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Island Songs: A Global Repertoire.

Edited by Godfrey Baldacchino. 2011. Landham, MD, Toronto, and Plymouth, UK: The Scarecrow Press 297 pp.

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Since the times of Malinowski and Mead, island cultures have been a favourite focus of ethnographic studies. They have been sought out by biological scientists for similar reasons: it was assumed that their isolation and independent evolution made them ideal natural laboratories. But the world is much more closely connected today than a century ago: people and their ideas flow between islands and continents with little resistance. In this day and age, is there anything distinctive about the music cultures of islands? The authors contributing to this new book believe we can indeed learn from them. They maintain that island cultures, and

their songs in particular, can expose patterns and commonalities relating to communities, music, change, and the flow of ideas around the globe, making them ideal locations to observe and critique the dynamics of globalization.

In recent decades, sociologist Godfrey Baldacchino has been a key figure in the emerging discipline of island studies, which may be defined as “the global, comparative and interdisciplinary study of islands on their own terms” (<http://www.islandstudies.ca>). Baldacchino founded the *Island Studies Journal*, organized conferences and published books in this emerging field including *A World of Islands* (2007), *Bridging Islands* (2007), and *Island Enclaves* (2010), all of which explore relations between island cultures and societies and their geographic conditions. In *Island Songs: A Global Repertoire*, edited by Baldacchino, the writers aim to “provide a global review of how island songs, their lyrics and their singers engage with the challenges of modernity, migration, and social change—uncovering common patterns despite the diversity and local character of their subjects.”

Although island music-making takes many forms and functions, the studies in this book demonstrate that song plays a central role in island identity and cultural well-being. The fifteen chapter contributors represent a wide swath of global island song traditions from the Caribbean, Atlantic Canada, Europe, Oceania, and beyond, and the authors come from a variety of disciplines including ethnomusicology, sociology, anthropology and geography. These studies not only serve as “bridges

to the islands” in their descriptions of musical traditions in context, but also present epistemological frameworks applicable to island music cultures elsewhere.

The book begins with a foreword written by Annabel J. Cohen that provides some project history. This work is associated with the SSHRC-funded Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (AIRS) initiative, a collaborative research project that involved some eighty-five researchers in Canada and abroad. Cohen is the director, and research represented in this book is one part of this project. Next is a preface written by Kevin N. Dawe, whose book *Island Musics* (2004) was one of the first comparative studies of island music. It is followed by an introduction written by Baldacchino that defines the field of island studies, and spells out the aims of the book as a comparative study of song in the context of island communities.

As authors explore island song traditions as concentrated instances of *place*, a number of common themes repeatedly surface, including issues relating to migration, nostalgia, globalization, tradition, authenticity, isolation, cultural preservation, tourism, change and identity. The book’s identification and problematization of common island issues and themes are particularly useful to future researchers. Space doesn’t allow a discussion of all fifteen chapters so brief descriptions are offered for select chapters, below.

In the three studies that deal with Caribbean music cultures (“English Caribbean: When People Cannot Talk, They Sing,” by Ijahnya Christian, “Spanish Caribbean: Liquid Identities,” by Soraya

Marcano, and “French Caribbean: *Adieu Foulard, Adieu Madras: A Sonic Study in (Post) Colonialism*,” by Yoko Oryu and Godfrey Baldacchino), the authors discuss how the legacy of slavery, colonialism, and the politics of race and identity in the Caribbean play out in song. Christian explores genres of the anglophone Caribbean and comments on how the legacy of slavery has led to a “secret language” in song that retains its associations with Mother Africa. The lingering impact of colonialism is also featured in Marcano’s writings about the prevalence of song texts based on “an idealization of country life and the peasant as the carrier of good values and culture” (23), a persistent holdover from 19th-century Romanticism that is still a widespread component of national identity in the Spanish Caribbean. The impact of colonialism is also a theme in Oryu and Baldacchino’s chapter, where they use a song to explore migration issues, marginalization, layered meanings and postcolonial relations.

Islands are often seen as places where time has stood still: they are marketed as idealized places from the past that serve as nostalgic keepers of authentic traditions. “Cape Breton Island: Living in the Past? Gaelic Language, Song, and Competition” by Heather Sparling explores the tensions concerning authenticity vs. change through the lens of a yearly cultural competition. Waldo Garrido and Philip Hayward’s chapter, “Chiloé: An Offshore Song Culture,” also describes tensions between authenticity and change. Cattermole’s work in Fiji on disappearing male drinking songs, “Fiji Islands: A Sustainable Future for *Sigidrigi*?”

and Johnson's study on the revival of songs in the vernacular language in the Channel islands, "Jersey: Jërriais, Song, and Language Revitalization" provide examples of how some island cultures are reacting to change.

Several of the chapters stood out in terms of clarity of writing and richness of content. Owe Ronström's "Gotland: Where 'Folk Culture' and 'Island' Overlap" eloquently describes how there are very few traditional songs with concrete details about the island or island conditions (255). He concludes, however, that "islandness" in Gotland songs is indeed recognizable to insiders through subtle references to nature, common human concerns and attitudes about a traditional way of life (257).

I found "Scotland's Hebrides: Song and Culture, Transmission, and Transformation" by Ray Burnett and Kathryn Burnett to be particularly engaging because of both its historical ethnographic content and its strong organization. This father and daughter team explain Gaelic song's links to individual and communal well-being on two almost-deserted islands in Western Scotland, supplemented with audio and visual examples that are available online.

Oli Wilson's "Papua New Guinea: Popular Music and the Continuity of Tradition: An Ethnographic Study of Songs by the Band *Paramana Strangers*" is a fascinating discussion of a popular music scene in Papua New Guinea (PNG) that is probably unfamiliar to most readers. The article is based on fieldwork with band members representing the Aroma coastal culture of PNG. Wilson suggests that this band

has been able to sustain aspects of local culture through the use of traditional language and compositional techniques repackaged in new musical styles. Aroma emotional states are informed by environmental factors, specifically wind directions, temperature and humidity. The notion that seasons or weather conditions influence emotional states, which are then expressed in song, sometimes comes up in Western culture (think "Stormy Weather," "Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone," and so on). Wilson shows how the associations between metaphor, environment and emotion play out in the social function of new songs.

Additional chapters include "Newfoundland: From Ron Hynes to Hey Rosetta!" (by Deatra Walsh), "Crete—Souls of Soil: Island Identity through Song" (by Maria Hnaraki), "Sicily: Navigating Responses to Global Cultural Patterns" (by Sergio Bonanzinga), "Aeolian Islands: Three Singers, Their Folk Songs, and the Interpretation of Tradition," (by Cristoforo Garigliano), and "Ibiza and Formentera: Worlds of Singers and Songs" (by Judith Cohen).

As I read, I found myself wishing that the book had been published with quickly accessible online musical links. It would be ideal to have the songs at the reader's fingertips, to hear with ease, for example, the *redoblat* Ibizan glottal ornament described by Judith Cohen (226), the sounds of traditional folk song in Sicily (Bonanzinga, 192), or the "pan Pacific pop" and band *Paramana Strangers* described by Wilson (119-122). Unfortunately, the sounds of the island traditions mentioned in the book

are only available though additional sources typically identified in the reference sections.

For those of us uninitiated in island studies theoretical stances, some of the writing is challenging without prior familiarity with the field's key concepts and terminology, especially the Epilogue by John Connell. The preface and Baldacchino's introduction do indeed help, but there are still a few unanswered questions about the field itself. For example, what exactly counts as an island? After all, can't all land masses be said to be islands? Are island cultures indeed different from other sorts of relatively isolated communities, say, a Yup'ik village community in West Alaska with no connecting roads? I think that these scholars would probably agree that in some sense, an island needn't be surrounded by water. In the end, it seems clear that music's role in reifying community identity as singers confront the outside world is applicable to many cultures around the world, whether they live on islands or not. The patterns are simply a little easier to see when the community is tightly circumscribed.

Overall, this is an outstanding collection of case studies that chronicles the ways in which song is essential to many island communities globally. It will be useful to readers in a range of fields including ethnomusicology, area studies, anthropology and folklore, as well as anyone investigating contemporary culture themes. 🍀