

The History of Rock Music: The 2000s

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Clubbers

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

Electroclash

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The "electroclash" movement was basically a revival of the dance-punk style of the new wave. It was New York dj Lawrence "Larry Tee" who coined the term, and the first Electroclash Festival was held in that city in 2001. However, the movement had its origins on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. One could argue that electroclash was born with *Space Invaders Are Smoking Grass* (1997), released by Belgian dj Ferenc van der Sluijs under the moniker I-f. At about the same time German house dj Helmut-Josef "DJ Hell" Geier was promoting a scene in Berlin that was basically electroclash.

Another forerunner was French dj Caroline "[Miss Kittin](#)" Herve', who had recorded the EP **Champagne** (1998), a collaboration with Michael "The Hacker" Amato that included the pioneering hit *1982*. The duo joined the fad that they had pioneered with **First Album** (2001).

Britain was first exposed to electroclash when Liverpool's [Ladytron](#) released *He Took Her To A Movie* (1999), that was basically a cover of Kraftwerk's *The Model*. Next came Liverpool's [Robots In Disguise](#) with the EP **Mix Up Words and Sounds** (2000).

Canadian folksinger Merrill Nisker converted to punk-rock, joined the Shit with fellow provocateur Gonzales, adopted the aesthetic of the riot-grrrrls, enhanced it with a quasi-porn show, moved from Canada to Berlin armed with a drum-machine and a sampler, invented the persona of rapper [Peaches](#), and recorded an album of sex-centric electronic dance music, **The Teaches Of Peaches** (2001), that basically set Blondie to the rhythm of Salt'n'Pepa and Liz Phair to the rhythm of digital hardcore.

German-USA-Australian trio [Chicks On Speed](#), a product of Munich's

school of art and also a fashion-design unit, offered an amusing take on alternative hip retro dance on **99 Cents** (2003).

German dj [Ellen "Allien"](#) Fraatz turned dance-music upside down on **Berlinette** (2003) with her recipe of psychotic vocals, glitchy electronica and crunchy beats.

Other notable electroclash albums of Britain were: the noisy and metal-tinged **For Screening Purposes Only** (2005) by the [Test Icicles](#), featuring two USA-born members (one of which, guitarist Dev Hynes, black); [Hot Chip's The Warning](#) (2006); **Attack Decay Sustain Release** (2007) by [Simian Mobile Disco](#) (James Ford and James Shaw); and **You Have No Idea What You're Getting Yourself Into** (2008) by [Does It Offend You, Yeah?](#).

One of the most infectious albums of the dance-punk revival came from Montreal's [We Are Wolves](#): **Non-Stop Je Te Plie en Deux** (2005).

Electroclash in the USA

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There were many "first" electroclash singles in the USA, notably Adult's *Hand to Phone* (2001). The definition of the genre was vague enough that any energetic disco-influenced song could be classified as "electroclash".

Chicago's duo [Fischerspooner](#) spearheaded the movement with their throbbing Giorgio Moroder-esque single *Emerge* (2000) and the album **#1** (2002), containing several more of those imitations.

Electronic dance-punk-pop in the vein of the new wave was practiced in New York by [Semiautomatic](#), for example on **The Trebuchet** (2001), replete with vintage keyboards and home-made instruments, and in Los Angeles by [Dance Disaster Movement](#), a Los Angeles duo, on **We Are From Nowhere** (2003).

Oregon's [Glass Candy](#) harked back to Blondie's disco-punk on the mini-album **Love Love Love** (2003).

Las Vegas' [Killers](#), fronted by vocalist and keyboardist Brandon Flowers, harked back to synth-pop of the 1980s with the singles *Mr. Brightside* (2003) and *Somebody Told Me* (2004).

New York's duo [Ratatat](#) (multi-instrumentalist Evan Mast and guitarist Mike Stroud) rediscovered "big beat" (the fusion of electronic beats and rock guitars propounded by the Chemical Brothers and Daft Punk) on **Ratatat** (2004), the main difference being that their catchy instrumental electronic rock was filtered through the personality of the laptop.

[LCD Soundsystem](#) (2), the project of James Murphy (half of New York's production duo DFA or Death From Above with Tim Goldsworthy), was initially a futile exercise in rehashing beats, melodies and arrangements of the past like most of the electroclash output, as documented on the double-CD **LCD Soundsystem** (2005). However, its follow-up **Sound of Silver** (2007) asserted the primacy of the producer over the performers, and

James Murphy proved to be one of the few artists since Brian Eno who could make the masses both dance and rock. And the 45-minute incidental suite *45:33* offered an encyclopedic survey of electronic dance music.

At the peak of the fad, [Clap Your Hands Say Yeah](#) became a sensation with **Clap Your Hands Say Yeah** (2005).

Ironically, it was the [Scissor Sisters](#), emerging from the alternative queer scene of New York, who became the best-selling act of the whole movement with **Scissor Sisters** (2004) and **Ta-Dah** (2006). But they were pushing the electroclash movement towards a more superficial revival of glam-rock and disco-music.

Late comers included New York's duo [MGMT](#) (Andrew VanWyngarden and Ben Goldwasser), who took inspiration from disco-music and synth-pop for **Oracular Spectacular** (2008).

Capitalizing on an old idea by Coldcut, Pennsylvania-based laptop musician Gregg Gillis, disguised under the moniker [Girl Talk](#), offered hyperkinetic and hyperdemented "plunderphonics" for the dancefloor (in other words, infectious dance music created from snippets of old pop hits) on a series of albums starting with **Secret Diary** (2002) and peaking with **Night Ripper** (2006).

Disco revival

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Acts such as LCD Soundsystem and the Scissor Sisters were part of a general revival of the Euro-disco format of the 1970s.

New York-based [Osunlade](#) had offered an original revision of disco-music with the Afro-spiritual hybrid of deep house, soul, jazz and world-music debuted on **Paradigm** (2001).

Norwegian producer Hans-Peter [Lindstrom](#) (1) rediscovered Giorgio Moroder's cosmic disco-music starting with the sleek hypnosis of *I Feel Space* (2005) and peaking with the 29-minute psychonaut *Where You Go To I Go Too*, off **Where You Go I Go Too** (2008).

French dj Pascal "[Vitalic](#)" Arbez concocted an original take on disco-music with **OK Cowboy** (2005).

French duo [Justice](#) (Xavier de Rosnay and Gaspard Auge), revealed by the singles *Never Be Alone* (2004) and *Waters of Nazareth* (2005), specialized in catchy, pounding and lushly-arranged retro-sounding house music for analog keyboards, leaning towards Daft Punk's "big beat" on **Cross** (2007).

Australia's [Cut Copy](#) (Dan Whitford) set the orchestral pop of **In Ghost Colours** (2008) to a retro-disco beat and then added the rock guitar in disorienting manners.

[Hercules And Love Affair](#) injected a childish optimism (in a genre that had been largely hijacked by the DFA-influenced neo-existentialist

crowd) with the effervescent dance jams of **Hercules And Love Affair** (2008).

The Return of Funk-punk

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The Talking Heads and underground acts like the Contortions and ESG, that established a credible format of funk-punk fusion in the early 1980s, exerted the biggest influence on the new generation.

[Rapture](#) (1), reborn in New York under the supervision of production duo DFA, turned dance-music into a self-flagellation process with the mini-album **Out Of The Races And Onto The Tracks** (2001) and the album **Echoes** (2003). The most successful songs achieved a disturbing sense of alienation and frustration by staging rituals that, as in the most orthodox new-wave aesthetics, were supposed to be hedonistic but turned out to be the opposite.

[Out Hud](#) (1), formed in Sacramento (California) by keyboardist Justin Vandervolgen, guitarist Tyler Pope and bassist Nic Offer, ranked among the earliest and most creative members of the funk-punk movement. The conceptual centerpiece of the all-instrumental monster revisionist **Street Dad** (2002) was the twelve-minute *The L Train is a Swell Train and I Don't Want to Hear You Indies Complain*, a syncopated and tribal techno ballet that mixed oneiric guitar tones, industrial-grade panzer rhythms and a symphony of quirky background noises.

Their offshoot [!!!](#) (1), featuring the same core trio of Vandervolgen, Pope and Offer (and pronounced "chik chik chik"), concocted even more savage hybrids, such as the nine-minute *There's No Fucking Rules Dude*, off [!!!](#) (2002), contaminated with psychedelic, hip-hop, dissonant and ska elements, and the relentlessly mutating funk machine of *Me And Giuliani Down By the School Yard* (2003), off the eponymous EP. Their mission was to set up and trigger deranged groove-driven workouts that sounded like parodies but actually constituted the new avantgarde. A more austere and at times even gloomy tone permeated the hypnotic and orgiastic dance music of **Louden Up Now** (2004). While Out Hud delivered the thumping feverish eleven-minute techno locomotive *Dear Mr Bush There are Over 100 Words for Shit and Only 1 for Music* on **Let Us Never Speak Of It Again** (2005), [!!!](#) indulged in breakneck multi-layered collage-like dance numbers on **Myth Takes** (2007). The overall feeling of these albums was closer to a psychoanalysis of the post-industrial digital world than to a nostalgic reminiscence of the pre-digital era.

[Erase Errata](#) (1), four riot-grrrrls from San Francisco, harked back to the most savage purveyors of funk-punk (such as the Pop Group) for **Other Animals** (2001), showcasing hysterical vocals, dissonant guitar, stormy keyboards and torrential rhythms. **Nightlife** (2006) even showed that the stylistic spectrum was far from narrow.

The [Numbers](#), a trio from San Francisco formed by vocalist and drummer Indra Dunis, guitarist Dave Broekema and keyboardist Eric Landmark, played neurotic robotic dance-punk, especially on **In My Mind All The Time** (2004).

Washington's [Black Eyes](#) (1) emulated the percussive nightmares of the Girls Vs Boys on **Black Eyes** (2003) thanks to two drummers and two bassists, but the chaotic structures, the funk undercurrents and the jazz shadowing harked back to Rip Rig & Panic.

English duo [Mu](#) (USA-born deep-house producer Maurice Foulton and Japanese-born vocalist Mutsumi Kanamori) adopted the deviant jazzy funk-punk of the Rip Rig & Panic tradition on **Afro Finger and Gel** (2003).

The Return of minimal techno

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The Cologne school of ambient techno (Gas, Markus Guentner, etc) found a natural heir in [Yagya](#), the project of Icelandic producer Aalsteinn Gumundsson, on **The Rhythm of Snow** (2002).

[Polmo Polpo](#) (Toronto-based producer Sandro Perri) fused minimal techno, droning textures and cello melodies on **The Science Of Breath** (2002).

Scottish dj [Alex Smoke](#) (Alex Menzies) practiced a nocturnal fusion of minimal techno and glitch music on **Incommunicando** (2005).

The Coldest Season (2007) by [Echospace](#), the duo of Chicago-area producers Rod Modell and Steve "Soultek" Hitchell, performed on old-fashioned analog devices, sounded like a tribute to German minimal techno of the late 1990s.

Another milestone for minimal techno was **From Here We Go Sublime** (2007) by [Field](#), the project of Swedish producer Axel Willner. Its blissful pieces owed more to collage, ambient and psychedelic styles than to the original minimal techno.

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