***Understanding Scotland Musically: Folk, Tradition and Policy*. Simon McKerrell and Gary West, eds. London: Routledge, 2019. 312 pp., maps, illus. Hardback and e-book. ISBN 9780367884192. £116.00 (hardback); £34.39 (e-book).**

Music can be used both to express community identity and to construct it – a fact clearly understood by the editors of this book. Simon McKerrell and Gary West, both of whom are bagpipers as well as academics, have studied the social impact of music in Scotland, and have written on the constitutive role of music in making and sustaining communities. Both see themselves as musical activists as well as commentators. They lay out their editorial line in the introductory essay, arguing that traditional music is the beating cultural heart that both expresses and constructs Scottish historical and contemporary identity. It also seems clear that if one had to choose between the terms 'traditional' and 'folk', the former might connect more sympathetically with the idea of 'civic' rather than 'ethnic' nationalism, a key idea in contemporary Scottish politics.

If the essays which followed simply fell into line with this set-up, this would be an interesting book about the role of traditional music in early twenty-first century Scotland, but a less interesting book than it actually is. The introductory essay provides a proposal which contributors are invited to debate, either by refining core points or by providing qualifications. *Understanding Scotland Musically* therefore opens up a conversation; and while other approaches might have yielded something different, the transparency of this approach leaves space for further discussion.

Preceded by a conference that took place in 2014, the year of the Scottish independence referendum, the book explicitly positions itself as a contribution to the debate about the place of Scotland within a changing UK and global context. Four main sections group the essays thematically into the political contexts of music making ('Policy and Practice'), defining what Scottish music comprises ('Porosity, Genres, Hybridity'), global interactions ('Home and Host'), and musical historicism ('The Past in the Present'). Of these, the sections on politics, definitions, and history provide the three main pillars of the book's argument overall.

The first section, 'Policy and Practice', deals with the political contexts and implications of traditional music. Of necessity, this discussion takes place within the long shadow of the 20th century folk revival, in which the left-leaning politics of that period contributed to a recurring unresolved tension between local Scottish cultural identity and international affinities. Simon McKerrell's essay, 'Traditional Music and Cultural Sustainability in Scotland', extends his case that traditional music is uniquely equipped to building a 'sustainable and authentic' national culture, while also pointing out that simply positioning traditional music as a kind of non-tangible cultural heritage (using this UNESCO terminology) underestimates both its popularity and economic value. He cites statistics on concert going to suggest that, in the Scottish context, traditional music is also a kind of popular music – an argument he also used in his 2016 textbook, *Focus: Scottish Traditional Music*.[1] Concert attendance figures are, however, only one index of engagement, and perhaps a rather crude one at that. What about streaming? What about those less formal places where people listen to a more diverse range of music in their everyday lives? However, this section isn't simply about description and neutral analysis; this is academic research as political intervention – the public policy decisions that support music infrastructures. McKerrell is asking the reader to consider whether all music is equally deserving of Scottish public funding. On the assumption that other kinds of popular music have a stronger marketplace infrastructure (a questionable assumption, perhaps), he implies that art music

[1] London: Routledge, 2016, 87.

has received more than its fair share of public funds. As a traditional musician, McKerrell is making a strong pitch for his corner; and although more might be said about the role of art music in a diverse national cultural scene and particularly in music education, he has a point: traditional music deserves its share of funding. He rightly points out that Tobar an Dualchais, a critical national traditional music archive, deserves long-term financial stability.[2]

Other contributions to this section include Josephine Miller ('"A sense of who we are": the cultural value of community-based traditional music in Scotland'), who writes on the social inclusivity and community-building fostered by the Glasgow fiddle workshop, a great project supported privately through fees and some charitable giving. Returning to the issue of public vs. private funding, David Francis ('The emergence of the "traditional arts" in Scottish cultural policy') examines the historic funding bias towards art music as expressed in the levels of public funding for national companies, and discusses the recent emergence of groups such as the Traditional Music Forum and TRACS (Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland) to network and advocate for traditional repertoires. Further case studies consider how publicly-funded national companies have also engaged with traditional music. In her essay, '"Eun Bheag Chanaidh" – Where the Gaelic arts and non-traditional theatre meet', Fiona Mackenzie describes her collaboration with the National Theatre of Scotland to develop a project, based on Margaret Fay Shaw's collection of traditional Gaelic song in the archives of Canna House, aimed at making Shaw and her collection known to a wider public through film and music theatre. Finally in this section, Mairi McFadyen ('Referendum Reflections: Traditional music and the performance of politics in the campaign for Scottish independence') comments on the 2014 Independence Referendum and its impact on traditional music infrastructure and debates, including the TradYES movement's emphasis on civic over ethnic nationalism (63). As a whole, this section helps the reader to understand how Scotland's traditional music community is positioning itself as the preferred bidder for cultural support from the Scottish national government.

The second section, 'Porosity, Genres, Hybridity', focuses on definitions of traditional music, assuming that such definitions are at the core of what constitutes Scottish music. As flagged in the book's subtitle, the relationship of 'folk' to 'traditional' music is an important one. There is, however, a significant difference between professionalised, concert-format music and amateur community-based participatory forms, even when the latter may benefit from professional leadership. Arguably, 'folk music' can be seen as a more commercial and contemporary category, while 'traditional music' might be thought to have a more participatory and historically-orientated aesthetic. But it is not this simple, and contributors to this section understand that these are unstable categories. Joshua Dickson ('The changing nature of conceptualisation and authenticity among Scottish traditional musicians') writes from his experience redesigning the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland syllabus in a rapidly changing post-folk-revival environment. Dickson suggests that although traditional music might be thought to be 'largely inseparable from the concept of place, or ethnic or culture provenance' (89), students need skills that will allow them to engage with a wide range of creative opportunities, not simply in Scotland. Accordingly, the RCS in 2014–15 rebranded its 'Scottish' music programmes as degrees in 'traditional' music, thus downplaying the importance of one singular national identity. In her essay, Meghan McAvoy ('Slaying the tartan monster: Hybridisation in recent Scottish music') circles round the music of the fusion trad-rock group Treacherous Orchestra, discussing how the participatory, working-class aesthetic of mid-century revival 'folk' music has accommodated itself to the demands of commercial,

[2] Tobar an Dualchais/Kist o' Riches, www.tobarandualchais.co.uk.

professional performance. Folk music, she argues, 'is an increasingly upwardly mobile genre' (101), with contemporary folk music including much that is newly composed rather than traditional. In her analysis of how Scottish ballad culture is used in the National Theatre of Scotland's 2011 production of David Greig's *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart*, Steph Harrop observes that, given so much that is imagined and fantastical in communities built upon ballad singing, this production's use of traditional song allows audiences to reflect upon the function of traditional music in telling and reimagining contemporary identity. These three essays all grapple, in different ways, with the complex relationship between 'folk' music and 'traditional' music. While the forum in classical Rome served the needs of both commerce and politics, in contemporary Scotland music seems to play a similar role.

The next essays in this section expand the boundaries of how traditional Scottish music is defined. David McGuiness ('The problem with "traditional"') is an academic and a historically-informed musician whose group Concerto Caledonia has transformed the recorded repertoire of 18th- and 19th-century Scottish art music. McGuiness energetically pushes against the editorial line of the book by drawing attention to the historical influences on Scottish music by wider regional art music traditions, particularly in periods when much of what is now considered 'traditional' was emerging and becoming canonical. He clearly demonstrates that there is more than one tradition in Scottish music, and that historical genre interactions give important insights not just into the culture of the past, but more generally into the fluid processes of listening and response that produce musical innovation. As if to illustrate this point, Phil Alexander's lively essay ('Salsa Celtica's Great Scottish Latin Adventure – an insider's view') considers Latin-Scottish fusion – a contemporary example of musical hybridity that reinforces the argument that music creativity is radically mobile. In what is one of the best lines in the book, Alexander asks, 'how, then, to approach the minefield of belonging and social identity surrounding a Jewish Londoner playing salsa piano in Scotland?' (149). Together, the five essays in this section show how 'tradition' in music, unconstrained by national boundaries, is constantly reconfigured by new influences and creative experiments. Understanding Scotland musically might encourage us to understand the capacity that this small nation has for imaginatively combining indigenous traditions with externally inspired innovations.

The third section of this book, 'Home and Host', is comparatively underdeveloped. While the two contributions grouped under that heading – Morag Grant's discussion of emigrant song collections and Patricia Ballantyne's exploration of Highland dance around the world – are interesting, the section as a whole would be stronger if it included consideration of how global music-making impacts Scottish music at home. Readers who feel that something more needs to be said about this global dimension – particularly, the importance of popular music forms – receive some clues from essays in other sections, as well as from Simon Frith's 'Afterword'.

The fourth and final major section in this book examines how the past is in dialogue with the present, with patterns of curation telling us about who we are, and helping to shape where we are going. Danni Glover ('Locating identity in the aural aspects of Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*') discusses how the English ballad collector Thomas Percy (1729–1811) pressed the Scots to consider what the border ballad repertoire meant to their national history, thereby encouraging the transformation of a fluid, oral repertoire into a literary culture of national songs. Stuart Eydmann ('Routes, roles and folk on the edge: Scotland's instrumental music through the revival lens') muses on the methodological challenges he has encountered in studying the organology (musical instruments) habitually associated with Scottish traditional music. Because 'revival' typically involves reassessing the meaning of what is being revived, the process of such revivals has

tended to change both performance styles and repertoire across all the major 'traditional' instruments. Tracing such change in the context of a single instrument, Ronnie Gibson ('Links with the past in the present-day performance of Scottish fiddle music; or, the historicity of tradition') describes the slow consolidation of historically informed performance practice in fiddling as a gradual process in which individual intervention matters. Comparing publications by historical innovators such as the Gow family (18th and early 19th century) and James Scott Skinner (1843–1927), Gibson demonstrates the slow evolution of traditional fiddling through lineages of pedagogy. Taken together, Eydmann's and Gibson's chapters allow readers to consider how processes of evolution, whether part of a generational process or of a wider cultural reassessment, inform cultural change. Finally, Karen McAulay's chapter ('Wynds, vennels and dual carriageways: The changing nature of Scottish music') dives into MacAulay's forensic knowledge of printed music books to demonstrate that the traditional music repertoire owes as much to music literacy as it does to oral practice, and to question what is meant by the term 'authentic' – a recurring topic ever since controversies about traditional music first arose in the 18th century. Taken as a whole, this section of the book helps readers understand how what is 'traditional' encompasses a tension between innovation and a desire to fix canons – a tension that is surely also an aspect of national identity. Grasping this seeming contradiction may help us to appreciate that Scots – whether in the 18th century or today – wish to be modern and not simply the curators of the dust of their ancestors, and enable us to understand that traditional music can be both ancient and modern.

In the book's not-quite-final chapter ('Understanding Scotland musically: Reflections on place, war and nation'), Gary West offers both an editorial comment and a postscript to the section on historicism. West's essay is overtly political, asking 'what is Scotland?' (241), and wondering what modern Scots might learn about themselves from examining historical repertoires. Specifically, West examines how the Scottish piping repertoire has responded to its military role, dwelling on the music's affective power to mark and process the grief and trauma of war, and reflecting on contemporary Scottish distress at entanglements in British imperial wars. Among other sources, West cites Benedict Anderson's exploration of community historical memory in *Imagined Communities* (241);[3] but rather than drawing upon print media, as Anderson does, West demonstrates how a soundtrack of piping laments and battle-commemoration marches has contributed to Scots' shared image of themselves in relation to Britain's military engagements.

Simon Frith is a very shrewd choice for the 'Afterword', as few have written so profoundly on the sociology of popular music and its importance in modern life. Frith's seminal book *Performing Rites* analysed the construction of and apparently exclusionary categories of art, folk and popular music, suggesting that these mapped onto distinctive material realities and value systems associated with different communities of practice.[4] One might argue that ideas of 'tradition' can cross between all three categories, although this book has connected it primarily with 'folk' music. Although Frith is carefully non-political, he thinks about the role of popular music in modern Scottish identity, drawing attention to what he calls the 'historical ideology' embedded within traditional music practice (257). He generously – and correctly – expresses appreciation for the care taken by all the contributors to be transparent in their own positionality on national politics.

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[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 1983.

[4] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

History does matter to national identity: we look back in order to look forward. Frith suggests that 'traditional' musicians are concerned with the past to a degree that other kinds of musicians are not. Storytelling entangles performers in questions of narrative point of view; there are events, and there is a plotline which reflects decisions to select and reject, to connect and to decouple. In performance, and clearly also in research practice, any definition of 'traditional' music requires taking a stance on what the past means to the present, and on how that meaning might shape the future of a community.

Such debates raise questions – not fully resolved in this book – about whether tradition can be exclusionary as well as inclusive. A gap in the book's discussion of identity is its lack of attention to religious and spiritual music – an omission that underestimates the historical role of that kind of music in Scottish cultural identity. The choices made by the editors, therefore, suggest how we might understand Scotland's *secular* identity: not unreasonable, but not the whole story. National histories intersect with individual histories in ways that may produce a wide variety of musical expression. In the context of debates about Scottish independence, 'traditional music' may have become a shibboleth of national belonging in ways that do not always reflect the experience of every Scot living in Scotland. This book helpfully demonstrates that there is ample room for continuing discussion, debate, and even disagreement.

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