Global Music: Africa, Latin America and the Diaspora — Charlie de Ledesma — Sound Systems

In this lecture and the one in two weeks time I'm setting out to fill in some gaps and make further connections between popular music forms. I am going to introduce a number of genres we haven't discussed so far from various parts, for the sake of argument, we will call the developing world, and contextualise these global musics within the genres and movements we've discussed in earlier weeks.

This week I'm covering music from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America and: identifying the key styles and illustrate what they are like; placing the music within the concepts and practices of the diaspora, modern migration and globalisation; and showing what impact these musical style have had in 'first' world locations.

First then, why are styles from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America significant for our main purpose, tracking the continuum from 19th century early US styles through to today's dance and urban creations?

1/ African music roots lie at the heart of everything we've talked about so far in the module. John Miller Chernoff says in his 1979 book on West African culture, 'African Rhythms and African Sensibility': "The popular music of the contemporary world is increasingly becoming an African Music Idiom. From Asia to Europe, from Latin America to the US, people are dancing to music that has its roots in Africa."

This takes us back to the first lecture on blues…we must remember the slave trade – 5m African taken from across the southern half of Africa to the Caribbean and Brazil first and then onwards to the south of the US.

What was the musical legacy?

Call & Response in West African drumming rituals found its way into American spirituals.

Syncopated rhythms and improvisations found in jazz & in R & B & funk.

And, based on poly-rhythms, vocal embellishments, some say, are one of precursors of rapping in hip hop and MCing in reggae styles

Just to take quick detour……there is a clear connection between West African praise singers, called Griots, and the early blues. There's the role of storytelling, and the close interaction between stringed instrument and voice; and the syncopated rhythms. Griots were also an oppressed social caste like the bluesmen. A modern day example is the Malian singer, Ali Farke Toure who, until his death a few years ago, popularised a blend of griot and bluesman. This track is a praise song for the President of Mali.

Trax: Farke Toure 'Mali Gakoyo.'

So these techniques formed the main underpinnings for blues, jazz, and, via embellishments, R & B and Rock & Roll. Advocates of more essentialist explanations, like critic Nelson George, have look closely for original African elements through disco into hip hop. Whereas Paul Gilroy's black Atlantic theory sees more of a complex exchange at work, as African-ness getting sifted many different ways – roots into routes.

2/ A second reason why global styles from these regions are significant is that many styles have been sophisticated and influential musical forms for many decades, not just coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s.

Given that, there's a need to flesh out the picture in the 1930s to the 1950s. Examples are: orchestral hi-life from West Africa, calypso from the Caribbean and Cuban music. Some were hits when exported to the West, and others set off dance crazes, especially the Latin mambo and cha cha cha.

Here are some examples of Cuban styles popular in the US, two mambos, one by the man known as the mambo king, Perez Prado, from the 1950 and the other, by Machito in 1962. Prado once described his music as an Afro-Cuban rhythm with a dash of American swing.

TRAX: Prado: 'Mama y Tata'; Machito 'Ritmo Pa Gozar'

And in the UK Trinidadian calypsos sparked interest– artists like Kitchener and, Sparrow were a bit like the West African griots, their songs like news broadsheets, covering politics, love, humour, work.

I'm going to play next songs by Young Tiger and Lord Beginner which reflect the experiences of the Caribbean migrants, brought over by the Windrush in the 1950s. You'll notice that the second one is a kind of election rap.

TRAX: Young Tiger 'Calypso be'; Lord Beginner 'General Election'

The popularity of these styles came and went though, depending on a range of political and economic factors, not just the whims of the public.

The island Cuba with its massive sugar plantations provides an example. It had been a playground for rich Americans but that ended when Fidel Castro's forces 'liberated' the country from dictatorship in 1959. Communist Cuba was boycotted by the US and so was it's music. Two-way cultural traffic ceased and Cuban music fell out of favour in the US.

One nation which remained under a dictatorship, Brazil, has a rich and deep musical tradition. It most famous style, samba, had featured in the carnival processions for since the 1920s. But samba had become identified with more conservative trends, and, through the 60s young musicians risked imprisonment and violence by speaking out against the regime.   The genre MBP, or Tropicalisimo, often placed political and satyrical lyrics within a creative musical hybrid of rock, soft melodic guitar playing and African rhythms.

Here's a flavour of the eclectic range of styles popular in this period – some typical samba, some weird psychedelic fusion from Os Mutantes and one of the vanguard of the MBP movement, Gilberto Gil, who is now minister for culture in Brazil. Amazing, given he had to 'escape' from Brazil in the late 60s and live in London because of his 'extreme' views. Gil's track here, Rep, is taken from his CD 'Act.'

TRAX: Samba, Os Mutantes, Gilberto Gil.

These Brazilian styles are intense musical and cultural hybrids, indicating the coming together of previously discreet styles into a new, and creative, wholes. Also, they symbolise a new global moment, with developing countries finding independence or trying to rid themselves of their coloniser or home-grown dictatorships.

Change was rife in African too where nations were experiencing political, economic and cultural shifts. But, by the mid 60's the majority of African states were free from colonial rule. Unlike Cuba, this often has a liberating and progressive effect on the music.

One important aspect of the 1960s African music - but one which wasn't noticed in the West - was the impact of Caribbean –especially Cuban- music on West African styles. A strong example of Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory. African music had been moved to the West, then re-appropriated into a variety of styles, and then shipped BACK to Africa, injecting new modernisms into the recently electrified music there. Author Sue Steward notes in her book on the history of Latin music, that in the period when independence movements swept through Africa, imported music "took a knocking as Africanization policies encouraged or dictated a return to traditional music and dancing, instruments and language." But, African nations viewed the music of 'liberated' Cuba as originating from Africa…rather than being an imported style!

So artists like Johnny Pacheco were very popular, with thousands of people greeting his plane when he arrived to play in 1965 in Abidjan, Ivory Coast -scenes reminiscent of the Beatles forays to the US in that time, or even the Emperor Haile Selassie arriving in Jamaica!

Cuban music, especially son and rumba was integrated by Congelse stars like Franco, and called African rumba, which quickly became a pan-African craze. The melody lines, played by horns and flutes in Cuba, were applied to guitars as the Africans couldn't get hold of the other instruments. Also there's strong Cuban feel to Senegalese music, coming through especially in singers like Youssou N Dour. The next track, 'Laissez Passer', features Franco's big band with around six guitars and the second a popular song from a very young N Dour, called 'Abse Guere.'

MUSIC: Franco; Youssou N'Dour

Connell & Gibson in Soundtracks make the point that Congolese rumba music was "a cultural fusion that spread across Africa." Adding that, and I quote "World music, perhaps more than any other style exemplifies how music is simultaneously an agent of mobility and a cultural expression permanently connected to place." :

In the second half I'll move through the 1970s and 1980s and see how styles interacted with jazz, disco and dance.

2nd half

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In the first half I established that as R & B, Rock & Roll and psychedelic rock developed in the US and the UK, other styles flourished in areas of the developing world. I also mentioned Gilroy's Black Atlantic theory, showing in the example of the popularity of Cuban music in affecting West African music, how exchange is a complex and dynamic process.

I now want to introduce a concept used in writings on globalisation. Arjun Appadurai has coined the term ethnoscape to describe the global cultural flows which characterise the complex, fast moving, post modern, or late modern, historic period.

By focusing on the 1970s through to the late 1980s we can see how global styles reflect Appadurai's ethnoscape very neatly. I will track their progress in three cities: London, New York and Paris.

LONDON

We heard in the reggae and dub lecture how international interest in the music grew and Bob Marley was promoted by a white Jamaican record company owner, Chris Blackwell. Blackwell, when looking for other artists from developing countries, with new ideas, picked up on Nigeria music. He signed King Suny Ade, who played juju, hoping it would be the next big thing. Ade's complex music looked to West African poly- rythmes, mixing in Hawaian pedal steel guitar and gospel-leaning vocals. Another music popular in Nigeria in the 1970s was Afrobeat, a fusion of James Brown-like funk, big band jazz and tribal call and response vocals – also, when played by its king, Felakuti, including raps. The Ade track is called 'Maa Jo' and the Fela one, 'Underground System'.

TRAX: Ade; Felakuti.

Fela's music particularly reflected a strong political dimension…he sung about development, corruption, the global finance system and the need to modernise and eradicate disastrous tribal divisions. Neither Ade or Fela really caught on in the West – and Nigerian music has moved on. But for a time these musicians had a strong, almost fanatical following.

The music of a southern African nation, Zimbabwe, was both very traditional and political at the same time. It was originally Shona spirit medium music transposed into pop by a dreadlocked, deep-voiced singer, Thomas Mapfumo. His lyrics often focusing on the liberation struggle, as Zimbabwe was in the throes of a civil war. The music was called, chimurenga, meaning struggle. George Lipsitz in Dangerous Crossroads says : "Thomas Mapfumo's music deploys traditional cultural forms to fuse a new political unity during and after civil war in Zimbabwe."

Here's Mapfumo with his hit song Chamunorwa, which asks: what are we fighting for?

TRAX: Mafumo

The likes of Ade, Fela and Mapfumo built on the embryonic popularity of African music in London, which previously had been mostly South African – the jazz-ified songs from Miriam Makeba and jaunty swing of kwela music. The 70s was too a time of intense support for reggae and the development of Trinidadian soca, a funkier, electric version of calypso which itself absorbed music from other Caribbean island and American funk.

The early 80s saw other labels joining Island Records. The former rock singer with Genesis, Peter Gabriel formed Realworld, and Virgin Records took on fusion artists from Africa too. Major London venues like the Rainbow, the Astoria and the South Bank were bringing in leading African Africa and bands were forming to play at smaller venues like the Bass Clef and the Africa Centre.

If South Africa had been the first African country to make a mark musically in the UK now it was the turn of a famous American – Paul Simon, from Simon and Garfunkel – to thoroughly popularise the rural and urban styles from there.

In 1986 Simon released Graceland, on which he sang songs on predictable American topics, but the music was different - played by some of the best rhythm players in South Africa.

Why was Simon interested particularly in this music? It's richness: a cappella choral and jangling guitar playing, called township jive. Here are some examples. The first though isn't from Graceland but a township groups, The Boyoyo Boys. This is the source material he used. The track is called 'Daveytown Special'. The second track, from the album is the a cappella Ladysmith Black Mambazo with Homeless..the third has Simon singing.

TRAX: Boyoyo Boys; Ladywmith Black Mambazo; Pual Simon

Researcher Jonathan David Greer notes that Graceland had a major impact in introducing Americans to new styles and ideas in popular music. But the release of Graceland didn't come without controversy. As well as breaking the cultural boycott against apartheid South Africa, Simon was pilloried for exploiting the musicians, and by some, of putting insular lyrics over the rhythms. But, some of them musicians gained form the exposure. Greer notes that guitarist Ray Phiri labelled the album as "the best thing that ever happened to him." Others, like Ladysmith we just heard, couldn't perform for some time in South Africa, although their international profile rose steadily as the record became influential. After the recriminations, it remained true that Simon had given support and recognition to a musical culture that, Greer says "had been mostly hidden thanks to the censorship of the South African government."

Soon after Graceland, the London record label Sterns helped launch the marketing category world music to enable record stores to know where to put all this material –

particularly South and West African. The term has come under all sorts of criticism since. We'll look at the term critically in two weeks time in a examination of the music of British Asian Nitin Sawhney.

Now… Over to NEW YORK CITY

We learnt earlier about the popularity of Cuban music, again it was Cuban elements which played a major part in the success of Salsa, another umbrella term, like 'world music' which some critics have thought of as little more than a marketing term designed to superficially categorize music in a way that appeals to non-aficionados. One leading player, percussionist Tito Puente has said that "the only salsa I know comes in a bottle. I play Cuban music". Interestingly, for some time the Cuban state media officially claimed that the term salsa music was a euphemism for authentic Cuban music stolen by American imperialists. But author John Storm Roberts thinks the term has more significant cultural origins: "The word salsa- it means sauce – had long been used by Cuban musicians in the sense of spice or pep – something like the original meaning of the word swing." It's said also that the world salsa was first regularly used in public by an MC in New York to rev up the crowd at Latin gigs.

The development and success of salsa in New York in the 1970s and 1980s has a lot to do with two countervailing forces: the evolution and elegance of Cuban, and Puerto Rican musical styles and the routes of migration. Thousands of Cubans had arrived in the US in the late 50s and 60s leaving communist Cuba and, ten years later tens of thousands of Puerto Rican migrated, after the US permitted Puerto Ricans to enter the US to live and work.

Migration has brought 40% of all persons of Puerto Rican ancestry to New York, and made the US the fifth-largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. Migration also, for the record, boosted the populations of London and Paris with Caribbean islanders.

Coming up is the sort of typically Cuban percussion music they would play. This is Milton Cardona's Salute to Elegua, who is a Cuban religious deity. It highlights the densely percussive roots of the Afro-Cuban music which were for years hidden in the ritual music of the santeria church, itself a synthesis of African animism and classic Catholicism, both deity-rich religions. The sleeve notes for the album, 'Bembe' say that it was the first to openly define itself as a recording of Santeria. And the notes suggests that it marks a coming of age of new York's Latin community.

TRAXK: Cardona

Connell and Gibson note that: "Music changed in the diaspora, as it reflected new contexts, technologies, opportunities and performing situations, empowering migrant groups by staking out a unique cultural place in the host nation…as well as…affecting the national identity of host nations.

Salsa then is a hybrid music, made from Cuban ingredients, blended with jazz and the showbiz ingredients of rock and roll. Its roots lie in African percussion, call and response and lyrical Spanish-ified guitar picking and vocals. All these shaped salsa's precursors, son and charanga.

Here are some examples, from pianist Eddie Palmieri, ‘Spirit of Love’, from his landmark album, ‘Lucumi, Macumba, Voodoo’, and second, Fania All Stars – the house band. Their track is Coro Miyare written by Johnny Pacheco.

TRAX: Palmieri; Fania All Stars

Through the 70s labels like Fania, Tico and of course Salsoul, blended Latin elements into disco – and disco into Latin - and artists like Santana fused latin styles with rock. Most people know Oye Como Va, so I don’t need to play it.

The fully blown salsa style, with close links to Latin jazz, became one of the quintessential fusions of the period. The Queen of salsa was – and still is – Celia Cruz, La Riena, who draws much of her expressive power from the religious fires of santeria. Here’s two Celia Cruz hits, Quimbara and Roro Mata, from the hit album, Celia and Johnny, produced by flautist Johnny Pacheco.

TRAX Celia Cruz and Johnny Pacheco

We heard how, a little later Paul Simon had utilised South African rhythms in Graceland. Talking Heads main man and New York city networker David Byrne caught the latin bug, duetting with Celia Cruz in the movie Something Wild and using a cast of top notch Latin musicians on his 1982 album Rei Mondo (carnival king).

TRAX: Byrne.

There’s much more that could be said about salsa, given that it helps ties up many of the strands we’ve been looking at. But the third geographic node I want to look at quickly is FRANCE. French cities, Paris and Marseille, have also seen potent music styles emerging from, or popularised by, migrant communities. Connell and Gibson note: “Music in the homeland of migrants is not static but, as in the diaspora, a product of synthesis and hybridity. “

This is particularly part for two styles: zouk from the French Antilles, and rai from Algeria, North Africa. Zouk developed as a hybrid genre in Paris among the large Antillean migrant community, and mixed disco, West African, mostly Cameroonian makossa, elements into the traditional, loping percussive native cadence style. Whereas rai started in the bars of the Algerian port city, Oran, where the bawdy lyrics were sung by women over percussion. In Marseille and Paris the style was electrified, added disco and jazz elements and synthesisers.

Gross notes that Rai “was a means of cultural expression for a minority struggling to carve out an ethnic identity and space in an inhospitable, racist environment.”

Here are examples of the earlier and later styles, from Cheba Rimitti and Cheb Khaled, two leading form diffent eras – Rimitti from the 1970s and Khaled from the 80s, although he is still very popular today. Remitti - in her 80s – still occasionally performs today. The track is ‘Guendouzi Mama’. The Khaled song title, translated as

‘O my Child’ illustrates mehna, the deep soulful suffering, which lies at the centre of Arabic singing.

TRAX: Rimitti; Khaled.

Now I want to finish by drawing together the various strands in this discussion.

Towards the end of the 1980s, given the successes of many of these styles, critics started to reflect doubts over the concept ‘world music’ . Questions surfaced about what was expected of global musicians. Author Timothy Taylor put it well:
“The west, while it views its citizens as occupying many different subject positions, allows ‘natives’ only one, and that is whatever one the west wants at any particular moment..(The West) often demanding that they be pre-modern, untainted – musically the same as they ever were.”

Concerns raised by Paul Simon’s Graceland didn’t help, although as we have seen, the subject was complex and not easy to generalise.

So, what can we say was achieved in the golden age of global music – the 1970s and 1980s?

Certainly, some careers were re-invigorated, in the case of Paul Simon, but more much more significantly, musicianship came back to the fore. Interest too was boosted in dance – look at the amount of salsa dance classes around and about!. Awareness was opened up of other cultures too. Connell and Gibson note: “At one level, the rise in world music emphasised the importance of the local in global commodity flows; on another, it draw little-known places and performers into global markets and culture.”

But, much of these gains have been arguably lost: the fizz has largely gone out of the global music scene through the 1990s, and it’s become increasingly ghetto-ised again. Small labels have been squeezed out of business and the majors show little interest. However, there is evidence that with globalised digital culture a new form of micro world music is growing in popularity. But global music elements pop up in all sorts of music, from Madonna and Shakira to dance music genres, like house, drum ‘n’ bass and trance.

The last tracks I’ll play are two fusions, typical of the hybrid spirit that has chacterised the core of global music over the last 40-50 years. Here’s Youssou N Dour with Wyclef Jean, formerly of the Fugees. ‘Birimi’ is a Senegalese/US rap with Youssou ending with: “keep an eye out for the truth”. And last, here’s a Moroccan reggae track from Casablanca.

TRAX: N Dour

I want to end on two quotes. One from Paul Gilroy and the other from Edward Said.

Here’s Gilroy – this is from the Black Atlantic, referring to diasporic cutlure: “Music has been restless, ever-evolving -through absorption and transformation…disrupting

the supposed certainties of ethnic and national cultures from a position in the margins of these cultures."

And here's Said, from the 1995 book, The Politics of Dispossession: "In a world of decentralisation, fragmentation and compression, all cultures are in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinary, differentiated and un-monolithic."

In two weeks I'll be talking about the impact of the Asian diaspora, and migration, on music and culture, particularly in the UK.

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