

**Craig A. Lockard. *Dance of Life: Popular Music and Politics in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998. 390 pages.**

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Craig A. Lockard has made a huge contribution to the study of both popular music and contemporary Southeast Asia with this carefully researched, lovingly assembled book. The volume documents the relationship between commercially disseminated popular music and politics, with a focus upon Southeast Asian music and performers who challenge the social and political status quo, primarily since the mid-twentieth century. A series of four case studies—of Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia/Singapore—is preceded by an overview of the major intellectual approaches to popular culture, popular music, mass media, and society. Lockard does not advance any particular theoretical argument, either in the overview or elsewhere, but rather seems sensitive to the variety of possible interpretations of the music-and-politics relationship. With a light touch, he cautiously picks and chooses analytical stances when offering tentative conclusions regarding any of his examples. His conclusions tend to be brief. The reader is reminded that it is difficult to generalize about such broad constructs as Southeast Asia, politics, performance. Nonetheless, throughout the region, music has been a compelling means of protest and rebellion under conditions that stifle free expression.

Working with a massive collection of secondary sources, the author traces the development and impact of politically significant popular musical styles. The bulk of his original work was carried out in Malaysia and published in an earlier form elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Lockard painstakingly and thoroughly pieces together accounts from other authors: scholars, novelists, local critics and reviewers, and English-language mass media sources. As a result, this book is citation-rich, with extensive footnotes and lengthy bibliographies. The endnotes and bibliography are a full hundred pages in length, a gold mine for those who hope to pursue in further depth the topics raised here.

The entire book should be quite accessible for upper-level students and others with little background in the region, politics, or music. The case studies provide ample historical and cultural information on each nation, and music is treated without technical analysis of musical forms, structures, particular performances—in other words, there is nothing here that should pose a problem for non-specialist readers or readers without a background in ethnomusicology. The chapter on Indonesia, for example, begins with a general overview of the nation's history and its major expressive forms, with a slight nod to connections between traditional expression and politics. Lockard moves on to document the growth of *kroncong* and its relationship to the emergence of nationalism, then traces the complex sequence of popular forms since the 1960s. He offers detailed profiles of two major performers, Rhoma Irama and Iwan Fals, peppered with excerpts of their lyrics. Due to the publication date of the volume, the account ends, of course, prior to the recent Indonesian presidential elections.

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the November 1, 1991 special issue of *Crossroads* 6.

This book is fun to read. Its interior has a distinctive and engaging “look,” with inset boxes, at-a-glance tables (including statistical information on such things as the number of cassette players and TVs owned in a nation), samples of lyrics, and eye-grabbing quotes, often from in-country commentators. All chapters are enriched by numerous photographs, most taken by the author himself over the past three decades.

As an encyclopedic document, *Dance of Life* will stand as a major contribution to the study of popular music internationally. Unquestionably, it updates and dwarfs earlier accounts of popular music in Southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup> From the standpoint of contemporary theory, and the study of transculturalism, more overtly theoretical books such as Timothy D. Taylor’s *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*<sup>3</sup> will leave more of a mark. Yet I am already recommending Lockard’s book most favorably to students and colleagues who want to know more about Southeast Asia, who rejoice in rebellious, socially critical popular music, and who desire a clear introduction to the standard analytical approaches to popular culture. For those who think that Southeast Asian music is all gongs and gamelans, this book will be a fascinating counter-balance.

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<sup>2</sup> Such as the relevant chapter in Peter Manuel’s classic, *Popular Musics of the Non-Western World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> Timothy D. Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (New York: Routledge, 1997).