

A Message from Martin Hayes



When we launched the Masters of Tradition Festival in 2002, my belief was that a sufficient audience with interest in the most authentic form of Irish music must surely exist; that the music itself does not have to be shaped or compromised to meet the perceived needs of an audience. In its purest form this music speaks a universal language. I have sat through almost all of the performances each year of the festival and every time I leave Bantry, West Cork where we hold the concerts in the most intimate of settings, I do so with a renewed faith in the strength of this music.

The goal of the festival and this touring show is to focus on the details and nuances of Irish traditional music. The performers are all masters of their instruments. Through their talent and abilities, the sophistication and artfulness of this music is revealed.

Irish music is a melodic based music with only the necessary amount of complexity to convey its musical message. The aesthetic quality of the music suggests naturalness and unselfconsciousness and a desire for feeling that supersedes the need for technical polish. The virtuosity of thought underlying musical choices is of greater value than the outward display of technical virtuosity. The Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi values the timeworn over the new, personal over the impersonal and natural imperfection over mechanical perfection. These ideas can be applied as easily to Irish traditional music and might serve as a listening guidepost to tonight's concert.

In one of the earliest accounts of Irish music, Gerald of Wales, who visited Ireland in 1146 A.D made some unfriendly observations about the Irish people. In the case of Irish musicians, however, his comments were more favorable and could as easily be made today:

“It is only in the case of musical instruments, that I find any commendable diligence in the people...They seem to be incomparably more skilled in these than any other people I have seen...They glide so subtly from one mode to another and the grace notes so freely sport with such abandon and bewitching charm around the steady tone of the

heavier sound, that the perfection of their art seems to lie in their concealing it as if it were the better for being hidden... An art revealed brings shame.”

Although the music of this period would likely have sounded different than its present day counterpart, the virtue of art concealed has remained a constant. It is not unreasonable to assume that what you will hear tonight carries some common strands from that first observation.

But perhaps we should give the final word to the classical composer Bela Bartok who recognized the beauty in folk melody with the following remarks:

“Folk melodies are the embodiment of an artistic perfection of the highest order; in fact, they are models of the way in which a musical idea can be expressed with utmost perfection in terms of brevity of form and simplicity of means.”

Martin Hayes
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