A personal

Irish Traditional Music Glossary

Accompaniment
Any non melodic instrument e.g. *guitar, piano, spoons*, drums etc. Can be effective in the hands of good players, and useful in holding a big noisy session together, but usually imposes on the tunes harmonies and rhythms which aren't there.

Accordian
Usually refers to the Piano Accordian, the Button Accordian being known as the *box*. Traditional musicians tend to besuspicious of this instrument and see it as not blending in with other instruments too well.

Annoying People
People who want intrumentalists to sing songs. Set dancers making 'speed-up' motions with their hands. *Session wreckers.*

Banjo
Either the tenor (tuned GDAE) or the plectrum (tuned ????). Capable of some superb music in the right hands. Banjo players typically gravitate towards the *fiddle*.

Bocca-bocca
Metronomic banjo-player

Bodhran
Small open-backed hand held drum, played with a short wooden beater, sometimes with the hand alone. Rarely adds anything to the music and is usually regarded as being played by ones who want to join in but can't be bothered learning a 'real' instrument. See *Accompaniment*.

Bones
Associated with *bodhran* players.

Bouzouki
Three course Greek lute. Not overbearing harmonically and so blends in well with the traditional instruments.

Box
The Button Accordian, typically the 2 row. Either in B/C tuning and played across the rows, or in C#/D or D/D# and played up and down the D row. The former gives a highly ornamented legato sound, the latter (known as 'press and draw') a more punchy effect due to the extra bellows work. Beloved of dancers.

Ceilidh
These days either a plain Ceilidh Dance (Waves of Tory etc.) or a *Set Dance* Ceilidh.

Cittern
Somewhat nebulous term usually refering to an instrument that is not a *bouzouki* or a *mandola*.

Clare
Seen as one of the strongholds of traditional music. Associated with *concertinas*, set dancing and a relaxed, highly ornamented fiddle style.

Closed Session
A session to which outsiders are not seen as welcome, usually because of the personalities involved. The included musicians will strongly deny that anyone is excluded. Often happens at *Paid Sessions*

Comhaltas
Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireinn. A Society for the promotion of traditional music. Organises the *Fleadhs*. Takes a lot of abuse for some of its attitudes, but brings on a lot of younger players.

Concertina
A pleasant sound at the right volume. Usually C/G tuning played across the rows, although some older players use the 'C' row melodeon style and play a tone down.

Crack
Social dynamics, usually alcohol fuelled. Can be 'mad', 'wild', 'mighty' or 'up to ninety'.

Cran
Ornamentation of the bottom 'D' and 'E' of the *pipes.*

Crushed Bowing
Term used by older fiddle players in Co. Down. Refers to playing consecutive notes in the same bow direction, but stopping the bow between the notes.

Cut
To ornament a note with a grace note.

Dancing
Step dancing is usually a solo dance. Ceilidh dancing is group dancing. Set dancing is also group dancing but specifically refers to quadrilles. Both step and ceilidh dancing have a formal competitive manifestation, usually involving young girls in green and gold dresses.

Donegal
A stronghold of fiddle music with a distinct Scottish flavour. You either love it or you hate it, its devotees living for little else, while its detractors make references such as 'playing very fast in 'A".

Doolin
In NorthWest *Clare*. Traditional Music's Disneyland. Probably best avoided.

Dulcimer
The hammer dulcimer. Has some claim to be a traditional instrument (mainly due to John Rea of Co. Antrim) but is not common. The way the notes hang in the air can be very disturbing to other musicians.

Fear an Ti
'Man of the house', At a session one who takes it upon him or herself to set the agenda, sometimes to the annoyance of others. However at old style ceilidhs and some *Comhaltas* sessions such a person is seen as necessary.

Fiddle
Perhaps the most versatile of the traditional instruments, and the only one that really sounds well with its own kind. Even pipers consider the fiddle at some stage in their lives. You can't have too many fiddles. You will never get bored with the fiddle.

First Position
Nearly all Irish fiddle music is played in the first position. Tunes which do demand shifting are often avoided, transposed downwards, or have the notes above high 'B' played an octave down. Fiddlers who can shift with ease are admired for this ability.

Fleadh
Competitions organised by *Comhaltas* on a county and regional basis leading up to the All Ireland Fleadh. Much extra-curricular pub-based activity at the chosen venues; to many musicians this is what the Fleadh is.

Flute
Usually the old style wooden flute with open holes. One of the classic traditional instruments and very popular as a natural development of whistle playing. Appears to be difficult to blow in tune.

Free Drink
Many pub sessions are thrown up a few free rounds of drink by the landlord, indeed many musicians see this as a constitutional right. Can result in a big noisy session. Unlikely to happen at *Fleadhs*.

Groups
For stage and recording. Typically 3 or 4 melody instruments, some harmony and percussion, and a singer. At its best a stimulating way of presenting the music, at its worst (more commonly) bland and formulaic. A lot of people are introduced to the music this way.

Guitar
Inevitably a part of things, but the chord based 'folk' style can be very overbearing and too harmonically definite unless carefully done. Many guitarists have gone over to alternative tunings, especially DADGAD, as a way around this.

Harp
Perhaps not an instrument for the dance music, although it can be done.

Highland
The *Donegal* version of the Scottish strathspey. Also Schottiches and Germans.

Hornpipe
Tune in common time, typically played slowly with a dotted rythm.

Jig
Tune in triple time with an even 'one note per beat' feel.

Mandola
Usually the Octave Mandola, used for backing rather than melody. The chords are spare and open and fit in quite well with the tunes.

Mandolin
Not common, probably due to its lack of power.

Melodeon
Old style single row box. Something of a party piece these days.

Messer
See *Session Wrecker*.

Miscellaneous
Didgeridoos, bongos, saxophones etc. Also used as a derisive term for anything not a fiddle, flute, set of pipes, box or concertina.

Mouth Organ
Too quiet for general use. Eddie Clarke reputedly plays in Eb out of a B/C harmonica, most other players are in diatonic mode.

Old Boys
Includes Old Girls. Pre-revival musicians in black jackets and flat caps. Usually fans of Michael Coleman, John McKenna and Seamus Ennis (i.e. even Older Boys), and untroubled by current developments.

Open Session
See *Closed Session*. Open and closed session are usually in the eye of the beholder.

Ornamentation
Triplets, rolls, cuts, slurs and *crans*. Often done at the expense of clarity and rythm.

Paid Sessions
Pub sessions where a group of Musicians are paid to play. Perhaps should not be referred to as sessions.

Piano
Sounds a lot better than it ought to, but only really works in a formal setting.

Pipes
The Uillean Pipes. Somewhat temperamental but with an amazing sound. In some ways THE traditional intrument; to take up the pipes is to take up an attitude.

Polka
Fast tune in double time. Associated with Kerry, where many sets are danced to polkas.

Real Boy

A particularly admirable Old Boy.

Reel

Fast tune in common time. The most popular type of tune, except perhaps among some Munster musicians.

Rip

Vigorous sound. 'He gets a real rip out of that fiddle'.

Roll

Ornamentation consisting of a grace note above and below the note in question. The effect is rythmic rather than melodic.

Scottish Influence

Obvious in the case of music from *Donegal*. Also quite strong in areas of Antrim and Down.

Sean Nos

'Old Style'. Highly ornamented way of singing in Gaelic. Does not travel well.

Session

Gathering of musicians, usually in a pub. The modern manifestation of traditional music as a social music. On the face of it a free for all but see *Paid, Closed* and *Open Sessions*. When a session is good its very, very good, when its bad its horrid. The music will mostly be *reels*, some *jigs* and perhaps one set of *polkas* or *slides* or *hornpipes*.

Session Wreckers

Musicians who play too loud, too fast or out of tune. Anyone out of sympathy with the other musicians. Some very good musicians are session wreckers.

Set Dance

1. A tune played for a specific step dance, usually going beyond the usual 8 bars per measure structure of traditional tunes, so that it sounds as if extra bits have been added on.

2. A set of quadrilles. A set consists of a series of measures, danced to all types of tunes, by a group of four couples. All the rage just now.

Setting

A version of a tune. Settings may differ by having extra/fewer parts, a different run of notes in places, have minor instead of major tonality and so on.

Singing

Traditional singing is a world in itself. Spectators like a few songs in a session, whereas musicians on the whole would rather get on with playing yet another obscure set of *reels*.

Slide

Tune in triple time with a strong skipping feel. Also known as a single jig. Slides are slightly mysterious in that they all seem to have internal rythms peculiar to themselves. Common among Munster musicians.

Sliabh Luachra

'The Rushy Mountain'. Area on the Cork/Kerry border with its own musical canon and its own way of life.

Sligo

Area famous for flutes and a very influential style of fiddle playing, particularly revered in America, less so in Ireland

Slow Air

Intrumental version of a song. Usually appears at competitions and on recordings.

Spoons

See *Bones*

Steady

A 'good steady session',a 'good steady style' or a 'steady pace'. Music at a nice relaxed pace. Seen as an admirable trait, often by musicians who will then tear off into the stratosphere, never to return.

Styles

Usually refers to regional styles of fiddle playing (*Sligo, Donegal, Clare, Sliabh Luachra* etc).

Technical Player

A fiddle player with the ability to shift positions, play tunes in unusual keys and perform complex pieces with ease. Sometimes respected rather than admired.

Tin Whistle

Cheap and easy to learn, therefore very popular with beginners. Players tend to progress onto the *flute*.

The Music

Traditional music. 'He's a great man for the music'.

Triplet

Ornament on the fiddle consisting of 3 fast staccato notes. Associated with *Donegal* but widespread nowadays.

Tuned Spoons

Banjo-mandolin

Tuning

Although nominally in 'D' (the bottom note on the pipes), some intruments are pitched sharp or flat. Thus in 'Eb' all intruments are tuned a semitone above concert,while in 'C' they are tuned a tone below. This is sometimes used as a weapon to get rid of unwanted instruments.

Violin

See *Fiddle*

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