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## Globalfest Showcases the Sounds and Traditions of World Music

By **JON PARELES**JAN. 18, 2016



The band Fendika, with Zinash Tsegaye, left, and Melaku Belay, performing Sunday at Globalfest at Webster Hall. Credit Kevin Yatarola

Roots were tangled, elastic and portable at this year's Globalfest, the annual showcase for world music that started in 2003. With 12 overlapping sets on Sunday night at Webster Hall, Globalfest included dance music, protest songs, tradition, fusion, electronics, shtick, spirituality, camp and the blues. Some of the musicians were self-conscious emissaries from their homes; others were expatriates and widely traveled citizens of a connected world. Through the years, Globalfest has demolished the stereotype of world music performers as naifs playing the only music they know. Instead, it presents

tradition as a choice and a resource, affirming a heritage or giving it a personal twist.

One thoroughly worldly individualist was [Mariana Sadovska](#), a Ukrainian musician based in Germany. She wrung startling drama from traditionalist songs turned contemporary in a set that spanned folklore, humor, grief and rage. Her voice holds the clarity and bite of Slavic folk styles; her stage presence has the bright-eyed intensity of Björk or PJ Harvey. Backed by Christian Thomé on drums and electronics, Ms. Sadovska moved between acoustic instruments — harmonium, jaw harp — and her own keyboards and electronics. She summarized her songs before she sang them, among them a creation myth, a New Year's ritual involving a goat, and a bitter, furious reflection on Ukraine after the Russian invasion, all of them vividly focused.



The cabaret singer Astrid Hadad dipped into Mexican and Caribbean styles. Credit Kevin Yatarola

[Lakou Mizik](#), from Haiti, and Fendika, from Ethiopia, had similar missions: gathering regional styles to present them in robust motion. Lakou Mizik, formed after the devastating Haitian earthquakes of 2010, is a genial cross-generational coalition along the lines of the

Buena Vista Social Club. Its songs, some of which are topical, draw on the rhythms and incantations of voodoo, the trumpeting of rara carnival music and hearty call-and-response vocal harmonies on their way to galloping, exultant dance grooves.

Fendika, named after the group's club in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, is led by a whirlwind of a dancer, [Melaku Belay](#). The music — for voices, percussion and krar (lyre) or masenko (one-stringed fiddle) — was sparse but mesmerizing, a gallery of regional modes and rhythms matched by twirling, shaking dances.

The lyra (fiddle) player [Stelios Petrakis](#), from Crete, in Greece, led his quartet, a string band with lauto (oud), mandolin and cello. Its repertoire spanned slow, plaintive, burnished instrumental melodies; somber traditional songs and quick-fingered, breakneck dance tunes that had the cellist twirling onstage and the audience happily clapping and stamping as if sharing a Cretan hoedown.



The band Lakou Mizik, which was formed after the Haitian earthquakes of 2010, is a genial cross-generational coalition along the lines of the Buena Vista Social Club. Credit Kevin Yatarola

The Music Maker Revue offered a regional style closer to home: Southern blues and funk. It's the project of the [Music Maker Relief Foundation](#), which supports blues musicians across the South, and it featured three venerable but vigorous singers: Robert Lee Coleman,

Alabama Slim and Robert Finley, who was more than convincing as he sang “Age Don’t Mean a Thing.”

Tribu Baharú, from Colombia, played leisurely, club-length songs in its own regional style: champeta, from Colombia’s Caribbean coast, which is kin to both Haitian compas and Congolese soukous. Dhol Foundation, from England, fuses the thundering beat of Indian bhangra with more leaden English rock rhythms and, like current club music, prerecorded vocals. Its front line of four dhol drummers had crowd-pleasing synchronized moves and a cheerful line of audience-participation patter.

[Astrid Hadad](#), a cabaret singer from Mexico, was Globalfest’s Lady Gaga, changing costumes throughout her set. Dipping into Mexican and Caribbean styles, she brought layers of camp probably best understood in Mexico, but her nutty flamboyance came through clearly. One of her costumes, with antlers at her shoulders and a headdress of feathered arrow tips, was based on Frida Kahlo’s painting “[The Wounded Deer](#).”

Updated Gypsy rhythms drove two groups: Ginkgoa and Debauche. [Ginkgoa](#) is the French band led by a singer from New York, Nicolle Rochelle, and a French songwriter, Antoine Chatenet; they’ve concocted a perky, lighthearted, electronics-tinged, mostly English-speaking version of Hot Club cabaret, full of eye-rolling flirtation. [Debauche](#) is a New Orleans band that plays what it calls “Russian mafia” music, with lyrics in Russian punctuated by “la-la” singalong choruses. It’s led by a growly Russian singer, Yegor Romantsov, who introduced nearly every song as a “sad song” before the band’s accelerating oompah rhythms and wailing clarinet pushed it into party mode.

The oud and violin player Simon Shaheen, based in New York City, brought his project Zafir, which embodies the musicological understanding that flamenco and the Arabic music of North Africa have a millennium-old connection. Another New York-based musician, [Somi](#), offered her own fusion. An American with parents from Uganda and Rwanda, Somi spent 18 months making music in Nigeria and returned with songs that draw on African rhythms, jazz, funk and thoughts of love and social issues. It was American music, globally conscious.

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