

## Book Review

Bob W. White, ed. 2012. *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 248pp. ISBN 978-0-253-22365-4 (pbk)

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The essays in White's collection *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters* emerge from an ethnographic project called Critical World, enquiring into "the relationship between popular culture and globalization" (vii), most specifically, the project's inaugural workshop in Canada in 2004. The table of contents and the Introduction may be read online at <http://criticalworld.net/music-and-globalization/>. Although not referred to explicitly in the title, the centre of attention here is World Music, implying perhaps that this marketing-based category is the only kind of music that is affected by globalization, though it is recognized also that music in general "is particularly mobile and therefore easily commodified" (1) and "primarily social" (2). In his admirably succinct introductory overview of World Music, however, editor Bob W. White also recognizes that "music has always been global" (2), and one of the great strengths of this collection is its ambiguous location of a music often situated rather schematically in a given historical and cultural matrix. Recognition of the political ambiguities makes a welcome shift from some of the more strident positions that have been taken up in public and even scholarly discourse surrounding World Music. Such nuances are unpicked with particular skill and delicacy in essays by Steven Feld about the 1981 album *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*; Phil Hayward's analysis of musical identities in Vanuatu, where he reverses the more usual dynamics of models of globalization; and Daniel Noveck's treatment of the violin as a trope for the politics that traverse the local and the global in an encounter between fiddlers from Coyachique in rural Mexico and the violin-making tradition in Cremona in Italy. This last is both an elegant and instructive case study, which, like the others I mentioned, establishes the resonance of a range of specific collateral details so easily overlooked in studies that focus exclusively on the

actual music and its underpinning theories. Even apparently non-musical gestures like how guests are fed and housed in the musical encounter, or the difficult (im)balance between hospitality and patronization, all bring into convergence music's complex articulations of deeply embedded power relations, complicated even further by the position of the observer/participant ethnomusicologist.

This breadth of attentiveness, the ability to alternate between the closest scrutiny of case study detail and the more encompassing cultural and historical panorama, is one of the conspicuous and distinctive strengths of this collection. The opening essay by Denis-Constant Martin draws out the links between nineteenth-century slavery and the emergence of World Music in the late twentieth century. The study by Rafael José de Menezes Bastos of an encounter between Sting and the Brazilian Indian Raoni situates its subject within a centuries-old tradition of Western art music. The sweep was impressive, although it was not always clear to me that the entire four pages of historical summary were essential to the ten-page chapter, and I had some sense that the author felt that this at last was an opportunity to assemble in one place a general ensemble of ideas that had been germinating in the sixteen publications of his own that were listed as references. Perhaps there is such a thing as standing too far back for all the detail to be clear: the perspective from which the Newcastle Big Band, in which Sting began his career as a bass player, could be described as "one of the most important traditional jazz groups in town" (82) seems rather too distant, though one should recall that perhaps something of the special meaning of "traditional" in jazz discourse can be lost in translation.

One of the pervasive extrapolations made in these essays is that any given moment or case study in World Music is not a simple Manichean encounter between the bad (usually the Western exploiters) and the good (the authentic exotic margins), but the outcome of labyrinthine intersections of interests, of often outrageous twists and tensions, and recondite convergences, in which the moral balance is too ambiguous to sustain simplistic dualistic models, a point made with great spirit by Feld in his conclusion. These recognitions lead inevitably to a number of significant revisions of the received World Music discourses, reminding us that established theories about cultural dynamics become most useful to us when they begin to collapse in the face of actual social practices, when, in Noveck's words, "practical issues challenge theoretical concerns" (107). More specifically, as Timothy D. Taylor concludes, "it might not be so easy to conclude that Western music is wiping out local musics" (181). Taylor's essay is one of two overviews that can be taken to frame the case study "micro-history" essays, examining not so much World Music, which has changed little since the late twentieth century, but "how its

representations and constructions have changed” (172). One of these changes has particularly provocative implications: “World Music is encroaching on the space once held by classical music; indeed, World Music is replacing classical music in certain ways and is becoming increasingly ‘Classicalized’” (182). It occurred to me while reading Taylor’s discussion that World Music has also replaced another musical tradition. He documents the importance of World Music in sample libraries of music which can be drawn upon for certain evocative moods and atmospheres such as ceremonial, pastoral, light industrial, travel, adventure and so on (174). There is an irresistible reminder here of early silent-film music libraries, which, it could be argued, served very similar political objectives, drawing upon various standard “orientalizations” in the very broadest sense of the term. There are links here that might make for an interesting line of enquiry into historical continuities: the technologies might have changed, but not the “mentalités”.

The other overview essay, which concludes the collection, is by the editor, who also explores the World Music discourse rather than the music itself, confirming that it is the site of mawkishly vapid and outdated sentimentalizations, particularly in its relentless romanticization of the social functions of music. Press-release statements such as that music “is a celebration of social harmony and tolerance” (191) or “music transcends cultural and religious boundaries” (192) are alarmingly uninformed when it is so clear that music in fact also functions to inflame conflict at every level from neighbourhood to national and religious differences. The press release for Manu Chao (195) in itself is worth a chapter-length commentary for its succinct embodiment of all the ironies, paradoxes, coffee-table bad faith and the egregious false consciousness that have come to frame the World Music public discourse. While these sentiments are enough to make you gag, they serve a useful purpose, as Taylor documents in his citation of Lortat-Jacob to the effect that the “universal” ideology of World Music is in fact positively dangerous (193), a reminder, we might say, of the potential evil of banality. The dangerous rarely looks dangerous. White concludes this outstanding collection of cautionary tales with a list of eleven strategies for non-essentialist listening, worth reading as practical guides that could do more to change the public (and even specialist) understanding and mode of engagement with the world than any theoretical model. The value of this collection extends far beyond World Music.