

van der Linden, Bob: *Arnold Bake. A Life with South Asian Music*. London: Routledge 2018. ISBN: 978-1-138-56180-9; 172 S.

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Ethnomusicology encounters Global History: Such is the implicit agenda of Bob van der Linden's illuminating biography of Arnold Bake (1899–1963). The study represents a highly valuable contribution to both fields: It fills a major gap in the intellectual history of ethnomusicology and, in doing so, joins recent calls within this discipline to return, again, to a historical perspective.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, van der Linden's account can be easily linked to research on global biographies, on cultural brokers and on the circulation of knowledge, all of which are thriving approaches in Global History.<sup>2</sup> Whereas these fields are extremely diverse by definition, Bake's story is of particular relevance for anybody interested in cultural relations between South Asia and Europe in the 20th century. As van der Linden convincingly argues, historians have largely overlooked the musical dimension of these relations.

Next to Jaap Kunst, who coined the term „ethnomusicology“ in 1950, Arnold Bake was the most enigmatic Dutch ethnomusicologist *avant la lettre* in the first half of the 20th century. Born in 1899 into a musical family, Bake for some time considered becoming a singer, before he ended up studying Asian languages. He learnt Sanskrit and Bengali and completed his dissertation, a translation of a 17th century Sanskrit treatise on music, at Visva-Bharati, the university founded by Rabindranath Tagore in Santiniketan. Altogether, he and his wife Carrie spent almost 17 years in South Asia researching and practicing music of all kinds, his primary motivation being „to understand what was happening musically in Indian society and the world from a comparative historical perspective“ (p. 123).

At least four recurrent aspects in van der Linden's strictly chronological account are noteworthy. First, Bake's views on Indian music reflect the complex interplay of European presuppositions, individual aesthetic prefer-

ences and efforts to do justice to local music traditions. On the one hand, Bake's perspective was clearly shaped by conventional elements of Western music. For example, he certainly believed in the notion of musical progress, and he lobbied for Indian singing instruction modelled after the European pattern. Likewise, he perceived India as a „living museum“ whose traditions would be threatened with extinction and, therefore, have to be preserved by recordings, films and photos. On the other hand, he did not share his colleagues' interest in Indian art music. Instead, he highlighted the need to delve into the highly variegated worlds of Indian folk music. In particular, he recommended a modernization of Indian music from within, here following up on the renowned Indian music reformer Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande. Also, Bake repeatedly criticized the vast dissemination of the European harmonium in India, which would have a negative impact on the development of modern Indian folk music. Tracing Bake's nuanced reflections very carefully, van der Linden shows just how much space was left between orientalist hardliners trying to freeze musical traditions and radical modernizers who aspired to a Western-shaped musical modernity.

Secondly, the close scrutiny of Bake's activities in South Asia allows for illuminating insights into the everyday aspects of research there in the first half of the twentieth century, including the various networks and the colonial infrastructure that allowed them to prosper. Bake, one gets the impression, was smack in the middle of them, at least in musical respect. Next to his close co-operation with the Tagore family, he also got together with the highly influential Bhatkhande and corresponded with almost every European who had a stake in the research and prac-

<sup>1</sup> See Jonathan McCollum / David Hebert (eds.), *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*. Lanham, MD 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Isabella Löhr, *Lives Beyond Borders, or: How to Trace Global Biographies, 1880-1950*, in: *Comparativ* 23 (2013), pp. 7–21; Martin Rempe / Claudius Torp, *Cultural Brokers and the Making of Glocal Soundscapes, 1880s to 1930s*, in: *Itinerario* 41 (2017), pp. 223–233; Stefanie Gänger, *Circulation. Reflections on Circularity, Entity and Liquidity in the Language of Global History*, in: *Journal of Global History* 12 (2017), pp. 303–318.

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tice of Indian music. At the same time, Bake and his wife made the acquaintance of Mahatma Gandhi and the Viceroy Lord Erwin, he chatted with Annie Besant and other people from the theosophical movement, and he collaborated with scholars from other disciplines such as Sylvain Lévi, a French orientalist whom he accompanied to Nepal. In the description of all these encounters, van der Linden never loses sight of the political and socio-economic conditions that enabled them, which makes for a somewhat ambivalent picture. On the one hand, Bake often relied on the British colonial administration and its Indian counterparts to facilitate his research. On the other hand, he was constantly in shortage of money and, despite rather unstable health, often opted for a very simple way of life.

Thirdly, and perhaps most staggeringly, no one did more to promote Indian music in the West in the era before Ravi Shankar than Bake. This holds especially true for the songs of Rabindranath Tagore. Indeed, Bake not only recorded a few of them in Paris for the French *Pathé* in 1930 and gave countless lectures and recitals in Europe as well as in the US and Canada. He also edited a book with musical transcriptions of 26 Tagore songs, including the translations of the lyrics and interpretative explanations. These promotions came with full approval of the poet-musician who held Bake's singing in high esteem. Despite some reservations on the personal level, the collaboration represented a successful cross-cultural encounter for both, and van der Linden has good reason to argue that the Dutchman was at the forefront of those who effectively made the noble prize laureate better known to the world.

Fourthly, Bake played a crucial role in the establishment of ethnomusicology as a discipline in Great Britain and beyond. In 1948, he became a lecturer for Sanskrit with special reference to music at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) in London. As such, he was the first university scholar to teach Indian music in the West. Even if his idea to establish a proper music institute at the School did not materialize further during his life time, his tireless efforts may certainly have a part in the fact that the SOAS music department finally founded in 1979 is today the

most important center for the study of non-Western music in Europe. Apart from that, Bake was also a founding member of the International Folk Music Council and engaged in many theoretical debates about Indian music, especially on *ragas* (melodic structures) and *shrutis* (microtones), in order to level out ethnomusicology as an academic discipline.

Because of the purely chronological approach, van der Linden's account adopts in parts a documentary character and is sometimes a dense reading. However, rich illustration and a very concise conclusion make up for these minor objections. Altogether, his study sheds new light on the history of musical relations between the East and the West in the first half of the 20th century. As such, it represents another important contribution to the emerging field of Global Music History in which ethnomusicologists loom large as objects of investigation and as interdisciplinary points of contact.<sup>3</sup>

HistLit 2019-2-112 / Martin Rempe über van der Linden, Bob: *Arnold Bake. A Life with South Asian Music*. London 2018, in: H-Soz-Kult 16.05.2019.

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<sup>3</sup>See also Bob van der Linden, Non-Western National Music and Empire in Global History. Interactions, Uniformities, and Comparisons, in: *Journal of Global History* 10 (2015), pp. 431–456.