

Chapter

3

KEY WORDS

affective memory
authenticity
early music
functional memory
mnemonic
narrative
primary sources
sean-nós
secondary sources

Learning Objectives

After successfully completing this unit, the student will understand that:

1. Memory is central to the creation and maintenance of both individual and collective identity.
2. Music is a powerful aid in the creation and recall of memory.
3. There are two kinds of memory, functional and affective.
4. In many cultures, music is a powerful tool in rituals which create or transform social identity.
5. Narrative songs, often called ballads, preserve cultural memories of both history and mythology. In some cultures, narrative singing is the official "collective memory" of aristocratic dynasties. Many of the journalistic functions which are fulfilled by print and electronic media today were formerly performed by ballad singers in widespread oral traditions.
6. Music is both an agent and an object of memory. Even in recreating broken traditions, musicians must ultimately make personal aesthetic choices about how they want music to sound today.

Television Program

Music and Memory

Audio Selections

28. "The Rocks of Bawn"
8. "Walbiri Fire Ceremony"
7. "The Flower of Magheralee"
50. "The Green Fields of Canada"
6. "Pretty Polly"
9. "Oy Comamos"

Music and Memory

“More than the words themselves, one tends to be inclined to associating the music one has heard with the times when we heard it. Through my life, many of my memories are entwined with these songs—dancing to the Red album (1962–1966) on the roof of my grandparent’s house in Calcutta or humming ‘Norwegian Wood’ while trekking on the Annapurna Base Camp circuit with a cheery Norwegian couple. . . .”

SIDDHARTHA BUTALIA

Music and memory are closely linked to individual and collective identity. Memories tell us who we are, and music is one of the most powerful tools for evoking memory. Music helps us to recall ideas and events, and serves to make particular occasions memorable. Like the senses of taste and smell, music provides a shortcut to memory, occasionally transporting us mentally back to earlier times. In many cultures, music reminds people of their shared history and shared beliefs; it can also create an active link with the past through rituals which help to form social identity.

Just as music aids memory, memory serves music. Remembering allows us to repeat and recognize melodies, sing, play, and talk, or write about music. This chapter concentrates on the role of music as an instrument and object of memory, shaping and being shaped by individual and collective identity in a variety of cultures around the world.

Memory makes us who we are. As individuals, our identities are based on remembrances of past events, people, and places.

Personal Recollections

Personal recollections of particular happenings and conversations stand in our memories as symbols of our relationships with parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and other associates. We chart our progress through life by recalling such events as signposts along the road of our being and becoming.

Collective Memory. Collective memory gives identity to groups of people, to nations, and to the ethnic and cultural communities that both live within and cut across national boundaries. Collective memory on the personal level, includes the contributions that friends and family members make to our individual understanding of past events. We put together a story based partly on our own recollections and partly on the testimony of others who shared an experience with us. On a cultural level, collective memory involves passing on the stories of events which we do not personally experience. Collective identity depends on the sense of common history, which may be passed on by word of mouth or recorded documents such as the Bible, the Koran, the Magna Carta, or the United States Declaration of Independence.

Individual Memory. We may divide individual memory into two types: functional and affective. *Functional memory* includes remembering how to ride a bicycle, memorizing alphabets and multiplication tables, learning to play a musical instrument, recalling important appointments, and mapping out the chronology of our lives in relation to certain key

Two Types of Individual Memory

- Functional
- Affective

incidents, such as entering grade school, graduating from college, and getting married. *Affective memory* refers to recollections which have a powerful emotional effect on us, sending us into blissful reveries or haunting us with disappointment, anger, or regret.¹

Music serves as a powerful tool in storing and recalling both functional and affective memory. Billions of English speakers have memorized the alphabet with the help of the alphabet song, sung to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." Affective memories are often stirred by hearing one's national anthem, familiar hymns, or a song associated with a parent, or with an intense love.

Music may be either an object of memory or an instrument of memory. As an object of memory, music is something that is taught, using *mnemonic* (memory-aiding) devices such as staff notation and solfege syllables (doh-re-mi, etc.), or documented in music history books. Music historians, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and performers put a great deal of energy into researching, preserving, revising, reviving, and reconstructing remembered—or partially forgotten—music.

As an instrument of memory, music itself is a mnemonic device that helps to store and trigger recollections. The effectiveness of music in aiding memory and stirring emotion is utilized by many cultures in creating and maintaining a sense of group identity. Many ritual traditions use music to define special, sacred, or memorable junctures in a person's life. Such rituals often employ music as a tool for personal and/or collective transformation. Important political events are also marked by performances of culturally charged, affective musical repertory. Both religious songs and national anthems usually serve as audible emblems of cultural identity.

Memory is not static: "The prime function of memory . . . is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present."² Both personal and collective memory are highly subjective, and we often revise our recollections in order to correct impressions which today seem incorrect or simply not useful. Music is frequently used as a tool in revising collective memory; songs are used to incite, sustain, and end conflicts ranging from athletic rivalries to international warfare.

Memory is concerned not only with the past, but also with the future. We not only remember what we did yesterday, we also must remember what to do tomorrow. Music is often used, not only to recall the past or to shape the present, but to point to the future. Contemporary syntheses which combine aspects of different musics from around the world seem to be creating a trans-cultural, global network of musical styles and genres.

Music as a Mnemonic Device

According to Mark Slobin, our earliest memories are often associated with music:

It's been shown that if you play certain songs to children before they're born, they will recognize those songs after they're born. So there's a very profound imprinting that goes on with music and human beings at the earliest possible stages, before they're even out in the world.³

Slobin goes on to describe the ways in which we “stitch together our lives” by connecting one musical memory to another, referring to certain temporary theories about the storage of aural information on replayable “sound tracks” in the brain. He recounts the case study of a woman who consulted a neurologist because she kept hearing songs in her head that she couldn't recognize:

They ultimately traced it to songs she had heard when she was young. And it appears that some part of her brain, because of an accident she'd been in, had gotten jiggled loose in a certain way. Some wire had been crossed and she kept hearing those songs. So at a very mechanical level we have in our brains a music track that is running. And, presumably, all the music we have ever heard is lying along that track and can be activated.⁴

▼ Peruvian mother and child

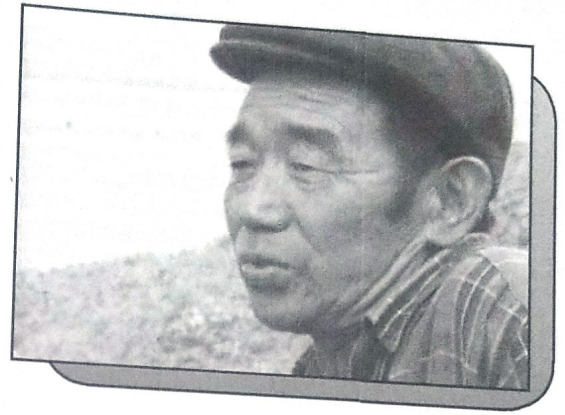


Cultures make use of this cerebral tracking of music to help us remember important information by linking important texts to memorable tunes and/or rhythms. “Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November” is a mnemonic chant by which children learn to recall the number of days in each month. On a more profound level, religious practitioners in many faiths use chant as a device to help remember sacred texts. In religions such as Judaism, with practitioners scattered around the globe, the sacred texts are standardized, but the melodies and rhythms of recitation vary from one place to another according to the aesthetic taste of given regions. “The melodies are very important for the survival of the text itself, as a way of keeping the text in memory and as a way of grounding locally, so that people are connected to that text.”⁵

Music often serves to remind individuals and groups of important places in their personal or collective history.

Tuvan Music. Among the Tuvan people in the mountainous region just across the Russian border from northwestern Mongolia, songs provide a guide or map of the Tuvan landscape:

There are songs that provide in great detail, what I would call a sonic map of a territory. And so the singer, by singing the song, takes you on a trip through this territory. . . . And there's a particular vocabulary that's used to describe landscape in a very detailed way. . . . And the songs are filled with these special terms that refer, say, to the way a mountain slopes down to a stream. Or, for instance, when Tuvans see a mountain range, a ridge, they don't see only a mountain, but they see a human figure. So human figures are personified in landscape. And a lot of the songs also talk about aspects of landscape as if they were aspects of human anatomy. . . .



▲ Tuvan singer

The songs serve as a way of creating and enhancing oral memory. They serve as an oral record, both of one's travels and of the places that one has lived in and loved and been close to.⁶

These Tuvan "sonic maps" guide the singer and listeners, not literally from one location to another, but through a landscape that corresponds to one's memories of life itself. The personification of mountains and ridges both intensifies memory and gives added emotional significance to the sonic map—each aspect of the terrain takes on human qualities, evoking particular sentimental responses in listeners who know the land and its history.

Ballads. In many cultures, narrative songs called ballads, like chant and the Tuvan "sonic maps," use melodies to help people remember detailed texts. According to Slobin, tunes that are both familiar and attractive help verses to stick in the mind:

There seems to be a receptor in the mind for tunes. It [a tune] just attaches itself to your mind. And because of that you will remember long stretches of text that you could never remember any other way. So that when you ask somebody, for example, the story of a ballad, they can't tell you the story. They have to start singing it. And then the whole thing falls together.

So a ballad, like any song, is a welded unit. The text and the tune are welded into a particular sculpture, a particular object which is beautifully crafted to serve this purpose.⁷

The function of music in a ballad is not only to help the singer remember the song. The melody also reinforces the mood of the text. Sad songs usually use sad melodies; happy songs use happy melodies. People from

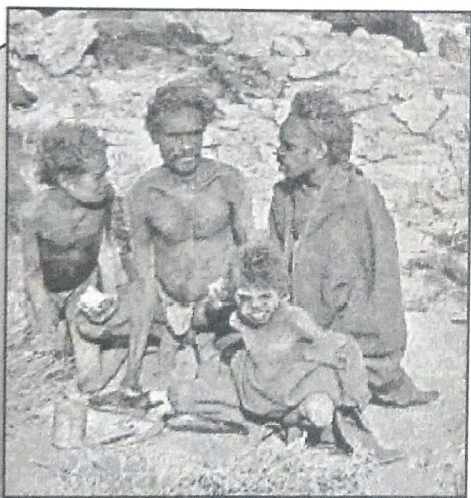
different cultures sometimes might disagree as to whether a given melody is cheerful or melancholy, but within a given culture, listeners usually are able to recognize a sad song when they hear it.

The ability of music to evoke emotional responses has to do with the mysterious way in which sound is linked to memory. Talking about a past experience does not usually allow us to relive it in the way that hearing a familiar voice or song can:

Affective memory of the greatest intensity reveals a past so rich and vivid we all but relive it. . . . It is not the introspection that yields these heightened recollections, but the chance reactivation of forgotten sensations, commonly a touch or smell or taste or sound.⁸

Music, then, not only reminds us of past experiences, but also rekindles the sensations and emotions of those experiences, in some measure transporting us back to an earlier time. This happens on a personal level whenever we discover that someone is “playing our song.”⁹ On a collective level, rituals sometimes use music to transport people back to the mythological beginnings of a particular society.

The Walbiri Fire Ceremony



▲ Australian Aborigines

For the Walbiri, an indigenous people in central Australia, the Fire Ceremony is one such ritual in which song and mythology play a predominant role. Aboriginal creation myths tell of legendary totemic beings or creative ancestors who wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the names of everything in nature—birds, animals, plants, rocks, water-holes—and so singing the world into existence.¹⁰

According to the Australian ethnomusicologist Stephen Wild, the creative ancestors were themselves the prototypes of all the living species in the Aboriginal environment, as well as the prototypes of human beings. The ancestors took the forms of plants or animals, such as the crocodile, lizard, or turtle, but still had human qualities.¹¹ Aboriginal peoples throughout Australia continue to use songs about the ancestors as a way to perpetuate the fertility of the land. Through the singing of song cycles, dancing, painting, and ceremony, they invoke the creative ancestors.

And when they perform as creative ancestors they are indicating their close association with a species and with the land which they occupy . . . in a way, they are participating in the original creative events.¹²



In the Fire Ceremony, the creative ancestor is symbolically showered with sparks as a punishment for not looking after a sacred site which he originally created. In different versions of the ritual, mythology associates it either with the travels of a snake, a rat kangaroo, or a bird. While the song cycles and mythology connected with each ceremony vary considerably, the manner of celebration is always the same, including a period of several weeks of preparatory singing of the song cycle. The last two days of the ceremony involve hours of dancing, singing, the use of a central fire to make torches, and the climax when the torches are set on fire and the dancers are attacked with them.¹³ The purpose of the Fire Ceremony is to use ritual to resolve old quarrels within the clan.

Other rituals and ceremonies invoking a culture's mythological beginnings often have a transformative effect, marking rites of passage that lit-



Two short songs from the Walbiri Fire Ceremony in which the singers accompany themselves with pairs of boomerangs.

erally alter one's social identity. We will now investigate the role of music in one such ritual: the Mouse Ceremony of the Suyá Indians of Brazil.

MUSIC, TRANSFORMATION, AND IDENTITY: THE SUYÁ MOUSE CEREMONY

Anthropologist Anthony Seeger documented the Suyá Mouse Ceremony during the rainy season of 1972. At that time, about 120 Suyá lived in a village in Xingu National Park, along the Suia-misu River in the state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. The Suyá speak a language called Ge, which is common to a number of tribes in the Xingu region.¹⁴

Seeger wrote about the relationship between ceremonial music and time among the Amazonian Indians:

Although we know relatively little about musical traditions in the lowland regions of South America, it appears that whenever music is heard, something important is happening. . . . In the Upper Xingu region, in the state of Mato Grosso, singing is associated with ceremonies taught to men by spirit ancestors when they walked on earth, and music makes possible a return to and renewal from the sacred past. . . . As far as we know, throughout lowland South America music is used to represent and create a transcendence of time and substance: past and present are linked and humans and non-humans communicate and become comingled.¹⁵

Past, present, human, and non-human are comingled in a fascinating way in the Mouse Ceremony, which reenacts aspects of the myth of the introduction of corn into Suyá life, and serves to initiate a young boy into the collective life of the men of the village plaza. The ceremony also reaffirms a variety of social relationships within the village, and reminds the Suyá of an important origin myth and the values which it imparts.¹⁶

According to Suyá tradition, the Suyá were introduced to corn and other edible vegetables by a young boy, whose mother had been secretly instructed about their preparation by a mouse from the "river of food." The Mouse Ceremony brings this myth to life in the course of a ritual which initiates young boys into their social and ceremonial identities.¹⁷

The Mouse Ceremony

The two-week ceremony involves all members of the village, but the principal actors are the young boy or name-receiver, his mother, his uncle or name-giver, and a ceremonial specialist, who in this case was the name-giver's elder brother. The ritual begins when the name-giver formally re-

nonceremonial times. Formal speech and song remind the village that this is a special time, and sets the mood for the social transformation that the ceremony is meant to achieve.¹⁹

During the two weeks leading up to the culmination of the Mouse Ceremony, capes are woven from the tenderest leaves of palm fronds. On the day before the actual initiation, the capes are painted, each in a pattern belonging to one of the name groups that provide each young boy with his social identity. At sundown on the final night of the ceremony, every man puts on his cape, ritually transforming himself into a creature which is both man and mouse. The men take the young boys out of the village, into a temporary forest village, from which all the initiated males then reenter the village. They enter the name-receiver's house after dark, through a hole in the back wall of the house (as mice would do), and hum ritual songs over the name-receiver. They then take the name-receiver out to the forest camp; he has now been transformed, given a social identity, and is ready to participate in the activities of the men's house.

After a full night of singing, the men's sisters ritually "wound" the mice by piercing their capes with arrows. Each man performs a song and dance before "dying" by freezing in place. The capes are then removed, and the men doused with cold water. The mice are now dead, and each man has returned to human status. At dawn, the men go to the river, bathe, and throw their mouse ornaments into the river, saying "Go, go back to the river of food."²⁰

Singing, Time, and Transformation

During the Mouse Ceremony, the Suyá collective memory of the origin of corn is impressed upon the entire community, and especially upon the young boys, in a most dramatic way. The mythical past and the tangible present collapse into a single moment, and the separate domains of human and animal are conjoined as the men of the village are transformed into dancing and singing mice. The ceremony reenacts certain aspects of the story of the origin of corn: like the young boy in the myth, the name-receiver is initiated by a mouse into the masculine activities of the village plaza. When the men return to human form, the name-receiver has been transformed with a new social identity, the men have enacted Suyá masculine values of verbal ability, strength, self-assertion, and endurance through a night of vigorous singing and dancing, and relationships between men, women, and young boys have been reaffirmed.²¹

The Mouse Ceremony begins with a song, and singing is a central ceremonial activity throughout the two-week ritual. For the Suyá, singing

seems literally to shape society. Their village is laid out in a way that conforms to the need to frequently reaffirm social values by the performance of ceremonies, which include music, stylized speech, and dance.²² The Mouse Ceremony both activates the Suyá memory of a mythical past, and creates new memories of an ongoing cycle of ceremonies, using song as a powerful tool in the creation of both collective and individual identity.

MUSIC AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITY— IRELAND

What is a folk song? This term has somewhat different meanings, depending on who is using it. A folklorist would probably define a folk song as one which has been passed on from generation to generation, primarily by oral tradition. It may originally have had a single author, but over the generations it has been modified by processes of oral transmission, and ultimately is regarded as the product and property, not of a single composer, but of a larger community. To folklorists, folk songs are in great measure defined by what they are *not*. They are not products of professional musicians attached to royal courts; they are not commercial songs produced for hire. They are, simply, the songs of “the folk”—a concept which has been carried over from the days of feudal society, in which the distinctions between the aristocracy and the peasants seemed clear.

In the modern world, many aristocracies have ceased to function, royal patronage is largely obsolete, and the growth of cities, capitalism, and the middle class has blurred the distinctions that once made folk songs an easily distinguishable genre. In modern commercial terms, a “folk song” might be any song which is sung to the accompaniment of an acoustic guitar, whether it is the product of generations of oral tradition, or a recent commercial creation.

Irish Traditional Music

In Ireland, musicians use the term “traditional music” to describe songs and dance tunes which belong, at least stylistically, and in most cases historically, to what folklorists regard as the Irish “folk music” tradition. New songs and tunes are frequently composed, but their creators are careful to tailor them in a recognizably traditional style, and are gratified when their songs or tunes are taken up as—and sometimes mistaken for—products of a generations-old oral tradition.

The building of modern nations around the world has inspired—and drawn inspiration from—a rebirth of interest in traditional music. As a

Ireland—these songs served to fuel the nationalist movement; after independence, they provided historical heroes for a developing nation.

Irish Traditional Singing

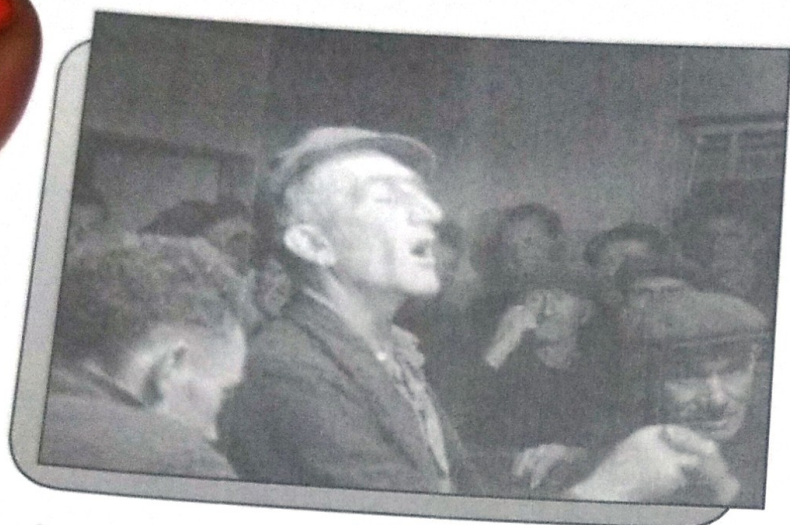
Contemporary Irish culture is the product of many centuries of contact and exchange with a variety of Europeans and later, Americans. The primary players were the Celts, the Scandinavians, and the English, each of whom brought their own languages and customs to this island nation. Christianity was introduced to the Celtic inhabitants of Ireland during the fifth century by European missionaries, mostly from Britain and Gaul; the most famous of these, Saint Patrick, was probably from Wales. During the latter centuries of the first millennium CE, Ireland was repeatedly invaded by the Norsemen of Scandinavia, who in some cases settled, intermarried, and ruled Irish kingdoms.

For much of the second millennium, all or part of Ireland was ruled by the English, who established an Anglo-Irish aristocracy across much of the nation and “planted” Scottish settlers—who themselves were descended from Irish emigrants to Scotland—in the northern county of Ulster. Each of these groups brought their own language, music, and musical instruments to Ireland. Students of Irish culture often feel like archaeologists examining layers, not of ancient ruins, but of the living, composite soil of a contemporary society. Irish traditional singing reveals these layers in striking ways.

The bedrock of Irish traditional song is a repertory and singing style known as *sean-nós*, which literally means “old way.” By the early twentieth century, systematic suppression and economic factors had eradicated the Irish language—a Celtic tongue, related to the Gaelic languages of Scotland and Brittany—across much of Ireland. Native Irish speakers still lived in the extreme north, west, and south, the areas farthest from the center of British rule in Dublin.

In 1922, Irish independence ushered in an era of linguistic resurgence, and Irish soon became a required part of the curriculum in all national primary and secondary schools. In 1998, English remains the most commonly spoken and sung language in Ireland, but the Irish language is widely understood, and enthusiastically spoken by a significant minority. The *sean-nós* singing style has enjoyed a resurgence paralleling the renaissance of the Irish language.

The *sean-nós* repertory includes primarily lyrical song texts, including nature poetry, love songs influenced by the French *chanson* of the late Middle-ages, and religious songs expressing a somewhat mystical brand



▲ Sean-nós singer



28, 29, 7

For two examples of English language singing in Ireland, listen to "The Rocks of Bawn" (audio #28 and #29), sung by the late Connemara singer Joe Heaney, the most renowned modern sean-nós singer, and "The Flower of Magheralee" (audio #7) sung by Pat Kilbride, a younger singer, born in County Kildare, Ireland, but now living in New York.

of Irish Catholic belief. The musical style of these songs is quite distinctive: unaccompanied solo singing, long, modal melodies largely independent of European notions of harmonic construction, florid melodic ornamentation, (especially in western Ireland), and a frequently nasal vocal timbre. Both textually and musically, the distinctive features of sean-nós singing mark it as a unique genre of European song, a clear marker of a collective memory that reaches back to the centuries before English colonization.

English language songs in the Irish traditional repertory show stylistic features, not only of the older sean-nós repertory, but also of English and Scottish folk song. Irish singers perform hundreds of versions of ballads like "Barbara Allen," narrative songs telling stories of love, jealousy, murder, betrayal, and the exploits of knights, ladies, kings, and queens. These songs are found not only in England and Scotland, but also in the United States. Lyrical, non-narrative songs, including love songs, humorous songs, and tributes to beloved areas of the Irish landscape, are also common. Tributes to Ireland include a large body of emigrant songs composed in England, the United States, and Canada, many of which share aspects of narrative—telling the story of the singer's emigration from Ireland—and lyrical poetry, singing the virtues of the beloved homeland.

Musically, Irish singing in English ranges from fairly simple, syllabic (one note-per-syllable), undecorated melodies to highly ornamented, free rhythm renditions which show the clear influence of sean-nós singing. It is tempting to attribute the plainer, syllabic singing styles to English influence, but this would be an oversimplification. The Irish language repertory includes many syllabic melodies, and English folk song includes styles that utilize a fair amount of ornamentation. It is impossible, after so many centuries of mutual contact and exchange, to chart a clear course for any but the most obvious influences.

Irish Contemporary Musical Landscape

The musical landscape of Ireland in the 1990s is dominated, not by traditional singing or dance tunes, but by both Irish and foreign productions in the international idioms of popular music: rock, country and western, rap, and other genres performed by Irish and non-Irish artists. In

spite of the dominance of these popular musical forms, traditional music, particularly dance tunes played on the fiddle, accordion, flute, tin whistle, uilleann pipes, concertina, piano, banjo, bouzouki, mandolin, and guitar, is frequently heard in informal pub sessions, on the concert stage, and through analog and digital media and even ringtones for current media cellphones. Although Irish listeners can choose from a variety of internationally available musical styles, traditional Irish music provides a strong marker of cultural identity.

With many styles to choose from, why do some Irish musicians choose to specialize in traditional music? Pat Kilbride describes his first musical inspiration:

I'll never forget the first time that Irish music made an impression on me. I was four years old, and it was a . . . concert, a variety show. You know, there was a guy came down from Dublin to play calypso music—he was actually a West Indian. And there would be a comedian.

And there was one part of the show [which] really struck me. It was a gentleman called Owen Kelly, who died—he was one of the old players around Kildare—and some of his buddies. And they sat on stage with . . . big shiny boots, and their black suits and shiny hats. And they played a tune. I can still hear it; it was a reel. And I've never forgotten. I can hear that music. If I close my eyes today, I can go back to that moment. And ever since then I've loved Irish music.²³

▼ Pat Kilbride

Memories tend to be most vivid when multiple senses are involved. An Irish reel, heard on a sound recording, only reaches the listener through the sense of hearing. Four-year-old Pat Kilbride was impressed, not only by the tune which he heard, but also by the appearance and behavior of the musicians. He mentions their shiny black boots and hats, and from his description of the musicians as “Owen Kelly . . . and some of his buddies,” we get the impression of a group of friends, who were clearly enjoying themselves. The overall effect was unforgettable, and provided Pat Kilbride with the initial inspiration for a life of music-making.



Irish Older Musicians

As Pat Kilbride's story indicates, personal contact with older musicians is a key element in the introduction of Irish musicians to traditional



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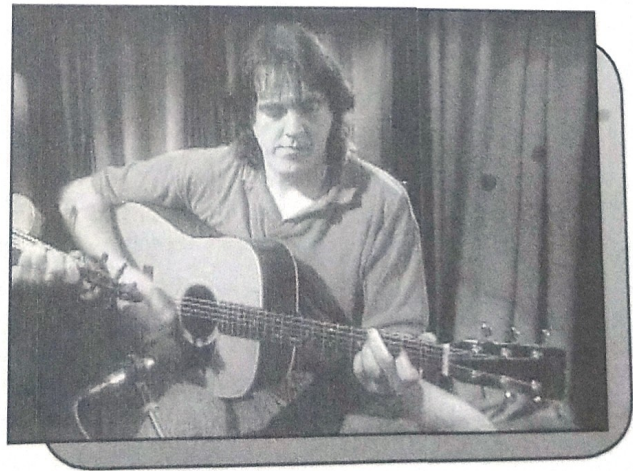
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▲ Jerry O'Sullivan

music. Senior musicians are usually quite approachable. A strong emphasis on humility and sociability has prevented an Irish "star system" from making musicians into inaccessible cultural icons. Young players often learn by meeting and playing with highly respected exponents of traditional music. Uilleann piper Jerry O'Sullivan describes the respect given to older players in gatherings of musicians:

The elder musicians are given pride of place. They're shown a lot of respect. They're given the best seat. They are allowed to make the decision what piece—what pieces—are going to be played. Generally, you know, people will be deferential and wait for them to suggest something. And people basically let them, in a very benevolent way, let them control the gathering . . . out of affection and out of respect.²⁴

Older musicians pass their repertory on to younger players both informally, by playing in musical sessions such as the ones Jerry O'Sullivan described above, and somewhat more formally, in music classes and lessons. Most players also learn Irish traditional tunes by listening to recordings. Going back to early 78 rpm records by artists such as the fiddler Michael Coleman gives younger players a certain sense of history, but to be initiated into the continuing tradition and social context of Irish music, young players seek out the company of senior musicians. O'Sullivan continues:

I think we all, you know, just speaking for myself and other musicians [of] my generation. . . . I think we're lucky enough to realize how much we owe this older generation of musicians. That in many ways we've learned our repertoire from them. We've learned a style of playing from them. . . . Of course there's also the stuff that's found on recorded media, which is fine. But in terms of getting a real sense socially, and in terms of making the whole musical picture fit with the cultural picture, you need a model.²⁵

Older players provide models, not only of musical technique, style, and repertory, but also of the social behavior that goes with the music. Irish traditional musicians tend to put a great emphasis on humility, humor, and a strong sense of camaraderie both with other players and with a sympathetic listening audience, which might include singers, dancers, and storytellers, each of whom could contribute something to an evening's entertainment. Such informal gatherings, called *céilís* in the Irish language, provide opportunities for musicians of all ages to enjoy the transmission of tunes, songs, stories, and anecdotes regarding important players in pri-

generations. O'Sullivan comments on the ways in which such meetings connected younger musicians to a tradition with roots deep in the past:

It's wonderful spending time in the company of older musicians. . . . For somebody like myself, you're much more connected to 100, 150 years ago. . . . They obviously can tell you stories about when they were young. And therefore it sort of brings the chain back even further than their own time. . . . You learn an incredible amount from these older musicians, just from their experience and the people they've met. And more importantly, they're an awful lot of fun to be with.²⁶

Irish Emigrant Songs

Like many Irish musicians, Jerry O'Sullivan grew up and learned from traditional musicians in a closely knit Irish and Irish-American community in New York City. Economic hardship in Ireland inspired many generations of young Irish people to seek employment elsewhere, resulting in the creation of an international Irish diaspora, with more people of Irish descent living abroad than in Ireland. Jerry O'Sullivan recalls the huge surge in emigration caused by the great famine, near the middle of the nineteenth century:

In terms of the Irish diaspora, the Great Famine, which happened 150 years ago, in 1847, was a cataclysmic event . . . over two million people starved or emigrated, or died in the crossing . . . A lot came to the U.S., to Canada, to Australia, New Zealand, England.²⁷

Emigration, prior to the advent of economical air travel in the mid-twentieth century, often meant leaving one's home and family, never to return. Nineteenth-century trans-Atlantic crossings were both difficult and dangerous, and departures were usually preceded by parties called "American wakes," so-named because parents, siblings, sweethearts, and friends did not expect to see the emigrants again.

As an uprooted people, often living in poverty, the Irish in the New World comforted themselves with the traditions of singing, instrumental music, storytelling, and dancing that they had carried with them from home. They lifted their spirits with lively dance music and humorous songs, and expressed their sorrow by creating a large repertory of emigrant songs, which described the poverty that had driven them from Ireland, the hardships of travel, and the wealth to be had in the New World, all the while expressing a profound nostalgia for Ireland. The memory of emigra-

tion is kept alive today by frequent performances of these songs, both in Ireland and abroad.

"The Green Fields of America," also called "The Green Fields of Canada," is a commonly heard song of emigration. The first part of the song describes hardship and oppression at home: living under an absentee landlord in Ireland, being evicted by a bailiff, and being forced, as Catholics, to pay a tithe to the minority Protestant Church of Ireland. It also relates the composer's sadness at leaving Ireland with his family. The third verse documents the results of oppressive living conditions: there is no longer any work for tradespeople, such as weavers, spinners, or coopers (barrel makers), so they are forced to emigrate to find employment. The second part of the song optimistically describes the New World as a paradise with an unlimited wealth of food, wildlife, and natural beauty.

"The Green Fields of Canada"

1

Farewell to the groves of shillelagh and shamrock
 Farewell to the girls of old Ireland all around,
 May their hearts be as merry as ever I would wish them
 When far away on the ocean I'm bound
 My mother is old and my father quite feeble,
 To leave their own country it grieves them full sore
 Oh the tears down their cheeks in great drops they are rolling
 To think they must die on a foreign shore ...

3

The lint dams are dry and the looms all lie broken
 The coopers are gone and the winders of creels
 Away o'er the ocean go journeymen tailors
 And fiddlers who flaked out the old mountain reels
 And I mind the time when old Ireland was flourishing
 When lots of her tradesmen did work for good pay
 But since our manufacturies have crossed the Atlantic
 Sure now we must follow to Americay ...

5

And if you grow weary of pleasure and plenty
 Of fruit in the orchard and fish in the foam
 There's health and good hunting 'way back in the forests
 Where herds of great moose and wild buffalo roam
 And it's now to conclude and to finish my ditty
 If ever friendless Irishman chances my way
 With the best in the house I will greet him in welcome
 At home on the green fields of Americay.²⁸

Irish traditional singers seldom regard a song as an isolated piece of repertory, out of context; they associate it with the singers from whom they learned it, and whatever they know of the history surrounding the song. Jerry O'Sullivan describes the background of "The Green Fields of America":

It originally came from the singing of Paddy Tunney . . . He's a wonderful exponent of northern Irish singing. . . . There are a number of people who sing the same song, but in all cases he was the source. And he got it from his mother, Bridget Tunney, going back. This would have been . . . probably before the turn of the century when she learned it.²⁹

O'Sullivan frequently plays the tune of "The Green Fields of America" on the uilleann pipes. Although he renders the song instrumentally, without words, he bases his playing on singing, and keeps the text of the song in mind as he performs. He describes a portion of the text which he finds particularly meaningful:

One part of the song that I always thought was very, very sad, and very accurate, is where the singer talks about a lot of the traditional trades drying up in Ireland—the barrel-makers . . . the fabric-makers. You know there's one part of the song, goes "The lint dams are dry, and the looms are all broken."

That actually happened, where a lot of the homespun industries were discouraged by taxation, by the government of the time. So that the native Irish industries could not compete with the stuff being imported from abroad. And all these industries were destroyed, and people scattered.³⁰

The lyrics to the chorus of "The Green Fields of America" refer to the "sea store," the supply of food which a family would need to carry with them for the six-weeks sea voyage from Ireland to America:

So pack up your sea stores,
Consider no longer;
Ten dollars a week isn't very bad pay.
There's no taxes or tithes to devour up your wages
When you're on the green fields of Americay.

In other ballads, less optimistic than "The Green Fields of America," the sea store is sometimes destroyed in a great storm, and the family depends on the charity of their captain to avoid starving to death during the voyage.



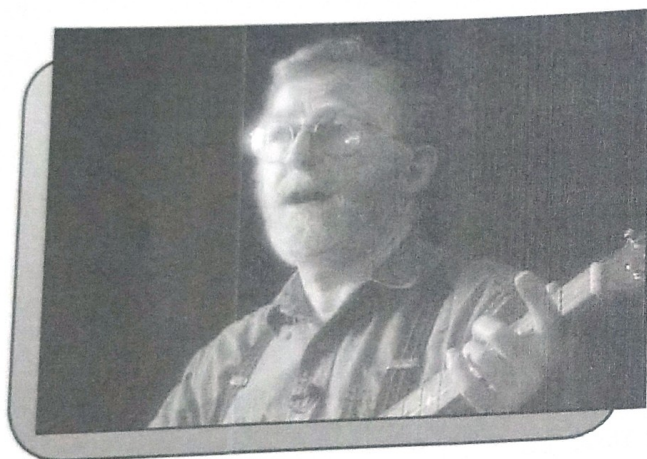
In this piece, Jerry O'Sullivan plays "The Green Fields of Canada" on the uilleann pipes.

Even Irish instrumental music, rendered without words, carries some imprint of Irish history. Lyrical songs praising a woman's beauty, or the Irish landscape (or both), convey a somewhat deeper historical impression, and narrative songs, particularly those depicting events in the Irish struggle for independence, are explicit expressions of Irish collective memory.

BALLADS IN SCOTLAND, ENGLAND, AND THE UNITED STATES

American film-maker and musician John Cohen has made films documenting ballad singing traditions in the United States, Scotland, and England. His research took him from the Appalachian Mountains of the American south to the traveling people of Scotland:

After I got interested in the ballads and went down to North Carolina and heard these singers singing so vigorously, I said, "I could go back to Britain to see if the ballad tradition's still alive there, or in what form it is." And I wasn't so interested in the revival of the ballads, you know, where people from the city like myself would learn a ballad and then perform it. I wanted to see if there were any places it was still sung within a family. And, as I searched through, the most vigorous form I found was with the travelers, or the tinkers, or the gypsies in Scotland, who were still singing these very ancient ballads.³¹



▲ John Cohen



John Cohen sings the murder ballad "Pretty Polly," accompanying himself on the five string banjo.

The travelers told John Cohen of their memories of patronage by the British nobility: "When the gypsy people talk about the ballads they say 'Lord so-and-so allowed us to live on his land. And we had some of the best pipers. And he'd have our pipers come in and play for his festival. Many of the ballads sung by the traveling people featured heroes and heroines from the class of landowners who sometimes patronized them. many parallel traditions around the world, including Irish bardic poetry. members of local aristocracies employed musicians who literally sang praises of their patrons and their royal ancestors. Such musicians sometimes served as court historians; the *jaliya* or griots of the Gambia, West Africa, were the official, professional genealogists and historians of the Mande chiefs. In such cases, narrative songs and stylized speech served as the collective memory of an entire people or tribe.

For the travelers of Scotland, noble patronage is obsolete, and the struggle to maintain their lifestyle in the face of government pressure to abandon their mobile caravans in favor of conventional, settled life is a constant factor of contemporary life. Ballads and bagpipes are reminders of an earlier era, when singing and musical traditions now surviving among the traveling people were the common entertainments of the society at large.

Musical traditions from Ireland, Scotland, and England, and particularly from eighteenth-century Scots-Irish emigrants to America, had a strong influence on folk music in the United States. Hundreds of ballads from the Anglo-Scottish repertory have been collected in North America, from the Green Mountains of Vermont to the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. For Appalachian singers, fiddlers, mandolinists, guitarists, and banjo players, as for Irish traditional musicians, traditional singing and dance music is a marker of regional cultural identity. Personal identity is associated with a particular singer's unique collection of songs and/or tunes.

John Cohen and his band, The New Lost City Ramblers, have introduced generations of urban Americans to the old-time music of the American south. Although he comes from a northern, urban background, John Cohen has spent many years singing southern ballads and documenting through his films the lives of singers in the southern context.

MUSIC AS AN OBJECT OF MEMORY: RECONSTRUCTION AND REVIVAL IN EARLY MUSIC

Early music specialist and wind player Tom Zajac defines *early music* as “the music that never made it to the twentieth century as a performing tradition.” Performers of early music specialize in European repertory dating from the Middle Ages through the end of the Baroque era in the mid-eighteenth century. As instrumentalists, they often perform on “period” instruments, either surviving antiques or, more frequently, modern reconstructions. Both singers and instrumentalists attempt to render early repertory in a way that seems consistent with what we know about performance practice at the time the music was composed. This involves a great deal of detective work on the parts of both performers and scholars who translate and interpret old musical scores and early writings on music. In this case, Medieval and Baroque musical compositions become objects of memory for performers and scholars to bring to life.

Photo courtesy of Iris Klugerman.

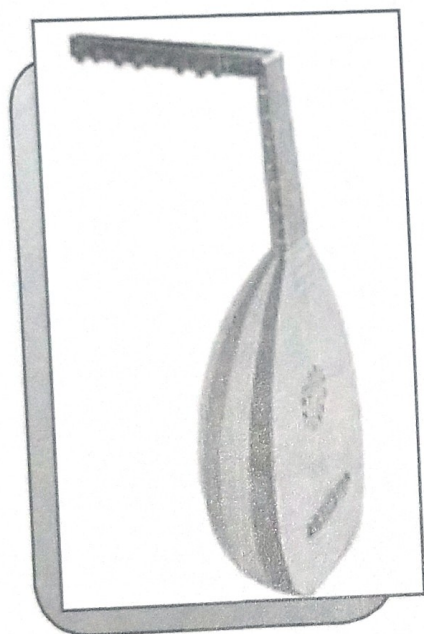


▲ Scottish Bagpiper

Early music repertoires, such as Renaissance lute music, are called “broken traditions,” because the music has been revived after long periods, sometimes centuries, of neglect. Tom Zajac discusses the challenges in performing such traditions:

I think one of the big challenges of performing early music is that it's a broken tradition. If you're a pianist today, you may have a teacher who had a teacher, who had a teacher who studied with Franz Liszt. And there's received knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation. In the performance of early music, there were centuries in between what people performed back then and what they're trying to do today. So in order to get a grip on how to perform this music, we have to do a lot of digging into primary sources and secondary sources.³²

▼ Lute



The piano, violin, and three-valve trumpet are modern instruments, and learning to play them often involves learning from teachers who provide links in an unbroken line back to the creators of the mainstream classical repertory. In the case of early instruments such as the lute, harpsichord, and baroque oboe, the chain of transmission is broken. Performance practice, like the instruments themselves, must be reconstructed based on the best surviving evidence about early playing techniques.

What attracts modern musicians to early music? The answer varies from player to player. Grant Herreid studied the trumpet in a music conservatory, where he took a course on early music. He was attracted by the sparse textures, pure vocal quality, and novelty of early music performance:

It really resonated inside me somehow. The music was so often sparse, it was very pure. The ways people sang it . . . used much more straight tone. It was very different from regular classical music, and a lot of this early music just seemed to hit a nerve in me, and I was hooked. I'd never heard anything like it.³³

Paul Shipper was a rock and roll and rhythm and blues singer and guitarist before he discovered early music. Looking for “something more from music, he found the mainstream classical approach to be “a little staid.” The scope for improvisation in early music excited him:

When I discovered early music, and how you can perform it, not just what's on the page, but what's on and off the page—that you were free, to a certain extent, to add and subtract notes that are on the page—the whole element of improvisation just was so appealing that I just had to get involved.³⁴

secondary sources which performers consult in deciding how to interpret early repertory.

Although primary and secondary sources are important resources for early music performers, they inevitably provide an incomplete picture. To fill in the blanks, performers rely on informed intuition. Based on their experience as singers and players, they make educated guesses as to how the music might have been rendered. Ultimately, like the artists who originally performed the music, they must make personal decisions about how they want the music to sound. Tom Zajac describes two kinds of authenticity in playing early music:

There [are] . . . two different types of authenticity. I think there's the authenticity where you're trying to find out as much as possible about how that music was played, so you can play it in the same way that it was performed in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. There's also . . . what I think of as an authenticity of spirit.³⁷

Authenticity of spirit, for the ensemble known as Nottingham Fair, sometimes means consulting various kinds of modern music practice as a source of ideas. To understand how Spanish Renaissance musicians might have improvised over a chord progression, or accompanied a drinking song, the members of the group look at contemporary Spanish folk music. Their aim seems to be not merely to reconstruct a broken tradition, but to bring that tradition to life in a new way. We will now examine their performance of a late fifteenth-century Spanish song, "Oy comamos y bebamos."

Early Music in Performance

"Oy comamos y bebamos" ("Let us eat and drink"), also called "Oy Comamos," was composed by Juan del Encina (1469–1529 or 1530), who is regarded as the father of Spanish drama. Encina composed both the words and the music of "Oy Comamos" for a theatrical entertainment held at the palace of the Duke of Alba, between 1492 and 1498.³⁸ The text of the song exhorts the listeners to "eat, drink, sing, and enjoy ourselves, for tomorrow we will fast in honor of Saint Antruejo. Well-fed, we will be satisfied, pull in our paunches, and hang up the wine-skin."³⁹

Nottingham Fair begin their interpretation of "Oy Comamos" with a single recorder, playing the first section of a spirited melody. A second recorder and a tambourine join on the second line, adding harmony and emphasizing the dancing nature of the tune. Then these three instruments are joined by a small, high-pitched Renaissance guitar, strumming in a festive style reminiscent of modern flamenco music.



As Nottingham Fair performs "Oy Comamos," the listener will notice that the instrumentation and style of performance are designed to reflect the lively meaning of the text.

Nottingham Fair ▶



After the instrumental introduction, the recorders are silent, while the tambourine and guitar accompany four voices singing the text in a spirited, sometimes boisterous fashion. The second half of the verse is rendered without voices; this time, one recorder plays an improvised solo reminiscent of various forms of modern Spanish folk music, accompanied by the other instruments. Finally, the voices repeat the verse. One singer bursts into emphatic speech as the second line is repeated—again reminiscent of modern folk and popular genres. The next-to-last line is rendered a cappella, a dramatic change in texture, before the instruments resume playing to accompany the last line of the song.

The original score of “Oy Comamos” from the *Cancionero de Palencia*, compiled in the Spanish court of Ferdinand and Isabella, shows only four vocal lines. The score contains no indication of a guitar, percussion, recorders, spoken performance, or opportunities for improvisation. Why, then, did Nottingham Fair incorporate all of these things into their performance? Grant Herreid addresses this question, pointing out that even modern sheet music omits details of orchestration and interpretation:

If I want to go find a piece today in a music store, by a popular singer, I can go find the sheet music and it will be arranged for piano and voice, and the piano part will be somewhat like how it was recorded, maybe. But if I sing it and play it on the piano, it really doesn't sound like it did on the recording. It maybe doesn't have



the drums, it doesn't have the other instruments. All the inflections of the singer, the thing that makes, gives the singer a personality, are not indicated in the music.

And so, when we have a piece like "Oy Comamos," which comes from the late fifteenth century in Spain, it survives in a single manuscript, in four vocal parts. . . . It gives us so little information about who was singing, . . . whether it was accompanied by other instruments, whether they used percussion, whether the singer sang with any inflection. All it gives us is the melody, the four different voice parts, and the words, . . . and it sounds very beautiful if you perform it just like that, but we found that we can infuse this music with more life by looking at surviving popular traditions in Spain, or folk traditions, where they use a lot of strumming on guitars, a lot of percussion, castanets, tambourines. And when we use these somewhat anachronistic elements in the earlier music, it makes it sound much more Spanish—it seems to be, and gives it much more life, and it's actually much more fun to play.⁴⁰

Musicians and scholars suspect that notation in the Renaissance, like modern sheet music, provides only part of the musical picture. Accompaniment on guitar and percussion, and occasional flights of improvised playing, may have been taken for granted by early composers. Since we

cannot *hear* the accompaniment style or improvisational approach of fifteenth century Spanish musicians, Nottingham Fair looked to contemporary Hispanic folk and popular music for models. The resulting performance of "Oy Comamos," then, is not merely a reconstructed rendering of a fifteenth century song, but a contemporary synthesis of musical practices from the Renaissance and contemporary Hispanic music.

This kind of synthesis is what differentiates the performance of early music from a historical "reenactment"—such as an American Civil War battle—where the object is to create a complete suspension of the present in order to recreate as accurately as possible the events of the past. In contrasting the idea of revival with reenactment, Niall Mackinnon suggests that revival requires that the past be entered in some symbolic way "but once so entered, artistic integrity is not so threatened by the intrusion of the present. It is entered . . . but allows continuity through a process of artistic evolution."⁴¹

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have examined various ways in which music is both an object and an instrument of memory. As an object of memory, music is the subject of historical research and musical reconstruction; as an instrument or agent of memory, it is a powerful mnemonic device, used by people in many cultures to create, preserve, and transform both personal and collective identity. Among the Tuvans of the Russian steppes, music provides sonic maps of both physical and emotional landscapes. Among the Suyá of Brazil, music is used to provide a young boy with his social identity, to remind the community of the origin of corn, and to reaffirm relationships within society and between society, nature, and the realm of myth.

In Ireland, Scotland, England, and the United States, narrative songs which once served as one of the primary modes of communicating and commenting on current events are now sung as markers of cultural identity—or simply because the singers enjoy singing them. Irish traditional music has comforted exiles through three centuries of emigration to the New World, and their struggles are remembered every time an emigration song is sung today.

For contemporary performers of early European music, the reconstruction of broken traditions is not only an exercise in nostalgia, but also the exploration of exciting, and, paradoxically, new frontiers. For each of the cultures we have examined, memory provides the tools to preserve old and synthesize new music, and thus music is a key factor in the maintenance of old memories and the creation of new ones.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Music and memory are closely linked to individual and collective identity. Memories tell us who we are, and music is one of the most powerful tools for evoking memory.
2. The effectiveness of music in aiding memory and stirring emotion is utilized by many cultures in creating and maintaining a sense of group identity. Many ritual traditions use music to define special, sacred, or memorable junctures in a person's life.
3. Important political events are often marked by performances of culturally charged, affective music; both religious songs and national anthems serve as audible emblems of cultural identity.
4. Music seems to be linked to certain receptors in the brain. Cultures make use of this cerebral "tracking" of music to help us remember important information by linking important texts to memorable tunes and/or rhythms, from nursery rhymes to political songs or sacred scriptures.
5. Music is not only an instrument of memory, but an object of memory. Musicologists and performers often consult literary, artistic, and organological evidence (the instruments themselves) to reconstruct "broken" musical traditions.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How are music and memory closely linked to individual and collective identity? Describe the importance of music in rituals that define special, sacred, or memorable junctions in a person's life. Give examples.
2. How are songs an important vehicle through which history is recorded and recounted?
3. How does music help us to remember important information and emotions?
4. How can music be an object of memory? What are some of the processes that musicologists and performers use to reconstruct "broken" musical traditions?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between functional and affective memory?
2. Describe the difference between music as an object of memory and music as an instrument of memory.
3. How does the Suyá Mouse Ceremony affect both individual and collective memory?
4. What are some of the ways that Irish traditional vocal and instrumental music create and maintain social identity for the Irish?
5. What are two approaches to authenticity in the performance of early music?

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