

Interview

Grant Goddard

Radio specialist / radio analyst / radio consultant

Grant produced and presented in the 1980s, at Metro Radio the UK's first weekly 'indie music' chart show. At Capital Radio, he worked for the late Charlie Gillett's world music show, creating 'world music information packs' mailed out to hundreds of listeners, and he managed the station's charity projects. In the music industry, he was a member of the ad hoc committee that coined the term 'world music' and marketed it for the first time in the late 1980s. In 1985, he discovered Yemeni singer Ofra Haza in Israel and then promoted her music in the UK.

MORE INFO : <http://www.grantgoddard.co.uk/>

WM Oasis -Your radio career started in the early 1970s as a presenter on London pirate stations, playing soul, reggae and African music. How have you manage to get African music that early in London?

G.G -To be precise, I was playing soul, reggae and African music amongst pop music for several AM pirate radio stations in London. At that time, there were no specialist music pirate radio stations until Radio Invicta arrived and played only soul.

African music was occasionally heard on radio. Dave Simmons' Saturday soul show on BBC Radio 1 played a few African songs. I remember hearing Rochereau's 'Savon Omo' for the first time and recording it on a cassette that I still have. Steve Barnard's 'Reggae Time' Sunday lunchtime show on BBC Radio London played a few African songs. I remember hearing a track by Ngengas there.

African music was available in record shops in London. London had 20 to 30 reggae record shops that I would visit regularly and they often stocked a few African albums. African albums were regularly found in the 'bargain bins' of mainstream record shops and I used to buy them for less than £1. African pressings of EMI and Decca releases from Nigeria were the most common.

Two labels in Harlesden, London were releasing African albums in the UK. Creole Records released Fela Kuti albums and I remember buying 'Shakara' in 1972. Oti Records was a label run by Jamaican Sonny Roberts from his Orbitone record shop and I remember visiting him to buy the 'Nkengas in London' album in 1973.

WM Oasis -You are one of the members of the ad hoc committee that coined the term 'world music', what was the best thing you remember from that meeting. Were you one among them who voted for the name world music? Do you think the term is still available today with the internet, globalization, fusion etc...?

G.G - With hindsight, it is easier to imagine that our meetings were more important than they really were at the time. We had a problem – nobody could find our album releases in UK record shops – and so we had a few monthly meetings of like-minded people to try and solve the problem. We could never have imagined that the term ‘world music’ would spread beyond the UK or would last for 30 years! I attended for two reasons: I was working part-time for Globestyle Records, one of the UK labels releasing this music, and I was trying to interest people in artist Ofra Haza whom I had discovered in Israel in 1985.

I cannot remember there being a vote. The meetings were very informal. I remember that ‘global music’ was the other choice that was popular, but in the end it was ‘world music’ that was chosen, and I agreed it was the best of the slogans. I agreed to compile a new monthly chart of best-selling albums that would be published in ‘Folk Roots’ magazine. The chart only lasted a few months because it became difficult to get accurate sales figures from the handful of shops that were very interested in selling the music.

I was also working part-time for Charlie Gillett’s weekly world music show on London’s Capital Radio. I suggested that we could send a ‘World Music Information Pack’ to listeners who wrote in to the show. Charlie agreed and I researched and compiled a huge pack of info that I copied and mailed to people. We received hundreds of requests and each pack had about 100 pages of concerts, record releases, shops and books all connected with world music. I think this had a major impact in London on developing a ‘fan base’.

WM Oasis - Many people have given the credit of the world music expansion to Paul Simon, David Byrne, Ry Cooder and Peter Gabriel, while others think that the Beatles with Ravi Shankar, Rolling Stones with the Jajouka, Don Cherry, Meriem Makeba are the ones that should get the merit and the prestige for their contribution to have succeed to introduce the world music to the western audience. Are there other people we need to thank?

G.G - In addition to music artists, there are hundreds of people behind the scenes and companies that make things happen by taking risks with unknown music. I worked at Rough Trade Records for a while, so I have seen the ‘indie’ music system from the inside. I think it is impossible to single out individual people because nothing ever happens due to one person’s efforts alone. Catalysts are largely unsung – nothing is ever an ‘overnight success’. A lot of success is down to luck.

WM Oasis - Mike Hart says “There's no such thing as world music, if you're in the Philippines, Appalachian music is world music. ... *If you're a Pygmy in the Ituri rainforest, and you hear a radio playing Elvis Presley, or Beyoncé, that's world music*”. Somehow, I found that he has somewhere reason. What is your opinion about this explanation?

G.G - Within weeks of launching our ‘world music’ campaign, there were a few journalists (for example, Rick Glanville at City Limits magazine) who argued that ‘world music’ was the wrong description. I think all the critics missed the point – this was a commercial marketing campaign designed to sell music by unknown artists. We were not musicologists or ethnographers’ attempting to define what was or what was not ‘world music’. Some of the albums we promoted were recorded in London!

Until record shops started a 'world music' section, an album by Hugh Masakela was likely to be filed in 'rock/pop' or 'soul' or maybe even 'folk' in a shop. None of these would help sales of the album. I have explained how I used to stumble across African albums in mainstream record shops in the 1970s. I only found and bought them because I was willing to spend so many hours looking through thousands of records I was not interested in. Most people are not so persistent.

WM Oasis -After reading the hundreds of definitions in different books and on internet, about world music definitions I found in the end that the "local music not from here" expression of Ian Anderson is maybe the best answer to define the term. What do you think about his expression? Is it correct according to the agreement you made during the meeting?

G.G - Ian Anderson attended all the meetings and we agreed then that the term 'world music' simply implied 'local music not from here', nothing more or less. I think that phrase is in the minutes of the meetings. It still holds good.

WM Oasis -You friends John Peel and Charlie Gillett are two persons you have had a good relations with, and they have done too much to expand the music via the radio, two important persons who have left us early too. Do you still have contact with the rest of the friends from the meeting 1987?

G.G - I found that I could not make a living from my interest in and knowledge of 'world music', so I had to move back into commercial radio to make ends meet. The people I had known in world music I lost contact with, particularly after working overseas.

Again, we were not making any attempt to define what was or what not 'world music' was. I laugh now when I hear or see music described as 'reggae' or 'soul' that I would not think of as a suitable description. These names are nothing more than shorthand labels. They were the 'Google' of their times to help us locate music in a wholly physical world. Obviously, everyone's idea of what is 'jazz' or 'folk' is going to be different. There can never be a rigid 'descriptor' of a particular piece of music.

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