

It may seem odd that a new column on contemporary sounds should kick off with the topic of early folkloric music. Yet today's jazz, rock, pop and new age are increasingly influenced by the world's ethnic folk traditions. And the "international" sections of record stores—once seen as specialty corners—have exploded in square footage stocked with various "world beat" categories.

It's natural that today's musicians should discover inspiration and reaffirmation in these sounds: nothing speaks more passionately and unaffectedly than the direct voice of roots. While the trend has spawned an alarming increase in diluted, touchy-feely versions of ethnic sounds, some labels offer the real deal.

One release that musicians should find inspirational is Shanchie Record's two-volume set, "The Secret Museum of Mankind/Ethnic Music Classics: 1925-48." The collection focuses on the exciting era of experimentation when the phonograph was new. During this time, a new breed of sound engineer traveled the globe, capturing examples of indigenous music for historical preservation and to bring the sounds of "exotic" lands back home to curious listeners.

Many of the tracks have been remastered from extremely rare 78s. There are gems galore among the 46 cuts: from Sardinia comes an unusual, complex solo on the *launeddas*, an ancient triple pipe; from Vietnam, otherworldly melismatic vocals are accompanied by an ensemble of two-string coconut fiddle, moon-lute and a guitar with

scooped-out frets that allow for dramatic, angular bends; a heated, driving *gadulka* fiddle solo from Macedonia in 7/16 sounds surprisingly modern (one expects a fusion band to kick in); from India, a harmonium, tabla and mandolin accompany the delightful, shimmering sound of suspended bell clusters called *ghungur*. It's a striking document of the old and a valuable resource for today.

Take a Chorus, Tubby

The beloved musical/narrative piece "Tubby the Tuba" has delighted and educated children and adults for 50 years. Remember the much replayed PBS version, with Julia Child reading and the Boston Pops Orchestra playing? Tubby, as you may recall, was the orchestra low-man who wanted a shot at playing the featured melody.

Times have changed and now that husky horn also wants to blow over changes. That's right: it's "Tubby the Tuba Meets a Jazz Band." In a quest to broaden his musical horizons, Tubby learns how to swing and improvise.

Jack Kleinsinger, jazz lover and son of Tubby composer George Kleinsinger, helped pull together the project along with Paul Tripp, the original writer and narrator of the popular stories. Trombonist Marco Katz gathered the fine jazz ensemble for the CD: tuba player Bob Stewart in the starring role, accompanied by Jimmy Owens (trumpet), Cynthia Sayer (guitar), Chuck Folds (piano), Leonard Gaskin (bass), Oliver Jackson (drums), John Thomas (percussion), Paquito D'Rivera (clarinet),

Katz (trombone) and conductor Rick Ulfik.

"When I told Paquito about the project," Katz recalls, "I began explaining the Tubby story, not knowing if he had been exposed to the story while growing up in Cuba. All of a sudden, his eyes popped wide open. 'Tubby!' he said. 'That was one of my influences to play as a kid. I *have* to be on this project!'"

Negotiations are continuing with Sony Records and several major stars are under consideration for narrator. For now, one is tempted to imagine an epilogue: returning to the orchestra from his jazz hiatus, the itinerant tuba-dour greets his maestro with, "Yeah, man, I really missed hanging with you cats."

Small Labels, Big Impact

A great place to hear Paquito in a more customary context is the disc "Reunion," featuring guest star trumpeter Arturo Sandoval. This blazing session, one of the multi-reed master's finest records, surprised me back in 1991 when I discovered that it was on a small German label, Messidor. Since then, Messidor has continued to release a catalog of artistic excellence with an emphasis on contemporary Latin jazz. The budding label made a surprise splash in the industry when its release of visionary tango artist Astor Piazzolla's "The Vienna Concert" sold 150,000 units.

As an introduction to their superb roster, "United Nations of Messidor" is an excellent two-CD compilation. Featured artists include the late Charlie Palmieri, Bebo Valdés, Mario Bauzá, Giovanni Hidalgo, Paquito, Seis Del Solar, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Irakere, Jesus "Chucho" Valdés and Paulo Maura. There's also a touch of tango by Piazzolla, and flamenco by guitarist Augustin Carbonell.

Another luminous small label is Postcards. Founded by composer/saxophonist Ralph Simon and president Sibyl Golden in 1993, the breakout label has managed to make an impact on the jazz press with only a tiny catalog of just over a dozen titles. The releases tend towards the cutting edge and are recorded with a "live," unrestricted immediacy. Two innovative releases that especially caught my ear were bass giant Reggie Workman's



Tubby the Tuba Meets a Jazz Band: left to right, Chuck Folds (seated at rear), Jimmy Owens, Jack Kleinsinger, Marco Katz, Paul Tripp and Paquito D'Rivera. All the musicians are members of New York City Local 802. Photo By Glenn Reinhart.