

## Reviews

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Karen Ralls-MacLeod and Graham Harvey (eds)

*Indigenous Religious Musics*

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*Indigenous Religious Musics* is a new book from Ashgate Publishing House, edited by Karen Ralls-MacLeod and Graham Harvey. It consists of ten articles and an introduction. The contributors are scholars from very different disciplines: religious studies and comparative religion, anthropology, ethnomusicology, composition, music education, and social work. The book also includes a CD, which contains five tracks, to accompany chapters 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8.

The introduction by Ralls-MacLeod and Harvey attempts to situate the book in existing debates within the discipline of ethnomusicology: particularly postmodern challenges to universalism and essentialism, the breakdown of traditional distinctions like insider and outsider, and the need to engage in self-reflexive field research which incorporates mutually respectful dialogue, or even collaboration, with those studied. The ambiguities of the terms indigenous, religious and music are also highlighted in a section entitled 'On Definitions.' Towards the end of the introduction, in a discussion titled 'Whose Ethnomusicology?', various scholars are referred to and extensively quoted: perhaps sixty percent of this section is directly quoted. The last part of the introduction contains a brief description of each of the chapters. The chapters themselves cover a wide variety of topics and beyond a general orientation towards indigeneity, religion and music, this reviewer feels that the collection does not quite gel as a whole. The introduction makes the following links:

We begin geographically near the dateline with Peter Mataira's case study of Maori oration and head westwards towards Anne Dhu McLucas' study of the Mescalero Apache girls' puberty ceremony. That both chapters contain words and music addressed to and involving girls is as serendipitous as the fact that both are linked by the dawning of new days. It is, of course, an aspect of the modern globalised and colonised world that (most) Maori girls are brought up nearer to the international dateline than (most) Mescalero girls ... Thus the framing of this work by these two chapters is an eloquent testimony to some of the themes integrating the study of indigenous religious musics and their wider context today. Other important links between these and other chapters (such as in emergent modes of research and academic discourse) produce the rhythms and harmonies that enliven this conversation and enquiry (p. 16).

There are seven articles in this volume which appear to be useful and valuable contributions to their respective fields. Chapter 3, by Keith Howard, is a rigorously researched article entitled 'Sacred and Profane: Music in Korean Shaman Rituals.' It shows that there appears to be an overlap between sacred and secular musical repertoires in Korea, especially in the use of a particular rhythmic pattern. This, Howard argues, is important in the context of Asian music scholarship where there is a tendency to think of sacred (here, shamanic) music as totally distinct from other musics. In so doing, Howard provides a useful introduction to many different musics in Korea, from folk, to courtly to shamanic. The article includes several transcriptions and is extensively referenced.

Chapter 4, 'Maasai Musics, Rituals and Identities,' by Malcolm Floyd, incorporates a large array of data. Details of Maasai social structure (and the different classifications made by different anthropologists of the Maasai), rituals, song concepts and song lyrics are presented in a number of neatly organised tables. The article provides some fascinating insights into Maasai cultural practices. Because of the sheer volume of data that the author presents, however, none is analysed in any great detail. Although music is mentioned, it is not described in musical terms at any point.

Peter Cooke's 'Appeasing the Spirits: Music, Possession, Divination and Healing in Busoga, Eastern Uganda,' in Chapter 5, provides an interesting, minute-by-minute account of an *okusamira* ritual, in which spirits are called upon to possess mediums and thereby receive offerings in order to placate them. The result is a fascinating and vivid description which Cooke adds to with useful, informative explanations of things as they arise. The extensive quoting, both from the ceremony, and of the explanations provided by the shaman, make this a balanced article, and Cooke does not attempt to situate himself as an expert; the expert is, of course, the shaman, and the last word is left to him. The placing of 'insider' accounts beside Cooke's 'outsider' descriptions is a timely and valid challenge to the format of traditional ethnographic writing. In a section entitled 'Discussion,' Cooke places his findings in an analytical context, both by relating his findings to other scholarship on African rituals, and by examining music and musical sound, and how it can be used to create trance states in the performers. The accompanying CD contains an excerpt from an *okusamira* ritual. Presumably recorded by the author, the CD information page includes details of where, when and who was recorded, as well as where the complete recording can be found.

Titled 'Chasing off God: Spirit Possession in a Sharing Society,' Chapter 6 is an introduction to the life and rituals of the Ju/'hoan people of the Kalahari, and it argues that the religion of these people was strikingly different to most religions: the gods were not worshipped or prayed to; instead they were fought against in the only ritual present in their society. This ritual, a healing ceremony, is the subject of the article. Jan Platvoet, the author, approaches the subject from a comparative religious perspective, and appears to rely on the work of anthropologists who studied the Ju/'hoan, for the information used in the article. While music is mentioned, it is not described in any detail. Platvoet repeatedly describes the Ju/'hoan as an egalitarian society, in which men and women have very different roles. In the ritual described, women play the music, and men go into trance and become healers. The reviewer became curious to know why this was, and how it related to the ways that Ju/'hoan see the roles and values of the sexes.

Guilherme Werlang's article on 'Emerging Amazonian Peoples: Myth Chants,' forms Chapter 8. It is a discussion of a particular *saiti* (myth chant) ritual belonging to the Marubo people of the Amazon, called *Mokanawa Wenia* (wild people sprouting). The majority of the article is concerned with the untranslatableability of Marubo terms related to *saiti*. These terms, Werlang argues, cannot be directly translated into English without losing the subtleties and complexities of their meanings to the Marubo people. Thus, according to the author's description of two of these terms/concepts, they are

in constant semantic traffic along the cosmic and bodily ways of space and time. Their migrant and recurrent dwelling within the human realm entail different *ethoi* and *aisthesis*, living intellection, distinctly experienced perception. These are diametric, paradigmatic paramaters, irreducible to expedient explication (pp. 174–75).

As this example shows, the article is densely worded and complex, and perhaps somewhat influenced in its phraseology by writers like Bourdieu. The second part of the article is a discussion of a musical motif which Werlang isolates as the germ of the entire *saiti* in question, and that aspects of its construction and presentation can be related to the Marubo way of seeing. Track 4, on the accompanying CD, is an excerpt from the *Mokanawa Wenia Saiti*, which certainly highlights the fact that a single repeating (and slightly varied) motif is used as the basis for the singer's melody. Details of the performers, location and time of recording are included.

'Structure into Practice: A theory of Inuit Music' is the title of Christopher Trott's Chapter 9. This provides an overview of drum music, throat singing and song duels in Inuit society. Trott's main aim is to show that the underlying principles found within the performance of music are the same as those underpinning Inuit society as a whole, and as such music represents and reproduces existing Inuit modes of being and ways of seeing.

Chapter 10, by Anne Dhu McLucas, is entitled 'The Music of the Mescalero Apache Girl's Puberty Ceremony.' The article is clear and logical, and the two page introduction honestly states the authors aims, methods, and biases. This is a good example of an author self-reflexively describing her position in relation to the 'field,' and McLucas also acknowledges her indebtedness to her informants. McLucas begins with a description of the Mescalero Apache reservation, and introduces the music in its context, before going into detail on the specific ceremony. This description, like that in Cooke's article, is a Geertzian 'thick description,' detailing and explaining each step of the five day and four night ceremony. The following sections describe the structure of the music and suggest that certain features (such as repetitiveness) function to aid the recollection of this ceremony and create a mental state in which one can concentrate on things other than the music, as is necessary for the ceremony. This is a concise and balanced article that provides a useful summary of a particular ceremony, showing how its associated music functions as an aid to its effective execution. The article also manages to incorporate relevant references to other scholars in the field without detracting from the narrative.

Unfortunately, there are three articles in this volume which this reviewer finds problematic, and about the inclusion of which she has significant reservations. The first chapter, 'Te Kaha o te Waiata—The Power of Music: Maori Oral Traditions Illustrated by *E Tipu e Rea*,' is by Peter Mataira, a lecturer in Social Work and Social Policy in New Zealand. Mataira's

main argument appears to be that Maori oral traditions and music are beneficial to the learning process, and are important to the continuation of Maori identity. What the reviewer finds problematic in this article is the use of an essentialised notion of 'music' which is not explicitly defined and, moreover, which is regularly conflated with 'oral tradition' and poetry. Indeed, Mataira points out in an endnote that 'the terms "Maori song", "song-form", "musical expression" and "oral traditions" have been used interchangeably to mean lyrical compositions' (pp. 32-33, note 2). Thus, when Maori song is divided into categories (*oriori*, *waita tangi*, *patere* and *waita aroha*), these are classified on the basis of their poetic subject matter rather than on musical characteristics. While this may be the result of using Maori concepts which may not necessarily draw clear and bounded distinctions between ideas like music and poetry (as is common practice in musicology) but rather see music as inseparable from poetry, it would be less ambiguous if this could have been made explicit. Mataira's small note does not constitute sufficient explanation. As it stands, the conflation of music and lyric in this article (and no mention of the *kind* of music being talked about) might render it confusing to a readership who commonly understand these concepts to be separate ideas. In a section entitled 'The Spiritual Dimension,' Mataira discusses the notion of 'music' in general and universal terms, describing it as having inherent power and meaning, rather than acknowledging that power and meaning in music are largely culturally determined. He then states that

Music's potent quality is, ironically, its claim to non-ownership. It belongs to those who appreciate it and can act upon it freely. It requires no academic or cultural qualifiers, and, as such, tends to be free of intellectual gatekeeping (p. 30).

There are surely many musicians and composers who would disagree with this stance and would not necessarily see music as non-owned, or available to be 'acted upon freely:' the furore surrounding free *Napster* internet downloads of popular music, and cultural appropriation issues of song ownership in Aboriginal communities in Australia are only two examples among many that could serve to refute Mataira's statement. Further, is it to be assumed that the claim about cultural and academic qualifiers means that Mataira sees the meanings of all musics as equally accessible to, and appreciated by, all? It might be argued that the very existence of music education, and music as an academic discipline is evidence enough to lay this assumption to rest. Track 1 on the accompanying CD is a selection of Maori songs, recorded in London and in Auckland.

The second chapter, by David Turner, 'From Here into Eternity: Power and Transcendence in Australian Aboriginal Music,' is in four sections. The first is an introduction to 'The Art of the Didjeridu.' Here the author attempts to describe the vocalisations employed in didjeridu playing, and their associated speeds:

the three melodic lines or didjeridu tempos that are employed by the Aborigines are these: 'degul, degul', the fast tempo; 'degul degula gula', the medium tempo; and 'degula, degula', the slow tempo (p. 36).

He does not explain, whether these vocalisations are his, or Groote Eylandt ways of voicing into the didjeridu (and if so, whether they are vocables, or meaningful words), and exactly how they relate to tempo. A reference to the concept of the *ostinato* might have made the explanation of specific repeating melodic motifs less confusing, and perhaps have avoided

the conflation of melodic lines with tempo. On pages 38 and 39, Turner's diagram attempts to align the vocal melody contour with that of the didjeridu line, which he does without noting the difference in time duration of each line, so that he can make a picture that, when rotated, looks a little like a Groote Eylandt picture of an inner spirit. Seeing the similarities between his diagram of an 'archetypical soundform' and that of a drawing of an inner spirit, he concludes that: 'Music is spirit, spirit is music; soundForms are visible, spiritForms are sound' (p. 39). Little argument is brought forward to support this statement.

From page 43 to 47, Turner vividly depicts the stages of a mortuary ceremony and recounts what is believed to be happening to the spirit of the dead person during the ceremony. This clearly written section is a useful introduction to the spiritual aspects of mortuary practices. A personal description of his own experiences follows, which highlights the difficulty of reporting upon his own spiritual experiences while maintaining an objective standpoint.

Three complicated and idiosyncratic transcriptions are provided at the end of the chapter in an apparently novel format, that this reviewer found unclear. The reference to a key in each of the transcriptions and the use of western pitch intervals do not exactly reflect the actual pitches used in northeast Arnhem Land music and are at odds with Turner's statement on page 38 that melodies are 'usually microtonal.' Given that Turner wants to represent Groote Eylandt music in such diatonic terms, perhaps the information he intends to convey could be given more simply in standard western notation: indeed, microtonal adjustments to pitches can be added to staff notation without much difficulty. The accompanying CD includes excerpts from Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island mortuary ceremonies, recorded in 1969. It is not clear if the transcriptions provided are meant to match the recordings, but it would seem that the didjeridu lines of Turner's transcriptions (which are written as continuous zigzag line) do not take into account the pronounced rhythmic patterns of Groote Eylandt playing styles, which are clearly articulated and incorporate regular overtone 'hoots.'

The seventh chapter is entitled 'Sounding the Sacred: Music as Sacred Site (the Search for a Universal Sacred Music)' and is written by June Boyce Tillman. At around thirty pages it is one of the longest articles in the collection and is divided into several sections: 'The Musical Experience,' 'The Sacrality of Music,' 'Music and Ethics' (p 149); "Religious Music" (p151); "Music as Sacred Experience" (p 153); "Music as Sacred Place," 'Music and Identity,' 'Music as Ritual' and a final, half-page summary. Specific examples are given in each section, and from these Tillman attempts to construct theories about music and spirituality in universal terms. On page 137, Tillman identifies five domains which she considers to interact in all pieces of music, Materials; Expressive Character, Formal Structures, Values and Transcendence/Spirituality. Rather than an explanation of these categories and what they mean in this context, pieces of music are described in relation to them. In a description of Allegri's *Miserere*, she states that 'At the level of Expressive character it is peaceful with fluctuations as the plainchant verses come in' (p. 138). The reviewer found this confusing, and would also question the use of these descriptors for the most penitential of psalms. As a music educator and composer, Tillman's own work is discussed a few pages later, in relation to the use of musical ideas, devices, instruments and texts from other traditions than the composer's own. Track 5 on the accompanying CD is an excerpt of Tillman's *Call of the Ancients*, an expansive and eclectic work which incorporates a Thai *piphat* ensemble, Kenyan drums, two church choirs, brass and a rock group. Later, Tillman writes, of another composer, 'As her own philosophy draws

on developments broadly within the feminist wing of the New Age ... she can fairly readily integrate elements of African indigenous spirituality within her work' (p. 144). The reviewer is not sure what is meant by a blanket notion of 'African indigenous spirituality.' Surely there is no universal way of being spiritual, or a single religion, in the many indigenous African communities (indeed two articles in this very volume are evidence of the very diverse spiritual practices found in Africa), and further, what has Feminist New Age belief in common with these? On page 162, Tillman states that the Western classical composer

descends into his or her personal underworld or unconscious to refashion the elements in it. This has parallels with shaman and possession cultures. The difference lies in where the other world is deemed to be located—outside or inside ... So there are similarities between the role of the shaman and that of the Western composer. It is, therefore, likely that those enculturated in Western culture will read music from shamanic traditions in a similar way.

The meaning of this is not clear: in a similar way to Western traditions or to shamanic ones? Either way, it would seem that this notion of 'shaman' is a universalist one, as if all shamans from all cultures shared the same beliefs and practices. The reviewer was a little confused by the implication that knowledge of Western music can somehow give one an understanding of 'shamanic' musical traditions without learning anything about the societies and cultures from which these musics come. Even if it is possible to make generalisations about shamans, the notion of Western composer fulfilling a shaman's role in Western societies is not sufficiently argued.

In the light of its title, it might have been hoped that this book would serve as a useful 'sequel' to Lawrence Sullivan's *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*.<sup>1</sup> Upon reading, it proved not to be so. While it is valuable to bring together diversity into an interdisciplinary volume like this, after reading the chapters, it appeared that in some cases certain theoretical orientations which have become fairly standard and generally expected in ethnomusicological research were not taken into account at all. These ideas and theories would include: the need to be aware of one's own cultural standpoint and biases, particularly in relation to ascribing meanings to musical sound; allowing the Other to speak in one's academic writing; the inherent limitations (and enduring usefulness) of participant observation research methods; and the large body of anthropological and ethnomusicological literature that critiques notions such as 'culture,' 'the field' and 'music.' Certainly a variety of perspectives is vital, but some of the theoretical foundations used by a few of the writers in this collection have since been abandoned in ethnomusicology because they are no longer considered valid or useful: notions of music as a universal language understood by all is a case in point. Further, it would seem that writing about music can be very challenging for scholars in disciplines outside the areas of musicology and ethnomusicology. In these few instances, it appeared that the writers concerned were not fully aware of the descriptive vocabulary already employed by musicologists. Instead, reliance on their own terms has, at times, resulted in confused descriptions. These reservations aside, the majority of articles in *Indigenous Religious Music* are of a high standard, and several serve as useful introductions to specific musics, for laypersons and scholars alike.

CAROLINE BRENNAN

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<sup>1</sup> Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed., *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997).