

J. Lat. Amer. Stud. 39 (2007). doi:10.1017/S0022216X07003173

Sergio Navarrete Pellicer, *Maya Achi Marimba Music in Guatemala* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2005), pp. viii + 276, £52.00, £16.00 pb; \$27.95 pb.

In this study Navarrete Pellicer describes and analyses the marimba musical traditions of Rabinal, a small area of Guatemala and home to around 25,000 people, both of the Achi people, one of the Mayan ethnic groups indigenous to the country, and Ladinos ('mestizos', in other parts of Latin America). A marimba is a long wooden keyboard instrument with large resonators, usually played by three musicians. It is regarded as the 'national instrument of Guatemala', with the traditions surrounding the marimba playing a key role in the social, cultural and generational history of the country. Fundamentally, this is a highly focused ethnomusicological study comprising in-depth description and analysis of how 'musical meaning arises from the social and cultural contexts in which musical production occurs' (p. 1). For the Rabinalense Achi, son marimba music is the tradition of the ancestors, and so represents a way of making sense of the world. In country-wide terms, marimba music is part of the 'soundscape' of all Guatemala's hamlets, villages, towns and cities.

The book is divided into two major sections: the first is mainly historical, and also includes a discussion of the basic concepts of music and its place in the Achi worldview. The second section concentrates on the social and cultural settings of musical practice and on musical change. Some of the areas under discussion include: belief in the dead (which is at the heart of local Catholicism); creation myths and their ritual discourses showing the relationship between the living and the ancestors and the role of music and prayers in the annual re-creation of the world; Achi ideologies concerning music, alcohol and women; social and musical change; the marimba teaching/learning tradition; economic aspects of musical change and musical strategies adopted by musicians to cope with poverty; and daily social interaction as part of the process of musical communication. This book is rich in very detailed musicological description (and notation) concerning social and religious contexts.

In recent decades the area of Rabinal has been the site of intense political violence – remembered as *la violencia* – in which army repression took the form of massacres and the burning of crops, livestock and homes (the scorched-earth policy). Atrocities and massacres took place in Rabinal between 1981–82, and as Guatemala's thirty-six years of low-intensity war officially ended in 1996, so began a new painful era as the violence began to be investigated, with major exhumations taking place. Although this study is located in this unique and traumatic environment, discussion of the musical activity in relation to the political and ideological context is curiously rather minimal. Navarrete Pellicer states that 'many marimbistas were among the hundreds slaughtered in local massacres' (p. 167) and observes that 'the political violence of the early 1980s wiped out almost an entire generation of marimbistas in Rabinal' (p. 210). One of the most fascinating aspects concerns the complex relationships that marimbistas had to negotiate, which is discussed briefly in chapter nine. The author describes how at the height of the political violence it was necessary for marimbistas to develop and maintain friendly relations with army officers, paramilitary police and military commissioners, because such relations were essential to both economic and literal survival. The general public, however, responded ambivalently to this position, regarding these musicians as the army's allies. Some people still harbour resentment against marimbistas, a resentment which is

complex and extends not only to musicians' survival but to their exemption from the civil patrols, which means that they were not forced to kill anyone (p. 206). Here we catch a glimpse of the some of the horrors, complex inter-relationships and consequences of *la violencia* in relation to music-making.

Another complex and fraught area embedded in this study, and that warrants further treatment, is that of the politics and ethics of fieldwork. As a Mexican and Ladino, Navarrete Pellicer entered what was an extremely sensitive area in terms of outsider intervention, arriving as he did just one year after the cessation of the thirty years war, going to a region where fear and suspicion of outsiders was a part of the everyday lives of the inhabitants and where 'the presence of foreigners had been rare until the exhumations began' (p. 6). Although Navarrete Pellicer himself went to Rabinal to study musical practices, his role was affected by the presence of his wife, a clinical psychologist, who had been involved in the exhumation of clandestine graves in the town the previous year. The author notes that 'the whole enterprise of research and analysis entails an enormous responsibility, which I alone must bear' (p. 9), and so an in-depth discussion of what that responsibility might entail would have enhanced this work, particularly addressing the complex relationships that are formed corresponding to power relations and possible consequences when a foreign scholar enters a highly politicised and traumatised context.

Studies examining musical traditions of Central America are rare, and so as part of the series *Studies in Latin American and Caribbean Music*, which aims to present interdisciplinary studies in traditional and contemporary musics, this work is a very welcome addition. The inclusion of a CD enables the reader to hear examples of the marimba music under discussion. For anyone studying Guatemalan society, ritual and beliefs and the role of music-making, musicians and musical behaviour in shaping and interacting with cultural and religious conditions then this book comes highly recommended.

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