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Analytical Studies in World Music, edited by Michael Tenzer.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

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Review

Analytical Studies in World Music, edited by Michael Tenzer. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Reviewed by Kelly Foreman

Michael Tenzer has assembled a volume of eleven analyses of pieces from mainly non-Western musical traditions with a substantial CD recording of the examples analyzed. *Analytical Studies in World Music* (hereafter “ASWM”) is not a comprehensive “world music” text; the geographic sampling of musical selections address broader questions of analysis, and are grouped under the three overarching themes of sectional periodicities, isoperiodicity, and linear composition in periodic contexts. Thus, the text differs significantly from either survey texts of world music or texts that attempt to generate a universal theory for all musics (such as Jay Rahn’s *A Theory for All Music*).¹ The contributors are well-known ethnomusicologists and specialists with years of field research and performance experience in the areas about which they are writing.

ASWM is an excellent text, unprecedented in its scope, depth, and in its efforts to be faithful to the traditions being analyzed while speaking to the Western musician. The individual chapters are of a high quality, each representing a thorough and detailed analysis. Its market is the Western-trained music theorist or composer who seeks a deeper understanding of musical structure (in a general sense) through case studies gleaned from the world’s many traditions. I suspect, however, that these analyses may be most useful to those with background training and performance experience in each area or to those who already specialize in them. Indeed, ASWM would be a difficult text for most undergraduate courses in world music analysis, and is perhaps

¹ Jay Rahn, *A Theory for All Music. Problems and Solutions in the Analysis of Non-Western Forms* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

best suited for use in a graduate context. Anyone teaching a course using ASWM will need several weeks for each musical sample, and attempting to cover the entire book in one semester would be a considerable challenge. Furthermore, while it may be possible for the astute Western musician lacking non-Western performance experience to gain significant insight into these musics armed only with ASWM and its audio recordings, I am of the opinion that the only way to really obtain a substantive understanding of the theory for any musical tradition—Western or otherwise—is through performance. This point is a key disciplinary fault line between ethnomusicology and Western music theory, one that Tenzer clearly recognizes and acknowledges. He does not propose to do away with actual performance experience but, rather, offers an additional and supplemental route to the understanding of musical structure.

In Chapter 1, Stephen Blum analyses a *Nava'i* song from northeastern Iran in terms of mode, phrase, musical intervals, and the treatment of text. While Blum employs Persian terminology, the chapter is quite accessible to the non-specialist Western musician. In Chapter 2, Donna A. Buchanan and Stuart Folsie present a largely modal and motivic analysis of Bulgarian *horó* composition, and discuss the models and compositional process (either explicit or unconscious) for creating the improvised *horó*. The authors interviewed two Bulgarian *horó* composers/performers—a conservatory-trained musician and a nationally recognized folk musician—in order to see how the compositional process takes place as these two very different musicians experienced it.

Peter Manuel analyses a sub-genre (song-type) of flamenco (*soleares*) in Chapter 3, in terms of mode (*maqam*), rhythm, phrase structure, pitch harmonization, and larger forms, and how a typical performance unfolds. Manuel's analytical and writing style is well suited for the non-specialist, and includes a helpful musical transcription. In Chapter 4, Robin Moore and

Elizabeth Sayre look at Afro-Cuban *batá* music through a detailed analysis of the piece *Obbatalá*. Although their analysis is not approached from a Western perspective, the authors make great efforts to guide the uninitiated listener in order to help make sense of the many levels of rhythm and patterns and to learn to aurally prioritize certain musical elements. The listener also gains a good understanding of the socio-cultural context for performance. However, the substantial number of necessary indigenous terms (for deities, instruments, rhythms, pieces, and text, for example) may make things difficult for non-specialists who may struggle both musically and linguistically. The transcriptions in Western notation should assist the uninitiated to some extent, though many scholars of African and Afro-Cuban music find Western transcriptions to be problematic.

In Chapter 5, Susanne Fűrmiss explores polyphony in African Aka song, incorporating socio-cultural context with analysis of cognitive and compositional processes. Several useful musical transcriptions in Western notation help the reader with the abundance of necessary Aka terms. Chapter 6 is Michael Tenzer's own contribution. In it, he proposes an alternative to the dualist perspective of Balinese musical time being either "static" or "progressive" through his analysis of the gamelan piece *Oleg Tumulilingan*. He avoids overwhelming the non-specialist with Balinese terms, and relies on several useful descriptive transcriptions, graphs, and charts that are designed to assist the reader who has no gamelan experience to help find their way within the dense layered textures.

In Chapter 7, R. Anderson Sutton and Roger R. Vetter explore gamelan music from Java focusing on the process of realization and creation of a known piece (in this case the piece *Ladrang Pangkur*) and the stretching of time that can take place for these known pieces. The chapter is accessible to the non-specialist in spite of the use of Javanese terms, although the

macro transcription and analysis will be challenging to those with little or no gamelan experience. In Chapter 8, Jonathan P. J. Stock examines a *huju* opera piece from Shanghai by a master opera actress who—lacking formal composition training—created (rather than “composed” in the usual written manner) the piece from several melodic elements. Through Stock’s analysis of the many aesthetic choices the composer made, we gain insight into the various aspects of Chinese operatic musical structure. In Chapter 9, Robert Morris explores the treatment of mode (*raga*) and form (*varnam*) in a South Indian composition “Valachi Vacchi.” This extremely thorough analysis utilizes many Indian terms and analytical techniques, but it is approached from a Western perspective and therefore the reader not trained in Indian music should be able to follow the analysis. In addition, Morris includes several helpful detailed transcriptions in Western notation (including ornamentation, the *raga*, and the *sargam* syllables), graphs, and charts.

In Chapter 10, William Benjamin looks at the first movement of Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 17 in G Major (K. 453), “in terms of two aspects of structure. . . : the manner in which the music attains rhythmic complexity and the ways its most sophisticated pitch structures are rooted in vernacular substrate” (333). In Chapter 11, John Roeder analyses Elliot Carter’s *Enchanted Preludes* for flute and cello (1988), exploring the ways in which chamber music “embodies the tensions in Western society between the individual and the community, narcissism and intimacy, autonomy and interdependence, demagoguery and dialog” (379).

ASWM revisits some of the oldest questions of cross-cultural musical analysis, and for this reason it is a courageous attempt to open what many feel to be an oppressive and closed world of disciplinary “ownership” and “control” of research methods, ideology, and approaches to the analysis of world musics. Tenzer does not tread these waters in ignorance; he is mindful of

the mistakes of previous generations of cross-cultural musical comparison. Of course, taking on such a charged topic will undoubtedly cause debate, especially among ethnomusicologists, particularly regarding cross-cultural universals that might allow one musical expression to somehow relate to another, as well as the extraction out of context that makes such comparison possible. For example, comments like the following in the Introduction will likely be problematic for many ethnomusicologists:

Is it all right to analyze music independent of its political, geographical, or cultural distance from the analyst or reader? Shall we allow ourselves to become absorbed in music's sound, conceiving of it as if in isolation from the world? . . . The response proposed here is nonetheless that yes, it is valid to do so, and anticipation of pleasure and refinement to be had is sufficient rationalization. We are all creatures of culture and ideology, but there is a moment in analysis at which we must curtail our penchants for modernist universalism, postmodern irony, or other language-based responses in order to confront music as elementally as possible. . . . Our purpose is to make the diverse systems of musical thought under consideration available for creative musicians looking for an informed basis on which to know assimilate, model, or borrow from world musics (5).

Moreover, Tenzer's re-opening of the "comparative musicology can of worms" in a comparison of Balinese temporal periodicity to Count Basie's "Sent for You Yesterday" (through an analysis by Ingrid Monson)² was a bit further than I was comfortably able to go, particularly in terms of the potential for even broader applications:

How far could we imagine extending this comparative potential? Might we use periodicity to compare Count Basie to a Burmese *hsaing-waing* ensemble or Shona *mbira*? If we found common elements there would be nothing to stop us; and there just might be some, if the example of the far-flung encounter between Bali and Basie has any persuasive power (232).

Indeed, many ethnomusicologists would wonder about the point of such comparisons, or what useful "knowledge" or "truths" would be assigned to such comparisons other than manufactured illusions of universality. And, while the text was successful in its avoidance of the problem of

² Ingrid Monson, "Riffs, Repetition, and Theories of Globalization," *Ethnomusicology* 43/1 (1999): 35.

“musical evolution by way of analysis” through the organization of the analyses under the overarching themes, locating the Western classical pieces as the final two consecutive chapters (and in chronological order) slightly compromised the overall effort and left a slight aftertaste of the comparative-musicology days of old.

While my doctorate is in ethnomusicology, I am also an active composer and I empathize with those who have experienced what can be a chilly exclusion within the academic context (and the right to participate in the discussion) from musical traditions other than their primary area of specialty. In spite of being an ethnomusicologist, I have also encountered some unspoken social barriers when venturing beyond my area of specialization. The challenges to approaching other musical traditions—performance experience, fluency in the language, fieldwork—are real and necessary for a decent understanding of them, but the *ownership* of each area that has become characteristic within ethnomusicology (and certainly others as well) often serves to deter more than educate. Therefore, I feel that there is—or should be—room for multiple perspectives, including those that may have little to do with indigenous meanings, as long as we keep the origins or ownership of those perspectives straight and remember why the music was created in the first place. While the ethnomusicologist in me has to at least question and perhaps even dismiss the broad comparisons, the composer in me—long having wished for a high quality analytical text for teaching world music analysis—cannot resist a look. And this is how this well-crafted, meaty book will likely be used: differently according to discipline and the questions one is seeking to answer from music. By far, ASWM is the most complete and rigorous attempt to present sophisticated musical analyses for a variety of world musics. All analyses, contributed by long-established specialists, are grounded in a specific piece (rather than a vague “genre” or “tradition”), inclusive of socio-cultural contexts. It is a welcome addition not only to each of the

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musical traditions analyzed but also to the body of work that seeks to bridge music theory and ethnomusicology.