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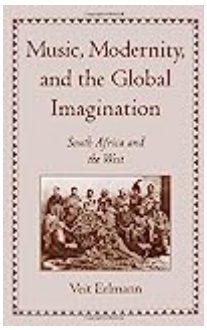

Veit Erlmann. *Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. 312 pp. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-512367-8.

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This study serves to illustrates the proposition that globalisation is not simply a one-way process, but that Africa and the West are engaged in a 'long conversation'; a dialogue which has lasted for more than a century. This interaction has shaped a 'global imagination' which is determined by way of the articulation of interests, languages, styles and images; an epistemological symbiosis between (South) African and Western modernities. According to Erlmann (p. 4) the term 'global imagination' denotes the means by which people shift the contexts of their knowledge and endow phenomena with significance beyond their immediate realm of personal experience. Musical forms of the global imagination allow cultural mediation. Erlmann elaborates as follows:

Unlike any other aspect of mass culture, music organizes social interaction in ways that that are no longer determined by the primacy of locally situated practice and collectively maintained memory. The new role of music in global culture is based on the fact that music no longer signifies something outside of itself, a reality, the truth. Instead, music becomes a medium that mediates, as it were, mediation. In other words, music in global culture, by dint of a number of significant shifts in production, circulation and consumption of musical sounds, functions as an interactive social context, a conduit for other forms of interaction, other socially mediated forms of appropriation of the world (p. 6).

For Erlmann, then, music is akin to a universal language because it is not bound by time-space relationships, and this is a distinguishing feature of modernity.

Erlmann dates the beginning of the global age and the onset of modernity to the 1890s. This periodisation provides a rather arbitrary framework for the structure of the book which is somewhat problematical. The first part deals with two tours made by black South African choirs to England and the USA in the early 1890s. The narratives of the events form the substance of the first five chapters and provide some connections between the chapters and hence some coherence. However, the thread between the first and the second part of the book is rather more tenuous despite a bridging chapter which argues for continuities between the late colonial and postcolonial worlds. And the subject matter of the second part is also rather more diverse. It purports to focus on a series of engagements by the *isicathamiya* (Zulu a capella) group Ladysmith Black Mambazo (LBM) and the international music industry. But certain sections make no reference to LBM whatsoever. Although connections are made throughout the individual chapters, they read like a collection of discrete articles. Erlmann would like to believe that this set of examples is 'fairly representative' and enables him 'to address a series of broader theoretical issues related

to the study of culture in the postcolonial world' (p.10). Whilst the selection of representative examples could be construed as a form of reification, they are generally instructive. Indeed, the book is suffused with interesting insights and Erlmann makes useful interventions in various musicological/anthropological debates such as the nature of appropriation in cross-cultural borrowing, and whether the notion of authenticity is a useful one in furthering understanding of the issues involved.

Erlmann's theoretical approach is eclectic. Discourse analysis is employed by Erlmann in the examination of (auto)biographical writings, travel writings, the notation and content of hymns, spirituals and other musical texts. He subjects these texts to 'deconstruction', in order to analyse the manner of, and the conditions affecting, their construction from prevailing discourses. This is augmented by semiology - the study of signs and symbols - in the analysis of sound and video recordings, as well as musical performances. For instance, Erlmann's analysis of the performance of LBM for Paul Simon's *Graceland* album, Tug Yourgrau's play *The Song of Zulu*, and Michael Jackson's video *Thriller* all, in their different ways, show how meaning of these texts is conveyed through musical codes. But Erlmann is equally concerned with the consideration of the musical context, with social process, class, gender, ethnic divisions, historical changes that make meaning possible. Thus he moves beyond the conventional musicologist's privileging of the text and its formal properties and breaches the theoretical divide between structuralism and post-structuralism.

What are we to make of Erlmann's claim that 'musicology could have only emerged in relation to colonial encounters' (p. 8)? That it is only over against the Other that Western society can define itself and its cultural forms? If musicology is a mode of knowledge about (primarily) western musical forms, does it necessarily define itself in contradistinction to the study of the musical practices of pre-modern societies? And, if so, what are the implications for ethnomusicology? Can the musical texts of literate societies only be understood in relation to those with oral traditions? Will the study of musical styles in their cultural (read traditional) context become obsolete? The main area of study in ethnomusicology has been music in the oral tradition, usually in non-western settings or of indigenous people in relation to western societies. The methodology of ethnography and participant observation which has involved considerable fieldwork and the making of field recordings was pioneered by figures like Alan Lomax in the USA and Hugh Tracey in Sub-Saharan Africa. Does this mean that work of this nature is virtually redundant in the postcolonial world? Certainly, pristine societies have all but vanished from the face of the earth and all musical production and distribution operates within the circuits of the capitalistic economy as there are no longer communities unaffected by global interdependence.

Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination is in many respects a profound book which repays careful (re)reading. However, the language tends to weigh it down for it is at times a dense, sometimes obtuse and occasionally jargon-ridden, work. It is an academic text and definitely not for the casual reader who might be interested in South African or 'world music'. Thus its readership is likely to be rather limited.

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