

prominent in Australia as an improvising pianist. La Trobe's music department was well known for its free music-making—its sound-making room complete with car parts was a legend amongst tertiary music schools—and the improvisation and composition tasks to be found in *Musical Environments* reflect this spirit. It is within this area of the book that I have my only reservations.

The type of improvisation task, of which there are almost seventy, involves music-making of a very free nature. Most of these suggestions for improvisational activity require the performer to explore the sound spectrum in a way that is not limited by musical 'rules' in any conventional way. This is an obvious starting point for people without musical skills and, indeed, is an activity I employ with beginning improvising students, both specialist music and generalist primary teacher trainees, to name just two groups. But from my teaching experience there comes a time when students seem to want their improvisations to have a stronger emphasis on the elements of rhythm, melody and harmony than is to be found in the creative tasks in *Musical Environments*. However, bearing in mind that the book is aimed at people without 'an assumed knowledge,' this criticism might be seen by some as a little unfair.

Notwithstanding my (very small) reservation, the book is a wonderful introduction to the pleasures inherent in creative performance. On its back cover it is described as a 'ground-breaking guide' to the world of sound and music and it is undoubtedly so. Indeed, if we are serious about music as an ongoing and living language we should all promoting this book. It deserves to be widely used by people of all ages and levels of experience.

ROS McMILLAN

Warren Fahey, *Ratbags and Rabblers: A Century of Political Protest, Song and Satire*

Foreword by Eric Bogle

Currency Press, Sydney, 2000

ISBN 0 86819 634 7. pb., 389pp., \$32.95 incl. GST.

As Warren Fahey admits, most of the sets of words reproduced in *Ratbags and Rabblers* as 'songs' were previously published by him in *The Balls of Bob Menzies* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1989). A polemically designed narrative threads the verses into garlands offered to the gods of the old left in both cases. No music appears in either book, though tunes are named where parodies have been tacked on to pre-existing melodies. The problem with this is that many of the original tunes have disappeared, not only from common usage, but from memory and the library shelves. Warren Fahey, a celebrated performer and collector, has been publishing Australian songs in this and the usual melody-with-words-and-chords format for many years.

In 1970 he formed the Australian Folklore Unit 'to collect, research, write about and popularise Australian folklore.' Three years later he began a year-long field search which resulted in a significant collection of songs and stories now housed at the National Library of

¹ G.B. Davey and G. Seal (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore* (Melbourne: OUP, 1993).

Australia. In 1971 he brought the folk music group the *Larrikins* into being, touring it nationally and internationally.² In 1973 he set up Folkways Music, a Sydney folk music retail outlet. In 1975 he created Larrikin Records and in 1988 the Larrikin Booking Agency. His books include *Eureka: The Songs that Made Australia* (1984), *Joe Watson: Traditional Singer* (1975), *The Balls of Bob Menzies* (1989) and *How Mabel Laid the Table* (1992). His formidable list of recordings includes the folk albums *Bush Traditions*, *Man of the Earth*, *A Garland for Sally* (Sloane), *Navy on the Line* and *Tales of My Uncle Harry*. For ABC radio he devised the series *While the Billy Boils*, which traces Australia's history through song. In 1988 he received an Advance Australia Award for services to Australian music.

A new book from this source, then, is something to reckon with, in spite of its having appeared in a previous incarnation. Twelve years ago Fahey was not using the internet to feed his voracious appetite for political words and music as he is now. Princess Di had not been immortalised, and the republic, federation and Howard's inability to say 'sorry' were not political news. The additions to the old texts fill in this time gap and enlarge on topics that have since attracted greater attention than they might have received in 1989. The linking text is still part political background, part historical revisionism. Irony, ridicule of the inept, and a powerful call to eternal political vigilance gives it a flavour as inimitable as billy tea.

Unfortunately poetry gives way to doggerel in most of the entries, but then, this is not a collection intended for pre-postmodernist English departments. This is a preaching to the converted, those general readers who value ephemera and the commonplace for what they reveal of the national character at any given moment. Lying naked on the page, their musical setting Photo-Shopped out, they do little to engage the musician. Yet the range of tunes indicated by titles in italics under the verse headings is astonishing.

In ten chapters, each treating a decade of the century of songs represented, Fahey gives the words to around 340 settings, identifies the tune parodied, supplies the source of the verses, and occasionally names composers, Eric Bogle among them. The range of music recruited can be gleaned even from a rough sampling. Opening with a couple of songs that are known to have been sung rather than recited, but lacking a tune tag, melody identification begins with the uncredited *Just Tell Them that You Saw Me* out of the Sydney Tivoli Songster No.12, a song from 1895 by the American composer-comic Paul Dresser, whose life was given bio-movie treatment in 1942 as *My Gal Sal*, with Victor Mature in the lead role.³ *When Your Hair Had Turned to Silver*, used for a 1930s Depression parody, is a Peter de Rose-Charles Tobias song from 1931.⁴ *Villikins and his Dinah*, used for the WWI and WWII parody *Dinki Di*, has its origins in the traditional air *William Taylor*, arguably originating in the Skene manuscript collection's lute tune of that name from c.1615,⁵ but burlesqued and popularised as *Villikins and his Dinah* by Frederick Robson around 1839 at the Grecian Saloon and the Olympic in London. The tune has an Australian traditional music history as the air for *The Euabalong Ball*, *The Nautical Yarn*, and in one of several variants, *Bluey Brink*.⁶ To look at a very different example try *Servin' USA*,

² Their recording titles include *Limejuice and Vinegar* (Larrikin LRF159), *The Larrikin Sessions* (EMI CD 4796472), and *Australia's Awake* (Larrikin LRE 043).

³ Paul Gammond, *Oxford Companion to Popular Music* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

⁴ Gammond, *Popular Music*.

⁵ A.G. Gilchrist, in *Journal of the Folk Song Society*, vol. 8.

⁶ Thérèse Radic, *Treasury of Favourite Australian Songs*, 2nd ed. (1983; Melbourne: Penguin, 1988) 126, note to page 49.

a Redgum song protesting against Coca-colourisation. This is based on *Surfin' USA*, an early Beach Boys' single by Brian Wilson, and open borrowing of the tune and rhythm of Chuck Berry's *Sweet Little Sixteen*.⁷

Backgrounding any one of these tunes makes it clear that Australian political protest songs have deep roots in other cultures and other times. Digging into what lies behind Fahey's collection could be a journey of genuine musicological discovery, one likely to raise awareness of how much that we think of as Australian and local is in fact a re-fashioning of sources already much travelled. How they came to be here is still a mystery. Warren Fahey has gone some way to providing the right clues to its solving, but his interest is more in the reading of song words as history rather than as musical genealogy. Nonetheless, his long engagement with song collecting and his meticulous transmission of verses set in an illuminating text, as evidenced here, deserves applause.

THÉRÈSE RADIC

⁷ Gammond, *Popular Music*.

Thomas Reiner, *Semiotics of Musical Time*
Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics Vol.43
New York: Peter Lang, 2000.
ISBN 0 8204 4525 8, 250pp., bibl., hb.

We all feel as if we possess an intimate understanding of time. This intuitive, common-sense assumption has no equivalent in physics, however. Scientists struggle to find a description of what the 'passing of time' might mean other than as a feature of our mutual, and privileged, experience. Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart recently summarised the issue: 'quantum mechanics describes what a system might do in the future, whereas classical mechanics describes what it has done in the past...Moreover, the present, where our consciousness resides, is a moving boundary at which the context changes—a travelling catastrophe in paradigm space.'¹ No better description would seem to be possible in our present state of knowledge. *Present state of knowledge*: the issue is a particularly complex one, as the subject of the investigation is itself the frame within which the investigation is conducted.

Brave, then, of Thomas Reiner to attempt a serious study of musical time and its semiotics. Some years ago, Reiner presented me with a copy of his bibliography of works relating to musical time; he commented, plausibly, that the bibliography is the most complete ever assembled, doubtless a necessary preparation for writing *Semiotics of Musical Time*. It is no surprise that the book is both long and detailed. At the core of the reasoning is the standard semiological tripartition suggested by Nattiez: a process from composer to score to performance to listener articulated by the three core concepts of *poiesis*, *trace*, and *esthesis*. Not that Reiner accepts this description as adequate; he is careful to clarify the ways in which both *poiesis* and *esthesis* are involved at several points along the source-to-receiver trajectory—in a footnote to Chapter 3, he points out that Nattiez identifies sixteen such steps—and the versions arising from different musical traditions.

¹ Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart, *The Collapse of Chaos* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).