

REVIEWS

Kwaito's Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa. Gavin Steingo. 2016. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 23 b&w figures (maps, transcriptions and photos), 2 tables, bibliography, filmography, index, 327pp.

Gavin Steingo's study of kwaito's inception, development and reception in South Africa is based on ten years of ethnographic research that included living for a year in kwaito's birthplace, Soweto, and performing and recording with kwaito musicians. He gives readers an account of the political history of South Africa contemporaneous with the musical history of kwaito from its birth just prior to the death of apartheid in 1994 through the first two decades of post-apartheid 'freedom' in South Africa. Early on he makes the distinction, "...if music during apartheid expressed the struggle *for* freedom, then kwaito expresses the struggle *of* freedom" (2). In support of his theory of a unique kwaito aesthetic, Steingo explains, "On the basis of ethnographic evidence, this book shows that if kwaito musicians and listeners ignore actual social conditions, they do this intentionally in order to forge another body and another way of hearing. From this perspective, kwaito is not an illusion that hides reality; on the contrary, it *doubles reality*...the conceptual shift from illusion as hiding/masking to illusion as generating a new sensory reality is fundamental to my argument" (6). He contends that kwaito is less a form of escapism than an "aesthetic practice of multiplying sensory reality and thus generating new possibilities in the midst of neoliberalism's foreclosure of the future" (viii). This idea is carried throughout the book's chapters as Steingo focuses on aspects of kwaito's production and reception beyond its aesthetic dimensions.

Readers are given the history of kwaito's emergence and explanations of why kwaito is *not* either South African hip hop or South African house, but its own unique genre even though the music does often borrow from international influences. His main focus in the book is "an examination of kwaito as an arrangement of sensory perception that suspends normative modalities of hearing and knowing, as a distribution of the sensible that ignores actual social conditions. [...] It also examines and insists upon the importance of musical production practices and the material conditions of those practices" (21). Accounts of production practices and on the ground conditions of those practices make it abundantly clear that it was producers in a Johannesburg studio who created/manufactured kwaito, not individual artists.

In Chapter 3, "Platform, or The Miracle of the Ordinary", various examples, beginning with the artists in kwaito's seminal group, Boom Shaka and Kalawa Records – whose founders, with their cassette releases in 1991 under the name Brothers of Peace (BOP), started kwaito – are given of how producers brought artists from far-flung regions across the country together in the studio where their voices were recorded over the multiple electronic tracks they assembled. Through this process producers created what was to become a 'platform' to be heard, as was the case with Boom Shaka's 1993 release, "It's about time" widely regarded as the first kwaito hit (60). This was followed

by a change of Kalawa personnel and the production company name to Kawala Jazmee in 1996. The company that same year manufactured another highly successful early kwaito group, Bongo Maffin, whose four previously unconnected members were given a 'platform' to be heard and access to commercial success. Steingo theorizes about this studio/artists relationship by paraphrasing Rancière saying,

one might say kwaito is a "community of sense"; not a "collectivity shaped by a common feeling" but a framing of audibility and "intelligibility that puts things and practices together under the same meaning." The work of platforms, in short, is to place diverse voices on an elevated yet equal footing (2009b: 31, in Steingo 66).

Bongo Maffin is his case in point, as each of the four artists in the group retain their individual voices and identities as lyrics are sung in the first language of each artist to create a sound palate that reflects the ethnic diversity of South Africa.

Steingo uses data from his ethnographic research with both commercially successful and community based amateur kwaito artists, studio producers and kwaito consumers to document the origins and development of kwaito into a genre that he insists is political by virtue of its avoidance of comment on contemporary politics in South Africa. His contention is that avoidance of comment on the dire realities of unemployment, poverty, inequality and general disillusionment with the status quo in post-apartheid South Africa is the unspoken method through which kwaito grapples with the 'struggle of freedom'; what kwaito reveals is that the only true freedom available to the marginalized masses is in the music and their reactions to it, and that this is in fact kwaito's promise. Through its capacity to create a common understanding, it gives everyone, no matter what their background or social environment, an avenue to imagine and create their own lived experience of and through kwaito and thereby exercise the fundamental equality of all human beings. A compelling final analysis of kwaito's promise in relation to the stark inequalities in present-day South Africa is given in the Epilogue.

Attention to the music itself is found interspersed throughout Chapters 4–6. Transcriptions in standard notation of melody lines and the electronic tracks supporting them give readers the musical content of what is sung over what is constructed by programmers in the studio. Steingo provides graphic layer analysis of certain well known songs such as Bongo Maffin's "Amadlozi" (177–80). Graphic grids show the placement of each of the 12 layers that comprise the track, thus showing how this particular kwaito song was constructed.

After explaining local and global influences on kwaito artists in terms of inside and outside to elucidate the multiple cosmopolitans that result, fascinating stories of how kwaito is listened to and engaged with in Soweto are found in the final chapter entitled "Times and Spaces of Listening". Taverns found on every block of every street and *shisanyama* street parties where people hang out, drink and eat meat prepared on sidewalk *braais* (barbecues) as cars drive by with kwaito blasting are expected spaces for listening; but, the extreme is the dangerous practice of spinning cars in crowded pedestrian areas with kwaito blasting from the car itself or stationary sound systems. Steingo tells of how the cars' drivers manage to leap out of the window onto the pavement and dance inside the circle as young women swing their upper bodies out of the car windows moving to

kwaito's sounds while the car spins, in place. The sound of screeching tyres and the smell of exhaust fumes and burning rubber are part of the auditory realm and encapsulate the 'doubling of reality' Steingo reiterates throughout the book.

Steingo elucidates how his theory agrees but differs from that of Kant, Adorno, Bourdieu, McClarey and numerous others to illustrate how his account of the emergence of kwaito and how it is experienced does *not* conform with the usual parameters of musicological and ethnomusicological analysis. He rather follows the thought of philosopher Jacques Rancière as he carefully puts forth his theory that "music is not so much an illusion that hides reality than it is a way of doubling reality"(xi) and then proceeds throughout the book to show readers how it is that kwaito doubles reality. The aim of the book, he says, "is twofold. I hope to contribute to the development of ethnomusicology as a discipline and I also hope to elaborate an understanding of music that lives up to the challenges of the contemporary South African political situation"(x). Clearly he has done the latter; Steingo's creation of a music ethnography that engages and goes beyond existing critical theory to articulate a theory substantiated by the example kwaito also achieves his first aim to contribute to ethnomusicology, the discipline. The book is clearly written and deeply descriptive of Steingo's interlocutors' and his own experience of kwaito and its contexts in Soweto and beyond. The exigencies of kwaito's manufacture, consumption and impact on life experience are analyzed in depth by Steingo. His incisive ability to understand the genre's music industry and consumer milieus and theorize convincingly about them has produced insights that go far beyond the obvious in revealing the realities of kwaito's practitioners (both the producers who manufacture it and artists who work for them) and its consumers. His analytical prowess is admirable. Finally, this book is a must-read for those seeking to understand how and why ethnographic research is essential to practice in ethnomusicology.

Diane Thram, Rhodes University

Staging Ghana: Artistry and Nationalism in State Dance Ensembles. Paul Schauert. 2015. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 29 online media examples at Ethnomusicology Multimedia Series, 15 figures, bibliography, index, 343 pp.

With examples such as David Gweshe's troupe from Zimbabwe, the Ballet National du Mali or the National Dance Troupe from Tanzania, the representation of nationhood through national dance ensembles has become popular in many postcolonial countries in Africa. After independence, for Nkrumah, representing or 'staging' the idea of a nation was an attempt at bringing awareness to the cultural plurality in postcolonial Ghana (82). Rather than promoting cultural plurality, many ideals of postcolonial nationalism over-represented the largest ethnic group of many, newly independent nations in Africa. Examples of the latter would be the elevation of Shona music by the Zimbabwean African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) in Zimbabwe,