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Special Issue Editors' Preface: Broadcasting Music and Dance

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To mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of 2RN, as the Irish public broadcaster Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) was first named, *Ethnomusicology Ireland* is excited to offer a special issue that reflects on a century's worth of broadcasting music and dance, both in Ireland and across the world. Indeed, we crafted the concept for this special issue with keen awareness of the plethora of broadcast services globally that are also marking centenaries this decade. During the 1920s and 1930s, broadcasting transitioned from hobbyist experimentations with radios to professionalised services delivering regular programming schedules via an increasing range of platforms. The British Broadcasting Corporation, for example, was founded in 1922 (BBC 2022) and joined by the precursor to BBC Northern Ireland, 2BE, in 1924 (BBC 2026). Other organisations soon followed suit: the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation launched as Colombo Radio in 1925 (Ministry of Mass Media 2025); the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) was inaugurated in the United States in 1926 (NBCUniversal 2026); and the South African Broadcasting Corporation consolidated its services in 1936 (SABC n.d.). With awareness of the complex entanglements that have shaped broadcasting, music, and dance over the last century, we cast a wide net, inviting contributions that reflected broadly on themes of history and commemoration, function and sustainability, technologies of sound and space, memory and archives, and reception and audiences. The result is a wide-ranging collection of research that centres music, dance, and theatrical traditions, and that places histories of radio alongside discussions of television and film, as well as more speculative accounts of new forms of broadcasting in the twenty-first century.

Our call to explore broadcasting music and dance was taken up by presenters at the 2026 ICTMD-Ireland Annual Conference, also themed "Broadcasting Music and Dance", and hosted by RTÉ at their Donnybrook Campus in Dublin. In a unique conference format that highlighted intersections in research, broadcasting, music, and dance, scholars and practitioners came together to share their work, explore histories, make music, and discuss twenty-first-century challenges. In addition to research presentations, conference delegates benefited from behind-the-scenes access to broadcast archives and participated as performers and audience members in the production of a special episode of RTÉ Radio 1's long-running Irish traditional music programme *The Rolling Wave*.

Christina Baade's inspiring keynote address (the first article in this special issue) reminded conference delegates of several "bad habits" that crop up in media studies. Drawing on Lisa Gitelman's influential work on media history (2006), Baade cautioned against technodeterminism, understanding broadcast technologies as transparent carriers of content, and treating "the media" as an undifferentiated monolith. There is

value, she stressed, in bringing historical accounts of media into comparative dialogue and closely examining moments when the “protocols” governing media usage are still emergent and norms unnegotiated (Gitelman 2006, 6): the medium, in these moments, is not transparent, nor are its cultural and social affects. A contrastive approach—like that which serendipitously emerges from reading the articles of this special issue in dialogue—between the old and the new, between jurisdictions and populations, normative and emergent applications, enables insight into the undetermined ways in which technologies, sounds and visuals are put to use by people (Baade 2026).

But neither is medium the only story to be told (McLuhan 2014). In their introduction to *Music and the Broadcast Experience*, Baade and Deaville comment that “if media scholars, intent on legitimizing radio and television as objects of study, tended to marginalize music in their analyses, musicologists largely ignored the fact that recording and broadcasting had any effect on music” (2016, 14). Though moves have been made to correct this omission (notable collections of scholarship include Deaville 2011; Rogers 2015; Western 2018; Deaville et al. 2021), Hilmes and Bottomley observe that “radio”, at least, “has been analyzed extensively as an industry, a technology, a political platform, and a sociological phenomenon, yet rarely as an art” (2024, ix). This special issue aims to contribute to this incipient field of work. Indeed, many of the contributors question not just what was broadcast but how medium, production context, and mandate influence artistic practice, content creation, and processes of meaning making. Cumulatively, this diversity resists totalising accounts of broadcasting as industry or institution, and productively explores how the social, cultural, economic, and technical intersect production, practice, artistry and affect across geographies and temporalities.

As the diversity of media, styles, contexts and methodologies represented in this special issue resist easy categorisation, we opted to organise the contributions in a more or less chronological order of subject matter. We begin with Christina Baade’s ICTMD-Ireland 2026 keynote address, titled for publication “Engaging the BBC’s Programmes as Broadcast Logs: Feminist Adventures with Big Data, the Archive, and Vera Lynn”. This article details the process of doing research in the BBC’s Written Archive Centre, working with written “Programme as Broadcast” logs,¹ and the challenges of reconstructing Dame Vera Lynn’s performed catalogue of songs. Through autoethnographic reflections on methodology and the tactility of archival research, Baade draws attention to the systemic biases of the commercial recording industry by tracking distinctions in the types of repertoire that a British songstress performed in different contexts over a career spanning much of the twentieth century. Framed as a feminist intervention in archives and big data—not to mention the gendered narratives of popular music history—Baade directs readers’ attention to the hidden labour that leaves traces in archival data; she also warns of the potential erasures that are risked through datafication, overreliance on GenAI and limited access to brick-and-mortar archives.

Xin Ying Ch’ng and Ham Chew Yung explore “Music Programming, Radio Listenership and Broadcasting Issues in Radio ZHI and the British Malaya Broadcasting Corporation, 1933–1940”. Drawing on reports, broadcast schedules, and listener letters published in colonial British Malaya’s English-language

newspapers, Ch'ng and Ham call attention to the reciprocal relationship between early broadcasters (programme controllers) and audiences that contested colonial control and localised content for ethnically and linguistically diverse audiences (Razlogova 2011). In addition to considering genres and formats, their analysis of broadcast schedules and reception pushes the reader to think about how audiences are interpellated in post/de/colonial contexts of multiculturalism and multilingualism. In such contexts, omnivorism is normalised and hegemonised, with taste cultures revealing more than stratifications by socioeconomic lines (Draisey-Collishaw 2017, 283–84). Their analysis of the reception and localisation of the BBC's Empire Service lays a foundation for comparative analysis of the differentiated ways in which “cultural technologies of sound” mediate space, locality, and identity(s) (Berland 2009, 186; Innes 1972; cf. Vipond 2009; Potter 2012; Johnston and Robertson 2019).

In the first of three articles in this special issue that address broadcasting and broadcast subjects in mid-twentieth-century Ireland, Pádraig Mac Aodhgáin's “To Inform, Educate and Entertain’: The Early Radio Broadcasts of Seán Ó Riada” presents a case study of his work with Radio Éireann from 1953 to 1962. While Ó Riada is often heralded for elevating and legitimising Irish traditional music as a unique expression of national culture (Egan 2019, 195–203; Ó Canainn 2003, 84; Ó Súilleabháin 2004), Mac Aodhgáin's analysis demonstrates the influence of formative experiences in broadcasting on later projects. Indeed, the values that justified investment in public service broadcasting in the first half of the twentieth century (in Ireland and many other national contexts) are positioned as driving forces in Ó Riada's work as a composer and impresario.

Notably, Mac Aodhgáin's case study is situated within a public service broadcasting system and during a period when public service mandates carried considerable political and cultural weight (see Hendy 2013 and Ramsey 2025 for an overview of public service media values and systems, and Gubbins 2024 for a discussion of how RTÉ's public service remit related to Irish folk and traditional music). Mac Aodhgáin is not the only author to address ideas of social good and public benefit in their analysis. Ch'ng and Ham, Stan Erraught and Olaoluwa M. Ayokunmi take up these themes of social value, education, and balanced representation in their analyses of commercial broadcasting systems in, respectively, 1930s British Malaya, 1970s Britain, and twenty-first-century Nigeria, and Adriane Pontecorvo addresses the cultural work of music broadcasts on community radio in Trump-era United States. When read together, these contributions suggest the complex ways in which value systems are conceptualised, deployed, and evaluated across apparently incommensurate broadcast systems, geographies, and eras.

Like Mac Aodhgáin, in “Framing the North Kerry Tradition: Broadcasting Folk Theatre in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries” Susan Motherway explores the biography of a noted mid-twentieth-century Irish cultural innovator, moving beyond memoir to suggest formative compatibilities between Father Pat Ahern's approach to theatrical soundscaping and broadcaster aesthetics. Motherway suggests that training at the Communications Centre in Booterstown and cultivating relationships with producers at the *Radharc* documentary film unit (an independent unit funded by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin to produce content for RTÉ) helped Ahern “articulate a coherent cultural vision” (56). Likewise, coverage by RTÉ offered a nascent *Siamsa Tíre*, the

National Folk Theatre of Ireland, a national stage and legitimated artistic and heritage practices. In the twenty-first century, archived broadcasts dating back to the 1960s provide source material for community-engaged podcasts that extend the mediation of place and heritage, even after the dissolution of Siamsa Tíre's professional performing company in 2024 and in the face of the organisation's ongoing financial precarity.

Stan Erraught offers another case study of an individual's broadcast contributions, presenting insights not only into 1970s Irish music scenes, but also how medium and production context shape content creation, artistic decisions and processes of meaning making. "Peter Carr: Two Films" describes two music documentaries produced, respectively, for broadcast on Britain's BBC Two and Granada Television (an ITV franchise) during the 1970s. Though made for British audiences, the films document Irish musicians and scenes: the showband, Nevada, on tour in the Republic of Ireland, and an American soul group, The Realistics, resident in Belfast, Northern Ireland, during the Troubles. More than simply documenting scenes that are underrepresented in accounts of Ireland's popular music, Erraught's analysis points to characteristics of a film genre that was still in formation. He also highlights how the limitations of working with film, the nature of the 1970s broadcast environment, and political context all shaped filmmaker Peter Carr's distinctive *verité* style.

In "The On-Air Musicologist: Broadcasting Nigerian Art Music on Radio in Contemporary Nigeria", musicologist, composer and educator Olaoluwa Ayokunmi presents an autoethnographic account of his work broadcasting Nigerian Art Music (NAM) in the twenty-first century, including his pivot from terrestrial radio broadcasting to sharing content over social media and internet radio as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Ayokunmi reflects on institutional support for NAM, audience interests and commercial viability, as well as the unequal ways that international and local intellectual property legislation intersect in his broadcasts (cf. Born and Eisenberg 2025). Similar to Ch'ng and Ham and Mac Aodhgáin, Ayokunmi speaks to a multilingual curatorial approach that normalises linguistic and cultural diversity (Hall 1993). When read together, these contributions suggest the importance of language in colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial contexts as counterhegemonic strategies that articulate localised public discourses and epistemologies of knowledge. If there has been a historical tendency by media scholars to neglect the music in broadcasts and of musicologists to neglect the mediation of music (Baade and Deaville 2016, 14), many of the authors in this special issue resist these dispositions. Like Baade, Ch'ng and Ham, Mac Aodhgáin and Erraught, Ayokunmi attends to the musical content of broadcasts as a discursive strand. Detailed accounts of repertoire offer insight into broadcaster assumptions and priorities, reception and the ways that musical choice interpellate audiences and alternative publics.

Adriane Pontecorvo's analysis of programming aired on the midwestern United States community radio station WFHB, in 2016, centres this idea of sounding alternative publics and communities. In "Radio as Resonance Chamber: Sounding Counterhegemonic Aural Imaginaries of Community on US Airwaves", Pontecorvo explores how a live music performance of Ghanaian musician Rocky Dawuni offers programmers and listeners alternative ways of imagining community and belonging. Pontecorvo critiques US mainstream media for its increasing partisanship, "America

first” rhetoric, and splintering audiences into closed-off ideological enclaves (“echo chambers”). She suggests that close ties to the geographically proximate community, the liveness of broadcast content, transgression of geographic boundaries through archives and internet streams and curatorial approach all contribute to more open-ended “resonance chambers” that reimagine community as accessible, multivocal, and creative (95-96).

Pontecorvo’s case study, like the other contributions to this special issue, highlights the ongoing significance of archives for communities, broadcasters and scholars alike. One of the more unusual features of WFHB is its maintenance of a public-facing online archive of webstreams, enabling listeners to return to broadcasts of interest, broadcasters to recontextualise past content in new forms, and scholars to analyse trends over time. Drastic cuts to funding, however, mean this archive is at risk. As Baade points out in her article, publicly accessible broadcast archives are rarities and even the comparatively well-funded BBC Written Archives Centre is under threat in an era where public service mandates are increasingly under fire and easy-to-access digital data is prioritised for its supposed democratisation of knowledge (13). Together, the articles in this special issue speak to the creative ways in which scholars use and build archives, as well as their ongoing importance for understanding what remains an underexplored facet of twentieth-century musical life: the ways in which musicians, broadcasters and audiences shape each other’s practices.

In the final article of this special issue, “Rethinking Operatic Presence through Volumetric Capture: Augmented Reality Opera from Montreal to Belfast”, Zoey Cochran, Clémentine Brochet, and Dafydd Hall Williams point to the future in their comparative case studies of two experiments in producing Augmented Reality (AR) operas. Volumetric capture, they explain, is an approach to filming that enables “the recreation of a three-dimensional image of performers in the real world, viewed through the camera of a smartphone or tablet” (112), accompanied by spatialised audio. In a detailed account of how nascent technologies and production pipelines shape content, form, and experiences of presence and liveness (Auslander 2008), the authors place AR opera in a lineage of interventions dating to the nineteenth century that have brought opera out of elite theatrical spaces and into spectators’ homes. Like Ayokunmi, the authors explore how changing transmission platforms influence audience access and development, but Cochran et al.’s description of the production process also hints at how integration of new technologies opens doors for those historically marginalised from opera worlds to influence the sounds, visualisations and subjects of new works (Chiumbu and Munoriyarwa 2023; Hartley 2000).

We offer sincere thanks to the authors who have shared their research and worked with us to shape this volume. Many of the authors who contributed to this special issue also participated in a roundtable discussion at the 2026 ICTMD-Ireland Annual Conference at RTÉ; their insights helped us to appreciate the many unexpected intersections that appear in their diverse approaches to research on broadcasting music and dance. We also are indebted to the peer reviewers who were generous with their expertise and advice to contributing authors. Finally, realising this special issue would not have been possible without the shared enterprise of the entire *Ethnomusicology Ireland* Editorial Board.

Endnotes

¹ These logs, descriptively termed “Programmes as Broadcast”, list what was included in each broadcast, offering the UK’s Performing Rights Society a means of ensuring royalties are appropriately distributed—and researchers a means of analysing the content and structure of programming. Similar types of logs exist in other national contexts. For example, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation maintains programme logs to monitor content and ensure regulatory and contractual conditions are met (see Draisey-Collishaw 2017). Similarly, logs for RTE’s radio programme content are available for up to the 1990s (Gubbins 2024).

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