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Book Review: Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg (eds), 'Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship' (2015)

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OLIVIA BLOECHL, MELANIE LOWE AND JEFFREY KALLBERG (EDS), *RETHINKING DIFFERENCE IN MUSIC SCHOLARSHIP* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), ISBN 978-1-107-02667-4, xvi+434pp, £77 (hardback).

*Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship* acts as the companion or sequel to Ruth A. Solie's landmark collection, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*.<sup>1</sup> Dedicated to Solie, *Rethinking Difference* recalls the rush of excited and exciting scholarship on music, musicology and identity that appeared during the 1990s, and builds on the work of the intervening twenty years in such areas as race and gender. Bringing together familiar voices from Solie's volume (Suzanne G. Cusick and Gary Tomlinson) and a range of other scholars, the volume comprises a weighty introduction, followed by thirteen chronologically arranged shorter chapters covering a variety of diverse repertoires and approaches. Authors adopt different critical standpoints and methodologies as befits their subjects—a pluralistic approach also appropriate for a set of essays that, although often professing a particular focus on race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality, all demonstrate the ways in which identity is multifaceted, flexible and almost impossible to categorize.

Of course, this holistic attitude sets up some aspects of *Rethinking Difference* for (partial) failure, given the impossible challenge of formalizing, or even surveying, such a large and sprawling discipline. Despite its wide remit to engage with 'music scholarship' in its broadest sense, there is little here that addresses musical cultures outside the US and Europe (nor, interestingly, any contributions from authors outside US academia), minimal discussion of audio-visual media or non-texted instrumental music, and not much (after the sizeable introduction) that deals specifically with the discourses of musicology, criticism and aesthetics themselves. The majority of essays focus primarily on differences of gender, race and ethnicity, with some consideration of sexuality, class and social hierarchy, but surprisingly little on narratives of (dis)ability or the amateur/professional distinction in musicology, for example. But one volume cannot represent an entire field: such inconsistencies and omissions are perhaps most fairly viewed as an indication of the size of the task facing the editors and their contributors, becoming opportunities for future work, rather than shortcomings in themselves.

These limitations aside, the collection addresses a variety of well-known and more marginal texts and figures. *Rethinking Difference* shows that there is much still to say about core repertoire, with chapters on well-known operas (Judy Tsou's thought-

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

provoking readings of race in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, and a meticulous exploration by Heather Hadlock of Rossini's construction of shifting and multiple masculinities); vocal music (Sindhumathi Revuluri's postcolonialist reappraisal of the seemingly straightforward 'nationalism' of folksong settings such as Ravel's *Chants populaires*); and a single, but fascinating, chapter on common-practice period instrumental works. Here, Melanie Lowe applies Habermasian models of the public sphere in a revisionist way, allowing her to construct a balanced and flexible vision of the production and performance of Haydn's music as a signifier of the relationship between Viennese composers and eighteenth-century social movements. At the other end of the spectrum, various essays on 'new' and popular music extend the collection's remit beyond the traditionally canonical. Judith Peraino discusses the queer sounds and sensibilities of early synthpop; Charles Hiroshi Garrett examines the ways in which humour can be used both to diffuse and to highlight gendered and racial tensions in hip hop culture; and Jairo Moreno brings together ideas about jazz, modernity and internationalization in the music and reception of composer, saxophonist, producer and bandleader, Miguel Zenón. These particular authors are often harder-pressed to 'rethink' difference, given the relatively scarce existing scholarly literature on their subjects, but their refined and detailed accounts continue to demonstrate the critical, as well as musical, benefits of bringing neglected repertoire and its associated personnel to more sustained attention. For example, Ellie M. Hisama's essay on the dual marginalization of the African-American, gay, modernist composer, Julius Eastman, along both racial and sexual lines treads some familiar ground in its account of non-normative identity as a barrier to musical and societal acceptance, but is no less interesting or significant for that.

In addition to *Rethinking Difference's* overarching focus on identity and representation, various other sub-themes and considerations cut through the collection. Authors open up dialogue around politics, reception history, (post)colonialism and a variety of boundaries and tensions—for example, those between 'noise' and 'music', 'technology' and 'artistry', and local and global models and communities. They also question understandings of identity itself as a concept with both 'past' and 'present' histories and applications, something that Olivia Bloechl's chapter on the usefulness and legitimacy of 'race' as a concept relevant to early music neatly problematizes. Essays such as Gary Tomlinson's 'Beneath difference; or, humanistic evolutionism' and Nina Sun Eidsheim's 'Race and the aesthetics of vocal timbre' also demonstrate the ways in which empirical approaches and scientific discourse can contribute to a field that, in musicology at least, has been concerned primarily with textual analysis and critically oriented discussion. Tomlinson presents a balanced and readable exploration of the challenges and opportunities that musicology of a 'biological turn' might present to cultural and societally located accounts of identity and difference, and Eidsheim combines analysis

of historical and contemporary accounts of vocal characteristics with ethnographic data on classical singing pedagogy to demonstrate the extent to which racial identities are, whether consciously or not, encoded in both sung and spoken voices.

'Rethinking' here does not necessarily mean redoing or revising, but is more a stepping back and reassessing, looking for broader patterns and alternative ways of conceptualizing, organizing and pushing forward the critique of difference. As Tomlinson notes (368), the study of difference in music has, like many newer subdisciplines and specialisms, often focused on expounding specific, detailed case studies that prove its legitimacy and make a strong and challenging point—but might thereby also create the impression, accurate or not, that these examples are exceptional or singular in some way. We might have missed the diverse and sprawling forest around us in our desire to engage with the nuances of the individually fascinating trees. Suzanne G. Cusick's discussion of Sinolfo Ottieri's 'illicit' access to the cloistered voice of Suor Maria Vittoria Frescobaldi in seventeenth-century Florence and Bonnie Gordon's account of Thomas Jefferson's silencing of 'black noise' in his home state of Virginia are just two of the chapters that demonstrate the benefits of this gradual shift in perspective. Both authors begin with the small-scale and personal—Ottieri's arrest inside Frescobaldi's convent apartment, Jefferson's correspondence with his daughter Martha—but swiftly move outside these confines to explore the racialized and gendered political, cultural and legal ramifications of subjective experience (and social position) upon broader, interlinked cultural definitions of 'acceptable' musicality and morality, as well as the anxieties about identity categorization that their attempted enforcement reveals.

Although difference, identity and representation are increasingly visible topics within conference programmes, new publication flyers and discussion boards of contemporary musicology, specifically focused collections like *Rethinking Difference* still have an important place in marking and shaping these debates. They allow a chance to reflect, reassess and reposition, showing the extent to which musicological studies of difference have become increasingly nuanced in their engagement with other modern critical disciplines, and also the ways in which their early need to fight for legitimacy has spread to deal, often more subjectively, with a broader range of repertoires, questions and approaches. Bringing a selection of such approaches together here allows *Rethinking Difference* to become more than the sum of its thorough and well-written parts. It celebrates past achievements, provides a taster of current ones, and helps to refine and sharpen the future agenda for a field that will always be a dynamic, malleable and subjective work in progress: a celebration of difference, as well as a critique.

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