

Cultural Revival in Ireland

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Revival movements that encourage the re-popularization of societal aspects have become a common institution in modern populations. The contemporary revival of the Irish population's cultural features has become a particularly vital element in recovering valuable ethnic practices. Ireland, a nation plagued by loss of tradition due to migration and imperialist outside influences, is a central location for such revival movements. The Irish people see revival as necessary to preserve Irish culture, due to the continued loss of national identity and divergence from authentic Irish culture. An integral part of this culture is folk music, which represents many Gaelic influences. The development of a renewed musical fervor in the form of modern ingenuities has aided the revival movements' establishment of an authentic Irish music popularity.

There is a significant need to preserve the culture of Ireland. Ireland is a nation that was once "one of the most classically learned and cultured nations in Europe" ("The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland" 1). However, with time, Irish culture has subsided to the dominant English culture ("The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland" 1). There are numerous examples of such cultural abandonment in Ireland, including "dropping the language...translating euphonious Irish names into English... [and] knowing nothing about Gaelic literature" ("The Necessity" 1). Factors of an authentic Irish culture are "in serious decay" (Ó Giolláin 116). This should be remedied because of the necessity of "cultural ingredients...to form a nation" (117). Revival movements have come about due to public dissatisfaction of seeing Irish culture become an imitation of more dominant cultures, no longer involving the native Gaelic elements that make

Ireland “Irish.” Revival focused on “cultivating everything that is...most Gaelic, most Irish” will propel Ireland towards their former reputation as “one of the most original, artistic literary, and charming peoples of Europe” (“The Necessity” 5). By recognizing the loss of culture, it can become possible to restore the authenticity of a native Gaelic nationality.

An essential representation of Irish culture is music. Folk music represents the nationality of the Celtic people, and reflects many aspects of the folk culture that have been lost in the past century. Irish people and the world regard folk music as “one of the most valuable heritages of the Irish race.” (“Abhráin Grádh Chúige Connacht or Love Songs of Connacht” 65). Folk music, especially in Irish culture, is a valuable form of transmitting the traditions and customs of Irish culture. Traditional Irish folk music “embodies the experiences of a group,” and “encapsulate[s] both their history and their current social conditions” (Sommers 121). If the performance of Gaelic music is abandoned, the connection between the past struggles of Ireland and the current cultural revolution is lost. Both political and artistic motivations for musical revival in Ireland indicate growing public opinion that “indigenous music appears as central to Irish cultural life” (Valleley 54). Gaelic intellectual influences are preserved through modern Irish music.

The Irish people’s efforts for cultural revival have made progress due to the modernization of Gaelic influences and transmission methods. As Irish music has been revived into a popular form, “new conditions of awareness” have allowed for contemporary music to “explore, develop, and assert itself” as an integral part of culture (Valleley 52). Modern Irish musicians have impacted the cultural revival movement by reinterpreting traditional Gaelic music. They have become effective translators between traditional and modern societal characteristics. With modern revival, the importance of playing music has shifted towards music

“as it is recorded and replayed” (Sommers 116). Modern technology has allowed for easier musical communication; as a result, commercial recordings are now “the most significant means by which music is transmitted” (Sommers 118). Irish traditional music has accommodated the trends of “making, learning and enjoyment of Irish music,” through “altering the process of learning the music for most players and enthusiasts” (Sommers 116). The modern revival movement has made Gaelic music more acceptable and accessible to a global audience. Through re-popularization of Irish traditional music, “performance, learning, and transmission of music may be accomplished using modern vectors” (Sommers 125). Rather than simply renewing former Irish musical influences, modern revival has created a new musical culture in Ireland that illustrates the importance of traditional music in Irish social life.

An essential aspect of the Irish cultural movement is the preservation of authenticity despite modern influences. In an interpreted “nation of imitators,” the creation of a culture that is “Celtic at the core” has become a necessity to maintain confidence in revival (“The Necessity” 5). With the evolution of Gaelic music, public acceptance has been key to transmitting the underlying social messages that traditional music carries. Modern musical variants that have emerged through revivalism could be “approved as right and authentic by local audiences,” or could be “viewed with suspicion” (Sommers 113). This predicament is a key concern when analyzing whether modern variations of traditional tunes can be included as a component of Gaelic culture. The value of traditional music is largely determined by the “idea of authenticity” as “the heart of what traditional music is about” (Valleley 55). In the recent renewal of Irish music as a popular phenomenon, maintaining a nativist authenticity is imperative to maintaining popular activism for such revival.

Traditional Irish music has played a fundamental role in shaping the social values of Irish culture and fueling Irish nationalism. Gaelic folk music is traditionally reflective of cultural values that illustrate the importance of being truly Irish. Through the traditional process under which folk music is created and communicated, “a portion of the social fabric...is thus transmitted” (Sommers 112). This phenomenon also occurs through the revivalist use of music as a popular form of cultural renewal. The ease with which contemporary Irish music can be spread makes it a useful tool for spreading positive social opinions on re-developing a wholly Gaelic culture. The playing of traditional Irish music can be regarded as the “retrieval and representation of Ireland’s immortal tonic soul” (Valleley 53). Irish musical revival is driven by the “ideological and artistic values” of the Irish people, reflecting its involvement in the social and moral values held by the Irish (Valleley 53). The values of “authenticity, tradition, music, territory, uniqueness, ageism, oldness, purity, Irishness, anti-Britishness, and religion” reflect a recognition of the global Irish experience and of modern Gaelic society (Valleley 54). Modern folk music revival has emphasized the continuation of recognizing these characteristics as vital to Irish culture.

Gaelic folk music revival has provided the means for the “gaelicization” of a modern Irish state. The spread of folk music has contributed to enabling “the reconstruction of a new high culture based on authentic native values” through its mass spread of folk beliefs (Ó Giolláin 118). The “interest in the life and folklore on the countryside” reflects the Irish revivalist emphasis that is placed upon recovering an authentically Irish culture (Ó Giolláin 131). Collection of folk culture occurs due to the contemporary revival of folk music that revives lost traditional values. Modern popularization of folk music gives the revival movement the

propulsion needed to undertake the preservation of Irish culture. One goal of reviving art culture in Ireland is “imbibing Irishism from the peasant, since the peasant alone possesses Irishman with the souls of Ireland” (Ó Giolláin 123). This continues the idea that the folk revival will truly capture what it means to be Irish. Ultimately, modern cultural revival has positively influenced folk culture. Rather than smothering it with contemporary popular culture, it has reinforced tradition with modern reinvention.

With the revival of folk music, a desire to “save” other aspects of Gaelic culture have emerged. Folk music transmits necessary awareness of the re-emerging traditional culture of Ireland. The disintegration of a strong national identity in post-famine Ireland also diluted aspects of Irish culture. A popular example of this phenomenon is the dramatically diminished use of the Irish language. The spread of folklore due to modern musical influence has popularized the importance of Gaelic to the maintenance of Irish nationalism.

Cultural revival movements are common in many modern societies. Past unwillingness to maintain authentic national culture has been challenged by the concept that preservation of native culture is vital to modern Irish society. Ireland is a prime example of a nation that lost touch with its cultural heritage due to outside influences. Revival of the Gaelic culture is an essential ingredient in maintaining social values. The conservation of Gaelic culture is made possible in part by the modernization of traditional music, bringing global access to Celtic influence. Musical revival has been the first step in spreading the cultural revival movement, and impacts other areas of revival, such as language. Revival of folk music in Ireland is only one aspect of Gaelic cultural revival; however, it is presently vital to the transmission of folk culture.

The Irish musical revival reveals the importance of music as a form of cultural expression and creation.

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