

THE ARTS (NI CURRICULUM) · P3–P7

Ceol Traidisiúnta Uladh

Traditional Music in Ulster — P3–P7

Ulster's two musical traditions

1

Irish traditional music (ceol traidisiúnta)

The same tradition as in the Republic — reels, jigs, slow airs, sessions. Strongly associated with the nationalist/Catholic community but enjoyed across traditions. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann is active throughout NI.

2

The Ulster-Scots musical tradition

Fiddle music, country dance, and pipe music brought by Scottish settlers. Closely related to Scottish traditional music. The flute bands are a particularly visible form.

3

Flute bands

A distinctive Ulster tradition — marching bands playing fifes and drums, predominantly from the unionist/loyalist community. Marching is a key cultural expression. The Twelfth of July parades feature hundreds of bands.

4

Fleadh Cheoil

The annual traditional music festival run by Comhaltas. Derry/Londonderry hosted the All-Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in 2013 and 2014. Attracted over 400,000 visitors.

5

Van Morrison

Born in east Belfast (1945). One of the most influential rock and R&B musicians in the world — 'Brown Eyed Girl', 'Moondance', Astral Weeks. A proud Belfast son.

6

The tin whistle across traditions

The tin whistle is one instrument that genuinely crosses cultural lines in NI — played in both Irish trad sessions and Ulster-Scots settings. A good classroom starting point.



Classroom — practical ideas

Across the Arts Area of Learning

- TIN WHISTLE: affordable, portable, appropriate for all P1-P7 levels. Teach a simple Irish tune — Twinkle Twinkle in D to start, then a reel.
- LISTENING: the BBC has excellent free traditional music resources. Comhaltas Online has thousands of session recordings — all free to use.
- DRUMMING: basic rhythmic activity using bodhrán-style frame drums. Connect to pulse, metre, and rhythm in music.
- BOTH TRADITIONS: teach children to recognise both Irish traditional tunes and Ulster-Scots fiddle styles. Both are part of Ulster's musical heritage.
- VAN MORRISON BELFAST: play a Van Morrison track. Discuss: what makes it Belfast music? What can you hear?
- MAKING MUSIC: compose a 4-bar tune using only 4 notes. Play it on whistle, clap it, hum it. Simple composition accessible to all.
- CROSS-CURRICULAR: link music to PDMU (both communities' traditions deserve respect), to History (when was this music made and why), to Languages (Irish song words).

