



## **"Worldbeat Music": A Selective Survey and Discussion of Associated Socioeconomic Issues**

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### **Abstract**

*"Worldbeat Music" can be defined as the synthesis or fusion of the indigenous music of non-Western peoples with Western pop music. Worldbeat music is often sung in native tongues (and sometimes in a mixture of English and an indigenous language). This music is a good example of cultural exchange and fusion between the First World and the Third World which is enriching. However, Worldbeat Music can be hijacked by powerful commercial interests and become watered down into a best-selling but musically bland and aesthetically uninspiring mix. Worldbeat musicians from the Third World are susceptible to "cultural imperialism" from individuals and transnational music corporations from abroad. They are seriously hampered by many factors as compared to their counterparts in the rich countries, e.g., lack of financial resources, lack of access to high quality studios, lack of marketing channels, rampant commercial piracy etc. Thus, when Third World musicians manage to tie up with Western musicians, promoters and record companies, they are vulnerable to unsatisfactory treatment and even exploitation. A reaction to domination by foreigners (including cultural domination) would be cultural nationalism and a "return to roots". Furthermore, unlike musicians in the First World, socially-conscious Third World musicians often face the possibility of political repression or even bodily harm from the "authorities" whom they offend.*

### **Introduction**

There is a genre of popular music called "Worldbeat Music" (or "World Music" as it is also called inaccurately sometimes). It can be defined as the synthesis or fusion of the indigenous music of non-Western peoples with Western pop music. Of course, "Western" pop music is not wholly Western in the sense that it has been influenced by the music of Africa through the music of the descendants of black slaves in the Americas. Thus, the music of Elvis Presley, the Beatles and the Rolling Stones were influenced by the music of black Americans circa 1950s and 1960s. Worldbeat music is often sung in native tongues (and sometimes in a mixture of English and an

indigenous language) but this does not prevent one from enjoying the complexities and aesthetics of the music itself. I will begin this article with a discussion of Worldbeat Music from different regions of the world such as the Caribbean; South America; North, West, Central and Southern Africa, the Middle East and so on. After a selective exploration of Worldbeat Music from different parts of the world, I will continue with a discussion of socioeconomic issues associated with this genre of popular music.

### **Selective Discussion of Worldbeat Music from Different Parts of the Globe**

The Black Diaspora in the New World has led to the emergence of many forms of music. Leaving aside the music of blacks in the United States, we have reggae music in Jamaica, calypso and soca (soul calypso) in Trinidad and neighboring islands, zouk in the French Antilles, rara in Haiti, rumba and son in Cuba, merengue in the Dominican Republic, samba in Brazil and so on (Broughton et al., 1994).

#### **The Caribbean**

Jamaica is, of course, famous for reggae music and its mesmerizing beat. The bands "Toots and the Maytals" and "Bob Marley and the Wailers" can probably be considered the originators of reggae music (which evolved from earlier forms such as "ska" by a slowing down of the ska beat) (Salter, 1994). Bob Marley (1945-1981) was not only a great singer but he also wrote poetic and moving lyrics for his songs. A follower of Rastafarianism, he sang about love, peace and freedom, brotherhood, Pan-Africanism and so on. Here are two examples of his powerful lyrics:

*"Concrete Jungle" (excerpts)*

*No sun will shine in my day today*

*The high yellow moon won't come out to play  
 I said, Darkness has covered my light  
 And has changed my day into night  
 Where is the love to be found?  
 Won't someone tell me  
 'Cause life, sweet life, must be somewhere to be found*

*Instead of concrete jungle  
 Where the living is hardest  
 Concrete jungle  
 Man, you've got to do your best*

*No chains around my feet  
 But I'm not free  
 I know I am bound here in captivity  
 I've never known happiness  
 I'll never know what a sweet caress is  
 Still, I'll be always laughing like a clown  
 Won't someone help me  
 'Cause I've, I've got to pick myself from off the ground*

*"Slave Driver"(excerpts)*

*Slave driver, the table is turned  
 Catch your fire, you're gonna get burned  
 Slave driver, your table is turned  
 Catch your fire, you're gonna get burned*

*Everytime I hear the crack of a whip  
 My blood runs in me cold  
 I remember on the slaveship  
 How they brutalized our very souls  
 Today they say that we are free  
 Only to be chained in poverty  
 Good God, I think it's illiteracy  
 It's only a machine to make money*

Jimmy Cliff was another early reggae star. Cliff's songs give voice to the poor and exploited migrant from the rural areas to the big cities of the Third World (in songs like "Many Rivers to Cross" and "Struggling Man"). For example:

*"Struggling Man"(excerpts)*

*Everyman has a right to live  
 Love is all that we have to give  
 Together we struggle by our will to survive  
 And together we fight just to stay alive*

*Struggling man has got to move  
 Struggling man no time to lose  
 I'm a struggling man  
 And I've got to move on*

*As the sun lights the day  
 And the moon lights the night  
 Struggling man keeps reaching for the higher heights  
 So we plan for tomorrow  
 As we live for today  
 Like the flower we bloom and then later fade away*

The above are examples of "roots reggae" (early reggae). Today, politically and socially-conscious reggae has evolved into ragga. Most social scientists would probably approve of roots reggae and disapprove of the misogynistic and anti-social tendencies of ragga (Salter, 1994).

Other interesting examples of world music from the Caribbean include "zouk" music from the French Antilles played by groups like Kassav and "soca" (soul calypso) from the Eastern Caribbean. Soca is a lively descendant of the earlier calypso and it is notable for its heavy emphasis on the horns and other brass instruments. "Merengue" from the Dominican Republic, "rara" from Haiti and "son" from Cuba are also interesting forms of Caribbean Worldbeat Music that show notable African influences (Hanly and May, 1989)(Broughton et al., 1994).

## **South America**

Probably the most well-known indigenous music of South America (at least outside of the region) is the haunting music of the "Indians" of the Andes Mountains of Peru, Bolivia and northern Chile. In spite of the efforts of Spanish conquistadores and the colonial Catholic Church to suppress the culture and music of the Andean peoples, (their music was accused of being associated with paganism), Andean music has managed to survive and even flourish (Darlington and Vargas, 1993). Nevertheless, there has been a certain degree of acculturation, e.g., the guitar has been borrowed from the Spanish and become part of the range of musical instruments used to play Andean music.

One beautiful and famous example of Andean music is, of course, "El Condor Pasa" or "The Condor Passes". This tune was made famous in the Western world when the pop duo Simon and Garfunkel borrowed it and came up with a hit song in English. Another wonderful Andean melody is "Titicaca". While listening to it, one can picture the reed boats of the local people resting on the surface of Lake Titicaca, the rippling of the water as the wind blows over the lake etc. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Nueva Cancion (New Song) movement emerged when Latin American musicians who were determined to recover their native pre-Columbian roots began incorporating Indian melodies into their music. They also used indigenous musical instruments like the charango - a guitar made from the shell of the armadillo. The Nueva Cancion musicians wanted to develop a politically and socially conscious music. The best examples of these musicians are Victor Jara and Violeta Parra. Victor Jara was tortured and murdered by the Chilean military regime of General Augusto Pinochet after the military coup of 1973 that overthrew the government of Dr Salvador Allende. Torturers from the regime broke Jara's hands

(a truly cruel act since Jarra used to play the guitar as he sang his leftist and populist songs) before murdering him. As for Violeta Parra, one of her most famous songs is "Gracias a la Vida" ("Thank you for Life"). Today, groups like Inti-Illimani are carrying on the tradition of the Nueva Cancion musicians (Fairley, 1994).

The Bahia region of Brazil is famous for its music and musical innovations. Bahian musicians like Margaret Menezes perform music that incorporate the pulsating beat of the Mardi Gras drum and percussion groups (Cleary, 1994). Paul Simon, although not a self-declared worldbeat musician, has clearly borrowed from Brazilian samba music in his album "Rhythm of the Saints".

Well-known black Brazilian singer-songwriter Milton Nascimento's works often deal with social issues such as environmental degradation and discrimination and racism of other Brazilians directed against the Amazon Indians. He has written a "Green" song called "Txai". Other notable Brazilian musicians include Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso.

### **African and Middle Eastern Pop Music**

West African pop music (music from Senegal, Mali, Guinea etc) are particularly interesting. Some of these countries have the griot tradition of musician cum praise-singers (Cathcart, 1989). Thus, modern singers like Salif Keita, Mory Kante, Youssou N'dour and so on are continuing this tradition. The West African pop musicians often incorporate the traditional stringed instrument called the kora in their music. From Nigeria, we have King Sunny Ade's "juju" music and Fela Kuti's "Afrobeat" music. Fela Kuti was a colorful character - he had many wives and his politically provocative lyrics and album titles, e.g., V.I.P. (Vagabonds in Power) got him into trouble with the authorities from time to time (Collins, 1992)(Frey, 2000). West

African pop music is well known and popular in France but, unfortunately, not so in Britain or the United States.

The "soukous" music of the Republic of the Congo and surrounding Central African nations is characterized by shimmering and quite complex guitarwork. Leading soukous musicians include Kanda Bongo Man and Tabu Ley Rochereau.

South African music is another form of Worldbeat Music which is very interesting musically. Again, Paul Simon's "Graceland" album is an example of Western borrowing of South African township music. However, Garofalo did point out that "... South African popular styles were themselves heavily influenced by African-American rhythm and blues, soul, jazz, and gospel from the 1950s and '60s." (Garofalo, 1992: 7). The white South African musician Johnny Clegg is a former academic who is fluent in the Zulu language and who later became a political activist-cum-musician. His multi-racial musical groups (Juluka and subsequently, Savuka) played songs which conveyed messages that irritated the pre-1994 apartheid regime. An example of one of his songs:

*"Woman Be My Country" (excerpts)*

*Woman be my country  
Till my country can be mine  
Hide me deep inside your borders  
In these dark and troubled times*

*Remember me my innocence  
Before I drown in a sea of lies  
Woman be my country  
Till my country can be mine*

*Woman be my country  
Till my country can be mine  
I have no flag, I sing no anthem*

*I no longer carry an Armalite  
Bathe me in your sweet rivers  
Anoint me with your touch and your smile  
To your colours I give my allegiance  
I lay it on the line*

Further north and just across the border in Zimbabwe, we find the musician named Thomas Mapfumo, also popularly known as the "Lion of Zimbabwe". Mapfumo's "chimurenga" music played an important role in mobilizing the black African majority against the white minority regime of Ian Smith. What is interesting about Mapfumo's music is his use of Western instruments like the electric guitar and the drums to emulate native Shona rhythms, sounds and traditional instruments like the mbira ("thumb piano"), gourd shakers and so on.

There are also African versions of reggae music - this is very interesting because reggae music is a form of music developed in Jamaica by the descendants of black slaves. Thus reggae music has, in a way, recrossed the Atlantic and established itself in Africa. Notable African reggae musicians include Alpha e Blondy from the Ivory Coast and Lucky Dube from South Africa (Salter, 1994).

The pop musicians of Algeria have come up with "rai" music i.e. pop music influenced musically by Arabic music. The presence of sizable numbers of Algerian immigrants and their descendants in France also means that rai music has established itself in France (Sweeney, 1989). In a similar vein, South Asian immigrants and their descendants have fused Indian music and Western pop music and come up with something called "bhangra" in Britain (Burton and Awan, 1994).

The music of Israeli pop star Ofra Haza is also Arab-influenced. Haza is of Yemeni Jewish descent and her music reflects her heritage. Some of her music is techno in approach and has a dance beat. In my opinion, these are actually negative detractions to her very interesting and complex vocals.

### **Socioeconomic Issues Pertaining to Worldbeat Music**

Professional musicians in the Third World are seriously hampered by many factors as compared to their counterparts in the rich countries. First is the lack of financial resources: the musicians may not need to undergo formal musical training but they still need money to buy musical instruments, sound systems etc. High quality studios for producing their music in the form of cassette tapes and CDs may also be lacking (Glanvill, 1989). To make things even harder, marketing (advertising, distribution and sale) of their music may be difficult within their native land and even more difficult overseas. According to Weber,

It can be seen ... that distribution and consumption, rather than production, are the key areas of control for the "Big Five" (music) transnationals. Major labels cannot entirely control production, manufacturing or public tastes: they cannot control what music people will make or what music people will like. However, they can and do restrict competition and structure audience choices: they can control what people can hear and what people can buy (Weber, 1996).

Rampant commercial piracy is also common in many Third World countries. Thus, copyright protection may not translate into satisfactory levels of financial reward through the payment of royalties. International commercial success is more likely if Third World musicians sing in widely-spoken languages rather than regional languages. Thus, Worldbeat musicians would have to sing in languages such as Mandarin Chinese, Arabic or Western languages such as Spanish, French and English if they wish to attain international commercial success.

When Third World musicians manage to tie up with Western musicians, promoters and record companies, they are vulnerable to unsatisfactory treatment and even exploitation because of reasons such as: eagerness for recognition and professional success abroad, lack of legal and financial expertise in dealing with sophisticated foreigners, and last but not least, susceptibility to pressure (even if well-meaning) to modify their music in order to "appeal" to foreign audiences. Thus, the early Ghanaian Worldbeat group called Osibisa managed to achieve temporary commercial success with musically bland and aesthetically unappealing songs like "Sunshine Day" but their success was short-lived (Graham, 1994).

"Cultural imperialism" (Tomlinson, 1991) occurs in contemporary Western pop music through "appropriation of "exotic" musical forms from the periphery for processing and sale in the core, with little financial return to the originators of the music" (Weber, 1996). Thus, the musician Paul Simon has been accused of "cultural imperialism" for borrowing music from the South African townships and from Brazil and turning them into the albums "Graceland" and "Rhythm of the Saints" respectively. He was also condemned for not following the sanctions against the South African apartheid regime of the era by playing with South African musicians (even if they were black)(Allingham, 1994). It was also noted that the South African musicians who helped Simon to come out with his Graceland album were not rewarded with songwriting and publishing royalties (Meintjes, 1990). However, it can also be argued that the a capella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo achieved international recognition partly because of the efforts of Paul Simon to promote them (Allingham, 1994).

In a less controversial manner, other Western pop musicians such as Peter Gabriel, Ry Cooder and David Byrne have also been linked to Worldbeat music. Gabriel helped to set up the

organization called WOMAD (World of Music, Art and Dance) whose music festivals have exposed more people in the West to worldbeat music (Rolling Stone, 2002). Cooder collaborated with musicians from Third World countries such as Mali (Ali Farka Toure) and Cuba (Buena Vista Social Club) and came up with albums of their fusion music (Ry Cooder, no date)(Strauss, no date). Similarly, Byrne has helped to promote Worldbeat music through his Luaka Bop music label and worked with Third World musicians - including the avante garde Tom Ze from Brazil (Talking-Heads.Net, 2000).

A serious criticism of Worldbeat music is that it constitutes a "bastardization" of indigenous culture. A response to this is that cultural exchange and fusion has always occurred throughout history, cultural exchange and fusion need not result in a decline in aesthetic quality, and that "bastardization" is preferable to the complete overwhelming and even disappearance of indigenous musical culture as a result of Western cultural penetration.

A reaction to domination by foreigners and other groups (including cultural domination) would be cultural nationalism, a "return to roots" and politicized music. This can be seen in Worldbeat Music, e.g., Zimbabwean musician Thomas Mapfumo abandoning Western music and turning to indigenous Shona music for inspiration and the Latin American Nueva Cancion movement of the 1960s and 1970s. As mentioned earlier, Mapfumo's chimurenga (struggle) music played a role in mobilizing the black population against the "internal colonialism" of Ian Smith's white minority government of Rhodesia. The Nueva Cancion movement was a reaction against U.S. hegemony over Latin America as well as a protest against great socioeconomic disparities in the region. In fact, music was even regarded as a powerful weapon in political struggle: hence the slogan "The guitar is a gun, the song a bullet" and the harsh treatment meted

out to left-wing musicians such as Victor Jara by the right-wing military regime of General Augusto Pinochet (Fairley, 1994).

The links between reggae music, lower class Jamaican society, Rastafarianism and social protest are well known. The lyrics of songs written by Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Bunny Wailer and so on are good examples of these links. What is interesting is that Jamaican politicians even came to recognize the utility of using reggae music to win popular support in their election campaigns during the 1970s. The Wailers also promoted black solidarity/pan-African nationalism in songs such as "Buffalo Soldier" and "Africa Unite". This may account for the fact that Bob Marley and the Wailers were asked to perform at Zimbabwe's independence celebrations in 1980 (Salter, 1994).

Unlike musicians in the First World, socially-conscious Third World musicians often face the possibility of political repression or even bodily harm from the "authorities" whom they offend (Garofalo, 1992). Although one can say that John Lennon was subjected to political harassment in the United States because of his protests against American involvement in the Vietnam War, there are few comparable events in the developed countries to incidents in developing countries such as the political exile of anti-apartheid activists Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masakela (Garofalo, 1992), the attempted assassination of Jamaican reggae star Bob Marley, the jailing of the Nigerian "Afrobeat" musician Fela Kuti, the murder of the Chilean leftist-populist singer-songwriter Victor Jara etc. In fact, I will end my essay with this moving excerpt from an excellent, comprehensive book on World Music:

It is Santiago, July 1969, and the first festival of nueva cancion is taking place in a downtown basketball stadium. On the stage are dozens of performers who had campaigned through their music for the election of the Popular Unity government of Salvador

Allende. After his election, Allende had appeared surrounded by musicians under a banner saying "There can be no revolution without songs".

Four years later, on September 11, 1973, the winner of that festival, 35-year-old Victor Jara, is arrested by the military and taken to the same stadium, along with hundreds of others on the Chilean left. Tortured, his hands and wrists broken, Jara is murdered, and his body, riddled with machine-gun bullets, dumped outside the Metropolitan Cemetery.

Another eighteen years: April 1991, and Chilean artists, dancers, actors, actresses, street musicians and traditional payadores are back in that same stadium for a wake - a purge - a day-long celebration of the end of dictatorship. This act of celebration and renewal is called "Canto libre" (Free Song) after one of Jara's last songs (Fairley, 1994: 569).

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