

# INTERVIEW

CZECHOMOR

# EXOTIC VARIETY

**You have already played in London four times and this month you are releasing a CD (*What Happened Next*) here in the UK. What kind of audience do you have here?**

About two thirds are Czechs and Slovaks who bring their British friends. I like London, and we have already done quite a bit of work here. It's because we worked with Jaz Coleman some time ago and currently with Ben Mendelson [*British music producers*]. Last year we performed in Ireland for the first time and this September we play there again.

**Do mainly Czechs and Slovaks attend your concerts when you're abroad?**

It depends where we play. Often we participate at festivals. Recently we played in Warsaw at Serecki stadium for 20,000 people and there were probably only a few Czechs.

**Is it different performing in front of Czechs who understand your lyrics as opposed to foreigners? How do you communicate with the audience?**

We communicate through music. We are musicians not storytellers so we ought to play. When we perform in the Czech Republic or Slovakia the concerts are more positive because people understand us and sing along. Abroad it's a bit of a fight. It's a test if the music

Czechomor's music is based on historical Moravian folk songs, and it bridges not only centuries, but nations too. *Klára Smolová* spoke with frontman Karel Holas about their mixed roots and the folk origins of Mozart's music

works, if we are able to transfer our energy to the audience. Usually we succeed.

**You are a band that belongs to the world music tradition. Why in your opinion is that style currently so successful?**

It's a response to globalisation. Wherever you go, every city has its own atmosphere but you still find the same McDonalds, the same shops, same multinational firms. You bring something original with you, something of your own and that's what world music is about. Pop music has become a cliché, therefore world music provides a different approach to music, which is able to attract a wide number of listeners. In fact, since recently, ethnic instruments have been used in pop music too, because these musicians are seeking their own creative way as well.

**Does folk or ethnic music have a future?**

Absolutely. It's rooted so deeply in people that its future is already proven. Czechomor, just like other bands, takes the old material, which is conserved and uses it with

contemporary instruments. Thus the material changes and creates kind of a bridge between our history, our roots and our present times. And that's how we are able to give the song another dimension, and perhaps reach a larger audience. Some stubborn folklorist doesn't need to like it, but when you look into history you find out it's quite natural. Even classical music used folk. For instance, Mozart and Beethoven both used folk music in their compositions.

**Do you have any specific goals which you'd like to achieve?**

We'd like to perform at Peter Gabriel's WOMAD festival [*an ethnic festival taking place in different countries every year*]. But in a way it is probably not achievable because these people are so busy that you need to get to them through some really close



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Fusion Magazine has teamed up with Czechomor and we are giving away merchandise packs to three lucky Fusion readers. Each pack has a Czechomor album and T-shirts. To win, simply log on to Fusion's website ([www.fusionmagazine.co.uk](http://www.fusionmagazine.co.uk)), then click on a link to the COMPETITIONS page and answer this simple question: **what kind of folk songs is Czechomor's music based on?**





# INTERVIEW

personal contacts. So I'm quite realistic about it, although I still think "what if".

Gabriel has got it very well thought through. He's got a studio, record company, a festival... which means he has all the tools to produce, release, and promote this music and, in my opinion, the festival is organised 90% to promote what his company does. But they are also looking for new markets. The Czech Republic doesn't interest them because they are already established there.

**You used to play at pubs and markets. Do you miss it?**

Of course. There are a few pubs around the country where we can play with no advertising. We just tell them that we're coming to play and if it's possible, we do so.

**Is playing pubs a way you keep in touch with your audience?**

A pub is basically a modern church, so for us, playing in a pub is sanctity. You get

immediate reactions from people. When you do a concert for 2,000 people you never have the feedback you get in a pub. Of course on stage you can get back the energy you give out, however slightly it is defocused. In a pub or a small club it's face to face.

**It's actually not that long ago since you guys became famous. Can you still remember your first big concert?**

Probably the first big concert we played at as a band was as a support for Lucie on their Czech tour in 1999. After that we performed at a festival in German Holdstat, which is a huge event. During four or five days we have performed three concerts on main stages out of 60 in total. As for myself the biggest crowd I've played for was with Alain Stival [French musician] on Stad de France. There were 70,000 people! At that point you don't feel the people nor the music the way you should. ■

## PROFILE

CZECHOMOR (or Čechomor) started in 1988 as the 1st Czechmoravian independent music company. Until 1996 they mainly performed in pubs. In 1996, the founder, Jiří Břenek, died and the band chose to begin playing clubs and festivals.

Their breakthrough came when David Koller, leader of popular band Lucie invited them to support that band on its tour in 1999. In 2001 the band recorded its bestselling album *Proměny* (*Transformations*) with producer Jaz Coleman. The whole band also starred in a movie by Petr Zelenka called *Rok ďábla* (*The Year Of A Devil*). In 2002 they received three Czech Anděl music awards and a year later the Český lev award for the film soundtrack. Their album *Co se stalo nové* is released on SonyBMG in the UK this month, under its English title, *What Happened Next*.

Karel Holas originally played with Czech band České srdce which was labelled as celtic rock. He toured around Europe with French musician Alain Stival at the beginning of 90's and joined Čechomor in 1994. Holas, as well as František Černý, also composes music for film, theatre and advertising. The band today consists of: František Černý – vocals, guitar; Karel Holas – violin, vocal, fujara; Radek Pobořil – accordion; Michal Pavlík – electronic cello; and Roman Lomatdze – drums, percussion.

**DISCOGRAPHY:**

*Dověcnosti* (1991), *Mezi horami* (1996), *Čechomor* (2000), *Proměny* (2001), *Rok ďábla* (soundtrack, 2002), *Čechomor live* (2002), *Proměny Tour* (2003), *Co se stalo nové* (2005).

