

Book Review

Sílvia Martínez and Héctor Fouce, eds. 2013. *Made in Spain: Studies in Popular Music*. Routledge Global Popular Music Series. New York and London: Routledge. 240pp. ISBN 978-0-415-50640-3 (hbk)

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Routledge's new *Global Popular Music* series admirably seeks to adopt a polyglot approach to redefine the centre and periphery in an attempt to simultaneously expand the geographical, cultural and musical parameters of what we understand by "popular music" and avoid the reification of "world music" as a discrete and frequently marginal(ized) category; the aim, in the words of series editors, Franco Fabbri and Goffredo Plastino, is to establish "a truly international arena for a democratic musicology, through authoritative and accessible books" (xi). *Made in Spain*, the series' debut, is a particularly timely and welcome entry focusing as it does on a culture and society whose output, influence and proficiency in relation to popular music has frequently been given short shrift by foreign—generally Anglophone—critics, and has not always been recognized at home, where the veneration of high art at the expense of the ostensibly corrupted—and, by implication, corrupting—nature of mass culture has done little to further its cause within the academy. The times, however, they are a changin', and as Silvia Martínez and Héctor Fouce note in their acknowledgements, "[t]his book is something like a dream come true. A collective dream, the one of the consolidation of popular music studies in Spain" (xv). Although they modestly efface their role, the editors have been instrumental—in Martínez's case, for over two decades—in midwifing this process, preparing the terrain for this landmark release, and it is testament to the fact that it would have been a difficult and perhaps quixotic task to find better-qualified editors that so many of the chapters contained in this volume are the strongest pieces I have read by the individual collaborators.

As is almost inevitably the case in any edited volume, the quality of the contributions is varied but the standout pieces would have no problems finding their way into any of the leading journals in the field. From the first

section, titled “Popular Music and Challenges to National Identity”, Karlos Sánchez Ekiza’s chapter on radical Basque rock explores in original and erudite fashion how questions of canonicity are bound not just by Spain’s position vis-à-vis the outside world but also by its status as a far from homogenous or even unitary nation-state, comprised as it is by various autonomous communities with radically different linguistic, musical and political traditions and agendas; for example, in the case of a highly industrialized region suffering from ETA’s regime of terror and frequent police brutality in the early to mid-1980s, Sánchez Ekiza explores the aesthetic and social explanations for why the local music scene felt more affinity with British punk than with the more playful punk-pop bands that proliferated in Madrid at the time. More generally, the book returns incessantly to the interplay of regional and (inter) national identities through, for example, the exploration of why and how Andalusian cultural traditions such as flamenco became metonymic signifiers of Spanish identity; the ethical and aesthetic reasons underpinning the decision by singer-songwriter Joan Manuel Serrat (interviewed in the final chapter of the book)—raised in Barcelona but with familial roots in Andalucía—to record and perform, in both Catalan and Spanish, a musical, linguistic and ideological stance for which he was criticized from both ends of the political spectrum; or how the so-called *ruta de bakalao*—a weekend journey taken by revellers from Madrid to Valencia, both a cause and consequence of Ibiza’s club culture—provided a specifically Iberian take on transnational techno drug scenes which paved the way for the commercialization of Balearic beats and the creation of globally recognized and exportable brands such as the Sónar Festival.

In line with the remit provided by both Routledge and the series’ editors, all of the contributions are in English, but are written exclusively by academics based in Spain. As an editorial policy, this is internally coherent, championing as it does non-Anglophone music through approaches and methodologies likely to emerge from outside the hegemonic centre(s) of popular music studies. An approach of this kind is not, however, a panacea and it does raise some wider concerns ranging from the pitfalls of parochialism to the danger that a volume, ironically designed to counteract Anglo-American hegemony and chauvinism, might be unwittingly capitalizing upon and contributing to the increased pressure on academics to publish in English irrespective of their geographical or biographical backgrounds. Plausible responses can be rendered to these broader philosophical and political issues but, if the publishers are committed to this initiative and its legacy, then they really do need to provide more rigorous proof-reading and editorial support. As a Hispanist, I would only accept a commission to edit a volume in Spanish if I were confident that well-qualified native speakers would be on hand to review and

revise my work. The constant misuse of the indefinite article, confusion of first and second-names and proliferation of lexical infelicities suggests that the editors of this volume were afforded no such luxury.

It would be particularly regrettable if these surface irregularities were to detract from the contents of a volume that provides a complimentary vision of the state of popular music studies as practised in Spain. Any reservations I have tend to relate to what I would consider to be the limitations of the field rather than this book in particular. While both Iván Iglesias's contribution on jazz and politics in Franco's Spain (1939–1968) and Eduardo Viñuela's chapter on the production and reception of popular music on the state television channel are particularly skilled at charting and unravelling the processes by which culture is not only constituted by but is also constitutive of wider socio-historical processes, there is an unfortunate tendency by a number of authors to resort to a default setting by which popular music is simply read in terms of the tumultuous politics of twentieth-century-Spain—a bloody Civil War (1936–1939) followed by 36 years of dictatorship under General Francisco Franco, whose death in 1975 paved the way for the transition to a monarchical democracy and European normalization. This can frequently result in a positivist account of musical development and expression which tends to lionize oppositional left-wing singer-songwriters while paying significantly less attention to straightforwardly pop artists, a legacy of the Frankfurt school of cultural determinacy which, perhaps understandably in a country whose dictatorial and democratic governments have used popular music as a privileged form of “soft power”, casts a long shadow in Spanish universities.

In a volume divided into four sections, the fact that three—“Looking to the Past”; “Steps Toward Modernity” and “Memory, Music and Image”—relate to a dialectic between the past and the present is indicative of how a politicized chronology of historical and affective time has been, and seemingly continues to be, instrumental in the mapping out of Spanish popular music studies. While, as Sílvia Martínez explores in her chapter, the *copla*—which, as she notes, could also be called a classic Spanish song (*canción española*)—can easily withstand comparison in terms of cultural impact, commercial appeal and musical prowess with the classical American songbook, this status has been denied not only by the Anglo-centric nature of popular music in both industrial and academic terms, but also as a result of how it has been appropriated and (mis-)construed in Iberian contexts. As María Zuazu notes in her contribution, “[t]he association of *canción española* with Francoism in general, and with its identity agenda in particular, has made and still makes highly problematic its placement in a country with significant challenges in establishing a common and comfortable identity” (159). In this instance, a number of the authors both individually and collectively describe and nuance this vision.

Elsewhere, however, the spectres of the past are insufficiently interrogated, and there is a somewhat naïve and reductive veneration of sub-cultural capital accrued through political opposition; hence, for example, Julio Iglesias is only referenced once compared to Serrat's six entries in the index, where relatively minor singer-songwriters are included at the expense of genuinely popular performers such as Los Chunguitos, Héroes de Silencio, Fangoria or Loquillo. This is regrettable not only from a methodological perspective but also because it limits the book's use as a reference tool for non-specialists.

An unfortunate correlative to this selective historiography is a certain degree of historical revisionism. The reader is twice presented with the oft-repeated argument that there was an official and concerted propaganda campaign against The Beatles performing in Spain in 1965, which purportedly accounts for why half the tickets to their Madrid concert were left unsold. I have yet to see any compelling concrete evidence to substantiate this claim. In the unlikely event it were true, it would still need to be contextualized by considering how the chief opposition to rock'n'roll in the 1960s did not come from an increasingly technocratic authoritarian regime, which sought to stress its modern(ist) credentials to the rest of the world through the promotion of a wide range of musical forms from Eurovision Song Contest entries to avant-garde composers, but rather the Marxist-inflected intellectual oppositional elites who believed populist songs to be a privileged example of bourgeois deviationism, a new opium for the people. Romantic as the image of popular song as the *lingua franca* of freedom may undeniably be, this is a retrospective interpretation that fails to take into account that the prime obstacles to international acts touring, or having greater impact in dictatorial Spain, were at least as much economic or practical than ideological: when I have spoken to band managers and promoters, they have all, for example, flagged the understandable reluctance of non-Spanish bands to perform in venues where the risk of electrocution was high due to the absence of adequate earthing. Where, however, a number of chapters do mark important new ground is in establishing that Spanish popular music not only provides genuine alternatives to Anglo-American traditions but also that the translation of foreign traditions into the vernacular does not necessarily equate to mere imitation or pastiche.

In a Spanish variation on Dick Hebdige's work on sub-cultures, Héctor Fouce and Fernán del Vals make a spirited claim for urban heavy metal scenes of the late 1970s and early 1980s, predicated on conflictual generational and class relationships, a dynamic that rarely takes root in Spain due to the combination of widespread intergenerational sociability and the frequently prohibitive cost of musical instruments and PA systems. Even the most commercially successful of these bands such as Obús and Barón Rojo had only

limited commercial appeal outside of Spain but subsequent hard rock/heavy metal bands such as Mägo de Oz and Héroes de Silencio have become transatlantic superstars. In fact, the frequent interexchange of music and musicians between Spain and both its former colonies in Latin America and the US provides a compelling narrative of political exile, personal desire and commercial ambition. According to a fascinating chapter by Rubén López Cano, “[t]he transhispanic genre that has lasted the longest, has attained stylistic homogeneity, widespread marketing, and the firmest transnational scene is undoubtedly the melodic song or romantic ballad” (193). As noted, this is a form of Spanish song that, as with much Spanish popular music, pre-dates the onset of Anglo-American rock’n’roll, and suggests a rich musical heritage of which anyone engaged in the study of popular music studies ought at least to be aware.

For a variety of historical, political and institutional reasons, the nascent discipline of Spanish popular music studies has not always been able to do full or even partial justice to the subject of its scholarly attention; this volume supplies evidence aplenty that this might not always or invariably be the case. As someone engaged, both intellectually and emotionally, with the study of Spain and popular music, I therefore believe this to be an important, albeit flawed, book. It does, however, warrant a broader readership beyond converted readers such as myself, combining as it does strong academic credentials with the potential to crossover to a more general readership. It is my sincere hope that its somewhat prohibitive price and lack of typological rigour will not preclude it from establishing itself as a watershed in the forging of a less chauvinistic and monolithic view of world music in all its many rich and varied guises. For this, and many other reasons, *Made in Spain* constitutes essential reading for students and scholars alike, while boding well for the future of this exciting new series.