

Radio and Regions in Irish Traditional Music

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Recording and broadcasting have had an enormous impact on the development, dissemination and popularity of Irish traditional music. There are a variety of aspects to the study of the geographical impact of radio and recording technologies, and I am here concerned with the perception and construction of regions in Irish traditional music. Recording and broadcasting are at the centre of the single greatest paradox in the discourse on regional styles: recording and broadcasting are considered homogenising forces, yet without recordings and broadcasts musicians may not have become aware of the regional diversity within the tradition. The most prevalent issues concerning recording and broadcasting relate to choice – who was recorded and broadcast; where these recordings were made; and the impact of these choices on processes of homogenisation or musical change. This paper examines the role of Seán Ó Riada and his programme *Our Musical Heritage* (1962) in the geographical imagination of Irish traditional music. It is divided into three sections: the making of *Our Musical Heritage* and the trips made by Ó Riada around Ireland; the contents of the programmes; and the legacy of *Our Musical Heritage* including a book of the same title.

Athea, 1962

There was a change in how radio programmes were made in the late 1950s with the development of the outside broadcast unit and the process of recording musicians in their local areas. Thus the radio became an increasingly influential factor in the evolution of Irish traditional music at both local and national levels (Breathnach, 1971). While Séamus Ennis and Ciarán MacMathúna were foremost amongst those who presented music and musicians from various parts of Ireland with varying remits and geographical reach, Ó Riada sought to examine more closely the stylistic differences in the music of different regions and provides the concept of ‘regions’ as a framework through which to develop a greater understanding of Irish traditional music.

Reflecting on *Our Musical Heritage*, Peadar Ó Riada notes a desire to develop a vocabulary to describe Irish traditional music that existed at the time as being part of

what the programmes were about (*The Rolling Wave*, RTÉ Radio 1, 26th December, 2006). He acknowledges that by the time his father had finished the series, “he had a much clearer picture himself about the subject that he was speaking of”. Ó Riada reflected on his journey around Ireland in preparing for *Our Musical Heritage*, stating:

While preparing these notes, I made several trips around the country collecting material. I found great enthusiasm everywhere, the kind of enthusiasm which attaches only to something felt to be of the greatest importance (Ó Riada 1982, p. 80).

The enthusiasm that greeted Ó Riada is part of the memory of these occasions. I focus on an event in Athea in west Limerick in 1962, informed by the memories of Timmy Woulfe, a former schoolmaster in Athea, and uilleann piper Seán Ahern of Moyvane who recorded for Ó Riada on the night.

Timmy Woulfe was the man in charge of organising the event in Athea. Woulfe was very good friends with another Athea man, folklorist Kevin Danaher. A few years previously, Woulfe had visited Danaher in Dublin. Danaher had an appointment with Ó Riada but had to meet with somebody else. In his absence, Woulfe went for a few drinks with Ó Riada in a nearby pub where they talked for a while. Woulfe believes this meeting and the influence of Kevin Danaher motivated Ó Riada’s trip to Athea in 1962. Danaher was also involved in recording Irish traditional music, notably including the only recordings of the uilleann piper Johnny Doran, recorded in Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin in 1947 for the Irish Folklore Commission (Bradshaw, 2002). While the network of activity that includes Séamus Ennis, Ciarán MacMathúna and Kevin Danaher creates an over-arching national context for investigating Irish traditional music, local networks and social geographies are integral to understanding regional diversity in Irish culture and society of the time.

Woulfe wrote a letter to Ó Riada, sent prior to Ó Riada coming to Athea and now part of the Seán Ó Riada collection in the Boole Library at University College Cork. The letter highlights the social geography of rural Ireland at the time and the importance of local figures in supporting the work of collectors, broadcasters and the Folklore Commission (BP/PP/OR/171/1). The letter reads:

A Sheain, a chara,

I'm really delighted that you're coming to Athea, and I'll do all I can to round up some local material. By the way, Athea is modestly referred to as 'the village', and we have no hotel. However we boast of up to a dozen pubs, any of which will, I'm sure, provide all facilities.

I live, in the Danaher house, a short distance from the village, so in case I'm not immediately available anybody will direct you to the house. It might even be the best place to start recording, because if the word gets around that you're coming, as it inevitably will, you could have hundreds of the locals cluttering up the place, as happened when Ciarán MacMathúna came to Athea. However that contingency, if it arises, can be dealt with, I'm sure.

By the way, I'm expecting Kevin Danaher on Wednesday also. He'll be spending a few days with us, and I'm sure he'll be pleased to know you're coming. Meanwhile I'll try to get as many as possible of the locals to attend.

All the best,

Timmy Woulfe

The outside broadcast unit had already become part of the social landscape of rural Ireland and Ciarán MacMathúna in particular commanded great attention and respect. Ó Riada was not as well known as Ciarán MacMathúna. Seán Ahern remembers that the excitement of the event had more to do with the coming of somebody from the radio than with any knowledge of Ó Riada. Indeed, as mentioned in the letter, Ciarán MacMathúna had been in Athea just prior to Ó Riada. Due to the enthusiasm and noise of the crowd, MacMahtúna was unable to record much material, though he later recorded Seán and Pat Ahern of Moyvane at a quieter location later that night, as well as returning to the Ahern house some time after.

Timmy remembers getting ready for the evening in Athea with Ó Riada, accompanied by John Kelly and Ruth Ó Riada:

He asked me to have a venue ready you see. But I decided that was a very dangerous thing in a place like Athea because I knew he wanted a pub, he always wanted a pub. And ah, I told him so, anyway, we'd go down town and I'd leave it up to himself. So we went into a couple of pubs and, rightly so I think, he decided they wouldn't be suitable. So about the fourth pub: 'twas up near, across the road from the church, 'tis now, well 'tis closed now, 'twas known as the Dugout, 'twas Mick Lynch that had it at the time. There were steps down into it. So, and I remember, there were three or four of us and we marched up down the middle of the street. I'd say 'twas the month of July or August or something like that. 'Twas a nice fine day, and we went into Lynches to the bar and he said is there any place out the back and the fella said, "yeah there's a kitchen,". So we went down into the kitchen, yeah, and he said, "what about that place out beyond, a little apartment," and he said, "ah now you don't want to go into that place, that's a dump".

“That’s ideal,” he said, which was great because the recording unit was able to go around the back and in the back yard and plank itself outside the door and that’s where he set up. And as I say ‘twas a lovely day with nobody around and within about an hour the street was full of people and Lynch’s pub was full and Lynch’s pub was drank dry before the night was out. I remember well there was loads of hay pulled up outside. ‘Twas a major occasion in the place (Interview with author, 18th February, 2009).

The musicians recorded by Ó Riada in Athea appear to be less select than in other areas. A notebook of Ó Riada’s lists musicians and singers from various places that he visited. There were few accordion players, mostly fiddle and flute and a scattering of concertina players. The number of musicians listed for west Limerick and north Kerry far outnumbers any other area and includes many musicians who were not featured on the series. In other places, Ó Riada lists a select number of now household names, but while the musicians in Athea were competent musicians, few were well known, even in the surrounding areas. The tunes recorded in Athea are primarily jigs and reels, while most of the songs demonstrate a local theme. Ó Riada recorded musicians of various ages in Athea, but it was the older musicians that he chose to use for *Our Musical Heritage*. For Ó Riada, fiddle player Patrick Ahearn and flute player John Joe Hartnett epitomised a distinctive west Limerick style of music. Later, in *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada commented:

West Limerick has been rather out of the limelight, and the attractions of its style are not as well known as they should be. Flute-playing in West Limerick, like the area’s fiddle-playing, is dominated by a strong, very virile rhythm. Ornamentation is somewhat sparse, and the phrases are short, but the drive – the tremendous force of the rhythm – more than makes up for what it lacks in other fields (Ó Riada 1982, pp. 62, 63).

Ó Riada also commented on the role of the bodhrán, particularly in relation to the strong rhythm of the west Limerick style, and two bodhrán players are listed in his notes, namely Jim and Michael Sheehy. As Woulfe recalls, bodhráns were not a readily available commodity at the time. He remembers receiving a request from Professor Fleischman of University College, Cork, possibly through the connection with Seán Ó Riada, to send a bodhrán to Cork to be used at the Choral Festival (Interview with author, 18th February, 2009).

Seán Ahern remembers that there were a large number of flute players in west Limerick at that time (Interview with author, 17th February, 2009). Woulfe told me of a fife and drum band in Athea that lasted for seven years (Interview with author, 18th

February, 2009). Established in 1946 at a time of great poverty, there was a very strong tradition of flute playing up around Coolwest, Knocknaboul. The musicians in the band picked up the music and traditions as they went along. They were mostly from the parish. John Joe Hartnett played with them. In providing a snapshot of music in Athea at that time, with the many flute and fiddle players, as well as a few concertina players, Ó Riada provides us with an example with which we can contrast the present. There are few musicians in Athea now and the accordion has become an important instrument in the west Limerick tradition.

Of the musicians who recorded for Ó Riada that night, it is fiddle player Patrick Ahearn from the Black Heights on the way to Carrigkerry who stands out. It is evident from Ó Riada's notes that he recorded more tunes from him than from any other musician on the night. Woulfe describes Patrick Ahearn as "the daddy of 'em all" (Interview with author, 18th February, 2009). He was almost blind and practically illiterate, but he could trace his musical lineage back to the piper Jackson, and taught a large number of fiddle players in west Limerick. Many musicians would call to his house. Woulfe remembers:

He was the star turn that evening. I remember John Kelly... he latched onto Patneen and when Patneen had his stint done, the two of them more or less disappeared together and ah talking and playing together, they played the night away. (Interview with author, 18th February, 2009)

Woulfe remembers that Ahearn would sometimes play different versions of the same tune and was always eager to learn new music. John Kelly was a significant influence on Seán Ó Riada during the making of *Our Musical Heritage*, and it is interesting that he sought the company of Ahearn that night.

To digress momentarily from the task at hand, I refer to a short story, 'The Music of Humanity', by the Listowel author John B. Keane, in which he remembers a night in Carrigkerry by way of Athea, in the company of three companions, Dan Kennelly, Jerome Murphy and Jimmy Boylan. On the night in question, there was a carnival in Carrigkerry and both streets and public houses were packed to capacity. Amongst the crowd were numerous musicians playing both indoors and in the open air. Keane recollects entering the public house where they encountered "the heart's blood of the Irish countryside with its own music" (1999: 48).

It was fiddle music, of course. We looked around for the musician. He stood nearby with his eyes closed, his bow moving gently across the strings and an unsurpassed melody pouring out from the soul of the venerable instrument which he clasped.

‘What’s that you’re playing?’ one of our party asked.

‘I’m not playing,’ he responded with a smile.

‘Buts it’s your fiddle.’ We told him, ‘and it’s your hand that is directing the bow.’

‘It is not my hand,’ he explained, ‘it is the hands of all men.’

He went further for our enlightenment and informed us that it was the stirrings of the throng of people which governed the movements of the bow.

‘Look,’ he said, as the crowd swayed, ‘the people are pushing against my arm. It’s their music, not mine.’

What he said was true. The bow moved over the strings, impelled by the human beings all around.

‘It’s the music of humanity,’ said the fiddler, praise be to God for all things.’

(Keane 1999, p. 49)

Keane’s story reflects the interconnectedness of music and people in spaces that no longer have the same capacity for meaning in Irish society. It is tempting to speculate that the enlightening fiddle player was Patrick Ahearn or one of his many students.

Contents of Radio Series

In *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada sets out two intentions:

To introduce to those not acquainted with it already, the rich and comparatively untouched pastures of Irish traditional music, both vocal and instrumental; and for those who already know the subject, to criticise (to some extent) the present condition of Irish traditional music with a view to suggesting some kind of standard (Ó Riada 1982, p. 19).

Ó Riada does not set out a regional understanding of the tradition as an intended outcome of *Our Musical Heritage*, rather this is interpreted from his work. However, Ó Riada seems influenced by particular ideas on regional styles. Perhaps influenced by cultural nationalism, Ó Riada chooses his regions randomly from along the west coast. Ó Riada was also influenced by Daniel Corkery and, in particular, Corkery’s 1925 publication *The Hidden Ireland* (Maume, 1993; Ó Canainn, 2003). Ó Riada is not only attempting to understand Irish traditional music but is interrogating Irish society and identity as a whole, influenced by his appreciation of Gaelic Ireland.

Irish traditional music, as explored by Ó Riada, is divided into the singing and instrumental traditions. The first geographical division identified by Ó Riada is in the singing traditions of Connemara and Munster. Ó Riada contrasted the big Munster songs that “are often spread over nearly two octaves, and use wide intervals which give a feeling of spaciousness” (Ó Riada 1982, p. 32) with the somewhat compressed songs of Connemara that “do not usually range wider than the interval of a 9th, or a 10th, just over an octave” (Ó Riada 1982, p. 33). Ó Riada further divides Munster into the regions of the Déise in east Munster, which even at that time was declining in range, and west Munster with two separate cores located in west Cork and west Kerry. By the time of *Our Musical Heritage* Ó Riada was not only coming to terms with Irish traditional music but was also forging a connection with, firstly, west Kerry and later the west Cork area of the Cúl Aodha Gaeltacht. Lillis Ó Laoire points out: “Ó Riada’s fascination with sean-nós song and the rigorous aesthetic prescribed for it in *Our Musical Heritage* placed sean-nós song at the heart of Irish traditional music” (Ó Laoire 2009, p. 13).

Ó Riada begins his study of the instrumental tradition by focusing on the uilleann pipes. The uilleann pipes present a challenge for the geographical consideration of regions in Irish traditional music. Breathnach recognised two identifiable styles of uilleann piping, namely loose or open fingering and tight or close fingering. He suggested that these styles were formerly regional, connecting open fingering with Leinster and eastern Munster, “whilst tight playing was favoured in Connacht and some other districts along the western seaboard” (Breathnach 1971, pp. 94, 95). Ó Riada does not recognise regional differences in uilleann piping traditions but his selection of examples suggests his familiarity with and communicates the existence of a Dublin based community of musicians. Tommy Reck and Séamus Ennis are used as examples of uilleann pipers, as is traveller Johnny Doran, while uilleann pipers Seán Potts and Paddy Moloney are used as examples of tin whistle players, although Ó Riada recognises their prowess on the uilleann pipes (Ó Riada 1982, p. 66).

After the uilleann pipes, Ó Riada turns his attention to the fiddle. He notes:

Like *sean-nós* singing, but unlike piping, fiddle styles vary from place to place; there is no definite standard style. I doubt if there is a county in Ireland that has not got its own quota of fiddle-players and its own tradition – thirty two counties and, you might say, thirty two styles (Ó Riada 1982, pp. 51, 52).

Ó Riada's seemingly throw-away remark ignores the complexity of the geography of Irish traditional music. It is unlikely that Ó Riada believed in the concept of a style for each county and, in his own analysis, he notes how musical regions crossed county boundaries. What Ó Riada is highlighting is the great diversity that exists in Irish traditional music presenting, perhaps, an invitation to others to explore in greater depth that diversity.

In *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Riada is arguably creating a framework for further analysis. It is in his introduction to the fiddle that Ó Riada states the crux of the discourse on regions in Irish traditional styles, an approach that has remained central to the discourse on Irish traditional music to the present. Firstly, Ó Riada explores a limited number of regions, chosen at random from along the western seaboard and namely Donegal, Sligo, Clare and a West Limerick-North Kerry. These regions remain central to the discussion of regions in Irish traditional music. In some areas, though notably not in Athea, Ó Riada lines up a number of individuals whom he believes will demonstrate particular styles of playing from different parts of Ireland. In presenting a limited number of musicians, Ó Riada fails to acknowledge the complexity of regional styles and the individuality of many of the musicians featured in *Our Musical Heritage*. In *Our Musical Heritage*, John Doherty is identified as musician who performs in a musical style typical of the Donegal fiddle style. However, in a study of the musical traditions of Co. Donegal, MacAoidh (1994) highlights the diversity of musical styles that exist in Donegal and emphasise the need for greater appreciation of this diversity.

The second intention, relating to a critique of the tradition and an understanding of relative standards, concerns the stability of the distinctions that Ó Riada identifies. Ó Riada states:

Radio and gramophone records are gradually tending to produce a uniformity of style in fiddle-playing, so that you could quite easily hear a fiddle-player in the far South playing in the style of some fiddle player from the far North whose style he might find attractive, and for which he would forsake his own local style (Ó Riada 1982, p. 53).

There are two elements of note in Ó Riada's deliberation. He is motivated to find difference in the tradition as he believes "no style is perfect, and the more styles that exist the better" (Ó Riada 1982, p. 53). Also, *Our Musical Heritage* is part of a much

more extensive process in which the radio and recordings that are leading to stylistic homogeneity are paradoxically highlighting and preserving regional difference.

Our Musical Heritage, and the attitudes expressed by Ó Riada towards the accordion and concertina, pre-empt the development of accordion and concertinas in different regions. Ó Riada's dislike of accordions is well known and Woulfe remembers a comment passed by Ó Riada during the night in Athea. During a phone conversation with me, local accordion player Domhnall de Barra's only recollection of the night, being relatively young at the time, was that he fell off his bicycle on the way to the pub and jammed the bass. Woulfe remembers Ó Riada commenting that he hoped it would stay that way. In reflecting on this comment, I am aware of Ó Laoire's note:

The fact that Ó Riada's denouncement of the 'box', the two row button accordion, amounting to the creation of a stigma, is still today repeated solemnly and without irony by some traditional performers, as a matter of fact, ignores Ó Riada's acceptance and use of the accordion in Ceoltóirí Chualann (Ó Laoire 2009, p. 7).

Ó Riada was not averse to making strong statements to emphasise a point. However it should not be interpreted that Ó Riada dismissed totally the role of the accordion in Irish traditional music but rather sought to emphasise what he interpreted as a hierarchy of instruments within the tradition. Ó Riada did much to 'rediscover' the music of the harp tradition, which had all but died out, and had a strong interest in both the Irish language and the sean-nós song tradition, both of which were considered to be in decline (Ó Canainn, 2003; Ó Suilleabháin, 2004). While Ó Riada was himself an agent of change, *Our Musical Heritage* maintained a retrospective gaze.

The changing instrumentation in Irish traditional music, which continues to the present, is outlined by Bohlman in the context of folk music: "The instrumentarium of the folk musician expands, admitting new instruments while rendering others obsolete" (1988, p. 124). Bohlman also points to the production and availability of instruments, a point also outlined by Smith who defines the accordion as "a product of the expanding capitalism and modernization which transformed traditional societies and brought the ascendance of new economic and class relations and massively increased production" (1997, p. 435). Smith suggests that the instrument "was conceived for a mass market of amateur musicians" (1997, p. 436) but outlines the development of the instrument and the styles of playing of many of the foremost

accordion players in Irish traditional music. Smith notes that Ó Riada's comments did little to deter accordion playing in Irish traditional music and the accordion has become accepted as an integral instrument in the tradition today (Carolan, 1987).

There were few accordions players in west Limerick in the early 1960s, though the concertina was very popular, but Ó Riada does not foresee the development of both instruments, not only in west Limerick but in other regions of the country. The C#/D accordion, as played by Johnny O'Leary and Jackie Daly, becomes an integral part of the Sliabh Luachra tradition from the 1970s (as heard in *Johnny O'Leary of Sliabh Luachra* and *Jackie Daly: Traditional Accordion and Concertina Music from Sliabh Luachra*), an association currently popularised by Paudie O'Connor (as heard in *Different State* 2005). Paddy O'Brien of Nenagh is responsible for teaching a style of B/C accordion playing that spreads out from Tipperary. O'Brien's musical style is often associated with *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* due to the success of musicians with this style at *Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann*. More recently, Diarmuid O'Brien's album, *Cáirde Cairdín* (2007), highlights the fiddle and accordion duet tradition associated with west Limerick today and includes the aforementioned Domhnall de Barra. The concertina is particularly associated with the musical traditions of County Clare with a number of prominent concertina players also coming from north Kerry. Ó Riada presents a limited number of regional traditions; limited by the nature of a radio series. In reference to singing, he states:

If, in these programmes, I have neglected one region or another, it is because I felt that the regions I covered included all the most important features of the sean-nós as it still exists (BL/PP/OR/554/9).

In reference to fiddle styles, as mentioned, however, he proposes the possibility of a style for every county. The importance of understanding *Our Musical Heritage* as an introductory foray into the depth and diversity in Irish traditional music must be reiterated here, yet the geography of Irish traditional music continues to focus on a limited number of regions, influenced by Ó Riada. For all that he discovered during the years 1961 and 1962, Ó Riada missed much. Highlighting the nature of *Our Musical Heritage* as a beginning, Kelly writes an undated letter, probably during the run of the series, to Ó Riada. The letter recommended Mick Conroy, a whistle player and a friend of Johnny Doran, who performed with, "a very pronounced style...based on the style of a famous flute player Tom Morrison" (Undated letter,

BL/PP/OR/593/1). It is likely that there were many more “Mick Conroys” in Ireland at that time who did not feature on the radio series but continued to perform in a local or regional social and musical network.

Reaction, Publication and Legacy

Timmy Woulfe does not recollect a strong reaction to *Our Musical Heritage* when it was broadcast, negated by two factors: it was not focused on Athea music and the impact of the disappointment generated by the events and subsequent broadcast of Ciarán MacMathúna’s programme (Interview with author, 18th February, 2009). More generally, in his biography of Seán Ó Riada, Tomás Ó Canainn notes:

The series had a mixed reaction: a majority welcomed it for the rare insight it gave them into their own music, while others reacted negatively for a variety of reasons. Some pseudo-experts felt threatened by Seán’s adoption of a position of authority. Others felt that he was a brash newcomer, with little background in the standard ways of traditional musicians playing almost by instinct. (Ó Canainn 1982, p. 14)

Despite this mixed reaction, the publication of *Our Music Heritage* was given priority after Ó Riada’s death and was seen as a most fitting memorial to his life and work. A press release from *Fundúireacht an Riadaigh*, a trust formed to organise and oversee projects in memory of Sean Ó Riada, states:

“The publication of Seán Ó Riada’s magnificent series ‘Our Musical Heritage’ is the priority which we would place before his friends” said the Chief Justice Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, who is Chairman of the foundation. “This series, originally broadcast on RTÉ, was the most comprehensive statement available of Ó Riada’s vision of Irish music.” (BL/PP/OR/715/8)

Similarly, a letter from Riobáird Mac Góráin dated 24ú Feabhra 1972 to solicitor Joseph Lambe states:

The first proposal, to which Ruth [Ó Riada] is very sympathetic in principle, is that the Fundúireacht should commit itself to achieving the publication of Seán’s very important radio series ‘Our Musical Heritage’ – and that this, in fact, should be the Fundúireacht’s first project. (BL/PP/OR/715/8)

There are a number of aspects of *Our Musical Heritage* that have impacted greatly on the development of Irish traditional music. Many of the musicians featured by Ó Riada including John Doherty, Patrick and John Kelly, Junior Crehan, Fred Finn and Peter Horan are amongst the most famous names in the musical traditions of their respective areas, their reputations strengthened by Ó Riada’s use of their music. The

styles of these musicians were ascribed regional status though the complexity of regional styles was not, and arguably is still not, fully explored conceptually or otherwise. The association of Irish traditional music with the west of Ireland is strengthened by Ó Riada's focus on Donegal, Sligo, Clare, Limerick and Kerry, although there is a greater awareness of Dublin based musicians and the changing social geography of Irish traditional music both in the work of Ó Riada and subsequent discourse (Kearney, 2007).

Through the publication of *Our Musical Heritage*, the legacy of Ó Riada is further strengthened as his views on and ideas about Irish traditional music are made accessible to a new generation of people who neither experienced the furore surrounding his visits to various parts of Ireland or experienced the importance of the radio in Irish society in the 1950s and early 1960s. Links may be made to other aspects of Ó Riada's work, including Ceoltóirí Chualann. Although Ó Riada did not include musical examples of the group in the radio series *Our Musical Heritage*, Ó Canainn, as musical editor of the published work, includes two examples – “An Long faoi Lánseol” (The Ship in Full Sail), from an early Gael-Linn recording, and “Mná na hÉireann” (Women of Ireland), from *Ó Riada sa Gaeity* (1970). Ó Canainn suggests that the repertoire of Ceoltóirí Chualann “might be regarded as one practical outcome of Seán's analysis of the state of Irish traditional music in the late fifties and early sixties” (Ó Canainn, 1982, p. 14).

Conclusion

Ó Riada's radio series *Our Musical Heritage* was a significant step in the development of a discourse concerning regions in Irish traditional music. I accept Barry Taylor's assertion, reiterated by Lillis Ó Laoire, that *Our Musical Heritage* is an unreliable guide to Irish traditional music and also the assertion by Ó Laoire that Ó Riada sought to provoke his readers, or in this instance, listeners. The recognition, construction and diffusion of regional styles in the latter half of the twentieth century nonetheless is a significant element of the evolution of Irish traditional music and owes much to Ó Riada. Regional difference is considered part of the richness of tradition (see McLaughlin 1992). Breathnach (1971) also signals the importance of diversity in the tradition, though his brief introduction to Irish music, like Ó Riada's *Our Musical Heritage*, is arguably not fully realised and subject to some overgeneralisation.

Broadcasting is one of a number of processes that impacted on the developing discourse on regions and regional styles in Irish traditional music. In his concluding comments to *Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland*, Breathnach gives particular mention to the radio, suggesting that, at their best, “radio programmes were not an unmixed blessing” (Breathnach 1971, p. 130). Breathnach also notes the impact of *Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann* and print media on the development of Irish traditional music. Commenting on the role of radio programmes in reversing the decline in Irish traditional music, Breathnach also observes how broadcasting helped establish a particular common repertoire to the detriment of local tunes and styles. However, Breathnach also acknowledges the role that radio performed in bringing attention to musicians and tunes previously unknown outside their own locality. Ó Riada does not get a mention from Breathnach, who was critical of Ó Riada, in *Folkmusic and Dances of Ireland* but the similarities in their thinking and their influence over the development of critical consideration of Irish traditional music are significant elements of the history of the tradition.

Seán Ó Riada may not have been well known in Athea in 1962, but he was one of a number of individuals who, during a period identified by many commentators as one of revival, helped shape the subsequent evolution of the tradition. During a time of increased interest in Irish traditional music, particularly by those involved in broadcasting, Charles Acton notes Ó Riada’s prominence, stating:

We have lately been very fortunate. The world wide recrudescence of interest in folk-song; modern recording; the enlightened enthusiasm of Donal Ó Moráin and Gael-Linn; the enthusiasm (some of it inchoate) of the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí and its Fleadh; all these and many others have come together just when the traditional ways of performing our folk-music were near extinction. And they have had the luck to interact with the inspiration of Seán Ó Riada. They needed him, since without him all the others could easily have submerged the whole thing in a welter of céilí bands, Light Orchestra arrangements, synthetic “folk” from America, banjos, electric guitars and heaven knows what. All of those things descend at various removes from Anglo-German harmony and form. Ó Riada cut through them. (“The Ó Riada Tradition”, *The Irish Times*, 22nd April 1965)

Our Musical Heritage was a small step in a journey that Ó Riada did not complete. It is a snapshot in time. It remains a testament to his genius and a reminder of how Irish traditional music has evolved in the past fifty years.

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