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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *What Will I Be: American Music and Cold War Identity* by Philip M. Gentry

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is particularly curious, given the editors' invocation of Charles Hiroshi Garrett, who reveals a much more complex racial and ethnic matrix of identities in the United States. (Relatedly, the volume probably should have been titled *Rethinking US Music*, given that none of the chapters address the music of Canada, Central, or South America.)

The problems introduced by these blind spots compound other frustrating aspects of the volume. Comparing US reception of Watts to the United Kingdom's, Crookshank writes, "Perhaps it could be said that the colonies and new nation were the eager Gentile recipients of Watts's musical gospel, in contrast to the British Israel for whom he had first poured out his efforts" (130). The comment, while not crucial to the argument, raises the specter of anti-Semitic ideas of ungrateful Jews rejecting Christ. More broadly, the editors classify all discussions of nonwhite music-making (African Americans and Browner's chapter on Native Americans) under the "Identity" and "Ethnography" parts. In so doing, the editors unquestioningly reproduce the white/nonwhite hierarchy that has dogged scholarship of music in the United States since its inception. This hierarchy naturalizes hegemonic whiteness so that nonwhiteness—however broadly defined—both carries the burden of and is reduced to notions of "difference." To paraphrase Kofi Agawu, such organization deprives nonwhite cultures of full participation in national critical acts.¹ The organization also obscures the foundational role of nonwhite music-making in the broader life of the nation and construes these cultures only as separate objects-to-be-studied or as resources for exoticism.

These editorial missteps do not invalidate the volume, which offers timely critiques of the field. Rather, a more thoughtful organization and titling would have helped guide readers toward a deeper understanding of US music scholarship. As it stands, the collection does not highlight "the expanding scope of American music scholarship as a discipline" (2) as it hopes, but rather reveals that certain blind spots still haunt our collective conception of what it means to be—and who is allowed to be—an "American."

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NOTE

1. Agawu observes that "to undercomplicate European practice in order to show Africa's uniqueness is to deprive Africa of full participation in global critical acts" (*Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* [New York: Routledge, 2003], 301).

What Will I Be: American Music and Cold War Identity. By Philip M. Gentry. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-0-19029-959-0. Cloth. Pp. vii + 187. \$29.95.

In *What Will I Be: American Music and Cold War Identity*, author Philip M. Gentry presents a series of short essays on music and identity in the postwar United States, focusing on early doo-wop, "post-swing-era girl singers" (such as Rose-

mary Clooney and Doris Day), Chinese American nightclub performance in San Francisco, and John Cage's *4'33"*. By situating this music within contemporary debates about identity—black masculinity in the case of doo-wop, for example, or queer identity with regard to Cage—Gentry helps us hear musicians expressing the self through sound. These musicians, Gentry maintains, provided listeners with various selves with which to identify (or not). As his title suggests, Gentry argues that Americans used music to ask and answer the question, *What will I be?*

The book's greatest strength is the diversity of its subject matter. Until recently, musicologists could expect a book about music and the Cold War to focus on how a handful of avant-garde figures confronted contemporary geopolitical issues. Gentry offers a different approach. He asks, *Who were the most well-known musicians of the period, and how can we understand them as exemplars of the various identities available to Cold War-era Americans?* The result is a refreshingly inclusive snapshot of postwar US musical life. Readers unfamiliar with the voices of Sonny Til, Patti Page, and Larry Ching will be grateful for the introduction. But more importantly, readers may well be convinced that any view of "Cold War" music that excludes musicians like Til, Page, and Ching is incomplete. Gentry's inclusive study makes the case that we can no longer afford to do Cold War music studies as usual.

For the most part, Gentry makes his arguments by interpreting a small amount of musical evidence rather than presenting detailed musician biographies, musical analyses, or reception histories. This strategy sometimes feels at odds with Gentry's stated goal of presenting a "performance-based history" (151). Chapter 4, for instance, offers only the briefest accounts of individual nightclub performers. Nonetheless, by calling attention to relatively little-studied musicians, the book suggests many avenues for future research.

Gentry could have engaged more with the book's twin themes: identity and the Cold War. He examines many individual musicians, some of whose stories have gone untold for too long. Still, Gentry could have delved deeper into the question of how these stories change what we think about music and Cold War identity more broadly. In the introduction, Gentry states that "musical performances took center stage" in what he calls a "new project of identity" inaugurated in the Cold War years (5). Later on, he suggests that the book aims to help readers understand "how the postwar moment transformed the process of identification" (107). The author implies that the book will offer a new way of understanding identity formation.

Instead, the book applies a familiar analytical method to relatively unfamiliar music and musicians. Many of the author's guiding questions and turns of phrase—questions like "What does the act of composing, performing, or listening to this music *do*?" (121) and several references to music's "cultural work" (13, 95, 103, and 134)—hark back to the new musicology. These approaches remain as valid as ever. It is in applying them to unsung musicians rather than retheorizing the relationship between music and identity that Gentry makes a significant contribution.

As for its second stated theoretical framework—the Cold War—at times the book seems less a study of the Cold War specifically and more an examination of US music in the 1940s and 1950s. Each chapter includes vignettes about how the Cold War informed life in the United States (with a heavy emphasis

on McCarthyism). Readers less familiar with this period will learn much from Gentry's evocative storytelling. Still, in some chapters the Cold War itself recedes into the background, only to reemerge toward the conclusion. This may well have been by design: one of the author's goals is to challenge readers to rethink the Cold War's influence on contemporary music. As it stands, though, the Cold War as a concept seems to figure less prominently in the book's major arguments than the book's title might suggest.

What Will I Be makes a valuable contribution to music studies. Scholars and students alike will benefit from Gentry's lively, inclusive case studies of music and identity in the Cold War United States.

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