

Lea Hagmann (2022), *Celtic Music and Dance in Cornwall: Cornu-Copia* (London: Routledge), 238 pp., £130, ISBN: 978-0-367-69141-7

Musicians and academics have embraced, commodified and derided the concept of ‘Celtic music’ to varying degrees, creating a challenge for researchers and audiences. In this book, cultural anthropologist Lea Hagmann critically engages with the term and how it is used and interpreted in relation to music and dance in Cornwall. Drawing on historical sources and fieldwork experiences, she undertakes a journey of academic and personal development, finding a balance between deconstructing and communicating the stories of the Cornish musicians and dancers she encountered. Hagmann’s text highlights the varying degrees to which people question the what, how and why of the musicking activities they engage in. Her questioning provides a model for critical engagement with other musical traditions, no matter how well established, that is sympathetic to the voices of those involved but retains an academic critique.

Utilising linguistics in parallel with the study of music communities, Hagmann readily recognises the invention of tradition, the manipulation of historical sources by early revivalists and the Celtification (in contrast with Celticisation) of local traditions, influenced by politics and commodification. She seeks to deconstruct the narrative of Cornish revivalists and, in doing so, provides a balanced and thorough examination of a very interesting musical world. This world is not isolated and must be understood in the context of the British folk revivals, the broader international folk revivals of the 1950s to 1970s and the impact of *Riverdance* in the 1990s, thus broadening the audience for this study.

Structured into concise, focussed chapters, Hagmann describes the search for and creation of a Cornish identity by a variety of different groups that draws significantly on music, song and dance traditions. From the introduction, it is clear that, despite the county’s

relatively small size, there is more than one narrative and perspective to be considered in relation to music and dance in Cornwall. In the early chapters, Haggmann brings scholarly scepticism to some older sources, teasing through interpretations without ignoring their existence, to demonstrate how some accepted assumptions were constructed. Her knowledge of linguistics invites readers to gain a greater appreciation of sound and dialect, not always present in written text, such as the discussion of *Hal-an-Tow* (69). She reflects on how changing musical tastes, politics and social factors shape not only the musical traditions as they are performed but also their reception and the meaning attached, accurate or otherwise, to particular aspects of these traditions.

Early in the book, Haggmann engages in a critique of the term Celtic, which extends the point of reference to include Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Brittany and the Isle of Man. In chapter 1, she emphasises language and the development of Cornish identities, with little reference to music. Chapters 2 and 3 provide historical insights that continue to make connections with language. Here, Haggmann demonstrates that local distinctiveness does not mean disconnection from wider contexts. Chapter 4 brings the reader into the twentieth century, placing Cornish music in a wider Anglo-British continuum before chapter 5 develops a focus on the Cornish music and dance revival of the 1970s. Critically, some of the main actors in this phase of development become interlocutors that Haggmann converses with during her research. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 focus on the three decades from the 1990s during which Cornish material was broadened, commodified and modernised. In the conclusion, Haggmann reiterates the multi-faceted understanding of Cornish music and dance traditions that she has outlined, returning to the concept of revivals and the various factors that triggered these revivals, as well as pointing to interesting future research potential with an awareness of other current research in the area.

Haggmann ably engages with the numerous linguistic and folk revivals, drawing on

academic literature and demonstrating how Cornwall aligns with theoretical conceptualisations of music revivals. Her ability to draw on an important German-language source, in addition to more familiar texts in Anglo-centric academia, is critical. She raises questions of cultural appropriation by different groups, without passing judgement, allowing the reader to gain a more holistic understanding of the twists and turns in musical activity. In chapter 4, she comfortably draws comparison with music and dance developments in Ireland, Scotland, Brittany, Wales and the Isle of Man, while also distinguishing between Cornish revivalists and English folkies. Her critique of collectors and collecting echoes other recent studies, such as that of Deirdre Ní Chonghaile (2021) on the Aran Islands in Ireland.

Hagmann interrogates the established and previously published narrative of Cornish music, exemplified in the example from chapter 5 of the establishment of the first Cornish dance group to participate in the Pan-Celtic festival in Killarney. She highlights the selective history employed and the influence of Welsh groups. The early discussion of Celtic music is further developed in chapter 7. It is interesting to note reflections on Irish and Scottish music influences, which were viewed as conservative or restrictive, while Breton cultural influences were more liberating. In chapter 8, divisions between the revival scene and the local community become evident, while there is also a move from a Cornish to Pan-Celtic or even broader imagination of these music and dance traditions.

The penultimate chapter is very current but perhaps weakened by the challenge to reflect as critically as earlier chapters, recognising that a post-revival phase has not yet happened. This, as well as the section on the internet, points to potential further study but also highlights the importance of the book in providing a robust counterbalance to the inaccurate narratives presenting online.

While telling a local story, Hagmann places Cornish music and dance in a broader context of revivals and the development of 'Celtic music'. She demonstrates the necessary

bravery to challenge prior scholarship and engage with competing narratives, listening to both sides as well as examining materials. There is evidence of thorough research as she returns to sources to check accuracy and develop her own understanding, rather than accepting the interpretations of others. She achieves balance between different stories and actions, addressing, acknowledging and contextualising divisions across different periods of revival to construct an engaging volume on music and dance in Cornwall.

Reference

Ní Chonghaile, D. (2021) *Collecting Music in the Aran Islands: A Century of History and Practice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press).

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