

# Ethno on the Road

Ethno on the Road and Världens Band: Beyond the Ethno Gatherings

The image shows two overlapping promotional posters. The left poster, titled 'ETHNO ON THE ROAD! - ung folkmusik från hela världen -', features a group of diverse young musicians sitting on a wooden bridge over a stream. The right poster, titled 'TRANSGLOBAL ROOTS FUSION VÄRLDENS BAND MUSIC FROM 3 CONTINENTS', lists countries (SWE, NOR, FRA, IND, UK, SEN) and shows a group of performers in traditional attire. Both posters include event details for York St John University on Friday 18th October 2019, 6.30PM, with free tickets and contact information.

**EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY**

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# Ethno on the Road and Världens Band: Beyond the Ethno Gatherings

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been an analysis of Ethno on the Road (EoR), a touring band comprising five participants who are selected at the end of Ethno Sweden each year, and Världens Band, a transcultural fusion band that has its roots in the Ethno Sweden Gathering and EoR touring band of 2010. Findings are based on ethnographic fieldwork, a focus group with the Världens Band and follow up interviews with an artistic leader for EoR and participants of EoR 2019. Academic discourse has drawn from the fields of ethnomusicology and community music with a focus on intercultural engagement and globalisation in Section A (Appadurai, 1990; Born and Hesmondalgh, 2000; Averill, 2004; Bithell, 2014; Hess, 2019, Campbell and Lum, 2019); performance frameworks, hospitality and outreach in Section B (Baumann, 1977; Turino, 2008; Brinner, 2009; Higgins, 2012; Bartleet, 2019); and informal learning, musical pathways and subcultures in Section C (Slobin, 1993; Finnegan, 2007; Green, 2008). The three sections provide the findings for five research questions:

### Section A: Embodying Ethno Ideals within the Band

*In what ways and to what extent do participants continue to embody the ideals of intercultural harmony espoused by Ethno-World even after “aging out” of the camps?*

EoR and Världens Band appear to embody three ideals drawn from Ethno-World gatherings:

- 1) **Respectful musical exchange** (Higgins, 2020) continues to manifest in both EoR and the Världens Band, demonstrated by a respect of the culture bearer of the song when songs are being shared or performed.
- 2) The development of a **unique musical identity** continues to enable EoR and Världens Band to collaborate and share music without a need to appropriate tunes they are learning. The use of “recognising difference” (Appadurai, 1990) appears to solidify the group’s unified identity with tensions appearing when members were needing to compromise their unique identity or contributions to the band.

- 3) The **creation of a 'new' sound** holds value to both Världens Band and EoR. Världens Band are shifting away from folk music collaborations to creating their own songs collaboratively, suggesting a further progression in their musical pathway. The use of musical hybrids draws attention to concerns surrounding the dominance of Western musical standards in World Music. In EoR the purpose of using hybrid sounds is to enable connection and collaboration between people, however there are risks of Western cultural dominance.

*How does EoR negotiate issues of power, authenticity and agency when they learn and perform folk music from around the world?*

As EoR performs some music where the culture bearer is not present, cultural appropriation comes to the fore. Similar to observations by Solis (2004, p. 17) and Bithell (2014) the manner in which the music of the “other” is taught can often encourage deeper engagement and understanding of these contentious issues. The process of learning within Ethno does provide opportunity for respectful musical exchange, however the smaller collaboration of EoR did highlight some tensions regarding the risk of dominance of Swedish culture and exoticising foreign musical cultures. Based on these research findings, I recommend the need for more **critical reflection** by organisers, EoR facilitators and participants during the tour to enable more agency for non-Swedish speaking participants. Such opportunities have occurred within the Världens Band. Providing space for dialogue and discussion within multicultural bands is vital in bringing awareness to issues of cultural dominance and working as a group to resolve any concerns members from ethnic minorities may have. This complexity for EoR needs to be constantly reflected upon, and in doing so, will lead to representations of the “other” that are meaningful, respectful, and promote social change (Solis, 2004; White 2012b; Bartleet, 2019; Gibson, 2019; Hess, 2019).

## **Section B: Performance and Outreach**

*What musical collaborations have grown out of Ethno experiences and how present are they on world and folk / traditional music stages?*

This report focused on the Swedish stage, rather than world music stages, as this was where fieldwork took place. EoR present a complex position regarding the world music scene. Mantie and Risk (2020, p. 24) note that Ethno gatherings are not currently producing music for the world music industry, however, the “Ethno sound” is a hybrid of Western popular and folk music. It therefore has strong parallels with a “world music sound” (White, 2012a; Taylor, 2014). Research findings for this report suggests EoR

focuses on a pedagogical aim, by providing an opportunity for professional development for young musicians, rather than one of commodification. No products were on sale at performances and participants were not paid for this opportunity.

Using Bauman's (1977) concept of performance frames, it is evident how EoR perform to a folk music audience that understand the context and performance expectations of the band. Furthermore, there is a strong suggestion that a particular ideal is being performed within this frame: that of people from many cultures having fun together on stage. The performance of this ideal appears to be a stronger focus compared to the promotion of folk or world music. Världens Band does, however, fall within the world music scene, causing some concerns for its members, particularly with regard to how the group are represented by advertisers and promoters of gigs where they perform (Världens Band focus group, 2019; Balosso-Bardin, 2018).

*What is the significance of an EoR performance as a means of outreach to the wider community?*

Both EoR and Världens Bands reflections reveal a growing awareness of a need to interact with communities that do not experience positive intercultural engagement. EoR 2019 felt much more could be done in this area, whilst Världens Band seemed to feel reaching out and performing in marginalised communities could be enough. Reflections of previous experiences with EoR and the refugee community by the artistic leader demonstrate that there is clear potential for impactful performances that have an underlying social justice cause, suggesting that EoR performances can act as a gesture of welcome and hospitality for displaced communities. This approach shifts Higgins (2012) focus from hospitality within a musical ensemble outward towards the audience, leading to a contemplation of how performers can support audiences in feeling welcome in a new space.

## **Section C: Professional and Personal Development**

*In what ways and to what extent did the Ethno experience influence life choices?*

Personal and professional development are intertwined within a musical pathway or subculture (Finnegan, 2007; Slobin, 1993). EoR and Världens Band continue to pursue careers in folk music, with some members of Världens Band still working within the Ethno network. It is evident that Ethno is seen as a catalyst for professional development, being seen as part of a process towards becoming a folk musician that can take a number of years and is dependent on the individual's personal experiences. This process is similar to Green's (2008) observations of informal learning.

Participation in Ethno appears to become an embodied experience, particularly for those who have attended multiple gatherings. Most participants recognise that the manner in which they interact with other people changes, with a deepening awareness of there being multiple perspectives to a situation or event, depending on an individual's cultural background. Once again, there was reference to this being a process that happens over a number of years as participant's consolidate their own positionality in the multiple contexts within which they engage. There is some suggestion that participants are already interested in issues of intercultural exchange prior to attending Ethno gatherings and may already be part of a shared affinity group, or subculture. With the exception of participants who chose to move to Sweden as a result of attending Ethno Sweden, the influence of the Ethno Experience appears to link more with a shift in attitudes and perceptions, rather than specific life choices.

### Final comment

The EoR project as an extension of Ethno Sweden provides effective professional development for its participants. It is an opportunity for young musicians to experience performing in a touring band and to learn how to collaborate within a small, multicultural setting. In some instances, as in the case of participants who continue to perform together in the Världens Band, EoR has been a catalyst towards a longstanding personal and professional network of friends and colleagues. EoR does fall within the tensions of globalisation and the power dynamics that come with it, and this should not be overlooked. By providing space for critical reflection of the intricacies of power and agency when rehearsing and presenting the music of the "other", EoR has the potential to have a powerful impact on a variety of audiences within Sweden as well as their participants.

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The logo for Ethno Research features the word "ETHNO" in a large, bold, dark teal sans-serif font. Below it, the word "RESEARCH" is written in a smaller, bold, light blue sans-serif font. The text is enclosed within a thin, light blue rectangular border. Horizontal lines extend from the left and right sides of the border, meeting the "RESEARCH" text.

# ETHNO RESEARCH

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