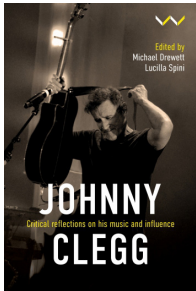




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Reflecting on Johnny Clegg

That Johnny Clegg is an important figure within the South African historico-cultural landscape and collective memory is unquestioned. For many white South Africans – both those alive during apartheid during the beginning of Clegg’s career in the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as those such as myself who grew up under the post-apartheid’s idealised banner of ‘The Rainbow Nation’ – Johnny Clegg represented a model of existence for those who found themselves morally opposed to the racist laws and practices of apartheid. His outward respect for Zulu culture, history, music and language provided an example of what non-racial and multi-cultural South Africa could be.

Thus, an edited volume such as this one is an important piece of scholarship, being published shortly after a similar volume on the South African composer Mziilikazi Khumalo.¹ What *Johnny Clegg: Critical Reflections on his Music and Influence* does so well is to complicate our perhaps overly simplistic understanding of who Clegg was and how he functioned within multi-racial musical and cultural spaces during a regime that strictly forbade such integration. This book also does well to include not only the voices of academics and scholars, but also those of Clegg’s friends and musical compatriots, such as Andrew Grant Innes and, most notably, his earliest musical collaborator Sipho Mchunu.

A number of chapters provide an insightful historical contextualisation of Clegg’s life, as well as insights from those who were close to him. Chapter 1, written by the volume’s editors, Michael Drewett and Lucilla Spini, provides an historical background of Clegg’s life, while also positioning the book not as a traditional biography, but rather as a series of perspectives on Clegg’s life, music and legacy. In Chapter 2, Andrew Grant Innes reflects on the relationship between Mchunu and Clegg, as well as his own interpretations of Clegg’s lyrics within the context of this relationship. Innes also co-authored Chapter 6 with Mchunu, in which the various Zulu names which were bestowed on Clegg during his lifetime are explained and discussed.

Multiple chapters are dedicated to various understandings of Clegg’s music; while these chapters utilise different mechanisms for considering Clegg’s oeuvre, their methods and conclusions are thought-provoking and highly engaging. Martina Viljoen’s chapter traces the theme of apartheid through a selection of Clegg’s songs. Viljoen argues that the musical and lyrical content of these songs – while never outright mentioning apartheid – can be understood as a form of subversive activism against the apartheid regime. The hermeneutic consideration of Clegg’s music is also seen in Nicol Hammond’s chapter. In considering two cover versions of Clegg’s ‘Asimbonanga’ – the first by the Soweto Gospel Choir and the second by Karen Zoid and Snotkop – Hammond elegantly argues for new positionalities of this song being performed after Clegg’s death.

Caleb Mutch’s chapter considers the compositional and sonic shift between Clegg’s bands Juluka and Savuka, by critically discussing both groups’ versions of the two songs ‘Siyayilanda’ and ‘Scatterlings of Africa’. While Mutch acknowledges that Savuka tended to have a more Western-oriented sound than Juluka, he also points out that Juluka still utilised aspects of Zulu music traditions, particularly in their song ‘I Call Your Name’. In Chapter 9, Chris Letcher considers the use of two Clegg songs on the soundtrack of two major Hollywood films in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Of particular interest in this chapter is Letcher’s discussion of the structural editing of ‘Scatterlings of Africa’ for the *Rain Man* (1988) soundtrack, as well as the track’s place on a soundtrack of a film that does not thematise Africa.

As suggested in this book’s title, Clegg’s music is not the only critical ground covered. Central to this book is the idea that Clegg was a multifaceted person, and this book resists the slippage of defining him through overly simplistic singular lenses. While Clegg was involved in union activity during apartheid in South Africa, Michael Drewett’s chapter points out that Clegg’s relationship with the British Musicians’ Union was complex, and Clegg often circumvented their rules in order to perform both inside and outside of South Africa’s borders. Thus, while Clegg can be considered one of the darlings of the anti-apartheid movement, his position on the cultural boycott and the travel ban on South African musicians was not straightforward, and could have been interpreted as counterproductive to the anti-apartheid movement.

Lizabé Lambrechts and Pakama Ncume further show that Clegg’s position within the South African music scene during apartheid was also worth reconsidering. Through their in-depth explorations of the Hidden Years archive, collected by David Marks and held at Stellenbosch University, Lambrechts and Ncume trace Clegg’s involvement in the white counterculture music scene of Johannesburg during the 1970s. This chapter further considers Clegg’s reticence at being placed within this scene, as he felt that this movement exoticised him and his music. Through exploring this uncomfortable symbiosis, Lambrechts and Ncume show the nuances of understanding white anti-establishment musicians during apartheid South Africa.

While Clegg’s legacy is undoubtedly one of inter-racial collaboration, in Chapter 5 Richard Pithouse argues that, considering Clegg’s involvement and solidarity with migrant workers, his legacy should also be considered as one of inter-class co-operation. Pithouse argues that to define Clegg as mainly someone defiant of apartheid laws “erases both his participation in the life-world of migrant workers and the way in which the Juluka period produced a remarkable body of work, much of which was focused ... particularly on migrant labour” (p.84). Pithouse focuses particularly on Clegg’s relationships with Charlie Mzila and Sipho Mchunu, arguing that these are not only examples of white–black integration, but also of middle class–working class interaction.

Clegg’s international impact is discussed in Chapters 8 and 10. In Chapter 8, Lucilla Spini interrogates Clegg’s popularity in France during the 1980s, and how, through record labels such as Celluloid, French audiences acquired an affinity for African music and activism. Spini focuses particularly on Clegg’s work with French singer Renaud Sechan – with whom he would share a lifelong friendship. Spini also co-authored Chapter 10 with Andrew J. Friedland, where the focus shifts to Johnny Clegg as the anthropologist and academic. This chapter

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documents Clegg's academic career in South Africa, his decision to leave the University of the Witwatersrand in order to pursue a career in music, as well as the academic connections he fostered at the City University of New York and Dartmouth College in the USA. Marguerite de Villiers Coetzee's chapter which closes the book, is a beautiful and philosophically intricate reflection on the non-linearity of time, of death and of Johnny Clegg's legacy and impact.

While this book presents a series of strong and critically robust chapters, there is a single chapter that falls noticeably short. As mentioned, the complicating of simple narratives around Clegg's life is a scholarly strength of this book, and this review has shown that the abovementioned chapters in this book do exactly this. Yet in considering Clegg's legacy – particularly within the context of 21st century and decolonial thought – the question of cultural appropriation is one which requires consideration. Upon looking at the Table of Contents, I was glad to see that Chapter 13, written by Brett Houston-Lock, would tackle this question. Unfortunately Houston-Lock's argument lacks the nuance required of such a task. Houston-Lock locates the question of cultural appropriation within a broader context of US cultural imperialism – which is frankly inaccurate considering that, historically, exoticism within music originated within the borders of Europe. Houston-Lock's claim that movements like Black Lives Matter spread beyond the USA due to American cultural dominance ignores the blatant fact that the danger to black lives is by no means a uniquely American issue.

Moreover, Houston-Lock's defense of Clegg's use of Zulu music betrays a misunderstanding of what cultural appropriation actually is. The issue is fundamentally not one of intercultural musical borrowing – with Houston-Lock using Paul McCartney's use of French *chanson* in 'Michelle' as an example – but with those in positions of hegemonic power utilising the music of marginalised peoples.

Houston-Lock's argument moves against musico-historical fact when he writes "cultural appropriation" – except in rare instances in which an insincere attempt has been made to profit off culture without collaboration or attribution – is an absurd notion" (p. 262). To state that instances of profiteering from marginalised musical artefacts is rare, is simply historically false. Whether one considers Elvis Presley and Led Zeppelin's blatant stealing of the music of black American musicians, or the wholesale use of the music of South African indigenous musicians such as Madosini, this is a practice that is sadly all too common, and should not be swept under the rug as 'absurd'.

While I agree with Houston-Lock that Johnny Clegg's use of Zulu music does not indicate cultural appropriation, his method of arguing this is clumsy and ineffective. Scholars such as Christopher Ballantine² have considered Clegg's relationship with and use of Zulu music with rigour, and the absence of this scholarship in this chapter contributes to an indelicate handling of an ultimately delicate issue.

This edited volume does what good scholarship ought to do: it introduces new avenues for critical consideration. After reading this book I was convinced that Clegg's music and legacy require continuous thought and consideration, and this book will hopefully be the beginning of these inquiries.

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