

BOULDER NEWS

The Daily Camera Online

Home

News

Local

CU News

Broomfield

State & West

Nation & World

Sports

BuffZone

Business

Science

Opinion

Living & Arts

Entertainment

Recreation

Health/Fitness

Food

Community

Weather

Site Contents

Search



Conference
on
World Affairs
1999

Browse conference
by day: [Monday](#) |
[Tuesday](#) | [Wednesday](#)
| [Thursday](#) | [Friday](#)
Browse panelist by
alphabet group: [A-B](#) |

[C-E](#) | [F-H](#) | [I-L](#) | [M-N](#) | [O-R](#) | [S](#) | [T-Z](#)

Musicians consider 'crossover'

Mixing musical cultures, styles can wreak havoc with careers, panelists say

By **Greg Glasgow**
Camera Staff Writer

Musicians and songwriters are the heroes, and record companies and music critics the villains in the never-ending war between art and commerce.

That was the consensus at Monday's "Crossover In Popular Music" panel discussion at the Conference on World Affairs. The discussion, among six prominent musicians, started off slow and unfocused, perhaps because the key word "crossover" never was defined or directly addressed by moderator Wendy Kahn. But once things got going, the conversation turned lively.

Record producer and studio musician Don Grusin (brother of Dave) tried to keep things on track by playing a song from the Blue Note Records release, *Wouldn't It Be Nice, A Jazz Portrait of Brian Wilson*. The song, a jazz rendition of the Beach Boys' "Surfer Girl," featured the bass playing of panelist Armand Sabal-Lecco, best known for his work on Paul Simon's 1989 *Rhythm of the Saints* album.

Grusin played the song as an example of crossover, which, loosely defined, means the infusion of one musical style with elements of other, often indigenous styles. "Surfer Girl," for instance, began as a straight-ahead piano jazz number, then added layers of percussion, harmonica and reggae organ to become a smooth jazz jam with international flavor.

"I played it for Brian Wilson," Grusin said, "and he wasn't offended. That (song is an) example of taking everything we're into, all these elements, and applying them to a well-known popular song."

From there the discussion turned to the music business. Claudio Slon, former drummer with Sergio Mendes, argued that an increasing proliferation of styles in jazz and pop music is bad for musicians. He made reference to the

Wireless Location Services™


McDonald
Automotive Group
Rocky Mountain's
Leading Volume
Volvo Dealer


If you're thinking
about buying a spa...

On any new
2000
Mercedes-Benz
In Stock

"file under" label that appears on the back of many CDs, letting record store clerks know where to file unfamiliar artists and albums.

"The 'filing under' in a record shop is necessary," Slon said, "but the 'filing under' of a musician to be called by a producer when they only need a certain kind of sound, that's bad."

Slon and Grusin blamed music critics and record labels, who must often attempt to categorize highly original music in an attempt to describe it on paper.

"I personally had to change my category from fusion to just musician," Grusin said, "because fusion piano meant a certain thing, part of a certain trend, and that trend was over."

Fusion, perhaps one of the earliest examples of musical crossover, is a style of music that combines jazz arrangements with rock 'n' roll instrumentation. It reached the height of its popularity in the late '70s and early '80s.

Panelist Oscar Castro-Neves, considered a founding father of Bossa Nova, blamed a profit-driven industry for what he sees as a dwindling amount of true musical talent. He said that 30 years ago, record companies were committed to nurturing new talent, and it often wasn't until the fifth or sixth album that the artist truly found his voice.

"Now," he said, "the companies want big sales from the first album. There's no time (for a musician) to mature."

Slon agreed. "We should go back to the time when princes gave money to the artists. We should get some rich people to pay for the recording time, and to pay for the CDs we make."

Panelist and musician Gerard Kurdjian waxed philosophical about the implications of crossover in music, suggesting that when musicians appropriate instruments and sounds from other cultures without understanding their social or religious significance, they run the risk of being disrespectful.

"We are exploiting the music of these communities without paying them," he warned. "The danger of our society is that it's a big mouth, a black hole attracting all the traditions of the world."

During the 90-minute panel, the six musicians also discussed the Internet as a tool for musicians who feel powerless because of recent record company mergers that left many artists and music executives jobless. Grusin said he had heard of one company that automatically dropped any band that had sold less than 120,000 copies of its latest release.

He said that if musicians unite and use Internet technology such as MP3, which enables consumers to download

CD-quality audio onto their home computers, they would be a force to be reckoned with.

"It's pretty incredible, the power in the aggregate," Grusin said, "but it's not organized yet."

April 6, 1999

Copyright 1999 The Daily Camera. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the express written consent of The Daily Camera is expressly prohibited. Users of this site are subject to our [User Agreement](#), you may also read our [Privacy Policy](#). Comments? Questions? Suggestions? E-mail us at webmaster@boulderpublishing.com.

