

Gerry Smyth

**“The orchestra of memory”: Music, Sound and Silence in *A Goat’s Song***

[...] A sister is a honk in the void

as the orchestra of memory  
takes to the air.

—Dermot Healy, *A Fool’s Errand*

**I**

Before his untimely death in 2014, Dermot Healy had established a reputation as a penetrating and powerful chronicler of contemporary rural Ireland in all its emotional, cultural and moral complexity.<sup>1</sup> He did so, moreover, across a variety of literary forms – poetry, drama, self-writing and fiction – and with reference to a number of recurring devices and motifs. One of the most potent motifs or devices permeating the canon of Healy’s work is that of sound: from the early short stories to the late poetry and the final novel, Healy’s Ireland is a noisy place, full of human and natural sounds, many of which are musical, all of which may be observed to engage with the developing narrative in complex ways.<sup>2</sup>

The creative writer’s concern with (musical) sound registers across a range of contemporary critical discourses and disciplines. One of my own long-term interests, for example, lies in what I have described elsewhere as “the musical novel” – narratives in which music features as a distinctive element at both/either a formal and/or a conceptual level.<sup>3</sup> Healy’s invocation of a wide range of musical styles and references situates him within a genealogy of Irish writing going back at least as far as Joyce (and arguably much earlier) in which music, with all its social and psychological resonances, functions as an important index of Irish identity.<sup>4</sup>

Another area of potential interest concerns a concept known to disciplines such as ethnomusicology and communications studies as “ubiquitous music.” As defined in the subtitle of a recent book on the subject, this term refers to “the everyday sounds that we don’t always notice.” The premise here is that music pervades modern life in every aspect of its private and public experience. This ubiquitous music has escaped serious attention, however, because it obviates the kind of serious, focused listening upon which the traditional discipline of musicology was founded and developed. Very few people ‘hear’ the music of everyday life in the way that traditional musicology imagines the ideal musical text-to-be-studied is heard – in isolation, with focus, understanding and alertness. Ubiquitous music, rather, refers

to “those musical events that take place alongside other activities” (Quiñones, Kassabian and Boschi 2013: 7) – driving, queuing, eating, working, shopping, etc. – and as part of a much wider “orchestra” of social sounds: conversation, traffic, wind, bird-song, and so on.

Such a concept resonates strongly with the work produced across the thirty years or so of Healy’s publishing career. His work is full of overheard music, drifting in from another room or a car radio.<sup>5</sup> It’s certainly the case that music-making or music-listening sometimes takes centre stage in the narrative; in this regard, Healy was fully attuned to the seminal role played in modern Irish rural life by a wide range of music styles. Such practices tend to be only one element of a much wider sonic array in which society at large is implicated, however. From the evidence of the writing, Healy did not share Joyce’s concern to integrate music as part of a self-conscious aesthetic philosophy; he did, however, share Joyce’s passion for the fabric of ordinary everyday Irish life in which music – however fragmentary, however incidental – plays a seminal role.

These two concepts (the musical novel and ubiquitous music) overlap significantly with a final theory I want to mention in this context: sound worlds. As described by one of its foremost practitioners, this notion refers to the ways in which “sound figures in bodily ways of knowing and being in the world.” Such a project, moreover,

is located at a significant anthropological intersection, one where the phrase “sound worlds” conjoins its dual possibilities, namely “worlds of sound,” and “sounds of the world.” The idea of the former, of “worlds of sound,” instantly denotes the multiplicity of distinctively local environmental soundscapes mapping the globe, and the complex ways their distinctiveness blurs as they change through space and time. Likewise, “sounds of the world” equally denotes the diversity of human musical practices both in their most distinct and their most amalgamated forms. Together the two ideas imply that sound worlds are entities both distinct and cumulative, built up from the interaction of diverse communities, diverse acoustic environments, diverse languages and musics. In short, the idea of sound worlds is that social formations are indexed in sonic histories and sonic geographies (Feld 2000: 173-4).

In this essay I want to consider what an appropriately sensitised reader, equipped with the array of theoretical concepts briefly introduced above, might make of Dermot Healy’s writing. More specifically, I want to try to describe Healy’s typical “sound world” as represented in his celebrated 1994 novel *A Goat’s Song*. My contention is that as we approach an understanding of this particular author’s “sound world,” we shall simultaneously approach a better understanding of Ireland itself during a crucial phase of its modern history.

## II

Despite its title, *A Goat's Song* is not easily recognisable as a “musical novel”; although music of various kinds is invoked throughout the narrative, none of it is foregrounded as being of especial narrative significance. This contrasts with the work of contemporary Irish novelists such as Roddy Doyle or Patrick McCabe, for each of whom music tends to embody or articulate an array of potential meanings which resonate in relation to the ongoing narrative (Smyth 2009: 65-83, 119-21). We observe this quite clearly in McCabe's *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998), for example, the title of which references a particular song which, if the reader knows it, reflects ironically on the life and experiences of its main protagonist. The same is true of Doyle's *The Commitments* (1987), the story of a (fictional) band purveying a specific style of music which, if the reader is familiar with it, affords a telling insight on a particular moment in modern Irish history.

Healy's invocation of music tends to operate somewhat differently. *A Goat's Song* tells the story of an ill-fated relationship between a Northern Protestant woman and a Southern Catholic man against the backdrop of late twentieth-century Irish history. In Chapter Nineteen (entitled “Oh No, Don't Stop the Carnival”) the sisters Sara and Catherine Adams attend a folk festival in a field near the Mayo townland where they have a holiday home. There they run into the enigmatic playwright / fisherman Jack Ferris, whom they had first met as teenagers during earlier visits to the area, and to whom each woman is at this stage attracted. The episode represents an important moment in the developing relationship between Catherine and Jack, as the reader is enabled to observe elements of their personality and habits which will continue to grow in significance over the course of the narrative.

Part of that significance lies in the setting: a folk festival in the west of Ireland sometime in the mid-1970s. Four principal kinds of music are described throughout the episode, each of which resonates in particular ways in relation to the various characters and to the wider community in which they are invoked. The first is ‘folk’ music, represented here by festival headliners, Planxty. The latter were a ‘super group’ comprised of four leading figures from the traditional music revival which had been growing in scope and influence since the previous decade. In terms of their age, their virtuosity, their repertoire and their iconography, Planxty embodied what might be described as the *progressive* wing of the *traditional* revival – and this is interesting in the context of a story which is in part about the ways in which the past continues to warp the present.<sup>6</sup> It's also interesting that Healy invokes the music without ever attempting to describe or reproduce what it actually sounds like:

Inside, the new generation were screaming for Planxty. The musicians must have come on because a great roar arose. Over the speakers came the bodhran and the mandolin, the bazooki and the Uilleann pipes. Then Andy Irvine began singing “A Blacksmith Courted Me” (243).

Now, some of Healy’s readers may be familiar with Planxty’s version of this song, others may not; it’s interesting to observe, however, that the author does not attempt to transpose that version into some form of literary discourse by using metaphors or other figures to try to integrate the (necessarily absent) musical discourse into the present narrative. It’s true that the title of the song is suggestive, offering an ironic commentary on the evolving affair between Jack (associated in part, like the blacksmith, with manual labour) and “me.” But the music itself remains curiously de-emphasised, unlike in the work of McCabe or Doyle; it’s simply there, one element amongst many within this community’s complex soundscape.

The musical taste of this “new generation” is set against the three other forms of music invoked in the episode:

In a white suit a crooner from the fifties sang Walter Glynn’s version of “Where My Caravan is Resting,” then came a local fiddle band who played too fast to dance to, then a long-retired country-and-western showband from Castlebar who looked into each other’s eyes as they swept through old popular airs. (239)<sup>7</sup>

Each of these styles embodies characteristics and connotations located at some remove from that embraced by “the new generation” who have come to worship at the feet of Planxty. In this context, crooning, *céilí* and showband music are linked by a sentimental regard for the past, expressed across a continuum running between nostalgia on the one hand and ‘the craic’ (that mythical Irish version of enjoyment) on the other. The music of Planxty, however, seems future-orientated, impelled by a regard for authenticity and an evolving ‘scene.’ All these styles and traditions have met temporarily at the folk festival, in the fictional ‘present’ of Healy’s narrative, where they form part of the sonic backdrop against which the story unfolds.

These four styles of music recur throughout the novel, where they are joined by others (including jazz and classical) and where they continue to assume important – although not defining – roles in relation to the narrative. Rock music grows in significance during Jack’s Belfast sojourn, as do the three playback formats which in large part facilitated the success of rock as a popular form during the period covered in the story itself (that is, the 1950s to the 1980s): the vinyl record, the cassette tape and the transistor radio. Chapters such as “Madame George” (295-305, named for a much-loved Van Morrison song) and “Popular Songs” (391-

98), as well as sections such as “The Musical Bridge” (319-408), signal the fact that music is a central part of the society in which this particular tragedy plays itself out, a seminal form of popular culture through which the characters engage with themselves, with each other, and with the community at large.

Much of this music, moreover, is of the kind described above as “ubiquitous”; and much of it does not appear to merit (or to receive) the kind of intense listening demanded in (popular) musicological discourse. It is, rather, casual, incidental, a vague contributing element to the sonic backdrop but one lacking the presence or the attention to solidify into a significant symbol: piped music in pubs (32); Christmas music in the streets of Dublin (36); the unidentified hymn overheard by Catherine as she gazes upon Matti Bonner’s hanged body (87); the unnamed tune hummed by a nervous Jack during a meeting with Catherine (226); and so on. Alongside the songs and artists self-consciously invoked throughout the text, these examples evade the narrative’s interpretive sonar; they are present, but we’re not sure why or what they contribute. Neither are we at all sure how the presence (or more intriguingly the potential absence) of these musics might be affecting the texture, and thus the meaning, of this imaginary world. It’s a testament to the incredible subtlety of Healy’s art that he manages to evoke a musical landscape which, in its vagueness as well as its precision, so accurately reflects the sonic texture of lived experience.

So, music of various kinds and significance features throughout *A Goat’s Song*. Above and beyond this level of engagement, however, any consideration of the text as a musical novel would have to take cognisance of its formal structure. It’s interesting, for example, that the first section of the *narrative*, entitled “Christmas Day in the Workhouse” (3-84), is actually the final section of the *story*, and that the general thrust of the narrative is as a consequence belied by the reader’s knowledge, gained during that opening section, of the ultimate failure of the relationship and its breakdown into alienation and alcoholism. Thus, the story ends (on p. 84) with Jack getting ready to write the story of his relationship with Catherine and everything that has led up to this point.<sup>8</sup> This unusual format clearly relates in some respects to the artistic discourse which constitutes one of the text’s principal reference points: Athenian tragedy, in which the audience knows the fate awaiting the unsuspecting protagonist. But it’s also interesting to consider it in musical terms, as a sort of overture, embodying notions of return and reprise. Indeed, such an anti- or counter-narrative gesture invokes the supremely musical effect in which the present contains within itself both its own past as well as the future towards which it is inevitably tending.<sup>9</sup>

Another musical effect adopted by Healy is the *leitmotif*. Particularly associated with Wagnerian opera, the *leitmotif* is a short musical phrase intended to represent a particular presence – whether character, object or idea – within the developing action of the story. As deployed in literary discourse, it is (according to an early scholar of the musical novel) “a verbal formula which is deliberately repeated, which is easily recognized at each recurrence, and which serves, by means of this recognition, to link the context in which the repetition occurs with earlier contexts in which the motive had appeared” (Brown 1948: 211). Now, every writer has peculiar ‘tics’ which characterise their style (Healy’s “used” instead of “used to” – found throughout his work – is one example); but there are certain usages beyond this which qualify as *leitmotifs* in this context. The ubiquitous wind and the roaring sea of the Mullet peninsula seems two obvious examples, and important ones (as we shall see) given their status as crucial elements of that community’s particular sound world.

Rather less obvious would be a word such as “galvanize,” which occurs on thirteen occasions throughout the novel.<sup>10</sup> The process of galvanization (whereby a protective coat of zinc is applied to iron or steel fixtures in order to prevent rusting) is commonly associated with the various milieux featured in the novel (farm, sea-board and war-torn city). “To galvanise” also means to rouse or to stir into activity, something which might be regarded ironically in the light of Jack’s increasing inertia. The word’s repeated usage throughout the novel, however, seems to perform no specific task other than to refer back to previous occurrences and forward to future ones. And yet, as those usages recur and as the instances mount up, some other process seems to be at work. Healy, like Joyce before him, doesn’t waste words; once the reader is properly sensitised, what might appear to be a ‘tic’ or even laziness emerges as a kind of *leitmotif*, suggesting potential resonances between various characters and contexts – resonances of which the text itself, apparently, is hardly aware. In literary terms such an effect may appear obviously poetic; like poetry, meaning is created at least partially through repeated words and images, some of them organised in relation to a semiotic (including a sonic) rather than a semantic function. The derivation of such an effect, however, is undoubtedly musical, linked to that field’s unique ability to provide interpretive possibilities for the listener through subtle patterns of resonance and repetition.

I suggest that any consideration of *A Goat’s Song* as a musical novel would progress along these lines, examining specific musical references (both deliberately symbolic as well as “ubiquitous”) at the level of the plot while also remaining alert to formal features that rely on or invoke musical discourse in some or other fashion. Besides this, however, Healy is (as suggested above) a writer who is in some senses paradoxically at odds with the written word,

and for whom sound rather than sight represents the pre-eminent mode of sensory engagement with the world. He is a writer constantly listening for and trying to transcribe into literary terms what, in his penultimate poetry collection *A Fool's Errand*, he referred to as “the orchestra of memory.”

### III

The various kinds of music encountered thus far qualify as “sounds of the world” in the terms described by Feld. *Céilí*, ballad, showband, country and western, rock, and so on – these denote (as quoted above) “the diversity of human musical practices both in their most distinct and their most amalgamated forms”: “distinct,” in the sense that this particular sonic array could only have emerged in Ireland during a specific phase of late twentieth-century history; “amalgamated,” in the sense that each of these musical forms is implicitly dialogic in Bakhtinian terms – less a ‘place’ where Irish identity dwells than a ‘space’ in which Irish identity encounters a variety of ‘others’ and attempts to remake itself in sonic form.

Equally important for any consideration of Healy’s work in general, and for *A Goat’s Song* in particular, is the construction of a “sound world” through which the author attempts to encapsulate the fabric of lived experience in various Irish contexts during this period. Let’s return to “Oh No, Don’t Stop the Carnival” and note some of the many sonic elements which combine to form that world.

It’s St John’s Eve, the summer solstice, and as the Adams sisters drive from the Mullet peninsula towards the folk festival at Barnatra (a few miles inland) they see bonfires all along the coast. This level of engagement is soon accompanied by the introduction of sonic elements which offset the scopic pleasure afforded by mere sight. These sounds tend to be of three principal types: 1) human-generated; 2) non-human-generated (including animal, machine and object), although with the inference of human agency; and 3) natural.

Besides the basic inference of sound implicit in the literary convention of dialogue, examples of human-generated sound in this section (237-43) include the barking of orders to stewards; the shouting by car drivers at passing women; the exaggerated cheers and raucous applause of the audience; aggressive roars of laughter; shrieks and screams; an odd roar from outside; the clamouring of drunken outsiders; a huge cheer of nostalgia and mirth and lust; the voices of couples. At one point a stray terrier wanders into the dance tent and begins “barking furiously at the band” (240); coming so soon after the previous (metaphorical) usage, the effect of this “barking” is to suggest the proximity of the human and the animal rather than the distance between the two. The festival represents a coming together of

individuals into a crowd, and it's interesting to observe in this list the description of sounds generated by the group rather than by any particular individual: cheers, applause, roars, clamour. Each of these sounds, in other words, concerns humanity above and beyond the level of the single unit; this is the community generating noise and listening to itself. This is the "sonic world" within which Jack and Catherine take a decisive step closer to their tragic *affaire*.

Another family of sounds contributing to this particular "orchestra" is created by the interaction of humans with objects of various kinds: in the present context, a generator hums, bicycle tyres lisp, engines moan, and footsteps clatter across a makeshift dancefloor. Besides the voice with which the species has been endowed by evolution – that exquisitely subtle instrument which bequeathed us language and endowed us with such an evolutionary advantage *vis-à-vis* the other life forms with which we share the planet – humans, it seem, generate inordinate amounts of noise, especially when they cluster together in large groups. Much of this noise is an effect of our reliance on technology – as in the list above: fire, bicycles, engines, generators, and the built environment (however temporary).

Besides the human voice and the sounds generated by human interaction with technology, the consistently dominant element in Healy's sound world is the wind. It is present throughout the section under discussion, in the "fierce" wind that makes the marquee billow and shake, and the "gusts" that assail the sisters as they walk from their car; it causes the sparks to "whoosh" from the bonfires; it "whips" the canvas, "charges" through the entrance, and threatens to carry off paper money. As Jack emerges from the toilet tent towards the end of the evening he hears the wind entering into crazy harmony with the human voices and technological noises described above, and this provides an apt and enduring soundtrack for his growing infatuation with Catherine Adams.

Healy's fascination with the sound of the wind resonates with the work of another west-coast writer, the cartographer and folklorist Tim Robinson. In *Listening to the Wind* (2006), the first volume of his *Connemara Trilogy*, Robinson recruits the ubiquitous wind of the Atlantic seaboard as a metaphor for the ways in which both the landscape and the past constantly impress themselves upon the world of the living. Like the "indefinite but enormous noises [which] are part of Connemara" (1), he writes, history also "has rhythms, tunes and even harmonies ... the sound of the past is an agonistic multiplicity" (2). This is the analogue of Healy's "orchestra of memory" – the complex harmonic sound world produced by the interaction of the human subject with the sounds of the past and the sounds of the landscape within which he dwells.

All these concerns come together in these paragraphs from “Oh No, Don’t Stop the Carnival”:

And there was a feeling that the dance music was issuing from a wireless where the hand had not quite found the station; it was a music gone back in time; other timeless conversations kept breaking in – arguments, the mock grunts of men wrestling, women screeching; it was something dangerous, something pagan; winds from the sea blew the tunes around, loudspeakers seemed to pick up one instrument only – and all the sound woven brashly together travelled across to where a small herd of cattle watched ears-up over a ditch.

It reached the old men who stood for a moment outside the houses on the outskirts of Barnatra watching the bonfires the children had lit. It reached a woman making her way home to her daughter’s. I remember those tunes, she thought. It was a small insignificant human sound, carried this way, carried that way. Sometimes not heard at all even if you listened keenly for it. (241)

The image of a badly tuned wireless brilliantly encapsulates the way in which the past constantly evades the focus of the listener in the present; at the same time, this “music gone back in time” is the “world of sound” created by the community as it continually makes and remakes itself. It is a world full of human sounds – grunting men, screeching women – but one also full of the ubiquitous wind, that insistent sonic backdrop to everything that is said or done or thought in this world. All these sounds weave together to form the orchestra of memory, the music of which may seem “insignificant,” but which is in fact keyed into something “pagan” and “dangerous,” something deeply embedded within the landscape. It is the sound world of this particular community; ever-present yet audible only on occasion, and then only by those who are properly attuned to its music. In the second paragraph, focus zooms in to anonymous, “insignificant” (in terms of the narrative) members of that community whom we observe catching little snatches of the sound world as they go about their business in the present. And the passage ends on an ominous note: sometimes, one cannot hear the orchestra of memory no matter how hard one listens; sometimes (and this may describe the condition awaiting Jack Ferris) one becomes desensitised to the music of the past and the music of the community. Sometimes, most terrifyingly, the past may simply refuse to speak.

#### **IV**

This last possibility haunts Jack throughout the text – a silence representing not peace or respite, but loneliness, isolation and death. This possibility also reminds us of the fact that amongst all its other signifying capacities, the phenomenon of sound – including the

organised instances of sound that we call ‘music’ – registers in human affairs in relation to its own recent or impending absence. The celebrated Israeli conductor Daniel Barenboim has described music as being in “a permanent, constant and unavoidable relation with silence ... the beginning, the first sound, is already in relation to the silence that precedes it ... the note dies,” he goes on, “[and] this is the beginning of the tragic element in music” (2006). The reference to tragedy brings us back to *A Goat’s Song*, the title of which (as Jack explains to Catherine during the course of the narrative, p. 227) refers to the ancient Greek myth concerning the birth of tragedy.<sup>11</sup>

Silence recurs at strategic points throughout the text; it operates, indeed, as a kind of *leitmotif*, although one characterised by the absence rather than the presence of a recognisable sound. Over the course of the narrative, moreover, it emerges that silence is multifarious and multi-accented – each instance of silence functions differently in relation to the sounds which surround it, bestowing and receiving its meaning in relation to those sounds. Silence, in short, makes a crucial contribution to the orchestra of memory.

We observe this particularly in relation to the friendship between Jonathan Adams, the failed Presbyterian minister turned Northern Irish policeman, and his Catholic neighbour, Matti Bonner. In the context of Northern Ireland’s sectarian history, their relationship poses in essence a question about the validity of the voice, the right to speak, and the meaning of silence in relation to both that right and that voice. The silence maintained by Jonathan and Matti on a long drive south (when Matti will stand as Best Man at Jonathan’s wedding) is a positive rejoinder to the tradition of sectarian denigration (96); on another occasion, however, Jonathan hears Matti’s silence as blame for his own documented Protestant aggression (134). The “fatalistic silence” (97) that assails Jonathan at Matti’s graveside resonates meaningfully in relation to modern history and to his own experience, as Jonathan’s entire life is in some senses an attempt to overcome the “long embarrassing silence” (100) that ruins his career as a preacher. Finally, after Matti’s suicide, Jonathan comes to regard “the silence of the labourer [as] one long note of defiance” (135).

As much as their relationship is characterised and indeed organised in relation to the array of sonic practices described in earlier sections of this essay, Jack and Catherine are in some senses the inheritors of this silence. And insofar as they represent or symbolise modern Ireland, in fact, the silence of previous generations is embedded within each, waiting to assert itself as a crucial, ineluctable element with the community’s sound world.

Jack follows Catherine to Belfast, where issues of “voice” and “silence” become politically charged, and where personal and public pressures combine to lead his always

fragile personality into crisis. As his alcoholism takes hold, Jack experiences “a sound he could not place running through his head. It was like the static across the trawler’s radio at sea” (306). This noise is augmented by a company of internal voices – “his own crazy thoughts raging in his ears”: these voices articulate feelings (guilt, self-recrimination, self-cleansing) which he attempts to repress over the course of the day by means of alcohol consumption. So insistent is the resulting cacophony, however, that it threatens to destabilise Jack entirely; only when Catherine appears does “the silence mysteriously [return and the] furies [depart]” (307).

Silence is not benign in itself, however; its significance is a function of its relationship – contextual and contingent – with sound. Just before his breakdown (towards the end of the story although at the beginning of the text, 11-12) Jack is haunted by an ominous silence: he stands by a road accompanied by three silent dogs; “the violent sea [makes] no sound” and “the surf [rises] silently”; a passing man makes no reply to Jack’s salutation. This “alarming silence” is all the more uncanny because of the presence of actual sounds – tractor engines and Irish-speaking girls spilling out of a nearby house. It is “alarming” precisely because Jack perceives it so; under pressure from alcoholism and intense emotion he is losing his place within the community and, as a consequence, losing his sensitivity towards that community’s sound world.

Another form of silence emerges as a response to the unanswerable questions Jack asks of himself (60). As (his) understanding approaches the realm of the unsayable, language thickens, slows down and then stops altogether, leaving in its place a silence pregnant with one very particular meaning, a first cause, a “word”: alcoholism. Jack intuits this word, although at this stage he cannot or will not countenance it. Later (in the text, although once again earlier in the story), after Catherine has committed herself to the affair, she lies waiting for Jack to return from a fishing trip:

From her bed she heard someone passing over the gravel. She waited but no knock came. Then she thought, I’ve let myself down. Someone went over the gravel again, and even when she knew it made no sense, she listened on.

If the gate stirred in the wind her heart flitted. If the wind blew a can down the road she listened for the silence that would come and bear his step (261).

Here we find distilled many of the sonic practices which inform the particular sound world created by Healy in this text: the anonymous human ‘noises off’, the intense listening, the ubiquitous wind, the inanimate objects resonating in response to human desire; and the silence which envelops and punctuates everything – the silence that was present before the

emergence of this sonic community and which will still be there after that community has ceased to reverberate.

## V

Of course, Ireland in the 1970s and 1980s was awash with questions to which nobody seemed able or willing to supply a credible answer; but if “alcoholism” is the implicit response to all Jack’s questions, then what might it be for the question of late twentieth-century Irish experience? Sectarianism? Revisionism? Post-colonialism? Post-nationalism? Late capitalism?

One should not turn to Healy’s work (or indeed the work of any artist) to discover the truth (or otherwise) of these potential responses. What one does find there, however, is a portrait of a country undergoing profound change, desperately attempting to calculate the moral, emotional and psychological debts of the past in relation to the demands of the present and the hopes of the future. Of course, this dauntingly complex equation faces every artist and every community; but part of Healy’s achievement was to recognise that, for very particular historical and social reasons, the experience of change is registered most sensitively and most revealingly in this particular community’s unique sound world. It is a calculation brilliantly encapsulated in the image of an “orchestra of memory” – a collection of sounds, natural and human, in which the complex “harmonies” of the past (pleasing or dissonant as they be) resonate in the present. These sounds provide an array of signifying practices through which both the community at large and its component members can approach a sense of identity – who they are, where they come from, what they want.

Healy’s extraordinary achievement was to enable us to hear Ireland listening to itself.

## Works Cited

Barenboim, Daniel. “In the Beginning Was Sound.” *Reith Lectures 1* (7 April 7 2006).

Web. 3 June 2015.

Bauerle, Ruth H. *The James Joyce Songbook*. New York: Garland, 1982.

--- Ed. *Picking up Airs: Hearing the Music in Joyce’s Text*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Bowen, Zack. *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce: Early Poetry through Ulysses*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1974.

Brown, Calvin S. *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1948).

- Bucknell, Brad. *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce, and Stein*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Doyle, Roddy. *The Commitments* (1987). Vol. I of *The Barrytown Trilogy*. London: Minerva, 1992.
- Farrell, Antony, Vivienne Guinness, and Julian Lloyd. Eds. *My Generation: Rock 'n' Roll Remembered*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1996.
- Feld, Steven. "Sound Worlds". *Sound*. Ed. Patricia Kruth and Henry Stobart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 173-200.
- Healy, Dermot. *A Goat's Song*. 1994; London: Flamingo, 1995.
- *The Bend for Home*. London: Harvill Press, 1996.
- *Sudden Times*. 1999; London: Harvill Press, 2000.
- *Long Time, No See*. 2011; London: Faber & Faber, 2012.
- *A Fool's Errand*. Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 2010.
- Knowles, Sebastian D. G. *Bronze by Gold: The Music of James Joyce*. New York: Garland, 1999.
- McCabe, Patrick. *Breakfast on Pluto*. London: Picador, 1998.
- MacLaverty, Bernard. *Grace Notes*. 1997; London: Vintage, 1998.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (1872) and *The Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Trans. Francis Golffing. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956.
- Quiñones, Marta Garcia, Anahid Kassabian, and Elena Boschi. Eds. *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Hear*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.
- Robinson, Tim. *Connemara: Listening to the Wind*. 2006; London: Penguin, 2007.
- Smyth, Gerry. *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2005.
- *Listening to the Novel: Music in Contemporary British Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008.
- *Music in Irish Cultural History*. London and Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009.
- Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science*. Trans. from the Third Edition by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. New York: Anchor Books, 1961.
- Weaver, Jack W. *Joyce's Music and Noise: Theme and Variation in His Writings*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The word which recurs most frequently in the reviews cited at the outset of *A Goat's Song* is "powerful."

<sup>2</sup> In 1996 Healy wrote (along with many other contemporary Irish writers and public figures) about his musical tastes and memories in a short piece included in *My Generation: Rock 'n' Roll Remembered*, ed. Antony Farrell, Vivienne Guinness and Julian Lloyd, pp. 151-53.

<sup>3</sup> See *Listening to the Novel: Music in Contemporary British Fiction* (2008), pp. 1-11. For the Irish context see the chapter "Listening to the Novel: The Role and Representation of Traditional Music in Contemporary Irish Fiction" in my *Music in Irish Cultural History* (2009), pp. 102-23.

<sup>4</sup> The critical literature on Joyce's musical concerns is vast; the most influential contributions in the present context include Bauerle (1982, 1993), Bowen (1974), Bucknell (2001), Knowles (1999), and Weaver (1998).

<sup>5</sup> The radio features particularly strongly in Healy's celebrated memoir *The Bend for Home* (1996), and also in his novels *Sudden Times* (1999) and *Long Time, No See* (2011).

<sup>6</sup> On the development of Irish traditional music during this period see Smyth, *Noisy Island* (2005), pp. 18-24; on Planxty in particular see pp. 67-8 of the same volume.

<sup>7</sup> Healy misquotes the title of "Where My Caravan Has Rested" a 'Romany' song first published in 1910, with music by Hermann Löhr and words by Edward Teschemacher. In the piece for *My Generation* already referenced, he wrongly attributes "Here Comes the Sun" from *Abbey Road* (1969) by the Beatles to *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). I make this point not to expose Healy's deficient musical knowledge but to emphasise that his engagement with music is, like that of his characters, non-systematic and quotidian, that of a casual user rather than a committed *aficionado*.

<sup>8</sup> For another example of an unusually structured Irish novel in which music features see Bernard MacLaverty's *Grace Notes* (1997), and my analysis of it (2009: 141-57).

<sup>9</sup> The conjunction of music and Greek tragedy in this context invokes the inevitable presence of Nietzsche, for whom the satyr chorus, with its goatish associations, provides the audience with an opportunity to assume its role as "the Dionysiac multitude" (1872: 54). For an alternative account of the association of goats with the emergence of tragedy see Vico (1961: 277-8). Each of these theories contrasts with Jack Ferris's story of male goats in ancient Greece crying for females from which they have been separated (227).

<sup>10</sup> Variants appear on pp. 11, 91, 99, 110, 187, 210, 213, 249, 252, 261, 370, 393 and 394.

<sup>11</sup> See Note 9 above.