Musical examples, illustrations, lyrics and translations, index, CD.

Anna Perkins
Undergraduate Student, Fourth Year, Music Composition Major
Christopher Newport University, Virginia, USA

Jazz Worlds/World Jazz, edited by Philip V Bohlman and Goffredo Plastino, provides a fresh and vivid take on the world of jazz beyond American borders. It questions the notion that jazz is exclusively American at heart, as it is commonly treated. This book proposes that perhaps labels such as “ethnic jazz” or “world jazz” simply ignore the hybridity of jazz, and that a more informed view would expand the genre. The collection of essays that make up the book are divided into five main sections: Place, History, Media, Globalization/Indigenization, and Race. Each chapter contains contributions from a different author and presents a unique political or cultural perspective regarding world jazz. These authors reference individual experience, personal interviews, and local histories to express the style of jazz within a particular region. Complete with a CD containing corresponding music, this large-scope collection is a helpful resource for those looking to learn about jazz beyond the United States.

The book contains a foreword by George E. Lewis, who asks who, rather than what, jazz is. He sets the scene for the rest of the book by establishing the argument that American jazz is typically seen as the only “true” jazz, though indeed arguments are still made as to whether jazz, even the word jazz, is distinctly American in origin.\(^1\)

Histories of the genre tend to exclude any contributions from outside American

borders; these local musics are only seen as foreign tweaks to the original “true” jazz. Jazz Worlds/World Jazz is built in direct response to this argument. Other sources, such as De Veaux’s groundbreaking “Constructing the Jazz Tradition,” have indeed discussed the role of ethnicity in relation to jazz, though these concerns are typically restricted to the ethnicity of African Americans. Jazz Worlds/World Jazz instead offers a more expansive outlook in terms of ethnicities and “authenticities.” It presents the music as a more universal genre, offering validity and authority to non-American jazz styles.

These sentiments are continued in the Introduction, written by editors Bohlman and Plastino, who seek to broaden the scope of the term jazz. They begin by boiling down the music to its very essence, in a way that I felt was truly beautiful and all-encompassing, writing,

while improvising, musicians personalise the structures of the language of jazz, forging new vocabularies by transforming the common ground of a standard tune into the dialects of altered chords and shifting progressions that express the intimate passage between past and future. In the course of jazz performance, the musicians turn inward, enclosing themselves in a world they selectively inhabit, ceaselessly in search of intimacy’s place (1).

The editors assert that the labels put on different branches of the same music are superfluous and only serve to perpetuate stereotypes and musical intolerance. Likewise, Ioannis Tsioulakis supports this argument, stating that these stereotypes hinder the progression, or even the participation, of jazz artists.

Bohlman and Plastino present six different factors that play into the musical features and practices of any given locale: political geography, cultural geography, performance spaces, the body, mediated spaces, and musical spaces. They then use these terms to highlight a few different musical traditions throughout the world, including the contributions of Eurovision, Doublemoon Turkish music, Putumayo World Music, and the Sardinian guitar. Before the substance of the book even begins, the editors offer a snapshot of the rest of the text through brief descriptions of local jazz. This vignette style presents somewhat of a challenge to the reader, however. Due to the overall text’s expansive 552 pages, this book requires a great deal of organization in order to remain effective. While this task is accomplished on the whole, the extensive introduction lacks the same focus. The editors speak about several different places and ideas, though few of them are addressed further in any of the later chapters. Many of the editors’ assessments and examples remain at the superficial level and do not

---


correspond with the issues discussed in the rest of the book. While I can see how these excerpts bolster the text’s argument further, I believe that by looking at so many different kinds of music this section lost some of the necessary focus.

The first four chapters of the book cover the subject matter presented in the introduction, beginning with the jazz of Scandinavia. Fabian Holt discusses the fusion of jazz and Scandinavian culture, particularly through the music of Norwegian saxophonist Jan Garbarek. Other volumes in world jazz, such as Mike Heffley’s *Northern Sun/Southern Moon*, have included the history of jazz in Scandinavia, but Holt’s research is unique in that he focuses on the present influence of Scandinavian culture on jazz. He examines the idea of “home” as a necessity in Scandinavia but is also careful to respect differences between cultures. For example, he explains how jazz concerts embody the Danish principle of *hygge*, “an atmosphere of intimacy and coziness,” but how jazz also relates to the Swedish idea of home as a national identity (55). This chapter is incredibly informative, for while there is literature to suggest a thriving jazz community in Europe, rarely is such research allowed to be so specific and intimate with the people in question and their unique cultures.

In the second chapter, author Claire Levy discusses the particular brand of jazz found in Bulgaria and other nearby Balkan countries. Primarily through the music of Milcho Leviev, she paints the practice of jazz as an act of rebellion, as well as an expression of freedom, in the presence of a totalitarian regime. Levy describes the importance of Leviev, as his experimental music was pivotal to the development of Bulgarian jazz, and the information she provides about actual musical developments is fascinating. However, I feel that she somewhat assumes the reader has previous knowledge of Leviev’s influence. Because this chapter is more specific, focusing primarily on one musician and not on the nation, it would help to know the extent of the importance of Leviev and his music. On the contrary, Inna Naroditskaya handles this issue quite well in the following chapter. Her discussion of the mugham jazz of Azerbaijan centers on musician Vagif Mustafa-zadeh. His contributions to jazz are truly significant, and his influence in Azerbaijani music is made clear throughout.

Chapters three and four explore the role of jazz in countries ruled by censorship and oppression. Both the Soviet rule in Azerbaijan in the mid-twentieth century and the strict Islamic government in Iran during the 1980’s and 90’s influenced the development and reception of jazz. The chapter on Iran is rather vague, however, as the role of Islam itself is not considered as much as the actions of Muslim rulers. In comparison, Christopher W. Chase provides more material to help explain this kind of culture in his article “Prophetics in the Key of Allah: Towards an Understanding of Islam in Jazz.” He explains how Islam relates to jazz, suggesting, “Jazz is prophecy. In other words, jazz itself presents us with the promise and example of an equalitarian ideal political, social,

---


---

Critical Voices: The University of Guelph Book Review Project is part of the curriculum at the School of Fine Art and Music, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
interpersonal framework and statement of collective action.” Perhaps an intersection between both types of data would be beneficial to understanding jazz in Iran, as I felt author Laudan Nooshin did not include enough information about the music itself.

Chapters five, six, and seven focus on history, discussing the influence and reception of non-American jazz from a larger historical perspective. Andy Fry’s chapter on France speaks about cultural reception, while Pedro Roxo and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco’s chapter on Portugal discusses the ways jazz relates to politics. The aim of these chapters varies so much from that of the first section on race and even from the introduction, because they do not include much information about the music itself, but rather the effects of the music. I would argue that, at times, the main focus of the book is blurred here; the editors present the book as an analysis of how international influences cause music to evolve, but several chapters do not incorporate musical elements. Furthermore, Philip V. Bohlman’s chapter on “Jazz at the Edge of Empire” is perhaps the most vague and confusing, because it speaks at times of historical empires such as the British, the Ottoman, and German, but at other times refers to the “edge of empire” as a concept. Surprisingly, the chapters written by the editors, including Plastino’s later chapter on Jazz Napoletano, may be the most difficult for a non-academic reader to understand, as they seem to be more philosophical in nature. I found that prior expertise in these geographical locations and histories was necessary for comprehension.

The three chapters that make up the section on media bring the focus back to music. Kay Kaufman Shelemay presents the recent origins of jazz in Ethiopia through the “Ethio-jazz” experimentation of musician Mulatu Astatke. She discusses his blend of a strong sense of individuality, essential to the Ethiopian culture, and American jazz traditions that make his specific sound. Though this pivotal performer studied in America, she says, he did not identify with the political tensions of African Americans. A crucial element of Shelemay’s chapter is the stress between African jazz and African-American jazz. Indeed, this argument resonates with Steven Feld’s book Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra. In his account, African drummer Ghanaba criticized the United States’ jazz culture for treating his African jazz roots as less intellectual, only wanting to “blacken” their sound by involving someone from Africa.

Chapter Ten looks at the music of South Africa. Through a discussion of the musical efforts of several jazz groups, author Carol Ann Muller seeks to create a jazz narrative separate from the United States, starting instead from Cape Town. In between these two chapters is an essay by Richard C. Jankowsky about jazz as a unique brand of diplomacy. Drawing specifically from international American propaganda concerts during the Cold War, he asserts that presenting jazz as quintessentially American in fact closes off all other forms of jazz from legitimisation. Though this chapter did not follow the unique music of a region like the others, it shed light on an issue that I had never seen before.


The section on globalisation/indigenisation—chapters eleven through thirteen—contains entries that are more personal and subjective. Niko Higgins’ chapter on musical fusion in India, as well as the cultural stress on virtuosity, is drawn almost exclusively from first-hand interviews with Indian musicians, particularly bamboo flute player Shashank and sitar player Niladri Kumar. Likewise, Anahid Kassabian’s chapter on Armenian jazz is autobiographical. He traces his musical experience and the impact that three different Armenian groups, Taksim, Night Ark, and the Armenian Navy Band, had on his life and musical outlook. He helps dissect the hybridity of this local jazz by discussing compositions that incorporate musical traits of Armenian folk music, such as odd meters like 9/8 or instruments such as the *dumbeg* drum. Both of these chapters are incredibly personal and less historical, but perhaps provide a meaningful viewpoint on areas of jazz rarely explored elsewhere.

The final section of the book, chapters fourteen through sixteen, focuses on race and raises concerns often ignored in discussions about music. While these arguments sometimes speak to American racial tensions, the issues present are likewise known internationally. Travis A. Jackson questions the canon of jazz and of “world jazz” in his chapter. He draws out some of the systems that help to perpetuate the imbalances in canonic formation, particularly those involving race. In the same vein, Kristin McGee’s chapter centers on jazz pianist Hazel Scott. She discusses the challenges faced by an African American woman in jazz and allows her story to create a larger narrative for other minorities. In the final chapter, Ronald Radano urges the reader to acknowledge the stereotypes and structures that exist regarding race and ethnicity. He argues that it is the responsibility of the listener to question the formation of the canon and to critically consider his/her perspective. Rather than criticize the media for information that can lead to stereotypes, Radano encourages the reader to look past the media and critically analyze music culture for themselves.

The epilogue by Richard Middleton is very open-ended and thought provoking. He brings back the question of what exactly jazz is or what it encompasses but does not actually provide any possible answers. I would argue that it was ineffective to provide such an unsettling, philosophical end to a book that seeks to give answers to some of these questions. Nevertheless, it could perhaps prompt the reader to further study beyond this volume.

There is one gaping hole in the information of this book. The discussion contains very little information about contributions from South or Central America, though Latin jazz is one of the most widely accepted genres of world jazz. While this book does provide excellent perspectives on musics previously unknown in America, I would have appreciated the inclusion of a genre that is more integrated into the American sound. In contrast, Christopher Washburne’s chapter in the edited collection *Jazz/Not Jazz* provides such information. He presents well-known Latin jazz artists and asks why their music is “rarely treated simultaneously with, or with equal weight as, the music of Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong?” While these arguments are made about other

---


*Critical Voices: The University of Guelph Book Review Project* is part of the curriculum at the School of Fine Art and Music, University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada.
international musics throughout *Jazz Worlds/World Jazz*, it surprisingly excludes the importance of Latin jazz.

*Jazz Worlds/World Jazz* is unique in both the amount and scope of research compiled. At certain points, such as in the introduction and the chapters on more abstract issues, I felt the scope was perhaps too wide. There is so much information in this book that it is difficult to organise or categorise. However, I feel that the aim of the book as a whole was true and concise. While there is other research on the topic of world jazz, I do not believe any other volume contains the amount of varied information found here, including the aid provided by the companion CD.

**For Further Reading:**


