

# The History of Rock Music: 1966-1969

Genres and musicians of the Sixties

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## Psychedelia 1965-68

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

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### *The Synthesis*

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Between 1963 and 1966 rock music took three decisive breaks from the original nature of rock'n'roll: Bob Dylan introduced an explicit socio-political message; British bands such as the Rolling Stones and the Who (the heirs to the "juvenile delinquent" image of the 1950s) indulged in instrumental and vocal mayhem; the Beach Boys, the Beatles and the Byrds focused on studio techniques and eccentric arrangements. Each of them embodied three different ways of using music as a vehicle: the profound bard, the street punk, the sound sculptor. The Rolling Stones and the Who personified an eternal and universal attribute of youth: rebellion. The Beach Boys and the Beatles were as removed as possible from their times (the Vietnam war, the civil-rights movement, the fear of the nuclear holocaust). Bob Dylan was all about his times. Dylan used music as a weapon, the Rolling Stones and the Who used it as an insult, while the Beach Boys and the Beatles were largely indifferent to the ideological turmoil.

The convergence of these three wildly different threads yielded the great season of psychedelic music, a genre that reflected the spirit of the time, that experimented with studio sound and that embodied the frustration of the youth. The synthesis of 1966 was fueled by hallucinogens, as if drugs were the natural meeting point of the bard, the punk and the sound sculptor. Most likely, it was a mere coincidence: drugs just happened to represent the unifying call to arms for that generation. It may as well have been something else. Drugs were conveniently available and stood for the opposite of what the hated Establishment stood for (war, bourgeois life, discipline, greed, organized religion, old-fashioned moral values).

If one had to pinpoint an event that concretized this historical synthesis, it would have been in may 1966, when Dylan's **Blonde on Blonde** came out, a double album (already a significant departure from the old format) that had ironically been recorded in Nashville (between october 1965 and march 1966). Until then,

rock musicians had all operated within the boundaries of the three-minute melodic song of pop music. After that album's release, only mainstream commercial music would remain anchored to the traditional song format of Tin Pan Alley. Albums with lengthy, free-form "songs" began to flow out of London, New York and Los Angeles: the Fugs' second album with *Virgin Forest* (recorded in January and released in March, thus actually beating Dylan), Frank Zappa's double-album **Freak Out** (recorded in March and released in June), the Rolling Stones' **Aftermath** (recorded in Los Angeles in March), the Velvet Underground's **The Velvet Underground & Nico** (mostly recorded in April and May), the Who's **A Quick One** (recorded in the fall), the Doors' first album (recorded in the summer), Love's **Da Capo** (between summer and fall), etc. Several of them had been recorded at the same time as Dylan's masterpiece, signaling a collective shift away from the pop song.

This shift in rock music (grafted onto the historical synthesis of the bard, the punk and the sound sculptor) coincided with the boom of "free jazz". Rock'n'roll had been born at the confluence of blues and country music, but after 1966 blues and country/folk became mere ingredients (two among many) of a much more complex recipe. The lengthy "acid" jams of the Velvet Underground, of Jefferson Airplane, of the Grateful Dead and of Pink Floyd, relied on a loose musical infrastructure that was no longer related to rhythm'n'blues (let alone country music). It was, on the other hand, very similar to the format of jazz music played in the lofts and the clubs that many psychedelic rock musicians attended, and that had rapidly become the second great pillar of the counterculture (the first one being the movement for civil-rights and pacifism). Basically, the indirect influence of free jazz became prominent in rock music during the psychedelic era, fueling its musical revolution and emancipating rock music from its blues foundations. Before 1966 rock music had been more a part of the blues tradition than rockers wanted to admit; after 1966 rock music became more a part of the jazz tradition than rock musicians wanted to admit.

### *San Francisco and the hippies*

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In 1965 San Francisco, whose scene had largely languished in the years of surf music and of the Greenwich Movement, suddenly became one of the most ebullient cities in the nation. The poets of the "Beat generation" moved here; the "Diggers" turned the Haight Ashbury district into a "living theater". Mario Savio founded the "Free Speech Movement" at the University of California at Berkeley, where sit-ins and marches were supported by the likes of Country Joe McDonald. There was excitement in the air. In the summer of 1965 a San Francisco band, the Charlatans, and their hippy fans took over the "Red Dog Saloon" in Virginia City (Nevada), and came up with the idea of playing a new kind of music for a new kind of audience. The Warlocks (later renamed the Grateful Dead) got hired by Ken Kesey to play at his "acid tests" (LSD parties), where the band began performing lengthy instrumental jams, loosely based on country, blues and jazz. In October of that year, the Family Dog Production organized the first hippy party at the "Long Shoreman's Hall". Following the success of that "festival", avenues for San Francisco's new bands sprang up all around. Those acts embodied the pacifist ideals that had been promoted by Bob Dylan, but with a far less political stance. Theirs was a philosophy of life ("peace and love" and drugs) that was in many ways the direct consequence of what Dylan had preached, but was also much closer to Buddhist philosophy.

Hippies gathered not to march, but to celebrate; not to protest but to rejoice. The spiritual experience was preeminent over the political experience. This represented a dramatic change from the times of rock'n'roll, when the music was an (ultimately violent) act of rebellion.

Rock festivals were invented with the "Human Be-in" held in January 1967 at the Golden Gate Park (the "Gathering of the Tribes"). The hippy phenomenon was unique in that it became a mass movement that spread rapidly around the States (and the world) although it never had a leader. It was a messianic movement without a messiah.

Mostly, the music of the hippies was an evolution of folk-rock. It was renamed "acid-rock" because the original idea was that of providing a soundtrack to the LSD parties, a soundtrack that would reflect as closely as possible the effects of an LSD "trip". This music was, in many ways, the rock equivalent of abstract painting (Jackson Pollock), free-jazz (Ornette Coleman) and beat poetry (Allen Ginsberg). These phenomena had in common a loose structure in which form "was" the content and an attitude of disregard for century-old aesthetic values. In music this meant that improvisation was as important, and (even more important) than composition. Acid-rock's main invention was the "jam", which, of course, had already been practiced by jazz and blues musicians. Acid-rock musicians jammed in a slightly different context: they placed more emphasis on the melody, less emphasis on the virtuoso performance. The most visible difference (besides the race of the musicians) was the lead role of the electric guitar. A more subtle difference was that the passionate, aching spirit of the blues was replaced by a transcendental, Zen-like spirit. The archetype for acid-rock was actually recorded in Chicago, by the white bluesman [Paul Butterfield](#) (1): *East-West* (1966), a lengthy piece that fused Afro-American and Indian improvisation. From the instrumental point of view, acid-rock was still very much a descendant of rhythm'n'blues, but from the vocal point of view it was very much a descendant of folk and country music. The melodies and the harmonies were mostly inspired by the white tradition. 1966 was the year of the jam: *Virgin Forest* by the Fugs, Paul Butterfield's *East-West*, *Up In Her Room* by the Seeds, *Going Home* by the Rolling Stones, *Sad Eyed Lady Of The Lowlands* by Bob Dylan, etc. In the following years rock musicians would record increasingly more complex and lengthier pieces.

[Jefferson Airplane](#) (25) were one of the greatest rock bands of all times. They not only embodied the spirit and the sound of the hippy era more than anyone else, but also counted on a formidable group of talents, that redefined singing (Grace Slick), harmonizing (Paul Kantner, Marty Balin), bass playing (Jack Casady), guitar counterpoint (Jorma Kaukonen) and drumming (Spencer Dryden) in rock music. Their early singles, *Somebody To Love* and *White Rabbit*, helped establish psychedelic-rock as a musical genre. The music of Jefferson Airplane was largely self-referential, and their career feels like a documentary of their generation. **Surrealistic Pillow** (Nov 1966 - Feb 1967) was a manifesto for the hippy generation. **After Bathing At Baxter's** (Jun 1967 - Nov 1967), one of the greatest artistic achievements of the psychedelic era, was the album that broke loose with the conventions of the song format and the pop arrangement. After **Crown Of Creation** (Jun 1968 - Sep 1968), a detour into transfigured folk-pop-jazz-rock lullabies and ballads, their supreme masterpiece **Volunteers** (Apr 1969 - Nov 1969) fused the backward trend towards a return to the roots (both musical and moral) and the forward trend towards hard-line politics. Paul Kantner's sci-fi and political concept **Blows Against The Empire**

(? 1970 - nov 1970) was a nostalgic look back to the ideals of the communes and a utopistic tribute to the space age. **Sunfighter** (? 1971 - nov 1971), credited to [Paul Kantner](#) & Grace Slick, was an adult and solemn return to the song format and to nature (an "ecological" concept). The sophomore album of the couple, **Baron Von Tollbooth & The Chrome Nun** (dec 1972 - may 1973), transformed the anthemic overtones of the Jefferson Airplane into a self-contained aesthetic. Their "marketing appeal" was precisely that they represented (and practiced) a new lifestyle, while, musically, they rarely challenged the song-oriented format the way other acid-rock bands did. Jefferson Airplane were partially accepted by the Establishment because they were still living in the world of pop music, because the folk and blues roots were still visible, because the melody was still the center of mass.

Others were reacting against all of the above. The [Grateful Dead](#) (23), considered by many to be "the" greatest rock band of all times, were a monument of San Francisco's hippy civilization, and, in general, a monument of the psychedelic civilization of the 1960s. Their greatest invention was the lengthy, free-form, group jam, the rock equivalent of jazz improvisation. Unlike jazz, in which the jam channeled the angst of the Afro-american people, Grateful Dead's jam was the soundtrack for LSD "trips". But soon it came to represent an entire ideology of escape from the Establishment, of artistic freedom and of alternative lifestyles. Contrary to their image of junkies and misfits, the Grateful Dead were one of the most erudite groups of all times, aware of the atonal compositions of the European avantgarde as well as the modal improvisation of free-jazz and the rhythms of other cultures. They managed to transform guitar feedback and odd meters into the rock equivalent of chamber instruments. The infinite ascending and descending scales of Jerry Garcia are among the most titanic enterprises ever attempted by rock music. The Grateful Dead never sold many records: their preferred format was the live concert, not the record. They literally redefined what "popular music" was: the live concert shunned the laws of capitalism, removing the business plan from entertainment. Their recorded masterpieces, **Anthem Of The Sun** (mar 1968 - jul 1968), **Aoxomoxoa** (mar 1969 - jun 1969) and **Live Dead** (mar 1969 - nov 1969), are mere approximations of their art. **Anthem Of The Sun** was refined in studio using all sorts of effects and techniques. The band looked at Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage and Morton Subotnick (not Chuck Berry) for inspiration. The Dead's blues and country roots were horribly disfigured by hallucinogenic fits, thus disintegrating song structure and development. Each piece became an orgy of amoebic sound: drums beat obsessive tempos to reproduce the pulsations of an LSD trip; electronics painted nightmarish and ecstatic soundscapes; gloomy keyboards moaned mysteriously like ghosts imprisoned in catacombs; guitars pierced minds and released their dreams into the sky; voices floated serenely over the maelstrom. Arrangements overflowed with tidbits of harpsichord, trumpet, celesta, etc. But overall the feeling was one of angst, enhanced by the jungle of dissonances and percussions. The lengthier improvisations sounded like chamber music for drunken junkies. (Credit goes to producer Dave Hassinger for overdubbing different performances and creating a "multi-dimensional" feeling, i.e. an extreme version of Spector's "wall of sound"). Rhythm and melody had become pure accessories. **Aoxomoxoa** repaired part of the damage, by moving back towards the traditional song format. **Live Dead**, instead, returned to their true dimension with tracks such as *Feedback*, one lengthy monolithic "trip" by Garcia's guitar, and *Dark Star*, the Dead's terminal jam and the swan song of acid-rock. At the same time, though, their free-form jams were born out of a philosophy that was still profoundly rooted in the USA tradition. They were

born at the border between the individualistic and libertarian culture of the Frontier and the communal and spiritual culture of the Quakers. Despite being ostracized by the Establishment, the Grateful Dead expressed, better than any other musician of that age, the quintessence of the USA nation, and perhaps that was precisely the reason that their music resonated so well with the soul of the USA youth. It is not a coincidence that the Grateful Dead, along with the Byrds and Bob Dylan, led the movement towards country-rock, via **Workingman's Dead** (feb 1970 - jun 1970) and Jerry Garcia's solo album **Garcia** (jul 1971 - jan 1972). The band spent their adult years trying to transform the subcultural idiom of the hippies into a universal language that could reach out to every corner of the planet (not only the hippy communes). They succeeded with a form of intellectual muzak which interpreted the lysergic trip as a cathartic escape from daily reality and liberation from urban neuroses: *Weather Report Suite* (1975), *Blues For Allah* (1975), *Shakedown Street* (1978), *Althea* (1979). In practice, their art was a psychological study on the relationship between the altered states of the mind (psychedelic hallucinations) and the altered states of the psyche (industrial neuroses).

The early San Francisco bands had to cope with a record industry that completely misunderstood them. The big companies were dying to exploit the hippy phenomenon, but they balked at the odd music that these hippies were playing. Producers were paid specifically to destroy the original sound and to "normalize" the jams (in other words, to "Beatles-ize" acid-rock).

While previous music scenes around the world had revolved around a specific style (such as Mersey-beat or rhythm'n'blues or surf music), the San Francisco Bay became the place where anything was allowed. In fact, pretty much the only thing that was not allowed was to replicate someone else's sound. Originality was mandatory, whereas talent was optional.

The album recorded in 1967 by the [Charlatans](#), **The Charlatans** (? 1966/? 1967 - ? 1977), was not released for ten years, but the songs came out as a series of limited-edition singles in late 1966 and early 1967.

[Kaleidoscope](#) (11) were among the most adventurous with the fusion of country, jazz, cajun, middle-eastern, Indian, flamenco, gypsy and South American music propounded on **Side Trips** (? 1967 - jun 1967) and **A Beacon From Mars** (? 1967 - ? 1968), the latter including *Taxim* (possibly raga-rock's all-time masterpiece).

Mike Bloomfield's [Electric Flag](#) debuted with **Trip** (may 1967 - ? 1967), a bizarre mixture of electronics, noise, psychedelia, country, ragtime and blues.

[Moby Grape](#) (2) embodied the casual and magical spirit of the acid jams on **Grape Jam** (jan/feb 1968 - apr 1968), featuring Mike Bloomfield and Al Kooper (both Dylan cohorts), and on Alexander Spence's solo album **Oar** (dec 1968 - may 1969).

[Quicksilver](#) (1), one of the greatest jam bands of the acid-rock scene, bridged San Francisco's acid-rock, the garage sound of the Northwest and Chicago's rhythm and blues, particularly on **Happy Trails** (nov 1968 - mar 1969), whose lengthier tracks are bold pan-stylistic cavalcades that take blues as the starting point but aim for the inner self.

[Mad River](#) (2) were also influenced by the blues on **Mad River** (? - ? 1968)

and **Paradise Bar And Grill** (? ? - ? 1969).

[Blue Cheer](#) (1), on the other hand, played blues-rock with a vengeance: **Vincebus Eruptum** (? 1967 - jan 1968) introduced a terrifying sound (deafening guitar and bass amplification), that challenged the whole "hippy" ideology and predated stoner-rock by 25 years.

[Steppenwolf](#) unleashed two of the hardest-hitting anthems of this loud and fast acid-rock: *Born To Be Wild* (1968), which contains the expression "heavy metal" that would come to identify a new genre, and *Magic Carpet Ride* (1968).

At the other end of the spectrum, [Fifty Foot Hose](#) (1), one of the most experimental bands of the 1960s, and one of the first to employ electronics and to bridge rock music and the avantgarde, recorded **Cauldron** (? 1967 - dec 1967), challenging the placid atmosphere of acid-rock with the cacophonous and chaotic sound of their apocalyptic "freak-out" jams (*Fantasy*).

By the time these bands reached the recording studios, the golden age of acid-rock had already ended thanks to two highly-publicized events in the summer of 1967: the Monterey festival (that legitimized the format) and the Beatles' **Sgt Pepper** (that legitimized the sound). During that summer the "alternative" became "mainstream". The anti-commercial spirit of acid-rock became a contradiction in terms. The following year, the hippy bands embraced country-rock and returned to the traditional song format. That summer drew young people from all over the USA. The term "Summer of Love" became commonplace (although one can argue that the real "summer of love" had taken place one year earlier, unbeknownst to most of the media).

There was also a sociopolitical reason for the sudden demise of the hippy movement. Hippies had never truly represented the intellectual class. They had represented the average young man from the middle class, who was afraid of being drafted for the Vietnam war and dreamed of a world without nuclear weapons. Left-wing intellectuals had different priorities, and subscribed to the notion that some degree of urban guerrilla was necessary in order to change the Establishment. The hippies were only one of the facets of the counter-culture. In 1968 the tide turned, and violent protests became more popular than peaceful ones. The peace movement was hijacked by revolutionaries of a different caliber, and its soundtrack (acid-rock) became anachronistic.

### ***New York and the new Boheme***

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Even during its heydays, San Francisco was not all psychedelic-rock. Bands such as the [Velvet Underground](#) (210) had little or nothing in common with the San Francisco bands. They represented the culture of "heroin" (which was a more sinister, neurotic, nihilistic culture) rather than the culture of LSD (which was bucolic, dreamy and utopian). The Velvet Underground scavenged the narrow alleys of the bad parts of town, and scavenged the subconscious of the urban kid, for emotional scraps that were a barbaric by-product of the original spirit of rock'n'roll. Their goal was only marginally the sonic reproduction of the psychedelic experience: their true goal was to provide a documentary of the decadent, disaffected, cynical mood that was spreading among the intelligentsia. These were not hippies, these were elitist musicians who were aware of the

avantgarde movements: they began playing (in 1965) as part of Andy Warhol's multimedia show "The Exploding Plastic Inevitable". They originated the "pessimistic" strand of psychedelic music (as opposed to San Francisco's optimistic strand). The Velvet Underground probably remain the most influential band in the entire history of rock music. Above all else, they originated a spirit of making music (independent, nihilistic, subversive) that ten years later would be labeled "punk". Rock music as it is today was born the day the Velvet Underground entered a recording studio. **The Velvet Underground And Nico** (apr/nov 1966 - mar 1967), recorded in the spring of 1966, includes an impressive number of masterpieces (mostly penned by Lou Reed and John Cale, and sung by Nico): the cold, spectral, autumnal odes of *Femme Fatale*, *All Tomorrow's Parties* and *Black Angel's Death Song*, the percussive boogie of *Waiting For My Man*, the orgasmic chaos of *Heroin*, the dissonant tribal music of *European Son*, the Indian raga imbued with decadent spleen of *Venus In Furs*. They are immersed in the dark, oppressive atmosphere of German expressionism and French existentialism, but they also exhaled an epic libido: each song was a sexual fetish, and a cathartic sado-masochistic release. It was difficult to find a precedent for the Velvet Underground's music, because these barbarians were attuned to the classical lieder and to LaMonte Young's minimalism, while they borrowed very little from rock'n'roll and pop music. Although less impressive, **White Light White Heat** (sep 1967 - nov 1967) contains *Sister Ray*, which probably remains the ultimate, definitive masterpiece of rock music, an epic piece that rivals Beethoven's symphonies and John Coltrane's metaphysical improvisations. The **Live** (oct/nov 1969 - sep 1974) album contains a few more uncontrolled jams in the style of *Sister Ray*, while the mellow ballads of **Velvet Underground** (nov/dec 1968 - mar 1969), and *Sweet Jane* (1970), founded a decadent pop-song that would be influential on glam-rock. By praising drug addiction and deviant sex, the Velvet Underground revealed a whole new category of hedonistic rituals. Their albums evoked a Dante-esque vision in which the border between hell and paradise was blurred. Their songs were also unique in the way they fused funeral elegy and triumphal anthem: they were terrible and seductive at the same time. Semiotically speaking, those songs constituted "signs" by means of which reality was encoded in sounds: the metropolis was reduced to an endlessly pulsing noise, daily life was reduced to an unconscious delirium, and everything, both public and private, was clouded in pure, Freudian libido. The Velvet Underground's hyper-realism was deformed by a mind constantly in the grip of drugs and perverted fantasies. At the same time, their music was a visionary chaos from whose fog the mirage of a better world could rise. Their music was always majestic, even when sinking into the depths of abjection.

The rest of the New York contingent pales in comparison to the Velvet Underground. The [Blues Magoos](#) (1) released one of the earliest psychedelic albums, **Psychedelic Lollipop** (? 1966 - nov 1966); and [Mystic Tide](#) released some of the earliest psychedelic anthems, notably *Frustration* (1966) and *Psychedelic Journey* (1966).

Psychedelic-rock would soon become as formulaic as any other genre. Few bands ventured outside the dogma, and those who did died in obscurity. For example, [Devils' Anvil](#) (1) played a unique middle-eastern acid-rock, immortalized on **Hard Rock From the Middle East** (? ? - ? 1967).

Tom Rapp's [Pearls Before Swine](#) (11) were perhaps the greatest band venturing into psychedelic-folk during the 1960s. Their two masterpieces, **One Nation**

**Underground** (may 1967 - ? 1967) and especially **Balaklava** (? 1968 - ? 1968) are mosaics of atmospheric songs that defy classification, evoking the hallucinated state of Dali's surrealism, lushly arranged, and influenced by both classical and jazz music. Each album is performed by a veritable "chamber ensemble": organ, harmonium, piano, harp, vibraphone, English horn, clarinet, celesta, banjo, sitar, flute...

Also typical of New York's artistic milieu were [Cromagnon](#) (1), who released one of the most radical, futuristic and frightening albums of the era, **Orgasm** (? 1969 - ? 1969).

Bizarre and eclectic arrangements featured prominently on **United States Of America** (dec 1967 - mar 1968), the one and only album released by Joseph Byrd's [United States Of America](#) (11), a hodgepodge of sonic experiments that can be hardly called "songs". One of the most significant albums of that era, it is also one of the first albums on which a whole range of keyboards (not just piano or organ) paint most of the soundscape. There are hints of cut-up techniques, atmospheric jazz ballads and futuristic lounge-music: ideas that would be resumed three decades later. Byrd's surrealistic music-hall was the opposite of the Fugs' political theater. A better definition for this kind of music is the title of Byrd's solo album, **American Metaphysical Circus** (? 1968 - ? 1969).

### *Los Angeles and acid-pop*

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Psychedelic-rock in Los Angeles clearly descended from the Byrds, but it rapidly split into several camps: the poppy, stereotyped novelty number, best represented by [Strawberry Alarm Clock](#)'s **Incense And Peppermint** (? 1967 - ? ?); the wild, raw, bluesy rave-up, influenced by the Rolling Stones, whose archetype were the [Seeds](#) (2), violent, lascivious punks who cut the unpleasant albums **Seeds** (? 1966 - apr 1966) and **A Web Of Sound** (? 1966 - oct 1966); the lengthy, intoxicating guitar-driven improvisation, whose heroes were [Iron Butterfly](#) (1), the band that released an album titled **Heavy** (oct 1967 - feb 1968) before the term "heavy-metal" was coined, and concocted an exciting, feverish blues-psychedelic jam, the title-track from **In A Gadda Da Vida** (early 1968 - jul 1968). The fragile and dreamy music of **Part One** (? 1967 - may 1967), by the [West Coast Pop Art Experimental Band](#) (1), was probably the closest thing to San Francisco's acid-rock that Los Angeles produced.

[Love](#) (11) were representative of three different stages in psychedelic-rock: its roots in folk-rock, still evident on the naive **Love** (jan 1966 - mar 1966); its full-blown creative maturity, after digesting blues, jazz and raga, as on their masterpiece **Da Capo** (jun/oct 1966 - jan 1967); its baroque apex, when, influenced (like everybody else) by the Beach Boys' **Pet Sounds**, the band adopted the lush pop arrangements of **Forever Changes** (jun/sep 1967 - nov 1967).

Of all creative bands in the history of rock music, the [Doors](#) (113) may have been the most creative. Their first album, **The Doors** (aug 1966 - jan 1967), contains only masterpieces (*Light My Fire*, *Break On Through*, *Crystal Ship*, *Soul Kitchen*, *End Of The Night*, and the most suspenseful song in the history of popular music, *The End*) and, as a collection of songs, it remains virtually unmatched. Jim Morrison may well be the single most important rock frontman.

He is the one who defined the rock vocalist as an artist, not just a singer. Ray Manzaker's style at the keyboards was at the vanguard of the fusion of classical, jazz, soul and rock music. The virulence of some of their riffs bridged the blues-rock era and the hard-rock era. Whether it was him, Manzarek or guitarist Bobbie Krieger or all of them, their songs exhibit a unique quality that has never been repeated. They are metaphysical while being psychological and even physical (erotic and violent). They are the closest thing rock music has produced to William Shakespeare. Partly Freudian psychodrama and partly shamanic/messianic invocation, Doors songs were always more than "songs". The fact that they borrowed elements from blues, Bach and ragas was less relevant than the fact that they represented suicidal self-inflicted agonies. They continuously referenced death: sex, drugs and death made up the Doors' triune reality. Each one was ecstasy and annihilation. The supernatural quality of their hymns was not gothic, but rather imbued with the fatalism of the French symbolists. Death was the ultimate aspect of that trinity, as Morrison found out in 1971. The music spanned a broad range of styles, a fact best epitomized by the long instrumental break in *Light My Fire*, where Krieger's guitar intones a raga while Manzarek's organ weaves a Bach-ian fugue and both improvise jazz-like. The Doors made at least three more albums that proved their talent, **Strange Days** (aug 1967 - oct 1967), **Waiting For The Sun** (may 1968 - jul 1968) and **L.A. Woman** (jan 1971 - apr 1971), but never managed to repeat the feat of their first album.

Jim Morrison represented a new kind of sexual persona. Elvis Presley's animal magnetism, which made him an idol of the teenagers of the 1950s, was largely a white impersonation of black (forbidden) sexuality. His moves and his voice were simulating black stereotypes. The teenagers who fell for his charade were mainly well-behaved children of the middle class. A decade later Morrison employed a completely different technique, which made Presley obsolete: Morrison's sexuality was demonic. Morrison placed his sexuality at a higher "forbidden" level. Morrison's act was also different from Presley's act in that it was not a travesty: it was real life. Presley only pretended to be a juvenile delinquent, whereas Morrison had all the intentions of being the (perverted and suicidal) character that he played. Morrison's audience was an audience of similarly deviated youths.

Technically speaking, [Spirit](#) (3) were even more talented than the Doors. They recorded some of the most adventurous albums of the psychedelic era, frequently employing elements of jazz and classical music and pre-dating progressive-rock. **Spirit** (nov 1967 - jan 1968) and **The Family That Plays Together** (mar/sep 1968 - dec 1968) toyed with an erudite fusion of blues, jazz, raga and rock, while **Twelve Dreams Of Dr Sardonicus** (apr/oct 1970 - nov 1970) marked a move towards overwrought (and electronic) arrangements.

Psychedelic-rock was a bonanza for Los Angeles producers, because it gave them the excuse to indulge in all sorts of bizarre arrangements. Producer Ed Cobb contributed to psychedelic-rock via an artificial band, San Jose's the [Chocolate Watchband](#), who are credited with his **The Inner Mystique** (? 1967 - dec 1967). David Axelrod penned the **Mass In F Minor** (? 1967 - jan 1968) by the [Electric Prunes](#) (1), the first "rock mass". But Music Emporium's **Music Emporium** (? 1969 - ? 1969) was more sophisticated than anything the seasoned producers concocted.

### ***Texas and the freak-out***

The psychedelic school in Texas, on the other hand, was one of the most authentic and uncompromising. The [13th Floor Elevators](#) (1) were among the earliest psychedelic bands: **The Psychedelic Sound Of** (oct 1966 - nov 1966) came out in the autumn of 1966. Like the Seeds in Los Angeles, their ferocious sound harkened back to the Rolling Stones. Roky Erickson was the demonic front-man and Stacy Sutherland was the quintessential fuzztone and reverb guitarist but Tommy Hall was the real brain behind the project, both in terms of sound (thanks to his electric jug) and in terms of ideology (he merged psychedelic culture with Eastern philosophies and Western science).

[Red Crayola](#) (102), later renamed [Red Krayola](#), were one of the greatest psychedelic bands of the 1960s and probably of all times. They played extremely wild and cacophonous music that was decades ahead of its time. They predated Germany's expressionistic rock (Faust) and the new wave of the USA (Pere Ubu). Their "freak outs" were closer to John Coltrane's free-jazz and to Jackson Pollock's abstract paintings than to rock'n'roll. Their leader, Mayo Thompson, was a composer who ranks among the greatest musicians of his time (classical, jazz, rock). His revolutionary compositional style had few stable coordinates. His pieces float not because they are ethereal but because melody and rhythm are left "loose". They are organisms that rely on supporting skeletons that are falling apart as they move. Thompson placed his art firmly in the iconoclastic tradition that Frank Zappa had just founded, and simply increased the amount and the speed of noise. **Parable Of Arable Land** (mar 1967 - ? 1967) is one of the milestones of rock music, a carousel of savage harmonic inventions/sabotages. **God Bless** (? 1968 - ? 1968) was even closer (in spirit if not in sound) to the likes of Edgar Varese and John Cage. It is not a coincidence that Thompson was rediscovered by the new wave ten years later: his **Soldier Talk** (? ? - ? 1979) could have well been the album of the Pere Ubu (the band he eventually joined).

[Euphoria's A Gift From Euphoria](#) (? 1969 - ? 1969), on the other hand, offered an odd combination of orchestral pop ballads, country-rock, distorted psychedelia and sound effects.

### *The spreading of the disease*

The first band to use the term "psychedelic" in an album title had actually been from a city that was not much of a hub of rock music: Philadelphia. The Deep released **The Psychedelic Moods** (aug 1966 - fall 1966) and then changed name to Freak Scene for the follow-up, **Psychedelic Psoul** (? 1967 - ? 1967).

Another martyr of psychedelia, [Jimi Hendrix](#) (21), was one of the greatest icons of the 1960s. His death in 1970 still stands as one of the crucial events in the history of rock music, one of the dates that divide two eras. His work may be less important than his image, as too many of his albums were below average. Hendrix was, after all, one of the most exploited artists of all times (many more albums were released after his death than during his lifetime). Hendrix made only two amazing albums: the first and the third, **Are You Experienced?** (apr 1967 - may 1967) and **Electric Ladyland** (aug 1968 - oct 1968). His greatest achievement was to coin a new guitar style, a style that amounted to a

declaration of war against western harmony. Born at the crossroad between Chicago's blues, Memphis soul and Charlie Christian's jazz improvisation, Hendrix's style was an excruciating torture of tonal music. His astral glissandos bridged the historical suffering of African slaves and the existential angst of European philosophers. A black man, Hendrix always used the blues as the basis for his improvisation, but then used the whole human body to play and distort the sound of the guitar. The guitar became a sacrificial totem for an entire generation. A cosmic hymn such as *Third Stone From The Sun* was fueled towards higher dimensions by the heroic guitar workout. The blues agony of jams such as *Voodoo Chile* was pushed to new psychological levels by the endless guitar pyrotechnics. Tracks such as *1983* flirted with free-jazz and avantgarde music to achieve a form of "sound painting". On the album **Band Of Gypsies** (jan 1970 - apr 1970) Hendrix was indulging in endless acrobatics. Hendrix's guitar opened new doors to experimental music. His lesson would be applied not only to guitar but also to keyboards and to whatever instrument would lead a rock song. His legacy as a guitarist is comparable to Beethoven's legacy as a symphonist.

Baroque arrangements (flute, clarinet, harpsichord) enhanced the compositions of the Chicago band [H.P. Lovecraft](#) (1), whose most accomplished album was **II** (jun/jul 1968 - sep 1968).

Another Chicago band, the [Amboy Dukes](#) (2), laid the foundations for both heavy-metal and progressive-rock with the complex and energetic compositions of **Journey To The Center Of The Mind** (? 1968 - apr 1968) and **Marriage On The Rocks** (dec 1969 - mar 1970).

[Ultimate Spinach](#) (1) were the most significant psychedelic band from Boston. They specialized in sophisticated suites such as *Ballad Of The Hip Death Goddess*, from **Ultimate Spinach** (sep/oct 1967 - ? 1968) and *Genesis Of Beauty*, from **Behold And See** (? 1968 - aug 1968). They, too, predated progressive-rock.

A Canadian band, [L'Infonie](#) (1), inspired by the cacophonous chaos of Captain Beefheart and Red Crayola, but also by Pierre Henry's musique concrete, by Sun Ra's cosmic jazz and Frank Zappa's dadaistic sketches, and obsessed with the digit "3", released **Volume 3** (? 1969 - ? 1969), performed by 33 musicians, **Volume 33** (? 1971 - ? 1971), and **Volume 333** (? 1972 - ? 1972).

Indirectly, psychedelic-rock also permeated melodic ("bubblegum") rock, as visible in American Breed's *Bend Me Shape Me* (1967), Steam's *Na Na Hey Hey Kiss Him Goodbye* (1968), Ohio Express' *Yummy Yummy Yummy* (1968). In Michigan, [Tommy James](#) roared *Mony Mony* (1968) and moaned *Crimson And Clover* (1968).

### ***Britain and the light show***

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British psychedelia was a very minor and very late phenomenon, with one notable exception: Pink Floyd. In the summer of 1966, Joel and Tony Brown, who had worked for LSD guru Timothy Leary in the USA, exported to London the "light show", which became immediately a major sensation. At the same time, upon returning from a journey to the USA, disc-jockey John Ravenscroft

(better known as John "Peel") began broadcasting psychedelic music during his radio show "Perfumed Garden". In december 1966, the UFO Club was inaugurated to foster the new phenomenon. In april 1967, dozens of bands played at the "14 Hours Technicolour Dream", which was de facto the first rock festival. In august 1967, the whole of Europe joined in at St Tropez. The following year a hippy festival was held at the Isle of Wight, and more (larger and larger ones) would follow.

[Creation](#) were the first psychedelic band to cause a sensation, but it was [Pink Floyd](#) (24) that soon became the reference point for the entire school.

Pink Floyd devised a compromise between the free-form tonal jam, the noisy, cacophonous freak out, and the eccentric, melodic ditty. This amalgam and balance was inspired and nourished by Syd Barrett's gentle madness on their first two albums, their psychedelic masterpieces: **The Piper At The Gates Of Dawn** (feb/jul 1967 - aug 1967), that includes the pulsating, visionary trips of *Astronomy Domine* and *Interstellar Overdrive* (the bridge between space-rock and cosmic music); and **A Saucerful Of Secrets** (aug 1967/apr 1968 - jun 1968), that contains the stately crescendo and wordless anthem of *A Saucerful Of Secrets* and the subliminal raga of *Set The Controls For The Heart Of The Sun*. The ambitious **Ummagumma** (live: apr 1969; studio: may 1969 - oct 1969), a failed albeit intriguing attempt at establishing their credentials as avantgarde composers, and the eponymous suite from **Atom Heart Mother** (mar/aug 1970 - oct 1970), a failed albeit intriguing attempt at merging rock band and symphonic orchestra, marked the end of the epic phase. Barrett had already departed, and the new quartet led by bassist and vocalist Roger Waters was more interested in sculpting sound for the sake of sound, with each musician (guitarist David Gilmour, keyboardist Richard Wright and percussionist Nick Mason) becoming a virtuoso at his own instrument. For better and for worse, Pink Floyd understood the limits and the implications of the genre, and kept reinventing themselves, slowly transforming psychedelic-rock (a music originally born for the hippies that had been banned by the Establishment) into a muzak for relaxation and meditation (aimed at the yuppies who are totally integrated in the Establishment). The other half of **Atom Heart Mother** already hinted at the band's preference for the languid, mellow, hypnotic ballad, albeit sabotaged by an orgy of sound effects. *Echoes*, the suite that takes up half of **Meddle** (jan/aug 1971 - oct 1971), sterilized and anesthetized the space-rock of *Interstellar Overdrive*, and emphasized not the sound effects but meticulous studio production. Pink Floyd did not hesitate to alter the letter and the spirit of psychedelic music. The delirious and cacophonous sound of their beginnings slowly mutated into a smooth and lush sound. Rather than just endorsing the stereotypes of easy-listening, Pink Floyd invented a whole new kind of easy-listening with **Dark Side Of The Moon** (jun 1972/jan 1973 - mar 1973) and **Wish You Were Here** (jan/jul 1975 - sep 1975). The former was a collection of high-tech songs propelled by funky rhythms and shaped by electronic effects. The latter was basically the high-brow version of the former, a concept on primal states of the mind such as fear and madness that set the devastated psyche of the narrator (Roger Waters) in the context of a tragic and oppressing Weltanschauung. The futuristic anthem *Welcome To The Machine* was actually a symphonic requiem for layers of electronic keyboards and romantic guitar. A tactical move soon became a strategic move. In the end, Pink Floyd reshaped psychedelic music into a universal language, a language that fit the punk as well as the manager, just like, at about the same time, jazz-rock was "selling" the anguish of the Afro-American people to the white conformists. Roger Waters'

existential pessimism and historical angst became the pillars of the band's latter-day melodramas, such as **The Wall** (apr/nov 1979 - nov 1979). These monoliths of electronic and acoustic sounds, coupled with psychoanalytical lyrics, indulge in a funereal pomp that approaches the forms of the requiem and the oratorio.

Nobody could compete with Pink Floyd, in terms of both artistic achievement and influence. However, [Tomorrow](#) (1), featuring drummer John "Twink" Alder, recorded one of the most eccentric albums of that season, **Tomorrow** (spring 1967 - feb 1968), and [Hapshash & The Coloured Coat](#) (1) did even better with **Featuring The Human Host And The Heavy Metal Kids** (? 1967 - ? 1967).

The [Incredible String Band](#) (2) was Scotland's premier hippy commune. Their album **5,000 Spirits or the Layers of the Onion** (early 1967 - jul 1967) introduced medieval and middle-eastern music into folk-rock. Their masterpiece, **Hangman's Beautiful Daughter** (dec 1967 - mar 1968), is a hyper-creative stew of hypnotic exorcisms, magical and pagan rituals, Indian music, Donovan-esque lullabies, baroque music, all drenched in exotic instrumentation and psychedelic chanting. Following their example, an impressive number of British bands released an impressive number of inferior albums that relied on the fusion between psychedelia and folk: the Trees' **The Garden of Jane Delawney** (mar 1970 - ? 1970), Forest's **Full Circle** (spring 1970 - ? 1970), Dr Strangely Strange's **Heavy Petting** (? 1970 - sep 1970), Clive's Original Band (C.O.B.)'s **Moyshe McStiff and the Tartan Lancers of the Sacred Heart** (late 1971 - ? 1972), etc.

Great Britain never had a counterculture movement in the early 1960s, a counterpart to Country Joe and the Fugs. It didn't have much of a pacifist movement, a Bob Dylan or a Free Speech Movement that could compare with the originals. There were no student riots in 1964, there was no need to create an alternative political world to fight the Establishment. Instead, it was the psychedelic movement that led to the development of an underground infrastructure (magazines, clubs, radio stations). In Britain, psychedelic music played the role that the Greenwich Movement had played in the USA.

Once that infrastructure was in place, the political wing of the movement was allowed to emerge.

The leading agit-prop band was the [Deviants](#) (13), which were born as the British version of the Fugs, but soon developed an even more iconoclastic and unpredictable sound via **Ptooff** (? 1967 - end 1967), their masterpiece, **Disposable** (sep 1968 - end 1968), **III** (? 1969 - sep 1969) and Mick Farren's solo album **Mona The Carnivorous Circus** (dec 1969 - mar 1970).

Also following a cue from the Fugs, [Edgar Broughton](#) (1) clearly represented the fusion of psychedelic and political elements on **Wasa Wasa** (early 1969 - jul 1969).

### ***Euro-psychedelia***

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However, one of the greatest of the European psychedelic bands was not even British but Swedish: [Parson Sound](#), whose compositions would surface only 32 years later on **Pärson Sound** (jul 167/aug 1968 - ? 2001). Their main influences

were minimalist composer Terry Riley, who at the time was inventing a musical aesthetic founded on repetition, and pop-art guru Andy Warhol, who, at the time, was experimenting with the droning music of the Velvet Underground. Renamed [International Harvester](#) (1), they later released **Sov Gott Rose-Marie** (aug/sep 1968 - spring 1969), a wild fusion of psychedelia, minimalism, raga, folk, jazz and sounds of nature.

Their only competitors were Italy's Le Stelle di Mario Schifano, a musical event put together by decadent-futurist pop artist Schifano the same way Andy Warhol put together the Velvet Underground. They composed a cacophonous suite *Le Ultime Parole di Brandimarte, dall'Orlando Furioso* (with the instructions "to be listened with the TV on and no volume"), off their only album **Dedicato A** (oct 1967 - nov 1967), one of the most experimental tracks of the time.

Brazil's [Os Mutantes](#) (1) concocted a high-volume maelstrom of dissonant guitar, musique concrete, found sounds and pop melodies on albums such as **Os Mutantes** (? ? - jun 1968) and especially **Mutantes** (? 1969 - ? 1969).

The Outsiders in Holland were also notable, thanks to their **CQ** (sep 1968 - end 1968). But Holland's most popular export was Shocking Blue's feverish *Venus* (1969).

The Czech band [Plastic People of the Universe](#) was the main psychedelic act of Eastern Europe (unreleased until 1978).

Last but not least, the open French ensemble of [Les Maledictus Sound](#) (1) released one of the most psychedelic albums ever, **Les Maledictus Sound** (apr 1968 - ? 1968).

The classical avantgarde was, indirectly, helping the creative freedom of this era. The marriage between rock and classical music was fostered by rock composers such as Frank Zappa, but also by classical composers such as Pierre Henry, whose *Rock Electronique* (1963) employed electronic riff and rhythm, and whose rock mass, **Messe Pour Le Temp Present** (1967), that mixed symphonic, rock and electronic instruments. In 1964 Charles Dodge and James Randall started "computer music". In 1965 Terry Riley and Steve Reich were performing music based on repetition of simple patterns ("minimalism"), an idea that shared with psychedelic-rock the hypnotic and mystical qualities.

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