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| On Eagle's Wing: Imagined Transatlantic Communities in the Ulster-Scots Revival

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ON EAGLE'S WING: IMAGINED TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ULSTER-SCOTS REVIVAL

The North-South Language Body which was born out of the Belfast Agreement of 1998 is comprised of the Irish Language Agency, and the Ulster-Scots Agency. The overall remit of the latter Agency is "to promote the study, conservation, development and use of Ulster-Scots as a living language, to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots."

Regarding this "attendant culture" the Agency specifically states that it "seeks to foster an ever growing desire amongst individuals and community groups to express their cultural identity through the arts, music (fiddle, drums, pipes, fife etc.) and song, dance (Highland, Set and Country dancing), poetry and prose, and performance".

In the latest Ulster-Scots revival there has been particular focus on migration history, language and music. This is evidenced for example by the development of the Ulster American Folk Park with its Annual Appalachian & Bluegrass Music Festival and by the setting up of several Northern Irish "Ullans", bluegrass, gospel and country influenced groups. Yet another example of this phenomenon is to be found in the launch in 2004 of the musical and "oratorio", *On Eagle's Wing*, (named after one of the first vessels to carry Ulster emigrants to North America) which purports to "celebrate the history of the Scots-Irish over 500 years" in music and dance.

An exploration of the latest Ulster-Scots revival raises interesting issues of cultural, political and religious identification. Revivals in general tend to re-interpret the past in accordance with a need for "imagined communities" in the present (Benedict Anderson, Georgina Boyes), often using language and music as potential markers of group identity. To what extent is the Ulster-Scots revival a spontaneous aesthetic movement and to what extent has it been culturally and politically manufactured by ideologists and politicians? To what extent does the process of Ulster-Scots revival mirror other popular revivals of folk and traditional culture?

This article will explore the links between cultural politics, in the context of the Belfast Agreement and devolution, and the revival of interest in Ulster-Scots history, language and music.

Key words: *Ulster-Scots, Scots Irish, folk revival, Ullans, On Eagle's Wing, "My Ain Countrie", The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, The Belfast Agreement, The North/South Language Body, Foras na Gaeilge, Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, The North South Ministerial Council*

«На орлином крыле»: воображаемые трансатлантические сообщества Ольстер-Шотландского Возрождения

Языковая организация «The North-South Language Body», который появился после Белфастского соглашения 1998, состоит из Ирландского и Ольстер-шотландского языковых агентств. Сфера компетенции последнего — «содействие изучению, сохранению, развитию и использованию Ольстер-шотландского как живого языка, чтобы поощрять и развивать весь спектр культуры и способствовать пониманию истории Ольстер-шотландцев». Что касается этой «культуры», указывается, что «поощряется к развитию постоянно растущее желание среди отдельных лиц и общественных групп, стремящихся выразить свою культурную самобытность через искусство, музыку (скрипка, барабаны, трубы, флейта и т. д.) и песни, танцы (Хайленд, Набор и Страна танцы), стихи и прозу, и другую творческую деятельность».

В последнем возрождении Ольстер-шотландцев особое внимание было направлено на историю миграции, языка и музыки. Об этом свидетельствует, например, развитие Американского Ольстерского фольклорного парка и проводящиеся в нем фестивали, а также создание различных северо-ирландских групп с фольклорными названиями. Еще один пример этого явления можно найти в запуске в 2004 году мюзикла и «оратории», «на орлином крыле», (названный в честь одной из первых судов для перевозки Ольстерских эмигрантов в Северную Америку), который претендует на «празднование пятисотлетней шотландско-ирландской» в музыке и танце.

Исследование позднейшего возрождения Ольстер-шотландцев поднимает интересные вопросы культурной, политической и религиозной идентификации. Возрождения, как правило, по-новому интерпретируют прошлое в соответствии с актуальной необходимостью смыслов и запросов «воображаемых сообществ» (Бенедикт Андерсон, Джорджина Бойс), часто используя язык и музыку в качестве потенциальных маркеров групповой идентичности. В какой степени это Ольстер-шотландское возрождение представляет собой спонтанное эстетическое движение, а в какой является продуктом идеологии и политики? В какой степени



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этот процесс является отражением других популярных возрождений народной и традиционной культуры?

В данной статье рассматриваются связи культурной политики в контексте Белфастских соглашений с возрождением интереса к истории, языку и музыке Ольстер-шотландцев.

Ключевые слова: Ольстер-шотландцы, Ирландские шотландцы, народное возрождение, Мирные Соглашения Северной Ирландии, Белфастские соглашения, Северный / Южный языковой корпус, *Foras na Gaeilge, Ullans, On Eagle's Wing, "My Ain Country"*

The term Scotch (or Scots) Irish is used in a historical sense, more particularly in North America, to refer to “Descendants of Presbyterians from Lowland Scotland who settled in Ulster, the northernmost province of Ireland, in the 17th century and subsequently emigrated from there to America”¹. The term Ulster-Scots (sometimes spelled Ulster Scots), on the other hand, is more politically charged and used in Northern Ireland to refer to the descendants of Lowland Scots who migrated to Ireland, but also to refer to the variety of anglic Scots spoken in Northern Ireland.

In the past thirty years there has emerged an Ulster Scots revival focussing notably on language and music. As Martin Dowling has pointed out this is a neo revival in that it builds upon earlier emergences of Ulster-Scots ideology and identity, notably during the period of the Home Rule crises². The previous movement was expressed in the publication of a number of historical narratives and also, more formally, in the Ulster Covenant of 1912³, an anti Home Rule petition which drew its defensive inspiration from the Scottish National Covenant of 1638⁴ and its name from the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643⁵ (the official title of the Ulster Covenant is “Ulster’s Solemn League and Covenant”).

The current revival also has academic origins. Transatlantic scholarly research on the Scots Irish and Ulster-Scots intensified after the first Ulster-American Heritage Symposium at the University of Ulster in 1976 as part of a more general growth of research into the role of ethnicity in American life fuelled by the bicentenary of the Declaration of Independence of the United States. The biennial symposium is now held alternately in Appalachian and Northern Irish academic institutions. The Ulster American Folk Park, focussing on migration from Ulster to North America, was also set up in the bicentennial year, and has hosted the Annual Appalachian and Bluegrass Festival for the past seventeen years.

Although academics have been taking renewed interest in Scots Irish and Ulster Scots history since the 1970s, it is only since the

1990s that a more visible revival has emerged even if it remains a minority phenomenon, even amongst the traditionally Unionist Protestant community. Several processes would seem to have provided the conditions for this revival. As Fintan Vallely has demonstrated, one of the outcomes of the Troubles was a tendency by the traditionally Unionist protestant community to turn away from identification with Irishness and Irish culture,⁶ a phenomenon which corresponds to a general tendency of distancing from the other side in time of conflict, an intensification of “us and them” type mentalities.

At the same time identification with Britishness was also becoming problematic. Ulster Scots activist Doug Elliot suggests that the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 was the “first big jolt” regarding such identification. This, Elliot surmises, coupled with a lack of political or cultural education amongst young Protestants, may have begun to raise levels of interest in identity.

The processes of globalisation, “ever closer” European Union, devolution and the decline of the status of the British monarchy have been perceived as resulting in an increasingly disunited kingdom in which Britishness, like the Union Jack, seems to be undergoing a process of symbolic deconstruction into its constitutive elements. These developments would appear to undermine the potential of Britishness to fulfil the ideological, political and cultural identification needs of the traditionally Unionist Protestant community.

Meanwhile, over the past 40 years, the Irishness which has provided an identity marker for the traditionally nationalist Catholic community has been enhanced by the jet age linking of the Irish diaspora, the formerly perceived economical miracle of the Celtic tiger and the global success of Irish cultural exports. In a context of apparently exponentially expanding Irish economic and cultural influence it is perhaps unsurprising that there should be an attempt to revive and reinvent a wider form of Scots Irishness or Ulster Scotsness as a potential marker of a correspondingly larger oppositional cultural identity.

The revival was more particularly bolstered by The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement which provided the framework for institutional recognition and financial backing. Section 3 stipulates that:

“All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.”⁷

¹ *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*.

² Dowling, Martin. “Confusing Culture and Politics: Ulster Scots Culture and Music”, *New Hibernia Review*. 2007

³ Cf. The Covenant and contextual information may be viewed at The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland website: http://www.proni.gov.uk/no.5_-_ulster_s_solemn_league_and_covenant_99kb_.pdf

⁴ The Scottish National Covenant of 1638 was framed in response to King Charles I’s attempt to impose a new Prayer Book on Scotland which had prompted riot in St Giles’s Cathedral in 1637. In February 1638 the vast majority of Scottish nobles, lairds, ministers and others signed the National Covenant, pledging to ‘maintain the true worship of God’ and the ‘true religion, liberties and laws of the kingdom’, and to disobey any orders which contravened them.

⁵ “The Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 — issued in the name of the nobility, gentry and ministers of England, Scotland and Ireland — pledged to ‘bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion.’”

⁶ Vallely, Fintan. *Tuned Out: Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland*, Cork University Press. 2008

⁷ The full text of the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement is available from the United Nations website: <http://peacemaker.un.org/uk-ireland-good-friday98>



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<p>1. Hi! Uncle Sam! When freedom was denied you, And Imperial might defied you, Who was it stood beside you At Quebec and Brandywine? And dared retreats and dangers, Red-coats and Hessian strangers, In the lean, long-rifled Rangers, And the Pennsylvania Line!</p>	<p>2. Hi! Uncle Sam! Wherever there was fighting, Or wrong that needed righting, An Ulsterman was sighting His Kentucky gun with care: All the road to Yorktown, From Valley Forge to Yorktown, That Ulsterman was there!</p>	<p>3. Hi! Uncle Sam! Virginia sent her brave men, The North paraded grave men, That they might not be slavemen, But ponder with this calm: The first to face the Tory And the first to lift Old Glory Made your war an Ulster story: Think it over, Uncle Sam!</p>
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In practice this has translated into the setting up of the North/South Language Body made up of two agencies, Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch, which are both supported by generous cross border funding. The North South Ministerial Council defines their remit as follows:

“Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for the promotion of the Irish Language throughout the island and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch is responsible for promoting the study, conservation, development, and use of the Ulster-Scots as a living language: to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.”⁸

Formal institutional support has assisted the development of various explorations and expressions including the setting up of The Institute of Ulster-Scots Studies at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster; the development of regular Radio and television broadcasts; history, dance, music and language courses and classes grant-aided by the Ulster-Scots Agency; musical, literary and storytelling events; websites⁹, print and internet publications etc.

The neo revival differs from the previous revival in that it reinvents an Ulster-Scots identity which places greater importance on what might be termed an imagined pan Scots Irish transatlantic cultural community, an imagined diaspora, with emphasis on westward movement and triangular links between Scotland, Northern Ireland and North America.

This would seem to build on the writings of Ulster-Scots activist Rev. William F. Marshall whose publications were part of an attempt to compete with a perceived enlisting of American support for Home Rule as exemplified by his poem “Ulster Sails West” written in 1911:

In his 1943 publication, also entitled *Ulster Sails West*, Marshall renewed and further developed his claim of the contribution of the Ulster Scots to the building of the United States, at a time of renewed calls for an end to the partition of the island of Ireland during the Second World War. His 1943 publication was celebrated by a 60th anniversary Ulster-Scots mural sponsored by the North Antrim Cultural & Musical Society and unveiled in 2004 in Ballymoney by the United States Consul for Northern Ireland:

⁸ North South Ministerial Council website: <http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org/index/north-south-implementation-bodies.htm>

⁹ e. g. the Ulster-Scots Agency website: <http://www.ulsterscotsagency.com/>



The artist, Kenny Blair, describes his mural as follows:

“...you have the picture of an early trapper and his dogs, who probably, a generation before that would have been from these shores in a farming capacity. But they went there and settled along the East Coast and helped mould, I suppose, the whole American continent. And then again, we have the emblem of the Ulster-Scots, which is the Red Hand and the thistles.”¹⁰

More recently still, in the wake of The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, the westward turn would seem to have acquired increased economic and cultural significance. During the first decade of the 21st century unionist and nationalist leaders came together in a concerted drive to encourage American investment, notably through the United States Northern Ireland investment conference of May 2008. The clear objective of this conference was to bolster peace in Northern Ireland through improved economic conditions which might be achieved, as in the Republic of Ireland, through massive American investment.

Bill Clinton had explicitly encouraged hopes of American investment and prosperity during his three visits to Northern Ireland in an attempt to cajole British and Irish leaders into compromise and agreement. On his first visit to Belfast in November 1995 Clinton made a key speech in front of a giant Christmas Tree shipped over

¹⁰ BBC Northern Ireland, Ulster Scots Voices: http://www.bbc.co.uk/northernireland/learning/voices/ulsterscots/tr_kenny_blair.shtml



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specially for the occasion from Belfast's twin city, country music capital Nashville, Tennessee, reminding the crowd of the numerous American presidents of Scots Irish ancestry and of his own Scots Irish roots telling the crowd that America and Northern Ireland were "partners for security, partners for prosperity, and most important, partners for peace" before switching on the Christmas lights".

Clinton's proclamations of pride in his "Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist" identity¹¹ would seem to coincide with a more general cultural revival of the American South, and, co-incidentally of the Scots Irish. Mel Gibson's blockbuster *The Patriot* (2000) emphasises Scots Irish connections,¹² while films like *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000),¹³ *Songcatcher* (2000), *Cold Mountain* (2003), and *Walk the Line* (2005) all suggest a revival of southern musical traditions, more particularly blues, gospel, Appalachian, bluegrass and country. The white, mountain man thus appears rehabilitated in contrast with the former stereotype of the moonshine crazed, inbred, degenerate hillbilly of *Deliverance* fame.

The popularity of Bill Clinton in Ireland during the late 1990s was paralleled by that of another southerner, country music star Garth Brooks. Country music had been popular throughout Ireland, declining somewhat during the 1980s, as in America, before reaching a new peak with the commercial country pop of Garth Brooks who set a Northern Irish attendance record with his five nights in a row in Belfast's King's Hall in 1998.

This southern cultural and musical revival would therefore seem to provide a convenient potential identity marker for the present Ulster-Scots revival. I would like to briefly consider two examples of such linguistic and musical identification. Firstly the Low Country boys recording of "My Ain Countrie"; secondly the musical *On Eagle's Wing*.

"My Ain Countrie" was issued on a 2007 Smithsonian CD album compilation of contemporary Northern Irish music entitled *Sound Neighbours: Contemporary Music in Northern Ireland*.

The album was a resultant publication of the 2007 "Rediscover Northern Ireland" cultural program launched in association with the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institute, the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as part of a strategy to pave the way for the investment conference of 2008. The program included more than 40 events to highlight trade and business, arts and culture, tourism and education concluding with the participation of 160 Northern Irish musicians, storytellers, craftspeople, chefs and cultural experts at the 2007 Folklife Festival.

¹¹ Remarks at the University of California San Diego commencement ceremony in La Jolla, California, June 14, 1997: "I am a Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist, and I'm proud of it."

¹² Fictional character of Benjamin Martin based partly on Carolina Scots Irish militia leader Andrew Pickens. Mel Gibson's line: "All I ask of you is to give me two shots before we withdraw" supposed to be a reference to battle of Cowpens when Pickens convinces his commanding officer, Daniel Morgan, to stand and fight British Regulars commanded by Banastre Tarleton. In a pivotal battle, Andrew Pickens' militia stood and fired two shots, then retreated. Tarleton advanced into waiting arms of Continental Regulars, who dealt a devastating blow to the English army under Major General Charles (Lord) Cornwallis. This led to the British retreat to Yorktown and ultimately the surrender of Cornwallis.

¹³ The three main characters have Scottish, Irish and English sounding names respectively: Ulysses Everett McGill (George Clooney), Delmar O'Donnell (Tim Blake Nelson) and Pete Hogwallop (John Turturro).

The program insisted on transatlantic links between Northern Ireland and the United States, including the cultural heritage of migration. Musical aspects of this heritage were prominent and the CD booklet states that the aim of the compilation is a celebration of "the richness and diversity of the region's musical traditions following a ten-year period of relative peace and stability, and the restoration of Northern Ireland's political institutions." The title of the CD is of course a play on words suggesting that Northern Irish nationalist and unionist communities are now good cultural and political neighbours, living harmoniously together and thus, by implication, creating a safe "neighbourhood" for American investment.

"My Ain Countrie" is a cover version of a song which was initially popularised in the late 19th century by Ira D. Sankey's *Sacred Songs and Solos* which started out as Sankey's personal resource repertoire before being published in the 1880s to become a highly influential evangelical hymnbook. Sankey, also known as "The Sweet Singer of Methodism", was an American gospel singer and composer associated with evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Sankey provided gospel songs to heighten fervour at Moody's revival meetings which played a part in the "Third Great Awakening", a period of revival of religious activism in American history from the late 1850s to the early 1900s characterised by a sense of social activism which affected pietistic Protestant denominations on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite increasing civil unrest and conflicting advice, Moody and Sankey travelled to Ireland in the 1870s, helping to spread the evangelical revival and its attendant gospel songs in Ulster. "My Ain Countrie" was further popularised by the Glaswegian street evangelist and gospel singer William McEwan who recorded the song in 1911. The Low Country Boys version follows the melody of the McEwan recording although differing in style and tempo largely owing to the bluegrass string band arrangement.

The lyrics of the song are borrowed from a poem written in the anglic Lowland Scots, or "Lallans" (from the Scots word for "Lowlands") dialect by American Mary Augusta Demarest and were first published in the *New York Observer* in December 1861. Demarest was of Scottish descent and lost her mother at an early age. She was left in charge of a Scottish nurse, from whom she learned the Scots dialect whilst her grandfather sang Scots lullabies to her as a child. Demarest allegedly based the poem on the story she heard of Scotsman John Macduff and his young bride whose health began to fail from homesickness after emigrating to America and who only recovered after her husband brought her back to Scotland. The poem was put to music in 1864 by Ione T. Hanna and harmonized for choral song by Hubert P. Main in 1873 becoming a gospel favourite of the "Third Great Awakening".

The Low Country Boys have described tracking down the original after obtaining a handwritten copy in the personal collection of William Wilson, the deceased grandfather of two members of the group. They insist therefore on musical and family continuity in the same way they insist on their homeland in the Ards peninsula as being one of the earliest places of the Scottish Montgomery settlement in Northern Ireland.

A am far frae ma hame an A'm weary aftenwhiles
For tha lang'd-fer hamebringin' and ma Faither's welcome smiles
An A'll ne'er be fu' content, aye until ma een dae see
Tha gowden gates o' Heaven, an' ma ain countrie.
Tha earth is fleck'd w' floo-ers, mony tinted,



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bricht an' gay Tha birdies warbles blithely, fer ma Faither made thaim sae But these sichts an' these souns wull as naethin be tae me Whun A hear tha angels singin' in my ain countrie

A hae His guid word o promise that some gladsome day tha King Tae His ain royal palace His banished hame will bring Aye wi' een an wi hairt rinnin owre we shall see Tha King in aa His beautie in wor ain countrie Ma sins they hae been mony, an' ma sorrows hae been sair But there they'll niver vex me, nor be remember'd mair Fer His bluid has made me white an His haun shall dry ma een When He brings me hame at last tae my ain countrie

Sae little noo A ken o yon blessed bonnie place A only ken it's hame, whaur A shall see His face It wad surely be eneuch, aye, fer iver mair tae be In tha glorie o' His presence in wor ain countrie Like a wean tae its mither, a wee birdie tae its nest I was fain be gangin' noo untae ma Saviours breast Fer He gaithers in his bosom witless worthless lambs like me An carries thaim hisselt tae His ain countrie

He is faithfu' that has promised an He'll surely come again He'll keep His tryst wi' me, at whit hoor A dinnae ken But He bids me still tae wait, aye an ready ay tae be Tae gang at ony moment tae wor ain countrie Sae A'm watchin' aye an' singin' o ma hamelann as A wait Fer tha sounin' o' His fitfa', this side tha gowden gate God gie His grace tae aa wha listens noo tae me That we a' micht gang wi' glaidness tae wor ain countrie.

The Low Country Boys version illustrates several key elements of the current revival. They have slightly adapted the lyrics from the original Lallans into Ullans (Ulster Scots) while the evangelical protestant end of century second coming theme remains prominent:

"He is faithu' that has promised and He'll surely come again He'll keep His tryst wi' me, at whit hoor A dinnae ken"

and is associated with the promised land theme:

"But He bids me still toe wait, aye an ready ay tae be Tae gang at ony moment tae wor ain country"

The is also is a more general theme of migration and longing for home. It is interesting in this respect to note that the Low Country Boys modified the original Demarest-Sankey lyrics from "hame" to "hamelann" ("homeland") perhaps reflecting concern for their presence in Ulster.

LOW COUNTRY BOYS

ULSTER-SCOTS, SCOTS AND OLD-TIMEY HILLBILLY GOSPEL MUSIC



The Low Country Boys are a bluegrass style acoustic string band with guitar, banjo, mandolin, electric bass, Appalachian dulcimer and four part harmony singing in the "high lonesome" style. They describe their musical style as "Ulster Scots, Scots and Old Timey Hillbilly Gospel Music" clearly suggesting triangular transatlantic musical and linguistic links.

The image and name of the group are also in the country or bluegrass mould reminiscent of the comical band name the "Soggy bottom boys" from *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* The Low Country Boys themselves indicate that the "Low Country" refers to their home area in the wet, low-lying middle section of the Ards Peninsula.

The Low Country Boys are however merely one example among several Ulster-Scots revival groups with varying political stances including the more Scottish influenced Ulster Scots Folk Orchestra and its various offshoots and splinter groups, such as Willie Drennan's Transatlantic Hillbilly Band while John Trotter's Ulster Scots Experience would appear to have narrower, more radical Ulster connections:

The second example I wish to consider is the ill-fated attempt to emulate the global success of the *Celtic Riverdance* with the launching in 2004 of *On Eagle's Wing*, described by its producers as a "Transatlantic Scots Irish musical extravaganza".

The name of the show implicitly suggests the triangular transatlantic Ulster Scots diaspora since it evokes the golden eagle, an icon of wild Scotland (and unofficial symbol of the country), which are reputed to cross the narrow stretch of water separating Scotland and Northern Ireland, while the bald eagle is the National emblem of the United States of America.

One of the first emigrant vessels to leave Ulster for the New World was also named *Eagle's Wing* although it in fact had to turn back due to bad weather. Paradoxically, the cast and crew of the musical also had to be flown home from Atlanta shortly before the world premiere due to financial difficulties. The *Sunday Tribune* reported that Lord Laird, former head of the Ulster-Scots Agency accused the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of acting in breach of the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement arguing, just before boarding the flight home, that the Ulster-Scots language was not getting the same level of support as Irish:

"I can't abide the fascist bigotry that exists and the determination to ignore Ulster Scots. Well, we're not going away you know. We want our slice of the cake, we want our day in the sun."

The Guardian meanwhile quoted another of Lord Laird's declarations:

"All we want is equal status. There is a culture of fascist bigotry on behalf of both the Irish and British governments: they simply don't think we exist. They have thwarted us at every turn. We have been airbrushed out of Irish history — for their own political agenda."

After the spectacular flop of the premiere the show was rapidly transformed into a television show and documentary issued in DVD format in 2005 and aired on BBC Northern Ireland and PBS. A significantly scaled down version was scheduled for several dates in Ireland in 2008 but there have been no announcements regarding a renewed attempt at an overseas tour.

As Martin Dowling points out *On Eagle's Wing* presents a selected historiography which represents the Scots Irish as "dispossessed" victims of history: a strategic stance in vying for sympathy, support



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and funding. This is a simplified and conflated representation of Northern Irish history with no reference to the complex realities of migration patterns, cultural interaction, influence and fusion. There is also an absence of reference to events with negative connotations such as the Lowland Scots implicit participation in the dispossession of the native Irish or the expulsion of the Cherokee on the Trail of Tears.

Finally the second striking feature is the hyperbole surrounding the show. It is suggested in the documentary that it has the largest stage currently on tour, the best dance troupe currently operating anywhere in the world, the finest traditional musicians in the United Kingdom etc. The symbolism confirms this: biblical sounding references to golden and bald Eagles soaring high (Isaiah 40:31); miraculous crossings of water; water drawn from a deeper well; the biblical analogy of Moses leading the chosen people out of Egypt to the Promised Land (the character of the preacher uses the terms "promised land" and "zion"); claims to have moulded present day America; the seventeen presidents claimed to be of Scots Irish origin; the founding of country music: "Even our music would become downright country" we are told.

It is significant that the show spends much time on the American leg of the journey with bluegrass and country music and dance routines but also images of graveyards, statues and frontier pioneers, while, paradoxically, Scots Irish specialist Tyler Blethlen warns against the dangers of ancestor worship. As the camera lingers on the statue of Andrew Jackson the narrator declares: "It's not our style to blow our own trumpet but we did play a big part in making this country great". One of the main songs of the show "Shout my name" mirrors the need for self-identification and attention:

The director John Anderson says that it is a "big story" and a "big show". The show appears to present characteristics of pantomime, of the tall story, of the Jack Tale common in Appalachia. This is not surprising since Anderson and several of the people involved in the production have also worked in pantomime. Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* might be loosely applied to the storyline: the young hero (the Lowland Scot), guided by a helper with special powers (the Presbyterian minister) has to leave home and family because of impending danger (the "Killing Times", famine etc.) and ends up after a long voyage and a series of trials and tribulations, involving much sacrifice (the Siege of Derry; Frontier life; the War of Independence), founding a family and finding land, fame and fortune (President of the United States) after having successfully defeated the ogre (the King of England).

The British sociologist Stuart Hall has suggested that lost status may lead to a miming of greatness played out in pantomime-like form in an attempt to come to terms with new circumstances. Beyond commercial opportunism and cultural commodification *On Eagle's Wing* may therefore correspond to a form of mythification, a form of psychosocial compensation for the feeling of being unjustly left out, ignored, forgotten and relegated to decline whilst the oppositional marker of Irishness has appeared to be on a spectacularly rising tangent.

Yet according to Marshall MacLuhan the medium too is the message. In both examples the medium is at least partly collaborative. "My Ain Countrie" was part of a cross community reconciliatory album and the Low Country Boys participated in the Folklife Festival associated with the album. *On Eagle's Wing* has

an international management team, cast and crew including Mark Dougherty, former Musical Director with *Riverdance*. Ullans is not used whereas Lewis born Alyth McCormack sings in her native Scottish Gaelic. There is Irish traditional music on the Ulster leg and the bodhr n makes a brief if perhaps token appearance, notably in front of Lambeg and African type drums in sequences reminiscent of the cross community initiative Different Drums, whose track "Northern Man" opens the Smithsonian compilation. Finally there is an almost comical paradox in the fact that the DVD begins and ends with the shamrock of the Irish Tourism advertisement:

"You can hear it in the echoes of ancient castles, in the proud words of warrior poets. You can see it in the smiles of countless new friends. There's something of Ireland in all of us."

Identity is a moveable feast, and, as Benedict Anderson has pointed out, folk revivals in general tend to reinterpret the past in accordance with a need for "imagined communities" in the present. Such reinterpretation takes selective account of history and culture. Revival may moreover present a spectrum ranging from nostalgic nationalism or ethnonationalism to more cosmopolitan or apolitical stances. As has been the case for other folk revivals, the Ulster-Scots revival would seem to present various facets with a tendency towards a narrow, nostalgic and selective interpretation of history thus perhaps providing a cultural mirror of the walls of political divide and partition in Ireland.

As Helen O'Shea has pointed out the emergence of Ulster-Scots music as part of a more general linguistic and cultural Ulster-Scots revival would therefore seem to mirror the emergence of a predominantly Catholic Gaelic Irish revival in Northern Ireland. The tendency, within Northern Ireland, to focus on a binary opposition between a reinvented and artificially rarefied Catholic Gaelic Irish culture on the one hand, and a reinvented and artificially rarefied Protestant Ulster-Scots culture on the other, would therefore seem to provide a cultural reflection of the political battle lines of 20th century conflict in Northern Ireland in a way which may tend to mask the historical reality of complex patterns of shared cultural, linguistic and musical forms, characterised by exchange, interaction, borrowing, conversion, hybridism and fusion.

One clear indication of the historical complexity of cultural exchange and fusion is evidenced by the fact that there are a significant number of Catholic Ulster-Scots speakers whilst some Scottish migrants to Ulster came from Gaelic speaking areas in Scotland. Closer analysis of Ulster-Scots and traditional Irish music in Northern Ireland does in fact reveal this fusion of influences with a certain number of shared styles, instruments, songs and tunes. It is also more clearly apparent in such cross-community musical projects as Different Drums of Ireland which began in 1991 "as a deliberate exercise in community relations", bringing together those two most symbolic of Northern Irish instruments, the bodhr n and the lambe g drums. It is also implicit in the 2007 Folkways compilation *Sound Neighbours: Contemporary Music in Northern Ireland* which brought together musicians from both sides of the community divide.

In the decade following the 1998 agreement there has nevertheless been greater exchange and increased crossing of the musical divide, most notably through shared musical experiences and adoption of shared instruments. Robert Watt, from Maghera, trained initially as a purely traditional Highland bagpiper playing in the Tamlaght O'Crilly pipe band. Since then, however, he has also



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learnt to play the Lowland pipes, Border pipes, the Irish Uilleann pipes and the Irish 'penny' whistle. Watt would clearly seem to recognise the inescapably multicultural nature of music in Northern Ireland, having declared that he has been exposed to traditional Irish music all his life, picking up many Irish tunes on his collection of High and Low whistles.

An excessive focalisation on the constructed cultural walls of division between Gaelic Irish language, culture and music, and Ulster-Scots language, culture and music may also tend to mask and exclude other important influences in Northern Ireland, including significant Highland Scottish, Borders, and English influences but also the influence of smaller groups of settlers over the centuries, such as the French Huguenots, or, in more recent times, Poles and Eastern Europeans. It remains to be seen whether the increased exploration of the roots of various forms of traditional and "folk" musics in Northern Ireland may eventually lead to recognition of the wider, constantly evolving and multiple complexity of musical and cultural traditions in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the whole of Ireland, and in the British Isles.

In his controversial publication *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster* Donald Harman Akenson argues that there has been a common thread in the views of Ulster Scots Presbyterianism, the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church, and Israeli Judaism, "each of which are committed to an Old Testament-like covenant with God that promises them the land they struggled to get if they make the commitment and sacrifice necessary in such a covenant" (the red hand symbolism for example). The idea of

promised land or eldorado was widespread in European colonialism and the ensuing territorial struggles have sometimes lead to a wider and unfortunately enduring propensity of the human spirit to engage in "ethnonationalism"¹⁴ or "Us and them" type group distinctions each group being persuaded of its righteous, superior position ("With God on our side"). In frontier type minority colonial situations mindsets may harden into "siege mentality" and "us and them" attitudes. Akenson suggests that it is only when the conflict and the root causes for the conflict are removed that this mentality, essentially built on fear, may gradually dissipate with time. There is an emphasis on land and home in many folk revivals but in the case of the Ulster-Scots minority on the island of Ireland it is perhaps a specific indication of an underlying and perhaps partly subconscious transgenerationally transmitted fear of ending up with no land, no home or nationality at all.

What better conclusion than the four lines from another song on the *Sound Neighbours* CD compilation, "Donegall Road", initially released on *The Note that Lingers on* (2003) in which Colum Sand's reminds us (if it were necessary) that globalisation and recent immigration may help us understand that there are infinitely more than just two cultures in Ireland:

"And here's tomorrow coming, children laughing hand in hand
Their skins are different colours, may they help us understand
If we're teaching culture here — it's a thing we often do
It's time that we were learning to count higher up than two"

¹⁴ Jerry Z. Muller, "Us and Them: The Enduring Power of Ethnic Nationalism", *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2008.

