

**John P. Welsh.** *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1995. xvi + 356 pp. \$131.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-313-29805-9.



**Reviewed by** Robert G. Weiner

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For those unfamiliar with the work of Stuart Saunders Smith, John P. Welsh's analysis of Smith's work provides a nice starting point. Welsh, a colleague and student of Smith's, has put together a detailed look at Smith's life, philosophy, and musical compositions for the past twenty-five years. Smith, a percussionist, considers himself a "jazz composer," but, as Welsh points out in *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith*, his work has more in common with twentieth-century avant-garde classical composers, like John Cage and Stockhausen, than with Charlie Parker or Herbie Hancock.

Welsh organizes the chapters in this book around his analyses of pivotal compositions in Smith's career. The compositions he examines include: "Gifts" (1974); "Here and There" (1971); "Tunnels" (1982- 1985); The "Links" Series; and Smith's Trans-Media compositions, which include "Return and Recall" (1976) and "Transitions and Leaps" (1990). There also is a chapter devoted to Smith's selected scores from 1970 to 1985.

Smith's work encompasses a wide range of musical instrumentations. Among these are "mo-

biles," Trans-Media compositions, and poetry. Mobiles are "open form compositions" in which individual parts are rehearsed but full performances are not. Trans-Media compositions combine various types of multimedia, such as symbol lighting, clothing, poetry, and the actions of the performers. Welsh includes copies of Smith's performance instructions for Trans-Media compositions. Each Trans-Media item includes specific directions and explanations for the performance. Other compositional techniques used by Smith include using poetry as a form of musical composition in "Tunnels" and an opera, "Songs I-IX," performed using household objects such as a bag of broken glass, a jug of water, and sandpaper. Smith's goal was to "make [his] opera everything a traditional opera is not....It is an opera of words, image, character, and percussion." Perhaps one could examine the relationship between a composition like Smith's and the "Noize" music, produced by industrial artists of the late 1970s, which used objects as instruments.

The author looks at movements like Surrealism, Dadaism, Futurism, the Bauhaus school, and

twentieth-century composers. This coverage provides readers with historical context for the various avant-garde art/music schools and a framework to explain Smith's work. Welsh does a good job of correlating the history of these movements and composers to the work of Stuart Saunders Smith.

The author assumes the reader has an advanced knowledge of technical aspects of the harmonics and the structure of music. He has transcribed and annotated many of Smith's pieces, and his analysis is detailed and thorough. However, even those with a limited understanding of musical notation get a "feel" for the type of music Smith composed. At the end of the book, there is a fascinating interview between Smith and Welsh which gives an insight into the workings of Smith's mind. *The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith* is a fine tribute to one of the most unique and creative composers of our time.

*The Music of Stuart Saunders Smith* is recommended for libraries with strong music collections. It is nicely illustrated throughout, and the author provides a complete list of Smith's compositions/discography from 1970 to 1994. The bibliography includes works about and published by Smith; there are forewords by Milton Babbitt, Brian Ferneyhough, and Ben Johnson.

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