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O'Brien-Rothe, L. *Songs that Make the Road Dance: Courtship and Fertility Music of the Tz'utujil Maya*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015.

Linda O'Brien-Rothe has provided an outstanding contribution to ethnomusicology, Maya Studies, and the Tz'utujil Maya through her comprehensive examination of *Songs that Make the Road Dance*. The book and the audio recordings of the music that accompany it reward study. With each reading the book reveals greater depth and nuance, enhancing the reader's appreciation for the richness of Maya culture and for the author's dedication to understanding, recording, maintaining, and sharing it. Listening to the music while reading the lyrics in the text brings the poetry and intimacy of the songs to life.

The study was possible only because of O'Brien-Rothe's half century of dedication. Her story is integral to the research. Yet, O'Brien-Rothe situates herself in the study without transforming it into a narcissistic account of her personal experience. Her participation in the Tz'utujil community introduces a research context and methodology and offers an exemplary model of what she describes as the facility of the Maya to embrace "foreign" cultural norms and practices as a means of strengthening and ensuring the continuity of their culture. It also reveals the extent to which she became integrated into the culture, even being guided on her own "road" by the Tz'utujil song makers.

O'Brien-Rothe came to the study of Tz'utujil Maya music through the unlikely route of serving as a U.S. Catholic Maryknoll mission Sister in Guatemala. She represented a foreign mission movement defined in its early years by efforts to eradicate what clergy identified as "folk Catholicism" or sometimes, more derogatorily as Maya "pagan" practices. Yet, O'Brien-Rothe's religious training as a Catholic novice also introduced her to "a symbol system expressed in sacred ritual and its music [which] would prepare me in a very deep way for my encounter with the ritual and music of the Tz'utujils" (p. 2-3). The mission brought her to the Tz'utujil Maya's music.

In 1964 O'Brien-Rothe volunteered to help a US Catholic priest from Oklahoma who appealed for assistance to determine if the Tz'utujil Maya of his congregation in Santiago Atitlan shared musical traditions he could engage to promote music in the contemporary, orthodox Catholic Mass. O'Brien-Rothe recounts that she believed naively at the time that the project of discovering and promoting traditional music was politically neutral and thus offered a safe haven from the increasingly politicized context of Catholicism in Guatemala (p. 4).

She discovered quickly that she and the foreign Catholic church she represented already were embedded in a cultural-political context. The Tz'utujil catechists who provided the backbone of the "orthodox" Catholic movement were scandalized by O'Brien-Rothe's attempts to incorporate traditional music into the orthodox Catholic service. Clergy taught them that their traditions were manifestations of paganism. Moreover, the particular songs O'Brien-Rothe selected in her ignorance of Tz'utujil musical culture were for courting. Catechists believed these songs, which were imbued with sexual metaphors and symbolism, violated the austere Catholicism they had embraced. O'Brien-Rothe left the mission, returned to the US and entered the ethnomusicology program at UCLA. For the next six years, she returned to Santiago Atitlan to "discover how music functioned in the context of ritual" within the Tz'utujil community" by seeking out song leaders and recording them in a multitude of contexts (p. 8).

Songs that Make the Road Dance, published in 2015, was the fruit of this early, intensive labor. O'Brien-Rothe characterizes her book "[a]s a work of ethnomusicology [that] explores several aspects of a particular genre of musical behavior, but ultimately it is also a contribution

to the discussion of the nature of time in a Maya cosmos . . .” (p. 17). Fully grasping this contribution requires considerably more than a cursory reading of the book. The layers of time and meaning enacted by Songmen and *cofradías* through *Songs that Make the Road Dance* are slowly revealed by O’Brien-Rothe’s presentation of multiple intersecting geographic locations, cultural practices, myths, songs, symbols, instruments, seasons, and social and spiritual agents. The complexity of the Maya culture introduced through the text and songs defies recounting in a short review.

Insight into “songs” “roads” and “dance” provides a hint at the way “Maya time endlessly repeats the past but in new ways” (p. 33). O’Brien-Rothe explains that “spirits known as the Nawals, “the Old Ones” or the “Ancient Ones” form a specific group of ancestor gods” (p. 20). The Nawals live in the mountains outside of town and provide for the needs of the people, including good weather, health, and fertility. They do so in exchange for sacrifices offered by people through the auspices of the *cofradía*. The currency of exchange, argues O’Brien-Rothe, is movement and more specifically dance (p. 21). “Dance and song are in some way identical” with both functioning as “offerings or sacrifices for the Santo to enjoy and approve” (p. 44). By performing dance and song the songmakers and *cofrades* dance the Nawals to an erect form so they can provide for human needs. This erection parallels human sexuality and reproduction of crops, which also are guided by songs of the road. The songs share many of the same metaphors and words and the lyrics offer beautifully intimate accounts of this process lived by boys, girls, families, and even fruits.

Roads are simultaneously physical roads of Santiago Atitlan that converge on the Central plaza and the Catholic Cathedral, mythical roads followed by the hero twins of the Popol Vuh (the Maya Sacred book), and metaphorical roads that define people’s paths through life. “Songs that make the road dance” invoke all of these roads. These songs help Nawals, Old Mam, people, and nature find and follow the “right road.” “The *cofradía* system [introduced by Spanish clergy in the sixteenth century] . . . provides the pedagogy, the resources, the religious paraphernalia and accouterments and the access to the power and energy of the complex of spirits so that people can follow the ‘right road’ that leads to finally *becoming* a Nawal by having acted like one” (p. 34).

Santiago Atitlan has twelve *cofradías*, twelve volcanoes, twelve apostles, and twelve heroic ancestors. The twelve heroic ancestors are credited with bringing “Old Mam”/“Maximon”/Judas Iscariot, a figure who embodies Maya dualities of good/evil, male/female, etc., to life through the power of the marimba, a sexually inflected musical instrument. The Nawals caused Old Mam to become their guardian spirit, empowering him to teach the twelve ancestors the *recibos* (or songs) that would allow them to follow the “right road.” By performing the songs, songmakers simultaneously reenact the ancestors’ experience, enact lessons of the Nawals, and become Nawals. They also engender fertility of young men and women whose pathways parallel and contribute to the fertility of the “Santo Mundo” so it can produce the sacred corn of which all men are made.

The “songs of the road” which constitute 126 of the 280 songs O’Brien-Rothe collected (p. 75) also follow a path. The first and second are meant for “opening the road” while the third is for courtship and fertility—the root of life. Here, recounts O’Brien-Rothe, there is the literal physical road of Santiago Atitlan where courtship takes place for boys and girls. There is also the metaphorical road of the path of individual life from courtship through marriage, which also begins the path to participation in the *cofradía*, and to family. Finally, there is a literal journey young men undertake in the year they contract marriage, which parallels and reproduces the

journey of the original twelve ancestors who set the path of life in Santiago Atitlan in motion by bringing Old Mam into being (p. 138).

The lyrics of the songs provided by O'Brien-Rothe reveal the parallels she recounts in her narrative. They also illustrate the ways that the songs reproduce the Maya traditions of the Popol Vuh in form through parallelism, meter, onomatopoeia, assonance and alliteration. The music, in which the Spanish guitar, carried by Spanish missionaries to Santiago Atitlan in the sixteenth century, plays the defining role reveals the ways that Maya "traditions" were constantly reproduced by incorporating foreign innovations—Spanish instruments and Catholic practices, iconography, and beliefs. This process is paralleled by O'Brien-Rothe herself who believed that singers recognized in her Nagra III recorder and Electrovoice 666 microphone the potential to record a tradition (that was slipping away), though she noted that the payment she could offer was surely also a motivator (p. 16).

The depth of O'Brien-Rothe's understanding of the significance of these "songs that make the road dance" also explains her lament of the disappearance of the songmakers. When she returned to Santiago Atitlan in 2011 most of the singers she had recorded had died. Some had been killed during Guatemala's twenty-year [actually thirty-six-year] armed conflict (p. 193). This was from O'Brien-Rothe's perspective an acute, devastating loss. For "[w]ithout the Old Ways the road of the ancestors would be lost, the order of the cosmos would fail, and the Santo Mundo would fall into chaos and darkness" (p. 18).

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