

BOOK REVIEWS

Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking in Jazz. Carol Ann Muller and Sathima Bea Benjamin. 2011. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 348 pp.

Musical Echoes: South African Women Thinking in Jazz is a remarkable contribution to the jazz literature, which, like its recommendation for the field, is a palimpsest of overlapping layers of historical, theoretical, musical, racial, and cultural exploration. The South African women 'thinking in jazz' are Muller and Benjamin, whose different social positionalities inform rich reflections on the nature of race, racial mixture, and transnational experiences of migration and exile. They both are South African and grew up in Capetown at different points in time and from different categories of race: Benjamin a jazz singer and Coloured; Muller an academic and white.

On one level the book tells the story of Sathima Bea Benjamin, a jazz singer, who, before this book, has been known primarily as the wife of pianist Abdullah Ibrahim, the South African jazz musician most widely known in the U.S. and Europe. In telling the story of Sathima, Muller demonstrates the power of narrating the history of jazz from the point of view of someone considered outside of the jazz canon, but nevertheless deeply entangled in it. Benjamin was pivotal in convincing Duke Ellington to come to hear Dollar Brand, as he was then known, at the Club Africana in Zurich, which ultimately led to the recording of two albums--*Duke Ellington presents Dollar Brand* and *A Morning in Paris* featuring Sathima accompanied by her husband's trio as well as Billy Strayhorn. Dollar Brand's album was released in 1964; Benjamin's not until 1997. In carefully documenting this history, Muller uncovered the archives of the CIA funded Transcription Center in London, which carefully followed the activities of South African musicians and artists in the cold war period. The various migrations and resettlings of Ibrahim and Benjamin in Zurich, New York, and South Africa are carefully documented with a rich array of historical materials.

What makes the book poignantly personal and reflexive in the best sense of the word is the trading of literary voices between Muller and Benjamin. Muller's home base in analytically oriented academic writing is challenged by the more metaphorical and emotional tone of Benjamin's voice. Muller responds with a degree of personal openness and experimental narrative strategy that make the book a pleasure to read. The dialogue between the two of them very compellingly illustrates the power of women's voices and experiences to unseat the way in which jazz is traditionally talked about.

Musical Echoes also unsettles South African musical history by focusing on neither black nor white but Coloured, the apartheid era category for those of racially mixed heritage. Muller notes that Sathima identified with the American jazz singer Billie Holiday, in part because she, too, was racially-mixed. The differences between the systems of racial categorization in the U.S. and South Africa are apparent, as Holiday was considered black in the American two-category system of racial segregation despite her intermixture. As Benjamin's and Ibrahim's networks of interaction with

African American jazz artists are documented it becomes apparent that as a product of their multiple jazz migrations they, like most African Americans of relatively light complexion during the civil rights and Black Power years, identified strongly with blackness and the struggle for racial justice. Muller makes clear how that identification is imbricated in a specifically South African history and experience of migration.

Muller develops these points theoretically to argue for a moving towards a concept of “new African diaspora” cognizant of the experience of African migration in the 20th and 21st centuries as opposed to an older idea of African diaspora centered on the descendants of enslaved Africans. In chapter four she writes very compellingly about four dimensions of this new diaspora, which she terms musical surrogacy, jazz migrancy, in exile, and the spirit of Africaness. As convincing are her points about more recent migrations from the African continent, the contrast between the new and old diasporas is sometimes too tightly drawn, for scholarship on the African diaspora in the Americas has long drawn attention to the more recent circulation of persons of African descent between the Caribbean and the U.S., for example, and its considerable musical implications. The recent works of Christopher Washburne and Raul Fernandez on Latin jazz provide poignant examples.¹ Muller’s considerable contribution highlights the migration experience of people from South Africa, which I think she is right to argue has theoretical implications for the way we talk about jazz in a more global fashion.

In *Musical Echoes* Muller argues that Benjamin’s story is not simply about South African jazz and its relationship to American jazz, but rather a story that demands that jazz studies rethink its narratives and assumptions about the relationship of non-Americans to jazz. As she puts it “it is almost always the other who knows something about what is happening in American jazz, while many American jazz musicians, critics and writers know little about jazz elsewhere.” In her call for a new jazz studies that recognizes that jazz has histories in many parts of the world, she also recognizes that it is imperative that this new jazz studies do so “without displacing the central place of African American creativity in the this larger jazz history.” I couldn’t agree more emphatically, especially in the context of some European perspectives on global jazz, which *do* seem committed to unseating the place of African American creativity and replacing them with a new form of European superiority.²

The theoretical framework Muller proposes to conclude her book may or may not resonate with the community of jazz scholars. Muller builds on the metaphor of the echo by asking us to imagine the sound waves emanating from and returning to sounds beginning at various times and places, in a manner similar to the way Veit Erlmann uses the idea of resonance to talk about the difference between thinking and

¹ Raul Fernandez, *Latin Lazz : The Perfect Combination = La Combinación Perfecta*. San Francisco and Washington: Chronicle Books, 2002; Christopher Washburne, “The Clave of Jazz: A Caribbean Contribution to the Rhythmic Foundation of An African-American Music.” *Black Music Research Journal* 17, no. 1 (1997): 59-80.

² William K. Bares, “The Eternal triangle: American jazz in European Postmodern,” Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2009

the sensory experience of hearing. The image of oscillating waves of sound provides Muller an image in which to imagine a more fluid idea of a transnationally vibrating jazz history that is more inclusive of jazz histories and trajectories such as those of Sathima Bea Benjamin and Abdullah Ibrahim. Muller is not alone in trying to imagine ways of describing the richly interacting histories of musics and people that migrate and circulate. Jocelyne Guilbault has used the idea of audible entanglements, Homi Bhabha has spoken of interstitial space, Chakrabarty has called for provincializing Europe, and jazz scholars as diverse as Gabriel Solis, Sherrie Tucker, Guthrie Ramsey, Farah Griffin, and myself have talked about the dialogue between the present and past as crucial to unsettling the teleological, masculinist, and heroic understandings of jazz history that we inherited.³ The metaphors we choose to express these relationships seem ultimately less crucial than the fact that a broader community of inquiry is on board with creating a more layered and evocative sense of jazz history. Muller's and Benjamin's remarkable book provides a much welcome tidal wave of ideas and experience from South Africa that will buoy us all up for quite some time.

—Ingrid Monson, Harvard University

Cultural Globalization and Music. African Artists in Transnational Networks.

Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof. 2011. Palgrave Macmillan. 272 pp.

How do African artists gain cultural capital in a context in which global cultural production is largely dominated by the advanced economies of the North? What role do individuals, institutions and the growing urban centers of the African continent play in furthering African artists' access to the cultural economies and creative industries of the developed world? These are some of the questions Nadia Kiwan and Ulrike Hanna Meinhof seek to address in their informative and wide-ranging study.

Anthropologists have long called for multi-sited research and ethnomusicologists are increasingly exploring the cultural and musical flows between communities of origin and diasporic communities. Kiwan and Meinhof propose to widen this 'bi-focal' scope from ethnically and spatially defined communities to the more complex and fluid flows between networking individuals. To do so, they introduce several concepts. The first of these is 'transcultural capital,' a combination of Bourdieu's familiar categories of social and cultural 'capital,' and the notion of 'social remittances' developed in migration studies. The advantage of the term, the authors suggest, is that instead of

³ Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality*, New York: Zone Books, 2010; Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* University of Chicago Press, 2007. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.