

Review

Ian Peddie, ed. 2011. *Popular Music and Human Rights* (Vol. 1: *British and American Music*; Vol. 2: *World Music*). Burlington, VT: Ashgate. ISBN 978-0-7546-6852-7 (hbk). 206pp/200pp.

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) grants everyone 'the right to freedom of opinion and expression' (art. 19), and the right to freely 'participate in the cultural life of the community' (art. 27) (www.un.org/en/documents/udhr). Does the combination of the two imply that musicians have the right to criticize their governments, their societies, and their communities? Is it important to consider people who use music to express critiques of their societies as a unique category within the wider discipline of ethnomusicology? Many ethnomusicologists study the way music can be used to challenge the powerful and to move the masses. Some frame their work as the critical examination of music as resistance. Others may deride this approach as a misleading, even arrogant, appropriation of power to the musical artist that romanticizes the role of music in culture. Ian Peddie firmly lies in the first category—his 2006 book *The Resisting Muse: Popular Music and Social Protest* made him a pioneer in the study of music as resistance. More recently, Peddie has edited the hefty two-volume Ashgate title *Popular Music and Human Rights*, which is divided between 'British and American Music' (twelve chapters in volume 1), and 'World Music' (eleven chapters in volume 2). Readers will need to decide whether they believe the division is justified. The English-speaking ('British and American') world certainly has had many great musical protestors; however, protesting wars carried out against others who are far from one's comfortable home can hardly be equated to protesting the daily indignities of starvation, torture and dictatorship that takes place in far too much of the majority world.

In any collection of this size, it is necessary to select some chapters to discuss while overlooking others that are equally deserving. The 'British and American Music' volume presents chapters on protest figures such as Billy Bragg, Tori Amos, Willie King, Gil Scott Heron, Bruce Springsteen, and other notable artists. Bragg, in particular, deserves author Keiran Cashell's attention, given Bragg's position in a long history of British folk protest. His role as an ardent supporter for the 1984-

85 miners' strike is detailed as the point of creation where he became an industrial protest folk singer. The fact that the protests did not slow the Thatcherite de-industrialization in the neoliberal world holds an element of sadness. However, Bragg persisted and became an historian 'against the grain' through his use of the British folk tradition.

Deborah Finding's well-written ethnography of Tori Amos's rape-narrative song 'Me and a Gun' brought me to tears. Sexual violence against women is a global human rights issue—one that pervades the worlds of rich and poor alike—and simply speaking up as Amos did (through song) provides a powerful model for young women to communicate their trauma, and, one hopes, heal. At Amos's concerts, a special time and place was created for young women to talk with her about their experiences of abuse and violence. Clearly such public confessionals are a powerful, emotional form of resistance.

The theme of 'speaking out through song' continues with Stephen A. King's study of Willie King and the Liberators. He argues that the ubiquitous 'my baby done mistreat me' blues lyric was a metaphoric frame for denunciation of the white oppressor during a time when blacks could not publically speak about such treatment. Willie King's music became the music of the civil rights movement, and he later continued working for African American cultural arts in rural Alabama—the blues was his tool. Willie King pairs well with the great American griot poet Gil Scott-Heron; rural to the urban, the blues birthing the chanting poetry that laid the foundation for rap. In this chapter, which is penned by editor Peddie, Scott-Heron's song/poem 'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised' is framed as a classic call to action in a time of ferment and social change. Scott-Heron applied his vision widely, acting locally with a global perspective. In a way, he made Willie King's subtlety clear as day, and sent the ideas of liberation to those suffering from injustice in the Caribbean and Africa. He was America's musical Frantz Fanon, a cross between John Coltrane and Amiri Baraka.

Supplementing these pieces on individual performers are chapters on political benefit albums and benefit concerts. I was less taken with these, in part because 'benefits' are often overhyped means for liberals to participate in causes and to assuage aching consciences. Author Neil Nehring points out that musical quality is often sacrificed in themed album samplers, and the concerts following 9/11 and Katrina, in Sam O'Connell's chapter, are arguably 'appropriate social responses' (113) to tragedy human and natural. I find this to be quite an excessive claim.

The second volume in *Popular Music and Human Rights*, titled 'World Music', ranges widely from studies on indigenous Australian protest music and occupied Latvia's neo-folklore movement, to the Chilean singer Victor Jara and a few fascinating chapters on Nepali and Middle Eastern heavy metal. Peddie's introduc-

tion sets the tone for the volume by posing the perennial question: are human rights really universal, or just an extension of Euro-American cultural and political hegemony? What is clear from these chapters is that the meaning of 'human rights' shifts across space and time (as one should expect), and some very curious situations and events can emerge as a result. Moreover, the efficacy of popular music to address injustice is not to be underestimated. Quoting Nigerian Fela Kuti (a performer sadly overlooked in this collection; instead see Olaniyan 2004) who declared that 'music is the weapon of the givers of life', Peddie notes that music's 'power to enlighten, to mobilize, and perhaps even to change' (2) will mean that hope will always remain.

There is an interesting focus on the metal genre in the first part of this volume. Paul D. Greene documents the Nepalese heavy metal scene, while Mark LeVine considers young Muslims' refinement and reinterpretation of heavy metal in the Middle East. These are fine tales, both unexpected and informative, and good examples of the extremely wide range of creative musical expressions in syncretist global scenes. Following this are well-paired chapters by Valdis Muktupāvels, on folk in Soviet-occupied Latvia, and Sergei I. Zhuk on the way western rock was perceived in Soviet Ukraine. In Latvia, as Muktupāvels points out, the government's official support for one form of folk music led to a counterculture revival of folk music influenced by environmentalism, feminism, neo-paganism and other modern and postmodern frames of analysis. Informality, spontaneity and syncretism became the watchwords for this movement, which culminated in a singing revolution in the late 1980s. Zhuk notes that in the Ukraine, rock music (whether it be the Beatles, disco, or *Jesus Christ Superstar*) was perceived to impart immoral values to youth, particularly as the 'fascist punk and heavy metal hysteria' (148) arrived in the early 1980s. Soviet officialdom interpreted British punks as fascist skinheads who were anti-Soviet in intent and subjugated their fans accordingly. As the 1980s progressed, anti-rock campaigns targeted heavy metal-heads, leading to special raids of music markets, confiscations of records and audiotapes, and many arrests. Claims that human rights were being violated were ignored.

Gerry Smyth's chapter, titled 'No Country for Young Women: Celtic Music, Dissent, and the Irish Female Body', is a perfect accompaniment to Finding's aforementioned chapter on Tori Amos in volume 1. Smyth writes about folk singer Christy Moore's melancholy song 'Middle of the Island', which chronicles the true story of 15-year-old Ann Lovett who died giving birth alone in Ireland in 1984. Performed in *sean-nós* old Gaelic style, the tale is a mournful recognition of the Irish limitations on women's reproductive rights. Sinéad O'Connor joins Moore in later verses, and their chilling duet points out that 'Everybody knew, nobody said' (119). Indeed, as Smyth keenly observes, 'many of the issues which have animated

the debate regarding post-revolutionary Irish identity may be observed in this particular song' (129).

Any edited collection, no matter how sizable, cannot cover all examples relevant to the topic. It is likely that most readers of this two-volume set will be disappointed that their favourite resistance music was overlooked. In my case, I would have liked to have seen a study of the Palestinian hip hop group DAM (cf. Salloum's *Slingshot Hip Hop*, 2009), or an analysis of musicians' efforts to bridge violent conflicts, as in the case of the bands Bustan Abraham in Israel or Alei Hazayit in Palestine (Brinner 2009). In any case, Peddie's collection is worthwhile, albeit a bit too heavy on Britain and the USA. Take heed: the resisting muse is rising, and is increasingly taken into serious account by scholars.

References

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