

About the author

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The **NO-NONSENSE GUIDE** to **WORLD MUSIC**

Louise Gray



Introduction

world, and not necessarily a series of interconnecting spheres, we will really be making progress.

An interview I once had in 2003 with Robert Wilson, the American-born artist whose name is usually prefaced with a description like ‘iconoclastic theater director’, sticks in my memory. We had met at the Royal Opera House in London, to which Wilson was bringing his controversial (at least as far as traditionalists were concerned) production of *Aida* over from La Monnaie in Belgium. Around us, the backstage area of the theater was the epitome of focused activity. I said a little to Wilson about the porous boundaries between art forms and how artificial attempts to separate them only hindered a greater and more complex understanding. Wilson suddenly looked interested. ‘It’s all one concern,’ he said in his rich, languorous voice. And so it is.

Louise Gray
London

1 It was in very much in this spirit that David Munrow and his Early Music Consort of London collaborated with Shirley and Dolly Collins on the two folk singers’ album, *Anthems in Eden* (Harvest Records, 1969).

1 Inventing world music

‘Don’t call me “world music” – that’s a neo-colonial label you British and Americans like to use for music not sung in English.’

Manu Chao, *The Guardian*, 1 October 2007.

Whose world and whose music? The uses and abuses of otherness... The problems of record racks... And what happened when the Gypsy Kings hit the big time.

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, 1987 was not one of the most auspicious years in the history of recorded music. Certainly the multinational record companies were doing good business – one could always measure just how good it actually was by the end-of-year parties that they threw, and there were stories of parties with free bars well into the night, parties with funfairs attached, parties designed to continue to court and schmooze the media who in these pre-blog, pre-internet days, were so important to getting the news out and, to use that time-honored phrase, shifting the units. Whatever one’s critical opinion of such mainstream artists as – to take three omnipresent 1987 names – Madonna, Whitney Houston and a breathless Australian ingénue called Kylie Minogue, these were the people doing the business, shifting the units, making sure everyone got paid. There was much to be complacent about, at least if you were a company executive.

And yet, there was something dull and utterly relentless about the music that it produced, its modus operandi, its ambition. There was an awful, swollen predictability sounding out in the big anthems blasting out of club speakers and film soundtracks. Those who could pick apart the smoothly produced songs to actually hear their essential emptiness might also have picked up on the jittery energy that ran around the margins of the music industry – in the songs played

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on pirate radio stations or in underground clubs, in places where diverse populations with a multiplicity of languages jostled for space to live and play.

New music

If the crackle of this new music was the sound of change, it was one played out in several musical arenas. It was the sound of rap finally breaking through – thanks to pushy, energetic new labels such as Def Jam in New York – and of technological innovation, as the new digital technology became adaptable enough to cope with the memory demands of the growing range of computerized instruments. The United States – or at least its black, gay and very underground club scene in Chicago and Detroit – was responsible for incubating and shaping the new music that was to dominate the next decade. With DJ-producers-composers such as Frankie Knuckles, Derrick May and Juan Atkins lighting the way ahead, something was happening that would see recorded music from all sources effectively recomposed as it was mixed up on turntables, spliced with new samples, fortified with new beats and the noises of the new drum machines and synthesizers that were becoming affordable and available, at least to those in the rich world.

So much noise and with so few items of equipment, or musicians, too: these early forays into digital music offered a seductive journey to a land where a multiplicity of sounds could break away from the limiting factors of history or geographical location. Guided by bold hands, the music created by these machines transcended time and place, the identities of its creators re-edited and reshaped each time a new 12-inch record was produced.

Inventing the name

But 1987 is also significant for another reason. It was the year that world music was invented. Which

is not to say that, prior to the June evening on which 19 men and women met in a London pub called the Empress of Russia, music from the world at large had not existed; it was just that it had not been formulated as such. Many of those attending the pub that night have become hugely significant players in their areas of music: Nick Gold, from World Circuit, the founder of World Circuit Records who went on to produce the Buena Vista Social Club and Ali Farke Touré; broadcaster Charlie Gillett and writer and producer Joe Boyd. Subsequent meetings included broadcaster and academic Lucy Duran, then the Africa expert at the National Sound Archives, and representatives from numerous record labels.

Convened by Roger Armstrong, director and owner of Ace Records and Ben Mandelson, a former post-punk guitarist who was now A&R man, producer and general all-hands-on-deck guy at Ace's GlobeStyle imprint, the group meeting that night had all identified a problem: while they all had great commitment to the music that they loved and promoted, categorizing it was causing real problems in the UK's retail outlets. World music (or what we – speaking from a distance of over 20 years – now understand as world music) was, as Armstrong was fond of saying, simply a 'box in a record shop'.

Up until 1987 there was no agreed generic classification system for records that took in everything from 'Yemenite pop, Bulgarian choir, Zairean [Congolese] soukous or Gambian kora records' (as the first press release issued soon after by the world music group was to put it) and record stores outside the small cache of dedicated specialist shops were in a flummox. Their confusion was often but an echo of that of the distribution companies which supplied the stores. If the visiting reps – the people who suggest new records to the stores – themselves were vague about the records they were recommending that the stores purchase from the

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distribution companies, how much harder would it be for the buyers, trying to anticipate demand? And then, at the last point of call, the record-buying public?

Growing interest

It's true that, in Britain, certainly, there was a growing interest in music outside the normal channels which would have undoubtedly helped to inform the public. There was a certain amount of prehistory to this. The Beatles (and especially George Harrison) had brought the Indian sitar master Ravi Shankar to their fanbase in the late 1960s, and as a consequence, the psychedelic music of the time made cautious attempts to expand its own frontiers.¹

The influential rock musician Peter Gabriel had launched the now hugely important World of Music, Arts and Dance festival – WOMAD – festival in 1982, complementing this in 1989 with the creation of the Real World record label. In London, there was a small but vibrant club scene that fed an appetite for African and Latin sounds. At Capital Radio, broadcaster and critic Charlie Gillett had been programming world music on his show, *A World Affair* (later *A World of Difference*) since 1983.

And two years later on BBC's Radio 1, DJ Andy Kershaw was developing an increasingly sophisticated rota of world music; he credits the appearance of the Zimbabwean band the Bhundu Boys on his show as 'tipping [him] heavily into African music'. Around the same time, musicologist Lucy Duran was making her first forays into programming world music for Radio 3, the BBC station devoted to classical and the high-art end of experimental music.

All four of the above – Gabriel in terms of festivals and recordings; Kershaw, Gillett and Duran in terms of putting world music onto national radio's agenda – are names that recur in the recent history of world music in Britain. But the three broadcasters did not

spring, fully formed, into action. On BBC radio, there had been, for some years, a smattering of DJs, John Peel chief amongst them, who displayed a demonstrable enthusiasm for the alternative. But even with so important a person as Peel, there was no clear idea of what to do with the music.

John Peel's influence

One album, a compilation of a variety of favorite tracks played on his radio show *Night Ride* (1968-69) and released by the Beeb's own label, was *John Peel's Archive Things LP: Unusual Recordings from the BBC Archive* (BBC) – and the title really says it all. The music – which included a nose-flute quintet from Malaysia, Bugandan royal music played on a xylophone, Australian 'aboriginal' children singing and playing a didgeridoo and songs from Ethiopia, China and, as filtered through the Soviet system, Ukraine, were novelty items. They were marginalized exotica, the sounds of otherness.

'Several of the greatest treats from the depths of the Archives became regular requests, under vague names like "the boot-slapping thing" and "that Russian with the funny voice",' wrote Peel in the LP's sleeve-notes.

The boot-slapping music was, in fact, a gumboot dance from South Africa that is synonymous with the highly rhythmical, stamping *toyi-toyi* dance that is, in turn, synonymous with black South Africans' protest against apartheid in the years before independence. Incidentally, so potent is the legacy of the *toyi-toyi* that it is still used in contemporary South Africa as an expression of disfavor against the government – currently that of the ANC government. Similarly in Zimbabwe, a country that had undergone its own convulsions to achieve majority self-rule in 1980, some years ahead of the collapse of apartheid, the *toyi-toyi* was imbued with such popular restiveness that president Robert Mugabe banned the dance in

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2004 as disquiet over Zanu-PF's style of governance grew.²

John Peel's intentions were genuine. A life-long champion of all forms of music, his playlists were blessed with an unusually energetic enthusiasm and curiosity for new sounds. But even for someone with an insider's position in so powerful an institution as the BBC, he was also very much the much-loved maverick outsider – remaining so until his untimely death in 2004.

Record label help

The record labels are not totally without credit. Lyricord, Nonesuch, Tangent and, especially in the francophone sphere, the French label Disques Ocora all did valuable work documenting and releasing music from around the world. Often public libraries stocked releases from the hugely important Smithsonian Folkways label. The record stores were also making attempts to respond to growing interest in 'other' music, whatever it might be called. Some of the chain stores had made their own efforts to categorize the foreign music – Virgin, for example, were already using boards headed 'International/Ethnic' – but it was often the case that any 'International section' in the record racks would be a place where you could find everything that didn't fit easily into the Western pop, rock or folk canon.

Here, new acts breaking through such as Ofra Haza, the Bhundu Boys, Salif Keita and Najma would rub sleeves with such middle-of-the-road Greek crooners as Nana Mouskouri and Demis Roussos; and the ageing French rock star Johnny Halliday or such established greats as Om Kalsoum and Fairuz. Even the Belgian punk band Plastic Bertrand made it into the International selection.

The choice of the phrase 'world music' was not the product of any frenetic advertising campaign, but some-

thing arrived at in an almost haphazard fashion. In his minutes of that first meeting at the Empress of Russia, Ian Anderson, editor of *fRoots* magazine, noted:

'It was agreed that we should create a generic name under which our type of catalog could be labeled in order to focus attention on what we do. We discussed various names for our type of music(s) and on a show of hands "World Music" was agreed as the "banner" under which we would work. Other suggestions were "World Beat", "Hot...", "Tropical..." and various others. It was suggested that all of the labels present would use "World Music" on their record sleeves (to give a clear indication of the "File Under..." destination) and also on all publicity material, etc.'

www.frootsmag.com/content/features/world_music_history/minutes/page03.html

'Yes, it did go through on a show of hands – it was the least worst option,' GlobeStyle's Ben Mandelson told me in 2008. It was a title, a descriptor, that was intended to embrace rather than exclude many musics that were by definition not getting their best shots at reaching markets and eager ears. Moreover, the Empress of Russia group had noticed, from recent history, that other non-mainstream musics such as folk, bluegrass and country were all ones that had achieved a level of success and visibility precisely because the same interested parties – that is, the record companies, the distribution companies and the shops – had all begun a measure of collective action. 'We didn't even have longevity as an aim of our meeting,' Mandelson continued. 'And we weren't doing anything as radical as inventing a genre with rules about who could join and who couldn't. But as record companies, we do have an obligation to our artists to get their records

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out there. Our compact as a record company is to put music in front of those people who might like it.' Thirteen years later, Anderson elucidated the decision in an article published in *fRoots* (see box **The birth of 'world music'**).

The Empress of Russia group nominated October 1987 to be World Music month, during which advertises in the popular and retail press plus a cover-mounted cassette given away free with the *NME* – Britain's biggest-selling music newspaper – would introduce readers to the concept of world music.³ And so it happened. Armstrong, Mandelson and Roy Carr, an *NME* veteran who had become its special projects editor, produced a cassette entitled *The World at One* and featuring musicians such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Salif Keita and Ofra Haza on its playlist. Bob Marley, the Jamaican reggae musician who can justifiably lay claim to being one of the most important international artists ever, fell outside these nascent

The birth of 'world music'

'[World Music] wasn't a new name, just one of many that had floated around in the preceding decades.'

'But the logic [was] set out by Roger Armstrong that an established, unified generic name would give retailers a place where they could confidently rack otherwise unstockable releases, and where customers might both search out items they'd heard on the radio (not knowing how to spell a mispronounced or misremembered name or title) and browse through wider catalogue. Various titles were discussed including "Worldbeat" (left out anything without drums), "Tropical" (bye-bye Bulgarians) – this a reference to the cult choral hit album from the Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Voice Choir titled *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* and released by 4AD in 1986 – "Ethnic" (boring and academic), "International Pop" (the death-by-Johnny-[Halliday]-and-Nana-[Mouskouri]-syndrome) and 'Roots' (left out Johnny and Nana). "World Music" seemed to include the most and omit the least, and got it on a show of hands. Nobody thought of defining it or pretending there was such a beast: it was just to be a box, like jazz, classical or rock...' ■

(*fRoots*, March 2000).

Bob Marley

However you want to categorize Bob Marley, the one uncontroversial fact is that the man was a superstar whose music, at the time of his death in 1981, symbolized a rich mix of rebellion and transcendentalism. Jamaican music had made sporadic inroads onto international playlists before Marley, but it was his blend of roots reggae, Rastafarian iconography and pop sensibility that burst through to global markets. Born into inauspicious circumstances in Jamaica in 1945, Robert Nesta Marley was the son of a white British officer and a young black Jamaican woman, Cedella. Growing up in Kingston's Trench Town (an area that would later feature in his songs), he was exposed to the range of popular music that Jamaica offered: mento pop, gospel (with its emphasis on a spiritual homeland), ska and rocksteady. Marley was blessed with a light voice and a canny ear for melody. Starting out from rocksteady beginnings with a band that would feature Peter McIntosh (later Tosh) and Bunny Livingston (later Bunny Wailer), Marley took up reggae's jolty rhythm and took it to a new place. *Catch a Fire* (1973), *Burnin'* (1973), *Natty Dread* (1974), *Rastaman Vibration* (1976) and *Uprising* (1980) – all released by Island Records – have become multimillion-selling albums, all as important in terms of cultural shifts and sheer imperviousness to time as those of the Beatles or Elvis. At this level, it is nonsense to think of Marley in any category other than as a musical colossus whose music straddles the world. ■

attempts at taxonomy (see box **Bob Marley**).

It was all good stuff: some of the musicians on the *The World at One* tape went on to make huge international names for themselves (Israeli superstar Ofra Haza chief among them), others remained with a quieter reputation. Once the huge US market had quickly bought into the world music idea, the phrase was secure. By 1993, Dan Storper's Putumayo World Music – a record label specializing in compilation albums – had begun its phenomenal upward trajectory. Putumayo, once a clothing shop, had branched into music via mix tapes. By 2008, it had sold over 20 million albums, helped the careers of countless musicians and bucked the general consumer trend towards buying music by download alone.

Yet, despite the evidence that the newly coined world music was building a growing audience, a momentum

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was necessary to reinforce the new category. And this had already appeared, in the form of an album which would push world music, its appropriation and politics to the fore, made by a singer-songwriter at the very heart of the Western popular canon.

Graceland's impact

The 1986 release of Paul Simon's album, *Graceland* – one year before the Empress of Russia meeting – was always going to be a major event. But few albums have ever generated so much controversy and fewer albums still have university courses taught about them and, probably, learned books in the offing. Simon, who had established himself nearly 20 years earlier as one half of the best-selling duo Simon and Garfunkel, was royalty. With Art Garfunkel, Simon had authored songs that had encapsulated an aura of Sixties America. Although less brittle (or changeable) than Bob Dylan, the marked softness of the duo's tone should never be taken as a trope for their intent. There was a sour melancholy at the heart of their music: the sheen on golden youth, they seemed to suggest, was always one of guilt.

Even so, no one had marked Paul Simon's card as a troublemaker and, more specifically, one who supported the apartheid regime then in place in South Africa. Of course, he was not and never had been a supporter. Simon's own antipathy towards South Africa's political system is well documented. The problem was that both the African National Congress and UNESCO had imposed a cultural boycott on foreigners working with Pretoria in any way that could be seen to shore up the regime – and part of *Graceland* had been recorded in South Africa, with black South African artists playing township jive and Zulu-originated *mbaqanga* alongside Simon's soft rock.

Which way to go? Was *Graceland* just a combination of superb music accompanied by some naïve

politics? (The *New Internationalist* magazine gave it one star for politics and five – the highest score – for entertainment in a review published in January 1987.) In truth, the situation was a vexed one. *Graceland* was a record that was a product of much collaboration. South African band Ladysmith Black Mambazo played on it; so too did the exiled trumpeter Hugh Masekela. The international clout wielded by someone such as Simon meant that many of the artists got some decent international exposure, something that was good for their careers and their incomes. And, as the debate raged, the album was selling millions worldwide.

But *Graceland* was not the only audible point of promised change. Even as listeners in the first/rich world were extending their definitions of popular music in all directions, very much on a cusp of wanting and waiting for something new, sounds that would shake things up – along came the Gipsy Kings.

Enter the Kings

The Gipsy Kings, an affable band of *Calé* or *gitano* musicians whose parents had crossed the Pyrenees into France during the years of the Spanish civil war and who were initially led by the flamenco-singing legend Jose Reyes, hailed from an unfashionable area of southern France. Specifically, they came from a *cité* outside Montpellier named, infelicitously, after the ancient Greek word for fear, Phobos.

While it is probable that the new *cité*'s naming had more to do with astronomy – Phobos is also one of two moons orbiting Mars – the area certainly was born under inauspicious signs. A satellite town, constructed in the 1970s as a government response to a growing demand for public housing, in particular to accommodate immigrants, Phobos was not exactly a *banlieue* (suburb) in the way that the word is now understood at the beginning of the 21st century.

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Phobos was not like contemporary suburbs of Paris and France's other great cities, some of which are strife-torn zones full of high-rise apartments and low opportunities. But as a brand-new conglomeration, Phobos lacked enough history, enough social glue to give it any kind of cohesion when the bad times came. The *cit * ultimately failed and exists now only in the memories of its former inhabitants. Bulldozed just 20 years after its founding, Phobos became, to coin a French phrase that poetically conflates invisibility with death, *la cit  disparue*.

But what does the fate of an ill-conceived experiment in urban planning have to do with the Gipsy Kings? Quite a lot. The *cit * was not only a kind of home from home for what was essentially a band of eight musicians from two related families, the Reyes and the Baliardos, but also a sonic crucible.

Mix of music

In their suburban environment, the young Kings would have heard much more than the traditional flamenco that was to form the base of their *rumba catalana* (a popped-up version of flamenco) and, as their career took off, led to global sales that numbered in the multimillions. Phobos would have also reverberated with the sounds of *raï* and the sobbing cadences of its *chebs* (singers) simultaneously homesick for, and sick of, Algeria; of proto-blues from such Francophone countries as Mali and Senegal; of reggae and the dance-dance-dance imperative broadcast from any radio or TV station that favored Europop's breezy and untroubled beats. In short, like any multicultural place, Phobos was a community of sounds. It resonated with a world music.

The Gipsy Kings' self-titled album was released in November 1988. Its instrumentation was, for the type of music it espoused, pretty predictable: in addition to the vocals, there were guitars, drums and percussion,

lots of hand-clapping – and a little digital intervention with the use of some synthesizers. Of all its dozen tracks, it was the upbeat 'Bamboleo' that caught the world's attention. After *The Gipsy Kings'* US release the following year, the album spent some 40 weeks in the American charts, something unheard of for a Spanish-language release.

All seemed good in the world of *rumba catalana*. And then, just when the Gipsy Kings were at their flamboyant flamenco peak, music critics caught hold of a rumor that chilled them to the bone. The Kings, it seemed, were anticipating their royalty checks with feverish impatience: they had their eyes on banks of electronic keyboards, synthesizers and plug-in drums. With the predictability of night following day, the debates – far older than Bob Dylan going electric – began: how authentic can a group playing traditional music be when they use non-traditional means?

In the event, there wasn't much substance to the Kings story – and, whatever the truth of the matter, the rumor has done their career precisely zero damage. The Gipsy Kings are, at the time of writing, still going strong; their album sales now number over 18 million; they are laden with platinum discs, Grammys and other awards. Good luck to them.

Search for 'authenticity'

Nevertheless, this story neatly illustrates the problems associated with notions of authenticity – and its charge that any contact with outsider elements pollutes the original material. The same debates will certainly take place in relation to Konono No 1, the extraordinarily resourceful 12-piece from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that sprang to international consciousness in 2005 with the release of a debut album that was 25 years in the making. With few resources other than a predilection for Bazomo trance music and a handful

Merritt on authenticity

'The question of authenticity seems to be something that's moot and connected with... distance. [Ethno-musicologist] Alan Lomax went around making field recordings of toothless octogenarians in the Deep South. He knew perfectly well that he was making stars of these people, and what he was recording was their very toothlessness and octogenarianess, and that was cool, whereas a 30-year-old with all their teeth just wouldn't have been glamorous for Lomax. He had an inverted glamor which was directly comparable to Warhol's point-and-click films of transvestites and drug addicts and he ended up with the same process.' ■

Stephin Merritt to Louise Gray, *The Independent on Sunday*, 2000.

of traditional instruments, Konono's founder and *likembé* (thumb piano) virtuoso Mawangu Mingiedi assembled a raft of the most rudimentary percussion and amplifiers imaginable from old car parts found in the scrap yards of Kinshasa. *Congotronics* (Crammed Discs) is not just electrified traditional Congolese music, it is also a masterpiece of bricolage, aesthetic and actual. One might add the Bedouin Jerry Can Band from Egypt's Sinai Desert, a group that describes itself as a 'collective of semi-nomadic musicians, poets, storytellers and coffee grinders', and makes music on the traditional lyre – the *simsimiyya*, reed pipes, flutes and old ammunition boxes and jerry cans left over from the Six-Day War in 1967.

Interestingly, the pros and cons of the authenticity debate have been stated most vehemently in the field of Western classical music.

Authenticity is one of those concerns that permeate many discourses: sociological, anthropological, linguistic and creative. It's an interesting idea, but also a spurious one. How do we hear? What do we see? There are as many ways of approaching music as there are separate cultures. We all bring something of our own background into contact with new experiences. Even in writing a word like 'separate', one is

aware that separateness is a fiction. Increasingly, in this linked-up world, cultures, experiences, sounds, politics and aspirations coincide, rather like a Venn diagram of overlapping circles. Each sound, each idea – they all have porous boundaries. To insist on the very existence of the authentic experience becomes an exercise in pursuit of a dubious purity, a kind of battenning down the hatches to keep the world of ideas at bay.

World music is the subject of this book, but what it is exactly is an elusive thing to pin down. 'Music' we understand as a portmanteau term – it describes so much, both in terms of organized sound and the ambient. To listen to the music of lost Phobos would have been to hear not just the songs emanating from the *cité's* radios, but also the incidental clamor of unintentional musics in the rhythms and counterpoints of speech and language, in the revvings of passing cars and the slippage and elisions of sounds from one register to the other.

As the experimental composer John Cage pointed out in his silent work *4' 33"*, there is a world of sound to be heard wherever we care to listen. But the 'world' bit of world music is far more problematic.

Delta blues

'To excavate the idea of the Delta blues is to describe something more amorphous and intangible: a history of voices and responses to voices, of the memories and emotions they generate, of how those associations change over time. What emerges from [the folklorists, critics and collectors'] stories is a genealogy of feeling and sensibility. The idea of a genuine, uncorrupted black voice has long had a potency that goes far beyond music. The Delta blues, in essence, was the end product of a journey of the imagination, in which the search for authentic black voices came to focus on commercial blues race records – and remade the blues itself in the process.' ■

© Marybeth Hamilton, from *In Search of the Blues: Black Voice, White Visions* (Jonathan Cape, 2007, p 18).

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Which world does it refer to? Whose world? Not the entire world, clearly: Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones and Madonna (to pluck three internationally big sellers from the racks at random) are not world music. Tinariwan, the band made up of Tuareg nomads; Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the Nigerian inventor of Afrobeat; and the Siberian overtone singer Sainkho Namchylak are, in the classifications of record shops, decidedly world music. Less attention is given to the fact that Tinariwan are arguably inheritors of an indigenous African blues tradition; that the saxophonist Fela Kuti revitalized jazz by offering the new horizons of Afrobeat; and that Sainkho (as she is usually known) is as often to be found in the most serious avant-garde performance circles as she is on the popular stage.

English rules the world

A quick glance over the names listed above shows they hold one thing in common. Michael Jackson, the Rolling Stones and Madonna all sing in English. The writing, production, making and diffusion of their music is supported by a well-developed industrial apparatus that is based in the first or rich world and honed to a lithe reflexivity by decades in the business.

Of course, singing in English is no guarantee of commercial and critical success, but for an artist to engage with the very hegemony of the English language is for them to expose themselves to global markets. There is a small exception to this: it was, even until the 1980s, relatively common for some leading pop artists to re-record their songs in other languages to favor more local markets, but this seems to be a practice that is dying out.⁴ While music has always been subject to a process of rudimentary taxonomy, simply for the ease of differentiating certain traditions from one another, the more contemporary classifications we use as shorthand for

music are driven by the impetus of marketing. They are also wildly inaccurate. So if 'world music' is little more than a marketing tag, who's writing the advertising copy? The simple answer is the sellers.

This is not a terrible situation. Sellers need to be pro-active in order to survive; and, as we have seen with regards to the people who met at the Empress of Russia, it's absolutely necessary for the sellers to negotiate a way to represent their own and their artists' interests. Neither world domination, nor belittling the musicians who would later fall into the world music category was on their agenda – even though there are many who are uneasy with the tag. 'Don't call me "world music",' the French-Spanish star Manu Chao told *The Guardian* writer Garth Cartwright in 2007. 'That's a neo-colonial label you British and Americans like to use for music not sung in English.'

Poking fun: 'World Love'

When the rhythm calls
The government falls
Here come the cops
From Tokyo to Soweto
Viva la musica pop
We are black and we dance all night
Down at the hop
And the letters were tall
On the Berlin Wall
Viva la musica pop
So if you're feeling low
Stuck in some bardo
I, even I
Know the solution
Love, music, wine and revolution
Love, love, love
Love, music, wine and revolution... ■

The Magnetic Fields, 'World Love', from *69 Love Songs* (Merge), © Stephin Merritt 1999. Published by Gay and Loud /Notting Hill Music. Reproduced with permission.

'We are the world' happy-clappy

Others detect a certain naivety in the term. Stephin Merritt, the sharp-edged American songwriter behind several American bands, the Magnetic Fields (see box **Poking fun: 'World Love'**) most famous amongst them, mocks the one-world, one-love inclusivity that sometimes permeates the wider culture of world music, with its bland call to happiness, typified by USA for Africa's 1985 fund-raising anthem, 'We Are the World'.

And David Byrne, a musician who together with Brian Eno released one of the most influential world music albums ever in 1981 – *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* – penned an article in *The New York Times* headlined, 'Why I Hate World Music':

'I hate world music... The term is a catch-all that commonly refers to non-Western music of any and all sorts, popular music, traditional music and even classical music. It's a marketing as well as a pseudomusical term – and a name for a bin in the record store signifying stuff that doesn't belong anywhere else in the store. What's in that bin ranges from the most blatantly commercial music produced by a country, like Hindi film music (the singer Asha Bhosle being the best known example), to the ultra-sophisticated, super-cosmopolitan art-pop of Brazil (Caetano Veloso, Tom Zé, Carlinhos Brown); from the somewhat bizarre and surreal concept of a former Bulgarian state-run folkloric choir being arranged by classically trained, Soviet-era composers (Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares) to Norteño songs from Texas and northern Mexico glorifying the exploits of drug dealers (Los Tigres del Norte). Albums by Selena, Ricky Martin and Los Del Rio (the Macarena kings), artists who

sell millions of records in the United States alone, are racked next to field recordings of Thai hill tribes. Equating apples and oranges indeed. So, from a purely democratic standpoint, one in which all music is equal, regardless of sales and slickness of production, this is a musical utopia.²⁵

Distinct roots

Kudsi Erguner, the renowned Sufi musician and *ney* (a reed or bamboo end-blown flute) virtuoso, detects certain dangers in the rush to embrace the tag of world music, not least in the loss of highly specific contexts. Erguner's fascinating memoir, *Journeys of a Sufi Musician*, contains many examples of this. He traces the way that the dance of the whirling dervishes has been, to a great extent, detached from its original religious context to become a folkloric spectacle.

Sufism, along with many other forms of traditional Turkish expression, including music, was suppressed by Atatürk's new Turkish republic as having retrogressive tendencies. And, as a master musician himself, someone whose long training was rooted in the subtleties of classical improvisation, Erguner mourns the inevitable loss of craft that comes with a widening of an audience. With the appearance of 'world music', he writes, 'the traditional musician begins to emphasize virtuosity to obtain a music more flattering and easy to listen to... Traditional music was corrupted by

Kudsi Erguner

"Sometimes I find myself dreaming of a world that is not "Eurocentric"... Imagine the situation reversed, the Middle East dominating the rest of the world. Imagine then, an ethno-musicologist from Baghdad researching German music. If he wrote that Bach belonged to German folklore, would this not appear strange to a European?" ■

Kudsi Erguner, *Journeys of a Sufi Musician* (Saqi, 2005).

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conforming to the tastes of a less and less educated audience.'

Chao, Byrne, Merritt, Erguner: they all have a point. Designating certain artists as 'world' ones can imply that they're not popular enough to be mainstream. But then, who is mainstream? Are the blind Malian duo Amadou and Mariam, whose Manu Chao-produced hit *Dimanche à Bamako* is a zappy, happy pop album of the first order, mainstream? Are England's Martin Carthy and Norma Waterson constellation – the stars of British folk – world music? Is the Australian indigenous singer Kev Carmody (part Irish, part Muri), a musician who has been described as Australia's Bob Dylan, best categorized as folk or world or even experimental? Is Jamaican reggae – a beat so important to the British punk scene of the late 1970s – world music? And if so, where would one place producers such as Lee 'Scratch' Perry or the Mad Professor (aka Neil Fraser), two of the genre's most significant and prolific experimenters? It's a contentious area. If we have to categorize, maybe one way of beginning would be to ask the musicians themselves and examine the creative frameworks within which they work.

Why now?

But even if we suspend a well-founded reticence to use the term 'world music', there are immediate questions to be asked. Prime amongst them is this: why is world music so interesting to the first world – its main consumers – now? World music is not new. The existence of musics outside the rich West has been known since travelers first traveled. It has been actively sought out and notated, by folk-song collectors such as Cecil Sharpe in Britain or John and Alan Lomax in the American Deep South; also by composers such as Bartok, John Adams and Kevin Volans.

The work of the American classical composer Steve Reich is fundamentally informed by African music and, via Philip Glass's work with Ravi Shankar, a whole school of post-1945 music – minimalism – is intimately tied to Indian ragas and their microtonal scales. Since the late-19th century, the capacity for recording sound on cylinders, discs, tape and, most recently in digital formats, has meant that the work of learned archives, filled by ethno-musicologists and others in fieldwork excursions the world over is becoming available to the many rather than the few.

This *No-Nonsense Guide* is a modest book, one which hopes to ask questions about the thing we conveniently describe as world music. It is not an exhaustive survey, replete with musicological insights. For that, readers are recommended to seek out the excellent (and regularly updated) *Rough Guide's* volumes on the subject. Nor is this book intended to be (or capable of being) a sociological study of music, its audiences and its distribution. For that, readers are directed to more academically orientated journals such as *Popular Music and Society*. Musicologists of all figs are served by many other publications. The scholarly *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* is too expensive for most individuals to own alone, but as a tool to be accessed either in libraries or online, it is an essential one.

Rather, what this book hopes to do is locate several manifestations of world music within a larger context. Its basis is that music is expressive of an idea of community, and that singing, and the involvement in singing – in acting in concert – underpins this idea. What of those outsiders who visit these musical communities? What is it that they – we – bring to the places they visit? What yearnings do we project onto what we hear? Could it be a complex longing for a simple idea of community itself? Listening to music

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outside one's own culture is, at its most basic level, an enriching, world-widening experience. It is a contact with the outside world. And this, along with the outsidership implied, plus all the fantasies, romantic and otherwise, are the subjects of the next chapter, where the focus is on Portuguese *fado* and the *rembetika* of Greece.

1 In addition to the Beatles, sitar sounds made appearances in songs by the Yardbirds, Traffic and the Rolling Stones, among others. **2** Formerly the British colony of Rhodesia, the country was cut adrift from the Commonwealth following its unilateral declaration of independence in 1965, after a refusal to countenance power-sharing with the black majority. **3** The tracks on the NME's *World at One* (NME 035) cassette (1987) were as follows. Side 1: Salif Keita *Sina/Najma Akhtar Dil Laga Ya Tha*/Yanka Rupkina with Trakiistra Troika & Kostadim Varimezov *Ot Kak Se Mara Rodila/Kass Kass Mister Oh!*/Yiorgos Mangas *Choreptse Tsifteleli*/Sidiki Diabete & Ensemble *Ba Togoma/Ketama No Se Si Vivo O Sueno/Zouk Time Guetho A Liso*/Abdul Aziz Mubarak *Ah'Laa Jarah*. Side 2: Ofra Haza *Galbi/Hukwe Zawose*, Dickson Mkwana & Lubeleje Chiute *Nhongolo/Shirati Jazz Dr Binol/Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan Ya Mohammed Bula Lo*/The Real Sounds Of Africa *Murume Wangu/Jali Musa Jawara Fote Mogoban/Dilika Amazimuzimu/Sadik Diko & Reshit Shehu Valle e Gajdes*/Jorge Carbrera *A Fuego Lento/Sasono Mulyo Gamelan Gon Kebyar*. **4** English-language songs have always been a popular way for non-native speakers to learn the language. *Pop Words*, until relatively recently a weekly radio program broadcast on the BBC World Service, was one predicated on this activity. Perversely, it seems that increased access to broadband now means that these kinds of program are no longer necessary. It is easier now to access websites that reproduce song lyrics than to record and listen to pedagogical programs. **5** David Byrne, 'Why I Hate World Music', *The New York Times*, 3 October, 1999. Byrne's polemic is also reproduced on the Luaka Bop website, www.luakabop.com/david_byrne/cmp/worldmusic.html.

2 Music on the margins

'The fado, the knife and the guitar are the three favorites adored by the people of Lisbon.'

Pinto de Carvalho, *Historia do Fado* (1903).

'[Rembetika] is the music of knife fights and decadence.'

Nikos Zachariades, quoted by Ed Emery, Introduction to Ilias Petropoulos, *Songs of the Greek Underground* (Saqi 2000).

Grime and crime – down and out in Lisbon and Athens with fado, rembetika and the aura of the other... Folk music and the dictators... The limitlessness of liminality.

ANY CONTEMPORARY VISITOR to the slopes of Lisbon's Alfama district could be forgiven for thinking that *fado* – Portugal's great surging song of melancholia – was ever an endangered species. Alfama is the oldest district in the capital city and it retains many of its medieval bearings. A multitude of tiny restaurants on equally tiny, winding streets offers travelers simple, homely fare, but robust music.

In these little restaurants, where the floor space is often no bigger than a standard living room, there's no telling who the *fadista* (fado singer) will be until the moment to stop serving the food and start singing the song arrives. And only then, when the cook comes out of the kitchen, wiping her hands and removing her apron, and one or two waiters pick up a *guitarra Portuguesa* (actually something more like a 12-stringed lute than a conventional acoustic guitar) does the fado begin. Even in such intimate settings such as these, the performances are highly staged affairs. The singer, all in black, stands in front of the instrumentalist; movement is confined mostly to arms and the most vivid expressions of the face. (Female