

The History of Rock Music: 1989-1994

Raves, grunge, post-rock, trip-hop

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Dance-music in the Age of House

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

Madchester, 1989-90

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The 1980s were almost over when a movement came out of Manchester that came to symbolize the hedonistic spirit of the era: "Madchester", a fusion of psychedelia, techno and pop. It was 1988 when anthems such as KLF's *What Time Is Love* imported acid house from the USA. The decade that had begun as the age of depressed cyberpunks was ending as the age of the wildest parties ever.

Manchester's 1988 "summer of love" became a musical movement with the debut of [Stone Roses](#) (2), one of the most influential English bands of the decade. **Stone Roses** (1989) epitomized the fusion of hypnotic disco beats, catchy melodies, surreal arrangements, and Sixties-style naive enthusiasm. Mixing Byrds with Abba, and Hendrix with Petula Clark, and James Brown and the Mamas & Papas, songs such as *I Wanna Be Adored*, *She Bangs The Drums* and *Made Of Stone* bridged different languages and civilizations while setting the foundations of a new language and a new civilization. Credit went not so much to vocalist Ian Brown and guitarist John Squire, but to the rhythm section of Alan John "Reni" Wren (drums) and Gary Mounfield (bass). Squire's guitar was more predominant on **Second Coming** (1994), a work heavily infected by hard-rock and southern boogie.

Shaun Ryder's [Happy Mondays](#) (1), who had already debuted with the psychedelic funk music of **Squirrel And G-Man Twentyfour Hour Party People** (1987), co-founded the movement with **Bummed** (1989), which embodied the ecstatic trance of raves but also a proletarian approach to it. Ryder, a sarcastic, nonchalant (and heroin-addicted) "primadonna" of techno, focused on the grooves with the disco-fied

Pills'N'Thrills And Bellyaches (1990). Years later, he upgraded Madchester to the generation of Beastie Boys and Red Hot Chili Peppers with a new band, [Black Grape](#) (1), basically a rapper fronting a horn and keyboard orchestra, and with the multifaceted dance music (funk, hip-hop, jungle, raga, house, reggae and heavy-metal) of **It's Great When You're Straight** (1995)

Tim Burgess' [Charlatans \(UK\)](#) (1) were emblematic of how "Madchester" soon became more of a social phenomenon than a musical one. **Some Friendly** (1990) merely offered old-fashioned organ-based psychedelic pop-soul.

The idea was infectious and spread from rave to rave throughout the Kingdom. Psychedelic dance albums of the era (often characterized by an orgiastic frenzy) include: [Renegade Soundwave](#) (1)'s **In Dub** (1990), and the [Shamen](#)'s **Boss Drum** (1992); whereas [Pop Will Eat Itself](#)'s **This Is The Day** (1989) and [Jesus Jones](#)' **Liquidizer** (1989) imported into the rave scene the fusion of dance beats and rock guitars already pioneered in hip-hop by the likes of Run DMC.

Throughout the decade there were countless remnants of the rave season, in the form of exuberant pop-dance singles and albums: [EMF](#)'s **Schubert Dip** (1991), that boasted an infectious mixture of bubblegum, psychedelia and rap; [Utah Saints](#)'s **Utah Saints** (1993), that basically replaced the idea of the "cover song" with the idea of a song made of samples of other songs; [Carter The Unstoppable Sex Machine](#)'s **The Love Album** (1992), that offered cartoonish glam-rock and synth-pop embellished with punk rage and scathing satire.

Body Music, 1991-95

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It took a decade for techno and house to become the dominant dance styles, but, when they did, they spread like wildfire around the globe. The masses reacted enthusiastically, as they had in the 1960s to the hippy phenomenon. Over the years, the difference between techno and house blurred, and most ravers would not know which one was which (techno was mostly instrumental and descended from Kraftwerk, whereas house was mostly vocal and descended from soul, funk and disco music).

Belgium was one of the epicenters of the fad, perhaps fueled by the school of "electronic body music" (Front 242). [Joey Beltram](#)'s *Energy Flash* (1990) and *Mentasm* (1991), credited to Second Phase, introduced a faster form of hardcore techno. **Lust** (1991), by the [Lords Of Acid](#) (1), offered wildly throbbing as well as openly erotic dance-music with a female vocalist. From Belgium, the new dance-craze spread to Holland and France. Soon, all the European countries overflowed with techno acts.

In Holland hardcore techno was pushed even faster and became "gabba", a genre pioneered by the Euromasters' *Where The Fuck Is Amsterdam* (1991).

France's [Laurent Garnier](#), with **Shot In The Dark** (1995), and Japan's [Ken](#)

[Ishii](#), with **Jelly Tones** (1995), were quintessential techno musicians of the era.

Sweden's [Ace Of Base](#) specialized in Abba-like melodies sung to the techno beat, such as *All That She Wants* (1992) and *Beautiful Life* (1995).

Norway's [Apoptygma Berzerk](#) (Stephan Groth) explored gothic techno on **Soli Deo Gloria** (1994).

Other international hits of the mid-1990s included: Corona's *Rhythm Of The Night* (1993), from Italy; Real McCoy's *Runaway* (1994), from Germany; 2 Unlimited's *Get Ready For This* (1994), from Holland; veteran USA r&b vocalist Judy Cheeks' *Reach* (1996); Playahitty's *Summer Is Magic* (1996), from Italy; No Mercy's *Where Do You Go* (1996), from Miami; although the biggest sensations worldwide was a much simpler production, Los Del Mar's flamenco-infected *Macarena* (1993).

Australia's most creative techno musician was perhaps David Thrussell, who evolved from the naive techno sound of [Snog's Lies Inc](#) (1992) to the almost avantgarde industrial-ambient-ethnic fusion of [Black Lung's Silent Weapons For Quiet Wars](#) (1994) to the sophisticated techno sculptures of **Hollow Earth** (1994), credited to [Soma](#) (1), a duo with Pieter Bourke.

German body Music, 1991-95

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Germany, where the Berlin wall had just fallen, boasted the most varied and fertile scene. An impressive number of sub-genres were created within just a few years.

Disc-jockey [Sven Vath](#) (1) virtually invented Frankfurt's "progressive-house" (or, simply, "trance") with the ambient **Accident In Paradise** (1993).

Palais Schaumburg's keyboardist [Thomas Fehlmann](#), became a respected Berlin-based producer, formed 3MB with Moritz von Oswald and Detroit's titan Juan Atkins, and then joined his pupil's "micro" scene with works such as **Visions Of Blah** (2002). [Maurizio](#) (Palais Schaumburg's percussionist Moritz Von Oswald) coined in Berlin a dub-inflected style of techno, a progenitor of "micro-techno", with the many singles under different monikers: Cyrus' 18-minute *Inversion* (1994), Quadrant's 20-minute *Dub* (1994), Maurizio's *M-4* (1994), etc. From those foundations [Basic Channel](#) (as producers Moritz Von Oswald and Mark Ernestus renamed themselves) created one of the most influential scenes.

[Air Liquide](#) (10), i.e. Ingmar "Dr Walker" Koch and Cem "Jammin` Unit" Oral, spearheaded Cologne's psychedelic techno with the ambitious **The Increased Difficulty Of Concentration** (1995), at the border between collage and stream of consciousness, an album that included the colossal *Robot Wars Symphony*, replete with movements that harked back to (alternatively) Klaus Schulze, Tangerine Dream and Brian Eno.

[La Bouche](#), formed in Frankfurt by two African-American vocalists,

became the most successful act of melodic techno after they concocted the Euro-techno hits *Sweet Dreams* (1994) and *Be My Lover* (1995); while [L@n](#) (1), the Duesseldorf-based duo of Rupert Huber and Otto Mueller, belonged to the avantgarde with the Neu-influenced robotic madly-psychedelic techno of **L@n** (1996).

[X Marks The Pedwalk](#) continued the tradition of the industrial dance of the 1980s.

[Ian Pooley](#) (Ian Pinnekamp) was one of the prime innovators of "hard" house, as documented on the compilation **The Times** (1996).

USA body Music, 1991-95

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The USA, the homeland of techno, on the other hand, was mostly derivative of the European styles. The jovial romps of New York's [Deee-Lite](#) and Los Angeles' [Crystal Method](#) were old-fashioned party music adapted to the new instruments.

Detroit's second (third?) generation was best represented by the work of [Jeff Mills](#), founder of the "Underground Resistance" collective, particularly his experiments on stripped-down techno beat begun with *Waveform Transmission Vol 1* (1992) and culminating with the multi-part symphony **Time Machine** (2001). Another Detroit act, [Drexciya](#), i.e. the duo of James Stinson and [Gerald Donald](#), between 1991 and 1996 fused the electro sound of the 1980s with space-jazz and cosmic music. Stinson pursued that avenue until the transcendent soundscapes of **Harnessed the Storm** (2002), while Donald concocted cryptic revisions of techno stereotypes for the post-cyberpunk age on Dopplereffekt's **Linear Accelerator** (2003) and Der Zyklus' **Biometry** (2004). [Robert Hood](#) invented "minimal techno", originally motivated by the desire to return to the soul-inspired style of the forefathers of Detroit techno. His brutally stripped-down approach to dance music was first announced by **Internal Empire** (1994) and the single *Moveable Parts Chapter 1* (1995). [DJ Assault](#) (Craig Adams) publicized the "ghetto tech" style, influenced by hip-hop culture. [Felix Da Housecat](#) was a purveyor of old-fashioned Chicago house but his alter-ego [Thee Maddkatt Courtship](#) unfurled lengthy languid jams on **By Dawn's Early Light** (1994). **BT** (Los Angeles-based composer Brian Transeau) invented "epic house" (or "progressive house" or "trance") with the single *Embracing The Sunshine* (1995), and his album **IMA** (1996) pushed the boundaries towards out-of-space electronica (the 43-minute *Sasha's Voyage Of IMA*).

The exception was San Francisco, perhaps the only place where a truly national style emerged. **President's Breakfrast** (1990) by [President's Breakfast](#), a San-Francisco based ensemble led by drummer and sampler technician Click Dark played an insane fusion of dub, funk, hip-hop and jazz. Starting with the EP **Magick Sounds of the Underground** (1992), [Hardkiss](#), a trio of disc jockeys and producers, began bridging the hippie and the rave eras by specializing in eccentric psychedelic electronica via lush, hallucinatory and orgasmic jams of acid, cosmic, techno-dub.

Daum Bentley became part of that San Francisco movement, that also included Single Cell Orchestra, Young American Primitive, High Lonesome Sound System, etc. His own project, [Freaky Chakra](#) (1), adapted Chicago house, European body music and British techno to acid-rock. *Trancendental Funk Bump/ Halucifuge* (1993) and *Peace Fixation* (1994) upped the ante for the entire movement thanks mainly to their cornucopia of electronic effects. The trippy tracks of **Lowdown Motivator** (1995) spiraled out of control, soaring over a jungle of manically pulsing synths and sequencers.

Ambient House, 1989-94

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An unusual form of dance-music became popular in England during the 1990s: "ambient house". The idea (originally from 808 State) was to offer music to "chill out", but soon the soundtracks for "chill-out rooms" created a genre of its own, at the border between techno and minimalism. It caused a major stylistic revolution.

An influential pioneer of ambient house was [William Orbit](#) (1), who proved to be an innovative electronic arranger (and world-class producer) with the electronic instrumentals of **Strange Cargo** (1988) and especially **Strange Cargo 3** (1993). At the same time he jumped on the bandwagon of acid-house with **Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Bass** (1990), credited to Bassomatic.

[808 State](#) (2), formed by the trio of producers Martin Price, Graham Massey and Gerald Simpson, but mostly dominated by Massey, were masters of the new electronic instruments and thus the ideal successors to Kraftwerk. Their techniques (which borrowed from Terry Riley's minimalism, Brian Eno's ambient music and Jon Hassell's "fourth-world" music) revolutionized house, techno and industrial music with tracks such as *Pacific State* (1989). The (mostly instrumental) electronic ballets of **808:90** (1989), one of the most elegant house albums of all times, and **Ex:el** (1991), were fluent in jazz-rock and world-music, bordering on progressive-rock.

The manifesto of "ambient house" was **Chill Out** (1990), by the wacky duo of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty, [KLF](#) (1), who mixed field recordings, celestial organ drones, languid guitar tones, musical samples, and electronic sounds.

The idea was given artistic depth by pioneers such as [Irresistible Force](#) (2), the project of disc-jockey Mixmaster Morris (Morris Gould). **Flying High** (1992) was inspired by avantgarde composers such as Harry Partch and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and was reminiscent of Brian Eno, Steve Reich and Tangerine Dream, while revealing affinities with Terence McKenna's hallucinogenic metaphysics. **Global Chillage** (1994) showcased both the psychedelic factor and the (almost baroque) producer's skills, thus wedding the postmodernist aesthetics of assemblage and acid-rock (after all, his suites were merely a new take on the old form of the free-form jam).

[Orb](#) (11), formed by disc-jockey Alex Paterson (who had worked for Paul

Oakenfold's "chill-out rooms") with assistance from former KLF's mastermind Jimmy Cauty, codified the revolution that was underway. The music of the EP **A Huge Ever Growing Pulsating Brain That Rules From The Centre Of The Ultraworld** (1989), a cosmic mantra for water and synthesizer, and of the album **Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld** (1991) sounded like new-age music. The lengthy tracks of **U.F. Orb** (1992) were born at the crossroad between Brian Eno's impressionistic landscapes, the postmodernist ideology of stylistic recycling, the new technologies of sampling and the techno beat. They did not have an emotional impact, and they did not unravel in a narrative way: they slowly morphed. *Blue Room* (a 40 minute-long single) featured guitarist Steve Hillage and bassist Jah Wobble, and was Paterson's tour de force of montage and mixing. Paterson had transformed the disc-jockey into a classical composer and transferred collage art to electronic dance music. Rather than fully endorsing the "ambient" style that he had contributed to create, Orb continued to experiment with new forms of dance music: **Orbus Terrarum** (1995) and **Orblivion** (1997) rely on a subtle art of choreography to deliver an experience that is both unsettling and hypnotic.

[Ultramarine](#) (2), i.e. Paul Hammond and Ian Cooper, laid an unlikely bridge between Canterbury's prog-rock of the 1970s and ambient house. Their ethereal, pastoral vision began to form on **Every Man And Woman Is A Star** (1992), which was virtually a collection of chamber pieces for flutes, trumpets, pianos, string section, samples and electronic machines, and blossomed on **United Kingdoms** (1993), which added stronger dub and jazz ambience and Robert Wyatt's divine vocals.

Cabaret Voltaire's [Richard Kirk](#) (2) experimented with ambient techno, first as Sandoz on psychedelic albums such as **Digital Lifeforms** (1993), then as Electronic Eye and the jazz, funk and dub fusion of **Closed Circuit** (1994), and finally as himself on the monumental **Number Of Magic** (1993), a labyrinth of ideas.

Ambient house transformed into avantgarde music with [Scanner](#) (1), born Robin Rimbaud. His works achieved intense melodrama through either hypnotic layering of found sounds or subliminal repetition of soundbites and beats. His early recordings, such as **Mass Observation** (1994), focused on austere sound-collages of telephone conversations. Exposing the existential nudity of the wireless society, Rimbaud contented himself with providing a passive documentary of the city's aural cacophony. His most challenging soundscapes were on **Spore** (1995) and the **Lauwarm Instrumentals** (1999), a bold excursion from new-age meditational pieces to symphonic apotheoses.

[Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia](#) (1), the project of Dutch electronic musician Reinier Brekelmans, introduced exotic ambient house with **Ov Biospheres And Sacred Grooves** (1992).

Norway's multi-instrumentalist Geir Jenssen (ex-Bel Canto), who had pioneered ambient house with Bleep's **North Pole By Submarine** (1990), produced one of the most lyrical albums of ambient house, **Microgravity** (1991), credited to his new project, [Biosphere](#) (1). And that project evolved towards a rhythm-less "arctic sound", set in an icy wasteland of sonic bliss, notably with **Substrata** (1997).

By 1992 the masters had all debuted and were spawning countless imitations. [Global Communication](#) (1), i.e. Mark "Link" Pritchard and Aphex Twin co-founder Tom Middleton, penned the cosmic, minimalist and melancholy soundpaintings and subtle, bionic mutations of **76:14** (1994).

Jonah Sharp's [Spacetime Continuum](#) (1), who had collaborated with psychedelic philosopher Terence McKenna, electronic soundpainter Tetsu Inoue and ambient dub master Bill Laswell, joined the ambient fray with the polished production, the chromatic arrangements, the organic flow and the psychodramatic tension of **Sea Biscuit** (1994).

George Fleming-Saunders, disguised under the moniker [Solar Quest](#) (1), blended minimalist repetition and ambient stasis on **Orgship** (1994).

Toby Marks, better known as [Banco De Gaia](#) (1), was quick to jump on the bandwagon with the alternatively ambient and dance postcards of **Maya** (1994) and **Last Train To Lhasa** (1995).

Paul Frankland's [Woob](#) (1) delivered the exotic and impressionistic **1194** (1994), ambient house's musical equivalent of Gauguin's and Rousseau's paintings.

German musicians active in the ambient and atmospheric variant of techno/industrial music, with slower tempos and sophisticated arrangements included: [Project Pitchfork](#), with the romantic and exoteric **Entities** (1992); [Bionaut](#) (Joerg Burger), with the tender, delicate minimalism of **Ethik** (1993); [Haujobb](#) (1)'s charming lounge-techno on **Solutions For A Small Planet** (1996).

[Drome](#), i.e. German Keyboardist and vibraphonist Bernd "Burnt" Friedman, was one of the first to incorporate hip-hop breaks into chill-out grooves with his album **Final Corporate Colonization Of The Unconscious** (1993).

IDM, 1991-94

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Numerous outfits experimented with the format of techno and house music, and with the sampling technology (the real protagonist of this generation's dance-music). The Intelligent Dance Music (IDM) mailing list was set up on the Internet in August 1993 to discuss the works of these artists, and the name stuck.

[Orbital](#) (12), i.e. Paul and Phil Hartnoll, crowned the season of raves. Their **Green Album** (1991) and **Brown Album** (1993) did to techno what Art Of Noise had done to hip-hop: they transformed it into a sophisticated art of complex compositions by intellectual "auteurs". The latter, in particular, was a parade of stylish gestures and poses, from sci-fi dissonances to dilated drones, from angelic voices to dadaistic collages, from staccato repetition a` la Michael Nyman to machine-like industrial cadences. **Snivilisation** (1994) and especially **In Sides** (1996) turned to narrative logic and emotional content, using the dance beats as mere

background.

[Eat Static](#) (2), a side project of Ozric Tentacles' drummer Merv Pepler and keyboardist Joie Hinton, used techno beats to reach the same orbit as Gong's effervescent space-hippie prog-rock. The craft of **Implant** (1995) was both insane and imaginative, and was channelled into smoother structures on **Epsilon** (1995), eventually leading to the sophisticated and elegant art of transglobal samples and stylistic cross-breeding of **Science Of The Gods** (1997).

London's disc-jockey Andy Weatherall was one of the men who revolutionized the scene with the [Sabres Of Paradise](#) (1), a project that evolved from the inventive techno music of **Sabresonic** (1993) to the loose, fractured and ghostly downtempo music of **Haunted Dancehall** (1994), a style that spilled over onto the evocative soundscapes of his next project, [Two Lone Swordsmen's The Fifth Mission](#) (1995), that blended dub, breakbeats and noise.

[Future Sound of London](#) (1), i.e. electronic musicians Garry Cobain and Brian Dougans, incorporated natural sounds (often as a rhythmic element), Klaus Schulze's cosmic music and exotic voices into **Lifeforms** (1994). The harmonic puzzle of **Dead Cities** (1996) returned to frantic rhythms, and used the feverish stylistic changes as yet another rhythmic element.

[Black Dog Productions](#) experimented with jazz, minimalism, cosmic and ethnic music on **Spanners** (1994). [Plaid](#) (1), an emanation of Black Dog Productions, revolutionized with new rhythmic patterns on **Mbuki Mvuki** (1991), predating jungle.

The general impetus towards "intelligent" dance-music yielded the grotesque phenomenon of electronic musician [Richard James](#) (1). The three EPs credited to AFX, starting with **Analogue Bubblebath** (1991, 1992 and 1993) contained harsh, abrasive dance-music, sometimes sounding like a disco version of Morton Subotnick's electronic poems (and they remained his most valuable musical statements). In the meantime, the catchy singles credited to Aphex Twin, *Quoth* (1993) and *On* (1993), were fusing techno and pop, aiming for the charts, and Polygon Window's **Surfing On Sinewaves** (1992) was traditional, throbbing techno music, aiming for dancefloor appeal. To further confuse his persona, Aphex Twin's **Selected Ambient Works 1985-92** (1992) and **Selected Ambient Works Volume II** (1994) were experiments in ambient house and abstract electronic/concrete composition. They were childish and antiquated (and perhaps a joke on music critics), but they increased James' reputation, making him the first star of ambient house. **I Care Because You Do** (1995), his most cohesive work, cleaned up his act, offering atmospheric dance-music with occasional hints to his old virulent style.

Ontario-based disc-jockey Richie Hawtin, better known as [Plastikman](#) (2), refined techniques developed over the years from Kraftwerk to Cabaret Voltaire to achieve the minimal and psychedelic aesthetics of **Musik** (1994) and **Consumed** (1998).

[Perfume Tree](#), a trio of Vancouver disc-jockeys, induced trance on **The Sun's Running Out** (1994) through a blend of dream-pop, hip-hop, dub

and electronica.

In the USA, the most famous techno artist of the 1990s was Richard Melville Hall, aka [Moby](#) (1). His early anthems, *Go* (1991) and *Drop A Beat* (1992), were soon superseded by the ambient/new age/neoclassical/minimalist ambitions of **Ambient** (1993) and **Everything Is Wrong** (1993), a passion confirmed by Voodoo Child's **The End Of Everything** (1997), a collection of electronic vignettes à la Brian Eno, and possibly his best work. [Vapourspace](#) (1), i.e. disc-jockey Mark Gage, produced the 35-minute single *Gravitational Arch of 10* (1993) and the **Themes From Vapourspace** (1994), that are reminiscent of avantgarde electronic music and reference Kraftwerk, Philip Glass and Klaus Schulze. But, again, the USA was only the periphery: Britain was the center for IDM.

Italian disc-jockey [Robert Miles](#) established a new trend in melodic dance music, shifting the emphasis from the beat and the drugs back to simple emotions with *Children* (1995).

Transglobal dance, 1991-94

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Another powerful innovation to come out of England was the "transglobal dance" craze. By fusing world-music, electronic arrangements and dance beats, these ensembles coined the ultimate synthesis of the 1990s.

The idea was pioneered by the multiracial group [Transglobal Underground](#) (2), featuring Natacha Atlas' exotic melisma, Nick "Count Dubulah" Page's creative sampling, Alex Kasiek's surreal keyboards and Hamid Mantu's forest of percussions, on **Dream Of 100 Nations** (1993) and **International Times** (1994), that fused dance, ambient and ethnic styles. It was not a sterile exercise of Arabic-African-Indian fusion, but a stab at reinventing rhythm itself: their "world beat" was solidly rooted in ethnic traditions from around the world, but was no longer any of them. As they replaced samples with real instruments, they also achieved a warmer (and more authentically "ethnic") sound on **Psychic Karaoke** (1996).

Another multiracial ensemble, [Loop Guru](#) (2), overdubbed tape loops, field recordings, vocal samples, and exotic instruments in a way that emanated stronger ambient and jazz flavors. **Duniya** (1995), which included their tour de force, *The Third Chamber*, sounded like a blend of Orbital, Jon Hassell, Brian Eno and Weather Report, and the mellotron-heavy **Amrita** (1995) made the experiment more accessible.

Future Primitive (1994) was the manifesto of former Tangerine Dream member [Paul Haslinger](#) (12). Swinging from extreme violence to extreme calm, Haslinger unleashed demonic orgies of percussions, techno-funky tempos, heavy-metal riffs, chamber music interludes, industrial beats, screams, electronic distortions and pounding polyrhythms. That futuristic collage technique intensified on **World Without Rules** (1996), which also boasts a stronger ethnic flavor and the sheer violence of a heavy-metal band, while remaining anchored to the format of dance-music. **Score** (1999) completed the trilogy in a more technical vein.

Michael Paradinas, better known as [Mu-ziq](#) (1), unleashed the polyrhythmic bacchanals of his third album **In Pine Effect** (1995), that worked more like a therapeutic shock than dance grooves, an idea refined on his most complex work, **Lunatic Harness** (1997), that ran the gamut from symphonic music to jazz, from lounge music to drum'n'bass.

The multiracial quartet [Cornershop](#) (1), led by Tjinder Singh, fused Indian, hip-hop and techno music on **Woman's Gotta Have It** (1995) and on the more commercial **When I Was Born For The 7th Time** (1997).

In the USA, the closest thing to "transglobal dance" was probably [Tulku](#), the project conceived by Native American keyboardist Jim Wilson: **Transcendence** (1995) and **Season Of Souls** (1998), were experiments in ethnic trance music that drew inspiration from various indigenous styles of the world.

Big Beat, 1992-94

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The last dance "cross-over" of the decade was to be the one between techno and rock music (or "big beat"). This happened almost by accident, as a number of British producers and djs reacted to the intellectual wing of dance-music by focusing on more accessible dance-music that relied on shameless, old-fashioned catchy breakbeats and silly, novelty-like samples. Because it did not depend so much on studio trickery, it could be performed live, thus meeting the demand of the rock audience. Because it could be performed live, it reasserted the importance of the "front-man", the distinctive trait of rock music.

The idea was pioneered in England by Liam Howlett's [Prodigy](#) (1) with the hyperkinetic numbers of **Experience** (1992), the versatile and cosmopolitan **Music For The Jilted Generation** (1995) and the super-synthesis of **The Fat Of The Land** (1997), which ran the gamut from ambient to heavy-metal (albeit in a very superficial manner). The Prodigy became the first superstars of the rave culture. Howlett was the brain behind the act, but Keith Flint (the singer) attracted the tabloids. It was techno for the rock market.

An even more obvious premonition was contained in the music of [Underworld](#) (2), the trio of disc-jockey Darren Emerson, vocalist/guitarist Karl Hyde and keyboardist Rick Smith. Rock guitars, electronic dance beats and spoken-word parts found a magic intersection in the lengthy tracks of **Dubnobasswithmyheadman** (1994), each a chameleon continuously changing in texture, melody and tempo without ever losing its identity. The album, a tour de force of dance production techniques, referenced the insistent sequencers of Giorgio Moroder's disco-music but was mainly a container of sound effects, polyrhythms and haunting melodic fragments. **Second Toughest In The Infants** (1996) reprised the combination of existential mood and fantasia-like melodic collage.

Musically speaking, the frenzy increased with the [Chemical Brothers](#) (2), i.e. "Madchester" veterans Tom Rowlands and Ed Simons, whose **Exit Planet Dust** (1995) and **Dig Your Own Hole** (1997) recycled overdoses

of funk, heavy-metal and hip-hop, confusing the languages of Public Enemy, Kraftwerk and the Stooges.

The prophecy of "big beat" was fully realized later into the decade by Norman Cook, better known as [Fatboy Slim](#) (2). The "songs" on **Better Living Through Chemistry** (1996) and **You've Come a Long Way Baby** (1998) were wacky collages of styles set to dance beats and fragmented into jerky segments, a praxis that, despite the high-school prank mood, was reminiscent of the deconstruction/reconstruction techniques of postmodernist art.

The only rivals of the British big-beat masters were France's [Daft Punk](#), whose **Homework** (1996) featured a retro fixation for Giorgio Moroder's disco-music while exploiting various styles of production (hip hop, ambient, funk, industrial and house).

Trip-hop, 1989-94

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One of England's great inventions at the turn of the millennium was "trip-hop", the style that bridged downtempo breakbeats, psychedelic dub trance and soft-jazz atmosphere. Pioneered in the 1980s by dance collectives such as A R Kane and Coldcut, by sophisticated singers such as Sade and Neneh Cherry, and by pop bands such as Cowboy Junkies and Blue Nile, trip-hop was born in earnest in Bristol, England, the home base of the collectives that turned the world of dance music upside down. [Soul II Soul](#), the project of disc-jockey Jazzie B (Beresford Romeo) and arranger Nellee Hooper, launched the genre in march 1989 with *Keep On Movin'*, a whispered, sensual scat over shadowy bass lines, softly hypnotic beats and orchestral counterpoint. Bristol created a clear demarcation between techno/house/jungle and atmospheric, ethereal dance music. [Massive Attack](#) (1), an emanation of the sound system Wild Bunch (disc-jockey Grantley "Daddy G" Marshall, rapper Robert "3-D" Del Naja and rhythm engineer Andrew "Mushroom" Vowles), formalized that dividing line on their influential **Blue Lines** (1991), featuring vocalist Shara Nelson, which established the sonic standard of trip-hop: a blend of soul vocals, dub bass lines, languid strings, ambient electronica, intricate drum patterns, and eerie atmosphere. The idea was not terribly original (it was basically a revamping of easy-listening, new-age music, orchestral soul and cocktail-lounge music for the affluent white disco crowds), but the choreography was clearly more important than the music, as **Mezzanine** (1998) proved in an even more seductive manner.

[Portishead](#) (10), formed by producer Geoff Barrow, vocalist Beth Gibbons, sound engineer Dave McDonald and guitarist Adrian Utley, were the ultimate creation of Bristol's fertile scene. The spectral and funereal lieder of **Dummy** (1994) set desolate laments to a casual backdrop of electronic music and let them float over a disorienting flow of syncopated beats. They had blurred the line between the pop ballad and the abstract chamber piece.

[Tricky](#) (1), a former member of the Wild Bunch, hired Martina Topley-Bird to imitate Portishead on **Maxinquaye** (1995), adding more neurotic

dynamics. The album credited to **Nearly God** (1996) featured guest vocalists such as Bjork, Neneh Cherry and Alison Moyet interpreting or backing up Tricky's "songs". Fulfilling his progression towards a more personal and sincere form of music, the bleak **Pre-Millennium Tension** (1996) set his depressed toasting against nightmarish soundscapes.

Luke Vibert devoted his project [Wagon Christ](#) (1) to the ambient side of the trip-hop equation with **Phat Lab Nightmare** (1994) and especially with the celestial trance of **Throbbing Pouch** (1995), exuding abandon and fatalism. Massive sampling of orchestral sounds gave **Tally Ho!** (1998) an almost symphonic grandeur.

Minimal techno, 1989-94

The career of Manchester-based disc-jockeys Sean Booth and Rob Brown, better known as [Autechre](#) (22), actually comprised two careers. The first one was about dance music whose beat had been deformed and suppressed, melted into a watery substance and emptied of its narrative content, but was still relatively warm and organic. The smooth and detached tones of **Incunabula** (1993), perhaps the most austere and implacable album in the history of dance music, coined a new form of ultra-minimal techno that was expanded on the more colorful **Amber** (1995), insinuating those minimal/artificial sounds in the most obscure orbits of the subconscious, and on the more claustrophobic **Tri Repetae** (1996), that resorted to metallic sounds and subsonic frequencies. These works were inspired by Steve Reich's minimalism, Kraftwerk's robotic trance, and Brian Eno's ambient music, but their emotional content (if any) was radically different. **Chiastic Slide** (1997) was the dividing line, the discontinuity that caused a phase shift. The menacing texture of digital beats, repetitive noises and dejected melodies mutated into alien beings with a life of their own. Autechre's second career, best represented by **LP5** (1998) and **Confield** (2001), was about dissonance, icy ambience, irregular rhythm and non-linear development. Both careers were characterized by austere, meticulous and intricate sound design. Autechre's tracks often seemed to be labyrinthine mirages: the closer one went, the more lost one felt.

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