

Somali lived what Dr. Larycia Hawkins calls “embodied solidarity”:⁵ knowing their suffering Lord, they were empowered to enter fully into the lives of their communities.

Mennonite institutions should consider making this text required reading for anyone engaged in theology, missiology, peacemaking, service, or witness in their many forms. Peacemakers from other traditions will also benefit from this research. Why? “Mennonites have understood rightly that the seeds of peace are sown in relationship, founded on the hope that God is calling out a peace clan who can teach one another how to walk in the light of the Lord” (235).

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Roberta R. King and Sooi Ling Tan, eds., *(un)Common Sounds: Songs of Peace and Reconciliation among Muslims and Christians*, Cascade, Eugene, OR, 2014. 348 pp. \$38.00. ISBN: 9781625644886.

In *(un)Common Sounds*, editors King and Tan set out a bold claim: “Where barriers between people have come to exist, they are torn asunder through musical performance of common musical traditions” (2). Focused on case studies from the Middle East and Indonesia, the book examines how music has been used to foster dialogue and reconciliation between Muslims and Christians; the title’s play on words derives from the rareness of such endeavors as well as from the many musical styles that are often treasured across religio-ethnic boundaries, like rock and rap among youth globally. Anchored in the specific, the authors try to avoid representing the members of either religion as a homogenous block with unitary beliefs and practices. Rather, they provide localized examples of lived faith.

This is a work of applied ethnomusicology, following “consultations” in Lebanon and Indonesia, where musicians and academics gathered to discuss music and social activism and listen to local examples. As the editors state, “Our ultimate goal became to suggest an initial framework (model) for implementing sustainable peacebuilding through music and the performing arts” (25). They expressly hope that other religious practitioners will follow their example by using music to reach across barriers of distrust and misinformation. Though scholarly in tone, the book includes discussion questions for each chapter. A website with some multimedia examples and information about the accompanying one-hour documentary also helps to make the project more accessible to lay audiences.⁶

⁵ See <http://drlaryciahawkins.org/>.

⁶ See www.songsforpeaceproject.org.

In framing the theoretical basis of their approach to peacebuilding, the editors draw heavily on John Paul Lederach's "moral imagination," which involves describing and then realizing a future that answers present challenges. Ethnomusicologically, they are indebted to Christopher Small's "musicking," a concept encompassing any kind of activity connected to musical creation or consumption, and Thomas Turino's penchant for participatory musics—those involving all present in some kind of direct physical or creative capacity. In brief, the authors believe that music's apparent "transcendence" can lead "musickers" (audiences or performers) to imagine a type of community where religious differences are characterized by dialogue and human rapport, and to then go about actualizing that vision.

After an extensive introduction, the book features chapters contextualizing the relationship of the two faiths, followed by a set of theological considerations. James Krabill's Anabaptist-inspired argument for peace centers on the calling of Christians to take part in God's work of bringing shalom to all of creation, while Sahiron Syamsuddin's interpretation of Qur'anic "war" verses concludes that force is only justified Islamically in self-defense. Nidaa Abou Mrad takes a careful look at a form of chanting shared by sectors of all three Abrahamic faiths, but also helpfully concludes that deep interreligious dialogue must come from a firm grounding in one's own tradition, from finding internal motivation to extend past the boundaries of the circle.

The bulk of the book consists of seven case studies, including studies of a Moroccan festival devoted to "world sacred music"; of individual musicians serving as "peace catalysts"; and of an Indonesian youth peace movement that strategically utilizes rock festivals. A central claim, argued by King, Jared Holton, and Mustafa Said, is that the act of musical participation—necessarily based on careful listening, dialogue, cooperation, and collaboration—offers a kind of behavioral model that can be extended to other types of encounter. As musicologist Christopher Small puts it, mutual participation becomes a metaphor for ideal relationships; this vision then inspires Lederach's "moral imagination."

In Holton's case, the musical collaboration was a long-standing one (between a Christian and a Muslim) that led to respect and affection after rehearsing and performing together in Libya on many occasions. He describes five ways in which musicians can potentially dialogue across religious barriers: through shared listening, performing for each other, learning music from the other, playing together, and performing together for an audience. But King also notes that even non-performing audience members can experience moments of "affective simultaneity" in the course of an emotionally powerful concert that can potentially bond strangers into a shared "community of interpretation." Extending the notion of collaboration to include "musickers" who organize interfaith rock festivals, Tan describes the strong relationships that develop over months of intensive planning.

Other case studies focus on “peace catalysts.” Marcel Akiki describes his decades of work in Lebanon promoting peace through music, and Rithaony Hutajulu examines two well-known Indonesian musical ensembles characterized by hybridity and pluralism in style, repertoire, and membership. Inwansyah Harahap’s oral history of a single accomplished performer of Indonesian “saman” asserts that artistic practice can create inner peace, which is then practiced with and communicated to others.

In their conclusion, King and Tan identify five ways in which music can contribute to peace: in the arena of the musical event, which can draw very different kinds of people together for the shared purpose of enjoyment; in music-making itself, modeling ideal or desired relationships; in musical “convergences” or moments of heightened experience and solidarity; through the work of musical “peace catalysts” who use their success and influence to promote peace; and through musical dialogues and collaborations that are ongoing, eventually leading to other forms of interaction and dialogue. This last point is crucial: people may leave a concert whistling new tunes and even reconsidering worldviews, but achieving true shalom requires deeper, continuous relationships.

Critics might find some of these conclusions a trifle optimistic: does music really have the power to inspire such relationships, at least on a scale large enough to effect meaningful change in interreligious encounters? Does deep spirituality necessarily lead to a peacebuilding orientation, as some of the chapters imply? From my perspective, both music and spirituality can be turned toward destructive or life-affirming ends, with potentially enormous effects on individuals, the building blocks of all social movements. The introduction and conclusion lay out this potential in a conceptually accessible way (despite some diagrams that are so detailed as to become confusing), while the case studies may well give direction to individuals living or working in zones of conflict—the book’s ideal audience.

Krabill references the Dominican Father Yves Congar, who lists five types of interfaith engagement on a continuum of increasing interpersonal complexity: personal relations, social justice projects, devotional activities, prayer, and theological discussion. Music can do some of these things directly (devotion/prayer), while its texts can reference justice and theology. But as the authors in this book attest, it can also slowly help to turn strangers into friends, which is the foundation for any kind of effective “witness” however we interpret that command.

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