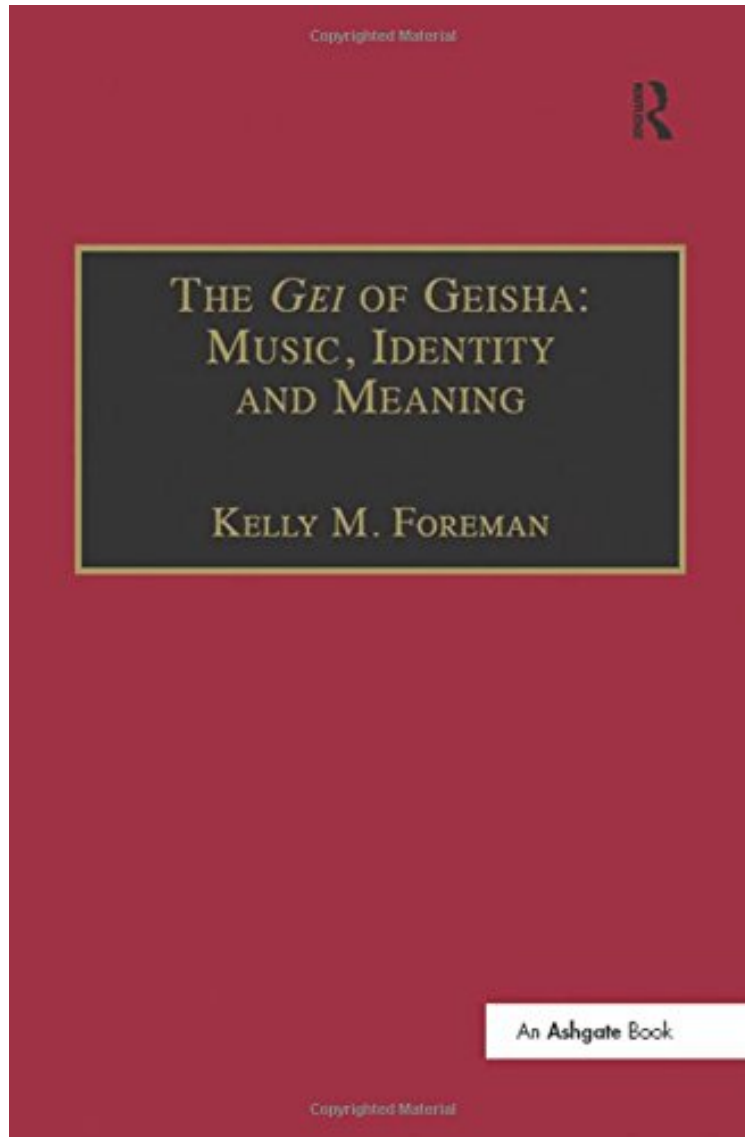


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The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning (SOAS Musicology Series)

Kelly M. Foreman

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Kelly M. Foreman : The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning (SOAS Musicology Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gei of Geisha: Music, Identity and Meaning (SOAS Musicology Series):

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Geisha StudyBy PrincessI've been reading books on geisha

for the past ten years, literally reading everything I found in English from Victorian novels to academic studies. Kelly Foreman's excellent study of the "gei" or "art" of the geisha is one of the most significant contributions to the study of geisha to date. First of all, the book is based on her extensive research as an ethnomusicologist who worked in Japan, taking music lessons and performing alongside geisha. Foreman was also able to meet and interview geisha in several sites in Japan. Foreman's focus on the arts takes the reader through the geisha's arduous training, her involvement in the social practices of the classical arts world of Japan, her desire to pursue a career as a classical dancer and musician. As Foreman clarifies, the performances at parties known as ozashiki, while an important part of the geisha's repertoire and often a source of pleasure, are geared toward providing funds for her arts lessons and major yearly performances onstage, which she must pay for from her own pocket. Unlike other classical artists in Japan, the geisha does not receive government subsidy, something that may become necessary if this artistic career is to survive. Foreman's accessible, expertly researched and analyzed book is a pleasure to read, and a "must" read for everyone seriously interested in geisha history and performance traditions.

The Japanese geisha is an international icon, known almost universally as a symbol of traditional Japan. Numerous books exist on the topic, yet this is the first to focus on the 'gei' of geisha - the art that constitutes their title (gei translates as fine art, sha refers to person). Kelly M. Foreman brings together ethnomusicological field research, including studying and performing the shamisen among geisha in Tokyo, with historical research. The book elaborates how musical art is an essential part of the identity of the Japanese geisha rather than a secondary feature, and locates current practice within a tradition of two and half centuries. The book opens by deconstructing the idea of 'geisha' as it functions in Western societies in order to understand why gei has been, and continues to be, neglected in geisha studies. Subsequent chapters detail the myriad musical genres and traditions with which geisha have been involved during their artistic history, as well as their position within the traditional arts society. Considering the current situation more closely, the final chapters explore actual dedication to art today by geisha, and analyse how they create impromptu performances at evening banquets. An important issue here is geisha-patron artistic collaboration, which leads to consideration of what Foreman argues to be the unique and essential nexus of identity, eroticism and aesthetics within the geisha world.

'This is the first book to focus on the art (gei) of the geisha and to position musical skills at the center of geisha life and identity ... Much of the material about geisha repertoire and history is not readily available in English. The final chapter is especially engaging. Summing Up: Recommended.' Choice '... this book is an insightful read, both informative and entertaining, bringing to life an area of Japanese society that continues to be steeped in myth and intrigue.' Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 'In this well-crafted book, Kelly M. Foreman takes on the pervasive conception of Japanese geisha as exploited erotic entertainers, and argues that the center of their professional lives is their dedication to traditional Japanese performing arts. ... The Gei of Geisha should attract those interested in the social phenomenon of female performing arts, as well as those interested in the arts themselves.' International Journal of Asian Studies 'The Gei of Geisha is a beautiful and much needed work that fits nicely into Japanese musical studies. Scholars and everyday readers alike would gain a new perspective on geisha from this book and, ultimately, because of Foreman's convincing detail, on what truly makes a geisha an artist - her gei (art).'

Ethnomusicology Forum 'This book is essential for anyone considering the scholarly study of geisha from an ethnomusicological or an anthropological perspective.' Ethnomusicology

About the Author Kelly M. Foreman teaches in the Department of Music at Wayne State University, USA.