

Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

Canadian University Music Review

Beverley Diamond, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen.
*Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations
Communities*, Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1994. xvi,
221 pp. ISBN 0-88920-228 (hardcover), ISBN 0-88920-242-7
(paperback)

Gordon E. Smith

Volume 19, numéro 1, 1998

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014607ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014607ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités
canadiennes

ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Smith, G. E. (1998). Compte rendu de [Beverley Diamond, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen. *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities*, Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1994. xvi, 221 pp. ISBN 0-88920-228 (hardcover), ISBN 0-88920-242-7 (paperback)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 19(1), 81–84.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1014607ar>

All Rights Reserved © Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique
des universités canadiennes, 1998

Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des
services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique
d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

é
rudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de
l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à
Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Beverley Diamond, M. Sam Cronk, and Franziska von Rosen. *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities*. Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1994. xvi, 221 pp. ISBN 0-88920-228 (hardcover), ISBN 0-88920-242-7 (paperback).

In the late twentieth century, research on First Nations music culture in North America has diversified in substance and perspective. Indeed, as in the early through middle decades of the century, First Nations ethnomusicology continues to provide a rich, dynamic field for ethnographic enquiry. Interdisciplinary and reflexive approaches are found, for example, in Charlotte Frisbie's *Navajo Medicine Bundles or Jish: Acquisition, Transmission, and Disposition in the Past and Present* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987) and Judith Vander's *Songprints: The Musical Experience of Five Shoshone Women* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988). In such texts, post-modern ideas of individual experience, multivocality, and alternate modes of representation are explored in ways which challenge authorial control and power paradigms. Influenced by theoretical models from other disciplines, and by dialogic approaches toward working with consultants, current research on First Nations music culture continues to be an important field of enquiry in ethnomusicology.

From perspectives of intent, content, and representation, *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments in First Nations Communities in Northeastern America* is an important and informative book. The book developed from a research project initiated and directed by Beverley Diamond (then Cavanagh) at Queen's University. Known as the SPINC project (Sound Producing Instruments in Northeastern Communities), her co-workers in the project, Sam Cronk and Franziska von Rosen, were students of Diamond at Queen's University in the early 1980s (they are both currently completing Ph.D degrees in ethnomusicology—Cronk, at the University of Michigan, and von Rosen, at Brown University). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, this research is groundbreaking both in its subject matter and its collaborative nature. With respect to organological studies on First Nations musical instruments, the authors observe that, apart from Thomas Vennum's *The Ojibwe Dance Drum: Its History and Construction* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1982), in which the author explores a single instrument type, there has been more work on the South rather than the North American context (p. 11). Drawing on theoretical ideas of Margaret Kartomi and Sue Carole de Vale (1990), in *Visions of Sound*, the authors are also concerned with extending the frameworks of studying musical instruments beyond fixed, Western-based parameters to reflect the kinds of emergent cultural, spiritual, and other ideas inherent

in First Nations life patterns. The authors explain how issues raised by Native elders with whom they worked (i.e., interactive personal experiences, reciprocal living, circular life cycles) cross over with ideas of critical theory in the last decades of the twentieth century (dialogic, multivocal expression, and reflexive critiques, among others), articulated by writers such as Pierre Bourdieu, Edward Said, Michael M.J. Fisher, George Marcus, James Clifford, bell hooks, Lucy Lippard, Susan McClary, and Dorinne Kondo. This confluence of ideas was central to the genesis of *Visions of Sound*, as well as foregrounding "the social groundedness of our [the authors'] thought, knowledge, and expression" (p. 9).

Visions of Sound has six chapters: (1) "Cultural Knowledge: Searching at the Boundaries"; (2) "Relationship, Complementarity, and Twinness"; (3) "Real"; (4) "Languages of Sound"; (5) "Languages of Image, Design, and Structure"; (6) "Motion, Cycles, and Renewal". Also included are an appendix entitled "All the Nations," which is an informative summary of the historical contexts of First Nations communities; a long bibliography reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the book; and an index of names and concepts. An impressive and fascinating aspect of *Visions of Sound* are the nearly 200 photographs of musical instruments and musicians, many of which were taken by the authors. In addition to the black and white photographs spread throughout the book, there are twenty-seven colour photographs gathered in the middle (pp. 111–26); other visual representation includes illustrative tables and drawings, some of which are by the authors. On one level, this visual presentation underlines a literal interpretation of the "Visions" idea in the title of the book. In addition, the photographs and drawings are often linked in metaphorical ways, reflecting First Nations ideas in accompanying captions and discussions.

As a text, *Visions of Sound* reads as a dialogue of different voices, a deliberate attempt on the part of the authors to thaw the frozen paradigms surrounding First Nations images from colonial times through to the present:

All of us in this dialogue are aware of the Euro-American heritage which attempted to legitimize the presumed cultural supremacy of the European in part by drawing a stereotypic picture of a simultaneously savage and naively noble North American Indian (p. 1).

The dialogue is not simply a three-way exchange amongst the authors, but also, significantly, incorporates the active voices of the consultants presented on different levels. This is accomplished by extended citations (in boldface type) from First Nations consultants, an aspect of the book which recognizes the importance of modes of Native expression in gaining understanding of music culture. This technique recognizes further that Native "processes" of knowledge differ fundamentally from those learned in educational institutions of the "dominant society" (p. 9). Non-Native ideas of "tradition" as learned, static, and linear are hereby challenged through the sensitive presentation of Native notions of tradition as experienced, individualized, and received through ongoing, circular, living processes. In addition to this multivocal dimension, each of chapters 2 through 6 are introduced with three-way conversations amongst

the authors on the chapters' respective topics. These dialogues add another collaborative and provocative perspective to the text.

The dialogic aspect of *Visions of Sound* derives also from the authors' acknowledgement that historic boundaries are no longer appropriate for the study of First Nations music culture. The boundary surrounding the anthropological designation "Eastern Woodlands," for example, which refers to a huge geographical area and many Native peoples, may be considered a point of departure, but is arbitrary and imposed: "[t]he Cree and Ojibwe Nations ... span areas called Eastern Woodlands and Plains; Western Native teachings are shared in Eastern Canada" (p. 3). In historical and current contexts, area boundaries have been crossed over by the migration of Native peoples, and social, cultural, and political change processes have contributed to fluid, dynamic expressions of intertribal, and Native and non-Native sharing. From one perspective, the fieldwork of Diamond with the Innu people from northern Quebec and Labrador, Cronk, with the southern Ontario and upper New York state Six Nations peoples, and von Rosen, with Maliseet and Micmac peoples in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, represent impressive field coverage within the old anthropological context of area studies. From another perspective, this fieldwork is presented in *Visions of Sound* in such a way as to facilitate gaining entry to understanding of a wide range of aspects concerning First Nations music culture. As well as localized and comparative perspectives, musical instruments as symbols and metaphors of the interconnectedness of much First Nations thinking, and roles of individuals within different contexts of gender, experience, and age, are foregrounded throughout the book. Artificial, imposed boundaries of compartmentalization are collapsed in favour of a flexible approach derived from knowledge as lived experience. The notion of North America as "Turtle Island," shared by some Native peoples, might be considered one inspiration for seeking alternative, indigenous modes of representation in the text.

Discussed in the second chapter of the book is the Native concept of relatedness, "an idea which generates co-existence and mutual respect among all living things" (p. 21). This concept is reflected in the frequently heard expression "All my Relations." In their discussion of this difficult to understand, yet fundamental Native concept, the authors develop notions of "complementarity" and "twinness," deriving from reciprocal ideas, and in the case of the latter, as an alternative to "sameness and difference": "a phrase we frequently heard in Algonquian gatherings as a means of describing contextually dependent relationships was 'the twinness of all things'" (p. 29). "Twinness" sometimes was implied by middle points rather than boundaries; emphasis on turning points and directions in Anishnabe myths, for example, shows the dynamic, fluid nature of Native complementarity. Native ways of knowing are further identified in the third chapter of the book ("Real"), in which the authors consider issues of authenticity, historical representation, and Native stereotyping. Inspired by their Native consultants to think beyond Euro-American models and artificial constructions of supremacy toward the Other, the authors

discuss “‘Preserving’ tradition by doing, recreating, and reinventing [rather than by] ... objectifying or encasing it” (p. 56).

“Languages of Sound” are explored contextually and metaphorically in the fourth chapter of the book, for, as the reader is reminded, none of the Algonquian and Iroquoian language families have a bounded word or phrase meaning music (p. 66). Different explanations of sound by Native consultants reveal the rich relational aspect of “music” in much Native understanding. “Sounds of Shakers” and “Voices of Drums” (pp. 86–90) demonstrate this idea with reference to particular instruments. The varied selection of drawings, photographs, and plates enhances chapter 5, in which physical and symbolic attributes of musical instruments are discussed.

In the final chapter of *Visions of Sound*, the authors examine ideas connected to concepts of motion, cycles, and renewal. In significant respects, this chapter rounds out the book by revisiting and expanding on issues discussed in earlier chapters (authenticity, tradition, change, sound metaphors, individual experience, boundaries, historiographic considerations). For this reader, the *Visions of Sound* text might be said “to turn back on itself” paralleling the circularity (open-ended) idea important in many Native contexts. The “kind of ‘authoring’ which invite[s] continuation” (p. 13), as well as the “wave” metaphor at the end of the first chapter of the book also illustrate this idea:

We, the writers, are rather like shells on the seashore: the “waves” break on us in a certain manner, we return their energy and send it out, yet we have a distinctive voice. The book is a series of gifts (stories, teachings...) made from members of the Native community to us, reflected on by us, and passed on with their permission to you (p. 14).

An interesting parallel is James Clifford’s idea of personal exploration as “glimpses of a specific path among others.” Referring to “self-location” and “ongoing webs of relationship,” Clifford observes that “the struggle to perceive certain borders of my own perspective is not an end in itself but a precondition for efforts of attentiveness, translation, and alliance.”¹

Visions of Sound should be of interest to anyone who wishes to learn about First Nations peoples and their music culture. In its presentation it is a fresh and engaging book which blends many diverse, yet related voices. Within the context of First Nations research, it stands out as a work in which postmodern ideas of multivocality and representation resonate with Native thought. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, *Visions of Sound* challenges the reader to re-examine ideas related to self/other boundaries, collective/individual identities, and the emergent parameters of knowledge.

Gordon E. Smith

¹ James Clifford, *Routes: Travels and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12.