

Sur la tranche :Mathilde Bosquillon de Jenlis M.Mus (Performance) 2017

The Fiddle and the Violin:  
Influence of Practice and Performance in Irish traditional music on the Classical  
Violinist

Mathilde Bosquillon de Jenlis

The Fiddle and the Violin: Influence of Practice and Performance in Irish traditional  
music on the Classical Violinist

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Music degree  
Dublin Institute of Technology  
Conservatory of Music and Drama

Supervisor : Peter Browne

September 2016

Mathilde Bosquillon de Jenlis

## DECLARATION

*I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of*

**Master's Degree (MMus)**

*Is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfilment for that stated above*

**Signed :**

**Date :**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF FIGURES AND MUSIC EXAMPLES .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE VIOLIN AND THE FIDDLE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE BODY AND THE INSTRUMENT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION .....	6
2.2. THE WHOLE BODY .....	7
2.3. POSITION OF THE HEAD ON THE VIOLIN .....	8
2.4. THE LEFT SIDE.....	10
2.5. THE RIGHT SIDE .....	12
2.6. CONCLUSION .....	13
<b>CHAPTER THREE: FROM TECHNIQUE TO MUSIC (FREEDOM AND CREATIVITY) .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. INTRODUCTION .....	16
3.2. RHYTHM .....	16
3.3. INTONATION .....	20
3.4. FREEDOM AND CREATIVITY IN MUSIC.....	22
3.4.1. <i>Introduction</i> .....	22
3.4.2. <i>Ornamentation and variation</i> .....	24
3.4.3. <i>Bow Techniques &amp; Creativity</i> .....	27
3.5. CONCLUSION .....	32
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: TEACHING AND LEARNING.....</b>	<b>33</b>
4.1. INTRODUCTION .....	33
4.2. TEACHING METHODS.....	33
4.2.1. <i>Introduction</i> .....	33
4.2.2. <i>Methods</i> .....	36
4.2.3. <i>Conclusion</i> .....	38
4.3. REPERTORY .....	43
4.3.1. <i>Introduction</i> .....	43
4.3.2. <i>Baroque Music</i> .....	44
4.3.3. <i>Repertory Inspired by Folk Music</i> .....	49
4.4. PSYCHOLOGY .....	51
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>58</b>
BOOKS .....	58
ONLINE SOURCES .....	59
DVD .....	59
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>60</b>

## **List of Figures and Music Examples**

### Chapter 1:

Figure 1.1. Twelfth-century carving on St Finan's Church, Lough Currane, Weterville, Co.Kerry

### Chapter 2 :

Figure 2.2 Martin Hayes

Figure 2.3a Joe Ryan

Figure 2.3b Julia Fisher

Figure 2.4a John Doherty

Figure 2.4b David Oistrakh

### Chapter 3:

Figure 3.4. Map of Ireland with the main fiddler by region

Example 3.4 Classical score: Tzigane by Ravel

### Chapter 4:

Figure 4.2. Memory Operation

Example 4.3.a extract of the gigue from the second partita for solo violin by Bach.

Example 4.3.b Master's Return

## **Acknowledgements**

My sincere thanks go to my supervisor Peter Browne for his guidance and patience during this project. I would also like to thank all the musicians who took the time to consider and respond to my questions. Thank you also to the violin and fiddle player Zoe Conway who took the time to reply to my questions. Finally, my heartfelt thanks to my fiddle teachers Odhran O'Casaide and Kevin Glackin for their support and encouragement throughout my studies. My thanks also to family and friends for their support during my discovery of Irish traditonal music

## Abstract

In what sense can it be enriching for a violinist trained in classical music to be interested in other styles of music? The violin is an instrument which allows the musician to play a whole variety of styles (classical, Irish traditional, jazz, country-folk, Klezmer and so on). One in particular, Irish traditional music, finds its origins, as does classical music, in European music that evolved in parallel to it. Occasionally, their paths crossed, as in works written by O'Carolan, with the violin occupying a prominent place in both traditions. However, in each, the approach to music and to the violin is distinct, even to the name of the instrument, the *violin* in classical music and *fiddle* in Irish traditional music. For the classical violinist, it is fundamental that the technical and musical knowledge of the instrument be taken as far as possible. With this dynamic in mind, the classical violinist, who encounters Irish traditional music, discovers and develops another facet of his instrument.

This research project explores the different aspects of the fiddle that might have a positive impact on learning the violin, beginning with an analysis of the differences in the positioning of the body in relation to the instrument. Thereafter, the analysis moves to a deeper level, to examine the technical aspects which have a direct influence on the music, such as rhythm, intonation and musical phrasing. Finally, it assesses those aspects which surpass the techniques associated with the instrument, such as the different methods of learning, the repertory and finally the psychology of the musician as regards his instrument.

Based also on a series of interviews with professional violinists/fiddlers who perform in both fields, the findings of the study indicate that studying the violin from the point of view of various aspects in traditional music can be enriching and instructive to the classical musician. Among these is the approach to rhythm, a greater freedom in the bowing technique and a better understanding of the repertoire, notably of Baroque and other forms of music based on popular themes and dance rhythms. Finally, it emerges that the musician develops a relationship with his instrument that is free of complexes.

## INTRODUCTION

When choosing my research topic, exploring the ways in which learning the fiddle in Irish traditional music be of interest for a classical violinist, came as an obvious choice of subject matter. Indeed, as a violin player for over twenty years, specialising in classical music, the topic was of particular personal interest. Two years ago, I came to Ireland with my violin, armed with my classical training, to discover what was, for me, a completely new style of music: the world of Irish traditional music. As I gradually discovered a completely new approach to music in general and the violin in particular, that in certain ways I was also beginning to improve the way I played and raise my overall level of play in the classical violin. The more I discovered, the more I was able to confirm this intuition. These impressions I found I shared with other violinists, who, like myself, had undergone training in both traditions.

In this study I will set out the reasons for which studying the Irish violin or fiddle can allow a player to develop an approach that might also be of benefit or positively influence the classical violinist, from a technical, musical or indeed pedagogical point of view. In order to explore the issue that this topic raises within the requirements of a Master's thesis, I will concentrate principally on an analysis of the function of the fiddle in Irish traditional music. Certain aspects of the technique of playing the classical violin will be explained in this thesis but my focus will concentrate particularly on those aspects of the classical violin that can be specifically improved by playing and performing Irish traditional music. Working on this particular research topic has given me the opportunity to further my own investigations and reflect on my own personal questions. For my research, I not only by collected and assessing information from general and specialised studies on the subject but also met and talked with professionals in the field, both of the violin and the fiddle. Amongst those professionals I met, I have particularly mentioned Zoe Conway and Odhran O Casaide. Both of these players are recognised, well-known professional players, who produce as much in classical violin as they do Irish traditional music. Moreover, I have been able to substantiate what they had to say thanks to a survey carried out amongst students who have been trained in both classical violin and Irish traditional Music. I have also been able to watch videos of masterclasses given by well-known fiddlers such as Frankie Gavin, Kevin Bruke and



Charlie Lennon, which have enabled me to increase my understanding of the techniques employed in playing the Irish fiddle.

Before establishing the close links that underlie the similarities between the classical violin and the fiddle, it is essential to understand what distinguishes them. Hence, in the first chapter, entitled *The Differences between the Fiddle and the Violin*, I have set out to examine what is understood by the terms traditional Irish music and classical music.

In the second chapter, entitled *The Body and the Instrument*, I have focused on an analysis of the important physiological aspects of the body as a whole and, more specifically, of the relationship between the body and the instrument. Here, I have limited my focus to the position of the body of the fiddler and the violinist in relation to the instrument, in an attempt to introduce and then highlight the differences and similarities in both approaches.

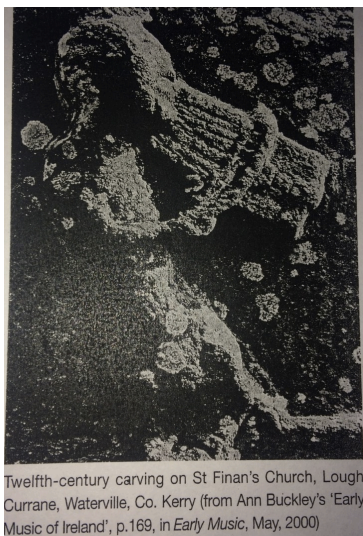
In my third chapter, entitled *From Techniques to Music*, I have sought to emphasise and underline the technical aspects of the instrument, associated with notions such as rhythm, intonation and musicality. In this chapter, I will analyse the technical approach of both schools as they relate to the search for a traditional and personal musical interpretation and results.

Finally, in my last chapter, entitled *Teaching and Learning Music*, I will attempt to go beyond the technical aspects of the instrument and focus on the more the general aspects that both the teacher and the pupil have to master when learning the fiddle/violin. Here, I will examine the different methods of learning which are available to the musician. I will also look at the aspects of the repertory which are important for the musician to develop, as well as his/her psychological approach with regard to the fiddle/violin, both during the learning phase and in performance.

## CHAPTER ONE: The Difference between the Violin and the Fiddle

Before analysing the characteristics of the Irish fiddle that might influence learners when learning the classical violin, it is important to establish the notable differences that exist between these two traditions. Firstly, it is interesting to point out that each tradition uses a different word to describe the same instrument. In the book *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, the word fiddle is defined as “a term used to describe an array of bowed, stringed instruments, but in the Irish context, this means the standard orchestral violin, which is the most popular instrument played today in traditional dance music.”<sup>1</sup> It was in Ireland that the oldest example in Europe of a medieval stringed instrument played with a bow was found, dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Fiddles, or *fidle*, are also mentioned in an ancient poem describing the fair of Carman, found in the book of Leinster, a manuscript written in about 1160. While the term *fiddle* in all probability refers to a stringed instrument that was played with a bow, “it was not of course the modern violin, which was developed in its present form in Italy only in the second half of the sixteenth century.”<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1.1.<sup>3</sup> Twelfth-century carving on St Finan's Church, Lough Currane, Waterville, Co.Kerry



---

<sup>1</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), 256

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 258

<sup>3</sup> English translation from : Vignal Marc, *Dictionnaire de la musique*, (Larousse 2005)

According to *The Companion to Traditional Irish Music*, the violin “emerged in Italy in 1550, as the result of evolutionary experimentation there with medieval fiddle”<sup>4</sup> This new instrument proved to be perfectly suited to playing Irish music, principally for dance music. Indeed, “It had an acceptable sound, and the fingering was flexible enough to permit all forms of ornamentation”<sup>5</sup>. The use of the fiddle in its current form was widely used in Irish dance music in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term *violin* is defined as

“A stringed musical instrument of treble pitch, played with a horsehair bow. (...). It has four strings and a body of characteristic rounded shape, narrowed at the middle and with two f-shaped sound-holes.”<sup>6</sup>

In etymological and historical terms, the word *violin* is derived from the Italian *violino*, a diminutive form of the word *viola*, with the addition of the diminutive suffix *-ino*. In his article on “*The Etymology of the Word Violin and Violoncello*”, Robert Jesselson suggests that the words fiddle and the violin may actually share the same original name, which are both derived from the same Latin word, ‘*vitula*’<sup>7</sup>. The origin of the word *fiddle* is derived from the Anglo-Saxon term *fithle*, which itself originates from the Germanic *fipula* (close to *vedel* in Middle Dutch, the Dutch *veel*, the high German *fidula*, the German *Fiedel* and Old Norse *fiðla*). The Medieval Latin word *fidula* or *vitula* is certainly a loan word introduced from Germanic.<sup>8</sup> These gave rise to the words *viola* and *violin*, as set out in the following description of their etymology:

“The word ‘*Vitula*’ evolved separately into the Old French word ‘*vielle*’, which became the Medieval word ‘*vyell*.’ ‘*Vyell*’, and served as the source for the Old Provencal term ‘*viola*’, which was the primary term for the violin family or ‘*viola da braccio*’). The diminutive of the instrument became the ‘*violino*’.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Valley, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999) 256

<sup>5</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 80

<sup>6</sup> English Oxford living Dictionaries <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/violin> [Accessed 5 June 2017 ].

<sup>7</sup> *Vitula*: means ‘to sing or rejoice’.

<sup>8</sup> English translation from : Vignal Marc, *Dictionnaire de la musique*, (Larousse 2005)

<sup>9</sup> Robert Jesselson, ‘The Etymology of the word ‘*Violin*’ and ‘*Violoncello*’: Implications on Literature in the Early History of the Cello’, Available at <http://www.cello.org/Newsletter/Articles/celloetymology.htm> [Accessed 17 June 2017 ].

Nevertheless, as has been pointed out The violin is sometimes informally called a *fiddle*, particularly in Irish Traditional Music and bluegrass, but this nickname is also used regardless of the type of music played on it. Indeed, speaking in his DVD *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Charlie Lennon insists that the Irish fiddle is in fact the same instrument as the violin. He adds, however, that “It’s how you use and play it that makes the difference”.<sup>10</sup> It can be understood, therefore, that the main differences between the two instruments are to be found both in the ‘style of playing’, as well as in the repertory.

By definition, classical music “is a collection of so-called cultured, as opposed to popular music, Western music dating from the Renaissance to the present day.”<sup>11</sup> By ‘cultured’, we mean music where the structural, formal and theoretical aspects illustrate not only a profound artistic and aesthetic sense but also an unprecedented respect towards musical traditions. Classical music encompasses both secular and religious music, as well as instrumental and vocal, baroque and contemporary music, including serial and electro-acoustic music. Classical music is represented by composers such as Monteverdi, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Mahler and many others.

The divide between classical music (sometimes also known as *grand music*), and popular music can, however, be very slight. Renaissance (or classical) music, for example, takes its inspiration as much from Gregorian chant as it does from secular music played by minstrels, troubadours and other groups of medieval musicians. The distinction between popular and cultured is as blurred as it is complex. Nevertheless, as has been pointed out: “The key characteristic of European classical music, which distinguishes it from popular music and folk music, is that the repertoire tends to be written down in (the form) of musical notation, creating a musical part or score. It is the score that typically determines the details of rhythm, pitch or whether one or more musicians (singers or instrumentalists) are involved, which determines how the various parts are coordinated. Moreover, the written quality of the music has enabled a high level of complexity of the music. Nevertheless, the score tends to leave less room for practices such as improvisation and *ad libitum* ornamentation, which is frequently heard in popular music. Another difference is that whereas most popular styles adopt

---

<sup>10</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

<sup>11</sup>

the song (strophic) form or a derivation of this form, classical music has been noted for its development of highly sophisticated forms of instrumental music such as the concerto, symphony and sonata, and mixed vocal and instrumental styles such as opera. As these are written down, they can sustain larger forms and attain a higher degree of complexity.

By definition, Irish traditional music is first and foremost a form of 'traditional' music, as it encompasses the complete repertoire of music associated with a national or regional culture or a geographic zone. Oral and popular forms of music are usually transmitted by ear, although some musicians preferred to transcribe the music to a score, thus enabling them to archive them and retrieve them to be able to practice and perform them. Traditional music is distinct from folk music in that it does not set out to demonstrate the past or the history of the music (with costumes etc.). Instead, it attempts to keep alive music that belongs to popular cultural heritage within their contemporary context. Each musician or group can appropriate the music in his own particularly way or style, which itself is influenced by the specific cultural and social environment that in turn keeps it alive. The three essential concepts which define traditional music are its socio-cultural and geographical roots (and the degree to which it has taken root), transmission and re-creation. As Breandán Breathnach suggests, "traditional music is a system of music in its own right. It has its own rules and by these it must be judged"<sup>12</sup>. As he goes on to say, it has its own collective body of sound, style, practice and skills, recordings, transcriptions, knowledge, culture and archived information.

It is not easy to define the term "Irish traditional music". However, it can be added that it is a European form of music. In its structure, rhythmic, pattern and pitch arrangement, as well as the themes contained in its songs etc. it closely resembles the traditional music of Western Europe. As is explained in *The Companion to Traditional Irish music*, the majority of traditional music comes from the past, even from antiquity, with much of the repertory being known to have been popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is probably the case that some older melodies and lyrics survive but these have largely been adapted to the modern form. For the most part, traditional music is instrumental

---

<sup>12</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971), 88

played at a fast pace for “isometric dance”. In Irish traditional music, these are mostly jigs, reels and hornpipes. Only a few slower listening pieces have been composed for the fiddle or adapted from songs or airs, as they are known.

*The Companion to Traditional Irish Music* goes on to outline the changes to which traditional music was almost inevitably subject throughout the ages. “These changes could arguably be predictable, in an instrumental tradition, where the tunes are not written down but are actually composed on the instrument itself and transmitted orally, clear that to a large extent they will carry something of the character of the instrument on which they were composed,”<sup>13</sup> *The Companion* suggests. “A discussion of style must therefore include a detailed analysis of those instruments which have been important in the tradition and on which the music is still played”. It is here that style is formed and reshaped by succeeding generations. String, wind and free-reed instruments are predominate amongst the instruments in the traditional musical repertoire. Foremost among them are the fiddle, the whistle, the flute, the uilleann pipes and the concertina. Percussion instruments are of “minor importance”, *The Companion* points out. While “certain timbres are considered traditional, and certain stylistic techniques are used which arise from the nature of the instruments, all are forms of instruments found in Western Europe,”<sup>14</sup> a definition that underlines the Western roots of the tradition.

---

<sup>13</sup> Ó Canainn, Tomás: *Traditional Music in Ireland*, (Cork: Ossian Publication 1978) 1

<sup>14</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), 256

## CHAPTER TWO: The Body and the Instrument

### 2.1. Introduction

It is clear that the musician can make use of every part of the body to modulate the sound that the instrument makes and musical aims he/she wishes to convey. Indeed, the position that the player/musician adopts in relation to the instrument has a direct impact on the sound and the range of colour that the musician has at his or her disposal. To develop a particular sound, the violinist has to analyse the way in which he can use his body so as to convey what is in his head to his instrument. The body thus forms the direct link between the imagination and realisation.

As Breandán Breathnach underlines, “the traditional sound is the product of the traditional manner of holding instrument and bow, and of the areas of each brought into play.”<sup>15</sup> This is in contrast to what has been observed elsewhere in traditional music, that there is “less emphasis on technique than on acquiring a fluid, relaxed but rhythmic sound.”<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the position of the bow and the fiddle is not the principle concern, where many different techniques for this exist in Irish traditional music. As Charlie Lennon emphasises further: “relaxation is the key to all of this”<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the fiddler has to be considerably relaxed in his body to be able to play for a whole evening without tiring himself out (compared to playing during a session). Contrary to the fiddler, the classical violinist tends to pay particular attention to the position of the body in relation to the violin. The violinist spends long hours engaged in technical exercises, such as open string exercises, scales and so on, in order to acquire an ideal position with regard to the violin and the bow.

Before determining those aspects of the positioning of the fiddle which might be beneficial to the classical violinist, it is important to explore the principal characteristics of these two methods, in practice. To examine a general tendency as regards the positioning of the instrument, I will refer to general studies the techniques of the fiddle

---

<sup>15</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971), 91

<sup>16</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), 262

<sup>17</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

and video tutorials, as well as to an analysis of the positioning used by musicians who are most well-known in each of their particular fields. As each musician tends to adopt a personal approach to positioning the violin in relation to his or her body (just as each player is different in terms of personal body shape and morphology), I will analyse the general tendency in which the body is positioned. The technical and musical aspects of the instrument will be developed in the succeeding chapter.

## 2.2. The Whole Body

It has been observed that Irish traditional music is generally played when the musician is sitting. Indeed, whether the musician is playing in a session, lesson or concert, the seated position seems to be the traditional way that the fiddler has adopted. Only some fiddlers play while standing up and only during certain performances. Contrary to the violinist, the fiddler has “the right” to tap his/her foot during a performance. It has been observed that often the seated position allows the musician to subdivide time by tapping his feet. An example of this is Martin Hayes<sup>18</sup>, who often beats the crochets with his left foot and the quavers with his right foot (for reels and hornpipes).

Figure 2.2a<sup>19</sup> Martin Hayes



→ Sitting Position

---

<sup>18</sup> Martin Hayes (born 4 July 1962) is an Irish fiddler from County Clare. He is a member of the Irish-American supergroup The Gloaming.

<sup>19</sup> Photograph taken by Gary Williams Photography, 2011



How flexible the upper part of the body is varies according to each individual musician. For example, it has been observed that Martin Hayes moves his whole body depending on what effect he wants to achieve musically. This he manages to do while keeping his violin steady on his shoulder, even when raising or lowering his fiddle. He also tends to swing or rock his body from left to right in time with the rhythm. By contrast, Frankie Gavin<sup>20</sup> tends to keep his upper body relatively stable while playing.

In classical music, the violinist would play mostly standing up. Traditionally, he or she would only sit when playing in an orchestra or chamber music group, (unless he or she is playing in a duet). To achieve the best results from the instrument, the musician would have to work on his whole body movement, beginning with his feet and the way in which he is 'anchored' on the ground.

### **2.3. Position of the Head on the Violin**

The violin is positioned differently according to the different traditions and places where it is played. (In India, for example, the musician sits cross-legged and places the scroll of his or her instrument on the ground, which enables him or her to make rapid changes in position with the left hand to (re)produce a traditional Indian sound).

Some American folk fiddlers play it 'off the chest', or on the knee - this is appropriate for the range of notes they use (in the first position) and is considered more comfortable and aesthetically 'correct'.<sup>21</sup>

The chin rest was introduced in 1820 to facilitate gripping the instrument with the chin, thus freeing the hand to move into advanced positions to obtain a greater range of notes. Older Irish players may still play 'off the chest', and their fiddles will have no chin rest, but most players today hold the fiddle under the chin. This is also the case with the shoulder-rest, which was introduced later. As in classical music, some fiddlers play without a shoulder-rest. "Resting rather than held under the chin, the instrument drops at a distinct slope instead of being held at a right angle to the shoulder as is the modern

---

<sup>20</sup> Frankie Gavin: 1956, is one of the most renowned living Irish fiddler from County Galway. Though primarily known as a virtuoso fiddler and founder member of De Danann, he has composed several tunes

<sup>21</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), p257

habit.”<sup>22</sup>. Charlie Lennon, in his DVD *The Complete Irish Fiddle Techniques*, explains that this allows him to roll on the lower strings more easily. One example of this style of play is illustrated by Joe Ryan.

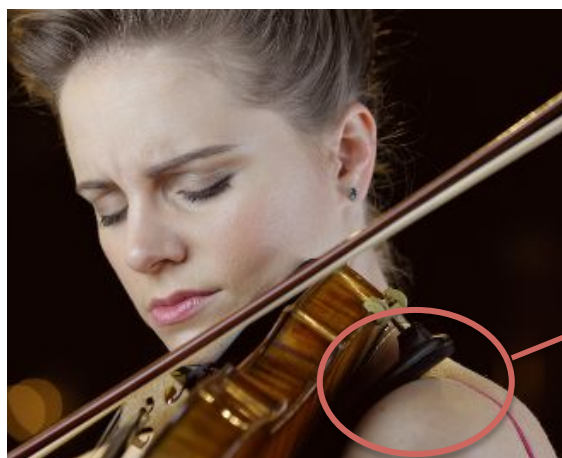
Figure 2.3a<sup>23</sup> Joe Ryan



The fiddle is not on the the shoulder and is resting under the chin

The classical violinist, by contrast, places the violin on the shoulder, but in such a way that it cannot slip or fall too far forward. This makes it easier for the player to keep the bow parallel to the bridge along its length, and frees up his left hand to be able to change position. The violin is holding by the shoulder

Figure 2.3b<sup>24</sup> Julia Fisher



The violin is holding by the shoulder

---

<sup>22</sup> Haigh Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott music 2013), 107

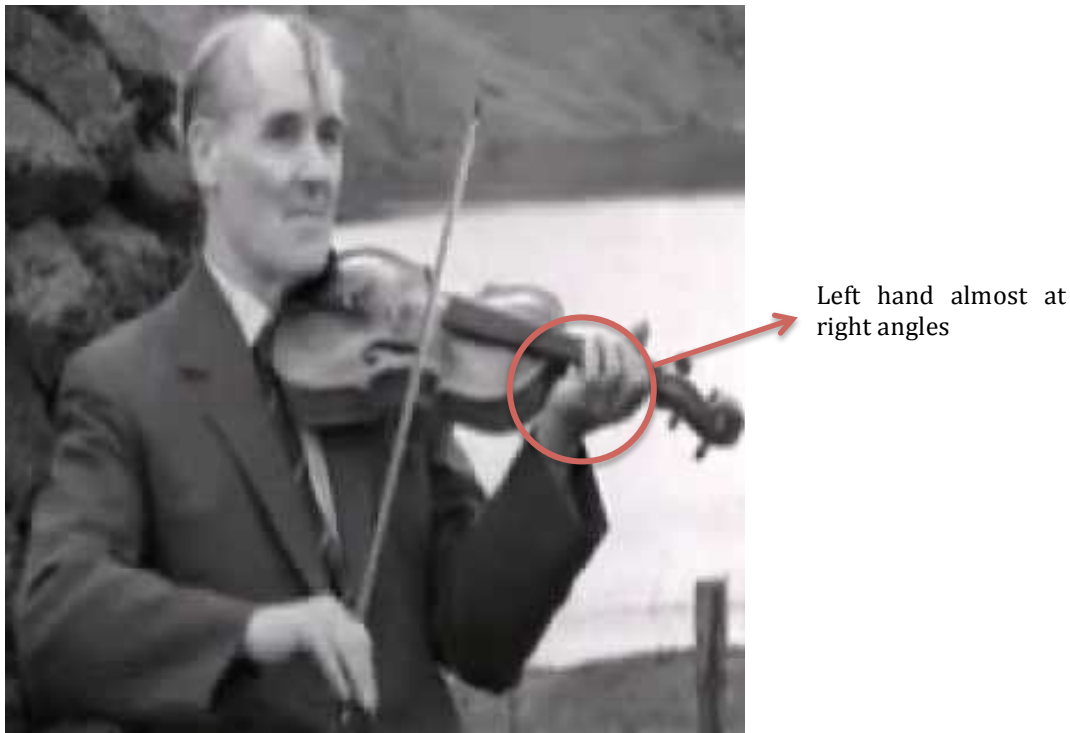
<sup>23</sup> Photograph taken by Celtic Cafe1993

<sup>24</sup> Photograph taken by Felix Broede 2007

## 2.4. The Left Side

“In Irish traditional music everything is played in first position.”<sup>25</sup> In the first position, it is possible to move from low G to B, with the fiddle held by the hand gripping the finger board. In the past, musicians often played with the palm of the fingering-hand held flat against the neck. The forearm of the left hand that holds the neck of the fiddle is held almost at right angles to the body. The hand is pressed downwards, so that the neck of the instrument is supported to an extent by the ball of the hand.

Figure 2.4a<sup>26</sup> John Doherty



The modern tendency is to extend the wrist outwards. Generally the fingers are kept close to the string. In fact, this enables the musician to limit the distance needed by the fingers on the left hand to change the note and increase dexterity and enhance his skill and technique. As regards the position of the elbow, Charlie Lennon asserts that “a good

---

<sup>25</sup> Haigh Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott music 2013), 50

<sup>26</sup> Photograph taken by youtube video 1960

way to see if it is in the right position is doing a roll with the left hand”<sup>27</sup>. Traditionally, Irish musicians seldom use vibrato, except when playing slow airs, when a small tight vibrato is used.

Fiddlers use a very fast and light finger movement to be able to do rolls, cuts and other ornamentations. Traditional fiddlers tend to use quite a lot of double stopping on strings which demand considerable effort from the left hand. As Zoe Conway explains in an interview, “You have to have a very strong technique to do some of these chords, especially when using for example the D note played with the 4th finger on the G string, while continuing the melody with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers on the D string. This is (a technique that) most commonly used by Donegal fiddle players.”<sup>28</sup>

To make these changes in position, the classical violinist has to keep the left hand in an extended position in relation to his/her arm. The position of the fingers on the string, however, varies according the speed required in the passage to be played and the type of vibrato used. In effect, the violinist varies the position of his elbow, depending on the position (first, second, third,...) and the string to be played.

Figure 2.4b<sup>29</sup> David Oistrakh



David Oistrakh Playing in fourth position → Left hand in an extended position

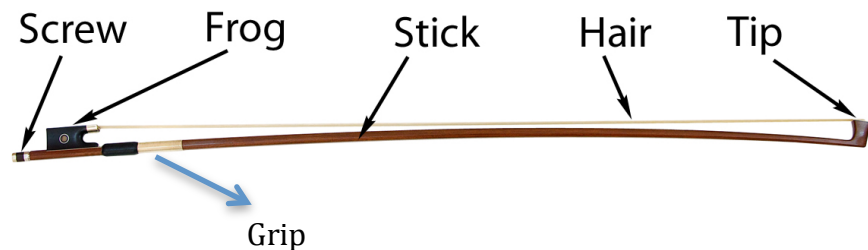
---

<sup>27</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Zoe Conway, Appendix A

<sup>29</sup> Photograph taken by unknown

## 2.5. The Right Side



"There is no set way of holding the bow in Irish music"<sup>30</sup>, affirms Charlie Lennon. Nevertheless, as has been observed, the left shoulder is generally kept low and relaxed. Fiddlers generally do not use their upper arm, as only rarely, if ever, do they use the part of their bow next to the frog. In traditional music, given that everything is played in the first position, there are plenty of very quick string crossings. In consequence, the fiddler has to handle the instrument smoothly to allow for the string crossing. As a result, the fiddler seldom uses his elbow, which stays in a static, more or less "relax(ed) and down" position<sup>31</sup>. Indeed, given that the fiddle is placed quite low on the neck and that the strings played most are in the higher strings (E and A), the fiddler does not need to lift his elbow.

Generally, the fiddler uses the forearm for the horizontal (up-/down-bow) and vertical (string crossing) movements. These movements will be more or less intense depending on the flexibility of the wrist, which varies from one fiddler to the next. According to Frankie Gavin, the movement with the bow "should be from the wrist, not the full arm"<sup>32</sup>. Indeed, it has been observed that fiddlers such as Seán McGuire, Seán Keane and Kevin Burke often use the wrist. Fiddlers such as Martin Hayes, Sean Ryan, Charlie Lennon and others, however, tend to keep the wrist in a fixed position.

The position of the hand on the bow and its use also vary considerably. Generally, the

---

<sup>30</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

<sup>31</sup> Charlie Lennon

<sup>32</sup> Frankie Gavin

bow is held somewhat rigidly above the nut, the ball of the thumb generally being flattened on the inside of the wood. Older players have a tendency to grip the bow some distance up the stick, away from the bottom or 'frog'. The grip which is predominantly used in classical violin playing, however, is in much more common use today. The number of upper fingers (the index, ring and little finger) that are used on the bow, as well as their degree of flexibility and their function, also vary from one fiddler to the next. For example, Tommy Peoples generally places his four fingers, which are very flexible, on the stick. This requires a complete change of position when a treble (a traditional Irish ornament)<sup>33</sup> is played. Whereas Seán Keane does not use his little finger<sup>34</sup> for example, Martin Hayes often only places two fingers on the bow (his index and little finger), and so on.

In classical music, the repertory favours long legato phrases. As a result, the violinist can avoid too many string crossings (thereby avoiding interrupting the musical phrasing), by lifting into positions with the left hand. To employ the phrases and the dynamics as required by the repertory, every part of the bow has to be used (from the frog to the tip). To avoid any loss in the quality of the sound, the bow has to be held parallel to the bridge as much as possible. In consequence, the classical musician has to use the upper arm to be able to play as close as possible to the frog, without the bow making a half-circle. He varies the height of the elbow according to the string being played and the duration of the note. The movement of the forearm and of the wrist varies depending on the speed of the string crossing and how fast the passage is. As the little finger is required to support the bow at the edge of the frog, and the index finger is needed to add weight to the bow at the tip, the classical musician has to use every finger on the right hand.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

As the classical musician has to analyse each of his physical movements very closely, he sometimes runs the risk of missing a fundamental aspect of music: using the imagination and/or listening to the sound that the violin produces. By wanting to control everything, he may miss out on gaining a more natural approach to the instrument. It has also been

---

<sup>33</sup> Example of Tommy People bow technic: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmxleN\\_9cAM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmxleN_9cAM)

<sup>34</sup> Example of Seán Keane bow technic: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWJc3LyLvaQ> (55')

observed that in traditional music, fiddlers develop a more personal approach to their positioning in relation to their instrument. This is an aspect of playing which also could be of interest to a classical violinist. Generally, classical violin lessons are given standing, whereas a majority of violinists will spend most of their professional career in a seated position. This requires a different approach to the body, which has to be taught and adapted to. The fact of having to work when seated enables the violinist to feel less tired in his body and be able to concentrate more on the mind and the music. We can also imagine that if beating the beat and the upbeat beat with the feet becomes part of the regular practice, then this may help the violinist to develop a better sense of rhythm and understand the importance of it in his music.

By extension, the traditional musician, who always plays in the first position, will soon become used to playing in this way. He owes it to himself to find a position that allows him to play for long periods in this fixed position and find a degree of comfort for positioning the arm. Indeed, in the first position, the hand is held away from the centre of the body, which can tire the arm more quickly. The classical musician, who plays in various positions, tends sometimes to avoid the first position, which is more uncomfortable. However, an intense period of playing in any position, especially in Irish traditional music, is likely to enable the player to find the necessary degree of comfort. As we have seen, traditional music gives the musician an opportunity to develop a degree of dexterity (flexibility and very light articulation<sup>35</sup>) and considerable strength in the fingers, so that he can add the many ornaments and play double stops associated with Irish traditional music. As it has been observed, “the ability to play very, very fast indeed requires a highly developed left-hand technique”<sup>36</sup>. This is an important technical aspect that classical musicians have to develop, especially in the fast passages of a piece. Often, the classical musician, who has studied vibrato, finds it difficult to alter practice, which can give an unsure quality to the vibrato. Traditional music enables the player to return to a more natural approach to the note, with fewer consequences for the left hand. This allows the player to concentrate more on the right hand and produce an interesting sound. According to Zoe Conway, Irish traditional music also enables the

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Odhran O Casaide, 4 June 2017

<sup>36</sup> Zoe Conway

musician to develop a “strong co-ordination between (the) brain, (the) left hand and (the) bow”.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that in traditional music the musician is constantly confronted by a need to make rapid string crossings or make frequent use of double-stops, helps him develop particular bow movements. This could be of interest if applied to the classical musician. Indeed, it is often noted that classical musicians tend to lose their energy when making movements that are too wide; they also tend to avoid making rapid, consecutive string changes or do so with difficulty. As Zoe Conway asserts: “Personally, I think the strongest element to my playing is a very fluid and relaxed bow arm. This undoubtedly comes from traditional fiddle playing, and trying to do very fast but light string crossing, and clear and relaxed bow triplets”.<sup>38</sup> The fact that traditional musicians do not use all their fingers on the bow enables them to take into account which fingers are necessary and which suit the sound they wish to obtain. The classical musician who, on occasion, overly concentrates on the arm, may overlook that each finger has a particular function in respect of the positioning of the fingers on the bow (whether at the frog or at the tip) and the desired sound. It is these fingers which are in direct contact with the stick and which have an essential role in modulating the sound.

---

<sup>37</sup> Zoe Conway

<sup>38</sup> Ibid



## CHAPTER THREE: From Technique to Music (Freedom and Creativity)

### 3.1. Introduction

The ultimate aim of a musician is to be capable of expressing musical ideas through his or her instrument. To be able to express him or herself fully in musical terms, the musician must be allowed to be as free as possible of all technical difficulties. Frankie Gavin begins his masterclass by explaining that “There will be technical difficulties that will get in the way of letting the music flow from the head and the heart in the instrument”<sup>39</sup>. Initially, therefore, it is important that the musician asserts his knowledge of music (repertory, history of music etc.) and of the instrument, as much as possible.

Whether in classical music or in traditional Irish music, musical composition consists of three basic parameters on which the musician can have an influence. These are the rhythm (the length of the notes in a specific pulsation); intonation (frequency, the high notes); and the intention musically (dynamics, articulations, phrasing etc.). In this chapter, each of these three parameters will be examined, first within the field of traditional music, and then in comparison with the field of the classical music. The purpose of a comparison with classical music is to be able to examine what could possibly be beneficial or influential for the classical musician.

### 3.2. Rhythm

With the exception of the “slow airs”<sup>40</sup>, which are melodies marked by the absence of a strict rhythmic structure, Irish traditional music is principally a music for dancing. Initially, this was a type of music in which the characteristic rhythmical structure is of particularly importance, so that the dancers can prepare and set their movements in response to the rhythm of the music. Dance music is divided into several types, of which the four main ones are the *jig* (6/8), the *reel* (4/4), the *hornpipe* (4/4 with swung eighth

---

<sup>39</sup> Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

<sup>40</sup> A ‘slow air’ is a type of tune in Irish traditional music marked by the absence of a strict rhythmic or structure, melodically “open ended” and generally derived from the melody of a sung song but instead played on a solo melodic instrument

notes)<sup>41</sup> and the polka (2/4).

In general, whatever the dance is, the usual structure adopts the form A A B B, where the (A) is called a *tune* (first part) and (B), a *turn* (second part). Each contains four or eight bars, forming a 'question-response'<sup>41</sup>. Each part is repeated, with the end of the repeat often slightly modified (A A' B B'), to allow the dancers to know when they have prepared for the next step. Sometimes a third (C) part appears and even more rarely a fourth (D), which brings the dance to its conclusion. A dance tune is usually played at least twice, with each version being played differently using variations etc.... On the basis of a clear and unchanging structure, the musician can develop a capacity to feel the structure, the phrase<sup>42</sup> and the song on a deeper level.

Example 3.2<sup>43</sup> an Irish score:

**Jim Ward's Jig**

Traditional



---

<sup>41</sup> There are three forms of *jig* : 1. The *double jig* in 6/8, with a rhythmical unit consisting of two groups of three quavers. Its other characteristic occurs in the last bar, which contains three quavers and one crotchet, with the latter reproducing the same note as the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quavers; 2. The *single jig*, in 6/8 or 12/8, presents a rhythmical unit of two groups in a crotchet-quaver structure. This jig is characterised by the last bar which is composed of a dotted crotchet and a quaver; 3. The *slip jig* or *hop jig* adopts a 9/8 beat in groups of 3 quavers (3/8 3/8 3/8). This type of jig stands out in particular because of the structure of its two by four bars; the other jigs always consist of two by eight bars.

The *slide* is a sort of jig in 12/8 that is characterised by its sliding sounds, hence its name, derived from the verb, *to slide*).

The rhythmical unit of the *reel* consists of two groups of four quavers (bar 2/2 or alla breve). In most cases, this dance is usually played fast, or even very fast, but it can also be played with a slow tempo, when they are known as *slow reels*.

The *hornpipe* adopts a 4/4 beat and is played at a moderate speed. In principle, there is an emphasis placed on every other quaver. Unlike the 'unequal quavers' in French Baroque, the emphasis is placed more or less as if the first emphasis has the same value as the last two quavers of the triplet.

<sup>42</sup> "A tune is played or a song sung, not bar by bar, but by the phrase, which very seldom is contained exactly between bar lines" Breathnach, Breandan: *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, (Litho Press), 89.

<sup>43</sup> Example 3.1. *Jim Ward's Jig*

It is noticeable, in reading an Irish musical score, that the quavers are organised differently, depending on whether it is a jig in (6/8) for example, or a reel in (4/4). The quavers all seem to have the same value of time and importance in Irish traditional music, “They are musical symbols, which have a particular meaning for the reader, depending on the system of music in which he has been trained”.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, not only does emphasis depend on the main beat in the bar (for example, in the reel, the first beat and then the third beat of the bar constitute main beat), but it also depends on the tradition or the feeling of the musician. As such, one of the notes can be emphasised and played longer than the others. In his book, *Bowing Styles*, based on an analysis of the way in which M. Coleman plays, David Lyth remarks that “generally, the first of each pair of quavers is played almost twice as long as the first, in both hornpipes and reels.”<sup>45</sup> However, the regular rhythm is constantly being reversed, in a variety of patterns. The same is true of the jig. In his masterclass<sup>46</sup>, Frankie Gavin explains that when a jig is read in a score the reader can often have the impression that the notes all have the same value whereas in traditional playing, the first has to be played longer and the other shorter. We shall see later that the timing of the notes in the ornaments is also highly variable.

As traditional music is principally dance music, the musician will use certain rhythmic effects to amplify the desire “to move or rock from side to side and dance with the body in space.”<sup>47</sup> “There is also the element of swing (involved), which is an ability to capture an authentic rhythmic pulse in the piece of music.”<sup>48</sup> Kevin Burke explains in his Fiddle video about ‘Irish Bowing Techniques’<sup>49</sup> that often in reels, for example, while the accent is placed on the 2 and 4, giving them more emphasis than might be expected, he gives less on 1 and 3 (while maintaining them as the main beat). “It sticks out”, he explains, “You don’t expect to be that strong.” He goes on to reveal that making the beginning and the end lighter with the bow and intensifying the sound in the middle, gives the impression of a pulse rather than of a direct rhythm.

---

<sup>44</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 88

<sup>45</sup> Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997), 6

<sup>46</sup> Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

<sup>47</sup> Swing definition by Didier Lockwood in his book *Cordes & Ame*

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Odhran O Casaide, 4 June 2017

<sup>49</sup> Bruke, Kevin, *Bowing-Irish Fiddle Technique Lesson*, Fiddlevideo 2016, Available at <https://www.fiddlevideo.com/bowing-irish-fiddle-technique-lesson/>

In classical music, the pieces are generally much longer and have an often more complex structure. As the musician may occasionally forget the structure of the work, this allows him to organise the development of the piece over time. The long musical phrases do not always allow the musician to find his mark in time and maintain a regular pulsation. Playing folk music may give the classical musician an opportunity to fix him or herself within this notion of structure in the work as well as to gain the feeling of pulsation, of the beat and the phrase which are form basis of music. "I have a map in my head of the structure of the piece, and that makes it much easier to learn classical off by heart."<sup>50</sup>

By contrast with Irish traditional music, when a classical musician, for example, reads a row of quavers on a score, he knows he will have to play them in a regular manner (the quavers should all have the same value of time). However, if he practices by lengthening and/or accentuating certain notes that make sense in the music, this enables him to structure his strokes in order to give them more meaning musically. As such, learning Irish music could be an interesting course of action for a classical musician, enabling him or her to assimilate a rhythm, a pulsation or a feeling for the structure of the music or phrase.

"Irish music is very rhythmic and complex in term of syncopation and accentuation"<sup>51</sup>, with the result that learners studying traditional music, consequently can develop a more relaxed approach towards more complex rhythms, the effects of off-beats, swing and so on. A possible difficulty for a classical musician is the development of an approach to the rhythm from a uniquely intellectual point of view, rather than one which not strictly linked to the music. The musician who plays Irish music experiences the rhythm essentially in his/her body, where it becomes an integral and natural part of the performance. Discovering and practicing traditional music may enable the classical musician to gain a feeling for rhythm and pulse, and so live the music more completely, both intellectually and physically.

---

<sup>50</sup> Zoe Conway

<sup>51</sup> Odhran O Casaide

### 3.3 Intonation

Whereas classical music is generally based on a major and minor scale, Irish traditional music is based on different modes. A considerable number of traditional tunes are modal. It is important for the fiddler to know (or feel or be aware of subconsciously) the mode in which he is playing in order to learn the tune more quickly, anticipate the notes that can be played and determine the general colour of the tune. The keys that are generally used in traditional Irish music are G, D and A. However, these 'key signatures' are chosen purely for convenience. They cannot necessarily be taken as an indication of the key of the tune, because many of the tunes are modal in character.

Initially, the fiddle is one of the instruments that is the most difficult to learn. By contrast with other instruments generally played in Irish music - such as the uilleann pipes, the banjo, the concertina and so on (where the note is given directly) - with the fiddle, the notes are not fixed. "Only by careful listening can the learner acquire the ability to play in tune"<sup>52</sup> comments *The Companion*. Indeed, only in recent years has the practice of tuning in concert pitch spread, whereas previously a tone, sometimes below, was considered preferable. "The whole effect is one of strong fingerwork with a relaxed and mellow tone rather than the hard brilliant tone favoured nowadays."<sup>53</sup>

The absolute pitch of the note A was not standardised until well into the present century and traditional fiddler players make little reference to that standard unless they play with other instruments of fixed pitch. Since the time of Bach, keyboard instruments were tuned through "equal tempering"<sup>54</sup>. "Violin players always depart more or less from this convention, and the differences are bigger in Irish playing than in classical

---

<sup>52</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), 262

<sup>53</sup> Haigh, Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott Music 2014), 13

<sup>54</sup> Tempering is a process used when tuning the degrees and intervals on a musical scale. Tempering refers to tuning in which several or all of the intervals are tuned by altering precise (or pure) intervals. Tempering is required because each of the notes in a scale has to be used in relation to each different circumstance, when slight variations in intonation are required. Whereas minor differences can be made on instruments which are played with varying degrees of movement, in the violin, for example, (where a slight movement or change in position of a finger on the left hand, or with a wind instrument, where a slight adjustment in the amount of air, can alter the intonation), instruments with fixed sounds require a compromise to be played effectively.

playing.”<sup>55</sup> Often, depending on the context in which the music is performed, certain notes such as the C on string A or the leading notes can go slightly up. It can also be observed that when the traditional musician plays an open A or E string along with the same note, stopped with the fourth finger on the next lowest string, the fourth finger is often placed very low. The ornaments or embellishments are even more variable in pitch than that of the main notes. It is interesting to point out the existence of the *scordatura*: while the standard tuning of the fiddle is GDAE, to obtain different droning effects fiddlers use an alternative tuning, such as AEAE.

How tone and tonality are perceived in classical music is of primary importance. Indeed the perception of tone by the musician allows him/her to structure the melody and to make full use of the harmony in the piece of music, with its tensions and relaxations. However, the classical musician, who early on in his training, attempts to learn complex scores from the harmonic point of view, does not always have sufficient time to learn how to feel the tone and the harmony of the work, and integrate this perception naturally and on a deeper level. Irish Traditional Music can thus help the musician in this respect.

In classical music, two types of intonation exist: Melodic and Harmonic intonation. When a musician plays in a chamber music groups (in a string quartet, for example), he/she has constantly to adapt to the other players in terms of the intonation in his/her play, so that the overall sound stays in tune. He or she has to be prepared to play with comas. Traditional music can consequently be seen as a good training experience in intonation and adaptation in terms of the overall sound produced by a group of musicians. Indeed, Odhran Ó Casaide has stated that “The use of modality and of microtonal effects enhances the player’s sonic experience. This does affect (his ability to) develop an ear that can appreciate music that is not typically written in Western diatonic scales.”<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Haigh, Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott Music 2014) 11

<sup>56</sup> Odhran O Casaide

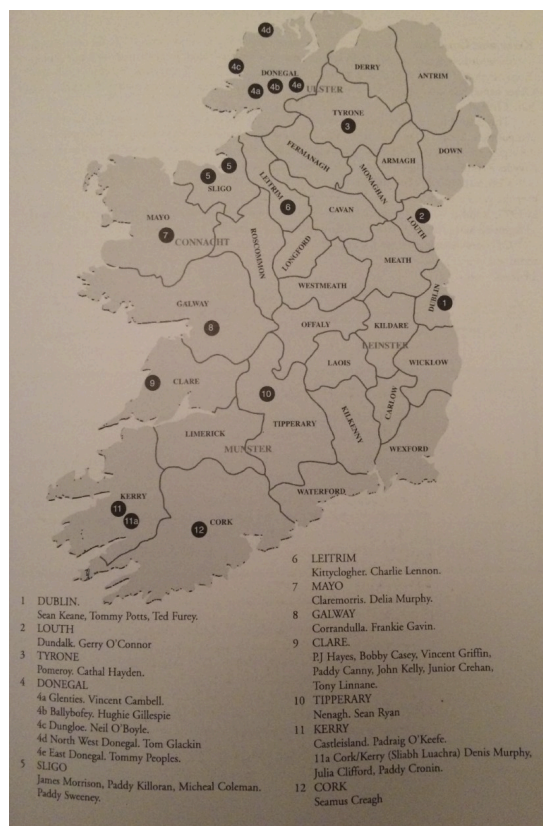
### 3.4. Freedom and Creativity in Music

#### 3.4.1. Introduction

As in any type of music, a musician who wants to develop his own creativity, style and musical personality first has to create his or her own repertory from the full repertory that exists already (such as a musical tradition, through different performers, musical works etc.).

Indeed, it is important to remember that the terms Irish traditional music and classical music, are generic and also refer to the various ways of interpreting a certain types of music depending on the origin of the musician, his/her country or region and accumulated knowledge of traditions and personal sensitivity. In Irish traditional music the main regional fiddle styles are generally considered to be those of Donegal, Sligo, Clare and Sliabh Luachra.

Figure 3.4.<sup>57</sup> Map of Ireland with the main fiddler by region



<sup>57</sup> Mc Nevin, Paul, *a complete guide to Learning The Irish Fiddle*, (Blanchastown, Waltons 1998), 35

Depending on the region where the fiddler has grown up, learned to play and continues to develop, he/she learns to interpret tunes in a particular way, adding variations and with an approach to sound and articulation that is particular to the region. All indications suggest that it is not possible to be conclusive about all the features of each style, because not every musician in a particular region plays in the same way. It can be understood, therefore, that a wide range of 'styles of playing' exist in Irish traditional music. In *The Companion*, the term 'style' refers "either to the way in which one musician plays as distinct from another player or alternatively, the distinguishing features of playing which identify musicians from particular area."<sup>58</sup> These differences in playing with respect to regional variation have considerably diminished with the emergence of technology, new ways of recording music, the development of radio, better transportation and so on. Nevertheless, it is still possible to hear some of these differences, especially among older musicians. Some younger players have also consciously or by choice elected to play in the style of their own region. Indeed, the development of recording has made music of all styles and genres more accessible to everyone. This has in turn contributed to the emergence of an individual or personal style of playing (as demonstrated by Kevin Burke, Martin Hayes, Frankie Gavin and many others), which may include elements from several regions and occasionally even several types of music including international genres.

The musician will normally develop a sound and a personal style through a combination of techniques, early instruction, temperament, and musical and physical approach. David Lyth suggests that "Traditional music attaches great importance to the individuality of each musician. A person's style is his own, reflecting his personal history, his technical ability and most of all the things he is trying to express in his music."<sup>59</sup> For the fiddle in particular, use of ornamentation (grace notes, triplets, rolls, slides or an absence of these), variation (melodic and rhythmic, tone) repertoire (tunes, tune setting and tune types), and bowing and bow techniques (rhythm and rhythmical nuances) serve to distinguish one playing style from another. As the repertory in Irish traditional music is not the same as that in classical music, I will focus here on what creativity, when associated with ornamentation, variation and bowing can bring to classical music.

---

<sup>58</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999)258

<sup>59</sup> Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997),V



### 3.4.2. Ornamentation and variation

In classical music, the musician is expected to reproduce in quite a precise and faithful way what the composer has written in the score. The classical composer can be extremely precise with the annotations he gives in a score (an example of this is Ravel). All the notes can be indicated with nuances, accents and sometimes with liaisons; even an indication as to which fingers to use may be given. Thus the intention of the composer and the performer will lie in a level of exactness towards the original text.

Example 3.4<sup>60</sup>: Classical score: *Tzigane* by Ravel

The image shows the first page of the Violon (Violin) part of Maurice Ravel's *Tzigane*. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a variety of musical notations and performance instructions. Red arrows and circles highlight specific elements:

- String to be play**: Points to the instrument name 'Violon' at the top.
- Nuance**: Points to the *Andante, quasi con danza* tempo marking.
- Articulation ; accent**: Points to an accent mark over a note.
- Liaison**: Points to a slur connecting two notes.
- Musical and tempo indication**: Points to the *Tempo rubato* and *espressivo* markings.

The score includes a copyright notice at the top left: 'OUVRAGE PROTÉGÉ PHOTOGRAPHIE INTERDITE'. The title 'TZIGANE' is prominently displayed in the center, with 'à JELLY D'ARANYI' above it and 'Rapsodie de Concert' below it. The composer's name 'MAURICE RAVEL' is on the right.

In Irish traditional music, by contrast, the tunes are often invented or developed by one or more unknown or anonymous musician and, as mentioned earlier, are transmitted orally (i.e. without a score) from generation to generation, with the likelihood that the song changes each time it is passed on. Those pieces judged to be less interesting or attractive by the general body of musicians thus often tend to be forgotten, while others lose popularity or become less well-known over time. They can also undergo considerable alteration over time, becoming a creation that not only belongs to one

<sup>60</sup> Example 3.E. Ravel, Maurice, *Tzigane*, First page

single individual but to a community as a whole.

When we see a score of Irish traditional music, it looks much simpler than a score in classical music. Indeed, what is indicated on the score is only in draft form. In order for the “real, authentic” piece to come to the fore, ornamentation, drive, the bowing patterns, the swing and the drones will all need to be added. None of these are actually written in the score but rather are acquired through a mixture of transmission of the tradition and of personal creativity and inserted during the performance in a more spontaneous way which is not fully pre-programmed by the musician (Example 3.2<sup>61</sup> an Irish score)

The term variation has, in consequence, two different meanings or implications: “what can be called ‘learned variation’ or the different versions that exist of a piece; and the process of creating a “micro improvisation around a version of a piece that has been learned.”<sup>62</sup> As traditional music is essentially melodic, it relies for much of its character on the ornamentation of the melody line. There are several types of ornaments or embellishments that exist. These are interpreted and played differently during different parts of the melody, depending on the musicians and their style of playing. The principal ornaments are the roll and trebling. On the fiddle, this is achieved through a combination of fingering ornamentation (Left Hand) and bowing ornamentation (Right Hand), with the addition of bowing, which is also a fundamental feature of fiddle playing. Three main forms of ornamentation that are used are: “embellishment, variation and rhythm”<sup>63</sup>.

By embellishment is meant the use of one or more grace note and filling the intervals. Examples of these are the single grace note, the double grace note and the roll etc.).<sup>64</sup> (...) Variation consists of changing or varying

---

<sup>61</sup> Example 3.1. *Jim Ward's Jig*

<sup>62</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971), 93

<sup>63</sup> Ibid 94

<sup>64</sup> The single grace note is very popular. This is when the note being decorated is graced by a note higher in pitch. The primary function of the single grace note is to emphasise an accented note and sometimes to separate notes of the same pitch. It is also used to good effect before the unaccented notes of a group, imparting a lift or skip to the music, with a double grace note in reverse order, Aba much like a triplet in which the first note is rather prolonged. The roll or group of three grace notes is a most effective form of decoration. It may be expressed as bagA, but the first note may be higher and third note lower to suit the instrument's play. Usually, the rolled note follows a note of the same pitch, AbagA but it is also used explosively, from scratch as it is were

group of notes during a tune. A variation on the theme or strain itself would be regarded as an attempt to compose a new part (known as an instant composition).<sup>65</sup> (...) The third form is that of rhythmical variation, which consists in changing the rhythmical value of one or several notes in a sequence. For example, in a jig, a triplet of quavers can be transformed into a dotted quaver or crotchet quaver, a technique that was explored earlier in the section on rhythm.<sup>66</sup>

It has been observed that when the traditional musicians perform a tune they are constantly engaged in the process of creating a melody while playing. As Charlie Lennon says “We never play the tune same way every time, it really depends your humour.”<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the traditional musician has to draw constantly on his/her imagination and emotions to embellish and vary the melody. The creativity of the musician is consequently mobilised and enhanced as the musician develops freedom within his/her creativity. In classical music, even though the musician cannot improvise with the score, it is still necessary to demonstrate creativity so as to make the score as lively as possible and with all the available means. Indeed, as has been commented, “the performer and the conductor have a range of options for musical expression and interpretation of a scored piece, including the phrasing of melodies, the time taken during *fematas* (held notes) or pauses, and the use of effects such as vibrato or glissando.”<sup>68</sup> Being able to mobilise this sense of creativity by playing traditional music, for example, may enable the musician to release creative instincts, both in the chosen work and also during performances. This allows the development of a capacity to adapt the performance more to the emotions expressed during the performance itself. Playing traditional music often also may reinforce the musician’s capacity to adapt and improvise if, for example, an incident occurs during a performance. As Zoe Conway suggests, performing traditional music gives her the freedom to be creative and reactive: “I can change bowing if I want and also fingering, depending on the situation in the concert.”<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, the traditional musician can create something new and improvise at any

---

<sup>65</sup> Two different kinds of variation occur.

The simplest form consists of changing a note in a group. These are the basic forms of ornamentation and come naturally to a musician just like a change in tone or an inflection in a conversation. The second form of variation is an entirely different matter, involving as it does a degree of instant composition. Here a group or bar is varied, perhaps only the skeleton of the phrase is retained. Each time the part is played some grouping is varied, and no performance is the same. (Cf. Michael Coleman, Sligo). The capacity to add variations in this way is a gift and is the hallmark of an excellent musician in Irish traditional music. Often musicians copy variations from other musicians.

<sup>66</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971), 94,95, 96, 97

<sup>67</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

<sup>68</sup> Vignal Marc, *Dictionnaire de la musique*, (Larousse 2005), 204

<sup>69</sup> Zoe Conway

moment during a performance. This requires an intense level of concentration at the moment itself, where the musician has to be 100% in the action, an actor in what is happening. It can happen that a classical musician who has rehearsed a piece several times and one phrase in particular, in order to reproduce it to the degree of perfection he is aiming for, finds himself slipping into a kind of passive way of playing. In effect, he is leaving it up to his tactile memory to reproduce what he has learned, without giving it any of his real self or injecting any of the emotions he experiences at that particular moment. In traditional music, however, the musician is allowed to develop his capacity of concentration and focus his attention within the moment itself.

### 3.4.3. Bow Techniques & Creativity

According to *The Companion*, “Bowing is the most critical element of style within fiddle or violin playing”<sup>70</sup>. Many fiddlers assert that with the fiddle and the bow there are two instruments involved. By contrast with the classical musician, who expresses his creativity principally through an intensity of the nuances in the sounds using dynamics, the traditional musician will place more importance on the accent and length of the phrasing. According to Breandan Breathnach, “Crescendo and diminuendo are terms for which one find no use in the notation of the music (...) the use of dynamics betrays the non-native.”<sup>71</sup> As Irish music was originally a form of music to accompany dancing, it requires feeling and a pulse. Playing tunes without any stress on the notes or articulation of the phrasing would otherwise make it sound dull and lifeless.

The creativity of the musician also depends on his ability to create a particular sound that can be associated with him. As Breandan Breatnach points out, tone “is a distinguishing mark of the traditional fiddler.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, Kevin Burke sees the bow more as a “tone maker” than a rhythm maker.

---

<sup>70</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999) 262

<sup>71</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 90

<sup>72</sup> Bruke, Kevin, *Bowing-Irish Fiddle Technique Lesson*, Fiddlevideo 2016, Available at <https://www.fiddlevideo.com/bowing-irish-fiddle-technique-lesson/>

There are several possibilities available to the traditional musician to enable him to produce these sound effects in the phrases. There are two essential features in the fiddle to allow this in playing - phrasing and tone: firstly, up- and down-bows which control the phrasing, where a player can play separate bow strokes, 'one note per bow or slurred bow' (i.e. more than one note per bow); secondly, the bow can be used to generate dynamic effects. There are several possibilities available to the fiddler to allow him to obtain these different dynamic effects: the length of the bow, the speed used; the weight of the bow, the circular motion of the bow and the between the bow movements.

#### The Division of the Bow:

In his book, *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing 2*, David Lyth suggests that "The pattern of up- and down-bows is the most important aspect of bowing, at any rate in traditional playing."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, according to Charlie Lennon "The bow is very important in Irish music because it determines the structure of the tune and the phrasing..." Certainly, it is with the bow that particular note patterns and note sequence are grouped and played together, and that a certain note may be accentuated and emphasised. Moreover, the bow has a significant effect on the sound produced by the fiddle, and also imparts the appropriate rhythm and articulation to the music, especially in the case of dance music.

By contrast with classical music, it is very rare in Irish traditional music to see bow strokes written on a score. The main idea in traditional playing is to use bow changes to define the phrasing of a tune. After acquiring a feel for the various bowing patterns, it will probably become clearer which of these is going to suit the player's own personal custom and practice as it has evolved. Indeed, for the experienced fiddler, a "decision about bowing, slurring or phrasing is largely subconscious. It relies not on what is written or on a good understanding of a set of rules, but simply on years of experience"<sup>74</sup>. In Irish traditional music, "there is no right way to bow any particular tune."<sup>75</sup> However, some musicians in Irish traditional music tend to develop the habit of dividing the bow strokes depending on the type of tune to be played. David Lyth gives an example of this in his book *Bowing Styles*, in his analysis of the way M. Coleman plays. Usually, when playing hornpipes,

---

<sup>73</sup> Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997),10

<sup>74</sup> Haigh, Chris, *exploring folk fiddle*,(London: Schott Music 2004), 56

<sup>75</sup> Ibid 57

only one or two quavers are played with the same bow. The slurred quavers often lie across the beat and are often played with an up-bow so that the more strongly accented down-bows can be played emphatically without running out of bow.<sup>76</sup>

It is often noted that the fiddler uses the bow in a way that we could consider “counter-intuitive”. “The player does not typically define emphasis with up- or down-bow. In fact, the up-bow is frequently used to define the strong beat.”<sup>77</sup> An example of this, according to Kevin Burke, is that it has become a common habit in a *reel* to play three notes (quavers) in an up-bow, three notes in a down-bow and two detached, which seems contrary to the natural rhythm of the tune. This is because the main beat in a reel is played on the first and the third: the first is in up-bow, while the third comes in the middle of a liaison. As Kevin Burke explains, the reason for using this type of division of the bow strokes is because “it really does make the tune float and come alive.”

Fiddlers play with the natural weight of the bow. The important notes - such as the off-beat accents or the notes which end a phrase – are often played with a down-bow. These are placed in the bowing pattern so that the weight of the bow produces a natural, unforced accent. This is particularly effective when combined with string crossing.

#### The Dynamic Effects with the Bow:

As mentioned above, the fiddler can make use of a range of possibilities in order to achieve different dynamic effects, such as: using the length of the bow as well as the speed; the weight placed on the bow; the circular bow; and between the bow.

- The Length of the Bow: As much Irish music is played quite fast, only the middle third or so of the bow is used most of the time. An example of this is Seán McGuire. According to Frankie Gavin, “using a big bow is a waste of energy in Irish music.”<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, many players use a long bow as well. This may be done when playing a long group of notes with the same bow or combined with additional pressure applied to give a single

---

<sup>76</sup> Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997),8

<sup>77</sup> Odhran O Casaide

<sup>78</sup> Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

note extra emphasis, a method that Charlie Lennon employs.

- The Speed of the Bow: The Irish musician often applies a speed of bow playing that is more or less constant. Some musicians, such as Martin Hayes, tend to accelerate the movement of the bow on the notes they wish to emphasise.

- The Weight of the Bow: A distinctive feature of the bowing style is the use of the weight of the bow. According to Kevin Burke, “there shouldn’t be any pressure (applied) on the bow except (for) the weight of the bow.”<sup>79</sup> However, for some fiddlers, such as Frankie Gavin, it is important to “put quite a bit of pressure on it because you have to bring the sound out of your instrument and be able to play very loud, especially when you play with other musicians.”<sup>80</sup>

- The Circular Bow: According to *The Companion*, “the mechanics of rhythmical bowing can best be described as ‘circular’, as opposed to a plain, horizontal, back and forth bowing motion.”<sup>81</sup> In the ‘circular’ motion, the bow hand or bow arm activates two essential movements. One of these can guide the bow back and forth across the strings while the other can create a circular motion, executed by a combination of the hand and the forearm. Such a style of bowing is the key to creating a pulse in traditional Irish music.

- Bow Changes: Another important aspect of bowing is the extent to which bow changes are articulated to be able to avoid any gap in the sound produced. In traditional playing, the articulation, *The Companion* suggests, can be quite pronounced. Moreover, as the bow is kept in close contact with the strings, it hardly ever “bounces”. In order to create sound effects and special nuances, the fiddler, unlike the violinist, does not generally attach importance to where he places the bow with respect to the bridge. Indeed, in Irish traditional music, *The Companion* explains, “the strings are bowed distinctly towards the

---

<sup>79</sup> Bruke, Kevin, *Bowing-Irish Fiddle Technique Lesson*, Fiddlevideo 2016, Available at <https://www.fiddlevideo.com/bowing-irish-fiddle-technique-lesson/>

<sup>80</sup> Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

<sup>81</sup> Valley, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999) 262

end of the fingerboard, and in many cases actually over it.”<sup>82</sup>

As we have seen, the bowing choices can have an enormous influence on how a piece of music sounds. It is for this reason that classical violin music is hardly ever published without bowing directions. However, the bow strokes indicated are not always the most natural. They are there principally to give an idea of phrasing. The musician has to develop a degree of freedom in relation to the liaisons indicated, so as to adapt the bowing to a style that comes naturally. This allows the musician to best express himself while respecting the intention behind the phrases indicated. Another benefit for a classical player who engages with traditional music is to use a method of so-called “free bowing”. “Free bowing” by definition offers more freedom of expression in the music. Moreover, as Zoe Conway suggests, “the melody is allowed to dictate the bowing, which makes the music much less complicated.”<sup>83</sup>

In traditional music, fiddlers develop a capacity to play with a style of bowing that is “counter intuitive”. This has the advantage of giving them real flow in the movement, and a greater freedom in relation to the bow as well as an additional range of sound. The classical musician can often find him or herself locked into a pattern of bowing, whereas he could possibly acquire greater freedom and agility in his bow technique by learning Irish traditional music. This would also allow him to expand his range of expression and bowing techniques.

As Charlie Lennon advises, what is important for the player is “the end sound you try to produce and not concentrate only on the technique.”<sup>84</sup> In Irish traditional music, the fact that the fiddler only plays in first position and without the vibrato, played with the left hand (which limits the difficulties techniques associated with the left hand), allows the musician to concentrate more on the right hand and listen more to the sound. The classical musician, however, is confronted by a number of technical difficulties. By over-focusing on these the violinist can sometimes have a tendency to forget to listen to him or herself and to the sound being produced.

---

<sup>82</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999), 263

<sup>83</sup> Zoe Conway

<sup>84</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402



### **3.5. Conclusion**

In traditional music, it is often the case that audiences who attend a concert of Irish traditional music do not know what tunes they are about to hear. Even the musician himself might not know in advance what he is going to play. Generally then, it can be said that an audience goes to an Irish traditional music concert to listen to the musician, to watch the way he or she plays, and to hear the player's interpretations, incorporating unique and personal improvisations and style. It can be understood then that what has always been of prime importance for traditional musicians is to develop a style of their own, which sets them apart from other musicians.

The audiences who listen to classical music tend to attach even more importance to the work than actually listening to the musician himself. The role of the classical musician is to pay homage to the musical work that a composer has written before him. Indeed, several tendencies have been observed in the field of the classical musician in this respect, notably that musicians can devote themselves entirely to the musical works they play. There are also different sorts of musicians, those who lose sight of themselves, as if they are in the service of the work, and those stand out by the quality of the personal style of play. Among those in this last category are musicians such as Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Gilles Appap and Maxim Vengerov, all well-known violinists who are at their particular stage in life where they are also exploring folk and popular traditions of music, such as gypsy, Indian or Jewish (Klezmer etc.) music and so on.

Some of these works require an investment in terms of expression by the musician. Indeed, popular music is a means of developing a personal style of play that can to some extent serve to enhance a work and bring in new elements.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Teaching and Learning**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Having examined the purely instrumental and musical techniques associated with the fiddle, it is interesting to now look at those aspects in Irish traditional music which could help the classical musician, both teachers and students, to understand their art. Indeed, beyond learning the technique of the instrument, every musician may be expected to develop a methodology in working and an understanding of the repertory, and to develop a healthy psychological approach to the instrument that will allow the player to develop and progress.

In this chapter, methods of learning available to a fiddler or violinist will be shown and analysed in order to examine the potential for another approach towards learning that may be beneficial to the classical violinist. In the second part of the chapter, I will attempt to make a connection between the classical and traditional repertories in order to explore what links can be found between them and so postulate a better understanding of certain aspects of the classical repertory. Finally, I will analyse the different psychological approaches that the fiddler and the violinist can develop, in relation to music in general and to the instrument in particular, both during the learning phases and when performing.

### **4.2. Teaching Methods**

#### **4.2.1. Introduction**

According to Breandán Breathnach, “There is only one way of becoming a traditional player or singer, and that is by listening to genuine material performed in a traditional manner.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Irish traditional music is essentially a tradition which by definition, is transmitted. As Breathnach explains, Irish traditional music is “handed down from one generation to the next or passed from one performer to another, more by example than by formal teaching.”<sup>86</sup> As a result, the traditional learner normally acquires knowledge of the repertory and styles of play “through unconscious

---

<sup>85</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 90

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

or conscious imitation of more experienced performers”.<sup>87</sup>

In terms of teaching, Breathnach goes on to explain that in traditional Irish music, by contrast with classical music, “standard fiddle teaching practice, based in repertoire, melodic variation and ornamentation, has typically been ‘by ear’.”<sup>88</sup> It follows then that various references to the staff or stave notation, tonic solfa and tablature “are used to a much lesser degree”. We can deduce that an important step in learning ITM is learning to acquire the tunes by ear. As such, the musician will generally learn by listening to music for hours on end - frequently while engaged in other unrelated activities - and then by listening more closely before starting to learn the tune in a focussed manner.

Accordion player Tony Mac Mahon states that Irish traditional music is “more learned than taught.”<sup>89</sup> Indeed, it has been observed that in Irish traditional music, most players are primarily self-taught, whereas formal instruction comes second. The teacher can help a great deal but mostly to point out pitfalls and technical problems. So, it is vital for a musician learning Irish traditional music to be self-critical, he warns, and find ways of addressing faults and weaknesses without that formal teaching: “You have to push yourself, the drive has to come from inside, and you have to have the right idea of it to get it right”<sup>90</sup>.

We have seen in previous chapters that there are many ways in which a tune can be played. As traditional music is about passing on musical ideas, it can be understood that there is no such thing as learning a tune perfectly (contrary to classical music). Learning a tune serves above all as a basis for learning a way of playing that is applied and applicable to one’s own practice in a more general way.

In Irish traditional music, some musicians may know hundreds or even thousands of tunes. However, it is important to know what is meant by “knowing” a tune. On the website [www.session.org](http://www.session.org), a survey carried out and posted by “Mick O’Lydian” entitled:

---

<sup>87</sup> Slow Player.org <http://slowplayers.org/listening/> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

<sup>88</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 90

<sup>89</sup> Slow Player.org <http://slowplayers.org/listening/> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

<sup>90</sup> Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

“How many tunes do you really know?” gives ‘quite a strict’ definition of the musician as someone who knows a tune so well that when

Given the title by someone, you should be able to play it through (with reasonable competence), for at least three iterations without the support of anyone else joining in and without reference to dots or a crib sheet of any music<sup>91</sup>

Nevertheless, the survey insists that the musician can also be expected to play a tune without knowing the title, but be capable of joining in when he recognises a tune that he may have momentarily “forgotten”. It can be understood that the idea of knowing in Irish traditional music is extensible.

As mentioned earlier, the principal skills which should be learned, practiced and applied everywhere are:

- Developing one’s sense of pitch; be able to distinguish whether the tune goes up or down, and begin to recognize intervals (i.e. the jump between notes);
- Recognize time signatures: e.g. what is the pulse of the tune? How are the beats grouped?
- Be able to focus on phrases: listen to tunes by chunking (*breaking them into smaller phrases*);
- 
- Determine the Key/Mode:
  - On what note does the tune end (resolve)?
  - What is its mode? (Hear the intervals: major third or minor third? flatted sixth or not?)<sup>92</sup>

*The Companion* describes the changes brought about in the dissemination of teaching materials.

Printed and manuscript song and music has had an influence on tradition since at least until the eighteenth century. Throughout this present century books, sound recordings, radio and television have played an important part in the transmission of the music, and there are always traditional performers with experience of popular and classical music.”<sup>93</sup>

These days, there are several methods for learning the traditional music, which reflect new ideas in education, either with a focus on group learning or making use of new

---

<sup>91</sup> The Session, ‘how many tunes do you REALLY know ?’, <https://thesession.org/discussions/33425> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

<sup>92</sup> Slow Player.org <http://slowplayers.org/listening/> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

<sup>93</sup> Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997) 689

technology. These methods include group tuition organised in weekly classes; one-to-one teaching, session playing, participation in an increasing number of summer school activities and projects, internet learning from websites specifically designed for learning the fiddle and tutor books written for the fiddle.

#### 4.2.2. Methods

Most fiddlers are taught in classes, progressing from simple airs, through to polkas, jigs, hornpipes and reels. As mentioned earlier, the musician generally learns orally. In class, this is largely done by the learner imitating the phrases played slowly by another musician. Audio recording devices and/or a system of notation can also be used, to help the learner memorise the melody that he or she has just learned.

##### Sessions:<sup>94</sup>

Session playing is a key aspect of traditional music learning, as it provides an important sphere in which the music can be formulated and innovated. Furthermore, sessions enable musicians to practice in a group. Playing in a session with other musicians is a prime method for musicians to increase and expand their repertoire. Sessions also allow musicians to develop their technique thanks to an opportunity to develop an attentive ear (in a group), learn to imitate and even analyse other musicians. According to Charlie Lennon "It's there where you practice without realising it; and you pick up other little things by mixing with people: watching and seeing how their bows go."<sup>95</sup>

##### Recordings:

Recordings are used nowadays as an additional source of material and methods of learning, to acquire learning techniques, expand repertoires or simply to enjoy and 'get the most out of' the music. Indeed, good musicians do not copy a particular style of play, note by note, but rather use an innate sense of musicality to develop their own musical

---

<sup>94</sup> **Irish traditional music sessions** are mostly informal gatherings at which people play Irish traditional music. The Irish language word for "session" is *seisiún*. This article discusses tune-playing, although "session" can also refer to a singing session or a mixed session (tunes and songs).

<sup>95</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

personality. Nevertheless, as experienced Irish traditional music musicians might testify, despite the modern-day advent of easily accessible recorded audio, it is still true that the essential way to acquire a satisfactory bowing style is through close personal contact with someone who has already acquired the skill.

#### Fiddle Tutor Books:

There are several fiddle tutor books available for learning the fiddle. Among these are: *The Complete Guide to Learning the Irish Fiddle* by Paul McNevin, *The Irish Fiddle Book* by Matt Cranitch and *Irish Fiddle Playing* by Philip John Berthoud. Generally, tutor books provide an overview of the position and the technique of the violin but also include a brief outline of the history of ITM; an explanation of the different types of tunes, variations and ornaments or embellishments; and scores of Irish songs. (The transcriptions of the songs are given, although they are not intended to be learned in the same way as classical pieces). They also generally include illustrative audio material.

#### Playing one or Several Instruments:

The beginner, at the commencement of the learning process, may encounter difficulties, from a technical point of view, such as intonation, appropriate bowing techniques that will produce a correct sound etc... This is the reason why the fiddler sometime begins with two years of training on the tin whistle, as this enables the beginner to spread out the initial learning phase. This can also help the learner to widen his musical understanding by being able to play several instruments.

#### Practicing Alone:

According to Frankie Gavin, it is important to practice when nobody else is listening, as this allows the musician to experiment with sound and ornamentation, without feeling pressure from outside. Charlie Lennon, for example, says that it is important to try to develop a sense of personal discipline, by practicing for at least 20 minutes every day and by playing slowly.

### 4.2.3. Conclusion

The professional classical musician learns the violin by taking lessons, one after the other and principally by working alone. Music is learned by studying a score in which the upper notes are given, the rhythmical values, such as they should be played, have been added, and the dynamics, articulations, liaisons and sometimes the fingering have been inserted. There may even be indications of how to interpret the piece, as intended by the composer. Example 3.4<sup>96</sup>: Classical score: *Tzigane* by Ravel

Occasionally, the classical musician learns the score by heart, depending on the type of work to be interpreted (concerto, sonata, a work for the solo violin and so on). By contrast, Frankie Gavin, in his masterclass, advises pupils who play with a score to set it aside or do without it as soon as possible. In his opinion, the score puts up a sort of screen or barrier which prevents the music from emanating from the heart and mind. Indeed, when a musician reads a score, part of his concentration may be taken over by it. It can be argued then that if a musician works too actively on his visual sense, he runs the risk of neglecting the development of his ability to listen and to tap into the wealth of feelings and emotions that are present in the music.

“When you learn a tune by ear, the tune seems to enter a different part of your brain—the part that’s directly connected to the sound and the music,”<sup>97</sup> it is written. For some people the visual processing makes it almost impossible for them to do some or all of the following: to listen to what you are playing, listen to what others are playing, pay attention to how you are handling your instrument, be aware of your body and draw the rhythm into your body.” Indeed, “written music utilises in part the same left-brain capacities for rational thinking, linearity, and logic that are utilized by language. Music taken in orally activates other parts of the brain (mostly the right hemisphere<sup>98</sup>).”<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>96</sup> Example 3.E. Ravel, Maurice, *Tzigane*, First page

<sup>97</sup> Slow Player.org <http://slowplayers.org/listening/> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

<sup>98</sup> The perception and understanding of music are among the faculties specific to the right hemisphere of the brain. The left hemisphere mostly deals with musical analysis and solfeggio, as it can decipher and analyse. But to be able to hear the music overall and in order for the notes that are assembled to become a melody, the power of synthesis by the right hemisphere is required.

Translated from <http://cerveaudroit.ouvaton.org/spip.php?article18>

In her book *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, Anne Dhu McCucas explains that aural learning is more natural and that it suits the brain's functions better. In effect, the child learns to speak by listening to his mother "repeat(ing) short, evenly spaced words with simple, sing-song intonations in a resonant yet relaxed and 'breathy', moderately high pitched voice."<sup>100</sup> This method of learning considerably influenced the method of music teaching developed by Professor Suzuki. Indeed, the Suzuki method<sup>101</sup> was largely inspired by the principle of learning one's mother tongue and then applied to the teaching of classical music.

The principle of this type of learning is centred on the learner's innate ability to discern a general direction and detect an approximate pitch by learning aurally, by ear, at a very early age. Studies have shown that from infancy, young children learn and memorise aurally by imitating the contours or outline of what their parents say and even sing. As Anne Dhu McLucas explains further, "one of the hallmarks of acquiring aural memory is that the outline<sup>102</sup> of a tune can be retained in the memory, even when individual notes are changed." Thus, she adds, "a single tune can be varied without losing the basic identity of its contour, which explains the development of creativity thanks to aural learning." Moreover, as this contour retention occurs primarily in the right hemisphere, the hemisphere that is dominated by human emotion, we can begin to understand the role of contour in generating emotions in music, and by extension, the role of emotion and repetition in being able to retain tunes.

Psychological research has shown that elements in short-term memory<sup>103</sup> may be "rehearsed" or repeated to keep them "active" in the memory. Repetition and practice as

---

<sup>99</sup> McLucas, Anne Dhu *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, (Ashgate 2011), 156

<sup>100</sup> Malloch, *Mothers and Infants* p.30

<sup>101</sup> The fundamental principles of this method are to begin learning music at an early age, based on the principle of mother tongue learning, to choose the repertory carefully, give group lessons and to invite the parents to individual lessons.

<sup>102</sup> music can be broken down into the basic elements of contour (melodic content), time (rhythm), and timbre (the sound colour or tone of the music)

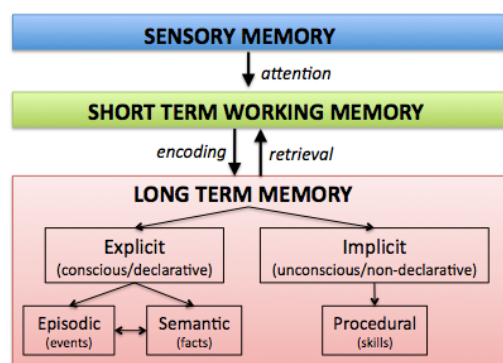
<sup>103</sup> The short-term memory is the second of the three stages to the brain's way of storing memory. It's the capacity for holding, but not manipulating, a small amount of information in mind in an active, readily available state for a short period of time (a few seconds).



a group, such as in the sessions mentioned earlier and as a component of the Suzuki method, for example, has the effect of allowing participants to retain the patterns of tunes more easily. The process of memory retention is explained in an online video: “With multiple repetitions, the refrains in the short-term memory become part of long-term memory as well.”<sup>104</sup> This would explain how musicians are capable of remembering a great number of tunes and can bring them out at will to perform them as and when required.

Indeed, research on the brain has demonstrated that long-term memory is constituted by two different memory systems: the implicit and the explicit. This notion of two different memory systems “has great relevance to the subject of oral tradition, because so much that is passed on orally is not learned consciously”.<sup>105</sup>

Figure 4.2.<sup>106</sup> Memory Operation



107

However, in order to remember the information longer, it would have to be repeat or recalled over and over again.

<sup>104</sup> Mc Lucas, Anne Dhu, ‘The Brain, Memory, and Oral tradition in Music’, Available at [https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/20899/urn\\_nbn\\_fi\\_jyu-2009411282.pdf?sequence=1](https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/20899/urn_nbn_fi_jyu-2009411282.pdf?sequence=1) [Accessed 8 August 2017 ].

<sup>105</sup> McLucas, Anne Dhu *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, (Ashgate 2011), 42

<sup>106</sup>

- <sup>107</sup> **Explicit (or declarative) memory** is consciously recalled. This includes:
  - **semantic** memory of knowledge, words and facts (e.g. Beethoven is a classical composer who wrote the Moonlight Sonata)
  - **episodic** memory of autobiographical events (e.g. I played Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata in a cold concert hall in Bristol when I was a teenager).
- **Implicit (o procedural) memory** is unconsciously recalled. This includes memory for skills (e.g. how to play the C# minor arpeggio at the start of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata).

Classical music is undoubtedly a complex and highly developed form of music. It is therefore difficult to learn through oral transmission. Nevertheless, the classical musician may have something to gain by exploring the system of learning in Irish traditional music, by its application and concentration on certain passages in a particular work and by listening to the work over and over again. This would help the musician to become immersed in the work and so be able to integrate and retain it more easily in his implicit memory. Furthermore, as Ó Casaide argues, “memory is a developed skill. Therefore, if you develop your ability to memorise a lot of music quickly, these skills will transfer to classical music as well.”<sup>108</sup>

It has been commented that in Irish traditional music, it is not the tune as such that is interesting in learning but rather the general manner of playing and style that gives it specificity. Indeed, the traditional musician is expected to learn a substantial number of tunes. In effect, in ITM, there is little time spent in learning a tune as a classical musician would have to when learning a concerto, for example. Zoe Conway echoes this by saying that: “I spent many, many hours perfecting difficult classical pieces, and much less time working on individual traditional pieces.”<sup>109</sup>

This is an approach to music that can be interesting to develop in the classical musician. Indeed, as some musicians can tend to be too focussed on the technical difficulties they encounter when studying of one piece of music in particular, they occasionally omit to make a connection between specific technical difficulties and the more general techniques for playing the instrument. Indeed, if the musician is allowed to develop this capacity to establish a relationship between the technical details associated with a particular piece of music and techniques in general, then the musician may begin to develop a more relaxed approach when tackling new works or expanding a capacity to play spontaneously.

By learning Irish traditional music, classical musicians may find a form of freedom with regard to their instrument and raise their consciousness as regards their level of technique. This could possibly enable them to play their repertoire while encountering

---

<sup>108</sup>Odhran O Casaide

<sup>109</sup>Zoe Conway

fewer psychological barriers. We can also imagine that the traditional musician, who learns several instruments, tends to make less of a connection between the music and the technical difficulties directly associated with an instrument. This allows him to perceive and see the overall quality of the music as a whole.

This traditional music approach to learning music can enlarge the capacity to listen and to play with others. As Charlie Lennon says, “You should always listen to what the other musicians are doing. You can pick their vibes, their rhythm. There is a communication going there all the time.” Lennon suggests that, “He (the other musician) is doing something which is complementary to what you are doing; that’s where your brain starts to open up again.” Irish traditional music is, in effect, learned by listening carefully to others. It develops an attentive listening ear as to what is happening around one. This is a concept that could also be of use to a classical musician. Indeed, in order to enable a group of musicians, a chamber orchestra or an orchestra, for example, to play together, it is essential that each musician listens carefully to how the other members of the group approach their playing. Learning classical music is principally centred on an individual approach. Indeed, the musician can spend hours alone or with a teacher analysing how he or she plays, and looking at the various technical aspects and interpretation that he or she can improve.

To develop a more attentive ear within a collective musical environment, it would be interesting in the classical music environment to organise typical Irish traditional music-type sessions for groups or ensembles, in which classical musicians could meet up to play specific passages from classical works together. This could help classical musicians to develop an ability to listen to each other, which could lead to expanding personal and individual development and enhancing skills and the overall level of performance of the group.

### 4.3. Repertory

#### 4.3.1. Introduction

The violin was originally a popular instrument, in the sense that its popularity originated among the ordinary population, played by the people: in villages, violinists had the job of escorting and accompanying a marriage procession and leading the guests into dancing. Indeed, in Irish traditional music, the violin marks the rhythm of the dances and sets the tone which enables the instrument to be played, in the open air and in noisy taverns. The violin, and he who played it, were not considered aristocratic.

The emancipation of the violin is an important and interesting event in musical history". From its role as a supplier of lively dance music, it was nonetheless loved by the 'lower orders' and transformed over a very short period of time to an instrument that conveys art at the highest and most elegant and refined level. This transformation came about in Italy towards the end of the 16th century. From 1607 onwards, Claudio Monteverdi was able to introduce a violin duo into his *favola in musica (Fable in Music)*, *Orfeo*, to present Orpheus' plea to Charon, the powerful guardian of Hell.

Nevertheless, the popular roots of the violin were often referred to as its role expanded. Its history recounts how in the beginning, it was used to accompany allemandes dances, suites, pavanés, galliards or songs played to accompany dancing. It was not until the end of the 17th century that the violin was admitted to the heights of the grand classical repertory, when composers discovered the richness and the resources that the instrument possessed. But it would take the boldness of composers such as Corelli, Vivaldi and others, for it to build up a repertoire and a 'literature' of its own.

Throughout the history of the violin until the present day, composers such as Bartok, Shostakovich, Tchaikovsky, Glinka, Brahms and Kodaly have composed a repertory for the violin that has been particularly daunting for players. The repertoire was inspired by popular themes, which were subsequently intellectualised, thus becoming a form of music that was both 'civilised' and 'wild' at the same time. This would require the player to be fully committed to the work and invest himself entirely, to the degree of seriousness that the music demanded.

As the repertory of the violin was originally a popular one, and continued, even later, to be inspired by popular music, it is interesting to examine how learning traditional Irish music could possibly provide a useful approach to the repertory and performance practice, in two fields of music in particular: baroque and the classical repertory inspired by popular music.

Although classical music in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century has lost most of its tradition in musical improvisation, we still have examples, from the Baroque era to the Romantic era, of performers who could improvise in the style of their time. As one article writes: “In the Baroque period, organ performers would improvise preludes keyboard performers, playing the harpsichord, would improvise chords from the figured bass figured symbols beneath the bass notes of the *basso continuo*; and vocal and instrumental performers would improvise musical ornaments. J.S. Bach was particularly noted for his complex improvisations. During the Classical era, Mozart, as both composer and performer, was known for his ability to improvise melodies in different styles. Again during the Classical era, some virtuoso soloists would improvise the cadenza sections of a concerto. During the Romantic era, Beethoven would improvise at the piano.” It can be deduced then that as improvisation is an important part of Irish traditional music. Therefore, learning traditional music could provide a key to understanding the approach towards music and playing, as demonstrated by the musicians and composers at that time.

#### **4.3.2. Baroque Music**

From the 17th century onwards, the violin, thanks to Lully, was increasingly used as a means of expression in artistic fields and became less of an instrument played purely for entertainment. Lully enlarged the repertory of the violin with dance suites, which became the precursor to the future *concerto*. He also organised the string orchestra with his famous group of players, Les Petits Violons (The Little Violins) that he founded in 1656.

The Baroque era is described as a period which “covers a long period in the history of music and opera. It extends from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the middle of

the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in a more or less uniform fashion, across the various countries where it was fashionable.”<sup>110</sup>In a necessarily schematic manner, the aestheticism and inspiration of the Baroque era succeeded that of the Renaissance, the highpoint of countrepont and poly-melody, and preceded that of Classicism and the birth of discursive and rational elements. The main feature of baroque music was the underlying, fairly stable *basso continuo*, which places the period at crossroads between counterpoint and harmony.

The element of dance music would appear to be the key link between the development of the violin from its origins of the violin as a popular and then ‘refined’ instrument. Noting the links between traditions in the history of the violin, Odhran Ó Casaide has explained in an interview that, “There are many similarities between Irish music and early music. Firstly, there is an emphasis on dance, the spontaneous nature of music making and use of modal scales.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, it has been observed that at the time of the emergence of the violin in ‘cultured music’, many of the popular dances (the gigue, the galliard and gavotte etc.) were taken up again and reinvented by composers during the baroque period. This suite of dances reached its apogee during this period, subsequently giving rise to the great forms of classical music (the sonata, the symphony, the concerto and so on). The origins of the suite of dances are a succession of airs to accompany traditional dances, which were in principle written dances, in the same tone, with dances alternating between slow and fast tempos and with *Coupe binaire*. The classical suite almost systematically includes four movements: Allemandes, Courante, the Galliard, Sarabande and the. Nevertheless, as we noted in previous chapters, the jig is also one of the principal Irish dances. The gigue was also an important part in the repertory of baroque music.

Definitions for the gigue describe it as a fast or very fast dance, of probably English, Scottish or Irish origin, where it came to be known as a *jig* or *jig*. Its rhythm is tertiary or binary (denoted in either triplets or dotted notes). It might be helpful for a musician who plays or performs a jig or gigue to be aware of its origins, and to have an idea of the way in which it was originally played. (It may also be interesting to note that the gigue in

---

<sup>110</sup> Translated from Wikipedia

<sup>111</sup> Odhran O Casaide

French is a musical instrument that dates from the Middle Ages, with strings played with a bow, one of the ancestors of the violin.)<sup>112</sup>

An important example of a suite of dances in the repertory of the classical violin is the three *partitas* for solo violin written by J. S. Bach. In the second *partita*, for example, we can find an *allemande*, followed by a *courante*, then a *sarabande*, a *gigue* and finally a *chaconne*.

Here is an example Example 4.3.a<sup>113</sup> of an extract of a *gigue* from the second *partita* for solo violin by Bach.



This can be compared with a score of an Irish jig, seen Example 3.2<sup>114</sup> an Irish score. The scores are similar in that they share the same rhythm. However, there is a significant difference in terms of the length of both pieces. This, as with Irish jigs, is roughly divided into A and a B sections which are repeated to make an AABB.



<sup>112</sup> Gigue :

<sup>113</sup> Example 3.1. J.S. Bach, Partita 2, Gigue

<sup>114</sup> Example 3.1. *Jim Ward's Jig*

As part of the research for this dissertation, when interviewing violinists in the Ancient Music department of the Royal Conservatory of Brussels (Belgium), all of whom had been trained previously in classical music, it became apparent that they had all encountered difficulties in making the transition from one type of training to another.. Their difficulties they had encountered were noted as follows:

- Learning to add ornaments.... the score is much less strict. Indeed, it (the score) is seen as a canvas that has to be decorated<sup>115</sup>. We have noticed that adding ornaments and variations is an integral part of ITM and certainly, this does not mean using the same types of ornaments but rather the notion of embellishing, improvising, 'embroidering' the canvas remains the same.

- In Ancient and Baroque music, it is necessary to learn to play unequally, especially in French music, which can be a different experience for a classical musician. In fact, in classical music, we learn that two quavers have to be exactly the same length, whereas in Ancient music this is not the case anymore. We have to be able to interpret (or play) the rhythm given in the score, and this depends on a set of the codes that indicate how the piece[PB3] is to be played, depending on when and where the piece was written."

In parallel to this, as we saw earlier in the chapter on rhythm, the quavers, which look as though they have the same value when they are written in a score, have to be played in an unequal way so that they are in close in style to the traditional Irish style.

- Another difficulty mentioned by the students from the Ancient Music department concerns the structure of the phrase: in classical music, the phrases often start at the beginning of the bar, whereas in baroque music this is rarely the case. We have to be able to structure the phrases; there are often several possibilities and so we have to look for the appropriate one which fits the tradition most." Breathnach confirms what has been observed in parallel to this in Irish traditional music, where:

The tune is played not bar by bar but phrase by phrase, which very seldom contains the exact number of bar lines. (...) The phrases are knitted or woven together by linking notes. Usually this function is performed by the last note of the group, which is thrown forward with a degree of emphasis

---

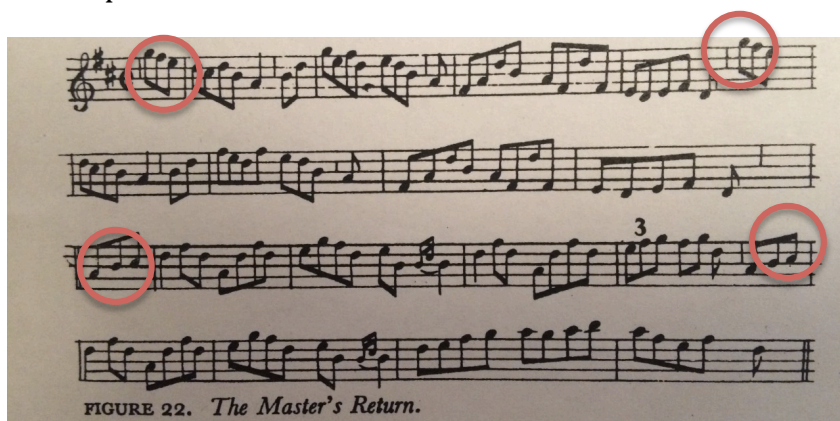
<sup>115</sup> See Rameau, *Traité d'harmonie*



to the succeeding group. This forward thrust is characteristic of the music that a traditional player, who is not familiar with musical notation will, if asked to call the notes of a tune, invariably attach the linking note to the group it introduces, rather than to that to which it belongs grammatically. The link between phrases and strains may often consist of two notes. Exceptionally, in some reels, three quavers may be used for the purpose. The reel called *The Master's Return* affords examples of all these linkings

116

#### Example 4.3.b<sup>117</sup>



- Another violinist has also remarked on the position of the violin in Ancient music which is different to that in classical music. Indeed, in Ancient music, no chin or shoulder rest is used, which consequently makes it difficult to change position with the left hand as well as to use vibrato. Moreover, vibrato is not the same as in the classical violin, where it is more often used as an ornament than systematically. The bow, as well as the position of the hand on the bow, is different. Indeed, in Ancient music, the player places his hand further away from the frog than in classical music. As mentioned in the chapter entitled *Body and Instrument*, traditional Irish fiddlers until comparatively recently (and this is still the case for some fiddlers) played without a chin rest and/or without a shoulder rest. We have also noticed that, apart from embellishing certain notes in the slow airs, the fiddlers tend not to use vibrato. We have also noted that "Older players had a tendency to grip the bow some distance up the stick, away from the bottom or 'frog.'"

<sup>116</sup> Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971) 89

<sup>117</sup> Example 3.1. Master's Return Reel

- For the musician from a classical background and is used to a standardised intonation (between 440Hz and 442Hz), it is difficult to become used to a new pitch. Indeed, often in Ancient music one plays at 415Hz, sometimes at 430Hz.” Parallel to this, as mentioned earlier in the chapter on intonation in Irish traditional music, only in recent years has the practice of tuning in concert pitch spread. Before that, a tone, sometimes well below this, was preferred.

Thus, there are many similarities to be found between Ancient music and ITM, undoubtedly because the origins of the latter are drawn directly from popular music. Learning ITM is therefore one of the ways which allows us to understand and perform Ancient music better.

Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1738) is a useful example of a musician who combined the two main musical styles of his time: classical and popular music, by allowing himself to be influenced by both one and the other. As an Irish harper, composer and singer, he had a gift for melodic composition. Some of his compositions were influenced by continental classical music (he integrated elements of baroque music in his compositions, inspired by Vivaldi and Corelli), while others such as *Carolan's Farewell to Music* draw on a much older style of Gaelic or Celtic Harping.

#### **4.3.3. Repertory Inspired by Folk Music**

There are a number of composers who were interested by the re-emergence of popular nomadic music, performing and interpreting them with several groups of musicians including even a full orchestra. Composers such as Bartok, Liszt, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, Ravel or Kodaly kept these dances and popular songs in mind when composing their works. The folklore from which the violin and its music originated represented a sort of Paradise Lost for the ‘civilised’ violinist, a realm which he could only approach without ever entirely becoming a part of. There was something that popular violinists had –whether they were gypsy, Norwegian, Irish or Hungarian – that was inimitable. Like a secret jealously guarded, and which only they could possess.

In reality, folklore has always brought elements of fertility to the West. From the middle

of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, with the rise in nationalism, folklore was given a place of honour. There were countless examples of this: in Frédéric Chopin's *Mazurkas* (particularly listen to n°18 op. 30 n°1) Frane Listz's *Hungarians Rhapsodies* (particularly the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> written in 1847); along with *Hungarian Dances* by Johannes Brahms and by Robert Schumann. All these composers were influenced, amongst others, by the Irish composer, John Field (1782-1837)<sup>118</sup>, who is best known today for originating the 'nocturne', a musical form that was later made famous by Chopin. Among the pieces that Field himself wrote which were influenced by the traditional music of his own country, was *Go to the devil and shake yourself*, a popular Irish dance tune which he arranged as a rondo for the pianoforte in 1797.

In the 20th century, the example of the 'exchange' between the popular and the cultured at the time was most strikingly found in works by Béla Bartók. Bartok in effect 'invented' ethnomusicology. From 1905 onwards, along with his friend Kodály, he carried out an extensive, probing survey on folklore in his native Hungary and in neighbouring countries. In 1937, he travelled the length and breadth of Romania, in search of melodies that were about to disappear, armed with his rudimentary set of materials to record the music. The richness of the melodies and rhythms that he discovered provided material that would be infused throughout his entire work. An example of one of these is his famous *Dance Suite*

Among the composers of the 19th and 20th centuries who were influenced by the traditional music of their native country, were the Irish composers Charles Villiers Stanford, with his Symphony No. 3 "Irish", and Herbert Hamilton Harty, with his *violin concerto Variations on a Dublin Air* and *An Irish Symphony*.

---

<sup>118</sup>An Irish pianist, composer, and teacher, Field was born in Dublin into a musical family, and received his early education there. The Field family soon moved to London, where Field studied under Muzio Clementi. Under his tutelage, Field quickly became a famous and sought-after concert pianist. Together, master and pupil visited Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg. Ambiguity surrounds Field's decision to remain in the Russian capital, but it is likely that Field acted as a sales representative for Clementi Pianos. Field was very highly regarded by his contemporaries and his playing and compositions influenced many major composers, including Frédéric Chopin, Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann, and Franz Liszt. Field is best known as the instigator of the nocturne, but there is evidence to suggest that this is a posthumous accolade. Although little is known of Field in Russia, he undoubtedly contributed substantially to concerts and teaching, and to the development of the Russian piano school.<sup>[1]</sup>

As commentators have written, we can witness, in effect, how the tradition of folklore has “always breathed a breath of spontaneity of a wilder dimension that was lacking in the ‘civilised’, cultured West.” Without it, commentators say, “the West would have become terribly boring, as if deserted by life itself”. It is important that “The violinist must not or cannot forget his popular and ethnic roots, so that he can play with greater credibility. By being interested in the music, he will be able to understand the works of some of these composers, often very well-known, even better.”

These days, a number of contemporary Irish composers are still influenced by the traditional music of Ireland. Among them are some of the most important personalities in the world of contemporary classical music in Ireland today, such as Gerald Barry, Patrick Cassidy and others. We can also find many themes influenced by traditional Irish music in orchestral music written for film, such as in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Braveheart*.

#### **4.4. Psychology**

When a classical musician goes to a traditional music concert, he is generally surprised by the traditional musician’s capacity to create a friendly atmosphere. His attitude on stage, the ease with which he addresses the audience and tells the history of the songs, his sense of humour and his relaxed way of dressing, all contribute to establishing a contact with the audience. In an interview, Odhran O Casaide explains that “Irish music tends to have a relaxed and informal (way of) presentation and I have also applied this intuitively in my classical performance as well.”<sup>119</sup>

Despite a particular evolution in classical music, the idea of the ‘concert’ is still principally based on the model of the ‘classical concert’, which came to the fore at the beginning of the 19th century. The idea behind this was to have a concert hall with a stage that was set apart from the audience who were sitting in darkness. The musician would be dressed in black, performed works (most often taken from the past) and

---

<sup>119</sup> Odhran O Casaide

would generally not communicate with the audience through speech. There is therefore a sort of separation between the audience and the musician, which induces an atmosphere that is more serious and consequently less relaxed. The state of mind of the classical musician who goes on stage for a performance is therefore often less relaxed than the traditional musician. The classical musician, if he or she has an acquaintance with traditional Irish music and has perhaps already played it in front of a public audience, has through this the possibility to explore an alternative way to prepare for a concert. He learns to take a step back, see things in perspective and adopt a more relaxed attitude. To present a piece of music with a sense of humour is also a good way of making a connection with the audience, thus removing the barrier that exists between the artist and the audience. The audience can also learn something from the musician, by him introducing the history of the work they are about to hear.

“Almost all fiddle music was once designed solely for dancing. The idea of playing for listening - either at a concert or with a recording, is a recent one, as is the idea of playing in a session purely for pleasure.”<sup>120</sup> “It is played in the home, in the public house and at other social gatherings, such as parties, weddings, dances festivals – and more latterly at concerts, on radio and television and for commercial recordings.”<sup>121</sup> “It is performed almost entirely for recreation, by people who are normally unpaid.”<sup>122</sup> “There are relatively few full-time professional performers.”<sup>123</sup>

For the classical musician, ‘playing music’ often consists of working on a piece in preparation for a concert, competition or examination, or practicing a series of technical exercises to improve his or her technique. The musician’s state of mind as regards the instrument is, by consequence, different from the traditional musician who plays music principally for his own pleasure and for moments of conviviality shared with other musicians or music lovers. If the musician classical ‘works’ at his instrument purely with the objective of performing, he can often lose the element of pure enjoyment of the music.

---

<sup>120</sup> Haigh, Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott Music 2014)

<sup>121</sup> Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999)

<sup>122</sup> Haigh, Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott Music 2014)

<sup>123</sup> Ibid

A good example of enjoyment in traditional music is playing in sessions. Charlie Lennon says, "If you have the chance to go to session, that's where the excitement is. It's there where you practice without realizing it, by mixing with people. You can get the swing of it and get really enjoyment out of it".

The objective in a session is not to provide music for an audience of passive listeners: although the *punters* (non-playing attendees) often come for the express purpose of listening, the music is most of all for the musicians themselves. The session is an experience that is shared, not a performance that is bought and sold.<sup>124</sup>

The traditional musician often envisages playing in this environment, with a sense of sharing with his or her colleagues. He shares his style, knowledge of the music, new tunes he has just discovered etc... The classical musician who also plays traditional music may also discover or re-discover that aspect of the music: playing for oneself and for one's own pleasure. This can be beneficial for the healthy psychology of the musician as well as a real sharing or exchange of experiences between the musicians.

It has been observed that the traditional musician has a capacity to play his instrument whenever, wherever and in whatever circumstance. Often the classical musician will find it difficult, even unnatural to playing outside his normal working hours or not in a concert. The phrase "I don't know what to play" is frequently heard from the classical musician when asked to bring out his instrument in a situation that has not been planned or rehearsed. At that moment, a number of things are called into question: the classical repertory is difficult to listen to or to play out of context; the musician does not know how to improvise because it is "not his job"; he is not necessarily in a good 'condition', either mentally or physically, to play (he has to warm up his fingers etc.); but above all, he is afraid of judgement or making a mistake. Indeed, in classical music circles, the notion of judgement is very present. The musician has to develop the skill to think critically so as to be able to direct his interpretation and performance of any given work. He casts a critical eye over his colleagues to compare himself, know where his own levels stand (and those of others) and be able to reject or take what he likes (or does not like) from others. The classical musician above all develops a critical view of himself.

---

<sup>124</sup> Foy Barry, *Field guide to the Irish music session* (Frogchart Press 2008), 5

By aiming for perfection in the interpretation and performance of a work, he does not reserve for himself the right to make mistakes. Details of every note are analysed and controlled during practice (it can happen that the musician can spend more than an hour on one bar alone). The teacher who is present is likely to develop this sense of critical thinking in the pupil. With this type of relationship to the music and towards other musicians, it is possible that the classical musician may develop a form of 'block' with regard to his instrument. By playing other styles of music, particularly in a number of different social settings and associated with a different feeling, the classical musician could possibly develop an approach to his/her music that would provide a different psychological mindset.

Charlie Lennon concludes his DVD with this sentence that clearly illustrates the positive psychology that exists in Irish traditional music:

It is all about fun; it's all about enjoyment; about letting yourself go and then letting it all happen. When you feel relaxed and happy, many surprises come along. The brain really gets into a creative mode; you feel that you can do a lot of things and you *can* do a lot of things, things you would never dream about in normal circumstances. So enjoy yourself and have fun!<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

## CONCLUSION

Throughout my research, I have attempted to shed light on and highlight what constitutes some distinctive and specific features of the traditional fiddle and the classical violin on the one hand and also to assess a contribution that learning the former can bring to the latter.

I myself went from discovery to discovery, as I became immersed in both general and specialist works on the fiddle and the violin and listened to direct testimonies, especially in discussions and interviews with professionals in both fields. Thanks to these investigations, I was able to take my reflections on the subject further. It was thus, in the first chapter, through the study of their etymology, that I realised that the words *fiddle* and *violin* are intimately linked, that both words in effect designate the exact same instrument. What distinguishes them are the different styles of playing and their repertoire; and that the term *violin* is used for classical music whereas the term *fiddle* is used in Irish traditional music. The principal differences between classical music and ITM are that the first is so-called ‘cultured’ (as opposed to popular music of which ITM forms a part) and that in classical music, the repertoire is written down in musical notation, creating a musical part or score, whereas in ITM the repertoire is transmitted primarily through oral traditions.

In the second chapter, I describe how the positions of the fiddle and the violin in relation to the musician’s body have a considerable influence on the resulting sound and on performance. This is why, as much in Irish traditional music as in classical music, there is a ‘traditional’ way of holding the instrument. I realised that the relationship between the musician’s body and the instrument in Irish traditional music is more intuitive than in classical music where the relationship is more studied. This difference in approach towards the positioning of the violin could be of interest to a classical musician seeking a



different, perhaps more natural and freer approach to the relationship with the instrument.

In the third chapter, I have taken my reflection on the technique of the fiddle and the violin further, by associating this directly with the results from traditional and individual music. I have attempted also to explore the three essential parameters of music: rhythm, intonation and musicality (musical creativity, phrasing etc.). I noticed that since Irish traditional music was originally music for dancing, that the pulsation is very explicit and is interpreted as such in ITM, whereas a considerable number of classical works favour long phrases in which the pulsation is less explicitly emphasised. In order to incite the audience to dance, the traditional musician will use rhythmical effects such as to reinforce the upbeat. Giving consideration to such an approach towards the rhythm could encourage and enable the musician to integrate the notion of pulsation to a greater extent and foster a keener awareness of what is happening during the main beat.

Moreover, the use of modality and of microtonal effects on the fiddle can enhance the player's sonic experience, effectively training the ear to appreciate music that is not typically written in Western diatonic scales. This would also allow the violinist to experience a different level of intonation. Finally, Irish traditional music enables the violinist to enhance his creativity, firstly thanks to the addition of ornaments and variations in music but also by the use of different effects with the bow. The traditional musician is constantly creating and reinventing tunes so that they do not sound the same when they are repeated. This requires the fiddler to be entirely present in what he or she is doing and aids creativity; two useful parameters for the classical violinist. The use of different bowing techniques by the traditional fiddler, if emulated, could develop a greater freedom in the use of the bow by the violinist.

Lastly, in the fourth chapter, I have examined the important aspects concerning the learning of the fiddle and the violin, in which I have tried to go beyond the solely technical aspects of the instrument. Firstly, I have noticed that learning the fiddle, in the strictest sense of the word, is generally acquired in the same way as when learning the violin. As learning the fiddle is based on oral transmission (contrary to the classical

violinist who learns a new musical work by studying a written score), this enables the player to develop an additional facet of the brain which, scientifically speaking, could be of interest to the violinist. The traditional musician learns to play his instrument, thanks in large part to listening attentively to other musicians with whom he plays. This helps him spontaneously to develop a trained ear, a skill which is equally useful to the classical violinist, when playing in an orchestra or chamber music orchestra, for example.

In the second part of this chapter, I have observed that there are similarities of approach between Ancient music and ITM, notably as regards the notion of improvisation in the use of rhythm and in the physical relationship with the instrument. I have also noted the extent of the influence of popular and traditional music on many composers whatever the period throughout the ages. I have also explored the degree to which an understanding of ITM can subsequently help the musician to have a greater understanding of these two fields in the classical repertory. Lastly, I have noted that most fiddlers have a different psychological approach to their instrument compared to classical violinists, where an approach towards the instrument that is free of complexes could provide a different approach.

So, as we have seen, there are certain aspects of learning the fiddle that may be of benefit to the classical violinist. However, it is important to find a happy medium. Indeed, as Breandán Breathnach says in his book *Folk and Dances of Ireland*, “people who advocate applying classical technique to fiddle-playing miss the point: that traditional fiddling” as Classical violin “is an art form in its own right. The techniques they seek to advance belong to a different system; and their adoption shows a pitiful ambition in the fiddler who uses them.”<sup>126</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Breathnach, Breandan: *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland*, (Litho Press), 92

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

Breathnach, Breandán, *Folk Music and Dances of Ireland* (Cork : Mercier Press, 1971)

Foy Barry, *Field guide to the Irish music session* (Frogchart Press 2008),

Haigh, Chris, *Exploring Folk Fiddle*, (Schott Music 2014)

Lambert George, *Le corps-instrument*, (Van de Velde, 2013)

Lockwood, Didier, *Cordes & Ame*, (Paris : Salabert, 2002)

Lyth, David: *Bowing Styles in Irish Fiddle Playing*, (Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann, 1997),

McLucas, Anne Dhu *The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA*, (Ashgate 2011),

Mc Nevin, Paul, *a complete guide to Learning The Irish Fiddle*, (Blanchastown, Waltons 1998)

Selum, Reine- Brigitte, *Physiologie et art du violon*, (alexitère, 2002)

Vallely, Fintan, *The companion to Traditional Irish Music* (Cork : Cork University Press, 1999)

Vignal Marc, *Dictionnaire de la musique*, (Larousse 2005)

## Online Sources

Bruke, Kevin, *Bowing-Irish Fiddle Technique Lesson*, Fiddlevideo 2016, Available at <https://www.fiddlevideo.com/bowing-irish-fiddle-technique-lesson/>

English Oxford living Dictionaries <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/violin> [Accessed 5 June 2017 ].

Gavin, Frankie (2014), *IMRO Music Masterclass with Frankie Gavin at Temple Bar TradFest 2014*, Available at : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVVx8g28JN8>

Mc Lucas, Anne Dhu, 'The Brain, Memory, and Oral tradition in Music', Available at [https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/20899/urn\\_nbn\\_fi\\_jyu-2009411282.pdf?sequence=1](https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/20899/urn_nbn_fi_jyu-2009411282.pdf?sequence=1) [Accessed 8 August 2017 ].

Robert Jesselson, 'The Etymology of the word 'Violin' and 'Violoncello': Implications on Literature in the Early History of the Cello', Available at <http://www.cello.org/Newsletter/Articles/celloetymology.htm> [Accessed 17 June 2017 ].

Slow Player.org <http://slowplayers.org/listening/> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

The Session, 'how many tunes do you REALLY know ?', <https://thesession.org/discussions/33425> [Accessed 7 August 2017 ].

## DVD

Lennon, Charlie : *Irish Fiddle Complete Techniques*, Trend Studio, 1 DVD, 1402

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A – questionnaire for fiddler/ violinist

Did Irish traditional music help you to build a stronger knowledge of lefts hand technic and Why?

Did it help you to build a stronger knowledge of the bow technic and Why?

How do you learn a tune in irish trad music?

Does the Irish music way of learning music develop different skills in a classical player?

Do you think it would be useful to apply this way of learning music to the classical repertoire? Why?

Do you think that the ability to memorize a lot of tunes quickly helps a classical player to learn difficult repertoire more quickly

Do you feel that the Irish trad music gives you a different approach to the rhythm in classical music?

Did the Irish trad music help you to have an other understanding of the structure of the cassical music?

Did aspects of tonality in irish music help you to develop an other ear in classical music?

Do you feel that irish trad music gives you a better understanding of the early music? Why?

Did Irish traditional music help you to have a different psylogical approach to the instrument? did it also inform the way in which you practice? and the way to present music on on stage?

Was the Irish trad music harmful to you at some point in your learning of classical music?

## **Appendix B – Email Interview wit Zoe Conway, 9 June 2016**

Did Irish traditional music help you to build a stronger knowledge of left hand technique and why?

Yes, in traditional fiddle playing you have to use a very fast and light finger movement to be able to do rolls, cuts and other ornamentation. Traditional fiddlers can also use quite a lot of double stopping or chords which demands a lot from the left hand. You have to have very strong technique to do some of these chords, especially when using for example the D note played with the 4th finger on the G, string, while continuing the melody with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd fingers on the D string. This is most commonly used by Donegal fiddle players. Also the ability to play very, very fast indeed requires a highly developed left hand technique and strong co-ordination between brain, left hand and bow.

Did it help you to build a stronger knowledge of bow technique and why?

Personally, I think the strongest element to my playing is a very fluid and relaxed bow arm. This undoubtedly comes from traditional fiddle playing, and trying to do very fast but light string crossing, and clear and relaxed bow triplets. However, one element which has been very important for me was bending the thumb underneath the bow which I learned in classical training, and also pulling the bow parallel to bridge and a very loud and focused tone, also learned from classical training.

How do you learn a tune in Irish traditional music?

I first learn a tune inside my head, and when I can sing it all, I can play it all! So I usually find a recording (or make one from sheet music if it hasn't been recorded yet) and then I put it on a loop and listen for a few hours a day. My samsung S6 phone is brilliant for this and I highly recommend it for traditional players!

Does the Irish music way of learning music develop different skills in a classical player?

Yes, it has been scientifically proven that when you learn music by ear, you store it in a place in the brain which is a long term memory. When you learn by sheet, a different part of the brain is used, and that is not a long term memory. That is why it is so difficult for classical players to learn a piece. Also, the more you use the ear to learn, the quicker and easier it gets, and the memory of tunes seems to be literally endless. I know players with tens of thousands of tunes in their heads.

Another benefit for a classical player to learn traditional music is using "free bowing". This allows much more freedom of expression of the music, and actually the melody is allowed to dictate the bowing, which makes the music much less complicated.

Do you think it would be useful to apply this way of learning music to the classical repertoire? Why?

Yes as it would make it much easier to memorise complex pieces.

Do you think that the ability to memorize a lot of tunes quickly helps a classical player to learn difficult repertoire more quickly  
Yes, without a doubt!

Do you feel that the Irish trad music gives you a different approach to the rhythm in classical music?

Yes, I feel that I have more freedom in every way - I can change bowing if I want and also fingering, depending on the situation in the concert, and I can play around with rhythm if I want, however, I am quite strict in my classical reading so don't make it sound like a traditional player playing classical!! I can also play very, very fast which comes from my traditional playing!

Did the Irish trad music help you to have an other understanding of the structure of the classical music?

Not really as they are so different. But learning by ear means I have a map in my head of the structure of the piece, and that makes it much easier to learn classical off by heart.

Did aspects of tonality in irish music help you to develop an other ear in classical music?  
Perhaps but I hadn't thought about that!

Do you feel that irish trad music gives you a better understanding of the early music? Why?  
Also sorry, hadn't thought about that either!

Did Irish traditional music help you to have a different psychological approach to the instrument? did it also inform the way in which you practice? and the way to present music on on stage? Not really, my approach to both styles of playing is the same, although I spent many, many hours perfecting difficult classical pieces, and much less time working on individual traditional pieces. Regarding being on stage, I always like to be happy, content, relaxed and smiling in both genres which I feel gives an audience a better experience and allows them to enjoy it as much as possible.

Was the Irish trad music harmful to you at some point in your learning of classical music?

Not at all in the actual music, but at the early stages there were prejudices from usually older teachers that traditional players couldn't play classical music. That didn't really affect me, but may have affected other people.

## **Appendix C – Interview with Odhran O Casaide, Dublin, 6 June 2017-05-06**

's a different use of the left hand, where there is flexibility a very light articulation. This is particularly evident in ornamentation which comes from the piping tradition and is therefore completely different to classical ornamentation.

The use of the bow is also light and flexible. the player does not typically define emphasis with up or down bow. In fact the up bow with an accent is frequently used to define the strong beat. There is no bowing plan as such and each player has to find a bowing pattern that suits their individual need. This is evident in the wide variety of individual and original bowing styles.

There are many ways in which people learn tunes but usually it is by imitation of phrases played slowly by another musician. people also learn from recordings and from printed sources. The printed sources are problematic as they do not give any indications of the variations and ornamentations required. As a result classical players who learn from printed sources lack authenticity.

This is quite an effective way of learning a complex musical style. it also makes the music accessible to a lot of people as musical literacy is not an obstacle. It is always better to teach the tune by ear first and then to introduce the score. otherwise the student only learns the melodic contour but not the details.

Classical music

classical music score is just a map and therefore at high level the listening skills are very important. Therefore at a very high level traditional music and classical music have these skills in common. If however aspects of music transmission in Irish music were used in classical music it would enrich their musical development.

yes of course, memory is a developed skill therefore if it is in your nature to memorize a lot of music quickly these skills will transfer to classical music as well.

Irish music is very rhythmic and complex in terms of syncopation and accentuation. ornaments in Irish music are not only melodic ornaments but also percussive ornaments. The best players use ornamentation to heighten the rhythmic accent of the music. for example the roll and the triplet are rhythmic devices as much as ornaments. this is particularly evident when you hear the exact same ornament played on the bodhran.

There is also the element of swing which is an ability to capture an authentic rhythmic pulse in the piece of music. This is sometimes very difficult for classical players to understand. These skills when transferred to the classical tradition greatly enhance the players ability to adapt to different styles.

The use of modality and of microtonal effects enhance the players sonic experience. this does indeed develop another ear which can appreciate music that is not typically written in western diatonic scales.



There are many similarities between Irish music and early music. Firstly the emphasis on the dance, the spontaneous nature of music making and use of modal scales. The closeness of Irish music and early music is particularly evident in the repertoire of the Irish harp in tradition.

Yes, firstly it was always my approach to memorize as fast as possible and it was easy for me to work in a world of sound texture and colour. However there were difficulties also as my tendency to deviate a little from the score was never appreciated and got me into a lot of troubles.

Because I was performing in both genres from my early age it was quite natural for me to perform both in public. Irish music tends to have a relaxed and informal presentation and I have applied that also intuitively to my classical performance as well.

As previously mentioned the ability to improvise on an urtext score was not greatly appreciated. The reading is not as fluent as an orchestra player.





