On The History of Rock Music

Yvetta Kajanová

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Recently published by Peter Lang *On the History of Rock Music* by Yvetta Kajanová is dedicated to popular music studies. More precisely this edition is translation of original Slovak book by Kajanová *K dejinám rocku* (Bratislava CoolArt, 2010). *On the History of Rock Music* presents research of 420 different musical examples carried out between 1990 and 1998 in Bratislava by Kajanová. Through the contents the reader is introduced to the historical and theoretical development of rock music. The content of the book is divided into couple of chapters: “Rock and Roll“; “Hard Rock-the First Era 1960–1967“; “Experimental Rock“; “Hard Rock-the Second Era 1967–1979“; “Art Rock“; “Electronic Rock“; “Punk Rock“; “New Wave“; “Heavy Metal“; “Hard Core“; “Speed Metal and Trash Metal“; “Death Metal, Black Metal and Grind Core“; “The 1980's Synthesis and Polistylistic Rock Music“. Each chapter offers two parts: A historical presentation and revision of main characteristic of particular subgenre of rock music and a music analysis centred on the rhythmical element. The music analysis focuses on the relationships between the sound, rhythms and improvisations in previous mentioned rock subgenres and gives specific attention to the development of rhythm in rock music. Also the theoretical analyse is supplement with notation examples of rhythmical patterns presented in each chapter such as from: Bill Haley and the Comets, 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 or musicians. Rhythmical elements in rock music such as beat-offbeat principle, polyrhythms and poly-metrics are fundamental to rock rhythm patterns presented in this edition. The author is also using the comparison method when summarize the similarities and differences between different periods of rock music. For example at the beginning of the chapter about First hard rock era we could understand better the differences in the use of rhythm, harmony and instruments between rock and roll and rock bands during the first half of the sixties. The twelve bar rock and roll scheme and thus the walking bass figure from rock and roll period were phased out by rock musicians during the sixties. 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, for example the dominant seventh and diminished seventh chords. Kajanová emphasise that drums and bass guitar assumed more significance as the basic instruments in the rhythm section for the bands of first hard rock era and also important moment in the development of hard rock happened when the bass guitar's part adopted syncopes and dotted rhythm. From other side Kajanová is analysing the similarities between these two periods. First hard rock era is also characterised by the march and blues patterns which were remnants of country and western music and rock and roll. From the notation examples we could find out that very often the accents into songs in first hard rock era were on the second and fourth beat. But in the period of experimental rock this changed, because experimental bands put 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 an also some of the bands used several meters in a single composition. (ex. Frank Zappa song “The Return of the Son of Monster Magnet“). The chapter about experimental rock is finished with the analyse of noise into the relation of regular rhythm. Kajanová gives example by Velvet Underground song “Sister Ray“, saying “The instrumental noise suppresses the patern 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). In the analyse of the chapter about second hard rock era 1967−1979 at the beginning Kajanová stress out that rhythmic pattern in this period not only has the role of basic rhythmic model in the rhythmic section but also serves as a melodic and rhythmic motif called a riff which is the basis for the development of the composition. Another new element in this period is the use of syncoped rhythm with combination of eight and sixteenth notes. The chapter about rhythm of punk rock presents the differences between art rock, progressive rock and punk. Punk rock diverged from the thematic development or sequence of the rhymthmic patterns in compositions. A punk rock rhythmic pattern is usually a one-bar pattern, and is created mainly by bass guitar and the drums. The chapter about heavy metal and its various subgenres presents the development of different heavy metal rhythmical patterns from the seventies until nineties. For Kajanová the principal heavy metal musical material is a melodic and rhythmic motif of the guitar in its horizontal progression and the vertical rhythmic pattern is left mainly to the drums. From the period of the eighties onwards there are reappearance of the previous hard rock, art rock (progressive rock), punk rock and heavy metal rhythm patterns. With the coming back of the earlier rhythm patterns Kajanová said that it is possible to speak of a postmodernist return to historic rock music. Near the end of the book we could understand the meaning of rhythm archetype which is a prototype and model of particular rock style. From a total of 420 analysed rock samples rhythm archetipes were found in 293. In other words out of every ten researched rock patterns seven possess rhythm archetypes and the remaining three use different rhythm structures. In the conclusion the author summarise the research findings with examples of six basic rock rhythmical archetypes.