

## RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION

### *Jiří Tichota, Czech Republic*

Three days ago when Michal Schmidt contacted me with an invitation card, I told him proudly that I would also like give a presentation. Two days prior to the conference date, I was wondering whether I could make it. One day before, I was starting to think that I could do with a few notes. Today, I have no notes, so I will comment on what I have actually heard here. I was pleased to learn from Irena Příbylová that I am a postmodernist. I have not thought about it so far, but considering that I am a great skeptic and ironist as well, I can be a postmodernist. As such, I have come to the conclusion that long discussions concerning terminology are very, very shaky and short-lived. Colleague Uhlíková pleased me with her introductory words saying that things were called one way in the past, but nobody was using these terms today; that we had been persuaded about the ethnic orientation of folkloristics before, but now we know that folklore as such is predominantly determined by society. This bears out that while discussing such issues, one must be aware that the possible results – which we may not even reach – will not be certain, permanent, or constant truths.

The question “What is world music?” is a question from the realm of exact sciences. There we may ask “What is sodium?” and simply answer that it is a substance with atoms and so and so many protons in its core – and nobody can contradict us. Nobody can say that sodium in his feeling is more like potassium. But what is world music? I believe that we must conclude that world music is anything – if we agree upon calling it so. Nevertheless, the attempt to define it will be more difficult. This is because we are not exploring one constant phenomenon, but a wide range of human activities. No matter how precise we are, there will

always be something that does not fit; there are holes to be fixed, definitions to be corrected and extended. Because as the saying goes, theory is the grey area; the tree of life is green.

We must also be aware of the fact that if we agree upon a term, it must have always been something that was among us. Today or tomorrow a similar colloquy can take place somewhere in Jevíčko or Los Angeles, and the attendees may feel that world music to them personally is more like potassium. I don't want to question the sense of our – or your – ideas; there is no other way to seek knowledge in this field. I would just like to stress that this is a never-ending story, and it is up to us to change it, so that when looking back at history, it will not be a never-ending story. How can we address journalists and ask them to write using proper terminology about the Muchovci brothers claiming that the brothers do not play traditional folk music while the brothers claim they do?

I guess we can take it easy – it is not so important. Here we are in the role of observers who can evaluate, listen and learn from live music. However, we cannot force people – and this is not our aim – to stop applauding things which do not fit into our structure of beliefs. When we claim that Čechomor is not the right way to deal with traditional folk music, nobody will be interested in us. Clever people will say, wait and see. That is why I have enjoyed so many different opinions on world music at this colloquy.

I would like to contribute to the multiplicity of views as well. I have brought some things from my field of music with me. This collection is a facsimile of a lute tablature written by a certain Mr. Šmal of Lebendorf in Prague at the beginning of the 17th century. Šmal of Lebendorf was a typist for Jaroslav Bořita from Martinice, who was cleverly depicted by a certain historian of the old school as 'the Bořita who is well known for his passive involvement in the Prague defenestration'. This collection and other manuscripts of that period include German songs, Italian madrigals, French chansons, dances called "Englesa", "Siebenbürger", Haiduk, as well as dances of Hungarian, Polish, and Spanish origin.

Some of these songs have Czech titles and were sung in Czech, but if we take the time to explore them, we will find that they have a foreign origin. They were written in German by Jacob Regnart, bandmaster to Rudolf II; we may also discover their Polish pendants. Two other manuscripts are evidently of student origin; there is no doubt that the repertoire was well known, as it was not exclusively sung at court. I will conclude that it was not only America that was a 'salad bowl'; at the time when original folk songs were being shaped, Europe was a 'salad bowl' as well.

According to Prague manuscripts, we can see that dances of the Seven Mountains area show how quickly new songs spread across Europe. I believe it was Professor Kresánek who found evidence that these dances were adaptations of Moresque dances that were practiced by soldiers on the Turkish front lines around open fires. According to another piece of evidence, the young Maximilian, future Emperor, learnt a Portuguese dance while visiting the Spanish court. After his return home to the Hapsburg court, he performed the dance on his mother's request. I wonder whether it might be the same "Kaysser Maximiliani Tantz" as recorded by Šmal of Lebendorf.

Please do not overestimate the speed of information of today's media world when speaking about the past! It is only our generation that can watch the movement of a distant missile before its explosion, nevertheless, how much time do the media spend observing the folk music of distant ethnic groups? In terms of popular or exotic hits or novelty songs, I believe that people in the past were well informed. Take, for instance, Prague in the period of Šmal of Lebendorf. A dance from the Turkish front reached Prague almost immediately. People who sang and performed songs of English, French, Italian, Polish, and German origin in Prague were ordinary, common people, but contributed to the development of local song and dance.

If I have understood well, colleague Uhliková suggested that in ethnomusicology, the historical approach was outdated now. I am not an ethnomusicologist, so I cannot judge the reasons why; nevertheless,

I think it is enlightening to observe history, because it teaches us to understand the present. Through the mirror of history, I can see that the present colloquy could have easily been called From World Music to World Music.

After hearing the paper on contemporary Czech folk music by colleague Sobotka, I felt so ashamed of Czech folk music that I decided to fast during the break and eat only one slice of ham. I changed my mind after a while and thought about having two slices. Finally, I ate all three slices with great appetite; I did so because I am persuaded that contemporary Czech folk music has not failed. I believe that contemporary Czech folk music cannot fail, in the same way that traditional folk music cannot fail, as with brass bands, Czech jazz, and Czech rock and roll. None of them can fail because they cannot be given tasks. We can explore them, evaluate them, but we cannot blame them for not doing what they have not done. Take the Czech National Revival of the 19th century: did it fail when it celebrated the somewhat simple poet Hanka<sup>1</sup> instead of a new Czech Goethe? When it preferred romantic national myths to less popular facts of history? When it followed the false lights over the mire of nationalism? Take another example: did modern Czech folk music fail in the period of the folk boom of the 1970s? Did it fail because it was Jaroslav Hutka<sup>2</sup> who was interested in the revival of our traditional folk songs? Jaroslav Hutka with his limits in music and limited sense for the fragile sublimity of traditional ballads? Hutka, whose knowledge about the National Revival was limited to the prefaces of ballad collections? I dare not say so. I am open to criticizing Hutka's performances; nevertheless, there are others who worship him for his magic and inspiration.

As for the comparison between the Czech lands and America, I am persuaded that it is good that the finer Czech singer-songwriters did not copy American folk music. Czech and American folk music are two different phenomena. By the way, it is a lucky coincidence that we call this modern music *folk* in Czech. I was there at its birth forty years ago.

I had no idea it would gain this name one day. My friends and I knew nothing about American music. The four of us who are considered the founders of modern Czech folk music were members of the Youth Arts University Choir, but we did not want to sing what the other members of the youth organization sung there: the repertoire included songs of classical music (which we loved), youth songs, and finally special arrangements [mostly ideological] of traditional folk songs from countries of the “peace block” [Communist countries]. It was an approach to traditional folk songs where Czechs and Americans differed radically. The pioneers of the American folk revival of the 1950s wanted to remind people of their forgotten folk music; they wanted to revive folk songs. In the Czech lands, traditional folk songs were expropriated; they became misused in the service of ideology and its propaganda. On the other hand, American ethnomusicology was at a different stage from Czech ethnomusicology of that period. There was no reason why young Czechs should interfere with the work of ethnomusicologists, visit archives, or mingle non-professionally with specialists. Luckily, there was something what both the American and Czech movements of that period shared: that was an effort to return the joy of active singing and performing back to people. This activity was suppressed by the huge development of recorded music. In its effort, the folk revival did not fail in either country.

Today it is difficult to count the thousands of bands which the folk revival and folk movement produced, allowing them various streams and styles. I wonder whether we would be meeting today discussing world music had it not been for the many enthusiasts around us who strayed onto the narrow path of world music from the main road of modern folk music. It is great that Czech folk music has something unique in its history as well: it represented a huge community striving for a free democratic life, and festivals of thirty thousand fans supporting non-commercial music. Modern Czech folk music has not failed – give me one more slice of ham, please!

**Notes:**

1. Prague defenestration, 1618, several Czech lords were thrown out of the windows of Prague Castle for political reasons.
2. Václav Hanka (1791-1864), the co-author of the false chronicles of the Czech lands which were "discovered" in the period of the Czech National Revival.
3. Jaroslav Hutka (b.1947), one of the leading figures of the Czech folk boom of the 1970s.
4. Jiří Tichota founded the vocal group Spirituál kvintet in 1960 (the other three members were Ivo Mach, Miroslav Keller, and Miloslav Kastelovič). The band, with Tichota as leader but with a different line-up, is still active today.