

Richard Moyle, *Traditional Samoan Music*. Auckland: Auckland University Press in association with The Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1988. Pp. xv, 271, maps, tables, musical notation, drawings, plates, appendix, glossary, bibliography, indexes. US\$45.00.

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*Traditional Samoan Music* is as handsome as its companion volume, *Tongan Music*, recently published by the same author and press (Moyle 1987). Like *Tongan Music*, this volume contains a great deal of information presented to an academic readership from a predominantly musical point of view.

*Traditional Samoan Music* is based on the author's fieldwork in Samoa between 1966 and 1969, and subsequent doctoral dissertation (Moyle 1971). The organization of the musical data, methods of analysis, and general conclusions are the same in both works. The 1971 manuscript has been substantially rewritten for the 1988 publication, and additional information has been included, such as a review of international collections of Samoan music recordings and a more comprehensive review of written historical sources concerned with Samoan music

and dance. Detailed information on the amount and types of musical data collected in the field, methods of field collection, criteria for evaluating the data, and quantification of the data and their analyses are available only in the 1971 manuscript. For example, Moyle collected 913 musical pieces, of which 353 were chosen for detailed description and analysis (1971:xxi-xxii). Presumably these same 353 musical pieces form the basis for the 1988 study.

The first three chapters of *Traditional Samoan Music* --"Introduction," "Musical Ethnography," and "Musical Instruments"--serve as an introductory section to the remaining five chapters, which concentrate on the presentation, description, and analysis of musical data. The musical data are organized according to "texture," a musicological term Moyle employs to designate major song types as "solo," "unison," "responsorial," and "polyphonic." Songs not strictly conforming to the four major song types are handled through use of the qualifying statement "and predominantly," as in, for example, "Unison (and Predominantly Unison) Song Types," the title of the fifth chapter. Dance songs are discussed in a separate chapter. The distribution of the musical data within the four major song types, additionally divided into "pitched" and "unpitched" categories, is presented in the dissertation (Moyle 1971:3-4).

My review of this work naturally reflects my own bias toward contemporary works of an ethnomusicological nature. I have long grappled with the impositions of Western music theory and approaches as well as with Western anthropological approaches, particularly toward determining what is and is not "traditional" and what is and is not of value to a certain people. I recently attended a symposium concerning Pacific island cultures and was dismayed to hear several scholars, young and old, state that "tradition" in Polynesia can only refer to that which was done before the islands were "discovered" by Europeans. I was rather astounded to learn that everything, including music and dance, produced by the Pacific islanders since discovery by the West is not considered traditional (by Western scholars!).

The meaning of the term "traditional" in relation to Samoan music is very important to this work, Moyle presents his argument for what is "traditional" Samoan music near the end of the introduction. He reviews the Samoan terms and expressions for Samoan music: *'o pese fa'a-Samoa* refers to traditional Samoan music (songs) and *'o pese Samoa* refers to Samoan songs with "a broader reference base, encompassing both traditional material and compositions of European style" (10). He points out that the use of the Samoan language in a musical

performance is not the only determining factor of its being traditional, but that age is also a factor as illustrated by the expression *'o pese mai anamua* (songs from antiquity), which "are usually said to be 'traditional' (*'fa'a-Samoa'*). However, the term *'o le pese mai anamua'* is sometimes used of [sic] a song of modern composition whose subject-matter relates to antiquity; in such cases care is needed to establish the date of composition, where this is known" (10). Besides age, Moyle says "a further basis for identification of 'traditional' musical styles emerges from the analysis presented later in this present work," that is, "texture," along with melodic contour, scales, rhythm, form, tonality, and other musical aspects. Throughout the volume Moyle places negative value on Western influences on music and dance, indeed on acculturated music in general, and positive value on pre-European music and dance. As one reads on, one discovers that many of the songs, musical instruments, and dances described are obsolete, or nearly obsolete. Do I assume then, to pick an example, that the Samoan songs performed today, accompanied by the Samoan equivalent of the Hawaiian slack-key guitar, are not traditional, or to take it a step further, are not Samoan?

Tantalizing glimpses of a complex political, economic, and social organization are given in the first two chapters, but the reader is left wondering how the rest of the study will relate to the people whose music and dance this is (or was). The idea of a "national" music, first mentioned in the introduction in connection with recent change in musical traditions, is never really explored. It is an intriguing idea and should have been fully developed for the reader to appreciate its manifestations in the data presented later in the book. In view of this, one wonders why, in the maps and in the discussions of Samoan history, Moyle ignores the political division between Western Samoa and American Samoa. That division certainly has affected the lifeways of Samoans and their view of a "national culture."

The references in the introduction to "prehistory" and "pre-contact" as opposed to "history" (2) is rather confusing as Moyle does not tell us clearly at what point the three became distinguished and by whom. Unfortunately, very little is said about Samoan accounts of Samoa's history, which, I suspect, would reveal that Samoa did have a great deal of contact with other peoples before the Europeans arrived. Many fleeting references are made to intermarriage, warfare, and trade with Tonga, Fiji, and Uvea. The reader, however, is never told when the contacts were made (and if they are still being made), how they were made, what the impact was on the society as a whole, and, in particular, how these contacts affected the evolving role of music and dance in Samoan

society. For example, a discussion of the historical and contemporary relationships to Tonga would have been useful at the end of the section on “historical songs” in the chapter on responsorial song types.

“Musical Ethnography” is an interesting, though brief (eleven pages) chapter. It would have been more satisfying to learn more about, for example, the values placed on certain kinds of musical and dance performances, the imagery and symbolism of the poetry, the gender roles in musical and dance performances, individual versus group presentations, competition, and the processes and products of change in terms of music and dance. Moyle affirms the importance of poetry to traditional music and dance, but makes a curiously weak statement in this chapter: “Although an examination of Samoan poetry is beyond the scope of this present work, *it appears* that the values ascribed to the artistry through which language is shaped into spoken poetry are heightened when that poetry becomes the means of group expression and is communicated through song” (18; emphasis added).

Musical instruments, particularly from museum collections, are given relatively great attention. The instruments are carefully ordered and described, although I feel Moyle forces too strict a categorization of drums where there seems to have been none historically. Perhaps he is responding to his concern that “any study of Samoan slit drums is fraught with difficulties and confusion when the focus turns to the mid-nineteenth century” (26). In the introduction he says that Samoan music is primarily vocal, as indeed most Polynesian music is, and that “musical instruments play a role in regulating tempo and in signalling” (10). I could not find sufficient illustration through transcriptions and/or descriptions of how this occurs. I would assume that such a role is most prominent in dance music, but was not able to find an example in the chapter on dance songs. Kaeppler pointed out in her review of Moyle’s *Tongan Music* that musical instruments were of minor importance to Polynesian musical performances before the introduction of the guitar and *‘ukulele* (Kaeppler 1989:355). Since Moyle does not present evidence of the relationship of musical instruments to vocal music in this volume, I assume that musical instruments were not of major importance to traditional Samoan music (although the guitar as played by Samoans certainly is important to the Samoan musical system today). Drums were (are?) obviously important to Samoans and many clues are given in the text as to the nature of that importance, but there is no discussion of the traditions surrounding their construction or their relationship to traditional religious and social ceremonies, the chiefly hierarchy, and traditional poetry.

A thorough inventory of historical song types, most listed by their

Samoan-language designation, is presented in the next five chapters. The inclusion of transcriptions and translations of Samoan poetry and narration, together with Western musical transcriptions, enhance the presentation, and a summary analysis of the musical data presented ends each chapter. The reader's appreciation and understanding of Samoan music would have been greatly elevated if a recording of the examples being described were to have accompanied the volume. Moyle refers the reader to a few commercial releases, one containing examples of his own field recordings from Samoa, for only a very few of the transcriptions.

The chapter on solo songs concentrates on *tagi* (songs performed during the course of *fagoga* stories) and medicinal incantations for four types of illnesses (Moyle reports that he collected incantations for eighty-four types of illnesses). Examples of lullabies are also examined. The section on medicinal song types, though most interesting, lacks an anthropological context. Some examination of the symbolism of the ideas and concepts expressed by the transcribed oral histories Moyle includes would have been helpful. One wonders why Moyle did not take advantage of the substantial body of literature available on traditional medicinal practices in Oceania (and elsewhere, for that matter).

The translation of the Samoan texts in this and subsequent chapters is apparently by Moyle (he does not credit any one individual). It is difficult to tell from reading his explanations of the texts whether what he writes is his own interpretation or the Samoan interpretation. Moyle makes a curious observation regarding the term '*ae*': "the term appears to have no lexical meaning, and is used exclusively in the *fagoga* context" (61). In his dissertation, Moyle did not offer this opinion. The term appears often in the poetry of other song types presented in the subsequent chapters, where it is translated (apparently by Moyle) as the exclamation "oh!" *Auwe (ae)*, the Hawaiian counterpart (also used in Tahitian and other Central Polynesian languages), is frequently used in speech and poetry to express grief, dismay, and surprise, and has a Proto-Polynesian root, *ae(e)* (see Pukui and Elbert 1986: s.v. *ae*). The word is also listed in the Samoan dictionary by Pratt (1911: s.v. '**Auē**) with the meanings "alas, oh! wonder; Oh! of approbation." '*Aue* is certainly a part of the vocabulary of Polynesian languages and does indeed have meaning.

Many of the musical transcriptions in the solo songs chapter are in the bass clef, including all the lullabies. Were the lullabies all sung by males or by women with very low vocal registers? Although most of the captions to the transcriptions identify the singer(s) by name, gender is not

given (nor is it specified in the index of Samoan singers). Moyle partially explains why the bass clef is used in his dissertation; the curious reader will have to refer to it (1971: 324).

The largest part of *Traditional Samoan Music* deals with game songs under the major grouping, "Unison (and Predominantly Unison) Song Types." I would think that at least some of the games might be gender specific; however, we are not told the gender of those who sing and participate in the games (the transcriptions are in the bass clef). Special emphasis is given the game *tuitui mata*, but no reason is presented for doing so. The reader gets a sense of important relationships of game players to particular age and gender groups, and, on a social level, of relationships to violence, punishment, and competition. These relationships are not explored.

The chapter "Responsorial (and Predominantly Responsorial) Song Types" includes songs to spirits (the only place in this volume where music relating to traditional religious practices is discussed), funeral songs, paddling songs, war songs, and a category of songs called *solo* in Samoan. Many of the transcriptions and descriptions are from historical sources, as Moyle was not able to find these types performed in the late 1960s. This chapter also includes *vi'i*, songs of praise, which Moyle says are very popular and represent the greatest number of song types in the culture. Unfortunately he presents only one example, because the *vi'i* he collected "tend to be acculturated and to contain a mixture of polyphony and block harmony" (190).

A separate chapter is devoted to "Responsorial (and Predominantly Responsorial) Song Types with Dance." In the volume's introduction Moyle points out that "throughout the historical period, and long before it, songs associated with dancing occupied a major part of the national repertoire" (10). In the introduction to this chapter Moyle eloquently describes how social rules embedded in historic antecedents are reflected in the *siva*, a common type of dance performed today, and how the values of social change have affected Samoan dance. One wishes this section had appeared earlier in the volume, since it refers to Samoan music generally. The chapter is divided into "obsolete dances" and "extant dances," with more attention devoted to the obsolete ones. Moyle has compiled a great deal of interesting historical material in a single source and succeeds in presenting a vibrant picture of dances of the past, particularly of a series of dances associated with the night-dance event called *poula*. Surprisingly, continuities of obsolete dances traceable in contemporary dances are largely disqualified by Moyle, who says that "occasions for performance, the size and constitution of

the performing group, the style of the accompaniment, and the actions themselves differ, in most cases, from those of the obsolete categories" (224). Although the social contexts of the obsolete dances are thoroughly described, their musical accompaniment and dance movements are not. Although I am sure contemporary dances differ from obsolete dances, an explanation of how and to what extent they differ should have been included, and the continuities, if any, should have been delineated. In the conclusion to this chapter Moyle strongly implies that hardly anything traditional is left in Samoan dance. I find that rather difficult to accept.

Moyle's last chapter on the musical data consists of a brief overview of polyphonic songs, which in the 1971 manuscript are called part songs. Polyphonic singing in parallel fourths and fifths, according to Moyle, was a traditional (pre-European) musical trait in Samoa (two-part polyphony is inferred), Polyphonic singing in three or four parts resulting in Western harmonies was introduced to Samoa by Europeans. The musical style characterized by parallel fourths and fifths is not related to any particular song type within the three given before (solo, unison, responsorial). If, as Moyle argues, parallel singing in fourths and fifths was pre-European, and the musical system was modeled on the solo type, polyphonic singing would also be traceable to the solo type and be closely related to the unison and responsorial types. Polyphonic hymn singing is not examined and only a short sentence acknowledges that locally composed Protestant hymns are still being performed in polyphony (244). Since Tahitians, Mangarevans, Cook Islanders, Marquesans, and many of the other peoples of East and Central Polynesia developed such a distinctive style of hymn singing, a comparison to Samoan hymn singing would have been most interesting.

The chapter titled "Summary Analysis and Conclusions" first presents the "technical distinction" between unison and responsorial songs, which, according to Moyle, is not major, and then discusses the basic determinants of traditional Samoan music. In 1971 Moyle had concluded that "it now appears that Samoan traditional music comprises four distinct stylistic categories on the basis of musical texture" (1971: 1066). In 1988, however, he concludes that "the stylistic basis of Samoan music as a whole . . . appears to be determined principally by the numbers of singers. Two major categories emerge--solo and group songs--the latter including both unison and responsorial items" (248). That traditional Samoan music was (is?) determined principally by the number of singers seems rather startling to me. Moyle himself says that Samoans place the highest value in music on the song text (15). Would

not the poetry, therefore, be the principal determinant of Samoan musical style, as it is in most Polynesian cultures?

The summary analysis of the musical aspects of Samoan music is presented according to the following Western musical traits: "form," "texture" (how is this different from "texture" as solo, unison, responsive?), "rhythm," "scales," "melody," "tonality," and "cadences," in that order. How does this order--or for that matter, these concepts--reflect Samoan perceptions of musical cognition? If one follows a Western approach to music analysis, as Moyle does, then the approach should have been based on a hierarchy of analytic levels, which would have required that scales, tonality, and rhythm be examined before melody and form, in that order.

The summary of scales (250) presented after the summary of melodic contour (247) raises a few questions. If the contour is characterized by level movement followed by a rise or a fall of a fourth, how does Moyle derive scales that include seven discrete pitches representing an interval of a major seventh for solo songs and four discrete pitches representing an octave for group songs? Moyle argues that two prototype minimal scales exist, each with a range of a fourth, for solo and group songs. He further argues that the "numbers of songs in the respective categories [by "texture" or by Samoan song categories?] . . . and the total inventory of pitches within any singer's vocal capacity suggest that the accretion [from a four-pitch to a seven-pitch scale] is not accidental" (250). Although he admits that discussion of this phenomenon can occur "only on a theoretical level" (is it not real to the culture?), he argues that "both hierarchies [of scales or of song types?] grew from scales with the fewest notes" (250). Does that mean that the seven-note scale, being on the far end of the process of accretion, is the most important scale to traditional Samoan music? That would not be consistent with his argument for the great importance of the interval of the fourth, clearly evident in the musical data. A musical scale refers in the Western mind to an ordering of pitches from lowest to highest. Samoans, according to this study, had terms for only two levels of relative pitch, low and high, and a term for pitch flattening during a song (an interesting but unexplored concept) (13). "Incantations," apparently widely used by Samoans, are described as "unpitched" songs (86) (strictly speaking, all voiced communication, including recitation, is characterized by discrete pitches, i.e., frequencies). Has Moyle considered the possibility that pitch may have been relatively unimportant to the pre-European Samoan musical system, and that its importance did not actually become manifest until well after Western influences became assimilated



and the prospect of "flattening pitches" became a concern? I agree with Moyle's conclusion that melodic and cadential stereotypes were used to form musical pieces, but I am not convinced that a "common scalic stock" had anything to do with Samoan musical cognition.

Moyle writes in the chapter on responsorial songs that "note durations closely parallel speech rhythms" and that "no pulse is evident" (193). This thought is repeated in the final conclusions. What is the Samoan concept of timing in music and dance? What value do Samoans place on time in general and time in traditional expressions, such as oratory? Unfortunately, Moyle does not provide parallel analysis of either Samoan speech rhythms or time and timing in Samoan culture. In addition, it would have been helpful for the reader interested in Samoan music and dance to have been given an idea of the kinds of voice qualities used in performance, of singers' movements and gestures during a performance, facial expressions, and clothing and ornamentation, all of which are considered by Polynesians to be important to the performance. Since Moyle briefly discussed some of these essential elements of traditional performance in his dissertation, I wonder why he chose not to in this publication.

A critique of two earlier works concerning Samoan influence on the music of Tuvalu is the focus of the appendix, "Post-European Samoan Influence." A brief discussion follows on the extent to which Samoan music influenced some of the island groups adjacent to Samoa, including Tokelau, and some of the island groups to the west of Samoa, including Torres Strait Islands and New Caledonia.

There is much of interest in this volume, particularly in the historical compilations, and the author is to be credited with publishing the first extensive work on Samoan music (although other extensive studies have been completed, they are not as yet published). This reader would have been less frustrated with the work had the author taken his chapter title, "musical ethnography," more to heart.

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