Gender and Sexuality in South African Music.

Chris Walton & Stephanus Muller (eds.). Stellenbosch: SUN ePReSS. 2005. 97 pp. ISBN 1-919980-40-7.

This collection can be partitioned into several themes, ranging from sexual orientation and artistic expression, gender issues, the politics of apartheid, and the suffering of the oppressed. The blurb of *Gender and Sexuality* states: "These and many other questions are addressed, ranging from the straight and narrow to the queer and wide. The result is a book that is invigorating, at times uncomfortable: a frank, scholarly, full-frontal portrait of a hitherto ignored, but vital area of South African Music History."

The two most impressive papers are by Grant Olwage ("Black musicality in colonial South Africa") and Shirli Gilbert ("Popular song, gender equality and the anti-apartheid struggle"). Olwage raises important issues regarding biased perceptions of the "feminising of musicality" and the "musicalising" of blacks. Gender issues feature strongly in this publication. Gilbert's paper

deals with the contributions of black women in the struggle against apartheid and how freedom songs reflect on the nature of this participation.

Brett Pyper shows not only how the "anxiety" with "female autonomy" is revealed in Todd Matshikiza's journalism in *Drum* magazine, but also how "his deployment of sexualised and gendered images" (24) enabled his journalism.

Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph's powerful account of some moments in her career reminds one of the many injustices and hurdles women face in the world of composers. South African readers will find that Zaidel-Rudolph's narrative resonates, and especially as she fully deserves her place as one of our leading composers. Her ambivalence about the label "woman-composer" is refreshing and welcome; the term should join "poetess" in the dustbin of history. Equally refreshing is her acknowledgment that motherhood "impacted on the way [she] composed, enriching [her] work with a warm life experiences and bringing out [her] nurturing side" (85). This is an illustration of the fact that our sexual being informs our creative acts, but we are dealing here with a much more profound level of experience than the stereotypical beads-and-bangles posturing that Stephanus Muller associates with being gay.

The most fascinating, and most controversial, papers are those dealing with homosexuality and its supposed effects on artistic expression. Stephanus Muller's paper, "Queer alliances", deals with many complex issues including Afrikaner Nationalism and its "don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding homosexuality; Arnold van Wyk and Hubert du Plessis's responses to this nationalism; and how these composers' sexual orientation may be reflected in their works. He paints a picture of two composers on opposite sides: Arnold van Wyk who resisted writing "correct" music for political occasions, and Hubert du Plessis who accepted large commissions from the state. Testimony from Muller's interviews suggests that the apartheid state turned a blind eye to the sexual orientation of these composers. To judge by the testimony of his ex-students, Hubert du Plessis had no reservations about discussing his personal life and sexual orientation in front of undergraduate classes even during the darkest days of apartheid. This hardly bears out the picture that Muller seems determined to paint of a repressed homosexual suffering in silence.

The essay by Nishlyn Ramanna about his compositions is sparse and unconvincing to this reader. The author shares with us his "secretly perform[ed] (…) ethnic and sexual identity" which makes me wonder whether Hubert du Plessis was ever asked whether he, too, chose musical text as a confessional space?

Chris Walton's assertion (in "Being Rosa") that van Wyk's and du Plessis's derision of Rosa Nepgen stem from the fact that she had been accepted by the establishment while they had not, seems hardly credible. One needs only compare the number of their performances and commissions to hers (and the critical approbation meted out to their respective contributions) to see that she enjoyed a very small part of the esteem in which they were held. Nepgen was not a particularly gifted composer, but had, by all accounts, a highly inflated sense of her own worth. This naturally made her an easy target for derision, especially, but certainly not exclusively, among her fellow composers. The author's statement that "not all the Rain Dances in the world could compensate a Hubert du Plessis for not being heterosexual" (69) verges on the ludicrous, and reveals more about his own mindset than it does about du Plessis's.

I was left with some unease after my first reading – not so much with the content of some of these essays, but more with some of their assumptions. Some papers would have benefited from more expansive treatment; one can look forward to more voluminous publications by writers such as Olwage and Gilbert. All this said, this book rightfully claims to be the "first of its kind" (ii) to deal with these diverse and complex issues within a South African context. It is a worthwhile read full of interesting insights and ideas that promises to provide rich ground for further research and argument.

Franklin Larey
University of Cape Town, Cape Town