

The DEFENDERS of PURITY

Historical note:

When I originally created this, I had just intercepted an IRTRAD post from a shadowy group called the DOWWCTBTP (Defenders of What We Conceive to Be Traditional Purity, a/k/a/ "DTP") asking for volunteers to break the news to Liz Carroll, Martin Mulhaire, Joanie Madden, Charlie Lennon, and 6327 other working musicians that their compositions, long accepted and respected by some of the greatest practitioners of ITM in the world, are in fact NOT TRADITIONAL (according to this group's definition, that is).

A training video accompanying their publication "Confidential Field Guide for Anyone Dumb Enough to Volunteer" records the following actual situation as a means of demonstrating what the Purity Volunteer might encounter in his/her quest to spread the group's doctrines. Let's watch!

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Volunteer:

You know, Imogene (*not her real name*), your tunes are really nice. However, since they're not traditional, we of the DTP have decided that no one - including you - should really be playing them. You realize of course that this is to maintain the purity of the tradition we both know and love. Furthermore, we have decided that you should stop composing immediately in order to minimize the damage you have caused to our idea of said tradition.

Imogene:

Who the hell are you to say what's traditional and what isn't? Get out of here before I make rottweiler treats out of your gonads.

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Volunteer (*flustered but persistent*):

Well ... uh ... er ... you know, we've talked about this a lot at our meetings, and hey, we know how you feel. We aim for maximum empathy. But your tunes just don't meet our criteria...

Imogene (*dripping sarcasm*):

... and what would THEY be, if I may be so bold as to inquire?

Volunteer:

Well, for one thing, everybody knows that you have *composed* your tunes, whereas we of the DTP have decided that anonymity of origin is a necessity for a tune to be really traditional. For example, "The Mountain Road" has just been downgraded because one of our TPR's found out that it was (*shudders slightly*) *composed* by one Michael Gorman ...

Imogene:

I'm almost afraid to ask this, but what's a TPR?

Volunteer:

A Tune Pedigree Researcher. We have a number of them on staff, many of them DEI hires. They're required to have at least a community-college degree in Ethnic Music. They're the ones who make the final determination as to whether a tune is traditional or not. It's a heavy responsibility, and the burn-out rate is pretty fierce.

Imogene:

Does it make any difference to your TPRs that every traditional musician for at least the past 50 years has played "The Mountain Road"? Or are they saying that because musicians play that tune and probably a lot of others that have been composed, they're really not traditional musicians?

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Volunteer (*sweating slightly, not anticipating such resistance*):

... er ... ah ... well, I can't speak for the TPRs, but I do know that acceptance of a tune by real musicians does not in any way enter into their evaluation process, which they refer to as "weighting". In fact I have read a quote from the head TPR saying that if the determination of a tune's traditionality were left to the average uneducated musician, chaos would result. The DTP exists to minimize that chaos. We sincerely believe that the tradition will be a much better place as long as WE get to make the rules.

Imogene (*after a rude mouth noise*):

Does your group include any real musicians?

Volunteer:

Wh ... what do you mean, "real" musicians?

Imogene:

I mean people who are out playing this music as often as possible, sweating blood at céilis, having beers poured down their backs in pubs, tooting "Silver Spear" at sessions squeezed in between unbathed serial killers turned bodhrán players and Unabomber look-alikes playing hammer dulcimers, hanging out in dimly-lit roach-infested kitchens in Dublin or Boston or the Bronx or Kansas City or East Cowchip just playing tunes and forgetting their kids' birthdays ... THAT kind of musician, the kind that drives a bus or hangs wallpaper or answers phones or guts fish for ten hours a day and then goes out and plays nothing but reels for another six ... THAT kind of musician. Any of them in your group?

Volunteer (*pale, breathless; takes several seconds to recover*):

Oh heavens no. We would have no use for low-life scum like that in the DTP. We ARE proud of our academic connections, however ...

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Imogene:

... which means you kind of like to sit around reading about it rather than doing it, huh? *(snickers maliciously)* Reminds me of a few other human activities I could name *(whispers in his ear; Volunteer gasps)* but won't - out loud anyway!

Volunteer:

Well, if you must know, just yesterday one of our board members had his doctoral thesis accepted. The title is " 'By My Gossip' - The Sexual Ambivalence of Turloch O'Carolan". I read most of it, but I have to admit that I got a little lost in the chapter where he tries to prove that O'Carolan composed the reel "Johnny With the Queer Thing" as a means of working out his latent homophobia...

Imogene *(yawning hugely)*

Look, it's been nice talking to you, but I have some tunes to compose. By the way, what does your group think of Ed Reavy?

Volunteer:

Who?

Imogene:

Forget it. Hey, been a pleasure. See ya!

(Unmistakable sound of cackling female laughter and door slamming. Video goes dark.)

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Epilogue

Think not to march into my tiny space
Waving your vacuum-engendered rules
Like banners emblazoned with inaccuracy.

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Taste, feel, smell the sound of tunes.
Climb the scale, jump from note to note,
Get dizzy sliding around the treble clef.
Get your sorry behind jabbed by a first ending.
Trip over a double bar and bruise your anacrusis.
Then, and only then,
Might I pay the least attention to you.

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