

Although it is a slim volume, it is similar in size, scope, and layout to the other books in Macater's series on Irish Dance Studies – this is the fourth in the series. *Steps in Time* provides the reader with a comprehensive exploration of Irish dance in Chicago, contextualizing it within the broader world of performance and competitive Irish dance. Through this case study, Flanagan manages to illustrate the proliferation of Irishness outside of Ireland, and all its resultant nationalist, religious and cultural complications. There is not a lot in terms of deconstructing such problematic concepts as authenticity and tradition, but the book provides some perspective on how the people involved lived and embodied these concepts in a particular time and space. This book will be of great use to scholars interested not only in Irish dance, but also on diasporic studies, ethnochoreology, and American studies. To the initiate, it will provide broad strokes on the cultural significance of Irish dance; to the expert, it provides a thorough chronology of the development of Irish dance in Chicago, further cementing the importance of the diaspora in this dynamic art form. 🍀

Musical Gestures: Sound, Movement, and Meaning. Rolf Inge Godøy and Marc Leman, eds. 2010. New York: Routledge. xi, 320pp, contributors, index. Paper.

BY ARNIE COX

This collection of essays joins the recent swell of interest in the bodily basis of musical meaning. While the focus is on Western art music traditions, it of-

fers information and perspectives that may be useful for ethnomusicologists. One impetus for this collection is the editors' desire for an alternative to the largely disembodied approach to musical meaning that historically has dominated Western music theory, which commonly takes it as incidental that most music is produced by physical movements and comprehended by embodied humans. This tradition continues in part because it is not a simple matter to show precisely how embodiment matters for musical meaning. The empirical evidence discussed in this volume, particularly in the editors' contributions, helps make this connection plain, and a theory of gesture offers one way of dispelling the disembodied illusion.

The first step is to define what a musical gesture is. Basically, musical gestures are human movements that are relevant to the production and comprehension of music, including those that do not necessarily contribute directly to the sound (such as facial gestures), and including responses that go beyond auditory processing proper (such as dancing to music). Ethnomusicologists might not be especially interested in the detailed definitions and typologies offered in Part I (Chapters 1-4), but these help make the theory more explicit and robust.

The next step would be to offer a theory of how gestures are meaningful, first generally and then in the context of music, as seen to some extent in Part II (Chapters 5-7). The basic idea here is that part of how we comprehend the observed gestures of others is by imitating them, either overtly (*monkey see, monkey do*) or covertly (*monkey see, monkey imagine-do*). For me this is the most

compelling and useful idea in the book, with implications for any consideration of embodiment, and so I would like to explore this further.

The idea that humans understand one another in part through some sort of imitation or mimetic behaviour is not new, as the authors note, but recent studies indicate that it is more pervasive than many of us previously suspected. The most surprising finding is that it occurs not only in overt imitation but also in imagination – and not only in conscious imagination, but also in non-conscious and marginally conscious imagery, often or most often without our intention. That is, whether we intend to or not, and whether we are aware of it or not, observed human movement activates mimetic motor imagery: neurological processing related to muscle movements that are either identical to or schematically the same as the observed movement. Thus, based on the neurological and psychological evidence cited in several of the essays, listening to drumming tends to activate not only the motor circuitry and muscle activity involved in drumming movements, but also the analogous movements of toe-tapping and dance. Although dancing is superficially not the same as drumming, spontaneous dancing nevertheless tends to match the rate, pattern, and something of the strength of the exertions evident in drumming. In other words, drumming and dancing can be understood as particular manifestations of a more basic exertion schema, much like Godøy describes in Chapter 5, and as I describe in my contribution to the 2006 collection, *Music and Gesture*.¹ Our moving to the beat is a strongly motivated

response as part of our more general mimetic comprehension of the behaviour of others. This is not a common interpretation, which makes the evidence cited important.

The evidence indicates that mimetic motor imagery applies to behaviours as basic and universal as speech acquisition, where learning to speak involves automatically learning to imitate the sounds and the correlated muscle movements (of the tongue, lips, throat, and abdomen) of those around us. Mimetic behaviour and cognition are innate and appear to be just as universal as speaking, and, just like speech, this basic component of human cognition manifests itself differently in different practices. Learning to speak Japanese, Wolof, and English may involve unique processes, but each involves learning to move muscles to make the same sounds as those around us. Within a given linguistic practice, even different accents are likewise a manifestation of mutual imitation.

With music in particular, there are a number of variables that shape the nature of our mimetic response, including innate and learned differences. For example, an overt mimetic response of moving to music in some way appears to be natural, but different cultural practices, and different contexts within a culture, determine the way that we respond to the mimetic “invitation” of music – from dancing with little restraint, to the wide range of choreographed responses, to the restrained responses of toe-tapping or of not moving at all. Based on the evidence presented in this book, ethnomusicologists interested in embodiment could understand musical

practices in terms of the kinds of sound-producing gestures that are performed and the kinds of mimetic, or congruent, responses that are performed by listeners (in practices where there is such a distinction). Bearing in mind that race, class, gender, and culture are performed in part by the way we respond to the mimetic invitation, one gains a different view when our learned and practiced responses are seen as shaping or controlling a natural urge to move, as opposed to the view that movement is something imported into musical experience and music comprehension.

The desire to lay out a foundation for a theory of musical gesture is not easily realized in a collection of essays by some 21 authors and co-authors, but they have presented a coherent view. However, there happens to be very little consideration of meaning at the level of musical works and practices. The application of the theory is confined for the most part to computer synthesis of human movement (Part III, Chapters 8-11), which is relevant to the topic but which is a very specific area. I can imagine that comparative ethnomusicology might make use of synthesized movement studies, as well as the typologies and definitions offered in Parts I and II, but I suspect that the broadest benefit will come from digesting the evidence and arguments presented by the two editors in Chapters 1, 5, and 6, which elaborate the ideas described above. This core of the book offers an empirical foundation for understanding how music gets into our bodies and, thereby, shapes our affective, cognitive, and social lives. 🍀

NOTE

¹ Gritten, Anthony, and Elaine King. 2006. *Music and Gesture*. Hampshire, United Kingdom: Ashgate.

The Never-Ending Revival: Rounder Records and the Folk Alliance.

Michael F. Scully. Music in American Life series. 2008. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press. ix, 288pp, black and white photographs, notes, index. Cloth.

BY MICHAEL B. MACDONALD

Folk Alliance is an important institution that has contributed to folk music in untold ways. But it should not be forgotten that Folk Alliance is also about business. It is remarkable that a book-length inquiry into this organization had not been previously published. Michael F. Scully's *The Never-Ending Folk Revival* is the first book-length attempt to situate folk music following the folk revival of the 1950s and 1960s. Since this book was published in 2008, Rounder was sold to an entertainment conglomerate, and Folk Alliance, while still claiming international status, is reeling from the separation and demise of Folk Alliance Canada.

It is unfortunate for Scully that these things happened so soon after the publication of this book. *The Never-Ending Revival* is an account of folk music and capitalism colliding. The tension is explosive because, as Scully reminds us, "strictly speaking, a commercial folk song is an oxymoron" (3). But if this were true then Folk Alliance and Rounder Records would never have been possible