

concern, because there is a continuing hegemony, and I use the word with all the intentions Gramsci and Williams had, of ethnographies with western interpretations of the Other. Here the number of references to Stoler in the Bibliography could have provided more flesh to Taylor's arguments. Stoler, a westerner and one of the leading scholars on colonialism in Indochina, is effectively de-exoticising the Other. Her work is a model for other western scholars who still only speak in the current self-reflexive fashion of the exotic Other. Speaking from the exotic side of the world, the authenticity of the book, one of Taylor's choice words, may be called into question.

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*Worksongs*. Ted Gioia. 2006. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 350 pp., notes, recommended listening, bibliography, index.

So, when did you last break into song as you were washing the dishes? Or perhaps at the last committee meeting the chairperson led a call-and-response chant. Not likely. More likely you had the radio or CD player on as you attended to chores, and just outside the boardroom music was being piped into the workspace. We no longer sing as we work, and if there is music in the work environment, it is not our own.

By contrast, the performance of music has traditionally been a part of every conceivable economic undertaking, from hunting and gathering to herding, tending crops, fishing, logging, mining, and working in factories. And this is music that is intended to accompany work, functioning universally not only as a way of relieving the drudgery of hard, physical slog, but also as a means of achieving co-ordination, affirmation, and control. As the author happily admits, this is a book about work and its history as well as music and its origins, and so interwoven are the two that in some societies there is no separate word for a given economic activity and the music that goes with it.

Gioia discusses numerous work-related songs, some ancient, some recent, from Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean, and Europe. These songs speak to nature or invoke higher powers. They complain, they boast, they express gratitude for plenty, or hope for better times. They contain exhortations to harder work, or even yearning for love. There are references to cruel overseers, bad pay, and social inequality.

The history of work-songs is told and illustrated through an array of revealing stories and anecdotes, often centering around colourful individuals as well as communities at various stages of development. One such individual was John Henry, who allegedly competed with a steam-powered drill to show that a man could do the same work even faster. Henry was immortalised in several ballads and songs, and was himself the "singingest" of men.

Work-songs were a conspicuous part of the musical culture of African-American slaves, a culture which impacted on jazz and related musics. Gioia is himself a jazz scholar, so it is not surprising that he devotes a chapter to the legendary field research,

spanning decades, of John and Alan Lomax, who discovered a rich source of African-American work-songs preserved in Southern prisons, particularly Parchman farm in Mississippi.

An issue that emerges is the ambivalence of attitudes towards forced physical work. Is hard labour a symbol of oppression or an affirmation of human dignity? Is it appropriate that an African-American work-song, performed under the most appalling and brutal conditions, should be counted as something of inherent beauty? On the other hand, the Marxist tradition extolled the virtues of labour and the heroism of the working class. The labour movement and early socialists also had their music, although as a matter of classification it is not clear that a protest song is a form of work-song.

The author's erudition is impressive and without contrivance or pretension. The text flows naturally, interspersed with sparkling asides and forays into numerous disciplines. If you find some academic writing dreary, tendentious and theory-laden, this book will restore your faith in the possibility of writing that is at once informative, stimulating, passionate, and entertaining.

The problem is that Gioia does not discuss how most of these work-songs sounded. He may as well be discussing folk poetry with no musical component. At numerous junctures he claims for these songs an aesthetic worth in addition to functionality, but very rarely does he discuss the music itself in terms of rhythm; and the realm of pitches, melodic construction, form, scales, and style is ignored altogether. We are left to take it on faith that these songs are musically effective, or even that they were sung rather than simply recited.

Another problem is that the overall argument is sketchy, even incoherent. Gioia advocates a return to the "connectedness" with everyday existence that music once enjoyed before industrialisation consigned it to the margins of social life. Whereas music used to be a purposeful activity which "did things", now it has become a form of recreation, administered like a drug for leisure-time consumption, a relief from work rather than an accompaniment to it. We should expect more from music, argues Gioia, we should "put art to use". He is nostalgic for the time when music had the power to enchant and transform and had an "intimate, personal element" in people's lives.

Yet by his own admission, even if we are not literally singing as we work, there is still plenty of music around. Many listeners make their favourite music "their own" (witness how many people sing along at big concerts) and probably have it in mind much of the time, using it in the same way as work-songs, to help them handle the job and get through the day. Music is still being put to use and still serves needs.

Even if we do wail the standard ethnomusicological mantra that music has become separated from everyday life, is this a bad thing? Is it not an achievement that music has become elevated above everyday toil, made into something special? Gioia speaks approvingly of the soundtrack to *Brother, Wherefore Art Thou* which features examples

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of African-American folk music. Yes, this music is expressive and moving, but it takes detachment from the immediate context of the music to make that kind of judgement possible.

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