

= Synthpop =

Synthpop (also known as electropop and technopop) is a genre of popular music that first became prominent in the late 1970s which features the synthesizer as the dominant musical instrument . It was prefigured in the 1960s and early 1970s by the use of synthesizers in progressive rock , electronic , art rock , disco , and particularly the " Krautrock " of bands like Kraftwerk . It arose as a distinct genre in Japan and the United Kingdom in the post @-@ punk era as part of the new wave movement of the late @-@ 1970s to the mid @-@ 1980s .

Early synthpop pioneers included Japanese group Yellow Magic Orchestra and British bands Ultravox and The Human League ; the latter largely used monophonic synthesizers to produce music with a simple and austere sound . After the breakthrough of Gary Numan and his band Tubeway Army in the British Singles Chart in 1979 , large numbers of artists began to enjoy success with a synthesizer @-@ based sound in the early 1980s , including Soft Cell , Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark and Depeche Mode in the United Kingdom , while in Japan , Yellow Magic Orchestra 's success opened the way for synthpop bands such as P @-@ Model , Plastics , and Hikashu . The development of inexpensive polyphonic synthesizers , the definition of MIDI and the use of dance beats , led to a more commercial and accessible sound for synthpop . This , its adoption by the style @-@ conscious acts from the New Romantic movement , together with the rise of MTV , led to success for large numbers of British synthpop acts , including Duran Duran and Spandau Ballet , in the United States .

In the late 1980s , duos such as Erasure and Pet Shop Boys adopted a sound that was highly successful on the US dance charts , but by the end of the decade synthpop had largely been abandoned . Interest began to be revived in the indietronica and electroclash movements in the late 1990s and , in the first decade of the 21st century , it enjoyed a widespread revival with commercial success for acts including La Roux , Lady Gaga , Kesha , Owl City , M83 and Chvrches .

The genre has received criticism for alleged lack of emotion and musicianship ; prominent artists have spoken out against detractors who believed that synthesizers themselves composed and played the songs . Some artists like Depeche Mode , who helped popularise the genre , were criticised for gender bending . Synthpop helped to establish the place of the synthesizer as a major element of pop and rock music , directly influenced subsequent genres including house music and Detroit techno , and has indirectly influenced many other genres and individual recordings .

= = Characteristics = =

Synthpop was defined by its primary use of synthesizers , drum machines and sequencers , sometimes using them to replace all other instruments . Borthwick and Moy have described the genre as diverse but " ... characterised by a broad set of values that eschewed rock playing styles , rhythms and structures " , which were replaced by " synthetic textures " and " robotic rigidity " , often defined by the limitations of the new technology , including monophonic synthesizers (only able to play one note at a time) . Many synthpop musicians had limited musical skills , relying on the technology to produce or reproduce the music . The result was often minimalist , with grooves that were " typically woven together from simple repeated riffs often with no harmonic ' progression ' to speak of " . Early synthpop has been described as " eerie , sterile , and vaguely menacing " , using droning electronics with little change in inflection . Common lyrical themes of synthpop songs were isolation , urban anomie , and feelings of being emotionally cold and hollow .

In its second phase in the 1980s , the introduction of dance beats and more conventional rock instrumentation made the music warmer and catchier and contained within the conventions of three @-@ minute pop . Synthesizers were increasingly used to imitate the conventional and clichéd sound of orchestras and horns . Thin , treble @-@ dominant , synthesized melodies and simple drum programmes gave way to thick , and compressed production , and a more conventional drum sound . Lyrics were generally more optimistic , dealing with more traditional subject matter for pop music such as romance , escapism and aspiration . According to music writer Simon Reynolds , the hallmark of 1980s synthpop was its " emotional , at times operatic singers " such as Marc Almond ,

Alison Moyet and Annie Lennox . Because synthesizers removed the need for large groups of musicians , these singers were often part of a duo where their partner played all the instrumentation .

Although synthpop in part arose from punk rock , it abandoned punk 's emphasis on authenticity and often pursued a deliberate artificiality , drawing on the critically derided forms such as disco and glam rock . It owed relatively little to the foundations of early popular music in jazz , folk music or the blues , and instead of looking to America , in its early stages , it consciously focused on European and particularly Eastern European influences , which were reflected in band names like Spandau Ballet and songs like Ultravox 's " Vienna " . Later synthpop saw a shift to a style more influenced by other genres , such as soul music .

= = History = =

= = = Precursors = = =

Electronic musical synthesizers that could be used practically in a recording studio became available in the mid @-@ 1960s , around the same time as rock music began to emerge as a distinct musical genre . The Mellotron , an electro @-@ mechanical , polyphonic sample @-@ playback keyboard was overtaken by the Moog synthesizer , created by Robert Moog in 1964 , which produced completely electronically generated sounds . The portable Mini @-@ moog , which allowed much easier use , particularly in live performance was widely adopted by progressive rock musicians such as Richard Wright of Pink Floyd and Rick Wakeman of Yes . Instrumental prog rock was particularly significant in continental Europe , allowing bands like Kraftwerk , Tangerine Dream , Can and Faust to circumvent the language barrier . Their synthesizer @-@ heavy " Kraut rock " , along with the work of Brian Eno (for a time the keyboard player with Roxy Music) , would be a major influence on subsequent synth rock .

In 1971 the British movie A Clockwork Orange was released with a synth soundtrack by American Wendy Carlos . It was the first time many in the United Kingdom had heard electronic music . Philip Oakey of the Human League and Richard H. Kirk of Cabaret Voltaire , as well as music journalist Simon Reynolds , have cited the soundtrack as an inspiration . Electronic music made occasional moves into the mainstream , with jazz musician Stan Free , under the pseudonym Hot Butter , having a top 10 hit in the United States and United Kingdom in 1972 , with a cover of the 1969 Gershon Kingsley song " Popcorn " using a Moog synthesizer , which is recognised as a forerunner to synthpop and disco .

The mid @-@ 1970s saw the rise of electronic art musicians such as Jean Michel Jarre , Vangelis , and Tomita . Tomita 's album Electric Samurai : Switched on Rock (1972) featured electronic renditions of contemporary rock and pop songs , while utilizing speech synthesis and analog music sequencers . In 1975 , Kraftwerk played their first British show and inspired concert attendees Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark to throw away their guitars and become a synth act . Kraftwerk had its first hit UK record later in the year with " Autobahn " , which reached number 11 in the British Singles Chart . The group was described by the BBC Four program Synth Britannia as the key to synthpop 's future rise there . Italy 's Giorgio Moroder paired up with Donna Summer in 1977 to release the electronic disco song " I Feel Love " , and its programmed beats would be a major influence on the later synthpop sound . David Bowie 's Berlin Trilogy , comprising the albums Low (1977) , " Heroes " (1977) , and Lodger (1979) , all featuring Brian Eno , would also be highly influential .

= = = Origins (1977 ? 80) = = =

Early guitar @-@ based punk rock that came to prominence in the period 1976 ? 77 was initially hostile to the " inauthentic " sound of the synthesizer , but many new wave and post @-@ punk bands that emerged from the movement began to adopt it as a major part of their sound . British

punk and New wave clubs were open to what was then considered an " alternative " sound . The do it yourself attitude of punk broke down the progressive rock era 's norm of needing years of experience before getting up on stage to play synthesizers . The American duo Suicide , who arose from the post @-@ punk scene in New York , utilised drum machines and synthesizers in a hybrid between electronics and post @-@ punk on their eponymous 1977 album .

The Cat Stevens album Izitso , released in April 1977 , updated his pop rock style with the extensive use of synthesizers , giving it a more synthpop style ; " Was Dog a Doughnut " in particular was an early techno @-@ pop fusion track , which made early use of a music sequencer . Izitso reached No. 7 on the Billboard 200 chart , while the song " (Remember the Days of the) Old Schoolyard " was a top 40 hit . That same month , The Beach Boys released their album Love You , performed almost entirely by bandleader Brian Wilson with Moog and ARP synthesizers , and with arrangements somewhat inspired by Wendy Carlos 's Switched @-@ On Bach (1968) . Although it was highly praised by some critics and musicians (including Patti Smith and Lester Bangs) , the album met with poor commercial reception . The album has been considered revolutionary in its use of synthesizers , while others described Wilson 's extensive use of the Moog synthesizer as a " loopy funhouse ambience " and an early example of synthpop . In July 1977 , Donna Summer released " I Feel Love " , written and produced by Giorgio Moroder , pioneering the Hi @-@ NRG genre , and influencing later synthpop acts such as Divine and Dead or Alive . Around this time , Ultravox member Warren Cann purchased a Roland TR @-@ 77 drum machine , which was first featured in their October 1977 single release " Hiroshima Mon Amour " .

Be @-@ Bop Deluxe released Drastic Plastic in February 1978 , leading off with the single " Electrical Language " with Bill Nelson on guitar synthesizer and Andy Clark on synthesizers . Japanese band Yellow Magic Orchestra (YMO) with their self @-@ titled album (1978) and Solid State Survivor (1979) , developed a " fun @-@ loving and breezy " sound , with a strong emphasis on melody . They introduced the TR @-@ 808 rhythm machine to popular music , and the band would be a major influence on early British synthpop acts . 1978 also saw the release of UK band The Human League 's début single " Being Boiled " , and in the US Devo began moving towards a more electronic sound . At this point synthpop gained some critical attention , but made little impact on the commercial charts .

British punk @-@ influenced band Tubeway Army , intended their debut album to be guitar driven . In 1978 , Gary Numan , a member of the group , found a minimoog left behind in the studio by another band , and started experimenting with it . This led to a change in the album 's sound to electronic new wave . Numan later described his work on this album as a guitarist playing keyboards , who turned " punk songs into electronic songs " . A single from the album , " Are Friends Electric ? " , topped the UK charts in the summer of 1979 . The discovery that synthesizers could be employed in a different manner from that used in progressive rock or disco , prompted Numan to go solo . On his futuristic album The Pleasure Principle (1979) , he played only synths , but retained a bass guitarist and a drummer for the rhythm section . A single from the album , " Cars " topped the charts .

Giorgio Moroder collaborated with the band Sparks on their album No. 1 In Heaven (1979) . That same year in Japan , the synthpop band P @-@ Model made its debut with the album In a Model Room . Other Japanese synthpop groups emerging around the same time included the Plastics and Hikashu . This zeitgeist of revolution in electronic music performance and recording / production was encapsulated by then would @-@ be record producer Trevor Horn of The Buggles in the international hit " Video Killed the Radio Star " (1979) .

1980 also saw the release of where " Video Killed the Radio Star " came from , the Buggles ' debut album The Age of Plastic , which some writers have labeled as the first landmark of another electropop era , as well as what for many is the defining album of Devo 's career , the overtly synthpop Freedom of Choice .

== Commercial success (1981 ? 85) ==

The emergence of synthpop has been described as " perhaps the single most significant event in

melodic music since Mersey @-@ beat ". By the 1980s synthesizers had become much cheaper and easier to use . After the definition of MIDI in 1982 and the development of digital audio , the creation of purely electronic sounds and their manipulation became much simpler . Synthesizers came to dominate the pop music of the early 1980s , particularly through their adoption by bands of the New Romantic movement .

The New Romantic scene had developed in the London nightclubs Billy 's and The Blitz and was associated with bands such as Duran Duran , Visage , and Spandau Ballet . They adopted an elaborate visual style that combined elements of glam rock , science fiction and romanticism . Duran Duran have been credited with incorporating dance beats into synthpop to produce a catchier and warmer sound , which provided them with a series of hit singles . They would soon be followed into the British charts by a large number of bands utilising synthesizers to create catchy three @-@ minute pop songs . A new line @-@ up for the Human League along with a new producer and a more commercial sound led to the album Dare (1981) , which produced a series of hit singles . These included " Don 't You Want Me " , which reached number one in the UK at the end of 1981 .

Synthpop reached its commercial peak in the UK in the winter of 1981 ? 2 , with bands such as Soft Cell , Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark , Japan , Ultravox , Depeche Mode and even Kraftwerk , enjoying top ten hits . In early 1982 synthesizers were so dominant that the Musicians Union attempted to limit their use . By the end of 1982 , these acts had been joined in the charts by synth @-@ based singles from Thomas Dolby , Blancmange , and Tears for Fears . The proliferation of acts led to an anti @-@ synth backlash , with groups including Spandau Ballet , Human League , Soft Cell and ABC incorporating more conventional influences and instruments into their sounds .

In the US , where synthpop is considered a subgenre of new wave and was described as " technopop " by the press at the time , the genre became popular due to the cable music channel MTV , which reached the media capitals of New York City and Los Angeles in 1982 . It made heavy use of style @-@ conscious New Romantic synthpop acts , with " I Ran (So Far Away) " (1982) by A Flock of Seagulls generally considered the first hit by a British act to enter the Billboard Top Ten as a result of exposure through video . The switch to a " new music " format in US radio stations was also significant in the success of British bands . The success of synthpop and other British acts would be seen as a Second British Invasion . Synthpop was taken up across the world , with international hits for acts including Men Without Hats and Trans X from Canada , Telex from Belgium , Peter Schilling , Sandra , Modern Talking , Propaganda and Alphaville from Germany , and Yello from Switzerland .

In the mid @-@ 1980s , key artists included solo performer Howard Jones , who S.T. Erlewine has stated to have " merged the technology @-@ intensive sound of new wave with the cheery optimism of hippies and late- ' 60s pop " , (although with notable exceptions including the lyrics of " What Is Love ? " ? " Does anybody love anybody anyway ? ") and Nik Kershaw , whose " well @-@ craft synthpop " incorporated guitars and other more traditional pop influences that particularly appealed to a teen audience . Pursuing a more dance @-@ orientated sound were Bronski Beat whose album The Age of Consent (1984) , dealing with issues of homophobia and alienation , reached the top 20 in the UK and top 40 in the US. and Thompson Twins , whose popularity peaked in 1984 with the album Into The Gap , which reached No.1 in the UK and the US top ten and spawned several top ten singles . Initially dismissed in the music press as a " teeny bop sensation " were Norwegian band a @-@ ha , whose use of guitars and real drums produced an accessible form of synthpop , which , along with a MTV friendly video , took single " Take On Me " (1985) to number two in the UK and number one in the US .

= = = Declining popularity (1986 ? 2000) = = =

Synthpop continued into the late 1980s , with a format that moved closer to dance music , including the work of acts such as British duos Pet Shop Boys , Erasure and The Communards . The Communards ' major hits were covers of disco classics " Don 't Leave Me This Way " (1986) and " Never Can Say Goodbye " (1987) . After adding other elements to their sound , and with the help of a gay audience , several synthpop acts had success on the US dance charts . Among these were

American acts Information Society who had two top 10 singles in 1988 , Anything Box , and Red Flag . British band When In Rome scored a hit with their debut single " The Promise " . Several German synthpop acts of the late 1980s included Camouflage , Cetu Javu , CCCP and Celebrate the Nun . Canadian duo Kon Kan had major success with their debut single , " I Beg Your Pardon " .

An American backlash against European synthpop has been seen as beginning in the mid @-@ 1980s with the rise of heartland rock and roots rock . In the UK the arrival of indie rock bands , particularly The Smiths , has been seen as marking the end of synth @-@ driven new wave and the beginning of the guitar @-@ based music that would dominate rock into the 1990s . By 1991 , in the United States synthpop was losing its commercial viability as alternative radio stations were responding to the popularity of grunge rock . Exceptions that continued to pursue forms of synthpop or rock in the 1990s were Savage Garden , The Rentals , and The Moog Cookbook . Electronic music was also explored from the early 1990s by indietronica bands like Stereolab and Disco Inferno , who mixed a variety of indie and synthesizer sounds .

= = = 21st century revival = = =

Indietronica began to take off in the new millennium as the new digital technology developed , with acts such as Broadcast from the UK , Justice from France , Lali Puna from Germany , and Ratatat and The Postal Service from the US , mixing a variety of indie sounds with electronic music , largely produced on small independent labels . Similarly , the electroclash subgenre began in New York at the end of the 1990s , combining synthpop , techno , punk and performance art . It was pioneered by I @-@ F with their track " Space Invaders Are Smoking Grass " (1998) , and pursued by artists including Felix da Housecat , Peaches , Chicks on Speed , and Fischerspooner . It gained international attention at the beginning of the new millennium and spread to scenes in London and Berlin , but rapidly faded as a recognizable genre as acts began to experiment with a variety of forms of music .

In the new millennium , renewed interest in electronic music and nostalgia for the 1980s led to the beginnings of a synthpop revival , with acts including Adult and Fischerspooner . In 2003 ? 04 it began to move into the mainstream with Ladytron , the Postal Service , Cut Copy , the Bravery and The Killers all producing records that incorporated vintage synthesizer sounds and styles that contrasted with the dominant genres of post @-@ grunge and nu metal . In particular , The Killers enjoyed considerable airplay and exposure and their debut album Hot Fuss (2004) reached the top ten of the Billboard 200 . The Killers , the Bravery and the Stills all left their synthpop sound behind after their debut albums and began to explore classic 1970s rock , but the style was picked up by a large number of performers , particularly female solo artists . Following the breakthrough success of Lady Gaga with her single " Just Dance " (2008) , the British and other media proclaimed a new era of female synthpop stars , citing artists such as Roisin Murphy , Little Boots , La Roux , and Ladyhawke . Male acts that emerged in the same period include Calvin Harris , Empire of the Sun , Frankmusik , Hurts , Kaskade , LMFAO , and Owl City , whose single " Fireflies " (2009) topped the Billboard Hot 100 chart . In 2009 , an underground subgenre with direct stylistic origins to Synthpop became popular , Chillwave . It sprouted new stars in the independent music scene like Washed Out , Neon Indian , and Toro Y Moi .

American singer @-@ songwriter Kesha has also been described as a synthpop artist , with her synthesized debut single " Tik Tok " topping the Billboard Hot 100 for nine weeks in 2010 . She also used the genre on her comeback single " Die Young " . Mainstream female recording artists who have had success in the genre in the 2010s are Madonna , Katy Perry , Jessie J , Christina Aguilera , and Beyonce .

In Japan , girl @-@ group Perfume , along with producer Yasutaka Nakata of capsule , produced technopop music combining 1980s synthpop with chiptunes and electro house from 2003 . Their breakthrough came in 2008 with the album Game , which led to a renewed interest in technopop within mainstream Japanese pop music . Other Japanese female technopop artists soon followed , including Aira Mitsuki , immi , Mizca , SAWA , Saoriii and Sweet Vacation . Model @-@ singer Kyary Pamyu Pamyu also shared the same success as Perfume 's under Nakata 's production with

the album Pamyu Pamyu Revolution in 2012 , which topped electronic charts on iTunes as well as the Japanese Albums chart . Much like Japan , Korean pop music has also become dominated by synthpop , particularly with girl groups such as Girls ' Generation and Wonder Girls . Other 2010s synthpop acts include Chvrches , M83 and The C.I.P.

= = Criticism = =

Synthpop has received considerable criticism and even prompted hostility among musicians and in the press . It has been described as " anaemic " and " soulless " . Synthpop 's early steps , and Gary Numan in particular , were also disparaged in the British music press of the late 1970s and early 1980s for their German influences and characterised by journalist Mick Farren as the " Adolf Hitler Memorial Space Patrol " . In 1983 , Morrissey of The Smiths stated that " there was nothing more repellent than the synthesizer " . During the decade , objections were raised to the quality of compositions and the limited musicianship of artists . Gary Numan observed " hostility " and " a lot of ignorance " toward synthpop , with detractors erroneously believing that " machines did it " .

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark frontman Andy McCluskey recalled a great many people " who thought that the equipment wrote the song for you " , and asserted : " Believe me , if there was a button on a synth or a drum machine that said ' hit single ' , I would have pressed it as often as anybody else would have ? but there isn 't . It was all written by real human beings , and it was all played by hand " .

According to Simon Reynolds , in some quarters synthesizers were seen as instruments for " effete poseurs " , in contrast to the phallic guitar . The association of synthpop with an alternative sexuality was reinforced by the images projected by synthpop stars , who were seen as gender bending , including Phil Oakey 's asymmetric hair and use of eyeliner , Marc Almond 's " pervy " leather jacket , skirt wearing by figures including Martin Gore of Depeche Mode and the early " dominatrix " image of Annie Lennox of the Eurythmics . In the US this led to British synthpop artists being characterised as " English haircut bands " or " art fag " music . Although some audiences were overtly hostile to synthpop , it achieved an appeal among those alienated from the dominant heterosexuality of mainstream rock culture , particularly among gay and female audiences .

= = Influence = =

By the mid @-@ 1980s , synthpop had helped establish the synthesizer as a primary instrument in mainstream pop music . It also influenced the sound of many mainstream rock acts , such as Bruce Springsteen , ZZ Top and Van Halen . It was a major influence on house music , which grew out of the post @-@ disco dance club culture of the early 1980s as some DJs attempted to make the less pop @-@ oriented music that also incorporated influences from Latin soul , dub , rap music , and jazz .

Musicians such as Juan Atkins , using names including Model 500 , Infinity and as part of Cybotron , developed a style of electronic dance music influenced by synthpop and funk that led to the emergence of Detroit techno in the mid @-@ 1980s . The continued influence of 1980s synthpop could be seen in various incarnations of 1990s dance music including trance . Hip hop artists such as Mobb Deep have sampled 1980s synthpop songs . Popular artists such as Rihanna , UK stars Jay Sean and Taio Cruz , as well as British pop star Lily Allen on her second album , have also embraced the genre .

= = Artists = =