

## The History of Rock Music: 1995-2001

Drum'n'bass, trip-hop, glitch music

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### Post-post-rock

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

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#### *The Louisville alumni 1995-97*

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The Squirrel Bait and Rodan genealogies continued to dominate Kentucky's and Chicago's post-rock scene during the 1990s.

Half of Rodan, i.e. Tara Jane O'Neil (now on vocals and guitar) and Kevin Coultas, formed [Sonora Pine](#) with keyboardist and guitarist Sean Meadows, violinist Samara Lubelski and pianist Rachel Grimes. Their debut album, **Sonora Pine** (1996), basically applied Rodan's aesthetics to the format of the folk lullaby.

Another member of Rodan, guitarist Jeff Mueller, formed [June Of 44](#) (11), a sort of supergroup comprising Sonora Pine's guitarist Sean Meadows, Codeine's drummer and keyboardist Doug Scharin, and bassist and trumpet player Fred Erskine. **Engine Takes To The Water** (1995) signaled the evolution of "slo-core" towards a coldly neurotic form, which achieved a hypnotic and catatonic tone, besides a classic austerity, on the mini-album **Tropics And Meridians** (1996). Sustained by abrasive and inconclusive guitar doodling, mutant rhythm and off-key counterpoint of violin and trumpet, **Four Great Points** (1998) metabolized dub, raga, jazz, pop in a theater of calculated gestures.

Post-rock was clearly more "instrumental" than "vocal", and [Rachel's](#) (2), formed by Rodan's fourth member, guitarist Jason Noble, merely formalized this fact with an all-instrumental format and a chamber ensemble built around Rachel Grimes' piano and Christian Frederickson's viola. **Handwriting** (1995) augmented the rock trio with strings and keyboards, but, rather than aiming for an orchestral sound, it downplayed the multitude of "voices" in favor of an artful exploration of timbres, while

the narrative languished somewhere between the Club Foot Orchestra's dark soundtracks (minus the expressionistic overtones) and the Penguin Cafè Orchestra's minimalist dances (minus the nostalgic and exotic factors). By the time of **The Sea And The Bells** (1996), this somber hybrid had evolved into hermetic and severe avantgarde music.

[For Carnation](#) (1), the new project of Slint's guitarist Brian McMahan, followed Gastr Del Sol's route to subtle dynamics and wasteland-evoking soundscapes on two EPs, **Fight Songs** (1995) and the superb **Marshmallows** (1996). They refined the art of low-key, sparse but nonetheless complex compositions to the point that **For Carnation** (2000) betrayed virtually no emotions, just illusions of emotions.

Slint's guitarist [Dave Pajo](#) (11) contributed to dispel the notion that instrumental music had to be atmospheric with **Aerial M** (1997), which delivered languid sub-ambient slo-core in which elements of lounge jazz, Ennio Morricone's soundtracks and Rachel's semi-classical scores were carefully defused. His minimalist and transcendental technique, equally inspired by Pat Metheny (jazz), Robert Fripp (rock) and John Fahey (folk), reached an existential zenith on Papa M's **Live From A Shark Cage** (1999), a phantasmagoria of cubist de-composition, the instrumental equivalent of Tim Buckley's music.

Rodan's guitarists Jeff Mueller and Jason Noble reunited when they formed [Shipping News](#) (1) with drummer Kyle Crabtree, and recorded the oblique, undulating jams of **Save Everything** (1997). They refined their approach with the slow-forming filigrees of **Very Soon And In Pleasant Company** (2000), impersonating not so much brainy improvisers as consummate storytellers spinning enigmatic tales, full of twists and surprises. Rodan's wreckage of classical harmony left behind flotsam of dub-like ecstasy and hard-rock fits.

### ***The Chicago alumni, 1995-98***

The Tortoise genealogy constituted the epicenter for Chicago's post-rock of the 1990s.

[Shrimp Boat](#) (1), featuring vocalist Sam Prekop, coined a jazz-soul-country fusion that sounded like a cross between Camper Van Beethoven and the Minutemen, particularly on their second album, **Duende** (1992). Prekop's next band [Sea And Cake](#) (1) almost wed post-rock and easy-listening. The drunk, sleepy delivery of the vocalist was matched on **Sea And Cake** (1994) by a gentle, low-key, Steely Dan-ian soundscape of jazz and soul phrases laid down by guitarist Archer Prewitt and Tortoise's multi-instrumentalist John McEntire. The idea led to the sumptuous keyboard arrangements of **Nassau** (1995) and eventually the electronica of **The Fawn** (1997).

Jazz was a major factor in alienating the Chicago school from the traditional foundations of rock music. More and more units looked to jazz for inspiration: [Isotope 217](#), the project of Tortoise's black guitarist Jeff Parker; [Euphone](#), the brainchild of drummer Ryan Rapsys, whose **The Calendar of Unlucky Days** (1999) was devoted to improvised, instrumental jams mixing electronics, acoustic instruments and syncopated

beats; [Bill Ding](#), veterans of the jazz scene who performed chamber music for electronics, vibraphone, cello, trumpet and violin on **Trust In God But Tie Up Your Camel** (1997); [Brokeback](#), a collaboration between Tortoise's bassist Douglas McCombs and Chicago Underground Quartet's bassist Noel Kuper-Smith, which delivered the quiet, ethereal, sparse watercolors of **Field Recordings From The Cook Country Water Table** (1999) and **Morse Code In The Modern Age** (2001).

[Duotron](#) (1) played abstract pieces in a psychotic form that ran the gamut from progressive-rock to noise to absurdist vaudeville to no wave and free-jazz, particularly on **We Modern We Now** (1995).

The instrumental group [Town And Country](#) (1) articulated an aesthetics of baroque trance that wed Harold Budd's hypnotic bliss and Bill Evans' romantic jazz. The lengthy pieces of **Town And Country** (1998) and **It All Has To Do With It** (2000), straddling the line between jazz improvisation and classical composition, led to the mature post-fusion synthesis of **C'mon** (2002), performed by Jim Dorling on harmonium and bass clarinet, Ben Vida on guitar and cornet, Liz Payne on guitar, Josh Abrams on bass and celeste.

The [Scissor Girls](#) (1), led by keyboardist Azita Youssefi and drummer Heather Melowicz, devoted **We People Space With Phantoms** (1996) to a schizoid (and largely improvised) form of punk, funk and electronic music.

[Zeek Sheck](#) (the brainchild of Roseanna Perkins Meyers) composed a Residents-like pentalogy on an imaginary race starting with **I Love You** (1998), a chaotic assemblage of violin, flute, clarinet, harmonica, tuba, guitar, bass and electronics, including Cheer Accident's keyboardist Thymme Jones and cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm.

[Frontier](#) ran the gamut from shoegazing to King Crimson to Can to Tortoise on **Heather** (1997).

[Dianogah](#), a trio of two basses and drums, betrayed the influence of Slint on the mostly-instrumental **As Seen From Above** (1997).

[Boxhead Ensemble](#) (4) was an impromptu project of the Chicago rock avantgarde that involved members of Tortoise, Jim O'Rourke and Ken Vandermark, assembled by composer Michael Krassner to score the soundtrack for a film, **Dutch Harbor** (1997), a set of austere, erudite, low-key and gloomy improvisations, of high-caliber noir and chamber jazz. Another stellar cast (Krassner, bassist Ryan Hembrey, violinist Jessica Billey, drummer Glenn Kotche, Souled American's guitarist Scott Tuma, cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm) improvised the smoky, sleepy chamber music of **Two Brothers** (2001), the seven transcendent **Quartets** (2003) and the eight zen-like **Nocturnes** (2006). The [Lofty Pillars](#) (10) recycled a few members of the Boxhead Ensemble to perform compositions by Krassner and keyboardist Will Hendricks. Like the Penguin Café Orchestra, **Amsterdam** (2001) was caught in a time warp, plotting a fusion of old-fashioned genres (Leonard Cohen-ian dirges, Dylan-ian odes, gospel and country hymns à la Band) and modern aesthetic values, while delivering clockwork performances worthy of classical music.

Chicago's [L'Altra](#) (1) introduced a sublimely elegant fusion of pop, jazz and classical music with their EP **L'Altra** (1999). The effect of **Music Of A Sinking Occasion** (2000), ten madrigals for a small chamber ensemble played with a lazy renaissance grace, was to transpose atmospheric and intellectual pop music to another temporal dimension, in the vein pioneered in the 1970s by the Penguin Cafè Orchestra. **In The Afternoon** (2002), featuring cellist Fred Lonberg-Holm, crystallized their method: lush and oneiric soundscapes accompanying dual vocal harmonies.

The towering figure of this generation was cellist [Fred Lonberg-Holm](#), who played in and led a number of orchestras and ensembles, notably [Pillow](#), a quartet with the Flying Luttenbachers' reed player Michael Colligan, and two members of Town And Country, bassist Liz Payne and guitarist Ben Vida, best documented on their second album **Field On Water** (2000), and **Terminal 4** (2001), that offered rock music for a pseudo-jazz quartet of cello, guitar (Ben Vida), bass (Josh Abrams) and trombone (Jeb Bishop), the [Terminal 4](#).

Chicago's trio (saxophone, bass and drums) [Bablicon](#) (1), featuring Neutral Milk Hotel's drummer Jeremy Barnes, was influenced by Soft Machine's progressive-rock, Slint's post-rock and Frank Zappa's irreverent musique concrete. The noisy, spastic, psychedelic jazz-rock of **In A Different City** (1999) and of the mini-album **Orange Tapped Moon** (2000) led to **A Flat Inside A Fog, The Cat That Was A Dog** (2000), a gloriously incoherent statement of piano-based ambient cacophony.

### *The golden age of post-rock, 1995-1997*

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The most obvious link between post-rock of the 1990s and progressive-rock and German avant-rock of the 1970s was a band from Maryland, [Trans Am](#) (1), a trio led by guitarist/keyboardist Philip Manley. The keyboards-driven instrumental rock of **The Surveillance** (1998) was unique in that it exuded the rhythmic exuberance of dance music. The group moved towards a less distinctive but more accessible prog-pop sound that culminated with **Red Line** (2000), under a broad range of influences, from Devo's futuristic rock'n'roll to Frank Zappa's noise-jazz bacchanals.

[Jackie-O Motherfucker](#) (2), the project of New York-based multi-instrumentalist Tom Greenwood, relied heavily on free-jazz improvisation for **Alchemy** (1995), **Cross Pollinate** (1996) and especially **Flat Fixed** (1998), featuring female guitarist Honey Owens, although his most intriguing works were probably the ones that moved away from those roots. **Fig 5** (1999) piled up elements of acid-rock, folk, blues, noise-rock and soul; and the jazz elements all but disappeared on the double-disc **Magick Fire Music** (2000), an epic journey from noise collage to ambient melancholia.

The recordings of the [No-Neck Blues Band](#) (3), a loose New York-based collective of improvisers, were mainly devoted to long chaotic instrumental jams that drew inspiration from the Art Ensemble Of Chicago, Captain Beefheart, Amon Duul II and Pink Floyd. **Letters From**

**The Earth** (1996), recorded on a roof in 1996 and including the 38-minute jam *Isopropyl Ocean*, and **Sticks And Stones May Break My Bones But Names Will Never Hurt Me** (2001) ran the gamut from an anthropological recapitulation of primal shamanic music to free-jazz improvisation. At their best, the jams were minimalist fanfares of sorts, combining a number of repetitive patterns into a tribal acid trip of loose guitar/mandolin threnodies, polymorph multi-instrumental beats, loose aggregates of free-jazz horns and languid trance-like droning instruments. **Qvaris** (2005) dressed that dadaistic vice into a more austere format, bordering on electroacoustic chamber music and musique concrete.

Boston's [Karate](#) were emblematic of post-rock's ambition to concoct loose and jazzy song structures, notably on **In Place of Real Insight** (1997).

In San Francisco, the iconoclastic tradition of the Residents and Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 was continued by albums such as: [Double U's Absurd Fjord](#) (1996), [Uzub](#) (1)'s **Alien Manna For Sleeping Monkeys** (1996). [Deerhoof](#) (1) was an avant-pop concept that balanced cacophony and melody, abstraction and organization, and evolved from the blissful Captain Beefheart-esque anarchy of **The Man The King The Girl** (1997) to the prog-garage ingenuity of **Reveille** (2002).

### *Instrumental post-rock 1995-99*

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Instrumental rock music became more and more ambitious in the second half of the decade.

Chicago's [Sive Style](#) (2), formed by guitarist Billy Dolan, Tortoise's drummer John Herndon, bassist LeRoy Bach and Lonesome Organist's keyboardist Jeremy Jacobsen, concocted first the angular funk and rhythm'n'blues of **Sive Style** (1995), which sounded like the Meters playing for Schoenberg, and then the nostalgic Caribbean nonsense of **Miniature Portraits** (1999), replete with demonic picking and kitschy vibraphone.

[Salaryman](#) (1), the all-instrumental subsidiary of the Poster Children, toyed with a kaleidoscope of genre deconstructions on **Salaryman** (1997).

San Francisco's [A Minor Forest](#) indulged in the lengthy instrumental improvisations of **Flemish Altruism** (1996).

North Carolina's [Tractor Hips](#) glued together remnants of Soft Machine's jazz-rock, Can/Faust's kraut-rock and John Zorn's avant-jazz on **Tractor Hips** (1996).

The [Fucking Champs](#) (1), hailing from San Francisco, leveraged the double-guitar attack of Josh Smith and Tim Green (ex-Nation Of Ulysses) on **III** (1997), released under the moniker C4AM95, one of the few works to bridge heavy-metal and post-rock since the pioneering work of Bitch Magnet.

[Paul Newman](#) were Don Caballero's disciples in Texas with albums such

as **Frames Per Second** (1997).

Minnesota's prog-rockers [Gorge Trio](#) (1) applied Don Caballero's art of counterpoint to **Dead Chicken Fear No Knife** (1998) and **For Loss Of** (1999).

Dazzling Killmen's bassist Darin Gray and Cheer Accident's drummer Thymme Jones who had been the rhythm section for O'Rourke's projects Brise-Glace and Yona-Kit, formed [You Fantastic](#) with guitarist Tim Garrigan, whose **Homesickness** (1999) contained brief experiments at the border between hardcore and free-jazz.

San Diego's [Tristeza](#) (1) seemed to wed new-age music and instrumental post-rock with the slow, gentle pieces of **Spine And Sensory** (1999).

[Out of Worship](#) was a collaboration between San Francisco-based guitarist/bassist Joe Goldring and Codeine/Rex/Him's drummer Doug Scharin, whose **Sterilized** (1999) achieved a sophisticated and colorful fusion of jazz, raga, psychedelia and dub (thanks to Ill Media's turntables, Tony Maimone's bass, Julie Liu's violin and Adheesh Sathaye's tablas).

[Turing Machine](#)'s **A New Machine For Living** (2000), the new project by Pitchblende's Justin Chearno, wed four generations of jamming (1960s' acid-rock, 1970s' kraut-rock, 1980s' noise-rock and 1990s' post-rock).

### ***Industrial nightmares 1998-2000***

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[Laddio Bolocko](#) (1), featuring Drew StIvany on guitar, Ben Armstrong on bass, Marcus DeGrazia on saxophone and ex-Dazzling Killmen's drummer Blake Fleming, mixed the neurotic introspection of post-rock and the psychotic attack of hardcore on **Strange Warmings** (1997), whose jams also referenced free-jazz and acid-rock. As structures exploded and imploded, the listener was taken on a rollercoaster of stylistic mirages. The soundscape got blurred on the EPs **In Real Time** (1998) and **As If By Remote** (1999), that abandoned the frenzy of the debut album to concentrate on textural explorations. After the group split, bassist Ben Armstrong and guitarist Drew St.Ivany formed [Psychic Paramount](#) with a drummer and de facto continued the same mission of Laddio Bolocko on **Gamelan Into The Mink Supernatural** (2005).

[Phylr](#) (1), the new project of Cop Shoot Cop's keyboardist Jim Coleman, indulged in Foetus-like gothic and industrial overtones on **Contra La Puerta** (1998).

Minnesota's space-rockers [Salamander](#) (1) indulged in abstract soundpainting on **Red Ampersand** (1998) and turned the title-track of **Red Mantra** (1999) into an avantgarde concerto.

San Francisco's [Burmese](#) were a guitar-less trio or quartet (two basses and one or two drums) who, inspired by Whitehouse's horror free-form noise, by the more abstract forms of grindcore and occasionally by Earth's subsonic drones, crafted the dense, chaotic, frenzied and heavy 21 brief

songs of **Monkeys Tear Man To Shreds, Man Never Forgives Ape, Man Destroys Environment** (2000).

San Diego-based [Tarantula Hawk](#) delivered post-industrial doom and psychedelic delirium on two self-titled albums, **Tarantula Hawk** (2000) and **Tarantula Hawk** (2002).

### *Ebbing and flowing 1995-2000*

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As instrumental post-rock lost its hardcore component and shunned the trance-oriented approach of ambient music, it developed into a new form of music, both dynamic and atmospheric.

Rake's guitarist/keyboardist Bill Kellum and Pitchblende's guitarist Justin Cherno formed a keyboards-guitar-drums trio, [Doldrums](#) (12), that concocted an atmospheric blend of Main's ambient shoegazing, Tangerine Dream's cosmic music, Grateful Dead's *Dark Star* and Pink Floyd's *A Saucerful Of Secrets*. **Secret Life Of Machines** (1995) and **Acupuncture** (1997) contained multi-part suites that, under the apparent staticity, mutated continuously, each an amorphous plasma of sounds that went from exuberant to ecstatic, from chanting to droning, from tribal drumming to abstract doodling. **Feng Shui** (1998) was a more artificial work, the product of studio editing, but that technique was refined on **Desk Trickery** (1999), a multitude of carefully-crafted sonic events seeping through the shapeless jelly.

[Scenic](#) (2), the new project by Savage Republic's founding member Bruce Licher (now living in Arizona), interpreted desert music in an almost cosmic setting. If **Incident At Cima** (1995) was still impressionistic and sketchy, **Acquatica** (1996) and **The Acid Gospel Experience** (2002) were ambitious frescoes of the musician's environment and, indirectly, of the musician's psyche.

Seattle's [Hovercraft](#) (2), the project of keyboardist/guitarist/samplist Ryan Campbell, created the musical equivalent of action painting performed by an epileptic acrobat on phantasmagoric albums such as **Akathisia** (1997) and **Experiment Below** (1998). Their atonal mini-symphonies recalled alternatively Sonic Youth, Red Crayola and King Crimson, but also wove a supernatural suspense and inspired apocalyptic fear.

Their cousins [Magnog](#) (1) incorporated the aesthetics of post-rock into the plot-less synth-tinged instrumental tracks of **Magnog** (1996), that offered a tuneless and mantra-oriented form of space-rock.

San Francisco's [Tarentel](#) (2) sculpted **From Bone To Satellite** (1999), a magnificent plateau of desolate, dilated, arpeggiated, minor-key, synth and guitar-driven scores à la Godspeed You Black Emperor. A more humane feeling surfaced from the stark, carefree solemnity of **The Order of Things** (2001). The four-volume series of **Ghetto Beats On The Surface Of The Sun** (2006) zeroed on skeletal rhythms piercing through a jelly of glitchy ambience. Their "ghetto" was a psycho-musical ghetto, a mythological "place" of the mind that manifested itself in a plethora of

disorienting soundscapes.

### ***Montage, 1996-99***

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In New York, [M'lumbo](#) (1) bridged dissonant avantgarde, free-jazz and dance music with the free-form collages of **Spinning Tourists in a City of Ghosts** (1999), that applied the collage technique to the most diverse sources.

Boston's [Land Of The Loops](#) (1), the project of Boston keyboardist Alan Sutherland, produced the cartoonish collages of samples, dance beats and ethereal vocals of **Bundle Of Joy** (1996).

[Bran Van 3000](#) (1), the project of Montreal-based multi-instrumentalist Jamie DiSalvio, assembled **Glee** (1998), a surreal, dissonant, hyper-realistic collage of hip-hop, conversations, scratches, jazz improvisation, choirs, loops, orchestral instruments, that magically retained the traditional song format.

In Holland, [Solex](#) (12), the project of Dutch used-record specialist Elizabeth Esselink, updated the soul-jazz diva to the age of samplers and drum machines. The songs on **Pick Up** (1999) and especially **Low Kick And Hard Bop** (2001) were fragments of music glued together and propelled by disjointed beats. The difference between her compositions and the audio cut-up of the avantgarde was that her compositions were actually "songs", and even "melodic" ones. Her silky voice blended naturally with the frigid textures of her collages. Few composers could turn a cold, artificial art of puzzle recomposition into a warm, personal art of personality decomposition, as she proved on another painstaking, almost surgical, cut-and-paste tour de force, **Laughing Stock Of Indie Rock** (2004).

The Australian ensemble [Avalanches](#) (1) coined a new form of sample-based dance music with their early singles and perfected it with the clockwork collages of **Since I Left You** (2000).

### ***German post-rock 1994-98***

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Post-rock owed a huge debt to German rock of the 1970s. Thus, it was not surprising that Germany rapidly became one of the centers for post-rock.

Ronald Lippock's [To Rococo Rot](#) (1) basically unified the aesthetics of trip-hop and post-rock on **Veiculo** (1997), achieving on **The Amateur View** (1999) a gentle, subliminal blend of hypnosis and vitality. Lippock's side-project [Tarwater](#) (1) infused the robotic rhythms and alien noises of **11/6 12/10** (1996) with romantic melodrama.

[Laub](#) (1), the duo of vocalist Antye Greie-Fuchs and keyboardist Juergen "Jotka" Kuehn, explored alien soundscapes on **Kopflastig** (1997) and especially **Unter anderen Bedingungen als Liebe** (1999).

Markus Archer's [Notwist](#) (1), featuring Martin "Console" Gretschnann on samples, were fluent in the idioms of hardcore, noise-rock and post-rock, which they applied simultaneously to the pastiches of **12** (1997). By the time that they crafted the carefully orchestrated and absurdist ballads of **Neon Golden** (2001), instead, they were pioneering the digital folk-rock of the new decade. Their cousins [Village of Savoonga](#) (1) straddled the line between expressionist drama, psychedelic doom and stream of consciousness on **Philipp Schatz** (1996) and on the mini-album **Score** (1998). And their other cousins [Tied & Tickled Trio](#) (1) revived cool jazz for the digital generation on **Tied & Tickled Trio** (1998) and **EA1 EA2** (1999), while horns-driven **Observing Systems** (2003) and the keyboards-driven **Aelita** (2007) balanced the elegant flow of a jazz improvisation and the cold geometry of a classical composition.

[Workshop](#) were the main heirs to the "krautrock" tradition during the late 1990s, especially on **Meiguiweisheng Xiang** (2000).

The "songs" built by Notwist's sampling engineer [Console](#) (born Martin Gretschnann) on albums such as **Pan Or Ama** (1997) and **Rocket In The Pocket** (1999). were tributes to studio technique, concentrates of electronic and computer trickery, complex hodgepodes of synthesizer melodies, spastic beats, samples, dissonances, reverbs, computerized voices.

[Kreidler](#) (1), featuring keyboardists Andreas Reihse and Detlef "DJ Sport" Weinrich, toyed with jazz, disco and glitch music on **Weekend** (1996) and with austere post-rock chamber music on the mini-album **Eve Future** (2002).

[Lali Puna](#), the project of Munich-based vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Valerie Trebeljahr, crafted minimal and alienated form of synth-pop on **Tricoder** (1999).

Austrian electroacoustic trio [Radian](#) (1) vivisected glitch electronica, post-rock and digital processing with surgical precision on the instrumental tour de force **TG11** (2000).

These German projects made up a formidable generation of experimental musicians, worthy of their predecessors Can, Neu and Faust.

### ***British post-rock, 1995-99***

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[Piano Magic](#), the project of guitarist Glen Johnson, offered the fragile electronic tapestry of **Popular Mechanics** (1997), performed on cheap keyboards and reminiscent of Young Marble Giants and Brian Eno.

Scotland's [Mogwai](#) (1) anchored the blissful, impressionistic ambience of **Young Team** (1997) to atmospheric guitar sounds, ranging from celestial drones to hellish walls of distortions. Removing the impetus of that work, **Come On Die Young** (1999) revisited the desolate soundscapes of "slo-core", music that wandered, drifted, diluted itself into myriad variations of its own theme. The slowly-unfolding ballads of **The Rock Action** (2001)

and the carefully orchestrated, organic, rational sonatas of **Happy Songs For Happy People** (2003) were practical applications of that theory.

Other notable albums of the second half of the decade included: **Precious Falling** (1997) by [Quickspace](#), the new project of Faith Healers' guitarist Tom Cullinan; the trilogy of concept albums begun with **Caledonian Gothic** (1997) by [Fiend](#), the brainchild of Mogwai's drummer Brendon O'Hare; **Slow Motion World** (1998) by [Snowpony](#), the supergroup of Stereolab's keyboardist Katharine Gifford, My Bloody Valentine's bassist Deborah Gooze and Rollerskate Skinny's drummer Max Corradi; **Hammock Style** (1998) by [Ganger](#); **Little Scratches** (1998) by Rob Ellis' [Spleen](#); **Fried For Blue Material** (1998) by Davey Henderson's [Nectarine #9](#), inspired by the Pop Group and Captain Beefheart; and **Volume One** (2000) by Richard Warren's [Echoboy](#).

[Fridge](#) was the post-rock project of English multi-instrumentalist Kieran Hebden that reached maturity with the evocative melodies of **Eph** (1999) and **Happiness** (2001). His alter-ego [Four Tet](#) (2) better revealed the composer's ambitions, starting with the encyclopedic 36-minute rhythmic vortex of the single *Thirtysix Twentyfive* (1998) and the electronic ethnic-jazz fusion of **Dialogue** (1999). **Pause** (2000) and **Rounds** (2003) repeatedly crossed over into "jazztronica" and digital beat-based folk music. Four Tet's "digital folk" became an abstract exercise in layering contrasting patterns over unassuming melodies and disappearing rhythms.

[Appliance](#) conceived **Manual** (1999) and especially **Imperial Metric** (2001) at the confluence of post-rock and shoegazing, a notion that would become more and more popular in the coming decade.

### ***Post-rock primitivism 1995-97***

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Chicago's [U.S. Maple](#) (2), formed by Shorty's guitarist Mark Shippy and vocalist Al Johnson, were among the "primitivists" of post-rock. The post-modernist blues of **Long Hair In Three Stages** (1995) used a confused vocabulary of spastic jamming, acid singing and crooked geometry, inspired by Red Crayola and Captain Beefheart. US Maple's surgical strike on tradition achieved an immaculate purity on **Talker** (1999) and **Acre Thrills** (2001). Both impeccable in their execution of the science of musical flaws and faults, they represented a genuine confession of love for what the band hated.

Seattle's [Old Time Relijun](#) (2) were possibly the greatest disciples of Captain Beefheart in the 1990s, devoted to organizing musical structures out of sheer chaos. The psychotic jazz-rock of **Songbook Vol 1** (1997) evoked a meeting of the Contortions and Albert Ayler, but the more experimental **Uterus And Fire** (1999), with Phil Elverum of the Microphones on drums, was reminiscent of Jon Spencer's deformed blues except that the focus was on DeDionysos's vocal histrionics, while atonal guitars and childish drums created a divine mayhem. The leader's saxophone solos and a demented rhythm section graced **Witchcraft Rebellion** (2001).

Chicago's [Joan Of Arc](#) (2), featuring multi-instrumentalist and singer Tim Kinsella and keyboardist Jeremy Boyle, inhabited a niche of sub-folk music with the likes of Nick Drake and Smog, but they focused on the disturbing process of a neurotic soul in the making. **A Portable Model** (1997) shunned the edgier, harshest overtones of post-rock and reached out to Will Oldham's anti-folk. That format was perfected with the rambling and sparse ballads of **How Memory Works** (1998), a cybernaut's journey through the extreme periphery of German avant-rock and electronic music. After a calm and subdued **Live in Chicago** (1999), Kinsella's ensemble crafted a frail music of scant and tentative emotions with the unstable and unfocused structures of **The Gap** (2000).

[Colossamite](#) (1) was the Gorge Trio augmented with the unholy growl of Dazzling Killmen's vocalist Nick Sakes. **All Lingo's Clamor** (1997) and **Economy Of Motion** (1998) unleashed brief but terrifying firestorms of dissonant guitars, chaotic drumming and beastly screams.

Oregon's [Rollerball](#) (1), that featured Mae Starr (vocals, keyboards, accordion), Amanda Wiles (sax) and Shane DeLeon (trumpet), indulged in Pop Group-inspired, spastic, psychedelic, progressive and free rock that peaked with **Trail Of The Butter Yeti** (2001).

### *Post-post-rock 1996-99*

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[Lowercase](#) (1), San Francisco's guitar-drums duo of Imaad Wasif and Brian Girgus, staged unstable, suicidal psychodramas via the slow, lengthy dirges of **All Destructive Urges** (1996) and especially **Kill The Lights** (1997), which basically reenacted over and over again a descent into a personal hell.

Chris Leo conducted the textural experiments of [Van Pelt's Sultans Of Sentiment](#) (Gern Blandsten, 1997) and [Lapse's Heaven Ain't Happenin'](#) (2000).

[I Am Spoonbender](#), the trio of Pansy Division's drummer Dustin Donaldson, Cub's guitarist Robynn Iwata and keyboardist Brian Jackson, mined the border between Brian Eno's retro-pop and Can's austere avant-rock on **Sender/ Receiver** (1998).

Indiana's [Tombstone Valentine](#) (1), fronted by vocalist Richelle Toombs, renewed the art of space-rock with **Hidden World** (1998), an album which blended the surreal element of Pink Floyd's **Piper At The Gates Of Dawn**, the percussive element of 1970s' German avant-rock, and the exotic element of the Third Ear Band.

New York's [Oneida](#) (1) carved an odd niche for themselves with the convoluted psychedelic and post-rock freak-outs of **A Place Called El Shaddai's** (1998), a mixture of Blue Cheer, Sonic Youth, and Can that blossomed on the sophisticated and harrowing **Each One Teach One** (2002).

[Fantomas](#), a supergroup formed by Faith No More's vocalist Mike Patton,

Melvin's bassist Buzz Osbourne on guitar, Mr Bungle's bassist Trevor Dunn and Slayer's drummer Dave Lombardo, debuted with an explosive blend of heavy metal and abstract sound-painting on **Fantomas** (1999). Their third album **Delerium Cordia** (2004) was instead a 74-minute chamber concerto for rock band, vocalist and electronics that sculpted an ambience inspired by progressive-rock, glitch electronica, post-rock and dark metal.

The core of the New York-based [Animal Collective](#) (3) was guitarist Avey Tare (real name David Portner) and drummer Panda Bear (real name Noah Lennox). The extraterrestrial android vaudeville of **Spirit They're Gone Spirit They've Vanished** (2000), credited to the duo, evoked Flaming Lips and Mercury Rev in their most anarchic moments, establishing an aesthetic of tenderly dissonant post-psychedelic electronica that was (deliberately) chaotic and unfocused. After the more abstract **Danse Manatee** (2001), credited to "Avey Tare, Panda Bear and Geologist", **Here Comes The Indian** (2003), the first album credited to the Animal Collective, was even more erratic and amoebic. The Animal Collective now resided firmly on the soundsculpting side of the musical universe. Rhythms and melodies had been subjected to a process of purification and distillation resulting in a complete loss of identity. The Animal Collective tempered its quirkiness on **Sung Tongs** (2004), although regained some of its wild edge on **Strawberry Jam** (2007). Meanwhile, [Panda Bear](#) (1) performed a spectacular deconstruction of pop and folk music on his solo album **Person Pitch** (2007) with multi-part vocal harmonies, cheesy bubblegum melodies and trance-inducing tribal rhythms, weaving singalongs that rode layers of humble arrangements according to an ancestral logic of tribal repetition and jovial self-parody.

Georgia's [San Augustin](#) (David Daniell and Andrew Burnes on guitar, Bryan Fielden on drums) specialized in introspective slow-motion low-volume free improvisation, documented on the live **Amokhali** (2000).

The [Music Tapes](#) (1), the brainchild of Neutral Milk Hotel's multi-instrumentalist Julian Koster, conceived **First Imaginary Symphony For Nomad** (1999) as a gigantic, mad collage in the vein of the Fugs' *Virgin Forest* with notable parts for singing saw and bowed banjo. Another cartoonish survey of a whole musical century, **Music Tapes for Clouds & Tornadoes** (2008), turned sound quality into a co-protagonist by recording all the songs on vintage equipment of yore.

### **Noise-rock's epitaph 1995-97**

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In the mid-1990s noise-rock picked up steam again. The new generation was led by creative outfits that reinvented rock music by embedding twisted melodies into atonal structures and, sometimes, irregular rhythms. Frequently, their songs were aural puzzles soaked in the history of rock music. Occasionally, their method straddled the line between trance and dissonance. Significant albums in this genre to come out of New York included: [Poem Rocket's](#) **Felix Culpa** (1996), [Lynnfield Pioneers'](#) **Emerge** (1997), **Fantastic Spikes Through Balloon** (1996) by [Skeleton Key](#) (1), **In An Expression Of The Inexpressible** (1998) by [Blonde Redhead](#) (1).

[Firewater](#) (2) was a noise super-group formed by Cop Shoot Cop's vocalist Tod Ashley, Jesus Lizard's guitarist Duane Denison, Motherhead Bug's pianist/trombonist Dave Ouimet, Soul Coughing's percussionist Yuval Gabay and Laughing Hyenas' drummer Jim Kimball. Ashley's tormented soul dominates **Get Off The Cross** (1997) and **The Ponzi Scheme** (1998), wandering in the paleo-gothic purgatory inhabited by the likes of Tom Waits and Nick Cave.

In Britain, [50 Tons Of Black Terror](#)'s **Gutter Erotica** (1997) was an album of brutal, convoluted, harsh music in the tradition of Jesus Lizard.

### ***Mood music, 1998-99***

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[Calexico](#) (12), which was Giant Sand's rhythm section of bassist Joey Burns and drummer John Convertino, coined one of the most distinctive and traditional styles of the era. The languid, introspective and touching mood of **The Black Light** (1998) relied on humble but eccentric orchestration and an hallucinated, oneiric take on mariachi music and Ennio Morricone's soundtracks. Austere but friendly, they sounded like the equivalent of the Penguin Café Orchestra for the Arizona desert. With **Hot Rail** (2000), Calexico opted for a more intimate form of expression, for a stylish, somber, bleak ballad that is often drenched in psychedelic reverbs and accented by jazz instruments. **Feast of Wire** (2003) was, instead, an album of film-noir gloom.

[Black Heart Procession](#) (11), a collaboration between Three Mile Pilot's singer Pall Jenkins and keyboardist Tobias Nathaniel, switched to melancholy, funereal music, sparsely arranged with analog keyboards, guitars, xylophone and trumpet. The skeletal lullabies of **1** (1997) led to the dark and creepy **2** (1999), which basically coined a new form of existential ballad, one that leveraged and transcended the abused stereotypes of Nick Drake, Leonard Cohen and Nick Cave. **3** (2000) wrapped the naked agony of that album into sophisticated arrangements, that, enhanced with Matt Resovich's violin, led to the post-psychedelic trance-y ballads of **The Spell** (2006).

[Maquiladora](#) (3), a trio from San Diego (vocalist Phil Beaumont, drummer Eric Nielsen, guitarist Bruce McKenzie), filled **Lost Works of Eunice Phelps** (1998) with lunatic ballads baked by the hot sun of the desert that ran the gamut from the drugged folly of the Holy Modal Rounders to the calm poetry of Leonard Cohen, from Syd Barrett's mad folk to the eerie stupor of Cowboy Junkies. **White Sands** (2000) refined the idea by adding several keyboards and string instruments to their arsenal, a move that somehow highlighted the similarities with Calexico's hallucinated country-rock. Far from being only an intellectual exercise, Maquiladora packed an impressive amount of poetry in the brief vignettes of **Ritual Of The Hearts** (2002).

Colorado's [Czars](#) (1) progressed from the low-key bittersweet laments of **Before... But Longer** (2000) to the atmospheric **The Ugly People Vs The Beautiful People** (2003), enhanced with the stately voice of John Grant.

Georgia's [Japancakes](#) achieved an almost transcendental fusion of post-rock, alt-country and atmospheric instrumental rock on their third album **Waking Hours** (2004).

### *Italy 1996-2001*

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At the turn of the century, Italy's post-rock scene had become one of the most vibrant in the world.

[Ossatura](#) indulged in a mixture of abstract electronic soundscaping, free-jazz improvisation, concrete collage and progressive-rock on **Dentro** (1998).

The [Dining Rooms](#) (Stefano Ghittoni and Cesare Malfatti) ventured into trip-hop with a cinematic twist on **Subterranean Modern Volume Uno** (1999).

[Yuppie Flu](#)'s **Days Before The Day** (2003) offered charming folk vignettes arranged with analog electronic keyboards.

[Maisie](#) (Alberto Scotti and Cinzia La Fauci) penned the dissonant and cartoonish divertissement **The Incredible Strange Choir Of Paracuwait** (1999) under the aegis of Captain Beefheart and Dada.

[Quintorigo](#)'s postmodern chamber workout **Rospo** (1999) was Italy's best attempt at classic-jazz-rock fusion since the heydays of progressive-rock.

Minimal duo [My Cat Is An Alien](#) (1) delivered a post-rock version of Tim Buckley's sublime dejection on the totally improvised three-part jam **Landscapes Of An Electric City** (1999). The (improvised) music on the triple-CD **The Cosmological Eye Trilogy** (2005) attained an even higher form of nirvana: astral and subliminal soundscapes sculpted with an arsenal of sound-producing objects at the transcendental border where acid-rock meets post-rock and free-jazz.

[A Short Apnea](#) (former Afterhours' guitarist Xabier Iriondo, guitarist Paolo Cantu and vocalist Fabio Magistrali) blurred the borders between post-rock, free-jazz and electronic avantgarde in the three jams of their second album, **Illu Ogod Ellat Rhagedia** (2000).

[Bron Y Aur](#) played a devastating kind of improvised post-rock on **Bron Y Aur** (Beware, 2000).

[Giardini di Miro`](#) (1) assembled an intriguing combination of hypnotic instrumental textures, deconstructed melodies, dilated psychedelic improvisation, and melodramatic soft-loud glacial/vibrant dynamics on **Rise and Fall of Academic Drifting** (2001).

Notable was also [Yo Yo Mundi](#)'s instrumental post-rock puzzle **Sciopero** (2001).

[Zu](#) (1) revived the school of jazzcore from the perspective of the post-rock generation with the brutal, free-form instrumental music of **Igneo** (2002).

[Jennifer Gentle](#) (1), perhaps the premier psychedelic band of Italy, penned the surreal folk-pop of **Funny Creatures Lane** (2002) for rock quartet, strings, accordion and sitar.

[To The Ansaphone's To The Ansaphone](#) (Heartfelt, 2003) harked back to the angst-filled no wave of the late 1970s (Pop Group, Contortions, DNA).

[Larsen](#) were among the most creative groups to try and bridge the aesthetics of post-rock and glitch electronica with the austere, brooding, hypnotic atmospheres of **Rever** (2002) and **Play** (2005).

### **Canada 1998-2000**

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The most important school of instrumental post-rock to emerge at the end of the decade actually came from Canada.

[Godspeed You Black Emperor](#) (3), a large ensemble from Montreal, revolutionized (mostly) instrumental rock with the three slow-building compositions of **f#a# Infinity** (1998): they were not melodic fantasies (too little melodic emphasis), they were not jams (too calculated), and they were not symphonies (too low-key and sparse), but they were something in between. Emotions were hard to find inside the shapeless jelly, dark textures and sudden mood swings. The four extended tracks of **Lift Your Skinny Fists Like Antennas To Heaven** (2000) were more lively, but no less enigmatic, alternating baroque adagios for chamber strings, majestic psychedelic crescendos, martial frenzy, noise collages and, for the first time, tender melodies. **Yanqui UXO** (2002) was a collection of glacial, colorless holograms with no dramatic content, massive black holes that emitted dense, buzzing radiations.

Three members of Godspeed You Black Emperor (guitarist Efrim Menuck, violinist Sophie Trudeau and bassist Thierry Amar) contributed to the two lengthy multi-part suites of **He Has Left Us Alone But Shafts Of Light Sometimes Grace The Corners Of Our Rooms** (2000), credited to [Silver Mt Zion](#) (1), that presented a more humane face of Godspeed's music, bending the techniques of the baroque adagios and allegros to fit the spleen (if not the aesthetic) of post-rock. Two Godspeed members (drummer Aidan Girt and violinist Sophie Trudeau) also contributed to [Set Fire To Flames' Sings Reign Rebuilder](#) (2001), a much more noise-experimental work.

[Fly Pan Am](#) (1), the project of Montreal's guitarist Roger Tellier, followed the example of Godspeed You Black Emperor for the lengthy and stately instrumental suites of **Fly Pan Am** (1999).

The [Shalabi Effect](#) (2), organized in Montreal by Sam Shalabi, employed vintage electronics, ethnic percussions, manipulated instruments and found sounds to produce the propulsive and trancey scores of **Shalabi Effect** (2000). The same orchestra of ethnic, western and electronic instruments performed **The Trial Of St Orange** (2002), wedding Third Ear Band, Amon Duul II and Taj Mahal Travellers; while Sam Shalabi's solo **On**

**Hashish** (2001) was a more pretentious experiment with field recordings, free improvisation, droning and glitches.

Toronto's instrumental combo [Do Make Say Think](#) imbued **Do Make Say Think** (1998) and **Goodbye Enemy Airship the Landlord Is Dead** (2000). with irregular flows of electronic, electric and acoustic sounds, yielding a fragile hybrid of free jazz, psychedelic dub, Canterbury-style spleen and progressive-rock. The sprawling **Winter Hymn Country Hymn Secret Hymn** (2006), structured as a set of three-movement suites, achieved a quiet grandeur.

### *Scandinavian alienation 1999-2000*

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Towards the end of the decade the marriage of the old post-rock aesthetic and the new digital aesthetic led to intriguing contrasts in the northern lands.

Norwegian duo [Alog](#) (1) composed **Red Shift Swing** (1999), a set of chamber lieder for acoustic ensemble, homemade instruments, found sounds and electronics.

Iceland's [Mum](#) (2) offered a delicate mixture of glitch electronica, chamber instruments and atmospheric vocals on **Yesterday Was Dramatic Today Is Ok** (2000) and **Finally We Are No One** (2002) applied the idea to a vast spectrum of music. The first album was a brainy disquisition. The second one was the object of that disquisition.

Finland's prolific [Circle](#) (1), a mostly instrumental combo fronted by bassist, vocalist and keyboardist Jussi Lehtisalo, adopted a stance that wed progressive-rock, metal riffs, repetitive patterns à la Steve Reich's minimalist music, "motorik" rhythms à la Neu, and mystical trance on **Andexelt** (1999) and **Guillotine** (2003), while **Miljard** (2006) removed the "metal" element altogether indulging in quasi new-age atmospheres. Suites such as *Puutiikeri*, off **Tulikoira** (2005), and *Steel Torment Warrior*, off **Tyrant** (2006), were more atmospheric than violent.

Norway's [Salvatore](#), played instrumental hypnotic droning propulsive abstract rock à la Circle on **Jugend - A New Hedonism** (2000).

### *Progressive music 1995-99*

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The Babel of music that did not abide by the linear conventions of pop music proliferated more than ever.

New York boasted talented and innovative combos that descended from the prog-rock bands of the 1980s. The veterans who ran [Run On](#) (11), drummer Rick Brown and bassist Sue Garner of Fish & Roses, plus guitarist Alan Licht of Love Child, and violin player Katie Gentile, showed how prog-rock could yield engaging songs and not only difficult constructs. **Start Packing** (1996) was a festival of instrumental lunacy,

brainy hypnosis, eccentric arrangements, and lightweight cacophony that mostly stuck to the format of the pop song. The oneiric folk-rock of **No Way** (1997), inconspicuously raised on acid-rock and Indian music, homaged the classics (Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, Neil Young) while steering away from classic rock. Nothing in these albums was obvious. Every note was where it was because "that" was not where it should have been, if one were a traditional composer. Brown and Garner's vision of music was a place where we should (obviously) all have been but have never even dreamed of being. **Still** (1999), credited to Garner and Brown, was, de facto, a late addition to the Run On canon.

One of the most eccentric musicians of his time, [Dave Soldier](#) (the violinist of the renowned Soldier String Quartet), organized the **Thai Elephant Orchestra** (2001), an ensemble of elephants playing large custom-made instruments and performing their own improvisations and some compositions by Soldier and others. He also organized the **Tangerine Awkestra** (2000), a vocal ensemble of schoolchildren performing free improvisation.

New York's [Escapade](#) (1) performed all-instrumental music straddling the line between kraut-rock, hyper-psychedelia and progressive-rock. The three lengthy acid jams of **Searching For The Elusive Rainbow** (1996) and the two epic-length excursions of **Inner Translucence** (1997) led to **Citrus Cloud Cover** (1998), containing the 30-minute *The Sunlight*, a tour de force within the tour de force, and the best formulation of their conflagration of free-jazz and avantgarde electronic music.

New York's [Rasputina](#) (1) were a trio of female cellists who played minor-key waltzes, sounding like the Penguin Cafè Orchestra fronted by Nico on **Thanks For The Ether** (1996).

New York's quartet [Gutbucket](#) (bassist Eric Rockwin, saxophonist Ken Thompson, guitarist Ty Citerman, drummer Paul Chuffo) played music of a frenzied and caustic wit straddling the border between punk-rock and progressive-rock on **Insomniacs Dream** (Knitting Factory, 2001),

An erudite form of instrumental progressive-rock was coined in Boston by [Cerberus Shoal](#) (3). The neoclassical suites of **And Farewell To Hightide** (1997) and **Elements Of Structure/ Permanence** (1997), particularly *Permanence*, sounded like Grateful Dead's *Dark Star* performed by a chamber ensemble. Deeper jazz and world-music undercurrents destabilized the two tours de force of **Homb** (1999), while the pieces on the transitional **Crash My Moon Yacht** (2000) sounded like collages. **Mr Boy Dog** (2002), both irreverently amusing and wildly creative in the tradition of Frank Zappa, offered sonic charades that mixed Albert Ayler, Nino Rota, Sonic Youth and Pink Floyd while deconstructing world-music, funk and free-jazz. The dense orchestration and inventive dynamics capitalized on three decades of progressive-rock.

[Bright](#)'s **Bright** (1996) in Boston bridged Cul De Sac and shoegazing.

The [Amoebic Ensemble](#) was a small chamber ensemble led by accordionist Alec Redfearn in Rhode Island that straddled the border between progressive-rock and cartoon music on **Limbic Rage** (1995). [The](#)

[Eyesores](#) were a large chamber ensemble formed by Redfearn that evolved from the cabaret-influenced style of **May You Dine on Weeds Made Bitter by the Piss of Drunkards** (1999) to a more abstract, avantgarde, progressive style, peaking with the 23-minute fantasia *Gutterhelmet Ascending*, off **The Smother Party** (2006).

Rhode Island's [Space Needle](#) (2), featuring keyboardist Jud Ehrbar, were responsible for the titanic nonsense of **Voyager** (1996), a deliberately amateurish work pushing the boundaries of progressive, psychedelic and cosmic music with mystical overtones. The no less cryptic hodgepodge of **The Moray Eels Eat The Space Needle** (1997) indulged in instrumental prog-rock jamming, ambient ballads and shoegazing ecstasy.

[Bent Leg Fatima](#) (1) from Philadelphia played a more ethereal version of Soft Machine's progressive-rock on **Bent Leg Fatima** (2000). When they reformed under the new name [Need New Body](#), their **UFO** (2003) opted for a fragmented and demented format.

Florida's [Big Swifty](#) (1) crafted the austere compositions of **Akroasis** (1997) around drones à la LaMonte Young, minimalist repetition à la Terry Riley and microtonal techniques.

Also in Florida, [Meringue](#) mixed the verve and imagination of Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart and Gong on the monumental **Music From The Mint Green Nest** (1996); while [Obliterati](#)'s **Havy Baubaus Infilience** (1998) sounded like a meeting of the Art Bears and the Contortions.

Washington's [El Guapo](#) (1) added manic doses of electronics to its stew of Soft Machine, Contortions, Pop Group and the Fall on their third album **Super System** (2002).

Michigan's [Larval](#), an open ensemble formed by Bill Brovold (a veteran of Rhys Chatam's groups), played progressive-rock tainted with avantgarde techniques on **Larval** (1997), that featured a rock band, and on **Larval 2** (1998), a free-form freak-out that expanded the rock band to classical and jazz instruments.

[Aloha](#) (1), from Cleveland (Ohio), merged progressive rock, free jazz, minimalism and post-rock in the intricate pieces of **That's Your Fire** (2000).

Ohio's [Witch Hazel](#) (1), the project of multi-instrumentalist Kevin Coral, indulged in a poppy and baroque form of progressive-rock on **Landlocked** (1995).

Inspired by Japanese noise-core, Chicago's [TV Pow](#), a trio of electronic musicians (including Brent Gutzzeit), compiled albums of atonal and chaotic electronic music such as **Away Team** (1998) and **Television Power Electric** (1999).

### *The Progressive West-Coast*

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In San Francisco, the [Tin Hat Trio](#) (1) evoked the Penguin Cafè Orchestra

and the Lounge Lizards on **Memory Is An Elephant** (1999) with a mixture of tango, jazz, folk, avantgarde and world-music. **Helium** (2000) was its cerebral counterpart, a kaleidoscope of quasi-dissonant jamming, pseudo-Balkan frenzy and atonal lounge melodies.

[Spaceship Eyes](#), the new project by Melting Euphoria's keyboardist Don Falcone, pushed progressive-rock towards a sort of acid electronic ethnic ambient music on **Kamarupa** (1997).

San Francisco's [Species Being](#) (1) penned the 11-movement suite **Yonilicious** (1998), an adventurous sonic odyssey through the musical genres.

[Idiot Flesh](#) were a Dada-inspired rock cabaret act and a colorful commune of dancers and noise-makers in San Francisco. Their shows, performed in outrageous costumes, would mix puppets, psychedelic lights, pyrotechnics, visuals and theatre. Their albums, from **Tales of Instant Knowledge and Sure Death** (1990), featuring guitarist Gene Jun, bassist Dan Rathbun, drummer Chuck Squier, keyboardist Daniel Roth and multi-instrumentalist Nils Frykdahl, to **Fancy** (1997), continued the tradition of eccentrics such as the Residents and Thinking Fellers Union Local 282.

[Estradasphere](#), a Bay Area-based quintet (with saxophone and violin) that participated in the community of Mr Bungle and Secret Chiefs 3, concocted a frenzied Frank Zappa-esque carnival of styles (ambient, jazz, metal, country and classical music) on **It's Understood** (2000), notably the 20-minute *Hunger Strike*.

The [Climax Golden Twins](#), the Seattle-based duo of Rob Millis and Jeffery Taylor, crafted surreal lo-fi collages of field recordings, electronic noise and sampled voices organized as madcap free-form pseudo-psychedelic jams on albums such as **Imperial Household Orchestra** (1996), **Locations** (1998) and **Session 9** (2001).

### *A progressive world, 1996-99*

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Symphonic rock was pursued in England by [Guapo](#) (1). After toying with samplers and electronics on **Hirohito** (1998), they fell under the influence of the Ruins and crafted **Great Sage** (2001), including the 16-minute epic *El Topo*. A more comprehensive summation of their art was the five-part suite **Five Suns** (2004).

In France, [Volapuk](#) (1) continued the neoclassical school of Art Zoyd and Univers Zero with albums such as **Slang** (1997). [Tear Of A Doll](#), featuring guitarist Francois L'Homer, fused progressive-rock, punk-rock, jazz, exotica and noise on **Tear Of A Doll** (1996). Later [Francois L'Homer](#) relocated to Burma and started [Naing Naing](#), a project devoted to "music without instruments", as demonstrated on **Toothbrush Fever** (2004) for natural sounds, computer and studio mixer.

The slow, thick and majestic compositions of [Ulan Bator](#) (2), a French ensemble led by guitarist Amaury Cambuzat, linked post-rock with French

progressive-rock, especially on **Vegetale** (1997) and **Ego Echo** (2000).

Canterbury's melodic jazz-rock survived in the music of the [Forgas Band Phenomena](#) (1), founded by veteran French composer and drummer Patrick Forgas. They debuted with the two lengthy suites of **Roue Libre** (1997) for a sextet with saxophone, vibraphone and keyboards. The 34-minute *Coup De Theatre* appeared on **Soleil 12** (2005) and a "short" excerpt of *Double-Sens* appeared on **L'Axe du Fou** (2008).

[Aavikko](#), the project of Finnish drummer Tomi Leppanen, penned the frenzied electronic instrumentals of **Derek** (1997), full of syncopated beats, old-fashioned analog keyboards, lounge jazz atmospheres, garage-surf rave-ups, and catchy melodies. The way the whole was sequenced and layered evoked alien noir soundtracks.

Norwegian horns-based combo [Jaga Jazzist](#) (1), a collective of multi-instrumentalists founded by Lars Horntveth and including Jorgen Munkby, straddled the border between the Canterbury (melodic jazz-rock) sound of Soft Machine and the Chicago (brainy post-rock) sound of Tortoise on **A Livingroom Hush** (2001). The electronic and "orchestral" **The Stix** (2003) veered towards atmospheric jazztronica for the masses.

Norwegian improvisers [Supersilent](#) (3), featuring Motorpsycho's keyboardist Helge "Deathprod" Sten, set a terrifying standard of violent and cacophonous jazz-rock on their triple-CD **1-3** (1998), an orgy of dissonant instruments, electronic noise and tribal drums, somewhere between free jazz and Japanese noise-core. All the extremes were painstakingly explored on the wildly improvised **5** (2001), while **6** (2003), instead, achieved an otherworldly balance of moods and sounds in six compositions (not only improvisations) of subtle counterpoint.

[Koenjihyakkei](#), the Magma-inspired side-project of Ruins' mastermind Tatsuya Yoshida that debuted with **Hundred Sights of Koenji** (1994), eventually achieved a baroque complexity on **Angherr Shisspa** (2005).

Vajra's drummer [Toshiaki Ishizuka](#) constructed ambient music for an "orchestra" of tonal percussion instruments on **In The Night** (1999) and **Drum Drama** (2006).

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