

## The History of Rock Music: 1976-1989

New Wave, Punk-rock, Hardcore

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### Industrial-metal

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

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#### *Industrial-metal 1986-88*

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A seminal achievement of the latter part of the decade was the merger of industrial music with hard-rock and heavy metal, pioneered in Switzerland by the [Young Gods](#) (1), whose **L'Eau Rouge** (1989) made music by sampling heavy-metal guitars and symphonic sounds.

In France, [Treponem Pal](#) used real guitars, notably on their third album **Excess And Overdrive** (1993).

In Canada, Don Gordon's [Numb](#) (2) performed brutal surgery on techno beats in the torture chamber of **Christmeister** (1989) and assembled the audio-collage of jackhammers and chainsaws of **Death On The Installment Plan** (1993).

Formed in Germany by keyboardist Sasha Konietzko, guitarist Nick "En" Esch and English vocalist Raymond Watts, [KMFDM](#) (3) debuted with the tentative **What Do You Know Deutschland** (1986) in a derivative robotic style, but found their true voice with **Naive** (1990), an album that was both explosive and robotic, welding blues, dub, gospel, hip-hop and heavy-metal in a substance that was both guitar-driven and keyboards-driven. The idea was refined on **Angst** (1993) by incorporating the steady beats of disco-music and techno, while the guitar riffs were pushed to the fore to compete with Ministry and Nine Inch Nails; and **Nihil** (1995) found a closure of sorts, replacing the angst with a nihilistic (but not desperate) acceptance of a grotesque futurism.

However, the fusion of industrial music and heavy-metal was completed mainly by the Chicago school. Criminal vocals, jack-hammer rhythms, and

piercing guitars took over the gothic/atmospheric noise of early industrial music. Al Jourgensen's [Ministry](#) (12), and their Belgian offshoot, Luc Van Acker's [Revolting Cocks](#), led the charge. Ministry's first tour de force of machine music, **Twitch** (1986), was still in the vein of Cabaret Voltaire but already displayed the violent fits that eventually took over **The Land Of Rape And Honey** (1988): guitar riffs and distortions, hammering drums, sound effects and demonic vocals gave new meaning to the word "industrial". It was heavy-metal disguised as avantgarde. **The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste** (1989), that featured the classic line-up of vocalist Chris Connelly, bassist Paul Barker and drummer William Rieflin, increased the dose of rhythm and guitars: Jourgensen was basically heading a power-trio and playing a psychotic variation on speed-metal. **Psalm 69** (1992) was not innovative at all, but contained the blasphemous anthem *Jesus Built My Hot Rod* (1991), with Gibby Haynes of the Butthole Surfers on vocals, Ministry's masterpiece and a masterpiece for all of rock'n'roll.

[My Life With The Thrill Kill Kult](#) represented the hedonistic fringe of the movement. From the gothic overtones of **I See Good Spirits** (1988) to the erotic overtones of **Sexplosion** (1991), the band specialized in fetishistic dance music.

The legendary career of Dead Kennedys' front-man and agit-prop preacher [Jello Biafra](#) (1) was mainly a sequence of high-level collaborations. His polemic wit and his saber-rattling vocals employed Ministry's guitarist Alien Jourgensen and bassist Paul Barker for one of industrial-metal's masterpieces, Lard's EP **The Power Of Lard** (1988), and its follow-up **The Last Temptation Of Reid** (1990), which paraded explosive raps, terrifying progressions, expressionistic recitation, grotesque dances and demented rigmaroles. He then teamed up with Steel Pole Bath Tub and King Snake Roost's guitarist Charlie Tolnay to form Tumor Circus and record **Tumor Circus** (1991), another dose of terrorism in music.

New York's multimedia collective [Missing Foundation](#) (11) created politically-inspired music a` la David Peel and the Fugs that borrowed from Foetus and Ministry. **Missing Foundation** (1987) was mainly a bundle of fastidious noise, propelled by grotesque, amateurish playing that packed a mixture of Pop Group's paroxysm and MC5's terrorism. **1933** (1988) was even more barbaric, primitive and minimal, a truly revolutionary work that attempted a dozen different directions.

### ***Nervous breakdown, 1986-88***

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[Neurosis](#) (12) in San Jose added keyboards and samples to their background of speed-metal and hardcore to pen the terrible visions of **Souls At Zero** (1992), an album that scoured infernal depths and treaded a fine line between improvisation and composition. The tracks on **Enemy Of The Sun** (1993) had no melodic center to speak of. Sounds obeyed no geometry, they were outpours of desperation. **Through Silver In Blood** (1996), possibly their masterpiece, was a work of spasmodic tension that constantly teetered on the edge of the psychic abyss, in a vain quest for an emotional center of mass. Neurosis' music was one of psychological

subtlety, based on the cynical orchestration of eerie dissonances, heavy riffs, frantic drumming, instrumental distortions, screams, whispers and echoes, a blend that mostly sounded like the nightmare of a deranged mind. Their melodramatic spectral textural symphonies and threnodies kept acquiring new meaning via subconscious-scouring works, finally acquiring a more metaphysical than psychedelic/esoteric quality on **Given To The Rising** (2007). Their side-project, [Tribes of Neurot](#) (1), dealt with experimental minimalist/ambient/psychedelic music. **Static Migration** (1998), an extreme experiment of electronic and guitar-based sound-painting, was mainly a collaboration between Steve Von Till and Pain Teens' Scott Ayers (under the moniker Walking Time Bombs).

[Pain Teens](#) (12), a duo of electronics (Scott Ayers) and vocals from Texas, bridged psychedelic, erotic, gothic and industrial elements to produce the expressionist, dissonant wasteland of **Case Histories** (1989), and the orgiastic, decadent and psychotic rituals of **Born In Blood** (1990). Barbaric guitars, primordial percussions and agonizing wails increased the tension in the nightmarish bacchanals of **Stimulation Festival** (1992). Abandoning the therapeutic shock of those albums, Ayers coined a post-Freudian and post-Brechtian form of communication with **Destroy Me Lover** (1993). The compositions sculpted with his collage technique (relying more on guitar feedback and less on vocals) covered a vast territory, from Chrome to Pink Floyd, while retaining the format of the rock song. The storm subsided on **Beasts Of Dreams** (1995), a display of Ayers' magician's skills via a series of musical abstractions.

Napalm Death's Justin Broadrick started [Godflesh](#) (12) in England to play post-industrial music that integrated elements of Foetus and Big Black. **Godflesh** (1988) was one of the bleakest albums since early Swans, and, overall, sounded like the last spasm of a dying man. The horrific monoliths of **Streetcleaner** (1989) fused grind-core and industrial dance, achieving a level of intensity that had few rivals. **Pure** (1992) emphasized heavy-metal guitar and thundering rhythms, and included a 20-minute aural montage of atonal sounds that could compete with Lou Reed's **Metal Machine Music**. Broadrick further pursued his experimental-noise ambitions with the "ambient" side-project [Final](#), that would peak with the 147-minute double-disc 27-movement abstract glitchy droning symphony **3** (2006), while his next project, [Jesu](#), that debuted with the 40-minute two-song EP **Heartache** (2004) and the full-length **Jesu** (2005), was devoted to slow-motion repetitive "noise and drone" music.

### *Apocalyptic Folk*

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A notable exception within the ranks of industrial music came from the musicians who, led by David Tibet's Current 93, moved away from industrial music and ventured into a new form of folk, no less ominous and depressed. That "apocalyptic folk" was industrial music's version of the classical lied. Douglas Pierce and Tony Wakeford launched [Death In June](#) (1), the project that was most directly influenced by Tibet. After Wakeford formed Sol Invictus, Pierce released his best collection of emphatic, martial and lugubrious ballads, **Brown Book** (1987). [Sol Invictus](#) played magical and ancestral folk, reminiscent of druidic legends

and embellished with electronic and neo-classical arrangements.

Straddling the line between Nico, In The Nursery and medieval/exotic music, film music and industrial music, the expressionistic school of Slovenia became the first relevant experience in Eastern Europe: [Autopsia](#) (1), whose mid-life **Kristallmacht** (1993) was a gothic neo-classical symphony, [Laibach](#) (1), whose **Nova Akropola** (1985) was a collection of gloomy post-industrial ballads, and [Borghesia](#) led the pack. They had a tendency to focus on depicting horror and violence.

In Holland the [Trespassers W](#) (1) served provocative and genre-defying works such as **Dummy** (1988) and the philosophical concept **Roots And Locations** (1991), whose episodes ranged from expressionist psychodramas to musical skits.

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