

***Communities in Motion: Dance, Community, and Tradition in America's Southeast and Beyond.* By Susan Eike SPALDING and Jane Harris WOODSIDE, eds. Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance 35. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995. Pp. xii + 273.)**

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The essays assembled in *Communities in Motion* primarily concern the dance traditions of Appalachia. Indeed, only one of them — Colin Quigley's comparison of Appalachian and Newfoundland forms — is specifically concerned with what can be considered Canadian material. Nevertheless, this deceptively narrow collection should be useful to those interested in broadening their understanding of traditional North American cultures to include movement and dance, for its real achievement lies less in its explicit content than in its capacity to suggest something of what the study of dance traditions might contribute to the study of culture — and something of why that contribution has hitherto been so slight.

The collection's subject is "vernacular dance," which the editors define as "dance that is community-based and is shaped and perpetuated by the traditional process," i.e., the process of tradition (p. 2) — a definition implicitly tested in the text. Attending primarily but not exclusively to the Appalachian region, a diverse group of specialists presents analytical essays and field-interview transcripts to explore four major issues: the problem of continuity and change in the dance life of particular communities; the challenge of conserving community dance traditions; the problem of invented traditions; and the practical challenges of documenting vernacular dance.

It is an ambitious agenda and, as they shaped these entries into an underdeveloped area of ethnographic inquiry, the editors perhaps succumbed to the temptation to make a single volume do too much. Evidently they wished to address the needs of beginning students and advanced researchers alike, for the editorial matter and some of the essays display a simplistic didacticism at odds with the ambitious aims of other contributions. The Introduction announces that "similarities between Appalachian and Newfoundland dance forms... suggest that communities do not simply preserve whole, entire dances that have been handed down to them, but actively and creatively combine elements of dance traditions into new forms" (p. 1), and that "it soon became clear that not all vernacular dance forms found in the Appalachian

region were indigenous... Clearly, vernacular dances are more complex affairs than we first assumed" (pp. 1-2). No doubt the editors wished by such means to disarm the beginning student's qualms about an unfamiliar subject, but some of their attempts at simplicity may mislead the beginner instead, as in the assertion that vernacular dance "can be either social or performance-oriented in character" (p. 2).

Nevertheless, those who persevere in reading further will find some genuinely useful models for the study of expressive movement and its integration into broader cultural inquiry. Quigley's comparative overview is one of the best. It is indeed explicitly didactic, but its clear exposition of paradigms for structural comparison should refresh specialists and illuminate others, while its geographical breadth and historical competence ought perhaps to have commanded it a place at the beginning of the collection. Several other essays enrich the local and temporal implications of Quigley's largely theoretical concerns. Gail Matthews-DeNatale's unassuming study of dance in Haywood County, North Carolina, and Paul Tyler's rigidly delimited account of square-dance evolutions in Hoagland, Indiana, demonstrate the solid understanding of movement traditions that can develop from scrupulous attention to place, time, local meaning, and the fluid contours of community. Woodside's poignant portrait of the Cherokee struggle to sustain tradition transposes the study of dance into the study of ethnic history, exploring the reanimation of cultural community through the imagined embodiment of historical identity in dance. Douglas Day and David Whisnant probe the complexities of cultural intervention in shrewd and sophisticated analyses of the legacies of the John C. Campbell Folk School and Bascom Lamar Lunsford, respectively; and Robert Dalsemer's deceptively basic outline for fieldwork exemplifies the lucid empiricism which must be the elementary criterion of acceptable and fruitful research into a culture's dancing.

Other essays suggest some of the problems which have relegated dance to the margins of the study of North American culture. Editor Spalding's essay on three Virginia dance communities, for example, might serve as a preliminary sketch for a richer investigation. As it stands, however it is unlikely to convince scholars in other disciplines of the relevance of dance-oriented scholarship to rigorous cultural analysis. Why bother to consider a community's dancing if it yields only the quality of insight that would explain "variety in repertoire, in clogging steps,

and in square-dance patterns... on the part of the Valley dancers" as a reflection of "a love of change and stimulation... developed over generations of living in a travel corridor" (p. 21)? One might also question why a volume devoted to vernacular community traditions should include two uncritical entries on the wholly synthetic and stage-oriented Green Grass Cloggers — though when juxtaposed with Day's dissection of cultural intervention, the Cloggers' revivalist arrogance becomes wickedly instructive: "many of the natives here couldn't care less about traditional dance... they're plugged into their TVs and satellite dishes and modern culture. I see the revivalists as the ones who are keeping those traditions alive" (p. 178).

Even the collection's less successful essays may therefore be unintentionally illuminating. In this respect, Merry Feyock's candid and fascinating account of historical dance reconstruction at Colonial Williamsburg is perhaps the best example, recounting a rigorously researched project whose single error Feyock never comprehends. She and her Williamsburg colleagues proceeded on the assumption that 18th-century Virginia gentry culture — and hence its dance — essentially replicated the gentry culture of England (p. 205). That is not a mistake which any historian of the early Chesapeake would be likely to make. The lesson is obvious: the study of dance cannot be abstracted from the study of culture in all its communal and historical complexity. That message is the real significance of this collection, rendered at least as clearly in its weaker contributions as in its strengths. Yet, if that be true, *Communities in Motion* also leaves the reader with a vital corollary: the realization that any study of a cultural community which ignores its dance remains fundamentally incomplete. The stimulation of that insight alone makes this volume a genuinely useful work of ethnographic scholarship.

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