

Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to examine how the popular music culture of Ireland has changed from circa the 1930s to the present time (late 1999). In doing so, much attention will be devoted to the social, political, religious, as well as the economic, events that have occurred in Ireland, which is a country now regarded amongst the most sought after destination for the 'culture tourist'.

Predictably, the events that influenced the changes in Irish music in the twentieth century can be traced to earlier centuries of Irish history. Amongst these were the catastrophic events of the mid-nineteenth century which catapulted the Irish on a course of irreversible change. The rapid expansion of the population during this period, followed by the natural disaster of the Great Famine, stimulated one of the great exoduses of Irish people to other lands. America was the popular choice of many Irish emigrants, a decision that was to have significant influence on the course of music of Ireland in the late twentieth century. A moral crusade by the Roman Catholic Church during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was also a major influencing factor in how and where Irish music was performed.

During the period between the 1940s and the 1960s, Irish folk music became associated, in the minds of many Irish people, with the rural poverty in the

The Changing Nature of Irish Music 1930s - 1990s

country and became displaced as dance music. In its place, music from Britain and the United States rose in popularity throughout Ireland. Irish folk music did regain its popularity in Ireland during the country's economic recovery in the 1960s. The musical innovation of Sean O'Riada and the music group he formed, Ceoltóirí Chualann was central to the triggering of the folk revival which raged through the 1960s and well beyond.

Seemingly unending changes took place in Irish society during the period in question, and these shaped developments in Irish music. These culminated in the emergence of a professional elite of Irish musicians drawn from an increasingly comprehensive music education system and expanding music industry to meet the requirements and demands of an increasingly educated, affluent and urbanized Irish society. These changes also provided empowerment for the Irish Diaspora throughout the world.

The dissertation concludes that Irish music, in the main, has evolved in such a way as to remain popular and relevant in Irish society.