

Reviews



JONATHAN D. HILL AND JEAN-PIERRE CHAUMEIL, EDs. *Burst of Breath: Indigenous Ritual Wind Instruments in Lowland South America*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011. 440 pp. ISBN 978-0803220928.

Two renowned scholars in lowland South American studies, Jonathan Hill and Jean-Pierre Chaumeil, have joined forces to present an impressive collection of essays about the tantalizing topic of how ritual wind instruments are used and performed among lowland indigenous groups. The result is an indispensable contribution to lowland South American studies, a book that anybody interested in this area of research should read. It reaches well beyond describing wind instruments, their use, and the sounds they produce to provide a comprehensive and detailed compendium of indigenous rituals, cosmologies, and social relationships. Hence, the book's title is somewhat misleading. It is not an ethnomusicological book or an organological study. The main topic, which would deserve to be mentioned in the book's title, is the issue of gender construction and differentiation among the aforementioned communities.

The implicit focus on gender topics is because wind instrument performance in the lowlands is exclusively the duty of men, and in many indigenous rituals, women (and other noninitiates) avoid seeing the instruments in order to "allow" the men to become spirits and the music and sounds they produce to become "the spirits' voices." One well-known ritual, the Yuruparí (various authors in the volume describe variations in detail), implies the threat against women of being gang-raped should they see the instruments. Most essays in the volume devote some space to analyzing and deconstructing this alleged domination of men over women. As it turns out, there is only one report of rape actually being carried out "sometime between 1947 and 1953" (70), related in Menezes Bastos's chapter. While that author maintains a surprisingly perspectivistic interpretation of the event—the men were turned into dangerous spirits when a woman saw the flutes—another contributor, Ulrike Prinz, interprets the taboo and violence connected to it as "the fear of trespassing over the established limits of gender roles and the secret longing for this experience" (286). This accounts for both men and women, as women also enact female-only rituals in which they aggressively turn on the men. It results that the ritual

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interaction involving taboos and symbolic violence is generally accomplished to minimize interventions of dangerous forces in everyday life that would result in illness and misfortune, and to foster and nourish fertility while maintaining (more or less) egalitarian gender differentiation.

Another eminent question raised in the volume is the problem of the “sacred” and the “secret.” In reading the essays, I had the impression that the term *sacred*, along with *shamanic*, was abundantly used (especially in the editor’s introduction) though never explained. Only Acacio Piedade, in a footnote, briefly declares, “I use the term *shamans* in the sense of ‘those who can see clearly’” (253). Nicolas Journet explores in his essay how the “sacred” is made manifest through secrecy, which he underlies with linguistic explorations around dissimulation, lying, evidentiality, and evidence obtained through “hearing” and “seeing,” respectively. What *sacred* would mean in a general but explicit sense is, however, left to readers. Jean-Michel Beudet states in his afterword that “‘to control,’ ‘to punish,’ ‘masculine power,’ ‘shamanic power,’ ‘rape’ and ‘forbidden’ are all terms whose definitions are not given and whose pertinence is not demonstrated” (373). Maybe this problem is linked to the fact that still much has to be learned from lowland South American indigenous peoples about their cosmologies and rituals, and precise terminology is therefore not yet well established.

Many contributions address hearing versus seeing, and there is specific emphasis in the editors’ introductory chapter. Here, the editors provide a historical summary, some organology, and a broad overview interspersed with detailed examples. They aim to theorize many of the issues found throughout the book: “The general theme of ‘seeing’ versus ‘hearing’ cuts across the entire spectrum of naturalized, lexicalized sounds and is prevalent throughout Lowland South America” (2). Many “natural sounds can all be ritually (re)introduced into human social worlds” (19). Hill describes this process as “‘cultural soundscaping[.]’ [which] is concerned with the creation of local identities through employing the power of mythic ancestors . . . to socialize animal nature,” whereas “‘natural soundscaping’ is a naturalizing of social being” (94). Likewise, the editors follow up that they conceive such sonic interventions “as a basic feature of indigenous ways of constructing the world as a soundscape, or worldviews that privilege sound over vision” (19). That sound was privileged over vision is contested in the same volume by Journet and Prinz, who suggest that evidence is finally obtained only by vision; anyway, the present volume is one of the few books about indigenous societies to date to consequently put forward the importance of sound and at the same time juxtapose it to the visual.

The sequence of essays in the volume is breathtaking, a burst of creative investigation and analysis. The introduction is followed by essays that deepen the theoretical framework (Chaumeil, Menezes Bastos, Hill,

Journet) and provide less-known but richly described further examples of cosmologically complex involvements of instruments in ritual (Mansutti Rodríguez, Fiorini). The second part is dedicated to examples from groups for whom the ritual taboos and sanctions are less strict or explicit (Brightman, Alemán, Ruedas), to cultural change and appropriation of hitherto nonindigenous musical items (Alemán, Ruedas), and to an outstanding “married” couple of articles by Piedade and his late wife María Inez Cruz Mello, in which he analyzes the male *kawoká* flute music and she describes in detail the female *iamurikumã* ritual and songs. Another noteworthy contribution by Claudia Augustat relates to the question of whether “sacred” instruments stored and shown in museums still retain their character, a perspective rarely accounted for in anthropological writing. Finally, Robin Wright and Beaudet provide comparative perspectives on histories of wind instrument rituals and on the collected essays in the form of a thoughtful afterword, respectively.

There is not one essay in the book that would stand out in a negative sense. All contributors provide original and inspiring insights and suggest that future scholars investigate more profoundly the topic of sound and ritual in lowland South America. The edition is overall of high quality. Although some of the figures are not well printed (e.g., those on pages 77 and 103), the illustrations are very helpful. However, in some instances one would yearn for more ethnographic (or sonographic, or musicographic) grounding of what is said. Only Piedade and Mello go into depth by explaining in detail the flute’s sound, what the women sing, and how sounds are organized, in an exact manner. Ethnomusicologists would like to read more of that. Finally, a CD with sound examples is very much missed; readers who have never heard the instruments or songs in question will have a hard time imagining what all this actually sounds like. Despite these minor drawbacks, *Burst of Breath* is a long-awaited-for compendium of musical ritual and the use of sound in lowland South America, and I highly and honestly recommend it to interested colleagues and the public.

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ANITA GONZÁLEZ. *Afro-Mexico: Dancing between Myth and Reality.*

With photographs by George O. Jackson and José Manuel Pellicer.

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In a mixed-race country like Mexico, being “black” means being part of an ethnic group, but in addition to the unstable inhabitations of racial iden-