

Music, the Moving Image and Ireland, 1897-2017, by John O’Flynn, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2022, 306 pp., £96.00 (hardback), ISBN 9781138561779

Since 1896 when the first Lumière Cinématographe programmes were screened at the Erin Theatre of Varieties in Dublin, film has been a major part of cultural life across the island of Ireland (Condon, 2008). Today, Ireland’s film industry has an ever-growing “magnetic creative energy,” with industry investments in domestic film and TV production growing by 40% in the past year alone and the number of Irish-based composers greater than in any previous period (O’Carroll, 2022). Figures from the International Union of Cinemas also show that Ireland has the highest rating in Europe for cinema attendance per capita—a position it has held for the last twelve years (Bramhill, 2019). It seems then that *Music, the Moving Image and Ireland, 1897-2017* by the renowned Irish musicologist John O’Flynn couldn’t have come at a better time.

In the book’s Introduction, O’Flynn boldly sets out his objective to offer the “first comprehensive study” (5) of music for screen productions from or relating to the island of Ireland. More specifically, he seeks to examine the use of music in international Irish-themed screen productions and in national cinema and TV; explore interrelations between music, film and national (counter)narratives; and evaluate selected scores and soundtracks in relation to film texts and other literary and cultural works (6). Of particular concern to O’Flynn is “the contexts in which scores and soundtrack are set, and the ways in which they interact with other components of audiovisual texts” (12). He aims to achieve this through “systematic readings of soundtracks and scores in combination with integrated audio-visual experiences” (6), supported by score analysis in some cases, using hundreds of analogue and digital recordings accessed online or primarily via the collections at the Irish Film Institute and RTÉ.

It is no mean feat to condense 120 years of music, the moving image and Ireland into some 300 pages. Indeed, when faced with such a task, it may be hard to know exactly where to start, how to organise the information and how to convey it in an informative yet accessible way. O’Flynn, however, meets this challenge head on and delivers successfully on all counts. His decision to split the book into three sections focused on ‘Irish Themes on Screen and in Sound’, ‘Perception and Production from Within’ and ‘Cinematic and Musical Developments’ is wise and allows each theme to emerge holistically, building on top of one another in a multi-layered account that shows the evolution of film and music in Ireland and the country’s increasingly important role in this area.

The first part of the book is centered on accompaniments and scores for 20th-century Irish-themed narrative features. Chapter 1 considers the growth of Irish film in the early 20th century and how domestic filmmaking subsequently contracted following the establishment of the Irish Free State. It looks at the growth of orchestral scores upon the onset of synchronised sound technologies and how, often, a limited number of songs were

recycled that perpetuated stereotypical representations of Irish musicality. Chapter 2 moves on to explore Irish-themed films from the 1950s to 1990s. It highlights the dichotomy between representations of “bucolic innocence” and “political danger” (64), with composers commonly relying on stock tunes and clichés from previous decades. However, it also highlights changes that began to occur in the 1970s through domestic reimaginings of traditional music and a move towards individual subjectivities rather than communal stereotypes. The final chapter of Part 1— Chapter 3—turns its attention to literature-to-film adaptations of works by the great Irish authors John Millington Synge, Seán O’Casey, Liam O’Flaherty and James Joyce. O’Flynn shows the evolution of scores over time, moving from sonic Irish tropes to progressive arrangements of traditional music and, later, a modified return to classical Hollywood scoring practices. Of interest here is the frequent juxtaposition of Irish folk and European classical music in some films, thereby reimagining Irish literature in wider geographical contexts.

The second part of the book outlines the interconnections between music, the moving image and the various cultural, political and economic developments in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland from the 1920s to 1990s. Chapter 4—perhaps the book’s standout chapter—offers a detailed examination of newsreel and rhetorical documentaries throughout the 20th century and the way that music was used to represent Irish and/or Northern Irish ways of life. O’Flynn provides an excellent analysis of the use of music and sound in Seán Ó Riada’s Gael Linn trilogy. His brief focus on Vivienne Dick is also appreciated, given the sparse number of women in the Irish film industry. Chapter 5 is another very strong chapter that covers Ireland’s troubles—in their broader sense—between the 1960s and the 2000s. It demonstrates how clichéd music was often used, but it also shows how music could disrupt typical narratives, particularly in later TV documentaries that reported abuses in ‘mother and baby’ homes and addressed marginalised peoples, such as LGBT groups and Irish Travellers. O’Flynn’s analysis of the three-part BBC retrospective on paramilitary forces (*Provos, Loyalists, Brits*) expertly identifies the subtle ways that music and sound were used to suggest distinctions between the “logic” of British forces and the “irrational” actions (122) of republicans and loyalists. Attention shifts in Chapter 6 towards leading Irish composers and stylistic developments and innovations in compositional techniques throughout the 20th century, focusing specifically on symphonic, chamber and vocal/choral music for film and TV. Major figures, from Éamonn Ó Gallchobhair and Havelock Nelson to A.J. Potter and Gerard Victory, are covered, demonstrating the important yet hitherto acknowledged historical involvement of Irish composers with moving image productions (134).

In the third and final part of the book, O’Flynn traces developments in music and sound design over various waves of Irish cinema from the 1970s to modern day. Chapter 7 explores the emerging Irish film industry and the increase in critical perspectives on Irish social experiences, as well as how music was used to interrupt conventional linear narratives. O’Flynn’s superb analysis of *Anne Devlin* also indicates how silence can sometimes be used as a powerful device to support a film’s narrative. Chapter 8 shines a

spotlight on the interplay between music and film genres in Irish cinema. It considers music-themed documentaries and folk and traditional musicians' involvement in original music for narrative features, in addition to innovations in late 20th-century scoring practices, particularly the emergence of hybrid approaches to orchestra and traditional music, dance bands and jazz, and, finally, the Irish music-film. Chapter 9, on the other hand, is concerned with the early 21st century and the growing transnational activity of the Irish film industry. It identifies how transnationalism is marking an interruption in essentialising demarcations of Irishness, as well as paving the way for new genres, opportunities and innovations, such as a reappraisal of hierarchies of and relationships between dialogue, music and other sound elements. Similar themes are picked up in the Conclusion, where O'Flynn revisits the first two decades of the 21st century and evaluates the growing number of retrospectives and (re)compositions in the form of documentaries, commemorative and historical dramas and remastered silent films.

Overall, I highly recommend *Music, the Moving Image and Ireland, 1897-2017* as a seminal book that demonstrates the evolution of music in Irish-themed and Irish-produced films over the last 120 years. My only minor criticism is that, at times, O'Flynn's analyses perhaps could have been enhanced by bringing in more tools from social semiotics that focus directly on music and sound (cf. van Leeuwen, 1999; Way and McKerrell, 2017). Nonetheless, even without them, the book brilliantly demonstrates the rich and complex heritage and dynamic cultural industries in Ireland, as well as the wide range of creative approaches, genres and technologies used by composers, performers and directors, and taps into many of the themes central to Irish musicology in recent years (e.g. concepts of Irishness, reappraisals of Ireland's troubled past, representations of marginalised groups). Furthermore, its multiplicity of themes and accessible format (including a handy glossary at the back) make it suitable for professional audiences across the areas of music, cultural studies, film studies, media and communication, history, sociology and politics, as well as those with a general interest in music, film and Ireland.

What is fundamentally clear from O'Flynn's painstaking research is that the next 120 years look to be even more fruitful for music, the moving image and Ireland.

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