

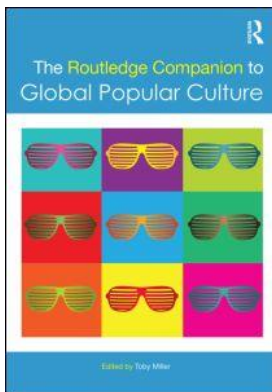
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### World Music

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## WORLD MUSIC

## The Fabrication of a Genre

*Timothy D. Taylor*

All the world's music is world music. It is only the globally dominant Anglo-American music industry that relegates some musics to the category of world music.

This wasn't always the case. For decades, the western music industry paid little attention to the music of its Elsewheres; it was more interested in selling its wares than taking the music of elsewhere seriously. The American and European recording industry was thus global almost from the beginning (see Gronow 1998). One effect of this, apart from the exploitation of new markets (which has been a powerful driving force of American capitalism since its beginning), was that people from elsewhere heard western musics, including popular musics, which encouraged people around the world to begin to learn European and American popular music. Learn it, emulate it, and let it affect their own local and regional musics. Locally produced popular musics seldom caught the ear of a western record label representative or fan, but after World War II an increasing number of popular musicians and genres began to be noticed in the west.

There were some precursors. Occasionally a popular song from elsewhere has found a western audience, as can still happen (the most recent example being Psy's "Gangnam Style," which took the world by storm in 2012). Before this, there were periodic US and European interests in musics not lumped into the world music category—"Latin" musics of various kinds have found large audiences in several periods in US history (see Roberts 1999); the Argentinian tango was a European craze in the 1920s and has enjoyed several waves of popularity since (see Savigliano 1995); Hawai'ian music and musical instruments have found mainstream audiences from time to time. All of these musics are now frequently lumped into the "world music" category (except for "Latin," which enjoys its own status as a freestanding category, unless it is folk or traditional music, in which case it is categorized as "world music"). But each wave, or each song, failed to have a substantial effect on the western music industry, which, if it paid attention to non-North American or non-European musics at all, tended to relegate these musics to marginal categories (there was a "Hawai'ian" category even in the 1920s, part of the mainland US's fascination for the islands it annexed in 1898).

One of the earliest examples of a nonwestern song becoming well known in the west was a 1939 song called "Mbube" ("Lion") by the South African Solomon Linda, which became known variously as "Wimba way" or "Wimoweh," and later as "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." The first US recording was by The Weavers in 1951 (Alan Lomax having

introduced Pete Seeger to the original recording), with perhaps the most famous version by the doo wop group The Tokens in 1961; and Disney used the song in *The Lion King* (1994). There were significant issues of copyright and ownership, to be addressed below.

Following this, some nonwestern musics periodically burst into western consciousnesses. The South African singer Miriam Makeba (1932–2008) became fairly well known to international audiences, with hit songs such as “Pata Pata” (released in South Africa in 1957 and in the US in 1967). And Harry Belafonte (1927– ) helped popularize calypso music (originally from Trinidad and Tobago) with recordings such as *Calypso* (1957).

But all of these were just flashes in the pan, musics or musicians heard and understood as exotic, different, Other. Beginning in the 1970s, however, nonwestern popular musics begin to sound increasingly like western popular musics. The distribution of western recordings to the rest of the world has a long history, but the rise of rock and roll and other forms of popular music had a profound effect on musicians around the world. Access to instruments and quality recording studios lagged behind the west (see Wallis and Malm 1984) but, nonetheless, recordings were made that sounded like western popular musics.

The first of these to gain notice was the Cameroonian Manu Dibango’s “Soul Makossa” from 1972, regarded by some as the first disco recording (see Shapiro 2005). The song had a cult following through happenstance in New York City, then found airplay on a New York City radio station. The original single was licensed by Atlantic Records in the US and released on that label, where it reached #35 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart and was widely covered by many bands.

With this and other popular songs, nonwestern musicians’ emulations of, and interpretations of, western popular musics began to be noticed by the American- and European-dominated music industry. Beginning in the 1980s, as more and more popular music outside the west began to be produced that sounded like music produced in the west (though not sung in English or a European language other than a colonial language, sometimes), western listeners began to realize that there was music that needed to be paid attention to. Some western rock stars, given their positions of power in the music industry, could come into contact with some of these recordings, given to them by others in the music business.

An early and perhaps the most influential example of this was Paul Simon’s (1941–) recording *Graceland* (1986), which makes use of various popular musics from the African continent. Simon, like all western stars who record with nonwestern Others, professes to love the music, and attempts to establish authority by demonstrating that he heard this music before most others did; he writes in the liner notes to *Graceland* that:

In the summer of 1984, a friend gave me a cassette of an album called **Gumboots: Accordion Jive Hits, Volume II**. It sounded vaguely like ‘50s rock ‘n’ roll out of the Atlantic Records school of simple three-chord pop hits: “**Mr. Lee**” by the Bobettes, “**Jim Dandy**” by Laverne Baker. It was very up, very happy music—familiar and foreign-sounding at the same time. The instrumentation (accordion, bass, drums and electric guitars) and the name of the record label (Gallo Records) made me think that **Gumboots** probably hadn’t been recorded by an American or British band.

(Simon 1986; *emphases in original*)

And political considerations were of no concern. Simon violated a United Nations boycott on trade with South Africa to make the recording, casting himself as a simple musician and nothing more:

The idea that interacting with musicians from another culture could be viewed as cultural imperialism never occurred to me. I was reacting musically. I liked certain kind of music, I wanted to play with those musicians, I wanted to interact with those musicians and I treated them with my utmost musical respect. At the very minimum I was paying people very, very well.

When it became an issue, I said, “Wait a minute, this has been going on forever. Musicians have always played with other musicians.”

(Quoted in Gonzalez 1990: §B, p. 25)

Later, he said:

The big issue approaching another culture is respect. That’s the key. If you come in with respect, as someone who doesn’t know and doesn’t pretend to know everything, I found that, overwhelmingly, people are friendly and open. But you must understand that you’re a guest and you are privileged to be there.

I am a white, Anglo, Jewish male, but I’m also more than that. We can transcend our little ghettos. People can communicate. It’s hard, it takes work, it takes time, but it happens. And when you break through and make contact, the experience is exhilarating.

(Gonzalez 1990: §B, p. 25)<sup>1</sup>

Such attitudes aren’t unusual. All western stars who work with nonwestern musicians—whether Peter Gabriel, David Byrne, Ry Cooder, or others—profess love and respect for the musicians with whom they work, setting aside all other considerations. And world music artists have frequently benefited from the curatorship, brokering, or collaboration (see Meintjes 1990) of these western stars.

### “World Music”

With the success of recordings such as *Graceland* and the continuing flow of nonwestern popular musics to western metropolises, for the first time the western music industry sought to create a new category into which to place these new but familiar sounds—world music. What we now call world music had a significant presence on minor and independent labels before the 1980s, which is when world music began to take off. Connoisseurs and ethnomusicologists knew many of these recordings, which were devoted to particular regions, or genres, or more.

But by the late 1980s, it was clear a new label was needed. The old label of “international,” with German polkas or ethnographic field recordings of folk and traditional musics, no longer worked. So, in the late 1980s, a group of journalists and DJs in the UK got together to devise a term. The influential British DJ Charlie Gillett recalled:

We had a very simple, small ambition. It was all geared to record shops, that was the only thing we were thinking about. In America, King Sunny Ade (from Nigeria) was being filed under reggae. That was the only place shops could think of to put him. In Britain they didn't know where to put this music—I think Ade was just lost in the alphabet, next to Abba. In 1985 [sic] Paul Simon did *Graceland* and that burst everything wide open, because he created an interest in South African music. People were going into shops saying: “I want some of that stuff” and there wasn't anywhere for them to look.

(Denselow 2004: 10)

With the rise of world music as a “genre” of music recognized by the music industry, the industry began to create an infrastructure to recognize sales and manage it. *Billboard* magazine, the weekly chronicle of the music industry, began to track world music sales in world music charts, established in 1990; the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, which bestows Grammy awards, created a Grammy Award for Best World Music Album in 1992. In 2003, it created a new award, so the two awards were named Best Traditional World Music Album and Best Contemporary World Music Album, but, a few years later, believing there to be too many small awards, they reverted to the original configuration of a single Grammy Award for Best World Music Album in 2012 (see Taylor 2012).

Retailers began creating spaces in their stores, both brick-and-mortar and online, for world music recordings. It wasn't well known in the 1980s and 1990s just who the world music audience was, though this became better known as record companies solicited information from their purchasers. They began to realize that the audience for world music was largely an educated and middle-class one, and the world music infrastructure began to shift to recognize this. One of the first magazines devoted to world music, *Songlines*, which began publication in 1999, started life the size of an academic journal, though it assumed the size of a glossy popular magazine later. And in at least one case, a major retailer discontinued its classical music section, which had been in a separate section of the store, and moved in the world music recordings, a particularly clear example of the declining interest in classical music among educated middle-class people and its replacement by world music.

Also demonstrating its connection to this particular social group, world music has become a staple on college radio and university campuses in concert series. Major concert halls frequently feature world music series, as well.

In Europe, more so than the US, world music has also established an important presence at festivals. The earliest and still one of the biggest is the World of Music and Dance (WOMAD), founded by Peter Gabriel and others in the UK in 1980 and held there and globally since 1982. In an era of declining sales of recorded music, these festivals offer musicians important venues and sources of employment, even as they occasionally continue to tie into western stereotypes and fears of the Other.

### World Musicians

For their part, musicians relegated to the world music category are ambivalent at best about it. Some claim to like it because it gives them a recognizable place in which western fans can find them. Others don't like it because they feel like the category is marginalizing or ghettoizing: they want to be rock or hip hop or rhythm and blues

musicians, not in a minor category. And they recognize the ways that the world music category perpetuates old stereotypes about nonwestern Others, particularly those from the African continent (see Taylor 1997). For example, the great Beninoise singer Angélique Kidjo (1960– ) said, “There is a kind of cultural racism going on where people think that African musicians have to make a certain kind of music” (Burr 1994: §H, p. 28). Elsewhere, she said:

I won't do my music different to please some people who want to see something very traditional. The music I write is me. It's how I feel. If you want to see traditional music and exoticism, take a plane to Africa. They play that music on the streets. I'm not going to play traditional drums and dress like bush people. I'm not going to show my ass for any fucking white man. If they want to see it, they can go outside. I'm not here for that. I don't ask Americans to play country music.

(Wentz 1993: 43)

With the growth of a recording industry infrastructure in many parts of the world, however, and the growth of festivals, it is increasingly possible for subsequent generations of musicians who once would have been classified as “world music” artists to make a living, or at least attempt to, without much regard for the western music industry. Many musicians from the African continent today are less interested in western stardom, or even acceptance, than making a music that makes them feel a part of a global African diaspora (Appert 2012), and that speaks to local, regional, or continental aspirations. As a Malian hip hop musician Amkoulel said recently, “We don't have an American Dream. We have an African Dream.”

### Digital Technologies

The rise of world music as a category of music recognized by the western music industry occurred at the same time as new digital technologies that made it possible to sample (that is, copy digitally) pre-existing recordings, and so new genres of electronic music (usually grouped under blanket terms like “techno” or “electronica,” or, more recently, EDM, “electronic dance music”) quickly sprung up that made use of samples of world music. Some of these (sub)genres were built on the idea of sampling of world music, such as “ethnotechno” (see Pareles 1996) and psychedelic trance (see Taylor 2001), both of which were characterized by danceable beats combined with world music samples. This sampling practice was mainstream almost from the beginning.

The first successful recording that featured samples of world music was *Deep Forest*, released in 1992; it sold over 3 million copies. The liner notes convey the continuing colonialist ideologies of the time:

Imprinted with the ancestral wisdom of the African chants, the music of Deep Forest immediately touches everyone's soul and instinct[.] The forest of all civilizations is a mysterious place where the yarn of tales and legends is woven with images of men, women, children, animals and fairies. Not only living creatures, but also trees steeped in magical powers. Universal rites and customs have been profoundly marked by the influence of the forest, a place of power and knowledge passed down from generation to generation by the oral traditions



of primitive societies. The chants of Deep Forest, Baka chants of Cameroun, of Burundi, of Senegal and of Pygmies, transmit a part of this important oral tradition gathering all peoples and joining all continents through the universal language of music. Deep Forest is the respect of this tradition which humanity should cherish which marries world harmony, a harmony often compromised today. That's why the musical creation of Deep Forest has received the support of UNESCO and of two musicologists, Hugo Zempe [sic] and Shima [sic] Aron [sic], who collected the original documents.

*(Liner notes to Deep Forest 1992)*

All this—including, of course, the music—constitutes a remarkable text. Not only are the names of the prominent ethnomusicologists (Hugo Zemp and Simha Arom) misspelled, the notes seem to strive to touch all the most revered buttons of western modernity: the mysterious Other, the universal cultural practices, the Other's unique, idealized kinship to nature, the totalization of the Other—different tribes from different parts of the African continent become “pygmies”—not to mention the use of the word “primitive” without quotation marks.

French producers Michel Sanchez and Eric Mouquet construe the source music as raw material, thought to be unpalatable to western listeners with sophisticated tastes. It is viewed so much as a natural resource to be exploited that, as is typical in such cases, the permissions of the original musicians was not sought, and not all of the original musicians were credited on the album (see Feld 1996). So it is backgrounded, encompassed, surrounded by up-to-date synthesized magic and drum machines. Most of the source music on Deep Forest is unrecognizable; it has been so manipulated, so smoothed over, so covered up by the western synthesizers, that whatever might be “universal” about the music is subsumed under a western totalizing ideology of universalism, which manifests itself musically by pushing the original music into the background. The music of the “pygmies” becomes zoo music: put behind bars (barlines, that is), behind western harmony, made accessible to today's western listener who only wants to spend money and dance. Evidently it has been sufficiently altered so that the two main forces behind the album, Eric Moquet and Michel Sanchez, are listed as the “songwriters” after each track.

“It was just for our pleasure in the beginning,” says Mouquet. “We just put all the feeling that we wanted into this music, and after we saw the success, we were very proud” (Geitner n.d.). According to Mouquet, his partner, Michel Sanchez, found some tapes of Pygmy chant recorded decades ago and played them after dinner one night. “It was very quiet, very beautiful,” said Mouquet, who then came up with the idea of combining the sounds with their own music (Geitner n.d.).

The success of this album resulted in the creation of Deep Forest not just as an album title but as a band which has released several more albums under the name Deep Forest; their *Boheme* (1995) sold over 4 million copies and won the Grammy Award for Best World Music Album. Subsequent releases have fared less well as the global music industry has suffered and, perhaps also, as the band's popularity has waned.

But their attitudes toward the music they sampled betrays longstanding western ideas of the nonwestern Other, who emits music naturally that is fit to be appropriated and refined—either electronically as in the case of Deep Forest, or acoustically, as in the case of Paul Simon and *Graceland*—made fit for sophisticated western tastes.

## Ownership

Almost since the beginning of “world music” in the 1980s (and in isolated cases before, such as “The Lion Sleeps Tonight”), there have been cases of exploitation of nonwestern musicians, either through the misappropriation of ownership rights of copyrights, or representations, or both. Solomon Linda was paid less than \$1 in today’s money for the rights to “Mbube” (see Malan 2004) and it wasn’t until a lawsuit decades later that his heirs received some degree of recompense (La Franiere 2006). Deep Forest did not seek the permission of the people whose music was sampled, and failed to credit everyone on the album. No share of their profits were returned to the original musicians (Mellor and Janke 2001; Feld 2002). Paul Simon was also accused of exploiting the musicians with whom he worked, though, for their part, the musicians indicated that they were seeking an international reputation and Simon was their means to this end (see Taylor n.d.).

These are complex issues, even when it is clear who owns the copyrights. But legal ownership of a copyright does not necessarily lead to treatments of sampled musics that many would consider to be ethical.

Partly as a result of these sorts of appropriations, there has been a global movement in the last few decades towards the protection of some folk and traditional music and dance (and other) practices under the rubric of “intangible cultural heritage.” This is a designation agreed upon by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at a convention in 2003. Since then, it has named many musical genres such as the tango and instruments as “Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.” While this designation is intended to protect these cultural forms, it can have the unwanted effect of advertising them, with the result of increasing tourism and raising the cost of musical instruments beyond the means of many (see Taylor 2014).

## Genrification and Standardization of World Music Today

World music has never enjoyed very high sales, roughly about the same as the minuscule sales of classical recordings; the Recording Industry Association of America, the industry lobbying organization which keeps track of sales and consumer data, has never broken out world music as a separate “genre” category in its annual tally of sales of various genres.

Nonetheless, world music has become increasingly ubiquitous, whether in recorded form as samples, soundtracks and commercials, or as live music in concert series and festivals. As a result, some knowledge of world music has become necessary for workers in the commercial music industry. Clients, whether advertising agencies or television or film studios, are increasingly familiar with various world music sounds and genres, and thus may request that composers and performers write or perform in a particular world music genre or performance style. Composers in the realm of commercial music need to be able to emulate many styles of music (see Taylor 2012).

This—along with the neoliberal movement of profits in the cultural industries up toward management and away from the workers, resulting in the outsourcing of studio recording jobs to cheaper cities such as Prague—has unemployed many musicians, and made it necessary for those who remain to become increasingly versatile. There is now the utility musician who can emulate a variety of sounds, including those considered to



be “world music.” It is cheaper and easier to hire a musician who can sound like anyone or anything than to attempt to find an authentic musician from a particular tradition for a spot of local color.

This trend towards the utility musician includes singers, who also must sing in a variety of styles. One singer, Marissa Steingold, who works both in commercials and film, described how the process works.

A lot of times they’ll ask, “Can you do this?” “Can you sound like a Bulgarian . . . ?” “Okay,” and I’ll just listen to one YouTube example and just sort of make it up. I’ve had to do a lot of Celtic stuff, just hoping I’m pronouncing things correctly.

(Steingold 2009)

And she provided an illustrative anecdote:

I had this gig not too long ago for Coca-Cola. They had this Indian singer who they really liked and so they gave me a recording in advance of her doing some wonderful chanting, and they said, “We want you to sound like her, but, it’s a Coca-Cola commercial and there are lyrics in English.” So I called up my friend from Bangladesh and had her do an impression of an Indian person speaking English who just doesn’t speak English that well, and tried to absorb that without being really offensive. It’s quite difficult, sometimes I have to be “Asian,” and I’m just praying that no one in Asia is listening. There’s no time to really work it out.

They kind of need people like me who are not genuine, not genuinely black, or not genuinely Indian, or whatever, because it would be offensive to ask an Indian person to sound less Indian.

Steingold also discussed the singer Lisa Gerrard, who gained fame from her performance on the soundtrack for *Gladiator* (2000), on which she sang in nonsense syllables. It sounded like world music, but it was fabricated.

I think of two singers as a spectrum and one’s on each end. Usually on one side you’ve got Enya, and then on the other side you’ve got Lisa Gerrard, and she’s much more intense. And so often I’m having to play this dance, so if I start to get too intense, earthy, too ethnic then it’s got to go to the Enya side. I think part of the reason why she’s been so successful is, she’s still pretty white. It’s an “other”—it’s Celtic, but it’s still something that we can handle.

(Steingold 2009)

Another commercial singer, Randy Crenshaw, said:

When you get the call they’ll say, “We’re looking for someone who can sing authentically in Farsi, are you good at that? Or do you know somebody who’s good at it?” So you come pre-approved, but once you get called for that you’re expected to come in there and really sound quite authentic. I’ve had to do things where I had to come in and do, you know, Sufi devotional music. I’ve had to come in and sing things that were in Hindi, or things that were in

Sanskrit, or things in Indonesian, where they said, “Okay we have kind of a Gamelan orchestra and we need you to sound authentically like . . .” and they’ll play me samples of stuff.

In a lot of cases producers are still looking for a pastiche thing that has the flavor of it without the genuine article. But, in enough cases they’re true aficionados of a musical style and when they say they want Bulgarian women, they really do want it to sound just like the record they have of the Bulgarian women. So it’s made us be a lot more broadly based eclectic music makers, instead of what we used to be, which is really highly technically great tone generators.

(Crenshaw 2009)

Crenshaw also said:

I have a library of probably 3,000 CDs and 2,000 LPs, you know, of the vinyl variety that nobody knows about any more? I still have a wall full of them, and I purposely took samples of virtually every vocal style that’s known to exist. I try and actually have a listening library so that when somebody says that they me want to sound like Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn, or whoever it is, I’ll say, “Okay, sure” and then I go and listen.

(Crenshaw 2009)

The kinds of demands faced by these musicians part of the music industry’s drive to genericize world music, to put it in its place, so that it can be knowable, manageable, manipulable, and, of course, profitable.

## Note

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- 1 For more on Paul Simon and *Graceland*, see Taylor (n.d.).

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