

The History of Rock Music: The 2000s

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Bards and Dreamers

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

Bards of the old world order

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Traditionally, the purposefulness and relevance of a singer-songwriter were defined by something unique in their lyrical acumen, vocal skills and/or guitar or piano accompaniment. In the 1990s this paradigm was tested by the trend towards larger orchestration and towards electronic orchestration. In the 2000s it became harder and harder to give purpose and meaning to a body of work mostly relying on the message.

Many singer-songwriters of the 2000s belonged to "Generation X" but sang and wrote for members of "Generation Y". Since "Generation Y" was inherently different from all the generations that had preceded it, it was no surprise that the audience for these singer-songwriters declined. Since the members of "Generation X" were generally desperate to talk about themselves, it was not surprising that the number of such singer-songwriters increased. The net result was an odd disconnect between the musician and her or his target audience. The singer-songwriters of the 2000s generally sounded more "adult" because... they were. They appealed to the more mature of the kids in their teens or twenties, and they appealed to those of the older generations who still listened to music.

The apocalyptic crowd of **The Heat** (2004) reinvented D Generation's vocalist [Jesse Malin](#) as a hyper-realist bard in the vein of Lou Reed and Bob Dylan.

Sixteen Horsepower's vocalist David-Eugene Edwards, under the moniker [Woven Hand](#), painted bleak frescoes of the contemporary world on works such as **Woven Hand** (2002) and **Mosaic** (2006), highlighted by a calm mastery of the folk tradition and a tormented brand of existential mysticism. By **Ten Stones** (2008) Edwards' booming croon had acquired the apocalyptic quality of the gospel preachers of the Far West.

[Stephen Malkmus](#)'s first solo album, **Stephen Malkmus** (2001), mostly sounded like an attempt to recreate the melodic apex of Pavement's career, **Crooked Rain Crooked Rain**. His blues-rock alter-ego, a more interesting guitarist than singer or lyricist, ended up dominating **Real Emotional Trash** (2008).

The ranks of the more or less old-fashioned folksingers included: [Rosie Thomas](#) from Seattle, whose **When We Were Small** (2001) was a collection of intimate songs in the tradition of Joni Mitchell's austere contralto and somber confessions; Whiskeytown's violinist [Caitlin Cary](#), a darling of the old Georgia establishment (Chris Stamey, Don Dixon, Mitch Easter), who delivered highly-dignified folk and country music on **While You Weren't Looking** (2002); Clem Snide's singer [Eef Barzalay](#), who explored a broad emotional and musical spectrum while employing minimal means on **Bitter Honey** (2006); etc.

Florida-based folksinger Samuel Beam, under the moniker [Iron And Wine](#) (1), opted for pastoral quiet on the home-made and naive **The Creek Drank The Cradle** (2002). Thus **Our Endless Numbered Days** (2004) stuck to the "less is more" aesthetic and demonstrated the power of understated emotions.

Texas-born singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist [Jolie Holland](#) specialized in the vintage sound of country, folk, blues and jazz, notably on **Escondida** (2004), her best revisitation of the world of Billie Holiday, Woody Guthrie, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Louis Armstrong.

The [Moldy Peaches](#), who only released **The Moldy Peaches** (2001), were an anti-folk group (or, better, "the" anti-folk group) based in New York, centered around Adam Green and Kimya Dawson, and specializing in topics (sex) and attitudes (sarcasm) that defied the stereotypes of folk music. [Kimya Dawson](#) debuted solo with **I'm Sorry That Sometimes I'm Mean** (2002), a collection of depressing teenage bedroom pop tunes that make creative use of the human voice.

Madder Rose's vocalist [Mary Lorson](#) collected a disturbing set of jazzy piano ballads and pop-soul hymns on **Tricks For Dawn** (2002), presenting her as a serious candidate to take Joni Mitchell's and Laura Nyro's place.

[Joanna Newsom](#) (11), raised at the border between California and Nevada, sang **The Milk-Eyed Mender** (2004) in the shrill and untrained voice of a little child, accompanying herself at her polyglot harp (used like a banjo, a contrabass, a dulcimer, a xylophone...). The music of **Nervous Cop** (2004), a collaboration with two drummers and Deerhoof's John Dieterich on electronics, sounds like a nightmarish evocation of the nuclear holocaust. Newsom employed arranger Van Dyke Parks to craft **Ys** (2006), whose five songs marked a turn towards Jane Siberry's introspective melodrama but with a sense of narrative melodrama that matched **Blonde On Blonde**-era Bob Dylan. Existentially speaking, these fluid structures resembled terminal confessions of a visionary whose visions had drained her soul.

Chicago's [Josephine Foster](#) manifested a different personality in each of

her first albums: the ukulele-based pop songstress of **There are Eyes Above** (2000), the retro-nostalgic hippy of **All the Leaves Are Gone** (2004), and the high-brow chamber folksinger of **Hazel Eyes I Will Lead You** (2005).

The Reminder (2007) propelled Canadian songstress Leslie [Feist](#) of Broken Social Scene to the forefront of the female singer-songwriters who were trying to bridge the Joni Mitchell generation and the Bjork generation.

The stark, skeletal **For Emma Forever Ago** (2008) introduced [Bon Iver](#), the moniker of Wisconsin's Justin Vernon, as an introverted bard in the vein of Iron & Wine but with a versatile falsetto register.

Boston's [Marissa Nadler](#) returned to ancestral gothic folk music on **Ballads of the Dying** (2004), sung in a haunting mezzo-soprano and accompanied with acoustic guitar and little else.

Nashville's [Taylor Swift](#) was the unusual country-music star (and songwriter and guitarist) who, barely 16 when she recorded the high-school concept **Taylor Swift** (2006), addressed her songs to the younger generation.

Britain seemed to be more focused on "bands" than "bards", but nonetheless managed to nurture two stars. England's teen idol [Amy Winehouse](#), the British equivalent of Erykah Badu, became one of the best-selling female artists with **Frank** (2003), a painful exhibition of a teenager's turbulent lifestyle disguised as a collection of soul-jazz ballads. Scotland's Kate ["KT" Tunstall](#) became a world-wide star with *Suddenly I See*, originally buried inside **Eye To The Telescope** (2004), a blues-rock shuffle sung in a casual tone. In the meantime, [Fovea Hex](#), i.e. veteran Irish folksinger Clodagh Simonds, resurrected Nico's archaic and stately atmospheres with the three EPs titled **Neither Speak Nor Remain Silent** (2005-07).

Bards of the new world order

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The 1990s had introduced a new role model, the one-man studio, i.e. the musician who not only writes and sings but also arranges the music. That also changed the very definition of "technical prowess": it was not about the vocal range or the playing of a specific instrument, but about the skills in arranging the instruments and the voice in a sophisticated manner. In a sense, this generation decreed the obsolescence of the singer-songwriter as an artist of stories that could relate to the every person and elicit an emotional response. The new singer-songwriter related to the every person and elicited an emotional response by a semiotic (not literary) device, one that relied a lot more on the sounds (on the arrangements) than on the words. It used to be that singer-songwriters were either romantic or realist. They could now afford to be mere soundmakers with only a passing interest in storytelling. However, the fundamental limitation of pop music (the mother of all limitations) was still there: predictable structures, dejavu melodies, a portfolio of abused rhythms. For the older generations these

songs mostly constituted trivia ("what does it sound like?"). For the younger generations they were muzak, no matter how intelligent.

New York-based [Dirty Projectors](#) (1), i.e. Dave Longstreth, abandoned the captivating idiosyncracies of **The Glad Fact** (2003) for ambitious orchestrations: a ten-piece chamber orchestra for **Slaves' Graves and Ballads** (2004) and cello octet, women's choir, wind septet and digital cacophony for the ambitious **The Getty Address** (2005).

[Slow Learner](#), the project of New York-based singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Michael Napolitano turned songwriting into an art of studio collage and sound sculpting on **In Their Time They Are Magnificent** (2006).

[Edison Woods](#), the project of New York-based multimedia artist Julia Frodahl, evoked a cross between Nico and Laurie Anderson with the transcendental and graceful melancholy of **Edison Woods** (2002),

[Beirut](#) (1), the project of New Mexico's multi-instrumentalist Zach Condon, offered the unlikely marriage of baroque arrangements and street music on the guitar-less **Gulag Orkestar** (2006). Relocating to France, Condon mutated into a melancholy crooner for **The Flying Club Cup** (2007). His music referenced a nostalgic ambience of ordinary lives in old environments, a universe of resigned ancestral emotions recycled via a blatant appropriation of stereotyped sounds.

And The Gospel Of Progress (2005), a concept album about a romantic relationship by Texas-based [Micah Hinson](#), inhabited a limbo halfway between orchestral pop and acoustic folk.

The Scissor Girls' keyboardist [Azita Youssefi](#) (1) converted with **Life On The Fly** (2004) and especially **How Will You** (2009) to the austere, erudite piano-based ballad style of Joni Mitchell and Robin Holcomb, her voice having become a fluent, eloquent, melismatic instrument.

[Ed Harcourt](#) (1), a classically-trained English pianist, displayed a fairy-tale imagination on **Here Be Monsters** (2001).

The [Week That Was](#), the project of Field Music's drummer Peter Brewis, debuted with the densely multi-layered concept **The Week That Was** (2008), bordering on progressive-rock.

Bards of the new Nordic order

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Scandinavia produced a generation of eccentric singer-songwriters who fully took advantage of the transition from the old world order to the new world order.

Swedish singer-songwriter [Jens Lekman](#) (1) demonstrated a stunning flair for crafting pop confections in his first three EPs, later compiled on **Oh You're So Silent Jens** (2005), but his art of arrangement truly took off with **Night Falls Over Kortedala** (2007), a collection of ballads overflowing with strings, horns and all manners of orchestral effects.

[Dungen](#), the project of Swedish multi-instrumentalist Gustav Ejstes, honed his skills with **Dungen** (2001), structured as three lengthy folkish medleys a` la Mike Oldfield, and then applied them to **Ta Det Lugnt** (2004), an orgy of retro production that roamed the aural landscape of the Sixties.

Norwegian singer-songwriter [Hanne Hukkelberg](#) arranged **Little Things** (2004) with folk instruments, found objects and Kare Vestrheim's keyboards, and sung in a soft voice somewhere in between Billie Holiday and Bjork.

Sweden also introduced three introverted chanteuses. [El Perro Del Mar](#), the project of Sarah Assbring, sung, played and arranged **It's El Perro del Mar** (2005), a set of old-fashioned sad litanies delivered in the naive lovesick crooning of the yeh-yeh girls of the 1960s but applied to the gloomy atmosphere of the 2000s. The Concretes' vocalist Victoria Bergsman debuted solo under the moniker [Taken By Trees](#) with **Open Field** (2007), a set of lushly arranged melancholy ballads contrasting the sound usually associated with the exuberant girl-groups of the 1960s with the existential spleen of the 2000s. [Lykke Li](#) (Zachrisson) sang stark dance-pop tunes with minimal arrangements (by producer Bjorn Ytting) on **Youth Novels** (2008).

Finnish-born, Swedish-raised [Anna Jarvinen](#) debuted solo with a collection of retro songs that harked back to the country-rock and piano ballads of the 1970s, **Jag Fick Feeling** (2007).

Swedish singer-songwriter [Frida Hyvonen](#) harked back to Joni Mitchell's tradition of piano-based meditations on **Until Death Comes** (2005), although Jari Haapalainen's lush arrangements turned her into a pop songstress on **Silence is Wild** (2008).

Bards of the psychedelic otherworld

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Syd Barrett's vision of eccentric introverted psychedelic music continued to haunt the world three decades after his disappearance.

Texas-born but San Francisco-based [Devendra Banhart](#) basically bridged the rural tradition of folk music, the metaphysical tradition of church music, and the urban tradition of the singer-songwriter with his artistic journey from the lo-fi fairy tales of **Oh My Oh My** (2002) to the almost gothic production and sparse but classical chamber arrangements of **Rejoicing in the Hands** (2004).

[Vetiver](#), the brainchild of San Francisco-based singer-songwriter Andy Cabic, practiced neo-hippy psychedelic-tinged chamber folk music on **Vetiver** (2004).

Relocating to San Francisco, Lungfish's vocalist [Daniel Higgs](#) (1) vented the spirituality at which Lungfish's albums had only hinted on his second solo album, **Ancestral Songs** (2006), containing six psalms of transcendental psychedelia for guitar, banjo, jew's harp, toy piano and

voice (mostly shaman-like invocations imbued with esoteric religious imagery). Higgs the alien troubadour perfected his fusion of India and Appalachia on the six instrumental pieces of **Atomic Yggdrasil Tarot** (2007) in the vein of Sandy Bull and Robbie Basho.

Mazzy Star's vocalist [Hope Sandoval](#) (1) employed My Bloody Valentine's multi-instrumentalist Colm O'Ciosoig to recreate the magic of her former band on **Bavarian Fruit Bread** (2001).

[Tanakh](#), the project of Virginia-based singer-songwriter Jesse Poe, resurrected the evocative, spiritual and gothic sound of the later works of Mike Gira's Swans on **Villa Claustrophobia** (2002), penned with acoustic, electric and handmade instruments.

[Hush Arbors](#), the project of Virginia-born folksinger Keith Wood, tried a psychedelic take on old-fashioned stark rustic Appalachian music, as if Jimi Hendrix had gone alt-country, on works such as **Hush Arbors** (2003) and especially the EP **Death Calligraphy** (2005).

Los Angeles-based [Nick Castro](#), with the naive and surreal ballads of **A Spy In The House Of God** (2004), scored for an eclectic orchestra of Western and non-Western instruments, and New York-based Edward Droste, i.e. [Grizzly Bear](#), with the atmospheric folk-rock of **Yellow House** (2006), were also representative of the psychedelic bards of the time.

Sonora Pine's violinist [Samara Lubelski](#) breathed life into the naive folk lullabies of her second solo album **Spectacular Of Passages** (2005) by embellishing them with slightly psychedelic orchestration.

The second solo album by Jackie-o Motherfucker's female guitarist Honey Owens, **Naked Acid** (2008), credited to [Valet](#), was an intimate psychedelic nightmare in the vein of David Crosby or Bruce Palmer.

After relocating to New York, Double U's child-like vocalist [Linda Hagood](#) debuted solo with the surrealistic cabaret of **Pink Love Red Love** (2008), the ugly side of post-psychedelic music.

New Zealand's [CJA](#) (1), a side-project by Armpit's Clayton Noone, greatly expanded the stylistic palette on the double-disc **Pink Metal** (2007), a genre-defying hodgepodge of free-form, atonal, droning and folk music. **Impact Wound** (2007) sounded like the ideal conflation of three historic strands of New Zealand's rock music: Dead C's wall of noise, Roy Montgomery's guitar soundpainting and Clean's lo-fi punk-folk.

New Zealand's [Lamp Of The Universe](#) (the solo project of Datura's bassist Craig Williamson) was devoted to elaborate chanted shoegaze-ragas, peaking with **Heru** (2005), a seven-movement chamber symphony for sitar, tabla, synthesizer and guitar.

[El Guincho](#) (Spanish vocalist Pablo Diaz-Reixa) took Panda Bear's strategy of using loops and samples to pepper a clattering and hazy art of spaced-out vocals chanting melodies over tribal rhythms and transposed it to the intersection of exotica and freak-folk on **Alegranza** (2007).

Belgium's [Ignatz](#) (Bram Devens) played ghostly psychedelic blues at a

meandering pace for abstract distorted vocals and erratic guitar fingerpicking on **II** (2006).

[Kiss The Anus Of A Black Cat](#) (Belgian musician Stef Heeren) rediscovered the pagan apocalyptic folk of Current 93 and latter-days Swans on **If The Sky Falls, We Shall Catch Larks** (2005), notably the 19-minute *Sighing Seething Soothing*, and **Nebulous Dreams** (2008), notably the 15-minute *Between Skylla and Charybdis*.

Bards of the digital frontier/ USA

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Pioneered by bands such as P.G. Six, "folktronica" was the inevitable consequence of the adoption of digital "instruments" by rock music. After all, rock music had been conceived mainly to deliver a message, and throughout its convoluted history it had always been used for communicating across groups of young people. The digital age was no exception to the rule. Only the sound was different.

Detroit's producer [Matthew Dear](#) wed the figure of the microhouse dj and the figure of the singer-songwriter on **Leave Luck To Heaven** (2003).

Seattle's [Dntel](#) (1), the project of Jimmy Tamborello, used laptops to craft the charming folk tunes of **Life Is Full of Possibilities** (2002) and immerse them in a glitchy soundscape.

Armed with an arsenal of electronic keyboards, Vancouver-based Scott Morgan, or [Loscil](#) (2), penned the brief instrumental vignettes of **Submers** (2002). Live instruments dented the mechanistic ambience of **Plume** (2006).

[Casiotone For The Painfully Alone](#), the project of Chicago-based singer-songwriter Owen Ashworth, delivered literate lo-fi pop performed with drum-machine and Casiotone keyboards on **Pocket Symphonies for Lonesome Subway Cars** (2001). It is the contrast between electronic/digital instruments and acoustic/electric instruments that lends the songs of **Etiquette** (2006) a unitary theme.

Michigan's [Patrick Wolf](#) (1) introduced novel elements in the "digital folk" format inaugurated by Four Tet (blending neoclassical music, folk music and industrial music) while anchoring them to a classical form of storytelling, first with the extended allegory of **Lycanthropy** (2003) and then with the introverted and elaborate riddle of **Wind in the Wires** (2005).

Los Angeles' iconoclastic tradition of Frank Zappa and Zoogz Rift was continued by singer-songwriter, writer and painter [Nate Denver](#). The goofy acid garage-folk of **No One Is Coming To Help You** (2005) evoked the Holy Modal Rounders transplanted in the age of death-metal and of videogames.

[Benoit Pioulard](#) (Oregon-based vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Thomas Meluch) employed found sounds, treated guitars, tape manipulations and

acoustic instruments to craft the simple, dreamy and hazy songs of **Precis** (2006).

M.I.A. had signaled the coming of the "iPod" generation that wanted to shuffle musical genres the way a busy worker eats fast food. Her equivalent in the USA was, for example, [Santogold](#), the project of Philadelphia's vocalist Santi White and multi-instrumentalist John Hill, who debuted with **Santogold** (2008), a hodgepodge of pop, dub, punk-rock, hip-hop, house, reggae, grime, psychedelic-rock and ska. That neutral, multi-faceted and faceless genre of genres (creating a new stereotype of stereotypes) was the face of the future.

Bards of the digital frontier/ Fairy queens

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During the 1980s avantgarde vocalists Diamanda Galas had shown how to alter the human voice and mix it with electronic music to dramatic effects. In the 2000s a number of female vocalists, taking advantage of digital devices, transposed that idea to a less melodramatic and more surrealistic format.

Oakland's [Inca Ore](#), the project of Eva Salens, manipulated her vocals (reverb, echo and delay) to shape the two lengthy oneiric pieces of the mini-album **A Knit of My Own Fibers/ When You Are Sleeping I Tell You Secrets** (2005).

Oregon's [Grouper](#) (1), the project of Liz Harris, drew abstract fragile spaced-out lullabies on a canvas of droning slow-motion foggy ambience of keyboards and guitars to create the avantgarde slo-core of **Way Their Crept** (2005) and **Wide** (2006) in the vein of Lida Husik. Even when she returned to a more traditional song format with **Dragging A Dead Deer Up A Hill** (2008), the music maintained the otherworldly dimension of reverb-drenched, introverted, whispered dream-pop.

The [Tropes](#), the project of German vocalist and multi-instrumentalist Susan Bauszat, wove wordless vocals, guitar, piano, xylophone, auto harp, flute, synthesizers, strings and drum-machines into the gentle, drifting dream-pop of **Tropes** (2008).

Geraldine Fibbers' vocalist [Carla Bozulich](#) (1) gave with **Evangelista** (2006) another terrifying vision of hell that harked back to Diamanda Galas: not songs but screams, whispers and moans that wander through the inner maze of the psyche, through a soundscape of noises, samples, drones, loops and distortions.

Argentinean singer-songwriter [Juana Molina](#) (1), coined an introverted form of bedroom folktronica for voice, guitar, keyboards and percussion. Electronic effects permeated **Segundo** (2003) and **Tres Cosas** (2004) to the point that they became the protagonists of the stories, and the ethereal ambience became the ultimate meaning of those stories. Molina sounded something like a calmer Diamanda Galas, a colder Bjork and a happier Lisa Germano. **Un Dia** (2008) was at the same time more intimate, more abstract and more hypnotic, with the voice increasingly turning into an

instrument and the rhythm increasingly turning into a voice.

Bards of the digital frontier/ Bay Area

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San Francisco, one hour away from Silicon Valley, benefited from the futuristic environment, but also from a tradition of irreverent cabaret-like avantgarde that went back to at least the Residents.

San Francisco's [Blectum From Blechdom](#) (1), the female San Francisco-based electronic duo of Bevin "Blevin Blectum" Kelley and Kristin "Kevin Blechdom" Erickson, experimented with their own brand of digital pop on the EP **Snauses and Mallards** (2000), a madcap collage of psychedelic ideas replete with toy and cheap keyboards, and the album **The Messy Jesse Fiesta** (2000), that indulged in fragmented grooves and laptop-based harmony. After the split [Blevin Blectum](#) specialized in chaotic tapestries of beats, loops, samples and sound effects on **Talon Slalom** (2002) and **Look! Magic Maple** (2004); while [Kevin Blechdom](#) (2) straddled the line between progressive-rock, new wave and something that still had no name on **Bitches Without Britches** (2003), that summarized the EPs **The Inside Story** (2001), **I Love Presets** (2002) and **Your Butt** (2003), and reinvented pop muzak on **Eat My Heart Out** (2005), a psychotic compromise between avantgarde electronic-dance music and vintage pop music, mixing post-modern elegance and post-industrial neurosis in one powerful antidote to the prevailing aesthetic mood.

[Safety Scissors](#) (1), the project of San Francisco-based (Minneapolis-born) electronic musician and singer-songwriter Matthew Curry, littered the catchy tunes of **Parts Water** (2001) with all sorts of "glitchy" debris and drenched them into a sneaky dub-techno vibe. The beats got even more disjointed on **Tainted Lunch** (2005), while the music became even more old-fashioned.

Female vocalist [Jade Vincent](#) (1) formed a duo with keyboardist Keefus Ciancia that engulfed the fake ballads of **Vincent & Mr Green** (2004) in an atmosphere of decadence and dejection.

Black Dice's vocalist [Eric Copeland](#) created the "songs" of **Hermaphrodite** (2007) from free-form collages of guitars, field recordings, electronic sounds and manipulated vocals.

Bards of the digital frontier/ Planet Earth

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[Manitoba](#) (2), the brainchild of Canadian producer Dan Snaith, debuted in the vein of Boards Of Canada's glitch-pop electronica with **Start Breaking My Heart** (2001), excelling even at jazztronica. Snaith coined a new form of anti-pop elegance with the nostalgic Brian Wilson-ian multi-layered retro-pop approach on **Up In Flames** (2003), arranged with all sorts of vintage equipment. Renaming the project [Caribou](#) (1), Snaith changed style again for **The Milk Of Human Kindness** (2005), opting for

a brainy rhythm-dominated dream-pop atmosphere that fleshed out his classic sense of melody while drowning it in neurotic pulsations and post-psychedelic sounds. **Andorra** (2007) marked yet another mutation, transforming Caribou into a necrophilic exercise of Sixties revival.

Canadian producer [Koushik Ghosh](#) mixed retro-pop lullabies with collages of sound effects and hip-hop beats on **Out My Window** (2008).

[Chad VanGalen](#) (1), also from Canada, composed, played and produced by himself **Infiniheart** (2004), arranging the songs with a large arsenal of classical instruments, self-made instruments and digital/electronic devices.

In Britain former Herbert's chanteuse [Dani Siciliano](#) turned to digital pop with **Likes** (2004).

The [Earlies](#) delighted with painstakingly-crafted orchestral-pop electronica a' la Manitoba on their early EPs, collected on **These Were** (2004).

[Part Timer](#) (Englishman John McCaffrey) filled **Part Timer** (2006) with pastoral lullabies for guitar, piano and flute, sung in an ethereal female contralto and drenched in a tapestry of glitchy and psychedelic sound manipulations pierced by murky beats and crackling ambience.

In Germany [Antye Greie-Fuchs](#), Laub's vocalist, devised cubist puzzles of voice and rhythm on works such as **Westernization Completed** (2003), as if she had shuffled the chronology of a stream of consciousness.

Yvonne "[Niobe](#)" Cornelius penned songs that juxtaposed heavily-processed vocals against a surrealistic backdrop of jazz, exotic and electronic archetypes.

French singer and electronic keyboardist [Emilie Simon](#) mixed pop, jazz and electronica on **Emilie Simon** (2003). The film soundtrack **La Marche de l'Empereur** (2006) employed sounds of "cold" objects (such as ice), while **Vegetal** (2006) used sounds of plants (and introduced the electric guitar).

The medium was indeed the message in the case of French duo [Cocorosie](#) (1): the music of **The Adventures of Ghosthorse and Stillborn** (2007), so fragile and improbable, was diagnosing an ongoing mutation in the collective psyche and in the zeitgeist of the 2000s.

Norwegian duo [Royksopp](#) basically offered a less challenging version of Boards Of Canada with the futuristic easy-listening of **Melody A.M.** (2001).

[Shugo Tokumaru](#) (2) debuted with the mini-album **Night Piece** (2004), that revealed him as a sort of bedroom Mozart, gifted with the talent to both borrow pristine old-fashioned melodies from around the world and to play dozens of instruments like a one-man orchestra. The serene, pastoral and witty mood of the debut yielded to colder and more introspective, meticulously assembled and densely layered, clockwork mechanisms on **L.S.T.** (2005). He played more than 50 instruments (and arranged them on his laptop) for **Exit** (2007), a veritable catalog of Sixties kitsch.

Wordless bards

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Solo guitar improvisation staged an impressive comeback in the 2000s, ironically just when John Fahey died. The "revival" had started in the late 1990s with Steffen Basho-Junghans and Sir Richard Bishop, but became a widespread phenomenon only after 2001. They mostly took John Fahey as a reference model and adapted him to the post-rock sensibility.

Pelt's guitarist [Jack Rose](#) was emblematic with **Red Horse White Mule** (2001), almost a remix of John Fahey's country-ragas, and **Raag Manifestos** (2004), that also experimented with electronics.

Souled American's guitarist [Scott Tuma](#) (1) ran the gamut from brief impressionistic vignettes to lengthy metaphysical brooding on the mostly unaccompanied **Hard Again** (2001), that sounded like an ambient remix of his band's most distressed songs. The soundscape got even more rarified on **The River 1 2 3 4** (2003) for guitar, harmonica, organ and harmonium (all played by Tuma himself), somewhere between Ennio Morricone's soundtracks, Far Eastern transcendence, blues dirges and folk lullabies.

Charalambides' female soul [Christina Carter](#) (1) added a fragile, intimate, introspective element to what was becoming ambient guitar music on **Electrice** (2006), a concept of sorts (all four lengthy pieces are in the same key and use the same guitar tuning).

Low's guitarist [Alan Sparhawk](#) instead leaned towards the psychedelic world on **Solo Guitar** (2006), full of drones, dissonances and reverbs.

Pakistani-born Minnesota's resident [Ilyas Ahmed](#) leaned towards the raga-psychedelic end of the spectrum with the improvisations of **Towards The Night** (2006) and the many recordings on which the acoustic guitar was not the only protagonist but the center of mass for a blurred soundscape of wordless vocals, piano, eerie drones and sparse percussion.

The humblest of the batch was perhaps Montreal-based [Harris Newman](#) (1), whose **Non-Sequiturs** (2003) felt like a fresco of evocative, bittersweet, country life, while **Accidents with Nature and Each Other** (2005) took off towards a more ambitious and unpredictable form of improvisation.

[Matt Baldwin](#)'s **Paths Of Ignition** (2008) represented the spirit of the Bay Area, as far from Appalachia as possible.

English guitarist [James Blackshaw](#) (2) was perhaps the one who came the closest to Fahey's original intent with the colossal fingerpicking-intense raga-folk improvisations for twelve-string acoustic guitar of **Celeste** (2004) and **Sunshrine** (2005). Blackshaw's personal touch was the shimmering cascade of notes that sculpted a dense wavering tapestry. The droning ambience of **Lost Prayers & Motionless Dances** (2004) and the timid experiments of **The Cloud of Unknowing** (2007) charted new paths.

[Fear Falls Burning](#) (1), the new project by Vidna Obama's Dirk Serries,

indulged in hugely-amplified drone-based abstract guitar soundpainting. The double-disc tour de force of **He Spoke in Dead Tongues** (2005) and the 39-minute piece of **I'm One Of Those Monsters Numb With Grace** (2006) bridged the avantgarde school of Jonathan Coleclough, the shoegazing music of My Bloody Valentine and the doom-metal school of Earth.

Paradise Camp 23's multi-instrumentalist [Erik Amlee](#) crafted the abstract psychedelic sitar or guitar improvisations of **Afternoon Dream** (2006).

Japanese guitarist [Hisato Higuchi](#) spun the slow-motion, introspective and languid solo meditations of **Dialogue** (2006), exuding zen humility, the very negation of Japanese noisecore.

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