

Reviews

***Exhibitions, Music and the British Empire.* By Sarah Kirby. Martelsham: Boydell Press, 2022. 264 pp. ISBN: 978-1-783-27673-8**

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Ruling elites have always manifested their power and authority militarily, economically and culturally to rivals and competitors, to those they rule and, not least, to themselves. To rival powers and those ruled over, manifestations of military might offer a warning, while to the elite themselves these offer reassurance. On the other hand, the products of an economy signify the regime's prowess in producing the wealth, however unequally distributed, that sustains the nation and its rulers. Cultural products are a different kind of signifier, however. It is through these that an elite represents itself ideologically and justifies its right to rule.

Australian musicologist, Sarah Kirby's highly informative book locates its study in the multifarious ways that music was presented and represented in a series of 13 exhibitions held in the British Empire between 1879 and 1890. These 13 include four that took place in Australia and one in India, as well as eight in the United Kingdom, including several in Scotland. Some, such as the 1883 (Fisheries), 1884 (Health) and 1885 (Inventions), had particular themes. However, in each one surveyed by Kirby, music played a variety of parts, underlying which were questions around class, nationalism and imperialism.

Helpfully, as well as examining each exhibition in detail, Kirby offers a useful summary of each one in her introduction before setting the scene for the inclusion of music in these later exhibitions by surveying those that began with and followed the Great Exhibition of 1851. Indeed, the inclusion of music in contexts primarily designed to showcase British scientific and manufacturing endeavour raised important aesthetic and also practical considerations. As Kirby notes, questions of how to represent music in such settings taxed organisers, commissioners and the music press. Could it be adequately represented through objects? Should it be present as popular entertainment or could and should its presence be more educational? Here, Kirby's discussion of the 'rational recreation' movement is hugely enlightening (see pp. 110–13, 126–7, 139–41).

Inevitably, issues of class intruded into such discussions. Performances of the classical repertoire by brass bands were often subject to a certain snobbery owing to the working-class associations of such ensembles. However, such undercurrents were particularly evident in the assumption that the presentation of appropriately edifying music could have an 'improving' function in such situations (p. 111) As the author points out, such assumptions were as present in the thinking behind the Sydney and other Australian exhibitions, as in that informing those taking place at the heart of the Empire.

Given that several of the exhibitions featured performances of 'non-Western music' by ensembles from China, Burma (Myanmar) and Siam (Thailand), Kirby gives a number of examples of 'othering' and 'Orientalism' in the responses of

both journalists and audiences. Even here, classist assumptions could be seen. The comparative receptions of the King of Siam's 'royal' band and an orchestra of Chinese musicians at exhibitions in 1884 and 1883 respectively, saw the former accorded a higher value because of its regal associations. At the same time, it was evident that such music could never aspire to the status of European art music. Non-Western music also featured informally in the 'ethnographic displays' at several exhibitions, including that in Calcutta in 1883, and at the Colonial and Indian, and Liverpool exhibitions, both in 1886. As Kirby states with appropriate disgust, 'These "living ethnological exhibits" – among the most horrific and exploitative anthropological exhibitionary practices of the nineteenth centuries – placed human beings "on display" in artificially constructed environments' (p.187). The message – explicit rather than subliminal – was that, not only did Britain and other 'civilised' nations have a right to rule over such 'inferior' races, but it was also their very duty to do so – while, of course, ensuring that social order and social hierarchy were maintained at home.

Kirby's success with *Exhibitions, Music and the British Empire* stems not only from the vast amount of detail she presents and the quality of her research but as much from the way she examines and explores the information she presents. She writes very well and tells the story of these exhibitions with real skill. She is more than willing to make judgements as above when needed, but she also avoids the temptation to poke fun at these funny Victorians and their odd little ways. After all, how will our quirks and fads look to later surviving generations – if any? But one does detect a wry humour lurking behind the printed word at times. As her comments about the International Fisheries Exhibition of 1883 suggest, 'Music was surprisingly prevalent here, although none of it was fish-related' (p. 17). It is a thoroughly readable and revealing study.

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The Punk Rock Politics of Joe Strummer. Radicalism, Resistance and Rebellion.
By Gregor Gall. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022. 295 pp. ISBN
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This is an ambitious and unusual book that aims to comment on the politics of punk rock legend Joe Strummer (1952–2002), vocalist/guitarist of The Clash. Gregor Gall criticises the use of lyrics by past authors to form assessments about Strummer's political inclinations, preferring instead an incredibly detailed study of Strummer's media interviews. Past authors, such as me (see James 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2014), who described Strummer as a 'Third World Communist' or 'Marxist', are criticised here in fairly strong terms. However, one can still argue the contrary perspective: many artists put major time and effort into lyrics, whereas magazine interviews may be used for publicity or shock quotes. Gall's thesis that someone's 'real' politics can be better inferred from interview quotes than lyrics is far from proved here. In