Reviews


In a publicity quotation on the back of the dust-jacket of Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice, American film musicologist Robynn Stilwell hails it as an exemplary ‘second generation approach to film musicology that stands in relation to the first generation (Gorbman, Kalinak et al.) much as her subject stands to Hollywood cinema . . .’. She thus raises the stakes of the critical implications of Davison’s own title, in which ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ are ostensibly opposed, on what her subtitle suggests might be primarily chronological grounds. Dust-jacket readers will thus expect additionally to learn about a critical opposition operating within the disciplinary, or rather cross-disciplinary site in which academic musicologists, cultural theorists and film scholars have been talking to each other about film’s music since the 1980s. They will not be disappointed. Davison herself makes the point (p. 1) that academic work in this area has tended to favour the ‘classical Hollywood score’ (as developed in the 1930s and 1940s). She thus sets the stage for a cinematic/academic re-run of the modernist narrative of creative youthful opposition to hegemonic cultural power and the theory it arguably spawns. Studio bosses, film producers and financiers – joined now by classical Hollywood theorists – seem set to take on the role of the bourgeois industrialists, conservative critics and petty court officials or censors whose images were the dartboards of the twentieth-century’s earliest avant garde, before the First World War.

Davison is not ignorant of the problems posed by the binaries of this narrative, but finds herself faced with economic and industrial issues that seem to encourage ‘oppositional’ readings of the kind that are certainly shared and explored by her four cinematic heroes: Jean-Luc Godard, Derek Jarman, Wim Wenders and David Lynch (a film by each is the main subject of each of her last four chapters). Stemming out of a doctoral project featuring these four, her readings of Prénom: Carmen, The Garden, Wings of Desire and Wild at Heart are succinct, engaging and consistently stimulating. But in her first three chapters, as something of a bonus, she also takes us on a whistle-stop critical tour of both the literature and the history of film-music: in classic-era Hollywood (Chapter 1), in the ‘new Hollywood’ of the 1970s and 1980s, represented by Jaws, Star Wars and the rest (Chapter 2) and in search of ‘alternatives’ to Hollywood – in Eisenstein’s Russia as much as in the critical minds of Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler as they battled with Hollywood in the 1940s (Chapter 3). Serious students of film music will certainly want to study Davison’s account. But there has to be a health-warning: watch where you tread; this is treacherous terrain.

The central area of modernist marshland is signposted in advance by the Ashgate series title, ‘Popular and Folk Music’, and Derek Scott’s ‘General Editor’s preface’ on the ‘relativistic outlook’ which, he tells us, has
replaced the universal perspective of modernism (the international ambitions of the 12-note style); the grand narrative of the evolution and dissolution of tonality has been challenged, and emphasis has shifted to cultural context, reception and subject-position. Together, these have conspired to eat away at the status of canonical composers and categories of high and low in music. [...] The series is designed to embrace the world’s popular music from Acid House to Zydeco...

It turns out, in fact, that the ‘popular’ has a rather rough time in this book, to the extent that one wonders if this was quite the right series for it to appear in. The ‘universal perspective of modernism’ seems still securely in place here. Davison progressively confirms the implicit underlying alignment of her own sympathies with ‘non-Hollywood’ opposition to, and critique of, the blockbusters (and their music) of ‘new Hollywood’; the latter, she notes with intent, started to dominate popular cinema contemporaneously with the development of academic film musicology in its present form. The problem with her argument that her chosen soundtracks demonstrate ‘an interesting – and often critical – relationship to classical Hollywood scores and soundtracks’ is signalled in her reversion, as early as her third paragraph (all this on p. 1 of her Introduction), to a blanket opposition between ‘Non Hollywood’ and ‘Classical Hollywood’. While New Hollywood certainly features in her second chapter, it takes a back seat thereafter, re-emerging fleetingly in the Wenders chapter and more substantially in the Lynch chapter before disappearing behind the catch-all phrase ‘conventional score’ in her Epilogue.

The specific difficulty is that Davison allows herself repeatedly to re-inscribe an insufficiently examined default alignment of ‘classical Hollywood’ as practice with ‘classical film theory’ (p. 35, my italics) as it applies to cinematic music – a theory which Davison cites Caryl Flinn as suggesting that ‘film composers were, in general, happy to play along with’ (p. 36). This works fine for an Adorno-esque reading of ‘Classical cinema as ideological’ (sectional subheading, p. 12) and encourages a long unfolding strain of her argument that the image-enslaved soundtrack of Hollywood finds its ‘own voice’ in a film like Jarman’s anti-establishment and gay-orientated The Garden (p. 134). It even, she suggests, finds ‘total liberation’ in the same director’s Blue:

In its possible liberation from the image, the soundtrack of The Garden presents the potential for reparation of these communities’ voices [those of homosexuals and AIDS victims]. [...] Liberated from the image, the soundtrack is able to speak for a minority community which has suffered much through the hostile surveillance and revelations of the tabloid media. (p. 136)

Now wait a minute. Suddenly it is as if this book on film music is not only equating the ‘pure’ soundtrack with ‘pure music’ – idealistically moral and universal (more on this later) – but also aligning film itself, dominated by the prying ‘surveillance’ eye of the camera, with ‘tabloid’ prejudice and the manifestation of hegemonic conservative ideology. Surely something has gone wrong here? In fact, what I like about this book is that Davison herself, perhaps not always quite wittingly, provides us with the tools we need to get out of this odd and apparently uni-directional theoretical corridor.

The key, as I have hinted, is to uncouple ‘classical Hollywood practice’ from ‘classical Hollywood film theory’ (as applied to music). On one level, Davison is surely right that in Prénom: Carmen, Godard is able to ‘crack open’ (but is the violence of that image entirely appropriate?) what she once more calls ‘conventional’ Hollywood scoring practices and expose their implicit claim to be ‘established by
natural law’ (pp. 82–3). She had, however, much earlier cited the work of James Buhler and David Neumeyer who have, she explains, considered ‘the ideological underpinning of film theory’s tendency to limit its conception of classical scoring’ (p. 34). Note that we are talking here about the ideology not of film but of film theory. Discourse can be as constraining and domineering as the institutional and economic set-up of the Hollywood studio system. She even goes on to point out, quite rightly, that classical film theory ‘stills non-diegetic music’s threat by proposing that it is not a threat’ and alludes to Buhler and Neumeyer’s suggestion (p. 35) that there might be a ‘similarity between the (apparently threatening) position of non-diegetic music and that of the female voice in cinema as theorised by Kaja Silverman in *The Acoustic Mirror*’. To cut a long story short, notions about classical Hollywood scoring practice can be cracked open by thinking about them as easily as by making a film like *Prénom: Carmen* (no disrespect to Godard intended). Might it even be that the transgressive or ‘liberating’ critique Davison wants to locate in the soundtrack of such a film is based on a theoretical misunderstanding, and therefore ends up by re-inscribing the Romantic ideology of ‘pure music’s’ autonomy and (‘liberated’?) lack of access to representation and/or ‘meaning’?

This is something that some significant recent musicologists like Susan McClary and Lawrence Kramer have long been subjecting to critical pressure (Kramer doesn’t make it into Davison’s bibliography or index and McClary only slips into the former with her book on *Carmen*). The fact that neither Davison’s director-heroes nor their work inspire anything very much in the way of questioning criticism here adds to one’s sense of unease when the very music that is cracking open poor old Hollywood’s late-Romantic indulgences turns out to be . . . Beethoven string quartets! How revolutionary can you get? Yet in this very same book we find Wim Wenders being quoted on his youthful conviction (p. 141) that rock ‘n’ roll ‘was the only alternative to Beethoven . . . because I was very insecure then about all culture that was offered to me, because I thought it was all fascism, pure fascism; and the only thing I was secure with from the beginning and felt had nothing to do with fascism was rock music’. I hardly need point out that we do not need to make crude links between Beethoven and fascism to see that, at the very least, this applies some critical leverage to Davison’s enthusiastic subscription to David Wills’s analysis of an oppositional counterpoint between the image track and the sound track in *Prénom: Carmen*. It also highlights her subsequent musicological homage to the fact that ‘these quartets are themselves marked by disruption and fragmentation’ (p. 85) which serves to foreground ‘the cut and paste nature of film, and thus the mediation of the apparatus’ (p. 86). By p. 89 we are even being reminded that the ‘dramatic force, intensity and seriousness of much of this music encourages the spectator to attempt a more serious interpretation of the film than might otherwise be the case’. Sounds like audience manipulation by another name? It is perhaps no accident that this chapter utilises the ideologically compromised assumptions of ‘pure’ musical analysis and concludes with a devotional twenty-page ‘timing-table’ of every musical and sound-effect cue in *Prénom: Carmen*. I can’t help smelling a cultural-conceptual rat or two here and wanting to turn back to Wenders. Davison herself, on p. 90, had considered whether one could argue ‘that this music hails a bourgeois subject, a subject that recognises this chamber music as the apex of serious high art music of the Western classical tradition (and thus also to be a demonstration of wealth, intellect and a developed artistic soul)’. 
Analysis of the important films Davison selects from a music- and soundtrack-orientated perspective is certainly needed, and is likely to proliferate. But we do need to think more carefully about theory, and we need to be prepared to keep our critical and historical wits sharpened. In her section on the Cahiers critics of the late 1950s (Bazin et al.), out of whose subsequent cinematic practice and experimentation Davison’s ‘Non-Hollywood’ seems to have developed, she valuably reminds us that the politique des auteurs in fact emerged in the context of a critical engagement with Hollywood (p. 76). The modernist binary (French ‘culture’ vs the ‘vulgarity’ of popular American cinema) was to some extent collapsed in favour of a more critically nuanced interest in specific films and directors (‘despite the studio system’, p. 77).

Perhaps it is for this reason that I long to see Davison do some head-on critical and analytical work on the New Hollywood movies that swim in and (more usually) out of sight here, accompanied by ‘unheard’ but subliminally felt reiterations of John Williams’s celebrated Jaws motif. We learn that ‘white, Western-centric subject position’ and ‘bourgeois, heterosexual male heroes’ are to blame, along with the orchestra ‘as a demonstration of wealth, of opulence’ and the ‘“new, conservative spirit in American culture”’ (p. 51). I have no prima facie argument with that, but would want to see the analysis happening, at a time when Music GCSE and A-level pupils up and down the country are being asked to rescore sections of these same movies without any tools or encouragement for genuinely critical insight. By contrast, Davison’s ‘alternative’ directors, allegorically liberating the soundtrack ‘from slavery to the image’ (p. 117) seem not only in practical thrall to the hegemonic cinema they are trying to ‘reject’, but also in thrall to crude historical theorising which is as much a part of the problem as it is a key to its solution.

If this all sounds tetchy and negative, I would really not wish it so. I am enormously grateful to Annette Davison for goading me into thinking more about these matters. And I meant it when I earlier encouraged serious students of film music to study this book. Its problems are, in the end, ones that we all share and the book fairly bubbles with enthusiasm, information and ideas. The argument may run away with itself and the ideas get tangled in the briars at times, but Davison is never less than a friendly and undogmatic companion on the path through the forest of film and soundtrack theory which any genuinely interdisciplinary approach to this subject must take.

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Peter Franklin


How often do you encounter a book which deals with your own discipline but actually changes your mind about something fairly fundamental? Not very often, I suspect, but that was indeed my experience here. I say ‘encounter’ because this is the first time I have reviewed a book without having read it all (although it is explicitly designed not to be read cover to cover). These two things are not unrelated, and I shall have to explore them a little. First, though, what is this modestly titled tome? For
readers aware of Philip Tagg’s work, this is the book we have been awaiting for ten years and more. It results from a series of listener tests undertaken with various groups of respondents, to the ten little title tunes of the title (The Dream of Olwen, The Virginian, Monty Python’s Flying Circus, Romeo & Juliet, Sportsnight, Emmerdale Farm, Sayonara, A Streetcar named Desire, Deep Purple’s Owed to ‘g’, and Miami Vice). Discussion of these form the major part of the book, together with a lengthy polemic against absolutism and in defence of semiotics, a detailed discussion of the authors’ methodology, a postscript on gender, and exhaustive appendices and cross-references. Each of the main chapters has a similar aim – to explore the immediate responses of between 100 and more than 600 listeners (almost all of whom were Swedish) to the references suggested by listening to these tunes in turn. These responses are catalogued and exhaustively cross-referenced, and the indexes provide readers with more than one way through this taxonomy, and the types of source museme that give rise to particular delineations. However, it does not take a reader long to realise that what is of musical interest is the authors’ own responses to these responses, and the ways that they argue for associative links between particular sound-complexes and listeners’ responses to these complexes. The more I read, the more I became bound up in the author’s explorations, and the more impatient I became with their empirical groundings. This became a problem for me since, on a number of occasions, I have argued for precisely the sort of empirical grounding to analytical work which Tagg and Clarida exemplify. Why, then, do I find myself reacting so strongly against it, and rethinking that position? Fundamentally, I suppose it is to do with the rhetoric of communication. I like this book, and I gain from reading it because of the way the authors relate, for instance, the subjective experience of ‘waviness’ in The Dream of Olwen (specifically in its accompanimental pattern) via a host of related examples from a wide repertoire, to the stock characteristics of discourse about meadows, to a very careful analysis of the gestural equivalence of Olwen’s accompanimental waves and the physical tracing of the contour of the horizon within a normatively hilly landscape. The demonstration is breathtaking in its audacity, and incredibly convincing. The only input it required from its subjects was the identification of ‘waviness’. This thus provides the authors with the security of knowing that their own (presumed) perception of waviness here is not culturally abnormal. However, as a reader, I would be more than satisfied to have missed out the other steps. And, surely, it is this convincing rhetoric which makes us read particular authors on music anyway, rather than wanting to read any of the participants on these pieces. So, the power with which this book is written convinces me that the exhaustive testing was probably unnecessary, other than to provide security for the transferability of the authors’ perceptions.

The book exists within a tradition of musicological enquiry perhaps best exemplified by Deryck Cooke’s much-referenced The Language of Music. By concentrating on the field of reception, and avoiding notions of the music (or the composers) expressing, it avoids the chief problems of that tradition, while still functioning as a compendium of musical effects. The authors clearly assume the book will be used as a resource – that its users will not necessarily read it from beginning to end (although I shall continue to do so), but will trace the references for particular qualities. What qualities? Well: ‘007’, ‘oak tress’, ‘oblivion (love)’, ‘of usual type’, ‘Oh dear oh dear!’, ‘Oh, Juliet!’, ‘Oh, Romeo!’, ‘OK’, ‘OK (so what)’, ‘old’, to take a succession of references from an index, and give you an idea of the level of detail they are talking to. In this sense, it assembles something of a semiotic dictionary. However, I find two
problems here. One is, of course, an assumption of the extent to which the denotations of musical sounds are historically and culturally circumscribed. My responses are pretty close to those of the Swedish participants in the research, so cultural specificity may at least extend to North-Western Europe. I have no idea, though, whether such responses will remain valid in fifty years time, or are valid elsewhere. I suspect they are, to a large extent, but perhaps this does form a question for (far) future research. The second problem is perhaps a personal one. It is grossly unfair to criticise the authors for having the wrong agenda, but I suspect it would be even more useful to develop a semiotic dictionary for songs, i.e. for the combination of music and lyrics. Perhaps that too is a job for somebody else.

In all, then, this is a much-needed study, massively impressive in the range of references it brings to bear (a beautiful passage contrasting stereotypical views of Russia and Greece in the context of mandolins and balalaikas, for instance), hugely insightful in the arguments it makes for the justness of the links made between stimulus and connotation, and with just the right degree of polemic to convince of the urgency of the task.

Allan Moore

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As the first comprehensive study of popular music in Israel, this work had a significant amount of ground to cover. In addition to surveying and critiquing the many dissertations and numerous articles published over the years on different aspects of Israeli popular music (including the work of the book’s authors), the authors directed a vast research project toward the writing of this book, which included the supervision of several more dissertations and masters theses on previously under-researched spheres of Israeli popular music. The two authors are Israel’s foremost experts on Israeli music, sociologist Motti Regev and ethnomusicologist Edwin Seroussi, and the result is a book well worth the wait.

Several contemporary scholars have examined the way in which music has been utilised as a tool for nation-building. The case of Israel exemplifies a particularly self-conscious form of a collectively ‘imagined’ young nation-state: Jewish law (Halakhah) became a fundamental component of the Israeli legal system, archaeological sites deemed to be those mentioned in the Bible became National sites, and because there was no common language, as early as 1881 Eliezer Ben Yehuda began reviving Hebrew from its ancient Biblical roots. Similarly, the antecedent of an Israeli national musical style was deliberately created beginning in the 1920s; this was only the beginning of a process that, to some extent, still continues in Israel today. Popular Music & National Culture in Israel relates the cultural history of a young country that viewed the creation of a new ‘native’ national musical style as crucial for its broader project: the inventing of a Jewish national culture in Israel.

Part I of the book consists of two impressive chapters; one, the compact yet surprisingly nuanced ‘Short Introduction to Israeli Culture’ and two, ‘Israeli
Institutions of Popular Music’. Much of the prior scholarship on Israeli music refers to
general structures of Israeli hegemony that defined and controlled Israeli music from
pre-statehood through the 1970s, therefore chapter two is particularly valuable
because it more clearly defines the bodies that maintained this control and how they
wielded it. For example, chapter two adeptly explains the way in which the powerful
Histadrut, the General Federation of Hebrew Workers in the Land of Israel, not only
commissioned songs but also published, printed, distributed, and created networks to
financially support musical performances (p. 33). In addition, this chapter details the
powerful role that radio, television and newspaper played in determining what
became accepted as Israeli popular music. Until 1990, Israeli broadcast media was
exclusively controlled by the state’s IBA (Israeli Broadcasting Authority) – consisting
of only a few radio stations and one television station – therefore the state’s influence
in determining its national music culture was quite palpable.

As the authors state in their introduction, this book ‘intentionally concentrates
on the major music cultures that have participated in the attempts to invent and
construct indigenous Israeli popular music’ (p. 11). The book focuses, therefore, on
the three primary Israeli forms of popular music that have competed for national
recognition throughout Israel’s short history: 1. Shirei Eretz Yisrael (Songs of the Land
of Israel – SLI), described by most scholars as Israel’s ‘folk’ music; 2. Israeli rock; and
3. musiqa mizrahit, a Mediterranean/Middle Eastern-styled pop music. The remaining
portions of the book – Parts II, III and IV – are largely devoted to these three musical
genres, respectively, and to the musical genres that helped shape them and competed
with them.

The songs of SLI contain nationalistic lyrics in Hebrew with music adapted
primarily from the styles of Yiddish, Polish and Russian folk songs. In their chapters
on SLI, the authors effectively challenge many of the suppositions of earlier
scholarship, even their own. They point out that although SLI is currently viewed as
Israel’s folk music, it was originally conceived as popular music, and its repertoire
includes songs that were originally cabaret songs, and foreign pop songs with new
Hebrew lyrics. Historically, the prevailing political, cultural and national climate
determined the selection and acceptance of songs into the canon of SLI. Throughout
these periods, however, the authors demonstrate the State’s explicit role in promoting
and controlling the parameters, sound and content of these songs, particularly
through state-produced and sponsored song festivals and the ‘army-made pop’ from
the Israeli army ensembles (lehaqot tvayiot). The book also underscores the delicate
issues that arose when nationalism too successfully pervaded popular music. When
‘Giv’at ha-tahmoshet’ (Ammunition hill) – a dramatic song from the lehaqot tvayiot
that recounts heavy face-to-face combat between Israeli and Jordanian soldiers during
the Six-Day War – topped the Hebrew hit-parade in 1968, radio music editors felt
uncomfortable about such a nationalistic song going down the chart. ‘The solution
they found was to “honourably” remove the song from the chart, without letting it
decline from the number-one slot’ (p. 98).

It was the rise of rock in Israel which transformed SLI into nostalgic ‘folk’ music.
Regev is the foremost expert on Israeli rock, and Part III, ‘Israeli Rock’, draws largely
from his own research. As the book states, ‘“Israeliizing” rock has meant two things:
making rock music in Hebrew, and demonstrating that Israeli rock serves the general
goal of constructing an “authentic” Israeli-Hebrew culture’ (p. 137). Israeli rock has
served as the dominant form of popular music in Israel since the 1980s. The book
highlights the fact that Israeli rock successfully reached this status by proving that it
was first and foremost ‘Israeli’ music and this was largely accomplished through the use of elements of SLI. Those who attained the highest level fame, such as teen idol Aviv Geffen, became stars because they effectively rebelled against certain aspects of Israel’s social realities through anti-establishment lyrics, while staying true to the conventional Israeli soft-rock sound reminiscent of SLI (pp. 165–8).

The book’s final section, ‘Musiqa Mizrahit’ is the authors’ most bold. The past two decades have witnessed a slew of scholarly articles written on the topic of musiqa mizrahit; it is by far the Israeli musical genre most written about by academics from a range of disciplines from within Israel and abroad. Most of this scholarship portrays the Eastern-tinged pop of musiqa mizrahit as a countercultural form of protest that sought to subvert the mainstream European-dominated Israeli hegemony and its Western-oriented music (SLI and Israeli rock). Musiqa mizrahit emerged from working-class Mizrahim (Middle Eastern and North African Jews), and for close to two decades it was denied radio air time. However, Regev and Seroussi cogently argue that the approach utilised by most academics writing about the genre has exaggerated the subversive nature of musiqa mizrahit, for ‘Political subversion or cultural rebellion were not, and are not, at the forefront of the agenda of most producers, performers, and consumers of musiqa mizrahit’ (p. 195). The authors attribute this heavily politicised scholarship to AZIT, musiqa mizrahit’s highly organised lobby, which attracted and perhaps manipulated scholars who had specific social and political agendas; AZIT’s version of the historical discrimination against musiqa mizrahit seemed to fit the cookie-cutter model of hegemony and resistance. According to the authors, this situation resulted in an oversimplification of a highly nuanced and complex subject. Part IV provides both an extremely informative and provocative analysis of the research on musiqa mizrahit to date. Readers will also enjoy the short profiles in all three sections of the book on the most noteworthy Israeli divas and stars of SLI, rock, and musiqa mizrahit.

The work’s only weakness is that if one is not at all familiar with Israeli music, comprehending or imagining what the many Israeli musical genres sound like may be unfeasible since there is very little description of the music itself. Yet given the diversity and breadth of the musical styles covered, attempting to fully flesh out each one would perhaps have proven quite arduous for both the authors and the readers. A companion CD would have been an excellent tool to help readers hear for themselves, as the authors describe, the way in which each Israeli musical style that emerged over the years dialogued with its predecessors. In lieu of such a CD, however, the reader will find the Discography citations in the back of the book useful.

By and large, this book represents a decidedly impressive and important contribution for scholars interested in music, Israeli studies, culture, media and nationalism. Furthermore, Regev and Seroussi have achieved the difficult task of authoring a stellar work of scholarship accessible enough for non-academics to enjoy as well.

Galeet Dardashti

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In the past decade or so, ethnomusicology, as a discipline, has been undergoing some notable changes. Not only has it begun to turn its attention to the popular musics of the areas of the world it tends to study, but it has also begun to employ its particular methods to address the music of Europe. On the surface, this book (the first in the series *Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities*) looks to be part of this development but, in practice, I don’t think it is. There is always a problematic divide between ‘popular’ and ‘traditional’ musics, but this collection is far more concerned with the latter, and is entirely unconcerned with recorded music. It also spends a lot of its time in North America, with aspects of a Celtic diaspora and, since North Americans tend to equate ‘Celtic’ to ‘Irish’, with Irish musics. Let me start elsewhere, then.

Desi Wilkinson discusses the *fest noz* tradition in Breton music, focusing on the particular construction of professionalism available to musicians working within this tradition, due to the unusual way the French social security enables them to support themselves. As an occasional beneficiary of this system himself, Wilkinson makes a strong case for the benefits of its adoption elsewhere. Indeed, although Wilkinson is both actor and reporter here, the only individual musician whose work is discussed at length is Welshman John Cale, in Dai Griffiths’ chapter (at least, the chapter’s *raison d’être* is his determined construction of Cale as Welsh). Griffiths reads Cale positively as a model of a modernistic approach, largely by way of Paul Gilroy. Griffiths parades a deep knowledge of Cale’s output, while his focus on how songs end raises interesting questions about the nature of performance under modernity.

The two essays on aspects of Scots music are unfortunately far more mundane. First, Jerry Cadden discusses the roles of composers and arrangers in working for Scots Pipe Band competitions asking what, in this environment, the term ‘ensemble’ actually means. Then, Peter Symon converses with Stan Reeves about educating Scots in their own musical traditions. A strange article this, almost devoid as it is of commentary. Indeed, in neither of these articles are questions of Celticism raised, while the nature of the ‘Celtic’ is very much the topic of Caroline Bithell’s chapter. She, however, discusses musicians in Corsica, and of the features – to do with music, identity, prehistory – through which Corsicans draw analogies (or perhaps more) between themselves and ‘Celts’.

We find ourselves perhaps closer to the centre of the debate in the two essays on Irish music. Scott Reiss argues that categories of ‘Irish traditional’ and ‘Celtic’ need not be mutually exclusive, by way of Appadurai’s much trodden landscapes. He pursues his argument in both abstract and concrete terms, focusing the latter on two events in the mid 1990s which crystallised opinion. Indeed, in identifying the origins of the contemporary focus on the Celtic, he sees it as a postmodern label, as identifying an imagined community. However, the musicians articulated by Fintan Vallely’s chapter seem much more an inhabited community. Vallely’s polemic, which neatly problematises notions of crossover, takes the side of those who, in the events Reiss refers to, chose to defend notions of tradition and purism. Here, at least, we get a sense of dialogue, a sense that there are musicians ‘out there’ to some of whom some people would apply the label ‘Celtic’, and the reasons why such labels are, and are not, controversial. For me, this potential debate is the most valuable part of the book.
Other outposts of Celticism are addressed – Graeme Smith looks at the incorporation of the didjeridu into the music of Irish Australians (without really addressing whether these Irish are Celts), while Johanna Devlin Trew explores music amongst the emigrant Irish community in Ottawa Valley. Timothy Taylor, in a thoughtful afterword, addresses the (non-commodified) nature of Celtic music today, but without proposing any summative conclusions. And in this, I suppose, I encapsulate my response to the book. Interesting as individual chapters are and, potentially exciting as the Reiss/Vallely discussion could become, a reader will probably come away with the sense that ‘Celtic music’ might, or might not, be a useful label, but without really knowing why. The book certainly raises questions, and avoids the pat answers to questions of identity and location provided by the growing number of popularisations of the field currently available, but fails (for me) to redeem the promise set up by the editors’ introduction. And, if you haven’t heard the music under discussion, then this isn’t the place to start. The book is subtitled ‘music at the global fringe’, but that’s not what it’s about. With the exception of the music of John Cale, we get no sense here of how the music sounds or how it feels to hear it – I think it should have been subtitled ‘musicians at the global fringe’, since it is the musicians themselves who seem to energise this collection, much more than the results of their endeavours.

Allan Moore
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*Satchmo: The Lewis Armstrong Encyclopaedia* is the first detailed encyclopaedic study of the person who many consider to be the most influential musician in Jazz, or indeed twentieth century popular music. A true cultural icon, Armstrong was the major instigator of the development of swing, popular song vocal technique, instrumental virtuosity, and contributed enormously toward the general acceptance of jazz as an art form. This publication is consequently a welcome and unique addition to the present Armstrong catalogue, which includes numerous biographical studies, two autobiographies, and solo transcriptions.

Organised alphabetically, Meckna discusses in detailed, yet user-friendly format anything and everything related to Armstrong. The subject matter ranges from more established aspects of the Armstrong canon, such as early influences (Boldon, p. 41; Ory, p. 232; Oliver, pp. 226–8; Morton, pp. 212–13), Hot Fives (p. 143), innovative style (pp. 307–9), critics (Davis, p. 74; Baldwin, pp. 24–5), and civil rights activities (pp. 60–1), to more trivial subject areas such as Woody Allen’s quoted virtues of ‘Potato Head Blues’ from his 1979 movie *Manhattan* (p. 4). Of particular interest are the detailed entries regarding Armstrong’s recorded output, where alongside a brief synopsis of individual pieces, the author has cross-referenced a selection of supplementary versions that are available on CD in Appendix 1 (for example, twenty of the fifty or more versions of ‘Basin St Blues’), detailing album title, catalogue number, release date, track list, performers and a concise synopsis. Considering the
explicit detail throughout the publication, I am confused as to why only approximately twenty per cent of the available albums on CD are documented. Although it may not have been possible to comment on all recordings, it would have been beneficial to catalogue the remaining eighty per cent for reference purposes, in addition to advising on accessing the supplementary material. Additional appendices include a useful chronology, a complete inventory of his movies (which includes cartoons, documentaries, ‘soundies’ and televised broadcasts), and a recommended webography.

Obviously a devout enthusiast, Meckna has to be commended for his systematic treatment of the subject matter, although comments regarding Armstrong’s anticipation of Rap (p. 71), and as ‘the most immediately recognisable voice of the twentieth century’ (p. 271) are possibly extending his legacy too far. Not always prevalent in popular music-related encyclopaedias, the inclusion of a comprehensive index is a useful addition, simplifying the process of locating specific discussions within numerous entries.

Although not solely written as an academic text, The Lewis Armstrong Encyclopaedia is a highly recommended conduit of further research, and will be of interest to scholars, fans, critics and practitioners. Detailed music-analytical content throughout its 432 pages is sparse, and may have been improved by cross-referencing an additional appendix that further examined what made his style so unique. However, it is accepted that encyclopaedic authoring has a responsibility to focus upon established facts, leaving potentially polemical analysis to more appropriate mediums. The information included is still extremely comprehensive, and includes numerous recommended recordings/publications facilitating more detailed research.

In summary, I expect this publication will become required reading for researchers interested in Armstrong’s substantial legacy and the history of New Orleans jazz. Rather than produce another biography, Meckna has sensibly and successfully captured a unique position within the ‘Satchmo’ canon. A thoroughly enjoyable read.

Paul Carr
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