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Getting to the Heart of the Music: Idealizing Musical Community and Irish Traditional Music Sessions

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Abstract

The power of shared musical experience has inspired scholars to theorize collective musical performance as capable of producing an embodied, transcendent experience of an *ideal* society. Scholars who have written about the group performance of Irish traditional music demonstrate a similar understanding. Such models tend to idealize musical performance (as if it always produced a transcendent experience) and to elide the experiences of participants, representing them as harmonious (at one) and homogeneous (as one). Drawing on fieldwork conducted among musicians playing Irish traditional music in East Clare, this article considers the social and musical consequences of idealizing group performance and proposes a more nuanced understanding of musical community as a process of dialogue.

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