

Various Artists - La Ola Interior - Spanish Ambient & Acid Exotism 1983-1990 - Full Text - ENG

La Ola Interior - Spanish Ambient & Acid Exotism 1983-1990 : Promo Text

Following “La Contra Ola” (BJR015), Bongo Joe is pleased to present LA OLA INTERIOR, a compilation exploring the ambient side of the Spanish electronic music produced in the 80’s. It gathers musicians from various horizons and of many generations, who shared the desire to create an immersive soundscape and to combine electronic music with non-Western musical traditions. Hardly known even in their homeland, these musics can be considered as pioneer in contemporary electronic experimentation.

Música discreta

In the 80’s, as the Movida was dying away and the post punk wave was declining, a new experimental music movement took place in Spain. It brought together creators involved in a common search for an alternative musical direction to the current Western pop music patterns. These musicians show an assertive interest in electronics and recording technology, and will work off the beaten path to provide the basis of the twenty-first century sound experimentation. Although these musics take part in various genres (electroacoustic, noise, industrial, sound collage...), this anthology is focusing on ambient sound and its links with ethnic tones.

Throughout the decade, Spanish artists dedicate themselves to the making of a form of ambient music which would be, as one of its founders Brian Eno once said: “as part of the ambience of the environment just as the color of the light and the sound of the rain”. Ambient music was born in the 70’s. Fully connected to American minimalist music and German Kosmische Musik, as well as the discovery of worldwide musical traditions, it is an exercise of texture and of sound modeling. Compared to the overwhelming majority of Western music, there are few questions of melody or harmony. It doesn’t need neither narrative structure nor tempo to exist. It could be the reason why it is so difficult to identify and kept under the radar.

Even if respected independent record companies have recently taken an interest in some of its leading figures, such as Luis Delgado or Suso Saiz, the Spanish story of this *música discreta* is unrecognized. As a general rule, the Anglo-Saxon tropism did relate the spanish peninsula’s

ambient music to the *Balearic Sound*, that is to say to the relaxing music played in Ibiza's nightclubs and especially valued by Northern European people. However, if ambient music may share a particular listening condition with lounge and chill out productions—according to Eno: “it must be as ignorable as it is interesting”—it surpasses them widely by the diversity of its approaches and its radical proposals.

Going back to its early years, the ambition of LA OLA INTERIOR is to bring Spanish ambient music back to its place in the productive territory of experimental musics, and particularly in its two main breeding grounds: the tape recording underground and the independent musicians-producers scene.

The acme of tape medium and birth of the electronic music underground

This new wave of experimental music is inseparable from the self-publishing process, music distribution and exchange, mostly on tape format, all of which are setting up in Spain in a handcrafted manner reminiscent of punk DIY. The democratisation of electronic instruments and cassette deck duplicators will allow a wide underground movement to get organized within a few years. Right at the beginning of the decade, recording labels started multiplying across the country: EGK, Investigaciones, Estudios y Proyectos (IEP), Proceso Uvergraf and Toracic Tapes in Madrid, Laboratorio de Música Desconocida (LMD) and Ortega y Cassette in Barcelona, Laboratorios No in Granada, Necromicon in Puertollano, etc... At the time, it was common to see a non-professional musician running their own record label, not only to publish their own music, but also publish music by other non-professionals and spread it throughout the country thanks to connections with other collectives.

Hyperactive, the Spanish tapes scene displays several features. Most of these projects are individual productions pretending to be a group. In fact they are the work of a single person with small means. The situation enables creativity and a unique use of devices, usually tinkered, following logics of sound collage or sound processing from concrete music. The use of pseudonyms as well as the multiplication of collaborations is frequent, and helps wipe off the idea of authorship, allowing artists to explore simultaneously various creative paths.

The Spanish underground philosophy is moreover radical and is the opposite of the prevailing culture. This antagonism expresses itself in the first place by the often provocative graphic

design of the sleeves and the gadgets that come with the tapes: dadaist satirical parodies, derelict industrial sites, congenital malformations and photographs of corpses. These aesthetics owe as much to book objects and to mail art, dear to Fluxus, as to copy machines and punk fanzines. As everywhere else in Europe, rough musical expressions such as noise and industrial music prevail in the Spanish underground scene. Such overabundant production could turn out to be repetitive but its explorative dimension is so viscerally assertive that many unusual experiments will also emerge from it.

Ethno-trance and genius tinkerers

A minority group of underground musicians will elaborate idiosyncratic and composite styles, pulling away from industrial music standards. It is worth emphasizing the influence of German Kosmische Musik in the 70's. The very extensive experimentation led on the electronic instrumentarium, then called in Spain the "Berlin School" (Conrad Schnitzler, Dieter Moebius, Popol Vuh, Tangerine Dream), served at that time as a complete reference in sound wave sculpture and in the disclosure of the sound spectrum. Also following the way shown by Krautrock bands, artists from the Spanish underground scene will furthermore take an interest in a music that is not yet called "worldmusic", striving to incorporate its influence to their productions.

Several projects introduced in LA OLA INTERIOR testify to the start of an electronic movement based on polyrhythm, the spatialization of sound and the reuse of oriental sound. Such is the case of Madrid band **Esplendor Geométrico**, whose long stay in the African enclave of Melilla will open a creative episode made of impressive sound experiments, mixing industrial beats and Arabian rhythmic. With this ethno-trance music, which echoes Muslimgauze's or 23 Skidoo's contemporary experiments, **Esplendor Geométrico** seem to have found the right balance between tone violence and subtle soundscapes exploration. Another Madrid experimental electronic scene leader, **Miguel A. Ruiz**, will lay under his own name—as well as **Orfeón Gagarin**—the foundation of a mysterious music. Sometimes called "tropical industrial ambient", it is a combination of electronic loops, ethnic drums and pounding drone music.

However, the melodious heterodoxy of those years is not limited to the Spanish capital city and will soon be spreading to other territories as for example the Canary Islands. Based in Tenerife, **Mataparda** (aka José Mesa) will self-produce in the 80's a series of very inventive tapes. A

singular creator, he is in line with Robert Wyatt or Pascal Comelade. **Mataparda** excels in miniature, he is able to compose very naive songs as well as noise music blasts or subtle micro-soundscapes, filled with African and Caribbean influences. But it's above all in Barcelona, where an avant-garde artistic tradition is deeply established, that electronic underground will become the most inspired. Handmade and pervious to European Western influences, the Catalan scene in the 80's is the home of many unclassifiable creators.

Victor Nubla is a producer, musician and cultural agitator but he's also one of the great figures of the pre-olympic and experimental *Ciudad Secreta* (secret city), as the journalist and rock critic Jaime Gonzalo called it. In the 80's, **Nubla**, founder in 1976 of the band Macromassa, developed a method consisting of random excerpts of radio sounds reworked with a sampler and a sequencer. He called it *Método de Composición Objetiva* (Objective Composition Method – MCO). The result of those frantic remixes is a repetitive music, erratic and thin, alternately cinematic and ethnic or spatial. Another figure from Barcelona, the duet **Camino al desván**, created in 1983 by Lole Garcia and Jordi Cabayol, associates electronic sounds and traditional instruments in favour of a thick and spectral and minimal music. Electroacoustic deviations, repetitive structures and medieval resonances interact freely in their music, giving the auditor a feeling of facing a mutant music.

In the early 1990's, the development of music softwares, the advent of compact discs and of the internet will weaken the activity of the Spanish tape scene. But one way or another its spirit will always stay alive. Either because artists like Miguel A. Ruiz or Esplendor Geométrico have succeeded to extend their activities up until today, or because some next generation have taken over. The Barcelona based artist **Eli Gras** could well be considered as the worthy successor of the underground's handicraft work approach, both by her personal work combining ambient music, avant-pop, musical improvisation and experimental string instrument making, and her editing work of unfindable pieces of music led by La Olla Exprés, her record label.

The independent record labels scene: Hypnotics, New Age & Fourth-World

The Spanish ambient music second thread is not to be found in the underground world of self-produced tapes but in the richest productions of specific independent record labels of the Iberian Peninsula. Emerged from the punk movement, two of the most important record labels, Discos Radioactivos Organizados (DRO) and Grabaciones Accidentales (GASA), developed strongly

in the 80's. As they realized that their own new wave scene was creatively exhausted, they sought to enlarge their field of activity to more elaborate instrumental music, as much by inclination as by the need to work with talented producers to record their albums.

Strangely, once overshadowed by the punk movement, some of the most adventurous artists of the 70's former generation will mark a come back thanks to those label companies. Coming through folk, contemporary, traditional or early music and familiarized with improvisation and with recording sessions, those artists are coming from a hippie culture, mutant, omnivorous, able to absorb many musical styles, from electronic ambient music to ethnic improvisations going through modal jazz. Their main influences are the American minimalist music composers of the 60's (La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Charlemagne Palestine perhaps Moondog) who enjoyed a great prestige at that time.

The composer and multi-instrumentalist **Suso Saiz** is fascinated with their repetitions and approach to tone. He produces a composition challenging all styles. From the 80's, along with his producing work, he creates a wide and introspective sound-scape he calls "Hypnotics", developing in the recesses of the most abstract sound matter, thanks to a clever use of electronic waves and modified guitar loops. If the Andalusian music of **Suso Saiz** is ethereal, the one by Canarian **Javier Segura** is in a close register, telluric. **Javier Segura** is recording alone. His work is based on electronic drums and guitar loops embellished with saturation effects or hold on only one note. These two artists share the same skill in overprinting sound layers. They also share the idea that in an analog system, a loop continually allows to hear new elements within a repeated sequence *ad libidum*.

Madridene **Luis Delgado** is reaching an interest for minimalist music in an even more ascetic manner, close to La Monte Young and his time distortion, especially in his solo works based on the live electronic handling of acoustic ancient instruments. Working in Madrid in the RCA recording studios with **Eugenio Muñoz**, they compose the **Mecánica Popular** project in which he performs concrete sounds, giving form to a mechanical and radical electronica. **Luis Delgado** founds his own record label, El cometa de Madrid, which will produce, piloted by GASA, some twenty references from 1986 to 1992. Striving for a minority music inside the mainstream system, *El cometa de Madrid* turns out to be an attempt to combine early, electronic, jazz and contemporary musics, in the manner of record labels like ECM or Windham Hill. In Spain, its production will come closest to a New Age movement.

However, LA OLA INTERIOR's overview would not be complete without mentioning the Spanish musicians who had a passion for the ideas developed in the late 70's by Brian Eno's and above all Jon Hassell's in a series of influential records around the notion of *Fourth-World Music*. For Hassell, the music of the "fourth world" originates from Western technology's ("first world") reprocessing of extra-occidental musical traditions (back then still known as "third world"). It's the soundtrack of a reconciled and ideal imaginary world.

Created in the mid-1980's, **Finis Africae** is **Juan Alberto Arteche**'s project, led at first with guitar player **Javier Bergia** and **Luis Delgado**. In four albums, today's iconic band laid the foundation of an ethno-ambient music joining together acoustic instruments, samples and electronic effects. It was capable of blending in their cross-breeding Amazonian sounds or tropical funk with traditional musics. Through a couple of albums released in the late 80's, the enigmatic **Jabir** (aka Francisco Javier Sánchez González), who was imbued with Sufi culture, tried to compose a sacred and secular music, mixing random electronic programming and classical Arab instruments.

Acid Exoticism

LA OLA INTERIOR is composed of two scenes and generations coming across a common interest for non-Western musical traditions and for "other worlds" music. Their exploration could lead to the tribal origins of electronic beats and the Spanish Arabic inheritance. As such, exoticism is temporal and geographic. However, their project has nothing in common with the conservative mission of the ethno-musicology or with the globalized polishing enterprise of "world music" business. It's all about a dreamed exoticism, a motionless journey, because most of these musicians never travelled to the countries whose culture, language and sounds they revere.

The most skilled of them have a real interest with the African, Amazonian or Oriental music instruments as shown by the great artefacts collections which sometimes help them to compose their music. But those instruments are hardly played in an orthodox or regular way. At that time, their good use and knowledge still relies on the ability to travel or to know their genuine performers. For many artists in LA OLA INTERIOR, the pursuit of a musical elsewhere involves the borrowing of sound archives, taken from radio programmes or sampled from ethno-musicology's record labels albums, like the French record label Ocora.

The sounds, beats or instruments of those traditions are always deliberately sieved with Western practices, as part of avant-garde musical ideas, of personal instrumental work out or the use of electronic technology. The result is a hybrid music, refined and redesigned, neither Western nor extra-Western, with a real taste for merging opposites, that we call Acid Exoticism because of its everlasting search for transe or contemplation.

In the end, those musics seek to challenge Western modernity, to create worlds of sounds which temporarily escape their own logic and open unbelievable potentials. What matters is the journey or the experience they provide and what music transforms in the auditory hearing and perception. As Luis Delgado said: “by any means, we were looking to opening paths that had never been hiked on, to walk on roads without landmarks. I guess it is not possible to get rid of the heritage of the music one always listen to but we tried to use available technology in order to gain different tones, another organisation and other patterns for the sound”.

Atmospheric, contemplative and serial, these musics still plunge us into a sensory trip, both internal and remote, organic and technological, between exotic memories and inner visions.

¡ Y ahora, buen viaje !