

Zeitschrift: Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft = Annales suisses de musicologie = Annuario Svizzero di musicologia
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Musikforschende Gesellschaft
Band: 40 (2023)

Buchbesprechung: Celtic music and dance in Cornwall [Lea Hagmann]
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Book Review

Hagmann, Lea (2022): *Celtic Music and Dance in Cornwall: Cornu-Copia* (= SOAS Studies in Music), London and New York: Routledge.

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DOI: [10.36950/sjm.40.12](https://doi.org/10.36950/sjm.40.12)

Some countries in the north-east of Europe have developed a recognition of their own Celtic identity over the last 150 years. These were territories ruled by “tribes” (23) usually referred to as Celts, described in romanticized terms as “noble savages”, whose fragmented identity and heritage have partly survived until the present day. This identity is expressed mainly through cultural features, such as language, art and music. Cornwall, a small peninsula located in the south-west of England, is one such place and the subject of a new book by ethnomusicologist Lea Hagmann.

The purpose of this book is twofold. It critically assesses narratives of revivalists who connect Cornish music traditions to the “Celtic heritage” while contextualizing them in current artistic practice and production. Hagmann focuses on the Cornish Music and Dance Revival that developed in the late 1970s. Through archival research, linguistic analysis and ethnography, she engages with conceptualizations of Cornish identity, combining academic theorization with first-hand experience. Her examination of language and the involvement of individuals from the music community provide different perspectives that balance between their interpretation of the Revival and her anthropological analysis. A key theme is the examination of the revivalists’ narratives about Cornwall’s cultural distinctiveness, which contribute to debates on Cornish independence.

The book begins by introducing the Cornish region and its history since the Neolithic age, followed by a greater engagement with musical traditions through literature reviews and archival analyses of sources from the Medieval and early modern periods. The second half of the book reflects Hagmann’s fieldwork, undertaken between 2008 and 2018, including participant observations and interviews within the local music community.

Hagmann also compares the Cornish Revival with other Celtic movements of the first half of the 20th century. Influenced by Irish and Scottish models, the *Troyl*-revivalists re-elaborated local material in line with extreme Celtic imaginaries, developing their “authentic” Cornish folk music. Hagmann defines this process as “Celtification”, meaning “conscious attempts to change texts, tonalities and the context of the songs in order to make them appear more ‘Celtic’ than they are” (17).

In contrast with the *Troyl*-revivalists, the new *Nos Lowen*-movement proposed new ideas, opening Celtic music to the World music phenomenon. Hagmann describes the clash between the two movements, expanding on existing scholarship about the terms “Celtic” and “authenticity”. *Troyl*-revivalists’ vision of “Celtic” corresponds to Michael Dietler’s term “Celticism” (an attempt to construct territorially through forms of collective memory and identities), while *Nos Lowen*-revivalists are closer to the concept of “Celticity” (a wider connection to the idea of Celtic identity). These different interpretations of “Celtic” coincide with diverse notions of authenticity. While the *Troyl*-revivalists understand authenticity of music as connected to ancientness and Cornwall’s historical Celtic roots, the *Nos Lowen*-revivalists

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are interested in adapting Cornish traditional music and dance to contemporary sounds, opening them to new influences and innovations (authenticity as *living tradition*). Hagmann explains this dichotomy through the notions of “nominal” versus expressive authenticity.

The author looks in detail at dissemination activities carried out by revivalists, investigating traditional media as well as the internet, while the impact of the Revival within Cornish popular culture is also considered. However, as she explains, the movement also suffers from weaknesses, such as a lack of interest among young generations, which contributes to threaten the revivalists’ aims.

While Hagmann’s book invites future research on music in Cornwall, she could have given more details about the recognition that Cornish traditional music and dance have within the international music market.

This volume offers a valuable source to engage with Cornish music and dance traditions, combining historical analysis and ethnographic research. With specific reference to the Cornish context, this book provides a strong analysis of the relationship between concepts such as identity and authenticity on one side and language, traditional music and dance on the other. Beyond Cornwall, this book provides a model for interrogating cultural identities, revivals, and the role of traditional music in contemporary society.

This monograph makes an important contribution to the investigation of the traditional Cornish music scene, and it will be of particular interest to those primarily engaged with ethnomusicological studies associated with Cornwall and its culture, as well as for people dealing with Celtic studies. It also may be a useful methodological source for music history analysis.