Australian Women’s Contemporary Music Inc.

Regarding this as a new and highly regressive intensification of sexist marketing techniques, Gordon responded to the complaint by using her media connections to get press coverage of the issue. Jon Casimir of the Sydney Morning Herald was one journalist who responded and wrote a piece which featured an interview with Gordon. As Gordon argued there,

'It’s a question of talent versus sexual marketing. OK, the industry is very much based on sex, but there is a difference between sexual exploitation and commercial sensuality, where the artists have control over their image'.

This measured and analytical approach has allowed Gordon to come to be seen as an informed industry spokesperson (rather than ‘just’ a campaigning feminist). Her reputation also allows her to serve as a more general expert within the media. She was, for instance, one of the featured interviewees on ABC TV’s Lateline special on Madonna (broadcast 20/10/92) where she contributed to the controversial matters discussed in the show as the representative of an organised political group.

The bastions of male power within the industry are now being challenged on two levels. Firstly, there is the area of training and performance opportunities, which AWCM has addressed over the last four years through its workshop and festival projects. Secondly, there is the popular critical discourse of the mainstream media in which AWCM have intervened to raise the profile of gender issues in rock music. In this regard, the production of Apocalypse’s I’m Your Venus, a documentary on women in Australian rock due to be screened by the ABC in 1993, is an important step in broadening awareness and debate. But despite such initiatives it is unlikely that institutional sexism in the industry will crumble in the short term and likely that the AWCM and allied enterprises will continue to exist as ‘particular characteristics of intervention and regulation in the music industry’ (Breen:70) for some time to come. Any study of the Australian industry which ignores considerations of gender-biases and sexism is missing important structural factors and exacerbating the problem rather than helping find solutions.

ENDNOTES

3 Cited by Gordon in interview with the author.

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THREE DECADES OF AUSTRALIAN POPULAR MUSIC


MICHAEL FLINT

The cover itself is a neat iconography of the contents of this volume. Three photographs are presented: at the top, Peter Garrett, at the foot, the face of contemporary Aboriginal music, a sepia image of the past-present. Linking the two, frozen in an exuberant leap between them, is her Kylieness herself. Here then, are three aspects of Australian music: the earnest ‘authentic’ pub-rock derived, the ethnic-based ‘roots’ stratum of contemporary World Music, and the cheerfully-commercial (and hence, much-derided) dance-oriented pop.

This is a collection of thirteen essays, with an introduction by the editor, the material being divided broadly into two subsections, ‘Institutions and Contexts’ and ‘Generations of Change’. The writers cover particular aspects such as (to single out a few of the essays) Aboriginal rock (John Castles), record labels and associated power relations (Marcus Breen), radio programming (John Picton), rock music on television (Sally Stockbridge), women in Australian rock (Vivien Johnson), Australian music video (Philip Hayward). There are also essays on Midnight Oil (Simon Steggles), Kylie Minogue (Idena Rex), and dance music (Andrew Murphy and Edward Scheer). The only real misfire is Craig McGregor’s account of the fifties and sixties, which in its self-reflexiveness is probably of prime interest to any future biographers of the author. He quotes himself at length twice, and of the four books cited in his bibliography, three are his own. Incidentally, although he lists the film The Wild One as dating from 1953, most sources give 1954. (p.98)

It is essentially a pluralist collection rather than a unified front with a recognisable party line, although all the contributors...
share an ultimate concern with the Australianness of their material: as Hayward points out in his introduction, the book’s aim is to analyse the material within a national context, and also to go beyond the usual discussions of the male mainstream of rock. Hayward comments that popular music has become internationalised in its styles and contents, and this has been seen as ‘tantamount to anAmericanisation of global youth’ (p.2), yet at the same time, he draws attention to the lack of homogeneity of global culture despite the internationalising processes of products and marketing. What then of ‘national culture’, specifically Australian popular music? Despite the Australian bands Hayward notes as having had some international success (Bea Gees, Little River Band, INXS, Midnight Oil), he admits that ‘there have been few international attempts to promote a national musical identity for Australian Rock.’ (p.4) It is worth adding, however, that of the examples he cites, only Midnight Oil are distinctly Australian-sounding in any identifiable way. Peter Garrett does try not to sing in international-speak, and the lyrical allusions are often specifically local. The sad fact is, the Australian music industry and its radio and TV outlets are still largely geared towards promoting safe homogenised Americana such as Diesel and Baby Animals.

Hayward acknowledges the importance of imported traditional music, such as Irish folk and American country and western, but notes that unlike the United States, Australia ‘appears to have witnessed little in the way of spontaneous development of indigenous music styles’ by its immigrant groups. (p.6) So what is ‘Australian’ music anyway? In North America, as Hayward recognises, musical styles have been cross-pollinating for a considerable time to produce what were recognisably ‘American’ genres in this century (country and western, blues, gospel, soul, and eventually rock and roll itself). It is also worth adding that Britain, with the exception of collectors such as Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams, seemed to have turned its back on its own ethnology from the early years of this century, and adopted American popular music genres wholeheartedly as and when they arrived, then began re-exporting them. What did Australia have of its own before pop, before rock? There was a largely mythologised national consciousness of the First Settlers and their music, which was represented as being almost entirely of Irish derivation: unlike Britain, then, Australia ‘remembered’, albeit vaguely. Until comparatively recently, the main popular ‘Australian’ genre seems to have been an adaptation of American country music. Australian country music, and it became very clearly Australian, was and is a vital, continuing force here, and has earned its right to be recognised as this, but unfortunately it is still regarded by many as an ‘unauthentic’ borrowed form: it isn’t rock, and rock is seen to have the credibility of being a genuine international language (whatever that means).

It is noteworthy that in his account of Aboriginal rock, John Castles discusses the heavy influence of country and western models in a number of recordings of Aboriginal musicians in recent years, to the extent that this influence is now part of a tradition, where ‘Aboriginality comes across not in the song structure itself but in the lyric themes and in the ‘grain’ of the voice.’ (p.28)

The derivative history of Australian popular music is reflected in advertising: when songs are used in commercials, they are invariably of British or American origin: obviously, the desired catchet is not possible when an Australian sees, say, a TV commercial featuring local 60s or 70s music. The soft-focus mist of nostalgia is evoked best by, to name current examples, the Turtles, or the Lovin’ Spoonful. The signs of advertising are telling us something about how Australians see their own musical past. Australian rock material seems to be regarded as most suitable for football promotion ads, but even then only recently, as Jimmy Barnes has joined the all-Australian girl Tina Turner on her Simple the Best commercial, and Jo Zep and the Falcons’ Hit and Run has now replaced Thin Lizzy’s The Boys are Back in Town.

The problem of Australian pop music, then, implicit in the essays in this collection, is that, as Graeme Turner observes, most of it ‘does not originate here’. (p.12) As a telling illustration of this, Turner points out that ‘most of us could recall a dozen songs about small towns in the US before we could ratttle off one tune which mentions Sydney, Melbourne or Perth’ (p.12) Turner writes of Australian popular music as being ‘Australian’ simply because that is its geographic/cultural location’ (p.13), arguing that it is not possible to locate an indigenous musical style in the mainstream or at the margins here, because of the American and British dominance of styles and in the market itself. Indeed, it is difficult to argue against this, at least at present. One of his conclusions is therefore that the most appropriate way to deal with Australian music as a national form is ‘through its industrial structures and practices’ (p.14), so that whatever the ultimate origins of the music (such as America) it becomes Australian because of and through its functions and uses here. Another important point Turner stresses is that Australian rock culture is suburban, and is characterised by ‘the centrality of the suburban pub as the primary location for performance and consumption’ (p.22), and it is interesting that an awareness of this aspect is implicit in both Vivien Johnson’s examination of women in Australian rock, and Idena Rex’s account of Kylie Minogue.

A number of essays in this book reveal a healthy awareness of a number of aspects of the Australian music industry itself as a mediating force which selects and disseminates its products. Marcus Breen provides a detailed discussion of record labels, their ownership, and their orientation, which has some optimism in his view of the position of independent labels. Independents, he shows, whether competing with or joining the majors, are still an important creative force, still providing what the majors cannot. At the same time, the majors are consciously improving their image by being seen to promote local talent, despite the fact that, as Breen acutely observes, only acts such as Midnight Oil, INXS, Icehouse, etc. really interest the majors, since they are the main sources of income. An example that could have been used here arises from the debate over the price of CDs in Australia, which brought out much sainit protestation of altruism from majors, who claimed they were using their returns to develop new talent, despite a fair amount of persuasive evidence to the contrary. This is more usually the claim of independents, and Breen shows that they tend to propagate themselves as the keepers of the flame, offering, according to his quotation from Larrink Records, ‘real music’ for ‘the more intelligent edge of the market’, thereby revealing their high self-evaluation. At the same time, though, Breen believes that the role of the independents remains important. As he concludes: ‘The fact that the majors are keen to associate with them and incorporate them into their corporate structure is a reflection of the creative bankruptcy that permeates the majors.’ (p.53)

Whereas Breen’s view is ultimately optimistic, John Potts’ essay on ‘Heritage Rock’ on radio outlines what is a fairly depressing prospect for the airplay of new music, as commercial radio stations compete on battle fronts of nostalgia. He points out that their ‘heritage’ programming is heavily Seventies-based, with a well-defined set of Australian content (Cold Chisel, for example). What does he not stress, however, is an even more restrictive aspect: the selected Heritage Rock is (almost) always the same: in Sydney, 2MMM’s ‘classic triple plays’ are relentlessly predictable once a year or the artist is announced. Usually, the Animals means House of the Rising Sun,
Daddy Cool means Eagle Rock, while John Farnham absolutely never means Sadie the Cleaning Lady on Fridays Kind of Monday. The Sixties and Seventies are, as Potts argues, very selectively strewn through the Heritage or ‘classic’ filter: this explains why the unfashionable Bee Gees are never part of the ‘classic rock’ pantheon. Even Men at Work would seem to have fallen in favour as classic Oz Rock. Radio ratings incurese the fear of the new into station programmers, who as Potts points out, depend on advertising for their revenue, and hence, on listeners who stay to listen. The result, as he says, is that ‘Heritage Rock is a remarkably homogeneous sound’ (p.56) designed to keep listeners comfortable and protected from ‘a type of music whose very difference jars the continuum of sound’. (p.57)

The recent 2MMM listener survey included in a Sunday newspaper (obviously far too late for consideration by Potts) strengthens his argument in the way its selection of ‘classic’ songs for listener evaluation is precisely restricted to exactly the kind of material he discusses. Listeners can apparently choose their diet of music, but only from what appears on the menu. When was the last time you heard, say, Anarchy in the UK, or Fernando on FM? The Sex Pistols and ABBA represent the fashion extremes of the past which Seventies-centred radio strives very hard to avoid.

The extremes of ideology and credibility within the industry are taken up in separate essays on Kylie Minogue and Midnight Oil. Idena Rex argues that Kylie Minogue has been downgraded in Australia because she is a female engaged in a new-unfashionable genre (disco), so that she can be labelled as a disco bimbo, and also because she did not come through the recognised Oz Rock Finishing School: the pub scene. Rex does not point out that her recordings have been effectively suppressed by many, if not all, FM stations (self-appointed bastions of rock credibility, perhaps), just as have those of Jason Donovan and Craig McLachlan. The reason is ultimately the same: these performers are not seen as having musical authenticity or credibility because of their soap opera backgrounds. Sexism has little to do with it here; it is a question of the perceived degree of authenticity of the performers. Rex over-argues that ‘Kylie Minogue’s basic thesis that she can be anything she wants to be (p.157), but surely this depends on whether she is actually allowed to be anything at all. By contrast, Midnight Oil, whose career and politics are discussed by Simon Steggals, can seemingly do no wrong. Their credentials are impeccable: a solid apprenticeship (although, as Rex points out, the career of a soapie star is an equally solid training-ground: it’s just not recognised by the music industry, and worthy ideals. Nobody expects Kylie Minogue to express ideals, and however sincere her much-deniered expression of sympathy for the endangered rhinoceros might have been, it didn’t do her any good, as disco bimbos aren’t allowed to have serious opinions. This is but one example of how Kylie Minogue is apparently strait-jacketed into fun images, despite Rex’s claim that everything was possible for her. Maybe for Madonna, but not for Kylie, who seems to be doomed to be unable to shock anyone even by revealing that she experimented with illegal chemicals.

In discussing Midnight Oil, Simon Steggals is not alone in his view that criticism of the practices and values of the band is (some- how) unfair, and he supports his case with appropriate illustrations of their idealism. He therefore rules out any kind of ideology-based criticism that can be directed at Midnight Oil, such as the contradictions inherent in their environment’s consumption of rock and roll, and in their songbook much be printed on recycled paper while the band eat electrical energy with each performance, and commit their musical output to plastics which will last even longer than the Third Reich dreamed of lasting. Steggals does not mention Peter Garrett’s unfounded defence of the music industry’s CD prices in Australia, which was somewhat weakened by his admission that he himself didn’t buy discs there. This is not cited as an example of a ‘practical critique’ of ‘the culture industry’. It seems that good intentions are enough to ensure canonisation in the case of the Oils: however, it is useful to consider a better counter-example than Kylie Minogue, the case of INXS, who can (almost) do no right, as evidenced by the volley of attacks over the Concert for Life in Sydney. Whatever the truth of INXS’s respective ideologies, actions or mishaps of the Oils and INXS, it does appear that a double standard exists to protect the one and revile the other whatever each of them does: it seems to be all a question of credibility, which apparently can be won or lost over the course of a career.

The account of the dance scene in Sydney by Andrew Murpnie and Ed Scheer, like Rex’s account of Kylie Minogue, focuses on an aspect of music which tends to be overlooked by custodians of rock culture. Again, the starting point is the overseas origin of the music itself, and they remark that what was ‘a sub-cultural ‘noise’ overseas’ was often reconstructed as mainstream ‘signal’ by the time it was imported into Australia’ (p.172-3). The annual Sleaze Ball of the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gals is identified as the prime example of what they term ‘dance-as-subversion’, but at the same time they note that gay dance culture is distinct not because of the music, but because of ‘the fact of living gay.’ (p.173) Nevertheless, they argue, inner city dance culture has absorbed elements of gay dance, notably ‘a movement away from dance as a way of pick-up to the emphasis on dance as an individual and creative pleasure in itself.’ (p.174) Their detailed analytical account of the development, spread, and survival of the dance party in Sydney is ultimately this volume’s most ‘academic’ essay, in its overt use of cultural studies discourse, but it is difficult to see how this aspect of popular music and its consumption could have been discussed as a cultural signifier without such an approach.

In a review such as this it seems manifestly unfair to single out a few of the essays in this volume for commentary, and to virtually ignore others. Sally Stockbridge’s account of rock music on Australian television, for example, is a concise history of the subject, from the grisly days of miming to overseas hits, to what she sees as a current focus on ‘the creative and independent aspects of contemporary aspects’ (p.84) in programs such as The Noise, Rage, and Rock Around the World, which she notes, either are or were on the two non-commercial TV channels, the ABC or SBS. Editor Philip Hayward’s essay on music video and the Bicentenary reads different music videos in semiotic terms against the background text of the Bicentenary itself, and he shows how their meanings can be constructed from this juxtaposition of intersexualities. His final comments on the ironies of the appearance of an excerpt from Yothu Yindi’s Treaty video among the token exotica on the 1991 MTV Awards are to be savoured in his own words rather than summarised here, as a culmination of Aboriginal history, culture and music is put in its assigned place by the TV industry.

As should be apparent, the diversity of views in this collection means that different parts of it will be of interest to different readers: rather like the music. Each essay has its own bibliography, and there is an index to the book as a whole. There seems to be a problem with names here and there: for example, the La Da’s shouldn’t have an ‘h’ anywhere, and Youssou N’Dour’s name gets slightly mangled. A book by Glenn A. Baker quoted at the opening of Vivien Johnson’s ‘contribution’ is apparently not identified in the bibliography. These are minor irritations, however, and do not detract from this volume’s value as a contribution to the study of popular music, how it means and how it is used. If we are finally no closer to defining what distinguishes Australian rock, the problems of definition are set out here in these essays.

MICHAEL FLINT
Oliver, P. (ed) (1991)

In his book There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack, Paul Gilroy puts forward the contested notion of a diaspora of black culture within which the hybrid, disparate forms of black music in Britain, both African and Asian, can be situated:

Black Britain defines itself crucially as part of a diaspora. Its unique cultures draw inspiration from those developed by black populations elsewhere. In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctively British experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and re-made. (Gilroy, 1987:154)

In other words, the music of Steel Pulse and Caron Wheeler, Osibisa and Abdul Tee-Jay, Derek B and the Cookie Crew, even The Young Disciples and Fine Young Cannibals, or Bappi Lahiri and Najma, has a connectedness, in being produced out of black subcultures, which is stronger than its generic or ethnic differences. In what he has labelled an 'anti-anti-essentialist' view, Gilroy posits a centrifugal concept of black music as a 'changing same' which is at least partly the result of oppositional strategies against the indiscriminate pressures of British racism. It is unfortunate that Gilroy's important theoretical work, which places black musics in the context of critiques of racism, capitalism and patriarchy, is not represented or even referred to in this collection of largely empiricist essays by predominantly white ethnomusicologists.

Edited by Paul Oliver, the author of a number of books on Afro-American Blues, Black Music in Britain follows an historical trajectory from Michael Pickering's survey of audience responses to black classical, folk and vaudeville singers who toured Britain in the 1800s to John Baily's survey of Sufi Qawwals in Bradford, which is admirable in confining itself to a local, ethnographic approach - Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan gets nothing more than a passing reference - but not in its failure to connect with a wider global picture. The individual essays describe a wide range of diverse, hybrid musical forms, covering gospel, jazz, calypso, steel bands, African musics (a brisk historical account of African musicians who have been based in Britain since the 1890s by the author of African All Stars, Chris Stapleton), reggae, blues, soul, bhangra and ghazals (an insider's view by Sabita Banerji, who is given more space and scope on the subject in her 1988 article in Popular Music), funk and disco. There is some reference to rap and hip hop, but in general the essays rarely reach beyond sketchy empirical surveys to any engagement with cultural theory. There is also

little attempt to consider the various musics in relation to patterns of migration, changing definitions of ethnicity, or notions of World Music. The result is a collection which lacks cohesion, continuity or critical complexity but provides a series of useful individual reference sources. Oliver's conclusion is indicative of the failure of the book's mosaic-like approach to engage with the complexity of the subject:

It is clear that there is no entity that is 'Black Music', no single definition that will satisfactorily encompass all that the convenient, but ultimately misleading term seems to imply. Even the unity that is implicit in the assumption that 'black music is that which is played by black musicians' is threatened when the performance of popular concert music by Blacks, or the participation of Whites in the playing of musical styles initially developed by Blacks, is considered. (173)

Fine, but if this had been the book's starting point, the individual essays might have had more legs. Oliver claims that the field has been insufficiently researched prior to this book, although it is strange that little or no mention is made by anyone - apart from Anthony Marks in his survey of Afro-American and Caribbean music from 1963-98 - to Dick Hebdige's work on reggae and Caribbean music, or David Toop's on rap and hip hop, or Chris May's numerous articles on reggae and African music in Black Music. As Oliver acknowledges, the book certainly raises more questions than it answers, although I am not sure the questions he articulates are necessarily the right ones:

Are black musicians always conforming in some measure to stereotypes - even when playing to Blacks? If they do not play 'black music', are they regarded as being suspect by their own communities? Is there a black equivalent for 'playing for Whitey'? Are the expectations that, say, Jamaicans play reggae, as much within the culture as outside it? Are black musicians sometimes trapped by black music? (169)

Surely existing work on musicians as diverse as John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix and Living Colour, not to mention Prince and Michael Jackson, has already superseded such interrogations into stereotypes of blackness and black music, and suggested that 'black music' is no longer a tenable entity in musicological terms? Music will always reflect social realities, including racial and ethnic contexts and identities, but musicians can hardly be expected to act as cultural ambassadors for reductive concepts of racial and cultural authenticity.

In a recent article in New Statesman and Society, black British writer Andrea Stuart expresses concern about Michael Jackson's self-deracination in Black or White and the appropriation of black styles by white musicians like Young Black Teenagers and Andrew Strong:

Whites may be able to choose to be black, but we cannot - with a very few monied exceptions - choose to be white. There has probably never been a worse time to be a young black teenager ... Never has the schism between blackness as a style, and blackness as a lived reality been so strong. (NSS 7 Feb 1992:32)

In the light of recent events in LA, Stuart's opposition of style and lived reality is pertinent, and suggests applications to 'black' musics in ways which free it from essentialist constrictions of authenticity. Black musicians' appropriations of white musical styles, forms and even contexts, from Public Enemy's use of Queen to Kev Carmody and Archie Roach's use of country music influences, are about breaking free stylistically from confining notions of ethnicity. This is equally true of black music in Britain from Bhangra remixes to ragga muffin, as
Gilroy concludes in his survey of black musical influences in There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: black British cultures have been created from diverse and contradictory elements apprehended through discontinuous histories. They have been formed in a field of force between the poles of under- and over-development, periphery and centre. (Gilroy, 1987: 218)

Some of the essays in Black Music in Britain hint at this hybrid diversity and discontinuity, but few explore it beyond a descriptive mapping of disparate historical fields.

TONY MITCHELL


There’s a statement in this book that matters more than any other because it perfectly counters Elvis’s popular unisus and the contemporary world as we have become accustomed to it. ‘Elvis’, says Marcus, ‘dissolved the symbols that had put America together’. Simple enough. But it defines precisely the United States of American experience, rather than the experience of the rest of the world translated through the alien eyes that assume that the American experience belongs to everybody. Elvis, Greil Marcus says, is America.

One argument, prominent among some critics in the postmodern school, suggests that we are increasingly transformed into global co-inhabitants of a planet in which one culture and experience is shared. Greil Marcus seems to be claiming a uniquely American experience for himself and for his Americans. What Australians make of Elvis, what the English or the Swedes or the Japanese make of Elvis is somehow less important. And Marcus is right. He traces Elvis back to the bosom of the American experience in the twentieth century. For about half of this book the richness of Elvis as an icon of cultural identity rises like a Magi out of-the reconstructions of the Marcus word processor.

Scholarship and opinion spin and weave their magic, as the fluent writing engenders enthusiastic reading. Questions appear that resonate with conviction. Marcus interrogates Peter Guralnick’s Highways: Journals and Arrivals of American Musicians, mining it for suggestions about American mythology, placing teasers and revelations that suggest ways of interpretation and analysis that are too rarely examined by the author himself. There are notable, often brilliant passages.

The best writing about American popular music - like the best popular American music itself - reveals hidden but profound connections between styles, performers, communities, races, and historical periods that at first glance seem all but self-contained. (p63)

While this may seem self evident, it is advice for which Marcus is noted. The acknowledgement that good writing has particular analytical responsibilities - does, at times, seem to be underwritten from writers who, if they have ever listened to popular music, seem to find little or no joy in it.

More than questions and good creative writing get a run when Marcus undertakes a demolition of Albert Goldman’s biography Elvis. Forget objective analysis and dispassionate writing here, Marcus simply unloads his passion for American popular culture on Goldman’s unscrupulous publication. While this makes for wonderful reading, the textual critique that Marcus undertakes of Goldman’s book is over-rated. Goldman may be interested in the “cultural genocide” of the “white working-class South” and “the pop world which emerged” in Elvis’s wake, but if Elvis was worth anything at all, his work is done. Greil Marcus is not going to resurrect him, nor is anybody else.

Ultimately, Goldman’s attack is another manifestation of an endless battle between classes and cultures that erupt at various historical conjunctions, especially when a progressive political cultural victory has been won, and needs to be undermined. Elvis was a victory for popular entertainment, creating a new sense of its place in the world. The fact that Elvis ushered in a new era of pop music and consumer marketing seems not to hold much interest for Marcus.

For people familiar with the other texts Marcus has written such as Mystery Train and Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century the attraction is not his academic method. His leitmotif is the loaded statement, the commitment to his cause, his opinion and the fact - exhibited in both the earlier books - that he loves the history of American popular culture as observed in rock and pop music.

What Marcus does in the second half of this book breaks with his earlier approaches. The result is a disappointing pastiche of ideas, observations and opinions from anyone who ever wrote or drew anything about Elvis. It makes for poor reading. I detected an air of media induced neurosis that insisted that Elvis would be revealed in any utterance from anybody. CNN in book form perhaps?

Greil Marcus fans will probably find this to be a disappointing book, especially following Lipstick Traces which was a most inventive rewriting of art/punk/cultural history. Elvis is dead. America thrives. The definitive study of the continuing influence of Elvis Presley is still to be written.

MARCUS BREEN


While both of these textbooks are aimed at 14-16 year olds, their aims and approaches are quite different. Popular Music is an introduction to the main styles and movements of the music which originated in the USA when black African music met and interacted with European folk styles. The progression takes the student from slave work songs through jazz and blues to heavy rock, reggae and disco, taking in country and western, folk and punk along the way. The cultural background is presented as an essential accompaniment to the music. It's a large area, and difficult to condense into a thin school textbook (90 pages), but it's quite accessible and neatly categorised into what amounts to a 'potted history'.

The book presupposes a basic musical literacy and includes recommended listening lists as well as assignments designed to stimulate interest and understanding, not to mention creativity. The tasks vary considerably in their demands. Compare Chapter 2: “Listen to one of the blues albums... and see how many 12-bar versions you can discover”, with Chapter 8: “Compose and record a song with a strange fairy-story or magical lyrics”.

Written musical examples are scant but generally useful as illustrations. Assignment 74 for example shows the rhythmic complexity of The Beat's Hands off she's mine, which is helpful in understanding the syncopation involved in a variety of music with Caribbean influences. Other examples are not so meaningful, such as the illustration of Pete Townsend's chord style on p.56. On its own such a figure would be out of context.

Perfect Beat 07 v1 n2 Jan 1993

Perfect Beat 07 v1 n2 Jan 1993
The focus of Popular Music is essentially on Britain and the USA, yet I feel at least a passing mention could be made of 'World Music', perhaps in the section 'The Future' at the end of the book. Other styles such as Latin, modern African and Indian have all influenced Anglo-based popular music and students could be encouraged to listen more widely. Interaction in music does not have to stop at language borders.

Keynote Plus places the emphasis firmly on musical technique. Each chapter takes a detailed look at a particular written piece of music for understanding or performing, followed up by assignments in composition or performance, with exercises to check understanding. The musical sources are varied and interesting, and all are chosen to teach a particular musical point. As an example, Chapter 9 uses Bridge Over Troubled Waters to illustrate the contrast between major and minor keys. There are a number of classical examples from Bach to Debussy which teach more traditional aspects of theory, side-by-side with King Sunny Ade as an example of Ostino, Martin Carly's Byker Hill showing the relationship of words to music, and Indian music performed by Lata Mangeshkar which illustrates the use of drones. A 'Research' section at the end of each chapter encourages extension work on the aspects dealt with. Musical terminology is explained step-by-step; a glossary is also provided, as well as a time-chart to put the various styles of music into perspective.

I would recommend this as a text for exam students. Musicality is comprehensively covered, and it lends itself readily to adaptation by the teacher. The chapters can be dealt with in any order, and useful but not prescriptive Teacher's Notes are provided in the first section. It is a stimulating text which encourages creativity through a sound understanding of principles.

RODERICK NIelsen


This is a reissue, with no updating, no corrections. The 1378 pages embrace every major genre of popular music, covering, for example, jazz, rock, country, folk, and the overall bias is distinctly Northern hemisphere, though there are entries on better-known aspects of World Music. So much for the good news; now for the bad. To begin with, there are a number of odd omissions. There is, for example, no main entry for Jack Bruce, despite the presence of a relatively substantial entry for Ginger Baker. Alan Stivell, an important pioneer in Celtic and 'roots' music, is totally absent. Some notable producers are included, such as Tony Visconti, while others, such as Nile Rodgers and Giorgio Moroder, are not. There is almost nothing on Australian music, reflecting the book's 'hemisphericism': Slim Dusty and INXS are there, but not Split Enz, Midnight Oil, or Kylie Minogue. Even more serious is the alarming amount of sheer disinformation. We are told, for example, that one of the Byrds' album Younger than Yesterday the drummer is Kevin Kelley, who in fact joined rather later on Sweetheart of the Rodeo; and that George Martin was never given a production credit on an LP sleeve until 1965 (ever looked at any old Beatles LPs? It is true that Stephen Stills missed out on being a Monkee, but it wasn't Mike Nesmith who got the job instead: it was Peter Tork. When Neil Young met Stephen Stills, exactly which of them was in the Squires? The entry here (under Neil Young) is muddled: in fact it was only Young, not both of them.

There is also evidence that song and album titles have been supplied from memory: the entry on Prince manages to distort the album titles in one sentence, and there are numerous other examples. No names or titles can be taken on trust, and there are some very strange manglings: Mike Pindar (sic) of the Moody Blues did not record a solo album called Thomas from Mighty Oaks (spot the errors in this statement alone). There are numerous other casualties among names: producer Lenny Waronker is rechristened Larry. Dates would also seem to be suspect: the year of Sandy Denny's birth is wrong. There are plenty of examples of poor cross-checking: Christy Moore is said to be only on the first two Piaxty albums (which are incorrectly identified), while in the entry on Piaxty he is (correctly) said to be on the first three.

The entries also contain misleading critical comments: Traffic's album John Barleycorn Must Die is certainly not 'folky', and there are many other instances where the contributor's judgement is suspect. The omissions and errors I have noticed are only within my knowledge: a jazz fan, for example, could well find even more horrors. There is still a need for a good reference work in this area, as the Oxford and Faber versions are not nearly so comprehensive, but I'm afraid this just won't do.

MICHAEL FLINT


Andre Previn, the internationally-renowned conductor and prolific composer, has done one helluva lot in his lifetime. After studying at the Paris conservatoire as a youth Previn fled with his family to America. Previn's father took him to the movies to learn English and soon he began composing for radio. At age 17, an MGM talent scout spotted him and he became one of the youngest arrangers in Hollywood, which in this, its heyday, employed an army of musicians. Previn's window on Hollywood's musical life is intriguing.

Every studio had a musical department with its own orchestra. The arrangers, Previn lovingly recalls, had to write in styles to order ranging from Tchaikovsky to Count Basie.

Most of the book is devoted to anecdotes about media moguls, directors, songwriters, stars and great classical artists. This is both exhaustive and exhausting. But there is the odd gem. Igor Stravinsky's only comment on hearing Previn play one of his works was: "you have wonderful fingers". Busby Berkeley created unforgettable sets: Small Town Girl' featured the heroine dancing on a dance floor with thousands of holes through which actors brandished musical instruments in strict rhythm. The studio mogul, Irving Thalburg, in fury, once issued an infamous edict: "From the above date onward, no music in an MGM film is to contain a minor chord" (hence, the title).

Andre has done everything and by the end of the book the reader cannot fail to know it, which is a pity as he is a man of prodigious talent. One further minor quibble: the film Rhapsody starring Elizabeth Taylor, was based "unrecognisably", Previn records, on a 3-volume novel by Henry Handel Richardson. Actually it was not based on Richardson's trilogy, the Fortunes of Richard Mahony, but on an earlier novel, Maurice Guest - equally unrecognisably.

CAROLYN CRAIG