

The History of Rock Music: 1970-1975

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Sound 1973-78

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

Borderline 1974-78

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In the second half of the 1970s, Brian Eno, Larry Fast, Mickey Hart, Stomu Yamashta and many other musicians blurred the lines between rock and avantgarde.

[Brian Eno](#) (34), ex-keyboardist for Roxy Music, changed the course of rock music at least three times. The experiment of fusing pop and electronics on **Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy** (sep 1974 - nov 1974) changed the very notion of what a "pop song" is. Eno took cheap melodies (the kind that are used at the music-hall, on television commercials, by nursery rhymes) and added a strong rhythmic base and counterpoint of synthesizer. The result was similar to the novelty numbers and the "bubblegum" music of the early 1960s, but it had the charisma of sheer post-modernist genius. Eno had invented meta-pop music: avantgarde music that employs elements of pop music. He continued the experiment on **Another Green World** (aug 1975 - sep 1975), but then changed its perspective on **Before And After Science** (? 1977 - dec 1977). Here Eno's catchy ditties acquired a sinister quality. The album felt more like a surreal fresco, the vision of humankind turned into robots. The melodies could be renaissance madrigals, and the rhythm could be used by disco-music, but the whole did not sound like renaissance music or dance music at all: it sounded like the end of civilization. A learned practitioner of musique concrete, Cage's aleatory music, LaMonte Young's minimalism, Karlheinz Stockhausen's electronic music, Eno had an ambitious program of "music for non-musicians" that was the equivalent of Schoenberg's "Theory of Harmony". If Schoenberg had argued in favor of a new way of composing (serialism), Eno basically proposed to abolish composition altogether, focusing instead on "sound". After toying with Philip Glass' repetition and droning on **No Pussyfooting** (sep 1972/aug 1973 - nov 1973), a collaboration with King Crimson's guitarist Robert Fripp, Eno had begun to implement his program on **Discreet Music** (sep 1975 - dec 1975), which was hardly music, and it was hardly "his" music: the composer

only set it in motion. What the listener heard was not what the composer wrote. The impressionistic vignettes of **Music For Films** (? 1975/? 1978 - sep 1978) bridged the gap between theory (his "discreet" music) and practice (his futuristic pop music). Eno's "discreet" music evolved via two collaborations with the German group Cluster (in 1977 and 1978). **Music For Airports** (? 1978 - sep 1978) presented the result: "ambient music", a music made of static drones and languid notes, a music that hardly changes at all, that hardly betrays any feeling at all, music that is meant "not" to be listened to, the avantgarde equivalent of supermarket muzak. This was his third revolution. And it would become one of the most abused genres of the 1990s. **On Land** (sep 1978/jan 1982 - mar 1982), **Apollo** (? 1983 - jul 1983) and **Thursday Afternoon** (apr 1984 - oct 1985) offered a psychological version of ambient music. On the way to becoming one of the most influential composers of the century, Eno had also become one of the most influential producers in rock music. In particular, he sculpted the techno-ethnic-funk that reinvented Talking Heads' career in 1979-80. Most likely, it will take a few more decades before the music scene absorbs all of Eno's intuitions.

[Larry Fast](#) (3), aka [Synergy](#), specialized in massive synthesizer-based arrangements, as preached on his **Electronic Realizations For Rock Orchestra** (dec 1974/feb 1975 - may 1975). Perhaps inspired by Mahler's late romantic symphonies and by Gershwin's jazzy orchestrations, Fast frescoed the futuristic soundscapes of **Cords** (sep 1977/apr 1978 - sep 1978) and **Metropolitan Suite** (jan/oct 1986 - ? 1987), emphasizing frantic movement and dense noise.

The music on **The Story Of i** (aug/fall 1975 - ? 1976), by Swiss-born and former Yes keyboardist [Patrick Moraz](#), was similar in scope, although less ambitious. Milestones in orchestral progressive-rock were also the elaborate compositions of [Jasun Martz](#) (2): the 44-minute **The Pillory**, premiered in july 1976 (? 1977/? 1978 - ?1978) and, more than a quarter of a century later, its follow-up, the double-disc seven-movement symphony **The Pillory - The Battle** (? ?/? 2004 - ? 2005 and ? 2007) recorded by an orchestra of 115 musicians.

Japanese monster-percussionist [Stomu Yamashta](#) (1) caused a brief sensation with the solo percussion album **Red Buddha** (apr 1971 - ? 1971), with the jazz-rock band Come to The Edge, that recorded **Floating Music** (jan/? 1972 - ? 1972) and with the multi-media show **The Man From The East** (oct/nov 1972 - ? 1973), but his exotic jazz-rock fusion is better documented by **Go** (feb 1976 - apr 1976), the super-group formed with keyboardists Klaus Schulze and Steve Winwood, percussionist Michael Shrieve and guitarist Al DiMeola.

Legendary Grateful Dead percussionist [Mickey Hart](#) (2) reinvented himself as one of the most brilliant ideologues and mentors of world-music with albums that are dazzling displays of percussions-based music. The album by the Diga Rhythm Band, **Diga** (end 1975/early 1976 - mar 1976), was one of the first mature fusions of jazz and Indian music, one of the milestones of world-music. After **Yamantaka** (? 1982 - ? 1983), a collaboration with Henry Wolff and Nancy Hennings on Tibetan bells, and **Dafos** (oct 1982/mar 1983 - ? 1983), another excursion into jazz, Hart would find a new audience (the new-age audience) with **At The Edge** (? 1987/? 1990 - aug 1990) that incorporates natural sounds, the orchestral **Mystery Box** (? 1995 - jun 1996) and the more conventional **Supralingua** (? 1998 - aug 1998).

Former Slapp Happy and Henry Cow guitarist [Peter Blegvad](#) (2) recorded the

jazz nonsense lieder of **Kew. Rhone.** (oct 1976 - mar 1977) and the deviant pop muzak of **King Strut And Other Stories** (? 1990 - jul 1990).

Techno-rock 1973-76

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Jeff Lynne's [Electric Light Orchestra](#) (2) virtually invented "high-tech pop", the idea of arranging catchy refrains with walls of keyboards, lush orchestral arrangements, neo-classical pomp and seductive lyrics. The four lengthy orchestral suites of **II** (may/oct 1972 - jan 1973) acted as the laboratory to distill the songs of **Eldorado** (feb/aug 1974 - sep 1974), their melodic zenith. That album, and the more trivial **Face The Music** (may/jun 1975 - sep 1975) and **A New World Record** (jul 1976 - oct 1976), led to the tour de force of **Out of the Blue** (may/aug 1977 - oct 1977) the same way the Beatles' **Sgt Pepper** led to the **White Album**.

[Supertramp](#) (1) were even more original in blending Yes' pomp-rock, Led Zeppelin's hard-rock, Beach Boys' vocal harmonies, EL&P's neo-classical rock, disco-music and catchy pop refrains. Thanks to its double-keyboard and horns attack, **Breakfast In America** (may/dec 1978 - mar 1979) ranks among the most original pop albums of the 1970s.

[Alan Parsons Project](#) (2), led by a keyboardist who had worked as a sound engineer on the Beatles' **Abbey Road** and the Pink Floyd's **Dark Side Of the Moon**, specialized in lushly-arranged, quasi-symphonic, concept albums such as **Tales of Mystery and Imagination** (aug 1975/jan 1976 - may 1976) and **I Robot** (jan/mar 1977 - jun 1977), although success would come with the more electronic and more easy-listening sound of **Pyramid** (sep 1977/feb 1978 - jun 1978) and later works.

Emblematic of the importance of sound were hits such as Gerry Rafferty's *Baker Street* (1978), featuring a soaring saxophone solo by Raf Ravenscroft and melodramatic orchestral arrangements.

In the USA, keyboard-driven pop yielded some of the greatest hits of the era. [Kansas](#) (1) approached Yes' pomp-rock from a more intimate and melodic angle thanks to a neo-classical line-up heavy on violin and keyboards, particularly on **Kansas** (summer 1973 - mar 1974). However, after the elegant *Magnum Opus Suite* (1976), they became stars of the soft-pop ballad. *Suite Madame Blue* (1975) turned [Styx](#) (1) into the quintessential "pomp-rock" band, a style they refined on **The Grand Illusion** (? 1977 - jul 1977), their commercial breakthrough. [Pavlov's Dog](#) were the most serious purveyors of progressive-rock in the USA, using mellotron and violin to craft the atmospheric **Pampered Menial** (? 1974 - ? 1975).

New Zealand's [Split Enz](#) (1), formed by vocalist and keyboardist Tim Finn, released an eccentric hybrid of glam-rock and techno-pop, **Mental Notes** (may/jun 1975 - jul 1975), before guitarist and vocalist Neil Finn joined the band and turned it into the pop machine of *Bold As Brass* (1977), *I See Red* (1978), *I Got You* (1979), *History Never Repeats* (1981) and *Dirty Creature* (1982).

The value of production 1973-78

Both progressive-rock and pop-jazz of the 1970s had emphasized the "sound" over melody, rhythm and harmony. The "sound" was mostly due to the interplay of timbres and to the producer's work. >From Phil Spector's hits to the Beach Boys' **Pet Sounds** to the Beatles' **Sgt Pepper** to Pink Floyd's **Dark Side of the Moon**, the ultimate value of a piece of music had consistently been shifting from the genuine ingredients of rock'n'roll towards the deception of the recording studio and of arrangement. Significant advances (and lower costs) in the recording technique led to a generation of musicians whose main goal was to compose "sound" rather than songs.

Despite the erudite lyrics, [Steely Dan](#) (2), formed by pianist Donald Fagen and bassist Walter Becker, invented the stereotype for the elastic, sleek, undemanding pop-jazz-soul fusion that would become the lounge-music of the uninvolved yuppie generation. **Countdown To Ecstasy** (? ? - jul 1973) and **Pretzel Logic** (oct 1973/jan 1974 - mar 1974) are perhaps the best examples of that "clean" sound, which was mainly a miracle of production, and of the elegant, technically impeccable performance.

[Hall & Oates](#) became masters of the genre that was born out of blue-eyed soul when studio high-tech allowed to pen mellow, languid, romantic ballads set in lush arrangements, dance beats and spacey keyboards. Their hits trace that evolution, from *Sara Smile* (1975) and *Rich Girl* (1976) to *Kiss On My List* (1981) and *Maneater* (1982). Despite the awful muzak produced as Hall & Oates, [Daryl Hall](#)'s solo albums, **Sacred Songs** (aug 1977 - mar 1980), **Three Hearts In The Happy Ending Machine** (oct 1985/may 1986 - ? 1986) and **Soul Alone** (? 1993 - sep 1993) were art-rock experiments.

Relocated to San Francisco, and re-shaped by guitarist Lindsey Buckingham and vocalist Stevie Nicks, [Fleetwood Mac](#) (2) became a sophisticated vocal and percussive group, heir to folk-rock and to Brian Wilson's baroque arrangements, aware of the new wave and of Pink Floyd's artificial studio sound, and, from this unlikely fusion, they managed to concoct two of the all-time best-sellers and production masterpieces: **Rumours** (feb/aug 1976 - feb 1977) and **Tusk** (? 1978/?1979 - oct 1979), for which Buckingham composed some of the most memorable melodies of the time.

[Toto](#) (1) were emblematic of the value of production in keyboard-driven melodic rock. **Toto IV** (? 1982 - apr 1982) was perhaps their most accomplished "production".

[Jim Steinman](#) (13) has one main claim to fame: he has coined a production style that makes Phil Spector's "wall of sound" seem shy. Steinman's productions are the quintessential of magniloquent, tragic, titanic, desperate. His singers bleed his lyrics. His keyboards are the thunders of the apocalypse. His melodies are religious psalms. [Meat Loaf](#) (Marvin Lee Aday)'s **Bat Out of Hell** (? 1975/? 1976 - oct 1977), that Steinman wrote and produced, began as a joke (a hysterical and emphatic exaggeration of rock'n'roll cliches), but actually reinvented the spirit of rock'n'roll, as did his solo **Bad For Good** (aug 1980/mar 1981 - ? 1981). Steinman was moving towards pure melodrama: Bonnie Tyler's hyper-ballad *Total Eclipse Of The Heart* (1983) and the musical **Tanz der Vampire** (premiered oct 1997) proved what he could do. His extravagant orchestrations and his ideology of sonic overkill triumphed on **Original Sin** (?

1989 - ? 1989), credited to [Pandora's Box](#), the masterpiece of his symphonic sound, and one of rock's masterpieces of all times. Steinman composed a metaphysical concept that mimics Broadway musicals and that alternates Zappa-esque parody and street pathos. This was brutal, colossal music of manic crescendos, of punishing rhythms of delirious choirs.

Prog-rock 1974-80

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The "Canterbury" sound was still alive and well in Britain, although mutating into a new form of easy-listening and jazz-rock.

[Camel](#) (1) evoked the styles of Colosseum, Yes and King Crimson on **The Snow Goose** (early 1975 - apr 1975) and **Rain Dances** (feb/sep 1977 - sep 1977), whose romantic spirit was emphasized by meticulous arrangements relying on electronic keyboards.

[Brand X](#) (2), formed by Genesis drummer Phil Collins, played smooth, classy, laid-back, soulful and all-instrumental jazz-rock on **Unorthodox Behaviour** (sep/oct 1975 - jun 1976) and **Moroccan Roll** (dec 1976/feb 1977 - apr 1977).

Feels Good To Me (aug 1977 - jan 1978) by Yes' drummer [Bill Bruford](#) (1) was emblematic of how close British progressive-rock had moved to jazz music.

Curved Air's violinist [Darryl Way](#) recorded an ambitious **Concerto For Electric Violin** (? 1978 - apr 1979), with electronic arrangements by Francis Monkman.

One of the most original bands of the 1970s, Simon Jeffes' [Penguin Cafe Orchestra](#) (13) played ethnic music with the elegance of a chamber ensemble and the decadent languor of the cafe-concerto. In the age of punk-rock, the nostalgic and aristocratic combo of cello, violin, ukulele and guitar that recorded **Music From The Penguin Cafe** (? 1974/? 1976 - ? 1976) was a grotesque oxymoron. The vignettes, harking back to the styles of baroque and renaissance music, explored the Caribbean islands, Africa and the Mediterranean. The repetitive patterns favored by minimalist composers added a surreal quality to each of these sketches. These postcards from exotic lands left the impression of imaginary memories, that altogether formed a collective imaginary memory of some enchanted eden, a shelter from the hectic tensions of the industrial society. The Orchestra carried out a revival, but it was reconstructing an era, not just a sound, and an era that never existed, an era that was an eternal state of the subconscious. **Penguin Cafe Orchestra** (? 1977/? 1980 - ? 1981), **Broadcasting From Home** (? 1982/? 1984 - ? 1984) and **Signs Of Life** (? 1985/? 1987 - ? 1987) increased the number of old-fashioned instruments (viola, bass, accordion, piano, harmonium, organ, pianola, penny whistle, trombone and so forth) and flirted more often with the avantgarde, while retaining that stylized and austere composure.

The French-speaking countries remained throughout the late 1970s and 1980s an unending source of prog-rock ensembles.

Richard Pinhas' [Heldon](#) (4) practiced a rock'n'roll for guitar and synthesizer that had few or no antecedents. While still naive, **Electronique Guerilla** (? - ? 1974) was their manifesto. **It's Always Rock And Roll** (? 1975 - ? 1975), that

contains *Cocaine Blues*, and **Agneta Nilsson** (sep 1975/jan 1976 - ? 1976), that contains *Perspective*, were their mature statements, cauldrons of hard-rock, free-jazz and sheer noise where Nice, King Crimson, Morton Subotnick, Silver Apples, Jimi Hendrix and Hawkwind shared the same orbit. The lengthy and sensational jams of their last albums, such as *Interface* (1978), *Stand By* (1979) and *Bolero* (1979), refined the concept to manic levels.

French keyboardist [Cyrille Verdeaux](#) (2) assembled a few key members of Gong (Steve Hillage, Tim Blake, Didier Malherbe) to record the **Clearlight Symphony** (? 1973/? 1974 - ? 1975), released under the moniker Clearlight, a lush electronic and symphonic work. The fourth Clearlight album, **Visions** (jun 1977 - ? 1978), featured a small orchestra comprising rock, Indian and jazz musicians. This work displayed the influence of Eastern music that would become prominent on Verdeaux's solo releases, peaking with the seven-hour **Kundalini Opera**, recorded between 1982 and 1999.

Gilbert Artman was an eccentric who started two projects: **Lard Free** (apr 1973 - ? 1973), a Heldon-like electronic-rock, and [Urban Sax](#) (1), a 27-saxophone horn section indulging in minimalist repetition that debuted with the shocking **I** (? 1977 - jun 1977) and **II** (? 1978 - ? 1978).

[Thierry "Ilitch" Muller](#) created albums of minimalist repetition for organ and treated guitar, such as the main track on **Periodikmindtrouble** (oct/nov 1976 - ? 1978), and of electronic, electric and acoustic collages, plus noise and vocals, such as **10 Suicides** (fall 1978 - spring 1980).

What Walter Carlos had done for electronic pop music, [Jean-Michel Jarre](#) (3) did for electronic dance music. **Oxygene** (aug/nov 1976 - nov 1976) and **Equinoxe** (jan/aug 1978 - dec 1978) merely overlapped and contrasted a catchy melody, a steady beat and a synthesizer, while the electronic poems of **Les Chants Magnétiques** (? 1980 - mar 1981) explored melodic electronica at a more abstract level. Live performance of his hits involved colossal multimedia shows that eventually became more relevant than his music.

After a trip to India, French composer [Ariel Kalma](#) conceived the 20-minute minimalist raga for electronic keyboards, ethnic instruments, saxophone and harmonium *Le Temps Des Moissons*, off **Le Temps Des Moissons** (? 1975 - ? 1975), reminiscent of Terry Riley's **Poppy NoGood**. After a trip to Borneo, he conceived **Osmose** (oct 1977 - ? 1978), a soothing blend of synthesizers, saxophone, harmonium, sound effects and the sounds of the rainforest.

[Univers Zero](#) (14), from Belgium, began in the wake blended Frank Zappa and jazz-rock with neoclassical elements and attitudes on **Univers Zero** (aug 1977 - ? 1977), also known as **1313**, but **Heresie** (mar 1979 - ? 1979) veered towards gothic atmospheres and discordant, industrial textures. Focusing on orchestration and production rather than on melody and harmony, **Ceux Du Dehors** (mar 1980/jan 1981 - ? 1981) and **Uzed** (sep/oct 1984 - end 1984) arrived at a smooth, stately, stylish and occasionally titanic flow of ideas. Capable of quoting and mixing stereotypes from atonal music as well as jazz-rock, minimalism as well as Eastern music, classical fantasias as well as requiems, the multiple tours de force of **Heatwave** (jun/sep 1986 - late 1986) rank among prog-rock's greatest achievements. Cinematic and suspenseful, elegant and dramatic, Daniel Denis' compositions for strings, woodwinds and keyboards coined a new kind of chamber music and jazz fusion.

[Art Zoyd](#) (3) were even more classical. While they never completely disposed of their original influence (Magma's and Henry Cow's jazz-rock), their broad orchestral palette painted a luxuriant, symphonic sound performed with the austere posture of the classical avantgarde. **Symphonie Pour Le Jour Où Brûleront Les Cités** (? 1976 - ? 1976), which transposed Stravinsky's style into rock music, the austere and expressionistic **Generation Sans Futur** (feb 1980 - ? 1980), an eclectic pastiche of abstract chamber music and free jazz, and **Phase IV** (apr/may 1982 - ? 1982), that injected minimalist and dissonant techniques into chamber music, displayed a remarkable gift for dense and dramatic textures, which would surface again on the soundtrack *Metropolis* (2002).

Belgium's [Aksak Maboul](#) (1) were perhaps the most eclectic followers of Henry Cow. A Dadaistic sense of humor made **Un Peu De L'Âme Des Bandits** (feb/aug 1979 - jan 1980) a delightful jazz-rock spoof. Ferdinand Richard's [Etron Fou Leloublan](#) were similarly bless on their **Les Poumons Gonflés** (nov 1981 - ? 1982).

[ZNR](#), featuring the young Hector Zazou on keyboards, harked back to classical music of the early 20th century for the chamber lieder of their second album **Traité De Mécanique Populaire** (dec 1977 - ? 1978).

[Archaia](#) churned out the electronic horror drum-less psychedelic **Archaia** (aug 1977 - ? 1977).

[Shub-Niggurath](#) were disciples of Art Zoyd and Univers Zero.

Two Swedish groups pioneered an original folk-jazz-classical fusion: Ragnarok on **Ragnarok** (aug 1975 - ? 1976), and Kebnekajse in *Balladen om Bjorbar och Natmelor*, off their **III** (jan 1975 - ? 1975).

[Finch](#) (1), from Holland, crafted the four lengthy instrumental jams of **Glory Of The Inner Force** (feb 1975 - ? 1975) and the two fluent melodramas of **Beyond Expression** (jan 1976 - ? 1976), *A Passion Condensed* and *Beyond the Bizarre*.

Supergroups 1975-80

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In Britain, the season of art-rock peaked with the supergroups of the late 1970s.

[10cc](#) (1), formed by veteran songwriter Graham Gouldman (who wrote several Yardbirds and Hollies hits) and veteran multi-instrumentalists Lol Creme and Kevin Godley, served mocking kitsch arranged with demented gusto and cartoonish wit, occasionally reminiscent of the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band, best represented by the high-tech tour de force **The Original Soundtrack** (? 1974 - mar 1975), whose glittering sound was the result of a veritable studio collage.

Former 10cc's [Godley & Creme](#) (1) launched a separate career with the triple-album rock opera **Consequences** (apr 1976/aug 1977 - sep 1977) that used a new technique to produce symphonic, choral and natural sounds, the first in a series of pretentiously bizarre albums.

[Foreigner](#) (1), formed by former Spooky Tooth's guitarist Mick Jones and by former King Crimson's keyboardist Ian McDonald, played a poppier, slickly-

arranged version of Bad Company's boogie-rock on albums such as **Double Vision** (dec 1977/mar 1978 - jun 1978).

[UK](#) (1) consisted of keyboardist and former Roxy Music violinist Eddie Jobson , former Nucleus guitarist Allan Holdsworth, former King Crimson bassist John Wetton and former Yes drummer Bill Bruford. **UK** (dec 1977/jan 1978 - mar 1978) featured the suite *In The Dead Of The Night*. Wetton joined a new supergroup, [Asia](#) (1), that featured former EL&P drummer Carl Palmer, former Yes guitarist Steve Howe and former Buggles keyboardist Geoff Downes, but **Asia** (jun/nov 1981 - mar 1982) offered a mixture of heavy and soft rock. While technically impeccable, the songs of these supergroups displayed little emotion and sounded a little dated, as far as progressive-rock went.

[Sky](#) (1), formed by classical guitarist John Williams and featuring former Curved Air keyboardist Francis Monkman, played pretentious progressive-rock for the masses, although lengthy suites such as *Where Opposites Meet* (1979) and *FIFO* (1980), both written by Monkman, harked back to the early days of the genre.

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