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*Music in the American Diasporic Wedding* is a compilation of eleven essays by diverse prominent scholars across the fields of ethnomusicology, cultural anthropology, music, European studies, Latino studies, and global arts studies. Offering a rich participatory ethnography from sites of multifarious diasporic nuptials, the volume’s major aim is to present diasporic weddings in the United States, situating its authors’ work within the “interconnection of three elements: weddings, diaspora, and music—each element illuminating and illuminated by the other two” (p. 14). Throughout the eleven chapters, all authors consistently express the intrinsic nature of music to diasporic weddings. They argue that music is the embodiment of and a vehicle for transcending the borders of nationality, territory, ethnicity, culture, race, faith, and generational gaps. Further, the book details how wedding music can be a powerful tool to construct, represent, reimagine, resonate, and negotiate complex heritage, immigration lore, trans-diasporic identities—individual and collective—and assimilation and adaptation in new homes in host countries.

The introduction by the editor, Inna Naroditskaya, offers the rationale for the book. She opens with a complex diasporic vignette and describes how weddings provide a “metaphor for diaspora,” exhibiting perseverance and accomplishments, unveiling preservation and compromise, linking the past and the future, and celebrateing affinity with both home and host lands (p. 2). She presents ethnographic snapshots of three weddings she attended: two Baku immigrants’ weddings at Houston’s Intercontinental Hotel, a Ukrainian wedding in Ukrainian Village in Chicago, and an Ethiopian Muslim wedding on Devon Avenue in Chicago. Naroditskaya further delineates the diasporic musical kaleidoscope at those three weddings and posits how their music served as a prime arena to represent homeland memory, childhood nostalgia, mixed-diasporic and mixed-generational disparities, and the weddings’ temporal and spatial event. She goes on to historicize royal weddings and
cinematic weddings, focusing on diasporic nuptials. The introduction also offers a brief account of American weddings, highlighting changes between the traditional and the contemporary.

The introduction is followed by eleven essays, each based around the theme of diasporic wedding and music. Chapter 1, by A. J. Racy, deals with the theoretical issues that have arisen within the concept, process, and institution of diasporic and homeland weddings. Through an ethnographic documentation of the Arab world—especially the Levantine, or eastern Mediterranean areas—and the Arab American diaspora, the chapter scrutinizes interpretations made by different theorists on weddings over the decades. The chapter suggests considering “changing complexions” of homeland or diasporic weddings while interpreting them, because “their mutual borrowings often acquire new meanings and nuances” (p. 39). In chapter 2, Carol Silverman presents a similar ethnographic account of Macedonian Muslim Roma weddings in the Belmont neighborhood of New York City, and discusses how a diasporic community embraces societal change and displays changing cosmopolitan identities while maintaining the traditional cultural values of its weddings. Further, the chapter points out musical embodiments in Balkan Roma weddings and the weddings’ fluidity in incorporating American customs to share a common musical repertoire and style. Chapters 3 and 4 address the case studies of Latinx and Croatian American weddings. In chapter 3, Lorena Alvarado and Frances R. Aparicio conduct a survey of eleven couples and four Latino grooms vis-à-vis musical repertoires played in Latinx weddings. They discuss how the Latinx couples’ musical selections at their weddings illuminated “their intimate lives and globalized trajectories” and challenged notions of purity, ethnicity, identity, tradition, and ritual (p. 84). In chapter 4, Ian MacMillen describes the nuptials of a Croatian Canadian bride and a Croatian American groom that took place in Ontario, Canada. He examines their use of the Croatian flag procession and tambura music performance in the context of South Slavic weddings in North America and the Balkan homeland.

Chapters 5 and 6 offer auto-ethnography of three different interfaith, interethnic, and interracial diasporic weddings. Meredith Schweig in chapter 5 documents a Taiwanese and Jewish American wedding in Massachusetts and discusses how music was a critical avenue in celebrating, commenting on, negotiating, and legitimizing multiple individual and collective identities: Jewish, Taiwanese, Chinese, and American. In chapter 6, Tanya Merchant describes her bicultural Bosnian wedding in the San Francisco Bay Area. She presents an example of the Sevdalinka music genre, rooted in Ottoman court music, performed at the wedding and argues how music has a “power to evoke emotion and [the personal histories of] Bosnian group identity” (p. 145). Chapter 7, by Nina C. Öhman, provides an ethnography of same-sex nuptials in New York that took place after the state passed the same-sex marriage bill on June 24, 2011. Over six hundred participants gathered in the Four Seasons Restaurant in Manhattan, where music played a symbolic role to represent advocacy, equality, and social justice. The chapter examines the performance of American singer Aretha Franklin at the wedding and discusses how her performance created “a space in which various collectives of American sexual minority and black diasporic identity hear[d] themselves as they hear[d] each other in the music” (p. 162).

The following three chapters—chapter 8 by Michael Allemana, chapter 9 by Hankus Netsky, and chapter 10 by Kaley Mason and Ameera Nimjee—all devote significant portions to the delineation of wedding musicians and music specialists’ perspectives. Allemana explores musicians’ planning process, repertoire selection, and wedding performances from his conversations with four Chicago musicians along with strategies for reciprocal benefits for both musicians and wedding couples/families. Netsky delivers a reflexive
account to describe the popularization of Klezmer—Jewish ethnic music in Philadelphia’s Jewish wedding scene after the 1980s—and highlights the characteristics of “ancestral connection that shows them who they truly are and where they come from” in Jewish music (p. 205). In a collaborative essay, Mason and Nimjee discuss the South Asian wedding scene of Devon Avenue in Chicago, examining the commercialization of weddings and the shifting work of music specialists as “affective labor,” based on interviews with six music specialists: a singer, a long-necked plucked veena player, a DJ, and three dancers (p. 208). The eleventh and final chapter, by Timothy J. Cooley, features Polish Górale weddings in Chicago as well as in Poland and investigates the meaning of a “traditional wedding” for the Polish Górale within the framework of “preservation and compromise” in a diasporic milieu. Cooley presents a case study of weddings of Polish Górale couples from Chicago and examines the idea of a “traditional wedding” among the Górale diasporic community that “emphasize rootedness in place and practices held to be from the Tatras” (p. 233).

The volume encompasses a wide range of diasporic nuptials: Arab American, African American, Romani American, Ukrainian American, Jewish American, South Asian American, Polish American, Latinx, Croatian American, Taiwanese American, and Bosnian American. Most of the fieldwork in the essays is carried out in American cities, with additional research in Canada, Poland, and the Arab world. Naroditskaya’s collection provides detailed accounts of each diasporic community along with their sociocultural and demographic structure in American cities. Some essays provide the process of immigration and trace multiple roots to the homeland.

Music is treated as an indispensable element of the diasporic wedding in each essay. Supplemented by a total of sixteen illustrations, the chapters describe how music is employed through the orchestra, the band, a traditional ensemble, professional musicians, and DJs. The chapters attempt to provide a synoptic summary of musical ensembles, instruments, styles, repertoires, and texts of music played in diasporic weddings. Two chapters—6 and 7—present in-depth musical analysis, and the rest of the essays focus on the ethnographic descriptions of their musical examples. The chapters are not grouped into any sections or themes; rather, they all fall into the interplay between diaspora, wedding, and music, as well as identity, representation, assimilation, and preservation.

Music in the American Diasporic Wedding’s greater contributions are its ethnographic stance, descriptive richness, and reflexive account. The contributors have done impressive fieldwork, including performing music in diasporic nuptials. The value of this book goes far beyond the specific case studies of the weddings discussed. Although the volume is centered on diaspora, music, and weddings, it uncovers several other key issues, such as identity, ethnicity, hybridity, and assimilation within diaspora studies. After Thomas Turino and James Lea’s compiled volume Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities (2004), this book appears to be the first prominent rigorous book to document a musical ethnography of diverse diasporic communities. Anyone interested in the nexus of diasporic culture and music will find it an important reading. It is primarily aimed at academic audiences, but lay readers may also find it beneficial in refining their understanding of the culture, ritual, and music of diasporas.

In summation, the volume’s comprehensive examination of diasporic weddings exudes the contributors’ deep involvement and sense of exploration. Through compelling, vivid, insightful, and engaging ethnographic narratives, the book introduces many strands of ethnomusicology, appealing to a broad readership, from scholars and students of ethnomusicology to those who are interested in anthropology, cultural studies, and diaspora studies. On the whole, the volume provides
an in-depth and cogent account of diasporic weddings and music and is a valuable addition to scholarly works on music and diaspora.

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