



From Isolation to Icons: Three Women Artists in Irish Country Music

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Declaration

We, the undersigned declare that this thesis entitled *From Isolation to Icons: Three women Artists in Irish Country Music* is entirely the author's own work and has not been taken from the work of others, except as cited and acknowledged within the text.

The thesis has been prepared according to the regulations of Dundalk Institute of Technology and has not been submitted in whole or in part for an award in this or any other institution.

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Abstract

This PhD examines women and their lived experience in Irish country music. Through the use of case studies of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann, this thesis explores how these women have negotiated identity, meaningfulness, and legacy in Irish country music. By examining how these themes are evident in the lived experience of these three artists, this thesis critically discusses gender roles, identity formations, and cultural reflections in Irish country music. This thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of Irish country music from the female perspective through a critical and in-depth investigation of gender roles, identity formations and cultural expectations. Through an examination of how women in Irish country music negotiate their gender identity, this thesis demonstrates how this music reflects Irish culture and cultural expectations. It questions how women artists' portrayal of gender reflect cultural expectations and norms, while it also explores how their actions contributed to a reimagination of gender norms in Irish country music. By engaging with scholarship on gender, this dissertation examines how women artists create and negotiate their gender roles within music, reinforcing cultural and community identity. It also provides a new discourse on how meaningfulness is created through song lyrics and performance, and finally explores how legacy is created in Irish country music.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The developing scholarship on women in music, particularly in an Irish context, has thus far neglected Irish country music. My thesis considers how the themes of identity, meaningfulness, and legacy are negotiated through the lived experience of women in Irish country music. These themes are examined through three case studies engaging with Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann. These three women have been artists in the Irish country music scene since the 1960s and continue to perform in 2022. My dissertation will demonstrate that, owing to their success and the admiration from both audiences and other artists, all three women may be considered as icons of Irish country music.

Growing up in rural Ireland, Irish country music was part of my milieu and informed my cultural and social identity. I have participated in and performed this genre of music since my early childhood, and I have listened to the three women at the focus of this study throughout my life. In contrast, my academic encounters with the genre throughout my education has been limited. My research is the first to focus on women in Irish country music and highlights the need for further examination of the genre. These three women are exemplary and provide insights not only into the music scene but provide an opportunity to develop a greater understanding of Irish society.

The longevity of their careers allows this thesis to examine their lived experience of Irish country music in three distinct stages of their careers. This chapter details the main concepts that aided in the development of this thesis. I provide a concise history of the genre of Irish country music before discussing the key methods and theorists that informed this dissertation.

Finally, I provide a detailed chapter layout to highlight the structural contents of both the overall thesis and the chapters themselves.

1.1: Aims

The dissertation explores how three women artists, Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann, contributed to the development and popularity of Irish country music for over sixty years. Through a critique of Irish society from the turn of the 20th century, I discuss how these three women transgress cultural norms and traditional gender roles. I examine the roles and positions women have held and continue to hold within the genre of Irish country music. I examine how the themes of identity, meaningfulness and legacy are negotiated through the lived experience, performances and recordings of these women. I address how these three women developed and evolved their image and identity, speaking out or acknowledging issues in society, and influenced other artists, thus creating their own space within the genre of Irish country music. Through a semiotic and cultural analysis model, I discuss how song lyrics and iconography reinforce communicate the lived experience of these three women, and reflect the lives of their audiences. Finally, I address how the careers of Begley, O'Donnell and McCann have impacted the contemporary Irish country music scene, identifying these three women as icons of Irish country music.¹ This approach provides a holistic understanding of the lived experience of women in Irish country music, informed by scholarship in ethnomusicology, musicology and gender studies, that fills a significant gap in the understanding of women in music.

1.2: Objectives

The objective of this research is to address the lack of academic engagement with Irish country music at an academic level. This thesis highlights the validity of examining this

¹ I utilise icon as the term prescribed to artists who have been pioneers in a music genre, artists who have gained respect from their peers within Irish country music, and are now recognised as role models by younger artists.

particular cultural expression of Irishness through an academic lens. Furthermore, it documents the lived experience of three women artists whose careers may have gone undocumented.

This thesis sets out to:

1. Explore and investigate the position and role of three key women in the development of (a) Country music (scene) in Ireland.
2. Critically examines the performance styles and portrayals of identity in the Irish country music scene, specifically identifying the expectations, challenges, and opportunities which these women have experienced.
3. Analyse the image and identity portrayals of three key female figures and determine if these markers change throughout their careers.
4. Document the contemporary Irish country music scene and the impact of technology on notions of gender norms, image presentations and identity portrayals.

The research will demonstrate the iconic status of these three women within the genre of Irish country music through their music, professional development, and influence on other performers.

1.3: Thesis Findings

My research demonstrates how identity is constructed and performed through the career span of these three women. I critically examined how Begley, O'Donnell and McCann challenged cultural and social norms in the beginning of their careers. I reveal how meaningfulness is created and maintained through image, iconography and song lyrics, drawing on the example of these three women and extending this to include other performers, both men and women, in the contemporary Irish country music scene. I establish the impact these women have had on

the contemporary music scene and legacy they have within the genre. Finally, I assert the validity of understanding Irish country music as a cultural expression of Irishness.

The findings of this thesis highlight how Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann have re-negotiated their identities through three distinct stages of their careers. At the beginning of their careers each woman faced adversity. This is evident in relation to access to performance spaces, and the challenges to attaining recognition as a performer. Societal norms in 1960s Ireland did not cater for gender equality and access in all aspects of life. This was especially true in the case of women's participation in public musical performances. These three women broke down social structures and made it possible for women to perform in similar spaces to that of their male counter parts. Their persistence to continue this career path, and their rejection of detractors along with the support of family, band members, and managers, enabled them to transform their status as interval singer in céilí bands to band leaders (O'Donnell 2014; interview 2018; Begley 2017; interview 2020, McCann interview 2019). The middle stage of their career saw all three women experience some form of familial or personal change. Philomena Begley and Susan McCann became mothers, while O'Donnell experienced ill health and addiction problems. However, encountering these changes did not mean that these women stepped away from their musical careers. Each woman made a concerted commitment to their musical career. Many previous women musicians, specifically women artists from the showband era retired from performing once they began to bear children. Begley and McCann did not subscribe to those same norms (Miller 2013; Gallagher 2016; 2017a; 2020e; Lee 2019; Martin 2018). Women musicians and performers resigning from their careers once they become mothers is something that still affects artists in the music industry as a whole. This is something that needs to be addressed both in writing and in practice.

In the later stages of their careers, Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann developed greater control over their touring schedules. Their careers have come full circle. They are now sought-after performers who are approached by various managers to perform rather than seeking a

performance. They are seen as icons and legends in the Irish country music scene and are the people new artists approach for the seal of approval. They fought for their positions within the genre. They continued to perform in spite of the prescribed social and cultural norms of Irish society, and have created a community of relatability and respect for those who continue to follow their careers. This dissertation highlights women in Irish country music and addresses an imbalance in the literature that has neglected country music, a popular music form, and the role of women in this genre. It demonstrates how identity is constructed and performed through a career cycle - early, middle, and late. It interrogates how lyrics create meaningfulness for the audience. It assesses how visual imagery reflects the identity and social markers of an artist. Finally, the thesis presents a critique of the contemporary Irish country music scene and the impact of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann on the Irish country music genre.

1.4: Irish Country Music

In chapter two I provide a discussion on the development of Irish country music. Significant publications on Irish country music come from authors such as Margaret O'Donnell (2014), Daniel O'Donnell (2005; 2017), Philomena Begley (2017), Kevin Martin (2018), Tom Gilmore (2018), and Eddie Rowley (2018). These authors highlight the mobility of Irish country music since the 1960s. However, at this juncture, I will define the specific type of music that I refer to when discussing Irish country music. Influenced by American country music, Irish country music - often referred to as 'Country and Irish', or 'Country and Western' - is the music most notably associated with Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, Susan McCann, Big Tom, Brendan Shine, Larry Cunningham, Daniel O'Donnell, Gloria, Declan Nerney, and Mick Flavin amongst others. This type of music is performed regularly in the West and North of Ireland, yet in the past twenty years has expanded to the South and some Eastern regions of Ireland. Originally performed in primarily rural areas, the main performance spaces for Irish country music includes hotel function rooms, parochial halls, marquees, and local bar lounges. These

spaces allow the music to fulfil its initial social function - dancing (Lynn, 2017). In the past ten years, the performance spaces have also expanded to include concert hall, theatres, and music festival tents. This is due to the growth in youth participation in Irish country music, prompting an added visibility of the genre in urban centres. This is changing the context for performances with less of an emphasis on the dance function of the music, and a move to a focused engagement with the musical content and artist gaze.

Despite the changing nature and context of Irish country music, the audience's primary method of interaction with Irish country music is through dancing, and secondary to this is vocal participation - singing. The lyrical content and musical structure of Irish country music have stayed the same since its emergence in the late 1960s. Several younger artists are composing country-pop songs that engage with contemporary issues or are arranging pop songs with a 'country beat', as discussed further in chapter two. However, these songs are supplemented with "old classics" such as *The Gambler*, *Thank God I'm a Country Boy*, *Back Home to Donegal*, *The Boys from the County Mayo*, and *Will you go Lassie Go*. The concepts of nostalgia and place within the lyrics of Irish country music is discussed further in chapter four. The combination of American classic hits with old Irish ballads and folk songs has been the formula for Irish country music performers since the 1960s. The artists narrate songs that contain themes of locality, life experiences, rural life, emigration, and love; themes that the audience can relate to. The country beat function reinforces these themes and evokes both movement and emotion from the audience. Whether the music is performed in a dance hall or concert setting, the beat still allows the audience to tap, sway, dance, and sing. Irish country music allows the audience to listen, interpret and embody the music.

1.5: Themes and Issues in American Country Music Research

Research on country music in the USA is a growing field of academic endeavour. In the past thirty years there has been an influx of contributions from American academics documenting one of the oldest forms of musical practice, which is still prominent and widely performed in

America in the 21st century. Early writing on country music is mainly concerned with highlighting the songs and sounds of the genre, particularly the work of Cecil Sharp (1916-1918), Alan and John Lomax (1933), and their collection of songs and tunes from Appalachia and the rural south.² Their work is followed in 1968 by Bill Malone's *Country Music USA*. Malone's publication is widely recognised in the USA as the first major academic publication on country music, considering Malone to be 'rightly ... known as the dean of country music historians' (Cohen 2014, p.126). Writing on country music since the late 20th century has expanded to include examinations of cultures within which this music is evident. In the late 1990s, Cecelia Tichi (1998) and Richard A. Peterson (1999) both published works on country music. Tichi's *Reading Country Music: Steel Guitars, Opry Stars and Honky Tonk Bars* provides a comprehensive discussion of country music. Tichi asks:

Why so little attention thus far? Folklorists aside, the cultures of country music and of the academy seem mutually exclusive. Country music is a latecomer to the latter, arguably because of its association with a social sector that the intelligentsia has been reluctant, even loath, to engage, namely, lower class Southern whites (Tichi 1998, p.1).

This sets up the structure of the entire publication. The contributors to this publication come from a multitude of fields of research including historical musicology, literature, and fine arts scholars, and country music scholars. Essays contained within include critical biographies, faith and country music, country music structures, gender and image embodiments, legacy in country music, traditions and change, sexuality and subculture, definitions of what is country music, the contemporary country music scene, race, and class. These topics continue to be prominent in research on country music as the discussion around them evolves in contemporary society. This

² Sharp, C. (1932) *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. 1. Reprint, United States: Loomis House Press.

Library of Congress (2020). John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax Papers | Digital Collections | Library of Congress [online] Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/john-a-lomax-and-alan-lomax-papers/about-this-collection/> [Accessed 18 Apr. 2021].

seminal text appears to be influenced by what Nettl (2015) described as ethnomusicology “at home” (Nettl 2015, p.186). He suggests that an influx of ethnomusicological research appeared after 1985 when ethnomusicologists began ‘looking literally in one’s own backyard, investigating, as an ethnomusicologist, one’s own culture’ (ibid). Tichi’s publication in 1998 came ten years after what Nettl states was the onset of “at home” ethnomusicological research. The essays contained within this book present one of the first collections of “backyard ethnomusicology” in country music in America.

Mary A. Bufwack’s (1998) chapter *Girls with Guitars – and Fringe and Sequin and Rhinestones, Silk, Lace and Leather* is particularly relevant to this study. In it, Bufwack addresses the issue of female presentations and the changing role of women in the country music scene in America. She assesses the images presented by women from the Carter Family in the 1940s by critically contrasting them to Reba McEntire and Carlene Carter in 1991. Spanning over five decades Bufwack investigates how the ‘choice’ an artist makes and how she ‘handles the dilemma of what to wear in her musical performance is greatly influenced by issues of group and class identity as well as by the forces of commercial entertainment’ (Bufwack 1998, p.153). Bufwack suggests that image presentation cannot be merely attributed to good or bad taste, rather, the assessment of the image must consider culture, mass media, and ‘women dressing for the male gaze’(ibid). She argues that these performers also want to showcase their own individuality ‘have pride in their performance, and to avoid the condemnation and ridicule of groups outside country music’ (ibid). Bufwack provides a thorough discussion of how these choices change throughout the decades and how women artists articulate their individualism and cultural markers through their performances of country music. This chapter provides a template for image analysis that considers both personal choice and cultural influences on a performer’s identity portrayals.

Richard A. Petersons *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* 2nd edition (1999) highlights the history and commercialization of country music from the late 1920s

onwards. In it, he discusses the most important contributors and factors that aided in the development of country music's popularity. Peterson underscores the icons that also contributed to this popularity and develops his discussion of authenticity from this standpoint. Authenticity is a highly charged and debated topic in American country music, Peterson brings this topic to the fore by engaging in a discussion of what authenticity means to certain people at specific times. He also asks where authenticity is most evident in country music – in instrumental music, in vocal music, in bluegrass music – and questions how authenticity changes over a prolonged period. Peterson also initiates a discussion on who the authority on authenticity is and how that is transferred from regions and generations. Joli Jensen also contributes to the field of authenticity in country music with her publication of *The Nashville Sound: Authenticity, Commercialization, and Country Music* (1998). Like Peterson, Jensen discusses the authentic sound of country music, how it changed through the control of certain features and factors, and how it became commercially valuable to stakeholders in the Nashville area. Jensen's book is a great precursor to Peterson, providing a complete discussion on authenticity. Both authors create valid arguments for their theories and allow those who read them to engage in a similar discussion of their area of interest.

Aaron Fox's (2004) contribution to the field of country music research documents the culture and practices of a small town in Texas, USA. Fox examines the concepts of local identities, language practices, and the cross over between speech and song. In particular, he illustrates how both speech and song are utilised by the locals in Lockhart, Texas in their cultural practices. Fox utilises ethnographic practices to showcase how his positionality aided in gaining insider knowledge of the music and culture of the locals in Lockhart, Texas. Fox's positionality is signified when he is 'chewed out' by one of the locals for not visiting in a couple of weeks, a term that refers to verbal chastisement by others. Fox notes the importance of being 'chewed out' by one of his interlockers as a sign of his acceptance into the community in Lockhart: 'Getting "chewed out" by Hoppy was a rite of passage, a sign of belonging and an

acknowledgement of hard-won local status' (Fox 2004, p.2). He stipulates that establishing this connection to the field allows him to both subjectively describe the musical culture and practices, while also objectively analysing these practices through academic theory and method. Fox also engages in a discussion on identity portrayals through music and the embodied performance of these identities through song and speech. His analysis of song lyrics enables him to detail the speech patterns of everyday life that are evident in the songs. Fox eloquently discusses how working-class identity is displayed through song and singing styles: 'for these people I was coming to know, speech and song were inseparable expressive modalities' (Fox 2004, p.37). Fox's detailed ethnography of this local music culture allows the reader to understand the complexity of how people use music in a multitude of ways. Especially their expression of identity through language, how songs and speech allow them to depict a 'realness' in their music, and how it articulates their working-class culture (Fox 2004).

Developed from a panel discussion at the 2003 International Conference of Country Music Diane Pecknold and Kristine McCusker's 2004 anthology *A Boy Named Sue* is a significant scholarly publication on country music that places gender as the core theme. In it, the authors examine gender conventions, both masculine and feminine, and ask how these conventions have structured and manipulated the advertising of Country Music. Contributors examine the sentimental mothers from the 1930s barn dance poster to the hypersexualized image of Elvis. The essays explore the ways that deep rooted concepts of gender and gender roles have institutionalized gender norms and the image associated with country music. This interdisciplinary publication of essays includes contributions from the field of women and gender studies, country music studies, ethnomusicology, musicology, and popular music studies. The book provides an extensive examination of gender. All the essays included provide individual insight into the idealised gender roles and images ingrained in country music from both male and female perspectives. While this publication is almost twenty years old the

contributions and discussions contained within are still valid in contemporary discussions of gender norms and gender roles.

Nadine Hubbs (2014) furthers an understanding of country music in the USA by examining how the concepts of gender, class, and identity unfold in one of America's most culturally and politically charged forms of popular music. In her publication *Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* Hubbs questions how taste, sexuality, and class, are both negotiated and mediated through country music. Specifically, Hubbs utilises historical cultural commentary and social systems to examine how country music became a working-class music, associated with bigotry and homophobia. Hubbs challenges this association by bringing together the redneck and the queer, highlighting the 'historical forgetting' of American history (Hubbs 2014, p.4). Hubbs' discussions on class and how it reinforces one's identity is highlighted in her discussion of Gretchen Wilson. She uses Wilson as a case study to highlight how this artist embodies her working-class identity. Hubbs suggests that Wilson utilises this identity to highlight her authenticity. She re-applies the derogatory term "redneck" to reinforce her working-class identity, thus showcasing an affinity to her childhood and a relatability to her audience. Hubbs also discusses how this reinforces her portrayal of working-class identity and alludes to Wilson's femininity and sexuality. She provides a detailed and lengthy analysis of the power and control evident in class structures in America. Hubbs is particularly interested in how the middle-class society created a dismissive, politically loaded discourse on country music, which it devalues, and working-class culture in general (Hubbs 2014, pp.75-138). Throughout her book, Hubbs utilises music analysis, cultural critique, and sociological analysis of contemporary culture and its formation, to present an argument in favour of participation in country music, listening to, and conducting an examination of its evolving culture. Situated in popular music studies and musicology, *Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* also draws on

ethnomusicological practices to provide a comprehensive examination of a particular American country as a genre.

In 2016 Diane Pecknold and Kristine McCusker published a follow-up anthology of essays asking questions not only of gender, but additionally questioning the construction of identity, sexuality, nationalism, race, class, and social structures. In *Country Boys and Redneck Women: New Essays in Gender and Country Music* the contributors ask questions of country music performance in new locations and spaces. They examine performance contexts in prisons, the conceptualized performance of gender in such performance spaces, and how “college country” in present-day Brazil has become one way of negotiating masculinity in an age of economic and social instability. These new essays that question sexuality, gender, and identity, provide a comprehensive and timely contribution to the discourse on country music. This anthology follows their previous edition with contemporary arguments, continuing to offer perspectives of gender and identity expectations, and how these expectations are being destabilized. This collection of essays highlights the global reach of country music and offers the reader many positions from which to read country music, through critical musicology, feminist studies, masculine studies, country music studies, ethnomusicology, and popular music studies. It formally highlights how country music negotiates its own identity through performances in many distinct locations and contexts, and advocates for this type of scholarship in country music studies to continue.

Leigh Edwards’ case study examination of Dolly Parton in *Dolly Parton, Gender, and Country Music* 2018 is also a critical contribution to country music studies. Complimenting the anthologies discussed above, Edwards presents this examination of gender, identity, and sexuality in a lengthy critique of Parton’s personal life and professional career. Edwards examines the images of Parton from the beginning of her career to the present day and discusses the cultural, social, and personal changes that are attributed to the changes in image presentation. She explores Parton’s role as musician, actor, philanthropist, and entrepreneur to

show how Parton's gender subversion highlights the challenges found in the most seemingly traditional form of American popular music. Edwards believes that Parton is critiquing gender norms by 'uplifting a negative image and linking it to a positive one, mixing the country music trope of the innocent and virtuous "mountain girl" with her "hillbilly tramp" persona' (Edwards 2018, p.30). Parton is real and fake simultaneously, offering new perspectives on authenticity claims in country music:

In juxtaposing the two, she reveals both to be artificial images and uplifts the demeaned, "fallen woman" image, in effect critiquing how the "hillbilly tramp" stereotype has been used to reinforce gender and class hierarchies (ibid).

Parton's career offers the reader the opportunity to ask questions of embodied performances of gender, identity, and sexuality, while also questioning the politics of cultural and social norms in 'traditional forms of music' (ibid). Edwards' critique of Parton's career to date provides a well-informed argument and a template from which to address concepts of gender, identity, sexuality, class, and social norms, all of which change and evolve over time.

Reflecting greater scholarly engagement with and interest in the genre, Nadine Hubbs and Francesca T. Royster edited the 2020 *Journal of Popular Music Studies Special Issue: Uncharted Country*. This publication contains contributions focusing on gender, race, sexuality, and LGBTQ+ themes. Some of the essays in this issue address the notions of country music's presumed natural whiteness and the partial erasure of blackness in country music (Hubbs and Royster 2020, p.6). Other essays focus on the concepts of the cultural transfer of country music from its 'roots' in southern America to more urban centres, the global shift of country music, and how that represents the new culture and society that has appropriated this music. Several essays analytically trace the musical features of country music and how those features represent the historical colour line of country music. While other essays investigate how the music industry and radio station structures have contributed to the lack of visibility of women country

music artists. This publication further highlights the important and critical research undertaken on country music. It illustrates how a form of music, often suggested as racist, homophobic, rural, and redneck, provides a rich field of study that is scrutinising these concepts to provide a comprehensive history of the genre. Specifically, the publication has recently received the Ruth A. Solie Award from the American Musicology Society in November 2021. Hubbs and Royster's edition informs current debates on country music and more importantly contributes to discourse and themes in popular music studies in general.

The International Country Music Journal 2021 contains a large body of essays concerning country music.³ This is the ninth edition of the journal with international contributors from many different academic fields. The themes that are examined in this edition concern identity, the social critique of country music in Japan, singing traditions and influence, concepts of gender, critical biographies, cultural histories, cover versions and nostalgia, and the memoirs of once a Grand Ole Opry Star. The contribution of essays from an array of authors highlight the important research being conducted on country music worldwide, while also highlighting the variety of topics covered. Additionally, the work of the Queer Country committee highlights the topic of queerness, sexuality, and identity in country music. The growth in research and discourse on LGBTQ+ and queer tropes in country music intersects with the growing academic engagement with these themes particularly in popular, traditional musics, and folk music research.

1.6: Research in Irish Country Music

Research on the topic of Irish country music is still in its infancy in Irish academia but in the last two decades Paul Maguire, John Millar, and Rebecca Miller have contributed significantly to scholarship in this area. Of particular importance is Maguire's (2012) PhD thesis on Irish country, Millar's master's thesis (2014) and PhD thesis (2020) on authenticity in Irish country

³ Lynn, C (2021) "Classifying Operations": Constructing and Manufacturing Identities in Irish and American Country Music *International Country Music Journal*. 9th ed, pp.127-150. Brackish Publishing: USA.

music, and Miller's (2013) chapter concerning gender on the showband and country music stage in Ireland

Paul Maguire's PhD on *Conditions of Possibility: Changes in Popular Music Culture and the Development of Country & Irish Music* (2012) contrasts the careers of two bands: 'Big Tom and The Mainliners' (1963-2009) and 'The Plattermen' (1958-1974). By focusing on these two bands, Maguire documents their contrasting experiences and highlights the social and economic influence on both sets of performers during the 1960s and 1970s. Maguire details the development of Irish country music and how it became a dominant musical form during that period. He discusses the cultural climate of Ireland during this time and the social structures that lead to the development of this genre out of the showband circuit in Ireland. His research incorporates both personal narratives from his own experience as a musician in both the showband era and the country music genre, and a cultural critique of the economic and social climate of Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s that led to the popularity of country music. Maguire utilises reflexive writing to consider why country and Irish music worked. He examines the promotion and reception of both 'The Plattermen' and 'Big Tom and The Mainliners' music, analysing both the musicians and the audience, and their perception of Irish country music. He also engages in a critique of the management and business structures evident at the beginning of Irish country development. Throughout the thesis, Maguire also discusses the disdain and denigration that country music has received from the beginning of the genre's development. Often seen as a music that is 'backwards' and 'rural', country music did not "fit" with the new social outlook of 1960s Ireland (Maguire 2012, pp.5-6, 44-47, 231). Yet, the genre continued to grow in popularity in Ireland and this created a bigger divide between musicians and audiences of all genres (ibid).

Maguire's overall argument illustrates how those who perform and participate in country music were actively creating something of their own rather than in reaction to something. Irish country music, according to Maguire developed organically, it created its own conditions from which

to develop, it was and continues to be a highly profitable genre, and it is a form of embodied identity for those who participated in it. While Maguire sets out that this thesis is a critique of the conditions of possibility through a contrast of two bands, there is a gap in the literature on the role or position of women in the initial stages of country music in Ireland. Maguire limits his discourse on women to brief references of Philomena Begley, women audience members, emigration and work in England, and women's ability to dance with a view to 'finding' a husband:

One young woman explained that she had no intention of returning to Ireland because she had 'a better life in Croydon' where she could go to dances twice a week, had a better paid job than she could get in Ireland and a better chance of securing a husband (Maguire 2012, p.160).

Yet, Maguire's research provides an especially important contribution to the study of country music in Ireland. Maguire's work represents the first comprehensive academic study to engage with country music at this level. He presents a well-structured and well-informed analysis of Irish country music and its development during the 1960s and creates a discourse on the reasons for its popularity.

John Millar's MA dissertation entitled *(In)Authentic Country: Country Music in Dublin* (2014) considers the concept of authenticity in country music performance and practice in Dublin city. This study provides a critical account of the perception of authenticity in American country music and how this can be transferred to the Irish scene. Millar describes how 'old-time or honky-tonk' country music as performed by Hank Williams, Ernst Tubb, and George Jones, is appropriated by Dublin based country music performers. He provides a case study on two Dublin-based groups, their performance, and their practices concerning country music, to illustrate how authenticity is a conceptual process. Millar argues that authenticity is not an

innate element of any given music, but a concept applied by those who participate within a music, alluding to a type of value.

Millar further develops the concept of authenticity in his PhD dissertation *Creating Authentic Country: Country Music Dances and Old Time Sessions in Ireland* (2020). He expands his examination of country music from Dublin to the west of Ireland, developing a discussion on authenticity and localization of a global music form (Millar 2020). Millar discusses both old-time – as performed by George Jones, Hank Williams, Ernst Tubb – and Irish country music – as performed by Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, Susan McCann, Big Tom, Daniel O'Donnell and many more Irish country artists. Millar examines the phenomena Irish country music dance rather than the performers of this music; however, Philomena Begley and Susan McCann are discussed prominently in interviews with Millar's interlockers. Margo O'Donnell does not feature.

Millar's examination of old-time and Irish country music enables him to explore the concepts of community, localisation, and identity through the lens of authenticity. Millar suggests the authentic nature of country music is a meaningful music form that is enacted through localised lived experiences and cultural practices of those who participate in it. To state that one form of

music is more authentic than another is to miss the real authenticity of this now localised form of country music:

Those individuals and the communities of practice of which they are part are in turn authenticated not just according to canonical but according to locally produced codes of music making (Millar 2020, p.174).

Utilising field work interviews and observations, as well as participation in both performance and dance, Millar intricately weaves his argument through each chapter to showcase how the concept of authenticity is part of all discussions on country music:

Country music is a mutable thing; on this island it has been enculturated to the locales into which it has been transposed, given vibrant form by social and cultural practices that together work to create living, authentically realised music (2020, p.181).

Furthermore, Millar demonstrates how this musical form has been in continuous practice on the island of Ireland for over sixty years, its presence verifying its authenticity processes and structures within the country music communities in Ireland. Both dissertations completed by Millar (2014; 2020) are important contributions to country music research in Ireland.

The chapter by American scholar Rebecca Miller entitled ‘We Were So Different!’ Negotiating Gender on the Showband Stage’ (2013) provides a critique of the showband years in Ireland from the female perspective. Miller details the processes and practices that showband women were subject to and to which they also adhered. Miller critiques the experiences of many showband women - Mildred Bernie, Tina Tully, Sandy Kelly, Muriel Day, Eileen Kelly, Margo O’Donnell, Philomena Begley – and examines how they were transgressing roles traditional held by women. These women performed in bands and on stage during a time when employment for women was slim or often non-existent in Ireland. The aforementioned women did not have to emigrate to Britain or America for work however, they gained employment

within the island that afford them, and their families, a stable and profitable occupation. While not always seen as a job suitable for a woman - often regarded as simply 'window dressing' - these women were pushing the boundaries of what was an 'acceptable' job for a woman secure (Miller 2013, pp.24-25).⁴ These women were no longer fulfilling a window dressing role, rather, 'women showband singers later often became the central attraction of the band, and in some instances, went on to lead their own groups' (Miller 2013, p.25). Of the women named by Miller, three of them went on to front their own bands which was a completely new role for women in the music industry. These women set about changing the gendered role of women in the music industry in Ireland, which, according to Miller, afforded all women who entered the music industry thereafter a new respect and control over their own career path. This chapter provides a pivotal background into the lives of women musicians in 'popular music' in Ireland from the 1950s; it also offers an understanding of their perception of their own experience. Miller clinically highlights the cultural and social intimacies of Ireland during these showband years, indicating the revolutionary career paths these women attained. It also illuminates the importance of the choices these women made during the 1950s, and how this has impacted on future participation of women in music. Miller's work contributes to writing on both popular music forms in Ireland and the early stages of country music writing in Ireland.

1.7: Popular Music in Ireland

Popular music studies in Ireland has become a vibrant field of research over the past twenty years. Of note for its relevance to this thesis are the works of Gerry Smyth's *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music* (2005), Martin McLoone and Noel McLaughlin's *Rock and Popular Music in Ireland: Before and After U2* (2012), Noel McLaughlin's *Post-Punk Industrial Cyber Opera? The Ambivalent and Disruptive Hybridity of Early 1990s' U2 in Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (2014), and Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn, Lonán Ó

⁴ See Dolphin, C. (2013). *Reels, Heels and Glass Ceilings: Musicians in the professional sphere of Irish Traditional Music* [unpublished] BA Thesis, Irish World Academy of Irish Music and Dance, University of Limerick. BA Thesis, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick.

Briain (eds) *Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music* (2020). Each of these publications has examined a particular type of popular music evident in Ireland during its most recent past.

In 2005 Gerry Smyth's publication examines the Irish rock music scene from the 1960s through to 2004. In it, Smyth investigates the history of the genre, the places, the performances of the music throughout Ireland, and the practices associated with rock in Ireland during this time. Smyth argues that this type of music is a legitimate form of Irishness and Irish identity. He insists that this form of popular music represents the changing economic and social structure of contemporary Ireland, thus highlighting the importance and significance of examining this music. Smyth instigates an examination in Irish musical culture, focused on contemporary music forms as an expression of Irishness and Irish culture. This publication prompted greater academic engagement with popular music that moved away from an established focus on Western Art and traditional music in Ireland.

Noel McLaughlin and Martin McLoone's (2012) publication provides a critical analysis of the Irish rock music scene against the international popular music scene through case studies of U2, Van Morrison, Sinéad O'Connor, The Boomtown Rats, and Horslips (McLaughlin and McLoone interview with Dave Fanning 2012). They address pivotal cultural moments such as the Beat Scene, the Folk Revival, Northern Irish Punk scene, and Dance Music in Ireland. Addressing both artists and cultural movements, this publication asks questions of national and cultural identity markers, and how they are utilised or refuted by this form of music. The authors innovatively approach debates previously discussed concerning Irish traditional music, classical music, and literature. They challenge the reader to question previously held notions of nationalism, Irishness, and identity, and reframe these concepts concerning popular music in this book. They refute the notion that Irish music is a particular type or genre of music, rather they suggest that Irish music is music played by Irish musicians regardless of the genre or

specific type. McLoone and McLaughlin document the development of popular music in Ireland, the grip of rock music, and the international presence of Irish popular music.

Noel McLaughlin's (2014) chapter focuses on U2's career between their sixth and seventh albums released in 1988 and 1990. He examines the impact of the change in sound and image of the band during this period and discusses the impact this had on popular music in Ireland and on Irish identity. McLaughlin begins with a discussion of the concept of authenticity and the impact of appropriation of cultural sounds on a band's reputation. He then discusses dance music and the impact it had on the proliferation of dance groups and bands in Ireland. McLaughlin examines U2's *Zoo TV* tour during this period and illustrates the impact that U2's music had in contesting notions of national identity and Irishness during this time. This argument engages with social and cultural commentary, utilising media discussions and images as a way of reinforcing his argument. McLaughlin suggests that U2 as a band changed the notion of a specific type of authentic national identity and Irishness.

The recent edited collection by Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn, Lonán Ó Briain (2020) combines essays from scholars in musicology, popular music studies, feminist studies, cultural studies, and ethnomusicology. This book contains three distinct sections with twenty essays in total. The topics consider record labels, gender, Irish language songs, new forms of popular music, underground music scenes, DIY scenes, media and technology, cultural appropriation, and the modern popular music scene. This publication does an excellent job of bridging the gap in the literature of popular music studies in Ireland. The editors stipulate that this is not an Encyclopedia of Irish music, however it does provide a comprehensive discussion on popular music culture, context, places, and activities in Ireland.

Three essays contained in this publication are considered here. Ann-Marie Hanlon's essay "Missing From the Record": *Zrazy* and Women's Music in Ireland' provides an incisive lens on writing women back into the history of Irish music. *Zrazy*, a group of women musicians

from Dublin, were (and continue to be) the visible figures of lesbian feminism in Ireland. Hanlon provides an extensive discussion on being a lesbian feminist and what it meant (means) in the context of Irish culture. She discusses how this group of women musicians stood in the face of political and cultural inequality. She states that ‘lesbian feminist art is a site of activism and protest, and these characteristics are epitomised by the members of Zrazy both in their music and actions as cultural workers’ (Hanlon 2020, p.69). This chapter provides an insight into writing women into the ‘record’ on popular music studies in Ireland.

Aileen Dillane’s essay on Sinead O’Connor is also a critical piece of writing from this publication. Dillane considers how O’Connor utilised her body and voice in protest of minority groups. This is discussed in more detail in the gender theory section below. Finally, Síle Denvir provides an interesting analysis of the Irish language songs of Tom a’tSeoige and Ciarán Ó Fátharta. Denvir provides a discussion on music in Connemara and the cross over and influence of country and western and folk music on the *sean nós* singing repertoire most associated with Connemara. Her analysis provides a glimpse into the changing context of musical style and performance as evident in the musical community in Connemara, and how the songs composed by both a’tSeoighe and Ó Fátharta provide that community with a new form of musical expression.

The *Encyclopedia of Music in Ireland* in 2013 edited by Harry White and Barra Boydell is significant in its contribution to writing on popular music in Ireland. This publication is an A-Z of Irish musical life across recorded history. The book aims to identify the activities through which music has become a persistent expression of Irish political, social, religious, and cultural life. Contributions from over 240 scholars aid in creating this large body of work with research documenting Irish music both on the island of Ireland and abroad. The topics comprise of Irish musical experience: secular and religious music to 1600; art music, 1600-2010; Roman Catholic Church music; Protestant church music; popular music; traditional music; organology and iconography; historical musicology; ethnomusicology; the history of recorded sound; music

and media; music printing and publishing; and music in Ireland as trade, industry, and profession. This complete work, in two volumes, offers a glimpse into all musical activities in Ireland from the Middle Ages to the present day (2013). However, as Fintan Vallely pointed out in his 2014 review, the balance of content within the publication is unequal. It contains a 69% majority written on classical music, and 25% containing traditional music writing. Popular music activities are considered in the final 6% of the books contents (Vallely, 2014).

The main consideration from the above synopsis of writing on music in Ireland is the lack and near invisibility of Irish country music in a number of these publications. Irish country music features briefly in the *Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, however it is not a detailed discussion but a well-structured overview of Country and Irish music by Paul Maguire. Furthermore, in *Music and Identity in Ireland and Beyond* (2014) edited by John O’Flynn and Mark Fitzgerald Country and Irish music receives a total of three mentions. There is no comprehensive discussion or contribution on the Irish country music contained within. In the most recent anthology edited by Mangaoang, O’Flynn, Ó Briain, again there are a number of mentions and considerations of country and Irish music in relations to other genres, with Sile Denvir’s essay on Irish language song the solitary contribution on Irish country music.

1.8: Gender Defined

Gender plays a significant role in the creation and formation of one’s identity. Gender theory is prominent in the discussion of Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann and their identity. Gender is also evident in their stage personas and their image displays. Therefore, it is pertinent to provide a comprehensive discussion on gender theory and align this thesis with a specific field of thought. Specifically, in this section I discuss concepts of gender put forward in relation to Irish traditional music and Irish popular music, and how they relate to this thesis

on Irish country music. I critically engage with texts from Ireland and beyond, and consider what questions these texts have posited about gender and music.

At the outset I must make clear what I consider gender to be and what that concept encapsulates. Sociologist Harriet Bradley (2013) has defined gender as

a social construct. It is a category used by human beings as a way of dividing up the world they perceive around them and making sense of it. Since the distinction between women and men is very basic to all societies, this way of categorizing social relations is one that has a very long history. However, being a social construct, gender is not something fixed, but something that varies according to time, place, and culture ... gender as a construct is politically deployed ... the usage of the term has been persistently bound up with power relations between women and men (Bradley 2013, p.3).

Previously sociologist Mary Holmes (2007) defined gender as

socially produced differences between being feminine and being masculine... it is generally agreed that gender differences are to be understood as a central feature of **patriarchy**, a social system in which men have come to be dominant in relation to women. There are ... questions around to what extent gender is imposed on individuals as a result of the material conditions and social structures in which they live [original bolding] (Holmes 2007, p.2).

Both definitions by Bradley and Holmes are expanded in the work of Ellen Koskoff (1987; 2014) and Jane C. Sugarman's (1989; 1997; 2019). Koskoff states that gender is:

primarily as a socially constructed and performed category of human differentiation. I say primarily because I am somewhat convinced by biological and brain studies showing that men and women are different in some ways - but these ways seem to me to be largely irrelevant to individuals as everyday social actors ... I applaud the efforts of gender-studies scholars who have attempted to deconstruct and destabilize centuries-long notions of

gender as a binary system solely based on biological sex; I see gender as they do, as more or less and ever-changing continuum of intertwined socially constructed and negotiated categories, as well as biological categories of many varieties and performances (Koskoff 2014, pp.6-7).

Koskoff makes clear that her concept of gender is a socially constructed ideology that is different from the biological sex of the human being. Sugarman further consolidates this concept of gender seeing it as:

generative of other aspects of culture, or even as situated at the core of a system's logic ... specific beliefs and attitudes regarding gender form an inextricable component of specific types of systems. For individuals living within a system, the internal consistency and logic of the fundamental relationships upon which it is based so pervasive that concepts regarding gender appear to be utterly natural and unquestionable (Sugarman 1989, p.192).

The need to question assumptions on gender and power structures is critical. More recently Sugarman has reinforced Holmes and Bradley's notions of gender as an integral part of power structures within certain cultures. She states:

Gender equality, in particular, has at times been aligned with nation-building efforts or national liberation movements. It is not only popular and mass activism that has played a role in the politics of gender and sexuality: throughout the twentieth century, policies regulating gender relations and sexual behaviours have been an intrinsic part of most state legal systems (Sugarman 2019, p.72).

Other studies also place a focus on the relationship between gender constructs and nation-building (Slominski, 2020). Critically, Sugarman notes:

One of the basic assumptions of Western feminism has been that relations of gender and sexuality are asymmetrical, with heteronormative males claiming

a patriarchal dividend and females and members of non-heteronormative groups occupying subordinate positions (Sugarman 2019, p.84).

Gender then is a social construct embedded with ideologies of power and norms. It has previously been linked with heteronormativity and sexual orientation. However, in recent years these notions of gender are being replaced with gender plus ideologies and a distancing of the sexuality. Importantly it must be understood that gender and gender norms are bound up in the culture within which 'we' live and form 'our' notion of self. Any examination of gender must also be aware of the culturally constructed notions of gender within each specific society and culture.

1.8.1: Gender and Women in Ireland 1900s to 2000s

The concepts of gender as discussed above are critical to an examination of Irish culture and society in the period between 1900 to 2000. Focusing on this time frame provides a clear indication of the gender structures and gender norms that were culturally assumed and inscribed in the lives of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann. Placing the focus on music, Sugarman states:

Each of us as individuals, whether we be cosmopolitan academics or perhaps no-less-cosmopolitan members of the communities that we study, invariably carry with us through life what are often "residual" notions of gender ... notions that vie with the more explicit, verbal formulations that we have developed for ourselves on an intellectual basis. Often it is highly symbolic practices such as music-making that have helped to inscribe and maintain those notions deep within our being, and their very beauty and power have often distracted us from noticing the assumptions that they embody. From this perspective, so long as we operate within gendered social worlds, gender is

intrinsic to our musical performances, and any musical performances is thus also a performance of gender (Sugarman 1997, p.32).

These ‘inscribed’ notions of gender norms are evident within Irish culture. Even before its independence from Britain, Ireland was a patriarchal society governed by men (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 2017). Tes Slominski’s 2020 book, *Trad Nation* provides an extended exploration of women in Irish history, highlighting how women have been remembered: virgin, maiden, and mother. These three categories were insighted by Irish poet Eavan Boland (1995) in questioning the personifications of nation and Ireland in Irish written history. Slominski further develops this concept of personification. At the turn of the twentieth-century Irish women continued to be associated with the domestic sphere. This association with domesticity is evident in many western cultures where women were associated with nature (domestic sphere) and men were associated with culture (public sphere) (Koskoff 1987; 2014; Sugarman 1997; 2019; Dibben 2002). Yet it is a culturally conceived idea, it is not something that is inherent in both sexes. There is a clear connection between this ideology and the place of a women in Irish society at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Mary E. Daly (1995) notes:

women were by no means inactive in the campaign for Irish independence, and the interaction between feminism and nationalism and, more specifically, between the suffrage movement and the struggle for independence has been the subject of considerable analysis. From the apparently dizzy heights of this revolutionary period the women’s movement in Ireland appears to have undergone a major decline in the independent Irish Free State (Daly 1995, p.99).

Caitriona Beaumont (1997) reinforces these claims writing:

Women’s contribution to the nationalist cause and to the foundation of the State was ... long forgotten. Legislation enacted during the 1920s and 1930s was seen to limit the citizenship rights of women. In 1937 the introduction of a new draft Constitution appeared to confirm these misgivings. Citizenship

for women was now defined solely in terms of her function as wife and mother
(Beaumont 1997, p.563).

Beaumont also notes Hanna Sheehy Skeffington's article in the Irish Independent newspaper in 1937 on the new Constitution stating that it was 'based on a Fascist Model, in which women would be relegated to permanent inferiority, their avocations and choice of callings limited because of an implied invalidism as the weaker sex' (Sheehy Skeffington in Beaumont 1997, p.563). Skeffington's argument was put forward concerning article 41.2.1 of the Constitution of Ireland, enacted in 1937. This section of the constitution states that:

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman give the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (*Bunreacht na hÉireann*, Article 41.2.1).

Debates on this section of the Irish Constitution suggest that this article was enacted to protect women's rights, yet the article highlights once more the concept of a 'woman's place' and association with the domestic sphere. As Daly suggests:

Most descriptions of women's lives in independent Ireland provide a dreary litany of legislative and administrative restrictions on women's rights: legislation banning divorce and access to contraception, restrictions on women's jury service and on the employment of married women – a pattern which is seen culminating in the 1937 Constitution with its emphasis on the role of women in the home (Daly 1995, p.99).

The growing Catholic ideology and economic austerity in Ireland in the subsequent decades saw the place of women become even more segregated in Irish society. As Catherine Rose (1975) notes in a 'country where Catholicism is all pervasive it is hardly surprising, that women have been brain-washed into a reluctance to assert themselves' (Rose 1975, p.11, also see

Cusack, 2021). The Irish Catholic Church played a significant role in the creation and preservation of gender roles and expected behaviours of the Irish population (Beaumont 1997; 1999; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Earner-Byrne and Urquhart 2017; Cusack 2021). For example, as Beaumont details in 1925, the ‘Catholic hierarchy issued a statement condemning divorce, suggesting that it would be altogether unworthy of an Irish legislative body to sanction the concession of such divorce, no matter who the petitioners may be’ (Beaumont 1997, p.565).⁵ This then prompted the first Irish government led by William Cosgrave - a devout Roman Catholic - to accept this advice of the Church and inscribe legislation to ban divorce (Beaumont 1997; 1999; Connolly 2003). Beaumont highlights the gender norms expected of Irish women from the late 1920s writing ‘it was the image of the ideal Irish woman, the wife and mother, who predominated in Irish society. This image was fostered in the schools, through State legislation and the pronouncements of the Catholic clergy’ (Beaumont 1997, p 566). This was also evident in the emphasis placed on the need for ‘moral virtue amongst the young, especially young women’ by the Catholic Church (Beaumont 1997, p.566). Inglis and MacKeogh also point out ‘The Catholic Church’s governance of women’s sexuality lasted into the 1980s’ (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012, p.77). Inglis and MacKeogh state that:

In the heyday of the Church’s monopoly over morality and sexuality, the deployment of sexuality, in Ireland as elsewhere, revolved around sexually promiscuous women who were seen as a threat to family and community, a silencing of sex particularly among children and adolescents, the promotion of unrestricted fertility and the castigation of any form of sex that took place outside of marriage as deviant (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012, p.74).

Later in the twentieth century, the Irish Constitution was amended to give women more rights to work, for employment equality, and for the right to purchase contraceptives without

⁵ Divorce was legalized in Ireland in 1995, only passing with a small majority vote. This highlights the Church’s sustained presence in Irish political life (Beaumont 1997; 1999; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005).

prescription (see Beaumont 1997; 1999; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005).⁶ These acts included the lifting of The Marriage bar in 1973, and the Employment Equality Act were written into the constitution in 1977. The marriage bar applied to women who worked in public sector jobs only, women who worked in the private sector were not under the same regulation to end employment after marriage. The majority of women were employed as domestic servants in the early part of the twentieth century, by the 1950s women were more visible in white-collar positions such as doctors, solicitors, and secondary school teachers (Beaumont 1997; 1999; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005).⁷ Irrespective of this growing visibility in other careers, women's employment in the domestic service was seen as training for a young woman. Ferriter highlights the report of a Commission on Youth Unemployment of 1951 ... that suggested 'domestic service helps to train a girl for her natural vocation – the care and management of home and children' (cited in Ferriter 2005, p.473-474). The establishment of the Pioneer Association of Ireland (a group under the direction of the Catholic Church) suggested that women, specifically wives, who drank alcohol from the 1950s were seen as 'rudderless, miserable, reckless' (Ferriter 2005, p.857). The Catholic Church had a strong hold over the ideology of what was 'right' and 'wrong', and 'good' or 'bad' behaviours for the citizens of Ireland. This power was maintained by the church up until the 1990s when its first major scandal rocked Irish society.⁸

From the 1950s onwards women became more aware of European and American concepts of femininity through their image presentations. Images of contemporary women were acquired through newspaper and magazine publications. Additionally, magazines, clothing and fashion accessories were sent by post to Ireland by those who had emigrated (Clear 2007; Inglis and

⁶ In 1975 the employment equality act was passed by the Constitution, and it was not until 1985 that the legalisation of the sale of contraception without prescription was introduced (Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005).

⁷ With the limited career opportunities available to unmarried women there was a high degree of emigration. There was also a substantial amount of male emigration due to the economic circumstance in Ireland during the 1940s and 1950s (Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005).

⁸ The child abuse scandal broke in national media in 1990 (Ferriter 2005; Inglis and MacKeogh 2012).

MacKeogh 2012).⁹ Women were becoming more liberal and presented a more cosmopolitan image akin to contemporary women in Britain and America. They attended more social events such as dances or the cinema, and women were becoming more vocal and visible in political spheres.¹⁰ Between the 1970s and 1990s women had become educated to a higher level and made up 32.8% of the labour force in Ireland (Walsh 1993). Yet, even during this time of liberalisation and the growth of the women's movement in Ireland, women (rural women in particular) continued to adhere to heteronormative lifestyles as inscribed by Church and State (O'Connor 2000; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Inglis and MacKeogh 2012; Inglis 2017).¹¹ There existed a societal perception that a woman's career was second-place in comparison to her domestic, maternal and familial duties.¹²

By the 1990s, Ireland had become more liberal and economically vibrant which meant there was less emigration of Irish citizens, thus encouraging more employment for women both in the public and private spheres. Additionally, women were more visible in politics and were in judicial services (Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Inglis 2017). Full gender equality is still a distance away for Irish citizens, and women continue to fight against many issues of inequality.¹³ However, this summation of the period between the beginning and the end of the twentieth century highlights some of the gender norms that were intrinsic in Irish social and cultural life. The gender roles and gender presentations that were inscribed into Irish society by Church and State impinged on women's gender roles, gender presentations, and cultural

⁹ As Inglis (2005) and MacKeogh (2012) highlight, the Church has lost its power over censorship in the media, allowing for an increase in the publication of contemporary writing Irish newspapers from the 1960s. See also John Horgan 2001; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis 2011; Anthony Keating 2013.

¹⁰ The established Irish Country Women's Association was becoming more influential in the political sphere. This was occurring alongside the emergence of second-wave feminism in the 1970s (O'Connor 2000; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Inglis and MacKeogh 2012).

¹¹ The Heteronormative lifestyle was reinforced as a cultural norm by Church and State in. Homosexuality (male same sex activity) was illegal until the 1990s and was a sin according to the Catholic Church (McAuliffe and Kennedy 2017).

¹² Women who became pregnant outside of marriage were sent to mother and baby homes and other institutions and were seen as outcasts of the communities (Luddy 2011; Graham 2012).

¹³ Women are not the only minority groups fighting for equality rights however they made-up a significant percentage of groups seeking equality (O'Connor 2000; Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Luddy 2011; Graham 2012; Inglis and MacKeogh 2012).

participation. The social construction of what was ‘right’ for a woman to do, both privately and publicly, impacted and in a certain way continues to impact Irish women’s lives. These gender roles and norms were imbedded as part of being a ‘good’ Irish woman.

The scholarship cited provides a discussion of Irish social and cultural changes from 1900 to the 2000s. Specifically, this period relates to the norms that were imposed on Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann. This discussion thus far concludes that the gender construct of women and nature, and men and culture, were and continue to be quite evident in Irish society. The androcentrism of the Irish Free State and the Catholic Church combined to place women at the periphery of Irish life, enabling church and state to place legitimacy on what gender presentation, roles, and norms Irish women should adhere to for the benefit of Irish culture.

1.8.2: Influential Publications on Gender and Music

In this next section I appraise a number of important gender and music publications that have informed this thesis. I critically consider the questions these texts have raised and how these questions relate to this dissertation. The seminal text by Judith Tick and Jane Bowers entitled *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition* (1987) sought to ‘rewrite women’ into the history of western art music. The essays contained in this publication are presented in several ways: including biographical accounts, musical analysis, and an assessment of women musicians as a class. The women within these essays are seen as “outstanding” performers and composers (Tick and Bowers 1987). The authors question:

Who were the women musicians? What was their historical traditions? What has been their special contribution to music making? ... How has sex as a historical variable affected the opportunities women as a class have had to realize their musical creativity? What is the connection between socialization and creative achievements? How have prejudice and discrimination -roughly

parallel to belief and behaviour - shaped the history of women in music? (Tick and Bowers 1987, pp.10-11)

These questions address the social and cultural considerations of women making music in the western art tradition so that they may be re-written into the history of western art music. These 'exceptional' women were assessed in relation to class, position, access, gender, biological sex, and the genre's tradition of making music. These questions thus position these women as exemplars of western art music between 1150-1950. While writers and critics have suggested that more questions could have been asked, this book does 'expand the scope and purview of music history...[to] emphasise the process through which women's contribution to music history have been shaped' (Tick and Bowers 1987, p.4). Although superseded by more recent scholarship, this book is foundational in its questioning of women's contribution to music and musical activities in the western art tradition.

Ellen Koskoff's anthology (1987) and her most recent publication (2014) also ask some highly influential questions. Koskoff's *Women and Music in Cross-cultural Perspectives* (1987) brought together fifteen essays that go beyond descriptive essays on musical practices to present a more nuanced argument around women's role in music-making. Two central questions were either explicitly or implicitly asked throughout each essay: 'First to what degree does a society's gender ideology and resulting gender-related behaviours affect its musical thought and practice? And second, how does music function in society to reflect or affect inter-gender relations?' (Koskoff 1987, p.1). The book also addresses the nature of ethnomusicology up to this point, and the evident lack of women's music practices that were published up to 1987 (See also Nettl, 1983). Both Nettl and Koskoff suggest that up to this point women's music had not been sufficiently examined, as it was not as easily accessible to the ethnographer or researcher as men's music was. Nettl also suggests that women ethnographers were influenced by their male teachers who had seemingly prioritized men's music in their research. In 2014 Koskoff published *A Feminist Ethnomusicology: Writings on Music and Gender* in which she critiques

her work from the 1970s up to 2010, discussing changes and developments in her own thinking. Koskoff considers the importance of field work for ethnomusicologists, and suggests that the primary questions one should always ask in the field are questions of sameness and difference. These questions are evident in all her writing however, her nuanced discussion of prestige, value, control, and power are themes that relate to this thesis. She questions how prestige and value reinforce control and power. These four concepts are at play through musical performance and within specific musical environments:

One result of the conceptual linking between gender, music, and other cultural domains is a separation between male and female performance environments, genres, and performing styles ... Musical behaviour, then, not only is enmeshed in social concepts of sexuality, but can also serve to reinforce and define one's gender (Koskoff 2014, pp.39-40).

As previously cited, Sugarman's publications also provide fundamental reading for this thesis. Sugarman's contribution to *Theory for Ethnomusicology: Histories, Conversations, Insights* in 2019 provides a comprehensive discussion of gender and music in ethnomusicology that pre-dates Koskoff's anthology (1987), and brings the discussion up to present day publications. Additionally, Sugarman's book *Engendering song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* (1997) provides this thesis with its most informative arena of questioning. Sugarman states that Albanians believe that women and men have different 'natures' and therefore their singing styles are expected to be different (Sugarman 1997). Albanians also believe that women and men have different roles within the family and community, therefore it is believed that they should have different roles as singers and address different themes. Sugarman details the different singing styles that men and women both produce, and how their vocal displays and repertoires reinforce the gender norms of Prespa Albanian people. These cultural practices are the same both in their homeland and in their immigrant communities.

Throughout her book, Sugarman is essentially questioning the themes of agency and resistance in the negotiation of gender norms.

The growing body of gender and music literature in Ireland has also impacted this research. Notable is Slominski's *Trad Nation: Gender, Sexuality and Race in Irish Traditional Music* (2020). Slominski addresses the long-standing concepts and norms concerning gender and Irishness. She addresses how race, sexuality, and gender are no longer be seen as barriers or exclusion markers from Irish traditional music, rather these themes should be the lens through which researchers analyse and develop Irish traditional music as a genre and inclusive community. Slominski's contribution to the special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland* (2021) also addresses the issue of gender concerning tradition bearers and how the concept of gender has hindered participation in Irish traditional music. The themes of the tradition bearer and gender are prominent concepts that relate specifically to this thesis.

Meabh Ní Fhuartáin (2021) provides a succinct introduction to this special issue of *Ethnomusicology Ireland* where she discusses the work currently conducted by Irish researchers and details the establishment of groups including 'Sounding the Feminists', 'Fairplé', 'Waking the Feminist', and 'Mnásome'. Ní Fhuartáin details the reason for the publication of this special issue, following the first 'Women in Traditional/Folk Music Symposium' which garnered presentations that engaged with the 'long-overdue chance to explore, challenge and react to the experiences of women in traditional and folk music practice, production and performance' (Ní Fhuartáin 2021, p.3). In the articles that followed, of importance here are the contributions of Slominski (above), Úna Monaghan, Verena Commins, and Joanne Cusack. Monaghan's research 'demonstrates that the mechanisms and structures of the Irish traditional music scene continue to privilege the contribution of men' (2021, p.17). It also highlights the prominent amount of abuse and violence directed toward women in the Irish traditional music scene in Ireland. This article discusses the attitudes of men within the genre towards women and how

their gender is perceived as something that hinders their ability as Irish traditional musicians and performers.

Commins' article critically discusses how 'Irish traditional music as a social practice has normalised hegemonic power structures and relationships' (2021, p.49). Commins suggests that power and authority in music practices are intricately linked with cultural identity and status. Therefore, the power structures and relationships in the Irish traditional music scene are central to the reinforcement of gender roles and norms attributed to women in both music practice and the cultural world they live in. She suggests both power and authority are seen as 'significant form[s] of cultural capital, revealing, amongst other things the complexity of relations between gender symbolism, gendered social organisation and the diversity of gendered dispositions in society' (ibid). Thus, gender representation and performance environments are pivotal aspects of examination to 'document and trace the absence of women's voices from the Irish traditional dance music canon in order to demonstrate how that has served to construe and perpetuate music-making arenas as men-dominated spaces' (ibid).

Cusack's article explores the experiences of women in the commercial Irish traditional music scene during and after the 1990s. In this article Cusack addresses 'how and in what way musical acts differ according to a musician's identified gender' (Cusack 2021, p.94). By addressing gender and reception concerning commercial musicians, Cusack questions image presentations and the changing cultural ideas of an Irish woman. She is also questioning the concept of the 'acceptable role' for women to play within commercial music contexts, stating:

women were also often expected to pursue a role or occupation that was deemed most "natural" for their gender in comparison to their men performer equivalents—a fact that is particularly visible in the context of a band consisting of a multiple number of men and one woman (Cusack 2021, p.104).

Cusack questions the 'music industry's expectations and standards of what they deemed as appealing for their audiences' in relation to image presentations of 'Celtic women' (Cusack

2021, p.104). Cusack not only questions the cultural gender norms and presentations within Irish society, but also questions the industry standard and expectations placed on women since the 1990s.

Finally, Aileen Dillane's contribution to *Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music* (2020) has been essential reading for this thesis as it informs the discussion on gender, gender norms, gender roles, and gender presentations. In 'Raging Mother Ireland: Faith, Feminism, and Fury in the Body and Voice of Sinead O'Connor' Dillane questions O'Connor's rejection of gender norms and the cultural markers of an Irish pop star. Dillane suggests that O'Connor transgresses these norms in place of a role as a 'radical protester and social critic'(Dillane 2021, p.55). Dillane sees O'Connor's career as 'lived feminism in her life experiences using her voice and body in protest for women and minority groups' (ibid). In the essay Dillane traces O'Connor's career utilising five songs as the text for understanding and interpreting her lived feminism. This includes a detailed discussion of changes and challenges both publicly and privately that occurred in O'Connor's life. Noteworthy here is the criticism that O'Connor received for her condemnation of the Catholic church and its abuse of women and children. Specifically noting the commentary O'Connor received after her Saturday night live performance where Joe Pesci, the host, threatened to 'deliver a swift sharp slap to put O'Connor back in her place' (Dillane 2021, p.62). Thus, giving rise to the question 'where is O'Connor's place if not on stage? Here we are made aware of O'Connor's gender as a result of her refusal to conform to gender norms, roles, and behaviours. Through her personal relationship challenges, her public arguments with fellow celebrities, and her chastising of the Irish Catholic church in her public performance (which made O'Connor question her own faith and belief systems, changing her religion on

several occasions), Dillane provides a comprehensive and thought-provoking argument as to how O'Connor has and continues to be a radical protestor and social critic.

1.8.3: Situating these themes in Irish Country Music

The themes that emerge from the discourse on gender and music can also be applied to a study of Irish country music. This dissertation interrogates the questions put forward by Koskoff (1987; 2014), and further investigate how the concepts of power and control are evident in Irish country music. This thesis questions if gender ideology in Irish society affects musical thought and practice; and how does this music practice reflect and reinforce gender roles, norms, and power structures. The gender disparity of the Irish country music scene is featured throughout many chapters in this dissertation. Therefore, it must question the gender roles as assigned by the music genre and how are they reflective of Irish society. Like Commins (2021), my thesis highlights how gender has impacted women's participation within the genre. I address concepts of identity, identity formation and how gender impacts the formation of image. Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann developed identities that were in part constructed for them through cultural inscriptions of gender. They transgressed normative gender roles through their career paths and constructed an identity that was informed by gender norms and expectations. I also examine the embodied performances of gender in the careers of these women. Specifically, as Sugarman (1997) has detailed, I discuss agency and resistance, thus questioning if these women are reinforcing cultural gender norms. Reconceptualising the gendered identity of the tradition bearer (Slominski 2020; 2021) in the context of legacy, I critically examine their ongoing impact on the contemporary Irish country music scene.

1.9: Methodology

1.9.1: Ethnomusicological Approaches

Taking an ethnomusicological approach to the research, I conducted field work in the form of interviews, performance observation, surveys, desk-based analysis, ethnography, journaling and reflective writing. This was combined with utilising theories that informed my examination

of the main themes of identity, meaningfulness, and legacy. During this research I had to adapt some of my approaches due to the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in relation to interviews and survey dissemination.

Ethnomusicological theory and method provide the tools necessary to observe, document, participate, discuss, and reflect on the themes set out by this thesis. As both a performer and a researcher of Irish country music, ethnomusicology provides me with the methods necessary to engage in both emic and etic writing, requiring a critical consideration of my positionality. Ethnomusicology enables this thesis to examine the practices that are in place within the Irish country music scene in order to answer how Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann negotiate the themes of identity, meaningfulness, and legacy through their lived experience. The focus of the dissertation is on 'the lived experience', which is explored primarily through interviews with the artists. The lived experience of the audience and wider community is also examined through my ethnographic fieldwork, which was limited by COVID-19 but augmented with surveys. The understanding of 'the lived experience' is reinforced through other forms of analysis focusing on album covers and lyrics to further inform an understanding of these three women's lived experience in Irish society and culture.

Several ethnomusicologists have informed and influenced this dissertation. I must note the influence of theorists such as Alan Merriam (1964), Anthony Seeger (1987), John Blacking (1973), Bruno Nettl (1983; 2005; 2015), Ellen Koskoff (1987; 2014), Kay Kauffman Shelemay (2008), Timothy Rice (2008), and Jeff Todd Titon (2009). These are a number of the major influential ethnomusicology theorists considered within this thesis. I discuss how they informed my fieldwork before providing a synopsis of the theoretical frameworks that underpin each

chapter. This will serve as a precursor to the theoretical framework set out at the beginning of each chapter.

Ethnomusicology provides the necessary tools and methods to complete an examination of the lived experience of three women musicians in Ireland. My methodology includes interviews, fieldwork observations, and a survey of stakeholders in the Irish country music scene. As such the work of Timothy Cooley, Gregory Barz, Timothy Rice, and Kay Kauffman Shelemay in the seminal text *Shadows in the Field* (2008) have proven to be a sanctuary and sounding board for my methodological concerns and implications. I conducted my fieldwork through interviews and observations of musical performances over twelve months. As Rice (2008) suggests, one of the primary methods of ethnomusicological research involves participation in fieldwork for an extended period. As an insider in the genre of Irish country music I utilise my connections in the genre and my cultural knowledge to establish a connection with artists, managers, and recording studios for interview (Rice 2008, pp.42-61). This positionality required me to address my own perspective as an insider and an outsider of Irish country music. I could not allow my subjectivity to hinder or bias any research analysis that I conducted. However, I could allow it to inform or aid in the creation of a hypothesis for research. My subjectivity as a practitioner could not impinge on the culmination and examination of this musical practice and the lived experience of these three women. The work of Rice (2008) in *Shadows in the Field* provides a comprehensive discussion on how to engage with and mediate your positionality through methodological thinking.

Rice provides a brief review of what theories underpin ethnomusicology before proceeding to define the field. He states:

The field emerges as a place where data are collected to test theories. It is a bounded place filled with insiders who share views about music, musical practices, and a host of other things. It is a place where we outsiders must go to encounter these insiders and their culture, and explain to other outsiders the

relationship between music and culture posited by our theories. (Rice 2008, p.46)

He then details the terms emic (insider) and etic (outsider) as used in cognitive anthropology and how to mediate these positions in research. Rice states that:

“etic” (from phonetic) and “emic” (from phonemic) analyses seemed particularly attractive to me and other ethnomusicologists, who feared that Western-style (etic) analyses might ignore, misunderstand, or even violate important (emic) principles operating within a culture...it seemed an attractive way to discover how natives think and talk about music, and thus gain insight into a supposed insider’s perspective on musical and other forms of cultural practice’ (2008, p.50).

Through his own fieldwork experience and study of Bulgarian music, Rice argues that ‘emic understandings are located in other people’s heads and [are] given to us in their language reports ... On the other hand ... etic understanding involves applying objective analytic methods to sounds without regard for their cultural salience’ (2008, p.55). Emic perspectives provide the insider understandings of the field, working in dialogue with the etic (outsider) researcher (2008, p.51). He suggests that both perspectives provide a comprehensive understanding of any ‘field’ of study. Rice states that a mediation and acknowledgement of both perspectives allow for a newfound understanding in researching music as lived experience in culture. This understanding of emic and etic perspectives has enabled this research to bring both perspectives to light in researching Irish country music. From my position as insider in the genre to working with other insiders in Irish country music, both the emic and etic positionality informs this examination of the cultural practices and principles of Irish country music.

The use of surveys to glean information from audience members is considered through the prism of fieldwork method, and qualitative analysis. My fieldwork concerning audience engagement was due to take place from September to December 2020. My research proposal

received approval using the DkIT ethics procedures and my approach included informed consent for all participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic I was prevented from entering a physical field to conduct this research. In response to this challenge, I restructured my approach to this aspect of my research, creating an online survey that was disseminated on social media. I engaged with email correspondence and telephone interviews to gather data from audiences, performers, and radio presenters on the contemporary Irish country music scene. This section draws on those responses to provide a comprehensive discussion on the reception of the contemporary Irish country music scene.

The purpose of this survey is to garner feedback from audiences and performers on their reception and perception of the contemporary Irish country music scene. Furthermore, the survey aims to understand their view on the position and role of women within the contemporary scene, while also garnering commentary on the impact of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann directly from audiences and fans of Irish country music. This is the first survey of its kind conducted with Irish country music audiences. As stated in earlier chapters, there is limited academic work completed on Irish country music, with even less work completed concerning women within the genre. This survey adds to the writing on women in Irish country music in the academic sphere.

Over a three-month period between December 2020 to February 2021 I conducted this online survey asking country music enthusiasts all across Ireland to participate and give their feedback on the contemporary Irish country music scene. I created a questionnaire with pertinent

questions regarding the contemporary Irish country music scene. Specific questions aimed at performers include:

- When did you first get involved in performing Irish country music?
- How has your experience of the music scene evolved over your career?
- Do you think that Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann have had an impact on the contemporary Irish country music scene?
- Do you think there is a gender balance within the Irish country music scene?
- Do you think that the contemporary music scene is different to the Irish country music scene of sixty years ago? Yes or no?
- If yes how so?
- Do you think that technology has made an impact on the Irish country music scene?
- How has covid impacted your career?

Respondents who selected the option of audience member were directed to a different set of questions. Those questions were:

- What first made you engage with Irish country music?
- Has Irish country music changed over the past number of years? Yes or no?
- If yes explain?
- Who are the artists you listen to the most?
- Do you participate in Irish country music events? Yes or no?
- If yes which events in particular?

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- In your opinion, have Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann impacted the Irish country music scene?
 - Do you think that contemporary female artists have modernised Irish country music?
Yes or no?
 - If yes how so?
 - Do you think there is a gender balance in Irish country music?
 - Has social media made it easier to connect with Irish country music artists?
 - How has the emergence of covid impacted your participation in Irish country music?

By selecting these set questions, it allowed the respondents to answer in detail rather than in a yes or no format. I utilised the Survey Monkey online survey application to host and share the survey on multiple social media platforms at once. This application made it accessible for participants to navigate easily. Setting questions as 'required to answer' encouraged the respondents to provide commentary on their opinions. The survey design allowed this research to create an anonymised survey for all who participated, which encouraged respondents to freely give their opinion, with the knowledge that they would not be identified. All respondents were asked to indicate their gender and to indicate that they were over the age of 18.

Over the three-month period I shared the survey link on social media, including with groups on social media that contained country music fans. Additionally, I contacted radio stations nationally to ask if they would share the survey on their websites and social media pages. I also was interviewed by some radio stations to provide insight into what the survey was trying to find out. I pushed notifications of the survey every month until the end of February 2021 when the survey closed. Over that period there were 484 respondents. However, of that 484, only 170

were completed in full. 160 of those respondents were audience members, leaving 10 respondents in the performers' category.

The discussion in *Shadows in the Field* (2008) concerning methods of reflexive writing, and objective and subjective analysis, aids in the development of an ethnography of three women and their lived experience in Irish country music. By conducting recorded interviews with the three case studies, along with other artists in the genre of Irish country music, I critically assess the careers, experiences, and contributions of these three women artists. Additionally, by engaging in performance analysis and reflexive writing I critique these women's identity and image portrayals, and assess how that reflects the social and cultural worlds at each given time. Furthermore, I engage in both semiotic analysis and cultural analysis through song lyrics and iconography which reinforces the lived experience of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann. Finally, I utilise survey responses from audience members of Irish country music to inform my writing on the contemporary Irish country music scene.

Kay Kaufmann Shelemay's (2008) essay on 'The Ethnomusicologist, Ethnographic Method, and the Transmission of Tradition' has been extremely influential on this research. As Shelemay suggests, an ethnomusicologist's primary role is to preserve a tradition. She proposes that ethnomusicologists are memorialising traditions, preserving them, and mediating them to the world at large. This has a lasting impact on ethnomusicology and the research of the musical traditions. Shelemay's theory prompts an ethnography on Irish country music. Shelemay states that:

every time a scholar quotes or paraphrases an interview or conversation, he mediates tradition ... Mediation can therefore entail not just translating for those outside of the tradition, but also participating in raising awareness of the tradition within the community itself (Shelemay 2008, p.151).

This research not only explores how these three women have negotiated identity, meaningfulness, and legacy in Irish country music, it also validates Irish country music as

worthy of study. It draws attention to tradition bearers that might otherwise remain on the verges of an unwritten Irish musical history. By documenting and examining this musical culture, through an academic lens, it provides a deeper understanding of the cultures and communities that exist within our island. This type of engagement and preservation allows for a comprehensive understanding of the structures and the norms that reinforce or transgress cultural and social happenings through music. Furthermore, this research adds to the body of work on country music studies worldwide.

The term icon is used extensively throughout this thesis in reference to these three women and their legacy within the genre. In early Christian traditions icons were hollow visual representations of religious concepts of worship, for example statues and/or paintings of Jesus, Mary, or Saints (Till 2010). They were utilised as pointers of attention, directing the viewer to these religious beings that were signified. This type of icon set the viewer apart from the greater being. In contemporary secular society, this concept of icon is taken to represent a living person that has ‘transcended stardom and have a level of adoration equivalent to such a religious figure’ (Till 2010, p. 143). Rupert Till suggests that in order for a star to be described as ““an icon” [it] requires their achievement of a level of fame at which they are treated with the sort of respect traditionally reserved for religious figures’ (Till 2014, p. 70). JUCU Ioan-Sebastian states that ‘as music permanently inhabits the geographic space ... in the same vein music legends are iconic figures for different communities, with a spatio-temporal involvement from local to global cultures influencing places and identities’ (2019, p.95). The globalisation of music impacts consumers across boundaries, allowing for a connection to music in different places and spaces, at varying times, influencing individuals identities and thus their views on a given music culture. Furthering this, their knowledge of a given music culture expands allowing them to contribute to the establishment of the concept of an icon. Referring gay icons and how a star becomes one, Kristin Lieb states ‘they are often vocal in their support of gay rights, participate in various forms of LGBTQ+ advocacy, and court gay audiences through theatricality, dramatic

storytelling, and ownership of their whole selves' (2018, pp. 165-166). She quotes music director Holly Williamson who suggests that 'they're gay icons because they're unapologetic about being themselves. Begley, O'Donnell and McCann demonstrate similar markers as icons in Irish country music. Ownership of the whole self, being unapologetically yourself, and not caring what other say are attributes associated to icons within Irish country music. As their careers progressed these women developed ownership of their identities. They are unapologetic about who they are and where they come from, allowing their audiences to learn about their lived experience. They stood against critics aligned with social norms, evident in their untraditional roles as singers in all male bands, sometimes singing about issues in Irish society that were taboo or uncomfortable. Furthermore, through their image and media presentations, these women established a recognisable identity that contributes to their iconicness.

I engage with Thomas Turino (1999) and his conceptualisation of the theory of semiotics. Turino develops the theory of semiotics as theorised by Charles Sanders Peirce (1860), to detail how semiotics can be utilised in the study of music. Turino suggests that music is the 'key resource for realising personal and collective identities which in turn, are crucial for social, political, and economic participation' (Turino 1999, p.221). He suggests that Peirce's semiotic theory provides the platform to create a theory of music, emotion, and identity. For Turino semiotics provides researchers with the tools necessary to assess all expressive practices. I utilise Turino's understanding of semiotics to address the theme of meaningfulness in the lives of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann, and their audiences. I engage with Turino's (1999) trichotomy (detailed further in chapter four) as a way of analysing lyrics and discussing the differed meaning of those lyrics in the creation of meaningfulness. The concept of meaningfulness is developed out of a rejection of what Anthony Giddens has termed "meaninglessness" (1990, p.102). Giddens states that meaninglessness or 'personal meaninglessness [is] deriv[ed] from the reflexivity of modernity as applied to the self' (ibid). He proposes that this concept is bound up in the modern world where the individual (the self)

is constantly in a reflexive process entwined with trust and risk. He argues that, as the individual becomes more aware of the world around them, they become caught in a reflexive network of comparison where meaninglessness develops. This is a process that did not occur in the pre-modern world total adherence to religious teachings and belief mitigates trust and risk. Giddens states that ‘religious cosmology is supplanted by reflexively organised knowledge, governed by empirical observation and logical thought, and focused upon material technology and socially applied codes’ (1990, p.109). The change from oppressive religious belief to a modern world seeking out one’s own information has culminated in what Giddens has termed “meaninglessness” (1990, p.102). I utilise Turino’s semiotic model to illustrate how Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann are creating a type of meaningfulness in the lives of their audience. I detail how their lyrics reinforce the experiences of the audience to whom they sing, and how the songs performances are contributing to a point of positive reflexivity by providing a comparison for their audiences.

Despite rejecting some of Giddens’ theories, I engage with his concept of identity and identity formation. Giddens states that ‘the self’ is a reflexive entity that organises the world around itself, writing:

The ‘identity’ of *the self*, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness. It is what the individual is conscious ‘of’ in the term ‘self-consciousness’. Self-identity, in other words, is not something that is just given, as a result of the continuities of the individual’s action-system, but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual (Giddens 1991, p.52).

In other words, Giddens suggests that the creation of ‘the self’ is not something that is autonomous for all individuals, something that is just a given, rather it is created through a reflexive awareness of the world around us, and thus something that everyone consciously prescribes as part of their individual identity. Furthermore, Giddens suggests ‘the self’ is ‘not a

passive entity, determined by external influences; in forging self-identities, no matter how local their specific context of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in consequences and implication' (1991, p.2). Giddens also discusses the concept of consciousness and how that plays an active part in the creation of identity through self-reflexivity (this will be discussed further in chapter three). This research agrees with Giddens' concept that identity is formed in relation to the narrative process of self-reflexivity. I apply this concept of self-reflexive identity by examining how all three women describe and portray their identities at three different career stages. Thus, highlighting how Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann's identities evolve through a reflexive process in Irish culture, a process that is constantly in dialogue with past selves.

I utilise David Machin's (2010) social semiotic approach to analyse the visual imagery of album covers of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann. This approach enables the research to examine the way these three women have embodied and negotiated their identity through their individual career cycles. Machin's model is:

concerned with the choices of signs available to communicators and the way that the meaning of individual signs changes when used in combination with others. In this approach it is important to first describe and document the range of possible choices available to communicators (Machin 2010, p.7).

Machin suggests that we must first understand the multitude of potential choices available to the communicator before we can understand a given meaning. Machin's model is similar to that put forward by Turino (1999) however is concerned primarily with iconography and image. Yet differed and referential meanings are also evident in his model. Analysing album covers also asks for the engagement with concepts such as the 'gaze', gender norms, cultural norms, and social norms. I combine Machin's model with an engagement of additional theories put forward by Lucy Green (1997), Nadine Hubbs (2014), and Tes Slominski (2020) in chapter five. All three authors have written extensively about women, representations and participation in music,

gender presentations, and social norms relating to their specific research topic. Their concepts will be discussed further at the beginning of each chapter however it is important to state their contribution at this point.

Finally, I apply the work of Jeff Todd Titon (2009) and his Music Culture Performance Model to critically assess the contemporary Irish country music scene and discuss the legacy of these three women. Titon's model allows this research to discuss aspects of music, the community, and the culture in which this specific music is performed. It allows for an assessment of the individual experience of music, the history of music, the economy and music industry, and cultural views on human and social behaviour. Utilising this model enables a reflexive examination of the Irish country music genre through critical discourse, audience reception, artists perception, and academic analysis. It additionally encourages the research to address the theme of legacy as it relates to Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann. Titon's model offers this research a structure to analyse a unique form of Irish musical expression.

1.10: Biographical Vignettes

1.10.1: Philomena Begley



Image 1. 1: Philomena Begley on stage in the Royal Theatre Castlebar, December 2021 (Opry Le Daniel, 2021).

Born on 20 October 1942 in the village of Pomeroy, County Tyrone, Philomena Begley is the fourth born of a family of eight. Pomeroy, is a rural village ‘where Gaelic football and céilí music were at the heart of the community’ (Begley 2017, p.15). From a farming family, Begley’s father was also a bread delivery man while her mother was a housewife and stay at home mother. In her biography, Begley (2017) recounts having a happy childhood: ‘things were good despite the difficulties of the outside world ...I can happily say that not one of us ever went without’ (ibid). Begley’s education was typical of many Irish citizens during the 1940s and 1950s. Having received her primary school education, Begley finished her education at the age of fifteen. She notes in her book that education wasn’t her forte; having failed her eleven-plus exams, Begley got a job working I.J Fisher & Co. Hat Factory in Cookstown, County Tyrone in 1957. Begley worked in Fisher’s Hat Factory and Woolworths in Dungannon, County

Tyrone, until 1966. Following a guest performance with ‘The Old Cross Céilí Band’ on a night out,¹⁴ Begley was asked to commence performing with them on a regular basis. She made her singing debut on the 11 May in 1962 in the Ardboe Hall in Pomeroy. Begley performed as a type of support act, performing before the main act and as an interval act when the band were taking their break. ‘The Old Cross Céilí Band’ then transformed itself from a céilí band to a country band in the space of two years, becoming known as ‘Country Flavour’.¹⁵ They recorded two songs in 1964 in a recording studio in Belfast that were later released in 1968 by Jim Aiken on his Dolphin Records label.¹⁶ By 1966 the band had become so popular that Begley left her daytime job to focus on touring and performing with the band. Between 1968 and 1972 the bands popularity had grown, and Begley was no longer the interval or support act she was the main singer and attraction of the band.

Begley and ‘Country Flavour’ recorded their first album *Truck Drivin’ Woman* in 1972 and it was released by Mick Clerkin and his label Release Records.¹⁷ The band travelled to America the same year touring in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago as guest of ‘Irish-American Bill Hardigan’, who was a venue owner in New York at the time (Begley 2017, p.49). Begley married Tom Quinn (the accordion player of the band) in 1974, and shortly after the wedding ‘Country Flavour’ disbanded. Tony Loughman was quick to approach Begley to front a ‘superband’ of country music (ibid).¹⁸ This group would come to be known as ‘Philomena

¹⁴ The Old Cross Céilí Band were popular locally and also broadcast on Radió Éireann for *Céilí House* presented by Seán Ó Murchú in the 1960s (Connolly and Martin, 2011).

¹⁵ See Johnson 1995; Bracefield, 1998; Foley, 2011; Maguire, 2012; Kearney, 2019; Scahill, 2020. Céilí bands were a staple part of Irish musical life from the turn of the twentieth century. As discussed further in chapter two, Céilí bands provided a platform for the formation of country bands in Ireland from the beginning of the 1960s. Many Irish country stars began their careers as singers or musicians in Céilí bands including Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann.

¹⁶ Jim Aiken later went on to establish Aiken Promotions. (See McGreevy, 2007; Begley, 2012; Gallagher, 2020f; Erraught, 2021).

¹⁷ Mick Clerkin (also known as Michael) was an established manager and record company owner in Ireland since the emergence of the showband scene in Ireland. Clerkin established his own record company in Ireland Release Records who recorded and distributed mainly country music acts. In 1981 Clerkin established a new record company based in London UK, which was pivotal for a number of country artists gaining international success. See also McDonagh 2017; McDonagh, 2021; Erraught, 2021; Rate Your Music, 2022.

¹⁸ Tony Loughman was a manager of country music artists and showbands artists from the 1960s. Loughman is regarded as one of the original music moguls of Ireland having the leading names of country music artists signed to his management company. Loughman established Top Rank Promotions alongside a record label Top Spin Records (1974) where his artists record and release music on a regular basis. Top Rank also owned a number of

Begley and her Ramblin Men', who debuted on the 14th of April 1974. The band consisted of some members from her previous band 'Country Flavour', Tom Quinn on keyboards, accordion and banjo, and Dan 'Dano' O'Hara on lead guitar, along with Kevin Farley on brass and sax, Kevin McGinty on trumpet and bass, Colm Keeley on drums, and Liam Gibson on rhythm guitar.



Image 1. 2: Philomena Begley and her Ramblin Men (Gallagher, 2017c).

This 'superband' was a huge success from its first performance, and Begley's star was beginning to shine even brighter. Through Loughman's ability to promote the new group and with his connections to venues, the band were playing '8 nights a week' ... 'for a full year we hardly got a night off at all' (Begley 2020; Begley 2017, p.60). In 1975 Begley recorded her first hit song that has become synonymous with her career to present day. *Blanket on the*

ballrooms and other venues across the country where top rank artists got priority on performing at these venues. Loughman established a weekly and monthly magazine which was distributed nationally to inform audiences of artists performing schedules and in-depth interviews. Loughman managed other country music artists and act including Big Tom, Paddy Cole, Susan McCann, Margo, Hugo Duncan (Begley, 2017; Crowe 2018, Gilmore, 2018; irishrock.org, 2019; Duncan, 2019).

Ground by Billy Jo Spears was reworked by Begley and the band to put the Irish twist to it.¹⁹ This song reached number five in the Irish charts, which beat the original version by six places. This song propelled Begley's career and 'got people talking. More importantly, it got them listening!' to Irish country music (Begley 2017, p.68). 'Philomena Begley and her Ramblin Men' proceeded to have more success with songs such as *Once Around the Dance Floor* (1976) and *Blue Jean Country Girl* (1980). Begley continued to tour and perform while also having three children during the 1970s and 1980s. During this time Begley was at the fore of Irish country music, culminating in her being the only female country artist to represent Ireland at the International Country Music Festival in Wembley in 1974.²⁰ She was also the first ever Irish female artists to perform at the Grand Ole Opry in 1978.²¹ Begley signed with K-Tel records²² in 1980 and won the European Gold Star Award for Ireland in 1983.²³ At the end of 1984 'Philomena Begley and her Ramblin Men' left the management team of Top Rank Entertainments. During their ten years together, 'Begley and her Ramblin Men' released thirteen albums. Subsequently 'the Ramblin Men' disbanded after leaving Top Rank Entertainments and the members went on to join other bands. Begley re-joined Mick Clerkin's management team at his new label Ritz Records as a solo artist later in 1984, and in 1985 Begley and her management team formed a band called 'Shotgun'. In 1987, on the twenty-fifth

¹⁹ Billy Jo Spears (1938-2011) was an American country artist who had several of number one hits in the American country charts. She also became an international country star touring Europe from the 1980s (Russell, 2011; Friskics-Warren, 2011; Rolling Stone, 2011).

²⁰ The International Country Music Festival was organised by promoter Mervyn Conn initially in 1969 and it lasted for 23 years. This festival brought together country music stars from all over the world to perform in London in front of an audience of 12,000 people (Laundon, 2002; Hope, 2012; Martin, 2018; Derek, 2021)

²¹ The Grand Ole Opry is the home of country music. The radio program started in 1925 and was broadcast from the Ryman Auditorium. In 1974 The Grand Ole Opry moved to a custom build Grand Ole Opry House at Opryland, Nashville. The Grand Ole Opry is the stage where all country musicians want to perform, a signature of their musical accomplishments and acceptance into the country music family. Being the first ever Irish women artist to grace the stage at the Grand Ole Opry indicates the reputation and prestige she has achieved both in Ireland and America in the 1970s. (Tassin, 1975; Rockwood, 1977; Jensen, 1998; Kyriakoudes, 2004; Escott, 2006; Pecknold, 2016; Ryman, 2022).

²² K-Tel Records was an Irish record company and producer that launched its record label in 1972. It signed acts, mainly Irish acts, and exported their music at an international level (Begley, 2017; irishrock.org, 2020; Discogs, 2022).

²³ The European Gold Star award was a similar competition to that of the Eurovision today, yet it only incorporated country music acts (Gallagher, 2017c; Martin, 2018; Rowley, 2021).

anniversary of her performing career Begley was honoured with a special TV segment on the BBC's 'Evening Extra' news program (Begley 2017, p.128).



Image 1. 3: Philomena in her trophy room on her BBC Evening Extra segment (TopRankEntertainment, 2022).

By the end of the 1980s, 'Shotgun' had disbanded, and Begley had become more content to reduce her touring schedule both nationally and internationally. 'Shotgun' had recorded and released four albums with Begley in their six years together. She toured America again in May 1990 with two of America's country super stars Glen Campbell²⁴ and Don Williams.²⁵ This tour highlighted the reputation and stature of Begley within both the American and Irish country music scene. On her return Begley teamed up with Mick Flavin in 1991 to release an album, *In*

²⁴ Glen Campbell (1936-2017) was an American country singer, guitarist, actor, and television host. He is best known for his number one hit songs in the US Country charts *Gentle on My Mind* (1967) and *Rhinestone Cowboy* (1975). Campbell was an international star of the country stage and had received numerous awards for his songs and music including Grammy Hall of Fame (2000, 2004, 2008) and Grammy Lifetime Achievement Awards (2012). Campbell died in 2017 after a battle with Alzheimer's. (Doyle, 2017; Bonner, 2022; Campbell, 2022).

²⁵ Don Williams (1939-2017) was an American country singer and songwriter who rose to fame in 1971 after beginning his solo career. Throughout his lifetime, Williams amassed 17 number one country hit singles including *I Wouldn't Want to Live if You Didn't Love Me* and *I Believe in You*. Williams a prolific career of hit singles with only four of his 48 singles not reaching top ten status in the U.S. market. Williams also achieved international success having number one hits in Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Williams reached chart success in the pop charts in the UK and Ireland with his singles *You're My Best Friend* and *I Recall a Gypsy Woman*. Williams died 2017 from emphysema (Tichi, 1994, Betts et. al, 2017; Williams, 2022).

Harmony, which she toured throughout Ireland and Scotland.²⁶ 1992 saw a thirty-year celebration of Begley's career where she was presented with a crystal crown by Daniel O'Donnell.²⁷ She also received an award for her contribution to the development of country music from the British Country Music Association in the same year.²⁸ In 1995 Begley was invited back to Nashville to attend the Nashville Fan Fair²⁹ where country artists from all over the world gather for a week to perform and meet fans from all over the world.³⁰ In 1996 Begley and Margo O'Donnell record a duet album in Nashville, *The way Old Friends Do*. Begley released a further seven albums between 1996 and 2011. 2012 culminated fifty years on tour for Begley, which was marked by a celebration of music in the Ardboe Hall in Pomeroy, Co Tyrone. She re-released a three-CD set of her greatest hits *From Then to Now* and toured Ireland and the UK from May to August of that year. Begley has continued to release music and has been a prominent figure of *The Late Late Show Country Special* since 2010.³¹ Begley has continued to receive numerous accolades including 'British Country Music Hall of Fame inductee, 2013', '1985: British Country Music Association Annual Awards', '6 Grand Old

²⁶ Mick Flavin (b.1950) from Longford who released his first album in 1986 influenced by American Country Music and signed to Ritz Records in 1990.

²⁷ Daniel O'Donnell (b.1961) an Irish country and folk singer who rose to fame in Ireland in 1983. Following in the footsteps of his sister Margo, Daniel's musical popularity grew after his first year performing in venues across Ireland. Daniel was considered a 'heart throb' by Irish and British country music audiences and his fame has continued to grow. He gained international success with his music and continues to perform regularly in Ireland, Britain, Europe, Australia, and America. He has sold over 10 million albums to date (O'Donnell, 2005; O'Donnell, 2017; Ingle, 2021; O'Donnell, 2022).

²⁸ The British Country Music Association, established in the 1960s, is an organization set up to support, promote and recognise excellence in country music and its artists. The association holds an annual awards ceremony since 2006 to celebrate the achievements of both UK and international artists. Philomena Begley received her award from the BCMA for her contribution to the development of country music in Britain and Ireland (britishcma.co.uk, 2022).

²⁹ The Nashville Fan Fair is a four-day music festival now known as the CMA Music Festival. It is a festival that is organised to raise money for charity and as a way for fans to meet their country music idols through performances and autograph sessions. Over 400 country artists now perform over the four-day festival.

³⁰ Nashville, Tennessee is synonymous with country music. it is known as the home of country music due to its connection to the Grand Ole Opry and the Nashville sound that emerged in the 1950s. Nashville has launched the biggest names in country music and is home to some of country music's best known song writers. Nashville also houses the Country Music Hall of Fame, The Johnny Cash Museum, The Blue Bird Café and the Grand Ole Opry House (Jensen, 1998; Kosser, 2006; Malone, 2013; Hubbs, 2014; Hemphill, 2015; Cusic, 2018).

³¹ *The Late Late Show* is regarded as an Irish television institution since 1962 where the host, Ryan Tubridy, and previous hosts by Pat Kenny And Gay Byrne, chat with guest, invites performances, and discusses topical issues. Having a show dedicated to only Irish country music each year since 2010 illustrates the recognition this genre is getting on a national level. Similar to the prestige of performing on the Grand Ole Opry, performing on *The Late Late Show* is considered a recognition of your musical achievements. Others whose first televised performances include U2 1980, Mary Coughlan in 1985, Boyzone in 1993, Westlife 1998. (Hegarty, 2021; RTÉ archive, 2022).

Opry Appearances’, ‘9 No. 1 Singles’, ‘12 Wembley Country Music Festivals’ and ‘The First Woman Inducted into the Irish Country Music Hall of Fame 2020’ (Begley 2017, p.201).³² Begley has released a further six albums since 2012. See Appendix 1A for Begley’s album discography.

1.10.2: Margo O’Donnell



Image 1. 4: Margo and her brother Daniel at the Late Late Show studio’s, December 2021 (O’Donnell, 2021).

Margo O’Donnell was born into a family of five on 6 February 1951. Her family lived in Burtonport, Co. Donegal. They emigrated to Scotland when O’Donnell was six months old and returned to Burtonport when she was three years of age. The family moved again to Kincasslagh, Co. Donegal where they lived until 1967. From 1951 until his death in 1968 O’Donnell’s father worked away from home, generally working in Scotland while her mother

³² The British Country Music Association awarded Philomena Begley as ‘Top Female Vocalist in 1985, nominating her as the best female country vocalist that year. The same association inducted Begley into their Hall of Fame in 2013 in recognition for her successful illustrious career (bcmhof.co.uk, 2022a). Begley was the first Irish women to achieve this award. Begley has had nine number one hits singles in the Irish charts and in the UK. She appeared 6 times on the Grand Ole Opry stage in Nashville, and twelve times at the International Country Music Festival in Wembley. She was recognised by RTÉ and the Sunday World in 2020 by being the first women to be inducted into the Irish Country Music Hall of Fame (Begley, 2017; RTÉ, 2020; Townsend, 2020).

worked in the home. The O'Donnell family had a similar life experience to that of other families in rural Co. Donegal at that time. Work was difficult to acquire, and many fathers worked away from home sending money home fortnightly (McLaughlin 1993). O'Donnell remembers her childhood fondly and suggests that the family 'never wanted for anything' (O'Donnell 2014, p.4).



Image 1. 5: Margo and the Keynotes c.1964 (O'Donnell, 2014).

O'Donnell's musical career began in 1964 in a village called Ardara, Co. Donegal at the age of thirteen. She had joined the local band call 'The Keynotes' and they toured around Co. Donegal in the early part of 1964. Their name and reputation began to gain popularity and they began travelling to other counties close to Donegal such as Mayo, Cavan, Sligo, and Galway. In 1965 'Margo and The Keynotes' staged their first headline tour of Glasgow beginning on St. Patrick's night. Following that performance, they sold out a number of other venues in Glasgow (O'Donnell 2014). At the time they were managed by Tom Dolphin from Co. Galway, who secured bookings for the band in 'every corner of the country [Ireland]' (ibid, p.25).³³ Their popularity was growing both nationally and internationally with the band recording their first

³³ Tom Dolphin was a Galway based manager who managed primarily showbands in Ireland during the 60s and later in the 70s. He managed the Astronauts Showband and the Conquers from 1971 (Gallagher, 2020b).

single in Dublin in 1968, published by Target Record Company.³⁴ O'Donnell left 'The Keynotes' in 1969 after being offered a lucrative deal with promoter John McNally from Dungannon.³⁵ McNally offered her £100 a week, a driver, and a car. Having felt the pressure to support her mother and siblings following her father's death in 1968, O'Donnell moved to Dublin the same year to pursue a solo career. This move meant that a band would be formed around O'Donnell, creating their own signature sound. The band formed came to be known as 'The Country Folk' (ibid, p.30).



³⁴ Target Records was a record company based in Dublin and established by The Tom Costello Organisation in 1967. Target products were distributed internationally by Pye Records a UK based company. Many Irish acts including Johnny McEvoy, The Cotton Mill Boys, The Nevada Showband and others. See Irishrock.org for a full list of recording artists (Kelly and McLoughlin, 2016).

³⁵ John McNally was a promoter from Dungannon who ran an Airlines Dance at the Crystal Ballroom in Dublin. While not much is written about McNally, he had many connections within the Irish country/showband scene in the 1960s and 1970s where he managed and promoted a number of acts throughout Ireland with Johnny (Johnnie) Kelly under Des Kelly Country & Western Promotions Ltd (Gallagher, 2020f).

Image 1. 6: Margo and The Country Folk (Gallagher, 2015a).

The Country Folk launched in Roscommon on 26 of December 1969 and the following decade was to bring O'Donnell huge success. 'Margo and The Country Folk' signed with ARA Records – the Irish branch linked with EMI Records. She appeared on *The Late Late Show* on RTÉ in the same year which propelled her popularity nationally. This appearance also offered her the opportunity to host her own show on RTÉ, *Margo & Co* (ibid, p.43). The name of the band changed following her television programme and, in 1970, 'Margo & Co'. released their first L.P containing the single *I'll Forgive and I'll Try to Forget* which went to number one in the Irish charts (ibid). In 1972 'Margo & Co'. went on their first tour of America, where she performed in New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Following her return from America, O'Donnell performed at the International Country Music Festival in Wembley with stars such as Loretta Lynn,³⁶ Conway Twitty,³⁷ Dottie West³⁸ and Tom T. Hall.³⁹ Appearing

³⁶ Loretta Lynn (b.1935) is an American singer-song writer whose career has spanned over six decades. Lynn had a hit song *I'm a Honky Tonk Girl* in 1960 and received her first appearance on the Grand Ole Opry in September of that year. Lynn's story is portrayed in the award-winning film *The Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) named after her number one hit in the Billboard American Country charts in 1970. Lynn is accredited with paving the way for other women country artists in Nashville, writing and performing her own songs. Her lyrics were very assertive and 'bold' for a women singer from the Kentucky hills. Loretta Lynn received the highest country music honour when she was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville 1988 for her contribution to country music. (Banes, 1985; Shipka, 2010; Lynn, 2010; LorettaLynn.com, 2021; Countrymusicshalloffame.org, 2022c; The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

³⁷ Conway Twitty (1933-1993) was an American country music singer and song writer who had achieved 55 number one country hits by 1990. Twitty's most recognisable song is his 1970s hit *Hello Darlin* with its iconic spoken introduction. Twitty was originally a 1950s Rock 'n' Roll singer yet found most of his success once he began singing country songs. He signed with DECCA records and is accredited with combining multiple genre influences on his country style of singing. Twitty continued to have chart success in the USA and internationally until his death in 1993. Conway was posthumously inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame (Cross and Kosser, 1987; Lewis, 1989; Hevesi, 1993; Rogers, 2002; Twitty, 2020).

³⁸ Dottie West (1932-1991) was an American country music singer-song writer. Alongside Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline, West is considered to be one of the most ground-breaking women artists of country music. West won a the first ever Grammy by a female country artist for her song *Here Comes My Baby* in 1964. She was known as a country pioneer for advertising jingles specifically for her work with the multinational corporation Coca Cola where she penned 12 songs for their campaigns from the 1970s through to the 1980s. Many of these songs had country chart success including a top 10 for the song *Country Sunshine* in 1973. West continued to write and record yet through bad investments and a lull in her career in the late 1980s she became bankrupt in 1990. She was involved in a serious car accident in Nashville in 1991 and died from her injuries the same year (Thanki, 2016; Cackett, 2020; Thompson, 2021; Countrymusicshalloffame.org, 2022b).

³⁹ Tom T. Hall (1936-2021) also known as 'the Storyteller' was an American country music singer-song writer. Hall penned 12 number one country hits and over twenty other songs reached the top ten in the country charts USA. Hall also had crossover hits, with the songs *Harper Valley PTA* and *I Love* making into the *Billboard* hot 100. He is regarded by Rolling Stone as one of the 100 greatest song writers. Hall was regarded as the storyteller through his use of speechlike singing, his 'smooth wit and unaffected amiable style' (Mazor, 2022). Hall was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2008 and the Song Writers Hall of Fame in 2019. Hall continued to write, release and perform music, as well as penning a number of novels up until his death in 2021 (Malone and McCulloh, 1975; Brown, 2005; Batey, 2015; Mazor, n.d.; Hudak, 2022).

on the same stage as these American stars and performing in America helped further O'Donnell's reputation as a country singer at the time.

O'Donnell's personal life then began to take a downward spiral and in 1974 she was involved in a serious road accident that almost cost O'Donnell her life (ibid, p.47). She did not perform for almost twelve months, during which time she began to suffer from prescription medication and alcohol addiction. O'Donnell continued to battle with this addiction for twelve years (O'Donnell 2014, p.48-49). After returning to touring in 1975 under the new management of Mick Clerkin and Release Records, O'Donnell had a new band formed around her called 'Country Pride'. Yet the return to touring had an adverse effect on her mentally (ibid). After an in-depth discussion with her new management team, it was decided she would begin her return to stage on a cabaret tour rather than the ballroom circuit.⁴⁰ It was during this time that O'Donnell collaborated with Larry Cunningham to record *Mr. Peters* which proved a huge success.⁴¹ O'Donnell, Cunningham, and his band toured extensively after this album, however, after a short time O'Donnell and the band left Cunningham and began touring as 'Margo and The Blue Ridge Boys'.

'Margo and The Blue Ridge Boys' recorded and toured on both the cabaret stage and on the ballroom circuit filling venues in Ireland, England, and America throughout the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s. O'Donnell's professional star continued to shine, while in her personal life she was struggling. In the late 1980s O'Donnell sought help for her addiction to alcohol and prescription medication which she discusses in her 2014 autobiography. She details

⁴⁰ The Cabaret show consists of a meal for the guests, who then sit and enjoy the after-dinner entertainment. The Ballroom circuit is where the audiences attend specifically for an evening of dancing to their chosen artists. the Cabaret show usually consists of a number of entertainers performing throughout the evening. Therefore, the demands of a two-hour performance are not expected of any given entertainer (Gallagher 2020d).

⁴¹ Larry Cunningham (1938-2012) was an Irish Country music singer. He began performing with showbands in the 1960s and was the first Irish artist to have success in the British pop charts during that time. Cunningham was renowned for his low vocal tones and his relaxed manner of performing. Cunningham is also accredited as being one of the first to bring country music into the Irish music scene. Cunningham had national and international success, and according to Kevin Martin (2018) was offered to move and record in Nashville after his chart success, however he refused the offer as he didn't want to move. Cunningham died in 2012 in St. James Hospital in Dublin (MacConnell, 2022; McMahan, 2012; Sweeney, 2012; Martin, 2018; Erraught, 2021; LarryCunningham.ie, 2022).

her struggle with addiction and her path to recovery when she attended one of the Aiséirí Clinic's (addiction treatment centres run by the Sisters of Mercy), taking a professional sabbatical:

I was given a date for admission. I got in touch with my band and, to save face, told them I was going to America for a while, and gave them holidays for a few weeks ... Little did I know what lay ahead. The Aiséirí was hard and it took a while for me to realise what the programme was about. We were free to leave if we wanted too and although I had not had a drink for months before going there, I knew when I had committed to this, I had to see it through ... I learned a lot about myself (O'Donnell 2014, p.55).

O'Donnell returned to touring and performing in the early 1990s and had a hit song inspired by the Donegal football team.⁴² Following this she toured Europe, the UK and Australia. O'Donnell also performed in a number of prestigious venues highlighting the pinnacle of her success as a country music artist. She performed at Carnegie Hall New York, Albert Hall in London and on the Grand Ole Opry Stage. O'Donnell recorded in Fireside Studio's with Porter Wagoner⁴³ and developed a lifelong friendship with Dolly Parton.⁴⁴ The performances at these

⁴² O'Donnell released *Walk Tall in Donegal* in September 1992 supporting the Donegal senior football team who had reached the All-Ireland Football final (O'Donnell, 2014).

⁴³ Porter Wagoner (1927–2007) was an American country music singer and television personality. He was the first person to introduce Dolly Parton to the music industry and the pair worked together for seven years. During that time, they had built a recording studio in Nashville that became synonymous with country music. Wagoner became known as Mr. Grand Ole Opry due to his hosting of the *Opry Backstage* and becoming the unofficial spokesman for the Grand Ole Opry in 1992 following Roy Acuff's death. Wagoner had 81 chart hits in the USA and was also well renowned for his arranging and production skills. Wagoner was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 2002. Wagoner died in 2007 (Eng, 1992; Syracuse, 2014; Goeres, 2021; CountrymusicHalloffame.com, 2022d; Thompson, 2022).

⁴⁴ Dolly Parton (b.1946) is an American singer-song writer, actress and businesswoman known most specifically for her work in country music. Having first emerged on Porter Wagoner's syndicate television show in 1964, Parton became a household name over her seven years working with Wagoner. During this time Parton wrote and performed a number of her own songs with Wagoner. She soon gained interest from record labels and left Wagoner to pursue a solo career (Edwards 2018). Parton was awarded Female Singer of the Year in 1975 and 1976 by the Country Music Association and her continued to flourish. She wrote the hit song *I will Always Love You* as a dedication to her partnership with Wagoner after she left his show in 1974. This song went on to reach number one in the Country Music charts USA and has been re-recorded by a number of artists including Whitney Houston for the film *The Bodyguard* 1992. Parton is known for her interface between country and pop music since the 1970s, receiving a Grammy Award for her song *Here You Come Again* in 1978. She went on to receive further Grammy Awards for songs and albums throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Parton has also appeared in a number of movies throughout her career including *Nine to Five* (1980) and *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (1982). In 1986 she opened her own theme park *Dollywood* which is centred around Appalachian traditions and her hometown. She was elected to the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999. Parton established her own record

venues and the invitation to record with Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton illustrate a highpoint in O'Donnell's career. It also highlights an acceptance as a key figure in Irish country music.

O'Donnell was involved in another road traffic accident in 1992 where she and her assistant received numerous injuries including rib, neck, and sternum injuries. Following this O'Donnell became very unwell, and in 1996 discovered she had developed a blood disease called Dyscrasia.⁴⁵ This ultimately ended her full-time touring career; however, she did continue perform on a limited number of dates throughout the year. In 2002 she was the first female artist to take court action against a record company. Following a Horslips case relating to recording rights against Outlet Records, O'Donnell discovered that her former manager John McNally had sold her master tracks and recordings to the same company in Belfast in 1977. McNally sold these recording for a profit of £37,500. As McNally had sold these recordings without O'Donnell's knowledge, she never received any royalties from these records. When she signed her contract with McNally, O'Donnell was a young and 'naïve' 17-year-old living in Dublin (O'Donnell 2018, Interview). She had no guidance or support structures in place to help and aid her in her professional capacity. O'Donnell was working with this management team on the basis of trust in their judgement and guidance for her musical career. Yet when she did begin to ask questions, she was told on many occasions to stop, or "she would be sorry":

A percentage of our earnings from our shows was put away for recordings and publicity, so essentially, I and the band made the money to pay for everything ... Then there were the recordings, which I paid for, but never received any royalty. I knew I deserved something from my records, though

company in 2007. Parton is one of an elite group of artists to hold an award from the four major annual American entertainment awards organisations: Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony. Parton was awarded the U.S Library of Congress Living Legend Award in 2004 for her work with the *imagination Library*. In 2005 she was awarded the National Medal of Arts from the United States Government – the highest honour given by the government for excellence in art. Most recently Parton was nominated by the Rock Hall of Fame in 2022, which she has refused. Parton has charted over twenty-five number one songs, forty-one top ten country albums and has sold over 100 million records world-wide to date (Parton, 1994; Wilson, 1998; Parton, 2012; Hall and Jones, 2016; Edwards, 2018; Dolly Parton Productions, 2022, Gorlinski, 2020).

⁴⁵ In my interview with O'Donnell, she discussed the development of the blood disorder she has called Dyscrasia which has impacted on her health and ability to tour on a full-time basis (O'Donnell 2018).

I didn't know what exactly, but I was afraid to rock the boat – it was easier just to go along with everything. When I did pluck up the courage to start asking questions, I was told that all the extra money went on publicity and recording. I said I thought that the percentage put away from the shows should take care of those things. I also said that it seemed like I was paying for everything – and I was told to be quiet, or I'd be sorry, with those words the matter was rested (O'Donnell 2014, p.40).

O'Donnell started court proceedings to reclaim ownership of her records which would ultimately give her control of her own musical output. In December 2002 she won her case and received her master tapes from Outlet Records (O'Donnell 2018, Interview). While this highlights one of the challenges O'Donnell faced during her early performing career it also showcases the changes in how she began to operate as an established artist later in her career. O'Donnell challenged the corporate music industry to establish her own worth and to reclaim what she had lost throughout the years. While she did win her case, a landmark case in Ireland, O'Donnell stats that she still felt hurt and abused by an industry that has gained so much from her:

And in 2002 I sat in the Lagan courts in Belfast and the Judge said, 'these recordings never belonged to anybody else'. I felt after that, that man and that company raped me for twenty years, you know. And I was so so hurt, he's dead now, but if I met him, I wouldn't know him [Outlet Records] but it left a sour taste in my mouth, you know (ibid).

While not discussed in depth in her biography, O'Donnell has received numerous accolades through her career and is celebrate widely in the Irish country music circles. Recently TG4 honoured her with a tribute to her career in 2019 celebrating her 55 years on the country music circuit. Throughout her career to date O'Donnell has record over 40 albums and compilations.

In her home she displays her golden, silver and platinum discs on the walls of her trophy room.⁴⁶

See Appendix 1B for O'Donnell's album discography.

1.10.3: Susan McCann



Image 1. 7: Susan McCann on the Late Late Show April 2021 (McCann, 2022).

Susan McCann was born 26 February 1949 in Forkhill, Co. Armagh. McCann is the third of eight children born to Eddie and Bridget McCann. McCann and her family moved to Carrickasticken, Co Armagh shortly after she was born to live with her paternal grandmother on the family farm. She recalls that times were hard when she was younger but ‘we never wanted for anything’ (Bell 2015; Walsh 2022). McCann walked to school in Forkhill along with her siblings, while her father worked on the family farm. Her mother worked within the home helping her grandmother and caring for the children. From a young age music was part

⁴⁶ While these plaques are displayed in her home there is no written account on which songs or albums, she received these discs for.

of McCann's life. She recalls her the family entertaining the local community at house parties and dances:

when I was a youngster, we had no electricity. I lived up in Carrickasticken outside Forkhill and we didn't have electricity up our road so there was no electricity in our house. So, we did sing songs and parties and you know, and that's how I became, that I got so involved. Da would sit with the accordion and I had a brother that played the harmonica, sure we had the best of crack (McCann 2019, Interview).

At the age of five her father taught her the words of the song *A Mothers Love's a Blessing* which enabled her to participate in entertaining the guests of the house parties. This connection to music became even more apparent in her schoolwork where she excelled in music and singing (Bell 2015). McCann credits her father as her musical influence while also adding that her mother had 'a beautiful singing voice that could be heard all around the house' (McCann 2019).

McCann's performing musical career began at the age of sixteen when she joined the 'John Murphy Céilí Band' (McCann 2019).⁴⁷



Image 1. 8: Susan McCann and the John Murphy Céilí Band in 1966 (Irishworld.com, 2022).

She was employed as the singer who entertained the crowd during the band's intervals.⁴⁸ As the group became more popular McCann's stage appearances became longer. McCann also met her future husband Denis Heaney in the 'John Murphy Céilí Band'.⁴⁹ McCann and Denis Heaney married in 1971. They left the céilí band and began performing locally in a group called 'The Farylanders' (Bell 2015). McCann was then talent spotted in early 1976 by Tony

⁴⁷ John Murphy was a well-known fiddle player in South Armagh. He took up the accordion and formed the band in the mid-1950s. They played regularly locally and also broadcast for *Céilí House* on Radió Éireann in the 1960s (Ceol Camloch 2009).

⁴⁸ The singers in céilí bands were utilised as interval entertainment so that the musicians could have a break from playing during their performances. Audiences would take the opportunity to also take a break from the dance floor and listen to the singer Céilí band performances in the 1960s lasted up to four hours, therefore it was necessary to afford these musicians time to recuperate between sets (Maguire, 2012; McCann, 2019).

⁴⁹ Denis Heaney was the accordion player in the John. Murphy Céilí Band. After they left the 'John Murphy Band' McCann and Heaney formed their own band and played locally in Newry, Co. Down. Further to this, when McCann began her professional career, Heaney became band leader, alongside playing Keyboard and accordion. Denis has been Susan's manager since she left Top Rank Entertainment in the late 1980s (Bell, 2015; McCann, 2019).

Loughman of Top Rank Entertainment and was invited to signed Loughman's label Top Spin Records. At this point McCann and her husband had two young children, consequently the family (including McCann's parents) engaged in a discussion of what this path may mean:

I told daddy all that had happened in the meeting and all and he said, 'that sounds like a great idea, and mom and I will help yeah as much as we can with the kids. But I want you to promise me one thing'. And I didn't know what he was going to say, he said, 'if it ever interferes with your family get out of it as quick as you went into it'. And I said, 'what do you mean by that', and he said, 'if it ever comes between you and Denis, or if I feel the children are being neglected, I'll say it to you' (McCann 2019, Interview).

McCann signed with Top Spin Records, and she released her first hit single in late 1976 with *Santa and the Kids*. This song charted well for McCann and her name started to gather a following all over Ireland as she received more radio play.⁵⁰ This success meant that McCann

⁵⁰ The song went into the top 20 Irish charts for an unspecified number of weeks; however, it was this recognition that began to give McCann the Air Play on local and pirate radio stations (Gallagher, 2015c; H&H Music Ltd, 2022).

needed a bigger band to support her. Loughman from the band called ‘The Storytellers’ around her in 1977.



Image 1. 9: Susan McCann and the Storytellers (McCann, 2022).

‘Susan McCann and The Storytellers’ released their first number one single hit *Big Tom is Still the King* in 1977.⁵¹ The song was number one in the Irish charts and stayed in the top ten for eleven weeks making McCann a household name. Following the success of *Big Tom is Still the King* McCann made her first appearance on *The Late Late Show* on RTÉ with Gay Byrne and became inundated with TV appearances and interviews. McCann travelled to Nashville to perform on the Grand Ole Opry stage in 1979 and performed on *The Porter Wagoner Show* on American television that same year. McCann went on to record in Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton’s Fireside recording studio in Nashville a number of times thereafter. Attracting this

⁵¹ *Big Tom is Still the King* is discussed and analysed in chapter four.

recognition early in her career showcased how quickly McCann was gaining recognition as a country music star both in Ireland and America.

In 1980 McCann made her debut appearance at the Wembley International Country Music Festival where she shared the stage with Tammy Wynette,⁵² Crystal Gayle,⁵³ and Emmylou Harris.⁵⁴ She was invited back to perform in 1981, 1985, 1989 and 1991 emphasising her reception and acceptance with UK country music fans and her contemporaries. McCann was showcasing her ability as a country singer and her reputation as singer was noted by European and American fans and associations. In 1982 she won the European Gold Star Award in Holland⁵⁵ and in 1983 she won the International Female Accolade from the International Country & Western Music Association in Fort Worth, Texas.⁵⁶ She repeated this feat in Fort Worth in 1984. McCann's star continued to rise with further number one hits including *When*

⁵² Tammy Wynette (1942-1998) was an American country music singer-song writer. Wynette was one of country music's best known country artists during the 1960s and 1970s and was known as the First Lady of Country Music in America. Wynette is best known for her hit song *Stand By Your Man* which she released in 1968 and it went to number one in the American country music charts. The song also reached number one in the UK charts in 1975 when it was released there, and propelled Wynette to superstar status following her national and international success. Wynette won many accolades throughout her career including a Grammy for Best Country Vocal Performance, Female (1970) and she was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in 1999. Posthumously, in 2010 she was selected by the Library of Congress as an addition to the National Recording Registry – a registry that selects recordings annually that are culturally, historically, and aesthetically significant (Morris, 1992; Tolley, 2001; Drake, 2017; Tammywynette.com, 2021).

⁵³ Crystal Gayle (1951-) is an American country singer best known for her hit single *Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue*. This song was released by Gayle in 1977 and was a huge chart success for her. Gayle, sister of Loretta Lynn, has been nominated and awarded Grammy's for Best Country Vocal Performance, Female (1977) and has been awarded numerous CMA awards including Best Song, Best Female Vocalists and Best Album. Gayle was the first American country female to achieve Platinum sales of an album in 1977 with *We Must Believe in Magic*. Gayle continues to perform and write her own music (Tracy, 2021; Crystalgayle.com, 2022).

⁵⁴ Emmylou Harris (1947) is an American singer, songwriter, and musician. Noted for her collaboration with Country singer Gram Parsons, Harris has written and released 30 albums. Her creative output can be heard in pop, country and rock genres, most notably country rock. Harris was part of the creative team that composed the music for the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000). In 2008 Harris was inducted in the Country Music Hall of fame and in 2018 she received the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (Moss, 2018; Emmylouharris.com, 2022).

⁵⁵ This was considered the Eurovision for country music and was held in Holland in 1982 (Bell, 2015).

⁵⁶ This award was a fan base vote from all around the world, held in Fort Worth, Texas (Byworth, 1983; Gallagher, 2015c).

the Sun Says Goodbye to the Mountain (1983), *Broken Speed at the sound of Loneliness* (1989) and *The String of Diamonds* (1991).⁵⁷

McCann toured extensively throughout the 1980s and 1990s. She performed for two serving American presidents George Bush (snr) and George W. Bush at the Strawberry Festival, Florida.⁵⁸ McCann was the first Irish artists to perform on this stage, a stage she shared with Garth Brooks.⁵⁹ McCann also had sold out shows in Carnegie Hall, New York (Bell 2015; McCann 2019). Her music tours also brought her to South Africa and Russia, the latter where she performed at the White Nights Festival.⁶⁰ McCann has been awarded a number of other accolades including winning RTÉ's Singer of the Year for five successive years (susanmccann.com 2022).⁶¹ In 2017 McCann was inducted into the UK's Country Music Hall of Fame, the second Irish women to be inducted after Philomena Begley.⁶² McCann received the Lifetime Achievement from Irish Post in Northern Ireland in 2018.⁶³ McCann has also received numerous Silver, Gold and Platinum Disc's for her number one success. She has

⁵⁷ *When the Sun Says Goodbye to the Mountain* (1983; 2011): <https://youtu.be/OpAQDuQtlZM>, *Broken Speed at the Sound of Loneliness* (1989; 2020): <https://youtu.be/FNjk7zADqjw>, *String of Diamonds* (1991; 2009): <https://youtu.be/GHlmb6JB8Zo>.

⁵⁸ The Strawberry Festival is a weekend festival that combines agriculture, commerce, industry, livestock, fine arts, horticulture, and crafts with music for fans from all over the world. 'The Florida Strawberry Festival represents a piece of Americana, a time in American history when fairs and festivals brought communities together through celebrations of their harvests' (Florida Strawberry Festival, 2022). The festival was set up to promote Americana lifestyles, and appreciation of all aspects of their culture. Over the years many American country music performers have taken to this stage including Garth Brooks, Willie Nelson, Randy Travis and others (McCann, 2019; Florida Strawberry Festival, 2022; Concertarchives.org, 2022; Jenkins, 2022).

⁵⁹ American Country Music singer Garth Brooks (b.1962) is the highest selling solo artist in US history (G.COM,LLC, 2022).

⁶⁰ This is an annual summer festival of music, arts and culture held in Saint Petersburg, Russia celebrating its near mid-night sunset. The festival 'is an international arts festival that takes place during the season of the midnight sun, when the Northern Light shines at both dawn and dusk, allowing the millions of festival-goers that visit each year the opportunity to celebrate all day and all night long' (Miller, 2022; travelhouse.com, 2016; saint-petersburg.com, 2022).

⁶¹ The RTÉ singer of the year award was an accolade that was part of the Keep it Country Awards ceremony presented by RTÉ radio 2. Pascal Mooney was the disc jockey for this show and presented the awards on the night (RTÉ Archives, 1983).

⁶² BCMHOF.com, 2022b: <https://bcmhof.co.uk/inductees/42-042-susan-mccann-2017>.

⁶³ See Lonergan, 2018.

recorded over 600 singles with her known albums culminating in 27 releases. See Appendix 1C for McCann's album discography.

The biographies of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann inform an understanding of their childhood, career success and reception within the Irish country music. They reveal how their lives were shaped by Irish culture and how they moved from positions of isolation to iconic status in Ireland. All three women refer to social and cultural norms and roles attributed to women within their interviews and in their own biographical writing. The biographies demonstrate how their engagement with music was shaped by attitudes towards women during their early careers and how they transgressed these attitudes to form their own legacy's in Irish country music. This historical context informs the research of their lived experience and will aid in the understanding of identity and identity portrayals. The section set the backdrop for the creation and analysis of meaningfulness in the lives of the artists and the audiences of Irish country music. My research is informed by interviews conducted with all three women artists and supplemented with biographical information contained in the books published by Philomena Begley (2017) and Margo O'Donnell (2014). I was invited to the homes of all three women to conduct these interviews at various points during this research. In March 2018 I interviewed Margo O'Donnell in her home in Castleblaney, Co. Monaghan. The interview lasted four hours in which O'Donnell spoke frankly about her life and lived experience of Irish country music. Susan McCann invited me into her home in Newry, Co. Down in May 2019. This interview lasted almost two hours where McCann spoke openly about the music industry, her family, and the country music 'family'. Due to COVID-19 my interview with Philomena Begley was postponed on a number of occasions, finally taking place in her home in Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone in September 2020. Similar to O'Donnell and McCann, Begley spoke freely about her experiences of the music industry both as a céilí singer and as a country music star. These interviews gave the research an informed understanding of their experiences that is not overtly

evident in their own biographies. Additionally, this is the first interview documenting Susan McCann's biographical lived experience.

1.11: Chapter Structure

Chapter one has thus far provided the structural, theoretical, and methodological concerns of this dissertation. This chapter will now conclude with a chapter structure for the entire thesis.

Chapter two provides the historical context and subsequent development of Irish country music.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Irish cultural and musical life from the 1920s which highlights the prominence of céilí bands. This is followed with a history of the Orchestra bands and their impact of in Irish musical life, before providing an in-depth discussion of the Irish showbands and the emergence of Irish country music. This historical discussion is accompanied by an overview of the genre of Irish country music; thus, providing an element of musical analysis that showcases the content and structure of Irish country music, highlighting the rhythmic features of the Irish country music jive. Additionally, the vocal style of Irish country music singers is discussed in this chapter. The chapter details the community aspect of Irish country music and how the stakeholders create a connection to their audiences. It highlights the musical pathways that Irish country musicians pursued before becoming known as Irish country music artists. Additional themes such as the infrastructure of the genre, influence and change, visibility, mass media, and the gender balance of the genre are analysed within the discourse of this chapter.

Chapter three engages with a critical discussion on identity and how identity conveyance occurs within the context of Irish country music performers. The chapter begins by describing the theoretical frameworks that underpin this research concerning identity and identity formation. Combining biographical information on Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann with theories on identity, this chapter showcases how these three women negotiated and embodied specific identity markers at specific times in their careers. The chapter depicts the cultural and societal norms of Ireland at each specific period in their career and assesses

how these women create, maintain, and negotiate identity markers as inscribed by these norms. These biographical accounts are the first time all three women have discussed in-depth the cultural and social environments that they were exposed to during their careers. These accounts are the result of my fieldwork interviews, generating an important contribution to research on Irish country music. These interviews provide a critically comparison of their lived experiences and those that they embodied for their audiences.

Chapter four provides an in-depth lyrical analysis of single song from Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann. These songs were selected as these artists are the only artists to have recorded them in the Irish country music context. Additionally, these songs have delivered each performer with considerable chart success. The chapter begins by providing a discussion of the concepts of meaningfulness and semiotics prior to commencing the analysis. The analysis combines semiotics, and cultural reflections to showcase how these women have created meaningfulness in their music. By examining the lyrics, stories, and narratives of these songs, it highlights the topics, tropes, and themes of rural Ireland – isolating the demographic of the music – and discusses the impact and implications of Irish country music. This chapter highlights how these songs reflect, embody, and reinforce social and cultural norms in Ireland. It also highlights how these women were aware of the cultural world and their impact on the audience to whom they sing.

Chapter five presents an analysis of the visual imagery of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann as presented on their album iconography from three distinct periods in their careers. This highlights the identity markers, social and cultural norms, and gender markers, evident as they progress through their careers. This chapter assesses how all three women negotiate identity and varying identity markers over their extensive careers. The chapter examines how these women were representative of a specific type of Irish audience and Irish society. Furthermore, it showcases the impact and influence of contemporary fashion on women

Irish country music stars. The chapter combines both analytical frameworks, and cultural narratives to present a discussion on visual imagery and the portrayal of identity in iconography.

Utilizing Jeff Todd Titon's 'Music Performance Model', I critically engage with the contemporary Irish country music scene in chapter six. The chapter begins once more with a discussion of the conceptual frameworks that underpin this specific argument before engaging in the cultural analysis of the contemporary scene. The chapter examines themes of reception, performance, community, impact, and legacy, in the context of Irish country music. This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the responses to the survey conducted on Irish country music, and it addresses issues such as image, gender, and engagement with Irish country music. Ultimately, it engages with contemporary audiences and contemporary artists to examine the contemporary scene, and to address the legacy of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann within the Irish country music scene.

Chapter seven provides the concluding comments on this critical examination of Irish country music. It compiles the findings from the previous chapters and re-addresses how the primary questions have been discussed through each chapter. It details the implications for this research and provides details for future research on Irish country music. This chapter reinforces the impact these women have had on the entire genre of Irish country music.

Chapter 2: Irish Country Music - History and Development

2.1: Introduction

This chapter details the history and subsequent development of Irish country music from the 1960s to the present day. Aside from some biographical accounts on the showband era (McCourt 1992; Gallagher 1997; O’Keefe 2002), recent studies focus on the relationship between showbands and economic change, youth culture, and dancehall regulations (Maguire 2012; Miller 2014; 2020; Martin 2018; Holohan 2018; Ní Fhuartháin 2019). This chapter adds to the limited body of academic work completed by Maguire (2012) and Millar (2014; 2020) on Irish country music. Herein, I trace the development of Irish country music from céilí bands, dance orchestra bands and showbands, and thus document the history of Irish country music from the 1960s to the present day. This chapter situates Irish country music within the context of social and cultural changes from the beginning of the 20th century. It discusses key figures from the varying decades who influenced change and progression, while also discussing the pivotal factors that aided in the creation of Irish country music. This chapter provides the background information necessary to further investigate the role of women in Irish country music.

2.2: The Lineage of Irish Country Music

2.2.0: Céilí bands

At the beginning of the Irish free state, circa 1922, the Irish musical landscape was much less diverse than it is today. The ‘wild years of the Roaring Twenties’ introduced modern dance and music, which was consumed by a substantial portion of the Irish population (Ó hAllmhuráin 2005, p.10). Music during this time was both a form of expression for people and was also a way of gaining some extra income to enhance living: ‘There was, for instance, the practice of poor families arranging dances with admission fees, not only as an entertainment, but primarily as an addition to their earnings’ (Wulff 2007, p.60). Local musicians or bands generally performed traditional Irish music and more contemporary “Jazz” music for dancing at these events. Not only were there dances held in homes across Ireland, but they were also documented

to have taken place at crossroads and other locations. However, these dance venues changed in 1935 with the introduction of the Public Dance Hall act in 1935 (Ní Fhuartháin 2019).⁶⁴ This act was introduced at the behest of several political parties along with the Catholic Church. All of whom saw this commercial, contemporary music and dance as a form of social and moral frailty. Alistair Cooke details this further:

the 1920s brought on a drastic revolt against the pre-war mores of gentility; and though the revolutionary symbols now seem trivial, they were sufficiently bizarre to alarm the middle-aged. Corsets were abandoned along with the Viennese waltz. Long skirts were scandalously abbreviated, and long hair was 'bobbed'. Young women smoked, and in public, and danced into the dawn to the sensual moan of the saxophone, an instrument forgotten for eighty years but now revived and condemned, by city fathers and magistrates on both sides of the Atlantic, as a siren sound, beckoning young girls to a losing battle with fate worse than death (Cook 1973 in Ó hAllmhuráin 2005, p.10).

Dances in homes and other unlicensed venues became illegal therefore changing the spaces in which dances took place. Curran notes that:

Ensemble playing arose out of the need of the musicians to make themselves heard in commercial halls, and was influenced by the interaction of other kinds of popular music. The transition from a rural to an urban context of performance, the impact of recorded music, the influence of other American cultural traditions, all played a part in the transformation of Irish music (Curran in Kearney 2012, p.3).

Group playing was conceptualised as a way of generating a larger sound to fill these now larger performance spaces. While there may have been many musicians that played together at these house dances their instrumentation may have needed much more support in the contemporary

⁶⁴ Definition of the Public Dance Halls Act 1935: An Act to make provision for the licensing, control, and supervision of places used for public dancing, and to make provision for other matters connected with the matters aforesaid (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>, 2020).

dance spaces. Céilí bands began to flourish after the introduction of the Public Dance Halls Act with parish halls now the location for local dances. These bands usually consisted of fiddles, flutes, accordion, concertina, and banjo. Drums, piano, saxophone, guitar, and double bass were added later and contributed to the rhythmic and harmonic development of the bands. This also helped achieve the volume required to fill larger venues (Wulff 2007; Ó Riada in Carson 2008; Vallely 2011; Kearney 2019). Bands generally played traditional Irish music in unison, regularly augmented with multiple songs throughout their performance. However, céilí bands mainly focused on instrumental music rather than vocal music. These types of céilí bands continued to be a prominent segment in the entertainment sector of popular music culture up until the 1960s. From the 1960s onwards, céilí bands were replaced by dancehall entertainers and showbands, who were becoming more popular.⁶⁵ However, it is noteworthy that céilí bands were not the only form of musical entertainment for the Irish public during this time; orchestra bands were also very popular in Ireland from the 1940s.

2.2.1: Orchestra Bands

A typical 1940s Irish dance orchestra ranged from six to sixteen players who sat while playing, and read from arranged parts placed on music stands. From all reports, dance orchestra members rarely looked up from their music to watch the audience. There was little improvisation and virtually no swing (Miller 2014, p.78).

Orchestra bands or dance bands were also an immensely popular form of musical entertainment in Ireland from the 1930s to the 1950s. At this time orchestra bands consisted of a large number of male instrumentalists. Although women were participating in aspects of public musical life during the early 20th century, there remains a research gap concerning a written history of women's participation in Orchestra bands. The instrumental structure varied depending on the number of members; however, the musical content remained the same. These groups played the

⁶⁵ It is important to state that céilí bands are still present in Ireland however are mainly associated with the traditional Irish music genre and are a prominent fixture of the Fleadh Cheol competitions.

popular music of the day, which enabled their ballroom audiences to dance to the prominent dance styles of the waltz and the foxtrot. The music was arranged for these groups and each member required limited music literacy skills to play. Typically, the music of these groups was usually bought in from England and referred to as “Jimmy Lally stuff” (Maguire 2012, p.60). Many of the bands consisted of lay men who had regular jobs with this position supplementing their income. Gallagher notes ‘many of these bands were actually resident bands in some of the larger ballrooms. During the “off season” they would pack up and tour the country at the weekends’ (Gallagher 2017c). Maguire also states that audiences regularly noted the lack of interaction from orchestra bands or dance bands with them:

The essentially functional aspect of the wide variety of musical combinations that have come to be classified as dance bands was emphasized by the scant attention paid by the dancers to the actual musicians who were performing the music (2012, p.60).

These musicians were primarily focused on playing the music as printed, rather than engaging with an audience. This was also encouraged by the audience who ‘preferred, or were more accustomed to, purely instrumental accompaniment when dancing’ (ibid). Jimmy O’Neill, a member of The Savoy Orchestra from 1939, remembered hearing dancers stating ‘there’s only an ould singer on now’ when recalling his time with the band (O’Neill in Maguire 2012, p.59).

It was not until after the radio ban of the 1940s in America that Irish audiences became accustomed to singers being prominent figures in orchestra bands.



Image 2. 1: The Ace of Spades Dance band c. 1930s (Maguire 2012, p.54).



Image 2. 2: The Mick Cummins Orchestra of Dublin c.1950s (Gallagher 2017c, Mick Cummins).

Images 2.1 and 2. 2 show the style and structure of the orchestra bands. While both bands are advertised under different band types, the structure of both bands is quite similar. The images of ‘The Ace of Spades Dance Band’ from the 1930s compared with the image of the ‘Mick Cummins Orchestra’ highlights the element of overlap between Dance Bands and Orchestra

Bands. Both adhere to the same instrument structure; both bands play the same type of music, both bands are situated in a seated position, behind their music stands and are dressed in tuxedos of varying colours. This style of dress is continuously associated with the ballroom etiquette of the 1930s and 1940s in Ireland and abroad.

2.2.2: Showbands

Following on from the introduction of the Public Dance Hall Act of 1935 and the anti-jazz campaign, dancing and music was largely removed from the home and the private sphere and was relocated into the control of those in charge of the public sphere (Ó hAllmhuráin 2005; Wulff 2007; Hogan 2014; Fogarty 2017; Porter 2018; Evans 2019; Ní Fhuartáin 2019). With the building of dancehalls, ballrooms and the use of parish halls, there was more opportunity for those in control of these venues to profit from dances from the early 1940s. Jim Smyth stated that ‘the act was draconian, making it practically impossible to hold dances without the sanction of the trinity of clergy, police and judiciary’ (Smyth 1993, p.54). By the end of the 1950s, social and economic change was developing in Ireland. Elected *Taoiseach* in 1959, Sean Lemass brought economic growth by shifting his focus from an ideology and identity dominated by Irish rurality, to embracing modernist European ideals. The landscape of Ireland changed with the construction of almost ‘450 large ballrooms countrywide’ (Hogan 2014, p.263). The construction of these ballrooms gave rise to the emergence and popularity of Showbands.

In the mid-1950s bands began to incorporate a show element into their set which created the showband name. Miller describes showbands as ‘the Irish response to American and British rock ‘n’ roll and pop music’ (2014, p.77). Their music was a combination of all the popular music of the time coming out of America and Britain. According to Gallagher, ‘Irish showbands actually started in the mid 1950s, but really didn’t catch fire and explode until the early 1960s’ (Gallagher 2017c). The emergence of showbands is often traced to ‘The Clipper Carlton band’, also known as ‘The Carlton Dance Band’ or ‘Dance Orchestra’, and referred to hereafter as ‘The Clippers’. In the 1950s there was an expectation that bands would play from 9pm to 2am

therefore incorporating an additional cabaret-type-show to the act, that allowed musicians some well needed rest during the evenings events (Maguire 2012; Miller 2013; Millar 2014; Gallagher 2017c; Martin 2018). ‘The Clippers’ were the first band to perform music from memory and began to engage directly with the audience. They created a setlist that incorporated the popular music hits from America and Britain, and included traditional Irish music and country and western music.⁶⁶ This type of structure and sound was emulated by multiple other groups around Ireland. By the early 1960s, showbands including ‘The Royal Showband’, ‘The Miami Showband’, and ‘The Capitol Showband’ had become so popular they began to drop the cabaret aspect of the show focusing primarily on the musical performance. These groups tried to replicate the exact sounds they were listening to on records and on radio. Vincent Power states that

Showbands were not seen as purveyors of originality. They were purveyors of entertainment. In fact, the public didn’t like to hear original music. I believe that every developing musical culture has to go through that phase ... you have to find your own voice and identity. You can’t force it... it is a phase that has to be gone through before a society finds its own voice. And then the originality comes (cited in Hogan, 2014, p.264).

Tracking the popularity and success of showbands in the charts during the 1960s, reinforces Power’s statement. Most showbands’ successes lay in their cover versions of already popular songs, adding their own ‘twist’ to it. ‘Twist’ is the colloquial term used by bands and musicians

⁶⁶ Example of Clippers Setlist includes: ‘Be Our Guest, Ring of Fire, The Rock Island Line, The Keeper of Boothill, Skits of the Clancy Brother, Little Old Wine Drinker Me, Bring Your Sweet Lips, Groucho Marx imitation, New York, New York, You’re the only good thing, Calipso Music, Stranger on Shore, Rosie O Grady, See you later alligator, Shake Rattle and Roll (The Clipper Carlton Show 2016, YouTube).

who create their own version of an already existing song or piece of music.⁶⁷ After they had achieved their initial wave of popularity, bands began to introduce their original compositions.

A showband consisted of between seven and ten members. The instrumental structure had not altered extensively from that of orchestra or dance bands. Generally, showbands consisted of a rhythm section including guitar, bass, and drums, supplemented with organ, electric piano and occasionally the piano accordion, and a brass section. The brass section was accepted to be any combination of trumpet, trombone, and saxophone. Showbands adhered to the dress style of tuxedos or suits with all band members wearing the same colour. Showbands also had a resident man or woman singer who travelled with them.



Image 2. 3: The Clipper Carlton band (Gallagher 2017c, Clipper Carlton images).



⁶⁷ See the Irish charts during the early 1960s. Additionally see Smyth (2005), Gallagher (2017a) and Miller (2014).

Image 2. 4: The Miami Showband in 1964 (Gallagher 2017c, Miami showband images).

During the 1950s and 1960s there is estimated to have been between 600 and 800 showbands touring Ireland, however, it is suggested that less than ten percent of these bands were performing at a professional level (Kennedy 2010; Gallagher 2020e). Miller writes ‘the showband industry itself also substantially contributed to kickstarting what had been a weak and stagnant Irish economy’ (2014, p.78). This era was not a craze for just the youth of the island as showbands audiences ‘were less age-delineated (not constituted primarily by ‘adolescent’/teenagers’) and tended to appeal to a broader age-range than that of the youth-oriented rock ‘n’ roll US Market’ (Smyth in Hogan 2014, p.263). Therefore, it generated a high turnover of clientele that in turn had a significant impact on the Irish economy (Maguire 2012; Miller 2014; Hogan 2014). Power states:

The showband craze changed Irish courting habits forever. In rural areas, the ballrooms created the opportunity to meet others away from the narrow confines of the parochial hall. Youngsters cycled to local dances in the ‘50s, and drove to ballrooms miles away in the ‘60s. Boys and girls could be more anonymous at the dance fifty miles from home – away from prying eyes of neighbours (1990, p.13).

Power’s statement reflects the social climate in which the showbands emerged. The showband era, as stated previously, emerged at the same time Sean Lemass took office as Taoiseach. This change in government meant a change politically, economically, and socially. There were more jobs available in Ireland therefore there was less immigration. The people of Ireland began to have more disposable income to use on things such as going to dances both in their local area and in other counties. All these factors combined to produce one of the most revolutionary periods, musically, in Ireland.

Showbands experienced a decline in popularity towards the end of the 1960s with many stating that many showbands were no longer popular in the 1970s (Maguire 2012; O’Donnell 2018;

McCann 2019; Gallagher 2020e; Begley 2020). With the depth of music available to audiences and musicians, showbands were struggling to produce the enormous number of musical demands of the audience. Following this many of the showbands reduced their size and followed one specific musical route, while other showbands disbanded entirely. However, it is at this point in Irish history that Irish country music bands begin to emerge and utilise the showband circuit.⁶⁸

2.3: Irish Country Music

2.3.1: The Musical Content and Structure

American country music had a major impact on musicians and audiences in Ireland. Music records were posted to relatives in Ireland from America, Australia, and Europe, from the 1950s onwards. The broadcast of American and European radio stations in Ireland commenced through legitimate broadcasters and illegal pirate radio stations. While the trend of performing this type of music did not take hold until the 1960s, radio stations such as Radio Luxembourg, American Forces Network and the BBC were playing all the American country music hits in the post-war period. RTÉ began playing country music later in the sixties on sponsored programmes which aired at 11pm weekly.

2.3.2: Instrumentation and ‘The Beat’

In the formative days of country music in Ireland, Irish bands tried to replicate the sounds and songs they heard from American radio stations and American performers. The foremost cited music influences in the initial stages of Irish country music included George Jones, Roy Acuff, and Hank Williams (O’Donnell 2018; Gilmore 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). Irish artists then began to incorporate the American style of country music into their sets by changing the

⁶⁸ The showbands circuit is referred to when speaking of the ballrooms that the showbands played throughout the country. These ballrooms play a vital role in the success of Irish country music. (Maguire 2012; Miller 2014; O’Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Gallagher 2016; 2020e; Begley 2020).

meter of the songs so that the music fit into a given dance type. Philomena Begley highlights this in her interview as she states

all the songs we got into, I got into Kitty Wells, the first song was a Hank Williams song *My Son Calls Another Man Daddy*, and we changed that into a Waltz. But that's what we did, we changed all the songs into either a waltz or a barn dance, or that time it was called a quick step, and then into a jive. And then we had the slow waltz as well (Begley Interview, 2020).

Here Begley is illuminating the function of the music which will be discussed later. At this juncture, I focus on the audio production practices concerning instrumentation and voice.

The instrumental structure for Irish country music bands does not differ entirely from that which was set out by the American pioneers. Building on the musical structure set out by the showbands, country bands consisted of percussion, bass guitar, piano or keyboards, violin or fiddle, steel guitar, rhythm guitar and vocals. Currently the number of band members vary from group to group with some members playing more than one instrument, however nationally recognized bands consist of a minimum of six instrumentalists plus the lead singer. Some country bands extend to include twelve band members; however, the size of the group does not alter the consistency of the musical content. The songs created by Irish artists contain the sounds of the steel guitar and Nashville fiddle as depicted by Jensen (1998) and Malone (2013) however there is a strong dance beat that accompanies them. While there are many groups that do include some traditional Irish instrumentation into some of their arrangements, the most recognizable feature of Irish country music is not the sound of Irish traditional instruments, but the rhythmic pattern generated by the percussion and bass guitar. Where possible, Irish country bands try to replicate some of the original sounds created by their American counterparts; the most crucial difference is the change in rhythmic patterns. Irish country music is most often arranged in 3/4 or 4/4 meter, thus giving the music a different 'beat' and feel. The drum section interacts with the bass section to generate a typical 'Irish beat'. For example, in a jive or a quick

step, the drums stick closely to a straight 4/4 meter which can often include the train-like pattern, and this can have a bpm of 90 up to 140. The following two examples showcase two types of drum patterns used in Irish country music that highlight the dance ‘beat’ utilised by Irish artists in jiving songs.



Musical Example 2. 1: Train Drumbeat from Mike Denver's 'The Day of My Return' single.



Musical Example 2. 2: Standard beat with Hi-Hat drive in jiving songs notated from Louise Morrissey's 'A Little Bit Longer'.

From the above examples, the two distinct beats that may be utilised to generate the same type of rhythm necessary for the jive beat. In the first example, the snare drum incorporates the train-like pattern with a strong consistency on the kick drum of straight crotchet beats to keep the rhythm moving. This is played faster than the second example which allows the band and singer to keep a high tempo and energy in the song throughout. Both examples encourage the audience to engage with a physical reaction in both dancing and seated participation. In the second example the Hi-Hat generates the drive of tempo while the snare drum accents the kick drum and Hi-Hat movement. This is typical of the Irish country music jive beat that can be played at a slower or faster pace depending on each performer. This beat pattern gives a clear indication of the time and tempo of the song thus allowing for both quickstep and jiving to be performed

by audiences in a dance setting. This is explored further in the work of Paul Maguire (2012) in reference to the dance beat in Irish country music context.

The bass guitar line is the second prominent feature of the Irish country music dance beat. The interaction of the bass guitar and percussion generate the specific ‘feel’ that Irish country music creates, which in turn encourages the audience to participate in some form of physical reaction.

‘Feel’ refers both to typical dance-based rhythmic gestalts and their associated moods (‘swing feel’, ‘shuffle feel’, ‘waltz’, ‘train beat’, ‘two-step’) and to a musicians’ grasp of the subtleties of expression that such gestalts demand in domains like timing, mood, and textural density (Fox 2004, p.171).

The bass guitar generates a tonic-dominant movement, highlighted in example 2.3 from the same song by Louise Morrissey, that accentuates the rhythmic pattern generated by the drums. This tonic-dominant movement on the strong beat of each bar also creates its own rhythmic pattern distinct from the drum beat, in a walk-like movement, thus generating a ‘feel’ that can

be replicated in the movement of the jive or quickstep. The creation of this rhythm and beat encapsulates the jive beat in Irish country music.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a jive beat in 4/4 time, set in the key of D major (one sharp). Each system consists of two staves: the upper staff for the Bass Guitar and the lower staff for the Drumset. The drumset part features a consistent pattern of eighth notes and eighth rests, with 'x' marks indicating cymbal hits. The bass guitar part provides a harmonic and melodic foundation, with notes often aligned with the drum hits. The first system shows the initial four measures. The second system, starting at measure 4, shows a more complex bass line with some sixteenth-note runs. The third system, starting at measure 7, shows the bass guitar playing a simple eighth-note pattern that ends with a double bar line.

Musical Example 2.3 Bass guitar movement over the drum pattern highlighting the tonic-dominant movement.

The other musical instruments add musical colour and harmony to the performances. The rhythm guitar adds strict consistency to the meter of a song, while the steel guitar, electric guitar, piano and fiddle all work together to compliment the entire musical output. There is typically musical dialogue between the fiddle and steel guitar, while the piano and electric guitar interject occasionally with decorative contours and often solo interludes. This all

culminates in the distinct ‘Irish’ dance ‘beat’ of a jive, waltz or foxtrot typically performed at an Irish country music event.

2.3.3: Vocal Styles

There is a rich history of song on the island of Ireland. In the context of vocal styles in traditional singing, particularly in the Irish language, scholars have noted the use of nasal tone, ornamentation and variation and often utilise the term *sean nós* [old style] (see Ó Riada, 1962 (1982); Ó Canainn, 1978; Williams, 2020). In contrast with the rural *sean nós* singer, the Irish tenor with influences of Western Art Music also gained international recognition through the twentieth century, often amongst Irish-American audiences who valued the sentimental and romanticised songs of their ‘homeland’ (Ó Laoire and Williams, 2011). Eamonn Costello (2015, 2016, 2019) provides further interrogation of the term *sean nós* pointing to the influence of cultural nationalism, competitions and regionalism with a particular focus on Gaeltacht areas. Interestingly he notes the popularity of Irish language country and western style songs in Conemara (p.12), a distinct subgenre that differs from Irish country music as examined in this dissertation. Relatedly, McCann and Ó Laoire (2003) point to hierarchies of language, which might impact on an understanding of Irish country music as an expression of Irishness, but English language song traditions are integral to the musical traditions of the island. As with other styles and genres of music, the focus of many studies of Irish traditional song is on men rather than women (Shields and Shields, 2011; Graham, 2010; Ó Laoire and Williams, 2011). The influence of Irish traditional song styles on the development of American singing styles is approached in Nuala O’Connor’s *Bringing It All Back Home* (1991), which also recognises the transatlantic influence of American performers on their Irish contemporaries.

The development of transatlantic connections is evident in the music and the vocal style of Irish country music as it does not differ drastically from that in the American idiom. There is recognisable use of portamentos, glissandos, and scoops throughout the Irish country music

genre. The vocal style can be categorised in two ways: 1. Storyteller singing style or 2. belting vocal style. There is noticeable use of Americanised vocabulary and twang by some Irish artists.

Sandy Kelly, a singer, and performer from Co. Sligo, is a renowned artist on the Irish country music scene. Kelly has released numerous singles of distinctive styles of country music and has collaborated with many national and international artists. Kelly has found most success in her Patsy Cline tribute show. In her cover of *Crazy* (1989), Kelly utilises her natural vocal vibrato to emphasize the heartache of the text. The range of the song extends to a thirteenth, making the range comfortable for her powerful voice. As she sings there is evidence of the American ‘twang’ in her performances, specifically utilising darker vowel sounds and almost replicating speech rather than song in some parts. Using darker vowel sounds indicates that the singer is intentionally using more vowels to make the words sound more like that of a southern American accent, such as ‘haart’ and ‘luve’. This is an example of the American style of singing, the storytelling singer who uses song as an extension of the voice (Fox 2004; Pecknold & McCusker 2016; Edwards 2018).

Cliona Hagan is an example of the belting vocal style in Irish country music. Hagan, from Co. Tyrone emerged on the Irish country music scene in 2015. Her vocal style is highly influenced by the American idiom of country music. In her performance of *Past the Point of Rescue* on *The Late Late Show: Country Special* (2019), there is clear and obvious use of darker vowel sounds and glottal stops in the first three lines of the song. Additionally, you can hear Hagan’s use of consonance to scoop up to notes while also invoking the twang of her American country music counterparts. In other performances, Hagan employs an ‘sh’ on many words containing a simple ‘s’, be that at the beginning, middle or end of a word. This potentially is due to her

accent however it adds to the American accent with which she predominantly sings. Her dark, husky voice lends itself well to the belting style in which she firmly sits.

Mary Duff, from Co. Meath is an alternative example of the storyteller style with fragments of the Irish accent in Irish country music. Throughout all her performances, Duff utilises clear diction and articulation of the lyrical content of each of her songs. Her vocal technique falls more into the classical or ‘sacred’ music traditions (Martin 2018, p.245). Duff does not engage with the use of slides, scoops, or twang in her performances. Duff engages with a type of ‘soft romanticism’ in her vocal style akin to that of other female singers in genres such as folk and ballad singing (McLaughlin and McLoone 2000).⁶⁹ Other singers who perform with a native Irish accent include Patrick Feeney, Big Tom (RIP), Daniel O’Donnell, Margo O’Donnell, Hugo Duncan, and Olivia Douglas.

Other notable performers throughout the genre often move between the storytelling style to the belting style. Most singers usually perform with an American stylised accent. These artists include Philomena Begley, Susan McCann, Mike Denver, Nathan Carter, Derek Ryan, Ray Lynam, Louise Morrissey, Lisa McHugh, Jimmy Buckley, Claudia Buckley, and Robert Mizzell. This could be for any number of reasons from the unconscious learning in an oral tradition or replication of a song previously performed by an American accent. Alternatively, it could be the way their speaking voice and accent lends itself to the song and twang associated with country music.

2.3.4: The Community

In the sixty years since the emergence of a country music scene in Ireland, the landscape of the genre has changed immensely. When the genre began to develop there were already a considerable number of venues established in Ireland that made it easier for bands to secure

⁶⁹ When speaking of women singers in contrast to the performances of Sinead O’Connor, McLaughlin and McLoone suggest that Mary Black, Dolores Keane and Eleanor McEvoy ‘rarely move out of a discourse about femininity, offering lyrically, musically and in performance, a more traditional equation of the feminine with the ‘soft’, the romantic, the pastoral and the home’ (McLaughlin and McLoone 2000, p.195).

bookings. The substantial number of venues, including marquees, carnival, ballrooms and hotels, meant that bands were in demand throughout the entire year. As noted by Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann, nightly performances during the early days of Irish country music garnered a crowd of between 1200 and 1500 people. Seasonal marquees and carnivals catered for between 2000 to 2500 people. In the 1960s and 1970s Begley, O'Donnell and McCann were booked for performances every night of the week, often booked for two shows on a Sunday (O'Donnell. 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). Every performance they gave was to full or near full capacity, and this experience was similar for all Irish country performers at that time. With the vast number of venues catering for musical events across the country, there was little need for competition between bands who were continuously performing (McCann interview, 2019). There were enough venues and locations for all bands to make a comfortable living from touring and performing at that time. However, as Ireland became more cosmopolitan and diverse – economically and socially – ballrooms began to disappear from the performing circuit in Irish country music. Youth culture began to move away from Irish country music, and urban areas began to shift musical taste from country to rock 'n' roll, rock, folk, and disco music (McLaughlin and McLoone 2000; Basegmez 2005; Ferriter 2005; Killeen 2012; Martin 2018). Yet, the Irish country music artists succeeded in maintaining their position as performers during these social and cultural changes. This, according to many of the artists, is due to the unwavering support and dedication of their fan base.

Irish country music maintained its largest area of popularity in rural Ireland; particularly in the west and north of the country where artists perform more regularly. Rural Ireland had developed an affinity with the Irish country music artists and with the songs they were singing. There was a relatability to the content of these songs and to the artists, who appeared to be 'one of their own' (McCann interview, 2019). The audience made 'real' connections to the artists, not only through the songs and music, additionally through the conversations they had with the artists before and after their performances (Fox 2004). This connection and relatability turned to

loyalty thus creating a community of sorts for the fans who attend these performances. That sense of personal connection has changed even more over the past ten years with the advent of social media. While there may be one or two artists who have stayed off social media, the advent of the internet has changed the landscape of Irish country music immensely. A cursory search across social media channels demonstrates the impact social media has had on Irish country music. Most artists have Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter accounts. This allows the public, particularly the younger audiences to have a more intense – albeit virtual – connection with Irish country music artists. Many artists utilise social media as a way of creating a personal connection with the audience member. They often upload videos of themselves talking directly to the camera thus alluding to a one-on-one conversation with the viewer. While this is a trend across all music genres, in the Irish country music context it is engaging with a younger fan base making Irish country music ‘cool’ again – modernising the genre. It also enables those with access to social media to listen, engage with, and share music videos and articles about their favourite artist or artists via their own platforms. Thus, it is creating a virtual community for Irish country music fans (Hughes and Lang 2003; Frick, Tsekoruas and Li 2014; Lieb 2018). Additionally, an audience member can join forums and pages specifically targeting fans of particular artists: Susan McCann’s fan page on Facebook and Instagram, Philomena Begley’s personal page on Facebook, and Margo O’Donnell’s Facebook and Instagram accounts.

One of the major reasons for Irish country music’s popularity is its social function – dancing. Previous research by Lynn (2017) highlighted how the social function of Irish country music was the most prominent and important part for many audience members in north Co. Mayo. While that research focused on one region in one specific area, the trends are transferable. The social dancing scene has become very popularised in the past decade, with both local bands and national bands featuring regularly in all areas of Ireland. For example, after examining the booking schedule of Philomena Begley, Susan McCann, and Margo O’Donnell for a twelve-month period - 2018-2019 - most of their gigs are played in hotel venues with large dance floors,

indicating the importance of dancing for audiences. Dancing allows both artists and audience the opportunity to meet new people and meet old friends. This concept of meeting new people and making new connections is highlighted by Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann, who note how a number of their fan base have first met their spouses at their gigs. Another benefit for having a performance in a hotel function room is that audience and artists can interact and converse on a personal level after a gig. The audiences are there to dance for two hours and enjoy the performance of their favoured artists, they are also conscious of the opportunity to interact with the artist on a personal level. This personal connection as stated previously has an impact on the audience member and their sense of connection to a specific artist and community (Maguire 2012; O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Martin 2018; Begley 2020).

This sense of community is also evident within the artists circle in the Irish country music scene. The artists, while all working as individuals, are highly supportive of each other's efforts and careers. Artists often collaborate with each other on both touring schedules and on record releases. This collaboration can be seen in the touring dates of Mike Denver in 2019 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Denver's concert tour of Ireland was in collaboration with Philomena Begley, Ray Lynam and Brendan Shine, all of whom established their careers in the early 1960s. Similarly, emerging stars, specifically Cliona Hagan, Olivia Douglas and Claudia Buckley have enjoyed guest slots with established stars as they begin their careers as Irish country music stars. There is a clear two-way support system at play here. Denver is benefitting from the popularity of the more established artists. By performing with him, the established artists validate his credentials as an Irish country music artist. While Begley, Lynam and Shine are participating in these shows they do not have the added pressure of organising venues, dates and band members and they can engage with a younger audience. By utilising this type of partnership both sets of performers are reaping the benefits. This type of performing schedule is not exclusive to the Irish country music circuit. Yet the sense of community evident within Irish

country music has become a pivotal feature of the industry in the past decade or so as more music venues are closing their doors. The changing performance landscape of declining numbers of venues makes it more difficult for new acts to gain bookings on their own. This intergenerational networking creates a unified and supportive approach to sustaining an Irish country music scene.

2.3.5: Learning the Trade

In line with all other forms of employment, artists in the Irish country music scene participate in an apprenticeship or an internship of sorts before moving onto the professional stage. Many of the early artists such as Philomena Begley, Susan McCann, and Margo O'Donnell, began their 'training' in céilí bands in their local areas. Begley commenced her performing career with the 'Old Cross Céilí band', McCann was the singer with the 'John Murphy Céilí band' and O'Donnell secured her place with 'The Keynotes'. As the singers in each of these groups, they performed several songs during a break in which the dancers rested as did the musicians. It was from these roles that the three women found a passion for performing and soon they became the reason for audiences attending dancehalls and ballrooms across the country. Other artists such as Larry Cunningham, Big Tom and Brendan Shine all had similar experiences before forming their own bands, in many ways serving an apprenticeship of sorts to more established artists. Artists such as Declan Nerney, John Glenn, James Kilbane, TR Dallas, and Mike Denver began as instrumentalists with local country music bands before developing a national profile fronting their own bands. Irish traditional music provided a pathway to professional careers for Nathan Carter, Olivia Douglas, and Patrick Feeney. All three competed as young traditional Irish musicians in Fleadhanna Cheoil competitions. Other artists such as Sandy Kelly, Mary Duff, Mick Flavin, and Louise Morrissey came to the Irish country music scene from their experience of music in family folk bands and ballad groups. Finally, two specific artists came to Irish country music from a vastly different route. Cliona Hagan and Michael English are two artists who trained as classical musicians and have participated in both examinations and

performance-based competitions in voice and pianoforte. Distinctly different in style, technique and repertoire, this combination of classical music and country music has created a segue for artists to manoeuvre from one genre to another with ease.

In the most recent past TG4 has been instrumental in facilitating new talent to gain experience of the industry. The producers of the programme *Glór Tíre* have collaborated with stars of the Irish country music circuit, who in turn mentor young talented singers over a six to eight-week period. The mentors help the acts each week by giving vocal lessons, promoting them on their social networks, collaborating with them on the live shows and bringing them with them on a number of performances. This allows the acts to gain experience and an understanding of the industry and helps to establish a profile for them in the public domain (Martin 2018; O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). This mirrors the apprenticeship style already alluded to.

2.3.6: Structures

As the country music scene developed out of the showband scene, some infrastructure and industry structures were already in place. Venue owners were the major stakeholders in the early days of Irish country music. These stakeholders had a monopoly over artists' performance schedules, thus impacting on the popularity of certain acts over others. O'Donnell (2018) depicts how this had an impact on her early career:

when I was starting out with the Country Folk, and that would be the early seventies, although it was few and far between there were halls that wouldn't play me, and one in particular, he became a fan and he would have played me every Sunday in my life if I wanted in the end, but in the beginning, he wouldn't play me, I didn't belong there. No (2018 interview).

The power of the venue owner is evident in this description by Margo, but the emergence of management companies led to change. Specifically, Tony Loughman and his company Top Rank Entertainment had a significant impact on the Irish country music scene. Loughman was extremely interested in the Irish country music scene and was successful in recognising and

nurturing talent. Loughman talent-spotted forty-nine bands in forty years and managed artists such as Philomena Begley, Susan McCann, Margo, Brian Coll, and Big Tom. Once Loughman had established a name for himself as a manager, he built a recording studio in Castleblaney. He then launched an entertainment magazine specifically targeting Irish country music fans and succeeded in buying many ballrooms across the country. Having ballrooms and a recording studio at his disposal allowed him to keep his bands continuously performing, while also being able to have them release records regularly. Other managers saw how well this type of organisation had worked for Loughman and followed in his footsteps. John McNally founded a record label through which he released records almost exclusively for O'Donnell once he became her manager.⁷⁰ Many managers and artists now have recording studios of their own and some artists have now set up their own entertainment companies. As the decades passed ballrooms and dancehalls began to fade into the background, hotel function rooms and theatres became the backbone of country music performances.

2.3.7: Influence and Change

Bill C. Malone posits that country songwriters 'have been part of the audience for whom they write' (in Hubbs, 2014, p.12). In my interviews with Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann, all three suggested that the songs that they sang had a story in them that the audience was able to relate to (O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). Irish country music has traditionally been most popular in rural Ireland and often evokes a connection to the

⁷⁰ Gerry Gallagher of The Magic Showband and IrishShowbands.com, detailed further about how record labels in Ireland during the 1970s: 'The local companies that started like Hawk Records and Release Records were the most like a real company, but in the early 1970's EVERYONE was forming record labels. All you did was record something at a studio, design a label, have them printed, then send the tape to Dublin to be mastered, then onto a manufacturing company to press the records (applying the labels) and finally to a company that would distribute them for a percentage of the sales ... since all these companies were paid up front, there was no need for the normal "artists development, advertising, etc." None of them cared about selling the record as they were already paid. Most singles (unless it was a hit) in those days were printed five hundred at a time and rarely did any of them sell any more than a few hundred of those copies at best. It was commonplace in the early days of Irish country music for entertainment companies to set up record labels which would in turn be distributed by major record "companies" like Polydor and EMI. These larger companies would not take the financial risk to fund their recording as they did not sell that many copies' (Gallagher email correspondence, 2020).

land. In an American context, writing about changes in identity and country music, Hubbs states:

Country is a music of working-class people ... country's songs, videos, artists, and publicity material traffic in themes, language and musical idioms linking to identities characteristically working class... and it links to identities southern, midwestern, southwestern, and provincial; white; Christian; and heterosexual (2014, p.12).

There are similarities with Irish country music. The songs that the American artists were producing were songs that had a story to tell.

As noted early the country music scene only began to develop in the 1960s and 1970s. There were few Irish songwriters composing Irish country music songs at that time therefore, there were modifications made to existing Irish folk songs and ballads to fit the dance rhythms enabling these bands to provide country music for audience to engage with. These bands were also incorporating and modifying as much American material as was possible into their sets. Early influences from America included George Jones, Hank Williams, Patsy Cline, Billie Jo Spears, Dolly Parton, Porter Wagnor, Loretta Lynn, Kitty Wells, Merle Haggard, Kenny Rogers, Waylon Jennings, Tammy Wynette, Buck Owens, and Jim Reeves. Their songs included themes of religion, drinking, placenames, patriotism, love, reflection, 'redneck' lifestyle, everyday life, and nostalgia. While themes are set to the 'authentic Nashville sound' (Jensen, 1998; Neal and Malone, 2002; Edwards, 2018), the story of the songs attracted Irish artists who then created their cover versions of these songs. Examples include Philomena Begley's cover of Hank Williams song *My Son Calls Another Man Daddy* (1968), Susan McCann's cover of Dolly Parton's *Coat of Many Colours* (1977) and Margo's cover of Patsy Cline's *If I Could See the World (through the eyes of a child)* (1968).

As the Irish country music genre progressed many Irish songwriters began to emerge. Henry McMahan, Michael Commins, and Johnny McCauley are renowned songwriters

on the Irish circuit. Taking influence from the content produced in the American genre, these artists began writing songs about nostalgia in the Irish context, religion, everyday life, and geographic locations in Ireland. These songs became staples of the Irish country music scene, most popular with diaspora communities were the songs of nostalgia and place names (location). The connection to their homeland and memories of their youth, saw record sales of all artists soar and their shows were sold out both in Ireland and in other countries, specifically in the UK. While the themes remain mostly the same, in the contemporary Irish country music scene the sound and texture of the music are changing.

Joli Jensen (1998), and Bill C. Malone (2002; 2013), and Joycelyn Neal (2002) have already published work on the Nashville sound and the changes that have occurred through the decades in country music in America. Their work is applicable to the Irish country music scene. The sound of the sixties and seventies is no longer the only sound associated with Irish country music. As detailed above the jive beat is the mainstay of most artists, yet the new wave of artists who have emerged on the Irish country music scene are modifying the sound once more. The younger and emerging artists are incorporating a country-pop sound into their music. The country music scene in America has had many crossover artists in the past decade including Toby Keith, Lady A., Carrie Underwood, and Taylor Swift, thus impacting on a large cohort of artists and fans alike across genres. The Irish country music scene is impacted by both the sound and the popularity of these artists. The music of Nathan Carter, Lisa McHugh, Cliona Hagan, and Derek Ryan epitomise this country-pop crossover in the Irish context. Each of these artists, while also consistently playing the hits of the past, are also branching out into this new sound. Thus, attracting a new younger audience base. Considering the work by the authors on American music and the evolution of that sound, we can trace the evolution of Irish country music sound in the same way. The move from traditional covers of American songs to the change in tempo and meter for the Irish dance beat, to the current climate of country-pop, Irish

country music has evolved with its artists and audience to enable itself to stay relevant in contemporary Irish society.

From examining the history of how the genre emerged, where and when musicians played their music, ‘Christian’ and ‘heterosexual’ are also aspects evident in Irish country music (ibid). Irish country music audiences were predominantly rural Irish dwellers. The ideologies of the Irish Catholic Church influenced rural Ireland in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Jean Farrell states ‘only those of us who were alive at that time understand how much power the clergy had’ (Farrell, 2019) while James (1997) points to the campaigning and outcome of the referendum of 1986 as indicative of the power of the Catholic Church at that time. The Catholic Church had a major impact on the Irish country music circuit, having been major stakeholders in the initiation of the Dance Halls Act 1935 (Hogan, 2014; Slominski, 2020). There was a prohibition of touring by Irish country music bands and showbands in Ireland during Lent up until the late 1960s.⁷¹ Thereafter the tradition of closing ballrooms ceased with ‘fast and abstinence [to] be slashed from the whole of Lent to just two days’ (Meagher, Reynolds & Ryan, 2014). Miller’s (2014) interviews with showband members who travelled to England during the six weeks of Lent in Ireland so that they could earn a living, echoes references by Begley, McCann, and O’Donnell to similar experiences in the early days of their musical careers. Although the Catholic Church’s apparent dominance and control over the private and public behaviours of the Irish population have dwindled since the late 1980s and early 1990s, a sizable percentage of Irish country music audiences adhere to the Irish Catholic identity. This is especially true of the older cohort of audience members. With this belief system dominating Irish country music audiences it is also clear that the artists and audience members align with heterosexual identity.

⁷¹ Lent is a six week ‘penance’ for the catholic church and congregation in preparation for the Easter: when Jesus rose from the dead. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday. While it has changed substantially in modern society, Lent was initially a time of fasting with no meat allowed to be consumed on Ash Wednesday or any Friday during Lent. This six-week penance was set to remind the catholic following of how Jesus suffered for forty days and forty nights in the desert battling the devil before his death. In contemporary society it is now engaged with by giving up something for the duration rather than a complete fasting period. (Dues 2006, pp.70-73).

Catholic teachings dictate that homosexuality is against God and the Church. It was still illegal to be homosexual in Ireland before 1993 (Knill and Prediel 2015). In 1993, before the ‘decriminalization of homosexuality’, Ireland was the only European country to still have such restrictive approaches to homosexuality (ibid). Combining both the Church’s teachings, and the governing laws within Ireland, Irish country music represented heteronormative Ireland during the 60s, 70s and 80s. Examining the artists and audience members of Irish country music displays of identity, it is also clear that Irish country music has not yet created a space for homosexual identity performance. Irish country music artists and audiences alike display an idealised conservative heterosexual identity that was instilled in rural areas by the Church and government (James, 1997; Conrad, 2001).

2.3.8: Gender Balance and The Changing Image of Irish Country Music Artists

An overview of the evolution of Irish country music artists since the 1960s demands that we question the gender balance of the genre. While several women had been part of the Irish showband scene, for example Eileen Reid, Maise McDaniel and Bridie Gallagher, there were only a small number of women who followed the Irish country music path on a professional basis. Philomena Begley and Margo O’Donnell emerged during the 1960s as country singers. During that decade Philomena Begley and Margo O’Donnell were outnumbered 4:1, by men performers.⁷² Reflecting on Irish country music artists who achieved a national profile, during this period in Irish music history there were many genres emerging and developing including pop, rock, Celtic rock, folk groups, and a revival in interest of Irish traditional music.⁷³ These genres too appear to be dominated by men performers, both as individuals and in group settings.

⁷² These ratios are created from research conducted by this PhD on performers active between the 1960 and 1970s.

⁷³ Rock and pop music was beginning to develop in Ireland with influence from America, Britain, and Europe. This was also during a time which is affectionately known as ‘the folk music revival’ in western parts of the world. Bands and singers in Ireland from this time include but are not limited to Dana, Rory Gallagher, Taste, Skid Row, Them, Van Morrison, Emmet Spiceland, Dr Strangely Strange, Thin Lizzy, Gary Moore, Horslips, Loudest Whisper, The Dubliners, The Johstons, The Chieftains, Sweeney’s Men. Mellow Candle are an exception who comprised of Clodagh Simonds, Alison Bools and Maria White, the band later expanded to include male instrumentalists. While these are some examples of groups from the 1960s in genres outside of country music, the trend is clear, women were not dominant participants in music groups during this period. See Bévant 2009, McLaughlin and McLoone 2000, Smyth 2005.

The 1970s picture gives a similar impression to that of the 1960s. Two more women performers emerged on the national Irish country music circuit, Gloria Smith, and Susan McCann. The 1980s saw a spike in the emergence of new talent specifically concerning female performers emerging on the scene. From 1985 to the end of the 1980s five more women performers had made their way to the top of the Irish country music scene, Kathy Durkin, Mary Duff, Sandy Kelly, Trudi Lalor, and Louise Morrissey. During the 1990s country music declined in popularity, reflecting an ebb and flow pattern (Maguire, 2012; Martin, 2018, Millar, 2020). During this period there were very few breakthrough artists of which, none of whom were women. At the turn of the century Irish country music became more popular again and five more artists, one woman Caitlin Murtagh and four males emerge on the country music scene. Since 2010 the new faces of country music have emerged with four women, Lisa McHugh, Cliona Hagan, Olivia Douglas and Claudia Buckley, emerging along with five men. The gender representation of Irish country music has thus changed from its initial outings to its current state.

O'Donnell depicts how she experienced peoples' views on women's place during the early days of country music:

I don't know, I think that a way back, that you know in years gone by the men didn't leave any gaps open for them [women], they [women] weren't even reckoned and the bands were all men, and it was harder for a woman... I mean women as far as men were concerned didn't belong in bands. And certainly, if that was the attitude to a man not playing a band because there was a female vocalist in it, what chance had a musician [in a] backing [profession], none. (O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

This statement highlights the barriers that O'Donnell, Begley, and McCann faced in their early careers, however these ideologies soon changed. All three women set the benchmark for other females to follow. They were changing the gendered image of Irish country music artists. These

women did not fall into the category of an angelic-romanticised figure, generally associated with women performers who traditionally only sing ballads or songs ‘fit for a woman to sing’. Pamela Fox argues that ‘fit for a woman’ is alluding to the idea of ‘social relations, identity formation and cultural representations as interlocking structures or systems of oppression’ (Fox 2009, p.6). She identifies taverns and their musical culture as ‘a man’s world’ and that the ‘songs are usually sung by men, the majority of the customers are men, and the songs describe life from a man’s point of view. Women appear in the honky-tonk world as fallen angels, corrupt by city life’ (2009, p.5). Slominski (2013; 2020) also discusses the gendered ‘acceptable femininity’ of women in Irish traditional music. Slominski states that there is:

an unspoken assumption that traditional music’s historical gaze still belongs to male musicians. With rare exceptions, Irish traditional music’s texts have all been written by men, and the brain trust of the tradition still rests with its “gentlemen scholars”. Thus, nearly all the accounts and recordings we have of pre-1970 women musicians come from male authors, interviewers, and collectors. Although this imbalance is slowly shifting, this dearth of female commentators and collectors reveals as much about the situation of women in all areas in Irish life in the mid-twentieth century as it does about the enduringly homosocial traditional music scene (Slominski 2013, p.3).

For Slominski, the Irish traditional music scene had very stern ideas about women, their place, and their participation in the scene. American and Irish country music had similar ideologies in the early days of their scene’s development, specifically concerning the playing of instruments. However, Begley, O’Donnell and McCann changed these narratives. They sang songs written for men, they performed in places and spaces that were ‘men only’ and they broke down barriers for other women to follow the path of Irish country music performance.

With the change of gendered image in Irish country music also came a change in style and costume. Costume in Irish country music initially was highly influenced by American country music’s style. Band and performers wore suits with fringe in many assorted colours while the

singer may often be witnessed wearing a Stetson cowboy hat, exemplified in images 2.5 to 2.7. As the decades moved on, the affinity to the American style changed for the Irish artists. Both men and women artists began to put their creative style of fashion into their performance. Contemporary outfits were being utilised by men and women, and a move away from the suits of the showband era occurred. While bands remained in a uniform colour and outfit, each lead

singer had now invoked a unique and contemporary fashion style, evident in images 2.8 and 2.9.



Image 2. 5: Big Tom McBride (Top Rank Entertainment 2020).



Image 2. 6: Philomena Begley in 1980 at The Wembley Country Music Festival (Top Rank Entertainment 2020).

Entertainment



Image 2. 7: Susan McCann in the 1980s (Top Rank entertainment 2020).

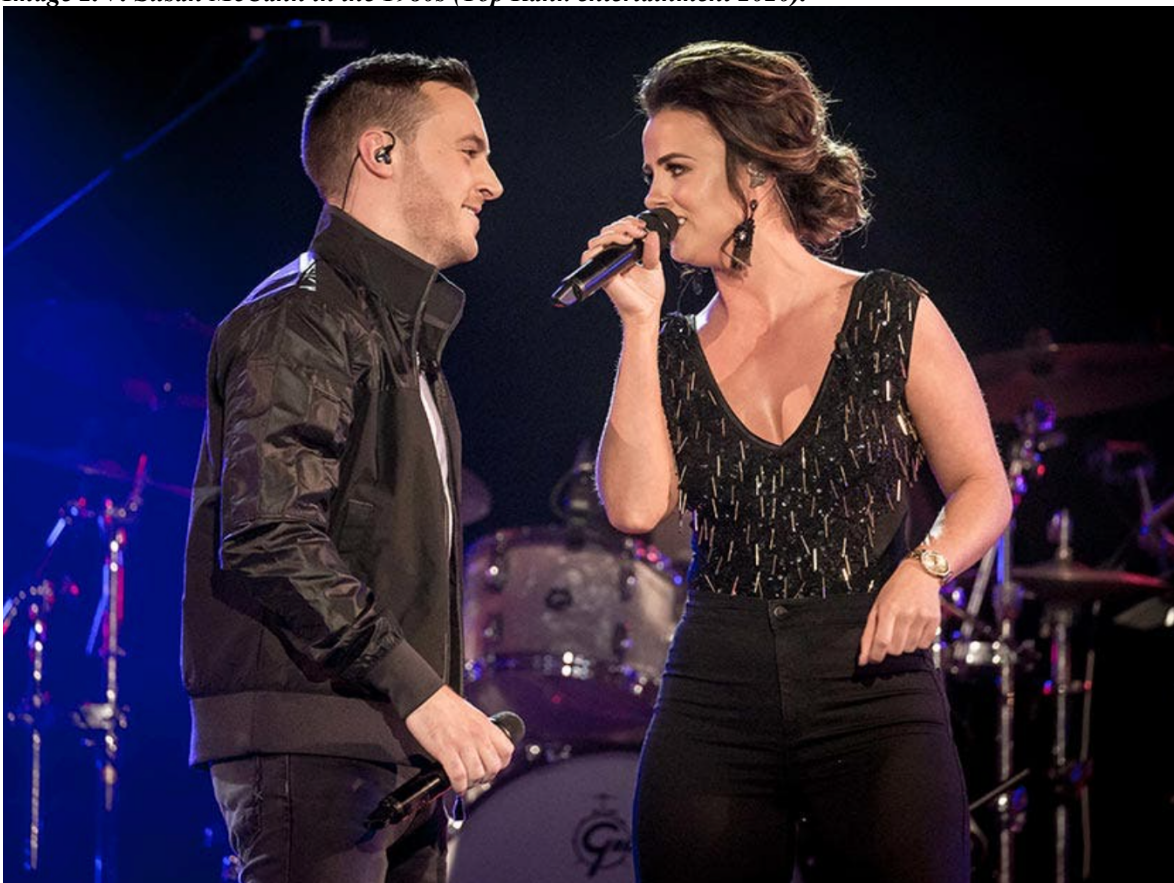


Image 2. 8: Nathan Carter and Lisa McHugh in 2016 (RTÉ 2016).



Image 2. 9: Susan McCann live in 2018 (Hot Country TV April 2018).

2.3.9: Irish Country Music, Visibility and Mass Media Culture

The popularity of Irish country music has ebbed and flowed in contemporary Irish society since its inception in the 1960s. As with many other genres of music of the 60s, 70s and 80s, the ability to increase publicity and generate advertisement was more limited than what is available to artists today. Concerning Irish country music there were several magazines created to enable for more advertising and discussion around what was happening in Irish country music. Top Rank Entertainment created their magazine to advertise their acts. Another influential magazine *Spotlight*, had a wide variety of entertainment between 1963 and 1979, including rock, pop, showbands, and folk. Journalists such as Pascal Mooney of RTÉ, Michael Commins of *The Farmers Journal*, and Tom Gilmore of *The Tuam Herald* wrote about Country music, including documenting new singles or records, discussing who was performing where and when that week (Begley 2017). In the 70s and 80s both Mooney and Commins presented radio shows and tv broadcasts on Irish country music, they continue to do so today. *Ireland's Own* highlights the work of Irish country music artists and their upcoming performances since the mid-1960s to present day. While *The Sunday World* and *The Irish Mirror* also provide commentary on Irish

country artists' upcoming performances. With the growth of the economy and mass media, more and more broadcasting outlets have been including articles and programmes on Irish country music. RTÉ now have dedicated country music specials on their *Late Show* programme, TG4 has been instrumental for over twenty years in broadcasting both concerts and competitions featuring Irish country music artists, while Sky TV are now also promoting programming advocating Irish country music. National newspapers are also covering stories on Irish country music more regularly. Although not all stories of country music are positive, it is clear that country music is becoming more visible in urban areas. Radio stations all over the country are including more country music on the airwaves. Within each Co. there is at least one station that airs a dedicated country music programme. While there have always been several stations across Ireland that promoted Irish country music it has only recently become a nationwide programming theme.

The advent of iTunes, Spotify, and Soundcloud have made buying music and listening to favoured country music artists remarkably simple. While there are current issues with Spotify from the artists perspective (Marshall 2015), yet it allows consumers to listen to country music artists for a minimal fee. iTunes works on sales only and has over the past six years began compiling charts for artists' popularity each week across different genres including Country music.

2.4: Conclusion

Irish country music has grown and developed in many ways since its emergence in the 1960s. The Showband and Céilí band era of musical entertainment proved to be vital building blocks for those who followed the country music path. The infrastructure of the Showband era provided venues for country music to flourish, while the céilí music scene was where many of the Irish country music artists made their debuts. The traditional Irish music scene has continued to have an impact on Irish country music, from the number of current artists who began as traditional musicians, to the incorporation of the old ballads and folk songs into the repertoire.

Additionally, the impact of the American genre of country music cannot be understated. American country music artists and their songs had a major impact on the Irish country music scene. The Irish artists began with an affinity to both the American songs and production values evident in that genre. However, the Irish artists modified that music to fit the social requirements of Irish country music. Changing the meter of these American songs soon propelled these artists to national fame, a fame that never subsided. The dance function of Irish country music thus created a large and mobile community, but the popularity and appeal of the genre relied on other factors. The lyrical content and subject matter resonated with the audience. Changes in Irish society are reflected in the musical culture. One aspect, the role of women, is intricately connected to wider society. As documented in subsequent chapters, Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann were to the fore in making women more visible on the Irish country music scene. Irish country music has grown with the developments in technology and the digitisation of music and media have enabled all of these artists to spread their music in new ways. Emerging Irish country music artists are contributing to making country music fashionable, again.

Chapter 3: The Self, Identity, and Irish Country Music

3.1: Introduction

you go out and you talk to them before, you're out in the foyer before the gig and after the gig and you know what I mean so they, they would count you as one of their own (McCann Interview, 2019).

When the country music came along, if you listen to any of them songs no matter what anybody says about it, I don't think there's anybody that can't identify with most of them songs in country music (Begley Interview, 2020).

While we have **real** people like that in music, in country music, I mean you have to be real, I think there is a little bit of **reality** in everybody that sings a country song, if they **feel** it. And then there is a lot of **reality** in some other people (emphasis added) (O'Donnell interview, 2018).

Performers and audiences relate and identify with many aspects of country music including the themes, contexts, and stories, as well as with other people in the Irish country music scene. From narrative stories of love and loss to the invocation of nostalgia, from the dance beat of Irish country music to the vocal quality of the singer, for those who relate to country music these aspects aid in their creation of a sense of identity. The above quotations by Susan McCann, Philomena Begley and Margo O'Donnell give an indication as to how these artists view themselves and their relationship with others in the Irish country music scene. In this chapter, I discuss how 'the self' (Giddens 1991) and identity are created by drawing on scholarship in and beyond studies in music. I draw upon concepts and theories put forward by Richard Jenkins

(2008), Simon Frith (1996), Jacques Derrida (1981) and Michel Foucault (1972).^{74, 75} This chapter examines the creation of identity in the lives of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann. Engaging with biographical and interview material, I frame this discussion of identity and identity formation through case studies of these three female artists. I detail the process of identity throughout the careers of these three women. This includes a discussion of identity formation with consideration given to the performance of gender and gender norms (Butler 1999). Gender theory and the concepts put forward by Judith Butler inform this writing on the process of identity formation. I discuss the portrayal of identity in the embodied performances of the performer. Finally, I engage with Philip Auslander (2004) in an

⁷⁴ Social theory and many others have also been influential in broadening and informing the topic of identity with authors such as Jacques Derrida (both Philosophy and social sciences) (1981), Michel Foucault (1972, 1978), G.H. Mead (1967), Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991), Erik Erikson (1994), Steph Lawlor (2014).

Cultural studies have also added to the discussion of identity with authors such as Stuart Hall (1992, 1996), Paul du Gay (1996, 2009), Douglas Kellner (1995), Lawrence Grossberg (1996), Homi K. Bhabha (2015), Linda Alcoff (2006), Andy Bennett (2008) contributing to cultural studies large body of work.

Anthropology has made contributions to the discussion on identity through the works of some theorists such as of Alan Merriam (1964), Clifford Geertz (1973;1999), Claude Levi-Strauss (1978), Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and Anthony Cohen (1994).

Ethnomusicology has also some valuable contributions to the discussions on identity specifically since the 1950s as noted by Timothy Rice (2007; 2008; 2014; 2019) since the 1950s. Contributions from authors such as Mantle Hood (1971), John Blacking (1973; 1995), Matha Ellen Davis (1973), Dick Hebdige (1979; 1987), Steven Feld (1982), Philip Bohlman (1988; 2004), Christopher Waterman (1982; 1990), Bruno Nettl (1983; 2005; 2015), James Clifford (1986), Martin Stokes (1997; 2008; 2013), Sara Cohen (1993; 1995), Stuart Hall (1996), Keith Negus (1997), Thomas Turino (1999; 2008; 2014), T.M. Lurhmann (2002), MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell (2002; 2017), Berger and Del Negro (2004), Kay Kaufman Shelemay (2008, 2011), Shelia Whiteley (2000), Aaron Fox (2004), Beverley Skeggs (2004), Ruth Finnegan (2007), John O'Flynn (2009; 2014), Nadine Hubbs (2014) have informed the body of work pertaining to identity theory.

⁷⁵ Richard Jenkins work is evident in ethnomusicological and musicological writing. Particularly, Jenkins' work is referenced by Jane Oakland, Ray MacDonald, and Paul Flowers (2013), Mark Fitzgerald and John O'Flynn (2014), Lauren Shuck, Katherine Salerno, Emil Atkinson, and Deborah L. Linebarger (2010), Jane Oakland (2014), Liselotte Goessens (2014). Simon Frith's work is cited in the works of Ruth Finnegan (2003), Keith Negus (1997; 2010), Jane W. Davidson and James M. M. Good (2002), David Hesmondhaigh (2008), Christine Coupland (2015), Patrick Williams (2006), and Reza Gholmai (2016). Derrida's work is cited by many philosophical thinkers in the field of ethnomusicology and musicology, particularly noted in the work of Theodor Adorno (1976, 1997), Christopher Morris (2018), and Pauline Mosley (2019).

While finally, the work of Foucault has influenced the works of Judith Butler (1990, 1999, 2007), Dick Hebdige (1979), Thomas Solomon (2000), Deborah Cook (2013), Gregory Barz and Willian Cheng (2020), and Kathryn Alexander (2016).

examination of embodied performances thus allowing for a more informed understanding of identity creation through stage performance.

3.1.2: The Self

Anthony Giddens theorises the creation of ‘the self’ in modernity in his book *Modernity and self-identity* in 1991. While this concept was first published over thirty years ago, the theory continues to be highly influential. Giddens states that ‘the self’ is a reflexive entity that organises the world around itself. Like other theorists (Hall 1996; Frith 1996; Grossberg 1996), Giddens is clear in his summation that ‘the self’ is not passive or unconscious to the individual. ‘The self’ is actively created through local and global interactions. Local interactions include learning how to speak, deciding if you like the taste of something, determining if you should cross the road at a given time. While global interactions encompass the purchasing of any given commodity within specific cultural norms: fashion, music, technology. Many of these interactions may seem passive, however they require active engagement. We learn about social and cultural norms in the context of active social influences. Giddens’ discusses the concept of ‘the self’ in relation to his theory of modernity; modernity for Giddens is a culture of risk and uncertainty. The indication of the active, reflexive self is a focal point in the creation of one’s identity. We, as individuals, cannot create an identity for ourselves until we understand ourselves as reflexive beings: ‘it is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography’ (Giddens 1991, p.53). For Giddens, the self and self-consciousness are actively engaged with, internally, daily by all beings. Human consciousness is an innate quality that allows us to understand ourselves and the world around us. Yet, Giddens is also concerned with the unconscious behaviours that are part of our daily lives in the creation of identity. He suggests that unconscious factors of our identities were once something that we actively engaged with. However, the regular repetition of these aspects become unconscious to us over time. Individuals then, are continuously in a state of self-reflexivity about who we are, to become who we want to be. Once we understand ‘the self’ as a narrative self, we can thus

reflexively begin to create an identity for ourselves. Thus, identity forms within the narrative process of self-reflexivity.

3.1.3: Identity Formation

Questions of identity and identity formation have been prevalent in a wide variety of academic research including social theory, cultural theory, anthropology, and ethnomusicology.

Richard Jenkins, in *Social Theory* 2008, theorises identity and its process. Jenkins states that identity by language definition means ‘the same’ (Jenkins 2008, p.16). He continues by discussing the Oxford English Dictionary definition which states that ‘the same’ has:

two basic meanings: the sameness of objects, as in A1 is identical to A2 but not to B1; the consistency or continuity over time that is the basis for establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something identity involves two criteria of comparison between persons or thing[s]: similarity and difference ... Exploring further, the verb ‘to identify’ is a necessary accompaniment of identity. There is something active about identity that cannot be ignored: it isn’t ‘just there’, it’s not a ‘thing’, it must always be established. This adds two further items to our starter pack: to classify things or persons, to associate oneself with, or attach oneself to, something or someone else (such as a friend, a sports team or an ideology) (Jenkins 2008, pp.16-17).

Jenkins is combining elements of Giddens ‘the self’ with the idea of a *process* of identity. He states that ‘identity can only be understood as a process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. One’s identity – one’s identities, indeed, for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular, and plural – is never a final or settled matter’ (2008, p.17). According to Jenkins we, as individuals, form our identities in a process of understanding and reflexive discussion of identifying with, or in the rejection of, something. This complements Giddens’ theory of ‘the self’ as a narrative reflexive

self. We are not passive beings who move from one day to the next unconsciously. We are active in our process of identity and identity formation, through ‘discourse’ and ‘différance’.

‘Discourse’ heretofore will refer to Michel Foucault’s theory on discourse and knowledge. In his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault suggests that identity is not something fixed in time and space but instead, is a discourse mediated by our interactions with others (Foucault 1972). For Foucault, discourse is the regulated production of knowledge through language that gives meaning to material objects and social practices: ‘discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of knowledge in an intelligible way’ (Barker and Jane 2015, p.18). Discourse then is how human beings discover knowledge and language to determine their identity. Discourse, according to Foucault, generates our understanding of social practices, that in turn allow the individual to accept a ‘regime of truth’ or to reject it through the process of self-reflexivity (Foucault 1972, p.131). We learn about the world around us through social conventions and cultural practices, which are in turn learned through discourse. In this sense, according to Foucault’s theory, we are not free agents in the creation of identity as these ‘regimes of truth’ already exist outside of us – femininity, manliness, modesty, propriety, discipline, pleasure, harmony. Through discourse we discover which parts of social and cultural practices we align with. We create our identities through discourse, learning with others, thus allowing for human agency in the creation of individual identities. Discourse allows us to understand what is outside of us, allowing the individual to attach to or reject any given concept or practice. This form of discourse is what Jacques Derrida termed ‘différance’ and ‘deferral’.

For Derrida, the construction of identity occurs in the open-ended process of repetition. That is, identity is never fixed but it is constantly renewed or created through the process of repetition to become what and who we think we are. This type of repetition is what Derrida refers to in

his term ‘différance’.⁷⁶ Analogously, Derrida utilises the concept of ‘deferral’ as a means of ‘deconstruction’, thus suggesting that one can come to their understanding of any given perceptions or knowledge through ‘deferral’. The repetition of ‘différance’ and ‘deferral’ allows individuals to question existing concepts of culture and society, enabling an individual to create their identity with or in opposition to any given set of ideologies. This deconstruction of set structures permits us, humanity, to generate our individual identities at the ‘limits’ of society (Derrida 1981). This encapsulates the process of identity: it is not fixed, instead, it is a process of questioning, in the repetition of our daily lives, to become who ‘we’ want to be in the future. Derrida suggests that identity is representational, and it is created entirely from linguistics and culture. Bringing together the work of Derrida and Foucault, we can understand the construction identity and identities transpires within discourses that are produced in specific historical and institutional sites. By incorporating Derrida’s concept of ‘différance’ and ‘deferral’, it can be deduced that identity emerges within the already existing power structures (cultural and societal structure, languages, gender norms), and are constructed through difference (Derrida 1981). We constantly repeat patterns in our daily lives that reinstate our identities, yet we do this in deferral as to what we are not, to become what we want to be. These concepts are bound in discourse, culture, and language; however, these concepts are in constant ‘deconstruction’ so that the individual can maintain their own identity.

3.1.4: Identity and Music

Informed by the philosophies outlined, Simon Frith focuses his theories on identity and music. Like Foucault, Derrida and Jenkins, Frith suggests that identity is ‘mobile, a process not a thing,

⁷⁶ The relation in which machine-like repeatability is internal to irreplaceable singularity and yet the two remain heterogeneous to one another (Lawlor 2021, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [online]).

a becoming not a being' (1996, p.110). Frith goes further incorporating the impact of music on identity when he states that identity is:

an experiential process which is most vividly grasped as music. Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both the self and others, of the subjective in the collective' (1996, p.110).

Frith is clear in his depiction, that music has a major impact on both self-identity and group identity. Music, according to Frith, allows the individual to understand themselves through music, and thus gain an understanding of the world around them through performance and listening to music. Frith reiterates this when stating that:

our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this self-in-process ... music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experience it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives (Frith 1996, p.110).

Allowing us (the individual) to experience ourselves with or in rejection of something, enables the 'self' to objectively accept or reject any given cultural experience. With this, the individual can align themselves with, or against, a given cultural or social structure. I adopt Frith's summation of music's impact on identity formation. As Frith has argued 'music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics (Frith 1996, p.109). Music allows for a reflexive, embodied narrative about who we want to be and how we want to become that person. Thus, music allows us to create and continue to create new fragments of a continuous identity formation. Music allows for the

‘self’ narrative to become a reality through, as Jenkins, Derrida and Foucault have established, discourse, deferral, language, and process.

An understanding of identity in the context of music requires critical consideration of concepts of performance and embodiment. The concept of ‘gender performance’ was first developed by Judith Butler (1990; 1999; 2006), and was influenced by Michel Foucault’s writings in *Discipline and Punishment* (1975 translated in 1995) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978 translated in 1990). The concept of gender performance remains critically influential in contemporary academic work. Butler presents gender as a cultural construct that is separate from sex. Butler states that while humans are born with male and female genitalia, gender is not set or inherently given. The societies within which we live construct gender. Butler states:

Originally intended to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potentially contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders (Butler 2006, pp.80-81).

Butler argues that gender is constructed through culture and outside of the biological sexed being. Pre-existing in culture, gender structures, norms, and expectations are imposed on all individuals from birth. Following on from Foucault, Butler suggests that gender is a form of prison in which the body exists, as ‘gender norms’ are prescribed for all sexes and thus all individuals in all cultures (2006, pp.398-400). She argues:

In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of

signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler 2006, p.400).

This concept of performing gender is conducive to elements of identity creation and the reflexive 'self'. As discussed by the theorists above, we understand ourselves with, or in rejection of given social and cultural structures. We identify with given groups and thus *perform* certain aspects that we objectively perceive as reflecting who we want to be.

This concept of performance is further theorised by Philip Auslander in his article *Performance Analysis and Popular Music: A Manifesto* (2004). Discussing embodiment in performance, Auslander incorporates elements of Butler's concept of gender performance. In his analysis manifesto, Auslander suggests that there are three layers contained in any performance: 'the real person (the performer as a human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith's star personality or image) and the characters (Frith's song personality)' (2004, p.6). Auslander's trichotomy allows researchers and audiences to analyse the embodied identities of performers through performances, both live and recorded. Auslander posits that these performances 'take place within contexts of the socio-cultural conventions of the societies in which they occur, conventions that popular music both reflects and contests' (2004, p.10). Auslander, is invoking Butler's 'performativity' concept, while additionally making a concrete connection to Derrida, Foucault and Frith on discourse, deferral, and music's impact on identity creation. Auslander's use of the words 'conventions' coupled with the idea

of ‘socio-cultural contexts’ enables all these concepts to be present in his model for performance analysis and identity creation in performance.

3.2: Creating Their Own Identity: Case Studies of Three Women Performers in Irish Country Music

Identity then is something that we align ourselves with from the early ages of our existence, and yet is something that continuously changes or modifies over time. Our childhood, how we are raised, the geographic location of our upbringing, and many other elements of society and culture have an impact on our identity. In chapter two, I detailed how country music situated itself and garnered the attention of audiences in Ireland. This section demonstrates how the community, experiences on tour, the music structures, and specific influences, have been clear identity markers for Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann.

To gain more insight into their personal lives, I asked all three women about their background, education, and early musical influences. Asking these questions did two things subconsciously: 1) It allowed the interlocutor to relax into the interview and 2) It offered an indication as to how they identified and continue to identify themselves. The places where they grew up impacted their identity in their formative years and into their early career.

When writing about Natalie MacMaster and creating a Cape Breton identity, Kathryn Alexander states that ‘articulating social place by linking individuals to community and geography is central to Scottish ethnic identity on the island’ (2016, p.90). This is also true of Irish country music. All three women make an important distinction of the geographic location of their upbringing. Philomena Begley was born and raised in Pomeroy in Co. Tyrone, Margo O’Donnell was born in Co. Donegal town and Susan McCann was born and raised in Forkhill, Co. Armagh. All three women regionally identify with the north of Ireland. The north of Ireland and Northern Ireland are two separate entities. The north of Ireland is in the Ulster region while Northern Ireland is the area of six counties that is under British rule. By making this distinction of regionality, Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell and Susan McCann are showcasing their

identities as Irish citizens. Each of these women also implement clear cultural markers when talking about the villages they grew up in, the homes they lived in and the cultural capital that was available to them during their early lives. Their childhoods, as detailed by all three women, are cultural markers experienced by many of their future audiences during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Ireland was becoming but was not yet an industrialised, modernised, economic hub. Many of its exports were produced from agrarian lifestyles. The childhoods that these women describe are not unique to them alone but are the tales of many Irish homes during this period. Ferriter (2010) Glassie (1982; 2016) and Estyn-Evans (1970) detail the experiences of the Irish population during the 1940s, 1950s. Each of these communities had comparable stories and written histories to that of the stories detailed by Begley, O'Donnell and McCann. Philomena Begley's autobiography details her birth and upbringing as being from rural Ireland: 'I was christened Kathleen Philomena Begley, and I came into the world on Tuesday, 20 October 1943, delivered at home in the hilltop rural village of Pomeroy, County Tyrone, by a lady known as Nurse Loy' (Begley 2017, p.17). From this description, Begley is invoking a rural Irish identity. She continues with these markers throughout her book by utilising phrases such as 'wee girl from the hills of Pomeroy' (Begley 2017, p.10) or 'I certainly felt far from the tiny Irish streets of Pomeroy where I had spent all of my life until then' (Begley 2017, p.11). Begley also introduces the concept of simplicity, modest or lower class living in her first chapter: 'Life in rural Ireland was simple and honest' (Begley 2017, p.17). This concept is introduced as an identity marker of rural Ireland. In the 1940s there was little economic prosperity and employment was hard to secure or sustain (Ferriter 2010). Agriculture was an important source of employment in rural Ireland and despite challenges including financial poverty, many families could rely on their produce for survival. As Ferriter notes, 'by the 1940s agriculture still directly employed almost half of the active work population, unemployment stood at 120,000 in 1936' (2010, p.630). Begley's father owned his farming land. However, he also supplemented this with a second job as a breadman to offer more financial stability to the

family. The entire family were expected to contribute to the farm from day to day. The simple and honest life that Begley refers to is that of surviving off what you had and working hard for it. Begley also discusses the family unit and her position within it. Being one of eight children, Begley was the fourth child to be born. She had an older brother and two older sisters, with two younger brothers and two younger sisters. While Begley talks about her father working locally and having a farm, she retains the theme of modest living when referring to the family home: 'we had a scullery, a sitting room and three small bedrooms in our house ... all five of us girls shared a good big bedroom with two double beds' (2017, p.20). Additionally, like many Irish families of that time, all members were expected to contribute to family life. Begley discusses this when she details the chores that she completed around the family home from 'gathering spuds and turf or watching the wee ones' (Begley 2017, p.23). These aspects of Begley's life were typical of many rural Irish dwellers during this period of Irish history.

Margo O'Donnell utilises the same geographic markers when she identifies herself as being from rural Ireland. In her autobiography, O'Donnell reminisces on her childhood by calling the chapter 'My Humble Beginning' (O'Donnell 2014, p.1) She depicts living in a 'little village' where their house was up on a hill: 'our address was The Hill, Kincasslagh' (O'Donnell 2014, p.2). The use of words such as 'humble' 'little' and 'hill' allows O'Donnell to create a rural, modest identity. She is situating herself in the rural settings of Co. Donegal, where her family lived a modest life. The modest lifestyle is reiterated throughout her first chapter as she describes how there was no plumbed toilet in their home until the late 1960s. Additionally, the only phone that was available to them was situated in the local post office, and the only heating their home had was the open fire 'with only crane and crook and the kettle hanging from it' (O'Donnell 2014, p.2). O'Donnell depicts a modest lifestyle identity marker by discussing how her father worked in Scotland for most of her childhood, only coming home to 'cut the turf and

for Christmas' (O'Donnell 2018, Interview). She discusses this further as she details working in Scotland herself as a young child picking potatoes with her brother John:

I went over there (Scotland) for school holidays and picked, [it was] a terrible, terrible, terrible, hard time ... I went over I did all the cooking for my brother John as well, and then at the end of the summer I came back home on the Derry boat. My father came down to the, to the farm where we were picking the potatoes, and I saw him coming it was like heaven, I thought to myself 'I'm getting outta here'. Because when I went away it was an adventure I thought, but it was, oh God, we were, we were sleeping in bothies, and the bothies were where the cattle slept in the winter, so the cattle were taken out, and there was just a makeshift straw beds put in there, and it was horrific I tell, but it didn't do us any harm, none at all ... I had the money then, I saved all John's money and we lived on part of mine, and I had some of mine home with me as well [to give to my mother] (ibid).

The modest lifestyle meant that it was the responsibility of the entire family to help in any way possible so that they could survive year on year. Again, it must be noted here that this lifestyle and experience was not unique to the O'Donnell family nor to the population of Donegal. O'Donnell notes this herself as she stated, 'I went over to, as did a lot of Donegal people, and Mayo people and Kerry people, to the potato picking in Scotland' (O'Donnell 2018, Interview). Heather Holmes (2000; 2001; 2004) details this form of seasonal migration and employment, for people from Donegal and other counties. This highlights the shared history experienced by many people from Donegal, and indeed other counties, during the 1940s and beyond with Holmes noting that this seasonal migration lasted up until well into the 1980s.

O'Donnell discusses the family dynamics of her childhood and her position within the family unit further throughout her autobiography. This is a key theme of the interview I conducted with her. O'Donnell was the second eldest of five children and was the oldest daughter in the family. She describes the joy and excitement she felt when her siblings were born, thus

identifying herself as a caring and protective older sister. This is further detailed when she speaks of her father's death in 1968. O'Donnell discusses the love and admiration she had for her father, when he passed away suddenly, she felt it was her responsibility to help look after her younger siblings. Already aware of the familial expectation and need to help financially wherever it was possible, after her father died O'Donnell felt it was her responsibility to fill his role as main provider. Thus, through discourse, deferral and reflexivity O'Donnell identifies her younger self as a rural, modest, hardworking, caring, and respectful daughter from Donegal.

Susan McCann analogously depicts her childhood. While Susan is the only one of these three that does not have a published autobiography, she has conducted many interviews throughout her career as well as discussing elements of her childhood through this research interview. Susan McCann is one of eight siblings; four brothers and three sisters. This excerpt from the interview I conducted with her depicts two elements of her childhood in one, the rural identity and the modest living identity.

when I was a youngster, we had no electricity. I lived up in Carrickasticken outside Forkhill and we didn't have electricity up our road so there was no electricity in our house, so we did sing songs and parties (McCann 2019, Interview).

By incorporating the phrases 'up our road' and 'no electricity' McCann is identifying herself as a rural Irish person, who was raised in a modest setting. Stating that they had no electricity indicates the distance her home was from urban settings. As noted by Ferriter (2010) and Clark, Kennedy and Ollerenshaw (1987), electricity supply was in its infancy in the early 1930s. By 1946 the 'Rural Electrification Scheme' was initiated, and it was completed in 1978 (Clarke et al. 1987). Most homes in the north of Ireland were connected to electricity in the middle of the twentieth century (Horrocks and Lean 2011; National Grid 2022). For McCann, her experience as a child was the same as that of her neighbours citing that there was 'no electricity up our road' (McCann 2019, Interview). Electricity was not a necessity for them to survive. The family

lived on a farm and all members of the family helped with the farm work. McCann has fond memories of her childhood as detailed in her recollection of a musical and community upbringing. This is also evident in an interview she conducted with Amanda Bell in 2015. Bell details how McCann's childhood was full of stories and songs even though 'times were hard, and money was tight, there was always tons of fun to be had' (Bell 2015, p.5). Taken as a whole, these three women have identified their childhood selves as Irish, rural, modest, individuals.

The importance of gender identity of each of the women is more apparent when all three women discuss how they had never 'really thought about becoming a singer' (O'Donnell 2018; Begley 2020; McCann 2019). Begley and O'Donnell had always thought their paths would lead them into the health sector, with both citing ambitions to become nurses. Particularly interesting here are O'Donnell and Begley's statements on their futures:

I decided that I was **just** going to be a nurse and I was going to get married and have kids and settle down (emphasis added) (O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

When I was younger, my main ambitions was to be a nurse, but life led me down a very different path and my eyes were opened to a whole new world. Working at night, with an all-male band, singing about cheatin' husbands and divorce, was a far cry from the traditional nine-to-five and my very Catholic upbringing (Begley 2017, p.66).

Both are citing gendered roles that were common traditional values of contemporary Irish society in the 1950 and 60s. These women were utilising cultural and social discourse to identify and *perform* their gender identity at that given time. However, their individual choices led them to refute those cultural norms and follow a different path. Yet, these discourses articulated gender markers that they were intending to follow and have taken these markers as part of their identity at that time.

O'Donnell's use of the word 'just' in her above statement is noteworthy. I suggest that there are two readings of this statement. Firstly, it can be understood as having a narrow worldview:

a nursing career until ultimately getting married, leaving your job, and having children (see Kiely and Leane, 2004). While the career paths for Irish women were limited with limited prospects of profit from any employment at this time, I suggest that a second reading of this statement could be more relevant to O'Donnell's sentiments. In their research on married women's employment during the period from 1936 to 1960, Kiely and Leane (2004) include statements made by Joan Griffin who was employed as a civil servant. When asked about resigning from her position when she got married Griffin states: 'I didn't think any more about it because we were conditioned into that' (Kiely and Leane 2004, p.430-431). It is this idea of 'conditioning' that is also utilised by O'Donnell in her sentiments of becoming a nurse, getting married and having children. Like many Irish women of that time, O'Donnell was 'conditioned' by the ideology of gendered employment roles (see also Slominski, 2021) unconsciously undervaluing the nursing profession with her use of the word 'just' in her statement. O'Donnell was set to follow the path of societal and cultural norms in 1940s 1950s and 1960s Ireland.

Begley's statement reinforces this idea of cultural and societal conditioning when she refers to working in an all-male environment, singing songs with content not adhered to by the catholic church and Irish society. As discussed in chapter two the Irish population were very conditioned to present an Irish Catholic identity. Singing about cheating husbands, and divorce, working with only men and performing in dance halls were not see as part of the Catholic identity. Women were not generally employed as singers in public, divorce and cheating were not recognised in the eyes of the church, and women certainly were not encouraged to be surrounded by men for a prolonged period.

McCann sought out alternative gender markers and trained as a hairdresser before pursuing her musical career. She states that she was always 'interested in fashion, hair and makeup' thus the logical step for her was to get a qualification in one of these elements (Bell 2015, p.6). Showbands were extremely popular up to this point in Irish history and many young men and women were becoming increasingly conscious of fashion and image as they matured in a

contemporary Irish society (Maguire 2012; Miller 2014; Gallagher 2017c; Gallagher 2020d). The cultural and social discourse of 1960s Ireland suggests that women were associated with fashion and a self-conscious image, therefore, McCann was also *performing* gender norms of contemporary Ireland at that time (see also Slominski 2013; 2019; 2020; Hogan 2014).

All three women discuss, either implicitly or explicitly, their affiliation with religion. Throughout each interview, each woman refers to or invokes the use of ‘God’, ‘Catholic’ and ‘mass’. This is exemplified in O’Donnell’s interview when she spoke of returning from Scotland and her mother buying her a new ‘coat for mass’ (O’Donnell 2018, Interview). Reference to her religious identity is clear in Begley’s above quote stating that her career was a ‘far cry from the traditional nine-to-five and my very Catholic upbringing (Begley 2017, p.66). While McCann refers to a connection to the church stating that her husband Denis and her ‘used to go up and take mum and dad to mass, then we would go back up and have dinner in mummies and then we would come back down and play in some of the pubs around Newry on a Sunday night’ (McCann 2019, Interview). From my interviews, it is clear that their beliefs are still part of their identity. Furthermore, these beliefs were an important part of their childhood identity. Thus, taking all these previous markers into account it can be summarised thus far that these three women identified themselves as Irish, rural, modest, daughter, Catholic and women. All three artists were conditioned by their upbringing as Catholic women who were set to follow a particular path.

3.3: Captivating The Audience: Generating Relatable Identities

In this section I discuss the music performed by these women to understand how they portrayed their identity and identity markers to their audiences. Focusing on the early careers of Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann, I detail how they established their own identity through their childhood, and how that impacted their early career identity. I also

consider how they presented their music and identity to create a sense of group identity with their audience.

Philomena Begley launched her career in 1962. In her autobiography when discussing the details of how she became part of the ‘Old Cross Céilí band’ Begley identifies as a local, respectable, young lady. The term ‘respectable’ is understood in the context of the teachings of the Catholic Church. She does this by invoking the memory of the band coming to her home and asking her to join the band. Her respectability is further communicated when she details the outfit that she wore the first night: ‘a white dress with a petticoat and red cummerbund’ (Begley 2017, p.44). The white dress indicates the angelic nature of her identity, accompanied by a petticoat and red cummerbund highlighting her knowledge of appropriate clothing for performing. Additionally, her respectful identity is evident when she speaks of ‘asking my father if it was okay to leave work and join the band fulltime’ (Begley 2020, Interview). Here it is clear that she was a respectful diligent daughter asking her father’s permission before agreeing to join the band at the age of twenty. Important to note here that Begley had still not begun her career as a country music singer and performer but as a céilí band member. Begley did not incorporate country music into her performances until the mid to late 1960s. From the mid-1960s American country music was having a major influence on Irish musicians and audiences.

Begley discusses the changes made by the band in rhythm and tempo so that they could perform for Irish audiences. Begley and the band changed American country songs into an Old Time Waltz to suit the dance needs of the audience. In interviews with Philomena Begley and her autobiography, she notes:

[We] could do nothing faster than a quickstep according to Irish tradition in halls across the country. So strict were the Roman Catholic priests who ran the céilí’s we were too afraid to step out of the box and sing anything more

exotic, for fear of being excommunicated! There were strict rules in the halls,
all enforced by the religious organisers (Begley 2017, p.45).

Utilising ‘appropriate’ dance types within this dance scene showcases local and cultural knowledge. By changing the songs to fit these dance types, Begley is identifying herself as a rural, Irish, and Catholic. She identifies with these markers, as she has the knowledge base to understand that 1) a ‘country two-step’ would not be suited to Irish dance steps and 2) that the rules and regulations set out by those who host the céilí dances would not approve of a ‘country two-step’. Begley states that after this Hank Williams song she was ‘hooked’ on country music. She began listening to singers like Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline. By invoking these singers, Begley is identifying herself as part of a group; Kitty Wells and Patsy Cline were icons of the American country music scene, therefore by aligning herself as being influenced by them she is adapting a group affinity and identity within country music. As a woman Irish singer, she recognises them as women singers similar to herself, she identifies with their music and the content of their songs. In identifying with them she is identifying herself as both a country music fan and a country music singer. Incorporating country music songs from icons of the genre such as Wells and Cline enabled Begley to perform songs that showcased her early identity - rural, local, Irish, daughter, woman, religious - while also incorporating her new identity as a country music singer.

Margo O’Donnell began her performing career in 1964 with ‘The Keynotes’. O’Donnell was thirteen years old when members of ‘The Keynotes’ band came to ask her mother if she would be permitted to sing with them during the ‘summer holidays’ (O’Donnell 2018, Interview). She indicates that she had known who ‘The Keynote’ from early in her childhood:

I mean when I was only very small I joined the choir in the church at home and then back, in lent of those years there was no dancing, so that the local priest knew that I sang in the choir, and eh there was a band called The Keynotes, the band that I joined, and they during lent would put on little

drama sketches in parochial halls around the area and of course I was the, the in between guest, I was only five when I first sang in St Mary's Hall in Kincasslagh, at the request of our priest Father Deegan ... So anyway, when I finished one of the verses Sarah shouted up, 'Good on you'. And of course, I looked down when I heard the voice and then I forgot the next verse. I remember Father Deegan coming onto the stage, lifting me, and taking me off I didn't even, you know I hadn't the sense even to walk off you know (O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

Here O'Donnell is identifying herself as a local, religious, respectful, shy, innocent, girl. By utilising reflexivity in the memory of her childhood, O'Donnell is showcasing how she identified herself as a young child through to her teenage years. It is noteworthy that the band were local and came to her house to speak with her mother. O'Donnell's mother was religious, and when O'Donnell performed at the show with 'The Keynotes' at the age of five years old, it was with the permission of the priest. She respected the priest's request and waited for her mother's permission before she made any commitment to perform. O'Donnell identified as shy and innocent both in her comments about her naivety and her detailed account of not knowing to walk off the stage when she had forgotten the words.

As she progresses into becoming a full-time performer, O'Donnell begins to incorporate country music into her sets. Like Begley, O'Donnell invokes names such as Kitty Wells, Patsy Cline and Skeeter Davis as musicians who influenced her. All three artists that O'Donnell has mentioned, both in her interview and autobiography, are known as leading women performers in the American country music scene during the 1950s and 1960s. O'Donnell identifies with these women artists because they were women, and they were singing songs that had a story to them to which O'Donnell could relate. She aligns herself with the musical content and with the artists, eventually incorporating their music into her performances.

Susan McCann began performing with the 'local John Murphy Céilí band' around Forkhill in Co. Armagh (Bell 2015, p.2). The invocation of local here allows McCann to

identify herself as a local girl who was part of her community. Like the two women discussed above, McCann was the interval act of the céilí band where she states that she would sing ‘old-time waltz’s and they would play céilí, but there was more céilí music played than there was singing’ (McCann 2019, Interview). The knowledge of the céilí circuit, and the strict rules and regulations of that scene, allows McCann to showcase her identity as a local, rural, religious woman. Again, like O’Donnell and Begley, McCann refers to Patsy Cline as the first American country artist that had an influence. Interestingly here, McCann also includes the influence of her father in the same sentence: ‘I was sixteen that time actually, and my father bought me an album of Patsy Cline for me birthday’ (McCann 2019, Interview). McCann is identifying as a country music fan and a family orientated girl, who respected her father’s authority and opinion. As McCann’s career develops, she incorporates Cline’s music into her own sets, therefore, identifying as a singer of country music.

Simon Frith suggests that group identity is something that can be created through participation and performance of music. He states:

what I want to suggest ... is not that social groups agree on values which are then expressed in their cultural activities ... but that they only get to know themselves as group (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn’t a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them (Frith 1996, p.110).

This concept of music as a way of living ideologies and identities is seen in the creation of group identities. Groups who participate in a particular type of music agree on what values are within the music. They prescribe to the material that is being performed and they evolve as a group through participation and performance. Irish country music is a community or group that was created to represent a set of ideas through which people in Ireland lived those ideas. The expression of the music by Irish performers allowed Irish audiences to relate to this music on a

completely different level than if it were performed by the original artist. Irish country music represents the lived ideas and expressions of its performers and fans. Both the fans and the artists are participating in a cultural activity such as dancing at a performance. Both are engaged in aesthetic judgement by choosing what material to sing and who's performance to attend. As these communities and groups are being created, they get to know themselves as individuals and as groups through the process of music-making. As performers of Irish country music Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann aided in the creation of their own identities and the identity associated with their audiences through participation in this specific music context.

3.4: The Stage and Identity

Understanding the identity presented by the three women on stage, and how this reflects their subjective experiences, is critical in understanding their career development. Auslander proposes three elements to the performative analysis: the real persona, the persona, and the character. I utilise this trichotomy to analyse these women and their stage performances. Auslander's trichotomy states that there is 'the real person (the performer as a human being), the performance persona (which corresponds to Frith's star personality or image) and the characters (Frith's song personality)' (Auslander 2004, p.6). Elements of Auslander's trichotomy are evident throughout the careers of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann and all maintain a similar identity throughout their entire careers. All three have stated that they have never changed, they never let the music get to their heads, they are still the same person they were before they became popular music stars. This is their most prominent identity marker; realness.

From the Mid-1960s onwards country music and Irish ballads became the focal point of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann's musical output. This music enabled them to showcase identities to

which the audiences could relate. Throughout their interviews and autobiographies, all three have suggested that country music has a story in it, it is music that people can relate to:

if there isn't a story to a song, I wouldn't be bothered with it ... and while we have real people like that in music, in country music, I mean you have to be real, I think there is a little bit of reality in everybody that sings a country song, if they feel it (O'Donnell interview, 2018).

My father helped me to choose the songs that was on *Susan McCann Sings Country* (1977) and I recorded 'Coat of Many Colours' on it. And I remember Daddy sitting, listening and listening to the song and God he said, "oh Susan record that, it's a lovely song". And I said, "I will", and he said, "you know I can really associate with that song", he said like that was my life. He said, "your mother knitting clothes for you" and he said, "she used to knit suits for us, Aran suits, skirts and the whole lot". She was a great knitter my mother. And so, the whole story of the song Daddy could relate to it. It was Dolly Parton that wrote the song, and she wrote it about her family, and so country songs are from the heart, you can always relate to it (McCann interview, 2019).

I was asked a lot in those days why I thought country music was so popular. I always answered that it starts with the lyrics. The lyrics of a song, and the stories in country music, are truer to life and people readily identify with them. there is also a strong, simple beat to it – if you can't dance to country music, then you can't dance at all! And even at a dance, when people aren't paying as much attention as they would at a concert, I always try to chat between songs and find a connection in banter with the audience. (Begley 2017, p.133).

These three excerpts from interviews and autobiographies detail how the three women connect with country music. The thematic and lyrical content of these songs allow all three women to do several things at one time. They select songs that they are personally able to identify with,

an element of a song that tells of their own personal experience, or it details something that they connect with. They are aware of the life stories of many people in their audience, and they convey this identity back to them. For example, Susan McCann details how her father helped her pick songs to sing on her first album. The song *Coat of Many Colours* had an impact on him because he could identify with the themes and images portrayed in that song. It reminded him of the early years of his marriage and building his family, which then allowed Susan McCann to make her connection to it. She identifies with the cultural markers within that song. McCann further details how she identified with the song *I Just Drove by to See If Things Had Changed* (2008). McCann's rural upbringing is highlighted as she remembers her old home but 'it has all changed now' (McCann interview, 2019). The lyrical content of songs allow these women to portray their identity through these lyrics. This is also showcased in the excerpts taken from O'Donnell's interview and Begley's autobiography. All three women state that the story contained in the song allow people to make a connection with the lyrics. They identify with some element of the content thus enabling them to see themselves in the narrative. These examples of connecting to the story and then telling it to others reflects Auslander's 'real persona'. All three women showcase their realness by being able to relate directly to the content of the songs. They connect with it on a personal basis and then re-tell the story to the audience. While it is not written as a direct representation of their personal lives, they are telling it - or singing it - as if it were, bringing the character persona to life. The real person persona is also portrayed in the way the three women talk about themselves. They all suggest that they are the same person on stage and off it:

The secret to my success during this time was that I never really changed inside, despite everything that was going on around me. I remained myself and never tried to get above anyone else, a product, perhaps, of my solid

upbringing and the family values my parents instilled in me and my siblings (Begley 2017, p.133).

But I never changed, I'm the same on the stage as I am talking to you, or a fan or a member of the audience, there is no difference. I don't change when I go up on stage ... but it never changed who I was on stage or at home. I am the same always. Well, I think I am I don't think that I changed or that anyone has said that I change when I'm on stage. (O'Donnell Interview, 2018).

somebody said one-time Big Tom didn't realise how popular he was, I don't think I realise either or Philomena realises, **we're just very ordinary people**. We go out and we sing, and we come home, and we do our [pauses], I spent my day yesterday cleaning carpets you know, hired out a yoke out of the Tesco's and cleaned my carpets. So, you know what I mean, I don't be thinking about the big break that I made ... I just don't think about it like that, it was my job at the time, and I was very lucky, and I love singing and I love meeting people, and having the crack and that's just the way I look at it. You know what I mean, I don't see it as, I don't see myself as being any different to anybody else cause I'm not (emphasis added) (McCann Interview, 2019).

Through their musical performances, these three women showcase their own personal identity as real, rural, Irish, religious, moral, local, heterosexual, singer. Begley and McCann also identify as wife and mother, markers that O'Donnell desired but did not come to be. These identity markers are enacted through their song selections, a mixture of old Irish ballads and country music classics from their American counterparts. The songs that they perform portray a story that showcases these identities for example Margo's rendition of *Back Home to Donegal*, Philomena Begley's cover of *A Village in County Tyrone* and Susan McCann's cover of the *Mountains of Mourne*. These specific songs allow them to place their geographic identities at

the forefront of their performances, both live and recorded. They are the ‘real persona’ in these performances.

The performance persona is always evident. Even though these women suggest that they are the same on stage as off stage, there is always a divide between the persona on stage and the person at home. As Begley stated, ‘once I got in the door from a gig it was apron on and heels off’ (Begley 2020). This is further emphasized by McCann and O’Donnell:

if somebody rang here looking for to book Susan McCann, I’d say that her management was not here at the minute will you ring back (laughing) if I answered the phone. I wouldn’t talk to anybody; I wouldn’t get involved to talk to anybody. I just don’t want to, you know, when I come in my gate and in the door, this is my oasis here, I don’t want people interfering in my life when I’m not on the road. So therefore, I wouldn’t be sitting on the phone, lots of managers do and singers, but I wouldn’t be sitting on the phone querying about how other people were doing it because I don’t care. I worry about what I do myself, and that enough you know (McCann Interview, 2019).

‘Yeah, well Margaret takes care of Margo, you know Margaret can sort of take care of herself. (O’Donnell Interview, 2018).

While the three women state that they are the same as they always were, or that they do not think they have changed there is a clear stipulation for a difference between the stage performance and the person at home. The performance persona is constantly at play once they begin to interact with the audience; how much of the ‘real persona’ they let the audience see depends on the song, the content, and the intimacy of knowledge between the audience and performer.

The embodied performances of songs as narrator, allow these women to understand and portray the content of the song, reflecting Auslander’s character persona. It may not specifically relate

to their identity, but their ability to embody the narrator of the song allows for the audience to make a connection to that specific song. This can be seen in their performance of old Irish ballads, singing songs concerning specific places, such as Margo's version of *Any Tipperary Town* and Susan McCann's cover of *The Town I loved so Well*, or songs that contain themes of broken hearts, lost love, broken families. While these themes do not specifically relate to the identities of these three women per se, their ability to embody the narrator to portray the songs as their own story allows the audience to identify even further with them as artists.

All three aspects of Auslander's trichotomy are evident in Begley, O'Donnell and McCann's performance styles. All three display the 'real persona' when they are singing songs that relate to their childhood, their homes, or their local community areas. They are continuously displaying the performance persona with a clear divide between the stage person and the person at home. Finally, they display the character through the narration of songs from different standpoints – broken-hearted lover (man or woman), divorced woman. All three embody the spirit of the character within the songs to create an authentic performance for the audience.

3.5: Conclusion

This chapter discussed identity, how it is formed, the process of creating identity, and how music is utilised in creating one's identity. These three women performers utilise their own identity to create and maintain a space for themselves in country music. They remain 'real', 'no different from anyone else' (O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). By consistently reinforcing this identity of real, the same as everyone else; they are clearly relatable to a specific audience, those who see themselves through the songs of these women. The concept of discourse, deferral and reflexivity, in social and cultural settings enables these women to continually assess their identity. This allows them to reaffirm their past identity to become who they want to be, reflecting or enacting the concept of identity as repetition. These women utilise their rural, Irish, women, religious, local, moral, respectful, married, wife, mother, performer, singer identity markers to engage an audience whose own identity reflects the persona these

women perform. These audiences identify with their story, where they have come from, how they have lived, through their lived experience. Country music audiences identify with the artists and the lyrical content as they are telling a story to which the audience can relate. As mentioned earlier, they are expressing a social place by linking individuals to a community and geography, yet they are also creating an identity that has been regularly shaped and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual. These identities are formed with and in the rejection of cultural factors of their given societies. Auslander (2004) demonstrates how these 'selves' and identities are portrayed through embodied performances. These women utilise all three elements of the trichotomy at various times to embody their own given identity. The process of identity has shaped both these artists and their audiences from the beginning of their careers. The artists and audience through discourse, reflexivity, deferral, and embodiment, can align themselves with this music as an expression of their personal identity. They identify with the music and with the artist that performs it. They make a personal and communal connection, and these aspects are identity markers.

Chapter 4: Meaningfulness and Lyrical Analysis

4.1: Introduction

Stories expressed through lyrics are an important aspect of Country music. This chapter provides lyrical analysis that generates an understanding of how these three women artists created meaningfulness for their audience. American country music theorists such as Aaron Fox (2004), Pamela Fox (2009) and Leigh Edwards (2018) are influential in setting the context for lyrical analysis, but this chapter takes a different approach to the analysis of song lyrics. By utilising a combination of semiotics (Turino 1999; 2008; 2014), difference (Derrida 1981) and discourse (Foucault 1972; 1995), this chapter details how the lyrics contained in these specific songs are keystones that enable the audience to create meaningfulness for themselves. Building on the elements of Giddens' (1991) work in chapter three concerning reflexivity and the self, as well as Turino's (1999; 2008; 2014) application of semiotics to the study of music, the first section provides an overview of the concept of meaningfulness and semiotic theory. The next section details the categorisation of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann's album output from a thematic perspective. The final section engages with lyrical analysis of one song from each artist to showcase how their music and lyrics are meaningful to their audience. I selected these specific songs to analyse as they have only been recorded in Irish country music context by these three women artists.

4.1.1: Meaningfulness

When discussing Benedict Anderson's articulation of identity, Thérèse Smith states:

people imagine themselves as connected through language, especially through their experience and understanding of shared texts, most notably poetry and song which produce, he argued "a special kind of contemporaneous community" (Smith in Dillane et al 2018, p.397).

The sense of community may be a subjective and emotional one. Writing on American country music, Aaron Fox creates a discourse on 'the meaningful components of musical "feeling"' and

how these meaningful connections are articulated by the audience (2004, p.171). Outlining the idea of feeling and the potential of songs as generative of meaning, Fox states:

Specifically, these various reflections and narratives suggest that “feeling” articulates (i.e., it both connects and gives voice to, which is also the double meaning of the verb “relate”) verbal and embodied domains of experience. Feeling then adds something else, some “meaning”. This meaning is often glossed with the idea of a story, or with an actual story, a “mem’ry”, or a fixation on something that “reminds you of something” (Fox 2004, p.171).

Memory is a critical part of meaningfulness and the evocation of memories through song and performance underlines a sense of community that can be challenged by modernity and postmodernism.

Sociologist and cultural theorist Anthony Giddens theorises that the late modern world, sometimes referred to as the post-modern world, is ‘apocalyptic, not because it is inevitably heading towards calamity, but because it introduces risks which previous generations have not had to face’ (Giddens 1990, p.4). Giddens suggests that this culture of risk emerged from the time of enlightenment. During this time the inhabitants of the western world believed in universal truth, in the concept of human reason and adhered to the belief in the one true self. Giddens suggests that the culture of society since the 19th century is one of risk and ambiguity where there are no universal truths. Moreover, there are more questions within the frameworks of the societies in which we live, and the individual is constantly in a state of reflexivity (Giddens 1990). It is this concept of “risk culture” and the anxious state of living that create a sense of “personal meaninglessness” for the modern individual (Giddens 1990, p.9). Giddens states that ‘personal meaninglessness is the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer’ (ibid). The theory that life is a ‘passive existence and meaningless’ is also an important point in poststructuralists’ view (Lackey 1992, p.183). However, as becomes evident throughout this chapter, I argue that these three women performers generate ‘meaningfulness’ for their

audiences. Through their position as pivotal figures and role models in Irish country music, these three women have sustained longevity throughout their careers. They have made substantial connections to their audience who in turn follow and support their music careers. These singers, as stated in their interviews, sing songs ‘from the heart’ (O’Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020). In a society and culture where there is more risk than clarity and certainty, these three women generate meaningfulness as they are creating a connection for the audience to the elements of their daily lives.

Connections to place, particularly local places, are readily evident in Irish culture and society (Corcoran, 1997; Kearney, 2010). Martin Stokes suggests ‘it has become evident that visible and audible media are spheres in which narratives of place are generated and articulated’ (Stokes 1997, p.10). This is certainly the case in the country music scene in Ireland. Stokes goes further to suggest:

the ‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundar[ies]. They also organise hierarchies of a moral and political order. The insistent evocation of place in Irish balladry or the ‘country and Irish’ heard on juke-boxes in bars in Ireland and amongst migrant communities in England and the United States is a striking example, defining a moral and political community in relation to the world in which they find themselves. In this particular process of relocation, the places, boundaries and identities involved are of a large and collective order (Stokes 1997, p.3).

This chapter demonstrates how Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann, and their music can generate meaningfulness.⁷⁷ Psychologist Martin Seligman suggests that ‘a

⁷⁷ Risk culture and the value and expression of place or locality is very evident in the present. At the beginning of 2020, there were sparks of concern regarding a virus (COVID-19). As the weeks progressed the spread of the virus grew, putting the world into a state of uncertainty. Declared a pandemic, many countries entered into various states of lockdown. During this time of human anxiety, there are certain elements of human culture that generated a sense of personal meaningfulness. At times, people were confined to short distances from their homes. While live performances were cancelled, artists and audiences engaged in virtual performances and music and lyrics contributed to a sense of meaningfulness. During the pandemic there were an untold number of music performances that took place through the use of technology and social media. Music gave both the performer and

meaningful life consists in the belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self' (2011, p.12). Furthermore, psychologists Crumbaugh and Maholick suggest that the purpose of meaning in life is the 'ontological significance of life from the point of view of the experiencing individual' (1964, p.201). Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann provide a platform and an arena in which their audience belongs to something, a larger group that is bigger than themselves. Yet, these audience members are also perceiving this group and the music as an individual experience.

4.1.2: Foucault and Derrida

French philosopher Michel Foucault's (1972) theory of discourse and power is, he suggests, bound up with language and practice. The concept of discourse is elaborated on when Foucault suggests, discourse produces knowledge to establish regimes of truth and power structures within a society:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true... In societies like ours, the 'political economy' of truth is characterised by five important traits. 'Truth' is centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing,

their audience a sense of meaningfulness in one of the most uncertain climates that many of the planet's population have lived through.

media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological' struggles) (Foucault in Rainbow 1984, pp.72-73).

Knowledge and regimes of truth are then disseminated through institutions of power (education, governments, writing, ideological strands) that are bound up with language practices.

Derrida's work focuses primarily on language and the deconstruction of an immediacy, or identity, between words and meaning. Derrida's concept discusses 'the relation of difference between signifiers, that meaning can never be fixed' (Barker and Jane 2016, p.18). Derrida's concept of difference incorporates both the meaning to differ (in space) and to defer (to put off in time, to postpone presence) at the same time: '[this concept] does not function simply as either difference (difference) or as difference in the usual sense (deferral), and plays on both meanings at once' (Derrida and Bass 1978, pp.xvii-xviii). Derrida suggests that words carry meanings, and history, including the resonances of other meanings from other related words in other contexts (Derrida et al., 2016). Therefore, words can never have a fixed meaning but a deferral of meaning.

I align my research with Giddens' conceptualisation of modernism, while also drawing on elements of Derrida's *Differènce* (1981) and Foucault's theory on discourse and power (1972; 1984; 2000).⁷⁸ We learn about the world and our world view develops as a result of discourse which in turn informs our knowledge of the world. As Giddens suggests:

modernity institutionalizes the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true,

⁷⁸ 'Discourse refers to the regulated production of knowledge through language that give meaning to both material object and social practices. Discourse creates and produces knowledge in an intelligible way while at the same time excluding other ways of reasoning as unintelligible, these are regimes of truth' (Barker and Jane 2016, p.18).

but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned (Giddens 1990, p.3).

This statement encapsulates both Giddens' "culture of risk", Foucault's theory of discourse and power informing knowledge, and Derrida's theory of deferral.

4.1.3: Semiotics

Music in communicative terms is considered a sign, which carries a meaning that has to be interpreted (Alexomanolaki 2006, p.1319).

The interpretation of music is considered utilising Charles Sanders Peirce's (1893-1914) phenomenology of the sign. Peirce developed a triadic theory of semiotics after studying Ferdinand de Saussure's late nineteenth century dyadic theory of semiology.⁷⁹ Peirce suggested

⁷⁹ Saussure believed that there were two aspects to understanding semiology, the signifier and the signified. The signifier was the *form* which the sign takes, while the signified was the *concept* it represents (Turino, 1999; 2008; 2014; Chandler, 2006). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is what he termed 'signification' (Saussure in Chandler 2006).

that semiotics include three different trichotomies: the representamen (the sign), the object (the concept it represents) and the interpretant (the sense made of the sign) (Turino 1999).

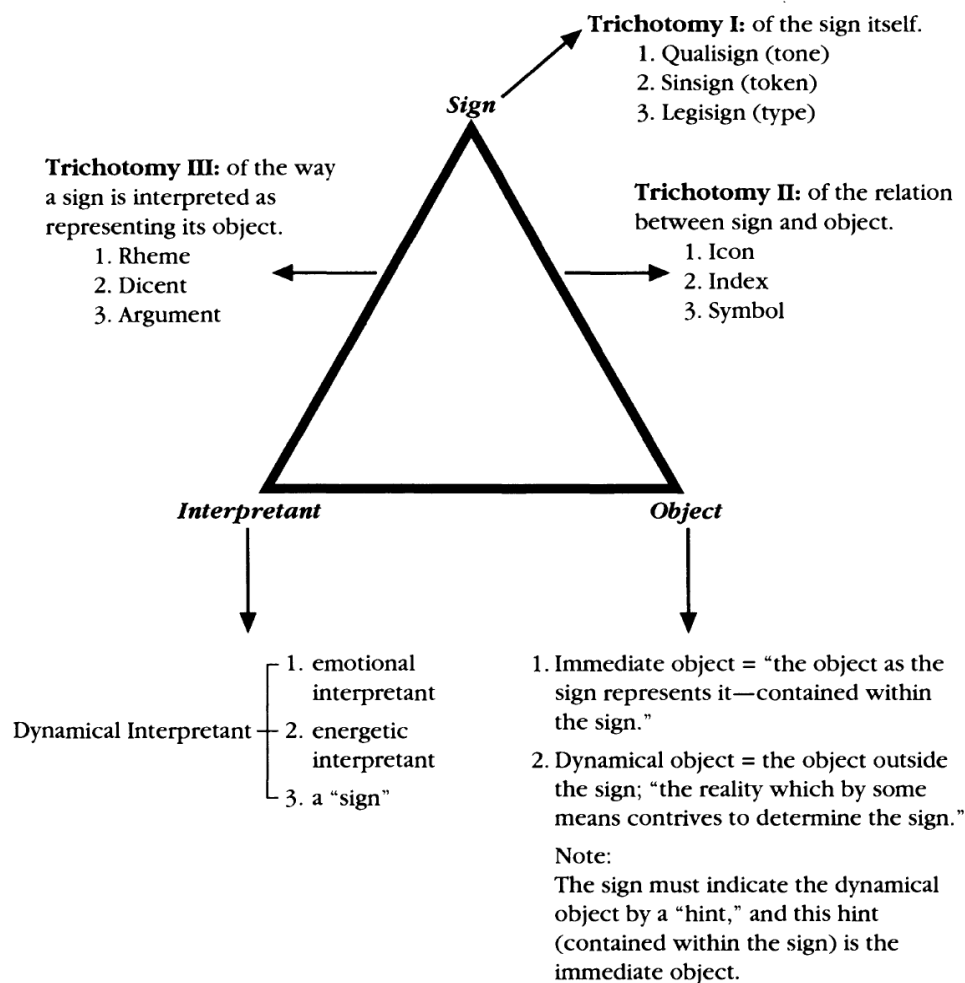
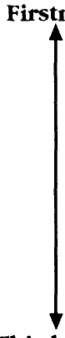


Fig 4. 1: Peirce's trichotomy diagram represented in Turino (1999, p.226).

Thomas Turino (1999; 2008; 2014) deconstructs Peirce's sign concept in figure 4.1. Turino illustrates the three different layers contained in each of the three trichotomies. 'Trichotomy I is of the sign itself (and hence is a relative First: qualisign, sinsign, legisign). Trichotomy II is of the relationship between sign and object (and hence a Second: icon, index symbol). Trichotomy III involves the way the sign-object relationship is interpreted and creates an effect,

[and hence a third]’ (Turino 2014, p.191). Of most importance Turino suggests, are the concepts of Firsts (Firstness), Seconds (Secondness) and Thirds (Thirdness).

Class of Sign	Trichotomy			10 Classes of Signs	
	1	2	3		
I	A	A	A	Qualisign (iconic rheme)	Firstness  Thirdness
II	B	A	A	Rhematic iconic sinsign	
III	B	B	A	Rhematic indexical sinsign	
IV	B	B	B	Dicent indexical sinsign	
V	C	A	A	Rhematic iconic legisign	
VI	C	B	A	Rhematic indexical legisign	
VII	C	B	B	Dicent indexical legisign	
VIII	C	C	A	Rhematic symbolic legisign	
IX	C	C	B	Dicent symbolic legisign	
X	C	C	C	Argument	

A=Firstness; B=Secondness; C=Thirdness
 1=Firstness; 2=Secondness; 3=Thirdness

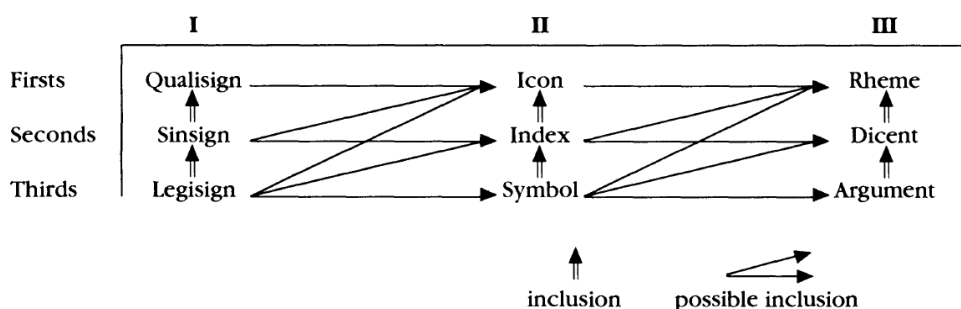


Fig 4. 2: Peirce's concepts of Firsts, Seconds and Thirds in Turino (1999, p.233).

Figure 4.2 details how Firsts, Seconds and Thirds are connected to each of the layers within Peirce's trichotomies. Firsts, or Firstness, as described by Turino in 2014 is 'the entity without relation to a Second, that is, an entity in-and-of-itself. Firstness is that which would be as it is regardless of how it is perceived when brought into relation to a Second (in this case, a perceiver), and hence pertains to Peirce's conception of "the real" and objective reality' (Turino 2014, p.214).

Secondness is the direct relationship between two entities without the mediation of a third; Secondness is brute force, cause and effect, unreflected upon habit... Thirdness is the relation of a First and Second by a Third so as

to produce something beyond the Secondness relation. Chemical reaction, lightening striking a tree to produce fire are examples. All semiosis is Thirdness in that the sign and object are brought together in a mind to produce an interpretant (the effect of the sign-object relation) (Turino 2014, p.216).

The importance of the Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness combined with direct instances of each trichotomy discussed below, are what Turino attributes to applying most specifically to music analysis:

Peircean phenomenology focuses attention on the becoming of individual selves, which are also social selves, through ongoing experiences in the world. But Peirce adds a whole set of systematically-related tools for understanding the specifics of the process of being ... The main sign types that are of concern to music scholars (i.e., qualisign, sinsign, legisign, icon, index, symbol, rheme, and dicent) each involves different types of linages within individual selves and the world, and distinct potentials for experience, as do his basic ontological categories for Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness (Turino 2014, p.186).

Turino believes Peirce's phenomenology offers a unique avenue of analysis for scholars within the field of ethnomusicology:

(1) every musical sound, performance, or dance movement, and contextual feature that affects an actual perceiver is a sign, and (2) every perceiver is affected by sign in relation to his or her own personal history of experience ... (Turino 2014, p.188).

Since ethnomusicology is the study of the dialectical interplay of music-making and social life, then Peirce's phenomenology offers a nuanced approach to examining lived experience through music. By utilising Peirce's phenomenology as 'scaffolding' for analysing music, this research is offered multiple layers of understanding of a musical experience (performing, listening,

observing): ‘One of the principal realms of sign activity, or semiosis (semeiosis), is human thought’ (Houser 2010, p.89).

I utilise Turino’s approach to Peirce’s phenomenology by incorporating the three trichotomies of the sign concept, while also examining Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Taking each song as a single entity, I examine the musical structure and arrangements of three songs to highlight the ‘personal history of experience’ of Irish country music (Firstness) (ibid). I then apply the semiotic analysis, discourse and deferral to gain a deeper understanding of the lyrics (Secondness and Thirdness), before returning to an appraisal of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness in the potential interpretation of the audience members and the performer. This generates an analysis of how the music of Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell and Susan McCann creates meaningfulness in the lives of their audience.

It is common sense that lived experience is, at its very inception, an interpretation because all experience is initiated by the perception of signs that have some type of effect on ... or create some type of interpretant for , the people involved... the concept of interpretant is large still in that it encompasses the concepts of interpretation and meaning simultaneously, if “meaning” is likewise understood in its widest possible sense as “any effect created in a perceiver by particular sign-object relation”. While meaning resides in the sign-object relation, it does not come to fruition until sign and object are brought together and interpreted by a perceiver (Turino 2014, p.202).

As detailed above, semiotics can illuminate a deeper understanding of signs, meaning and referential understanding of music that is not clearly evident in a straight forward reading of song lyrics. Therefore, by utilising Peirce’s phenomenology and Turino’s understanding of this

concept of signs, in line with lyrical analysis of a song, this research can further deduce and analyse the meaningfulness that is created through the music of these three women.

4.2: Album Categorisation

Since the beginning of their careers, Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann have produced approximately 100 albums combined. Philomena Begley began her performing career in 1962 and has released 37 albums over her career to date. Beginning her career in 1964 Margo O'Donnell has released over 34 albums,⁸⁰ and Susan McCann has released 27 albums since she began performing professionally in 1976. Since the release of their first albums, individually they all have sustained a steady release of albums. This body of material allows for the categorisation of their individual thematic progress through the lifespan of their careers to date.

Categorising the themes contained in the albums of these three singers facilitates an analysis of themes prominent at different points in their careers. Edwards (2018) presents a similar analysis of Dolly Parton's career to showcase how Parton developed her performing persona and image throughout her song lyrics and album covers. She states:

Parton's treatment of the pastoral and of her own autobiographical narratives of her mountain origins is multilayered. At times, she is nostalgic for her mountain home. At other times, she eschews easy nostalgia and instead depicts the gritty realism of how hard mountain life could be in the midst of stark material conditions and crushing poverty (Edwards 2018, p.78).

The songs that Parton has penned are expressive of her personal experience, additionally they lend themselves well to the experience of these Irish performers. Parton's treatment of the pastoral scenes in her songs lend themselves to the imagery and experiences of rural Ireland. Begley, O'Donnell and McCann portray these scene in their performance as real expression of

⁸⁰ O'Donnell lost the rights to her master tracks during her career therefore an exact quantification of her album releases is not possible.

their lived experience, and that of their audiences. Parton additionally critiques social and cultural themes in her music – *Coat of Many Colours*, and *Joleen* are just two examples – that are also a critiques evident in society and culture in Ireland. These geographically transferable themes provide Begley, O'Donnell and McCann with the context to express issues in song to Irish audiences.

Edwards' style of analysis must be adapted in this context as these three women were performing cover versions of songs that already existed. This demonstrates how the themes they were singing about from the American context reflect the Irish society in which they live; these women actively chose these particular songs to cover. Moreover, it highlights the type of audience to whom these women were singing. Edwards suggests that Parton's 'popular autobiographical songs about her childhood in the Smoky Mountains ...[were] both celebration of the pastoral and rejection of any false nostalgia for poverty or idealization of rural mountain culture' (Edwards 2018, p.65). This statement denotes a striking similarity to these three women. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann perform Dolly Parton songs in their early, middle and later albums. Specifically, the song 'Coat of Many Colours' appears on a number of albums by all three singers. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have made a connection to these songs as they are expressive of their own circumstances. They alter her songs so that they can put their own 'stamp' on them. This in turn generates a connection to these songs for their fans. The songs they sang and still sing, while not autobiographical, are representative of their own lives and stories. As they progressed through their individual careers' they chose songs with themes that were related to their own lives, and to the lives of their audiences.

4.2.1: Truck Driving Woman

Philomena Begley and 'The Old Cross Céilí Band' had been performing and touring for ten years before they released their first album. *Truck Driving Woman* was released in 1972. The album is an LP record with six songs on both the A side and B sides. The themes on this album are heterogeneous, as there are a number of songs pertaining to love, loss and the hardship of

relationships. In essence this album is not focused on one aspect of human existence but is combining a number of themes that are evident in the everyday life of the audience. Begley combines the songs of love with songs of loss. These songs fit well together as this could indicate a warning to her audience: you can love someone with all your heart, but you can lose them as well. She also engages with the theme of the single independent woman when she sings of a strong-will woman who is the director of her own destiny. Finally, there are songs that refer to Ireland and its beauty of landscapes and character. While these songs are ever present in the majority of Begley's albums, it brings the listener back to their homeland and situates them within the Irish context. By combining all of these themes it suggests that Begley is engaging in topical discourse of that period.

Having left 'The Old Cross Céilí Band' to front her own band, 'The Ramblin' Men', Begley includes more songs about Ireland and returning home on *The Best of Philomena* (1979) than on any previous album. At this point, Begley has been touring for almost twenty years and the album highlights the importance of Ireland to her, and similarly of the popularity of Irish songs amongst her audience. The themes of emigration, longing for home, and love persist throughout the next decade. In 1992 there were more songs dedicated to themes of learning life lessons from broken relationships and learning from traditions experienced in the family home. This is evident on the album *Reflections* (1992). However, the biggest change in thematic content came with the release of the album *The Way Old Friends Do* (1996) when Begley collaborated with Margo O'Donnell. In this album Begley introduces her most substantial output of gospel and religious music, while also continuing to sing themes of love, relationships, homeland, and family. This is not the first time Begley has released an album that contained religious themed songs, but it is the first album with a dedicated section to religion. In 2003 Begley released *Once Around The Floor*, and this is the first album to incorporate the theme of memory and nostalgia. While the album still contains the themes she initially dealt with such as love, heartbreak, strong-willed women and family, there is an overarching theme of memory and of

the ‘good old days’. This theme of nostalgia pervades every album that Begley has released since 2003. This pattern is also apparent in Margo O’Donnell and Susan McCann’s album output. It is also evident in the albums released by men and women contemporaries both in Ireland and in America who have arrived at the same career juncture.⁸¹ These categorisations, in essence, can give an indication of the different periods of Begley’s performing career. In her early career (1972–1990s) Begley’s thematic output consists of love, relationships, hardship, and homeland. In the middle of her career (1990s–2000s) she is concerned with themes of family, love, learning life lessons and religion. While in the latter part of her career (2000s–present) centres on themes of nostalgia and memory that appeal to the audience who have grown with her throughout her career.

4.2.2: From Margo with Love

‘The Keynotes’ released their first LP album in 1971, *From Margo with Love*. On this album O’Donnell combines Irish folk songs with some country music classics, however they are not interlinked on the album. The A side of the record contains all the Irish folk songs while the B side showcases O’Donnell’s country connection. In the albums that followed, O’Donnell continues with this theme of Irish folk songs and classic country songs, however the order in which they appear changes to mix the themes unlike that of the first album. In 1973 O’Donnell released a complete album of Irish folk/ballad and rebel songs. This album showcases her connection to Irish songs and the songs she learned as a child:

my dad loved to sing the folky ballads and that's really what I grew up learning
... when Mam would be putting out the washing, she would make me sit, yeah
know, on the ground and she would say the words to me over and over and
over again and I would (learn). So that's how I got to know that you know the

⁸¹ Dolly Parton, Johnny Cash, Mick Flavin, Meryl Haggard, Declan Nearney, Big Tom, Loretta Lynn are some of the most familiar names in Irish and American country who have released albums in their later career with overriding themes of nostalgia.

Irish ballads and the first song, that I sang in the hall in Kincasslagh

(O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

Throughout the rest of the 1970s and 1980s O'Donnell's thematic output did not change. Each album released during these two decades included country classics and Irish folk/ballads. In 1996 O'Donnell then released *The Way Old Friends Do* with Philomena Begley. In this album, as mentioned above, both O'Donnell and Begley sing country songs, Irish folk songs, with the addition of a dedicated section to religious songs. The content in many country songs hints at a religious aspect, however, this is the first time O'Donnell is directly indicating an association with religious or gospel songs on an album. In 2006 O'Donnell marked her return to the recording scene when she released *I'm Still Here*. The themes in this album are interrelated with themes that have gone before: love, family, religion, Ireland, life lessons, heartbreak and emigration. From this point on O'Donnell also introduces the theme of nostalgia and invocation of memory. The theme of nostalgia pervades every album since 2006. Additionally, in 2012 O'Donnell released an album dedicated to her mother: *Songs for Mother* which was released close to her mother's ninetieth birthday. All the songs on this album, sixteen in all, are in praise of a mother, the hard work that mothers do daily, what mothers teach their children and the safety of mothers' prayers.

The albums released since 2012 to present combine all of the themes previously evident. O'Donnell appears to combine the Irish folk/ballads with the country classics, the religious and the praise songs. While there is no drastic change in O'Donnell's thematic content, there are a number of slight changes that indicate the early, middle and latter periods of her career. The early period of O'Donnell's career can be marked from 1972 to 1983. The middle period is marked from 1983 to 1996, where there is a considered focus on religion alongside some of the themes evident in her early career. O'Donnell's latter period is marked by the inclusion of the theme of nostalgia and paying homage to both her parents and her good friend Big Tom. Another aspect which marks her latter period is the inclusion of original compositions on her

albums (2006 – present). These career categorisations enable the audience and the research to clearly see her evolution thematically. Additionally, it shows how she has grown with her audience as the years have passed.

4.2.3: Susan McCann Sings Country

Susan McCann began her professional performing career in 1976 when she signed with Spin Records. Just one year later she released her first album *Susan McCann Sings Country* (1977) which included themes of love, heartbreak, rural living, emigration, and familial love. These include well-known country songs that McCann and her band altered to fit the Irish country music scene, along with Irish folk and ballad songs. These themes persist throughout the seventies and eighties, where there is the addition of themes of learning lessons in life, challenges of relationships and marriages, and making connections to Irish landmarks.

In 1990 McCann released an album called *You Gave Me Love*, in which the majority of themes deal with motherhood, religious belief and salvation. This is the first album to take religion as the main theme, while it is also peppered with themes of motherhood and the challenges it brings. The theme of salvation may refer to religious salvation or could be interpreted as believing that love can save a person. Following on from this album, the remainder of the 1990s saw McCann return to the themes of emigration, Ireland, landmarks, love, heartbreak, and learning lessons from life experience. It is also in the 1990s that she begins to introduce medleys of songs into her albums, specifically her *String of Diamonds (Medley)* that has been a fixed feature of her repertoire since 1991.

In 2001 McCann released a dedicated album of Irish folk and ballad songs for the first time since 1985. On this album, themes that have been evident previously reoccur but now refer to Ireland, Irish landscapes or Irish “heroes” as opposed to the American country classics. In 2005 she released an album of forty songs dedicated to her musical heroes, the songs and songwriters who had influenced her the most up to this point. These songs are thematically the same as those previously released, however there is an overarching theme of homage and gratitude to

this album. Demonstrating the development of a new, mature persona, *The Older I Get* (2020) contains a new theme of teaching your children or the youth of today to live well and morally in a modern world. By utilising the album categorisations, the analysis pinpoints McCann's three periods of her performing career. Her early performing career can be thematically charted between 1977 and 1989. McCann's middle period begins in 1990 where she introduces a religious aspect to her music in line with the addition of motherhood, salvation and the creation of a medley of songs that are thematically linked (1990–1999). The latter period of McCann's career can be demarcated from 2000 to present when she introduces the theme of nostalgia alongside the themes of educating the youth of society and paying homage to those who have impacted and supported her career.

4.3: Lyrical Analysis and Creation of Meaningfulness

4.3.1: Philomena Begley: Queen of the Silver Dollar

Begley first released *Queen of the Silver Dollar* in 1976 with her band 'The Ramblin' Men'. This song is a slower tempo 'jive' song in simple quadruple time, that allows the audience to participate in the social function of dancing (Lynn, 2017). The jive has been a staple part of the Irish dance scene since the showband era (Firstness). Its popularity can be seen in the album releases of Begley, whose most popular songs during the 1970s were jive songs. This song opens with a single guitar strum of the tonic D flat major, accompanied by a dotted quaver-

semi-quaver-crotchet rhythm pattern played on the bass drum, as seen in musical example 4.1 below.

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Voice, showing a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (D-flat major), and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics 'she a-' are written below the notes. The second staff is for the Piano, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a 4/4 time signature. The third staff is for the Acoustic Guitar, with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats, and a 4/4 time signature, showing a single chord (G8) every four beats. The fourth staff is for the Bass Guitar, with a bass clef, a key signature of three flats, and a 4/4 time signature. The fifth staff is for the Drumset, with a double bar line and a 4/4 time signature, showing a semi-quaver-crotchet rhythm pattern on the bass drum.

Musical Example 4. 1: Queen of the Silver Dollar Opening two Bars.

Begley enters as the solo voice on top of a stripped-back musical arrangement. The guitar continues to provide a single strum every four beats which indicates the key and subsequent transitions to the sub-dominant and dominant as the verse progresses. The steel guitar and piano provide fluttering harmonic colour throughout. At the end of the verse, the drums enter in a more dominant role initiating a drive for the chorus, while the bass guitar plays a tonic-dominant walking bass line, that is a staple part of musical arrangements of Irish country music. The steel guitar starts to announce its capability throughout the chorus harmonically swaying throughout the range and tonal possibilities of D flat major, while the piano and rhythm guitar are utilising

quaver and dotted quaver chordal dialogue. This use of syncopated rhythms is what drives the momentum of the chorus, facilitating a lyrical impact of the chorus.

The musical score for the chorus of 'Queen of the Silver Dollar' is presented in a five-staff format. The top staff is for the voice (Vo.), with lyrics: 'Queen of the sil- ver dollar She rules the smo - key kingdom her'. The second staff is for the piano (Pno.), showing a complex harmonic accompaniment with syncopated rhythms. The third staff is for the guitar (Guit.), featuring a rhythmic pattern of chords and single notes. The fourth staff is for the bass guitar (B. Guit.), providing a steady bass line. The fifth staff is for the drum set (D. Set), showing a consistent drum pattern. The score is in 4/4 time and the key signature has three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor).

Musical Example 4. 2: Queen of the Silver Dollar Chorus.

As the second verse begins, again the music reverts back to its original sound, however this time it is accompanied by harmonic and tonal coloration from the acoustic guitar. This persists until the chorus returns and here again all the instruments re-emerge. As the song moves to its final verse it is now the turn of the piano to take center stage of the harmony, while the rest of the instruments strip back to the sparse accompaniment of verse one and two. Thus, the song concludes on a repetition of the chorus three times with the sound from the band growing behind the ever-prominent solo voice of Begley.

She arrives in all her splendour
 Each night at nine o'clock
 Her chariot is the crosstown bus
 That stops right down the block
 Now the old piano minstrel plays her tune as she walks in
 And the Queen of the Silver Dollar's home again

She's the Queen of the Silver Dollar
She rules this smokey kingdom
Septor is a wine glass and a bar stool is her throne
Now the jesters flock around her tryin' to win her favours
To see which one will take the
Queen of the Silver Dollar home

Now her royal dress is satin
It's shabby and it's torn
The royal jewels are rhinestones
The shoes are scuffed and worn
Of the many roads she's been down,
And the places that she's seen
Well they all look at her and say God save the queen

She's the Queen of the Silver Dollar
She rules this smokey kingdom
Septor is a wine glass and a bar stool is her throne
Now the jesters flock around her tryin' to win her favours
To see which one will take the
Queen of the Silver Dollar home

Now the Queen of the Silver Dollar
Is not as haughty as she seems
She was once an ordinary girl with ordinary dreams
But there's a man who found her
And he brought her to this world
He's the one who made a queen of a simple country girl

Yes I'm the Queen of the Silver Dollar
I rule this smokey kingdom
Septor is a wine glass and a bar stool is my throne
Now the jesters flock around me tryin' to win my favours
To see which one will take the
Queen of the Silver Dollar home

Yes I'm the Queen of the Silver Dollar
I rule this smokey kingdom
Septor is a wine glass and a bar stool is my throne
Now the jesters flock around me tryin' to win my favours
To see which one will take the
Queen of the Silver Dollar home

Yes I'm the Queen of the Silver Dollar
I rule this smokey kingdom

Septor is a wine glass and a bar stool is my throne
Now the jesters flock around me tryin' to win my favours
To see which one will take the
Queen of the Silver Dollar home

Fig 4. 3: Lyrics to 'Queen of the Silver Dollar' © Sheldon Silverstein 1972.

Queen of the Silver Dollar lyrics can be interpreted in different ways. Initially when reading these lyrics, it suggests that this song is depicting a 'Grand' lady who has fortune untold, yet she spends her nights in a local bar being pursued by the male customers. As the song moves through each verse the idea of the lady's riches dissipates as the lyrics describe her dress as 'shabby and torn' with scuff marks on her shoes that have been worn for too long. Eventually the song leads us to an understanding of how this lady became a regular feature at this bar, having been introduced to this scene by a male companion at some point in her life. This point hints at her marrying into money or being a former lover of a rich man who bought her extravagant things like the 'satin dress' she is described as wearing.

A separate reading insinuates the idea of royalty and power from a female perspective. The woman is queen of the bar because she is the only woman there to rule over all the men. This woman may be imagining her royal gown, creating the idea of her grandeur over all the men who 'flock around her'. The jewels she speaks of are rhinestones and her clothes are worn and dirty indicating she could be a cowgirl or a rodeo girl who travels all over to work. These themes are evident specifically in the second verse when she states, 'Of the many roads she's been down, And the places that she's seen, well they all look at her and say God save the Queen', suggestive of a mark of respect. This could infer that she is a queen as she has won her race, or that she has given a good performance that is as good as any man has done; 'she rules the smokey kingdom'. This smokey kingdom is most likely a pub or saloon, but could also be interpreted as 'a rodeo ring' where she rides with dust creating the illusion of smoke. Additionally, she is seen as the *Queen of the Silver Dollar* as she has won the prize fund. In verse three the same theme continues yet this time it is alluding to her lack of power. She hints

at being encouraged to go on this path by a dominant man, yet she had dreams of her own. These dreams were cast aside at the behest of the male who brought her down this path, yet now she sits alone, and her dreams are gone as well. She must stay on this path now as life has passed her by and she has no other way to make a life for herself.

Alternatively, the lyrics could be read as a woman performer who spends her nights singing in a bar. She is well dressed and is drawing much attention from her male audience. This lady spends her nights entertaining these men, and at the end of the night sits and talks with them. She sees the men as having too much interest in her, in-fact she suggests that they are trying to win her affection so that she may go home with them at the end of the night. As the verses move through she could be described as having ‘grown up’ and matured on stage yet she still dons a similar style of dress which she used in the early days of her career. This insinuates that she has not made a lot of money from her job as an entertainer, yet she continues to return every night to perform. In the final verse this reading is solidified as she speaks of being brought into this world by a man, potentially a manager who recognised her talent. The manager introduced her to this world of performing and sold her a dream of fortune which never materialised. She saw herself with different dreams however she did not pursue them. It seems that the manager sold her this dream of stardom, yet by the end of the song the lyrics do not suggest that the manager is still with her. In fact, as the song develops it alludes to ‘the Queen’ being on her own in the bar with no one there to be chaperone or a protector, as many managers would do in the case of a woman artist.

Examining the lyrics through the concept of semiotics there are elements of all three trichotomies evident. There are also multiple instance of firstness, secondness and thirdness. The qualisign (firstness) include ‘old’, ‘satin’, ‘smokey’, ‘jewel’, ‘shabby’, ‘torn’. These signs are then supported by the use of the sinsign and the legisign (secondness). The sinsign within the lyrics are ‘bus’, ‘bar stool’, ‘piano’, ‘shoes’, ‘wine glass’, ‘man’ and ‘home’. These sinsigns create the sense of a real setting, be that outside of the bar or inside the bar. The legisigns

contained within the lyrics are similar to the sinsign with the addition of ‘crosstown’ and ‘nine o’clock’. As Turino described, a legisign is a ‘sign as a general type’ (Turino 2014, p.215) and the sinsign is any specific instance (token) of a sign experienced in actuality’ (Turino 2014, p.216).

As Turino (2014) stated, icons, indexes and symbols are the most pertinent to the analysis of music (secondness). They are represented in these lyrics adding a second layer of meaning. The ‘silver dollar’ is both a symbol and an icon. Other icons include ‘man’, ‘queen’, ‘piano’, ‘road’, ‘kingdom’, ‘jesters’, ‘septor’, ‘throne’, and ‘world’. These are icons as they represent the actual existence of a given thing, yet some are also metaphor signs. Additional metaphors include the words ‘minstrel’, ‘kingdom’, ‘ordinary’ and ‘simple country girl’ as they are not suggesting the actual existence of something but are a referential possibility. The index signs contained within the lyrics include ‘smokey’, ‘dress’, ‘scuffed’, ‘torn’, ‘shabby’, ‘worn’. Symbols are the final aspect of the second layer evident in these lyrics. ‘Queen’, ‘nine’, ‘chariot’, ‘splendour’, ‘silver dollar’ and ‘block’ are also symbol signs as they are culturally learned understandings of the words. By using symbols such as these the lyrics are cultivating a number of meanings in multiple people at one time. All three elements of trichotomy II enrich the meaning and thus meaningfulness of the lyrics within the audience.

In the third layer of the trichotomy there are three final sign representations: rheme, dicent and argument (thirdness). The application of the rheme sign is associated with words that generate an idea or the possibility of something. The rheme can also generate the meaning of the song in totality, depending on your personal understanding of the words and sentiments within the song.

This song at a general level focuses on a woman who has fallen from grace or who is living on the perimeter of society. However, this does not affect her status within the space she is situated. Ultimately this woman is securing the power of owning her own space (the bar room). She does

not allow the concept of a 'woman's place' to distract from her importance within this space. This woman is not the president of a country or a woman in high power, she is living a 'regular' life, yet she has found a meaning and a place where she feels she is in control of her own destiny. While she has set aside other dreams, she has embraced her current space and place, and embodied the power that comes with her position. She is the ruler of this space, she is in control of who she is, and of who she wants to be. By taking this control she is portraying a strong sense of self, thus controlling the room and 'the jesters'. The messaging in this song are relatable and inspiring. Women audience members listen to the lyrics of a powerful woman who is ruling the space which is generally associated with male power. These lyrics are encouraging women to secure their own power within arenas dominated by men, and utilise their own sense of self to be seen as strong, independent women. This is also reinforcing Philomena Begley's power within a music genre that is dominated by men at this time. Not only is she singing about power relations of her own lived experience, she is voicing the power relations of society at large.

By compiling the layers of meaning from trichotomy I to trichotomy III of Peirce's phenomenology, the analysis has illustrated how these representations create meaningfulness for the listener (Thirdness). Analysed through this method, music can generate meaning in multi-layered ways. This in turn generates the sense of meaningfulness, understanding how the audience create meaning for themselves. The same can be said for the performers, yet they are vessels that allow for the creation of meaningfulness through their portrayals of this music.

4.3.1.1: Women's Place Outside the Home

In *Queen of the Silver Dollar*, Begley is singing about a woman whose life is situated outside of the traditional family home. Ireland during the 1970s was becoming gradually more progressive in all its manifestations, specifically in relation to women's rights and liberation. In particular there were many changes in government policies that aimed at elevating the status of women within society. Changes in policy that aimed to generate equality began in the late

1960s and was pushed forward in the 1970s by the second wave feminist movement.⁸² The contentious subject of article 41.2 of the Irish constitution, that combines womanhood and motherhood and firmly locates them in the home, as highlighted by Buckley and McGing (2011), is pinpointed as a major factor in Ireland's oppression of women. In their chapter on *Women and the Election* Buckley and McGing state:

This constitutional declaration, coupled with the prominence of the Catholic Church in Irish society, which viewed the role of women as being child bearers, carers and nurturers, meant that Irish women were met with strong cultural, societal and legal barriers in their attempts to enter public life (Buckley and McGing 2011, p.224).

Ciara Meehan (2013) discusses the second wave feminist movement that came to the fore in Ireland in the 1970s and how women began to enact their own positionality on the subject of

⁸² Policies that were introduced during the 1970s were: 1973 the marriage bar was removed, 1974 the Anti-Discrimination (1974, Anti-Discrimination (pay) Act, 1976 the Family Home Protection Act, 1977 the Employment Equality act, 1979 the Health (Family Planning) Act (Connolly 2003; Kenny 2009; Buckley and McGing 2011; Da Col Richert 2013; Meehan 2013; 2021).

gender equality. Meehan details a magazine produced by women in UCD in the mid 1970s that advertised the perfect job for a woman, in a tongue and cheek way (image 4.1).

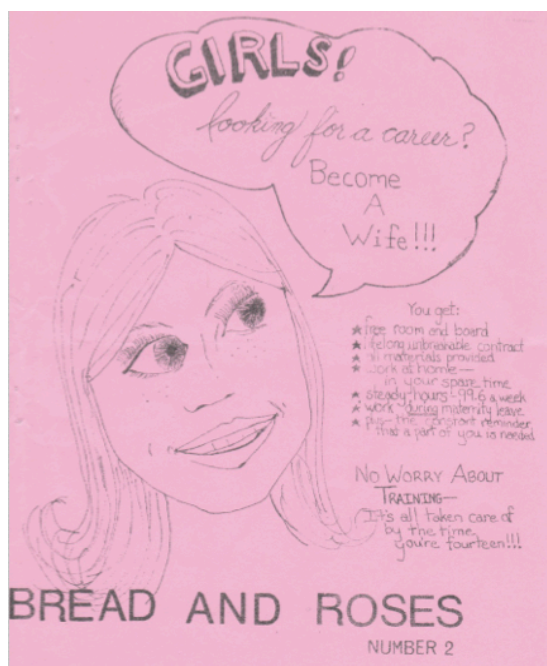


Image 4. 1: Magazine cover c.1974 (Hidden History of UCD).

The sarcasm of the statement ‘Girls! Looking for a career? Become a wife!!’ underlines frustrations concerning the inequality women faced during this time.⁸³ The frustrations of women were met with growing numbers of liberation groups forming and meeting around the country to hear the voice of women. Yet, as Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert (2013) discusses, not all women reaped the rewards of the changes in policy, with women in rural Ireland still living in unequal conditions.⁸⁴

Begley’s performance of *Queen of the Silver Dollar* can be read as speaking out against the traditional gender roles associated with Irish urban and particularly rural lifestyles. The majority of Begley’s audience were from the rural communities of Ireland. This song is not only

⁸³ The advertisement goes further to detail the positive attributes that can be associated with being a wife, and concludes with a reference to training for the role of a wife, stating: ‘it’s all been taken care of by the time you’re fourteen’ (ibid).

⁸⁴ The role of ‘men as the breadwinner and controlling activities in the public sphere while women as the mothers and homemakers are in charge of the private sphere’ was still very much part of the rural lifestyle during the 1970s in Ireland, with 62% of women engaged in domestic duties in 1971 (Da Col Richert 2013, p 127-135).

highlighting the story of a woman who is making a life for herself outside of these ‘traditional’ roles, but also drawing attention to a woman securing a sense of power in a space typically dominated by men. The song finishes as a biographical song, as the words state ‘I’m the Queen of the silver dollar’, identifying Philomena Begley with those lyrics and her position in Irish country music. This generates a connection for Begley to the lyrics she is singing, she has not prescribed to the traditional role of the homemaker. The song lyrics and the meaning within the song generate a sense of meaningfulness within the audience to whom she sings. The changing culture of Ireland of the mid 1970s enabled the song to receive popularity with the audience. It also allowed for the song to speak about the changing nature of gender roles that in turn creates a sense of meaningfulness within the audience.

4.3.2: Margo: Will Your Lawyer Talk to God?

O’Donnell recorded and released *Will Your Lawyer Talk to God* in 1989. Similar to Begley’s song, it is set in a foxtrot dance structure in simple quadruple time, popular in Irish country music (Firstness). The track opens with the fiddle, drums, bass and guitar setting the tone and the tempo of the song in G major. The fiddle plays a high descending melody line that becomes

evident as an imitation of the melody line from the chorus. This is supported by the addition of electric guitar to conclude the melodic introduction.

The musical score is arranged in five staves, all in 4/4 time and the key of D major (one sharp). The staves are labeled as follows from top to bottom: Voice, Violin, Lead Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drumset. The Voice staff contains a whole rest. The Violin staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, a quarter note F#4, and a quarter note G4. The Lead Guitar staff is marked 'Intro' and begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note D4, a quarter note E4, and a quarter note F#4. The Bass Guitar staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note D3, a quarter note E3, and a quarter note F#3. The Drumset staff begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note D, a quarter note S, and a quarter note D. The second measure of the introduction features a complex rhythmic pattern: the Violin, Lead Guitar, and Bass Guitar all play a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F#4), while the Drumset plays a triplet of eighth notes (D, S, D). This pattern repeats in the third and fourth measures.

Musical Example 4. 3: Will Your Lawyer Talk to God Introduction.

O'Donnell's voice is complemented by the electric guitar in harmonic coloration throughout both verse and chorus. In the chorus there are subtle male backing vocals on the 'important lines' such as 'will your lawyer talk to God', and the addition of 'oohh's' when O'Donnell sings 'man made laws to set you free on earth, but is God satisfied'. The bass guitar and drums play a steady pattern akin to a walking bass line evident in the jive beat. Both instruments continue

this pattern throughout the entire song and are the primal structure for maintaining the strong foundation for the song.

Chorus

7 Law - yer Talk to god and plead your case up on high and de-

Vo.

Vln.

L. Gtr.

B. Guit.

Drs.

Musical Example 4. 4: 'Will Your Lawyer Talk to God' chorus highlighting the drums and bass guitar movement.

After the first chorus is completed the violin takes an eight-bar solo utilising the melodic material of the chorus before O'Donnell re-enters for the second verse. At this point the song modulates to a new key of A Major. The second verse and chorus follow a similar pattern as the first instance of each. The only alteration is the repetition of the last line, where she concludes the song in solo voice.

Your lawyer called today, and said he had the papers all prepared.

And to sign my name was all I had to do.

He seen the Judge now he seen me, there's only one thing left

Will your lawyer talk to God for you?

Will your lawyer talk to god and plead your case upon high

And defend the way you broke my heart in two

Man made laws to set you free on earth, but is God satisfied.

Will your lawyer talk to God for you

We all face the final judgment, and it's very strict they say

When your time comes, I wonder what you'll do

Will you bow your head in shame? Or will turn your head away

or will your lawyer talk to God for you

Will your lawyer talk to god and plead your case upon high
 And defend the way you broke my heart in two
 Man made laws to set you free on earth, but is God satisfied.
 Will your lawyer talk to God for you?
 Will your lawyer talk to God for you?

Fig 4. 4: Lyrics for 'Will Your Lawyer Talk to God?' Harlan Howard 1961.

This song portrays the story of a broken marriage and the steps that are being taken to be granted a divorce from a female perspective. The protagonist suggests that she has not spoken to her husband since they began divorce proceedings and his lawyer is speaking to her on his behalf. The song appears as though it is a letter to a former lover, addressing him directly. The woman describes her actions and emotions of the experience of divorce. She speaking to herself as well as her estranged husband at the same time, yet there is no evidence of a reply from him here. There is a transference of subject or focus away from the singer, placing the husband's lawyer as the subject: '**your** lawyer', '**He** seen the Judge now **he** seen me' and '**your** case'. She is calling out her husband for his lack of acting for himself when he has decided to file for divorce. The words suggest that the husband has filed for divorce, which she views as shameful, singing: 'will you bow your head in shame or turn your head away'. The protagonist is hurt by this path her estranged husband has taken, and this hurt is shown in the second line of the first verse as she states: 'And to sign my name was all I had to do'. This is alluding to how distanced the lawyer is from the marriage, while also showcasing how easy he thinks it would be just to sign on the dotted line and the marriage is then forgotten. She does not see it that way and does not agree that it is the right path to take. However, as the lawyer has all of the paperwork ready, and has the permission of the judge she has no choice but to follow through with it.

Within these lyrics there are multiple signs that are recognised as a legisign: man, lawyer, judge, God and heart (Secondness). These words are legisigns, as they are signs that are informed by generally agreed understanding and knowledge of what they represent. However, four of the five words can also be sinsigns: man, lawyer, judge and heart. The subject matter sings to

women who may have experienced a difficult relationship, with reference to lawyer and judge, both usually men in positions of respect with an objective role, contrasting with reference to heart, which is usually more feminine and subjective. Several icons are utilised in order for the perceiver to create a connection to the song. There is reference to ‘papers’, signifying a legal document, and actions including ‘plead’, ‘call’, ‘bow your head’, and ‘turn your head’, which may have legalistic connotations. ‘How you broke my heart in two’ is a common metaphor, generating the icon of being ‘heartbroken’, evoking empathy or sympathy from the listener. Other metaphors evident are when O’Donnell sings of, ‘the final judgement’ and ‘when your time comes’, have religious connotations relating to death and the belief that you will meet God after you die. The metaphor is speaking to religious beliefs based on the teachings of the Catholic Church, which do not allow for divorce at this time in Ireland (Thirdness).

There is further emphasis on religious beliefs in the question ‘is God satisfied?’. Other symbols within the lyrics include ‘bow’, ‘defend’, ‘broken’ and ‘man made laws’. These signify respect, or lack thereof, and a division between the law of the church and the law of the land. There is some consideration of the husband’s feelings, and it is suggested that he is affected by his decision, and he bows or turns his head, ultimately suggesting that he may believe that the female protagonist is correct in her admonition of him.

4.3.2.1: Ireland, Divorce and Meaningfulness

In their study *A Comparative History of Church-State Relations in Irish Education* (2011), Tom O’Donoghue and Judith Harford describe Ireland as ‘a country in which Catholicism has always been the religion of the majority and in which the Catholic Church has seen control of education as a way of preserving its influence’ (p.315).⁸⁵ Tom Inglis (1998) suggests that in the:

heyday of the Catholic Church’s power, particularly during the fifty years
after the foundation of the state, its influence expanded beyond the religious

⁸⁵ Michael Carroll (1995) and Stuart Henderson (2019), amongst others, disagree, stating that the Church’s power began to emerge in post-famine Ireland.

field into the field of politics, economics, education, health, social welfare, the media and many other fields. The power of the Church meant that it structured not just the religious life of the Irish people, but their social, political and economic life as well... (1998, p.246).

The election of Seán Lemass as Taoiseach in 1959 and the influence of TK Whitaker on the country's economic development, led to social and cultural change.⁸⁶ Inglis states:

the state abandoned the Church's ideal of a self-sufficient, rural society based on small-scale production in which family, community and religious life took as much precedence as the acquisition of material possessions. From the end of the 1950s the state began to pursue economic growth through increased industrialisation, urbanisation, international trade, science and technology (1998, p.246-247).

In the three decades after Lemass' election Ireland began to experience substantial social and cultural change (Mac Réamoinn 1995; Fahey 1998; O'Toole 2010; Flannery 2015; Holohan 2018). One of the most controversial debates of Irish social history occurred in 1986, with the proposed bill to amend the Irish constitution in order to remove the prohibition on divorce. This was a highly contentious debate within the Irish population. The Catholic Church spoke publicly about the proposed referendum suggesting it to be a 'Frankenstein monster' with one bishop, Bishop McNamara comparing divorce to the 'catastrophe at Chernobyl', (Hug 1998, p.41). Additionally, the Catholic Church morally questioned their congregations, asking them to consider 'if the decision is in accordance with the law of God and based on what a person judges as best serving the common good and in the best interest of future generations' (ibid).⁸⁷ While each political party was said to be 'officially neutral' in this campaign, the anti-divorce side of the argument was highly supported by Fianna Fáil (ibid). The pro-divorce group (DAG

⁸⁶ TK Whitaker was the former secretary of the Department of Finance of Ireland from 1956-1969, and former governor of the Central Bank of Ireland from 1969 to 1976.

⁸⁷ The Catholic Church was not the only anti-divorce campaign in Ireland at the time, however they were in a position to command a great sway over a mass attending audience. Other anti-divorce institutions include lay Catholics, and the ADC (Anti-Divorce Campaign) which was established in April 1986 (Hug 1998).

established in 1980) was the biggest opposition in the 1986 debate; however, this group did not hold enough power to be as vocal or visual as their counterparts. Inevitably in June of that year the referendum was not passed by public vote with a majority of 63.48% voting no (ibid).

In the song *Will your Lawyer Talk to God*, O'Donnell is engaging with current cultural commentary of Ireland at the time. While she did not write the song and has made no statements on her own views of divorce, this song is engaging with the thoughts and feelings of the public to whom she sings. In 1989 O'Donnell's audiences were, for the majority, from rural dwellings and observed the teachings of the Catholic Church. These audiences may not have discussed their own views and opinions about divorce with others outside of the home, however, this song is a significant marker to their positionality. The song is written from the position of a faithful woman who does not believe in divorce and is suggesting that the estranged husband will have to make peace with his decision now, as there may not be forgiveness from 'God' when he dies (Thirdness). These sentiments are thoroughly portrayed by Catholic Church's argument made to the Irish population 1986.

This song is a signifier of meaning and enables meaningfulness with the audience as O'Donnell is bringing the discussion into the minds of the audience and the theme of the song is reminiscent of a fracture of that audience's belief system.

4.3.3: Susan McCann: Big Tom is Still the King

Susan McCann released *Big Tom is Still the King* in 1977 and the song went to number 1 in the Irish charts. This song was the driving force behind McCann's overnight transformation to an Irish country music star and cemented her place as a pivotal female figure in the genre. McCann details how she suggests her success came from this song:

a fella called Michael Commins wrote the song 'Big Tom is still the King', sure Big Tom was massive at the time. And Tony he had the song, he was a great man at picking songs, and picking hit songs, and he knew his job he was just a good manager. And he got me to record it, and sure every Big Tom fan

in the country bought it, and that's, it stayed at number one for I don't know fourteen or fifteen weeks or something, and because everybody was buying it, and everybody loved big Tom and in turn I was lucky enough that the fell in love with me too, and just that how it happened (McCann 2019, Interview).

McCann's point here is to highlight how the community of Irish country music fans welcomed her into their homes, as a result of the content of this song.

Big Tom is Still the King is a 'jive' song performed in a simple quadruple time signature, similar to the two songs previously discussed (Firstness). The song begins in the key of B major with the violin beginning the introduction around the tonic scale.

The musical score for the introduction of 'Big Tom is Still the King' is presented in a multi-staff format. The key signature is B major (two sharps) and the time signature is 4/4. The staves are labeled as follows:

- Lead Vocals:** Three measures of whole rests.
- Lead Guitar:** Three measures of whole rests.
- Violin:** Starts with a whole rest, followed by a melodic line in B major. The first note is B4, followed by C#5, D5, E5, F#5, G5, A5, B5. There are triplets under the notes C#5, D5, E5 and F#5, G5, A5.
- Rhythm Guitar:** Three measures of a syncopated pattern of chords: B4, D5, F#5, G5, A5, B5.
- Electric Guitar:** Three measures of whole rests.
- Bass Guitar:** Three measures of a simple line: B2, D3, F#3, G3, A3, B3.
- Drumset:** Three measures of a crotchet bass drum and quaver snare pattern.

Musical Example 4. 5: Big Tom is Still The King Introduction.

The drums consist of crotchet bass drum under a quaver snare drum movement, while the Hi-Hat is utilising quaver-semi-quaver movement. Again, the rhythm section is utilising the syncopated rhythm patterns to create the recognisable Irish 'jive' beat. The bass line is moving from tonic to dominant of each harmonic chord while rhythm guitar replicates the Hi-HAT rhythm of the drums. The chorus invites an element instrumental 'freedom' as there is a call and response between lead guitar, fiddle and steel guitar. These play an important role in

harmonising the song, and are utilised for melodic colouration throughout. The bass guitar continues with the I-V movement utilised in the previous songs discussed however, the rhythm pattern has changed from a dotted-quaver-semiquaver to crotchet movement throughout the verse. This generates another level to the syncopation of the rhythm of the ‘jive’.

The musical score is for the chorus of 'Big Tom is Still The King Chorus'. It features seven staves: L. Voc., L. Gtr., Vln., R. Gtr., El. Guit., B. Guit., and Drs. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line (L. Voc.) has lyrics: 'you can have your Way - lon Jenn- ings or'. The electric guitar (El. Guit.) plays a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The bass guitar (B. Guit.) plays a crotchet (quarter note) pattern. The drums (Drs.) play a pattern of quarter notes with 'x' marks above them, indicating a specific drum sound. The right guitar (R. Gtr.) plays a series of chords. The violin (Vln.) has a whole rest. The left guitar (L. Gtr.) has a whole rest.

Musical Example 4. 6: Big Tom is Still The King Chorus.

In the chorus the bass guitar changes rhythm pattern to a dotted-quaver-crotchet pattern enhancing the rhythmic drive. All instruments are incorporated throughout the chorus which alludes to the importance of lyrics contained within. The instruments then return to a stripped back arrangement for the second verse, with the steel guitar becoming more prominent towards the second chorus. The song structure follows a standard four-line verse with rhyming phrases or words to end each line. McCann is the solo vocalist on this track with no backing vocals or harmonies added. The musical structure stays the same through the song, transitioning from tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant harmony throughout.

The ballrooms in this country are living proof today
Of a man who's now a legend from Wicklow to Galway
We love our country music, to us it's everything

It don't matter what they tell you, Big Tom is still the King.

With fever-pitched excitement, country music on our mind,
I'd drive one hundred miles to hear that voice so warm and kind
And I can still recall now the first time I heard him sing
I feel proud to be from 'Blaney, where Big Tom is still the King

You can have your Waylon Jennings or Nashville's Charlie Pride
They boast of all their superstars, but for us it's Tom McBride
Oh Nashville is so far away, it scarcely means a thing
But when you're in Old Ireland, Big Tom is still the King.

Next time you're down in Wexford or West in old Mayo
Don't need to ask who's the King? They chose Big Tom long ago
You can ask the stars in Ireland, they say he's got the swing
They'd be the first to tell you, Big Tom is still the King

You can have your Waylon Jennings or Nashville's Charlie Pride
They boast of all their superstars, but for us it's Tom McBride
Oh Nashville is so far away, it scarcely means a thing
But when you're in Old Ireland, Big Tom is still the King.
But when you're in Old Ireland, Big Tom is still the king.

Fig 4. 5: Lyrics for 'Big Tom is Still the King'. Words by Michael Commins 1976, music by Waylon Jennings 1974.

4.3.3.1: Place, Nostalgia and Meaningfulness

Andy Bennett suggests that 'the significance of music in relation to the articulation of notions of community and collective identity, grounded in physically demarcated urban and rural spaces, is matched by its role in the articulation of symbolic notions of community, which transgress both place and time' (Bennett 2017, p.4). McCann, through these lyrics creates credibility while also articulating meaningfulness to the lives of both the performer and the audience. In the documentary *Secret Languages: Folk Art*, first broadcast by RTÉ in 1982, J. Ardle McArdle discusses the connection between country music and the Irish audiences with reference to *Big Tom is Still the King* stating:

here we have our first deliberate cliché, Ireland is a predominantly rural
country and the homespun philosophy of Nashville strikes a chord in farmers

hearts that was never struck by Mozart and Motown. The identification is immediate, but the secret language is there as well. Country and western music manages to combine the earthy realities of family life with quasi-religious parables of sin, redemption and all forgiving love. Life is a veil of tears, home is heaven, heaven is home and Big Tom McBride has sold a million records (McArdle 1982 in TopRankEntertainment, 2013).

These sentiments are evident in the words of this song, while additionally in its chart success. McCann refers to both the rural and national within an Irish context (Thirdness). She grabs the attention of the audience by referring to specific places such as ‘Wicklow or Galway’ in the first verse, and repeating the tactic with reference to different places in the other verses (Secondness). By doing this, McCann is speaking directly to specific audiences, the listener in Wicklow or Galway, allowing them to feel a connection with the artist and with the lyrics. Referring to placenames helps create a sense of community, a shared culture and identity: this person knows ‘us’, they are speaking to ‘us’ and singing the same sentiments that ‘we’ have. McCann not only references locations across the island of Ireland, but also speaks of the local in colloquial terms. She sings “I feel proud to be from ‘Blaney” making the local connection to Castleblaney, Co. Monaghan, in local terms, allowing herself to be consumed as a local woman, in the rural context (Secondness and Thirdness). Writing about monuments and spaces for engaging in musicking in the context of Irish traditional music, Kearney proposes:

Other spaces of meaning are constructed through the construction of a landscape of memory The meanings invested in the visual landscape and the sounds of that landscape, when combined, can offer perspectives about the people, society or organisation that designed, composed and constructed them (Kearney 2010, p.8).

McCann again places herself in line with the audiences when she speaks of driving ‘one hundred miles’ to hear him play. The localised idea of music in Ireland is prominent here. She suggests that driving one hundred miles in Ireland is a long distance, however it wouldn’t matter

as long as you got to hear Big Tom sing. McCann here places geographical importance on the lengths audiences will go to in order to listen to ‘The King’ of Irish country music (Thirdness). She acknowledges that driving one hundred miles in the 1970s demonstrated commitment on behalf of the audience. Declan Nerney adds: ‘Big Tom was Ireland’s Elvis; right up until he died people were coming from all over the country to meet him in person at his home in Co Monaghan’ (Nerney in Kiernan 2018).

The opening line of the song draws the audience back to the iconic rural dance venues where many of them would have visited and experienced country music in its live format. Country music in Ireland in 1977 was at a peak. Country bands were dominating the dancehall and live performance circuit during this time (Maguire, 2012; Millar, 2014; Lynn, 2017; Gallagher, 2017; Martin, 2018). With this opening line McCann is encouraging the audience to absorb this sense of popular culture and community through the music in ‘the ballrooms of this country’. Andy Bennett states that ‘music ... can bond displaced peoples, effectively bridging the geographic distance and providing a shared sense of community’ (Bennett 2017, p.5). Irish country music was popular culture in Ireland at that time as evident with the song reaching number one in the Irish charts. Geographer George Carney suggests that ‘popular culture serves as a mirror wherein society can see itself and better understand its own character and needs’ (Carney 1995, p.3). The words in this song are capturing the zeitgeist of the seventies Irish country music scene, both within and outside of the island of Ireland.

McCann creates the image of Big Tom as a ‘gentle giant’ that is loved by all, attributing some feminine qualities to him in the process. His voice is warm and kind, he is not rude or rough. McCann sings about him in the way that he is perceived by his audience. The song paints him as the father figure or the warm friend next door (Secondness and Thirdness). A vital element in this song is that it is representative of the audience and their admiration for Big Tom. While the song is not written by McCann she is adopting a persona and expressing how well liked and

respected he is all across the country. The popularity of the song, which reached number one in the Irish charts, is testament to this.

The chorus of the song discusses Nashville and major American country music stars Waylon Jennings and Charlie Pride. Nashville is considered the home of country music but in this song the singer states that it is ‘so far away it scarcely means a thing’. This validates Irish country music as a separate art form despite the song being a pastiche of American country music. The chorus mentions both Nashville and two of its stars, yet McCann manages to place legitimacy on Ireland’s own music and ‘her King’. Despite the musical referencing, she is disregarding Nashville because it is so far away. Instead, she is praising Big Tom as he is in Ireland as an active musician, who helped establish the genre of Irish country music (Secondness and Thirdness).

While appealing to an Irish audience, this song also reaches out to a diasporic Irish audience, particularly one located in the USA. McCann is also making a connection with diasporic communities referencing ‘old Ireland’, an emigrant phrase more popular in America, and evoking the sense of being back home in Ireland in these places or remembering places they may have seen Big Tom perform. It alludes to a place they had to leave but of which they have fond memories that can involve or be evoked by music. This type of storytelling adds to the creation of meaningfulness in the lives of the audience and the performer.

This is evident in McCann’s own words when asked about country music songs content:

I was on a boat there recently on a cruise to Bermuda, and I, one of the shows there, I’m only back there last week, and one of the shows that I did, there were people sitting down in the front row crying, I sang *The Town I Loved So Well*, there were tears dripping from them, now I’m sure not because of my singing, but they probably left Ireland whatever amount of years ago, and there Irish American all on this trip with Irish music and its traditional Irish tour, cruise, it’s not country it’s traditional Irish only I sing my country and

ballads, I sing more Irish too than I do [country]. But you know sitting crying when I sang *The Town I Loved So Well*. It means so much to them, it really really does, and it's the same with country, it doesn't have to be an Irish song it's the same with *I Just Drove By To See If Things Had Changed*, and *The Coat Of Many Colours* and you know, a song that Patsy Cline recorded *I Cried All The Way To The Altar*. Are you aware of that one, great stories to the songs. People, [like the] goofs in Dublin I call them, that don't rate country music, [they] would laugh at that, oh well that song's about crying, somebody's getting divorced, and so, no it's not [just about that]. Country songs are written from the heart, you know. And it's not all about people getting divorced, and people crying and yapping, it's not all about that, there are some great, great country songs written. Like if you listen to the story of *The Coat Of Many Colours*, what a song, brilliant. And that other one *Teach Your Children* that's a great song too like. Great song. You know that's my summing up of it (McCann 2019, Interview).

Here McCann is highlighting the impact of songs on her audiences. Some of the songs she performs create a sense of meaningfulness through memory, nostalgia and narrative song. Ramón Pelinski, (2000 and cited in 2016) discussed Simon Frith's work on musical understanding and meaning, stating:

Frith observes that the interpellative function of music does not originate from immanent meanings, but from the meanings that *the listeners themselves assign* to the music. As in the case of homology, if meanings were inherent in the musical material, the listener would not be able to relate to them; therefore, musical meanings are to be understood as social constructions; this would explain why they are often contradictory ... (Pelinski in Salgar 2016, p.3-4).

The above statement by Pelinski states that meaning, and understanding are interpreted differently for all people at the same time. Yet, that meaning creates a sense of community, comfort, nostalgia, and self-worth. In a culture where the majority of Irish country music

audiences were living in rural Ireland, one of their social outlets was to attend dances. This music was a way for them to express themselves. It was, and still is, a meaningful cultural expression of their love of music, dance and community.

4.3.4: Belonging and Meaningfulness

In writing about early European history and cities shared interested in folk music, Philip Bohlman states:

Music played [and still plays] a role in expressing the common culture of a people because it was in a language shared by the people and was part of their daily lives and rituals. Music was thought to be inseparable from the essence of culture. As such, it could express the culture's past, share traits of a language, and articulate religious belief. In doing so, music differentiated one society from another on the basis of national, regional, and linguistic styles (Bohlman 2016, p.254).

For the rural population, Irish country music was (and is) a representation of their social structures, their daily lives, and the hardships they may have endured during their lives. The music, combined with dancing, is a way for this society to express themselves. Audiences travel to see bands in rural and local parochial halls and in more sub-urban areas of hotel function rooms, and ballrooms. The distance travelled by audiences and bands alike does not matter once each participant is engaged in this cultural expression, which was, and continues to be, facilitated by the greater mobility amongst the rural population.

In the early years of the new state there was an ideological up lifting of rural Ireland that was not underpinned by financial support. The reality was quite different in the 1950s and 1960s. The supposed similarity with national narratives covered over diversities such as regional inequalities in wealth and opportunity (Basegmez 2005). With these inequalities and differences unapologetically apparent to the rural population, Irish country music became a 'symbol of social boundaries in all the fields through which it exists' (Kayhan 2014, p.150).

This music was telling the story of the lives of the rural Irish public; emigration, living off the land, family, love, hero's, and happiness. With that said it also became a 'symbol of social boundaries' for those who did not like the music, many of whom were located in urban Ireland. The urban areas of Ireland moved with the economic and social changes that came in the 1960s and prescribed to the rock and folk music movements that followed. The urban population were looking to the future with hope, excitement and the promise of prosperity. Cities according to Kayhan are:

[a] centre of achievement, learning, and communication, as well as a space of aggressive togetherness, ambition and noisiness. The province [Sub-urban, rural areas], on the other hand, is the space of the natural way of life, peace, innocence, and simple virtues, but also of backwardness, ignorance, and limitations (Kayhan 2014, p.151).

The urban population were moving away from the old ways of Ireland. This was especially true of the music. The larger city populations were unmoved by the simplicity of Irish country music, uninterested in the lyrical content and unable to make any meaningful connection to it. Irish country music is based and engaged with primarily outside of the urban/city centres. This allows the population to keep the distinction between of the rural and the urban way of life. This distinction generates a platform for detractors of country music to come to the fore. Such detractors commentary can be viewed in Paul Maguire's PhD where he collected some highly controversial descriptions of Irish country music:

The real enemy was Country 'n' Irish, and its practitioners were seen as the Saddams of the Irish concert circuit, carpet-bombing the towns and villages of Ireland with their **twanging**, trad-flavoured musical **Scuds**. They were, to paraphrase Bono, from an Ireland that we didn't want anything to do with, but

into which we had been corralled by prevailing tastes (Kevin Courtney in Maguire 2012, p.6).

I've nothing against country and western in principle, but the variety that became popular in Ireland was possibly the **worst** aspect of it. Musically it was fairly **uninteresting**, and so were the lyrics (Robert Ballagh in Maguire 2012, p.6).

The genre has a **tiny vocabulary**, as indeed do several of its perpetrators. The handful of key words are: Ramblin'. Mother. Lovely. Road. Mother. Old. Travellin'. Mother. Farewell. Fields. Dear. Mountains. Mother. Home. Kissin'. Missin'. Mother. Leitrim (D. Corless in Maguire 2012, p.6).

I went to see the Mainliners because I had heard of them but like most musicians hadn't seen too many other bands. I thought they were **a comedy act**. This was 1965-64. I couldn't believe it (McGlynn in Maguire 2012, p.7).

Gentle Mother was such a hit and on the other hand it got such **slagging**. Terry Wogan and them used to play it on **RTE and they'd laugh** (Morgan in Maguire 2012, p 7).

Northern Irish country music - have we found the **worst genre** of music imaginable? I am trying but literally **can think of nothing worse** - and I'm trying believe me even just for humour's sake. (The guardian.co.uk in Maguire 2012, p.7) (bolding emphasis added to highlight derogatory descriptions).

While these are a collection of documented commentary on country music, I argue that this music creates that sense of meaningfulness and belonging by singing songs to which the audience can relate. As we have seen above, all three women have released songs that have both cultural and personal content contain within. These women present relatable songs so that the audience are able to generate both a sense of meaning and belonging to the music and the

community. Each of these three women also believe that their music is meaningful and creates that relatability to the audience:

It probably is heart music from the heart. Because that you know most of these songs, Like, really and truly. Like most of them country songs it would take the heart out of you ... Like country music like there is no doubt in the world that it would eh.... like its country music its happy and its sad. It's just everything, country music deals with everything. I think. It deals with everything, it leaves nothing out, and I mean nothing. It deals with everything (Begley 2020, Interview).

I would be more at home with the fans, than with artists ... fans that I had they grew up with me, they were coming into the dancehalls and they were dancing to me, that was the line of enjoyment, that was the entertainment you know, and all of those people, if they had nothing else at the end of the week, they were waiting for the new single from some singer, they were in and they were buying it. But it was because we grew together, you know there's so many different avenues now, and that is the way it is, but we were so lucky that people came to the dance, that they met their future husband or wife, then they went off the scene to have their families, and now they are back out again, so you're a winner all the way because they love to reminisce, and remember back to where they were ... My fans are my friends in the bigger picture, they really are (O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

I recorded a song one time it was called *I just drove by to see if things had changed*, and the minute I heard it I think of up home where things have changed drastically. The house we lived in is all changed, there's a new house built there and it's not like it was. The whole area has changed, and when I heard it, I thought that's definitely, I'm going to record that song – I just drove

by to see if things had changed. Lovely song. So yeah, it's music from the heart there's no doubt (McCann 2019, Interview).

The sentiments of these three women about their music and their fans reinforce the concept of meaningfulness and belonging. They relate to and situate themselves in the lives of their audiences, through their music. Thus, creating a real sense of community, belonging and meaningfulness through mutual musical experience.

4.4: Conclusion

Audiences have embodied and verbalised articulations of meaning by connecting with the lyrics of songs. As Fox (2004) detailed, the meaning is generated by the connection that the audience have made to the lyrics within the song, and how these lyrics relate to their own lives.

While not specifically discussing identity here, the audiences of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann are identifying with the music the three women are performing. Through the use of language and performance style, these women are articulating the themes of the songs to the audience in a particular way. Thus, enabling the audience to generate a specific type of meaning for each individual. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have all detailed, in their biographies and in personal interviews, how much of an impact their music has had on their fans. They speak of the music as 'real music for real people'. They both understand the lyrical content of the songs, and also the lives of those to whom they sing. Irish country music has a community in which the fans and the artists are active participants. Within this community, the people are connected through language, experience and understanding of shared text (Fox 2004). The audience interpretation of the songs is twofold: 1) the audiences are generating a meaningful connection to the songs and 2) the artists are generating meaningfulness for themselves and audiences in a modernist world.

As suggested previously by Frith (1996) and Pelinski (2000), music allows for multiple meanings to be created for listeners at any given time. These sentiments fall parallel with the theories advocated by Derrida and Foucault, that there is no one universal truth in a given

language, only deferred meaning and the use of discourse to develop understanding and knowledge. Additionally, through the use of Turino's (1999; 2008; 2014) semiotic understanding, the multi-layered phenomenon of signs reinforces the concepts of no universal truth, simply deferred meaning. Music allows for multiple meanings to be generated through time and space. The performance of these three songs in different geographic locations, at different times in history allows for an individual personal meaning to be created by both performer and audience member. The songs discussed in this chapter do not boast of a universal truth, their meanings are deferred, and they are deliberated over within the discourse of Irish country music. Country music in Ireland is a constant source of meaning which articulates a personal world and is vital form of personal expression.

Chapter 5: Visual Image analysis

5.1: Introduction

Visual imagery is a constant aspect of an icon, artist, and performer's life. This chapter presents an analysis of the visual imagery of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann on three album covers, to highlight the identity markers, social and cultural norms, and gender markers that are prescribed to woman performers. In this chapter I discuss how Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann's identity markers evolved over time and how they present these markers in their album covers. This illustrates how these women are representative of a specific type of Irish audience and Irish society. Furthermore, it showcases the impact and influence of contemporary fashion on women Irish country music stars. Album covers and art are integral to the communication of a musicians' identities. Keith Negus states:

The cover of an album defines an artist in a specific way, locating them as a particular type of human being and as a product placed within the market categories of the music industry. The artwork and iconography is there to seduce the consumer to purchase the product (1997, p.186).

Negus highlights the importance of visual image and iconography in the modern music industry. Here he suggests that the 'artwork and iconography' on the cover of an album have a function that he terms 'consumer commodities'. I argue that the album cover also serves as a narrative totem for the artist. I utilise album covers from three separate periods of the performing career of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann to conduct an analysis of the images presented. This analysis reinforces the evolution process of their own identity throughout these periods. Every album, picture, and poster that has been produced and published tells a story. By examining albums from three distinct periods of the careers of Begley, O'Donnell, and

McCann, I demonstrate how visual images and iconography are vehicles for the identity narratives and presentations of these artists.

5.1.1: Theoretical Frameworks

A significant quantity of writing on visual imagery has been published in popular music studies. The work of theorists such as Dick Hebdige (1979), Linda Kalof (1993), Nicola Dibben (2002), Klaus Kaindl (2005), Marion Leonard (2007), Keith Negus (1997; 2010), Sheila Whiteley (1997; 2000) and Leigh Edwards (2018) have fundamentally informed and contributed to the critical understanding presented in this chapter. Particularly their focus on artists, imagery, commodities, and the modern music industry, at large. The work of Lucy Green (1997), David Machin (2010), Nadine Hubbs (2014) and Tes Slominski (2020) on visual imagery, representation, and iconography have significantly informed my analytical model for this chapter.

My research engages in multimodal semiotic analysis as developed by David Machin (2010). In *Analysing Popular Music: Image, Sound and Text* Machin details how his approach to analysis includes an examination of image, iconography, musical sound, and text (which include lyrics, clothing, commodities, music video, appearances, albums, singles and interviews). Drawing from contemporary theorists (Halliday, 1978; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 2002), Machin developed a ‘multimodal semiotic analysis’ model to aid in the analysis of popular music (Machin 2010, p.7). Halliday’s work is directed at social semiotics and how lexical and grammatical options are used to build meaning or ‘meaning potential’ (1978, p.1). Additionally, Kress and van Leeuwen have argued that these same elements can be applied to visual communications (1996: 2002). Machin goes further to state that since there are a multitude of choices available to ‘create combinations [they] do not have fixed meanings, but have ‘meaning potential’ (Machin 2010, p.7). In order to analyse the iconography in the album images of Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann, I utilise Machin’s

‘multimodal semiotics’, as it enables this analysis to examine the album covers from multiple semiotic positions. Machin argues that the researcher must understand the multitude of potential choices available to the communicator before the research can produce a succinct analysis of the ‘given’ meaning. Machin’s concept of meaning potential was previously detailed in the work Thomas Turino (*Thirdness*) (1999; 2008; 2014). Turino’s work alongside that of Machin’s model will provide a large catalogue of vocabulary to conduct this analysis, and understand the meaning potential.

In Machin’s theory he states that ‘we first describe the semiotic choices found in a text or visual composition and, second, describe the way that meaning potentials are activated’ (Machin 2010, p.8). He suggests that one must have an ‘inventory of words’ to be able to describe what we are seeing in order to analyse it to its full potential (Machin 2010, p.10). This ‘inventory of words’ is then supplemented by the idea of an image ‘denoting or connoting’ something.⁸⁸ Influenced by the work of Roland Barthes (1977), Machin is engaging in how images portray or reference particular things at one time, and have ‘metaphorical association’ at another (ibid). Thus, giving rise to meaning potential, not fixed meanings. Machin provides signposts of

⁸⁸ ‘On one level images can be said to document. In other words, they show *particular* events, *particular* people, places, and things. Or in semiotic terminology, they *denote* ... other images will still depict people, places, things, and events, but ‘denotation’ is not their primary or only purpose. They depict concrete people, places, things, and events to get general or abstract *ideas* across. They use them to *connote* ideas and concepts’ (Machin 2010, p. 35).

analysis bringing the researcher from one aspect of the image to the next, detailing how to engage in this type of image analysis.

Iconographical Elements	Modality
Poses	Articulation of detail of elements and background
Gaze	Light and shadow
Social Distance	Tone
Objects	Depth of vision
Settings	Modulation of colours
Typeface	Saturation of colours
Saliency (Size, Colour, Tone, Focus, Foregrounding, Overlapping)	

Table 5. 1: David Machin (2010) guide to conduct image analysis (pp.33-57).

Machin's model enables the researcher to assess the image, and provides a guides through the process of semiotic choices and potential meanings. These semiotic choices and potential meanings are in all aspects of the piece being analysed. These aspects are broken down to examine individual elements including the space used by the artists, their pose, and the gaze of the artists. The analysis also engages with the shot distance and its relevant meaning, additional

objects contained in the image, clothing and what it could potentially represent, and salience (Machin, 2010). Machin states that:

artists need to tell us about themselves, about who they are, their meanings as an act and how to understand their music, not just through the kinds of sounds they make, but also through the way they look and move, through the photographs in which we see them and the art work they use on record sleeves (Machin 2010, p.32).

These elements detailed by Machin are the key concepts analysed in this chapter. The analysis considers what identity markers are utilised as each artists identity evolves, and how that impacts a change in presentation on their album covers.

Concepts of femininity are also integral to my analysis. Lucy Green's book *Music, Gender, Education* (1997), and in particular her chapter entitled 'Affirming femininity: women singing, women enabling' has also provided an interesting theoretical framework for this chapter. Green gives four reasons why women singers display patriarchal concepts of femininity:

[1] The female singer is affirming her femininity by singing and is therefore embodying femininity as defined by a patriarchal society, 2) the absence of technology in female singing, 3) 'the image of the paid female singer who puts body and voice on public display has inevitably been associated in practically all known societies with that of the sexual temptress or prostitute', 4) 'the association with public sexual availability is opposed to an alternative face of woman which has always been present as the corollary of availability' (1997, p.28-29).

These four elements are what culminate in the cornerstones of gendered musical practices for Green. It is also here that Green introduces a discussion of the 'gaze' with which women are viewed, relating back to Auslander's (2004) performer persona in chapter three. Commenting

on the power differential developed through the construction of a metaphorical mask, Green notes that the displayer has the power of ‘the lure’, while the onlooker is ‘passively in danger of becoming seduced and ensnared by the mask’ (Green 1997, p, 22). Alternatively, the displayer is ‘passive, weakened by the necessity to be partially concealed’ while the onlooker has the ‘disarming power of the gaze’ (ibid). I utilise Green’s application of the concepts of gaze, power relations, and ‘affirming femininity’ in the analysis of the images portrayed by Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann on their album covers.

With a focus on country music in the USA, Nadine Hubbs’ book *Rednecks, Queers and Country Music* (2014) also informs this critical engagement with image and identity. Hubbs’ book centres on the discourse of working-class society and middle-class society in the USA. Hubbs suggests that middle-class society create the narrative for all people living in the USA. The middle-class narrative suggests that country music and southern working-class society, are perceived as less valuable and inferior, in order to make middle-and upper-class societies more valuable. Hubbs’ analysis of the ‘Redneck woman’ and the concepts she puts forward on the ‘consumption and self-construction’ in line with Bourdieu’s concept, where the ““object” of sociology’s classification produces her own “classifying operations”” are very important here (Hubbs 2014, p.118). Hubbs’ argument centres around the American country music artist Gretchen Wilson and her portrayal of the ‘Redneck woman’. Hubbs suggests that Wilson is utilising the descriptions associated with ‘Redneck’ in a positive way. These social and cultural markers are what create the ideology of the real ‘Redneck’. According to Hubbs, Wilson has the cultural knowledge of these markers and utilises them as a call to arms for her fans. ‘Redneck’ is a term that is often used as a derogatory term in the USA (Hubbs 2014). It may be compared with the Irish term ‘culchie’, usually used to refer to people from rural, and

agrarian backgrounds in Ireland.⁸⁹ Providing a variety of potential origins and etymologies for the term, Kelly Holmes asserts: ‘In very broad terms a culchie is a person who is not from Dublin’ (2019, p.353). In most instances, the term is used in a derogatory manner, but may be appropriated as a positive attribute in some instances. While Ireland is not known to have a classed society, those who live and work in rural areas were understood to be working-class (Finnegan and Merrill, 2015). Utilising Hubbs’ framework aids in assessing the album covers of Philomena Begley, Margo O’Donnell, and Susan McCann, and in determining if they incorporate elements of the Irish culchie.

The representation of women in Ireland is also varied and problematic. Slominski (2020) discusses various manifestations of Irish identity, the most notable are those developed by Irish nationalism and consequent association with gender identities. In discussing ideals surrounding women musicians during the twentieth century in Irish traditional music, Slominski highlights the conceptualisation and representation of Ireland as ‘mother’ ‘maiden’ or ‘virgin’.⁹⁰ In this discourse Slominski suggests that this ideology of Ireland as feminine was an ideal that established Ireland as an entity unable to defend ‘herself’ and thus must be protected by the men of the country. This concept is seen in the long history of Irish poetry and song – the song *Roisín Dúbh* for example or invocations of the Shan Van Vocht.⁹¹ The narrative of the new state suggests that during the Irish rebellion women were not frontline activists but were the domestic support systems for fathers, brothers, husbands and sons who fought to protect them

⁸⁹ See Lynn, C. (2021) ‘“Classifying Operations”: Constructing and Manufacturing identities in American and Irish country music’.

⁹⁰ See also Joanne Cusack (2022) ‘A Woman’s Heart: Women, Feminism, and a Communal Voice’. *New Hibernia Review* [online] 26(1), pp.103-122. Available: http://www.pdcnet.org/nhr/content/nhr_2002_0026_001_0103_0122 [accessed 30 April 2022].

⁹¹ ‘the Shan van Vocht’ (“The poor old woman”) portrays Ireland as a *cailleach* – a mythological pan-celtic figure of creation and destruction, a visionary and untameable crone. In the song (The Shan van Vocht), the Shan van Vocht incites rebels to action by predicting victory in the ultimately doom Rebellion of 1798... the ballad scholar Georges Denis Zimmermann argues that it and other street songs represented the beliefs and aspirations of working-class Irish people. Although this generalization is suspiciously broad, it locates the personification of Ireland-as-woman in both oral and written tradition’ (Slominski 2020, p.31). The song also retains a political message and feminine personification of Ireland similar to that of the *aisling* (vision or dream) genre, in which Ireland appears as a human woman (ibid).

and Ireland.⁹² Slominski utilises the concept of social norms and expectations to analyse how and why certain women have been remembered for their contributions to Irish traditional music. She uses those same questions to understand why others have been cast aside. While these concepts are directed towards the Irish traditional music scene, they will be useful in the analysis of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann's album covers. Slominski's work offers a new perspective to appraise these three women and their individual presentations of social and cultural identity norms. These three women were at the beginning of their careers during the 1970s, thus, the concepts put forward by Slominski of gender roles and appropriate social conventions are applicable here. By combining the above concepts this chapter presents a comprehensive model for the analysis of the album iconography of these three women.

5.2: Three Pioneers in the 1970s

This section begins with the analysis of three albums released by Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann in the 1970s when all three women were at the formative stages

⁹² There are a number of women who were very much active in the rebellions that took place in Ireland over the centuries, however as Slominski details, the majority of women were domestically positioned and not in the 'throws of war' (Slominski 2020).

of their country music careers. The recordings discussed in this section include the first released albums by each of the three artists in the 1970s.

5.2.1: 1972 - Truck Drivin' Woman.

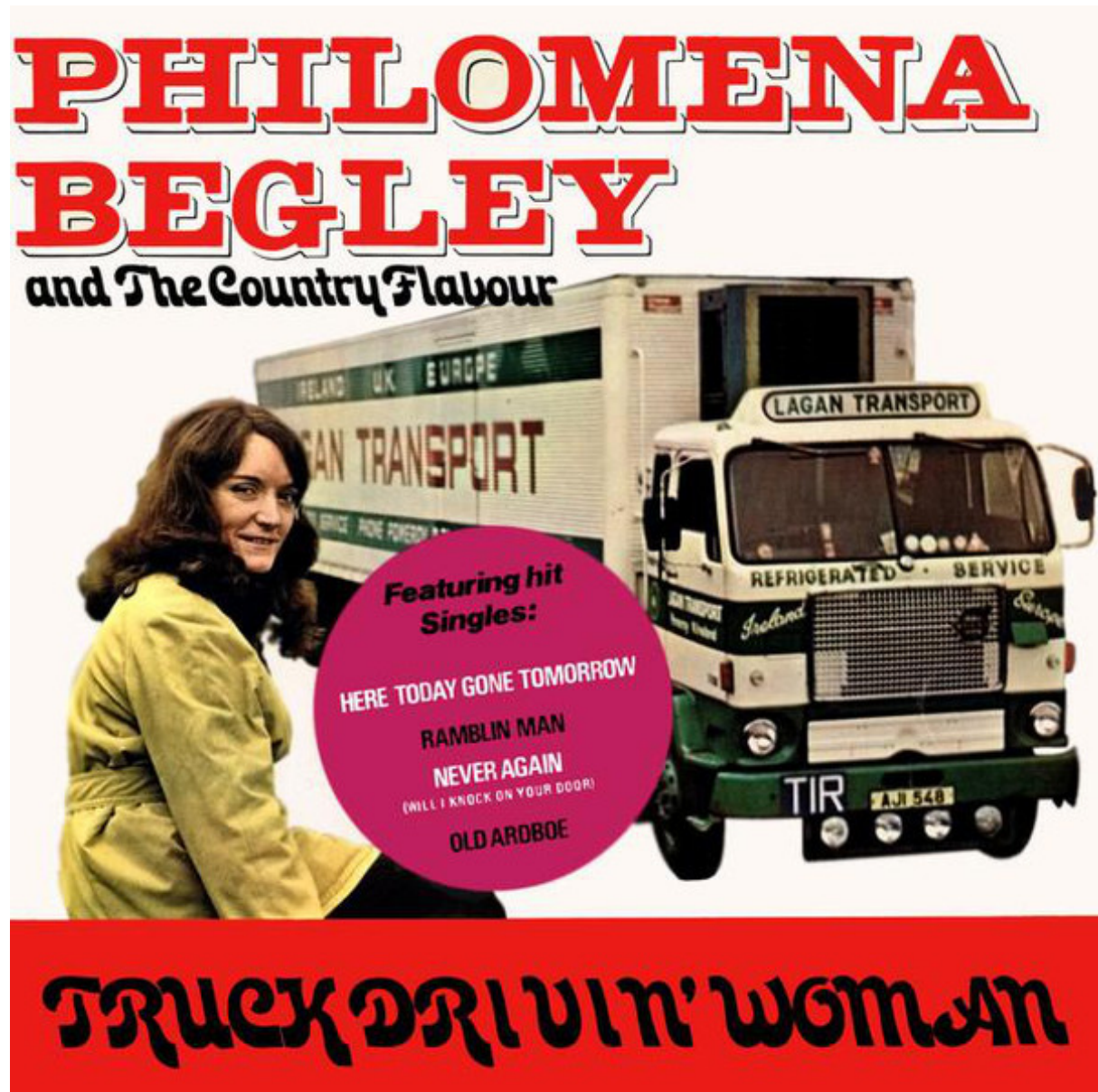


Image 5. 1: Philomena Begley 1972 Truck Drivin' Woman.

Utilising the model put forward by Machin (2010) image 5.1 is deconstructed in order to comprehensively understand its visual messages. Examining this image as an entire entity, it is communicating a local girl in the truck yard nearby, singing songs. The truck is old, and is registered in the north of Ireland hinting at Begley's roots in Co. Tyrone. Her casual attire

reflects contemporary Irish women's fashion of the 1970s; the wearing of a coat alluding to an outdoor setting or lifestyle. However, it is unclear if she is actually in the yard as there is no evidence of ground images – tarmacadam, concrete, driveway and so forth. Begley is presented here as she describes her early identity, a local girl from a small village in Co. Tyrone. The message that is being connoted is the local girl, down to earth, and homegrown. She is being shown as having a connection to her roots. The truck is symbolic on a number of levels. This type of transport truck is an Irish based, locally sourced truck. In particular the word 'Ireland' is highlighted a number of times on the truck displaying an affinity to her Irish identity. Additionally, its colours are white and green with the words Lagan Transport on the side of the truck in a red orange colour. All of these are colours that are closely associated with the Irish flag asserting her identity of being an Irish citizen. The use of the truck also reflects influences from the USA where truckers replace cowboys traversing the open country of the American Mid-West, the place with which Country music is most associated.

Begley's identity as a woman is not overtly expressed but there are a number of elements in the image that connote femininity. Begley's name is written across the top of the image in large red letters, followed by the title of the band in black letters. Red and black are often cast as opposites (Li, 2015). Red can symbolise femininity but may also be understood as :

'(1) the colour of blood of fire; (2) informal communist or extremely left-wing political view – used to show disapproval; (3) revolutionary; (4) success; (5) smooth'(Li 2015, P1315). Black is '(1) the very darkest colour, like night or coal, (2) without light; completely dark; (3) very dirty; covered with dirt; (4) sad and without hope for the future; (5) full of feelings of anger or hate; (6) death' (Li 2015, p.1315).

Red is seductive, sensual, the colour of love, lust, and hints at the tacit understanding of smooth, words and terms aligned with femininity. These lexical associations allow for the viewer to

understand the use of red in Begley's name as denoting femininity. On the other hand, the use of black for the band's name identifies them as male. Dirt and darkness are words used to describe males throughout the centuries. It also allows for the subtlety of their positioning within the group structure, they are not the stand-out feature in the image or the band. They have a supporting role to Philomena Begley, and this is clearly portrayed in this specific colour coding.

According to Machin (2010) the pose, shot length, and gaze also tell us something about the artist. Begley is seated at the left-hand corner of the image. Her legs appear crossed, and she is seated side on, with her arms down on either side of her body. She is not 'demanding attention' (Kress and van Leeuwen in Machin 2010, p.40) or performing for the audience. Begley appears content and relaxed, seated in a ladylike manner. Here we can suggest that she is performing a representation of femininity, seated off to the side with legs crossed. This is also a reflection of what Slominski is speaking about in relation to the representation of Irish nation as young women, or her descriptions of fiddle players May McCarthy and Mollie Morrissey in Francis O'Neill's *Irish Musicians and Musicians* (2020, p.57). Begley is in her youth and her hair is flowing down by her face and shoulder, thus representing Begley as Irish, youthful, and female.

Begley's gaze and the shot distance add another layer to this analysis. Begley is seated side on, she looks directly at the camera. This is connoting the idea of recognition with the viewer. She is creating a relationship – imaginary as it may be – with a viewer, recognising them and asking them for a response. Combined with the concept that a closer shot is 'more personal', it can be deduced that this image is trying to make a personal connection with the audience who view the album or buy it (Machin 2010, p.42). Utilising Green's (1997) application of the gaze and the mask, we can see that Begley is not putting her body on show

to be gazed at. Yet she is engaging with direct eye contact, she appears to be the dominant in this relationship and in control of this gaze.

Reinforcing the use of Machin's model of analysis, Begley's image has portrayed her as a local or rural, Irish, young, and female. The song titles printed on the album cover aid in locating Begley as local. These titles are printed in different colours, black and white, inside a pink circle. This is a contrast in colour to the rest of the picture and draws the viewer to it. The song titles *Here today and gone tomorrow*, *Ramblin Man*, *Never Again*, and *Old Ardboe*, give a glimpse of the musical narrative in this album. More specifically it adds to the concept of locating Begley as a local girl from county Tyrone. *Old Ardboe* tells the story of the village of Ardboe, which is a short distance from where Begley grew up in Pomeroy. Here the image is locating her within her native county. The other song titles are less of an obvious statement of locality, they hint at her femininity and heteronormativity – the lyrics of *Ramblin Man* and *Never Again* are entwined with themes of love, and heartbreak from the female perspective. The other songs indicate a sense of independence and power for a woman with allusion to trucking with *Here Today Gone Tomorrow* and *Never Again (Will I Knock on Your Door)*. By including these titles in the image, Begley is once again displaying her Irish, local, young and female identity markers but also asserting her independence. This deconstruction of the image, combined with the discussion in chapter three on identity, provides comprehensive evidence that Begley's identity at this time was Irish, young, and female.

5.2.2: 1971 - From Margo with Love

From Margo with Love was released by Margo O'Donnell and 'The Country Folk' in 1971. O'Donnell had previously released a number of records with 'The Keynotes' but at this point she had been offered a contract with a music management company in Dublin and established

her new band. Image 5.2 presents the image on the front cover of the album, which included a mix of Irish folk and American country songs.



Image 5. 2: Margo 1971 From Margo with Love.

O'Donnell's face and presence are at the fore of this image. The viewer is drawn to the person on the cover. Taking the image as a whole, O'Donnell appears to be coming out of the cover. She appears to be climbing out of this vehicle into the public domain. A 'potential meaning' can encompass O'Donnell breaking out into a new style of music and putting herself to the

forefront of public discourse. Taking a more in-depth approach this analysis deconstructs the image and examines what additional meaning potentials are evident in this album cover.

The image suggests that O'Donnell is positioned in a van or a bus. However, the condition of the vehicle is far from glamorous. There is no window in the vehicle as we can see both of O'Donnell's hands are placed on the edges of the frame, confirming the dilapidated condition of the vehicle. Here the image is alluding to the identity markers previously discussed in chapter three as relating to O'Donnell. The broken-down, worn-out vehicle hints at her identity as a rural and modest person. Furthermore, the outside of this vehicle consists of a lot of rust and weld markings, with the worn-out van contrasting with the youthful, smiling artist. This image creates a sense of unity for O'Donnell and her audience. She is not advertising herself as a glamorous singer with all the most fashionable commodities available. On the contrary, she is showcasing how ordinary and 'down to earth' she is by being positioned in this vehicle. This 'down to earth' idea is what Nadine Hubbs' discusses in relation to the *real* 'Redneck' (2014).

There is another face visible in the background of this image. This image was captured in an old vehicle, with a child playing in the background (O'Donnell 2022, personal conversation). The young child has a little dirt on his face and looks bemused by the picture being taken. Here the image of the child in the background hints at O'Donnell travelling on a bus rather than in her own private vehicle. The presence of dirt on the child's face alludes to the condition of the vehicle inside. Collectively, this all adds to the idea that O'Donnell is the same as every other individual from rural areas in Ireland. This image also has an alignment to the argument put forward by Slominski. The positioning of the child behind - or even beside O'Donnell - hint at the notion of woman as mother, maiden or virgin as suggested by Slominski. Here the child is close to O'Donnell and is in focus alluding to the idea that O'Donnell is the protector or carer of this child. The audience may be aware of the personal

details of the artist and are aware that she has no children of her own at this point. However, the maiden, and caring aunt is relatable to many Irish homes at the time. The representation of the Irish nation as represented by a caring woman is present in this depiction of O'Donnell. The image could also be presenting O'Donnell's private self behind the public figure, this distinction between Margo and Margaret. Yet this is a highly heteronormative display of femininity. O'Donnell is portrayed as a shy, youthful, and reserved woman. She is not standing or sitting in a suggestive manner, there are no sexualised or radicalised images of femininity here. O'Donnell's album cover falls in line with the woman as non-threatening and reserved.

O'Donnell is the main focus of the image. We can see her porcelain skin and smile are the pinnacles of the image. She is dressed well in a fashionable white ruffle blouse and navy waist coat.⁹³ Her brown hair, clear skin and smile are quintessential markers of the heteronormative Irish woman. The image only portrays the top half of her body and the very tips of her hands, hinting at the delicate nature of the Irish woman.⁹⁴ O'Donnell is looking directly at the camera, front facing, which depicts the 'demanding image' (Machin 2010, p.40). She is addressing the viewer and asking the viewer to acknowledge her. The use of the direct engagement with the viewer allows O'Donnell to create an imagined relationship with the viewer, thus creating a connection to them. It is thus a personal connection in two ways: 1) the viewer sees themselves as directly engaged by O'Donnell; 2) the use of the short camera shot indicates that the picture is personal or a closer connection to the artist. She is in control of that relationship or connection as her face is the only part of the 'mask' that is on display. Therefore,

⁹³ I am suggesting that it is a waist coat as we can only see the very top of this outfit, the rest is left for the viewer to imagine.

⁹⁴ See Barbara O'Connor (2009) *Colleens and Comely Maidens: Representing and performing Irish femininity in the nineteenth and twentieth century*.

the meaning potential is that the viewer sees themselves as having a close connection to O'Donnell, yet the artist controls this connection.

The final aspect of this image I analyse is the use of black and white. Dark and lighter colours are often used in opposition, specifically in iconography. The use of the dark shadow behind O'Donnell alludes to an uncertainty. A darkness and a fragility that may be associated with the music industry, her own personal life, and the music contained on the album. In contrast, the title of the album is typeset in bold white lettering across the top of the image. White has a number of semiotic connotations: '*White* is in contrast to black and, as such, linked to light and purity; it mostly has positive connotation' (Allan 2009, p.626). This idea of purity and light are also associated with angelic or holiness and convey again the sentiments put forward by Slominski: women are seen as mother, maiden or virgin (Slominski 2020). O'Donnell's image portrayal in this instance provides evidence of her identity markers discussed in chapter three. She describes herself, at this time as being rural, Irish, modest and female.

These identity markers are further reinforced with the inclusion of the song titles on the album's image. The song titles situate O'Donnell within the context of rural Ireland with the use of county names such as Mayo and Galway. These counties in the west of Ireland were mostly associated with agrarian lifestyles. Furthermore, the *Hills of Glenswilly* and *Deep Sheephaven Bay* situate O'Donnell in her native Donegal by engaging with local place names. The other songs are less obvious presentations of her identity, yet the lyrics tell stories from the female perspective. They tell of the experience of some Irish people at that time. There was significant emigration of Irish citizens to other countries including the UK and the US between the 1930s and the 1960s. The song lyrics of *I Washed My Face In the Morning Dew* is a combination of new cultural encounters and the lack of knowledge of other ways of life beyond your own community. Many Irish emigrants encountered new places, new communities, and new social structures that were very strange in comparison to their childhood experiences in Ireland. These

songs and their titles aid in showcasing O'Donnell's local and national identity. The also alluded to her hometown roots and her femininity. Margo's image allows her to be identified as Irish, rural, and female.

5.2.3: 1977 - Susan McCann Sings Country

Susan McCann began her performing career in 1976 and had her first major hit record in 1977.

Susan McCann Sings Country (1977) contains all American country music songs.



Image 5. 3: Susan McCann 1977 Susan McCann Sings Country.

Taken as a whole the picture is representing the countryside, with McCann sitting at the fore, focusing the viewer's attention. The leaves on the trees are brown indicating that this picture has been taken in the autumn. The green grass is fading however, it still depicts a beautiful back drop. The positioning of McCann outside in a green field or grass area alludes to her rural roots and upbringing on an Irish farm. The green area does not encompass the entire image, leaving the top half of the image in white to portray her name and title of the album.

McCann is positioned at the front and slightly to the left of centre of the image, leaning slightly back. McCann is looking up and away from the camera. This image is taken at short-shot range, instigating the idea of the personal shot. Here the image connotes the personal relationship between McCann and the viewer. However, unlike the other images of Philomena Begley and Margo O'Donnell, McCann is not engaging directly with the camera. She is looking up and off to the side. This has a number of potential meanings. The first suggests that there is a shyness about McCann, a lack of confidence in the artist herself. Unsure of her place in public. The second potential meaning is she is looking off into the distance reflecting in a melancholy way. This image is an 'offer image' (Machin 2010, p.40). It is asking the viewer to engage with the artist in a different way. As McCann is looking up as well as off to the side, it alludes to the viewer having some power, that we as the viewer are looking down at the artist. The viewer has control over the engagement relationship. This incorporates the idea of the 'mask' but in this instance, the viewer is the dominant force. McCann has more of her body on display and is not engaging directly with the viewer. She is allowing herself to be gazed at in a very different way to that of the other two women. She is not directly looking at the viewer, yet they are directly viewing her. McCann is also leaning back, as the image appears to depict. This would suggest that McCann is open to interaction and conversation in a playful yet reserved

way. Combining these elements, the image thus has the meaning potential of inferring the identity markers of youthful, female, Irish and rural.

The colouring included enhances a number of these markers even further. McCann is wearing a green suit jacket, accompanied with a white shirt inside. The green colour is a marker of her Irish identity. According to Allan, the colour green 'is the complement to red, [and] is said to be a restful colour. Being the dominant colour of living leaves ... it is associated with political movements which focus on the preservation of the natural environment' (2009, p.633). The green emphasis in the background of this picture, allows McCann to be more prominent in a vibrant green than the grass on which she sits. It also alludes to nature and her rural farming background. Music provides a break from farm labour. Many viewers would be aligned with these identity markers and make a further connection to this image. The white enhances this green colour yet also indicates purity, innocence and light. McCann does not display any instances of grandeur in the image. She is wearing makeup and has gold earrings in her ears; however, these are markers of fashion and not of monetary distinction. Her hairstyle reflects contemporary styles and fashion. McCann's previous experience as a hairdresser enables her to showcase her cultural knowledge of new styles of hair fashion. Presenting a youthful and daring hair style, a trait that becomes synonymous with McCann as her career developed.

The colouring on the top half of the image indicates a sense of ambiguity for the viewer. Again, the white background hints at purity, light and innocence. Yet, it is contrasted with red writing detailing McCann's name and album title. As discussed earlier red indicates, sensuality, smooth, fire, blood, and success. Here, in contrast with the white the red enables McCann's name stands out, hinting at her potential success. This is also signifying her femininity. Yet, the difference in red (sensuality) and white (purity) allows the viewer to gaze in a variety of ways. I propose that this album connotes McCann's identity markers as detailed in chapter three. This displays markers of her female, Irish, and rural identity. She creates a connection

with the audience, yet does not demand a response from them. The image she portrays is one of a typical Irish woman during the 1970s. McCann utilises social and cultural norms that existed in Irish society for decades to adhere to, and to portray a heteronormative female image.

5.3: Mid-career - 1980s-1990s

By the 1980s, all three women have reached the mid-point of their career. Analysing album covers from this period highlights changes in visual display that coincides with the evolution

of their identity markers. I begin this section with an analysis of Philomena Begley's album released on the silver anniversary of her performing career.

5.3.1: 1989 - Silver Anniversary



Image 5. 4: Philomena Begley 1989 Silver Anniversary Album.

Image 5.4 provides a contrast to Begley's first album of 1972. We are drawn immediately to focus on the artist, as she is prominently set to the foreground of the image. The picture does not contain additional artifacts, like that of the first album. Here the confidence and importance of the artist is on display. Begley has numerous chart successes by 1989. She is known as the

‘Queen of Country music’ for her continued success both on the country music circuit and with her chart success. She has also gained attention of music professionals in the American country music scene by this point in her career. This image is alluding to the lifestyle of the artist and her success at this time. The dark backdrop of the image has the potential to allude to a performance space, a recording space or photoshoot. While all images are ‘produced’ this image appears to have been constructed in a studio rather than choreographed on a stage setting.

Ireland had become a more cosmopolitan country since joining the EU in the 1970s and the economy began to find stability after the recession of 1980-1985. (Ó’Gráda 1997; Ní Laoire 2000; Lobo & Salvo 2002; Ferriter 2005; O’Connor 2011). Begley is displaying a contemporary stylised image of the 1980s. This is portrayed in the clothing that she has presented. The shoulder pads are iconic of the 1980s feminised style. Begley’s image, facial detail and clothing are accentuated by the dark background. Begley is wearing makeup, red lipstick and dark eye shadow. This is complemented by the long gold earrings donned on each side of the face. Each of these factors highlight the changes in style and social norms, yet also showcase the ability of the artist to modernise her image in line with contemporary Irish society. Begley’s hair also suggests a modernisation of image, as the style and colour have both changed since the 1970s album. The clothing in this image of Begley hint at an affinity to the clothing displays of women country music stars in America. Image 5.5 features a contemporaneous image of American country music star Reba McEntire. These styles are also evident in the images of Dolly Parton and other American women country music performers

in the genre at this time. In particular, the use of shoulder pads and a permed hairstyle are reflective of these contemporary styles.



Image 5. 5: Reba McEntire 1987 The last one to know.

The fact that McEntire released this album two years prior to Begley highlights the cultural and fashion knowledge the women in Irish country music had of their counterparts. This image

comparison reinforces the connection to the American scene, simultaneously showcasing a very contemporary Irish country music style.

Begley's use of a red top alludes to the femininity of the artist. This femininity is reaffirmed with the use of makeup in this image. The use of a gold pattern and gold jewellery hints at the 'glittering career' that Begley has at this point (Allan 2009, p.636). The sparkle of the gold from her clothing and from her earrings gives the viewer a sense of wealth. However, it is not overstated in this image. The red in contrast to the black on the clothing gives contrast and subtlety, it is not overtly seductive or sensual when portrayed within a combination of colours. This colour combination suggests an affinity to the success often associated with the colour red - 'red hot' (Allan 2009, p.631). Both the jewellery and clothing are intertwined with pearls to suggest a wisdom and serenity. As this album was released at her silver anniversary, the invocation of pearls hints at her wisdom of age and experience in the industry. It also alludes to her serenity as a performer. Pearls are often seen as rare and priceless, thus by displaying these in the image allows the viewer to understand Begley as being 'of great rarity and worth' (Lexico.com 2021).

The positioning and gaze of Begley is 'demanding' a response from the viewer (Machin 2010, p.40). Her eyes are fixed directly at the camera. She is actively engaging with the viewer, asking for a response. The facial expression is of a natural and neutral shape. This image gives a sense of curiosity and ambiguity to the artist. Begley offers a more affirmative display of gender in this image. The close shot frame of the image allows for a sense of personal connection to the viewer. Begley appears to be in control of the relationship of the gaze. She is looking directly at the viewer, yet not directly engaging the viewer outside of this mask. The viewer can only see what she wants them to see (and hear). The viewer is only engaging with the elements of her identity that Begley wishes to display. Here Begley has moved away from the ideal of previous female displays of Irishness, into a modern display of femininity. She is

actively asking the viewer for a response. That response can involve buying the record, engaging with the music, and replicating the fashion being displayed. From this analysis, the potential meaning connotes Begley as a modern, female, iconic, valuable, and experienced Irish country music singer. These are the identity markers that Begley has utilised herself at

this point of her career: ‘on stage, I had developed a persona - a jokey, confident, performer who could interact with an audience I'd known for quarter of a century’ (Begley 2017, p.148).

5.3.2: 1983 - A Toast From an Irish Colleen



Image 5. 6: Margo 1983 A Toast from an Irish Colleen.

By 1983 O'Donnell had been performing for almost twenty years. Image 5.6 is a photograph of the original 1983 release, which was subsequently changed. There is a significant difference in her presentation from the earlier album cover. The image is busy with a number of artifacts

visible to the viewer. The eye is first drawn to O'Donnell who is positioned in the centre of the image. Her position suggests that she is presenting an offer image, yet also somewhat in a demanding image engagement (Machin 2010). The shot length suggests the intimacy of the image portrayed. O'Donnell is looking directly at the camera, thus engaging and asking for a response from the viewer. This image connotes a sense of personal and intimate conversation with the viewer. It also connotes the sharing of a drink in a toast in celebration or a sense of romance. Here O'Donnell is in control of the 'mask' and the gaze. She is seated, as the analysis suggests, and is positioned behind the flowers. She is presenting a feminine display yet is controlling what part of her femininity is allowed to be gazed at. The viewer can only see what the artist wants them to see and is yet enthralled in the gaze of the performer.

The image presents more to the viewer than a simple picture of O'Donnell. The picture is taken in a dark setting: conveying a relaxed environment with O'Donnell sitting in a position comparable to that of the performance space after a show or resting in her home. She is wearing a green suit jacket with a sequin pattern on the breast of the jacket giving a brighter colour image. As detailed earlier, green is seen as a restful colour, however, in this instance I suggest it is used to highlight O'Donnell's Irishness. The green is accentuated with the use of a white long-collar blouse, and a gold necklace with an emerald centre. The shirt alludes to light and purity, that is also a highly fashionable style in contemporary Irish society at this time. The collar shape also portrays an affinity to the American country scenes fashion output of that period. It is not overtly clear if O'Donnell is wearing makeup in this image therefore this section cannot attest to her use of any such cosmetic displays.

O'Donnell is positioned behind or beside a bunch of flowers, with the colours suggesting a rich pink or red flower. These flowers may have been offered by a loved one, friend, or fan to wish O'Donnell good luck. Alternatively, these flowers may be meant to symbolize the purity of the artist. The meaning potential of the flowers, complemented by the word 'colleen', meaning

‘little girl’ in the Irish language, connotes youth and purity. The typesetting of the artists’ name and the title of the album are set in white against the black background thus solidifying this connotation.

The presentation of a glass full of ‘alcohol’ gives the illusion of a toast. In many western societies it is custom to raise a glass of alcohol as a symbol of good luck wishes (Kotthoff and Spencer-Oatey 2007, p.184). In this instance the album is called *A Toast from an Irish Colleen*, suggesting that O’Donnell is wishing good luck to any of those who engage with and potentially buy the record. It also reads as toasting herself in acceptance of a good performance, or accepting the acclaim of those who have purchased the album. This image is connoting two other messages. The first message is the presentation of what appears to be sherry or wine in the hands of young Irish women presents a new portrayal of femininity in Ireland. Changes occurred in Irish society that allowed women to be served alcohol in bars and pubs during the 1970s, thus this presentation of alcohol in the hand of an Irish star alludes to these changes (Ferriter 2005). By 1983 it had been normalised for a woman to consume alcohol in private and public spaces. O’Donnell engages in cultural and social norms, and displays these norms in her visual imagery presentations. An alternative reading of the image is informed by reflexive knowledge of O’Donnell’s struggle with addiction during this period (O’Donnell 2012; O’Donnell 2018). While it was known by audiences at this time that O’Donnell had some issues with alcohol, her addiction to painkillers was less well known until more recent years. O’Donnell retrospectively, speaks openly about this time in her life and this image portrays the identity markers she associated with both publicly and privately at that period of her career. In a personal interview conducted with O’Donnell and in her autobiography, she details that while

she may not have been aware of how the addiction to painkillers and alcohol were affecting her public presentations, the audience were very much aware of her struggle:

I didn't realise that when I drank my words would be slower; I couldn't change key in the songs as quickly either. I didn't see or hear any of that...I wouldn't have a drink every day or every night or even when I went out at times. I drank on stage... that continued for almost twelve years (O'Donnell 2014, p.49).

The meaning potential of the image represents the identity of Margo O'Donnell at this point in her career, and can be reinterpreted by later audiences who have knowledge of aspects of her life that audiences at the time were not aware of. In the image from 1983, O'Donnell is presenting female, Irish, young, modern, and fashionable identity markers. While the addiction

is not overtly presented, the inclusion of the alcohol and the dark background present a sadness, darkness and ambiguity of the artist to the viewer.

5.3.3: 1991 - Diamonds and Dreams



Image 5. 7: Susan McCann 1991 Diamonds and Dreams.

The release of this 1991 album by Susan McCann coincided with the emergence of several new artists and an increase in sales and audiences for Irish country music. Image 5.7 demonstrates the changes in the identity presented by McCann. She is depicted here in an action shot, showcasing her in the midst of a performance. The positioning of the artist sets the image up

as a dual display. McCann's image consumes half of the space, as the other half consists of the typeface of the image. McCann's temperament appears relaxed, she has a smile on her face indicating her joy and happiness. She is holding the microphone to appear as if she is in a performance, yet this could be a constructed performance setting. The jovial nature of the picture alludes to the joy and happiness that singing brings to her, and that she brings to her performances. The relaxed appearance of the picture alludes to how natural the art of performing is for McCann. Holding the microphone in her hand allows the image to portray elements of confidence in the artist. It appears the McCann is in control of the 'performance': both in singing and image portrayal.

The image is further away from the camera indicating a withdrawal of the intimacy from the previous album discussed. McCann is looking directly at the camera, asking for a response. The distance in the picture taken creates a greater distance between her and the viewer. The distance between an icon and the audience. However, the distance could also allude to the 'dream' in the title of the album. Dreams are out of reach, yet they are still there to be thought of and longed for. This relates to Green's (1997) conceptualisation of the 'mask' and the relationship between the performer and the viewer. The use of the mask for the performer is expertly utilised in McCann's image. She controls where, when, and what the viewer is seeing. As if on stage, she looks to the audience, yet the viewer only sees her smiling face and performance stance. McCann is on display to be gazed at, yet she is out of reach to lose control of her gaze position. The distance between her and the viewer allows for the viewer to dream of being two possibilities: 1) be closer to her in a performance context or 2) dream of being her or being a performer of country music in their own right.

Reflective of the discourse presented by Hubbs (2014) and Machin (2010), McCann's sense of style has modernised and expanded. She is actively producing her own sociological 'classifying operations' (Hubbs 2014, p.118). Contemporary Ireland in the 1990s was a prosperous space

for many. The economy was growing rapidly and by the mid-1990s the impact of the Celtic Tiger was beginning to spread across the country (Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005; Allan 2009). McCann has been a professional performer for almost twenty years and had numerous chart successes, awards, and record contracts at this time. Her career was flourishing, and she is seeing the fruits of her labour in revenue. Thus, her image is changing in line with a contemporary Irish style and influences from the American country music scene. Here McCann is wearing a purple and silver shimmering dress. Purple is often associated with wealth, luxury, ambition and mostly associated with women, often known as a regal colour (Allan 2009). Here combining the shimmer of silver with purple the colour connotes both grandeur and femininity. The lighting in this picture enhances the sparkle of the dress in a stage performance. Her display of style is further enhanced by the accompanying jewellery worn by McCann. She is wearing large diamond earrings. These are accompanied by the prominence of her engagement ring and wedding band on her left hand. Also visible is a gold and diamond watch, with gold rings on her right hand. McCann is further feminised with the use of red lipstick and red nail varnish in this image. These features all add to the glamorous connotations and highlight further elements of her female identity. This is a highly modernised display of femininity, and is an internationalised presentation of femininity. This image contrasts starkly to the previous image in green. There are no overt displays of Irishness presented here. This image highlights a distancing from Irish cultural norms. By all accounts McCann is modernising the idealised display of Irish femininity as discussed by Slominski (2020).

The writing dominating the left-hand side of the image is enlarged to fit the dual nature of the album cover. McCann's name is the most prominent, also written in purple to reinforce the ambitious, luxurious, and glamorous nature of the artist. Set below is the title of the album *Diamonds and Dreams: 16 love songs*. These words are set in a blue colour with the potential meaning being that of diamond colour, or the blue skies – often times dreams are said to be in

the cloud or daydreaming. The backdrop is a light blue purple with a white diamond shape behind the album title. All these markers hint at the ambition of the artist, the grandeur of a star, the glamour of performing, and the trajectory of McCann's career to this point. This image portrays McCann as modern, glamorous, stylish, female, married, and a performer. The simplicity of the image allows the viewer to understand the display in a more thoughtful manner.

5.4: 2010s - Iconography in the Recent Past

In this final section I appraise the images of these three women in the second decade of the 21st Century. The three artists have entered a new stage in their career and their images reflect their maturity, in some instances these images are contrasted with images from earlier career stages,

demonstrating the longevity of their careers. By concluding this chapter with these images, it showcases a timeline of image and identity changes throughout each of their individual careers.

5.4.1: 2012 - Ireland's Queen of Country



Image 5. 8: Philomena Begley 2012 Ireland's Queen of Country: From then till now.

The photographs of Philomena Begley in image 5.8 explicitly contrast the early and mature identities of an artist proud of *50 years of music and memories*. Begley celebrated fifty years as a performer in 2012 and released a compilation album. Image 5.8 refers to the journey that Begley has taken since 1962 through the use of the dual images on the cover. On the left there

is a picture of Begley taken in the 1960s – Begley’s autobiography also contains this picture however she does not give specific dates from when it was first taken. Begley is dressed in a green skirt and matching waist coat outfit that is decorated with a white fringe. This is accompanied by a white blouse and a black ribbon tied in a bow under the collar. The outfit is completed with knee-high white boots. This presentation is clearly influenced by American ideals of country music and its associations with the American West. This is contrasted with the image presented on the right-hand side of the album. This image is a representation of Begley as she appeared in 2012. Begley is dressed in an all-black trouser outfit, a velvet quality to the material. The outfit is open at the chest presenting the femininity of the artist in a new sexualised way. This is accompanied with silver jewellery, a bracelet and drop earrings. Begley’s wedding band is also on display. The distance of the picture does not give a clear indication of a comprehensive use of makeup, however there is evidence to suggest the use of eye makeup in this picture. Furthermore, the colour and style of Begley’s hair has changed, referencing contemporary female hairstyle presentations. Begley’s style presentation is once again contemporary to the lives of contemporary Irish society. She is not demanding attention with her dress presentations; however, she is demanding attention with her stance, positioning, and gaze.

Begley’s stance in this image is more demanding than any of the images discussed previously. She is facing front on with the viewer and is standing with her feet set apart. One leg is slightly bent; yet the overall presentation is that of dominance. Begley’s hand is on her right hip to highlight her figure. This does not detract from the dominant stance Begley is engaged in, rather it enhances her power in the image. Yet, this image is not overtly aggressive. This stance is accompanied with a smiling face. Here Begley is presenting a dominance of her career in Irish country music. As suggested in the title of the album, Begley is been known as ‘the Queen of Irish country music’, and this presentation, and use of a dominant stance

showcase her position as a top country artist. Additionally, placing this image at the right side of the album cover allows the viewer to take an enhanced understanding of her dominance and power. The shot length is hinting at an impersonal shot. However, in this case we can see the entire body of the artist giving a sense of closeness to her. The clothing choice allows Begley to have some control of the 'mask'. Yet, the presentation of the body allows for more control of the mask to be with the viewer. The viewer may gaze at the artist entirely and on their own terms. As mentioned above the positioning of the hands and the opening of the outfit on the chest assists the image in highlighting the female figure. This presentation by Begley is an altered and progressive portrayal of femininity. She is highlighting her female figure yet is presenting a dominant stance, showing her own strength and power. Begley is creating a new and powerful presentation of femininity within the context of Irish country music.

The typeface and colouring of the album emphasise Begley's dominance in the Irish country music scene. The colours red and gold are both fighting for position in this image. The red backdrop is rich in colour and consists of jewel or crown like patterns. As Allan (2009) alluded to, the colour red is sensual, smooth, and ambitious. This adds to the already altered presentation of femininity in this image. The gold colour indicates rich, expensive, jewels, and the concept of the 'golden age' (Allan 2009, p.635). Red and gold combined hint at royalty; crowns and cloaks are regularly depicted as such. In this case the colours infer Begley's long-standing reputation as 'Queen of Country Music'. They are also referencing as Allan has suggested a golden age for Begley. The longevity of her career is highlighted with the use of such colouring at the release of this album. Her continued success both nationally and internationally has garnered her the title of 'Queen of Country music'. The image portrayed in this album shows

how Begley's identity has evolved, and now manifests as confident, powerful, stylish, female, royal, and iconic.

5.4.2: 2019 - Old and New



Image 5. 9: Margo O'Donnell 2019 Margo: Old and New.

This album released by Margo O'Donnell brings the viewer and audience on a journey with her, from her early 1960s releases to her most recent collaborations. This marks O'Donnell's 55th year as an Irish country performer. This album presents the viewer with two images of

O'Donnell: the old (younger) and the new (older). The old image presentation is almost hidden in a mist of purple, while the new image is crisp and clear.

The old image is purposely placed behind and to the right of the current image of O'Donnell. In the old image, O'Donnell appears to be in a performance setting, holding the microphone with an uneasy facial expression. As this is an action shot taken from a number of decades before it is not clear if this image was part of a performance. The picture could have been during the performance of a sad song, where O'Donnell is engaged in portraying the story of the song. It can also hint at the unease O'Donnell felt during performances as discussed earlier in *A Toast from an Irish Colleen*. O'Donnell is wearing a dotted light colour shirt with dark bottoms. Her hair style is similar to that presented earlier in the chapter hinting at the decades that have passed since this picture was taken. In contrast to that image, the most recent presentation of the contemporary O'Donnell, she is full of colour and apparent happiness. O'Donnell is positioned at the front left of the album cover. The image is not demanding the viewer to react but is creating a personal connection to the viewer. The dual image is offering the viewer the opportunity to take a journey with O'Donnell from past to the present day. The use of this close shot image enables the viewer to feel this personal connection. Additionally, O'Donnell is looking directly at the viewer with a soft smile. O'Donnell is displaying a sense of growth with the viewer, showcasing the changes in facial features as she has grown older with the viewer. She is dressed in a black and white blazer jacket, with pink hems and edges. Underneath the jacket O'Donnell is wearing a pink V-neck ruffle top. She appears to be seated with her arms crossing her torso. The use of pink in this image alludes to femininity. As Allan notes:

Pink for girls and blue for boys is a custom that developed after the 1930s; in earlier times, the colour for boys was hunting pink. It is possible that the swap came about because the blue uniforms of the navy, air force and police

put a macho gloss on blue while the Nazi marking of homosexuals with pink triangles made that colour seem effeminate (2009, p.633).

Allan also notes a connection to health, stating that to “be in the pink” means “to be in excellent health” (2009, p.636). O’Donnell’s outfit is complemented with the use of a necklace and earrings. The earrings are understated silver small hoops, while the necklace is a silver cross. The presentation of the cross highlights O’Donnell’s affinity to religion and her faith. O’Donnell is displaying subtle use of makeup as can be seen around the eyes and mouth. The use of makeup is not overstated here bringing the viewer to an almost natural look of the artist. This type of outfit and visual presentation is in vogue for contemporary women of this cohort in Irish society.

The positioning and shot selection, alongside the cut off image of O’Donnell gives her control of the ‘mask’ and thus the gaze of the viewer. The image is engaging the viewer with an ‘offer image’ yet is ‘demanding’ a specific type of response from the viewer (Machin 2010, p.40). The eye contact of O’Donnell and the smile presented are asking the viewer to respond. The personal connection to the image (close shot) enables the viewer to gaze at the face and upper torso of the ‘mask’ in a controlled way. The viewer is ‘enthralled and captured’ by the image (ibid). Thus, the viewer is not controlling what they are seeing but are controlled by it. The use of the second image in the background again is controlled by the artist and by its placement. Placing the current image in front of the old image leaves the viewer trapped with questions of their gaze. Questions arise regarding the location of the photograph and the meaning behind her emotions, but these questions are superseded by the positive representation of the current image. The image presents a healthy, happy O’Donnell who has transformed herself from a performer of unease to a leading voice within a genre, at ease and has confidence within herself. Furthermore, the prominent use of song titles enhance O’Donnell’s position as a formative voice of the genre. The song title is accompanied with big white bold text

enhancing the words ‘Big Tom’ to draw the attention of the viewer. O’Donnell and Big Tom’s friendship had developed since the 1960s, therefore the song title *A Love That’s Lasted Through the Years* highlights both the love of the friendship and the love of the genre. Both O’Donnell and Big Tom are still active performers when this song was released. The use of ‘duet with Big Tom’ on the album cover is alluding to O’Donnell’s equal stature to him in the genre. The nature of the duet is more akin to dialog, thus enhancing this idea. Additionally, those who had followed O’Donnell from her early career would be aware of her standing and reception within the genre by both performers and audiences. For those who were encountering her music later in her career, may see this association with Big Tom as a ‘seal of approval’. Many believe Big Tom to be the first to launch the Irish country music scene in a big way, and he was often referred to as ‘the King of Country’ (Commins 2016; Martin 2018). Therefore, the use of his name and the song title ratifies her status as leading voice, and an icon of the genre.

The colouring in the album also communicates meaning. The backdrop of the album is purple, hinting at a purple haze over the past. As detailed previously purple can depict luxury, glamour, and ambition. Purple is often associated with illusion, fantasy and spirituality (Bellantoni 2013). The use of purple is hinting at the illusion of the past and the lessons O’Donnell has learned throughout her career. Alluding to the use of her past as a spiritual messenger for her current and future self. The purple is accompanied with pink and white lettering. This pink showcases the femininity and health of the artist, the white portrays purity and positivity. This image thus portrays O’Donnell as mature, stylish, religious, healthy, and female. The incorporation of the old image behind the new, also allows the image to be viewed as a personal

battle that has been won: ‘But you learn, Jesus Christ if I hadn’t learned by now, but you do learn as you go on’ (O’Donnell 2018, Interview).

5.4.3: 2020 - The Older I Get



Image 5. 10: Susan McCann 2020 The Older I Get.

Susan McCann’s album *The Older I Get*, released in early 2020, marked her forty-fourth year as a professional country music performer. The image portrays a woman in the comfort of her home bringing the viewer into a new realm of personal connection. The relaxed and comfortable position she is displaying further hint that McCann is in her own home. The positioning of the shot length offers the viewer opportunity to make a personal connection. McCann is looking directly at the camera, thus directly engaging the viewer asking them for a

response. This is not a demanding image but an 'offer image' (Machin 2010, p.40). McCann is offering the viewer a glimpse of her 'home', a look inside the world of a leading country music artist. Seated, McCann is displaying a reserved, mannerly, female presentation. McCann's demeanour in a seated position is telling the viewer to come and sit with her, as she tells stories, and tips of life she has learned throughout her years. She is alluding to the theme of nostalgia bringing the audience with her on this trip down memory lane. McCann is highlighting her female features with the positioning of her right hand along her cheek. Drawing the viewer to the face, McCann portrays a contemporary visual display with the use of makeup. She showcases a warm, gentle smile accompanied with subtle use of lipstick to enhance the facial features and draw the viewer to the smile. By concentrating on the face, the eye is drawn to her hair presentation. The short style of hair is accentuated with the red dyed colouring. This hair colour enhances the subtle use of makeup by McCann. She is wearing glasses that aid in framing the face but also signify increasing age, maturity and wisdom. There is a display of the body however it gives the viewer a limited view. By utilising a seated position and wearing a jacket, the viewer is not gazing at the entire artist but at the aspects of the artist they want to display. Here the complete control of the gaze is in the hand of the artist.

Styled in the fashion of contemporary women of her age group, McCann is displaying a demure presentation of fashion. As mentioned above McCann is wearing a large jacket covering a dark outfit underneath. While it is not clear what specific type of outfit it is, there is a clear preference for trouser type clothing. The outfit is accompanied with a leopard print scarf, a dark coloured necklace and silver jewellery. The necklace is dark with silver highlighted through it and is accompanied by diamond earrings. On her arm there is also visible jewellery, two silver bracelets augmented with diamonds. The image invites the viewer to think of this as a portrayal of McCann's craft and additional interest in fashion. The awareness of fashion is evident in McCann's use of the leopard print scarf. Leopard print according to Jo

Weldon: 'Is a statement, a symbol, and an implication' of meaning for the person that wears it (2018, p.18). Further he suggests that 'the print expresses the power they feel within or makes them feel armoured against the power they may lack' (p.19). Weldon details association of leopard print with women throughout the world from the mid twentieth century. However, the most important and relevant association of leopard print is 'a marker of either sex work or mature feminine sophistication' (Weldon 2018, p.25). In McCann's display the association with leopard print is one of mature feminine sophistication. This portrays two things to the viewer, 1) a new mature display of femininity and 2) a display of social position from her career as a country music performer.

McCann is situated in a sitting room. This is further reinforced with the subtle glimpse of accessories within the image such as carpets, curtains, tables and lamps in the background. The colour scheme of the room, a rich red and warm yellow, alludes to the warmth of a fire in a sitting room. The table to the side of McCann is gold in colour alluding to luxury and wealth. This is further stated in the gold colouring that is evident in the chair McCann is seated on. An important element in this image is the idea of glamour and sophistication. The colouring and typeface used places McCann's name in large white bold text highlighting the importance of her name, while the album title is in a yellow gold colour. This connotes the longevity of her career, being in the golden years, having an abundance of knowledge to pass on to those who have come to listen. McCann displays a subtlety of wealth, a wealth that she has worked hard to achieve. McCann's images tell us that she now identifies as an icon, female, sophisticated, knowledgeable, stylish, and a gatekeeper.

5.5: Conclusion

it's changing you know, I was always eh I used to like the long skirts, but I
find myself now I nearly always wear pants, because it is accepted but when

I started out you wouldn't get me in pants in a fit. But I never, I never dressed above the people (O'Donnell 2018, Interview).

but I used to wear an awful lot of sequin top and that when I was younger, but I still, I am still very adamant about how I dress. I think it's important for any entertainer, like when you go out and do a show, when you go on the stage you have to be presentable. People come in to see a show, they don't come in to see somebody in tatters on the stage like, you know. I never thought of it as image as such, it's just you do what you do, you have to look presentable you know what I mean (McCann 2019, Interview).

I would have been into the wee fringy short skirts and wee jackets, and blouses, white boots, and stuff like that, you know in the early days. Ach sure I would have worn the usual stuff, when I started the first dress, I had on me was a big white dress with a big netty petty coat on it, a big red cumber band on it, that was the first one. And then I had a kind of a, it was a bridesmaid's dress was one of the other ones, but this was when I was only singing a couple of songs at the time, and sure I thought I was the bee's knees, up standing on a big stone and all (laughing) when I think of it. But that was the fashion at the time, whatever was going at the time you, that's what you wore (Begley 2020, Interview).

This chapter analysed the visual presentations of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann from three periods of their careers – the beginning, the middle and present day. These presentations showcase the changes in presentations as they progress from breakthrough stars to icons of Irish country music. The use of their album covers illustrates how their identities evolved as they progressed through their careers. By developing an approach informed by the work of Green (1997), Machin (2010), Hubbs (2014) and Slominski (2020), the analysis shows how these three women have utilised social and cultural norms to portray ideas of femininity within the Irish context. The changes evident through the images used on

album covers reflect contemporaneous changes in society. By engaging with Green's (1997) application of concepts of the 'gaze' and 'mask' and how that impacts the viewer and the artists, this chapter highlighted the control all three women have had over their visual image presentations. All of these combined with Machin's (2010) analysis model illustrates how image and identity are intertwined in the lives of these artists, and thus their audience. They have been and continue to be style icons for those who have followed their careers from the beginning. The images and identities portrayed by these three women have left a lasting effect on the artists that have followed the path of Irish country music. They are symbols of not only Irish country music, furthermore they are symbols and products of popular music culture.

Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann portray the identities of female, singer, performer, Irish, religious (in some instances), gatekeeper, and icon. All three women are consistent in their self-reference to being 'real', and being the same as the viewer and audience member. A narrative of who they are as both an artist and an individual are communicated through these images. There is a progression from the youthful images, through a 'glamorous' period to 'mature femininity' evident in the images used by all three. Many of the images, particularly in their early career, allude to localised and rural identities they were brought up with and have thus transformed and manifest themselves into presentations of women who remained close to their roots. Changing colour schemes, notably from green to purple and red, signify different meanings that also reflect a career path that has taken them from the local and Irish scene on to international success. This is also evident in the structuring of the gaze, changing from the familiar 'girl next door' to 'music star' to 'friendly and wise neighbour'. Their identities incorporate contemporary fashion and style that is relevant to the society of the time, and also includes reference to elements of American, as well as Irish fashions. The use of dual images in later albums highlights career longevity. The album and song titles also contribute to the

narrative of real and relatability. When viewed collectively, it informs a reading of their identity throughout their careers.



Image 5. 11: Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann 2017 on RTÉ's Late Late country special with Ryan Tubridy.

Chapter 6: Women in Irish Country Music Today

6.1: Introduction

6.1.1: Todd Titon's Model Explained

Women have created and occupy more prominent roles within the contemporary Irish country music scene in the 21st century. In this chapter, I detail the position of women audience members, artists, and performers of Irish country music in order to gain an understanding of access and representation within this genre. I assess how Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann are received by audiences as a whole, through an analysis of stage performances, interviews and survey responses. Finally, I draw on the use of social media as a way of modernising the genre. This chapter combines theoretical concepts and frameworks with personal data from my own performing experience to conduct this examination. It also utilises my fieldwork interviews with women country singers, interviews with music producers of Irish country music, survey responses from Irish country music fans, and feedback from a number of country music radio DJs across the island of Ireland to inform my research. This chapter is underpinned with the use of Jeff Todd Titon's music culture performance model, which allows for a discussion of the musical world of contemporary Irish country music. I engage with the concepts of the 'cultural why' and the 'musical what' (Titon et al. 2009, p.18), while also engaging in the 'what' and 'who' concept developed by Adriana Cavarero (2000) and furthered by Tes Slominski (2020) to further enhance the understanding of this music culture.

Titon suggests that 'when people make music, they do not merely produce sounds – they also involve themselves in various social activities and express their ideas about music' (Titon et al. 2009, p.18). His music culture performance model allows ethnomusicologists to discuss:

aspects of music, not just the sound...whether musicians are true to an ideal or have "sold out" to commercial opportunity? This [model] presents music in relation to individual experience, to history, to the economy and the music industry, and to each culture's view of the world, which includes ideas about

how human beings ought to behave. To help think about music in those ways, we next consider music as it exists in performance (ibid).

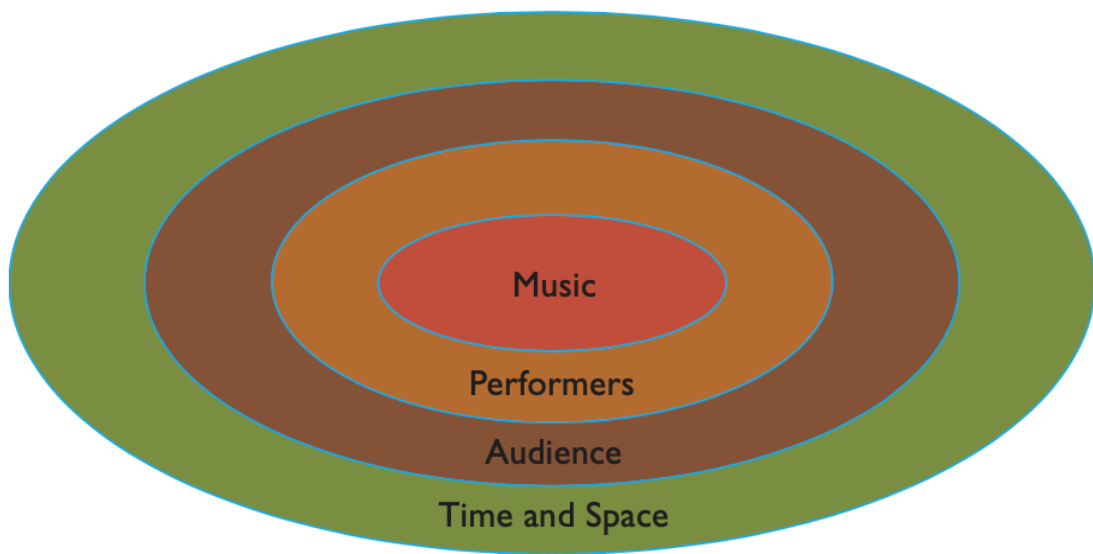


Fig 6. 1: Titon's' 'elements of a musical performance' model (Titon et al. 2009, p.15).

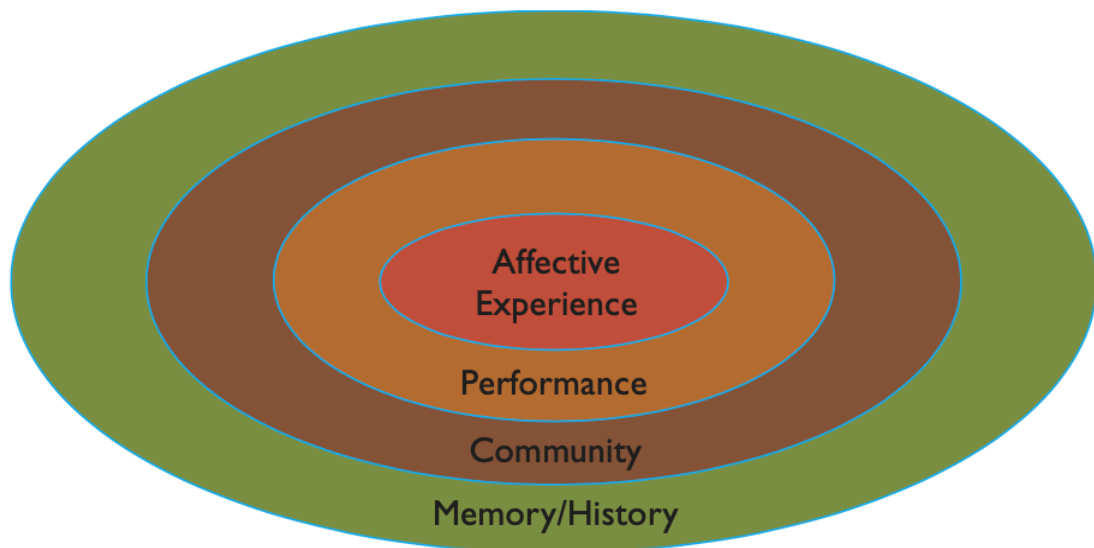


Fig 6. 2: Titon's' music-culture model 'after Titon 1988:11' (ibid).

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate how Titon has utilised concepts of what occurs within a performance to ask questions of what happens within a music culture. Titon states that at the centre of his model is the culture's music.

At the centre of the music (as you experience it) is its radiating power, its emotional impact – whatever makes you give assent, smile, nod your head, sway your shoulders, dance. We call this music's affect, its power to move, and place affective experience at the centre of the model (Titon et al. 2009, p.15).

The next layer of the model is the performance. Performance involves analysing if it is markedly different from everyday life encounters: 'from storytelling about where a song comes from to marking the end of a performance with an applause' (Titon et al. 2009, p.15). Furthermore, Titon suggests that there are two additional elements to be examined throughout performance:

Second, performance has purpose. The performers intend to move (or not move) the audience, to sing and play well (or not well), to make money, to have fun, to learn, to advance a certain rite or ceremony. The performance is evaluated partly on how well those intentions have been fulfilled. Third, a performance is interpreted, as it goes along, by the audience, who may cry out, applaud, or hiss, and by the performers, who may smile when things are going well or wince when they make a mistake (ibid).

The performance, performer, and audience are fundamental elements of this model of analysis. They must all be considered in order to garner a better understanding of any given music culture. The third layer in Titon's model is community. The 'community is the group ... that carries on the traditions and norms, the social processes and activities, and the ideas of performance' (Titon et al. 2009, p.16). This element of community in Titon's model generates a process of examining how traditions and social norms have impacted the contemporary Irish country

music scene. It also enables the research to understand how the audience connect with the music and what it represents to them as a community – audience and performer alike.

The final layer that Titon includes in his model is titled memory and history. Titon suggests that ‘musical experiences, performances, and communities change over time and space; they have a history, and that history reflects changes in the rules governing music as well as the effect of music on human relationships’ (Titon et al. 2009, p.17). Titon is proposing that all music within all music cultures has a history, whether written down, recorded or remembered. This history is both reflected in how we experience the music currently and how that music has been remembered. Remembering a specific culture’s music history can be informed from both within and outside of a given culture. Titon suggests that music critics and historians have impacted, influenced, or altered memories of cultures. This chapter aims to create an accurate written history of the contemporary Irish country music scene from which future research can depart. Utilising Titon’s model enables this research to critically examine how contemporary Irish country music affects its audience (affective experience), how the music is received and perceived (performance), how the music has evolved (community), and how it is discussed socially (memory and history).

Influenced by Jane C. Sugarman’s *Engendering Song: Singing & Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* (1997) and Tes Slominski’s *Trad Nation: Gender, Sexuality and Race in Traditional Irish Music* (2020), I highlight the representation and experience of women in the Irish country music scene (performance, community, memory and history). Slominski’s work documents the experience of women in the Irish traditional music scene in the 20th century. This will provide an important contrast to the experiences of women in the Irish country music context (performance, community). Sugarman examines the intersection of music and gender identity in Prespa weddings, thus providing a contrast to representations of women in geographically separate music cultures (community, memory and history). Finally, I utilise the work of Kristen Lieb (2018) to assess the impact of social media on the contemporary Irish

country music scene (memory and history). Lieb's work provides a guide to assess the impact of social media, news and magazine media, and image in the 'branding' of contemporary women artists in Irish country music (ibid).

6.2: The Audience Feedback and The Contemporary Scene

In this section I discuss the responses to the online survey conducted with Irish country music audiences. The gender identity of the survey respondents was assessed after the survey closed on all online platforms. The chart below details the gender balance of respondents of the survey conducted with audience members. Of the 170s respondents 15% were male and 85% were female with no respondents selecting an option to identify as any other gender identity.

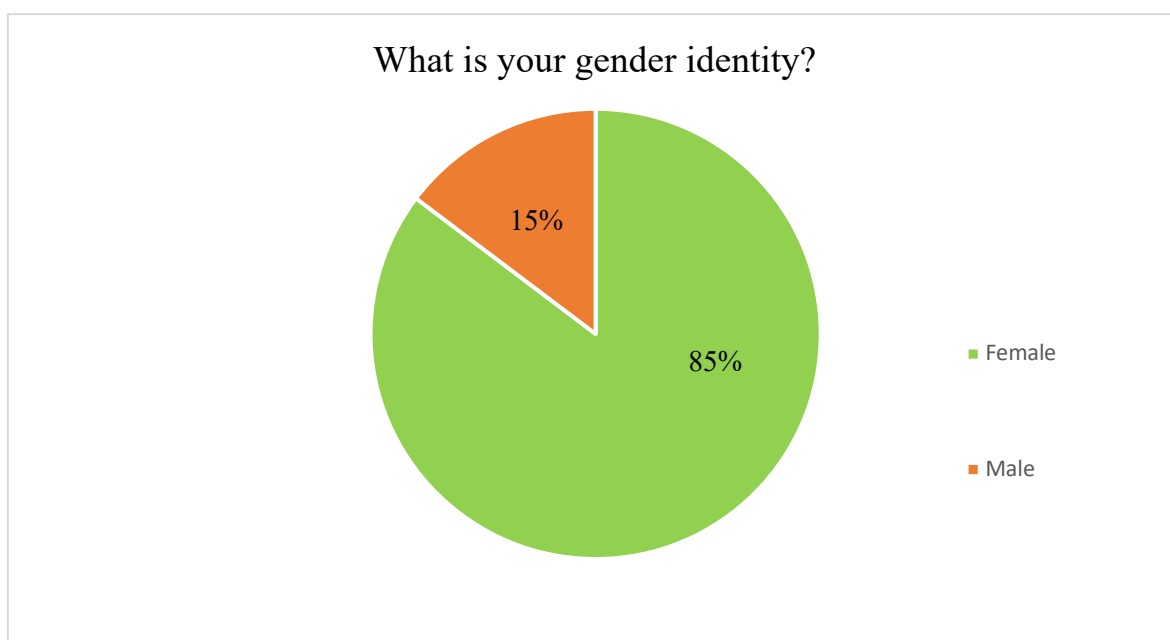


Fig 6. 3: Gender Balance of Respondents

The gender balance of the survey reflects my experience of audience balance at Irish country music events throughout my research. From previous personal experience within the Irish country music genre and observations at concerts, there is a majority representation of women attending most country music events. In contrast, there is often a priority of men as performers or headline acts at these events. Singer and promoter Trudi Lalor states: 'I feel a lot of different events that sometimes run, they would - some of the venues and some of the event organizers -

tend to give you know, probably more shows and more engagement to male artists more than female artists' (Lalor 2021, Interview). One male survey respondent stated that women artists 'work well as opening acts but none are strong enough to be headliners' (anonymous, survey respondent 2021). This promotion of men acts was evident at the most recent charity concert for the *Reach Out Movement* (discussed in more detail later). There were seventy-five performers on the cd release, however for the concert there were only thirty-five performers over a three-hour period on the night. Of those thirty-five acts, eight were solo women artists, with one as a dual front in a duet band.

The data shows that of the 170 respondents, 103 or 60% had engaged with or became familiar with Irish country music through familial connection. Many stated that their parents listened to that music which in turn made them aware of it. Others stated that it would have been the music played in their grandparents' homes. Local radio is seen as having had a major impact on the

respondent's introduction to Irish country music; 24.1% of respondents referenced local radio or geographic location, as the reason they were first introduced to Irish country music.

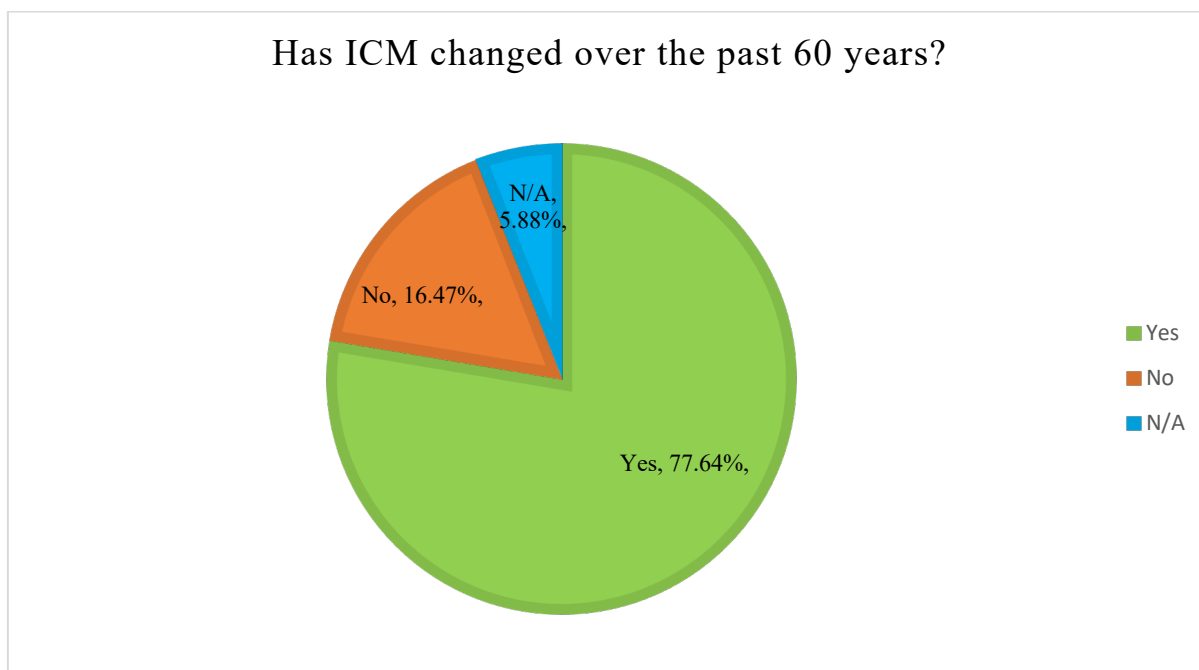


Fig 6. 4: Consensus of Respondents on The Musical Evolution of The Genre.

Respondents were asked if there had been a change in the Irish country music scene in the past sixty years, with 132 respondents saying yes and twenty-eight indicating that it had not. Ten respondents did not answer this question. While every music genre evolves over time, the respondents of this survey were very positive about the speculated 'change' that has occurred in Irish country music. Some of the respondents suggested that the music is 'Americanised', 'it has a younger twist to it', and there are 'covers of pop songs being done by country artists' (anonymous, survey responses 2021). Others have stated that the music has 'gotten better' and that 'younger artists are bringing a more up-tempo version of it' (ibid). Furthermore, artists such as Olivia Douglas have suggested that while her music is more 'geared' towards the older dancing scene, emerging artists and contemporary styles are attracting the attention of a younger crowd. Douglas goes further to suggest that artists such as Nathan Carter, Derek Ryan, and Lisa McHugh have their own 'sound' attracting a younger audience to their events. This reinforces the audience feedback of a modern contemporary sound, and experience of Irish country music.

The reference by both the audiences and performers to the sound and the space in which the national performers of Irish country music now inhabit suggests a modernised approach to this music. Responses from audience members and performers have indicated that concerts are now to the fore of country music in Ireland. Occasionally national performers will perform at weekend events scheduled in hotel function rooms; however, these events do not always focus on the dance aspect. This shows a move away from the initial venues, and the concerns of Irish country music artists, who catered specifically for dancing for their audiences. Local performers and up and coming stars continue to play at social dancing events, and in pubs which always cater for dancing.

Respondents were asked which artists they were most likely to listen to. The majority of respondents indicated that they listened more to men artists than women artists, with the most cited men artists being those of the more contemporary scene: Nathan Carter, Derek Ryan and Mike Denver were all noted more than fifty times. Meanwhile, women artists were cited a maximum of twenty-three times, with that number attributed to Philomena Begley. Other artists most noted thereafter were Lisa McHugh, Cliona Hagan and Margo O'Donnell respectively. This highlights the ongoing prominence of the icons Philomena Begley and Margo O'Donnell with contemporary Irish audiences. Irish country music stars Clodagh Lawlor and Derek Ryan both discussed the imbalance between men and women performers at length during recent interviews however, neither could give a specific answer as to why there was a major following, liking or interest in men stars over women stars.

I think it's a bit more, harder for women, I don't know why... maybe you have wives at home and sometimes they don't want them going out listening to girls for the night or something like that... like you see the big male artists like Nathan or like Daniel O'Donnell and there can be lines of women outside waiting for them to arrive... and then you think would you see a line of people lining up for a female artist outside for hours, probably not as much unless it was a group of guys or just a load of groups going together or something like

that. Which is something I don't understand sometimes I don't think I'll ever understand how the fan base works. I think if it's country music and you have a good enough band behind you and you have a good singer/artist then it should be the same thing (Clodagh Lawlor 2021, Interview).

People say it's a lot easier make it if you're a guy in the business you, em and I think you know the old myth, I think or reason behind that is that like people say like well guys, (laughing) I don't necessarily believe this but I'm just saying it guys generally aren't as jealous as girls, guys will go along with their girlfriend to go see a guy on stage, but girls mightn't like, mightn't necessarily like, go and see a guy looking at a girl, d'you know what I mean, so. I don't know if I believe that but that's what a lot of people would say... (Derek Ryan 2021, Interview).

As Clodagh Lawlor, and Trudi Lalor previously, have both indicated, it is “harder for a woman to make it” (Lalor 2021, Lawlor 2021). However, as seen by Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, Susan McCann, and other women artists that have come after, once a woman artist ‘proves’ themselves they can sustain a place and garner a following within the genre. The longevity of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann's careers highlight the ability of a woman star to

remain a prominent figure within the genre. However, it does appear to take longer for a woman star to create a market and a space for herself.

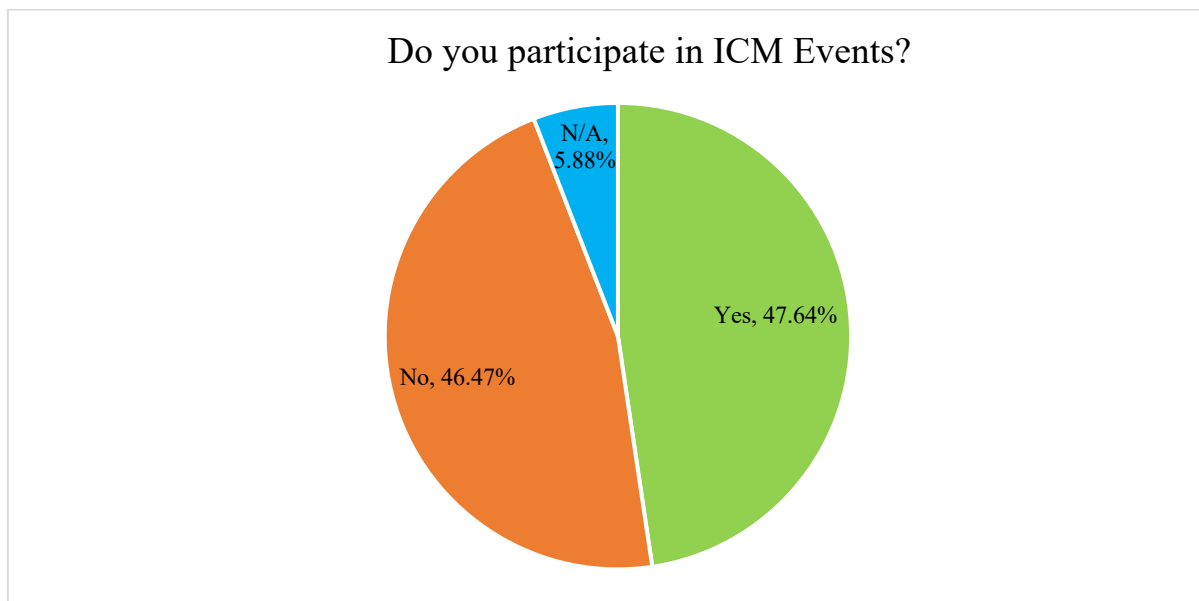


Fig 6. 5: Responses to Participation in Irish Country Music Events.

Figure 6.5 demonstrates an almost equal divide between respondents who participate in Irish country music events and those who do not. The respondents who answered yes all go to events, concerts, dances and online gigs – the newest form of country music engagement since Covid-19. The respondents that answered no, engage with the genre in their own home, car, or personal space: they do not participate in live events. This shows a new form of engagement in music through the use of technology. With the emergence of streaming services, it is now more accessible for fans to experience their music in their own personal and intimate way. These new forms of technology are creating a new space within the community to enjoy the music in a number of different ways. The artists and their fans are creating a new online community for Irish country music.

When asked if they thought contemporary women artists had modernised Irish country music over 80% of respondents said yes. Many of them believe that the contemporary women artists

are putting their own style to the music. Some responses suggested that these contemporary women artists:

“Make country music more hip and modern”.

“They appeal to the younger audiences that like to jive”

“They are making it more upbeat, poppy and funky and a lot of it you can dance to e.g., jive, waltz”

“The look, the writing, the connection on social media”

“the sounds are more modern, their sound and image”

“they’ve moved towards the style of more commercial ‘Nashville’ type artists”

“it has become a bit more sensual less about the music”

“Una Healey for example brought a modern twist to music and brought it up to date for this generation she made it cool to like country”

“Give a voice to Irish women” (ibid).

While these responses showcase a highly positive response it must be noted that not all respondents had such positive comments.⁹⁵ The audience responses suggest that contemporary women artists are making country music ‘cool’ again. The use of the term ‘cool’ recurs with a number of artists and survey respondents when referencing the contemporary Irish country music scene. Derek Ryan stated when he initially was engaged in country music events it ‘wasn’t cool, country music wasn’t cool for people my age, but I think the younger artists now are making it cool for younger people to be part of’ (Ryan 2021, Interview). Emerging artists are attracting younger audiences, making the music more engaging to younger generations,

⁹⁵ Not all respondents were fans of Irish country music but were fans of country music as a whole with particular interest in American country music.

while also keeping some of the tried and tested repertoire in their sets. These respondents have also suggested that the image portrayed by women artists has had a major impact on their modernisation of the genre. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

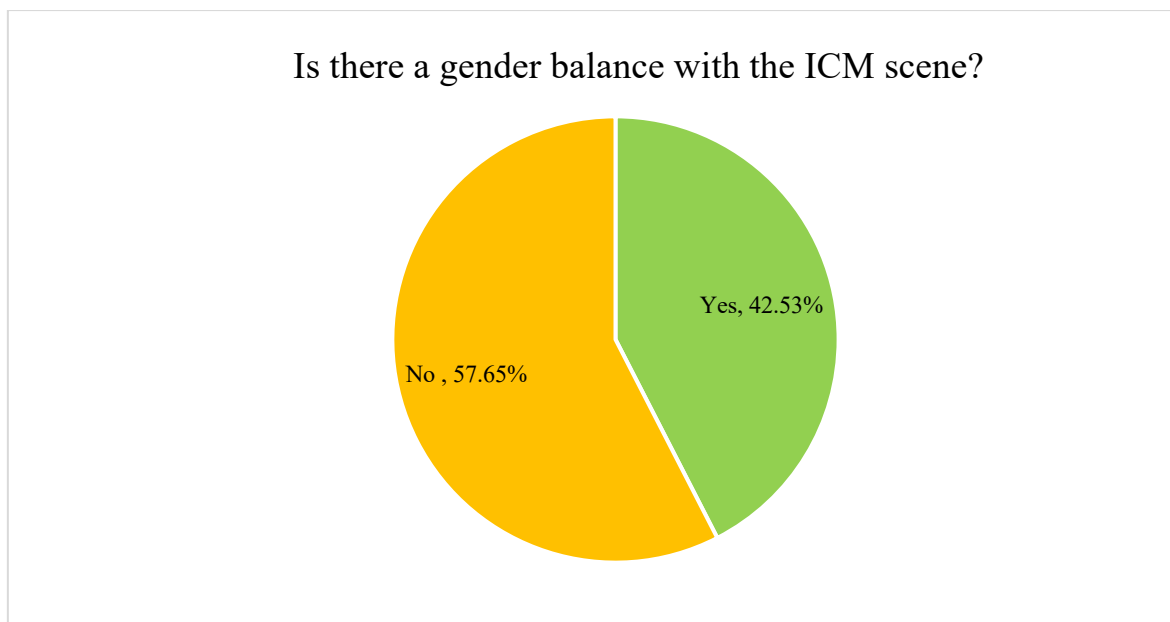


Fig 6. 6: Gender Balance Responses.

When asked if the respondents thought there was a gender balance in Irish country music they gave the following feedback. According to 57.65% of respondents there is not a gender balance with one stating that there ‘needs to be more female performers’ (anonymous, survey respondent 2021). There were 42.53% suggesting that there is a gender balance. These respondents stated that ‘there is an equal opportunity to make it if you want to’ while others state that there is equal representation of genders in the scene today (ibid). Trudy Lalor insinuated that there is ‘probably 10 men to every 1 female in our industry’ (Lalor 2021, Interview). Many fans of Irish country music are not fully informed of industry statistics on gender balance. When reading their responses to the survey it is obvious that their understanding of the scene is informed by advertising, marketing, radio play and social media of their favourite artists. Many fans only know of the gender representations of the stars whom they like, follow, or are told about through the mediums specified above. Currently within the Irish country music scene – speaking specifically of singers – there is not a gender balance.

Furthermore, from my research of the Irish country music scene the roles that are filled by men and women throughout the strata of country music are very different.

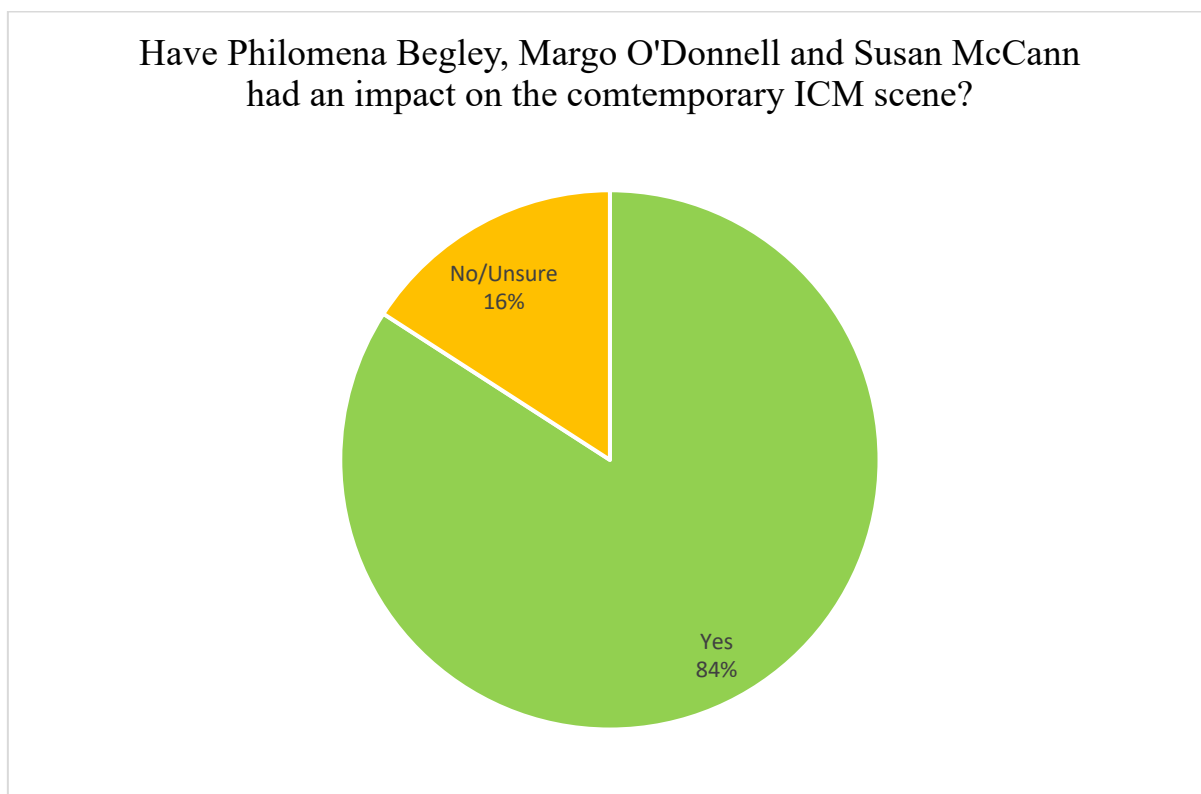


Fig 6. 7: Impact of Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann on The Contemporary Irish Country Music Scene.

When asked if Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell and Susan McCann have had an impact on Irish country music and the contemporary genre the results were as follows:

'Yes, they have paved the way for more female artists'

'Yes, they have been around so long they have inspired younger artists'

'Yes, they have led the way for women in the industry and shown it's a career path that is possible'

'Yes, powerful women in a man's world'

'Yes, they have given many Irish women a great platform for singing and has shown that there is opportunities for ladies in the country music scene'

‘Yes, [they] made music more relevant to women's issues’

‘Absolutely. They are three queens of Irish country just like Dolly, Tammy, and Lorretta in America. They’ve had a huge impact and gave and inspired the many young performers like myself, [that] we see today’

‘Yes, they championed women in the industry, along with the likes of Kathy Durkin, Mary Duff, Louise Morrissey etc’ (Survey responses, 2021).

While this is just a small selection of answers the majority of the responses were quite similar. Notably, some of the responses suggest that the country music scene in Ireland is a ‘man’s world’ yet as previously shown many suggest that there is a gender balance. Additionally, this reiterates the point made above in relation to the popularity of men and women artists. Women artists appear less supported by audiences than men artists. For the respondents that answered ‘no’ to Begley, O’Donnell and McCann having had an impact on contemporary country music scene, some suggested that they did not like their music, they ‘haven’t heard of them’ or they have impacted the scene ‘very little’ (anonymous, Survey Responses 2021). I conclude, from my own experience in the scene and from interviews conducted that the majority of Irish country music fans do know who these three women are and would suggest that they have had an impact on the scene. Their impact on the scene is further detailed in concluding this chapter.

In the following section I discuss the Irish country music community, the roles, representations, and presentation of women within the scene. I will utilise elements of data from the survey as well as interview material and personal experience to provide a comprehensive discussion of the contemporary scene.

6.3: Detailing The ‘Community’ - Places and Spaces for Women

Historically, women in Irish country music are primarily singers or backing singers in bands. This section examines the roles women have held and continue to hold within the contemporary

Irish country music scene. The community of Irish country music will be examined to highlight how visible, or invisible in some cases, women have been and continue to be.

6.3.1: Representation of Women as Promoters and Managers

In chapter two I discussed the showband circuit and how these venues became structures for the Irish country music circuit. Within that structure the majority of venue owners, promoters, and managers of Irish country music were male (Gallagher 2017c). Rebecca Miller references the prominence of men venue owners, promoters, and managers when discussing women in the Irish showbands of the 1950s:

Overwhelmingly, however, the popular music scene in the 1950s and 1960s was a male dominated culture. With the exception of a handful of ‘girl’ singers and even fewer instrumentalists, the vast majority of showband musicians, managers, agents, dance hall owners, and record producers were men (Miller 2013, p.25).

As country music evolved out of the showband era, these structures changed very little. Men also held the position of event organisers of carnivals and marquees during the 1950s and 1960s (Miller 2013; Gallagher 2017c; Martin 2018; O’Donnell 2018; Lalor 2021). Over the past fifty years, women have become more visible within the scene. There are a number of women who are primarily instrumentalist musicians, there are others who work in radio and television, and there is one woman, Trudi Lalor, who is now combining her performing role with that of promoter within the genre. These women are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Trudi Lalor has been a singer and performer of country music for over twenty years. Lalor has in the last five years, taken on the role of concert promoter for a number of Irish country stars alongside her husband Billy Morrissey. Lalor grew up in a musical family and always knew she wanted to be a performer (Lalor 2021, Interview). Her ‘love’ of the music and performing is evident in the way she speaks about her own experience. Lalor depicts the Irish country music scene as a ‘family’ (ibid). Lalor states that while women continue to have to work twice as hard

as men within the genre to get bookings and get their name recognised, women within the genre have made large strides toward gender equality and recognition. She told me:

I do think we could do a lot more for the female singers in this country... And so, you're, you're kind of fighting a little bit against that. Maybe female singers will agree with me in this, but I know a lot of them will, that you know you kind of work twice as hard sometimes. However, you know, we are breaking through and even the respect shown to female artist nowadays is [better] (Lalor 2021, Interview).

Echoing the stories of Margo O'Donnell, Philomena Begley and Susan McCann, Lalor also highlights the lack of facilities for women to change in or even use until the 1970s with some venues not having facilities into the 1980s (O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020; Lalor 2021). Lalor suggests that women during these early decades of the genre did not complain about the facilities they were offered as they did not want to be seen as any different: 'I'm part of the gang' (Lalor 2021, Interview). However, that has changed, in all genres, there are facilities at the ready for men and women separately. Access to separate changing facilities and lavatory use is not something that the contemporary fans and audiences would think about. Yet it was very much part of several decades of the developing Irish country music scene. Lalor also suggests that women within the contemporary scene have become more vocal about:

what is expected and what is not expected ... but you can't be whinging, you can't be moaning ... that's what you do. And while the audience see two hours, you know of the glamour, the smiling, and laughing, and that you know, you're probably maybe after 9 hours of traveling to get to that gig (ibid).

The genre has adapted and welcomed the emergence of more women stars, however as Lalor stated there is a lot more that can be done for women within the genre. Following on from her own experience and engagements with her husband Billy Morrissey, Lalor began to become

more involved in the promotional and events management side of the Irish country music scene. She has managed and promoted the most recent concert tour for Margo O'Donnell in 2019 to celebrate Margo's 55th year of touring. Drawing on her own experience, Lalor has the ability to negotiate the acceptable standard of venues and facilities for:

the Queen of 'Country and Irish' ... but Margo is you know every inch the Queen of 'Country and Irish' because she's unique in the sense that she's **real**, and, and that's what country music is about, is about being **real**, that when you're singing the songs that you feel it, you mean it ... You know she's, she's a friend and she's a confidant and for me as a female in the business she has been a great mentor to me as well (Lalor 2021, Interview) (emphasis in bold to highlight the emphasis in speech).

Lalor has been influenced, mentored, and aided by that acts that she has promoted, and generated respect for herself as both an artist and a promoter within the genre. This respect and rapport with fellow country music stars and the wider country music community is seen in the work she and her husband have done with the *Reach Out Movement 2021*. When COVID-19 pandemic emerged in Ireland, the music industry was the first to stop and by March 2021 it still had not returned to full capacity.⁹⁶ This led to a break in the country music community, between audience and performer. Highlighting the severity of this change, Lalor told me:

It's unique in the sense that Irish country music has very little of a bit of a divide between the actual followers and supporters of country music and the performers themselves. So, most country music stars will come off the stage you know at the end of the show, and they think nothing of given two or three hours meeting their fans signing autographs, taking selfies, so the fans end up becoming friends of theirs... So it's very much like a family. You know, that's

⁹⁶ The restrictions set out by the government as part of Ireland COVID-19 response have had a major impact on the Irish arts sector. From March 2020, no artist had been able to perform to a live in-person Irish audience. Artists began to return to full schedules by the beginning of 2022 almost two full years later. Furthermore, there has been a lack of financial support for self-employed musicians with many artists having to gain part-time employment in other sectors to combat the lack of financial income (Kirwan 2020 *Late Late Show* interview).

why we call it the Irish country music family because everybody knows everybody else. And you know, it's quite intimate and probably unique in that sense (Lalor 2021, Interview).

The time without live performances allowed Lalor and Morrissey develop the concept of the *Reach Out* campaign. Lalor stated that it began with the stars of Irish country music making phone calls to fans to ‘touch base’ with them and find out how they were coping with the pandemic. It then evolved into a charity single *Reach Out* in which over seventy-five Irish country stars featured. Lalor and Morrissey orchestrated and wrote the song with Max T Barnes to raise money for the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC). Lalor is a key figure in the promotion of country music in Ireland and the promotion of women within this genre. Her ability to use her position and contacts within the genre has enabled her to move out from behind the microphone and situate herself in other aspects of the music industry that lack other female representation.

Throughout this research I have asked all interviewees if they were aware of any women managers within the genre of Irish country music. While Susan McCann did state that she does not partake in the ‘ins and outs’ of the industry anymore, Philomena Begley and Margo O’Donnell have suggested that there are women involved within the music structures besides Trudi Lalor. Both Begley and O’Donnell suggest that the other women, although invisible in the industry, could very well be personal assistants to the male managers and promoters in the industry (O’Donnell 2018; Begley 2020). During my fieldwork I have not encountered nor has anyone been able to provide me with information on women managers of Irish country music singers or bands, outside of Trudi Lalor.

6.3.2: Radio, Podcasts, and Television

Many women performers have also taken up positions as radio presenter or DJs. Trudi Lalor is also a radio presenter on Tipp FM. Tipp FM and many other Co. radio stations have dedicated country music shows broadcast on a daily and weekly basis. Artists like Louise Morrissey,

Sandy Kelly, Susan McCann, and Una Healy are the most noted performers turned presenters on Co. radio. Louise Morrissey presents her own show on Tipp FM, while Sandy Kelly has a show on Ocean FM. Susan McCann appears on guest slots in her local radio station in Newry, and Una Healy has joined the team at Country Hits Radio in the UK. Several artists appear as co-hosts or once off hosts of their own television shows on Spotlight TV and Hot Country. Both shows air on Sky TV and Freesat providing a larger audience base to these women Irish performers. Lisa McHugh for example had her own show *On the Road with Lisa* in 2014 where she interviewed Irish country music stars weekly. McHugh has recently launched her own podcast series with Apple Podcasts 2020 and joined the radio station *Downtown Radio* Northern Ireland for a Saturday country music show in 2021. These appearances and co-host positions appear to follow the pattern set by Begley, McCann and O'Donnell, who all presented their own television shows on BBC and RTÉ respectively. This engagement with the use of such media platforms creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the artist and the platform. This collaboration is a way of engaging current fans with new and existing talent. Media plays an important role in the distribution of music and in the creation of the 'star' personality. These women have utilised social media platforms as a way to be seen and heard as both artist and individuals. They are also engaging with the community of Irish country music by conducting interviews, having conversations with fans, enabling themselves to be seen as separate from their music, and as individuals as well as performers. It empowers them with an authority on the genre: to be in a position to speak about the genre in such a public sphere is to be viewed as a person of power, and are respected within that community. These women are recognised not purely as singers, but as respected figures, presenters, and individuals who are engaging a wider audience. At a symbolic level, these women as presenters on radio and television, are providing

younger women audience members and fans, with an alternative professional career path within Irish country music (Mitchell 2016).

Additionally, the TG4 *Glór Tíre* programme has been highly influential on the contemporary Irish country music scene. *Glór Tíre* is a talent competition on the Irish language station TG4 in which country music enthusiasts sing in competition with one another to win the final prize. Contestants are mentored by Irish country music stars weekly. Participation on this show has proven to be a platform for many young Irish country stars who have subsequently embarked on professional careers. Many women performers began their careers as acts on this show including Chantelle Padden, Lisa McHugh, Olivia Douglas, and Sabrina Fallon. Aside from having an equal number of women and men performers, there are a number of other roles that are filled by women, including booking agents, the stage managers, and producers. There is a woman co-host of the show, Aoife Ní Thuairisg, and two women judges Caitríona O'Sullivan and Jo Ní Chéide. The ratio of women judges to men judges are 2:1. This gives an authority position of women within the structures of the Irish country music scene; an authority that was not evident over twenty years ago. The positions held by these women along with an even representation of women as performers on the show, highlights the growth in representation of women in the contemporary Irish country music scene. Additionally, it is illuminating roles for women outside of the performance sphere. The image that is being projected challenges established norms and stereotypes. Women are becoming more visible within the genre and

these aforementioned women are creating a space for this to continue (Machin 2010; Mitchell 2016; Lieb 2018).

6.3.3: Singers and Instrumentalists

Just as the performance of heavy metal has become associated with male musicians, other roles, such as solo pop vocalist or the singer-songwriter, have come to be culturally understood as legitimate or even prescribed roles for female performers. While not exclusive to female performers, the role of the pop singer or folk vocalist accompanied by an acoustic guitar can be viewed as tapping in to and reinforcing conventional notion of femininity (Leonard 2007, p.91).

Women in Irish country music bands have predominantly held the role of singer. This genesis of the woman singer has been evident even in the showband era, where Irish country music received its inspiration. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann are renowned in the Irish country music scene for their voices. This trend of women being singers in bands has continued into the contemporary country music scene. For instance, Caitlin Murtagh, Chantelle Padden, Cliona Hagan, Clodagh Lawlor, Kerry Fearon, Lisa McHugh, Mary Duff, Sabrina Fallon, Sandy Kelly, and Trudi Lalor are presented as primarily singers in their stage and social media performances. Yet, there are a number of women performers who play an instrument as well as performing the role of singer. These include Carmel Sheerin, Claudia Buckley, Louise Morrissey, Lorraine McDonald, Mags McCarthy, Niamh Mc Glinchey, and Olivia Douglas. While these women do play an instrument, it is not their sole focus during performances. In the majority of cases, the women performers tend to take the instrument up for one set, after this it is placed back on the stand and remains there for the rest of the night. Some of the above-named singers also

accompany themselves in social media posts – Lisa McHugh and Claudia Buckley are most noted for this – however they do not tend to do this at regular events and performances.

As Mavis Bayton stated in her examination of the rock scene in England in 1998: ‘[the] lack of female role models meant that women growing up in the 1950s, 1960s, or early 1970s never considered playing as a possibility’ (1998, p.17). In the Irish country music scene women are not as visible as instrumentalists within the band structures as men. They were and continue to be primarily employed as backing vocalists and front women. Irish country music feeds into Bayton’s suggestion of a lack of role model instrumentalists to highlight this path for women. McCann noted to me: ‘I never had anybody female musician playing with me. It wasn’t just, well I don’t know, it wasn’t the done thing at the time’ (McCann 2019, Interview). Similarly, O’Donnell stated: ‘I mean women, as far as men were concerned, didn’t belong in bands. And certainly, if that was the attitude to a man not playing a band because there was a female vocalist in it, what chance had a musician as a backing, none’ (O’Donnell 2018, Interview). Yet, Irish country music is not alone in its gender representation. Irish traditional music, for example, has a higher proportion of its women participants that are instrumentalists, but women are often the forgotten players of the genre. Slominski states that there are:

interlocking categories that describe women traditional musicians active in the period 1890-1970. First a few...were nationally or internationally visible and tend[ed] to be remembered as extraordinary rather than exemplar. The assumption that these women musicians, however skilled, were exceptional helps erase less famous women musicians from popular historical memory ... second, evidence shows that many women musicians were visible at one time but have since been forgotten outside of their families and immediate communities ... thirdly, I contend that in addition to these better-known women musicians, an unknown and possible significant number of women

musicians occupied social positions that rendered them illegible and therefore invisible to the musical public sphere (2020, p.45).

Although specifically referring to the traditional Irish music spheres, Slominski's view can be compared to the Irish country music scene. We remember certain musicians because they are nationally or internationally known, they were visible at one time but have been forgotten, or they were not in the correct social position to be remembered. These remarks can represent any music genre and its re-writing of musical history. For example, in the past ten years Ina Boyle has gained recognition for her work as an Irish composer. As a student of Vaughan Williams, Boyle had been encouraged to move to London to pursue a musical career. However, she chose to remain in Co. Wicklow to care for her parents and sister: 'As a result of her isolation from musical life in London, early success was not followed through and performances of her music dwindled' (Beausang c2018). Boyle tried to maintain a position for herself within the classical music strata in Ireland, however her work had been forgotten by those outside of her family until recently. This is another example of an Irish woman being re-written into Irish history. In the context of Irish country music, women have held positions of authority – singers, fronting their own bands – however, instrumentalists within the genre have been occupied predominantly by men. Even in the contemporary scene there are a limited number of women instrumentalists in band structures to provide role models for young audience members and fans. There are a small number of notable exceptions to this. Piano player Liz Gordan (died 2019) played in Irish country bands throughout her career touring extensively with Philomena Begley and her band 'Shotgun' for over ten years. Other women instrumentalists include Sarah Jory (English performer) who plays steel guitar for a number of Irish country music artists, while also being a singer herself. Moira Fraser is the musical director of the 'Foster and Allen band'. Emily Shine plays keys and piano for her father Brendan Shine for all of his television performances. Finally, Lorraine McDonald is a saxophone and flute player who is also a singer in 'Keith and Lorraine McDonald Showband'. Also evident on *Glór Tíre* there are a number of

unnamed women who play instruments such as fiddle, guitar and keyboards however a repository of names is not yet available.

6.3.4: Studio Producers and Session Musicians

Women are the forgotten gender in the recording studios of Irish country music. While women record in studios, as evident by the amount of music released by women country stars in the last twenty years, there is a lack of representation of women on records and albums as instrumentalists, producers, and sound technicians. There are no examples of women as producers of Irish country music from Irish recording studios. While it can be stated that the recording industry of Irish country music is in its infancy in Ireland, there is a clear indication of gender imbalance in this sector at present. Jonathan Owens, a music producer, and musical director for *The Late Late Show* country music special, has acknowledged that women have not yet broken into the music production side of Irish country music. Responding to questions about his own employment of women musicians, Owens states that while he does use women string players they are not Irish or based in Ireland (Owens 2021, Interview). This highlights a gap in the genre where the representation of both genders is not yet evident. No recording studio in Ireland that caters for Irish country music is run by a woman. Owens, Lalor, and Ryan

collectively suggest that if there were an option to record in a studio led by a woman it would be utilised by Irish country music artists, however the option does not yet exist:

that's not saying that women aren't invited into roles like that, but it's just something that they haven't done (Lalor 2021, Interview).

Maybe there are some across other genres ... but I can't think of any in country, just goes to show you it's not common, it's not popular (Owens 2021, Interview).

It is very strongly towards males as musicians and producers ... I don't know why that is, but these things change, and it is changing (Ryan 2021, Interview).

The historic forms of societal structures have led to a legacy of non-participation that is slowly beginning to change. The recording studios of Irish country music remain, unoccupied by women. As history has shown women and men held very different roles in Irish society and culture (Connolly, 2003; Ferriter, 2005; Miller, 2013; 2014; Earner-Byrne and Urquhart, 2017; Monaghan, 2021; Ní Fhuartháin, 2021; Slominski, 2020; 2021). Irish country music is a representation of elements of those norms that are still evident in Irish society. Analysing this music highlights Alan Merriam's (1977) concept of music as culture. These two concepts cannot be detached from one another but analysed simultaneously with each other. Irish country music is representative of a culture that contributed to its formation and development. It is also representative of the contemporary Irish culture, society, and its changing gender roles. Women are now contesting spaces that were dominated by men. The older women artists within the genre normalised the roles they occupied; the newer women artists are contesting these spaces. Begley, McCann, and O'Donnell have all stated that they were treated as one of the lads within their band structures, they happened to be the singers in these bands. They did not consider themselves as being different to anyone else. They were accepted by their band mates as one of the "gang", and therefore normalised the role which they inhabited. In contrast, when discussing

acceptance in the contemporary Irish country music genre, Clodagh Lawlor suggests that the country music industry is not as it once was:

We are slow to change here, it's like they are not letting women be just as equal sometimes ... and you know I don't get it sometimes, like I've always said to my parents I'd love to be a voice for country music, for women, to be like look it, we are just as good as the men are, and you know we don't have to have short skirts to prove that we're good or that we don't have to have like low tops or anything like that cause sometimes, and that's the world of music it is a business and I know that sometimes people think of sex appeal with women sometimes and all this. It was never like that those many years ago, it was never like that, the women like Philomena any of those, none of them ever had to prove themselves it was always about the music. But I suppose that sometimes that might be the impression that some people get about females, oh she's good looking more so than she's a great voice (Lawlor 2021, Interview).

While Lawlor is speaking specifically about expectations placed on women singers, these norms are in other structures throughout the genre. The younger women artists are engaging in the discourse of gender norms and expectations so that they can contest spaces and places that already exist within this genre. The comments made by Lawlor are reflective of societal discourses concerning women and equality within contemporary music making across all genres, evident in the work being completed by *Mise Fosta*, *Fair Plé*, *Sounding the Feminists*, and *Why not Her Collective*. The slow changes of gender roles in Irish country music are an example of the impact in today's world of the social and cultural history of Ireland.

There is no discernible evidence to support the visibility or presence of women as sound engineers or lighting technicians on tour with bands in the contemporary scene. From personal experience I am aware of a number of women sound engineers in other genres of music.⁹⁷ I

⁹⁷ Women sound engineers include Bronagh Howard, Alannah Hayes, Stephanie Caffery. In April 2020 Ruth Medjiber shared a post on twitter asking people to fill in their favourite Irish female music professionals which

have not yet encountered them in the Irish country music sphere. Irish country music is making a move in the right direction to have a gender balance in all aspects of its structures. However, there are areas such as sound technicians, lighting and sound engineers, record producers and instrumentalists that need an improved approach to incorporating women into these roles.

6.4: Community and Memory - Image, Women, and Creating History

Every music genre works and proceeds along a given set of rules or principles agreed on by that specific community. Titon states that his music-culture model:

defines music in performance as meaningfully organized sound that proceeds by rules ... finding out those rules or principles becomes the task of analysis. These rules include (but are not limited to) what is usually covered under musical analysis: ... Beyond that, the task in exploring music-cultures is to discover the rules covering ideas about music and behaviour in relation to music, as well as the links between these rules or principles and the sound that a group calls “music” (Titon et al. 2009, p.16).

This section discusses image presentations by contemporary women Irish country stars. Herein I detail how image reflects and transgress ‘rules’ or ‘ideas’ associated with Irish country music.

Slominski (2020) and Anne McClintock (1995) both note Irish nationalism and morality have been prescribed to, and maintained through rhetoric concerning Irish women. The historic legacy of gender prescriptions associated with women in Ireland is still cause for debate in 21st century Ireland.⁹⁸ Earner-Byrne and Urquhart reinforce this point stating that in ‘2016 distinct ideas of gender continue to shape legislation, social mores, expectation and opportunity and,

included Production Manager, Songwriters, Labels/Publishing, Sound Engineer, Lighting Engineer, Artist Manager, Radio DJ, Promoter, Producer, and Tour manager:
<https://twitter.com/ruthlessimagery/status/1382812290341298181?s=09>.

⁹⁸ See Slominski ‘a sort of a “neutral gender”’: almost (but not quite) one of the boys’ (2020, pp.128-136). Also see Eavan Boland (1995) and Slominski (2020) on the discussion of women as maiden, mother and whore.

most crucially, the lives of men and women' (Earner-Byrne and Urquhart 2017, p.326).

McClintock states that concerning nationalism:

women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking, and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity (forward thrusting, potent and historic) embodying nationalism's progress, or revolutionary principle of discontinuity (McClintock in Miller 2013, p.43).

McClintock is discussing women in colonial and imperial Britain, Europe, and Africa. However, her description of what a woman represents fits into the ideological concepts of what it meant to be an Irish woman in the 20th century (see also Connolly 2003; Ferriter 2005). It is still evident in some parts of contemporary society that women should behave in particular ways, and occupy certain roles (Inglis and MacKeogh 2012; Sheehan et al 2017). Gender stereotypes and gender norms were created by religious institutions, family structures, and governing bodies, and were reinforced in certain regions and by certain music types. Interviews with Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have indicated that the church had a major impact on Irish country music, how it was performed, when it was performed, and what kind of music they were allowed to play for their audiences. Clergy were often present at Irish country music events to ensure patrons were "behaving" in a morally appropriate way (Begley 2020, Interview). In the 20th and 21st century the cultural and societal rules that had been established, where women were seen to be 'good' or 'bad', continue to be evident in rural and sub-urban regions of Ireland, particularly those areas with a large country music fanbase. Aaron Fox's (2004) discussion on concepts of gender construction and gender relations in American country music are directly relatable to this governance of gender within the Irish context. Fox states:

What would seem to be a highly residual regime of gender relations hangs on in memory and practice and becomes especially focused, as an object and an instrument of aesthetic and political scrutiny, in the performative genre

cultivated in small-town bars and churches. Both institutions can seem, in the present, like patriarchal time machines, spaces in which emotionally explosive male performance is celebrated as a nostalgic emblem of working-class identity, especially in song and verbal art. These are places, as well, where most women are commonly expected to conform to norms of femininity that are simultaneously pure and sexualised, and almost always submissive to male interest. These norms are powerfully symbolised in dance and highly thematized in country music. But in country music and in working-class discourse, these norms are also the object of critical reflection, especially in genres of expression that give voice to working-class women's increasingly feminist sensibilities (Fox 2004, pp.254-255)

As Fox details, notions of gender relations and constructions are now often maintained in churches and bars in small-town areas. Notions of older, prescribed, generational cultural and social gender norms continue to exist in places such as the 'small-town bars and churches' (ibid). These norms continue to be practiced within these institutions and thus spread throughout communities. As noted by Jane C. Sugarman, these notions of "systems" are engendered into the community and society in which 'we' live (1997, p.331).⁹⁹ To continue to perform these notions of social and cultural norms is to reinforce gendered stereotypes as culturally appropriate, specifically in present day society.

The Irish country music scene is beginning to provide a space where gender stereotypes are being transgressed by the longstanding artists and the emerging talents. Philomena Begley for example states that while she loved getting on stage and 'entertaining the people and, especially

⁹⁹ Sugarman is specifically writing about singing practices in the Prespa Albanian community in southeast Albania and the emigrant communities in North America and Canada. She states that 'for those in attendance, Prespa weddings accomplish more than a mere depiction of society. As active participants in the event, members of the host families and their guests negotiate their way through a complex network of community expectations and individual assessments as to what proper social demeanor, defining through their actions – both physically and symbolically – the terms of the social order that the celebration constructs' (Sugarman 1997, p.3). Furthermore, she suggests that during wedding celebrations 'each rendition of each song thus serves as an embodied performance of multiple aspects of that performer's sense of self and of community. At the same time, each performance provides one of the myriad images which individuals within the community may subsequently draw on as they formulate their view of themselves and their social world, and thus contributes fundamentally to the ongoing consolidation of the practices that together define the Prespa community' (ibid).

in concerts and cabaret and that. I would always get down on the floor and go around the audience, have a bit of craic and chat to them. Sit on their knee, do all the things and embarrass everybody' (Begley in Miller 2013, p.34). This is a prime example of how Begley was not conforming to social norms prescribed for a woman in a public sphere. The stereotypical norms of image presentation are continuously being broken down by current women artists in Irish country music. However, it must be noted that not all Irish country music artists are transgressing 'traditional' feminine presentations, there are a number who are.

Singer Olivia Douglas states when speaking about pressure for women artists to present a specific type of image:

There probably is a certain amount you're always thinking oh you have to look your best ... like I don't go to the gym, not that gyms are open now, but I know there are people up in the morning doing their workouts, but that's not me ... And I know it is hard there is, that onus is there on girls but, thank God, as I say it doesn't really get to me (Douglas 2021, Interview).

The image that is associated with the contemporary women Irish country music performer, is a similar image portrayed in popular music spheres. The 'onus' as Douglas suggests, on women to 'look well', be in good shape, and be appealing to audiences, is evident in the presentations of her contemporaries, Lisa McHugh, Cliona Hagan, Claudia Buckley, Chloe Agnew, Clodagh Lawlor, Mags McCarthy, and many more. However, I suggest that these image presentations highlight how women Irish country stars are transgressing societal norms to present a global presentation of femininity. The images that these artists are presenting are contemporaneous

and thus enable them to be viewed as idols and role models for young women audience members.



Image 6. 1: Olivia Douglas on Stage with Kane O'Rourke 2019 (Douglas 2021, Off Stage, On Stage, Out & About).

Olivia Douglas states that when she was younger she watched videos of Philomena Begley and she specifically remembers thinking 'I want to be like her ... and **her lovely blingy dress**' (Douglas 2021, Interview) (bold added for emphasis in speech). Douglas was attracted to the visual aspect as well as the music of Philomena Begley. She has taken this image from her youth and placed it in her own presentation as an Irish country music star. Douglas utilises the idea of 'blingy' clothing in a large portion of her stage image presentations. For example, in image 6.1 we see her in a 'blingy' silver sleeveless jumpsuit. This image is very contemporary in its presentation. She is highlighting a modernised, high-fashion presentation of country music image traditions. It is a figure-hugging outfit that enhances Douglas' female figure. The silver 'bling' hints at the glamour associated with being a star, which is further reinforced with the addition of silver diamond jewellery. Douglas here is presenting an image that has been

influenced by those who have come before by Philomena Begley, Margo O'Donnell, and Susan McCann.



Image 6. 2: Cover photo of Clodagh Lawlor's single 'Me and Johnny Cash' April 2020 (Lawlor 2021, Pictures).



Image 6. 3: Claudia Buckley pictured at the RTÉ Late Late Country Special December 2020, (Buckley 2021, Pictures).

This modernised image of 'blingy' is further utilised by Clodagh Lawlor and Claudia Buckley. Both artists present a high-fashion contemporary image in line with that of Olivia Douglas. For example, in image 6.2 and 6.3 clearly Lawlor and Buckley utilise the sparkly, sequin clothing image presentation. Additionally, the use of tan, specifically in image 6.2 shows a very contemporary image presentation. Lawlor is highlighting the contemporary image of modern-day Irish society with the use of tan, make-up and accessories. The sequin one shoulder dress shows her sense of fashion, accompanied with diamond earrings, rings and a silver bracelet. This image is then complimented with subtle and natural use of facial cosmetics. Lawlor is presenting a neutral facial presentation that is not overtly enhanced by the use of makeup but is complimenting her natural facial features. In contrast, Claudia Buckley in image 6.3 is not utilising jewellery accessories. She is presenting a simplistic yet contemporary image with an outfit that is complimented with definitive makeup. Buckley's outfit is flashier than Lawlor's, suggesting there is no need for extra accessories. The sleeves of the outfit contain diamantes or diamonds, with the V-neckline filled with silver sequin sparkle also. The outfit is completed with a white belt containing diamantés under her chest line. The material of the outfit itself resembles that of lace, yet it is not see through. The entire outfit, while it may seem simple, accentuates her female figure in an informed and contemporaneous way. Buckley's makeup then is neutral yet highlights her facial features. There is clear use of blush products, lips stick, and mascara. Her eye makeup compliments the sparkle of her outfit with a silver shimmer eye shadow, enhanced with the use of black mascara and eyelash extensions. All three of these younger artists are presenting an image that is created and influenced by the women who have

gone before them. Yet they are bringing a fashionable and contemporary presentation of that image to their audience base.



Image 6. 4: Lisa McHugh on stage during her NYF Dublin Performance 2019 (McHugh 2021, Pictures).

Lisa McHugh presents an alternative type of image. In image 6.4 McHugh is engaging in contemporary fashion presentations. This image is taken from a live stage image at the New Years' Eve Festival in Dublin in 2019. McHugh is wearing a black playsuit that is accessorised with silver, diamond-like shoulder patterns. This shoulder pattern is an acknowledgement of customary country music fashion from the past in a contemporary way. The hem of the shorts in the playsuit are also accessorised with this diamond-like design. This is accompanied with knee-high high heel boots, tights, and makeup. The tights give a shimmer look to McHugh's legs, a feature that ties the outfit together.¹⁰⁰ The make-up illuminates her facial features. However, the most prominent feature of this picture is McHugh's stance. She is positioned in a

¹⁰⁰ McHugh has stated that she doesn't have a stylist for her everyday image but does get help from her management team and "bab's" for her show outfit. Thus, reinforcing the concept of creating her own image. (McHugh 2021).

power pose (James 2008). Her feet are hip width apart with one arm raised in the air. This displays authority over the stage and the people on it. McHugh is symbolically highlighting the power of women artists within the genre, and the power of women in general. Furthermore, body language and in this case McHugh's stance is 'creating [an] image and therefore selling' herself as a strong, powerful, singer, and woman (James 2008, p.4).



Image 6. 5: Cliona Hagan single cover 2020 (Hagan 2020).

Cliona Hagan presents a more sexualised image within the genre of Irish country music. This image is the cover image on a recent single *When Love Comes Around the Bend* (2020). Hagan is portraying a sexualised image, one that is more commonly associated with popular music

rather than country music.¹⁰¹ This image is presenting underwear or lingerie as outerwear or as everyday clothing.¹⁰² Hagan's image is presenting Irish country music as current, in line with contemporary fashion and cultural norms. The late 20th and early 21st century societies tend to normalise what they see in mass media. Both mass media and culture are in constant dialogue with each other as new norms are created and maintained.¹⁰³ Hagan's image is presenting a sexualised image, yet there are still elements that hint at the "glitzy", "sparkly", and "blingy" image initiated by Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann (O'Donnell 2018; McCann 2019; Begley 2020; Douglas 2021). This image is changing the nature of previous presentations, thus transgressing engendered notions of female-image stereotypes in Irish country music. These women have been influenced by the women gone before, yet they are bringing their image presentations and self-identity portrayals into the contemporary society through a rejection of gender stereotypes. From the images above and the analysis conducted, these women are forging a renewed sense of style, fashion, and sex appeal to Irish country music. They are making the music modern not just through the arrangement of their songs, but also by their portrayals as contemporary Irish women. These images are being constantly reinforced with fans and audiences through use of artists social media accounts. As Lieb has noted social media plays a major part in the creation and sustained viewing of "pop stars" (2018 p.XXII). Social media has helped them create this body positive image of themselves. Lieb further suggests that as they:

blur the line between the personal and the professional for attention and fame,
audiences themselves are blurring the lines between their personal and public

¹⁰¹ Music videos: Miley Cyrus: *We Can't Stop* (2013): <https://youtu.be/LrUvu1mlWco>, Nicki Minaj *Anaconda* (2014) : <https://youtu.be/LDZX4ooRsWs>, Katy Perry: *When I'm Gone* (2022): <https://youtu.be/N-4YMlihRf4>, Pink! *Glitter in the Air* (2010): <https://youtu.be/6MKI3KKHyds>, and Arianna Grande *7 Rings* (2019): <https://youtu.be/QYh6mYIJG2Y>. Each of these videos provide comparative contemporary fashion statements by popular music stars.

¹⁰² Current of Western contemporary fashion.

¹⁰³ Grazian explained the process by which meanings can become powerful myths that act as cultural shorthand for those receiving them: "cultural hegemony operates at the level of common sense; it is a soft power that quietly engineers consensus around a set of myths we have come to take for granted". In the world of female pop stars, these myths center around youth, beauty, and sexuality' (Grazian and Lieb in Lieb 2018, pp.5-6).

selves via social networking sites such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. At the same time, lines between the content side of the entertainment business and the business side of business (e.g., marketing and advertising) are collapsing, destroying the once-critical notion of artistic purity. As such boundaries collapse, and we can no longer distinguish a private person from her public representation of herself, we feel like we know her - especially if she is on Instagram, just like we are. But what we really know is a constructed, advertised brand (Lieb 2018, p.37).

Through social media these artists are generating a narrative of themselves that audience can directly relate to. Through this use of social media many of the artists showcase the ‘work’ they put into their body and image. Lisa McHugh for example posts weekly on her personal social media for her *Downtown radio show*. These photos and videos are taken from her home showcasing her clothing choices and use of makeup. McHugh also uses her social media platforms as a way of advertising her new music releases and podcasts, while additionally posting personal pictures. Moreover, McHugh posts her workout routines and healthy lifestyle routines. Throughout COVID-19 lockdown, Cliona Hagan performed live Sunday evening sessions from her sitting room allowing the viewer into her home. She also posts regular picture of her and her family, celebrations, and regular check-ins for her fans. Hagan posts videos and images with links to her clothing presentations. Both McHugh and Hagan are creating greater “accessibility” and interaction with their fans (Lieb 2018, p.66). As Lisa McHugh detailed in a recent interview with Lynnette Fay ‘you have instant contact with fans and friends...and I am in control of my socials’ (McHugh 2021). This type of content is posted by the majority of contemporary artists, comprising of both women and men, on their social media outlets. The

artists now control the narrative and allow the fan to see the elements they specifically wish them to see. These artists show the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ selves to the audience.

A significant amount of Irish country stars utilise social media platforms to advertise and create an online presence. Clodagh Lawlor asserts:

I'm all for social media, you know, I, I think it's a great great, great thing. And it's, it's free advertising for artists and it gets music out there. It gets people creative with the music you know with stuff like TikTok and everything. Yeah, and it just gets, it gets the music and the people out there that bit more which I think is incredible (Lawlor 2021, Interview).

Engagement with social media can be seen as creating a place for themselves in the history of Irish country music. These stars are the first generation of Irish country music artists to utilise social media platforms for online shows, blogs, and daily check-ins with fans. They are changing how fans and artists interact resulting in a contemporary online culture for Irish country music to evolve further.

6.5: Memory and History - The Gatekeepers and Their Impact on Contemporary Irish Country Music

Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have had a lasting influence on the Irish country music scene. They represent the longest touring artist on the Irish country music circuit. These three women have contributed to the emergence of the genre, while also contributing to the continued engagement with Irish country music. Contemporary artists have reiterated these points:

They definitely paved the way for any of us that's out there now. They are the ones that paved the way. Like ... the video of Philomena, that had such an impact on me. All I thought is "I want to be like her". And the three of them

and even the likes of Louise Morrissey as well, they are all so down to earth (Douglas 2021, Interview).

Women were dominating the scene for a long time ... women I looked up to like Philomena Begley, Margo, and Susan McCann... I want to be a voice for women like they were (Clodagh Lawlor 2021, Interview).

They are legends really you know, I mean the likes of Philomena, I've dueted with Philomena and I've wrote songs for Philomena, and one thing that strikes me, I probably know her the most out of the three you know, em and one thing that strikes me about her is her work ethic. Like she is always up for everything she works hard, she, you know, she never stops (Derek Ryan 2021, Interview).

The sentiments expressed by Olivia Douglas, Clodagh Lawlor and Derek Ryan in their interviews highlight the importance of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann in the contemporary Irish country music scene. Similar statements have been made by the audience members who were respondents to the survey discussed earlier. These three women icons 'paved the way for future female entertainers', 'they have given female country singers someone to look up to', and 'they gave women a voice, showed younger ones it can be done, it's not a man's world!!' (anonymous, survey responses 2021). These responses and the quotations from Douglas, Lawlor and Ryan showcase how important these women have been for the contemporary Irish country music scene. Douglas suggests that they are 'down to earth' and they are very supportive of the younger generation of singers coming through. In fact, Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann, have stated on separate occasions how they are sought out for advice from many up-and-coming artists. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann are seen as mentors to the stars of the Irish country music scene. They are the 'gate keepers' of a tradition that is becoming very popular with Irish audiences once more. I utilise the term 'gate keepers' in the sense that they have provided a large number of acts, both men and women, with their first opportunity to get their music out to country music audiences. Nathan Carter secured his first support act

performance when he supported Begley in one of her shows in the early 2000s. On hearing him perform Begley helped Carter continue to spread his name and music to Irish country music audiences. O'Donnell has had a number of new artists play as support acts for concerts: evidence of this is Lisa McHugh when she first began to emerge on the Irish country music scene. O'Donnell was also part of RTÉ's *Late Late Show* 2019 quest to find the next big country singer. McCann and Cliona Hagan regularly discuss how McCann provided Hagan with her first support act performance, while also providing Hagan with regular career advice. Furthermore, Begley, O'Donnell and McCann, when not touring with acts, they are recording duets with younger artists. Begley and McCann both released new songs as duets with younger artists in 2021 and 2022. Younger artists look to them for guidance, and approval. All three women continue to provide support, advice, performance slots, and mentorship to the next generation of country music stars. They have continuously provided new acts with the support they need, and they ask for. Most importantly, as a result of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann's reputation and stature within the genre, these women have the ability to spread the name of new acts to Irish country music audiences. When asked to participate in interviews for this research, all three were delighted to be able to help promote and enhance the sustainability of the genre. As Douglas has pointed out 'they are so down to earth', they do not see themselves as icons or stars but as women who are happy to help others in any way they can. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have enabled young women artists to envisage a career as a country music singer. These women are still touring and releasing music, selling out venues and making TV appearances, and they are 'not finished yet' as noted by Philomena Begley on the *Tommy Tiernan Show* (Begley 2021, television interview). Since 2020, the impact of women on Irish country music has been recognised by RTÉ and the Irish country music association. In December 2020, Philomena Begley was the first woman to be inducted into the Irish country music hall of fame. This award thus highlights the impact and importance these women have

had on the genre of Irish country music. They are known as the Queens and the first lady of Irish country music, and their impact can be seen and heard throughout Ireland.

6.7: Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed women in Irish country music through the use of Jeff Todd Titon's music-culture analysis model. Through this model I detailed the qualitative data from my own survey on Irish country music. This survey reinforces ideologies concerning women and the culture associated with women artists within the genre of Irish country music. The survey provided insight from audiences on their perception of Irish country music and on the impact of Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann.

The use of Titon's model, in combination with additional theories and authors, has showcased how women are modernising the genre and making it accessible to a more contemporary audience. This examination of a music culture through performance, community, memory and history, illustrates how women are transgressing previously held nationalistic ideologies of womanhood. Contemporary women artists are following the path of Begley, O'Donnell and McCann and positioning women in the forefront of contemporary Irish society. They are appealing to a younger audience by engaging with contemporary image presentations and by providing audiences with a sense of more direct contact. Some have suggested that these women are making country 'sexy', that is not to say however that the male singers are not doing this as well. On the contrary, I suggest here that the use of social media and popular culture images allow for the newest generation to make country 'cool' together.¹⁰⁴ However, I do suggest that the gender presentations used by women have illustrated how Irish country music is a more expressive form of music than it was before. Contemporary women artists are not hiding their bodies away from the audience, they are putting their bodies on display. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann demonstrated to young Irish women that the country music stage was not just for men. They gave women a voice within a previously male dominated genre. These women have

¹⁰⁴ The words sexy and cool are utilised by performers in interviews, and by audience in their survey responses.

provided structures, support and music to the younger generation of Irish country music artists. They opened many doors for new artists along the way so that Irish country music can survive long after they are gone. They are the gatekeepers of a cultural expression that is once again gaining a strong hold with the Irish population.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Begley, O'Donnell and McCann demonstrate how artists negotiate identity, meaningfulness and legacy in Irish country music. Beyond Irish country music, this research has relevance to a wider academic audience seeking to gain a greater understanding into social and cultural change in Ireland. Recognising the limitations of this study, I conclude with proposals for future research within the field of country music studies in Ireland.

This research sought to highlight the impact Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have had on Irish country music. To achieve this an in-depth examination of their lived experience in Irish country music was conducted to consider how Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann negotiated their identity, created meaningfulness, and developed a legacy within this genre. Utilising specific identity theories, this dissertation has illustrated how these three women have created an identity that was relatable to their audience. Their development and presentation of a rural, Irish, home grown, female identity has enabled audiences to embrace them as someone who is no different than the audience. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann were all born into families situated in rural Ireland during the 1940s. Their own lived experience in childhood is extremely similar to that of their audiences. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann embraced a career path of music and performance at a young age. This choice required all three women to grow and mature on stage in front of an audience of their peers. Yet, they never viewed themselves as different to their audience. Their lived experience as both individuals and performers enabled them to develop a special connection with the audience. The identity that each of these performers had formed during childhood, and the self-reflexive process through which identity is created, has contributed to a continued reinforcement of their identity as rural, Irish, home grown, and female.

Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have been constant figures in the Irish country music community for over five decades, and their identity markers have evolved to incorporate new

aspects of who they have become. From being teenagers, to wives, to mothers, to lifelong friends, these identity markers are an evolution of their lived experiences. Their identity and identity markers are reflected in the lives of their audiences. The audience to whom these women sing, relate to the embodied identities and portrayal of identity by these three women. This generates the sense of belonging to a community of country music. This type of identity dialogue aids in the creation of an identity for the community within Irish country music. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have created a specific space for themselves within Irish country music through the use of their identity markers as rural, Irish, religious, local, mother, wife, friend, woman, with whom the audience create a 'real' connection.

The identity of these three artists is also promoted in their visual displays, evident on their album covers, promotional material, music videos and stage performances. These performers reinforced and disseminated their identity markers through their images which further reinforces their identity with the audience. By selecting their own clothing, outfits, and cosmetic presentations, they are further presenting a specific type of identity. By choosing their own clothing presentation, these women are creating a further sense of connection to their audience, frequently choosing clothing styles that are available on general sale. This allows the audience to relate to their image presentations, often replicating the aesthetic presentations of these artists at performances. The audience reflect the aesthetic choices and also the identity markers these women have portrayed, adding to the image and identity markers of a music community, genre, and fan base. The album cover images presented in this dissertation provide a snapshot of a specific moment in time when Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann were at different points in their careers. These images allow the audience and viewer to read the cover as a presentation of a specific type of identity. These image displays showcase the cultural and social knowledge that

these artists had acquired, and how their identity informed or transgressed social and cultural norms.

Begley and McCann became mothers during their careers as performers and they rejected the social norm of mothers staying at home and taking care of their children full time. They highlighted how women can have a career and a full-time job simultaneously. They broke down preconceptions of women's role in society and illustrated that women musicians were capable of fulfilling multiple societal roles including mothers and wives. O'Donnell was also contributing to this rejection of societal norms by continuing her musical career when cultural expectations of that time suggested she should become a teacher or nurse, get married and have children. All three women highlighted to their audience members, and the wider Irish society that identifying as a mother, a wife, and woman does not mean that one cannot continue to pursue a music career. Their lived experience enabled Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann to present to the audience their identity of strong and powerful women who wanted to succeed and progress in their music careers.

The combination of identity and visual display add to the creation of meaningfulness in the lives of their audience. Meaningfulness is created by these artists both in their identity formations, identity presentations, and in their lyrical content. Their songs create a type of lived narrative for the audience and for themselves. Irish country music is performed predominantly to audiences in rural Ireland. These women sing songs that are expressive of the audiences' everyday lives providing the audience with a real connection. While the themes contained in the songs may be of a general nature, they are tangible with the lived experience of these three performers and their audience base. In their later career performances, recordings and interviews, nostalgia plays a significant role in the lives of both the performer and the audience despite reflecting on a time when cultural and social life in Ireland was harsh on its citizens (1960s-1980s). While the level of emigration was high amongst both men and women, there was an added harshness in the lived experiences of women, whose role in Irish society was still

limited. The nostalgia presented in their songs is connected to particular places. The fan base for Irish country music in diaspora communities is connected to particular locations that these artists sing of, creating the meaningfulness by remembering home, reminiscing about functions and remembering family and old friends. The singers are evoking memories for their audience, and for themselves, that construct a sense of meaningfulness. Nostalgia and meaningfulness are more apparent in the lives of their ageing audience members. This type of meaningfulness reinforces a personal connection for the audience to both the singer and the song.

The combination of identity and meaningfulness enabled Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann to create a legacy for themselves in Irish country music. The identity marker of being strong women is showcased in the early stages of their career when they fronted their own bands in male dominated places and spaces. They performed in parochial halls, town halls, community centres, marquees, carnivals, hotel ballrooms, and public houses, when it was not regarded as a 'proper place for a woman' (O'Donnell 2018; Begley 2020; McCann 2019). They fought for their right to play in these locations, indicating their growing power within the genre. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann showed the Irish nation that women were equal to men on the Irish country music performing stage. They were capable of performing seven nights a week since the beginning of their careers, while identifying as a woman, a mother, a wife, or a daughter. These identity markers did not impact their professional ability. This has had a lasting effect on the Irish country music scene. These women created a career path that is pursued by a large number of women in contemporary Irish society. Begley, O'Donnell, and McCann have become gatekeepers of Irish country music. They are consistently sought out for advice, mentorship and support from men and women contemporary artists entering the Irish country music scene. They have shared their lived experience to provide their expertise on choosing this career and they have paved the way for so many others to follow. They have utilised Irish

country music as a medium to negotiate identity and meaningfulness, which has informed the creation of their legacy in Irish country music.

This research contributes to the discourse on country music in Ireland by filling the literature gap on women in Irish country music. A limited amount of research has been conducted on Irish country music to date, with an absence of writing on women within the genre. This research not only fills that gap but adds to this body of growing academic work in Ireland. Irish country music has often been seen as something of an “other”, or an outsider. Often Irish country music is spoken of with an element of disdain, hinting at the rejection of modernity in Irish culture through its simplistic lyrics and musical structures. However, this thesis illustrates how Irish country music is a form of music that is expressive of modern life for those who participate in it.

This research also contributes to writing on country music as a discipline within Ireland and in the broader context of music scholarship in the USA. During my postgraduate studies, I have published work in the *International Journal of Country Music* (Lynn, 2021), highlighting issues of identity within the Irish and American country music context, specifically relating to women artists. Additionally, a chapter in the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, Bloomsbury, concerning country music in Northern Ireland is forthcoming (August 2022). Those publications and this dissertation contribute to building knowledge on Irish country music as a whole, while also contributing to writing on gender and identity in country music. Moreover, this dissertation adds to writing on Irish music and society. Much of the writing on music in Ireland is concerned with traditional Irish music, art music, and popular music. This dissertation contributes to writing on Irish music as it is performed, received, and engaged with outside of

those genres, placing Irish country music within the discourse of Irish music and Irish music making.

This research makes an important contribution to writing on women in ethnomusicology. The output of writing on women in Irish music has to date been sparse within the context of ethnomusicology. However, the recent special issue of the journal *Ethnomusicology Ireland* (2020) has brought forth an important influx of writing on women in Irish music at a general level. This dissertation contributes to this developing discourse in ethnomusicology in Ireland and to ethnomusicology on an international level. Finally, this dissertation contributes to writing on concepts of modernity and specifically states how country music as a medium creates meaningfulness in the lives of its audience and performers.

This research sought to highlight the impact of three women on Irish country music but highlighted many more aspects of the genre and scene that are under-researched. Irish country music is a cultural expression of Irishness and requires further scholarly engagement. Irish country music provides commentary on cultural and social practices, on cultural expressions, on identity displays, and on the concepts of meaningfulness. It also incorporates ideas of nostalgia, it engages with technology and social media, and has begun to cross over into pop-country. Further research could attempt focusing on mapping the genre, investigating the places and spaces for country music in Ireland, and geographically locating them within the Irish context. Additionally, research on heteronormativity in Irish country music and places/spaces for LGBTQ+ members could also be considered. These areas provide the context for further research on Irish country music that were not within the scope of this current research topic.

Primarily focused on three women within Irish country music from the 1960s to present day, it was pertinent to examine their lived experience within the genre. This research presents an informed understanding of the challenges that these women faced within their careers as Irish country music artists. It also discusses how they formulated a specific place and space for

themselves within the genre. The research illustrates how identity and visual imagery play an important role in the reception of Irish country music stars and how this is embraced by the country music community. This dissertation provides a considered approach to the concepts of power and legacy through the use of meaningfulness, discourse, and difference. Power is created through discourse and knowledge; these women have become powerful within Irish country music through discourse and an acquired knowledge of the country music scene by both the artists and their audience. Power as an identity marker has also been informed by their rejections of limitations to their careers through cultural norms. This power has enabled them to create a legacy as powerful figures in Irish country music. They have maintained an identity that is referencing both their lived experience and the lived experience of their audience. This discourse on Irish country music contributes to building academic knowledge on the genre, and on women's participation and impact within it. These women are now known as: Philomena Begley - The Queen of Country; Margo O'Donnell - The Queen of Country and Irish; and Susan McCann - First Lady of Irish Country. As performers for over sixty years the longevity of their careers, and their recognition as leading voices within the genre, highlights why their lived experience warrants academic research. This thesis builds on a limited amount of academic writing on Irish country music to date, it fills the gap on writing on women in Irish country music, and contributes to the increase in writing on gender, women and music, and identity in country music studies.

Appendices

1A: Philomena Begley Discography

Philomena Begley	Year	Title	Record Label
	1972	Truck Driving Woman	Release Records
	1973	The Two of Us with Ray Lynam	Release Records
	1974	Together... Again with Ray Lynam	Release Records
	1974	Meet the Queen of Country Music	Top Spin Records
	1975	Introduces her Ramblin Men	Top Spin Records
	1975	Blank on the Ground	Top Spin Records
	1976	Queen of the Silver Dollar	Top Spin Records
	1976	Irish Country Queen	Top Spin Records
	1977	Truckin' Queen	Top Spin Records
	1978	Nashville Country	Top Spin Records
	1979	Fireside Country	Top Spin Records
	1979	The Best of Philomena Begley	K-Tel
	1979	Scots 'n' Irish	BGS
	1980	Philomena's Country	Top Spin Records
	1982	My Kind of Country	Top Spin Records
	1983	Country Scenes	K-Tel
	1984	You're in My Heart	RITZ Records
	1985	Simply Divine with Ray Lynam	RITZ Records
	1987	More About Love	RITZ Records
	1989	Silver Anniversary	RITZ Records
	1991	In Harmony	RITZ Records
	1992	Reflections	K-Tel
	1996	The Way Old Friends Do (with Margo)	Sharpe Music
	2003	Today	Privately Released
	2003	Village in County Tyrone	H&H Music
	2003	Once Around the Dance Floor	H7H Music
	2004	Red is The Rose	H&H Music
	2004	The Way Old Friends Do	H&H Music
	1989, 2007	Live in Dundee	H&H Music
	2011	I'll Only Give This up When it Gives Me Up	H&H Music

	2012	From Then Till Now	H&H Music
	2013	50 years of Music and Memories	H&H Music
	2013	How I Love Them Old Songs	H&H Music
	2013	Here Today Gone Tomorrow	H&H Music
	2014	The Complete Duet Collection with Ray Lynam	H&H Music
	2017	My Life My Music. My Memories	H&H Music
	2019	Jive Time	H&H Music

1B: Margo O'Donnell Album Discography

Margo O'Donnell	Year	Title	Record
	1970	Margo and The Country Folk	ARA Records
	1971	From Margo with Love	ARA Records
	1972	Country Lovin'	ARA Records
	1972	Irish Request	ARA Records
	1973	At Home In Ireland	ARA Records
	1973	Margo: Greatest Hits Vol 1	ARA/Outlet Records
	1973	Margo: Greatest Hits Vol 2	ARA Records
	1973	Margo Country Girl	Outlet Records
	1973	Margo Country Style	Outlet Records
	1973	Margo: The Girl from Donegal	Release Records
	1973	Margo: The Three Leaf Shamrock	Outlet Records
	1973	A Trip to Ireland	Outlet Records
	1973	Margo and Larry Cunningham: Share Our World	Harp Records
	1976	Margo and Larry Cunningham: Yes, Mr. Peters	Release Records
	1977	A Toast to Claddagh	ARA Records
	1977	Margo: Old Ireland Free Once More	Derry Records
	1982	Margo's Favourites	Harp/Pickwick Records
	1982	18 Irish Songs	ARA Records
	1982	I'll Settle for Old Ireland	Harp Records & Startime: Release Records
	1983	Margo: Destination Donegal	Evergreen Records
	1983	A Toast from an Irish Colleen	Release Records
	No Date	Margo: Ireland Must be Heaven	Rosses Records
	No Date	Margo: The Irish Songs I Love to Sing	Smashed Records

	1988	Margo Now	RITZ Records
	1989	Margo: A Trip Through Ireland	I&B Records
	1994	Margo: New Beginnings	RITZ Records
	1995	Margo: Old Friends of Mine	Hazel Records
	No Date	Margo: The Heart That Beats in Ireland	Music Box Records
	1996	The Way Old Friends Do	Sharp Music
	2005	I'm Still Here	Tulip Records
	2005	Highway of My Life	Tulip Records
	2005	Parcel of Dreams	Crashed Records
	2005	Two Sides of Margo	Crashed Records
	2007	Country & Irish	Crashed Records
	2008	Golden Favourites	Crashed Records
	2009	Songs of Inspiration	Crashed Records
	2010	Irelands Where I Call Home	Crashed Records
	2010	Stories in Song	Crashed Records
	2011	Margo and Friends	Crashed Records
	2012	Songs for Mother	Crashed Records
	2012	World Through My Eyes	Crashed Records
	2014	50 Songs 50 Years	Crashed Records
	2014	The Promise & The Dream	Crashed Records
	2019	Old & New	Crashed Records

1C: Susan McCann Album Discography

Susan McCann	Year	Title	Label
	1977	The Blaney Years (Sings Country)	Top Spin Records
	1977	The Blaney Years (Papa's Wagon)	Top Spin Records
	1978	The Blaney Years (Down River Road)	Top Spin Records
	1980	Storybook Country	Top Spin Records
	1981	Susan McCann in Nashville	Top Spin Records
	1981	Susan McCann Sincerely Yours	Top Spin Records
	1983	Charts Hits	Fortune Records, Top Spin Records
	1984	Back to Me	K-Tel Records
	1985	At Home in Ireland	Homespun Records
	1985	When the Sun Says Goodbye to the Mountain	Top Spin Records
	1986	Songs Just for You	Homespun Records
	1987	Twenty Country Classics	Harmac Records
	1987	Susan McCann and Brendan Quinn	Sharp Music
	1990	You Gave Me Love	Gold Record Music
	1991	Diamonds and Dreams	Prism Leisure Corporation
	1995	Sean Wilson Susan McCann Command Performance	Prism Leisure Corporation
	1998	Part of Me	Pegasus Records
	2001	Irish Favourites	Sharp Music
	2005	Susan McCann My Heroes	Prism Leisure Corporation
	2006	String of Diamonds	H&H Music
	2007	Sentimental Journey	H&H Music
	2008	Once Upon a Time	H&H Music
	2009	The Nashville Years	H&H Music
	2010	Ireland First Lady of Country Music	H&H Music
	2010	A Merry Christmas with Sean Wilson	H&H Music
	2015	Through the Years	H&H Music

	2020	The Older I Get	H&H Music
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Radio Show

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C103 Anthems and Country & Irish with Eric Griffin (2021). 102.6-103.9 FM [radio] 2021
Weekdays 7.00pm – 11.00pm.

C103 Country with Michael Dennehy (2021). 102.6-103.9 FM [radio] 2021 Saturdays 6.00pm
– 10.00pm.

Clare FM (2021). 95.2, 95.5, 95.9, 96.4, 96.6 [radio] 2021.

Classic Hits Country with Chris Carroll (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, daily 1.30pm –
3.00pm.

Country Jamboree (2021). 102.5-105 FM [radio] 2021, daily 7.00pm – 10.00pm.

Dundalk FM (2021). 100 FM [radio] 2021.

Fireside Radio with Michael Commins (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, Sundays 10.00pm –
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- KFM, K Country with Liam Kett (2021). 97.3 - 97.6 [radio] 2021 Monday to Thursday 8.00pm – 10.00pm.
- LMFM (2021). 95.8, 95.5, 104.9 FM [radio] 2021.
- Mac's Country Store (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, Saturdays 10.00pm – 1.00am.
- Mid-Morning Show with Paul Claffey (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, daily 11.00am – 1.00pm.
- Midlands 103 (2021). 95.4, 96.5 FM, 103.5 FM [radio] 2021.
- Nice & Easy (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, daily 8.00pm – 10.00pm.
- Premier Country with Trudi Lalor (2021). 95.3, 97.1, 103.3 103.9 FM [radio] 2021 Sundays 11.00am – 2.00pm.
- Radio Kerry (2021). 96.2-97.6 FM [radio] 2021 weekdays 6.00pm – 8.00pm.
- RTÉ Raidió na Gaeltachta (2021). 92.8 FM [radio] 2021.
- Shannonside FM (2021). 95.7, 97.2, 104.1, 104.6 FM [radio] 2021.
- South East Radio (2021). 95.6, 96.2, 96.9 FM [radio] 2021.
- South East Radio, Country N' Irish with Tony Kehoe (2021). 95.6 – 96.4 FM [radio] Weekdays 6.00pm – 8.00pm.
- The Late Show with Michael Commins (2021). 96.1 FM [radio] 2021, Wednesdays 11.00pm – 2.00am.
- The Paschal Mooney Show (2021). 102.5-105 FM [radio] 2021, Saturdays 11.00am – 2.00pm.