

**Music Reference Services Quarterly.** William E. Studwell, editor. New York: Haworth Press, 1992- ISSN 1058-8167 Subscription rate for Canada: \$104.33 U.S. a year.

Browsing through several years worth of *Music Reference Services Quarterly* may leave you wondering what music reference is all about. The grab-bag of topics and varied treatments could be a representation of the kinds of things music reference librarians are apt to encounter or think about through working at a public service desk, or it could be more a reflection of an editor's desire to parade his personal interests. There is a strong hint of the latter in this publication, with its editor William E. Studwell, a prolific author and professor at Northern Illinois University Libraries. Studwell's interests are eclectic, with some focus on the vernacular music of North America, and he contributes a good portion of the articles and reviews. His approach to editing has made for a varied mix in the remaining contributions in terms of content as well as quality and professional value.

The upside of Studwell's liberal attitude towards editing is that, both in terms of content and form, he has made it possible for things to get published that would likely never fit into another journal. To give some examples: all four issues in 1993 (v. 2) were devoted to presenting the papers of a 1986 conference on music bibliography, resulting in *de facto* conference proceedings, while another two issues combined (v. 5, no. 3-4) are devoted to a single extended article what could have been published as a smallish reference monograph. And in some cases these extended single-topic volumes are

indeed published separately as monographs. In terms of content, we find essays like "The Musical Mess that the Mass is in: A conservative Christian View of Recent Popular Music" (v. 4, no. 3) and "Muddying the Well: Contemporary Musicology and Absolute Music" (v. 4, no. 3), which is prefixed by the qualifying "Special Feature Commentary," next to articles that have to do with bibliography-discography, building collections and specific topics in music research. This is the place to find brief bibliographic-discographic treatments of college fight songs, Indian film music, or American patriotic songs. Humor is also allowed: "Insights into Idiom Idiosyncrasies: Unabashed Definitions of Ten Musical Genres" (v. 4, no. 4), is a brief piece by Studwell where definitions of musical styles are ridiculed (for example, jazz is defined as "a basically formless improvised genre which has a number of different established sub-forms"). In other words, you can expect anything that has to do with music to be published in the journal, which makes for interesting reading.

How does all of this fare in a journal with an academic-sounding title and layout? Luckily, a useful feature of the journal is the clear labeling of articles, either as part of a series (e.g., "The search for the Minor Composer" and "Music Mini-Perspectives") or as a type of article (e.g., Historical/Bibliographical, Technical, or Philosophical) as a means of warning readers in advance if they cannot

already figure out the gist of an article from its title. Brief abstracts also supplement the categorization. But the philosophical and analytical articles are by no means of the same scope and depth as those in the standard musicology journals such as the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* or the *Journal for Music Theory*, and it is doubtful that these journals would even accept them. Titles of articles do not always live up to the expectations they create, as in for example the minor treatment of the topic at hand in “The Link Between Popular Culture and Non-Popular Culture” (v. 3, no. 2), the title of which, perhaps mistakenly, gives rise to all sorts of grand speculation. Given some of the mildly controversial opinions expressed in some of these articles, however, we should probably be thankful that they do appear in print somewhere. The bibliographic-discographic survey articles are well conceived and useful from a music reference point of view. Their scope is usually limited to a genre, such as a bibliography-discography for a core rap collection (v. 4, no. 4), an introduction and

bibliography for circus music and drinking songs (v. 4, no. 3), or a two part essay on obscure popular songwriters (v. 4, no. 3-4). These are useful sources, if only because they are available nowhere else.

In comparison, *Notes* has a great many more reviews of books, sound recordings and scores, and *Fontes Artis Musicae* has an undisputed international orientation and coverage. Both of these journals are also sanctioned by established associations which obviously exert much stricter editorial control in addition to imposing more limited scopes. Next to these two journals, Studwell’s publication may seem either like a breath of fresh air or an act of heresy. But it is also clear the music reference issues are not well-represented in either journal (at least in its practical aspects), so *Music Reference Services Quarterly* is filling a gap, albeit in an idiosyncratic way.

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