“Whiskey in the Jar”: History and Transformation of a Classic Irish Song

Masters Thesis

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By

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Abstract

“Whiskey in the Jar” is a traditional Irish song that is performed by musicians from many different musical genres. However, because there are influential recordings of the song performed in different styles, from folk to punk to metal, one begins to wonder what the role of the song’s Irish heritage is and whether or not it retains a sense of Irish identity in different iterations. The current project examines a corpus of 398 recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” by artists from all over the world. By analyzing acoustic markers of Irishness, for example an Irish accent, as well as markers of other musical traditions, this study aims to explore the different ways that the song has been performed and discusses the possible presence of an “Irish feel” on recordings that do not sound overtly Irish.
Dedication

Dedicated to my grandfather, Edward Blake, for instilling in our family a love of Irish music and a pride in our heritage
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Graeme Boone, for showing great and enthusiasm for this project and for offering advice and support throughout the process. I would also like to thank Johanna Devaney and Anna Gawboy for their valuable insight and ideas for future directions and ways to improve. I am very grateful to my talented colleagues, Lindsay Warrenburg and Caitlyn Trevor for the proofreading and helpful editing suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank The Ohio State University for making this project possible.
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Table of Contents

Abstract...........................................................................................................ii
Dedication.........................................................................................................iii
Acknowledgments............................................................................................iv
Vita.....................................................................................................................v
List of Figures...................................................................................................vii
Chapter 1: Introduction......................................................................................1
Chapter 2: Methodology and Background.........................................................17
Chapter 3: Traditional Performances.................................................................31
Chapter 4: Rock Performances........................................................................43
Chapter 5: Results.............................................................................................52
Chapter 6: Unusual Performances......................................................................85
Chapter 7: Conclusion.......................................................................................103
References........................................................................................................107
Discography......................................................................................................119
List of Figures

Figure 1. P.W. Joyce’s transcription of “There’s Whiskey in the Jar” .................. 22
Figure 2. Colm O’Lochlainn’s transcription of “There’s Whiskey in the Jar” ............ 23
Figure 3. James N. Healy’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” ...................... 25
Figure 4. Sam Henry’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” ......................... 26
Figure 5. Helen Hartness Flanders’ transcription of “Lovel, the Robber” .......... 27
Figure 6. Oliver Ditson Co.’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jug” ............... 28
Figure 7. James F. Leisy’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” ................. 29
Figure 8. Alam Lomax et al.’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” .......... 30
Figure 9. Transcription of The Dubliners’ “Whiskey in the Jar” ............... 37
Figure 10. Transcription of The Pogues’ “Whiskey in the Jar” ................. 41
Figure 11. Transcription of Thin Lizzy’s “Whiskey in the Jar” ................. 46
Figure 12. Transcription of guitar riff from Thin Lizzy’s “Whiskey in the Jar” .... 47
Figure 13. Recordings by year ................................................................. 52
Figure 14. Recordings by country............................................................... 53
Figure 15. Lyric groupings....................................................................... 55
Figure 16. Traditional lyrics by year......................................................... 56
Figure 17. Traditional lyrics by country .................................................. 57
Figure 18. Rock lyrics by year ................................................................. 58
Figure 19. Rock lyrics by country .................................................. 58
Figure 20. Folk lyrics by year .......................................................... 60
Figure 21. Folk lyrics by country .................................................... 60
Figure 22. Hybrid lyrics by year ...................................................... 62
Figure 23. Hybrid lyrics by country ................................................ 62
Figure 24. Lyrics over time ............................................................. 63
Figure 25. Traditional accents ....................................................... 64
Figure 26. Traditional singing styles .............................................. 65
Figure 27. Traditional instruments ................................................. 68
Figure 28. Rock accents ............................................................... 70
Figure 29. Rock singing styles ....................................................... 70
Figure 30. Rock instruments ........................................................ 72
Figure 31. Folk accents ............................................................... 73
Figure 32. Folk singing styles ....................................................... 74
Figure 33. Folk instruments ........................................................ 75
Figure 34. Hybrid singing styles .................................................... 76
Figure 35. Hybrid instruments ..................................................... 77
Figure 36. Miscellaneous singing styles ........................................ 78
Figure 37. Miscellaneous instruments ......................................... 79
Figure 38. Instrumental recordings by year .................................... 80
Figure 39. Instrumental recordings by country ................................ 80
Figure 40. Instrumental instruments ............................................ 82
Figure 41. Total instruments ........................................................ 83
Figure 42. Transcription of Ewan MacColl’s “Whiskey in the Jar”..........................85
Figure 43. Transcription of Tom Kines’ “Whiskey in the Jar”.................................86
Figure 44. Transcription of Mark T. Conard’s “Whiskey in the Jar”.........................87
Figure 45. Transcription of Brendan Moriarty’s “Whiskey in the Jar”.................88
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Whiskey in the Jar” is a popular Irish song about a highwayman who is betrayed by the woman he loves. Versions of this song have been found all over Ireland, as well as in several other countries, appearing under different titles and with different lyric and melodic alterations. While the ubiquity, variety, and popularity associated with this song apply to many other Irish folk songs, “Whiskey in the Jar” is unusual because it is performed by bands and musicians from several different musical genres. In fact, the most popular version of the song on iTunes is by Metallica, which is not a band known for singing Irish folk songs.

“Whiskey in the Jar”’s multi-genre appeal can be traced back to Thin Lizzy’s recording of the song, released as a single in 1972.1 While The Dubliners helped to popularize “Whiskey” in 1968, Thin Lizzy’s was the first major performance of it as a rock song instead of a folk song, and it became their breakout hit.2 This recording enabled the song to reach a new audience by appealing to rock fans outside of Ireland, as well as a younger generation within Ireland. Today, performances of the song often engage with multiple influences, including the Irish folk and pop music traditions, the folk punk/rock movement, and rock and heavy metal. The goal of this paper is to explore the different ways that “Whiskey in the Jar” has been performed and to determine if the Irish identity of the song remains relevant to all performances. This

1 Annie Zaleski, “The long and winding road of “Whiskey in the Jar,” Irish music’s most beloved song,” A.V. Club, March 17, 2015,
paper does not seek to provide a systematic analysis of the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic features found on diverse recordings. Instead, by investigating the markers of different lines of musical traditions in performances of “Whiskey in the Jar,” I will discuss how the inclusion of different musical features identifies each recording with specific musical communities.

The remainder of this chapter will review previous corpus studies in the music theory, musicology, and music psychology literature that have investigated multiple performances of a single song. It will also discuss literature pertaining to “covers” of popular songs. In Chapter 2, I will outline the methodology for the current corpus study and provide a brief musical history of “Whiskey in the Jar.” Chapters 3 and 4 situate two of the more prominent lines of influence, recordings of “Whiskey” by The Dubliners and Thin Lizzy, respectively, in their historical context and discuss these performances in depth. The results of the broader corpus study are addressed in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 provides more detailed analysis and discussion of several unusual performances of the song. Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the results of this study in terms different musical communities, evaluating the influences of each of these on contemporary performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

Previous Research

The idea of focusing a project on multiple recordings of a single song is well-anchored in music scholarship. Several papers have examined multiple performances of a single song in the folk, blues, or rock tradition that was transmitted either orally or through recordings. For example, in the final chapter of The Melodic Tradition of Ireland, James R. Cowdery looks at several transcribed performances of the traditional
instrumental tune “Blackbird.”¹ The transcriptions and his discussion of the different performances serve to highlight how much a tune can change through oral tradition. Cowdery also addresses the different ornamentation techniques used by different performers. Since the ability to skillfully and appropriately embellish a melody, making each verse different, is highly prized in traditional Irish music, this discussion could well apply to the ways that different performers play or sing the various verses of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

Though the use of transcriptions serves Cowdery’s point quite well, the present study will use transcription minimally: first to examine the appearance of “Whiskey in the Jar” in various folk music collections and then to illustrate some of the melodic and rhythmic differences between the performances by The Dubliners, Thin Lizzy, and Irish-punk band The Pogues, and finally to look at some versions of the song with unusual melodies. While transcriptions might have provided useful insight into the performances in the corpus study, that undertaking was impractical given the sample size. Since I am predominantly interested in presence or absence of specific performative features, including linguistic accents, musical instruments, lyrical changes, or signature riffs linking the performance to a specific tradition, melodic transcriptions would not necessarily have been useful for the study at hand.

Graeme Boone’s 1997 paper, “Tonal and Expressive Ambiguity in “Dark Star,’”¹ provides analysis and explanation of a Grateful Dead song by breaking it down into its composite features and creating time-flow diagrams to illustrate the progression of the

piece, including its extensive improvisations. In later work, Boone further developed this project by analyzing all of the Grateful Dead’s performances of “Dark Star” and theorizing all of the different ways that the band performed the piece, the commonalities between different performances, and the way the performance evolved over time. More recently, Boone conducted a similar investigation of the Grateful Dead’s “Birdsong,” examining the ways that the combinations of different components of the song changed in performances over time.

Boone’s detailed analyses of “Dark Star” and “Birdsong” are especially useful when one seeks to track changes over time in contexts involving improvised episodes within a stylistic or generic context (however broadly defined), but would not be as informative in the context of the present study, which concerns performances that emphasize the comparatively fixed components of melody, lyrics, and arrangement in and around a well-known song, and in which the improvisatory or otherwise open-ended elements are too varied to produce a coherent narrative. While identifying the various components of different performances of “Whiskey in the Jar” will help to determine which musical traditions are being invoked in each performance, the amount of variety in performances by different artists means that an analysis that uses timestamps and differences between performances would not necessarily produce meaningful results.

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In 2013, Steven Rings examined almost 800 recordings of a song by a single artist over a 45-year period: Bob Dylan’s “It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding).” Rings selected this song because of its date of composition – while Dylan was transitioning from acoustic to electric music – and because its continued performance throughout Dylan’s career allowed it to be performed in many different arrangements. By looking at these performances longitudinally, as well as investigating certain performances individually, Rings sought to determine the “poetics,” or “sonic details engaged analytically,” of “It’s Alright, Ma,” taking the work of Adam Krims as a model. He groups the different performances of the song into seven versions and then discusses each of these.

This approach of clustering performances together based on their similarities and then discussing each cluster more in depth influenced the design of the current project. While Rings’ focus on longitudinal changes between recordings does not apply to this project for the same reasons as Boone’s work, the desire to find a “poetics” of a particular song through many different performances is relevant.

Samuel Marvin takes a more musicological approach to this type of analysis, examining the influence of the music industry, particularly recordings, on performances of “The House of the Rising Sun.” Marvin explains that, prior to the commodification of music, musicians were free “to interpret and develop existing songs to their own individual styles and forms, often freely changing lyrical, rhythmic, and harmonic
However, as music became more commercialized and certain artists became known for performing certain songs, some of that flexibility disappeared. In order for musicians to interpret songs their own way in this new culture, the original performer or the person who owns the rights to the song must give consent and receive compensation.

Marvin’s observations about the initial diversity in performances of “The House of the Rising Sun,” which disappeared as particular versions of the song came to be better known, is directly applicable to a discussion of “Whiskey in the Jar.” Since both The Dubliners’ and Thin Lizzy’s recordings can be seen as definitive or seminal performances in their own distinct ways, the influence of one or both of these may be determined through similarity markers displayed in later versions. Marvin does an excellent job of tracing the history of “The House of the Rising Sun” in relation to the growth of the recording industry. The current project aims to give a similarly evocative history of the song before entering into a discussion of contemporary performance practice.

Finally, Kevin Holm-Hudson discusses the ways that performances of the same song by different artists can have different meanings. Using a semiotic approach, he examines performances of “Superstar” by The Carpenters and Sonic Youth, discussing how the differences in arrangements, performances, and the recordings themselves convey different meanings. This approach is very similar to the one used in the current project in that it investigates interpretations of the same song by different performers, however its scope is much smaller than the project at hand.

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11 Marvin, “‘The House of the Rising Sun,’” 2.
In the field of western art music, similar corpus studies usually focus on a single piece of music for which a score is the primary text. While the presence of a written score does limit the amount of variation between different performances, enough interpretive differences exist to support investigation. The largest number of connected studies like this comes from the Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM). For example, in “Performance analysis and Chopin’s mazurkas,” Nicholas Cook used CHARM’s Chopin mazurka corpus to demonstrate how computational approaches to research can be useful to the field of musicology.¹³ Through the use of Sonic Visualiser software, Cook examines the same points in multiple performances to highlight the expressive choices of each performer.

Using the same corpus, Spiro, Gold, and Rink seek to counter the tendency to ignore individual performance variations in favor of broader similarities.¹⁴ Instead, they focus on patterns of performance in “beat-to-beat relationships as they are performed in terms of their relative timing and, to a lesser extent here, their relative dynamic characteristics.”¹⁵ Using Sonic Visualiser and clustering analysis, the authors were able to illustrate the presence of multiple interpretations of a piece. Both of these studies are relevant to the project at hand because they favor individual interpretive decisions. While this project traces the influence of seminal recordings on later performances, I expect that these influences will often appear with their own unique interpretation. Furthermore, I am interested in investigating interpretations that do not reflect these expected influences.

The performer’s expressive choices are further explored by Leech-Wilkinson.\textsuperscript{16} He explains, “Franz Schubert’s setting of Craigher de Jachelutta’s “Die junge Nonne” offers special opportunities to performers to play a major role in deciding what the piece is about: an unusually wide range of performances is possible without contradicting anything in the score.”\textsuperscript{17} Because the text of Schubert’s song leaves so much open to interpretation, the singer must think carefully about her character so that she can let the character’s emotions inform her performance.

Timmers also examines different performances of Schubert’s songs.\textsuperscript{18} She analyzes eight recordings of each of three songs to determine the relationship between emotion, expression, and structure, ultimately concluding that there are “clear differences in performance characteristics between pieces, performers, and dates of recording.”\textsuperscript{19} Due to the lyric and narrative variations in “Whiskey in the Jar,” a similar interpretive freedom exists when it comes to characterizing the narrator. As we will see in our discussion of the key recordings, the singer has a lot of freedom to interpret the narrator’s emotions about his predicament.

Georgia Volioti takes a slightly different approach in her study, “Playing with tradition.”\textsuperscript{20} Instead of thinking of each recording as an infallible representation of that time period’s performance practice, research must recognize that recordings only capture an individual’s interpretation. To illustrate this, Volioti looks at 28 recordings of Grieg’s “Butterfly” recorded between 1903 and 2007. Using the tempo data from these

\textsuperscript{17} Leech-Wilkinson, “Sound and meaning,” 210.
\textsuperscript{19} Timmers, “Vocal expression in recorded performances,” 250.
\textsuperscript{20} Georgia Volioti, “Playing with tradition: weighing up similarity and the buoyancy of the game,” \textit{Musicae Scientiae} 14, no. 2 (2010), 85-114.
performances, she explains that there is no linear relationship between choice of tempo and date of recording and that these variations may have other explanations instead. This way of thinking about recordings, not as representative of an entire tradition but as individual performances, is important to keep in mind for a song like “Whiskey in the Jar.” While I am using seminal performances to trace the influence of certain traditions, I recognize that these influences may manifest themselves in a myriad of ways depending on the performer’s interpretation. Furthermore, the choice to highlight The Dubliners’ performance does not reflect a desire for the most “traditionally accurate” performance. Rather, this choice was made because of the record’s popularity and distribution.

Corpus studies like the ones listed above are not unique to CHARM. For example, Bruno Repp looks at the differences of expressive timing in performances of Schumann’s “Träumerei.” Using 28 performances by 24 pianists, Repp uses a waveform editing program to measure the inter-onset intervals in each recording and compare them across performances. His analyses conclude that, while there are variations in overall tempo, “there are significant commonalities that apparently reflect constraints on performance, at least those performances that have been deemed suitable for commercial distribution.” While an interesting study and certainly applicable to the more conservative field of western art music, we will see that, if there are constraints on performances of songs like “Whiskey in the Jar” that make them suitable for recordings, they are incredibly loose.

Sloboda and Lehmann examine multiple performances of Chopin’s Prelude op. 28, no. 4 to investigate changes in perceived intensity of emotion. They found that the trajectory of the emotion ratings correspond with the musical structure of the piece and that increased perception of emotion correlates with deviations from expected performance. This supports the idea that the unexpected can trigger an emotional reaction, which is part of the reason that I examine unusual performances of “Whiskey in the Jar” in Chapter 6.

Fabian and Schubert use 34 performances of Variation 7 from the Goldberg Variations to empirically examine the relationship between perceived musical character and what is happening in the piece. The authors wanted to see if the Baroque technique of dotting has an effect on the perceived musical character of the performance. They found that, while different features of performance were shown to influence the perceived character, dotting has a relatively small effect. Though this study did not give the authors the results they had hoped for, it does support the idea that specific features can influence the character of the piece. In the case of “Whiskey in the Jar,” this means that specific features could help to align the piece with one or more musical communities.

Bailes and Barwick apply this type of study to Aboriginal songs in an examination of absolute tempo. They look at 54 field recordings of the song Djanba 14 and 35 of Djanba 12 to see if there is a stability of tempo in these songs, which are part of an oral tradition. The study found little variation in the performed tempo of both

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songs, each of which demonstrates, “stability around a quite different mean tempo” when compared to each other. While it would be relatively fruitless to examine the tempi of all performances of “Whiskey” in relation to each other, tempo does play an important role in determining the influence of different traditions on the performance.

Other studies have asked several performers to play the same excerpt and collected data in real time instead of using recordings. For example, Sloboda asks participants to play two sequences of notes on the piano. The two sequences differed only in the location of the metrical stresses. This study found that performers used different expressive techniques in each excerpt and that there was between-subject agreement on these expressive differences.

Caroline Palmer looked at performer intentionality with regard to expressive timing. She has six performers play a musical excerpt on an electronic keyboard that recorded their expressive decisions. Then, the performances were analyzed for chord asynchronies, rubato patterns, and overlaps. In a second experiment, the performers marked their interpretive decisions on the score. When comparing these markings to the performance data, it was concluded that things like chord asynchronies, rubato patterns, and overlaps “are part of the performer’s intention to perform a piece musically.” The work of Sloboda and Palmer shows that, while some expressive decisions seem to be inherent in the music, others are intentional interpretive decisions made by the performer. Both types of expression will be important in discussing different performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

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26 Bailes & Barwick, “Absolute Tempo in Multiple Performances of Aboriginal Songs,” 483.
The studies discussed above have all focused on the differences in performances of a single song. This brings up the question, how different can a performance be for it to still be acknowledged as the same song? In other words, how can you define what a piece of music is? As Leech-Wilkinson says:

An awful lot can be done differently by different performers and still leave us with something we recognize as a particular ‘work.’ The work, as I’ve already hinted, is the collection of all possible recognisable performances. Beyond that, there is no way of saying what is a particular piece and what is not. A lot can be changed and still leave the same work recognisable. It is impossible to say how much.

It is important for a study on multiple performances of a single song to consider if, at some point, a version is just too different to be considered the same song.

Emilios Cambouropoulos addresses the problematic notion of similarity in the study of music in his paper, “How similar is similar?” He claims that music scholars use the term “similar” too broadly without ever defining it. While recognizing similarities is important for the understanding and discussion of music, Cambouropoulos argues that scholars need to set a similarity threshold so that the term does not lose all meaning in music scholarship. If everything is similar, then the similarities are no longer of interest.

In the study of folk music, there is a concept called a “tune family,” or “a group of melodies showing basic inter-relation by means of constant melodic correspondence, and presumably owing their mutual likeness to descent from a single air that has assumed multiple forms through processes of variation, imitation, and

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31 Emilios Cambouropoulos, “How similar is similar?,” Musicae Scientiae Discussion Forum 4B (2009), 7-24.
assimilation.” However, there does not appear to be a concrete description of how different melodies need to be in order to be considered a tune family as opposed to variations of the same song. In the case of “Whiskey in the Jar,” I do not believe that the different versions of this song constitute a tune family because, while there are some melodic variations, the bulk of the variance is in instrumentation, tempo, style, and the wording of the lyrics. Furthermore, the structure of the lyrics and basic narrative unite the different performances of the song.

Why are musicians interested in performing a traditional song differently? There are several ways that this is addressed in music scholarship. Leech-Wilkinson addresses the role of the performer in classical music and claims that they are not given the credit that they should receive. He explains, “for so many musicologists creativity is not the performer’s job: only the composer is considered to be the creator of music.”

Therefore, scholars often take the score as the definitive piece and discount performances, particularly those in which the performer takes creative liberties. However, Leech-Wilkinson does not believe that this is the way it should be. Instead, he advocates that “once the composer has done his job, has written down the advice to performers – which is perhaps how we should consider notation – and has passed it on, the performer takes over, in effect, as the source of a piece of music.” This shift in thinking about performers would help to validate expressive choices.

Eric Clarke discusses the preoccupation that Western culture has with innovation. He explains, “novelty and uniqueness… are central to that powerful

33 Qtd in Cowdery, *The Melodic Tradition of Ireland*, 84.
34 Leech-Wilkinson, “Ch. 2: Performance,” par. 7.
Romantic notion of creativity which still dominates our culture – creativity portrayed as the mysterious appearance of the radically new, apparently from nowhere.” Clarke, “Creativity in Performance,” 161. Thus, musicians are inclined to make their performance their own in some creative way. Of course, the notion of innovation is difficult to define, as it depends on cultural and historical context and because “the boundaries between the mundane, the creative, and the unacceptably idiosyncratic are constantly shifting.”

While creative performances of a well-known piece of music may not be representative of meaningful innovation in mainstream historical musicology, performing someone else’s song, or covering it, is a common phenomenon in popular music. George Plasketes notes that song covers and tribute albums became very popular in the 1980s, then peaked in the 90s and have remained steadily popular since then. This is what he refers to as the “Re” mode. Despite this desire to revive an existing song, “the process of covering a song is essentially an adaptation, in which much of the value lies in the artists’ interpretation.” In this way, musicians are able to put their own creative stamp on a song. Often, “a familiar tune is easily… more closely connected with the cover artist than the original songwriter. Popularity equals ownership.” This, as I have already mentioned, is the case with “Whiskey in the Jar,” as Metallica’s popular performance is better known than the many versions that preceded it.

Most often, a cover is loosely defined as a performance of a song that someone else recorded first. However, as Gabriel Solis points out, this definition is problematic because it implies that all performances of well-known pieces, including jazz standards

37 Clarke, “Creativity in Performance,” 161.
38 Clarke, “Creativity in Performance,” 164.
and classical symphonies, would fall under the umbrella of covers.\textsuperscript{42} For the purposes of this paper, I would instead like to use Solis’ definition of a cover:

A cover is not simply any new version of an older song for which the original was a recording. Rather, a cover is a particular kind of version: a new recording or performance of an older song that exists in the memories of musicians and audiences because of a strong, previous recorded version, and for which authority and authenticity are understood to be shared by the original performer and the covering performer.\textsuperscript{43}

This definition allows us to distinguish between covers, standards, or songs performed by many different groups in many different ways with no single definitive version, and traditional songs, for which an original performer or recording cannot be identified. It also allows us to separate out classical music from this discussion, since classical music’s primary text is a written score as opposed to a recording. As folksinger Eliza Carthy explains, “traditional music is a blank page. You can never imagine what the person who sang an old song originally sounded like.”\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, folk songs are missing the original recording necessary to Solis’ definition of a cover unless they explicitly reference a previously recorded version of the folk song, for example using the fiddle introduction from The Dubliners’ recording of “Whiskey in the Jar.”\textsuperscript{45}

Solis describes how the process of covering songs allows “individual musicians…” to be connected to denser and denser networks where reference connects them to reference music and musician, but also to others who reference similar music and so on.”\textsuperscript{46} However, even in these dense networks of connections, it is possible to say that one cover is explicitly referencing another. Solis uses the example of Green Day’s cover of “I Fought the Law” to explain that, though it is connected to all previous recordings

\textsuperscript{43} Solis, “I Did It My Way,” 315.
\textsuperscript{44} Eliza Carthy qtd. in Plasketes, “Further Reflections on “The Cover Age,”” 30.
\textsuperscript{46} Solis, “I Did It My Way,” 300.
of the song, it is interpretable as directly covering the performance by The Clash because of the presence of the same unique guitar part in both recordings. By this logic, I would argue that the famous Metallica recording of “Whiskey in the Jar” is a cover because it is explicitly referencing Thin Lizzy’s recorded performance.

This project falls somewhere between the work of the popular music scholars and that of the classical researchers. Like the popular studies, it examines many performances of a single song whose primary text, from the point of view of this study, is a recording. Like the classical projects, however, these performances stem from different artists. I will investigate the relationships between the performances influence of different musical traditions to illustrate how one’s performative choices can prompt identification with a particular musical community. However, I also discuss several particularly creative performances, looking at the ways that these artists make a much-performed song their own.
Chapter 2: Methodology and Background

This project is an exploratory study of a corpus of 398 recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” which traces multiple lines of musical influence: traditional Irish, rock/metal, folk, and hybrid. To create operationalized dimensions with which to measure these influences, an empirical methodology was implemented. First, a playlist of approximately 500 recordings was assembled using the iTunes database, accessed in the fall of 2015, by searching all of the known titles of “Whiskey in the Jar” as well as the work of bands that are known to perform Irish music, taken from a list on the website Irish Punk.47

Next, I compiled a list of significant features based on the study of the first thirty seconds of each song in the corpus. On the basis of the features list, I constructed an analytical model that accounted for musical features, lyrics, and other markers of different musical styles, genres, and traditions. Finally, I listened to each recording in its entirety, coding for the presence or absence of features listed in the model. This data was then analyzed in order to determine the degree of influence of the two key performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.” These results are addressed in Chapter 5. Performances that did not seem to fit the analysis model are analyzed in Chapter 6 (though they are still included in the data from Chapter 5)

History of “Whiskey in the Jar”

Before considering the key performances of “Whiskey in the Jar,” it is appropriate to set them in a context within the broader history of the song. “Whiskey” is a broadside ballad that is thought to have been composed between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Versions of the song have been found in the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England, Australia, Canada, and the United States. Because the song appears in the folk song books of so many countries, there has been some debate as to where it actually originated. However, since all of the print sources that I have found refer to the song as Irish, even those from outside of Ireland, I will consider “Whiskey in the Jar” as an Irish folk song within the confines of this paper.

Though it is best known today by the title “Whiskey in the Jar,” the song has appeared under a variety of titles, including “Whiskey in the Bar,” Kilgary Mountain,” “Bold Lovel,” “The Sporting Hero,” and “McCollister.” There are many variations to the lyrics; so many, in fact, that it is impossible to identify a “definitive” version. Almost all versions of the song, however, contain the same basic plot structure: a highwayman robs a soldier on a mountain and brings the money home to his lover; she betrays him and he gets arrested.

Keeping in mind the social and political environment of Ireland in and after the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one can see why this song may have become popular there and then. Ireland had been a British colony for many centuries and had suffered tremendously under British rule. In Irish Songs of Resistance, Patrick Galvin argues that almost all great Irish songs concern a desire to overthrow the British

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49 Cowdery, The Melodic Tradition of Ireland, 6.
rule and are thus songs of resistance. He also asserts that “Irish nationalism dates from the eighteenth century,” around the time of the Great Rebellion of 1798, and that this nationalism continued to grow in the nineteenth century with the “political movements for Catholic Emancipation (granted in 1829) and for Repeal of the Act of Union (which is still in force today in Northern Ireland).” Since it is often assumed that the soldier robbed in “Whiskey in the Jar” is British, one can see how the repressed Irish people would gravitate towards a hero that undermined their oppressor. However, “Whiskey” would have to be either less than or more than a straight-out song of rebellion; while the song tells of a rebellious outlaw, this unfortunate hero winds up in jail for his crimes and focuses more on his lover’s betrayal than on any British oppressors.

While the lyrics are transmitted in many and extreme variants, these predominate at several common points. The name of the mountain range in which the robbery occurs is thought to have originated as “far famed Kerry Mountains,” but it also appears as “Cork and Kerry Mountains,” “Kilmagenny Mountains,” “Kilgary Mountain,” “Gilgarra Mountain,” “Abercrombie Mountain” (in Australia), and “Mulberry Mountain” (in the U.S. and N. Ireland). The name of the soldier is often Captain Farrell or Colonel Pepper, though there are other variations. The name of the lover usually appears as Jenny or Molly, and the ways that she betrays the highwayman include stealing his weapons, putting water in his pistol so that he can’t shoot, and summoning the soldier to her home while the highwayman is asleep. In some cases, the soldier confronts the highwayman after leaving his lover’s home, though in most cases the confrontation

52 Several versions of the lyrics identify the soldiers who accompany him as “redcoats,” a nickname for the British army.
happens there. Another variable is whether the highwayman is arrested right away or if he kills the soldier first.

The final verses of the song can go in many directions, and may include a verse about the highwayman’s brother rescuing him from prison, a verse about different things men like to do which ends with a description of things the highwayman likes (whiskey, women, his lover), or a verse about escaping from prison. Aside from these names and plot changes, there are also many variations to the wording of each of these events, creating a very diverse corpus of lyrics.

Despite this variety, the chorus of the song remains similar or identical across most of the versions that I studied. It usually appears as “musha ring dumma do dumma da, whack fol de daddy-o, whack fol de daddy-o, there’s whiskey in the jar,” though some of the syllables at the beginning vary between performances. There has been some speculation that the refrain was originally in Gaelic, but became unrecognizable over time.54 A more commonly accepted explanation is that the beginning of the chorus is an example of the technique, common in Irish and Scottish drinking songs, of “Port a’beul,” or “nonsense sounds used to fill in the melody of songs when musical instruments aren’t available due to poverty or laws forbidding them.”55 There has also been speculation that the line “there’s whiskey in the jar” refers to the narrator taking a drink before continuing on to the next verse.56

“Whiskey in the Jar” is thought to have developed out of the song “Patrick Flemmen he was a Valiant Souldier,” also known as “Patrick Flemming” or “The

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56 Unknown, “Meaning – Musha Ring Dumma Do Dumma Da.”
Downfall of the Whigs.” Patrick Flemming was a legendary highway robber and murderer in Ireland and his story bears some striking resemblances to that of the highwayman in “Whiskey.” For example, both songs involve a highwayman robbing a soldier on a mountain and being betrayed by a lover when she fills his pistol with water so he can’t fight. Also, both songs specify that the highwayman carries a sword and a gun and both reference a brother in the army.

Having discussed the historical background and general lyric variations to “Whiskey in the Jar,” I will illustrate the diversity of the musical settings using transcriptions from Irish and American folk song books. These transcriptions were chosen because of their availability, and they represent several lyric and melodic variations present in the tradition.

Transcriptions of “Whiskey in the Jar”

Irish Transcriptions

The first transcription of this group is found in P.W. Joyce’s Old Irish Folk Music and Songs (1965) and is illustrated in Figure 1. The song appears under the title “There’s Whiskey in the Jar” and it does not have any lyrics printed with it. Joyce collected it “from a private in the 41st Regiment, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.” This transcription has a similar length and rhythm to other versions that we will see, though the melody is a bit different, and thus it is easy to imagine fitting the lyrics to it. In fact, measures 10 and 11 strongly resemble the common contemporary melody of the song. Unique about this transcription in comparison to the others that we will study at is that it is situated in the

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57 Zaleski, “The long and winding road of “Whiskey in the Jar.””
60 Ibid.
minor mode on E. This is seen, not in the alteration of any particular scale degrees, but in the descent to E at the end of the song where most other versions would have ended on G.

The key signature of this transcription suits the claim that “most traditional music is played in the key of D or G, with E minor a strong runner up.”\textsuperscript{61} This is believed to be the case because these were the keys that best suited traditional Irish instruments like the fiddle, uileann pipes, flute, tin whistle, and accordion. Perhaps this is indicative of how people would have heard the song performed in Ireland. However, it may simply be coincidental that the private from who Joyce made this transcription happened to sing it in one of the common keys.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{P.W. Joyce’s transcription of “There’s Whiskey in the Jar”}
\end{figure}

The next transcription, illustrated in Figure 2 below, comes from Colm O Lochlainn’s \textit{Irish Street Ballads} (1960).\textsuperscript{62} The book does not give any information about where O Lochlainn heard the song, though he claims to have excluded all songs that

\textsuperscript{61} Sean Ó Riada, \textit{Our Musical Heritage} (Portlaoise: The Dolmen Press, 1982), 65.
already appeared in Joyce’s collection, with the exception of “Molly Bawn,” when clearly “Whiskey” is also a duplicate. O Lochlainn also claims that the songs “are set in keys to suit the average voice,” which might explain why his transcription does not fall into one of the keys observed above.63

The lyrics that appear in O Lochlainn’s transcription are similar to those used in contemporary performances, most notably by The Dubliners and The Pogues. The melodic contour is also similar to contemporary versions, though it introduces some chromatic alteration by using the flatted seventh scale degree as the climax tone of the first two phrases. James Cowdery addresses such melodic variation when he explains, “flexibility in the rendition of certain pitches (often the third, fourth, or seventh scale degree) is a feature of certain performances and should be seen as a kind of variation rather than a change of “modal” category.”64

Figure 2: Colm O Lochlainn’s transcription of “There’s Whiskey in the Jar”

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63 O Lochlainn, Irish Street Ballads, x-xi.
64 Cowdery, The Melodic Tradition of Ireland, 15.
In essence, the flatted seventh degree in the first two phrases does not threaten the “major” feel of the song, since its implied Mixolydian scale is near-identical to the major mode that replaces it later on. The other noteworthy aspect of O Lochlainn’s transcription is the rhythm, which seems to go into double-time at the chorus. This does not appear in other folksong transcriptions, but I will discuss contemporary performances that resemble it in Chapter 6.

James N. Healy’s 1965 transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” in *Ballads from the Pubs of Ireland*, shown in Figure 3, has a melody that is very similar to contemporary versions, though it does appear to contain transcription errors. The first occurs in measures one through four, where the melody should presumably match the repetition in measures 9-12, as shown in Figure 3. The second error occurs after measure 12, where a measure seems to be missing. Healy printed the lyrics and the music separately and it becomes apparent that something is wrong when one attempts to line them up together. My suggested corrections to Healy’s transcription appear on the figure in red, including the new measure 14.

Healy’s notes suggest that the song originated in Kilkenny, most likely in the late eighteenth century because of the rhyme scheme. He explains that, in the Irish language, rhyming only requires that vowels rhyme and not entire words (i.e. syllables or syllable groups) as in English. He argues that the internal rhymes present in parts of this song indicate that it was written by someone who was intimately familiar with the Irish language, and suggests that such familiarity with both English and Irish would have been most common in the late eighteenth century.

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66 Ibid.
The final Irish transcription comes from Northern Ireland. It is found in *Sam Henry's Songs of the People*, but was originally printed as part of Sam Henry’s newspaper column in 1939. The transcription, taken from a gardener in Ervey, is given below in Figure 4. Notice that, though similar in length and rhythm to other versions, the melody, chorus, and lyrics are very different. It is worth noting however, that the two very different versions, Joyce’s and Henry’s, were both transcribed from specific informants while the other transcriptions do not list their sources. It is possible that these two transcriptions might reflect more sensitivity to variable oral transmission. It is also possible that O Lochlainn and Healy took their transcriptions from larger urban areas or groups of people that sang in a similar way that is more closely related to today’s popular versions.

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68 Ibid.
Figure 4: Sam Henry’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar”

For a little contrast, let’s briefly take a look at some American transcriptions of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

American Transcriptions

The first transcription, entitled “Lovel, the Robber,” is found in The New Green Mountain Songster (1939) and is shown in Figure 5.69 This version has a different title and different lyrics, but the rhythm, melodic contour, general subject matter, and use of “Port a’beul” suggest that it is related to “Whiskey.” The notes accompanying the transcription also claim that the song developed out of “Patrick Flemming,” thereby emphasizing the connection.

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The next transcription was published by the Oliver Ditson Company in 1858 in
Boston. Printed as a broadside ballad, this version of the song, entitled “Whiskey in the
Jug,” includes a full piano accompaniment, shown in Figure 6. The piano is not a
traditional Irish instrument, and the written accompaniment makes the song feel more
like a theatrical show tune than an Irish pub song. Additionally, this transcription
removes many of the dotted rhythms that are characteristic of Irish music, and includes a
completely different first verse that prefaces the rest of the story. However, it does
makes use of the flatted seventh found in *Irish Street Ballads*, suggesting a possible
relationship to more traditional versions.

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70 “Whiskey in the Jug,” (Boston: Oliver Ditson Company, 1858).
Figure 6: Oliver Ditson Co.'s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jug”
Finally, the transcriptions of James F. Leisy\textsuperscript{71} (Figure 7) and Alan Lomax and associates\textsuperscript{72} (Figure 8) are very similar to each other and to contemporary versions of the song. Both transcriptions were also printed with guitar chords. While the guitar may have been a more prominent instrument in American folk music, it was not used much in Irish folk music until the 1920s and 1930s and wasn’t popularized until the folk revival, so these transcriptions represent a more modern and more American approach to “Whiskey in the Jar.”

\textit{Voice} 

\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{whiskey_in_the_jar_1.png}

\textit{Figure 7:} James F. Leisy’s transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar”

\textsuperscript{71} Leisy, \textit{The Folk Song Abecedary}.

\textsuperscript{72} Alan Lomax, Peggy Seeger, Máté Seiber, Don Bandy, Michael Leondard, & Shirley Collins, \textit{The Folk Songs of North America in the English Language} (Garden City: Doubleday, 1960), 16.
Having discussed numerous melodic, rhythmic, lyric, and accompanimental variations to “Whiskey in the Jar,” we might wonder how a certain approach to the song came to predominate in contemporary performance. The answer seems to lie with the Dubliners and like-minded popularizers, whose polished versions of this song reached millions through the mass distributions of records and radio.
Chapter 3: Traditional Performances

There were two major trends that converged to spark the revitalization of Irish traditional music after World War 2.73 The first came about through the efforts of Irish composer and traditional-music enthusiast Seán Ó Riada. Capitalizing on the extreme nationalism of Ireland in the mid-twentieth century, he saw traditional music “as the expression of fundamental Irish identity and any other music as the impoverished workings of an alien culture.”74 Ó Riada wanted to gain for traditional Irish music, particularly that involving Gaelic-language singing and solo performance, the prestige and reverence traditionally accorded to western art music. He also worked to create what he considered to be the ideal instrumental ensemble, working with the group Ceoltóirí Cualann. He cautioned against the infiltration of non-Irish-traditional instruments including the piano, drums, double bass, saxophone, guitar, and banjo.75

Although he aimed to support the existing traditional music, he modified it as he saw fit; thus, “authentic traditional music is what Ó Riada decided it should be and this leads to a further paradox.”76 According to Scott Reiss, “playing traditional music in Ireland defines a certain construction of Irishness. It enacts a culture of orality, an

74 McLaughlin & McLoone, *Rock and Popular Music in Ireland*.
awareness of heritage and lineage, an aesthetic of spontaneous creativity.” 77 Ó Riada complicated this construction when he brought traditional music out of the homes and pubs and into the concert hall. Transforming traditional music into an ‘art music’ threatened its culturally grounded authenticity in the name of preserving and enhancing it.

The other trend that energized and redirected Irish traditional music was the folk revival of the 1950s and 60s. As Michael Brocken explains, “Within the atmosphere of post-war utopianism, the folk revival launched an important attack upon contemporary music aestheticism. There was a shock value to the folk music of the 1950s… In this challenging stage, the revival contributed to many people’s sense of cultural identity.” 78 In a complicated historical time, the “folk revival symbolised attempts to preserve early musical traditions and, to some extent, the cultures of which they were part: working-class, rural areas where elements of community life remained.” 79 While this impulse to re-invest in one’s historical roots may seem a romantic notion, the folk revival also reflected the ways in which “modern culture continues to rearticulate the past in a variety of different and stimulating ways.” 80 Unlike Ó Riada’s efforts, the folk revival did not aim to represent folk music traditions in an idealized, ‘untrammeled’ form, but freely adapted them to suit the times, notably by “singing about one’s own experiences and placing these experiences at the forefront of tradition.” 81

The folk revival also made traditional music modern by exploring ways in which the music might be transformed. In the case of Irish folk music, this was done by adding vocal harmony; by incorporating instruments, such as guitar and banjo, which were popular in the American and English folk revivals; and by performing in groups and combos. “The folk revival of the 1960s brought Irish ballad groups like the Clancy brothers with Tommy Makem to a large international audience” and paved the way for groups like The Dubliners.82

The Clancy Brothers, Pat and Tom, emigrated from Ireland to New York, arriving there in 1950, and immediately got involved in the theatre and music scenes.83 Their brother Liam joined them several years later and he introduced them to another Irish immigrant, Tommy Makem. Together, they formed a folk group and began singing Irish traditional songs in a new way:

The Clancys adapted these songs for the American folk audience. They did this by incorporating choral singing and the instrumental accompaniment of guitars and banjo. They Americanised their presentation of Irish folk material. Guitars and harmony were not native to the Irish tradition. The Clancys were responding to what they saw and heard in the folk clubs of New York.84

They were very successful, both in the United States and back in Ireland. As Nuala O’Connor explains, “Seán Ó Riada set out to reclaim the instrumental tradition and present it to a new, increasingly urbanized Irish audience. Irish culture was now seen as a proud badge of national identity, if not the badge, so The Clancys were very much riding a wave of high national self-esteem.”85

82 Reiss, “Tradition and Imaginary,” 152.
84 O’Connor, Bringing It All Back Home, 103.
85 O’Connor, Bringing It All Back Home, 106-107.
Riding the same wave, the Dubliners were founded in 1962 by Ronnie Drew, Luke Kelly, Barney McKenna, Ciarán Bourke, and John Sheahan. They “were a bearded-hard-drinking hard-living crew, who were quickly adopted by the Dublin working class and then went on to become favourites among college and bohemian audiences in Ireland and England.” Roughing up the clean-cut image that bands like the Clancy brothers had given Irish music, “the Dubliners stood for the authentic sound of the tradition.” Their instrumentation was innovative, including vocals, guitar, 5-string banjo, tenor banjo, mandolin, melodeon, tin whistle, harmonica, fiddle, and concertina. The Dubliners, and groups like them, reflect the collision of Irish folk music with the international folk revival at a time of heightened nationalism and burgeoning popular music.

Though they had been recording for Transatlantic Records since 1963, their first big hit came 1967 with “the controversial, and oft-banned ballad Seven Drunken Nights.” Though not as big as the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem in the United States, the Dubliners played a prominent role in popularizing Irish folk music across mainland Europe. They had a strong influence on many later bands including The Pogues, Flogging Molly, and Dropkick Murphys. The Dubliners are considered to have the “definitive” versions of many Irish folk songs including, some might argue, “Whiskey in the Jar.”

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92 Ibid.
The Dubliners recorded “Whiskey in the Jar” for Transatlantic Records in 1968.

Their lyrics for the song are given below:

As I was a goin' over the far famed Kerry mountains
I met with captain Farrell and his money he was counting
I first produced my pistol and I then produced my rapier
Saying "Stand and deliver" for he were a bold deceiver

(Refrain) Mush-a ring dum-a do dum-a da
    Whack for my daddy-o.
    Whack for my daddy-o
    There's whiskey in the jar

I counted out his money and it made a pretty penny
I put it in me pocket and I took it home to Jenny
She sighed and she swore that she never would deceive me
But the devil take the women for they never can be easy (Refrain)

I went up to my chamber, all for to take a slumber
I dreamt of gold and jewels and for sure 't was no wonder
But Jenny drew me charges and she filled them up with water
Then sent for captain Farrell to be ready for the slaughter (Refrain)

'Twas was early in the morning, just before I rose to travel
Up comes a band of footmen and likewise captain Farrell
I first produced me pistol for she stole away me rapier
I couldn't shoot the water, so a prisoner I was taken (Refrain)

Now there's some take delight in the carriages a-rollin'
and others take delight in the hurling and the bowling
but I take delight in the juice of the barley
and courting pretty fair maids in the morning bright and early (Refrain)

If anyone can aid me 't is my brother in the army
If I can find his station in Cork or in Killarney
And if he'll go with me, we'll go rovin' through Killkenny
And I'm sure he'll treat me better than my own a-sporting Jenny (Refrain).

These lyrics are close to those seen in the transcription from *Irish Street Ballads*. The highwayman robs Captain Farrell in the far famed Kerry mountains, then takes the money to his girlfriend Jenny. While he is sleeping, Jenny steals his sword and fills his pistols with water. When he wakes up, the Captain is there and the highwayman is
captured because he can’t fight back. The first-person narrator then summarizes his life’s greatest pleasures as women and being drunk, and imagines how happy he would be if his brother came to save him.

The Dubliners recording of this song runs approximately 2:59 and the tempo is around 104 beats per minute. It begins with a solo fiddle introduction based on the last two lines of the chorus before the accompanimental instruments, tin whistle and Ronnie Drew’s vocals enter for the verse. The backing vocals enter on the chorus. Aside from the fiddle introduction, there are no other instrumental breaks or solos in the song; the verses and the choruses flow together. Overall, the accompaniment is rich, though a little quiet, and when the tin whistle joins in on the melody it is low in the mix. The melody of this performance is the standardized contemporary melody and a transcription of it appears in Figure 9. While there are other small rhythmic variations in each verse depending on the lyrics, this transcription gives a good idea of how The Dubliners’ perform “Whiskey in the Jar.”

On this track, the singers’ indigenous accents come through strongly, lending in effect a celebratory Irishness to the performance. The way that the backing vocals are balanced with Ronnie Drew’s lead also creates something of a “spontaneous pub feel.” When the backing vocals come in, they are a little bit off from the lead vocals and this quality becomes more noticeable as the song goes on. The result sounds a little bit like a bunch of guys singing in a bar.

By giving listeners some of the feeling of being in an Irish pub, the Dubliners recording calls to mind the pleasures and pathos of traditional Ireland, but in so doing, it

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also raises questions about modernity. Ruth Barton describes this problem in relation to how Ireland is typically portrayed in movies and television, with shows such as *Ballykissangel*, about a small Irish town outside of Dublin, promoting stereotypes about the Irish that affect what people want to see when they visit Ireland. In “‘Blame it on Maureen O’Hara’: Ireland and the Trope of Authenticity,” Colin Graham argues that what people outside of Ireland consider “authentically” Irish is “only ever reproduced, filtered, and reconstituted through a process of authentication and recognition of status.”

![Figure 9 Transcription of “Whiskey in the Jar” by The Dubliners](image)

It would seem that performers like The Dubliners served to perpetuate, perhaps despite themselves, notions of Irishness as suffused with quaint and old-world qualities. The use of “traditional” instruments like the fiddle and tin whistle, resonant at first with

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the ‘modern’ folk revival of the 1960s, represent a traditionalizing Ireland regardless of whether or not the musicians are from there.

Such markers of Irishness are combined with identifying features of other musical communities to create hybrid musical identities. Perhaps the best-known example of such an Irish hybridization is The Pogues. Though lead singer Shane MacGowan and several other members of the band were born in Ireland, the band formed and lived in London.\textsuperscript{96} The 1980s and 90s were a tough time to be Irish in the UK because of the IRA bombings, and singing Irish rebel songs did not really help their popularity.\textsuperscript{97} Though they were not IRA supporters, it took a while for the band to become accepted in London. They also were not well received in Ireland because of the way that they performed Irish songs and embodied the “most obvious and negative Irish stereotypes… violent and drunken Paddy and the comic stage Irishman of yore,” stereotypes that modern Ireland did not want to be associated with.\textsuperscript{98}

The Pogues, originally named Pogue Mahone (or “Kiss My Ass” in Irish) were formed in 1982. Their members included Shane MacGowan, Spider Stacy, Jem Finer, James Fearnley, Cait O’Riordan, Andrew Rankc, Philip Chevron, and Terry Woods, with occasional guest appearances by The Clash’s Joe Strummer. Their instrumentation was a mix of old and new, much like that of The Dubliners in the 1960s: vocals, tin whistle, banjo, accordion, mandolin, concertina, bagpipes, cittern, guitar, bass, and drum set. The Pogues’ breakout hit was “Fairytale of New York,” recorded with Kirsty MacColl in 1987. They are credited with introducing Irish music to British punk fans. As

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{97} Kevin Toolis, \textit{Rebel Heats: Journeys Within the IRA’s Soul} (Berkshire: Cox & Wyman Ltd., 1995).
\end{thebibliography}
McLaughlin and McLoone explain, “The Pogues, in appropriating traditional folk music, have inflected it with aspects of a punk sensibility.” The Irish stereotypes that they embodied fit with the punk culture of London: “The Pogues accrued a conception of Irishness that was accommodated easily in the ethos of punk – hence their penchant for shouting, swearing and rowdiness.”

The Pogues’ version of “Whiskey in the Jar,” recorded with The Dubliners in 1990, appears on Shane MacGowan’s last album with the band (the iconic front man was asked to leave in 1991). The lyrics of their version are very similar to those of The Dubliners, with the exception of swapping verses five and six so that the highwayman hopes his brother will come and save him before he discusses how much he likes whiskey and women. The track length is 2:42 and approximately 146 beats per minute. Though shorter than The Dubliners’, they manage to fit in the same number of verses and an instrumental interlude by taking a significantly faster tempo.

Shane MacGowan and Ronnie Drew alternate singing on the first four verses, but sing the last two together. This collaboration between The Pogues and The Dubliners seems to embody The Pogues’ approach to Irish music: a combination of the old and the new. Though his voice is not quite as rich and resonant as on The Dubliners’ original recording, perhaps due to age or to singing a minor third lower than the original, Ronnie Drew’s singing supports the old world stereotypes that all Irishmen can sing.

Once again, it draws the mind to a scene in a quaint Irish pub. MacGowan on the other hand has a much rougher voice. Not only is he affecting an Irish accent instead of his

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99 Ibid.
101 Merrick, *Shane MacGowan*.
usual cockney, he is singing in a punk style that involves a harsher pronunciation “which makes the utterance sound like a threat or a challenge.” A transcription of MacGowan’s first verse and chorus is included in Figure 10.

The Pogues are credited with being the voice of a diasporic culture, one that addresses what it was like to be second-generation Irish living in London. They were using some traditional instruments to perform Irish songs, but their original material was about the London-Irish experience. The British didn’t claim them and the Irish didn’t like their take on traditional music, but the second-generation Irish living in London were very attached to them. The way that they gave voice to this specific diasporic population inspired other diasporic bands like Flogging Molly and Dropkick Murphys, whose music speaks to their own unique experience of the Irish diaspora. However, one valid complaint that the Irish have about The Pogues is their perpetuation of negative stereotypes. “MacGowan’s wish to stage a hybrid (London-) Irishness was contingent on the singer being seen as Irish, and one of the few available means by which an English-accented… figure could achieve this was through the exposition of existing archetypes, perhaps the best known of which… was the ‘boozy’ migrant ‘Paddy.'” This drunk and violent image would ultimately lead to MacGowan’s dismissal from the band.

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104 Campbell, “The Importance of Being (London) Irish,” 60.
The Dubliners and The Pogues illustrate different ways of engaging with markers of Irish traditional music. The Dubliners provide a standard traditional performance, at least in the folk revival sense, while The Pogues demonstrate how Irish traditional music can interact with markers of other musical communities while still identifying with the Irish traditional music community. As described in Chapter 2, the current study seeks to trace markers of this musical community through other performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

The first marker that will be used to determine a connection to the tradition of The Dubliners and The Pogues is the lyrics. Because there are so many different versions of the lyrics to “Whiskey in the Jar,” performances that use the same lyrics can be thought to be part of the same tradition. Therefore, any recordings that contain the six
verses seen in The Dubliners’ performance, or those with a similar narrative, are associated with the Irish traditional music community.

Presence of an Irish accent, whether real like Ronnie Drew’s or fake like Shane MacGowan’s, gives the singer the appearance of authenticity in the Irish musical tradition. Additionally, the instruments that a band uses can indicate a relationship with authentic traditional music. Performances which included acoustic guitar, banjo, mandolin, melodeon, tin whistle, harmonica, fiddle, concertina, bodhran, tambourine, flute, accordion, bagpipes, spoons, and bouzouki are seen as belonging to that musical community. Other features such as traditional dance breaks, clapping on the chorus, heterophony, dotted rhythms, and a performance that is felt in 2 also show a connection to Irish traditional music. One or many of these features may be present to trigger this association, and they can be combined with features of other musical traditions, creating a hybrid musical identity.

Performances that possess markers of Irish traditional music are not automatically seen as being covers of The Dubliners or The Pogues. Recall from Solis’ definition of a cover that a performance must call to mind a specific recording, not just appear to be part of the same musical tradition. However, covers of these performances can exist through the use of the distinctive fiddle introduction that opens both recording.

The next chapter will introduce another key recording of “Whiskey in the Jar” and examine the different markers associated with the rock music tradition.
Chapter 4: Rock Performances

Thin Lizzy was formed in 1969 and included guitarist Eric Bell, vocalist and bassist Phil Lynott, drummer Brian Downey, and keyboardist Eric Wrixon, though Wrixon left the group before they recorded “Whiskey in the Jar.” Thin Lizzy was part of a great tradition of three-person Irish rock bands including Rory Gallagher’s blues-inflected Taste and Brush Shiels and Gary Moore’s experimental group Skid Row. Thin Lizzy one of the first Irish rock bands to become popular internationally without trading on their Irishness and they have had a strong influence on many contemporary hard rock and metal bands, including Metallica.

“Whiskey in the Jar” marked a turning point in Thin Lizzy’s career. After enjoying two years of great success in Ireland, the band moved to London in 1971 to take their career to the next level. London was not kind to Thin Lizzy initially, and they were still struggling to make it there in 1972. Growing up in Ireland, the band was familiar with traditional Irish songs and would occasionally play them for fun during rehearsals. They enjoyed “Whiskey in the Jar” in particular because guitarist Eric Bell had come up with a new riff to work into the song. After all, “a song which deals with armed robbery and a woman’s treachery and had had a rollicking drinking chorus to

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107 Ibid.
boot, well, that was something they could get into late at night in the studio when whiskey and other potables had been flowing.”

One day their manager heard them playing “Whiskey” and insisted that they record it. The band did not want to release the recording because they did not want to be known for playing traditional Irish music. In the end, they agreed to release it as a B-side to one of Phil Lynott’s original songs. When the record company heard it, however, they insisted that “Whiskey” be the single instead, and it ended up as their breakout hit. While the band was happy with the success, they were not pleased that this song provided their big break. Traveling around Europe to promote the song was wearing on everyone. Eric Bell cites the “Whiskey” situation as one of the things that led to his decision to leave the band at the end of 1973.

Thin Lizzy’s version of the lyrics has some unique features that do not seem to appear in earlier versions and some have speculated that Thin Lizzy reworked the lyrics themselves. Their lyrics are given below:

As I was goin’ over the Cork and Kerry mountains.
I saw Captain Farrell and his money he was countin’.
I first produced my pistol and then produced my rapier.
I said stand o’er and deliver or the devil he may take ya.

(Refrain) Musha ring dumb a do dumb a da.
Whack for my daddy-o,
Whack for my daddy-o.
There’s whiskey in the jar-o.

I took all of his money and it was a pretty penny.
I took all of his money and I brought it home to Molly.
She swore that she’d love me, never would she leave me.
But the devil take that woman for you know she tricked me easy. (Refrain)

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109 Putterford, *Phil Lynott*.
110 At this time, I have been unable to confirm or refute this claim.
Being drunk and weary I went to Molly's chamber.
Takin' my money with me and I never knew the danger.
For about six or maybe seven in walked Captain Farrell.
I jumped up, fired off my pistols and I shot him with both barrels. (Refrain)

Now some men like the fishin' and some men like the fowlin',
And some men like ta hear a cannon ball a roarin'.
Me? I like sleepin' specially in my Molly's chamber.
But here I am in prison, here I am with a ball and chain, yeah.(Refrain)

And I got drunk on whiskey-o

The first verse of the song corresponds to other versions: the highwayman robs Captain Farrell on the mountain. In the second verse, the first two lines begin the same way: “I took all of his money.” The band seems to have made a deliberate choice with the name of the highwayman’s lover because, while “Jenny” would have fit with the rhyme scheme of the song, the band chose to call her “Molly.” The third verse is very different from previous versions: the highwayman, drunk and tired from his long day, goes to sleep and wakes up to Captain Farrell entering the room. Jumping out of bed, the highwayman grabs his guns and shoots Captain Farrell. There is no description of his arrest, but in the fourth verse, after describing what some men like, the highwayman tells the listener that his is in prison. After the last verse, the highwayman bemoans his lost love, crying, “I loved my Molly.” Finally, in each chorus, the band sings “whiskey in the jar-o” instead of “whiskey in the jar.” With their emphasis on violence and drinking, this recording comes across as more stereotypically rock ‘n’ roll, but the tough-macho persona fades away at the end of the song when the highwayman expresses his grief.

Even though Thin Lizzy’s version includes two stanzas fewer than the one by The Dubliners, the recording is nearly twice as long. The track is 5:45 in length and approximately 126 beats per minute, though the rhythm proceeds at half the speed of
that in The Dubliners’ recording, giving it a more laid back feel. A transcription of the first verse and chorus appears in Figure 11. There is a brief improvised guitar solo at the beginning, followed by an instrumental introduction based around Eric Bell’s famous guitar riff, transcribed from the introduction in Figure 12. Similarly structured interludes occur after each chorus and there is an extensive guitar solo between verses two and three, almost foreshadowing the chaos of Captain Farrell’s visit.

Figure 11: Transcription of the first verse and chorus of “Whiskey in the Jar” by Thin Lizzy

In an interview with A.V. Club, Eric Bell observed, “for a folk song to become a hit in the ’70s – but played on electric instruments, not traditional instruments, like bodhráns and Irish pipes and violins and fiddles – our version was extremely modern… Still, it somehow kept that Irish feel.” This is an interesting comment because, I would

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112 Zaleski, “The long and winding road of “Whiskey in the Jar.””
argue, there is nothing overtly Irish about the performance. The instrumentation is electric guitar, electric bass, and drum set, and the half-time performance of the lyrics makes the song sound much slower than a traditional performance.

![Electric Guitar](image1)

**Figure 12:** Transcription of the guitar introduction from “Whiskey in the Jar” by Thin Lizzy

What may be most strikingly un-Irish is that Phil Lynott sings without his Irish accent, affecting an American one instead. One explanation for this behavior is “a drive to approximate one’s language to that of one’s interlocutors, if they are regulated as socially desirable and/or if the speaker wishes to identify with them and/or demonstrate good will towards them.”

Phil Lynott grew up idolizing American musicians like Jimi Hendrix and he was hoping to become an international rock star. It seems plausible that Lynott’s performance of “Whiskey in the Jar” with an American accent was an attempt to make the song fit how he wanted to sound and the kind of music that he wanted to play. Additionally, this decision could reflect the band’s desire not to trade on their Irishness. As I reflect on what Bell could have meant, the only things that come to mind are the conscious use of the name “Molly,” which is arguably more Irish-sounding than “Jenny,” and ending the chorus with “jar-o” instead of “jar” – together with the fact of

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transmitting a popular and very Irish traditional song, with its classic Irish themes involving outlaws, drinking, and betrayed romance.

Though the markers of Irish musical tradition are arguably downplayed in Thin Lizzy’s “Whiskey in the Jar,” and while their highly original recording does not appear to be a cover of an earlier performance, perhaps Eric Bell also meant that the band members’ Irish identity itself served to infuse the track with an “Irish feel.” Many later recordings of the song, however, were explicit covers of this recording, but without being able to claim the same literal degree of Irishness as Thin Lizzy. The list of such covers would notably include that of Metallica.

Metallica is a metal band formed in California in 1981 and including original members Lars Ulrich, James Hetfield, Ron McGovney and Dave Mustaine, though bass players Cliff Burton, Jason Newsted, and Robert Trujillo, as well as guitarist Kirk Hammett joined the group later in its career.114 They recorded their first album in 1983 and were an instant sensation. Over the course of their career, the band released several cover albums including Garage, Inc., the 1998 album that includes “Whiskey in the Jar.”115 The band also occasionally performs the song live, most often in Dublin, though the first time they played it live was in Toronto in 1998.116

Metallica’s recording of “Whiskey in the Jar” runs 5:05 and the lyrics to its four stanzas are the same as Thin Lizzy’s.117 Instead of beginning with the improvised guitar solo, Metallica jumps right in with the full band introduction; though the distortion effects give the performance a harsher feel. Instead of placing the guitar solo after verse

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116 Ibid.
two as Thin Lizzy did, Metallica puts it after the death of Captain Farrell, which seems to suggest a struggle during the highwayman’s arrest. Also, Metallica’s narrator does not lament the loss of Molly at the end of the song. Instead, he sings “whiskey in the jar-o” again after the final chorus and concludes by repeating “musha ring dumma do dumma da” several times. Otherwise, Metallica’s version is close to Thin Lizzy’s, even if these small changes create an overall harder, ‘angrier’ feel.

Thin Lizzy brought the traditional Irish song to a new audience, but were they successful in this because they made the song “less Irish” and “more universal”? Is this equilibrium between the Irish and the universal what drew bands like Metallica to the song? In The Irishness of Irish Music, John O’Flynn discusses interviews that he performed with Irish concertgoers at a wide variety of performances. In essence, O’Flynn asked his participants if the music that they heard, from Dervish to the Irish Tenors to Irish orchestral music, sounded Irish. He also followed up with questions about other Irish musicians.

Apparently, the question of whether or not something sounds Irish is a complicated one. People expressed knowledge regarding whether or not the musician or composer was Irish, but that did not lead them to say that the music itself sounded Irish or not. Instrumentation, singing style, and the presence of traditional interludes like jigs or reels all factored into people’s decisions. Interviewees also distinguished between authentic Irish and “Oirish,” or “fakes or partial fakes which trade, very profitably, on the nostalgia of the displaced Irish themselves and on the ignorant sympathy or pity or

118 John O’Flynn, The Irishness of Irish Music (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).
curiosity of the non-Irish.” O’Flynn did not ask his participants about Thin Lizzy, but if he had, I wonder if the responses would have reflected Bell’s claim of an “Irish feel.”

Regardless of whether or not Thin Lizzy sounds Irish, their performance identifies them with the international rock community. As with the Irish traditional and pop performances, there are specific “Thin Lizzy” markers that I will use to trace the influence of their performance on future recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar”. The unique narrative of Thin Lizzy’s lyrics is enough to identify their influence, since in no earlier versions does the highwayman kill Captain Farrell. Additionally, the absence of an Irish accent and presence of rock- or metal-style vocals is more suggestive of Thin Lizzy’s approach than of any traditional recordings of the song.

Of course, the presence of Thin Lizzy’s instrumentation, electric guitar, electric bass, and drum set, already identifies bands with the rock tradition. The most obvious marker of this rock identity, however, is the presence of Eric Bell’s guitar-riff introduction and interludes. However this riff appears in later versions, it signifies the “Thin Lizzy tradition” or its later “Metallica tradition” offshoot. The presence or absence of distortion effects and the choice of closing material, a lament for Molly or a repeat of the first line of the chorus, can distinguish between the two.

Chapter 5 will give the results of the corpus study and examine the influence of the Irish traditional and rock music influences on performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

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Galvin, *Irish Songs of Resistance*. 
Chapter 5: Results

This project began with a corpus of 502 recordings taken from iTunes. As described in Chapter 2, after compiling the corpus I went through the first 30 seconds of each recording, using the features that I identified to create the model for analysis. Then, I used this model to code each recording. During the coding process, I also identified all medleys, incomplete recordings, parodies, and duplicate recordings and removed them from the corpus, bringing the total number of analyzed performances to 398.

There are a few limitations to the corpus used for this project. First of all, the project necessarily focuses on recorded performances of “Whiskey in the Jar,” particularly commercially recorded performances, instead of investigating the ways that song is performed live. Second, recent developments in the availability of recording technology have skewed the sample towards more recent recordings. Additionally, many older recordings only appear on iTunes in the form of recently released compilations or reissues, further skewing the sample towards what appears as “more recent recordings.” However, I have attempted to find original recording dates for each version in the corpus and a chart of the recordings by year is given in Figure 13 below. Despite these limitations, this corpus study provides some significant information about recorded performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”
The Corpus

This corpus contains 398 recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” recorded between 1957 and 2015. I was able to identify the home countries of 299 of the bands, and a chart of these countries is given in Figure 14. A band’s home country was defined by the nationality of its members, when available. When this information was not available, I used the band’s “home base” as its home country. As you can see, bands from the United States created 134 of these 299 recordings. The second most-represented country was Ireland with 42, followed by the UK with 32, Germany with 24, and Canada with 15. Other countries that produced at least one recording were Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary,
Israel, Italy, Norway, Romania, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Predictably, most of these recordings (77.59%) come from countries that, like Ireland, were once part of the English-speaking British Empire. 20.74% are from non-English speaking European countries. Performances from Asia and South America make up a small part of the sample (0.33% apiece) and the only performance from an African country (South Africa) was counted with the rest of the British Commonwealth community. The remaining 1.34% of the sample consists of performances by groups with members from multiple countries.

Figure 14: Graph of recordings by country
Lyrics

In this corpus, 25 recordings did not contain a vocal track and therefore will not be included in the sample for lyric analysis. Additionally, several songs were performed in languages other than English (2 in Norwegian, 3 in German, 2 in Finnish, 1 in Dutch, 1 in Czech, and 1 in multiple languages). These recordings have also been removed from the lyric analysis, bringing the total number of recordings for the lyric analysis to 364.

While the initial project predicted three major lines of influence, traditional, rock, and a hybrid of the two, it was necessary to consider the influence of another tradition on the corpus, post-hoc, given that the earliest recording in this corpus comes from 1957, and because The Dubliners’ recording was not released until 1968. Although Ewan MacColl’s 1957 recording does feature lyrics similar to those of the Dubliners, there are several early performances which do not. This line of influence naturally falls under the header of the “Folk tradition,” since folk-related features predominate in its recordings. Lyrically, this tradition is categorized by verses that differ from the other two traditions and usually include the highwayman’s escape from prison, with or without the help of his brother. This lyrical tradition does not appear out of thin air, however. Similar lyrics can be seen in the Irish transcription of Healy and the American transcriptions of Leisy and Lomax, discussed in Chapter 2.

Because there are many small or slight variations that can occur in the lyrics of “Whiskey in the Jar” (see discussion in Chapter 2), it would be impossible to address each of variations effectively in this limited corpus study. Instead, the lyrics were grouped by their overarching narrative. The 364 recordings for which lyrics were coded were divided into those resembling by The Dubliners (“traditional”), those resembling
Thin Lizzy (“rock”), those that represent a hybrid influence of The Dubliners and Thin Lizzy (“Hybrid”), those containing a description of the highwayman’s escape (“Folk”), and those that appear to be unique (“Misc.”). The breakdown of these different influences is given in Figure 15.

Traditional

Lyrics that identify with the Irish traditional music community make up 67.03% of the sample. This category is the broadest because it contains all versions of the song that follow the basic narrative arc of The Dubliners’ recording without necessarily containing all of the same verses or exactly the same wording. A graph of recordings with traditionally influenced lyrics is given in Figure 16. An accurate date of one of the recordings, Luke Kelly’s, could not be found and has been omitted from this graph.

Figure 15: Graph of recordings by lyric grouping
Another way to look at this data is to examine the breakdown by country, illustrated in Figure 17. As you can see, many of the recordings with “traditional” lyrics come from the United States (35.25%). Of the 134 recordings in this corpus made by American bands, 64.18% have such lyrics.

The next-highest population represented in this graph is recordings of unknown origin, which make up 25.41% of the “traditional” lyrics and accounts for 62.63% of the unknown recordings. This makes sense, since the vast majority of bands with unknown countries of origin appear on albums that claim to contain Ireland’s greatest hits or playlists for St. Patrick’s Day parties. Given these claims, it is logical that these recordings should stick close to “traditional” renditions of the lyrics.
The third most-represented country shown above is Ireland, accounting for 13.11% of the traditional recordings. Of the 42 recordings by Irish bands in the corpus, 76.19% contain lyrics that belong to the same tradition as The Dubliners. Overall, the lyrics of recordings from 20 different countries reflect this influence.

**Rock**

Lyrics categorized as “rock” contained the specific vocabulary and narrative found in Thin Lizzy’s recording. A graph of these recordings by year (Figure 18) is given below. We can see the initial blip in 1972, reflecting Thin Lizzy’s recording, and then there are no other rock-influenced recordings until the 1990s. This is not to say that no one else performed “Whiskey in the Jar” in the style of Thin Lizzy during the intervening years, just that no recordings of such performances are available on iTunes. While there are a few rock recordings in the early 90s, the numbers have increased significantly since
Metallica’s recording was released in 1998. A discussion of Thin Lizzy’s influence versus Metallica’s can be found later in this chapter.

**Figure 18:** Graph of recordings with rock-influenced lyrics by year

**Figure 19:** Graph of recordings with rock-influenced lyrics by country
The breakdown of the recordings by country of origin is given in Figure 7 above. Of the 64 recordings with rock-influenced lyrics, 25% were performed by bands whose countries of origin were unclear to me. The next highest proportion in this category were the United States and Germany, each accounting for 17.19% of the sample. Recordings with rock-influenced lyrics made up 8.21% of the American recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar,” but accounted for 45.83% of the German performances. This may be due to the popularity of heavy metal, including traditional-oriented “folk” metal music in Germany more generally. There are only 6 performances with rock-inspired lyrics from Ireland, accounting for 14.29% of the total number of Irish recordings. Overall, this sample includes recordings from 11 different countries, making it less diverse than the traditionally influenced lyrics.

Folk

For a song to be included with the folk-inspired lyrics, it only needed to tell of the highwayman’s escape from prison. Aside from this unifying narrative feature, this category contains many different variations. A graph of folk performances over time is given in Figure 20 and a breakdown by country is seen in Figure 21. An accurate date of performance could not be identified for one folk recording, that of Lena Bourne Fish, and it has been left out of the graph.

It is interesting to note the number of American recordings that fall into this category. These account for 62.22% of recordings with folk-influenced lyrics and these recordings make up 20.9% of the total number of American recordings. One wonders whether the narrative distinction used to create this category, namely the highwayman’s escape from prison, is a variation that occurred after Irish immigrants brought the song
to the United States. However, the presence of similar lyrics in Healy’s transcription makes this unlikely.

Figure 20: Graph of recordings with folk-influenced lyrics by year

Figure 21: Graph of recordings with folk-influenced lyrics by country
Hybrid

Recordings with hybrid lyrics contain elements of both the traditional and rock-inspired approach. There are 5 recordings, from between 2001 and 2014, in this category. This is not to say that these are the only recordings that show both influences, rather this categorization only applies to the lyrics. One of these performances comes from each of the following countries: Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Additionally, one is performed by a band of unknown origin.

Miscellaneous

The miscellaneous lyric category contains six recordings that did not fit into any of the aforementioned categories. A diagram of these recordings over time is seen in Figure 22 and a graph of their country of origin is given in Figure 23.

The first of these performances is from a Canadian musician in 1962. While the narrative is similar to that of other versions, the verses break up the narrative action differently, spending more time describing the scene of confrontation between the highwayman and the soldier. The 1999 recording from Germany similarly breaks up the narrative, but also includes two verses where the narrator describes having two brothers in the army instead of one. This is the only recording to do so.

The 2000 Irish performance ended up in this category because the highwayman attacks the soldier with his banjo instead of trying to shoot him, giving it an original flair. The American recording from 2006 adapts the lyrics to tell the story of a cowboy, modernizing and Americanizing some of the phrasing. Finally, the American performance from 2008 resembles The Dubliners’, but includes one final verse about the musicians themselves, landing it in the miscellaneous category. While these lyrics are
unusual, they are also not without precedent as the transcriptions by Sam Henry and Oliver Ditson also contain lyrics that differ significantly from other versions.

**Figure 22**: Graph of recordings with hybrid lyrics by year

**Figure 23**: Graph of recordings with hybrid lyrics by country
A graph of the number of recordings in different lyrical groups appears in Figure 24 below. As you can see, the overall number of recordings begins to increase in the nineties. While there is some variety up through the eighties, the number of traditional recordings increases significantly in the nineties and is well above the number of recordings from any other genre in the 2000s.

![Graph of recording numbers over time](image)

**Figure 24:** Lyric groupings over time

Now that I have broken the corpus up into these five lyric groupings, I will use these groupings to break down the musical data, highlighting instances of single tradition versus hybridized recordings.

**Music**

**Traditional**

I will begin by looking at the group of recordings whose lyrics were categorized as “traditional.” One of the most obvious markers of identification with Irish traditional
music is an Irish linguistic accent, regardless of whether or not it is genuine. Of the 244 recordings with traditionally-influenced lyrics, 197, or 80.74%, included a singer with at least a slight Irish-sounding accent. Other apparent accents on the recordings include Australian, British, Croatian, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Hispanic, Hungarian, Italian, Russian, Scottish, American Southern, and Swedish. A graph of the prominence of these other accents is given in Figure 25. It is worth noting that a singer could be coded for multiple accents if, for example, he was affecting an Irish accent but there were still traces of his German one present. Additionally, I am not an expert in determining accents, but these labeling decisions were made to the best of my abilities and taking into account the performer’s country of origin (if known).

![Figure 25: Non-Irish accents in recordings with traditionally-influenced lyrics](image)

Another important consideration when discussing the vocal performance on these recordings is the singing style. While other corpus studies have used spectrograms
to show differences in singing style over time, I did not feel this was necessary for the current project because the differences in singing style for these recordings can be described by a genre label. The different singing styles present in recordings with traditional lyrics is illustrated in Figure 26. Like the accents, each recording could fall into multiple categories if there was a change of style in the middle of the song or if the singing style itself was a hybrid.

![Figure 26: Singing styles in recordings with traditionally-influenced lyrics](image)

While the operationalization of singing style is somewhat objective, I did work to separate some of the more nuanced genres. For example, punk, metal, and rock, while similar to each other, were separated by subtle differences. Punk was distinguished by a more nasal pronunciation, metal by a harsher vocal quality (almost like screaming), and rock vocals did not contain either of these features. Additionally, “lyrical” was added as a
style to distinguish performances with traditional-sounding vocals that had a better vocal quality in the classical sense than other traditional performances.

Overwhelmingly, the most common singing style in this lyrical category was traditional, with 84.43% of the recordings containing traditional-style singing. The next most common was punk, perhaps reflecting the influence of the folk-punk style epitomized by The Pogues. 18% of the recordings contained punk style singing. Similarly, rock vocals were present in 13.52% of the sample.

It was discussed in Chapter 3 that, while vocal harmony was not historically part of Irish traditional music, it became part of the tradition during the folk revival thanks to the music of the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem. In this category, 52.46% of the songs contained vocal harmony at some point.

One last thing to look at with respect to the vocalists is the gender of the lead singer. In the 244 traditional recordings, 228 of them – or 93.44% - feature a male vocalist, 4.9% feature a female vocalist, and 1.64% feature both a male and a female vocalist. This split is understandable given that the narrator of “Whiskey” is male and that much of the song is about his female lover.

One of the defining features of traditional recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” is that they are grouped into 2-beat measures, as opposed to rock versions, which are grouped into 4-beat measures. While this distinction can be often be unclear, it was relatively straightforward in the case of “Whiskey.” Of the songs with traditionally-influenced lyrics, 95.9% are felt in 2. Of the remaining recordings, 3.28% are felt in 4 while 0.82% switch from 2 to 4 or from 4 to 2 mid-song. I will return to the eight songs that are felt in 4 when I discuss song with traditional lyrics that include references to
Thin Lizzy. Additionally, 99.18% of the recordings in this category were in simple duple-beat-division) meter, while 0.41% were in compound (triple-beat-division) meter and 0.41% switched subdivision mid-song.

The instrumentation used in each recording of “Whiskey” is very useful in determining which musical traditions the performers identify with. Those wishing to associate with Irish traditional music might make use of instruments like the acoustic guitar, banjo, string bass, tin whistle, harmonica, fiddle, flute, accordion, bagpipes, bouzouki, bodhrán, spoons, and tambourine, while those identifying with the rock tradition might prefer to use electric guitar, electric bass, keyboard, and drum set. Figure 27 illustrates the relative presence of instruments found in recordings with traditionally-influenced lyrics. It should be noted that this is not a perfect system and my analysis favors instruments that were clearly audible on the recording.

Of the 244 performances with traditionally-influenced lyrics, 96.72% of them contained at least one traditional instrument. The most common instrument present was the acoustic guitar, followed by the banjo and the fiddle. Bagpipes were the least common traditional instrument to appear on these recordings. 47.5% of these recordings contained at least one rock instrument, most commonly the drum set although the electric guitar was a close second. Additionally, 6.9% of the recordings contained distortion effects on at least one of the instruments, a marker of rock influence. 12.7% of the recordings contained an instrument or group of instruments that does not belong to either Irish traditional music or rock music. The synthesizer was the most common non-traditional, non-rock instrument used in recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” with traditionally-influenced lyrics.
Other Irish-traditional markers include instrumental heterophony, clapping during the chorus, and the inclusion of a traditional dance break. Instrumental heterophony, not exclusive of chordal accompaniment, was included in 18.44% of the recordings in this category. 22.5% contained the clapping, either by the band or by a live audience. 4.1% included a traditional dance break. Since there were no dance breaks present in any of the key recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar,” I am led to believe that the inclusion of such interludes is meant to further identify the performers with the Irish traditional music community.

Finally, 19 of the recordings in this category (7.79%) included the fiddle introduction from The Dubliners recording, identifying them as covers. 12 of the 19
perform this introduction in its original instrumentation while five use a banjo or bouzouki, one uses a guitar, and one uses a guitar and a fiddle.

Before moving to the rock-influenced lyrical group, I want to touch again on the eight recordings from the traditional lyric category that were in a rhythmic feel of 4 instead of in 2. Seven of these eight recordings contained the standard rock instrumentation, allying them with the rock music tradition. Furthermore, two of them contained the signature Thin Lizzy guitar riff. All in all, there were nine recordings in this category that contained the riff (3.69%). Of those nine, the riff only appeared in its original instrumentation in three of the recordings; the rest reorchestrated it for a traditionalizing sound, including tin whistle, fiddle, banjo, and voice.

Rock

Based on the discussion of Phil Lynott’s vocals in Chapter 4, I anticipated that fewer of the vocalists on rock-influenced recordings would have an Irish accent. A graph of the accents found in these recordings is given in Figure 28. The most common accent found in these recordings is an American accent, or vocalist with a pronunciation similar to Lynott’s. This was present in 29.69% of the rock influence recordings. Irish was the next most common (23.44%), followed by German (14.06%), British (12.5%), and American Southern (9.38%).

I also expected that the singing style used in these recordings be different from those found in the traditionally-influenced lyrics. A graph of the singing styles in this category is seen in Figure 18. Overall, rock vocals were the most popular and were found in 79.69% of the recordings. Traditional (26.56%) and metal (15.63%) vocals were also
fairly prominent in this sample. As you can see from Figure 29, there are fewer different
types of vocals in this lyrical category than in the traditionally influenced one.

Figure 28: Accents in recordings with rock-influenced lyrics

Figure 29: Singing styles in recordings with rock-influenced lyrics
Performances with rock-influenced lyrics contained vocal harmony 60.94% of the time. Since there was some vocal harmony present on the chorus of Thin Lizzy’s “Whiskey in the Jar,” its frequent occurrence in this category is not surprising. As far as gender of vocalists in this category, 90.63% of the recordings feature a male vocalist. 7.81% of the recordings feature female vocalists while 3.13% feature both a male and a female vocalist.

As discussed above, one of the trademark features of rock performances of “Whiskey” is that that are felt in 4 instead of in 2. In this corpus, 71.88% of the recordings featuring rock-influenced lyrics are felt in 4. 21.88% of them are felt in 2, while 6.25% switch between 2 and 4 at some point during the song. This shows much greater variability than was present in the recordings with traditionally influenced lyrics. However, 98.44% of the recordings in this category are in simple meter, with only one recording that switches to compound meter during and instrumental interlude.

In these recordings, I would expect the traditional rock instrumentation to be present more often. The inclusion of traditional instruments would suggest hybridity. The presence of instruments in the recordings with rock-influenced lyrics is given in Figure 30. 93.75% of the recordings with rock-influenced lyrics contained at least one traditional rock instrument and 81.25% contained drum set, electric guitar, and electric bass (the entire ensemble present on Thin Lizzy’s recording). 62.5% of the recordings used some type of distortion effects on either the instruments or the vocals. Eric Bell’s signature guitar riff from Thin Lizzy’s recording was present on 75% of the recordings in this category. 79.17% of the time that this riff was present, it appeared in its original
instrumentation. The other 20.83% of the time, it was reorchestrated for traditional instruments. In addition to this riff, 14 recordings (21.88%) contained the improvised guitar introduction from Thin Lizzy’s recording, though sometimes it was played by a different instrument and sometimes just the underlying harmonies appeared without the solo line. Finally, 51.56% of the recordings had some sort of outro based on either Thin Lizzy’s or Metallica’s recording. 36.36% of these outros were exactly like Metallica’s, while the remainder more closely resembled Thin Lizzy’s.

![Figure 30: Instruments in recordings with rock-influenced lyrics](image)

Traditional instruments appeared on 46.88% of the recordings in this sample, with fiddle being the most common, followed by acoustic guitar and banjo/bouzouki. Spoons and harmonica were the least common traditional instruments in this sample. Other traditional markers were uncommon in this sample: clapping during the chorus occurred in 7.81% of recordings, a dance break was present in 1.56% of the recordings,
and heterophony occurred in 4.69%. Other instruments were present in 14.06% of the recordings with rock-influenced lyrics and the most common one was the synthesizer.

Folk

Based on the number of folk performances from the United States, I did not expect there to be many non-American accents present in these performances. However, there are still plenty of Irish accents in these recordings. A chart of the accents in the folk-influenced recordings is given in Figure 31.

![Chart showing accents in folk-influenced recordings]

**Figure 31:** Accents in recordings with folk-influenced lyrics

While there are some different accents present in these recordings, including a New York accent and someone singing with the pronunciation of Elvis, 75.55% of the recordings with folk-influenced lyrics feature a singer with at least a slight Irish accent. The singing styles of these recordings are illustrated in Figure 32. As you can see, the
traditional singing style accounts for the bulk of this category, with 93.33%. There is also a much more limited number of singing styles present in this sample.

Perhaps similarly influenced by the presence of vocal harmony in the folk revival, the performances with folk-influenced lyrics have vocal harmony on 66.67% of the sample. 82.22% of the recordings feature a male vocalist, while 15.56% feature a female vocalist and 2.22% feature both a male and a female vocalist.

Figure 32: Singing styles in recordings with folk-influenced lyrics

Metrically speaking, 97.78% of the songs in this category are in simple meter and 2.22% are in compound meter. Additionally, 44 of the 45 songs (97.78%) are felt in 2 while only 1 (2.22%) is felt in 4.

Like the recordings with traditionally influenced lyrics, this category of songs is expected to use primarily traditional instruments. Presence of instruments from the rock music tradition would indicate hybridity. A graph of the use of instruments in recordings
with folk-influenced lyrics is given in Figure 33. Overall, 97.78% of the performances with folk-inspired lyrics used at least one traditional instrument. The acoustic guitar was the most prevalent, appearing on 66.67% of the recordings. Banjo/bouzouki was also fairly common, appearing on 57.78% of the tracks. Tambourine and bagpipes did not appear on any of the recordings in this category. With respect to the other markers of a traditional performance, 22.22% of the recordings featured clapping on the chorus, while 8.89% included heterophony and only 4.44% had a traditional dance break.

![Figure 33: Instruments on recordings with folk-influenced lyrics](image)

Rock instruments appear on only 31.11% of the tracks with folk-inspired lyrics. Once again, drum set was the most common rock instrument to appear, but electric guitar was the least common. Only 4.44% of the sample used any sort of distortion effects. Additionally, only one of the recordings (2.22%) in this category featured the Thin Lizzy guitar riff, appearing in its original instrumentation.
There are very few instruments outside of the Irish traditional and rock music traditions in these recordings. The piano appears on four of them (8.89%) and the slide whistle is featured prominently on 1 (2.22%).

Hybrid

80% of the recordings in the hybrid category feature a singer with an Irish accent, while the remaining vocalist has an American accent. A graph of the different singing styles present in this sample is given in Figure 34. Rock and traditional singing styles appear in 40% of the recordings apiece, while lyrical and metal singing styles each appear in 20% of the sample.

![Figure 34: Singing style on recordings with hybrid lyrics](image)

Vocal harmony is present in 60% of the recordings with hybrid lyrics. Additionally, all of the recordings in this category feature a male vocalist. Finally, 100% of the recordings are in simple meter, 80% of which are felt in 2.
With only five recordings in this category, it can be expected that the variety of instruments used will be smaller than some of the other categories. Figure 25 gives the breakdown of the instruments in recordings with hybrid lyrics. As you can see, there are fewer traditional instruments present in these recordings, even though 80% of the recordings include traditional instruments. The bagpipes, bodhrán, harmonica and spoons are absent entirely. The banjo/bouzouki is the most common, present in 80% of the recordings, and the acoustic guitar appears in 60%. None of the recordings in this category contain traditional dance breaks, and clapping and heterophony each appear in 20% of the recordings.

All of the recordings in this sample include at least one rock instrument, with electric bass appearing on 80% of the recordings and keyboards not appearing on any of them. Distortion effects are present on one of the five recordings, and this recording also includes the Thin Lizzy riff, reorchestrated for synthesizer.
There are also only two instruments that don’t qualify as Irish traditional or rock instruments appearing on these recordings: the glockenspiel and the synthesizer which each appear on one recording.

Miscellaneous

There are five recordings that fall into the miscellaneous lyrics category. Three of these five contain singers with an Irish accent, while one features a singer with a Southern accent. A graph of the vocal styles present in these recordings is given in Figure 36. The traditional vocal style is present in 60% of the recordings, while country, pop, and punk vocal styles are each present on 20% of the sample. Additionally, 60% of these recordings include vocal harmony and all of the vocalists in these recordings are male. All of the recordings are in simple meter and four of the five are felt in 2.

Figure 36: Singing styles on recordings with miscellaneous lyrics
The instruments found in these recordings can be seen in Figure 37. 80% of the recordings in the miscellaneous lyrics category contain a traditional instrument. Acoustic guitar is once again the most common instrument in these recordings with 80% and the banjo/bouzouki appears in 60%. The accordion, bagpipes, bodhran, spoons, and tambourine do not appear on any of the recordings. None of the recordings contain dance breaks or clapping and only one contains heterophony.

Only one of the recordings in this category contains rock instruments: drum set, electric bass, and electric guitar. This recording does not contain any distortion effects, but the Thin Lizzy riff does appear in its original instrumentation. One of the recordings also includes a non-rock, non-traditional instrument: the piano.

![Figure 37: Instruments on recordings with miscellaneous lyrics](image-url)
Instrumental Pieces

33 of the recordings in this corpus do not contain any vocals or contain vocals in a language other than English. A graph of these recordings over time is given in Figure 38 and the data is broken down by country in Figure 39.

Figure 38: Instrumental/non-English recordings by year

Figure 39: Instrumental/non-English recordings by country

80
Many of these recordings, like the traditionally influenced lyrics, appear on Irish-themed compilation albums, and so the higher number of unknown countries of origin makes sense. Metrically speaking, all of these recordings are in simple meter: 78.79% are felt in 2 and 21.21% are felt in 4.

There is a large variety of traditional, rock, and other instruments present in these recordings, illustrated in Figure 40. Traditional instruments are present in 87.88% of the instrumental recordings. The acoustic guitar is the most common, present in 54.55% of recordings, followed by the tin whistle/flute (42.42%), fiddle (39.39%), and banjo/bouzouki (33.33%). One of the recordings has a traditional dance break, 21.21% contain clapping, and 6.06% contain heterophony.

33.33% of the recordings contain rock instruments. Electric bass and drum set are each present on 51.52% of recordings, and electric guitar is present on 39.39%. Three of the recordings (9.1%) contain distortion effects and 5 (15.15%) contain the Thin Lizzy riff. This riff appears in its original instrumentation twice and in a modified instrumentation three times. Additionally, the Thin Lizzy improvised introduction appears once, played by the flute, and variations of the outro appears on three of the recordings.

Unusual instruments appear in 51.51% of the instrumental performances, perhaps because the absence of vocals makes more interesting and diverse instrumental timbres appealing. The synthesizer is the most common non-traditional, non-rock instrument in these recordings, appearing on 36.36% of the recordings. The piano is also prominent, appearing on 21.21% of them.
Figure 40: Instruments on instrumental/non-English recordings

A graph of instrument popularity across genres is shown in Figure 41. As you can see, the most popular instrument in performances of “Whiskey in the Jar” is the acoustic guitar, followed by the banjo/bouzouki. Each of these is present in over half of the recordings in the corpus. Drum set, electric bass, fiddle, electric guitar, and tin whistle/flute are all present in at least a quarter of the corpus.
Now that I have outlined the general results from the corpus study, I would like to investigate some of the more unique recordings in Chapter 6. I will return to these results in my concluding chapter.
Chapter 6: Unusual Performances

This chapter discusses some unique recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” found in the corpus. I begin by looking at several recordings that feature vocal melodies that are not derived from the melodies of either The Dubliners’ or Thin Lizzy’s recordings. Other than the different melody, these recordings all fit into a traditional or folk style. Next, I highlight some of the innovative ways in which bands and performers have covered Thin Lizzy’s (or Metallica’s) recording, putting their own unique touch on the song while still referencing the well-known recording. Finally, I discuss several particularly innovative performances of the song that do not explicitly reference either of the key recordings. I provide brief descriptions of twelve performances that contain specific unique features and then discuss what I found to be the nine most unusual performances in a little bit more depth.

Different Melodies

The first alternative melody that I will address is from a recording by Ewan MacColl. While the album that this recording appears on was released in 2013, MacColl recorded the song in 1957.120 MacColl was a leader of the folk revival in the UK, working to produce “a democratic alternative to performance history, a challenge to the monopoly of the musical and academic elite.”121 A transcription of the first verse and chorus of MacColl’s performance is provided in Figure 42. While differing from the

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121 Brocken, The British Folk Revival, 2.
melodies of both The Dubliners and Thin Lizzy, MacColl’s melody is not altogether novel. It bears a striking resemblance to the transcription found in Colm O Lochlainn’s *Irish Street Ballads* and illustrated in Figure 2 of Chapter 2. Like O Lochlainn’s transcription, MacColl’s lyrics are not all that different from those of The Dubliners. However, it uses b7 as a climax tone in the first two phrases of the verse and seems to go into double time at the chorus, though MacColl’s chorus rhythm is slightly different than the one in O Lochlainn’s transcription. This melody also appears on the first verse of Roger McGuinn and Tommy Makem’s recording,\(^ {122}\) the last chorus of the performance by Diarmuid O’Leary and The Bards,\(^ {123}\) and Bob Davenport’s recording.\(^ {124}\) However, in the first two of these recordings, measures 19 and 22 appear at half the speed, making their choruses eight measures long instead of six as in MacColl’s recording.

![Figure 42: Transcription of Ewan MacColl’s “Whiskey in the Jar”](image)

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85
The second unique melody is from Tom Kines’ 1962 recording. Kines is Canadian and his is one of the oldest recordings in the corpus according to the album release dates. A transcription of his melody is given in Figure 43. This melody does not resemble any of the earlier transcriptions printed in Chapter 2 and it has several unique features. First, in most of the other transcriptions, the first and second phrases of the verse begin in the same way. In Kines’ recording, however, measures seven and eight ascend instead up to E4 and then return to B3 instead of descending to E3 like measures three and four. Additionally, the chorus in this version is ten measures instead of eight, with the first line of the chorus being stretched to twice the length that it normally is.

The last two recordings with different melodies do not have countries of origin associated with them. The first is Mark T. Conard’s recording from 2006, shown in

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Figure 44. First of all, this recording is much slower than many of the others, approximately 76 beats per minute. This melody contains some more individualistic and pop-oriented features than the other melodies that we’ve seen, including the use of rests between the verse and the chorus, mid-chorus, and on the downbeats of measures. There are also more melismatically-treated syllables in this version than in others. Finally, the chorus here is very different, repeating the first line three times instead of including the second and third lines “whack fol me daddy-o” as in other performances. I think given the pop-oriented nature of this melody and Conard’s singing style that this melody was an original arrangement and not based on earlier versions of the song.

Figure 44: Transcription of Mark T. Conard’s “Whiskey in the Jar”
The final seemingly original melody is Brendan Moriarty’s recording from 2010, shown in Figure 45. This melody does bear some contour similarities to Ewan MacColl’s melody, though lacks the Mixolydian inflection of the flatted seventh, instead rising to scale degree 5. The chorus resembles the well-known versions at first, but instead of the second and third line being the same, Moriarty’s second line descends to D3 while the third line rises to D4 and is followed by a scalar descent back to tonic.

![Transcription of Brendan Moriarty’s “Whiskey in the Jar”](image)

**Figure 45**: Transcription of Brendan Moriarty’s “Whiskey in the Jar”

**Creative Covers of Thin Lizzy**

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the signature Thin Lizzy guitar riff, which signifies a cover by calling to mind a specific recording, appeared in the corpus both in its original
instrumentation and reorchestrated, most often for traditional instruments. In addition to the guitar riff appearing in different instrumentations, several bands use markers of other musical genres to make their covers more unusual.

The first of these covers was by German band The Beatlesøns in 1995. While this recording contains rock instruments like the electric bass, electric guitar, and drum set, they are much lower in the mix than traditional instruments like the banjo, which plays the guitar riff, the tin whistle, which doubles the melody, and the accordion, which is a prominent accompanimental instrument in this performance. This combination of instruments makes the song sound much lighter and more upbeat than Thin Lizzy’s recording, though this is in part due to the quick tempo and 2-beat feel more common to traditional performances of the song. The prominence of the banjo along with the rock instruments lends a country feel to the recording, but the German accent of the singer contrasts with that genre. Overall, this performance sounds more traditional than rock, although the inclusion of the guitar riff does connect it to the rock idiom.

The juxtaposition of Irish traditional and rock influences is seen very clearly in the 2003 recording by Irish band More Power To Your Elbow. In this live performance, the band begins by playing the first two verses in the traditional style, energizing the crowd. This is followed by an instrumental break in which the tin whistle and fiddle play the melody. However, after the instrumental the band stops playing for a few seconds. When they restart it is with the improvised guitar intro of Thin Lizzy’s performance, then launching into verse one again in the rock style, albeit at a faster tempo than Thin Lizzy’s. In this performance, the guitar riff is played by the electric

guitar, fiddle, and tin whistle, as is the guitar solo after verse 2. After the guitar solo, the band jumps into a traditional Irish dance break in compound meter, featuring the fiddle and tin whistle, which concludes the performance. This is an excellent example of an Irish rock band paying tribute to both the traditional and the rock music that has come out of Ireland.

In 2006, a band of unknown origin called Rhinestone Cowboys performed “Whiskey in the Jar” with an interesting arrangement.\textsuperscript{129} The song begins with rock instrumentation, though the guitar effects are a little twangier and country-sounding than Thin Lizzy, and the signature guitar riff is played by an electric guitar. The guitar solo in the middle of the song also appears as expected. However, when the verse begins it is played on a saxophone instead of sung. All of the verses in this recording appear this way, but each chorus is sung in unison by an ensemble of male and female vocalists. It is clear from the name of the band as well as the guitar effects that they are identifying with the country music community, however the presence of the saxophone calls more to mind rock musicians like Clarence Clemmons.

Another country-inspired performance appeared in 2006, played by American band Smokewagon.\textsuperscript{130} This recording was discussed briefly in the analysis of miscellaneous lyrics in Chapter 5, but it warrants mentioning again here, as its musical features are also distinctive. While the recording clearly calls to mind Thin Lizzy’s performance, particularly the descending bass line that begins the song, the guitar riff that follows is not the same as the one created by Eric Bell. However, it is the same length and occurs at the same points in the song as the Thin Lizzy riff, and thus I would


consider this a variation. In addition to the lyrics conjuring images of the southwestern United States, the echo effects on the track create the feeling of open space and the low, gruff vocals sound like they belong to an archetypical outlaw. Not only does this performance lack any overt markers of Irishness, it is aligning itself with another culture entirely.

In 2007, a pop/rock inspired recording was released by an Australian group called Johnny Logan & Friends. The instrumental introduction calls to mind U2 recordings like “Where the Streets Have No Name,” communicating a sense of motion and openness without being propelled forward by the drums. The vocalizations over this introduction sound like they belong to the pop tradition, giving the song a less serious feel and the absence of the descending bass line which normally precedes the guitar riff contributes to a more mellow feel. The verses are sung more freely, appearing at twice the speed that one would expect, but with rests following each line that allow the vocals to echo. This pattern continues into the beginning of the chorus, however the last three lines occur at the quicker tempo without any additional rests between them. After the first chorus, the feeling of forward motion increases with a more defined guitar strum pattern, a stronger drum-set presence, and the entrance of the fiddle and accordion. Additional verses and choruses are performed at the quicker tempo of a traditional performance without the extra rests. This song also contains a fiddle solo. Upon hearing this, I thought that it was similar to the recording by More Power To Your Elbow, referencing two Irish musical traditions in the space of one song: folk and the rock music of U2.

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Skorbut, a band from Germany, released a recording of the song in 2008. The instrumentation and singing style of this performance are similar to those found on Thin Lizzy’s recording. However, the accompanimental pattern is much more relaxed, consisting mostly of guitar and drum backbeats that make the song sound almost like reggae. The guitar riff and solo are present on this recording, but they are lower in the mix than in other recordings and generally sound more relaxed as well, thanks to the more laid-back accompaniment.

The next recording is an instrumental performance by Bags of Rock, a Scottish band, released in 2012. At the beginning, this sounds like a pretty standard cover, however instead of a vocal entrance at the verse the melody is played with what I assume is a bagpipe effect on a synthesizer. This continues for the entire song, with the rest of the instrumentation remaining the same as the Thin Lizzy or Metallica performances. This use of an instrument so stereotypically associated with Celtic music, both Irish and Scottish, connects the performance to both rock/metal and traditional music communities.

The last four performances that I would like briefly to mention are all hybrids that incorporate some reference to the rock recordings into a traditional- or folk-oriented rendition of “Whiskey.” The first is by British musician Jonathan Taylor and was released in 2013. While the signature riff is absent from this recording, Taylor sings the rock version of the melody in 4 accompanied by a quiet, mellow acoustic guitar. This makes the whole song sound sad, instead of angry like so many rock performances.

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The second hybrid performance is by Shaking Quakers in 2013.\textsuperscript{135} This recording begins with sustained chords that would normally fit under the improvised guitar introduction. When the introduction proper begins, the instrumentation is very traditional and the guitar riff is played by the fiddle. The drum set also gives the introduction a double-time feel. However, when the verse begins, the accompaniment switches to sustained chords until the chorus, when the drum set picks up again. The vocals on this track sound like the indie folk performances of bands like Fleet Foxes, once again conveying a melancholy mood.

The Irish band Hot Whiskey released a recording of the song in 2015.\textsuperscript{136} This performance is at a nice bright tempo and features the banjo in place of the guitar on the solo lines and riffs. However, I think one of the most distinctive features of this recording is the prominent Irish accent of the singer, given the absence of any pronounced accent on many rock-influenced recordings. The final cover that I would like to mention is by The Bluebird Band and was released in 2015.\textsuperscript{137} Like the Smokewagon performance, this recording features a riff that is not the same as Eric Bell’s but bears enough similarity to it to call the Thin Lizzy recording to mind, despite the fact that this riff is played by the fiddle instead of the guitar.

Despite the variety present in all of the performances discussed in this section, all of these recordings are covers of Thin Lizzy’s (or Metallica’s) “Whiskey in the Jar” because they make explicit reference to that arrangement, even though they put their own unique spin on it.


\textsuperscript{136} Traditional, “Whiskey in the Jar,” Hot Whiskey, \textit{Live in Dublin (Live)}, Hot Whiskey, 2015, MP3 file, downloaded November, 2015, \textit{iTunes}.

Other Unique Performances

In performances of “Whiskey in the Jar” that are not explicitly referencing other recordings, there are many different ways that musicians put their own unique touch on the song. Some musicians do this through lyric alterations like the cowboy recording of Smokewagon, or the 2013 recording by Nolwenn Leroy, which reverses the gender of the narrator and the lover. Other musicians add a unique introduction or instrumental solo to their performance. For example, American band Seven Nations includes a long New Age-style instrumental with a spoken introduction over it at the beginning of the song. Dust Rhinos, a band from Canada, released a version with a prolonged rhythmic bodhrán and fiddle groove introduction that comes back throughout the song.

Still other groups appeal to different musical genres or arrangements in their interpretation of the song. Phil Coulter, a musician from Northern Ireland, created an instrumental arrangement that, while traditional-sounding in the middle, begins with an extended, classical sounding piano verse, complete with expressive rubato. Similarly, Irish guitarist John O’Shea gives a beautiful solo acoustic guitar performance. Celtica Pipes Rock, a group from Scotland and Austria, performs a mostly instrumental version of the song with the melody played by bagpipes and pop vocals only singing the first and last lines of the chorus. Many different musical genres are represented in this corpus.
including traditional heterophonic recordings like that of The Free Staters,\textsuperscript{144} classical orchestral recordings like The Irish Tenors,\textsuperscript{145} dance remixes like Dance to Tipperary,\textsuperscript{146} 80s-style rock performances like Wattenläufer,\textsuperscript{147} and country renditions like that of Blaggards.\textsuperscript{148} I will now look more closely at nine particularly creative performances of “Whiskey in the Jar.”

The first of these performances is from a German band called Lack of Limits, released in 2000.\textsuperscript{149} The track starts out with drum clicks leading into the first phrase of the rock introduction in its original instrumentation. Then, the band cuts off and laughter is heard. After a few seconds, a saxophone leads into a sultry blues introduction. When the first verse begins, the melody is altered to sound bluesier and each line is repeated twice. The chorus repeats the same line three times and before changing to “there was whiskey in the jar” and this is followed by a ritard and descending saxophone line. The band cuts off again and then counts down in Finnish to begin once more in the style of 50s rock. The melody now becomes fairly close to that of the Dubliners and they perform verses two, three, and four this way, with the singer affecting a bit of an Elvis impersonation.

This leads into an instrumental break with the saxophone playing the melody, followed by verse five, still in the 50s rock style. After verse five, the band segues back into the blues chorus performed earlier before launching into a funk groove over which

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\textsuperscript{147} Traditional, “Wat Wöör Dat Scheuen Hüüt Nacht (Whiskey In the Jar),” Wattenläufer, \textit{Strand! Goot!}, Kutterfon, 2010, MP3 file, downloaded November, 2015, \textit{iTunes}.
\end{flushright}
they sing “here comes Lack of Limits” several times. Then, verse one is repeated, this
time as a rap over the funk groove, followed by verse two, three, and four sung in a
punk/ska style. After all of these verses, the chorus is performed as a call-and-response
rap. Finally, they transition back into one last blues chorus. This performance, from a
live show, does not contain any overt markers of Irishness in any of the styles that it is
performed in, but it is certainly an energetic, entertaining, and unique rendition.

In 2004, a band called Sally’s Gap performed a self-proclaimed ska interpretation
of “Whiskey.”150 The track begins with the band chanting, “All right, here it comes, the
number one,” over a drum and guitar introduction. The drums build into the entrance of
a horn section as they continue to speak: “Whiskey in the jar,” followed by laughter. The
song is felt in 2 and sung by a male and a female vocalist in unison, with the horns
embellishing the second half of each verse. The overall sound of this track is very bright
and upbeat. Instrumental breaks feature percussive vocals, giving a fun, relaxed
impression. Further contributing to this effect is a whistling solo before the final chorus,
which then gives way to a jam and fadeout. While entertaining, this arrangement seems a
little odd considering the nature of the story.

Icewagon Flu, a band from the U.S., released a funk rock-inspired version of the
song in 2006.151 The recording begins slowly with a solo vocalist accompanied by a single
guitar line, and the backing vocals enter at the chorus. After the first chorus, the band
pauses and then reorients themselves in a slow funk rock style complete with wah-wah
guitar effects and jazz flute. Despite the style change, the melody remains the same.

November, 2015, iTunes.
151 Traditional, “Whiskey in the Jar,” Icewagon Flu, Off the Wagon, Jivin’ Jones Records, 2006, MP3 file, downloaded, November,
2015, iTunes.
Verse two is followed by a quote from the Thin Lizzy guitar solo, making this performance a cover. This quote comes back after verse three and four as well. The track ends with a descending guitar lick. While very different from typical performances of the song, the mood created in this recording does seem to fit the narrative.

The performance by American band Salty Frogs in 2006 begins in a fairly typical way, using rock instrumentation with the 2-beat feel of a traditional performance and featuring a female vocalist. After verse two, the band transitions into a traditional dance break featuring the fiddle. Verses three and four are sung in the same style as one and two and are followed by another, longer dance break. This leads back to verse five and two statements of the chorus. The truly unique part of this recording comes after the vocalist starts repeating the last line of the chorus over a fermata before jumping into a gospel vamp on the lyrics “there’s whiskey in the jar,” leading to a soulful ending. Once again, while playful, this ending feels slightly too upbeat for the narrative of “Whiskey.”

British band Think Twice released their recording of “Whiskey in the Jar” in 2008. At the beginning of the track, there is the sound of footsteps, followed by someone singing the opening lines of verse one to themselves. After a brief pause, drum clicks lead into the entrance of the rest of the sparse band, beginning the song anew. This recording is at a relaxed tempo with folk/indie vocals and the melody has been adjusted so that the range is much more limited. When they get to the chorus, the band sings the line “whack fol the daddy-o” twice followed by “there’s whiskey in the jar,” twice over sustained keyboard chords. These four lines are sung twice for each statement of the chorus. The song closes with the singer chanting “whiskey in the jar” over an

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instrumental outro. This track creates a somber mood appropriate to the story of the unfortunate highwayman.

An American group called The Dreamers recorded an instrumental performance of “Whiskey” in 2013. The track begins with a very mellow introduction featuring bongos, synthesizer, finger-picked guitar, and strings. After this very calm beginning, there is a series of keyboard chords that lead into a more upbeat traditional version of the song with the melody played by fiddle and cello. This continues for two sung verses. After two verses, the beat subdivision switches to triplets, or a swing feel which holds for two more verses. Then, there is a transition to a minor-sounding interlude which calls to mind early chamber music, before returning to the upbeat simple meter for another two verses, followed by two more verses of swing with an embellished fiddle melody and prominent spoons part. This performance pieces together a lot of traditional sounding instruments, but the constant switching of styles, as well as the presence of instruments like synthesizer, makes it feel a bit artificial.

A particularly interesting recording came about in 2014 from a performer known as Zippy Kid. The track contains guitar, a drum set — possibly a drum machine — and vocals, but none of them seems to be quite together with the others. The thickly-accented vocals are spoken, not sung, over all of the instruments, the guitar does not follow a particular strum pattern, and the drums seem to be going on in the background oblivious to everything else. The singer even restarts one of the verses when he speaks the wrong lyrics, while the instruments go on without him. This continues for five

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minutes and six verses, including with a guitar solo that sounds much more intentional than the rest of the song. Somehow the chaos, while a bit odd, does not feel completely out of place on this song because of the chaotic actions within the story.

An Austrian band called Irish Steirisch (i.e., ‘Styrian Irish’) released a performance of “Whiskey in the Jar” in four different languages and musical styles. The track begins with an accordion, fiddle, and percussion introduction and these instruments, with the addition of a tuba, accompany the first verse, making it sound a little bit like a polka. This verse is performed in German by a male vocalist singing in a punk style. Backing vocals enter on the chorus, which also features a busy fiddle countermelody. A percussion solo accentuated by fiddle and accordion hits follows this first chorus. This leads into verse two, which is performed in French by a different male vocalist in a less sing-speaking style. The verse also features a lyrical accordion line, different from the accordion presence in verse one, which calls to mind scenes of French cafés. The second chorus is followed by a repetitive fiddle and accordion interlude and builds into verse three, sung in English by a female vocalist, with the instrumentation back to the polka-like style of verse one. After the third chorus, sustained vocal and accordion notes descend to lead into verse four, which is in Italian. This is sung by a male vocalist and accompanied by a lyrical fiddle countermelody. After repeating the chorus twice, there is a somewhat New-Age sounding outro featuring sustained vocals and accordion, a busy percussion part, and repeating the line “my Molly.” This is followed by a clapping and percussion break with a short accordion vamp and coming to a bluesy sounding close. I found this performance incredibly creative and appreciated

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how the accompaniment style changed with the language, but it still seemed like an odd way to perform the song.

The final performance that I would like to discuss was released by Holger Münzel & Udo Mittelbach in 2015. It begins with a funk guitar lead-in to an introduction consisting of sustained keyboard chords over a guitar and bass funk groove with hits by many different percussion instruments. There is also a synthesizer part that comes in midway through the introduction. When the vocals come in, the melody has been rewritten to better fit the funk style. After the first verse, there is a trumpet interlude that moves directly into verse two. The chorus features a deep voice chanting “musha ring dumma do, musha ring dumma do, musha ring dum do dumma da, musha ring dumma do, musha ring dumma do, there’s whiskey in the jar” embellished by horn hits. This is followed by two more verses before the chorus comes back, this time without the horn embellishments. The chorus progression is repeated four times before the chanting stops and the horns enter along with the funk groove from the introduction and the track fades out from there.

As you can see from these examples, the presence of key recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” by The Dubliners and Thin Lizzy by no means limited the ways that this song can be performed, despite the patterns of influence seen in Chapter 5. I will discuss the meaning of these findings in my concluding chapter.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The analyses presented in Chapters 5 and 6 serve to illustrate the popularity and diversity of interpretations of “Whiskey in the Jar.” Amid this diversity, I am struck by the inability of this corpus study to reveal any single dominant identity for the song. Each of these performances has something unique to offer to the understanding of “Whiskey in the Jar,” but many of these subtle nuances are lost in the dataset. In exchange, however, we are able to see some of the overarching patterns of performance emerge, including the determinant influence of key recordings like those of The Dubliners and Thin Lizzy.

With regard to the lyrics, the majority of recordings (67.03%) reflect the direct influence of Irish traditional music, while Thin Lizzy’s more rock-inflected approach is present in 17.58% of the corpus. Overall, these two traditions account for 84.61% of the versions looked at in this paper. With regard to instrumentation, 346 of the 398 songs in the corpus (86.93%) contain at least one traditional instrument, while 177 (44.47%) contain at least one rock instrument. Thin Lizzy’s guitar riff appears, in various instrumentations, in 16.33% of the corpus.

With regard specifically to hybridity, 212 of the recordings (53.27%) in this corpus contain some sort of instrumental mixture, whether a mostly traditional ensemble with one or two rock instruments, a rock band with one or two traditional instruments,
or an ensemble that contained an even mix of both. Performances that contain one of the “other” instruments, falling outside of the band’s prevailing format, were also considered hybrids. Still, a fairly large number of the recordings (37.69%) contained only traditional instruments and 9.05% contained only rock instruments.

Different style markers identify these recordings with different musical communities. The most widely represented were, of course, Irish traditional music and rock/metal music. Other genres that appeared in the corpus were dance remixes/electronica, blues, funk, rap/hip-hop, ska, polka, New-Age, and country. Future directions for this project would include investigating the stylistic range of treatment in other Irish traditional songs. Clearly, “Whiskey in the Jar” appeals not just to those with explicit connections to the Irish musical community, but to a wide variety of musicians and fans. I would like to examine whether this is due to the popularity of multiple key recordings of “Whiskey in the Jar” or if the commercialization of folk music through such mutable genres as “World Music,” roots music, and folk metal has led to similarly eclectic arrangements of other Irish songs.

It is remarkable to me that this simple strophic song, written approximately two hundred years ago, can attract the attention of so many musicians from various age groups, countries, and musical styles. Each of these musicians has used “Whiskey in the Jar” to fit within or among different musical communities. This began with folk revivalists like Ewan MacColl, seeking to preserve traditional music. It continued with groups like The Dubliners and The Pogues, who made folk music more accessible to modern generations by incorporating instruments borrowed from other styles. Thin Lizzy, despite their reluctance to be associated with the song, made their recording into
something that fit their identity and experience: a rock song. Later, Metallica created a similar version to pay tribute to the music and influence of Thin Lizzy, bringing the song to a new generation of fans outside of Ireland. Musicians that perform traditional or rock renditions of “Whiskey in the Jar” connect themselves to these traditions.

Looking back at the nine unusual recordings discussed at the end of Chapter 6, it seems fitting to me that none of those bands are from Ireland: Icewagon Flu, Salty Frogs, and The Dreamers are from the U.S., Think Twice is from England, Lack of Limits is from Germany, Irish Steirisch is from Austria, and the countries of origin for the others are unknown. Recall that both The Clancy Brothers and The Pogues were able to change the way that Irish music was performed by forcing it to confront their own experiences. While there are no doubt many songs that each of these bands could have chosen to perform from within their own musical genres, they chose to bring “Whiskey” into those communities and thus to be brought into dialogue with others who have made that choice.

The identification of this song with diverse and even seemingly contradictory musical communities reflects the unpredictable adaptability of music to diverse backgrounds, tastes, and experiences. Within the Irish traditional musical community, there are mixed feelings about the ways that traditional music has been transformed outside of the tradition itself. As Fintan Vallely explains,

Irish traditional music is becoming a victim of its own success. Its top artists live lives that two decades ago would be more associated with rock stars. The music supports hundreds of performers – hungry, young Apollos of shamrockery blasting with guitars, ballads, and bodhráns through the thousands of “Irish” bars worldwide, local Irish pub-session musicians and major, popularly acclaimed and well-paid festival and concert-hall players.158

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However, not everyone shares Vallely’s disdain for the intermingling of Irish traditional music with other musical communities: “‘Traditional’ cultural forms, including musics, were always innovating, flexibly moving with their conditions of existence and those who made them.”159 Timothy Taylor’s afterword in *Celtic Modern*, entitled “Gaelicer Than Thou,” discusses his experience as an Irish-American Protestant, feeling like he wasn’t Irish enough because he wasn’t Catholic. He objects to the idea that Irish traditional music must be kept in its original form in order to retain its Irishness. Perhaps, as Eric Bell claimed of the Thin Lizzy performance, each of these recordings retains “that Irish feel” simply through the very idea of the song.160

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160 Zaleski, “The long and winding road of “Whiskey in the Jar.”
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111


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Discography


