

The History of Rock Music: 1966-1969

Genres and musicians of the Sixties

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Electronics and Rock 1968-70

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(These are excerpts from my book ["A History of Rock and Dance Music"](#))

The single event that would eventually revolutionize rock music down to the deepest fiber of its nature was the advent of electronic instruments. In 1966 the USA inventor Robert Moog began selling his "synthesizer", a new kind of instrument, the first instrument that could play more than one "voice" and even imitate the voices of all the other instruments. The avantgarde was quick to seize on the idea. Morton Subotnick, for example, published a free improvisation on synthesizer, *Silver Apples of the Moon* (1967), which was simply the classical equivalent of acid-rock.

Until then, electronic music had been a luxury that very few popular musicians could afford. Most synthesizers were owned by classical music centers or by large recording studios.

Despite the practical difficulties, a few visionary composers introduced electronic arrangements in popular music, following the success of the Beach Boys' *Good Vibrations* (1966).

German-born Palestine-raised composer [Gershon Kingsley](#) (Goetz-Gustav Ksinski) relocated to the USA in 1946 and in 1955 moved to New York, where he began to work on Broadway musicals. French-born [Jean-Jacques Perrey](#) moved to the same in 1960 and, influenced by Pierre Schaeffer's "musique concrete", began to compose music by cutting and splicing together bits of tape. When the two met, they recorded an album based on that technique of electronic assemblage (or "electronic sonosynthesis"), **The In Sound from Way Out** (? 1965/? 1966 - jul 1966). Their second album, **Kaleidoscopic Vibrations** (? 1967 - ? 1967), added the Moog synthesizer and included a catchy ditty, *Baroque Hoedown* (destined to become a Walt Disney theme). Kingsley then used the new instrument to record **Music To Moog By** (? 1969 - summer 1969), that included another catchy novelty, *Popcorn*. Three years later a member of his First Moog Quartet, Stan Free, played the Moog on a German cover of that tune

by Hot Butter that became the first worldwide hit of electronic music. The First Moog Quartet had debuted at the Carnegie Hall in 1970 (one of the earliest live performances of a synthesizer), and Kingsley had composed a *Concerto for Moog* (1971) scored for synthesizer quartet and symphony orchestra.

Canadian-born composer [Bruce Haack](#) moved to New York in 1954, and in 1962 started a series of children's music, for which he also used electronic sounds. The most futuristic were **The Way-Out Record for Children** (? 1968 - ? 1968) and **The Electronic Record For Children** (? 1969 - ? 1969). He then turned to psychedelic rock with the electronic sci-fi concept **The Electric Lucifer** (? 1968/?1969 - ? 1970) and to electronic pop with **Together** (? 1971 - ? 1971), the latter under the moniker Jackpine Savage.

Canadian composer [Mort Garson](#) (3) recorded **The Zodiac: Cosmic Sounds** (may 1967 - nov 1967), a suite accompanied by Paul Beaver on electronic keyboards, **The Wozard of Iz** (? 1969 - ? 1969), an electronic parody of the children's classic (featuring Bernie Krause on "environmental sounds"), **Lucifer** (? 1971 - ? 1971), an exoteric opera/mass, his wildest hodgepodge of electronic sounds, and **Music for Sensuous Lovers** (? 1971 - ? 1971), which features the Moog synthesizer and orgasmic moans by a porno star.

[Ron Geesin](#) (1), an eclectic British sound researcher who had already experimented with the collage on **A Raise Of Eyebrows** (? 1967 - ? 1967), wed psychedelia and Dadaism on **The Body** (jan/sep 1970 - nov 1970) and particularly **Electrosound** (? 1972 - ? 1972), which expanded cosmic music and predated industrial music.

The man who is credited with turning "electronic music" into commercial music is [Walter Carlos](#), whose **Switched On Bach** (? 1968 - dec 1968) was the first electronic album to climb the charts, although his best one was **Sonic Seasonings** (? 1971 - ? 1972), which predated ambient music by a few years.

In 1968 several rock bands also experimented with the new medium to enhance their creative chaos, notably the psychedelic bands United States Of America in New York and Fifty Foot Hose in San Francisco.

[Lothar & The Hand People](#) (2) were perhaps the first rock band to use electronic instruments for more than mere background filling on their albums **Presenting** (? 1968 - ? 1968) and **Space Hymn** (? 1969 - dec 1969).

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Legendary cult-band [Silver Apples](#) (2) were an experimental duo of electronic keyboards and vocals that predated new wave and synth-pop by almost a decade. The music on **Silver Apples** (? 1968 - ? 1968) and **Contact** (? 1969 - ? 1969) wed psychedelia and rock'n'roll while packing urban neurosis and existential angst.

In Boston, Beacon Street Union's member [Peter Ivers](#) applied electronic "modulations" to the already wildly eccentric arrangements of his religious concept **Knight Of The Blue Communion** (may 1969 - ? 1969). A surreal parade of jazz, psychedelic, pop, classical and vaudeville numbers featuring an opera singer.

The first musician to improvise live on a synthesizer was probably Annette

Peacock, performing with Paul Bley's jazz combo.

Two veterans of electronic instruments formed another influential duo, simply named [Beaver & Krause](#) (3), whose **Ragnarok Electronic Funk** (? 1968 - ? 1969) was another important milestone in the adoption of electronic instruments. On **In A Wild Sanctuary** (? 1970 - ? 1970) they attempted a raga-classical-folk-psychedelic fusion, and on **Gandharva** (? 1970/feb 1971 - ? 1971), recorded in San Francisco's cathedral with help from Gerry Mulligan and Bud Schank, they further expanded towards jazz.

In 1970 Robert Moog unveiled the Minimoog, the first portable synthesizer. That event made electronic music available to a much broader group of musicians. While still expensive, this toy could be moved from one stage to the other, and, therefore, be integrated into the rock ensemble.

In 1969 David Borden formed the electronic trio [Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Company](#) (1) that would record the eponymous album **Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Company** (spring 1970/summer 1973 - jan 1974), armed with the Minimoog synthesizer and inspired by Terry Riley's minimalism and jazz improvisation.

In Sweden, [Bo Hansson](#) released **Sagan Om Ringen** (fall 1969/apr 1970 - fall 1970), a collection of twelve impressionistic vignettes that mixed folk, classical, jazz and pop and predate both synth-pop and new-age music.

In Britain, electronic music pioneers [White Noise](#), the brainchild of USA-born David Vorhaus, concocted the ethereal space lullabies of **An Electric Storm** (? 1968 - ? 1969).

Finally, the [Tonto's Expanding Head Band](#) (1) recorded **Zero Time** (dec 1970 - ? 1971), the first collection of original pop melodies entirely played on synthesizers.

By that time, German bands had begun to shift the center of mass towards the electronic keyboards and would soon proceed to reinvent rock music.

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