

## **#NoBorders. Världens Band: creating and performing music across borders**

Cassandra Balosso-Bardin, University of Lincoln

### **Introduction**

Bands comprised of members from different cultures and different musical backgrounds are not a new phenomenon. Since the rise of ‘World Music’ in the late 1980s, many multicultural bands and projects have achieved commercial and critical success.<sup>1</sup> In the UK alone, examples include Afro Celt Sound System, Salsa Celtica, Transglobal Underground, and collaborations such as The Chieftains with Galician musicians, the Imagined Village, and Sekou Keita and Catrin Finch; one needs only to pick up a world music festival programme to find more examples.

At first glance, Världens Band (the ‘World’s Band’ in Swedish) may seem to be another such project. With its thirteen professional musicians spanning six different nationalities, three different countries of residence (Sweden, UK and India), and at least two migrant members (Cissokho, born in Senegal and a Swedish citizen since 2013, and myself, a French national based in the UK since 2010), the band gathers multiple genres of music stemming from both inherited native backgrounds and acquired musical understanding through cosmopolitan practices. Yet, distancing itself from the historically more sample-based and collaborative world music bands such as Transglobal Underground (see Hesmondhalgh 2000:208-304) and departing from a familiar model where a well-known Western (generally male) musician or producer forms a line-up of artists around him, Världens Band is a live-music band with a fixed line up and an equalitarian peer-based intercultural music-making ethic. Indeed, the band was formed in order to create a gender-balanced, ethnically diverse and instrumentally eclectic orchestra where each member was to be perceived as important as the next, abandoning hierarchical roles such as the lead singer or a main artistic leader.

Unlike most set line-ups where members of a band live in close proximity (excluding occasional collaborative experiences; see Frith 2000:319), the geographical dispersion of Världens Band’s members limits the possibility to perform one-off concerts or mini-tours, as the financial implications for bringing the band together are heavy. Yet the band has managed to remain sustainable through successful grant bids from the Swedish and British governments—mainly through marketing itself as a young, diverse and gender-balanced group—and the development of a residency and tour ethos: the musicians come together for a certain amount of time (between ten and seventy days) during which they have an initial rehearsal period (three to six days) of long intense working days (up to twelve hours) where music is created, immediately followed by a tour with concerts at venues, schools and festivals. Initially conceived as a one-off project supported by funding from the Swedish Arts Agency in 2012, by summer 2014 Världens Band had developed into a fully-fledged professional band for a Swedish festival tour. In 2015, Världens Band embarked on a ten-week tour travelling to Sweden, Norway, Denmark and the UK (England and Scotland). At the time of writing, the band has performed over 150 concerts and recorded one EP (2014) and two albums (2015 and 2018) (Världens Band 2015b).

As a full member of the band since its inception, I occupy a privileged position, akin to Cottrell’s ‘native ethnomusicologist’ (2004:15) experience. Much like him, I was immersed in

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<sup>1</sup> See discussion about the word ‘multicultural’ in Taylor 2012:123-126.

the social networks surrounding the band even before it was created, witnessing the whole process as a full participant. Although my research only started later, my ongoing ethnographic training allowed me to observe and record from a unique standpoint the evolution of the band throughout the years. In order to complete my participant observation, I carried out, for the purpose of this article, in-depth interviews with eleven of the fourteen other band members.<sup>2</sup> In order to respect the trust of the musicians and our prior relationship, I was clear that only the interview material would be quoted directly and that no private and sensitive information revealed informally prior to these would be disclosed. However, thanks to years of collaborative work, I was able to ask some members to clarify and revisit positions that they had expressed in the past, thus enabling them to explore their opinions and clarify them in a more formal setting than during band meetings when emotions can run high.

The presence of clearly rooted musicians representing discrete music cultures could be understood as the ‘collaborative’ facet of the band, theorised by Juniper Hill when exploring how Finnish folk musicians interact with ‘world music’ (2007:69). Such musicians ‘[look] right’ (Howard 2007) and ‘[embody] immediate authenticity [as] an insider who “culturally knows”’ (Trimillos 2004:38). In *Världens Band*, this category is represented by a group of musicians that could be considered as ‘tradition’ or ‘culture bearers’. Charu Hariharan, for example, hails from a musical family and learned drumming and singing in Kerala with her guru; kora player Abdou Cissokho comes from a long line of griots; David Foley is a Scottish musician immersed in his tradition since childhood, winning national competitions; and Thea Åslund is the daughter of a violin maker in Dalarna, a Swedish region renowned for its active folk music scene (Aldskogius 1993:64).

Hill identifies two more ways of interacting with world music: through a musician’s personal connection with a musical tradition, often by taking lessons with a native instructor (ibid.:69) and through the incorporation of ‘disembodied sonic markers’ (for example using a didjeridoo as a drone), using the ‘exotic’ factor to signify their ‘participation in the world music scene’. Although several *Världens Band* musicians use instruments that are not linked to the individual’s native culture, these embody the acquired knowledge of a given musical culture rather than being a mere ‘exotic’ prop. For example, percussionist Mischa Grind, who plays a personalised percussion kit, undertook a year-long study trip in 2017 to different countries in order to learn vernacular drumming techniques with local masters. Similarly, percussionist Tobias Karlehag, who focuses on ‘traditional percussion instruments from the Orient’ has learned over the years with native tutors both in Sweden and Istanbul (interview, 19 May 2017). I include myself in this list, embodying cultural knowledge of other musical genres, acquired by travelling extensively and playing vernacular instruments such as the Galician and Aegean bagpipes with native musicians. This often leads confusion about my identity, with many assuming I have dual nationality. These examples neatly feed into Hill’s category of musicians who do not ‘belong’ to a community of which they are the musical tradition bearers but who have ‘deep personal connections borne of individual experiences’ through ‘extensive study and practice’ (2007:71).

I would add to these three categories a fourth type of interaction with world music, intersecting between these categories: musicians who have incorporated a plethora of musical styles due to regular exposure throughout their lives and understand this as a natural way of creating and interacting with music. Indeed, although many musicians within *Världens Band*

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<sup>2</sup> All interviews but one were conducted in English. The interview with Cissokho was conducted in French and translated by the author for this article.

can be considered to be culture bearers, this does not exclude their interaction with other types of music at a high level. Matthew Jones and Dave Gray, for example, identify as English folk musicians, yet they are also intimately familiar with French, Irish and Scottish music; David Foley, identified as Scottish within the band, is also half Irish and plays bodhran at competition levels; Hariharan, trained as a South Indian classical singer and mridangam player also composes for the South Indian film industry and engages with electronic music professionally. Similarly, band members without an inherited native musical background interact with music beyond Hill's categories: classically trained Swedish clarinetist Malmström, who recently pursued her interest in Turkish clarinet techniques by taking lessons in Istanbul with a well-known musician, also had to learn Swedish traditional music at a later stage as she was mainly a big band musician and involved in a social and musical environment that had no links to local folk music. More significantly, when discovering klezmer music as a teenager, she actively sought out a range of different courses that would teach her more about Balkan music and participated in world music ensembles where numerous music styles were approached (interview 27 May 2017). Thus, although Malmström is Swedish, it would be more accurate to describe her musical identity as 'cosmopolitan', with a specific interest in Turkish music.

This approach to music, considered as natural by several band members, further deconstructs the distinction between inherited musical practices corresponding to national identity and acquired musical practices. National borders are blurred through cosmopolitan music practices and migratory routes. Guitarist Matthew Jones considers that the 'added' influences allow the band to extend their 'transglobalness', beyond the culture bearers' realm of expertise (interview, 22 May 2017). This diversity, as I will show below, is addressed differently by traditionally rooted musicians, ranging from eagerness to learn to reluctance to accept that the music will never truly sound 'from' a specific culture. Thus, although the wide diversity of musical styles found in the group broadly intersects with national borders, it also diverges from clearcut national identities, as each musician brings with him or her a wealth of genres, whether inherited, absorbed or sought out.

Armed with fluctuating identities and the will to create music that both reflects and transcends them, borders are being constantly negotiated by Världens Band's musicians in musical, political and touring contexts. Focusing on the social agenda and the music created by the band, this article provides an example of cross-border and intercultural music-making from the musicians' perspectives. It responds to a call for case studies by scholars studying music and globalization, world music and intercultural music making (White 2012:6). In the following pages, I will discuss the band's self-definition as 'Transglobal Roots Fusion' before exploring how the band was created, defined by funding and mobility constraints whilst finding ways to incorporate a multicultural ideal through the strategic choice of musicians. I will then examine how the band's democratic ethics are applied, navigating national dominance socially and musically before discussing the notion of borders and how this emerges within the music, both politically and creatively.

### **'Transglobal Roots Fusion'**

Despite literally meaning 'the world's band' in Swedish, Världens Band consciously moved away from the generic, commercial and controversial 'World Music' label and branded its music 'Transglobal Roots Fusion', a term invented by Matthew Jones in an effort to define the group's sound for promotion purposes. Readily endorsed by the other band members, 'Transglobal' seemed to encapsulate the band's concept well, through the combination of

trans (across) and global (world), reflecting the multiplicity of musical influences used in the group. Nolan Warden theorizes the use of ‘roots’ as ‘music that historicizes or authenticates musical experience’ (2010). In the Världens Band’s context, it becomes a direct reference to music—both traditional and composed—sourced from the tradition bearers’ inherited musical cultures and interpreted by an orchestra of cosmopolitan musicians. Through the use of ‘roots’ alongside ‘transglobal’, Jones confers a sense of authenticity to the music played; the balance between ‘tradition bearers’ and ‘tradition borrowers’ anchors the music in native idioms, either imagined or real, through a variety of markers such as musical genres, native languages, vernacular instruments, stage costumes, physical appearance and spoken accents. It also frees the music from rigid imitation of style: tradition bearers allow the music to evolve, lending their heritage legitimacy, and work in tandem with tradition borrowers who flow from one style to another, adapting to the circumstances. The resulting music could be understood as a ‘glocal’ (Robertson 1995) sound: one anchored both locally through the tradition bearers and globally through the ensemble of musicians from different backgrounds, creating music that is accessible to an international audience whilst retaining numerous vernacular elements.

The claim to authenticity of the music produced is therefore found not in the discrete elements of music but rather in the collective arrangement of them; as Frith observes, ‘hybridity’ seems to have become the new ‘authenticity’ of the commercial world music discourse (Frith 2000:312). The world ‘fusion’, referring in this case to the collective incorporation of melodies and sounds from different musical cultures, has been much criticized, especially within the context of the commercialization of world music (see Taylor 2007:140-160). One of the criticisms of these word is that neither fusion nor hybridity take into account the notion of novelty (Brinner 2009:124, Bayley and Dutiro 2012:395). However, the nature of the band’s music-making process towards the creation of a new, identifiable ‘Världens Band sound’ is precisely created from the ‘joining of two or more things together to form a single entity’, the definition of fusion in the Oxford Dictionary of English (2017). With these three words ‘transglobal roots fusion’, then, Jones not only refers to the group’s different influences, but also summarizes the ‘contradictory struggle to secure the meaning of key notions’ used in the world music discourse ‘such as authenticity, roots, hybridity and the local’ (Stokes 2004:59).

## **The origins of Världens Band**

Key to the creation of Världens Band was the support of multi-instrumentalist Ale Möller, one of Sweden’s most acclaimed folk musicians, who collaborates extensively with musicians from different musical traditions.<sup>3</sup> In the years prior to the creation of Världens Band, Möller served as a role model for the members of folk-pop band Kolonien, the initial creators of Världens Band, more specifically his nephews, Erik and Arvid Rask. Arvid Rask reflected on his uncle’s constant music-making with musicians from different cultural and musical backgrounds:

‘Since I grew up with it, I took this thing for granted, its not exotic, it’s just there. I didn’t reflect about it so much. So doing this project and listening to world music is perfectly normal ... And also when doing these kind of projects ourselves, we had,

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<sup>3</sup> See [www.alemoller.se](http://www.alemoller.se), last accessed 15 June 2017.

just a phone call away, someone with the experience of doing this' (A. Rask, interview, 24 May 2017).

For the members of Kolonien, then, a cosmopolitan understanding of music, formed part of their native musical language, becoming a natural way of expressing themselves and influencing their future projects and creations.

Another key element to the creation of Världens band were the Ethno camps, founded in 1989 at the Swedish Falun Folkmusik Festival (FFF) by festival organizer and fiddler Magnus Bäckström and supported early on by Jeunesses Musicales International. Ethno project coordinator and press officer Peter Ahlbom remembers that 'the idea of Ethno was simply to give young folk musicians a chance to meet and play together during the festival and then do a concert in the end... with the purpose of crossing borders and making the world a better place already from the start, of course' (Ahlbom, pers. comm. 23 May 2017). A peer-to-peer learning culture was developed, encouraging participants to teach each other with the artistic leaders' support and guidance. Slobin describes the camp's objective as one of 'direct exposure to and exchange of music in a deliberate counter-cultural manner' (1992:49), leading to the creation of an intercultural affinity group (1992:48-49). During the concert, the leaders of a certain tune would come to the front of the stage, providing a visible and audible feature for the audience, supported by the rest of the group (see Gayraud 2016:115-124). As it became popular, the Ethno concept was exported by participants wishing to organise similar projects in their own country.<sup>4</sup>

In 2005, the Swedish government foundation Rikskonserter launched a complementary program called Ethno on the Road. Six Ethno participants would work together in a more intimate and selective setting before touring around Sweden for a couple of weeks, giving the young musicians a taste of the professional touring life and promoting Ethno Sweden to a wider audience. The six musicians, three female and three male, were selected from a hundred Ethno participants in order to form a balanced instrumental line-up with a diverse range of cultures. In 2010, Arvid Rask was selected to tour with this program along with five other musicians, three of whom were later invited to join Världens Band.

In 2011, Erik Rask applied for funding from Statens Musikverk, the Swedish Performing Arts agency, to create a large band of musicians from all over the world, as well as a world music festival in central Stockholm. Thus, the coming together of the musicians was initially conceived as a collective of smaller bands that would be able to play at the festival, supporting the larger collective band throughout the day (Rask, interview, 19 May 2017). The grant specifically required collaboration between two countries with four members of each nationality. Equally influencing the choice of musicians was gender equality, aiming for a 50/50 line up, which would reflect well on the application. The funding application thus strongly dictated the line-up, creating a strong bias for two main nationalities, which from the start challenged the desire to create a multicultural band, thus forcing the brothers to think creatively about the line-up, and invite several musicians with multiple music backgrounds to the group.

With a line-up heavily dictated by the demands of the initial grant, the Rask brothers made decisions founded on practical mobility decisions, based on the global market (cheap air

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<sup>4</sup> More information can be found on the Ethno camps' website: <http://www.ethno-world.org/countries/> (last accessed 28 January 2018)

travel) and international policy (visa-free movement within Schengen zone). Sweden and the UK were chosen as the two countries as, according to Arvid Rask, Ryanair flights were cheap and facilitated mobility. Ease of travel within Europe was a given: only two members from the initial line-up were non-European citizens, thus reducing visa applications. Today, only Hariharan from Kerala, India, travels with a visa and the band has increasingly noticed the difficulty that this poses, especially since 2015 when European countries started closing their borders; despite a six months temporary Schengen residency permit, Hariharan was stopped from boarding a plane to the UK in summer 2016 to play at Cambridge Folk Festival. When not on tour, the band relies on digital interfaces to communicate. Email, Skype, Dropbox and social media allow the group unit to function throughout the year, creating platforms where serious and less serious information can be shared, thus alleviating the isolation of members who are not regularly in physical contact with each other. A product of the neo-liberal world, Världens Band could not have existed in another time and age.

Within these constraints, Arvid gathered a group of musicians for an initial project in the spring of 2012. The Swedish hosts included the band Kolonien (guitar, mandola, fiddle and percussion) and folk-rock band Abra Makabra, adding a second fiddle and percussionist as well as a double bass player to the line-up. Four British participants were chosen from different Ethno workshops and strongly led by instrument choices, including a fiddle, a flute, a guitar and a melodeon. Other participants from Ethno on the Road included Hariharan (India, percussion and vocals) and myself (France, recorders and bagpipes). Finally, Rask invited two more people to balance gender and ethnic diversity: Stockholm based clarinetist Anna Malmström and Tanzanian vocalist and *ilimba* player Msafiri Zawose, who he had met at Ethno Tanzania in 2012. Emerging from this line-up is the gender balance within the orchestra, with men and women sharing the instrumental line-up, challenging the common divide between female vocalists and male instrumentalists.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Instrument(s)</b>	<b>Provenance and membership in VB</b>
Thea Åslund	fiddle, hardanger fiddle and vocals	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Cassandre Balosso-Bardin	bagpipes and recorders	France (2012-pres.)
Abdou Cissokho	kora and vocals	Senegal (2014-pres.)
David Foley	wooden flute and whistle	Scotland (2012-pres.)
Dave Gray	melodeon	England (2012-pres.)
Adam Grauman	bass, double bass, viola da gamba	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Mischa Grind	percussion	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Charu Hariharan	vocals and percussion	India (2012-pres.)
Matthew Jones	guitar and UK booker	England (2012-pres.)
Tobias Karlehag	percussion	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Anna Malmström	clarinet and bass clarinet	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Anna Möller	fiddle and vocals	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Arvid Rask	Mandola	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Erik Rask	manager/producer	Sweden (2012-pres.)
Alexander Thyberg	sound engineer	Sweden (2013-pres.)
<b>Past members</b>		
Msafiri Zawose	vocals and ilimba	Tanzania (2012)
Maisie Greenwood	fiddle	England (2012)
Rutendo Machiridza	vocals and mbira	Zimbabwe (2013)
Navah Elbaz	vocals	Tunisia (2014-2015)
Felicia Westberg	double bass (dep. for A. Grauman)	Sweden (autumn 2016)

**Table 1: List of band members current and past, their instruments and their provenance.**

When observing the above line-up, the most striking aspect is that the least stable members of the band are not from the UK or Sweden. Indeed, during the first few years different group formations impacted on the dynamic of the group as well as the repertoire. Although each member discontinued their collaboration with the band for different personal or professional reasons, this led to a feeling of insecurity amongst members who were not part of the founding members of Världens Band, destabilizing the democratic process as certain members from the dominant nations may have been perceived as more stable than others.

Cissokho, the last member to have joined the band and remained as a permanent member, may have been more successful in integrating the band and adopting the ethics of the group due to his personal background. Before he moved to Sweden in 2010, his older brothers had previously emigrated and established successful musical careers, collaborating with international musicians including Ale Möller. Cissokho's membership in Världens Band could therefore be perceived as continuing his family's migration pattern. Additionally, his recently acquired status as a Swedish citizen (granted in 2013), provided stability as he spends most of the year in Stockholm working as a musician as well as in a restaurant (interview, 21 May 2017). Cissokho therefore feeds the imagined cosmopolitan aspect of the group by representing Senegal through his presence and his musical background whilst simultaneously being socialised in Sweden, living in Stockholm and building his musical career following his brothers' footsteps.

### **A Social Experiment—Towards democratic leadership**



Although the Rask brothers were strongly influenced musically by their uncle, they diverged from him when it came to the social organization of the group. While Ale Möller emerges as a strong bandleader, choosing the artists and leading the artistic choices (E. Rask interview, 19 May 2017), thus emulating a more autocratic model (see Hackman 2005), Världens Band was conceived closer to the Ethno ideal of peer-to-peer learning. Rask had the vision of a ‘group identity’ that would concentrate on the whole and feel like a solid unit. In order to do this, he developed a strategy that would allow each individual to feel valued and part of the group.

I remember thinking that one of the main challenges is that half of the band is from Sweden and they know each other very well, they have tight connections and all speak Swedish. Because they were the norm .... a key thing was to get everyone involved so it didn’t become an exclusive club ... so that all fourteen people<sup>5</sup> in the band would form a group identity as quickly as possible instead of seeing all the things that separate the group as the main thing in the group (Rask, interview, 24 May 2017).

Well aware of Swedish dominance within the group, Arvid Rask used strategies during both rehearsals and leisure time to ensure that each individual was heard and felt comfortable within the group. Mirroring Kofi Agawu’s recommendation for ethnomusicologists to focus on ‘sameness rather than difference’ (1995:389-390)—which echoes Owe Ronström’s theorization that ‘sameness’ enhances the feeling of shared identity (1989:97)—Rask encouraged the group to concentrate on similarities, moving the focus away from the cultural and personal differences, thus allowing the group to form around a common goal. Critically addressing White’s remark that ‘encounters occur on the terrain (or at least on the terms) of the powerful, who mostly ignore the privilege that allows them to play by rules of their choosing’ (White 2012:7), Rask showed remarkable sensitivity and awareness of the Swedish dominance in the group:

Världens Band has a really strong European culture in it and preferably Swedish norms, political views, right and wrong, any way of communication has been dominated by what’s common in Sweden because half the people of the band are from Sweden, and even thinking, working with this approach to groups is very typical in Sweden (interview, 24 May 2017).

As the band’s ‘entrepreneur of identity’ (Haslam and co 2010: xxii), Rask’s creation of a strong group that worked well together and felt united was, for him, the primary goal; this process, he insisted, was important as it would guarantee a good result:

The main goal was never the concerts actually ... it was sort of the group process ... [i]f we could get the group to become a good group together, as comfortable as possible, then the rest would solve itself, because a strong group would solve the problem of a good concert. But it’s really hard to make a good concert without a strong group (A. Rask, interview, 24 May 2017).

Thus, according to Arvid Rask, the coming together of these individual musicians was a social experiment, with the concerts as a consequence rather than the aim of the social gathering. This echoes Bayley and Dutiro’s conclusions that, for a successful intercultural

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<sup>5</sup> Rask is referring to the band in 2012 when there were fourteen musicians involved. Shortly after this, Erik Rask decided to take on a managing role reducing the number of musicians to thirteen. Currently, there are thirteen musicians, one manager and one sound engineer, all who are considered as members of Världens Band.



collaboration, two elements must be avoided: putting ‘the emphasis ... on an end product for promotional purposes and commercial gain’ and when a ‘directive rather than collaborative’ relationship is established, thwarting dialogue (2016: 400-401). Although Bayley and Dutiro theorised these conclusions from a very different type of intercultural collaboration, the ‘co-creative aspect’ of the project is relevant to Världens Band. Despite their young age at the time (22 and 23 years old), the Rask brothers were aware of the importance of well-managed communication in order to maintain a solid group ethic with each musician on as equal a footing as possible. The different communication methods resulted in an imperfect, but overall convincing democratic ethic within the group that was, as I show below, translated to the rehearsals, musical material and performances.

### **Toward democratic artistic leadership**

Since very early on, Erik Rask emerged as the logistical leader of the band, choosing to manage the band instead of participating as a musician. Throughout the years, Erik supported a democratic organization of the team, allowing space for musicians to voice their opinions and concerns, as well as make collective decisions about the band’s professional goals and trajectory. Despite his overarching roles as main producer and manager, Erik Rask has over time shared his responsibilities with other members of the band; more recently Anna Möller slowly emerged as the rehearsal mediator, shifting the dynamic away from the previously male-dominated leadership roles. She became the main online coordinator for artistic content during the year, pushing the creative conversation forward, organizing the band’s rehearsal schedules and working on the arrangements, proposing via Dropbox elements that musicians could learn, work on, and reflect upon prior to meeting up.

Whilst logistical and managerial roles are overall well-defined within the band, artistic leadership is intentionally much more fluid and shaped differently at every gathering. Thanks to the band members’ common Ethno experience, the overarching concept of peer to peer learning and shared artistic leadership was a given. During rehearsals, artistic leadership is given to the individual(s) who brought the music to the group. Although the arrangement process is collective, the artistic leader(s) shape the discussion and are consulted regarding aesthetics of the music.<sup>6</sup> For example, a recent piece called ‘Mauri’ was composed and brought to the band by percussionist Karlehag and clarinetist Malmström. Artistic decisions were taken as a group and ideas were altered as people voiced their opinions on the arrangement. Karlehag and Malmström, as architects of this particular piece, were more vocal about its musical direction; meanwhile, Möller controlled the timeframe, often pushing the band into taking artistic decisions due to the lack of time for lengthy discussions. This process, initially modelled on the Ethno camp rehearsals, has now become an organic and enjoyable part of communal music creation, allowing the band members to feel ‘safe’ to voice their opinions and be part of the artistic and creative process.

Despite this ideal model, a lack of time combined with personal traits such as self-confidence or even musical familiarity with the material has led to some imbalances. Jones underlines that ‘there is not the time for all the ideas. It’s the most frustrating thing with a big band like this, I have ideas that have not been heard’ (interview 22 May 2017). Cissokho also used the term ‘frustrating’ to describe his feelings when the ideas of the same three of four people were

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<sup>6</sup> This echoes the shared leadership system used by the group Orpheus, where one person is designed as concertmaster for a given piece but the overarching communication regarding logistics is overseen by a single individual (see Hackman 2005:136).

repetitively adopted, silencing the creativity of the better part of the band (interview, 21 May 2017). Åslund underlines how her social place in the band departs from the usual driving position she occupies in smaller projects: 'I feel like I am very much a listener and observer ... I have learned ... that it's as important to know ... when you should back off'. The rotating leadership, however, means that she has 'more responsibility and feeling for a tune' and she becomes 'more eager to get [her] ideas into the arrangements' (interview, 23 May 2017). Similarly, Hariharan found that she 'might get a bit frustrated of being unable to contribute into such phases of arrangements because the language of music is different. [Indian music is] melodic and Western music is harmonic' (interview 16 May 2017). However, Hariharan addresses this issue by treating it as a learning experience, lending her expertise when leading on her melody. These moments underline the difference between the democratic ideal of the band, where every voice is as important as the next, and the reality of certain moments that emerge during rehearsals, when a handful of voices seem to dominate the decision-making process, leading less vocal and/or less culturally dominant people to feel frustrated.

Despite this, the systematic rotating artistic leadership (see table 2) seems to provide a temporary platform for members with less vocal or forceful creative opinions. New ideas and voices emerge as artistic expertise is shifted and the power balances are re-evaluated. Thanks to this system, a model closer to equal representation is allowed to emerge, hand in hand with the desire to feature each member of the band as equally as possible in the music. This, ironically, is at times established by more vocal participants or artistic leaders, volunteering other members for solos or features. However, transposing the democratic ethic to the material and staged performances, the resulting concerts lead the audience to perceive that '[e]ach exceptionally talented musician plays with individual expressionism, whilst fusing together as one colourful, global tribe' (Mayall 2015). Set lists, like the one copied below, are devised to find a constant balance, featuring every musician at least once as a soloist, supporting the balance between the individual and the group:

Set list for Kungsbacka Teater (Sweden), 5 November 2016 (Erik Rask replacing Arvid Rask, away on paternity leave)		
Transition	Piece (main artistic leader(s))	Features
Straight in	1. Leva som dom lär (Kolonien) <i>Composed by Kolonien, arranged by VB</i>	Orchestra introduction Cissokho: vocals and kora Hariharan: vocals
Straight in	2. Tamzara (Malmström) <i>Armenian melody</i>	Orchestra Malmström: clarinet (solo)
Dave Gray introduces	3. Sabou (Cissokho) <i>Composed by Cissokho with integrated Norwegian melody and improvised solos</i>	Cissokho: vocals and kora Möller and Åslund: Fiddles Foley: flute solo (improve) Hariharan: vocal solo (improve)
Straight into	4. Samsingen (Möller) <i>Traditional ballad, arrangement and lyrics by Möller</i>	Möller and Åslund: vocals and fiddles Westberg: bass solo
	5. Kelou/Kissed by Fire (Cissokho/Foley) <i>Compositions by Cissokho (song) and Foley (instrumental)</i>	Cissokho: vocals Foley: flute Gray: melodeon
Foley talks about album on sale	6. Farewell to Govan/Superfly (Foley) <i>Traditional/composition by Kevin O'Neill</i>	Jones: guitar Möller: fiddle Balosso-Bardin: bagpipes Foley: flute Åslund: vocals
Break		
Straight in	1. Thillana (Hariharan) <i>Composition by Lalgudi Jayaraman</i>	Hariharan: vocals Balosso-Bardin: recorder (solo)
Cissokho talks about the song	2. Revolution (Cissokho) <i>Composition by Cissokho</i>	Cissokho vocals and kora
E. Rask tells the story of the band	3. Mauri (Karlehag and Malmström) <i>Composition by Karlehag and Malmström</i>	Orchestra Karlehag: tar Mini solos: melodeon, recorder, Hariharan vocals
Balosso-Bardin talks	4. Sweltering Night/Bulgarian (Balosso-Bardin/Åslund) <i>Composition by Balosso-Bardin/Traditional</i>	Balosso-Bardin: recorder Malmström: clarinet (solo) Melody instrument focus Grind: Tapan Karlehag and Hariharan: percussion solos
Möller short intro	5. Krafthalling (Möller/Åslund) <i>Traditional melody, lyrics by Möller</i>	Möller and Åslund: vocals and fiddle Malmström: bass clarinet Balosso-Bardin: rap
E. Rask introduces the whole band	6. Final set Muineira del verano (Balosso-Bardin) Begglen (E.Rask/VB) Pressed for time (Jones/Foley) <i>Compositions by Balosso-Bardin, Cissokho/Rask, and Gordon Duncan</i>	Balosso-Bardin: bagpipes Cissokho: vocals Orchestra

**Table 2: Set list for Världens Band's concert on 5 November 2016 at Kungsbacka Teater (Sweden)<sup>7</sup>**

As shown in the table above, showcasing the individual within a unified group is a central part of Världens Band's ideology. Here, the set list illustrates the diversity of artistic

<sup>7</sup> Many of these arrangements can be heard online at <https://soundcloud.com/varldens-band>

leadership, the numerous features and the different voices presenting the melodies. Rhythm Passport's review noted that the performance 'highlight[s] the individualities living side by side in the group and allow[s] them space to express themselves. In this way, the musicians can emphasise their origins and display their skills' (Canepari 2015).

Off stage, mediated meetings were organized with uninterrupted speech time for each member, to share feelings and thoughts about the music but also about the group, often at critical moments in order to release tension that had built up within the group, primarily stemming from the stress of touring in a large band with little to no personal space, long working days and very few days off with no travelling or performing, and sometimes due to personal issues between band members which strained the group. Despite a few hiccups in the first years and several changes in the line-up between 2012 and 2015, the initial idea of a strong group ethic seems to have worked. Each musician that I interviewed reinforced the social aspect of the band, calling it: 'a special band', 'a group of friends', 'a family', 'a collaborative experiment', 'a collective experience'. Reflecting on this, clarinetist Anna Malmström considers that from the audience perspective, people can see that 'this is a group, they all know each other but they are all different and yet they are all the same' (interview 27 May 2017). This echoes percussionist Tobias Karlehag's vision of the band as 'a small culture': 'it is such a big group that we make like a small culture, a small culture of Världens Band' (interview 19 May 2017). The 'new community of musicians' (Bayley and Dutiro 2016:402), empowered by the musicians' affinity to cosmopolitan music-making (after Slobin 1992:48), is influenced by the 'directionality—the flow of influences and information' (Brinner 1995:176) between the musicians and between the leaders and the group (both logistically and artistically).

### **Music: borders or no borders?**

The united group ethic established over the years translated itself into the music, especially when Världens Band transitioned into a professional group from 2014 onwards. Over time, most band members increasingly rejected the notion of borders, choosing to be represented through their music as a unity rather than as individuals from different nations. This desire to reject borders, primarily initiated by Swedish members, specifically emerged during the 2015 autumn tour, at the height of the refugee crisis in Europe, prompting turbulent political contexts throughout the world in general and Scandinavia in particular. Whilst travelling through Sweden, Denmark and the UK, Världens Band's Swedish members became increasingly vocal and critical about Denmark's measures to dissuade refugees from coming to their country. In reaction to this, the band started reflecting on their politics, emerging with strong humanist ideals that were simultaneously projected on them by the audience. Writing for the Review Graveyard in October 2015, Nick Smithson noted that: '[i]n coming together ... Världens Band ... exhibit[s] how music can unite and create a common understanding across sociopolitical and cultural borders. They are a seemingly impossible group that always had the potential for possible conflict with religious and political differences; by using music as their universal language and common ground, they have blossomed into an explosive orchestra that aims to challenge norms and prejudices'. The stark contrast between the band's international mobility and crossing borders that were becoming increasingly closed, including in Calais where high barbed wire fences and an impressive police force were deployed to protect the British border: 'we saw all these people, 100 of people walking on the rail tracks ... and people turned away by the police', (Karlehag, interview 19 May 2017), led a shift in the group's values. They became a political band through their mere existence, without having to utter a single word about politics on stage. Referring to band members through their

instruments and naming the musical pieces by their titles rather than by the national provenance of the main musical influence, became a symbolic but important gesture towards the deconstruction of nationality within the group, resisting the xenophobic constructs witnessed every day in the media and on the road and refocusing the attention on a more in-depth and meaningful collaboration based on diverse musical skills, individual personalities and intercultural entente.

However, whilst the rejection of national borders preoccupied many band members they clearly defined others, such as Foley, who identifies as Scottish and makes a clear distinction, both politically and musically, with his English colleagues. However, within the scope of the band, he privileges the 'who and how' over the 'where from' and rejects identifying pieces by their 'nationality' (interview, 19 May 2017). He also described the band as having 'a deep rooted sense of multiculturalism and inclusiveness' and that it also 'supported feminism' (pers. comm. 19 May 2017). Further, despite the will to '[remap a] world without boundaries' (Bohlman 2002:149), this No Border ideology contrasts with the band's promotion material on which the different nationalities are advertised, printed on either side of the logo (see figure 2). Sound engineer Thyberg comments on this paradox: 'It's a bit weird to claim that no borders, nothing matters, where you're from ... It's hard to talk about the band we are without talking about countries and differences' (interview 22 May 2017). Further, despite the musicians' emphasis on the collectiveness of the arrangements and their willingness to integrate as many individual influences as possible, obtained both from native and cosmopolitan heritages, festivals regularly brand the band as Swedish or at times Sweden/UK, thus obliterating the multicultural ideology of the band by firmly anchoring it in one or two nations.

### **'Borrowed' repertoire**

As previously established, the inherent cosmopolitan nature of many of the musicians' musical education led them to understand hybridity as something natural and desirable within music-making. The willingness to create a new sound from the amalgamation of all the individual voices seems to take precedence over the perceived authenticity of a tune 'borrowed' from another culture. Jones acknowledges that the music can 'go beyond each of our individual nationalities, it goes to each our individual interests' (interview 22 May 2017). Fitting Hill's third 'global folk' musician category—someone with personal connections and knowledge in a non-native repertoire due to extended contact with that musical culture (2007:69)—Malmström is aware of the ethical implications of 'cultural appropriation'. She however rejects this notion immediately by underlining the fact that although some melodies are 'borrowed' the band does not try to imitate one style to perfection, an approach which many university world band leaders have adopted to 'maximize authenticity' (Averill 2004:100) and avoid 'accusations of cultural appropriations and misinterpretation' (Solís 2004:17).

Further justifying the use of 'borrowed' music, Erik Rask argued that stylistic authenticity did not seem to affect the audience's enjoyment: Reflecting on the Armenian melody brought to the band by Malmström, he points out that they 'have a friend in Gothenburg who is Armenian from Turkey. He loves that we are playing this Armenian tune. ... He thinks we play it really well and it makes him feel proud that we play music from Armenia. He's been sending it to friends around Europe saying "look at this!"' (interview, 19 May 2017). However, despite this affirmation, there are few 'borrowed' melodies in the band's set list (three out of twelve in Table 2) and many have gradually been replaced by other tunes.

However, Rask does comment on the fact that the music is geared to be accessible to a Western audience and goes as far as calling this a ‘compromise’:

If we were playing in India we would probably play differently. I’m of the opinion that if you are in a touring band, it’s more fun if you play music that the audience will enjoy ... I’d say yes, definitely we ...compromise the music to make it accessible for the audience and venues we play in. On the other hand, ... that does not mean that you are untrue to yourself, or that you are compromising with your musicality (Rask, interview 19 May 2017)

Different nuances of compromise emerge here. Commercial compromise, also understood by artists as ‘selling out’, giving way to the pressures of the market dictated by powerful labels or producers (see Hesmondhalgh 1999:36), is different to intercultural compromise which encourages the musicians both to make their music intelligible to their audience and to find common ground in order to facilitate musical collaboration. Indeed, although Världens Band performs to a predominantly Western audience and uses an overall harmonic and tonal system, as pointed out earlier by Hariharan, the band has, for example, resisted singing in English, instead offering lyrics in Tamil, Hindi, Wolof, Mandinka, Jola, French and Swedish. The language of the lyrics was brought up several times over the years by flute player Foley. English translations would attract an Anglophone audience. The rest of the band, however, disagreed and English has, to this day, not been included in any of the songs. The good reception of the band in the UK does not seem to warrant changing languages either.

### **‘Traditional’ Repertoire: a musical compromise?**

Leading on from this, when asked about whether this musical compromise was corrupting the music, Hariharan clearly responded that this was not the case. Speaking about Thillana in Maand, a dance melody composed by violinist Lalgudi Jayaraman in the South Indian Carnatic style, she remembers choosing the music for the band:

‘This particular composition seemed very appealing to me and I was personally very inspired by it. I could hear layers when I listened to it first ... It is based in major. Doesn’t have a lot of Indian *gamakas* (intonations), but still retains the traditional elements, has beautiful rhythmic intricacies... I think I made a good choice that VB can learn and play well. Thillana sounds amazing in our band and that’s not just my opinion. I’ve made people here listen to it and they’ve loved it’ (Hariharan, pers. comm. 16 May 2017).

However, it took longer for other musicians to come to terms with the fact that the group was not anchored in any specific musical culture, but rather the bedrock of a new musical space. David Foley, who supported the independence of Scotland during the 2015 referendum and strongly identifies as a Scottish national despite his mixed Irish/Scottish background, struggled for years with Världens Band’s hybridity and lack of common specialism in a certain type of music:

‘For me it was very difficult to compromise for a long time because I thought playing tunes not as well as a Scottish band was a bad thing but then I realized it was nonsense because we weren’t a Scottish band. It ... [was] a long process of realization. It wasn’t something that was easy to let go of. I think I realized last tour that it would never

sound the way I wanted it to be. As soon as I realized that, ... I thought the end goal would be just as good but I thought about it in a different way. Why would two English guys be able to play Scottish music? ... Why would Charu have the groove of a reel? Why would [fiddlers] Anna and Thea get how to do the ornamentation? ... It's very short-sighted not to realize that and it isn't a bad thing because it's the way it is. It does mean you have to pick your material more cleverly but it doesn't mean it's a bad thing.'

Letting go of his expectations to recreate Scottish music seems to have come as a relief, allowing him to look at the material from a different standpoint. Both Hariharan and Foley's comments point to a strategic choice of repertoire for the band, taking into account the individual stylistic limitations of the musicians but also the endless possibilities provided by an orchestra with 'weird acoustic instruments' (Thyberg, interview 22 May 2017). Overall, the consensus within the band seems to be that despite supporting and consciously engaging with multiculturalism both on and off stage and within and beyond the band, the important element is creating music that forms a 'new musical culture' (Hariharan, interview 16 May 2017). Through coming together to play music, the musicians create a unique space that translates into a new and unique sound. Pipa player Wu Man describes this space as a 'middleground' (Bayley and Dutiro 2016:391); Bhabha refers to this 'new area of meaning and representation', which is hybridity, as a 'third space' (Bhabha 1990:211).<sup>8</sup> The sum of all the individual music makers creates what Cissokho describes as a 'symmetrical orchestra', a group where each individual has his or her own space and has as much of a presence as any other member, where everyone plays an instrument from their musical background and where everyone becomes a leader on stage and in the arrangements. It is in this third space that the 'Världens Band sound' can emerge, through composition, collective arrangement and the fusion of each individual's musical abilities.

### **The third space: composition**

Over the years, composition became more and more prominent in Världens Band's music as musicians started bringing their material to the band. Composition becomes a way of controlling the ownership of the material, enabling creative licence and thus stepping around the issues of 'cross-cultural appropriation' (Hill 2007:73). Cissokho, who has been bringing his compositions to the band since he joined in 2014, comments on this process:

'In Världens Band there are six different origins. If we play folk music it means I have my folk, you have your folk and the other person has their folk and so on ... I don't want to feel like it's Senegalese music. If I want a Senegalese group, I'll go to Senegal and create a Senegalese band. But even the name, Världens Band ... has said everything ... It's important not to limit ourselves. "We must play traditional pieces, we must". No! Those who create traditional music are people like us. Our grandparents were not more intelligent than us. Why not create our own music? Of course, we can take traditional pieces but we make them ours. There, that's it. It's us, not English, not Swedish. That's important' (Cissokho, interview, 21 May 2017).

Cissokho echoes musician Baaba Maal's view that tradition is a 'vital, practical force that is constantly transformed through use' (Sugnet and Maal 1997: 188). His reasoning also points to Taylor's notion of 'strategic inauthenticity' (1997:125), developed partly through the analysis of Youssou N'Dour musical practice: through the integration of new cosmopolitan

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<sup>8</sup> See Taylor 2012:140-160 for more on hybridity, world music and globalization



influences acquired through travel and musical exposure to different styles into his music, he counteracts the Western demand for ‘authenticity’. Similarly, Världens Band moves closer to a sound that Cissokho describes as ‘ours’ or ‘us’ through collective rehearsals and arrangements, taking on board the variety of influences brought by the different band members. Although, as Cissokho points out, the origins of tunes are often clearly identifiable, the collective arrangement process enables an almost organic fusion between different musicians’ ideas. This freedom of arrangement, liberated to a certain extent from the ‘authentic’ values attached to the interpretation of music within a given style or tradition, was repeated several times by the musicians. Hariharan emphasized the need for ‘free expression’ in music, summarizing Malmström’s understanding of how the band creates music: ‘we have our traditions and we mix them, take them out of context and it feels like we do whatever we want with it...’ (interview 22 May 2017).

The ‘Världens Band sound’, as Malmström puts it, reflects the ethic of this group, transcending national borders by creating a new musical space where composition and collective arrangements devised under a democratic and rotational leadership system allow the musicians to control the authenticity discourse. ‘Sabou’, for instance, was composed and brought to the band by Cissokho in autumn 2015. Under his artistic leadership, the tune was arranged collectively and features, amongst other things, a riff invented by Gray, a Norwegian influenced melody brought by Möller, and an improvised raga by Hariharan complete with a jazzy response by Foley (see [https://youtu.be/jk\\_M7F1bdLE](https://youtu.be/jk_M7F1bdLE)). Cissokho’s compositions led other band members to bring their own compositions the following year. For the 2016 ‘Transglobal tour’, the set list featured no less than seven original compositions.

However, despite advocating ‘free musical expression’ and feeling that one can create music without any restrictions, the above discussion shows that the ‘free’ music making of Världens Band happens within the scope of carefully chosen repertoire for the orchestra often with the perceived expectations of a Western audience in mind. This translates in creating new repertoire that portrays the band members as culture bearers—whether imagined or not—such as Cissokho composing melodies with a strong Senegalese aesthetic or Jones composing a reel clearly within the aesthetic realm of British folk music language. As Hyunju Park observes, ‘the process of hybridity is not one of absolute free choice but one of constant compromise between what might be desired creatively and what might be accepted commercially’ (1998, quoted in Frith 2000:309). However the ‘togetherness’ of the group, cultivated over the years has led the musicians to feel comfortable in the music-making process, familiarizing themselves with the imposed limits of musical ability and knowledge as well as the Western market in order to go beyond them and create a space where music-making has become a communal and positive experience, defining through the collective arrangements the sound of Världens Band one tune at a time.

### **Closing words**

The notion that the group has, over the years, created what they understand as the ‘Världens Band sound’ refers to the constant fusion of different cultures created by a group with fluctuating musical identities, channeled into arrangements to form a united orchestral sound. Whilst the fusion of musical styles does not set the group apart from other World Music projects, the way in which the defining orchestral sound is achieved does. First of all, the band has a long-term vision, leading to a long-standing collaboration and a stable line-up, challenging the common ‘guest artist’ collaborations that lead only to superficial music creation. Their consistent approach has allowed them to work towards the creation of a new

and unique musical language, the sum of their collective skills, instruments and personalities. Secondly, democratic teamwork has eliminated the role of a dominating voice, often that of a Western male figure. This, combined with an awareness of gender balance, challenging gender inequalities found in the musical world such as the separation between female vocalists and male instrumentalists, or female performers and male arrangers/composers and encouraging equal participation in orchestral work, solo features, compositions and arrangements, has encouraged each member to find their space within the band, evolving as personal and professional ambitions and goals change throughout the years. Thanks to this, the democratic ideology has found its way into the group's creative, social and performative spheres, becoming visible to the audience when performing on stage. Finally, the band challenges a rigid perceptions of identity by embracing a cosmopolitan approach to music making, based on the fluid identities embodied by each musician within the group. By combining a vision of music making that challenges more conservative 'authenticity' discourses with an ideal of democratic artistic leadership, Världens Band offers a contemporary vision of world music making, letting go of national borders and identities to create music that reflects a modern, cosmopolitan world.

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