

Book Review

Bridging Musicology And Ethnomusicology
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This volume is a collection of essays by fourteen scholars and musicians of international repute. The scope of the essays is wide, embracing a range of approaches from ethnomusicology, historical musicology, composition and popular music studies, as well as addressing broader issues in education, sociology, and technology. The essays are bound together by their focus on developing feminist musicology through, what Ellen Koskoff describes in the foreword as, 'women-centric', 'gender-centric' and, more recently, post-modern scholarship. The essays are also bound together, Koskoff suggests, by two fundamental notions: "First, women, men, gender,

identity, music, culture and so on are not, and never have been, fixed categories; Second, and perhaps more important, authors and their views on such subjects exist in dynamic contexts as well, so that the author's subject position must also be acknowledged in the work" (p. xi).

The importance attached to the latter led the editors to include email discussions with the various authors as their articles took shape and form during the various phases of the book's compilation. One of the primary strengths of the book, these 'conversations' allow the authors to voice primary methodological concerns, particularly with respect to the way in which

late 1980 and early 1990s scholarship in feminist theory was "framed within the North American academy and addressed a culturally specific tradition: either Euro-American concert music or American vernacular and popular musics" (p. 2). The conversations also generate a sense of community and support. Even more important, though, is the way in which the conversations show how bringing together the different viewpoints of these women can highlight the enormous complexities of concepts such as 'gender' without forcing any final evaluation of what is right or inviolable. Nonetheless, the essays deal with problems of complexity and methodology with varying degrees of success. The best provide clear and thorough models for holistic research and analysis; the less successful, on the other hand, fail to come completely to terms with inherent contradictions or the need for nuance when interpreting data and reading 'culture.'

Drawing together such a diverse group of authors also raises questions concerning whom forms the target audience, while simultaneously making it difficult to identify the core texts and research to which the writings refer. The most audience-sensitive writing in the book presents material and articulates structures for non-specialist readers; although this can sometimes be at the expense of an undue emphasis on prefatory remarks contextualizing a particular issue, topic, or methodology (probably perceptible only to the specialist audience the writer might normally address). At other times, the authors' enthusiasm for a particular approach or concept (often arising from the 'conversations' or the melding of disciplines) may have discouraged looking for the occurrence of that concept in the wider reach of scholarship. This is apparent in the discussion concerning the relationship of the researchers' gender to their subjects and their work in the field (p. 8), as well as in the examination of recorded music as a genre and its agency in the construction of the listener's self (p. 338). These notions, if not commonplaces in ethnomusicology and the study of recorded music, have certainly been discussed elsewhere and it would have been useful to explore how the experiences of these authors could have added to those bodies of thought.

Of the essays on Western musics, Jane Bowers' chapter, 'Writing the Biography of a Black Woman Blues Singer' stands out as a work that grasps and

confronts the complexity of its task, while still managing to address audiences with different backgrounds. Bowers initially assesses the difficulties of putting together a biography from few sources, distinguishing 'life story' from 'life history' and providing introductory material useful to someone coming at the book from a different perspective or from a narrower experience. She then tries to get behind the reasons for inaccuracies or contradictions in her subject's multiple life stories, delaying her analysis of how Mama Yancey fits into the category 'black woman blues singer,' until after she has considered herself as a story-teller and as a counter-persona to the 'bluesman.' Bowers considers how Mama Yancey's history problematizes the creation of a 'traditional' feminist biography. And, in so doing, she ultimately shows it is not only possible, but through that the creation of such a biography can open new paths for investigation, such as that of music-making beyond the narrow confines of professional activity during years of normal working age. Most importantly, Bowers is unafraid to state the dangers of using evidence to promote value or significance of 'female' experience over general human (or specific African American) experience, thus showing how feminist perspectives can be both liberating and limiting depending on how the evidence is used.

With respect to the essays focusing on non-Western musics, Michelle Kisliuk's 'Performance and modernity among BaAka pygmies' and Naila Ceribasic's 'Defining women and men in the context of war: Images in Croatia popular music in the 1990s' stand out as successful examples of 'genderist' writing, used not as an end, so much as an inroad into the nuanced discussion of wider webs of discourse and the construction of identity within the cultures concerned. Fundamental to both essays is the recognition of the authors' subjective viewpoint, what Kisliuk calls 'non-objectivist scholarship' (p. 29). However, rather than problematizing the existence of the non-objective observer, these essays use this recognition of the authors' subjectivity and femininity to build an insightful analysis of their subject matter. In doing so, they neatly illustrate the danger, common to many strands of post-modern liberal Western thought, of assuming that the acknowledgement of one's own subjective position is tantamount to cancelling the implications of such a position. As

Kisliuk and Ceribasic note, the recognition of one's own participation in the performance of the research context and the consequent blurring of the self/other divide leads to the acknowledgement that one cannot simultaneously stand on both sides of a gender divide, or a conflict divide; it is by working within the implications and constraints of this position rather than in the attempt to evade them that a meaningful enquiry may be built.

Despite the lengthy and information-rich introduction, there are some questions about the purpose of the volume that remain. Are the concerns manifested in the book necessarily linked to gender or do they just happen to have come up mainly in gender-centred discourse? Would it be fruitful to have more explicit discussion of that interrelationship? The introduction to Part 2, 'Telling Lives,' articulates the need for 'a storied epistemology, one that grants epistemic force to narratives that tell of the construction of knowledge, and of subjectivities, stories which are specifically contextualized within and located in relation to human lives' (p. 96). This need could be perceived as fundamental to all contemporary scholarship, as are the issues of agency, technology and 'essentialized identities'. A more generous exploration of how feminist musicology, 'gender-centric' ethnomusicology, and indeed all branches of the investigation and generation of music, are positioned with regard to broader sociological and cultural study might have been beneficial to this book as a whole.

The book appears to have taken a long time to come to press, and this is perhaps the most significant factor that comes to bear on any assessment of its content. The long delay between publication and review makes some of its concepts seem, if not dated, not as cutting-edge as they might otherwise have been when they first saw light of day. This is not a criticism, although at this remove, changes in the landscapes of music scholarship suggest that this volume might have been quite different were it to have been proposed today. Although the writers are drawn from different cultural and geographical backgrounds – American, Canadian and European – it is perhaps symptomatic of the collection's origins in early- to mid-1990s scholarship that all its contributors are women, and all focus on women in their essays. There is a slightly uncomfortable feeling that in an effort to bring

together so many diverse writings on so many diverse subjects, there is an unintentional falling back on feminist stereotypes from which many of the writers are individually striving to get away.

The final chapter is an essay written by Marcia Herndon, one of the senior figures in the book's virtual community and the person to whom it is posthumously dedicated. Its message is unambiguous: "The inclusion of gender as an essential aspect of all ethnomusicological research is far from becoming a reality. In fact, gendered considerations of music, along with what [Pirkko] Moisala suggests as "musical genders", have yet to be recognized as a useful tool either in the scholarly dialogue across cultures or in the discourse within them" (p. 347). Further on, in her conclusion, she adds another stark comment: "One way to distinguish ethnomusicologists from musicologists is through the fact that ethnomusicologists deal with living musics in a synchronic way, whereas musicologists deal with historical musics in a diachronic way" (p. 357). This situation may have existed in the past. And, one can feel the rhetorical force of Herndon's argument; but, to leave its articulation until the conclusion of the volume seems marginally self-defeating, especially as the statement doesn't apply to the best essays in the book, ethnomusicological and musicological, which demonstrate a more nuanced approach to their research. It is also to ignore the sense in which Herndon's stated objective for the future was already well underway at the time of writing: "As musicologists begin to add information about the cultural context of the performers of composers they are studying, and as ethnomusicologists venture more often into art music topics and historical contexts of current musics, it is possible that the two fields of study may yet merge" (p. 357). While the extremes of the disciplines may never converge, evidence abounds to suggest that there is certainly a willingness and groundswell of conviction to make much of the potential common ground.

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Modern Period: Essays in the Memory of Fanca Trinchieri Carmiz (Ashgate, 2003). She is currently writing a study of the hot jazz vocal group the Boswell Sisters.