

Apeiron

Vasco Martins

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ApEiRoN, music for electronic sound sources, percussion and sound design:

The first steps towards the composition

In 1998 I commissioned the architect Anildo Silva to build me a Roman-Etruscan arch over a limestone terrain that was filled with underwater fossils and petrified trees. The choice of place was based on artistic intuition and a feeling for positive telluric forces.

The arch faces east, in the direction of the rising of the sun, and on the 1st of January of every year the sun rises in the center of the arch. The arch was inaugurated on the 21st of June, the day of the summer solstice, a date that for thousands of years has been a ritualistic one, and one that is still visibly part of the human unconscious: consider, for example, the June festivals in Cape Verde that have to do with the land and fertility. The arch was given the name of **ApEiRoN**.

ApEiRoN

The concept of *ApEiRoN* is a very ancient one; it harkens back to Greece and to the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaximander. In those days philosophers observed nature; intuitive beings, they were, in essence, poets. With their open-minded souls they began to understand the world. That is how Anaximander got around to creating the concept of Apeiron, which means “indefinite” or, even, “invisible.”

It took a year to compose the music: the artist is the recipient of cosmic forces and he conveys what he has learnt. This comes into close union with the

philosophies of the beginning of the universe proclaimed by Indian mysticism:

In the beginning was the Sound, represented by the word “om” (as opposed to the Judaeo-Christian philosophies, which speak of the Word). This primordial sound is disseminated throughout the whole of the universe (which coincides with the recent discovery of the “white noise” that exists everywhere in the Cosmos, and which was discovered by an American scientist in the 1950s: it is the primordial sound of the Big Bang and it is more than 15 billion years old).

In ancient Indian philosophy there were two kinds of sound:

Anahata: those vibrations that man cannot hear

Ahata: normal sound

Musicians and composers with a mystical inclination may, in a certain sense, be the recipients of such *anahata* vibrations; by means of their intuition and meditation and by making an effort to perceive those sounds, they may even transform it into normal sound, *ahata*.

Everything Vibrates

Planet earth itself produces a vibration that has been calculated at 1/31,556,925.9747 Hz. As we know, the human ear can hear only from 16 Hz up to more or less 22,000 Hz. If we multiply this very low frequency by 32 we obtain 136.10 Hz, which is the mystical note used in Buddhist temples, which they call *Sadja*, and which is situated between C# and D (bass). The songs of the Buddhist monks in their hidden plateaus in Tibet have made a perceptible connection with planet Earth and, consequently, with the Cosmos.

Two “drones” were used, one in A, the other in D.

Three “loops” were also used, and these were mainly based on the ancient Greek Lydian scale.

But the more invisible, more secret motivations behind the construction of the arch, one for which there is no formulation according to some method, belongs to the world of metaphysics and to the deepest recesses of the soul. Of these we shall not speak. Over-interpretation can destroy the poetry that is intrinsic to it and sometimes it is only to another being that we owe an explanation.

Tone colors used

Textures from: psycho-sonic synthesizers, ritual Chinese flute, ghuzen (a guitar-like Chinese instrument), “whistling piano,” strings, etc.

For percussion: “udus” from Nigeria, “floor-toms,” cymbals, Tabanka

seashells, Tibetan bell, “djembê,” etc.

All in all, more than 30 different tone colors [*timbres*] were used.

Two seashells are used in **ApEiRoN**: one which has been “baptized” by the “Tabanka da Várzea” on the island of Santiago, and the other made in São Vicente and “baptized” by the sea around the Baía das Gatas. It is an oceanic instrument and, according to Pierre Schaffner, it is the instrument that gave birth to wind instruments. In certain age-old oriental philosophies the seashell is a symbol of creation.

The use of the seashell in **ApEiRoN** is necessary on account of its oceanic tone color and it is also a calling from outside time.

Poetry is alive in the environment north of Praia

Yellow flowers in the dunes that seem to have grown out of nothing and that flower only in February, limestone rocks, rare water-springs, sea-birds, common plants, the breathing of the ocean, rocks from primordial lava, “ouedes” (the desert river-beds of brooks)...

These environmental features contributed to the creation of **ApEiRoN**; all in all: the arch symbolizes the vertical union between the land and the cosmos and the need for sublimation and for love. The environment all around is that of Cape Verde, in its natural strength that goes beyond men, in the strength that is intrinsic to it. At night the stars illuminate Praia; or else it is the moon, which is born in the distant horizon, in the east or in the northeast.

The *Morna*, or the ambience of the *Morna* as a Cape Verdean reference

The *Morna* is the source of inspiration of **ApEiRoN**. Some basic principles were established: soul (a subjective notion, but one that is inherent to any musical form that has attained a synthesis of the musical personality of a people).

The rhythm is supplied by pre-established sequences, in counterpoint. The harmonies operate above. There is a kind of static movement. In their turn, the percussion instruments, the “udu” or the “djembê” or the cymbals, produce the rhythmic cells and “loops.” The melody is constructed and simple, almost minimalist; there is space for improvisation.

The mountain-scape as random musical reference

The mountains surrounding the **ApEiRoN** arch are beautiful, solid, furrowed, and full of the power of the earth. These are rocks older than 300 million years. If we trace the lines from the summits of the mountains we have

the outline of a random music, one which has been used in the “atmospheric” parts (excluding “the desert atmosphere,” where Berber scales from Mauritania are used) and in the “spiral-wise oceanic movements” theme.

ApEiRoN is a musical metaphysical necessity, the attempt to make a cosmic connection through the music.

Already Pythagoras had divided music into the following types:

Music made with instruments

Music created within men

The music of the spheres

Every night the stars communicate the great mystery of creation and how it remains unfathomable.

Note (an aside, but an integral part of the rest; not a justification but a reflection):

I don't know why some people question electronic instruments. It is true that there is a certain vogue for what is acoustic, a return to roots (as if that were possible! The Universe is on the move all the time...), and an ecological spirit of the “long live the ox-wagon” type. But these people, these inflexible critics, have in their homes electronic music players to listen to their CDs; they travel by plane, they communicate by means of cellular phones and through the internet, they make use of multimedia.

An instrument is an instrument, so long as it serves to create music and make substantial what is insubstantial.

Music is sufficient: it embraces the world, brings out the profundities, it reaches deep into what is metaphysical, it creates worlds, it gives food to the spirit, it gives strength, sublimates, calms down; it is life; it is sufficient to offer what there is to offer; it encapsulates the universe, it communicates with men and with the gods within them or outside of them.

Vasco Martins is an ethnomusicologist who studied in France, a composer, poet and novelist with many published novels, among them *Tempos da Moral Moral* (1993). He also has published poetry and an essay about the *Morna*, as well as a vast discography with more than ten titles.