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Participatory Music Making and Affinity in Washington, DC Irish Sessions



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Abstract

The Washington, DC metropolitan area hosts a vibrant Irish music scene. Like those in many Irish sessions found throughout the world, the District's network of musicians plays traditional dance tunes at local Irish pubs. This research, centered on ten weekly Irish sessions, explores how DC participants navigate authenticity and develop their skills within a social community. Musicians of varying skill levels perform together and include both those of Irish descent and those with no Irish heritage. Issues such as degrees of strictness with regard to tunes played, instruments permitted, and session etiquette demonstrate each

session's unique characteristics. This thesis discusses the influence of participatory music making and affinity, since Irish session musicians perform primarily for themselves. Based on field research through participant-observation and interviews, and expanding upon recent discussions of tradition and imagination in sessions worldwide, I analyze Irish sessions in DC in terms of participatory music making and socializing.

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