

FROM FOLKLORE TO WORLD MUSIC – A DISCOURSE IN TERMINOLOGY

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Folk and ethnic music, and their transformations in contemporary music genres, is a hot topic today. Different fields and institutions deal with them differently. They sometimes use the same terms, but their contents may be completely different. Or they depict or even evaluate various phenomena which they haven't fully researched, or which are marginal from their point of view. It is a problem which we have noticed in discussions, observations and comparisons of different views with scholars, music publicists, critics, performers, and general public as well.

I. From Folklore to Folklorism

(Lucie Uhlíková)

In this presentation, we attempt to explain some *terms and historical and social contexts*. Each of us will present a view which is based on her long-term academic studies and experience in the field. First of all it is necessary to stress that all phenomena in society and culture have been *constantly developing* and changing, like their representatives. This is why the search for a definition is quite difficult. I would like to mention here the famous quotation from Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht,¹ that the only definition of a phenomenon or a term is its own history. Regarding folk culture and the folklore of nations and ethnic groups, we have to bear in mind that their contents, form, place, and function have been constantly transformed during their development.

The term of *folklor* in Czech comes from the English expression *folklore*¹, that is, what people know. There have been more than one hundred scholarly *definitions of folklore*, and their contents differ. Most stress tradition, antiquity, collectivity, and oral forms, but the variants are also quite important. Some definitions work with traditional culture only, while others include the phenomena of mass culture as well.

Czech folkloristics understands folklore as the oral, music, dance, and performing phenomena of the folk, including children's folklore. Some folklore branches and genres have developed without interruption, while others have been transformed and still others have vanished. The term folklore originally signified just part of the traditional spiritual culture connected especially with the common people. These were depicted as the folk (*lid* in Czech). In the Czech lands, the folk were understood mainly as the people of *rural and agricultural* environments. Later on, ethnography included *urban* environments, and the related urban folklore, in its research as well. Considering the decline² of traditional rural culture, and the significant *changes in culture and society in the 20th century*, Czech scholars like to leave out adjectives such as folk and folklore, preferring instead to speak about local traditions, spontaneous occasions in music and dance, and about group songs. Understanding folklore as a term limited only to its development and to its archaic forms was abandoned a few decades ago. In her presentation, Dr. Toncrová deals with this issue in detail. The *general public* understands the term folklore in Czech in its narrowest sense, that is, as folk music and dance, and includes in it what we in the academy call folklorism.³

Folklorism deals with passing some parts of folk culture from their original environment into another context. One sometimes meets the term in a simplified version as 'folklore on stage'. Quite often, folklorism is defined as the 'second existence of folklore', the mediation of folk culture by secondhand experience. Such use and copying of traditional elements are characterized by the change of original functions

and different communicative links (for instance, in the original environment there is no difference between the stage and the auditorium), intentional and systematic preservation, revival and development of tradition, the use of attitudes found in high arts, and in many cases, commercialization. Regarding the level of stylization of folklore material, we can distinguish between quotation, imitation, and arrangement of folklore—the individual use of a folklore form by an author. We don't include highly individual works of art that are inspired by folklore; sometimes it is quite difficult to find the borders. The *evaluation of folklorism*, as can be met in the media especially, is quite daring and more often incorrect. Folklorism is a multi-layered phenomenon and it is impossible to evaluate it without proper knowledge. I will comment on some of the most *common mistakes*:

1) *The use and misuse of folklore* for political and other representative aims has been known in Europe since the 18th century. The period of Communism and totalitarianism hardly brought anything new. Interference in the actual content of traditional music by Communist authorities was a new, short-lived, unhappy period in the development of Czech and Slovak folklorism. Folklorism was considered an officially supported display of socialism. Conversely, when there is demand, there is supply.

2) *The stage presentation of folklore* is quite an important activity of folklore ensembles, but not the only one. The other important aspects include non-commercial activities; functions connected with local representation and identification; folklorism as an active part-time interest; preserving singing activities; and finally, helping folklore return to its original functions (which is called the third existence of folklore).

3) Folklore and/or folklorism *in the contemporary media* provide many examples of misunderstanding the term: there are stereotypes in themes and in the form of the message. What are quite popular with the media are images such as festival members in traditional costume drinking alcohol, or in Slovakia, erotic-like camera angles focused under

the skirts of dancing girls.

4) It seems that journalists like to speak about *authenticity* (what is authentic and what is not; what is of folk and folkloric origin and what is not); they like to demonstrate this through museum pieces, not living folklore; they like to interpret brass bands and their music as a decline of folk tradition; they prefer to see cymbalom bands as something traditional and typical; everything with a cymbalom is considered traditional. A point of view is crucial: each ethnomusicologist will refuse the critical approach to brass bands in the history of Moravian folk music. On the one hand, brass bands would sometimes simplify the melody and harmony of tunes; on the other, their popularity in some regions has helped to allow traditional music forms to survive. Contemporary brass bands are linked with the activities of traditional musicians; they perform on various customary and ceremonial occasions as well as Saturday night dances. In Moravian and Bohemian regions today, brass bands are more authentic than contemporary bagpipe bands or hammer cymbalom bands. Regarding instrumental set up and performance style, bagpipe bands and hammer cymbalom bands represent a new tradition that has come with the increasing enthusiasm in folk culture and conscious interest in folk tradition in the area of folklorism (see BAIER 2002, UHLÍKOVÁ 2000b).

5) Taking into consideration the above-mentioned facts and functional aspects of the whole issue, most views concerning folklorism, contemporary folk music and Czech world music work with considerably *simplified ideas, distorted points of view, and dilettantism*, especially when evaluating their long-term aims (not commercial success), viability, and wider social impact.

6) The misuse of the Czech term *lidovka* is quite alarming. It is a term from the field of Czech popular music, but it is wrongly used as another term for traditional folk music. Here one term is used to signify two different things. The initial *lidovka* originated in the late 1920s as a combination of widely accessible and popular marching and dance

songs, which were good for social singing as well. In some features, the initial *lidovka* extended folk music and even replaced it in some regions. A highly commercial nature, the application of copyright, and the use of modern mass media are typical for the *lidovka*. Its precursors included František Kmoch and the best representatives were Karel Hašler, Jaromír Vejvoda, and Karel Vacek (see KOTÉK, 1998).

7) *Folk music vs. ethnic music* is another problem issue. There are several reasons why we don't usually work with the term 'ethnic' in European music folkloristics. First, many nations are not based on ethnic but political principles. Second, cultural phenomena connected with folk culture never respected ethnic borders. There were quite specific cultural grounds where some of the explored aspects (such as folklore text, dance, melodic types, and instrumental set up) were almost identical within several ethnic groups. Third, there is one well-known European peculiarity: the high, official, and elite culture of higher social groups on the one hand, and the low, folk culture of the lower social groups on the other. This lower culture also includes traditional folk music. Using modern terminology, folk music is part of non-artificial culture and non-artificial music. Traditional folk music has always been a social category, not an ethnic category. In non-European countries, music and dance are often divided into sacred and secular (with the exceptions of the classical music of India, China, and Japan).

8) Finally, the contemporary trends in music in folklorism are not understood. We can distinguish two different phenomena. The first one is identical or very similar to what we understand as performance of folk musicians: improvisation in playing songs with more or less agreed on harmonization with no authorial intentions. This type of performance is quite often connected with various forms of social entertainment with dance and song. The second phenomenon is characterized by an individually different and intentional approach to traditional materials. Three tendencies can be distinguished here: first, a reconstruction of the authentic version; second, simple and moderately difficult stylizations of

traditional music with a certain measure of authorial aim (this includes brass bands); third, crossing the borders of music genres, their combination intending to make it accessible to broad spheres of listeners today.

All three approaches have been used in the Czech lands for several decades, all have their specific functions and positions. The first and second approaches have their impact mostly within the folklore movement; the third one addresses the general public, especially young people who have no direct link to traditional music. Today, this third approach seems to have the best possible future. If I may quote myself (see UHLÍKOVÁ, 2000a), the form in which folk song will survive into the next millenium is not so important. It is the poetics and truth of folk songs which are more important, their power to address future generations, and the wide range of folk song themes which capture the experience of previous generations.

Notes:

1. H. H. Eggebrecht (1919-1999), professor of musicology at the University of Freiburg, noted music lexicographer, author of materials on music from the Middle Ages to the 20th century.
2. Word coined in 1846 (to replace the term "popular antiquities") by English scholar William John Thoms.
3. Instead of saying the decline or vanishing of folk traditions, I prefer to use the term transformation. This is quite a natural phenomenon, because folk culture is connected to its bearer, that is, the folk. The folk in the era of feudalism are not identical with the folk of capitalism (or socialism); different social conditions represent different cultural phenomena.
4. There are some other misinterpretations of the term folklore in the media. Here it means some negative phenomena connected with politics and other spheres of public life; it is also connected with an evaluation of the Czech "national" character. See Jeřábek, R.: "Folklór je, když..." In *Národopisná revue*, 2 (1995): 115; *ibid*: "Další dimenze folkloru." In *Národopisná revue*, 4 (1996): 221; Uhlíková, L.: "Jak folkloristé interpretují folklorové písně na folkloristických festivalech". In *Folklor*, 5 (1999): 267 - 268.
5. Apart from an organized folklore movement of ensembles, this includes folklorism of fine arts, literature, music, and presenting folklore on TV, radio, and film.

6. Functional aspects mean the observation of a place and function (such as esthetic, identificational, representative, social, entertaining, ceremonial, economic, and ideological) of the individual non-artificial music streams.

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II. The Postmodern Era and World Music: Some Notes on Terminology

(Irena Příbylová)

To understand folk music and its many contemporary forms, I would first of all like to draw your attention to some linguistic issues. Please note that in English-language scholarly materials only the term *folk music* has been used; *folk* as such has been applied to people, not to music. Czech speakers use the Czech expression *folk* to denote music which grew out of the folk movement, revival, or boom of the 1960s; they do not link it to their own traditional folk music. Also, Czechs use the single Czech expression *folklór* to denote anything connected with traditional culture, including traditional folk songs. That is why there are many misunderstandings when translating from Czech into English or the other way round. There may be similar problems in other Slavonic languages.

Let us try to look at folk music from a distance. I would like to start at the beginning of a new era: the period in the arts and philosophy following modernism, later called **postmodernism**. In socialist countries, we grew up in a period called *social realism*. For many of us, the first meeting with postmodernism came after the fall of communism; it seemed like chaos to us. Anyway, there is logic in it, which I will try to explain. In connection with the period of postmodernism, I will mention terms like **postcolonialism**, **the search for roots**, **mass culture**, and **cultural studies**. I will end up with the term world music as it is used in English-language sources. (This means that we will be working with terms from different fields: the arts, history, politics, and economics).

Postmodernism is a wide-ranging cultural movement that adopts a *sceptical attitude* to many of the principles that determined Western thought and social life for the last few centuries (Sim: 2001: 339). It

started as early as the 1950s, but became fashionable in the late 1980s. (It seemed like it was over in the 1990s; some scholars have already been trying to call this most recent period POMO, post-postmodernism.) Postmodernism applies to fields like architecture, literature, and music. Its general connotations are *irony, self-mockery, allusion, parody, immersion in popular culture, refusal to believe in or even worry about grand ideas or gestures* (Stringer:1996:541).

As time has passed since the end of postmodernism, more definitions of it are available. I believe that the key term is the *end of grand ideas*. All big and singular truths are gone. That which remains offers *pluralism* and *multiple choices*: this is why we now speak about the 'salad bowl' or 'mosaic' of the USA rather than the former 'melting pot'. The stream of new immigrants is never-ending, like the *possible mixtures* of races and cultures. The white Anglo-Saxon Protestant is no longer in the focus of interest; it is *the other* who matters.

In Britain this period is marked by the end of the British Empire. (Many former colonies of France, Spain, and Portugal have fallen apart as well). *Postcolonial studies* are interested in the issues of language, place, history, and ethnicity of postcolonial countries. Former colonial countries have become independent, and with the departure of the colonizers, the inhabitants retained their *double experience* (in language, culture, religion, etc.) – one for home, the other for public life. Furthermore, instead of staying back there, many people from Africa and India have come to the UK. In Britain they even speak about colonization in reverse.

In the period when no single *language, religion, culture* or *race* prevails, when all ethnic and gender minorities are coming out, when all choices are valid and equal, we speak about the search for identity, or as it later came to be called in music, for roots. Artists (authors) are no longer hidden behind their work; they comment on the process of creativity, and become part of their work.

What makes it more complicated is the fact that there is also an end to one possible culture – the unique and elitist *high culture*. *High and low cultures meet*; they borrow from each other. Artists also freely borrow from the past, and from *all genres and styles* as well. With the coming globalization, they are not limited to their home locations. With the *development of technology*, they are not limited to natural sounds either. Social class division has lost its validity. *Mass culture* satisfies broad cultural needs with the help of *industry*; masses of people decide what is *popular* and what is not.

To study cultural changes in the period of postmodernism, one has to understand more than just one field. A new science that attempts to do this is called *cultural studies*. The first Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies was established in Birmingham, UK in 1964. In the Czech lands, 'cultural studies' has become a household expression recently, but it is part of the departments of English language and literature, ethnology, social studies, music, etc. There has been no accredited academic institution to fully prepare qualified graduates in cultural studies, nor one to provide doctoral studies either. (There are no Czech professors in cultural studies so far). This may explain why the people in media (you...) rely on their intuition and experience when dealing with the contemporary forms of culture, not on academic studies. This may be why their views differ.

The term **world music** makes it more complicated; it is so new that it has not been listed in the latest electronic version of the respected *Grove Music Dictionary* (grovemusic.com). In fact, it is not a music term, but a *commercial term*. It was first used in the UK in the summer of 1987 for the music of what was called the non-Western world.¹ The origins of the term are explained in an article of the British *FolkRoots* magazine (March 2000, no. 201); the information is available on the web pages of the magazine as well (www.frootsmag.com). It was also provided with an introduction to the first edition of a manual called *World Music / The Rough Guide* (1994). To conclude, I can say that the content of the term

world music has existed roughly since the 1950s (simultaneously with the coming of postmodernism); the term was given its name in 1987, and it was not until the late 1990s that the academic community started to deal with it seriously. You will hear many possible definitions of world music during this colloquy. Unlike traditional folk song and ethnic music, world music reflects our postmodern era. I hope that this short introduction to postmodernism will help you as a short introduction to world music.

Notes:

1. Before calling it world music, this music was given many terms in Great Britain, such as worldbeat, tropical, ethnic, international pop, roots, and new sounds. In the U.S.A the terms were Earth Music, Fourth World Music, and One-World Music.

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