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GlobalFEST 2008

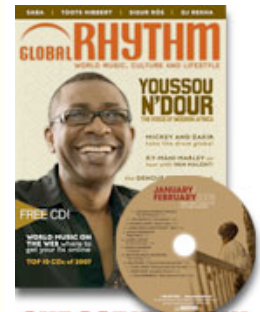
January 13, 2008
Webster Hall
New York City

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"It means a lot for us to be at GlobalFEST," said Brooklyn-based Nation Beat co-founder Scott Kettner during a backstage interview before the band hit the stage. "We've been working very hard to finally get to the point where we're able to be ready to be recognized by the producers – it's my third time playing at GlobalFEST (he previously performed with other groups) so it's an honor to finally be playing with my group here."

Kettner says that the reaction for Nation Beat's musical blend has been quite positive since the CD's release in October 2007. "We've been getting a lot of really great response – the fusion of country and bluegrass has really come together with Northeastern Brazilian styles – we have the Klezmatics on three songs, it was just magical being in the studio with those guys," he explains.

Newly minted vocalist Liliana Araujo also seemed thrilled to be there, given the hard time she's had with adapting to a new culture and specially climate. "It has been a difficult change – I come from the tropical Fortaleza, where the sun shines all year," she said in Portuguese. "It has been, however, a great experience. I am very glad to be singing with Nation Beat, because it serves to show that Brazil is not only about samba and bossa nova - our country is very rich from a musical standpoint, and the musicians [in the band] have definitely done their research well."



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During their set, they showcased exactly what Kettner proposes to do -to bring together sonic influences from Brazil, Cajun and bluegrass, adding both the fiddle and lap steel guitar to Kettner's *zabumba* (a round-shaped drum commonly used in *forró*), which resulted in a mix that was both enjoyable and also palatable to American audiences.

Earlier that evening, which featured 12 bands appearing on three different stages over the course of five hours, South Carolina's Crooked Still showcased their take on alternative bluegrass music. At one moment, five-string banjoist Gregory Liszt quipped that the audiences back home "aren't that different from that of an East Village club," but they were thrilled to see so many people hearing them.

One of the highlights of their set was "Undone in Sorrow," a tune that had more of a syncopated beat to it, unlike the mellower material they chose to play that night. It was interesting to notice the chemistry between vocalist Aoife O'Donovan and violinist Darol Anger – they seemed to complement each other, picking up when one left off and doing seamless vocal/violin harmonies that were worth the performance alone.

In the meantime, Italy's Vinicio Capossella played a strange mix of songs, ranging from Gypsy-like music to bolero-influenced tunes, all played in avant-garde fashion. His band used unlikely instruments – the banjo was played with a bow, and there was also a theremin. The crowd seemed confused, and the response was warm at best.

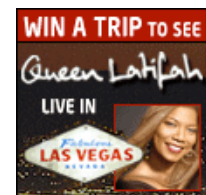
One of the evening's best surprises came from Lo Còr de La Plana, a six-piece hand-clapping, foot stomping and drum beating group from Marseilles, France. The members' energy and charisma was truly captivating, and they also sounded amazingly tight. Using nothing but their own resources, they got the jam-packed room moving to their beat, making self-mocking jokes about their own heritage ("the people from Marseilles are lazy and dirty, and we're proud of that," one member said halfway through their set) as they played songs that were all about drinking and poking fun at Parisians, who they nicknamed "the big mess." Dressed impeccably in white, Youssou N' Dour protégé Fallou Dieng (who also hails from Senegal played a high-energy set that quickly captivated the audience. Halfway through the performance, a dancer emerged from backstage and transfixed everyone with his moves. The music, which is highly percussive, got everyone moving to his beat, and there was no stopping until the very last song was played.

Hungary's Little Cow also played with a lot of energy, but their rock-inflected set list failed to impress this writer. Visually, they seemed to have been stuck in a time warp (the bass player looked like a circa-1974 George Harrison) from different eras. Their sound was very Americanized, having very little Eastern European influence to their sound except maybe for the presence of an accordion. One audience member said that she "expected something more Hungarian" and was clearly disappointed that the band was attempting to draw from more Western influences.

At 84 years of age, Dominican Republic's Puerto Plata (AKA Jose Manuel Cobles) played from the heart - his repertoire was mostly formed of boleros and acoustic merengues from his long career that was mostly obscured lack of airplay in his native



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land. The strain from his long years was evident in his voice, but he showed incredible vitality as he rose from his chair and danced a few steps. The sound mix was rough - whenever the group sang in harmony, they sounded a bit loud. Plata, however, seemed thrilled at the opportunity to play here, and dedicated one of the songs "from my heart to New York City."

One band that really rocked was Niger's Toumast – led by guitarist Moussag Ag Keyna, who is clearly influenced by Jimi Page (not only by the way he plays, but also by the manner he presents himself). The band, which also features bass, drums and percussion, kept up nicely, and the result was one of the evening's most electrifying performances. Too bad his sister Aminatou Goumar, who also sings, wasn't able to make the trip.

Other groups that also appeared during the evening were Brooklyn's cumbia rockers Pistolera, gypsy-inspired Samarabalouf, Argentinean tango fusion master Chango Spasiuk and Korea's own Dulsori, a drum-based group whose name translates as "wild beat."



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