

***Song Interpretation in 21st-Century Pop Music***, by Ralf von Appen, André Doehring, Dietrich Helms, and Allan F. Moore, editors; Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series, Stan Hawkins and Lori Burns, series editors; Burlington, VT, Ashgate University Press, 2015, xxi, 282 pp., \$119.95 (hardback), ISBN-13 978-1-47242-800-4

Scholarship in the humanities is typically an individual endeavor, with co-authored works rare in musicology, music theory, and popular music studies. So much of the musical analysis produced in these fields is ultimately subjective—a reading particular to the specific author. This reality may be used as an argument to continue individual research or to choose the juxtaposition of multiple subjective readings as opposed to integration. *Song Interpretations in 21st-Century Pop Music* illustrates the latter.

The resulting book is a collection of thirteen chapters, each focusing on an analysis of a single song. The editors have brought together thirty-four authors from three continents and twelve countries. Half of the essays are written by five or six authors, the result of a multi-day collaborative session in September 2011 at the University of Osnabrück, Germany, during which participants were assigned to a group and a song. The task was to achieve a detailed analysis of the work that drew on the strengths of each group member.

The book is divided into two sections, the first titled “Listening Alone.” As the title indicates, this part is devoted to singly authored essays. These authors include the two organizers of the original two-day workshop in 2009, Ralf von Appen and André Doehring, as well as the four keynote guests for the 2011 five-day summer school: Allan F. Moore, Walter Everett, Anne Danielsen, and Simon Zagorski-Thomas. Each of these special guests was invited to focus on a particular element of popular music analysis, interpretation, harmony and voice-leading, rhythm, and sound/record production, respectively, and these areas of focus emerge in their published essays.

Although the introduction claims that “there are many books and papers that are particularly interested in harmony and voice-leading, while methods of analyzing sound and record production, or rhythm and groove are still underdeveloped” (p. 2), the book begins with a disappointingly traditional, albeit thoughtful, analysis by Walter Everett of Death Cab for Cutie’s “I Will Follow You into the Dark,” featuring Schenkerian voice-leading sketches.

The most surprising essay in this section is Ralf von Appen’s creative retelling of the writing of Ke\$ha’s “Tik Tok” through a fictionalized conversation between Ke\$ha and Dr. Luke. Appen ultimately wants to understand why the song is so catchy, so he focuses on form, groove, vocal style, and production choices to answer the question. The tone is uncomfortably condescending between Dr. Luke and Ke\$ha at times, which is all the more unfortunate given the recent legal battle between Kesha Sebert and Lukasz Gottwald in which she alleges emotional and sexual abuse, including two instances of being drugged and raped.

While I hope von Appen’s bold narrative approach will inspire more creativity in popular music research, the essay’s lack of scholarship on gender in popular music (and how that might shape his own fictionalized narrative) points to the book’s failings in the analysis of gender, race, ethnicity, and class issues related to the songs. While the book emphasizes the concerns of music theorists, several essays do address social, historical, and cultural contexts. Many of the analyses, however, would be well served through a deeper engagement with these contextual factors.

The most important essays in this book, I argue, are Anne Danielsen's analysis of "Nasty Girl" by Destiny's Child and Simon Zagorski-Thomas's analysis of the Kings of Leon's "Sex on Fire" because they present convincing analyses of elements that are typically either under-analyzed or insufficiently precise. Danielsen's focus on rhythm and groove pinpoints microtiming and rhythmic ambiguities in "Nasty Girl," an unlikely song for analysis in the group's output—which makes it an especially interesting read. Simon Zagorski-Thomas's expertise in production permeates his analysis of the Kings of Leon's "Sex on Fire." Spatial staging, gestural activities, and interactions help Zagorski-Thomas articulate perception as an ecological and embodied matter. His essay stands out as an important example of popular music analysis that does not rely heavily on formal (including harmony and voice-leading) and lyrical analysis.

The essays by Dietrich Helms on Lady Gaga's "Poker Face" and Dietmar Elflein on Rammstein's "Pussy" emphasize the international context of this project and the importance of conversing with scholars from around the world who draw on different literature, such as Helms's application of Roman Jakobson's six functions of communication. Helms considers Jakobson's framework transcendent of the usual art versus popular music binary, yet I found the essay often reinforces the belief that we must continue to justify analysis of popular music, or that popular music is equal to or perhaps better than art music.

Dietmar Elflein tackles Rammstein's "Pussy" with a strong emphasis on the background of Rammstein and its place in the former German Democratic Republic punk scene. Elflein's love for the band is apparent, and his detailed close listening is admirable. The balance of context and close reading is more effective in André Doehring's analysis of the electronic dance music track "New for U" by Andrés. This essay is a particularly good model for scholars new to analyzing electronic dance music. Doehring provides a brief but essential literature review before analyzing the tempo, rhythmic layers, harmony and pitch content, instrumentation, and form of "New for U." Doehring also nicely articulates the role of nostalgia in the track's popularity through analysis of music magazine reviews.

The final essay in the first section is the most personal, even as the book emphasizes the subjectivity of all analysis. Allan F. Moore opens with an anecdote about first hearing Amy Macdonald's "This Is the Life" in a car commercial, and this guides his consideration of form, texture, harmony, melody, lyrics, and persona (including discussion of the video), and his existential reflection about the meaning of life. One small detail stood out in his formal scheme: While many of the preceding chapters include only measure numbers in tables of formal schemes, Moore uses tracking times, a more appropriate choice for analysis of music that is not score-based.

The second half of the book (titled "Listening Together") includes five collaborative essays. These essays are clearly not as strong as those in the first half. Nonetheless, they contain a number of thoughtful observations about five diverse songs and, perhaps more importantly, offer a collaborative model of popular music research that is rare in the field.

Despite my belief that collaborative work would benefit the individuals involved as well as the research thus produced, I can also see in these essays the downsides of such an endeavor. First, the essays underscore the challenges in coming to agreement on the written product. One group was explicit about the tensions and arguments that ensued during collaboration as well as the difficulty in attaining consensus regarding analytical approaches and interpretations. While the group uses these disagreements to highlight how a song can produce multiple interpretations, the group's revelations also act as a cautionary tale to those eager to implement collaborative work in or outside the classroom.

Each group references its approaches for negotiating collaboration with people from varied scholarly and cultural backgrounds (including language), and some chose to divide their chapter into sections, with each section written by a single group member. The need to somehow equitably and efficiently divide tasks within the group may have reinforced the selection of traditional aspects of song analysis such as lyrics, form, texture, and harmony, as opposed to a limited, and therefore in-depth, analysis as found in many of the earlier chapters or unconventional approaches, like Ralf von Appen's fictionalized reenactment.

These five essays include many important contributions, such as (1) the stylistic and intertextual references in Janelle Monáe's "Tightrope" (authors Frederike Arns, Mark Chilla, Mikko Karjalainen, Esa Lilja, Theresa Maierhofer-Lischka, and Matthew Valnes), (2) the articulation of the micro-rhythmic dissonances in PJ Harvey's "The Words That Maketh Murder" (authors Cláudio Azevedo, Chris Fuller, Juliana Guerrero, Michael Kaler, and Brad Osborn), and (3) descriptions of the vocal performance and production choices in Björk's "Crystalline" (authors Phil Allcock, Natalia Bieletto, Maxime Cottin, Katharine Nelligan, and Yvonne Thieré).

The groups clearly struggled to find overarching arguments or themes to unite and bring significance to the detailed analysis of several musical elements. For example, the essay on "Helplessness Blues" by the Fleet Foxes (authors Paul Carter, Samantha Englander, Alberto Munarriz, Jadey O'Regan, and Eileen Simonow) identifies the theme of "struggle" in the song, but it seems to say more about the working of the group rather than the actual song. Both the authors of the essay on "Danza Kuduro" by Lucenzo, featuring Don Omar (Félix Eid, María Emilia Greco, Jakub Kasperski, Andrew Martin, and Edin Mujkanović) and the essay on "Crystalline" rely on binary oppositions that are used rather too easily as frameworks for the essays (exotic versus familiar and nature versus technology, respectively).

That the scholars in "Listening Alone" acted as mentors to the groups during their five-day summer school is apparent not only through frequent citations of their published work but also through footnote acknowledgments for specific observations. These scholars are leaders in the field, and their work is essential to this study. However, many other names are missing, including John Covach, Jay Hodgson (production and mixing), and Serge Lacasse (vocal staging).

The book is uneven and disjointed. This is to be expected, given its origins and sheer number of different authors, methodologies, and objects of analysis. This is not a book to read from beginning to end: Choose the artist, song, or analytical focus you desire. Nonetheless, it offers many different models of analysis—and different aspects of emphasis. And this book could be an important first step in shifting the field from entrenched habits of sole-authorship to the incorporation of many different kinds of collaboration, including smaller groups, junior-senior scholar pairings, or single-author analyses with responses and revisions published together. This book reminds us that there is no one way to "do" popular music analysis and is an opportunity to think even more creatively about what effective and fulfilling research can look like.

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