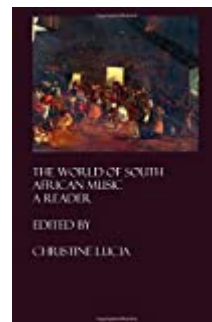




Christine Lucia, ed. *The World of South African Music: A Reader*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005. xlv + 367 pp. \$79.99 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-904303-36-7.



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Historicizing South African Music

Christine Lucia, who is professor and chair of music at the University of the Witwatersrand, has compiled and edited a collection of writings by travel writers, anthropologists, musicologists, and other commentators on South African music. These writings span about two hundred years of South Africa's recorded history from the early nineteenth century to the present. They are arranged chronologically in four sections: part 1 is headed "Imperialism and Modernism" and covers the most extensive period from 1806 to the 1930s; part 2 is entitled "Apartheid and Musicology" and includes pieces from the 1940s to the 1980s; the selection of writings in part 3 falls under the rubric of "Music and Social Transformation" and samples writings from the late 1980s to mid-1990s; and part 4, called "A New South Africa," has a selection of writings from the mid-1990s to 2004. The preference for a chronological rather than, say, a thematic structure stems in part from Lucia's expressed wish to avoid being seen to impose a narrative framework on the material. As commendable as this may be, it does mean that there is a danger that the chosen readings may not be adequately contextualized. This volume falls between these two stools.

Whilst not exactly spoiled for choice given the relative paucity (especially in the earlier periods) and uneven quality of writing, Lucia has assiduously tracked down a fairly extensive range of diverse sources. Altogether there are 61 short and judiciously edited readings in the volume. Some are already well known and were presumably chosen for their frequency of citation, whereas other more ephemeral sources are rescued from relative obscurity. Whatever Lucia's intentions, there can be no doubt that the very act of selecting certain readings rather than others amounts to a process of canonization. Consequently, the body of readings will probably be treated as a representative survey of the historiography of South African music.

So what are the imperatives informing this project? What is its rationale? In the introduction, Lucia enumerates three criteria for the inclusion of the extracts in the reader. These are that the pieces deal directly with music; provide space for marginalized voices of those previously excluded by their race, gender, etc.; and make amends for the previous underrepresentation of certain musical styles. The first criterion allows for a focus on

music rather than context and enables the inclusion of numerous examples of musical notation and lyrics. So the pieces in this volume tend to be chiefly concerned with musical composition, instrumentation, vocalization, etc. Indeed, some of the readings require a fair degree of familiarity with technical musical concepts and terms and presuppose that readers will themselves be musicologists or music students. In pursuit of the second criterion, Lucia manages to provide some space for marginalized voices. For instance, the item by accomplished Zulu composer, teacher and choral conductor Reuben Caluza represents a member of the African educated elite discussing musical influences and the changing traditions of indigenous music. Occasionally we hear the voices of performers such as Dollar Brand (also known as Abdullah Ibrahim). But most of the voices are those of scholars offering an appreciative professional understanding of their fields of musical expertise rather than from an “insider’s” experiential perspective. However, the sheer diversity and range of sources means that the extracts provide little more than an introduction to South Africa’s vast array of musical styles and genres.

With respect to the third criterion, Lucia notes the reification of the perception that “popular or traditional ‘Black’ music might sometimes seem to represent South African music as a whole” (p. xli). This tendency is evident in entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001) and the *Rough Guide to World Music* (1994). I was acutely aware of and tried to make amends for this when writing on South African music for *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Popular Culture* (2007). But Lucia’s own selection of texts for her reader does not provide much of a corrective for styles or musical idioms that are underrepresented in the extant literature. Notwithstanding the relatively rich coverage of twentieth-century popular music (including African or Saffrojazz), there are still notable omissions. There are numerous extracts relating to the syncretism of Christian hymnody and African choral traditions but nothing on South Africa’s most commercially successful genre, gospel. Apart from a brief mention of the revue “Wait a Minim,” there is a complete absence of readings on white (including Afrikaans) popular music. And while Martin Scherzinger makes reference to *kwaito* in his piece devoted to the globalization of South African music (p. 320), this new hybrid style consumed primarily by black urban youths deserves more than passing mention. So these and other lacunae mean that the reader is far from comprehensive. It is the type of collection that readers are more likely to dip into from time to time than read from

cover to cover. As a primer rather than a guide, it is unlikely to be prescribed for courses in South African music history and musicology.

Lucia’s introductory essay makes some telling comments about the past and present states of musicological scholarship in South Africa. She points to the limitations inherent in the pieces penned by pioneers in the field of South African ethnomusicology that are included in the text. So, for instance, Hugh Tracey, who expended much of his energies during his travels in sub-Saharan Africa in making field recordings of what he believed was “traditional” music, comes in for some criticism. Tracey’s project was premised on an understanding of identity that regards traditions and cultures as hermetically sealed entities that exist in time warps. As Lucia indicates (p. xxv), such an essentialist approach overstates binaries such as traditional-modern and urban-rural, and tends to overlook the extent of cultural exchange that has occurred throughout sub-Saharan Africa, as well as the impact of two-way conversation between global and the region’s popular musics. Lucia notes that David Rycroft was one of the first South African scholars to research and re-evaluate urban African music (p. xxxii). The current crop of musicologists has largely rejected the essentialism that characterized so much of the writing of their predecessors and has problematized notions such as “tradition” and “authenticity” in the (South) African musical context. Those who have been influenced by the cultural studies paradigm apropos their understanding of popular culture are well represented in this volume. Whilst their more extensive writings reflect a concern with social history and the consumption of musical genres, the excerpts included here tend to focus on its production and performance.

South Africanness is contested and there is considerable debate about what constitutes “South African music.” While Lucia does not engage directly with these issues, she recognizes that South African identities are constantly being constructed and that the country’s musical genres are subject to constant renewal and transformation. If music reflects something of the changing nature of South African society, then this volume amounts to an attempt to historicize developments in its music. As such, *The World of South African Music* makes a valuable contribution to the field of (ethno)musicology. But it is difficult to know exactly who its intended readers are. And given its prohibitive cost, I would not necessarily recommend it as an entry point or way into the world of South African music.

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