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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Songs, Dreamings, and Ghosts: The Wangga of North Australia by Allan Marett

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three themes. *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance* will be of interest both to regular readers of research in indigenous performance and culture, and to other academic readers with interests in many different areas of the performing arts, humanities, and social sciences.

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References

Marett, Allan. 2005. *Songs, Dreamings, and Ghosts: The Wangga of North Australia*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Songs, Dreamings, and Ghosts: The Wangga of North Australia. Allan Marett. 2005. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. xxiii, 292 pp., appendices, bibliography, index, black and white photographs, musical examples. Accompanying CD. Paper, \$34.95.

Inspired by a concern that a young Aboriginal man expressed to him in 1986 (and subsequently confirmed in the Statement on Indigenous Music and Performance issued at the 2002 Garma Symposium on Indigenous Performance Research) that the songs of Aboriginal peoples are not properly valued in the non-Aboriginal community, Allan Marett seeks to improve our ability to understand the significance of Aboriginal performances, and the practices and conventions that guide them (xvi). In *Songs, Dreamings, and Ghosts*, he focuses on four repertoires of *wangga*—a major genre of Aboriginal Australian music, composed and performed by Marri-tjevin and Marri-ammu people in the Daly region, and Wadjiginy people from the community of Belyuen to the north—Marett argues that by examining the “fine detail” of text and music we can recognize how performers use music and dance conventions to enact broader cultural themes (3). Wangga songs, which are performed usually by one or two male singers (songmen) who also play clapsticks and are accompanied by a didjeridu, are given to songmen in dreams by particular spirit beings and other song-giving agents. These songs are transmitted to other songmen according to hereditary and customary conventions. The living and the dead interact not only when songs are given to songmen, but also when songmen perform the songs in ceremony. The texts of wangga songs, and the dances that accompany them, are central to this interaction. By understanding how performers put songs and dances together, Marett holds, we can appreciate the poetics and aesthetics of their traditions (81). He demonstrates this with finely detailed analyses of both particular performative moments and trends that span multiple decades and generations.

Interpenetration of the worlds of the living and the dead, and reciprocal

obligation and interaction between the living and dead, are guiding principles in the composition and ceremonial use of wangga songs. In Chapter One, comprehensive accounts of the principal repertoires of wangga, and of the role of different orders of the being that are involved in song conception, ease the way first into a fuller account of ancestor-to-songman song-giving and lineages of hereditary and customary transmission (Chapter Two), and then into a fuller account of the ceremonial role of wangga and its ancestral precedent (Chapter Three). Marett shows how both song transmission and ceremonial performance draw the worlds of the living and dead together, following ancestral precedent, and how they are highly flexible and relevant in the changing social lives of wangga performers. What particularly distinguishes this book, however, is the way that Marett uses textual, dance, and musical analyses to “open up” and render intelligible “significant (and signifying) moments” of wangga performance (6).

Marett shows that song-texts in the Walakandha and Ma-yawa wangga repertoires from the Daly region (Chapters Five and Six, respectively), and Tommy Barrtjap’s and Bobby Lambudju Lane’s repertoires from Belyuen (Chapters Seven and Eight, respectively), enact the voices of particular song-giving agents. Marett shows how techniques and conventions such as grammatical ambiguity and ellipsis have the effect of presenting simultaneously two voices—that of the singer and that of the song-giving agent. Marett draws on collaborative work with linguist Lysbeth Ford and surpasses previous work on song-texts in northern Australia by showing how interpenetration of the living and dead worlds is maximized with these techniques, and by demonstrating the continuity of ancestral precedent in the present-day actions of wangga composers and performers.

Marett also makes significant advances in research on rhythm and meter in northern Australian music. In wangga, the modal organization of rhythm is manipulated in relation to changing social environments and relationships with country. Songs in the Walakandha wangga repertory, for example, are today performed in only one rhythmic mode in order to facilitate participation in dance and to unite multiple language groups in the changing social environment of the community where this repertory is performed (132). In the Ma-yawa wangga repertory from the same region, by contrast, we see a musical system that, no longer constrained by the same social forces, contains individual songs that are performed in multiple rhythmic modes, reflecting a more complicated past practice. In Chapter Nine, Marett goes on to compare the system of rhythmic mode operating in the wangga tradition with that of *lirrga* (another performance genre indigenous to the region), and *manikay* (from Arnhem Land). This in itself makes a significant contribution to understanding musical systems across north Australia. Marett, however, also flags a compelling area for future research by drawing on historical evidence of

contact between Macassans (from Ujung Pandang) and people from Western Arnhem Land, and relationships between people from the Daly region (where wangga is performed) and Western Arnhem, and to suggest that northern Australian music may represent “the southeastern end of a vast continuum of music” that reaches “from the Middle East, through India, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia, to the northern shores of Australia” (208).

Marett’s analyses of song-texts and rhythm are matched by his attention to the conventions that guide the performance of melody. Building on research that identifies the potential power of melody in Australian Aboriginal music to “signify relationships between people, their Dreamings, and their country” (80) pioneered by Ellis (1984), and subsequently addressed in research on repertoires from both Central Australia and Northeast Arnhem Land, Marett explores the relationships that wangga melodies and modes have with specific language groups and hereditary lineages. As with the deployment of rhythmic modes, melodic material is manipulated as part of the negotiation of changing relationships between different lineages, shifting relationships to country, and new social and ceremonial contexts.

A final section of the book discusses the spread of wangga into the Barunga/Beswick region, to the east, and into the northern and western Kimberley, to the west. Marett regards the grammatical coherence that is retained in the Barunga repertory as a sign that some understanding of the broader cosmological significance of the songs is retained. By contrast, in the Kimberley repertory he finds that songs “take on a new significance” (218). What this significance is, however, is yet to be shown, as relatively little research to date has been done on wangga in the region. This, however, is not the primary focus of Marett’s research and what he has shown contributes to and paves the way for further research of song transmission within the Kimberley and across north Australia.

In the introduction to the book Marett positions himself within the tradition he studies, conceiving of his writing task as part a web of reciprocal obligation that guides the relationship of “cultural bestowal and trust” between living and deceased songmen in song conception, and that similarly guides his own relationship with the living and deceased songmen with whom he has worked (14). Marett’s commitment to this relationship is marked by the careful and thorough documentation of the wangga tradition, by the way in which musical and social analyses are integrated to achieve the aim of appreciating its poetics and aesthetics, and by the book’s overall significance to the fields of Australian Aboriginal studies and ethnomusicology. It is also marked by the care with which Marett presents his research to a wide range of readers; while analyses, extensive appendices, and a wide-ranging index will be particularly useful to specialists, the author eases the reader into the analyses with tools such as an initial “thumbnail sketch” of one song

(18–23), and he presents analyses with useful and integrated audio examples, transcriptions, photos, and illustrations, rendering the book equally suited to non-specialists. Marett's commitment to participation in the wangga tradition, to the wangga songmen with whom he conducted his research, and to a diverse audience, is evident throughout the book, maximizing its potential to achieve the aim of improving understanding of the significance and role of Aboriginal performance.

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Reference

Ellis, Catherine. 1984. "Time Consciousness of Aboriginal Performers." In *Problems and Solutions: Occasional Essays in Musicology presented to Alice M. Moyle*, edited by J.C. Kassler and J. Stubington, 155–70. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger.

Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India. Amanda J. Weidman. 2006. Durham: Duke University Press. xvi. 350 pp., photographs, illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$84.94; Paper, \$23.95.

The late nineteenth and twentieth century history of Carnatic music has often been understood as one of revival and revitalization of a centuries-old tradition, now preserved faithfully through concert hall programs, notations of compositions, and hagiographies of the great "saint-singer" composer Tyagaraja, among other strategies. In *Singing the Classical*, Amanda Weidman deconstructs this narrative on several counts. First, she argues that, rather than predating the impact of the West in modern India, "Carnatic classical music" emerged relatively late *as a result of* the colonial encounter with Britain. Second, she posits that the aesthetics of voice in Carnatic music, far from representing a continuous and ancient tradition, actually developed dynamically during the last century, stemming from forces such as the intersection of gender and caste, and the role of technology. Finally, she holds that the other pivotal features of the tradition—such as its devotional and text-based nature, and the centrality of composition and the composer—also emerged recently from a variety of factors related to the colonial encounter and modernity in general.

Weidman views Indian classical music not simply as a site of counter-hegemonic resistance to British domination, or as a timeless expression of national identity and complex, beautiful art, but instead as a set of distinctly twentieth century ramifications of this encounter. Few book-length works on Indian classical music have addressed it in this way (Bakhle 2005 is an exception), and