

Review

Keam, Glenda, and Tony Mitchell, eds. 2011. *Home, Land and Sea: Situating Music in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Auckland: Pearson. ISBN 978-1-44251-632-8 (pbk). 320 pp.

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What is the relationship between music and place? The answer lies less in the music than in the ways it is heard, interpreted and used. Although New Zealand has produced a great deal of music, there has been 'a dangerous lack of critical discourse' about it (Dugal McKinnon, 237). With this issue in mind, Keam and Mitchell's new edited collection (along with Henry Johnson's 2010 collection, *Many Voices: Music and National Identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand*), can be seen as welcome additions to an emerging discourse. *Home, Land and Sea: Situating Music in Aotearoa New Zealand* takes the local as its subject and, in the process, highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach.

The book aims to cover all kinds of Aotearoa New Zealand music (from traditional Maori, to popular and art music) and there are a number of interesting case studies. For example, Jennifer Cattermole's "Oh, Reggae but Different!" The Localisation of Roots Reggae in Aotearoa' provides an overdue examination of the complex ways the genre has interacted with aspects of local culture, spiced with a little musicological analysis, but accessibly rendered for the non-musicologist, like myself. This is usefully complemented by Norman Meehan's article on Wellington's productive roots scene (featuring bands such as TrinityRoots and Fat Freddy's Drop) which grounds the musicology within a cultural and economic context. There's a nice transition here to Geoff Stahl's account of Wellington alternative scenes, whose participants line up to bag Fat Freddy's 'bland roots music' (145), demonstrating a refreshing diversity of viewpoints. Stahl illuminates connections between micro musicking practices and macro governmental/economic discourses of 'creativity'. Taking a different route, Sarina Pearson discusses parodies of Kiwi hits in Aotearoa New Zealand/Asian TV comedy series *A Thousand Apologies* in terms of Homi Bhabha's reverse mimicry, thus making a forceful argument about ethnic difference and colonization. Due to my pop background, I approached the

art music section of *Home, Land and Sea* with some trepidation, but found it highly engaging. One standout chapter was Bruce Russell's study of the Lines of Flight festivals and his application of Bourdieu's concepts of art world and avant garde to experimental music scenes. Another, by the aforementioned Dugal McKinnon, contended that the overemphasis of technology in electroacoustic art music has resulted in a neglect of audiences. There are also a number of worthy ethnomusicological pieces, all of which display a theoretical rigour or a freshness of perspective lacking in some other contributions.

Editors Keam and Mitchell state that they find 'a wide range of regionally situated local musics in NZ, rather than a nationally distributed musical identity' (x), and as such offer case studies from the four main urban centres (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin). Each city has supported distinctive musical scenes and has its own history but there is also a risk of simply reifying local mythologies: Auckland's cultural melting pot; Christchurch's dark underbelly; and Dunedin's splendid isolation. Local scenes are also sites of diversity, contestation and rivalry. The historical narrative approach taken in some of these essays tends to suppress struggle in the interests of coherence. Why don't the editors consider classical crossover singer Hayley Westenra as part of the Christchurch music scene (xxi)? Every locale combines many scenes and stories, but typically only a few get to be 'representative'. So, by what processes does this occur?

One reason for the editors' suspicion about 'identity' is the unreflective way it is used in Government policy to justify support for the arts, but this does not justify simply ignoring political economy, or considering how economic and governmental policy interact with culture (exceptions here being the chapters by Stahl and Pearson). Identity is always under erasure: we recognize the term is unsatisfactory, but go on using it 'in quotation marks'. Even so, many contributors address national identity in a literal manner, from familiar tropes such as rugby and landscape, to more obviously ideological definitions of Aotearoa New Zealand music in binaries such as: local not foreign, alternative not mainstream or commercial, subversive not affirmative, New Zealand not 'Kiwi'. In their anxiety to tell us what New Zealand is or isn't, these contributors overlook that 'New Zealand' itself is also the product of interpretation that is made out of words and music, not just places and people. A number of contributors invoke the 'tyranny of distance' argument as if New Zealand's geographical isolation equals difference. This, in turn, manifests itself in a suspicion of theory and a tendency to offer surveys rather than arguments. This provides useful historical research upon which to build an argument, but it also comes with assumptions which should be questioned. When Glenda Keam describes how local classical composers have used or imitated natural sounds in their work, shouldn't she also interrogate what is meant by 'nature',

and why it is intrinsically associated with local identity (in what sense is nature 'ours?'), and how concepts of the natural vary?

There is no essential Aotearoa New Zealand found in an empty landscape nor a crowded bar. In fact, Simon Frith (1996) argues music doesn't reflect identity but instead constitutes identity—a point also made by Don McGlashan in the Afterword in an observation about the connections between a songwriter, his song, and his city: 'you could say that Graeme Downes's ... "Death and The Maiden" reflects rainy Dunedin streets, or you could say that New Zealanders' perception of rainy Dunedin streets has ... changed because of "Death and The Maiden"' (281). I'd like to see more evidence of the latter.

References

- Frith, Simon. 1996. 'Music and Identity'. In *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. S. Hall and P. du Gay, 108–27. London/Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Johnson, Henry, ed. 2010. *Many Voices: Music and National Identity in Aotearoa/New Zealand*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.