



Research > AVANT

Sound art and experimental music arrived to Spain relatively late, but over the course of the last three decades they have produced names, scenes and works that have managed to establish themselves with certain authority on the international stage.

From the most academic electroacoustics to industrial music, from radiophonic art to post-no-wave improvisation, AVANT has joined together with some of the most important performers of experimental music in Spain to retrace some of the key moments of the country's musical avant-garde, scarcely documented until now.

Each AVANT focuses on the work and career of a group project from the scene, documented and composed of two parts: the first part reconstructs the artist's context through interviews, and the second part retraces the artist's work with musical examples.

Curated by Roc Jiménez de Cisneros.

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Roc Jiménez de Cisneros (Barcelona, 1975) is a musician and composer. Since 1996, he is the core of computer music project EVOL, and his work has been released on internationally acclaimed record labels. In 2003 he began developing a series of electroacoustic pieces entitled "Punani", in which he deepens in some of the main aspects of his work, namely algorithmic composition, various synthesis techniques, spectro-morphology and the musical application of fractal geometry and other mathematical phenomena. Since 1997, he co-runs the record label and artists collective Alku with Anna Maria Ramos, as well as imbecil.net, a platform for absurd computing and binary obfuscation. He lives and works in Barcelona.

Voice: Clàudia Faus.

AVANT #3

Francisco López

From his home studio in the late seventies, Francisco López began working on what would eventually become one of the most solid careers in the international sound art scene. For decades, this biologist-musician has manipulated natural sound recordings and developed the basics of what he calls "absolute concrete music", a sonic approach that uses nature as the raw material for recreations of strangely beautiful parallel worlds and virtual realities. AVANT #3 reviews his entire career in music through this monographic program.

01. Biography

Although it is now relatively easy to establish conceptual links between Francisco López's creative output and certain philosophical and artistic traditions of the last two hundred years, one of the most interesting (and paradoxical) aspects of his work is that it actually developed in personal, cultural and generational isolation, barely penetrated by external stimuli. Today, it is easy to connect the work of this nomadic artist from Madrid to the theories of Goethe, Richter, Herder and other icons of German romanticism who formulated the foundations of what came to be known as absolute music: a new aesthetic and formal paradigm that banished the use of words as a vehicle and narrative thread and concentrated on pure sounds as the true representatives of human emotions. Or to the musique concrète of Pierre Schaeffer and his followers... For years, López himself has used the term "absolute concrete music" to define the boundaries of his approach. But when López first began manipulating audio cassettes and environmental recordings in his home studio in Madrid, he was actually completely unaware of these schools. And in reality, his way of perceiving, conceiving and processing sound material arose from his own way of seeing the world, influenced by pop culture (from the many branches of alternative rock to Hollywood soundtracks), rather than associations of the academic kind.

As with many other artists his age, Francisco's work flourished (with difficulty) in a rich but dispersed underground scene, with a tape culture influenced by mail art and the punk ethic that provided people doing experimental work with a complex exchange network, laying down roots that survive to this day. What may seem paradoxical is that López was able to take this essentially post-pop, sincerely anti-academic premise and use it to build one of the most solid careers in the international sound art scene, to unanimous acclaim from critics, the art world and the experimental music community around the world. Over the decades, this musician-biologist has masterfully manipulated recordings of natural environments, developing an approach to sound that uses nature to create strangely beautiful parallel worlds and virtual realities, with their own narrative and aesthetic laws. Francisco López transforms the environmental recordings captured by his equipment into fascinating, disconcerting imaginary worlds – alternative universes that require a profound listening, free from aesthetic prejudices and especially from the need to associate what we hear with our actual surroundings. Because while the essential ingredients of López's work – his "musical objects", in Schaefferian terms – are often sourced from nature (insects, rivers, the wind, birds, urban soundscapes), his music totally transcends the original context of these phonemes.



[Francisco López, 1996]

In the last few years, he has further expanded his immense discography (simply too huge to come to terms with), with a series of untitled works that don't state the original sound source or explain the subsequent processing, but, like a Köchel catalogue, offer a number as their only clue. Something like the antithesis of the work of British musician Chris Watson, a founding member of Cabaret Voltaire in the eighties, now a sound artist specialising in field recordings of animals and natural environments. When listening to Watson's recordings, which portray unheard/unseen daily life in wild corners of the planet, part of the experience and a great deal of the enjoyment comes from recognising and knowing the source of the sounds. With López however, it is just as essential to put a literal and figurative blindfold over one's eyes and previous knowledge when approaching his sonic cooking pot, in order to fully connect with the universal human essences that cover the fabric of his compositions. The sober darkness of his *mis en scène* also prevails in the graphic quality of each of these untitled releases, which keep descriptive and decorative elements to a minimum: a clear invitation to listen first and foremost. To concentrate on what we hear and let ourselves be absorbed by these immersive, sublime, distorted, augmented and improbable but totally possible realities.

02. Appendix

"Music is the echo from a transcendent harmonious world; it is the sigh of the angel within us."
Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825)

03. List of sound fragments

Part I

- Francisco López, "La Selva" (in *La Selva. Sound environments from a Neotropical rain forest*, 1999)
- Asmus Tietchens, "Mit Zebras Rennen" (in *In Die Nacht*, 1982)
- SPK, "Berufsverböt" (in *Information Overload Unit*, 1981)
- Francisco López, "Macroaggregates Of Phytodetritus" (in *Azoic Zone*, 1993)
- Francisco López, "Untitled" (1983)
- Francisco López, "Untitled" (in *Untitled (1981-1983)*, 1998)
- Francisco López, "Untitled #89" (in *Untitled #89*, 2000)
- Rafael Flores / Francisco López, "Frío (part 2)" (in *Frío*, 1987)
- Francisco López, "Untitled #104" (in *Untitled #104*, 2001)
- Francisco López, "Untitled #194" (in *LESS-LETHAL, vol. 1*, 2007)
- Pierre Schaeffer & Pierre Henry, "Eroica" (in *Symphonie pour un homme seul*, 1952)
- Asmus Tietchens, "Paranoide_reflexe" (in *Aus Freude Am Elend*, 1988)
- David Lynch, "Digah's Stomp" (in *Eraserhead*, 1977)
- Francisco López, "Untitled #180" (in *Untitled #180*, 2006)
- Francisco López, "Untitled #101" (in *Untitled*, 2000)
- Francisco López / John Hudak, "Untitled #95" (in *Untitled #95*, 1999)
- Francisco López, "Untitled Music for Geography" (in *Untitled Music for Geography*, 1997)
- Francisco López, "La Selva" (in *La Selva. Sound environments from a Neotropical rain forest*, 1999)



[Francisco López, 2004]



[Francisco López, 2006]

Part II

00:00:00 Francisco López, "Wind" - fragment (in *Wind [Patagonia]*, and/OAR, 2007)
 00:15:07 Francisco López, "Untitled XXX For Iannis Xenakis" (in *Persepolis - Remixes*, Asphodel, 2002)
 00:24:27 Francisco López, Untitled #132 (in *Turnoff*, Noise Asia, 2003)
 00:34:20 Francisco López, Untitled #203 (in *Airport Symphony*, Room40, 2007)
 00:47:11 Francisco López, Untitled #168 (in *Singing Bridges Vibrations: Variations*, Sonic Artstar, 2004)
 00:53:44 Francisco López, "La Selva" - fragment (in *La Selva. Sound environments from a neotropical rain forest*, V2 Archief, 1999)
 01:04:21 Francisco López, Untitled #94 (in *New Forms - Compilation*, Raster Noton 2000)
 01:09:57 Francisco López, Untitled #76 (in *Decay*, Ash International 1997)

Note: the tracks on this compilation come from recordings released on various formats. The differences in sound quality and feel were preserved for the sake of historical value.

04. Related links

<http://www.franciscolopez.net>
<http://www.alien8recordings.com/artists/francisco-lopez>
<http://www.discogs.com/artist/Francisco+López>
<http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/2/abstractconcrete.php>
http://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2008/04/francisco_lopez.html
<http://f4.filecrunch.com/files/20080508/8d048f2b99b27febeb1aad87e412a5b8/Absolute%20music%20in%20Oxford%20Music%20Online.pdf>
<http://www.treetheater.org/bklyn04/>
<http://projects.clarity-entures.com/GWO/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=xhkRMCvtTNM%3D&tabid=61&mid=381>
<http://martialorpee.free.fr/TextesPSFree/preface1.htm>

05. Acknowledgements

AVANT #3 wishes to thank Francisco López and Rafael Flores.

06. Copyright note

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