

# What Isn't World Music?

A globetrotting week of great sounds

**A**lexander the Great is said to have wept when he ran out of known world to conquer. So it is, though less imperialistically, with “world music” these days. Thanks to the assiduous efforts of anthropologists, global-sound-mining pop artists like David Byrne, Peter Gabriel and Paul Simon, and various enterprising record labels, most of the planet’s music is available to anyone who knows where to listen. Still, it’s not every week — or year — that we get to experience a master of Bulgarian folk music, and we get our chance May 31, when the **Petar Ralchev Quartet** plays WOW Hall. One of the world’s great accordionists, Ralchev updates and energizes folk with his sizzling improvisatory skills, harmonic sophistication, pan-Balkan rhythmic influences and experience with half a dozen other multi-ethnic European ensembles. If you think of Bulgarian music as merely Communist-era works by women’s choirs, this show will reveal the continuing richness of a lovely world music tradition.

Another performer who draws on Eastern European influences is Portland cellist/chanteuse **Ashia Grzesik**, a Polish immigrant often seen hereabouts with the neo-cabaret band Vagabond Opera and Portland Cello Project. Grzesik, whose solo work stretches into various gypsy and Americana territories, performs May 26 at Cozmic Pizza along with **Foxtails Brigade**, and she opens for Kingdom County June 4 at Sam Bond’s.

Cozmic Pizza also offers southern African sounds on May 28, when the local



Foxtails Brigade

youth marimba band **Hokoyo Marimba** performs a benefit for Tariro, supporting young Zimbabwean AIDS orphans. And on June 2, Cozmic welcomes **Los Cumbiamberos**. The urge to dance to this stuff is irresistible, so show up early for a free lesson. Latino music love continues June 3 at Cozmic with **Eugene Arte Latino’s Festival of Song, Poetry and Dance**, a family friendly affair in which a dozen performers cover everything from Andean music to bossa nova to mariachi y mucho mas.

The impressive jazz bassist and composer **Michael Formanek** and his quartet play June 4 at the Shedd. Jazz fans might remember ‘90s band Wide Open Spaces, and certainly recognize some of his previous collaborators in a strong 35 year career: Stan Getz, Freddie Hubbard, Chet Baker, Fred Hersch and many others — including the coveted bass spot in the Mingus Big Band. The reliably excellent ECM label has just released Formanek’s superb debut album, *The Rub and Spare Change*, which showcases the individual talents of his veteran band as well as the tight collective interplay they achieve.

The classical season is winding down, clearing the decks for the **Oregon Bach Festival**, yet a few gems remain. On June 2 at Lane Community College, the **Lane Chamber Orchestra** performs Eugene composer **Paul Safar’s Concerto for Electric Guitar and Orchestra**, starring soloist Olem Alves.

**The Oregon Symphonic Band** and others perform music by Prokofiev, John Mackey and more May 26 at Beall Hall, and there’s a free noon chamber music concert at the Schnitzer art museum May 27. And don’t forget the June 2 big spring **Choral Concert at Beall**, featuring several choirs singing contemporary sounds by the splendid Estonian composer Arvo Pärt, Eric Whitacre and others. The traditional June 5 wrap-up concerts feature the **University Percussion Ensemble** at Aasen-Hull Hall in a mostly contemporary program, plus a Telemann transcription, and at 5pm in Beall, the ever popular **University Gospel Ensembles**. **EW**

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## Might Win Some but She Just Lost One

I’m not writing this to make enemies. I was just as excited as you were, if not more so, to hit the Cuthbert Amphitheater and watch **Lauryn Hill** crush it. Lauryn Hill isn’t just a musician to me; she is a cultural icon who shaped an entire portion of my life and the lives of people who identify as the conscious hip hop generation. I feel guilty for writing what I am about to write, and I really mean that. But I am going to write it anyway.

Friday, May 20, Lauryn Hill broke the hearts of hundreds of Eugene fans that came out to the Cuthbert Amphitheater. Her disappointing performance was so lackluster that nearly twenty minutes into her set, I turned around and saw most of the crowd going and gone.

Hill’s band was not terrible by any means, but they played terribly; the instruments sounded as if they were in a race against each other. Hill’s voice was unusually raspy, and she seemed to be playing catch up with the musicians as she strained to hear her own vocals through the onstage monitors.

“Kill the sound man!” a frustrated show-goer bellowed. I’m not into violence, but I got his point. The music sounded muddy, like it was being played through a sock. I was on the lawn of the amphitheater, sitting on the concrete lip just behind the gravel path, and it was a struggle to hear Hill’s lyrics over guitars, drums and back-up vocals. Something was seriously imbalanced. Every single person I have talked to who attended this show was upset, and some were very pissed off. No one was stoked, which, given the impresario talent of Hill, is astounding.

*Why, Lauryn? Why?* Eugene Oregon loves you (And I still do, regardless of the show)! From the white kids with bleached dreads to the handful of brown folks that live here, from the mothers who came to dance with children in arms, to the scantily clad college girls who shivered through the evening, we were all there. And no one understands what happened. Maybe it was just a bad night on a long tour? But people who’d seen shows in Portland and California relayed the same information: Hill, struggling to keep up with a hyperactive band playing her smooth joints way too fast.

The night wasn’t a total loss if you caught the opening act **Dead Prez**. The revolutionary hip hop duo put on an excellent show, engaging an audience much smaller than Hill had the privilege of playing for. — *Dante Zuñiga-West*

