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BOOK REVIEWS

Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, and John Rink (Eds). *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. 359. $108.00 (cloth), 32.99 (paper).

Reviewed by Theodore Gracyk
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No one expects an edited "Companion" to make revolutionary contributions to our knowledge of a topic. Yet its mere existence can confer legitimacy on emerging research topics that have been seen as trivial or marginal. When *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* appeared this year, I venture that no one was surprised to learn that opera is a field of study in its own right. Recorded music is a bit less obvious. Consequently, the chief value of a *Companion to Recorded Music* is that it confers legitimacy on recorded music as a focal point of academic research. This volume is additionally important for its overview of the field's primary insight, which is that recordings have changed both the production and the consumption of music. This point may appear so obvious that it does not merit hundreds of pages of explanation. However, there is a lingering resistance to recognizing this paradigm shift in music culture, and this collection's primary value is its comprehensive documentation of that shift. In particular, the essays of Andrew Blake, Albin Zak, Simon Trezise, and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson should enlighten anyone who underestimates the breadth and depth of the paradigm shift.

It is slightly disappointing, therefore, to open the volume and to find that the four editors decided to overhaul the usual "Cambridge Companion" format. As one expects, the book contains twelve essays that canvass various aspects of the field. The editors call these the "main chapters" (2). However, they are outnumbered by the seventeen short "personal takes" inserted throughout the book. Largely, these are personal anecdotes. Granted, it is entertaining to find a contribution by a member of Pink Floyd: Nick Mason recounts the difficulties of fabricating "the right sort of coin-jingling sound" for *Dark Side of the Moon* (214). But what does this accomplish? Are these anecdotes included to attract readers who do not care how a needle in a groove creates stereophonic sound, or about beat-lengths in Polish performances

of Chopin? Imagine *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* with a similar format, with its sixteen essays surrounded by twenty short, autobiographical contributions about, for example, a personal crisis that led to a reconsideration of Jesus's divinity, a personal struggle to grasp the doctrine of the Trinity, and so on. This would be a bit of a distraction, at best. It is also telling that the editors of *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music* could not locate appropriate personal takes for the ninth and the eleventh essays, by Nicholas Cook and Simon Frith, respectively. No personal take follows Cook's highly technical contribution on "Methods for Analysing Recordings." Yet here it would have been genuinely useful to have someone relating a case where sonic visualization made an important difference in a musicological analysis, leading to a better "understand[ing] of music as a cultural practice" (241). In contrast, Frith's essay on music criticism is followed by three pages from Chris Watson, a professional sound recordist. However, Watson describes recording the "music" of the sounds of nature. His reflection has nothing whatsoever to do with the essay it accompanies (or perhaps, it constitutes a subtle example of music criticism—a *very* subtle example).

The book additionally reflects its origins in a British research grant. The major essays are by musicologists in the United Kingdom. To be fair, two anthropologists and one American musicologist make the cut. Another imbalance is that recorded classical music is overrepresented. By way of example, although David Patmore's essay on the business of selling recordings makes the point that "popular music" has long accounted for more than ninety percent of the business, Simon Trezise's account of discographies is ninety percent about classical music discographies. The book's own discography confirms this heavy emphasis on classical music.

Another telling gap in the selection of topics is highlighted when Nicholas Cook—one of the four editors—suddenly provides three paragraphs of text on "Copyright and Recordings" (208–09). This micro-essay follows Simon Trezise's essay on recordings "as sources of evidence" (186), but it is not acknowledged in the table of contents. In his essay, Cook calls attention to the complicated hodgepodge of copyright laws and the resulting misfortune that copyright law limits access to a lot of recorded music. Cook's intervention has the unintended effect of calling attention to the relative absence of the topic in David Patmore's essay on the record business (Chapter 6), where it might have played an important role. Such lapses suggest that the volume would have benefited from an economist's take on the record business, which would resonate with Georgina Born's

closing speculations on digitized music. The absence of the discipline of economics parallels the absence of philosophy; there is no organized treatment of what philosophy and philosophical aesthetics have to say about technological mediation in modernity and postmodernity.

Finally, here is a pet peeve. Given that the volume's multiple chapters examine slightly different facets of the same topic, an insight in one chapter will frequently provoke curiosity about resonances elsewhere in the "Companion." For example, a passing reference to radio in Arild Bergh and Tia Denora's chapter on techno-cultures of listening (Chapter 5) led me to reflect on the relative absence of that topic in the previous chapters. Turning to the index, I was disappointed to find that "radio" does not appear there. For the most part, the index is a name index. Where subject terms occur, they often seem random. A case in point is "diegesis," which directs the reader to three widely dispersed pages. True, the term appears on those pages, but there is no more than a passing reference to the concept in those locations. (This discovery invites the additional question of why the parallels between film and sound recording receive so little attention in this book.) "Mechanical recording" gets one page reference, yet the actual subject occupies long stretches of many chapters. In short, haphazard subject indexing reduces the book's value to academics.

Kevin Fellezs. *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. Pp. 312. $84.95 (cloth), $23.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Kevin Gaines
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Kevin Fellezs's *Birds of Fire: Jazz, Rock, Funk, and the Creation of Fusion* is a major contribution to American music history. Critically astute, brimming with insights, and prodigiously researched, *Birds of Fire* (its title borrowed from the name of a Mahavishnu Orchestra album) focuses on the efforts of four prominent fusion musicians to pursue new, liminal musical expressions across and between the established popular music genres of rock, jazz, and funk. Following three chapters that provide contextual discussions of jazz, rock, and funk as genres and as pioneering fusion music projects, Fellezs devotes a chapter each to jazz drummer Tony Williams; guitarist John McLaughlin; singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell; and pianist, composer,

and bandleader Herbie Hancock, all of whom explored the promise and the perils of creating music that mixed genres, and that thus defied musical, racial, and cultural categories and their attendant fixed notions of identity.

Although the countercultural moment seemed auspicious for the fusion experiments of these artists, with open-minded young audiences increasingly receptive to progressive rock, jazz-rock, and jazz-funk, each of these musicians encountered resistance from purist critics and musicians. Each struggled to reconcile his or her lofty artistic, political, and spiritual goals with his or her pursuit of commercial success. At times, Fellezs can be quite critical of these artists, highlighting the problematic aspects of their cross-cultural appropriations and self-fashionings. Yet he retains an unwavering sympathy and respect for their transgressive spirit of aesthetic and cultural innovation, and for their noble failures, which, in the end, were akin to the failure of fusion to achieve lasting commercial viability.

What was fusion? After a bracing reminder of the constructed nature of genre categories and their extramusical and often racialized criteria, Fellezs devotes a crucial early chapter to defining fusion as a plural, hybrid style of music that blended various combinations of jazz, rock, funk, non-Western musics, and other genres. Fusion was not the latest, sorry episode in a narrative of declension, as some jazz critics claimed, but an idiom unto itself, "moving between jazz and other genres" (31). Throughout, Fellezs deftly situates fusion and its related genres within a brilliant and nuanced history of American popular music.

Fusion musicians faced an immediate backlash from critics and others whose musical opinions were at turns shaped by racialized genres, cultural snobbery, and music industry indifference. Jazz drummer Tony Williams incurred the wrath of black nationalists and jazz purists for declaring himself a fan of the Beatles and fronting the interracial hard rock group Lifetime. Williams and Lifetime contested the racial and social categories that underwrote the marketing and consumption of hard rock. After the demise of Lifetime, Williams's bandmate, British guitarist John McLaughlin, achieved commercial success with the Mahavishnu Orchestra. McLaughlin's spiritual devotion led to the breakup of Mahavishnu, freeing him to delve more deeply into cross-cultural collaboration with Shakti, which featured virtuoso Indian musicians L. Shankar on the violin and Zakir Hussain on percussion. While Fellezs observes that this collaboration implicated McLaughlin in the history of British imperialism and Western appropriation, he concurs that it was also an exploration of alternative

meanings and functions of music for spiritual enlightenment and social transformation, as opposed to mere entertainment.

A key framework for Fellezs's readings of his four case studies is the "broken middle," a concept invoked by Isobel Armstrong to suggest an unresolved, unstable site of contradictions. For these musicians, Fellezs finds the broken middle to be an ambiguous space of creative tension, a lonely, in between space of non-belonging, but also a potentially liberating space, free of dogma and convention. At the site of the constructed genres of "jazz," "rock," and "funk," ossified in the minds of critics and audiences blinded to their hybrid, blended nature and their ideological uses, the broken middle presents possibilities for new musical fusions and social identities, "highlighting the agency of given individuals in facing the social norms that seek to limit and define them" (9).

The idea of the broken middle lends itself beautifully to Fellezs's superb chapter on Joni Mitchell's jazz-inflected albums of the 1970s, dismissed by both jazz and pop critics who portrayed Mitchell as an interloper. Though not a jazz musician, Mitchell collaborated with the bassist, composer, and bandleader Charles Mingus. Mitchell penned lyrics to themes composed by Mingus shortly before his death of ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease). Fellezs argues persuasively that Mitchell's Canadian-ness and sense of non-belonging was integral to her mixing of genres, her affinities with jazz and African American culture, and her experimental jazz-pop fusion aesthetic linking the present and future to a black musical tradition forged amidst racial and social injustice.

Herbie Hancock, like McLaughlin, was guided by spiritual beliefs in his own rejection of the cultural snobbery of jazz purists. For personal fulfillment, he vowed to play music that would reach larger audiences. As leader of the sextet Mwandishi, Hancock had traded the stability of being a sideman with Miles Davis for the crooked path and pressing responsibilities of a bandleader. But Mwandishi's collaborative approach and desire to challenge as well as entertain audiences with its amalgam of jazz, funk, and avant-garde stylings proved unsustainable. Hancock found commercial success with the more populist jazz-funk approach of his band Headhunters, for which he wrote his memorable funk instrumental, "Chameleon." The success of Headhunters was attacked by jazz purists, who questioned Hancock's motives and accused him of doing it simply for the money. Hancock always insisted that his fusion experiments were born of sincere musical interest, and a recent acclaimed collaborative project, *River: The Joni Letters* (2007), based on the music of Joni Mitchell, suggested

the broken middle as a place of freedom and vindication for Mitchell and Hancock.

Fusion was too eclectic and idiosyncratic to establish itself as a genre during the 1970s. But its cultural achievements and significance were profound: "fusion musicians such as Hancock, Mitchell, McLaughlin and Williams positioned their music as an articulation of the broken middle[s] between genres and identities by emphasizing ethics rather than ethnicities and contradiction over cohesion" (226). Despite its commercial failure as a genre, the fusion principle is evident across a wide swath of contemporary popular music, with a seemingly endless blending of genres, musical traditions, and idioms, including "mash-ups." Today, the musical fusions of such figures as Hancock, Cassandra Wilson, Yo-Yo Ma, Danger Mouse, and countless others are routine, and hardly the stuff of controversy. *Birds of Fire* is a profound work of scholarship; like the music it chronicles, Fellezs's book will inspire and enlighten musicians, music scholars, and music lovers alike.