Irish Music Ensemble
ETHNMUS 91Z (lower division) / 161Z (upper division)
Wednesdays 6:00 – 8:50 PM in SMB 1420
website: https://ccle.ucla.edu/course/view/19W-ETHNMUS91Z-1

Director: Aaron M. Bittel (https://schoolofmusic.ucla.edu/people/aaron-bittel/)
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Phone: 310.825.1187
Office: SMB 1630C (Ethnomusicology Archive)
Office Hours: by appointment, Monday – Friday 10 AM – 6 PM

About the Course
This course is about the traditional dance music of Ireland and the Irish diaspora communities in
England, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere, often referred to as Irish traditional music or sometimes,
especially in Ireland, just trad music. Today, Irish traditional music is played around the world, from
Cape Town to Tokyo, Moscow to Buenos Aires. However, it originated in the music of rural farming
communities in Ireland, played for dances, celebrations, and home entertainment; the music
continues to be played in these contexts. The course will also touch on musical traditions closely
related to Irish traditional music, such as those from Scotland, Québec, and New England.

The primary modes of learning will be through listening and playing. But because music-making is
a human cultural activity and context is important for fully understanding it, we will also discuss the
current and historical cultural contexts for the music from time to time. You are not required to have
prior experience studying music or playing a musical instrument to take this course. We will learn
the tunes (repertoire) by ear, which is the primary way Irish traditional music is learned and
transmitted. You can use notation on your own to help you learn, but you are strongly encouraged to
focus on learning by ear. It may be hard at first, but it will pay rewards later when you find you can
pick up tunes after only hearing them a few times.

Enrollment
This class requires a PTE number to enroll, which you can get from the Director by filling out a
Registration Form with your nine-digit University ID number (on your BruinCard). The section you
enroll in depends on your class standing, not your ability level. Students with lower-division
standing (freshman, sophomore) should enroll in Ethnomusicology 91Z; all others (upper-division
and graduate) should enroll in Ethnomusicology 161Z.

Instrument Requirements
You are required to own or otherwise have access to an instrument appropriate to Irish traditional
music, such as whistle (aka pennywhistle or tinwhistle), flute, fiddle (aka violin), button or piano
accordion, concertina, acoustic guitar, tenor (four-string) banjo, mandolin, or harp. Other instruments
may be included with approval of the ensemble Director. You are required to bring your
instrument to class each week starting from the second class meeting. Failure to do so will be
reflected in the class participation part of your grade, since you can't fully participate without an
instrument.

If you have never played an instrument before, or if you don't already play one of the instruments
listed above, you should purchase a whistle in the key of D. While there are many makes of
whistles available online and in music shops, for this course you are strongly recommended to purchase a Freeman Mellow Dog whistle in D, available at https://www.ebay.com/itm/282934017545.

Note: If you are purchasing a whistle for class, place your order as soon as possible, as it can take up to two weeks to receive it.

The price with shipping is $46.60, which includes a 10% student discount. Although it’s not the cheapest available whistle out there (it’s also by far not the most expensive!) it is definitely the best value for a beginner, and it’s still less than the cost of most textbooks. Very cheap ($10-15) whistles often have tiny, almost invisible manufacturing defects that can make them frustrating if not impossible to play. Many people have given up on playing the whistle, thinking that they had no talent for it, when in fact they just had a poorly made instrument. You’ll learn faster and have much more fun with a dependable, consistent instrument. Likewise, more expensive whistles (up to $400 or more) are available, but these offer only very small refinements over the Mellow Dog.

Students who have financial concerns about buying this instrument should talk with the Director about other options.

Course Website
The course website on CCLE is an integral part of the course activities, and you are expected to make regular use of it. You can access it from MyUCLA or via the link at the top of this syllabus. There you will find recordings of each week’s tunes, additional listening, links to resources, an up-to-date syllabus, and more. It is also where intermediate/advanced students will sign up to teach the group a tune and sign up for a date to teach that tune to the class (see Choosing a Skill Level, below).

Course Structure
The course meets weekly from 6:00 – 8:50 PM, and is divided into three parts (subject to change):

1. **Tune-learning workshop #1/Beginning whistle workshop, 6:00 – 7:00 PM**
   This workshop will focus on simpler tunes from the core of the Irish repertoire, as a vehicle for learning to play, and mastering, the whistle. Players of other instruments are welcome to join as well, either to learn the core tunes on their instruments, to pick up the whistle as a secondary instrument, or both. Attendance required for beginning students.

2. **Tune-learning workshop #2, 7:00 – 8:00 PM**
   This workshop will focus on learning new tunes – jigs, reels, hornpipes, barn dances, slip jigs, etc. – from the Irish traditional music repertoire and occasionally from related traditions. It will be for all instruments, with a strong focus on melody. Tunes will be taught by ear in the traditional call-and-response method. Attendance is required for all students; beginning students will listen and may join in when they feel comfortable.

3. **Seisiún (Session), 8:00 – 8:50 PM**
   This is an informal gathering modeled on the pub or house session, which these days is the most common venue for engaging in the social activity of Irish traditional music. You can eat, drink, tell stories, and most importantly, play tunes. This is a good opportunity to get some extra practice on the tunes we’re learning in class, as well as to bring in new tunes to share.
Choosing a Skill Level
You get to choose whether you identify yourself as a beginner or an intermediate/advanced player when you fill out the registration form. It may be hard to decide which fits you, but here are some guidelines:

**Beginners** are students who have never played any musical instrument before, or who have some experience playing a musical instrument (maybe years ago) but have never played Irish traditional music or any similar music taught by ear. They will participate in the first tune-learning workshop part of each class, where they will receive additional instruction to get them started on the whistle. Beginners are also required to attend and listen at the other parts of each class, and may join in with the rest of the group as they feel ready. They will be expected, at a minimum, to master the tunes taught in the first part of each class, and to lead the group at the end of the quarter in one of those tunes (see Skills check, below).

**Intermediate/advanced** students already play one of the instruments common to Irish traditional music steadily and confidently, either by ear or using notation (sheet music), or they have experience with an aurally-transmitted style of music and are comfortable learning tunes by ear on a new instrument. They will participate in the second tune-learning workshop part of the class, as well as the session part, and will be expected to learn more tunes than the beginners (two to three per week). They will also be expected to learn a tune on their own for teaching to the rest of the group later in the quarter (see Skills check, below).

Expectations and Grading
This is a participatory course, therefore your grade will depend largely on both the quantity and quality of your participation in class and class activities. This includes attendance, since you have to be present to participate. It also includes preparation outside of class, so that you are ready to fully participate in class. The breakdown of grading is:

**Participation, including attendance: 50%**
This includes being on time, bringing your instrument, and making your best effort at playing along with the group. Even if you’re not confident that what you’re playing is right, it’s better to play the wrong notes loudly than to try to hide by playing quietly or, worse yet, pretending to play. You will get one absence each quarter excused automatically, no matter the reason. Any additional absences will reduce your grade in this area by 5% each, and may only be excused at the discretion of the Director. Documentation of the reason for your absence will be required.

**General weekly preparedness: 30%**
Each week, on your own outside of class, you are expected to: (a) practice the tunes taught in class to a point where you can play them confidently with the group at the next class meeting, and (b) listen to recordings and/or watch videos of Irish traditional musicians, in order to improve your understanding of appropriate style, interpretation, ornamentation, notable players, and repertoire in Irish traditional music generally and for your instrument in particular. Resources will be provided on the class website and more are available in the Ethnomusicology Archive, but you are also encouraged to go out and find your own. This preparedness will be reflected in your playing in class each week, in your skills check, and in the final class activity.
Skills check: 10%
Later on in the quarter, you will be required to give a short demonstration of what you’ve learned so far. Grading will be based on improvement since the start of the quarter, so if you are just starting out, you won’t be expected to play at the same level as someone who has been playing for years. Beginners will be required to start the group in playing one of the tunes learned in the workshop, by playing it solo one time through, after which the rest of the group will join in. Intermediate/Advanced students will be required to teach a tune to the rest of the group. The tune must be part of the Irish traditional music repertoire (or related repertoires, with approval of the instructor), and must be prepared outside of class so that you are ready to teach it to the group. There will be a certain number of available slots in the second half of the quarter to teach your tune, and you must sign up in advance.

Final class activity: 10%
Each quarter, we will have a final class activity that will be announced in the early part of the quarter. Examples of final activities are a class seisiún (open to the public and possibly with invited musicians), a workshop with a guest musician, a concert, or a recording project. This may or may not take part during regularly scheduled class time, although we will try to accommodate everyone’s schedule. Any schedule conflicts must be discussed with the Director as soon as the activity is announced so alternative arrangements can be made.

Grading Scale

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97 – 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93 – 96.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90 – 92.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87 – 89.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83 – 86.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80 – 82.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77 – 79.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
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<td>D</td>
<td>63 – 66.9</td>
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<td>D-</td>
<td>60 – 62.9</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0 – 59.9</td>
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Professionalism and Civility
Playing music is supposed to be fun, and by taking this class you agree to commit to doing your part in keeping the environment enjoyable and safe for everyone. This really just boils down to showing respect for everyone else in the class, by: (a) paying attention to the person speaking, asking a question, or teaching a tune; (b) not playing, talking, or otherwise disrupting that person; (c) refraining from using your phone or other device in class unless it’s directly related to what’s going on and it doesn’t cause a distraction for you or others; and (d) engaging in civil discussion. Insults, discriminatory behavior, inappropriate comments and the like will not be tolerated.

Support for Students with Disabilities
If you require academic adjustments based on a disability, you must register with the Center for Accessible Education (CAE). CAE will assess your needs, determine reasonable academic adjustments, and work with you to implement academic adjustments. When possible, students with disabilities requiring academic adjustments should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of each term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. You may contact the CAE at (310) 825-1501, go to the CAE office at A255 Murphy Hall, or access the CAE website at www.cae.ucla.edu.