

# The History of Rock Music: 1966-1969

Genres and musicians of the Sixties

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## Canterbury 1968-73

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

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The Canterbury school of British progressive-rock (one of the most significant movements in the history of rock music) was born in 1962 when Hugh Hopper, Robert Wyatt, Kevin Ayers, Richard Sinclair and others formed the Wilde Flowers. Wyatt, Ayers, Hopper and their new friends Daevid Allen and Mike Ratledge formed the Soft Machine; whereas Sinclair and the others went on to form Caravan.

[Soft Machine](#) (103), one of the greatest rock bands of all times, started out with albums such as **Volume Two** (mar 1969 - apr 1969) that were inspired by psychedelic-rock with a touch of Dadaistic (i.e., nonsensical) aesthetics; but, after losing Allen and Ayers, they veered towards a personal interpretation of Miles Davis' jazz-rock on **Three** (may 1970 - jun 1970), their masterpiece and one of the essential jazz, rock and classical albums of the 1970s. Minimalistic keyboards à la Terry Riley and jazz horns highlight three of the four jams (particularly, Hopper's *Facelift*). The other one, *Moon In June*, is Wyatt's first monumental achievement, blending a delicate melody, a melancholy atmosphere and deep humanity. *Moon In June* will remain in the essential canon of music well after rock music has disappeared. A vastly revised line-up (heavily influenced by Ian Carr's and Keith Tippett's jazz ensembles) that in october 1969 added a four-piece jazz horn section (notably Elton Dean), continued the experiment in a colder, brainy, austere manner. For example, the four-movement suite *Virtually* (1971), on their fourth album, and the futuristic *1983* (1972), on their sixth album.

The other co-founders of the Canterbury school, [Caravan](#) (3), impersonated a simpler, lighter, mellower and catchier kind of jazz-rock than Soft Machine's. Their specialty were melodic fantasias that basically enhanced folk-like lullabies with jazzy rhythms and intricate instrumental counterpoint: *Can't Be Long Now*, on **If I Could Do It All Over Again** (feb/mar 1970 - sep 1970), *Nine Feet Underground* (their masterpiece), that takes up half of **In The Land Of Grey And Pink** (nov 1970/jan 1971 - apr 1971), *Nothing At All* and *The Love In Your*

*Eye*, off **Waterloo Lily** (nov 1971 - may 1972).

Ian Carr's [Nucleus](#) (2), one of the most skilled combos in the world, were protagonists of Britain's jazz-rock scene for several years. The dreamy, romantic *Song For The Bearded Lady*, off **We'll Talk About It Later** (sep 1970 - mar 1971), the "orchestral" and electronic sound of *Torso*, which takes up half of **Solar Plexus** (dec 1970 - ? 1971), and the elegant, baroque synthesis of their most flawless album, **Belladonna** (jul 1972 - ? 1972), relied on horn and keyboards arrangements, as well as on rhythms that were both slippery and solid.

[Keith Tippett](#) (2), who had assembled a formidable group of talents, delivered works such as **Dedicated To You But You Weren't Listening** (sep 1970 - ? 1971) and the colossal **Septober Energy** (jun 1971 - sep 1971), performed by the 50-piece orchestra Centipede, that were more properly jazz.

[Khan](#), fronted by guitarist Steve Hillage, had released an album of space-fusion jams, **Space Shanty** (nov 1971/mar 1972 - may 1972). Steve Hillage and keyboardist Dave Stewart started another dynasty within the Canterbury school when they formed [Egg](#) (3), yet another overlooked band that played musical nonsense. The *Symphony No.2*, on **Egg** (oct 1969 - mar 1970), the classical-jazz-rock phantasmagoria *Long Piece No.3* (their *Valentyne Suite*), on **The Polite Force** (may 1970 - feb 1971), and the last, brainier jams on **The Civil Surface** (aug 1974 - ? 1974), such as *Germ Patrol* and *Enneagram*, packed enough ideas for two generations of musicians to explore.

Several of Canterbury's masterpieces were recorded in the early 1970s by former members of Soft Machine. [David Allen](#) (12) was only vaguely related to the school's main stylistic directions: Allen was, first and foremost, a hippie/freak who wed Frank Zappa's paradoxical aesthetics and San Francisco's communal ethos. His Gong, featuring guitarist Steve Hillage, saxophonist Didier Malherbe and keyboardist Tim Blake, concocted a "cosmic" version of acid-rock. Their masterpieces, which include at least **Camembert Electrique** (sep 1971 - oct 1971), the superb **Flying Teapot** (jan 1973 - may 1973) and **Angel's Egg** (aug 1973 - dec 1973), are demented collages of nursery-rhyme melodies, circus horns, jazz rhythms, galactic keyboards, sensual/celestial wails, sardonic mantras, mock-heroic electronics and caricatural anthems. The whole exudes a sense of stately cacophony. This is psychedelia that is hallucinated but not catalectic. **Flying Teapot**, in particular, still ranks as one of rock music's wildest flights of imagination.

[Kevin Ayers](#) (12) became a lunatic singer-songwriter projecting the persona of an exotic, decadent dandy. **Joy Of A Toy** (jun/sep 1969 - dec 1969), a collection of enchanting ditties, defined his nonchalant cross-breeding of music-hall, folk lullabies, world-music, and even children's music. The existential melancholy that already surfaced on that work permeated his most eccentric album, **Shooting At The Moon** (jun 1970 - oct 1970), featuring avantgarde composer and keyboardist David Bedford, teenage guitarist Mike Oldfield, and even jazz saxophonist Lol Coxhill. Ayers had found an unlikely balance of harmonic nonsense and catchy refrains, while drenching his fairy tales into surrealism and expressionism. The 18-minute four-part suite *The Confessions of Doctor Dream* (1974) was his most ambitious and nightmarish work.

[Robert Wyatt](#) (113) expanded on the intuitions of his *The Moon In June* on his

first solo album, **The End Of An Ear** (aug 1970 - oct 1970). He invented a whole new language, with nods to both the tradition (pop, soul, folk, jazz) and the avantgarde (minimalism, electronics), both personal and public. The same fusion of private and public themes, but with an emphasis on his public (and communist) persona, characterized the two Matching Mole albums, **Matching Mole** (jan 1972 - mar 1972) and **Little Red Record** (aug 1972 - oct 1972), which are rare examples of brainy, agit-prop music that is actually touching, besides ranking among the most intense recordings of any jazz-rock quartet. His private persona erupted on **Rock Bottom** (mar 1974 - jul 1974), one of rock music's supreme masterpieces, a veritable transfiguration of both rock and jazz. Its pieces straddle the unlikely border between an intense religious hymn and a childish nursery rhyme. Along that imaginary line, Wyatt carved a deep trench of emotional outpouring, where happiness, sorrow, faith and resignation found a metaphysical unity. The astounding originality of that masterpiece, and its well-crafted flow of consciousness, were never matched by Wyatt's later releases. The last significant work of his career was **Animals Film** (aug 1981 - ? 1982). Wyatt concocted some of the most moving music of all times and at least one of the century's masterpieces. He was helped by being both a gifted drummer, heir to both the progressive-rock and the jazz-rock traditions, and a uniquely innovative vocalist, whose falsetto cry (loosely derived from wordless jazz singing) blended soul, Buddhism and psychedelia.

**1984** (jul/aug 1972 - ? 1973) by [Hugh Hopper](#) (1) and [Elton Dean's Elton Dean](#) (may 1971 - jun 1971) also rank among the most original and erudite works of British progressive-rock. Overall, Soft Machine alumni constitute a significant chunk of the prog-rock canon in Britain.

The Canterbury school continued to produce bands, talents and masterpieces throughout the mid 1970s. Richard Sinclair and Dave Stewart joined forces and formed [Hatfield & The North](#) (1), whose first album, **Hatfield And The North** (oct 1973/jan 1974 - mar 1974), was a competent appendix to Caravan. Dave Stewart and Alan Gowen later formed a more keyboard-oriented band, the [National Health](#) (2), who were not shy to toy with dissonance, electronics and Frank Zappa's orchestral jazz-rock on the four lengthy jams of **National Health** (feb/mar 1977 - oct 1977) and on their masterpiece **Of Queues And Cures** (jul 1978 - nov 1978).

When enfant prodige [Mike Oldfield](#) (11) cut **Tubular Bells** (apr 1973 - may 1973), an album-long suite of instrumental music, all played by himself gluing together the parts of dozens of instruments, he redefined what prog-rock was. In fact, "progressive-rock" became an obsolete term to refer to a music that crossed all stylistic borders. Oldfield's subsequent ventures into the suite, starting with **Hergest Ridge** (spring 1974 - aug 1974), never repeated the miracle of his first work, despite the fact that **Ommadawn** (sep 1975 - nov 1975) and **Incantations** (dec 1977/sep 1978 - dec 1978) were built on more and more ambitious foundations. Oldfield would eventually downplay that format in favor of the pop song, particularly with 1982's *Moonlight Shadow*.

However, the second Canterbury generation was best represented by [Henry Cow](#) (22), founders of the "Rock In Opposition" political and musical movement. Featuring virtuosi such as guitarist Fred Frith, bassist John Greaves, percussionist Chris Cutler, keyboardist Tim Hodgkinson, and, later, oboe player Lindsay Cooper, they increased the intelligence quotient of progressive-rock. **Leg End** (may/jun 1973 - aug 1973), inspired by Soft Machine's jazz-rock and

Frank Zappa's orchestral suites but also by free-jazz and by the dissonant avantgarde (*Nine Funerals Of The Citizen King*), was merely the appetizer for **Unrest** (feb/mar 1974 - may 1974) and its brainy, convoluted, arduous but also extravagant, whimsical and surreal jams/suites. Henry Cow had found a magical balance between composition and improvisation. Further progress was displayed on **Desperate Straights** (nov 1974 - jan 1975), the first fruit of merging with multinational group [Slapp Happy](#), featuring British keyboardist Anthony Moore, German vocalist Dagmar Krause and USA guitarist Peter Blegvad, whose **Acnalbasac Noom** (? 1973 - ? 1980) had been an intriguing experiment of expressionist cabaret and rock music. Their second, and better, joint album, **In Praise Of Learning** (feb/mar 1975 - may 1975), was their artistic testament: the clownish fusion of the early years had mutated into an austere and erudite form of art. That idea was further explored by Frith, Cutler and Krause as the [Art Bears](#) (2) on the abstract lieder of **Hopes And Fears** (jan/mar 1978 - may 1978) and **Winter Songs** (nov/dec 1978 - early 1979).

Several of Canterbury's veterans went on to produce significant bodies of work. [Steve Hillage](#) (2) carved a unique niche at the border between acid-rock and cosmic music with *Lunar Musick Suite*, off **L** (may/jun 1976 - sep 1976), and the two lengthy suites of **Rainbow Dome Musick** (jan 1979 - apr 1979), both benefiting from Miquette Girandy's electronic keyboards. The couple, renaming themselves [System 7](#), would later bridge hippy culture and rave culture on the double album **System 7** (? 1991 - sep 1991) and endorse ambient house on **777** (sep 1992 - mar 1993).

[Tim Blake](#)'s mad synthesizer, best heard on the suite of **New Jerusalem** (spring/summer full moons 1978 - nov 1978), came to symbolize the opposite of the radio-friendly, synthesizer of Jean-Michel Jarre.

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