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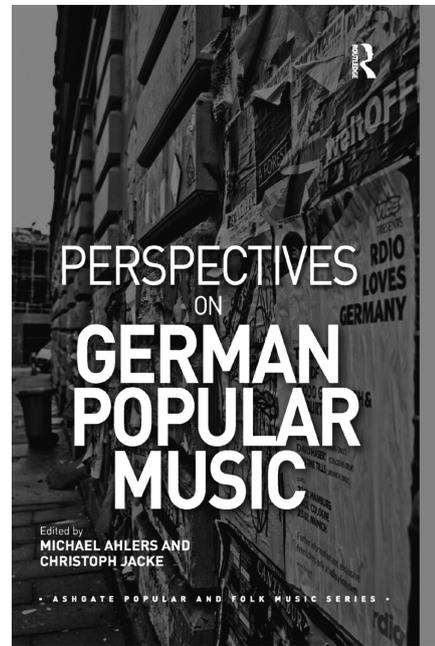
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# Michael Ahlers & Christoph Jacke (eds.), *Perspectives on German Popular Music*, Abingdon, New York, Routledge, 2017

By Mario Dunkel

Michael Ahlers and Christoph Jacke's new volume on "German popular music" and the discipline of popular music studies in German-speaking countries is an important anthology of texts dealing with many facets of popular music history in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. While part I is dedicated to the history of popular music studies in Germany, parts II-VIII provide thirty-one short introductions to aspects of popular music produced in German-speaking countries.

In part I, the editors juxtapose divergent views on the history of popular music studies in German-speaking countries – a clever approach that forces readers to make sense of the contradicting narratives provided here. In letting texts by Helmut Rösing (chapter 2) and Peter Wicke (chapter 3) speak for themselves, the editors reveal a level of contestation within the field that continues to shape how popular music studies is framed and approached in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. In Chapter 2, Helmut Rösing,



one of the founding members of the West German "Arbeitskreis Studium populärer Musik" (Workshop for Popular Music Studies, launched in 1984), emphasizes the importance of the West German popular music studies network for the development of this discipline in German-speaking countries. Notably, even though Rösing focuses almost exclusively on West German music scholarship, his chapter is titled "Popular Music Studies in Germany: From the Origins to the 1990s."

Rösing's view is contrasted by Peter Wicke's chapter, "Looking East: Popular Music Studies between Theory and Practice." This chapter can be seen as an attempt to write East German popular music studies into a historiography of the discipline that is preoccupied with West German developments. Since the history of popular music studies in East Germany

is closely tied to Wicke himself, the chapter is inevitably characterized by a high degree of self-referentiality. These self-references are a case in point, as they undermine the dominance of West German views. In the end, this dynamic leads to more than five pages of Wicke entries in the book's overall bibliography; the list of Wicke entries is longer than some of the book chapters (295-300). Rösing and Wicke's opposing approaches to narrating the history of popular music studies in Germany testify to ongoing struggles that date back to the Cold War.

Besides illuminating this history, the overall concept of this book does have some drawbacks that should be mentioned for readers who wish to use it as a comprehensive overview of popular music (studies) in German-speaking countries. For one, the editors' definition of German popular music as "music being produced in Germanophone countries, even if the artists or producers were not born there and even if their productions are not in German" (6) may seem inclusive. The definition's conflation of national categories (German) with linguistic concepts (Germanophone), however, is also problematic, demonstrating a lack of sensitivity regarding the role that notions of linguistic homogeneity have played in the legitimization of national expansionism. The annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany, for instance, was based on this conflation in the idea of a common Germanophone "Sprachraum" (linguistic area) that should correspond to the nation. I am far from saying that the editors seek to continue Germany's imperial projects. But I do wish to make a case for nuance when it comes to using national and linguistic categories to talk about

cultural difference. For comparison, imagine a book on "English popular music" that uses the term "English music" to talk about Ella Fitzgerald or Michael Jackson. "Perspectives on Popular Music from German-Speaking Countries" would have been a better title for this anthology.

Second, a book in which scholars focus exclusively on "their own popular music cultures," as the blurb on the dusk jacket suggests, tends towards self-exoticization. There is no reason why, say, a forty-year-old writer socialized in an Austrian middle-class milieu would have a more accurate understanding of East German jazz of the 1960s than a researcher with a different national and cultural background. To be sure, the decision to present only "German voices" is a response to a lack of international visibility of popular music scholarship from German-speaking countries. The book's dichotomy between self ("German") and other ("non-German"), and its use of German as *pars pro toto* for German, Austrian, and Swiss, however, are unnecessarily syncretic and hopefully won't become standard practice in English-language texts on popular music from German-speaking countries.

Third, the book's meddling of two different things – perspectives and methodologies from German-speaking countries, on the one hand, and popular music produced in German-speaking countries, on the other – leads the editors to leave out texts and scholars who have contributed substantially to either one of these aspects. The editors demonstrate their awareness of these shortcomings in chapter 1, but I wonder if this could have been prevented by assembling a book that deals either with the history of popular musics from Germany, Austria,

and Switzerland or with perspectives on popular music studies that are unique to these countries.

Fourth, the decision to include a large number of very brief chapters on aspects of “German popular music” is double-edged. The editors are well-aware of this, saying that “it quickly becomes clear how fragmented and fragile such a kaleidoscope of assorted perspectives has to remain if one does not wish it to become a multi-volume compendium” (3). While this approach has the advantage of underscoring the multiplicity of popular musics, the individual chapters are too fragmented to be truly inclusive and remain too short to provide elaborate discussions and contextualizations.

Despite these drawbacks, the book does offer fascinating studies of artists and genres that have been marginalized in popular music studies, including West German heavy metal, Frank Farian, Helene Fischer, Modern Talking, and the Hamburger Schule, to name only a few. It stands as an important contribution to the study of popular music from German-speaking countries, the historiography of popular music studies in these countries, and the continuing project of legitimizing this discipline in the academy.

## **Tsitsi Ella Jaji, *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity*, Oxford University Press, 2014**

**By Mumbua Kioko**

Africans of a certain age may well remember a time when Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” was a big hit. Blaring from shops on noisy streets through the hustle and bustle of urban routines, the song’s danceable rhythms seemed to come from many places. This was not only an urban phenomenon, however. Children in rural areas too knew that there was a Buffalo Soldier “in the heart of America, fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.” Whether they were herding sheep and goats or standing on street corners looking for something to do, people found things to engage them in Bob Marley’s well-known song released in 1983. Tsitsi Ella Jaji begins her new book *Africa in Stereo: Modernism, Music and Pan-African Solidarity* by citing Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” and noting its popularity in Africa. In placing “Buffalo Soldier” at the core of *Africa in Stereo*, the author seeks to exemplify the transmission of music from the African diaspora (transatlantic) back to Africa and to demonstrate the sense of solidarity that emerged from