

Book Review

Diamond, Beverley, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen. *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern North America*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1995. xviii + 222 pp., 165 b/w photos, 27 col. plates, 6 maps, 25 figures, appendices. ISBN 0-88920-228 (cloth 49.95; paper 24.95)

There is great need for information on First Nations musical instruments. This volume is an excellent resource for students of Native music. Besides being a compilation of facts, diagrams, and photographs of instruments, this is a book of ideas that range across such concerns and approaches of contemporary scholarship as semiotics, synesthesia, experiential learning, and cultural appropriation. Nonetheless, I am uneasy about the book's title.

For those expecting a quick guide (such as London's Horniman Museum publications), this work may be frustrating. Conversely, it may be overlooked by those who would like a stimulating "read." Otherwise, everything in this monograph is in order.

The prose is readable; the headings are dependable; the maps are well chosen; even the comprehensive list of archival collections is of interest. Appendix A provides historical and cultural background for the groups considered: Beothuk, Wabanaki, Wendat, Iroquois, Innu, and Anishnabe. Indeed, for those with little knowledge of Native Studies, I recommend starting with these few pages. Chapter One has a quick review of both Native and non-native (i.e., scholarly) attempts to know Native music culture.

The three non-native scholars refer to an impressive list of Native consultants, and Native voices can be heard throughout the volume. Each chapter begins with a dialogue among the three authors that helps us become acquainted with them and provides relief from a fairly dense text. I wonder, however, whether the voices could have been those of the Native consultants.

For most of us, the delight of conversation with our peers comes from doing, not reading. Here is an opportunity to listen in on a conversation most of us rarely hear: Aborigines discussing music in the context of their lives, societies, cultures, environments. All the same, Native voices are heard elsewhere in this book, often in the form of quotations and even a few conversations.

The text's outstanding aspect is its quality of motion, process, and aurality. These resonate so well with Native culture. Individual chapters have titles like "Languages of Sound, of Image" and "Motion, Cycles and Renewal." A chapter titled "Real" reminds us that what is real is culturally determined, and sometimes designated as real for political reasons. Published non-native interpretations tend to homogenize, freeze in time, and stereotype. By contrast, Native music and its contexts are in flux. The idea of "realness" leads, for example,

to the intangible information received from dreams and transformed into material reality, which may appear as the personal dream images decorating musical instruments.

The prose of *Visions in Sound* is unmistakably a product of the late twentieth century: processual, few generalities, and even fewer conclusions: "an 'authoring' which invited continuation" (p. 13). Emphasis is on individuals; however, I wonder whether individuality was quite so pronounced in pre-contact, cohesive societies. The colourful, fixed impressions of the instruments contrast starkly with the authors' moving script. But finally, despite their awareness of Father Ong's work (p. 67), this is a printed item, and print is fixed in time and space.

In my opinion, the entire book is "struggling" against its presentation in print. The authors' sensitive interpretations and Native "doing, recreating, and reinventing" of tradition (p. 56) can only be mired in this format. I hope the authors are preparing a version for computer (which I suspect must have been in their minds as this work was put together). Congratulations on a work that pushes and pulls at our present ideals of scholarship and will lead us on to new insights.

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