

— “All Connected Through the Gypsy Part of Town”: The Gypsyfication of East European Immigrant Identity in U.S. Gypsy Punk Music

Abstract

This essay analyzes the emergence and popularity of Gypsy punk music in New York through the prism of the genre's most popular band, Gogol Bordello and the group's front man Eugene Hütz. It argues that Gypsy elements and those elements perceived as being “Gypsy” function as marketing tools intended to draw listeners into a musical sphere that is perceived to be on the fringe of popular music but in reality is a centrifugal force through which white American cultural hegemony is brought into focus and turned in on to itself. Through an analysis of Gogol Bordello's music and performance style, it shows the ways in which Gypsy punk music focuses in and inverts a power dynamics between East European immigrants and the broader American public.

In the last decade or so, much interest in popular Balkan and Gypsy music genres has been generated among middle class white American youths through a proliferation of Eastern European popular music on internet sites such as MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, and numerous others.² Gypsy groups in particular have had increasing opportunities to perform at a variety of performance venues ranging from dance clubs to festivals throughout the United States, among them the widely publicized Caravan Festival (1999, 2001), which featured musical groups such as Maharaja from India, Fanfare Ciocarlia and Taraf de

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² WNYU Radio at <http://wnyu.org> hosts a radio show called “Gypsy Part of Town” which draws its name from the Gypsy punk band Gogol Bordello's 2005 album “Gypsy Punks: Underdog World Strike.”

Haïdouks from Romania, Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble from Spain, and Esma Redžepova from Macedonia (Silverman, 2007). Gypsy bands such as Kal from Serbia have also performed at American universities, generating a following among college-age youths who perceive Balkan-influenced music as authentically village-based, with a modern twist in terms of instrumentation, arrangement, and lyrics. Gypsy punk borrows elements from these traditions such as verse and refrain song structure, the prominent use of the accordion, violin, and guitar, instrumental improvisation, and vocal interjections. Nevertheless, the Gypsy punk style as espoused by groups such as Gogol Bordello functions less as a type of roots music and more as a form of post-modern cabaret that fuses hard-edge, anti-establishment aesthetics characteristic of punk music with eclectic costuming that ranges from Soviet-era military hats to belly-dancing scarves and striped pants in the style of court jesters.

Notions of “Old World” are embodied in the persona of popular Gypsy punk entertainers in the United States such as Gogol Bordello’s front man Eugene Hütz. Hütz speaks with an accent, has a gold tooth, and presents himself as a cross between a village bumpkin and the poster-child for the postmodern citizen of the world. One of Hütz’s biggest draws is the fact that he manages to diffuse the information about his exact ethnic roots. Born in Kyiv, Ukraine, he was displaced because of the Chernobyl catastrophe and lived with his family for three years in refugee camps in Austria, Italy, Poland, and Hungary before arriving in New York in 1999. He uses such stories to market himself as a person who has no specific roots to any one place but feels and acts at home everywhere. In many ways, Hütz presents himself as an itinerant Gypsy, an identity he superimposes onto his immigrant status in the United States.

Taking into account Gogol Bordello’s growing international audience and the impact that Gypsy punk music has had on Balkan-influenced underground scenes worldwide, this essay offers insights into how and why Gypsy punk musicians celebrate ethnic diversity by blurring Gypsy and East European immigrant symbolism within a multilingual and multicultural post-modern kaleidoscope of sounds. The music “Gypsyfies” Eastern European immigrant identity in tandem with a crisis among college-aged students regarding white Americans’ self-perceived lack of ethnic “culture.” The aura of un-place-ability, itinerance, and worldliness surrounding “Gypsiness” allows it to be appropriated by musicians and audiences that have little or no cultural connections to East European Gypsy identities per se.



| Gogol Bordello performs at the 9:30 Club in Washington DC to a predominantly young, middle class white audience, January 2, 2010 | Photo author. |

Gypsy Punk as a Way of Being

As a graduate student living in New York in the mid-2000s, I expanded my dissertation research on Gypsy music in Ukraine by conducting interviews with musicians and audience members at Mehanata, a Bulgarian bar on the lower east side of the city. A relatively small space with a performance stage that is level with the dance floor, Mehanata features young musicians who play a fusion of Mediterranean, Balkan, and Gypsy music on a variety of modern and traditional instruments. When I attended the dance evenings at Mehanata, its most frequent patrons were young male migrant workers from Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. They danced in a circle and reacted to each other's footwork that altered according to the rhythm of songs popularized by artists in the Balkans. In less than five years, the ethnic make-up of live musicians and audiences at Mehanata has changed dramatically and comprises many white middle-class Americans without East European roots or with no active cultural connection to their East European heritage.

Serbian ethnomusicologist Marjana Lausevic, in an ethnography that analyzes the popularity of Balkan music and community dance outside the Balkans, views Balkan dancing

in the United States as providing community-based interaction for people who otherwise have no ethnically-based social ties (Lausevic, 2007). While Lausevic is correct in her assessment and her arguments can be carried over from traditional Balkan music scenes to popular venues such as Mehanata, a further explanation for Mehanata's popularity among white Americans is perhaps the increased proliferation of Balkan-influenced music in mainstream American popular culture. For instance, the soundtrack to *Sasha Baron Cohen's* popular film "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan" (2006) features the Romanian Gypsy brass band, Fanfare Ciocarlia, Esma Redžepova and Kočani Orkestar from Macedonia, the music of Goran Bregović, and Mahala Ra Banda (Noble Band from the Ghetto) from Bucharest, Romania.

On the one hand, the Gypsy signifier in music lures audiences with promises of unrestrained, passionate, and perhaps dangerous if not immoral sounds, a stereotype that is reiterated regarding Gypsies in American culture as much as it is perceived as such worldwide. On the other hand, "Gypsy music" is interpreted as an infinitely stretching category, which has not and perhaps might not ever be claimed by one particular group or music genre. Due to the historical roots of this term in Europe which have been discussed in-depth elsewhere, it is relatively easy for diverse groups of people to lay claim to it, interpret, and present it with less restraint (Malvinni, 2004). It is a category that is plagued by what I refer to as a premise of "presentation without clarification," one which functions and works in the musicians' favor within the Gypsy punk scene as well. For instance, Eugene Hütz presents himself in interviews as having come from a Servy Roma family in Ukraine. According to a 2006 film "The Pied Piper of Hützovina" which chronicles Hütz's "return" to Romani settlements in Transcarpathia, home to groups of Roma that differ culturally, musically, and linguistically from Servy Roma in central and eastern Ukraine, it is evident that his musical upbringing did not involve participation in much, if any, Gypsy-influenced music making. In other words, musicians such as Hütz use "Gypsy" as a marketing category through which they gain shares of the world music market in the United States.³ This is possible because "world music" is marketed primarily in terms of fusion aesthetics that allow for a blurring and lack of critical distinguishing between what is "real" and what is "interpreted." Furthermore, the scene functions as an inclusive forum through which everyone lays claim to the "source" of music. Again this is possible because the sources – Romani musicians themselves – are greatly underrepresented and largely voiceless in these scenes.

3 While the term "Roma" is used as a political signifier, "Gypsy" is used in the marketing of music in the United States.

“Gypsy” as Marketing Category in Western Popular Music

A specific marketing strategy that has positioned “Gypsy music” as a tripartite genre eclipsing traditional, popular, and fusion music characterized by various Gypsy music styles emerged with the collapse of socialism in the early 1990s. Gypsy musical traditions from the Balkans, Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union began to circulate increasingly within the Western-dominated world music market, spurring a proliferation of compact discs, field recordings, and Gypsy-influenced popular genres. Competing world music markets have contributed to growing opportunities for Romani musicians in particular to record and disseminate their music on the world stage.

Due to converging discourses that arise from increased opportunities for Romani musicians on the international arena and the growing awareness of Gypsy music genres among non-Roma worldwide, the “Gypsy music” category can thus best be understood as a broad marketing category comprising 1) any music performed by musicians of Romani descent; 2) Gypsy music performed either by Roma and/or non-Roma; 3) traditional and popular fusion musics that incorporate elements of various Gypsy musical expressions, texts, and performed by Roma and/or non-Roma, 4) Romani-based styles that are differentiated according to gender, age, socio-economic background, and the musician’s country of origin. These subdivisions, while not meant to overemphasize the musical diversity among Romani musicians and imply a divide among Roma and non-Roma (*gadje*) musicians involved in “Gypsy music” scenes, nevertheless loosely account for the wide variety of music genres that are marketed as “Gypsy” on the contemporary world music scene.

Interestingly enough, it seems that young audiences in the United States do not question the perceived authentic Gypsy roots of Gypsy punk music. Interviews with audience members and with students in my world music classes at the University of Pittsburgh reveal that the majority of listeners believe that the sounds the musicians produce are rooted in a variety of Gypsy music styles from Central and Eastern Europe. As Hütz reveals in “The Pied Piper of Hützovina” documentary film, his lack of previous knowledge regarding Gypsy music led him to create a sound that fused various traditional and popular musical elements. During his visit to Romani settlements in Transcarpathia, he states of the music: “Whatever I dreamt is basically real.” In this sense, Gypsy music functions as a category that can be filled with one’s own perceptions, emotions, and experiences. The ethnic Gypsy is deemed unnecessary – rather non-Gypsy musicians use the figure of the Gypsy to channel their ideas of what Gypsy music is and should be.

The Gypsy as Immigrant

Though the dominant stereotype regarding Gypsies worldwide is that of musician, the idea of the Gypsy nomad has been most frequently engaged within Gypsy punk music. The Gypsy nomad is a person who is perceived to come from elsewhere, who allegedly feels at home everywhere, and yet belongs nowhere. In many ways, Gypsy punk music blurs the figure of the Gypsy and that of the East European immigrant. In American popular culture, an immigrant is culturally identified as a person who speaks, acts, and socially engages others in ways that are often based on values that allegedly differ from the status quo. This amalgamation of characteristics does not fall far away from popular perceptions of Gypsies as people who have historically been marginalized and ostracized by majority populations due to cultural differences as well. The immigrant, like the Gypsy, is rejected socially but embraced culturally, a lure of the foreign and exotic, one whose cultural offering is consumed but accepted only in certain contexts.

In the song “Underdog World Strike” by Gogol Bordello from the 2005 album “Gypsy Punks: Underdog World Strike” the protagonist, a foreigner in the United States, criticizes the hierarchical distribution of wealth within American society. In his rap, he states that even a rich girl may be lured to the “Gypsy part of town,” implying that even girls from proper white families will listen to Gypsy punk because it is good, powerful music, even if such behavior is culturally and socially unacceptable in their milieu. The message seems to be that money can’t buy happiness, freedom of expression, and a strong sense of identity. Such cultural tropes blur cultural stereotypes traditionally associated with Gypsies with the identities of male, working class East European immigrants in the United States.

I am a foreigner and I’m walking through new streets
But before I want to I see the same deeds
Inherited by few, a power machine
That crushes you and strangles you
Right in your sleep

But be it me or it’s you, the leisure class
I think we all know
That be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound
It is all connected through
The GYPSY part of town...
Let’s go!

It's the underdog world strike!

And let your Girl Scouts lip-synch about the freedom
Just the way you want them
But soon enough you'll see them
Soon enough they all, they turn around
And soon enough you see them in a different part of town

But be it me or it's you, the leisure class
I think we all know
That be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound
It is all connected through
The GYPSY part of town...
Let's go!

It's the underdog world strike!

I am a foreigner and I'm walking through new streets
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But be it me or it's you, the leisure class
I think we all know
That be it punk, hip-hop, be it a reggae sound
It is all connected through
The GYPSY part of town...
Let's go!

It's the underdog world strike!

Gogol Bordello positions the “Gypsy part of town” as a far-reaching musical formula that is powerful and flexible enough to influence a variety of music genres, be it punk, hip-hop, or reggae. Though the song functions more as a spoken rap over a quadruple dance

meter accented by dissonant violin, accordion, and guitar improvisations, the invocation of genres not traditionally associated with Gypsies in Eastern Europe reveals how broadly the “Gypsy” framework is stretched among underground musicians and audiences in the United States and abroad.⁴

The East European Immigrant as Gypsy

A variety of musics marketed as “Gypsy” have gained an increased following within both the United States and Europe due to increased marketing within the world music niche. However, like the image of the immigrant who leaves a homeland, the “Gypsy” is marketed as if he belongs nowhere and answers to no one. The Gypsy is a curiosity and his/her energy is a draw. This culturally diffused identity, presented as an amalgamation of everything and nothing, opens a perceived circle where anyone can enter and experience creative energy. Carefree and unrestricted by social and physical boundaries, this fusion in popular music draws on a variety of instruments, vocal traditions, rhythms, and embellishments that projects an idea of a life free from social, historical, and economic constraints. Like the immigrant who has left the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia and cannot return to a nation-state that no longer exists, the Gypsy and the East European immigrant are inclined to create a socio-cultural micro-cosmos that functions within itself, innovating by incorporating and fusing a wide-range of cultural elements from within themselves.

East European immigrants who have come to the United States since the fall of socialism have dealt with numerous stigmas regarding East European identity in the United States. From the late 19th century to World War II, East European immigrants were among the largest group of poor, uneducated migrants to the United States. Portrayed in American popular culture as having a lack of access to education, economic betterment, and political representation, East European immigrants of the 20th century aimed to assimilate, to shed the stigma of village-based traditionalism (Rubin and Melnick, 2006). A 2007

4 A song titled “Gypsy part of town” was released in 2004 by J.U.F. (Jüdisch-Ukrainische Freundschaft), a collaboration between members of Gogol Bordello and the Gypsy punk group Balkan Beat Box. The song features Middle Eastern vocal embellishments that aim to further orientalize the already “Gypsified” frames of performance by repositioning the sounds in a context that evokes identities that reach beyond the U.S. and Europe.

television commercial for Comcast Digital Cable attests to the continuing stereotypes that Americans have regarding East Europeans. The commercial features “The Slowskys,” two turtles who are overwhelmed by the digital revolution and prefer slower-paced digital service. The name identifies the turtles as ethnically Polish (“slow” plus “sky”, a typical ending for a Polish surname) and taps into cultural stereotypes regarding Polish-Americans as “slow,” meaning backwards and dumb.

In contrast, the majority of East European immigrants in the last twenty years are educated and enjoy relative economic success in the United States. As such, many East European immigrants have increasingly begun to rebel against the pressure to culturally assimilate into American society. The immigrant accent, food, and way of being, once shunned in public discourse, are thus embraced in American popular culture, particularly in films and music. This is illustrated very well in the film “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan” in which Sasha Barren Cohen parodies the trope of the Eastern European Other through the manifestation of a fictional character from Kazakhstan. The film appears to make fun of the East Europa on many levels. The title of the film purposefully makes use of improper grammar to capitalize on the stereotype that immigrants cannot master the dominant language. The quality of the filming alludes to the lack of technological development within the film industry during the Soviet era. Cultural nuances such as humor, clothes, dinner etiquette, gender and race relations are set-up to show the perceived backwardness of a person from the former Soviet Union. However, in creating various improvised scenarios, the film inverts these tropes to show the high levels of anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia that prevail in American society. In so doing, the film evens out the playing field between the majority and East European immigrants to show that white Anglo-Saxon Americans have no basis to judge or criticize others because they are no more “American” than others. “American” is understood here as open-minded, cultured, accepting, and free from the constraints of “tradition” that immigrants are perceived as being hindered by. In fact, the Central European/Eastern European/Central Asian comes across as smarter, economically resourceful, and able to integrate him/herself in new environments without losing a sense of self.

In similar vein, there is an increased attention in American popular culture to “white” Americans for their perceived lack of “color,” contributing to what I call “white America’s

5 Many white students in my world music courses at the University of Pittsburgh express their anxieties that they do not have a hyphenated ethnic identity, whether Slovak-American, Italian-American, or Irish-American.

crisis of hyphenation.”⁵ The 2002 Hollywood blockbuster film “My Big Fat Greek Wedding,” which celebrates a union between a Greek-American woman and a white American, focuses on the positives of ethnic heritage, a large family, food, and merriment. White Americans are mocked through humor and pitied because they are perceived as lacking “culture,” a framework through which all “normal” people express their innermost human emotions of joy, laughter, and tears. Such sentiments are clearly evidenced in Gogol Bordello’s song “American Wedding” from the 2007 album “Super Taranta”.

Have you ever been to American wedding?
Where's the vodka, where is marinated herring?
Where's the musicians that got the taste?
Where's the supply that's gonna last three days?
Where's the band that like Fanfare
Gotta keep it going 24 hour!

Ta-tar-ranta-ta-ta
Super taran-ta taran-ta ra-ta ta

Instead it's one in the morning
and DJ's patching up the cords
Everybody's full of cake
Staring at the floor
Proper couples start to mumble
That it's time to go
People gotta get up early
Yep, they gotta go

Ta-tar-ranta-ta-ta

People gotta get up early
And she's got a boyfriend
And this whole fucking thing
Is one huge disappointment

And nothing gets these bitches going
Not even Gipsy Kings
Nobody talks about my Supertheory
Of Supereverything!

So be you Donald Trump
Or be an anarchist
Make sure that your wedding
Doesn't end up like this

Ta-tar-ranta-ta-ta...

I understand the culture's of a different kind
But here word "celebration" just doesn't come to mind!

Ta-tar-ranta-ta-ta...

Have you ever been to American wedding?
Where's the vodka, where is marinated herring?
Where's the musicians that got the taste?
Where's the supply that's gonna last three days?
Where's the band that like Fanfare
Gotta keep it going 24 hour!

The video to "American Wedding" opens with a drab room filled with guests dressed in black and white attire. The character of Eugene Hütz, dressed initially in similar fashion to the guests, expresses his disdain and disappointment at the lack of revelry. Changing into his court jester-like yellow and black striped pants, he joins a group of Gypsy women dressed in colorful Russian Gypsy Teater Romen influenced costumes sitting in another part of the room. Expressing his disgust to them, he moves to change the tablecloths, food, and clothes of the wedding participants. He motions for the Gypsy women to teach the guests how to dance, by shaking their shoulders, dancing in a group and jumping to the rhythm of the Romen influenced music rather than dancing as couples with slow movements. By the end of the song, the guests have been "transformed" and the physical change in the color of the room signals the altered flavor of the celebration.

In this song, having fun in a Gypsy and/or East European immigrant style implies acting in ways that may seem different or deemed inappropriate by people who do not have that shared experience of social singing, dancing, and drinking. Yet the fun of the other is most alluring, most appealing, and seemingly somewhat dangerous. By opening opportunities for others to engage in their type of fun, the outside group shifts the power dynamic in terms of who constitutes public values of normalcy in regards to behavior and expression of self. Like the Gypsy, the East European immigrant is embraced as being more colorful, vibrant, and exhibiting “culture”.

Both the Gypsy and the East European immigrant resound within Gypsy punk music as citizens of the world. This postmodern perception of individualism allows Gypsy punk musicians to draw on discourses of the original, powerful, and the authentic in terms of musical style, performance aesthetics, and marketing. As Gogol Bordello extends their influence into Latin America, releasing their newest album with Portuguese vocals, samba, and Spanish guitars inspired by the band’s recent experiences living and working in Brazil, it behooves ethnomusicologists to analyze the ways in which cultural aspects of “Gypsiness” resound with new audiences across the globe. What messages does samba-infused Gypsy punk carry in milieus that have fewer direct cultural notions of Gypsy experiences and East European immigrant identities? It seems that one thing is for certain – only localized ethnographic research that focuses on in-depth audience experiences can shed light on the ways in which cultural notions of “Gypsiness” have come to influence new developments in popular music throughout the world.

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Resumé

Adriana Helbig

„Všechny nás spojuje romská část města“: Poromšťování identity východoevropského přistěhovalce v gypsy punkové hudbě v USA

Undergroundová hudební scéna v USA je od počátku devadesátých let 20. století ovlivněna styly vycházejícími z rytmických a melodických rysů balkánské a romské hudby. Na gypsy punkové hudební scéně, která vychází z newyorské klezmerové scény, se podílejí imigranti z východní Evropy, Američané východoevropského původu, bílí Američané i američtí židé. Tato scéna zároveň spojuje představy o Romech s identitou východoevropských imigrantů. Zhruba v posledních deseti letech se výrazně zvedl zájem o žánry balkánské a romské hudby, což souvisí mimo jiné s šířením hudby z východní Evropy na webových stránkách jako MySpace, Facebook, YouTube a další. Skupiny hrající tyto žánry začaly vystupovat i na mnohých festivalech v USA; například známý Caravan Festival (1999, 2001) hostil hudebníky jako Maharaja z Indie, Fanfare Ciocarlia a Taraf de Haïdouks z Rumunska, Antonio el Pipa Flamenco Ensemble ze Španělska, nebo Esma Redžepova z Makedonie. Následkem této popularizace především americká mládež začala vnímat balkánskou hudbu sice jako původně venkovskou hudbu, ve které se však uplatňují i moderní hudební nástroje, aranžmá a texty. Gypsy punk si pak z těchto tradic půjčuje jednotlivé prvky jako jsou struktura verše a refrénu, výrazné užití akordeonu, houslí a kytary, instrumentální improvizace a vokální vsuvky. Nicméně gypsy punkový styl, reprezentovaný kromě jiných skupinou Gogol Bordello, funguje spíše jako určitá forma postmoderního kabaretu, který v sobě spojuje estetické rysy punkové hudby, namířené proti establishmentu, s eklektickými kostýmy, mezi kterými najdeme všechno možné, od vojenských čepic z éry Sovětského svazu až po šátky břišních tanečnic a pruhované kalhoty ve stylu dvorních šašků.

Frontman skupiny Gogol Bordello, Eugene Hütz, původně pochází z ukrajinského Kyjeva, v důsledku černobylské havárie však byla rodina nuceně přestěhována. Sám Hütz pak žil v uprchlických táborech v Rakousku, Itálii, Polsku a Maďarsku, tři roky před tím, než se dostal do New Yorku v roce 1999. Tyto různé části své osobní historie Hütz využívá k budování vlastní image jako člověka, který sice nemá nikde opravdové kořeny, zato se však cítí doma kdekoliv, přičemž se především prezentuje jako kočovný Rom a tuto identitu nadřazuje statu imigranta ve Spojených státech.

Gypsy punková hudba je oslavou etnické rozmanitosti v tom smyslu, že v rámci ní jako pestrého multilingvního a multikulturního postmoderního kaleidoskopu zvuků dochází k roz-

mazávání a vzájemnému propojování symboliky romských a východoevropských přistěhovalců. V článku se Adriana Helbig zabývá tím, proč a jak k tomuto míšení dochází. Gypsy punková hudba podle ní „poromšťuje“ identitu východoevropských přistěhovalců do USA. Přítahuje navíc členy mainstreamové americké společnosti, kteří prožívají jistou krizi ve vztahu k vnitřně identifikované absenci vlastní „kultury“. Aura ne-zakotvenosti, vy-kořeněnosti, kočování a protělosti světem obklopující vše romské dává možnost připojit se k tomuto hudebnímu stylu i těm hudebníkům a posluchačům, kteří sami nemají s východoevropskou romskou identitou jako takovou vůbec nic společného.

Srbská etnomuzikoložka Marjana Lausevic zabývající se světovou popularitou balkánské hudby a tance, kterého se společně účastní celá určitá skupina lidí, uvádí, že důvodem této popularity v USA je právě společný charakter těchto tanců, který dává příležitost komunikovat v rámci určité komunity i lidem, kteří jinak neudržují žádné etnické založené sociální vztahy. Helbig k tomu dodává, že rostoucí popularita balkánské hudby mezi bílými Američany se dá vysvětlit také rozšířením hudby ovlivněné Balkánem v mainstreamové americké popkultuře. Jako příklad uvádí soundtrack k filmu Borat (2006) s hudbou rumunské dechovky Fanfare Ciocarlia, Esmy Redžepové a Kočani Orkestar z Makedonie a také s několika skladbami Gorana Bregoviće a skupiny Mahala Raï Banda z Bukurešti.

Helbig připomíná – a na příkladu Eugena Hütle, součástí jehož hudebního vzdělání evidentně není to, že by nějak výrazně hrál s Romy, demonstruje –, že kategorie romské hudby je velmi široká a neexistuje skupina nebo jeden konkrétní žánr, o kterém by se dalo říci, že romskou hudbu nejlépe reprezentuje. Proto je také pro různé skupiny lidí relativně snadné romskou hudbu interpretovat a prezentovat. Dá se tudíž říci, že hudebníci jako Eugene Hütz užívají termín romská hudba jako prodejní značku, skrze kterou mohou ve Spojených státech získat podíl na trhu s world music. K tomu jim pomáhá i fakt, že na scéně world music se do velké míry stírají hranice mezi „autenticitou“ a „interpretací“ a autentickým romským hudebníkům se na ní nedostává příliš prostoru.

Adriana Helbig si všimá komercializace romské hudby a souvisejících změn v pojetí její definice (tuto část článku trefně nadepisuje titulkem Romská hudba jako prodejní značka v západní populární hudbě). Strategie prezentace romské hudby jako hudby tradiční, populární i fúzované byla vytvořena krátce po rozpadu Sovětského svazu v devadesátých letech 20. století, kdy se na západním trhu s world music začaly ve větší míře prosazovat vlivy romské hudební tradice ze zemí post-komunistického bloku. Postupně vytvořené marketingové označení „romská hudba“ zahrnuje všechny následující charakteristiky: 1) jakákoli hudba interpretovaná hudebníky romského původu; 2) romská hudba hraná Romy nebo Neromy; 3) fúze tradiční a populární hudby, která vstřebává prvky různých romských hudebních výra-

zů, textů a může být produkována Romy či Neromy; nebo 4) romské styly dále diferencované podle pohlaví, věku, socio-ekonomického původu a země, ze které pochází jejich interpret. Zdá se však, že mladé americké publikum nepochybuje o autentických kořenech gypsy punkové hudby a věří, že tento styl vychází z rozličných stylů romské hudby střední a východní Evropy. V tomto smyslu je dle Adriany Helbig romská hudba vnímána jako kategorie, jejíž obsah si může doplnit každý sám na základě svých vlastních emocí, představ a zkušeností. Účast etnických Romů na takové hudební produkci přitom není nutná; naopak, neromští umělci zde často uplatňují své vlastní představy o tom, co romská hudba je nebo jaká by měla být. Tak o své zkušenosti mluví i Hütz v dokumentárním filmu „The Pied Piper of Hützovina“ (Strakatý pištec z Hützoviny) – svojí hudbu z nedostatku znalosti samotné romské hudby založil na fúzi různých prvků tradiční i populární hudby a při pozdější návštěvě romských osad konstatuje: „Všechno, co jsem si vymyslel, je tady v podstatě reálné.“

Adriana Helbig si dále všímá paralel mezi tím, jak jsou v americké společnosti vnímáni Romové a východoevropští přistěhovalci. Na gypsy punkové scéně je nejrozšířenější představa Roma jako kočovníka, tj. člověka, který pochází odjinud, všude se cítí jako doma, ale ve skutečnosti nepatří nikam. Z některých úhlů pohledu se zdá, že představy o Romech se na gypsy punkové scéně mísí s představami o přistěhovalcích z východní Evropy. V americké popkultuře je přistěhovalec kulturně identifikován jako osoba, která mluví a jedná na základě jiných hodnot. Stejně jako Romové, kteří jsou historicky marginalizovanou skupinou, jsou i přistěhovalci v USA sice společensky odmítáni, ale jejich exotická kultura je – do určité míry – akceptována. Pojetí Roma a východoevropského přistěhovalce se tudíž v rámci amerického trhu s world music do značné míry překrývá: imigrant, který opustil Jugoslávii nebo Sovětský svaz, se – stejně jako Rom – nemá kam vrátit, protože stát, ze kterého odešel, už mezitím zmizel. Proto imigrant i Rom inklinují k vytvoření svého vlastního sociokulturního mikrosvěta, který do sebe nasává širokou škálu dalších kulturních prvků.

Historická marginalizace a ostrakizace Romů má také jistou paralelu ve vnímání přistěhovalců z východní Evropy americkou majoritní společností: od konce 19. století až do druhé světové války tvořili imigranti z východní Evropy největší skupinu chudých a nevzdělaných přistěhovalců do USA. Aby se zbavili stigmatu vesnického tradicionalismu, chtěli se ve 20. století co nejrychleji asimilovat do většinové americké společnosti. Naproti tomu většina východoevropanů, kteří přišli do Spojených států v průběhu posledních dvaceti let, je vzdělaná a v Americe relativně ekonomicky úspěšná. Proto se mnoho z nich začalo postupně bouřit proti tlaku kulturní asimilace. Jejich kdysi znevažovaný přízvuk, kuchyně a způsob života si nyní užívá pozornosti americké popkultury, a to hlavně ve filmech a v hudbě. Příkladem je i film „Borat“, který v posledku naznačuje, že bílí anglosaští Američané nemají právo soudit

a kritizovat přistěhovalce z východní Evropy, protože sami nejsou o nic více kulturní, tolerantní a prosti „tradic“, kterými jsou údajně imigranti omezeni. Imigrant z tohoto porovnání nakonec vyjde jako chytřejší, ekonomicky zdatný a schopný se adaptovat do nového prostředí, aniž by ztratil sebe sama.

Adriana Helbig také upozorňuje na souvislost s krizí identity bílých Američanů. Na příkladu filmu „Moje tlustá řecká svatba“ ukazuje, že v dnešní době jsou vyzdvihována pozitivně etnického dědictví a bílým Američanům je naproti tomu vyčítán nedostatek takovéto kultury. I Romové a přistěhovalci z východní Evropy jsou považováni za zajímavé a pestré lidi, kteří milují život, a – jak naznačuje text a klip k písni „American Wedding“ (Americká svatba) od Gogol Bordello – umí se narozdíl od bílých Američanů bavit. Jejich zábava ale není v žádném případě uzavřená, proto každý, kdo má zájem, se může připojit a stát se její součástí. Ostatně totéž platí i o americkém pojetí romské hudby.

Eliška Vránová

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