



***Canadian Music and American Culture: Get Away From Me.* Edited by Tristanne Connolly and Tomoyuki Iino.**

London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017. 297 pp. ISBN 978-3-319-50022-5.

Reviewed by: Allyson Rogers, McGill University

Canadian Music and American Culture: Get Away From Me is a collection of essays that aims to explore the ways in which a selection of successful Anglo-Canadian pop artists grapple with Canadian identity in relation to the powerful influence of American culture and cultural industries. The book is the most recent title in Palgrave-MacMillan's *Pop Music, Culture, and Identity* series, a collection that offers perspectives on pop music from scholars outside the field of musicology. The contributors to this volume are all literary scholars who

presented their work at a 2011 symposium hosted by Sophia University's Institute of American and Canadian Studies in Tokyo. In her introduction, editor Tristanne Connolly explains that the essays are written from a fan perspective informed by literary training. "Indeed we are all writing about music we love," she writes (p. 16). If personal taste and experience are prime motivators for these essays, this may partly account for the book's limited scope, and the extent to which it focuses squarely on the music of white, predominantly male, Anglo-Canadian artists from the 1960s to the present. An essay is devoted to each of the following artists/groups: Neil Young, Rush, Bruce Cockburn, Saga, Kim Mitchell and Max Webster, The Tragically Hip, The Band, Jann Arden, Joni Mitchell, and Peaches. One chapter breaks the norm and discusses industrial music more generally, although it focuses primarily on Skinny Puppy and Front Line Assembly.

Connolly provides several explanations for the narrowness and predictability of this survey of Canadian pop music. She offers the caveat that it is impossible for such a short volume to be representative, and regrets that artists such as Buffy Sainte-Marie, k-os, and Maestro Fresh Wes have been left out. While the artists included may all warrant more study, the complete exclusion of Anglophone Indigenous and racialized artists (with the exception of Robbie Robertson from The Band) is glaring, and perpetuates the erasure of these artists from histories of music in Canada. Connolly makes a more persuasive argument by proposing that if hegemonic American culture is white and Anglophone then white Anglo-Canadian artists are more likely to be implicated in



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

keeping the status quo intact, therefore examining how they conform and differentiate themselves against American culture provides particular insight into Canadian identity. It is a potentially fruitful angle, however many of the essays lack substantial theorization and instead fall into extended personal anecdotes and prosaic analyses of the lyrics. Essays on well-studied figures such as Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, and Bruce Cockburn tend to rehash well-worn themes rather than offer new insights. There is little analysis of anything musical such as instrumentation, arrangement, phrasing, or timbre, and there are no figures or illustrations (e.g. musical notation, album artwork, photos of the artists, etc.). While one does not expect a musicological study here, foundational works in popular music studies are conspicuously absent from the bibliography, and the authors draw heavily on music journalism and popular press sources. The tone tends to be more journalistic than scholarly.

The essays on less studied artists such as Jann Arden, The Tragically Hip, Skinny Puppy and Front Line Assembly, are generally more engaging and consolidate important information. C. E. J. Simon provides an articulate assessment of the tension between the nationalistic furor The Tragically Hip incite among their fans despite the band's persistent critique of unbridled nationalism, rampant consumerism, and Canadian government policies. Simon aptly draws on Eva Mackey's work to show how the cultural construction of The Tragically Hip as "Canada's band" exemplifies her contention that Canada's multicultural policies implicitly reinforce a core Anglo-Canadian culture around which other cultures orbit (p. 185). Veronica J. Austen's chapter examines the documentary film *Jann Takes Manhattan* (2004), which chronicles Jann Arden's attempt to gain a more prominent foothold in the US music industry through a series of performances in New York City. Instead of attracting a new audience in New York, Arden seems to attract Canadians, and her alleged failure ultimately reinforces her celebrity status in Canada and contentment with returning home. Although there is little here on Arden's music, it is an engaging story about staging a documentary film around an ostensibly planned failure to break into the American market. Indeed, the film seems to have served Arden well since she has transitioned successfully into television work.

The most unfortunate aspect of this book is the lack of careful editing and seeming absence of peer review. The essays read like conference papers rather than published articles. The bibliographic style is non-standard and inconsistent, and footnotes and citations are completely missing in chapters four and nine. The writing is riddled with grammatical errors that obscure the arguments and frequently result in cryptic passages such as the following: "Rock and ideology rely so much on identification and affiliation—but if Rush stands for something, it is constantly and conscientiously reconsidering what you stand for" (p. 98). The obtuse and confusing title of the book itself is emblematic of the content. Too often the conversational tone becomes distracting as the authors digress into excessive personal detail unrelated to their arguments. While diverse perspectives and research on Canadian pop music are welcome, poor editing and an unsatisfactory publication review process ultimately make this book difficult to recommend. With a few exceptions, these essays revisit well-worn territory without offering substantially new research or theorization.