

Steven Feld, *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982. Pp. xii, 264, maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$28.00. Paperback \$10.95.

This ethnography evolved out of a highly idealized fieldwork situation. Steven Feld was initially intrigued by the dissertation and subsequent book of a fellow anthropologist (E. L. Schieffelin) and his wife on the Kaluli, one of the four Bosavi-speaking groups of the Southern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea. It was his good fortune to gain access both to their linguistic proficiency (he lived with them during most of his year's fieldwork) and to their field collections of genealogies, local histories, and detailed records of social and economic activities. Thus Feld began his fieldwork with much of the groundwork for his study already prepared--enviable if not perfect research circumstances serving to increase the reader's expectations.

The breadth of the book's subtitle notwithstanding, Feld focuses on the songs of the *gisalo* ceremony and consciously sets out to complement Schieffelin's own work (1976) which examines its social significance. Feld's book began as a doctoral dissertation, and although the transition to its present form has been largely smooth, remnants of the original work occasionally slip through: unnecessary repetition in the early chapters; two subheadings in French (presumably to indicate his acknowledgement to Levi-Strauss); and periodic breaks in the presentation to recast already lucid accounts in the language of one or other of his interpretive models (Levi-Strauss, Geertz, and Hymes). Another distraction is the frequent introduction of new material in chapter sections headed "Conclusion."

The book is organized around interpretations and ramifications of the Kaluli myth "The boy who became a *muni* bird," seeking to establish music as a system of symbols. The opening chapter examines how the Kaluli values of interpersonal relationships, food, hunger, and reciprocity are reflected and crystallized in the myth and how both the pitch sequences and interpreted meaning of the *muni's* call are paralleled in women's weeping and men's *gisalo* songs. It is here, however, that an apparent procedural oversight has been made. If there is such a thing as Bosavi or Kaluli musical style, then one can expect to find shared features among the various song categories. Feld admits that four song categories have pentatonic tonal structures (p. 36), and one of these also duplicates the *muni* call representation (p. 37). He claims that the Kaluli represent the *muni* call in a four-note descending pitch sequence (p. 31). The possibility therefore exists that the Kaluli have structured their representation of the call using melodic intervals that fitted into their musical style, i.e. the *muni* call was incorporated into an existing style. Feld, however, claims a generative relationship between the call and the *gisalo* song contours (pp. 38-43), and indeed much of the book is predicated on this assumption. He may well be correct, but the fact remains that he makes no mention of

any other possible explanation for the similarities between the *muni* call and the *gisalo* song. In a work relying heavily on indigenous terminology and outlook, this apparent extrapolation is a disappointment. A more rigorous treatment of this theme would have resolved such misgivings.

Chapter two provides a detailed taxonomy of local birds according to Kaluli ornithology and relates this to metaphors using bird names, symbols incorporating bird coloring and movements, and the grouping of bird calls into linguistically intelligible and unintelligible units. The amount and variety of detail are justified by the importance of the *muni* bird myth to the Kaluli in matters of sorrow, death, *gisalo* song, and belief about the afterlife.

The *muni* myth has connotations of child abandonment, grief, and death. The representation of the *muni's* four-note call is said to form the basis of *gisalo* ceremony melodies. *gisalo* texts contain a graduated sequence of sorrowful references culminating in the "hardening" of the words at the point of climax, revealing that the songs are directed at a particular man in the audience, recently bereaved, and are allegedly sung by the spirit of the deceased who is now a bird. The emotional intensity moves this man (and his close relatives and friends) to tears. They seize burning torches and ram them into the singer's back in retribution for having provoked them to tears. The same *muni* pitch sequence occurs in the melodic weeping of women during mourning, expressing grief transcending mere speech. A deft mirror image emerges: song moves men to tears, but weeping moves women to song.

A subsequent chapter examines the poetic content of *gisalo* song texts. These are shown to have layered meanings, with "insides," "underneaths," and "turned-over language" (i.e. metaphor) culminating in a "hardening" when the identity of the man to whom the songs are directed is identified unequivocally. The texts trace recent travel through local country associated with the deceased and the specific member of the audience, recounting shared activities at remembered places.

Feld also analyzes Kaluli musical terminology, which derives from metaphors about the qualities of water and bird calls. This analysis largely duplicates a paper published in 1981 (Feld 1981). Specific melodic intervals and overall melodic shape derive from the various characteristics of waterfall sounds. For example, *sa-min* is a level area before a waterfall drop; in music, it describes level melodic movement. Less clear, however, is the term *sa-gulu*, which relates to level movement on the phrase final (p. 168). Feld translates this term as the "tonal center" (p. 169), but offers no justification in terms of Kaluli metaphors, apparently confusing melodic movement on a pitch with that pitch itself.

Chapter six summarizes the previous data and sets out to examine Kaluli aesthetics, by which the author means the bases and nature of emotional responses relating to sorrow and song. The “becoming a bird” metaphor is deemed central to Kaluli emotional states because it alone evokes deep feelings of loss, nostalgia, and abandonment. Feld himself took drumming, singing, and dancing lessons, becoming an inside outsider in order to add an emotional dimension to his material by attempting to duplicate the emotional state of a Kaluli performer. Evidently impressed, the Kaluli responded by talking about the “inner dimensions” of such an emotional state, but unfortunately Feld does not record their comments. Mastery of the technical elements of performance, however, is but a single factor; bimusicality, like biculturalism will forever elude the trained Western mind by simple virtue of that training. Feld’s rejection of a value-free, objective, analytical approach to studying the emotive qualities of musical phenomena in favor of a performance-oriented, personal, and subjective “experience” is somewhat frustrating (p. 236), as there is no sign that he had exhausted Kaluli disclosures on the subject. Moreover, his claim that ethnographers should (and therefore in his mind, could) become “emotionally involved people who have an open nondetached attitude” (p. 236) appears to ignore the cultural bias in the educational processes that underpin the Western mentality, and which presumably motivates ethnographers into the field in the first place.

Despite these reservations, the book’s strong points are immediately apparent and impressive: lucidity of expression and tenacity in extracting the details of intricate and multivocal phenomena. In these respects, Feld’s work advances Papua New Guinea ethnomusicology in a manner that is both absorbing and stimulating. Mention is made of two discs of Feld’s Kaluli recordings (p. 259). One, which deals with the *gisalo* songs examined in the book, was, regrettably, unavailable. The other, *Music of the Kaluli* (1982), contains examples of songs both locally composed and imported from surrounding areas. Several points of similarity with the *gisalo* songs are evident including melodic intervals, descending melodic contours, and “echo” polyphony. Although the subject matter of Feld’s book is limited to the *gisalo*, a more comprehensive approach to Kaluli music as a totality would have put these *gisalo* texts and music in a more balanced setting. It is hoped that we can look forward to Feld’s next publications to do this.

REFERENCES

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