



## World Music Appreciation: 1990

by Vladimir Simosko

Since beginning to teach courses surveying non-western music cultures in 1969, I have observed the blossoming of general interest developing from the late 1960's fad for the music of India following the Beatles' superficial use of certain textures and appreciation of Ravi Shankar, through the broader but still superficial ``New Age'' fascination, to the more recent ``World Beat'' and ``Ethno Pop'' bins in record stores. Unfortunately the key term for defining this interest remains, ``superficial'', despite the proliferation of influences and manifestations of the phenomenon.

Part of the problem is the difficulty in gaining a background for appreciating what non-Western music cultures have to offer. Even ethnomusicology survey courses in ethnomusicology are rare or nonexistent in most universities, despite the emergence of the field of music therapy in the West, and the ``shrinking'' of the planet earth as global communication and population transplantation brings all cultures into contact. Even many existing ethnomusicology programs approach non-Western music from a western paradigm, despite the obvious difficulty in appreciating or understanding what is going on without gaining a cultural perspective, placing the music in context within the culture and perspectives which spawned it. Ultimately and ideally, study and appreciation of the anthropological, social and spiritual context is necessary. Visiting the culture firsthand is increasingly unnecessary as recital tours and local population groups from those cultures can give intimate first-hand access to their values and approach, not to mention major artists from their traditions. Even such immersion on a local level and the study of available ethnomusicological recordings and publications is rarely undertaken. Very few musicians sit down with artists from other cultures for a few lessons, let alone try to play non-western music on authentic instruments. Judging by the usual result, even those who do so merely utilize superficial effects in a westernized performance of obvious commercial intent, except in rare cases.

Ironically, it didn't start out that way: interest in, and appreciation of, non-Western music traditions for the purpose of creating fusions of styles, began among jazzmen in the West (if jazz can be defined as part of ``western'' music). As noted in my article ``Cross Cultures'' (*Coda*, April 1975, pp. 2-5), jazz began as a cross-cultural fusion of African and European elements and followed up with an intense rediscovery of African roots in the 1940's; by the 1950's jazzmen were studying all the world's music for ideas and inspiration. The logical connection between jazz and most non-western music traditions is the emphasis on improvisation and rhythms, but generally the figures in the jazz world interested in developing these connections tended to be interested in the broader aspects of the ethnic cultures whose music they were investigating, including their spiritual orientation. Unfortunately after flourishing as an ingredient of the avant garde in jazz from the 1950's

on, recently it has become clear that most of the interesting figures using this approach have either ``sold out'' to commercial considerations or gone underground with their experiments. Many have also died, and few have emerged to take their place.

While this phenomenon was one of the most interesting movements in jazz history, it tends to be ignored or underrated in jazz studies generally, and the contributions of the pioneers are in danger of being overlooked or forgotten. Even the most celebrated non-jazz pioneer in this area, Harry Partch, seems to be studied more for his compositional and theoretical approach than for how he incorporated influences from non-western music cultures.

More appalling than these figures being overlooked and forgotten is the gradual loss of the traditional music cultures themselves, in the flood of Westernisation transforming the traditional cultures of which they are a manifestation. The last generations trained from entirely within the cultural tradition are dying out. Their students necessarily approach their own traditions from increasingly westernized perspectives. Ultimately survival of these music cultures will depend on ``outsiders'' (those not raised in the traditional culture from which the style developed, since the traditional culture will no longer exist), necessarily studying the music as an anachronistic specialty or academic discipline. But the authentic ``signals'' in the traditional style, part of the natural expressive vocabulary of individuals raised in the tradition, will have to be merely feigned by the dedicated interpreter, much as a skilled and talented actor projects appropriate signals, nuances, and mannerisms in conveying the appropriate gestalt for the character. It is fortunate technology enables us to capture authentic performances (ideally holographically, but at least on video or, most basically, good sound). If the trend towards Westernisation of the entire planet continues, future generations will have only what we preserve to work with in studying the authentic cultures and evaluating the work of those still trying to carry on those music traditions (who, in turn, will have only those same documents to learn from, aside from those few musicians trying to preserve the traditions of the vanished cultures).

Even more frightening than losing touch with appropriate performance signals, it does not seem likely that the traditional functional dimension of the music of most non-western music cultures will be retained. Music therapists are those in the West most likely to be able to appreciate and use, for example, shamanic healing effects, but have been slow to adapt or even study in depth such phenomena, as noted in my papers ``Jung, Music and Music Therapy'' (C.G.Jung and the Humanities Colloquium preprint, The Author, 1987) and ``Jungian Music Therapy: Ethnomusicological Implications'' (Canadian Folk Music Society preprint, The Author, 1989). The relationship between the music and dance is similarly endangered as choreographers take over presentation of traditional forms as entertainment. Offerings at various non-western ethnic pavilions during Winnipeg's annual Folklorama celebrations provides an interesting case study in the relationship between traditional expression and westernized entertainment, in observing the presenta-

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tions of various cultural groups from year to year. Disturbingly often one is presented with a version of the cultural tradition that seems to have been filtered through a Hollywood musical. Even sincere efforts at authenticity are impeded by their presentation as an act in a show, and this is often as close to the traditional culture as the average spectator is likely to get.

As primitive, magic-oriented cultures for whom music is a functional part of life give way to urbanized civilization, music becomes stratified into folk-forms and classical expressions. Throughout history these folk forms and classical traditions have been related organically to the previous traditions. Currently, the traditional cultures are being absorbed into western culture with superficial signals retained as identity-indicators, perhaps signalling underlying cultural values immutable even in the face of terminal westernisation for the prevailing culture. (See Alan Lomax: Folk Song Style and Culture, AAAS, 1968, for a full discussion of nuances in style as an indication of cultural style and values). The result involves the ``World Beat'' and ``Ethno Pop'' phenomenon as these fascinating but ultimately superficial blends of traditional forms with western pop music are offered commercially. These blends are excellent propaganda as the signals representing western commercial values dominate, but of necessity the retained signals from the watered-down indigenous culture blend with the westernized aspects. As many of the traditional cultures under consideration offer music whose intrinsic value-signals are spiritually oriented and obviously therefore in conflict with the western commercial paradigm, one is left with abandoning the deeper messages of spiritual content or having a conflict of signals within the music. The latter is not necessarily incompatible with the propaganda value as chaos and mixed signals; even Orwellian ``double-think'' is an aspect of Westernisation which is so obviously prevalent it is usually overlooked or ignored especially by Westerners.

It seems apparent the development of a ``World Music'' from all the music cultures on the planet is taking place, and as expected it reflects the values of the prevailing emerging world culture: western materialism. The deeper, often specifically spiritually oriented blends with which the aforementioned jazz movement experimented, which was an attempt to retain the more specifically spiritually oriented values of the traditional cultures they sought to incorporate, thereby respecting the ethnic tradition rather than merely using it superficially, is never likely to be popular on a large scale as it takes too much background study to understand and reflects the ``wrong'' values relative to the prevailing culture. The potential for an intricately creative and profoundly deep world music has been demonstrated, and is being developed on an ad-hoc basis ``underground'' despite the prevailing trend towards superficial commercialism, but it seems unlikely to flourish without a worldwide change of values. Meanwhile we get what we deserve and lose what we're not smart enough to keep.