

ISLAND ANTHEMS

Jersey, Identity, and the Island Games

HENRY JOHNSON

Introduction

This paper explores the processes that have helped the creation of new island anthems in the context of the Island Games. Focus is given to Jersey as a long-term member of this organisation, and as an island that has recently chosen a new anthem for use at such a sporting event. In this particular discussion, emphasis is not on the connection between music and sport, but, rather, on the way Jersey has chosen a new anthem that might be played at major sporting occasions or other important events.

The Island Games is a sporting event that was established in the Isle of Man in 1985 “with the intention of bringing together a number of small islands from different parts of the world in friendly competition as part of the Isle of Man’s Year of Sport” (IGA 2007). The event has been held biennially since this time. While 15 islands participated at the first event in 1985, 25 took part in 2007 at the last Island Games when they were held on the island of Rhodes in Greece (Table 1). Each of the Island Games Association (IGA) members belongs to a larger nation state, although many have a high degree of autonomy or independence.

Table 1. Venue Number of Sports, Number of Islands, Number of Competitors

Year	Island	Number of Sports	Number of Islands	Number of Competitors
1985	Isle of Man	7	15	700
1987	Guernsey	9	18	1049
1989	Faroe Islands	11	15	800
1991	Aland	13	17	1500
1993	Isle of Wight	14	19	1448
1995	Gibraltar	14	18	1214
1997	Jersey	14	19	2000
1999	Gotland	14	22	1858
2001	Isle of Man	15	22	2020
2003	Guernsey	15	23	2129
2005	Shetland	15	24	*
2007	Rhodes	14	25	*

* Data currently unavailable.

Source: IGA (2007).

While the IGA aims to include all islands, its actual membership is geographically quite limited, possibly due to the cost of travel to attend this smaller sporting occasion vis-à-vis larger events. Of the current 25 member islands (none of which is an independent nation state), a large proportion (15 of the 25) are British. Of the British members, 5 are British Overseas Territories, 10 are islands within the British Islands, 5 are British Crown Dependencies, and 4 are Channel Islands (Tables 2-3). The 10 non-British islands come from mainly around Europe and the Mediterranean, with one member coming from Canada (Prince Edward Island). The furthest British member from the others comes from the Southeast Atlantic (Saint Helena).

Table 2. Number of Islands and Political Status

Island Status	Number of Islands
British Crown Dependency	5
British Overseas Territory	5
Scottish council	3
Danish	2
Norwegian	2
Finish	1
Swedish	1
English county	1
Spanish	1
Canadian province	1
Greek prefecture	1
Estonian county	1
Welsh council (part of)	1

Table 3. Members of the Island Games (as of 2007)

Island	Political Status
Aland	Autonomous possession of Finland
Alderney	Part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey (British Crown dependency)
Bermuda	British Overseas Territory
Cayman Islands	British Overseas Territory
Falkland Islands	British Overseas Territory
Faroe Islands	Autonomous province of the Kingdom of Denmark
Froya	Municipality in Norway
Gibraltar	British Overseas Territory
Gotland	County, province and municipality of Sweden
Greenland	Autonomous province of the Kingdom of Denmark
Guernsey	British Crown dependency
Hitra	Municipality in Norway
Isle of Man	British Crown dependency
Isle of Wight	English county
Jersey	British Crown dependency
Menorca	Spanish Autonomous Community
Orkney	Council in Scotland
Prince Edward Island	Canadian province
Rhodes	Dodecanese Prefecture of Greece
Saaremaa	Main island of Saare County, Estonia
Sark	Part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey (British Crown dependency)
Shetland Islands	Council in Scotland
St. Helena	British Overseas Territory
Western Isles	Council in Scotland
Ynys Môn (Anglesey)	Part of a county in Wales

What is clear about the IGA is that its very nature of bringing islands together that are part of a larger nation state helps to construct a sense of identity and difference on several levels. As a sporting event, the Island Games are about competition, but the event also helps generate a feeling of island identity as a body of islanders coming together to celebrate their similarities and differences. As the IGA notes:

Other benefits of such a unique festival of sport are the opportunities for cultural exchange and social interaction with visiting teams, and to establish new lifelong friendships with fellow islanders. (IGA 2007)

Islandness, therefore, is constructed at a level that celebrates island identities through a sporting competition. In the same way that some other sporting events bring people together (e.g., Olympic Games, Commonwealth Games, Asian Games, etc.), the Island Games brings islanders together simply because of the distinct geographies and identities of islands. Such is the extent of island identity at the heart of the IGA that the contested nature of what constitutes an island surfaced recently in a public debate between two IGA members when Guernsey (78 km²) challenged Prince Edward Island (5684 km²) as a contender to host the 2013 Island Games due to the latter's relatively large size (CBC News 2008).

Island Anthems

As a sporting competition that models itself on other large-scale sporting events, the Island Games celebrates sporting achievement in a way that is familiar the world over (ie opening and closing ceremonies, and the awarding of medals). However, with the Island Games the very make up of its members in terms of their island identity often shows the need for a participating island to have its own visual and sonic emblems vis-à-vis the larger nation state to which it belongs. While the IGA does not require unique anthems, the process of islands developing new anthems in this context helps show the contested nature of island identity. In such a setting, there are several situations when a state national anthem might be the recognized emblem of celebration and could even represent several islands, as with the 15 islands that are British.

For the islands that belong to IGA, when several islands have the same anthem to represent their larger political status, the playing of an identical anthem for different winning islands might be confusing and contradict the idea of celebrating a winning island's identity. That is, hearing the same anthem for different islands seems to contradict the very nature of the games, which is to celebrate distinct and separate island identity, heritage and culture through sporting achievement.

Two points might be identified regarding this conundrum. Firstly, if the political status of an island means that it already has its own official or unofficial anthem, then the Island Games provides a context where that anthem can be foregrounded for all to hear. Secondly, if an island does not have its own anthem then it might have to go through the process of negotiating a suitable piece to represent the island. Several examples from the British Islands help illustrate these selection processes, which show the geo-political interconnectedness on the one hand between island and state, and challenge to that connection by the very existence of islands within a nation state. These processes point to the social and human geographies of islands and the culture that is created on them as a result of their physical, cultural and sometimes political place as part of complex boundaries that connect and disconnect nation states.¹

In the case of the islands that are British members of the IGA, with 15 out of 24 islands having 'God Save the Queen' as their national anthem,² the confusion that would occur due to the lack of a sonic symbol of distinct island identity is obvious. Even in the geographic British Islands, in 2007, ten of these islands were members of the IGA (Table 4). Of these islands, four were from the Channel Islands: Alderney, Guernsey, Jersey and Sark. While each of the Channel Islands represented in the IGA has 'God Save the Queen' as its official national anthem, as British Crown Dependencies, only Alderney and Sark – the smallest in population and physical size of the Channel Islands entering the event – used this anthem at the Island Games. Both Guernsey and Jersey used other pieces of music during official ceremonies.

Table 4. Island Games Members from the British Islands (as of 2007)

Island	Political Status
Alderney	Part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey (British Crown dependency)
Guernsey	British Crown dependency
Isle of Man	British Crown dependency
Isle of Wight	English county
Jersey	British Crown dependency
Orkney	Council in Scotland
Sark	Part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey (British Crown dependency)
Shetland Islands	Council in Scotland
Western Isles	Council in Scotland
Ynys Môn (Anglesey)	Part of a county in Wales

Guernsey's island anthem is 'Sarnia Cherie' ('Guernsey Dear'), which was adopted nearly one hundred years ago in 1911. With words by George Deighton (1869-1935) and music by Domencio Santangelo (1882-1970), the anthem serves to differentiate Guernsey from the other Channel Islands. Sarnia is the Latin name for Guernsey, and there are verses in English and Guernesias, the local yet minority language of Norman parentage. 'Sarnia Cherie' is extremely popular in Guernsey and a well-known song that has patriotic associations. The song is replete with symbols of local, island identity, especially relating to the physical island itself. The song mentions such local identity markers as 'island', 'shore', 'rock', and 'bay', each of which helps construct a sense of place for locals who understand such imagery.

For Jersey, the largest of the Channel Islands, the anthem 'Ma Normandie' ('My Normandy') has long represented the island at the Island Games and other occasions. While on the island another popular piece, 'Man Bieau P'tit Jèrri' ('Beautiful Jersey'), has been the favoured song on such occasions as Liberation Day (9 May, the day the island was liberated in 1945 after five years of Nazi occupation during World War II), 'Ma Normandie' helps index the island's geographic location as part of the Norman-speaking region. However, the lyrics of 'Ma Normandie', which were written by a Frenchman, Frédéric Bérat (1801-55), have recently been contested in Jersey's government – by Jersey's Chief Minister himself – due to its reference to France (Chief Minister 2007). In contrast, there is no wider public challenge for the continuation of 'Ma Normandie' to represent the island. The song contains the lyrics (in English translation): "Under the beautiful sky of our France" and "I like to see once more my Normandy". Consequently, over the past two years Jersey residents have participated in a competition to decide on a new anthem for the island that could be played at such sporting events as the Island Games and occasions such as Liberation Day. As the Chief Minister for the island noted in 2007:

I would like to notify members that . . . a competition is to be held to seek an anthem for Jersey.

Members will know that the number of occasions on which the Island wishes to celebrate its own distinct identity is increasing. Many of these relate to sporting occasions when islanders receive a medal, or other recognition, at events involving other islands and indeed, sometimes, other countries.

The Island Games and the Commonwealth Games are well-known examples.

It has rightly been pointed out by some of those participating that there is at present uncertainty as to the anthem which should be played. 'Ma Normandie' is often relied upon because of its association with our past but, of course, it is a piece of music which has itself no connection with Jersey; indeed, it has quite different associations for many.

. . .
I should make it quite clear that this is not to be a replacement for the National Anthem which will continue to be played in recognition of our constitutional position, and of our loyalty and affection for the Crown. (Chief Minister 2007)

The government department responsible for making the arrangement to hold the competition, the Department of Education, Sport and Culture, announced on 12 February 2008 a shortlist of five anthems, out of a total of 27 entries, that had made the final (Cudlipp 2008; Morrison 2008).³ Interestingly, 'Ma Normandie' did not make the final, but 'Man Bieau P'tit Jèrri' did. The judging process for the shortlisted pieces included a public vote on the night of the competition when the five pieces were performed by the Jersey Festival Choir, and a panel of judges helped make the final decision.⁴ 'Island Home', by local composer Gerard Le Feuvre, won the competition and was performed at its first official event at the Liberation Day celebration in 2008 (this piece is yet to be ratified by the Jersey government). However, at this same event 'Man Bieau P'tit Jèrri' ('Beautiful Jersey') was also performed, thus maintaining part of the island's tradition of playing this piece on this occasion and possibly signalling the contested place of the new anthem at this time. The winning piece, in the style of a traditional and serious hymn,⁵ has the following lyrics:

*Ours is an Island home
Firm on rock and strong by sea
Loyal and proud in history
Our thankful hearts are raised to
God for Jersey
The beauty of our land
Long inspires both eye and mind*

*Ours the privilege to guard its shore
So help we God that Jersey
Might through grace endure
Amen. (BBC Jersey 2008)*

Events such as the Island Games have provided a context for 'Ma Normandie' to be heard as an anthem of Jersey, which has helped establish its place as the island's piece of music for such celebratory occasions. In a somewhat paradoxical way, however, an outcome of the Jersey anthem competition is that on the one hand it has helped create musical culture on the island through the production of new music, but on the other hand may help put an end to the tradition of 'Ma Normandie' being heard at such events.

Conclusion

While the IGA has not itself required that islands have their own unique anthems, which is evident with several islands using the same piece of music, events and occasions such as the Island Games provide opportunities for islands to celebrate their own island identity through anthems that are played at such times of celebration. The process of identifying or creating an anthem for an island that is part of a larger nation state is something that helps show the contested nature of island identity. The physical existence of an island creates a boundary for identity construction; and this identity is celebrated through cultural symbols relevant to the island. For the Island Games, therefore, island anthems provide sonic markers that celebrate island heritage and identity. While some anthems in this context already have an established history for their respective islands, others, like the example from Jersey, are sure to be chosen as a direct result of island commonality on the one hand and competition on the other.

Endnotes

¹ On the complex connections between music, place and the construction of cultural identities, see further, for example, Connell and Gibson (2003)

² Alderney, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Isle of Wight, Jersey, Orkney, Sark, Shetland Islands, St. Helena, Western Isles, and Ynys Môn (Anglesey). Four of these islands use 'God Save the Queen' in the Island Games: Alderney, Isle of Wight, Sark, and St. Helena.

³ Each of the five finalists can be heard on the web pages of BBC Jersey (see Morrison 2008).

⁴ The full criteria for the competition were provided by the Department of Education, Sport and Culture in 2007 (<https://www.gov.je/ESC/Lifelong+Learning/AnthemForJersey.htm>).

⁵ Jersey maintains an Anglican community with the island divided into twelve socially and politically influential parishes. The Dean of the Anglican church in Jersey is a member and chaplain of the States Assembly (Jersey's legislative assembly), although not allowed to vote. See further <http://www.thisisjersey.com/community/government/>.

Bibliography

BBC Jersey (2008) 'Island Home', Island Life –

http://www.bbc.co.uk/jersey/content/articles/2008/04/15/anthem_gerardlefeuvre_feature.shtml

CBC News (2008) 'P.E.I. Too Big for Island Games, says Guernsey', CBC News.ca –

<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/prince-edward-island/story/2008/03/11/guernsey-games.html>

Chief Minister (2007) 'Statement to be Made by The Chief Minister on Tuesday 30th January 2007', States of Jersey – <http://www.statesassembly.co.uk/documents/statements/21828-31865-3012007.htm>

Connell, J and C Gibson (2003) *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*, London: Routledge.

Cudlipp, R (2008) 'All together now...'. This is Jersey, 14 March –

<http://www.thisisjersey.com/2008/02/12/all-together-now-2/>

IGA (2007) 'History' – <http://www.islandgames.net/content/background.html>

Morrison, R (2008) 'Jersey's new anthem'. BBC Jersey, 6 November –

http://www.bbc.co.uk/jersey/content/articles/2008/04/15/island_anthem_overview_feature.shtml