

Wallis, Roger and Krister Malm. **Big Sounds From Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries.** London: Constable, 1984. 419 pages. (Communication and Society Series)

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Every nation has its own very distinctive music culture. But what happens when the giant transnational companies move in, when electronic technology arrives, spreading with it mass produced popular music? The big transnationals see the small countries as providing marginal markets and being sources of exploitative talent. But does the money ever filter through to the original artists and performers? Will every country end up with universal westernized popular music that sounds like the Eurovision Song Contest? Or will modern music technology be used to keep smaller cultures alive and thriving?

These and other important questions are addressed by Roger Wallis and Krister Malm in their book, **Big Sounds From Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries.** The book is a study of the workings of the music industry in twelve small nations on four continents: Jamaica and Trinidad in the Caribbean, Tunisia in the Arab world, Tanzania and Kenya in Africa, Sri Lanka in Asia, the Nordic nations (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland), Chile in South America, and Wales. This investigation is based on a three year research project, (MISC) The Music Industry in Small Countries, administered by the University of Gothenburg. The project is also represented as an audio visual series for television and educational purposes and in a series of radio programs.

In the latter half of this century the phonograph record, together with the cassette tape, has progressed to become a medium of worldwide significance. The transnational music industry based on producing and selling records and tapes has an estimated annual turnover of ten billion U. S. dollars. The industries products have wide ranging effects on our acoustical environment, either directly or with the assistance of other forms of mass communication. Records and tapes are potent and omnipresent carriers of culture and agents of socialization for whole generations of youth.

In the 1970's using the strategy of vertical and horizontal integration the five major companies (CBS, Polygram, WEA, EMI, RCA) achieved unprecedented oligarchy in the world market. The main vehicle for this expansion continues to be the Anglo-American popular music record. As the industry concentration increases the diversity of the phonograms decreases with more emphasis being placed on a few best sellers. This involves selling the same products in as many countries around the world as possible.

Social scientists have shown little interest in this area. There is a lack of knowledge on most aspects of popular music and the music industry. As a result Wallis and Malm didn't have many relevant examples of previous research to draw on. They instead collected their research data from interviews with a broad selection of people active in the music scene in their sample countries. This included representatives of transnational music corporations, politicians, civil servants, educators, mass media people and musicians. These interviews were aimed at getting the informants to identify "significant incidents" in the field of music during the period from around 1970 through to the early eighties. These "significant incidents" resulted in a wealth of information concerning the organizational development of music (institutions and organizations), the formal development (relevant legislation), the business development (companies involved in music), mass media development with relevance for music (radio, TV, video, press), and other activities such as tourism, etc. Wallis and Malm then use this data to construct their Music Industry in Small Countries Interaction Model which identifies three main levels of action. The International level includes international organizations, the transnational music industry and related media and electronics industries. The National level includes the local music industry, mass media, music institutions and organizations. The third level refers to the aggregate of Music Activity in a country, including the actual music played by musicians and listened to by members of different musical sub cultures, the organization of different musical sub cultures, musical preferences, etc. They then use this model to attempt to answer some of the questions posed by the influence of the transnational music industry in small countries.

The first two chapters of *Big Sounds From Small Peoples* provide a summary of the Music In Small Countries project and describe the actors in the music scene on an international, national, and local level.

Chapters three and four highlight the problems of being a small country and look at the relationship of the big and small in the music industry. An interesting section deals with the integration of the phonogram companies into other sectors of the music industry, notably the lucrative area of music publishing.

Chapter five, titled *The Enthusiasts* is a hope filled section that looks at the people who provide the energy, ideas and skills to get the music moving at the local level. One of the positive effects of the growth of the music industry is that new technology is widely available and made easier for small musicians to record and reproduce their music.

Chapter six covers the very difficult area of copyright. Wallis and Malm explain the various ways of remunerating creators and per-

formers when music is distributed to the public. They also provide a fascinating study of a number of well known musical works -- Malaika, Guantanamo, Day 0, Jamaica Farewell -- to find out where the money went!

Chapter seven takes up government policies and especially how they relate to tourism, an area which has left its mark on the music life of many countries.

In chapter eight the development of mass media and their effect on music is examined. The authors come to several conclusions. First, the gatekeepers who decide which music are transmitted have considerable influence over public taste, and thus a great measure of cultural responsibility. Secondly, even if local music is considered to be of poor quality, it will not get better by being ignored by the local broadcasters. Thirdly, freedom of action and ability to support local culture is heavily curtailed if they do not engage in their own recording activities.

Chapters nine and ten summarize the state of affairs and look towards the future. The large record companies are joining forces with the electronics industry, hence today EMI provides the software and Thorn the hardware. The industry is on the threshold of complex new digital and laser techniques. The same technical norms have been infused throughout the world. But apparently all hope is not lost! At the same time the new music technology provides enormous opportunities for local musicians to develop their skills. The authors tell us that, "human beings have incredible qualities of resilience which can be called on when things dear to their hearts are threatened. The threat of being flooded by a nationless transnational music culture leads to counter-actions in the form of local sub-cultures."

The sheer size and complexity of the Music In Small Countries project leaves one in awe at times. The books sometimes seems too large and too detailed to absorb properly. A more explicit theoretical framework would probably have helped in this respect. An important question that must be raised is, why the small countries? Wallis and Malm explain that, "studying these questions in a sample of small countries is a practical approach to a complex problem area...Small countries by virtue of their vulnerability are more likely to provide evidence of patterns of change at an early stage than larger nations." Is this really the case? Are the patterns of change not first visible in the large industrialized countries where new technology and music are first introduced? Also if the threat of transnational music leads to the formation of musical subcultures does it not follow that the record companies will exploit and "co-opt" these subcultures. Take the punk rock movement as an example. As soon as it was apparent that punk would sell every major record label scrambled to find and sign up a band.

As a whole, **Big Sounds From Small Peoples** is an imaginative piece of research of the kind that is long overdue. In order for people to have a chance to steer the international music industry, we must first understand how it operates. Wallis and Malm have provided us with a pioneering effort in this direction. They add greatly to our body of knowledge. In the words of reggae musician Jimmy Cliff, "The whole system is a vampire, everybody's out to dig you out or rip you off -- you have to learn or you get burned."

This is a book that should be read by all those concerned with the world of music.