On The History of Rock Music

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*On the History of Rock Music* by Yvetta Kajanová is dedicated to popular music studies and 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 chapters including: “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 analysis is supplemented with notation examples of rhythmical patterns presented in each chapter with artists including: 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 and 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 also uses the comparison method which not only summarize the similarities and differences between different periods of rock music, but also provide gradually presentation of rock main characteristics developed from the sixties onwards. For example at the beginning of the chapter regarding the First hard rock era allows the reader to further understand 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 emphasises 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. At the same time Kajanová analyses the similarities between these two periods. The first hard rock era is characterised by the march and blues patterns which were remnants of country and western music and rock and roll. From the notation examples it is argued that very 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, 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 and 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 concludes with the analysis of noise in relation to regular rhythm. Kajanová gives examples of the 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).

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 seventies until nineties with the use of chronological, comparative analysis acomplished with diverse musial examples. While in the chapter about heavy metal we have very good analysis of heavy metal music in the last chapter about polystilistic rock music the chronological presentation is missing concrete examples. We could not find rhythmical examples about alternative music developed in the 80s and 90s such as grunge or neo psychodelic music. 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 direction that was active in average ten years and sometimes less as in the case of punk music contributed to the complexity of Kajanová analysis of rhythm in rock music. But through a detailed process of listening to 420 songs, their rhythmical notation, analysis, performing calculations Kajanová managed to create a chronological analysis of rhythm in 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.

References

Kajanová, Y. 2010. *K dejinám rocku*. Bratislava: CoolArt

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