

**Desblache, Lucile (2019). *Music and Translation. New Mediations in the Digital Age*. London (UK): Palgrave Studies in Translating and Interpreting, pp. 407, € 88.39. ISBN 978 1137549648.**

**M**usic and Translation: *New Mediations in the Digital Age* by Lucile Desblache can be best defined as the joining link between the seemingly detached, but actually closely interwoven disciplines of Translation Studies and Musicology. So far, just a few studies have tried to go beyond the somewhat limiting assumption that translating music implies a sort of word-for-word translation of lyrics, with the aim of producing the so-called singable translations meant to be sung to the same music composed for the original lyrics (Apter and Herman 2016); other scholars have started to explore this field from an interdisciplinary point of view, thus encompassing semiotic, sociological and multimodal issues, but their research was mostly confined to opera and song translation (Gorlée 2005; Low 2016; Minors 2013; Susam-Sarajeva 2008).

This volume is much more than this: resting upon the need for “a transcultural approach” (1), Desblache enlarges and enhances the notion of translation, giving voice and visibility to such a rich branch of human activities – the musical ones – which have so far been kept on the fringes of what was once a more traditional and restrictive idea of Translation Studies. It is undeniable, however, that several and challenging processes have updated the discipline as a whole today, due to recent technological developments and social networks, globalisation, unpredictable international contexts, new notions of inclusiveness and accessibility. Therefore, the time is ripe for Translation Studies to welcome such a seminal contribution which paves the way for further investigations and new theoretical scenarios, while paying homage, methodologically speaking, to the well-established notion of translation as formulated by Roman Jakobson (1951[2012]) in terms of interlingual, intralingual or intersemiotic transfer of meanings from a sign system into another.

His tripartite definition is also echoed in the structure of the volume, which explores the way in which translation shapes music and music, in turn, affects translation from a threefold perspective: (1) a broad interpretation of translation, defined as the interlingual, intralingual or intersemiotic act of transferring both verbal and non-verbal texts into other languages; (2) the transmutation of musical forms or elements that are non-verbal, such as the metamorphosis of “polka from a traditional Easter European dance to twenty-first century pop-metal genre” (4); (3) translation as a transformational tool used in music to produce sense and meaning across different boundaries.

Desblache’s volume has the merit of showing how the intersection between music and translation can be a fruitful and fascinating topic of inquiry, albeit an “intimidating” (8) one, due to the complexity of this much-needed and comprehensive interdisciplinary approach. Besides thoroughly assessing

the state-of-the-art in both research and practice today, Desblache starts by defining such challenging and protean concepts as music and translation, not forgetting to reflect on the related notions of adaptation, mediation and transcreation. Then she goes on to explore how musical texts are translated in an attempt to map a possible landscape of music translation. Without claiming to offer an exhaustive guide to song translation (even though this is an important professional aspect of translating music), she wants to illustrate the multifaceted variety of translation practices and techniques which have implications for vocal and instrumental music worldwide. Finally, in the third part, she analyses the pervasive presence of music and its universal value: music can be inspired by the sounds found in nature and can try to reproduce them; at the same time, it also has the power of creating culture-specific associations with nations and regions of the world, due to the evocative force of certain musical atmospheres and landscapes. At the same time, music shows a translational ability which can establish multifarious connections between human and non-human worlds: interestingly, in the last chapter entitled “Music and the Natural World,” the author illustrates, in an age of growing ecological awareness, how music can translate the natural world “shaking the myth of human supremacy, and opening new communication channels” (372).

Drawing from an impressive number of examples from a broad range of genres, styles and instruments and moving from European to world music, this volume is a very successful effort to make the two disciplines enter into dialogue, hopefully reaching a wider audience in both areas of Translation Studies and Musicology, thus being “ear-opening for translators and mind-expanding for musicians” (11). Ultimately, *Music and Translation* bridges the gap between the two fields in a truly authoritative manner and will for sure be a must-read for anyone interested either in Translation Studies or Musicology, or both.

## References

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**Mariacristina Petillo**  
**University of Bari (LELIA Department)**  
E-mail: [mariacristina.petillo@uniba.it](mailto:mariacristina.petillo@uniba.it)