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Sound Experiments: The Music of the AACM

by Paul Steinbeck, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2022, 304 pp., \$32.50 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-226-820095

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In *Sound Experiments: The Music of the AACM*, Paul Steinbeck examines the contributions of the South Side of Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians throughout their nearly 60-year history. Steinbeck knows the subject intimately having studied and performed with AACM artists, and the monograph contains many accounts from the author's first-hand interviews with AACM members.

Over the course of nine chapters, Steinbeck examines ten recordings to come from AACM member groups or individuals. One of the founding principles of the AACM was to create and perform new compositions by its members. This gave the author the daunting task of choosing the selection of compositions from the 10 recordings here to represent the collective's six decades of output. Steinbeck chose recordings and compositions from Roscoe Mitchell, Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, the AACM trio Air, George Lewis, Fred Anderson, AACM Great Black Music Ensemble, Wadada Leo Smith, and Nicole Mitchell (no relation to Roscoe Mitchell). The types of compositions chosen range from fully notated works to group improvisations to George Lewis's *Voyager*, which involves a performer improvising alongside a computer program that reacts to the performer in real time.

Steinbeck begins each chapter by providing historical and social context for the compositions that will be analyzed later in the chapter. As a fan of many AACM artists, I found Steinbeck's storytelling in these sections particularly engaging. I often found myself looking up more information about particular composers and performers after reading about their history, how they became members of the AACM, and how their music contributed to the advancement of this creative music.

Non-musicians may find some of the analysis sections daunting, but thanks to the author's clear writing and the nature of some of the works, there is a lot that non-musicians or those who are new to experimental music can take away in terms of understanding form and process in the making of this music. Steinbeck does a great job of contextualizing these compositions as a juxtaposition of jazz traditions alongside the experimental and avant-garde music of the 20th and 21st centuries. AACM member Wadada Leo Smith describes the music as a fusing of African-American musical traditions with classical music traditions to create a wholly new music. Steinbeck's analyses help to illustrate how that works in this type of music.

Not only does this book provide a wonderful addition to jazz scholarship, but Steinbeck has demonstrated that these artists should be talked about right along with other leading figures of the avant-garde music scenes in the 1960s and beyond. This book could prove useful to many researchers outside of the jazz realm, such as composers, performers of experimental music, musicologists, and general fans of experimental music.

If it seems odd that recordings by one of the premier and longest-lasting AACM groups, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, are not featured in this book, see Steinbeck's previous monograph *Message to Our Folks: The Art Ensemble of Chicago* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2017). AACM member George Lewis's *A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2008), *The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 to Now* (Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2015) edited by Naomi Beckwith and Dieter Roelstraete, and Ronald Radano's *New Musical Figurations: Anthony Braxton's Cultural Critique* (Chicago, IL, University of

Chicago Press, 1993) round out the current books published on AACM artists, leaving plenty of room for future research into this influential and still active collective of musicians.

My main disappointment is the lack of color prints for some of the scores featured in the analyses, but this is understandable due to publishing costs and considerations. The author highlights the use of color in Anthony Braxton's graphic scores, and it would serve the reader well to see many of these scores that have been used as museum pieces because of their visual qualities. Readers can also consult *The Freedom Principle* to learn more about the collective's forays into visual art.

The AACM/Art Ensemble of Chicago motto, "Great Black Music – Ancient to the Future," is on full display in Steinbeck's writing. This book demonstrates the continuous advancements to jazz and experimental music made by AACM members from the 1960s to today, and that there's a rich vein of research ready to be mined when it comes to the AACM and its artists past and present.

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(RE:) Claiming Ballet, edited and curated by Adesola Akinleye, Bristol, UK, Intellect, 2021, 328 pp., \$46.50 (paper), ISBN 978-1-7893-8361-4

(RE:) Claiming Ballet reframes ballet's history by observing it through a diverse lens that veers away from the white, cis-hetero, and patriarchal viewpoint that has dominated the industry. Quickly, readers find that ballet has always been shaped by people from diverse backgrounds. The book is divided into four parts, each consisting of 4-5 chapters written by different contributors. The writers discuss everything from historical influences that nonwhite and/or non-cis artists have exerted on ballet to their personal experiences in the ballet classroom. At times, the contributors utilize abstract concepts that can be difficult to absorb; it is imperative to read this book intentionally, otherwise, the depth of their arguments and experiences may be lost on the reader.

The first section, *Histories*, discusses how ballet was controlled by imperialists as property rather than art; it also covers the history of Black people within the context of classical ballet. The first chapter, "Ballet, from Property to Art," is written by the editor and is the densest. Akinleye utilizes a copious number of analogies and comparisons to other texts, which can sometimes make it difficult to follow. Re-reading this chapter after finishing the rest of the book might help to better contextualize it. The second chapter, "Should there be a Female ballet canon?" by Julia Glech and Molly Faulkner, discusses exactly the issue suggested by its title. It outlines the concept of a canon and how the canon has historically been "a form of institutionalized marginalization" through the tracing of its development (p. 31). Glech and Faulkner argue that holding spaces for the marginalized contains them within that space and does not allow them to truly enter the canon. Chapters 3 ("Arabesque en Noir") and 4 ("Portrayals of Black people from the African