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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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Reynolds, Dwight. *The Musical Heritage of Al-Andalus*. SOAS Studies in Music. Abingdon, Oxton: Routledge, 2021. 978-0-369-24314-2. 272pp. 17 b&w illustrations. \$138 hardback, \$48.95 paperback.

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Dwight Reynolds' *The Musical Heritage of Al-Andalus*, the first book of its scope and rigor, offers a much-needed encyclopedic history of music in the Iberian Peninsula from the period of Islamic conquest in 711 CE to the final expulsions of Moriscos in the seventeenth century. In line with Reynolds' characteristic prowess for big-picture storytelling, translation from numerous languages, and detailed evidence-based textual arguments, this new book will quickly become the new standard for teaching in the anglophone world and a handy reference for scholars in the disciplines of Mediterranean Studies, Andalusi Music Studies, Ethnomusicology, Early Music (European), and History. The text is terse and direct and is accessible for non-specialists, thanks to Reynolds' meticulous definition of terminology and his modular organizational approach, which includes five sections with short chapters within.

Ever a good teacher in his writing, Reynolds leaves many openings for further study and exploration, never shying away from identifying what remains ambiguous, unknown, or likely unknowable. Reynolds' primary concern is the articulation of an authoritative history, but he also offers instruction along the way on *how* to write history with care toward the compiling and analysis of evidence and sensitivity toward the humanity and complexity of the characters that animate his story. For instance, he openly discusses the challenges of writing history with scant documentation, the unreliable veracity of sources, and the problematics of interpreting visual images, like those found in the thirteenth-century *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. When faced with inconclusive historical findings, he includes all possible scenarios in order of their likelihood.

The thrust of Reynolds' critical history concerns the dynamics of social, cultural, and religious interaction in the creation of new musical forms and practice in al-Andalus. In all the periods under study – Iberian music before 711, Andalusi music to the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate, the Medieval period, and post-Umayyad Iberia – Reynolds identifies key political figures, musicians, composers, and important musical social roles and categories like the *qiyān* (singing slave girls) and *juglares* (minstrels) and *bailadores* (dancers). Beyond this, however, he also describes, to the best of historical knowledge, what courtly contexts, composition processes, performance and listening contexts, and social interactions of performers may have been like. In familiar Reynolds style, the people of the text come alive in his translations of alternately hilarious, mundane, crude, and serious textual excerpts describing music-making. Reynolds

productively complicates concepts like indigeneity, “Arabs,” and “Spain” (13) and considers the social dimensions of gender and class.

Sandwiched in the middle of the book, Reynolds explores what he terms “musical mutual intelligibility” (141) in the richest contextualization of this concept to date. Reynolds argues that the cultural and religious admixture and geographic movement of musicians, musical forms, and the material culture and techniques of instruments in the medieval Mediterranean world created circumstances in which music and musicians from different origins were readily comprehensible to each other. He successfully illustrates this concept through the lenses of cultural, religious, and musical divergences and convergences on the levels of individual musicians and large-scale geopolitical powers. This theme continues throughout the book, though I had hoped he might return to address the current state of “musical mutual intelligibility” (or its lack) in his “Epilogue” about Andalusí music since the seventeenth century.

At several points, Reynolds does subtle but powerful work to dispel myths of musical purity and fixity. Though he does not make any direct statements to this effect, by acknowledging the mixed, dynamic, and hybrid development of Andalusí music in Iberia, Reynolds also weighs in on modern-day exclusive or narrow claims of Andalusí musical heritage ownership. Backed by detailed and well-reasoned evidence, this is an important message for contemporary practitioners and scholars of Andalusí musics, especially in North Africa, where nationalism, revival, and heritagization have shaped the very definition of Andalusí music. Reynolds’ themes of connection, interaction, inclusion, and change are a crucial counter to persistent nationalist narratives, like those in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, that often (1) privilege singular melodies and texts as ‘authentic’ over other regional variants, (2) write-out particular historical actors to suit current political agendas, and (3) suggest that contemporary performance and listening practices are unchanged since Medieval times. Today, North African Andalusí musics are deeply embroiled not only in matters of heritage preservation and revival, but also in issues of nationhood, race and racism, class and elitism, indigenous identity, and minority cultural groups.

For me, a scholar of contemporary Andalusí music practice in Tunisia, Reynolds’ detailed history offers essential historical background for interpreting present-day realities. His inferences about musical melodies in relation to poetic rhyming structure in the *muwashshah* (167-8) is hugely informative for my own exploration of the contemporary use of melismatic vocables to fill ‘empty space’ in Tunisian *ma’lūf*. Reynolds’ discussion of the *muwashshah* ‘refrain’ also has bearing on my study of the participatory listening practices of modern audiences (183). Reynolds’ discussion of Andalusí *contrafacta* musical composition practices – the application of new lyrics to a pre-existing melody – is also key in contextualizing and understanding more recent instances of this technique. Reynolds’ modular approach allows for individual chapters to be used as readings for topics courses; I have already assigned Chapter 6. “Instrumentarium” in an undergraduate course on North African music, arts, and culture with great success.

Finally, I will offer a small suggestion for the book’s second edition, that Reynolds provide translations more consistently for his Catalan- and Spanish-language excerpts. While in-text translations are provided for all Arabic passages, some Romance language excerpts are presented without full translations (218-9, 221-2). *The Musical Heritage of Al-Andalus* is a significant new contribution to both the historical study of Andalusí music and the study of the contemporary

repertoires and practices of Andalusí musics in the North Africa, the Middle East, and Spain. For the field of Mediterranean Studies, this book offers a compelling analytical approach to musico-cultural history in terms of mutual intelligibility and the changes wrought by fad and fashion, political power, masterful musicians, curiosity of the foreign, collective artistic efflorescence, and forced expulsion. The sheer amount of research involved in preparing such a volume and his efforts to communicate the fruits of his research clearly and completely is apparent on every page and Reynolds' appreciation for all aspects of history – including the absurd, the lewd, the profound, the contradictory, and the silly – are not lost on the reader.



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Author’s Response:

The author was provided with an opportunity to respond to the review, but declined.