

# Ponk

‘Czech world music’ anybody? **Bas Springer** hears about a band manufacturing a few new mash-ups.

**T**he rich folklore tradition of Moravia, the easternmost region of the Czech Republic, is mostly associated with violins, clarinet, double bass and a large cimbalom, producing music for weddings, dances and fairs. To give a fresh boost to the strict rules of traditional Moravian music, three young Czech musicians founded the band Ponk, incorporating their Moravian roots with rock, new-wave, jazz and even hip-hop. Their highly praised debut album *Postfolklore* contains catchy melodies with texts about death, disaster, murder and mayhem. It's high time to meet these Moravian folk rebels.

Ponk (Czech for workbench) was formed in the country's second largest city of Brno in 2013 by Michal Krystýnek (vocals and violin), Eduard Tomašík (cimbalom) and Jakub Nožička (double-bass). All three share a background in classical music education and have played in various Moravian folk groups. As an innovative trio they blend traditional Moravian music with other styles such as pop, rock and jazz. Their first CD *Postfolklore* received rave reviews from all over the world and was voted the best Czech world music album of 2015.

What makes their record so fascinating is the creative way the trio transport original Moravian folk songs and lyrics into the 21st Century, making them sound like pop songs. With tight and pointed arrangements, full of breaks and unexpected twists, these youngsters add a rock attitude to traditional Moravian instruments and melodies, attracting a wider, mainly young, audience. The highpoint of Ponk's career up to now was their showcase at WOMEX 2016 in Santiago de Compostella, being the first band ever to sing in the Czech language at this prestigious world music expo.

Asked about their inspiration, bass player Jakub Nožička replies "Traditional Moravian music is beautiful but the standard way of playing is not really understandable for contemporary listeners because there is hardly anything the listener can connect to. There is not enough groove in it. We want to develop Moravian folklore into new directions."

Singer and violinist Michal Krystýnek adds: "We became quite bored playing traditional Moravian music, so we tried to combine it with our musical influences but we stuck to the three traditional instruments. We don't use drums, samples or synthesizers because we don't need them to express ourselves."



Photo: Matej Kmet

Jakub: "With the title *Postfolklore* we wanted to express that we play traditional music in a completely different way. Traditional Moravian music has specific rules and specific bounds. We didn't want to be confined in that small area. If you jazz up playing Moravian folk a little more, older Moravian people say it's wrong and not so polite to play it this way. Their argument is 'there are rules and you can't play it in a different way.' We simply like many styles of music and artists like Sting, Red Hot Chili Peppers and Depeche Mode."

Why are the lyrics so dark and ominous?

Michal: "You can express sadness in a very direct way but you can also express it as a kind of art therapy, like what happened with the murder ballads in American folk music. Alan Lomax recorded quite a few songs which sound really cute but the lyrics are about murder, tragedies, blood and cutting off hands. In Moravian music you can also find dark songs. All the songs on *Postfolklore* have to do with accidental, inflicted, or inevitable death. When you listen to some songs you might hear a happy melody but the lyrics can be about three young girls hanging on a rope. We are interested in the contrast between melodies and lyrics."

Asked about promoting Ponk on Czech radio, Jakub answers that "The mainstream stations don't play our music but luckily we

also have clever radio stations who like us. We attract a new audience because our music sounds fresh. In the past there were some Czech bands who experimented with traditional instruments, drums, electric guitars and synthesizers, but we prefer the traditional instruments. The Czech Republic has a long tradition of playing music in the old fashioned way. This music was sacred and it was hardly allowed to touch or change it. In contrast to the rest of Europe our country doesn't have a rich tradition of mixing world music."

**M**ichal says that "The next step will be finishing the material for our second album. We don't want to continue with dark lyrics because life is not only about death so our new album will be mainly about relationships. We are in the middle of composing new songs. It's a long and complicated process because we don't sing in the official Czech language but in Moravian dialect. We don't have a strategy or business model. We really like playing together and things are happening to us but that doesn't mean we are unprepared. The biggest problem is that we don't have an official music export office in our country so we have to figure it out all by ourselves. But I'm sure we will manage it."

[www.ponktrio.cz](http://www.ponktrio.cz)

