

Regional Styles in Instrumental Music | Sample answer

2015 Q5 (B) (iii) Discuss regional styles in traditional instrumental music.

Different areas in Ireland have very different music playing styles. Musicians coming from certain areas will have elements of that style in their playing.

Donegal Style:

A fiddle playing tradition can be heard in Donegal. Single stroke staccato bowing is used here, as well as a clear and crisp tone. There is little use of rolls in this style. The music is very strong and vigorous. Staccato triplets are used in Donegal music, and they have a fast “Reel- based” repertoire. They have Scottish influences, as seen with the playing of highlands such as “The Braes of Maas”, flings and mazurkas. Another example of Donegal style is “Drops of Brandy” as played by Johnny Doherty on “The Floating Bow” album. The strong, forceful Donegal style can also be heard in Johnny Doherty's “The Spirits of Wine”. Many of these features can also be heard in the music of “Altan”, a Donegal based group. Lead singer and fiddle player, Mairead Ní Mhaonagh, is known as a true exponent of the Donegal style.

North Connaught Style:

This style incorporates both the fiddle and flute tradition. The pace of the fiddle playing tends to be quite fast, and a lot more ornamentation is used. It has a more flowing style and uses slurs more often. A lot of “swing” can be heard in north Connaught style music. An accentuation of the “back beat” is created through this swing, which produces the common syncopated rhythm of the reel. Michael Coleman was a north Connaught fiddle player whose records were issued in America in the 1920s. He set new standards in fiddle playing and was immortalized as the most influential figure in 20th Century Irish music. An example of north Connaught style music is “The Reel of Rio” as played by John Vesey on “The First Month of Spring”. This piece features the “swing” feel produced by the emphasis being put on the back beat, in this case the third beat of the bar.

North Connaught swing can also be heard in John Vesey's playing of "Up Sligo". The swing is produced in this jig by putting an accent and a longer duration to the first beat of the group of three.

North Connaught flute tradition features rhythmical playing which uses articulation techniques and overblowing to make a very big, rhythmical sound. An example of this is Eddie Cahill's playing of the reels "Ah Surely and the Old Copper Plate".

East Clare Style:

This style of playing is similar to east Galway style. It features fiddle and flute tradition, with slow and flowing music, seen in the playing of Martin Hayes. It also replaces long rolls with a dynamic in either direction on a single tone. Martin Hayes' "The Lonesome touch" shows East Clare style of playing. This can also be heard in the jig "The Cat in The Corner".

West Clare Style:

West Clare is a multi instrumentational region, but features heavily the fiddle and concertina. The music of this area tends to be fast, and it features much ornamentation. The style is flowing, and little techniques of emphasis are being used. An example of this style is Noel Hill's "Kiss the Maid behind the Barrel" from the Irish Concertina.

Sliabh Luacra Style:

This style incorporates the fiddle and accordion tradition. It is heard in the West Cork, East Kerry and West Limerick areas. Lots of ornamentation is used, as is a variety of slurs and single stroke bows. Its repertoire mainly consists of polkas(2/4 time) and slides(6/8 or 12/8 time). An example of this style is Jackie Daly on the CD "The Mountain Road" playing the reels "Keefe's/ The Clog". In the Sliabh Luacra polka playing there is an emphasis on the off- beat, or second quaver of the group. An example of this is Matt Cranitch's playing of "Mick Duggan's Polkas".

These styles show the diversity of Irish music today, and the adaptations of their playing over time has created traditions which can still be seen in these areas today.