

ethnicity". Finally totally carried away now by his liberal-humanistic vision of a universal, united humankind with jazz as its appointed musical language, he enthuses about jazz supporters "with diverse national and cultural backgrounds who have adopted the community's music as their own "(do they then become honorary members? I ask) and with an "abiding devotion to the music that binds this diverse population together".

Berliner cannot decide whether he is a relativist or a universalist; he cannot decide whether jazz belongs to a particular group, or whether it belongs to anyone. On the one hand he claims that jazz can only be properly explained by those who are *really* jazz musicians, those who are accredited members of "the community", but on the other hand, he claims that jazz is a universal music, capable of being adopted by all kinds of people.

It is significant that Berliner adopts a non-historical approach to the music, as if jazz simply exists, as if it could somehow transcend the specific spatial and temporal conditions under which it developed. The ubiquity of jazz has as much to do with economics, the media, and so-called "globalisation", as it has to do with any inherent universal appeal on the part of the music. Jazz is not the only music to have acquired widespread popularity, as Berliner the mbira-player should well understand.

At one point Berliner refers to the notion of jazz as "a symbol of rebellion, a musical emblem distinguishing individuals from their contemporaries or from their parents". He should make more of this angle. Jazz is full of quirky, often unlikeable and anti-social eccentrics with a solitary vision and a highly problematic relationship to "the community", and it is often such loners who have been at the forefront of new movements and changes in direction. Jazz is not a static traditional music rooted in a timeless, unchanging, isolated community: it is the music of individuals thrown into a constantly shifting, confusing and threatening environment, who are urgently trying to create an identity for themselves, using whatever creative resources are at hand. The idea of a "jazz community" represents precisely the kind of romantic abstraction – an imposed perspective – that Berliner is ostensibly trying to avoid.

Rick van Heerden, Rhodes University

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NIGHTSONG: POWER AND PRACTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA, by Veit Erlmann, Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press 1996

This book is the culmination of many years of research on Zulu male choral competitions in KwaZulu Natal by German ethnomusicologist, Veit Erlmann. It is concerned with the experiences of Zulu men who are forced to leave their rural homes and families for extensive periods at a time in search of wage earnings on the mines and major city centres. It examines the complex historical construction of "embodied imaginings" by a displaced people, codified in song, text, choreography, theatrical gesture and scrupulous style. These symbols are re-enacted every weekend through an intricate network of choral competitions, staged always deep into the night in squalid township hostels or in disused halls in downtown city spaces. Each week, the performances by these dignified, shimmering choirs provide momentary respite from the alienation and hardship of their fractured lives.

*Nightsong* commences with a warming introduction by Joseph Shabalala, the "godfather of Isicathamiya" a founder of the internationally acclaimed group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo. In each of the 10 chapters thereafter, the book proceeds with a painstaking review of the evolution of various aspects of the performance practice.

Set in the “unhomely” context of labour migration, *isicathamiya* is a performance style which comments upon home and homing, rural tradition and Zulu identity. Erlmann’s intention is “*the making of South African music history by which performers are perceived as social actors and subjects of a historical process*” (42). Where the book lacks description or discussion regarding the dance and musical practices of *isicathamiya*, it is a substantial and thoughtful socio-historical study:

*“In trying to bring the insights of an emerging historical anthropology to bear on performance and social practice in South Africa, we actually have to demonstrate - through ethnographic description based on a clear model of social analysis - the interplay of numerous social worlds, ideologies, and expressive forms setting each other into motion.”* (43)

What makes Erlmann’s analysis so compelling is that he foregrounds social ambiguities and locates them in performance. Most distinctively, *isicathamiya* combines African stylistic features with vaudeville-like colonial symbols of self-advancement: two-tone shoes, white gloves, handkerchiefs, and briefcases as dress accessories. According to Erlmann, migrant performance typically carries multiple meanings, tensions, images and references. He proposes that the complex symbols in *isicathamiya* seek to subvert and reform dominant power relations and the profoundly antagonistic social and political order in which its practitioners live. However, his analysis of the genre’s blend of seemingly contradictory features attests to the fact that the concept of oppositionality needs rethinking in the South African context. Performance becomes a potentially empowering act of transformation and restoration, and at the same time, it is a “realistic praxis” that poses questions about society.

*“Isicathamiya performers do not only counterpose different idea of social order. They also engage with the hegemonic system in numerous ways and often, almost mimetically, do so on the terms and in the figurative language set by the system itself. Opposition and dissent are not some better, purer form of social practice but frequently a variant of the prevailing mode of social interaction.”* (241)

Erlmann frames his interpretation within a concept of space. This is an appropriate framework in that the performance practice itself constitutes negotiated space, imagined and real. In terms of the socially situated ‘real’, Erlmann delineates the connecting and dividing spaces which Zulu migrants – by their very migrancy – carve out between centre and periphery, here and there, rural and urban, past and future, lost and desired. It is the political economy of apartheid and the migrant labour system which lies at the very essence of *isicathamiya* performance.

Further, the notion of space is utilized by Erlmann as a “socially guided process”, as “embodiments of the imagined order” (98). It is constructed through performance, ordered, formalized and invested with meaning. The space in which *isicathamiya* is constructed, performed and experienced, allows for the mediation of identity and the negotiation of change. It structures and reaffirms relationships based on nationhood, regionalism, community, home, fraternity and selfhood, as expressed through a “*bricolage of song lyrics, choir names and uniforms of images and symbols representing an imagined Zulu collectivity.*” (175)

Finally, Erlmann addresses the impact of commercialisation on present-day *isicathamiya* by the South African record industry, the post-Graceland globalization and commodification of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, its mobilization by both Zulu ethnic nationalism and the trade union movement, and its participation in fashioning a “new South African” identity.

*Nightsong* is a comprehensive study into which Erlmann has woven a broad range of

theoretical perspectives. It builds on his previously published archival research on *isicathamiya* in *African stars: studies in Black South African performance* (1991) and offers complementary ethnographic perspectives. Although this text is significantly more vivid than his previous writings, I would have liked to have had more sense of the individual voices of *isicathamiya* – the leaders, the women, the judges – and through them, be permitted insight into a broader range of experiences of the genre. In addition, the text would have been enhanced by a closer sense of the author himself, particularly in light of his introductory appeal for a more reflexive approach to the study of expressive culture.

The book, with its accompanying 60-minute videotape, makes a particularly valuable contribution to scholarship in South African performance studies, which has been largely historical in approach. It also contributes distinctively to South Africanist social and political history. Characteristically influenced by neo-marxism, this body of literature has tended to gloss over the formal and performative details of expressive culture, which Erlmann attends to so meticulously. While he may have failed to include analysis of musical structures and sound – an aspect of *isicathamiya* which has yet to be documented – he argues convincingly for an analysis which recognises the centrality of expressive culture to the production of power and notions of resistance. These arguments are pertinent not only to South Africanists, but also to ethnomusicologists and scholars of popular culture studies more generally.

Angela Impey, University of Natal, Durban

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AFRICA FOLK MUSIC ATLAS, hardbound book, CD-ROM & 3CD-Audio, edited by Leonardo D'Amico & Francesco Mizzau, 1997, Firenze, Italy: Amharsi Edizioni Multimediali. 93pp. index, map, illustrations, bibliography, cloth. Hardware requirements: CD-ROM drive double speed, PC486 DX2 66 MHz, Windows 3.1 or 95, 8Mb RAM, keyboard and mouse Microsoft compatible, graphic board SVGA 640x480 high color 16 bit mode, audio board Sound Blaster compatible.

The Africa Folk Music Atlas is Vol. 1 of an 8 volume series, with the seven subsequent volumes covering Italy, Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and Oceania, North America, Celtic Europe, and the Ways of Jewish Music. Credit for the idea for this book/CD-ROM/CD-audio compilation is given to Francesco Mizzau, Livio Biacomini and Matteo Silva. The intention of this volume and the series in general is “to increase awareness of the world’s many musical origins...Our hope is that ethnic music will be studied in schools as an important subject, a metalanguage for mutually understanding and accepting the differences of all the cultures of the planet” (8-9). Though the audience targeted is “everyone” this product will likely have its greatest use in school libraries and classrooms. The text of the book and CD-ROM is accessible for school age consumption, but also at an adequately sophisticated level to have appeal among adults. The texts are informative in an encyclopedic tightly summarized style.

The ‘atlas’ idea is carried from the book – which is illustrated with numerous color photos and two maps of the continent, one topographic, the other geographic – to the CD-ROM. With the help of the CD-ROM this product becomes a comprehensive interactive atlas of African music with special attention to African instruments and vocal styles in relation to their points of geographic/cultural origin. The CD-ROM is accessed from a map of the continent for each of five major “routes”: Ethnohistory, Vocality, Music of the African People (with sub-topics North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa), Musical Instruments, and Modern African Music. The