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The Manx Music Festival: A Socio-Cultural Consideration

Introduction

At the close of the 1993 Manx Music Festival, Sir Charles Kerruish, then President of the Isle of Man parliament, Tynwald, stated: "This festival demonstrates the strength of Manx culture as it is today. Frankly it makes me feel proud to be Manx and happy in the knowledge that our cultural heritage is in such safe keeping."[1] This article is a consideration of the ways in which this music festival can be claimed to demonstrate "the strength of Manx culture as it is today." By examining the festival from two perspectives it will consider the ways in which the festival is negotiated as a symbol of Manx culture. The first of these perspectives focuses on the meanings found within the festival itself, and the second on the place the Manx Music Festival occupies in the broader culture of the Isle of Man as a whole. Ultimately the article will show how a competitive music festival is used as symbol of both culture and identity.

The empirical research for this paper took place over a number of preparatory months and culminated in an intensive six-week period of field study in the Isle of Man that included attending the 108th Manx Music Festival in April 2000. I have chosen to report my findings from this research using the present tense, but this is by

no means an attempt to place the research in some sort of historically ambivalent moment, with disregard to the passage of time. The paper is concerned with the social and cultural meanings found in and through the Manx Music Festival and whilst the research certainly considered the historical formation of these meanings, the qualitative research took place in the period from 20 March to 3 May 2000. The conclusions made reflect the thoughts, opinions and considerations of chosen research subjects at one particular moment in time and it cannot automatically be assumed that they reflect the thoughts, opinions or considerations of the research subjects either before or after the immediate research period. I have chosen to use the present tense rather than the past, however, to emphasise that the research was "live" involving real people, showing what they thought in a particular "live" period of time, reflecting the qualitative, subjective nature of the research. I wish to present my findings as I myself found them—not in a distant past, but very much in the here and now. I have employed the term "the festival" to refer not to that which was of the festival, but rather to describe that which was found in the festival. As the social scientist Clifford Geertz states, "the locus of the study is not the object of the study. Anthropologists don't study villages; they study in villages."[2] So, then, is my study of the festival a study of what was found within the festival and the culture of the Isle of Man.[3]

History

Strategically located in the centre of the Irish Sea, the Isle of Man, measuring no more than twelve miles in width and thirty seven in length, was the target of much attention from its surrounding neighbours and beyond, belonging, throughout the last two millennia, to Norway, Scotland and England. Despite its turbulent history, or perhaps because of it, the native population developed their own unique set of cultural features

including the Manx Gaelic language, music and dance. These phenomena were influenced by contact with the surrounding Celtic nations; for example, the language bears a similarity to the Gaelic of Scotland and Ireland and there are many examples of folk tunes that appear not only in the island, but also in Scotland, Ireland and England. This distinction, however, was not to last and the arrival of the Victorian age, and hundreds of thousands of tourists a year, saw the fast decline of a subsistent way of life that had existed for centuries.[4] Native Manx were forced to adapt to the ways of the incoming English, if only to survive economically. The need for economic advancement by the native population was coupled with the arrival of the philanthropic need to improve and educate. Those in the dominant, by now English-speaking, classes saw it as their mission to educate and improve the local population.[5] Whereas the local population had, in all probability, been bilingual, English now quickly established itself as the first language. People still continuing to use the Manx language were regarded as being somewhat inferior, even backward in the face of the opportunity afforded to those speaking English and catering to the tourist market. Whilst there was some effort to record the language, music and dance of the island, the people undertaking this were very much in the minority and their efforts were really more a case of antiquarian preservation rather than continuation. By the beginning of the twentieth century that which can be termed the "traditional" was in fast decline, and in everyday life the distinction between that which was Manx and that which was English was becoming increasingly blurred. If "Manxness" was going to be maintained in any form then the population had to look outside what had for centuries provided a sense of Manx society and appropriate those things which were thrust upon them.

In December 1892 the bud that was to blossom into the Manx Music Festival made its first appearance. Initially attached to the annual exhibition of the Isle of Man Fine Arts and Industrial Guild, the music "section"—the brainchild of one woman, Miss M. L. Wood—was a day-long round of music competitions. The first day of competitions consisted of adult and junior sight-singing classes (something Miss Wood thought to be of paramount importance in musical education), and adult and junior choral classes, and culminated in an evening concert involving all competitors. The entrants came from around the island and the competitions were an instant success; it was hoped they would become a permanent addition to the Fine Arts and Industrial Guild.[6]

In actual fact the Guild did not survive the First World War, but the Manx Music Festival flourished. The original intention behind the formation of the Manx Music Festival had been to educate musically, both in terms of what was considered to be good musical taste at the time and in terms of performance practice. However, quite unconsciously it also provided one successful platform upon which the re-establishment of a Manx identity began to be built. This was primarily because the festival was an event that involved the whole of the island. People were encouraged to come from towns and villages with measures in place to facilitate participation such as discounted public transport and "half-days" being given by employers so people could attend the competitions. The music festival provided a forum upon which a microcosm of Manx society was represented and in which everyone had their role to play from the Governor of the island who presented the prizes, down to the youngest entrant in the junior sight-singing class. All parts and all classes of the island were represented and in the early years the music festival was for many the only time residents left their respective villages and intermingled with residents from other parts

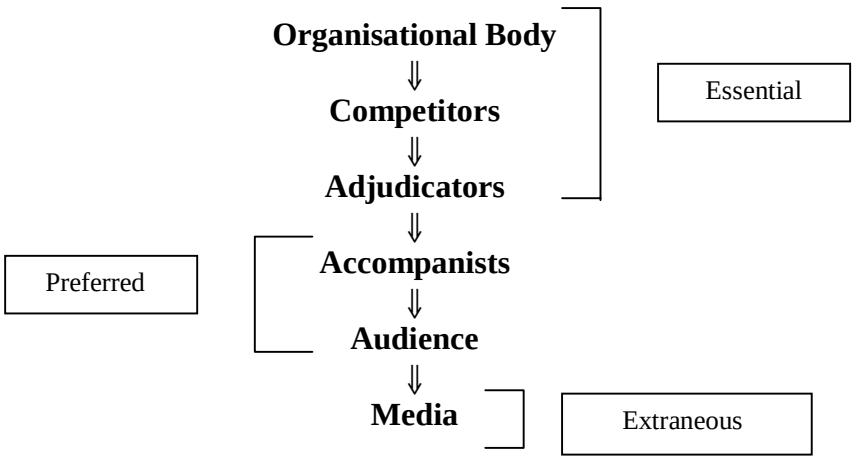
of the island. In the festival was found not only the pursuit of musical excellence, but also a gathering of representatives from the whole of the Isle of Man.

The fledgling status of the festival in the early twentieth century as a Manx phenomenon was confirmed as the century progressed, but it was not only the socio-political circumstances surrounding the native population at the festival's inception that led to this confirmation; other factors have also had their part to play. The geographical location of the festival has enabled it to grow as a symbol of culture. The status of the festival as an island festival has afforded it a large degree of insularity perhaps not present in festivals elsewhere: the majority of people attending the festival are Manx, and always have been Manx for over a hundred years. The festival has never happened anywhere other than the Isle of Man and as such can be claimed to be part of the ethnic identity of those involved, something that is important in the individual definition of what it means to be Manx. This is very important when remembering that at the festival's formation there was very little present in the Isle of Man that could still claim to be Manx. Further to this point is the fact that until 1923 the festival was only open to those people who resided on the Isle of Man, so "foreigners" were prevented from being involved. After this date the classes became open to those from outside the island and although there was some outside interest this was, and remains, usually very small. The festival remains something by the Manx for the Manx, and the value of this, to those involved with the festival, cannot be overestimated. Today, the Manx Music Festival has evolved from small beginnings into a week-long extravaganza of over a hundred classes in music, speech and dance and has, through its long history, formed a unique self-contained society.

The Society of the Manx Music Festival

The people who form the society of the Manx Music Festival are drawn from a variety of backgrounds: they may be school children, politicians, judiciary officials, teachers, doctors, lawyers and so on; however, what matters in the festival is not what role these people perform in the outside world, but what role they play within its confines. For example, High Bailiff Andrew Williamson, becomes Andrew Williamson, triple Cleveland Medallist, whilst Noel Cringle, President of the Manx Parliament, Tynwald, becomes Noel Cringle, Chairman of the Manx Music Festival.[7] The festival provides something of an egalitarian set upon which the actors are responsible for creating their own roles regardless of their external roles. As with every example of egalitarianism, however, some are more equal than others and the festival possesses an internal dynamic and hierarchical structure that has been shaped and formed through its history. Each of the individual actors in the festival assumes his or her role by choosing to belong to one or more of the six social groups present in the festival.

Social Groups within the Manx Music Festival



This chart is representative of the relative necessity of each of the six social categories shown here in descending order. The socio-cultural meaning present in the festival is formed by the members of the six groups outlined and is assisted by the self-contained festival setting. This festival setting, now found in the Villa Marina, has fostered the development of the society found within the festival. The Villa Marina complex sits back, off the promenade on Douglas sea front, Douglas being the capital of the Isle of Man. Originally built in 1913 as a complement to the existing large concert venues present in Douglas during the tourist heyday, it first became home to the Manx Music Festival in 1948, when the "reading room" was used to house the more junior instrumental and singing classes and the more intimate of the adult classes such as the lieder. The Villa Marina became the permanent home of the festival in 1958 and has remained so ever since. The complex consists of two performance venues: the Garden Room, the former reading room, which is a small hall seating approximately three hundred and is still used for the junior and lieder classes, and the Royal Hall, a magnificent octagonal two tiered concert venue that seats fifteen hundred when filled to capacity. Connecting the two venues are numerous passageways, a bar, and a café and social area. In the fifty-one weeks of the year when the Manx Music Festival is not happening, the complex is used for a variety of entertainments: professional musical and comedy acts take place in the Royal Hall, while youth discos and ballroom dancing are to be found in the Garden Room. The complex is badly in need of renovation and the Isle of Man Government, having recently purchased the building from the council to save it from financial ruin and demolition, has drawn-up major plans to turn it into a National Arts and Entertainment Centre. In the meantime, however, it remains a relic to a long gone glorious past and, for one week of the year, the Manx Music Festival community descend *en masse* to make it their own.[8] The

self-contained facilities of the Villa Marina complex allow for total immersion in the festival environment and enable participants to spend all day attending the competitions, eating, drinking and socialising without having to step outside the complex grounds. Once in the festival context, as mentioned previously, the members' six social groups cast off their roles from the outer world and assume their festival identities and the meanings, behaviours and idiosyncrasies that these imply. High ranking in the unspoken hierarchy of the festival is gained from a number of directions: long association with the festival, membership of several of the social groups, membership of one of the "Guild" families—and a Cleveland Medal or two, or three, or four, can only enhance an individual's status in the proceedings.

National Identity

Geoffrey Christian, nephew of the late and famous (at least in terms of festival folklore) Miss Emily Christian, former choral conductor and official accompanist, is, along with his wife Elaine, a keen member of the festival community both as an audience member and competitor. He considers the festival to be "Our own Manx festival. I know that there are other groups on the Island…but I see the Guild as being our Manx National Festival and we need to support it."[9] The need to "support" the festival stems from ethnic motivation: it provides a common tradition and the place of the festival as a "national festival" must be maintained. Triple Medallist Andrew Williamson agrees with the placing of ethnic value on the festival: "It has been going since 1892. Everyone born on the Island since then has grown up with it and always known it. The Celtic Nations have always enjoyed their music making."[10] Here the insinuation is that the festival is part of the Manx culture due to its stable presence in the life of those on the Isle of Man. In this case the festival becomes not only part of

Manx culture but is seen as an extension of the "Celtic" connections that the Isle of Man and the Manx people are always keen to promote.

Quadruple Cleveland Medallist, Barbara Gale, is one of the festival's keenest supporters, being a competitor, steward and member of the committee. She states that,

> The "Guild" is one of "the" weeks to Manx people. Our new residents attend it if their children are involved but many Manx people attend because it is the thing you do! They'd never not attend….This is a truly Manx occasion, the Guild is the biggest musical event of the year.[11]

Again, the festival is perceived as being a "Manx" event, even though on the surface there is very little Manx about it other than the fact it takes place on the Isle of Man. The festival has become nationalised through those involved with it who are certainly keen to state the connection of the festival to the idea of what it means to be "Manx." It is viewed as something that is still for the Manx people in an island that has seen many modern day invasions from the tourists of the early twentieth century, to the late twentieth-century finance industry. The existence of the festival for over one hundred years provides a stable tradition that has been adopted as being culturally significant. Futhermore, those involved in the festival never refer to it as the "Manx Music Festival" but always by its colloquial name of the "Guild" which again demonstrates the appropriation of this competitive music festival into something that has a special, almost exclusive, significance. The implicit meaning of the word "Guild" will only be understood by those who are part of the insular culture, whereas the alternative "competitive music festival" would be understood by almost all speaking the English language. "Guild" differentiates the festival; for those involved it contributes to its uniqueness as well as the role it plays in the formation of national culture.

The status of the festival as part of the Manx nation was consolidated in 1907 when perhaps the most overt culturally significant event of the festival's history took

place. This was the appearance of the Manx National Anthem. Written by W. H. Gill, compiler of *Manx National Songs*, the anthem was to be sung in English at the close of every festival session.[12] Using an adaptation of a traditional tune that had, for the Manx, held political significance for centuries, Gill crafted an anthem that combined the old with the new, the Manx air with the English words. It is not recorded anywhere that Gill had intended to write something that would stir up nationalistic fervour, but the singing of a new national anthem by people from all parts and all classes of the island can only have had a powerful effect in establishing the festival as a place to re-install, or in some cases install, a sense of Manxness and a sense of unity between the sometimes uneasy camps of the native Manx and the "comeovers" who had chosen to make the Isle of Man their home. Today the singing of the national anthem is still an important part of the everyday life of the festival. To the society of the Manx Music Festival this is seen to be one of the prime elements in affirming the "Manxness" of the event.

Dr Fenella Bazin, director of the Centre for Manx Studies and former official accompanist at the festival, encapsulates the feeling that this ritual inspires when she says,

> [It] is one of the great life experiences on the Isle of Man. I always seemed to find myself on the end of the row on Cleveland night and I was the one who had to sit at the end of the row when they announced the results and I was the one who had to go and play the piano for the National Anthem. Now the sound of the people in the Villa singing the National Anthem, our National Anthem, not the British one, it's the most amazing sound, it's quite extraordinary. People singing four parts and improvising in the four parts as well, it's the most thrilling thing that you can actually do.[13]

Individual Identity Formation

The festival is not only used as a construct of ethnic allegiance and national identity, however, but also provides a tool for the promotion of family and individual identity.

The small population of the Isle of Man means that many families are related, either by blood or by marriage. The members of the society of the Manx Music Festival in the year 2000 are often the fifth or six generation of the family to participate in the festival. Often several generations of families are seen at the same festival and the festival has created a certain number of "Guild families," the members of which are expected to be successful and thus continue the family tradition. Marilyn Cannell, current official accompanist, provides one illustration of this:

> We used to go out as a family group, I think we had a name…yes, we were the "Country Singers," the various branches of the family. My Mother was a contralto, my Auntie Ena Gelling was a mezzo soprano, she's won the Cleveland medal three times, her son Philip has won it once and the other sister is Mrs Ruby Crowe and her son Graham has won the medal three times.[14]

Marilyn Cannell's immediate family are also connected with the festival, her two daughters, Ruth and Eleanor, having both won one of the festival scholarships for being considered the best all round performer of music, for those aged eighteen and under. The Curphey family provides a further example of a festival "dynasty" with father and daughter both winning the medal, William Curphey in 1975 and 1978, and Margaret Curphey, who was to have a prolific professional career, winning in 1960. Susie Curphey was the successful conductor of the Glenfaba Choir, a role that her daughter Muriel has emulated by leading the same choir to success in two classes at the 2000 festival. The Curphey family is, incidentally, related by marriage to the Crowe/Gelling family of which Marilyn Cannell is a member.[15] Family connections are present throughout as Fenella Bazin comments:

> It's very interesting, it's just like a big family party, that's what is so much fun and people are either related by marriage, or blood relatives, or third cousins twice removed or whatever, but it's a great family atmosphere.[16]

The tradition associated with the festival means that a large body of its community has known each other since childhood; their parents have known each other and their children know each other and all are interested in music and the arts. This leads to further fostering of the festival society, the social gathering together of like-minded people for one particular week of the year. Marilyn Cannell defines the experience: "The Guild is a social thing, you meet people and you sit and chat. You meet up with people who you haven't seen all year and you go and have coffee and it's nice…"[17] Charles Guard, a professional broadcaster and musician, has similar thoughts about the festival as he compares it with other competitive festivals away from the Isle of Man:

> I am much more interested in the Manx festival than I am, say, in the Blackpool Music Festival, simply because I know everyone here, and it's the personal knowledge, the "skeet"[18] about who's singing, who's in and who's out that makes it more interesting.[19]

The festival has provided an ideal platform for the building of a societal group who have similar interests and motivations and have succeeded in extracting socio-cultural meaning and significance from a competitive music festival.

Outside Influence

Despite the insular nature of the event, the festival society is not a "closed" one. Any one can take part, even those from outside the Isle of Man. The question that needs to be asked is how these non-Manx are received into such an insular event, especially one upon which such a large amount of "Manx pride" is placed. The answer is usually very well, particularly if they become keen supporters of the festival. Karen Elliott provides the best example of this: having moved to the Isle of Man from England in 1987, she is now one of the most successful competitors at the festival and a popular,

respected figure both with fellow competitors and audience members alike. The reason for her acceptance seems to lie in her own acceptance of the constructs found within the festival:

> I do think the festival is part of the Manx way of life. So many families on the Island are connected to and with the festival. It's a superb week of music making. It forges friendships and everyone helps everyone…I am not Manx and that may change my perception, perhaps I'm not as blinkered as some or so steeped in the tradition that I just keep my head down and keep going.[20]

Karen Elliott realises that the existence of, and the importance placed upon, ideals of family and tradition found within the festival, and whilst these do not personally affect her, she does not openly challenge them. Therefore, to the festival community she is seen to be embracing the traditions. She also contributes to the continuance of the festival by entering her own singing pupils in the competition. She has also been such a successful presence at the festival for over ten years now that many people have probably chosen to forget that she ever came from anywhere other than the Isle of Man and thus is embraced as being "Manx" even if only by adoption. Other people are not so lucky with their acceptance into the festival community. Fenella Bazin recalls possible reasons for acceptance and non-acceptance:

> I've played for people who come from across and it depends on the person, it depends how they relate to the other people who are involved in it. If they come in, and I can think of several people, there's a chap from Jersey and he was so much a part of it, he made great friends with people, he had no Manx connections at all and he was regarded as one of them. But I've also seen people who sort of swan in and say "of course, we've come from across" and they expect to sweep the board. They don't usually, which is always nice. But it really depends on the attitude of the individual.[21]

As long as visitors are prepared to abide by the unspoken rules of the festival then they are made welcome. The main rules involve a respect for the convention of the

festival, as part of both the heritage of the Isle of Man and the family traditions held within it. Those who are unconnected and treat the festival as part of a long circuit may find themselves lacking in the support of the other competitors and the audience. The need for this type of consideration is usually, however, very small: a glance at the 2000 festival programme shows that of the total number of competitors, numbering towards two thousand, only four were from outside the Isle of Man.[22] The insularity that has led to the festival becoming a vehicle for the construction of socio-cultural meaning looks set to continue.

There is one "outside" presence that is impossible to ignore and that is Cleveland, Ohio. The Cleveland Medal, first donated in 1923, has become the top award at the Manx Music Festival, but the question that needs to be asked is whether the festival has any meaning to the people of Cleveland, Ohio. The answer can be found in the thoughts of Mona Haldeman, year 2000 President of the Cleveland Manx Society:

> I don't know why the decision was made to present the medal. All I know is that it was started in 1923, and was meant to show the interest of the Cleveland Manx in the Isle of Man…The first medals were gold, but now they are merely gold plated. A mold was made, and until a few years ago, all medals were made using that mold, even though it had been cracked somewhere along the line. It was finally decided that it could no longer be used, so a new mold, a rubber mold, was made and enough medals were cast to last until 2023. After that time, who knows? While the Cleveland Manx Society is the oldest in North America, we are dwindling fast, and when the present members expire, there may not be enough younger ones to carry on. We are very proud of our contribution and love to have the medallists come and sing for us.[23]

For the Cleveland Manx Society, the opportunity of giving the medal has provided a link for the Cleveland Manx with their "homeland" for over one hundred years. As for those within the festival, the Cleveland Manx are provided with a sense of heritage, contributing to a strengthening of ethnicity and identity. For the Cleveland Manx,

especially in the year 2000 when the majority of native immigrants to Cleveland, Ohio, will have died leaving mainly second, third, fourth and even fifth generation Cleveland Manx, the link to the festival is naturally weakening. For now, however, and indeed for the near future, the fostering of trans-national cultural associations within the festival looks set to remain.

The Festival in the Wider Community of the Isle of Man

Whilst the socio-cultural meanings found within the festival are extremely significant for those involved, it must nevertheless be asked if the festival has any cultural value for those who are not members of the immediate festival society. When one considers that the number of people directly involved with the Manx Music Festival totals no more than four thousand, this leaves the vast majority of the population of seventy thousand with no evident connection. Despite this, there is a wide awareness of the festival outside its immediate circle, as Graham Crowe, three times Cleveland Medallist illustrates:

> [The festival] is an important part of the way of life for a small number of people, but for the vast majority of Isle of Man residents, the festival passes them by. A big percentage, however, has heard of and is aware of the Cleveland Medal.[24]

This indirect connection with the festival and the Cleveland medal is fostered by a number of sources, which include newspapers, the radio and word of mouth, and through other musical events in the Isle of Man, and thus the festival becomes part of a wider "web of significance."

The three local newspapers each have an average weekly circulation of approximately sixteen thousand, and the Manx Music Festival features on the front page of all of these throughout its duration. However, it is not only in the printed press

that knowledge of the festival becomes available to the general public. Manx Radio began transmitting daily reports of the festival in 1965, although Martin Faragher reports that "at that stage not many Manx villages could pick them up."[25] Nowadays, transmission is not problematic and Manx Radio reaches every part of the island. In 2000 the festival had twice daily reports on the radio throughout its duration timetabled at 8.15 am and 6.00 pm. In addition there were two further programmes: the broadcast of Finals' Night highlights and a two-hour nostalgia programme on the afternoon of Finals' Night. These programmes are broadcast at such a time as to give maximum exposure. For example, people may idly have Manx Radio on in their cars on the way to and from work when the festival broadcast is likely to be playing. This sort of exposure enables raised awareness of the festival even if the people listening are not personally involved with it, so, for instance, the listening audience will pick up on the importance given towards "Cleveland Night" and attach their own significance to the event and the winners.

The final way in which the profile of the festival is raised in the eye of the general public is by word of mouth, which is particularly the case in respect of new residents who would not otherwise be aware of the festival's existence. Alison Farrina, resident of the Isle of Man for three years and lately Head of Drama at the Manx Academy for the Performing Arts, describes her first encounter with the festival as follows:

> Well I heard about the Guild the first year I was here from word of mouth and didn't quite know what it was and everyone kept saying, "Oh the Guild…he's in the Guild…the Guild…the Guild… the Guild" and erm, I wasn't quite sure what it was, but I knew it was important because of the reverence that everyone seemed to have for it. And finally I realised it had to do with singing and music and some bits of drama and then I started to get more interested in it.[26]

This type of introduction to the festival is not unusual for new residents, particularly the confusion over the use of the colloquial title "Guild." What can be drawn from Alison Farrina's response is the appearance of meaning drawn from the "reverence everyone seemed to have for it." Alison Farrina was aware of a cultural significance, even if she was not actually sure what that significance was.

The best example of the festival containing cultural significance throughout the Isle of Man is seen in the presence of festival terminology in mainstream society. Graham Crowe stated "a big percentage (of the population) have heard of and are aware of the Cleveland Medal." The media, in reporting other musical events in the Isle of Man, often encourages this awareness. The Cleveland medal becomes a culturally implicit term: it is seen and known as a validation of singing ability to the vast majority of Isle of Man residents even if they do not actually know what the Cleveland Medal, or the Manx Music Festival, actually is. Medallist Andrew Williamson comments,

> Singers and Musicians are likely to say "X is good, therefore he will win the Cleveland Medal." Non-singers and non-musicians often see it the other way around— "X must be good *because* he has won the Medal."[27]

Double medallist Karen Johnson similarly reports,

> I have won two medals and I found that I was asked to perform at certain functions *purely* because of the medal, whether they knew I could sing or not and, of course, the next year someone else would be asked.[28]

The term "Cleveland Medal," like the term "Guild," is culturally implicit only in the Isle of Man and it is impossible to imagine the words "Cleveland Medal" holding any significance for those not connected with the Isle of Man. That the term would only

be understood in the Isle of Man highlights the existence of a specific Manx culture, of which the Festival itself is a key part.

The vast majority of the musical community in the Isle of Man is in agreement over the influence that the festival has had in raising the standards of music-making in the Isle of Man. This may not be as apparent now when there is an excellent peripatetic music education system in the island's schools and many private instrumental teachers to complement it, but it must be remembered that the initial interest in musical education for the masses in the Isle of Man came from Miss M. L. Wood, the festival creator. Without her initial interest in musical education and the creation of the musical competitions, it is safe to say that music making on the Isle of Man would certainly not be at the standard it is today, and would not be nearly as prolific as it actually is. The interest in music making fired by the Manx Music Festival over one hundred years, be it for social, competitive or other reasons, means that the Isle of Man now has a musical heritage of which it can be justifiably proud.

Conclusion

In conclusion then, it can be seen that there are four distinct elements that make the Manx Music Festival "Manx":

- Firstly, the festival began at a time when the local population were undergoing an extreme change in circumstance leading to the obliteration of their traditional practices and the consequent need to reformulate these.
- Secondly, the festival takes place on a small island thus affording a degree of insularity that is not necessarily present in festivals that have a larger area and population base to draw upon.

- Thirdly, the festival provides the setting for a self-contained microcosmic society that has been and still is largely of Manx origin.
- Fourthly, elements of the festival have permeated the wider society of the Isle of Man leading to a number of culturally implicit terms and traditions sprung directly from the existence of the festival, the quintessential example being the national anthem.

The Manx Music Festival is not all things to all men; it does have its opponents, from those who see competition in music as being unhealthy for musical development, to those who think it could be doing more to help the more "traditional" Manx arts.

Indeed, there is great debate among many parties as to what the term "Manx" actually signifies. At a most obvious level the festival is Manx because it takes place in the Isle of Man and the majority of participants are from the Isle of Man. There are, however, a number of interested parties in the Isle of Man who vehemently promote what they see to be a Manx culture that is not to be found in the Manx Music Festival. To the promoters of this particular cause, the Manx Music Festival is seen as anything but "Manx;" it may take place in the Isle of Man but that is the only claim to the loaded term "Manx" that it can make. It does nothing to promote the traditional way of life that way changed forever by the arrival of English dominance in the nineteenth century, with the exception of a few token "Manx" language classes; it is, indeed, part of the system that was responsible for the erosion of Manx culture in the first place. The great debate as to what is and is not "Manx" has been ongoing since before the twentieth century, and is closely associated with ideas of tradition and authenticity. The place of the Manx Music Festival in this debate lies in whether it is justified in claiming its place as being a part of Manx culture.

The promotion of an indigenous culture is obviously very important to any nation; it gives a sense of uniqueness and creates solidarity, and the Isle of Man is certainly no different in its need for this. On the other hand the promulgation of ideas of "tradition" and "authenticity" is always precarious. Many supporters and promoters of the "traditional" see the Manx Music Festival as not being sympathetic to what they perceive as being Manx Culture. Although the Manx Music Festival has, as already mentioned, periodically offered a number of Manx language, music and dance classes, this has never been wholly accepted and supported by the "traditional" community. Manx Nationalist and ardent supporter of traditional Manx culture, Phil Gawne, recognises this but also sees the potential the festival could offer in the promotion of the "traditional" side of culture:

> Festivals such as Yn Chruinnaght are far more important to those people who take part in terms of the development and growth of traditional Manx culture, however, they are, and look set to remain, minority festivals...the Manx music festival does command a far greater audience and public profile (because its been around so much longer) than Yn Chruinnaght and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. For this reason I believe it is essential that traditional Manx cultural classes continue in the festival and that these classes are supported to a far greater extent by traditional singers, dancers and musicians.[29]

The Yn Chruinnaght festival that Phil Gawne is referring to is an annual inter-Celtic festival of music and dance attracting groups from throughout the Celtic world. It was "revived" in 1978 and since then has been embraced by the traditionalists as being truly "Manx." Phil Gawne does see the usefulness of the Manx Music Festival as a tool for the promotion of traditional culture but does not consider it to be part of the traditional culture.

In many ways, though, the Manx Music Festival can be considered to be more representative of "Manx" culture than any of the current music and language

revivalists may give it credit for. Fenella Bazin, who has been greatly involved with both the Manx Music Festival and the more "traditional" culture of the Chruinnaght, summarises the issue when she speaks of the Manx Music Festival in the following way:

> I think it's a lot more Manx than a lot of things people say are Manx events. Mainly because it's got a long tradition, not just since 1892, but this sort of music competition was going on long before that, right since the beginning of the 19th century. If you look in the newspapers you'll see reports for music competitions and festivals and such. And the whole basis of the Guild was really singing. I mean it's changed in the past twenty-five years, there have been a lot more instrumentalists, but singing is still at the core of the festival. Singing was the thing that was going on in the Island. People were enthusiastic about singing in the nineteenth century—it was the main thing that was going on. So I think the whole atmosphere is such an unforced atmosphere. I've been involved in the Chruinnaght right since the beginning of the revival. I used to take part in Chruinnaghts when I was young as well, and Chruinnaghts when I was young were Manx because they were what you did. Of course, the 1978 revival was something done very consciously and people were being very consciously "Manx" and consciously "Celtic" so in a sense that was much more artificially Manx than the Guild is. A lot of people wouldn't agree with that, but that's how I see it.[30]

Perhaps the real question is not what is and what is not Manx, but is more concerned with the definition of "culture" itself. If one agrees with the anthropologist Clifford Geertz that "man is an animal spun in webs of significance that he himself has created," then surely every individual is responsible for determining their own cultural identity.[31] The Manx Music Festival therefore is unquestionably part of Manx culture because there are symbolic "webs of significance" found within it and these symbolic webs are linked to cultural definition. It is only culturally significant, though, to those who choose to spin these webs of significance; therefore, for some, the festival may not hold the same degree of significance that Yn Chruinnaght does. Each culturally aware individual in the Isle of Man will have their own interpretation

of what is or is not part of Manx culture—their own individually formed "webs of significance."

It is impossible, however, to ignore the place the Festival now occupies within the culture of the Isle of Man and the part it has played in shaping Manx culture throughout its 109-year history. Those involved with the festival have used their own power, whether consciously or unconsciously, to impart a socio-cultural meaning that is pertinent to the formation of both national and individual identity. It is this which led to the President of Tynwald using the Manx Music Festival as an example of "the strength of Manx culture as it is today," and the Manx Music Festival will continue to occupy an important role in the culture of the Isle of Man.

Notes

[1] Manx Independent, 4 May 1993.
[2] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 22.
[3] In undertaking this study I was fortunate enough to be able to approach it from the position of the native ethnographer, and although this provided me with some distinct advantages, it left me wondering whether my own close involvement with the Isle of Man and from the age of five, the Manx Music Festival had clouded my judgement in any way. And so, although I have not consciously manipulated the research in any way, I am aware that, being human and being personally involved with my chosen field, there is a possibility that this may have happened despite my best efforts to the contrary. I am mindful that what I am presenting is by no means a definitive account.
[4] The figures peaked at 663, 360 in the year 1913 (reference taken from J. Belchem, ed., *A New History of the Isle of Man, Volume 5: The Modern Period 1830-1999* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).
[5] Although immigration was a feature of island life for centuries, and English was widely spoken throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was during the Victorian period that the effects of Anglicisation were most profoundly felt.
[6] It is interesting to note that Miss Wood herself immigrated to the Isle of Man in the year 1857 at the age of sixteen and that her motivation in forming the musical competitions was itself sprung from the philanthropic drive to improve and educate the local population.
[7] 'High Bailiff' is the name given to the Stipendiary Magistrate of the Isle of Man.
[8] Since the initial research for this paper was undertaken, the Villa Marina has now closed for renovation and will not re-open until the year 2004. In 2002 the festival plans to split itself across two sites in central Douglas. Whether this change in venue will have an effect on the festival remains to be seen.
[9] Author's interview with Geoffrey and Elaine Christian, 17 April 2000.
[10] Response to written questionnaire.
[11] Response to written questionnaire.

[12] Gill, along with his brother Fred and Dr John Clague was a keen collector. Although not resident on the Island, he has a keen supporter of Manx culture and edited *Manx National Songs* to become part of Boosey's *Royal Edition* of songbooks. It contained Manx airs with English words and added four-part harmony.
[13] Author's interview with Fenella Bazin, 20 April 2000.
[14] Author's interview with Marilyn Cannell, 17 April 2000.
[15] Interestingly, I recently interviewed an adjudicator about the work I'm undertaking now. He adjudicated at the Manx Music Festival in the 1970's and when I told him of my connection with the festival he said: "Oh, the Manx festival, that's where they have all those singing families, isn't it?"
[16] Interview with Fenella Bazin.
[17] Interview with Marilyn Cannell.
[18] "Skeet" is the colloquial Manx expression for gossip.
[19] Response to written questionnaire.
[20] Response to written questionnaire.
[21] Interview with Fenella Bazin.
[22] The festival programme prints each competitor's village or town next to their name: it is easy to spot when someone comes from further afield.
[23] Email message received from Mona Haldeman, 13 August 2000.
[24] Response to written questionnaire.
[25] Martin Faragher, *With Heart Soul and Voice – 100 years of the Manx Music Festival* (Burtersett: Leading Edge, 1992), 63.
[26] Author's interview with Alison Farrina, 8 April 2000.
[27] Response to written questionnaire.
[28] Response to written questionnaire.
[29] Email message from Phil Gawne, 29 August 2000.
[30] Interview with Fenella Bazin.
[31] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, 5.