

Interview

Tom Schnabel

Thomas Schnabel is music producer, consultant, teacher, Journalist and author program director of world music at the Hollywood Bowl and Walt Disney Concert Hall, music consultant and DJ working out of Los Angeles. He was former music director of music station KCRW.

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

WM Oasis - You began producing radio for KCRW in 1977 where you became Music Director 1979-1990. You succeeded after to introduce World Music to public radio. Was there world music before you began to introduce it?

Tom S - No, there was only “international” which meant pop stuff like Tino Rossi or Nana Mouskouri; there was also “ethnic” music, such as the Ethnic Folkways, Smithsonian, Unesco, etc. that was usually field recordings. If you lived in Paris or Brussels you could probably find African music on lp at the time, but not here in the U.S.

WM Oasis - In July 1998, you have been honored by the French Ministry of Culture with the prestigious French Medal of Arts, “Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et Des Lettres,” for your work in furthering knowledge of world music in America. Why not the same by the English Ministry which have the pride to be the country where world music has been launched?

Tom S - I promoted a lot of Francophone music: Quebecois, French, African, Reunion, Seychelles, as well as zydeco and Cajun music. I didn’t do much English folk music, etc. World music means outside of the UK and Anglophone.

WM Oasis - I know that Billboard magazine introduced a world music chart the first time in the 1992. When did the term world music appear for the first time in the American society?

Tom S - I would say around 1984. Some British guys including Roger Armstrong, Ben Mandelson and Nick Gold coined the work. Charlie Gillett may have been involved too.

WM Oasis - The African music appeared in France and England in the end of 70’s- beginning of the 80’s thanks to artists like Touré kunda, Fela Kuti, Sunny Ade etc, Labels as Sonodisc,

Celluoid and festivals like Africa fête, Festival mêlissés de Angoulême (France) who opened their doors to artists from Africa and Asia. Who are the actors (artists, producers, labels) who did the same job in the United States?

Tom S - Feel, King Sunny, and lots of soukous bands in the late 80's. Celluoid did a lot, Real World also,

WM Oasis - on a question about when he heard for the first time the world music, Mike Hart answered: Well, I guess it would be the clave, and it would have to be Tito Puente and all those great Latin players in New York in the '50s. I grew up in New York, and at that time, there was a cultural explosion, where all these people were migrating to New York and they were mixing the African rhythms and the rhythms from Puerto Rico and Cuba, especially. And the clave was being reborn, using horns and set into the jazz medium. Also, in the indigenous mediums as well—the merengue, cha-cha, mambos. Was it during that period that world music appeared for the first time in the USA and is this the mix of different styles that they later called world music?

Tom S - No—tropical Latin (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia) is separate from world music. The first two “world music” albums in the U.S. would have been Olatunji Drums of Passion and the Missa Luba. Then there were also the Misa Flamenco and Criolla.

WM Oasis - You resigned your position as music director in 1990 to broaden your career as a record producer. You have produced a series of recordings under the name: **Trance Planet, vols. 1–5**. Do you call your music world music or is it something else. What is in that case the world music for you?

Tom S - I left KCRW because I was offered a nice job running a world music label for A&M. Good salary, benefits and budgets to produce albums. Unfortunately A&M changed its mind after just 8 months and our epic African album (Ry Cooder, Ali Farka Touré, David Lindley, Boubacar Traoré & others) never got recorded. that would be the launch album for Horizon Records and branded the label.

WM Oasis - Many people have given the credit for the world music expansion to Paul Simon, David Byrne, Ry Cooder and Peter Dinklage, while others think that Georges Harrison with Ravi Shankar, Brian Jones with the Jousouka, Mike Hart, Miriam Makeba are those who should have the merit to be the first to introduce world music to the western audience. What is your opinion about that? Is there other people we need to thank?

Tom S - The print media, radio like John Schafer and many others. also the clubs and concert venues that took the risk of bringing world music artists here.

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 have reason. What is your opinion about this explanation?

Tom S - I don't like judgments like this. the category world music was devised as a marketing term to put certain music in record stores, to help brand it. Hart is being narrow here.

WM Oasis - Ian Anderson from folkroots summarized the choice of the name world music by these worlds : Trying to reach a definition of 'WORLD MUSIC' provoked long discussions and finally it was agreed that it means practically any music that isn't, at present, catered for by its own category e.g.: Reggae, jazz, blues, folk. So my question is why all this people have been and still are trying to find a definition to the world music, when the people who created it have given a simply answer to that?

Tom S - I think you will find the answer to this in my book intro.