The History of Rock Music: 1995-2001

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

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Trip-hop

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

The golden era of trip-hop 1995-99

Bristol's greatest invention, trip-hop, became one of the most abused languages of dance music.

After the success of Portishead came the deluge: Funki Porcini (James Braddell), with the pastoral **Hed Phone Sex** (1995); Rockers Hi-Fi, the Birmingham-based sound system of Richard "DJ Dick" Whittingham and Glyn Bush, with **Rockers To Rockers** (1995); Andrew Barlow's Lamb (1), with the psychodramas of **Lamb** (1996); Morcheeba, fronted by sensual chanteuse Skye Edwards, with **Who Can You Trust** (1996); Red Snapper (1), who sculpted the complex, arcane and recombinant **Prince Blimey** (1996); the Sneaker Pimps, the project of keyboardist Liam Howe and guitarist Chris Corner, fronted by singer Kelli Dayton, whose **Becoming X** (1997) was trip-hop for the generation that never heard the new wave; all the way to gothic, decadent chanteuse Alison Goldfrapp and her elegant, sexy and slow **Felt Mountain** (2000).

London-based producer Howie Bernstein, better known as Howie B (2), who had engineered the atmospheres of Soul II Soul's records, followed a different route on his solo albums: the instrumental tone poems of **Music For Babies** (1996), the stylistic studies **Turn The Dark Off** (1997), ranging from vibraphone-based lounge shuffles to big-band dancehall exuberance, and the elegant ballet of noises and instrumental sounds of **Snatch** (1999), works that elevated him to the jazz counterpart of Brian Eno and the hip-hop counterpart of Robert Fripp. Skylab (1), a collaboration between avantgarde composer Mat Ducasse and Howie B, crafted a wild collage of manipulated sounds, **#1** (1995), an essay in the absolute dissolution of identity that sounded like John Cage reborn as a

Edited and updated in 2010 by Rocco Stilo

disc-jockey.

In other countries musicians influenced by trip-hop produced an atmospheric form of sound collage that ventured beyond the original premises of trip-hop.

An atmospheric sound similar to trip-hop hovering in an ether halfway between dub, hip-hop and ambient music, was often produced via a technique of cut-up that was the equivalent of cinema's montage. For example: Grassy Knoll (1), the project of San Francisco-based disc-jockey, filmmaker, photographer and composer Bob Green, on **Grassy Knoll** (1995); or Russian-born Andre Gurov, better known as DJ Vadim, who focused on collage of micro-samples with **The Theory Of Verticality** (1996).

DJ Cam (French dj Laurent Daumail) sculpted the subliminal jams of **Substances** (1996), that frequently employed samples of obscure jazz records, and the doleful, impressionistic sonatas of **Loa Project Vol. 2** (2000).

Towa Tei, a Korean-Japanese former member of Deee-Lite in New York, assembled jazz, world-music and all sorts of retro styles on **Future Listening** (1995).

A number of "atmospheric" groups were also more or less related to trip-hop. Iceland's Gus Gus (1) coined an anemic, sleepy, out-of-focus kind of pop-soul-jazz ballad on **Polydistortion** (1995), that sounded like the equivalent of be-bop in the age of trip-hop: a dejected soundtrack for the neuroses of the urban crowd. Sweden's Whale incorporated sensual crooning and heavy-metal guitars into the trip-hop sound of **We Care** (1995). Tosca, i.e. Austrian producers and disc-jockeys Richard Dorfmeister and Peter Kruder, achieved the majestic mannerism of **Opera** (1997) and especially **Suzuki** (2000), which was replicated by the Sofa Surfers, an Austrian quartet led by Wolfgang "I-Wolf" Schloegl, on **Cargo** (1999).

Chris "P'taah" Brann (1), a white dj from Atlanta (Georgia), who had already contaminated house music with jazz and Latin elements, caused a sensation with the twisted fusion of futuristic jazz-rock, funk, downtempo and acid-jazz on **Compressed Light** (2000). He even adopted the austere, quasi-classical composure of the ECM sound for **Staring At The Sun** (2003).

Towards the end of the decade all these innovations circled back to influence British trip-hop.

Iranian-born London-based dj Leila Arab abstracted the stereotypes of trip-hop to create the surreal electronic folk of **Like Weather** (1998), each song being painstakingly sculpted and then caressed by a guest vocalists (mostly Luca Santucci). After an eight-year hiatus, Leila applied the same ideology to the otherworldly digital ambience of **Blood, Looms, And Blooms** (2008).

The Cinematic Orchestra (1), led by bandleader John Swinscoe, devoted **Motion** (1999) to a tribute to film soundtracks of the 1950s. It was one of

the works that marked a turning point in avantgarde, when "reconstructing" started prevailing over "deconstructing" (that had been the dominant buzzword throughout the era of postmodernism).

The Groove Armada, i.e. London-based disc-jockeys, Tom Findlay and Andy Cato, "reconstructed" the romantically retro **Vertigo** (1999).

Western dub

Dub had a life of its own in the western world. Notable works included: **Sounds from the Thievery Hi-Fi** (1996) by Thievery Corporation (1), the project of Washington-based disc jockeys, Eric Hilton and Rob Garza; the series that culminated with **Dub Voyage** (2000) by Twilight Circus Dub Sound System, i.e. Holland-based multi-instrumentalist Ryan Moore; **Rome** (1996) by Rome, a Chicago instrumental trio of bass, drums and sampling keyboards sculpting dissonant electronic dub; **Dancehall Malfunction** (1997) by Sub Dub (the quartet of bassist John Ward, programmer Raz Mesinai, vocalist Ursula Ward and saxophonist Grant Stewart), which spearheaded a fusion of hip-hop, ambient house, world-music and dub; **CD 1** (1998) by Pole, i.e. Berlin-based sound engineer Stefan Betke, who became the master of a starkly minimalist form of dub-based dance music. Influenced by Bill Laswell's and Jah Wobble's experiments of the 1980s, not to mention Adrian Sherwood, the Pop Group and Tackhead, they reinvented the genre as a stark and austere form of art.

British dance hybrids, 1996-2000

Inevitably, in a world that lived on continuous change, the days of traditional techno and house were numbered. For example, Simon Posford under the moniker Hallucinogen began crafting electronic dance music influenced by Indian music, as documented on **Twisted** (1995) and **The Lone Deranger** (1997). British disc-jockey Paul Oakenfold launched that "Goa Trance" at the "Full Moon Party", yet another dance craze ("Goa Trance" was literally Sven Vath's "trance" via the hippie tribes of Goa, in India), one that actually took hold in Germany and produced such production masterpieces as Paul Van Dyk's *For An Angel* (1998) and Andre Tanneberger's *9pm Till I Come* (1999). It was, however, the last of the major dance crazes.

Spaceheads (1), i.e. the duo of trumpeter Andy Diagram and percussionist Richard Harrison, alumni of Pop Group-style avant-jazz-funk-rock outfits such as the Honkies during the "Madchester" era, wed the collage techniques of the avantgarde, jazz improvisation and the angular rhythms of the post-techno dancefloor (a mixture of hip-hop, drum'n'bass and acid-jazz) on **Spaceheads** (1995), enhancing the textures of their "prepared" instruments with loops and overdubs.

Leftfield, i.e. the duo of Neil Barnes and Paul Daley, created techno for non-dancers (slower, softer, lighter) with **Leftism** (1995).

British producer, disc-jockey and tablas virtuoso [Talvin Singh](#) was an erudite purveyor of "transglobal dance" transplanting ethnic styles (and their traditional instruments) to a field of electronic beats and techno production techniques on **OK** (1998).

[Death In Vegas](#) (1), the brainchild of multi-instrumentalist Richard Fearless, contributed the ambient-dub-techno-rock stew of **Dead Elvis** (1998).

Inspired by "garage house", the style born in the late 1980s out of New York gay clubs that basically set sexy rhythm'n'blues crooning to a techno beat, [Basement Jaxx](#), i.e. British disc-jockeys Felix Burton and Simon Ratcliffe, composed real songs out of exuberant, catchy, frantic post-techno music with reggae and Latin overtones on **Remedy** (1999).

[Faithless](#) (1), the project of producers and disc-jockeys Rollo Armstrong and Ayalah "Sister Bliss" Bentovim, penned the elaborate, acrobatic, chameleon-like arrangements of **Reverence** (1996).

The [Lo-Fidelity Allstars](#) opted for a "street" approach to dance music, rooted in urban alienation and decadence, with albums such as **How To Operate With A Blown Mind** (1998), while the music sampled (literally and metaphorically) half a century of dance styles, from soul to funk, from dub to house, from hip hop to trip-hop.

[Luke Slater](#) (1) crafted **Freek Funk** (1997), an eclectic potpourri of hip-hop, propulsive funk and ambient textures.

[Christian Vogel](#) was a significant composer of "dissonant" techno, particularly challenging on **Specific Momentific** (1996) and the programmatic **All Music Has Come To An End** (1998). [Super Collider](#) was a collaboration with producer and vocalist [Jamie Lidell](#) that fused soul crooning and ambient techno on **Head On** (1999). On his own [Jamie Lidell](#) concocted the deranged dissonant funk music of **Muddlin Gear** (2000) and injected different brands of old-fashioned soul music into the body of techno music on **Multiply** (2005).

South-African born and British-based dj [Mira Calix](#) (Chantal Passamonte) conceived a dance style that was an unlikely fusion of folk tunes, orchestral arrangements, oneiric ambience, twitching beats and field recordings, peaking with **Eyes Set Against the Sun** (2006).

In Ireland, [David Holmes](#) composed works, such as his third album, **Bow Down To The Exit Sign** (2000), that mixed audio verite` segments and an eclectic range of black musical styles (soul, acid-jazz, funk and hip-hop).

[Cassius](#), a pair of veteran French producers of dance music, blended house music, dub, pop and hip-hop on **Cassius** (1999).

Post-dance music, 1999-2001

By the end of the decade the cross-pollination of dance styles had reached

a level that either produced abstract stylistic collages or stifled the very nature of dance-music.

As One (1), i.e. British techno dj/producer Kirk Degiorgio, pursued a techno infused with elements of jazz and soul in the tradition of Squarepusher, notably on **Planetary Folklore** (1997) and on the luxuriant **21st Century Soul** (2001).

In Japan, Susumu Yokota (1) wove the intricate grooves of **Cat Mouse And Me** (1996) in a continuum of sonic bliss before turning to ambient house with **Magic Thread** (1998), a stylistic journey that would lead to an art akin to Brian Eno's impressionistic soundpainting on **Sakura** (2000) and **Grinning Cat** (2001).

Seattle's Entropic Advance (1), the project of Seattle-based avantgarde musicians Wesley Davis and Casey Jones, best summarized on the double-disc **Red Yellow Noise** (2002), concocted a collage of warped melodies, digital arrangements, multi-layered rhythms, ambient electronica, found sounds, free jazz, hip-hop, ethnic and industrial music.

The theatrical fusion of disco-music, punk-rock and dissonant electronica packaged by Detroit's Adult on their early EPs, starting with **Dispassionate Furniture** (1998), peaked with *Hand to Phone* (2001), one of the earliest electro-clash classics. **Anxiety Always** (2003), however, was a visceral and brutal work that betrayed their punk personas.

The German dancing avantgarde, 1997-2001

Germany, in particular, was still a leader in the fusion of avantgarde and dance music.

Robert Hood, a Detroit producer, was widely credited for "inventing" minimal techno. However, similar ideas had been pursued in Berlin since 1993 by Basic Channel (producers Moritz Von Oswald and Mark Ernestus), who were more influenced by dub music than funk/soul music. Monolake and Porter Ricks were the first major protagonists of minimal techno.

Monolake, the Berlin-based duo of Robert Henke and Gerhard Behles, bridged minimal dub-techno music and abstract digital soundsculpting, as documented on the compilation of singles **Hong Kong** (1997).

Porter Ricks, a duo with Andi Mellweg, was Thomas Koner's brainy and ghostly techno project, first documented on **Biokinetics** (1996).

Most purveyors of this subliminal languid psychedelic brand of "deep" techno, that basically de-emphasized the rhythm, were assembled around Chain Reaction, a Berlin-based record label owned by the Basic Channel duo: Scion (German techno producers Rene Lowe and Peter Kuschnereit) who had pioneered the sound with *Emerge* (1995), Vainqueur (Rene Lowe) whose anthemic *Lyot* (1992) had already been a hit and whose first album was **Elevations** (1997), Substance (Peter Kuschnereit) whose first

album was **Session Elements** (1998), Fluxion (Konstantinos Soublis) whose first album was **Vibrant Forms** (1999), and Hallucinator (Anna Piva, Trevor Mathison and Edward George) whose first album was **Landlocked** (1999).

Gas, one of the many projects of Wolfgang Voigt (the godfather of Cologne's dance scene), inaugurated "minimal ambient techno" with **Zauberberg** (1997) and especially **Konigforst** (1998), on which he achieved a haunting fusion of the three elements. The dancefloor beat coexisted with abstract drones obtained by manipulating samples of classical music, tiny digital noises and a sense of cosmic dub. Another pioneer of Cologne's ambient techno was Markus Guentner, whose **In Moll** (2001) almost hid the beats behind the feathery, breathy drafts of electronics.

German house producer Rajko "Isolee" Mueller spearheaded "microhouse" (a fusion of glitch aesthetic, minimal techno and house music) with **Rest** (2000).

Rechenzentrum, the project of digital composer Marc Weiser and visual artist Lillevaen, engineered **Rechenzentrum** (2000), a subtle venture into the realms of minimal techno and hip-hop.

Komet, the project of German digital composer Frank Bretschneider, specialized in skeletal highly-processed glitch-techno music for microscopic events, notably on **Rausch** (2000) and **Curve** (2001).

Austrian drummer and electronic composer Bernhard Fleischmann (1) packaged a disorienting combination of glitch music and synth-pop on **Pop Loops for Breakfast** (1999). The two lengthy suites of **Tmp** (2001) and especially the double-disc **Welcome Tourist** (2003) pioneered the marriage of post-rock and dance music.