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# South Indian Carnatic singing and Irish *Sean-nós* - an ethnographic, musical and linguistic comparison

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Despite sharing some interesting linguistic and possible cultural connections from a very distant past, South Indian and Irish musical cultures have emerged from highly distinct contexts and influences. Drawing on doctoral field research within the respective traditions as practiced in Australia as well as experience as a student and performer, this paper presents a comparison of Carnatic and *Sean-nós* singing from the perspectives of anthropology, ethnomusicology and linguistics and outlines some significant areas of connection and contrast. This analysis of two diasporic traditions in an antipodean settler context represents an innovative departure, by focusing not on the heartlands of these musical traditions, but on their existence in an urban, transnational context, dominated by an Anglo-Australian majority. Such a comparison reveals differing perspectives on both traditions.

**KEYWORDS** *Sean-nós*, Carnatic music, Irish music, ethnography, performance, Tamil, Gaelic.

The embers of the combustion fireplace dwindle, its fuel of ‘eco-logs’ letting out the last throes of warmth. Canberra winters are colder than your average for an Australian city and it gets cold enough to want a fire to sit around. My inspired mind imagines such quiet nights both here and in the other hemisphere spent in good company, sipping warming fluids, making memories, reaffirming bonds and re-enacting culture both in times long past and times closer to our own. I imagine that these moments would, of course, call for a song and I would wish myself there at this confluence of music, language, vocalisation, story, performance and event.<sup>1</sup> At this imagining, sitting here in the southern land, I conjure up my devotions to and digressions from these traditions I hold dear, the Carnatic singing I imbibed from childhood and the *sean-nós* singing I later came to taste. From this dreaming up of unknown possible origins, groundedness in the drone, modal resonances and the

*bhāva* of *mothúcháin*<sup>2</sup> I proceed to present a study of the two expressive traditions and the links between them.

Carnatic vocal music and *Sean-nós* singing are both traditional vocal music forms which are highly regarded for their musical artistry and cultural richness in their respective homelands of Southern India and Ireland. Carnatic music<sup>3</sup> from South India is performed vocally or instrumentally. It is one of the art music traditions of India designated as 'Indian classical music'. Like the other such traditions, Carnatic music is underpinned by a rich system of melody known as *rāga*, a concept which is vaguely analogous to musical scale but eludes easy description.<sup>4</sup> Carnatic music performances comprise 'items' which revolve around texted song compositions which in turn are interspersed by a limited set of improvisatory formats, drawing on the same *rāga* used for the song itself. Each texted song is typically also set to a rhythm cycle known as the *tāla*. The texts for songs are almost always devotional in subject matter and generally considered simple forms of poetry. These may be in the languages Telugu or Sanskrit, less frequently in Tamil or Kannada, occasionally in other Indian languages and, in some cases, in a combination of these languages. *Sean-nós* singing from Ireland is an exclusively vocal tradition comprising texted songs and it is part of a broader tradition of Irish 'folk' music.<sup>5</sup> The term '*Sean-nós*' emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to distinguish the Irish traditional style of singing from the parlour room vibrato singing which was popular at the time. Common features of *Sean-nós* include a strong melodic and modal orientation without harmony, an emphasis on solo performance in general, a strong focus on telling or bringing out the mood of a specific story through song, a regular poetic metre to the verse and a strophic melodic structure to the song, with acceptable variations and melodic ornamentations in the melody from verse to verse. Despite the strong sense of poetic pulse, many *Sean-nós* songs are often performed with a free rhythm or temporary departures from a rhythm cycle. Many styles of *Sean-nós* singing also tend to be quite nasal in vocal quality, with little vibrato.<sup>6</sup> The songs tell a story through poetry and, as such, the tradition could arguably be considered as much a form of sung poetry as vocal music.<sup>7</sup> *Sean-nós* is considered by some to refer exclusively to Irish language<sup>8</sup> song, while others may include English language lyrics sung in a traditional style within its limit. There is also a repertoire of 'macaronic' songs which combine words in Irish and English.<sup>9</sup>

Both Carnatic music and *Sean-nós* singing have ancient antecedents going back several hundred years or more. At the same time, the actual format and much of the established repertoire of the two traditions are around two hundred years old.<sup>10</sup> Both traditions use language in the form of pre-composed texted songs, bring together communities which share linguistic resources and create contexts in which those shared resources can be used productively. This paper presents an ethnographic, musical and linguistic analysis of the Carnatic vocal tradition (henceforth Carnatic singing)<sup>11</sup> and *Sean-nós* singing, and teases out some points of comparison and possibility which may be relevant for comparative ethnomusicology and cross-cultural performance. The findings are based on my doctoral research on the traditions in the diasporic context of South Indian and Irish cultural communities in Australia, as well as insights gained through other fieldwork and engagement with the traditions as a learner and performer.

## Sociohistorical connections and discourses of connection

There are several points of historical connection between Indian and Irish cultures which invite association and comparison of their contemporary cultural practices. There are the shared linguistic and cultural Indo-European roots of Celtic and Indic languages.<sup>12</sup> Ireland and India also share the cultural legacies, of colonialism and postcolonialism, including the influence of the English language and an associated history of emigration and transnationalism.

Despite these points of connection there are many points of difference. Indian culture, particularly South Indian language and culture, is only partly Sanskritic, with the unrelated Dravidian language family an equally major source of linguistic and cultural input. Likewise, the trajectories of British, particularly English, colonialism and postcolonialism have played out quite differently in both countries. The language situation of the very multilingual India also contrasts with the situation of Ireland where shared contexts and shifts have largely been between the two languages, Irish and English.<sup>13</sup>

The above contrasts highlight the high degree of cultural and historic distinctness between Ireland and India and provide a glimpse of the range of convoluting factors in trying to establish historic, or other, links between the two. Yet, despite these big differences, discourses have emerged within Ireland and elsewhere over the twentieth century which connect aspects of Irish culture and history to other places beyond Europe including India. For example, in his 1963 radio series 'Our Musical Heritage,' Seán Ó Riada laid out an internationalist, non-Eurocentric basis for appreciating Irish music, stating that 'all Irish music including *Sean-nós* singing is fundamentally different from European music... as fundamentally different as Indian music' and inviting the listener to listen to Irish music as if they were listening to Indian music.<sup>14</sup> Hence, India has been singled out as a candidate for cultural connection of some kind, particularly in the context of traditional music and, in particular, *Sean-nós* singing, a move which reflected both the exoticised, orientalist fascination with the non-western cultures, as well as the nationalist pre-occupation with emphasising Ireland's unique identity.<sup>15</sup> The strategy also allowed Irish music to be understood differently from its usual parameters, a fading legacy of impoverished peasants that was better forgotten as Ireland progressed in the modern world.

From my perspective as a practitioner of Carnatic singing and music, the most obvious and concrete formal similarities between Irish and Indian traditional music<sup>16</sup> are the use of modes in Irish music, which parallel the scalar basis of *rāgas*. The use of ornamentation and subtonal variation manifests particularly in *Sean-nós* singing providing another point of close comparison between the two.<sup>17</sup> However, melismatic ornamentation, subtonal variation and the use of scales occur in a number of musical cultures across the globe so in that regard this shared aspect between Irish and Indian singing is not particularly unique or evidence of any traceable historical connection.<sup>18</sup>

## Carnatic and *Sean-nós* performance themes and contexts

It is useful to talk about Indian performance using Milton Singer's notion of the 'cultural performance', highlighting the embeddedness of performance in cultural life and the

grand narratives which underpin it.<sup>19</sup> This phenomenon is arguably quite widespread across the world but Singer's descriptions are specific to India, where overlapping cultural elements are particularly visible in performance. In Carnatic music, almost every song is devotional and emerges in a context in which religious life and stories associated with deities infuse daily life. Hence, many songs could be described as songs in praise of a deity, often describing the deity's features, qualities and powers. However, it is not just in the worship of deities but also through listening to the stories of their exploits that one can achieve spiritual goals as the lyrics of the following main (refrain) lines of a Carnatic song in Telugu reveal:

**Example 1: The pallavi (first section) of the song Ramakatha Sudha**

*rāma kathā sudhā rasa pānamokarājyamu jēsunē* To drink the nectarine juice of Rama's story is equal to (the rule of) a kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

The story of Rama referred to in Example 1 is the *Ramayana*, which is often related, depicted and/or drawn from in various forms across India (and Indian influenced cultures) through oral storytelling, song, drama, dance, painting and, more recently, film. Often the depictions in these various art forms come into combination; songs feature in dances, dance is intertwined with drama, songs and dances can feature in film or be depicted in other art forms. A song praising the power of Rama's story assumes that the listeners have prior knowledge of the story and a sense of its centrality to Hindu belief and practice. In my observations of and participation in, the Carnatic music community in Sydney, the figure of Rama and the story of the *Ramayana* are quite significant and there is often a fine line between the performance of song and devotional practice to Rama or other deities.

In *Sean-nós* singing we find a different set of tropes. Songs are typically not directly devotional (though some are) but they are still all rooted in a milieu of Irish Catholicism. We find songs grounded in everyday life - of boating tragedies, stories of unrequited or lost love - like *Dónal Óg* - the story of Irish nationalism and independence in the *aisling* songs such as *Roisín Dubh*, comic songs and songs with direct religious themes. Even religiously themed songs can be given a non-religious interpretation. For example, in one performance of the song *Caoineadh na dTrí Muire*, 'The Lament of the Three Marys', the Australian *Sean-nós* singer, Judy Pinder, specifically pointed out that she liked this song because there was 'no mention of God or heaven' in the song and that it was 'just a lament by a mother for her lost son'. Hence, for this singer, the death of Jesus became grounded in the everyday through reframing the song as one of human loss, a profane interpretation of a theme normally considered sacred. In this way, a *Sean-nós* song's devotional elements emerge as marginal to their groundedness in the unfolding of story and their everydayness. In my participant observation in *Sean-nós* events in Australia, I observed that the grounding of the stories of the songs and the plights of the protagonists in the everyday and contemporary realities was a centrally recurring theme. Additionally, the historicity of narratives such as Ireland's struggle for independence also often came to the fore. And while there is not the devotionalism of Carnatic music, divine powers are commonly invoked, particularly through lines pertaining to the search for some kind of divine deliverance, appealing to the *banríon* 'queen' and/or *rí* 'king' of heaven as the songs *Na Connerys* and *An Cailín deas Crúite na mBó*. In the case of *Dónal Óg*,



FIGURE 1 Sydney-based carnatic singer Lakshmi Kumaraguruparan does 'Anjali' Gesture of divine offering in response to audience applause. This is both a salutary and devotional gesture used widely in Indian, especially Hindu, cultural life. Photo by Rajesh Kumar (used with permission).

a case of lost love beyond deliverance, the last verse expresses the depth of despair of the betrayed protagonist whose words sung in the final line as 'So great is my fear that you even took God from me'.

### The changing contexts of the two traditions

Both Carnatic singing and *Sean-nós* take place in settings that reflect continuities with, and departures from, the traditional performance contexts. The contemporary performance context of Carnatic singing is the concert (also called *katchēri*) in which one or more singers are accompanied by an ensemble of instrumentalists (typically one melody player and one or more percussionists),<sup>21</sup> all usually seated on the floor of a stage or raised platform. The concerts generally go for three hours, except in cases of junior artists or special programs in which performances are of shorter lengths. The Sydney Music Circle (SMC) hold regular monthly concert events, which typically feature a student artist (performing a shortened concert) and a main artist (usually performing the full three-hour concert). The SMC also hold other events, including festivals, which celebrate the work of particular noteworthy composers- the performances at these events comprise individual renditions of songs by local artists and students without any improvisation. Such special occasions differ widely from the concert format, involving much more participation and performances, including more instances of group singing or instrumental ensembles, by those who would not normally perform at concerts.

Indian art music and dance forms underwent a process of classicisation, which saw them shift from temples and courts to concert halls, hence producing a groundbreaking change in context, accessibility and patterns of patronage.<sup>22</sup> Despite this shift, the norms of audience engagement appear to have some sense of continuity with the past,



FIGURE 2 Sydney-based sean-nós singer Judy Pinder sings with her eyes closed in an inward orientation. Photo by Brian Ó Ceallaigh (used with permission).

which is evident in the continuing high level of embodied audience engagement and configurations of elitist and caste-based spectatorship. Likewise, the devotionality of the lyrics and groundedness of the tradition in religious practice has continued, though not without contestation from a secularist discourse.<sup>23</sup>

The contemporary performance contexts of *Sean-nós* include ‘sessions’ and concerts. Sessions are informal gatherings of musicians for the purpose of playing instrumental tunes and typically take place in pubs, although they may sometimes take place at people’s houses. Singing may sometimes intersperse the instrumental music or a session may be designated as a ‘singing session’, so as to maintain the focus on singing and delineate a more conducive setting for vocal performance. While sessions are an important concept and part of Irish traditional music, as evidenced in the Irish language word *seisiún*, the word has been used to refer to the same phenomenon of informal and participatory music-making in other non-Irish genres of ‘folk’ music. Arguably, there are continuities in Irish music sessions with traditional performance practices such as the *céilí* (a gathering for music, dance and storytelling traditionally at a person’s house) and the terms are often used interchangeably. However, it has been argued that the group musical performance, which comprises much of the session, is a departure from the traditional context that favoured solo performance even for instrumentalists. In this sense, *Sean-nós*, a largely



solo undertaking, brings to the session interesting continuities in practice with traditional practices.<sup>24</sup> Concerts are also another contemporary performance context for *Sean-nós* singing and these vary in formality, format and setting.

It is rare (though not impossible) to encounter the kinds of performance contexts described in Freeman, writing in the 1920s about an Irish concert at someone's home. Freeman outlined the inward or distant orientation of the singer, the participation of audience members in being seated amongst the performers and engaging in fourth-wall breaking practices such as the iconic turning of the hand.<sup>25</sup> From what I have experienced of Irish traditional singing performance today, at least in Australia, there is an attempt to maintain continuity by recreating the mood of embedding performance in everyday life - the informal singing session being an example of an idealized contemporary performance context and concerts also being quite deliberately informal affairs. Both these settings combine conviviality with reverence around the act of performance to attempt to recreate of an imagined past and invoke its values as an affirmation of ethnic identity in a modern diasporic settler context. But there is still an obvious shift in the performance context for the most part and a sense that things have changed. Many participants at sessions and concerts I have observed and in which I have participated, are folk music aficionados including some Irish migrants to Australia, some Australians with Irish ancestry and some with no ancestral or birth connection to Ireland. Contemporary performances of Irish traditional music take place in a context following various revivals (of Irish language and culture and European folk music and non-dominant ethnicities and cultures generally) and within globalised spaces, both in Australia and in Ireland. The continuity of embeddedness of performance in everyday life is a phenomenon that Ó Laoire finds amongst singers in Tory Island.<sup>26</sup> The past was also invoked in singer Joe Heaney's invitations to audiences around the world to let their minds journey with his to the fireside of a rural Irish cottage in framing his *Sean-nós* performances.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, when I recently had the experience of having my hand turned as I sang a *Sean-nós* song outside a pub in Inis Mór, a good part of the power of the gesture felt to me to lie in its invocation of past practice and ritual affirmation of the continuity of tradition, as well as being a gratefully received gesture of acceptance, respect and welcome in the present.

While the cultural context of Carnatic singing has arguably not undergone the same level of disruption and urgency to recreate the past as the cultural context of *Sean-nós*, it has certainly undergone a lot of change, social reconstruction and disruption and an orientation to a real and imagined past (much like most things which call themselves traditions). And there are some interesting parallels with the journey of *Sean-nós* as an art form which confound the split between 'folk' and 'classical' that would normally render two such traditions incomparable.

There are, and have long been, fluid boundaries between folk and classical in Indian performance traditions. While the label 'Carnatic music' or *karnāṭaka saṅgīta* is more recent, it is known that the form of art music represented by the term did exist since at least the 16th century, as we find that most of the composers of the fixed repertoire of Carnatic music date from that time. What made Carnatic music a ripe candidate for its designation as a 'classical' art form was an existing sophisticated system of melodic frameworks, the *rāga* system. It shares similarities with its North Indian counterpart, Hindustani music, containing subtle differentiations between each *raga*, as well as having a long tradition of written musicological texts in Indian languages. Such texts include,



for example, Bharata Muni's *Nāṭya Shāstra*, an ancient treatise on the performing arts believed to date back some two millennia, as well the later *Sangīta Ratnākara* written by Saranga Deva in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Additionally, even more recent texts specific to Carnatic music theory, including Venkatamakhi's *Chaturdandi* (c. 1634) form a part of this canon. As India began to assert itself against British colonialism, developing a sense of nationhood and anticipating independence, Indian nationalist intellectuals looked for great traditions that might be representative of its nationhood. The classicisation of performance forms such as Carnatic music, Hindustani music and Bharata Natyam and Kathak dance was part of this drive to raise the status of art forms that could compare favourably to the great high art traditions of the west. Part of the classicisation of Carnatic music- along with the other performance forms- was the establishment of bodies such as the Madras Music Academy to safeguard and revitalise the tradition for a modern urbanising society, and to support practitioners and teachers. While the Academy successfully managed to popularise these traditions and recontextualise them to modern urban lifestyles, it also had a somewhat standardising effect, for example, ironing out existing variations in the interpretation of *rāgas* through debates and resolutions. For example, in the report of the Madras Music Conference '29 in the *Journal of the Music Academy Madras 1929*, pages 6-8 relate discussions about notes within *rāgas*, and contain a resolution regarding *rāga Bhairavi* that made it admissible to use two different *daivatas* (the sixth note). These notes correspond, more or less, with the minor and major sixth. This is just one example of such discussions, which could be intense. The processes in the establishment of Carnatic music as a classical tradition seem to reflect processes that also unfolded in the establishment of *Sean-nós* as a high art tradition emerging from the interests of antiquarians, who drew on Herderian ideas about the arts and national culture reflecting the essence of a people. It is because of these origins that *Sean-nós* is categorized as 'folk'. To talk of *Sean-nós* as classical seems absurd but interestingly it is certainly regarded as high art and subject to the rigorous evaluation of official bodies such as An tOireachtas ([www.antoireachtas.ie](http://www.antoireachtas.ie)), which hosts the national singing and music competitions. And yet, being categorised as folk plays to the embeddedness of *Sean-nós* in the everyday, its grounding amongst common people and a certain pedagogical philosophy that valorises learning by osmosis rather than instruction- or, to draw from Ó Laoire's analysis of Tory Island singers, 'lifting', *tógail* rather than 'learning' or *foghlaim*.<sup>28</sup>

Interestingly Carnatic music maintains a similar slant on learning: while instruction tends to be more formalised than in *Sean-nós* it is much more about the oral transmission and aural skills rather than the notation. As an interesting parallel, I remember learning part of a song from singer Treasa Ní Mhiolláin from Inis Mór on my first visit to Ireland and being struck by the similarly exacting and repetitive nature of the process to my own learning of Carnatic music from my singing Guru in Sydney.<sup>29</sup>

Despite these similarities in pedagogical philosophy, it would appear absurd to describe Carnatic music as folk music, as Indian scholars, commentators and the general public appear to have clear notions of the categories of classical, folk, 'semiclassical', the rather broad 'devotional' music genre as well as 'popular' music which is almost always film music.<sup>30</sup> A rich multiplex interplay that continues to this day has always characterised the whole spectrum of traditional genres and film music. Arguably, such exchange echoes a close interrelationship between theatre, dance and music which existed across India in ancient times. It appears that the boundaries between tradition and the modernity of

film music are hardening as the more marginal or elite genres mount attempts to protect their identities. For example, Amanda Weidman highlights how these boundaries were blurry even up until the 1940s, and how they subsequently became more rigid as the Madras Academy tended to exclude devotional and film singers from the ‘canon of classical musicians.’<sup>31</sup> This possibly accounts for one source for this increased distinction between genres and echoes Matthew Harp Allen’s findings that there was a greater degree of exchange between different South Indian genres and their practitioners than is suggested by their current mutual exclusivity.<sup>32</sup> While I agree with Weidman and Allen’s observations, I would also argue that some degree of fluidity remains, particularly with certain songs (such as the Tamil song *Alaipāyudai*) which get popularised in film and end up being part of the repertoire of classical, devotional and film music, though this is perhaps less common than in the past. Such examples vindicate critiques of the usefulness of categorisation of music as classical, folk or other labels to scholarly discussion.<sup>33</sup> Hence, we find that Carnatic music and Irish *Sean-nós* share similar historic journeys of becoming established and recontextualised as cultural traditions of national importance. Strikingly, these recent trajectories of valorisation and canonisation render them more comparable than their respective designations as ‘classical’ and ‘folk’ would suggest.

The performance contexts I observed in both traditions, particularly during my doctoral research based in the diasporic context of Australia, and the reflections of performers and audience members, highlight the effect of recontextualisation while at the same time showing strong evidence of continuity. Even in the new contexts of the Australian Irish language community and ‘folk’ music scene,<sup>34</sup> Irish traditional singing performances are typically characterised by moods of conviviality and camaraderie which evoke traditional settings<sup>35</sup> and audience members draw on some traditional modes of engagement, including silence for unaccompanied slow airs and the voluble praise of singers between verses. Likewise, the framing of Carnatic singing concerts in Sydney subscribes to the traditionally prescribed *katchēri paddhati* - a standard concert format devised in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century - and involve practices which reflect the balance/tension between Hindu religiosity and secularism which has characterised much of Carnatic music’s social history.

## Language choice and language ideologies – Irish and Tamil

Both *Sean-nós* and Carnatic singing emerged in more or less multilingual ecologies. Much of the repertoire of *Sean-nós* arose over the last two to four hundred years when more people were starting to become bilingual in Irish and English. Hence, there are songs in Irish, English and bilingual or ‘macaronic’ songs that use both languages (and occasionally other languages such as Latin as a singing language for liturgical purposes). Similarly, Carnatic music evolved in a time and setting of widespread multilingualism, 18<sup>th</sup> century Southern India with its royalty and educated elite often well versed in the a number of South Indian languages spoken by their constituents as well as the liturgical language of Sanskrit.<sup>36</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, both Irish and Carnatic singing developed alongside the emergence of strong linguistic ideologies that brought the concerns of linguistic rights, particularly relating to the Irish language and Tamil, into contact with the cultural projects of nationalism that made those traditions prominent. Hence, the development

of interest in preserving *Sean-nós* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century arguably stems from the Gaelic language and cultural revival and its associated figures such as Douglas Hyde,<sup>37</sup> while Carnatic music was closely linked with Indian nationalism. However, in the case of the latter, projects around linguistic rights for India's regional languages such as the *Tani Tamil* movement and the *Tamil Isai Iyakkam* or 'Tamil Music Movement' actually came *into conflict* with the Madras Music Academy which was the dominant institution for Carnatic music.

In brief,<sup>38</sup> Tamil linguistic nationalism and Dravidian consciousness mixed with caste-based politics leading to a push for language-based states within India and a foregrounding of expression in Tamil within the newly formed Tamil Nadu. This spawned groups such as the *Tamil Isai Iyakkam* that called for songs performed in venues and broadcasts within Tamil Nadu to be only in Tamil. Meanwhile, a contrasting ideology emerged within the music establishment, which expressed the idea of music as a universal language that should be unbound by the strictures of having to be performed in a particular language.<sup>39</sup> The Brahmin elite dominated these establishments, and they became the targets of Dravidian self-respect and caste-based activism at the time. While these ideological struggles brought about a number of social changes, the outcome within Carnatic music was to maintain the status quo of the multilingual repertoire more or less. The consensus favoured the compositions of the Trinity of celebrated Carnatic composers who mainly composed in Sanskrit and Telugu. A small proportion of core concert repertoire would come from Tamil language composers and the other Tamil language repertoire, often ancient poetic works set to music or songs composed for dance, would often be included as part of the 'light' repertoire, known as the *tukkadas* - meaning pieces. A number of scholars argue that the current status quo within the Carnatic music world reflects the legacies of this debate, with a general continuity of the centrality of Sanskrit and Telugu compositions with some concessions such as an increase in Tamil songs as part of the core repertoire.<sup>40</sup>

In my studies of Carnatic singing and Irish traditional singing in Australia, I found some interesting continuities with the aforementioned 20<sup>th</sup> century developments within the traditions and the associated languages. Despite the singers being Tamil speakers, the concerts I observed at the Sydney Music Circle, a predominantly Brahmin Carnatic music community, adhered to the traditional mix generally favouring Telugu and Sanskrit for the core repertoire, and Tamil for the *tukkadas*. This spread of languages reflects the outcomes of the aforementioned debates and developments in 20th century South India within and outside the music establishment. The choice to sing more than two core songs in Tamil (out of around 5) was unusual.

Meanwhile in *Sean-nós* we find that the notion of the Irish language repertoire being prototypical really emerges with the discourses of nationalist and linguistic consciousness which foregrounded the rural, and the non-English and stylistically, the Connemara style of singing.<sup>41</sup> In the diasporic context, I found that the Irish language repertoire tends to be more valorised because *Sean-nós* tends to take place in contexts involving Irish language activities. In these settings, a linguistic ideology which I call *úsáid na Gaeilge*, 'use of Irish' prevails, that favours the use of Irish as much as possible even by learners. There is also space within the Australian folk music scene amongst singers for *Sean-nós*, where there may only be a few Irish speakers in the audience.

In the contexts of the Irish language community, the performance of *Sean-nós* songs in Irish sometimes provide an impetus for Irish language use as a spoken conversational

medium, particularly when the sung repertoire spills over into the spoken passages of performer talk between songs,<sup>42</sup> or where potential interaction between performer and audience opens the way for conversations. In such contexts, the Irish language use tends to be postvernacular and to a great degree symbolic.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in Carnatic music settings in the diaspora, it is not so much the repertoire but the settings that enliven the use of participants' heritage languages. While the performances are rather formal and any audience directed speech is almost always in English, I observed Tamil speaking singers and audience members communicating to one another informally using Tamil or codeswitching between Tamil and English. Interestingly, the main languages of performance, Sanskrit and Telugu, were not used much in interaction - Sanskrit restricted to the ritual domain and Telugu being the heritage mother tongue of only a small number of the community.<sup>44</sup>

### Musical and linguistic artistry combined

Finally, another interesting phenomenon which invites comparison between *Sean-nós* and Carnatic music is the way in which music and language artfully combine, which I have elsewhere referred to this as 'musicolinguistic artistry',<sup>45</sup> following the work of a range of music and language scholars who have attempted to take interdisciplinary perspectives.<sup>46</sup> Understanding musicolinguistic artistry requires a combined analysis of formal linguistic and musical features as they unfold in performance.

In Carnatic music, where there is a strong emphasis on improvisation, a particularly heightened sequence within a concert is the improvisatory format known as *niraval* which involves the repetition of a line in set melodic, rhythmic and textual combination. In *niraval*, subtle variations of these elements combine to create a heightened musicolinguistic experience and highly regarded aesthetic achievement. Performers also have to display their knowledge by choosing the appropriate moment to do *niraval*, how it should be appropriately commenced, how to develop it in stages and good interplay with co-performers.<sup>47</sup>

The musicolinguistic artistry of *Sean-nós* is likewise manifold. It includes picking the right time, setting up the *údar an amhráin* or story behind the song, either through its relationship with surrounding events, talk or other songs or through the overt laying out of the background, the judicious use of ornaments, the right words including the control of textual variation within parameters of correctness.<sup>48</sup> In the performances I observed of *Sean-nós* singing in Australia, singers displayed musicolinguistic artistry through harnessing the above elements, particularly through using performer talk before the song to ground the performance in context and frame a particular interpretation of it as well as putting their own stamp on the song through arrangements which straddle varying degrees along the tradition and innovation continuum.

### Possibilities, connections and conclusions

As a musician, I have been trained in Carnatic singing and I subsequently sought out exposure to Irish traditional singing and music. With an academic background as an anthropological linguist, it has been fascinating to explore points of connection, similarity and contrast in these two traditions. I have attempted in my own musical composition and performance to bring these two styles into conversation.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the curiosity to combine and draw from western music in India is as old as contact itself.<sup>50</sup>

The difference between a particular Western scale and the ascending and descending scale of its equivalent *rāga* is quite large, given the subtonal variation manifest in oscillating notes. Hence, although a Carnatic musician can certainly ‘hear’ plain note modes and draw equivalence with a particular *rāga*, the general fixity of the notes within modes means that the *rāga* does need to be transformed to a large extent if it is to resemble a mode. In the process, the actual configurations of melodic pattern which give a *rāga* its identity are often lost and recognising the *rāga* requires something of an imaginative leap.

Interestingly, Peadar Ó Riada, when discussing the legacy of his father Sean Ó Riada, makes a direct parallel between whole Irish tunes such as jigs, reels and airs with *rāgas*.<sup>51</sup> This parallel has some validity, although it is problematic in other respects. According to Peadar Ó Riada, tunes in Irish music form the basis for improvisation, and ‘variation is the norm.’<sup>52</sup> Songs can also be set to particular tunes in Irish music and more than one song can be set to the same tune. There is variation in the way tunes are played and between each playing. All of these elements share the characteristics of *rāga*. However, I would argue that there is conventionally a greater degree of fixity of particular tunes in Irish music, at least in terms of their scalar basis, melodic contour and the rhythmic parameters, while the conventionality in *rāgas* is of a different kind. And while there is scope for the embellishment of pre-composed ‘tunes’ and ‘songs’ in both Irish traditional and Indian classical music, Irish music is not confined by *rāga*. Neither is there scope in Irish music (as typically performed) to explore the melodic elements of tunes which may be analogous to *rāga* outside the confines of the pre-composed element, something which is possible in Carnatic music and other Indian classical forms because of its emphasis on improvisatory structures. Peadar Ó Riada is perhaps a notable exception of an Irish traditional musician who, while composing new tunes, also breaks the bounds of melodic contour and rhythm, drawing on the philosophy of using tunes as building blocks for compositional arrangement and improvisation, which resonates with the compositional theory outlined by his father in ‘Our Musical Heritage.’

The presence of a concept of ‘tune’ in Indian classical music, called *varnamettu*,<sup>53</sup> and actual tune borrowing in Carnatic music, whereby different songs have identical tunes, further complicates the equation between tunes in Irish music and *rāgas* in Indian music. In discussing this phenomenon, Matthew Harp Allen highlights the link between Carnatic music and South Indian ‘non-classical’ genres, wherein tune-borrowing is more frequent.<sup>54</sup> Based on this observation, I would argue in favour of placing *rāga* somewhere between a scale or mode and a tune. Setting a song in a particular *rāga* places constraints on the notes used (like a scale or mode), but also the order of the notes and particular phrases which are associated with the *rāga* (a bit more like a tune). But a *rāga* is not fixed much beyond these elements of scale, note order and characteristic phrases.

It would certainly be worthwhile to engage in deeper comparative explorations of melody between each tradition, particularly in the ways in which both tunes and *rāgas* have been transformed in their various manifestations over time and place by different performers (and composers) within each tradition. In a newspaper report on a Carnatic musicological discussion at the Madras Music Academy published in *The Hindu* by Nandini Ramani, the author provides an account of a scholar illustrating the way that certain particular *rāgas* were derived from tunes within the folk tradition and makes mention of ‘scale-oriented’ and ‘tune-oriented’ *rāgas*.<sup>55</sup> Within the scope of the present analysis and discussion, however, I contend that the analogy between *rāga* and tune

requires an appropriately cautious and qualified approach, in our search to understand or explain either tradition from the point of view of the other.

The pronouncements of Seán Ó Riada brought a fresh approach to understanding Irish music and inspired people to look further afield than Europe for comparison, making particular mention of India. Some historical connections and parallels can juxtapose forms of Irish and Indian music interesting from broader sociocultural and linguistic perspectives. Here I have attempted a comparison, from the perspective of anthropological linguistics and ethnomusicology, of *Sean-nós* with one particular Indian vocal tradition, Carnatic singing, focusing particularly on the way these traditions are performed and enjoyed in the present-day diasporic setting of Australia. In the process of comparing the two traditions, a number of interesting parallels and contrasts have emerged. Both *Sean-nós* and Carnatic singers have an inward orientation in their performance although Carnatic performers tend to be more expressive with their bodies. The role of religious devotional themes, although present in both traditions, is also quite different within each, with a greater degree of religiosity within the Carnatic tradition, reflecting perhaps a greater secularisation of the Irish tradition. Language choice is also an interesting point of comparison, with interesting parallels in the role of language ideologies relating to the Irish language in *Sean-nós* singing and relating to Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit in Carnatic singing. Finally, the two traditions diverge in the ways that music and language are brought together. A prime example of this artistry in Carnatic singing is *niraval* where a line within the fixed song text is repeated in improvised combinations based on the melody of the *raga* within the cycling rhythm of the *tāla*, reflecting an idea of copious textual repetition subject to subtle, and, therefore, abundant musical variation. Meanwhile, the artistry of *Sean-nós* is not borne out of repetition but in the conveyance of the story and its mood. *Sean-nós* singers almost invariably adhere to the basic melody of a particular version of the tune of a song, apply appropriate ornamentation and variation to this melody and meaningfully contextualise and frame of the song. These points of similarity and contrast make for interesting and varied musicolinguistic conversations, both scholarly and creative, between the two traditions. Consequently, when approached with appropriate research questions, with a mutual respect for the traditions involved, a productive dialogue can emerge that does not reduce one musical system to the terms of the other, but highlights similarities and differences in ways that enhance our understanding of both. This may provide a way to reach beyond understanding to a space where *mothúcháin* can meet *bhāva*, in inspired and thoughtful expressions of empathy.<sup>56</sup>

## Notes

- 1 With a nod to anthropological linguist and folklorist Richard Bauman, author of a book *Story, Performance, and Event* (Cambridge, 1986).
- 2 These are both words for 'feeling' in Sanskrit and Irish, respectively.
- 3 For a social history of Carnatic music see Subramanian *From the Tanjore Court to the Madras Music Academy: a social history of music in South India* (Oxford University Press, 2006). For ethnomusicological studies of Carnatic music see Viswanathan & Cormack 'Melodic Improvisation in Karnatak Music: The Manifestations of Raga',

*In the Course of Performance: Studies in the world of musical improvisation* edited by B Nettl and M Russell (University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Morris 'Variation and Process in South Indian Music: Some 'Kritis' and Their 'Sangatis'', *Music Theory Spectrum* (vol. 23, issue 1, 2001) pp. 74-89.

- 4 For an introduction to the concept of *raga* and other technical elements of Carnatic music refer to Viswanathan & Cormack (Ibid.) or G R Kassebaum, 'Improvisation in Alapana performance': A comparative view of Raga Shankarabharana, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, (vol 19, 1987), pp. 45-64.



- 5 For an introduction to Irish traditional music including *Sean-nós* singing see Lillis Ó Laoire, 'Irish music', *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Irish Culture*, edited by J Cleary and C Connelly (Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 267-284, or Sean Williams, *Focus on Irish traditional music* (Taylor & Francis, 2009).
- 6 Debates about the presence or absence of vibrato in *Sean-nós* singing have been discussed in Sean Williams & Lillis Ó Laoire, *Bright star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish song man*, (Oxford University Press 2011).
- 7 In using the term 'sung poetry', I am emphasising the linguistic and literary characteristics of the form while I use the term 'vocal music' to refer to music made by the voice, which may, in fact, be entirely without language, notwithstanding the blurriness of the lines between poetry, song and music (cf. Banti & Giannattasio 'Poetry' in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* edited by Alessandro Duranti, Wiley 2008).
- 8 The Irish language is also known as Gaelic, Irish Gaelic or *Gaeilge*.
- 9 H Shields, 'Singing traditions of a bilingual parish in North-West Ireland', *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, (vol 3, 1971), pp. 109-119.
- 10 For Carnatic music see Ian Bedford, 'Listening to the voice in South Indian classical music', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, (vol 19, issue 2, 1998), p. 237. For *Sean-Nós* see Sean Williams, 'Melodic ornamentation in the Connemara *Sean-nós* singing of Joe Heaney', *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, (vol 8, issue 1, 2004), p. 124.
- 11 Carnatic singing is treated here as distinct from the instrumental tradition for the purposes of juxtaposition and comparison with *Sean-nós* singing. However, unlike *sean-nós* where one can talk of overlap and blurred boundaries with a distinct Irish instrumental music tradition, Carnatic singing and Carnatic instrumental music are practically synonymous; with relatively minor differences in the repertoire, concert format and kinds of innovation within each. A full discussion of the nature of these differences is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 12 This connection is evident in parallels between cognate Hindi and Irish terms such as cow- *gō*, *bó*, god- *dēv*, *día*, death- *mrt*, *marbh* and even worm- *krmi*, *cruimh*. As a student of linguistics, coming across this connection excited in me an already growing creative and intellectual fascination with the Celtic world and its kinship with, and, equally, its otherness from my own Indian cultural heritage, especially its music.
- 13 Besides a few notable other minority languages (Shelta, Ulster Scots, Yola and Fingalian), Irish (Gaelic) is the main traditional language of Ireland and has coexisted with English for over 500 years. The other minority languages in question also have a fairly close relationship either to English and/or to Irish. In contrast, India has been characterised by multilingualism and a high degree of dialect differentiation, with 447 currently recorded languages (according to Ethnologue), and this situation has continued despite the hegemonic influence of English and a much smaller number of officially recognised languages. Ethnologue also reports a language diversity index of 0.913 for India and 0.067 for Ireland. < <http://www.ethnologue.com/statistics/country>>, Accessed 29/10/2014. However, it should be noted that the prevalence of dialect continua often make it impossible to set the boundaries of 'languages' on purely linguistic grounds, as Ethnologue tries to do.
- 14 Sean Ó Riada, 'Our Musical Heritage,' (RTE, Irish Radio broadcast 1963).
- 15 Orientalism and Ireland have had an interesting relationship considering the role of Ireland and Irish people in colonial conquest. There appears to be a thread within the colonial narrative concerning Irish people's particular familiarity with and to the peoples who were often under their charge (see, for example, J. Lennon, *Irish Orientalism*, (Syracuse University Press 2004).
- 16 Even many 'folk' music forms across India conform to a melodic framework which is analogous to *rāga*, though it is not necessarily systemised to the same extent.
- 17 I daresay that this was what drew me to really want to explore *Sean-nós* singing in the first place following initial exposure to the highly scale-based (and also interestingly ornamented) Irish instrumental music tradition. These music forms appealed to my '*rāgic*' sensibilities, arguably validating Ó Riada's sense of there being a likeness.
- 18 It is worthwhile mentioning the work of film-maker and scholar Bob Quinn and his comparisons of *Sean-nós* with North African singing styles, particularly Berber music in his film *The Atlantean Irish*, (1983). Quinn highlights the interesting parallels evident within the singing traditions and other aspects of culture and history to put forward his Atlantean hypothesis, suggesting a shared sea-faring culture between various peoples in the Atlantic and Mediterranean coast of Europe and North Africa. It is interesting and noteworthy that Quinn dismisses the idea of a connection between Irish and Indian music which Ó Riada's aforementioned comments left open for suggestion. In fact, Quinn critiques Ó Riada's choice of Indian music as comparable or connected on the basis that Ó Riada must have been drawing on the connection suggested by the term 'Indo-European'. According to Quinn, the notion of 'Indo-European' is misguided in the context of music, because it has been overused and abused but, in fact, does not carry any significance beyond the linguistic connection. As with possible, though unlikely, connections in origins between Indian and Irish music, the relevance, or lack thereof, of the term 'Indo-European' beyond language is important to bear in mind, but a comprehensive discussion is beyond the scope of this article. It is not my aim confirm or refute Quinn's hypothesis.



- 19 Milton Singer, 'The cultural pattern of Indian civilization: A preliminary report of a methodological field study', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, (vol 15 issue 1, 1955), pp. 23-26.
- 20 Translation sourced from <<http://www.shivkumar.org/music/ramakathasudha.pdf>>, accessed 3/10/2014.
- 21 When the main performer is an instrumentalist, there may still be an accompanying instrumentalist and there will be a percussionist. The repertoire, format and length are the same with the only difference being that there is no singer and, therefore, the songs are performed instrumentally.
- 22 Lakshmi Subramanian, *New mansions for music: Performance, pedagogy and criticism*, (Social Sciences Press 2008).
- 23 For a discussion see B. Benary, 'Composers and tradition in Karnatic music', *Asian Music*, (vol. 3, issue 2, 1972), p. 44.
- 24 The centrality of solo performance in Irish traditional music is the source of some debate. Breandan Breathnach argued that traditional performance was mostly a solo affair (see B. Breathnach, *Folk music and dances of Ireland*, Ossian 1996). Meanwhile, J. R. Cowdery *The melodic tradition of Ireland* (Kent State Univ Pr 1990, p. 24), 'the solo musician and the unison session seem to represent the oldest layer of traditional Irish music' (emphasis added). Meanwhile, the most common discourse about *sean-nós* singing highlights solo performance and the well-known singer Joe Heaney was known for his dislike of singalongs. See Sean Williams & Lillis Ó Laoire *Bright star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish song man*, (Oxford University Press 2011, pp. 86, 134). See also Sean Williams, 'Melodic ornamentation in the Connemara *Sean-nós* singing of Joe Heaney', *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua*, (vol 8, issue 1, 2004, p. 134), '*sean-nós* is a strictly solo tradition'.
- 25 A.M. Freeman, 'An Irish concert', *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, (1920, pp. xxi-xxvii).
- 26 Lillis Ó Laoire & Eamon Mac Ruairi, *On a rock on the middle of the ocean: Songs and singers in Tory Island, Ireland*, (Scarecrow Press 2005).
- 27 Sean Williams & Lillis Ó Laoire, *Bright star of the West: Joe Heaney, Irish song man*, (Oxford University Press 2011).
- 28 Ó Laoire & Mac Ruairi (2005), pp. 59-65. Also mentioned in Lillis Ó Laoire, 'The right words: Conflict and resolution in an oral Gaelic song text' *Oral Tradition*, (vol. 19, issue 2, 2004), p. 190.
- 29 Carnatic music can be and is taught, and has a long history of formal instruction while Quinn reports of singers in Connemara saying that *sean-nós* can be learnt but not taught, which may highlight a degree of unease or, at the very least, ambivalence about any formalisation of instruction in *sean-nós*. Nevertheless, the teaching of *sean-nós* singing does take place and is, based on preliminary ethnographic observations of singers on Inis Mór, formal instruction appears to play a crucial part of *sean-nós* transmission in the contemporary context, despite a prevailing valorisation of learning by osmosis. The idea that *Sean-nós* cannot be taught may refer to the ability of the singer to become a gifted interpreter of the tradition.
- 30 The category of 'fusion' is also worth mentioning here. Most likely stemming from the blend of 'jazz fusion' and world music in projects such as John McLaughlin's *Shakti*, the term 'fusion' has arguably taken on another meaning in Indian discourse as the superordinate term for any form of contemporary music which draws on Indian traditional music in combination with other traditions or modern styles. Interestingly, this genre often reflects a high art aesthetic, even with its grounding in popular commercial music instrumentation.
- 31 Amanda Weidman, 'Can the subaltern sing? Music language, and the politics of voice in early twentieth century South India', *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, (vol. 42, issue 4, 2005) pp. 485-511. On pp. 506-507.
- 32 Matthew Harp Allen, 'Tales tunes tell: Deepening the dialogue between 'classical' and 'non-classical' in the music of India, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, (vol. 30, 1998), pp. 22-52.
- 33 Another work critiquing the folk/classical split also with a focus on South India is Stuart Blackburn, 'Looking across the contextual divide: Studying performance in South India', *South Asia Research*, (vol 18, issue 1, 1973) pp. 1-11. In this work, Blackburn highlights the problematic nature of the folk and classical split in relation to a range of South Indian modes of performance.
- 34 See Graeme Smith, 'Making folk music', *Meanjin*, (vol. 44, issue 4, 1985), pp. 477-490 for an interesting discussion regarding how the Australian folk music scene was developed and established by left wing intellectuals in Australia, drawing from British and Irish traditional music and the American folksong tradition, and a particular sense of Australian national consciousness.
- 35 Examples of work which describe these elements within traditional settings include Sean Williams, *Focus: Irish traditional music*, (Taylor & Francis, 2009) p. 164, and M. E. Cohane & K. S. Goldstein, 'Folksongs and the ethnography of singing in Patrick Kennedy's The Banks of Boro', *Journal of American Folklore*, (vol. 109, 1996) pp. 425-446, and p. 430.
- 36 The multilingualism prevalent in the Vijayanagara Empire is discussed by L. Mitchell in *Language, emotion, and politics in South India: The making of a mother tongue*, (India University Press, 2009), p. 10. Indian languages are characterised by diglossia so it is possible that this multilingualism may have also involved a command of both written and spoken forms of the languages.
- 37 For example, in Hyde's speech-cum-essay *The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland*, (1892).
- 38 For a fuller discussion see L. Subramanian, 'Contesting the classical: The Tamil Isai Iyakkam and the politics of custodianship', *Asian Journal of Social Science*, (vol. 32, issue 1, 2004), pp. 66-90.

- 39 Weidman (2005) proposes the idea of two contesting metaphors of music as language. One of these, espoused by advocates of Tamil music sees music as inseparable from language and, therefore, sees the need for music to be 'in' the language of the singer. The other metaphor, espoused by the largely Brahmin elite, saw music as a universal language and therefore beyond particular languages and capable of expression that cut across language boundaries.
- 40 For example, Yoshida Terada, 'Tamil Isai as a challenge to Brahminical music culture in South India', *Music and Society in South Asia: Perspectives from Japan*, (vol. 71, 2008) pp. 203-226, and, Weidman (2005).
- 41 See McCann and Ó Laoire, "Raising one higher than the other": The hierarchy of tradition in representations of Gaelic-and-English-language song in Ireland' (2010) point out that in the *sean-nós* repertoires of places such as Donegal, this foregrounding of Irish language repertoire is problematic and not reflective of singers traditional practice.
- 42 For a more detailed discussion of performer talk see Mahesh Radhakrishnan, 'Performer talk in Irish traditional singing performances in Australia' in *Proceedings of the 2012 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society* edited by John Henderson, Marie-Eve Ritz and Celeste Rodríguez Louro (Perth, 5-7 December 2012, published 2013).
- 43 I first encountered this term in relation to Yiddish in Jeffrey Shandler, 'Postvernacular Yiddish: Language as a performance art', *TDR*, (vol. 48, Issue 1, 2004). I am indebted to Lillis Ó Laoire for his suggestion to apply the term to the language situation of Irish.
- 44 The language ecology of the Sydney Music Circle can certainly not be generalised to all Carnatic music communities, who may be predominantly Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam or Tamil-speaking, or comprise a more even mix of these and other languages, not to mention North Indians and other apparent 'outsiders' to the tradition and cultural milieu.
- 45 Mahesh Radhakrishnan 'Musicological artistry of niraval in Carnatic vocal music' in *The 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference Proceedings* edited by M. Ponsonnet L. Dao & M. Bowler (Canberra, 1-4 Dec 2011, published 2012) Canberra: ANU Research Repository <https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au>.
- 46 The term 'musicological' has been used by Stephen Feld & Aaron Fox, 'Music and language', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, (vol. 23, 1994) pp. 25-53; Amanda Weidman, 'Can the subaltern sing? Music, language and the politics of voice in early twentieth century South India', *Indian Economic & History Review*, (vol. 42, issue 4, 2005) p. 488; and Simon Jo-Keeling, *Musicking Tradition in Place: Participation, Values and Banks in Bamiléké Territory*, (2011 PhD Thesis, The University of Michigan) p. 242. These scholars have used the term to designate various elements of convergence between language and music.
- Feld & Fox hyphenate the term in the subtitle to their review, *Music and language: Towards a musico-linguistic anthropology*, which explores 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship on the relationship and intersections between music and language. Similar concepts are Alan Rumsey's 'musico-lingual interaction' in his work 'Musical, Poetic, and Linguistic Form in 'Tom Yaya' Sung Narratives from Papua New Guinea', *Anthropological Linguistics*, (vol. 49, Issue 3/4, 2007) p. 267) and Michael Sollis' 'musical-lingual interplay' in his work 'Tune-tone relationships in sung Duna Pikono', *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, (vol. 30, issue 1, 2010) p. 67. Both Rumsey and Sollis use their respective terms to refer to the formal intersection of music and language in song. My use of the term 'musicological artistry' draws on all these interdisciplinary perspectives but particularly focuses on the formal aspects of music and language which artfully unfold together in the performance of song.
- 47 For a full analysis see Mahesh Radhakrishnan 'Musicological artistry of niraval in Carnatic vocal music' in *The 42nd Australian Linguistic Society Conference Proceedings* edited by M. Ponsonnet L. Dao & M. Bowler (Canberra, 1-4 Dec 2011, published 2012) Canberra: ANU Research Repository <https://digitalcollections.anu.edu.au>.
- 48 Ó Laoire refers to this acceptable variation as *mouvance*, drawing on its use in oral performance theory. See Lillis Ó Laoire, 'The right words: Conflict and resolution in an oral Gaelic song text' *Oral Tradition*, (vol. 19, issue 2, 2004).
- 49 Although this particular combination of traditional music crossover is not common, it is certainly not unheard of in this globalised world, particularly since the commodification of 'world music' in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and the growing presence of an appreciative audience.
- 50 One of the first Carnatic songs I learnt as a child was *Shakthi Sabita Ganapatim* 'composed' by Mutthuswami Dikshitar in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and set exactly to the tune of the English jig *Oats, peas and beans* (the first part of this tune is also the A Part for the Quebecois tune/song *La Bastringue*). Dikshitar was one of the tradition's most revered Carnatic composers who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the British began their complete rule of India. Such pieces, generally termed *nottusvaras* (from the English word 'note'), made particular use of the Western major scale, considered a plain note version of the closest equivalent *rāga Shankarābharanam*. See Mounika Parimi, 'Musical Mixes of 'Classical' India and The West: Exploring Novel Styles.' (2014, Honors Research, University of Redlands), for a more detailed discussion of musical contact between Carnatic music and English and Celtic music. Also, note that it seems difficult to decide whether to use the word 'compose' in such instances, (hence the inverted commas), notwithstanding that the setting of newly 'composed' songs to the tune of already

existing songs is not unheard of, and in such cases the new song is still regarded as a new 'composition' in English language discourse about Carnatic music. One example is the near identical correspondence in tune between Thyagaraja's *Ragbunayāyaka* and Papanasam Sivan's *Karunai Seivāi* which is based on the same tune. Tune borrowing in Carnatic music is discussed in Matthew Harp Allen, 'Tales tunes tell: Deepening the dialogue between 'classical' and 'non-classical' in the music of India, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, (vol. 30, 1998), pp. 22-52.

- 51 Peadar Ó Riada- radio interview following broadcast of Sean Ó Riada's *Our Musical Heritage* (2012, RTE).  
 52 Peadar Ó Riada- '3/Triúr (In Search of Musical Form). <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kqkKt1kxc0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kqkKt1kxc0)>, Accessed 24/08/2015.  
 53 Matthew Harp Allen, 'Tales tunes tell: Deepening the dialogue between 'classical' and 'non-classical' in

the music of India, *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, (vol. 30, 1998), pp. 22-52. On page 22, Allen translates *varnamettu* as 'melodic setting or tune', but also states that this is an incomplete translation.

- 54 Ibid.  
 55 Nandini Ramani, 'Pioneer among divine composers', *The Hindu* (Friday, January 05, 2001), <<http://www.thehindu.com/2001/01/05/stories/0905070q.htm>>, Accessed 15/10/2014.  
 56 One such interesting exploration is undertaken in Stan Scott's essay 'Brown ale and black tea' in *Dear far-voiced veteran: Essays in honour of Tom Mumnelly*, (The Old Kilfarboy Society, Miltown 2007). In this essay Scott reflects on his journeys as a performer and scholar from America, and a practitioner of the American folk genre, in exploring both the Irish tradition which lay at the roots of his own musical 'home' and North Indian classical and folk music in Bengal.

## Notes on Contributor

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