WNYC's World Cup Culture Guide

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By Marlon Bishop

As the world turns its attention to the planet's biggest sporting event, it's not all about the games. Whether you are a casual observer or a die-hard fan, you are bound to encounter the music, video and art of the World Cup.

MUSIC

Like all good international sporting events, the World Cup opened with a larger than life, made-for-TV concert. The bill, designed to reflect the diversity of soccer-loving nations in attendance, included the Black Eyed Peas, BLK JKS, Hugh Masakela, and Juanes, among others.

More than a few musicians have put out special releases for the Cup, including amateur producers churning out nationalistic tunes for the (very) unofficial World Cup Song Contest and the biggest industry players.

The official, FIFA-sanctioned World Cup album is called Listen Up!, and it's exactly what you'd expect: a mash of hyper-dramatic, "feel-the-rhythms-of-Africa" anthems and "we-are-the-world" ballads sung by artists ranging from R. Kelly to Matisyahu, often in awkwardly paired transcultural collaborations.

The compilation is helmed by Shakira's "Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)," a loose cover of an 80s hit from Cameroon and the official song of the World Cup.

Though it might not be officially official, the song you're hearing buzzing out of every recess of the media landscape is "Weavin' Flag," from Canadian-Somali rapper Khaan. The infectiously feel-good song has hit #1 in a number of countries, including Germany and Switzerland. Tellingly, it barely grazed #99 on US charts.

Khaan has tailor-made twelve bilingual "Celebration Mixes" for footie fans in places around the world, from Nigeria to Indonesia. Each includes a different local pop singer and, amazingly, has its own music video. The Arab World version below, features Lebanese superstar Nancy Ajram.

For those that like their World Cup music with a little less overt chores, The Fader's Pitch Perfect mixtapes might hit the spot. The music magazine has teamed up with Nike to release six mixes, one for each continent participating in the Cup.

Each mixtape features art depicting pixelated animals playing soccer and comes loaded with dancefloor-worthy jams curated by the big names of global ghettotech. They include a cumbia-heavy South America mix put together by Rio-based producer Maga Bo, and a Caribbean-flavored North America mix by San Franciscan globalista Chief Boima.

The Africa mix, released on June 11, was created by South African DJ Spoek Mathambo and features plenty of kwaito, the local Jo'Burg rap-techno hybrid sound, as well as a few coupe decal tracks from the Ivory Coast, a tournament favorite.

While you're at it, stop by this blog.

VIDEO

With $425 million paid by stations for U.S. broadcasting rights and a projected $2.59 billion to be gleaned in sales of official FIFA merchandise alone, there are gobs of money to be made on the World Cup.

Sneaker companies are marketing particularly hard. Nike, Adidas and Puma have all entered the fray with a slew of glossy World Cup-themed ads and some are pretty spectacular. While Adidas comes in close second with its "Celebrate Originality"—David Beckham, Snoop Dogg and other celebrities are digitally inserted into a Tatoine cantina alongside a young Harrison Ford—nothing competes with Nike's "Write the Future."