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Regula Burckhardt Qureshi. *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*. Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 265 pp., music examples, videographs, videocharts, sketches, photographs, summary tables, glossaries, bibliographies, index. [Accompanying music cassette available separately.] ISBN: 0-521-26767-6

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read this and begin to experiment with the possibilities suggested by Toft is difficult to say. What is clear, however, is that Toft makes a persuasive and historically justifiable case for more experimentation in performance and in editions, and this is something that performers of early music have been waiting for musicologists to say for a long time.

Victor Coelho

Regula Burckhardt Qureshi. *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali*. Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. 265 pp., music examples, videographs, videocharts, sketches, photographs, summary tables, glossaries, bibliographies, index. [Accompanying music cassette available separately.] ISBN: 0-521-26767-6.¹

Sufi Music offers an intensive, insightful and thought-provoking case study of music from a dynamic perspective, namely music as “performance” or as the “process of interaction between musicians and listeners, between music and audience responses” (p. 5). The musical event under investigation is the qawwali of North India and Pakistan, in particular, qawwali as it was performed at the Nizamuddin Auliya Shrine of Delhi, India, in 1975 to 1976.

The term “qawwali” names both a genre of Islamic devotional music and the occasion for its performance. At a qawwali assembly, Sufi devotees gather under the guidance of a spiritual leader (sheikh) to experience states of mystical love and divine ecstasy – the core experience of Sufism – through a ritual of listening to music (sama’). The music heard, qawwali, comprises mystical poetry in Farsi, Urdu, and Hindi that is selected and improvised upon melodically, rhythmically, and textually by professional musicians (qawwals) in direct response to the anticipated and perceived reactions of their audience:

In listening to the songs, devotees respond individually and spontaneously, but in accordance with social and religious convention, expressing states of mystical love. The musicians, for their part, structure their performance to activate and reinforce these emotions, adapting it to the changing needs of their listeners (p. xiii).

Herein lies the axiom or self-evident truth which informed and structured Qureshi’s approach. Insofar as qawwali music is “context-sensitive” and “var[ies]

¹ Editorial comments by Dr. Wesley Berg are gratefully acknowledged.

with variation in its context of performance” (p. 5), its musical sounds ought to be grasped in terms of both its sound idiom and its use in performance. Hence, chapters 1 and 2, which constitute part I of this book, are “musicological” in their expositions of the qawwali musical repertoire and sound structures, respectively. Chapters 3 and 4 (Part II) are “anthropological” in their delineations of a normative framework for understanding the performance of qawwali, namely, the ideological and socio-economic settings of Sufism and of the qawwali assembly, respectively.

Sufi Music aims at informing the reader ethnographically as well as analytically. Part 3 oscillates between explanation, description, and explanation in chapters 5, 6, and 7, respectively, as Qureshi sets forth her rationale for analysis, describes the two musical events of her analysis, and analyses the contents of her descriptions. An analysis of her analysis is then presented in chapter 8, followed by generalizations in the final and concluding chapter.

Qureshi presents ethnographic evidence of the performances in the form of “visually accurate” videographs in chapter 6, where arrows and clusters of strategically positioned upper and lower case letters are plotted against the melodic transcription of a song to represent and chronicle the many listeners and their responses to the music. The constraint of space led her to represent the listeners with upper case letters, a practice which this reviewer finds problematic insofar as the identities of these participants are not transmitted beyond the first and only videograph where the information necessary for identifying them is given. A re-listing of these listeners’ identities alongside their symbols in the first column of every videograph would be helpful. This problem aside, Qureshi’s choice here of a systematic and detailed layout is quite ingenious because it allows her readers to retrace for themselves her process of induction while it is simultaneously made clear that her findings are richly and convincingly substantiated. Also noteworthy is Qureshi’s innovative use of videocharts in chapter 6 to ground the improvisation of musical sounds succinctly and concretely in performer-audience interactions. Her forty-two tables, too, are invaluable as cumulative summaries of the discussions in the book.

Sufism dictates that a listener’s emotions of love are to be aroused musically and directed toward an appropriate manifestation of the Divine that begins with his sheikh and leads – via an established lineage of the great Sufi Saints (auliya) and the Prophet Muhammad – to a cognition (ma’rifat) of the ultimate Truth (haq). By creating an inventory of audience responses and mapping it with the set of improvisational techniques adopted by the qawwals in their music-making, Qureshi reveals how musical repetitions, accentuations, and accelerations as well as physical gestures were actually used to generate, intensify, and sustain this process of spiritual arousal.

Qureshi found that the qawwals targeted their audience both generally and selectively for feedback on which repertoire, which melodic, rhythmic and textual improvisations, and which “actions” of physical gestures and facial expressions to perform next. She documents the use of veiled texts in Farsi and Hindi, “old” classical melodies, complex rhythms, rhythmic (rather than melodic) elaborations, and restrained performing styles for patrons deemed by the qawwals to be of high status spiritually (as a result of their saintly descent or personal devotion), worldly (power or wealth) or personally (seniority). Low status patrons – such as unpedigreed young men with some signs of devotion or a little money for offering – were presented with more accessible songs comprising explicit texts in Urdu, “new” popular melodies, simple rhythms, melodic elaborations, and exuberant performing styles.

Qureshi infers that the qawwals were ultimately constrained in their musical improvisations by the religious, political, social, economic, and personal status as well as spiritual identity of their audience. In addition to fulfilling the basic Sufi requirement of generating and enhancing spiritual arousal in the listeners, the qawwals also found it necessary to aim their music-making at increasing their patrons’ ritualistic offerings of money (which translated into payment and livelihood for the musicians) and at satisfying those of high status (to secure future engagements).

Qureshi concludes, based on function, that the qawwali sound idiom was a polysemous or multi-channelled musical code which could convey up to several “contextually derived,” “extra-musical,” or “referential” meanings simultaneously. Such meanings – the “semantic referents” – were personal in conception, but they were also instituted by Sufism and stratified socio-economically. As the “sole mouthpiece” for the entire assembly, it was the qawwal who activated these referents selectively by performing in appropriate musical dialects, as it were, that matched the perceived status, identity, and behavior of a targeted listener or group of listeners. The degree to which the qawwal’s precarious livelihood hinged on his ability to satisfy his audience collectively and individually meant that he also had to balance his attempts at serving their widely-divergent spiritual needs with the meeting of his own economic and social needs:

Indeed, issues of spiritual and socio-economic priority, of dominance and submission, of hierarchical order and individual assertion, of conformity and creativity, are being negotiated audibly, in the language of music, throughout a Qawwali performance. ... [T]he Qawwal ... ‘speaks’ musically not only for himself, but for all his listeners, articulating, in structure and dynamic, the multiplicity of relationships between all participants including himself (p. 231).

Qureshi defends her “operational choice” of analysing qawwali music from the vantage-point of the qawwal on the grounds that he was ultimately “the exclusive maker of the music” (p. 230). This position, moreover, offers her “a key to dealing with the music-context relationship in an analytically clean” (p. 230) and “holistic” (p. xiv) manner. But can the religious experience of qawwali music be apprehended cleanly, holistically, and from a vantage-point that is paradigmatically more socio-economic than spiritual? The qawwal may be the designated spokesperson for the qawwali assembly, yet he is, by function, by social reality, and by Sufi ideology still largely excluded from the full Sufi experience of mystical love and divine ecstasy.

Qureshi acknowledges that her approach offers only one of potentially numerous views on the subject of qawwali:

There still remains the more fundamental question of whether any single vantage point can generate knowledge that is more than a point of view, predicated on the expectations that originate with that vantage point; whether indeed the knowledge of a musical event – or any event – must not be derived from a view in the round; whether such a view is epistemologically possible; and most important, whether the dynamic behind human action, even that of one individual, can be grasped across cultural, social and intellectual boundaries that remain real in practice just as they may be accounted for analytically (p. 230).

One would be hard-pressed to contest this superbly documented study on empirical grounds. *Sufi Music* is an engaging read for those interested in understanding not just qawwali, but also how music – perhaps all musics – is informed by, shaped by, and interacts with the ideological, socio-economic, and performance environments of its composers and performers.

Kenneth Chen

Stephen Blum, Philip V. Bohlman, and Daniel M. Nueman, eds. *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 322 pp. ISBN 0-252-01738-2.

This volume of fifteen essays is dedicated to the American ethnomusicologist, Bruno Nettl, on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. Nettl’s international prominence as a music scholar is well-known and recognized. He is a prolific author whose writings include numerous books and articles on a range of research areas: the music of the Middle East (Iran), North American native