

Richard Moyle, *Tongan Music*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987. Pp. xiv, 256, music transcriptions, photos, illustrations, bibliography, indexes. NZ\$75.00.

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It is not often a reviewer has the opportunity to do a second review of a book and to cover the same ground with a perspective enlarged by the first.¹ *Tongan Music*, by Richard Moyle, is a book that bears looking at a second time because it covers so much and because it is very timely, coming as it does when traditional culture the world over is under increasing pressure from outside modernizing influences. Moyle brings to his subject a background in anthropology and music. His field research in Tonga spanned some twenty years and was augmented by other research in the music of surrounding islands.

Tongan Music is a welcome addition to the field of ethnomusicology because it deals so well and in so much detail with one of the great but unheralded music traditions of the world. It is a handsome book, done in a large format, with a number of pertinent photographs, figures, and, most importantly, notations. The text is enriched by the inclusion of Tongan musical terminology and also musicians' extended comments in Tongan with side-by-side translations into English, a glossary, and list of prominent performing groups. One of its strengths is that it seeks to cover every facet of Tongan music, from pre-Western contact to the present, from children's game songs where music is peripheral all the way to the large forms where it is central. The book effectively describes the various genres, sometimes with a good deal of historical background, their performance contexts, and something of their visual appearance. The text is fleshed out with notations, charts, figures, and pictures. This mass of detail makes the book an essential reference work for those interested in any aspect of musical sound in Tongan culture.

While I hold a very positive view of the book, there are several points that merit discussion and critique, noting beforehand that implied criticism comes as much as anything from a personal point of view of what should be included in a book dealing with music. The first drawback of the book, as seen by this reviewer, is the seeming ambivalence towards the "sound" of the music, as may be exemplified by the absence of a discography of present recordings of traditional music and the thinness of the material in chapter 2 ("Musical Ethnography") that, though ostensibly dealing with musical sound, misses most of the important things--sonority, harmony, musical structure. One is led to wonder about the relative importance given to the actual sound of the music itself, within the culture as well as by researchers. While the book covers a vast amount of material dealing with music, there is much less substantive, analytical material on the actual sound of the music itself than one would hope for in a book dealing with music.

Perhaps part of the problem of ambivalence towards "sound," partic-

ularly in the large forms, arises from the conceptual framework the author uses in translating the word *faiva* as "dance."² There really is no conceptual equivalent for *faiva* in English, though the term "multi-media performance," stripped of its high-tech connotations, would come somewhat close. Simply stated, in Western categories of thought, movement with music equals dance and music without movement equals music. In the former, movement dominates our perceptions and in the latter we focus on the music. Thus, for the Westerner it becomes difficult to define exactly, for example, the *lakalaka* where three components--poetry, music, and dance--combine to make an aesthetic impact. To call it dance immediately focuses our attention on the overall visual effects and relegates the poetry and music to a secondary status. Is the *lakalaka* merely a dance accompanied by choral music produced by the dancers, or is it choral music accompanied by dance, or is it poetry set to choral music and accompanied by dance? I believe the latter is closer to the native view and that for Tongans a performance of fine dancing to so-so music is less palatable than one with fine singing accompanying so-so dancing. But the importance of each of the three elements in the whole cannot be overemphasized. To do full justice to description of *faiva* one would have to deal in detail with all three components, which would understandably be beyond the scope of the book. In a book on music, however, one had hoped that the music component would have received more in-depth coverage. a

The reason for harping on the importance of the musical "sound" here is that it is the conception and perfection of the "sound" of a performance, as much as anything else, that carries the Tongans to the heights of aesthetic experience. In their words, the music must "make the blood surge, and the heart glad." Since such ephemeral things as sound are difficult to describe in words, this is the point where a discography and extended musical description and analysis would become important. The ideal, of course, would be to have an accompanying tape to augment the notated musical examples. But perhaps that is too much to ask at this time.

The above critique is not to fault the author's research, which appears to be excellent, but rather to wish he had taken a different tack. His problem, however, was to describe a national music for an audience unfamiliar with its sound and who lack the recordings to fill in the gap. This is a hard task at best, for with only the printed word it is difficult to convey any sense of the grandeur or compelling nature of the music. Moyle met this problem by giving the book a heavy historical slant with

a wealth of material from early Western observers of the Tongan scene. By combining written history with modern oral tradition he has attempted to reconstruct for us a fair view of musical life in Tonga before European contact as well as during the inevitable acculturation process that followed. Each chapter begins with a historical treatment of its subject, often quite extensive and detailed. He has done a thoroughly commendable job of combing through literature related in any way to Tonga for musical references that shed light on its music from the time of the coming of the Europeans in the late eighteenth century. Devoting so much space to history, however, did leave less room for other things.

A third point of critique is the relative space allotted to the discussion of the various musical genres. Moyle has touched on almost every type of music to be found in Tonga, thus making the book a veritable encyclopedia. However, he has devoted about equal space to each genre, which works out to a comparatively inordinate amount of detail for some forms where music is only peripheral as compared to others where music is central. This can be confusing because such equal space does not convey the relative importance of each genre in the culture. Coupled with the heavy historical treatment this may give an unbalanced view of what is really important in present Tongan musical life. For example, he discusses in detail traditional musical instruments, most of which find little or no use any more, and music used in fables and children's game songs, which are surely peripheral genres by any measure.

By contrast, there is comparatively less discussion of the music of the larger forms-- the *lakalaka*, *mā'ulu'ulu*, and *hiva kakala*--where musical sonority, harmony, and structure figure so prominently. Hymn singing, which touches the lives of all Tongans, is mentioned only in passing and patronage choirs are not mentioned at all. These genres in particular are where the majesty, power, and sophistication of the Tongan musical sensibilities are to be heard and felt. This and the centrality of these forms to present-day Tongan musical life would seem to argue for a comparatively more lengthy discussion, especially, as much as words can convey, of the musical sound.

In conclusion, *Tongan Music* is an important addition to the growing number of books dealing with traditional musical cultures. The above critique is to be seen not as criticizing a fine and much needed work, but rather as a discussion of points of view and also of directions for future research and writing.

NOTES

1. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 97, no. 2 (June 1988): 210-212.
2. Chapter 3 is entitled "*Faiva* (Dances)" and deals with all the large forms.