

Susan Boynton and Roe-Min Kok, eds. 2006. *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth*. Music/Culture. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

**Reviewed by Tyler Bickford**

Studies of music and childhood have a long, if irregular, history (Minks 2002), but childhood nonetheless remains a marginal topic in musicology—Ruth Solie calls it “unusual” in her blurb on the cover of this volume. In the last decade a number of books, articles, and dissertations have begun to argue that music and aesthetics are key elements in children’s social practices, in the articulation of childhood identity, and in adult frameworks for understanding their own and others’ childhoods, and that children and childhood deserve prominent attention from musicologists. In this environment, *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth* represents an important achievement, appearing at an opportune moment to consolidate this emerging literature and lay the foundations of a developing field of study.

This is above all a diverse collection. The authors take variously historiographic, ethnographic, and critical approaches to topics ranging from early modern Seville to modernist opera and Reform Jewish summer camps in the US. This variety reflects the extreme reach of childhood as a topic and exposes the limitations of contemporary musicological scholarship on childhood to date, as each chapter suggests even more new directions for study. By grouping the chapters into thematic units, each with its own introduction, and bookending the collection with a synthesizing preface and an afterward by Amanda Minks, editors Susan Boynton and Roe-Min Kok have brought into dialogue a wealth of scholarship that may otherwise have been mutually incomprehensible.<sup>1</sup> The editors’ accomplishment is to gather and present these various approaches to produce a volume that is not only intelligible but intellectually productive: establishing an emerging field of study without limiting its reach or stifling its methodological diversity. This volume stands out as particularly ambitious and successful in its commitment to interdisciplinarity, which should be credited to both its competent production and the unique potential an “unusual topic” like music and childhood offers for reaching across disciplinary lines. Boynton’s and Kok’s preface is a useful starting point for anyone interested in the history of childhood studies and the current state of music and childhood scholarship. And Minks, whose 2002 article about twentieth-century traditions of music and childhood research established herself as a major voice in the field, provides

a necessary theoretical synthesis in the afterward, tracing out shared themes and extending the volume's intellectual reach.

The ten chapters are grouped into three thematic units. The first section, "Ritual Performance," includes two chapters about religious music in medieval and early modern Europe and one about contemporary Apache girls' coming-of-age ceremonies. In the first chapter, Boynton and Isabelle Cochelin engage with debates about medieval childhood that have continued since Philippe Ariès's seminal *Centuries of Childhood* (1962) put into dispute the historical applicability of "childhood" as a distinctly recognized phase of life in that era. While critics of Ariès argue that medieval notions of childhood are essentially continuous with contemporary childhood, Boynton and Cochelin find a middle ground, pointing out dramatic changes in the role of child oblates in the Burgundian abbey of Cluny from the eleventh to the twelfth centuries—when increasing numbers of adult converts began to fill monastic roles that once would have gone to oblates—that suggest shifting configurations of the relationship between family and church and of the role of children in medieval Europe. Boynton and Cochelin are critical of discussions of medieval childhood that "have studied children alone, without trying to understand them in regard to other age groups" (5), and they present instead a careful analysis of the role of child oblates at the bottom of monastic hierarchies but nonetheless playing an indispensable role in the performance of the daily liturgy.

Todd Borgerding's contribution considers the public performances of choirboys in early modern Seville, and it makes an effective companion to Boynton's and Cochelin's chapter. Both chapters note the charged attention to boys' bodies in religious rituals where discourses of sexuality, gender, and spirituality are intertwined. In eleventh-century Cluny, attainment of angelic status was the accomplishment of older, faithful monks, while child oblates were understood both to be physically vulnerable to disease and exposure and to be potential dangers to monks threatened by "these prepubescent bodies that represented potential objects of desire in a world devoid of women" (12). Conversely, in sixteenth-century Spanish feast performances, Borgerding argues, theological emphasis on boys' preadult status led their performing bodies and voices to be understood as signifiers of purity and virtue. In the context of the feast of Corpus Christi and Marian celebrations, performances by boys accomplished the delicate task of representing divine embodiment, as "their underlying purity could be molded and directed by costume, context, and text, to communicate specific messages" (31).

Anne McLucas's chapter on Apache girls' coming-of-age ceremonies has difficulty finding purchase in this section, in part because it is simply about a very different time and place, but also because McLucas's emphasis on

formal explication of “the elaborate and beautiful symmetry of the Mescalero ceremony” (51) leaves little space for directly thematizing childhood as it is constructed in the rites of passage she documents. McLucas focuses instead on gender roles, arguing that, despite participant girls’ and women’s vocal silence during these performances, they are full participants and even leaders throughout the ceremony. She outlines a “separate but equal” understanding of the “balance” of gender roles in Apache society (58–59), where silence need not imply powerlessness. The milieu McLucas describes surrounding these events is complex and fascinating: the ceremonies are performed on a rodeo grounds with loudspeakers and vendors, viewed from a permanent set of bleachers, and despite the “carnival-like atmosphere . . . the actual performance of the ritual is carried out with care and dignity” (50). This juxtaposition of “modernity” (in the form of capitalism and public spectacle) and “tradition” (in the form of “native” rituals) need not be seen as incongruous, but I wished for more attention to the apparently complex negotiations and settings in which these ceremonies take place, with the goal of better understanding the multiple identifications involved in the ceremonial performance of girls’ transition to “womanhood” in contemporary Apache life. I worry that McLucas’s quick defense of the ceremonies’ “beauty” and “dignity” in the face of the commercialized scene, and her pointed indication that, in addition to tourists, the audience also includes Native Americans from around the county, may only reproduce unhelpful binaries of “tradition” against or in spite of—rather than in engaged dialogue with—“modernity.”

These disjunctures notwithstanding, grouping McLucas’s piece with Boynton’s and Cochelin’s and Borgerding’s highlights important themes. In light of the frequent invisibility of children in academic study, the chapters in this section together forcefully demonstrate the central role children play in performative enactments of group values and identities in different times and in different places.

Three of the four chapters in the following section, “Identity Formation,” focus on adult memories of childhood musical training, though from widely different perspectives. The other is a critical reading by Stephen Huebner of Ravel’s *L’enfant et les sortilèges* that proposes applying the theories of influential developmental psychologist Jean Piaget in place of more common Freudian readings. Huebner’s chapter is provocatively argued and compellingly written, and his application of Piaget is convincing and novel. Especially refreshing is Huebner’s commitment to “employ[ing] child development theories as narrative constructs” (73), rather than as “scientific” truths about human development. Developmental models are often eschewed in the “new social studies of childhood” (James, Prout, and

## Current Musicology

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Jenks 1998) as methodologically and theoretically limiting, and it is notable that Huebner's contribution is the only chapter in this volume that addresses child psychology. Without conceding the scientific authority of psychological models for understanding global childhoods, we can identify those models as profoundly influential discourses about childhood, and as active participants in the social construction of contemporary childhood, through education, parenting, medicine, and even global children's rights policy (Boyden 1990). And while Huebner's goals are more modestly focused on interpreting one opera, Minks points out in the afterward that, by juxtaposing Piagetian narratives with Ravel's and Colette's dreamy and often disorienting opera, he illuminates both as "distinctly modern imaginaries of childhood" (216). The only dedicated critical or interpretive essay in a volume largely devoted to "sociomusical" studies of childhood, Huebner's elegant prose and careful argument remain sensitive to the complex interactions, negotiations, and disputes with adults, ideas, and the environment that can characterize children's position in the world.

The following three chapters, by Kok, Patricia Tang, and Heather Willoughby, introduce a theme that then runs through the rest of the book: adult memories of childhood as both "data" for scholars seeking information about those past childhoods and as contemporary discourses about the adult identities of those doing the remembering. "Representation" is well-traveled scholarly territory, and deconstructing representations of childhood is central to arguing that childhood is a social construction rather than a stable category of human development (Prout and James 1990). To identify remembering as itself a mode of representation is an important move in understanding the changing identities of individuals: memories of childhood are both intensely personal reflections on one's "Self" and also selective portrayals of an "Other," earlier person.

Kok synthesizes these perspectives nicely, bringing her own memories to bear in reconstructing the history and influence of a globally distributed British piano instruction program to identify the direct reach of "an arc of cultural power that extended from the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music in Great Britain to a child in Malaysia" (90). Kok notes that through her piano program's insistent articulation of "civilization" and "cultural excellence" alongside Western music, she "was, in short, imbibing postcolonial values alongside note values, chord progressions, melodies, and rhythms" (95–96). While exposing this rich and disturbing history of postcolonial hegemony through global music networks, Kok also narrates her own process of discovery: her exposure to "critical approaches to knowledge" (99) in graduate school provided the tools for identifying the hierarchies and hegemonies to which she had been subjected. So the postcolonial identity

Kok elaborates in her chapter is simultaneously that of the child in the 1970s under the direct postcolonial influence of British cultural hegemony and that of the adult who applies discourses of “postcoloniality” to narrate that childhood to herself and others.<sup>2</sup>

Patricia Tang’s chapter provides the most explicit consideration of memory as discourse and representation, as she frames her presentation of the life histories of three Senegalese griots. Tang problematizes the life history as a scholarly genre, noting that such narratives “invariably involve a complex collaboration between researcher and tradition bearer, reflecting the selective histories of each” (108). Rather than simply mining the personal narratives of her griot informants for details about their musical childhoods, Tang argues that the narratives she collected emphasize childhood memories “as a way of constructing their identities and reinforcing their significance to Senegalese culture” (107) in a musical environment where griots’ exclusive claim on singing and drumming has been progressively diluted since the colonial era. Unfortunately Tang does not follow through with this promising program: the “case studies” she presents involve a handful of long quotations with little explanatory or interpretive discussion. While the quoted passages do discuss childhood memories, they are collected and displayed as disconnected fragments. One griot emphasizes his natural capacity for drumming as a child as evidence that “drumming and singing isn’t something you inherit; you don’t study it. It’s in the blood” (111). Another notes the constant presence of drums around him growing up. Another narrates his early performance experiences and points to adult mentors. All of these *could* be examples of the speakers’ emphasis on childhood experience to ratify their authority as griots. But because Tang’s interpretive voice is absent from the case studies, they come off instead as interesting anecdotes about what it was like for these musicians as children—the opposite of Tang’s stated claims. I stress my disappointment here because Tang’s essay is a rare moment when memory is directly unpacked as a discursive strategy, and an opportunity has been missed to examine critically and in detail the procedures by which adult narratives of childhood are strategically deployed to determine their position, as adults, in society.

Willoughby’s chapter also examines adults’ memories of their musical childhoods, looking at the early experiences of three female Korean *p’ansori* singers from different generations—Kim So-hŭi, born 1917, Yi Chu-ŭn, born 1972, and Song-hwa, a character from the immensely popular 1993 film, *Sŏp’yŏnje*. Willoughby outlines the shared theme in each of the stories, that “all three overcame specific social boundaries in order to succeed in a male-dominated society and profession” (122). In overcoming these boundaries Willoughby’s subjects navigated multiple, often contradictory positions in

their journeys: as child prodigies each was treated with the responsibility and respect due an older person in their musical lives; and as women performers of traditional music they had to claim often unconventional, progressive identities as unmarried, professional women while remaining committed to a performance tradition steeped in respect for authority and history (and conservative gender roles).

“Identity formation” suggests a model of progressive development during childhood that focuses on the path children take to “arrive” at some adult identity, which can end up emphasizing “coming of age” processes while neglecting children’s identities *as* children. This is why memory is such an important term for these authors to unpack, and while the framing material—Boynton’s and Kok’s editorial preface and Kok’s introduction to this section—does a good job pointing to the meditating role of memory in the three chapters, the chapters themselves are somewhat hit-or-miss in accomplishing the delicate task of treating the children under consideration with the respect due them as full participants in society while maintaining a critical focus on the position of the adults (and, in one case, filmmakers) who narrate those childhoods. Nonetheless, together these chapters convincingly suggest that to understand childhood, we must also try to understand the adults who interact with, discuss, remember, and theorize childhoods.

The final section, “Musical Socialization,” brings together three fascinating studies. The first two look at musical policy for youths in postwar Germany and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan, while the third, in keeping with the volume’s surprising and productive juxtapositions of widely different scholarship, is an ethnographic and historical study of songleading traditions among teenagers at Reform Jewish summer camps in the US. Joy Calico outlines the history of Hanns Eisler’s and Johannes Becher’s *New German Folk Songs*, composed with state sponsorship after the Second World War to foster an East German citizenry devoted to peace and antifascism. Calico writes that “Eisler and Becher . . . needed to reinvent the *Volk* who had inhabited the most recent incarnation of a German nation as antifascist socialist *Volk*. Because the latter consisted by and large of survivors from the former, youth were their best prospect as agents for change” (150). Calico supplements her historical research with interviews of adults who grew up in East Germany and remembered the *New German Folk Songs*. The interviews suggest that “children’s songs are an effective means of evoking the past” and that “enculturation through song makes an indelible, lifelong impression” (163), while also revealing that the songs’ sometimes heavy-handed political messages were transparent to the youths singing them: as one participant states, “We knew very well what reality looked like” (160).

Hermann Gottschewski's and Machiko Gottschewski's chapter explores similar territory, the music educational policies of Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1870s the Japanese ruling class instituted widespread training in Western music as part of the establishment of compulsory schooling, with the goal of building "a new nation that could compete with the Western world powers." Gottschewski and Gottschewski write that "changing the nation meant changing education, and creating a new people meant creating new children" (170). They follow children's music in Japan through the 1920s, noting varying degrees of emphasis on Western music, music written for children by educators and composers, and children's playground music as reflections of policy makers' shifting concern with consolidating traditional identities or cultivating economic and social progress. Both chapters demonstrate that constructions of childhood and constructions of national identity happen jointly and are often inseparable.

Judah Cohen's chapter is a sensitive ethnographic and historical account of summer camp songleading traditions among Reform Jewish teenagers. Cohen emphasizes that songleading is "a phenomenon both propagated and mediated by young people . . . [that] has come to embody an organic voice and deep culture that the Reform youth movement claims as its own" (188). This chapter rounds out the collection as the only piece to seriously consider children or youths on their own terms and to account for and validate values produced in peer communities that may seem silly or trivial to adult observers. Songleading originated with camp organizers as a way to "reinforce the camp's religious and political agendas" (193), but was quickly taken over by campers, who took responsibility for training one another and for composing and disseminating songs and the "schtick"—silly gestures and interjections—that accompany them. Cohen relates a wonderful story about a camper comparing Passover gatherings with "Nutter Butter Peanut Butter," a line of schtick shouted between verses of a popular camp song, as exemplary Jewish traditions that, the camper notes, are "constantly being created, reread, and re-evolved" (198). Cohen writes that songleaders "came to see themselves as participants in a longstanding tradition" (195) that was valued significantly as an expression of independent youth culture. Alongside Calico's interviews with adults who grew up in the GDR, Cohen's study suggests that children can be more astute, engaged, and independent participants in organized musical activities than adult organizers may expect.

Cohen's chapter supplements Boynton's and Kok's preface by usefully reviewing various literature that addresses, directly or indirectly, children and music. His critique of Paul Berliner's chapter about childhood experiences of jazz musicians in *Thinking in Jazz* (1994) would have been useful

in the previous section on identity formation: “The anecdotes are removed by decades, are colored by the subsequent layering of many years of experience, and may better represent the interviewees’ need to portray their lives as logical trajectories” (189). Cohen follows up this point when discussing past songleaders’ criticisms of current participants’ “diluted” and “superficial” performances, noting that such comments “portrayed the importance of the [adults’] *own* teen years in creating a lasting, meaningful personal ideology through the songleading medium” (204). Overall Cohen rejects approaches to child or youth culture that emphasize “an adult hegemony imposing itself on youth” (190) in favor of an approach outlined by Patricia Shehan Campbell (1998) that addresses “children making music *as* children” (191). As a corrective to an adult-centric view of childhood this is useful, but I find Boynton’s and Cochelin’s goal of “trying to understand [children] with regard to other age groups” (5) more persuasive. Cohen’s study is itself littered with mentions of adult oversight, disapproval, and tolerance and kids’ defiance, empowerment, and intentional differentiation from adults (198, especially). I wonder if these phenomena are not similar to (if milder versions of) the classic Birmingham School topic, which Cohen rejects, of “youth that rebel *against* what they perceive as an adult hegemonic power” (190), and I would argue that “understanding a system of youth expression *as* youth expression” (191) necessarily includes understanding how that system of expression is positioned and defined within the larger social contexts in which youths interact, affiliate, and negotiate with adults.

Children’s role as mediators of tradition and modernity are themes that run throughout this volume. It is unexpectedly common for children to act as “conveyor[s] of tradition” (132), whether in Apache ceremonies, traditional Korean *p’ansori*, Senegalese drumming, or even in peer communities of Reform Jewish summer camps. And children are regularly positioned as the bearers of social change, a role assigned to them in the musical policies of postwar Germany and late nineteenth-century Japan. In each of these examples children are crucial to a community’s understanding of itself in a changing world—even in the studies of early European history we see children assigned roles that are critical to their communities’ sense of the past and future. But while popular music is a prominent mediator of tradition and modernity in the contemporary world, commercial and popular cultures remain largely unexplored in these chapters. In part this volume usefully expands the topic of musical childhoods beyond the single-minded focus on popular youth cultures that cultural studies research has established. But occasional hints occur throughout the book to suggest the relevance, even to these widespread topics, of popular culture, media, and globalization. The photograph on the cover, for instance, shows a young Khadim Mbaye, son of

Thio Mbaye, one of Tang's informants, "drumming on a Nescafé can" (114), as the caption reads, but the colorful Pokemon sweatshirt he is prominently wearing goes unmentioned. Pokemon is a transnational, multimedia brand of TV shows, movies, video games, toys, and card trading games that parallels certain Disney franchises as a major actor in the globalization of childhood media consumption. Presumably Pokemon is one recent element of the changing Senegalese culture to which Tang's informants are responding when they cite their own childhoods as markers of cultural authenticity. With the photograph on the cover and indirect mention in chapters by McLucas, Willoughby, Kok, Tang, and Cohen, the chapters repeatedly touch on children's involvement in processes of globalization, suggestively hinting at the complexity of even young children's participation in both local and transnational networks of circulation and systems of value. But this volume lacks the direct engagement with the globalization of childhood that has been prominently called for by Sharon Stephens (1995), and it neglects the increasing participation of children around the world in the consumption of commercial music and entertainment that is evidenced in important recent efforts such as the "Day in the Life" project (Young and Gillen 2007). These critical topics are at the center of the expanding multidisciplinary study of childhood, and scholars of music should take a more active role in understanding the cultural processes of globalization's impact on childhood.

With the exception of Cohen's chapter, children's voices are largely absent in this volume, and children's own musical experiences do not receive much attention. In part this is due to the problematics of scholarly sources, as the historical chapters necessarily examine documents produced by and for adults. But the absence of children's voices is also the product of an important and sophisticated theoretical move, the recognition that "childhood" is a construct with implications beyond the lives of children: adult identities and values are meditated through memories of childhood, as Kok, Tang, Willoughby, Calico, and Cohen all address in some fashion; societies are organized around child-rearing and education just as they are around commerce and politics, as Calico's and Gottschewski's and Gottschewski's chapters suggest; and the presence of children in ritual performances often highlights the representational, semiotic function of "children" as signifiers as much as it indexes the role of children themselves, as the chapters by Boynton and Cochelin and Borgerding point out. Boynton and Cochelin argue, rightly, that a narrow focus on children that does not take into account their relationships with other groups or the intersections of childhood with class, gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and disability would be reductive and incomplete. It remains a problem, however, that this volume spends so much time exploring the discourses and representations that

structure childhood as a social category without adequately presenting the voices and experiences of individuals belonging to that category. Children are a marginalized group, and it is important to seek out and validate their knowledge and experience as children, and to allow them to speak back to dominant narratives about who children are, what they need, and how they should be addressed (topics that, I have found in my research with schoolchildren in the US, kids attend to closely).

As an introductory volume, *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth* looks forward to future work in a burgeoning field rather than reviewing and consolidating an already-established literature. Music and childhood studies remain widely varied, and disciplinary centers of gravity have yet to fully converged around central topics, questions, or methods, so it is too much to ask a single volume to address every relevant issue at length. This book effectively takes advantage of the opportunity posed by the newness of its topic to bring together a fantastically wide range of scholars and scholarship, and to allow themes to emerge from pairings of diverse methods, frameworks, and topics. It is a *necessary* book, and it succeeds wonderfully at opening new horizons for the musicological study of children.

### Notes

1. Full disclosure: I have studied under Susan Boynton as a graduate student at Columbia University, and she has served on committees with oversight of my academic progress.
2. Arguing that remembering is a mode of representation is not the same as denying the accuracy or validity of a person's memories (or the authenticity of the identities constructed through acts of remembering). Another reviewer rejects Kok's elegant negotiation of past and present with a dismissal of the potential for capriciousness, meanness, and even (symbolic) violence in the postcolonial order: "such accounts are all too often taken at face value, rather than being perceived as 'creative reconstructions of the past' . . . whose presentation today may have some quite ulterior motive that has prompted deliberate or unwitting distortion. In Kok's case, one cannot imagine that an examiner would fail a child who omitted to say 'Good morning, sir,' but one can well believe that a child might fear such a scenario, and might now as an adult interpret this fear as a response to cultural imperialism, thereby creatively reconstructing the past" (Cooper 2008:125). Kok's chapter never comes close to the sort of naïveté that Cooper's response implies, and Kok deserves more credit for carefully thinking through issues of her own identity and position in an unquestionably complex and difficult global order. Kok herself identifies "a colonized mentality that constantly anticipates the white man's displeasure and its consequences" (89); is Cooper unwilling to acknowledge that such a mentality might actually be a response to cultural imperialism, and not simply the imagination of a theory-minded woman scholar? Cooper adopts Minks's phrase "creative reconstructions of the past" (212) from the afterword, but he unfairly adds a valence of fabrication to a term that Minks uses to characterize everyday discursive practices through which speakers co-construct the meanings of their interactions. Such "creativity" is not dissimulation or self-deception, but rather productive social action.

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