

Fusion of Irish Music | Sample answer

Fusion involves combining two genres of music to create a unique sound. Over the past 50 years Irish music has been combined with many other genres, such as jazz, classical, popular and rock.

The growth of pop and rock music during the 20th Century had a significant implication on Irish traditional music. A band who incorporated both Irish and rock music in their sound was “Horslips”. The name is a combination of the hornpipe and the slip jig. Through their music they inspired an entirely new sub category - celtic rock. Horslips were committed in an Irish cultural dimension and eschewed the American and British rock clone models. They wanted a sound and material that would be clearly Irish but also successful popular music. Well known songs of theirs were “King of the Fairies” and “An Dearg Doom”. The instruments they used included electric and acoustic guitars and fiddles, bodhran, keyboards, flute, mandolin and concertina. In their music they used Irish dance tunes, old harp music, airs and marches, songs in Irish and English and folk music of other countries. Their last jig was in 1980 but they left a lasting impression on the future of Irish music.

Another kind of fusion was Irish and classical music. An extremely prominent example of this is “Mise Éire”, written by Sean Ó’Riada for a film in 1960. At the time Ireland had no established film industry and the Irish people were immensely proud. The status of Irish music was raised amongst a section of society who had never taken an interest before. This combines Irish traditional tunes and sean nós songs with orchestral accompaniment. “Mise Éire” was originally conceived as the first of a trilogy of films. This last film commission in 1963 was the music for a screen adaptation of Synge’s “The Playboy of the Western World.”

Another example of this type of fusion is “The Brendon Voyage” by Shaun Davey. This is a work for uilleann pipes and orchestra. This was Davey’s first major orchestral suite, composed for Uilleann pipes played by Liam O’Flynn. This piece depicts Tim Severin’s adventure in reconstructing Brendan’s 6th Century Atlantic crossing to America.

Irish traditional music has also been fused with jazz. An example of this is Michael O’ Suilleabhain’s piano arrangements of Irish dance tunes in a three-way fusion of traditional, classical and jazz. Also in this type is Sharon Shannon’s “Cavan Potholes”. This piece features jazz style riffs. A scene in Bill Wheelman’s Riverdance “Trading Taps” incorporates jazz, combines Irish music with alto jazz saxophone.

Irish traditional music has also been fused with popular music. An example of this type is De Danann's recording of the Beatles' "Hey Jude" transposed into a set of dance tunes. Another example is Sinéad O'Connor with "Nothing Compares 2 U." This song incorporates synthesised strings, keyboards and drums using a rock beat, fiddle and Irish fiddle style.

Another example of this genres is the Pogue's "Fairytale of New York". It is sung in punk genre with harsh used of belting of the voice. Orchestral accompaniment prevails, and after the first verse the accordion, drum kit, guitar and bass enter. Tin-whistle is added between verses.

It is these types which fusion of Irish music has developed into over the 20th and 21st Century.