

# The History of Rock Music: The 2000s

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## Trippers

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

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### *Droning psychedelia*

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Rock music owed a lot to psychedelia. The search for a psychedelic sound had been the first and foremost motivation to cultivate progressive structures and creative arrangements. Without that motivation, rock music might have been stuck in Chuck Berry's riffs forever. Psychedelia was in a sense the "big bang" of rock music, from which the expansion began. However, after four decades it was difficult to see what that original impulse still had to offer that had not been heard already a thousand times.

The sound of droning guitars was not particularly exciting anymore, shoegazing ecstasy was becoming the equivalent of the new-age music of the 1980s, and psychedelic folksingers were beginning to sound senile.

Boston's [Paradise Camp 23](#), the brainchild of multi-instrumentalist Erik Amlee, indulged in the 47-minute shapeless space-noise jam that takes up most of **Bar-BQ Dungeon** (2001) and then unleashed the 46-minute drone-based jam of **Solitaire** (2002), bathed in cosmic electronic noise.

Seattle's duo [Growing](#) turned psychedelic trance into an austere and pure science with its subliminal ambient dronescapes for guitars and electronics: *Epochal Reminiscence*, off **The Soul Of The Rainbow And The Harmony Of Light** (2004), that diluted a folkish melody into a cycle of ear-piercing tones; the pulsating galactic tsunami *Wide Open*, off **His Return** (2005); the dense hyper-dilated slowly-shifting *Blue Angels*, off **Color Wheel** (2006).

Minnesota-based duo [Glass Organ](#) (Justin Meyers and Tom Helgerson) dealt with acid/abrasive droning music on **Our** (2007), containing three pieces each lasting eleven minutes and eleven seconds, at the intersection among hyper-doom metal, psychedelic raga, Japanese noisecore and

shoegazing music.

[Acre](#), the project of Seattle-based digital musician Aaron Davis, used mixers, samplers and assorted sound effects to fashion the undulating and multi-layered cosmic drones of **Candyflipping** (2007) and **Monolith** (2008).

The abstract instrumentals of [Expo'70](#) (1), the brainchild of Missouri-based guitarist Justin Wright, bridged the keyboard-based cosmic music of the 1970s and the guitar-based droning music of the 1990s on works such as **Mystical Amplification** (2007). **Animism** (2007) formalized Wright's ambient abstract progressive-rock, and **Black Ohms** (2008) de facto coined a new genre of austere guitar-based soundsculpting.

Expo '70 were emblematic of the trend towards the "ambient space jam", also represented by San Francisco-based one-man band [Horseflesh](#) (Dereck Donohue) with **Synthesia I** (Chambara, 2008), and by New York-based duo [Destructo Swarmbots](#) with the colossal *Banta*, off **Clear Light** (2007).

[Pocahaunted](#), the Los Angeles-based duo of Amanda Brown and Bethany Sharayah, delved into the psychotic tribal droning freak-out of **Island Diamonds** (2008).

New York had a vast community of droning free-folk music. [Lichens](#) was a project by 90 Day Men's Afro-American bassist Robert Lowe devoted to droning improvisations for electronically-processed voice and guitar, bordering on Tibetan mantras and Indian ragas on **The Psychic Nature Of Being** (2005). [Hototogisu](#) was a collaboration between the Double Leopards' Marcia Bassett and Skullflower's Matthew Bower that released dozens of albums of free-form noise such as **Floating Japanese Oof! Gardens Of The 21st Century** (2004) and **Ghosts From The Sun** (2005). Bassett was also active in [GHQ](#) with Pete Nolan (from the Magik Markers): their **Cosmology Of Eye** (2006) and **Heavy Elements** (2006) were devoted to ethereal laid-back free-form spaced-out droning raga-folk music.

San Diego's duo [High Mountain Tempel](#) (Maquiladora's guitarist Eric Nielsen and noise-maker Keith Boyd) employed field recordings that exhibit an "African jungle" quality as well as ghostly human and animal voices buried deep into the mix to craft animate dronescapes that nurtured tiny metabolic events on **Pacific Sky Burial** (2007) and **A Screaming Comes Across The Sky** (2007), each album sounding like the brooding soundtrack to collective spiritual catharsis.

Los Angeles' hyper-prolific duo [Robedoor](#) epitomized the dark-drone movement, that borrowed from both droning psychedelia and doom-metal and produced countless lo-fi recordings such as **Hidden Ascension** (2006).

By the mid-2000s droning music (whether psychedelic or doom/metal in nature) had become a genre in which the musicianship did not matter much. [Vulture Club](#) (Kansas-based guitarist Thomas Lee) took that fact to its extreme consequences by almost letting the guitars play (or, better, "drone") by themselves on **Pure Agitator** (2006), scored for a guitar and

amplifier. If the former album was merely a rotting corpse, **Live Young Die Fast And Leave An Exquisite Corpse** (2007) was actually alive, breathing and moving, the drones undergoing a metabolism of their own while the "music" played.

Britain's "black psychedelia" was born from a fusion of acid-rock and black metal. The dark distorted heavy hypnotic psychedelic jams of [Ice Bound Majesty's A Tomb To Erect](#) (2007) blurred the boundaries among progressive folk, black metal and ambient music. The guitar-less duo [Skultroll](#) sculpted **Skultroll** (2007) with hyper-distorted bass and frenzied drums.

Ireland's [Bonecloud](#) (a duo featuring Tim Hurley) unfurled dreamy acid droning tides of sound such as the 44-minute *Snow Burial*, off the double-disc **Bonecloud** (2006), and the 40-minute piece of **Drawing Spirits In Crystals** (2007). The prolific Hurley was also active as [Quetzolcoatl](#), delivering ethereal blissful ambient music for stringed instruments on works such as **Where Are We Going Sister** (2006).

[Natural Snow Buildings](#), the French duo of male guitarist Mehdi Ameziane and female cellist Solange Gularte, alternated between brainy chamber post-rock freak-folk interludes, droning psychedelic trips and abstract ambient music on the double-disc **The Dance of the Moon and the Sun** (2006).

New Zealand's [Bad Statistics](#) (1) combined noise, doom, drone and repetition (and psychedelic vocals) for the two lengthy jams of **Static** (2007).

### *Post-shoegaze*

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New York's [Asobi Seksu](#) paid an unabashed tribute to the walls of distortions of My Bloody Valentine on **Asobi Seksu** (2004), and were perhaps the best of the orthodox shoegazers.

However, others went well beyond those premises.

Georgia-based [Deerhunter](#) (1), fronted by vocalist Bradford Cox, split **Cryptograms** (2007) between surreal instrumentals and psychedelic lullabies.

Georgia's [Atlas Sound](#), the brainchild of Bradford Cox, took Deerhunter's pensive side to new heights on **Let The Blind Lead Those Who Can See But Cannot Feel** (2008).

New York's [A Place to Bury Strangers](#) sounded like a louder version of My Bloody Valentine's distorted bliss with Jesus And Mary Chain-style melodies and new-wavish keyboards on its debut **A Place to Bury Strangers** (2007).

San Francisco's [Wooden Shjips](#), influenced by both the Doors and Spacemen 3, filled **Wooden Shjips** (2007) with barbed garage-grade riffs

and hypnotic throbbing rhythm.

A similar combination of Spacemen 3 and the Doors also inspired New York's [Religious Knives](#), fronted by organist Maya Miller and guitarist/synth-man Michael Bernstein (both members of Double Leopards). The lengthy trance pieces of **Remains** (2007), tinged with exotic and electronic overtones, laid the foundations for the chanted noise-songs for motorik rhythm and electronic drones of the mini-album **The Door** (2008).

Texan trio [Indian Jewelry](#), featuring vocalist and keyboardist Erika Thrasher, gave an evil and drunk spin to shoegazing on **Invasive Exotics** (2006).

The relatively simple idea of feeding distorted music into heavy music and viceversa was pushed to a higher degree of paranoia by New York's trio [Heavy Winged](#) in the lengthy jams of **A Serpent's Lust** (2006), **Blacc Stork** (2006), **Taking the Veil** (2006), **We Grow** (2007), making them the most relevant pupils of High Rise.

New Orleans' duo [Belong](#) (Turk Dietrich and Michael Jones) took shoegaze-rock to a higher (noisier) dimension with **October Language** (2006), a victim of the chaotic glitch aesthetic but still devoted to the psychedelic cause.

In the late 2000s a new fad was a kind of swaggering lo-fi shoegaze-pop, a fusion of sloppy instrumental mayhem and catchy vocal hooks that Adam Elliott called "romantic nihilism", something like the marriage of Dead C and Pavement. After Ohio's [Times New Viking](#), fronted by Adam Elliott and featuring keyboardist Beth Murphy, debuted with **Dig Yourself** (2005), their example was followed by Ohio's [Psychedelic Horseshit](#) with **Magic Flowers Droned** (2008), and Oregon's [Eat Skull](#) with **Sick To Death** (2008).

French electronica duo [M83](#) (1) transposed shoegazing psychedelia into an age in which keyboards had replaced guitars as the pivotal sound-effect instrument. After the display of studio mastery and encyclopedic musical knowledge of **M83** (2001), they indulged in the idea of making heavy rock using keyboards instead of (or in addition to) guitars on **Dead Cities, Red Seas & Lost Ghosts** (2003), juxtaposing both ambient and cosmic passages.

France's [Abstrakt Keal Agram](#) achieved a balance of shoegaze, glitch and droning music on their album **Bad Thriller** (2004), with psychotic electronic keyboards and creative drum programming, that made them sound like an ominous version of M83.

French quartet [Cyann & Ben](#) evoked Bardo Pond's space-rock, Cocteau Twins' dream-pop, Mogwai's post-rock and Low's slo-core on **Spring** (2003).

Norway's late shoegazers [Serena-Maneesh](#) (1) blended My Bloody Valentine's introverted ecstasy and the Velvet Underground's pulsating neurosis on **Serena-Maneesh** (2005).

## *Folk freaks*

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Loose folk-rock jamming of the kind pioneered by the Incredible String Band in the 1960s ("freak folk") was one of the most abused praxes of the 2000s. By the mid 2000s several psychedelic-folk "collectives" were active on the East Coast.

The No-Neck Blues Band's keyboardist John Fell Ryan launched [Excepter](#) (1) with the digital psychedelic collage of **Ka** (2003), that matched if not surpassed the dementia of his old band. The album still tried to retain a semblance of the song format, but the EP **Vacation** (2003) let the sonic mess drift ad libitum. **Throne** (2005) was another "concrete" symphony for electronics, guitars and wordless vocals.

New York's [Akron/Family](#) (1) played soundscape-oriented instrumental background music for warbling surreal elegies and litanies of metaphysical loss on **Akron/Family** (2005). **Love Is Simple** (2007) was a more conceptual affair, of grander proportions, that reconstructed tribal and choral hippie music in a modern context.

New York-based psychedelic-folk collective [Wooden Wand](#) coined a tribal and dissonant form of urban folk music via **L'Un Marquer Contre La Moissonneuse** (2005), containing two free-form soundtracks for the afterlife of drug-addicted ghosts, **Buck Dharma** (2005), an evocative work approaching the ambience of latter-day Swans, and the percussive, demonic and distorted rituals of **The Flood** (2005).

Oregon's duo the [Plants](#) stretched out with the three lengthy "songs" of **Double Infinity** (2006) that were melodic fantasies for neoclassical instruments (flute, cello, piano) seesawing through slow-motion sloppy drones and setting the stage for devil-angel male-female harmonies (Joshua Blanchard and Molly Griffith).

[Spectre Folk](#), that released **Spectre Folk** (2006), and Folk Spectre, that released **The Blackest Medicine** (2008), were the same project by the Magik Markers's drummer Pete Nolan. They were meant to sound like primitive folk recordings: warped folk lullabies drenched in crackle-and-hiss background noise, like a folkish version of shoegazing, or a slower version of garage-rock.

[Department Of Eagles](#) the duo of Grizzly Bear's guitarist Daniel Rossen and Fred Nicolaus, achieved a nostalgic fusion of orchestral pop and freak-folk on **In Ear Park** (2008).

Rhode Island's [Black Forest Black Sea](#), one of many collectives that played improvised psychedelic folk music in the mid-2000s, marked the progress of this genre's artistic ambition by evolving from the fragmented **Black Forest Black Sea** (2003) to the two lengthy jams of **Black Forest Black Sea** (2007).

Another Rhode Island-based combo, [Urdog](#), mixed organ-driven prog-rock and freak-folk, like a meeting of Nice and the Incredible String Band,

on **Garden Of Bones** (2004).

The Vermont-based collective [Feathers](#) jumped on the bandwagon of psychedelic folk with **Feathers** (2005), that sounded like a summary of 40 years of the genre, from Donovan to the Incredible String Band to Marc Bolan.

[Espers](#), a sextet including Greg Weeks on electronics that headed the Philadelphia scene, were more preoccupied with crafting melancholy, evocative, zen-like ambience than penning acid-folk ballads on **II** (2006).

Philadelphia's [Fern Knight](#), fronted by singer-songwriter Margaret Wienk, played gothic folk-rock that bridged the Celtic and Appalachian worlds, and channeled the timbral opulence of their instrumentation into something akin to baroque chamber music, notably on their third album **Fern Knight** (2008).

The groups of the Midwest were harder to categorize. New Mexico's [Brightblack Morning Light](#) (1), fronted by guitarist/vocalist Nathan Shineywater, conjured the hazy slo-core atmospheres of **Ala.Cali.Tucky** (2004) and then ventured into a psychomusical journey, not unlike the ones attempted by avantgarde trumpeter Jon Hassell, on **Brightblack Morning Light** (2006): its warped funk, jazz and blues visions evoked places and ages without quoting any particular geography. Wisconsin's collective [Davenport](#) ("conducted" by Clay Ruby), as documented on **Free Country** (2004), performed electroacoustic country music that mixed primordial droning, free noise, anemic shamanic vocals, tribal beats, guitars, fiddles, keyboards, percussions and environmental sounds, sounding like a sedated version of the Holy Modal Rounders.

British combo [Rameses III](#) introduced a transcendent variant on this genre with the sweet dreamy ambient guitar vignettes of **Parsimonia** (2004).

Belgian ensemble [Silvester Anfang](#) improvised tribal satanic hippy music that bordered on both acid folk and gothic rock on **Satanische Vrede** (2006), containing the suite *Demonische Agricultuur II*, **Echte Vlaamse Geiten** (2007), containing *Demonische Agricultuur*, and **Kosmies Slachtafval** (2007), containing just two lengthy (and more ambient) pieces.

Erik Skodvin inaugurated the project [Svarte Greiner](#) with **Knive** (2006), an album of mournful slo-motion free-form acoustic folk dirges drifting through distant and murky acoustic soundscapes.

Australia's [Brothers Of The Occult Sisterhood](#) (the duo of siblings Michael and Kristina Donnelly) were among the most chaotic acts in the world: **Run From Your Honey Mind** (2005) and **Goodbye** (2006) demonstrated meandering atonal, tribal, ceremonial music sprinkled with electronics over a bed of found percussion.

### ***San Francisco post-hippies***

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It was inevitable that San Francisco, the homeland of the hippy movement in the 1960s, would eventually get the lion's share of the phenomenon.

The [Franciscan Hobbies](#), featuring three members of Thuja (Glenn Donaldson, Loren Chasse and Rob Reger) plus other local musicians, were emblematic of the loose Bay Area collectives that still congregated around the Jewelled Antler label (around the pioneers Thuja and the Skygreen Leopards) for which the communal spirit mattered more than the improvised amateurish psychedelic-folk music with mystical and idyllic overtones that they played on albums such as **Masks & Meanings** (2003).

One-man folk orchestra Steven Smith of Mirza, now disguised as [Hala Strana](#), employed a huge arsenal of instruments (both classical, ethnic, home-made and found sounds) to revisit the traditional music of Eastern Europe on **Hala Strana** (2003) and the double-disc **Fielding** (2003).

The [Alps](#) (1) played languid lo-fi ambient drone psychedelic-folk on **Jewelt Galaxies** (2005) and **Spirit Shambles** (2006), but then absorbed German electronic "cosmic" music for **III** (2008), apparently heading towards a rhythm-less kind of atmospheric music while retaining the old scaffolding of spaced-out vocals, ghostly pianos and distorted guitars.

The [Elemental Chrysalis](#), i.e. the duo of ambient composer Chet Scott and James Woodhead, employed an arsenal of instruments to craft the celestial atmosphere of **The Calocybe Collection** (2005), which was basically instrumental ambient folk music. The double-disc **The Dark Path To Spiritual Expansion** (2007) explored an oneiric, magic and nebulous underworld, basically a high-brow version of freak-folk.

The duo [Barn Owl](#) dreamed up meandering instrumental drumless space-folk for guitars, bass, banjo, harmonica, synthesizer, organ and drums on **Barn Owl** (2007).

### *Finnish elves*

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However it was Finland, of all places, that had possibly the most vibrant school of "freak folk", specializing in primitive electroacoustic production aesthetics.

[Kemialliset Ystavat](#), a hippy collective à la Incredible String Band, devoted their entire career to droning improvised freak-folk for casual chanting, atonal strumming and primitive drumming. Their philosophy of art was best summarized on their second album **Kellari Juniversumi** (2002).

[Avarus](#) (1), a collective of musicians derived from fellow Finnish ensembles, pursued the most avantgarde form of "free folk", bordering on both free jazz and musique concrete. The fundamental elements of their sonic whirlwinds of the mid 2000s were guitar feedback, primitive instrumental plucking, haphazard drumming, and amateurish garage rave-ups; but then the product was subjected to a variety of tortures in the studio, distorting it via tape loops, enhancing it with samples, playing it

backwards or at variable speed. The result often resembled abstract noise. The most creative jams were those on **A-V-P** (2003), **II** (2006) and **Rasvaaja** (2007).

[Islaja](#) (Finnish female singer-songwriter Merja Kokkonen, a member of both Avarus and Kemiälliset Ystävät) multitracked her voice over the sparse pastoral droning psychedelic sounds of **Meritie** (2004) and the more touching **Palaa Aurinkoon** (2005). **Ulual Yyy** (2007) added horns and electronics.

The hyper-prolific (and inevitably sloppy) [Keijo](#) Virtanen masterminded meandering jams of loose, improvised, cluttered and droning ambience for detuned instruments, spastic tribal drumming and erratic vocals. His first official disc was **After At Once** (2006), but he had already self-released a dozen albums in three years.

At least two female singer-songwriters graced this commune and represented a gentler side of Finnish free-folk: [Kuupuu](#) (Jonna Karanka), who delivered the dreamy **Yokehra** (2006), and [Lau Nau](#) (Laura Naukkarinen), who sang the otherworldly lullabies of **Kuutarha** (2005).

The super-prolific [Uton](#) were emblematic of these wildly redundant and self-indulgent forest hippies. Their sub-amateurish chaotic psychedelic freak-outs, often wed to glacial drones, were a new form of shapeless background music, and sometimes, like in the case of **Highway Nation** (2006), **Background For Silence** (2007), or **Ground's Dream Cosmic Love** (2008), they hardly moved at all.

## *Chaos*

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Madness without a method sometimes fared better than madness with a method. The generation after Bardo Pond reinvented space-rock and the "psychedelic freak-out" as a much wilder and looser form of non-music.

Philadelphia-based quintet [An Albatross](#) introduced themselves as sort of the Red Krayola for the age of grindcore with **Eat Lightning Shit Thunder** (2001) and especially with their second **We Are The Lazer Viking** (2003): frenzied keyboards-based acid-rock with shrieked vocals, except that they opted for grindcore-style bullets rather than side-long freak-outs.

New York state's [Burnt Hills](#) ventured into a hyper-psychedelic, primitive and tribal sound, which was inspired by both Dead C and Crash Worship, with their **To Your Head** (2006) for five guitars, bass and three drummers. The abrasive, propulsive one-hour piece of **Stoners Pot Palace** (2007) set a new standard for their recordings, that now became hour-long streams of consciousness, notably on **Tonite We Ride** (2008) for seven players.

Instrumental synth-spiced space-rock was best represented by New York's [Titan](#), indulging in the three live jams of **Titan** (2006) and the 40-minute live jam of **Pilzmarmelade** (2006). The suites of their cousins [La Otracina](#)

on **Love Love Love** (2006) and **Tonal Ellipse Of The One** (2007) were emblematic of the electronic intersection of acid-rock, prog-rock and post-rock.

New York's [Gang Gang Dance](#) (2), fronted by Liz Bougatsos and featuring guitarist Josh Diamond, keyboardist Brian DeGraw and drummer Tim DeWitt, debuted with the jam-oriented electronic psychedelic tribal music (à la Animal Collective or Residents) of **Gang Gang Dance** (2004). They rediscovered the song format and crisp production for the surrealistic **God's Money** (2005) and then they also rediscovered the groove for **Saint Dymphna** (2008).

Chicago's [Plastic Crimewave Sound](#), the brainchild of vocalist-guitarist Steve Krakow, harked back to Blue Cheer's stoner-rock and Hawkwind's space-rock, adding Eastern, orchestral, motorik and electronic elements on their second album **No Wonderland** (2006).

However, the most diligent revisionists of Hawkwind's abrasive hard-rocking space-rock were perhaps New York's [White Hills](#), notably on **Glitter Glamour Atrocity** (2007).

Santa Cruz's wildly psychedelic [Residual Echoes](#) (the brainchild of guitarist Adam Payne) were the most extreme heirs of the Comets On Fire with a freak-out that bordered on Japanese noisecore and chaotic free-jazz, feeding on extreme shrieking and/or extreme distortion, as documented by **Residual Echoes** (2004).

Iowa's [Raccoo-Oo-Oon](#), the brainchild of Shawn Reed, dabbled in dense tribal hysterical jazz-tinged acid-rock with electronically altered vocals, fuzzed guitars and gnomish synthesizers that seemed to sum up the 1970s of Hawkwind, Gong, Neu and Faust via the Animal Collective. **Is Night People** (2005) and **The Cave Of Spirits Forever** (2006) toyed with a prism of rock subgenres.

Australian collective [Grey Daturas](#) ran the gamut from extended guitar workouts to wildly acidic garage-rock on **Grey Daturas** (2002) and **Dead In The Woods** (2004).

[Shit And Shine](#) (13), an English collective featuring multiple drummers and guitarists, concocted a seriously damaged nuclear fusion of garage-rock and heavy-metal music on **You're Lucky To Have Friends Like Us** (2004). The 42-minute jam **Ladybird** (2005), featuring little more than the incessant pounding of the drums and massive distortions, was to psychedelic music what Lou Reed's **Metal Machine Music** was to progressive-rock: an abominable terminal point. Another colossal nightmare, the 30-minute *Practicing To Be A Doctor*, off the double-CD **Jealous of Shit and Shine** (2006), the two jams of the mini-album **Toilet Door Tits/ The Biggest Cock In Christendom** (2006), and **Cunts With Roses** (2007), documenting the first ever live improvisation by the band, as well as the apocalyptic single *Cigarette Sequence* (2008) for multiple drummers, bass players and electronic noise makers, displayed the same visceral and pointless impact.

In Japan the generation of Acid Mothers Temple and Ghost had laid the foundations for a more subdued form of psychedelic rock. [Suishou No](#)

[Fune](#) (2), formed by female guitarist Pirako Kurenai and male guitarist Kageo, accompanied their reverb-drenched slow-motion lullabies with hypnotic mellow lightweight free-form twin-guitar noise. **Suishou No Fune** (2005), particularly the 17-minute *The Blue Bird - Betrayal and Freedom*, and the three improvised jams of **Writhing Underground Flowers** (2007) rehearsed the format that peaked with the mournful dilated ballads of the double-disc **Prayer for Chibi** (2007), a requiem of sorts. [LSD-march](#), the brainchild of guitarist Shinsuke Michishita, debuted with the mellow anemic ballads à la Lou Reed of **Shindara Jigoku** (2004) but the double-disc **Nikutai No Tubomi** (2007) contrasted the 40-minute harsh juggernaut *Nikutai no Tubomi* and a disc of ethereal fantasies, showing that it had transformed into an octopus of acid-rock, noisecore and post-rock.

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