‘Rise and Follow Charlie’: Rebel Songs and Establishment Politicians in the Republic of Ireland, 1969-1998.

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The relationship between music and national identity is well-established in Ireland as elsewhere. Ritualistic parades, rousing communal renditions and national anthems all contribute to the construction of national communities in music. However, existing scholarship has not explored the ways in which nationalist musical culture characterised mainstream, establishment political movements in the Republic of Ireland. As such, the assertions of certain performers that it became socially and politically unacceptable to perform rebel songs have gone unchallenged. Rebel songs topped the Irish charts and mainstream political groups employed rebel songs in their campaigns. This article considers the enthusiasm of even the most established political parties for radical nationalist ideals through an examination of rebel song tradition. It employs contemporary newspapers, song books, recordings and the records of political parties. In doing so, it argues that rebel songs expressed the ideological pretensions of a range of political movements and identities significantly divergent from dissident republicanism.

Keywords: music, nationalism, rebel songs, Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour, Haughey.

I am grateful to the AHRC, Linacre College and the British Association of Irish Studies for providing funding towards the research on which this article is based.

Introduction: Music and Modern Political History

Scholars in history, music and social science have consistently demonstrated that there is a 'reciprocal and mutually reinforcing' relationship between social movements and popular music (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998: 138). In the twentieth-century, particularly, the growth of popular music as youth culture and commercial product allowed individual musicians (e.g. Joan Baez) to produce politically informed music for large audiences. Commercial success, while not always fully congruent with the anti-capitalist rhetoric of performers, did not detract from the political power of music. Indeed, as Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison argue it has often enhanced it (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998: 113). Global commercial networks meant a global body of listeners. Music disseminated forms of political expression, manifesting notably during the late-1960s, when various protest movements across the world adopted consciously interconnected and transnational musical cultures (Kutschke & Norton, 2013: 6). Activists typically describe the music as exercising political power by energising participants, inspiring them towards other political acts such as protest (Mattern, 1998: 4, 33). Perhaps more often, buying, playing or performing music was an accessible form of activism, open even to timid sympathisers with the cause. For protesters, music was a means of 'community based political action' through which 'disparate individuals' could 'recognise and act upon common concerns and interests' (Mattern, 1998: 4-5). Public performances and communal renditions of songs such as 'We Shall Overcome' were noisy, assertive, and created the appearance of unity even amongst the most ideologically variable gatherings. It is for this reason that states and political parties have often enthusiastically embraced musical ceremonies (notably national anthems). Barley Norton has discussed in a Vietnamese context how doing so creates a form of 'mass propaganda' in which the supposedly 'clear, unambiguous meaning' of music and lyrics combines with 'mass participation in musical activities to foster comradeship'

(Kutschke & Norton, 2013: 100). As Mark Mattern has noted, this is a 'limited' form of power that ultimately relies on actions beyond musical performance itself (Mattern, 1998: 33). Music promoting revolution against capitalism was rarely considered a real threat to the capitalist system by the corporations that marketed and sold such music (Street, 2011: 244). Nevertheless, it has often been 'those who despise the pleasures' of popular music who have been most inclined to identify it as a threat (e.g. the American politician Bob Dole's campaign against rap music) (Street, 2011: 243). These contradictions constitute the real strength of music's politics. When a musical culture's opponents respond with censorship, arrests, or violence, they appear heavy-handed. Music is at once forceful, provocative, indirect and peaceful. It expresses a specific set of symbols to unite its participants but avoids details that might reveal the fragility of that unity. Finally, while lyrics often express unconditional loyalty to the cause, music's modes of participation—singing along or buying records—are appropriately non-committal to suit the curious and the sympathetic alongside the dedicated. Thus, protest music does not mark a clear divide between the oppressed who sang and the oppressors who tried to stop them. Instead, one must account for the body of ambiguous listeners for whom music was an accessible and non-committal engagement with the cause.

Rebel Songs in Irish Historiography

In light of the work on music and politics referred to above, the seemingly straightforward role of rebel songs in Ireland needs to be reconsidered. Throughout modern Irish history, rebel songs have been synonymous with rebellion against British rule and anti-establishment politics. Certainly, the way in which revolutionary groups used music would seem to support that perspective. Throughout the nineteenth century, those agitating for separation from Britain celebrated the deeds of those who fought and died for that cause in song. The revolutionary period (1913-1921) saw a plethora of new

songs attacking the British and praising Irish rebels. After Ireland became (mostly) independent in 1921, and during the civil war that followed, the same songs were fought over by political movements of almost all shades. Rebel music associated new political groups with the martyrs of nationalist history (Parfitt, 2015, 2017: 31-128). In that sense, they provide a typical example of the view that assumes radical music inherently represents a form of 'resistance' practised by the oppressed in an ongoing 'struggle' amidst 'political turmoil'(Jovanovíc, 2005: 139).

Existing scholarship on music during the Troubles era has highlighted how the IRA used rebel songs as 'supportive constructs' against British oppression to create a 'shared sense of being "us" against "them"', while any mainstream musicians who 'broke from the herd' and expressed nationalist sympathies faced 'negative consequences'(Coogan, 1994: 625; McKeown, 2001: XV; Rolston, 2001: 65). However, as this article seeks to demonstrate, such studies underestimate the extent to which rebel songs (and by association the romanticisation of nationalist violence) were also an important part of mainstream Irish political and musical culture. The absence of a serious consideration of how the Irish establishment itself used rebel songs has allowed narratives that suggest the celebratory accounts of battle perpetuated by such music became socially unacceptable to go unchallenged. According to Ronnie Drew, singer in the folk group, The Dubliners, before the Troubles it was 'valid to sing rebel songs, but in 1969 when the Troubles started I said I wasn't going to sing another rebel song in public'. He had realised, he said, that 'defenceless people were being killed' and as such his group 'dropped' the 'rebel stuff'(Drew, 2008: 124). Drew's remarks are deeply misleading. Despite the violence, neither musicians, audiences nor politicians did abandon the 'rebel stuff'. This article combines musical and political source material, including recordings, newspapers, memoirs, and the archives of Fianna Fáil

and Fine Gael. It does not seek to provide a comprehensive account of the political role of music in the Troubles era, although it does provide a contextual summary of the relevant Irish musical cultures that operated. Rather, its focus is on how mainstream parties, State institutions, and audiences employed explicitly nationalist music. In doing so, it problematises the assumed relationship between musical genres of protest and the established political interests against which they supposedly operated, arguing that moderate Irish politics did not quietly forget the music of rebellion, but rather carefully renegotiated and redefined it for contemporary agendas. Through rebel songs, a wide range of audiences could associate their political identities and allegiances with ideological republicanism.

Political Context

It is certainly true that dissident republican politics enjoyed a largely unchallenged monopoly over violent forms of national struggle. The Border Campaign (1956–1962), which inspired the ballads of republicans such as Brendan and Dominic Behan, was something of a damp squib, but after 1969 increasing violence in Northern Ireland meant that revolutionary nationalist violence was no longer the exclusive subject of nostalgic songs, but rather an immediate reality. The various, ideologically disparate organisers and protesters that made up the Northern Ireland civil rights movement had been increasingly active into the late-1960s, but their protests led to clashes with police and with unionists. The British government deployed troops in 1969, but following ‘Bloody Sunday’ in 1972, when soldiers fired at crowds of demonstrators in Derry and killed 14 protestors, violence escalated, and the republican movement increasingly and successfully co-opted the civil rights narrative. Even as the Republic of Ireland became more internationalist, notably by entering the European Economic Community (EEC) in

1972, the violence in Northern Ireland could not be ignored by the governing political parties.

Musical Context

The range of political causes with which Irish music engaged during the Troubles era is indicative of the multifaceted and occasionally schizophrenic identities through which an inhomogeneous public interpreted the violence. On the one hand, Irish-born musicians positioned themselves within an internationalist youth culture, notably Bob Geldof, of the Boomtown Rats, who instigated the Live Aid concerts aimed at famine relief in Africa. Likewise, global superstars U2 predominantly pursued global humanitarian causes, including a well-received Live Aid performance and a long-term relationship with Amnesty International (Dunphy, 1993: 2, 346). To the limited extent that U2 engaged with nationalist politics, it was in line with the vague politics of peace that characterised their charitable engagements. 'Sunday Bloody Sunday', written on the events of that name in both 1920 and 1972, asked '[h]ow long must we sing this song?' and condemned violence on all sides. Lead singer Paul Hewson (stage name Bono) routinely introduced the song by proclaiming 'this is not a rebel song' (Dunphy, 1993: 258). In addition, the punk movement purported to offer its advocates (especially in Northern Ireland) an alternative to sectarian modes of identity. Followers of the genre have constructed a substantial mythology around Northern Irish punk, including a film, *Shellshock Rock*, crediting it with having 'rocked the troubles' as 'the first and arguably the only social force to bring together Catholic and Protestant teenagers since the Troubles began' (McLoone, 2004: 29, 34). This narrative has focused on songs describing the pains of adolescence, notably 'Teenage Kicks' by the Undertones, from Derry. This was similarly the case for the four members of Stiff Little Fingers, from Belfast, whose songs dealt with the frustrating restrictions that the Troubles imposed on

youth culture and criticised the attitudes that perpetuated the violence (Burns and Parker, 2003: 12-14, 31, 33, 51). On the basis that it appealed to both Protestants and Catholics (Stiff Little Fingers singer Jake Burns described the group as 'a happy mix' of Protestants and Catholics), punk has been represented as a unifying genre in Northern Ireland (Burns and Parker, 2003: 29, 79). A full assessment of this narrative is beyond the remit of this article, but it should certainly be treated sceptically. Whether those who embraced the punk movement were likely paramilitaries is difficult to ascertain and, as this article demonstrates, traditional political narratives in music were still heavily prevalent despite the growth of musical genres that supposedly transcended such divisions.

Music directly promoting national struggle retained a tenacious hold on the public consciousness. Indeed, modern means of production (radio, television, vinyl records and cassettes) and the impetus of transnational musical phenomena like that which spawned U2 could also foster rebel song culture. Songwriter Pete St John had been involved in the American civil rights movement but returned to his birthplace of Dublin in the late-1970s ("Pete St John .com," n.d.). He wrote 'Fields of Athenry', which was a top 30 hit for The Barleycorn in 1982. His song describes a man who, made desperate by the Great Famine of the 1840s, steals food from the local landlord only to be punished with deportation ('Against the famine and the crown,/I rebelled they ran me down') (The Barleycorn, 1982). Contrary to the claims of Ronnie Drew, The Dubliners continued to romanticise historical nationalism well into the late 1980s, including Brendan Behan's account of life as an IRA prisoner, 'The Auld Triangle' (The Dubliners, 1975, 1988). On their 1973 album *Plain and Simple*, the group included a medley of nineteenth-century nationalist ballads entitled 'Rebellion'. 'The history of

Ireland,' the song's introduction begins, 'is the history of oppression… At regular times… grievances have boiled over and people have reacted in the only way open to them: Rebellion' (The Dubliners, 1973). 'Fields of Athenry' and The Dubliners each demonstrate a distinction, vital for the purposes of this article, between rebel songs that romanticised Irish history and those that glorified contemporary violence. While 'Fields of Athenry' romanticised the violent response of a nineteenth-century Irishman to British misrule, it made no mention of violence in the present. Likewise, 'Rebellion' featured a series of songs dating to a century earlier, but none that were cultivated by contemporary republicans in Northern Ireland. This was a subtle and deeply problematic point of difference, but one that facilitated the appropriation of such music by a wide range of non-violent political actors.

Others went further. Christy Moore, the highly successful folk singer who went on to front Planxty and Moving Hearts, boasted a comprehensive political repertoire combining socialism, 'old anti-imperialist ballads', and nationalist material (Moore, 2000: 46). Moore located the Northern Irish struggle in a tradition of working-class 'freedom fighters' against political oppression (Moore, 2000: 45, 148). He played a range of rebel songs from all eras, with a preference for those of socialist influence (e.g. 'The Patriot Game') or which addressed internment (including ballads written by the hunger striker Bobby Sands) (Moore, 2000: 55, 83). He recorded with Dominic Behan, performed 'The Auld Triangle', and contributed to anti-nuclear campaigns (Moore, 2000: 9, 78, 148). Fronted by the notorious singer Shane MacGowan, the members of the London folk group that would become The Pogues similarly employed historical rebel songs including 'The Bold Fenian Men', 'The Auld Triangle' and 'The Patriot Game' (Scanlon, 1988: 8, 12, 54). Like Moore, their own compositions attacked British actions in relation to the ongoing IRA campaign. In 'Streets of Sorrow/The Birmingham

Six', the group criticises the conviction of the 'Birmingham Six', six men imprisoned (incorrectly) in connection with an IRA bombing in Birmingham in 1974 ('But they're still doing time/For being Irish in the wrong place/At the wrong time') (The Pogues, 1988). Explaining the intent behind the song, MacGowan stated:

> It's about people getting framed up by the British system of justice, or whatever you want to call it. It specifically mentions the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four but there's also a verse about the eight guys who were recently done by the SAS. Basically, it's about anybody who's been locked up without any real evidence against them (Scanlon, 1988: 122).

MacGowan's criticisms of British oppression are clear and explicit. In this instance he heavily implied his romantic interpretation of rebellion, but in elsewhere he expressed an unequivocal desire to have been involved with the IRA during the 1970s (Foster, 2008: 155). This was not the humanitarian, radio-friendly internationalism of U2. Rather, promoting republican perspectives was an integral part of MacGowan's public persona.

Even the most politically charged compositions could achieve commercial success. In 1972, The Barleycorn released 'The Men Behind the Wire', a song condemning the policy of internment without trial in Northern Ireland and expressing support for those who were imprisoned ('Every man must stand behind/The men behind the wire') (The Barleycorn, 1972). Northern Irish police made a substantial contribution to the song's success when they arrested and interned lyricist and band member Pat McGuigan shortly before release. The resultant press coverage drove 'The Men Behind the Wire' to number one in Ireland, and it remained in the charts for 40 weeks (*Irish Independent*, 15 Dec. 1971: 1, "Men Behind the Wire," n.d.). The Wolfe Tones, a

ballad-singing group in the style of The Dubliners, sang several songs expressing often explicit sympathy with the IRA, not least their album *Rifles of the IRA* (The Wolfe Tones, 1969). Most famously, in 1973 after three IRA inmates escaped from Dublin's Mountjoy Jail via helicopter, the Wolfe Tones released 'Up and Away (The Helicopter Song)', which exuberantly celebrated the breakout (The Wolfe Tones, 1973). Like 'The Men Behind the Wire', the song reached number one. It then stayed in the charts for eight weeks ("'Up and Away (The Helicopter Song),'" n.d.). What emerges from these examples—The Dubliners, Moore, The Pogues, Barleycorn, The Wolfe Tones—is a wide and commercially viable audience for rebel songs, including both older ballads and new compositions expressing sympathy with contemporary rebellion.

Music and Republicanism

These were not merely the political expressions of ideologically indulgent musicians. The statements of public figures during the Troubles period reflects how extensively rebel song rhetoric passed into the public consciousness. Expressing sympathy for internees, Mayo priest Fr. Morahan encouraged his audience at an event organised by the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) to 'take part in non-violent demonstrations against oppression in the North'. 'I admire their courage', he continued, 'I acclaim their constancy in diversity. I rejoice with their escapes into freedom: and from this assembly, send through the barbs of a flagrantly unjust restriction our salute and brotherly encouragement to "the men behind the wire"' (*Irish Press*, 31 Jan. 1972: 3) The reference to McGuigan's anti-internment ballad conveys the extent to which such songs became associated with support for nationalists in the North, and indicates the popularity of such views. Similarly, following Bloody Sunday in 1972, Sinn Féin led (but by no means monopolised) calls for the Irish Rugby team to boycott an upcoming match in London. This was on the basis that to play the match would require that the

team ‘stand to attention for the British national anthem’, which a correspondent to the *Irish Press* described as the ‘anthem of an oppressive foreign power’ (*Irish Press,* 8 Feb. 1972: 8, *Irish Independent,* 5 Feb. 1972: 11). Just as nationalist ballads were emblematic of support for resistance, therefore, the British anthem symbolised oppression. These interpretations of music were constructed around resistance to the British other and provide further evidence that nationalist musical cultures had widespread political value.

Unsurprisingly, political organisations actively supporting violent rebellion put nationalist music to ample use. In 1969, a Sinn Féin rally in Dublin saw 2,500 demonstrators gather outside the British embassy singing the nineteenth-century ballad ‘A Nation Once Again’ by the prominent Young Ireland writer Thomas Davis as well as ‘other patriotic ballads… to express solidarity with the citizens of Derry’(*Irish Press,* 14 Aug. 1972: 7). Demonstrators at a Provisional Sinn Féin march in Dublin in 1976 sang ‘Memory of the Dead’, which celebrated the 1798 United Ireland rebels and called on listeners to emulate their efforts (‘And true men be you, men,/Like those of Ninety-Eight’) (*Kerryman,* 1976: 8; Ingram, 1900: 100). When they held meetings to raise funds for Republican prisoners and their dependents, speakers regularly cited the title and lyrics of the ‘The Men Behind the Wire’ (*Anglo-Celt,* 28 Jan. 1972: 6; *Mayo News,* 15 Feb. 1975: 13). The Sinn Féin Ard Fheis routinely concluded with the national anthem (‘Amhrán na bhFiann’ or ‘The Soldier’s Song’, itself a rebel song) (*Irish Independent,* 25 Oct. 1971: 1). They produced songbooks featuring older rebel songs, including ‘The Rising of the Moon’, which celebrated the 1798 rebellion, and ‘A Nation Once Again’ (*Ireland,* 1972). Their own original compositions also referenced nationalist traditions. ‘Freedom’s Sons’, printed in 1982, described executed 1916 rebels Padraic Pearse and Sean MacDermott among others, concluding:

> Six counties are in bondage still
> They died brave men, was this their will?
> Until they're free and oppressions cease
> Only then brave men can rest in peace (*Songs of Resistance*, 1968-1975, 1975: 11).

In their musical self-image, the Provisionals' struggle against partition therefore continued the struggle for which the 1916 martyrs died. They pursued similar goals by recycling old songs with new lyrics. 'The Ballad of Bobby Sands', printed in 1981 not long after Sands' death on hunger strike, was set to the air of 'Kevin Barry', immediately equating Sands' martyrdom with that of Barry, who was executed during the Anglo-Irish War (*Meath Chronicle*, 30 May 1981: 26). Through this music, the Provisionals sought and often received international support. In America, the Irish Northern Aid Committee (Noraid), associated with the Provisionals, organised events with 'singers of Irish ballads' raising funds for political prisoners' dependents (*Irish Press*, 2 Oct. 1979: 10). The Provisionals also distributed songbooks in Europe, translated into native languages and carrying images demonstrating police brutality (*Irish rebel songs*, 1975, *Smash the H Blocks*, 1980).

Rebel Songs and the Irish State

It is partially the association between rebel song culture and the Provisional IRA that has driven the narrative stating that rebel songs became unacceptable in Irish society. However, that the Provisionals made extensive use of rebel song culture does not itself confirm that rebel songs were limited to their own support base. The notion that rebel songs enhanced the cause of the rebels alone developed in part because of the actions and statements of several high-profile organisations and groups. The first was the state

broadcaster, RTÉ. Although the broadcaster never imposed a complete ban on nationalist songs, their attempts to moderate content gave the impression that an arm of the establishment was suppressing oppositional culture. In 1971, RTÉ restricted the playing of songs from the Wolfe Tones album, *Up the Rebels*. It was not, as the band would claim, a blanket ban on rebel songs. Rather, some songs from this specific album were restricted if they had the potential to 'create tension in Northern Ireland' (*Irish Independent*, 21 Aug. 1971: 22). Indeed, when the band's manager accused RTÉ of banning another of their songs, 'Up and Away', in 1973, his cited evidence was that RTÉ had 'only' played it three times (*Irish Press*, 22 Nov. 1973: 9). That the band courted the image of a group subjected to government suppression indicates that such a reputation was more likely to benefit the group concerned than it was to restrict their message. Rather than a carefully thought out policy of censorship, it is suggestive of inefficient indecision on the part of RTÉ. Similarly, the broadcaster did not play 'The Men Behind the Wire' on radio when it first entered the charts. RTÉ denied that it had banned the song, stating that their chart show did not play 'The Men Behind the Wire' because the song was not 'appropriate' in genre or content for a programme dealing in pop music (*Irish Press*, 7 Jan. 1973: 4). After a producers' meeting, the broadcaster released a further statement insisting that it would 'find a place in RTÉ programmes' elsewhere (*Irish Press*, 8 Jan. 1973: 6). RTÉ's attitude is typical of the difficulty facing mainstream Irish politics. Rebel songs seemingly encouraged violence in Northern Ireland, but their popularity and resonance with the Irish public prevented their being simply ignored.

To the extent that rebel songs were genuinely unacceptable, it was limited to committed moderates who were unlikely to have expressed support for radical

republicanism under any circumstances. The moderate *Irish Independent* provided a vehicle for many of these views. The newspaper printed several pieces denouncing rebel songs and promoting what the writers believed were more constructive expressions of Irish patriotism. In 1981, a correspondent to the newspaper asserted that the protectionist 'Buy Irish' campaign was a welcome expression of national pride for those whose 'patriotism' was not 'confined to rebel songs' (*Irish Independent*, 2 Oct. 1981: 10). Perhaps most prominently, these moderate voices expressed discomfort about Ireland's national anthem. 'Amhrán na bhFiann', originally 'The Soldier's Song', was a republican marching song written by 1916 rebel Peadar Kearney. Increasingly, newspaper editorials and correspondence pages were populated by discussions of the so-called anthem 'dispute', with the majority following the line that the anthem was 'more political... than patriotic' (*Western People*, 6 Sept. 1969: 6; *Sunday Independent*, 13 Jan. 1974: 2). An article headlined 'Time for a New Anthem' in the *Irish Independent* in 1978 stated that '[o]bjection to Peadar Kearney's creation, "A Soldier's Song"' was 'based on its militant lyrics' and was therefore 'justifiable on the grounds that there is much more to nationhood than political freedom and the physical force its attainment may demand'. In a letter attached to the article, one correspondent stated that he associated the anthem with 'violence', an assertion he supported by asking, quite accurately: 'Are there not words about cannon's roar and rifles?' (*Irish Independent*, 2 Oct. 1978: 8).

The Irish Rugby Union team was a focal point of the anthem debate. On the basis that the team represented both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) had consistently chosen not to play either 'Amhrán na bhFiann' or 'God Save the Queen' even before the outbreak of widespread hostilities. During the 1987 World Cup, when the tournament organisers insisted upon

teams using national anthems, the Irish side used ‘The Rose of Tralee’, to the consternation of some (*Mayo News*, 17 Jun. 1987: 5). Their position, and their discomfort with ‘Amhrán na bhFiann’, was made most explicit in 1991 when the IRFU approved the use of a new anthem for the Rugby team, ‘A New Song for Ireland’:

> We share the tears,
> We all share the sorrow,
> We’ve looked and found,
> No future in the past,
> It’s time to-day.
> Now time to build tomorrow:
> We’ll start afresh,
> Old quarrels must not last.

It was written to the tune of ‘Danny Boy’, itself a rare example of a tune that was widely known and yet not monopolised by either the nationalist or the unionist political tradition in Northern Ireland. In its refusal to seek a ‘future in the past’ and its references to shared trauma through ‘old quarrels’, ‘A New Song for Ireland’ is an explicit (if crude and uninspiring) attempt to reject existing divisions. Instead of national identities rooted in historical conflict (and musical expressions thereof), the lyrics call for a fresh start. The *Irish Independent* gave ‘A New Song for Ireland’ a positive review, contrasting it with the official national anthem which was, it stated, ‘an emotive and unacceptable national anachronism,’ unsuitable ‘as a national anthem for Ireland of today’ (*Irish Independent*, 1 Mar. 1991: 10). Nevertheless, it is important to note that this was a high-profile organisation in a relatively unique position. Likewise, the *Irish Independent* was representative of a vocal but far from ubiquitous class of moderates. ‘A New Song for Ireland’ was quickly forgotten following its first and only

usage, and was eventually replaced with ‘Ireland’s Call’, equally devoid of rebel song features but lacking in the condemnation of Northern ‘quarrels’ (*Irish Press*, 6 Apr. 1995: 16).

As ‘A New Song for Ireland’ suggests, the ongoing peace talks during the 1990s encouraged the view that rebel songs were improper and an incitement to violence. In 1995, the leader of the Progressive Democrats Mary Harney expressed the belief that the ‘words of “Amhran na bhFiann” were not compatible with peace and reconciliation’ (*Irish Press*, 25 Feb. 1995: 7). Similarly, one writer in the *Irish Independent* asserted that there was a need to ‘update an Irishness narrowly expressed in terms of rebel songs’ (*Irish Independent*, 20 Apr. 1998: 6). Many of the perceptions whereby rebel songs became an unacceptable taboo emerge from this period, rather than during the 1970s or 1980s. It was 1992 when Ronnie Drew actually took the decision to cease singing nationalist songs, and likewise it was not until the 1990s that moderates began to assert that rebel songs had been unacceptable in the country at large since the outbreak of violence (The Dubliners, 1992). An editorial in the *Irish Independent* in 1990 claimed that for the last twenty years people in Ireland had been ‘uneasy about singing old rebel songs when they came to reflect on what these might mean in today’s context’ (*Irish Independent*, 30 Jun. 1990: 16). This is not consistent with their own protestations about rebel songs at the time, which would have been unnecessary had nationalist music been the subject of genuinely widespread disapproval. That the Wolfe Tones and Barleycorn were topping the charts similarly indicates that large sections of the public were far from uneasy about expressing their political and national identities through nationalist musical content. The national anthem, similarly, remained unchanged, as it does at the time of writing.

Rebel Songs in Party Politics

That musicians and audiences used rebel songs to express political standpoints beyond dissident republicanism is illustrated most starkly by the way in which the governing parties in Ireland continued to employ nationalist music in their own political propaganda. Fianna Fáil did so most successfully. At its rallies, as it had before the outbreak of the Troubles, Fianna Fáil made regular use of the national anthem and 'Soldiers of the Legion of the Rearguard'(UCDA, P104/1980). The latter was written by Jack O'Sheehan, a member of the IRA during the revolutionary period (1916-1923) who opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty. He wrote the song whilst interned by the Free State government during the Civil War, and in its lyrics he positioned the anti-Treaty tradition (specifically Éamon de Valera) as the true custodian of nationalist aspirations:

> Legion of the Rearguard answering Ireland's call,
> Hark their martial tramp is heard from Cork to Donegal
> Tone and Emmet guide you, though your task be hard,
> De Valera leads you, Soldiers of the Legion of the Rearguard.

Its accompanying music is loud and martial, with a strong, regular marching rhythm. At the singing of de Valera's name, O'Sheehan has the accompaniment drop sharply in volume, consequently placing additional emphasis on the vocals. O'Sheehan thus draws attention to de Valera as an icon of the republican movement (O'Sheehan, 1924). Even after the start of widespread violence in Northern Ireland, and well beyond de Valera's death in 1975, the party continued to use the song, for example after then Taoiseach Charles Haughey spoke at the 1989 Fianna Fáil Ard Fheis (*Irish Independent*, 25 Feb.

1989: 8). The party made similar use of ‘A Nation Once Again’. As stated above, Thomas Davis wrote ‘A Nation Once Again’ during the nineteenth-century. Its lyrics described a vision of Ireland rid of its English rulers, no longer ‘a province’ but ‘a nation once again’. However, since partition parties of various shades had reappropriated the song as an abbreviated statement of their desire to achieve unification. Instead of the restoration of national status, ‘A Nation Once Again’ became a shorthand for aspirations of national unity. Thus, when bands played ‘A Nation Once Again’ to conclude the unveiling of a memorial to de Valera in County Clare in 1981, it positioned Haughey (who led the ceremony) as the man who would provide that unity (UCDA, P176/186(1)).

That this was a deliberate exercise in political positioning is evidenced in the arrangements made for the Fianna Fáil 50th anniversary concert in 1976. When committee members considered the programme for the concert as it was originally proposed, they responded that it was ‘inadequate’ and that they ‘felt that a stronger National tone might be given to the items’. They suggested a list of songs, mostly consisting of rebel songs that they hoped to see included instead. Organisers then added more nationalist songs to the redrafted programme, including ‘Kevin Barry’ and ‘A Nation Once Again’. The former lamented the death of the eponymous IRA fighter during the Anglo-Irish War (1919-1921) and denigrated the British for executing him (‘Another martyr for old Ireland/Another murder for the crown’) (UCDA, P176/950(14, 93)). ‘A Nation Once Again’, which as noted above was by this stage strongly associated with partition, was performed by a choir, The Foyle singers, from Derry. This, recorded the committee, was intended to give a ‘Northern Ireland flavour to the concert’ (UCDA, P176/186(51)). That a group from the town at the epicentre of the Troubles provided the concert’s rendition of ‘A Nation Once Again’ can only be

interpreted as an attack on partition (UCDA, P104/1993). The concert concluded with a performance of 'Soldiers of the Legion of the Rearguard', the full lyrics of which were printed in the programme to facilitate its singing 'in unison' by the audience. That programme also included a photograph of de Valera in 1918 behind a banner bearing the opening lyrics of 'The Soldier's Song' (UCDA, P176/950(34); UCDA, P176/951). The concert was broadcast on national radio (UCDA, P176/950(12)). Fianna Fáil, therefore, demonstrated no unease regarding nationalist music. In 1982, the party even booked The Wolfe Tones to play at a de Valera centenary concert (UCDA, P176/186(69)). The absence of any controversy over doing so speaks to the mainstream appeal rebel songs continued to enjoy (Parfitt, 2017: 154). Nevertheless, the party's repertoire was carefully chosen. Fianna Fáil traced its lineage to the rebels of 1916, the IRA of the Anglo-Irish War and the anti-Treaty rebels of the Civil War period. Thereafter, the party's lineage diverged from that of violent republicanism. As such, they only employed music that celebrated rebellion up to and including the Civil War. They clearly avoided songs associated with the IRA after 1923 and particularly songs such as 'The Men Behind the Wire' associated with contemporary unrest, just as the Dubliners limited themselves to music associated with historical rebellion.

Instead of promoting rebellion, Fianna Fáil appropriated rebel music with the intention of promoting constitutional methods or, more commonly, cultivating populist patriotic support during its election campaigns. That is reflected in the contexts and rhetoric in which the party located nationalist music. At a Fianna Fáil event in 1992 commemorating Wolfe Tone (leader of the United Ireland rebellion in 1798), Taoiseach Albert Reynolds spoke about the need to find 'a solution to the Northern conflict' immediately before the band played the national anthem (*Irish Press*, 19 Oct. 1992: 17). His conciliatory tone was far from standing amidst 'cannon's roar' against the 'Saxon

foe' and demonstrated how nationalist music could be reimagined. More commonly, the party sought to use music to give its political aspirations a republican flavour, invigorating aspirations to political office with pretensions of a national mission. A song composed on the defeat of Brian Lenihan, the party's candidate in the 1990 Presidential Election, is a typical example. Its lyrics cast Lenihan as a martyr of the nationalist cause, while the scandal that derailed his campaign was a plot contrived by the enemies of that cause:

> Another martyr for old Ireland,
> A Political murder for Dublin town,
> An honest man's career was ruined,
> By the forces of that "clown",
> He tried to tell them in his own way,
> But their hardened hearts would not sway,
> Garrett, Alan and Dick Spring,
> To his knees this honest man did bring,
> These political assassins hatched a plot,
> His faithful service they soon forgot (UCDA, P176/186(29)).

The air of 'Kevin Barry', to which the song is set, would have been easily recognisable to anybody hearing the ballad. Whether it was sung is doubtful, but it provides an extreme example of the desire of many in Fianna Fáil to contextualise their efforts within the cause of national struggle.

The party's most successful songs were those that utilised the machinery of popular music, namely professional recording and broadcasting. Ahead of the first election under the new leadership of Charles Haughey in 1981, Senator Donie Cassidy arranged for Pete St John (lyricist of 'Fields of Athenry') to write a song. His

composition, ‘Charlie’s Song’ (commonly referred to as ‘Rise and Follow Charlie’), was then recorded and released by folk group The Morrisseys (*Irish Press*, 28 Feb. 1995: 3; *Western People*, 17th Apr. 1985: 12). The lyrics in the opening verse describe southern shores and ‘Northern hills’, perhaps a veiled reference to partition. The chorus pays considerable homage to rebel song tradition, employing a typical combination of martial language (‘we’ll march along’) and unity (‘we’ll sing as one’):

> With Charlie’s song, we’ll sing as one,
> With Charlie’s song we’ll sing along,
> With Charlie’s song we’ll march along,
> We’ll rise and follow Charlie.

The refrain ‘rise and follow Charlie’ is strikingly similar to the Scottish Jacobite song, ‘Sound the Pibroch’ (Roberton, 1978). Thus, in its language ‘Charlie’s Song’ drew liberally upon the anti-establishment and anti-British material available to it. In the second verse, references to ‘freedom’ and ‘Irish pride’ carry the vague nationalistic tones to which Fianna Fáil hoped to appeal:

> Hail the leader, hail the man,
> With freedom’s roar it all began,
> With Irish pride in every man,
> We’ll rise and follow Charlie.

The third and final verse makes the vital link between these deliberately ill-defined ideals and Fianna Fáil’s record in government. In the song’s conception, Haughey kept ‘the country on the move’ and was helping ‘the Nation to improve’. The format and intended medium is that of contemporary pop music, while the banjo accompaniment

invokes ‘folk’ genres and the nationalist connotations thereof (The Morrisseys, 1981). That some wrongly attribute the song to the Wolfe Tones indicates the nationalist connotations that it carried (Byrne, 2011: 161). Commentators treated the song as a figure of fun in hindsight, one describing it as a ‘mind altering ditty’ (*Irish Independent*, 5 Nov. 1997: 12). However, its popularity upon release should not be underestimated. The song spent eight weeks in the charts, peaking at number seven (“Charlie’s Song,” n.d.). Fianna Fáil employed the song widely at rallies and meetings, especially when Haughey was present, throughout his leadership (*Meath Chronicle*, 30 May 1981: 31; *Southern Star*, 13 Feb. 1982: 22; *Connaught Telegraph*, 18 Mar. 1987: 11; *Connaught Tribune*, 9 Jun. 1989: 31). Fianna Fáil augmented the song’s success in part by using the marketing strategies of anti-establishment musical culture. Just as The Wolfe Tones exaggerated the levels of censorship to which they were subjected, Fianna Fáil sought to give the impression that political opponents had conspired to suppress ‘Charlie’s Song’. When RTÉ chose not to let The Morrisseys play it on the *Late Late Show* in April 1981, Pete St John and Donie Cassidy accused the broadcaster of ‘partiality’. Somewhat implausibly, they also stated that they did not ‘understand RTÉ’s attitude’ because the ‘lyrics of the song contained no reference to any political party’. RTÉ, for its part, defended the decision on the basis that it was attempting to avoid favouritism (*Irish Press*, 13 Apr. 1981: 3). However, the party interpreted the decision not as an editorial choice in the interests of impartiality but as an unequivocal prohibition. Bertie Ahern, then chairman of Fianna Fáil’s youth committee, said that ‘RTÉ has once again shown partiality and bias in banning the record’ (*Irish Press*, 22 Apr. 1981: 3). Thus, the most established of Ireland’s establishment political parties harnessed supposedly anti-establishment musical cultures to its own advantage. It took the musical form, the commercial machinery and the exaggerated indignation of rebel song culture and put it

at the service of a political agenda that had little in common with extreme republicanism.

The statements of the press and of other political parties often implied that Fianna Fáil was alone in making appeals to nationalist music. When Fine Gael leader Garrett Fitzgerald emerged at the party Ard Fheis in 1981 to the strains of 'A Nation Once Again', newspapers commented that it 'seemed a little out of place' and that the Fine Gael leader seemed to have 'borrowed traditional nationalist songs from Fianna Fáil' (Mooney, 1981: 4). However, these responses speak more to Fianna Fáil's effectiveness in employing rebel songs than they do to Fine Gael's reluctance to do so. Fitzgerald's rebel song soundtrack in 1981 was not unique. There is ample evidence to suggest that Fianna Fáil's opponents applied these methods frequently. The party regularly booked marching bands to add a sense of occasion to their rallies throughout the period (UCDA, P39/GE/167(9)). Bands at the party's Ard Fheis in 1971 played 'Step Together' (a nationalist marching song) and 'God Save Ireland' (commemorating three republicans executed in 1867). In doing so, they reinforced Fine Gael's claim to Ireland's nationalist inheritance. Newspapers described the songs as adding to the 'razzamatazz' of the occasion (Glennon, 1973: 12). The party similarly used music to make (non-specific, non-committal) allusions to ending partition. In 1979 a party representative described Fitzgerald as 'a man who is destined within his own lifetime to bring together the fragmented parts of this whole island and make us a nation once again' (*Irish Press*, 2 Apr. 1979: 5). The reference to Davis's nineteenth-century ballad represented a deliberate attempt to associate Fitzgerald with an idealistic nationalism that was largely detached from his actual politics. Thus, both predominant political parties used music to establish their nationalist credentials. In both cases, the idealism of rising up or making Ireland 'a nation once again' had the advantage of being both

uncompromising and vague, committing the parties to a specific objective but a decidedly nonspecific means or timeframe. Both parties were also careful and deliberate in their song choices, conspicuously avoiding anything that condoned or encouraged violence in the present, limiting themselves to what they presented as the more virtuous violence of the past.

The different wings of the labour movement also used the rebel song tradition to assert their connections to national struggle. In 1969, the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) band marked its golden jubilee with a concert. At that concert, the band secretary Jack Daly claimed that in 1935 some of their members were 'arrested and detained' for playing 'The Soldier's Song' outside a railway station in Northern Ireland (*Irish Press*, 25 Sept. 1969: 11). In doing so, he portrayed the band as an active participant in nationalist resistance to unionism. Similarly, Labour Party conferences traditionally concluded with the 'Watchword of Labour' (O'Byrnes, 1985: 8; *Munster Express*, 9 Apr. 1993: 1). Written by Labour Party founder James Connolly, executed in 1916, 'Watchword of Labour' concerned labour politics rather than that of the nation. Nevertheless, the lyrics employed the same martial, marching quality as rebel songs, with a similar language of defiance and revolutionary liberty:

> Oh! Hear ye the watchword of Labour!
> The slogan of they would be free,
> That no more to any enslaver.
> Must labour bend suppliant knee.
> That we on whose shoulders are borne.
> The pomp and the pride of the great.
> Whose toil they repay with their scorn.
> Must challenge and master our fate (Connolly, n.d.).

Perhaps most importantly, by foregrounding the Labour Party's association with Connolly, the song provided the party with a link to the revolutionaries of the early twentieth century. Notably, the party did not employ socialist anthems such as 'The Red Flag'. Connolly was safer territory in a Catholic political climate that was often unwelcoming of socialism and Marxism. Indeed, in years previous to the Troubles Labour's opponents had attempted to use instances of trade unionists singing 'The Red Flag' to discredit the entire movement (*Sligo Champion*, 15 Aug. 1953: 2). Connolly's unquestionable nationalist credentials shielded the party from such criticisms. While other groups did not achieve the same scale or success as Fianna Fáil in their employment of nationalist music, therefore, they still did so with much of the same enthusiasm and many of the same intentions.

Despite the Troubles, rebel songs remained an important means of political expression for individuals from a range of ideological backgrounds. Rebel songs were still popular with the public, demonstrated in the commercial success of bands that played them, and even if politicians from the main Irish parties avoided new songs praising contemporary rebellion, they still sought to take advantage of the historical associations that old rebel songs provided. Nevertheless, doing so required a degree of renegotiation to make the clarification between the virtuous violence of history and the damaging violence of the present. An editorial in the *Kerryman* in April 1976 commenting on a Provisional Sinn Féin rally explained:

> "Who fears to speak of '98" and "Henry Joy" [two songs celebrating the 1798 rebellion] are strange numbers of the Provisional Hymnology. The United Irishmen did not go out to die for a Catholic dominated Ireland… The 1798 rebellion was mainly Presbyterian, the perpetrators of the Kingsmills massacre are hardly among

> its more notable heirs… Such inconsistencies did not seem to bother the speaker on the platform. They left us in no doubt that the Provisionals are heirs to all that is best in the Irish tradition (*Kerryman*, 30 Apr. 1976: 8).

Unlike the United Irishmen, therefore, in this conception the violence of the Provisionals was not worthy of reverence and was not part of the benevolent nationalist tradition. It was constitutional nationalism, these narratives implied, that inherited the ideals of former rebels like Wolfe Tone, not the modern day rebels whose methods resembled much more closely the icons they celebrated. The use of rebel songs by Fianna Fáil and its rivals required a dramatic degree of doublethink, harnessing violent lyrics and rousing songs of rebellion for decidedly non-revolutionary agendas.

Conclusions

As this article has demonstrated, nationalist music was prevalent and popular in Ireland during the Troubles. That in turn suggests that populist republicanism had a widespread appeal with the Irish public as an ideology, if not as a practical policy platform. The success with which the Provisionals harnessed that appeal to create genuine sympathy for their cause from a significant minority in Ireland and elsewhere in many ways speaks to just how realistic their propaganda strategy was. Even if only a minority, the numbers willing to rise and follow Sinn Féin was seemingly greater than those willing to rise and follow Haughey. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that rebel songs were not only tolerated but thrived in mainstream culture and politics during the Troubles era. The internationalism of U2 and Bob Geldof or the socialism of musicians like Christy Moore does not necessarily contradict this popularity, but rather demonstrates the disparate political narratives that penetrated the Irish public consciousness in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Beyond Ireland, this article also supports the

view that historians must interrogate the supposedly binary relationship between the 'establishment' and so-called 'anti-establishment' musical cultures. The barriers between the wealthy and powerful and self-defined democratic forms of mass musical expression were often very porous. In this instance, the music of rebellion was redeployed to support parties whose policies were often deliberately opposed to violent uprising. That governments are willing and able to harness musical cultures purportedly cultivated to inspire resistance against them must be subjected to greater levels of historical enquiry.

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Word Count: 9000 words