

• *Book Reviews* •

Nettl's Elephant: On the History of Ethnomusicology. By Bruno Nettl. Foreword by Anthony Seeger (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xxix + pp. 288, foreword, introduction, references, index).

My Acadian grandmother collected elephant figurines. A superstitious woman, she believed elephants indicated positive things to come. The elephant figurines depicted throughout *Nettl's Elephant: On the History of Ethnomusicology* certainly proved her right. This comprehensive analysis of a difficult-to-define academic discipline is quick-witted, beautifully written, and intensively researched. A renowned scholar who has been a part of many seminal moments in the history of music scholarship, Nettl uses his own collection of elephant figurines as a multifaceted metaphor for ethnomusicology, ethnomusicologists, and his approach to the history of the discipline. The elephant collection symbolizes cultural diversity, elements of “folk” and “high” art, and the idea that there are different ways of interpreting and negotiating one’s identity. Elephants in mythology and nature inspire Nettl’s goal to analyze the discipline’s development in a sensitive manner. Despite his goal of sensitivity and lightheartedness, Nettl’s pen is far from dull. *Nettl's Elephant* puts forward an honest and responsible interpretation of the main ideological questions—and the historical moments that inspired them—in the field of ethnomusicology.

Following introductions by both Anthony Seeger and Nettl himself, this book features four sections, composed of papers or conference presentations Nettl assembled in the 1980s. In these papers, Nettl questions disciplinary divides, reveals multinational attitudes toward the “e-word,” and gives an honest history of the discipline without becoming defensive. He also toys with the idea of rebranding ethnomusicology as something less exclusive, less categorical, and less “ethno.”

The first section, “Central Issues in a Grand History,” outlines issues surrounding the early history of ethnomusicology. The first chapter deals with the 1880s as the decade in which ethnomusicology began, alongside musicology. In the

second chapter, Nettl unpacks foreign streams of ethnomusicology. He emphasizes the fact that many foreign scholars do not appreciate the label of “ethnomusicologist,” as it alludes to the idea of studying primarily “ethnic” music, as well as the idea that the music they study is only valuable for cultural reasons, rather than for its inherent value. In the third chapter, he outlines how the idea of “world music” appeared, and problematizes the idea of presenting the music of the “Other” as simply a representation of culture rather than a complex and specific system of art. The fourth chapter examines the idea that ethnomusicologists have been remarkably concerned with criticizing and defining themselves, especially vis-à-vis musicology. Nettl points out the idea that some argue ethnomusicology is no longer useful as a discipline, and should be enveloped by musicology. This would eliminate the racist implications of one discipline studying the “West,” and the other, the “Rest.” The last chapter deals with the myth that comparative musicology (involving the collection of quantitative data) disappeared in the 1950s, when it was replaced by cultural ethnomusicology. Nettl argues that some scholars are still essentially doing comparative musicology, despite common perceptions to the contrary.

Part II, “In the Academy,” deals with how ethnomusicology has been approached pedagogically. In the first chapter, Nettl discusses how ethnomusicologists were received into the academy, especially by their colleagues in musicology. The second chapter deals with the idea that music evolved in a Darwinian fashion. In response to this notion, Nettl argues against the idea that music might have a single, “monolithic” history. In the third chapter, Nettl discusses how music is negotiated in anthropological literature.

Part III, “Celebrating Our Principal Organizations,” is a series of three papers that discuss the history of the ICTM and the SEM on their fiftieth anniversaries. Arguing that both societies have progressed forward, Nettl also suggests questions regarding definition and negotiation of key terms such as “ethnomusicology,” “tradition,” “folk,” and “minority” continue to be relevant. The interest of

ethnomusicologists in minorities, Nettl argues, is furthered by ethnomusicology's own position as a pseudo-outcast in the academy. Nettl also hilariously refers to ethnomusicologists as the "Rodney Dangerfields" of the musical academy, because we, along with modern composers and violists, "don't get no respect." Given that my department has produced no fewer than *six* violist-ethnomusicologists, myself included, in its short (less than 10-year) history, Part III inspired us to think about *why* we are interested in our chosen subject matter.

Part IV, "A Collage of Commentary," is made up of a series of essays that exemplify problems faced in ethnomusicological literature. The first chapter explores neglected writings that involve music and its place in particular spaces. The second continues the discussion of minorities, looking at how they affect our studies and how we affect their lives. The third chapter discusses the concept of canon, arguing that ethnomusicology has functioned to both build and deconstruct bodies of canonical works. The fourth chapter deals with the notion of defining one's own identity; Nettl notes that people are uncomfortable with hybridity, and prefer to place people (and music, for that matter) in particular categories. The last chapter explores ten themes that consider the question, "What is music?" These themes include sections on what counts as good and bad music, what kinds of sounds constitute music (and who decides), and how music fits into history according to various groups of people. This chapter ends the book well, as it considers the most basic questions with which ethnomusicologists are faced.

Generally, this volume is a sharp and informative approach to the history of a very complex area of study. There are some instances of clunky writing—especially when Nettl engages in name-dropping—and some reiteration of key points. Both are understandable in this context; attempting to write a comprehensive history of a discipline in a series of essays, and to *not* name-drop or repeat oneself would be impossible. And comprehensive this work is; Nettl apologizes for not including certain topics and authors, yet it is difficult to imagine a clearer or more straightforward guide to the field. As a young scholar who straddles the foggy line

between musicology and ethnomusicology, I am grateful to have this book in my arsenal; understanding how these disciplines have grown together, and how they might relate in the future, is pivotal to understanding my own academic development. Every ethnomusicologist, from the aspiring to the well established, should read this book. Its history, literature review, expansive reference list, and informed commentary prove it a great resource for those looking to find their place within music scholarship, as well as a great reference guide for those who already have. This is an elephant of a book—I daresay one of the most intricate and inspiring in Nettl's collection—and is doubtlessly a necessary source for anyone lost in the study of music.

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