Reviews


This is Keith Negus’s third book and his second to focus on the practices of (major) record companies. His first book, *Producing Pop*, consisted largely of an analysis derived from extensive interviews with a large number of senior music industry figures on both sides of the Atlantic. This book is similar in its methodology but his net is spread even wider in a way that reflects and supports the volume’s title. In this work Negus revisits the corporate offices and boardrooms of the ‘majors’, not only in a wider range of geographical locations, but also in a wider range of ‘genre’ locations. His case develops from the recognition that the major companies, particularly, but not solely, in the USA, apply the corporate strategic management practice of ‘portfolio management’ to the combined issues of internal departmental organisation and to record sales in general. Consequently, the departments designated to deal with hip-hop, country music, R&B, and so on, must perforce be open to the perspectives and practices of the ‘cultural matrices’ associated with particular musical genres. This exposure to and necessarily intimate involvement with ‘fans and audience cultures, musician networks and broader social collectivities’ in turn allows us to re-evaluate the seeming sway the ‘majors’ hold over the creation and circulation of popular music products. Rather than being seen as the dominant force in popular musical creativity, the logic of portfolio management demands the recognition that the expertise of major record companies lies in ‘their ability to understand how to distribute music to consumers’.

*Musics Genres and Corporate Cultures* can be recommended for its use of extensive primary research together with the detailed case studies it contains (especially that on rap music), and for the insightful material on the contradictions generated by the felt corporate need for market research. More than this, the case Negus advances is significant for a wider set of reasons: firstly, this work, as *Producing Pop* before it, represents a major contribution to the scarce literature on the music industry. Secondly, the work presents a radical and contentious analysis of the record industry. Thirdly, the work stands in marked contrast to the argument presented in his earlier work, so much so that *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* exists as a radical and contentious contribution to the author’s own oeuvre. In such terms, a short book review is inappropriate to the scale of critical response demanded by the work. In turn, the opportunity to review the work does offer a vehicle to plead that far greater research attention be paid to the music industry – we only *have* Popular Music Studies because a record and a music industry exists. Further, the focus of our study is, more accurately, records (and therefore record-making) rather than music, as such. On these twin bases, this latest work by Negus can be considered to be one of the key texts of the past ten years for the way it attempts to connect corporate practice with musical creativity. While not exactly an argument...
for a holistic approach to textual and contextual issues alike, the very fact that he is able to make a convincing case for the merging of the origination, dissemination and active reception of popular music products in an ‘environment’ that is ‘always political’ (where corporate and musical practices meet and are negotiated), is a stimulant to further research and argument in its own right.

As such a stimulant, Negus’s earlier work and conclusions cannot help but seem an absent presence in the current text for, rather than proceed by re-evaluating his earlier work in the light of fresh evidence, Negus returns to ‘first principles’ in a concerted attempt to re-conceptualise the recording industry. He develops his argument by identifying the inadequacies of various political economy analyses of the music industry in order to make the signal recognition (derived from more culturally percipient studies) that it is the many and combined cultures of music-making and music enjoyment that produce the record industry as much as it is the record industry that produces the cultural conditions for the production of recorded popular music. It is this insight which signals the break with his earlier argument – gone is the picture of a profoundly powerful record industry distinguished by the practice of ‘Artist Development’ and poised to become more powerful still through the processes of ‘Globalisation’, ‘Media Synergy’ and the ‘Total Star Text’, to be replaced by a far less omnipotent and omniscient industry, good at its specialism, effectively corporatised (in at least the minimal sense that corporate nostrums are favoured and practices are pursued), but seemingly far more responsive (and vulnerable) to the methods of music-making and to the ‘multiple mediations’ between ‘talent’ and ‘audience’ that lie substantially beyond its control.

The principal weakness of *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures* is the (implied) question that motivates the study: ‘What is creative about the music industry?’ If we want to learn more about the music industry as an industry, then our question needs to be ‘What is industrial about the music industry?’ This recognised, the strength of Negus’s work, of both his works on the music industry (or, more specifically, the recording industry), is that he is determined to link the practices and perspectives of musicians to those of corporate employees and their bosses. In mounting two such different studies, he provides the reader with a rich range of source data and a challenging set of judgements. It is to be hoped that his determination to specify how popular musical creativity becomes popular record success will inspire a wider body of research.

University of Liverpool

Mike Jones


Cultural innovation almost always moves from the margins to the mainstream. Those marginalised by existing social arrangements have a different angle of vision on the culture, and need alternative avenues for cultural expression. If you want to know, for example, what straight, white men will be wearing, what music they will be listening to in five years, check out what gay men and black men are wearing and listening to today.
This perspective has informed many sociological analyses of the preponderance of blacks, Jews, gay men and lesbians, and other 'others' in cultural production.

Typically, though, when we think of the presence of Jews in popular music, we think of them behind the scenes, the music moguls – record executives (like David Geffen), band managers (like Brian Epstein), studio honchos (Goldwyn, Mayer, you name it) and dozens of assorted producers and distributors. They are backstage, out of sight, the puppeteers pulling on the strings of the black or non-Jewish marionettes who are out front performing. Invisibly, but indelibly, they make the system work, and they rake in the profits. 'We see non-Jewish rockers, uncool Jewish performers, and hear about the back-stage deals of Jewish managers', as Michael Billig puts it in this short, pleasant, but ultimately, analytically unsatisfying book (p. 40).

Rock 'n' Roll Jews looks at the presence of Jews from the front of the stage. This useful compendium of important Jews in the history of rock and roll catalogues the centrality of Jews in the creation and performance of the music as well. Surely way beyond their demographic percentages, Jews have been central to the history of rock and roll.

Billig’s main contribution is to catalogue the presence of Jews as composers and performers in the USA throughout the twentieth century. From Tin Pan Alley to the celebrated Brill Building, Jews like George and Ira Gershwin, Lieber and Stoller, Bacharach and David, Doc Pomus, King and Goffin cranked out hit after hit – whether those hits were performed by Jews like Al Jolson or Barbara Streisand, or by non-Jews like Elvis, Sam Cooke, Aretha Franklin. A final chapter examines the careers of four pioneers of American rock since the 1960s – Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Lou Reed and Leonard Cohen. But even these four vignettes get only a slightly less cursory treatment than the earlier cataloguing.

In a sense, the book is mistitled. It is hardly about Rock and Roll Jews, but really about the significant number of Jews who have played influential roles in all forms of popular music in the United States. Readers searching for a discussion of Jewish rock and rollers elsewhere will be disappointed.

More importantly, this useful little book stops short of any analysis of either form or content. First, form: Billig offers only the sketchiest analysis of why Jews have been such a force in the history of the music. Is there something about Judaism, or is it simply another avenue of mobility for the marginalised? Billig offers hints of analysis here. Lieber and Stoller’s music is unthreatening, ‘inclusive’ (p. 58), suggesting a desire to fit in. Bob Dylan is the consummate outsider, the ‘insider-as-outsider’ (p. 118) – whatever that means. Jewish comedians typically made the ‘wry observations of the outsider’ (p. 163).

Here some comparative discussion might have been useful. For surely Jews have been a distinct minority in Britain, for example, and yet have not exerted nearly the influence on popular culture that they have in the United States? Why would the book on British Jews be pretty much Brian Epstein, Mark Knopfler, The End? Perhaps the answer lies less in the specificity of Judaism and more in the experience of ethnic minorities, of immigrants and questions of ethnic succession and mobility; or of countries that have a well-defined and self-conscious working class (so that ethnicity and race become proxies for class).

In Britain, it is the working class that provides the marginalised’s angle of vision that animates popular culture, from the Beatles and Stones to Graham Parker’s pub rockers, and punk bands like the Sex Pistols and the Clash. Or maybe it is
a different religion. One could, after all, do a companion volume called ‘Rock ’n’ Roll Catholics’ and discuss the flurry of Irish folkies who worked themselves into British pop stars, or, in the US the lives of Dion, Cher, Bruce Springsteen or Madonna, or hundreds of others.

Nor does Billig answer the question that has plagued others who have addressed the same issue: Does the fact of being Jewish contribute anything to their musical sensibility? Do they draw on Jewish themes or sensibilities in the creation of the music? Does form somehow dictate content? After all, there were plenty of marginal groups in the USA at the turn of the century, but only Jews chose to ‘dominate’ popular music. How come?

Today, Billig argues, ‘American Jewry, over three generations, has made the successful passage from strange, foreign migrants to assimilated citizenry’ (p. 160). While enough ink has been spilled on this question of Jewish assimilation to turn the Red Sea black, Billig nonetheless begs the question. If so, then why are Jews still such a dominant force in popular music? It was Jews, he argues, who put the bomp in the bomp-shoo-bomp. If they have any bomp left, it must come from somewhere other than marginality. Or is Jewish assimilation something that only non-Jews observe, while Jews themselves believe that they are still a besieged minority, cultivating that cultural marginality that provides the unique perspective that can articulate the longings of every other arriviste?

Michael S. Kimmel

State University of New York at Stony Brook


Gary Stewart’s *Rumba on the River: A Popular History of the Two Congos* is a thoroughly enjoyable read. I am an enthusiast of Congolese music, having devoted my graduate studies to its history, and I am aware that few people share this passion. Books on subjects of interest to small populations are often designed as reference tools or academic texts to be used primarily by scholars. Stewart’s book, however, was written to appeal to a wider audience. With the growing popularity of African music in Europe and North America, many listeners are certain to want to know more, and *Rumba on the River* is both an introduction and an in-depth look at perhaps the most popular of Africa’s many musics.

*Rumba on the River* contributes to the filling of a frustrating void: literature on Congolese music written in English. The total of all sources available in English, culled from Stewart’s extensive bibliography, as well as years of my own research, reaches only about fifty pieces. With a few notable exceptions, these have tended to repeat either the same superficial description of Latin music’s impact on Congolese music, or some warmed-over tale of the peregrinations of this guitar wizard or that angelic singer.

moderne. If Stewart lacks Bemba’s style, he compensates with greater content; if, unlike Tchebwa’s, his voice is only vaguely discernible, the abundance of interviews and excerpts from local media stands out; if he lacks Lonoh’s analyses of song themes and regional stylistic differences, he makes up for this with the myriad of musicians discussed.

In fact, the most notable characteristic of Stewart’s work is its scope. His is not a book about only the most famous bands or artists, nor does it glamourise the mundane, the who-went-where-when gossip column prevalent in music reportage. He takes the reader from the days just after Stanley’s exploits up to the present, interlacing biographies of musicians with sketches of the political and economic climates. We learn about the creation of musicians’ unions, the advances in recording technologies and the birth of local studios. We watch rival record labels Ngoma, Opika, Loningisa and CEFA compete to sign on the early heroes, like Roger Izeidi, Henri Bowane, Jimmy ‘the Hawaiian’, Wendo Kolosoy and Joseph Kabasele. Against the backdrop of the two Congos’ emancipatory struggles, the cold war, and internal political and economic changes, we witness the debut and demise of countless bands, playing at bars like Chez Faignond, Congo-Moderne, Vis-à-Vis and Petit Bois. We learn about the endless string of dance crazes, like Orchestre Bantous’ boucher, Orchestre Sinza’s soukous, African Fiesta Sukisa’s kiri-kiri, and Choc Stars roboti robota. We follow Sam Mangwana, M’Pongo Love and Papa Wemba on their excursions to wider Africa, Europe and the USA.

One of the most striking aspects of Stewart’s work is his assiduous attention to bands’ genealogies. Anyone familiar with Congolese music knows that few musicians stick with one band, and bands’ line-ups are never static for long. The fissiparous nature of these ensembles is, to my knowledge, unparalleled in any other pop music. The scene, from its beginnings at the end of World War II, resembles a giant extended family, with the vast majority of bands belonging to one of three major stylistic schools, that of African Jazz, O.K. Jazz, or Zaïko Langa Langa. The most successful bands serve as training grounds for scores of musicians, who break off and start their own bands, join up with other bands, or return to their previous bands after a failed attempt at a solo career. These two features – the fracturing of groups and their traceable heritage – make constructing a family tree both irresistible and maddeningly complex. Stewart is meticulous here, tracking, for example, the ramification of Zaïko Langa Langa into at least a dozen off-shoots, together dubbed ‘Clan Langa Langa’, with musicians fusing with one another, only to undergo further fission a short time later.

Unfortunately, Rumba on the River will not be as helpful to the scholar as it could have been. The decision to exclude crucial bibliographic information seriously reduces this text’s usefulness as a resource for research. Quotations are referenced (when not from Stewart’s personal communications), but the sources for factual information are not given. Furthermore, the system of citation is frustrating: notes are placed at the end of the text without any internal indication that there is a note. Stewart seeks neither to raise nor answer questions and is concerned with none of the issues of historiography. Thus, his book comes across as entirely unaware of itself, and this lack of self-referentiality is troubling at times. Stewart fails to interrogate the language he uses, and in several places he seems to affirm discredited colonial constructs, such as the primitivist dichotomy of traditional and modern: ‘[…] Congo music had made the leap from traditional to modern in roughly the span of a single generation’ (p. 76). Several other sketchy passages
place Stewart outside current post-colonial disclosure, such as ‘[Patrice Lumumba’s] slender frame stretched a full head above most Congolese as if his bloodline flowed in part from the elegantly tall Tutsi people of eastern Africa’ (p. 75) and ‘Africans in the two Congos embraced [Latin music] like a kidnapped offspring suddenly released from captivity’ (p. 18).

Though about music, Rumba on the River does not talk about the music itself. I am accustomed to authors’ reluctance to engage music and dance directly when they are not trained in those fields, and Stewart, too, is shy, leaving issues of performance, for instance, to the more ambitious scholar. On a few occasions, Stewart describes how a particular song sounds, but with neither transcriptions nor accompanying CD, it will be difficult for the reader unfamiliar with Congolese music to get a full idea of what s/he is reading about.

Rumba on the River includes a full discography of the works mentioned in the text. The bibliography, a collection of diverse primary and secondary sources, is a valuable resource. The index is accurate and useful. The book is physically attractive, with dozens of photographs, exquisite reproduction of disc labels and album covers, and a few maps. It is a hefty book in the unusual and agreeable format of 4″× 6″.

Rumba on the River is a valuable document for readers of Popular Music, for it shows in detail what has gone on behind the scenes in the creation and propagation of Africa’s most widely appreciated music. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for comparative thinking on why and how some genres of highly syncretic musics succeed.

Jesse Samba Wheeler

University of Brasilia, Brazil

References

Lonoh, M. 1969. Essai de commentaire de la musique congolaise moderne (Kinshasa: Ministère de la Culture et des Arts)
Tchebwa, M. 1996. Terre de la chanson (Louvain-la-Neuve: Duclot)


This study comes out of Peter Wade’s long-standing interest in how processes of racial identification are bound up with nationalism and national identity, an interest evidenced in his previous works: Black Culture and Social Inequality in Colombia (1989), Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia (1993) and Race and Ethnicity in Latin America (1997). In this latest book, the key question addressed is how the music of the marginalised coastal region of Colombia, La Costa, has come to be the most commercially successful music at the national level and the best known internationally. Fans of internationally recognised salsa bands, such as Fruko y sus Tesos, Grupo Galé, Orquesta Guayacán, Latin Brothers and, in particular, Grupo Niche, with its success on US Latin dance floors, might well dispute the international predominance imputed to música tropical. In this connection,
it is worth noting that since Wade focuses almost exclusively on the genres of porro, cumbia and vallenato, he does not refer at any length to one of the biggest Costeño ('coastal') stars, Joe Arroyo. Arroyo's unique 'tropical' sound or 'Joe-son' is notoriously difficult to define in terms of genre, as it syncretically combines a wide variety of Caribbean and Latin American musical styles, appealing to discourses of blackness, region and nation in songs such as 'Rebelión' ('Uprising'), 'En Barranquilla me quedo' ('I'm sticking around in Barranquilla') and 'Costumbres de mi tierra' ('Customs of my homeland').

It is these discourses which form the central focus of this study. Wade examines how cultural practices and politics are racialised, gendered, sexualised and spatialised through a historical and anthropological analysis of the development of Costeño music over the course of the twentieth century. His research methodology combines archival work with the examination of oral histories to get a feel for how people relate to or think about music and identity. Wade and local research assistants carried out interviews in Bogota, Medellin and Barranquilla according to pre-specified criteria of class, age and gender. Unfortunately, these criteria are not made explicit for the reader, although there is a comprehensive, annotated list of interviewees given as Appendix A to the text. There are also a limited number of interviews from Cartagena, which is a key area for the study of newer, explicitly 'black' forms such as champeta. A rather surprising omission in the study is the lack of in-depth analysis of the city of Cali, given that it has the largest urban black population in Colombia and is an important centre of music production (see article by Lise Waxer in this issue of Popular Music). In his preface, Wade admits that he had originally envisaged doing research in Cali but was unable to do so due to time constraints.

The text has a clear historical and anthropological focus. Brief musicological analyses of the genres being studied are somewhat awkwardly integrated into the main body of the text, which does, however, address issues of lyrical content, instrumentation, performance and vocal style. The styles of porro, cumbia and vallenato are defined according to musicological characteristics in Appendix B by Alex Miles on the basis of a minimal number of recordings. Genres, which, as Wade acknowledges elsewhere, are difficult to pin down, are reduced to sets of limited structural characteristics that cannot account for the wide variations within genres and the crossing of boundaries in increasingly inter-generic sounds. Indeed, a highly polemical discussion around generic definition was sparked off by Marco Vinicio Oyaga’s paper on porro and its variants, porro tapao, porro palitiao and porro chocoano, at the Third Latin American Conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music held in Bogota in August 2000 (see report in this issue).

In his introduction, Wade provides an extremely useful overview of theoretical approaches to the interconnections between national identity, race, gender, sexuality and music. He draws on post-colonial studies, writings on popular music and popular culture in general, current theorising of race and gender, and Latin American cultural studies to critically examine key concepts such as homogeneity and heterogeneity, syncretism and hybridisation, transformation and appropriation, authenticity and commercial degeneration, hegemony, and the national and the transnational in the context of music capitalism. He also addresses an area too often overlooked in studies of popular music, which is the relationship between music, dance and body in constituting a sexualised cultural topography of the nation. He goes on to outline how Costeño identity has been constructed in relation to national identity through an analysis of the ideological fields of racial identification, tradition
and modernity, realism and magical realism, political power and powerlessness, before examining the origin myths of porro, cumbia and vallenato. Wade calls into question both lay and academic accounts of Colombian music that are grounded in notions of tradition and authenticity, and that posit a simple homological link between music and the identity of particular social groups. He constantly foregrounds the difficulties attached to the production of knowledge, in a highly self-reflexive analysis that constantly deconstructs ontological and epistemological categories whilst acknowledging the continuities that necessarily characterise historiographical accounts located in particular social contexts.

Wade explores the trajectory of música tropical from its marginalised status in the late nineteenth century through its appropriation in the mid-twentieth century as a national symbol, in the context of rapid modernisation, the growth of the mass media and development of modern music technologies. Its revival at the close of the twentieth century is linked to renewed concerns about regional identity, but also to the new context of a postmodern, multicultural nationalism officially enshrined in the 1991 constitution. Wade’s central argument is that throughout these processes a tension can be traced between ambivalent discourses of tradition and modernity, sameness and difference. The appropriation of Costeño music as a symbol of national identity has not led to the homogenisation of difference or erasure of blackness.

Why has this music, with its connotations of tropicality and blackness, come to play such a key role in a nation in which dominant representations of national identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were rooted in the white heritage of the highland, interior regions? Wade’s conclusion is twofold. On the one hand, the early modernisation of Colombia’s coastal cities provides the structural conditions for projects of cultural modernity constructed around the ambivalent traditional elements of openness and sexual freedom (linked to notions of blackness). The recourse to traditional community values, particularly a tropicality associated with peacefulness, may also in part reflect a desire to distance the nation from the overpowering images of violence that have come to characterise Colombia since the irruption of widespread partisan violence, known as La Violencia, in 1948. On the other hand, the multivocality of Costeño music makes it especially productive in the constitution of a variety of identities in different contexts which cut across boundaries of class, race, gender and regional alliance.

Overall, this is an insightful study of the complex interactions between ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, region and nation, in the context of the tensions between discourses of tradition and modernity, homogeneity and heterogeneity, in the construction of both regional and national identities in Colombia through the study of Costeño music. The notes are very full, as is the extensive bibliography which is extremely useful for researchers in the field. This is a serious academic work highly recommended for those with an interest in Latin American music, racial and cultural studies.

Vanessa Knights

University of Newcastle