

## Brian Eno: a Biographical Note

Brian Eno has become an iconic figure within international contemporary culture. As an artist, musician, ideologue and systems-maker, he has not only written, performed, recorded and produced some of the most original music of the last thirty years, but has also established a philosophy of cultural production which links the enquiring spirit of conceptual art to the broadest applications of popular culture and sociology. Best known in the field of music, Eno's discography as a musician, producer and artistic collaborator includes some of the most acclaimed recordings in the history of modern music. Artists as seminal yet varied as John Cale, David Byrne, Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Bono, Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon and Coldplay have chosen to work with Eno, and he is one of the most sought after figures working across the spectrum of contemporary music, from guitar driven rock to film scores and electronica.

And yet music is only one strand of Eno's creative project. As a lecturer, visual artist, writer, political activist and futurologist, his opinions and ideas have been requested by institutions and think tanks on subjects as disparate as concepts of time, urban futures, perfume making and the history of art. The publication by Faber & Faber of his diary for 1995, under the title 'A Year With Swollen Appendices', proved a best seller and gave some indication of the extraordinary range and diversity of Eno's activities.

In 1996, he also co-founded The Long Now Foundation, as a creative organization dedicated to addressing the contemporary social and individual relationship with time, acceleration and experience.

Eno's roots are in the progressive art education systems of the middle to late 60's. His early involvement with the musical avant garde, can now be seen to establish the foundations of his career-long interest in self-generating systems of creativity – a form which he would refine nearly twenty five years later, in 1996, through his creation of 'Generative Music' software. Eno's role as a founder member of the art rock group Roxy Music, in 1971, can still be regarded as one of the most accomplished debuts in the history of pop.

But his creativity required a broader laboratory and playground in which to renew itself, unboundaried by the specific demands of working within a rock group. Departing Roxy Music subsequent to their second album, 'For Your Pleasure', in 1972, a typically eclectic yet interconnected set of projects immediately followed.

Two solo albums, *Here Come The Warm Jets* and *Taking Tiger Mountain (By Strategy)* matched Eno's exuberant surrealism as a lyricist to his warmly melodic vocal style. His now legendary *Another Green World* and *Before And After Science* albums, were released in 1975 and 1977 respectively. This meticulous crafting of songs has always run parallel to Eno's instrumental recordings – the artistic starting points of which are related to notions of time as much as instrumentation. Hence his creation of 'Ambient' music – first using the term in 1978 – would provide the cultural lexicon with one of its principal epoch-defining concepts. In the early and middle 1970's, his recordings with the former King Crimson guitarist, Robert Fripp – 'No Pussyfooting' and 'Evening Star' – established a new approach to how music might be made, and, as important, how it might be heard and listened to.

In 1975, in collaboration with the artist Peter Schmidt, Eno also developed the 'Oblique Strategies' set of problem-solving cards for artists.

Each card states an act or attitude which can make an immediate intervention into the creative process.

It was also in the 1970s that Eno established the 'Obscure' label of recordings. Audaciously harnessing his by-now extensive fame as a 'rock' musician, to a progressive, curatorial role as a producer, Eno single handedly brought some of the most interesting and important musicians from the musical avant garde to the vast new audience commanded by rock.

The series would also include Eno's own 'Discreet Music' – a recording of simple variants of musical tones, and a founding example of Eno's creation of Ambient music as a genre and a softly philosophical statement. 'Obscure' records were a direct expression of Eno's creative exploration of music as a fluid, physical, economic and conceptual form, so the releases brought him further recognition as a musician whose genius allowed the glamour of pop to have artistic and intellectual parity with conceptualism, theory and systems-making.

By the late 1970s, Eno's legendary collaboration with David Bowie on the latter's 'Low', 'Heroes' and 'Lodger' albums, combined with his own 'Ambient' series and 'Music For Films' releases, enthroned Eno as the presiding spirit of much immediately post-punk, industrial and electronic music. A veteran pioneer of extreme forms of music making, with a lifelong interest in working outside of inherited or presumed roles, Eno's brilliance as a producer lies in his ability to enable musicians to re-enchant their own creativity in new and dramatic ways. His role as U2's producer – on *The Joshua Tree*, *Zooropa* and *Achtung Baby!* would transform the band from anthemic rockers into purveyors of multi-media spectacle – the anthemic rocking intact, but intensified into a hyper-stylised version of itself by the acuity of Eno's production. His collaboration with David Byrne, *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, released in 1981, is still regarded as one of the founding models for the use of sampling music, ahead of its time, not just in terms of sound but in terms of concept.

Between 2004 and 2006, in addition to producing the hugely acclaimed new album by Paul Simon, Eno recorded two of his most eagerly anticipated albums to date. *The Equatorial Stars* (2004) saw Eno working once more with the legendary guitarist Robert Fripp. Then in 2005 the release of what was being popularly described as Eno's first album 'of songs' for over a decade, *Another Day On Earth*, saw a return to the lyrical and vocal richness of *Before And After Science* and *Another Green World*.

As Eno's tireless creativity seems always to have been empowered by his balancing of opposites – systems and glamour, science and aesthetics, conceptualism and politics – so his continued work in the musical field has been matched by his site specific and environmental media projects – notably in the form of audio-visual installation.

In 2006, with the release of his DVD-ROM, *77 Million Paintings*, Eno would combine his career-long interest in generative creative systems with his work as an installation artist. Creating a seemingly endless succession of re-combining and configuring images, dictated by their own randomness, *77 Million Paintings*, played at its fastest speed, would take 9,000 years to watch, at its slowest, several million years. Eno's audio-visual work has been shown internationally in venues as prestigious as the Venice Biennale, the Pompidou Centre, the Hayward Gallery, London, White Cube/Jay Jopling, The Science Museum, London and the Marble Palace at the Russian Museum, St. Petersburg. In 2005, he was invited to create a new work for the Lyon Biennale of Contemporary Art, and responded with an audio visual installation called *The Quiet Club*. Installations of *77 Million Paintings* were subsequently created in Venice, Tokyo, Milan, London and also at the Baltic gallery in Gateshead.. As an installation, *77 Million Paintings* was less concerned with contributing to a discussion about art-making, and more directed - like much of Eno's ambient and generative work - to creating a reflective, meditational but compellingly engaging environment. It is at such a point, perhaps, between art, science, futurology and politics, that all of Brian Eno's remarkable achievements are ultimately combined.

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