Introduction

By Blair Black, Armen Adamian, and Lucas Avidan

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From the Editors

Blair Black, Armen Adamian, and Lucas Avidan

We welcome you all to Volume 23 of Ethnomusicology Review. In times of uncertain political futures and precarity, we hope these pieces help all of us remember the way music creates, maintains, and reforms communities.

After nearly two and half years of social precarity–wrought by the global COVID pandemic and numerous political reckonings across the world– the works presented in this volume demonstrate the complex and nuanced ways in which social cohesions are realized, fragmented and pluralized through musical practice. For some marginalized communities, engaging pragmatically and syncretically with dominant-culture practice is vital to the makeup and survival of their distinct and unique group identity. Yet in the context of other marginalized groups, the demarcation of a unique identity may be realized through modes of contradistinction to dominant cultures and its markers of privilege. At the center of these processes, musical practice and conduct often plays a pivotal role in the way groups orient themselves, both internally and externally, along intersections of power and privilege.

First, we feature an article on the make-up of a plurality of queer spaces at a small liberal arts college in New England. The musical spaces centered in this article feel like relics of a past and intimate pre-pandemic time– the college party. The article deftly describes the ways in which gatherings of queer students, while carving out a space that centers the LGBTQIA community within a larger college community, is still maintains an reinforces whiteness in terms of both musical choice and its corresponding codes of cultural conduct. Central to this piece is a consideration of leisure, and an analysis of diverging student attitudes and definitions concerning “party music.” Ultimately, the author demonstrates how these issues are predicated on modes of listening that are enculturated by intersections of race, sexuality, and gender.

The article that follows considers the practice of group song in British Jewish synagogues. Understanding Jewish Synagogue music as both synchronous with British society more generally, as well as effective in carving out a Jewish identity in the country, the author demonstrates that British Jewish choral practices are not just mere adaptation of their local Christian counterparts, but unique in their aesthetic combination of British Christian harmonics with Hebrew scripture. Moreover, that these Jewish musical practices also blur the boundaries between choir and congregation, demonstrates how groups employ music as an intermediary device that cements secular social relations into a collective spiritual body.

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