# Ed Sheeran sparks debate by claiming cultural Irish identity despite English upbringing



Ed Sheeran has stirred controversy recently by stating that he "identifies culturally" as Irish during an appearance on The Louis Theroux Podcast. This declaration has reignited discussions surrounding his heritage, given that he was born in Halifax, West Yorkshire, and raised in Suffolk. The singer's paternal roots run deep in Ireland, with his father, John Sheeran, originating from Belfast. This connection is not just geographical; it also informs much of Ed's music and personal narrative, deeply influenced by his family history.

At the core of Sheeran's Irish identity is the poignant love story of his grandparents, Nancy Mulligan and William Sheeran. Their union was fraught with familial conflict, stemming from the significant religious divides of their time—Nancy being a Catholic from the Republic of Ireland and William a Protestant from Northern Ireland. Ed's song "Nancy Mulligan," released in 2017, narrates their struggles and triumphs as a couple who faced disapproval yet built a large family over nearly 70 years. Ed recalls touching anecdotes about their wedding, where only one family member attended, and his grandfather's resourceful approach to creating a wedding ring, melting down gold teeth from his dental practice.

On the podcast, Ed elaborated on his cultural identification, stating, "I class my culture as Irish. I think that's what I grew up with." He emphasised the role of traditional Irish music in his upbringing, reflecting on childhood holidays spent in Ireland and the influence of bands like Planxty and The Chieftains. He shared how these experiences shaped not only his musical style but also his self-perception, noting he has never felt the need to limit his identity to being merely British. Indeed, Sheeran expressed pride in his Irish roots, stating, "It should be how you feel and how you were raised."

While many fans appreciate his acknowledgment of Irish culture and heritage, his comments have also sparked considerable backlash on social media. Critics argue that he is misappropriating an Irish identity that doesn’t belong to him. Statements from detractors included questions about his eligibility to represent Ireland in sports, with remarks like, "It’s not where you’re born; it’s your bloodline that determines what you are." Others were less harsh, noting that identifying with one's heritage is perfectly valid, stating, "You can be born and raised in England and still identify culturally as Irish."

Sheeran’s frequent references to his Irish connections often lead to further exploration of his musical collaborations and inspirations. He has worked with numerous Irish artists and attributes a substantial portion of his songwriting influence to these relationships. When discussing his intimate ties to Irish culture, he mentioned places like Dingle Bay and the fond memories associated with them.

In a poignant reflection on family, Ed expressed his heartbreak over missing his grandmother's recent funeral due to his high-profile copyright trial in New York—an event he devoted considerable time and focus to. Following her death, he shared that it inspired the song "Supermarket Flowers," which touches on the themes of loss and remembrance, underscoring the profound impact of his family on his artistry.

In conclusion, Ed Sheeran's claims of cultural identity as Irish reflect a complex interplay of heritage, familial history, and personal experience. Regardless of public opinion, his narrative of pride in his roots remains significant, shaping both his music and his public persona in an era that increasingly values cultural diversity and self-identification.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14801289/Ed-Sheeran-bitter-family-rift-Irish-roots-identifies-culturally.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/ed-sheeran-my-irish-heritage-is-something-i-ve-always-been-proud-of-1.3536068)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14801289/Ed-Sheeran-bitter-family-rift-Irish-roots-identifies-culturally.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/ed-sheeran-i-grew-up-on-planxty-and-the-chieftains-1.2985287), [[6]](https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/entertainment/ed-sheeran-nancy-mulligan-irish-granny)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/ed-sheeran-discusses-irish-influences-on-his-music-the-guy-who-made-me-wanna-write-songs-is-irish__23645/), [[4]](https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/ed-sheeran-my-irish-heritage-is-something-i-ve-always-been-proud-of-1.3536068)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14801289/Ed-Sheeran-bitter-family-rift-Irish-roots-identifies-culturally.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/ed-sheeran-my-irish-heritage-is-something-i-ve-always-been-proud-of-1.3536068), [[5]](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/ed-sheeran-says-belfast-born-grandad-was-a-huge-royalist-1.3327994)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/ed-sheeran-i-grew-up-on-planxty-and-the-chieftains-1.2985287), [[6]](https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/entertainment/ed-sheeran-nancy-mulligan-irish-granny), [[7]](https://www.irishmirror.ie/showbiz/celebrity-news/ed-sheeran-left-heartbroken-beloved-29865319)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/ed-sheeran-discusses-irish-influences-on-his-music-the-guy-who-made-me-wanna-write-songs-is-irish__23645/), [[6]](https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/entertainment/ed-sheeran-nancy-mulligan-irish-granny)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14801289/Ed-Sheeran-bitter-family-rift-Irish-roots-identifies-culturally.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/music/ed-sheeran-i-grew-up-on-planxty-and-the-chieftains-1.2985287> - Ed Sheeran discusses his deep connection to Irish music, highlighting his upbringing with bands like Planxty and The Chieftains. He expresses a desire to integrate traditional Irish sounds into pop music, believing that such vibrant and youthful music should be at the forefront of pop culture. Sheeran also reflects on his song 'Nancy Mulligan', inspired by his grandparents' love story, and his aim to make traditional music more accessible and appreciated in contemporary pop.
3. <https://www.officialcharts.com/chart-news/ed-sheeran-discusses-irish-influences-on-his-music-the-guy-who-made-me-wanna-write-songs-is-irish__23645/> - Ed Sheeran shares insights into his Irish heritage and its influence on his music. He mentions that his connection with Irish audiences is strong, attributing his inspiration to write songs to an Irish individual. Sheeran also highlights his collaborations with Irish artists and his appreciation for Irish culture, noting that his song 'Galway Girl' resonates particularly well with Irish crowds. He expresses a deep fondness for Ireland, mentioning places like Dingle Bay and Cork as special to him.
4. <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/ed-sheeran-my-irish-heritage-is-something-i-ve-always-been-proud-of-1.3536068> - Ed Sheeran expresses pride in his Irish heritage, emphasizing its significance in his life and music. He highlights his connection to the London Irish community and his support for the London Irish Centre, a charity dedicated to promoting Irish culture and supporting the Irish community in London. Sheeran's involvement in events like the concert at the London Irish Centre underscores his commitment to celebrating and preserving Irish culture abroad.
5. <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/ed-sheeran-says-belfast-born-grandad-was-a-huge-royalist-1.3327994> - Ed Sheeran reflects on his grandfather's strong royalist sentiments, noting his admiration for the British royal family and his collection of commemorative items. He shares a personal anecdote about wishing his grandfather could have witnessed his own achievements, such as receiving an MBE, highlighting the deep familial connections and the pride he feels in his family's history and his own accomplishments.
6. <https://www.irishcentral.com/culture/entertainment/ed-sheeran-nancy-mulligan-irish-granny> - Ed Sheeran's Irish grandmother, Anne 'Nancy' Mulligan, listens to his song 'Nancy Mulligan' for the first time. In the video, she expresses that she doesn't think of him as famous and that he is the same as always when he visits. Sheeran's song, inspired by his grandparents' love story, tells the tale of their marriage despite religious differences and familial opposition, reflecting a deep connection to his Irish roots.
7. <https://www.irishmirror.ie/showbiz/celebrity-news/ed-sheeran-left-heartbroken-beloved-29865319> - Ed Sheeran's beloved grandmother, Anne 'Nancy' Mulligan, who inspired his hit song 'Nancy Mulligan', has passed away. The article details her passing and reflects on her life, including her marriage to William Sheeran, Ed's grandfather, and their eight children and 23 grandchildren. It also touches upon Ed's feelings of loss and the impact of his grandmother's death on him.