

# **UNDERSTANDING IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND THOSE WHO PLAY IT**

*While rooting around in a bookstore the other day, I came across this interesting little publication, which is obviously written for the edification of various segments of the population who might come in contact with us. Here are a few excerpts...*

## **Tips for the Promoter / Producer**

= Although they may initially complain about it, IT musicians LOVE to dress up in little green suits and hats and adorable pointy shoes. Take advantage of this. Encourage them to say things like "Top o' the mornin'!" and "Begorrah!" Punish them severely if they throw up on their little green shoes.

= Good phrase to remember: "I don't look on it as commercialization. I look on it as Bringing Full Realization to the Potential in this Music!" Practice using it sincerely. Render the capital letters meaningful. Making this statement with forced tears can't hurt, since most Irish people are sentimental dolts anyway.

= Even though their music and singing may be unbearably UN-entertaining for you, you can spin big money out of these activities if you package them correctly. For example, the word "Irish" should never be used; "Celtic" is the preferred phrase. "Irish" has unpleasant overtones of Catholicism and potatoes and famines and out-of-tune fiddles and untidy cottages full of pigs, while "Celtic" is sort of misty and vague and pagan and full of beautiful women in white gauzy dresses playing Yamaha synthesizers costing many thousands of dollars. Guess which one will be the bigger seller for you!

= Most IT musicians are drunks and will do anything for booze. Keep lots of it around - certainly nothing expensive that you'll have to explain to your accounting department - and distribute it liberally to make them think you're a good person. Also helpful: a sad story to appeal to their mawkish sentimentality (e.g., "You know, my poor old grandmother was from Ireland and wished until the day the bulldozer ran over her that she could make one last trip," etc etc.) They don't have to know that your grandmother is from Poland and now lives in Miami Beach. You'll have them in the palm of your hand!

= Have all ITM contracts drafted in Livonian or Tosk or some other obscure dialect. Have them printed in one-point type but make sure that they are at

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least 16 pages long (your legal department should have no problem with that). If the musician complains or asks for time to read it before signing it, act offended and say something like "Gee, the Bothy Band had no problem with it!" or "You know, Miko Russell - God be kind to him - helped draft that document ..."

## ***Tips for the Academic***

= IT music and musicians should be approached with EXTREME CAUTION, even on the unlikely chance that you are familiar with it or them (having attended "Riverdance" twice with your ex-wife is not academically valid). The musicians are especially sensitive about having their biceps or cranial dimensions measured during a so-called "rake of reels". Remember: don't touch unless you ASK FIRST! (Also applies to blood samples).

= Sean-nós singing is SUPPOSED to sound weird. Deal with it and for heaven's sake learn to control involuntary statements like "Ouch!" or "Is this for real?" After all, you're the objective academic, right?

= You will be wasting your time asking the heavily-bearded flute player who smells a little like a barn and is missing most of his teeth whether or not that last tune he played was in the Dorian, Mixolydian, or Aeolian mode. Safest bet is to record the tune surreptitiously and bring it back to your Musical Dissecting Room for further analysis.

= Clipboards can be weapons in the wrong hands. Tape the edges so that minimal damage is done to your head if an unhappy specimen belts you with it. Also: learn to write with crayons so that you cannot be punctured by piano accordion players who think you are laughing at their rhinestones.

= Always wear a good set of running shoes when you attend sessions. Never introduce yourself as "Doctor" anything. If you're asked to leave, do so with as much grace as you can muster. Console yourself with the thought that even Socrates had a chamber-pot emptied on his head!

= Fight off the temptation to say things like "Gee, that sure sounds like a Cape Breton tune!" or "Funny, the musicians in the next town play that tune with a C sharp, not a C natural" unless you are sure that your life insurance

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is paid up and your little family can struggle on with their existences in your absence.

= It may be important for you and your PhD thesis to determine if the fiddler is playing is a slightly northwest Clare style, a befuddled east-central Leitrim style, an off-the-beaten track Wexford style, or a who-gives-a-fudging-shite Dublin style, but it is most probably of zero importance to the musicians whose session you are unwisely interrupting with your questions. Learn to back off gracefully. A pretend trip to the men's/ladies' room always comes in handy.

= Passing copies of your doctoral thesis around in the pub is probably not going to win the trust of the natives. Ditto for attempting to disguise your intentions by pretending to play bodhrán and whispering comments into the clapper. Buying a round of drinks would be a step in the right direction, but is as you know a serious violation of the Prime Academic Directive [= "don't screw around with the specimens"]. Avoid it unless failure to do so somehow jeopardizes your research, or your life.

= Jokes beginning with lines like "How many Minimalist composers does it take to screw in a light bulb?" or "So Bach, Beethoven, and Stravinsky walk into this pub, see, and..." are probably not going to help, since the crafty specimens are going to see how uncomfortable you are as an academic trying to demonstrate a sense of humor. Just sit there and shut up and hope that somebody - hopefully that blonde fiddler with the violet eyes to die for - feels sorry for you. A quivering lower lip and poorly-muffled sniffing sounds can't hurt.

