

Alternative Mirror

A column by Roy Parkhurst

Pop music, especially "rock and roll," is in a definite crisis. A multitude of trends exists simultaneously, some quite antagonistic to others. In other columns I will discuss other important trends, notably "New Wave" and some new Jazz trends, but here I wish to discuss an anti-rock rock movement known as Ambient Music.

Brian Eno, known best for his keyboard playing with the art-rock band Roxy Music, has developed considerably in the past few years, formulating a true rock esthetic which contrasts greatly with conventional rock and roll. In some respects it is a conscious minimization of music (as I will detail in PART II), but it is also more concerned with an esthetic result.

Let me quote Eno's own definition of Ambient Music from Ambient #1, "Music For Airports."

The concept of music designed specifically as a background feature in the environment was pioneered by Muzak Inc. in the fifties, and has since come to be known generically by the term Muzak. The connotations that this term carries are those particularly associated with the kind of material that Muzak Inc. produces -- familiar tunes arranged and orchestrated in a lightweight and derivative manner. Understandably, this has led most discerning listeners (and most composers) to dismiss entirely the concept of environmental music as an idea worthy of attention.

Over the past three years, I have become interested in the use of music as ambience, and have come to believe that it is possible to produce material that can be used thus without being in any way compromised. To create a distinction between my own experiments in this area and the products of the various purveyors of canned music, I have begun using the term Ambient Music.

An ambience as defined as an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint.

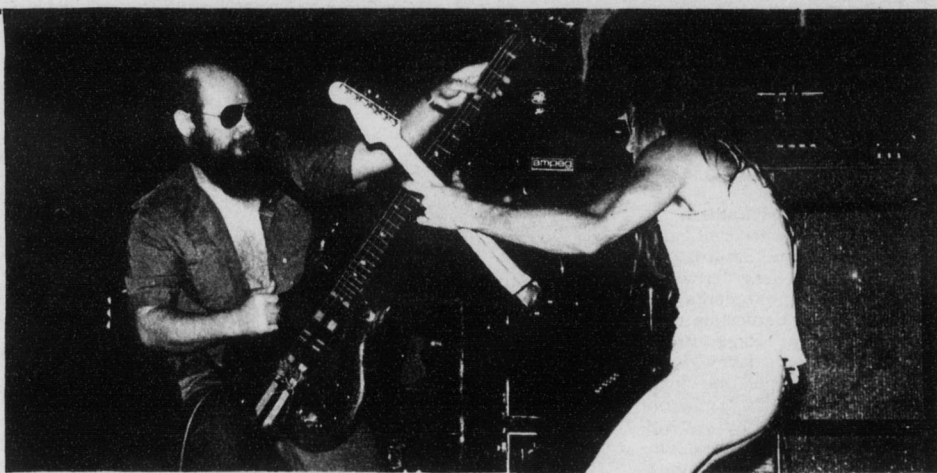
My intention is to produce original pieces ostensibly (but not exclusively) for particular times and situations with a view to building up a small but versatile catalogue of environmental music suited to a wide variety of moods and atmospheres.

Whereas the extant canned music companies proceed from the basis of regularizing environments by blanketing their acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncracies, Ambient Music is intended to enhance these. Whereas conventional background music is produced by stripping away all sense of doubt and uncertainty (and thus all genuine interest) from the music, Ambient Music retains these qualities. And whereas their intention is to 'brighten' the environment by adding stimulus to it (thus supposedly alleviating the tedium of routine tasks and leveling out the natural ups and downs of the body rhythms) Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think.

Ambient Music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting.

What Eno is suggesting is not too far from what Satie suggested in "Wallpaper Music" or the state of concentration as is implied in "Vexations." The Dada-isque attitude is reemerging, as is evidenced by John Cage. Eno's suggestion of Ambience is a reaction against the very "active" conventional dance rhythms of rock music, an attempt to establish a new esthetic. As Satie and the French crowd early in the 20th century reacted against the conventions of the Wagnerian shadow, so, too, Brian Eno and a few others are reacting against the failure of rock to expand and grow. Art movements which fail to change stagnate. Eno exists in the middle of the wave of Disco, Molly Hatchett's and WGLD's. These are active musics and/or empty musics no matter how diverse they are in style. Eno is suggesting for the first time an intellectual, passive, musical esthetic in the field of pop.

In Part II of this discussion I will deal with the music itself and give a discography of sorts for interested readers. In Part III, I will comment on the implications of the movement and how the public has reacted to it and how its value has been misinterpreted.



Dixie Dregs: Diverse, Fantastic!

By Sue Hubley

Dana Auditorium was rocking last Thursday night to the hard driving sounds of The Dixie Dregs. The five man group consisted of a bass guitar, acoustic guitar, electric violin, keyboards, and drums. Although this band is considered southern rock, it has enough variations in its style so that there is something for everyone -- A little jazz, a little bluegrass, and much straight-forward southern rock-n-roll.

Judging from the enthusiasm of the audience, one can tell that this band has been heard and well-liked. From the soft

lyrical rhythms of the track "Hereafter" to the foot-stomping beat of "Cruise Patrol", the fans were with the band one hundred percent. The fact that the lead musician and all of the members of the group do their most to relate to the audience has a lot to do with the group's popularity.

Says Hugh Stohler, "I liked the concert because it was not the kind of bands I usually hear." Other members of the audience seemed just as enthused with the various tunes they heard.

The Dixie Dregs have mastered the instruments they play.

The electric violin that the lead member plays symbolizes the group's diversity and it is the diversity that attracts the audience.

The alternating tempo also attracts fans. In the midst of a loud jam session, the beat will suddenly turn into a soft, mellow tune. The lighting, which was spectacular, flashed and jumped to the tempo resulting in a light show that perfectly complimented the music.

All in all, the concert was well worth the time and expense because of the diversity and feeling put into the show.

