

## The History of Rock Music: 1989-1994

Raves, grunge, post-rock, trip-hop

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### Post-rock

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

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#### *Louisville's post-rock 1989-92*

The single most important regional school at the turn of the decade may well have been the one that came from one of the most unlikely of musical scenes and the one that sold the least records: Kentucky's "post-rock". Louisville's musicians introduced a convoluted, angular, cerebral style, that had little in common with rock'n'roll's hedonistic foundations. Basically, theirs was progressive-rock for an age that did not appreciate emphatic emotions anymore. The origins of this school go back to Squirrel Bait. From their ashes a number of bands were born: guitarist Brian McMahan formed Slint and For Carnation; guitarist David Grubbs formed Bastro, Bitch Magnet, and Gastr Del Sol; vocalist Peter Searcy formed [Big Wheel](#).

[Slint](#) (101), who also featured drummer Britt Walford, bassist Ethan Buckler and guitarist David Pajo, represented a major shift in musical purpose: they were more intimidating than exciting. The mostly-instrumental music of [Tweez](#) (fall 1987 - ? 1989) kept the tension and the neurosis of hardcore but lost the passion and the narrative logic. It was "pointless" music. It was a stylistic black hole which sucked the history of rock music, in which the history of rock music virtually ended. It wasn't exactly acid-rock, although it indulged in a similar free-form approach, it wasn't progressive-rock although it exhibited the same brainy stance, it wasn't heavy-metal, although it relied on forceful guitar work, it wasn't free-jazz or avantgarde classical music, although it shared with them a penchant for innovative structures. [Spiderland](#) (aug/oct 1990 - mar 1991) was even more abstract. Its harmonic zigzags through irregular tempos, fractured melodies and discordant counterpoint were as disorienting as notes scribbled in an unknown language. Vapid moribund passages were inundated by sudden tidal waves of sound, or, better, given the glacial tone of the band's jamming, arctic quiet was shaken by icebergs cracking in the ocean. The whole album flew in an inorganic manner, but still retained an odd sense of unity. It sounded like the stream of consciousness of a mathematician's brain as it was solving a difficult theorem.

In the meantime, the explosive metal-punk mix of [Bitch Magnet](#) (11) highlighted the innovative styles of guitarist David Grubbs, debuted in earnest on [Bastro's Diablo Guapo](#) (? ? - sep 1989), and vocalist Sooyoung Park. **Umber** (jun 1989 - ? 1989) was a magnificent essay on how destructive and constructive processes could coexist in art, of how the irrational (fear, angst, anger) and the rational (determination, calculation, cold execution) could coexist within the same narrative. Alien riffs, psychotic melodies and truculent rhythms carried over to **Ben Hur** (may/jul 1990 - ? 1990), that reduced the role of vocals to mere decoration.

[Gastr Del Sol](#) (12), an evolution of Bastro's last line-up, i.e. the trio of David Grubbs on guitar, Bundy Ken Brown on bass and John McEntire on drums, gave new meaning to the word "subtlety" with **The Serpentine Similar** (sep 1992 - ? 1993), which inherited from Slint the grammatical mistakes but replaced the hardcore energy of Slint with an anemic nonchalant flimsiness. Despite the mood swings, the music bordered on free-form "slo-core" and John Fahey's transcendental suites. Jim O'Rourke joined the ranks for the chamber lied *Eight Corners* (jun/aug 1994) and the chamber concerto of *The Harp Factory On Lake Street* (nov 1994), both monopolized by his ambient dissonances and derailed by anarchic jamming. Gastr Del Sol became basically a duo of Grubbs and O'Rourke for the alienated scores of **Upgrade And Afterlife** (? 1995 - jun 1996) and **Camoufleur** (jun 1997 - jan 1998), that virtually reinvented the format of the "ballad" for the post-rock generation (dissonant chamber music loosely anchored to an off-key melody). Gastr Del Sol's research program was basically continued by the solo albums of [David Grubbs](#) (11), beginning with the solo sonatas of **Banana Cabbage, Potato Lettuce, Onion Orange** (nov 1996 - mar 1997). **The Thicket** (mar/jun 1998 - sep 1998), recorded by a supergroup featuring John McEntire on drums, Josh Abrams on bass, Jeb Bishop on trumpet, and Tony Conrad on violin, was an exercise in angst-filled settings for a new style of story-telling, of mixing timbric exploration and folk melody. Its compositions betrayed and fused Grubbs' influences: Red Crayola, Pere Ubu, John Fahey and John Cage. After the avant-jazz jams of **Apertura** (jan 1998 - ? 1999) and *Avocado Orange* (spr 2000 - ? 2000), Grubbs returned to the idea of his masterpiece with **The Spectrum Between** (? ? - jun 2000), although in a simpler and lighter tone.

[King Kong](#) parodied B52's and Talking Heads on amusing collections such as **Funny Farm** (? ? - aug 1993).

Another Louisville band, [Rodan](#) (10), set a standard for music that was neither atmospheric nor abstract, but a bit of both, with the lengthy conceptual compositions/improvisations of **Rusty** (sep/oct 1993 - ? 1994). The interplay among Jason Noble's and Jeff Mueller's guitars, Tara Jean O'Neil's bass and Kevin Coultas' drums (plus Christian Frederickson's viola and Eve Miller's cello) contained elements of rock, jazz and classical music, but the "songs" didn't quite fall into either category. Mueller went on to form June Of 44, and Noble went on to form Rachel's, thus starting a new genealogy of Kentucky's post-rock.

### **Chicago's post-rock 1989-94**

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Post-rock was codified in Chicago with a German accent (as in "Can, Faust and Neu") by Tortoise and their countless descendants and affiliates.

[Jim O'Rourke](#) (4), Illusion Of Safety's guitarist, introduced into rock music an abstract concept of music that drew from the likes of John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Anthony Braxton and Derek Bailey. The improvisations for "prepared" guitar of **Remove the Need** (? ? - ? 1989), the ambient/industrial noise of **The Ground Below Above Our Heads** (mar 1990/feb 1991 - ? 1991), the electronically-manipulated chamber music of **Tamper** (? 1989/? 1990 - ? 1991), the musique concrete of the monumental **Disengage** (mar 1991/feb 1992 - ? 1992) and of **Scend** (feb/apr 1992 - ? 1992), the chaotic free-noise of **Terminal Pharmacy** (dec 1992/may 1995 - nov 1995) revealed one of the most eclectic, visionary and radical minds of the decade. His first venture into a more accessible style was [Brise-Glace](#), a collaboration with other Chicago luminaries (Dazzling Killmen's bassist Darin Gray and Cheer Accident's drummer Thymme Jones), which yielded the ambient blend of jazz, rock and dub of **When In Vanitas** (jan/mar 1994 - ? 1994) and then mutated into a new project, **Yona-Kit** (? ? - jul 1995). O'Rourke's experimental fury subsided with the tributes to Tony Conrad's droning music of **Happy Days** (sep/dec 1996 - ? 1997) and to John Fahey's "primitive guitar music" of **Bad Timing** (? ? - aug 1997). And then, suddenly, he reinvented himself in the tradition of orchestral pop and easy listening with **Eureka** (aug 1997/dec 1998 - mar 1999).

[Tortoise](#) (21) basically reinvented progressive-rock for the new millenium when they anchored their musical drifting to dub and jazz pillars. The geometry of their sound started with the very foundations of the line-up, which was basically the union of two formidable rhythm sections, Poster Children's drummer John Herndon and Eleventh Dream Day's bassist Doug McCombs plus Gastr Del Sol's rhythm section (drummer John McEntire and bassist Bundy Ken Brown), augmented with Tar Babies' percussionist Dan Bitney. They were not only inspired by the historical rhythm sections of funk and dub, but they set out to obscure that legacy with a more far-reaching approach. On **Tortoise** (nov/dec 1993 - ? 1994) each musician covered a lot of ground and alternated at different instruments, but basically this was a band founded on rhythm. With Slint's guitarist Dave Pajo replacing Brown on bass, **Millions Now Living Will Never Die** (jun/sep 1995 - jan 1996) streamlined the mind-boggling polyphony of their jams and achieved a sort of post-classical harmony, a new kind of balance and interaction between melodies and rhythms. *Djed*, in particular, could swing between sources as distant as Neu and Steve Reich while retaining a fundamental unity, flow and sense of purpose. The jazz component and academic overtones began to prevail. The sextet (McEntire, Herndon, Bitney, McCombs, Pajo and black guitarist Jeff Parker) that recorded **TNT** (nov 1996/nov 1997 - mar 1998) had in mind the Modern Jazz Quartet and Miles Davis' historical quintet, not King Crimson or Slint, but the result was nonetheless a magisterial application of *Djed*'s aesthetics.

[Rex](#) (1), the new project by Codeine's and June Of 44's drummer Doug Scharin with singer/guitarist Curtis Harvey, Red Red Meat's bassist Phil Spirito and cellist Kirsten McCord, penned the lengthy, downbeat, convoluted jams coalescing in cloudy ballads of **Rex** (? 1994 - apr 1995). The "intricate" became "majestic" on **C** (feb 1996 - oct 1996), Rex's most accomplished work. [Him](#) (1) were born as Rex's dub side-project with the dreamy extended pieces of **Egg** (win 1995 - ? 1995) and **Interpretive Belief System** (? 1996/? 1997 - aug 1997), but then switched to jazz-rock for **Sworn Eyes** (mar/may 1999 - ? 1999), with Rob Mazurek's cornet playing the ghost of Miles Davis, and to ethno-funk music for **Our Point**

**Of Departure** (jan/feb 2000 - ? 2000).

The [Denison-Kimball Trio](#) (2), or DK3, formed by Jesus Lizard's guitarist Duane Denison and Laughing Hyenas/Mule/Firewater's drummer James Kimball, played nocturnal jazz with a profusion of atonal and abrasive tones on **Walls In The City** (apr 1994 - oct 1994), sounding like Lounge Lizards on drugs, and achieved a sophisticated synthesis of jazz, blues, rock and avantgarde on **Soul Machine** (may/aug 1994 - apr 1995), following the addition of jazz saxophonist Ken Vandermark, and **Neutrons** (mar 1997 - aug 1997).

### *New York's post-rock 1993-94*

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Hybrid vibrations, that mixed a post-punk ethos with the austere stance of progressive-rock and the spirit of dub and jazz, emanated also from New York.

[Soul Coughing](#) (12) concocted an effervescent blend of funk, hip-hop, jazz and rock propelled by Sebastian Steinberg's bass and Yuval Gabay's drums, and obfuscated by sampling-engineer Mark Degli Antoni's murky soundscapes on **Ruby Vroom** (apr/jun 1994 - sep 1994). A further disorienting contrast was the setting of Mike Doughty's scat-like free-form poetry against a backdrop of cartoonish novelties à la Frank Zappa, glued together by an ominous urban pulse. Following the eclectic and witty intellectual circus of **Irresistible Bliss** (? 1995 - may 1996), the varied and sophisticated **El Oso** (late 1997 - sep 1998) was another stylistic tour de force but with an almost theatrical attitude, that continuously reinvented itself.

In Rhode Island, [Six Finger Satellite](#) (11) played industrial rock'n'roll that was both demented and visceral. The chaos and the noise of **The Pigeon Is The Most Popular Bird** (? ? - jul 1993) were hardly in line with the aesthetics of post-rock. Skewed, jolting rhythms and off-kilter or plainly out-of-tune melodies were injected with lethal gas by John McLean's and Peter Phillips' abrasive guitars, and ripped apart by the emphatic, possessed vocals of Jeremiah Ryan, who engineered the best synthesis of Freud, Sartre and Bukowski on record, while instrumental interludes referenced everybody from John Cage to Throbbing Gristle to Chrome to the Velvet Underground. **Severe Exposure** (? ? - jun 1995) was even more brutal and frantic, but still managed to cohere into a vision of post-nuclear wastelands.

[Ui](#) (1), a trio of two basses (Sasha Frere-Jones and Wilbo Wright) and drums (Clem Waldmann), offered perhaps the most adventurous fusion of dub, jazz and rock on **Sidelong** (dec 1994/sep 1995 - late 1995) with compositions that harked back to the Contortions and Material and further back to Can.

### *West Coast post-rock, 1993*

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The West Coast was less affected by the post-rock movement, although many of San Francisco's eccentric bands (from the Residents to the Thinking Fellers) could be said to have predated it. Seattle's [Engine Kid](#), the band of guitarist Greg Anderson, concocted an ugly hybrid of

industrial music, progressive rock and jazz-core on **Bear Catching Fish** (? ? - nov 1993) and **Angel Wings** (? 1994 - mar 1995). It was only the beginning of Anderson's influential career. Seattle's [Pigeonhed](#) (1), a collaboration between Satchel's vocalist Shawn Smith and Pell Mell's keyboardist Steve Fisk, yielded the industrial/electronic dub-soul crossover of **Pigeonhed** (spr 1993 - dec 1993). Again, it was only the beginning of Fisk's influential career.

The absurdist rock of Residents and Thinking Fellers was still practiced in the Bay Area by [Fibulator's Drank From The Asphalt](#) (? ? - ? 1993), and in Oregon by the [New Bad Things](#) (1), for example on **Freewheel!** (? 1992 - ? 1995).

[Miss Murgatroid](#) (2), the brainchild of San Francisco-based accordionist Alicia Rose, blended psychedelia, raga and minimalism on **Methyl Ethyl Key Tones** (early 1993 - ? 1993) and especially **Myoclyonic Melodies** (? ? - oct 1996), a glorious fest of eerie drones, Hendrix-ian glissandos, bombardment-like walls of noise, radio signals, gothic Bach-ian toccatas, noir atmospheres and surreal concertos for dissonant accordion and all sorts of instrumental noises.

### *Analog ambience 1993-94*

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[Labradford](#) (12), the Virginia-based duo of keyboardist Carter Brown and guitarist Mark Nelson, were influential for at least two reasons: they rediscovered the appeal of analog keyboards; and they coined an ambient/chamber form of rock music that shunned percussion and relied on drones. The mostly instrumental albums **Prazision** (? 1993 - oct 1993) and **A Stable Reference** (? ? - may 1995), which added a bass to the equation, subverted the song format by conceiving each "song" as a slow-motion nebula of loops, drones and guitar events (hypnotic strumming, psychedelic reverbs), while barely whispered melodies glided in different directions. This "textural" form of jamming (jamming that enhanced the timbres and the contrasts, like an impressionistic watercolor) was basically a non-psychedelic (i.e., stark and austere) form of shoegazing. Labradford opted for a machine-driven sound with **Labradford** (? 1996 - nov 1996), which began to add samplers and drum-machines to their arsenal of instruments, and to employ found sounds and dissonances. However, the overall ambience became warmer because the vocals had evolved into a real "voice", not just background hissing. Thanks to technology, the "emptiness" of previous albums had been "filled", but the "containeer" was no less frightening than the container: a barren and spectral landscape, enveloped in a ghostly calm, that emerged out of a nightmarish fog. After the formulaic **Mi Media Naranja** (? ? - jul 1997) and **E Luxo So** (? ? - jul 1999), that indulged in the "panoramic" element of their music, Labradford returned to the aseptic mood of Brian Eno's original ambient program, albeit one in which details matter, with the four lengthy tracks of **Fixed::Context** (jul 2000 - ? 2000), each piece overflowing with "dark matter", with invisible sounds that were nonetheless the substance, whereas the whole was merely a vehicle, a backdrop, a context.

Fundamentally, Seattle's [Jessamine](#) (1) reprised the electronic rock format of the Silver Apples and the United States Of America, and upgraded it to My Bloody Valentine's shoegazing. **Jessamine** (? 1994 - nov 1994) introduced the droning music of keyboardist Andy Brown and guitarist Rex Ritter, but **The Long Arm Of Coincidence** (oct 1995/feb 1996 - sep

1996) added a number of subtleties to the model that set it apart from other droning ensembles: a predisposition to Can-like structures, a twisted rhythmic emphasis, jazzy synth ectoplasms and occasional echoes of Soft Machine's prog-rock. Andy Brown continued the experiment in [Fontanelle](#) (1), a collaboration with guitarist Rex Ritter, whose **Fontanelle** (spr 1992 - aug 1992) offered instrumental jams that were evocative, trance-oriented recapitulations of Soft Machine, John Cage and Miles Davis.

### ***Instrumental post-rock 1993-94***

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Post-rock's focus on instrumental interplay indirectly fostered a resurgence of instrumental rock. Oddly creative combos had been around independently of post-rock. For example, born in Boston from the ashes of Human Sexual Response, the [Concussion Ensemble](#) (1) offered a mixture of minimalistic repetition, free improvisation and hard-rock on **Stampede** (sum 1993 - nov 1993).

Instrumental post-rock found its prophets and visionaries in Pennsylvania's [Don Caballero](#) (12), the first band, with Virginia's [Breadwinner](#) (who never recorded an album), to consciously and thoroughly explore the innovations of Bitch Magnet and Slint. One could find countless references inside **For Respect** (jan 1993 - oct 1993), from Neil Young's neurotic progressions to MC5's monster riffs, from Arto Lindsay's atonal screeches to Chrome's manic distortions, from King Crimson's progressive-rock to Black Flag's progressive-hardcore. The barbaric duels of guitarists Mike Banfield and Ian Williams, and the colossal "blunders" of the rhythm section (Damon "Che" Fitzgerald on drums and Pat Morris on bass) created a deviant, menacing wall of noise. Technically, **2** (jan 1995 - sep 1995) was even better, as it introduced a quartet of sophisticated, skilled players, and not just an enigmatic whole. Four lengthy tracks summarized 40 years of intellectual rock music, from Soft Machine to Metallica, and unloaded a cornucopia of odd time signatures and intense/elaborate textures. **What Burns Never Returns** (late 1997 - jun 1998) was an alchemic work that retained little of the original verve.

[Thee Speaking Canaries](#), a trio fronted by Don Caballero's drummer Damon "Che" Fitzgerald and featuring Karl Hendricks on bass, made post-rock, folk-rock and power-pop collide on **Songs For The Terrestrially Challenged** (aug 1993 - may 1995).

Don Caballero's guitarist Ian Williams pursued his experiments in [Storm & Stress](#) (2), featuring bassist Eric Topolsky and drummer Kevin Shea. **Storm & Stress** (? ? - jul 1997) and **Under Thunder And Fluorescent Light** (jun/jul 1999 - jan 2000) were ambitious attempts at playing music while intentionally forgetting the song that they were playing. The technique resonated with theories borrowed from John Cage, Ornette Coleman and Einsturzende Neubaten. A chronic lack of a gravitational center permeated all of their jams. At times, harmony was so loose that it appeared to be random.

Chicago's [Trenchmouth](#) (1), led by vocalist Damon Locks and guitarist Chris DeZutter, mixed heavy-metal solos, and elements of ska, funk, reggae and jazz on the philosophical concept albums **Inside The Future** (? ? - sep 1993) and **Vs The Light of The Sun** (jul 1994 - jan 1995), to the point that their final **The Broadcasting System** (jun 1995 - may 1996)

was virtually a tribute to the dub civilization.

Australian trio [Dirty Three](#) (23), comprising Warren Ellis on violin, Mick Turner on guitar and Jim White on drums, chiseled lengthy evocative jams that aimed for a folk-jazz-raga-rock fusion, a sort of culmination of four decades of crossover. **Sad And Dangerous** (late 1992/early 1993 - nov 1994) and **Dirty Three** (dec 1993/jan 1994 - jun 1994) evoked John Fahey, Albert Ayler, the Third Ear Band and the Turtle Island String Quartet, but, ultimately, were quite unique thanks to Ellis' violin, that could imitate John Cale's viola and Jimi Hendrix's guitar as well as an Indian sitar or a jazz trumpet. More importantly, the narrative masterpieces of **Horse Stories** (dec 1995/jan 1996 - sep 1996) delivered emotions without exploiting the conventions of emotion in music. The trio's music transcended stylistic boundaries and technical vocabularies, but somehow managed to be intuitive and user-friendly. Abandoning the punkish undulations of the early works, the austere chamber music of **Ocean Songs** (aug/sep 1997 - mar 1998) upped the ante. It was delicate, lyrical and pictorial, without the harsh edges of the early works. The emotional content was much higher because the album was a tribute to nature and also a somber meditation on the human condition, the violin rising to universal voice of the century's existential angst. The six extended compositions of **Whatever You Love You Are** (jul/sep 1999 - mar 2000) hastened the convergence with classical music, as the jazz and folk influences faded away.

### *Montage, 1990-94*

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The [Vampire Rodents](#) (121), a project of Toronto guitarist/vocalist Anton Rathausen (real name Daniel Vahnke) and keyboardist Victor Wulf, were possibly the greatest composers of collage-music of the decade. **War Music** (early 1989/jan 1990 - ? 1990) merely set the existential tone of their opus by juxtaposing recitals of horror stories against industrial music performed by Neanderthal men on stone instruments. **Premonition** (? ? - ? 1992), featuring Andrea Akastia on violin and cello, transposed that program to another dimension, making music out of a frantic collage of sources. On one hand, the combo created a music in which sound effects, not instruments, became the element of composition. On the other hand, they retained the feeling of jazz and avantgarde chamber music. Their savage art of montage reached a demented peak with **Lullaby Land** (? ? - oct 1993). Rhythm permeated this work at least on two levels: a disco/funk/house beat that propelled the track; and the pace at which snippets were glued together to form "songs". At both levels the verve was palpable. The songs were gags, and each gag was an assembly of cells. It was entertaining, and it was terrifying. The whole recalled the grotesque and unpredictable merry-go-rounds of Frank Zappa's early works and the Residents' early suites. Vampire Rodents' "lullaby land" was set in a Freudian nightmare and that nightmare played at double speed in a very chaotic theater. **Clockseed** (? 1994 - apr 1995) added more acoustic instruments and more drum-machines, and offered a more linear, rational and focused take on the same idea. It was another symphony of chaos and multitude, that, indirectly, harked back to composers of urban cacophony such as Charles Ives and Edgar Varese (and composers of cartoon soundtracks such as Carl Stalling). It was still a cannibal and schizophrenic art, that continuously devoured itself and that continuously changed personality. **Gravity's Rim** (? ? - may 1996), instead, returned to

the format of the pop song, thus closing an ideal loop. Layers of samples merely provided the "arrangement" for the melodies carried by the vocals. Vampire Rodents' art shared with Dadaism and Futurism the aesthetic principle that avantgarde and clownish novelty should be one and the same.

[Bugskull](#) (12), the brainchild of Oregon's guitarist and vocalist (and former folksinger) Sean Byrne, coined a style of arrangement that was the post-rock equivalent of Brian Wilson's orchestral productions: a catalog of musical mistakes instead of an abundance of instrumental counterpoint. The "songs" of **Phantasies And Senseitions** (? 1993/? 1994 - ? 1994) were jams of found sounds, electronic sounds, distortions, out-of-tune passages, abstract noise, and, last but not least, senseless lullabies. **Snakland** (? ? - may 1996) focused on the core (the tune) rather than on the shell (the cacophony), but the program remained one of wrapping tunes into layers and layers of cacophony. **Distracted Snowflake Volume One** (? ? - ? 1997) marked the formal triumph of his techniques of lo-fi avantgarde. Each piece was carefully sculpted with a myriad of sounds, resulting in "songs" that were both overwhelming and exhilarating.

### ***British post-rock, 1992-94***

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At the same time that the post-rock aesthetic was spreading in the USA, England boasted a significantly different school of intellectual rock.

Napalm Death's drummer [Mick Harris](#) recreated the original line-up of that band (namely, guitarist Justin Broadrick and vocalist Nick Bullen) for his new project, [Scorn](#) (11) but the music they played on **Vae Solis** (nov 1991 - apr 1992), was from another planet: Harris operated sampling machines and sequencers, and sculpted arrangements that incorporated industrial music and dub in a brutal and lugubrious framework, reminiscent of Public Image Ltd and Killing Joke. The bleak, hallucinated, horror soundscapes of this album enabled the stately psychodramas of **Colossus** (dec 1992/jan 1993 - sep 1993). The territory was still scoured by heavy beats and ghastly distortions, but there were real souls wandering in the miasmatic mist. It was a music of agonizing, paranoid rhythmic patterns, and rhythm rapidly became the focus of Scorn: **Evanescence** (? 1993 - mar 1994) incorporated the syncopated beat of hip-hop, and Scorn retreated to a spectral ambient format with the instrumental **Gyral** (? ? - oct 1995), once Bullen had left Harris alone at the helm. As the music of Scorn became more trivial, the music of its alter-ego, [Lull](#), became more complex. The electronic poems of **Dreamt About Dreaming** (jul 1992 - ? 1992) evolved into the ambient monoliths of **Cold Summer** (apr 1994 - ? 1994) and **Continue** (may 1996 - oct 1996), influenced by two crucial collaborations: the four lengthy **Murder Ballads** (early 1994 - ? 1994), sung by Martyn Bates, at the border between gothic and ambient music; and the two ambient suites of **Somnific Flux** (nov/dec 1994 - ? 1995), a joint venture with Bill Laswell. The sheer scope of Harris' work was stunning. Free-jazz, ambient music and grindcore found an improbable meeting point in [Painkiller](#), the trio formed by Harris with Bill Laswell and John Zorn, best represented by **Buried Secrets** (aug/oct 1991 - oct 1992).

[Disco Inferno](#) (1), after becoming the creature of producer Charlie McIntosh and vocalist/guitarist Ian Crause, delivered one of the most challenging albums of the era, **DI Go Pop** (? ? - feb 1994).



[Pram](#) (12) twisted the old craft of progressive-rock to the point that it became a container for all sorts of odd structures. Rosie Cuckston's childish vocals inhabited a wonderland painted by the surreal colors of Max Simpson's samples and keyboards, plus the occasional trumpet or saxophone, and was constantly challenged by the grotesque charge of a power-trio ignited by Matthew Eaton's guitar. Elements of jazz, dub and electronica permeated **The Stars Are So Big The Earth Is So Small** (? ? - sep 1993), thus it was not surprising that **Helium** (? ? - sep 1994) sounded like Daevid Allen's Gong playing trip-hop. Its creative chaos had few rivals in those years. Despite the number and density of sonic events, the loose structures of **Sargasso Sea** (? ? - aug 1995) sounded like pure abstractions, mirages, phantasms, and eventually led (on a more earthly plane) to the exquisite muzak of **North Pole Radio Station** (? ? - mar 1998) and **Museum Of Imaginary Animals** (? ? - aug 2000).

[Moonshake](#) (2), the creature of singer-songwriters Dave Callahan and Margaret Fiedler, reduced the song format to a plasma of rhythmic and melodic fragments on the atmospheric experiments of **Eva Luna** (aug 1992 - oct 1992). A bold synthesis of psychedelia, trip-hop and jazz, their sound basically upgraded Public Image Ltd's sound to the age of sampling. As **The Sound Your Eyes Can Follow** (jan/feb 1994 - ? 1994) provided sturdier scaffolding for the melodies, the mood settled halfway between Pere Ubu-like hysteria and Contortions-like neurosis. The more robust **Dirty & Divine** (dec 1995/feb 1996 - may 1996), without Fiedler, further polished the edges and displayed similarities with Talking Heads' rhythmic juggernauts and hypnotic fanfares.

[Laika](#) (11), the new project of Moonshake's co-founder Margaret Fiedler, continued the exploration of Moonshake's stylistic crevices while focusing on electronic keyboards, sampling machines, flute and polyrhythms. **Silver Apples Of The Moon** (? ? - oct 1994) delivered circular jazz-funk bacchanals reminiscent of Rip Rig & Panic and ethno-ambient frescoes reminiscent of Jon Hassell. **Sounds Of The Satellites** (aug 1996 - feb 1997) refined the production technique and achieved a super-fusion that stretched from Miles Davis' jazz-rock to Morton Subotnick's musique concrete.

Scottish guitarist [Richard Youngs](#) specialized in "lo-fi" improvisations inspired by Terry Riley's minimalism and John Fahey's instrumental folk music, notably the three lengthy spectral improvisations of **Advent** (dec 1988 - ? 1990) and the three lengthy "ballads" of **Sapphie** (nov 1997 - ? 1998). Significant detours included **Summer Wanderer** (sep 2004 - ? 2005), a moving a-cappella album, and **Multi-Tracked Shakuhachi** (? ? - ? 2006). Since the late 1980s he had also been collaborating with avantgarde composer Simon Wickham-Smith, creating lengthy free-form noise collages/jams such as **Ceaucecu** (apr 1991/apr 1992 - ? 1992), *The Proof Of The Point*, off **Kretinmuzak** (mar 1993 - ? 1994), *Diabetes* for more than 20 instruments, off **Asthma And Diabetes** (jun 1993 - ? 1993), *More Urban Music for the Middle Of Nowhere*, off **Enedkeg** (? ? - ? 1996) and *Angels From CT* with sampler, rhythm machine and synthesizer, off **Veil** (? ? - ? 1997).

### ***Italian post-rock 1990-94***

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Post-rock was particularly fertile in Italy, a country that since the 1970s

had been on the leading edge of progressive music. In general, the sonic model was a mixture of Big Black, Sonic Youth and Fugazi, while the themes coined a sort of neo-existentialism, very much concerned with the psychodramas of ordinary kids. It all sounded like a brain scan at the edge of a nervous breakdown.

[Afterhours](#)' stylistic tour de force of **Hai Paura del Buio?** (? 1997 - jul 1997) achieved an eclectic fusion of hardcore, grunge, folk and pop.

[Uzeda](#) (1) cemented a dark noise-rock style that was both brutal and lyrical, physical and psychological, while fusing atonal guitar, jazzy rhythm section and hardcore vocals on their third album **Different Section Wires** (nov 1997 - apr 1998).

[Starfuckers](#) (1) merged rock and electronic sounds on the ambitious aesthetic manifesto of **Sinistri** (sum 1994 - ? 1994) and especially on **Infrantumi** (jul/aug 1997 - ? 1997), a blend of free-jazz, cubism, dissonant avantgarde, musique concrete and Faust-like structures.

[Massimo Volume](#)'s subtle second album, **Lungo I Bordi** (? 1994 - ? 1995), was an oneiric and noirish journey into a Fugazi-esque hell.

[Marlene Kuntz](#)'s existential noise-rock on **Il Vile** (nov 1995/feb 1996 - ? 1996) sounded like a synthesis of European and USA moods.

[Three Second Kiss](#) devoted **For Pain Relief** (? ? - jun 1996) to free-form noise-rock.

The post-rock renaissance of the 1990s somehow emancipated the rest of the nation, fostering innovation in many different genres. Both [Epsilon Indi](#)'s ambient exotic monolith **A Distant Return** (? 1991 - ? 1992) and [Timoria](#)'s melodic concept **Viaggio Senza Vento** (jun/jul 1993 - oct 1993), their fourth album, heralded a boom in new genres. [Elio E Le Storie Tese](#), a six-member unit, became Italy's most relevant disciples of Frank Zappa with **Elio Samaga Hukapan Kariyana Turu** (sep 1989 - end 1989).

A sign that Italian prog-rock was about to stage a major come-back was [Eris Pluvia](#)'s baroque **Rings Of Earthly Light** (? 1990 - ? 1991), particularly its five-movement title-track. [Deus Ex Machina](#) indulged in a vehement, torrential fusion of classical, jazz and rock, that slowly became more cerebral as they progressed from the rock opera **Gladium Caeli** (may 1990 - ? 1991) to the three-part suite *Res Publica* off **De Republica** (jul/oct 1994 - ? 1995) and to the jazzy fantasias of **Cinque** (feb/oct 2001 - ? 2002). [Finisterre](#)'s **Finisterre** (sep/oct 1994 - ? 1995) saluted the revival of Italy's prog-rock school with an unusual balance of classical piano and rock guitar. [Bluvertigo](#) delivered the progressive cauldron of **Metallo non metallo** (? 1996 - jan 1997).

[Technogod](#) fostered an industrial-rap-rock fusion with **Hemo Glow Ball** (? ? - ? 1992), while [Templebeat](#) concocted industrial-music nightmares inspired to all sorts of sci-fi, horror and porno visions on **Media Sickness** (? 1995 - jan 1996).

[Almamegretta](#) coined a new form of world-music on **Sanacore** (? ? - ? 1995), an ambitious encyclopedic revision of traditional codes that bridged the ancient folk tradition of Napoli (Naples), electronic dance music, dub production techniques and Middle-Eastern scales.

[Ordo Equitum Solis](#) (a duo of guitar and vocals) crafted sets of solemn, melancholy folk ballads redolent of medieval music such as **Solstitii** **Temporis Sensus** (sep 1990 - dec 1990).

### *Germany 1994*

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Germany didn't have a post-rock school with a unified style until the second half of the decade, but it always had musicians who tried wildly unusual avenues.

[Mouse On Mars](#) (3), the Duesseldorf-based duo of Andi Toma and Jan Werner, applied the post-rock aesthetics to post-techno dance-music. The pseudo-psychedelic trance of **Vulvaland** (jan 1994 - jul 1994) was unusual mainly because of its tragic, gloomy mood, but **Iaora Tahiti** (? ? - oct 1995) layered elements of dub, jungle, hip-hop inside a shell of warped ambient/cosmic cliches, thus creating a new kind of futurism, one that was not Kraftwerk's paranoia of machines but a very bodily (and current) neurosis. **Autoditacker** (early 1997 - aug 1997) consolidated that style in a baroque synthesis of light polyrhythms and bizarre electronics, while **Instrumentals** (? 1995/? 1997 - oct 1997) was perhaps the most austere enunciation of their deconstruction technique. The "thickness" of sound effects on **Idiology** (? ? - apr 2001) gave rise to an hallucinated symphony of instrumental colors, while assembling a catalog of impossible beats.

The instrumental quartet [Bohren & der Club of Gore](#) (2) penned the modest ambience for piano and guitar of **Gore Motel** (aug 1994 - ? 1994). That idea transcended its original scope on the double-disc **Midnight Radio** (oct 1995 - end 1995), whose pieces were rendered hypnotic, subdued, slow, stark and evocative by super-heavy bass notes and catatonic drumming; and finally morphed into the minimal ambient noir jazz of **Sunset Mission** (? ? - feb 2000) and **Black Earth** (? ? - oct 2002), with a saxophone replacing the guitar.

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