The Irish music industry’s own statistics for 2008 illustrate the support for domestic artists in the local marketplace (Hot Press, Dublin, July 2009, pp. 12–16) with the year’s top 50 albums including twelve artists designated Irish. At first reading a twenty-four per cent representation seemed to indicate a healthy level of support, yet the taxonomy is open to question given that UK acts like Snow Patrol and The Priests are deemed Irish. Their Northern Irish origin, and presumably UK tax residence, points to why these acts are considered British in UK statistics. The top 50 singles chart yields less success for Irish artists; only four Irish singles (eight per cent) rank amongst the fifty highest sellers. The top single *Galway Girl* by Sharon Shannon and Mundy was written by North American writer Steve Earle. The next highest Irish act is emblematic of the globalised music industry: The Script are Irish born, found their success in Los Angeles, are managed by a London company and signed to RCA records, now owned by Japanese entertainment conglomerate Sony. Interestingly for a country where tourism and music are highlighted in national discourse, the press release available on their website quotes the band on their Irish home: ‘I’m not trying to romanticise it, where we grew up was a shit hole, it was stealing cars, all the usual bollocks, but music gave me a sense that I could break away’ (http://www.sonybmg.ie, accessed 29 July 2009).

In their pioneering work in 2003, Krister Malm and Roger Wallis demonstrated the workings and impact of the globalised music industry on small markets. These three recent books on music and Ireland are valuable for scrutinising an industry which appears to be healthy yet suffers from inherent structural flaws. Only an honest assessment and analysis can foster enhanced long-term economic and social contribution by music to the island of Ireland.

The problem for a country like Ireland is finding the right tools to analyse the industry. In his book *The Irishness of Irish Music*, John O’Flynn posits that Adorno and the Frankfurt School should not be dismissed lightly. He also quotes Simon Frith: ‘... the music industry’s strategies for market control ... have been developed precisely because the market is one they can’t control’ (p. 18).

Richard Peterson and David Berger’s ‘Cycles in Symbol Production’ model would be an excellent diagnostic tool for gauging the health of the domestic music industry (Frith and Goodwin 1990, p. 117). Sadly, though not unexpectedly,
Ireland’s pop charts were notoriously suspect from the 1960s up to the 1990s. Over-the-counter sales figures were only tabulated with any level of industry consensus from 1992. The data collection process initially ignored or marginalised sales from independent stores. More recently the charts have failed to recognise sales by independent acts via online or direct-to-fan channels.

The image of a country of music lovers appears to be substantiated by the statistics cited by O’Flynn. In 2006 Ireland basked at the top of the music consumption charts with the fourth highest CD sales per capita in the world. The Irish music market was the twenty-first biggest in the world, considerably larger than that of more populous nations.

Given the absence of long-term reliable sales data, O’Flynn provides the most useful alternative analytic tool. He deploys the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) figures. His chapter ‘Mapping the Field’ should be essential reading for students and stakeholders of the Irish music industry. The IFPI statistics for the decade 1997–2006 indicate market share for domestic music product relative to imported acts. Ominously the trend for the decade is downward to twenty per cent. In other words, the Irish music consumer purchases one domestic artist’s CD for every four imports. O’Flynn’s comparison of the 2001 figures with those of other Western countries will be a revelation to many. The UK consumer purchases double the amount of local product relative to the Irish music purchaser. The French consumer triples it. The Japanese music lover buys three domestic CDs for every single import.

O’Flynn cites Robert Strachan and Marion Leonard (2004) as well as Frith on the flows of capital associated with the globalised music industry. Irish artists signed to major labels contribute profits to the US or UK parent labels (p. 56). Frith’s 1996 analysis that ‘monies earned by [major labels headquartered in the US and UK] do not directly benefit domestic recording activities’ deserves interrogation in the Irish context given Ireland’s status as a recording destination for commercially successful international acts.

The Irishness of Irish Music also provides an overview of attendees at a range of performances by artists in Ireland. Their perception of the artists as Irish is thoroughly scrutinised by O’Flynn. Anecdotes from audience participants give an insight into the mindset of the Irish music consumer. This type of qualitative analysis may indicate a useful parallel tool to the quantitative data gathered by Irish tourist and industry sources. It is constructive knowing that a certain number of tourists enjoyed music in Ireland; a more insightful question may be: ‘what music would you have preferred?’

In contrast to O’Flynn’s interviews with attendees, in her book The Making of Irish Traditional Music, Helen O’Shea converses directly with the musicians. She applies this qualitative analysis to the performing participants in Irish traditional music sessions. Taking us back-stage in a number of venues around the country, her book is a literate, dense and compelling study of the state of traditional music in Ireland. She uses her insider knowledge of music and her qualification as a performer to glean information and establish conclusions that are pointed and practical, if not always pleasant. This makes this work all the more vital and fascinating. She provides forty-four pages of references and footnotes containing, not just a musical context for her work, but also an insightful social analysis of the country.
Drawing upon a year’s field-work amongst non-Irish musicians in Ireland, O’Shea discovered public performance spaces where an invitational appearance belied an exclusive dynamic. She challenges the popular image of Ireland’s musical community espoused by Irish cinema and advertising images. Her book debunks the myth of a country of ‘welcomes’, where every music shop is an invitation to sit and compose quietly, and every pub session is an invitation to sit and participate communally.

O’Shea’s conclusion points to a necessity to challenge some common assumptions about the nature of music in Ireland: ‘Perhaps Irish traditional dance music, saturated in nationalist ideology, is incompatible with an inclusive narrative. In that case, the music of others, as well as outsider-musicians, will remain foreign bodies to be dissolved in the river of sound’ (p. 148).

The tension between nationalist ideology and inclusiveness is at the heart of Fintan Vallely’s valuable investigation, Tuned Out: Traditional Music and Identity in Northern Ireland. His book deals with a very specific area of the island yet presents insights relevant far beyond the musical communities in the Ulster province. His work provides at least one plausible contributory factor for recent economic statistics which present the trade between the Republic and Northern Ireland as being one-third of what would be expected. Crucially, he also skilfully demonstrates the common sources of songs claimed with such vehemence by both Nationalist and Unionist communities. For example, he cites Brian Mullen on a song with strong sectarian lyrics. One version starts:

‘God save Ireland cried the heroes’.
Another commences with the line:
‘No Pope, priest or holy water’.
The original, a North American Civil War song, marched along to the lyrics:
‘Tramp, tramp, tramp the boys are marching’.

Despite these common origins, Vallely describes how music which could have community bridging possibilities, in Northern Ireland remains an aspiration rather than a result: ‘In general, Traditional music is viewed by Protestants as alien, if not potentially subversive’ (p. 137).

Both O’Shea and Vallely provide excellent histories of traditional music in Ireland and document the groups with vested interests in its revival and presentation. In a short, six-page chapter entitled, ‘Tonal boundary-marking: prejudice, politics and ethnicity’, Vallely neatly deploys John Blacking’s 1970s work in South Africa. Commencing with the well-worn slogan, ‘Catholics dance, Protestants march’, this is an excellent account of the dominant ideologies at work in Ireland, and skilfully interrogates the reasons for why these communities are often so out of step with each other.

These three books combined present a world of music and musicians with immense possibilities for harmony. The authors’ dissection of myths and exposure of often under-acknowledged aspects of musical life in Ireland make each of them welcome additions to the study of a small musical island caught in the rising tide of globalisation.

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Performing Class in British Popular Music. By Nathan Wiseman-Trowse. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008. 208 pp. ISBN 978-0230219496
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The spectre of authenticity is never far from an academic analysis of popular music, and Wiseman-Trowse’s book offers a useful theoretical discussion of the concept in which he posits, ‘Authenticity as a necessary strategy to counter the seemingly paradoxical relationship between art and commerce within popular music’ (p. 4). However, while questions of authenticity may seem like the staple diet of sociologists and cultural theorists, Wiseman-Trowse suggests that, to a large extent, such analyses have failed to explicitly consider the role of class in generating notions of the authentic. This may seem counter-intuitive: after all, early studies of popular music, led by the Birmingham School, were very interested in popular music and class. However, this earlier approach considered popular music as the articulation of particular subcultural class positions, which Wiseman-Trowse criticises because popular music does not work in a ‘simple, documentary fashion’ (p. 13).

Rather than considering class as a relatively stable socio-structural institution, Wiseman-Trowse, influenced by Judith Butler’s work on performativity, considers class as ‘a relatively mobile form of subjectivity that can be invoked through cultural texts’ (p. 5). Such a position is relatively common in sociology and, particularly, cultural studies at present but is also subject to the criticism that it exaggerates individuals’ capacity to perform varied identities and underestimates the constraints placed upon them by wider material circumstances. This would seem particularly pertinent when related to class identity, so it is a pity that Wiseman-Trowse does not offer a more detailed consideration of the issue.

Thus, the central premise of Wiseman-Trowse’s book is that individuals learn and perform forms of identity within particular discursive frameworks and his particular focus is on how class identity is performed in British popular music for, as he states, ‘articulations of class abound throughout British popular music’ (p. 16). Such articulations, however, should not be understood as, ‘being direct manifestations of class positions in a socio-economic sense’ (p. 5). Rather, they are constructions of class that only make sense within a particular discourse – rock – and the centrality of authenticity within that discourse. Seen this way, authenticity can never be considered, in absolute terms, as a ‘real’ manifestation of social relations. Instead, authenticity is only ever a discourse caught in a web of other discourses and something can be authentic only in relation to other representations. Furthermore, ‘authenticity only ever [is] a performance, detached from the social relations outside of that form’ (p. 9). So, while smashing up one’s