

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

[Book review] Made in Ireland: studies in popular music edited by Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn and Lonán Ó Briain

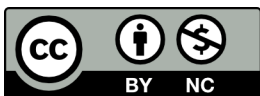
## Journal Item

### How to cite:

O'Hagan, Lauren (2021). [Book review] Made in Ireland: studies in popular music edited by Áine Mangaoang, John O'Flynn and Lonán Ó Briain. Irish Studies Review, 29(4) pp. 542–544.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© [not recorded]



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/09670882.2021.1982821>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

**Made in Ireland: Studies in Popular Music**, edited by Áine Mangaoang, John O’Flynn and Lonán Ó Briain, New York and London, Routledge, 2020, 280 pp., £27.99 (paperback), ISBN 9781138336032

In 2017, journalist David Forsythe posed the question “what have the Irish ever done for us?” As he went on to demonstrate through his stories of Irish people who have made their mark in the fields of science and engineering, quite a lot! And that is undoubtedly the case too when it comes to music, as Mangaoang, O’Flynn and Ó Briain so expertly demonstrate in *Made in Ireland*.

Bringing together a range of interdisciplinary scholars, *Made in Ireland* is the first dedicated collection of essays on Irish popular music from the post-WW2 period to the present day. As the editors state in the book’s introduction, the “assumed musicality” of the Irish has often hindered the “recognition and status of domestic popular music-making” and downplayed “individual agency and particular (sub-)scenes and local networks” (10). *Made in Ireland* firmly addresses these points with its all-encompassing focus on the “reproduction, appropriation and development of global musical-cultural movements and phenomena in local and national contexts” (3), as well as the “hybridities and other points of intersection” (3) between international music genres and traditional Irish music practices. This makes it an up-to-date, comprehensive and *inclusive* volume that injects dynamism into the growing area of Irish musicology and offers new approaches, understandings and theoretical paradigms onto the activities and perspectives of domestic music producers, mediators, distributors and consumers on the island of Ireland, as well as aspects of performance and reception that spread to Britain and other Anglophone countries through the Irish diaspora.

The book consists of 17 core chapters, organised into three thematic areas rather than chronologically—Music Industries and Historiographies (Part 1), Roots and Routes (Part 2) and Scenes and Networks (Part 3)—followed by a coda from cultural historian Gerry Smyth and an afterword featuring an interview with Neil Hannon of The Divine Comedy. Part 1 provides a thorough overview of the close entwinement of Irish popular music with the economic, political and social contexts of life on the island, while Part 2 delves into the locations, directions and articulations of domestic genres and practices in historical and contemporary contexts. Part 3 focuses on popular musical scenes and networks in early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Ireland, with a particular emphasis on the impact of digitalisation and globalisation on local music-making, styles and genres. This structure is refreshingly clear and engaging, enabling salient topics—Irishness, (trans)locality, sociomusical spaces and places, rebellion/resistance—to build dialectically across chapters in ways that foreground the relationship between Irish popular music, geospatial context and cultural identity.

In the coda, Smyth makes the important point that contemporary studies of Irish popular music must “strive towards intersectionality” and break down the preconceived dichotomies between “Irish and Northern Irish, Gaelic and Anglo, urban and rural, working-class and middle-class identities” (248). This ability to challenge boundaries and recognise a type of hybrid, malleable and polysemic Irishness is a key strength of *Made in Ireland*, expanding the field considerably by breaking with the “Celtic Tiger” stereotype of what being Irish should be and, instead, demonstrating its complexities and

multifacetedness. We see engagement with race in J. Griffith Rollefson's essay on Irish rap and Laura Watson's discussion of memoirs on Thin Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott, while sexuality is addressed in Ann-Marie Hanlon's study of the lesbian electro-pop duo Crazy. Womanhood—an often-overlooked area of Irish musicology—is also adeptly covered in Aileen Dillane's analysis of the life and career of Sinéad O'Connor and Noel McLaughlin and Joanna Braniff's account of pioneering blues singer Otilie Patterson.

*Made in Ireland* is also to be praised for its attention to traditional Irish music and cultural practices and their continued importance in contemporary society. Triona Ní Shíocháin's essay offers an insightful look into how Irish-language songs perform the "post-colonial self" and create "new emergent Irish identities" (109), while Adrian Scahill expands Peterson and Kern's concept of the "cultural omnivore" to explore how post-revival traditional music is dissolving the boundaries with popular music. Similar themes are at work in Síle Denvir's chapter on the evolution of *gaelcheol tíre* and its role in Connemara's musical landscape and John O'Flynn's essay on the articulations of otherness in mediations of Irish popular music. The enduring influence of Ireland's storytelling tradition is also a key theme in the aforementioned chapters on rock memoirs and Irish rap.

The way in which Ireland's troubled history has helped shape the island's unique music scene is another important focal point of *Made in Ireland*. This is excellently demonstrated in Timothy A. Heron's essay on the Northern Irish punk scene, Stephen R. Miller's work on Irish rebel songs and Ciarán Ryan's study of Irish fanzines. All three authors show how music can be used to showcase rebellion or resistance, yet at the same time, create solidarity between diverse communities and act as conduits to develop one's own identity.

Another core aspect that distinguishes the Irish music scene from others is the centrality of place and space. This is skilfully addressed by both Jaime Jones and Eileen Hogan in their studies of the significance of "local" for understanding community in the Dublin and Cork music scenes, respectively, as well as by Caroline Ann O'Sullivan in her exploration of how music in Dublin has changed as a result of new technology. Hogan's concept of "parochial capital" (185) is particularly thought-provoking and provides a useful way of thinking about the significance of place attachment in local music scenes. We also see the strong interconnection between the local, translocal and international in Michael Mary Murphy's essay on Irish record labels and Helen Gubbins and Lonán Ó Briain's study of RTÉ Radio 2's *Fanning Sessions*.

There is very little to critique about *Made in Ireland* as the editors have done an exceptional job of offering a comprehensive and thorough overview of Irish popular music, ensuring that a diverse range of artists, styles and social contexts are addressed. One area that could perhaps have been better developed, however, is the role of fans. While this is touched on in Ryan's essay on fanzines, the opportunities for participatory fandom offered by social media channels like YouTube and Facebook (cf. O'Hagan, 2021) may have further enriched some of the arguments in the book around hybrid Irishness and (trans)locality. Likewise, a greater emphasis on material culture—whether album artwork, clothing or instruments—could have provided new perspectives on the way that Irishness is articulated and Irish music networks interweave and expand beyond local contexts while remaining grounded in them.

Overall, I would like to highly recommend *Made in Ireland* for its fresh and valuable insights into the development of Irish popular music over the past eighty years. Its content will appeal particularly to scholars of music, cultural studies and history and has the potential to open up new discussions, approaches and areas of research in Irish musicology. However, the book's accessible style also makes it suitable for anybody with a general interest in Irish popular music. The editors are to be commended for producing an outstanding volume that clearly demonstrates that popular music is a fundamental part of Irish cultural heritage and a key resource for the articulation of being Irish in the modern world.

Reviewer name: Dr Lauren Alex O'Hagan  
Institution: University of Sheffield  
Email address: l.a.ohagan@sheffield.ac.uk

### **References**

Forsythe, David. 2017. *What Have the Irish Ever Done For Us?* Dublin: Currach Books.

O'Hagan, Lauren Alex. 2021. "Rory played the greens, not the blues." Expressions of Irishness of the Rory Gallagher YouTube Channel, *Irish Studies Review* 29(3):348-369.