

Weisbard, Eric (ed.). 2012. *Pop When the World Falls Apart: Music in the Shadow of Doubt*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 329 pp. Pb.: \$25.95. ISBN: 9780822351085.

The source of the collection *Pop When the World Falls Apart* is drawn on from the presentations at the annual *Pop Conference at Experience Music Project*. Since 2002, this has been bringing together different kinds of music writing: academics, musicians, critics, fans, music-enthusiasts etc. This particular book is shaped by the conference proceedings from 2006 to 2008 and its' crosscutting theme is the 'music in times of trouble: the role of pop at times when it seems that the world has fallen apart' (p. 3). Trouble is defined here widely: not only as an external phenomenon (i.e. wars, crises), but also as a part of our normal lives.

As multi-coloured as the pop music scene is, so too is this book. The articles and essays encompass inquiries from case studies of one musician/band to extensive studies about cultural/musical life. Most of them refer to pop music and the pop music scene in the US. A great advantage of this book, yet simultaneously a disadvantage, is the variety of the writing styles and genres of the essays, which shows the versatility of music criticism (as well as the versatility of people who writes about music). On one hand, it makes much more pleasure of reading to have academic writing pieces mixed up with journalism and literary impressions; on the other, some of the pieces remain in the unfavourable comparison.

Superficially, it looks like all eighteen essays, and articles are loosely linked or even ordered randomly, but according to the editor Eric Weisbard, the book is divided into five thematic sections.

The articles in the first section navigate to the turbulences of self. In the first essay of the book, Jonathan Lethem shows remarkably elegantly the physical acknowledging of pop music through dance. Greg Tate traces the history of Black Rock, Alexandra T. Vazquez exemplifies the idea of knowing nothing in the activity of music criticism and David Ritz demonstrates enthrallingly in his article why he became a ghost-writer, who has given voice to someone else (e.g. Ray Charles) while remaining in the background.

The common denominator to the second section is the setting place: Orange Country, California. In his article, Tom Smucker deals with the music in the 1970s: the Carpenters, Lawrence Welk and the Beach Boys. In the next article, by Eric Lott, Karen Carpenter is the theme, this time through the theoretical prism of Theodor Adorno. Karen Tongson explores the sociological and musical structure in the breakdance club Studio K at Knott's Berry Farm in Buena Park in the eighties, concerning race, identity, control, etc.

In my view (and maybe from the global or at least non-US viewpoint as well), the most valuable articles are in the third section, which shows how does pop music respond to massive troubles like war in Iraq (started in 2003) and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, US in 2005. This section is opened with an analysis by J. Martin Daughtry of the sonic dimension of the war in Iraq. Daughtry shows that people who live in conflict zones have evolved advanced listening skills to analyse the information from bellifonic sound in order to survive. However, these very sounds can both physically and

psychologically traumatise those who experience them. Through the analysis, as well as personal experiences by the service members of the Iraq conflict, the author shows that, through the sonic dimension of war, we can learn something general about listening. Larry Blumenfeld's article is about the jazz culture fighting for its life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Political and social statements are subjects for the next paper: Nate Chinen explores the coded context of the song *Somewhere over the Rainbow* by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, which most listeners may not recognise.

In the penultimate section of the book, we can find four case studies dedicated to different music genres, including hip-hop, blues, retro-soul. In her article, Diane Pecknold shows how country-pop hit *By the Time I Get to Phoenix* interpreted by Isaac Hayes, later known as 'Black Moses', became a symbol of black cultural nationalism. The rise of retro-soul movement is given next in the book: Oliver Wang considers the movement both from musical and social aspects. Carlo Rotella's essay opens up Chicago blues scene and its last orthodox member, Magic Slim, who has not been influenced by other blues-related genres and is 'currently the strongest argument for Chicago blues as a living genre' (p. 230). The section closes elegantly with three monologues in the mode of documentary theatre based on interviews with Iowan hip-hop fans by Brian Goedde, Austin Bunn, and Elena Passarello.

The final section of the collection takes us to the world of punk and metal. Michelle Habell-Pallán provides an insight into the punk rocker Alice Bag's strongly Mexican influenced performance style in the Hollywood punk scene, particularly how Alice Bag flavoured the sound of punk with elements of *canción ranchera's* vocal aesthetic, *estilo bravío*. In his article, Scott Seward examines the connections between folk music and extreme metal. At the very end, Kembrew McLeod writes about a media prank, which was born on the pages of *Spin* magazine in the 1990s in Virginia.

As a coda, the volume ends with an article about 'guilty displeasure' of hating Celine Dion by Carl Wilson, which also reflects a little the content of the book as well as the idea of Pop Conference in general.

Finally, the collection of papers *Pop When the World Falls Apart* serves an abundant source for those interested in pop music and culture, especially for understanding the versatility of pop culture as well as understanding the versatility of pop music criticism. Furthermore, there is undoubtedly much more to write about it than I have been able to express in short of this book review.

LIISI LAANEMETS

Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre (Estonia)