## Interview with

## Thomas Brooman - Co-founder Womad

Thomas Brooman is a festival organizer and promoter of music, best known for his role as cofounder and artistic director of the WOMAD (World of Music Arts & Dance) festival organization. He has programmed and collaborated in the production of more than 145 womad festivals and events in 24 countries and islands all over the world until 2008.

Thomas is also a co-founder of Real World Records, a label established in 1987 and one of the members who coined the term world music 1987.

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**WM Oasis -** You are a co founder of the real world records. What does the name real world record really mean in this context, since the world music concept was already founded?

**WM Oasis** - In 1980 you were one of the founders of womad; you did already have a vision of a multicultural music. A few years later came the name world music, a label to make order in the record shops. This is a name that has been interpreted in many different ways. Some people even think it's a discrimination of the music from "outside", what do you think about that?

**WM Oasis -** The name "world music" have create order in the shelves in the shops around the world, but artists like Ray Lema don't want to classify his music as world but Jazz. In witch shelve you think we should place his music?

**WM Oasis** - How do you see the evolution of world music today?

**WM Oasis -** Rai music from Algeria had its glory days in the 80's and 90's with Khaled, Mami, Zahouania, but seems slow now and no new artists is emerging now. Why do you think it's like that?

WM Oasis - On internet i found a lot of different answers that make me little bit confused . whose idea with womad and who are the few people who have in the reality been involved from the start? What was the role of Peter Gabriel?

Thomas B - Before Womad became Womad, as it were, the whole project began with an idea from Peter Gabriel. He had the thought of organizing a concert with one or more artists from 'somewhere else' in the world (most probably Africa) together with one or more sympathetic western artists who would encourage an audience to attend. At the start, there was no clear idea of a festival. Discussion of the idea began in January 1981 at a meeting between a whole group of people who Peter had invited to attend. We had several meetings in Bath during January and February 1981, as far as I remember. The first two meetings were attended by Peter, myself and my friends from The Bristol Recorder (Martin Melbourne, Jonathan Arthur and Stephen Pritchard), Jumbo Van Reenan (who was with Virgin Records' Frontline Records at the time), Mark Kidel (film-maker and journalist) and Toni Basil (pop star and

choreographer, who was giving dance lessons to Peter at the time). There may have been others at these first meetings but I think those were the people who attended the first of them.

From this first meeting onwards it was The Bristol Recorder 'team' who volunteered to take action and communicate this idea to other people. We sent out a letter in March 1981 on Bristol Recorder headed paper to a whole variety of possible allies and interested parties (for example, to David Byrne, Brian Eno, Mick Fleetwood, Robert Fripp and John Miller Chernoff) describing the project in quite a lot of detail. This letter was signed by Peter Gabriel, Mark Kidel and myself.

At that point, in the Spring of 1981, there was still no clear idea that it would be a festival we were planning to present. We described the project as an 'event to provide a meeting place for different cultural sources of music'. We mentioned a possible title: "Music from the Edges of the World' but we quickly discarded this possible identity! We also mentioned using a possible indoor venue for the event, which was The Exhibition Centre in Bristol's City Centre.

Two months later, in late May of 1981, we wrote a second letter to a wider group of artists and experts and by that point we had identified The Bath and West Showground near Shepton Mallet in Somerset as the venue we intended to use. We also began to describe the event as a festival and we mentioned July 1982 as the date we were aiming towards. At that point we mentioned "Rhythm '82" as a new identity we were possibly going to use.

The name Womad was chosen towards the very end of 1981, I think, and the idea (to use a completely new acronym...rather an obscure approach!) of the title came out of the Bristol Recorder office and I remember Peter agreeing to the title when he made a rare visit to our office in Bristol. I think this was very early in 1982.

Peter's role, then, was obviously one of crucial importance and inspiration to all of us involved. What became Womad would never have begun without Peter. He also used his extensive address book to connect us with many of the artists and industry professionals who we began writing to. This list was soon supplemented by many contacts of our own at The Recorder (including The Beat, Echo and the Funnymen and The Thompson Twins for example) and the whole project was really only carried through due to the energy and commitment of the Bristol Recorder group in Bristol. Mark Kidel resigned from any formal involvement in the festival and I think that happened in the Autumn of 1981.

There was very little support for the project we had embarked upon but we were all completely persistent - stubborn, even - in taking things forward. I remember a rather gloomy party at my flat in Bristol at the end of 1981 where our small (and unpaid!) office staff tried to celebrate a year which was ending with no money, no certainty that a festival would actually take place and no real supporters other than Peter. By that point we had all but abandoned our Bristol Recorder business, too, because all of our energy had been drawn into the 'impossible dream' of Womad.

Peter Gabriel was also of central importance in the way that we organized and compiled a Double Benefit album for the festival. This was called Music and Rhythm and the album was eventually released in July 1982 (the month of the first festival itself) on WEA Records. It was directly through Peter's contacts (with the American music lawyer, Martin Machat, and with Charles Levison, who was the Chairman of WEA) that this album project came to life.

Peter also talked personally to artists like Pete Townsend of The Who in order to get some original pieces composed. In this project as well, though, we also used our connections from The Bristol Recorder to add to the artists contributing.

We all worked almost obsessively through this whole period and we took on all of the roles and responsibilities of what was a really major undertaking. Stephen Pritchard led the considerable educational dimension to the festival. Stephe was able to secure funding from the Commission for Racial Equality in order for us to produce a teaching resource of ten sections. Stephe and his small team also managed to get almost four hundred schools to use this resource in their classrooms and to attend the first day of Womad. Thousands of school children came along and I think that this dimension to the festival was really important to its significance and achievement.

Jonathan Arthur took on the role of Site Director and he hit the ground running, as it were, in organizing all of the staging and technical facilities that we needed for the weekend.

Martin Melbourne became the festival's financial administrator and overall producer. Martin also invested £3,000 of his own money into Womad during early 1982 and up until July 1982 this was the only financial support that we had. At that point we also received a large advance from WEA Records for the benefit album and from that point onwards we were reliant on the money from ticket sales to get the event presented.

My own role was described as Festival Director and I was of central importance in shaping the artistic idea of the event. I had been the 'lucky one' who got sent to Rennes in Western France to attend a festival, Musiques de la Monde, presented by La Maison de la Culture in April 1981. It was at that event that I saw Drummers of Burundi and The Sabri Brothers, both of whom were inspirational to us as organisers, showing us artists from other cultures who we felt would connect with our own (future!) festival audience. I also worked with Bob Hooton on the artist line-up and Bob and I went on to work singlehandedly together in re-establishing Womad from 1983 onwards.

But we were only a handful of the many people who were involved from an early stage in getting the festival produced. There are just too many others for me even to attempt to mention!