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The Lark on the Strand: A Study of a Traditional Irish Flute Player and His Music

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THE LARK ON THE STRAND:
A STUDY OF A TRADITIONAL IRISH FLUTE
PLAYER AND HIS MUSIC

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Lori Jane Kaplan
May 1979

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A STUDY OF A TRADITIONAL IRISH FLUTE
PLAYER AND HIS MUSIC

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THE LARK ON THE STRAND: A STUDY OF A TRADITIONAL IRISH
FLUTE PLAYER AND HIS MUSIC

Lori J. Kaplan

May 1979

82 pages

Directed by: Burt Feintuch, Lynwood Montell, Jim Wayne Miller
Center for Intercultural and Folk Studies
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This thesis provides an in-depth study of a traditional Irish flute player, Jack Coen. Jack, raised in the village of Woodford in County Galway, immigrated to America in 1949 at the age of twenty-four. With his large repertoire of Irish traditional dance tunes, Jack has played music at parties, dances, with the New York Ceilidhe Band, and at festivals such as the 1976 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. Jack teaches the flute and the tin whistle and is recognized both as a teacher and as a player.

By examining Jack Coen's music we learn about the style, technique, and repertoire of a traditional Irish flute player. And by focusing on the performer, we observe the relationship between the stylistic features of Jack's music and his sense of musical aesthetics; that is, his perception of how the traditional Irish flute should sound and the way in which he aims to achieve a musical quality on the flute. From the performer we also understand more about the traditional process of transmission by discovering how the music has been learned, the different situations of performance, and the manner in which the music is taught. This understanding provides us with the knowledge of how

the music has been carried on from generation to generation and by whom. In the case of Jack Coen, and the many Irish immigrant musicians who came to America before him, we see how an Irish musical tradition has functioned when transplanted to another culture.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis represents a study of an Irish flute player named Jack Coen. The study focuses on how he has become a flute player in the Irish folk tradition, how he has maintained this tradition in another culture, and on his music. Jack was born in the village of Woodford in County Galway in 1925 and immigrated to America at the age of twenty-four. With the exception of a year and one half spent in East Rutherford, New Jersey, he has remained in the New York area ever since. Jack has a large repertoire of Irish traditional dance tunes. He has played his music at parties, dances, was a member of the New York Ceilidhe Band in the early 1960's, and was one of the musicians chosen to represent Ireland at the 1976 Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. He teaches the flute and the tin whistle and is recognized both as a teacher as well as player.

From November 1975 through May 1976, I was one of Jack Coen's pupils and went to his home each week on a regular basis for flute lessons. During those six months I came to know Jack as a person, player, and a teacher. He inspired not only my development as a flute player, but also my interest in Irish folk music. While studying with Jack, I realized that, in order to play in an authentic style, I

had to lay aside my formal music training and learn via the folk process, that is, orally or aurally by imitation, not through written example. I became very interested in how Jack learned to play the flute within his particular traditional idiom.

From that time until the present I have read all that I could find on traditional Irish music, both scholarly and popular. Little scholarly attention has been given to individual bearers of tradition although some musicians in Ireland have been documented both by recordings and scholarly articles.¹ Robin Morton has produced a study of traditional singer John Maguire,² but there has been no book length study of an Irish musician in the instrumental tradition (i.e. performer of dance, not song, music). A few articles have been written on traditional Irish instrumentalists--most notable of these is Michael Moloney's study of folk composer and fiddler Ed Reavy.³ None of these articles are devoted solely to an Irish flute player. However, the subject of acculturation has received some atten-

¹See, for example, the recordings of Michael Coleman: The Musical Glory of Old Siigo IRC Records (no number), 1967; The Heyday of Michael Coleman Intrepid Records (no number), 1973; The Legacy of Michael Coleman Shanachie Records 33002. An article appeared on Michael Coleman by Lawrence McCullough, "Michael Coleman, Traditional Fiddler" Eire-Ireland 10 (1975): 90-94.

²Robin Morton, Come Day, Go Day, God Send Sunday (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973).

³Michael Moloney, "Medicine For Life: A Study of a Folk Composer and His Music" Keystone Folklore XX (Winter-Spring 1975): 4-37.

tion from scholars.⁴

This thesis presents the less studied "domestic"⁵ musician who, like the virtuoso professional player more widely studied and documented by recordings, has contributed to the development of Irish traditional music in America by providing the music for local events and tutoring younger musicians in the community.

This kind of study, which centers on the performer rather than the text, is important because by looking at the performer the scholarly tendency to separate the musician from his music is partially corrected. From the performer we can learn more about the process of transmission by discovering how and under what circumstance the music was learned. Jack not only represents the way a good traditional flute player has functioned in Ireland, but also how one functions in an Irish American community.

This thesis contain four chapters. Chapter I looks

⁴Excellent studies by Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather: Traditional Irish Music in its American Cultural Melieu" (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1975) and George M. Stoner's "If I'd Been Polish, I'd Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas: An Examination of the Social Contexts of Traditional Irish Music in Rochester, New York" (M.A. Thesis, Western Kentucky University, 1976) both account for the changes in performance contexts of Irish music in America.

⁵This term was coined by George M. Stoner to classify those people who work at a variety of occupations not related to music and play during their free time in the local community. And, although Jack is semi-professional in that he has played music at concerts, dances, and has just released a record, he does not support himself by his music. See, "If I'd Been Polish, I'd Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas," p. 13.

at the early years of Jack's life until the time of his emigration to America. Emphasis is given to the musical environment of his home and how he has learned his music. Chapter II discusses Jack's life after emigration, noting how his music has continued in a new country despite the transition from rural to urban performance contexts. Chapter III describes Jack's music, his style and repertoire. Concluding remarks are contained in Chapter IV.

Throughout the thesis Jack is allowed to speak for himself as much as possible. I have used quotations from our interviews and have taken the liberty of briefing some of the sentences. I have added no words of my own except where bracketed.

Most of the information pertaining to this study came from informal discussions and informal interviews conducted in March and September 1978 with Jack Coen, from personal observations, and discussions with others who know and have played music with him. Since the period being discussed covers over forty years, the reliability of information was checked by following Langness' suggestions: observe, check the account of one informant to another, and ask the same questions of each informant.⁶ Many of my questions related to Jack's personal history, family background, the musical environment of his home, his training

⁶L. L. Langness, The Life History in Anthropological Science (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), pp. 42-43.

as a musician, the different contexts in which he has played music, flute technique, Galway musical style, and the quality of music he aspires to in his playing. The information gained was important in providing an understanding of the ways that these musical traditions have persisted and how they are performed and transmitted. Some of the information presented is the result of my own strong involvement with traditional Irish music for the past four years, which includes a one-month trip to Ireland where I collected traditional flute music and a participant-observer relationship with the New York Irish musical community.

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS

Jack Coen, the second in a family of nine children, grew up on his father's farm in the southeastern part of County Galway in the west of Ireland. Although sections of County Galway are Irish speaking, Jack's village, Woodford, was not classified as part of the Breac-Ghaeltach.¹ He did learn some Irish in school while growing up but never learned to speak Irish fluently. East Connacht,² of which Woodford is a part, is almost entirely a lowland that has been divided into small subsistence farms which shaped the landscape as it appeared when Jack was growing up. Wheat, oats, potatoes, and barley were the Coen's main crops, and butter, eggs, pigs, and cattle were the main sources of income. The Coen family and their farm animals consumed most of the produce that was raised. Jack recalls: "Farming

¹In 1925 the Gaeltach Commission looked at the areas in the west of Ireland where the Irish language survived among a significant part of the population and marked two types of Gaeltach: the Fíor-Ghaeltacht, where at least 80% of the population speak Irish, and the Breac-Ghaeltacht, where 25-80% speak Irish. See T. W. Freeman, Ireland: A General and Regional Geography (London: Methuen and Company, LTD., 1950), pp. 178-184.

²Ancient Ireland was divided into four provinces; Ulster, Connacht, Munster, and Leinster. Connacht includes the counties of Galway, Mayo, Sligo, and Roscommon.

was general at that time. See, they grow a lot of crops for the family, to feed the animals besides, plus the main source of revenue for the farm was cattle, store cattle, ready for fattening."

Music was an important part of people's lives in County Galway. It provided entertainment for families like the Coens who did not have a radio or a record player. Neighbors looked to each other and the community to hold parties and dances. The musicians of the community were needed to provide music at social functions, and the young were encouraged to learn to play an instrument.³ The musician was respected and his status was high in the community. Jack says, "You were treated like a king if you could play music; oh yeah, that's definite."

Jack first heard music from his father, Michael Coen, a concertina player and singer.⁴ His father provided music for local dances and parties, and most of all he played the concertina each night in their home. From him, Jack learned tunes that he has never since heard played by anyone else.⁵

³See Seamus MacMathuna, "The Fortunes of Irish Music," Treoir 8 (May 1976): 8-9.

⁴Breathnach notes that the concertina was played at one time throughout Ireland. Now its use is limited to County Clare and areas close by. Woodford lies approximately six miles from the County Clare border. See Brendan Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland. (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, LTD, 1971), p. 91.

⁵For example, "Mike Coen's Polka" and "The Branchline" are two polkas that Jack heard played only by his father. See The Branch Line: Jack and Charlie Coen Topic I2TS337, side I, band 7.

Jack was eight years old when his father's concertina broke, and it was not replaced before Jack immigrated to America many years later. Without a concertina, Jack's father often reminded Jack of a tune or corrected his versions of a tune by lilting, which was a way of singing dance tunes by using nonsense syllables.⁶ Liling was not unusual where Jack was from; it could be heard while the musicians' hands were occupied with work, Jack explains, "By people going along, working in the fields, they'd be whistling and liling."

There was no shortage of music while Jack was growing up. Of the music heard at houseparties, he recalls, "Next door to us there was a few parties there. We were allowed to go there, that was only two hundred yards away." Occasionally there would be a concert in town where travelling groups put on shows. They were not traditional Irish groups, but Jack remembers, "They would have somebody there who could play a nice tune, and if he played a strange one everybody in the country would be whistling it the next day." He remembers that the local players got together for the crossroads dance (which had died before he ever had the opportunity to participate): "It was a big slab of concrete in this particular case, about twenty feet wide by forty feet long, built by the local people. They used to collect there on a Sunday after-

⁶An excellent example of liling in the Irish tradition can be heard on The Chieftains 3 Ceirnini Cladaig CCIO, side 1, band 4.

noon and dance. And the musicians would collect."⁷

Music was provided for dancers at the local feiseanna:⁸ "There would be no prizes of any description, no medals, no competition, just exhibition dancing." Jack did not learn to dance when he was younger. He says, "I couldn't dance. I went to take lessons at one time, and they told me I had two left feet and made me very happy to hear that." Although Jack had never wanted to dance, the music caught his ear. Some of the best flute players in Jack's part of the country could be heard at these events, including Jim Conroy, Johnnie Conroy, and Tommy Gaffey. By the time he was eight years old, Jack could lilt up to a hundred tunes that he learned without conscious effort.

At about the age of eight, Jack received a tin whistle for Christmas. The whistle was conical in shape and resembled the Clarke C whistle sold today in Ireland. It was common for children to begin on the tin whistle and play it until their fingers could cover the larger holes on the flute. He remembers that it was considered more of a toy than an instrument: "They were sold in the candy stores or other stores as toys, so they were, and there was very little

⁷Stoner notes that the crossroads dance was, at one time, very common in Ireland. See George M. Stoner, "If I'd Been Polish, I Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas," p. 20.

⁸A feis (pl., feiseanna) presently refers to a competition of Irish step-dancers. See Stoner, pp. 51-58, and McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," pp. 37-40 for a detailed description of the feis.

regard for them as a musical instrument. Yet, I guess it's what everyone learned to play on that graduated to the flute in later time." Jack played on a tin whistle for over a year before he knew it had two octaves: "I never knew it had a second octave. I thought it had doh-ray-me-fah-soh-lah-te-doh, and that was all." When a tune went into the second octave, he was stuck. Jack could never play an entire tune until:

A man by the name of Jim Conroy saw me fiddling around with it one day and says to me, "Don't you know there are two octaves on the flute?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "When you go up to the top you can begin again at the bottom and go way up again." I says, "I never knew that." So he showed me how it happened, how to do it. Once I found that out, I was off, that was it.

Jack regards his ability to learn easily by ear as fairly common and natural among his countrymen: "Everybody in the country could learn very fast by ear." He attributes this to the emphasis on singing and ear training given to the children in school:

We had an advantage at home. We were taught how to sing going to school. Everybody was taught how to sing a scale and we were all taught to sing by note, you see, on the scale, on the tonic solfa.⁹

⁹Tonic solfa refers to a system of sight singing first used in the early 1840's. It has a syllable notation for the pitches of the scale starting on the tonic note, the first degree of the major scale: doh-ray-me-fah-soh-lah-te. The minor is handled as a mode of the major starting on lah-te-doh, etc. Sharps and flats can be expressed by changing the vowel; sharps to 'e' and flats to 'a'. Practice in the pitch aspect of the system is done in class where the teacher points to the note names and the class sings them. Ear-tests are given in which the pupil names the notes that the teacher sings or plays on an instrument. See Percy Scholes, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 579-580.

And what they gave us--a very good foundation--was ear training. . . . Well, that's what made it so easy because we used to have a lot of ear tests. There was a nun in there and she used to have an old harmonium¹⁰ and she would play, you know, maybe three notes behind the other, sometimes she would skip a few and play in and out and up and down, backwards and forwards. And you'd have to call out the note, whether it was doh-me-soh, or doh-soh-me, or doh-ray-doh, or whatever it was. She'd go back, pause on them, and you'd have to call them out as she would play them on the harmonium. So that was a big help, I thought. Well, it helps your ear out quite a bit. And sometimes you'd have to sing the scale upwards and backwards in your mind, you know, in order to find out what some of them were. . . .

. . . We were all taught how to sing scales in different keys. And then when you got an instrument, you found the scale on the instrument. You knew what you were doing automatically from the teaching of singing. They were very strict on scales, ear-tests, and all that kind of stuff. . . . You see, we got a good foundation in that. So I would say that it was from that that I learned how to put the tunes on the part of the scale. So then when I found out that there were two octaves on it, well, I didn't have any problems after that. You see, all of the tunes I was able to play halfway, I was able to complete them.

Jack was able to sound tunes out on the whistle for himself with his new knowledge of whistle technique combined with the numerous melodies he already knew:

Like from there I was able to figure out to ~~play~~ play the whistle because I was able to play the scale on it. That would be the first thing when I got it. I was able to put one finger after another and figure out it was the very same scale we learned in school. Everything seemed to make sense when I found out there was a second octave on it; that made it much simpler.

During this time, Woodford, a parish which Jack estimates to have fewer than five hundred people, was depended

¹⁰A harmonium is one of the reed-organ family that dates from the early 19th Century, "It is a free-reed keyboard instrument, blown by two pedals operated by the left and right foot working in alternating strokes." See Scholes, p. 476.

upon for her monthly fairs by farmers too distant from the larger markets of Loughrea and Gort.¹¹ The small farmer sold his calves to the dealer or large farmer. As the calves grew up they moved from small to large farms, from pastures in the west to richer pastures in the east. Consequently, stated Arensberg in 1959, "The local cattle fair is still the small farmer's mart, as it was in the Middle Ages."¹² Jacks says:

Well the fair in those days, they don't have them anymore, if someone had cattle or pigs to sell, sheep or stuff like that, they would take them into the town to buy, and they'd sell a few off and buy another. And the dealers would come from different towns and buy them up, buy whatever you had to sell.

The big fair in Woodford was on Saint Stephen's Day, December 26. The fair on Saint Stephen's Day was the best time Jack could hear the many flute players in his neighborhood.¹³

The wrenboys would come in playing flutes . . . followed them up the town, down the town, around, and everywhere, listen to them, watch them, listen,

¹¹Freeman, p. 421.

¹²Conrad Arensberg, The Irish Countryman (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 40.

¹³According to Estyn Evans, "Saint Stephen's Day is in many parts of the country associated with the hunting of the wren, and the sport is not entirely extinct. The wrens were killed beforehand by noisy and excited bands of youths, and carried on a holly bush or a decorated wooden tray on St. Stephen's Day. The procession, shouting and singing the prescribed songs to the accompaniment of homemade skin tambourines, made its way from house to house demanding money and drinks. At one time the wrenboy ceremonies involved much fertility symbolism and were attended by men disguised as women." Estyn Evans, Irish Folkways (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 279.

you'd learn something. . . . Oh since I was able to walk, the wrenboys used to come. Since I first went to town on a Saint Stephen's Day, they'd be there.

Jack was a wrenboy between the ages ten to sixteen years old. The wrenboys would collect from near and far to form a group. As young wrenboys, Jack and his classmate, Willie Joe Conroy, played the tin whistles while the other boys in his group would tag along, dance and "act the clown." They collected money from door to door and at the fair, which was later divided between them. Jack recalls:

They would dress up and blacken their face, or wear a mask. Sometimes older ones would put ribbons on themselves, round about their caps, round about their jackets, and try to make themselves as ornamental as possible. And they'd have a boy and girl who could dance--never a girl, it'd be a man dressed up in girl's clothes. . . . They would never kill a wren but carry around a holly bush that would have a fake nest in it.

The older wrenboys showed up with instruments of all kinds and played jigs, reels, and hornpipes--the dance music. There would always be tambourines, or bodhráns as they are called in Gaelic, to provide rhythmic accompaniment. They were made by stretching a goatskin over a wooden frame, and they were played either with the knuckles or a stick.¹⁴ Saint Stephen's Day was the only day that the wrenboys played in public. They did not go to town; instead they

¹⁴The bodhrán was also used to provide rhythm in the dance music as well as ceremonial occasions. Three examples can be heard in an LP re-issue of recordings of early ceili bands in the 1920's and 1930's. See Reg Hall, ed., Irish Dance Music, Folkways FW 8821, side 1, bands 4&7, and side 2, band 4.

would collect money from people at the fair. The money they acquired was used to hold a party and dance in a barn with a loft and a spacious floor. Jack recalls, "They would collect the musicians and have a big night's fun with plenty of Guinness stout, tea, and soda bread. . . . So that was the big amusement around Christmas time, and that's when the local music would be flying."

Although Jack knew the basics of whistle playing, he was eager to increase his repertoire. Like most traditional musicians, he learned many tunes by hearing them played in various musical contexts. He learned many more and developed his techniques as a player in the different musical contexts. At sixteen, Jack started to go out on his own: "Once I came to the age of sixteen, I began to get around." He learned tunes by ear which were picked up in several ways; by hearing music from his father; from people in the fields; at local events such as a feis or Saint Stephen's Day fair; at house parties where neighbors would gather to play music and dance for themselves; at dances; and from visiting musicians in the neighborhood. The crossroads dance was dying out but there were dance halls in Woodford and the towns nearby where people would congregate to dance. Jack surreptitiously went to dances in the district which were restricted to those over eighteen, and heard some of the best ceili bands of his day: the Aughrim Slopes Ceili Band from County Galway; the Kilfinora Ceili Band from County

Clare; and the Ballinakill Ceili Band from County Galway.¹⁵

Jack remembers:

As I said, you'd learn them [tunes] anyway you could. Well, Ballinakill was only four miles away from me. When I was sixteen years old, they used to have dances there on a Sunday night. They had great musicians down there. We used to go there when I was sixteen years old. You're not supposed to go there until you're eighteen. So you'd have to sneak in, sneak in and sneak out, and hope they didn't put you out.

Two of the flute players that Jack grew to admire most, Eddie Maloney and Jack Coughlin, were heard playing at these fourpenny ceilis in the Parish Hall of Ballinakill. The ceilis in Ballinakill were held only in the summer, but there were year-round dances that Jack attended called "fourpenny hops" at The Bungalow, a dance hall in Whitegate, close to the County Galway border in County Clare.

According to Jack, "ceili" referred to a dance which lasted from eight to eleven in the evening where the local musicians played. The standard dances at a ceili in Jack's area were the Galway set (several figures of the quadrilles and the polka round)¹⁶ to which jigs and reels were played; the barn dance, to which hornpipes or special tunes called

¹⁵A group of musicians who perform traditional Irish music for traditional Irish dances is called a ceili band. The word "ceili" comes from an Irish word which refers to the visiting of neighbors during the evening in some house with the intention of exchanging gossip. This often would develop into a session of music and dancing. See Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland, p. 50.

¹⁶Reg. Hall, ed., Irish Dance Music FW8821, notes to the recording, p. 3.

barn dance tunes were played; old-time waltzes, social figure dances to which polkas were played; and the highland fling, which was a couple dance unlike the Scottish highland fling, which is a solo dance.

Many instruments would be heard at these dances. Flute, tin whistle, and fiddle players were abundant in Jack's part of the country. There also were a number who played melodians and a few concertina players. Jack remembers one or two good pipers. But the union bagpipes (sometimes called uillean bagpipes) were expensive, and not many could afford them even if they wanted to play.¹⁷ The flute was simple system, open-holed, and made of wood.¹⁸ The melodians had just one row of buttons (ten keys) and were

¹⁷Folk music in Ireland was usually heard on these instruments. For a brief description of each see Breathnach, p. 73-91. Burt Feintuch provides a brief history, bibliography, and discography in Liam O'Flynn, Uilleann Pipes and Tin Whistle: Notes for the Recording FSUP-T61 (Philadelphia: Folklore Society of University of Pennsylvania, 1972). Also see the last three chapters of Francis O'Neill's Irish Folk Music: A Fascinating Hobby (reprint ed., Darby, Pennsylvania: Norwood Editions, 1973) which are devoted to the uilleann pipes. The first is their history and development, followed by two tutors for the bagpipes, one by O'Farrell and the second by Patsy Touhey.

¹⁸The simple system flute was developed before the Boehm flute system. It is conical in shape and in the key of D. Boehm's cylindrical bore flute is standard for the modern flutes and is commonly used today. For discussions on the history and construction of the flute see: Philip Bate, The Flute (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1969), Anthony Baines, Woodwind Instruments and Their History (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1967). For special interest in the development of Boehm system flutes see, Theobald Boehm, The Flute and Flute Playing (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964).

smaller than the later button accordians.

Radio programs with Irish traditional music were heard at the neighbors'. Jack recalls: "Leo Rowsome, he was a great piper. He used to be on every Sunday night. All the people used to make it their business to have him on their radio."¹⁹ Jack could learn a tune by hearing it a few times and sought every opportunity to hear melodies he may have previously heard as well as new tunes: ". . . turn on the radio and maybe you wouldn't get it all, but you could get a piece of it. A piece of it would hang in there someplace, but if you ever heard it again, you'd have your ear open for it, you know." Other ceili bands like the Kincora Ceili Band and Austin Stack's Ceili Bank often broadcast.²⁰ And occasionally Jack heard traditional records played at the neighbors': "Coleman's records got over there, too, around that time, and Morrison's, the

¹⁹Leo Rowsome was one of the few professional Irish pipers of the first half of the twentieth century. He was well known in Ireland as a teacher, a pipe maker, and a performer.

²⁰An insufficient amount of information on early ceili bands is available, although recordings of early bands have been issued. For example, Reg. Hall, ed., Irish Dance Music, Folkways FW8821, Irish Popular Dances, Folkways FW6818, 1966, and Ceol Tíre, Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann. Also see the accompanying booklet to Ceol Tíre called, "Music of the Old Masters" (reprinted in Treoir [5-1976] p. 16-17).

fiddle player."²¹

At the age of seventeen, Jack joined the local defense force which was formed during World War Two.²² He learned to play fife as one of the eighteen members from his parish in the Fife and Drum Band. Jack describes the fife, which was given to all the fifers in the band as smaller than the flute and: "It has got six holes in it, identical to the way you'd play the whistle." The fife differs from the whistle only in the way it is blown. So the transition from the whistle to the fife was not difficult for Jack to make once he became used to the adjustment in his embouchure. His repertoire expanded a great deal as he often practiced and performed with the other musicians:

So then we used to have practices, the Fife and Drum Band. That's where I began to pick up a lot of tunes, from the other musicians. We'd have a practice two

²¹ In the 1920's and 1930's, several major record companies in the United States issued a special 78 rpm "Irish" series that featured some of the best traditional instrumental musicians of the day. Some of these star performers who lived in America such as Sligo fiddlers Michael Coleman, James Morrison, Paddy Killoran, and flute players John McKenna and Tom Morrison tremendously influenced playing styles back in Ireland as well as in America. For some information on early traditional Irish recordings in America see; Lawrence McCullough "An Historical Sketch of Traditional Irish Music in the U.S.", Folklore Forum (July 1974) p. 184-185., McCullough, "Michael Coleman, Traditional Fiddler" Eire-Ireland (Spring 1975), p. 90-94, and Michael Maloney, "Irish Traditional Music in America" Sing Out! 4 (1977): 4.

²² Jack explains, "They had a defense force in Ireland during the War, what they called the "Local Force" during World War Two, and everybody from the age sixteen up belonged to the local defense. This was in the event of any problems in defense, that they would help out."

nights a week, and we'd have a good practice. We not only played marches, but we could stand upon a corner and anytime play a blast of jigs, reels, and hornpipes. And when we got into a strange town, we could always form a circle after the march or parade and play jigs, reels, and hornpipes. I learned a lot of stuff from them.

The members of the band ranged in age from about seventeen to forty. One of the senior members, Jim Conroy, was the leader of the band. Jack was acquainted with Jim--he had grown up hearing Jim play the flute, at local concerts and feiseanna, and Jim had explained the tin whistle's double octave to Jack several years earlier. But when the war was over there was no need for a local defense force or a marching band. Yet their relationship had only begun. It lasted well after the Fife and Drum Band dispersed.

Jack's training, like that of other beginning musicians, progressed as he spent many evenings visiting an older, more experienced musician. It was under Jim's influence that Jack decided to take up the flute; "He [Jim] invited me out to his house, and I used to go out to him. That's when I decided to get a flute. He was a very good flute player." Jack describes the process of learning a new tune; "The first thing you would try to do is get it off in your head so that you could lilt it, and you'd lilt along with it until you'd get it into your head . . . then you would play it . . . there was no problem, playing it was nothing." So after the tune was memorized it was easy to play. However, an Irish tune performed by a traditional

player is generally ornamented, and it consists of more than the basic notes in the melody. Ornamentation is affected by embellishing the notes, by varying the notes in the tune, and by the use of rhythmic variation.²³ When I asked Jack who had shown him how to ornament and where in the tune the ornamentation should be used, he replied:

Well, I don't think anybody. I think that's something you get from listening to someone else doing it, and playing with somebody you get a lot of that. . . . If you learned by ear, your fingers would follow theirs anyway. . . . Somebody who learns by ear, they got to give it a lot more thought than someone who learns by note because that's all they got to depend on, so they listen a lot closer. And all those little things, you can hear them playing in your sleep done by somebody else, you just hear them coming and coming. Then you pick up the flute, you find yourself doing them. Without anybody showing you, your fingers just go ahead and do them. Without anybody showing you, your fingers just go ahead and do them because you don't know where the finger's going anyway. It's following the note, wherever it is, on the flute.

So, Jack was able to learn a tune to the note the exact way he heard it, and to this day he will play it much the same as the person he learned it from. Of this he says:

I would have it note for note, any tune I learned from Jim, even though I couldn't read a note at that time. But that would be closer than note for note, every little tittle tattle would go in there, would be identical. . . . I could go back and meet him tomorrow and play all them tunes and there still wouldn't be a bit of difference.

The first flute that Jack owned was bought from Tommy Gaffey, another flute player, for ten shillings.

²³How ornamentation is affected on the Irish flute, and, particularly in Jack's playing, is discussed at greater length in Chapter III.

Jack says, "It was a very old dilapidated piece of works." So Jim Conroy loaned him a flute for six months until he found another, and it was on the borrowed flute that Jack learned to play. Jack remembers that, "Flutes were hard to get, yet there were flutes knocking around, here and there. You could buy them in pawnshops from time to time. And they were laying around in a lot of houses--how they got there I will never know." Jack's second flute was bought by his brother in a Dublin pawnshop for twenty-five shillings.

When Jack finished school, he worked on the family's farm, but the seasonal cycle of farm work was at a low in winter. So during this season money was earned by building roads and fences. When Jack was about nineteen, he worked on the roads along with Johnnie Conroy, a brother of Jim's. Johnnie was another flute player whom Jack rated very high and aimed to learn from. Tunes were quickly learned by hearing Johnnie whistle while they worked and by playing music together in the evening. Jack recalls:

I worked with him [Johnnie] on the roads over there in the winter times. I used to go over to his house at night and learn a lot of tunes from him. I could learn them in a day. I worked with him. He could whistle them, anything you'd want to learn, he'd whistle it for you and keep on whistling until you get it.

Jack's music took shape under the strong influence of the Conroys.

Jack then began to perform with local musicians at concerts. The ensemble usually consisted of one concertina,

two fiddles, and two flutes. Jack recalls:

Before I came out, they used to have concerts in the halls, and I'd play with the local musicians for the concerts. It wasn't a band or anything like that; but a few normal people that would play for intermissions and play a few tunes while the town was gathered, mainly.

However, Jack recalls that there were only two or three concerts a year around Saint Patrick's Day, and there really was no place to play traditional music except for one's own amusement in the homes. The regular ceilis that Jack attended from the age of sixteen through eighteen then became infrequent until he was twenty-one, and he does not remember any ceilis during his last three years in Ireland. There had been a change in trend; the dances had become modern and the new music there was being played by jazz bands. Jack says, "Only the old people loved to listen to it [traditional music]. . . . There were few musicians in those days of the younger generation."

The process of cultural learning which is termed "enculturation" by Herskovits is defined as, "The aspects of the learning experience . . . by means of which, initially, and in later life, man achieves competence in his culture."²⁴ We have seen that Jack began his musical training through imitation. Merriam believes this to be common to children of all musical cultures. He further

²⁴Melville J. Herskovits, Man and His Works (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 39.

states that if children begin their musical enculturation this way, then in order to become a musician in society, more formal training is necessary.²⁵ The individual who pursues formal instruction becomes a specialist in his form of music, unlike the casual performer who learns almost completely by imitation. Jack continued his training by finding flute players who were specialists and, therefore, could teach him. Like an apprentice who learns from a master, Jack spent much time with older musicians and learned through observation and practice. Jim and Johnnie Conroy were models from whom Jack could learn flute technique, style of playing and repertoire. As Merriam says, "It is through learning, enculturation, that the culture gains its stability, for members of one generation teach the members of succeeding generations what a culture is and does."²⁶

Jack had reached the last stage of his training as a traditional performer when his repertoire became large enough to supply entertainment for the community. But this stage has never really ended for Jack, who, like other traditional performers, has neither stopped adding to his repertoire, nor stopped seeking a higher degree of perfection in his playing.

²⁵Alan P. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music (Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press, 1954), p. 150.

²⁶Ibid., p. 162.

CHAPTER II

AFTER IMMIGRATION

In this chapter, Jack Coen's musical life after his immigration is seen within the larger perspective of the history of traditional Irish music in America. Personal relationships which have been of most consequence to the continuation of Jack's music are discussed, and Jack's role and status in the Irish American musical community are determined by placing the music in the contexts for which Jack has been playing; that is, for ceilis, sessions, feiseanna, concerts, and lessons. By observing both the way Jack teaches his art and the contexts in which the music is performed, we can understand some of the way in which this tradition has been transmitted, and, therefore, kept alive.

Irish immigrants had reached America as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they were mostly descendants of the Presbyterian Scots who in the early 1600's had been removed by the English from Scotland to the northeastern part of Ireland. According to O'Faolain, these Ulster Scots retained a cultural tie with Scotland despite their stay in Ireland and brought with them the lowland Scots (non-Gaelic) musical

traditions.¹ Irish immigration to the United States drastically increased around the middle of the nineteenth century when the potato famine of the late 1840's left thousands of Irish with no other alternative. McCullough points out that,

Upon their arrival in America, they clustered into the burgeoning Irish communities which began to appear in every major urban and industrial area of the United States. Their recent disastrous experience with agriculture was impressed indelibly upon their collective unconscious, and, for this reason and others, the Irish experience in America became synonymous with the urban experience.²

The sudden transition of Irish music, a rural music, to the urban, Irish enclaves of nineteenth century America did not alter its basic musical forms. That is, the structure of the dance music and airs has not changed from the traditional forms in Ireland.³ McCullough claims:

Changes have occurred in the styles of performance and in the repertoire favoured by performers and public, but the changes have been initiated within the traditional community and reflect no discernible direct borrowings from other American musical idioms or dance genres.⁴

Nor did this transition eradicate the interactional

¹Sean O'Faolain, The Irish (Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 86.

²Lawrence McCullough, "An Historical Sketch of Traditional Irish Music in the U.S.," Folklore Forum 7 (July 1974): 179.

³Lawrence McCullough, "The American Scene," Ceol IV: 70.

⁴Ibid., p. 70.

habits of the musicians. Instead it reinforced them since Irish music was flourishing in the Irish communities of the major cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ The once wandering, professional musician became a performer in the popular travelling minstrel shows and vaudeville companies. Traditional musicians played at social events, taverns, dance classes, and other formal and informal occasions. The end of the nineteenth century began a prosperous era for the Irish musician who had achieved a high status in the Irish American community. There were thriving groups of Irish musicians in Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and most other major cities.⁶ This musical culture was encouraged by immigrant musicians from different parts of Ireland: "Their former local loyalties transferred intact to another highly localized situation in the Irishtowns of nineteenth century America."⁷

In the early twentieth century, the growing record industry began to issue recordings of some of the best traditional Irish musicians: such as, Michael Coleman, James Morrison, Hugh Gillespie, and Paddy Killoran. These recordings exposed musicians from different sections of

⁵Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 63.

⁶Biographical accounts of some of these musicians are found in Francis O'Neill, Irish Minstrels and Musicians, (Chicago: The Regan Printing House, 1913).

⁷Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 63.

Ireland to other styles and repertoires formerly unknown to them.⁸ There was live Irish music on the New York radio each night in 1935. There were several places where one could find musical entertainment in the area of 149th Street and Third Avenue and 138th Street in the South Bronx. Traditional music could be heard at Roger Feely's Pub and Paddy Killoran's pub, and there were regular weekend dances at dance halls in the South Bronx as well.⁹

A decline in Irish music began in the 1930's as Prohibition ended music in taverns, and modern music was preferred in the dance halls.¹⁰ The end of the prosperous days of traditional Irish music occurred with the end of the 78 rpm records in the mid-1940's. McCullough writes that the Depression and the shellac ban during World War Two had a substantial effect, but the largest factor contributing to the decline of traditional Irish music in America was the absorption of the Irish into the mainstream of American society.¹¹ He notes:

⁸Some of the performers recorded in the 1920's and 1930's are still admired for their musical brilliance and have set high standards for modern musicians.

⁹See Daniel Collins, Andy McGann and Paul Brady SH29009, notes to the recording. (N.Y.: Shanachie Records, 1977) and Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds SH29004, notes to the recording, (N.Y.: Shanachie Records, 1976).

¹⁰Michael Moloney, "Irish Traditional Music in America," Sing Out! 25 (1977): 5.

¹¹Lawrence McCullough, "An Historical Sketch of Traditional Irish Music in the U.S.," p. 185.

As the American Irish became progressively more American and less Irish, their ethnic identity was increasingly defined in terms of external symbols and symbolic behavior, and the more esoteric aspects of their cultural heritage--such as traditional music, song, and dance--lost all relevance and meaning when divorced from their native contexts.¹²

In the early part of the twentieth century, the Irish who had assimilated into American society were replaced by new immigration. Civil War and adverse economic conditions in Ireland encouraged 220,591 Irish people to come to the United States in the 1920's.¹³ Heinrich Böll writes in his Irish Journal:

While almost all European countries fear a labor shortage, and many are already feeling it, here two out of six, three out of eight brothers and sisters know they will have to emigrate, so deep rooted is the shock of famine; from generation to generation the specter takes its terrible toll; at times one would like to believe that this emigration is some sort of habit, a duty they take for granted--but the economic situation really does make it necessary: when Ireland became a Free State, in 1923, it not only had almost a century of industrial development to catch up with, it had also to keep pace with new developments; there are scarcely any cities, or industry, or any market for the fish.¹⁴

Only 13,167 emigrated in the 1930's and 1,059 came between 1941 and 1945. Between 1946 and 1950, 26,444 Irish immi-

¹²Lawrence McCullough, "The American Scene," p. 70.

¹³Census Bureau, Historical Statistics of the United States, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960), p. 56.

¹⁴Heinrich Böll, Irish Journal, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 111.

grants arrived,¹⁵ due to the shortage of jobs in Ireland after World War Two. Immigration has tapered since the 1950's, affecting the Irish musical tradition which now lacks an important source of replenishment.

McCullough claims that, "Urbanization is not the cause behind the dissolution of the community of Irish musicians in the United States, but, rather, suburbanization."¹⁶ Suburbanization is responsible for the scattering and isolation of traditional Irish musicians, which is steadily decreasing their present interaction.

However, an important effect of the American cultural environment on traditional Irish music has been to expand the importance of musicians' associations' roles in promoting the revival of interest in Irish music in the United States.¹⁷ These organizations, such as Comhaltas Ceoltíróí Éireann and The Traditional Irish Musicians Association of New York, are revivalistic in the sense that they came into existence after the musical tradition

¹⁵Census Bureau, Historical Statistics of the United States, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1960, p. 56.

¹⁶Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 63.

¹⁷According to Lawrence McCullough, "This is not, perhaps, evidence of Americanization, so much as it is the result of modernization--the attempt of an 18th century tradition to adjust to the cultural context of the 20th century." See, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 102.

was recognized, and they were founded to offset any deterioration in the quality or number of its members. The activities of these organizations, such as, concerts, ceilis, competitions, and schools, have increased the involvement of the decreasing number of active performers. New York City, with its large Irish and Irish-American population estimated at 315,000,¹⁸ sustains numerous schools of Irish music, musical occasions where traditional music is featured, and a group of semi-professional traditional musicians who perform and teach.

The growing availability of traditional Irish music through public occasions has not only prompted the performers, it has given young players a chance to hear the music in a live performance situation. In addition, through public performance the status of the performer of traditional Irish music has in recent years been raised by the awareness that the performer is an active transmitter of a significant aspect of the Irish cultural heritage.

Musical Relationships in America

Jack Coen decided to come to the United States in 1940. His intentions were to profit from the greater economic opportunities and then return to Ireland. But

¹⁸Census Bureau, Census of Population (1970): General Social and Economic Characteristics-New York. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1972), pp. 607-612.

he remained in America, according to his own explanation:

So the years drag on and you don't go back. And then you go back for a trip and figure you'll go back out [to America] for a couple more years and accumulate a little more money. Then you get married and after a while you get settled down, have kids, and then you don't go back at all.

The first six months Jack spent in the Bronx, New York, with his uncle, Jack Coen, around 134th Street, off Willis Avenue. He then moved to East Rutherford, New Jersey, where there already were many Irish immigrants from his part of the country, and many more were to arrive later. A few of them worked at the same job with Jack, loading groceries and produce on trucks. Mike Rafferty, a flute player, came one year after Jack, and they shared three months working and playing music together.¹⁹

Jack did not play his flute except for an occasional time with Rafferty:

Well, coming out here at that time, I brought my flute with me. It used to sit there in the case except for a few times I played a few tunes with Rafferty. Once in a while you get invited to a party and they tell you to bring the flute along. And as you know yourself, a flute don't make that much noise. So, it really wasn't much good to them because it wasn't loud enough, nobody could listen to it. They just wanted something they could jump around to, something they could dance the Stack of Barley²⁰ to, something that would make noise. They didn't care what it sounded like so long as you could hear it over the beer, loud noise, and loud

¹⁹About six years earlier, Jack had heard Rafferty play the flute with the Ballinakill wrenboys on St. Stephen's Day.

²⁰The Stack of Barley is a couple dance to which a tune called The Stack of Barley is played at hornpipe tempo. Sometimes other hornpipes are played during this dance.

talk, and everybody having a good time. They weren't interested in music, especially Irish music. So you'd more or less get disgusted and say, "Why brother?" which is usually what happened.

There was not much music at the local immigrant dances or parties because the musicians were discouraged within the Irish community by those who were trying to blend into the American mainstream. Many felt it was demeaning to be associated with the folk culture they left behind. Jack recalls:

God knows, there weren't too many dances. There were plenty of dances then, but very little Irish music in them, put it that way. So the only time we'd play would be when there'd be a house party out in Jersey. I think we played at one wedding. More or less for our own amusement that we would play, not for anybody else, for not too many at that time cared to listen to us, actually. A lot of people didn't even want to be associated with us. . . . Irish people! They thought it was degrading, or I don't know what you'd call it. They thought it was rocky mountain music that should be left where we got it and not be brought from there at all. That's strange isn't it? But that was the way it was in those days.

After one and a half years, Jack moved back to the same neighborhood in the Bronx when his uncle found him a job as a lineman for the railroad. He found there were many musicians in New York, especially fiddle players: "Oh yeah, [Larry] Redican, Andy McGann, Paddy Killoran, of course, Paddy Sweeney, John McGrath. And Lad O'Beirne was the best of them all. Paddy Reynolds came out around the same time I did." The flute was another story, Jack remarks, "When I came out here, there was nobody playing the flute much. Now the Irish Americans, they didn't play

flutes at that time; nobody learned how to play the flute."

One could hear traditional Irish music regularly in a few bars on Third Avenue in the South Bronx, but there were not many organized public gatherings where musicians would play. Music in the Fifties, like the Thirties and Forties, was played mostly in the home. Unless one associated with a group of musicians who would gather informally, occasions to play were few.

In the middle of the 1950's, an Irish organization called Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Éireann (The Musicians Association of Ireland) organized branches in America where musicians could gather each week. The organization provided musical instruction, and organized musical competitions called fleadhanna.²¹ The musical gatherings, or sessions,²² were and still are necessary contexts for many traditional Irish musicians to keep their music alive. For some, they

²¹The fleadh (pl. fleadhanna) is similar to ~~the~~ feis except that it is music, not dance, oriented. Competitions for different age groups are held on Irish instruments; the union pipes, the fiddle, the flute, the tin whistle, the melodeon, and the accordion. The fleadh is held in New York and Chicago each year, and the winners go to Ireland to compete.

²²The session is an informal gathering of musicians where the performer plays mostly for himself and his fellow musicians. The number of musicians and types of instruments vary, and sessions occur in public and private places. Since the musicians receive no money, they are able to play whatever they like. For discussions on the session see, Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," pp. 41-46, and George M. Stoner, "If I'd Been Polish, I'd Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas." pp. 58-68.

were the only opportunity to play with others because they rarely played together in their homes. These sessions functioned not only as a pastime, but also as a symbol of their ethnicity.

Jack attended the local C.C.E. club in the Bronx, and there he met Paddy O'Brien, who had recently arrived from Ireland. O'Brien, from Tipperary, and Joe Cooley of Galway, "Led the Post War development of the [two row] B/C button accordion style with its high degree of ornamentation."²³ At the time, O'Brien was an innovator, and his records influenced other musicians. The old single row ten key melodeon was pitched in C and not as suitable for playing with the fiddle and the flute because it did not have a flatted seventh for mixolydian tunes and it did not play in different keys.²⁴ The B and C double row accordion was better suited to play with other instruments because it was possible to play in many more of the standard keys, since one row was in the key of B and the other row was in the key of C. According to Jack:

He [Paddy O'Brien] was the first good accordion player. . . . He was the first good one that I ever heard. I didn't like accordion playing up until that time, I didn't like them at all. . . . And he was able to get those notes on that particular type of accordion. And that started a revolution in accordion playing. So then, the fiddle players didn't mind playing with him or the people that came after him, because their accordions weren't

²³Reg. Hall, p. 2.

²⁴Ibid., p. 1.

that loud, and they were more mellow and sweeter and closer. They made a nice blend, but the old-time accordion and fiddle was not a very good blend.

Many Irish people relinquish their ethnic ties, especially those who are not encouraged during their initial months or years in this country by other Irish people with whom they can share their ethnicity.²⁵ Jack did not bring his flute on the first visit to Paddy O'Brien. He had not been playing much, had forgotten many tunes, and preferred just to listen to Paddy play. But, Paddy said that he would not play his accordion until Jack brought his flute. Jack remembers:

So, in order to hear him play a tune, I had to bring up the flute and play the five or six tunes I could play at the time from having them forgotten and playing them upside down and every blooming thing.

Jack feels that Paddy was responsible for reviving his interest in the music that he almost lost. He says:

So that was kind of a new beginning then, you might as well say. Otherwise, if I hadn't met him I wouldn't have played another tune, probably. . . . That's when I decided to go back and learn tunes, and brush up on the ones that I had forgotten.

Jack and Paddy made an agreement after the first night:

He [Paddy] said to me it was a shame that I ever stopped. He wasn't playing that much himself at the time we met, so we said we'd meet every Wednesday night and see how it would go, and see whether we'd get back on it. I think we met every Wednesday night. Paddy didn't back down till five years later [when Paddy returned to Ireland].

Jack learned many tunes from Paddy and claims: "There

²⁵George M. Stoner, p. 28.

wasn't any tune that I ever heard in Ireland that Paddy O'Brien couldn't play, [and he could play] a lot more."

At this time, Jack also struck up a close friendship and musical relationship with Larry Redican, a fine fiddle and tenor banjo player. He met Larry through Paddy O'Brien, although he had heard Larry play before Paddy ever came to New York, at a ceili in Brooklyn. Jack recalls that, "He was exceptionally good." He did not meet Larry Redican again until three or four years later, after which they played music once a week for over fifteen years. Jack says, "So whatever playing I did with Paddy, I more or less continued with Larry up until the time Larry died."

Jack played regularly with Larry Redican and learned a couple of tunes a week, some of which Larry composed. For his own amusement Jack also played music with Joe Madden, an accordion player who lived only a block away. Jack's younger brother Father Charlie Coen, an accomplished concertina, flute, and tin whistle player, made frequent visits to the Bronx, and they often played together as well. This time, the early through mid-1960's, was a particularly rich period in which Jack's music grew as he practiced consistently and actively expanded his repertoire.

The New York Ceilidhe Band

Jack's music was further enhanced by his association with the members of The New York Ceilidhe Band, which was formed in the late 1950's. This band featured Larry Redican,

Andy McGann, and Paddy Reynolds on fiddles, Paddy O'Brien on accordion, Mike Dorney and Jack on flutes, Gerry Wallace on piccolo, and Felix Dolan on piano. They played for a few ceilis and practiced together on Sundays in the CBS Building in New York City. Jack remembers that these musicians were very particular as to the way they would play a tune:

They were very sharp, all of them. They wouldn't half play it [a tune]. If one of them had one note different from the other, they'd stop right there and decide which was which, or which was better. . . . And the source of the tune, I guess, before they'd play it, they would have a pretty fair knowledge. They like to know how authentic it was or if it sounded right, or where it came from. And they'd get to the bottom of it some way or other, and they would decide on the way to play it.

The idea for the instruments to play a tune in unison was not to say that there was only one way to play a tune. But it was a part of the group's and Jack's own musical aesthetic. Jack believes:

When two [or more] people are playing together, it's very important that they both do the same way in order that it sound good. If one does it one way and the other does it in the other way, which sometimes you can get [with] two very headstrong people, one will not change to suit the other, and then you wind up with lousy music, even though they can be two good players.

The New York Ceilidhe Band was formed and managed by Steve Quinn who wanted them to make records after competing in the 1960 Fleadh Cheol na Éireann (All Ireland) in Boyle, County Roscommon. Unlike today, there were no qualifying fleadhanna in this country, so there was a competition for all the overseas ceili bands on the day before the contest. Since the New York Ceilidhe Band

came in first, they were able to compete with the finalists of Ireland's four provinces. Third place was given to them in the ceili band competition, Jack and Larry Redican came in second in the overseas duet competition, and Larry Redican, Jack, and Paddy O'Brien were awarded first in the overseas trio competition.

For the following year, the New York Ceilidhe Band continued to gather for sessions. But Irish music was in less demand as the dances held by the Irish-American social organization called more and more for popular music. Jack also blames the emergence of the modern amplification system for creating less need of many instruments to produce a large sound. With a sound system, two or three musicians could fill a dance hall and they were not as expensive to hire as a full sized ceili band. The New York Ceilidhe Band was eventually forced to disband. Jack recalls:

Actually, it [the band] never split up, there's just that there was no place to play, except if we get together in one another's houses, or place like that. And we even went to the trouble, we used to rent a room down at CBS and play there for our own amusement, you know, once in a while. . . . To stay together as a band, well we could stay together as a band forever, but there was no place to play. See, Irish music was not that popular at that time. It was popular enough among a lot of the Irish people, but it was never able to attract a big crowd to a dance. And another thing, the people who used to run those dances, with modern amplification that you have today, they don't need a band. All you need is a whole lot of knobs that you can turn up the volume with. And they're not interested in tone or sound or blend of music. They're only interested in something people could dance to, that would be loud enough to be heard over the crowd of people that were talking and drinking. So, then it really cut out all the bands, really,

and cut them down to three, two combo piece or three combo, something like that. That really put a stop to everything or did away with all your bands, practically, in New York, even in the modern dance halls.

It is unfortunate that the Band never recorded more than an unreleased 78 rpm record, as it had some of the strongest New York players in one band, and was, according to many who had heard the group, one of the tightest ceili bands they every heard.

Dances in the 1960's

After Paddy O'Brien returned to Ireland in 1962, Jack played at two or three ceilis a month at a dancehall in New York City with Larry Redican and Joe Burke on the button accordion. Sometimes Jack and Larry would play with Paddy Reynolds and Andy McGann.²⁶ Jack remembers that the turnout was not large; there were never more than two hundred people at these dances.

By the late 1960's, Jack was not playing regularly at ceilis. Younger musicians were being hired and the flute came to be regarded as a superfluous addition when only two or three musicians were hired to play. Jack says:

Don't get me wrong, a lot of people used to love to hear the flute, so they used to, it was nice music.

²⁶The reader can hear some of these performers on several recordings, such as, Andy McGann and Paddy Reynolds SH29004, (N.Y.: Shanachie Records, 1976), and A Tribute to Michael Coleman 05-360 [played by Joe Burke, Andy McGann, and Felix Dolan], (Ireland: Shaskeen Records, n.d.).

And it was an instrument you could do without, you know, that kind of way. You could get by without it. They didn't think that it was much of an addition. It was an addition, they all admitted the music sounded better with a flute or with two flutes, but yet you get by without it, so why bother with it. You have the same thing now, too. They'd love to have it, but why bother with it if you can get by without it, you know? And you don't have as much money to pay. Why pay a flute player when you don't have as much money to pay. Why pay a flute player when you don't need it? And you have that going on, even in the present time.

Jack remarked that a flute player was not regarded as highly as a fiddle player in this country, but in Ireland he was on par. He says:

They didn't think any more of a fiddle player than they did of a flute player, an accordion player, concertina player, or any of them. Actually, around my part of the country, they loved the flute. And they would tell you at that time that there was no ceili music without a flute. And any place they will come by a music session, or if you hear them talking about it, they'd say, 'That was beautiful, but it'd be so much nicer if you had a couple of flutes in with it, you know?' You know, something that would give it that blend.

At the ceili one could hear traditional Irish dance music, while at an Irish-American dance, one hears the popular songs of the day as well as the older Irish favorites. The main instrument at the Irish-American dance would be the piano accordion with a set of drums, guitar, bass, perhaps a saxophone or brass instrument, and occasionally a violin. Jack heard plenty of dancehall music, or as he puts it, "God knows, I listened to enough dancehall music," after bartending on weekends at City Center for five years in the late Fifties and early Sixties. For the

most part, the bands did not play traditional music. Jack says that they played, "The other stuff; it would go in one ear and out the other. But I could learn if they played a reel. I'm telling you, they wouldn't but play it two nights in a row and I wouldn't have it off."

For a few years, Jack played for some of the large dances such as the Annual County Dance, St. Patrick's Night Dance, and Hurling Club Dances²⁷ with Joe Madden's Orchestra. This band had on the average of twelve to fourteen pieces, including saxophones and brass instruments. Joe Madden on button accordion, Larry Redican, and Jack, provided the "Irish" or ceili music. The dances were held in the ballrooms of some of New York's best hotels, such as The Commodore and the Hilton, and the musicians played for crowds as large as two to three thousand people. All of the musicians had to be union members and the union determined, according to the dancehall, the number of pieces a band should have. But Jacks says:

The large dancehalls folded. . . . They don't have the crowds. Many Irish have moved out of the city and have their own little clubs in their own little localities. Being occupied with them, they don't go to the County Dances. Now five hundred would be a big crowd where five thousand used to be.

²⁷Hurling is an Irish game resembling lacrosse but played with a netless, wide-bladed stick.

The Feis

Throughout the 1960's, Jack played at the feiseanna in New York. The feiseanna is not the most desirable situation for most musicians to perform in. They must play the same tunes all day, play outdoors, often in the sun or wind, and receive low pay. When some of Jack's children grew old enough to dance in the competition, he was needed more to look after his other children than to play for the dancers.²⁸ He explains:

It's too hard at a feis on a flute, out in the open air, because it takes more wind, even with the amplifier. It takes a lot of wind, and if you're playing in the open air, a lot of that wind goes out into the breeze, and the music goes off in the breeze. And then, a lot of kids were small, see, so, well my wife used to like to watch the kids that were dancing, and I'd be minding the ones that weren't dancing. So it was a two-man job, to take care of the family at the feis without playing.

Concerts

In recent years Jack, along with other traditional Irish musicians, had performed more frequently in "representational contexts." Stoner uses this term to distinguish the events, such as concerts, where the traditional music is played mostly for a non-Irish audience, to represent one

²⁸Four of Jack's six children (all of the girls) learned to step dance at an early age and continued to dance for many years, although they no longer do so.

aspect of the Irish culture.²⁹ Since the early twentieth century, the concert format has not been popular with Irish-American social organizations because their members preferred a dance where they could move about and socialize with others rather than be restricted by concert etiquette and remain still.³⁰ The lack of interest in promoting this kind of entertainment reflects the estimation that the music is not worth listening to.³¹ Not until the late 1960's was traditional Irish music featured at concerts, and even so, it was outside the Irish community; the urban folk music revival gave traditional Irish musicians recognition.

By the early 1970's, ensembles of Irish musicians began touring the United States and giving concerts sponsored by Irish-American social organizations. Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann (The Musicians Association of Ireland) have made annual concert tours of many United States cities with a group of traditional musicians, singers, and dancers since 1972. These concerts have emphasized that the traditional music is a part of the Irish cultural heritage and

²⁹See Stoner, p. 68. Please note that I include the Irish-Americans who are several generations removed and have been raised in the American, not Irish, culture in the "non-Irish" category. Very often they have had little contact with their "roots".

³⁰McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 25.

³¹See Jack's comments on p. 32 in which he observes this attitude.

something to take pride in. Since then, there have been many benefit concerts to provide aid to victims of troubled Northern Ireland and fund raising activities to promote Irish organizations that have brought traditional performers to the concert stage.

Since September 1975, The Philadelphia Traditional Irish Music and Dance Festival has been held annually. The festival is presented by The Philadelphia Ceili Group, an organization which aims to promote and preserve the traditions of Irish culture, particularly music and dance. The festival provides workshops on the different instruments and Irish dancing, as well as an afternoon and evening concert. Jack Coen was one of twenty-five musicians from New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh who participated in the 1976 and 1978 festivals. Jack remembers that all of the union pipers, flute, and tin whistle players performed an unplanned program together.

In 1976, Jack also was one of the twenty-five traditional artists chosen from the United States to represent Ireland at the Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D.C. The Irish flute players at the Festival included Mike Flynn, Mike Rafferty, Mike Preston, Father Charlie Coen, and Jack from New York, and Seamus Cooley from Chicago. Sonny McDonnagh from County Sligo and Miko Russell from County Clare were the only flute players from Ireland who performed, as Jack remembers. The Festival lasted one week, and the musicians played every day and every night.

During the day, Jack performed with the other flute players now living in the United States, and they performed three or four times, each time for half an hour at the Mall. At night, the musicians had a session at Georgetown University where they stayed. Jack says, that the sessions were, "just to pass the time away."

The Irish Arts Center in New York City has been inviting different artists, not only musicians, to give an hour performance before the start of their weekly sessiun (session) since 1977. Jack was one of the first members of the community to be asked to perform at this event. His performance consisted of a spontaneous selection of reels, hornpipes, marches, jigs, and airs, and time was given for a question and answer discussion between the audience and performer.

For two weeks in January, 1978, the first national concert tour of traditional Irish music and dance sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts visited ten cities in the United States. Richard Shea of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs organized the tour. The National Center is a private non-profit organization founded to promote respect for cultural pluralism in American society. The participants included Jack Coen on the flute, Father Charlie Coen on the concertina and tin whistle, Liz Carroll on the fiddle, Michael Flatley, a step dancer and flute player, Sean McGlynn on the button accordion, Michael Moloney, a singer and mandolin player, and Bill Ochs on

the union pipes and tin whistle. These musicians were drawn from indigenous Irish communities, and they went on tour to other Irish communities in Buffalo, New York, Syracuse, New York, St. Paul-Minneapolis, Minnesota, Washington, D.C., Albany, New York, Chicago, Springfield-Holyoke, Massachusetts, Providence, Rhode Island, and Wilkes-Barre-Scranton, Pennsylvania.

According to Michael Moloney in a recorded interview during their final concert at Wilkes-Barre, the aim of the tour was not only to remind people of the music that went before, but also to "democratize the availability of culture forms; make a choice available," and not have only one form of music that is "Irish" or "Irish-American" for the American public. The response from the communities was positive, and the turnout was as large as 1500 and 1800 people at some of the concerts. Numerous local Irish community organizations which helped to prepare for this concert tour, for example, Comhaltas Ceoltoirí Éireann of Chicago and St. Paul-Minneapolis, hoped, after the tour, to take hold of the local enthusiasm. Moloney says, "In order to make available alternative cultural resources for people who might be interested in perpetuating Irish music in America."

Teaching

In Chapter I, we have seen how Jack learned to play the Irish flute in the folk tradition. Chapter II has thus

far discussed how Jack transmits the music through its performance in different contexts. But Jack not only bears his tradition, he also actively strengthens it through teaching the Irish flute and tin whistle.

After Larry Redican passed away in 1975, Jack played the flute very little because he no longer had anyone to play with. Joe Madden became too busy as his family grew, and Father Charlie Coen visited less frequently since he moved to Staten Island. Jack's eldest daughter, Mary, played the violin for five years but quit at the age of fourteen. Two of his other daughters studied the piano for nine years, sometimes playing traditional dance tunes on the piano. None of them actively pursue their music.³² Jack decided to remedy the situation by teaching the tin whistle and the flute. He says, "I started teaching after Larry died. There was no one to play with. I thought, 'If I'm gonna have someone to play with, I better start doing something about it.'" Over the past four years, neighborhood children have been coming to Jack mostly to learn the tin whistle, and a few come to learn the flute. For six months in 1977, Jack taught the wood flute at The Irish Arts Center in New York City but has since been too busy to continue. As Jack's reputation as a teacher has grown, so has his number of students. At the present

³²Jack's son Jimmy (age 12) has recently taken up the guitar and is a promising musical companion for his father.

time, he gives about seven individual lessons a week.

Just as Jack learned by visiting more experienced musicians, so he taught by a personalized and individual method of transmission. What is transmitted varies with the ability of the student. The pupil at first imitates Jack's examples, then absorbs more through observation.

Jack explains his method:

Well, first lesson of course is getting them to put their fingers on the holes and play the scale, the D scale. That's number one, play it up and play it down. It might be two lessons before they're able to do that. Then I teach them the names of the notes; D E F# G A B C# D. And then, once they get that off pretty good, then I give them a tiny little bit of an air. Some of them can get it right off, more of them can't get it. After a few lessons then, I'll get them to play with it at home. They pick up the tempo and get nice even time. They learn the value of the notes, and so on and so forth. It helps them from making hesitations, you know, here and there. They try to play with the tape.

Because his pupils have not received ear training to the degree that Jack did while in school, he tries to compensate by the use of certain techniques to force them to listen more closely. Jack's students use the tape recorder to aid their memory when learning by ear, and are also taught to read music. Jack relates:

And then as they advance, I try to develop their ear a little bit. Usually the tune I'd be going to give them next week, I'd put on the tape for them this week, have them listen to it. Then I might do it in reverse, you know. The following week I give them the notes and see if they could make music out of it. Then I put it on very plain, and see if they could add something to it. Then I do that in reverse. I write it plain as I can, and I play it with little ornamentations here and there, and see if they could pick up any of it.

He teaches them the meter of the jig, reel, and hornpipe,

and starts his students with a few simple tunes before proceeding to those more difficult:

I teach them the time of a jig, the reel, and the hornpipe. The reel, of course, is last, and I usually start them off with a polka, or maybe five or six polkas that would have some runs and rolls, and try and get them to practice them quite a bit before they go onto the reel because of the fingers, good exercise. . . . We keep going along, we go from the very easy, keep on getting harder as they're able to take it. But I think the worst thing in the world is getting someone to play something real hard or intricate before they are able, let them work their way up to it. And then when they do get up to it they'll find it's not that hard after all.

When the students are ready, Jack demonstrates how he produces the ornamentation used in a particular melody and encourages them to use the same ornaments in other tunes.

He says:

I usually show them something [ornamentation] in one tune that they can use in another tune when the same notes might come in, you know, and go along that way, pick out little spots, different little things, different ways you'd ornament different notes and everything else like that. If I show it to them in one tune, I try to get them to use it everywhere. . . . You see, a lot of parts might be similar to some other tune in that particular spot. So you could do the same as you would do in the next part, maybe in another tune. Something similar in the same situation, something like that.

Because of the nature of the instrument, Jack teaches his tin whistle students to play only in the keys of D and G.

He will teach other keys on the flute:

They'd have to go onto the flute before I'd bother with anything else. Then I might move into A, or a couple of slow airs in F or B, or something like that. It'd be something slow because it's mighty awkward to play a reel or jig on it.

None of Jack's pupils have identical repertoires. He

deliberately gives each of them a few "tunes of their own" to increase their sense of pride and individuality.

The silver flute is becoming increasingly popular among many Irish players including some of Jack's students. The younger children can more easily "fill" a silver flute than a wooden one, which requires more air.³³ And, of course, the main reason is that many flute players have difficulty in finding a wooden flute, especially one that is in repairable condition. Jack says, "The wooden flute's very hard to come by, very hard, impossible. . . . And anybody that switches from a wood to a silver [flute] does because they can't get a good wooden flute anymore." However, Jack prefers the wooden flute, "I just happen to like the wooden flute better. . . . The wood flute is more mellow, it's a mellower sound." The shortage of good wooden flutes has led Jack and two carpenter friends to attempt flute making themselves. They have successfully made one 3/4 size flute in the key of F and have not yet finished a full sized D flute.

Jack Coen's status within the New York Irish musical community is high thanks to his technical proficiency on the flute, his large and varied repertoire, and his consistency as a player. These factors have made him valued for ceili bands or dance accompaniment, as a solo performer,

³³The expression, "to fill a flute" means to bring a full tone or sound out of the flute.

and as a teacher. But the status of the traditional Irish musician in America today is not as high as it was in Ireland at the time when Jack grew up, when the musician's role as provider of entertainment was more important. In America, the traditional Irish musician's role is decreasing as he or she is needed less frequently to play for Irish dance classes, for which records are used, and to play in Irish bars, which use more modern types of music to draw in a crowd. When traditional music is heard in bars, it is generally played on the fiddle and accordion, rather than the flute.

Jack continues to play the flute for his own enjoyment; he plays for about an hour every Sunday morning, and once in a while during the week he plays a few tunes, he says, "If I feel good or [am] in the mood. . . ." The only other times at which Jack now plays are the occasional session, perhaps at a party or festival, and at concerts. Significantly, it is only at these concerts, which are often held outside the Irish community or by Irish cultural revival organizations, that traditional Irish musicians are recognized and given the status of both an artist and a conservator of an important part of the Irish culture. Accessibility to the music of high quality performers and teachers, such as Jack Coen, gives the current revival of Irish traditional music among young Irish-Americans (and some non-Irish Americans) promise for the future.

CHAPTER III

JACK COEN'S MUSIC

The Musical Background

Most of the instrumental music of the Irish folk dance tradition was composed over the past three centuries. The majority of the dance tunes probably date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹ Irish folk music is ancient, but little is known about its forms previous to the seventeenth century. Political and social changes, especially the change from the Irish to the English language and the Famine, have caused a loss of much repertoire.²

Travellers' accounts indicate that country dances were very popular in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ By the end of the eighteenth century, itinerant dancing masters were teaching more complex dances called solo or step dances, which eventually became widespread. The most popular of these dances were the jig, reel and hornpipe. Jig, reel, and hornpipe tunes were composed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to accompany the dances. There are three forms of the jig:

p. 19. ¹Brendán Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland,

²Ibid., pp. 17-36.

³Ibid., p. 40.

the single jig in 6/8 and 12/8 meter; the double jig in 6/8 time, and the hop or slip jig in 9/8 time. The reel is played in 4/4 tempo, and the hornpipe resembles the reel except in the manner in which it is played, that is, the hornpipe is played more slowly and deliberately by accenting the first and third beats of each bar.⁴ It seems that pipers were the first to play these tunes for dancers. Breathnach notes, "In the eighteenth century, according to an author of the time, every village had a piper."⁵ Flutes and tin whistles gained popularity later towards the end of the nineteenth century. Brendan Breathnach has estimated that the legacy of tunes left from this period consists of at least six thousand pieces; jigs, reels, hornpipes, and hundreds of tunes for sets, polkas, and other dances.⁶

About the beginning of the twentieth century, a type of group dancing developed which was called ceili dancing. McCullough says:

Ceili dancing in its present form was shaped by members of the Gaelic League Revival of Irish Culture. . . . Ceili dances, such as the Walls of Limerick, Bridge of Athlone, Siege of Ennis, Haste to the Wedding, and Padeen O'Rafferty were the result of the Gaelic League's unceasing efforts to

⁴For further discussion of the structure of Irish dance music see, Brendan Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland, pp. 8-16.

⁵Brendan Breathnach and A. L. Lloyd, The Breeze From Erin 12T184, notes to the recording (London: Topic Records Limited, 1969).

⁶Brendan Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland, p. 58.

create an 'Irish Ireland'. In the area of dance, this entailed the purging of 'foreign' dances from the ballroom.⁷

The revivalists replaced the 'foreign' dances with dances thought to be truly Irish in origin. However, these Irish dances are now believed to have been devised in the early nineteenth century on the order of foreign quadrilles.⁸ The music accompanying the sets and half sets adapted from these quadrilles required tunes in 6/8 and 2/4 time which were already found in the native music, so the new dances were easily assimilated. The Irish continued to adopt foreign dances such as the polka by the end of the nineteenth century and waltzes in the twentieth century.

Repertoire

Jack Coen's repertoire, like that of most traditional Irish musicians, contains not only jigs, reels, and hornpipes but some marches, barn dance tunes, highland flings, set dance pieces, polkas, waltzes, slow airs, and some of the compositions of eighteenth century Irish harper, Turlough O'Carolan. Polkas are in 4/4 tempo; they are similar in structure to a reel but less elaborately constructed. The fling tunes, although related to the Scottish strathspey, are played without a Scots snap,

⁷Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather", pp. 32-33.

⁸Brendán Breathnach, Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland, p. 49.

meaning that two eighth notes would be played instead of a sixteenth and dotted eighth note combination (♩ instead of ♩.). Structurally, the flings resemble reels but are played more slowly at hornpipe speed.⁹ According to Jack, barn dance tunes are a selection of hornpipes that especially suit the barn dance. The set dances have different rhythms (2/4, 6/8, 9/8), and sometimes the parts are in different time signatures. These dances are characterized by an exceptionally long part. Jack says, "The second part usually has more bars in it than the first, nearly in all cases."

Several of the tunes in Jack's repertoire were composed recently by traditional musicians.¹⁰ Jack says, "I learned quite a few tunes from Paddy that he composed. Larry Redican used to be a very good composer, too, they were very good at putting them together." To Jack, these newly composed tunes are no less traditional than the tunes that have been passed down from his father. His definition of traditional is not based on the premise that a tune's origin must be anonymous to be truly "folk" music. Nor does he base his definition upon the age of a tune. Jack's

⁹This understanding of the highland fling tune was made clear to me during a discussion with union piper and researcher of traditional Irish music, Bill Ochs, on October 6, 1978 in New York.

¹⁰A study of one of the more prolific Irish folk composers of the present day, Ed Reavy, was written by Michael Moloney, "Medicine for Life: A Study of a Folk Composer and His Music," Keystone Folklore XX (Winter-Spring 1975).

criterion for a tune to be considered traditional is that it must be composed and played in the style of Irish music.

He says:

Lots of tunes can be composed last week, the week before, and someone tells you that's very traditional. Well, how can you call something that was composed a week ago traditional in one sense of the word? It would be the style and the music, style that it was composed in. It would have to be played in a traditional style. And that's about the only way I could define traditional.

Jack has never composed a tune, although he has wanted to. He says, "I was never able to compose one to satisfy myself, and never had the time, I guess. You'd need to have nothing else on your mind when you do that. And when I could do it, I didn't bother to do it. And when I'd like to do it, I never had the time."¹¹

Some of the tunes in Jack's repertoire were acquired from tune books after he learned to read music at the age of thirty. He remembers:

I had an aunt who gave me a few lessons. She used to play the piano, and every time I'd go visit her, she'd always give me a lesson on how to read music and how to apply it to the flute and everything like that. I'd stick whatever she'd write down for me in my pocket, and I'd never bother to look at it till I'd go visit her, maybe a month from then, three months from then. But then, in case she'd say anything about it, I'd look at it going up on the subway, you know, and make sure I'd have some of it off. But then she'd give me something else. And I think that's all I ever bothered with the reading of it.

And then I bought a tutor book one time that followed the tin whistle. It was written for the key of C. So, when I had nothing else to do after getting married, I had it thrown in a drawer somewhere, I

¹¹The composition process of a folk composer is discussed by Michael Moloney, "Medicine for Life: A Study of a Folk Composer and His Music," pp. 20-22.

thought I had it lost, but I took that out and I transposed it into D for myself. And I started studying it lesson by lesson coupled with what she had taught me. And then I began putting it all together.

Tune books then became a useful source of new melodies.

Jack says:

Sure, if they appeal to me, I won't pass them up. I'll learn them off by heart then. But then, playing a tune out of the book, you have to play it over a few times, and you have to like it. And then if you like it, you take and you play it. You might make a little adjustment here and there to suit your instrument. Or, it may be rough in spots, you know, you have to hack corners off it.

Books also serve to remind Jack of tunes that he had forgotten. He says, "They're a great guide to memory, you know, that's what a book is." Jack mainly uses the tune books of O'Neill, and say, "I refer to O'Neill's as the best of them all."¹² O'Neill's published collection of 1850 tunes has become the "Bible" of Irish traditional musicians, and has been important in preserving and enlarging their repertoires.¹³ Occasionally, Jack has learned tunes from Cole's 1000 Fiddle Tunes.¹⁴

¹²Francis O'Neill; O'Neill's Music of Ireland, 1850 Melodies (reprint ed., New York: Dan Collins, 1963) and The Dance Music of Ireland: 1001 Gems (reprint ed., Dublin: Walton's Musical Instrument Galleries, Ltd., 1965).

¹³See Richard Dorson's discussion on the role of the book and the symbolic value it has to his immigrant informants in, "Is There Folk in the City?" in The Urban Experience and Folk Tradition, edited by Americo Paredes and Ellen Steckert, Publications of the American Folklore Society Bibliographical and Special Series, vol. 22 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971): 45-46.

¹⁴1000 Fiddle Tunes (Chicago, Ill.: M. M. Cole Publishing Company, 1940).

Jack has no idea as to the number of tunes he has in his repertoire and says, "There isn't any way I could possibly find out. There isn't because I could never think of them." He guesses that his repertoire consists of several hundred tunes, and he learned approximately one half of these tunes after coming to America. Only a fraction of these tunes remain active in his repertoire because of lack of memory.¹⁵ He says:

I mean, sometimes you can think of a tune that you haven't played for five years, ten years. Sometimes you can't think of a tune at all. I might sit down to play sometime and not be able to think of a tune at all. You take a walk down the street and you could think of a hundred of them between there and the corner.

Jack does not claim to have any favorite tunes. He says, "When you learn a new tune, it's a favorite for a while till you get to like it. That holds good maybe till you learn another one, maybe not, maybe not that long." On occasion, Jack will still learn a new tune. More often, he will re-learn or re-activate tunes that he had learned before.¹⁶

Aided by a grant from The National Endowment for the

¹⁵See, Kenneth S. Goldstein, "On the Application of the Concepts of Active and Inactive Traditions to the Study of Repertory," Journal of American Folklore 84 (January-March 1971)P 62-67.

¹⁶Goldstein calls this a pattern of "intermittence." Tunes are actively performed immediately having been learned "then" later become part of inactive repertory, only to be revived still later to take their place again as part of the active repertory." See Kenneth S. Goldstein, "On the Application of the Concepts of Active and Inactive Traditions to The Study of Repertory," p. 64.

Arts to record Irish music in America, Michael Moloney recorded and produced a record of Jack Coen on the flute and his brother Father Charlie on the concertina, published in 1977.¹⁷ The record provides a well balanced selection of jigs, reels, hornpipes, slip jigs, polkas, and flings. Unlike most records of Irish traditional music being produced, there is a comparatively high proportion of jigs on this record. This is not to say the Coens have a small repertoire of reels, rather, the Coens possess an evenly balanced repertoire which is characterized by a wealth of hornpipes, jigs, polkas, set pieces, and flings. From this, we can see the influence of their home area, especially their father, who liked to play all kinds of dance tunes.¹⁸

Style

Two main styles of flute playing encompass the many local sub-styles found in Ireland. A flowing, legato interpretation is found in the Western counties, such as County Galway where Jack is from. The second style, which Jack associates with County Sligo, is played in a staccato manner, the notes often tongued.¹⁹ The phrasing is broken, the

¹⁷See, The Branch Line: Jack and Charlie Coen, Topic 12TS337.

¹⁸Michael Moloney, The Branch Line: Jack and Charlie Coen, Topic 12TS337, notes to the recording.

¹⁹Tonguing refers to the use of the tongue in playing wind instruments for an attack on the note, interrupting the players flow of wind.

player taking frequent breaths. This style gives the music a windy feeling. The former style of flute playing is characterized by long, sustained phrases as noted in a County Galway saying, "The long bow, the long blow."²⁰ Jack explains:

It would be in the filling of the flute, a lot of it would be. They had a smooth, steady flow, the music. They would fill the flute, and they would concentrate quite a bit on tone. And that was number one, and then the finger work comes next. You see, it would be a long steady flow. And they always tried to play as much as they could with the one blow, tried to go through the eight bars of music; or, there would be less breaks in their music in contrast to Sligo style (they break often for wind). They paid more attention to breath control. . . . They like to flow rather than spit it out. They like it to flow out. . . .

I'd like to hear a good tone and hear it well played, smooth, and have it flowing, flow out, not be forced out, not forced. And anybody that's too forceful on the flute, well, I don't like forceful flute playing, let's put it that way. I'd like it to flow out nice and smooth and steady.

Jack aims for an uninterrupted fluency in his music through his sense of breathing and long phrasing, even when he plays with another flute player. He says:

If I am playing with someone else, if it's another flute player, I'll try to take a breath where he won't take one, so there will be no break in the music. And they take a breath to take up the slack, you know? I'm taking up the slack for where they are taking a breath, and I'm hoping they'll do the same when I take mine. And that way you get a continuous flow. I try to do it that way. Now you'll get people to argue with that, too. They say that if flute players play together, they should both take a breath in the same place. I disagree with that. But that's just one man's opinion again.

²⁰This saying was told to me on September 30, 1978 by Cathal McConnell, a flute player from County Fermanagh, as an expression often heard in County Galway about the Galway style of playing traditional music.

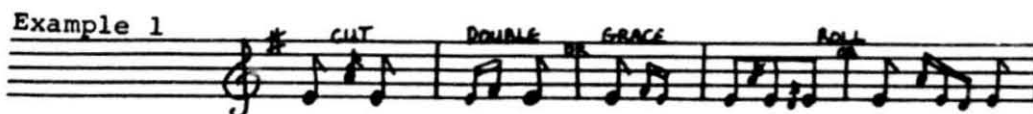
61

Although use of dynamics is not characteristic of Irish music, feeling is conveyed through the phrasing and accentuation of notes. In performance, phrasing is an artistic expression of the "punctuation" of a tune--its phrases, half phrases and motifs.²¹ A tune is phrased in four bars. The first note of the phrase has the heaviest accent and is held the longest. The odd beats in the bar are stressed more than the even beats, and the linking notes join the phrases into larger thoughts usually by the last note of the group. In Jack Coen's music, this note is accentuated, which gives the music a forward drive. Jack places extra emphasis on the final note of each strain so as to conclude the musical idea. An occasional feature of Jack's playing is a sudden stopping of a note in the middle of a quick dance tune, an effect which adds lift to his music.

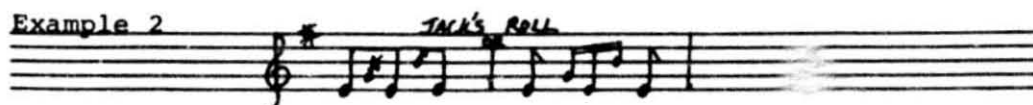
In the style in which Jack plays the flute, tunes are more often embellished than rhythmically varied. A tune is embellished by decorating the notes and using passing notes to fill in the intervals. However, the form of embellishment may vary from county to county, player to player. Single, double, or triple grace notes are used on

²¹Phrasing has to be carried out, ". . . unobtrusively, as the result of genuine feeling and not mere intellectual analysis of the structure of the music: so achieved it constitutes one of the greatest refinements in the art of performance--instrumental or vocal." Percy Scholes, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music, p. 442.

the flute to embellish a note. The single grace note or 'cut' is used to separate notes of the same pitch and accent notes. For example, to cut the note E, the A finger is quickly lifted and replaced while playing the E. The double grace note can be played like a triplet in which the first note is stressed, or, as two grace notes preceding an emphasized note. Three grace notes or the 'roll' are commonly used on a note that follows the same pitch. In this type of roll, the original note is always embellished by the note below it. In the case of an E roll, the embellishing note would be D. See Example 1.



Jack has developed a unique type of roll which produces a trill effect. See Example 2.



Note that he does not play a D grace note to ornament the E note as shown in Example 1. In fact, he uses either one or both the G and the B note fingers in all of his rolls. And Jack often uses his G note finger (third finger on his left hand) to trill a note in place of a triple grace note. This, too, is not a common technique among other traditional flute players whom I have encountered.

Intervals are often filled to ornament a tune. Jack frequently inserts a C between the B and D notes, where GBD become GBCD. For example:



Sometimes within a tune notes, grace notes, and rhythms are varied each time a part is repeated. Rhythmic variation might simply be a replacement of eighth note triplets with two eighth notes or a quarter note, as Jack will sometimes do. This kind of ornamentation is not intended to change the basic melody. See Appendix for examples of Jack's use of ornamentation and his sense of phrasing in a selection of dance tunes.

Just as a tune may vary within itself, it may also vary each time it is played. Bertrand Bronson has stated in respect to the traditional musician that, "What they have in their minds is not a note-for-note accuracy of a written tune, but rather an ideal melody, or melodic idea, which is responsive to the momentary dictates of feeling. . . ." ²² So the traditional musician really plays variations on a musical idea. Jack agrees that there is not only one way of playing a tune. He says:

²²Bertrand Harris Bronson, The Ballad as Song (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 62.

I guess it depends on how you feel, the mood you're in. If you felt like doing something queer with it, you might, or if you felt like being real serious about it. . . . A lot of people tell you if a tune is right or wrong just because it has a note different from the way somebody else does it. Well, I don't believe that. . . . So long as you are playing by yourself you can do what you like, it's all right.²³

Jack's overall use of ornamentation adds touches of sweetness where it is needed and does not exaggerate sections of the music. He says:

And sometimes one note used in the proper place by itself can be much nicer than rolls and triplets or anything else. It depends on how it is put in and how it might be ornamented, or how it would sound. It's not what you would do but how it would sound, and if it sounds good to you, you'd play it that way. Just because somebody puts in a whole lot of notes, that doesn't necessarily mean that it sounds nicer. . . . 'Course there are places that if you leave them out it can hurt, too.

Jack tries to play a tune on the flute as he would lilt it, bringing out or emphasizing the "nice" parts by ornamenting in the same manner as he would when liltng. Jack says that, "Every tune has a nice part in it someplace or another. And they always try to make more emphasis on that part than any other part, you see, give it a little character." Jack remarks that, "The old-time flute player was much better at that than the present-day flute player," perhaps because the old-time musicians played slower than the flute players today. Jack says, "Right now there

²³As Jack expressed earlier (see Chapter II) in the context of playing with the New York Ceilidhe Band, "If you're playing with someone else, you try to do it exactly like the other person is doing, or as close as you can."

seems to be a trend for playing real fast . . . the nice part of the tune is often skipped over and doesn't sound any different from the other parts of the tune." He stresses the importance of playing tunes at a steady pace so that every note can be heard, placing the emphasis where it is needed.

Moreover, the dancing rhythm can be lost when a tune is played fast. Mensuration is the main feature of dance music since the music has evolved as accompaniment for dance. The tendency for the music to be played fast was even criticized over fifty years ago by O'Neill, who said:

The prestige of Irish music has suffered incalculable loss by disregard of the old Irish time, by many of its admirers and would-be friends, who no doubt obtained their erroneous ideas from the frantic contortors of vaudeville entertainers. The Irish dance music was intended for Irish dancers, and neither the fancies nor the vagaries of musician, humble or famous, will justify any faster time than a dancer requires.²⁴

Today, Irish dance music is frequently played to a listening audience or to musicians themselves who appreciate technical showmanship. The performance context has encouraged a change in the way the dance music is played.

Jack does not find that the modern traditional flute players compare with the older flute players, although he respects their technical abilities. He says, "They [old flute players] had a tone. The present day flute players

²⁴Francis O'Neill, Irish Folk Music (Chicago: The Regan Printing House, 1910), p. 292.

don't." Jack explains:

When I was back [in Ireland] three years ago, I heard an old flute player. He was seventy years old, but there was little touches of sweetness, and little touches of . . . then again you use the traditional touch, whatever traditional means. The small things that they would do would have more music in it than the big things that the present day player does. And the little nice expressions that were in every tune, they really knew how to go to town on them. They more or less used to give it to it where it needed it. . . . And there were places that needed it more than others, to bring out the nice parts of the tune. And they seemed to have a knack for doing that, the gift of doing that.

Jack places Jim Conroy high among these older players and claims: "He was the greatest at that time. And I think he might still be the best I ever heard; I will have to say he was." Jack patterned his music after Jim Conroy and says that the "little things" in Jim's music were so musically meaningful that, "These are the things that used to make me play at all in the first place." These inspirational "things" that Jack speaks of became ideational models, acquired unconsciously as part of the maturation process. In turn, the use and transformation of these models have produced the stylistic features unique to Jack's music, expressing his creativity and his musical sense of aesthetics.²⁵

Jack maintains the older County Galway musicians' style of traditional flute playing in America. Referring

²⁵A similar idea has been discussed at length by ethnomusicologist John Blacking in his study of the Venda of Africa, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), pp. 89-116.

to their music Jack says, "That was all I heard and that's the only way I knew how to play, and that's the only way I wanted to play. That's the way I still want to play, the way I wanted to play when I was young." Despite Jack's association with musicians of different regional and stylistic backgrounds, a merging of styles did not occur in his music. The most significant effect of his interaction with musicians in the Irish community of New York was to increase and disperse his repertoire.²⁶

To gain an appreciation of the fine distinctions of phrasing and variation and the sensitive touch through which the notes of the melodies are graced, one must listen to the subtlety of Jack's music with a keen ear. In doing so, one should "hear" the relationship between Jack's style and technique of flute playing and his musical ideas which have already been indicated in this chapter.²⁷

²⁶As mentioned in Chapter II, Irish music has resisted change in the acculturative situation. For instance, a blending of several Irish styles into one American way of playing traditional Irish music has not developed, nor have the elements of traditional Irish music combined with existing American musical forms, changing both the cultural significance and the form of the Irish music. The latter process is called syncretism and is discussed by Alan Merriam, The Anthropology of Music, p. 314.

²⁷See the tape which accompanies this thesis which can be found in the Folklore, Folklife, and Oral History Archive at Helm-Cravens Library at Western Kentucky University. All of the tunes in musical notation can be heard on this tape, so the reader may wish to look at the transcriptions in the appendix while listening.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis has provided an in-depth study of a traditional Irish instrumental musician. Such a study has been missing from Irish folk music scholarship. In this study, questions about one of the most common yet neglected exponents of the Irish folk music tradition, the flute player, have been dealt with. By examining Jack Coen's music we learn about the style, technique, and repertoire of a traditional Irish flute player. And, by focusing on the performer, we understand more about the traditional process of transmission through discovering how the music has been learned, the different situations of performance, and the manner in which the music is taught. This understanding provides us with the knowledge of how the music has been transmitted from generation to generation and by whom. In the case of Jack Coen, and the many Irish immigrant musicians who came to America before him, we also see how the tradition has functioned when transplanted to another culture.

Until recently, the majority of folklorists have

been concerned with text.¹ Abrahams explains that, "The implicit view seems to have been that traditional art exists apart from performance; the singer has simply provided a convenient voice through which these relics, these anachronisms, could find one last-gasping performance."² The belief was that the performer merely presented the songs or tunes passed on to him and asserted none of his own individuality. However, it is in the performer that the music becomes relevant. Jack Coen, as a performer of traditional Irish music and an individual with his own idea of musical style, is responsible for the change and continuity of his art through its performance. There is a folk aesthetic and there are individuals worthy of study as individuals. For this reason, it is important to collect not only the text but, " . . . the singer of songs and the teller of tales."³

This study would have been incomplete without an analysis of Jack Coen's repertoire and his style of playing the flute. As discussed in Chapter III, Jack's sense of musical aesthetics reflected directly in his art. But many of his attitudes on how the traditional music should

¹Alan Dundes, "Texture, Text and Context", Southern Folklore Quarterly 28 (1964): 251-265.

²Roger Abrahams, A Singer and Her Songs. Almeda Riddle's Book of Ballads (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), p. 149.

³MacEdward Leach, "Problems of Collecting Oral Literature," Publications of the Modern Language Association 77 (June, 1962): 338.

be played were drawn from his local community. This accounts for the fact that the music of players of the same region in Ireland share similar elements of musical style. For example, Jack's emphasis on long phrasing and flow in his music is characteristic of many Eastern Galway players as opposed to flute players from County Leitrim. Since Jack was never influenced by flute players outside of his native region, his music represents the Eastern Galway style of flute playing. And his style did not change upon the contact with musicians of different musical regions after immigrating to America.

Jack's music has been reinforced by the large Irish population in America even though the role of traditional Irish music in the Irish American community has never been especially prominent. The change of social and cultural contexts did not drastically alter the performance situations in which Irish music was played in America. The ceilis, feiseanna, sessions, and concerts provided an outlet for Jack's musical growth in this country. At these events, Jack met and exchanged music with other musicians. It was these contacts and performance situations that gave Jack the incentive necessary to sustain his interest in playing his native music in another culture.

Although the performance situations are similar to those in Ireland, the contexts have changed in their degree of importance to the musicians during the years Jack has

been in America. Today the session, both organized and informal, has replaced the dance as the most vital of these contexts.⁴ Concerts have raised the esteem of traditional Irish music by exposing it more frequently to American audiences, spreading an awareness of America's cultural pluralism. The establishment of musicians' associations, which promote these activities, has helped to create more enthusiasm within the Irish-American community for the music.

Changes have also occurred in the transmission process of the music because of the effects of mass communication. However, traditional Irish music, is still perpetuated mainly by aural means, as when Jack learned it. The aural media (recordings, tapes, broadcasting media) have been more important to the music's development than the printed media. McCullough explains:

Traditional Irish music is not a musical tradition that depends on printed music for survival. Aural methods of transmission are the chief means of perpetuating the tradition, although many musicians do not hesitate in picking up a tune from a printed source.⁵

Jack, for example, did not learn to play Irish music through written music, although many years later he did teach himself to read music and has added to his repertoire

⁴My observations concur with conclusions made by George M. Stoner, "If I'd Been Polish, I Guess I'd Be Playing Polkas," p. 72.

⁵Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 91.

from written tune collections, cassettes, and records.⁶ This makes his repertoire no less traditional in an age of mass communication. On the notion of oral transmission Dan Ben-Amos states, ". . . an insistence on the 'purity' of all folklore texts can be destructive in terms of folklore scholarship. Because of the advent of modern means of communication, folklorists who insist upon this criterion actually saw off the branch they are sitting on."⁷

Mass communication has not completely altered the patterns of transmission of traditional Irish music even though it has affected the way beginners are introduced to the music. Formerly, most performers, like Jack Coen, were initiated into the idiom through a family or community member who played traditional music. This practice still commonly exists, but many of the younger musicians are exposed to the music by listening to traditional Irish music in concert or on recordings rather than hearing it from a neighbor.⁸ Even so, the acquisition of repertoire and instrumental technique by a new player is still mostly done on an informal basis. After becoming interested in the

⁶The new tune is then re-modeled in accordance with Jack's own particular sense of style. With some performers, a tune may differ considerably from the printed version.

⁷Dan Ben-Amos, "Towards a Definition of Folklore in Context," Journal of American Folklore 84 (January-March, 1971): 14.

⁸Lawrence McCullough, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 62.

music, the individual tries to find a performer who can teach the basics of the idiom of a particular instrument. Some teachers, like Jack Coen, provide their students with the rudiments of music theory and notation. However, the music is essentially learned by ear. Records and tapes often supplement the students' repertoire and develop their familiarity with the stylistic features of the music.

Today, mass communication has lessened the isolation of the different traditional musical styles of Ireland endangering the continuity of regional styles. Through the aural media, the student of Irish music hears various traditional styles and can choose not only a style he would most like to imitate, but also he can choose stylistic traits of different players to incorporate in his own style. And the use of printed materials as the main source of repertoire by schools of Irish music, in order to prepare students for group performance, encourages a conformity to standardized source materials.⁹ The long-term effects of mass communication may result (as some people fear) in a breakdown of regional styles into a more uniform way of playing traditional Irish music. For this reason, the need for folklorists to document different regional

⁹Lawrence McCullough mentions that New York is able to support several Irish music schools due to, "the large Irish and Irish-American population of the area . . ." and, "the fact that a number of Irish music competitions are held within the area and provide public outlets for the demonstration of skills acquired in the schools." See, "The Rose in the Heather," p. 83.

styles of traditional Irish instrumental music has become imperative.

By complementing our musical studies with an examination of the individuals who maintain the folk tradition, we learn more about the life of this tradition than by simply basing our knowledge on the surviving products of the folk culture. Through Jack Coen, I have tried to show that not only are the items of a folk culture important for folklorists to preserve, equally important is a documentation of the means by which they have functioned and persisted as a part of the traditions of a culture, thus enabling one to appreciate the role of the performer in sustaining his folk traditions.

APPENDIX

1 DOUBLE JIG

Musical notation for '1 DOUBLE JIG' in G major, 3/8 time. It consists of four staves. The first two staves show the melody with a repeat sign at the end. The third and fourth staves show a more complex melodic line with triplets and a breath mark (1) above a phrase.

2 TOUCH ME IF YOU DARE

Musical notation for '2 TOUCH ME IF YOU DARE' in G major, 4/4 time. It consists of five staves. The first two staves show the melody with a triplet. The third and fourth staves show a more complex melodic line with a breath mark (1) above a phrase. The fifth staff shows a final melodic phrase.

(1) - Indicates a breath taken only on the repeat of the phrase.

3 THE FRIENDLY VISIT

Musical score for "The Friendly Visit" in G major, 3/4 time. The score consists of five staves. The first staff is the melody, featuring a sequence of eighth and quarter notes with several triplets. The second and third staves are accompaniment, with the second staff containing a bass line and the third staff containing a treble line accompaniment. The fourth and fifth staves are additional accompaniment parts, with the fifth staff ending with a double bar line. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

4 BANKS OF NEWFOUNDLAND

Musical score for "Banks of Newfoundland" in G major, 3/4 time. The score consists of five staves. The first staff is the melody, featuring a sequence of eighth and quarter notes with several triplets. The second and third staves are accompaniment, with the second staff containing a bass line and the third staff containing a treble line accompaniment. The fourth and fifth staves are additional accompaniment parts, with the fifth staff ending with a double bar line. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

5 BATTLE OF AUGHRIM

The image shows four staves of musical notation for a piece titled "5 BATTLE OF AUGHRIM". The first three staves are in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The first staff contains a melody with a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the melody with another triplet. The third staff features a more complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The fourth staff continues the melody, also featuring a triplet. Below the fourth staff are three empty staves.

1. This double jig was learned by Jack in the United States from Larry Redican. Jack does not remember a name for this tune, although he does remember that it was not The Lark on the Strand as it appears in Brendan Breathnach, Coel Rince Na hEireann, #7, called An Fhuiseag ar an Tra or The Lark On the Strand.
2. Jack learned Touch Me If You Dare while growing up in Ireland from his father. This tune appears in O'Neill's, The Dance Music of Ireland, #631, under the same title.
3. This hornpipe was learned in Ireland from Jim Conroy, and it is found in O'Neill's collection, The Dance Music of Ireland, #894, as The Friendly Visit.
4. Jack learned The Banks of Newfoundland in the United States from Paddy O'Brien. The tune is published in Breathnach's, Coel Rince Na hEireann, #8, and is called Bruacha Thalamh an Eisc.
5. This lament was written after the Battle of Aughrim in 1691, when troops of King William of England defeated the Irish army. Jack learned the lament from the old-time fife players in the fife and drum band. The tune was commonly heard as the signature tune of the Aughrim Slopes Ceili Band.

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