

Bennett Zon. 2007. *Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Reviewed by Sindhumathi Revuluri

Bennett Zon's *Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain* surveys British primary sources from the "long" nineteenth century that describe, theorize, and react to various types of music from around the world. Through detailed descriptions and discussions of these sources, Zon shows how discourse around non-Western music in this time and place was shaped by and indebted to broad intellectual trends in anthropology and psychology, as well as musicology and travel literature. As Zon states in his preface, this study is meant to rectify the lacuna around how composers or the general populace may have perceived non-Western musics, not simply the way they were imagined in classical compositions (xii–xiii). A parallel aim of the study appears explicitly in the epilogue and deals with establishing a history of British ethnomusicology and redeeming previously overlooked innovators as particular agents in that history.

The contribution of this book comes mostly in bringing to light a vast array of primary source material that will be relatively unknown to most readers. Zon is able to construct a convincing chronology of the types and methods of writing on non-Western music that intertwines nicely with currents in other disciplines, especially anthropology. As a larger intellectual history, this study offers a sense of how theories of evolution, monogenism and polygenism, and degeneration manifested themselves in musical writings and in musical terms.

The book is divided into four parts that reflect both chronology and methodology. Beginning with discussions of music in anthropological writings, the volume then moves to specific music writing and closes with two detailed case studies of the work of Charles Myers and A.H. Fox Strangways.

Zon's early chapters on travel literature rely on brief and individual accounts. Through these, he introduces ideas prevalent at the time, including perceptions of the savage as simplistic, the common origin of man (called monogenism, versus the polygenist approach), and the claim of degeneration to account for current states of non-Western people. By Zon's own admission, music figures only marginally into most of these accounts, but the chapters do provide some "first-hand" descriptions of what was heard and how it was understood.

Current Musicology

As Zon moves through his chronology, we begin to see how non-Western musics became a larger preoccupation in both anthropological writings and the musical press. Contemporary scholars must have also maintained their interest in the topic, since certain strands are later included in general music histories. Unlike the travel literature, it seems that those who chose to include non-Western music in these types of writing may not have had any direct contact with said music and instead theorized on the basis of extant literature. (Zon does not make clear what the path of access or reception was, but this timeline can be plausibly reconstructed from his other discussions.)

The second half of the book consists of two in-depth case studies of Charles Myers and A.H. Fox Strangways. By the epilogue, it becomes clear that Zon's mission is, at least in part, to recuperate the reputations of these figures as more than mere stepping stones on the way to contemporary ethnomusicology. Indeed, much of his discussion reads as a defense of their approaches and as an introduction of their work to a broader public. In the case of Myers, Zon diligently reports on his psychological writings, claiming that the theories developed there also influenced his approach to music. Recognizing this connection, Zon argues, allows us to see Myers as an innovator who was willing to hear and treat non-Western musics as counterpoints to European music, rather than the primitive ancestors of contemporary Western musics.

Notably, it is only in the final case study that "actual" music (in the form of transcription) is included and discussed in any detail. In dealing with Fox Strangways, his approaches to translation, and the transcriptions of Indian music he produced, Zon argues that Fox Strangways worked to "foreignize" the music he was recording (261–62), a term, as I discuss later, that requires further critical pressure. Finally, Zon's epilogue takes on the meanings and objectives of contemporary ethnomusicology. It is only in this last section that Zon reveals a crucial part of his argument throughout the book: that Myers and Fox Strangways, as well as many of their predecessors, anticipated the current concerns of the discipline of ethnomusicology.

In Zon's many close readings, he touches upon recurring issues, including evolutionism and individualism versus universality. Though the book is arranged chronologically, with the earliest sources appearing near the beginning and moving to the later nineteenth-century sources towards the end, it is also implicitly progressive in the methodologies it describes. While a progression of thinking, not only in music scholarship but also in the other disciplines from which Zon draws, is certainly to be expected, there is little to no attention paid to other factors that may have affected these developments. For example, it is not surprising that sources describing non-Western music would shift from travel literature to more academic texts as the possibilities

for travel became more widespread throughout the century and music—or any cultural artifact, for that matter—from faraway became less of a novelty and more an item to be studied. This would have been especially true in an imperial capital, a fact that Zon never mentions.

Given the praise that Zon bestows upon many of the primary source authors for their situating of music in context, it is surprising that Zon does not do the same for these writings. That is, if we are to look at music in cultural context, should we not also look at writing about music in *its* cultural, political, intellectual, and social context? Zon spends much of the first half of the book elaborating upon theories of evolution, monogenism and polygenism, and development and degeneration. But what of the larger context of nineteenth-century Britain? That there was so much writing about non-Western musics at this time owes a great deal to Britain's position as an imperial capital. How did the dynamics of the metropole affect perceptions of the margins?

Indeed, the frame of the book, while stated, is never justified in a way that explains the sources marshaled or structure imposed. Given all of the implications of the title, it is more than surprising that the words “imperial,” “empire,” or “colonial” do not appear in the index in any form. I was left wondering why the particular task of this book was important, if not in the broader socio-political context of empire and the brand of representation it engenders. This lack of context showed up in a number of ways, including the missing definition for “non-Western,” and a heavy use of the word “racist” without a sense of its implications. Indeed, if racism and Orientalism are to be the undercurrents of the book, as Zon suggests in the introduction (2–3), then each must be subject to further pressure. Without a sense of how these positions came to be articulated during the nineteenth century, and in Britain especially, the significance of this project is very much obscured.

Similarly, the terms of the primary texts are rarely interrogated. When Henry Chorley and Carl Engel say “national music,” how are they defining nation? Was there an accepted definition at the time? Was the use of the term in any way political? Was it actually a code word for “race”? Confusion around the idea of national music resurfaces throughout the book, and in later cases it comes to mean folk, ethnic, or nationalistic—all terms with unique histories and connotations requiring further discussion.

In his consideration of Fox Strangways's attempts to “foreignize” music through transcription, Zon does not tackle what “foreign” might mean—or have meant. Given that source material is available, it would have been helpful to have an elucidation of how this process worked in Zon's view. Instead, we seem to get a surface understanding of “foreign” (perhaps read simply as “difference”?):

Again, in translating an aural experience of foreignness into domestic understanding, it is the foreignness that must be maintained, as in Fox Strangways's view of foreign songs retaining foreign texts, or foreign music retaining foreignizing notational meaning in whatever way possible. (288)

Zon ties this intention to an attitude towards ideal translation, without a sense of what Fox Strangways meant by "foreign." This final section is perhaps the most provocative of the entire book and deserves serious elaboration. Again, the larger context of the British Empire (and the fact that the subject here was the music of India) suggests that there may have been more at stake.

On a related note, while Zon's professed aims include revealing how various "Othering" discourses were embraced, responded to, and eventually debunked in a variety of disciplines (3), it would be important to know how each of the authors he discusses were received in the broader intellectual community, or even simply by future "ethnomusicologists." Without this piece of evidence, their observations—however liberal or astute—do not necessarily have the weight of influence that he ascribes to them.

An example of how reception may have added nuance to the discussions included in the study comes in the penultimate case study on Myers. What seems extraordinary about Myers is the degree to which he privileges listening over fundamental principles. Zon discusses Myers's favoring of "individualism" over "universality," but that this comes across musically through *listening* rather than in theoretical approaches or empirical data seems significant given the time in which it emerged. A revolutionary aspect of Myers's work seems actually to lie in his attitude towards recording technology. Through various citations, it is clear that Myers privileged the live over the recorded, but that he also understood human impulses more honestly than most of his contemporaries. For example, he acknowledged that we are guided by our previous experiences and should therefore use the phonograph to check—and re-check—our transcriptions (246). But he also claimed that while music may be recorded either by writing or the phonograph, only detailed, reproducible impressions from *live* (actual) performances have any "scientific value" (220). It is not difficult to see why, faced with the phonograph, Myers would add this requirement to his ideal of research. But how, then, did he read the earlier work of the many authors Zon discusses? That is, what did Myers make of early attempts to describe, represent, or engage with non-Western music? As Zon shows us, understanding from earlier in the century came mostly from travel literature and tended not to include much musical detail. Where did Myers get his information when it was clearly not gleaned from personal experiences? A

sense of the reception of the earlier works—and their philosophical and theoretical bases—would have greatly enriched Zon’s discussion of Myers and allowed for a reflective moment in the chronology of British writings on non-Western music.

Some of these may seem like criticisms aimed at arguments and material simply beyond the scope of this book. Indeed, this study stands on its own as a treatment of the history of a discipline (ethnomusicology) before it was even a discipline. Because of the small amount of secondary literature in this area, the author is required to provide descriptions that would be tedious in other contexts, simply to situate his readers. In assembling these primary source texts and providing us with detailed summaries and interpretations that contextualize them within the British intellectual tradition, Zon has done us a great service. His volume has laid the groundwork for future studies that may pursue those questions that remain unasked and unanswered here.