

Ireland's inscriptions on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage

In December 2015, Ireland ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Intangible cultural heritage 'refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity'. Ireland has currently three inscriptions on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List: **Uilleann Piping**, **Hurling** and **Harping**.

- **Uilleann Piping:**

This distinctive Irish musical art-form, often referred to as “The Sound of Ireland”, was recognised at the 12th Session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2017.

The Uilleann Pipes are a sophisticated instrument, offering more musical possibilities than any other type of bagpipe in the world. They originate from an instrument known as “The Irish Pipes” which were introduced in the 1740's. The Uilleann Pipes saw a decline in the 19th century before their successful revival in the 20th century.

Today, Uilleann Pipes are celebrated in 50 countries across all continents. Over three thousand Uilleann Pipers spread the Irish tradition around the world by playing music on this uniquely Irish instrument.



- **Hurling:**

Hurling was the second Irish inscription on the list. It was approved at the 13th session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in November 2018.

Hurling is known as the fastest game on the grass and is one of the most skilful sports in the world. One of Ireland's oldest traditions, the game has been played for over 3,000 years. Today, Gaelic games, including Hurling and camogie, are played on every continent. UNESCO's recognition of the sport acknowledges its unique cultural significance and its proud place at the heart of Irish society.



- **Harping:**

Ireland's latest inscription on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List was approved at the 14th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2019.

The harp is Ireland's national symbol and has been played for more than 1,000 years. The ancient tradition of harping was almost lost completely, seeing revival during the 19th century, where Irish harp and harper metaphors were used in contemporary literature and song to address social injustices.

Harping is at its most popular level in Ireland since the decline of the tradition over two hundred years ago. Young Irish harpers are coming more and more to the fore, bringing new life to the tradition and ensuring its bright future.

This recognition by UNESCO of Irish Harping is a huge achievement for Irish culture as it will draw global attention to this tradition and help to sustain its valuable role within our culture.

