

MARABI NIGHTS: EARLY SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ AND VAUDEVILLE, by Christopher Ballantine, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1993, 116pp, with cassette.

Written in an elegant and accessible style, this book is both enjoyable and informative. An invaluable contribution to the growing body of historical research into black South African music, it more than fulfils the author's wish to "assist" in the "task of social reconstruction" so necessary in South Africa today. *Marabi Nights* partners Erlmann's book *African Stars* particularly well,¹ and between these two publications the development of urban black popular music prior to World War Two is now substantially surveyed. Ballantine's in-depth research and meticulous referencing of source material is particularly valuable and important given the relative lack of attention to detail in some earlier publications about black South African popular music.

As his previous publications indicate,² the relationship between music and its social context has long been of primary concern to the author. Not surprisingly, therefore, the prime focus of *Marabi Nights* is the relationship between these musical activities and the socio-political circumstances which begat them. Although material contained in three of the chapters in this book has appeared elsewhere, it is most useful that the complimentary perspectives provided by each chapter are now available in one publication. Augmented by an introduction, these perspectives are skilfully moulded into a cohesive whole.

The introductory chapter situates early South African jazz and vaudeville within its musical context and provides an overview of related musical styles from the 1880s to the present day. The South African minstrel tradition, isicathamiya, mbaqanga and kwela are some of the styles which receive special mention before the author's attention is focused on the effect on musical expression of South Africa's socio-political climate since 1945. Using the "Concert and Dance" tradition as a base, the second chapter is an exploration of the development of South African jazz in the first four decades of the twentieth century. The two primary streams of influence were contemporary African-American popular music style and "traditional" music indigenous to South Africa. An exceptional and ground-breaking account of *marabi* is followed by a discussion of the influence of whites (missionaries and music teachers for instance) on the education of black musicians.

Although evident in the first half of *Marabi Nights*, Ballantine's theoretical concerns, namely the relationship between music and its context, are most clearly articulated in the book's final two chapters. The third chapter, entitled "Music and Emancipation", is an exploration of the differing roles allotted to music in the struggle of black people to improve their social circumstances and political rights. Ballantine divides concern over this dilemma into two approaches: the liberal view which assumed that social conditions could be improved within the given order and that music could further this end; and the radical view which proposed that music

¹ Veit Erlmann, *African stars: studies in Black South African performance*, University of Chicago Press, 1991. (Ed: reviewed in this issue)

² For instance Christopher Ballantine, *Music and its social meanings*, Gordon and Breach, London, 1984.

could assist effort tending "in the direction of more fundamental social change".

The final chapter is an exposé of repression experience by musicians and the ways in which this repression affected their music. In his analysis Ballantine isolates two types of repression, that which is external and internal to the communities concerned. External repression was experienced primarily as a result of discrimination and harassment on grounds of race. Internal repression is classified as those restraints on music-making resulting from the attitudes of powerful sectors within black society. For the most part such repression is class or gender related.

Perhaps the most innovative and exciting aspect of *Marabi Nights* is that the music discussed in the text is immediately available to the reader. Both the author and publishing house must be applauded for going to the trouble and expense of issuing a cassette with the book. I hope this will become a trend in the publishing of ethnomusicological texts particularly, in cases such as this, where the music under discussion is otherwise completely unavailable. Perceptive and informative commentary about each track of the cassette is provided in the appendix. The presence of the cassette as part of this study is particularly important since, in tune with much recently published research into African popular music,³ the author is not primarily concerned with detailed structural analysis and description of the music he discusses. The cassette provides readers who may be interested in the "music itself" with the means to conduct their own further investigations. An in-depth examination of the internal musical construction of early South African jazz and vaudeville is potentially one of the most valuable contributions to be made by future researchers in this field.

On its own, the cassette will appeal to jazz enthusiasts, both audience and performers, and particularly to black South Africans searching for their musical roots. The book and cassette together provide an invaluable educative tool and will be of interest to academics working in the fields of African history, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies as well as those in music education, popular-music studies and ethnomusicology.

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³ For instance David Coplan, *In township tonight!: South Africa's Black city music and theatre*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985; Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: studies in Black South African performance*, Chicago, University Press, 1991; Charles Hamm, *Afro-American music, South Africa, and apartheid*, Institute for Studies in American Music, City University of New York, 1988; Christopher Waterman, *Juju: a social history and ethnography of an African popular music*, University of Chicago Press, 1990.