CHAPTER 1

Invitation to a Session

Reading 1

"Listen, Stan and Dora. There will be music, dancing, and singing tonight at Gleesons Pub in Coore. Here's how you get there." Jerry O'Reilly leans over our table and draws a small map, providing directions for a twelve-mile drive along the western Irish coast and then inland on narrow, hedged country roads. We are sitting in a small restaurant in the coastal town of Ennistymon in County Clare, where dozens of singers from Ireland and abroad have gathered for a weekend festival of traditional singing. It is Sunday evening, and the festival has begun to wind down as weekenders return to their homes.

Jerry's manner seems almost conspiratorial, as he moves between tables, inviting a handful of friends to the session. He speaks quietly and efficiently, as if sharing a secret only with those who "need to know." Gleesons has hosted music, singing, and dancing on Sunday nights for four generations in the small farming hamlet of Coore. While festivals, schools, clubs, competitions, and concert halls provide important venues for the sharing of Irish traditional music today, these are, by definition, *contrived* occasions, created by people who set out to promote the tradition. Gleesons provides a different kind of experience: the life of the music in a community where the music has been getting along "on its own," patronized by local people and performed by local musicians, for generations. Jerry's approach is therefore both welcoming and protective, wanting to share this unusual session with outsiders who will be able to appreciate and participate in it, but wary of drawing in people who would not respect the sensitive cultural ecology of this local tradition.

We, Dora Hast and Stan Scott, are outsiders here, American musicians with a long-standing passion for Irish traditional music. Jerry's invitation on this night in early June, 1997 is a pleasant surprise. At half-past nine we set out, following Jerry's directions down the coast and then inland for a few miles. The sun will not set for another hour, and

the Atlantic sparkles to the west, while the verdant hills of West Clare roll gently to the east. The narrow roads grow narrower still as we approach Coore. We dip and bounce over a short bridge and find ourselves before two whitewashed buildings, a two-story farmhouse attached to a long, low pub with the words "Gleesons" and "Coore" printed above the door.

We find a parking place among a dozen cars, and enter the pub. The front door opens into a small passageway with doors leading into a single, spacious room. Entering, we find ourselves facing a side wall with a large fireplace. Before the fireplace stand two tables, where a number of older patrons sit talking. In the back corner fits a small stage with four empty chairs, an accordion, and several fiddle cases poised where their players have left them. Photographs of musicians adorn the wall to the left of the stage; also displayed are poems by Junior (Martin) Crehan, the eighty-nine-year-old fiddler who has led these Sunday night sessions for more than fifty years. The remainder of the long back wall is taken up by the bar, where the pub owners, Jim and Nell Gleeson and their sons and daughters, serve drinks. Before the left-hand wall stands a second bar, behind which various foodstuffs are displayed on shelves. In the not-too-distant past, many country pubs served as grocery stores and post offices as well as taverns. While Jimmy and Nell continue the grocery tradition today, they have far fewer customers since their local post office was closed.

We move to the bar where we are greeted by a number of regular attenders of the session. Some were born within a mile of the pub, and have danced to the music of Junior Crehan all their lives. Others have moved to the area from Dublin, London, or the United States, drawn by the rich musical traditions of West Clare. Some are expatriated Irish, who return home from places like New York, Boston, London, and Manchester during their summer holidays. Local patrons of Gleesons include farmers (like the Gleesons themselves, and many of the musicians who have played in the pub over the years), old age pensioners (fifty to sixty of them in the nearby hills), teachers (like Muiris Ó Rócháin and Harry Hughes, who run the famous Willie Clancy School of traditional music each July), and folklorists (like Tom Munnelly, director of the Ennistymon Singing Festival).

After a few minutes, the musicians move to the stage. Junior Crehan and Michael Downes are the senior fiddlers, each in his eighties. Kitty Hayes, whose late husband Josie played flute with Junior for seven decades, plays concertina. Eamon McGivney, fiddler, and Conor Keane, accordionist, represent a younger generation of players steeped in the

FIGURE 1.1 *Nell Gleeson.* *(Photo by Dorothea Hast)*

music of West Clare. Peter Laban (tin whistle and bagpipes) and Gabi and Geoff Wooff (fiddle and concertina), European and British expatriates who live nearby, complete the ensemble. Drawn to Clare by their love of the music, they have become permanent residents of the area and frequent players at Gleesons.

They begin their set with a gentle, lilting jig, "The Mist Covered Mountain," composed by Junior Crehan. He has composed some forty tunes, many of which have entered the traditional repertoire (Munnelly, 70). Every few minutes, the musicians switch to a new tune, moving seamlessly from one melody to the next. Finishing their first set of jigs,

the musicians chat together and refresh themselves with the drinks that Nell Gleeson has placed beside each player: pints of Guinness stout, or glasses of soda water with lemon and a cherry. Their thirsts temporarily quenched, the players launch into a set of reels.

The music is only lightly amplified; "anchor" players, Junior, Eamon, and Conor, play into microphones, but the music is purposefully kept down to a level that allows patrons at the bar to carry on conversations. As pub owner Jimmy Gleeson explains:

> People that come in there want to come in and converse and talk and maybe sell a bullock or a heifer or something like that among themselves. It's a farming community. So it's very important that you can hold a conversation, listen to the music if you want to. If someone is singing then, that's the one time, the only thing I want to hear when someone is singing is the big clock ticking. And you know when you can hear the clock ticking that you have silence (J. Gleeson in discussion with authors).

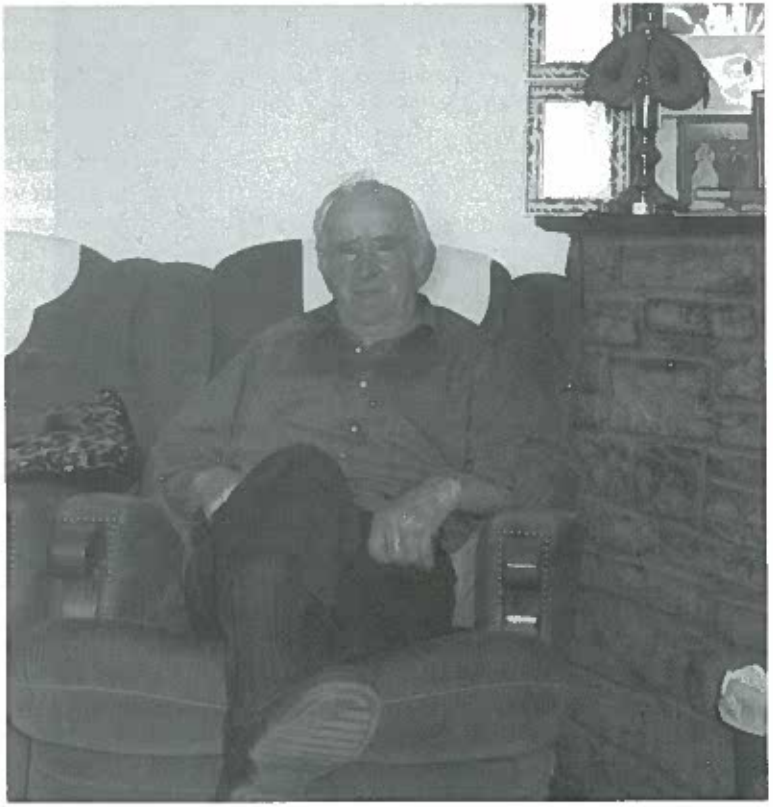

FIGURE 1.2 *Jimmy Gleeson.* *(Photo by Dorothea Hast)*

For some time, we talk with friends as the musicians continue to play, sip their drinks, and converse with each other. Their playing is neither a performance in the conventional sense nor background music. Instead, they are a complete unit within themselves—playing for each other and immensely enjoying one another's company. Three of the musicians sit offstage facing the other musicians, with their backs to the pub patrons. They make no announcements to the crowd, but joke with each other, enjoying the *craic* (chat, pronounced "crack") as they take leisurely pauses between sets of tunes. Their own self-involvement makes no demands on the patrons, but their presence and music enliven and enrich the whole atmosphere of the pub.

Then several dancers appear on the open floor in front of the stage; one of them asks Junior to provide music for the "Caledonian Set." Conversation is reduced to a murmur, as all eyes move to the dance floor. The musicians launch into a fast reel for the first section of this traditional set dance, and four couples begin moving gracefully through the figures, stepping in time to the music. This dance is one in a genre of social dances performed in square formation that were first brought to Ireland by French dancing masters in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Originally called "Sets of Quadrilles," the dances were also exported from France to England and the United States. The dances were quickly indigenized in Ireland by the composition of new choreography and the use of Irish dance tunes for the accompanying music. While set dances have enjoyed a remarkable revival all over Ireland during the last twenty years, some areas such as Coore have had an almost unbroken tradition of set dancing since the genre was first introduced. Many regions have their own localized set, and in West Clare, it is the Caledonian.

ACTIVITY 1.1 *Listen to the dance music of Junior Crehan (fiddle), Michael Tubridy (flute), Tommy McCarthy (concertina), and Eamon McGivney (fiddle) on CD track 1. They recorded these two reels, "The Maid Behind the Bar" and "Gregg's Pipes," in 1992. To learn more about the Caledonian Set, including how to dance the first figure, please go to our website, www.oup.com/us/globalmusic.*

FIGURE 1.3 *Dancing the Caledonian Set in Gleesons.* *(Photo © Peter Laban, Miltown Malbay, County Clare, Ireland)*

During the relative lull in conversation, the music seems sweeter and more compelling. The dancers conclude their set, conversation resumes, and the musicians begin a new set of reels. Before being drawn into a new conversation, I (Stan Scott) decide to move closer to the stage, where I will be able to concentrate on the music. I am gradually drawn in by the flowing rhythm and subtle ornaments of the players, who themselves seem to have entered a state of trance-like concentration. For some time, perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, I am swept along by the music, hypnotized by its charm. Then the players stop, stand, place their instruments on their chairs, stretch, and move to the floor for an interval of conversation with friends. Junior Crehan greets me and shakes my hand.

"Do you like the music?" he asks me.
"It's beautiful music," I reply.
"Did you ever hear Willie Clancy play the pipes?" he asks.
"Only on recordings."
"He was a mighty player. I wrote a poem about him:

I am writing those lines with tears in my eyes
For a comrade who now has departed
And my soul is heavy with grief and woe
And I'm almost broken-hearted,
For the voice of the one that we'll surely miss
A voice that is gone forever
Oh! Willie asthore we'll see you no more
Oh! never, never, never.

There's a gap in tradition that ne'er will be filled
A wide gap that ne'er shall be mended
On the hill o'er the town we laid you down
'Twas sad that your young life ended.

FIGURE 1.4 *Junior Crehan.* *(Photo © Peter Laban, Miltown Malbay, County Clare, Ireland)*

Let's hope that we'll meet in that brighter land
With music and song for ever
Aroon aroon you were taken too soon
And your music we'll hear again never.

You are up in high Heaven I hope tonight
With your father and mother who bore you
And the Dorans and Rowsome and Scully and Tadg
The musicians who went before you
By night and by day for you I will pray
To the Blessed God above you
That His Angels may gather you under their wings
Is the prayer of one who loved you." (Crehan 1973)

In this tribute, which Junior composed in 1973, the year of Willie Clancy's death, Junior honors an old friend and playing partner, and also pays homage to the preceding generation of players who moved through the area, pipers and fiddlers who passed the music on to Willie Clancy and Junior Crehan. As he speaks into my ear above the din of pub conversation, I am flattered to be the solitary audience of his recitation, but we will later discover that this personal, welcoming demeanor—and conversational virtuosity—was typical of Junior throughout his life. Jimmy Gleeson recalls that back in the early days,

> there was a kind of routine. They were very gentle modest people who would come in the door quietly with their instruments usually hanging down by their legs, like they were sneaking it in, and they would park their instruments somewhere around the stage, if you had a stage. A lot of places only had a big table or something like that and they'd stick them under the table. And they would drink a few pints first and chat and the conversation was often as interesting as the music. Junior was a great storyteller and a great entertainer in that light. He'd circulate and meet all the people (J. Gleeson in discussion with authors, June 2001)

Junior Crehan was an example par excellence of the holistic nature of Irish performance traditions: a musician, composer, storyteller, and dancer—who sometimes danced steps while playing the fiddle!

After the musicians have spent a few minutes mixing with friends at the bar, a solo voice rises with the first few notes of a song. Half a dozen tongues "shush" the crowd. Tim Dennehy is the singer; he moved from Dublin to Miltown Malbay in West Clare some two decades back, drawn, like so many, by music. A founder of Dublin's *Góilín* Singer's

Club, he now broadcasts programs of traditional music for Clare FM, a local radio station based in the nearby town of Ennis. He frequently sings *sean-nós* songs, "old-style" repertoire in Irish Gaelic, but on this occasion he chooses to sing an English-language song:

Farewell to Miltown Malbay, a long and sad farewell,
The sorrow in my heart today no words of mine can tell.
I'm parting from my dear old friends, the scenes I fondly love,
May happiness attend them all, and blessings from above . . .

(CD track 2: Tim Dennehy singing "Farewell to Miltown Malbay.")

Tim continues his solo, unaccompanied performance through seven verses written by Miltown Malbay poet Tomás Ó hAodha (1866–1935). The song praises the beauty of the West Clare landscape, the kind hearts of the people who live there, and local cultural traditions, including the bagpiping of Garrett Barry—cousin of Junior Crehan's grandmother,

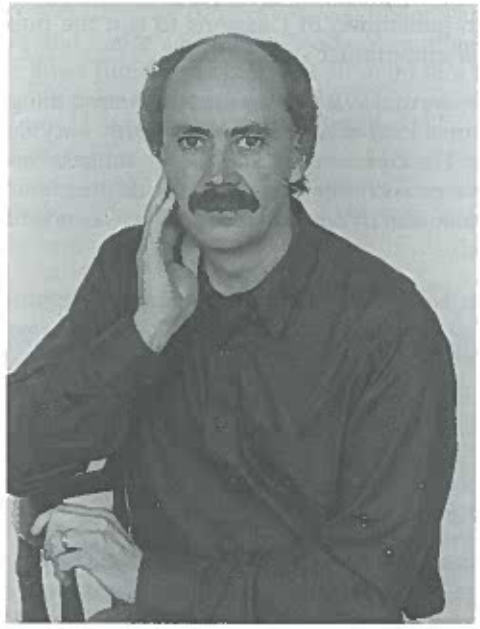

FIGURE 1.5 *Tim Dennehy.* *(Photo used with permission by Tim Dennehy. Photographer: Michael Killeen, Killeen Photography, Miltown Malbay, County Clare.)*

from the generation just preceding "the Dorans and Rowsome" eulogized in Junior's tribute to Willie Clancy. In songs, poetry, storytelling and conversation, a powerful vein of praise for places and people (particularly musicians), runs through the culture of Irish traditional music, providing motivation to pass songs, music, and stories on to future generations. Songs and dance tunes are so frequently linked to particular singers, players, places and events that every step one takes towards the music (as a singer, player, dancer, or listener) seems to envelop one further among the threads of the culture that surrounds it.

As the night continues, more songs are heard in both Irish and English, more jigs and reels are played, another set is danced, and, perhaps, some heifers and bullocks are bought and sold. The musicians finally stop playing around 1 o'clock in the morning and the patrons gradually begin leaving for home. What is the history behind these Sunday night sessions in Coore? How did Junior Crehan become such a central figure in these sessions?

When Junior Crehan was born in 1908, Gleesons was a smaller establishment—a small pub in the farmhouse kitchen. Jimmy and Nell are now the fourth generation of Gleesons to run the pub. Jimmy recalls that even in his grandfather's day,

> there was always music. It was never an organized thing. Every house nearly had some kind of an instrument, mostly back then a fiddle or a concertina. The concert flute and the tin whistle came in later on and there was no such thing as a guitar back then. You might get an occasional banjo, but it was mostly concertina—concertinas were very popular (ibid).

ACTIVITY 1.2 *Listen to CD track 3 to hear the sound of the concertina played solo by Kitty Hayes. She performs two jigs, beginning with Junior Crehan's tune "The Mist Covered Mountain" followed by "Tommy Whelan's Jig."*

During Junior Crehan's childhood, dances accompanied by fiddle and concertina were regular outdoor events at crossroads like Markham's Cross, one mile from Junior's home. Music and dancing also took place on Sunday evenings at the Lenihan household in nearby Knockbrack. The Lenihans always had the latest 78 rpm recordings of

Irish music from America; Junior would borrow one record each week, take it home, learn the tunes, and exchange it for a new record the following Sunday. Junior's first instrument was the concertina, which he began learning from his mother at age six. Junior's first fiddle teacher was an itinerant dancing master and fiddler named Thady Casey; by the age of twelve, Junior and flutist Josie Hayes were playing music in Gleeson's kitchen. Junior's storytelling mentor was Pat Murrihey, who conveyed in English the stories his own father had told in Irish Gaelic. The three generations, from the elder Murrihey to Pat to Junior, represent the transition of West Clare from an Irish-speaking to an English-speaking environment (Munnelly 1998, 64–5).

As a young man, Junior attended college for a short time, but was delighted to return home to work his family's farm—and to play the fiddle. His father, Martin Crehan Senior (1876–1973), a schoolteacher and farmer, did not approve of music and dancing. Folklorist Tom Munnelly writes:

> Living at home meant having to cope with his loving but austere father, and there was continual conflict between Junior's growing fondness for music and dance and the demands of running a farm efficiently. Many times Junior would be out all night at a house dance and in order to impress his father would have to try and look bright and breezy to avoid detection. He took to hiding his pyjamas in the barn and when he returned at dawn he would put them on, conceal his fiddle where he had hidden the pyjamas and enter the house carrying a pot in his hand so that his father would think he had just been out to feed the hens! (ibid., 64).

Another of Junior's teachers was itinerant dancing master and fiddler Paddy Barron, an older rival of Thady Casey who taught step and set dancing in local homes. The step dances are virtuosic solo dances based on the hornpipe, reel, and jig, in which the dancer's foot movements create percussive patterns on the floor, while the sets are group figure dances in square formation. Junior accompanied Barron's classes in the 1930s. Getting tunes from the dance master was not always easy. Junior asked to learn a tune called "The Drunken Gauger," but Barron was reluctant to teach it. Junior finally arranged to learn it secretly, by eavesdropping in the home of one of his friends. In Junior's own words:

> "Come early to my house," the man of the house said, "on Sunday evening, and have your fiddle tuned and I'll question him about it."

I already had the first part of the tune in spite of Barron, but I couldn't get the long part. I couldn't think of it. So:

"Stay in the porch," says your man.

So I did, and I had the fiddle ready. He went in to Barron.

"Barron," he said, "I didn't hear you playing 'The Drunken Gauger' with forty years."

"Yerra", he said, "I don't care about it. 'Tisn't much good."

"Play it till I hear it."

So he played it. And I was in the porch and I picking up the notes. And your man says to him—

"I thought 'twas different to that," says he. "Play it again," says he.

So he played it again.

"Begod, I don't know. I thought there was more in it than that."

He played it four or five times. He played it around three times and stopped and your man put him on again and he played it maybe four times. By the time he was done I had it. And I was the only one that kept it (ibid., 83).

In this tradition where musicians learn by oral transmission, tunes have often been regarded as the personal property of the musicians who played them. While most musicians have been generous in sharing their repertory, it was sometimes necessary to learn by stealth, especially before the widespread use of the tape recorder and the growth of the recording industry.

On one occasion, Junior attributed the persuasive charm of his music to a gift from the fairies. He had finished playing for the dancing at one house party, where he had been rewarded with food and a good deal of drink, and was walking at midnight to another house to play for a second party:

I had to come back by this fairy rath [ring fort—an ancient earthen rampart]. It was on the side of a hill and there was a level field to the right of it and you would never see it until you come on top of the step on the stile that was leading to it. The moon was out and the odd cloud would go across the moon and she would get dark for a while and then get bright again. There was a hedge down by the southern side of the rath and you would never see it until you come up a bit in the field. As I was coming along I stood on the stile and I saw this little ball of light going to and fro. It would shine very bright and when it would come on to the ground it would get dark. So I came off the stile anyway, and as I was walking didn't I see two goal posts and a little man standing in between the goal posts? and the ball was coming!

"Stop the ball," says he.

I stopped the ball and I put my leg on it. It hit me on the side of the ankle.

"A good job for me," says he, "that you did it" (ibid., 110).

Junior observed the playing of two teams of little men, one team in red, the other in green, until the cock crowed and all but the goaltender disappeared. Junior walked on with the little man, who spoke mixed Irish and English and came up only to Junior's knee. The goaltender, who was a rush-fairy, gave Junior a piece of metal "about half the size of a horseshoe nail" to put behind the bridge of his fiddle, as a charm to win a wife. Proceeding to his next engagement, Junior saw that the girl he admired, Cissy Walsh, was among the dancers:

They put her up step dancing. She did not live very far from myself. I used to see her working and she was well able. But anyway that night I put my yoke of a charm on the string of the fiddle. She was dancing a reel. And the reel I was playing, I'll never forget it, the name of it was "The Girl That Broke My Heart."

While the music was on the people were in a kind of a daze. They never heard anything like it in this world. And a lot of them say they will hardly ever again hear anything like it. It kind of put them all to sleep. And when the reel was over she sat on my knees and we were talking and talking. I suppose the *draíocht* [magic] of the little horseshoe nail worked (ibid., 112–113).

Five decades later, listeners still were charmed into "a kind of a daze" by Junior's playing. And the magic of his playing, fairy spell or no, did help to win him the hand of Cissy Walsh in marriage.

Prior to 1936, Junior would frequently play for country dances in homes. Dances were held for special occasions, such as a wedding, holiday, or an American wake—events that both celebrated and mourned the loss of a neighbor bound for America. Dances were also held when a family would encounter some misfortune, like the death of some cattle, and the charge of a few pennies' admission at the door helped them recoup their losses. The Dance Halls Act of 1935 changed all that. Jimmy Gleeson recalls:

The Dance Halls License Act came in. It was mostly run by parish priests and they made the country dance illegal. You couldn't hold them anymore. And you had a fierce gap between the old tradition

> of the country dance, traditional music. When the Dance Halls Act came in, it was all modern music—waltzes, quicksteps, and that kind of stuff—and there was a big lapse in the traditional music for about twenty or thirty years . . . It was a great way for the parish priests and the parish as a whole to collect money. (J. Gleeson in discussion with authors, June 2001).

To compete with the big bands performing in the church halls, traditional musicians joined into large ensembles called *céilí* bands, consisting of up to twenty players on traditional instruments like fiddle, flute, accordion, and bagpipes, augmented by piano and drum set. These bands performed for parish-sponsored dances and later, for competitions. Junior, along with his friends Willie Clancy, Josie Hayes, Paddy Galvin, and many others, played in the Laichtín Naofa Céilí Band from 1954 to 1962, winning the national Oireachtas Céilí Band competition in 1956 (Munnelly 1998, 71).

ACTIVITY 1.3 *Listen to this 1937 recording of the Dublin Metropolitan Garda Céilí Band on CD track 4 to hear the large group sound. On this selection, the group plays three hornpipes: "The Sunshine," "Humors of Castle Bernard," and "Dick Sands."*

For more informal playing in smaller ensembles, traditional musicians met in pubs like Gleesons. Admission could not be charged; players received hospitality in the form of sandwiches, soup, sausages, and drink. Junior was the central player in the ensemble, which included Josie Hayes (flute), Michael Downes (fiddle), Paddy Galvin (fiddle), Pat Kelly (*bodhrán* or frame drum), and Mike Cleary (flute). These kinds of informal pub sessions grew increasingly popular after the 1950s, with the demise of the country dances and house parties in the homes and the outdoor crossroads dances. Today, pubs are considered the major context for informal music making, and traditional music sessions are found in pubs throughout Ireland and the Irish diaspora.

Jimmy Gleeson expanded his small pub to its present size in 1978 so that it could accommodate music making, dancing, and social functions. The Sunday night sessions became a permanent fixture in the new space, attracting musicians from all over Ireland, America, and England who

were always welcome to sit in. The session has continued to be a mecca for traditional musicians, singers, and dancers even as the older musicians gradually stopped playing. Junior's passing in 1998 marked the end of an era at Gleesons, but the session continues on strongly today, incorporating new musicians and hosted by the renowned accordion player, Jackie Daly.

The session documented above in 1997 is special given its place within the local history of West Clare. It demonstrates how all the strands of Irish traditional culture—music, dancing, singing, storytelling, poetry, and the art of entertaining conversation—are inextricably bound to one another in an evening's entertainment. It also reveals how music is an essential part of a community, serving as entertainment at social functions, in informal pub sessions, and as a convivial background for the negotiation of local transactions. As can be seen here at Gleesons, the community surrounding the music—including people, place, and even physical locale—is a vital component in the overall musical experience.

This session is appealing to Irish urbanites, international visitors, and expatriates who are interested in experiencing the music in its most traditional context. The beauty of the countryside, the presence of older musicians, the conviviality and interaction of musicians, dancers, singers, and listeners, and the hospitality of the Gleesons evoke nostalgia for a simpler, less commercial way of life. It seems to embody the heart of the tradition, in which individuals are highly valued within a well-defined community, and camaraderie, good humor, respect, love for the music, and love for the land exist side by side. Because of its locale and its mix of participants, this session serves as a window into the culture of Irish traditional music, both past and present: its perceived and actual base in rural Ireland, its strong link to community and history, the simultaneous presence of old and new repertory, and the incorporation of urbanities and foreigners into the tradition.

WHAT IS IRISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC?

Irish musicians use the term "traditional" to describe several categories of music and dance: songs in Irish Gaelic, songs in English, instrumental slow airs (which are usually based on song melodies), dance music, solo step dances, and group set dances. Many of these forms are shared with other European traditions, but have become distinctly Irish over time through the use of particular melodies, performance styles, and in-

FIGURE 1.6. *Some musicians, old friends and neighbors of Junior Crehan in a session at Gleesons (L to R): John Joe Tuttle (fiddle), Michael Downes (fiddle), Kitty Hayes (concertina), and Patrick Galvin (fiddle). Photo of Josie Hayes (tin whistle) on the wall.* *(Photo by Peter Laban, © Peter Laban, Miltown Malbay, County Clare, Ireland)*

strumentation. The major forms in the tradition were established by the early nineteenth century, but they have continued to evolve through the absorption and adaptation of new elements and instruments.

Technically, Irish traditional music is what folklorists call folk music, meaning a body of orally transmitted, usually rural-based, nonprofessional, noncommercial repertory created by and for "the folk" (i.e. not the aristocracy). "Folk" denotes music that has a long history within a specific community, often functions in rituals of all kinds, and serves as a reminder of shared cultural history and values. Because of the process of oral transmission from generation to generation, the names of original composers are often forgotten, and tunes and songs undergo a gradual process of change, becoming products of a community over time rather than of a single individual.

The American (and international) folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s blurred the meaning of "folk music," broadening its popular definition to include virtually any song accompanied by acoustic guitar. Irish musicians use the term "traditional" to distinguish the older repertory and styles from more contemporary and commercial productions. As we

FIGURE 1.7 *(L to R): The new leader of the Gleeson session, Jackie Daly (button accordion) with John Kelly (fiddle), Denis Doody (button accordion), and Tommy McCarthy (concertina). Session at Gleesons to commemorate the first anniversary of Junior's death.* *(Photo by Peter Laban, © Peter Laban, Miltown Malbay, County Clare, Ireland)*

will see, while the effort to define and preserve "authentic" or "pure" traditional music is an important one, the Irish tradition itself consists of evolving syntheses derived not only from Irish but also from French, English, Scottish, American, and other sources.

Defining "traditional music" is an increasingly complex task in our global economy. While it is tempting to classify traditional music as something old, passed down from generation to generation in an unchanged way, music cultures are dynamic. In the case of Ireland, traditional music and dance forms have remained distinct genres over time, but have also changed in response to both internal and external cultural influences. New repertory, styles, instruments, and contexts for performance have been created or adopted according to need, and then either absorbed into the tradition or eventually discarded.

BASIC THEMES

The complexities and ambiguities inherent in the word "tradition" fuel our discussion throughout this book as we explore meaning, continu-

ities, and change in the world of Irish traditional music and dance. Performances today take place in a wide range of contexts, ranging from country pubs in the west of Ireland to concert halls in every major capital around the world. While most Irish musicians play nonprofessionally at sessions throughout Ireland and the Irish diaspora (Canada, the United States, England, and Australia), touring musicians and groups, such as Martin Hayes, Patrick Street, Altan, and Lúnasa, have extensive recording and performing schedules that bring them to North America several times a year, as well as to Europe and Asia. Since the mid-1990s, shows such as *Riverdance* and *Lord of the Dance* have integrated aspects of Irish traditional culture with Broadway, bringing a syncretic form of Irish music and dance to mainstream audiences all over the world.

The increasing diversity of Irish music within a global context has spawned new niches and marketing strategies in the recording industry. The term "Celtic Music" is now used to sell a wide range of Irish musics alongside traditional roots, fusion, and pop music from other areas of Celtic culture, including Scotland, Wales, Brittany, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Spanish regions of Asturias and Galicia. Promoted in the "World Music" sections of record stores in Europe and North America, "Celtic Music" covers a huge range of musical styles.

But within this diversity of contexts, three themes emerge, revealing the continuities of the Irish tradition over time. The first reflects the importance of people and place as embodied in performance style and context. There is a balance between the celebration of individuality (the central regard for key individuals, especially senior musicians) and the strength and sociability of the community. This community is strongly rooted in locality, as reflected in music that praises place, ranging from the extremely local to the whole of Ireland. The music is also imbedded in the larger cultural context of *céilíing* ("visiting") and *craic* ("conversation"), in which values of hospitality, generosity, reciprocity, humor, and social intimacy take precedence over sheer musical virtuosity.

The second theme reveals the flexibility of the tradition, which throughout its history has allowed the incorporation of techniques, instruments, and styles from other parts of the world, ranging from France, England, and Scotland to America, Eastern Europe, and India. The interface between Irish traditional music and American popular music has an especially long history, beginning with minstrel shows and vaudeville, and influencing music on both sides of the Atlantic.

The third important theme is the relationship between the contemporary performance of the traditional arts and Irish history, including

the long years of struggle under British colonial rule, the impact of three centuries of emigration, and the formation of modern Ireland. Traditional Irish music and dance emerged as important symbols of cultural and national identity in the struggle to create the Irish nation. Many of the contexts for Irish music established throughout the twentieth century were designed to bolster national pride in the developing Irish state. These issues will be explored in the next chapter, which focuses on Irish music from a historical perspective.

Note: Junior Crehan passed away in August, 1998, some fourteen months after the session documented in this chapter. In this present-tense account of a night of music, we write as if Junior were still alive—as he surely is, in the music and stories he passed on to several generations of musicians.