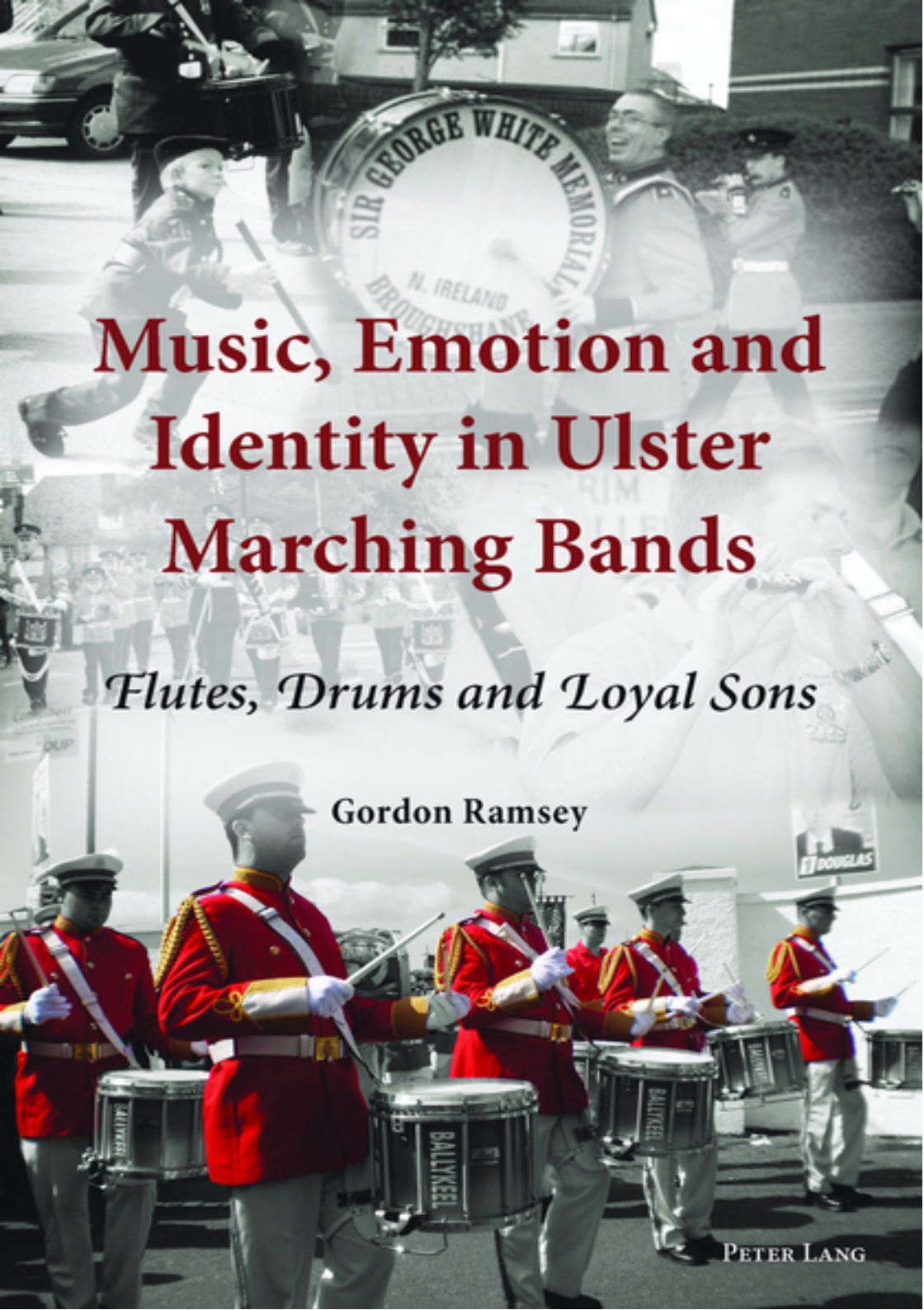

Music, Emotion and Identity in Ulster Marching Bands

Flutes, Drums and Loyal Sons

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CHAPTER 1

Becoming a Bandsman: Contexts, Purposes and Methodologies

It is a truism in western consumerist societies that our music is a part of our identity, and identity in consumerist societies is often seen as a product of 'lifestyle choices'. We define ourselves, in our own eyes and in the eyes of others, by the CDs we buy, the concerts we attend, the styles of clothing, frequently influenced by musical role models, that we adopt. This book does not dispute the reality, or significance of such practices. But it seeks a more profound understanding of identity, and of its relationship with music, by examining a community within a western consumerist society whose deep engagement with musical practice is largely unmediated by the mechanisms of consumerism. This book seeks to explore the nature of identity by understanding how what we are, what we become, and what we conceive ourselves to be, is conditioned by the things we do, the ways we live our lives, and in particular, by the deeply emotional experiences of communal musical participation.

The people who are the subject of this book do indeed make 'lifestyle choices' – choosing to acquire particular skills, connections and ways of being in the world that constitute their self-making projects, and thus constitute them as persons within particular webs of communal relationships. It cannot be said, however, that these are entirely 'free' choices, for they are made within the constraints of systems of class and ethnicity which limit the choices available to any individual, and which, moreover, play a crucial role in forming the tastes and dispositions which inform those choices.

'Identity' is a word with particular resonance in Northern Ireland, where the limitations of 'consumer choice' become immediately apparent, for in Northern Ireland the term is inextricably associated with ethno-religious heritage, which is not chosen, but assigned at birth or before. Yet

the political ethno-religious identities of 'Protestant' or 'loyalist', 'Catholic' or 'nationalist' are not transmitted in the blood – they are reproduced only because people choose to engage in practices which recreate them in each generation. One of the practices which has been central to the recreation of Protestant and loyalist identities in Ulster has been parading to music in marching bands.

'I know you!' a girl in a nightclub exclaimed to my young friend, Sam: 'You're a hardcore loyalist!'

'Why do you say that?' questioned Sam, who has a very limited interest in politics.

'You play in *two* flute-bands!' she responded.

'Oh yes', Sam acknowledged, 'I *am* a hardcore bandsman.'

The conversation above illustrates the virtual impossibility, in Northern Ireland, of maintaining any separation between aesthetic taste, musical participation, and political commitment. Identification as a 'bandsman' carries with it identification as a 'loyalist'. This book will explore the relationships between musical practice, political commitment and identity, and the ways these relationships are shaped by their aesthetic and emotional dimensions, through ethnographic study of three marching flute-bands in County Antrim, Northern Ireland: Ballyclare Victoria Flute-Band (BVFB), Sir George White Memorial Flute-Band, Broughshane[1] (SGWM), and the Ballykeel Loyal Sons of Ulster Flute-Band, Ballymena (BLSOU).

In what follows, I seek to answer two key questions:

1) How are processes of identity formation and transformation related to musical practice?
2) How are these processes mediated by emotion and aesthetics?

I will seek to answer the first question by examining the acquisition of musical competence through processes of enskilment in the context of particular music-making communities. In answering the second, I will focus

1 The name of this County Antrim village close to Ballymena is pronounced 'Br'shane' in the local vernacular.

on the ways that the motivation to acquire and maintain such competences derives from positive emotional experiences, conditioned by aesthetic judgements which are themselves a product of learning within particular communities.

In this chapter, I will contextualise the study musically within wider traditions in Ireland, socially within post-conflict Northern Ireland: in terms of class and ethnicity, and academically within the tradition of participatory, reflexive scholarship which was pioneered within ethnomusicology by Hood and Blacking.

The Historical Context

Marching-bands appeared in Ireland as part of a parading tradition which dates to the late eighteenth century, and was historically focused around the major parades organised by the Orange Order (OO), a 'loyalist'[2] fraternal organisation with a mass membership devoted to upholding the Protestant faith and the political union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and similar parades held by the Ancient Order of Hibernian's (AOH), an equivalent organisation dedicated to upholding the Roman Catholic religion and the political ideology of Irish nationalism.

Marching bands were part of a wider ensemble of popular musical practices which included dance and song, and the tunes played on parade were often the same tunes used in other recreational contexts (as many still are). Hastings (quoted in Vallely 2008a:118) notes that up until the mid-twentieth century, 'the only music in Ireland for punters was the jigs, reels and hornpipes'. The musical practices of the marching band tradition therefore share common roots with the practices now known in Ireland as

2 'Loyalist' is usually understood to mean loyal to the United Kingdom. I will suggest more nuanced understandings.

'traditional music', although this commonality is not always acknowledged or even understood either by band members or 'traditional' musicians.[3]

In this chapter I will detail my research methodologies and the theoretical issues which informed them. I will then examine the ways my background and methodologies position me within the field and the ethical issues deriving from this positioning. Finally I will detail my writing strategy and the format of the book.

Loyalism, Nationalism and the Working Class

'Loyalist' bands came into being in the context of the longstanding ideological conflict between 'loyalism' and 'nationalism', which culminated in a thirty year period of intermittent communal violence, usually dated from the first outbreak of rioting in 1968 until the Belfast Agreement of 1998, known as the 'Troubles'. This period saw the British Army deployed in significant strength against paramilitary groups from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds.[4]

These paramilitary groups, of which the most prominent were the nationalist Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), and the loyalist Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and Ulster Defence Association (UDA), also engaged in violent inter-communal and intra-communal battles with each other. Bombings and assassinations were the primary tactics used by all paramilitary groups, and this, in combination with rioting and security-force action resulted in significant civilian casualties (McKittrick et al 1999:1480–1). In all over 3,600 people died during the thirty years of the Troubles (McKittrick et al 1999:1473–4).

3 Definitions of 'traditional' music will be discussed later.

4 The relationship between the British Army and the various paramilitary groups is controversial and the Army (particularly its intelligence units) has been accused of colluding with groups from both sides.