

Around the World in One Night, Courtesy of Song

MUSIC REVIEW

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Even where Tanya Tagaq hails from — Nunavut, the territory in northern Canada that is home to several thousand Inuit people — the ancient art of throat singing is in short supply. But at Webster Hall on Sunday night, where Ms. Tagaq, who is Inuit, performed as part of the world music showcase Globalfest, she made it sound fiercely contemporary, futuristic even. Recalling animal noises and various other nature sounds, she was a dynamo, delivering a sort of gothic sound art while she stalked the small basement stage with feral energy. Ms. Tagaq regularly collaborates across genres, including several works with Björk, and her vicious act suggested she may have been studying that Icelandic eccentric for performance points, and perhaps also Beyoncé. And possibly Laurie Anderson.

Most of the performers at Globalfest, which featured 12 acts on three stages over five hours, were traditionalists of a slightly more faithful stripe. This festival, now in its sixth year, presents a casually touristic view of a handful of the world's musical cultures, though true strangeness is rarely prized. Instead, many of the groups here verged on genre originalism — the night was often a streamlined, somewhat homogenized representation of the world's music — even if many are themselves carpe diem artists, style revivers and nostalgists.

The showcase is presented with the annual conference of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters, which gathers talent bookers from across the country who can help turn a promising band with a small following into a reliable generator of road money, an appealing proposition for art-



Kailash Kher, left, led his band, Kailasa, from India, and Calypso Rose of Tobago offered a bit of levity with her bawdy songs.



ists like these, working far outside the major label system. The result is something of a Darwinian affair, with acts not playing for their supper per se, but maybe for a few months' worth of suppers later this year or next.

Here, the most musically expansive acts were often the most thrilling. The Chicago-based Occidental Brothers Dance Band International played a winning amalgam of Ghanaian highlife and rhythmically inventive post-rock. And Kailash Kher's Kailasa, a seven-piece band including four percussionists, imagined a jam-band read on Sufi music. The compact Mr. Kher, a noted Bollywood playback singer and judge on "Indian Idol," the televised singing competition, was the flashiest and most charming of the night's performers, a star comfortable with stages bigger than the one he had here.

Many of the night's other acts tried assiduously to keep a straight face musically, much to their detriment: Chicha Libre, from New York, played light,

Globalfest Webster Hall

overly polite cumbias, and L&O, from France, offered whimsical chanson cabaret verging on preciousness. There was a shambolic set by Brooklyn Qawwali Party, which plays jazz-funk variations on the Sufi devotional music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. The Brazilian samba singer Márcio Local was tender, perhaps too tender to leave a mark (though not too much for the many women in his crowd, swaying side to side, suggestively biting their lower lips), and La Troba Kung-Fu, charming Spanish purveyors of Catalan rumba, lacked percussive thump.

Saddled with the night's earliest time slot, the Hot 8 Brass Band, from New Orleans, was technically agile, but its set had the listlessness of the obligatory. (In this context the sound of the second line is another local heritage style in need of preservation.) Had it played later in the

night, it certainly would have been received as enthusiastically as the event's closing act, Watcha Clan, from France, whose toothless drum 'n' bass and hazy vocals made for an often grim mix. (On Friday the sets will be archived at wnyc.org/globalfest.)

Watcha Clan, at least, seemed mindful of the past decade's worth of popular music, highlighting one of the weaknesses of this iteration of Globalfest: it felt like a look backward. More than ever, world music is becoming aggressively hybridized with hip-hop and electronic music — Brazilian baile funk, Angolan kuduro, South African kwaito — but these sounds were nowhere to be found. Even Globalfest's traditionalism is selective. While many groups wielded accordions, there was no regional Mexican music — banda, Norteño — to be heard. Even in its breadth Globalfest can feel narrow.

Still, leave it to the most orthodox of performers to deliver the night's greatest shocks. The bawdy songs of Calypso Rose, from Tobago — the genre matriarch wearing a resplendent red suit — who sang, mischievously, "Chiney man or Indian man/Any man could give you satisfaction," injected something this festival badly needed: levity.

And Shanbehzadeh Ensemble, from Paris, which plays the droning music of the Boushehr region of southern Iran, enthralled with its minimalism. Early in its set Saïd Shanbehzadeh nimbly played the neyban, an Iranian bagpipe, sometimes holding it atop his head as he high-stepped across the stage. (He was accompanied by his son Naghib on drums.) And by set's end, he was shirtless, shouting refrains at the audience, which was shouting right back at him. It was, refreshingly, a little bit punk.