

8 World music

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Attempts to define the label ‘world music’ – or those categories to which it is linked, such as worldbeat, ethnopop, New Age, *sono mondiale*, and *musique métisse* (hybrid music) – have long been marked by contradiction and controversy. It may be noted, for example, that the geographical reference to ‘the world’ which the label suggests has been defined in the narrowest of terms. World musics are taken to be those musics which come from outside the ‘normal’ Anglo-American (including Canadian and Australian) sources, and mainly from tropical countries. And because the attraction of world music is seen to lie in its use of rhythm, so essential to the aesthetics of African music, the term has usually been associated with musics from Africa and the African diaspora. With time, however, the umbrella covering world music has become more inclusive. It now covers American, Asian and European musics, albeit those of minority groups within these geographical areas. We may conclude, then, that world music is the product of aggrieved populations, either from third world countries (Africa and the African diasporas), or from disadvantaged population groups in a general sense. Given all this, it is both appalling and revealing to note that, within the global economy of popular music offered on MTV, the United States’ main music video service, world music is taken to represent a tiny subculture.

By looking at the ways in which world music has been talked about in promotional and academic contexts, I want to show how world music cannot escape being seen in terms of the power relations of today’s music industries. I will then offer a contrasting account of world music, drawing on ethnographic studies of calypso and soca, with particular attention to the musical practices of the superstars associated with this music. As this study will argue, world music should not be seen as simply oppositional or emancipatory. Neither, however, should world music be viewed as merely the result of cultural imperialism or economic domination. To understand world music fully, we must look at its place within the complex and constantly changing dynamics of a world which is historically, socially and spatially interconnected.

The selling of world music

In strictly musical terms, world music is usually described as the blending of modern and traditional musics. These are usually associated with, respectively, the musics of the first and third worlds. In graphic terms, as scholar Tony Mitchell (1993) has noted, this fusion of the modern and the traditional is often symbolised in the design of record jackets. One side of the record sleeve will offer a Western look, showing the artist wearing clothes of the first world. The other side will offer a more exotic view, usually by showing the artist in non-Western clothes, often surrounded by mystical symbols or landscapes typically associated with faraway lands. This type of record sleeve design recalls claims made by scholars of post-coloniality, who have noted the ambivalence inherent in stereotypes of the Other. One finds, in these graphic elements, a simultaneous sense of identification with, and estrangement from racial and geographical Otherness.

At the linguistic level, world music is habitually taken to mean ‘not in English’, with translations of lyrics frequently included in the liner notes of recordings. In advertisements, world music is often referred to as dance music, as a thrilling source of unusual and original sensations. Read, for example, how ‘A Beginner’s Guide to Worldbeat Music’ published in a Canadian daily newspaper speaks of calypso: ‘Carnival music from Trinidad provokes the Caribbean’s dirtiest dancing. Sweaty, ecstatic fans jam and wine and wave towels in the air’ (Feist 1994). At other times, the reader is even invited to experience such dances: ‘Yes, it’s time to boogie to a new beat; not rap, rock, reggae, or disco. Try gyrating those hips to soukous, rai, juju, or zouk. But be forewarned, these global sounds are seductive and addictive...’ (Wentz 1991). In record stores and music magazines, ‘world music’ has displaced the older label ‘international music’, as the category under which musics from third world countries are classified. At the same time, ‘world music’ is seen as the outgrowth of an evolutionary process which has enriched non-European musical styles.

Writings on world music have grappled with the difficulties of defining this new category. Everyone seems to agree that world music cannot be defined in clear and consistent terms, and that it remains elusive as a genre or category. Nevertheless, it has been constructed as a genre. It has its own sections in record stores, and is the focus of its own magazines, recording labels and advertisements, its own festivals, radio and television programs, and so on. World music, we may conclude, has been institutionalised within the music and media industries.

It is instructive to look at the ways in which the category of world music

has been used to include and exclude some population groups. If world music is associated with non-Anglo-American sources, and, more specifically, with tropical countries and cultural minorities, does this mean that world music is the exclusive product of certain territories and spaces, of specific racial and ethnic groups, of particular classes of people? What becomes clear is that the use of this new category tells us little about what it is meant to 'contain', and much more about the perspectives of the people employing the category. These perspectives are informed by a Euro-American, postcolonial vision. The various ways in which world music is marketed in the west – as exotica, quality art-rock, dance crazes, musical for mystical mind-expansion, scholarly folklore – all presume an Other with rather specific characteristics. That Other is not from here (that is, not marked by Northwestern Euro-American origins or influences), exotic (in the sense of unusual), sensual (in its connections with dance), mystical (in its philosophical dimension), and attractive.

On the whole, one may conclude that the label 'world music' presumes a number of things: (a) a sense of geographical space as consisting of stable, bounded territories; (b) a corresponding sense of cultures as homogeneous and belonging to particular locales; (c) a notion of race which sees it in terms of fixed biological and musical characteristics; and (d) the sense that all those participating in this phenomenon must be disadvantaged – socially, economically, or otherwise – whether they be Africans, members of the African diaspora, or minorities of Europe and the Americas.

Controversies over world music

Of the many issues which arise within the production, marketing, distribution and consumption of world music, one of the most controversial concerns the ways in which local, national and racial identities are being defined through musical fusion. From one perspective, world music may contribute to a loss of identity on the part of the people it is meant to define through musical fusion. By causing musicians to abandon forms of music rooted in longstanding cultural traditions, in the interests of commercial profit, the global music industry is seen as a force for cultural imperialism, bringing about the homogenisation of musical cultures throughout the world. From another perspective, however, world music is regarded as an opportunity for musicians to offer resistance to the dominant Anglo-American culture and its institutions. Through its fusion of forms within new, eclectic combinations of musical elements from around

the globe, world music is seen as defying the limits of national boundaries and the exigencies of the music industries.

The key concept in these controversies is that of appropriation. This term, which refers more often than not to the appropriation of third world musics by people working in the first world, implicitly pits the people of the first and third world countries against each other, and raises a series of ethical and moral issues. These issues include the use of cheap labour in the hiring of musicians without due payment for their talents; the exploitation of human and artistic resources without proper acknowledgement and the appropriate payment of royalties; and the censorship of elements seen by the creators of music as essential to the meanings or identities of the songs in question. Typically, instances of musical appropriation are seen as rooted in a lack of personal ethics on the part of musicians and others. As has often been pointed out, however, media imperialism is not perpetuated by musicians on their own, but is part of the cultural hegemony of the West built into the structures of the global music industry.

In the actual production of music, musicians associated with world music often run into obstacles in attempting to obtain the sort of mix required by their music, both in the recording studio and at live performances. These obstacles may be described in terms of the ways distinct musical sensibilities compete with each other. In the mixing of mainstream music, the tendency to highlight certain sounds or specific instrumental lines often takes precedence over other ways of thinking about sounds. In other cases, non-Western music is recorded with less attention to processes of mixing and arrangement, in response to the belief that the perceived authenticity of such music constitutes one of its main attractions for Westerners.

The new combinations of sound and practices which one finds in world musics, and the fusion of musical elements that often result, have led to important debates over the new aesthetics at work here. To what extent, it is asked, are developments in world music judged according to their compatibility with Western definitions of music? Might the aesthetics of world music be better evaluated using such concepts as that of pastiche, which acknowledge the loss of referentiality in a postmodern, global culture? Does the process of mixing various elements together in new musical contexts challenge the epistemological limits of those once-dominant aesthetic theories inspired by classical, European models?

While so many views of world music focus on the processes of loss and disorientation which are seen to mark it, or on the cooptation, deception, or confrontation which surround it, world music is also seen by some as a context in which musicians may mount a resistance to Anglocentric

musical hegemony. It is sometimes claimed, for example, that when musicians working within world music use new, eclectic combinations of musical elements from around the world, they are defying the constraints of national boundaries and the exigencies of the mainstream music industry. Similarly, the appropriation of new technologies by musicians from third world countries is seen as giving them greater independence from the recording studios of first world countries, and an enhanced capacity to experiment musically. For some observers, musicians working within world music may even have the capacity to turn national, minority cultures into global majorities with significant economic, political and social potential.

In this respect, the transnational and transcultural interactions which mark world music are seen as having a positive effect on local cultures. They are said to have contributed, for example, to the revitalisation of certain local genres, and to the emergence of a new breed of entrepreneurs who are able to take advantage of the growing popularity of world music. At the same time, world music in a general sense is seen as having made possible new sorts of alliances, both through its aesthetics and through the various practices which surround it. The production, marketing, distribution and consumption of world music may all be interpreted as evidence of openness to the Other, as part of processes by which racism and intolerance will be discredited and musical sectarianism attenuated. In this respect, many musicians involved in world music present themselves and are perceived as social and political activists, a role which they fulfil as a function of their activity as musicians and may also, on occasion, adopt as an explicit personal objective.

It is not the intention of this chapter to choose between the pessimistic and optimistic accounts of world music offered here. What is clear, however, is that these issues continue to be formulated in terms of power relations and territorial divisions. World music is seen as involving both first and third world countries, and these in turn are perceived as distinct entities. They are physically distant from each other, and opposed to each other within relations of inequality, relations which mirror the broader pattern of inequalities between North and South.

World music in practice

The issues which surround world music cannot be considered in isolation from the world system of which this music is a part. In this section, I propose to look closely, not at local but at localised practices of musical production and consumption. More specifically, I will look at calypso and

soca superstars of the English Caribbean, and at the ideologies, lifestyles, activities and networks that circulate between their countries of origin and their host countries. Caribbean superstars, and the musical practices associated with them, will be examined from an explicitly transnational perspective. Indeed, most superstars of the Caribbean move so frequently and with such familiarity between their society of origin and such places as Toronto, London or New York, that it becomes difficult to identify where they belong. Regardless of where their permanent homes might be, their lives are stretched across geographical, cultural and political borders. Within this context, it can be argued, Caribbean superstars live as transnationals.

To speak of Caribbean superstars as transnationals is to emphasise that their subjectivities and their identities, their actions and their commitments, are embedded in relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states. These artists must be seen in terms of the increasing internationalisation of capital, the restructuring of production processes and the resulting disruption of local economies. Most importantly, this leads us to consider the ways in which Caribbean superstars, as transnationals, are changed by the transnational nature of their activities, just as these activities themselves will alter both the artists' original nation-states and those nation-states in which they might now live.

The term 'transnational' is not new. In his book *Transnational Diasporic Citizenship* (1997) anthropologist Michel Laguerre notes that it was first used in 1916, with reference to what was then called 'transnational America'. The term was meant to signal that immigrants in the United States were not the only ones transformed by the process of migration. Their countries of origin, and not simply the host countries which received them, were transformed as well. The term transnational is used here, not in reference to musical practices which are the same everywhere, but to designate those practices which cross the borders of nations, nation-states, or other traditionally circumscribed spaces. The term is meant to suggest that ideas about world music which are built upon the rigid dichotomy of first and third world countries – themselves thought of as occupying different locations, distant from and in opposition to each other – are not adequate to account for the complexity of all those population groups and musical practices dubbed 'world music'.

The present-day transnational character of Caribbean artists must be seen in terms of the specific historical circumstances from which these artists have emerged. These artists are part of a tradition of migration, one which has been woven into Caribbean lives for over a century and a half. In the case of Trinidad, for example, the colonisation period, followed by decolonisation in the 1960s, the restructuring of the local economy, and

the ongoing attempt to redress things since the fall in oil prices in the 1980s, have all provided a context in which many Trinidadians, including artists, have emigrated. This emigration may be seen as both response and resistance to their marginal positioning within the global economy and, in the case of musicians, within the global music industry. Transnational practices, however, have not been nurtured solely because of affective ties, cultural practices or lingering political attachments which join emigrants to their countries of origin. Racial discrimination, as well as the dominant emphasis on ethnic identification in those countries where Caribbean diasporas have tended to settle (as reinforced through policies of multiculturalism, for example) have provided serious incentives for maintaining ties with home.

Within this context, Caribbean superstars have developed complex networks of transnational relations and activities. These are articulated as much through the production of their music in recorded form as through the distribution, marketing, live performance and consumption of this music. In this respect, the production of a typical album by the calypsonian Arrow offers a telling example. Arrow is a calypsonian from Montserrat, who does most of his recordings in New York City, often at the recording studio owned by Charles Dougherty, a musician originally from Jamaica. For each track, Arrow often uses two arrangers who do not necessarily originate from the same country – one for the brass parts and another for the rhythm and bass arrangements. Regularly, Arrow asks Trinidadian Leston Paul, one of the most sought-after arrangers in the English Caribbean, to fly to New York to write and direct the horn parts for his songs. Arrow always uses a mix of musicians from the United States and the Caribbean to produce a special sound in the horn section. As Leston Paul explained to me,

[Arrow] always uses an American horn section, especially with the trumpets and trombones (expensive! you know), and on sax, you could always use a West Indian . . . but for that punch there, that, sometimes what we do, we use an American for the first [trumpet], a West Indian for second trumpet, and an American trombone . . . We're looking for that high pitched sound. And also, we need to lock into the soca groove. Because the music is also a groove, you know. Sometimes, if we would use all Americans in that horn section, it would sound a little too funky over the rhythm and it would sound a little alienated. We need to get that swing feel that we still do, a kind of dance feel. So we mix [the musicians].

The fully developed transnational practice represented in the production of Arrow's recordings, as described above, is not unusual. The production of Caribbean recordings typically involves musicians from

different nationalities and territories, and various stages of the recordings often take place in different locales. The recording of the rhythm section may be done in one studio in Trinidad, and, while the horn section and final mixing may both take place in New York, they may be done in different recording studios.

The transnational practices of superstars of the English Caribbean are not limited to North–South axes. In fact, polylateral exchanges among third world countries in the new world, as well as those occurring among southern third world countries and the nations of Asia have helped create a growing commercial market. Among the eighty artists with whom Leston Paul works annually, we find a Japanese group for whom he wrote arrangements. Kenny Philips, an equally famous musician from Trinidad, has written arrangements for calypsonians from St Kitts, Antigua, Dominica, St Lucia, Barbados and Grenada.

We can conclude from all this that Caribbean superstars follow agendas which are explicitly transnational, and which both shape and are shaped by the global music industry. Artists strive to increase their options and revenues and to enhance their social status, both locally and internationally. At the same time, they draw on their pool of relationships to increase their knowledge of the international scene, so that they can respond to – and resist – the demands of the global music industry.

By facilitating the flow of ideas and products across the boundaries of nation-states, the transnational practices of Caribbean superstars have played a key role in reinforcing ties between emigrants and those who remain in their countries of origin. In 1995 alone, the five-time calypso Monarch Leroy Calliste, known as ‘Black Stalin’, did over one hundred shows, spread over the Caribbean islands, Canada and the United States. A better idea of what this entailed can be gleaned from Black Stalin’s own description, in 1995, of the shows taking place between February and early September of that year:

Immediately after Carnival in February, I went to Antigua for a concert organised by the Ministry of Education; a few days later, to Barbados, for the Spektakula yearly show which features ‘the cream of the Trinidad carnival calypso’; in April, back to Antigua for the Spektakula second anniversary show. This show in Antigua was on Saturday night and then I played the Sunday night in Brooklyn for Isaac MacLeod’s birthday, the guy that organises the shows at the Madison Square Garden; then I went back to Trinidad and, at the end of April, I went back to New York for a Chutney show with Sundar. We did that on Saturday night and the Sunday, I went back to Trinidad and did the celebration show in San Fernando for Black Stalin Victory [Black Stalin won the calypso Monarch competition that year]; then I went to St Lucia for one night, which was Sandal’s hotel

[ownership] first anniversary – a private show that night. Then I went back to Trinidad for the sixth of May and did the Chutney final in San Fernando. Then, I went back to New York for Mother's day [third week of May]; for that, we try to bring artists from all the Caribbean islands . . . So not everybody fall on the same night. [In connection with that], this year, I did three shows in all, one in Madison Square Garden and two in Brooklyn. After Mother's Day, I stayed in New York and did two concerts in Atlanta for the Peach Tree Carnival in the last weekend in May; well, I miss out something, you know . . . The show, the end of April at the SOB [Samba of Brooklyn] one night; I did that the day before the New Orleans show; then I went back to Trinidad and then another show in Barbados for a private organiser; then in Toronto for a one-night show for an independent organiser mid-June – a show which we usually do the eve of Confederation Day on the first of July. Then I went to St Thomas with Sparrow for a one-night show, on a Friday; and then on Saturday, for a beauty parlor in Miami at a yearly show organised by a friend of mine. After that, I went back to Trinidad, and around the 6th of July, I went to St Vincent for a celebration of Becket's twentieth anniversary [as a calypsonian]; then on the 16th of July, there was the Central Park concert, a summer stage concert; then I had one Family Day show organised by the Police Department in San Fernando, and one show organised by the government for Emancipation Day on the 1st of August at Laborie [in Trinidad]. And then two nights for Caribana in Toronto in the first week of August; after that I am flying to New York where the 13th August I have two shows to do, one for Labor Day Festival Committee and another one at a high school in Brooklyn; then on the 25th of August, I am working in Houston for a pre-carnival something they have with the Carnival committee; the 28th of August, I work with Sparrow for the last summer show that the city gives; then later on, I am playing on the 31st for the Soca Chutney show at the Brooklyn Museum; then on Friday night, I am going to do a Chutney jam in Calypso City [in Queens] with Sundar; on Saturday night, I am working for Spektakula at the Rose Bowl in Manhattan for two nights; and on Labor Day, I work at three o'clock in the evening and then that morning I fly to Atlanta for a Family evening show.

Black Stalin sees his touring as 'servicing' the Caribbean communities, wherever they are. As he explains further, '[a] show is like a roti, it feeds people. It is a piece from home. It stays with the people for weeks, for months.' In the process, Black Stalin and other transnational artists like him could be said, over the years, to have contributed to a large extent to the development of pan-Caribbean identity, and also to have given voice to an identity that reflects the transnational experience shared by the artists and migrant populations.

For this to happen, though, the key element is 'circulation'. For Caribbean artists to circulate, they must be connected to the entertain-

ment industry on which they are dependent. By facilitating exchange between various nation-states in and outside the Caribbean, the entertainment industry creates a transnational field for both migrants and Caribbean artists. For instance, the artists hired by Trinidadian-owned Spektakula Promotions have greatly benefitted in recent years from the shows it has organised, not only in Trinidad, but also in Barbados, Antigua, Toronto and, since 1995, in New York. By enabling calypsonians and other musical entertainers to circulate among these various locations with the same hit tunes, Spektakula Promotions and other organisations like it can be said to have helped significantly in mapping the experiences of Caribbean communities marked by physical distance from each other. On a large scale, the numerous Caribbean carnival organisations around the world (especially in England, Sweden, Canada, the United States and several Caribbean islands) have been key in furthering the circulation of commonly appreciated cultural phenomena by providing top calypsonians with performing venues.

From the same perspective, those Caribbean music organisations which have taken on transnational dimensions, and on which Caribbean superstars have come to depend on many levels, such as Caribana and the Labor Day festival, may also be seen as important contexts in which the collective identities of Caribbean artists and diasporic populations have been defined, mediated and contested. Through the transnational performances these organisations have promoted, they have effectively contributed to a reconfiguring of social and political spaces. With respect to the Labor Day festival, for example, the authors of *Nations Unbound* remark,

These public expressions of West Indian collective identity are also the statements of a group making claims to political space in the ethnicised structure of New York politics. Within this milieu . . . eating a Jamaican pattie on the Eastern Parkway assumes a symbolic significance it never had in Jamaica. The annual outpouring of tens of thousands of West Indians on Labor Day, claiming the Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn for their strut in full carnival regalia, is a further staking of political ground. Their ownership of this day has become so complete that now even New York City's mayor and national political leaders like Jesse Jackson take their place at the head of the parade. (Basch et al. 1994: 74–5)

The transnational fields in which Caribbean superstars operate, which encompass many different nation-states, are the contexts in which these superstars construct, contest and reformulate their own identities and strategies, interacting with the hegemonic processes operative in the various locations in which they live. The transnational experiences of Caribbean superstars are evident in the artistic decisions they make in creating their music as much as in the subjectivities and identities which

result from the networks of relationships through which they are connected simultaneously to many nation-states. Their transnational experiences shape their musical creation, not only with respect to the choice of topics for their songs – which must take into account the political, economic, social, etc., experiences of the various population groups with which they interact – but also their choice of sounds, tempi and musical instrumentations. These become coterminous with the various soundscapes and ideoscapes which weigh upon them as artists and lead them to make certain decisions and take particular actions.

The following musical examples are offered to show how musicians participate in the global industry and in particular, how calypsonians respond to and resist some of the tendencies within that industry. They are also meant to demonstrate how the music of these calypsonians is marked by the influence of, and interaction with, a wide variety of musics, not all of which come from the so-called mainstream.

The first song, ‘The Doctor Daughter’, was released in December 1995 for Carnival 1996 by Lord Kitchener, a legendary and most revered figure, a pillar of the calypso artform on a par with Mighty Sparrow, who is now seventy years old and still active in the music scene (Lord Kitchener, ‘The Doctor Daughter’, *Incredible Kitch*, JW Productions, 1996). The song illustrates how the use of global music industry’s latest ‘sound’ on the veteran calypsonian’s last album has not prevented him from remaining faithful to the traditional format of calypso song. In ‘The Doctor Daughter’, the audible use of the drum machine, synthesisers and, more generally, of particular timbres in fashion in recent years, is combined with the characteristic verse/refrain and sensually oriented subject matter of calypso lyrics. The call-and-response arrangement is distributed in typical fashion among the various parts of the brass section and between the song-leader (Kitchener in this case) and his choir of responders.

The second example, ‘Out de Fire’, is also by a veteran calypsonian, Roaring Lion who, after being away from the limelight for several years, has re-emerged with outstanding success over the past four years with remixes of his old calypsos (Roaring Lion, ‘Out de Fire’ on *Carnival Special ’96: Ringbang*, Ice Records 1996). ‘Out de Fire’ shows how calypso arrangers are influenced by some of the musical genres most prominent within both the global and local Trinidadian musical soundscapes of the 1990s – genres which, we shall see, do not necessarily come from the usual Euro-American musical centres. Released on a 1996 Carnival Special compilation, the new version of the ‘Out de Fire’ mixes the singing of Roaring Fire with an arrangement which could be said to be influenced by ‘dub’ – the internationally acclaimed musical genre (also called dancehall) from

Jamaica, a so-called third world country but recognised world musical centre. The dub influence is evident in an ensemble of characteristics, including the slow tempo at which the song is performed, the use of a prominent bass line, and the sparse and carefully distributed instrumentation in which the rhythmic section is emphasised.

The third example is intended to show how, in their lyrics, calypsonians integrate their own transnational experience and that of a great many members of the Caribbean population. In 'Iron Band Jam', released in the summer of 1995 (*Black Stalin: Message to Sundar*, Ice Records, 1995), calypsonian Black Stalin recounts how Trinidadians belong to several worlds, celebrating their carnival and going to hear the 'engine room', that is, the rhythm section of the steelbands in Brooklyn, New York, as well as in Point Fortin, one of the southernmost villages in Trinidad: 'Jean she went back to Brooklyn last year and hear how she boasting, How Trini Carnival she really had a bachanal, Joyce she went with the steelband, May she went with the brass-band, She went Point Fortin for Jouvert, just to hear the engine room play.'

The fourth example features a soca song played at an extremely fast tempo – a tendency in Trinidad throughout the 1990s. Instead of being played, as in former years, at the usual tempo of ♩110 or ♩120, this song – 'Bounce', by Superblue, which won the Road March competition in Carnival 1996 – is here played at ♩144 (*Carnival Special '96: Ringbang*, Ice Records, 1996). The explanations given by West Indians for the fast speed of soca songs in the 1990s are worth recounting, in order to demonstrate how musics outside the Euro-American mainstream may influence each other. The 1990s move towards faster tempi in Trinidadian soca songs is said to have been influenced by soca bands such as Burning Flames, from Antigua, who have been using fast tempi since at least the mid 1980s. In turn, these bands from Antigua are said by musicians from both Guadeloupe and Dominica to have developed their fast speed through the influence of zouk music from Martinique and Guadeloupe. The fast pace of zouk from Martinique and Guadeloupe, in turn, is said to have been influenced by soukous from French Africa, via the close collaboration of zouk and soukous musicians in Paris.

The fifth and final example shows how some of the decisions and actions taken by certain superstars may willingly go against what appear to be dominant trends, through the creation of songs which might be read as resistance or challenges to the demands of the global music industry. Black Stalin's 'Man Out For Change', released in 1995, seems to be doing just that. In contrast with the usual instrumentation, which typically includes a brass section, rhythmic and solo guitars, synthesisers, bass, drum kit,

cowbell and conga, Black Stalin is accompanied solely by an acoustic guitar and a drum beat produced by a drum machine, and he sings, at an unhurried pace (.76), a text which seems to be produced more for listening than for dancing. This kind of calypso song is rare in the 1990s.

From these examples, we could say that, as a whole – and with few notable exceptions – the musical styles and cultural tastes developed by and reflected in calypso and soca recordings by Caribbean superstars articulate a transnational social, musical and political field that spans and bounds the experiences and attitudes of Caribbean people living in Caribbean nation-states and elsewhere.

World music in strife

What is missing from the ethnographic account offered so far is consideration of the various struggles at the heart of the transnational practices of Caribbean superstars, and the double-edged implications these practices may have, both at home and in the various nation-states in which these artists are active.

In many ways, the transnational practices of Caribbean superstars could be said to help reinforce the very system which forced them to adopt these transnational practices in the first place. Through their transnational activities and their numerous concerts, calypsonian artists give the impression of a far healthier Caribbean music industry than is actually the case. (Most Caribbean musicians must still hold down a day job to earn their living.) As a result, these artists do not lead the people living in the home societies to reckon with the needs of musicians on a local level – through, for example, the enforcement of copyright laws, or through the institution of regulations governing artists' working conditions (in terms of salary or adequate working spaces). As a result, musicians continue to be forced to live as transnationals in order to make a living. Moreover, as mentioned above, in the process of doing so they contribute to reinforcing the hegemonic cultural and economic practices of those nation-states whose domination has forced people to emigrate or become transnationals. They do this, for example, through the rental of their facilities.

At the same time, while transnational musical practices have allowed the calypsonian superstars to resist subjugation in their host and home societies, these practices, in a sense, perpetuate this subjugation and the resulting need to live as transnationals. Because they allow musicians to move between host and home societies in emotional, cultural and material terms when the conditions in either place become intolerable,

transnational musical practices diminish the likelihood that calypsonians will collectively challenge either system.

At another level, Caribbean superstars, as transnationals, are dependent upon Caribbean diasporic populations and organisations for their living, particularly insofar as record sales and concerts are concerned. Apart from the affective, cultural and political ties that bind them to many members of these diasporic populations, calypsonian artists need to maintain their social relationships with many of these people in order to continue their transnational practices. This means, for example, regular phone calls and other forms of interaction. At the same time, these artists help to perpetuate that longstanding protectionist system through which, in order to receive recognition, an artist must win (or at least participate in) a calypso competition in the home societies. Thus, a migrant artist who is relatively successful in a nation-state other than the home countries, and who may be appreciated for the moral and economic support he or she may provide to Caribbean artists from home during their transnational performances, is not extended the same opportunities to perform at home. This system is reinforced within diasporic populations, meaning that Caribbean transnational organisations usually invite only calypsonian superstars from 'home' to perform in their concerts.

While Caribbean artists have, on occasion, made strides in helping to reorder social and political spaces – for example, during the aforementioned Caribbean carnival on Labor Day in New York – they have not always been successful in their efforts to be heard, taken seriously, and respected. More often than not, they have been engaged in an ongoing struggle against some of the longstanding stereotypes about Caribbean communities and individuals. Ethnomusicologist Anne-Marie Gallagher (1995) has observed that the mainstream press in Toronto, Canada, reports on calypso and Caribana in ways that prevent the history and identities of people involved in these practices from getting through to mainstream culture. Caribbean cultural forms are often reduced to tourist commodities, talked about in terms of the millions of dollars which Caribana has injected into the city's economy.

In this section, we have offered concrete examples of the ways in which the transnational practices of calypsonian superstars, in such contexts as New York, might be seen as emancipatory. These practices have helped claim political spaces, and reinforced collective identities in the face of such forces as racial discrimination and ethnic ghettoisation. At the same time, we have observed how transnational artists may also contribute to the reinforcement of hegemonic structures and practices, both in the society of origin and in those nation-states in which these artists operate.

Consciously or not, artists may contribute to the enforcement of protectionist measures, or to the perpetuation of an exploitative system. These tensions are symptomatic of the dilemmas facing transnational musicians in a world marked by clear inequalities and by a complex set of relationships between musical production at the local level and the global music industries.

World music in perspective

It should be clear that the label 'world music' cannot be interpreted solely through the reductionist lens of a Marxist perspective, and that the politics of world music may not be celebrated unconditionally. A Marxist approach will prove inadequate because its basic premises presume a world neatly divided on the basis of clearly bounded categories, a world of homogeneous groups which divide neatly into the dominant or the dominated, of spaces designated as either central or peripheral, of cultures defined as either first world or third world. These premises are now being challenged. There are third world spaces in the United States and Canada, just as there are world centres for music in cultures often considered part of the periphery, as, for example, in Jamaica. Furthermore, those spaces traditionally thought of as centres are being displaced, as the global music industry undergoes a restructuring. It is no longer the case that the best studios are located in London, Paris and New York, exclusively. In the same vein, as we noted above, the usual definition of the international market in singular terms (referring, most of the time, to North/South relations) is no longer valid. Those people considered dominated are not the passive recipients of goods and styles they were once assumed to be.

Having said that, it must be acknowledged that the label 'world music', and the people and products it purportedly embraces, cannot be celebrated unconditionally as the sign of liberatory politics. There are still, within the world music industry, many musicians who are denied opportunities on account of race, audiences who are manipulated to cultivate orientalist attitudes, and musical practices which are appropriated to accomplish ends opposed to those for which they were intended. The use of reggae music in Coca Cola advertisements is a clear example.

The notion of world music stars as transnationals may become a key to our understanding of the socio-political, economic and cultural constraints and opportunities which these stars are confronting at a local and global level. This notion helps us better to appreciate the interconnectedness of people and practices on which the global music industry is built. More precisely, it helps us to grasp how musicians participate in this global

industry, by changing it and, at the same time, complying with many of its characteristics. In concrete terms, it leads us to observe how artists, like the superstars we have examined, develop intimate links between diasporic populations, and explains how they may benefit from such links. Through an examination of all these features, we can see how the intentions of artists and the global structures of mediation interact to inform the transnational practices of world music and the fields in which this music circulates.

World music, we could conclude, is most certainly not about a specific repertoire and a specific group of people, but rather about the positioning of particular musical practices in relation to the mainstream. As a label, its appellation may be quite appropriate in referring to the transnational movements of musics and artists and the new alliances, both social and musical, these continually permit. In fact, it may be the label which evokes best the unfixable, by including musics which arise from the meeting of different times and places, from necessity as well as pleasure. While it may offer and invite a wide range of musical experiences, the label 'world music' in and by itself is a reminder of the hierarchy the dominant music industries impose on the music markets they control: by using the indescribable appellation 'world music', they keep at bay any music – and by extension its artists and fans – which falls outside the so-called mainstream.

Further reading

In 'Global imaginings', Gage Averill provides a critical and an incisive analysis of the relation between products with local specificity (such as world-beat recordings) and global culture industries (in *Making and Selling Culture*, edited by Richard Ohmann, Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1996, pp. 203–23). Veit Erlmann's *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) is a great example of so-called 'world musics' in historical perspective. In this study, Erlmann skilfully highlights how the multi-faceted experiences with the international music industry by several key artistic figures from South Africa articulates not only the profound entanglement of South Africa and the West, but also the legacies of the colonial and postcolonial world. Steven Feld's 'A sweet lullaby for "world music"' (in *Public Culture*, Globalisation Issue, edited by Arjun Appadurai, Millennial Quartet, volume 2, January 2000) forcefully addresses some of the most common problems experienced by the music-makers of so-called 'world music', most particularly in regard to copyright and ownership issues. In *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place* (New York: Verso,

1994), George Lipsitz offers invaluable insights in a series of essays that addresses in theory and in practice the complex positioning of several non-mainstream popular musics at the cultural, socio-political and economic levels on both the local and international scenes.

Star profiles II

BOB MARLEY, DAVID BOWIE, ABBA, MADONNA,
NIRVANA, PUBLIC ENEMY, DERRICK MAY, THE SPICE
GIRLS

Rock emerged in the 1960s as a way of putting new audiences together, pursuing new cultural dreams, putting music centre stage in people's lives in new ways. It was utopian – which is why sixties pop stars are still regarded so nostalgically; and it was Anglo-American. Since then popular music has been routinised both commercially and aesthetically; new music markets, new music worlds, have been niche markets, with the most significant artists defining themselves against the mainstream. And yet superstars have still appeared, still surprised; sounds still travel around corporate networks in unexpected ways. Bob Marley didn't just help make Jamaican reggae music a normal part of the Western pop diet, he also prefigured the third to first to third world circuit that was eventually christened 'world music'. Abba weren't just Sweden's biggest export they also helped define a new sort of European dance pop culture that was to have unexpected repercussions on both sides of the Atlantic. At the same time, the very transparency of rock commerce fired new sorts of artistic ambition. The importance of, first, David Bowie, and then Madonna, was not so much that they placed themselves in the worlds of art and fashion (though they did do that) than that they made the selling process itself – the making of brand and image – an aspect of their art. Their influence is obvious on pop phenomena of the late 1990s, the Spice Girls, who combined the most old-fashioned glee of the girl group and boy band with the most sophisticated, self-conscious and controlled approach to marketing.

It was against such upfront commercialism that indie rock of all sorts continued to define itself, most confrontationally as punk, most determinedly as heavy metal, most poignantly in the music of Nirvana, and most importantly as rap, the latest form of African-American vocal music which became the most successful musical genre of the 1980s and 1990s, spreading round the new global music circuits in ways which were both dependent on and defiant of corporate ideology. The politics, art and confusions of rap were best voiced by Public Enemy. And meanwhile, under the urban noise of rap another musical revolution was happening: new kinds of dance music meant new cross-cultural alliances; new technologies of production meant a new kind of music maker – musician as engineer, mixer,

deejay; a new dance floor aesthetic celebrated records that were anonymous, wordless. Derrick May is thus the least-known name here but his music shows the circle turning once more in the ongoing musical trade that defines pop and rock, between Europe and the United States, art and commerce, machines and emotion.

Bob Marley

Bob Marley was the first star of what came to be called ‘world music’. He was born in Jamaica in 1945. His mother, who brought him up, was black; his father, whom he hardly knew, was white. Marley grew up in the extraordinary Jamaican musical culture of the 1950s, to the sounds of African drumming, Protestant Revivalist hymns, European ballroom dance, Caribbean calypso and rumba, US rhythm and blues. Hooked into the networks that linked Jamaican families to diasporic communities in England and North America (Marley’s mother moved to Wilmington, Delaware, in 1964), part of a local inter-island club and hotel circuit, for Jamaican popular musicians the local was already the global.

Seventeen-year-old Bob Marley cut his first records (as a singer) in 1962, and formed a vocal group, the Wailers, in 1963. Inspired by contemporary American soul acts like Curtis Mayfield’s Impressions, the Wailers were used by their producer, Coxsone Dodd, as an in-house group to front whatever was currently fashionable on the local dance floor: cover versions of international soul and pop hits, ska, rocksteady. Between 1963 and 1966 the Wailers released around eighty singles with enough hits to establish the group as Jamaica’s most successful. In 1966 the group was reduced to a vocal trio (Marley, his childhood friend, Bunny Livingstone, and Peter Tosh). The stripped-down Wailers were committed to Rastafarianism and began working with producer Lee Perry, who added a rhythm section (Aston and Carlton Barrett on bass and drums) and encouraged the group to develop their own material and sound.

The Wailers’ records from this period helped define reggae and if, initially, this was a Jamaican music (Bob Marley even spent the summer of 1969 living with his mother in Delaware and working for Chrysler) it soon began to make its mark on British pop too. Chris Blackwell, a Jamaican musical entrepreneur, who was involved both in supplying reggae records to the British Jamaican community (through the Trojan label) and developing new rock acts (on his Island label), heard the new Wailers sound and realised that his two markets needn’t be separate. The Wailers were a reggae act which could be sold to rock fans.

Marley’s first Island album, *Catch a Fire* (1973), remains a blueprint for



Figure 8 Bob Marley
© Redferns. Photo: Keith Morris

world music marketing. There could be no denying the Wailers' difference, not simply in the complexity and verve of reggae as against rock rhythms, but in the exoticism of Rastafarianism itself – the locks, the language, the spliffs. But, at the same time, the Wailers' music was made familiar – in the production values, the uplifted guitars, the sweetness of Marley's voice (compare the Island and Lee Perry versions of the same songs). As both a

recording and performing artist Bob Marley became immediately popular, his rock status confirmed by Eric Clapton's hit cover version of his 'I Shot the Sheriff' in 1974. As a vocal trio the Wailers soon broke up (Bunny Livingstone and Peter Tosh pursuing solo careers), but between 1974 and 1981 (when he died of cancer) Bob Marley became a global superstar.

His status as a world music figure remains unique. His vocal tenderness, his stage charisma and his skill as a songwriter gave him a rockstar-like personal appeal (Island tried, unsuccessfully, to repeat the process with the African musician, King Sunny Ade). But what made his career special was that he never ceased to be a third world musician. Marley's Rastafarianism meant both that his origins in the poorest part of Jamaican society were never forgotten and that his global appeal wasn't simply as an entertainer – for the Zimbabwean independence movement, for the aboriginal people in Australia, even for white punks in Europe, reggae in the 1970s became the musical form with which to voice protest. Not surprisingly, then, Marley's popularity and influence survived his death. By the end of the twentieth century sales of Wailers' records were greater than ever.

David Bowie

David Bowie's career makes better sense looking backwards than forward. Moment by moment his changes of sound and image seemed opportunist and/or wilful. In retrospect the steps that led from the nervy ersatz-cockney pop singer of the mid-1960s to the suave artist/entrepreneur floating himself (or, rather, his back catalogue) on the New York Stock Exchange in 1997 were quite logical. Bowie is often said to be the musician who most successfully brought arguments and attitudes from the high art world to the low world of commercial pop, but many of his peers were pop artists in this sense (the Who, Velvet Underground, Roxy Music). David Bowie was special for another reason: he was the first musician to appreciate the pop importance of artist as brand, and he understood early on that brand identity (and brand loyalty) did not mean musical consistency: Bowie's dramatic changes of musical style became one mark of his 'Bowieness' and in career terms one can see that his film/acting roles have been as carefully chosen as his stage personae (he is one of the few rock stars with credible acting credits).

As member/singer of various aspiring suburban sixties beat groups Bowie was not obviously marked out for stardom (his 1973 album, *Pin Ups*, is a wry tribute to the bands who did then make it) but he did develop two interests that were to mark his music. First, he became interested in

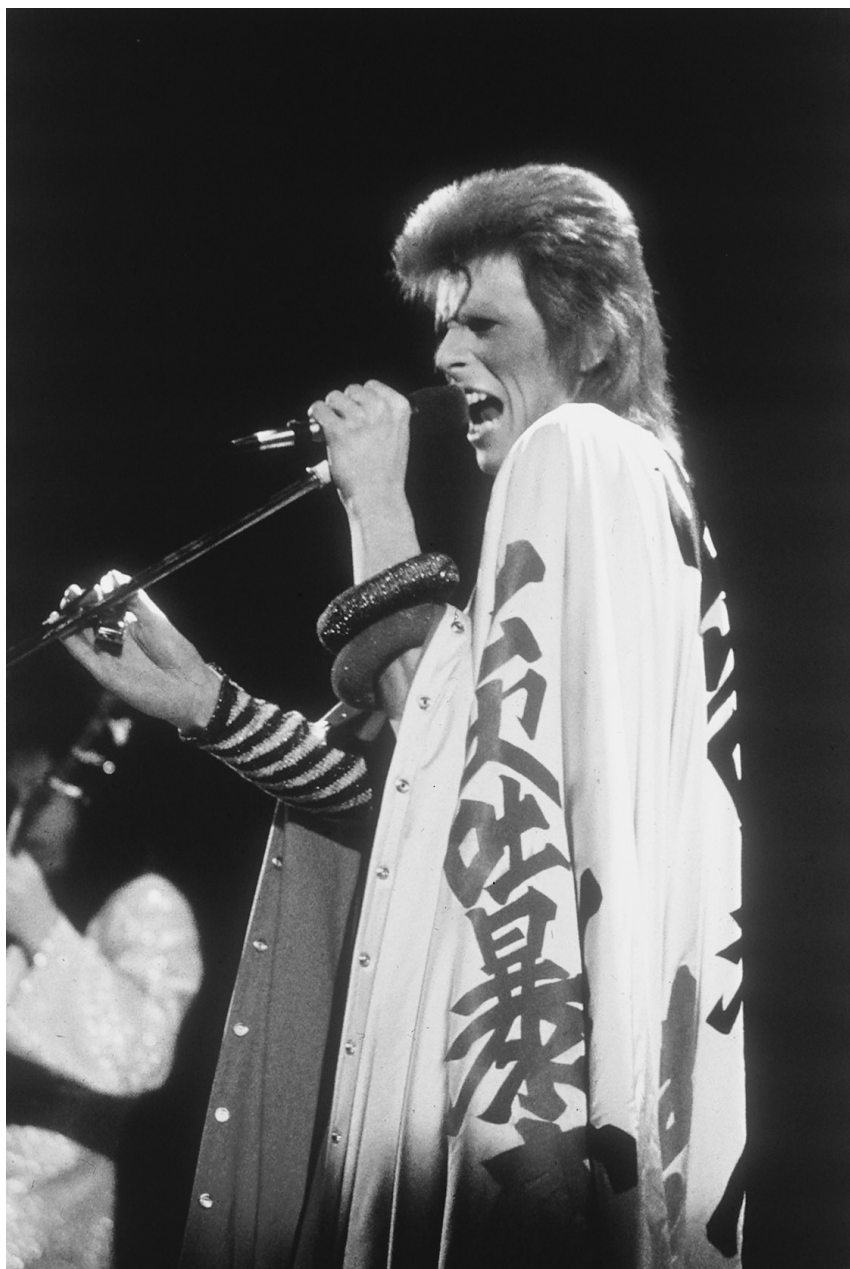


Figure 9 David Bowie
© Redferns. Photo: Debbie Doss

narrative/character songs. He explicitly admired Anthony Newley but, in the end, he was less influenced by the British music hall or variety tradition than by the European traditions of chanson and German cabaret (he was to cover songs by both Jacques Brel and Brecht/Weill). Story songs – ‘Space Oddity’ (1969), for example, Bowie’s first big hit – need staging, and this meant Bowie’s second, unexpected, interest: performance art. Although it became commonplace later, Bowie was one of the first rock stars to treat a concert as a show, to choreograph each song, and by the beginning of the 1970s he clearly had a different ambition from most of his London peers: he saw rock stardom as an artistic project, and placed himself in the contemporary American/European art worlds (so that Andy Warhol was as much an inspiration as Bob Dylan, Joseph Beuys as much as Kraftwerk).

Over the next decade Bowie moved from glam rock (*Hunky Dory*, *Ziggy Stardust*, *Aladdin Sane*, *Diamond Dogs*) to white soul (*Young Americans*, *Station to Station*) to Euro electronica (*Low* and *Heroes*) before settling for a kind of intelligently playful eclecticism (*Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)*). The 1970s were undoubtedly Bowie’s decade, not so much in terms of sales (his 1970s releases have probably sold better as repackages) than as an influence on audiences (the ‘Bowie Boys’ who haunted British provincial streets in the mid-1970s were the precursors of punk) and artists (as producer and performer Bowie has worked with a remarkable variety of musicians).

While other acts have become icons despite themselves, David Bowie took on the role of ‘rock star’ deliberately, scripting a part for himself that he could (and sometimes did) equally script for other people. His skill, from this perspective, is as an actor/image manager; he did for himself the work undertaken by other artists’ managers, producers and public relations teams. But he could only do this successfully because of his grasp of both pop and technological detail. His most remarkable gift was to capture a cultural moment in a three-minute pop song (‘Rebel Rebel’, ‘Boys Keep Swinging’, ‘Let’s Dance’). And if since those days he’s become rather grand, David Bowie remains one of the few ageing rock stars who could still do something surprising.

Abba

The Swedish quartet, Abba, are the most successful ever Europop group. Europop is music made in Europe for general European consumption. It can be contrasted to European music made for particular national consumers (Dutch speakers, say) and to music made in Europe for the Anglo-American market. Europop hits contain traces of their national



Figure 10 Abba
© Redferns. Photo: Richie Aaron

origins and, as a genre, Europop has had international significance, via the dance floor, but, in general, the label is attached to music that denies linguistic and cultural borders in Europe without crossing the Atlantic or reaching American ears. Abba were much less successful in the United States market (where ‘Dancing Queen’ was their only hit) than anywhere else.

The first Europop hit is generally taken to be Los Bravos’s ‘Black is Black’, a million seller in 1966. Los Bravos were a Spanish group with a German lead singer and a British producer. Their success was a model for both cross-European collaboration and commercial opportunism. Ideal Europop adapts the latest fashionable sound or rhythm to Euroglot lyrics (which can be followed by everyone with a classroom foreign language) and a chorus line (which can be sung in every continental disco and holiday resort). Other early successes in the genre were Middle of the Road’s ‘Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep’, which sold ten million copies in 1971, and Chicory Tip’s 1972 hit, ‘Son of My Father’, the English version of a German/Italian song which had originally been recorded by one of its writers, Giorgio Moroder. But Abba’s only serious rival in the 1970s was Boney M, a foursome from the Caribbean (via Britain and Holland), brought together by German producer Frank Farian, who sold 50 million records in 1975–8.

Abba had eighteen consecutive European top ten hits following the victory of 'Waterloo' in the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest; by the end of the decade they were said to be an even bigger foreign earner for Sweden than Volvo. Abba, like Boney M, appealed (particularly through television) to listeners older and younger than the usual club and disco crowd, combining child friendly chorus lines with slick choreography and a tacky erotic glamour that gave them a camp appeal that was a major influence on late 1970s gay music culture. The most successful British pop production team of the 1980s, Stock, Aitken, Waterman, was clearly influenced by Abba and by the promotion processes that supported it. Pete Waterman's 1990s project, Steps, were, in effect, Abba clones.

Abba broke up at the beginning of the 1980s but by the mid-1990s it was clear that their music had a second life. The Australian film, *Muriel's Wedding*, about an obsessive Abba fan, was a global box office hit. The Abba tribute band, Bjorn Again, became one of the biggest draws on the live circuit. *Mama Mia*, a musical of Abba songs, became a long-running London West End show. The continued appeal of Abba's songs isn't simply nostalgic but a measure too of their pop quality, and in this respect Abba clearly transcended the limits of the Europop genre. The group came together for emotional rather than commercial reasons (they were married to each other) and although their producer, Stig Anderson, was important for their success the group wrote all their own songs. Before Abba they were already experienced and successful entertainers – Anni-Frid Lyngstrad (who was actually Norwegian) and Agnetha Faltskog as solo singers, Benny Andersson in the Hep Stars, Bjorn Ulvaeus as a Hootenanny Singer. Their most Swedish characteristic was undoubtedly folk and if Abba followed Euroglot conventions lyrically 'Mama Mia', 'SOS', 'Ring Ring', 'Fernando' – their melodies had a charm, their harmonies a freshness, their arrangements a sheen that was unusual in Europop. As the group became successful they used the banality of the Europop genre to articulate something of the banality of new European affluence. 'The Day Before You Came' remains a classic of middle-class pop.

Madonna

Madonna Ciccone was the biggest pop star of the 1980s and early 1990s, a star who became so well known globally that she is likely to command media interest and record sales for the rest of her life. She was, with Michael Jackson, the first pop star to understand and exploit the video clip as a means of promotion and to ally herself with a global sponsor, Pepsi-



Figure 11 Madonna
© Redferns. Photo: Michel Linsen

Cola. Of all pop and rock acts she has most successfully integrated sound and image (as a film star and model as well as a musician), and she was the first post-feminist female icon: there has never been any doubt that she is in control of her own destiny and rarely any suggestion that she hasn't loved every moment of her fame.

Madonna's genius was a matter of taste, not technique, and undoubtedly involved an element of luck. Following stage/dance/performance

classes, she arrived in New York from Detroit at exactly the right time. She became a pop diva in the wash of Debbie Harry, who had pioneered the craft of marketing thrift-store sex appeal as performance art, playing out the fantasies of the knowing big sister and the wannabe little sister simultaneously. She became a disco diva at the moment when New York's dance scene was at the height of its glorious ride along the cusp of the mechanical and the soulful, with old rhythm and blues conventions of vocal dirt and desire being deployed by a new generation of engineers who layered the dance floor's background noise with a new percussive subtlety.

One source of Madonna's success, then, was the way she traded off the disposable anonymity of her singles – dance tracks designed to grasp the fashionable moment on the dance floor – with the rococo semiotics of her videos (the most academically over-analysed example of pop culture ever). If, in disco terms, Madonna's voice is a thin instrument – there's not much body in it; her vocal chords don't, in themselves, make enough noise to defy a rhythm track – she has been shrewd in her choice of producers and co-writers. Her hit songs were designed for the dance floor but lyrically captured something more resonant. 'Everybody', 'Holiday', 'Like a Virgin', 'Material Girl', 'Into the Groove', 'Papa Don't Preach': Madonna sang the chorus lines of big city single girl hedonism (the narrative was left to the videos). Her adroitness in writing lyrical lines that changed their rhythmic structures as they unfolded gave her voice the necessary physical momentum while her deftness in constructing melodic units out of conversational stress-points let certain words and phrases float free and, in the end, it was this sense of spontaneity (rather than her elaborately orchestrated videos) that gave Madonna her fan appeal. Add to this the sheer pleasure she took in stardom and it is not surprising that she became an icon. As Robert Christgau wrote of her greatest hits albums, 'their corny, cool postfeminist confidence, pleasure-centred electronic pulse, and knowing tightrope dance along the cusp of the acceptable capture a sensibility as well as an age'.

Nirvana

When Nirvana's writer/singer/guitarist Kurt Cobain killed himself in 1994 he gave the Nirvana story such a dramatic ending that it was difficult not to read it as a new telling of an old rock'n'roll myth. A trio of teenage losers with nothing else going for them defy years of schoolyard mockery by forming a band. The intensity of their determination to be heard gives them a fanatical following first locally (in and around Seattle) and then,

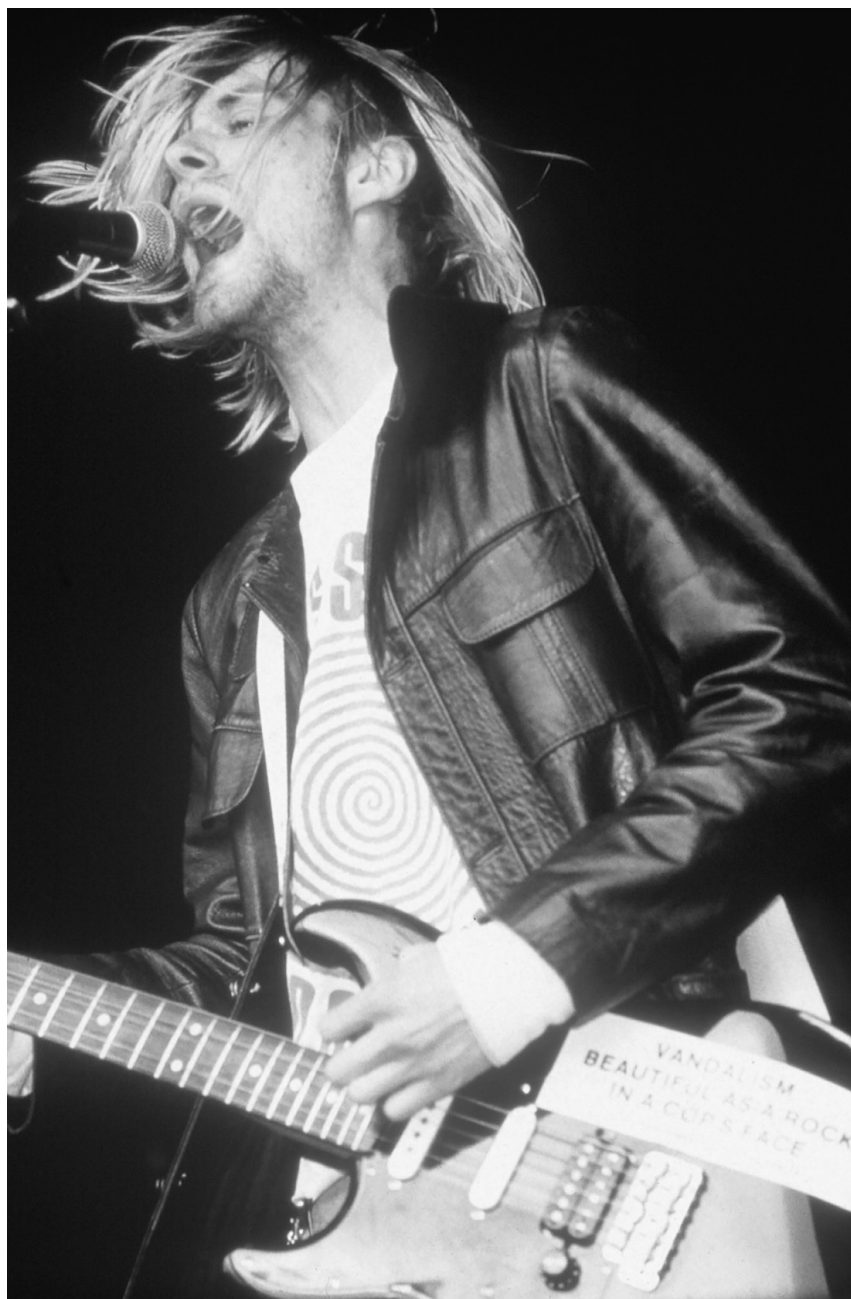


Figure 12 Nirvana's Kurt Cobain
© Redferns. Photo: Mick Hutson

after signing to the SubPop label, on the national indie circuit. SubPop do a distribution and promotion deal with a major label, Geffen; ‘Smells Like Teen Spirit’ becomes an MTV phenomenon, and *Nevermind* the album of a generation (netting \$80 million dollars for Geffen Records alone). A second Geffen album, *In Utero*, and two years of tours and festivals make Nirvana global rock stars too. Living a life now in which every hedonistic fantasy can come true, Cobain commits suicide, a suicide which gives his anguished lyrics a new frisson (and guarantees that the commercial exploitation of his music will be even more systematic after his death than before).

Before accepting this myth there are two points to consider. First, Cobain didn’t kill himself because he was a rock star; rather, stardom was a new kind of pressure – if rock had once been the escape from everyday problems it was now the everyday problem itself. (And from a fan’s point of view it was obvious that Cobain’s drug problem wasn’t a rich star’s indulgence but a poor man’s despair.) Cobain was the one grunge kid for whom Nirvana couldn’t be a site of rock utopianism. He knew how much labour and corporate capital Nirvana’s success took. Grunge music as defined by Nirvana asserted the power of noise – whether rhythms pumped up to exploding point, guitar thrash-din, or simply massed chorus lines – over anxiety, over fractured lyrics, hesitant melodies, vocal breaks (in Nirvana’s case this often meant Cobain’s voice being lost in the rock charge he was himself leading). This could be a description of the indie rock aesthetic generally: exhilaration with a discordant undertow, escape down musical dead ends; the sound of people hopelessly defying circumstance. Nobody in the 1990s captured this sense of adolescent frustration as brilliantly as Nirvana; no group was more loved by its fans.

And this leads to the second point. Nirvana was indeed dependent on the corporate clout of Geffen and MTV for its ultimate success, but it was equally dependent on the cultural community it had built up before anyone was sharp enough to spot their mainstream potential. This network of shops and radio stations and magazines and clubs was essential to Nirvana’s sense of themselves as a group (hence the local friends and idols used in their MTV Unplugged session), and if the band came to stand for indie music in the middle of the 1990s, forty years after the origins of rock’n’roll and at a time when everything had become grist to the marketing mill, it was not because of the introspective and/or anarchic nature of their songs (nor, indeed, because of Cobain’s suicide – a private matter), but because of their unwavering sociability, the indie sociability that was to take full advantage of changing technology, from home taping to MP3, from fanzine to web site.

Public Enemy

Rap is the popular form which can best claim some affinity with blues. In both cases we find a basically (but not exclusively) African–American music which is initially dismissed by the commercial pop establishment as artistically primitive and socially crude, then exploited by it as a cheap-to-make novelty, and finally essential to it as a genre which is endlessly flexible (on film and commercial soundtracks, for example) and mobile – by the end of the 1990s there were rap acts, usually using their own language (if with Americanisms thrown in) all over the globe. Within a decade of moving from clubs and streets and meeting rooms to radio, television and cinema, rap had become a world-wide way for minority groups to voice their identity. And all this without ever really getting the approval of the American cultural establishment. The virulence of attacks on rap acts, on their politics, violence and misogyny, far exceed anything that has been thrown at rock’n’roll.

Public Enemy were the group who more than any other defined the possibilities – and problems – of rap as a music that is both mass entertainment and minority protest, which uses new technology to articulate long-standing grievances at the racialised nature of the American power structure. Just as recording technology was what enabled the blues to flourish as popular form – people could now hear the unique vocal and instrumental qualities of a particular blues performance; so sampling and digital mixing enabled rap acts to use the sounds of the streets and the media as their performing site. Rap foregrounds words but its art is in the background, in the organisation of the sounds against which the rappers have to make themselves heard, in the insistence of the pulse which drives the rappers on, riding the moment, nervy like graffiti artists, wild style. And even as Public Enemy were giving aesthetic shape to the sheer din of black youth they were also suggesting a politics: black youth as public enemy, the stance which was both simplified and glamorised by the MTV’s *Yo, MTV Raps!* and gangsta rap.

Race relations lie at the centre of the history of twentieth-century popular music, and Public Enemy addressed the implications with unusual force, whether in terms of the possibility (or impossibility) of musical separatism or by reference to the old blues dilemma: what does it mean or matter that black rage and suffering are the source of white folks entertainment? But what Public Enemy’s records show most of all is that rap is art and not just sociology, craft and not just a spontaneous communal outpouring. Public Enemy itself was formed at Adelphi University on Long Island in 1982: Chuck D and Hank Shocklee mixed shows for the



Figure 13 Public Enemy
© Redferns. Photo: David Redfern

college radio station (where they were joined by Flavor Flav), ran a mobile deejay service and a live rap venue. In 1987 the group was signed to Rick Rubin's Def Jam label, adding Professor Griff as ideologue and Terminator X as deejay. From *Yo! Bum Rush the Show* (1987) to *It Takes a Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back* (1988) to *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990), Public Enemy provided the best samples and slogans, the smartest sense of black cultural sounds and history, the clearest blueprint for rap as the most important popular music of the late twentieth century.

Derrick May

'I want my music to sound like computers talking to each other', Derrick May once told a journalist. 'I don't want it to sound like a "real" band. I want it to sound as if a technician made it. That's what I am: a technician with human feelings.' May was one of a group of technicians from in and around Detroit who in the 1980s developed the dance music that was, appropriately, called techno. This was urban music which didn't so much reflect the ruined industrial landscape of post-Fordist, post-riot Detroit than see through it to a utopian future in which the relics of heavy industry were transformed electronically into a weightless magic motion.



Figure 14 Derrick May
© Graham Proudlove. Photo: Graham Proudlove

New York garage, Detroit techno and Chicago house music transformed the sound of the European dance floor in the late 1980s and helped shift the centre of gravity of the British music scene, as dance clubs and clubbers became the focus of youth groups and independent entrepreneurs who had previously been primarily interested in rock. But then techno in particular was, from the start, a music which defied accepted genre wisdom. Derrick May and his friends – Aaron Atkins, Juan Atkins, Kevin Sanderson – got their musical education from a local radio deejay, the Electrifyin’ Mojo, whose shows denied all musical boundaries. They took their world view from Alvin Toffler’s vision of a cyber future, *The Third Wave*. They made their first musical experiments on cheap synthe-

sisers and cassette recorders. They were equally excited by European electronic pop – Giorgio Moroder, Gary Numan, above all, Kraftwerk – and the odder examples of George Clinton’s futuristic funk. They started checking out the various new club sounds in New York and Chicago, putting on their own ‘progressive’ nights in Detroit.

The contrast between these young musical entrepreneurs and Berry Gordy, who had founded the Tamla Motown label in the city almost thirty years earlier is striking. Motown drew on the live musical culture of the gospel church and black family entertainment; its key session musicians were jazzmen, part of Detroit’s jazz club community; its market was built up on radio play and touring Motown packages. House producers made records for themselves – to play as deejays, to cart from club to club. They were neither musicians nor performers in the traditional Motown sense and their community existed only in their clubs. And yet, ironically, techno flourished because it could travel on the trade routes between Detroit and Europe that Motown had helped establish, not just in its 1960s pop heyday but also in the 1970s, as an aspect of Northern Soul. In 1988 Northern Soul veteran Neil Rushton heard some of Derrick May’s local Detroit releases (under the name Rhythim is Rhythim) and invited him to Britain; liking May’s unreleased tracks even more, Rushton went back with him to Detroit to put together a compilation: *Techno! The New Dance Sound of Detroit*. One track, Kevin Sanderson’s ‘Big Fun’ (recorded by Inner City) was an immediate British top ten hit.

As dance music’s best British chronicler, Matthew Collin, has written, garage, house and techno music shared a premise: the use of technology to heighten perception and pleasure. In late 1980s Britain drugs, specifically Ecstasy, were used to the same end, and the resulting Acid House scene broke down cultural boundaries which had been in place since the rock/pop split of the early 1970s. A new generation of indie bands – the Shamen, Primal Scream, Happy Mondays, Prodigy – were inspired equally by techno and rock’n’roll, and rave culture emerged as a remarkable synthesis of the various subcultural politics of pleasure – hippie, punk, dance. One track always cut through the confusion: Rhythim is Rhythim’s ‘Strings of Life’, Derrick May’s instrumental classic which is, despite itself, as soulful as anything that has come out of Motown.

The Spice Girls

The Spice Girls were Britain’s biggest pop phenomenon of the 1990s and, more surprisingly, the most successful British teenpop act ever in the United States, rapidly topping both singles and albums charts there in



Figure 15 The Spice Girls
© Redferns. Photo: Mick Hutson 9619

1997 with their debut releases, ‘Wannabe’ and *Spice*. Like most overnight successes, the Spice Girls had actually followed a long and winding road to the top. Victoria Adams, Melanie Brown, Emma Bunton, Melanie Chisholm and Geraldine Halliwell (known in a piece of inspired marketing as Posh, Scary, Baby, Sporty and Ginger Spice) met while scuffling mostly unsuccessfully at the bottom end of show business. They got together to write songs and work out stage routines as a group in 1993; their career took off when they hooked up with a manager, Simon Fuller, who got them a deal with Virgin records and put them in touch with some of London’s leading session musicians. By the time they were launched publicly, in June 1996, they weren’t just another pop group, they were an ideological package: Girl Power!

In many respects the Spice Girls’ story is familiar. They were marketed by Virgin like a boy band (in a tradition going back through Take That and Bros to Wham! and the Bay City Rollers); their songs drew on the even older tradition of the sassy, conversational girl group. The Spice Girls were unusual (though not unprecedented – Madonna was their obvious model) in their cross-gender appeal, and they managed the difficult trick of retaining an individual personality while lightly touching all the bases of contemporary pop and dance music. Their own long considered role in the making of the Spice Girls’ sound and image was important here, just as

their lasting success confirmed that they were not just some Svengali's puppets – their break with Simon Fuller at the end of 1997 had little effect on their fortunes.

What made the Spice Girls something new in pop terms was their grasp of the now limitless scope of the pop world itself. The scale of their success marked the triumph of the *Fame* approach to stardom; they were followed in Britain at least by a stream of stage school pop acts. And its speed reflected the remarkable pace now of the circulation of stardom across different media – singles on the radio, videos on television, interviews and photo-shoots in magazines, scandals in the tabloids. By the end of the 1990s each of the Spice Girls was famous in her own right, and their solo records seemed more designed to promote their individual names as names than to advance any kind of musical career. And whereas this would once have marked them clearly off from the world of rock (the Monkees weren't the Beatles) now, thanks to dance music, media superstardom seemed quite compatible with club culture. At a time when the most uncompromising of rap stars were routinely courted by Hollywood, and the hippest of Ibiza deejay tracks could reach the general public via the soundtrack of a television commercial, it became possible for the Spice Girls to be an old-fashioned showbiz act and contemporary trend-setters simultaneously. And if, after *Spice*, their music lacked much character and was made only to keep them in the public eye, then couldn't much the same be said of the Rolling Stones?