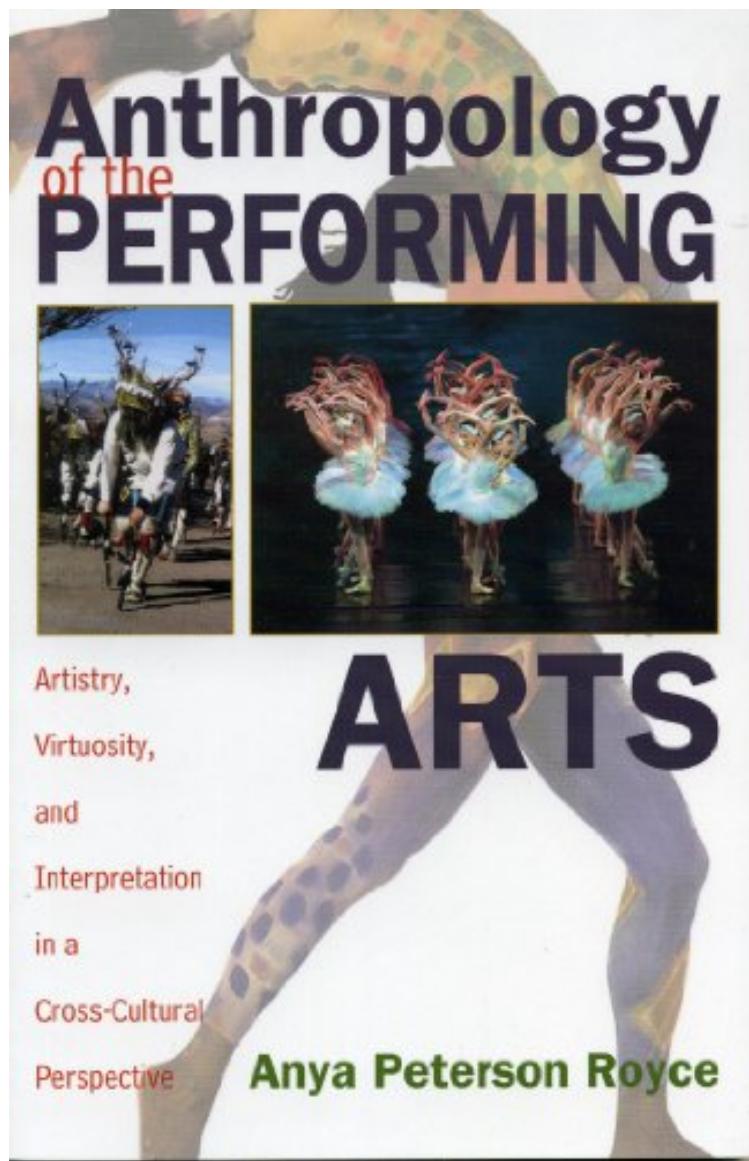


[PDF] Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Perspective

# Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Perspective

Anya Peterson Royce  
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Anya Peterson Royce : Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Perspective before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Anthropology of the Performing Arts: Artistry, Virtuosity, and Interpretation in Cross-Cultural Perspective:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Virtuosity and ArtistryBy E. N. AndersonAnya Peterson Royce was

a professional ballerina before becoming an anthropologist. This book is a personal record: thoughts on ballet expand out to experiences with other dance forms, ranging from Kabuki to the dances of the Tewa Pueblos of New Mexico. Then she moves on to classical music and to traditional small-scale cultures' healing rituals; in such cultures, healing is a performance art, since the main thing the curer can really accomplish is psychological support and help posed in dramatic forms. Where this book stands out is in contrasting virtuosity--sheer technical skill--with true artistry. Royce has given a great deal of thought and attention to the question of what differentiates a great performance from a merely good one (or, worse, a merely slick one). A good dance performance can be perfect in timing, flow, steps, poses, and so on; a music performance can be perfect in timing, pitch, attack, dynamics and so on. A great one is never perfect--not in that way. A great artist adds countless tiny, almost imperceptible variations to bring out the emotional force of the piece. A musician will come in a tiny fraction of a second early on an attack note, and make up for it by coming in a tiny bit late on a later note ("rubato and agogic"). Similar tiny variations will appear in force of attack, tone quality, pitch levels changes, dynamic contours, and all other variables. These changes are not just random; they are all carefully calculated, or more often intuited, to drive the emotion and intensity of the piece. This is what differentiates a merely pleasant performance from a performance that sounds, superficially, the same, but leaves the audience collapsed in their chairs, drenched in sweat and tears. The great artist can then go on and build original creations on the understanding of emotions that emerges from such performance success. This use of micro-variations seems to be worldwide. The Chinese have about 100 different named ways of playing a single note on the qin (Chinese elite stringed instrument). Blues guitarists have a complex vocabulary for such variations. Effective use of them in the service of really intense emotion is what differentiates Robert Johnson from an ordinary bluesman. Royce plays cello and uses it as one example; I remember once hearing Mischa Schneider coach a friend of mine who is a concert cellist. My friend was playing about as well as I thought possible, but Schneider played the same piece with just a little sharper attack, more rubato-agogic, and so on, and the difference was astounding. Royce's description of working with the great cellist Janos Starker brings out all the things I heard, in much more detail and from much deeper knowledge. I am glad somebody has finally come out and said this in the anthropological literature. I have seen many pathetic and dismal attempts to define what makes art great (e.g. Robert Jourdain in his otherwise excellent book *MUSIC, THE BRAIN, AND ECSTASY*; see my .com review). Now, Royce has provided a good account of one vital key: the performance side of art. Now someone else has to tell us how humanity got from "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" to Beethoven's symphonies. Some things this book is not: It is not a sustained, brilliant tour-de-force; it is more a set of personal essays. It is not an introduction to anthropology of performance art; Royce assumes the reader already knows that literature. She also assumes great knowledge of elite European dance and music. The book is, alas, also not well edited. Comma faults, missed quote marks, repetition (often word for word), and other problems are distractingly common. On the other hand, she gets a full extra star for not using, anywhere, such phrases as "inscribed on the body" or "problematizing gender" or "the modernist program," even though she is treating in detail the actual phenomena in question. Such phrases once were valuable, because they referred to exciting new topics. They have long ago become vapid cliches, and should be dropped once and for all from the English language. Also, Royce is far too knowledgeable to think there is a thing, "the body," that has some kind of separate reality that makes it (note that neuter gender) a special topic for study!

Anya Peterson Royce turns the anthropological gaze on the performing arts, attempting to find broad commonalities in performance, art, and artists across space, time, and culture. She asks general questions as to the nature of artistic interpretation, the differences between virtuosity and artistry, and how artists interplay with audience, aesthetics, and style. To support her case, she examines artists as diverse as Fokine and the Ballets Russes, Tewa Indian dancers, 17th century commedia dell'arte, Japanese kabuki and butoh, Zapotec shamans, and the mime of Marcel Marceau, adding her own observations as a professional dancer in the classical ballet tradition. Royce also points to the recent move toward collaboration across artistic genres as evidence of the universality of aesthetics. Her analysis leads to a better understanding of artistic interpretation, artist-audience relationships, and the artistic imagination as cross-cultural phenomena. Over 29 black and white photographs and drawings illustrate the wide range of Royce's cross-cultural approach. Her well-crafted volume will be of great interest to anthropologists, arts researchers, and students of cultural studies and performing arts.

Dr. Royce, dancer, musician, poet, anthropologist, linguist, critic, writer, and teacher undertook the daunting task of defining virtuosity, one of the most elusive elements in the arts. The results are illuminating, educational, thought provoking and, above all, good reading. She has my utmost admiration. (Janos Starker, Cellist, Distinguished Professor, Indiana University) Anya Royce was a ballet dancer before becoming a skilled ethnographer. Later she apprenticed herself as a musician. All of this combines to make Anthropology of the Performing Arts a must for ethnographers who study dance, mime, music, theatre or ritual or for those who look at cross cultural communication. Royce analyzes how performers learn their craft and come to embody basic skills, with some acquiring virtuosity and others moving on to the artistry that holds us spellbound, and then identifies commonalities of performance across

cultures and across genres within culture that underlie the codified and metaphorical vocabularies through which the performer reaches out to us, the audience. Now that she has made these explicit it is possible to engage at a deeper level with what is happening on stage or in the rituals of daily life. (Elizabeth F. Colson, Professor Emeritus, UC Berkeley)Pioneering dance anthropologist Anya Royce provides a magisterial account of the role of the performing arts in social life, from the Ballets Russes and Marcel Marceau to kabuki, butoh, and Tewa Indian dance. Based on more than forty years of experience, starting as a ballet dancer and coming of age as an anthropologist among the Isthmus Zapotec, Royce thinks broadly across the arts, while attending to the particulars of distinct artistic traditions. Bringing together her experience as a performer and her anthropological training, she senses and makes sense of the embodied nature of performance. The result is a profound sensitivity to what makes a performance what it is and a precise exposition of its felt characteristics. This book is an important contribution to the anthropology of the performing arts. (Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York University, author of *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*)Anya Peterson Royce is Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology and Comparative Literature. Her extraordinary book about Anthropology of the Performing Arts is a treasure. Anya Peterson Royce goes deeply in all directions, touching the roots of human culture in art which includes classical and contemporary dance, music, opera, commedia dell'arte, pantomime (the white face of Pierrot), modern mime revealing Etienne Decroux, Jean Louis Barrault, and myself. But she evokes with depth the Ballets Russes, Fokine, Nijinski, south Indian dance, Indian rituals, silence, Japanese zen, Kabuki, Noh, Bunraku, Butoh. At the same time she reveals the greatness of contemporary dancers?Mikhail Baryshnikov, Nureyev, Spanish flamenco, the elegance of Fred Astaire, the Pilobolus style, Zapotec music and dance, the art of shaman healers, the Italian quattrocento from Michelangelo who influenced the sculptures of Rodin. She assumes with great authority Masonic symbols, compares virtuosity, style, and aesthetics. Her thoughts will enlighten the general public, all professions, especially the young generations who have lost the history of those cultures. The lack of knowledge of the past will bring a fragile future for our culture of today. I am very proud to have met An (Marcel Marceau, Directeur Artiste de la Nouvelle Compagnie Theacute;acirc;tral MARCEL MARCEAU, Member of L'Institute de France, Academie des Beaux-Arts)Drawing on her immensely varied experience as a dancer, musician, ethnographer, teacher, and student of performance as well as of music and languages, Anya Peterson Royce has crafted a testament?at once engaged and analytic, both passionate and knowledgeable?to the multiple ways in which artistry is recognized in her own as well as other societies. In the process, she shows that modern anthropology has an important role to play in the cultures that gave it birth, and especially in respect of the cultural significance of the exceptional and the aesthetic in performances of many kinds. (Michael Herzfeld, Harvard University; author of *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*)The book provides a viewpoint on how a dance anthropologist interprets her experience both as a performer and as an anthropologist. In this regard, the book provides insight into the thinking process of one of the primary contributors to dance ethnology. (Barbara Sellers-Young Dance Research Journal, Vol. 39, No. 2, Winter 2007)Anya Peterson Royce is Chancellor's Professor of Anthropology and Comparative Literature. Her extraordinary book about Anthropology of the Performing Arts is a treasure. Anya Peterson Royce goes deeply in all directions, touching the roots of human culture in art which includes classical and contemporary dance, music, opera, commedia dell'arte, pantomime (the white face of Pierrot), modern mime revealing Etienne Decroux, Jean Louis Barrault, and myself. 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Her writing reveals such poetry, knowledge?a wonderful exploration and a moving encounter with the creators of all art forms who influenced deeply our contemporary culture. Her new book is a MUST. Don't miss this opportunity to read it. She is indeed a master. Her tribute will be eternal. (Marcel Marceau, Directeur Artiste de la Nouvelle Compagnie Theacute;acirc;tral MARCEL MARCEAU, Member of L'Institute de France, Academie des Beaux-Arts)About the AuthorAnya Peterson Royce is professor of anthropology at Indiana University and a specialist in the anthropology of dance and the performing arts.