

*AIDS, Politics and Music in South Africa*. Fraser G. McNeill. 2011. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 278 pp. Audio available from website.

It is clear to the reader of this finely crafted book that Fraser McNeill has drawn on his wide experience from many years spent among the Venda in the northern region of Limpopo Province in South Africa referred to as 'Venda'. Starting with a gap year in 1995, he has returned over the years in various roles, from English teacher to AIDS activist, musician and social anthropologist. The central theme of the book is AIDS education in the context of traditional leadership and folk knowledge about illness. Music's role in this investigation is as a research tool, as the music of girls' initiation, the male *zwilombe* who sing and play guitar, and the songs of predominantly female peer educators are examined in turn for what they reveal about perceptions regarding HIV/AIDS. In his conclusion, McNeill, a social anthropologist, neatly summarises his approach by stating that "the arguments in this book have brought together three analytical threads that have not intersected previously: the politics of tradition; an anthropological approach to knowledge; and health-related interventionism" (p236).

The book begins with an examination of traditional leadership in Venda in the context of the post-apartheid state. A detailed history of the struggle between two candidates for traditional kingship gives the political context in which HIV/AIDS education takes place. A major theme of the book, tradition versus modernity, is introduced as it plays out in contemporary Venda kingship and the African renaissance. McNeill argues in Chapter 3 "that state interference in the political economy of kingship has been integral to the promotion of 'tradition' in post-apartheid Venda" (74). One of the outcomes of this has been the promotion of female initiation, which leaders claim includes HIV/AIDS education, although McNeill's research suggests that this is not the case:

In the case of Venda girls' initiation, the AIDS epidemic has been interpreted by elders not through scientific explanations, but through ancestral ('folk') knowledge. As such, AIDS is believed to be rooted in the build-up of pollution in female bodies that do not adhere to the *milayo* (rules/laws) of the initiation school. (75)

Underpinning girls' initiation ceremonies is the concept that knowledge is acquired through lived experience (there is a direct link between experience and knowledge in Venda thought) and the activities of the initiation ritual ensure that the girls will have the necessary knowledge that they need as wives and mothers. This connection between experience and knowledge has implications for the AIDS peer educators who try to pass on biomedical knowledge by speaking and singing about HIV/AIDS. McNeill argues that they are ineffective because the act of talking or singing about HIV/AIDS implicates these women in the lived experience of it. The peer education process is examined in detail by the author, revealing the contradiction that the peer educators are motivated by the possibility of personal upward mobility when they engage in the work, not only by a wish to see the end of HIV infections. Some of those who start as volunteers in the programme have been steadily promoted to jobs in the Department of Health.

These arguments and others offer suggestions as to why AIDS education in Venda has not been successful, suggesting that programs should take African worldviews into account. The peer educators sing to get their message across, and while this is an African and apparently culturally appropriate practice; in Venda, it remains ineffective. McNeill explains that taboos about speaking openly about death and illness, and a folk connection between knowledge and experience implicates the peer educators in the spread of the disease. Although the peer educators “pursue new ends by old means” (154), McNeill suggests that the ritual use of music ensures that potentially ‘dangerous’ knowledge (i.e. knowledge of sexuality and health) is passed on safely only within the context of ancestral protection. This is the case with the songs of *zwilombe*, in which men accompany their singing on the guitar. These songs can also include HIV/AIDS in their subject matter, but the performers, unlike the peer educators are not implicated in the spread of the disease. McNeill argues that if music is to be used as a medium to transfer potentially ‘dangerous’ information, it requires ritual protection, to ensure that those imparting it are not ‘polluted’. The *zwilombe* are spiritually sanctioned owing to a close connection with the ancestors (181).

McNeill leads the reader through the South African government’s relationship with HIV, from the denialist regime of Thabo Mbeki to the roll out of antiretrovirals, which has had different degrees of success in various parts of the country. He explains why there is a common misperception that condoms are the *cause* of AIDS, rather than a preventative measure. This is partially the outcome of Western models of education and awareness that are an ill fit with the local worldview, because the peer education model is built on “eurocentric notions pertaining to the bounded, objectified self” (130).

Musicological content is scanty in this book. The songs are studied for their sociological rather than musicological relevance. Lyrics in ChiVenda and English are supplied, but the book does not contain any musical analysis beyond the audio files of the songs which are available from the Cambridge Press website. The internet file contains all of the songs and must be downloaded in its entirety, the songs cannot be downloaded one by one. Peer educators change the words of familiar songs to suit their aims and McNeill probes the significance of the songs’ different origins, for example whether they are struggle songs from the apartheid era, worship songs from church or from the ritual context of female initiation.

Thanks to John Blacking’s early work, Venda is an area that has been the focus of much research, and in this book, McNeill extends Venda studies by connecting various aspects of Venda society to shed light on AIDS education. Music plays a role in this anthropological study, but this is not a book about music. A passing suggestion is made that the research is relevant to medical ethnomusicology, and while that may be valid, the wider issue is that music, always present, though not always foregrounded in ordinary life, reaches further than its performative context. In this case, the relevance of the music is the role that it plays in Venda life, and the extent to which it can offer alternative readings on a topic as complex and socially difficult as HIV/AIDS. McNeill

has a fluent style and his text is highly readable and clear. The book is meticulously argued and McNeill brings together the various threads of his thesis, keeping his line of thought clear at all times. In this book McNeill follows a process of joining seemingly unconnected dots, and sheds new light on a problem that lies in the seemingly unresolvable clash of cultures, but that urgently needs the insight that he offers.

—Mandy Carver, Diocesan School for Girls

***Music Notation: A South African Guide.*** Christine Lucia. 2011. Pretoria: UNISA Press. 318 pp.

In South Africa, and many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, music literacy is rare. Access to music education is limited by social and economic factors that have improved little since the end of apartheid, especially in rural areas where teachers and resources are in dire need. Yet throughout the country there are popular competitions featuring music and dance from *ingoma* and *maskandi* to brass bands and symphony orchestras. *Music Notation: A South African Guide (MNSAG)* fulfills a growing need for an accessible, self-sufficient, and affordable text for beginning students in music theory and musicianship. The book targets a wide range of interest groups including students at schools and universities, professionals in the industry, and the interested amateur. The course should also appeal to singers familiar with tonic solfa and South Africa's historic choral tradition. Unlike traditional music theory textbooks, Christine Lucia's spiral-bound manual does not assume a Western art music orientation. The basics of common practice tonality are carefully explained but the text introduces a new repertoire and multi-faceted method for practical musicianship that are a welcome addition to cross-cultural music theory pedagogy. In this it sets a new course for postcolonial music studies on the African continent.

Chapters 1-3 introduce the basics of tonic solfa, staff notation, and the piano keyboard. These are foundation chapters that must be mastered thoroughly if the student is to succeed through the remainder of the book. Access to a piano or keyboard of some kind is essential since Lucia provides numerous exercises and basic instruction in piano skills. Innovative use of keyboard diagrams aids the beginning student (much as in a piano tutor). The early chapters also introduce French time names, as well as simple rhythms, time units, signatures, rests, and clefs (Chapters 4-6). Most of these topics are conventional enough, but the need to balance out the tonic solfa and staff notation dual focus necessitates a short introduction to transcription. This is particularly useful for singers, composers, and conductors interested in the South African choral repertoire. Other topics covered here include: major keys, aural exercises, and rhythms with a jazz feel (Chapters 7-10).

Lucia's multiple commitments in *MNSAG* – both in terms of repertoire and technique – become more apparent as the text unfolds. The detailed discussion of