

Ottoman Intimacies, Balkan Musical Realities. Edited by Risto Pekka Pennanen, Panagiotis C. Poulos and Aspasia Theodosiou. 2013. Helsinki: Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens. xxx+173 pp.

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The musical world of the former Ottoman Empire and the Balkans is a complex one, inextricably linked to such different phenomena as the intricacies of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian history, and the current appropriation of “Gypsy music.” The essays in this volume, which originated in a conference held in Athens in 2010, explore aspects of the edgy relationships among Ottoman and Balkan musical worlds, and the “intimacies” of the authors with their topics often offer valuable insights into these and many other issues.

Walter Zev Feldman opens the volume with a brief, thoughtful foreword, drawing on his expertise in Ottoman and Balkan musical traditions, as well as political, historical and social contexts, to situate the areas and cultures under discussion within his reflections on empires and their legacies. More detail and discussion of these and related questions are offered in the longer introduction by the volume’s co-editors. Here, music is situated within a complex historical/political/social context—or set of contexts—establishing an almost palpable atmosphere, of the shifting, contradictory relationships which constitute the Balkan “realities” of the collection’s title. It is difficult to discuss Ottoman, Balkan and Roma issues in a really clear

way; indeed, the discourse here, and in some later chapters, seems almost as labyrinthine and contradictory as the topics themselves. Nevertheless, there is never any lack of information to process and ideas to consider.

The chapters are grouped into three sections: “Imperial Musical Worlds and their Peripheries,” “Ottoman Pasts, Representations and the Performing Arts” and “Ottoman Echoes and the Current Mediaspace.” One might quibble about whether “performing arts” and “mediaspace” should be in different sections, but, then again, one can always argue for rearranging sections and chapters—or for not having any sections at all.

Cem Behar opens the first section with a discussion of how orality and literacy are interwoven in sometimes unexpected contexts, reflecting on the absence of “original” or “global” versions. Perhaps Maureen Jackson’s fine volume (Jackson 2013) on Jewish paraliturgical singing in Turkey had not yet appeared when he wrote his chapter; several issues that he discusses also appear there, though in different contexts, and one can imagine a fruitful dialogue.

In “Solemn Songs for the Sultan,” Darin Stephanov offers a fascinating glimpse of how praise songs and prayer lyrics were intended to bring the non-Muslim population into the field. Risto Pekka Pennanen discusses the fruits of his minute perusal of archival documents, guiding the reader through intersections of music and musical symbolism, history, politics, nationalism and local and global perspectives in Habsburg, and anti-Habsburg Ottoman Bosnia. Ottoman and Orientalist music and musical occasions, Bosnian Muslims, Catholics and

Orthodox Christians all appear in his narrative, though curiously the Jewish population does not.

The middle section consists of only two essays. Tatjana Markovic explores romantic opera, and its depiction of the Ottoman “other.” “Multicultural Balkan identity” in film is discussed in Nevena Dakovic and Marija Ciric’s chapter, which reflects on identity and in-between-ness, and is also one of the few chapters to take up the issue of gender roles (92).

In the third and last section, Panagiotis C. Poulos’s discussion of music in non-Muslim Istanbul includes reflections on architecture, nostalgia and cosmopolitanism. His apt quotation from Amy Mills about Greek and Jewish minorities becoming “beloved” and “present” only when they have departed (57) is fitting here, but the long and central Jewish presence in Istanbul is relegated to a footnote (56, n. 20). I was mildly bemused by Poulos’s choice of adjectives such as “bizarre” and “curious” (52, 53), rather than less value-laden terms such as “unaccustomed” or “unfamiliar,” and couldn’t help wondering whether “cultural intimacy” had perhaps temporarily let him down here. Nevertheless, there is much to learn and reflect on in this essay.

Carol Silverman leads us through markers of “Roma” and “Gypsy” identity, especially in Bulgaria, with her characteristic acumen. She discusses developments such as the use of more—and fewer—and more again—“eastern” markers, the increasing use of electric genres and hip-hop, collaborations with musicians from outside Bulgaria, combinations with village styles and more. Silverman effectively explores themes such as “nesting orientalisms” and representational contra-

diction (109). As a small side note, from personal experience with the family, I can suggest that her description of the Roma *chalga* star Azis and his partner (114) is only one of several contradictory images the singer has chosen to project, and not the one his parents described to me!

Vesa Kurkela narrates and reflects on the emergence of “Chalगतube,” an Internet channel sponsored by gambling interests (126). He argues that these videos evoke, and in a way, are a substitute for, the old *mehana*, tavern, with live music and dance. Kurkela also discusses the development of *chalga*—from cassette culture through DVDs to streaming and p2p file exchange—and muses on the meanings of terms such as “popfolk *chalga*” (“... ‘folk’ here mostly denotes audiences and, only secondarily, music”; 127) and “Gypsy *chalga*” (129), and their relationship to the concepts of westernization and orientalism. His “Afterthought” notes that in 2011 Chalगतube disappeared, and reflects on the ephemeral nature of the Internet, speculating that it might soon resurface – indeed, as I write this in 2014, “chalगतube.org” is cheerfully playing on my computer.

Aspasia Theodosiu brings us to the urban area around the northern Greek city of Ioanina, specifically a suburb where Roma live in a “double marginality,” a state of “disheveled alterities” (138). She is concerned with issues of identity, exoticizing and branding, as well as appropriation and erasure. Theodosiu ably discusses the elusive genre *fantasia* and its relation to the Turkish *cifteteli*, and offers an interesting discussion of local musicians’ notions of a “selfish” and a “professional” mode of playing.

I was surprised that Rosemarie

Statelova's slim, deliberately provocative volume on "the seven sins of chalga" (Statelova 2005) is referred to only fleetingly in the collection, and that issues of gender are given little specific attention, aside from Theodosiu's footnote that Roma (instrumental) musicians are all male (150, n.103), and in the chapter on film (92). The long and complex history of Jews and Jewish musicians in the Balkans is likewise seldom mentioned, and never really discussed. While Martin Stokes' work is mentioned by some of the authors, his focus on the "intimacies" of the collection's title, in the context of Turkey (Stokes 2010) would have been useful to at least the discussion in the Introduction; perhaps it was not yet available when this volume was in preparation.

On a practical note, I was not actively looking for small errors, but enough jumped out at me to be mildly annoying. They include the occasional verb which doesn't agree with its subject ("... the imagery ... contrast with ...", xxiii), confusing "complement" with "compliment" (64, 82), awkward phrasing such as "up myself" (63), "different to" (149), a number of different verb tenses mixed together ("they played and sing," 60), and several others, especially in the penultimate essay. Thorough proofreading would have taken care of these.

All the authors discuss issues of identity or identities, marginalization in many permutations, and in general complications and contradictions. Even those of us accustomed to both moving about physically in the Balkans and former Ottoman Turkey and Greece, and to reading, writing, talking, singing, etc. about them, might get lost along the

many roads, paths, lanes and intersections of the narratives in these essays. In each case, however, their authors shed light along the way, often in places where one might not expect it. At times, to me at least, the focus on cultural intimacy, in a development of Herzfeld's concept (Herzfeld 1997) seems apt, while at other times it seems a trifle forced—both its use as a part of the framework for this volume and in specific essays. Then again, the term "realities" with respect to Balkan and Ottoman history is perhaps even more problematic. Perhaps the best way to engage with these very engaged essays is to turn the theoretical aspects of "Ottoman intimacies and Balkan realities" into experiences which offer their own intimacies and realities: by listening to some of the music under discussion. 🌿

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