I have long been fascinated by the identification of 'Celtic' culture and, by extension, 'Celtic' music. Its adequate definition has even resisted recent attempts (Stokes & Bohlman, Sawyers, Melhuish). One of the initial questions I have concerned myself with is whether the term 'Celtic music' has force as a style-label, as a genre-label, as a practice, or simply as a deft marketing ploy. As such, I have had to ask myself about the relationships between individual examples of ths repertoire – what they share, what they fail to share, and how such sharing comes about. The sharing of, or re-working of, material between distinct items within a repertoire is, it seems to me, very much on the agenda of this gathering. The terms in which I might discuss these in 'Celtic music' are not, however, self-evident.

The obvious conceptual apparatus for this is represented by Bakhtinian dialogism. And, it seems to me that this will be useful, particularly in consideration of intra-opus details. Indeed, in ordinary analytical work, dialogism has already made a marked entry into musicology. I am less easy, however, with the employment of the concept to discuss inter-opus details, to discuss material shared between different items within a repertoire. Kevin Korsyn glosses Bakhtin's concept of the 'dialogic chain' like this:

> utterances … continually respond… to past utterances while anticipating
> their future reception… In this dialogic process, we are sometimes authors,
> but we are also intermediaries, passing on socially constituted messages;
> we are couriers (Korsyn 2003: 39)

A successful courier is, however, mute. For a dialogue to take place in the inter-opus world, messages have to pass in both directions. Indeed, it seems to me that Korsyn's earlier, much-referenced discussion of influence (the *Music Analysis* article) demonstrates one step in a properly monologic chain.[1]

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[1] Note that the 'di-' in 'dialogue' does not mean 'two' as in 'dioxide', but in the Greek 'dialogos' apparently carries the sense of a word ('logos') moving in opposing directions ('dia-') – the two-way process is definitional.

An alternative concept which is worth consideration is that of 'signifyin(g)'. This term calls attention to the observation that within African-American culture, it is considered normative to make overt reference to, to employ, excerpts from earlier music – one 'signifies on' some other music, in the process commenting on it, weaving one's own work into the web of the culture's musical memory and, in the process, consolidating the place of the music on which one is signifyin(g). The term's potential value here comes from the fact that the repertoire which comprises 'Celtic music' is not canonic, but is essentially vernacular both in origin and use. A key analysis employing this concept is David Brackett's impressive discussion of James Brown's 'Superbad', an essay Richard Middleton has identified as substantiating a clear link between Brackett's analysis and Bakhtinian dialogics (2000:24) through Brackett's focus on the 'double-voiced utterance', something which partakes of both black and white discursive worlds. However, in Samuel Floyd's influential argument, 'signifyin(g)' is seen to be specific to the cultural and historical location of Black Americans. Floyd argues that signifyin(g)

> is a reinterpretation, a metaphor for the revision of previous texts and figures; it is a tropological thought, repetition with difference, the obscuring of meaning – all to achieve or reverse power, to improve situations (Floyd 1993: .95)

and he, like others. traces its origin in the African divinity Esu-Elegbara. This necessary specificity seems to me highly pertinent, and distinguishes the use of 'borrowed' material by African Americans, from its use by present-day Celts, where the emphasis is simply to play the song or tune handed down, with or without modification, rather than to play with a foot in more than one world, or with a necessary view to its function as a political statement. I shall return to this.

So, there are internal reasons why neither dialogics nor signifyin(g) may be suitable to a discussion of Celtic music. For me, though, there is a more potent reason for avoiding them. Both terms, both concepts, have been developed in order to address an imbalance which, it seems to me, is ideological. Within hegemonic Euro-American culture, to produce original work is perceived as praiseworthy. To produce derivative work is perceived as … well, because it is not valued, we seem to have no ready opposite in English for 'praiseworthy'.

'Blameworthy' is hardly satisfactory. Originality is the bane of contemporary cultural production. Ask any aspiring group of avidly practising young musicians who they sound like and, in the midst of a list of favourite bands, will hide the assertion that, in the last analysis, they don't sound like anybody else. And yet, were that really to be true, it would render them inaudible.[2] And record labels pander to this obsession as they promote genres like 'classical' or 'rock', in which difference is the key factor – recent examples such as The Darkness, or The Kings of Leon, demonstrate that originality is merely part of the hype. This drive for originality is a larger cultural requirement, of course. In all forms of artistic production, it is a remnant of the belief in individual genius. It also retains mystical connotations in that to be in touch with the origins of an artifact or practice held significant is to transfer that originary power to the user, thus underlying the correct performance of ritual of all types. In the commercial world, the successful marketing of all products – olive oil, beds, screwdrivers – requires the identification and promotion of an advance, requires the presence of an aspect which had been hitherto unavailable, however illusory or false such an advance can be shown to be under analysis. In this sense, originality is tied to progress – for a field to progress, it requires the injection of something hitherto unknown, something original. And yet, as Christopher Small noted nearly three decades ago now, in the field of artistic production, such a drive is specious:

> The notion of 'progress' may have some meaning in regard to science, which is concerned with the accumulation of abstract and objective knowledge divorced from personality, but it impossible to sustain in the arts, based as they are on experience, which is unique to the individual and must be renewed with each succeeding generation (Small 1977: 9)

I want to address this imbalance, rather simplistically, by way of markedness theory. Markedness originates in the Prague school of phonology in the words of Giorgio Bruzzolo:

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[2] This is surely a parallel to Tagg's argument for the logical impossibility of absolute music: Tagg & Clarida, 2004, opening.

> a marked phoneme can be distinguished from an unmarked one
>
> because the former contains a mark or feature (later called "distinctive
>
> feature" by R. Jakobson) which the latter lacks. (Bruzzolo).

Although a very rich, and somewhat debated concept, it has been brought into music theory by scholars such as Robert Hatten (on Beethoven) and Nicholas McKay (on Stravinsky). In the theoretical prologue to his semiotic study of Beethoven, Hatten invokes markedness theory to discuss oppositional terms. He states

> Whenever one finds differentiation, there are inevitably oppositions. The
>
> terms of such oppositions are weighted with respect to some feature that
>
> is distinctive for the opposition. Thus, the two terms of an opposition will
>
> have an unequal value or asymmetry (Hatten 1994: .34)

It is actually this asymmetry, to which Hatten points, which interests me. I have already called attention to the pairing 'original/derivative' which, though we might use different terms, is widely apparent in cultural production. Under modernism, specifically, originality is considered normative to such an extent that the term is normally transparent. We talk simply of 'composition', or of 'writing music', with the assumption that what we are writing is new – we enshrine this newness in law, not only protecting us from exploitation, but preventing the flow of information for the good of the community. It is for this reason that music which does not parade its originality, music which overtly uses other music, is taken as challenging the norm, and as indicative of postmodernity. It has been extremely unfortunate that postmodern theorists who discuss music aesthetics have modernism as their touchstone, defining such an anti-modernist practice as borrowing as postmodern, failing to observe that even in Europe, music which uses other music is at least as old as documented records show. Indeed, during the Renaissance, it was almost definitional of notated music. But, the coining of particular terms and their associated conceptual baggage – dialogism, signifyin(g) – draws attention to the music which exemplifies its unoriginality as marked, as exceptional, as somehow abnormal. It is not. Indeed, I believe it to be the norm in the human production of music, a norm hidden from us, so deeply has modernism infected our conceptual apparatus.

I take up here two contrasting examples of such borrowing practices in the Celtic musical world. I cannot demonstrate that they are definitional to the field – I have to ask you to take that on trust. What I hope to show is that such borrowing operates at two totally different levels, which perhaps indicates that its presence is far from superficial.

I start at the largest scale – the borrowing of an entire song. I have been working with three versions of the song 'I will put my ship in order', part of a large family of Anglo-Celtic songs collected both in the UK and in North America under such titles as 'The Drowsy Sleeper' and 'The Silver Dagger'. The first of these versions was recorded by the band Ossian in 1984, the second by June Tabor in 1999, and the third by Capercaillie in 2003. It is a song about unrequited love, although the cause of the estrangement between the young couple who populate the song varies between the girl (in one of these versions) and her parents (in the other two). At least eight tunes are used traditionally for this song, but the tune for none of these three recordings appears in any catalogues I have found. The tune for the Ossian version was written by singer Tony Cuffe, to words from Ord's *Bothy Songs and Ballads* originally published in 1930, and this tune is taken up in Capercaillie's version. There are a number of subtle differences, of course, but there are a couple of quite significant ones too. Firstly, in the middle of the second and fourth lines of the verse, the melodic line drops by a fifth as sung by Karen Matheson, as opposed to the third present in Tony Cuffe's melody. This means that, for Matheson, the ensuing cadence is approached from below (^5 ^1 ^2), rather than above (^5 ^3 ^2). This seems to signify that the decision to 'sail her on the sea' (as the first verse has it) seems in Capercaillie's hands more the outcome of some inner struggle than a simple choice between two alternatives.

There is a more significant distinction, which lies in the accompaniment. At the point at which the girl points out to her lover that her parents will never agree to their union, the bass line changes, becomes higher, loses its emphasis on root positions and, combined with a change of vocal tone, suggests a greater degree of intimacy and perhaps resignation at this point. I could go on, but this

should be enough to suggest that although both bands are performing the same song, the performances are shaped quite differently.

The original lyrics collected and printed in 1930 to the song 'I will set my ship in order' run to 13 verses. Of these, Ossian and Capercaillie take nine, tightening the structure somewhat. In this version, a girl refuses to unbar the door to her lover for various reasons – by the time she actually does so, he has departed. A second set of lyrics is widely available on the Internet (see e.g. Bluegrass Messengers, n.d.), to a song 'I will put my ship in order', only five of whose verses appear in Ord. This second set is the basis for June Tabor's version and it omits all the reasons for the man to shoot off before his lover has had time to unbar the door. If one compares Tabor's melody to the other two, one notices that while the first two phrases have notable similarities in terms of contour, the latter two are reversed (ABBA rather than ABAB), while the stress is altogether different – not "I will set" but "I will put", which makes the song one which describes action, rather than one which recounts the reasons which give rise to that action – hence also the needlessness of the explanatory verses.

So, three virtual performances of the same song. Two are very close, but offer subtly different interpretations of the lyric. The third, appearing historically between the others, is markedly different, but is still recognisably the same song. There is no sense of dialogue going on here. There are two streams of interpretation (two different versions) which, from this small evidence, do not interact. Although Tabor will have known the Ossian version, there is no obvious way that it impinges on her performance. Nor does her version play a part in Capercaillie's. There is not even a dialogue going on between the Ossian and Capercaillie versions, because Tony Cuffe died before Capercaillie put theirs down in the studio. It would be possible to argue that Capercaillie were, in some sense, 'signifyin(g)' on the Ossian version, as theirs is an acknowledged homage, but it seems to me so much clearer, and perhaps more pertinent, simply to invoke the theoretically more transparent notion of homage, and to observe the interpretive differences between these performances. These interpretive differences have, according to what records we have, been the stuff of this

tradition for some centuries, however much there is now a call to contaminate them with modernism.

So, let's move to a totally different scale, doubly speaking. No longer an entire song, but a simple rhythmic pattern – close to what Philip Tagg might identify as a 'museme'. And, to a pattern which occurs as part of the repertoire of every 'Celtic' band I have yet encountered. It seems to me that a Celtic identity is frequently instantiated by a tendency to leave empty, in a key layer within the texture, either the third beat of a four-beat unit, or more broadly the downbeat of the second half of a metrical unit. This needs a number of examples to identify it.

The Capercaillie track 'The turnpike' begins with two patterns on the bouzouki. The first pattern is repeated four times – an anticipated third beat is clear. The second pattern then follows four times – because of the strumming articulation, there is a hint of a third beat presence. Thereafter, the third beat becomes stronger. Scots band Ceolbeg's 'Zito the bubbleman' uses essentially the same pattern as a drum cadential figure in every fourth bar – the remaining three bars are less syncopated. The traditional Irish reel 'Blessings', as played by Stockton's Wing, uses the simplest possible representation of this pattern throughout (two dotted critchets followed by a crotchet), in the bass. One task I shall at some point have to undertake is to isolate the origin of a pattern such as this. On the page, it bears a passing resemblance to the habañera and other Latin rhythms, where the third beat is similarly anticipated. In practice, however, the regularity of the dotted quavers (into which the dott4ed critchets are frequently subdivided) almost implies a change of pulse, which might suggest a different origin. My hunch is that this is to be found in the drum patterns of marching bands, but that is as yet only a hunch.

These have all been straight beat patterns, but there is as we might expect, a shuffle equivalent, as in Capercaillie's 'Fosgail an Dorus', where the second dotted crotchet beat is anticipated. For a final Scots example, the Capercaillie song 'Dean Siàor an Spiórad', a song about pan-Celtic identity, employs a

variant. The same tendency is, however, found beyond just Scotland and Ireland. Today, annual Celtic festivals in Brittany draw musicians from both the UK and the USA The album *Zénith* was issued in 1998 as the record of one such multi-collaboration with musicians from across the Celtic world – Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Galicia, set up by Breton guitarist Dan Ar Braz. The album is replete with these patterns. The verse of Welsh duo Elaine and Derek Morgan's 'Ar y Ffordd' has a variety of empty second-bar downbeats, while Ar Braz' tune 'The little cascade' switches between two accompanimental patterns, each of which has this property.

So, on the basis of these and many other examples, I have no doubt that this absent 'third beat' or equivalent, normally found in an accompanimental strand, acts, probably in concert with other elements – instrumentation, language, melodic contour, production values - to signify 'Celticism'. One point here – I am aware that I have elided two means by which this emptiness is actualised – anticipation of the beat, and its simple omission. As yet, I am not convinced that there is a significant difference between these.

So, what do I conclude from this presence of a common means of metric articulation across a wide range of examples? Is the best way of conceptualising this recurring pattern to invoke yet a third concept, the rather over-used 'intertextuality'? Are we talking about the presence of one text within another? Again, I don't think we are. It is possible that we could define such a pattern as a text in its own right, which finds its way into various performances across the Celtic world. However, what I have been talking about is not the presence of particular material, but an absence, an absence which is articulated in different ways. The patterns I have transcribed have their own separate identities - they simply hold a particular characteristic, the absence of a downbeat in a particular place - in common. It seems to me that a better paradigm is formed by viewing this not as a text, but as a practice, as a way of playing, a way of activating inert material. In many cases, it is a call to dance, and the absence of this key beat functions in much the same way that similar absences operate in

the drum patterns of West African music – as metric absences which call forth to the dancing body to supply a metric presence.

Indeed, this is the second reason for my choosing such disparate examples of borrowing – the entire song on the one hand, the metric pattern on the other. To return to the question I asked myself at the beginning, it is clear that the range of material understood as 'Celtic music' can be understood in more than one way. For its consumers, as they are addressed by recod labels, by retailers, by journals, 'Celtic music' represents a series of artifacts, of texts, with a boundedness distinguishing them from each other. 'Celtic music' here is a series of songs, or dances. For its performers, though, or at least a large number of them, for instance those who feature in Philip Bohlman & Martin Stokes' recent collection, 'Celtic music' represents a practice, a way of playing material where individuality of approach is marked less by the material one chooses to play than by how one activates it. 'Celtic music' here is a particular approach to vocal production, to the absence of a particular metrical beat, or a preference for certain types of chord voicings idiomatic to the bouzouki or de-tuned guitar. Thus, to return to my initial distinction, the label 'Celtic music' probably has force both as a genre label and a style label, but when functioning as each of these, it operates for different users. Keeping this duality in mind will be one task of my ensuing research.

So, on both the small, and the large, scale, Celtic music borrows from itself. This practice is normative. And, because it is normative, it is better to avoid conceptualisations which call attention to the practice as if it were 'other', as if it were abnormal. It is my belief that it represents a human norm, and it is about time it was recognised as such.

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