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The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA

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chapter 7. We return to the death camps of World War II, where thousands of Poles were also interned and died. Goska suggests that the responsibility of the deaths of millions of Jews has been transferred, in part, from the more educated German to the Polish peasant.

Included in Goska's work are interviews conducted among American adults of Jewish descent to elicit information about stereotypes of Poles and Jews in search of "the presence of the Polish stereotype, Bieganski" (p. 216). Data from these interviews are presented in chapters 8 and 9. In the latter, stereotypes of Jews elicited spontaneously are discussed. The book closes with "Final Thoughts." The reader could assume they would tie together the text, but they appear, however, to be meandering musings.

Bieganski poses a difficult challenge to the reader. Issues exist with the writing style, use of facts, and the author's approach. Stylistically, the author takes readers on distracting tangents. In chapter 4, before the discussion of the four films, the reader is hijacked to four other films, one of which is set in Italy, before segueing into the text. The work seems to be a number of disparate articles about a similar topic loosely woven together. The separate chapters do not necessarily build into a cohesive whole. The only theme uniting the individual pieces is the focus on the stereotypes of Poles.

Factual errors also are evident. Goska includes *The Deer Hunter*, yet it is a narrative about three Rusyn American blue-collar workers, not Polish Americans. Members of this relatively small Eastern Orthodox ethnic group would not self-identify as Poles, as the author identifies them (p. 135). Furthermore, the film's wedding reception, which the author refers to as a "stereotypical Bohunk wedding," isn't Polish.

The ethnic slur "Bohunk" appears repeatedly as a synonym for the epithet "Polack." When I did research with Eastern Europeans in Cleveland, Ohio, this term referred to people from central Europe, a combination of Bohemian and Hungarian. Early in the book, a "Pole" is defined as a non-Jew descended from people who spoke Polish. A "Jew" is one "whose ancestors were Jewish" (p. 42). Many Jews would vehemently dispute the latter statement, a rationale used to identify Jews during World War

II. In addition, many of the concepts addressed by the author remain superficial. For example, the discussion of blood libels leads to another tangent including the illegal kidnapping of children for adoption toward other minorities. These incidents are incorrectly categorized as blood libels.

Perhaps a primary problem with *Bieganski* is that the author is too close to the subject. Not many Americans are familiar with Polish nationalism, but Polish identity is at the heart of this work. The complexity of this identity is presented too simplistically and often with reference to Eastern European stereotypes in general. The title of the work and the lead character is *Bieganski*. But what is the Bieganski? Is it a term that was invented by the author to capture the essence of Polish peasant culture, or is it the stereotype by which it has become known? The title also refers to Polish-Jewish relations, a topic that the author often sidesteps and then perhaps fills in with the interviews that she conducted. Furthermore, the author draws her source material from the press, popular literature, the cinema, among others, not extensively from oral tradition, thereby further limiting the value of this book as a folklore text.

The Musical Ear: Oral Tradition in the USA.

By Anne Dhu McLucas. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010. Pp. 205, list of recorded examples, series editors' preface, acknowledgments, introduction, appendices of comparative transcriptions, bibliography, index, audio CD.)

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This pathbreaking volume, published as part of the SEMPRES Studies in the Psychology of Music, is two books in one. One concerns music in the United States, with special attention to how oral tradition comes into play in traditional, popular, and art musical expressions, illustrated by a telling variety of concise case studies. The other concerns the scientific evidence that can help us understand how the human brain processes music. Four chapters on aspects of the

first topic are each followed by “interludes” exploring the second. The relationships between chapters and interludes, at first loose, become more intimate as the volume goes on, and the fifth chapter synthesizes and summarizes.

Chapter 1 offers tidy case studies introducing general themes in oral tradition. Two songs sung by Hazel Dickens illustrate the fidelity-creativity continuum, a Mescalero Apache singer highlights the importance of meticulous memory in ritual song, a blues artist shows the importance of malleability of materials in his creativity, and last, a fiddler conjoins memory and notation as he learns an Irish tune. Interlude 1, “The Brain, Memory, and Oral Tradition,” treats similarly general themes, that is, factors affecting short- and long-term memories of melodic contour; here, brain geography becomes important. Chapter 2 treats oral tradition as an ingredient in popular music, with special attention to three topics: the interaction of musically literate and non-literate individuals in the cultivation of such music; timbre; and the variable nature of the “hook.” The following interlude focuses on the creative side of oral tradition, with sections on “filling in for memory loss,” imprecise contour memory as a spark for creativity, improvisation, and the interaction of repetition and creativity—all familiar topics, but with discussion buttressed by the results of careful scientific research.

Chapter 3 is a bit of a forced march through most of the topics conventionally treated in histories of American music, from early religious music through music in a variety of theatrical contexts to formal composition, mostly of the twentieth century. Two threads dominate: which important repertoires or individual composers draw directly or indirectly on oral tradition, and the topic of performance practice, that is, how much of what musicians do and audiences hear is not reflected in notation. McLucas pursues the latter thread in the following interlude, detailing, for instance, how the habits of thought associated with notation tend to limit variety in rhythm and timbre even for modern composers who are consciously focusing on those elements.

In chapter 4, the survey approach to American music as consisting of tribal/folk, pop, and

art musics yields to a behavioral emphasis to explore how oral tradition operates in individuals’ lives. McLucas notes how children sing, how a near universality of ability in active musicianship fades when formal training kicks in for a selected minority, and how some music activity persists nevertheless for the majority—in group singing situations, karaoke, sports chants, and so on. She also takes a nuanced look at the predominance of what are generally but simplistically called passive listening habits, how the “downloading generation” (p. 139) receives plenty of music as wallpaper while on hold on the telephone, in banks, and supermarkets, and, this reviewer would add with regret, while studying. She contrasts this exposure to ways that they may also seek out very specific genres and pieces energetically, and savor and share these musical selections. The final “interlude” has a grand title: “The Mental Musical Capacities of Ordinary Humans and the Intersection of Meaning, Emotion, and Memory.” The specific American-ness of the topic disappears here, since *all* humans arrive on earth with a powerful template for musicality, which rises “to the level of a biological need, important in the evolution of human thought and perception” (p. 146). Central topics of the book are recalled here: this shared template includes the sense of timing, a memory for contours, and an amazingly precise classification of, and multiple cognitive uses of, timbre. Brief but eloquent sections follow on music and emotion, on the importance of music in human evolution, and on how central music is to human identity.

McLucas points out an undeniable fact several times, that “oral tradition is indeed a dominant feature of American musical life” (p. 155). A very similar book could have been written based on Brazilian, Argentine, or Australian case studies, in fact, drawing on any culture whose musical life has a modest art music component employing written notation—and constituting essentially a weakened version of the European model. McLucas does not quite say that the authors of the half-dozen best-known textbooks on American music are thoroughly wrongheaded in their overwhelming emphasis on art music, but this reviewer is happy to do so.

Many readers will not find this important book easy to work through. The author's prose is crystal-clear and free of jargon but replete with scientific terms, and summaries and other navigational aids abound. One problem is that the topics, however briefly treated, are massive. The book can first be approached at face value, as an extremely compact, compelling argument concerning the reliance of most American music on oral tradition, coupled somewhat uneasily with an even more ruthless précis of current thought on the psychology of music. But the volume's usefulness reaches well beyond that: the documentation is so thorough—an average of a quarter of the physical space on each page consists of footnotes—that each reader can easily pursue any of dozens of attractive subtopics. This is a pioneering effort, one that in decades to come should prove to be seminal. All who are interested in the scientific backdrop for aural/oral transmission, or in any aspect of American music, should read this book.

Work and Sing: A History of Occupational and Labor Union Songs in the United States.

By Ronald D. Cohen. (Crockett, CA: Carquinez Press, 2010. Pp. 200, color illustrations.)

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Ronald D. Cohen dedicates his history of occupational and labor union songs this way: "To Archie, my friend and inspiration." Archie Green, who must have known that Cohen was working on this book, did not live to see its publication, but his presence is felt on every page. *Work and Sing* narrates a history of work songs and labor union songs in the United States, while giving insight into their use by workers, union organizers, and labor songsters. The book is more about the collecting and publishing of occupational and labor songs, than it is about the songs and their singers. Folklorists may wish for more ethnographic detail on the singing of the songs. That said, *Work and Sing* can be read as a history of folk song scholarship, with a focus on the US labor movement.

Intended as introductory essay rather than a critical exploration, *Work and Sing* covers

songs relating to work dating from the eighteenth century on through to the early decades of the twenty-first century. The book is organized chronologically. Like others before him, Cohen distinguishes between songs about work and songs sung in order to physically do work. The latter—sea chanteys to raise sails, African American work calls to tamp spikes and line tracks, and waulking songs to work wool—have all but disappeared with the shift from manual to mechanized labor. Labor songs once sung in union halls and on picket lines have now entered the tradition of popular folk music.

Songs about work and work experiences have long pervaded workers' culture in the United States. Cohen begins his book in the colonial period with the work of skilled craftsmen and organized laborers. As he moves on through history, Cohen brings to our attention the collecting efforts of folk song scholars who published collections of street cries and field hollers, the rich lore of African American railroad and stevedores' work chants, cowboy songs, lumber camp songs, and mining songs. Among these are songs that alleviated the monotony and loneliness of work on the range and at sea, as well as the work chants that provided an outlet to express grievances over harsh physical conditions and incompetent bosses. Cohen then moves on, giving historical context to union songs and songsters, the post-World War II songs popularized through the singing labor movement, and the folk song revival. The latter movement includes the Almanac Singers who, in the early 1940s, braved union picket lines, attempting to inspire a singing labor union movement. Soon after, the monthly *People's Songs* bulletin, heralded by Pete Seeger, worked with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) with the goal of supplying labor songs for organizational purposes when music was no longer a part of workers' culture. Cohen's history is a valuable reminder of the political activism of the early folk song revival.

The publication includes a wonderful section of color plates. On these glossy pages are reproductions of songbook covers and sheet music covers. The typography and illustrations that adorn these covers are highly evocative of the time in which they were published. Viewing them is like wandering into the special collec-