

Barbara Caine, Moira Gatens, Emma Grahame,  
Jan Larbalestier, Sophie Watson, Elizabeth Webby (eds),  
*Australian Feminism: A Companion*  
Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998.  
ISBN 0 19 553818 8, 607pp.

*Australian Feminism: A Companion* is hardly of a size to fit in the average handbag—six hundred pages comprising forty-nine essays, several hundred biographical and terminological entries, a chronology and bibliography. The essays begin with 'Aboriginal Women and Economic Ingenuity,' and expand on 'Cultural politics,' 'Cyberfeminism' and 'Motherhood' among other notions, while the shorter entries, besides outlining the biographies of women activists such as the evergreen Germaine Greer, explains 'International Women's Year' and feminist activity in 'Newspapers.' Several of the longer essays provide useful summaries of areas of interest to musicologists. 'Cultural studies' is defined as the engagement with 'theories and the variables of class, gender, race and sexuality,' originating from a group of sociologists gathered at the University of Birmingham in the early 1970s. The essay on 'Feminism' is of interest for its survey of the use of the term, and summary of its standing in contemporary society and scholarship. The shorter entries are however far more suited to ready reference, particularly in the case of suffragists, politicians and social reformers. Useful to the laywoman are definitions of catchwords such as 'Patriarchy,' 'Essentialism' and 'Separatism,' and for those interested in literary approaches there are entries on 'French literary theory,' 'Autobiography' and 'Fiction.' While the essays are strong on feminist history, sociology and politics, the visual and performing arts scarcely seem to qualify. Included is an essay on 'Visual arts and crafts,' but none on theatre, music or dance. The reader must turn to the shorter entries, where discussions of theatre and women's drama groups appear to have been relegated, under 'Theatre' and, surprisingly, 'Humour.' As the editors have deemed that the criterion for inclusion is feminist identification we might have expected to see entries on Margaret Sutherland and Helen Noonan alongside those on Janine Haines and Jennie George. Robyn Archer rates a biography, as do the writer Helen Garner and poet Mary Gilmore. But well might the reader conclude that Australian women's creativity has lain dormant over the last two hundred years.

Music is at least represented in shorter articles entitled 'Songs and bands,' 'Music: art' and 'Music: popular.'<sup>1</sup> The latter, in keeping with the procedure of the literary entries, presents a short history of feminist activity in that area, exemplified by the 'ratbagish' Ovarian Sisters. It traces the feminist lineage back to a Concert for Women in 1913, points to a coming of age at the She Concert in Melbourne in 1973, and maturity exemplified in the proliferation of feminist fanzines.

By contrast, 'Music: art' does not attempt any such historical overview of art music composition in Australia, instead launching into an alarmingly blinkered lecture on the state and substance of feminist musicology.<sup>2</sup> Whereas the entry on 'Poetry,' for instance, presents a

<sup>1</sup> Janette Joy Prichard, 'Songs and bands,' 492-3; Janette Joy Prichard, 'Music: popular,' 461-2; Sally Macarthur, 'Music: art,' 460-61.

<sup>2</sup> Sophie Fuller gives just such an overview for the UK in 'Dead White Men in Wigs,' *Girls! Girls! Girls!*, ed. Sarah Cooper (London: Cassell, 1995) 22-36.

history of women's voice in verse, here an outline of music composition by Australian women and the possibility of a canon are sidestepped as soon as the very first sentence, which announces that 'Feminist scholarship in Australian "art" music is comparatively new and fragmentary.' It continues with a commendation of Australian research (not cited) which has 'identified the almost total maleness of music's public image, from the occupation of senior positions in university music departments to the overwhelming preoccupation by scholars and practitioners with music composed by men.' As a consequence, we learn, 'much of the feminist activity in Australian musicology has been concerned with "balancing the books," or with creating a parallel women's music history.'

If we are to accept that the article makes no attempt to address 'Music: art' and is in reality 'Musicology,' it might be expected that we would be offered a summary of the breadth and achievements of this 'feminist activity' over the last few decades. There is none. Instead we find a fleeting reference to the production of predominantly unpublished biographical narratives of 'deceased and living' Australian women composers and musicians, and a random overview of dissertations about women practitioners (and none of these are cited either). Reading between the lines, the author is lamenting the paucity of published material, and might well have despaired of the fact that publication continues to be achieved by men practising hismeneutics (the recent biographies of Florence Austral and Margaret Sutherland come to mind, as well as the reissue of one on Nellie Melba). The virtual absence of Australian feminist studies from library shelves is a state of affairs which could easily lead observers to the conclusion that feminist and musicology have failed to connect in this context. But this is not to say that feminist musicology in this country has no history, no profusion of ideas or schools of thought. And the current state of the discipline is sadly misrepresented when the only research cited and discussed at length are two unpublished doctoral dissertations, one of them being the author's.<sup>3</sup>

What then, might a compensatory history of Australian feminist musicology consider? Firstly the pioneering studies of Aboriginal women's music, among them Helen Payne's PhD on women's land rites.<sup>4</sup> It would acknowledge the many life and works studies of journeywoman composers such as Esther Rofe, Meta Overman and Dulcie Holland, as well as canonic composers such as Margaret Sutherland and Anne Boyd.<sup>5</sup> And it would not overlook the abundance of studies of women's music-making, from accounts of the role of the piano in colonial life, to the Women's Work Exhibition held in Melbourne in 1907 and women as music

<sup>3</sup> Sally Macarthur, 'Feminist Aesthetics in Music: Politics and Practices in Australia,' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1997 and Linda Kouvaras, "'Sweet Death": Strategies of the Feminine Grotesque in a Contemporary Australian Chamber Opera,' PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Payne, 'Singing a Sister's Sites: Women's Land Rites in the Australian Musgrave Ranges,' PhD thesis, University of Queensland, c. 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Pauline Petrus, 'Esther Rofe, Theatre Musician and Narrative Composer: A Biographical and Historical Overview of Her Life and Music,' MA thesis, Monash University, 1995; Patricia Thorpe, 'The Life and Music of Meta Overman,' MusB thesis, University of Western Australia, 1988; Victoria Brookes-Horne, 'The Musical Contributions of Dulcie Holland During World War II,' GradDipMus thesis, Australian National University, 1995. On Sutherland see, for instance, Ann Patrick, 'The Young Kabbarli: Daisy Bates as an Operatic Heroine,' MPhil thesis, University of Western Australia, 1996 and on Boyd, for example, Deborah Crisp, 'Elements of *Gagaku* in the Music of Anne Boyd,' BMus (Hons) thesis, University of Sydney, 1978.

educators in contemporary schools.<sup>6</sup> But the most obvious evidence of feminist musicological exercise comes from the series of Composing Women conferences—Adelaide 1991, Melbourne 1994 and Sydney 1997—two of which have produced landmark volumes of proceedings.<sup>7</sup> At the 1994 conference there was exciting evidence of a burgeoning body of scholarship: studies of opportunities for women composers, reception studies of music by women, biographical narratives, studies of gendered encoding of Australian music, theorising about cultural deafness and 'essentialism' in the Australian context, and about the insidious gendering of new music technology. And feminist outpourings had increased by 1997 to encompass studies of representations of women in opera, queer theory and feminist performance linguistics. In that year, more encouragingly, these were completed on 'Feminist Aesthetics in Music: Politics and Practices in Australia' (one of the theses discussed here), 'Parsifal and Homosexuality: A Study of the Reception of *Parsifal* as a Homoerotic Text' and 'Liberating Voices: Towards an Ethnography of Women's Community A Cappella Choirs.' But when will we see the sort of offerings listed at US feminist conferences, the theorising about voice, about embodied codes in instrumental music, about narratives of popular music, or the sexual politics of opera? Will Australian musicology ever address issues of feminist epistemology, the performance of virility in heavy metal music, Grainger's music as a site of both resistance and empowerment of the feminine, and Australian composers' responses to AIDS?

As the article in question argues, Australian feminist scholarship lags (at least) ten years behind that of the US (but, interestingly, is well ahead of that in Britain). Worse, the scholarship of Susan McClary (whose ideas are outlined here at inordinate length) is certainly 'regarded by the Australian mainstream with scepticism and scorn.' But the charge levelled at 'mainstream music theorists' of 'working on the assumption that music is somehow produced in a vacuum and is thus devoid of social meaning' is surely no longer a valid assessment of Australian musicology. That theorists 'tend to shy away from producing critical, interpretative readings of musical works' concentrating instead on 'elaborate formal, stylistic analyses' may be a valid generalisation, but the redoubtably masculinist pursuit of Schenkerian analysis is now rarely encountered in Australian research. And this, it could be argued, is due to a gradual feminisation of the discipline.

The *Companion's* essay on 'Women's Studies' provides a yardstick by which to measure the progress of feminist studies in music. It notes that every Australian university now teaches a program in the area, and that there are two chairs and some fifty academic staff around the country propagating feminist discourse. Subjects such as 'Women in English Society' and 'The Political Economy of Women' have been taught since the 1970s, putting to shame Australian musicological offerings. To my knowledge, it was only in the 1990s under the aegis of Anne Boyd at the University of Sydney that feminist musicology was first taught in this country; at present even the most adventurous curriculum subsumes such study under the

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Crisp, 'The Piano in Australia, 1770 to 1900: Some Literary Sources,' *Musicology Australia* 18 (1995): 25-38; Catherine Wilson, 'The Music of the Women's Work Exhibition,' MA thesis, Monash University, 1994; Danielle Lynch, 'Sexism in Music Education and Women in Music: A Discussion of Sexism and a Resource Kit Featuring Six Women Composers,' BMusEd thesis, Sydney Conservatorium of Music, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Thérèse Radic (ed.), *Repercussions: Australian Composing Women's Festival and Conference, 1994* (Melbourne: National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1995). Sally Macarthur and Cate Poynton, eds, *Music and Feminisms* (Sydney: Australian Music Centre, 1999).

title 'Music as Cultural Interpretation,' and some department heads actively ban the subject. Sympathy for this plight is to be found in the experience of feminist literary theorists. What feminist musicologist does not nod in agreement with the statement in the essay on 'Literary Theory,' that feminists in that field labour in academic institutions which are 'relatively small, increasingly undergoing severe economic restructuring, and often far apart. ... [W]here there has been a resistance to "theory" in some departments of literary study, feminist scholars often work in comparative isolation. Courses have come and gone, dependent on the insecure presence of usually untenured feminist scholars.' Moreover, Australian feminist musicology, if not generic musicology, suffers a dearth of publishing outlets. The Australian Music Centre and Australian centres at Monash and the University of Melbourne have each published collections of expressly feminist and musicological essays, but only Angus & Robertson's *Peggy Glanville-Hicks* and Currency Press's *Sweethearts of Rhythm* could be classed as monographs.<sup>8</sup> The latest feminist musicological findings are more likely to be found in journals as remote and scarce as *Music in New Zealand*, *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, and the *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* (Washington DC), or under the auspices of European publishing houses.<sup>9</sup>

Of most concern about 'Music: art' and its slant, however, is the hint of an underlying value judgement: that the mostly unpublished 'balancing of the books' branch of feminist musicology is of less significance than the 'burgeoning theoretical work' in the areas of gay and lesbian studies and feminist theory (no matter that in quantity the sheer number of studies in the former category far outweighs that in the latter, and that their feminist identification is incontestable). It is true that Australian musicology has not fully articulated the paradigm shift which is manifested in 'interrogations of music' as a construction of subjectivity, gender, desire, ethnicity and the body (*vide* Susan McClary).<sup>10</sup> Still less have we explored the ways in which performative acts constitute the feminine (*vide* Suzanne Cusick).<sup>11</sup> Australian feminist musicology might be more chrysalis than butterfly, and the furthest theoretical reaches may not yet have penetrated the 'mainstream,' but the existence of proponents should be recognised.

Some gathering of the various tribal groups may be in order. I note that a panel on Feminist Theory/Women's History conducted at a recent American Musicological Society conference brought together under that heading Susan Cook (co-editor of *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*) discussing the relationship between feminist theory and popular music, Suzanne Cusick on Francesca Caccini and Italian feminist theory, Susan McClary

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Beckett, *Peggy Glanville-Hicks* (Pymble: Angus & Robertson, 1990); Kay Dreyfus, *Sweethearts of Rhythm* (Sydney: Currency, 1998).

<sup>9</sup> Sally Macarthur, 'Writing "Difference" in the Musical Body,' *Music in New Zealand* 21 (1993): 10-13, 104; Nina Treadwell, 'The Performance of Gender in Cavaleri/Guidiccioni's *Ballo*, "O che nuovo miracolo" (1589),' *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 1.1 (1997): 55-70; Suzanne Robinson, 'Unmasking Peggy Glanville-Hicks,' *Journal of the International Alliance for Women in Music* 2.2 (June 1996): 4-7; *Die Geige war ihr Leben: Drei Frauen im Portrait*, ed. Ursula Simek and Elena Ostleitner, published by Vier Viertel Verlag (Vienna) includes an essay on the Australian violinist Alma Moodie by Kay Dreyfus.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) and, more specifically, 'Paradigm Dissonances: Music Theory, Cultural Studies, Feminist Criticism,' *Perspectives of New Music* 32.1 (1994): 68-85.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Suzanne G. Cusick, 'On a Lesbian Relation with Music: A Serious Effort Not to Think Straight,' *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Philip Brett, et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994) and 'Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem,' *Perspectives of New Music* 32.1 (1994): 8-27.

advocating new ways of thinking about sound and listening and Judith Tick (author of the recent biography of Ruth Crawford Seeger) outlining feminist biographical approaches to the woman composer.<sup>12</sup> Such cooperation between theorists and historicists, activists and conservatives within the auspices of the national society should be a lantern to Australian observers. In a famous debate more than twenty years ago between literary scholars Carolyn Heilbrun (on the side of the feminist biographers) and Catharine Stimpson (speaking for theorists), it was concluded that both camps are necessary to the health of the discipline. They drew an analogy with the Old and New Testaments, finally agreeing that 'only the Jeremiahs of the feminist critique can lead us out of the "Egypt of female servitude" to the promised land of the feminist vision.'<sup>13</sup> With a fourth Composing Women conference scheduled for 2001 it is to be hoped that visions will be realised.

SUZANNE ROBINSON

<sup>12</sup> 'Report on the Open Meeting of the Committee on the Status of Women,' *AMS Newsletter* 30.1 (February 2000): 5.

<sup>13</sup> See Carolyn G. Heilbrun and Catharine R. Stimpson, 'Theories of Feminist Criticism,' in *Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory*, ed. Josephine Donovan (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976) 64, 68 and 72, and Elaine Showalter, 'Toward a Feminist Poetics,' *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986) 125-143.

Greta Mary Hair and Robyn E. Smith (eds), *Songs of the Dove and the Nightingale: Sacred and Secular Music c.900–c.1600* Australian Studies in History, Philosophy & Social Studies of Music 3  
Sydney: Currency Press, 1994.  
ISBN 0 86819 409 3. xii+278pp., index, app., ill.

*Songs of the Dove and the Nightingale* is a collection of papers by leading early music scholars on repertoires spanning the period from the earliest surviving plainchant sources to the late renaissance. The wide range of subject matter treated in this volume is the result of the papers having originated at the Symposium of the International Musicological Society held in Melbourne in 1988. Strictly speaking, this volume is a proceedings, and, generally speaking, conference proceedings attract less attention as review material than other types of publication. What perhaps makes this volume stand out is that, while not the only collection of early music studies with Australian overtones,<sup>1</sup> it is unusual to see a volume of papers on European early-music traditions published in Australia. Here, the editors, Australian Robyn E. Smith and Australian-born Greta Mary Hair, have recast the foci of the Symposium simply as 'sacred' and 'secular' for the benefit of a wider readership.

The volume is divided into three parts. The first part concerns the sacred realm, represented by the dove, with papers drawn from the session 'Medieval Liturgical Chant: Recent Research Findings.' The second part concerns the secular realm, represented by the nightingale, with papers from the session 'Analogy: Structural Relations between Music and Text.' In especial

<sup>1</sup> See for example the volumes dedicated to Australian musicologist Gordon Anderson, *Gordon Athol Anderson 1929–1981: In Memoriam von Seinen Studenten, Freunden und Kollegen*, 2 vols, *Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen* 39/1–2 (Henryville, Ottawa & Binningen: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1984).