

***Music, Culture, and Experience: Selected Papers of John Blacking*. By John Blacking, edited by Reginald Byron. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Pp. xii + 269)**

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From my own place on the margins of folklore, I see the discipline at a crucial point in its history. Because of this, *The Quest of the Folk* is particularly welcome. Folklorists may not agree with all that McKay says about our field or about a figure like Helen Creighton but he does force us to reflect on our discipline's role in ideologies like antimodernism and to see theory where we once denied its presence. *The Quest of the Folk* comes at an important juncture as we contemplate the changing place of folklore both in Canadian society and in academic life and as we address the uses being made of folklore not only by the people who create and exchange it but by those—including folklorists—who appropriate and commodify it.

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Music, Culture, and Experience: Selected Papers of John Blacking.
By John Blacking, edited by Reginald Byron. (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1995. Pp. xii + 269)

At the time of his death in 1990 at the age of 61, John Blacking was one of the world's pre-eminent ethnomusicologists. Blacking was an exceptionally accomplished and deeply committed scholar/musician/social idealist who indefatigably proselytised on behalf of a universalistic vision of the properties and significance of music in the construction, maintenance and expression of human beingness. From his post as head of the Department of Social Anthropology at the Queen's University of Belfast from 1970 to 1987, he became the principal mentor of a fair number of the scholars currently active in ethnomusicological work. Blacking was a key figure not only in the institutionalisation of ethnomusicology as an academic discipline in Europe but also in the democratisation of access to ethnomusicological training worldwide. He created, as well, a substantial body of highly original and often provocative scholarship.

This volume, as epitomised in the publisher's statement on its back cover, "brings together in one convenient source eight of Blacking's most important theoretical papers along with an extensive introduction by the editor. Drawing heavily on his fieldwork among the Venda people of South Africa, these essays reveal his most important theoretical themes such as the innateness of musical ability, the properties of music as a symbolic or quasi-linguistic system, the complex relationship between music and social institutions, and the relation between scientific musical analysis and cultural understanding."

Although Blacking's published output spans the years 1953-89 (and posthumously to 1992), the eight essays anthologised in this collection all appeared between 1969 and 1985, and four of them are from the three-year period 1969-71. It was this fruitful three-year period which saw the publication of twelve papers which show Blacking moving away from the primarily particularist/descriptivist stance of his earlier work and becoming more overtly concerned with engaging broader issues and ideas. The thinking of this period was soon to be further synthesised and refined in his most famous publication, *How Musical Is Man?*, one of the first ethnomusicology "textbooks" to be supplied with illustrative sound recordings (Blacking 1973; 1974). The four remaining essays date from 1977-85. Their titles alone give a good indication of the diversity of Blacking's concerns: "The Study of Musical Change," "Reflections on the Effectiveness of Symbols," "The Music of Politics," "Music, Culture, and Experience." It should be noted that these are not Blacking's original titles; editor Reginald Byron has retitled all but one of the eight essays, giving them a less pedantic and/or geoculturally focused tone than the originals. Byron has also "deleted and altered some material" (p. 21) here and there, in the interests of making the papers more timely.

It would be unfair to Blacking, and to the field of ethnomusicology at large, to attempt to outline and discuss the range of thought embodied in the eight papers in the anthology within the confines of a short review. Thankfully, Byron's lengthy (twenty-eight page) introductory essay, "The Ethnomusicology of John Blacking," does an excellent job of this. It is a thoughtful summation of Blacking's life and work, and includes expert expositions and contextualisations of each of the eight essays in the collection. Byron also supplies a "List of Works by John Blacking" (the works number more than 100: books and booklets, edited books, sound recordings, television programs, and papers). Blacking was indeed, in the words of the late Alan Merriam, "a fearsomely energetic man" (p. vii). Additionally, Byron has taken the trouble to marshal the reference lists for the eight anthologised articles into a collective reference list, where one can see at a glance the enormously wide range of publications Blacking knew intimately enough to be able to engage meaningfully in his own work. The collective reference list also includes items cited by Byron in his introductory essay, most notably a number of "tribute" pieces which appeared following Blacking's death. These pieces are essential reading for anyone wishing to gauge Blacking's contributions and impact (see especially Bailey 1990; Donnan 1991; Howard 1991; Kippen 1990).

In some ways, John Blacking is to the 1970s-80s period in the history of cross-cultural studies in world music and dance what musicologist/cultural historian Curt Sachs (1881-1959) was to this multidisciplinary enterprise in the earlier decades of the century. Blacking, like Sachs, was a fecund scholar with uncommonly broad interests and vision who sometimes "tended to idealise"

(Bailey 1990:xiii) in the service of making a powerful case for a passionately held theory or point of view. And Blacking, like Sachs, was “a giant among musicologists, as much for his astounding mastery of several subjects as for his ability to present a comprehensive view of a vast panorama” (Sadie 1988:651). Although in the current intellectual climate in ethnomusicology and related fields, notions of “difference” and “contingency” seem to be more in vogue than such perennial Blacking themes as “commonality” and “necessity,” this does not diminish Blacking’s enormous achievement, nor discount the many ways his work can continue to be useful. It is our profound loss that we cannot know where Blacking would stand today. As Bruno Nettl remarks in his elegiac forward to the collection, “[Blacking’s] last year or two of life produced much that promised to change or expand the directions of his approaches, and to affect powerfully the field of music research generally” (p. vii).

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