

# Listening for geography: the relationship between music and geography

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A fundamental question that has emerged in the evolution of geography in recent years relates to geographies traditional engagement with the visual above all other senses (Smith, 1994, 1997). Over the past decade, *Chimera* has been to the fore in publishing emerging research in this field with a particular focus on Irish perspectives. Articles have examined the role of folk music traditions, composers, and songwriters in creating a sense of place and engaging with the attitudes and changes of society. Authors have also engaged with popular culture and pointed to the need for greater awareness of popular music. In an attempt to contextualise the recent developments in the geographical study of music in Ireland, this article takes a step back in order to outline the development of geographical studies involving music and highlight the importance of understanding music as part of future geographic discourses in an Irish context.

Two schools of thought are presented; an American approach, pioneered by George Carney, which emerges out of the cultural geographies of Carl Sauer is contrasted with a British interdisciplinary approach. The concerns of the American School of music geography are considered through the work and anthologies of George Carney (1987; 1995; 1998). The themes and approaches of the British geography of music are presented primarily through the work and influence of Leyshon, Matless and Revill's anthology, *The Place of Music* (1998). The influence of Jacques Attali's work, *Noise* (1985), must also be considered, particularly in relation to the development of interest amongst British geographers in the 1990s. The article concludes with a reflection on previous contributions to *Chimera* that approach various issues through an awareness of music.

The geographical importance of music lies in its role in reflecting and shaping geographical processes and, simultaneously, the role of geographical processes in shaping the music that is produced. Noting the many contexts for music with clear geographical implications, Lovering states:

Music is not just a hobby indulged at the end of the working day, an aspect of ‘entertainment consumption,’ or even a personal door to the sublime – although it can be all of these things. It is often also a profound influence on the way we see our world(s) and situate ourselves in relation to others (1998: 32).

Music performs a number of different roles in society. Music is connected to power (Attali, 1985); it is an economic resource, part of the heritage of a place or society and integral to the identity of social or political groups (Ó Suilleabháin, 1994; Herbert, 1998; Sweeney-Turner, 1998). Recognising the role of music in geographical study, Ryecroft states that “geographers of music are influenced and defined by a series of discourses surrounding politics, social order, and culture” (1998: 224). Ryecroft identifies these discourses as “structuring frames” that can be used to study “localised music genres” (*ibid.*). Localised music genres occupy particular spaces that help shape the sounds produced. Many of the approaches outlined in this article point to localised understandings, socio-economic contexts and spatial awareness.

### ***American music geography***

In reviewing the development of music geography, I borrow heavily from the work of George Carney, located in an American geographical tradition still influenced by Sauer. Carney was considered “the ‘guru’ of geomusicology, [and] has encouraged geographers for the past quarter-century to explore a facet of cultural geography long overdue in the plethora of North American folk and popular culture topics” (Nash, 1996). However, the use of Carney’s work is problematised by allegations of plagiarism (Bartlett and Smallwood, 2004). Acknowledging the difficulties in the authorship of Carney’s work, the theories presented by him in a number of publications remain relevant and influential.

In an article written for a special issue of the *Journal of Cultural Geography*, for which he served as guest editor, Carney (1998b) presented an overview of the first thirty years of geographical writing on the subject of music. He identifies an article by Peter Hugh Nash (1968) as “the first scholarly article on music authored by a professional geographer” (Carney, 1998b: 1). The work detailed by Carney is almost entirely focused on American folk and popular music.

**Table 1 Approaches in a geography of music.**

1.	History of musical traditions and their development.
2.	Regional studies and the production of cartographic representations of the location of musical traditions and spaces.
3.	Examination of cultural hearths and patterns of diffusion.
4.	The perception of place in music.

**Source: Adapted from Carney (1987).**

In *Sounds of People and Places*, Carney (1987) presents four approaches to the geographical study of music (Table 1). The first considers largely historical perspectives on the roots and development of American music. The second section focuses on regional studies of country music and the development of cartographic representations of musical traditions. Carney notes: “Historians, sociologists, and folklorists have claimed for some time that there were regional patterns in the origin of music styles and that preferences for types of music varied from place to place” (1987a: 55). The second section, including contributions from Crowley (1987) and Lornell (1987), as well as Carney, attempts to locate musicians, festivals and events and briefly analyse the patterns presented. The third section focuses on cultural hearths, identified as places from where musical traditions are diffused. The fourth section concerns the perception of place in music. Carney thus seeks to analyse a type or genre of music, the music of a place, the diffusion of a musical style and the role of music in the perception of place.

A prominent process in the work of Carney is that of diffusion. Cultural traits are diffused, evolve and adapt in different settings. In relation to music, Waterman states:

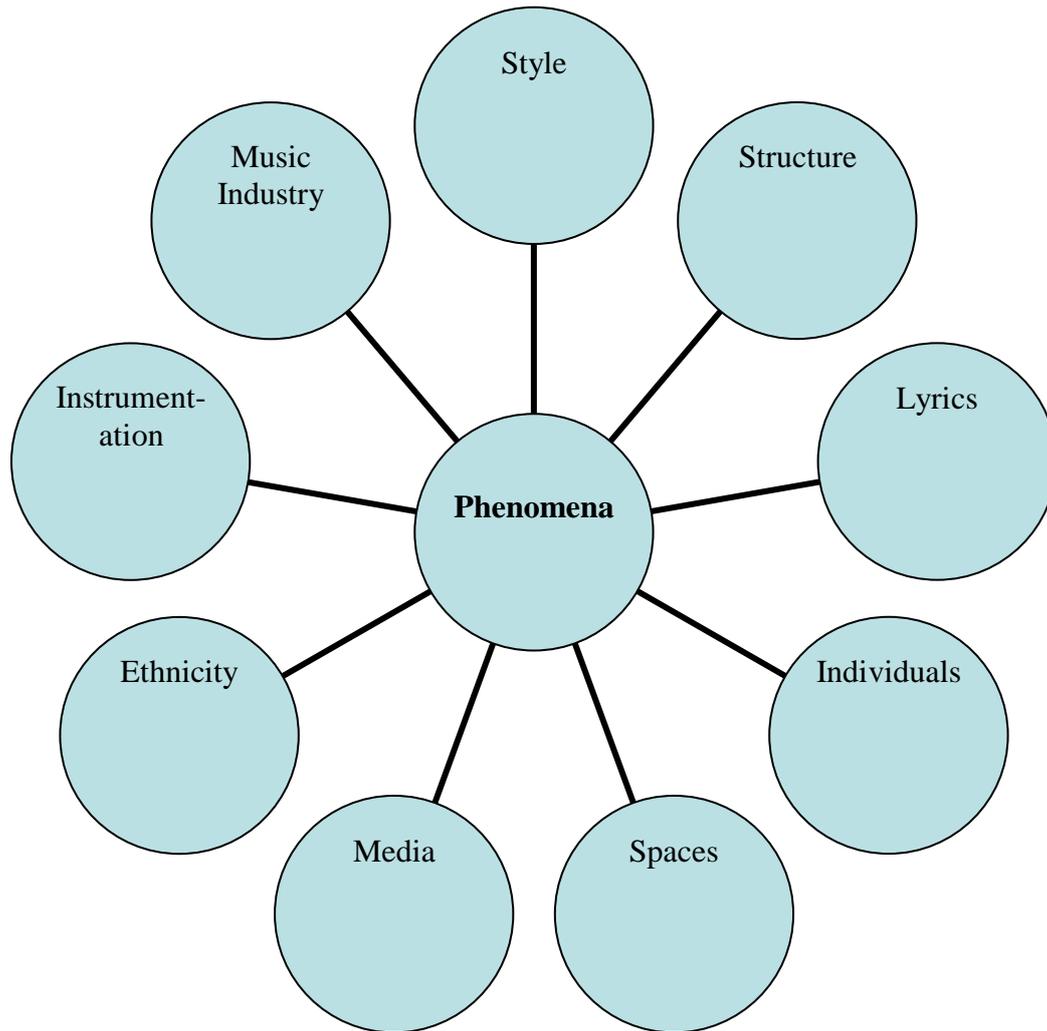
Music develops continuously over space and through time, stimulating, absorbing influences and constantly changing. As with other cultural artefacts, music – genres, instruments, performing styles – spreads from various points of origin and is adopted and adapted by other cultures. The music of any given provenance metamorphoses, a process augmented and amplified in the contemporary world as sounds of

different provenance meld. There is nothing particularly unusual about this: adaptation is part and parcel of the diffusion of cultures and the globalisation of music has never been a one-way process but multi-channelled (2006: 1).

The complexity of patterns of diffusion of musical traditions relates to other aspects of society influenced by politics, economics and the environment. Music travels with emigrants and migrants often perform their identity through the performance of music (Hall, 1994; Stillman, 1999; Connell and Gibson, 2002). Other processes of diffusion, including those shaped by the commercial music industry affect the location of music communities and the existence of local or regional musical styles or genres. However, in spite of trends related to globalization and advancement in information communication technologies, Bohlman (2002) notes the continued existence of the local in globalised music forms. The diffusion of music does not necessitate the abandonment or extinction of older locations, places or regions in a musical tradition.

Carney identifies nine categories of phenomena for investigation in a geographical study of music (Figure 1). The first three phenomena concern musical style, structure and lyrics. These involve analysis of the language of music. Instrumentation is integral to the study of style and the role of individuals in the study and development of musical traditions is also stressed. Carney also creates a spatial awareness, evident also in his concerns with the cultural landscape. The media, music industry and ethnic identity are important factors in the representation of musical traditions and their connection to place. The phenomena for study presented by Carney relate readily to aspects of ethnomusicological study and, in particular, are very similar to Nettl's (1964) outline of historical and geographical approaches to the study of music in culture (see also Myers, 1993; Nettl, 2005).

**Figure 1 Phenomena for study that may be considered in a geographical investigation of music.**



**Source: Adapted form Carney (1998b).**

Carney identifies ten categories of processes that feature in the geographical study of music (Table 2). The various processes presented by Carney (1998b) relate the music to more established geographical themes such as location, diffusion and spatial organisation. A critique of Carney's model identifies a lack of clarity in the boundaries between the various themes and approaches that he presents. It is difficult to separate some of the issues as many are interrelated, shaped by other aspects of the context and processes in which music exists.

**Table 2 Geographical processes in the study of music.**

1. Delimitation of music regions
2. Evolution of style with place
3. Identification of cultural hearth
4. Migration, transportation, communication
5. Psychological / Symbolic association of music and place
6. Development of cultural landscape
7. Location of music industry
8. Impact of environment
9. Role of national and nationalist politics.
10. Relationship with other cultures

**Source: Adapted from Carney (1998b).**

Carney acknowledges the role of the media as influential in our understanding of music and the geography of music. Several geographers have highlighted the role of the media in our understanding of place (Tuan, 1977; Ryden, 1999; Gibson and Davidson, 2004; Thompson, 2006). Stereotypical images, sounds and ideas of space and place are communicated through various media forms to the extent that a people of conceive of places without ever being present in that place (Ryden, 1993; Thompson, 2006). Through the media, people can also make assumptions connecting particular musics and places (Lovering, 1998; Thompson, 2006).

Carney's geographies of music are deeply embedded in Sauerian Cultural Geography which was challenged in the 1980s by the cultural turn emanating in particular from a British geographical community. Human geographers began to consider the role of aesthetics and politics of art (Smith, 1997). The focus of study

changes from particular musical traditions, their cultural hearths and patterns of diffusion to the awareness of the relationship between music, spaces and identity.

### ***A British geography of music***

Developed in part from a natural interest in and enthusiasm for music amongst geographers, a conference entitled “The Place of Music” was held in 1993 at University College London. That was followed in 1995 by a theme issue of *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* concerning music (Leyshon et al, 1995) and in 1998 a book entitled *The Place of Music*, edited by Andrew Leyshon, David Matless and George Revill. In the preface, the book sets out a desire for the exploration of the geographical imagination in a transdisciplinary approach without suggesting that one discipline should ‘colonise’ others. Indeed, it states: “Many of the contributors to this volume would not style themselves as geographers and may have been surprised to be approached by those who do” (Leyshon, *et al.* 1998: ix). The relationship between music and place and the development of a geographical awareness of the existence and implications of musical practice underscores this and subsequent works. The transdisciplinarity of *The Place of Music* highlights the integrated approach to the study of music that is particularly apparent in geography. It is influenced to a significant degree by the work of Jacques Attali (1985).

In *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Attali (1985) greatly emphasises the connection between music and society and culture, in particular the role of politics and economics on the evolution of music. Recognising music as “a mirror of society”, Attali notes: “Music is more than an object of study: it is a way of perceiving the world” (1985: 4). Music is organised noise that is shaped by a number of social, political and economic forces. As Stokes suggests: “The musical event [...] evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (1994: 3). Smith reinforces the possible role of music in understanding society, stating: “music can express and reinforce the status order, challenge some of the more stifling aspects of the economic hierarchy and help make sense of the political geography of identity” (1997: 505). Indeed Jarviluoma states that “music and music-making construct, rather than merely reflect, places” (2000: 103). For Attali, music is a commodity and object

of consumption, shaped by economic forces and aesthetic tastes of society that may be shaped by other forces including the associations between music and class or power. The role of music, as derived from Attali's writing, is creative of order, influencing the construction, perception and maintenance of power hierarchies in society.

In spite of the editors apparent rejection of older geographies of music, a number of phenomena, processes and patterns are studied by the authors in *The Place of Music*, though where Carney is primarily concerned with processes, authors in *The Place of Music* are, like Attali, concerned with networks. Farrell (1998) examines the role of recordings of local music in an Indian context, aware not only of the music on the recordings but also of the spaces in which the recordings were made, aspects of diversity not represented by a catalogue of recorded music and the use of images that become associated with the music. A number of authors recognise the importance of music, social and spatial networks in the political economy of music that may be linked by a number of processes including the sharing of memory, stories, radio, and print media. Music can act as a mode of communication or representation of social and political identity or struggle. Herbert (1998) notes the development of brass bands in Victorian England as a reflection of the social change of the era. Sweeney-Turner (1998) acknowledges the use of language and the role of singers in influencing political change in Scotland. Stradling (1998) acknowledges desires for a national music in England. Berland (1998) focuses on the role of the radio in the mediation of space, recognising also that the radio creates new spaces as space is made active. These spaces, though often highly personal, are controlled to a degree by the political economy of music. The role of the media in negotiating space is part of processes of globalization and localization, identified by Hollows and Milestone (1998) as elements in the politics of identity bound up in the identification of regions. Hollows and Milestone (1998) also identify the importance of pilgrimage in the spatial geography of music.

Scottish geographer Francis Morton has outlined how *The Place of Music* provides researchers with an insight into the opportunities for the geographical study of music and "the benefits of music to the spatial imagination" (Morton, 2001: 22). In contrast to the Sauerian influenced American geographies of music that focused on regions, location and diffusion, the British School of 'the geography of music' presents further opportunities for the study of dislocated musics and music spaces.

Indeed in the introduction the editors reject the “deliberately restricted sense of geography” of previous studies in favour of examining the spatiality of music (Leyshon *et al.*, 1998: 4).

The political economy of music is acknowledged in many of the articles and an emphasis is placed on local music spaces. Lovering asserts: “Local live music, while not necessarily producing an alternative sound, may enable people to experience music in distinctive, localised ways” (1998: 15). The performance of live music, by necessity a local experience, helps define the characteristics of a place and create a sense of community (Street, 1993: 54). The sounds produced may be contrasted to represent differing social groups inhabiting the same or neighbouring spaces. Jazeel states:

The analysis of music in the social sciences raises inherently geographical questions, particularly around how musical practice carves spaces of performance, expression and culture, and how it shapes social spaces of identity, belonging and community (2005: 233).

The space of musical performance helps create the context in which the music is experienced and interpreted (Whiteley *et al.*, 2004). Small (1998) has outlined the meanings conveyed through the design and nature of musical spaces such as a concert hall. Other spaces of meaning are constructed through the construction of a landscape of memory by the creation of monuments and statuary (Kearney, 2010). 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.

Festivals have been identified as important spaces for the performance and consumption of music (Aldskogius, 1993; Goertzen, 1996; Duffy, 2000; Gibson and Davidson, 2004). Festivals create another geographical layer at which to consider the role of music in the lives of people and the construction of place. Aldskogius outlines the importance of analyzing the spatial distribution of festivals and “the social and environmental characteristics of localities or regions where they take place” (1993: 55). The inhabitants of a place hosting a music festival play an important role in shaping the festival and Duffy examines “the relationship between music and place by focusing on participation in [a] community music festival” (2000: 51). Duffy

differentiates between the different forces that lead to the development of a festival, focusing in this study on the community music festival as understood in an Australian context. Also working in an Australian context, Gibson and Davidson (2004) explore the role of music festivals in transforming rural places and the attachment of meaning to place, which echoes Jarviluoma's (2000) assertion that music and music-making can construct as well as reflect places. Gibson and Davidson (2004) also acknowledge the role of strategic place marketing undertaken by a range of groups, which plays a role in the conceptualisation of place through its association with a musical tradition. Another important aspect of festivals is the role of music competitions. Goertzen's (1996) study of American fiddle contests is useful in understanding the politics and dynamics of competition on musical style. The appreciation of musical styles is a subjective experience and competitors may choose to perform a particular style influenced by the requirements of the competition.

### ***Tuning in Irish geography***

*Chimera* has been to the fore in publishing emerging geographical research concerned with music. In 2002, Clare Mulvihill published an article concerning the wren traditions on St. Stephen's Day, focusing in particular on Dingle/Daingean Uí Chuis. Acknowledging local publican Fergus Flathery's assertion that the focal point of the wrenboys parade lies with the musicians, Mulvihill notes the importance of the ritual in the town and the micro-geographies created by the various teams representing different streets in the town. Mulvihill also identifies the role of the bodhrán, the rhythm of which is part of the ritual that is the assertion of communal identity. Acknowledging connections with wider socio-political events, Mulvihill also points to the introduction of the "fief and drum" by Joe O'Gorman on his return from service in the Boer War. Thus, a seemingly local ritual is the result of a complex mix of influences that serve to construct and reinforce local identities.

In the same issue, Sinéad de Bháill and José Horta (2002) brought approaches from both geography and English to present an exploration of the work of Percy French (1854-1920) in a geographical and literary context. Concerned with Irish identity and the Irish landscape, de Bháill and Horta provide a deconstructive analysis of French's work, stating:

The songs and poems of Percy French are by no means trivial. They are certainly not simple tunes with weightless words. Instead they are nationalistic in tone and are embedded in a sense of patriotism. Throughout his work, French attempts to construct an Irish identity, one defined by independence and pride (2002: 98).

The authors' defence of their study is repeated in a later article by Hogan who notes that music is often dismissed as mere entertainment, trivial and ephemeral (2007: 162). However, de Bháill and Horta outline how French was part of contemporary geopolitical discourse. He was primarily concerned with rural Ireland, operating at both micro- and macro-scales. de Bháill and Horta point to French's awareness of identity in the song 'The Four Farrellys' in which he presents stereotypical types of identities from the four provinces of Ireland. French was aware of attempts at creating a singular Irish identity for the purposes of Irish nationalism while simultaneously recognising regional diversity and the importance of local issues in Irish society.

In 2005, the journal included two more articles that dealt with music in very different ways. Richard Collins examined representations of landscape in the lyrics of popular Belgian songwriter Jacques Brel (1929-1978). Echoing some of the approaches of de Bháill and Horta (2002), Collins examined images, the portrayal of imagined and physical landscapes and Brel's exploration of the meaning of places through his songs.

Focusing on the relationship between music and national identity, David Kearney and Angun Sønnesyn Olsen presented an article that outlined the common cultural themes in the development of postcolonial identities in Ireland and Norway, particularly in reference to their respective folk musics. An important aspect of the public awareness of folk music in each country was the use of national music by prominent composers, specifically Edvard Grieg (1843-1907) and Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971). Kearney and Olsen concluded:

Ó Riada and Grieg are exemplary individuals whose aesthetic agendas featured the folk music of their respective countries in eras of nationalistic energy. They have become components in national movements that strive for cultural as well as political identity primarily because of their use of a folk idiom, and their ability to popularise part of a nation's culture. Both men found fame in their time but they also

allowed their work to inspire and awaken interest in the folk music of their country, brought about change in attitudes towards folk music, and created wonderful works of sustained popularity (2005: 32).

Another important aspect was the increased popularity and awareness of rural folk traditions amongst an urban audience due, in part, to the work of the two composers.

In 2007, another article by Kearney, again influenced by the role of Seán Ó Riada in the evolution of Irish traditional music, examined the changing geography of Irish traditional music in the twentieth century. The paper critiqued the concept of regional styles in Irish traditional music and presented an argument that the concept is, in part, an urban myth, generated by a new urban audience in the 1950s. The impact of social movements, economic change and various organisations is assessed in an attempt to understand the geography of Irish traditional music at the start of the twenty-first century. The paper focused on the growth of an urban context for a tradition popularly perceived as rural and, in particular, the development of Irish traditional music in Dublin.

Hogan (2007) provided a very different paper in the same issue that sought to examine the interactions between place, identity and popular music. Hogan provided three approaches to the study of music. The first approach, which is relevant and related to Kearney's (2005, 2007) articles, considered social policy and what was considered to be 'appropriate national music'. The second approach, which mirrored the approaches used by de Bháill and Horta (2002) and Collins (2005), considered the representation of place in the songs of John Spillane. The third approach focused on migration and mobility of music, which provided a contemporary perspective on themes addressed historically in Kearney (2007).

At the core of Hogan's article was the need to address the marginalisation of popular music, identified by Smyth (2005) and since addressed to a greater degree by O'Flynn (2009) and Smyth (2010). Reinforcing the need for geographers to be aware of music and music-making, Hogan notes how Irish social policy has "played a key role in shaping Irish identity through the construction of legitimate and, particular with reference to popular music, illegitimate music practices" (2007: 164). Hogan also points to modern trends in mobility and migration patterns, emphasising the role of migrant musicians in the Cork musicscape. The impact of mobility and migration is demonstrated through musical activity as "local music-making practices are being

reconstructed as musical products and spaces are being reworked to accommodate ethnic diversity” (Hogan, 2007: 174). Cork’s musicscape is an evolving and diverse entity, influenced by a variety of geographic processes.

In 2009, Kearney turned to popular music and presented two approaches through which music could be used as “a platform for engaging with particular issues” (2009: 122). Kearney highlighted the role of high profile musicians in highlighting global issues and the evocation of a sense of place by musicians in their music. Focusing on Bruce Springsteen, Bob Geldof and Bono, Kearney highlighted the role of music in geographical study, particularly in consideration of the politics of identity and conflict.

## **Conclusion**

Graham notes that “geographers study spatial relationships; geographers study the relationships between people and environments; geographers study landscapes; geographers study regions or localities” (1997a: 11). Music provides opportunities to gain new perspectives into each of these elements of geographical study. Music geography has emerged and evolved informed by two traditions of cultural geography. While Carney’s geography of music, influenced by Sauer and other primarily American studies, concentrates on patterns of location and diffusion, a British based discourse on music geography is more concerned with spaces, networks and contexts for the performance and consumption of music and identity. *Chimera* has published a number of articles that have explored many diverse aspects of music and music-making from a geographical perspective. However, it is field that is only beginning to grow and there are many aspects still open to geographers informed by cultural geography, economic geography, political geography, migration studies and Irish studies.

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