

This shortfall in theoretical depth is most apparent with the lack of space allocated to examining how to define what experimental music actually is. Priest looks at this briefly in her preface (pp. 1–3) and Knowles allocates a small section to the question (pp. 11–12), but, as Priest acknowledges, this raises more questions than answers. Such definitional problems are nothing new in experimental music, but the book would have benefited from more investigation of these very questions. Initially, this lack of space dedicated to just what it is the book is about leaves the reader wanting something more to ground the book's subject matter upon. This reflects the book's decision to act primarily as documentation, as opposed to being a serious enquiry into experimental music in Australia. As such, the road taken is coverage of music scenes and artists who identify their own work as 'experimental music' and are accepted as such by their peers; this is, perhaps, the most practical route to follow in the interests of documenting this music. Were the alternative of nutting out a water-tight definition and only including artists who existed under its terms taken instead, no doubt many significant artists would have been left out. Instead, we have a relatively complete document of experimental music and related activities. Some noteworthy names may not have been afforded as much discussion as others, but in general the coverage is vast, and there are no glaring omissions.

The accompanying CD contains nine tracks from artists discussed in the book, including a precious live recording of Teletopa (David Ahern's early experimental Sydney ensemble, previously unheard on an official release) from 1971. The book features eye-catching photos throughout that help convey aspects of experimental music performance.

*Experimental Music: Audio Explorations in Australia* succeeds in documenting its subject in a fashion that is both readable and informative, and will prove a valuable text to anyone interested in this previously under-represented field in Australian music. The book's shortcomings in the provision of any serious enquiry into just what experimental music is in Australia, or of the theories and concepts that underlie it, will disappoint to a degree, but should not undermine the book's value as a significant starting point in taking Australian experimental music seriously. This book will be valued for years to come both by those active in Australian experimental music, and for those looking for a guide into this most challenging of music.

**Karen Welberry and Tanya Dalziell, eds, *Cultural Seeds: Essays on the Work of Nick Cave* (Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series)**

Burlington, UK: Ashgate, 2009

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**Reviewed by Ian Chapman**

An academic tome dedicated to Nick Cave might strike some as being something of a surprise. Looking beyond his 1995 flirtation with the mainstream, *Where the Wild Roses Grow*—a duet with pop superstar Kylie Minogue—it is clear that Cave's output has largely, whether by design or default, taken place in the half-lit peripheries of popular music/popular culture. Yet, a volume such as this has surely been long overdue. One of rock's great subterranean-dwellers, Cave has received—and continues to engender—considerable critical attention throughout a career

now spanning more than three decades. His relative underground status, however, brings with it the risk that his is the type of contribution to popular music that might well have formerly been shunted aside, in favour of other, more household-name 'cult(ish)' figures for whom undeniable and sustained mainstream commercial success has provided a far more powerful analytical attractant. It is thus to the credit of both Ashgate Publishing and the book's editors, Karen Welberry and Tanya Dalziell, that this volume exists, offering as it does a broad range of approaches to and critiques of the fluid contemporary artistic practices of one of rock's shadiest, most eloquent, most elusive, and certainly most interesting practitioners.

Cave is a songwriter, a performing musician, novelist, screenwriter, curator, critic, and actor. With an artistic output of such broad stylistic and interdisciplinary breadth, his body of work is undeniably significant, and certainly worthy—as Welberry and Dalziell argue—of the 'comprehensive scholarly and critical overview of Cave's work and its wider, ongoing cultural significance' (p. 3) that this publication seeks to provide. As clearly outlined by the editors, the aims of the book are threefold: 'to compile a comprehensive scholarly and critical overview of Cave's work and its wider, ongoing cultural significance; to bring together interdisciplinary scholarship addressing Cave's work and its influence from a number of perspectives; [and] to introduce an edited collection that is of interest to general audiences and academics alike' (p. 3). While certainly achieving the first two of these goals, it is questionable, because the writing is predominantly of a far more academic tone than a 'general' one, whether the publication manages to cross over to that desired general audience.

Although the editors' introductory claim that 'Cave is an almost daily reference point in the international news and music media' (p. 4) is perhaps an unnecessary, and indeed unmeasurable justification, it nevertheless conveys clearly the obvious regard they have for their subject. This evident enthusiasm for Cave's work and his perceived sphere of influence sets the scene nicely for the essays that follow, essays that continually seek to locate the works within a prevailing cultural context and that run the full gamut of approaches from cultural studies, semiotics, postculturalism, psychology and sociology.

Multiple aspects of Cave's work are picked over. Jillian Burt sets the scene in Chapter One with a close and intimate situating of Cave's love songs within cultural and aesthetic contexts, attributing 'spiritual landscapes' or dioramas to his songs, and eschewing the oft-held notion that the artist is some sort of self-styled gothic prophet of doom. Necessarily subjective, nevertheless the writing is convincing and provides a compelling example of how Cave's lyrics might resonate in direct collusion with the experiences and world-view of an individual receptor. Clinton Walker, an associate of Cave's in the early days of his career, provides a vital and very readable journalistic account of these formative years, with an emphasis upon the 'colonial experience', effectively aligning the artist's historic output to the national and international influences impacting upon them at the time. This does much to flesh out the wider narrative of Cave's career, offering pointers to the future directions he would follow and insights into his wider *raison d'être*. Co-editor Karen Welberry's contribution, 'Nick Cave and the Australian Language of Laughter'—effectively his use of words—is a vibrant critique of the artist's own claim that he is first and foremost a comic writer. Based primarily upon the premise that Cave's self-consciously romantic, flowery and verbose word-smithing is intentionally and totally at odds with the man-of-the-land colonial heritage from which he has emerged, she argues that this also simultaneously and consciously sabotages any perceived, stereotypical

rock-star pretensions. Welberry's essay is one of the best in the book, being both well researched and beautifully written. Crucially, she notes the influence of Colin Cave, Nick's father and a teacher of English, succinctly outlining his enormous enthusiasm not only for great literature *per se*, but also the manner in which he so passionately transformed these literary works so that they might resonate with a displaced readership—specifically, the people of Wangaratta, in rural Victoria, where Nick spent part of his childhood.

Chapter Four of *Cultural Seeds* examines the subject's work from a gendered dance perspective. Laknath Jayasinghe's analysis of *Nick the Stripper*, Cave's music video for his band, the Birthday Party, is especially revealing, concluding convincingly that Cave's performance in the clip fully flies in the face of traditional Australian rock music masculinities. The presentation of opposition thus uncovered in the subject's work ties in well with Welberry's preceding essay, and it is evident even by this early stage of the book that the broad-ranging interdisciplinary approach of the work is unpacking a vital and significant central component of Cave's governing *modus operandi*.

Chris Bilton's chapter, 'An Audience for Antagonism,' examines Cave against the multiple meanings of celebrity. Rightly regarding the artist as a prototype post-punk anti-star, this author, too, draws much from the *Nick the Stripper* video clip, ultimately reaching a conclusion that neatly mirrors the increasingly evident flow of the book that, despite Cave's lampooning of stardom, his protestations and presentations nevertheless equate to the central components of celebrity/stardom. The juxtapositions of opposites continue.

Cave's novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* receives a fine yet all-too-brief analysis from Carol Hart. Comparing the work to traditional conventions of gothic fiction, Hart's is an engaging essay that focuses upon Cave's narrative excess. Because this particular quality in Cave's literary offering is one mirrored throughout his wider performative *oeuvre*, one might have wished for a more expansive critique than this edited volume allows. Correctly pointing out that Cave's work, for this reason and more, makes significant demands upon the reader, as do his songs, Hart's alignment of the artist's appeal to this factor, married to her claim that the novel transcends traditional gothic parameters and takes the reader into 'new' territory, is an argument that deserves extrapolation.

Further highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the publication, Adrian Danks explores Cave's film career to date. Given that his music is frequently regarded as having, as Danks puts it, 'a heightened melodramatic quality ... with patently imagistic and narrative form' (p. 110), this is another intramedia exploration that sits well amid the broad-ranging scope of the book. Refreshingly offering criticism of aspects of Cave's work—a rare component within *Cultural Seeds*—the critic nevertheless ends with a summation that would sit equally well at the conclusion of many of the other appraisals, describing a 'combination of brutality, Biblical morality, elemental conflict, grace-like quiet, lyricism, total commitment to the material and a degree of self-consciousness' (p. 120).

By the time one reaches Angela Jones's analysis of Cave's 2007 project *Grinderman*, the reader is beginning to feel remarkably familiar with the cornerstones of the artist's methodology outlined thus far, the continuity between appraisals to date having been notably marked, regardless of the origin(s) of the approach. Because the book is so interdisciplinary in nature—and surely this is the only logical way to approach an artist such as Cave—a convincing and wide-ranging argument is being cemented. Jones's voice supports this body of evidence, but also, crucially,

adds to the wider debate by pointing out, among many other threads, the duality of Cave's performative activities, that is, the potential for Cave's 'authentic' self to be discerned from the artificiality of the performance he offers. For this reviewer, Jones's is the standout piece in the book, and this is no small feat amid the many worthy appraisals. One aspect of Cave's 'real self,' his religiosity, is subsequently the topic of Robert Eaglestone's essay. Ranging from overt and clearly acknowledged religious thematicism, at times sourced directly from the bible, to what one might term a more diverse secular religiosity, this ongoing debate is a primary concern within the artist's work. It is a feature also addressed by Lyn McCredden, who argues, however, that Cave's concern is more one of sacredness than of religiosity *per se*, that is, a sacredness founded upon 'the human dimensions of flesh, erotics and violence' (p. 167).

Nathan Wiseman-Trowse unpacks, with commendable clarity, the artist's use of Elvis Presley—both the man and his work—as an invaluable resource for 'star' archetypes that are then used, with varying degrees of explicitness, in Cave's own work. Co-editor, Tanya Dalziell, then has the final say in the book, and the disparate nature of her analytical discourse is one that neatly reflects and bookends the wider project. Drawing upon references including Romantic poets, a mid-nineteenth-century painting, a gospel, and a text on Elizabethan psychology, she undertakes an exploration into Cave's personal brand of melancholy and creativity within his love songs. With Cave playfully aligning and naming his mindset, when in darker creative territory, to the character of a moose, Dalzeill makes a commendable effort to probe this referent, and 'The Moose and Nick Cave' is a wide-reaching and, in itself, creative critique. The essay also comes the closest to attempting a modicum of musical analysis, albeit of a (arguably necessarily) non-theoretical style.

This volume is a very valuable contribution to understanding the work of one of the more complex, at times perplexing, figures operating within both popular music and beyond. Yet, such is the complexity and depth of the interdisciplinary analysis that comprises these essays, along with the aforementioned predominantly academic style of writing, that it seems questionable that *Cultural Seeds: Essays on the Work of Nick Cave*, will do a great deal to bring the artist's work—or an understanding of that work—to a wider, more general audience as per the stated, hoped-for goal of both the editors and publisher. Simply, this is much more a scholarly work than one accessible for, or, arguably, attractive to, a general audience. Given this scholarly slant, one might very much have welcomed the inclusion of at least a modicum of more traditional musicological analysis. While the other forms of analysis that permeate the work are applied with consistent and appropriate rigour, some engagement with musical form, harmony, melody, rhythm, et cetera, being brought to bear upon the subject may well have added much to the overall picture. But this is the conundrum of the Ashgate series, and introduces a much wider philosophical debate about how to talk about music without necessarily utilising what is, for a general audience, musical terminology that amounts to jargon. Accusations such as the one brought to our attention by Dalziell, that Cave might favour lyrics over the music that underpins them, for instance, cry out to be put to the test, and it is hoped that somebody will take up the challenge.

Putting this troublesome and perhaps unfair caveat—at least in this context—aside, *Cultural Seeds: Essays on the work of Nick Cave*, delivers exactly what the editors and the publisher set out to achieve, and the work is thus a welcome and timely addition to the literature of popular musicology.