

What Is Cyberpunk Music ?

Billy Biggs
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Or more appropriately, what music is Cyberpunk ?

Many repetitive threads have gone through alt.cyberpunk asking the question : what is cyberpunk music ? The answer is not simple. Due to the fact that every definition of cyberpunk can be argued to the point of non-existence, trying to define a genre of music is not a simple task.

I would like to say that all opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the entire population, or even close. They are my opinions and you may write your own if you want to.

This article is far from being finished. I only grazed the surface of a few bands, not even going into great detail.

[Front Line Assembly]

To me, the closest thing out there to a "Cyberpunk" group is probably Front Line Assembly. The sound is a mix of techno-like beats, interesting lyrics and added samples. Their *Tactical Neural Implant* CD I would consider extremely cyberpunk in nature.

A war of technology
Threatens to ignite
Digital murder
The language of machines

-- Taken from "Mindphaser"

The Mindphaser video is excellent. A mixture of high-tech weaponry, computer animation, japanese writing, Cybertech and mech-like machinery used to create an extremely cyberpunk atmosphere.

[Front 242]

The belgian Electronic Body Music group is commonly considered cyberpunk. The sound is a mix of noise, sounds, samples, synths and dancy beats. Described (by MuchMusic) as being a mix between Kraftwerk & DAF. The music is extremely electronic, busy (it's best to hear on CD, you almost need the sound quality with *06:21:03:11 Up Evil*) and alternative. Front is not a mainstream group, although rumor has it that they are trying to change that (good or bad ?). With their latest release, *05:22:09:12 Off*, Front 242 has added a female vocalist (99 Kowalski). Rumor has it that Front is creating a new album combining the vocals of J-L De Meyer, Richard 23 and Christine 99 Kowalski to create a much different sound.

The F242 video for "Quite Unusual" has been considered cyberpunk. Other videos by Front are a bit more mainstream (Rhythm of Time was strange, images of a spinning ball with knives sticking out of it, a cyborg

head, J-L D. M. singing and a mouse in a cage. Cyberpunk ?) yet it's more the industrial sound that sets Front 242 away from other groups.

[Kraftwerk]

Interestingly enough, I don't ever recall Kraftwerk being mentioned as Cyberpunk. The group to me is like a couple of german guys with a synth. The sound is synth music. Pretty much just synths, drums and vocals. It's not bad, if you like that kind of stuff (I do, but it's pretty weird).

[Negativland]

An interesting group with much attention on the net. The sound is samples. Yup, lots of samples. Samples, electric guitar and drums. Innovative idea, lots of satire, "soaked in an acid bath of irony". I can't really give too much of an opinion, since I only own the Negativconcertland CD, but I was impressed by what I have heard.

Their latest release, *Free*, is supposed to be a good listen. Keyboard magazine, in a review of *Free*, said : "The fact that Negativland, like John Oswald, has taken sample pastiche to a high level of expressive power doesn't settle the question of whether lifting samples from records is legally or morally defensible. But *Free* does remind us that strict copyright protection comes at a cost - the suffocation of musicians denied the kind of access they need to express themselves through this idiom".

Much discussion has occurred in alt.cp concerning a law suit against Negativland by Island records about a 30 second sample of a U2 song. Questions of copyrights and related issues that don't belong in this article but that are worthy of discussion elsewhere have arisen because of Negativland.

[Billy Idol]

With his *Cyberpunk* CD, Billy Idol has entered himself into the world of cyberpunk, and the world of internet. His CD is for people who listen to that kind of music. Idol was right on a few notes, but I'm sure he got alot of hate mail through his Internet account.

In VR land
The future of fun
Tell me what to do
In VR law
Computer Crime
Um, so sublime
A Fantasy scene
In my machine

-- Taken from "Wasteland"

Whether or not his lyrics are cyberpunk, or if his attitude is cyberpunk, or if he has read Gibson, or if he knows what he's talking about are subjects that have received alot of attention. There are cyberpunks [?] who like what Idol has done and who like his music. I'm not going to say he isn't cyberpunk. If there are people who listen to it, maybe it is.

[Others]

[Notice : this list is **incomplete**] Other groups considered cyberpunk by some would be some assorted EBM groups, Industrial music, Ministry, Pet Shop Boys, Information Society, Electrik Music, Art of Noise, Devo ?, U2 (Zoo TV ?), Pink Floyd, Chemlab, etc, etc, etc.

"In the end, real cyberpunks listen to whatever the fuck they want."