

The History of Rock Music: The 2000s

[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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Intellectuals

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

As it is often the case with rock genres, "post-rock" had become a term encompassing more than one style, and sometimes simply differentiating the non-song format from the song format. There were three main schools: the "ebbing and flowing" style of post-rock (as in God Speed You Black Emperor and Mogwai), the brainy jazz-influenced style of post-rock (Tortoise), and the original style of post-rock, that was simply a form of non-linear instrumental music (Slint, Don Caballero). Prog-rock, by comparison, tended to be more exuberant (if not bombastic) and more about the technical skills of the musicians. Ambient, noise, glitch and world music all contributed to further confuse the tongue of post-rock.

Post-rock in Chicago

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Aesthetically speaking, being "post" something was the artistic manifesto of many in the 2000s. It was basically a generalization of post-modernism: not only pushing the boundaries of existing styles, but reinventing, reinterpreting, recontextualizing them and, ultimately, dismantling them.

Chicago's school of post-rock was still alive and kicking in the 2000s, although its focus and scope was rapidly shifting towards the digital soundscape.

The [Battles](#) (1), a New York-based supergroup formed by Don Caballero's guitarist Ian Williams, jazz vocalist Tyondai Braxton, Helmet's drummer John Stanier and Lynx' keyboardist Dave Konopka, single-handedly reinvented post-rock for the 21st century with **Mirrored** (2007), appropriating dance rhythms, jazz improvisation and digital editing (via a meticulous process of collage) to craft erudite and intricate compositions that harked back to the Canterbury school of progressive-rock of the 1970s.

The Boxhead Ensemble's drummer [Glenn Kotche](#) recorded **Introducing** (2002), an experiment in free-form electroacoustic percussion-based music, and **Mobile** (2006), an unlikely blend of ethnic, glitch, jazz and minimalist music.

The [Eternals](#), formed by Trenchmouth's bassist Wayne Montana and vocalist Damon Locks, experimented with the keyboards-heavy dub-jazz-funk fusion of **The Eternals** (2000), the lengthy disjointed suites of hip-hop, dub and electronica of the mini-album **Black Museum** (2002), the anarchic funk-punk jams of **Rawar Style** (2004), halfway between Material and the Contortions, until **Heavy International** (2007), with its way of deconstructing and reconstructing funk, dub, jazz and techno, began to sound like the post-rock equivalent of what the Talking Heads had done to the new wave in the late 1970s.

Town & Country's multi-instrumentalist Ben Vida, disguised under the moniker [Bird Show](#) (1), mixed Western and Eastern acoustic instruments, ethnic field recordings and found sounds on **Green Inferno** (2005).

[Yakuza](#), fronted by saxophonist Bruce Lamont, concocted a colorful hybrid of industrial-metal, hardcore, jazz-rock and chamber post-rock on **Way Of The Dead** (2002), mostly taken up by the 43-minute atmospheric piece *01000011110011* à la Miles Davies.

[Volcano!](#) (drummer Sam Scranton, guitarist Aaron With and keyboardist Mark Cartwright) harked back to Chicago's brainy post-rock tradition on **Beautiful Seizure** (2005) and **Paperwork** (2008), classic exercises in balancing the yin-yang of chaos and structure, dynamics and meditation, harmony and discord.

Post-industrial in New York

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If Chicago was the epicenter of post-rock, New York was the epicenter of noise.

[Black Dice](#) (3), featuring Bjorn Copeland on guitar and Eric Copeland on vocals, attempted an unlikely and epileptic fusion of hardcore punk-rock and abstract electronica on **Black Dice** (2000) and the mini-album **Cold Hands** (2001), but then dropped the punk pretense for the sprawling jams of sound effects on **Beaches & Canyons** (2002), frequently sculpted with samples and loops and occasionally blending everything into a tribal orgy, with Aaron Warren's keyboards dominating soundscapes that borrowed from both Throbbing Gristle's industrial soundscapes and Godspeed You Black Emperor's post-industrial streams of consciousness. After the tour de force of sound manipulation that was the EP **Miles Of Smiles** (2004), **Creature Comforts** (2004) continued the process of dissolving the textural unity of Western music by altering timbres, confusing dynamics and diluting rhythms, thus creating a new kind of audio collage. The more organic approach of **Broken Ear Record** (2005) highlighted their surreal synthesis of the primitive and the futuristic, even evoking the psychotic "modern dance" of Pere Ubu.

The [Books](#) (2), a duo (Nick "Zammuto" Willscher and Paul DeJong), concocted a fusion of folk, electronica, vocal samples and found sounds on **Thought For Food** (2002) but using an anemic approach that rarified sounds and disconnected them to the point of non existence. It was Dada without a sense of humor. **The Lemon of Pink** (2003) was even more cryptic and disorienting. At times it sounded like the same solemn demystification of roots-music preached by the Holy Modal Rounders in the Sixties, however transposed from the hippie civilization to the high-tech civilization; the same surrealistic cabaret of the United States Of America, but transposed inside a videogame. There was something grand and noble to these grotesque dizzying montages. As deranged as it was, the Books' sound art was a metaphor for a higher plane of life the same way that psychedelic freak-outs were a metaphor for altered mental states.

[Sightings](#) specialized in hysterical industrial hardcore noise that evoked the Boredoms and Mars on early works such as **Michigan Haters** (2002). By setting their mayhem to a robotic beat, **Arrived In Gold** (2004), instead, took musique concrete to a disco.

[Parts and Labor](#) turned **Groundswell** (2003) into an epic feast of new-wave digressions, mostly highlighted by the electronic noises of Dan Friel.

Top Dollar (2001), the only album by [Toby Dammit](#) (1), the brainchild of New York-based percussionist Larry Mullins, was a unique artifact of that scene, a frenzied merry-go-round of techno, dub, funk, jazz, industrial, exotic and electronic elements.

Post-dada in San Francisco

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Irreverence and anarchy still reigned in San Francisco, continuing a tradition that had started in the 1960s and had produced creative oxymorons in each and every decade.

Multi-instrumentalist Nils Frykdahl and bassist Dan Rathbun of Idiot Flesh formed [Sleepytime Gorilla Museum](#) with Tin Hat Trio's violinist Carla Kihlstedt and Species Being's drummer Frank Grau. **Grand Opening And Closing** (2001) was a visceral hodgepodge of convoluted prog-rock jamming, operatic/cabaret vocals, home-made instruments and loud industrial/grindcore guitars, with sudden incursions in chamber music.

[Faun Fables](#), the Bay Area-based duo of folksinger and performance artist Dawn McCarthy and Sleepytime Gorilla Museum's multi-instrumentalist Nils Frykdahl, staged a quirky Brecht-ian cabaret on **Family Album** (2004).

[Book of Knots](#), featuring Sleepytime Gorilla Museum's drummer Matthias Bossi, Tin Hat Trio's violinist Carla Kihlstedt and Pere Ubu's bassist Tony Maimone, penned the historical concept album **The Book of Knots** (2007) and especially the spasmodic and demented **Traineater** (2007).

[Hella](#) (1), the Sacramento-based duo of guitarist-keyboardist Spencer Seim

and drummer Zach Hill, unleashed the spastic instrumental post-rock of **Hold Your Horse Is** (2002) and **The Devil Isn't Red** (2004) in a deliberately chaotic fashion. The EP **Bitches Ain't Shit But Good People** (2003) and the mini-album **Total Bugs Bunny On Wild Bass** (2003), with a prominent synthesizer, dangerously increased the instability of the formula. The mission was completed by the double-disc **Church Gone Wild/ Chirpin Hard** (2005), one disc for Hill's industrial noise and one disc for Seim's videogame cacophony.

[Howard Hello](#) (1), a percussion-less trio formed by Tarentel's bassist Kenseth Thibideau, Dilute's guitarist Marty Anderson and Court and Spark's vocalist Wendy Allen, roamed a vast territory of electronic and acoustic sounds with irregular time signatures and dissonant counterpoint on **Howard Hello** (2002).

[Subtonix](#), that released only **Tarantism** (2002), were an all-girl band devoted to Contortions' spastic noise-jazz-punk-rock with synthesizer and saxophone.

Outside the Bay Area there were only islands of insanity. Philadelphia's [Man Man](#) (1), fronted by vocalist and keyboardist Ryan "Honus Honus" Kattner, harked back to the exuberant, eclectic and satirical music-hall of Frank Zappa augmented with an added tribal element and the leader's Tom Waits-ian sloppy baritone. The reckless romps of **Man in a Blue Turban with a Face** (2004) and especially **Six Demon Bag** (2006), featuring synthesizers, horns, strings, chaotic percussions and all sorts of vocal harmonies, were catalogs of musical mistakes cursed to an ever-shifting focus.

Post-soundpainting

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Several acts were the musical equivalent of "pointillistic" painting: focusing on the pixels rather than on the overall picture in order to produce a different view of the form being painted. A complementary approach was to aim for ambient and cinematic music, for moody and cryptic atmospheres, for contemplative and meditative moods. In a sense, this "ambient" form of post-rock was the lay/secular equivalent of spiritual acid-rock. Where Eastern-tinged psychedelia had liberated the mind to wander through a transcendent dimension, ambient post-rock liberated the mind to wander through a lay philosophical dimension.

Jackie-O Motherfucker's female guitarist Honey Owens, Fontanelle's keyboardist Brian Foote and Fontanelle's percussionist Paul Dickow formed [Nudge](#) (1), whose **Trick Doubt** (2002) and **Elaborate Devices for Filtering Crisis** (2003) were experiments in sculpting glacial and fragile post-rock structures permanently on the verge of disintegrating. Nudge's vivisection of sound peaked with **Cached** (2005), a work whose eclectic excursions (from lounge soul to acid freak-out, from ambient electronica to dub-funk-jazz fusion) were meant to disorient while "re-orienting" the listener.

[Aemae](#), the project of San Francisco-based engineer Brandon Nickell,

employed software of his own design to animate **The Helical Word** (2005), a work that was emblematic of the advent of austere, erudite and high-brow noise; while **Maw** (2007) explored the concept of ambient music for the glitch generation, or industrial music for the age of abstract digital soundsculpting.

[Souvenir's Young America](#), a Virginia-based trio featuring keyboardist Jonathan Lee and guitarist Ken Rayher, opted for an anti-bombastic, textural, autumnal, contemplative sound on **Souvenir's Young America** (2006) and especially **An Ocean Without Water** (Crucial Blast, 2007), characterized not by gigantic guitar but mournful harmonica, and by a sense of emptiness reminiscent of Calexico's desert rock.

At the same time, this generation had mastered the praxis of improvisation/composition that had been appropriated by post-rock after being refined over the centuries by classical music (the fantasia) and by jazz (the jam).

A case in point, Texas' [Explosions In The Sky](#) (1), fronted by guitarists Mark Smith and Munaf Rayani, pushed the wild dynamics of Godspeed You Black Emperor to new heights (sonically speaking) of epic instrumental post-rock on **Those Who Tell the Truth Shall Die** (2001) and **The Earth is Not a Cold Dead Place** (2003). The six impeccable pieces of **All Of A Sudden I Miss Everyone** (2007) could be used as instruction manuals for apprentice post-rockers.

[Kopernik](#) (1), formed in Georgia by upright bassist Tim Delaney and computer composer Brad Lewis, employed a postmodernist technique of collage and cut-up on **Kopernik** (2003) to create droning ambient neoclassical free-jazz as well as ornate neoclassical sonatas.

The [Cloaks](#) (Oregon's pianist Spencer Doran) dabbled in swirling minimalist repetition of piano patterns woven into intricate layers of sonic events, notably with the 32-minute *A Crystal Skull In Peru* for piano, electronics, zither and bells, off **A Crystal Skull In Peru** (2007) and the 35-minute *Dream Tape Number One* for piano and electronics, off **Serene** (2008).

Post-new

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New York also witnessed the revival of the "new wave" of the 1970s, a movement that in those days had recaptured the intellectual and rebellious spirit of the late 1960s, and then wed it to pseudo-avantgarde techniques as well as to existential lyrics.

[Interpol](#) (1) led the movement with the dark, somber and claustrophobic **Turn on the Bright Lights** (2002).

The [Strokes](#) became a sensation in Britain with the album **Is This It** (2001), that found perhaps the ideal balance between dejavu and fashionable.

[Yeah Yeah Yeahs](#) expressed the quintessence of sexual frustration and existential desperation on the EP **Yeah Yeah Yeahs** (2001).

Zah Lehorff's [Seconds](#) (1), featuring Yeah Yeah Yeahs' drummer Brian Chase, penned **Y** (2001), and **Kratitude** (2006), whose sound was the closest thing to the "no wave" of DNA, Mars and Teenage Jesus.

Other Mathematics (2001) by the [Ex Models](#) (1) flew through 13 songs in just 24 minutes in a breathless manner not heard since the heydays of the "no wave".

The fusion of futuristic electronica, nostalgic pop and punk verve was best epitomized by [TV On The Radio](#) (2). **Desperate Youth Blood Thirsty Babes** (2004) was a stylistically ambiguous statement littered with encyclopedic musical quotations. Few musicians had traveled the vast land bordered by industrial nightmares and a-cappella harmonies in just one album, or even one career. The effect of squeezing together doo-wop, shoegazing and digital ambience was to make **Return To Cookie Mountain** (2006) an even more tormented sonic feast.

The [Liars](#) (1) progressed from the effervescent **They Threw Us All In a Trench And Stuck A Monument On Top** (2001), a festival of hostile vocals and gargantuan rhythms, to the abstract and expressionistic **Drum's Not Dead** (2006), once the group had relocated to Germany. Their senseless lullabies evoked anemic soundscapes that created a sense of alienation.

The [High Places](#), a New York-based duo (vocalist Mary Pearson and digital musician Robert Barber), created the childish multi-layered multi-stylistic songs of **High Places** (2008) by assembling on a computer a repertory of samples, loops, found sounds and home-made instruments.

The cosmopolitan sound of the Talking Heads was becoming a major influence again in New York. [Yeasayer](#) (1) blended non-rock instruments, four-part harmonies and polyrhythmic beats on **All Hour Cymbals** (2007), achieving an opalescent pan-ethnic electronic rock reminiscent not only of the Talking Heads but also of Peter Gabriel and latter-day Fleetwood Mac. [Vampire Weekend](#) (1) meticulously crafted the quasi-orchestral and pan-ethnic stew of hooks and grooves of **Vampire Weekend** (2008), reminiscent of Paul Simon as well as the Talking Heads. The [Ruby Suns](#), formed in New Zealand by USA-born multi-instrumentalist Ryan McPhun, pioneered a simpler way to bridge world-music and baroque pop on **Sea Lion** (2008).

Black Madonna (2007) by New York's duo [Austerity Program](#) (Thad Calabrese on bass and Justin Foley on vocals and guitar) was the best imitation yet of the visceral and jagged sound of Steve Albini's Big Black propelled by a seismic drum-machine.

New York State's sextet [Ra Ra Riot](#), fronted by vibrato tenor Wesley Miles and featuring violin (Rebecca Zeller) and cello (Alexandra Lawn), filled **The Rhumb Line** (2008) with gloomy new-wave inspired dirges.

From New York the revival of the new wave spread to the rest of North America.

San Francisco's [Vue](#) ventured into a marriage of the Stooges (a crude double-guitar assault) and Suicide (pulsating keyboards) on **Vue** (2000).

The stylistic schizophrenia of Los Angeles' [Mae Shi](#) encompassed both spastic funk-punk and synth-driven new-wave eccentricity. The EP **To Hit Armor Class Zero** (2003), running the gamut from catchy refrains to danceable rhythms to the 51-minute electronic pastiche of *To Hit Armor Class Zero II*, was the ideological manifesto of musicians that did not want to have an artistic manifesto.

Seattle's [Pretty Girls Make Graves](#) improved over the naive punk-pop à la Fastbacks of the mini-album **Good Health** (2002) by superimposing a progressive/aggressive sound in the vein of the new wave on **Elan Vital** (2006).

The [Paper Chase](#), a quartet from Texas fronted by singer/guitarist John Congleton and featuring Sean Kirkpatrick on keyboards and samplers, were artsy, nervous and neurotic like the early groups of the new wave on the album **Young Bodies Heal Quickly You Know** (2001) and the EP **Cntrl-Alt-Delete-U** (2002). Since the times of Chuck Berry, rock music tended to tailor the music to the lyrics. The Paper Chase's **How You Are One Of Us** (2006) was emblematic of a switch towards deliberately decoupling the two and even juxtaposing them, so that one's yin contrasts with the other's yang.

San Diego's [Xiu Xiu](#) (3), fronted by vocalist Jamie Stewart and featuring Yvonne Chen's and Lauren Andrews' cheesy keyboards and assorted instruments, debuted with the highly eccentric and creative **Knife Play** (2002), that bridged the wildly introverted and apocalyptic sounds of the new wave and the wildly extroverted sounds of the late 1990s. The quartet painted abstract mood pieces that simmered and boiled, but never lost control of the energy they radiated. Stewart invented one of the few truly innovative styles of singing of the decade, hardly singing at all. The use of silence and of "non-melodic" singing was even more prominent and effective on **A Promise** (2003), that continued their exploration of the border between music and non-music. Gothic in spirit, but too rarified to be anything at all, Xiu Xiu's music left behind any pretense of songwriting, focusing almost exclusively on the angst-ridden atmosphere centered around Stewart's schizoid persona. The arrangements had declined to the status of mere signs, as the accompaniment fell short of the most elementary musical qualities. Not only was each instrument limited to a few seconds of sound, and not only were those sounds mostly atonal, but there was virtually no counterpoint, harmony, polyphony. Xiu Xiu's songs relied more on silence than on sound. After going electronic on **Fabulous Muscles** (2004), Xiu Xiu achieved a subtler form of sound-painting with the meticulous, sophisticated arrangements of **La Foret** (2005), that also added keyboardist Caralee McElroy to the line-up.

Texas' [I Love You But I've Chosen Darkness](#) revisited Joy Division's dark-punk via Interpol on **Fear Is on Our Side** (2006).

Under the pretext of revisiting the new wave, Florida's [Black Kids](#), led by vocalist Reggie Youngblood and keyboardist Dawn Watley, retailed the

bouncy party music of **Partie Traumatic** (2008).

The [Evangelicals](#), a foursome from post-Flaming Lips Oklahoma, played energetic, catchy and lo-fi garage-rock **So Gone** (2006) while adopting a "maximalist" aesthetic for the lush, thick, operatic and stately tunes of **The Evening Descends** (2008).

Connecticut's duo [Have A Nice Life](#) (1) concocted an unlikely hybrid of My Bloody Valentine's shoegaze-pop, Joy Division's dark punk, Godspeed's post-rock, Nine Inch Nails' industrial dirges and the Swans' proto-doom on the double-disc **Deathconsciousness** (2008).

Pennsylvania's [Black Moth Super Rainbow](#), featuring keyboardist Tom "Tobacco" Fec, employed analog keyboards for the lo-fi electronic psychedelic pop of **Falling Through A Field** (2003), displaying the influence of the Boards Of Canada on the sprawling **Dandelion Gum** (2007).

Vancouver's [Frog Eyes](#), featuring melodramatic vocalist Carey Mercer, sounded like a romantic version of Xiu Xiu or a cubistic version of Roxy Music on their first two albums, **The Bloody Hand** (2002) and especially **The Golden River** (2003), both characterized by declamations in the vein of Tom Waits and Nick Cave, by Kafkian atmospheres due to keyboardist Grayson Walker and guitarist Michael Rak, and by a fragmented stream of consciousness. **Tears Of The Vaedictorian** (2007) reached for emotional and musical balance.

Post-pop

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Britain and Canada were reeling from a decade of poppier and poppier bands. The injection of a new-wave sensibility helped move the scene onto more creative forms of pop.

[Franz Ferdinand](#) were basically a simplified Scottish equivalent of New York's dance-punk, and their **Franz Ferdinand** (2004) did much to launch the "new generation" of Britain. The other precursors, the [Futureheads](#), wed Mersey-beat harmonies and dance-punk from a new-wave perspective, like a schizophrenic alter-ego of Franz Ferdinand, on **The Futureheads** (2004). Their cousins (via drummer Peter Brewis) [Field Music](#) mixed early XTC's skewed pop, new wave's arrangements and Beach Boys' harmonies on **Field Music** (2005). Paul Smith, [Maximo Park](#)'s frontman, was the Ray Davies of the "new generation": a poignant chronicler of his times who used addictive hooks and riffs (and rhythms) to capture the attention of his audience: the frenzied dance-pop of **A Certain Trigger** (2005) was ultimately just a more streamlined version of Franz Ferdinand and the Futureheads, and perhaps also the catchiest of the three. Of that generation, the most valuable were perhaps [Bloc Party](#) with **Silent Alarm** (2005). Their main inspiration was the hummable punk-rock with disco-like drumming of early XTC. And, ultimately, these British bands simply augmented the eccentric and punkish tones of the new wave with Brit-pop melodies and danceable tempos. For example, [Kaiser Chiefs](#) harked back to early XTC's sprightly power-pop on **Employment** (2005).

Later the [Foals](#), fronted by Yannis Philippakis, tried to fuse dance-punk à la Bloc Party and post-rock à la Mogwai on **Antidotes** (2008).

Toronto's [Junior Boys](#) were more poignant on **So This Is Goodbye** (2006), opting for a twitching synth-pop sound that referenced the stereotypes (stately melodies, evocative electronics, erotic vocals) while destabilizing them at the root.

Even more original were [Holy Fuck](#) (1), an instrumental Toronto-based combo led by keyboardists Brian Borcherdt and Graham Walsh, who mixed techno, jazz and progressive-rock on the mini-album **Holy Fuck** (2005) and then penned percussive and surrealistic rave-ups on **LP** (2007). Few bands had ever used propulsion as their raison d'être like Holy Fuck did.

Montreal's [Arcade Fire](#) (2), fronted by vocalist and guitarist Win Butler and featuring keyboardists Regine Chassagne and Richard Parry, crafted the magniloquent pop ballads of **Funeral** (2004), one of the most creative achievements of the decade, and of **Neon Bible** (2007). Overflowing with references to the classics, their songs elegantly blended elements of folk, blues, glam-rock, new wave and classical music.

The [Islands](#), also from Montreal, absorbed the influence of Arcade Fire on their **Return to the Sea** (2006), but inhabited their own sonic niche, one that descended from slo-core and psychedelic pop, and that embraced Caribbean, hip-hop and country music.

Post-Europe

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The nonlinear and cross-stylistic nature of post-rock had opened new horizons for bands worldwide. Britain, the land of the Boards Of Canada and Mogwai, was still leading the way.

[Electrelane](#) (1), an all-girl group from England formed around multi-instrumentalist Verity Susman, based the evil ditties of **Rock It To The Moon** (2001) on the contrast between the propulsive side of the band (intent on pounding hypnotically à la Velvet Underground or Neu) and the contemplative side (busy weaving disturbing soundscapes). **The Power Out** (2004) applied that instrumental schizophrenia to Susman's erudite lieder.

[Aereogramme](#) (1) offered an ambitious mixture of prog-rock, death-metal, industrial music and emo-core on **A Story In White** (2001) and especially **Sleep And Release** (2003).

[65Daysofstatic](#) coined a sound for guitar, piano, noise and drum-machine that seamlessly blended Brit-pop, hard-rock and drum'n'bass on **The Fall Of Math** (2004).

[Asbestoscape](#) (one-man band Luke Shaw) blended post-rock, trip-hop, drum'n'bass and droning metal on **Asbestoscape** (2008). The [Fuck Buttons](#), a duo that sounded like the English equivalent of Black Dice,

combined electronic noise and melody on **Street Horrrosing** (2008). The [Vessels](#) indulged in instrumental post-rock that roamed a vast range of influences (folk, jazz, metal, dance, hardcore) on **White Fields And Open Devices** (2008).

[Aki Peltonen](#), a Finnish accordionist, fused folk, classical, jazz and post-rock elements on **Radio Banana** (2005).

[Huntsville](#), formed by three Norwegian veterans of creative jazz music (guitarist Ivar Grydeland, bassist Tonny Klutten and percussionist Ingar Zach), played their instruments in unorthodox manners and then manipulated their sounds to obtain the post-modern reinvention of folk, jazz, raga and drone music of **For The Middle Class** (2006).

French composer Cecile "[Colleen](#)" (2) Schott built the instrumental lullabies of **Everyone Alive Wants Answers** (2003) via a meticulous collage of sampled records in a way reminiscent of Solex. The same fragile textures drenched in nostalgia permeated **The Golden Morning Breaks** (2005), composed, performed and recorded in the traditional way with acoustic instruments played live. In fact, the role of the instruments, and in particular of medieval and renaissance instruments increased on **Les Ondes Silencieuses** (2007), de facto an album of adult classical music.

In Germany the abstract and syncretic post-rock school of Bohren & der Club of Gore yielded [Gruenewald](#) (guitarist Christian Kolf and drummer Florian Toyka), who experimented an oneiric and spectral fusion of slocore, jazz-rock and cosmic music with the three suites of **Gruenewald** (2008).

The Icelandic tradition of Sigur Ros and Mum was continued by the [Apparat Organ Quartet](#), founded in 1999 by Iceland's composer Johann Johannsson and consisting of four organists and a drummer, that delivered the retro-futuristic pop of **Apparat Organ Quartet** (2006). [Johann Johannsson](#) (1) himself specialized in grandiose constructs for orchestra, choir and electronics such as the hour-long solemnly melodic piece **Virthulegu Forsetar** (2004), scored for eleven brass players, keyboards, percussion and electronics, and **IBM 1401 A User's Manual** (2006), an "opera" about a historical computer.

Finnish sextet [Magyar Posse](#) (armed with guitars, violins and keyboards) fused Godspeed You Black Emperor's elegant dynamics and Ennio Morricone's haunting ambience in the lush fluctuating melodic fantasies of the instrumental concept album **Kings Of Time** (2004).

Finnish trio [Paavoharju](#) penned the hazy, boreal and lunatic dance-pop wrapped in electronic effects of **Yha Hamaraa** (2005).

The stark, exuberant and propulsive organ-driven rhapsodies unleashed by Finnish quartet [Shogun Kunitoki](#) on the all-instrumental **Tasankokaiku** (2006) occupied a niche in between Neu's "motorik" rhythm and Steve Reich's "minimalist" pulsation.

Ukrainian ensemble [Moglass](#) improvised droning music for guitars and electronics and bathed its filaments in a desolate atmosphere on **Uhodyaschie Vdal' Telegrafnye Stolby Stanovyatsa Vsyo Men'she i**

Men'she (2003).

In the new century Italy was still a fertile territory for electronic and digital post-rock experiments, as proven by [Claudio Rocchetti's **The Work Called Kitano**](#) (2003), [Uochi Toki's **Vocapatch**](#) (2003), [Technophonic Chamber Orchestra's **Nemoretum Sonata**](#) (2004), [Stefano Pilia's **The Season**](#) (2004), [Unicode Duello's **Unicode Duello**](#) (2004), [In My Room's **Saturday Saturn**](#) (2005), [Allun's **Onitsed**](#) (2005), [Punck's **Nowhere Campfire Tapes**](#) (2005), [Sinistri's **Free Pulse**](#) (2005). Italian supergroup [3/4hadbeeneliminated](#) (comprising avantgarde composers Stefano Pilia, Claudio Rocchetti and Valerio Tricoli) wove together slow-core melodies, instrumental post-rock tapestries for guitars, drums and turntables, and drones constructed from field recordings and home-made instruments, on their second album **A Year Of The Aural Gauge Operation** (2005) and on **Theology** (2007).

Post-prog

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In a sense progressive-rock had become an obsolete concept in the 2000s. In the 1970s it was revolutionary to hear a rock band arrange a piece with non-rock instruments or incorporate elements of a different genre or shift tempo. By the 2000s just about every musician in the world could do so, and did so routinely. However, a few acts stood out for their original take on arrangement and/or dynamics.

Oregon's [Menomena](#) (2) reinvented the power-trio for the digital age. Brent Knopf, the putative guitarist, was not interested in bravura shows but in bionic synthesis: he composed songs with help from software that facilitated the creation of collages and loops. The artificial music of **I Am The Fun Blame Monster** (2003) seamlessly blended the aesthetics of baroque psychedelic-pop of the 1960s, melodic progressive-rock of the 1970s, jarring noise-rock of the 1980s, eccentric post-rock of the 1990s and agonizing emo-rock of the 2000s. The instrumental dance score **Under An Hour** (2005) focused on sophisticated placements of instruments to produce the equivalent of classical fantasias.

[Kayo Dot](#) (1), the new name chosen by Toby Driver for his Boston-based ensemble Maudlin Of The Well, achieved perhaps the most accomplished fusion yet of death-metal, post-rock, jazz and classical music by any band on **Choirs of the Eye** (2003). More obscure and abstract, **Dowsing Anemone with Copper Tongue** (2006), placed a stronger emphasis on vocal theatrics.

At The Drive In's guitarist Omar Rodriguez-Lopez and singer Cedric Bixler formed [Mars Volta](#) (10) with keyboardist Isaiah "Ikey" Owens. **De-loused In The Comatorium** (2003), featuring the Red Hot Chili Peppers' bassist "Flea", was characterized by collage-like structures and haphazard dynamics (that turned the codas into micro-concertos of sound effects). Each of the five cryptic, neurotic, elongated pieces of **Frances The Mute** (2005) was basically an album in itself, made of several sub-tracks that often collided with their neighbors instead of segueing smoothly from and into them. The typical Mars Volta composition was a cascade of

incoherent fragments that generated a brutally disjointed but viscerally introspective stream of consciousness.

The [Ahleuchatistas](#) in North Carolina tried to update King Crimson's progressive-rock for the post-industrial age on the all-instrumental twin albums **On the Culture Industry** (2004) and **The Same and the Other** (2004).

Wisconsin's [Far Corner](#) (1), led by keyboardist and composer Dan Maske, evoked Colosseum with the energetic and elegant fusion of jazz, rock and classical music of **Far Corner** (2004) and especially of the suite **Endangered** (2007).

The instrumental post-rock of Texas' [By The End Of Tonight](#) was fueled by Josh Smith's jazz-rock guitar technique on the EP **Fireworks on Ice** (2004) and on the mini-album **A Tribute To Tigers** (2005).

Pennsylvania's duo [Zombi](#) indulged in instrumental electronic Goblin-influenced horror prog-rock on **Cosmos** (2004) and **Surface To Air** (2006).

[Combat Astronomy](#) (1), a transatlantic collaboration between Oregon-based bassist James Huggett (also programming the drum-machine) and three British jazz musicians (saxophonist Martin Archer, bassoon player Mike Beck and flutist Charlie Collins), straddled the border between industrial, heavy-metal and free-jazz on **The Dematerialized Passenger** (2005). Caveman Shoestore's vocalist Elaine DiFalco helped turn **Dreams No Longer Hesitate** (2008) into an expressionistic version of trip-hop.

Oregon's [Grails](#) (2) approached the expressionistic intensity of the German band Faust on **Black Tar Prophecies Vol's 1, 2, & 3** (2006), **Burning Off Impurities** (2007) and the mini-album **Take Refuge In Clean Living** (2008), using keyboards and samples to disorienting effects, creating a genre-neutral genre, a prismatic cauldron of estranged musical stereotypes.

The English quartet [Zukanican](#) (saxophone, trumpet, bass and drums) wed free-jazz, ambient music and prog-rock in a carnival-like atmosphere on **Horse Republic** (2006) like a meeting of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Frank Zappa and Brian Eno.

German duo [Caacrinolas](#) (avantgarde musicians Bjoern Eichstaedt and Larry Luer of the free improvised trio Bretzel Killing Machine) were masters of instrumental horror ambience, from the black metal of the the single-track EP **A Thousand Cries Has The Night** (2001) to the 36-minute piece of **Valley of the Dead** (2003), that displayed the influences of Ennio Morricone and of King Crimson, and to the two lengthy suites of **Vargtimmen** (2007), this time influenced by doom-metal, German cosmic music and Hungarian composer Gyorgy Ligeti.

Japan's post-Ghost scene was one of the most fertile. Japanese instrumental quartet [Mono](#) (1) indulged in post-psychedelic chamber music with sentimental overtones that were unknown to the founding fathers of post-rock. The trilogy of **Under the Pipal Tree** (2001), that toyed with post-rock torment, the elegiac **One Step More And You Die** (2003), that included their artistic peak *Com*, and the pensive **Walking**

Cloud And Deep Red Sky (2004) provided three perspectives on introversion in music, each complementing the others. [Quest For Blood](#), featuring veteran jazz flutist Yukihiro Isso, invented the hyperkinetic flute-driven fusion of prog-rock, Japanese folk, free jazz and black metal of **Quest For Blood** (2008). [Birushanah](#) mixed Japanese scales and Western rock music to obtain the post-doom folk music of the two juggernauts of **Akai Yami** (2007) that sounded like a jam among Mogwai, Mike Oldfield and Khanate.

Post-noise

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During the 1990s the "noisecore" scenes of Japan and New Zealand (remote descendants of the British "industrial" music of the 1970s) had legitimized extreme cacophony as a musical genre on its own. Digital instruments helped the genre evolve and branch out in many different directions.

[Lightning Bolt](#) (1) from Rhode Island (the duo of drummer Brian Chippendale and vocalist/bassist Brian Gibson) were among the few USA bands that could compete with the Japanese noise-core masters, notably on **Ride The Skies** (2001), that matched dissonant fury with killer speed. Chippendale's side-project [Mindflayer](#) offered an explosive fusion of free-jazz, house music and Neu on **Take Your Skin Off** (2003).

[Death From Above 1979](#) (the Toronto-based duo of bassist and synth-man Jesse Keeler and vocalist and drummer Sebastien Grainger) delivered abrasive industrial-grade heavily-syncopated hardcore on the EP **Heads Up** (2002) and the album **You're a Woman I'm a Machine** (2004).

[Ahousesen](#) (1), a Japanese quartet of saxophone, guitar, bass and drums, explored the obvious border between acid-rock and free jazz with far from obvious mood shifts on **Ahousesen** (2007), notably the acrobatic explosions and implosions of the 28-minute *Ophelia*.

Japanese electronic musician [Guilty Connector](#) (Kohei Nakagawa) produced metallic ear-splitting noisescapes such as the incandescent and fibrillating fragments of **First Noise Attack** (2001), ranging from a five-second "song" to the 17-minute *Lethal Firetrap*, or the 15-minute pummeling and scraping *Brighter Than 10,000 Cacophonous Suns*, off **Cosmic Trigger/ 2AM Visit** (2004).

[Armpit](#) (the duo of Noone Clayton and Jon Sugar) were the heirs to New Zealand's tradition of atonal rock à la Dead C. **Butta Daze** (2003) and the double-disc **The Praying Mantis** (2003) were the musical equivalent of galaxies of unstable antimatter.

[Mammal](#), the project of Detroit's electronic musician Gary Beauvais, relished the extreme sensory experience of **Double Nature** (2003), a jungle of pummeling beats, horror shrieks and ear-piercing electronics.

[Burning Star Core](#) (1), the project of Ohio-based violinist Spencer Yeh, achieved a unique balance of droning ambience, musique concrete and

psychedelic freak-out, a standard first set by the two lengthy meditations of **A Brighter Summer Day** (2002) and then magnified by **Three Sisters Who Share An Eye** (2006), his most extreme solo work. **Operator Dead Post Abandoned** (2007) inaugurated a quartet with Yeh on violin, Trevor Tremaine on percussion, Mike Shiflet on computer and Robert Beatty on electronics, performing a loud and transcendental fusion of free-jazz, acid-rock and digital soundsculpting over spastic percussive frenzy.

The [Julie Mittens](#), a trio of Dutch improvisers, played heavily-distorted guitar-based acid-rock with free-jazzy drums, halfway between Fushitsusha and Supersilent, on **The Julie Mittens** (2008).

The audio compounds of [Blue Sabbath Black Cheer](#) (the Seattle duo of William Rage and Stan "Plethora" Reed), such as the 32-minute piece of **Drowning In Hate** (2006) and the two monoliths of **Boutranger Moor** (2007), emanated radioactive ear-piercing electronic noise with industrial rhythms and otherworldly vocals halfway between Merzbow and Wolf Eyes.

The [Starving Weirdos](#), a group (mainly Brian Pyle and Merrick McKinlay) from Northern California, assembled oneiric free-form noisescapes that ran the gamut from ear-piercing walls of noise to otherworldly drones, all the time maintaining a gloomy underlying leitmotif, as if they were soundtracks to the post-nuclear world, for example on the double-disc **Eastern Light** (2006).

[Hum Of The Druid](#), the project of Seattle's digital composer Eric Stonefelt, emulated the stream of consciousness of the industrial society with the obsessive reverb-drenched suites of **Societal** (2005) and the multi-faceted abrasive drones of **Raising The New Wing/ Braided Industry** (2008).

New Zealand's music promoter [Antony Milton](#) was determined to find a common denominator to industrial music, psychedelic music and droning music, as announced on his manifesto **Near/Far** (2001). Seen Through's **Extant** (2003) and Street's **School Of Religious Studies** (2004) simply revisited Throbbing Gristle's noise-core, but [Mrtyu](#)'s double-disc **Blood Tantra** (2006) applied that cacophonous aesthetic to an ever-shifting kaleidoscope of guitar noise. A more humane phase began with the ethereal ambient music of **With Throats As Fine As Needles** (2006), a supersession recorded outdoors with Campbell Kneale (Birchville Cat Motel), James Kirk (Sandoz Lab Technicians) and Richard Francis (Eso Steel), and with the even more delicate dronescapes of Nether Dawn's **Outer Dark** (2006). [Glory Frckn Sun](#)'s **Vision Scorched** (2007), a collaboration with multi-instrumentalist Ben Spiers and jazz percussionist Simon O'Rorke, was a symphony of smoldering cosmic distortions.

The intense, frenzied, polyrhythmic improvised music for guitar, drums and electronics of [Moha](#), the Norwegian duo of drummer Morten Olsen and guitarist Anders Hana, sounded like a cross of atonal jazz master Anthony Braxton and grindnoise master James Plotkin on **Raus Aus Stavanger** (2006).

[Poochlatz](#), the duo of Israeli electronic musician Maor Appelbaum and vocalist Rani Zager, vomited the hypercharged industrial noisescape of

Victims of Self-Preservation (2006). Adding drummer Matan Shmueli and changing their name to [Grave in the Sky](#), their **Cutlery Hits China - English For The Hearing Impaired** (2007) bridged Throbbing Gristle's industrial music, the psychedelic freak-out and doom-metal.

Also in Israel was active the eight-piece ensemble [Lieterschpich](#), whose **I Cum Blood In The Think Tank** (2007) was one of the most original takes on Throbbing Gristle's industrial music and Whitehouse's power electronics.

The British combo [Emit](#) terrorized the crowds of black metal with the claustrophobic electronic gothic industrial music of **A Sword Of Death For The Prince** (2005).

The Dutch combo [Stalaggh](#) added the delirious vocals of mental patients and a suicidal murderer to the harrowing industrial noise of **Nihilistik Terror** (2006) that could make even Diamanda Galas shiver.

The Scottish duo [Wraiths](#) ran the gamut from the demonic pounding industrial pow-wow of **Oriflamme** (2006) to the feedback-based black-noise ambient music of **Plaguebearer** (2007).

German duo [Feine Trinkers Bei Pinkels Daheim](#) (Jurgen Eberhard and Oswin Czerwinski) rattled the post-industrial scene with the droning and wavering collages of found sounds and white noise documented on **Apfelmost Und Essig** (1999) and by the 64-minute **Hungerhaken's Speckrolle** (2002). By adding Swedish guitarist Chris Sigdell the duo became [NID](#) and released **Plate Tectonics** (2007) that continued their hypno-cacophonous mission.

Post-ambient

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The definition of "ambient" music changed as quickly as the definition of "rock" music. Generally speaking, it stood for quiet instrumental music with minimal dynamic development. But that was more appropriate of the destination than of the journey.

Connecticut's [Landing](#) abandoned the lengthy, dreamy, unstructured instrumentals of their second album **Oceanless** (2001) for the lush, almost symphonic sound of **Seasons** (2002), that absorbed acid-rock of the 1960s, Cocteau Twins' dream-pop, Windy & Carl's ambient madrigals and Bedhead's slo-core. That form peaked with the deeper psychological study of the EP **Fade In Fade Out** (2002), at the same time approaching the delicious trance of Harold Budd. Continuing the process of disintegration, **Passages Through** (2003) built guitarscapes that were even more ethereal and hypnotic.

The manifestoes of [Eluvium](#) (1), the project of Oregon's composer Matthew Cooper, were *Zerthis Was a Shivering Human Image*, a simple massive tsunami of guitar distortion, off **Lambent Materials** (2003), and *Taken*, a gently wavering geometric fantasia (reminiscent of Johann Pachelbel's *Variations*), off **Talk Amongst The Trees** (2005). Cooper did

with the guitar what used to be done with electronic keyboards. **Copia** (2007) stood as the crowning achievement of his progression towards counterpoint, with chamber instruments replacing the shoegazing guitars.

Another project that imitated electronic cosmic music of the previous decades was [Dreamland](#), based in Texas, whose **Underwater** (2001) evoked the tense atmospheres of Klaus Schulze via distorted guitars and electronic keyboards.

Chicago-based laptop folk musician [Greg Davis](#) (1) composed fragile structures that borrowed elements from both dance, concrete and folk music on **Arbor** (2002) and **Curling Pond Woods** (2003).

Boston's electronic composer [Brendan Murray](#) made blissed-out ambient music of shifting drones via a pointillistic and layered approach. His major works, the 41-minute piece of **Everybody Wants The Tide** (2006) and the 49-minute piece of **Commonwealth** (2008), sounded like philosophical meditations.

An exercise in nonlinear post-psychedelic music, the third album **Far Flung Hum** (2008) by [Christmas Decorations](#) (the duo of Rorschach's guitarist Nick Forte and Steve Silverstein) was a slowly revolving kaleidoscope of electroacoustic fragments, hinting that what mattered was not the composition but the way the sources were "remixed".

The British school founded in the 1990s by Colin Potter and Andrew Chalk continued to thrive and incubate talents, notably [Ian Holloway](#) who employed musique-concrete techniques to create the ambient drones of the 39-minute piece of **A Lonely Place** (2007) and the 37-minute piece of **Ashram Psych Tip** (2007).

British composer [Max Richter](#) transposed the avantgarde chamber and electronic music that he had been practicing for decades into the realm of popular music with **Memoryhouse** (2003). Electronic and digital effects were subdued on **Blue Notebooks** (2004), that was mainly a new interpretation of Erik Satie's "elevator music" for chamber instruments.

[Tenhornedbeast](#) (British soundsculptor Christopher Walton) mastered the style of apocalyptic ambient drones on **The Sacred Truth** (2007).

The ambient aural collages of [Xela](#) (English digital musician John Twells) became progressively darker and gloomier, with **The Dead Sea** (2006) virtually a tribute to Italian horror soundtracks of the 1970s, and the four-movement requiem **In Bocca Al Lupo** (2008) representing an emotional nadir.

[Hauschka](#) (German pianist Volker Bertelmann) turned the tables on the avantgarde when he applied John Cage's then-provocative techniques and the repetitive strategies of the minimalists to simple and pastoral folk-inspired melodies on **The Prepared Piano** (2005).

[Dorine Muraille](#) (1), i.e. French composer Julien Locquet, sculpted the post-ambient melodies of **Mani** (2002) by means of computer-processed acoustic instruments.

[Deaf Center](#), the Norwegian duo of producers Erik Skodvin and Otto Totland, crafted the psycho-ambient music of **Pale Ravine** (2005) by setting in motion collages of found sounds and classical instruments.

New Zealand's soundsculptress [Gydja](#) (Abby Helasdottir) specialized in dark ambient electronic works such as the the shamanic concept **Liber Babalon** (2001) and the 79-minute piece of **Cold Seed** (2001).

New Zealand's [Seht](#) (Steven Clover) ran the gamut from the 60-minute surreal noisecape of **Goodbye America & Have A Nice Day** (2002) to the 40-minute aural collage of **Syddo Paragone** (2005) to the 34-minute minimal glitch piece of **Guyrz Nz You Are Thus Alienated** (2006) to the 36-minute majestic drone music of *One Moment*, off **Dead Bees** (2008).

Post-glitch

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There was a tendency in digital soundsculpting towards extremes, but not so much towards the extremely noisy as to the extremely dynamic. Building on the legacy of electronic music, digital music did not conform with the laws of classical Western harmony, but was nonetheless meticulously crafted through a process of sound sculpting that was no less complex and laborious than scoring parts for an orchestra.

[Apparat](#) (Berlin's electronic musician Sascha Ring) transitioned from the "intelligent" techno music of **Multifunktionsebene** (2001) to the gentle and shy glitch music of **Duplex** (2003).

Washington-based multi-instrumentalist [Chuck Bettis](#), a member of the avantgarde collective All Scars, was influenced by videogame soundtracks for the laptop-based compositions on **Community of Commotion** (2005).

[White Flight](#) (1), the new and wildly experimental project of Anniversary's guitarist Justin Roelofs, yielded the cacophonous collage of **White Flight** (2006), basically a "freak-out" in the vein of Red Crayola augmented with breakbeats, digital noise, vocal effects and non-rock instruments.

[Jasper TX](#), the project of Swedish multi-instrumentalist Dag Rosenqvist, crafted shimmering instrumental textural slo-core drenched in lo-fi hissing, crackling, rattling ambience, starting with **I'll Be Long Gone Before My Light Reaches You** (2005), and peaking with the 21-minute *Some Things Broken Some Things Lost*, off **A Darkness** (2007), and the dark, cryptic and hypnotic six-movement symphony **Black Sheep** (2008).

[Machinefabriek](#) (1), the project of Dutch electronic musician Rutger Zuydervelt, sculpted hypnotic and grandiloquent soundscapes, despite the fuzzy background noise, notably the 18-minute *Lawine*, off **Marijn** (2006), the 19-minute *Licht*, off **Bijeen** (2007), the 22-minute *Still*, off **Slaapzucht** (2007), the 21-minute *Flotter*, off **Zwart** (2007), the 17-minute *Zink*, off **Ranonkel** (2008), and the 25-minute *Singel*, off **Dauw** (2008).

Oakland's [Yellow Swans](#), the project of vocalist Pete Swanson and

guitarist Gabriel Mindel-Saloman (both also on electronic/digital instruments), created the tapestries for electronics and drum-machines of **Bring The Neon War Home** (2004) and **Psychic Secession** (2005) by fusing free-jazz, musique concrete and drum'n'bass, and the latter even adding ghostly vocals by Inca Ore and Christina Carter of Charalambides.

Inspired by Zen and Sufi philosophy, and therefore more interested in stillness than in movement, British soundsculptor [Keith Berry](#) espoused Bernhard Gunter's and Steve Roden's aesthetic of silence for **The Ear That Was Sold To A Fish** (2005) and the double-disc **A Strange Feather** (2007).

[Dialing In](#), the project of Seattle-based digital composer Reita Piecuch, painstakingly constructed the dense and glitchy ambient music of **Cows In Lye** (2006) from found sounds, found music and assorted keyboards.

Rhode Island-based [Geoff Mullen](#) composed droning and softly cacophonous music for guitar, banjo and electronics on **Thrtysxtrllnmnfstns** (2006). **The Air in Pieces** (2006) indulged in dense subsonic distortions whose original sources were impossible to detect. The double-LP **Armory Radio** (2007) increased the sense of confusion with constantly shifting textures and continuously evolving patterns. His music sounded like John Fahey's progressive folk being remixed by a glitch musician.

[Tarab](#) (Australian sound artist Eamon Sprod), a specialist in manipulating field recordings, transposed landscapes into dark and subliminal sound art on **Surfacedrift** (2004) and **Wind Keeps Even Dust Away** (2007).

Post-instrumental

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Digital deconstruction of acoustic instruments played a role too.

[Tim Hecker](#), an electronic musician from Montreal (Canada), was a more orthodox purveyor of ambient glitch-electronica. **Haunt Me Haunt Me Do It Again** (2001), inspired by Christian Fennesz's digital manipulation of guitar sounds, and especially **Presents Radio Amor** (2003) manipulated samples and field recordings to generate organic, romantic creatures.

Canadian electro-acoustic composer [Mitchell Akiyama](#) created the glitchy ambient music of the mini-album **If Night is a Weed and Day Grows Less** (2004) and of **Small Explosions That Are Yours To Keep** (2005) by manipulating live acoustic instruments.

[Tuk](#), the project of Belgian digital musician Guillaume Graux, chopped and sliced instrumental parts, stitched them together, dilated them and contracted them, alternating slow-motion and rapid-fire tempos; and finally bathed the stuttering, malfunctioning clockworks of **Proud Princess Of A Brand New City** (2004) and **Shallow Water Blackout** (2007) in dilapidated ambience.

Swedish trio [Tape](#) (1) sculpted the seductive, minimal, slow-motion and drum-less soundscapes of their **Opera** (2002) by painstakingly merging synthesizer, field recordings and acoustic instruments (guitar, harmonium, melodica, harmonica, zither, piano, flute, accordion, trumpet and percussion) on a computer. The acoustic guitar was the dominant voice, as if John Fahey had been catapulted into an electroacoustic chamber concerto. The trio reached their formal zenith with **Rideau** (2005), whose pieces explored the ambient side of post-rock's nonlinear, abstract, unstructured equation; rural and pastoral instead of urban and neurotic (as most post-rock was).

Italian composer [Giuseppe Ielasi](#) morphed from the soundsculptor of **Plans** (2003), a 31-minute electroacoustic collage of drones, glitches, percussion and field recordings, to the puppeteer of **Gesine** (2005), an essay on minimal textures for electronics and manipulated guitar sounds that coined an original genre of concerto for acoustic instruments and languid musique concrete.

Maryland's [Half Makeshift](#) (sound designer Nathan Michael) was devoted to glitchy electronic post-rock based on piano and guitar manipulations. His project evolved from the massive 35-minute post-doom expressionist nightmare of the EP **Aphotic Leech** (2007) via the more relaxed **L'Anse Amort** (2007), set in an unstable but more humane noisecape, to the brooding four-movement drone-intense requiem for humankind **Omen** (2008).

The [Fun Years](#), a New York-based duo of baritone guitar (Ben Recht) and turntable (Isaac Sparks), employed the "noises" of the turntable to "arrange" the music of the guitar and viceversa, exploring the complementary roles of the two instruments when locked together in a polyphony of samples, loops and drones, thereby unfurling the discreet schizophrenic meditations of **Life-Sized Psychoses** (2007) and **Baby It's Cold Inside** (2008).

Australian-born Iceland-based laptop composer [Ben Frost](#) choreographed the fanciful scenes for treated guitar of **Steel Wound** (2003) and then coupled industrial horror with glitchy post-rock dynamics, and psychedelic drones with minimal techno, for **Theory Of Machines** (2008).

Post-drones

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Droning minimalism was evolving too, as composers were trying ever more creative ways to explore the tones and overtones and microtones of stationary waves.

[Encomiast](#), the brainchild of Colorado's Ross Hagen, produced the dense, brooding, slowly-revolving dronescapes of **Winter's End** (2001) and **Espera** (2003) by digitally manipulating and blending acoustic instruments, voices, programmed rhythms and field recordings.

[SourceCodex](#), the brainchild of North Carolina-based guitarist and digital composer John Patterson, created entirely on a computer the music for

Codex Hypnos (2004), an ambient cosmic industrial droning symphony.

[Hoor-Paar-Kraat](#), a trio of electronic/digital musicians led by the prolific California-based soundsculptor Anthony Mangicapra, secreted ambient music from collages of field recordings. The dark sheet of drones was disturbed by small dissonant events that sometimes rose to become tidal waves. The effect was particularly dramatic on **Asha Dasha** (2005) and the mini-album **The Nagaraja Movements** (2006).

Toronto's prolific [Aidan Baker](#), who also played doom-metal under the moniker Nadja, practiced hushed droning ambient music on works such as the double-CD **Oneiromancer** (2006) and **Pendulum** (2006).

Ohio-based [Taiga Remains](#) (Alex Cobb) created raga-like noise music by manipulating and overdubbing the sound of an acoustic guitar on the three EPs titled **Ribbons Of Dust** (2006).

[Light Of Shipwreck](#) (the project of Delaware-based sound artist Ben Fleury-Steiner) borrowed the ebbing-and-flowing aesthetic of post-rock and applied it to a combination of ambient guitar noise and propulsive drum-machines, an odd mixture of drone and dance music, to create the three suites of **From The Idle Cylinders** (2007), the 21-minute piece of the EP **Through The Bilge Lies A Calm And Bloodless Sea** (2008), and the 49-minute piece of **In The Empty Wreckage Of A Dream** (2008).

An ever-mutating form of digital music was practiced by Germany's [Black To Comm](#) (1), the project of laptop musician Marc Richter, who first blended vinyl records, field recordings, voice and found percussion for **Ruckwärts Backwards** (2006), that ran the gamut from Phill Niblock's infinite drones to Gordon Mumma's massive walls of noise, with sprinkles of both chamber music and musique concrete; then manipulated the sounds of traditional instruments to create the variegated drones of **Wir Konnen Leider Nicht Etwas Mehr Zu Tun** (2007); and finally invoked a circus-like atmosphere for the collage of voices, analog keyboards and acoustic instruments of **Fractal Hair Geometry** (2008).

French duo [Maninkari](#) played droning gothic music for chamber instruments and electronics on the double-disc **Le Diable Avec Ses Chevaux** (2007) like a classical orchestra performing Sunn O)))'s music.

Swedish duo [Skull Defekts](#) assembled abstract, chaotic and cinematic electronic soundscapes such as the 55-minute piece of **Open The Gates Of Mimer** (2005), *Magnetic Skulls*, off **Magnetic Skulls & Intense Sound Stimulations** (2006), and the 43-minute piece of **The Sound Of Defekt Skulls And Intense Cranium Contact** (2007).

Australian inventor [Tim Catlin](#) pursued a dadaistic version of LaMonte Young's droning minimalism via works such as **Slow Twitch** (2003) for self-built guitar automata, and **Radio Ghosts** (2007) for prepared tabletop guitar (à la Keith Rowe).

New Zealand's guitarist [Peter Wright](#) used field recordings and acoustic instruments to manufacture the oneiric dronescapes of **Catch A Spear As It Flies** (2002), with the 25-minute *The Bride Stripped Bare, Pariahs Sing Om* (2003), **Desolation Beauty Violence** (2004), **Yellow Horizon** (2005),

the double-disc **At Last New Dawn** (2007), with the 34-minute *At Last New Dawn*, **Pretty Mushroom Clouds** (2008), with the 24-minute *The Devil Wears Sunroof*.

Post-cosmic

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Germany had a prolific school of electronic/digital soundsculptors.

[Stephan Mathieu](#) used sample-based composition to create the atmospheric glitch-pop of **Frequency Lib** (2001), but the romantic chamber ambience of **The Sad Mac** (2005) led to the evocative **Radioland** (2008), created by manipulating short-wave radio signals. [Christian Kleine](#) animated delicate digital soundscapes gently ruffled by live instrumentation on **Real Ghosts** (2004). [Jan Jelinek](#) (2) blended jazz/funk bass lines (lifted from old records), repetitive minimalism, glitch music, trip-hop and house music on the groundbreaking **Loop Finding Jazz Records** (2001). He then used German records of cosmic music as the sources for **Kosmischer Pitch** (2005), an even more elegant application of the principle of slow variation within repetition. The beat all but disappeared on **Tierbeobachtungen** (2006), replaced by the rhythms of the loops that permeate the compositions.

As usual, Cologne was at the vanguard. For example, POL, formed by Carsten Schulz ([C-Schulz](#)), mixed field recordings, world-music and techno beats on **Transomuba** (1994). One of its members, [Pluramon](#) (Marcus Schmickler), meticulously rebuilt in studio the sound of an instrumental prog-rock band by layering live and computer-generated sounds on **Pickup Canyon** (1996).

[Cloudland Canyon](#), the duo of Tennessee-based guitarist Kip Uhlhorn and German musician Simon Wojan, wed German "cosmic" music of the 1970s (the "motorik" rhythm of Neu and the analog keyboards of Tangerine Dream) with digital processing (a dense flow of manipulated vocals and instruments) to mold the two lengthy suites of **Silver Tongued Sisyphus** (2007).

Post-world

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In a world that was rapidly becoming "globalized" the idea of "ethnic" music did not make much sense anymore, unless it referred to the "classical" or "folk" past of each region. Hence most of the contamination was now working in the opposite direction: the developing world incorporating the sounds and rhythms of Western music. For USA musicians, instead, the "ethnic" element was mostly just one of the many possible ingredients of an increasingly complex recipe, and it had lost much of its "novelty" appeal.

Quix*o*tic's stately vocalist Mira Billotte went on to play ethnic-folk-jazz-rock fusion with [White Magic](#) on their **Dat Rosa Mel Apibus** (2006).

The Arizona-based instrumental duo [Smoke & Mirrors](#) (1) mixed acid-rock, world-music, orchestral music and electronica on the Hindu concept album **Deities** (2004).

Turkish soundsculptor [Erdem Helvacioğlu](#) (1) was emblematic of how the "ethnic" music scenes themselves were adapting to a global civilization: the ethereal, haunting and subliminal sound sculptures of **Altered Realities** (2006) belonged to a genre of post-folk music straddling the border between ambient, jazz, folk and concrete music.

Shanghai in China was rapidly emerging as a new powerhouse of avantgarde laptop-based music. [Intelligent Shanghai Mono University](#) (1), a quartet of four Shanghai-based digital musicians, explored abstract musique concrete, torrential white noise, disjointed electroacoustic chamber music, collages of manipulated samples, post-industrial cacophony and glitchy pseudo-dance music on **7.9** (2003). [718](#) (Sun Lei) assembled the subliminal collages of noise, samples and beats of **Nowise Assault** (2005). [Li Jianhong](#) (1) recorded juggernauts of solo guitar improvisations such as the 60-minute piece of **Talking Freely Before The Beginning** (2003) and the 51-minute piece of **San Sheng Shi** (2008).

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