



*Tuned Out. Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland*

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## REFERENCES

Fintan Vallely, *Tuned Out. Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2008, 196 p., ISBN 978-1-859184431

- 1 *Tuned Out* offers a lively and informative history of traditional music in Ireland in which the author attempts to account for the increasing absence of Protestant musicians from the contemporary traditional music scene. By re-visiting the significance of the revival period for traditional music and demonstrating an acute awareness of how the political context shaped both opinion and practice, the author presents an original and multi-faceted piece of work which will make a worthy contribution to a number of academic fields. Not least of these is the field of ethnomusicology, which has been significantly lacking in thorough studies of this kind.
- 2 Vallely demonstrates how in the past four decades Protestant musicians have largely detached themselves from a musical tradition that was once common to all people on this island. The changing political climate of the sixties and seventies contributed largely to the “revival” of traditional music and its subsequent classification as a Catholic and nationalist source of entertainment. As a result of the simultaneous growth in support for traditional music and increased fervour for nationalist politics from Catholics, many Protestants felt that they no longer could identify with the music. This unfortunate situation was not helped by Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Éireann who throughout the period concerned made a number of statements explicitly referring to the connection between musical performance and political aspirations (p. 87).
- 3 Protestant players generally agree that the music is not of itself or its occasions of practice, political (*Whose Music?* Conference, Enniskillen, 1990). If individual actors and

spectators at a session invest a musical occasion with political symbolism it is done so privately, and meaning for that person is therefore subjective and highly personal. It is when these “personal interpretations” become known and accepted as fact that we see this regretful alienation of one community from a music that was once their own. Unfortunately, music in Northern Ireland often functions as an idea of something other than itself. And this is clearly seen in the discourse that surrounds the tradition and its practices.

- 4 The strength of *Tuned Out* comes from the wealth of the author’s personal experience as a musician, historian, and teacher of Irish music studies. The diversity of voices included in the book allows readers to appreciate the variety of opinions and the significance of their backgrounds. The book is punctuated by some forty illustrations and newspaper extracts, and a plethora of musical examples support the author’s arguments throughout.
- 5 What has happened in Northern Ireland is that Protestants have come to reject not the traditional music itself, but what they perceive to be the social function of such music (40). Wolfe Tone said in Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star* that “Music is the only art above politics. That is why it is the helpless pawn of politicians”. It would indeed seem that in Northern Ireland this “art” has been used more to create and anchor divisions than to heal old wounds. A book like Fintan Vallely’s *Tuned Out* can do much to set the record straight.