

BOOK REVIEWS

New York Klezmer in the Early Twentieth Century: The Music of Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras

By Joel Rubin. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020.

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Ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice once wrote: “Even so-called ‘insider’ ethnomusicologists, those born into the cultures they study, undergo a productive distancing necessary to the explanation and critical understanding of their own cultures.”¹ In other words, even as an insider, it is necessary to take a step back in order to analyze and research your own heritage (musical and otherwise). Joel Rubin’s *New York Klezmer in the Early Twentieth Century: The Music of Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras* does exactly this; Rubin himself is a seasoned klezmer performer and uses that knowledge to analyze a specific time and place in its history, namely early twentieth-century New York City. To do this, Rubin focuses on two clarinetists, Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras, whose musical legacy can still be heard in klezmer performance today. Rubin’s book is the latest in a line of klezmer scholarship that has exploded over the past 25 years.² Rubin has been instrumental in bringing this style into the world of musicology, and his latest volume is no exception.

Rubin’s first chapter focuses on the history of klezmer, examining its roots in Eastern Europe to lay the foundation for understanding how the klezmer tradition unfolded in the United States. After discussing the general lives of Jewish townspeople and their traditions in Europe, he shows how klezmer emerged and became part of Eastern European Jewish culture. With its growth came the business of the klezmerim, and Rubin goes into detail about where the klezmerim performed and the occasions that warranted the performance of klezmer music (e.g., weddings, military events, etc.).³

The second chapter begins detailing klezmer music and the community life of the Yiddish speaking Jewish community in New York City. Rubin talks about how the culture Eastern European immigrants met upon their arrival to the United States differed drastically from what they left behind. In New York, klezmer would begin to amalgamate its Eastern European roots with musical life in the United States. Rubin examines the pathways for a musical career and how immigration affected it. Discussions about professional Jewish cultural organizations and even unions show not only how Jewish musicians were supported, but also the evolving preferences and stylistic tastes of audiences at the time. The detail Rubin uses to sketch Jewish life in early twentieth-century New York City allows the reader to get a clearer picture of the situation in which Naftule Brandwein and Dave Tarras became musicians.

Chapters 1 and 2 show the history and society of klezmer musicians from the early twentieth century and the journey that led to the burgeoning klezmer music scene in New York City. Chapter 3 discusses 78 rpm recordings and how the commercial recording industry may have affected the

¹Timothy Rice, *May it Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

²These include Hankus Netzsky, *Klezmer: Music and Community in Twentieth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); Walter Zev Feldman’s *Klezmer: Music, History, and Memory* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016); Yale Strom, *The Book of Klezmer* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002); Mark Slobin, *Fiddler on the Move: Exploring the Klezmer World* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³Klezmerim is defined as the professional Jewish musicians, mainly instrumentalists, who played klezmer music for a living.

perception of klezmer music among its musicians and audiences. Chapter 4 looks at classification, using Benjamin Harshav's model for Yiddish language as a framework for the development of musical processes. Rubin does not claim that klezmer and the development of the Yiddish language have a direct connection, but rather that klezmer is a musical language in its own right and that, on a metaphorical level, the musical thinking that goes into creating it can be compared to the linguistic thinking that developed Yiddish. At the end of the chapter, Rubin uses the recordings of Brandwein and Tarras to provide an example and point of comparison between their klezmer music stylings and those common in New York in the first half of the twentieth century.

In the fifth chapter, Rubin turns to the analysis of klezmer compositions, with a focus on the modality of the music. The author argues that, in order to understand how klezmer functions musically, there needs to be an understanding of the melodic and harmonic modalities inherent in it. He examines a variety of elements within this analysis, using detailed examples and theoretical layouts (such as charts and diagrams). Rubin identifies four basic modal scales that interact with other musical patterns, leading to distinct styles of performance on the recordings by Brandwein and Tarras.

Chapter 6 shifts from analyzing the notated music to the performance practices of the recordings examined in chapter 5. This chapter illustrates the formulaic aspects of klezmer on a compositional level and then applies them to the ornamental improvisations played by Brandwein and Tarras. These improvisations make Brandwein's and Tarras's performances unique, and Rubin provides ample diagrams and musical examples to show their intricacies. After doing this very specific, minute deep dive, Rubin shows how these elements of improvisation and ornamentation combine to form the larger structure of these pieces. He also compares performances of the same piece by Brandwein and Tarras, demonstrating how each artist chose different ornamentations, but placed them similarly. Tarras's more technical approach to clarinet playing is exhibited in his choice of ornamentation and, as Rubin mentions, this highlights his role in the transition between the Eastern European style of klezmer playing and a newly developing U.S. style.

Chapter 7 acts as an epilogue. Rubin discusses here how and why the New York klezmer tradition declined in the 1930s. One reason was generational: Children born in the United States to New York klezmer playing families did not necessarily take up the family tradition. The founding of the state of Israel in 1948 also brought a shift, as the U.S. Jewish community moved from speaking Eastern European Yiddish to a Hebrew-Israeli dialect. This prompted a change in the repertoire of U.S. Jewish events (like weddings) where music was prominent. Klezmer eventually underwent a revival later in the century, and while the klezmer of today may sound different than that of 1920s New York, Rubin very much makes it clear that artists like Brandwein and Tarras had a major influence on modern musicians.

Rubin's book is nothing short of a watershed moment in the study of klezmer music. Using Brandwein and Tarras as examples of early U.S. practitioners, Rubin approaches the topic through an historical, theoretical, ethnographic, and (in many ways more importantly) interdisciplinary lens that allows for an incredibly detailed picture of the history of klezmer music and its development in the city of New York. Despite including extensive formal musical analysis, the author does an exemplary job of creating a volume that is accessible to a wide range of music scholars. His historical and analytical work is supplemented with ethnographic work that includes interviews of musicians who were born between 1911 and 1940. While firmly rooted in what can only be described as significant musicological and ethnomusicological analysis (by virtue of the subject matter), Rubin crosses over into Jewish studies, ethnic studies, sociology, and cultural history. Each chapter could easily stand on its own as assigned reading, and the musical analyses sections, in particular, should be included in theory courses for both graduate and undergraduate students. This study also has implications for how ornamental improvisation can be analyzed in other music genres, such as jazz. In addition to providing detailed indices and glossaries, a companion website is included with the volume, which allows readers to view the book's transcriptions while listening to the recordings discussed. By examining klezmer from all angles (historical context, performance practice, musical analysis, ethnographic recording history), Rubin provides what may very well prove to be an unparalleled example

of how to approach the performance history of a specific genre of music, and gives the field of klezmer studies a book that bridges the history of its Eastern European past with the start of its U.S. chapter.

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Manifest Technique: Hip Hop, Empire, and Visionary Filipino American Culture

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Over the past 15 years, music and performance studies scholars have analyzed the relations and collaborations between Filipino American and Black performing artists during the twentieth century.¹ Mark R. Villegas's *Manifest Technique: Hip Hop, Empire, and Visionary Filipino American Culture* continues this research as he journeys through the global circuits of Filipino American hip hop vernacular cultures. Villegas focuses on Filipino American “manifest techniques,” which he describes as a reversal of U.S. colonial and expansionist visions of “manifest destiny” in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, in order to highlight how diasporic Filipino Americans devise “multiple, messy, and often contradictory expressions in hip hop” (x). He argues that Filipino American hip hop makers—ranging from dancers, emcees, and DJs to graphic artists and poets from the 1980s to today—act as agents of postcolonial memory work that construct a new Filipino racial knowledge. Villegas traces how their complicated political and collaborative work, which he argues is intimately linked to Black American hip hop and expressive cultures, “operates as a local and popular site for Filipino Americans to investigate their racial position in history and the world, expanding the opportunities for practitioners to author their own representation” (5). One exciting contribution of this cultural history is that Villegas also considers Filipino American vernacular hip hop cultures outside of expected urban centers like New York City and San Francisco. He alternatively centralizes locations where these often-overlooked expressions and collaborations emerge, particularly communities in and around military bases, such as Jacksonville, Florida and Richmond, Virginia.

In chapter 1, “Currents of Militarization, Flows of Hip Hop: Expanding the Geographies of Filipino American Culture,” Villegas highlights the vast geographic terrains and spatial politics where Filipino American hip hop vernaculars appear, particularly through the influence of U.S. military bases. Through the metaphor of “currents,” he traces the “symbiotic epistemological flow” that U.S. militarization has had on Filipino American hip hop artists. The author analyzes the biographies of emcees Geologic and Bambu, whose careers have been impacted by the U.S. militarization of the Philippines

¹See Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns, *Puro Arte: Filipinos on the Stages of Empire* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012); Antonio T. Tiongson, Jr., *Filipinos Represent: DJs, Racial Authenticity, and the Hip-hop Nation* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); J. Lorenzo Perillo, *Choreographing in Color: Filipinos, Hip-Hop, and the Cultural Politics of Euphemism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020); Mary Talusan, *Instruments of Empire: Filipino Musicians, Black Soldiers, and Military Band Music During U.S. Colonization of the Philippines* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2021).