

## WHAT DO YOU CALL WORLD MUSIC? AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE THE TERM AND PHENOMENON IN A BROADER CONTEX

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“What do you call world music?” This is a question which any thoughtful man must ask when encountering contemporary music. It seems that there is no strict definition, no unifying view, but only the real manifestation of this music, which everyone (publicists, production managers, businessmen, musicians, and scholars) wants to capture through his or her own point of view and experience.

In their introduction to the first edition of *World Music. The Rough Guide* (1994), the editors say that “the name was dreamed up in 1987 by the heads of a number of small London-based record labels who found their releases from African, Latin American and other international artists were not finding rack space because record stores had no obvious place to put them. And so the world music tag was hit upon. . . . The name stuck, and was swiftly adopted at record stores and festivals, in magazines and books, on both sides of the Atlantic.” They add, “There’s a purist argument that world music is a “ghetto” term, and another that the term is next to meaningless, so broad is its interpretation. Alternatives abound: roots, international, ethnic. But the music industry feels at home with the world music tag.”

The term inspired musicians, producers, and organizers who dealt with international genres rooted in ethnic music, and who had troubles placing them into the already stabilized genres of jazz, rock, and pop. The world music tag started to include contemporary music with a wealth of characters.

At the same time, independently of the terminology in the music market, some ethnomusicologists started to use the term world music to

depict the subject of their studies: non-Western music. In the late 1980s they were already working on the upcoming ten volumes of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (2000), which in the end came to include Western music as well. One of the volumes deals with European music, which means that two concepts of world music have merged: (1) world music as non-Western music and one of the subjects of ethnomusicology studies (the static concept), and (2) world music in general as the next step in the development of music with traditional roots (the dynamic concept).

In their introduction to the second edition of *World Music. The Rough Guide* (1999, in two volumes), the editors explain that "the Guide sets itself a clearly impossible task: to document and explain the popular, folk and (excluding the Western canon) classical music traditions around the globe." The Western canon here is the set of rules, norms and works of western classical music which had earlier been separated into the specific category of classical music.

In fact, not only classical music had been separated, but jazz, contemporary folk music (singers-songwriters), and rock as well. These categories are not part of world music, though they merge with it and have been spread internationally. The answer to why they do not fit into world music is that they lack one typical feature of world music, musical ethnicity. World music is fundamentally based on music traditions, both older and more recent, which are connected with individual ethnic groups (tribes or nations).

World music, as presented in a book or at a festival, includes not only the traditional forms of folk music (connected with musical folklore in some countries); it can also include a mixture of various contemporary styles (such as contemporary folk, rock, jazz, and pop) which have been inspired by traditional folk music. In non-European countries, this also includes the non-folk, higher musical culture.

It is evident that jazz, contemporary folk, and rock, due to their development, have been based on general more than on ethnic principles

(in fact, they are defined by more general principles: the stress on individual improvisation, the message of the text, and the significant rhythm). Then we can say that one of the fundamental features of world music is its focus on musical expressions that are rooted in ethnic tradition. Such musical expressions can be manifest in rhythm, melody, color of the tone (exotic instruments, the ways of singing and harmony, etc.), and in the development and amplification, in the broad sense of the word.

Some ensembles have based their careers on the application of a single significant ethnic feature (such as Värttina, from Karelia, Finland, with its characteristic vocal harmonies), and its use in various experiments (excluding classical music). One of the strongest weapons of contemporary world music is the use of multiple rhythms of various traditional styles. A well-known British producer, Joe Boyd, even speaks of access to the most erotic rhythms of the planet. In this, world music differs from contemporary folk music, which stresses primarily the message of the lyrics (from the old ballad to a present day story), and is interested neither in musical expression nor in perfect and well-developed style.

Researching world music without any deeper theoretical studies, one might consider it the next stage in the development of folk music (though this statement can be further discussed; rock music and contemporary folk music might also be considered the same). There are differences between traditional folk music and world music: traditional folk music is of anonymous authorship and uses a stable set of stylistic features. World music, on the other hand, significantly stresses the creativity of its authors, as well as the performing qualities of individual musicians and ensembles. World music respects traditional music but does not yield to it; world music uses traditional folk music as a source of creative inspiration, and freely uses its traditional features in a new environment. We may ask whether this difference is not provided by the historical perspective of our view. What would be our take on traditional culture if

we happened to be, with our present knowledge, right in the middle of the folk culture of the Baroque period? Can the answer be that in fact we have been watching the roots and branches of the same tree growing, although to where we don't know?

World music means, above all, a contemporary musical content. It is a phenomenon that develops in a creative, open way, without possible anticipations. It gains various forms and functions in various parts of the world. In Africa it is part of local liberated pop music, in the Anglo-American world it is more a reaction to the stiff and manipulative structures of excessive show business. It is worth mentioning that world music in Central Europe is not a phenomenon that would strictly follow folklorism in music; the folklorism which developed and was depicted in the 20th century, and which in its later, mature stage shows features of an intentional interest in keeping and developing tradition, as well as interest in its use on stage. Its focus is there.

World music does not function as a new contents of folklorism, though it can merge with it. The dynamic boom of world music, as I see it, is partly a psychological reaction on folklorism, an attempt to balance it. In a way, it is an unconscious, intuitive attitude toward traditional folk music. (An attempt to balance the development has been nothing new in the history of mankind). World music continues musical traditions in different criteria, quite often based on personal feelings and experience only. The focus may not be directly connected to traditional folk music and its development; it may involve psychological and sociological issues. The influence of the contemporary music market and its mechanisms cannot be neglected either. Regarding deeper sociological and psychological aspects, it is worth quoting Bernhard Hanneken, program director of Tanz und Folk Festival in Rudolstadt, Germany: "Contemporary world music festivals are natural heirs to the hippie festivals of the late 1960s." Hippie festivals also responded to the established social structures and dominant views.

From the psychological point of view, world music can be explained

as a phenomenon that completes the outer expressions and needs of the human psyche, provided we regard all basic psychic functions and their compensatory manifestations.' In my opinion, Central European world music, in general, expresses a wave of emotions as a reaction to the wave of rationalism in the advanced stages of folklorism. This is especially evident in countries such as Germany, the Czech lands, most of Poland, and urban parts of Hungary: traditional folk music has almost vanished as a kind of entertainment for the general public in these regions (an emotional saturation par excellence has been missing). Unlike Slovakia, south-eastern Poland, and Romania, the above-mentioned regions have witnessed an early invasion and development of world music, as well as contemporary folk music, and a greater number of performers.

My statement is perhaps too simple. It would be worth considering other aspects, such as the connection between folklorism and the broader entertainment in a specific region, whether it works through emotions, or is the intellectual construction/reconstruction of a limited number of fans. Nevertheless, I believe that a view based on a specific psychological energy and its laws is competent and able to explain many of the social and cultural movements. The compensatory attitude can generally be applied to the characterization of any psychological expression, provided we are aware of the relative pair of opposing parameters and characteristics at any given level (such as rational/emotional, intuitive/perceptive, traditional/non-traditional, conservative/liberal). Consequently, one of the principles of world music is a principle complementary to the principle of tradition, provided tradition is defined as "the set of established customs, habits, and views kept by generations". At present, musical folklorism is a relatively stabilized, conservative extension of tradition. World music today is strongly destabilized.

As it is evident from the discussion above, it makes no sense at present to compare and evaluate the products of musical folklorism and world music in any form at any stage, because these streams (or, more

accurately, maximum amplitude of their manifestations) cover different spaces: both in time and in the level of psychology and sociology. They also differ in the way they work with traditional folk music, as well as in their own creativity and performing qualities (to make this statement evident would exceed the scope of this paper). Fundamentally, they bear features of mutual compensation and completion.

In order to understand what is going on, it is important to explore details, employ a general view, and understand the relations. Musical folklorism and world music are two different streams of one field of musical culture, though the line between them is not sharp. Similarly, the lines between traditional folk music and folklorism, and world music and traditional folk music, are not sharp. It is also important to be aware of the position and parameters of the streams, as well as the position of the observers. People in science especially should ask themselves - in order to observe properly - "What is my standpoint? Am I aware of the space with which I am internally involved?" This attitude can fundamentally help any researcher in the humanities with personal solutions; it allows him or her to make further steps, reach objectivity, and exceed the level of personal reactions.

After a period of unprejudiced knowledge, it is easy to go from one stream to another and back. It is as simple as moving between various branches of science and art, provided we know their natures and their benefits for us.

World music is a confusing term. Its origin is not in science, but in the psychology of vibrant contemporary life in all its scope, where various needs and tendencies of the period meet. It is questionable to think about world music within the limits of a scientific category, at least at present. The drawbacks are evident in the European volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (2000), which is unbalanced and hasty, especially in passages describing the development and scope of world music over the past decades.

In spite of the above-mentioned drawbacks, a good deal of space

exists for the further development of the term world music, a space for imagination and clarification. Most likely, the term will be differentiated over time into strictly defined categories that will gradually focus on the field of 'traditional' forms. The term has originated recently and is valid at present; world music has found its place and function (festivals, active musicians, reflective audience, publishers, presentation in the media, etc.). At the same time, world music strives for a definition of itself through confrontations with some stabilized categories, sometimes it merges with them, sometimes reaches for the unknown. In short, it lives and grows.

World music is a psychological and sociological testimony of the turn of the 21st century. It is a phenomenon based on the common recurring principles of history; it has its specific social and cultural parameters which reflect the present. Consequently, it has its unique quality (positive values), as well as its drawbacks. Who knows what the future of this 'drifter in time' is. Perhaps it will vanish after some time, leaving an almost invisible trace, to emerge somewhere else at a different time, using a different name and form.

#### Notes:

1. See Kysel, 2000.
2. See 2001, 46.
3. See Jacobi, 1976.
4. See *Slovník spisovné češtiny*, 1978, 567.

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