

Exoticism Globalised in a New Century: The Forgotten Roots of World Music*

by

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Since the 1840's, the so-called "Third World" has played a significant and often understated role in the development of the global music industry, but its impact has been more that of a cultural and spiritual donor than as a commercial exporter deriving benefit from products originating from strongly developing economies.

It has often been cogently argued – by historians such as Lord Briggs – that all the great cultural movements, as well as the most remarkable technological innovations, of the twentieth century (and indeed beyond), have their roots firmly planted in the nineteenth century. This contention would seem to be borne out by the relatively recent phenomenon of "World Music".

To prove such an argument in this particular musical context, we must initially, therefore, look back to the beginning of the "modern period": to an age when railways and steamships were starting to open up the world to trade, mass travel and tourism, for the first time. More precisely, a time-traveller of today might be struck by the novel sounds that were catching the public's imagination in 1844. If you were sitting in a Paris concert hall in that year, you might well have heard a completely new and "foreign" kind of music of a type that soon became immensely popular, and made its composer famous literally overnight.

The single work which caused this sensation was Félicien David's "Desert" Symphony – inspired by the composer's tour of the Middle East in 1833-5, and incorporating the "Call of the Muezzin" (or Muslim call to prayer). When the Desert Symphony received its première in 1844, it was believed to be the first time that non-Christian religious music had ever been heard on the Paris stage. Although forgotten today, David's Desert Symphony is indicative of the tremendous vogue for so-called "exotic" music which commenced in the 1840's, reached its apogee in the 1890's, and which was revived in a different form at the end of the twentieth century (as "World Music").

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It was alongside the colonisation by Western European nations of many of the countries we today refer to as "Third World" or "Developing Countries" that an interest in the musical cultures of these lands was stimulated. To Western Europeans, all music outside their own limited fields of knowledge was labelled "exotic" - and appropriately so, because the term derives from the Greek word "exo", meaning "outside". Furthermore, and harder to grasp today, is the fact that in the nineteenth century most "exotic" music was also referred to as being "oriental". While countries such as China, Japan and India are still seen as "oriental", we must appreciate that a hundred years ago and more, vast tracts of the globe were labelled Oriental: all of the Middle East – especially the ancient Biblical lands; the Near East – including Turkey and Greece; also North Africa, Spain, and other countries subject to Islamic influence – including parts of Eastern Europe and Russia; and indeed many other regions as well.

Ever since Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798, scholars had been undertaking extensive research into Oriental languages, customs and music. Napoleon's enthusiastic team of artists and scholars documented precisely the sort of instruments that intrigued them, and which David was to imitate in his *Desert Symphony*. The impact of the orchestral textures David created was tremendous. For years to come, they influenced French and Russian colourist composers, in particular.

As well as modern Oriental instruments, Ancient Eastern instruments – such as those recovered from Egyptian tombs – fascinated Western composers. We can hear this influence in works such as Hector Berlioz's "Dance of the Nubian Slaves" from his epic, ancient Oriental opera, *Les Troyens (The Trojans)*, of 1863. In this number, one of the most exotic he ever wrote, Berlioz calls for antique cymbals and a "tarbuka" drum on stage, while four Nubian slaves sing in an "oriental" language Berlioz himself invented.

That Berlioz could even think of fabricating an "Oriental" language shows just what a fantastical, semi-imaginary place the East was held to be by the European public in the nineteenth century. Later operas inspired by the exotic sounds of the East include Saint-Saëns' *Samson and Delilah* of 1877, Massenet's *Hérodiade* of 1881, and Delibes' Indian-inspired *Lakmé* of 1888.

This great vogue for "exotic" music by the Western industrialised nations can be interpreted as an important element in a general cultural "plunder" which occurred in the nineteenth century – an age of increasing trade and colonisation. Indeed, it was the trading strength of the East India Company which ultimately led Britain to assume complete control over India. Interestingly, European commentators in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw Western culture as bloated, but decaying, like some great supernova, and thus in need of renewal and inspiration from more "primitive" or "underdeveloped" Oriental cultures. The West was looking to the East – to the exotic lands where life began – to renew its spiritual life, which was supposedly being sapped in this material age of rampant commerce and capitalism. Commentators such as Oswald Spengler saw the early twentieth century as the era of the "Decline of the West".

Ironically, the East was trading on its own decaying heritage, for Western tourists were eager to buy any old pieces of the past – even ones as grim as the wares of those bemused Egyptian salesmen who all too readily sold ancient (and not so ancient) mummies by the cartload!

By the 1930's, a new kind of enthusiasm for exotic music was in evidence in the vogue for jazz, and in dances such as the tango – showing the influence of North and South America respectively, and especially heralding the rapidly increasing trading power of North America: the "New World". Increasing ease of travel and improved communications had greatly shrunk the world by this time, and the age of colonialism was ending. Exotic music could not inspire in quite the same fantastical way, and indeed it was realism, not romanticism, which would triumph by the end of the twentieth century.

After the Second World War, and with the coming of the Cold War, the world was divided up and classified anew. It was in 1956 that a French commentator first attempted to define the *tiers monde* or "Third World". The "First World" referred to the Western capitalist bloc, the "Second World" to the Communist Soviet bloc. The "Third World" originally referred to those countries in

Africa, Asia and Latin America that were aligned with neither the First nor Second Worlds, but this imprecise term soon took on economic rather than political connotations in the 1960's. In geographical terms, the whole of Africa, Asia and Latin America were seen as "Third World" regions in the 1960's and 1970's – when the term "developing countries" began to supersede that of "Third World". Most developing countries still have virtually no industrial base, are reliant on commodities to generate foreign income, and, in many ways, are not yet all that far removed from their colonial past. Today, economists tend to speak of members of the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] as comprising the First World, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe comprising the Second World, while the Third World is said to be comprised of three further sub-categories: upper-middle income countries such as Brazil, Malaysia and Algeria, middle income countries such as Nigeria, Indonesia and Bolivia, and low income countries such as China and India. A United Nations category of around 30 "least developed countries" is even called the "Fourth World".

Not all "Third World" economies have, in fact, developed – a few remain stagnant and some are even in decline (such as Somalia and Bangladesh). As quickly as the others do develop, the First World continues to develop still faster, and with such economic muscle goes the power to influence and control the global music industry. Indeed, neither is the music industry truly global in the sense that the First World still produces and consumes much more than the Third World, particularly in relation to the recorded music industry. Indeed, besides the recorded music industry, other music industries where the First World dominates include the concert industry, the musical instrument industry, the sheet music and music text industries, and even the scholarly research industry.

In the late twentieth century, so-called "authentic" Eastern and exotic music came once more into vogue in the West – partly through clever marketing, and partly through a desire to embrace less familiar musical styles, in the constant commercial hunger for new material. A fine example is provided by the Musicians of the Nile, recorded in the late 1980's on the "Real World" label (sponsored by Peter Gabriel). The Real World series features music from Africa, North and South America, Asia, Oceania, Europe, the Caribbean and the Indian Subcontinent, and its aim is, according to Peter Gabriel, "to record and promote a whole range of different artists, both traditional and modern, from around the world". The burgeoning growth of the Egyptian and other developing economies has little to do with stimulating such recording projects, their promotion or popularity. It is once again the West that is reaching out to draw in new inspiration from outside sources, and to profit commercially thereby.

In the short time from David Fanshawe's seminal recording, *African Sanctus*, of 1972 – when ethnomusicology was still a limited field of research – to Paul Simon's South African tour and hugely successful *Graceland* album of 1986, we have seen an explosion of interest in music from around the globe. The Western world, however, still acts as the greatest producer, promoter and consumer of most of the world's commercial music performances and recordings. The Third World is only able to export the "raw materials" of its musical traditions in the new enthusiasm for "World Music", while the industrialised nations continue to derive greatest benefit and remuneration from this trade.

In rough figures, 80% of revenue earned from recorded music sales stays in the developed countries to which the Third World export their musical raw materials: approximately 12% goes to retailers, 14% in royalties and interest to First World companies, 13% in packaging materials, 11% in transport costs, with around 20% going back to the country of origin and mostly benefiting a select few – the musicians, one continues to hope, among them!

The global entertainment conglomerate AOL Time Warner own the recording company that features Djura, the Algerian singer who lives in exile in France, through her refusal to fulfil the traditional role of the Berber woman. Her music is that perfect compromise between Eastern and Western styles that makes it commercially very saleable. Indeed, Djura's musicians hail from both North Africa and France, and her 1993 *Voice of Silence* recording forms part of a series entitled "Adventures in Afropea". The overwhelming majority of successful record companies throughout

the world are either American or European, and even where they have shifted their manufacturing bases to Second, and sometimes Third World, countries (where low wages are paid), most income returns to the First World.

Significantly, in recent years the Western world has also seized the opportunity to manufacture and sell mass-produced versions of traditional "Eastern" instruments, so that once exotic, foreign instrumental sounds are coming more into the mainstream of Western music-making. A good example of the adoption of such previously unfamiliar instruments is the ancient Middle-Eastern goblet-shaped drum, known as the "darabuka", as first imitated by Félicien David in his *Desert Symphony* of 1844, and later, by Berlioz, in *The Trojans* (where the instrument is called a "tarbuka"). Originally made from wood or clay, with a goat or fish-skin head, modern Western versions of the darabuka are often made of steel or copper, with plastic heads.

The phenomenon of World Music would seem to bear out the thesis that the roots of many of today's artistic trends – just as with trends in economics, politics and technology – seem largely to stem from nineteenth-century notions. The United States is the inheritor of, and debtor to, all these traditions. America's great strength at present lies in the fact that the US is able to export much of the recorded music it produces for world-wide, as well as domestic, consumption, while other countries around the globe have relatively less success in exporting their musical products, and deriving economic benefit from doing so. This pattern looks set to continue in the foreseeable future. The question then remains: will we come to see a time in this new century when a traditional artist from the developing world is able to dominate the global music market, as can, say, a Britney Spears? At least one hurdle still seems insurmountable. It stems from the fact that, in marketing terms, artists today amount to much more than just their music. So without substantial further economic development in former Third World countries, music marketers are unlikely to be able to sell – in addition to their music – the artist's corresponding life-style.

DISCOGRAPHY (CD's) (The year refers to the date of record release):

- Berlioz, Hector (1970), *Les Troyens* [4 discs]. Philips 416 432-2.
- David, Félicien (1991) "Le Desert", *Les Brises d'Orient*, vol.1. Capriccio 10 379.
- Djura (1993), *Voice of Silence* (The Best of Djur Djura). Warner Bros. 9 45211-2.
- Fanshawe, David Arthur (1972), *African Sanctus*. Philips 426 055-2.
- Fanshawe, David Arthur (1991), *Spirit of African Sanctus* (The Original Recordings of David Fanshawe 1969-73). Saydisc CD-SDL 389.
- Musicians of the Nile, The (1989), *Luxor to Isna*. Realworld CDRW8.
- Simon, Paul (1986), *Graceland*. WEA 759 925 447-2.