

**Denis Crowdy (2016) *Hearing the future: The music and magic of the Sanguma band*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press. 183pp, ISBN: 978-0-8248-5156-9. US\$52.00.**

*Hearing the Future* is about Sanguma, a band from Papua New Guinea that blended local and international musical styles and was especially active between 1977 and 1989 (reforming in 1993). The band, whose name refers to sorcery that results in death, had a sonic vision for the future of PNG, which was reflected in its hybrid musical style and influences the title of this book. Sanguma is significant in music research because of the band's fusion musical style and its innovative and inspirational contribution to a Melanesian 'world music' sound. The band is especially significant for its vision to create a style that represented PNG at a time when the country had recently gained independence from Australia in 1975. Sanguma's musical style blended indigenous Melanesian sounds with rock, jazz, and other influences. Showing its hybrid style and broad appeal, lyrics were in English, Tok Pisin, and several local languages. In his book, Crowdy skillfully analyzes Sanguma's place in PNG politics, culture, and the popular music industry, and investigates in much detail the band's history, style, and activities.

Following a very useful chronology of the band and a short introductory chapter, the book's main analytical discussion occupies six chapters that trace the history of the band. Crowdy is a music researcher who spent eight years in PNG from 1992, when he worked as a guitar teacher at the University of PNG. During this time, he interacted closely with members of Sanguma, undertook interviews, and explored the band's music and cultural context through ethnographic study. His research drew on ideas from the fields of ethnomusicology, popular music studies, and anthropology, each of which is represented throughout the book.

The history of PNG from around the time of independence is introduced in Chapter 2, in connection with a focus on the importance of the Creative Arts Center (later named National Arts School), where Sanguma's members were students at the time of the band's formation in 1977. The Center was pivotal in the national production of culture and identity at the time. This chapter examines this institutional setting in terms of its students, staff, programs, and analyses the Center's influences not only on Sanguma but also other musical talent of the time and years to follow.

In Chapter 3, Crowdy explores Sanguma's musical activities, especially with regard to the band's touring. He observes the significance of the band's fusion style of indigenous and popular music and its contribution to 'world music' in the years directly preceding the invention of the term in the mid-1980s. Indeed, in the 1980s Sanguma "found their place in the sun," as the author comments several times in the book. For much of the decade the band toured internationally (especially regionally, but also to the United States and Canada).

Chapter 4 is a study of Sanguma's sound. From a musicological perspective, Crowdy looks in detail at the musical parameters and influences on the band and its distinct modern Melanesian sound. For readers who want to look in more detail at the band's music, this chapter provides an overview of recordings, musical style, sound, and place. The text is laced with several musical/graphic examples, and supported visually with some black-and-white pictures. The chapter closes with a poignant reminder of what Sanguma brought to the musical identity of PNG at the time: "Sanguma emphasized the value of Papua New Guineanness in music, attitudes, beliefs, relationships, and as a strategy to cope with a rapidly changing world in which Western culture was perceived as overbearing and domineering. Included were broad beliefs about racism and the need to get on with people despite differences." It was through such a social framework that Sanguma transmitted ideas to other bands and continued in the 1990s after it re-formed, although with a slightly changed line-up.

As the band's career progressed into the 1980s, there were harsher realities in connection with the politics of being professional musicians in PNG. In Chapter 5, Crowdy studies this political context in relation to the commercialization of Sanguma's music, both locally and internationally. Crowdy describes how Australian indigenous rock band Yothu Yindi performed in PNG in 1994, an event that helped with the reforming of Sanguma. After the performance, two members of Sanguma were invited to join Yothu Yindi, which was receiving significant international attention in the world music scene. Throughout the chapter there is discussion of the sometimes-ruthless nature of the music industry, with examples of

exploitation, unethical practices, and commercial appropriations. Crowdy provides a glimpse at some of this behaviour and explains how it was framed within a dominant local discourse.

Chapter Six brings the history of the band into the technological age with a discussion of business issues in promoting its music, aesthetics, and power relationships. PNG has moved from a cassette culture to a digital culture and nowadays has many studios and producers. In this chapter, Crowdy applies the notion of 'high art' to Sanguma as a way of comprehending and challenging some of the dynamics of the fusion style that was the Sanguma sound. In this final chapter Crowdy is particularly aware of the internal political and business dynamics in which Sanguma existed, and points out some of the power relationships that led to the band being unable to access its own music and it being sold overseas to a sound library. "The driving force behind these differences in phase and the imbalances in power, ownership, and control . . . is commerce under neoliberal capitalism, in which a free market ideology has an increased, if not at times dominant, influence over societal development, norms, and qualities compared to state governance."

Crowdy has an elegant writing style that mixes in-depth cultural knowledge and critical scholarly discussion. It is a thought-provoking work that has been thoroughly researched. If there is one criticism it is that more music might have been presented, both in visual and recorded forms. As with many books on music an accompanying CD would have been especially useful, although a quick search on YouTube will reveal a number of fascinating music videos and interviews.

For those interested in music, *Hearing the Future* offers valuable insight into a unique band, PNG, and the music business. The book will have appeal to those working on the culture of PNG, including ethnomusicologists and pop musicologists. For the field of Island Studies, the book offers insight into a significant band's roots on a politically divided island, and its cultural activities with the Melanesian, Australian, and broader regional music business.

*Henry Johnson*

*University of Otago, New Zealand*

[henry.johnson@otago.ac.nz](mailto:henry.johnson@otago.ac.nz)