When in Ghana...

I'm back again, and this time I'm jumped onto the cross-cultural bandwagon: Music and Rhythm, various artists on PCC Records.

The past few years have seen a popular music explosion in Africa, highlighted by the emergence of profound outside influences. Adam and the Ants and The Buggles have been influential in African drumming, the Talking Heads have exploded native polyrhythms, and the sounds of African music have been taken and used by Breton and Brian Eno has gone as far as incorporating tapes of the real thing into their own compositions (e.g., My Life in the Bush of Ghosts). One would think that Africa hadn't existed before the 1960's, when ethnomusicologists (at the time a newly formed discipline) began collecting field recordings of native music.

The release of Music and Rhythm is another major step toward promoting a consciousness of things non-Western. The record was issued to support production costs for the World of Music, Arts and Dance Festival that was held in the U.K. this summer. The festival was masterminded by Peter Gabriel, yet another art-rocker gone native. Gabriel also compiled the double album, which is not a collection of pop and recordings of some of the ethnic groups that appeared at the WOMAD festival, which was the nightmare of badly sequenced tracks is instead a suite of 14 African mini-songs showing on the second disc.

Music and Rhythm leads off with the drumming of Makabola, Burundi. While this particular performance is not as interesting as in the Burundi Black band recording, it served as the perfect segue into Peter Gabriel's "Across the River," a dace-chant punctuated by Stewart Copeland's own Burundi figures. Ekome, a Bristol-based dance company is up next with a stunning call-and-response chant described as a "Ghanian social varsing" that the performance, stunning as it is, sounds a bit thin when compared to XTC's "It's Nearly Africa," which feel more like the genuine item. This comparison points out one of the flaws in the compilation: since many of the ethnic performances are derived from field recordings they don't receive the benefits of Western recording technology, consequently they don't sound as full as their ethnic counterparts. The talking drum recording that closes side one suffers from the same defect but closer listening reveals the dense polyrhythmic structure of the piece.

Side two is the most unified block of tunes, demonstrating influence of African music on Western pop and the influence of Western pop on African Music. The Beat contribute a revised version of "Mirror in the Bathroom," a piece derived from the "high life" pop music of West Africa, particularly Prince Nico Mbarga and Roscall Jazz. Prince Nico has incorporated New Wave instrumentation, especially guitars, into his shuffling uptempo "Sweet Mottis," the compilation's most danceable entry. A calypso number ("Music and Rhythm") by Mighty Sparrow and a reggae-doo-wop song by Rico ("What You Talkin' 'Bout") represent the West Indies influence. Sounding not at all foreign due to the influx of reggae and ska in pop music.

Morris Perk (percussionist for Brand X) contributes "Marraksh," an intriguing number meant to create a North African feel with its heavily shifted meters, succeeded instead in creating an Afro-Indian amalgam.

Things begin to fall apart on side three which features two execrable tunes by Western devils, the Peters Townshend and Harrison's "Assassin." Two sounds like a Welsh choir run amok, while "Hurt," by Brian's Pink Floyd as Peter Gabriel's Pink Floyd, is a standard state of affairs for him. The side is rescued by the remaining performances: Producer Vic Coppermith-Heaven rocks out on a Balinese Kolak chant (if you can call a collection of guiro, flutes and a gong "rock") which is meant to be a faithful rendering of monkey chatter, and follows it with his recording of the actual chant. Jon Hassel provides one of his "fourth world" Indonesian trumpet excursions, and falls to the greatest editing crime on the disc, being reduced from twelve minutes to a mere four - hardly enough time to appreciate Hassel's extraordinary performance. A riveting Islamic chant by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Due to the delay and the Federal Communications Commission's refusal to make a decision, the AM stereo going the way of FM quad, and hear no change from the Americans, but their failure to make a move presents a good opportunity to complete the circuit (at least on this record) continues this ever widening effort.

David Shaw

Getting it with both ears

AM stereo has become a reality. For years of tittering between the consumer electronics industry, radio stations, and the Federal Communications Commission the era of AM stereo should go into general use, the FCC made a "no-decision" decision. It recently began announcing availability of AM stereo for broadcasting.

None of the few formats can be received in stereo on presently-available receivers. About 50 percent of the AM stations planning stereo will utilize the Kahn-Hanzetine system. When broadcasters use the Kahn system, listeners can hear most of the stereo effect by placing two monaural radios side-by-side. KSAN San Antonio was the first to use this format, followed closely by KFRC San Francisco, WNBQ New York, WLS Chicago, and WMAL Washington. Most of these stations have been actively promoting their new medium and most broadcasting by way of jingles in an effort to regain fit audience which has been switching to FM in vast numbers over the past decade. Stations such as WQXI Atlanta, using AM stereo formats, have found the going is still rougher and are keeping promotional advertising to a minimum until new programming is available. Unfortunately, even the Kahn stereo receivers have been delayed in production, Murza Corporation, the manufacturer of AM stereo/FM portable radios, is still awaiting receipt of a microprocessor from Kahn. Due to the delay AM stereo receivers (for Kahn systems) may not be available before 1983, at an estimated wholesale retail price of $50.

The latest Artforum ratings have shown that the majority of radio listeners now tunes to FM stations. While FM station ratings are not as high as the above, the number of AM stations, AM ratings have been falling precipitously. Format shifts from music on AM are down, the last year New York's WABC made the switch from music and talk to an all-news format. The industry personnel are worried about the possibility of AM stereo going the way of FM quad. Khan, actually wins or loses the battle for all new AM stations and hear no change from monaural AM into stereo. Many new re- ceivers - they'll merely switch back to FM. Murza personnel believe that AM stereo reception will be far superior to that of FM stereo. If true, once high-quality receivers are on the market, AM stereo might just rejuvenate the now-dying airwaves.

Stuart Gitlow

Off the Beaten Groove

The MIT Lecture Series Committee presents搖

AS TIME GOES BY搖

by James Thurber

This weekend's LSC Movies:

MY LIFE

In Ghana

Sturay Friday, 7:30 pm, Kresge's Fireside Room

20s

Friday, September 17. 1:00 pm, for their program of one-at-a-time plays to be performed in the WGBH Studios. For further information call 332-3877.

Melody will hold auditions on Monday, September 20, at 7:30 pm, for their program of one-at-a-time plays to be performed in the WGBH Studios. For further information call 332-3877.