

Interview

Ben Mandelson

Ben Mandelson is a leading freelance world music record producer, musician and one of those UK music professionals who launched the current 'world music' genre 1987. He is the co-founder and A&R manager / house producer for GlobeStyle Records label in London, Ben was a founding member of the world music cult band 3 Mustapha's 3 and founding director of WOMEX 1994-1997. He is now a member of Billy Bragg's orchestra, The Blokes.

More info: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Mandelson

WM Oasis -You are one of the participants of the meeting in the Empress of Russia. An historical day that has made order in record stores, and give status and recognition for the music all around the world. What do you remember from that historical meeting? Were you satisfied and convinced about the chosen name" world music"?

Ben M - I think, at the time, I was probably satisfied with the term 'world music' – I certainly accepted it and the whole campaign enthusiastically - I'm not even sure if I voted for it [when we all proposed different campaign names around the table], but it was certainly the 'least worst' option, and the most inclusive of all of the different things that we all wanted to bring.

WM Oasis -You were one of the first bands in the beginning of 80's to mix of Western rock and dance styles of the Balkan region of Eastern Europe and other Mediterranean lands with Balkan music. Today this is usual, what can you call that kind of music and under which categories can you put your cd's to make them easy to find?

Ben M - I have a feeling that - for many people back in that 'Mustapha' time – we were the first time that they had ever seen or heard the kinds of music that we were playing. I'm not saying that we were the best, only that we were the first encounter – and hopefully we inspired listeners (and other musicians) to go deeper and listen wider. I think that we did. It's hard to imagine now, especially with the richness of YouTube, with downloading, file transfers and the rest.

WM Oasis - Where can we set the limits for the world music umbrella?

Ben M - Not sure! I am much more aware now of 'multiple identities' (as are all of the online marketers and profilers who collect data about us and our buying tastes!). So - you can be world music and traditional music and African music and reed-instrument diverse music and youth music and island music and political music and sacred music and new urban music and

field-recording and music from the archives and music from a very small place., and many more things of course. Or just ‘file under...’ the artist’s name. As far as filing CDs goes....I don’t know, when I was working with Globe Style we used the ‘retro rubric’ on the back ‘file under....’, and then put ‘world music / country / region / style’. It depends how specialist the shop is (or if there is a shop anymore

WM Oasis -Is the Dubliners, Carlos Santana, Fairport Convention, Gotan project, a part of world music or are they included in another category?

Ben M - Dubliners and friends as world music? Yes, if people say they are, why not? They are other things as well, but that’s OK. World music is a very flexible term, very porous along the edges – that’s a benefit, I think.

WM Oasis -The first compilation you have made 1987? Have you made a vinyl too, at the same time?

Ben M - The ‘world at one’ cassette was only a cassette – no vinyl. It was in cassette-format as it was a ‘cover-mount’ cassette attached to the NME [New Musical Express] magazine.

I compiled it – extra compilation credit went to Roy Carr, who proposed one of the tracks, and was on the staff of the NME (and, I think, perhaps responsible for aspects of the ‘cover mount’ series in general).

WM Oasis -why the title “the world at one” instead for just world music?

Ben M - The title is a kind of English language playing with words (we English like to ‘pun’). The phrase has various meanings:

It can mean ‘the world in harmony or in agreement with itself’ [to be at one with....]

It is also the name of a leading daily BBC Radio News show at 1 pm ‘The World at One’

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