
REVIEWS

Mervyn McLean, *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance*. Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1999. Pp. 556, illus., bib., index, CD. NZ\$79.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Mary E. Lawson Burke, Framingham State College

THE TITLE of Mervyn McLean's book, *Weavers of Song: Polynesian Music and Dance*, alludes to a common Polynesian concept of song creation: melody and text are "woven" together to create musical expression. In much the same way, McLean has gathered and painstakingly combined material from hundreds of sources to create this ambitious book, which is sure to become the standard reference in this area. *Weavers of Song* is a beautifully presented text, its pages liberally sprinkled with photographs, drawings, and musical examples. An audio CD featuring forty-three tracks of excellent quality is a welcome inclusion; many are field recordings that are unavailable commercially.

In the introduction McLean states his book is intended to "encompass known information about music and dance throughout Polynesia" (p. vii). The impressive result attests to the author's familiarity with the literature gained from his more than thirty years of bibliographic research on Pacific music and dance, leading to such comprehensive works as *An Annotated Bibliography of Oceanic Music and Dance* (1995), and *Maori Music* (1996). Specialists and general readers alike will find much of value. Illustrations of instruments, dances, and performance contexts enliven the content, while the many musical examples offer further insight to the musically literate. Enhanced by endnotes, the scholarly writing is clear, accessible, and free of jargon—evidence of the thoughtful decision making that went into organiz-

ing the vast amount of material. Appendixes include a glossary of musical terms and a pronunciation guide to Polynesian languages.

Specifying at the outset that he did not intend this work to be theoretical in nature, McLean forgoes engaging contemporary ethnomusicological issues. He also excludes song text translation, analysis of dance movements, and consideration of contemporary “Pan-Pacific pop” as beyond the scope of the book. The exclusion of the popular acculturated musics is disappointing, since these genres are rapidly becoming important—and commercial—modes of expression for young people.

The book is divided into two sections: Book I, “Regional Music and Dance,” which comprises about three-fourths of the text, and Book II, “Comparisons.” Book I begins with an overview chapter on Polynesian geography, language, subsistence, material culture, social organization, religion, and theories of origins and migrations. The sixteen subsequent chapters systematically describe individual culture areas grouped into Central, Western, and Marginal Polynesia, based on information from historical accounts, published research, songbooks, dictionaries, and word lists. Each chapter briefly describes location and history and then focuses on musical instruments, dances, and song styles. The Western and Marginal Polynesia areas employ separate headings for composition, ownership, learning and instruction, and musical structure—although the material is often very brief. In the final chapter, “New Zealand,” McLean presents a succinct overview and refers the reader to his *Maori Music*, widely regarded as the landmark work on the subject. Each chapter includes brief lists for further reading and recommended listening.

Uneven chapter lengths and lack of substantive material for some topics in some regions reflect McLean’s observation that many gaps exist in the published research (p. vii), especially regarding contemporary practice. One exception to this is hymnody in the Society Islands, for which he offers a provocative discourse. Using missionary histories, hymn books, travel accounts, and the superb research of Amy Stillman (1991), McLean outlines the development of the complex polyphonic vocal styles known as *himene* and reinforces Stillman’s theory that fuguing tunes played an important role.

Book II, “Comparisons,” begins with the section “Traditional Music and Dance,” an overview of affiliations among Polynesian performance styles divided into chapters “Musical Instruments,” “Uses of Song and Dance,” “Performance,” “Composition,” “Ownership,” “Learning and Instruction,” and “Music Structure.” This final chapter contains detailed lists that compare scales (notes, pitch range, melodic intervals), cadence types, tempo, and types of polyphony, providing a good starting point for future comparative analyses.

In the second section, "The Impact of European Music," the author briefly describes early interactions with Europeans, eventually focusing on missionaries, including a concise discussion of Polynesian musical responses to the introduction of hymn singing. The section ends with overviews of musical acculturation and contemporary Polynesian performance. After stating that the "history of modern Polynesian music is largely one of European influence" (p. 437), McLean points out that the process of Polynesian musical acculturation has been two-way, noting the impact of Polynesian practice on European structures.

McLean concludes Book II with "Cultural Connections and Diffusion of Styles," wherein he compares musical traits and, incorporating linguistic evidence and methodology, deduces a possible chronology for Polynesian cultural diffusion. Although he states that his dates are "approximate, tentative, and subject to review" (p. 464), his conclusions, based on careful appraisal of the evidence, are compelling.

Throughout the book McLean uses the terms "traditional" and "modern" as the basis for organizing his material, with "traditional" indicating practices dating from the time of European contact. He employs past and present tenses to clarify which genres are still performed with one caution: One should not assume that past-tense usage necessarily implies obsolescence, since documentation is incomplete for many areas. In the discussion on acculturation in Book II, he introduces the term "modern traditional" to refer to "forms of music accepted as traditional by Polynesians which have either been influenced by European music or are post-European" (p. 437). McLean adds that outsiders must recognize something as "traditional" if the people do, but also must acknowledge the reality of the process that led to it.

Several minor enhancements might benefit the book's ease of use. Although the CD contents list provides page references for notated musical examples, page references to information about the other tracks would be helpful. Numbering the many illustrations would facilitate identifying associated prose, and providing dates for all illustrations in the captions would obviate the need to consult the illustration credits in the appendix or the bibliography. Also, the categorization of Polynesian cultures might be more consistent among all parts of the book. In Book I Polynesian cultures are clearly grouped into Central, Western (including Outliers), and Marginal, but Book II refers to Eastern and Western Polynesia. Further, the CD contents page indicates four categories: Eastern, Western, Outliers, and Marginal. Those not familiar with Oceanic material might be initially confused despite the early statement that Marginal and Central Polynesia are collectively considered Eastern (p. 4).

Weavers of Song is a major achievement and a testament to Mervyn

McLean's lifelong dedication to Oceanic music and dance. In the introduction he states his hope that the book will stimulate further research into Polynesian performance traditions. His wish will certainly be fulfilled. *Weavers of Song* is destined to become an essential reference tool for those who choose to pursue scholarly work in Polynesian performance traditions.

REFERENCES CITED

McLean, Mervyn

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 1996 *Maori Music*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.

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Barry Craig, Bernie Kernot, and Christopher Anderson, eds., *Art and Performance in Oceania*. Bathurst, N.S.W.: Crawford House Press and Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999. Pp. vii, 318, illus., bib., index. A\$65.95 and US\$65 cloth.

Reviewed by Jehanne Teilhet-Fisk, Florida State University

The Fifth International Symposium of the Pacific Arts Association, held in Adelaide in early 1993, was a lively and stimulating conference. It hosted some two hundred international delegates and scholars in anthropology, art history, archaeology, sociology, art, cultural-center arts, repatriation-related issues, museology, and ethnomusicology. The conference had the largest ever participatory attendance by indigenous artists and performers. It also had workshops and a very successful showing of indigenous films. This volume contains twenty-four papers from the sixty or so presented and is divided into four parts: "Art as Performance in Micronesia and Polynesia," "Bringing People Back into the Collections: Indigenous Australians and the Presentation of Culture," "From Performance to Museum in Melanesia," and "Pan-Pacific Development." The title of the book does not really capture the scope of these contributions, a range which while not particularly focused does represent many of the interesting issues occupying scholars in the area of Oceanic arts. It is unfortunate that this volume follows so long after the con-