

Francisco Lopez is currently Spain's best-known exponent of experimental music, having risen from the '80s cassette scene to become a prolific producer of works created from found-sound recordings, ranging from dense packets of powerful drone and noise to extremely quiet and sparse pieces. In this respect, his music has some similarities to the likes of David Jackman (Organum), Hafler Trio, and Chris Watson (ex-Cabaret Voltaire), as well as the subtleties of artists such as Ralf Wehowsky or Rehberg & Bauer.

Lopez's basic techniques of sound manipulation, which began solely with tapes and has since moved into the digital realm, also hearken back to the original work of the musique concrète pioneers. Yet Lopez has his own inimitable style, releasing many records and CDs, but usually with stark, minimal packaging and no titles. He also brings a scientist's perspective into experimental sound, having earned his Ph.D. in entomology studying ants at the University of Madrid, where he now works in the ecology department. His biological inclination has led him to release works such as the *La Selva* CD, which processes the raw sounds of the jungle.

Lopez credits the strange music accompanying a puppet show he saw at a young age for starting his interest in experimental music. Later, he began doing tape experiments and plugging into the cassette noise underground. "In the late I got the chance to listen to the music of people like Maurizio Bianchi or [Spanish industrial pioneers] Esplendor Geométrico in Spain," he recalls. "At the same time I was doing some recording with cassettes, so I finally decided to do something with that interest. At the time I was in touch with Bianchi, Hunting Lodge, and SPK. I was trading recordings with these people, but it was really very small. At the time I didn't know there was anything else apart from these people.

"The only thing I had at that time were cassette recorders, and for many years that was the only thing that I used. I didn't have the money to buy a synthesizer or rhythm box. I was always fascinated with the studio of Esplendor Geométrico but couldn't afford to buy anything like that. In the end for me that was good, because it gave me the experience to work with very simple materials, basically combining recordings from cassettes."

Though Lopez still works with cassettes, he obviously has had to come to grips with the computer as an audio tool. He won't call himself a sonic "Luddite," but he's also not totally enamored with digital technology, either. "[T]o me if your goal is to work with the sound, then it's never a point of what computer I'm using," he explains. "That's contrary to the Mego people, because they follow the aesthetics of the machines—the errors and the glitch, which I respect, but I don't share that. I don't want to talk about all that. To me, it's completely irrelevant."

Ironically, Lopez recently released *Untitled #92* on Mego. With their dissimilar views on technology, why did he decide to put the record out on the Austrian label? "Because we share a common interest in some of these sounds, and we've

I don't put any titles on my records. Sometimes, the titles have a relationship to be playing together," he says. "I can enjoy the part of the work that we're doing which relates to the sound, but I don't follow their aesthetics.

"That's why I don't put any information on the records, and also related to that, the sound because of the recordings that I did at a certain place, but I don't want this to be part of the music I present. I want people to have no preconceptions, no descriptions, nothing that can tell them what's the purpose of that or the idea. To sort of create a blank space where people can decide the meaning for themselves."

As his academic career suggests, Lopez is particularly interested in manipulating natural sounds because of their "intense and complex" nature.

"These materials for me have been the best source to work with because they have lots of imperfections and don't seem produced, like with instruments," he says. "In most electronic music, I don't like the textures of the sounds. I don't like the impression that it's been produced with a machine. Of course I like a lot of music, but what I do is prepare original material to work with sound. Nature has provided me always with excellent material. It has a different quality; it's more organic."

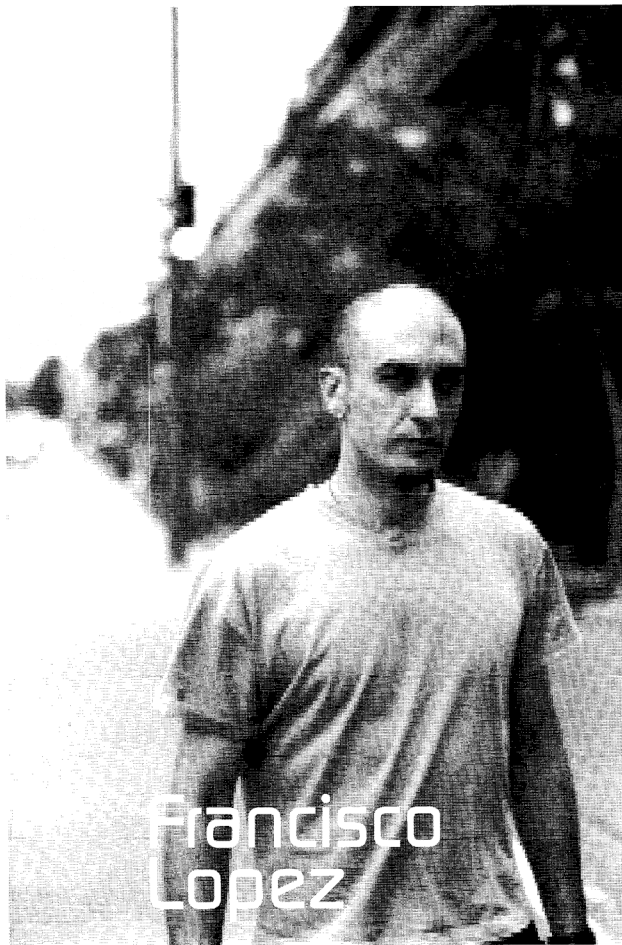
His biological work has taken Lopez to Central and South America, where he has tried to initiate some interest in musical explorations like the ones he has undertaken. "I lived partly in Costa Rica for several years—I was moving back and forth between there and Spain—and it was very difficult to find people interested in that kind of stuff," he says. "Many times what I find is people that don't know anything about experimental music, and then they go to a concert and have some kind of good reaction to it, like they're impressed by the sound. Then they try to connect that with their own usual experience.

"In Costa Rica, for example, I was doing a concert there, and people related that to the sounds from the jungle, which is especially intense there. And that gives them a connection to their reality. So I think there's a possibility to start there and to get people interested in something which is not so real, but more abstract."

Lopez's latest release, *Untitled #104* on Canadian label Alien8, showcases his usual sonic manipulations, but on a radically different sound source, so radical in fact that it stunned the crowd during a performance at this year's Sonar Festival in Barcelona—even Alien8 is refusing to disclose it. With this release on a respected North American electronic label and a successful U.S. tour last summer, perhaps Lopez will buzz his way into the eardrums of more electronic fans—and help put the Spanish experimental scene on the map in the Western hemisphere.

—Manny Theiner

Untitled #92 is out now on Mego, Untitled 1998 is out now on Generator, and Untitled #104 is out now on Alien8.



Francisco Lopez