

Steven Feld

JAZZ COSMOPOLITANISM IN ACCRA: FIVE MUSICAL YEARS IN GHANA

Duke University Press, 2012, www.dukeupress.edu

2013 Elliot P. Skinner Book Prize, Association for Africanist Anthropology

Companion CD and DVD links at www.stevenfeld.net and

www.vimeo.com/voxlox

Twenty-Six Reviews in Order of Appearance 2012-2016

“The chapters in which Feld listens and retells the stories of these mercurial musicians are compelling, and throw up original and profound material. . . . Feld is brilliant at articulating the multiple overlapping narratives and experiences that both obfuscate and animate diasporic dialogues, and in that process his book attains its own world-historical significance.”

—**Tony Herrington, *The Wire***

“A successful fusion of anthropology and aesthetics that illuminates the musical and cultural links—and differences—between African and American jazz, this is also a fascinating memoir of one person’s attempt to understand the urban culture of Ghana in an age of globalization.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“What I loved most about *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* is that Feld never objectifies the people he’s describing. Feld’s love for jazz music and respect for the musicians he works with really comes through, and his exploration of the meanings of cosmopolitanism, and how it actually plays out in different forms in the real world, makes for a fascinating and thought-provoking conclusion. And the many included photographs just bring Accra and its musical citizens even more to life.”

—**Eva Kay, A Striped Armchair blog**

“[A] vital statement about the infinitely nuanced nature of cultural exchange between Africa and America, and how our fullest understanding of jazz history might be furthered by enquiries like this.”

—**Kevin Le Gendre, Jazzwise**

“This fascinating book opens up jazz from the African perspective. Whether he’s discussing with Nortey the Africanization of his saxophone and his absolute dedication to the music of John Coltrane or explaining Ghanaba’s musical relationship with Max Roach, Feld brings a full picture to the broadening cultural aspects of Africans playing their own type of jazz.”

—**Jon Ross, Downbeat**

“Feld offers an engaging, well-written, insightful work that is both a study of

Ghana's contemporary music scene (particularly avant-garde jazz) and a memoir of his experiences as an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist. . . . The numerous photos are captivating and help bring the stories to life. Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty and professionals; general readers."

—D. J. Schmalenberger, *Choice*

"Feld's new book is a celebration of storytelling as ethnographic form and a compelling portrait of cosmopolitanism as situated musical experience."

—Max Ritts, *Society and Space (Environment and Planning D)*

"Feld reveals the high degree of cosmopolitanism in jazz-pop related musics and the huge role that race and class play in constraining the players. Deciphering the intertextuality of African American life and music requires an expert like Steven Feld. He has done a masterful job."

—Philip K. Bock, *Journal of Anthropological Research*

"With rich and diverse examples, Feld demonstrates the pervasiveness of cosmopolitan outlooks among jazz musicians in Accra, whether mobile or immobile, socially powerful or powerless, rich or poor...*Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* is an important theoretical intervention in 'cosmopolitanism from below' and a powerful narrative about jazz as an African diasporic art form from the standpoint of musicians in Accra."

—Stephen Hager, *Notes*

"In addition to his effective usage of the storytelling mode, Feld provides an exemplary illustration of the seamless integration of multiple roles as a documentary filmmaker, musician, anthropologist, historian, and tour promoter...Feld realizes that not all Ghanaians would view these musicians as cosmopolitans, but that fact seems to actually reinforce his discussion of the discourse on cosmopolitanism and its relationship to race, class, and other structures of power. Indeed, he opens many doors for his readers and tells us stories of why these types of music making are important beyond Ghana. He leads us to a more refined understanding of cosmopolitanism, not to provide a series of answers, but to provoke in each of us more thoughtful questions about our music, our research, and ourselves."

—Dave Wilson, *Ethnomusicology Review*

"*Jazz Cosmopolitanism* is a lively and important book, one that uses the vehicles of dialogue and sound to unearth the complex cultural and political dynamics that connect a group of urban Africans to the diaspora and wider world. It is a fun, invigorating, and worthwhile read. . . .that continues to resonate when finally put down. I highly recommend picking it up."

—Nate Plageman, *Journal of African History*

"This is a very complex and multi-layered text, and at the same time a smooth-flowing reading, for the way it mixes storytelling and dialogue, music-like composition and a multi-sited perspective."

—Lorenzo Ferrarini, *Visual Ethnography*

"This purportedly scholarly work is in fact a thoroughly humane and endearing narrative account of Feld's attempt in Ghana, encumbered by the title "Prof," recording and photographic equipment, a car, and many of the resources one expects from a citizen of the wealthiest nation on earth, to try and engage with and understand Accra's musical landscape and especially those aspects of it which relate to jazz. It's a joy to read and includes priceless accounts ..."

—Ben Robertson, www.africanjazz.com

"The book's greatest achievement is not just this capacity to entertain and amuse, but also to show fundamental aspects of jazz from perspectives rarely imagined, much less investigated. Feld connects his narratives with contemporary theories of postmodernism, hybridization, migration, performance and embodiment. The work is of great value, not only for jazz fans, but also for all ethnomusicologists..."

—Bernd Brabec de Mori, *El Oído Pensante* (translated from Spanish)

"Feld's brilliant work should have a broad impact and appeal, offering significant contributions and interventions to interdisciplinary discourses on jazz, Ghanaian music, cosmopolitanism, as well as (urban) Africa and its diaspora."

-Paul Schauert, *African Music*

"... Feld, a musician as well as an anthropologist, spends most of his book on great ethnography. We do get to know the musicians well; along with the CDs there are seventy-eight photos to peruse. I strongly recommend this book."

-Frank A. Salamone, *African Studies Review*

"What makes this book so captivating, so consequential, is not simply the colorful tales of cosmo-politics, but more precisely Feld's distinctive approach to music-writing, an interpretive strategy grounded in the teachings of linguistic anthropology as it is resonant with the conversations informing contemporary cultural theory...There is, really, nothing quite like it, and in its originality *Jazz Cosmopolitanism* stands as a new model for jazz writing as it also provides a powerful critique of US-based jazz studies... Feld's book suggests, indeed, a new kind of ethnographically centered, transnational jazz studies, one that is deeply attentive to the consequences of nation, race, empire, and colonialism, for these forces continue to inhabit jazz's resonances and interpretations far and wide. *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* will not only become one of the most

important studies in jazz scholarship; it will also provide a provocative indication of where and how culturally oriented music studies might develop.”

-Ronald Radano, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*

“...a magnum opus...Steven Feld’s three DVD set, *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra, Ghana: A Film Trilogy* (2009), in combination with the monograph *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (2012), comprise an intertextual, multi-medium excavation and documentation of three linked case studies of Ghanaian performing artists, whose creative outputs, spanning visual to sonic, deserve lengthy and notable mention in the global canon of jazz history.

-Matthew Morin, *Ethnomusicology*

“...a delightful excursion into the ‘acoustemological’ world of contemporary Accra...The protagonists of this extraordinary adventure in ethnomusicology...are an amazing bunch... Feld links them to a web of contingencies and complexities which emphasize their importance on a global scale...Feld’s work shows us that a better world is possible, and that the cosmopolitanism that matters always comes ‘from below.’”

-Tony Mitchell, *Journal of World Popular Music*

“...*Jazz Cosmopolitanism* is a significant text that bestrides the disciplines with clear intersubjectivities and reflexivities beyond ‘acoustemologies.’ ...the complex interplay of politics of race, ethnicity, identity and belonging, ownership, and glocal and diasporic currents in and out of Ghana are carefully documented ...Many readers will certainly applaud Feld’s meticulous archival and secondary sources that enrich his historical and contextual notes.”

-Daniel Avorgbedor, *American Anthropologist*

“...a very warm and intimate study. The reader will be invited to listen to the people involved. Hearing their voices is important, a point Feld makes very clear by writing in their own style of talking...An integral part of the way he delivers his argument is by audio and video. The Accra book is published with a companion CD and DVD of which the latter includes three one-hour documentary films. Feld is carrying out his research in an academically hybrid environment. This might concern the more textually oriented academic but it is more than evident that the audio and visual documents of the subjects in hand are indispensable...”

-Meri Kytö, *Popular Music*

“*Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* is a book that has its best quality in the great narrative force that flows into a number of insights about earlier research and the West. Feld makes clear that these musicians have much to say, that their ideas are able to make (thanks to the mediation of the author) a contribution to the global discussion, opening a new way of approaching culture in a cosmopolitan framework. The work is also a lesson in method, especially against excessive

attention to localism that sometimes undermines ethnomusicology..."

-Fabio Calzia, *Analita: Revista Online di Studi Musicali* (translated from Italian)

"Through detailing 'off-the-radar lives of people,' Feld creates a means to represent the politics and poetics of cosmopolitanism from the point of view of artists in Accra...he argues that stories provide a means to relate encounters, memory, and intimacy that reveal local subjectivities. For those interested in more information on the way Feld frames his ideas, there are extensive endnotes that provide a wealth of additional information and resources for the reader. However, it may be, for many readers, the stories that have the most resonance and that encourage careful consideration. Vignettes ranging from inequality at airport security to hustling for survival have a way of sticking with the reader long after putting down the book."

-Alex Perullo, *American Ethnologist*

"*Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* stands as an exemplary proof of what jazz scholarship in the 21st century can be: carefully grounded in jazz subjectivities from wherever the music is made, skillfully attuned to its various histories and localized practices, and passionately committed to the jazz improviser's ethos to always tell a good story."

-Alex Rodriguez, *Jazz Perspectives*

"A text to listen to... *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra* is a prime example of substantial academic research presented in an accessible way. The book builds on Feld's close relationships with the musicians...With his combination of academic depth, collaborative approach, and aesthetic sensibility in this book, as in his other work, Steven Feld is a guiding light for us all: musicians, filmmakers, anthropologists in Ghana and further afield."

-Helena Wulff, *Visual Anthropology Review*

"Feld's commitment to exploring 'the seriously off the-radar lives of people who...live quite remotely to theorists...that dominate cosmopolitanism conversations' is well placed. Here he seeks to contribute to a 'cosmopolitanism from below,' one that seeks to problematize less critical discourses of the redemptive possibility of any global communal solidarity imagined as cosmopolitanism."

-Osei Allyne, *American Anthropologist* (Visual Reviews Essay)