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Book Review

David F. Garcia. 2017. *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. xii + 360 pp. ISBN 9780822363705 (pbk)

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Before digging into David F. Garcia's *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins* you should be aware: this book is a tough read. It is not that the prose is self-indulgent nor its arguments inscrutable; there is just an immense amount of content tightly packed into a single, overarching narrative. The book jumps back and forth between multiple storylines, each rigorously researched and intricately detailed, which at times can make it challenging for readers to find their footing. This is not a book one can simply peruse and get the gist of the night before a graduate seminar (as this reviewer had to do the first time around). This is a book that makes you work and should be approached with the time and attention it demands, with the promise that what it offers in return will be well worth the effort.

This book is less about Africa than it is about the representations of Africa which circulated throughout the Atlantic world between the two World Wars. The premise is how Africa, as a concept, was fixed at a distance both spatially and temporally from the urbanized, modern world, and how modernity depended on that distance for its own constitution. Yet, when modernity failed to deliver on its promises of universal freedom, the supposedly remote, unchanging, primitive African past became a vital source to build critiques against the shortcomings of the present and to catalyse pathways towards alternative futures. *Listening for Africa* is not about a music genre, artist, scholar or theoretical paradigm *per se*, but a "political economy of race" in which the music genre, artist, scholar and paradigm interact, and how each of the players levied their position and made use of the resources they had access to, to animate their interventions in modernity, for themselves and for others.

To map these trajectories Garcia pursues (and thoroughly commits to) a rhizomatic analysis. The rhizome, as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, is "a mutant line" that "delimits nothing" and "describes no contour" (268). It establishes relationships between the arts, sciences and "social struggles" and pulls them together into a common discursive field (19). Correspondingly, *Listening for Africa* weaves its way through seemingly unrelated people, places, events and ideas, and puts them into lively conversation. Yet, for all the meandering unpredictability of the rhizome, the book is meticulously balanced and carefully ordered. Chapters are long (about 50 pages), and each is sub-divided into three equally-weighted storylines, bound together by common threads of how Black music's and dance's African origins were analysed, listened for, embodied, resisted or desired. Though organized thematically, chapters slowly drift chronologically through the 1930s and 40s, landing in the early 1950s.

The interconnected storylines of *Listening for Africa* feature a diverse cast of characters: comparative musicologists Miroslav Kolinski and Richard Waterman; Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz; bandleader Miguelito Valdez; African performers Modupe Paris and Asadata Dafora, who were rallying support for decolonization efforts on the continent; Paul Robeson; percussionist Chano Pozo; Duke Ellington; avant-garde filmmaker Harry Smith, and mambo pioneer Perez Prado. If there is a star of the show it is Katherine Dunham, and if there is a tragic figure it is Melville Herskovitz, both of whom appear throughout. Some of the connections drawn are obscure, such as the wife of Richard Waterman's Nigerian informant/lab assistant, who offered high praise for one critic's scathing satirical critiques of anthropology's "sciencing" of Black music (186), echoing the tenor of "the anthropologist emcee" in the script for Katherine Dunham's 1943 production *Heat Wave* (180–81). This gives an idea of how Garcia does more than chronicle collaborations and personal engagements; he also imagines how the various actors, as part of the same world, may have passed each other on the street without even noticing. *Listening for Africa* is full of such fleeting anecdotes that punctuate the larger storylines, both of which evince the intensity of Garcia's rigour as researcher and storyteller.

For all the stringent analysis, some of the vignettes in *Listening for Africa* are absolutely gripping. The story of Miroslav Kolinski. who continued to analyse field recordings for Herskovitz while on the run from the Gestapo (37–54), shows that even an ivory tower like the Berlin Phonogram Archive could not insulate one from the pressing threats of warfare and holocaust. But the real highlights were the sections on Katherine Dunham, particularly her foray into academia (54–73). Herskovitz, her mentor, encouraged her to pursue her research through the academy, but proved ill-equipped to see the

value in her methods and findings, which were no doubt shaped by her very different experiences in the field as a Black woman. In reviewing Dunham's correspondences and notes from the field, Garcia reveals an anthropologist who was well ahead of her time, anticipating Fanon (66–67), Geertz and the feminist praxis of the 1970s (57), but her mentor was not inclined to take her seriously as a scientist. Herskovitz, consumed by his own agenda (the New World Negro), seemingly set out to *prove* his theories rather than *test* them. Dunham, it appears, never really had a chance to make it in the academy. Both these stories give form to some of the canonical names in anthropology and comparative musicology; real-world presences that went unacknowledged in their work. This disparity reveals the distance anthropologists have long placed between themselves and the people they study. Garcia pivots the lens and subjects the anthropologist to the scrutinizing gaze of the ethnographer, shedding new light on these characters and beckoning a re-assessment of their places on the mantle.

In *Listening for Africa*, Garcia expands the field of discourse of the Black Atlantic. He introduces a good deal of material from the Spanish-speaking Atlantic into the mix, particularly from Cuba. The final chapter is devoted to the Mambo craze which circulated heavily not just across the Europe–Caribbean–USA matrix as formulated by Gilroy, but throughout Latin America as well. Likewise, Herskovitz, a Jew in the time of the Holocaust, was deeply invested in "primitive" African music, deemed essential to his acculturation theories which were intended to help solve "the American race problem" (51). This step back adds a depth to discourses on the Black Atlantic, revealing a broader investment in emerging Black identities not limited to peoples of African descent. This approach allows us to resist categorical divisions of Black, white and Latin, and shows that it is possible to examine them as part of the same world, especially considering that Black cultural producers were often closely working across such divides, be it Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo, or Dunham and Herskovitz.

Listening for Africa is not a book for undergraduates or non-academics but should be accessible to non-musicians. Anyone familiar with social theory should feel right at home. The individual stories could easily be mined for other uses, but the way the master threads are continuously woven back into the narrative may make it difficult to pick up on the theoretical arguments without having read the entire book. *Listening for Africa* should be of interest to scholars working on race, diaspora, transnational music in the Americas and representations of Africa. It may also be useful in disciplinary surveys of ethnomusicology since it bridges the gap between the demise of comparative musicology, set in motion by the Cairo Conference of 1932, and its re-emergence as ethnomusicology in the 1950s, as the story is often told.

Though this book is not exclusively about popular music, it largely has to do with how certain artists navigated the terrain of the entertainment industry to enact their political agendas while making a living, whether Dunham's Broadway dance revues, Perez Prado's mambos or Paul Robeson's film roles. Readers of this journal will probably appreciate the extent to which popular artists are taken seriously and put on the same level as intellectuals. The case of Dunham and Herskovitz certainly makes clear that, despite the legitimating veneer of science, artists can often be several steps ahead, even in the realm of science itself, driving home Johannes Fabian's contention that anthropologists could learn a lot from popular culture producers (1998: 140).

This review is being written at a moment where our various disciplines, and the academy as a whole, are being heavily scrutinized. Calls to "let it burn" and "rebuild from the ashes" are gaining unprecedented frequency. In *Listening for Africa*, David F. Garcia manages to answer common calls to produce histories that are more inclusive, and analyses that are more decentred, while maintaining a firm grounding in the traditions of our scholarship. Yet, according to the author himself, it is not just important how we write or think about Black music (or any music), but how we teach it (268): not as something separate from or in opposition to, say, Western classical music, but as a real relationship, with both entities interacting within the same world. In the spirit of the rhizome, I won't say that this book points the way forward, but it may be one of the points we want to pass through as we re-examine the possibilities for what our scholarship should look like, and what we want it to do. For all this book does, *Listening for Africa* is nothing short of an accomplishment in music studies (or whatever we end up calling it).

Reference

Fabian, Johannes. 1998. *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.