

AMBIENT MUSIC

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Abstract:

Artistic exploration period of the early 20th century draws two new directions in art history called Dadaism and Futurism. Along with the painters and writers who begin to manifest in these artistic directions, is distinguished composers whose works are focused on producing electronic, electric and acoustic sounds. Music gets a strong minimalist and concrete experimental type, evolving in different genres including the ambient music.

Keywords: *ambient music, minimalism, experimental music*

Ambient music is a derivative genre of electronic music known as background music developed from traditional musical structures, and generally focuses on timbre sound and creating a specific sound field.

The origins of this music are found in the early 20th century, shortly before and after the First World War. This period of exploration and rejection of what was classical and traditionally gave birth of two artistic currents called in art history, Dadaism and Futurism. Along with painters and writers manifested in these artistic directions were distinguished experimental musician such as Francesco Balilla Pratella, Kurt Schwitters and Erwin Schulhoff.

This trend has had a notable influence in Erik Satie works which consider this music as „music of furniture” (*Musique d'ameublement*) and proper to create a suitable background during dinner rather than serving as the focus of attention¹.

The experimental trend has evolved at the same time with the „music that surrounds us” which start to delimitated the cosmic sounds, nature sounds, and sound objects - composers being attracted by sound exploring in microstructure and macrostructure level through the emergence and improvement of acoustic laboratories or electronic music studios as well as Iannis Xenakis, Pierre Boulez, Karl Stockausen.

Music Ambient syntagma declared in the mid 70s is assigned to Brian Eno, English musician (1948) known as a composer, singer and producer and considered one of the main innovators of this music genre. The term used *ambient* comes from the Latin word, *ambire*, which means „to surround” and refers to a particular atmosphere created by music that puts the listener into a specific state of mind.

Graduated some art schools in England, Eno is a musician with refined tastes in music and arts. He himself acknowledges the influence of Erik Satie and John Cage in his

¹ Jarrett, Michael, *Sound Tracks: A Musical ABC*, Volumes 1–3. Temple University Press, 1998

compositional efforts. Moreover, his compositions bears the marks of other musical genres such as American jazz (inspired by Miles Davis) or *music drone*² of La Monte Young (1935), American musician known as avant-garde music composer and as the first minimalist and contemporary and experimental music author.

Along with Eno are other composers who influenced and developed ambient music genre. Significant composers are Mike Oldfield, Jean Michael Jarre, Vangelis, alongside with music of such bands as Pink Floyd or Yes, who added notable distinctive aspects that led to diversification and enrichment genre repertoire.

Since the 1990s, are the first mentions of the press about ambient gender and music performers: *ambient house*, *ambient techno* and *IDM* (intelligence dance music). Once, with the popularization and diversification of ambient music are detach certain exclusive genres as *chill-out* with rhythms and tempos relatively rare which suggests relaxation and mind psychedelic experience. The note from Brian Eno's album *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* edited in 1978 is very suggestive in this way: *Ambient Music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting.*³

Another direction is developed by sound artists or DJs and is based on abstract textures of short models electronically processed starting to align with minimalist compositions and concrete music.

The musicians and sound artists start to explore the physical space of listening and producing by creating „sonic sculptures” and using sound installations. Today, many concerts are including screenings lights or specific images. Also, the electro acoustic influence is seen in contemporary works (2008) of Polish artist Michal Jacaszek (1972) – as the album *Treny* (Miasmah).

Ambient music is used in films, TV shows and video games. Vangelis wrote numerous soundtracks, including the soundtrack for the film *Chariots of Fire*, the productions of *Blade Runner* (1982 and 1492), *Conquest of Paradise* in 1992, both directed by Ridley Scott.

For the soundtrack of *Dune* (1984) the director David Lynch gives up at the style of classical theme as sci-fi epic, popularized by Star Wars, in favor of an atmospheric musical theme created by Toto and Brian Eno.

The musician Paddy Kingsland (1947) is known not only for its composition, but also for musical style that brought in several seasons of Doctor Who series, who worked up musical signals or minimal music, for most of its history.

The trilogy video game *Fallout* and its derivations, using too ambient music that sometimes containing gentle rumble to portray the post-apocalyptic world emptiness where gambling is developed.

In 2002, the album of Brian Eno *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* was voted in the list of *25 Most Influential ambient albums of all times*. It is understood so that such a classification was made of the most popular albums and some of them grab the public.

² Music which contains drones and is rhythmically still or very slow, called „drone music” can be found in many parts of the world, including bagpipe traditions.

³ Brian Eno, *Music for Airports*, liner notes, September, 1978

Among similar genres or derived types from ambient music we mention some of the best known and most consistent genre in terms of composition:

Organic Music is an ambient music dominated by electronic, electric and acoustic musical instrument, but also instruments like percussion, piano or dulcimer. It is called organic music because they are used and explored natural intonations and sounds of electric, electronic instruments either improvised instruments (flutes range of PVC tubing).

Robert Rich (1963), Steve Roach (1955) and Klaus Schulze (1947) who is also co-founder of the band Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel are just some of the composers of the New Age. Steve Roach is known for his nighttime extended concerts and Schulze for his frequent shows between 1970-1980 where is overlap the music of a string ensemble, or an ensemble of solo cellists with its representations on a synthesizer.

Ambient music inspired by nature

This music is made of samples and recordings of natural sounds from the environment. Samples can be processed and arranged to have either a fixed structure, either a free structure, and not focused on a specific motif or register. Sometimes music could be made only from a selection of nature sounds or „founded sounds” but can also be overlapping or combined. For example, in the music album *Substrata* composed by Biosphere (1997) are distinguished cold themes suggesting mountains, glaciers and rivers.

Another example is *Sonic Seasonings* album (1972) by Wendy Carlos who is also the author of the synthesizer with the same name. This album consists of a single composition in four contrasting parts with a programmatic that suggests a certain unfolding events and can be considered a reply to Vivaldi's Four Seasons. The papers contain musical sounds combined with recorded sounds of nature to evoke the songs of the birds in the *spring*, sounds of insects in *summer* or wind gusts in *autumn*. On the re-edited edition on CD (1998), the author explains in a note on the album: *It was intended to work on a timbral and experiential level, so the sound could "flow over you"*⁴.

Dark ambient music

This dissonant music is mainly used to create feelings and states of dark, sinister and fear.

The effects are achieved through the extensive use of digital reverberation, with lower sounds, as deep drone sites, bleak male choir, echoing thunder or distant artillery. The albums in this experimental genre are *Ghosts on Magnetic Tape* of the band Bass Communion or the collaborative album *Stalker* of Robert Rich and Lustmord.

Ambient house appeared in the 80s in the UK and Japan and is a stylistic mix between *ambient*, *house music*, *electronic music* and *acid house music* style developed by DJs in Chicago and Illinois, America. The songs are characterized by symmetrical

⁴ <http://www.wendycarlos.com/+sslms.html#behind>, accesat pe 19 mai 2015

rhythmic patterns, generally four times, with synthesizer sounds produced and short vocal fragment defines an „atmospheric” style. Band The KLF – with *Chill Out* album (1990) and Biosphere – with *Microgravity* album (1991) are just two of the subgenre representatives.

Industrial ambient music is a hybrid genre that consists of dissonant harmonies development of drone metal and resonances, low frequency rumble and noise emitted by various devices sometimes included gongs, percussion rhythms, distorted voices, and sounds recorded of radio telescope or telegraph wires. Some artists that are producing this subgenre are Deutsch Nepal, Hafler Trio, Lustmord, Thomas Köner, Zoviet France.

Space music - includes a wide range of other genres environment that has certain common characteristics in defining contemplative sound experience. Space music varies from simple to complex sound textures, being played by traditional instruments or only electronic without having precise guidelines on traditional parameters in compositional process known as melody, rhythm, harmony, formal construction⁵. This music also called *cosmic music* is often used as background for various actions (for example, contemplation of the planetarium) but can also be heard in order to stimulate relaxation and inspiration. Because in general, this music has a continuous spatial representation, it can facilitate emotional transcendence by introspection, meditation, deep listening and achieve the sensation of floating⁶.

The classical music critic David Hurwitz believes that in the space music category may be included Joseph Haydn's Oratorio *The Creation* (1798). One argument is on the one hand in terms of sonority created - *a genuine work of spatial music, the gentle pulse of high violins and brass columns of air as cellos and basses with nothing in the middle*⁷ and secondly, in terms of composition, Haydn designing his work after music and astronomy discussion with Frederick William Herschel, a famous composer and astronomer (discoverer of Uranus).

Space Music is also a component of many film soundtracks and is frequently used in various spaces for relax and body care: beauty salons, spa, massage, chromo or aromatherapy, etc. Artists who have contributed to this sub-genre are Michael Stearns, Enigma, Jean Michel Jarre, Robert Rich, Steve Roach, Numina, Klaus Schulze and Tangerine Dream and last but not least, Vangelis.

Music ambient isolationist known too as Isolationism, is a music with exclusive features that can make it easy to distinguish from other subgenres by dissonant sounds, repetitive structures, micro-tonalities and unresolved harmonic structures that create feelings of anxiety, instability and suspense⁸.

⁵ Stephen Hill, *New Age Music Made Simple*, https://www.hos.com/n_word.html, accesat pe 5 mai 2015

⁶ Lloyd Barde, *Notes on Ambient Music*, Hyperreal Music Archive, http://music.hyperreal.org/epsilon/info/barde_notes.html accesat pe 5 mai 2015

⁷ Hurwitz, David (2005), *Exploring Haydn: A Listener's Guide to Music's Boldest Innovator*, Amadeus Press Unlocking the Masters Series, Hal Leonard. pp. 78-81.

⁸ Reynolds, Simon, *Chill: the new ambient*, ArtForum, Jan, 1995, http://archive.is/20120629010637/findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n5_v33/ai_16462111, accesat pe 6 mai 2015

The term was introduced in the mid-90s, by *The Wire* British magazine with the compilation album *Ambient 4: Isolationism* and including some influence of metal post music.

Some of the artists known for this style of ambient music are Inanna, Thomas Köner, Robert Fripp, Steven Wilson and Chuck Hammer (Guitarchitecture). Besides this, joins several bands of progressive metal with ambient influences as Cult of Luna, Isis, and Between the Screams (known as post-metal bands).

Ambient Dub is a musical style that comes from remixing of tracks - especially Jamaican or reggae - by eliminating some voices or instruments and emphasizing the bass guitar. This expression occurred in early 1990, in Birmingham, England. A series of four albums *Ambient Dub* were inspiration for many artists as the producer and sound engineer Bill Laswell who created and collaborated with various musicians.

This type involves a fusion of several styles of dub complemented by ambient electronic assisted by DJ with echo, equalization, electronic psychedelic effects represented especially by King Tubby and other Jamaican artists sound.

Ethno ambient Music

Ethno Music comprises various musical styles ethnic - acoustic, including traditional music or quasi-traditional that combines influences the level of form and instrumentation with techniques derived from ambient music - sound textures, technological processing or use of land (field) records. It is believed that there are certain affinities with *tribal techno* subgenres, *ethno techno* and especially *World* and *Ambient music*, styles launched in late 1970 by Jon Hassell and Brian Eno.

This style has evolved due to globalization and interpenetration of cultures through migration of peoples from the former and current colonies to European capitals, Paris in general, or to promote various forms of music of non-European space - Indian raga music, Tibetan, Chinese and Japanese Koto music, Eastern European Folk music, Folk music of the Balkans, Northern Folk music, as well as in other parts of Africa (N, S, E), Asia, Oceania, Central America South, etc. Composer Alan Stivell is the originator of the connection between the music derived from traditional folk music, modern rock, and world music with *Celtic Harp Renaissance* album⁹ in 1972. Other representatives are Bill Laswell, Steve Roach, Adi Lukovac, Robert Rich, Vidne Obmana, Ian Naismith and Paul Haslinger etc.

Beyond the major influence of Brian Eno and other musicians who contributed significantly to the development of „ambient music” must not be omitted „classic” composers which brought drone in their work, even occasionally, in order to evoke distinct and specific sonorities as: archaic, rustic or folk: J. Haydn, *Symphony No. 104*, opening of finale, accompanying a folk melody, L. van Beethoven, *Symphony No. 6*, „Pastoral”, opening and trio section of scherzo, G. Mahler, *Symphony No. 1*, introduction; a seven-octave drone on A evokes „the awakening of nature at the earliest dawn”, B.

⁹ Lloyd Barde, *Notes on Ambient Music*, Hyperreal Music Archive, http://music.hyperreal.org/epsilon/info/barde_notes.html, accesat pe 5 mai 2015

Bartók, in his adaptations for piano of Hungarian and other folk music. Works such as *Tristan und Isolde Prelude* by R. Wagner, *La mer* by C. Debussy, *Bolero* by M. Ravel, *Ecstasy Poem* by A. Scriabin, *Rite of Spring* by I. Stravinsky, *Wozzeck* by Alban Berg are just brief examples of music that involves particularities ambient, supporting the idea that the ambient function was and is an important and determining component (fact) in music .

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