

WORLD MUSIC: THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF EUROPE'S CULTURAL PANORAMA

Petr Dorůžka, Czech Republic

1. Introduction

The exploration and mixing of diverse music cultures, known as world music today, is not an exclusive domain of the last decades – it has been here since time immemorial. Parallel to trade and military routes, musicians and their instruments traveled as well. It is generally known that this process has sped up in the last fifty years under the influence of the media and the interest of the public.

In this paper I would like to comment on the reflections of this process in the media - the work of journalists and festival organizers, to what extent the choice of working with independent record companies has influenced their work, and how it differs from work with large companies generally known as the majors.

The global music industry represented by large companies uses strong and powerful means of promotion. An alternative or independent branch of the music business must look for means which are effective in the same way in addressing the public and entering the media.

One of these methods is networking: building international links.

An example: if I have a radio show on world music, which is an endangered species within commercial radio, my situation will improve if I join forces with other people of the same profession abroad. Why?

- Sharing sources of information in this specific field may improve the quality and competitive strength of my shows, among other things.

- In union with my colleagues, I can create strategies for making my work more visible. For instance, the Deutsche Welle radio station launched a world music award with this aim in mind. As a result, the financial prize for the winners allowed the organization of international

expeditions and their radio coverage. For instance, there was a series of shows on Brazilian music on Belgian Radio.

- You may find similar analogies in other professions: if I organize a festival in Belgium, my position would improve if I joined forces with organizers in France and Germany. If I represented an independent recording label in Madrid, it would be very profitable to find similar labels in Greece and Finland, and agree on joint distribution. Contrary to the business of large companies, when there is one managing centre which directs branch offices, the world music business works in a very specific way, like a system of jointly linked cells. This linking works in various directions: horizontally, that is on one level within one profession, for instance radio editors, festival organizers, and distributors; on the other hand, it may also work in a complex way, across all professional spheres.

An example: as a journalist, I did an interview with the Klezmatics on the occasion of their concert in Ostrava. The interview was done in English via e-mail. With very little effort I could offer the text to specialized foreign magazines. I would get a very small fee for it, but my article would be very valuable for the recording company. In the future, this would increase my chances in getting access to another interview or CD review.

This was just a personal example, but it shows one common feature of an enterprise in culture: if you want to succeed in the world music business, a profession which is so rewarding personally but not very much commercially, you have to invest your own personal effort first; the results of that come later. A great example of this is the folk festival *Folkové prázdniny* here in Náměšť.

A typical example of networking is the often mentioned meeting of British producers, journalists, and organizers in 1987, which introduced the term world music as an umbrella term for a whole range of music styles. Two years ago, there was a discussion concerning the sense and interpretation of the term on the grounds of this colloquy as well. Many

people involved in the discussion then completely missed one practical point: it was very useful and functional to make records stores set up a world music shelf. All other discussions on the sense of this term seem a little too academic from this point of view. The advertising campaign which followed was only 3,500 pounds, approximately 200,000 CZK, which is a ridiculously small sum when compared to today's marketing endeavours. Its results had a snowball effect.

2. Radio Networking and World Music Charts

The first non-European hits topped the European hit parade: the Papua New Guinea singer and kora player Mory Kante with *Yeke Yeke*, and the Yemenite-Israeli singer Ofra Haza, both in 1988. The Berlin based DJ Johannes Theurer recollects: "We felt it as a new trend. World music is coming to Europe! Many DJs started their world music programmes, but there were no more world music hits the next year. *World music is over now. Your programme is discontinued.* That's what happened to one of my three programmes, but I was aware that the number of festivals, concerts, and albums was growing. These events were not linked to "stars" in the mainstream sense. We had to create something that the music industry could understand: a hit parade." In May 1991, Johannes Theurer started World Music Charts Europe (WMCE), based on the play lists of about 30 contributing DJs from all over Europe. In an era controlled by the major companies, this became a powerful tool for indie labels to get airplay. At one point, the charts were published in 15 countries in daily papers and magazine with a total circulation of 4.5 million.

3. Music Expo – WOMEX

For several years the WMCE panel was the only professional network of its kind in Europe. In 1998, its annual meeting was hosted in Prague by Czech Radio. There was another European network developing as part of the "alternative" music festival/fair held each year

in Berlin known as BID, Berlin Independence Days. Before it closed, world music was one of its program topics, and when BID stopped, World Music Expo, or WOMEX for short, became its successor. From the 200 registered delegates in 1994, it grew to 2000+ in 2004. It is regularly held at the end of October with about 40 showcases from all over the world selected by a jury of professionals and a daily programme with conferences and trade fair stands.

4. BBC World Music Awards

Since 1999 Womex has also presented the Womex Award for lifetime achievement. So far the winners have been: Juan de Marcos + Nick Gold (for Buena Vista Social Club), Mahotella Queens (a vocal trio from South Africa), Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (Pakistan qawwali singer, in memoriam), Jivan Gasparyan (Armenian *dudek* player), Freemuse (The World Forum on Music and Censorship), and Marc Hollander (Crammed Discs).

The most influential European world music magazine, London-based *fRoots*, has its own annual awards as well: The Album of the Year. It was *fRoots* editor Ian Anderson who came up with the idea of genuine global awards supported by the media and presenting music from the whole planet: the BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards. The nominations in 8 categories are selected by WOMEX delegates, the winners by a jury. There are also two additional categories: the Listeners' Award is selected by Radio 3 listeners, and the Critics' Award is in fact The Album of the Year selected by the *fRoots* international panel of critics.

5. Festivals in Europe, cultural tourism, and festivals outside of Europe

As mentioned before, in 1982 Womad was the first world music festival on European soil. Now it takes place annually in Reading, England, along with local Womad festivals in many other places, including Seattle, and Adelaide; Womadrid in the Spanish capital Madrid

is the latest addition.

In the 1990s, other festivals varying in size and focus emerged all over Europe. The most important ones are members of the European Forum of Worldwide festivals. Various international festivals such as Roskilde (Denmark), Glastonbury (UK), and Sziget (Hungary) have added world music acts to their stages.

Also, many Europeans are willing to travel to far off lands to hear local music in its natural environment. The most accessible yet still very exotic country is Morocco. It should be stressed that of all the Muslim countries, this is the most liberal one. Each year Morocco hosts several important festivals, including the Fes Festival of Sacred Music. The programme includes American gospel music, and Jewish, Buddhist, and Sufi music from Islamic countries. The most remote musical event is the Festival in the Desert, hosted by the Touareg nomads in the North of Mali.

Reference - websites:

World Music Charts

<http://wmce.de>

European Forum of Worldwide festivals

<http://www.efwmf.org>

WOMEX

<http://www.womex.de>

fRoots

<http://www.frootsmag.com>



The Womad festival is one of the best known and most influential world music festivals. This photo is from the first and only Prague edition of Womad in 2000 when Prague was the Cultural Capital of Europe.



Gangbe Brass Band from Benin, performing at the 2004 edition of the Womex music fair in Essen, Germany.



One of the best Central European festivals is held in Rudolstadt, Germany, a few hours from Prague. Kayhan Kalhor is an Iranian spike fiddle virtuoso, performing with Irishman Ross Daly, who lives in Greece.



Zhyvaya Voda festival at the Altai Mountains.

World music portals

<http://www.worldmusiccentral.org> (American)

<http://www.mondomix.org> (multilingual)

<http://world.freemusic.cz> (Czech, partly multilingual)

Folk Alliance - World Music Mailing List Archive

<http://archives.his.com/fa-worldmusic>