

Winter 12-19-2013

Traditional Irish Music in New Jersey and New York

Peter L. Ford

Lawrence E. McCullough

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/isds-studies>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Celtic Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ford, Peter L. and McCullough, Lawrence E., "Traditional Irish Music in New Jersey and New York" (2013). *Studies on the Irish-American Experience in New Jersey and New York*. 5.
<https://scholarship.shu.edu/isds-studies/5>

Traditional Irish Music in New Jersey and New York

In this pairing of articles, we are given two perspectives on traditional Irish music in New Jersey and New York. Peter L. Ford and Lawrence E. McCullough, both practitioners of this art form, occupy different yet complementary positions in the trad scene in our area. Ford is an up-and-coming musician, building a strong name for himself because of his noteworthy musical skill and bridging genres and learning the unique ways in which trad music enhances his own appreciation of the music of his heritage. McCullough is a sage, bearing a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology and participating for years in egalitarian sessions with seasoned musicians and neophytes alike. In this publication, Ford provides us with a creative, impassioned, and honest recounting of his own experiences in the trad music scene, and teaches us what he has learned about how to get involved in this always-evolving art form. McCullough counterbalances Ford's exploration with a brief history of trad music and an outline of its increasing visibility in our area. We think that you'll find both of these pieces instructive for seasoned musicians, new musicians, and those whose only instruments are fingers tapping the table and toes tapping the floor in the neighborhood pub.

Getting Good: Trad-heads, Tunes, and Amateurs

By Peter L. Ford

The bar was packed. There was some sort of community fundraiser going on, cramming men and women in their late thirties up against the bar-top and into each other's faces, but that did not stop anyone from yelling hoarsely into each other's ears. Under a canopy of flat screen televisions and pennants from Glen Ridge's athletic past, people moved through the crowd, a drink in either hand, like ants bearing a cold, liquid crumb. Directly opposite, in the front corner of the bar, I sat around a table with five other musicians. Larry McCullough, playing flute and

whistle that night, turned to me between a set of tunes and said, “We should go around this place and drop an Ambien in about ten drinks. See if we can get some sort of osmosis effect going.” I doubted that Ambien could affect a group of revelers who likely have purses full of similar “prescriptions,” but their volume didn’t stop our playing.

After the waitress came with another round of the drinks for the musicians, courtesy of the owner, a young fiddler named Amy looked around and launched into an up-tempo reel. The volume of the other patrons forced us to lean in to hear what the tune was. Like fans in a stadium, a wave went around the circle, each of us nodding in understanding once we figured it out, and we started playing our own particular instrument. I had never met several of the players that night, but all of us played continuously for three hours, save the odd cigarette, knowing the tunes but not each other. The red-faces at the bar were as oblivious to us as we were to them, but sitting near us were a few older couples tapping their feet along with the music, offering a clap or two between sets. That was all we could expect and that was enough, because we had the music, and the music we were playing we can only play with those who know it, so in a sense, we were all of us playing for ourselves.

Beneath the personal and experiential aspect of the Irish traditional music, there is a cultural and historical component. Granted, there is a repository of thousands of tunes, most of them written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in comparison, there have been few additions to the modern tune lexicon. I have to wonder then, how is this music so alive when the tunes have the vitality of Latin? It is like the relationship of the museum to the studio, or the English Department to the Creative Writing Department. Where is it preserved and where does it grow? The music is being preserved, but in the people I have talked to and played with, I tried

to understand if trad is kept in formaldehyde. I do not think so as I sit in the corner of a bar sweating and strumming to songs older than the town I'm in.

I have been playing Irish traditional music with some seriousness for about three and a half years. By playing, I mean I have spent hours at home trying to learn as many tunes as I can so that I can go to a bar and sit in with a group of musicians who play this music. That is putting it quite simply. Playing Irish music in a modern context is much different than being in a rock band or a jazz group. To play and perform "trad" is an odd amalgam of individual work and democratic consensus. The "performing" context usually takes place at a bar that designates one night a week or two in which musicians, mostly playing fiddles, whistles, flute, guitars, and accordions, among other instruments, are allotted a corner of the bar to sit together in a circle and play tunes.

On my own journey within Irish traditional music, I slowly learned how to act in a session, and also learned a few more tunes. All the while, though, I wondered as I ventured through this new musical landscape, who are these people, and why are they playing this music? These are basic questions that can be asked of most any music, but there is something different about Irish music that befuddles these broad questions. The root of the matter is that this is an ethnic genre primarily played and kept alive by amateurs. It comes from one group of people, but I sit in at sessions next to a former member of the Israeli army, or across from a Japanese business man and think, I'm Irish, but I blow compared to these guys. At the same time, I think of many of the musicians I play with in other genres and see long hair and cigarettes, while at a session I sometimes feel grossly under-salaried hanging out with clean-cut lawyers.

They play tunes, not songs, because songs often imply some element of rehearsal and dynamics. “Trad,” however, is unrehearsed, that is, no one is really sure who is going to show up at the session. It is an open session, meaning that anyone and everyone is welcome to play, and the lone qualifier is knowing some tunes. Larry McCullough, Ph.D. ethnomusicologist and musician, the Virgil to my Dante in the theoretical world of Irish Traditional music, told me, “it’s easy. . . well, let’s say the entry level is low-bar. . . you can go into a session, play one tune and you’re actually participating. . . try walking into a Peruvian music session or a Middle Eastern session and “jamming” with those cats. . . the level of even basic knowledge is way too high, but with old-time and Irish you can start out totally basic and work your way up and still play in a session or ceili with master players.”

When I asked him what is so appealing about this music to people of different background and skills levels, he said that it is “because you don’t really need to know a special language to participate in ITM (unless you want to sing Gaelic songs), it’s an idiom open to anyone who can play basic tunes in a basic fashion, and with the community that develops at sessions, it’s attractive to amateurs as well as professionals.”

I came to my first session knowing maybe four tunes, which by most standards is a drop of water in the ocean. I sat down in a circle of guys in their fifties and sixties. I brought with me my significant background in bluegrass, an American mutation of the music the Scots-Irish brought to the States in the nineteenth century. I thought my loose musical-genetic history would ease me into the group of old, red-faced men sitting around with familiar instruments. I was pathetically wrong. Not only was there a new vocabulary and repertoire, there was a new decorum and etiquette to the music, and all of this among strangers who knew these hidden codes.

It is relatively easy to take an etiquette misstep at a session. There are no rule books or finishing schools for people who set out to play Irish music. Instead, these lessons are learned through looks of derision or through the eloquence of irate musicians outside the bar during a smoke. Here is a quick tutorial that I approach sessions with:

1) Know tunes – if you show up and you only know five or six, you are going to run out of tunes in about five minutes. For some beginners, this crisis can be averted by playing an instrument that is not reliant on actual melodies, i.e., chordal instruments (guitar or bouzouki), or percussion (bodhran, spoons). Granted, playing in the rhythm section of an Irish session has its own difficulties; that is, as opposed to having thousands of tunes written out for melody, rhythm and accompaniment are entirely improvisational, which can lead to its own assortment of embarrassing train-wrecks.

2) Always have a “set.” A set is a combination of tunes, usually three, that are strung together so as to create a longer piece. Most, if not all, of these tunes run about forty-five seconds long. Most sessions will play each tune three times, and then go onto the next tune, and so on. Therefore, there is a total playing time of about four to five minutes for each set. These sets often combine somewhat dissimilar tunes in terms of keys. An average set might start with a tune in G, then go to one in D, and then maybe back to G, which lends a mood change to the set. However, sets at a session almost never combine different types of tunes, i.e., jigs and reels, polkas and slip jigs. This is important because these “types” are in different time signatures. If a reel goes to a jig, the entire feel of the set has to be re-oriented, often losing the momentum of the previous tune or tunes. On the topic of sets, if you ever encounter a session and you hear

someone start a tune, and then they only play that single tune, you can see faces of loss and despair if another tune does not immediately follow. Stopping after a minute and a half of playing feels like *coitus interruptus* set to music.

I went outside with Steve Wickins for a smoke after one such incident. Just as I was lighting my cigarette Steve exclaimed, “Somebody’s got to talk to that f-----. Who has the b---- to do that to some of the players in there? And then to look around like a grinning idiot afterwards?” He turned away, threw his hands up and said to the street, “Unbelievable!” These players take this stuff very seriously.

3) Relax. Though it sometimes feels like you are playing a touch football game with the Steelers, you have to remember that everybody started somewhere. My problem was often showing up late or stepping out to get a drink or a smoke and not realizing that a tune from my limited repertoire was being played. Later on in the session I would suggest playing it in a set. I remember one time doing as much and then looking across to a fiddler as he said, “Well, we already played it.”

Larry McCullough, who was sitting next to me, put his whistle up to his mouth and said, “But we can play it again,” and then ripped right into it. It was like having a dunce’s cap pulled off my head, but set nearby in case I should want to put it on again.

I am left wondering why is this music, a decidedly ethnic genre that has a running index of about thirty-thousand tunes, played by such various people. And it’s not just an outlet for some – it is a very real and difficult hobby. I talked to one player, Steve Wickins, about a Japanese fiddler that makes most of the sessions, and Steve re-enacted the fiddler saying in a

definitely un-P.C. imitation, “If I learn three tunes every day, I should be very good in ten years.”

The math does not work out, but the intention is true: this is a serious music that takes time and effort. It is about loving, just loving the music and the process.

Sitting down to write about this music and the people and who play it, I find myself searching for what makes people approach an ethnic music like trad with a professional diligence for amateur results. By this I mean, they take the time and energy to perform at exceptionally high levels of playing, but for no pay and little recognition. A significant number of these players are not playing because it was their parents’ music, or anything blood-related; rather, they came upon a style of music that is daunting yet feasible. Moreover, it does not entertain the illusions of selling out stadiums or waking up with groupies. Instead the reward is getting in some laughs between tunes, sipping a pint, and showing off what you know and learning what you didn’t.

Larry McCullough handed me a copy of an article which he had published in 1980, and I’m pretty sure this was the first copy he made judging by the rust on the staples. In it he traces the development of the session, with its origins in the ceili (an Irish dance party) up to its modern formations. Before the twentieth century, Irish music was performed by a soloist, but it was not until the growing popularity of ceilithe (ceili plural) that a “band” was required, thus forcing the musicians to tailor their individual abilities into a cohesive dance band. A testament to Larry’s intelligence and class is his ability to sidestep the St. Patrick’s Day ignominy without even mentioning it: “the Irish social organizations provide a Cinderella community that comes

into being for a day or a night once a week, once a month, or perhaps only once a year before vanishing again upon conclusion of the particular event.”¹

Larry McCullough, at around 6’1”, stands out among many of the short, and sometimes stout, players at the session. It is difficult not to focus on him despite his usual position in a dark periphery of the players’ circle. Moreover, he’s the guy in the white linen suit. I’ve heard another flautist describe Larry and his style as “a very fine, smooth, beautiful, crushed velvet sock.” Larry brings a level of class to the congregation of musicians dressed in jeans, t-shirts, or whatever they still have on from work. Larry’s attention to his breezy appearance crosses over to his free, yet subtly thorough, playing.

I first met Larry at Kilkenny House in Cranford, NJ, when he sat down next to me about forty-five minutes after the session started. After a brief nod to me, during which his brushed-back brown hair stayed eerily put, Larry leaned in to listen to what the tune was and immediately started playing along. I got up to catch a smoke with Steve after about two more sets, and as Steve cupped his around his lighter he spoke through the cigarette between his lips, “You know Larry McCullough’s sitting next to you.”

In my ignorance I said something to the effect of, “Well, does he know he’s sitting next to me?”

“Don’t be a t---,” Steve told me.

If you are a real trad-head, you keep your ear to the ground, staying abreast of who is tapping their feet in the growing circle of traditional Irish music in the New York City area.

¹ Lawrence E. McCullough, “The Role of Language, Music, and Dance in the Revival of Irish Culture in Chicago, Illinois,” *Ethnicity* 7 (1980): 439.

Knowing not only the music, but also the players, is of unspoken importance, and Larry exists in a weird Venn-diagram in which he knows the tunes, knows the players, and everybody knows about him. Larry is not only an authority on the techniques of trad, but he is also a Ph.D. ethnomusicologist. With his hair falling onto his shoulders and a glass of water with lemon typically placed in front of him, I thought that I might consider Larry an academic if I went to college under a beach umbrella with a margarita, but more likely a pint of stout, sitting in front of me. As I've come to know Larry, I have learned that he has done a lot of stuff, really well. As a playwright and author he's won 48 awards in 32 literary competitions, as well as publishing 182 poems and short stories in 92 North American literary publications. As a musician, he has played on over 49 major label recordings, as well as working on the soundtracks for several of Ken Burns's documentaries, not to mention the Neil Jordan film, *Michael Collins*. He has published over 1,200 newspaper and magazine articles. His work with theatre has led him to compose scores for numerous plays and incidental theatre.

Larry, true to form, was easy-going when he and I were sitting together at a session at Fitzgerald's in Glen Ridge, NJ on a particularly loud night. Loud is an understatement. It was like trying to hum a tune in the middle of a stampede on the Serengeti. There was some sort of fundraiser going on, filling the bar with middle-aged parents getting lit while babysitters counted the minutes back home. I have no problem with a nice rowdy crowd getting lit, but being on the player side of the scene is exceptionally different – imagine tuning in the Thunderdome. Remember, one of the key aspects of a session is it is acoustic – no electric guitars to cut through three guys hollering about their handicap, and let's suppose they're talking about golf.

Back at Fitzgerald's, I couldn't help but think about the people with whom I was playing. Next to me was Amy, a petite girl with a background specialty in Cape Breton fiddling; across

was Greg, a tall, lumberjack-looking type with a resonator mandolin; next to him was Steve, his shaved head and glasses common to German architects hovering over his bodhran; next to me was Larry, pulling whistles out of his suit coat magically between tunes and sips of water; and then me, younger than everyone else and making up the chords as I went along. We were an odd bunch. It is terrible to judge by appearances, but I can tell that most everyone is approaching this music with some varied musical experience other than playing trad.

Steve is a perfect example, if there can be one, of the unusual backgrounds that most players in the U.S. walk into a session with. Firstly, he undercuts this idea because he is British. Steve came over to the States with one of the many rock bands he played with in the mid-Eighties. He still plays in rock bands, though not professionally anymore. His current band, Streams of Whiskey, is a Pogues cover band. The Pogues are a band from Ireland and England that often takes traditional Irish songs and put them through a blender of punk rock and jazz. Steve's voice has an eerie similarity to that of the band's lead singer, Shane MacGowan – helped by decades of smoking. His raspy Sussex accent seems an anachronism in playing trad, but in truth, it is not. Most of the players at sessions are of limited, if any, Irish descent. Not to mention that there is a significant population of trad musicians (some of the best) in the United Kingdom.

Steve also looks a bit different than everyone else. He seems younger than the other older guys that show up to play; there is something about his thick-rimmed glass and how he keeps his head shaved to the skin that gives of an impression of youth. Though he has two daughters in college, he brings a rock attitude to this seemingly old-fashioned music. He and I sync up during sets, playing behind the music with an intense syncopation that sometimes throws

other players off because of our steadfast time. The beats he plays are as un-Irish as his accent, but he still knows when and where to lay into a driving traditional rhythm.

Steve had always been a drummer and a singer, albeit in punk and rock groups, but in Irish sessions, he plays the bodhran. The bodhran (pronounced bow-rah-n) is essentially a drum that has not changed much since the Stone Age. It was traditionally a war instrument, like the pipes and fifes, but since the 1960s, it has developed into a very serious instrument, both in composition and technicality. It also is the source of more jokes than the banjo - if you can believe that. It is a large wooden rim with a calf-skin stretched across one side, and the musician places one hand inside of the open end and controls the pitch by stretching or loosening the skin. It is not unlike the sound of some African drums, but the main difference is that it is struck with a tipper. A tipper is a rod about six to eight inches long in various shapes made of different types of woods, depending on the sound the musician wants. Steve told me one joke that he particularly hates about bodhrans:

“Q: What is the best type of tipper?”

“A: A penknife.”

As I smirked, Steve said with a sneer, “Clever.”

Bodhran is perhaps *the* instrument that most people think that they can immediately play when setting out to play Irish music. Yet like the experiences of any instrument in trad, it is not as easy as it looks. Firstly, and most importantly, it requires a sense of time. Time is a peculiar thing in trad; that is, it is often quite fluid. Depending on who is playing, time is treated the same way it is in any music. It should be consistent, un-changing. Since Steve and I are often a two-man rhythm section for the sessions we go to, and we have a good deal of experience playing

other styles of music, I would like to say we have pretty good time, which leads to some knowing looks across the circle between him and me when there is player leading a tune with the meter of a dying jack-in-the-box. Then again, Steve really appreciates certain players who show up to most of the sessions who play out of tune and out of time. What he respects in these people is first and foremost that they have heart. Not to mention they know a bunch of tunes. Though hearing some of these “heartfelt” players by themselves can recall chalkboards and cats, what they manage to do is keep the session moving.

The modern session is never an individual effort. It almost seems rude to have all of these people drive countless miles to sit around as one person performs a small concerto. That is not to say that it does not happen. Sometimes a particular guest or a regular who has been away for a long time will be asked to do something by himself. It is still uncommon. The same idea applies when someone plays a tune that no one else knows. It is not that the other players do not appreciate it, but the sound is so thin without the rest of the group. It does not have the same energy that fills a pub when everyone is digging into an up-tempo tune.

This seems to be the reason Steve got into the music. He loves the idea that you can just show up, do your best, and “you don’t have to lug any g--d---- gear around.” I feel the same way, and I am sure most other players do, too. It is like playing a pick-up football game: everyone knows the rules, each person knows their particular strengths, and they all know that after the game they will be better for the exercise and the camaraderie. In sessions, however, you can drink.

Steve does not drink. For that matter, a good number of the players do not drink. Many have a cup of tea, coffee, or glass of water. This somewhat confuses the idea that most people

have about Irish music. For many, it is some drinking songs on a juke box on March 17th, yet most of the singing that is infrequently done at sessions pertains to the I.R.A. of some other melancholy subject relating to having to leave Ireland. As a guitar player, I have decided to update my repertoire by learning some of these songs, but also with the intention that they have a specific melody that other instruments usually play. It is the same idea as playing a set alone, it just does not have the same collective frequency without the group playing together.

That is not to say that I do not have a couple of drinking songs in my bag. These types of songs are what the “crowd,” and I use that word loosely, can get into. Singing and lyrics are something that anyone with a basic vocabulary can access. Moreover, it is a nice break for the musicians who are not playing anything. This is usually when Steve and I go out to catch a smoke before the next set begins.

On a Wednesday night in December when it was really starting to get cold, Steve and I stood outside of The Kilkenny House in Cranford, NJ, talking about some of the players just on the other side of the windows. It was around 10:00 and the road was empty from where we were on a small side street of the downtown. This “imitation-Pub,” as Steve calls it, is a lot like most of the pubs in North Jersey. It has some memorabilia of Ireland hanging on the yellow, sponge-painted walls, demonstrating an obvious attempt at recreating the smoke-stained inside of a real Irish pub. Its laminated menus with a section called “Irish Specialties” are a far cry from the chalkboard menus of Ireland that have not been washed in decades. The big difference is the Clockwork Orange-esque ubiquity of flat screen televisions.

“You would never see that over there [Ireland],” Steve said of the shiny screens all over the bar. “They might bring one in for the World Cup. And that is your country playing. None

of this bullshit about minor league baseball,” He is bothered by the “fakeness” of these pubs. It is not uncommon to finish a set and hear the radio playing through the speakers near the ceiling. Invariably, someone gets up to tell the bar to turn them off, but it says something about sessions: we are not necessarily asked to play, but allowed to play. The painful thing is that we do not really bring in a crowd. That is not to say that as people are leaving they often come by the circle and say what a nice surprise it was to hear such great music. This weird drama often permeates the Kilkenny House. Sometimes the group will be so into a particular set that we all jump out of our seats when the guys at the bar holler after a touchdown.

There are never stages at sessions, nor are there fancy lights, fog machines, or rooms in the back to warm up. There are still petulant owners, managers, and bartenders. At another session at the Kilkenny House, we were finishing up, and Rich Brautigan, a banjoist and singer, said that he would like to play the last set for a group representing some Irish organization (what my grandmother referred to as “gun-runners” for the I.R.A.) from a nearby town. Apparently one of these members said to the manager something to effect of “You c---- should treat the band a lot better.” Apparently he noticed that the radio was on.

As we packed up, the manager, a large red-faced man from Kilkenny, Ireland, came over and yelled at Rich and told him to tell those people to never come back. I was surprised anyone was even listening, let alone observing the treatment of the musicians. I guess this is worth chalking up as a resounding round of applause.

Regardless, these moments of appreciation are few. Playing at sessions never really feels like it is about the applause. Instead, it is one of the older players telling you it was a good set, or the feeling that you knew every tune for the past half hour. Oftentimes, when I get into my

car, I think about how I had no idea what was going on at certain points, unable to find even the key of what was being played. Lately, these moments have been balanced out with the times where an older guy will compliment me on my chord choices. The best compliment I have received from Larry regarded either my health or my playing: “It feels empty when you step out for a smoke.”

Steve and I still step out for smokes every hour or so. We, the de facto rhythm section, need a break because we play on every tune. Though we do not know the exact melodies of each set, we keep it moving, and we move it along best when all of the other players are in it too. Although most of the people who come to play at sessions are doing so out of their own pocket, they keep coming. They keep learning more tunes and meeting new people. I am not sure if there is any reason for playing this music beyond a simple love for it, an unfettered appreciation for the odd people, the sketchy bars, and the difficult music. It is a singular feeling: walking into a situation unsure of the outcome, let alone the process, but knowing you will be better for it, though I am not sure how. For the most part, it is just fun. Larry told me a story of an old tin whistler who was playing a ceili years ago. This guy danced a tune, then played a set, lowered his head as if he fell asleep, and died on the bandstand. Larry said with a smile, “I think I would like to go like that.”

Reference

McCullough, Lawrence E. “The Role of Language, Music, and Dance in the Revival of Irish Culture in Chicago, Illinois.” *Ethnicity* 7 (1980): 436-44.

The Irish Traditional Music Network in Northern New Jersey

By Lawrence E. McCullough

Irish traditional music is a vocal and instrumental idiom that coalesced in the early 1600s in Ireland, drawing structure, instruments and repertoire from Scots, English, French and native Irish musical sources. By the end of the 18th century, Irish traditional music was performed throughout Ireland in forms familiar to us today — dance music such as jigs, reels, hornpipe, slip jigs and song-based forms such as ballads, airs and the sean-nos style of Gaelic folk song. In the 19th century the music found its way to the English stage and American minstrelsy and vaudeville. In the second decade of the 21st century, the public performance of Irish traditional music in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area is nurtured by a network of live music sessions, music clubs, programs on local radio and television stations and websites, blogs, online meet-ups and podcasts.

The “session” is a musical occasion where the musician plays primarily for self-satisfaction in the company of fellow musicians. The musicians playing in a public session are not attempting to entertain, although there may be a number of bystanders who are thoroughly entertained by the performance. The chief motivation of a performer in a session is to express his or her musical individuality by engaging in a communal performance occasion with other musicians; if members of an audience are pleased with the musical performance, the musicians are also pleased, but their priority is toward making the musical performance fulfilling to themselves, not the audience. The session has been the chief vehicle for keeping Irish traditional music alive in the U.S. during years when the idiom was not so widespread or popular. The last two decades may have witnessed an increase in céilís, concerts and theatre shows featuring Irish

traditional music, but, without the existence of the session, it is difficult to see how this revival could ever have been possible.

Currently, there are 34 Irish traditional music sessions occurring at least monthly in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area — 9 in New Jersey, 10 in Manhattan, 7 in the other New York City boroughs, 8 in Long Island and in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester Counties. Most public sessions are sponsored by and take place in commercial taverns. A few are convened by Irish traditional music clubs. These clubs are non-profit cultural organizations affiliated with CCE — Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Musicians' Association of Ireland) — a Dublin, Ireland-based musical organization formed in 1951 and sponsored by the Irish government. The Mid-Atlantic Region of CCE includes 10 music clubs, 7 of which are in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area: Claddagh na nGael Branch (Central NJ), Michael Rafferty Branch (Northern New Jersey), Craobh Úll Mór Nua Eabhrac (New York City, NY), Killoran-Clancy Branch (Queens & Brooklyn, NY), Michael Coleman Branch (Bronx, Westchester, Rockland Counties, NY), Martin Mulvihill Branch (Rockland County, NY), Mulligan-Quinn Branch (Nassau & Suffolk Counties, NY).

The CCE music clubs sponsor Irish traditional music concerts by local and visiting musicians, sessions, céilis, instruction in music and Irish language. The Mid-Atlantic Region clubs hold an annual music competition called a “fleadh cheoil,” at which music performers qualify to compete in the All-Ireland competitions for Irish Traditional Music held in Ireland each August. The music clubs have done much to increase the status of the performer of Irish traditional music by bringing about recognition of the performer as an active carrier of an important aspect of the Irish cultural heritage.

Radio broadcasts in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area that included Irish traditional music began in the 1930s. Today, the music can be heard on 16 programs aired on 11 New Jersey/New York AM and FM radio stations and two web-radio broadcasts. Irish Traditional Music performers are featured on the *Out of Ireland* syndicated television program produced at WLIW-TV, Channel 21, on Long Island since 1994. The show is carried by 31 U.S. public television stations with an estimated audience of 6.3 million Irish-American homes.

Area performers of Irish traditional music use personal web sites to keep audiences and other performers aware of their performances and recordings. Irish traditional music news in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area is circulated via online calendars such as the Ceol Agus Rince (“Music and Dance”) calendar compiled by Maureen Donachie, chair of the Craobh Úll Mór CCE music club. The calendar is located on the web at www.my.calendars.net/ceolagusrince, and weekly updates are emailed to the subscribers.

The Irish American Culture & Heritage Online Meet-up Group is based in Belmar, New Jersey and located on the web at www.meetup.com/nj-irish-by-the-sea. Founded in February, 2008, this online organization has over 100 members who gather to listen to Irish music, dancing, Gaelic sports, the Gaelic language and more. In 2011, fiddler Gwen Orel of Millburn, NJ, created a blog and podcast titled New York Irish Arts located on the web at <http://newyorkirisharts.blogspot.com>. This includes articles, reviews and interviews on current Irish Traditional Music happenings in the Northern New Jersey/New York metro area.

The years to come will undoubtedly see area performers and promoters of Irish traditional music make use of newly evolving mass-market communications technology. But the

key to the music's future health will be the continued abundance of live music sessions and organized music club activity offering classes and events for musicians and their devotees.