

aesthetic and political flux in the creative practice of Rudolf Brucci viewed as a consistent authorial oeuvre”.

In this major work, Sovtić tackled what is today an unpopular topic in an extremely accomplished way, showing a high degree of professional dignity in avoiding clichés and commonplace simplifications in interpreting and perceiving a politically engaged composer. Therefore, this is a bold study in terms of its topic, consistent in terms of its impartial problematization, methodologically consistent in every element of its scholarly mooring – from the thesis to the evidence presented and the conclusions reached. The main interdisciplinary viewpoint is pursued in this work between Rudolf Brucci’s creative and social authorial ‘being’, wherein his music sets up one of the most complex ‘traps’ to today’s musicology: the transitional position of a composer who accomplished his oeuvre by correlating his aesthetic and socio-political being, authentically belonging to the self-managed and non-aligned environment of socialist Yugoslavia. Nemanja Sovtić superbly managed to avoid that ‘trap’, unpacking and explaining the complex aspect of Brucci’s oeuvre by means of a non-standard and un-dogmatic discussion of Brucci’s *nonaligned humanism*, compellingly led and argued in professional terms, carefully thought out and shaped in interdisciplinary terms. Sovtić articulated his discussion in a precise and multilayered language, making a visible effort to push the boundaries of our analytical and scholarly terminology.

Article received on March 14th 2019

Article accepted on May 16th 2019

UDC: 781.22(049.32)

BOJANA RADOVANOVIĆ*

Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts

Institute of Musicology

***The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music*, Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, Zachary Wallmark (eds.), New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.**

In its history, musicology has often posed the question of its research subjects, methodologies, goals, and the sustainability of its autonomy and authority in relation to the academic studying of music. Academic musicology has especially been fortified regarding the exploration of popular music. In the “Afterword” of the book we are reviewing, Simon Frith suggests that ‘serious’ musicology has always had an issue with people who “just listen” to music, as opposed to taking music seriously (p. 374). Also, with all of the other social sciences like anthropology and sociology that already deal with ‘the music of the masses,’ the dilemma always lingered in terms of the plausible musicological contribution to popular music scholarship. What is a musicologist to do in this field – to study *the music*, musical works, composers, performers? In a musical area which functions a little differently from the institu-

* Author contact information:

br.muzikolog@gmail.com

tional system of art music, a musicologist may at times feel uneasy and helpless. This is not to say musicologists over the last few decades have not managed to cope with this issue successfully; there are of course numerous examples of insightful and fascinating contributions to popular music studies that demonstrate the potential of musicological competences.

The collection before us, dubbed *The Relentless Pursuit of Tone: Timbre in Popular Music* (Oxford University Press, 2018), edited by Robert Fink, Melinda Latour, and Zachary Wallmark, without doubt is one of these contributions. Inspired by a graduate musicology seminar at the University of California, Los Angeles (taught by Fink and attended by Latour and Wallmark in 2011), this book brings an abundance of refreshingly new perspectives not only to ‘popular musicology’ (i.e., musicology dealing with popular music) but to musicology in general.

This scientific endeavour intends to draw (musicological) attention to the significance of the notion of tone and timbre in popular music and to offer possible analytical paths in current “‘tone-deafness’ within humanistic music studies” (p. 2). The editors notice that in popular music the “dominance of tone seeking rhetoric” is evident, causing *the tone* to become a “quasi-object” in Bruno Latour’s sense. In the center of the discussions presented here is the most elusive of all the qualities of tone – timbre. In order to fight ‘tone-deafness’ and bridge the gap between timbre and tone, the authors focused their attention on instruments, sounds, and techniques instead of “songs, scenes, and personas.” (p. 12)

The Relentless Pursuit of Tone comprises fifteen papers, prefaced by the editors’ Introduction and the Afterword by Simon Frith, counting in total sixteen contributors with different disciplinary backgrounds and methodological stances. According to their main topics, the chapters are divided into four parts: Genre, Voice, Instrument, and Production. The authors were mostly concerned with the phenomena in the musical scenes and music industry of the United States during the 20th century.

Part I of this collection, titled Genres, consists of four chapters dealing with the notion of timbre in specific genre environments such as electronic dance music (EDM) in California in the 1990s, country music, death metal, and, finally, “bass-heavy” genres like reggae and EDM. In her paper, “Hearing Timbre: Perceptual Learning among Early Bay Area Ravers,” ethnomusicologist Cornelia Fales explores the San Francisco Rave scene in the 1990s. Her ethnographic methodology serves the basic assumption of the paper – the idea that the listeners and the participants of the SFRaves were strikingly sensitive to the timbre of EDM and thus capable of continuous perceptive/auditory learning. The second chapter, entitled “The Twang Factor in Country Music,” by music theoretician and popular music scholar Jocelyn R. Neal brings out the question of *the twang*, an essential timbral quality of country music. In a thorough and captivating way, Neal explains the four possible meanings of country music’s defining word, and then proceeds to delve into the particularities of the production and reception of twang – and the cultural signi-

fiers it carries – throughout the 20th century. The question of death metal timbre is posed in the third chapter, “The Sound of Evil. Timbre, Body, and Sacred Violence in Death Metal.” Musicologist Zachary Wallmark argues that the timbre is the most prominent sonic quality of death metal, dealing with the way ‘the sound of evil’ is produced, its role in “ritual sonic sacrifice,” the ritualization and symbolism of concerts, and the reception of death metal within contemporary society. “Below 100 Hz: Toward a Musicology of Bass Culture” by Robert Fink, the final chapter of Part I, introduces the investigation of sound systems and a search for the fitting, specialized speakers that would do justice to bass (“as”) culture and bass as a “timbre of no timbre” (p. 112).

The relations between voice and timbre tie together Part II of this collection. The three chapters presented here examine the nature of vocal identity in different and compelling ways. Mark C. Samples, in his paper “Timbre and Legal Likeness: The Case of Tom Waits” investigates the possibility of “elevating a person’s vocal timbre to the level of his or her visual representation” (p. 119), bearing in mind the lawsuit Tom Waits raised after the misappropriation of the singer’s voice for commercial purposes. The author raises the dilemma of whether the notion of brand can be utilized in relation to someone’s voice, especially considering the diversity of Tom Waits’ vocal expression throughout his career. In the chapter entitled “The Triumph of Jimmy Scott: A Voice beyond Category”, musicologist Nina Sun Eidsheim views voice – in particular the “uncanny and transgressive,

ripe for projection, misidentification, and dismissal” voice of Jimmy Scott, (only recently) a famous jazz musician – as a place for infusing diverse interpretations and meanings (p. 144). The last chapter of Part II, “Auto-Tune, Labor, and the Pop-Music Voice,” deals with the phenomenon of Auto-Tune. Understanding Auto-Tune as “both a *tuning system* and a *tool of standardization*” and enlightening the history of this, essentially, software plugin, Catherine Provenzano raises questions of labor division in the recording industry, as well as questions of race, class, and the sovereignty of voice.

The following, Part III, posits instrumental timbre in the heart of the discussion, delivering four papers. In his chapter, “Hearing Luxe Pop: Jay-Z, Isaac Hayes, and the Six Degrees of Symphonic Sound”, John Howland ‘cross’-examines the use of orchestral and ‘spectacle’ elements in popular music genres beginning from the 1920s symphonic jazz, and up to the latest occurrences of “hip-hop-meets-orchestra” spectacles in the first decade of the 21st century. He discusses “a long tradition [of] merging Afro-diasporic music idioms with lush orchestration, big-band instrumentation, and other markers of musical sophistication and glamour,” thus presenting a history of “luxe pop” (p. 186). Melinda Latour’s chapter entitled “Santana and the Metaphysics of Tone. Feedback Loops, Volume Knobs, and the Quest for Transcendence” discovers the possible bond between Carlos Santana’s New Age spirituality and the recognizable tone coming from his guitar. Latour proposes that Santana’s spiritual practice influenced his approach to technology and equipment, leading him to patent his

“woman tone” and avoid masculine rock aesthetics. The next chapter, “Synthesizers as Social Protest in Early-1970s Funk” by Griffin Woodworth, views synthesizers’ timbre as a powerful tool for social protests in 1970s funk music. Woodworth claims that “R&B/funk artists such as Worrell and Wonder claimed the power of synthesizer technology on behalf of black America,” thus forever changing the way the world understands this sound. On the other hand, Steve Waksman examines the history, technology and questionable commercial success behind guitar synthesizers in fusion music in his paper “Crossing the Electronic Divide. Guitars, Synthesizers, and the Shifting Sound Field of Fusion.”

Part IV of the collection deals with the manners and modes of production in popular music. Jan Butler’s chapter “Clash of the Timbres: Recording Authenticity in the California Rock Scene” delves into the ever-so-important question of authenticity in rock music by exploring the early rock scene in San Francisco and Los Angeles in search of the prevalence between live and recorded musical acts. Chapter “The Death Rattle of a Laughing Hyena: The Sound of Musical Democracy” and the author Albin J. Zak bring us back to the moment in time when big musical companies were faced

with the idea of the listeners’ active role in capitalist music culture; namely, during the 1950s many independent musical acts entered the scene without belonging to any established idiom, announcing the age of “musical democracy”. In his text “The Sound of Nowhere; Reverb and the Construction of Sonic Space”, Paul Thénèrge investigated the history of recording, paying special attention to one of the most utilized and frequent effects known in music – *reverb*. The final chapter of the collection, Simon Zagorsko-Tomas’ “The Spectromorphology of Recorded Popular Music: The Shaping of Sonic Cartoons through Record Production” presents the theoretical exploration of the cognitive process of interpretation engaged when listening to electronically mediated music.

Concluding this review, I am inspired by Simon Frith’s observation as follows: “I certainly finished this book realizing that I understood popular music much less well than I thought I did and wanting to start my research career all over again” (p. 375). Indeed, in reviewing this collection, we must agree that a new chapter in popular music scholarship has already begun. And there seem to be many more questions to be posed and answered, and many more exciting and innovative modes of approaching them.