

# ULRR

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## The roots and routes of Irish step dancing: issues of identity and participation in a global world<sup>1</sup>

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Within our modern twenty-first century world we may take the time to ask ourselves to what extent is knowledge, or an understanding, of our roots important to us? Is this word roots something that is perceived to be tied up with a nostalgia for a romanticised past or is it something that enhances our knowledge and understanding of who we are, *where we are*, and *how we are* as we are now? Is it, in effect, important to our modern sense of identity? This paper addresses these questions in relation to one specific cultural practice, namely, step dancing, within one specific pedagogical context, the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme, at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, Ireland.

In August, 1967, when the anthropologist, Margaret Mead, was leaving the island of Manus in Samoa – one of her fieldwork sites, for the last time – she urged the people that when bringing new customs to the island, not to forget their ancestors, history, and old traditions. She stated that if they forgot these, they would have no ground beneath their feet or roots in the ground. They would belong only to the present and have no idea of their past. This statement was made in response to changes that Margaret Mead observed and experienced on the island of Manus since her previous visit. In the interim the island had hosted two million American troops for operations in the Pacific after the war, which had influenced the island's cultural life. The islanders were now also going away to be educated, listening to American popular music, smoking cigarettes, and so on.<sup>2</sup> This is an example of how physical contact between cultures can bring about change and today, in our modern global world, contact between cultures and people is either physical contact through travel, economic migration, education, business, tourism, war, and so on, or technological contact through the World Wide Web, YouTube, and social networking.

Today, we experience what Giddens refers to as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations'.<sup>3</sup> We live in a global world culture, which according to Hannerz:

is marked by an organisation of diversity rather than the replication of uniformity. It is created through the increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as through the development of cultures without a clear anchorage in one territory. These are all becoming 'sub-cultures within the wider whole'.<sup>4</sup>

Such subcultures are referred to as affinity groups, as proposed by Slobin and Cooley.<sup>5</sup> Today we also experience 'the creation of new and the multiplication of existing networks and activities that increasingly overcome traditional political, economic, cultural, and geographical boundaries'.<sup>6</sup>

### **Irish Step Dancing as a World Dance Practice within a Global World Culture**

Within this global world culture, cultural practices need no longer be confined by boundaries such as ethnicity, race, gender, class, or geography. For example, Irish step dancing, as a cultural practice, is no longer confined to Ireland, Irish people and the diaspora. Following the commoditisation and global commercial success of the Irish dance show, *Riverdance*,<sup>7</sup> in the 1990s on the international arena,<sup>8</sup> step dancing as a dance genre became exposed to many different cultures. Also, the newly composed music of *Riverdance* by Bill Whelan, combining Irish traditional dance music with East European rhythms, and the presentation of this in a rock-like manner, provided a new style of music accompaniment for step dancing.<sup>9</sup> Having seen *Riverdance*, people's perceptions in Ireland and abroad changed towards Irish step dancing. *Riverdance* placed Ireland globally and Irish dance had much to offer Irish tourism.<sup>10</sup> *Riverdance* also succeeded within the competitive world of economics, and other sister shows followed in a clone-like manner all employing Irish step dancers and disseminating the dance form further afield.<sup>11</sup>

This was a new era for Irish traditional dancers and musicians that professionalised Irish step dance and also gave Irish traditional musicians a gig that lasted for months, if not, years. These dancers and musicians performed in the USA (Broadway), Russia, China, Japan, and other countries. They performed in different parts of the world for dignitaries, royalty, as well as for others who could afford to pay to see their shows. These institutions were not tied to locality. They were commercial enterprises that competed within the global market.<sup>12</sup> Dancers moved with these shows from place to place; they interacted with the personnel and performers in their show; and they rarely built relationships with people outside their world of performance.

These step dancers attained an unprecedented status in the field of step dance on the global stage. They were perceived as trained, skilled dancers, and were respected for their skill. These step dancers were also exposed to the world of theatre and the personnel who contributed to this world: stage managers, sound engineers, lighting technicians, and wardrobe mistresses, together with other personnel who contributed to maintaining their bodies: physiotherapists. In shows such as *Riverdance*, they were also exposed to other dance forms such as flamenco,

Ukrainian dance, and tap. All of these contributed to these dancers' sense of identity as Irish professional step dancers.

Participation in these shows was considered attractive and relatively lucrative, and step dancers, not only from Ireland but also from the diaspora and further afield, auditioned for places in them. Although there were status and financial rewards, these dancers also performed in *Riverdance* and the other stage shows simply because they could and because they wished to experience dancing in the show. Also, they were only too aware of the impermanence of this lifestyle and wished to avail themselves of the experience while young and fit, and before *Riverdance* and the other shows were no longer economically viable.

Step dance as a dance form was reaching a wide international audience, resulting in a demand for Irish dance teachers and classes. These dance classes were for young and old and were taught both in English language speaking countries and non-English language speaking countries. To meet the demand on mainland Europe, WIDA (World Irish Dancing Association), a new association of Irish dance, emerged. This association organised step dance competitions to promote and elevate the standard of Irish step dancing on mainland Europe. Teachers from step dance organisations in Ireland, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*<sup>13</sup> and *Conhhdháil Múinteoirí na Rincí Gaelacha*<sup>14</sup> – two of the primary organisations of step dance in Ireland and abroad, also taught classes and organised competitions (*feiscanna*) on mainland Europe and further afield. So popular had Irish dance become that, according to one teacher, there were three generations in one family learning to step dance in one school in Germany.<sup>15</sup> Also, the primary figure and *céili* dance book of the organisations in Ireland, *Ár Rincidhe Fóirne* ('Our Figure Dances'), was translated into Czech, making these institutionalised group dances available to a wider Irish dance audience.<sup>16</sup> Dancers from the shows, particularly the lead dancers, found themselves in demand as teachers across mainland Europe, including Norway and Russia. Some earned their living as teachers in between gigs and shows. Irish dance had become a transnational dance form.

### **MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance**

In 1999, in the midst of this unprecedented global awareness of Irish step dance and a healthy economic climate in Ireland, popularly called the Celtic Tiger, an MA Dance Performance programme was established at the Irish World Music Centre (now known as the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance), at the University of Limerick. The MA had two separate specialisations: Irish traditional dance and contemporary dance. This paper focuses on the Irish traditional dance stream which was established to provide a strong learning environment for advanced training in Irish dance within a university context. This context would enhance students' knowledge and understanding of the repertoires, styles, and histories of step dance, and, indeed, other dance practices. It would also teach research methods to enable students to do self-directed research, particularly empirical research – fieldwork. As a performance programme, it would also endeavour to assist students to find

their own individual voices through the medium of Irish dance performance, while honouring its artistic integrity, history, and identity. The programme would validate Irish dance within a university context and would provide an alternative route for step dancers. It was the first MA of its type in the world and still remains so today.

As Course Director of the programme, I was responsible for its design and implementation. I wondered about the kinds of students who might avail of this MA. Would they be *Riverdancers*? Would they have undergraduate degrees? Would they be from competition culture? I wondered what the performance and pedagogical needs of these students would be. As a step dancer, teacher, and ethnochoreologist, I was aware of the imbalance in power and representation between practices of step dance, which were considered to be 'core', and those which were considered to be peripheral or marginalised.<sup>17</sup> The 'core' was the institutionalised practice operating within the structures of the step-dance organisation, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*, and had, since the early decades of the twentieth century, constructed and maintained a hierarchical system of step-dance competitions under the auspices of the cultural nationalist movement, the Gaelic League. These competitions had been established for ideological purposes.<sup>18</sup> Within these competitions, particularly major competitions, music accompaniment for step dancing was on the piano accordion with piano accompaniment; specific metronomic speeds for playing were designated by the organisation. The majority of the step dancers performing in the globally acclaimed step-dance shows, *Riverdance* et al, had been trained in dance schools registered with *An Coimisiún* and to a lesser extent, *An Comhdháil*, and had competed successfully in competitions, such as the All Irelands, the Worlds, and others, over many years. For step dancers in the commercial shows, and indeed for aspiring



**Figure 1** *Sean Nós* dance performance by Patrick Coyne, student on the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme, in the Performing Arts Centre, University of Limerick, Ireland, on 6 December 2005. Musician: Alan Finn. *Photo by Maurice Gunning*

'show' step dancers, the route to becoming one of these 'show' step dancers was through the step-dance organisations, where step dance skills required for these shows were taught. The marginalised practices at the time were those which were associated with local, rural nineteenth-century step-dance practices and which continued to be performed by individuals, but to a lesser degree than before, in predominantly informal, social settings. These individual dancers did not perform in the globally acclaimed commercial step-dance shows. Their repertoires and styles of practice were different but they found themselves in demand for television, concerts, festivals, and step-dance workshops where older, traditional styles of step dance were sought.<sup>19</sup>

In designing the programme, I attempted to address this imbalance of representation. This was achieved by providing various training systems and by selecting tutors who were representative of different dance practices. This included teaching diverse repertoires and styles including *Sean Nós* (old style) dancing (see Figure 1),<sup>20</sup> North Kerry step dancing,<sup>21</sup> festival dancing of Northern Ireland,<sup>22</sup> and competition dancing associated with *An Coimisiún*, *An Comhdháil* and *CRN*.<sup>23</sup> It also involved short experiences for students in world dance practices, such as Nigerian dance, flamenco, Kathak, Bharatanatyam, and Cape Breton step dancing. The students shared these classes with students on the MA Ethnochoreology programme.<sup>24</sup> The latter dance forms briefly exposed the students to 'other' dancers and 'other' dance cultures, with the intention of extending their horizons, and leading to processes of reflexivity, in attempting to both self-understand and understand others through dance. They therefore provided sites for reflexive interrogation of their own dance practice and a deeper understanding of themselves as Irish step dancers. But who were these step-dance students and where did they come from?

### **Student Profiles**

The MA degree in Irish traditional dance was open to all step dancers who met the requirements of entry to the programme. This entry requirement was an undergraduate degree and/or professional step dancing equivalence in life experience; an interview and audition was required in all cases. For those who were unable to attend a live audition, an audition DVD and interview was acceptable.

The dance backgrounds of the students fell into different categories; these included:

1. Step dancers who had trained for years in Ireland or abroad with one of the step-dance organisations established in Ireland: *An Coimisiún*, *An Comhdháil*, or *CRN*. Some of these step dancers had either won or were placed high in highly esteemed step-dance competitions such as the All Ireland Championships, the British Championships, the US Nationals, or the World Championships.
2. Step dancers who had trained within one of the existing organisations of step dance and who had also performed professionally with *Riverdance*, *Lord of the Dance*, or one of the other commercial Irish step-dance stage shows.

3. Step dancers who had seen *Riverdance* and who subsequently trained in the new schools of step dance on mainland Europe, Russia, etc. These dancers also attended step-dance workshops when available and some also travelled to teachers in Ireland for further training. These dancers may or may not have competed in competitions with WIDA;
4. Step dancers who had seen *Riverdance* and who subsequently moved to Ireland to learn directly from teachers in Ireland; and
5. Dancers who had trained in other percussive dance forms, such as tap dance, and who had invested time in making Irish dance their primary dance expression.

The geographical spread of the MA students was also interesting. 40% were Irish born; 30% were from the Irish diaspora; and the remaining 30% were comprised of students from mainland Europe, Japan, and Russia.

The MA students therefore came from different geographical locations and had different educational and dance backgrounds. Some had trained in step dance since the age of four; others took it up at the age of twenty. Some had trained in Irish step dancing alone; the majority had other dance and theatre influences, including tap, jazz, capoeira, and contemporary dance.

Reasons students provided for pursuing the MA included:

1. To spend a year doing something that they really felt passionate about at an advanced level. (The MA provided a one-year duration of intense Irish dance practice which was not available at any other university or institution);
2. To become as good a dancer as they could become;
3. To perform in contexts other than competitions;
4. To learn what there was to learn within the structures of a university MA;
5. To get an MA qualification.

Since 'professional life equivalence' was acceptable as an entry requirement, an undergraduate degree was not obligatory, especially for those who had left school after their Leaving Certificate or before to dance with *Riverdance*, and who, after ten years of dancing professionally and as mature students, decided to return to education.

According to one alumnus of the programme:

I decided to undertake this course because I saw it as an opportunity to grow further as an Irish dancer. I felt that I needed to do it for myself because I had dedicated so much of life to Irish dance. I felt it would be a waste not to jump at the opportunity and luckily enough I was accepted.

Another alumnus of the programme had this to say:

I just wanted to take a year for myself, to just dance, because it was something I always loved to do [...] I did not think anything would come of it; I just wanted

to have the experience. However, it completely changed the course of my career path.

The MA was perceived by some students as a next step after their years of training in Irish step dance; for others, it was a self-fulfilling challenge: to belong to an affinity group that held meaning for them and with which they wished to identify. These students were all open to meeting the challenges of the MA programme, including practical, theoretical, and technological challenges.

### **Routes to the Past**

In including marginalised step-dance practices in the curriculum, I hoped to provide students with the opportunity to embody knowledge of different step-dance practices and their histories. It was, in effect, a pedagogical and corporeal challenge to draw students' awareness to the past-ness, the histories, and the 'otherness' of step dance. This was not tied up with a sense of nostalgia for a romanticised past; rather, it endeavoured to enhance the students' knowledge of the history of their field and provide them with an understanding of who they were, where they were, and how they were as they were now as step dancers. It also furnished them with a strongly embodied and historical sense of their practice from which they could support future work in the practice.

The practices were taught through a combination of practical dance workshops, lectures and seminars. Specific repertoires and their aesthetic and stylistic systems were transmitted and were contextualised with relevant literature. For example, step dance in North Kerry was informed by my own fieldwork with step dancers in North Kerry from 1983 to 1986. Here I brought together a marginalised step-dance system from elderly step dancers, who had all learned from the itinerant dancing master, Jeremiah Molyneux (1888–1965). This formed the basis of my PhD thesis in 1988 and this research assisted students with understanding the practice. The repertoire of reels, jigs, and hornpipes prevailed, but certain step-dance choreographies had associations with the region of North Kerry and, in particular, Jeremiah Molyneux. These steps were taught to the students, as was the style of performance: earthy, close-to-the floor, confined practice space, and loose upper body. The relationship of the dance to the accompanying music was also discussed and practised. This relationship was one of dialogue, whereby the step dancer moved in conscious dialogue with the accompanying musician, often a fiddler or a melodeon player. Improvisation also featured in these performances, demonstrating not only a mastery of the practice but also a familiarity and intimacy with both music and dance practices. The transmission of different marginalised step-dance practices assisted in providing students with a somatic and alternative way of performing step dance from different places and times. Also, they extended students' knowledge of Irish dance and illustrated how step dance could be performed differently, depending on different functions, contexts, and historical times. Improvisation, an important aspect of some of these practices, was also explored.

While the MA step dancers had different degrees of training in Irish dance and had come from diverse dance backgrounds, few had a holistic understanding of the historical and contextual past of step dance. Therefore embodying and performing stylistic differences in step-dance practices proved challenging to them all. Students were required to be able to locate themselves in specific socio-historical step-dance contexts, thus requiring an awareness of different contexts of performance, informal and formal – for example, house dances, concerts<sup>25</sup> – and an ability to perform in an informed and appropriate manner. This included having a knowledge of the vocabulary and aesthetics of the specific system in question and that they have an awareness of the following: the patrons of the dance, age and gender associations of the dance within their respective social groups, respective music accompaniment, music instrumentation, music tempo, spatial requirements of dance, relationships between musicians and dancers, relationships between audiences and dancers, costume, shoes, and such like. Students were required to be aware of step dance as both a presentational practice, where dancer and audience are formally separated, and as a participatory practice, where step dancers perform in contexts which are social by nature and where the division between the dancer and the audience is not formally constructed.<sup>26</sup> Students were required to embody and be historically aware of step-dance practices which were considered to be marginalised, nationalised, and globalized. In doing so, they acquired a stronger sense of the ‘roots and routes’ of Irish step dance.

The MA students in Irish Traditional Dance Performance also learned ethnochoreological research methods and dance documentation skills, specifically Labanotation, and carried out research in the field in a case study of their choice. This provided an outreach element to the programme, allowing students to engage in a wider world of Irish dance. These opportunities of learning, researching, and embodying different step-dance aesthetic systems challenged students’ prior perceptions of step dance while also extending historical and theoretical understandings of these practices within local, national, and global arenas.

### **Routes to the Future**

All living cultural practices change. To facilitate this and to prepare step dancers for a broader professional dancer’s life, students were also encouraged to find their own individual voices through the medium of Irish dance within the context of theatre. Ancillary classes were provided including classes in contemporary dance principles, body awareness classes, ballet, and yoga. Tutors and guest choreographers were invited to work with the students to develop and extend their dance vocabulary and techniques. Students also choreographed their own theatrical solos. The practices and perceptions of Irish dance were being challenged and extended to construct alternative contexts and meanings for these Irish dancers.<sup>27</sup>

Although *Riverdance* and the other stage shows had been performed in theatrical contexts, a new emergent Irish step-dance culture was aimed at creating artistic work in the Western sense for smaller theatre venues. Within the context of the MA, the dance work produced was facilitated by the MA programme, the guest

tutors and choreographers, and, indeed, the students themselves. Other step-dance performers outside the MA were also endeavouring to create new theatrical work. These included Colin Dunne,<sup>28</sup> Gene Butler, Breandán de Gallaí, and others.

Within the context of the MA, students were exposed to working with diverse choreographers. Some of these were Irish step dancers; others were tap dancers and contemporary dancers. These choreographers were required to work with the students on a regular basis in the creation of new ensemble theatrical work. While these works challenged perceptions of Irish dance practice, they also provided sites where students could experience dance differently.

The choreographers worked in different ways. Some created the work themselves first and then taught it to the students; some created it in collaboration with the students in the studio, while others combined both methods. The choice to use music – traditional music or any other type of music or not – depended on the choreographer and the choreography. The MA programme therefore provided a site where choreographers could try out their choreographic ideas on a body of step-dance students who were willing to work, who came free, and where studios were provided. This provided choreographers with a unique opportunity to progressively build dance works, which were performed publicly as part of the students' final performances (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Students on the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme performing *Shadow Dolls*, choreographed by Breandán de Gallaí, at the Belltable Theatre, Limerick, Ireland, on 15 May 2008. Dancers are: Neasa Ní Ghiolla Comhgháin (front left), Renske Burghout (front right), Kate Spanos (back left), and Mairéad O'Connor (back right).

*Photo by Maurice Gunning*

The students also negotiated their step-dance practice through their theatrical solos, which allowed them to express themselves and their practice theatrically. Students selected individual situations, memories, emotions, or a concept of relevance to them in choreographing these theatrical solos. They selected movements from step dance, physical theatre, or the natural world, and utilised contemporary dance principles. They analysed and deconstructed step-dance movements and their associated aesthetics, and focused on developing concepts or ideas through select movements for the new theatrical context. They created their own soundscape by selecting music of their choice (not necessarily Irish music and maybe no music at all), natural sounds, text, film, photography, art, technology, and so on. These solos were representative of who they were and where they came from. They were also representative of changing times and a changed context – a university context.

But to what extent is knowledge, or an understanding, of the roots of Irish dance important to these step dancers? In contributing to the development of an established dance practice, in this instance Irish traditional step dance within a university context, it is important to honour and respect the artistic integrity, history, and identity of that practice. The dancers on the MA need to learn what there is to know in their field: theoretical and practical, although performance takes precedence; this means that they need to embody and know older repertoire as well as being involved in progressing their practice. They need to be aware that, in order to develop the practice into the future, they need knowledge of existing and earlier documented practices within the field. Living traditions are constantly changing and, consequently, dancers need to be knowledgeable of existing and earlier documented step-dance practices in the field. They also need to be informed and engaged in the present, and looking to and contributing to the future.

In our global world culture today, we see the creation of new social networks and an increasing interconnectedness. We see emergent cultures, subcultures, and affinity groups all providing sites for shaping individual and group identities. The MA in Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme at the University of Limerick provides one such site where step dancers, from different geographical and cultural backgrounds, come together to participate in advanced practice in Irish step dance. They are aware that they are part of a specific world dance practice and an emergent Irish step-dance culture. They enjoy participating in this culture with the objective of becoming professional dancers and, after graduating from the MA programme, some remain in Limerick to stay close to what is happening in the field and to maintain their connection with the MA programme, the university, other students, and the wider Irish step dancing community. In 2008, some of these students formed an Irish step-dance company called Stepscene, which received funding from the Irish Arts Council.

It is now ten years since the establishment of the MA programme, and students, tutors, and choreographers have assisted in shaping the programme over this time. The MA students have invested time at the university, learning about step dance and how its practice may be maintained, redefined, shaped, and challenged,

while honouring and respecting the tradition from which it has come. Those who participate in the programme enhance their cognitive and corporeal knowledge of Irish step dance, and they also acquire a deeper understanding of their own modern sense of identity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This keynote address is based on a paper I presented as part of a panel at the 26<sup>th</sup> ICTM Symposium on Ethnochoreology, Třešť, Czech Republic, 19–25 July 2010.

<sup>2</sup> André Singer (director), Bruce Dakowski (writer and presenter), *Coming of Age: Margaret Mead (1901–1978)*, Central Television series, UK, *Strangers Abroad*, Programme 5 (1986), issued as a DVD, Royal Anthropological Institute, RAI-200.279.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Ulf Hannerz, 'Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7, no. 2 (1990), 237–51 (p. 237); quoted in Anthony D. King, ed., *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991), pp. 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), pp. 35 and 98; Timothy Cooley, 'Music and Affinity Groups', seminar presented at the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, February 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Manfred B. Steger, *Globalisation: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Riverdance, <<http://www.riverdance.com/>> [accessed 12 January 2012].

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Frank Hall, 'Your Mr Joyce is a Fine Man, But Have You Seen Riverdance?' *New Hibernia Review*, 1, no. 3 (1997), 134–42; Catherine E. Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance: National, Global and Local', *Dance Research Journal*, 33, no. 1 (2001), 33–44; Barra Ó Cinnéide, *Riverdance: The Phenomenon* (Dublin: Blackhall, 2002); Barbara O'Connor, 'Riverdance', in *Encounters with Modern Ireland*, ed. by Michel Peillon and Eamonn Slater (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1998), pp. 51–62; Helena Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads: Memory and Mobility in Ireland* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001)', p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001)', pp. 39–41.

<sup>11</sup> Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001)', p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001)', 40–41.

<sup>13</sup> The step dance organisation, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha*, will be simply referred to from here on in as *An Coimisiún*. It was established in 1930 by the cultural nationalist movement, *Conradh na Gaeilge* (the Gaelic League). See John Cullinane, *An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha (Irish Dancing Commission): Its Origins and Evolution* (the author: Cork, 2003); Catherine E. Foley, 'Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry: A Contextual and Structural Analysis' (unpublished doctoral thesis, the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 1988); Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001)', 33–44; Catherine E. Foley, '*...and then they danced*': *Researching Traditional Step Dancing in Ireland*, Ó Riada Memorial Lecture 21 (University College Cork: Traditional Music Archive and the Irish Traditional Music Society, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> The step dance organisation, *Comhdháil Muinteoírí na Rincí Gaelacha*, will be referred to as *An Comhdháil*. *An Comhdháil* is a step-dance organisation which was established in 1969 when step dance teachers left or split from *An Coimisiún*, owing to their desire to function and to develop step dancing outside the auspices of the cultural nationalist movement, the Gaelic League.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Donnellan, unpublished essay, MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Therese Tuohey, unpublished essay, MA Ethnochoreology, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> See Foley, 'Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry' (1988); Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001), p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> See Foley, 'Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry' (1988), pp. 81–92; Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001), pp. 35–38; Foley, '*...and then they danced*' (2009), p. 3; Frank Hall, *Competitive Irish Dance: Art, Sport, Duty* (Wisconsin: Macater Press, 2008), p. 35; Wulff, *Dancing at the Crossroads*, pp. 92–93.

<sup>19</sup> Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001), p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> *Sean Níos* dancing is a solo, improvisational style of step dancing, performed in an earthy, close to the floor, style. It has strong associations with the Gaeltacht regions of Conamara on the west coast of Ireland and Rath Cairn in County Meath. See Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (County Kerry: Brandon Books, 1999), pp. 136–49; Foley, 'Perceptions of Irish Step Dance (2001), pp. 33–44.

<sup>21</sup> See Foley, 'Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry' (1988).

<sup>22</sup> See Joyce Ann MacCafferty, *The Deep Green Pool: The Life, Work and Legacy of Patricia Mulholland* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> CRN means *Cumann Rince Náisiúnta* (The Organisation of National Dance) and this independent organisation of step dance was a split from the organisation *An Comhdháil*.

<sup>24</sup> The MA Ethnochoreology programme I designed in 1996. This was the first programme of its type in Europe. I have course directed this programme to date and there is some sharing of classes between the MA Ethnochoreology programme and the MA Irish Traditional Dance Performance programme.

<sup>25</sup> See Foley, 'Irish Traditional Step Dancing in North Kerry' (1988), pp. 111–12.

<sup>26</sup> See Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 23–65, for a discussion on participatory and presentational performance.

<sup>27</sup> See Catherine E. Foley, 'Maintaining, Redefining and Challenging Dance Boundaries: Irish Traditional Dance within Third Level Education', in *At the Crossroads: Dance and Irish Culture*, ed. by Catherine E. Foley (Limerick: Dance Research Forum Ireland, 1<sup>st</sup> International Conference Proceedings, 2007), pp. 64–70.

<sup>28</sup> See Catherine E. Foley, 'Negotiating Boundaries in Irish Step-Dance Performance Practice: Colin Dunne and Piano One', *Inbhea: Journal of Irish Music and Dance* (Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, University of Limerick, 2010), 56–62, see <<http://www.inbhear.ie>> [accessed 12 January 2012].