

The History of Rock Music: 1995-2001

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

[History of Rock Music](#) | [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-75](#) | [1976-89](#) | [The early 1990s](#) | [The late 1990s](#) | [The 2000s](#) | [Alpha index](#)

Musicians of [1955-66](#) | [1967-69](#) | [1970-76](#) | [1977-89](#) | [1990s in the US](#) | [1990s outside the US](#) | [2000s](#)

[Back to the main Music page](#)

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Ambience

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

Avantgarde world music, 1995-1999

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The technology of sampling and the broad availability of ethnic instruments turned world-music into a sort of commodity. Generally speaking, the studio became the real center of the new "high-tech" world-music.

Georgia's [Macha](#) (1) penned the mostly improvised **Macha** (1998) and the quasi-symphonic **See It Another Way** (1999); while New York's [Badawi](#), Raz Mesinai's project, fused traditional Middle-Eastern instruments, simple reggae figures and syncopated drumming at a deeper level on **Jerusalem Under Fire** (1997).

[Tuatara](#) (1), a supergroup made of REM's Peter Dinklage, Screaming Trees' drummer Barrett Martin, Luna's bassist Justin Harwood and jazz saxophonist Skerik (Nalgas Sin Carne), indulged in studio magic on the all-instrumental **Breaking The Ethers** (1997).

Michigan's [Fibreforms](#) (1) performed instrumental world-music a` la Penguin Cafe Orchestra on **Treedrums** (1996), but based on the haunting sound of the African bounkam. They changed their name to [Kiln](#) (1) and repeated the exploit with **Holo** (1998).

[Hochenkeit](#), led by guitarist Jeff Fuccillo of Portland's Irving Klaw Trio, concocted the psychedelic/electronic world-music cauldron **I Love You** (1999), inspired by German avant-rock of the 1970s.

Britain's [Bob Holroyd](#) integrated Deuter's eastern spirituality, Jon Hassell's fourth-world atmosphere and Deep Forest's sampling on **Fluidity And Structure** (1995).

The lush electronic arrangements and soothing melodies of **Mythos** (1998) by Canada's [Mythos](#) were the obvious bridge with new-age music.

Dead Can Dance's multi-instrumentalist [Brendan Perry](#) (1) returned with **Eye Of The Hunter** (1999), an intensely personal statement arranged for (synthesized) orchestra and a plethora of acoustic instruments, but more reminiscent of Nick Cave and Leonard Cohen than of his old band.

In Japan, [Onna-Kodomo](#) offered a languid and spiritual fusion of western classical music and eastern classical music on **Syuuka** (1997), in a vein similar to Popol Vuh's **Hosianna Mantra**.

[Terra Ambient](#) (1), the project of electronic musician Jeff Kowal, employed percussion, didjeridoo, guitar and ethnic instruments for the "fourth-world music" of **The Gate** (2004).

Ambient guitar noise 1995-2000

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In the USA, ambient guitar noise was generally more subdued than it had been in Britain at the beginning.

Pennsylvania's [Azusa Plane](#) (1), the project of guitarist Jason DiEmilio, formalized a mystical psycho-acoustic art of guitar drones and overtones on **Tycho Magnetic Anomaly And the Full Consciousness of Hidden Harmony** (1997) leading to the chamber ambient dissonant music of **America Is Dreaming Of Universal String Theory** (1998).

The genre of instrumental drone-oriented psychedelic music was perfected by Oregon's [Yume Bitsu](#) (11). The lengthy, trancey, ethereal suites with a dramatic edge of **Giant Surface Music Falling to Earth Like Jewels From The Sky** (1998) were reminiscent of both German cosmic music and British shoegazers. On **Yume Bitsu** (1999), the quintessential album of extended psychedelic jams, guitarists Adam Forkner and Franz Prichard painted (or, better, drilled) soundscapes of incredible brightness, enhanced by the surreal palette of Alex Bundy's keyboards. Texture and mood were the two fundamental axes of Yume Bitsu's art. Their technique was mainly "pointillistic": a thick layer of colored dots (percussions, guitar tones, repeated chords) that created the illusion of shapes and stories.

[Surface of Eceon](#) (1), formed in New York by former Yume Bitsu's guitarist Adam Forkner, penned **The King Beneath the Mountain** (2001), an album of epic-length triple-guitar textures, adrift in a solemnly calm sea of languid notes that recalled both Popol Vuh and Pink Floyd, but refracted through the lenses of Dali's surrealism. Forkner's stylistic journey eventually rediscovered the land of Terry Riley's **Rainbow In Curved Air** and Brian Eno's **Discreet Music** with [White Rainbow](#)'s **Prism Of Eternal Now** (2007).

[Pan American](#) (2), the side-project of Labradford's guitarist Mark Nelson, used the extended (and mostly instrumental) compositions of **Pan American** (1998) and especially **360 Business 360 Bypass** (2000) to craft ambient music for the post-house age. Mixing wavering beats, organic

pulses, digital noise, processed instruments and voices, Nelson built minimalist soundscapes and populated them with slow-motion events. The process of music-making was hardly recognizable anymore, especially when all that was left was a weak, unfocused signal. Whenever instruments or voices resurrected harmony, Nelson killed it again, at a deeper level. Wadded rhythms drifted through the music rather than supported it. **The River Made No Sound** (2002) whispered languid tones into liquid, murky textures. **Quiet City** (2004) was music of environments that are, first and foremost, in the mind. The events within those environments are modest and tidy, but generate intense poetry, as in the sonata of *Christo in Pilsen*. Mark Nelson's still nature, which prefers pale colors and smooth surfaces, reveals itself in a discreet, almost fearful manner. The subtleties and innuendos of Nelson's compositions gave ambient music a new meaning.

San Francisco's [Bethany Curve](#) bridged pop song and ambient guitar on **Gold** (1998). Michigan's [Tomorrowland](#) seemed to play old-fashioned "kosmische musik" on **Stereoscopic Soundwaves** (1997) even though all sounds were produced by manipulating acoustic instruments.

Ambient avantgarde, 1995-2001

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Ambient music was another example of an avantgarde genre that, by the end of the decade, had become a commodity. A handful of composers took it as an inspiration to create new forms of "light" electronic music.

[Cevin Key](#) (1) of Skinny Puppy composed a magniloquent symphony for "subconscious electronic orchestra", **Music For Cats** (1998).

A former member of Chicago's Illusion of Safety, [James Johnson](#) recreated Harold Budd's ethereal ecstasy with the computer-generated music of **Surrender** (1999).

[Stars Of The Lid](#) (2), the Austin-based duo of Adam Wiltzie and Brian McBride, manipulated found sounds, acoustic instruments and electronics to produce the ambient concertos of **Ballasted Orchestra** (1997); and an even more austere exploration of melody and movement was carried out on **The Tired Sounds Of Stars Of The Lid** (2001).

Los Angeles-based tuba improviser [Tom Heasley](#) manipulated the sound of the tuba in order to produce the ambient music of **Where the Earth Meets the Sky** (2001) and **On the Sensations of Tone** (2002).

New York-based clarinetist and saxophonist [William Basinski](#) (3) specialized in gentle compositions for loops and drones, whether derived from snippets of radio broadcasts, such as on **The River** (2002), or composed with electronic keyboards, such as on **Watermusic** (2001), or obtained by letting tapes slowly deteriorate, such as on **The Disintegration Loops** (2003), or created out of variations on simple melodic patterns, such as on **The Garden of Brokenness** (2006) and **Variations For Piano And Tape** (2006).

[Eliane Radigue](#) (1) proved to be La Monte Young's greatest disciple on **Trilogie De La Mort** (1998).

Pendulum (1999) by [Kevin Keller](#) (1), featuring David Darling on cello and Jeff Pearce on guitar, achieved a magical balance of lyrical and cerebral elements by juxtaposing cosmic drones of guitar and cello against slow piano notes.

Other notable ambient recordings included [Robert Scott Thompson's Music for A Summer Evening](#) (1997), and [Akira Rabelais's Spellewauerynsherde](#) (2004).

The **Metachoral Visions** (1997) by [Larry Kucharz](#) (1) signaled an original (and somewhat neurotic) take on the repetitive music of minimalist Steve Reich, with a preference for timbres that approach the busy signal of the telephone.

[Rick Cox's](#) 25-minute piece of the EP **Fade** (2005) was typical of the ever more popular strategy of creating ambient music via tone exploration: the instruments improvised around each other's sustained dreamy tones, patiently weaving a labyrinthine celestial atmosphere.

[Ashera](#) (1), Australian electronic sound-sculptor Anthony Wright, was a faithful disciple of the paradisiac ambient music of Harold Budd on **Colour Glow** (2000).

British ambient, 1995-2001

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An important contribution to ambient music of the mid-1990s came from the British collective [Ora](#) (1), that included Colin Potter, Darren Tate and Andrew Chalk. Their droning music was quite humble, peaking with the eight vivid rural landscapes of **Amalgam** (2000).

[Andrew Chalk](#) (1), who had debuted in 1985 with the industrial noise of his project Feral Confine and had collaborated on David Jackman's project Organum, emerged solo with the crystalline, shimmering ambient music of **East of the Sun** (1997), and soon became a specialist in ringing overtones. **Over the Edges** (1999) contains three untitled works of 1997 obtained by exciting only two strings of an acoustic guitar with an e-bow (an experiment along the lines of old ideas by Alvin Lucier and Ellen Fullman). The 74-minute droning symphony of **Shadows From The Album Skies** (2004) was devoted to extended droning-guitar monoliths whose overtones harked back to the experiments of Phill Niblock and Eliane Radigue. **The River That Flows Into The Sands** (2005) and **The River That Flows Into The Sands II** (2006) explored oneiric and ghostly guitar soundscapes. Among his most evocative works of deep-listening music were **Sumac** (1999), a 71-minute collaboration with Jonathan Coleclough, **Fall In The Wake Of A Flawless Landscape** (2004), and the 51-minute solo-piano suite **Blue Eyes Of The March** (2006). [Mirror](#) was a prolific collaboration between [Christoph Heemann](#) of HNAS and Andrew Chalk, whose manifesto, **Eye Of The Storm** (1999), created a thick blend of natural sounds, ringing percussion, fluttering electronics and

Heeman's sustained bowing drones.

[Colin Potter](#) had started releasing cassettes in 1979, but his first solo CD was **And Then** (2000).

[Monos](#) was the new project of [Darren Tate](#) that focused on the droning manipulation of field recordings, a project that often involved Colin Potter (de facto, a continuation of Ora without Chalk). Despite the abrasive sound of early pieces such as the 32-minute **Promotion** (2000), Monos was more often concerned with the thick, rich drones of pieces such as **360 Degrees** (2001) and **Sunny Day In Saginomiya** (2001), that explicitly referenced natural sounds. However, **Nightfall Sunshine** (2002), that delved into the "concrete" sound of vintage analogue electronics, and the 47-minute **Collage** (2003) were more ambitious in that Potter's studio work all but totally eclipsed the original sources, a process that peaked with the four extended pieces of the double-disc **Generators** (2005).

[Paul Bradley](#) became part of the same scene via his collaborations with Colin Potter and Darren Tate. His major solo works of droning computer-manipulated field recordings were disc-length pieces such as: the 54-minute **Liquid Sunset** (2005), the 40-minute **Sketches From Dust** (2006) for guitar and piano drones, the 41-minute **Memorias Extranjeras** (2006), the 57-minute **Pastandpresentcollide** (2006), the 40-minute **Sketches From Dust** (2006).

British sound sculptor [John Coleclough](#) (1) operated at the border between droning ("deep listening") music and abstract electronic music on sophisticated poems such as **Cake** (1998). His **Period** (2001) ranked as one of the most soothing and monolithic compositions in the repertory of droning music.

Nick "[Farfield](#)" Webb coined a form of ambient music for tape collage of electronic sounds, found sounds and instruments on **The Edges of Everything** (1999).

[Hwyl Nofio](#) (1), the brainchild of veteran British guitarist Steve Parry, prepared droning and drifting collages of treated keyboards and guitars (including Danish guitarist Fredrik Soegaard and Hungarian guitarist Sandor Szabo) for **The Singers And Harp Players Are Dumb** (1999) and **Hymnal** (2002), while the more radical **Anatomy Of Distort** (2005) epitomized his nonlinear fusion of free jazz, Indian raga, ambient music, musique concrete and minimalist repetition.

The disease had already spread to continental Europe.

[Arovane](#), the project of Berlin multi-instrumentalist Uwe Zahn, wed ambient music, Debussy's impressionism and new-age relaxation on **Tides** (2000).

Russian classical pianist [Anton Batagov](#) penned ambient music inspired by Buddhism on the triple-cd **The Wheel Of The Law**, originally recorded in 1999, containing three compositions/improvisations for organ, glockenspiel, xylophone, piano and percussion: *Circle Of Time*, *Voidness cycle*, *Liberation Through Listening In The Between*.

Noise

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On the more radical front of noise and sound manipulation, countless musicians worldwide composed symphonies of "textures" (as opposed to "instruments"), sometimes with abrasive overtones and sometimes with an ambient/new-age feeling: Gareth Mitchell's [Philosopher's Stone](#) in England, with **Preparation** (1997); [Klangkrieg](#) in Germany, with **Das Fieber der Menschlichen Stimme** (1999); [RhBand](#) in Los Angeles, with **Third Order Parasitism** (1997); and [Ether](#) in Utah, with **Hush** (1997).

Campbell Kneale's [Birchville Cat Motel](#) (1) in New Zealand inaugurated his career with a tour de force of sound manipulation, **Siberian Earth Curve** (1998). This laid the groundwork for the later symphonic frescoes of **We Count These Prayers** (2001), **Beautiful Speck Triumph** (2004) and **Birds Call Home Their Dead** (2007), that alternated between droning, layered nightmares and cascading, distorted, pulsating space-rock jams and whirlwinds of visceral musique concrete.

[Randy Greif](#) (1) indulged in hypnotic, percussive, tribal pieces like **Bacteria and Gravity** (1987) and especially **Verdi's Requiem** (1997), reminiscent of Morton Subotnick's chaotic scores, but also coined a novel technique of postmodernist deconstruction and recomposition of texts with **Alice In Wonderland** (1992) and **War Of The World** (2001).

[Thomas Dimuzio's Sonicism](#) (1997), created by distorting an arsenal of instruments, samples and field recordings, was perhaps the best example of dark ambient industrial music.

[Ophoi](#) (prolific Italian composer Gianluigi Gasparetti) created "dark ambient" music for analog synthesizer, notably the 49-minute three-movement suite *Space Forest*, off **Three Lights at the End of the World** (1996), the live double-disc album **The Spirals of Time** (1998), and the 67-minute piece of **Behind The Wall Of Sleep** (1998), that set the standard for the monoliths of his subsequent releases.

Further developments

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[Hood](#) (1) began as followers of Flying Saucer Attack with **Cabled Linear Traction** (1994), but, via the dilated melancholic folk-rock of **Rustic Houses Forlorn Valleys** (1998), they mutated into a different band. Their most original achievement, **Cold House** (2001), juxtaposed gentle melodies, acoustic instruments, layers of cutting-edge electronica, digital clicks and fractured beats.

Canadian composer and inventor [Jean-Francois Laporte](#), pursued his own original version of "deep-listening" music with the symphony of loud abrasive drones *Dans Le Ventre Du Dragon* (1997), performed by an air compressor equipped with car horns and trumpet bells inside a reverb-inducing ship; with the spectacular 20-minute "dronescape" of the EP **Mantra** (2000); and with *Tribal* (2002) for an orchestra of invented

instruments.

In Iceland, [Sigur Ros](#) (2) specialized in lengthy suites that leveraged celestial vocals and orchestral drones on **Ágætis Byrjun** (1999). The dilated fabric of () (2002) evoked the image of frail organisms crawling on spectral landscapes, particularly *Death*, thirteen minutes of cataleptic suspense and understated raga.

Neil Campbell's [Vibracathedral Orchestra](#) (2) in Britain drew inspiration from droning-minimalist composers such as LaMonte Young and Pauline Oliveros. Working with a variety of acoustic instruments, as well as electronics, they turned the chaotic **Lino Hi** (2000), **Versatile Arab Chord Chart** (2000) and **Dabbling With Gravity** (2002) into mystical experiences, specializing in a dense and blurred mixture of guitar mayhem and ambient bliss.

English duo [Jazzfinger](#) (Ben Jones and Hasan Gaylani) merged the schools of noise, drone and glitch music on **The Little Girl On The Plane Who Turned Her Dolls Head Around To Look At Me** (1998).

Finnish jazz drummer [Terje Isungset](#) employed instruments made of ice (including gamelan-sounding percussion and moaning simulations of horns) as well as eerie wordless vocals for his "all-ice trilogy": the ghostly turbulent **Iceman Is** (2001), the more soothing and tribal **Igloo** (2006), and the more shamanic **Two Moons** (2007).

[Troum](#), the brainchild of Maeror Tri's Stefan Knappe, created pagan/shamanic droning ambient music on a trilogy dedicated to the aboriginal "dreamtime", **Tjukurppa - Harmonies** (2000), **Tjukurppa - Drones** (2001) and **Tjukurppa - Rhythms And Pulsations** (2003), while the three-movement **Sigqan** (2003), the "circular" suites of **Autopoiesis** (2004) and the 51-minute piece of **Shutun** (2007) in collaboration with All Sides (Nina Kernicke) were studies on the organization of sound that transposed into music the combination of biological metabolism, Freudian stream of consciousness, and sci-fi cinematic visions.

[continues...](#) | [back...](#) | [Index](#)