

CELTIC MUSIC DEFINED

*Excerpts from the Zouki No-Bulls**t Encyclopedia of Musical Terms, Volume III [Harvard Press, 1996]:*

Celtic [KEL-tik or (in Boston area) SEL-tik], adj.

The term "Celtic" is often applied to forms of musical expression that sound almost Irish or almost Scots but are in actuality not either.

Music referred to as "Celtic" is commonly sweet and harmless; in listening to it, one has the impression of something diaphanous or shimmery, kind of musical Jello [green, without the fruit cocktail], easily digested and soon forgotten. Certain species of it may also be tinkly.

Celtic music is undemanding and inoffensive; it will never break up any families or keep anybody up for three days and night playing it. It's soothing enough to play on an airliner just before take-off; it's an easy-listening programmer's dream around Saint Patrick's Day.

Celtic music wants to be loved by everybody; it pities the unshaven yahoos crouched in smelly dark pubs spilling drinks on themselves and shouting things like "upya-boya!" or "give it shtick!" at equally unappetizing musicians.

In content Celtic music is often minor or mixolydian; harps and synths and heavy reverb are important to its sound; banjos almost never used; uilleann pipes are okay if they can be miked to sound very far away and not particularly happy about it. If bodhráns are used, they are played as melody instruments; usually there are a lot of them. Theramins and glass harmonicas are not beyond the realm of possibility.

Conjecture 1: If it kicks ass and makes you want to stuff the head-phones INSIDE your ears, it's probably not Celtic.

Conjecture 2: Joe Burke, Frankie Gavin, Liz Carroll, James Kelly, Joe Derrane, Joanie Madden, and 7,654 other musicians are NOT Celtic and never will be.

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Some important rules to keep in mind:

[1] True Celtic music must never be performed using identifiable melodies. You cannot possibly hum Celtic music.

[2] An Irish tune can be transformed into a Celtic tune, but the process is not pleasant to listen to and can cause serious trauma to those over the age of forty.

[3] If you hear it played under the following circumstances:

--- you're having a cavity filled

--- they're stuffing your mother-in-law into a MRI machine

--- you're having your bad back manipulated

--- you're stocking up on house-brand toilet paper at the supermarket

--- you're waiting for Earl and the guys to finish up that goddam lube job on your Corolla

... the chances are 97.4 to 1 that it's Celtic.

Celtic music is best listened to with two Paddies [whiskies, not humans] under one's belt and perhaps a small animal nearby upon which to vent one's frustrations. Sharp objects should be kept under lock and key.

It's also appropriate to listen to Celtic music when watching an astronomical event like a solstice or an equinox, but the listener should ideally be robed in bear-skins [scraped] at the time to capture the plenitude of the experience. A goblet or two of mead doesn't hurt either.

WARNING: Welsh, Manx, and Breton music are also considered part of Celtic music. This should serve as sufficient warning to those intending to drive vehicles, perform gall-bladder surgery, or operate machinery.

The term "Celtic" is also extended to Galician music and, according to the ethnomusicological gossip mill, may soon be stretched to cover the musical endeavors of the mysterious Lost Celts of the Trans-Caucasus, who routinely disembowel any musician daring to play in 4/4 time and who worship an obscure deity that resembles Paddy Moloney.

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