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In Process and Practice: The Development of an Archive of Explicit Stylistic Data for Irish Traditional Instrumental Music

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**In Process and Practice: The Development of an
Archive of Explicit Stylistic Data for Irish
Traditional Instrumental Music**

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Submitted for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Dublin Institute of Technology
Conservatory of Music and Drama

Supervisors: Dr Marian Deasy, Dr Maria McHale

October 2013

Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of PhD, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

This thesis was prepared according to the regulations for postgraduate study by research of the Dublin Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for another award in any other third level institution.

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ABSTRACT

The study of style in Irish traditional music is very much in its infancy. Although current authors locate its beginnings in the 1980s, valuable information can be found from as far back as the eighteenth century. While style is a much-discussed topic, to date it has not been the subject of a major study. Through what is termed ‘the oral tradition’, much of the genre’s stylistic features are transmitted as implicit knowledge. This type of knowledge is difficult to measure, consciously use and share and while these difficulties have been highlighted in one EU-level report, they are also well known in informal conversation. Were this implicit knowledge to be codified into explicit knowledge, it is likely that the process of overcoming these issues could begin, however, at present, no such supplementary approach to transmission exists.

In this study it is contended that through the collation of existing explicit knowledge and the codification of implicit knowledge, the creation of an archive of explicit stylistic data is possible. Furthermore, this thesis explores how such an archive may in the future be used as a resource in reducing the issues surrounding measurability and creativity. In order to do this, a two-part model termed *the musical catalyst process* is proposed. Its first component, *the musical catalyst framework* acts as a set of instructions for constructing an archive of explicit stylistic data and draws on the relevant literature (1786–2012), audio recordings, permutation formulae and practice-based research. As the initial lists of explicit stylistic knowledge grow, the implicit aspects of style are progressively easier to identify. While the stylistic data of the genre could never be exhaustively collected, the aim is to develop and explore a process that would deliver concrete results and which could be used as a reliable approach beyond this project. The end result of this is an archive of explicit stylistic data that has the potential to be further grown.

The second part of the process is termed *the musical catalyst approach*, the aim of which is to explore and demonstrate how for the first time explicit knowledge could be used to inform practice. Here, seven high-level musicians were familiarised with the archive and asked to demonstrate selections of it on a repertoire of ten tunes. The results

of this process were recorded, transcribed and critically discussed in terms of stylistic development/ measurability and creativity.