



Cohen (left, with Paddy Moloney of The Chieftains) trumpets world music.

TO THE RHYTHM OF A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

Alecia Cohen is a force of nature. Ask this young New Yorker what inspired her to start her world-music lifestyle magazine, *RhythmMusic*, and she dives into an ocean of richly detailed explanation, emerging only slightly breathless several minutes later. The magazine is her passion, and it shows.

Cohen, 27, has been the publisher of *RhythmMusic* since 1991, when it was a Boston-based regional newsletter consisting of "a piece of paper folded in half." Today it's a four-color magazine with a print-run of 60,000 (25,000 subscribers), published 11 times a year, with a CD of world music accompanying every subscriber issue. A year's subscription is \$49.95 (or \$29.95 without the CDs). And, Cohen is delighted to point out, it became a profit-making enterprise this past June.

"I've always had an interest in ethnic culture, ever since I was a child," says Cohen, who grew up in Miami ("when it wasn't as hip as it is today"), surrounded by a diverse array of nationalities and cultures. After studying anthropology and art history at Curry College in New England, she launched into a career as a museum curator right out of college, working at Boston's

Museum of Fine Arts part time, and managing an African-art gallery.

"But pretty soon I realized that looking at artifacts in a glass case is not a real way to see culture," Cohen says. "I thought, 'Why not try to preserve culture that's out there right now, and allow people to experience these cultures through their sights and sounds?'"

The idea begat the newsletter—financed through "pocket money" and by charging for event listings—about the emerging phenomenon known as world music. "I define it as music both traditional and popular that comes from other cultures," Cohen says. The newsletter a year later begat the magazine, currently financed almost entirely through subscriptions and advertising. (A full-color ad page costs just over \$4,000 for a one-time appearance.)

In recent years the magazine has added such lifestyle features as travel and food stories and coverage of world issues. Interestingly, 71 percent of readers are between the ages of 26 and 40; it's a predominantly white, Boomer audience, professional and educated.

Cover subjects have ranged from Paul Simon's controversial Broadway musical *The Capeman* to Joan Osborne's col-

laboration with Ireland's Paddy Moloney of The Chieftains—to popular clamor for all issues Tibetan (featuring a cover image of the Dalai Lama being fitted for Mickey Mouse ears).

Within the space of six years, the self-taught publisher ("When I started, I didn't know anything about the printing business") has evolved into a junior Tina Brown, creatively linking social events with business in a way that would do the ex-*New Yorker* editor proud.

Cohen moved the magazine to New York in 1996, and has watched her advertising business leap 35 percent—much of which she attributes to an enormous party she threw in August of 1997 at New York's famed avant-garde showplace, The Knitting Factory.

"We were celebrating one year in New York and the fifth anniversary of the magazine, and we got Harry Belafonte, an acquaintance of mine, to host the party," Cohen recalls with as much enthusiasm as if the party had been last night. "We had world musicians and ethnic food, and we expected 300 people to come. But 750 showed up! People are *sniff* talking about it—I remember those gift bags you gave out!" (The party cost between \$10- and \$15,000—only \$2,000 of which came out of the magazine's coffers. "When you start from scratch, you become the queen of sponsorship!" Cohen laughs.)

The magazine is also a regular fixture (and sometime co-sponsor) of such brand-name events as WOMAD (World of Music and Dance), Central Park Summer-Stage, and The Tibetan Freedom Concert. One staffer's full-time job is to travel to myriad festivals, distributing copies of the magazine and signing up new subscribers.

Cohen sees her publication as riding a growing wave of interest in other cultures, other music.

"Look at the influx of immigrants into this country—it's fascinating to see the mix of ethnic cultures arriving here, opening restaurants, creating havens for people to go to," she says. "From a business perspective, world music has not peaked yet. It's going to keep growing for at least the next five years." —Susan Champlin Taylor