

Ambient Dub

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Ambient music is a genre of music that puts an emphasis on tone and atmosphere over traditional musical structure or rhythm. Ambient music is said to evoke an "atmospheric", "visual", or "unobtrusive" quality. According to Brian Eno, one of its pioneers, "Ambient music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting."

As a genre, it originated in the United Kingdom in the 1970s, when new sound-making devices were being introduced to a wider market, such as the synthesizer. The work of Tangerine Dream, Ash Ra Tempel, Cluster, King Tubby, and composer Erik Satie, as well as the psychoacoustic soundscapes of Irv Teibel's Environments series, were all influences on the emergence of ambient music. Brian Eno named and popularized ambient music in 1978 with his album Ambient 1: Music for Airports. Artists such as The Orb and Aphex Twin gained commercial success with ambient tracks in the early 1990s. Ambient compositions are often quite lengthy, much longer than more popular, commercial forms of music. Ambient had a revival towards the late 1980s with the prominence of house and techno music. Eventually, ambient grew a cult following in the 1990s. By the early 1990s, artists such as Aphex Twin were being called ambient house, ambient techno, or "ambient" by the media. Genre offshoots include dark ambient and ambient dub.

Precursors and origins

Developing in the 1970s, ambient stemmed from the experimental and synthesizer-oriented styles of the period. Although Jamaican dub musicians such as King Tubby, Japanese electronic music composers such as Isao Tomita, and German bands such as Popol Vuh and Tangerine Dream, predate him in the creation of ambient music and/or were contemporaneous with him, Brian Eno played a key role in its development and popularization. The concept of background or furniture music had already existed some time before, but only in the 70s was ambient music first created, which incorporated New Age ideals with the newly invented modular synthesizer. The impact the rise of the synthesizer in modern music had on ambient as a genre cannot be overstated; as Ralf Hutter of early electronic pioneers Kraftwerk said in a 1977 Billboard interview: "Electronics is beyond nations and colors...with electronics everything is possible. The only limit is with the composer". Similarly, Eno said in a 2013 interview with The Guardian that "One of the important things about the synthesizer was that it came without any baggage. A piano comes with a whole history of music...when you play an instrument that does not have any such historical background you are designing sound basically. You're designing a new instrument. That's what a synthesizer is essentially. It's a constantly unfinished instrument. You finish it when you tweak it, and play around with it, and decide how to use it. You can combine a number of cultural references into one new thing."

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