

– I used to sing, too, I was always singing a lot, Buddy Holly, Elvis. This was American music, African music, in the middle of the English countryside ... I think the echo on Elvis’s “Hearbreak Hotel” is better than the song itself, by far. Nobody could tell me what that was, in my family. They didn’t know what to make of that sound. It turns the studio into a cave ... When I was young, the most overpowering sense of wonder was inspired in me by music.³

Eno, like many other English rock-musicians-to-be of his generation, has been harshly critical of his own country’s popular music of that period. “English music at that time was *really* boring. Cliff Richard and Tommy Steele and ... just a lot of very poor imitations of the larger American stars.”⁴ On another occasion, Eno used the phrase “Martian music” to describe the alien, *other* quality of the 1950s doo-wop he heard emanating from the G.I. culture of the air bases.⁵ In 1981, he was to philosophize on the question of exactly why such music would have seemed so full of mystery to him, and on the lessons such experiences held for his own creative work:

I suppose people here [in the U.S.] might think it’s strange to regard doo-wop as magical music, but I did, because in England we had no tradition of it whatsoever ... It could have been from another galaxy for all I knew. I was absolutely entranced by it, from the age of seven or eight, when I first heard those early songs like “Get A Job” [The Silhouettes, 1958]. I thought, “This is just *beautiful*.” I had never heard music like this, and one of the reasons it was beautiful was because it came without a context. It plopped from outer space, in a sense. Now, in later life I realized that this removal of context was an important point in the magic of music. One of the things I’ve been concerned with quite a lot is to deliberately dismantle or shift contexts around so that something comes from an area where you didn’t expect it, or something appears and it has a certain mysteriousness to it.⁶

Eno’s imagination was galvanized by early rhythm and blues and rock’n’roll, and he would play certain records incessantly on his parents’ auto-repeat record player: “I used to leave it on all day, every day.”⁷ Eno was also exposed to big-band jazz:

And then another [group] I heard was, funnily enough, the Ray Conniff Singers. Because I had an uncle who had to leave the place he was living, and he parked his record collection with my parents for a while.

³ Mark Howell, “From a Strangers Evening with Brian Eno,” *Another Room* (June/July 1981), n.p.

⁴ Loder, “Eno,” 26.

⁵ George Rush, “Brian Eno: Rock’s Svengali Pursues Silence,” *Esquire* 98 (Dec. 1982), 130.

⁶ Jim Aikin, “Brian Eno,” *Keyboard* 7 (July 1981), 62. In another interview Eno cited Don and Juan’s “Chicken Necks” as another example of what he called “mystery music.” Loder, “Eno,” 26.

⁷ Rob Tannenbaum, “A Meeting of Sound Minds: John Cage and Brian Eno,” *Musician* 83 (Sept. 1985), 67.