

Reviews

John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, eds,
Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia
Sydney: Currency House, 2003.
ISBN 0 95812131 1, hardback, 734pp., index.

Reviewed by Geraldine Bloustien

*Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises
sounds and sweet airs that give delight but hurt not ...*

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act III, Scene II

In the preface to *The Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, the editors, John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell, state that their intention is to provide the first comprehensive mapping of the practice of music and dance in Australia from the beginning of European colonisation to the present day. This is indeed an ambitious task, and to a great extent the depth and breadth of this book achieves this aim, involving well over two hundred contributors and over 730 pages of text. The result is a fascinating and lively account of the complex mosaic that constitutes music and dance in Australia, with particular focus upon the fields of activities and genres through which particular music practices are embedded and expressed.

The book is an attractive hardcover volume, the cover in its golden browns and blues and superimposed interwoven coloured type, symbolising an Australian continent of land, sea and movement. The text within, heralded in the interlinked words on the cover, describes the vast variety of subjects that make up the fields of contemporary Australian musical and dance performance and the mapping of their development. Within its many pages, the book discusses the history and development of different musical and dance performance genres, outlining the evolution of the various technologies used to create different types of music art forms and the impact of these changes. It examines the infrastructures of education and training that underpin such musical creativity, its production and performance in Australia and explores the role of place, space, venues, politics and policy in development of Australian music and dance industries.

Rather than arranging this copious material thematically, *The Companion* simplifies the presentation by using alphabetical headings, thus enabling the readers partly to spin their own webs of relevancies and connections. This arrangement also means that readers are offered a particularly broad sweep of information, which the editors perceive as underpinning Australian musical/dance-performance history and social contexts. This selection includes entries which have rarely, if ever before, been collected into one volume. The detailed index lists not only sections on 'the usual suspects,' but also includes many others that point to less-commonly documented areas. The resulting interrelationships of national and cultural influences side by side, highlight the rich complexity of the Australian music and dance performance repertoire. Some of these fields include the expected entries on Aboriginal musicals, protest songs, Australia's first jazz band, bush dancing, the didjeridu, gum leaf playing, garage bands, gospel choirs and *Waltzing Matilda*. These are interleaved with many others on less obvious choices such as Jindyworobakism, Lithuanian, Hindu, Hmong, Israeli and Kurdish traditions, Kodály music education and Masonic lodges.

The overall effect is to alert the reader to the eclectic mix of the musical and dance traditions in Australia and the fascinating and on-going cross-fertilisation of the many styles and formats. This is highly significant as debates on often narrow but fondly held interpretations of musical authenticity and origins of Australian music still rage in the academy and the media. This volume reminds us that such boundaries are often rightly contested, being symbolic and frequently highly permeable. The Australian continent is a marvellous melting pot of cultural musical traditions, which continue to reverberate and be re-created in 'our isle of delightful noises.'

Another aspect of the *Companion* worthy of note is that within the main alphabetical entries there are detailed, separately headed subsections. Many of these offer a depth of unusual details and some lateral observations. So, for example, under the main heading on 'Spanish-speaking Immigrants Traditions' are subheadings on 'resistance to Pinochet,' 'music of the altilano,' 'reciprocal influences,' 'social issues in song' and 'Spanish-influenced festivals in Australia.' Similarly, a section on military music includes several subsections offering information and insights, including those discussing the different types of military bands and the conversion from all-brass to reed-and-brass ensembles. The large section on jazz, which runs for over eleven pages, encompasses twenty subsections, exploring the influences of vaudeville, markers of modernity, and eclectic fusion. Yet another large section, on Indigenous Adaptations, running over ten pages, has four subheadings. These cover the impact of the exchange of music between Europeans and Americans and Aborigines, the tours of the Aboriginal riverboat entertainers, the relationship between place and community, and the impact of particular political interventions, such as the national referendum in 1967. Each subsection provides a widening circle of information about the influences and insights of Australian musical development, its cultures and practices.

Clearly, while the editors have attempted to provide a comprehensive account of Australia's musical history and its influences, the particular areas selected from the vast cornucopia of possibilities in the *Companion* are based ultimately on the particular knowledge of the contributors. Inevitably, this means that some sections have a broader sweep and wider cross-referencing than do others. Perhaps this is because the editors themselves felt that some sections

required more space, or it may be that the personal interests and expertise of the contributors, and the amount of new research needed to be undertaken for the book, provided more information in some areas rather than for others. Or again, it may be that as not all of the contributors are established academics, some of had less researched material to draw upon. In fact, one of the strengths of the book is that while many of the writers are established international scholars of popular music and musicologists, others are listed as emerging and independent researchers, or well-known practitioners of music and dance. Many are simultaneously researchers and practitioners, and all are clearly enthusiasts for the particular art forms they write about. This insider knowledge makes the readings particularly informative and unusual, with many sections including unexpected details, focusses and esoteric elements, providing overall 'a wealth of information not readily available elsewhere' (p. 5). The carefully selected cross-references at the end of each segment, highlighting overlaps and interactions between technologies, instruments, genres and artists, together with the comprehensive index at the end of the collection, provides a particularly valuable resource for researchers and lay readers alike.

In spite of this unusual mix of contributors, and their sheer numbers, the style of the companion is relatively consistent, producing a certain uniformity of style and tone. It seems that Whiteoak and Scott-Maxwell have taken pains to weave into the tapestry of contributions a common stylistic and linguistic thread with a minimum of specialist jargon, all of which makes for easy and accessible reading. Overall, this is a highly enjoyable volume, and it is an amazing feat to have collated so much detailed material. It is a highly recommended acquisition for every library's collection, and a must for the bookshelf of every serious scholar of music and dance studies.

Shane Homan, *The Mayor's a Square: Live Music and Law and Order in Sydney*
Newtown, NSW: Local Consumption Publications, 2003.
ISBN 0 949793 30 2, ix + 210pp., index, bibl.

Reviewed by Bruce Johnson

In the year 2000, I had the pleasure of examining a doctoral thesis on the history of the regulatory framework of popular music in Sydney since the 1950s, written by Shane Homan. In my report, I signalled its potential as a platform for cultural policy development with far-reaching social implications. I also enthusiastically recommended that it be developed for publication. I am delighted to see both of these propositions come to fruition. At that time, I had just presented a preliminary submission to the NSW Ministry for the Arts on the apparent decline of live music in New South Wales. When the Ministry and the Australia Council provided funding to develop the study, Shane Homan's research made him an obvious choice as co-investigator, and I invited him to collaborate on the project. The possibilities for arts policy are thus now emerging in the recent publication of the report *Vanishing Acts: An Inquiry into the State of Live*