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## ***Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction.* By Slobin. Oxford and New York: OUP, 2011. 176 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-539502-0**

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Second, the overall framing of the book puzzles me. In the Introduction the referential encoding–decoding paradigm is presented at the outset for studying audiovisual television music. However, simultaneously an emphasis is made on the multiple meanings that music may produce, as well as on in-depth analysis of ‘the audience reaction to music, sound and its absence’ (p. 11). Nevertheless, the practices of the lively fan communities mentioned are not really taken into account. An interesting step in this direction is taken by Rob Dowe’s analysis of fan-produced music videos (Chapter 8), investigating the transformation of meaning in the remix of the *Buffy* text in amateur music videos, but still the object of analysis is the audiovisual text rather than the remix as social or aesthetic practice. Disappointingly, the chapter ends by concluding that ‘what this highlights, if nothing else, is the importance of audio in both the program and the fan artwork in the production and transforming of meaning’ (p. 148) – and I wonder if anyone would disagree? This reflects an overall urge to stress ‘how important music is in our understanding of and engagement with television series’ (p. 12), showing *that* music is important rather than *how*. As indicated by an increased number of journals and books published on various aspects of the relationship between music and television, the difficulties of crossing the boundaries between the study of music and the moving image are – luckily – not as many as they might have been 10 years ago at the time of the inaugural idea for this volume.

On the other hand, taken in its own right, each contribution illuminates interesting research topics and analytical variations, and within the narrower scope of the *use of music in television series* this volume is a ‘must read’.

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***Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction.* By Mark Slobin. Oxford and New York: OUP, 2011. 176 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-539502-0  
doi:10.1017/S0261143012000451**

Mark Slobin’s contribution to OUP’s *A Very Short Introduction* series carries the title ‘Folk Music’, which may give the impression to some that they will find advice inside on which headliner to catch at the next Cambridge Folk Festival. But while casual readers hoping for advice on whether to buy tickets for Gillian Welch or the Unthanks may initially be disappointed, their perseverance will soon be rewarded with an inviting overview of an impressively wide vista of musical issues. Slobin’s work in northern Afghanistan in the 1960s, in East European Jewish music and his 40 years at Wesleyan University have been a powerful influence on more than one generation of ethnomusicologists, but perhaps ‘Ethnomusicology’ was just too forbidding a term for the cover of such an appealing-looking pocketbook. The term ‘World Music’ had already been taken by Philip Bohlman for his 2002 volume in the series.

In fact, the book’s title is a real problem. Slobin quite deliberately avoids defining the term ‘folk music’, and he is upfront about its range of possible meanings and the problems that such language can bring. The closest thing to a definition that he settles on is ‘everyday musical invention’, invention which can also (but may not) be

connected to a broader public arena. To clarify the importance of the everyday, his introduction gives examples from West Africa and Papua New Guinea where local musicians resisted academics' urge to record, collect and classify, but similar resistances to music's commodification, whether as a commercial product, a free digital stream or as research data, exist wherever the live musical experience is valued for its own sake. Slobin's notion of 'meaningful performance' can be applied almost anywhere, and music that is *not* folk music by this reasoning becomes rather hard to define. He acknowledges that folk music can be spread by YouTube just as well as from mother to baby, so what is this book about?

He even appeals to innate common sense for a definition – 'we know [folk music] when we hear it' (p. 1) – but we all hear in different ways, and for almost all of the book you can remove the word 'folk' from the term 'folk music' and his analysis will still hold up well. The key process he describes, of working *practices* whereby musical *resources* are deployed in *strategies* to further an *aim*, can even be applied within the Euroclassical tradition. The book, then, is less about a type of music than it is an account of looking at the operation of music in society, illustrated by different cultures and in different places. In the 21st century this can be a musicologist's goal with or without the 'ethno-'.

One of the book's many strengths lies in Slobin's ability to summarise complex issues elegantly and swiftly, and to make passing reference to big themes to encourage further exploration on the part of the reader. So in Chapter 1 alone he touches on the hereditary musician-families found in many cultures, the impact of instrument technology on musical spaces, the differences between insider and outsider musical theories, flexibility of tempo, the boundaries between speech and music, a whole series of problematic issues in the history of ballad collecting, and the effects of music which are most usually considered desirable. Any one of these could make a fascinating and wide-ranging study of its own.

In his third chapter, on intellectual and political intervention, we get closer to a definition of 'folk', with the coinage of 'folklore' by William Thoms in 1846, as an English counterpart to the German *volk*. Slobin's description of Allan Ramsay's 1720s collection *Tea-Table Miscellany* as a 'goulash' is wonderful, but the *Miscellany's* contents were intended to be sung, not 'read aloud': Ramsay even included the titles of the tunes where the songs' own were not sufficiently well known.

Slobin uses two binaries in his perceptive overview of bureaucracy and its action on folk music: the two overarching modern trends he finds are the seeking of identity and the building of institutions, and the two conflicting or parallel agendas behind these are nationalist and universalist. He provides thought-provoking examples of the action of all of these, touching on the privileging of some traditions over others, the influence of Western classical models on folk instruments, state certification of folk musicians and the use of folk culture as a weapon of war. Although he discusses state support for ethnomusicology, he doesn't mention state-supported institutions that teach folk music practice: Finland has been a ground-breaker here with Helsinki's Sibelius Academy programme in the 1980s, as it was in the 19th century when its literary epic *Kalevala* was among the first folk culture to be put to nationalist political use.

Slobin has some telling points to make on music's use as a cultural identifier where languages are too diverse or numerous to do the job. He draws attention to the 'troubling lack of overlap' between the commodities of Celtitude and

Negritude and, using 'Balkanites' as an example, how one needn't have a genetic connection to a culture in order to be attracted to it or involved in it. He can also turn a memorable sentence: Chapter 6, on the present and the future of folk music, begins 'If there is a universal soundtrack to folk music today, it might be the snapping of administrative umbrellas over the heads of musicians' (p. 108).

The book's usability could have been improved by the provision of web audio by the publisher. A reference to a CD set last issued in 2003 is not necessarily useful to a reader brought up on YouTube who doesn't want to wait for a CD to be shipped in order to hear the music under discussion, and the relationship between Slobin's transcriptions of Afghan music in Chapter 2 with the audio clips on Wesleyan's website is not particularly clear. A dedicated page at OUP could have solved both of these problems neatly, and allowed further musical illustration.

Touching on many difficult issues lightly and with a broad appeal is not easy, and Slobin is well up to the task. In the bibliographies and web resources, there is enough material to keep academic and general readers occupied for some time, neatly fulfilling the series' aim to be a 'stimulating way in to a new subject'. Even if you reach for this very short introduction simply to choose which headliner to see at your next local folk festival, prepare for your horizons to be broadened.

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***Shakespeare and Popular Music.* By Adam Hansen. London and New York: Continuum, 2010. 185 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4411-2698-6  
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There is much to enjoy in this impressive study focusing on the ways Shakespearean characters, words, texts and iconography have been represented and reworked in and through popular music. The author's evident passion for both popular music and Shakespeare makes for lively and engaging reading and his exploration of the ways Shakespeare has featured in popular music and what this means for our understanding of his cultural influence is far reaching. Aiming the book at undergraduate students and music fans, Hansen employs a writing style that is fresh and accessible. There is much of value in *Shakespeare and Popular Music*, with the author revealing the Bard to be both sampler and sampled and demonstrating how 'Shakespeare helps popular music assume different forms' just as 'popular music makes Shakespeare mean different things too, putting a new spin on his words in new contexts' (p. 158).

Probing such questions as 'Do all types of popular music represent Shakespeare in the same ways?' and 'how do the links between Shakespeare and popular music alter what we think we know about Shakespeare, and what we think we know about popular music?', the author draws on a broad range of examples for answers (p. 2). These include Cowboy Jack Clement, Elvis Costello, the Kaiser Chiefs, Greil Marcus, Jon Savage, the Sex Pistols, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Waits and many more. Exploring the relationship between popular music and Shakespeare through such a diverse variety of examples – ranging from The Beatles to country music, from punk to folk-singers – enables Hansen to reveal links which challenge distinctions between high and low culture, to locate some interesting cultural shifts and to show that 'popular