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BOOK REVIEW:

"Take Me to Spain": Australian Imaginings of Spain through Music and Dance by John Whiteoak, Lyrebird Press, Melbourne, 2019, 1 + 258 pp., (paperback), ISBN 9780734037923.

Ask an Australian to tell you the first words that come to mind when they think of Spain they will likely respond with some variation of "fiery" and "passionate". Well into the twenty-first century, Spain continues to hold a particular allure for Australians that is unashamedly two-dimensional. Despite Australians' predilection for travel, Spanish iconography in the Australian imagination struggles to extend beyond bulls, castanets, and Gypsy women. According to Luke Stegemann in *The Beautiful Obscure* (2017), Australia's cultural and geographic distance to Spain, coupled with a relatively small Spanish immigrant community, has contributed to this shallow understanding of the country. The recent production of Georges Bizet's *Carmen* by Opera Australia in 2017 is testament to the enduring imagining of a Spain brimming with colour, lust and fervour. On a recent trip to Spain, a good friend who had watched the production at a local cinema scoffed: "It was a crude attempt to throw every cheap Spanish stereotype into one production." She was not wrong.

John Whiteoak's *"Take Me to Spain": Australian Imaginings of Spain through Music and Dance* (2019) is an ambitious monograph that documents the considerable history of "Spain themed" music and dance in Australia and as such situates the Australian proclivity to Orientalise Spain into a relevant context. The title *"Take Me to Spain"* is borrowed from a 1960s travel book by Sydney author Colin Simpson and the monograph is structured almost like a travelogue; it transports readers across disparate Australian landscapes and into a multitude of recitals, radio shows, tin pan alley productions, operas, flamenco shows, and so on, that have "taken" Australians in their imaginations to an exoticised version of Spain. Whiteoak's canvas is vast. It spans the early colonial era with examples such as the dancer "Lola Montez" who wowed Australian audiences in the 1850s with her fiery and passionate—though not technically perfect—versions of Spanish dance. The fact that she was really Irish, born Eliza Gilbert, did little to diminish the infamy of her representation of the Spanish Gypsy woman. More recent examples include the 1950s "flamenco fad" that, as Whiteoak points out, has largely escaped the attention of cultural historians (2019, 199). Meticulously researched and clearly organised, *"Take Me to Spain"* is a compelling and welcome addition to both Australian cultural history and contemporary studies on "Spanishness" and ideas of Spain.

The book's premise is simple: the public fixation with both Spanish music and dance in Australian cultural history has led to exotic (or semi-exotic) representations of "Spanishness" that are showcased to Australians as being emblematic of Spanish national identity (3). Key to this public fixation are exotic conceptions of the bullfight and the Spanish "Gypsy" woman that loom large in

Australian representations of Spanish music and dance genres. In the early colonial era, Whiteoak notes, this was partly influenced by the global dissemination of France's exoticisation of Spanishness that followed Napoleon's invasion of Spain (1808-13) (2019, 9). But Australia's remoteness from both Europe and Spain meant that Spanish music and dance genres evolved in relative isolation, leading to processes of cultural decontextualisation that impeded the correct performance of some of these genres, resulting in the loss of much of their sociocultural meanings (Whiteoak 2019, 5).

Despite Whiteoak framing his study using concepts such as hyperethnicity and hybridisation, the monograph is mostly descriptive, choosing to provide readers an exhaustive historical account of how Australians have been "taken" to Spain through music and dance. The first part focuses on dance and includes examples of stereotypes of the "Spanish woman" and the matador in early performances of flamenco dancing. The second part covers Spanish musical genres including the Spanish guitar and the Tin Pan Alley-style Spanish music that often confused Mexican and Spanish musical genres and was often ethnomediated through the Italian diaspora (2019, 146). The third part looks at both music and dance together by mainly focusing on the flamenco fad of the Luisillo era (1958-76). For some readers, the scant theoretical framework means that they have to do much of the work to connect the descriptive passages to the concepts outlined in the introduction. But its descriptive approach makes the monograph accessible to a wide readership and ensures its well-earned place in the cultural history of Australia.

"Take Me to Spain" does not ultimately take readers to Spain but it does take them on a journey of Australians searching for and *imagining* a romantic Other. That many of the representations that emerged from this imagining were semi-exotic constructions sustains Stegemann's contention in *The Beautiful Obscure* (2017) that manifestations of Spanish culture in Australia are usually attuned to accord with Australia's conservative sensibilities. Whiteoak concludes his book by suggesting that Australia no longer looks to Spain for exotic and mysterious otherness as Australians orient themselves toward Asia and Australian Indigenous cultures (2019, 244). For Hispanophiles, however, we continue to dream of Spain; a Spain that remains mysterious but also multitudinous, fervid, and always, complex.

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