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Listening to identity: Music in 21st century Ireland

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Abstract

This paper firstly reviews recent scholarship on music and identity in Ireland. The review detects and discusses a set of issues around the identification of genre and nationality in a country which continues to experience a rapidly changing population structure, against which the mapping of a communal Irishness onto existing categories such as 'traditional music' becomes increasingly difficult. Against the grain of this recent scholarship, the paper argues that, in a postmodern and globalised consumer culture, one of the principal locations of music's affect is through music synchronised to advertising. Having examined the musical content of a number of television advertisements, the paper concludes that the global culture they represent indicates the comparative dis-location of music, identity and Irishness.

Keywords: (Traditional) music, Irishness, identity, television, advertising

Introduction

At the end of the past century music in Ireland seemed to revolve around a couple of relatively stable, though overlapping signifiers. Traditional music and its generic offspring, whether performed in bars or in *Riverdance*-style commercial concerts, was a vital aspect of a welcoming land for "craic"-seeking tourists, while the Celtic Tiger's creative economy also punched well above its weight in pop and rock music. Each of these was also part of the culture of the Irish diaspora.

However, even if this typology was useful in the later twentieth century (and it had severe limitations, discussed below) neither traditional nor rock music can fully represent the increasingly multi-ethnic, globalised Ireland of the twenty-first century. Scholars have recently begun to engage with the multiphonic musical voices of this New Ireland, exploring, for example, the increasing globalisation, commodification and hybridisation of Irish traditional music, or the music introduced into Ireland through the increasingly significant African presence in Dublin. This paper will begin by reflecting on this new scholarship. It will then focus on the musical content of advertisements on Irish television. In any postmodern and globalised economy, advertising becomes a principal discourse, one which to an extent displaces existing (regional and national) political and cultural formants of identity; and music is a vital, but under-studied, part of the communicative discourse of advertising. The examination of the ways in which music in advertisements propose, or subvert, traditional and/or newer forms of identity, will throw new light on the musical representation of minorities in both the "New Ireland" of post-EU-membership economic growth and significant net immigration, and what could be called the "Newer Ireland" of the 2007-8 financial crisis and its aftermath.

The re-invention of traditional music

There is a rich vein of recent scholarship on Irish traditional music. Its historic lineages have been mapped in relation to discourses of regional, national and diasporic identities. While the precise directions of these lineages, and their cultural and political effects, remain a matter of debate, it is clear that no account of Irish culture can ignore traditional music.

In relation to the ‘New Ireland’, then, one of the more significant contributions to the debate is Helen O’Shea (2008). *The Making of Irish Traditional Music* incorporates a very interesting historical overview of traditional music from the nineteenth-century Gaelic revival onwards, with the roles of Church and State in the Irish Republic given particular prominence. The account stresses the relative homogenisation of traditional music which occurred during the twentieth century, thanks to factors such as inflexible educational curricula; choices made by those directing state-supported funding systems; interventions by the Church to ban public dancing; and labelling, categorising and commodification by the music industry.¹

It is, however, O’Shea’s ethnographically-driven reflections on the contemporary scene which are of most interest here. Her account positions traditional music as, simultaneously, a continuing articulation of the remaining regional styles within Ireland, and a signifier of Irishness(es) within the global market for world music. Each aspect needs a little unpacking. The preservation of modes of articulation which can be labelled ‘Regional’ style – O’Shea refers to differences in tempo and rhythm, and to the bowing styles of fiddlers – is usually associated with acknowledged leading individual players, whose work is represented on broadcasts and recordings, and practised at ‘sessions’ in pubs. Though the latter are usually informal, and often relatively open (in that guest players are, often, made welcome both as ensemble players and soloists), they are led by those leading players and their acolytes. The sessions and recordings alike are the means through which these styles can be maintained and generationally reproduced.

They can also, at least in theory, be learned by anyone interested. An important artefact of the late twentieth and twenty-first century tourist industry, traditional music encourages two sorts of visitors to Ireland: consumers, and performer-participants. The complex set of issues raised by this participant-phenomenon is at the heart of O’Shea’s book. O’Shea identifies as an Irish-Australian. She grew up in Australia with traditional music, learned to play it, and has returned to the ancestral homeland in order to further her studies in a geographic context which should, she assumes, valorise her ‘authentic’ performance as a member of the global Irish community. This belief that traditional music performance is Irish-identity-confirming is widely shared; for example, in a study of Irish music in Birmingham (UK), ethnomusicologist Angela Moran (2010, p. 10) writes that:

My family was part of that mass migration to Birmingham during the second half of the twentieth century and ... I engaged in a variety of Irish musical (and other) activities throughout my childhood and adolescence, typical for a second or third generation upbringing. It is through music that I continue to form my own personal belonging to Ireland.

Also seeking to hone their skills in traditional music are an increasing number of visitors who have no claimed ancestral connection with Ireland, but who admire the music and wish to learn to play it. One result of this influx of ‘performance tourists’ is that numerous summer schools and festivals facilitate the study of performance skills and give opportunities for public performance. Doolin and Miltown Malbay (in County Clare), for example, are among the best-known places offering summer schools and summer music festivals.ⁱⁱ

In this context, O’Shea examines notions of performative identity and authenticity in music-making from a viewpoint beyond that of local-cultural diaspora, preservation and homecoming. Cultural globalisation is in many ways a market-based phenomenon, and one of the principal products in the global cultural market is of course ‘world music’. Through the operations of this market, musical practices from more or less everywhere have been made available to anyone with the requisite purchasing power (e.g., to buy CDs and attend performances, or to buy instruments and/or tuition in performing styles). One response to this plethora of available musical information, usually stripped of any originary cultural or spiritual significance, has been the growth of what might be called world-music cultural capital. To attain world-music cultural capital, practising musicians from any cultural or national background, assume that – with the right instruments, and with diligence in practice supported by expert coaching – they can learn to play in any of these styles without necessarily sharing the ethnic status, or religious or political beliefs, of the music’s originators. O’Shea refers to these non-Irish players as ‘outsiders’. In her words, the outsider musicians’:

aim to sound Irish indicates that they recognised that in some way (whether by long exposure or by ‘second nature’) Irish musicians have a more authentic sound; it is also to Irish musicians that they accord the authority to decide whose music is authentic and whose is not. Yet none of the younger musicians believed that in order to sound Irish they needed to be Irish themselves (O’Shea, 2008, p. 103).

In this account, then, while O’Shea argues – problematically – that traditional music expresses an essential and biocultural Irishness, her research demonstrates amply that this apparently stable music-identity relation is under constant, and increasing, challenge from assumptions made through the global market in world music and its associated cultural capital.ⁱⁱⁱ

New sounds, and new identities, in the New Ireland

Meanwhile the number of people permanently resident in Ireland but not of immediate (white) Irish extraction has increased exponentially since the early 1990s. Ireland has become a globalised location. As part of the EU (and one of its most ostentatious success stories), the “Celtic Tiger” economy became a draw for ambitious people worldwide. At the same time the serious steps towards peace in Northern Ireland and the subsequent normalisation of Anglo-Irish relations removed the intensity of the global gaze on “Ireland-as-problem”, and encouraged inward investment. As a result of these changes, Ireland’s population has grown significantly, and there are now, for example, several distinct population groups originating from Africa resident in Ireland. A survey carried out by Abel Ugba at the turn of the millennium (Ugba, 2004) indicated that there were in fact people from 18 sub-

Saharan African countries located in Dublin. Ugba followed this survey by work on the African Pentecostal Churches in Ireland (Ugba, 2009a; Ugba, 2009b), and this work and an essay by Matteo Cullen (Cullen, 2014) on African music in Dublin are among the first attempts to encompass the musical impact of these shifting patterns of population.

Cullen's essay appears in a recent, very interesting and very wide-ranging survey of music and musicians in Ireland and the diaspora (Fitzgerald and O'Flynn, 2014). His ethnography includes accounts of participant-observer visits to two events held at clubs in Dublin: 'Firehouse Skank', a reggae/ragga/dancehall evening fronted by an African DJ, and 'Club Louso', a themed 'African Night'. Attendance at the former was predominantly white, though with significant presence of African men, and most of the music played was Jamaican, though with some African contributions. As you might expect, given that reggae and its subsequent sub-genres have been popular in the West since c.1970, the reggae evening was in Cullen's view socially, culturally, and, as he puts it, "romantically" integrative (Cullen, 2014, p. 226).

The Club Louso event, however, was attended almost exclusively by Africans (of both genders), and most of the music on offer was African popular music. Genres included "Congolose soukous and rumba, South African and Zimbabwean kwaito, and Ivorian mapuka" (Cullen, 2014, p. 227). Cullen identifies the African night as preservative of the incomers' existing cultural identities – he notes that relatively small groups of people from the various African cultures present spoke almost exclusively with each other, and predominantly in non-European languages. This is not integrative in the sense that the Firehouse Skank event might be, then, but instead reinforces the micro-community strength which is so important to all immigrant groups; in this case, the micro-communities are assisted by the larger grouping of Africa-within-Ireland which the club night represents. Cullen ascribes a similar function to the African Pentecostal Church, also in Dublin, which he attended. Newcomers immediately become part of an existing community with connected social and business links. The music, led by a nine-piece choir with the backing of a small band, is sourced from African and African-American traditions, and exuberant and intense in delivery; in Cullen's view, the music reinforces a collective sense of Blackness as well as promoting the collective Africa-in-Ireland identity, which he also ascribes to the Club Louso event.

Cullen acknowledges, however, that the musical representation of Blackness is only imperfectly subscribed to among Dublin's Africans. He is surprised that most of his African interviewees have little or no interest in the historic African-American stars of the musical Black Atlantic (figures such as James Brown or Miles Davis). He seems disappointed – shocked, almost - to discover that his interviewees actually like European music:

Attending Club Louso, I was surprised to hear a number of house remixes during the DJ sets, as I didn't think Africans would have an interest in house music; the enthusiastic reception the house sets received stands in seeming opposition to the exclusive 'Africanness' that the music and ambience of the club generate (Cullen, 2014, p. 231).

While it would seem that Africa, too, is part of a global cultural economy which trades in music from everywhere, and has little interest in merely preserving a canon of work by great artists from the past, it should also be acknowledged that both Cullen and Ugba rehearse some of the difficulties faced by immigrants to Ireland, which until the recent waves of immigration represented itself as culturally and ethnically homogeneous. However, while acknowledging that African Pentecostal Churches in Ireland have a role in offsetting discrimination faced by the new immigrants, Ugba also argues that African Pentecostals in Ireland do not identify principally as African, or Black, but as Christian. Their Churches have a mission to transform Ireland, making it into a true Christian state again. Several of Ugba's interviewees represent this missionary zeal:^{iv}

The present Ireland is unconnected with the Ireland of the past where Christianity and Christian values thrived. Parents are not handing over the spiritual heritage that they had received from their parents, grand-parents and great-grandparents ... the link is broken and we aim to restore it ... our main aim is to restore Christianity in this country ... in years to come people will look back and understand that we had been brought to Ireland by God for a purpose (Ugba, 2009b, p. 129).

As often identified by the Catholic Church during the twentieth century, in this vision secular music is part of the problem. In contrast, the enthusiastic mix of choral and solo singing, in African and African-American inspired genres, belongs at church, and is therefore part of the transformative project to return Ireland to the true ways of the faith. While Ugba mentions music only in passing (e.g., Ugba, 2009a, pp. 126, 202), one of his interviewees illustrates the importance of music in the project of building the Church:

When I started attending the church, it was a very small place. They had no drums ... I told the pastor, 'look I'm very good on the set drums. If you get the real drums I'll be playing them for the church'. We got the drums and the whole service changed. It became livelier and more people started coming in. We started growing at a very rapid pace (Ugba, 2009a, p. 133).

African Pentecostals using gospel music in their mission to return Ireland to its "true" Christian heritage, Africans in Dublin dancing to house music, and non-Irish traditional musicians fiddling in County Clare, are all illustrations of a global tendency to dis-location: in these examples, music, location and identity can no longer be mapped simply onto one another (if they ever could).

The "hidden" Irish popular music

And yet there is an Irish popular music which in its way stands outside the global flows of contemporary culture, while preserving its own international, diasporic flow. It is often, mysteriously, ignored in studies of Irish music. Any account of musical cultures identified by special interest groups such as academics needs to be deconstructive, and to look at the gaps and absences, the half-uttered thoughts, which can be discerned from such surveys of music in Ireland. For example, O'Shea quotes one of her "outsider" musicians, someone who has made a deep psychic identification with traditional music – seeing it as a metaphor for Ireland itself – and who was

therefore surprised to find that “when you get to know Miltown Malbay, you realise that the average people down there are not really interested in [traditional] music at all” (O’Shea, 2008, p.86).

What might they prefer? Given the immense international commercial success for what could be called mainstream Irish-Anglo-American-style rock and pop (the Cranberries, U2, and Sinéad O’Connor; Boyzone, B*witched and Westlife) and “Celtic”-inflected rock and pop (The Corrs, Clannad, Enya and the Celtic Woman phenomenon) — these genres might seem more obvious candidates for the interest of the majority population of any small town on the west coast, or anywhere else in Ireland for that matter, than traditional music. And indeed these acts and others in rock and pop have been given a great deal of attention in much of the recent scholarly work on popular music and Irish identity, including those by Gerry Smyth (2005; 2009) and John O’Flynn (2009).

But rock and pop are by no means the whole story of non-traditional Irish popular music. The most consistent absentee from detailed consideration in academic treatments of music in Ireland is country music, which is given a typically brief, almost apologetic, mention by O’Flynn:

Although rarely if ever celebrated in a national sense, domestic adaptations and variations of country and western music (‘Country and Irish’) can be heard on local radio stations, on the Irish-language channel TG4, and in many venues throughout the country ... arguably, this is one of the most popular forms of music in Ireland, with many of its artists notably the singer Daniel O’Donnell, enjoying sustained success at home and amongst the Irish diaspora (O’Flynn, 2009, pp. 32-33).

Similarly, Angela Moran makes a throwaway remark that country and western, while popular in the Birmingham Irish circles she grew up in, is *not* part of what she identifies as a recognisable “public Irish sound” (Moran, 2010, p. 33). However, this dismissive attitude is inverted by one of her interviewees: “local Irishman Frank Murphy claims that migrants travelling to Birmingham ‘lived in an Irish cultural bubble ... our music was 1960s Irish ballads and country and western’” (Moran, 2010, p.51). At this point Moran concedes in a brief aside that, since country and western’s roots include music brought to the USA by the Irish, it can be seen as part of the cultural diaspora. It is treated as such in a brief historical overview in the *Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Maguire 2013). More typically, a recent (and otherwise interesting) collection of academic essays, *Ordinary Irish Life. Music, Culture and Sport*, while devoting two chapters to traditional music, makes no mention of country music at all (Ní Fuartháin and Doyle, 2013).

Music on Irish Television

Invoking the work of Jim Mac Laughlin (1997a), O’Flynn (2009, p. 140) labels Country and Irish part of a ‘hidden’ musical Ireland. Though Maguire’s overview, and an entry on Daniel O’Donnell, in the *Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* (Ní Fuartháin 2013), along with Mac Laughlin’s somewhat hostile article on O’Donnell, appear to be the sole academic treatments of this music, the label is on the face of it absurd. If this musical Ireland is in fact ‘hidden’, it is at least hidden in plain sight. O’Flynn himself points to the presence of Country and Irish music alongside

traditional music, on the Irish-language television channel TG4; a similar point should be made about the English-language channel Irish TV, which ran from May 2014 to December 2016.

This channel and its website were aimed at the Irish diaspora: much of its advertising focused on travel to and from North American and Australasian cities, and there were regular features on events in the USA and the UK. The channel addressed its chosen audience with a mix of Irish national and regional news and magazine items. Early in the Irish TV channel's history, its evening repertoire typically consisted of back-to-back Country and Irish music programming, as for example on January 19th 2015:

- 7 pm *Irish Music Lounge*. "an Irish country and easy listening programme"
- 8 pm *Entertainment Ireland*. "the best of new music, dance and fashion"
- 9 pm *The Phil Mack Country Show*. "great country and Irish music featuring established and up and coming artists in the country music scene in Ireland, the UK, Australia and America"
- 10 pm *Ireland's Country*. "a selection of the best loved artists on the circuit"^v

A week of viewing in January 2015 revealed similar programming every evening. There was, at this point, no traditional music on this Irish Television channel. Instead, viewers were treated to sequences of low-budget country music videos featuring conservatively dressed performers (men wearing sports jackets, women in flowing dresses) either in concert footage, or lip-synching in front of stereotypical manifestations of the rural Irish landscape, delivering songs which tell of personal and familial loss, and which are imbued with the nostalgia typical of the genre.

It's entirely possible that this programming was chosen as much for its cheapness as its popularity: promotional music videos are seldom as expensive to buy/hire as original programmes are to make. As the channel developed, and the ratio of original programming increased, its musical base broadened. By the time of its closure in December 2016 programmes featured light classical music, rock and soul, showbands, ballad groups, and traditional musicians, alongside the country shows – which were still broadcast for two hours per day. Presumably this increased breadth of coverage and the investment needed to fund it helped to force the Irish TV channel into bankruptcy – though the immediate cause was a major investor's (John Griffith) decision to stop backing a losing horse.^{vi}

However, in terms of Country and Irish programming, the vacant slot left by Irish TV had already been filled – by Irish TV presenter, country star and entrepreneur Phil Mack, whose *Keep it Country* TV channel is, at the time of writing, available in the UK on Sky, Freesat and Freeview. *Keep it Country* broadcasts country music, via American promotional videos, and a daily admixture of Irish-led programming, 24/7. This is a typical evening programme from February 2017:

- 7 pm *Ireland West Music American Country* "a blend of the best new and nostalgic American country music"
- 8 pm *Hot Country* "playing the latest releases from Ireland's country stars, news, gig guide and more"
- 9 pm *Phil Mack Country Show* "Established and up-and-coming artists in the country music scene in Ireland, the UK, Australia and America"

10 pm *Ireland West Music TV* “songs we know you love to hear along with interviews with some of the best known artists on the Irish and Country music scene”

Musical Irishness, it would appear from these examples, is at least as well represented by the “Country and Irish” genre as it is by traditional music or rock and pop, and it would also appear that academic commentary on music in/and/of Ireland needs not just to acknowledge but to catch up with this salient fact, as it has tried to do with the musics brought by the “New Ireland’s” immigrant populations.

The national broadcaster RTÉ – which, partially state funded, has less need to cater for popular taste – seldom represents Country music, though it often includes traditional music. RTÉ’s 2015 All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil coverage, a sequence of recorded broadcasts in January and February from the festival held in Sligo, was the televised equivalent of O’Shea’s coverage of the traditional music scene. The programmes embraced and celebrated the event’s internationalism, with space given to competitors and other performers from outside Ireland: musicians from Australia, the United States and the UK (including a British Asian Muslim), performed traditional music and expressed their enthusiasm for it. Each programme also featured a number of young learner-performers – many of whom, again, were from outside Ireland. The resulting representation was of a living music which was simultaneously traditional, national, and globalised.

Elsewhere on Irish television, however, the emphasis was more simply on the global. Most of the music to be found on Irish television – theme tunes and incidental music for programmes – is from the mainstream of rock, pop and associated genres, and/or newly written music by composers trained in the classical tradition. The RTÉ News channel’s station theme tune or ‘ident’ (at the time of writing), for example, is by Ronan Hardiman, a Royal Irish Academy of Music graduate whose credits include orchestral scores for the Michael Flatley shows *Lord of the Dance*, *Feet of Flames* and *Celtic Tiger*. This background in what might be called extruded-traditional light music might lead the listener to expect a news ident with a traditional flavour either in rhythm, or melody. And so, in a way, it is: Hardiman’s work for RTÉ news is an arrangement of the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist song ‘O’Donnell Abú’ (whose melody has been the basis for Irish broadcasting news idents since the 1930s). But Hardiman’s score is also typical of the global genre of news idents, and his 2009 version (subtly revised in 2014) is structurally almost identical to the current BBC News equivalent composed by David Lowe.^{vii} In each case, loud drum patterns introduce an orchestral passage with synthesiser bass line, which builds quickly to a fanfare played forcefully by trumpets and horns, before fading over a rhythmic pulse on drums and synthesiser, the latter nodding emphatically in the direction of Electronic Dance Music.

Music in advertising on Irish television

The RTÉ news theme announces that Ireland is part of the global community, its increasingly urbanised people sharing a fascination with political news and current affairs with the middle classes and ruling elites elsewhere in the world, and decreasingly fascinated by their own national stories. While the Irish TV channel repeated old tropes about family-based diasporic Irishness, and did so partly through the medium of Country and Irish music, the RTÉ News ident places Ireland firmly in

the contemporary world of global consumer capitalism, in which familial and national identities are less important than participation in a relatively boundaryless global marketplace (Mac Laughlin, 1997b). And as such, arguably the most important discourse on television is not the programmes themselves, but advertising.

Advertisements on Irish television constantly address the nation's place in the globalised world (as they do almost everywhere else). They signal a modern economy just like every other, strong in financial services, whose tourist trade sells 'culture' principally as a factor in the country's GDP. In this context the music carried on advertisements made specifically for Irish television is of particular significance – though the role of music in advertising is usually taken to be subliminal, that does not make it any the less important in conveying the messages the advertiser wishes to relay (Blake, 1995; Cook, 1993).

A number of Dublin-based advertising agencies and film production houses produce advertisements for Irish television. This output almost always uses music, which is either specially commissioned – written by bands or individual composers – or 'synchronised' (bought from an existing source such as a music library, or an agent representing a band or record label's output). There is very little specifically Irish-sounding music in these advertisements. The table below is an overview of the Dublin agencies' output for the six months ending February 2015, with a brief description of the music used in each individual advertisement. The composer and/or band are identified wherever possible (in many cases the agency's input on its promotional website www.tvads.ie makes no mention of either).

Table 1: Overview of Irish-made adverts for Irish TV, September 2014-February 2015 (source: www.tvads.ie)

Music	Client/subject	Type	Date	Agency/ producer
folk guitar chords, written to video	Jacob's crackers	food	02.15	Butter
micky mousing (MM) sound effects (SFX) written to video; guitar 'ident' [a brief musical sign associated with the brand]	FBD insurance	finance	02.15	Publicis Dublin/ Russell Curran Productions
incidental orchestral chords, MM to video; guitar ident as above	FBD insurance	finance	02.15	Publicis Dublin/ Russell Curran Productions
Electronic Dance Music (EDM); synthesiser ident	Electric Ireland	energy	02.15	Butter
Drum ident; synthesised build, by Ben Carrigan; then a synchronised Dire Straits track 'Walk of Life'	Investec (profiling Irish rugby player Johnny Sexton – during the 6 Nations championship)	finance; sport/ tourism	02.15	Along Came a Spider
EDM written to video	No Nonsense car insurance	finance/ sport/ tourism	02.15	Publicis Dublin/ Motherland
MM SFX written to video; marimba arpeggio ident	Bord Gáis Energy	energy	01.15	Publicis Dublin/Red Rage films
electropop song with female	Fáilte Ireland/Visit	tourism	12.14	Motherland

voices; probably a synchronised song	Dublin			
slow chords on string quartet plus MM SFX under voiceover speaking Louis MacNeice's poetry	Fáilte Ireland/Visit Dublin	tourism	12.14	Motherland
Electronic pulse/chords with guitar chords late on – rock more than EDM	The Dean Hotel, Dublin	tourism	12.14	Indigo & Cloth/Fortune and Walsh
orchestral warmth	Dunnes Stores	retail	11.14	Simply Better
as above	Dunnes Stores	retail	11.14	Simply Better
synchronised track by The Delorentos 'Just Like Heaven' – Irish alt rock	Barry's tea	food	11.14	Irish International/Red Rage
orchestral chords and gentle pulse behind voiceover	Aviva Insurance	finance	11.14	Sweet Media
orchestral chords and gentle pulse (again) by Gareth Averill; synthesiser ident	BMW Ireland	motor	11.14	Sweet media
piano and synthesiser chords, rock drums and synthesiser pulse (like Vangelis's theme for film <i>Chariots of Fire</i>), by Robert Sword	Irish Sports Council (anti-doping)	sport	11.14	Atomic
orchestral ident only	EBS	finance	11.14	Irish International
no music	Iarnród Éireann	tourism	10.14	Sweet Media
orchestral spookiness	Tesco (Halloween)	food retail	10.14	Tiny Ark
rock track, no vocals, Sigur Rós-like (Sigur Rós is an Icelandic alt rock band)	Bank of Ireland	finance	09.14	Butter/Cawley Neate
slow pulse orchestral	AIB	finance	09.14	Rothco
traditional Irish musicians, flashmobbing in a shopping centre	TG4 (promoting a new traditional music show)	tv promo	09.14	Publicis Dublin
quiet guitar and keyboard chords	AIB – Gaelic Athletic Association	finance/sport/tourism	09.14	Rothco
synchronised track by Hot Chip, 'Over and Over' (Hot Chip is a British dance/pop-rock band)	VHI Healthcare 'supporting' blue September anti-cancer	health	09.14	Publicis Dublin
Electronics plus solo violin arrangement of the melody from the final movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony – which doubles as the EU's 'anthem'	Tesco Mobile	mobile phone	09.14	Chemistry/Russell Curran Productions

Of these 25 advertisements, the only traditional Irish music is in a promo for a television programme featuring more of the same. While the Delorentos track for Barry's Tea presents a gentle song by a relatively well-known Irish band in support of a strongly Irish-branded commodity, this is the only such scenario. Otherwise the music is either newly-written pastiches based on mainstream Anglo-American popular and European classical genres, and/or songs taken from the global pool of tracks commercially available for synchronisation.

The Irish nation as cultural entity is addressed through advertisements for sporting events (the Six Nations rugby union championship, and the Gaelic Athletic Association disciplines) rather more than it is through music. Indeed, neither the GAA adverts, nor the Irish Sports Council's anti-doping infomercial, nor the Investec advert promoting Ireland's participation in that year's Six Nations championship, used traditional music (or Country and Irish, for that matter). Perhaps most surprisingly, given the importance of music-based tourism in Ireland, the adverts for Fáilte Ireland/Visit Dublin used a variety of musical genres, none of them immediately recognisable as Irish; and the ad for Iarnród Éireann used no music at all.

The six months' worth of television advertising itemised in the table above are not an anomaly. The pattern was the same in the Dublin-made advertisements in the previous six months, with traditional music similarly conspicuous by its absence, and traditional-influenced or 'Celtic-rock' rhythms, instruments and/or melody patterns identified in music written for only three of a further 25 advertisements. Of these, two were for Irish banks (Permanent TSB and the Bank of Ireland) and the other, the most traditional-Irish-sounding of the three, a rock track with a recognisable bhodran drum pattern emerging towards the end, was heard on a long corporate ad celebrating Lucozade Sport Ireland's sponsorship of the All-Ireland hurling final. Other musical genres used for adverts during these six months included reggae, jazz, American popular song, and in one instance a witty parody of Sergio Leone in grandest Spaghetti Western mode (an ad for the soft drink Britvic Club Zero). Again, none of the music used in this six months could be identified as Country and Irish. In this year-long sample, then, musical Irishness is merely one, relatively unimportant, component of an outward-looking modern Ireland eager to play its part in the global exchange of goods and services, and signalling its place in the new common culture of global capital by embracing its music.

Conclusion

The key music-related discourse of global consumer capitalism – advertising – represents both Ireland and Ireland's consumer class as dis-located. For many servants of the Celtic Tiger – including immigrants struggling to find a voice, as well as younger professionals tired of the discourses of nationalism – this may have been good news. Weakening the bonds of music and identity can open the country as a more inclusive and welcoming place for people of all backgrounds and cultural preferences, though it might also mean changing the status of traditional music to a mere tourist-enticing commodity.

At any rate, as all political parties compete to offer guarantees for the further development of the Irish economy (and therefore to act as the guardians of neoliberal capitalism) globalisation is the only game in town. This will bring gains as well as losses for those committed to the articulation and preservation of musical difference. Globalisation may be a totalising project, but it is not yet a fully homogenising one. Cultural difference remains important as a constituent of market differentiation; and, while music still signals difference in the New(er) Ireland, the markers of such difference – musical genres, styles, traditions and techniques – are floating signifiers whose meaning is mutable. Thus, even the constrictions of a market-based economy can allow for the emergence of new musical voices such as those of the 'non-Irish' traditional musicians or Dublin's Africans, while the attempted suppression of musics which did not fit the (pre-New Ireland) grand narrative of national identity – such as

‘Country and Irish’ – is less possible in a multichannel, Web2.0 media world in which music, cultural capital and identity are commodities to be traded and consumed – in other words, enjoyed – rather than mutually reinforcing absolutes.

Notes

ⁱ Complementary, somewhat longer-duration overviews can be found in Dowling (2014), and – with an emphasis on classical music – Dwyer (2014).

ⁱⁱ Some idea of the range of annual events in County Clare, from formal festivals with a mix of tuition and concerts, to open sessions in pubs, can be found in

<http://www.clare.ie/images/documents/clarefestival%26eventsguide2015.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ O’Shea’s research was conducted before the impact of the internet, and in particular Web2.0’s social media and modes of diffusion such as YouTube, could be measured. Doubtless this impact on the music-identity relationship proposed here has been considerable.

^{iv} See also Ugba (2009a, pp. 103, 127, 209).

^v Retrieved from www.irishtv.ie, accessed January 2015.

^{vi} <http://www.irishtimes.com/business/media-and-marketing/irish-tv-wound-up-as-attempts-to-secure-funding-fails-1.2913014>

^{vii} <http://www.ronanhardiman.com/projects/rte-television-news/>;
<http://www.davidlowe.co.uk/portfolio/featured#credit-65>

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