

FUSIONS, HERETICS, AND APPARATCHIKS WORLD MUSIC: IS IT REALLY A NEW PHENOMENON?

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Media articles and even seminar papers frequently offer a misleading idea: world music is a strictly 1990's phenomenon, a natural product of modern information technology. Our world collapsed into "global village", a place of vibrant musical fusions, which would not be possible without CD players, transcontinental travel, and mass media. Traditional folk singers are backed by electric guitars and create a modern day crossbreeding that would not have been possible earlier in history.

In my paper I would like to offer a different view: many of the most precious kinds of music, which are now assumed to be pure, developed decades or even centuries ago in the same way as modern day fusions: by blending different cultures, or importing foreign ideas into local styles. While saying this, I agree that there is a difference in time scale: in the past, the process was much slower, while today the market is flooded with fusions done on purpose.

Here in Moravia, the best-known example is the introduction of the cymbalom to the village bands. Many other styles, today accepted as permanent, were created by migration and combination of musical traditions: jazz, blues, flamenco, reggae, spirituals, tango, as well as all Latin American music.

But, besides these obvious examples, there are other cases, less apparent, but nevertheless stimulating.

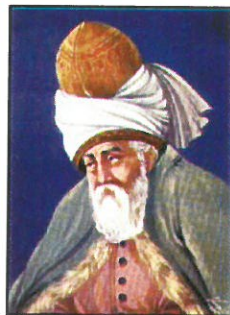


Medieval fusions and migrations

[music]

CD Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. *Bari Bari*. Oriental Star SR 37, 1991, track 1

This is a contemporary version of the *qawwali* style with a seven-centuries-long history. The recording is by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan from Pakistan. By the end of the 13th century, *qawwali* could be considered as a novelty fusion. Europe was going through the dark ages at that time, but the Islamic world was flowering. In the West, it reached as far as today's Spain; in the East, Muslim missionaries tried to export their religion to India. *Qawwali* was born as a fusion of spiritual poetry from Persia with music of the Indian subcontinent. The lead singer, known as a *qawwal*, is backed by a *party*, incorporating a choir, who repeat the solo singer's key lines, players on tabla drums, and a small harmonium.



This instrument originally came to India from Europe, to replace the Indian violin *sarangi*.

Qawwali belongs to a larger family of sufi disciplines that also include whirling dervishes and certain kinds of poetry. The earliest Sufi poet, Jellaludin Rumi, had a life that could easily fit into today's context of world music and mass migration. His family fled from Afghanistan to Turkey prior to the invasion of Mongolians. In Turkey, Rumi founded the order of whirling dervishes and his poetry can be still heard on contemporary Sufi performances.

A European heretic in the Arab world

The Sufis believe in spiritual ecstasy through music - and are considered to be heretics by orthodox Islam. According to the German musician Peter Pannke, a link between Sufis and European troubadours existed in medieval times. While in Europe the Troubadour tradition vanished during the reign of the Inquisition, sufis succeeded in carrying on until today. The Sufi music also charmed Europeans other than Peter



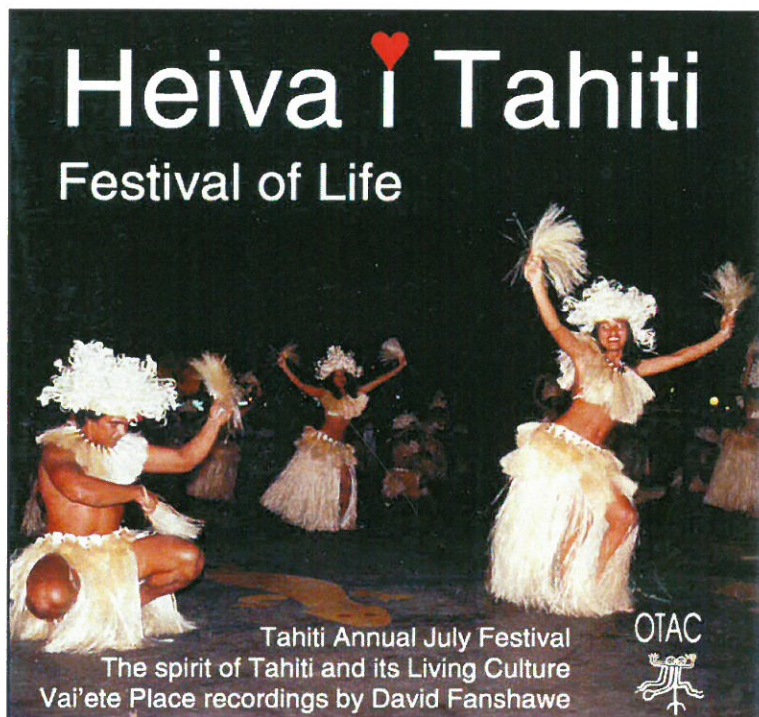
Pannke, including the French Swiss musician Julien Weiss, who spent the last 27 years of his life in Syria mastering the Arabian zither qanun, and admits that he could be considered heretic too, because to praise Allah he doesn't use his voice, as Islam prescribes, but a musical instrument.

Novelties from the Pacific and Bulgaria

Another example of how the introduction of new religion leaves its mark on music comes from the Pacific. The first Christian missionaries came here 200 years ago and totally changed the musical scene.

[music]

CD Heiva i Tahiti. *Festival of Life*. ARC EUCD 1238, 1992, track 3



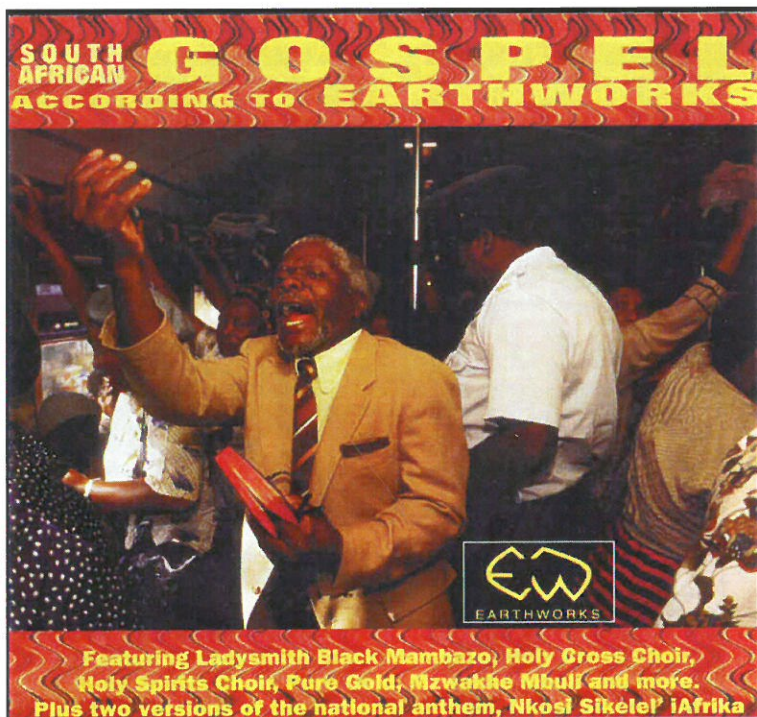
A recording from Tahiti from the early 1990s. In today's context it sounds very ethnic, yet it is a fusion, blending Pacific polyphony with European church singing.

Without the forced migration of African slaves into today's United States, there would be no jazz, blues, or gospel. But what kind of music do we get when the Blacks stay on their home continent and get exposed for many generation to European culture?

Some of the best examples can be found in South Africa. Both South African jazz and gospel grew up as parallels of the North African styles, but they maintained their own distinct flavour.

[music]

CD *South African Gospel*. Earthworks STEW 39 CD, 1998, track 4



You have probably already heard this song - it was the South African anthem, originally a church hymn, titled *Nkosi Sikelela iAfrika*, God Bless Africa, composed in late 19th century by Enoch Sontonga, who was a church choir master and teacher. Because he died at an early age, he never knew that it was adopted by the African National Congress, who used it to close their protest meetings.

For East Europeans, megalomaniac folklore ensembles of the Soviet era represent an infamous yet significant part of cultural history. For several generations of audiences, they degraded tradition to a meaningless institutional pseudo-music. But even in this dubious landscape you find one miraculous exception.

[music]

CD *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*. Lale Li Si. Jaro 4178, 1994, track 12



This musical phenomenon, known as *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*, was discovered for the rest of the world by the Swiss organ player and producer Marcel Cellier, who released their album in 1976 in France. Later it was re-released by the British label 4AD and discovered a cult following among rock audience. This album attracted world audiences to Balkan music long before the craze of Gypsy brass and fiddle bands. Contrary to general opinion, this is not a pure folk tradition, but delicately arranged music, created on politically motivated demand.

In the early 1950s, the Pyatnitsky choir from Russia performed in Moscow, and the Bulgarian government decided that a similar ensemble should be created according to the Soviet model. The composer Filip Kutev traveled throughout the Bulgarian countryside to pick up female singers for his choir. Thanks to Kutev's talent, however, his ensemble stood far ahead of his Soviet era contemporaries. He took the village singers' vocabulary and molded it into a new musical language, sophisticated enough to satisfy international audiences, yet genuine and true to its roots.

Kutev died in 1982, and led his choir under the strict scrutiny of apparatchiks. A folk musician quoted in the *Rough Guide to World Music* explains: "Once they told me that I was playing too fast, and that Bulgarian music is not played so fast. This was a tune that I myself had written, it was I that was playing it, and I am a Bulgarian musician. How could they tell me the way to play my own song? But they could. I tell you, Bulgarian music used to be behind closed shutters – but now the shutters have been opened."

Despite the fact that I selected only four pieces of music, I have attempted to cover the widest scale and give a partial answer to the everlasting question: What is world music?

I hope it is now easy to understand that world music is not a single style. I believe it is more an attitude than a musical genre. It is a withdrawal from the Euro-centric reference point, and an attempt to evaluate each culture and music within its own context. This view first

appeared at U.S. universities during the 1950s and '60s, and is defined precisely in a document by the International Society for Music Education Policy on Musics of the World's Culture in 1994 (see Appendix).

Appendix:

International Society for Music Education Policy on Musics of the World's Cultures

Prepared by the ISME Panel on Musics of the World's Cultures and approved by vote January – 15 March 1994

We believe that the musics of the world's cultures, seen individually and as a unit, should play a significant role in the field of music education, broadly defined. We thus subscribe to the following document as a statement of the Society's position on the musics of the world's cultures, and adopt the concluding recommendations as organizational policy.

This policy is based on the following basic assumptions:

(a) The world of music should be seen as a group of discrete musics, each with a unique style, repertory, set of governing principles and social contexts. Western art music is simply one of these musics, but because it has achieved widespread respect and an almost universal geographical distribution, it appropriately plays a special role in the world's musical education. We recognize that each society has a stratification of musics somewhat related to its social stratification, e.g. classical, folk and popular musics; but that each society makes its own relative evaluation of the musics within its purview.

(c) There are no universally valid criteria for the evaluation of music, but each society has its own way of judging the compositions, performances, instruments, teaching methods, and other forms of musical behavior in its own purview. We believe that all musical systems are valuable and worthy of comprehension and study.

(e) Music can best be comprehended in social and cultural context and as a part of its culture. Properly understanding a culture requires some understanding of its music, and appreciating a music requires some knowledge of its associated culture and society.