

Warsaw Village Band Bio

When you think of music from "other places," you either picture bands playing local traditional music or playing some form of global pop in their native language. But Warsaw **Village Band**, on their latest album *Infinity* (Barbes Records; **April 7th**), is forging a little-known third path for musicians "from somewhere else," from the places rarely covered in the news or taking the lead in current events, but places with roots extending deep into world culture.

This is music that is both inherently Polish, and inherently new. "People nowadays have forgotten that pop music comes from the past," WVB songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Wojtek Krzak muses. "There would be no Rihanna, no Destiny's Child without rock and roll. John Mayall and Elvis Presley wouldn't exist if it hadn't been for Black musicians from the Mississippi Delta. So, how can we really say where tradition ends and pop or classical music begins?"

The endless links in the chain of human culture stretching from forgotten ancestors to the youngest generation lie at the heart of *Infinity*. "As a new father, I was thinking about this connection between the generations of the past and the future," Krzak recalls, "and suddenly I knew it was a great moment to record an album called 'Infinity.' To present the music of the past in a modern way for the next generation."

Krzak and Kleszcz began working in a whole new way: composing songs instead of improvising with band members in the studio. They brought in youthful Polish soul singers and hip-hop musicians where once they had turned to musical elders in Polish villages.

In the process, they uncovered connections both functional—with African and African-American culture—and historical, the ancient ties that bind Poland with the Jewish community, Scandinavia, and the East.

Though the African connection may seem unexpected, for Krzak it makes absolute sense. "When I am listening to African music, it feels the same as traditional Polish music," Krzak explains. "They have different rhythms and feelings, but the drum in Poland is used for the same reasons. In fact, if you think about traditional music, sometimes it's really hard to find borders. It's like a different taste from the same dish."

The transcultural pulse beats in songs like "Skip Funk," a funk-ed-up version of a traditional Polish wedding song where Taraf de Haidouks meet P-Funk, thanks in part to the hip-hop touches of Polish rapper and DJ, Sebastian Filiks (DJ Feel-X). "Is Anybody In There?", inspired by a traditional Polish work song, recovers the kinship of field hollers everywhere with interlocking calls and drums.

But perhaps most revealing is the unexpected funkiness WVB discovered in the high pastures of Poland's Carpathian Mountains. For "Little Baby Blues," WVB invited traditional Carpathian violinist and singer Jan Trebunia Tutka, to lay down a solo. "When he started to sing in this blues style, we were just blown away. It was so easy for him," Krzak smiles. "I asked him who his main influence was. I was expecting something Romany. But he looked at me and said one name, 'James Brown.'"

While exploring the global possibilities of Polish music—Krzak and Kleszcz also have a side project, Incarnations, that collaborates with African musicians in Poland—Warsaw Village Band continues to connect the dots of Poland's past.

Part of this history includes the country's long marginalized Jewish culture, now revived by a passionate interest in Polish klezmer music. With the "ghostly voice of Krakow," as Krzak puts it,

singer and violist Tomek Kukurba of the popular klezmer-inspired trio Kroke evokes a lost world on "1.5 Hours," drawing on Jewish, Middle Eastern, and his own unique approach to Polish music.

The resemblance between the Swedish *polska* and Polish dances like the *kujawiak*, as well as a fanciful story of 17th-century Swedish soldiers taking Polish songs home with them, inspired "Polska Fran Polska." Krzak sets aside his fiddle for the Swedish *nyckelharpa*, along with a smaller 7/8 violin that came from the 17th-century.

Before any musical traffic over the Baltic, however, Poland had ties with the Near East, as the 16th-century kingdom of Poland once extended all the way to the Black Sea's shores. It was perhaps there, at one of the Silk Road's last stops, that Poles first discovered what became the *suka*, a bowed instrument played with edge of the fingernails related to the Indian *sarangi*. This surprising heritage resounds on "Circle No. 1" in what Wojtek calls a "Slavic raga" using the traditional dulcimer and the *suka* to give a playful nod to Poland's trans-Eurasian roots.

"These songs are all deeply inspired by tradition, but aren't traditional Polish," Krzak reflects. "This is the main difference between our previous albums and *Infinity*. They were about the past we had lost. But now, our music is about the future."