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Irish Historical Studies, xxxviii, no. 151 (May 2013)

Challenges to social order and Irish identity? Youth culture in the sixties

In 1967 Fr Walter Forde, an activist in the field of youth welfare work, noted 'signs of unrest' amongst Irish youths growing up in the sixties.[1] He identified the ways in which they were 'being influenced by English teenage culture':

> First fashions in clothes and hair-styles increasingly follow the English trends. The amount of money spent by them on records, dances and clothes is a new feature in Irish life. Drinking among them too is becoming more common … Second, the recent popularity of beat clubs in Dublin (where all eleven were opened in the last eighteen months) shows their desire to have a recreation of their own ...[2]

Ten years previously, the British magazine *Everybody's Weekly* had expressed similar concerns about the influence of American youth culture on British youths, asking its readers 'Are we turning our children into little Americans?'[3] This unease, like Forde's, reflected the fluid and international nature of youth culture in the years after the Second World War.[4] New genres of film, fashion and music catered exclusively for young people, while developments in communications enabled more of them to experience their youth together. As a spending rather than saving subsection of society, young people appeared particularly well placed to benefit from the economic 'miracles' witnessed in both the United States and a number of industrialised European countries. In contrast, poor economic performance had produced high levels of youth emigration in Ireland which, when combined with low levels of industrialisation and urbanisation, hampered the development of highly visible youth subcultures.[5] However, these factors

[1] For most historians 'the sixties' as a period of social, economic, political and cultural change begins somewhere in the late 1950s and ends in the early 1970s. In this article 'the sixties' represents the period *c*.1956 – *c*.1973. The '1960s' refers to the ten years of that decade. This article focuses on young people in the Republic of Ireland.

[2] Forde was active in youth affairs from the early sixties. He acted as chairman of the Ferns Diocesan Youth Service and as General Secretary of the National Youth Federation. See Walter Forde, 'The aimless rebellion' in *Christus Rex*, xxi, no.1 (1967), pp 45–51, at p. 50.

[3] Dominick Sandbrook, *Never had it so good: a history of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London, 2005), p. 410.

[4] David Fowler has identified the interwar years as critical for the emergence of new forms of youth culture: Fowler, *Youth culture in modern Britain c.1920 – c.1970: from ivory tower to global movement – a new history* (Basingstoke, 2008).

[5] As histories of youth often focus on peer groups in industrialised societies, comparing examples over time and space, Irish examples rarely feature. While social scientists have produced studies that analyse youth as a distinct social category in the Irish context, the topic has been relatively neglected by historians. David Fowler's recent work *Youth culture in modern Britain* is a notable exception. He provides a study of youth culture in Northern Ireland and independent Ireland *c*.1922 to *c*.1939, analysing the role of the

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were relatively less significant in the Republic of Ireland during the sixties. In this period the level of youth emigration fell significantly, while opportunities in non-agricultural employment increased. This led J. J. Lee to describe the generation that came to adulthood in the 1960s as the 'first in more than a century to have a realistic chance of making a decent living in their own country'.[6] Migration to urban areas became a significant phenomenon and these changes made for a much more visible youth population, as well as allowing for the expansion of a market driven youth culture.[7]

Between 1961 and 1971 the population of the Republic of Ireland rose from 2,818,314 to 2,978,248; from the lowest to the highest level recorded since the foundation of the State. The most notable feature of changes in age composition was the considerable increase in the number of young people; the number of those aged fourteen to twenty-four years increased by 91,861 (20 per cent).[8] While population growth ultimately resulted in higher levels of unemployment, as the series of economic programmes initiated by government failed to create more jobs in industry than were lost in agriculture, the picture is slightly more positive when the youth population is isolated. The majority of fourteen to twenty-four year-olds were categorised in the census as 'employees' (wage earners), 'assisting relatives' (those engaged in agriculture working effectively for subsistence) or as 'at school or students'. While there was a significant reduction in the number of 'assisting relatives' (from one in ten in 1961 to one in twenty-five in 1971), the number of those engaged in education rose dramatically (from one in four in 1961 to one in three in 1971). Furthermore, despite the significant rise in the number of young people, almost one in two were described as 'employees' in both 1961 and 1971.[9] While the sole beneficiaries of the expansion of provision of second level education, it appears that young people also benefited disproportionately from the job creation that did occur. The

Y.M.C.A. and the public dance hall, while a second chapter is devoted to the topic of juvenile delinquency in Northern Ireland. Other relevant historical works include those that draw links between traditional youth peer group activities and political organisations, as well as studies of migration and sexuality. Examples include Peter Hart, *The IRA and its enemies: violence and community in Cork, 1916–23* (Oxford, 1998); Enda Delaney, *The Irish in post-war Britain* (Oxford, 2007); Mary E. Daly, *The slow failure: population decline and independent Ireland, 1920–1973* (Madison, WI, 2006); Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland* (London, 2009).

[6] J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 404.

[7] The percentage of the total population living in large urban centres of over 10,000 inhabitants was 36 per cent in 1961 and 40 per cent in 1971: *Census of population of Ireland, 1961,* i: *Population, area and valuation of each District Electoral Division and each larger unit of area* (Dublin, 1963), p.140; *Census of population of Ireland, 1971,* i: *Population of District Electoral Divisions, towns and larger units of area* (Dublin, 1972), p.136.

[8] *Census of population of Ireland, 1961,* ii: *ages and conjugal conditions* (Dublin, 1963); *Census of Population of Ireland, 1971,* ii: *ages and conjugal conditions* (Dublin, 1973).

[9] These proportions are approximate and refer to those aged fourteen to twenty-four years. It should be noted that in 1961 'apprentices and learners' were not included in the category 'employees', while in 1971 they were. This has been accounted for in these calculations. *Census of population of Ireland, 1961,* v: *occupations* (Dublin, 1964); *Census of population of Ireland, 1971,* v: *occupations and industries* (Dublin, 1975).

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beneficial effects of the economic programmes could be seen in cities like Waterford and Galway, where the establishment of industrial estates had led to an increased population.[10] In 1968 the *Irish Times* extolled Waterford as a 'City for the Young', highlighting how increased employment opportunities had stemmed emigration.[11]

Demographic, educational and economic developments combined to allow the emergence of an increasingly visible social group that had 'the leisure and freedom from responsibility to follow interests and inclinations'.[12] These 'interests and inclinations' were reflected in changes in Irish youth culture, which mirrored international trends. Motorcycles and mopeds, an international symbol of youth rebelliousness, as well as the clothes and beauty products associated with international styles and trends, were advertised in new manifestations of the youth press. Youth magazines were often dedicated to musical acts and in Ireland included *Spotlight*, *New Spotlight*, *Musical Gazette* and *Top Ten Weekly*.[13] Internationally, commercial interests and sociologists alike recognised the significance of the teenager as a key economic actor. Teenagers in the sixties represented an older group than they do today and in Britain were frequently identified as unmarried young people aged between fifteen and twenty-five years; ages which represented the school leaving and average marriage ages.[14] In Ireland there was a similar focus on those in their teens and early twenties. The *Evening Herald* ran a regular feature for the 'younger set', which featured record charts and entertainment news, and was aimed at 'tweens', or 'teens 'n' twenties'.[15] Similarly *New Spotlight*, the successor of *Spotlight*, ran an agony aunt column entitled 'Ask Ruth', which begged the question, 'Got a Teen 'n' Twenty Problem?'[16]

While associated with increased levels of affluence and greater leisure time, youth culture was also linked to juvenile delinquency and sexual permissiveness. Youth has long been subject to such dual representation and since the nineteenth century has 'served as a metaphorical device', embodying 'both the aspirations

[10] Tomás Roseingrave, *Manpower in an industrial growth centre: a survey in Waterford* (Dublin, 1969), pp 20–1; Mary Kelly, *Manpower in Galway: summary report* (Dublin, 1970), p. 27.

[11] *Irish Times*, 25 Nov. 1968.

[12] Terence Brown, *Ireland: a social and cultural history, 1922–2002* (London, 2004), p. 264.

[13] These magazines followed Irish and international musical acts. *Spotlight* and *New Spotlight* were manifestations of the same magazine, while *Top Ten Weekly* merged with *New Spotlight* in 1967. *Spotlight* described itself as being 'written by young people for young people'. Referred to as to the 'showband Bible' by Vincent Power, showbands were its chief focus, reflecting both their popularity and the business interests of those involved with the magazine. It had a light-hearted and promotional/commercial rather than a critical tone. First published in Cork in 1963, production moved to Dublin in 1965 and ceased in 1974. *Musical Gazette* (also known as *Dancing News*) was similar in character. It was published in Longford and had a limited circulation. See Vincent Power, *Send 'em home sweatin': the showband story* (Cork, 1990), pp 198, 202–6.

[14] Arthur Marwick, *The sixties: cultural revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford, New York, 1998), p. 58.

[15] *Evening Herald*, 5 Oct. 1966.

[16] *New Spotlight/Top Ten Weekly*, 21–26 June 1967.

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and anxieties of a particular historical time'.[17] This phenomenon is evident in Ireland during the sixties. The position of young people was elevated as their participation in the new national project of economic growth was essential for success.[18] However, young people simultaneously provoked concern as harbingers of cultural change and youth re-emerged as a subject of concern in official studies and in the media. The lord mayor of Dublin's Joint Committee on Vandalism and Juvenile Delinquency (1957) and the government's Inter-Departmental Committee on Crime Prevention and Treatment of Offenders (1962) represented attempts to address delinquency, while the sexual lives of young people were increasingly addressed in newspapers and magazines.[19] While there was a renewed focus on young people as both troubled and troublesome in this period, when troublesome youths were identified they were often, though not always, working class. In the 1950s the Teddy Boy, typified by Edwardian-style clothing, a fondness for rock 'n' roll and a penchant for knife crime, emerged from the British working class and confirmed the existence of a youth subculture that was a danger to wider society.[20] In Ireland the term 'Teddy Boy' was frequently used throughout the sixties to describe troublesome youths.[21]

This article investigates new manifestations of a commercialised youth culture that emerged in Ireland in the sixties, including analysis of the ways in which young people spent their leisure time. Whether it was dancing in the ballroom, watching a live band in a beat club or socialising in a lounge bar, new ways of living one's leisure time had arrived for Irish youths. This way of living had much in common with that of their British and American peers, and while the corrupting quality of foreign imports had long been debated in Ireland, in the sixties a larger youth population, developments in communications and increased commercialism deepened adults' concerns. This article addresses how elements of an international youth culture were adapted in the Irish setting and demonstrates how analysis of the various music 'scenes'[22] to which Irish youths subscribed provides insights into Irish identity and reveals the way in which anxieties about societal change surfaced in debates about young people.

[17] Jon Garland, Keith Gildart, Anna Gough-Yates, Paul Hodkinson, Bill Osgerby, Lucy Robinson, John Street, Pete Webb & Matthew Worley, 'Youth culture, popular music and the end of consensus in post-war Britain' in *Contemporary British History*, xxvi, no. 3 (2012), pp 265–71 at p. 266.

[18] See Carole Holohan 'More than a revival of memories? 1960s youth and the 1916 Rising' in Mary E. Daly and Margaret O'Callaghan (eds), *1916 in 1966: commemorating the Easter Rising* (Dublin, 2007), pp 173-97.

[19] See Paul Ryan, *Asking Angela Macnamara: an intimate history of Irish lives* (Dublin, 2012).

[20] Tony Jefferson, 'Cultural responses of the Teds', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds), *Resistance through rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), pp 81–6.

[21] In the aftermath of the so-called riots that accompanied the Beatles' concerts in Dublin in 1963, a Garda spokesman described how 'force was used only to restrain people from breaking cordons, and every consideration was given to girls and youths who obviously were not of the "teddy-boy" type': Colm Keane, *The Beatles Irish concerts* (Bray, 2008), p. 127.

[22] The term 'scene' was commonly used by the media to describe different youth subcultures and referred not just to the places where young people socialised but also to associated tastes in music and fashion.

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The protection of a distinctly Irish culture was a difficult and long-fought battle. Desmond Bell identifies how guardians of Gaelic culture and Catholic values long claimed that modern and commercial youth culture had no indigenous roots within Ireland, while Clair Wills argues that 'in the absence of indigenous Irish versions of progress, becoming modern appeared dangerously close to becoming foreign'.[23] In the 1930s the 'modern imports of jazz and swing' created a 'fever of dancing' amongst Irish youths, while in the 1940s the enthusiasm of Ireland's youth for the cinema led one cleric to declare that 'We cannot be sons of the Gael and citizens of Hollywood at the same time'.[24] Even the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.), whose promotion of Gaelic sports was supposedly matched by a promotion of Gaelic culture, fell foul of its own rule against foreign dances and by the 1950s was being criticised for allowing members 'to run foreign dances up and down the country'.[25] At the association's Annual Congress in 1965, one delegate revealed both the popularity and commercial necessity of such dances by asserting that 'small clubs would go out of existence if the Rule [against foreign dances] were adhered to'.[26]

The commercial power of the dance, long an intrinsic feature of Irish urban and rural life, expanded rapidly in the late 1950s with the emergence of the youth-driven music industry and its focus on rock 'n' roll. This genre of music transformed youth culture internationally as the development of the transistor radio, a new genre of teenage films and the arrival of television guaranteed its dissemination.

The advent of personal radios and portable record players enabled young people to exercise choice as never before, and this was accompanied by the emergence of commercial radio stations such as Radio Luxembourg and pirate stations like Radio Caroline.[27] The popularity of these radio stations in Ireland, indicated in polling carried out by *New Spotlight*,[28] reflected the limited amount of programming catering for young people's tastes on the national broadcaster, Radió Éireann, although a Top Ten chart of popular music was introduced in 1962.[29]

Rock 'n' roll music was perceived not just as a threat to national cultures, but to the morals and safety of the young people who enjoyed it. The sexual themes deemed inherent in the lyrics and less formal dances that accompanied it generated concern, as did disturbances at screenings of teenage films like *Rock*

[23] Desmond Bell, *Acts of union: youth culture and sectarianism in Northern Ireland* (London, 1990), p. 30; Clair Wills, *That neutral island: a cultural history of Ireland during the Second World War* (London, 2007), p. 30.

[24] Wills, *That neutral island*, pp 30–1; Richard S. Devane, *Challenge from youth* (Dublin, 1942) cited in Bell, *Acts of union*, p. 30.

[25] This criticism came from the secretary of the executive committee of Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann: *Irish Independent*, 10 June 1957.

[26] Ard Chomhairle minute book, 18 Apr. 1965 (G.A.A. Archive, Dublin, GAA/CC/01).

[27] Marwick, *The sixties*, p. 48; John Venmore-Rowland, *Radio Caroline: the story of the first British off-shore radio station* (Lavenham, 1967), p. 18.

[28] *New Spotlight*, Jan. 1967, pp 6-8.

[29] *RTV Guide*, 28 Sept. 1962.

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around the clock (1956).[30] While Daragh O'Halloran asserts that jiving, the style of dancing associated with rock 'n' roll, was initially banned in some ballrooms, rock 'n' roll would penetrate Irish dances by the end of the 1950s.[31] However, the form it took was not one associated with deviance or subversion and was relatively well accepted by the establishment. In the sixties showbands performed rock 'n' roll hits to Irish audiences and the showband scene emerged as a transitory cultural phenomenon. While rock 'n' roll groups had emerged in Dublin's working class suburbs, playing parish halls in the late 1950s, they were not 'as bankable a proposition as the showbands' for the owners of larger venues and it was showbands that created an Irish music industry.[32]

Showbands performed cover versions of songs by American and British artists, along with Irish songs. Particularly popular amongst rural audiences, they gave many Irish youths the opportunity to hear their favourite songs performed live and to dance to them. An all-island phenomenon, showbands usually had up to eight members and replaced larger orchestras that had traditionally provided music for dancers in ballrooms. Given that they covered chiefly British and American artists, showbands represented an Irish adaptation of British and American youth culture. However, they also borrowed from older traditions, playing country and western, folk and traditional Irish songs, and often added elements of comedy and variety to their performances. Their success was reflected in the building of new ballrooms to accommodate them, the emergence of a supportive youth press and the development of a complementary television programme on Telefís Éireann, *The Showband Show*.

Dickie Rock, later the lead singer with the Miami Showband, began his music career in a rock 'n' roll band, The Melochords, and had initially found the showband scene repugnant:

> Some of the bands would dress up in costumes and impersonate the big stars of the day, such as Elvis, and there were sometimes even comedy routines between the songs … To me, the showbands seemed a bit frivolous and gimmicky, with the fancy costumes and on-stage theatrics. Some showband performances were more like something you'd see at a variety show...[33]

But the show element of a showband was integral to many bands' success. They represented an adaptation of the rock 'n' roll genre which was readily accepted by many Irish youths, particularly, though not solely, those in rural areas where showbands survived longest. While showbands could be described as being specific to Ireland, other countries experienced similar phenomena. Dominick Sandbrook identifies how in the late 1950s British pop stars like Cliff Richard neatly bridged the gap between American rock 'n' roll and the surviving British traditions of variety and show business.[34] Similarly, while Tommy Steele was Britain's first 'home grown' rock 'n' roll star, his success was built on his musical versatility, showmanship and an assertion of traditional values, such as 'his love of his native community and his deep regard for his close-knit

[30] There were disturbances at screenings in both Dublin and Drogheda: *Irish Times*, 1 Sept.,16 Nov., 1956.

[31] Daragh O'Halloran, *Green beat: the forgotten era of Irish Rock* (Belfast, 2006), p. 16.

[32] Dickie Rock, *Always me* (Dublin, 2007), p. 28.

[33] Ibid., pp 36–7.

[34] Sandbrook, *Never had it so good*, p. 447.

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family'.[35] Gillian Mitchell argues that it was this combination that secured his success, as Steele quelled fears about the inherent immorality of teenage culture. 'The blending of traditional and novel musical styles, the foreign and the familiar' were integral to the success of acts like Steele and Richard.[36]

In the same way the clean-cut image of Irish showbands sat comfortably with the other forces of Irish social life. *The one nighters* (1963), a film which represented a day in the life of Ireland's most popular showband, portrayed the members of the Royal Showband as humble and hardworking young men who missed their families whilst on the road and were inclined to have a pint of milk after a show. The Royal's success had led to British and American tours, but the band wanted to live the lives they 'were used to' in Ireland, 'ordinary lives'.[37] Band members were shown going home to their families each night and were '"captured" discussing the importance of family life over a friendly card game on their tour bus'.[38] *Spotlight* magazine was similarly infused with domestic values and Vincent Power argues that it 'set the right moral tone at a time when no self-respecting suitor ever left home on Sunday night without his Pioneer pin', a reference to the large numbers who were members of the Pioneer Total Abstinence Association and the fact that commercial dance halls did not have a licence to sell alcohol.[39]

For much of the sixties showbands were viewed by many as a source of national pride as despite their imitative character, they represented a national phenomenon – Irish youths, predominantly young men, provided music for Irish dancers. However, their inherent Irishness and their adaptation of the international youth culture in a way that did not transgress traditional Irish mores, was not all that had made them successful. As Irish identity evolved throughout the sixties, their success also rested on the fact that they *were* playing contemporary music which had foreign and urban roots. Musicologist Gerry Smyth describes how the Royal Showband represented a new form of Irishness that was internationalist and market-oriented and therefore a 'cultural counterpart' of the government's economic policies.[40] Showbands represented a successful industry at a time when industrial growth was increasingly identified as the solution to Ireland's economic and emigration problems. In 1963 J. B. Meehan, a journalist with *Spotlight*, described how:

> Thousands of £s cascade into the dance hall and dance band coffers and into the outstretched palm of the Income Tax collector, helping in a big way to keep this green isle of ours off the financial rocks, giving employment to hundreds, [and] stemming emigration ...[41]

[35] Gillian A. M. Mitchell, 'A very "British" introduction to rock 'n' roll: Tommy Steele and the advent of rock 'n' roll music in Britain, 1956–1960' in *Contemporary British History*, xxv, no. 2 (June 2011), pp 205–25 at pp 205–7.

[36] Ibid., p. 208.

[37] *The one nighters* (1963).

[38] O'Brien describes how *The one nighters* 'pre-empted Richard Lester's *A hard day's night* (1964) in its depiction of its subjects as a group of happy-go lucky "kids" with clearly defined semi-comic personae': Harvey O'Brien, *The real Ireland: the evolution of Ireland in documentary film* (Manchester, 2004), p. 153.

[39] Power, *Send 'em home sweatin'*, p. 200.

[40] Gerry Smyth, *Noisy island: a short history of Irish popular music* (Cork, 2005), p. 14.

[41] *Spotlight*, July 1963, p. 4.

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Four years later *New Spotlight* similarly noted the economic impact of the showband scene:

> There is a lot of employment in the dancing industry. Builders have made money, ballroom staffs are earning good wages and the offshoots of the business – record pressing plants, printers, music publishing concerns, recording studios, record shops, amplification equipment firms, etc. – should be safeguarded. Showbusiness should be an attractive career for the nation's youth.[42]

In the sixties it was an attractive career and *The one nighters* showed how many members of the Royal Showband had left white collar employment to play music. However, just as the comparatively high levels of economic growth witnessed in the early years of the 1960s didn't last until the decade's end, many showbands faced a similar demise. This was in large part due to the growing value dancers attached to original and well produced music over live performances. In the early years of the sixties performing covers was not problematic, even for international stars, as the performance or interpretation was more highly valued. Dancing was also particularly important for Irish youths and early issues of *Spotlight* featured 'Dancing Time', step-by-step instructions to new dances.[43] Dickie Rock describes showbands as 'dance bands' and argues that 'it would have been impossible to play over two hours of original music and hold the interest of the audience'.[44] However, despite the popularity of dancing in the early sixties, original music produced on high quality records ultimately became central to success, which was measured in the record charts. The charts represented the individual musical tastes of young people, whereas the ballroom dance, a communal and community activity, lessened in importance. Belief in the unique talent and longevity of showbands blinded those involved to the limitations of the scene, as musicians and managers refused to accept that producing an original record was more important than putting on a good show. The fact that showbands could copy any song, incorrectly suggested that they would never fall victim to a change in teenage tastes as they were inherently adaptable to anything new.[45] However by the end of the sixties the dancehall was becoming a less significant space, and pubs and clubs provided alternative places for youths to socialise.

Both the 'beat' or 'group' scene and the folk scene, with their origins in Britain and the United States, provided significant competition for Irish showbands. The beat scene provided an alternative style of music to showbands and was, as Smyth describes, 'aesthetically opposed to the values upon which the showband scene had thrived … whereas the latter was organised as a business … the former had, from its inception, artistic – specifically, romantic – aspirations'.[46] The Beatles had signalled a rebirth of rock 'n' roll and their popularity produced numerous beat groups around the world. An Irish beat scene developed which represented an alternative to what O'Halloran describes as 'the highly visible … showband mainstream championed by most sections of the national media'.[47] This scene first emerged in the suburbs where local bands were given

[42] *New Spotlight Weekly*, 19 – 26 July 1967.
[43] *Spotlight*, 6 June 1963.
[44] Rock, *Always me*, p. 44.
[45] Power, *Send 'em home sweatin'*, pp 211–12.
[46] Smyth, *Noisy island*, p. 16.
[47] O'Halloran, *Green beat*, pp 18–19.

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opportunities to play parish halls and tennis and rugby clubs, but it soon generated new spaces for young people to socialise in the form of beat clubs.[48] While many Irish beat bands performed similar music to showbands, imitating international acts, they lacked the variety element of a showband performance and their choice of songs reflected a different value criteria.[49] However, there was significant range within this scene. Frank Boylan, a member of The Creatures, described how they played 'stuff the kids like', arguing that there was 'no use playing over their heads', thereby demonstrating a similar approach to Irish showbands.[50] Other Irish groups, however, composed original material 'demonstrating an ability and an ambition that the showbands almost without exception, lacked'.[51] Further distinguishing it from the showband scene, the beat scene represented not just a new style of music but a new fashion trend, as mini-skirts for girls and slim-fitted trousers for boys announced the arrival of the Irish mod.[52]

Those involved in the showband scene were quick to defend the domestic industry from possible interlopers. The Beatles received a rather underwhelming response from *Spotlight*, which described them as being distinguished by 'a somewhat off beat hair style, and a zany sense of humour' and as 'hoarsely' chanting 'their own offbeat compositions'.[53] While their originality and the hysterical reaction they provoked from fans generated unease, The Beatles had initially been presented as 'four clean-cut, well groomed Liverpool lads'.[54] Some Irish beat bands followed this model of respectability, but were nevertheless often considered subversive. Frank Boylan described the responses he and his band mates sometimes received as a result of their long hair:

> Seriously a lot of people have the false impression that if you wear your hair long, you are some sort of teddy-boy. Most of the fellows I know are just the same as any young Irish lad; they take an interest in Croke Park, elections, fleadh cheoils and such.[55]

This negative response reflected widespread disapproval of many British groups. Whereas previously an unofficial 'moral standard' had existed for successful popular musicians, by the mid-1960s groups like the Rolling Stones not only refused to conform but their image was based on their non-conformity and their lasciviousness.[56] While there were clean-cut beat groups, bands like the Rolling Stones and The Who represented the other end of the spectrum. B. P. Fallon, a disc jockey and broadcaster, conducted an interview with Pete Townshend for *New Spotlight* in 1966 which, according to Fallon, he had been 'reluctant' to publish due to Townshend's 'frightening outlook'. Townshend's use of drugs had gotten him into trouble with police in England and The Who guitarist informed Fallon that for him to smoke marijuana or take 'pills' was 'like

[48] Ibid.
[49] Smyth, *Noisy island*, p. 27.
[50] *New Spotlight*, July 1966, p. 5.
[51] Smyth, *Noisy island*, p. 28.
[52] Even Steven, a 'mod shop', was located over Club Arthur: *Irish Times*, 19 July 1966.
[53] *Spotlight*, 23 May 1963; *Spotlight*, Dec. 1963, p. 6.
[54] Keane, *The Beatles Irish concerts*, p. 98.
[55] *New Spotlight*, July 1966, p. 5.
[56] Mitchell, 'A very "British" introduction', p. 221.

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having a glass of bitter to the bloke down the road'.[57] To many readers who would have been soft-drink or 'mineral' drinkers this would have not provided much solace, and Fallon's tone probably mirrored the conservatism of his audience and their opposition to the values which underpinned many of the new forms of self-expression which emerged in the sixties.

While the values associated with the beat scene sat somewhat uncomfortably in Irish social life, the folk scene occupied a more ambiguous position given that it also represented cultural continuity. This scene was another threat to the commercial dancehall by the end of decade, given its location in hotels and pubs where alcohol was served. The Irish folk scene had both domestic and international roots. By the 1950s folk music, in particular the ballad, had become an adjunct to left-wing politics in the United States and Britain. Acts like the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Irish emigrants living in New York, became part of an emerging folk scene by reinventing traditional Irish songs. Their success in the United States created in Ireland the so-called 'ballad boom' of the sixties. A proliferation of 'Clancy-style' groups quickly emerged and many traditional musicians gave up playing at the parish hall for employment in lounge bars.[58]

Just as there had been an explosion of showbands and groups, ballad bands similarly developed their own scene. In Dublin, folk acts like the Wolfe Tones and the Dubliners played at hotels and pubs, but also in folk clubs like the Universal Folk Club on Parnell Square in Dublin's city centre, a square which was also the site of beat clubs and dancehalls.[59] Vallely describes the variety within this scene, arguing that

> Whereas the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem were clean cut, if a tad on the boisterous side, the Dubliners were a bearded, hard-drinking, hard-living crew, who quickly became adopted by the Dublin working class and then went on to become favourites among college and Bohemian audiences in Ireland and England.[60]

While the 'ballad boom' popularised a form of traditional Irish music, efforts to preserve traditional music had a long history. Radió Éireann had long promoted the genre and it received a further boost from the formal establishment of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (C.C.É.) in 1951, which aimed at its promotion and preservation. Throughout the sixties, C.C.É.'s main annual event – Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann – would become an increasingly commercial venture, capitalising on the popularity of folk music within youth culture.[61]

In 1967 *New Spotlight* declared itself 'the second biggest selling magazine of any kind published in Ireland', with a monthly distribution of 66,000.[62] Chiefly concerned with covering Irish showbands, it had been forced to accommodate

[57] *New Spotlight*, June 1966, p. 38.

[58] Harry Long, *The Walton's guide to Irish music* (Dublin, 2005), p. 85; Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *O'Brien pocket history of Irish traditional music* (Dublin, 1998), pp 151–2.

[59] John Coughlan, *The swinging sixties* (Dublin, 1990), p. 102; Fintan Vallely (ed.), *The companion to Irish traditional music* (Cork, 2004), pp 19–20; *New Spotlight Weekly*, 27 July – 2 Aug. 1967.

[60] Vallely, *Companion to Irish traditional music*, pp 19–20.

[61] It should be noted that the traditional music scene became divided as some resented the profile afforded commercial forms of the genre.

[62] *New Spotlight*, May 1967, p. 3, Apr. 1967, p. 3.

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other musical tastes in its pages, including beat and folk music. There was significant overlap between these scenes. Musicians often left beat groups to play in showbands and *vice versa*, while the same songs, though interpreted in different ways, could be heard in a dancehall, beat club and pub. Irish youths were part of an international youth culture, but a distinctly Irish element also existed. While the top ten most popular records in Ireland from 1960 to 1962 were those of British and American artists, in 1963 Brendan Bowyer and the Royal Showband broke into the charts for the first time. By 1966 seven of the top ten most popular records were Irish, a mixture of showband and folk acts, illustrating how Irish youth culture mimicked international trends but retained a distinctively Irish element.[63] Whereas British and American music was embraced by Irish youths, the popularity of showbands revealed the cultural conservatism of many who rejected the subversive element of the new music genres. Despite this, Irish youths, more visible than ever before, often provoked unease.

II

While in 1937 high levels of female emigration led a dancehall proprietor in Castletownbere, County Cork to seek to lower the age of admission in order to boost numbers, by 1961 there were 2,000 licensed dance halls dotted around the country, with applications for new licences lodged at a rapid rate.[64] In 1966 there were twelve beat clubs in the Dublin area and throughout the decade the Fleadh Cheoil became a much larger event.[65] The greater presence of young people in Irish society allowed for increased commercial activity as business interests capitalised on youth culture. This activity was highly visible and often created adult anxiety.

Notions of both vulnerability and dangerousness have long characterised debates on youth, leading to a range of adult and even state interventions. In Ireland, agents of the Catholic Church persistently tried to regulate the spaces where young people socialised and pronouncements against the evils of night dances had been common since the 1920s. In the 1930s the state sought to 'regulate recreation' via legislation such as the Public Dance Halls Act (1935).[66] The dance had always represented 'a place to meet a possible mate' and both dances and the cars in which young people travelled were viewed as sites of moral corruption.[67] In the sixties, the proliferation of dancehalls, beat clubs and the entry of women into pubs signified an evolution in the socialising habits of young people, and concerns about the dangers of sociability re-emerged. The problem pages of *New Spotlight* attested to the legitimacy of adult fears, as they dealt with sex and teenage pregnancy, undermining the clean-cut image of the showband scene.[68]

[63] See Eddie Kelly, *The complete guide to Ireland's top ten hits: the definitive listing of Ireland's top ten hits, 1954–1979* (Dublin, 2009).

[64] Wills, *That neutral island*, p. 33; Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, p. 403.

[65] *Dáil Éireann deb.*, ccxxiv, 833-4 (6 Oct. 1966).

[66] Maria Luddy, 'Sex and the single girl in 1920s and 1930s Ireland' in *The Irish Review*, no. 35 (summer, 2007), pp 79–91 at pp 79–83.

[67] *Irish Times*, 14 Jan. 1970.

[68] For examples see *New Spotlight Top Ten Weekly*, 21–26 June 1967; *Spotlight Weekly*, 11 Jan. 1968; *New Spotlight Weekly* 7 Sept. 1968, 30 Mar. 1968.

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While David Fowler reveals that Catholic bishops' criticisms had little effect in preventing public dances in the 1930s,[69] the tradition of closing ballrooms for the forty days of Lent survived in rural areas well into the sixties. While the Royal Showband first toured the United States in 1960 during the Lenten season, the suspension of dances caused economic hardship for smaller bands.[70] However, by the end of the sixties the custom of suspending dancing at Lent appeared under threat. Whereas dances were regularly held in Dublin during Lent, the holding of the first dance during Lent in the village of Glenamaddy, County Galway in 1966, which 560 youths attended, was reported as perhaps representing 'the first shot in a new assault on the traditional observance of Lent in rural Ireland'.[71] The holding of this dance not only signalled changes in the demands of the youth population but indicated the growing power of commercial interests. *Musical Gazette* suggested that the banning of dances at Lent caused many young people 'to become resentful of the clergy'.[72] But it was clear that it was not just young people who were becoming resentful. James O'Donoghue, one of the promoters of the dance in Glenamaddy, asserted that the dance represented a business that gave employment to thousands of people and that this industry could not afford to waste six weeks of the year.[73] The following year the joint Lenten pastoral of the four archbishops of Ireland expressed their hope 'that in places where it was customary to have no dancing during Lent, the custom will continue to be honoured'.[74]

Although the influence of the Catholic Church was somewhat diminished, youth culture was increasingly regulated by the law. The Gardaí were concerned by the sight of young people, particularly females, walking home from dances in the early hours of the morning, often trying to 'thumb lifts' from strangers.[75] When renewing annual dance hall licences in the Dublin District Court in 1966, Justice Cathal O'Flynn resolved that unless dancehall proprietors provided transport home for persons less than eighteen years of age, they would not be allowed into Dublin dancehalls after 11 p.m.[76] But while the law endeavoured to protect young people it also sought to safeguard the public from disturbance. O'Flynn also noted that 'people who have dance halls must take into consideration that citizens are entitled to the quiet enjoyment of their homes and to sleep. You cannot just licence a nuisance'.[77] Concerns about singing pubs, where the folk scene thrived, were also expressed and the assistant state solicitor Thomas MacDonagh asserted that the Gardaí were unanimous that 'the Court make it a stipulation for all such licences that music and singing must stop a quarter of an hour before last drinks were served' and that music and singing not be amplified outside premises.[78] That same month a judge in the Dublin Circuit

[69] Fowler, *Youth culture in modern Britain*, p. 90.

[70] Rebecca S. Miller, 'Irish traditional and popular music in New York city: identity and social change, 1930–1975' in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher (eds), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore & London, 1996), pp 481–507 at p. 495; Rock, *Always me*, p. 35.

[71] *Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1966.

[72] *Musical Gazette*, Mar. 1968.

[73] *Irish Times*, 22 Mar. 1966.

[74] *Irish Press*, 6 Feb. 1967.

[75] *Irish Independent*, 1 Oct. 1966.

[76] *Irish Press*, 1 Oct. 1966.

[77] *Irish Independent*, 1 Oct. 1966.

[78] Ibid.

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Court granted an injunction on the Anchor Club, a beat club in Dún Laoghaire, after locals complained that the noise it created caused cups and saucers to vibrate in their homes.[79]

Despite the fact that only soft drinks and coffee were sold in beat clubs, the beat scene had always been subject to harsher criticism as, unlike the showband scene, it appeared to reject rather than embrace traditional social values. Beat clubs, where disc jockeys played records and groups gave live performances, could be found in Dublin, Limerick, Cork, Waterford, Kilkenny, Carlow and Dundalk.[80] Unlike dancehalls, beat clubs were members' clubs and therefore were not licensed under the Public Dancehalls Act. While this created animosity from dancehall proprietors who resented the fact that beat clubs were not operating under similar restrictions, it also suggested that these spaces were not being effectively monitored. In September 1966 the *Evening Press* reported that legislation to control beat clubs was being considered as 'under existing laws Gardaí are practically powerless in getting into and investigating the activities of any club without the co-operation of the proprietors'. A senior Garda spokesman described how the clubs were undermining the moral fibre of the youth of the city and suburbs, noting that the activities in the 'bad clubs' were beyond description.[81] Debate about moral degradation in the clubs raged in the media in 1966 and even featured on RTÉ's *The Late Late Show*.[82] In November the owner of Club Caroline in Dún Laoghaire was fined for running public dances without a licence. The manager of the band playing, The Chosen Few, was also fined, with a Garda inspector claiming that the band had been 'ejected from two other respectable clubs for playing music that incited sex, rape and indecency'.[83]

The beat club also garnered a reputation as a haven for drug-users. The government's Working Party on Drug Abuse revealed the limited size of the Irish drug scene, reporting that only two people were charged with drugs-related offences in 1965 and one in 1966.[84] Irrespective of this, in October 1966 Gerry L'Estrange T.D. asked the minister for Justice Brian Lenihan

> if his attention had been drawn to a report that it was well known to the Gardaí that boys and girls in their early teens were paying from 2/6*d*. to 5/0*d*. for single reefers (cigarettes tipped with certain drugs) and 5/- a cup for shot coffee.[85]

Lenihan dismissed the claims that drug-taking was rife in the clubs, noting that he had 'no legislative proposals under consideration in relation to clubs of this kind' and adding that he had no responsibility for 'hysterical newspaper reports'.[86] Despite this, the public accusations provoked an organised protest in defence of the clubs. Two Dublin teenagers, sixteen-year-old Regan Hanvey and eighteen-year-old Betty Wall, presented a petition at Leinster House signed by

[79] *Irish Times*, 6 Oct. 1966.

[80] In September 1966 the *Evening Press* reported the opening of a beat club in Limerick, Club A-Go-Go, which had a counterpart in Dublin: *Evening Press*, 3 Sept. 1966; O'Halloran, *Green beat*, pp 89–90, 105.

[81] *Evening Press*, 15 Sept. 1966.

[82] *Evening Press*, 19 Oct. 1966.

[83] *Irish Times*, 15 Sept. 1966.

[84] *Report of working party on drug abuse* (Dublin, 1971), p. 12.

[85] *Dáil Éireann deb*., ccxxiv, 1391-2 (18 Oct. 1966).

[86] Ibid.

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2,500 people, asking for an independent inquiry into the claims that drugs were being taken in the clubs.[87] This was followed by a protest down O'Connell Street on 15 October. An estimated one thousand Dublin teenagers marched to beat music and carried placards with slogans such as 'Don't Crush the Clubs', 'Leave the Kids Alone', and 'We are not Drug Addicts'.[88] This response suggested that for many beat club members drugs were not an integral part of this scene, despite the fact that drugs like L.S.D. and marijuana were increasingly associated with the British acts to which they danced.

While concerns about 'the drug problem' increased towards the end of the 1960s, alcohol consumption was often identified as a larger concern. Alcohol was increasingly glamorized throughout the sixties, the effects of which were notable in the falling number of Pioneers.[89] Despite the respectable image of the showband scene, Dickie Rock described how the introduction of beat groups as support acts for showbands reflected the staggered arrival of the dancers:

> Most of the lads would be down in the local pubs getting some Dutch courage into them before a dance. The girls would know this so they wouldn't bother turning up too early. You'd often be playing for around an hour before the place started to fill up.[90]

Drinking alcohol increasingly became part of Irish youth culture as women entered pubs and commercial interests capitalised on this new clientele. Joe Cleary argues that the ballad scene, in being closely associated with 'lounge bars', venues that catered to women and men, broke down an exclusively male pub culture.[91] In 1967 novelist Ita Daly described the change women brought to the pub scene:

> You could say we have brought civilisation to the whole affair. What is more, we have brought money to it – and that is why the publicans like to woo us. Like it or not, women in pubs are now an established part of the contemporary scene.[92]

Alcohol was identified as a dangerous part of youth culture, particularly when large numbers of young people amassed in relatively small towns for the annual Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann availed of it. While the Fleadh Cheoil provided an opportunity for traditional Irish musicians to play and compete with one another, in the sixties the ballad boom meant that it also became part of youth culture. In 1961 it was estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 people attended the annual event in Swinford, while in 1963 it was estimated that between 70,000 and 100,000 attended the event in Mullingar.[93] The influx of such a large number of young people into a town the size of Mullingar was unprecedented and disturbances and disorder perpetrated by 'beatniks, teddy boys and girls and undesirables from God knows where' were widely reported.[94] The noise of this crowd kept many residents awake all night as young people took over the streets of the town:

[87] *Evening Herald*, 14 Oct., 18 Oct. 1966.
[88] *Sunday Independent*, 16 Oct. 1966.
[89] Diarmaid Ferriter, 'A nation of extremes: archival sources for drink and temperance in twentieth century Ireland' in *Irish Archives*, iv, no. 1 (1997), pp 8–14, at p. 11.
[90] Rock, *Always me*, p. 49; O'Halloran, *Green beat*, p. 17.
[91] Joe Cleary, *Outrageous fortune: capital and culture in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), p. 207.
[92] *Scene: Ireland's new international magazine*, June 1967, p. 9.
[93] *Western People*, 27 May 1961; *Westmeath Examiner*, 15 June 1963.
[94] *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 June 1963.

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Racing through the town arm in arm or in long lines doing "The Congo" and the Twist, most of them armed with bottles and glasses of drink … they continued their mad demonstrations all through the night and well into the morning … Several of these mobs threw themselves in front of motor cars, and lay down on the streets. Many of them tried to overturn cars when the drivers were in them … Gardaí looked helplessly on.[95]

The *Irish Catholic* described similar scenes and condemned youths for their public display of 'lascivious attitudes' and for 'heavy petting and necking openly'.[96]

Middle class students were often the focus of condemnation. This reflected international trends, as anxiety about the activities of working youths in the late fifties and early sixties, was replaced by unease at the 'counter culture' of middle class university students. Newspaper coverage of the fleadh, including letters from local residents, reveals how the various music genres and scenes could be blended by some adults into one troublesome category, while the urban origins of these subcultures were stressed:

As regards the troublemakers it was apparent that the scum of Dublin had gathered … Teddyboys and Beatniks ... filthy boys and deadbeats, filthy from being unwashed and deadbeats from the dissipated, drunk and drugsodden life which their pallid features portrayed so obviously. If these are the University educated then I am more than satisfied with my secondary education … Not in one instance did I hear the upraised voice of countryman or town resident. The Dublin jackeen was to be heard overall.[97]

Alcohol was considered the prime culprit for the 'rowdyism' which marred the Thurles fleadh in 1965. It was reported that windows of business premises were smashed and Liberty Square was left littered with broken glass. While alcohol and the inaction of the Gardaí were blamed in an *Irish Independent* editorial entitled 'The Last Fleadh?', the Garda commissioner described reports of what happened as exaggerated, noting that 'there is some evidence that some pubs became overcrowded and that some people did take bottles onto the street and that bottles were broken'.[98]

In 1963 the *Irish Catholic* suggested 'that the character of the fleadh has subtly changed. Many regard it now as a sort of bohemian outing and thousands come who have no interest at all in Irish music'.[99] The character of the fleadh most certainly had changed as folk music had become part of youth culture. However, it was the combination of this with economic interests that allowed for such a dramatic growth in size and change in tone. C.C.É. was eager not just to promote Irish music but Irish tourism. Sylvester Conway, its national chairman, appealed to young people to behave appropriately, highlighting how the fleadh represented 'something to offer the tourist, something not to be found in any other country'.[100] Business was also keen to maximise profit on the annual event. The *Irish*

[95] Ibid.

[96] This article from the *Irish Catholic* was reprinted in the *Westmeath Examiner*, 29 June 1963.

[97] Terry O'Sullivan described 'the young men who ruined the Thurles Fleadh' in 1965 as having been 'uniformly middle class, all with money to burn': *Evening Press*, 8 June 1965; *Westmeath Examiner*, 22 June 1963.

[98] *Irish Independent*, 7 June, 8 June 1965; *Evening Press*, 8 June 1965.

[99] *Westmeath Examiner*, 29 June 1963.

[100] *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 June 1963.

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Catholic reported how 'commercial pressure produced some strange gimmicks for a fleadh cheoil', noting that 'several pirate address systems blared in opposition to the official system to attract customers', while there were 'concerted efforts to have musicians confine their impromptu performances to licensed premises'. There were also 'numerous cases of overcharging, and attempts to fix high prices collectively'.[101] In 1965 one young festival-goer complained that he had paid '1/- for a bottle of milk', suggesting that the 'people in Thurles must have made a mint of it'.[102] The difficulty he and his friends had in finding music in the town indicates that the event was not designed to cater to such large crowds. While he expected 'lots of music and dancing' he and his friends spent most of the weekend 'at our camp site singing ballads...'.[103] Similarly, in response to the 1963 fleadh, 'two Catholic mothers' asked if 60,000 people were expected in Mullingar, 'what toilet and sleeping accommodation did they provide for them, or for half or even a quarter of this number'.[104]

III

The controversy provoked by beat clubs and the annual Fleadh Cheoil reflected fears that traditional moral values would be undermined by a youth culture that had urban and international roots. The lifestyles of many young people certainly changed, as social networks between them became more prominent, altering the role of parental and church authority. Despite this it appears that values were relatively resilient.[105] While accusations of drug use plagued beat clubs and colourful depictions of the Fleadh Cheoil indicated youthful licentiousness, closer inspection of this condemnation suggests that this applied only to a minority. In the case of beat clubs, the absence of regulation had allowed adults to project on to them their worst fears, while a lack of preparation for such large numbers at the fleadh created the circumstances that provoked outrage. Anxiety about the social, cultural and moral lives of young people reflected broader changes in Irish society. A larger youth population encouraged the development of new spaces for young people to socialise and this meant that business interests played a key role in facilitating youth culture. In this way concerns about the detrimental effects of an increasingly commercial culture intersected with concerns about youth.

The beat scene represented a challenge to Irish identity, whereas the folk scene had a more ambiguous impact. While folk music could epitomise Irishness, the folk scene was urban and leftist in origin and associated with a commercialised form of the genre. The showband scene, with its image of respectability and success as a domestic industry, provoked relatively less controversy. Despite its adaptation of the foreign, this scene's association with traditional social values

[101] *Westmeath Examiner*, 29 June 1963
[102] *Evening Press*, 11 June 1965.
[103] Ibid.
[104] *Westmeath Examiner*, 15 June 1963.
[105] Girvin has argued that Ireland, in the period 1959–89, was characterised by continuity, which was directly related to political and social stability: Brian Girvin, 'Before the Celtic tiger: change without modernisation in Ireland 1959–1989' in *The Economic and Social Review*, xli, no. 3 (autumn, 2010), pp 349–65.

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identified it as Irish and even aroused patriotic defences. One young woman from Limerick made this clear in a letter to the *Evening Press*, voicing her 'disgust at the injustice done by an Irish disc jockey to one of Ireland's finest singers, Dickie Rock':

> I know from my own friends ... who feel as I do that Johnny Mathis' recording of 'Every Step of the Way' should not be played while one of Ireland's leading vocalists has this record on the market; … This kind of thing is certainly not happening in England nor in America for that matter … Also, listening to Radio Luxemburg every night I hear one, perhaps two Irish records being played and quite late at night too, for fear it would interfere with the sales of their own. One must hand it to them anyway, at least they are loyal to their own, be they good or bad.[106]

However, such patriotic loyalties would not survive for long. While some of the more successful showbands would grow with their fans and stay in the entertainment business, finding a new niche for themselves in the emerging cabaret scene in the 1970s, the rest would disappear. This scene had demonstrated how international youth culture could be negotiated and adapted to incorporate traditional values. Its eventual demise, however, demonstrated that adaptation, the blending of the foreign and the familiar, was becoming increasingly unnecessary. British and American music remained popular amongst Irish youths in the 1970s, but a modern music with a distinctively Irish component also materialised. With its origins in both rock and folk, this music indicated that in order to be modern, Irish youth culture no longer had to be imitative.[107]

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[106] *Evening Press*, 10 June 1965.

[107] Cleary argues that original bands, with roots in both folk and rock music, such as Thin Lizzy and the Horslips marked the emergence of a distinctly Irish popular music: Cleary, *Outrageous fortune*, p. 81.

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