Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now: Popular Music in Australia. **Edited by Shane Homan and Tony Mitchell. University of Tasmania, Hobart: ACYS Publishing, 2008. 295 pp. ISBN 9781875236002 (pb)**

Over the last decade, Australia has become the site for an enthusiastic research programme in popular music that reflects the diversity of a nation that finds itself caught in the mawl of globalisation amidst the challenges of localisation. This is nothing new, although the recent emergence of localised scholarship has helped open up the research agenda to questions and methodologies that may yet offer a unique contribution to popular music studies more generally.

Indeed, the book under review offers work by a number of new researchers who, together with a small cohort of established researchers have brought popular music studies into the Australian academy over the past fifteen years. Drawing on the old and the new, *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now* is a survey text that cuts a comprehensive line through the breadth of popular music genres that flourish in Australia. In fact, one of the most important aspects of this collection is that it reflects the numerous popular music subcultures in the country and opportunities within the academy to study them.

Australia is unique, as much because it is a land mass almost equal to the USA with a population of about twenty-one million people, as because of its porous cultural flux. Social life is casual, as are categories that in larger nations operate at a sociological level to divide classes, ethnicities and interests. Consequently, popular music in Australia offers an openness that is not replicated in the US – where I currently live.

This porous social world is suggested by the book's editors Shane Homan and Tony Mitchell, who describe three characteristics of Australian popular music: musical forms listened to by large numbers of people; art music that collapses into popular music practice; and popular cultural practices that extend the circulation of meanings about popular music. What this broad-ranging inclusiveness means is that jazz sits alongside avant garde and electronic music, as well as Top 40 and Internet music issues in Australia. Why is this the case and what is unique about the Australian context? Aline Scott-Maxwell suggests that the dynamism of the country's music is 'distinctly Australian' because it emerged from 'the pragmatic opportunism of an emerging local world music movement that nevertheless derived its authority from multicultural Australia' (p. 82).

There is more to this claim than meets the eye: popular music in Australia is constructed around an ideological debate about Aboriginal culture and its place in the nation, thereby measuring all popular music against a localised metric of world music. Ultimately, the entire sonic landscape of Australia emanates from public consciousness of the vastness of the inhabited wilderness within which the national cultural space (mostly the densely populated eastern seaboard) is contested. I suspect that nowhere else in the world is there such a powerful resonance of indigenous sound within 'the popular' as there is in Australian popular music.

Questions about this theoretical concern are suggested within *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now*, but rarely given concentrated consideration. The main theoretical concern of the anthology is discussion about how Australian music fits within a range of propositions about globalisation. Scott-Maxwell's perspective (above) is derived from her research into world music in Australia through the impulses of multiculturalism. Her observations point to the challenge of how a generalist book

could offer a localising framework which it surely must, after a decade of neo-liberalist globalisation, outrageous commercial indulgence and thoughtless consumerism. Australia's celebratory consumption was fed by a combination of easy credit and economic riches that came from the raw resources boom in coal and iron ore that helped feed Chinese economic growth.

The fact is that there are cultural, social, economic, geographical, regional and ideological concerns that need to be clearly demarcated from the global to reflect what can be considered the troubled history of Australian popular music. These issues include Aboriginal and Islander music, Indonesian and South East Asian music and hybrid varieties that offer a new way of viewing and conceptualising popular music in Australia.

Unfortunately, after twelve years of a conservative pro-American government (ending November 2007) that endorsed a bilateral trade treaty with the US, Australia has a less definable national culture industry sector than in the mid-1990s, so that too few questions are asked about the seamless integration of Australian culture into global cultural circulation. Consequently, the struggle to theorise globalisation is one limitation of the treatment of the all the genres presented in this book.

In effect, the book is a broadly conceived and effectively delivered introductory survey of Australian popular music in the mid-2000s. It proves that the field of popular music studies is established in the Antipodes and flourishes in a multitude of genres.

However, some omissions need to be remedied. For example, the emergence of festivals, especially the Big Day Out (and a plethora of other large popular music lifestyle events) needs to be incorporated within a discussion of how popular music operates within the culture of consumption, youth and escapism. Moreover, discussion about cultural policy and Intellectual Property Rights is sadly lacking, as is a sense of what could be termed the prehistory of institutionalised popular music studies, as seen in the 1950s into the 1990s through the eyes of men like Craig MacGregor, Glenn A. Baker, Warren Fahey, Mackenzie Wark, Stuart Couple, and even television gate keeper extraordinaire, Ian 'Molly' Meldrum.

While popular music studies in a small country is sure to be limited by the numerical dimensions of the population, the canvas of ideas in this book seems at times to be cautious of overstepping the boundaries of the survey technique that is deployed.

In a book with seventeen different authors there is plenty of information that reflects the healthy variety of Australian popular music. Authors who are well know to me and in some cases friends, continue their established work, including Aline Scott-Maxwell, Graeme Smith on country music as a 'movement', Tony Mitchell on rap, John Whiteoak on improvisation, and Chris Gibson and Peter Dunbar-Hall on contemporary Aboriginal music. Their contributions, in fact all the book's chapters, offer a starting point for research and analysis by undergraduate university students seeking documentation on Australian popular music. The 'Questions for Discussion' sections at the end of each chapter make it clear that the book is intended for classroom utilisation.

The most challenging yet intellectually exciting chapter is by Ross Harley and Andrew Murphie who appropriate Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's idea of musical and existential *refrains* to explore Australian electronica. Versions of their work have been published elsewhere. This chapter suggests an especially

productive way of imaging the sonic world of Australian popular music within its unique context, while borrowing key ideas from a foreign academic source. What could be more in keeping with the troubled history of Australian popular music?

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Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria. **By Jonathan Holt Shannon. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006. xxvi + 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-8195-6798-7**

This monograph is an ethnographic study of culture and modernity in contemporary Syria, using music as the lens through which to focus on local debates about the nature of Syrian and Arab modernity. Shannon focuses on local discourses about authenticity, heritage and modernity (including nuanced etymological explorations of the Arabic-language terms these English words commonly translate), especially in regard to how they position and provide interpretive stances for the performance and reception of contemporary urban 'classical' Arab music.

The book consists of six chapters framed at the beginning by a preface and introduction, and at the end by brief 'notes toward closure' and an epilogue. The book is elegantly structured like a suite in the metaphorical *maqam* (musical mode) of authenticity; the chapters stand in relation to each other like the different parts of the *wasla* musical suite – consisting of a sequence of instrumental pieces and songs in various genres – that is the main way of organising performances of Syrian art music. If authenticity is the primary 'mode' of the book, the six chapters represent modulations to secondary modes or related themes such as modernity, emotion, memory, temporality, etc. Each chapter is also structured using musical metaphors, beginning with a *matla'* or opening evocation of the main theme of the chapter – usually in the form of an ethnographic fragment or anecdote from Shannon's fieldwork, and much of the best writing in the book can be found in these vivid and evocative sections – and ends with a *qafla* or closing statement, analogous to the closing melodic cadence that ends a musical improvisation.

Perhaps the main theoretical contribution of the book is its exploration and application of the idea of 'alternative modernities'. Drawing on and critiquing the terms of contemporary debates about modernity associated with the work of Timothy Mitchell, Partha Chatterjee, Dilip Paramashwar Gaonkar and others, Shannon argues against narratives which hold that European modernity is the standard which other, alternative modernities are based on or can be measured against. The crux of Shannon's argument in relation to Syria is that because of the under-development, in material economic and political terms, of Syria under Ottoman and French rule, the only spheres left in effect for modernisation are the cultural and the spiritual (p. 65). Shannon argues that locally specific conceptions of modernity, imagined in relation to European (especially French) modernity, were in Syria defined dialectially in terms of imagined 'authentic' elements of Arab culture (such as emotionality and sentiment) in relation to imagined 'inauthentic' elements derived from the West (such as techno-rationality). Syrian modernity, and the aesthetics of authenticity on which it is based, emerges from this dialetical