

4-1-2015

Crafting Culture: 'Tradition', Art, and Music in Disney's 'A Small World'

Katherine Baber
University of Redlands

James V. Spickard
University of Redlands

Follow this and additional works at: http://inspire.redlands.edu/oh_articles

 Part of the [American Popular Culture Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baber, Katherine and Spickard, James V., "Crafting Culture: 'Tradition', Art, and Music in Disney's 'A Small World'" (2015). *Our House Articles, Poems, and Short Stories*. Paper 27.
http://inspire.redlands.edu/oh_articles/27

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Our House at InSPIRe @ Redlands. It has been accepted for inclusion in Our House Articles, Poems, and Short Stories by an authorized administrator of InSPIRe @ Redlands. For more information, please contact gabriela_sonntag@redlands.edu.

CRAFTING CULTURE: 'TRADITION', ART, AND MUSIC
IN DISNEY'S "IT'S A SMALL WORLD"

By

Katherine Baber and James Spickard¹
University of Redlands

To appear in the

Journal of Popular Culture

Accepted for publication 26 March, 2013

Published in Volume 48, Issue 2, pp 225-239, April 2015.

"This is the pre-peer reviewed version of the article, which has been published in final form at <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jpcu.12253/abstract>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Wiley Terms and Conditions for Self-Archiving."

Anthropological analyses of Disneyland mainly fall into four groups. Some authors focus on the cultural messages embedded in Disney theme parks; for example, Van Maanen in "Displacing Disney" contrasts the American cultural messages at Anaheim Disneyland with the Japanese cultural messages at its Tokyo sister park. Brannen, Yoshimoto, and Raz analyze Tokyo Disneyland in more depth; Salamone and Salamone do the same with Disneyland's Main Street, as does Steiner with Frontierland. A second group of authors treats Disneyland and Disney products generally as vehicles of American cultural imperialism. Nooshin, for example, "explores the relationships of power embedded within the Small World ride" (236) and the use of music to mask the Disney Corporation's exploitation and domination of other parts of the world; Dorfman and Mattelart make similar arguments, applying them to Disney comic books, as does Fjellman for the theme park experience. A third group focuses on the presentation of race and gender in Disney products, including the parks: for example, Picker's film *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* and Orenstein criticize the messages about body image, relationships, and race presented by Disney princesses. Maio, Lippi-Green, Bell, and Brode chart similar themes in Disney films and their derivatives. Finally, a fourth group of scholars focuses on the workers at Disney parks, particularly their working conditions (Kuenz, MacAdam, Wasko) and the forced cheerfulness (Raz, Van Maanen, "Smile") deemed suitable for "the happiest place on earth".

Each of these approaches has merit. In the present article, we undertake two related tasks. First, we chart in some detail the visual and musical techniques used in the Small World ride at Anaheim Disneyland to reflect a particularly American image of other countries. Building on Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on "the invention of tradition" and Lutz and Collins' analysis of National Geographic, we show how the Small World ride reinforces an ethnocentric sense that all the world's peoples are fundamentally just like Americans, albeit with different languages, foods, customs, and dress. We thus provide detail to Van Maanen's ("Displacing") analysis by showing the specific visual and musical techniques with which this American cultural reinforcement is accomplished.

Our second task lies perpendicular to our first. The Anaheim ride's 2009 refurbishment, which inserted Disney film characters

¹ The authors would like to thank Stephanie Takaragawa for bibliographic help and Chris Meyers for invaluable conversation on the practicalities and experience of the "It's a Small World" ride. Please address all correspondence [Katherine Baber@redlands.edu](mailto:Katherine.Baber@redlands.edu) and [Jim Spickard@redlands.edu](mailto:Jim.Spickard@redlands.edu).

among the animatronic dolls, reinforced a growing theme in the park at large: that Disneyland is its own fantasy universe, which one can visit through movies, books, soundtrack recordings, and the park itself. This theme does not replace the ride’s American ethnocentrism; instead both themes operate at once. Popular culture is like that: it is interesting precisely because so many things are going on simultaneously.

I. “It’s a Small World”

WED Enterprises, Disney’s design subsidiary, developed the Small World ride for the Pepsi/UNICEF pavilion at the 1964 World’s Fair. Then, as now, visitors rode in small boats that took them through various “countries” where they were serenaded by animatronic figures of children dressed in folk costumes. The ride was originally called “The Children of the World”, but Walt Disney himself renamed it with the title of the catchy song that his staff composers Robert and Richard Sherman wrote to replace its original music (Maxime, “Sherman”).

The ride was an instant hit. In an early audio promotion, Disney described it as “a tribute to the enchanting world of childhood” and summarized the ride’s highlights in words that reveal the popular American fantasies of life overseas. He described Scandinavia (“these toy soldiers guard Copenhagen’s Tivoli Garden”), followed by Ireland (“shamrocks and leprechauns”), Scotland (“a wee bagpiper”), “jolly old England”, “the wooden-shoe children of Holland”, “sunny Spain”, Italy, France, and so on. Each country came with stereotypes: Italy had a leaning tower and gondoliers, France featured “ooh-la-la: Paris!” and dancing girls.

The rest of the world was even more clichéd. “Exotic Asia” was described more musically than verbally, but Disney mentioned “the fabulous Taj Mahal and flying carpets”, “the beautiful children of Southeast Asia”, and “the land of the Rising Sun”. Africa was “the mysterious dark continent”, where hippos out-shown people and the sounds of monkeys and drums morphed into Dixieland jazz. South America was penguins, Andes, and rainforests, ending with a visit to Carnival in Rio. The ride referenced penny-magazine tourist images, not real life. People loved it.

When the New York Fair closed, in 1965, WED moved the ride to its park in Anaheim, changing its external architecture, which proved

too expensive to relocate. In a large celebration in May, 1966, Walt Disney joined “children from sixteen ethnic groups” to pour flasks of water from the “seven seas and nine major lagoons” into the waterway for the attraction (Maxime “World’s Fair”). The ride has been popular ever since, and is now a fixture at the other Disney parks, with some local differences.

Despite renovations, the floating tour still follows the 1964 outline. The current Anaheim ride begins in the Arctic (with Eskimos, a Canadian Mountie, and Swedish dancers), visits the Europe described above, floats through an arch to scenes from the Middle East and India, then on to Thailand, Korea, China, and Japan. Africa and Australia are shown mainly inhabited by animals. South America now has pampas in place of rain forest; Mexico shows a large food market and folkloric dancing; the Pacific Islands section shows surfers and a hip-swinging hula. This portion of the ride ends in America, represented by a Midwestern corn field, Indians, and tepees.

The ride’s last section drives home the core theme, expressed in 2009 by Walt Disney Imagineering’s Kim Irvine, as “all children coming together under one happy sun” (Niles). After the American West, visitors float under a rainbow arch into a huge room decorated in white and bathed in colored lights, where dolls from the previous sections dress in white versions of their native costumes and sing in English, in unison. Most hold hymn-books and stand in rows: a universal choir of angelic children. Their differences are now just matters of skin color, hair style, and hats—reduced even further from the country-by-country section. From this ‘white room’, the ride then returns to the outside world through a tunnel lined with colorful travel posters and imaginary postcards, expressing happiness to be enjoying Disneyland, USA.

The core notion here—that all people are basically the same—echoes deeply in American culture. America sees itself, as John F. Kennedy put it, as “a nation of immigrants”; its national myth shows it accepting people from all over the world, regardless of race, culture, creed, or national origin, to turn them into Americans. The Statue of Liberty’s greeting in New York harbor and the Declaration of Independence’s ringing “all men are created equal” are part of this myth, which speaks to a fundamental American attitude: all people are alike under the skin. At the entrances to Disneyland in Anaheim, Disneyworld in Orlando, and Disneyland Paris, “Main Street U.S.A.” sets the stage for this myth by collapsing ‘the American experience’ into an

early twentieth-century town square. The architecture, costuming, 'real' mercantile emporiums (selling souvenirs instead of dry goods), and a combination of live and pre-recorded Dixieland music invite visitors to perceive their own hometowns through this nostalgic lens, regardless of geography (Carson, 229-230). In an even bolder fashion, the Small World's children celebrate their minor differences—of costume, food, and language. In the end, Disneyland says, we can all live peacefully together. As Van Maanen put it somewhat acidly:

Disneyland sucks the difference out of differences by presenting an altogether tamed and colonized version of the people of other lands who are, when all is said and done, just like the good folks living in Los Angeles or Des Moines. ("Displacing", 24)

The question is: exactly how is this accomplished, artistically? Our next two sections will show, in some detail, how the Small World ride reinforces this American myth, both in art and music.

II. The Visual Moment: Representing Childhood, Representing Tradition

The Small World ride is visually striking, with two aspects of its artistry related directly to our theme. First, there is the ride's overall design, including its use of animatronic dolls to represent the world's children. Second, there is the way those dolls are clothed—in 'traditional' folk costumes, which play to a specific American cultural attitude about the relationship between America and the rest of the world.

The Small World look was developed by noted Disney designer Mary Blair. Throughout the ride, bright splashes of primary color in both paint and lights illuminate a landscape of cut-outs, representing an imagined landscape for each visited 'country'. These cut-outs are each slightly bent in what Niles calls a "1960's mod style". Maxime ("Blair") remarks that the "angular cutouts are lopsided, domes and circles have egg-shaped profiles and arches are taller than they are wide and slightly unsteady on their stork-like legs." They reference rather than portray the key icons of the various countries: Pisa's leaning tower, a Japanese arched bridge, pointy mountains, and so on, all *faux naïve*, as if built by children. The colors are also childlike: "pure primaries 'straight from the tube' ... often put in violent contrast to

each other." Maxime notes the daring use of mocha skies and salmon mountains; he points out "families of saturated reds, ranging from oranges through violet to cerise" that accentuate the hotter countries visited. Blair's brightly colored world reinforces an image of childhood as both wildly kaleidoscopic and fundamentally the same. In Maxime's words, "Blair's treatment of place makes one venue look a lot like all the others in the Small World, and reduces architecture to a kind of universal principle."

Then there are the dolls: the hundreds of almost-identical moving figures that represent the world's children. Blair patterned them after a successful series of Hallmark cards that she designed for Disney the 1940's. Round-headed, large-eyed, and button-nosed, they differ mainly in skin tone, hair color, and clothing. The East Asian dolls have slanted eyes, the (few) Africans have kinky hair, but none of these characteristics disguises their essential sameness. They look alike, they are all similarly endearing, and, moreover, they are all doing the same kinds of things. They dance, they play music, they have fun, and they all sing the same song. The result is as subtle as a jackhammer: national differences are external, not intrinsic; look beyond the surface, and anyone can see that all people are alike.

This point has often been remarked (e.g. Maxime, Van Maanen "Displaced", Nooshin²). Less remarked has been the role that the dolls' costumes play in differentiating America from the rest of the world, thereby skewing that 'oneness' in a particularly American direction. Simply put, all the dolls are dressed in clichéd folk costumes that present a stylized image of 'tradition' in their various parts of the world. The Swedish girls wear *Folkdräkt*, the Dutch children wear wooden shoes, the Spanish girls wear high lace kerchiefs, the Indians wear *saris* or turbans, the Chinese wear conical hats, the Japanese kimonos, the Polynesians grass skirts, and so on. Even the few American figures are stereotyped: the corn farmer has a straw hat and a plaid shirt, the cowboy has a Western hat, a bandana, chaps, and a twirling rope. Each is an icon to the past. None presents the world of children as it exists; instead, they present the world as most Americans imagine it once to have been.

² Nooshin gets many details about the ride wrong, though she presents an accurate overall picture.

This may seem innocent, but it is not. First off, most of these ‘traditional’ costumes are actually 19th- and early 20th-century inventions, created by urban elites to sanitize their own countries’ rural pasts, thus making them safe for nostalgia. Morgan writes, for example, that the Welsh “national women’s costume” was created in the 1830s by Augusta Waddington, a leader in the Welsh romantic movement (80). Trevor-Roper notes that the Highland kilt was created by a Quaker industrialist (21) with its plaids a matter of personal taste, not clan allegiance (23). Christiansen traces Danish ‘folk’ dances and costumes to the farmer’s revival of 1900, an effort on the part of prosperous farmers to distinguish themselves from other rural social groups (128). ‘Traditional’ costumes from other countries similarly reflect not what people actually wear, but what Americans typically think they wear: a fancy dress-up past that speaks to the American cultural imagination. This parallels what Paul Spickard calls “the Ellis Island model” of America: the idea that people emigrate to the U.S. from around the world, where they discard their traditions and become modern (4-14). “It’s a Small World” floats modern people through an imagined past, showing us where we came from and explaining how our ancestors’ fundamental likeness made it possible.

Lutz and Collins documented this cultural imagination in another medium: though a careful content analysis of the popular magazine National Geographic. They showed how that magazine portrays some parts of the world as ‘traditional’ and other parts as ‘modern’, with the transition between the two being one of the magazine’s dominant themes. They show, for example, how the magazine presents Japan in just two modes: hyper-traditional and hyper-modern. Africa is dominantly presented as a source of social problems (soluble with Western help), brought about by its effort to throw off the past. Articles on Pacific Islanders are overrun with grass skirts and bare breasts, as Polynesians and Micronesians are portrayed as struggling to enter the modern world. Interestingly, the mother of one of our students lived on Chuuk (Truk) when NG was preparing its 1986 magazine article about Micronesian independence (Patterson); she even hosted staff photographer David Hiser during his stay there. Her pictures of local life bear scant resemblance to the exoticized images the magazine used to portray Micronesian traditions. As Lutz and Collins argued, National Geographic confirms American cultural stereotypes about foreign lands rather than showing those lands the way they really are.

The Small World ride does the same. Dressing its dolls in ‘traditional’ costumes and having them sing and dance for park visitors does more than just show that people the world over are equal under the skin. It equates the world’s people with the past. From Sweden and Denmark to Italy to Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and beyond, the dolls show us a happy past that never was, in which people’s differences vanish into an idealistic haze. This includes America’s own cultural past as well: the Midwestern family farmers, cowboys, and Indians that are the ride’s sole U.S. representatives. The ride tells us that the past is all alike, and that we are therefore (albeit potentially) one people in the present. Doing this visually—through child-like cut-outs, bright colors, and near identical animatronic dolls—slips the message to us without our having to think about it. Walt Disney, Kim Irvine, and other representatives’ explicit statements about the ride’s meaning are thus superfluous. The artistry alone communicates the message very well.

III. The Music

The same is true for the Small World’s music: it reinforces the centrality of Western culture in general and of American music in particular. Though derided as “one of the most nauseating tunes of all time” (Van Maanen “Displacing” 13) and “Philip Glass, if he’d been commissioned by your local kindergarten” (Niles), the Sherman brothers’ song that plays continuously throughout the ride provides a blueprint for audiences to comprehend their experience. Both music and visuals draw on a Euro-American artistic vocabulary of traditional instruments and dress against a backdrop of iconic animals and architecture. The music works just like a film soundtrack. Any analysis of the ride needs to take the aural dimension into account.

Two frameworks are central to decoding the music: the form of the song and the tonal system in which its memorable melody is grounded. The song takes the simple verse-refrain form prevalent in European and North American vernacular music. Since there are only two verses—beginning “It’s a world of laughter, a world of tears” and “There is just one moon, and one golden sun”—it would be easy to misidentify the song with the strophic form common to Euro-American folk ballads (which consists of verses without an interspersed refrain or “chorus”). However, the music that accompanies

the titular lyrics “It’s a small world after all...” clearly has the character of a refrain. Although there are analogs to strophic form and ballads in many musical cultures,³ the use of a verse-refrain form encloses the song within an explicitly Western cultural framework.

Less obviously, but crucial to understanding the Disney ride, the verse-refrain form is the foundation of the Tin Pan Alley and Broadway song repertoire, from the turn of the 20th century to the present. Disney’s songwriters, Richard and Robert Sherman, wrote songs in the Broadway vein to several Disney feature films, both before and after their work on the “It’s a Small World” ride. Some are essentially film musicals: *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *Mary Poppins* (1964), *The Jungle Book* (1967), and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (1968). The Broadway version of the verse-refrain structure leads one to expect exposition in the verse—narrative, emotional, or situational—and a message in the refrain. For example, “A Spoonful of Sugar” contains a moral in its titular refrain, which *Mary Poppins* illustrates with examples in the verses. Conversely, her lullaby “Stay Awake” takes a strophic form—not a verse-refrain—more appropriate to its folk-music character. English-language audiences may expect a story from either form, but are conditioned to listen for a point to be driven home in a verse-refrain. “It’s a Small World” does so.

The song’s message is, of course, cultural similitude. Both the verse and refrain are simple and repeated enough that it does not matter where the audience enters the song (which a floating ride cannot control). The verse simply explains what is meant by the refrain’s phrase “small world.” The verses tell us that all people experience a range of positive and negative emotions (laughter, tears, hopes, and fears), from which we are asked to extrapolate (“it’s time we’re aware”) that these fundamentals of human experience add up to a universal cultural template—one with infinite charming variations. As a nearly irresistible earworm, the refrain of “It’s a Small World” stays with the listener long after the journey is finished.

Part of what makes the song so engaging, in addition to its simple form, is its melody. That melody, composed within the framework of Western tonality, is second nature to many listeners but is by no means a cultural universal. Even in Western classical music, the tonal system

of major and minor keys and the accompanying equal temperament (the way a standard keyboard is now tuned) did not take hold until the late eighteenth century. Tonality exists alongside modal systems in both European and American culture; much folk music, for example, is not tonal but pentatonic. Moreover, the majority of the world’s musical cultures function outside of the tonal system and use instruments tuned in ways appropriate to their own systems for creating melody and harmony. In fact, pentatonicism—which sounds like a scale with “gaps” compared to major or minor scales—is arguably more prevalent around the world.⁴

Every tonal framework communicates meaning in its own codes, familiar even if they go unrecognized. For instance, the melody of “It’s a Small World” is in a major key, which to acculturated Western listeners sounds “happy” or “bright,” and it gradually rises and falls through simple intervals. The largest space between one note and the next is a third (notes only two keys apart on a keyboard) except for the drop of a fourth near the end of the refrain, just before the melody rises to the tonic (the “home” note of the key) on the words “small, small world.” Musicians call this pattern “diatonic” (avoiding the black notes on the keyboard) and it is incredibly simple. This makes it a logical choice for teaching music to children. In the verse there are musical rhymes—similar melodic phrases—that parallel the textual end rhymes. This makes the song easy to memorize, like any good proverb or moral. Furthermore, the equal length of the melody for the verse and the melody for the chorus, plus the overall consonance of both, means that they can be sung one over the other, in counterpoint. This gives the song some variation throughout the ride, but it also points to the distinctly Euro-centric framework of the whole—counterpoint being a standard European musical form. That the composers of “It’s a Small World” should make these choices seems obvious, given the original intended audience—American or European families and their children—but the tonal system is also recognizable to the international audiences. The melody aptly serves the text: it’s a small world.

The possible meanings inherent in the music, however, extend beyond the message of its didactic lyrics and cheery melody. Some of those semantic possibilities are consonant with the multicultural narra-

³ For example: strophic forms are also common in the instrumental music of Southeast Asia (Sutton).

⁴ See, for example, Bobby McFerrin’s performance of the pentatonic scale at the 2009 World Science Festival (found on YouTube, Vimeo, and TED).

tive the ride enacts and some of them are rather dissonant. We shall focus on three issues: the text-setting and the instrumental accompaniment in the ride's first, multi-cultural section, and the musical function of the ride's final section, the 'white room'.

First, the text-setting. Much of the song's strength as a mnemonic device depends on the degree to which the text fits the music. Since it is awkward to sustain a consonant when singing, the longer notes of a well-written melody typically coincide with rounded vowel sounds, such as those in the words "small," "after," and "world." In addition, important words are emphasized by their location on longer or higher notes. For example, the operative word of the song, "small," rests on the highest pitch in the refrain. Except for opening with the relatively flat vowel "I" ("it's"), the song is extremely well-crafted—and even the nasal "I" arguably contributes to the song's overall American twang. "It's a Small World" is thus perfectly suited to its purpose—in American English. Other languages are a different story.

To start with, the song uses contractions, which makes setting a translation of the text to the existing melody very difficult, even in another European language. For example, a direct translation of the title phrase to German would be either: "Die ist schliesslich eine kleine Welt" or "Es ist eine kleine Welt, nachdem alle." Clearly, neither matches the four-beat original (which has "it's a" sharing a beat). "Unsere Welt is klein", so klein" does better—the vowels still fall on long notes and the contractions mostly work—though opening with this particular "U"-sound on a long note is weak. The meaning shifts, however: "Our world is small, so small" has a distinctly different connotation than the original. And these words don't work for the fourth phrase, which shifts the "it's a" to the upbeat and puts the main accents on "small", "after", and "all". One could solve this with "Doch ist die eine kleine Welt" in that phrase (accent on "die", "kleine", and "Welt"); however, "doch" is a special form of "after all" that typically contradicts a previous negative phrase. Close, but not good—and certainly not in the same league with the original.

Similar issues beset other languages, from Dutch through Hindi and Japanese. Tonal languages like Mandarin or Yoruba (which depend on pitch contour for correct pronunciation) would present even greater difficulties. One can make do, but the song is never as graceful, nor is its meaning quite the same. This may be why there is al-

ways an English version playing in the background, no matter which country one is "visiting". The English holds everything together.

This privileging becomes even clearer when listening to the song's instrumental accompaniment in the ride's first section. Most notable are the ways the musical performance shifts as the ride travels away from Europe and as it returns to America at the end. Throughout, sounds and instrumental music form a counterpoint to the constantly repeated song, one which typically references the country, the doll figures, or something else going on in the scene. This counterpoint interacts with the scenes to tell an aural story, connecting riders to the dolls in front of them. It becomes increasingly exoticized as the ride leaves Europe behind.

The brief introduction to the ride in its first tunnel, where we hear the children singing for the first time, creates the normative soundtrack that carries through the ride's first two rooms. In the first room, we hear a symphony orchestra with the vocal line doubled by pitched percussion—glockenspiel and xylophone. These reinforce the sense of childish enthusiasm (xylophones are favorite musical toys for American children). In the second room, the scene shows Danish royal guards performing on drums and trumpets. The musical background seems to come from these instruments, though the pictured heraldic trumpets (straight, without a modern trumpet's valves) are not actually capable of performing the song's melody and the field drums (which have a hollow sound) cannot produce the accompaniment's snare-drums' rattle. This performance, while whimsical, keeps perfect time with the ride's basic soundtrack. Similar musical references to other European countries—harps in Ireland, ducks quacking on off-beats in Holland, bells in Switzerland, Italy's mandolins, Spain's castanets and guitars, and the German polka band—demonstrate a similar cultural proficiency. They all perform the melody or a suitable accompaniment on the folk instruments 'native' to their region. The one exception would be Scotland's bagpipes, which are chronically out of tune with the melody, though still in time; obviously the effect is meant to be humorous.

These folk music traditions are just as invented as are the costumes and were codified in the same nineteenth century nationalist environment. For example, nearly every European culture has a version of the harp and bagpipe, but these instruments have come to be stereotypically associated with Ireland and Scotland, in roughly the same

way that the Scottish highland regiments codified the tartan (Trevor-Roper). Castanets are typed as Spanish, though they are Roman in origin and are but one of Spain’s many regional percussion instruments, many of which were introduced during the Moorish occupation of the peninsula. They became signifiers of Spanishness largely through nineteenth century orchestral and operatic works, particularly those by French composers: Jules Massenet’s *Le Cid*, Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*, and Emmanuel Chabrier’s rhapsody *España*. Though nineteenth century French musical culture certainly perceived Spain to be as exotic as Japan, from the twentieth-century American perspective these all represent a more familiar exoticism—essentially like our own music, but with different accessories. Thus, through music, these countries are shown to be our capable cultural companions. We sing, play, and dance in time and in tune.

As the tour moves through the Balkans to Central and East Asia, the instrumental performance is increasingly marked as exotic and the voices are translated to less-familiar languages. The most obvious shift is the increasing dominance of percussion: tambourines, gongs, tam-tams, an imitation of *taiko* drums, and a medley of pitched percussion instruments that evoke a Balinese (or Javanese) gamelan. Boat passengers have a hard time telling which music goes with which country, though the *taiko* drumming clearly emanates from the Japanese scene and the gong splash serves to introduce China. The plucked string *shamisen* and the bowed *ehru* also emanate from Japan and China, respectively. Though not performed on these briefly featured traditional instruments, such musical exoticisms were also common to nineteenth century European musical portrayals of the East, as was a focus on exotic-sounding wind instruments. In this part of the ride, a low, whispering flute and nasal oboe perform the melody, but they drift away from the song’s major key into a minor mode (generally marked as *not* happy, but also frequently used to evoke ‘other’ musical cultures from within Western tonality). These instruments perform the only chromatic tones in the ride (those not on a piano’s white keys) as part of their seemingly improvised ornaments and flourishes. The oboe in particular corresponds to the stereotypical ‘snake charmer’, common to representations of the Middle East and India in theater and film. Though it features flute rather than oboe, the python Kaa’s song “Trust in Me” in the Disney movie *The Jungle Book* trades in similar exoticisms.

The net result of these changes is a quasi-cacophony. The audience hears a wider range of musical sounds than before, and these new sound worlds overlap in a relatively un-ordered fashion. The instrumental performances are also sometimes out of tune with the main song soundtrack. Some of this is simply a technical problem—a combination of small differences in the pitch center of the different recorded tracks, speaker placement, and the Doppler Effect. However, a minor-mode oboe solo played over the major key melody still ringing in the audience’s ears is going to sound out of tune. In either case, the Middle East and Asia sound like a babble of languages and instruments. Though they are still clearly performing the same song as before, they leave an impression of not being as proficient and orderly—and as being decidedly foreign.

Moving to Africa, the soundtrack drastically simplifies the depictions of musical otherness. By way of transition, we hear a muted trumpet and English horn emanating from Egypt, again with chromatic frills that highlight one final time perceived Oriental ornateness. The children depicted in these equatorial regions no longer sing; they laugh along with primates and, in the adaptation from the World’s Fair version to the Disneyland theme park, with hyenas. The instrumental performance is dominated by stereotypic drumming, particularly hand drums like congas and un-pitched percussion like rattles, although pitched pan drums do filter in. The accompaniment leans toward what is essentially a swing jazz arrangement of the song, a decision that might seem incongruous, were it not for the association of jazz with blackness in the Sherman brothers’ musical world. Again, *The Jungle Book* provides a useful frame of reference: the apes’ song “I Wanna Be Like You” features many markers of swing, some provided by the arrangers and others, like the Cab Calloway-style scatting, produced by the lyricist and performer. The use of a familiar American musical style, encoded as black, in Small World’s Africa may help to modulate the strangeness of African culture, though the scene’s racial stereotypes disturb. (This is one of only two scenes dominated by animals, and the only one in which animal voices partly replace humans’.)

Jazz also provides the trans-Atlantic link between Africa and South America. Small changes in instrumentation—the appearance of maracas, emphasis on violin and trumpet melody, marimba, and acoustic guitar—swing the song’s performance toward Latin jazz and mariachi. Peruvian flute makes an appearance as well and helps add

‘authenticity’ as well as confirm the return to bright, major key tonality. Most important, however, is the return of vocal performance. The South American instrumental performances provide a noisy but essentially sunny counterpoint to the song much as it appeared in Europe. The harmonized chirping of the birds still suggests primitiveness but, for the most part, the South American sound world indicates that their culture is much like Euro-America. This corresponds to the predominant Cold War view of Latin and South American countries as likely allies in the United States’ own backyard.

Lead by the guitar, already used in Mexico, the ride moves into the Pacific—Australia, New Zealand, and Polynesia—with Hawaiiana the predominant musical model. Acoustic slack key guitar and pedal steel guitar provide a smooth, relaxed paraphrase of the melody to balance the somewhat frenetic drumming that accompanies the hula performance. While it has its own native traditions, Hawaii, as part of the United States, is depicted as capable of urbanity and sophistication. American audiences, in particular, understand this musical coding: from the 1920s onward popular song has turned to Hawaiian themes and instruments (especially ukulele and hula girls). This fascination reached its peak in 1961 with Elvis Presley’s performance in the film musical *Blue Hawaii*. It is striking that this is the final ‘foreign’ setting before the return to the U.S. Hawaii’s 1959 statehood—just before the World’s Fair—provided a model for the kind of acculturation depicted in the ‘White Room’ that ends the journey.

The question of cultural proficiency as embodied in performance is even more prominent after the ride’s 2009 renovation, which added a return to the mainland U.S. absent from the World’s Fair and prior theme park versions. Amid Midwestern cornfields, barns, and farmhouses, a positively virtuosic guitar solo in a finger-picking style temporarily overshadows all else on the soundtrack. Americans, the ride says, are not only able to keep time and tune, but they are *creative*. The introduction of Toy Story’s Jessie as a guitar-playing figure here tells us just what sort of creativity the ride has in mind.

The finale of “It’s a Small World” sublimates nearly all of the musical differences that characterize the rest of the experience. The visual composition homogenizes the various national folk styles into a common scene: white costumes on white landscape, with only residual hair and skin differences remaining. The music engages in an even stronger whitewashing: all the children sing in English, and the aural

wrinkles are now smoothed out—with the one exception of the persistently dissonant oboe, which now plays in the normative major key of the song instead of its original ‘exotic’ minor. Otherwise, the accompaniment is now a lush symphony orchestra, the Western norm in film soundtracks. We are back home.

Before leaving the music, we have one final comment. Unlike Nooshin, our goal here is not to deconstruct “It’s a Small World” from a postcolonial standpoint. Instead, we seek to understand the ride’s musical construction of otherness within the vocabulary of American music and the milieu of Disney productions. Like the movie soundtracks that Disney and other studios produced, “It’s a Small World” draws on the invented traditions of the nineteenth century, both European nationalism and its flip-side, exoticism, to depict other cultures. The message of the song—as we are guided to understand and internalize it through its form and melody—is that these differences can be overcome once we understand the basic musical fabric from which all cultures are created. The message of the song as performed throughout the ride, however, is that not all cultures are as proficient at this cultural translation as others. Some people are *more* like us than others; some people are still learning to sing along to what is essentially *our* song.

IV: 2009: A New Direction

Anaheim Disney renovated the Small World ride in 2008-09. The change brought a new water flume and sturdier boats, brighter colors, and a few new attractions (e.g.: the New Guinea section was replaced by the American Southwest). Most importantly, the ride now featured 30 characters from the Disney animated films: Aladdin, Nemo, Ariel, Donald Duck, and so on now appear at various points in the ride, usually associated with the countries associated with their films. To list just a few: Alice and the White Rabbit show up in England, Peter Pan circles high over London, and the ride locates Cinderella and her mouse friends in France, Pinocchio and Jiminy Cricket in Italy, and (incongruously) Aladdin and Jasmine appear on a flying carpet over the Taj Mahal. Ariel sings to the riders from her own watery hangout, Lilo and Stich surf in Hawaii, Donald Duck and *los otros dos caballeros* (from the 1944 film) play guitars in Mexico, and Toy Story’s Woody and Jessie serenade us from the American Southwest. Mary

Blair’s dolls still take center stage, though they now share it with some more famous companions.

In our observations, younger riders appear excited at spotting these film characters, exhibiting the same enthusiasm they show at meeting the costumed Disney characters that stroll the park outside. Likewise, one can play “name that tune” with the iconic songs from the films that now emanate from separate speakers placed within the scenes in which Disney characters appear. Adult Disneyphiles were reportedly less positive. The Associated Press described “angry fans [who] see an unabashed marketing ploy that trashes the pacifist message at the heart of the ‘Happiest Cruise That Ever Sailed the World.’” It quoted Leo Braudy, a cultural historian at the University of Southern California: “Disney wants to brand the diversity of the entire world and somehow say that it’s Disney-derived. It seems a bit crass to put this brand on something that was meant to be a sort of United Nations for children.”

In response, the AP report quotes Marty Sklar, the vice-president of Walt Disney Imagineering: “We are not trying to turn this classic attraction into a marketing pitch for Disney plush toys.” We suspect he means this, but we see something more complex going on here than either just an innocent refurbishment or an intentional shift from a ‘pacifist’ vision of world unity to Disney over-commercialization. If taken in a more neutral tone, Braudy’s notion of “branding” diversity under the Disney label accounts, at least partially, for some of the 2009 alterations. For example, the soundtrack and visual design of Disney’s 1992 film *Aladdin* traded in many of the same exoticisms as the non-Western portions of “It’s a Small World”. However, by using only the image of the carpet ride and the song that originally accompanied it (“A Whole New World”), “It’s a Small World” reduces that exoticism to emphasize the wonder of travel. Focusing on Alan Menken and Tim Rice’s Broadway-style ballad—the only song in the entire *Aladdin* soundtrack devoid of any “Middle Eastern” signifiers—erases the difference embodied in its characters while also dodging some of the film’s more problematic elements. On the other hand, a song that proposes to take us “wonder by wonder” and offer a “new fantastic point of view” provides a fitting counterpoint to the Shermans’ “It’s a Small World.” This particular revision to the ride re-situates the Disney experience in a generationally accessible way.

Our analysis above shows how the Small World ride’s ‘world unity’ comes with a peculiarly American accent; we are not the first to notice how Disneyland exudes American cultural messages. Writing of Disneyland’s Main Street, for example, Salome and Salome refer to “the manner in which Disney has managed to bring American cultural fantasies to life, externalizing the almost inchoate romantic images of the people” (85). Van Maanen writes more extensively:

what is celebrated at Disneyland and what is taught come together under such labels as faith in the future, patriotism, cultural superiority, political conservatism, and the trivialization of differences across the globe. America shines and spreads its light on the world and the exotic is reduced to safe and familiar terms. All this is packaged in a fashion that is thematically consistent, rather banal, closely scrutinized and controlled, and licensed by broad middle-class values of harmony and order. (“Displacing”, 14-15).

Steiner’s work on Frontierland and Fjellman’s cultural analysis of Disney World make similar points. Disneyland is a place where visitors can revel in a simpler, cleaner version of America—from Main Street’s vision of small-town harmony to Frontierland’s memory of an adventurous past, to Tomorrowland’s promise of a wonderful future, with a good deal of fantasy thrown into them all. This older Disneyland, these scholars say, has long helped Americans reconnect with their basic myths; it is a place that helps them reaffirm who they are.

Yet, the park has changed in recent years, and on several levels. For one thing, there are more movie tie-ins than before, and not just in “It’s a Small World”. The Tomorrowland submarine ride is now the “Finding Nemo Submarine Ride”, joined by “Buzz Lightyear Astro Blasters” and “Star Tours: The Adventures Continue”—a collaboration that (according to a park reader-board) “combines the creativity of Disney with the genius of George Lucas”. A long list of non-movie attractions have closed (“The House of Tomorrow”, the “World Beneath Us”, the “Carousel of Progress”, etc.), to be replaced by movie-themed rides, some of them short-lived (“Honey I Shrunk the Audience”). In Frontierland, “Tom Sawyer’s Island” (a 1950s movie tie-in, but also a reference to classic American literature) is now dominated by the “Pirate’s Lair”, tied to Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* film series. That series was itself modeled on an existing Disneyland ride,

which became a movie tie-in *ex post facto*. Except for the "Jungle Cruise" and the "Enchanted Tiki Room", Adventureland is now dominated by films: the "Indiana Jones Adventure" and "Tarzan's Tree House". (The short-lived "Aladdin's Oasis" has closed.) Mickey's Toontown was the first whole "land" made from a movie, though Fantasyland has always had Disney cartoons at its core.

A second change has been the growth of "Disney Princesses", not as rides, but activities pitched at young girls. The present-day park is virtually overrun with 4-8 year-old girls dressed up as princesses from the various Disney animated films. Orenstein reports that these were originally spontaneous: girls dressed in princess costumes, imitating their favorite movie characters. Disney marketing jumped on it. The park now sells costumes for Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and several others; since 2007, girls can get a "princess transformation" (make-up, manicure, one of three hairstyles, gown, crown, wand and shoes) at the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique near Cinderella's Castle for from \$54.95 to \$189.95. Many do. Then they tag along after the various 'real' princesses (Disney actors) who walk through the park, smiling shyly at them and collecting autographs. They come to Disneyland to connect to a fantasy world, in which every girl can become a princess and where the magic world of the films comes alive.

That, we think, is the point of the Small World ride changes. Their purpose is not (just) to sell products; Sklar is right about that. Their point is to connect the Small World ride to the rest of the park, and particularly to what Disneyland has become: a fantasy world of its own, almost its own planet, where movie-creatures dwell and where one can be reminded of the joy the films bring. One sees the films, once visits the movie tie-in attractions, one buys the products to take home as souvenirs; this is all part of a single motion, connecting visitors to "The Happiest Place on Earth".

Disneyland is no longer (just) a place where Americans come to experience a smaller, cleaner version of their own country and (by doing so) to make sense of themselves. It is now (also) a destination of its own, where people come from many countries to visit the place where films are made. The new message does not drive out the old; "It's a Small World" still exemplifies American cultural values, as our analysis of its art and music has shown. Alongside this, however lives an independent world—the world of Disney films. Adding Disney

characters to that ride did not destroy the cultural message we have outlined in this article. It merely added a new dimension to a supposedly 'international' experience.

WORKS CITED

- Associated Press. "Disney's Iconic 'Small World' Ride Makeover Finds Nemo". 5 Feb 2009. News Wire Service. 17 October, 2012.
- Bell, Elizabeth, Lynda Hass, and Laura Sells, eds. *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. Print.
- Brannen, May Yoko. "Cross-Cultural Materialism: Commodifying Culture in Japan." *Meaning, Measure and Morality of Materialism*. Ed. Floyd Rudmin and Marsha Richins. Provo, UT: Association of Consumer Research. 1992. 167-180. Print.
- Brode, Douglas. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Print.
- Carson, Charles. "'Whole New Worlds': Music and the Disney Theme Park Experience." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13.2 (2004): 228-235.
- Child, Francis James. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, Parts I-X*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1882-1898. Print.
- Christiansen, Palle. "Peasant Adaptation to Bourgeois Culture? Class Formation and Cultural Redefinition in the Danish Countryside," *Ethnologia Scandinavica* (1978) 98-152. Print.
- Disney, Walt. "Walt Disney Welcome." *Walt Disney and the 1964 World's Fair*. Los Angeles: Disney Studios, 2009. CD.
- Dorfman, Ariel and Armand Mattelart. *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. New York: International General, 1975. Print.
- Fjellman, Stephen M. *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1992. Print.

Baber & Spickard: "Crafting Culture"

Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrance Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Print

Kennedy, John F. *A Nation of Immigrants*. New York: Harper, 1964. Print.

Kuenz, Jane. 1995. "Working at the Rat." *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disneyworld*. Ed. The Disney Project. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995. 110-162. Print.

Lippi-Green, Rosina. *English with an Accent: Language Ideology and Discrimination in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Print.

Lutz, Catherine A. and Jane L. Collins. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993. Print.

MacAdam, Murray. "Working for the Rat." *New Internationalist*, December, 1998. Print.

Maio, Kathi. "Disney's Dolls." *New Internationalist*, December, 1998. Print.

Maxime. "Mary Blair," "Song by the Sherman Brothers," and "The 1964 World 's Fair." *DesigningDisney*, n.d. Web. 23 July 2012.

Mickey Mouse Monopoly: Disney, Childhood and Corporate Power. Dir. Miguel Picker. Media Education Foundation, 2001. DVD.

Morgan, Prys. "From a Death to a View: The Hunt for the Welsh Past in the Romantic Period." *The Invention of Tradition*. Eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 43-100. Print.

Nooshin, Laudan. "Circumnavigation with a Difference? Music, Representation, and the Disney Experience." *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13.2. (2004): 236-51. Print.

Niles, Robert. "Disney Debuts Changes to 'It's a Small World' [with video]." *Theme Park Insider*. Robert Niles. 5 Feb, 2009. Web. 9 Oct, 2012.

Orenstein, Peggy. *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*. New York: Harper, 2012. Print.

Patterson, Carolyn Bennett. "In the Far Pacific: At the Birth of Nations". Photographs by David Hiser and Melinda Berge. *National Geographic* 170 (October 1986): 460-500. Print.

Raz, Aviad E. *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. Print.

Salamone, Frank A. and Virginia A. Salamone. "Images of Main Street: Disney World and the American Adventure." *Journal of American Culture* 22.1 (1999): 85-92. Print.

Spickard, Paul R. *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2007. Print.

Steiner, Michael. "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West." *Montana* 48.1 (1998):2-17. Print.

Sutton, R. Anderson. "South-east Asia." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Web. 11 Jan. 2013.

Trevor-Roper, Hugh. "The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland." *The Invention of Tradition*. Eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. 15-42. Print.

Van Maanen, John. "The Smile Factory: Work at Disneyland." *Rethinking Organizational Culture*. Ed. P. J. Frost et al. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1991. 58-76. Print.

———. "Displacing Disney: Some Notes on the Flow of Culture." *Qualitative Sociology* 15.1 (1992): 5-35. Print.

Wasko, Janet. 2005. "Corporate Disney in Action". *Popular Culture: A Reader*, Ed. Raiford A. Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz, 2005. 184-196. Print.

Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. "Image of Empire: Tokyo Disneyland and Japanese Culture Imperialism." *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*. Ed. E. Smoodin. New York: Routledge, 1994. 181-202. Print.

About the Authors

Katherine Baber is Assistant Professor of Music History at the University of Redlands. She specializes in American musical modernism, with particular emphasis on the works of Leonard Bernstein. She has written on World War II radio propaganda and the role of jazz styles in Bernstein's theatrical and symphonic works. She is completing a book on the intersection of music, politics, and culture in Bernstein's aesthetic. She holds a Ph.D. in musicology from the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University and she is occasionally a clarinetist.

James Spickard is Professor of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Redlands. He has written widely on contemporary ethnography, on religion in the late-modern world, on human rights, and on the hidden influences of culture. He holds a PhD in religion and society from the Graduate Theological Union. He teaches visual ethnography and is a photographer.