.

I do not speak for myself alone. And finally, believe me that I write this in deep sincerity and true friendship, and cherishing the privilege of being regarded by you as your friend. Yours, Charles Acton.¹³⁶

Acton's letter is clearly shaped to reflect the public nature of the exchange, cognisant that their words will be open to varying degrees of interpretation. Unlike Ó Riada, who challenges Acton on wider points, he frames the entirety of his criticism on his original review of Ó Riada's solo concert. Rather than bringing the debate to a conclusion, Acton replicates the tone of Ó Riada's letter. Each point he raises an attempt at a counter argument; the level of debate being reduced to fighting over the smallest of points.

Forgive me therefore, for saying that you should know the difference between the future indicative tense and the conditional. Had the words been "this overture will endure" that would indeed have been prophecy (and extremely rash at that).¹³⁷

However, despite the minute attention to detail within Acton's reply, he ultimately situates it within a more pertinent argument, contending that through the legacy of his work, Ó Riada has a far wider responsibility to his audience. In an earlier comment, he contends that Ó Riada has talents 'which are a public responsibility'.¹³⁸ His appeal for Ó Riada to 'accept the burden we put upon you' also reflects Acton's original criticism surrounding the value of engaging in such a lacklustre performance in light of Ó Riada's output to date.

Published the day after Ó Riada's 40th birthday, a public reply was never received due to the deteriorating nature of his health, and his hospitalisation for the final time that month. However, an incomplete draft letter written by Ó Riada would appear to be a reply to Acton, in which he states

My dear Charles, Lookit [sic] here to me – this must stop! Do you realise that you are making me write more letters than I wrote in years? Have you no pity? I have a good mind to telephone you instead, but the difficulties involved in that kind of operation (from both sides) are daunting, to say the least. I marvel at the way other people are, or used to be, able to write letters. James Joyce, now, was a great epistolarian – for the last two or three nights I have been reading his letters in bed. Where did he find the time for all this furor [litterari] scribendi? [sic] Of course, he didn't produce a great deal of work, only a handful of books (I suppose you'd describe him as a class of Duparc). But then, the books he made he made well; he never yielded to the dictates of the ephemeral, the fashionable. (Mind you, the ephemeral and fashionable did their best to imitate him after he had achieved some success, but, sure, it wasn't the same thing at all.) This question is disturbing, just the same.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Acton, 'A Reply to Sean O Riada', *Irish Times*, 2 August 1971, p. 8.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ó Riada, *Ó Riada Collection*, Item 252.

Within Ó Riada's personal papers, there is also some indication that he received public reactions towards the entire exchange. Two letters, both of which are deriding Acton's original review, are kept by Ó Riada in July 1971. Orla Ní Mhurchú, from 7 Templemore Avenue, Rathgar, Dublin 6 outlines her shock at reading Acton's review, commenting that they are the 'slightly dotty ramblings of a venomous old tea-cosy' and that she feels that 'senile decay' has 'sapped what was left of his lopsided integrity'.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Norah Power from Rathgar, Dublin writes that she 'saw red' on reading Acton's review and that 'He's blinkered by the Pale glasses'.¹⁴¹

Acton and Irish Traditional Music

As already outlined, Acton's columns throughout this period focus on all aspects of Ó Riada's musical career which, at times, instigated a response from Ó Riada himself.¹⁴² His writing often straddled a thematic line between Ó Riada's stature in Irish society and his engagement across various genres of music. Ó Súilleabháin asserts that 'there was a huge overlap of energy' between Acton and Ó Riada,

There was something exciting in the appropriation of the traditional musical voice by a classical commentator. It was political in the cultural sense of the word, and significant for its time.¹⁴³

In terms of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Acton's views clearly evolved throughout the 1960s, in line with the development and musical output of the group itself. However, Ó Súilleabháin's comment asserting the 'appropriation of the traditional musical voice by a classical commentator' is a central characteristic of Acton's commentary on Ceoltóirí Cualann.

Writing in 1963 about their first album release, Acton states

The band pride themselves, apparently, that "there are no written parts, each player making his personal contribution to the texture of the music according to a design prearranged in discussion with the director". Brave words, but, judging by the sound, they conceal either casualness or a lack of artistic integrity on Mr. O [sic] Riada's part or perhaps an inability by his players to make use of musical notation or to change from a solo to a group experience. Sean O [sic] Riada and his band could revivify popular national music, or cross the folk idiom with 20th century life, or produce a new and valid art music genre, but only if a vast amount of conscientious hard work is

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Item 233.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Item 234.

¹⁴² See Acton, 'Sean Ó Riada On-Man Show Lacked Polish', *Irish Times*, 15 July 1971; Ó Riada, 'An Open Letter to Charles Acton, From His Friend Seán Ó Riada', *Irish Times*, 27 July 1971; and Acton, 'A Reply to Seán Ó Riada', *Irish Times*, 2 August 1971.

¹⁴³ Ó Súilleabháin in Michael Dervan, 'Remembering Charles', *Irish Times*, 29 April 1999, p. 12.

done by the director and a great deal of study and rehearsal is done by the band as a unit. Private fun does not become public art merely by recording.¹⁴⁴

Although Acton's comments clearly reflect early apprehensiveness towards the template being put forward by Ó Riada, the nature of the overall review is somewhat dismissive of a process that was already well underway and public by 1963. The album, which is clearly replicating the model developed by Ó Riada in the radio series *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, is not referenced at any point by Acton. Alongside this, his analysis of aspects of Irish traditional music ensemble performance, as explored by Ó Riada through Ceoltóirí Cualann, lack thorough scrutiny which would have been expected for an album of this nature. His comment relating to 'artistic integrity' suggests his review is on the basis that Ó Riada is positioning his new group template along classical standards, rather than utilising classical techniques within the genre of Irish traditional music to highlight its individual artistic value.

As highlighted in Chapter 3 when commenting further on *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, Acton concludes that 'novelty and enthusiasm are definitely not enough'.¹⁴⁵ In relation to the sean-nós singer Darach Ó Catháin, Acton outlines his lack of experience in such a field while simultaneously contending that Ó Catháin 'is too inflexible and too much devoid of any communication of personal feeling about his songs'.¹⁴⁶ Finally, his concluding remarks regarding 'private fun does not become public art by recording' only further highlights the lack of context being provided within Acton's review for the type of ensemble being put forward on this album, whether that be positive or negative in nature. Acton immediately follows his review of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* on the same page with a review of another album, once more indicating that his view of Ó Riada's ensemble template is based upon judging both the music and methodology adopted by Ó Riada against standards that are not reflective of Irish traditional music. He states that

For a different entertainment and one that (by contrast) is a characteristic of the conscientious high craftsmanship that creates an atmosphere of slick spontaneity, let us turn to a cabaret artist in a New York club – "Mr the Schlamme at The Gate of Horn" accompanied by Frank Hamilton.¹⁴⁷

Commenting on further recordings by Ceoltóirí Cualann in 1964, Acton begins to expand his views on Ó Riada's potential by stating that Ceoltóirí Cualann

¹⁴⁴ Acton, 'The Lighter Side', *Irish Times*, 2 Jan 1963, p.8.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

may show an entirely new synthesis of folk-music and original artistry (but scarcely yet). He [Ó Riada] has an almost infinite capacity for development and fame, but also (I suspect) an equal talent for living for the present and taking the line of musical least resistance. He remains a question mark, coloured with equal measures of confident hope and exasperation to his admirers, among whom I number myself.¹⁴⁸

Acton's apprehension, and his characterisation of Ó Riada as a 'question mark', continues a pattern of viewing Ceoltóirí Cualann as a product of his wider engagement with Irish traditional music; the music of the group being interwoven with Acton's wider prospects for Ó Riada's contribution to Irish music. Four months later, Acton considers the ensemble template of Ceoltóirí Cualann further, in the context of the release of wider issues within folk music. In conjunction with a review of an album by the Chieftains, he writes that

The Ó Riada type band has a direct pedigree from our true folk-music... Ó Riada sees a prospect (and it seems to me a most exciting prospect) of developing from these elements a true art music. I am quite sure he is right. And I am equally certain that he can produce an art music of great fertility, that can be notated and published, conceived for sophisticated instruments and for art singers of other countries who could not acquire the 'nya' of our folk singers. So far nearly all of that is a future hope and it is very possible that the pleasures of the Ó Riada band may be for him a cul-de-sac because he may not feel impelled to develop the land ahead.¹⁴⁹

Considering it was two years since Acton's first review of *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh*, he continues to view Ceoltóirí Cualann as Ó Riada's desire to develop a 'true art music' that can be 'conceived for sophisticated instruments'. His language continuing to suggest that Ceoltóirí Cualann, as a musical template, is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Further progression is clearly evident when Acton reflects upon the group's second recorded album, *Ceol na nUasal*, in which Ó Riada consolidates the identity and purpose of the group through his repertoire. Acton states

I find that this new record of Ó Riada's is by far the most interesting thing he has yet done with his Ceoltóirí Chualann and reinforces me in my opinion that if he only gets round to it his contribution to the art music of the world could be very great indeed... This disc seems to me to show a considerable advance. I take this as a declaration of intent to bridge the gap between 1641 and 1922... I am myself convinced that, whatever improvisatory his music, he will have to make use of sophisticated notations and to get his musicians to use them.¹⁵⁰

Finally, albeit a minute reflection of Acton's analysis during this period, he outlines his views in 1969 following Ceoltóirí Cualann's Gaiety performance.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 'A Sheaf of Irish Music', *Irish Times*, 30 Dec 1964.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 'The Ó Riada Tradition', *Irish Times*, 22 April 1965.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 'Ó Riada Breaks the Rules', *Irish Times*, 15 Nov 1967.

Ó Riada and his Ceoltóirí Cualann have by now all the assurance of the seasoned troupers they are. There is now a real ensemble that used to be lacking, as well as the enthusiasm they always had... he has something there that is enormously folklorique, however far from the ethnic.¹⁵¹

It is notable that amongst all of Acton's commentary on the recorded work of Ceoltóirí Cualann, he should apply his most positive commentary towards both *Ceol na nUasal* and the group performance for *Ó Riada sa Gaiety*. Through repertoire and production, both are resonant of Acton's familiar classical genre. *Ceol na nUasal*, with its repertoire of Gaelic Ireland, and the formal production and presentation of Ceoltóirí Cualann's music in the Gaiety Theatre in 1969, are viewed by Acton as a 'considerable advance'. He views such features, not as part Ó Riada advancing any element of Irish traditional music but rather, as justification why his musicians will have to 'make use of sophisticated notations' in order to bridge the historical gap in art music that Acton understands as the premise for Ó Riada's group model.

Conclusion

Whether it be in the context of analysing Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann or not, definitions surrounding musical innovation and tradition are not so easily aligned. As witnessed through the organisation and production of Ceoltóirí Cualann by Ó Riada, innovation is as much about focusing on what is traditional as it is about creating something entirely separate. However, Ó Riada's own conception of what constitutes traditional, and the extent to which his ensemble template represents a model that is loyal to Irish traditional music, is bluntly expressed by him, both verbally and musically. Glassie points once more to the inherent difficulty in bridging a divide between innovation and tradition; a relationship that exposes the ability of history to express an account of the past which identifies innovation in terms of what the author seeks to confer.

Overtly, histories are accounts of the past. Their authors, acceding to the demands of narration, customarily seek change, the transformations by which they can get their story told. Change and tradition are commonly coupled, in chat and chapter titles, as antonyms. But tradition is the opposite of only one kind of change: that in which disruption is so complete that the new cannot be read as an innovative adaptation of the old.¹⁵²

The views of Ó Riada regarding Irish traditional music and song, and the manner in which he put such views into practice, form part of wider explorations of musical genres

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 'Ó Riada Commemorates Peadar O Doirnin', *Irish Times*, 1 April 1969.

¹⁵² Glassie, 'Tradition', p. 395.

during the course of the 1960s.¹⁵³ By examining Ó Riada's broadcast and print material, his central idea of 'righting a wrong' is one which arises in the context of Irish traditional music, particularly that of group performance. At the core of his argument is the idea that Irish traditional music was mistakenly taken down a route in which céilí bands, although a progression in terms of ensemble templates, failed to address the transition between solo and group performance. The period in which Ó Riada articulated these views, and ultimately put them into practice through the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, was one in which variation and innovation within folk genres took hold. Although Irish traditional musicians within the diasporic community, particularly in the United States, were influenced and formed part of many of the Irish-American dance bands which were popularised from the 1920s onward, the lack of similar variation within the céilí band model fuelled much of what was to occur in a national context.

These changes were to influence production, repertoire, recordings and most notably for Irish traditional music, performance settings. However, as is evident within the writing of Charles Acton, such changes within Irish traditional music were viewed through the prism of Ó Riada's struggle to mould a new Irish musical artform. Although Ó Riada's approach throughout *Our Musical Heritage* suggests such a prospect informs his work, taking that position fails to recognise the innovative characteristics of his methods. Acton devotes regular sections of his column in the *Irish Times* throughout the 1960s to reviewing the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann but his tendency to revert to assessing Ó Riada as a figure of wider change in Irish music emphasises the disjointed nature of evaluating his work. Despite Acton's viewpoint of Ceoltóirí Cualann, the manner in which he writes about Ó Riada is the most obvious example of a recognition of the distinct nature of the methodology that was displayed through the group's development. A continuous thread throughout this chapter, the innovative process adopted by Ó Riada forms the basis of much of Acton's commentary; Ceoltóirí Cualann representing a medium in which such methods are being applied.

As witnessed through the approach undertaken by Ó Riada, the innovation of the process was just as significant as any innovation that can be identified within the music itself. Ó Riada's methodology is shaped by a scientific approach that identifies an issue, hypothesises a solution, and places such theories in an experiment type setting to determine

¹⁵³ See Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York, 2010); Jill Terry and Neil A. Wynn, *Transatlantic Roots Music: Folk, Blues, and National Identities* (Mississippi, 2012); Ronald Cohen, *A History of Folk Music Festivals in the United States: Feasts of Musical Celebration* (Lanham, 2008).

results. Such a process has far reaching consequences in the analysis of Ceoltóirí Cualann and comparisons to other traditional groups who display obvious similarities in terms of arrangement and production. In a national context, Ceoltóirí Cualann are the beginning of that timeline which produces a variety of ensemble models. However, evaluating all of these groups as a coherent timeline from the 1960s onward produces an evolution of musical output rather than a radical shift in the methodological approach to Irish traditional music. Although Ceoltóirí Cualann develop in line with Ó Riada's terminology, which he broadcasts through a variety of mediums, his failure to justify his process overshadows the features of innovation that emerge through the group's history. Members of Ceoltóirí Cualann themselves display a living memory that reflects this failure and reverts to evaluating their experience through perceptions of how the group should have operated, rather than how it was intended to function by Ó Riada. As witnessed through the comments of Marcus, amidst early uncertainty surrounding the music of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann, a space existed in which the group's initial transmission was evaluated on both musical and theoretical terms.

For Ó Riada, the concept of 'results' hinged on evaluating the new template on musical and production terms, as opposed to any form of commercial success. Ultimately, Ó Riada's template was never intended to conform to any sustainable model that would produce a professional and touring ensemble; it explored group activity through public performances, through radio broadcasts, and, through recorded album releases. It was a conclusion that was as scientific and precise as its original manifestation. What emerges is an interlinked approach by Ó Riada involving hypothesis, test, result, and conclusion. As verbally expressed through *Our Musical Heritage*, we are presented with his hypothesis; through the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann, Ó Riada engages in experimentation; through albums and Ceoltóirí Cualann's concert at the Gaiety Theatre in 1969, he produces his results; and ultimately through the abrupt dispersal of the group, he presents his conclusion.

Conclusion

This thesis evaluates the development and significance of Ceoltóirí Cualann as a demonstration of Ó Riada's methodological approach to Irish traditional music. It also outlines the history of Ó Riada's formation and expansion of his ensemble template in the period 1960-1970. By establishing the unique methodological approach Ó Riada developed, as epitomised through Ceoltóirí Cualann, the thesis also sought to put forward a fresh model of analysis of the role of Ó Riada within Irish traditional music. By considering Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann as a singular and distinct aspect of his professional career, it highlights not only the significance of Ó Riada's ensemble model, but also evaluates the scientific manner in which he treated the group and which distinguishes Ceoltóirí Cualann from later ensemble models in terms of its core purpose. By including issues surrounding Ó Riada's method of working, and the clear lack of understanding that existed on the part of group members, this thesis contends that such personal issues can be used to evaluate individual aspects of Ó Riada's career without reverting to a wider debate about an 'artistic crisis', which distorts the historical accuracy of a comprehensive study on Ceoltóirí Cualann.

Chapter 1 explores the origins of Ó Riada's relationship with Irish traditional music and aspects of his early career which are later witnessed through the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann. In order to examine the period that Ó Riada was working within, this chapter outlined the key social, cultural and political issues that underpin the thesis and set the context for the period in Irish history within which he was theorising about ensemble models and testing such hypotheses through the music and production of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Although Irish cultural history has forever been linked to emigration and the effect it had on galvanising support behind the revival of many cultural practices,¹ this chapter distinguishes Ó Riada's work within Irish traditional music as taking place within a national context; albeit a career that is influenced by his broader musical upbringing and education. In particular, Chapter 1 highlighted Ó Riada's place in a post-independence Ireland in which a new generation expressed themselves culturally and politically in the first period of economic regeneration since the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922. Though expressed within a different context, cultural nationalism can be identified through the social history of 1950s and 1960s Ireland and is represented throughout all chapters of this thesis within the tone of

¹ See Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*.

Ó Riada's language and the basis for his theories surrounding the place of traditional music in Ireland's cultural identity.

A strange blend of rural decay and urban renewal marked the status of Irish traditional music in the early years of the twentieth century with many musicians living in regions west of the Shannon being isolated from the small pockets of cultural renewal which were springing up in the urban centres.² Indeed, it is striking how the situation within traditional music is comparable to that of the Gaelic League in its opening years where such a rural-urban separation also developed.³ This was in stark comparison to the Ireland of the late 1950s and 1960s in which traditional music was coming to the fore on the back of a strong emigrant influence and wider interest in varied styles of folk music. Historians such as Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin have remarked that Ireland of this period was a polarized society in which the status afforded to the traditional musician was well beneath that accorded to his 'high art' counterpart.⁴ Shunned by the educational establishment, ignored by the popular press, and derided by urban music societies, many traditional performers had a low self-image of their role in Irish music and of its place in contemporary Ireland.⁵

Finally, Chapter 1 examines Ó Riada's general interaction with Irish traditional music by evaluating the various environments and mediums he draws upon to put forward his ideas and interact with other traditional musicians. What is evident is that along with Ó Riada's changing professional priorities, he chooses to engage with Irish traditional music at various levels as his interest with other projects continues. Ó Riada's views surrounding Irish traditional music, as expressed through *Our Musical Heritage*, define the theoretical framework he develops which underpins his musical engagement with Irish traditional music as a solo musician and through the development of Ceoltóirí Cualann. Ó Riada's critique of solo performance dominates the broadcast series, often defining the tone which Ó Riada sets. As Ó Canainn attests in Chapter 1, Ó Riada followed a mantra 'that to make a point strongly, one sometimes had to overstate the case a little.'⁶ It is within this context that *Our Musical Heritage* must be viewed. Despite his most significant comments taking the form of a discussion on group activity, he deliberately precedes this debate with a detailed evaluation of

² Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Pocket History of Irish Traditional Music*, p. 97.

³ See Nuala C. Johnson, 'Making Space: Gaeltacht Policy and the Politics of Identity', in Brian Graham (ed.) *In Search of Ireland: A Cultural Geography* (London, 1997), pp. 174-191.

⁴ Ó hAllmhuráin, *A Short History of Irish Traditional Music*, p. 143.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122-3.

⁶ Ó Canainn, 'Musical Editor's Preface', p. 14.

solo performance styles, fusing points on regionality with far more direct and harsh criticisms of technique and instrumentation. At the heart of this discussion is the place of Ó Riada's persona within his work life, which Marcus remarks in 1981 as 'perhaps the most brilliant of his time', and largely unrecorded as part of a concise analysis of his work.⁷ What emerges is the extent to which Ó Riada's personal life, although a feature which impacts his professional career, remains a key element in fuelling many of his interactions with Irish traditional music as a topic.

Chapter 2 explores the history of Ceoltóirí Cualann by examining the premise of Ó Riada's formation of the group, the development of the ensemble throughout the 1960s, and the various performance settings which Ó Riada positioned Ceoltóirí Cualann during this period. Due to the nature of Ó Riada's work pattern, the underlying conclusion to emerge from this chapter remains Ó Riada's broader relationship with Irish traditional music as a topic; one in which his theories and criticism of group activity, and his development of Ceoltóirí Cualann, do not align in a coherent manner. Furthermore, what emerges from this chapter is that Ó Riada's increasing preoccupation with Ceoltóirí Cualann also coincides with his fervent pursuit of his own authentic Irish lifestyle. The role of Irish traditional music within that process is epitomised through the primary medium in which the music of Ceoltóirí Cualann is disseminated throughout the decade; that being Ó Riada's radio series *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio*. Reflecting Vallely's characterisation of Ceoltóirí Cualann as an 'experimental radio band',⁸ Ó Riada's sustained use of Ceoltóirí Cualann to anchor both radio programmes highlights two distinct issues. It emphasises the group's role in a far wider process being engaged in by Ó Riada; one in which the integration and promotion of various Irish cultural practices are performed alongside a recognised musical repertoire that is produced in an innovative manner. As well as the revival of a Gaelic harp repertoire that copper fastens the overall Gaelic theme that is being conveyed to Ó Riada's audience.

Finally, Chapter 2 puts forward one of the most significant findings of this thesis regarding Ó Riada's production and direction of his new ensemble model; that being Ceoltóirí Cualann's representation as a tool within Ó Riada's wider artistic endeavours and the impact that such a feature had on the formation of a group identity. Although Ceoltóirí Cualann is a distinctive musical group, with Ó Riada at the heart of proceedings, the history

⁷ Marcus, 'Seán Ó Riada and the Ireland of the Sixties', p. 17.

⁸ Vallely, *From Fifth Column to Pillar of Society*, p. 30.

of the period highlights that this is very much about ‘Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann’. Despite their continued radio broadcasts and irregular live performances, primary evidence clearly indicates that Ó Riada frames Ceoltóirí Cualann as a tool in his own process of engagement with Irish traditional music. Through the format of album covers, radio listings and concert advertisements, Ó Riada remains the central focus and his presentation is conveyed as being transmitted through Ceoltóirí Cualann, alongside other cultural tools and performers.

Chapter 3 marks the second half of this study, moving from discussing the chronology of Ceoltóirí Cualann to examining the distinctive features of the group, musical and otherwise. Although radio broadcasts form the key element of Ó Riada’s desire to formulate a broad display of Irish cultural practices, his presentation of the group through recorded albums displays a thematic chain of thought which acts as a separate mode of expression for Ceoltóirí Cualann. In particular, *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Ding Dong* represent concept albums which, although mirroring Ó Riada’s radio productions, present a more concise formulation of Ó Riada’s ideas due to the restrictive nature of an album recording compared to the flexibility of a continuous radio series. Therefore, if his radio series *Reacaireacht an Riadaigh* and *Fleadh Cheoil an Radio* represent an environment in which Ó Riada engaged in experimentation, then the two above mentioned albums represent Ó Riada’s central message of each individual concept. They are not conventional albums; they are a product of Ó Riada’s wider process and should be treated as such.

In comparison, *Ceol na nUasal* is far more representative of Ó Riada anchoring an album with a unique theme in which the ‘idea’ of the album is just as significant as the music itself. At the core of this process remains both Ó Riada’s use of a Gaelic harp repertoire, as well as his utilisation of the harpsichord as means of projecting such a concept. Through his use of the harpsichord, Ó Riada is putting forward a theoretical argument to validate its use, while simultaneously using his own position as the harpsichord player in Ceoltóirí Cualann to underpin large elements of the group’s musical output. As a result, the central ‘idea’ of reviving Gaelic Ireland through the repertoire of the 18th century harping tradition is channelled primarily through Ó Riada himself, with Ceoltóirí Cualann and Ó Sé acting as accompaniment tools within such a process. Although Ó Riada’s use of such repertoire embodies the significant features of *Ó Riada sa Gaiety*, the ramifications of *Ceol na nUasal* ensure that it marks the most substantial musical contribution by Ceoltóirí Cualann during their performance history.

Chapter 4 considers the reception history of Ceoltóirí Cualann, as witnessed through audience reactions and critical analysis from the period. Primary evidence broadly reflects the nature of Ó Riada's ensemble template, focusing in the majority of cases on the uniqueness of the 'Cualann sound' and the manner in which such a new concept is being received. As outlined in Chapter 1, Ó Riada's prominent fixture in Irish cultural life following the national success of *Mise Éire* in 1959 played a significant role in establishing a platform upon which he is able to disseminate his views on Irish traditional music, as well as the music itself, to a wider audience. The RTÉ audience report that is referenced is perhaps the most potent expression of the broad nature of Ó Riada's audience. Participants are all classified along lines of occupation (housewife, local government official, insurance official and civil servant)⁹ and as a consequence, the reception history of Ceoltóirí Cualann is often far more reflective of Ó Riada's burgeoning audience, rather than a reflection of reactions within Irish traditional music settings. However, the defining feature of Ceoltóirí Cualann's reception history remains the critical analysis they receive towards the recorded albums they release.

The relationship between Ó Riada and Charles Acton displays the central struggle that defines Ó Riada's position within Irish cultural life. As part of the introduction to this study, the assertion by O'Connell that Ó Riada's engagement with both classical and traditional genres created a dual set of audiences in which Ó Riada was assessed is exemplified by his relationship with Acton. Despite Ó Riada engaging in a process of cross-pollination between classical and traditional musical characteristics, his method was applied on the basis that his audience is uniformly aware of all aspects of his work within both genres. Although Ó Riada seeks to educate his listenership through *Our Musical Heritage*, the remarks of Acton clearly indicate a listenership that has not travelled the same theoretical journey as Ó Riada in arriving at the point at which the albums of Ceoltóirí Cualann were released. Instead of engaging in the type of hypothesising he displays throughout the opening years of the 1960s, Ó Riada's last interaction with Acton descends into precisely the type of sphere that exists in some secondary sources when assessing Ó Riada; that being one in which artistic ideals define each and every element of his professional career.

A final research finding to emerge from Chapter 4 relates to defining innovation within the history of Ó Riada and Ceoltóirí Cualann beyond the significance of musical output. A concept that is referenced across the entirety of this thesis, but is elaborated on

⁹ Ó Riada Collection, Item 575 (1).

within this chapter, Ó Riada's expression of his views on Irish traditional music and the design of his ensemble template are innovative factors to be considered in isolation. What is revealed is that despite issues surrounding his methods of work and the views of those within Ceoltóirí Cualann, Ó Riada approaches Irish traditional music in a very scientific and precise manner. Through hypothesis (*Our Musical Heritage*), experimentation (development and radio) and results (albums and public performance), there is a clear historic timeline which accounts for a process that is significant and innovative when evaluated before the musical elements are even considered. Ó Riada's methodological approach is defined by his discussion on what constitutes Irish traditional music, the role of regional styles, the place of an authentic Gaelic identity, and the appropriateness of certain performance techniques within the genre. By classifying his use of radio as a means of experimentation with group performance, it becomes abundantly clear that *Our Musical Heritage* represents the preceding section of that process; that being his formulation of a hypothesis surrounding group activity. Although he had already engaged in experimentation when he puts forward his views through the medium of radio, Ó Riada is engaged in a scientific process that is both distinct and innovative for that period in time. This key element of Ó Riada's methodology is obscured heretofore within a debate surrounding his own development and comparisons with artistic struggles across genres of music.

Writing as part of the foreword to *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, Seán MacRéamoinn comments that

The conflict in his life as an artist was sharpened and quickened by two factors which single him out from most of his contemporaries. First, they were nearly all writers: with them the lines of battle, internal and external, had been long drawn, the weapons well tempered and to hand, the strategies well tried. That a talent like Ó Riada's, exploding into genius, should express itself in music, was without social or artistic precedent. He had not alone to teach the Irish a new alphabet, he had to invent it.¹⁰

MacRéamoinn's comments speak to a significant characteristic of Ó Riada's career in which the 'idea' of his work overarches the way in which his engagement with music, traditional or otherwise, is interpreted. The alignment of Ó Riada's life and career with the first generational shift within the Irish Free State, and the opportunities that such a position bestowed, shapes the cultural environment in which Ó Riada explores various facets of Gaelic culture. His expression, through the medium of Irish traditional music, is a central

¹⁰ Seán MacRéamoinn, 'Foreword: An tÉadach Is An Duine', in Harris and Freyer (eds) *Integrating Tradition: The Achievement of Seán Ó Riada*, p. 10.

element of that process. Ó Riada's development of Ceoltóirí Cualann is therefore both musically and structurally significant. Ceoltóirí Cualann is a direct manifestation of Ó Riada's hypothesising about group performance within Irish traditional music; a theory that is shaped by the historical characteristics and definition of the genre, and the space for ensemble activity to remain loyal to such foundations. The music of Ceoltóirí Cualann, and Ó Riada's production of the group in radio broadcasts, albums and public performances, displays musical innovation within Irish traditional music that distinguishes the group template as a significant moment within musical life in Ireland. Yet, it remains part of the 'idea' of Ó Riada's work; one in which Ceoltóirí Cualann are one substantial element. The innovation of Ó Riada is therefore as much about the process and the journey of his career, as it is about the final musical contribution.

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