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Tunes for All? Music on Danish Radio.

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This collection explores multifaceted aspects of music on radio and radio music from the 1920s to the present. All 10 articles revolve around the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, and its music policies. The book is founded on contributions of the research project RAMUND, an acronym that covers ‘A Century of Radio and Music in Denmark’ and ‘Music Genres, Radio Genres, and Mediatisation’. The anthology focuses on programme content and production by studying music radio in the context of radio research and cultural musicology ‘to raise fundamental questions such as: What is music? What is radio?’ without forgetting the question ‘to whom?’ (p. 14). The research is contextualised within the tradition of Western music radio research and history of music radio in Denmark with scholarly views from sociology, anthropology and music and media studies.

A profound, three-part introduction weaves together music radio research in Europe, in the US and in Denmark and introduces the chapters. Topics range from radio programming, selecting music, music programmes, music in sports radio, musical diversity, the hit parade, broadcasting corporation orchestras, music and the provinces, finally to the negotiation of musical hierarchies. Although chapters tackle predominantly public-service radio music, its transformation is contextualised historically with emerging legal and illegal commercial radios in Europe. Alongside the book’s main themes – which are music radio production, questions of genre on music radio, nation-building and issues in the historiography of music and radio in Denmark – other interesting issues are raised, such as the tug-of-war between entertainment and enlightening programme policies, the way that pirate radio transformed public-funded music policies, and the introduction of American format radio to replace block radio.

In the 1980s rationalising and formatting public radio and automated music scheduling were unfamiliar in Denmark – or any Nordic country, for that matter. As Mads Krogh discusses, an American consulting company played a major part in this ‘rationalisation’ process resulting in the management characterising DR corporation as a ‘company’ (p. 72). This change of production culture is described in Katrine Wallevik’s chapter outlining the head of music’s work and exploring everyday practices for selecting music and use of software. Iben Have’s chapter on a morning music radio programme reveals how an informative and formal style of speech transformed into an entertaining and informal one, and how recorded music was ‘radiotised’ (p. 129).

Kristine Rinsager’s chapter ‘Presenting a World of Music’ paints a picture of musical diversity and practices concerning cosmopolitan awareness and music. Case studies on the contribution of three DR presenters’ since the 1950s are intertwined with themes such as globalisation, the history of ethnomusicology and how public broadcasting was used to spread anthropological insights. The analysis of personal histories and interests, alongside organisational rearranging and intrigues in DR, expands to include organising the public services network and the subsequent founding of the EBU World Music Workshop. This is a good read for anyone interested in the historical development of non-mainstream music policies in public-service radio.

Henrik Smith-Sivertsen’s case study on hit-music broadcast by DR analyses somewhat similar phenomena to other European countries. The American-style hit
parade and the related format radio were created in heated dialogue with public-service broadcasters. The paper’s research is contextualised historically with the evolution of post-World War II broadcasting and off-shore radio stations, arguing that rock and roll, vinyl records, transistor radios and targeting music to teenagers contributed to a new Danish media-scape. The tension in policy between enlightening public service and entertaining commercial radio is narrated with the help of a young music enthusiast and a more conservative head of the entertainment department, who ‘simply did not like popular music’ (p. 233). Analysis of the repetitive music broadcasting of Top 20 programmes can also be read as an introduction to contemporary radio music programming.

In Anja Mølle Lindelof’s chapter, the diverse radio orchestras of DR, their ‘production mentality’ (p. 244) and how live-music broadcasting practices were contrasted in relation to gramophone music are presented. The 1920s and 1930s saw continuous discursive dichotomies between live and recorded music, such as radio’s being comparable to the ‘living art’ (p. 261) of the concert stage or theatre when compared with the mechanical and reproductive nature of the gramophone. In-house discussion of radiophonic and phonographic practices were dealt predominantly in the context of Western classical music. Paradoxically, this dispute hindered the recording and historical documentation of the DR orchestras. Furthermore, the role of DR is described in the context of music and the provinces and how Copenhagen’s position as musical centre was challenged and its centre–periphery relation discursively and technologically (re)constructed. Nation itself was constructed by binding, geographically and socially, diverse music audiences together as a common audience not only by the national anthem and music but also through pause signals and sounds of the Copenhagen City Hall carillon.

Musical hierarchies in inter-war DR are described by Morten Michelsen against the background of the binary dichotomy of high and low. Instead of ontological differences, genres are appropriately analysed as ‘cultural constructs set up by specific people for specific purposes’ (p. 312). Modern media helped to bring the high and low spheres together – or perhaps brought them together in juxtaposition – but at the same time created middle-brow culture. Interestingly, also, utilitarian views are discussed, such as the idea of music’s lightening up a dull day or contributing to Gross Domestic Product. Live music broadcasts embraced daily and special concert series as well as dance music from restaurants, but excluding ‘music of the stinking jazz dives’ (p. 338). What remains uncharacterised is the nature of music of the ‘dives’ left unaired. It can be hypothesised that it was performed to a dancing audience and thus similar to music of the dance restaurants themselves, leading to the conclusion that their differences were mostly likely discursive ones.

Tunes for All provides great deal of enjoyment and food for thought for anyone keen on public-radio music policies. An impressive-looking book, it is well written, typographically well laid out and a comfortable read. The detailed index is useful for finding diverse themes presented throughout the book. Perhaps a glossary of key concepts would have made the book scholarly even more appealing, because a few of the major research concepts of music and radio research are cultivated somewhat nonchalantly and left undefined. Apart from that, however, it is highly recommended.

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