MYTH-MAKING THROUGH MUSIC:

The "lost songs" of St Kilda

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ABSTRACT: *The Lost Songs of St Kilda* is an album of piano pieces reportedly taught to a Scottish mainlander by a St Kildan music teacher. The album comprises of piano recordings, performed by the mainlander, Trevor Morrison, together with orchestral arrangements of the pieces and was released in September 2016. It reached the top of the British classical music chart shortly after and became the fastest selling posthumously released debut album in British chart history. This paper explores how a contemporary recording of songs reportedly from St Kilda has captured the British fascination with a "remote" place and a "lost" island society in a manner that represents what might be termed "thana-islomania". The article will suggest that the contemporary recordings and the packaging of the album act in concert to create emotional geographies of St Kilda that are constructed in a mythical place-time, a "mythscape".

KEYWORDS: St Kilda, music, mythscape, islomania, thanatourism, mediascape

Introduction

Much work has been done by geographers to explicate that places are not static objects but complex constructions; assemblages of objects, symbols and people, and as such they are contested and continually in the process of becoming rather than being essentialised or fixed (Massey, 1994; Tuan, 1979). Therefore, place cannot be an apolitical or neutral construction but is often a deeply personal and emotional assemblage (Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2007). Islandness is a particular sense of place associated with spaces surrounded by water (Stratford, 2003). This sense of place is said to be derived from the "bounded identities" (Gössling and Wall, 2007: 429) that are formed at islands' edges as "clear physical borders constitute psychological borders" (Hay, 2003: 203). Islandness not only creates a sense of place through geographical precision but also through a sense of separateness from elsewhere. This has been described as "a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation" (Conkling, 2007: 191). Islandness, therefore, constitutes emotional geographies that cannot be replicated in continental places (Stratford, 2008). Further, islandness represents the tensions that arise from the interaction between island geographies and histories. Islandness, therefore, blurs the sense of time experienced on an island so that the past feels ever-present (Conkling, 2007). This is important as place, any

place, as a "geographical terrain only has integrity if it retains a certain configuration through time" (Hay, 2003: 33). While island geographies tend towards insularity, island histories tend towards contact and interdependence (Warrington and Milne, 2007).

Island scholars have done much to elucidate and explicate the enduring allure of islands, particularly small islands, on the human psyche. Geographical precision, a comprehensible scale and differentness to continental life has seen islands regarded as places that entice, tantalise, revitalise, and snare (Weale, 1992). As such "islands have occupied such a powerful place in modern Western imagination that they lend themselves to sophisticated fantasy and mythology" (Baldacchino 2005: 247-248), and this has been described as an obsession termed "islomania" (Gillis, 2007: 247). Islomania has presented itself in various ways in occidental culture. Islands are a persisting literary motif, from the great adventures of Homer's *Odyssey,* to the science fiction works of Jules Verne and the "who-dunnits" of Agatha Christie, to the point that the cultural history of the Occident can be considered as an island story (Gillis, 2004; Baldacchino, 2007a, 2004). Islands have also become an inter-mutual setting in popular culture, particularly in reality television series where contestants are stranded together for comedic or anarchic effect (such as *The Island with Bear Grylls* (2014-) and *Love Island* (2016-2017 and 2015-). Laurie Brinklow goes further to state that the "island is one of - if not *the* central metaphor of our time" framing not just literary and media works but framing the way people think about our world, such as 'traffic islands' and 'kitchen islands'" (2011: 169). Further, people seek out islandness, they want to be islanded (Conkling, 2007; Irvine, 1984). This islanding often takes the form of tourism and many islands are happy to capitalise on their reputations for rest, relaxation and/or revitalisation (Royle, 2001: 12; and see stlucia.org [nd]). Even those islands without the appeal of tropical weather and warm water can invite exploration, expedition and adventure to outsiders (Baldacchino, 2006). The day-to-day realities and mundanities of island life are often overlooked in such psychological constructions of place.[1]

The complex relationship between music and the human sense of place has only recently become a field of serious inquiry for geographers despite wider recognition that historically "there are strong links between music and senses of place and identities, both of people and places" (Hudson, 2006: 626). The production of place through music is a contested process but it is generally agreed that, "music plays a very particular and sensuous role in place-making" (Cohen, 1991: 288). Like sight, taste, and touch sound helps us mediate experiences. The senses act in concert to form a foundation on which "geographical understanding is constructed" (Rodaway, 2002: 1). Due to the particularities of island geographies mentioned above, music that originated on islands or is played on an instrument associated with them or even just played in a certain way often becomes intrinsically linked to cultural understandings of these places, for example, ukulele music with Hawai'i, and reggae music with Jamaica. Music can act as a self-identifier, a touchstone and a representation of the values to which we adhere (Johansson and Bell, 2012:1) but it can also distinguish us from the 'other'; new sounds and instruments can convey otherness and exoticism (Connell and Gibson, 2004: 345-345). In this way, music has the ability to create and transform a place for the listener in both symbolic and real ways and by evoking familiarity or otherness music can create emotional geographies (Gibson and Connell, 2012).

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[1] See, for example, Royle (2001: 107) for an image of a place sign in the Faroe Islands graffitied with the words "Wellcome (sic) to hell"; and MacKinnon (2014) for discussion of the challenges of life in the Outer Hebrides.

The authors will use sociologist Andy Bennett's (2008) framework for the development of a "mythscape" via an established "mediascape"[2] to discuss the popularity of *The Lost Songs of St Kilda*. Bennett argues that mediascapes "offer individuals the potential to construct particular, and highly romantic, ideas images concerning the nature of places" (ibid: 89). Over time, as media becomes the primary form of experience for audiences, ideas of particular places become re- and de-contexualised to the point where imaginings of these places can be described as "mythscapes" (ibid). Bennett's work focuses on the urban mythscape of the British "Canterbury Sound;" examining ways in which fans use musical knowledge and aesthetic judgements via the Internet to (re)imagine the city of Canterbury and its role in the birth of the "Canterbury Sound". As such, mythscapes are considered to be "a primary form of experience for audiences who use the information received through the mediascape to construct or build upon their existing ideas concerning particular places" (ibid). The authors will illustrate how literary texts have been the primary sources that the British public have drawn on to "consume" St Kilda. The literary mediascape of St Kilda has been dominated by the sublimity of the landscape and the sadness of a community allegedly "corrupted" and destroyed by modernity. Over time this mediascape has been recontextualised into a mythscape where St Kilda is associated with more abstract emotional geographies of remoteness and pastness and the *Lost Songs* album will be shown to be a contributing factor in the construction of this mythscape. This article will, therefore, comment on the ability of the *Lost Songs of St Kilda* to connect its audience to a mythical place-time that is rooted in a sense of "familiar otherness" associated with the mediascape of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland as well as the more metaphysical allure of "lost" or "abandoned" places more generally.

St Kilda

The St Kilda (*Hirta* in Scottish Gaelic) archipelago lies approximately 120 miles west of the Scottish mainland coast; its nearest neighbour being the Hebridean island of North Uist, some 40 miles east (Figure 1). St Kilda forms part of the Outer Hebrides administrative region (*Na h-Eileanan an Iar* ['the islands of the west'] in Scottish Gaelic). Hirta is also the name of the largest island, the only one that has ever had permanent inhabitation, while the smaller islands of Soay, Boreray and Dùn were only ever used as pasture for sheep. The archipelago's landscape consists of sharp, craggy cliffs and sea stacs formed of granites and gabbro. Hirta's Village Bay is distinct by having a gentler slope facing down to the sea, suitable for the construction of dwellings. The islands are home to two native breeds of sheep, the Neolithic Soay and the Iron Age Boreray, as well as being an important breeding ground for many seabird species such as northern gannets, northern fulmars and puffins. St Kilda is thought to have been inhabited since Neolithic times, evidence of which is provided by a series of ancient architectural features, such as stone circles, (National Trust for Scotland website [nd]). The earliest official records of population date to 1764 when a census recorded 90 people living on Hirta (38 males and 52 females) (National Records Scotland, 2016). In 1841 a private census taken by a visitor counted 105 people, in 1851 the population stood at 112. The emigration of 36 islanders to Australia in 1852 caused a sudden drop in the population and by 1861 a census counted 71 islanders. In 1911 the islanders only numbered 74, and ten years later stood at 71. In the 1920s deaths and migrations saw a dramatic drop, with only 43 islanders remaining in 1927 (ibid). By 1929 the islanders

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[2] An approach that is based on the earlier work of Arjun Appadurai (1990) with regards to the nature of "scapes".

believed that without enough healthy men to do the laborious work of tending to sheep, fishing, catching cliff birds, and looking after widows and the infirm, the remaining population could not survive another winter (Steel, 2011). Twenty islanders petitioned the government for resettlement in May 1930, their wish was granted and the island was voluntarily depopulated on 29 August 1930. The islanders were given new homes and jobs in various locations on the Scottish mainland. The decline of St Kilda has been attributed to the "corrupting" influence of modernity in the form of education, organised religion, and the emergence of a cash economy through the development of a tourism market (see MacDonald, 2001; Steel, 2011; MacLean, 1972).
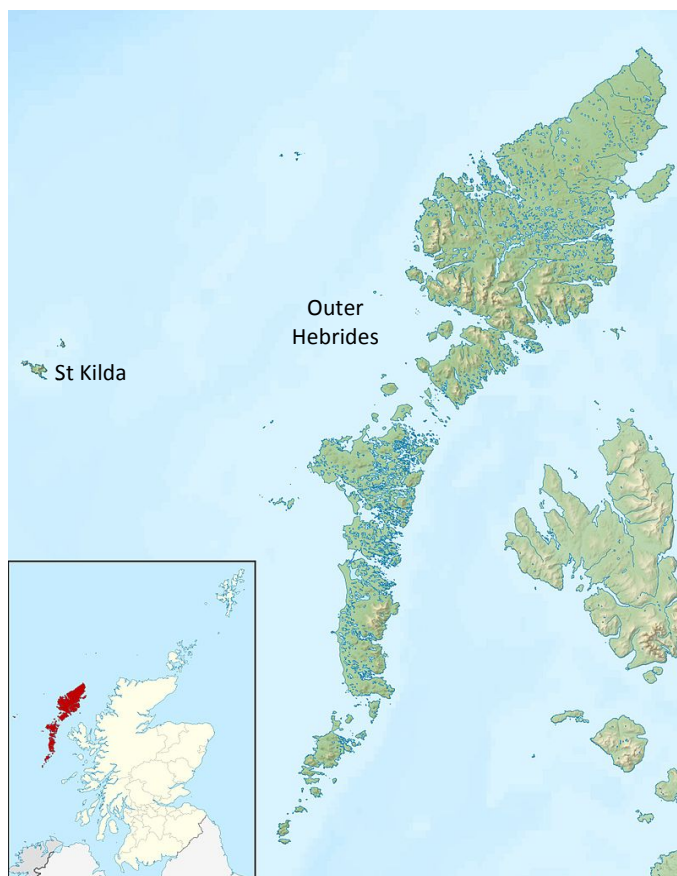

Figure 1: Map of St Kilda to the West of Scotland and the Outer Hebrides Includes Crown Copyright material

The archipelago was privately owned by the MacLeods of the Isle of Skye from the 16th century until the laird sold the islands to the Marquess of Bute in 1931, after the islands were depopulated. On the death of the Marquess in 1957 St Kilda was bequeathed to the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). Since taking over ownership the NTS has been restoring the village and conducting scientific research on the flora and fauna. Also, in 1957 the British government established a military base on St Kilda by leasing the land from the NTS; this saw the island inhabited once more but with workers generally on short-term

contracts. Today, the military base remains in operation, run by the private defence company Qinetiq, and, as St Kilda does not have an airport, military transportation is carried out by helicopter. Tourists can visit Hirta on one of the several small high-speed vessels that run from April to the end of September, leaving from the Isles of Harris, Uist and Skye. These boats generally seat twelve people, each paying around $300 for the day's experience, so tourist numbers to St Kilda remain low and sailings are often cancelled even at the height of summer due to weather and sea conditions. Therefore, St Kilda remains beyond the physical (and financial) reach of the vast majority of the British public.

Figure 2: View over Village Bay and the military base (Source: Otter, Creative Commons)

The 'Mythscape' of St Kilda

> *Bens and glens, the lone shieling in the misty island, purple heather, kilted clansmen, battles long ago, ancient and beautiful language, claymores and bagpipes and bonny Prince Charlie – we know all that, and we also know it's not real.* (Womack, 1989: 1)

It has been said that Scotland suffers an ongoing identity crisis that has been termed, "Braveheart Syndrome" where an essentially urban society is presented with a rural face (Devine, 2001: 231). This identity is typified by images of hills, lochs, castles, estates, clans, ceilidhs, Highland games, warriors and bagpipes (Symonds, 1999). If people appear at all in this myth, then they are a happy, carefree peasantry living an Arcadian existence (Robertson and Hall 2007: 19). "Braveheart Syndrome" has been coined since the release of the 1995 film *Braveheart* directed by and starring Mel Gibson. The film has been criticised for promoting the Highland myth of Scotland to a world audience, overlooking the important economic and culturally innovative urban centres of the Lowlands as well as including some glaring historical inaccuracies (Edensor 1997, 2002). This Highland myth is valorised internally and externally; internally by Scottish tourism organisations and externally through diaspora events and media such as Highland Games in the United States (Symonds, 1999; Cassidy 2006). As a result of the longevity and desire for the Highland

myth outside Scotland, it is now the case that much Scottish iconography exists independently of the everyday Scotland (Devine, 2001).

However, this mythical Highland Scotland was not an invention of 1990s Hollywood; its origins lie in much earlier travelogues of the British elite. At the turn of the 18th Century the Highlands of Scotland seemed as far from London as the New World of the Americas. Highland people were considered pagans, barbarians and savages who lived in a hostile and inhospitable natural environment and were considered in need of moral, cultural and economic "improvement" by the Scottish Lowland elite and the English ruling class (see Smout, 1982; Devine, 1994). The Act of Union in 1707 brought Scotland into the Kingdom of Great Britain and the concurrently emerging field of philosophical aesthetics, with its concern with the sublime, saw increasing numbers of the British elite journeying through the Scottish Highlands in search of supposedly authentic nature and an escape from increasing modernity (Huijbnes and Benediktsson, 2009: 117; Womack, 1989; MacDonald, 2001, McNeil, 2007, Smout, 1972). Martin Martin, a native of the Isle of Skye, was reportedly the first traveller to write about St Kilda after his voyage to the archipelago in 1697. His writing, although disparaged by some, including Samuel Johnson and James Boswell (Withers, 2014: 2), inspired others to journey to the far corners of Scotland in pursuit of scientific discovery and exploration of otherness. Their travelogues did much to pique the interest of British society in the Scottish Highlands and Islands and laid the foundations of the Highland mediascape. If one was in search of the truest, "wildest" adventure into the sublime, then St Kilda represented the ultimate journey to the very edge, the extreme of otherness within the British domain (MacDonald, 2001). Increasing numbers of British travellers were reaching St Kilda in the latter half of the 17th century, with the first tourist steamer arriving in Village Bay in 1834. From 1870 onwards St Kilda featured regularly in boat tours of the Hebrides and the frequency of these boats lead the summer months to become known as the "steamer season" (Steel, 2011). The legacy of early visitors such as Martin Martin saw St Kilda come to be regarded as the "home of a semi-mythological tribe of people unpolluted by western civilization" (Hutchinson, 2014: 75).

Bennett (2002) contends that the transformation of a landscape into a mythscape occurs through a three-step process of mediatisation. Firstly, the landscape is transformed into a mediascape, whereby media representations of a place shape "the way we understand our imagined worlds" (Appadurai, 1990: 589). This occurred when the early travelogues brought St Kilda to the British public's attention and the archipelago began to be marketed to tourists. The second step involves this mediascape becoming the primary form of experience for audiences and its construction or transformation of a place into geographical imaginings. After the abandonment of St Kilda in 1930 the second stage of the mythscape came into play as the primary method of consumption became via media such as the many literary works listed above. One such mediatised representation of place was the reaffirmation of the sublimity and awesomeness of the St Kildan landscape by Charles MacLean. When visiting in 1971 he described how his initial sighting was beyond conventional description and understanding:

> *The colour improved the closer we sailed; the outline sharpened; a second landmass moved out from behind the first. Shoulders of cliffs descended into the ocean and re-emerged as stacs and skerries, standing up out of the water like elbows and knees at angles of defiance... from afar the green effect of the island had camouflaged the variety of its component colours, which were now revealed in patches of brilliant and dullest green, of dark to pale brown and violet and in the whites, greys, yellows and blacks of stone, loose scree and*

> *bald faces of rock. In that curious westerly light, drawn from the reflective*
> *expanses of sea and sky, the colours of St Kilda seem to permeate the*
> *atmosphere with the rhythms of soft luminous energy. It gave the island a*
> ***magical*** *quality which seemed familiar because half-remembered from*
> ***dreams***. *Upon the first sight and sensation of Hirta, signs of human in*
> *habitation follow as a disappointment.* (1972: 1-2 emphasis added)

The day-to-day life of St Kildans has been the subject of many literary works. In the foreword to his book *St Kilda: A people's history,* Hutchinson writes:

> *The author of any new book about St Kilda is not standing on the shoulders of many*
> *giants. But he or she is perched perilously at the apex of an enormous human pyramid*
> *of predecessors... They have issued in such a flood that, in my occasional capacity as a*
> *book reviewer, I once threw my hands and cried in print, 'Enough!'* (2014: Foreword)

Randall (2010) identifies that there have been over 700 titles written about St Kilda to date (and numerous others have been published since). The third and final stage identified by Bennett sees decontextualised images and information becoming re-contextualised by audiences into new ways of thinking about and imaging places. The end result of this mediatisation process is the formation of a mythscape. Bennett explains that the "mythscape in turn begins to take on a life of its own - stories, discussions and anecdotes being linked to a place entirely in relation to that place's representation as a mythscape" (2002: 89). In this article we argue that the *Lost Songs of St Kilda* album firmly sits within the third and final stage. The vast majority of media representations of St Kilda have been produced by anglophone outsiders, with few notable exceptions, such as Gilles' (2014) account of life on the island. This follows Baldacchino's observation that "very (re)representation" of the smallest, remotest and least populated islands

> *is dictated, penned or otherwise determined by 'others'... They find themselves*
> *presented as locales of desire, as platforms of paradise, as habitual sites of*
> *fascination, emotional offloading or religious pilgrimage.* (2010: 373-374)

Perhaps the best known of the St Kilda books is Steel's *The Life and Death of St. Kilda: The moving story of a vanished island community* (2011). As well as numerous books, both non-fiction and fiction.[3] St Kilda has not only featured in the album addressed in this article but has been the subject of several musical projects. Folk singer/songwriter Brian McNeill wrote the track 'Ewan and the Gold',[4] a tale of a St Kildan who after seeking his fortune prospecting for gold in Australia and California, returns penniless to the island but concludes with his inability to stay. Scottish folk-rock band Runrig's track 'Edge of the World' (from its 1990 album *The Big Wheel*) tells of the isolated life of the islanders. A Scottish Gaelic language opera about the Islands toured Europe in 2007 with financial support from the Scottish Government. In 2013 musician Alasdair Roberts and poet Robin released a recording called *Hirta Songs* inspired by the archipelago. Most recently St Kilda has been recreated within *Minecraft*, with the video game allowing users to download the digital map and participate in six historically-inspired stories.

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[3] See, for example, Altenberg (2011), Macaulay (2009) and Murray (2014).

[4] Included on his 1991 album *The Back O' The North* (CDTrax).

The Lost Songs of St Kilda

The CD album, *The Lost Songs of St Kilda*, (2016) consists of fourteen tracks. The first eight tracks are the "Lost Songs," piano "songs" (hereafter referred to as "the piano songs") as recorded by Trevor Morrison. The titles of all the piano pieces (and arrangements thereof) are taken either from the names of St Kilda islands (Hirta, Soay, Boreray, Dùn) or from the names of surrounding rocky outcrops called stacs (Stac an Armin, Stac Lee, Stac Levenish, Stac Dona). The remaining six tracks are either modern arrangements for string orchestra and harp of some of these pieces ('Soay', 'Stac Dona', 'Dùn' and 'Hirta') or impressionistic string orchestra pieces incorporating one of the titles ('Stac Lee – Dawn' and 'Stac Lee – Dusk'). One of the arrangements ('Hirta') also incorporates Morrison's recording of the piano song 'Hirta'. Another ('Dùn') includes two verses of a spoken poem (translated into English) and a further two verses of the same poem sung in the original Gaelic. This poem written in the 1990s has been cleverly fitted to the original 'Dùn' piano song.

The CD packaging is a four panel cardboard design with two inserts, one for the CD and the other for the CD booklet. The cover features a dramatic photo of Stac an Armin and Stac Lee. In the centrefold there is a photo of a St Kilda settlement building as seen through a window of the settlement church, and a photo of a craggy island. None of the photos (which are credited to John Dyer) are captioned. The CD booklet mostly includes other photos of St Kilda scenery in addition to a small-sized photo of Trevor Morrison playing the piano in his Edinburgh care home. A two-page booklet annotation by Tim Cooper relates the story of the discovery of pianist Trevor Morrison and the recording of the piano songs. It also incorporates an account of how the songs were "reimagined" by the contemporary Scottish composers who worked on the *Lost Songs* CD project (Sir James MacMillan, Craig Armstrong, Christopher Duncan, Rebecca Dale and Francis Macdonald.

The booklet text is rich with emotive descriptions of the piano tracks. Cooper describes the melodies as "simple, haunting, evocative, elegaic". One of the composers, James MacMillan, believes that "there's something very haunting about those recordings. You could feel the years rolling back: something very ethereal." Stuart Mackenzie, the volunteer care-home worker who recorded the piano songs recounts that "The way he [ie Morrison] plays the music was like a keyhole into his life - full of mystery, melancholy and a wistful sense of yearning for another time and place" and arranger, Rebecca Dale, identifies being "moved to tears" by the music. To dispel scepticism about the authenticity of the songs, there is a disclaimer of sorts in the booklet text. Morrison is quoted as saying that his piano teacher, who is never identified by name (presumably because Morrison could not remember his name), putatively a resident of St Kilda before the 1930 evacuation, had told him that there was never a piano on St. Kilda and that the melodies he taught him [i.e. Trevor] were based on remembered songs, as sung by the St Kilda men hunting birds on the stacs.

In the booklet text, this is followed by a rather specious claim by Cooper that "*The Lost Songs of St Kilda* is the last remaining link to that legacy." Before making that claim the record company (Decca) should have done some research, as there are at least two genuine field recordings of St Kilda songs that have been collected by folklore scholars and are held at the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh, one of which, 'Maighdeann Ùr nan Sùil Bhlàth' is available to listen to online.[5] Although there has been a strong

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[5] http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/44798/4 - accessed 14th August 2017

promotional pitch around the authenticity of the *Lost Songs* CD project, Sir James MacMillan expressed some reservations in a Classic FM interview recorded in 2016:

> *So far nobody recognises the songs. They are unknown, so they could be from St Kilda. Even if they're not it doesn't matter. It's just a beguiling story.*[6]

Figure 3: Front cover *Lost Songs* CD[7]

Analysis of the recordings

The piano songs demonstrate a consistency of musical style even to the point of sounding formulaic in their construction. Texturally they all consist of a slow melody played by the right hand accompanied by sparse chords played by the left hand. The melodies are usually initially played as a single line but are typically reinforced as the song develops by octave doubling and by adding thirds or sixths between the octave notes. The accompaniment is chordally triadic, either expressed as block chords or arpeggiated chords. The melodic lines use diatonic scales (major or minor) and the chordal vocabulary is diatonic for the most

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[6] Interview with Sir James MacMillan: http://www.classicfm.com/music-news/lost-songs-st-kilda/#jYs5xrvTkC1Gmv42.97 - accessed 14th August 2017.

[7] Thanks to John Dyer for his permission to reproduce this photo image.

part. That is, only diatonic (major and minor) chords that can be derived from the major and minor scales are used (with a few chromatic exceptions as discussed below).

The style of performance is highly flexible rhythmically, so much so that it is often difficult to hear what the metrical bases of the songs are. It is possible to interpret this performance approach as being related to the romantic-style 19th Century classical piano performance concept of *rubato* where rhythmic values are subtly manipulated to achieve emotional affect. The metricality is further obscured by the very slow tempi. However it is clear from aural analysis that the overriding metre of all the piano songs is a slow waltz (triple metre). In some cases (for example the third bar of 'Soay') a different bar length (four beats instead of three) is inserted within the overriding triple-time context.

Although these piano song melodies could possibly be based on St Kilda folk songs, they give the impression, from an analytical perspective, of being melodies derived from the chord progressions that underlie them, and thus would seem to be, as discussed below, out of kilter with traditional Celtic song making and performance practice which is essentially monophonic and alien to European classical music chord progressions. It is a common technique in 20th Century popular songwriting to derive the melodic lines of a song from a standard (or non-standard) chord progression. In 'Soay', for example, we see something like that process taking place: there is a melodic pattern (called a sequence) which follows the chords F major 7, E minor 7, D minor 7. It seems improbable that such a melodic design would result from anything other than the process of composing a melody based on an underlying chord progression. 'Stac an Armin' is even more rooted in its underlying chords. It prominently uses a melodic/harmonic device called *appoggiatura* where a melodic note outside an underlying chord is used as a tension-creating device. This dissonant note is then "resolved" to one of the notes of the chord. 'Stac an Armin' also involves chromatic melodic and harmonic elements (notes outside the major or minor scales) that would have been highly unlikely to occur in Gaelic folk songs in the early 20th Century (or before). 'Hirta' (in the key of A minor) also includes several instances of the major chord of the tonic which is essentially a classical music harmonic colouration.

Another feature of the piano songs that seems inconsistent with Gaelic folk song melodic design is the dearth of decorative techniques such as grace notes (quick notes or groups of notes immediately preceding the main melodic notes). In fact, of all the piano songs on the *Lost Songs* CD, only 'Hirta' (one out of eight piano tracks) uses this technique, and only sparingly (6 ornaments in a-2 minute track) By contrast, for example, traditional instrumental Scottish pipe music typically employs grace notes on at least half of the main notes of any melody as illustrated in the following (Musical Example 1) (MacLeod [nd]: 26), where we see the grace notes represented as much smaller in size than the main notes.

Musical Example 1 – 'The Road to Balquhidder' (Macleod, nd: 26)

As part of the promotion of the *Lost Songs* CD, a piano was transported to Hirta where Sir James MacMillan performed a transcription of the piano songs, including 'Stac Lee' and 'Soay'. Interestingly he added a lot of melodic ornaments to his interpretation of these pieces, elements that are not present in Trevor Morrison's recording.[8] It is as if MacMillan is trying to make the pieces sound more idiomatically like Scottish folk music. The field recording of the Boreray (St Kilda) song "Maighdeann Ùr nan Sùil Bhlàth" mentioned above, is worth examining for comparison with Morrison's piano songs. This song is primarily based on a pentatonic scale (five notes as distinct from the seven-note major scale) and involves no accompaniment (and therefore no chords). It thus seems to have little in common with Morrison's piano songs recordings.

As it is thought that the Gaelic-speaking people of St Kilda would have arrived there from Lewis, Harris, North Uist, South Uist or Skye many centuries ago (Steel, 2011: 50), it is worthwhile also to compare folksong field recordings collected from those locations. The CD compilation *Scottish Tradition 2: Music of the Western Isles* (1992) consists of twelve tracks, all (except for one brief section of piping) of unaccompanied, repetitive solo or unison vocal melodies. A few tracks of work songs involve some percussive elements which result from the activity of waulking: the stretching of tweed material (MacInnes, 1971). The melodies tend toward pentatonism or mixolydian modalism. That is, they have no elements that suggest diatonic harmonic treatments which are a dominant feature of the *Lost Songs of St Kilda* piano songs. In contrast to the *Lost Songs* piano pieces, the Western Isles songs also strongly demonstrate melodic "grace note" ornamentation.

It is notable that the titles of material on this Western Isles folksong compilation are not focused on place names, as they are on *Lost Songs*, but rather on human interactions and aspirations. Some of the traditional music titles (translated from Gaelic into English) include 'I would make merry with the black-haired girl', 'Song to Rankin's Wife' and 'Open the door to the fiddling tailor'. Only one of the tracks involves a place name: 'A day when the Fenians were in the Mountain of Marvels: Fenian Lay'. It thus seems uncharacteristic that all the *Lost Songs* tracks have one-word titles that only refer either to an island or a stac. In the text of the *Lost Songs* CD booklet it is never indicated whether the titles of the piano songs were identified by Morrison when they were recorded or whether they were applied later in the CD production process.

Arrangements and compositions

Orchestral evocations of Scottish cultural and geographical themes have a long history and many of them became very popular with orchestral audiences from the time of their composition up to the present day. After a visit to Scotland in 1829, the German composer, Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) wrote his *Die Hebriden* for orchestra (also known as *Fingals Höhle* – aka *Fingal's Cave*) (1830).[9] It was inspired by geological feature of Fingal's Cave on the uninhabited island of Staffa. Mellers believes it is Mendelssohn's finest work "attaining

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[8] Performances of 'Soay' and 'Stac Lee' recoded on Hirta on by James MacMillan are online at:
http://www.classicfm.com/music-news/lost-songs-st-kilda/#jYs5xrvTkC1Gmv42.97 and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqG_8oZH604 - accessed 18th August 2017
[9] Score for the work and an audio recording of a performance by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra online at: http://imslp.org/wiki/The_Hebrides,_Op.26_(Mendelssohn,_Felix) - accessed 17th August 2017.

a strange immateriality in the hazily floating modulations" of its development section (1962: 831). It also has become his most popular work with orchestral audiences (Slonimsky, 1992, 1192). Richards identifies an "obsession" that British composers have with British islands (2004, 199-212), analysing works by John Ireland (1879-1962) that are based on imagery and literary themes concerning the Channel Islands, works by Judith Weir (b. 1954) that draw their inspiration from the Western Isles and, in particular, from Margaret Fay Shaw's collection *Folk Songs and Folk Lore of South Uist* (1939) and an electronic music work by Andrew Hugill (b. 1957) called *Island Symphony* (1995) which is a "synthesis of the real, lived and experienced aspects" of Cornwall's St. George's Island (Richards, 2014: 210-211).[10]

Born in Salford, England, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016) lived in Orkney from 1971 (first on Hoy, then on Sanday) until his death. Although his body of work is mostly modernist, arguably his most famous work is a simple piano piece titled 'Farewell to Stromness' (the second largest town in Orkney) (1980). The solo piano work, composed as an instrumental section in a protest cabaret piece entitled 'The Yellow Cake Revue', has a Scottish folksong-like quality that MacMillan has likened to the *Lost Songs* piano pieces. 'Farewell to Stromness' is structured upon repeated chord progressions, indicating that the chords came first and the melody is thus composed to fit the chords. It may sound somewhat folksong-like, but its method of creation is foreign to the way traditional songs are formulated. Davies also wrote other works that reflect the Orkney culture such as 'Orkney Wedding with Sunrise' for orchestra,[11] which charts a traditional wedding event on the Orkney island of Hoy. It includes a selection of orchestral interpretations of Scottish folksongs and a section where the music simulates the drunkenness of some of the musicians playing at the party. It has a surprise ending with the appearance of a piper onstage playing a traditional tune representing the sunrise experienced by the composer as he walked home across the island at dawn.

It is within the context of this musical tradition of evoking Scottish cultural ideas and physical imagery that the five Scottish composer/arrangers attached to the *Lost Songs* project have delivered a wide range of ways to respond to the piano songs recorded by Morrison. Each of the composer/arrangers has in his or her own way value-added to the mystique of the source recordings. The arrangement for string orchestra and harp of 'Soay' by Rebecca Dale (b. 1985) is in some respects the most truthful to Morrison's interpretations. A feature of this arrangement is the use of a solo violin to carry the tune. Dale does not deviate much from the melodic and harmonic content of Morrison's piano interpretation but she does add complex interlude sections that dramatise the piece and also flamboyant virtuoso violin figurations to add drama and scintillation to her arranging. Her background as a screen composer is evident in the way she is able to intensify the emotional impact of the original piano song.

Unlike Dale's arrangement of 'Soay', 'Stac Lee – Dawn' and 'Stac Lee – Dusk' are original compositions by Craig Armstrong (b. 1959), best known for his film scores for Baz Luhrmann films such as *Moulin Rouge* (2001) and *The Great Gatsby* (2013). Armstrong is quoted in the *Lost Songs* CD booklet as saying he wanted to "continue the story of these forgotten songs, the atmosphere of what it would have been like living on St Kilda and the

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[10] A unattributed recording of which is online at: https://soundcloud.com/andrew-hugill - accessed 27th May 2017.
[11] A performance of the work by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Ben Gernon is online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCeh6amXyYE - accessed 17th August 2017

history of this special place". Indeed these two pieces are very filmic, atmospheric constructions reminiscent of György Ligeti's orchestral 'Atmosphères' (1961)[12] a work that was licenced by Stanley Kubrick to underscore the deep space images of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). As with 'Atmosphères,' Armstrong's two pieces are not based on melodic themes accompanied by chord progressions but are rather created by the textural layering of sustained notes that derive their musical content and interest from changes in timbre and exploration of different instrumental techniques. 'Stac Lee – Dawn' explores timbral variations of different string orchestra voicings of one chord (F minor 6), using techniques such as harmonics, tremolo and pizzicato. 'Stac Lee – Dusk' is similar in construction but includes in addition to strings, a punctuating harp melodic motif (a minor third interval) which could be intended to echo the interval of the first two notes of Morrison's piano interpretation of 'Stac Lee'.

In contrast to Dale's arrangement of 'Soay,' the treatment of 'Stac Dona' by Christopher Duncan (b. 1989) takes a lot of liberties with the melodic design of Morrison's piano interpretation, principally in the details of the rhythm but also by changing some of the pitches, developing motives from a selection of the melody's interval shapes and incorporating rich extended-chord harmonies. The arrangement for string orchestra and harp is decidedly un-Celtic in its sound, opting instead for a schmaltzy Hollywood ambience. Francis Macdonald (b. 1970) takes another approach to the project by adding a poem written around 1990 by Norman Campbell (from the Isle of Lewis) to his arrangement of 'Dùn'. The North Uist singer, Julie Fowlis, speaks the first two verses in English over the instrumental arrangement of the melody of 'Dùn' and then sings last two verses in Gaelic to it. The poem, 'Dha Fionnlagh MacDhomhnaill a Hiort' (which translates as "To Finlay MacDonald, St Kilda") (nd) deals with MacDonald's activities as a hunter of birds on the islands and stacs of St Kilda. Macdonald's arrangement follows the melody of Morrison's piano version of 'Dùn', with minor adjustments to accommodate the vocal setting of the words of the poem. The final track, an orchestral treatment of 'Hirta' by Sir James MacMillan (b. 1959), is unique to the project in that the composer has built his arrangement around Morrison's recording of 'Hirta'. Using a range of standard and extended string techniques, MacMillan creates a rhapsodic mélange of sumptuous sounds to embellish the sparse piano performance.

Discussion

Music, through its actual sounds, has the capacity to create and articulate space and place in the form of emotional and imaginary geographies to the point where listening can become a form of virtual tourism (Rodaway, 1994; Connell and Gibson, 2003, 2004; Leyshon, et al, 1998). Whether virtual or real, tourism involves collective imaginings of places assisted by "socially transmitted representational assemblages" (Salazar, 2012: 864). We argue that the popularity of the *Lost Songs* recording is, at least in part, due to the marketing efforts exploiting familiar island tropes of "remoteness" and "pastness" along with a lesser established sadness for what has been lost that we term "thana-islomania". In our increasingly interconnected, globalised world where mobility is the norm, the "scarcity of remoteness has driven up its value" (Gillis, 2001: 39). It is therefore because we can reach so many places with relative ease that the allure of St Kilda only grows. It is much easier for

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[12] An unattributed recording of which is online at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWlwCRlVh7M - accessed 14th August 2017

Londoners to fly to many Caribbean islands than it is to reach St Kilda. It also possible to reach the Caribbean at all times of the year (if not advisable in the hurricane season), whereas St Kilda is effectively out of bounds outside the short summer months. Listeners to this album can experience a type of virtual or metaphysical tourism where the archipelago, because of its remoteness, can become anything to anyone, a novelty site where the imagination can run riot (Baldacchino, 2006).

Remoteness is often associated with pastness to the point where John Gillis argues that in a mobile society "it is connection to the past rather than to place that is most sought after" (2001: 40). Therefore, the construction of place also constitutes the creation of a "collective sense of memory" (Harvey, 1996). Music's ability to elicit strong feelings of memory (Wood, Duffy and Smith, 2007) then intertwines the production of place and time so that rather than preserving the past they "adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present" (Lowenthal, 1985: 210). This is important for the *Lost Songs of St Kilda;* with its disputable origins and simple melodies it has the ability to construct an entirely modern record for the musical tradition of the archipelago. Once again, islands act as *tabulae rasae* for any outside agenda (Baldacchino, 2006) and, in this instance, it is the myth of memory. The memories created by the album, its sounds and accompanying visuals, narrate the memory of a society that is gone, effectively shrouded in the "mists of time" as so little of the St Kildan musical tradition remains, and must be sought out. The album represents the final stage in the construction of the St Kildan mythscape; the media representation of the past eighty years since depopulation have renegotiated reality and authenticity to the point where the myth of St Kilda forms part of its narrative.

When listening to the *Lost Songs of St Kilda* one experiences a type of virtual thanatourism. Thanatourism is often thought of as the visiting of sites or media associated with human tragedy and/or death, such as going on a trip to Auschwitz (Seaton, 1996) with the purpose of triggering specific emotions as a way of "relating to the past and its victims" (Knudsen, 2011: 55). However, thanatourism's scope has broadened to include any tourist activity that can fall under one of the following categories: tragedy tourism, hardship tourism, warfare tourism, grief tourism, genocide tourism, extreme tourism, and horror tourism (Dunkley, Westwood and Morgan 2007; Hartmann, 2014). By listening to the songs of a community and society that no longer exists, listeners can be said to experience tragedy, hardship and grief tourism. As Massey rightly points out, "place and community are rarely coterminous" (1994: 147). Islands like St Kilda are the exception to the rule where geography facilitates a very special sense of place-based community and its "death" represents a blemish in the human construction of the island idyll. If the "ideal" island community with its own language, customs and geographical separateness cannot sustain itself, then what does this mean for our own sense of place and our island-dominated psyche? It is a place of the truly sublime, a place where nature is greater than the human capacity to be islanded.

The popularity of this album may be evidence of "thana-islomania". The increasing allure of "remote", 'lost' and/or "abandoned" places may be evidenced by the rise in popularity of a sub-genre of non-fiction, often in the form of thematic atlases, as Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of remote islands: fifty islands I have not visited and never will*, (2010), Richard Hopper's *Abandoned Places: 60 stories of places where time stood still* (2015) and Travis Elborough's *Atlas of Improbable Places: A Journey to the World's Most Unusual Corners* (2016)*,* all of which include St Kilda. It is here that the mythscape of St Kilda is perpetuated. The archipelago, in such books, is represented by stylised cartography with limited historical or cultural analysis and instead presented as part of a group of places that share an essence. If anything these publications are further evidence of that the islomania experienced by

mainlanders is often symptomised by an "obsession to frame and map an island cognitively", to "take it all in,"(Baldacchino, 2007: 165) but there is another element in these publications, tragedy and extremeness that has meant humans have not, or could not, survive in such places.

Conclusion

This article has illustrated that there is a complex relationship between the production of music and the construction of place. Music not only facilitates a form of virtual tourism but it can also construct a type of temporal tourism, connecting us to a past, either real or mythical. This is important for the *The Lost Songs of St Kilda* where the past of the archipelago, through mediatisation, looms large in its present. The story of St Kilda is largely the story of its people and their abandonment of their home. The album offers a tangible, sensory connection to what has been lost; an entire community that lost its connection to a place, a way of life that has been lost forever, and an island that has lost its people. However, the album's dubious origins and the fact that there are archived St Kildan musical pieces available for scrutiny suggests that the British public are just as enamoured with the myth of St Kilda than experiencing historically accurate recordings. The album connects listeners to a past that never really existed, a past of an island when life was simpler and the island was unadulterated by the trappings of modern life; the island idyll that often beguiles the islomaniac. The capacity for *Lost Songs* to connect us to "a past" of "an island" that has been lost is symptomatic of *thano-islomania*, whereby people construct their own emotional geographies based on remoteness and a pastness that is difficult to experience in any real sense in a postmodern, globalised world.

The popularity of *Lost Songs* illustrates that despite eighty years and hundreds of media representations since abandonment, the British public have not had enough of St Kilda. The archipelago has a history of being a highly mediatised place, from the early travelogues of the British elite to its inclusion in contemporary thematic atlases of far flung places. However, the mediascape of the archipelago has shifted and been reimagined over time so that the place of St Kilda now exists as a mythscape. Whereas early literary media representations of the archipelago contextualised the landscape and inhabitants of St Kilda within the sublimity and "otherness" of the Scottish Highlands, later media, such as thematic atlases, emphasise the archipelago as a decontextualised "remote" and "abandoned" place. The album, with its simple sounds and visuals of misty stacs, on one hand builds upon the Highland myth of Scotland as a haunting place with a wild and rugged landscape where people struggled in vain to survive, while on the other hand disregards the musical traditions of both the Highlands and St Kilda, and pays lip service to the Gaelicness of St Kildan music. Therefore, *Lost Songs* not only forms part of the St Kildan mediascape but its musical and historical un-rootedness means that it is complicit in constructing the St Kildan mythscape.

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