



World Music: Traditions and Transformations

Michael Bakan

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From jeliya to cha cha ch?, Shandong to sean n?s, and the Beatles and beleganjur to Bollywood and belly dance, the second edition of *World Music: Traditions and Transformations* takes students on an exciting global journey of musical and cultural discovery, exploration, and experience. Through clearly focused case studies of diverse musicultural traditions, Michael Bakan illustrates the transformative life of world musics from traditional folk, ritual, and classical genres to contemporary popular and art musics, jazz, and world beat. Integral connections between particular musics and their historical, cultural, and international contexts are consistently emphasized. The text also includes a globally inclusive introduction to core elements of music and culture that makes its unique and friendly approach accessible to music majors and non-majors alike.

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World Music: Traditions and Transformations Details

Date : Published February 16th 2011 by McGraw-Hill Education

ISBN : 9780073526645

Author : Michael Bakan

Format : Paperback 377 pages

Genre : Music, Nonfiction

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From Reader Review World Music: Traditions and Transformations for online ebook

Neil Coulter says

This is the first in what will be a series of reviews looking at the current editions of world music survey textbooks. Michael Bakan's *World Music: Traditions and Transformations* is the most recent entry into the list of possible options. The first edition was published in 2007, and the current edition (2nd) is from 2012. I don't know the first edition; my only experience with the textbook is the 2nd. I was looking forward to reading *Traditions and Transformations* because I have a lot of respect for Bakan. In particular, I enjoyed an article he co-wrote in *Ethnomusicology* in 2008 about his work with autistic children through music therapy playtimes. As an applied ethnomusicologist myself, I am always happy to learn about how others are also using ethnomusicology to improve the world. Bakan's compassion and care for the children (and their families) he worked with shone through the article, and I found it very inspiring. So when I came to the textbook, I already had positive feelings toward Bakan, assuming that he is very likely an excellent teacher of students at a variety of levels. *Traditions and Transformations* is written especially for American undergraduate students, and especially non-music majors. I taught a world music survey to exactly this group myself for four years, and I well remember the pleasures and challenges involved.

The good: Most world music textbooks are written collaboratively by a team of ethnomusicologists, which makes sense. Bakan's textbook is written solely by himself, and I acknowledge what a feat that must have been. Certainly most of the information about musical traditions is gleaned from other sources (and cited throughout the text), but this is still quite an accomplishment to have put all of this information together in a unified structure.

Bakan crams a lot of information into the book—I wonder sometimes if it's too much for an undergrad non-music major to really take in. After an initial section on the basics of music (more on that later), the book features a country-by-country look at various musical traditions. This is typical of world music textbooks and the way probably most world music survey courses are structured. Some musical traditions have come to be regarded as standard fare for intro world music surveys, and Bakan hits several of these: Bali (could there ever be a world music survey without Balinese gamelan?), India, West Africa, Ireland. These are all fine. Bali is Bakan's specialty, and his depth of knowledge comes through in that chapter. The chapter on India centers on Ravi Shankar, tracing some of the dominant Indian classical traditions and their integration into the international music scene from the mid-20th century. That chapter ends with a section on Bollywood superstar A. R. Rahman. Similarly, the chapter on Ireland looks at Irish traditional music standards and then moves through some popular innovations from the 1970s to the present. The West Africa chapter provides a brief glimpse of instruments—especially the kora—and styles, then moving to new directions in Africa music, with Toumani Diabate, Angélique Kidju, and others.

These topics are all expected, and they're fine. But what was a pleasant surprise were the chapters on somewhat unexpected musical traditions: Latin America, Egyptian belly dance, and the Chinese zheng. Latin music is not so unexpected, but I liked Bakan's method of following one song—"Oye Como Va"—through several versions and eras. That's the kind of teaching tool I would use if I were teaching, and it was an interesting way to teach about Latin music in the 20th century. Along the way, that chapter also meanders through other styles and performers. I found the chapter on belly dance to be one of the most fascinating in the whole book, probably because it was the one tradition I knew the least about, and it's the tradition that was the most unexpected choice in an intro survey textbook. For the teacher using this chapter, there are a lot

of avenues open for movie clips and extra historical explorations that I think would be very intriguing for a class. The final chapter looks at Chinese music, primarily through the development of the zheng (zither). Following a single instrument through a musical tradition is another really good way of getting into that tradition. Bakan did a decent job of navigating some very complicated history to present information about musical styles, performers, and the zheng.

The bad: There is, then, a lot to admire in *Traditions and Transformations*. However, I also have a number of criticisms. The first is about the introductory chapters on the fundamentals of music structure. Bakan gives separate chapters on a “musicultural” approach; rhythm; pitch; dynamics, timbre, and instruments; and texture and form. The back cover states that these chapters have been significantly revised from the first edition, which suggests to me that Bakan received criticisms of these chapters. He may have revised them, but there is still a long way to go before they are clear and easy for the non-musician to understand. I see what he is trying to do in these chapters, but it just doesn’t work. I don’t think a non-music major would “get” this; worse, I fear that these introductory chapters would turn students off to music study and the class. I look forward to seeing how other textbooks handle the basics-of-music topic. Bakan is at his weakest here, and it’s a shame that this is how the textbook begins.

Bakan mostly does well at writing for his target audience, but there will always be the difficulty of translating a teacher’s classroom voice and style into a printed textbook. I don’t know how other textbooks deal with this, but in Bakan’s book I often felt that he was trying to put his own voice into the text and it just didn’t quite work. In teaching world music, there is so much that the teacher must put into each class. A good teacher barely even needs to use a textbook, and a bad teacher won’t necessarily be helped by relying on this one. I can tell how engaged Bakan is with the topics he writes about, but I wonder if that comes through to the student doing assigned readings. Also, while I understand where Bakan is coming from from an academic standpoint, and I see how he is trying to present academic information to a general audience, it sometimes comes across as clunky—an ethnomusicology professor trying so hard to be cool, relevant, engaging. These shortcomings are not a fault unique to Bakan; it’s just very difficult to find the right voice in a textbook. The section that made me laugh the most was the introduction to the Chinese zheng chapter, which has Bakan describing a performance at a musicology conference banquet! If that’s your best story, your world may be getting a little too small.

A difficulty with any world music textbook will be conveying the pronunciation of so many non-English words. The pronunciation guide that Bakan uses very often struck me as clumsy and odd. Some of the words which I *know* how to pronounce were unclear to me in the text; have I been mispronouncing this all these years, or am I just misunderstanding the pronunciation guide? How I wish that everyone would just learn to read the IPA!

As I said, I really enjoyed the chapter on Latin music and “Oye Como Va.” I think an interesting discussion to include would be the very idea of a song becoming a cultural phenomenon. Bakan talks about the influence of Tito Puente’s original version, and then the even bigger influence of Santana’s cover. This would be a good time to lead students in a discussion on what has happened to pop culture now that either encourages or (as I think) inhibits anything becoming a lasting phenomenon. The evidence of cultural change is right there throughout Bakan’s text. He talks about significant songs or performances that changed the way the world thought about a culture or style. But when he mentions hit songs from the last 20 years or so, I found myself wondering if students would even recognize them; sure, Lou Bega’s “Mambo #5” was a hit in 1999, but does anyone remember it now? Did it have any lasting effect on pop music? What has changed in culture that makes performances and recordings so disposable and forgettable? This is probably beyond the scope of Bakan’s book, but it might be an interesting side discussion in future editions.

My final criticism of the textbook is also the biggest: the presentation. This is McGraw-Hill’s fault, not

Bakan's, but really—is this the best they could do? No color pictures, and many of the black and white photos are grainy or blurry, giving the text a low-quality feel. Everything about the design and layout makes the book look twenty years older than it is. Some of the pictures are obviously staged photos of whoever happened to be at Florida State University (where Bakan teaches) at the time. This sometimes feels a bit stagey and artificial. It's also a little odd when it's something like “Didgeridoo being played by Benjamin Koen”; and unintentionally amusing (to me, anyway) when the caption is “Sheng being played.” This textbook is strong in other ways and might have been a strong candidate for a survey course text; unfortunately, I am not able to recommend it because of the terrible design.

An important part of any world music textbook is the accompanying musical examples. Bakan provides an excellent array of songs and excerpts, on CDs and on the related website, to illustrate the text—and for the price McGraw-Hill charges for that CD set, it had better be very impressive indeed. I did not have the CDs to review with the book, but I'm familiar enough with most of the examples or styles that I have a good sense of what the CDs offer. Cost is certainly an issue, and I wonder how long publishers can maintain the industry of unbelievably expensive textbooks and CD sets, now that so much is available online and e-books continue to gain support in many domains. I enjoy world music textbooks, but I also felt as I was reading this one that it's building on a model that is surely going extinct soon.

Verdict: *Traditions and Transformations* has a lot of strengths, but the poor “look” of the book, along with the clumsiness of some key sections, leads me to keep looking for the ideal world music survey textbook. If a teacher is going to invest so much in basing a course on a single textbook, and if students are going to pay so much to purchase the book, then it needs to be a better overall package than what this book offers.
