

## The History of Rock Music: 1995-2001

Drum'n'bass, trip-hop, glitch music

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### Drum'n'Bass

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

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#### *Jungle*

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Dance music of the 1990s largely rejected the simple, jovial, hedonistic approach to body movement that had ruled since James Brown invented funk music in the 1960s. Disco, techno and house had simply imported new technologies (both for rhythm and arrangements) into the paradigm of funk. The 1990s continued that process, but further removing the "joy" of dancing from the beats, and, in fact, replacing it with fits of acute neurosis. One of the most important ideas to come out of Britain was "jungle" or "drum'n'bass", a syncopated, polyrhythmic and frantic variant of house, a fusion of hip-hop and techno that relied on extremely fast drum-machines, epileptic breakbeats and huge bass lines.

Precursors of jungle included, in the USA, *Bug In The Bassbin* (1989), the rhythmic workout of Carl Craig's Innerzone Orchestra, and, in Britain, Perfecto's *Baz De Conga* (1989). The experiments of Plaid and Meat Beat Manifesto also laid the foundations of jungle.

Jungle saw the light in 1992 in London with tracks such as Leakage Trip's *Psychotronic*, Nebula II's *Flatliners* and Johnny Jungle's *Johnny*, followed by Andy C's *Valley Of The Shadows* (1993) and Ed Rush's *Bloodclot Attack* (1993), while [Omni Trio](#)'s *Renegade Snares* (1993) and especially [LTJ Bukem](#)'s *Music* (1993) invented "ambient jungle" (a calmer, introverted version of that hyperkinetic dance music). The name originated from the London club that first promoted the new style, the "Jungle". Jungle (the style) spread like wildfire through other club venues, such as "Roast", "Roller Express", "Telepathy", "Desire", "A Way Of Life", "Jungle Rush", "Jungle Fever", "Thunder And Joy", "Thrust", etc. In 1994, the style began to be called "drum'n'bass", and in 1995 Goldie turned it

into a mass phenomenon. The London club "Rage", thanks to disc-jockeys Fabio and Grooverider, became the epicenter of drum'n'bass.

Few genres of popular music underwent so many changes and reached such ambitious heights as jungle did. Within a few years, jungle musicians were already composing abstract and ambient pieces, integrating breakbeats with pop vocals, adopting jazz improvisation.

### *The golden age of drum'n'bass*

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[4 Hero](#) (2), the duo of Dego MacFarlane and Mark Mac, coined a sort of "armchair jungle", a groundbreaking marriage of fusion-jazz and ambient music that even employed lush strings and free-form electronics with the sci-fi concept album **Parallel Universe** (1994) and with the ambitious **Two Pages** (1998).

The first star of jungle, [Goldie](#) (1), born Conrad Price, made his name with the extended singles *Terminator* (1993) and *Timeless* (1994), which were mini-symphonies of hardcore techno, and the groundbreaking **Timeless** (1995), that used breakbeats to construct atmospheric music. Thanks to his skills at sound manipulation, he turned songwriting into sound painting. And the hour-long composition *Saturnzreturn* (1998) removed any boundaries from his studio explorations.

Another milestone for "ambient jungle" was the tour de force of **Waveform** (1996), by [T Power](#) (Marc Royal).

[Roni Size](#) (1), the leader of Bristol-based dj collective Reprazent and one of the first "auteurs" of drum'n'bass, blended jungle's breakbeats with live instruments and singing on the monumental double disc **New Forms** (1997), and reconciled dance music's suite format with the traditional song format of pop/soul music.

Other musicians who merged drum'n'bass with jazz were [Photek](#), born Rupert Parkes, with **Modus Operandi** (1997), and [James Hardway](#) (real name David Harrow), with **Deeper Wider Smoother Shit** (1996).

Major additions to the drum'n'bass canon came from various directions. [Ella Brazillia](#), the duo of Steve Cobby and Dave McSherry, were perhaps the most adventurous in cross-fertilizing different genres, particularly on their later albums, such as **Power Clown** (1998) and **A Touch Of Cloth** (1999). [Adam Fenton's Colours](#) (1997) was also an album of diverse stylistic experiments. [Boymerang](#) (1), the new project of former Bark Psychosis frontman Graham Sutton, sculpted **Balance Of The Force** (Regal, 1997), a conceptual work of art that straddled the boundaries between pop, jazz and avantgarde. The imaginary soundtrack **Exorcise The Demons** (1999) qualified [Source Direct](#), i.e. veterans Jim Baker and Phil Aslett, as jungle's equivalent of Barry Adamson.

In the meantime, new styles continued to emerge from London clubs, such as "techstep" (a fast, brutal fusion of techno and jungle probably invented by DJ Trace in 1994), "speedgarage" (mainly a production technique,

developed by Armand Van Helden in 1996, of huge breakbeats and bass lines, which he himself defined as "a cross between house and drum'n'bass"), "two-step garage" (interplay of frantic breakbeats and velvety soul vocals, emerging in 1997) and "drill'n'bass" (very fast drum'n'bass). Garage music (only vaguely related to Larry Levan's "garage" of the 1980s, and closer to the style perfected by disc-jockey Tony Humphries of New Jersey's "Zanzibar" club) was refined by groups such as the Dreem Teem and Tuff Jam, and began to climb the British charts with Shanks & Bigfoot's *Sweet Like Chocolate* (1999) and Dj Luck & Mc Neat's *A Little Bit of Luck* (2000).

Germany's [Panacea](#) (1), i.e. Mathis Mootz, borrowed elements from death-metal and industrial music for the "drill'n'bass" sound of **Low Profile Darkness** (1997).

[Animals on Wheels](#), the brainchild of British electronic musician Andrew Coleman, employed a kaleidoscopic assembly of jazz samples, frantic breaks and downtempo electronica on **Designs And Mistakes** (1997) for his brand of drill'n'bass.

Japan's [Bisk](#), born Naohiro Fujikawa, introduced a very ornate, baroque, manically-crafted style on albums such as **Strange Or Funny-haha** (1997).

[Propellerheads](#), i.e. Alex Gifford and David Arnold, led "big beat", the subgenre of drum'n'bass that assimilated tribal African beats, with **Decksandrumsandrockandroll** (1998).

### *Avantgarde jungle*

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Thanks to ever more intricate beats and to free structures borrowed from jazz, jungle music rapidly became the foundation for a new kind of avantgarde music, "conceptual jungle", pursued by the most austere of the genre's visionaries.

[Spring Heel Jack](#) (23), the project of John Coxon and Ashley Wales, subverted the rules of ambient jungle with the symphonic extravaganzas **There Are Strings** (1995) and especially **68 Million Shades** (1996). The experiments with jazz and minimalism of **Busy Curious Thirsty** (1997) blossomed on **Treader** (1999), a wild excursion into 20th century classical music. Most of its tracks sounded like symphonic poems: lush, thematic orchestral narratives built out of samples, loops and echoes. The jazz elements became predominant with **Disappeared** (2000), a work that alternated calculated geometry and Wagnerian intensity. Storming, Foetus-like spasms crushed a steady flow of sonic debris, while elsewhere melodic fragments morphed into alien structures. **Masses** (2001) completed their conversion to avantgarde jazz with a chamber concerto performed by the sensational ensemble of Matthew Shipp (piano), Evan Parker and Tim Berne (saxophones), Roy Campbell (trumpet), Daniel Carter (flute and saxophones), Ed Coxon (violins), Mat Maneri (viola) and William Parker (bass). And **Amassed** (2002), featuring Han Bennink (drums), Ed Coxon (violin), John Edwards (bass), Evan Parker

(saxophone), Paul Rutherford (trombone), Matthew Shipp (piano), Kenny Wheeler (trumpet), and the "shoegazing" guitar of Spiritualized's Jason Pierce, was one of the most exhilarating stylistic orgies of modern jazz, straddling not one stylistic border but pretty much all possible borders.

Tom Jenkinson, better known as [Squarepusher](#) (2), coined a cubistic version of drum'n'bass on **Hard Normal Daddy** (1997): a wild assembly of manic breakbeats, spirited electronica and disjointed samples concocted a whirling cacophony à la Morton Subotnick. Visceral intensity and impeccable fluidity coexisted and enhanced each other. Each piece on **Go Plastic** (2001) was, de facto, a treatise on a new form of Dadaistic, disjointed, beat-based music in which the drum-machine became the equivalent of a jazz instrument for a creative solo improvisation while approaching the abstract intensity of chamber electronic music (basically, musique concrete imbued with punk frenzy).

Brazilian-born [Amon Tobin](#) (12) well impersonated the classical composer in the hip-hop age. Instead of composing symphonies for orchestras, Tobin glued together sonic snippets using electronic and digital equipment. **Adventures in Foam** (1996), released under the moniker Cujo, and especially his aesthetic manifesto and masterpiece, **Bricolage** (1997), unified classical, jazz, rock and dance music in a genre and style that was universal. Tobin warped the distinctive timbres of instruments to produce new kinds of instruments, and then wove them into an organic flow of sound. Tobin kept refining his art of producing amazingly sophisticated and seamless puzzles on **Permutation** (1998), **Supermodified** (2000) and, best of his second phase, **Out From Out Where** (2002). Once he had exhausted the possibilities of instruments and samples, Tobin turned to found sounds and field recordings as the sources for **The Foley Room** (2007), without basically changing style. In effect, Tobin carried out several philosophical debates at once (e.g., on the irrelevance of the message, on the irrelevance of time), while entertaining his audience with catchy numbers of an extra-terrestrial music hall. Tobin was debating on the meaning of music itself, on the nature of composition, on the viability of communication, on the ultimate constituents of sound. His neglect of form was a new kind of form, a form that had reduced form to the annihilation of form. The dualism of content versus form was resolved by the post-modernists as a non-issue: Tobin redefined it as a process, a process of form-abatement by which content is created, as if content and form were the same substance, and more of one meant less of the other one.

Matt Elliott's [Third Eye Foundation](#) (1) evolved from the atmospheric blend of guitar textures and jungle breakbeats of **Semtex** (1995) to the sample-based disorienting puzzles of **Ghost** (1997) and especially **You Guys Kill Me** (1998).

[Twisted Science](#) (1), the project of disc-jockey Jon Tye, was to techno what Sonic Youth were to rock'n'roll: a scaffolding of hard-core techno was brutalized by layers of abrasive electronica, distorted hip-hop beats, jungle polyrhythms and industrial cacophony on **Blown** (1997).

[Witchman](#) (1), born John Roome, contaminated drum'n'bass with gothic, techno, industrial, dub and ambient music on **Explorimenting Beats**

(1997).

[Faultline](#) (1), the brainchild of clarinet player and studio wizard David Kosten, fused chamber music, industrial techno and free-form noise on the melancholy multi-part sonatas of **Closer Colder** (1999).

[Klute](#) (Tom Withers) indulged in intricate and psychotic arrangements on **Casual Bodies** (1998).

[Andrea Parker](#) (1), a classically trained cellist, a disc-jockey and an electronic composer with a penchant for analog synthesizers, mixed string orchestrations, hip-hop beats and heavy bass to create the highly seductive music of **Kiss My Arp** (1999).

[Neotropic](#) (2), the project of female electronic dance musician Riz Maslen, offered a dreamy, deconstructed version of trip-hop and drum'n'bass on **15 Levels Of Magnification** (1996), although the tracks floated weightlessly (and beat-lessly) in the fragile, haunting electronic soundscapes of **La Prochaine Fois** (2001).

[Icarus](#) (2), the London-based duo of Ollie Bown and Sam Britton, dislocated beats and melodies on **Fijaka** (1998) while adopting a digital and minimalist aesthetic that would lead to pieces such as *Three False Starts*, off **I Tweet the Birdy Electric** (2004), at the border between ambient, jazz, concrete and glitch music.

[Venetian Snares](#) (2), the moniker of Canadian electronic musician Aaron Funk, established his trademark "breakcore" style of complex, brutal, distorted, skittering, whirling drum programming (with a manic passion for the 7/4 time signature and often only consisting of "clicks and cuts") on **Printf("shiver in eternal darkness/n")** (2000) and especially on **Doll Doll Doll** (2001). Innovative tracks of the period include the ten-minute *Twisting Ligneous*, off **2370894** (2002), the 15-minute *A Giant Alien Force More Violent & Sick Than Anything You Can Imagine* (2002), the nine-minute *Marty's Tardis*, off **The Chocolate Wheelchair Album** (2003), the digital pastiches of glitchy videogame-like drill'n'bass of **Find Candace** (2003), and the ferocious bombardments of the mini-album **Winnipeg is a Frozen Shithole** (2005); while *Badminton* (2003) and *Moonglow* (2004) toyed with jazz. Funk transformed from punk terrorist to nostalgic dreamer and existential philosopher with the "Hungarian" album **Rossz Csillag Allat Szuletett** (2005), that introduced strings, horns and piano. His split personality then yielded works such as **Meathole** (2005) in the old brutal style and works such as **My Downfall** (2007) in the orchestral style.

[Noize Creator](#) (1), the project of Dresden's disc-jockey Stefan Senf, emerged with harsh, visceral cut-up breakbeat deconstructions that sounded like Nine Inch Nails playing drum'n'bass, and **Deferred Media** (2002), a barrage of syncopated beats set against wildly disjointed soundscapes.

### *New York's progressive jungle*

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Jungle came to the US in the second half of the decade, thanks to British expatriates such as [DJ Dara](#) Gilfoyle, sculptor of the cerebral, sinister, post-industrial soundscapes of **Rinsimus Maximus** (1997). New York became the main USA center for jungle. [We](#) (1), featuring Gregor "DJ Olive" Asch, demolished the clichés of dub, trip-hop, drum'n'bass and jazz on **As Is** (1997). [Datach'i](#) (2), Joseph Fraioli's brainchild, spun the chaotic high-speed digital novelties of **10110101** (1999) and the hyper-kinetic pandemonium of **We Are Always Well Thank You** (2000). [Dylan Group](#) (2), i.e. percussionist Adam Pierce and dj Dylan Cristy, retooled drum'n'bass for the post-rock generation with the jazzy, vibraphone-driven **It's All About** (1997) and the more relaxed **More Adventures In Lying Down** (1999), even expanding into progressive-rock with **Ur-Klang Search** (2000). Dylan Group's multi-instrumentalist Adam Pierce also had his own project, [Mice Parade](#) (1), that was even more adventurous on **The Meaning Of Boodley Baye** (1998) and on the the symphonic **Ramda** (1999), a dazzling take on dub, jazz and techno.

The musicians of the New York school created such bold experiments that the term "progressive jungle" was more appropriate.

At the same time, New York was home to the "Illbient" movement (as christened by DJ Olive).

Paul Miller, better known as [DJ Spooky](#) (5), the star of the Illbient movement, opted for a chaotic flow of rhythmic and non-rhythmic electronic sounds that harked back to Italian futurism and to electronic-music pioneers such as Morton Subotnick and Karlheinz Stockhausen. **Songs Of A Dead Dreamer** (1996) explored the least visited interstices of genres such as ambient, dub, electronica, trip hop, drum'n'bass. The tracks on **Riddim Warfare** (1998) were not so much dance grooves as catalogs of sound effects that turned drum'n'bass into an electronic symphony. His most ambitious work, **Viral Sonata** (1998), credited to Paul D. Miller, was an amorphous aural architecture that evoked a post-apocalyptic wasteland roamed by ghosts. **File Under Futurism** (1999) was chamber electronic music. **Optometry** (2002), performed by the quartet of pianist Matthew Shipp, bassist William Parker, saxophonist Joe McPhee and drummer Guillermo Brown, was one of the works that blurred the line between live and sampled jazz music.

The Illbient disease contaminated even avantgarde composer [Bob Neill](#), a former member of La Monte Young's ensemble, who collaborated with DJ Spooky and We's DJ Olive on **Triptycal** (1996).

[DJ Olive](#) himself demolished and redirected the entire movement with **Buoy** (2004) and **Sleep** (2006), that contained only one colossal track each, and each a titanic endeavor of abstract soundsculpting, musique concrete, glitch art and ambient droning.

[Mocean Worker](#) (1), the project of New York-based vocalist and bassist Adam Dorn, followed in the footsteps of the jazz and drum'n'bass fusion of Spring Heel Jack, duly updated to the age of digital soundsculpting, on **Home Movies From the Brain Forest** (1998).

In Los Angeles, Medicine's guitarist/keyboardist Brad Laner used the

moniker [Electric Company](#) to carry out a study in deconstruction of drum'n'bass as Kraftwerk would have done it, on **Studio City** (1997).

San Francisco-based disc-jockey [Jhno](#) (John Eichenseer) offered a bold fusion of ethnic, ambient, jazz and techno music on **Understand** (1995), while **Kwno** (1998) mixed drum'n'bass and computer-generated improvisation and **Membrane** (2000) focused on inventing a new vocabulary of irregular rhythms and eerie soundscapes.

[Demolition Squad](#) (1), the Los Angeles-based duo of jazz saxophonist Jim Goetsch and Japanese keyboardist Kim Koschka, integrated drum'n'bass, dub, trip-hop, world-music, orchestral and electronic effects to craft **Hit It** (2000).

Under the moniker [Hrvatski](#), Boston's electronic and digital composer [Keith Fullerton-Whitman](#) (2) began composing drum'n'bass soundscapes that were actually audio collages of breakbeats, as documented on **Oiseaux 1996-1998** (1999). He began a more austere career of soundsculptor under his own name, first with the mini-album **21:30** (2001), an abstract piece for guitar and laptop computer that borrows the "phasing" technique of minimalist composer Steve Reich, and then with the album **Playthroughs** (2002), also dominated by electronically-manipulated guitar tones. The mini-album **Antithesis** (2004) and the full-length **Multiples** (2005) were split between droning trance, ambient nebulae, minimalist undulations and guitar psychedelia. All these strands came together on his masterpiece **Lisbon** (2006), a 41-minute live improvisation that also ventured into field recordings and Alvin Lucier-inspired feedback-driven music.

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