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Global Beat Fusion: The History of the Future of Music

Author: Derek Beres



Book Review by William Doty, Ph. D., Professor Emeritus of Humanities and Religious Studies at the University of Alabama. Dr. Doty, the editor of *Mythosphere: A Journal for Image, Myth, and Symbol*, is a prolific writer, translator, and editor who has published fourteen books and over seventy essays in a wide range of journals on topics including religious studies, anthropology, psychology, classics, and art criticism. His best-known book is *Mythography*.

Frequent readers of any of the various schools of speculative fiction/"science fiction" will be aware that there are terms no author has to clarify when using: *sophont*, for instant, or *maglev* — for magnetic levitation of vehicles, already a daily experienced reality in countries outside the now rather backward technology of the USA. Derek Beres's first book was to me — someone with several decades of music study and performance, producing classical programming for a public radio station, and managing a chamber orchestra — a bit like a non-habitué of sf suddenly reading an sf classic. It seemed like at least a hundred types of world music — "international electronica" — and as many instruments that I'd never heard of.



No matter: he clarifies many in a glossary or in the text (an index would have helped enormously). The point is no "match the columns" quiz here, but "Relax, dude [or is it — at 66, I'm no longer sure I grok the argot — dudess] and enjoy the light show!" Or in this case *soundshow*, and while I've never experienced the DJ'd club scenes Beres is a master at, I've had my earwax simply melted away by the CDs he has mixed and sent to me over the last year. (We met briefly at the Mythic Journeys 2004 conference, where he presented *Mythika Electronika*; turns out he did a BA in Religious Studies at Rutgers, where I used to teach).

There are so many things going on in this volume, it is sometimes like relapses to MJ '04 and hints of the forthcoming '06. But as with Journeys, it coheres, largely thanks to Beres's *energy*, coming from a source deep within his praxis of yoga/s (which he teaches in New York). And I am reminded of Joseph Campbell stating that his yogic practice was underlining books as he read — clearly Beres's "other" yoga is Joe's as well, because he's been a Voracious Reader, and a

student especially of Asian-Indian materials. His style is sometimes off the wall with philosophical and religious insights that suggest an ancient mind in his young frame.

The book cries out for digital hypertexts — I don't think I might have been so impressed with it, had I not had those CDs in my inner head (check out samples on his website at www.globalbeatfusion.com; his first published DJ-mixed CD, *Moving Stillness*, on One World Music came out in May). But it remains wonderfully humane, not spacecat stuff, largely because he remains clear about how his own autobiography is something to be proud of (Hungarian roots, maybe Rom, the way I've sometimes wondered if American Indian blood flows in me). And how skillfully and respectfully he turns repeatedly to statements from the many world music performers he's worked with. They are carefully cited (and photographed) in the same manner to indicate his respect for them all; he is a marvelously sympathetic interviewer, as he has shown in many performance and artist reviews in music mags and online.

The "future" of the subtitle that Beres presages is rooted in the various "folk" musics that global beat fusion enfolds (or "infuses," as American Heritage Dictionary suggests: "To introduce (a solution) into the body through a vein for therapeutic purposes"). But not just as quaint tones ukuleled at a Honolulu luau — "folk" as in Astor Piazzola's astonishing tangos for bandoneon that Kronos Quartet has featured, or the sort of extravaganzas my generation experienced in the bravura performances of Ravi Shankar. We are at a point where a truly 21st century musical scene is being birthed, and this book (alas without accompanying CD) is a bit like the US Declaration of Independence. Forget where *we have been*; here's the Ellis Island gates disgorging a whole new mythical musicality.

As a child in mountain New Mexico, I used to be glad when I was ill on a Sunday morning, and could stay home to listen to the one hour of classical music to be heard (of course, on a commercial station — "culture" to the vast majority of the American landscape has always meant "elitist"). That one hour a week led me to a lifelong love, to piano and then cornet and for the longest stretch of time, French horn and solo/choral voice.

I think *Global Beat Fusion* might be the equivalent of that hour for many people, not of course, necessarily to my classical path, but to a revolutionary/ evolutionary sonic awakening. Reading this book, one realizes that "music" to Derek Beres is as it was to the ancient Greeks: not what one practices after the day's lessons and homework, but an attunement of the psyche, a (piano-)tuning of the intellect, an emotional discipline that may stabilize one's life, even to long-life and the hereafter, should there be one.

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