

South Korea

Simon Barker, *Korea and the Western Drumset: Scattering Rhythms*

Surrey: Ashgate, 2015. 145 pages, 4 black and white photographs, 1 CD, 1 DVD.
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This book is an exciting new addition to the growing body of academic literature written about non-Western influences on the Western drumset by an active practitioner. Simon Barker, a lecturer in jazz studies at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, is a widely known and deeply respected drummer in a number of overlapping genres and groups. These include the Australian jazz ensembles the Matt McMahon Trio, the Phil Slater Quartet, several lineups led by Scott Tinkler, Showa 44, and Band of Five Names; international collaborations with South Korean musicians, such as Trace Sphere, Daorum, and Chiri; and his central role in Emma Franz's film "Intangible Asset Number 82."

An outgrowth of Barker's doctoral dissertation at the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, this book is as much a historical and theoretical study

as it is a practical workbook for aspiring drumset players. Barker opens with the personal context for his journey, namely, the search for developing an improvisational language applicable to his instrument that moves beyond the traditional confines of the North American and European-derived contemporary jazz/improvisation scenes on which he has been raised. As a performer and educator working within the Asian-Australian region, he felt the growing practical and ethical need for developing a language based on his local geography that could be applied to the performance practices and pedagogical practices of drummers. This book documents his deep exploration of South Korean traditional percussion traditions as part of this larger project.

The main body of the text is comprised of four chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of previous research, a history of the drumset since 1890, Barker's aesthetic and musical-performative motivations for conducting this research, and the two-fold aim of the book, defined as: "to enhance our understanding of rhythmic processes occurring in Korean traditional music and to explore the potential of these resources as a framework for the development of new improvisational vocabularies for the drumset" (99). Chapter 2 focuses on core rhythmic forms from the urban contemporary percussion group (and genre) Samulnori and from cultural asset holders of Korea's east coast shaman ritual music, looking to identify underlying rhythmic structures and developmental procedures to aid in the expansion and fluidity of one's improvisational skills. Chapters 3 and 4 reveal Barker's process of the "Koreanization" of the drumset through analysis of his solo and group performances with a number of broader goals that include the identification and development of Korean-inspired stick techniques, approaches to breathing and movement, and improvisatory processes. The volume is enhanced by rich supplementary material in the form of an Appendix full of notated drumset exercises and compositions that complement the main text, a CD that further illustrates his pedagogical and aesthetic aims through recordings, and a DVD that brings it all together in a well-conceived visual and aural record.

As an ethnomusicologist and someone who has spent considerable time in East Asia, this book provides a welcome perspective on artists, repertoires, and approaches located outside of Europe, North America, and the United Kingdom. Such a disciplinary background also brings about a sensitivity to issues of translation and appropriation in cross-cultural encounters. Even with the drumset having a developmental history with its own standards and ethics (outlined in this book), I am convinced that Barker has spent the time, made the contacts, and experienced the Korean musical expressions in their original performance contexts. What he has accomplished here is respectful, nuanced, and deeply informed by a profound understanding of the genres he is sampling and from which he draws inspiration. And while much of his discussion is couched in rhythmic-technical language that takes a little time to get around, in the end, the reader is rewarded with rich insights through his painstaking analysis.

There are two points of clarification required to tighten up what has already been identified as a great accomplishment. The first is the occasional use of hand designations (L and R) in notated examples in place of pitched examples (showing high and low strokes), such as that found in Table 2.1 (33). Because much of this text is based on the Korean hourglass drum the *changgo*, there is potential confusion—especially for those familiar with Samulnori—for the ordering of the hands and pitches, as Korean drummers play both "right" and "left" handed. Showing high and low pitches (as is done elsewhere in this book) will make the links to the Korean rhythms clear, as would

a picture of a *changgo* early in the text to help readers unfamiliar with the drum's structure (all other instrumental configurations in the book are suitably illustrated). The second issue is the occasional mis-Romanized term or misattributed scholar's name, which can be easily remedied (page 2: *tokkaeki* to *tokkaekki*; page 34: Kim Il Su to Kim Inu; page 55: *hoe hup* to *hohŭp*).

I began this review with the adjective “exciting” because of what this book will mean to current and future generations of percussionists and lovers of different world music traditions. The crowning achievement of this entire enterprise is Barker's artistry, which shines through in the accompanying CD and DVD. In everything he does, the Korean influence is unmistakable, yet he achieves a true East-West hybrid by creating something that doesn't just slavishly imitate the Korean source material. Korean percussionists and Western drumset players (among many others) will find much to ponder and enjoy in Barker's work, and one can only fully grasp the complexity and depth of the aesthetic worlds he has invented through seeing what he is doing and how he is producing the sounds (especially in the composition “Five Companions”). His playing and insights, like the traditions on which they are based, are a real wonder.

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