

## **Commodification and Authenticity in The Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative.**

### **Introduction**

In 1999, the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) and the Scottish Tourist Board (STB) launched *The Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative*, a 3-year project designed to raise the profile of Scotland's traditional music, and increase visitor access to traditional music performances. In more ideological terms, the initiative was also intended to transform tourists' preconceptions of Scottish traditional music. In particular, it claimed that overseas visitors' perceptions of Scotland's musical heritage had been dominated by symbols including the bagpipes, pipe bands and ceilidh bands. The Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative was therefore promoted as a counterweight to this image: it was, claimed the music director of the SAC, "about the real thing, not the shortbread tin image" of Scottish traditional music (Knowles, 2002). This paper will argue that the prevalence of folk music sessions in the *Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative* is a manifestation of the project's concern with authenticity. Drawing on Dean MacCannell's model of destination spaces, it will argue that the *Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative* was an exercise in manufacturing 'back region' experiences in order to provide tourists with the authenticity which they are deemed to desire. It will also, however, draw attention to the problematic manner in which the rhetoric of authenticity was used to promote this initiative.

### **Authenticity, Music and Tourism**

Rob Stokes of Rockville Music criticises those musical performances which are staged for visitors to Scotland and suggests that tourists wish to experience informal musical events which are not organised specifically for their benefit:

... educated, sophisticated, independent-minded visitors to Scotland are served up the same old heather and Haggis shows on their travels unless they are lucky enough to stumble upon informal sessions or folk clubs (Clark, 1997: n.p.).

The pejorative tone of Stokes' comments regarding tourist shows suggests that he believes these to offer visitors a superficial, caricatured impression of Scottish musical culture.

Tourists wish to penetrate beyond such contrived experiences, he argues, and attend pub sessions which are less staged and more representative of Scotland's 'genuine' folk tradition.

Stokes' comments are evocative of Dean MacCannell's assertion that the travels of Western tourists are primarily motivated by the search for authenticity: "Touristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experience" (1999: 101). Thus, according to MacCannell, the modern tourist eschews the superficiality of performances and events staged specifically for tourists, in favour of what they conceive as the 'real life' experienced by the destination's inhabitants. He argues that: "Sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives..." (MacCannell, 1999: 94). It is MacCannell's contention that tourists wish to have meaningful interactions with host populations and to penetrate beyond the superficiality of experiences which are staged specifically for the tourist market. MacCannell (1999: 94) argues that tourists aim to overcome the 'front regions' of the destination, namely those social spaces which are manufactured for tourist consumption. Their objective is to penetrate the 'back regions', those spaces which are reserved exclusively for the host community, and from which audiences and outsiders are typically excluded. Entering such areas, it is presumed, permits tourists to experience the inner workings of the community and thereby achieve the authentic experience which they seek.

The division between front and back may be aided by architectural arrangements, but is primarily based on social relations (MacCannell, 1999: 92). In the destination's front regions, for example, the divisions between performers and audiences are evident and fixed: performers are paid to entertain, whereas audiences pay to be entertained and these social boundaries are not transgressed. As MacCannell observes, however, the front and back regions are ideal, if unattainable, poles of the tourist experience. Divisions between front and back are blurred rather than dichotomous, for front regions often appropriate characteristic elements of the backstage in order to enhance their touristic appeal. More specifically, MacCannell argues that whilst the tourist may seek authentic experiences, attempts to do so are invariably thwarted by the 'staged authenticity' of what is presented to tourists in those spaces which are manufactured to resemble back regions. According to MacCannell's logic, the modern tourist is condemned to only inauthentic experiences, with no means of escape.

## The Session

This paper proceeds from the understanding that authenticity is a socially defined concept, and as such is negotiable rather than absolute. Nevertheless, MacCannell's concept of the backstage is a pervasive notion for many folk music practitioners, who in common with Stokes, believe that that tourists favour music which is performed in an informal environment over performances which are aimed directly at the tourist market. It will thus be apposite to offer an overview of the session itself, in order to assess why musicians should consider it to be so intimately associated with the concept of authenticity. Niall MacKinnon offers a succinct definition of the typical British pub session:

A session is a gathering of musicians who meet informally to play tunes. A singing session or singaround is a similar gathering of singers, though if instrumental and vocal music occur together it is normally referred to as a session (MacKinnon, 1993: 99).

The musicians who participate in sessions and singarounds often know one another and may play together on a semi-regular basis. The session is not a performance in the sense that it has no need for an audience. Indeed, even if listeners are present, session musicians typically play facing one another, rather than their observers. Architectural arrangements are often also invoked to contribute to the session's 'back region' atmosphere. Session musicians are invariably drawn to pubs which have back rooms or small bars (MacKinnon, 1993: 102) in order to create a physical boundary between themselves and others present who are not actively participating in the session.

As MacKinnon (1993: 103) notes, the session is designed to be "the antithesis of staging". Unlike concerts, the session is not a staged event in the sense that musicians are not booked to perform at it. Moreover, the music is played in an extempore fashion, without sheet music. A key feature of the session is therefore its informality: this, together with spontaneity, is a quality which MacKinnon argues is "greatly revered in folk music" (1993: 103). Indeed, it is the supposed spontaneity of sessions that contributes to their back region mystique. Although many sessions are regular events which are publicised in advance, many others are simply impromptu happenings, or are organised on a word-of-mouth basis.

The informality of the session also permits visitors to participate in the music-making. With its apparently egalitarian ethos, the session effectively blurs the distinction between hosts and guests. The social relations which pervade staged events are erased. In the concert, for example, there are evident divisions between the performers selling their wares, the audience who pay to consume that music, and the event promoters who dictate how the show is presented. In the session, conversely, divisions between audience and performers are fluid: musicians are free to play, or sit back and listen, as they see fit. Lack of musical ability need not be a barrier to participation: indeed, even listeners who clap in time with the music are arguably becoming part of the performance. It is this theoretical equity of access which renders the session a prime example of visitor admission to the backstage. For this reason, traditional musicians often consider the session to be a more 'authentic' representation of Scottish traditional music than that which is performed on a concert stage. Rather than being a musical 'pseudo-event', the session is conceived of as a back region happening, an event which is not manufactured for the benefit of visitors.

A further reason for the particular appeal of the session is that the music performed therein is not mediated through the aesthetic demands of an event promoter: rather, it is the musicians who determine what music is played and how their tradition is represented. There is accordingly a widely held perception amongst musicians that the music-making which takes place in sessions is often of higher quality than that performed on a concert stage. Untrammelled by the strictures of the staged music event, musicians are free to experiment musically, to engage in musical exchange and to play for enjoyment, rather than for any financial recompense. As MacKinnon observes, "it is in such informal settings as opposed to staged performances that many practitioners believe that the 'real' music is able to reach its heights" (MacKinnon, 1993: 103).

This statement points to the perceived connection between authenticity and quality: it is invariably presumed that 'real' music is, by definition, 'good' music. This pervasive notion has been noted by Peter Kivy (1995). Arguing that the term 'authentic' has virtually become a synonym for 'good', Kivy asserts that: "But the continual use of 'authentic' ... has had an effect on musical discourse that is so profound as to have made it apparently unthinkable for a performance to be inauthentic and good, or authentic and bad" (Kivy, 1995: 2). Indeed, it will become evident that this equation of authenticity with quality is practised by many traditional

musicians in Scotland, and has accordingly informed public policy on both traditional music and tourism.

### **Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative**

In particular, this equation of authenticity with quality, and hence economic profitability, pervades The Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative (TMTI). Launched in 1999, The TMTI was a 3-year project organised jointly by the (then) Scottish Tourist Board, and the Scottish Arts Council. An initial report into the first year of the project was published in 2000 under the title *The Traditional Music and Tourism Initiative 1999-2000* (SAC/ STB, 2000), while the entire project was assessed in *A Soundtrack for Scottish Tourism 1999-2002* (SAC/ VisitScotland, 2002), a report published in 2002.

In 1998 the TMTI steering group was set up: its membership included a number of tourist board staff, but was dominated by traditional musicians. At a practical level the initiative was designed to enable visitors to access music performances more readily, thereby creating synergy between the traditional music and tourism sectors. A number of 'local demonstration projects' were also gathered together under the umbrella of the TMTI. Together, SAC and STB made funding available which individual regions could apply for in order to finance individual projects in their respective areas. In the first year of the initiative projects came to be organised in Angus and Dundee, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Orkney, Ross and Cromarty, Scottish Borders and Shetland. Further projects were supported in the following years, with the result that, by the end of the three year initiative, 19 projects in 11 different areas had been financially supported.

The creative direction of the project was guided by those members of the steering group who were themselves musicians. In this respect, the TMTI was an opportunity for members of Scotland's folk music community to reclaim ownership over the representation of their tradition. The initiative was viewed by many on the steering group as an opportunity to rectify historical misrepresentations of Scotland's traditional music. As the comments of one steering group member indicate, the initiative offered the traditional music community the opportunity to determine which aspects of Scotland's musical traditions should be foregrounded, and which should receive lesser emphasis in future promotional campaigns:

we could say to [VisitScotland] ... 'it's time you stopped punting this whole idea that the only Scottish music you're going to hear is from bagpipers wearing big furry bonnets'. And they took that on board right away, they didn't really have a problem with that... But that was certainly one of the aims of the whole initiative was to try and change the way people look at traditional music as well, because that's actually a very false image. You're much more likely to see traditional musicians playing in an informal basis, or even in a formal environment, certainly not dressed up in tartan, you know (Interview A, 2003).

The Highland bagpipes, an instrument which most musicians in the working group deemed to have received undue prominence in tourism literature over the years, were therefore to be sidelined in favour of a less 'false' image of Scotland's musical traditions. In advocating such a stance, the musicians on the working group were effectively practising a politics of cultural selection, one which was informed by an ideology of authenticity. Naturally, the musical image which they sought to promote was allied their own professional musical interests. It is significant that there was no piper on the TMTI steering group.

This selective view of Scotland's musical traditions was to become the TMTI's entire rationale and ethos. Carolyn Paterson of the Scottish Arts Council, explained that the research study which was carried out as part of the TMTI established that tourists' perceptions of Scottish traditional music were dominated by what she termed the "conventional symbols", namely bagpipes, pipe bands and ceilidh bands (SAC/ STB, 2000: 8). The TMTI was therefore not intended to promote the "tartan and haggis" image associated with these symbols (Paterson, 2002), she argued: rather, it was designed to counter such perceptions, and promote a more 'realistic' image of Scottish music.

This attempt to downplay piping and tartan imagery in tourism promotion was publicised by the TMTI's progenitors as a means of offering tourists a more authentic experience of Scotland's musical culture. *The Soundtrack for Scottish Tourism* itself foregrounded the TMTI's concern with authenticity, when paraphrasing the words of Allan Wilson MSP at the launch of Dumfries and Galloway's More Music Live! initiative: "Visitors were discerning, recognised good when they saw it, and good meant 'authentic'. Traditional music could provide that authenticity, he

concluded” (SAC/ VisitScotland, 2002: 6). With this statement Wilson explicitly equates authenticity with quality, thereby bolstering Kivy’s (1995) contention that ‘authentic’ has become a synonym for ‘good’ in musical criticism. The result of such rhetoric was that the TMTI’s ethos of authenticity virtually became a marketing tool designed to assure consumers of the project’s high quality. In an effort to confer this valuable air of authenticity upon the initiative, certain aspects of Scotland’s musical traditions (piping, most notably) were by-passed in favour of events which, as we have seen, are intimately associated with the concept of authenticity: namely, traditional music sessions.

### **Sessions and the TMTI**

The influence of the Irish experience is evident throughout the TMTI, with the report itself even featuring a bodhran player on its front cover. A fundamental component of the initiative consisted of a research trip to Ireland, undertaken by Shetland’s Music Development Officer, in order to assess how Scotland may development a similarly vibrant traditional music and tourism scene. The report attributed Ireland’s success in generating tourism through traditional music to its healthy network of pub sessions:

Bord Failte (The Irish Tourist Board) recognise that Irish traditional music is one of the ‘top three’ reasons why visitors choose to holiday in Ireland.... The traditional music scene is well organised in Ireland, primarily through the efforts of pubs themselves who are aware of the potential financial gain to be made from music.... The music played in pubs and bars is generally of such high quality that people do not have to go to concert halls to see Irish traditional music (SAC/ STB, 2000:6).

Much of the initiative appears therefore to be an attempt to emulate the Irish experience through the development of pub sessions. Indeed, an examination of the projects which the TMTI supported reveals a preponderance of session-oriented events. Of the 11 areas which received support through the initiatives, 7 of those organised projects which either entirely or partially comprised of establishing sessions in local venues. Ninety-six sessions were organised in pubs and hotels throughout Orkney in the summer 2001 season, for example: the result was that music was available somewhere in the Isles 6 nights per week over a 12 week period (OTB, 2001: 2). Similar projects were arranged in Angus, Arran, Dumfries and

Galloway, Fife, Ross-shire and Shetland. This predominance of sessions had the indirect (but desired) effect of excluding the Highland bagpipes from the TMTI, these being an instrument not amenable to indoor performance.

Also of significance in this respect are the criteria used to determine which particular pilot projects should receive financial support through the TMTI. These criteria were decided upon through discussion with the initiative's advisory board (Paterson, 2002) and are alluded to as follows in *The Soundtrack for Scottish Tourism*:

In selecting projects to support, the Initiative has acknowledged that visitors like to feel they have happened upon a 'normal' facet of life in Scotland, rather than bespoke entertainment.

This approach is aligned with VisitScotland market research suggesting that today's tourists ... value 'authenticity' (SAC/ STB, 2002: 3).

This statement makes explicit the connection between authenticity and an absence of staging. In common with MacCannell, it presumes that tourists do not wish to be entertained by musical pseudo-events which are organised specifically for their benefit. An evident irony which emerges from this enterprise, however, is the fact that the TMTI is in itself an exercise in creating 'bespoke entertainment' for tourists.

The selection of criteria which favoured session-oriented projects can be attributed to a number of factors. One particularly prosaic reason is the relatively modest costs which sessions entail. In the TMTI, the standard method for organising a session involved paying a fee of approximately £60 to one musician who was then required to encourage others to also participate. The cost of organising a session is therefore significantly cheaper than that of organising a concert, a factor which has evident appeal for venue proprietors and funding agencies. In a similarly commercial vein, one steering group member attributes the focus on sessions to an acknowledgement that "in the short term if you were trying to get people to have access to traditional music that perhaps the best way was through a session" (Interview A, 2003). As sessions are free to attend, they do not entail any financial barriers to participation. Moreover, given that most professional musicians cannot be hired for a £60 fee,

such events offer paid performance opportunities for amateur musicians. Such series of sessions are deemed to be influential in enhancing networking opportunities and thereby fostering a sense of community amongst local musicians.

Another steering group member interprets the prevalence of sessions in the TMTI as a response to tourist demand and as a means of increasing tourist satisfaction. In more ideological terms, however, he does make an explicit connection between the informality of the session and the authenticity which tourists supposedly seek. Speaking specifically of Shetland, he observes that:

[sessions were] just something that was there, something that we saw was authentic and something that the tourists said 'yes, that's what I'm looking for ... what I really want to do is see you guys playing your fiddles down the pub in an informal setting' (Interview B, 2003).

Another respondent develops the theme of informality in his discussion of the session-oriented nature of many of the TMTI projects. He points to the particular appeal of happening upon events which are not designed or marketed for tourist consumption:

I think in their heart of hearts tourist people know that visitors often have the best experience when they stumble on something local and quite exclusive, accidentally. You know, if you came across a village dance or that kind of thing, it's not something that's been hyped up, it's not something that you're necessarily prepared for. But in the best of these circumstances when you go to something like that and you're just kind of accepted as part of the company, that's often when people have the best time. And I think that what a lot of these events are trying to do is almost kind of recreate that experience. But of course you can't (Interview C, 2002).

Thus, the 'village hall' is a classic example of MacCannell's back region, a social space reserved for locals and from which visitors are generally excluded. It is the type of space and experience which is deemed to inspire the tourist gaze. Acceptance into such an environment,

it is assumed, will satisfy tourists' desire for an experience of 'genuine' Scottish culture. According to this steering group member, it is this ethos which informs many of the projects in the TMTI. As his final caveat suggests, however, there are inherent difficulties in attempting to manufacture such experiences for tourists. In order to establish the precise nature of these difficulties it will first be apposite to offer a detailed overview of one project which was launched under the auspices of the TMTI.

### **Dumfries and Galloway: More Music Live!**

The project organised in Dumfries and Galloway in 2001 was entitled More Music Live!, and involved the programming of 72 sessions in pubs and hotels around the region. Organised by Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association (DGAA) and marketed by the local tourist board, this initiative was intended to:

increase visitor awareness of traditional music and to ensure that visitors had ready access to traditional music during a visit to Dumfries and Galloway thus enhancing their visitor experience and encouraging a return visit (DGAA, 2001a: 2).

Indeed, the original intention was that visitors to the region would be able to find music somewhere in the region on every night of the week (DGAA, 2001b). Fliers advertising the programme of sessions were compiled by Dumfries and Galloway Tourist Board (DGTB) and distributed to venues, tourist information centres and DGTB members throughout the region. Like the TMTI itself, the More Music Live! fliers featured photos of local musicians performing in pub sessions.

In touristic and economic terms the initiative was highly successful, with 88% of audiences reporting that such events would encourage them to make a return visit to the region. The response from venue proprietors was similarly positive, for the average rise in takings on session nights was 29%. Musicians also responded favourably to the initiative, with all who participated agreeing that the initiative should be continued in the future (DGAA, 2001a). Indeed, so successful was the project that it secured 3 year funding from an EU community regeneration fund in order to continue following the end of the TMTI.

From 2002 onwards, the More Music Live! publicity material adopted a subtitle: *Real Music, Real Close*. The 'real close' element of this slogan derives from DGTB's *Area Tourism Strategy* (2001-2006), which promotes Dumfries and Galloway to domestic visitors as an accessible destination for short breaks. The 'real music' element is indicative of the project's concern with authenticity, with the sessions themselves attempting to convince tourists that they have moved beyond the superficiality of staged performances and 'stumbled upon' a back region event.

In 2003, however, More Music Live! incorporated ceilidhs into its programme: this is a somewhat singular inclusion for a project which self-consciously promotes its ethos of authenticity, for the modern day ceilidh is arguably an 'invented tradition'. In the Western Isles and Highlands of Scotland the term 'ceilidh' traditionally referred to a 'visit', that is a social gathering in a neighbourhood house, at which music and songs were performed. (Feintuch, 2002: 8). As Flett and Flett (1964: 39) note, however, "in most districts of the Highlands such informal ceilidhs are now things of the past". Since the First World War this understanding of the ceilidh as a domestic social event has waned, and throughout Scotland it has been reinterpreted to mean a public event at which traditional dances are performed to the accompaniment of a Scottish country dance band.

Thus, with its relatively recent origins, the type of ceilidh which *More Music Live!* promotes does not conform to any essentialist interpretation of the concept of authenticity. Moreover, as events with necessarily strict music and dance conventions, ceilidhs cannot lay claim to the informality or spontaneity which supposedly confer an air of authenticity upon the session. Whilst one could argue that the Scottish ceilidh has acquired what Cohen (1988) terms 'emergent authenticity', it is apparent that its inclusion in this programme problematises the project's claim to historical verisimilitude (although this does not render the ceilidh any less worthwhile or enjoyable for its participants). Indeed, it is perhaps indicative of Urry's (2002) notion that the very concept of authenticity is jeopardised under the condition of postmodernity: it remains an eminently appealing, yet ultimately elusive concept, and the tourist is deemed to be aware of this dichotomy. Indeed, McCrone *et al* (1999) develop this argument, specifically in relation to the Scottish context, noting that:

It is even possible to acknowledge pastiche while believing in it. Somehow, simulacra pretences, presented as the real, for example the Scottish ceilidh experience, have the power to overcome our cynicism.

Thus, for McCrone *et al* the type of ceilidh promoted under the auspices of More Music Live! is nothing more than a simulacrum: a perfect replica of an original event that never existed. Although a tradition of only relatively recent origin, it is marketed as “real music” by the More Music Live! publicity material. The event coordinator discusses the reasons for incorporating a previously separate series of ceilidhs into the More Music Live! session programme: “ceilidhs, I think, are good for tourism. That’s the kind of thing that tourists like – [adopts American accent] ‘authentic Scottish dances’” (Interview D, 2003). Thus, this respondent points to not only the perceived touristic demand for the ‘real’, but also to the socially constructed nature of that authenticity. Whilst the More Music Live! ceilidhs may have little claim to historical verisimilitude, they are authentic insofar as they are experienced by visitors. It is the authenticity of the subject’s experience which matters.

Yet to what extent can sessions which are planned, publicised and paid for claim to offer such an experience? It is apparent that many TMTI initiatives were intended to create the illusion that the tourists concerned had stumbled upon a back region happening. Arguably, however, such attempts to create musical back regions for tourists are inherently contradictory in nature.

### **Commodification of the Session**

Indeed, evidence of the staged nature of the event can easily be detected. Any illusion that the visitor has ‘stumbled upon’ a back region event must surely be dashed when they are asked to complete a questionnaire rating their enjoyment of the session, a procedure which occurred at many of the events organised under the auspices of the TMTI. Audiences at the Arran Sessions had an especially slight chance of avoiding this indicator of the event’s staged quality, for each venues’ funding was withheld until proprietors returned questionnaires which had been completed by attendees (Boyle, 2002). Moreover, the content of the questionnaire itself will enlighten participants to the tourism-oriented nature of the event: respondents are required to provide information regarding their demographic characteristics and place of residence, and answer questions such as “Would this kind of event encourage a return visit?” (DGAA, 2001a). Thus, although intended to give the impression of being informal,

spontaneous happenings, the manner in which observers and participants were surveyed highlights the staged quality which such encounters retain.

Indeed, attempts to promote sessions for tourism purposes are fraught with challenges, not least of which is the fact that a session is, almost by definition, an impromptu occurrence. Initiatives including More Music Live! and Shetland's 'Simmerin' Sessions' produced programmes, detailing the locations, dates and times of the various events, together with the names of musicians and artists booked to appear. Some 40% of attendees at Orkney's 'Rolling in the Isles' initiative found out about the sessions through the event's publicity material and as such were aware that the sessions were planned rather than impromptu events (OTB, 2001: 4). Moreover, such publicity renders the musicians, rather than the session itself, to be the attraction, and highlights the contrived nature of the event. The very scheduling of a session is inherently contradictory in nature, for an event which is programmed cannot be spontaneous.

Moreover, without the requisite funding, none of the TMTI sessions would have happened. When MacKinnon published his critique of the British folk scene in 1993 sessions and singarounds were distinct from concerts in that they were "not mediated by any financial transaction whatsoever" (MacKinnon, 1993: 132). In the attempt to create imitation back regions, however, this distinction has been erased. It is the seed money paid to the 'anchor' which acts as the stimulus for the session and which alters its rationale for existence.

Thus, through this financial transaction the session itself becomes commodified. The music is no longer played simply for its use-value: rather it is given an explicit exchange value which transforms the nature of the social relationships between those who participate in the session. Due to their financial investment in the session, funders are able to make demands of the musicians which they would not be able to if the musicians were receiving no financial remuneration for their efforts. At a more general level, the venue proprietor who provides the seed money may be able to choose which musicians he wishes to 'anchor' the session in his venue. Venues which participated in the Dumfries and Galloway More Music Live! initiative, for example, were able to select their desired session performers from a "Musical Menu" (a list which detailed participating groups' members, instrumentation and musical style). This is a luxury which the host of a genuinely *ad hoc* event would not enjoy. More specifically, the

proprietor is able to stipulate where the musicians should be seated, what tunes they should be play and the volume at which they should perform. Whilst this may not necessarily act as a source of conflict, it does highlight the changes wrought upon the session by the commodification process.

Meanwhile, the session becomes a place of work for the musician who is booked to appear and it is no longer an “opportunity to let one’s hair down”, as MacKinnon (1993) conceived of it. Indeed, the anchor musicians are obliged to perform professionally in order to secure work for themselves in the future. The session is thus transformed from a musical happening free of the trappings of capitalism into one which can be bought and sold.

Commodification also transforms the relationships between the anchor musicians and passive observers. As previously noted, the session has traditionally been understood as an event at which divisions between audience and performers are minimal, with observers welcomed and positively encouraged to participate in the music-making. When particular musicians are booked to instigate, and hence guarantee, a session, this changes the very dynamics of the session itself: in particular, the social divisions which characterise the staged event are reinstated. The ‘anchor’ becomes a performer, rather than one of many participants. While other attendees are still able to participate in the music-making, the anchor, by virtue of his paid post, is responsible for directing the musical direction and content of the session.

Similarly, the commodification of the session creates audiences, a social grouping which is typically excluded from back regions. The fact that particular musicians have been hired to lead the session can intimidate others and thus deter them from contributing. As a result, they become audience members rather than participants. Equally, when particular musicians are booked to lead sessions, they become performers, and the session ceases to be defined by its informality and equity of access. The session, in effect adopts many of the elements of staging associated with the concert and loses its essential defining features.

## **Conclusion**

As both musicians and tourists alike have particular reasons to favour the session as a forum for traditional music-making, venue proprietors have an evident vested interest in hosting such events. Indeed, the TMTI is testament to the economic benefits which sessions may afford the

venues in which they are held. The impact of the TMTI has been such that a musical event which has hitherto eluded commodification has since become commodified. This has had profound impacts on the form of the session, changing the dynamics of the social relations within the event itself, and essentially transforming it from a back region occurrence to one which possesses merely the illusion of informality and spontaneity.

These observations do not necessarily render the music-making which takes place in such sessions any less meaningful or enjoyable for the participants, however. Indeed, the commodification of the session has had evident economic benefits for hundreds of amateur musicians, providing them with paid employment opportunities that otherwise would not have existed. In cultural terms, moreover, the organisation of such sessions had had beneficial impacts on the musical lives of local communities. The sessions which were organised in both Dumfries and Galloway and The Borders have spawned further sessions and have offered local musicians the opportunity to make contacts with other performers in their respective regions. In this sense, they have served to stimulate further music-making in many communities.

Thus, the intention here is not to suggest that the commodification of the session has been an entirely negative development. Rather, it is to highlight the problematic nature of much of the rhetoric used to promote these traditional music initiatives. The TMTI was described by its proponents as a more authentic - and hence a superior - representation of Scottish traditional music than that which had historically been promoted by the tourism authorities. The TMTI working group decided that certain musical forms should be sidelined in favour of those which more closely reflected their own musical interests. In so doing they practised a politics of cultural selection which was justified by its self-conscious concern with 'authenticity'. Musical authenticity was not sought and promoted for its supposed innate value, however. Rather, there was a clear commercial intent behind such pronouncements: if authenticity is indeed equated with quality, then the SAC and VisitScotland had an evident material interest in convincing the listening public that the musical product of the TMTI was indeed 'real', and hence 'good'.

Yet this constant equation of authenticity with quality is inherently problematic. The superior musical value which the TMTI events were reputed to possess was not predicated on the

status of the musicians themselves (for all of the participants were amateurs). Rather, it was based on the presumption that the session is, by definition, a more authentic forum for traditional music-making. As has become evident, however, this is a highly problematic claim in relation to those sessions which were organised as part of the TMTI. The manner in which these events were commodified robbed them of their spontaneity and compromised their informality, the very qualities which have traditionally caused the session to be so closely associated with authenticity. The session, in effect, became staged.

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## Interviews

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