Editorial

Lonán Ó Briain, Jonathan Stock & Abigail Wood

To cite this article: Lonán Ó Briain, Jonathan Stock & Abigail Wood (2016) Editorial, Ethnomusicology Forum, 25:2, 143-145, DOI: 10.1080/17411912.2016.1207867

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2016.1207867

Published online: 21 Jul 2016.
Welcome to issue 25(2) of Ethnomusicology Forum, the second print edition of 2016. As we write, the editorial cycle of the journal is rolling onward: since each print edition represents the culmination of several months of reviews and editorial work, this is a first printed issue for incoming co-editor Abigail Wood; meanwhile, we are currently seeking a new co-editor to replace Jonathan Stock, whose term will come to an end at the end of 2016. From reading new submissions to voting on the colour of the cover of printed volumes, working on Ethnomusicology Forum allows a privileged and fulfilling insight into new work and current debates in our discipline, and we encourage scholars to get involved.

This is a general issue, yet as always, the juxtaposition of articles enables interesting and thought-provoking resonances to emerge. While focusing on very different cultural contexts, the first three articles share nuanced approaches to the question of musical authenticity, authority, fusion and borrowing, in response to sharp changes in cultural circumstances and to multifaceted encounters between musicians working in ‘popular’ and ‘traditional’ styles. While ethnomusicology literature focusing on innovation and change has primarily focused on new, popularised contexts for music-making, the first two of these articles show that performers of ‘traditional’ genres must equally respond to the rapid pace of musical change and changing aesthetic expectations.

Alexander Cannon employs the productive concept of the musical ‘ruin’ in order to explore processes by which musicians regulate innovation and preservation in order to create a sustainable future for traditional Vietnamese music. ‘Ruined’ or ‘decayed’ forms of neo-traditional music provoke conversation and creative reactions among musicians who seek to reassert their claims of ownership and authenticity and to regenerate communities of practice and preservation.

Christopher Witulski turns to ritual gnawa music in Morocco, exploring how popular music aesthetics (including popularised versions of gnawa) have influenced ritual practice, provoking musicians to shape their performances according to the tastes of mixed audiences. Witulski invokes the title ‘ritual entertainment’ to describe a performance space that encompasses diverse and sometimes conflicting listening practices: some participants in a ritual may seek trance and ritual healing, while others at the same event seek a dancing and entertainment in a genre familiar from the popular music industry. Describing ‘the constant flow of ideas between ritual and ceremony’, he suggests that authenticity is not a singular concept; rather, a successful artist must engage multiple discourses of musical and ritual authenticity in order to satisfy a broad client base.

Fiorella Montero Diaz, by contrast, focuses on ‘popular’ music spaces in Lima, exploring how Peruvian fusion music has provided an avenue for white upper-class youth to address the aftermath of the internal war, promoting conflict transformation and cultural
‘togetherness’ by engaging with Andean musical genres and artists. The musical stage becomes a performance space for new, idealised relationships, allowing greater openness to diversity and reflection on the privileged self, in turn spurring political awareness and action.

The final article in this issue, by Anton Killin, brings us to another productive area of contemporary debate: the evolutionary status of music. Killin’s article begins from a critique of Francesca Lawson’s prizewinning 2014 article in this journal; he uses Lawson’s work as a springboard to explore the niche construction perspective, an alternative approach to theorising the evolution of music, and to interrogate the place of ethnomusicology in evolutionary thinking about music. Following Killin’s article, we include a brief response by Francesca Lawson. We are grateful to both authors for their willingness to continue this debate in the pages of the journal, a process which points to the continuing vitality of Ethnomusicology Forum not just as a repository of articles by solitary authors but as a dynamic space for thinking and rethinking our discipline.

The reviews section of this issue begins with two contrasting edited volumes. Kari Veblen reviews The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Musical Cultures, edited by Patricia Shehan Campbell and former Ethnomusicology Forum editor, Trevor Wiggins. The Oxford Handbooks in Music have received plenty of attention from ethnomusicologists; this particular volume draws attention to an area that has tended to be neglected by ethnomusicologists, but one to which Campbell in particular has been devoted for an extended period. The volume’s 35 essays examine the ways children engage in musical activities around the world. Shifting from a generational to a regional setting, Byron Dueck reviews Donna A. Buchanan’s edited volume, Soundscapes from the Americas: Ethnomusicological Essays on the Power, Poetics, and Ontology of Performance. Dedicated to the renowned scholar of Latin American music, Gerard Béhague (1937–2005), this collection includes research from across the Americas, although perhaps unsurprisingly, the essays predominantly consider music on the southern continent.

Next, three reviews of monographs focus on the music cultures of the Asian continent. Jasmine Hornabrook reviews Zoe Sherinian’s Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology. Sherinian examines how musicians of the relatively marginalised Christian Dalit caste use music to protest their social oppression and as a vehicle of spiritual liberation. The second review also focuses on the South Asian region, this one on the far more widely disseminated sounds of Bollywood. Jayson Beaster-Jones’ Bollywood Sounds: The Cosmopolitan Mediations of Hindi Film Song, reviewed by Jaime Jones, presents the first book-length historical survey of the songs of Mumbai’s film industry. Another music culture from Asia that has received international attention recently is Japanese taiko drumming. Jay Keister reviews the first English language monograph on this music, Shawn Bender’s Taiko Boom: Japanese Drumming in Place and Motion. Together, these books highlight the current vibrancy of Asian music studies and offer valuable new reading materials for scholars and students of the region.

In acknowledgement of the recent swell of interest in the relationship between economics and music among ethnomusicologists, the reviews section of this issue concludes with a review essay by Tom Wagner. Wagner, who serves as administrator for the Economic Ethnomusicology Special Interest Group of the Society for Ethnomusicology, selected three contrasting new titles: Jazz Sells: Music Marketing and Meaning by Mark Laver, Music in the Marketplace: A Social Economics Approach by Samuel Cameron and
Music and Capitalism: A History of the Present by Timothy D. Taylor. Laver’s book focuses on marketing and consumption practices associated with one musical style (jazz). Cameron, meanwhile, takes a social economic approach to his study of the music industry by presenting an economic analysis of social behaviour related to music production and consumption. Finally, Taylor, who will present the keynote at the next BFE One-Day Conference in Edinburgh this October (https://bfe.org.uk/conf/radio-and-ethnomusicology-historical-and-contemporary-perspectives) and is perhaps the most familiar name of the three to readers of this journal, examines how capitalism has shaped the music industry over the past few decades.

Lonán Ó Briain, Jonathan Stock and Abigail Wood