

# The History of Rock Music: 1976-1989

New Wave, Punk-rock, Hardcore

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## From Computer Music to Collage

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

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(The following is an excerpt from my book on avantgarde music. Only composers who are closely related to rock music are given a rating).

### *Computers and electronics*

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Computer music continued its slow evolution, but the digital devices remained too expensive and exotic to be adopted by ordinary musicians.

[Laurie Spiegel](#) reacted to the futurism and dadaism of the early pioneers by developing an original aesthetic borrowed from folk music, creating relatively atmospheric and melodic music via arcane mathematical algorithms. The floating drones of *The Expanding Universe* (1975) evoke the same awe-inspiring eternity of Klaus Schulze's cosmic music, with masses of static "melodies" (stillborn melodies, that never grow to be one) endlessly repeating their distant wail, echoed from galaxy to galaxy, the same way that Brian Eno's ambient music does not conclude.

[Richard Teitelbaum](#), who introduced the synthesizer in Europe while playing in Musica Elettronica Viva with Alvin Curran, and partnered with jazz improvisors such as Anthony Braxton, George Lewis and Leroy Jenkins, found his mission at the intersection between chamber music, free jazz and electronic/digital music through works such as *Blends* (1977) for synthesizer, shakuhachi flute, tablas and percussion.

[Tod Machover](#) (USA, 1953) was one of the early adopters of computer music within the format of chamber music, starting with *Light* (1979) for chamber orchestra and computer electronics.

[David Rosenboom](#) focused on computer-enhanced chamber music. **Future Travel** (? 1981 - ? 1981) for computer, electronics and acoustic

instruments was one of the first albums composed almost entirely with a digital synthesizer.

[John Bischoff](#) pioneered interactive electronic and computer music in the 1970s and formed the world's first computer network band (League of Automatic Music Composers). The [Hub](#), an ensemble of six digital improvisors (John Bischoff, Tim Perkis, Chris Brown, Scot Gresham-Lancaster, Mark Trayle and Phil Stone) coined Computer Network Music on **Computer Network Music** (? 1986/? 1988 - ? 1989), performed on computers that are interconnected, thus interacting at the software level.

The Colorado-based ensemble [Mnemonists](#) (12), formed by William Sharp and others, and later renamed [Biota](#), assembled wild assortments of sonic events on albums such as the monumental **Mnemonist Orchestra** (mar 1979 - ? 1979), **Biota** (sum 1980/sum 1982 - ? 1982) and **Rackabones** (spr 1984/early 1985 - ? 1985) that ran the gamut from classical music to sheer noise. Their production technique bordered on free-jazz improvisation, but at the same time was surgically designed in the studio. Their audio collage was the equivalent of a descent into hell. In their reincarnations as Biota, that initially continued the Mnemonists' mission with the hybrid of free jazz and musique concrete of **Tinct** (sum 1986/spr 1987 - ? 1988), they eventually moved towards a highly musical "anti-concrete" approach that employed even more sophisticated collage techniques but resulted in user-friendly structures driven by recognizable acoustic instruments (accordion, flugelhorn, guitar) and even vocals. **Invisible Map** (spr 1996/sum 2000 - ? 2001) secreted pop music and at times **Half A True Day** (fall 2002/sum 2007 - oct 2007) sounded like a remix of psychedelic music from the 1960s.

### *Event, chance, noise*

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On the other hand, "event" music continued to prosper. In fact the Fluxus movement might have reached the peak of its influence in this decade.

Influenced by John Cage's principles of indeterminacy, [Cornelius Cardew](#) organized monumental works that defied the logic of composition, such as **Great Learning** (feb 1971 - ? 1971), a four-hour composition full recorded only in july 2010, based on the eponymous Confucian classic, scored for non-singers producing random vocal noises, or *Treatise* (1967), whose score is a 193-page manual of instructions.

The aesthetics of [Frederic Rzewski](#) bridged compositional indeterminacy and jazz improvisation, for example in the lively agit-prop variations of *The People United Will Never Be Defeated* (1975), a stochastic exercise on a touching Chilean theme.

[Robert Ashley](#), coined a new form of opera, that relied on layers of trivial verbal events to create meaning. It was more "sound verite" than "stream of consciousness", because its source was the accidents of life, not the organic working of a particular psyche. The music for **Automatic Writing** (prem. jun 1979) and the two LPs of **Perfect Lives** (? 1979 and ? 1981) are a sophisticated flow of unassuming melodies that borrow from

centuries of musical repertory.

Other composers influenced by the Fluxus aesthetic were [Walter Marchetti](#) in Italy, whose eccentric ideas were documented on **La Caccia** (? 1974 - sep 1974), and [Yasunao Tone](#) in Japan, famous for his "concrete" collages of damaged discs such as *Music for Two CD Players* (1982).

[Gavin Bryars](#) experimented with an early form of "remix" in *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet* (1971), "symphonic" variations obtained by electronically processing a tramp's song, and in the *Hommages* (1980), aleatory pieces derived from other composer's music.

[Carl Stone](#) manipulated sources to slowly transform it into an apocalyptic maze of mirrors. Thus the concrete symphony *Woo Lae Oak* (1981) for the tremolo of a rubbed string and the tone of a blown bottle electronically processed, the evening-length collage *Kamiya Bar* (1992), based on sounds of Tokyo's city life, and the four-movement collage symphony *Nyala* (1995).

### ***Minimalism***

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Minimalism had changed the classical western view of music. A composition could evolve like an organism, rather than being designed to stretch over a predetermined narrative or emotional path. The listener, in turn, was required to listen more carefully, to enter into a sort of union with the piece of music; which was, of course, an idea derived from eastern music. Minimalism had introduced improvisation and meditation into western music. These intuitions were further developed in various directions by the second generation of minimalist composers.

One of the most powerful innovations in minimalist music had come from rocker Brian Eno, who had bridged the sensibility of rock and avantgarde music on the manifestos of "ambient music". Following his lead, [Harold Budd](#) (12) crafted sugary, velvety, tinkling cartilages such as *Bismillahi Prahmani Brahim*, off **Pavilion Of Dreams** (nov 1976 - ? 1978), *Children On The Hill*, off the EP **The Serpent** (nov 1976 - ? 1981), *Abandoned Cities* and *Dark Star*, both off **Abandoned Cities** (sep/oct 1983 - ? 1984), *Gypsy Violin*, off **Lovely Thunder** (? ? - ? 1986), that emphasized the hypnotic quality of droning and repetition.

[David Borden](#), founder (1969) of the electronic combo Mother Mallard's Portable Masterpiece Company, took many years to complete *The Continuing Story Of Counterpoint* (1987) for keyboards, horns, guitar and voice, one of the most monumental studies on counterpoint of the century.

North Carolina's violinist [Henry Flynt](#) launched an ambitious project to found a "new American ethnic music" that fused avantgarde music (particularly the hypnotic aspects of minimalism and free-jazz) and hillbilly/country music, best represented by *S&M Delerium* (1970s), *Jive Deceleration* (1976), *You Are My Everlovin'* (1981), *Celestial Power* (1980) and **Purified by the Fire** (dec 1981 - ? 2005).

The elegant pulsing scores of British composer [Michael Nyman](#), such as *Water Dances* (1984) and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat* (1986), were a post-modernist version of renaissance music.

[John Adams](#) pioneered the fusion of minimalist pulse and romantic rhetoric in *Harmonium* (1981), *Grand Pianola Music* (1982) and *Harmonielehre* (1985).

[Daniel Lentz](#) injected stereotypes of the past into the minimalist skeleton, for example in *Point Conception* (1979) and *Missa Umbrarum* (1973).

[Ingram Marshall](#), applied minimalism to ethnic music in compositions such as *Gradual Requiem* (1979).

Charles "[Charlemagne Palestine](#)" Martin's *Strumming Music* (1974) turned "strumming" (a tremolo style) into an avantgarde technique, and minimalism into highly dynamic (and noisy) music, although the colossal church-organ drones of *Schlingen-Blaengen* (1979) did exactly the opposite.

Ukrainian (German-born) composer [Lubomyr Melnyk](#) devised "continuous music" for his piano compositions that is closely related to minimalist repetition: a continuous flow of rapid arpeggios that generates overtones melting into each other. This translated into a very fast playing technique, up to a dozen notes per second, as demonstrated with *KMH* (1979), *The Lund-St Petri Symphony* (1979) for organ, *Legend and Song of Galadriel* (1984), *Wave-Lox* (1985) and *The Voice Of Trees* (1983) for three tubas and two pianos.

Japanese composer [Somei Satoh](#) employed repetitive techniques to create music that was, first and foremost, a spiritual experience, for example in *Litania* (1973), *Mantra* (1986) and *Stabat Mater* (1987). While Indian religion had been the scaffolding of much of LaMonte Young's and Terry Riley's work, Satoh harked back to both Christian liturgy and Japanese zen.

In 1981 Japanese-born performance artist [Yoshi Wada](#) recorded a solo voice invocation (à la Pandit Pran Nath) and a duet for voice and loudly-droning Partch-like sound-making sculptures on **Lament For The Rise and Fall of Elephantine Crocodile** (nov 1981 - ? 1982), followed by the concerto **Off The Wall** (may 1984 - ? 1985) for two bagpipes, home-made pipe organ and percussion, merging the droning and repetitive brands of minimalism.

The massive guitar ensembles lined up by [Glenn Branca](#), for example in *Ascension* (1980), *Symphony 3* (1982) and *Symphony 5* (1984), used repetition, but were better described by the word "maximalism" than minimalism.

A similar avenue was pursued by [Rhys Chatham](#) with his compositions for large ensembles of guitars, for example in *Die Donnergotter* (1986) and *An Angel Moves Too Fast To See* (1989). [David Bedford](#) in Britain had predated both with *Nurses Songs With Elephants* (1971).

The minimalist dogma was bent to more pragmatic (melodic) needs by

Belgian composer [Wim Mertens](#), whose *Close Cover* (1983), *Whisper Me* (1985), *Lir* (1985) and *Educes Me* (1986) attempted to reinvent chamber music and lieder.

Other notable minimalists of the 1980s included: [Arnold Dreyblatt](#), founder of the Orchestra Of Excited Strings (1979); [Piero Milesi](#), with the sophisticated *Modi* (1980); [Michael Byron](#), composer of *Tidal* (1980) for small orchestra; [Mikel Rouse](#), composer of the percussion piece *Quorum* (1984); [Mary Jane Leach](#), who created the angelic polyphony of *Bruckstueck* (1989) for eight sopranos; [Lois Vierk](#), who employed an "exponential" method to build up the dense architecture of *Simoom* (1986) for eight cellos.

[Arthur Russell](#), a cellist who composed chamber music inspired to Indian ragas (or "Buddhist bubblegum music") and a disc-jockey who crafted disco hits, composed the neoclassical seven-movement suite **Tower Of Meaning** (feb 1981 - ? 1983) in the minimalist vein.

Oliveros' deep-listening music was well-represented by the improvisations of trombonist [Stuart Dempster](#), documented on **In The Great Abbey Of Clement VI** (jul 1976 - ? 1987), by the music for the extended tones generated by long vibrating wires of [Ellen Fullman](#), documented on **Long String Instrument** (? 1981/? ? - ? 1985), by the music for steel-metal sculptures played with a bow of [Robert Rutman](#), documented on **1939** (mar 1989 - ? 1989), and by the long-string installations of [Paul Panhuysen](#), documented on **Partitas for Long Strings** (? 1997 - ? 1998).

### *The voice*

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The experiments on the human voice pioneered by Meredith Monk and Gloria Coates were continued by [Joan LaBarbara](#), a collaborator of John Cage and other composers. She stunned the world of music with the hallucinated vocal performances of *Vocal Extensions* (1975), *Klee Alex* (1979), *Berliner Traume* (1983) and *Twelvesong* (1977).

[Laurie Anderson](#) bridged those experiments on the human voice with the pop sensibility, the dance rhythms and the creative spirit of the new wave, particularly in her multimedia opera *United States I-IV* (1982).

[Diamanda Galas](#) (111) was the most extreme vocalist of the time. The atrocious free-form hysteria of *Litanies Of Satan* (1981), *Panoptikon* (1983) and *Deliver Me* (1986) invented a new form of lieder for voice and (jarring) electronics, one that references ancient Greek choirs, medieval "dances macabres", the French "poets maudits", expressionist theater and, ultimately, sheer terror.

Percussionist and vocalist [David Moss](#) recorded the chaotic and cacophonous tour de force of **Terrain** (aug/sep 1980 - end 1980).

[David Hykes](#)'s Harmonic Choir was inspired by Mongolia's "hoomi" style on the hypnotic **Hearing Solar Winds** (aug 1982 -mar 1983) and **Harmonic Meetings** (? ? - ? 1986).

[Shelley Hirsch](#) crafted the symphony for voices and electronics *Haiku Lingo* (1988).

### ***Plunderphonics***

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The invention of the sampler even enabled musicians to compose music out of other people's music. In 1984 Ensoniq introduced the synthesizer "Mirage", that included a built-in sampler, making it cheap to create samples-based music.

[John Oswald](#), originally a free-jazz improviser on alto saxophone, crafted the **Mystery Tapes** (early '70s/late 1989), credited to Mystery Tape Laboratory, aural collages of music, voices, and found sounds credited to Mystery Laboratory. In the 1980s, the "mystery tape" aesthetics evolved into the "plunderphonics" aesthetics. A "plunderphone" is basically a "quote" of a famous piece of music, typically from popular music. In a sense, it is the musical equivalent of Andy Warhol's pop icons. A plunderphonic composition is a sonic montage of many plunderphones. Unlike *Plunderphonics* (1988), that sounded like a collection of practical jokes by a merry studio prankster, the ambitious plunderphonic symphony *Plexure* (1993), that collated more than one thousand musical quotes, was a full-fledged "classical" composition, except that it uses quotes rather than notes as its building blocks.

San Francisco-based [Negativland](#) (Mark Hosler, Richard Lyons, David Willis, Don Joyce) opted for a satirical urban documentary on **Negativland** (dec 1979 - apr 1980) and **Points** (? 1981 - ? 1981), breakneck-speed parades of sonic fragments (found sounds as well as radio broadcasts, conversations and musical pieces) that also stood as grotesque celebrations of the consumer society. Their audio collage was the equivalent of a hike in a junkyard.

### ***Collage***

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The early musique concrete of Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry expressed a futuristic ideology. The following generation of concrete musicians instead became fascinated with "field recordings", with the sounds of ordinary lives or environments. A field recording could be used as a background for electronic or acoustic music, or could be "reorganized" (via electronic equipment or computers) in an electronic poem.

[Bernard Parmegiani](#), another pupil of Pierre Schaeffer, created *De Natura Sonorum* (1975), that combined the droning sounds emitted by live instruments with the dense and wild textures spun by electronic machines, and *La Creation Du Monde* (1984), a phantasmagoric mythological suite of electronic collage.

[Alvin Curran](#), a co-founder of Musica Elettronica Viva in Rome, crafted intensely spiritual works that mixed natural sounds, live electronics,

improvised voice and keyboard patterns: *Canti E Vedute Del Giardino Magnetico* (1974), his most lyrical collage, scored for tape, voice, flugelhorn, synthesizer and tape of natural sounds (wind, high-tension wires, frogs, beach waves, etc); *Fiori Chiari Fiori Oscuri* (1975) for ocarina, voice, piano, toy piano, synthesizer, and tape; *Libri D'armonia* (1976) for conch shell, zither, voice, piano, synthi, and tape; and especially *Canti Illuminati* (1977), a vast sonic montage based on the human voice.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the urban sound documentaries of [Philip Perkins](#), barely processed electronically, provided vast frescoes of modern life such as *Apartment Life* (1980).

The collage of sounds *World Rhythms* (1975), devised by New Zealand artist [Anne Lockwood](#), spanned the dimensions of the human experience, from volcanic eruptions to human breathing.

[Qubais Reed Ghazala](#) constructed *Requiem For A Radio* (1985) out of the sounds made by a transistor radio while it was being methodically destroyed.

[Noah Creshevsky](#) used collage as the fundamental medium for pieces that are rapid-fire assemblies of snippets of (human and instrumental) sounds, with an emphasis on maintaining the "musical" quality of the collage. He also specialized in the creation of "hypervirtuoso" music, music performed by electronic instruments simulating acoustic instruments played in a way that no human virtuoso could possibly match.

Algerian-born sound engineer [Jean-Marc Foussat](#) crafted **Abattage** (? 1981/? 1983 - ? 1983), one of the most creative collages of the era: brutal and frenzied musique concrete that ran the gamut from electronics to found sounds and from vocals to guitars.

[Stefan Weisser](#), aka Z'ev, created brutal and barbaric music for found percussion, such as on **Elemental Music** (feb 1981 - ? 1982), that was reminiscent of the aesthetic of punk and industrial music.

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