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Discophonia: Dance Music for Listening. A Contribution to the Early History of Electronic Music in Lithuania

Aesthetics of popular music as a catalyst for structural analysis

Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue, Menuet, Ecossaise, Walz, Ballade, Polonaise, Mazurka, Tango, Ragtime, Jazz, Swing, Rock'n'Roll, Salsa, Disco, Soul, R'n'B, Hip-Hop… A large number of genres from early music until modern times proves that dance music is not only an everlasting medium for accompanying expressive bodily movements but also one of the most popular forms of music, at least in the last century.

It is striking that until the beginning of the 20th century, most intellectuals endorsed a so-called modernist view (an elitist consensus) claiming that popular music (PM) lacks at least three characteristic features of art music. These are progressiveness, non-functionality and compatibility with any characteristic of fine art.[1] Eduard Hanslick and Edmund Gurney are the forefathers of the notion that PM's primary appeal is visceral, bodily and felt, thus not demanding an intellectual response: "the body hears, but only the intellect listens".[2] In accordance with their perspective, there is nothing to listen to in popular music,

[1] Theodore Gracyk, n.d. "The Aesthetics of Popular Music," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu, §1.

[2] Gracyk, n.d. "The Aesthetics of Popular Music," §5.

because it primarily functions as an outlet for emotional expression and a generator of dance rhythms.

This statement may be partially true since Hanslick's and Gurney's ideas are echoed in recent PM-oriented philosophical accounts. Though advocating for PM's creativity, originality and artistic autonomy by cherry-picking more complex examples, Richard Shusterman claims that musical form should be rooted in "organic bodily rhythms" and social conditions that make them meaningful.[3] He also claims that because of these "bodily rhythms", movement is necessary for appreciating PM. Thus, intellectual engagement is not PM's forte unless complex lyrics accompany it. Moreover, Bruce Baugh points out that PM cannot be explained through standards that are used to analyze Mozart or Wagner.[4] Indeed, it may be true, considering the obvious discrepancy between them and PM, i.e. the different time of composition. At the same time, Baugh certainly supports Shusterman's claim about the bodily experience of music. He adds that there is more value in performance, material embodiment, rhythm and expressivity of PM than in its composition, structure, melody, harmony, etc.

However, counterposition comes into the debate. James Young writes that the emphasis on performance and composition is characteristic of both European concert tradition and PM.[5] Stephen Davies adds that bodily as well as somatic responses are naturally cognitive thus intellectual. More importantly, any listening requires attention to form and matter as well as knowledge of syntax and grammar of a particular musical style.[6] Given the range of perspectives on the subject in the philosophy of music (and the relative novelty of ideas as well), it is not surprising that PM (thus dance music of any sort) still often flies under the radar of traditional musicology. However, it is also clear that there is something to listen to in PM, even if it was designed to move the listener's body.

In addition to a growing body of research analyzing PM via corporeality, expressivity, social conditions, performance and material embodiment, studies

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[3] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*. 2nd edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 199.

[4] Bruce Baugh, "Prolegomena to Any Aesthetics of Rock Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Winter, 1993): 23–29.

[5] James O. Young, "Between Rock and a Harp Place," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Winter, 1995): 78–81.

[6] Stephen Davies, "Rock Versus Classical Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* Vol. 57, No. 2 (Spring, 1999): 193–204.

analyzing form, structure, syntax and grammar are also gaining momentum. This kind of inquiry is fruitful in recently emerging cases, especially, in the spectacular work by Drew F. Nobile.[7] The author postulates to maintain the common analytical techniques (which were initially developed for studying tonal music) and to adjust them to the new repertoire of PM.[8] Another example of a "spring in PM's structural analysis" is Ralf von Appen and Markus Frei-Hauenschild's extensive work on song forms and their historical development.[9] The authors consolidate the terminology of song form and its structural elements, drawing on thousands of examples from the American PM repertoire, starting at the beginning of the 20th century.

Case study: Argo

While the body of writing on PM is constantly increasing and touching a number of topics, the objectives of the conference "Musical Multimedia as a Keystone of Artistic Manifestations in the 20th- and 21st-Century Europe"[10] addresses the latest PM aesthetic inquiries mentioned above. The broad issue taken into consideration during the meeting was the role of music across cultural activities in 20th- and 21st-century post-Soviet Europe. Naturally, by assigning a role, one is trying to figure out what is essential and valuable in particular music. Given the keyword "post-Soviet", the outlook spreads beyond the walls of ever-growing and developing PM culture of the "free world," providing a spotlight for the art and culture which existed, but was not known in the Western world.

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[7] Drew F. Nobile, "A Structural Approach to the Analysis of Rock Music" (Ph.D. diss., *CUNY Academic Works*, 2014), https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/83.

[8] Nobile points out key features of canonical rock repertoire by dissecting transcriptions of numerous songs, focusing on harmonic functions and contrapuntal relationships between melody and harmony. He concludes that the role of pitch relationships and form are of the highest importance in PM.

[9] Ralf von Appen and Markus Frei-Hauenschild, "AABA, Refrain, Chorus, Bridge, Prechorus: Song Forms and Their Historical Development," *German Society for Popular Music Studies* e. V. Ed. by Ralf von Appen, André Doehring and Thomas Phleps, Jahrgang 13 (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.22029/jlupub-850.

[10] Held at the Institute of Musicology of the Jagiellonian University, Kraków, August 31 – September 2, 2022, https://multimediality.confer.uj.edu.pl/en_GB, accessed on November 24, 2022.

In this particular framework, the Lithuanian electronic music (EM) pioneers, the band Argo, seem to be the perfect and important case yet rarely occurring in the contemporary discourse. Next to Soliaris and the Latvian Zodiacs, Argo is briefly mentioned in Mindaugas Peleckis's paper on the origins of Lithuanian experimental music as an "exceptionally professional lite electronica ensemble"[11] and "the first of the kind in the USSR" ,[12] active from 1979 to 1986.[13] It was a six-piece instrumental combo (see fig. 1) based in Kaunas, originally consisting of Giedrius Kuprevičius (as artistic director and keyboardist), Julius Vilnonis (band leader and keyboardist), Linas Pečiūra (guitarist), Artūras Kuznecovas (bassist), Arūnas Mikuckis (drummer) and Orūnas Urbonas (sound engineer).[14]

Quite intriguing is the short bio note found on the sleeve of the band's debut studio album *Discophonia*:

> The ARGO electronic music group was formed at the Kaunas Musical Theater in 1979. It includes members of the Theater orchestra. Giedrius Kuprevičius, the artistic director of the group, thus describes the activity of ARGO: "The predominance of electronics in the creative work of the group bears out our desire to master and artistically interpret the possibilities of modern musical instruments. We are the first who are entrusted with testing the Vilnius-5 model of a new electronic organ. We are sure of good prospects of the instrument. The group takes part in performances of the Musical Theater, it has prepared a theatricalized concert "The Deepest Well Reflects the Sky"… (1981).

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[11] There is no purpose in debating here whether it was EM, EDM, or lite electronica since there was not much of a thing around. There was some experimentation before (see Mindaugas Peleckis, "Eksperimentinė muzika Lietuvoje: jauno vyno negalima pilti į senus vynmaišius," *Kultūros barai*, November 2011 (603), Vilnius.), but EM was not parading on scarce and censored media platforms of the Soviet Union; in fact, it was not very well acclaimed in the whole block at all as "a fruit of moral decay" (Wojciech Oleksiak, "A Foreigner's Guide to Polish Electronic Music," CULTURE.PL, September 12, 2014. https://culture.pl/en/article/a-foreigners-guide-to-polish-electronic-music)..

[12] Peleckis, "Eksperimentinė muzika Lietuvoje," 39.

[13] One can add the Estonian electronic and progressive rock composer Sven Grünberg into the same timeline. See https://www.helilooja.ee/en/members/sven-grunberg/, accessed on November 24, 2022.

[14] Many coming-and-going musicians can be added to this list, most notably Gintaras Kizevičius, also vocalists Valentinas Navikauskas, Virgis Stakėnas, Alvydas Lukoševičius, Irena Zelenkauskaitė, Violeta Sagaitytė, Vitoldas Christauskas, Gintarė Skėrytė, Gintarė Jautakaitė, Mindaugas Gylys and instrumentalists Eimuntas Švabas, Marijus Čižas, Janas Skrobotas, Arvydas Joffė.



Figure 1. Original members of ARGO (from left): Linas Pečiūra, Giedrius Kuprevičius, Julius Vilnonis, Artūras Kuznecovas, Orūnas Urbonas, Arūnas Mikuckis, posing in photo session for theatrical concert programme "220V". (Photo from the personal archive of G. Kuprevičius).

The group's provenance seems quite unconventional, considering the usual type of collectives in demand for dance evenings. At the same time, a protest in the form of a rock band was impossible to organize, given the political conditions.[15] However, the emergence of Argo[16] on the theatrical stage was

[15] There were major crackdowns on society by the Soviet apparatus after the young Lithuanian activist Romas Kalanta immolated himself in Kaunas in 1972. Youth, artists and intelligentsia went under repression and constant watch (Kastytis Antanaitis, "Sovietinių partinių institucijų reakcija į 1972 m. įvykius Kaune," *Kauno istorijos metraštis*. T. 4: 15–26. Kaunas: VDU, 2003, https://www.vdu.lt/cris/bitstream/20.500.12259/61470/1/ISSN2335-8734_2003_N_4.PG_15-26.pdf; Nerijus R. Gudaitis, "Kalantos įvykių atgarsiai Lietuvoje pagal KGB operatyvinę informaciją," *Kauno istorijos metraštis*, T. 4., 27–33. Kaunas: VDU, https://www.vdu.lt/cris/bitstream/20.500.12259/61455/1/ISSN2335-8734_2003_N_4.PG_27-33.pdf; Rūta Tverkutė, "1972 metų gegužės įvykiai liudininkų akimis," *Kauno istorijos metraštis*, T. 4, 35–47, Kaunas: VDU, 2003, https://www.vdu.lt/cris/bitstream/20.500.12259/61454/1/ISSN2335-8734_2003_N_4.PG_35-47.pdf).

[16] The band's name was adopted from Greek mythology, where Argo was a ship that carried a crew (the Argonauts) through seas and oceans with the dangerous goal of retrieving the Golden Fleece, a symbol of majestic power. Thus, poetically, the band is a carrier of bandmates on a journey to reveal unsurpassed capabilities of the modern music technology.

fairly natural for Kuprevičius because he saw EM as a proving ground for the creation of theater music.[17] It is notable that from 1966, he was studying various sound synthesis methods and instruments in different institutions around the USSR.[18] In theater he could make use of his fascination with progressive Western PM, accessible only to those who had means and prohibited technology to get around blocked radio waves and bypass censorship.[19] Thus, The Beatles, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Isao Tomita, Pink Floyd, Yes, Led Zeppelin and Jethro Tall influenced G. Kuprevičius' technique in theater music. Almost simultaneously with the rise of Andrew Loyd Weber's rock operas (*Jesus Christ Superstar*, 1970), he composed music for the rock oratorio *Darbas ir duona* ("Work and bread", 1974), which was staged by the Music Studio of Youth and finally became the first piece to join Argo's repertoire.[20]

Another reason for Argo's formation was much more practical. The absorption of the band into the Kaunas Musical Theater was a pragmatic move because the institution was in crisis and there was no money to make stage works. Contrarily, "Argo and its sound equipment could easily fit into one bus, plus one lorry truck with decorations, and off we go 'round the whole union".[21] It is no wonder why data about the Kaunas Musical Theater's activity during

[17] Karolis Vyšniauskas, "Pirmosios lietuviškos elektronikos grupės Argo muzikantai sintezatorių susikūrė patys," *LRT RADIJO laida "Pakartot,"* 2016, https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/tavo-lrt/15/130114/pirmosios-lietuviskos-elektronikos-grupes-argo-muzikantai-sintezatoriu-susikure-patys.

[18] It is the British "Synthi 100" and russian "ANS", owned by the Skriabin Museum in Moscow. Also, there is the sound/color synthesis developed by the Kazan student organization "Prometeus", Bulat Galeev (Giedrius Kuprevičius, "Elektroninės muzikos grupė Argo", Interview by Lukas Devita, *Garso gėlės*, LRT, December 4, 2020, Audio, 59:54, https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000132089/garso-geles-elektronines-muzikos-grupe-argo).

[19] As a primary progressive Western PM source in the 1960s and 1970s Kuprevičius mentions Polskie Radio Program III (Trójka) and Radio Luxembourg: "If a new release came out in London early morning, the same day evening one could hear it on Polish radio" (Giedrius Kuprevičius, *Personal communication*, July 24, 2022; November 23, 2022). He recorded the same programs onto tape and played them during open public lectures in the Kaunas Public Library. Though it was risky, censorship had no clue because "The English language was yet another saxophone for them," according to G. Kuprevičius (Ibid.).

[20] Kuprevičius, *Personal communication*.

[21] Probably, compared with the costs of maintaining the whole orchestra, troupe, decorations, soloists, choir and permanently "fixed" ticket prices (Kuprevičius, *Personal communication*).

that period is scarce and brief.[22] In official sources, years of the densest activity of Argo are practically inexistent.[23]

During that time, Argo became a regular music service provider for ambitious theater programs and composers, such as Vidmantas Bartulis, Antanas Rekašius, Mindaugas Urbaitis, Faustas Latėnas, Eduardas Balsys and Raimo Kangro. Thus, the theater was a medium for Argo to thrive. In the *Book of Activity*,[24] over 30 stage works are listed for which the band was performing music live or taking part in recording sessions. Renditions of original stage works, instrumental pieces and even J. S. Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge* were also incorporated into the repertoire.

The band was regularly covered on regional, state (republic) and "central" press, radio and TV programs. Interviews and live performances were broadcasted not only on television in Moscow and Leningrad (St. Petersburg), but also on Köln Radio III (BDR), Polish, Bulgarian and Canadian TV. Press articles were released in Czechia, Poland, London and New York.

As mentioned earlier, the predominance of electronics in creative work and the desire to master and artistically interpret the possibilities of modern musical instruments were a creative impetus, a goal as well as primary media from the very beginning of Argo's activity. Mind-boggling and their extraordinary enthusiasm explicating fact is that the first synthesizers in use were hand-made by bands' sound engineer Orūnas Urbonas.[25] It is "ARGO A1" and "Stringas" —the first synthesizers made in Lithuania. Later on, the band managed to

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[22] There is a gape in the official history of theater activity (Kauno valstybinis muzikinis teatras. n.d., "Trupės istorija," http://www.muzikinisteatras.lt/?lan=EN&id=1&id1=46&id2=47#/Trupes-istorija.html).

[23] In 1981–84 Argo performed 203 concerts. It is a significant fact that during the same years, the theater building was under reconstruction (Teatras yra pastatas, n.d., "Kauno valstybinis muzikinis teatras," https://teatraspastatas.lithuaniantheatre.com/pastatai/2-kauno-muzikinis-teatras).

[24] It is a primary source, a hand-written notebook consisting of more than a hundred pages of a meticulously filled register of Argo activity: rehearsals, live/studio/TV performances, records, media articles, statistics, etc., made and kindly provided by G. Kuprevičius.

[25] More information about the first Lithuanian synthesizers can be found in a report from the national broadcaster telecast "7 Kauno dienos": https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000232170/7-kauno-dienos-lietuviski-sintezatoriai-lauko-darzelio-privalumai-bei-pokalbis-apie-vaiku-nutukima-ir-sveika-mityba?time_start=27, accessed on November 24, 2022.

acquire the electronic transistor organ Vilnius-5,[26] synthesizers Korg Poly 800, Yamaha RX-15 and electro-mechanic piano Fender-Rhodes.[27]

The idea of modern sound was also explored using conventional amplified instruments. However, it was not an easy task to acquire Western-made instruments. East German Musima Eterna Deluxe electric guitar, Czechoslovakian Jolana Iris bass guitar and also Czechoslovakian Amati drum kit were in use.[28] During live sets, the band used average-quality stage amplification sets (i.e. East-German Vermona). However, the "front of house" was always maintained by Orūnas Urbonas, who used his own made 24-channel mixing console and effects (such as phasers, envelope filters, equalizers and reverbs).[29] This resulted in a consistent, modern, recognizable sound of Argo.[30] Nonetheless, equally important was the hardware used for recording sessions in the Vilnius Vinyl Disk Studio,[31] namely, the Ampex 8-track tape recorder (only four tracks were functional at the time of recording *Discophonia*[32]) and an old local clumsy 8-channel console. Urbonas improvised inserts to plug his homemade effects in it. The result of these creative endeavors was encapsulated in four original studio releases: *Discophonia* (1981), *Milžinkapis* (1982), *Šviesa* (1983) and *Žemė L* (1986). Each of these has its original artistic idea and merit. In the following part, *Discophonia* will be put under scrutiny.

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[26] It was the only mass-produced electronic instrument tested by Argo and also the only one that could be mentioned officially in the album because DIY production and sourcing the parts were illegal and at high risk in Lithuania at that time (Kuprevičius, *Personal communication,* July 24, 2022; November 23, 2022; Orūnas Urbonas, *Personal communication*, November 11, 2022). Also, Vilnius-5 was a transistor-based (rather than subtractive-synthesis based) organ. More about the instrument: http://www.sintezatorius.lt, accessed on November 24, 2022.

[27] Moreover, they were asking for the ministry permission to acquire Roland Jupiter-8 to no avail (Kuprevičius, *Personal communication,* July 24, 2022; November 23, 2022).

[28] Julius Vilnonis, *Personal communication*, August 29, 2022.

[29] Urbonas, *Personal communication*, November 11, 2022.

[30] The Argo bandmates kindly regard Leonas Berezinas as another crucial sound engineer who later joined the band (Kuprevičius, *Personal communication,* July 24, 2022; November 23, 2022; Urbonas, *Personal communication*, November 11, 2022).

[31] A significant recording studio in Vilnius, where most notable Lithuanian recordings were made from 1957 to 1990 (Rūta Skudienė, "(Ne)Pamiršta 'Melodija': Vilniaus plokštelių įrašų studijai 60," *Lietuvos muzikos link*, January-February, 2017, No. 20, Lietuvos muzikos informacijos centras, https://www.mic.lt/lt/diskursai/lietuvos-muzikos-link/nr-20-2017-sausis-gruodis/ruta-skudiene-nepamirsta-melodija-vilniaus-ploksteliu-irasu-studija). All the albums of Argo were recorded there.

[32] Vilnonis, *Personal communication*, August 29, 2022.

Discophonia: meaning, artwork and structure

In the bio note of the band we can read:

> The present record is the first one. The music recorded in it has been created for this particular purpose. We sought to make use of wide possibilities afforded by recording equipment. *Discophony* consists as if of two musical layers: disco-intended for entertainment and based on dance rhythms, and -phony- music for listening with predominating, electronic sound. The vocal part is interpreted in an instrumental way. […] If the whole work of ARGO could be compared to days of week, then Saturday would be the day of *Discophony*.

Disco is a short form for *discothèque*.[33] From its inception, the term has been related to music, sound and recording. If today someone utters *disco*, they probably describe club culture, including nightclubs, sound and light equipment, DJing, dance, fashion, even drug subculture, eroticism and sexual liberation. However, none of these symbols were welcomed by the Soviet authorities back then. By adding *-phonia*[34] to the word, Argo redirected focus to the sonic experience of the album while subtly assigning certain elements of music to both elements of the term (*disco* to dance rhythms, *phony*[35] to electronic sound and listening). The rest is left to the interpretation of a listener, which seemed to satisfy the composers' union and the censor during hearings.[36] Disengaging from lyrics and associating vocals with an instrument worked as a clever smoke screen, a "move along, nothing to see here" sign, while real meanings were lurking inside, tailored for those who would dance to listen.

The masking and ambivalence are much more apparent considering the record sleeve and the artwork (see fig. 2). Naturally, the visual aspect is much more immediate than the audial one. The envelope does not contain massive

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[33] A French word for "a library of phonograph records" (Denny Hilton, "The Birth of Disco," *OUPblog*, Oxford University Press, October 19, 2012, https://blog.oup.com/2012/10/birth-of-disco-oed-appeals).

[34] Gr. *-phōnia*, fr. *phōnē*, sound of the voice, voice, speech.

[35] It is worth noticing that the album is referred to as "Discophony" in the text, making associations with "cacophony", which is a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds.

[36] Hearings are mentioned in the *Book of Activity* on March 12, 1981, 3 months prior to the release (p. 8). Also, Kuprevičius remembers the trouble into which Argo went to release their second album, originally named *the Process* (a title later changed to *the Light*). It is an artistic idea about the relationship between man and woman. The censor blocked it because of too much of a negative impact on the morale of the Soviet youth (Kuprevičius, *Personal communication*).



Figure 2. Front cover of "Discophonia" album (designed by Alvydas Limba).

credits, paragraphs of acknowledgment or an extensive listing of lyrics, which would require a double-folded envelope that could be found in popular rock music albums of the time. The artwork of the album is abstemious. Two elements catch an eye: it is colorful and bilingual. While a more detailed artwork analysis is due, one can assume that the bilingualism of an album cover meant that it was printed for export to Western countries.[37] The front cover comprises two sections: the title in Latin alphabet, a bit smaller one in Cyrillic russian, and the artwork itself. The back cover contains the title in the same language order, track listings, credits, the album description, the label's emblem, the price in rubles and a fragment of the front-cover artwork arranged under one frame. However, here the Cyrillic text is prioritized, meaning it is an actual product for domestic purposes. Moreover, the official language, despite the band's descent, was russian.

The artwork (designed by Alvydas Limba) depicts a half-opened zipper and a rainbow emerging from it. In a simplistic view, it could be anything—it is funny, juvenile and provocative. Nevertheless, every symbol in this picture tells a story of a real (grim) state of affairs. Firstly, there are jeans, which were

[37] According to Brezhnev's doctrine, the official language of the USSR had to be russian. The second language on the record sleeve was English.

a hard-to-get, expensive commodity, a symbol and a statement worn mainly by youth and those adoring Western culture. There are plenty of stories about people coming home with no pants because of burglary; one month's salary was not sufficient to get a pair of them.[38] The zipper contains elements of animism, especially in terms of its teeth. It looks like a mass, a crowd, an army, faceless guards of establishment, interlocked with their heads. Noteworthy is the analogous theme in Alan Parker's screening of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* shortly after, in 1982. Also, notice the logo on the slider, as it frames Argo in place of the agency of revealing what is hidden under, i.e. a rainbow. Furthermore, the rainbow's connotations differed from the ones we know today. Firstly, it closely resembles the artwork of the Beatles 1968's album *Yellow Submarine* (designed by George Dunning). It encapsulates everything that most people lived for and breathed with for decades: hippie, flower power movement ideas of peace, atomic disarmament, freedom and human rights. Secondly, the artwork is generally a statement, a trajectory of a dream to come true, encapsulating a feeling embedded in the public conscience of what is to come and inviting to open an envelope and put the record on.

Form and structure

After discussing briefly the sociocultural aspects, material embodiment, instrumentation and studio techniques of the album, we can move to its form and structure. The record has seven tracks: four on side "A" and three on side "B". All of them were composed by Kuprevičius except for "A3" (by Julius Vilnonis) and "B2", which is an arrangement of a Lithuanian folk song made by Kuprevičius.[39] Further, I will describe a form by referring to distinct changes in the character of textures, rhythm and/or tempo, introduction of specific musical

[38] More on the topic: Gordon, Calum. "Exploring the USSR's underground obsession with Levi's 501s." *Fashion Secret History*, Dazed (August 19, 2016). https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/32495/1/exploring-the-ussr-s-underground-obsession-with-levi-s-501s; Tracey Panek, "Blue Jeans and the Fall of the Berlin Wall," *Levi Strauss & Co.*, November 7, 2019, https://www.levistrauss.com/2019/11/07/blue-jeans-and-the-fall-of-the-berlin-wall. The price comparison of jeans in the USSR is available in: Ričardas Savukynas, "Kaip palyginti sovietmečio atlyginimus ir kainas su dabartimi?," *Rokiškis Rabinovičius*, February 12, 2014, http://rokiskis.popo.lt/2014/02/12/kaip-palyginti-sovietmecio-atlyginimus-ir-kainas-su-dabartimi.

[39] It has not been confirmed by Kuprevičius, but such title names might have worked perfectly to avoid insinuations.

elements. Undoubtedly, the original manuscripts of music[40] were a valuable reference for determining structural parts of compositions and which audible elements were not written on a sheet and figured out impromptu during the session. However, breaking points will be displayed by time reference to the original audio record.[41]

Indisputably, studio production was meticulous and complex. Consequently, following Gracyk and Kania's[42] proposed idea on the ontological thickness of PM recorded tracks, some elements are mentioned as an equally important structural part of the composition. Also, this paper is relative and context-oriented; it does not aim to measure how much EM can be found in *Discophonia*. However, the most noticeable EM instances will be highlighted for the most keen. In the following sections, form is outlined in tables by assigning a capital letter to each described episode, below which time references and key features of music are provided. The structural elements are described below.

A1

Intro	A	B	C	D	E	F (B1)	C
0:00	1:00	2:02	3:05	4:00	4:30	5:00	6:44
Disco	Disco	Funk	Guitar theme	Drum solo	Bass solo	Shouting chorus	Theme (reprise), guitar solo

The piece is a suite (a genre that comes from dance music) that comprises numerous characteristic episodes.

0:00 The introduction starts with a loudly whispered word "disco". It is accompanied by the dialogue of the bass and the electric guitar, a dreamy progression (Bm9-Amaj9) of the electric piano emulating Vilnius-5 and the 16th-note, accent-less texture high-hat, which is processed through a hand-made phaser[43] and thus moving gradually in-between the stereo axis. Also, there is the generated synth audio wave carried through LFO, which oscillates at a relatively high rate and amplitude, giving it an unearthly sound characteristic.

[40] Kindly provided by the composer himself.

[41] Referring to the version published on the Spotify streaming service: https://open.spotify.com/album/3wjvnANkDaBLt0xhRn9MjA?si=v0jxnO3BR62m7IA0iwipbQ, accessed on November 24, 2022.

[42] Gracyk, n.d. "The Aesthetics of Popular Music" and Andrew Kania, "Making Tracks: The Ontology of Rock Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Autumn, 2006): 401–414.

[43] These and the following remarks about audio processing gear used on record are concluded after a personal conversation with Orūnas Urbonas, head sound engineer of Argo.

1:00 A blood-pumping though subtle disco beat commences. It is embellished by the intensifying exclamation "disco" and the vocal part answering "phonia". The keyboards, guitar and bass freely riff in disco style to a given rhythmic pattern (over Dmaj7-F#min9). The one interesting quirk in this episode is the irregular 5/4 measure that leads to the tonal modulation (from F#minor to E minor, then to A minor).

2:02 A sudden cadence, or the "break"; the dance tempo and style change into the 1970s' funk. The riff is played with Vilnius-5, shockingly resembling the timbre of Honner Clavinet. The episode is written in the simple ABAB[1] form, concluding with a funky ending.

3:05 A guitar theme episode, which turns out as the track's main theme. It is a guitar melody accompanied by a mid-tempo soul groove and the synth pad doubled with the electric piano. Interesting is the form of the melody: A-A1-2-measure bridge-B-B1. It is a long, developing phrase with something extra added to it, like Robert Schumann, Franz Schubert, or other great composer did. It is an allusion to displaying what Dana Gooley called "an improvisation imagery".[44]

4:00 The coda of this episode is a drum solo accompanied by a marvelous bass guitar riff and a parallel falling progression.

4:30 A marvelous riff[45] transitioning to a bass solo episode. The solo is quite complex since it breaks out just as the harmonic tempo doubles and is composed of many altered chords (#5).

5:00 A shouting chorus-style episode, typical of the Afro-American gospel music tradition. Stylistically, it relates to B episode a bit, with its funky clavinet part and very irregular breaks. The second chorus is improvised by all parts, just like the praising episode. The guitar signal is processed through a phaser; the synth string lead enters on an improvised part.

6:44 Reprise of the guitar theme. After repeating the main theme six times, the guitar breaks into melodic improvisation. The keyboard part embellishes harmony and pans over stereo sound imagery back and forth, or L and R. Everything fades out.

A2

Intro	A	B	A1	C	Outro
0:00	0:10	1:55	2:57	3:38	4:20
Synth ascension	Theme	Guitar solo	Theme	Sequence alla Romanesca	C fading out

The piece has a form of a theme and improvised variations over the chorus.

0:00 The tune begins with ascending synth melody (played with Stringas), its signal processed via LFO-controlled AMP, giving it an even 16th-note pulsation.

0:10 The theme is based on a 4-measure chorus (Am-Em-Dm-Am) and consists of a descending

[44] Dana Gooley (2018, 17)

[45] The riff could easily fit a sample library of any DJ disco/house set. According to whosampled.com, Argo was already sampled in at least 15 mixes (https://www.whosampled.com/Argo/, accessed on January 4, 2023).

melodic sequence. The episode includes ten choruses and is developed by repeating the theme and variations and adding several instrumental track layers. Layering is a distinctive approach present in disco-style records (i.e. Donna Summer's "I Feel Love"). The first layer is a melodic theme accompanied by a groove, which consists of a sequenced 16th-note hi-hat pattern (achieved through a modulating filter), live-recorded drums and melodic replicas played by the envelope-filtered bass guitar. The second layer (added in the third chorus) is a counterpoint sequence, imitating a harpsichord in two registers (Vilnius-5), doubled by the bass guitar. Though the tune is in a minor key (A minor), the theme is somewhat jolly because it is maintained in a higher register and made of short phrases. Moreover, the second voice (or counterpoint) is answering in the lower register in the same descending manner. It sounds like a conversation from the very top. The tempo is not very fast (around 92 bpm, typical disco) and the calm pace is kept by changing harmony in every measure.

1:55 A new episode is marked with a change of accompaniment and an expressive guitar solo introduction. The chorus consists of a twice more extended sequence of eight measures (Cm-Gm-Bm-F#m-Am-Em-Dm-Am). Expression is enhanced with the overdriven signal of the guitar but also with twice-as-long melodic sequences in the accompaniment. Interestingly, the guitar solo gradually pans from the right to the left and then back to the right, as though the guitarist entered the room for a solo, walked around and left. The episode and the solo last three reiterations of the chorus.

2:57 A reprise of the theme. Only this time, the accompanying layers are almost identically imitating the theme as the conversation would have come to a mutual agreement for the subsequent four choruses.

3:38 The last episode comprises a chorus of the same size (4 measures), but the harmonic pace is twice as fast and sets off in the major mode (C-G-Bm-F#m-Am-Em-Dm-Am), which gives it a bit of *Romanesca* flavor. A new layer of tremolo-processed electric guitar appears, resembling a talking voice. Everything fades out.

A3

Intro	A	B	A	C (oda)
0:00/0:12	0:34	1:21	1:54	2:40
6/4 to 4/4	Theme	Modal episode	Theme	Vamp/solo

The composition naturally stands out as it is the only one composed by a band keyboardist and leader Julius Vilnonis.[46] The form of the tune does not seem to be very complicated. It is a 32-measure theme, followed by a 16-measure modal episode, a theme again, and a coda. This simplicity on a surface is embellished with beautiful chord alterations, substitutions, pedals and modal

[46] It has a period-related vibe to it, which one can find in Herbie Hancock's "I Thought It Was You," "Chameleon" (10 years earlier, though), Roy Ayers's "Everybody Loves the Sunshine," etc.

interchange. Furthermore, added measures at the end of each episode make it more lively and asymmetrical.

0:00 The composition starts in the 6/4 meter, with the 3-3-2 rhythm pattern motive. Then, it settles to a lower tempo in the 4/4 steady beat (0:12). The electric guitar, bass, drums, Vilnius-5 and a small synth-generated efx are the only instruments present.

0:34 The theme starts with A1 synth. It is a lovely, lively, detailed 32-measure theme, constructed of two symmetrical, archetypal sentences. The remarkable beauty can be found in the tritone substitution of C7 and Dm chords in the first measure of the theme's initial and second phrases, respectively. Moreover, rhythmical accents mark the every end of the phrase.

1:21 The B episode is initiated by a modal interchange between Cmaj9 and Cm9 chords. Then follows the progression of ascending major chords over the C pedal and four measures of the dominant pedal.

1:54 A reprise of a theme with few melodic embellishments in the second sentence and an extra measure leading to the coda (2:40). The coda is a vamp filled with a repeated melodic motif, which turns out to be an improvised solo over a new chorus (Dmaj7-G67-Dmaj7-A11), and an outstanding synth string arrangement. The track fades out.

A4

A	B
0:00	2:21
Improvisatory chorus	Coda ("Peace on Earth")

A jazz waltz of a slow and lyrical character.

The structure contains a cleverly composed one period (17-measure chorus, repeated three times) and a coda. There is no melody or theme in a strophe, only melismatic/chord-embellishing improvisation recorded with Vilnius-5, generating a timbre of a vibraphone of some sort, which seems to follow the harmony of the chorus.

The third chorus enters the organ part, which gives more support to harmony and seems like a development. This whole episode creates the feeling of suspension since it never lands nor resolves to the tonic key. It only happens in the coda, which is foretold two measures before by the II-V-I chord progression.

2:21 The coda is a four-measure chorus (Ebmaj7-Gm6-Fø9-Bbsus7), which is repeated five times. The vocalist is dreamingly singing something like "Peace on Earth",[47] while the guitar plays a descending three-note melodic motif in George Benson's octave style. The bass is slowly gliding from one note to another, played with A1. Drums only mark the first and third beats.

[47] Unconfirmed.

B1

Intro	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	A
0:00	0:45	2:27	3:00	3:37	4:00	5:41	6:02	6:23	6:40
A capella	Theme, canon	Tape episode	Slow rock, big production	Disco Rock	Disco theme	Paradox, Ragtime, Jazz-like	Rock march	Falling sequence	Vocal outro

It is another suite for the B side of the record.

0:00 For an intro, the effect of the choir singing rich, closely positioned, never-ending harmony of "phonia" is created. It is one voice, overdubbed multiple times, while inhaling at a different time in relation to other tracks.[48] It is a hexachord from Bb in C minor. Then, the theme is introduced (0:13).

0:45 After one chorus, two quarter notes later, enters the second part, which repeats precisely the same melody. It is a canon. The canon is played back rather than recorded live (a studio perk) and the guitar part is embellished in a dominant 7/13 chord sequence (upper structure).[49]

2:27 A kind of "beatlish" episode. It is a tape recording played back in double speed over harmony gliding from Eb7/13 to C7/13, making the instruments sound tiny, almost comically.[50]

3:00 A slow rock episode: the growling synth bass, the drums with tom fills, the organ, and the straight strummed guitar chords (in rhythmic music partiture often expressed as a "big production"). Groove is played in a shuffling manner, John Bonham's style.

3:37 Disco returns with a rock flavor. It is an interesting modern mash of styles that became popular later in rock music. The bass plucked with a pick, disco groove and synth arpeggio sequences are prominent disco features.

4:00 After the big synth effect, the disco theme is introduced (following the modulating progression am-em7-dm7-am7). It is very similar to the theme of the A1 track and accompanied by a very characteristic disco bass line and the drum parts. Most of the tracks are processed through a phaser.

5:41 Paradox episode, an inherent element of music for G. Kuprevičius. It mixes the manouche guitar style, the walking bass, the rock'n'roll drums and the ragtime keyboards with a quick delay effect.

6:02 A gloomy and strict rock marching episode, akin to the sound of Emerson, Lake & Palmer, leads to a falling sequence (6:23) that could pertain to bad news.

6:40 A reprise of canon, but this time with the "phonia" choir together.

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[48] It is an ingenious live recreation of the Mellotron instrument. It was a conscious decision; Kuprevičius had publicly expressed adoration for the instrument multiple times.

[49] In the manuscript, there is the mark "PL" above particular parts, meaning an overdubbed track or "playback", as explained by the composer.

[50] A studio technique used in *music concréte* and by Abbey Road, Pink Floyd and Frank Zappa, among others.

B2

Intro	Intro 2	A	A1	A2	A3	A4	Outro
0:00	0:24	1:02	1:46	2:31	3:12/3:48	4:21	5:27
Shrieking birds	Organ + beat	Original theme	Theme variation	Theme and impro	Development, synth ostinato, guitar solo	Theme reprise	Coda, birds, tag chorus

The only unoriginal piece is the so-called arrangement in the album. At the same time, it is one of the most beautiful recordings here. It contains the variations on the Lithuanian folk song *Pasvarcyk untela*.[51]

The composition starts with several combined generated synth waves, which aesthetically imitate wind and a flock of shrieking seagulls. A "techno-like" rhythm pattern enters, which is unconventional. It is impossible to say where the strong beat is.

0:24 When the organ theme starts, it demolishes any preconceived illusion about the stability of the beat. It is a deliberate choice: the folk song tells a story of uncertainty, indecisiveness and lingering anticipation of important life decisions one has to make. This is even more evident in the further tune development. The first, 20-measure organ episode is asymmetrical as well. Nevertheless, the pulse is evident, giving an electronic dance music a new quality—meditativeness.

1:02 The original folk song theme is introduced. It is yet another harmonized folk song, fitted into an even number of phrases. It sounds like a *cantus firmus* of the chorale, a modal counterpoint within the ambitus of the minor seventh, phrased upon twelve measures.

1:46 Following the organ line serves its purpose of bringing more asymmetry to the groove, utilizing the polymetric technique. It is a variation of a theme. While the rhythm machine is pumping the same pattern in 4/4, the organ melody is phrased in 6/4, giving an impression of instability, forming multiple metrical layers and accents, leading the listener to cling on at least one (either groove or melody).

2:31 The reprise of the original folk theme. This time, it is accompanied by a counterpoint and a flute-like improvisatory solo over it. It is 21 measures long(shortened at the end with the irregular 6/4 measure), thus maintaining asymmetry and forming an organic joint to the next section.

3:12 A breaking point, during which a rhythm inversion happens, marking the beginning of a new section, half of the piece, and the start of a development. A1 synth riff enters, the organ chorale on the theme accompanies and gradually builds tension until the lead guitar enters. This chorale is constructed by employing 4/4 and 6/4 meters, giving it the impression of changing tempos at the same pulse, like gears.

3:48 An expressive, jazz-flavored guitar solo. A modulation of synth signal commences almost in choir with a solo, creating a more developing impression.

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[51] "Take a thought, little duck", or "Swim, My Duck". *Lietuvos ansamblis* interpretation: https://youtu.be/wkCNQ7456Ns, accessed on November 24, 2022.

4:21 Recapitulation of the theme. This time, the whole choir of organs and the lead synth with vibrato present the entire theme in an extended version (24 measures plus a 12-measure cadence). Furthermore, the beat recovers to its original version, where the syncopation resides in the second half. The synth ostinato fades out.

5:27 The beat stays, the "shrieking" effect returns and a very characteristic pop/soul style tag commences. The harmony progression sounds very familiar (Im7-Vm7-IVsus7-Vm7).

B3

A	B	C	D	E	F
0:00	0:19	1:49	2:30	2:50	3:34/4:18
Reverse disco beat	Melody fade in	Second melody joins	Timbres are getting more distinct	Many more melodies join, they are converging	Disco lives on, fades out

A piece is a mini-suite or a symbolic recap of an album.

0:00 The introduction commences with a reversed disco beat.[52]

0:19 A distant improvised melody emerges from the harmony that is borrowed from a later episode.

1:04 The second improvised melody joins, making it a conversation between the two.

1:49 The tonic appears and the first melody takes the lead by adding vibrato to its timbre.

2:30-2:39 The third melody appears and joins the ensemble.

2:50 The fourth melody shows up. More melodies add up and converge.

3:34 Everything explodes with the loud "bird", emulating the synth effect, merging into a classical disco groove. There is the guitar, bass, electronic piano, drums, synth lead, effect vamping on two chords in a four-measure refrain while everything fades out.

Conclusions

Discophonia is a multi-faceted work of art, which was planned by Argo from the very inception of the creative process. All the elements are carefully designed: from the album cover and studio production to instrumentation, musical form and other elements. A variety of forms used in the compositions attracts the listeners' attention, forming not merely a party banger but a rich narrative, intertwining music stories, feeling of development and leitmotifs. It is especially

[52] The same conventional studio technique is used on the Beatles' records (for the first time in "Rain", the *Revolver* album session, "Tomorrow Never Knows", etc.) as well as on Pink Floyd's albums.

audible in the reoccurring disco thematic material in "A1", "B1" and "B3". The composition process, performance and studio work efforts resulted in the album that is sonically akin to the 1980s' Western music productions of Earth, Wind & Fire, Herbie Hancock, Roy Ayers, George Benson and Gino Vanelli, among others. However, it was impossible to afford any technical equipment or actual, hands-on knowledge from the outside of the Iron Curtain. Regarding the given analysis, one can expect a slightly more informed recreation of the works in a live setting.[53]

The article has tackled the Argo phenomenon from multiple dimensions. However, it is far from complete, considering over a hundred pages of registered events in the *Book of Activity* and ideas represented in other albums through music, lyrics, etc. Although this work does not discuss the issues and consequences of postulating ideas of the Western civilization back then in Soviet Lithuania, it proposes the meaning and context of Argo's creative musical ideas. An artistic motto of the group declares an inclination toward experimenting and novelty, which is always attractive to young audiences and certain oppressed groups (which constituted the majority of the population in Lithuania and the Soviet Union at the time). These ideas seem to be cleverly wrapped in the album's artwork as well as in music. The goal was not the Golden Fleece but the journey itself. Hopefully, more is to come.

[53] This was the case during the opening ceremony of the exhibition "1972. Breaking Through the Wall" on May 14, 2022. The performance of A2, B1 and B2 took place at the Kaunas Central Post Office Main Hall, using original Lithuanian synthesizers from the album of Motiejus, Mykolas & Benediktas Bazaras, https://youtu.be/rMKSStp9CLc, accessed on January 25, 2024.

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Summary

Discophonia is the title of the debut album by the Lithuanian band Argo, one of the pioneering electronic music ensembles in the Soviet Union. It was released in 1981 by the Melodia pressing plant in Rīga and reached a run of around one million copies. The acclaim of Argo was evident and proved by the fact that in 1979–1986 the band performed around 50 concerts per year, touring around socialist states and taking part in TV shows. The title of the discussed album is prominent: "disco" is a short term for "discotheque" and "phonia" defines disco as an aural experience. The ambitions of the ensemble are materialized not only on the vinyl record's envelope. Profound compositional ideas become evident when considering merits of the creative founder and leader of the band, Giedrius Kuprevičius. A prominent academic music composer himself, Kuprevičius mentions the composition technique of The Beatles, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Isao Tomita, Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Jethro Tull and Yes as influential and important for Argo next to Bach, Mozart, Berio and Stockhausen.

The music analysis of the album's ontologically "thick" sonic material and manuscripts reveals the true purpose of the endeavor of the Argonauts. The article will display creative musical means by which Argo urged the audience to perceive their music as one to which they can dance, but also listen.

Keywords: Argo, history of electronic music, pop music analysis, composition, musical form