Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda and Gisa Jähnichen, *Hindustani Traces in Malay Ghazal: 'A song, So Old and Yet Still Famous'*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 386 pp. ISBN 1443897590, price: USD 103.70 (hardcover).

This co-written volume aims to study very specific elements of one discrete musical tradition—elements within the Malay *ghazal* tradition of sung poetry that are directly related to the tradition as practiced in the Hindustani musical world. To address this seemingly modest subject, the book covers an extremely broad range of historical and musicological topics, moving from Persia through various parts of India to the broader Malay world (including Singapore, Sumatra, and the Riau islands); it discusses the histories of the diverse Indian communities in colonial Malaya, and the popularization of *ghazal* in Lucknow and Johor; and describes the origins of both the Parsi theatre and local Sumatran genre of *gamat* (the latter genre previously unknown to this reader, a scholar of Sumatran music). To illustrate the challenges and promise of coming to terms with the Malay *ghazal*, consider that the *ghazal* seems to have arrived the Malay world at least four different ways: through precolonial Islamic literary circles, the stage productions of the Parsi theatre, the recordings of early Bollywood, and the lived musical experiences of Indians brought to Southeast Asia by the British colonial state (and those who listened to and with them). Consider as well that the *ghazal Johor* features one musical instrument that comes from the Middle East and uses Arabic musical modes (the *gambus*), one musical instrument that was brought by Europeans but has been adapted as a substitute for a Hindustani instrument that uses Indian musical modes (the *biola*, filling in for the *sarangi*), and one instrument of relatively recent creation that is associated with colonial, Malay, and Indian musical traditions (the harmonium). And we have not even begun to talk about the sung poetry, or its singers and listeners.

The book draws widely on a variety of sources, moving between a Malaysian MA thesis or newspaper article, and older and recent scholarship from South and Southeast Asia, by Malay, Indian, and Western scholars. The authors suggest that the *ghazal* tradition has not produced a great range of scholarship, requiring resourcefulness in finding relevant literature. This rings true considering that only recently have ethnomusicologists of Southeast Asia begun to recognize the importance of Islamic musical traditions, and begun to employ the historical methodologies often necessary to understand them. This is perhaps more true of Indonesianists than scholars of Malaysian music, but in any case, the disparity between the plentiful studies of Indonesian music, and

comparative paucity of studies of the wider Malay world makes this volume particularly welcome.

The book contains six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the theme of the book and its research questions, and develops the authors' methodology at length, a methodology to which the three appendices—of musical transcriptions, a complete list of interviews conducted, and transcriptions of interviews with individuals—are germane. Chapter 2 describes the development of the Malay *ghazal*, and it is here that the purview of the book is most broad, as it moves from the precolonial to modern documentation of *ghazal* groups. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 comprise the true analytical heart of the book, and look at the *ghazal* tradition from the perspective of melodic structure, vocal line, and musical instruments. These chapters include significant musical transcription as well as examples of Malay poetry. Chapter 6 offers a conclusion of the sort that summarizes the writing that has already been done, rather than using it to clarify a new argument.

The strength of the book is clearly in the middle three chapters, which offer an analysis of the musical and poetic details known to the musicians—and sometimes, only to the trained musicologist, who is clearly the book's intended reader. The prodigious effort that went into making the musical transcriptions alone deserves special praise. Often, the Western notation is supplemented by figures showing the spectral and wave form of the performances. Although at first, I looked at them askance, by the end of Chapter 3, I recognized their utility in notating vocal intensity or a rhythmic pattern. However, at some times I would have traded this new technology for evidence that better supported the argument—for instance, a chart on page 187 shows songs that traverse multiple *raga* (Indian modes) and *maqamat* (Arabic modes) in the same *ghazal*, a fact that astonished the authors. The surprise could have been extended to more readers if, in addition to the transcriptions showing these modes, we could have seen the scales associated with each *raga* or *maqam*. Similarly, I would have traded all of the Urdu terms for the different rhymes in a Hindustani *ghazal* (178–179), which were not used much in the subsequent work, for just deep, comparative readings of Urdu and Malay *ghazal* that plumbed each poem's respective depths and conveyed their similarities and cleavages on an aesthetic level. The transcription of the harmonium line provided in Chapter 5 (pp. 221–231) was exemplary precisely because it allowed for a comparison of vocal-harmonium interactions in both the Hindustani and Malay traditions, at length.

As I read through the book, I was pleased to find that almost all of the literature I thought to be relevant was cited and discussed. And yet the organization of the discussion consistently impeded my understanding of the argument,

particularly in the first two chapters. Things that seemed only peripherally important—such as pre-Islamic Indic trading patterns—were discussed for paragraphs; while clearly important information, such as the history of the Parsi theatre, was described multiple times in much the same way. The court of Wajid Ali Shah in Lucknow came up three times (and included details about a zoo and aviary) and yet neither his name, city, nor region (Awadh) merited an entry in the index. Discussions of relevant literature often proceeded in an uncritical way, and the overall text was hampered by a lack of clarity about where the authors themselves stood, especially on issues that were open to interpretation. The authors deserve some leeway here, as the very act of parsing the Hindustani roots of a Malay tradition is fraught in a place like Malaysia where the Indian transmission of Islam is consistently downplayed, and a Delhi or Lucknow regularly replaced with Mecca. A sense of clarity as to when the reader should recognize a discussion as a historiographical exhibit, rather than a statement of fact, might have helped here.

Finally, I am left with the impression that the authors' choice of a focus on "traces" of Hindustani music actually is a disservice to the true richness of the tradition that is evident in this book. Such a focus feels like a "search for origins" that smacks of Greater (Islamic) India, ceding the integrity and meaning of cultural forms to Indian, not Malay, practitioners. For instance, I wondered repeatedly why the *ghazal parti*, a North Malaysian musical genre that includes clowning, dancing, music, and gender play, should be explicitly shunted aside in favor of *ghazal Johor*. Certainly, there is more of the "elevated" nature of Urdu poetry and Indian classical music in the *ghazal Johor*, and more of the *mehfil* (the Persian and Urdu word for philosophical music and poetry gatherings) in the courtly culture of the south. Southern musicians have noted as much, which explains why the authors' considered *ghazal Johor* to be the best exemplar of the Hindustani tradition and the rightful focus of this book. And yet by privileging the verifiably Hindustani musical aspects of mode and instruments, instead of the social aspects of music making and listening in the larger world united by the word *ghazal*, stricter limitations than necessary are imposed. Much meaning can be found in the slippage of terms and traditions. Even though the poetry listened to was in other Islamic forms—*syair* and *hikayat*, not *ghazal*—a description of the poetic listening culture in classical Malay courts could usefully have informed this study. The *ghazal parti*, which seems to be connected to the fun and histrionics of the Parsi theatre, rather than the poetic glory or musical prestige of the *ghazal* proper, might remind us that the poetry of the Mughal court was often danced to by courtesans as it was sung, both seriously and dramatically—in short, that the *ghazal* was always a social practice, wherever it was. Luckily, I arrived at this conclusion through

the exhaustive efforts and insights of these authors, who described the *ghazal parti* even while jettisoning it, and who offered many more tantalizing insights to readers willing to extract all of the considerable work put into this volume.

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