

The History of Rock Music: The 2000s

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Tunesmiths

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

Emo-smiths

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The long, long tide of emocore did not recede in the 2000s.

Continuing the cross-pollination begun in the previous decade, New York's [Coheed And Cambria](#), fronted by vocalist-guitarist Claudio Sanchez, carried out a historical fusion of the progressive-rock tradition and the emo-core tradition on their sci-fi tetralogy, notably **In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth** (2003).

Pioneers of "progressive emocore" were also [Breaking Pangaea](#) in Philadelphia, who crafted the lengthy progressive emo psychodrama *Turning on A Cannon To A Whisper* (2001). The same city later witnessed the ascent of [Circa Survive](#), whose fusion of hardcore, pop, metal and prog-rock peaked with **Juturna** (2005).

[Minus The Bear](#) rejuvenated emo-core in Seattle by stretching Fugazi's original aesthetic to accommodate progressive jamming driven by guitarist Dave Knudson and keyboardist Matt Bayles, best on the EP **This Is What I Know About Being Gigantic** (2001) and partially on the album **Highly Refined Pirates** (2002).

Oregon's [31 Knots](#) were perhaps the most versatile and erudite in fusing progressive-rock and melodic/melodramatic emocore, starting with **A Word Is Also A Picture Of A Word** (2002).

The epitome of the teenage melodrama was, however, to be found in the more modest songs of New York's [Taking Back Sunday](#), e.g. on **Where You Want To Be** (2004), that featured half of Breaking Pangaea (notably guitarist Fred Mascherino).

[Straylight Run](#) coined a pensive, adult version of emocore, relying on the male-female vocal harmonies of John Nolan (formerly of Taking Back Sunday) and Michelle Nolan as well as on atmospheric instrumental accompaniments on **Straylight Run** (2004) and **The Needles The Space** (2007).

Michigan's sextet [Chiodos](#) grafted screamo vocals, metalcore attitude, and heavy-metal bombast onto Mars Volta's theatrical progressive-rock for **All's Well That Ends Well** (2005).

There were clearly two extremes. On one hand the charts-oriented punk-pop of band such as Nevada's [Panic At The Disco](#), that scored big with **A Fever You Can't Sweat Out** (2005), or [Jack's Mannequin](#), the project of Los Angeles-area singer-songwriter Andrew McMahon, with **Everything in Transit** (2005), or Toronto's [Silverstein](#), with **When Broken Is Easily Fixed** (2003). And on the other hand the bands that still had roots in punk-rock. For example, Cursive's guitarist Stephen Pedersen launched [Criteria](#) in Nebraska with the high-class all-out punk attack **En Garde** (2003).

Among the former, New Jersey's [My Chemical Romance](#) reached their lyrical peak with the concept **The Black Parade** (2006) in a harder and quasi-metal variant of punk-pop. Emerging from the same busy scene, [Early November](#) fulfilled Arthur "Ace" Anders' songwriting and musical ambition on the triple-disc semi-autobiographical concept album **The Mother, The Mechanic and The Path** (2006).

The slabs of supercharged melodic hardcore of **Revolutions Per Minute** (2002) by Chicago's [Rise Against](#) harked back to popcore of the 1980s.

The idea of turning emo into fun was further refined in Chicago by popcore outfits such as [Fall Out Boy](#), notably on **From Under The Cork Tree** (2005), and [Academy Is](#), especially on **Almost Here** (2005).

Melody makers

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The world, apparently, had not had enough of three-minute ditties. However, most bands in this genre had to resort to meticulous production in order to keep the project interesting.

[Decemberists](#) (2), fronted in Oregon by Colin Meloy, stood out from the crowd with their coupling of brainy lyrics and simple melodies. In particular, **Castaways and Cutouts** (2002), that included the ten-minute quasi-psychedelic meditation of *California One Youth and Beauty Brigade*, and **Picaresque** (2005), that included the tragicomic nine-minute fantasia *The Mariner's Revenge Song*, were tours de force of emotional storytelling.

[Wolf Parade](#) (1), the project of Montreal-based singer-songwriters Dan Boeckner and Spencer Krug, employed two keyboards and an encyclopedic palette for the eclectic pop structures of **Apologies To The Queen Mary** (2005).

The Bay Area's [Velvet Teen](#) (1), fronted by singer-songwriter Judah Nagler, presented ambitious and melodramatic pop constructs on their second album **Elysium** (2004), although they steered towards a more cerebral and electronic sound on **Cum Laude** (2006).

Chicago's [M's](#) dabbled in retro garage-pop with vintage guitar riffs, vintage vocal harmonies and vintage refrains that, on **The M's** (2004), evoked just about every catchy and rocking British band from the Kinks to T.Rex.

After incorporating singer and multi-instrumentalist Janie Porche, Chicago's [Bound Stems](#) delivered the eccentric power-pop of **Appreciation Night** (2006).

New York's trio [Oxford Collapse](#), fronted by guitarist and vocalist Michael Pace, harked back to noise-rock and college-pop of the 1980s as well as to Pavement's lo-fi rock of the 1990s on the virulent and angular **Good Ground** (2005).

Australian octet [Architecture in Helsinki](#) (1) struck an unlikely balance between naive refrains and futuristic lounge jamming on **Fingers Crossed** (2004), arranged with a revolving cast of acoustic and electronic instruments.

Australia's [Art Of Fighting](#) (1) were among the few who aimed for psychological depth, in particular on their second album **Second Storey** (2004).

Less original but more commercially successful purveyors of pop included: New Mexico's [Shins](#), formed by Flake's guitarist James Mercer, with their third album **Chutes Too Narrow** (2003); [Long Winters](#), the brainchild of Seattle-based singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist John Roderick, with **When I Pretend To Fall** (2003); [Capitol Years](#), the brainchild of Philadelphia-based singer-songwriter Shai Halperin, with **Let Them Drink** (2005); Canada's identical twins [Tegan and Sara](#) Quin, with **So Jealous** (2004); etc.

If nothing else, [Polyphonic Spree](#), a large group formed in Texas by Tripping Daisy's vocalist that includes a small orchestra and a choir for a grand total of between 20 and 25 musicians, delivered pure grandiose sugary pop on **The Beginning Stages** (2001).

Nebraska's [Head Of Femur](#) employed 28 performers to decorate the baroque pop of **Ringodrom or Proctor** (2003), an idea that evolved into the massive orchestral sound of **Hysterical Stars** (2005).

As usual, Sweden was at the vanguard of melodic rock. [Peter, Bjorn & John](#), featuring producer Bjorn Yttling, were as derivative of the Sixties as possible on **Peter, Bjorn & John** (2002). [Love Is All](#), fronted by the shrieking Josephine Olausson, shot the brief and slightly neurotic punk-pop bullets of **Nine Times the Same Song** (2005) and **A Hundred Things Keep Me Up at Night** (2008): retro party music with gutsy saxophone, driving rhythm and crunchy riffs.

Going against the gloomy zeitgeist of the 2000s, German quartet [Banaroo](#)

delivered one of the most demented dance-pop anthems of all times, *Dubi Dam Dam* (2005).

Canada before the flood

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The pop renaissance of the 1990s in Canada led to a generation of deft and versatile acts.

[P:ano](#), the project of Vancouver-based songwriter Nick Krgovich and multi-instrumentalist Larissa Loyva, managed to sound intimate and profound on their second album **Den** (2004).

The [Dears](#), fronted by Montreal's sentimental crooner Murray Lightburn, indulged in psychological analysis with the lengthy orchestral noir melodramas of **No Cities Left** (2004).

Belle And Sebastian's folk-pop was still an influence, as demonstrated by [Hidden Cameras](#), the project of Toronto-based singer-songwriter Joel Gibb, on **The Smell of Our Own** (2003).

Montreal's [Besnard Lakes](#) (1) roamed several decades of pop styles to produce **Are The Dark Horse** (2007), although wrapping it in an elegiac mood.

Toronto's [Broken Social Scene](#) (1) employed 15 players to craft **You Forgot It in People** (2002), whose parade of styles was captivating in its anarchic and protean overreaching, with the music often morphing gently into its own negation within the same song.

[Azeda Booth](#) concocted a dreamy fusion of ambient, glitch and pop music on **In Flesh Tones** (2008), somewhat reminiscent of Mum.

Montreal's [Plants And Animals](#) subverted the conventions of baroque pop with the lush chamber **Parc Avenue** (2008) because each of the songs was a busy, moody and whimsical micro-suite of styles.

Britain after the flood

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The land of Brit-pop was still being haunted by an endless series of "next big things" but their credibility had greatly decreased. The [Clientele](#) played classy psychedelic pop on **The Violet Hour** (2003) that was arranged with a cornucopia of delay, reverb and tape effects. [British Sea Power](#) were original on **The Decline Of** (2003), toying with elements of progressive-rock, but then converted to Brit-pop.

[Go Team](#) (2), a sextet formed by English wunderkind Ian Parton, concocted sample-heavy party music à la Avalanches on albums that were hyper-arranged in an amateurish manner such as **Thunder Lightning Strike** (2004) and **Proof Of Youth** (2007). If the original songs used as blueprints were simple pop hits, in the hands of the Go Team they

became the emotional equivalent of a national anthem.

More trivial were the [Arctic Monkeys](#), whose **Whatever People Say I Am** (2006) became the fastest-selling debut album of all times in Britain; the [Guillemots](#), also a "next big thing" for a few days, and perhaps the most melodramatic of all on **Through The Windowpane** (2006); and the [Libertines](#) with **Up the Bracket** (2003).

Two groups from Liverpool briefly stole the show. The [Coral](#), a sextet fronted by James Skelly and boasting organ and horns, harked back to the effervescent technicolor Brit-pop of the mid-Sixties for **The Coral** (2002). The [Zutons](#), a quintet fronted by David McCabe and featuring a saxophonist, sounded like a folkier version of the Animals, less bluesy and more attuned to the sugary choruses of Merseybeat, via the pub-rock of the late 1970s on the lively and entertaining **Who Killed The Zutons** (2004).

Even the [Last Shadow Puppets](#), the duo of the Arctic Monkeys' vocalist Alex Turner and Miles Kane, sounded more original than the stars on **The Age Of The Understatement** (2008), the ultimate retro-pop album, sampling the styles of every master of the past with grand orchestral arrangements (courtesy of Final Fantasy's Owen Pallett).

[L Am Kloom](#) started an acoustic-pop revival in Manchester with **Natural History** (2001). The most original of the batch were probably [Elbow](#) with **Asleep in the Back** (2001) and **Cast of Thousands** (2004).

[Camera Obscura](#) started out as pupils of Belle And Sebastian's folk-pop but progressed to the lush chamber arrangements of **Let's Get Out Of This Country** (2006).

Towering over the rest of British chamber pop, [Lorna](#) (2) employed sophisticated arrangements of string, wind and keyboard instruments for the folkish ditties of **This Time Each Year** (2003) that mixed naive female vocals with lounge-style xylophone, pastoral flute, jazzy horns and neoclassical strings. **Static Patterns & Souvenirs** (2005) added a further layer of otherworldly electronic sounds.

The influence of My Bloody Valentine and the Cocteau Twins was still being felt by some left-field pop groups. The [Fields](#) peppered **Everything Last Winter** (2007) with shoegazing guitars, dream-pop orchestration, atmospheric synths and male-female harmonies.

[Los Campesinos](#) boasted non-stop fun with a punkish verve on **Hold On Now Youngster** (2008).

The [Wild Beasts](#), a trio fronted by eccentric and theatrical singer-guitarist Hayden Thorpe, evoked different kinds of stage (exotic club, cocktail lounge, cabaret, discotheque, musical theater and punk saloon) with the eclectic stylistic stew of **Limbo Panto** (2008).