

BOOK REVIEW

Eric Akrofi, Maria Smit and Stig-Magnus Thorsén (Eds.).
Music and Identity: Transformation and Negotiation.
Stellenbosch, South Africa: African Sun Media (Sun Press),
2007, 414 pages, pp I-X, no price indicated.

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Representing one concrete, tangible outcome of the Swedish South African Research Network (SSARN) on Music and Identity, (a collaborative research partnership between two areas of the world, Sweden and South Africa,) the book under review was to be the culmination of a research project with the main objective “to develop research discourses around music, identity and culture, shared between two areas of the world, Sweden and South Africa” (Introduction, p. iii). However, as the work progressed, participation in the project grew exponentially in geographical terms, with the result that, as the projected book came to fruition, the South African constituency of the Network included inputs from Namibia, Kenya, the USA and Ghana, while the Swedish counterpart included participation from Denmark, Finland and Australia, a dimension that is evident in the contents that now make up the published volume.

Organizationally, the volume consist of a table of contents, a foreword, introduction and 23 chapters, the latter which in turn are grouped under three main themes (or “discourse sites”), these being Concepts of Identity as the first theme, Music and Discourse as the second theme, and Musical Encounters as the third and final theme. As though setting the tone to the volume, Concepts of Identity, as a “discourse site”, claims the largest number of chapters (10), followed by Musical Encounters (9), with Music and Discourse in third place with only four chapters. Providentially, thanks to an excellent Introduction by Professor Christine Lucia, couched in a lucid, incisive and exceedingly informative style, and the fact that the editors saw to it that all the contributors to the volume have consistently prefaced their respective chapters with a brief yet informative abstract, the reader is spared the intellectual ordeal of having to read every single chapter in order to gain a holistic understanding of the issues involved.

The brief notes that now follow have the purpose of giving the reader a foretaste of the pudding that is on the menu in the volume. Thus, among the contributions falling under Concepts of Identity, Thembele Vokwana of the University of South Africa, gets the ball rolling with the lead article, "Resurrecting an African identity through popular music in the post-apartheid South Africa", which, as the central thrust of the issue at hand, focuses on emergent musical styles such as kwaito and hip-hop in order to reveal the significant role being played by black youths in reformulating and developing a post-apartheid African identity in South Africa (pp. 3-4).

In similar vein, in "Singing the nation: Negotiating South African identity through coral music", as the next chapter, Nicol Claire A. Hammond, of the University of the Witwatersrand, examines the construction of South African identities through coral music-making among the choirs of three Gauteng universities by empirically testing the thesis that the university choir provides a productive space for the examination of the politics of identity formation within South Africa because of its position between the creativity of music performance, and the ritualised hegemony of the ideological state apparatus of the university (p. 21).

Regarding the next set of chapters falling under Music and Discourse, Christine Lucia's contribution tantalizingly and provocatively titled "Travesty or prophecy? Views of South African black choral composition" draws on the example of African choral music in South Africa "to show how differently the anthropological view of music in society and the musicological object can affect the way South African music is perceived" and, at the end, proposes "another kind of analytical reading, one that accepts a new African identity in the making of 20th century choral music" (p. 161). As an extension, in some ways, of this line of discourse, the following chapter "The hymnic identities of the Afrikaner", by Elsabé Kloppers, University of Pretoria, attempts to address the hypothesis that "hymns are symbols of the cultural identities of churches and nations" by, among other means, presenting a short overview of the history of the Afrikaner and relating it to Afrikaner religious views (p. 181).

The third and final set of the chapters, Musical Encounters, opens with a contribution titled "Tourism and cultural identity: conservation or commodification?" by Minette Mans, Namibia, whose line of inquiry "interrogates cultural tourism in relation to its impact on Namibian traditional cultures and contemporary music" (p. 235). With "Musicians behind bars: Can music help renew identities?" as the fourth chapter under this theme, the author, Zoliswa Tarani, of Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, sought "to investigate the extent to which music activities subvert the watchfulness of prison authorities", as well as "the way in which music encourages offenders to transcend their prisoner status, while modifying their behaviour for reintegration into the society as reformed citizens" (p. 297).

As a volume which was, in large part, the fruition of a research project involving the participation of researchers and/or scholars from various parts of the world, it is a

matter of more than passing interest that, out of a total of 23 chapters, 10 (or almost 50) per cent are contributions by collaborative research partners from outside South Africa, among them four from Sweden, two from Australia and one each from Ghana, Namibia, Denmark, Finland and the USA. The potential that such a rich diversity of cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences has for adding scientifically validated value to the body of knowledge represented in the present volume is unquestionable.

In conclusion – taking the cue from a key point Professor Lucia draws to our attention and from among several trenchant observations she makes in the concluding remarks of her Introduction; namely that “‘Identity Study’ as a whole is a vast, indeed multiple area of scholarship producing a widely divergent literature, both non-fiction and fiction, and concerning itself with gender, race, the body, the community, the nation, and fundamental issues of repression and domination at all levels of society” (p. iv) – the body of well-researched data resulting in well-grounded scholarship, as represented in the volume that has been the subject of this review, attests eloquently to the cogency of the opposite view. In this regard, in the opinion of this reviewer, the current volume will prove to be of relevant interest to a wide spectrum of social scientists, both those with a professional niche in the Humanities as well as those based in the Social Sciences. There is certainly grit for the mill in the volume for the musicologist, the sociologist, the cultural psychologist, the educationalist, the professional political scientist, and others. More generally, the volume is strongly recommended as bedside, inspirational reading for any world citizen with a modicum of interest in the welfare of the human race and an understanding that each one of us, as human beings, need to seek and secure an identity, a niche, and a role, on the earthly planet of which we are an essential and integral ingredient.