

recorded a solo cover of 'I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend' at the same speed as the original ... I'm sure the brothers would have loved it. Maybe.

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Music is My Life: Louis Armstrong, Autobiography, and American Jazz. By Daniel Stein. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012. 349 pp. ISBN 978-0-472-05180-9
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This is not another among the many biographies of Louis Armstrong, but rather a study of the relationship between Armstrong's prolific visual, music and written output, his 'autobiographics', and larger issues in US cultural history, in particular 'the African American struggle for racial equality, as well as American claims to cultural excellence and exceptionalism' (p. 4). Apart from his musical eminence, Armstrong makes an excellent study here both for his high public profile for half a century or so of volatile race relations in the US and because he left behind an astonishingly prolific written and graphic record of his own life, some of which can be accessed on the website <http://www.louisarmstronghouse.org> and in Steve Brower's 2009 publication, *Satchmo: The Wonderful World and Art of Louis Armstrong*. Given these primary materials, Stein's approach is 'transmedial' and 'intermedial' (p. 23), aiming among other things to explore Armstrong's involvement in the construction of his own image, and 'to make sense of a historical development from the construction of "blackness" on the minstrel stage to performances of "blackness" during the Jazz Age and into the era of the civil rights movement' (p. 27). In the process there is welcome demolition of much of the patronising and de-politicising romanticisation of the subject that was set in motion largely by Robert Goffin, as well as correctives to the aesthetic disdain that much of Armstrong's post-1920s music has attracted.

The coverage of the Armstrong archive and the secondary literature is extraordinarily thorough (although Brower, above, doesn't appear in the bibliography, but since that is embedded unalphabetically in the footnotes, I could well have missed it); likewise the readings applied to these materials. These are bold and revelatory, although they sometimes draw a long bow that does not always convincingly find its mark. In pursuing his argument about the degree of Armstrong's complicity in the minstrel tradition, the author notes that the musician's account of his early years in New Orleans 'produces echoes of "coon" images', with references to indolence, gambling, knife-fighting, pimps and prostitutes, 'a panoply of minstrel and "coon" images' (p. 185). Yes, but perhaps they also simply produce echoes of the actual childhood he is recalling in a tough black neighbourhood. Stein argues that the angle at which Armstrong is holding his trumpet in the cover photograph for *Ebony*, which 'extends from his groin' with the mouthpiece pointing towards his wife's breast, 'displays the musician's more devilish side' with its 'obviously phallic angle' (p. 98; you can google this image). Well, yes, but, speaking as a trumpet player, resting the bell on your thigh (it's not actually resting on his groin) when seated, and at an angle, also happens to be a comfortable way to hold the instrument. Stein's conjecture is just that, as in many other stages on the way to his argument.

There is a photograph of Armstrong backstage with, as always, a knotted handkerchief on his head and white witch hazel lip balm, to the latter of which he drew particular attention in his inscription. Although Armstrong was known to wear a handkerchief to control sweat or following a hair-wash, for Stein, a 'more plausible explanation' is that the handkerchief and the lip balm 'could signify many things at once: minstrel makeup as well as witch hazel; the big mouth of the minstrels and coons as well as the battered chops of the master musician' (p. 175). The word 'could' quietly carries a lot of weight here. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

This tendency to make a long jump to get to his argument is something of a pattern in this study. The fact that Armstrong is 'facing a mirror' while reading a letter makes clear 'the connection with autobiography as a genre of self-reflection' (p. 67). Sure, but it also reminds us that the central items in most dressing rooms are a mirror with a seat in front of it. Connections with the world of Mark Twain are both explicit and implicit in the fact that both men referred to 'life' on the Mississippi, and used the word 'adventure' in relation to that life (p. 70). When Armstrong refers to his fee as 'loot', this 'suggests an act of appropriating goods from the economically and politically powerful' (p. 150). Does that apply to everyone (including the powerful) who uses this standard slang? Although the origin of the Satchmo is abundantly documented, we are told here that it is 'a sonic reference to the Sambo' (p. 158). When Armstrong says that Black Benny was 'one of the greatest characters I ever know', this is not simply a demotic departure from 'ever known' or 'ever knew' but a 'phrase evoking a timeless aura' (p. 184). The conclusion in particular is rather rich in overheated and conjectural readings of Armstrong's strange recording of 'Laughing Louie'. Stein doesn't need these interpretive prestidigitations, because at their most convincing his arguments are measured, nuanced and firmly evidence based. But the urge to 'find meaning' can become somewhat suffocating, and Armstrong the musician is often in danger of disappearing behind screens of ideology and analysis.

It is axiomatic that all utterances are to a greater or lesser extent traversed by ideological currents of which we are barely if at all aware, and it is these currents that Stein sets out to navigate. But not every utterance is filled to the brim with ideology to the exclusion of all else. A sob or a scream will emerge from an ideological network, but it is also a sob, a scream. 'A sigh is just a sigh.' This is because there is a physiological and transcultural underpinning to affective utterance, and especially with utterance that is meaningful but non-lexical (including music). Some sounds are just playful sonic doodling, a form of 'play', or related to the idea of Keats's 'negative capability'. Armstrong's output (written as well as musical) is full of play. Certainly, as Stein argues, and overall very persuasively, this playfulness is shaped largely by ideologies pertaining to race and gender. Stein cites Brent Edwards' phrase, an 'excess of signification', as a characteristic of Armstrong's autobiographics. That 'excess' is analogous to what distinguishes the *Book of Kells* from a black-letter *Bible* (and is apparent in Armstrong's own letters). Stein comes closest to engaging with it musically in his discussion of Armstrong's recording of 'When You're Smiling' (pp. 134–9), but even here the emphasis on 'blackness' (p. 138) seemed to overshadow something important about the music.

It is really gratifying to find a study of a jazz performer that recognises so comprehensively the deeper historical and cultural framework of a music that has been so often deracinated or romanticised. The study points in a number of potentially fruitful directions for further work in, for example, cognitive ecology and the relationship

between gesture and cognition. Finally, however, this felt more like a study of 'blackness' than of music. In itself, for all its breadth, and even though framing ambiguities are thoughtfully articulated, something essential to the experience of Armstrong's music seems to be silent, except through the quoted words of someone else, like Ralph Ellison or Max Kaminsky, who described so powerfully listening to Armstrong as 'staring into the sun's eye', so intense that he felt he had to flee from it (p. 134). Kaminsky and Ellison were both trumpet players. Maybe that helped.

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Reference

Brower, S. 2009. *Satchmo: The Wonderful World and Art of Louis Armstrong* (New York, Abrams)

***Music Festivals and Regional Development in Australia.* By Chris Gibson and John Connell. Farnham: Ashgate, 2012. 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-7526-6
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Among the stated aims of *Music Festivals and Regional Development in Australia* – one outcome of a research project carried out between 2005 and 2010 – is an intention to refocus the study of regional development in order to give greater attention to festivals and similar phenomena, often overlooked in a field which tends to privilege larger and longer-term developments as subjects of research. Chris Gibson (University of Wollongong) and John Connell (University of Sydney) also aim to examine music festivals from multiple perspectives, rather than simply opting for detailed economic analysis – an analysis which could no doubt warrant a book-length study in its own right.

The book is divided into two roughly equal parts. The first section deals with broad themes concerning the dynamic relationship between music festivals and the areas in which they are located. A brief summary of the history of music festivals – starting internationally, before focusing on Australia – is followed by chapters on music festival audiences, economics (both in terms of festivals' finances and their impact on the local economy), and their engagement (or otherwise) with local community and identity.

The second half of the book consists of a number of case studies: each chapter differs slightly in focus, purpose and tone, reflecting the diversity of places and events being discussed. The first case study spotlights a single festival (the Elvis Festival, hosted by the town of Parkes), while the second chapter examines and compares two classical music festivals held in outdoor, rural settings. In what is perhaps the most interesting chapter of the book, the authors discuss the town of Tamworth and investigate how it came to be known as 'Australia's Country Music Capital', focusing on the role played by the town's Country Music Festival in earning the town this reputation. Here, the discussion of the role of music festivals in the formation of identity extends from the regional to the national, with attention paid to