

virtue trembles, crushed within the arm which encircles the waist.” Thompson points out that it “has also formed a basis for concert music and a vehicle for love songs” (57). In fact, one *danza* melody, “La borinqueña,” became the anthem of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952.

In the aftermath of Spain’s 1898 war with the United States, Puerto Rico came under the control of a new country and culture, an event that produced dramatic changes in its musical life. For one, the Americans had no intention of continuing European-style government subsidization of the arts. As a result, many institutions soon found themselves short of assistance. The era of the New Deal saw some improvement in this situation; moreover, the establishment of the Casals Festival in the 1950s attracted attention to the island and served as an enticement to industrial development and expanding tourism. Not everyone reacted with glee to this development, however. In 1972, years after its inception, Rafael Aponte-Ledée derided the Festival for “spreading a false image of Puerto Rico as a prosperous country, a model of progress and felicity thanks to its special condition as a protégé of the United States” (102–103). Thompson himself wrote an article on the subject in 1994 and took a much more benign view of the Festival, which he felt had invigorated the musical life and institutions of the island. Of course, classical music was not Puerto Rico’s chief cultural export. The rise of urban and commercial music there, particularly the *bomba*, *plena*, and salsa, has transformed the way we view the country and its music. Many writers have focused on this phenomenon, in particular on the music of Rafael Hernández. Despite its obvious importance, the only study made to date of music criticism in Puerto Rico (and which is reprinted in this volume) is Sylvia Lamoutte de Iglesias’s 1997 “La critica musical: origen y desarrollo,” which contains an impassioned plea for a continuation of the tradition of musical criticism in the local press as a means of maintaining and expanding the musical public.

By Thompson’s own admission, his compendium of excerpts represents but a small fraction of what has been written about the musical life of Puerto Rico. Nonetheless, this book provides a necessary foundation and vital impetus for future investigations. Above and beyond that, it is simply a pleasurable and fascinating read.

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*Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*. By Carol Vernallis. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Carol Vernallis’s *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* is one of the most insightful and important contributions to the study of multimedia to

date. For scholars working in music video, it is the most exhaustive body of work on the medium in over a decade, as it is the first book-length study to engage with all technical aspects of the medium. Previous contributions to music video theory and analysis by Nicholas Cook and Andrew Goodwin examine in depth only certain aspects of music video. Cook's *Analysing Musical Multimedia* includes analyses of opera, advertisements, and animated musical cartoons in addition to commercial music video, and provides an excellent investigation into the role of metaphor in all instances of musical multimedia.<sup>1</sup> Andrew Goodwin's *Dancing in the Distraction Factory* can perhaps be regarded as a precursor to *Experiencing Music Video*.<sup>2</sup> His thoughtful consideration of the music as a stabilizing force undergirding the fast edits and untethered subjectivity of the medium allows for a book like *Experiencing Music Video* to set these debates aside to examine the materiality of contemporary music video.

*Experiencing Music Video* is organized in two sections, "Theory" and "Analyses." The first section is divided into eleven chapters, each one a discussion of individual aspects of musical multimedia: lyrics, settings, music, and so on. The second section presents critical analyses of three commercial music videos: Madonna's "Cherish," Prince's "Gett Off," and Peter Gabriel's "Mercy Street."

In the chapter "Telling and Not Telling," Vernallis argues for a "gapped" kind of storytelling that takes advantage of music video's particular shot styles and popular-song structure, and offers a rich counterargument to Alf Björnberg's defense of narrativity in the medium.<sup>3</sup> Among the other chapters in this section, "Space, Color, Texture, and Time" and "Editing" present the most probing and distinct arguments. Vernallis's discussion of color as both an affective and structural device is a particularly important contribution to the literature on music video, expanding our notion of significant analytical parameters only briefly noted in other writing about the medium. In "Editing," Vernallis provides a nuanced analysis of the ways editing techniques and shot treatment contribute to the rhythmic and visual texture of music videos. She presumes the importance of editing to our perception of the medium and develops a taxonomy of shots and edits in music video that reflects the technical differences between traditional cinematic techniques and those used in music video. Vernallis's description of an editing or directorial style that both reflects sonic processes and positions the viewer as a listening subject demonstrates the care with which she attends to music video. Also noteworthy are her discussions of specific music video directors. Her arguments are important to our understanding of music video genre and style, as they are buoyed by interviews with many of the most prominent directors.

"Musical Parameters" is the least successful chapter in this section. The visual parameters in music video receive careful treatment throughout the book, but the

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Alf Björnberg, "Structural Relationships in Music and Images in Music Video," in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton, 347–78 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

music is not accorded the same level of specificity. Vernallis, who clearly wants to engage with specific musical parameters, continues to struggle with the breadth of the task of trying to deal with the music and images. Most of the time, the musical analyses want for the level of specificity that might draw us deeper into her arguments. When we learn, for example, that a guitar melody is convoluted and thus isomorphically relates to visual content (157), we need more information on the same melody's sounds—its notes, timbre, or place within the song's texture. In her discussion of rhythm, she argues that the performers in a particular video begin by articulating beat one of the four-beat measure, but finish the song emphasizing beats two and four (171). What is not made clear is the musical environment that might have precipitated this change in emphasis. Given that the musicians in question, Boyz II Men, are known for their complex vocals, what happens with the entrances during this shift? Is it possible that the articulations towards the end of the video are responding to something rich and varied in the vocal lines, like a breath, or vocal emphasis, rather than an accented backbeat? We do not have enough musical information to be sufficiently convinced by her argument.

Although Vernallis attempts to deal comprehensively with the individual aspects of the medium, at times her theory reads more like a list of possibilities, too numerous to generate a usable model for analysis. In this respect, Cook's *Analysing Musical Multimedia* may prove more helpful for scholars looking to develop their own ways of analyzing the interaction of music and image. A clear distinction between references to a music video versus its song text would also be extremely helpful. For example, Goodwin introduces a way of distinguishing between a song text and a music video text by enclosing the former in quotations and capitalizing the latter, and it would be easier on the reader if Vernallis had adopted something as clear.

*Experiencing Music Video* includes three critical analyses of music video. The final chapter, discussing Peter Gabriel and Matt Mahurin's video "Mercy St.," exemplifies Vernallis's thoughtful and at times profound insights into music video. The form of this analysis attempts to "reproduce," in her words, a viewer/listener's experience of music video. Towards this aim, she intercuts her analysis of the music video with poems by Anne Sexton (the subject of the song) and stills from the video. This technique of mirroring the perceptual experience of music video viewing proves extremely fruitful, if challenging. Vernallis argues that as we read this material we gain some understanding of the changing threads to which we attend as we watch music video. This analysis encourages experiences akin to listening to music video. The interspersed poetry triggers in the reader a kind of "other" voice, an aspirated or enoiced form of reading that may approximate song in our minds. For those who have seen the video, the presence of the stills interpolated into the text function as reminders of specific audio/visual moments. For those familiar with the song, it becomes sounded in the snippets of lyrics, stills, and poetry and makes for a rich, if haunting, reading experience.

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