



REVIEW | On the History of Rock Music

Yvetta Kajanová

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Yvetta Kajanová's history of rock was originally published in Slovak as *K dejinám rocku* (Bratislava CoolArt, 2010). It presents Kajanová's research of 420 different musical examples carried out between 1990 and 1998 in Bratislava, Slovakia. The reader is introduced to the historical and theoretical development of rock music including: rock and roll, hard rock development since the 1960s, experimental rock, art rock, electronic rock, punk, new wave, and various forms of metal and rock.

Each chapter is divided in two parts: a historical presentation and revision of the main characteristics of particular subgenres of rock music followed by music analysis. The music analysis focuses on the relationships between the sound, rhythms and improvisations in various rock subgenres and gives specific attention to the development of rhythm. In addition, the theoretical analysis is supplemented with notation examples of rhythmical patterns by artists such as Bill Haley and the Comets, The Yardbirds, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Frank Zappa, The Velvet Underground, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Kraftwerk, The Ramones, Talking Heads, Sonic Youth, Iron Maiden, The Cure and other Anglo-American bands and musicians.

Kajanová shows how rhythmical elements such as the off-beat principle, polyrhythms and poly-metrics are fundamental to rock music. The author uses a comparative method that not only summarises the similarities and differences between various periods and styles of rock music, but also provides a chronological presentation of rock main characteristics, as it developed from the 1960s onwards. For example, the discussion of the first hard rock era enables the

reader to further understand the differences in the uses of rhythm, harmony and instruments between rock and roll and rock during the first half of the 1960s. The standard blues-based twelve-bar rock and roll scheme, and the walking bass figure from the rock and roll period, were phased out by rock musicians during this period. Bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones and The Who tended to enrich the harmony with tetrachords on the basic scale degrees and their substitutes, such as the dominant seventh and diminished seventh chords.

Kajanová further emphasises that drums and bass guitar assumed increasing significance as the basic instruments in the rhythm section for the bands of the first hard rock era. An important moment in the development of hard rock occurred when the bass guitar's part adopted syncopated and dotted rhythm. At the same time Kajanová's analysis demonstrates the similarities between the periods of rock and roll and the first hard rock era. The latter is characterised by marching and blues patterns, which are remnants of country and western music and rock and roll. From the notation examples, it is argued that often the accents into songs in first hard rock era were on the second and fourth beat (32). But in the period of experimental rock this changed, placing accents on third beat. Furthermore Kajanová shows with rhythmical examples that experimental bands played in more diverse meters like 2/4, 3/4 and 6/4, and that some of the bands used several meters in a single composition such as Frank Zappa's "The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet" (1966). The chapter about experimental rock concludes with the analysis of noise in relation to regular rhythm. Kajanová uses the examples of Velvet Underground's "I Heard Her Call My Name" and "Sister Ray" (1968), stating that "The instrumental noise suppresses the pattern and, in the drums and the bass guitar, only two notes of equal rhythmic value that stand out, they lead to a negation of metre" (49). The chapters about heavy metal, hard core, speed metal, trash metal, death metal, black metal, and grind core presents the development of different heavy metal rhythmical patterns from the 1970s through to the 1990s with the use of a chronological, comparative analytical method applied to a range of musical examples.

The rapid change of sub genres in rock music during the second half of the 20th century, and rhythmic-melodic variations that occur in particular rock directions (active on average for ten years and sometimes less as in the case of punk music) contribute to the complexity of Kajanová's analysis of rhythm in rock music. Through a detailed process of critically analysing the rhythms of 420 song recordings, Kajanová has produced a chronological analysis of rhythm in rock music. This is supplemented by an overview of the meaning of rhythm archetypes in terms of prototype and model of particular rock styles. In 293 analysed rock samples, from a total of 420, such rhythm archetypes were found. In other words, out of every ten researched rock patterns, seven possess rhythm archetypes and the remaining three use different rhythm structures. Such archetypes occur most highly in post-rock and roll music, punk rock, and heavy metal, while the lowest on the scale are, as can be expected, found in examples of experimental rock and new age music.

This study does not only offer a chronological and statistical overview of rhythm patterns in rock music, but also provides a useful comparative tool within a particularly new research approach in the study of specific rock music genres.

Thus it shows in which way, and how often the basic rhythm archetypes are modified, bringing new insights to the understanding of rhythm patterns in particular rock styles.

References

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Discography

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