

MARTINEZ, JOSÉ LUIZ. *Semiosis in Hindustani Music*. Performing Arts Series, IX. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2001. xxiv + 396 pages. Figures, tables, musical examples, bibliography, index. Cloth Rs. 495; ISBN 81-208-1801-6.

Ethnomusicology was once a field in which European or North American scholars went to strange and unusual countries for a short stint of “fieldwork” and then came home to write speculative or “authoritative” treatises on subjects that few non-natives knew much about. Today, however, an increasing number of Asian, African, South American, and other researchers are bringing about the long-needed internationalization of the field. This trend is personified in the author of the book under review. José Luiz Martinez is a musician and semiotician of the Internet age: Brazilian by birth and upbringing, a specialist of Indian music, trained largely in Finland, and writing in English.

In this study of Hindustani music, originally published in Finland in 1997 and now issued in India, Martinez sets himself the question “not so much *what* does music mean but *how*.” He tackles this broad issue by looking at Hindustani music via the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce. One imagines that the book will be valued in India mainly for what it has to say about semiotics; in the rest of the Anglophone world, however, it will most likely be read for what it has to say about Hindustani music. I shall not speculate on how this book will be received in India, but for the non-Indian the volume constitutes a welcome and significant contribution to the understanding of Hindustani music and indeed Indian music as a whole.

The first section of *Semiosis in Hindustani Music* reviews various approaches to the study of musical meaning: first the “classic” ethnomusicological theories of Merriam, Nettl, and Seeger; and secondly attempts by Molino, Nattiez, Tarasti, Monelle, Hatten, and others to produce a more focused semiotics of music. After a well-organized and concise exposition of various ideas and issues in and around musical semiotics, Martinez moves to the theories of Peirce himself, with special reference to the place of music in Peirce’s conceptual and classificatory schemes.

In the second section of this study Martinez outlines a specifically Peircean semiotic theory of music as applied to Hindustani music. After a lengthy explanation of Peircean philosophy with its detailed taxonomies and esoteric terminology, Martinez begins to tackle the complex nature of musical semiosis in Hindustani music. This section will be rough going for most ethnomusicologists, Indologists, and others chiefly interested in music, Indian or otherwise, for one must battle here with sentences replete with Peircean jargon. One may question how much is gained by explanations such as “Indian music, and improvised music in general, is made by sinsigns that are very flexible in relation to the legisigns of which they are replicas” (89), or “A rāga is at the same time a legisign, its replica or sinsigns, and their qualisigns” (96). However, by referring back to the table and elucidations on page 69 such sentences become decipherable to the noninitiate with adequate patience. Nevertheless, readability (and comprehensibility) is often sacrificed for a degree of “scientific” precision that many will find overwhelming. What is at issue is not just the difficulty of the theory—nearly any worthwhile new theory is at first difficult to grasp—but rather whether the energy expended on mastering new terminology and tangled explanations is rewarded with fresh insights and new understanding.

In this section of the study Martinez analyzes in great detail the various types of signification, reference, and iconicity that endow specific Hindustani musical sounds and structures with meaning, arguing that this music is well-nigh incomprehensible if it is appreciated or analyzed as something resembling absolute music. This is an important and convincing

argument even if Martinez's claim that "absolute music" is "restricted almost totally to Western culture" (111) (with the possible exception of traditional Japanese shakuhachi music and Hindustani solo drumming) is either simply false or tautologous, depending on one's definition of "absolute." In fact most of the world's music from the "Eroica" to "Esashi oiwake" refers not just to itself but to elements that lie beyond the borders of pure sonoral structures. At the same time, a good deal of the music in all corners of the globe, particularly instrumental music, also contains a certain degree of independence from the "outside" world, and is thus to some extent "absolute." Fortunately, Martinez is aware of this in his analyses, which maintain a good balance between purely musical factors and meaning gained by relations to non-musical elements.

It is in the third section of this volume that most ethnomusicologists and Indologists will no doubt feel most at home. Martinez here elucidates in some detail classical Indian theories of aesthetics and *rasa* (essence, feeling) and analyzes their connections to specific elements of Indian music. For centuries Indian theorists have spilled oceans of ink on treatises arguing for this or that meaning of *rasa*, and Martinez has done us a great service by explaining and organizing a good number of relevant concepts and arguments. The discussion then proceeds to the relationship of *rasa* to more specifically musical material, but still remains largely in the realm of Indian music theory. Martinez finally arrives at the level of *rāga*, the exact nature of which has concerned nearly everyone who has ever set foot in the deep waters of Indian music. In this section Martinez is again careful to keep in mind both intrinsic musical structures and extra-musical meaning (relation to the seasons, to human emotions, etc.) of each of the *rāgas* that he introduces.

As this study moves towards its conclusion most references to a specifically Peircean musical semiotics disappear, no doubt to the relief of many readers. Only in the last pages does Peirce again rear his head, reappearing in full force in the closing sections of the chapter entitled "Aesthetic Rapture." This book, however, remains most interesting for what it has to say about the world of Hindustani music concepts; it does not convince me that Peircean semiotics is the *sine qua non* for understanding music, Indian or otherwise. Moreover, much else related to musical meaning could have filled the space devoted to discussions of rhemes, dicents, phaneronoscopy, and all the rest. *Semiosis in Hindustani Music* leaves one wondering, for example, how improvisation contributes to the meaning of a *rāga*, or how the addition of the rhythmic cycles of drumming (*tāla*) affects the whole. Surely "meaning," if one defines it in a meaningful manner, is affected when a *rāga* moves from the level of abstract theory to that of actual performance.

Semiotics, Peircean or otherwise, also shows itself to be something less than an entirely satisfactory tool for dealing with the historical or social dimensions of Indian music. Although the final section of Martinez's book treats the shifting web of the Hindustani musical conceptual armory in a roughly chronological order, "Hindustani" music in the second section of the study is presented as if it were a largely static system. Yet, like all of the world's musics, it has surely changed greatly through time, particularly during the twentieth century. What do these changes tell us about shifts in signification and meaning? And *why* have both the music and its meanings changed? In addition, treating Hindustani musical practice as a kind of "system" means running roughshod over social differences that too have evolved and changed over time. Does each musical element examined by Martinez mean the same thing to men and women, now and a hundred years ago? To members of various classes or castes? To a seventy year-old professional performer and a seventeen year-old high-school student? To members of various ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups encompassed by the term "Hindustani"?

To answer these questions, which are at the very heart of the nature of musical mean-

ing, one must look beyond the limits that Peirce set for himself. Semiotics, Peircean or otherwise would, however, then prove to be not the ultimate science explaining all meaning in general, but rather a historically and culturally contingent set of propositions and theories that manages to provide a certain amount of insight precisely because it eliminates so much from its field of view.

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## NEPAL

LEWIS, TODD T. *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism*. Translations in collaboration with Subarna Man Tuladhar and Labh Ratna Tuladhar. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. xviii + 236 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Paper, n.p.; ISBN 0-7914-4612-3.

This book explores some of the popular and pragmatic Buddhist traditions found among Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. It does so by translating and explicating a small sample of the many vernacular texts that have been incorporated into that community. Of the five texts collected here, two are narratives, the first concerned with stupa veneration and gender relations (the Shṛṅgabherī Avadāna, Chapter 2), the second juxtaposing the accumulation of wealth through trade with achieving advanced spiritual progress (the Sīṃhala-sārthabāhu Avadāna, Chapter 3). Both of these are didactic stories that illustrate proper living and include such pragmatic messages as a Buddhist defense of marriage, support for family ties, encouragement for the Newar diaspora trading groups, and justification for the rightful seeking of worldly happiness and security. Two other texts are ritual guides for priest-led, lay-sponsored rituals known as *vratas*, the Tārā Vrata (Chapter 4) and the Caturdashī Vrata of Mahākāla (Chapter 5). These are manuals for worship programs whose purpose is to achieve merit and realize the good, though they also emphasize the necessity of being a donor and patron. Chapter 6, the book's longest section, presents the five apotropaic *sūtras* of the *Pañcarakṣā*, the most utilized Mahāyāna text in Newar Buddhism. Each *sūtra* (as the text itself refers to its separate sections) is composed of a Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* (powerful condensed formulaic verses) accompanied by testimonial stories, each with a line drawing and an iconographic description of its protective deity.

These five translations, particularly that of the vernacular *Pañcarakṣā*, are in themselves important to anyone interested in the history of religion; but the volume is further enhanced by the author's developing, more descriptively than analytically, the theme of "religious domestication." Lewis defines this as "the dialectical historical process by which a religious tradition is adapted to a region or ethnic group's socioeconomic and cultural life" (3–4). Domestication frames an ambitious project not fully realized but fruitfully explored throughout this volume. The pragmatic, ethical, and utopian expressions of the texts are investigated with considerable success, as are the ways that rituals derived from these texts exemplify and express doctrinal Buddhist views. More controversial is Lewis's attempt to reconstruct interpretively discrete Buddhist traditions. Lewis describes the present, accurately, as "a chaotic pattern that simultaneously mixes archaic traditional continuities with modern elements of breakdown, revival, and transformation" (xvi), but then suggests, without real evidence, that somehow the situation must have been more orderly in the past. Consequently, he endeavors