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***Tony Allen: An Autobiography of the Master Drummer of Afrobeat.* By Tony Allen with Michael E. Veal. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013. 199 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5591-5**

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negotiated, interactional narratives of ageing in the public eye. Heavily reliant on textual analysis, as well as focused on the performing bodies and identities of well-known women artists, the collection would have benefited from both further incorporation of 'con-textual' approaches such as ethnography, an examination of negotiation of gender and age by lesser known, 'hidden' female performers as well as those occupying more alternative and experimental musical spaces.

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The lack of informed discussion of the creative behaviours, motivations and intentions of popular music instrumentalists is perplexing in the light of the emergence of an influential school of thought emanating from the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice (CMPCP) that seeks to re-centre the musician. Wanting to understand better the role of the performer, the Centre's Director, Professor John Rink, takes the view that 'the fact that we can speak of performance studies as an integral part of today's musicology is attributable to the development of a sizable international community of scholars, institutions to support their work, a large body of research, established modes of dissemination, shared beliefs and values, a common discourse, and a perceived identity'. In the brave new world that might now follow, Rink (2012) foresees that 'the immensely significant role of performers will be fully recognised by musicologists and thus will inform and shape their research'.

Further literature on and about popular music instrumental practitioners, in this case drummers, is therefore to be welcomed. Extant books by or about drummers have on occasion been less than informative; Ginette Baker on her father Ginger Baker's hell-raising, jazz-writer Leslie Gourse's biography of Art Blakey, Bruce Crowther's look at Gene Krupa, and singer Mel Tormé's inside take on Buddy Rich, to name but a few, have tended to dwell much on the anecdotal and circumstantial. Issues of creative behaviour, motivation and intention remain largely unexamined.

Where *Tony Allen: An Autobiography of the Master Drummer of Afrobeat* raises a bar that needed a certain amount of raising is in the deft contextualising of Allen's work by musician-academic and co-author Michael Veal. Veal is a saxophonist and Professor of Music and African American Studies at Yale University, and author

of an earlier biography of Allen's long-time employer Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Positioning both books within the growing field of African cultural studies, Veal situates the life and work of Fela's drummer as a microcosm of the macrocosm of the history of Nigeria in the second half of the 20th century. The music that foreshadowed, accompanied or reflected those changes was latterly based upon the rhythmic lilt of Afrobeat, of which Allen is credited as inventor.

Like Rich, Baker, Blakey *et al.*, Allen's musical journey comprises the usual litany (omitted from the college curriculum) of unpaid gigs, broken promises, bedbugs, lousy transport, worse food, near-death experiences and visa hassles that is the lot of any popular music instrumentalist as he struggles to keep his head above water, anywhere from London to Lagos. Admittedly, unlike Allen, not everyone has to do it through a civil war. He is best known, we're told, as the inventor of the beat of 'Afrobeat'; an inspired piece of re-branding that helped to reinvigorate the 'highlife-jazz' that his employer Fela Kuti was purveying in the late 1960s. 'It was really just a name to help sell the music', according to Allen (p. 62). Being called the 'inventor' of something (or anything) in music is a dubious accolade indeed, deserving of our sympathy. Not only is the hapless soul obliged to defend his position from others who may claim to have invented the same thing, but he is condemned to produce his invention for the delectation of others at every turn, lest others become unhappy in its absence and demand the return of their admission price.

Notwithstanding the description of his skills as 'virtuosos' (p. 16), what Allen plays is not 'difficult' for a competent Western kit drummer and makes little pretension to drum virtuosity in the Western sense of that word. (Your reviewer is a drummer, but my performance experience with Senegalese drummers is too limited to permit further analysis of African notions of virtuosity.) The manner in which it is done seems to me to be more interesting than what is done. The gravitas, deportment, confidence and sheer style of the African or African American master drummers such as Allen, Roy Haynes, Art Blakey and Doudou N'Diaye Rose contrast sharply with the lowly position of their marginalised European counterparts. The Europeans can only look on with envy at the exalted status of the African master drummer – characterised as storyteller, keeper of the flame, the tribal elder to whom everyone doffs his hat, in possession of some groove knowledge that only the groove doctor can enable – in short, an important bloke. Even Fela Kuti, dictatorial in his musical instructions to everyone else in his quartet, allowed 'Allenko' plenty of scope; 'My drumming patterns were all my own. Fela left that completely up to me' (p. 54). Allen's greater contribution, however, may be as a cultural catalyst, a re-agent whose adoption of the Western drum kit made African music more acceptable to Western ears. We're told, for example, that Allen's integration of the hi-hat cymbals allowed him to integrate the innovations of the rhythm and blues and funk drummers – in other words, to become more Western. For this he was no doubt rounded upon by traditionalists in the Lagos percussion fraternity and accused of 'selling-out'.

Veal asserts and presumes greatness in his subject. Both a personal friend of Allen and occasional employee, having played saxophone in his band, Veal states that 'many consider him to be "Africa's greatest drum set player"' (p. 2), a 'view-count' assertion presumably supported by the oracle at YouTube, and which again garners sympathy. To be lauded as not only the inventor of Afrobeat but also 'Africa's greatest drum set player' is the sort of double-barrelled accolade from which few careers recover. For Brian Eno, Allen is 'the greatest living drummer' (back cover). The drummer himself is in no doubt: 'There was no drummer that

could stand next to me' (p. 89), although he tempers this by his pregnant acknowledgement that he needed someone else to enable greatness: 'at least I had one person pass through my life that I was able to achieve greatness with' (p. 173). Despite the poor treatment meted out to him, his loyalty to the mercurial bandleader Fela Kuti speaks volumes as to just how much Allen wanted that greatness.

In fact, questions of greatness abound. As Simon Frith (1996) has pointed out, one of the great pleasures of popular music is sitting around in the pub arguing about who is, and who is not, great. Who attributes greatness, and by what yardstick is it measured? Among popular music instrumentalists, is it to be found *within* practice or *around* the way practice is construed by the broader community which ascribes value? It is a matter of opinion, certainly, but whose opinion matters? Is it possible to be great from the position of a talented sideman in someone else's band, as this book's cover blurb tells us, or does it require something more? Do drummers, of all popular music instrumentalists, need others to enable greatness?

While the book does not set out to answer these questions, they are inevitably raised by Allen's narrative. They hover wraith-like over the text but disappointingly attract no further engagement from Veal or Allen, and the opportunity to do so slips by. While academic dispassion is in somewhat short supply, the book nevertheless offers an unusual glimpse of the Western musical scene from the Afro-centric perspective of a subject highly experienced in both. The chronological narrative is well edited, fast paced and just a little more than it purports to be: an honest view of life from the drum-stool of a 'Yoruba modernist', and is as such a welcome addition to the bookshelves of those who, like Professor Rink, have sought to re-centre performance studies within musicology.

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Following several years of work, a bibliographic guide focusing on cinema and television music has been published. It is a significant publication as it is the first of its kind to provide such useful tools for accessing sources of research on television and cinema music.