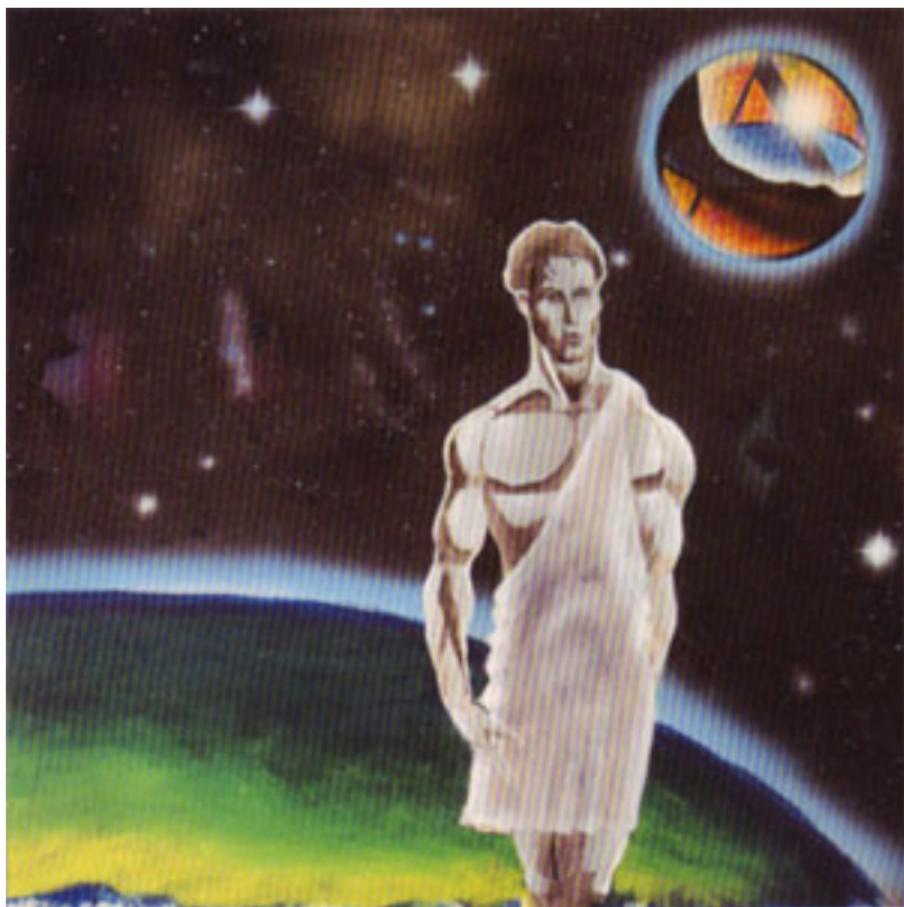


Ambient techno

ByteNoise

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"File Under Ambient," a classic Ambient Techno release

Ambient techno, like its name implies, is a genre of music which

combines some of the elements of ambient with some of the elements of techno.

From ambient, it takes the idea of making music which doesn't crave to be the centre of attention. Slow, simple melodies only a few bars long are often repeated hypnotically using gradually evolving sounds. String, pad and choir sounds are popular because they can be sustained for long periods of time, and fade in and out very slowly. Their subtle entries into the soundscape, and departures from it, have the essential quality of being as subliminal as possible. Ambient music always sets a mood, and that mood is usually calming and soothing.

From techno, it takes the idea of getting stylistic cues from the technology used to make modern music. Sounds are generated synthetically, and notes are often step sequenced. Unlike regular ambient music, rhythms can feature predominantly, and they can even be somewhat loud ones. Analogue drum machines are the natural first choice for creating the rhythms due to their synthetic timbres and step sequenced playing. As with techno in general, step sequencing is common in ambient techno, but certainly not necessary — unlike most regular techno, the occasional track consisting of beatless music played by hand is present on many ambient techno albums, although it is more likely to be an intro or breather than the focus of the album.

The sounds themselves are an important part of ambient techno. Synthetic sources are generally preferred for most sounds, such as leads, pads, strings, choirs, basses, percussion, and sequenced arpeggios. These instruments can often sound more creative than in most genres of music, bearing less resemblance to their acoustic equivalents. Often several sounds are present which verge on being sound effects

or background noises, giving the listener the impression of being in some exotic alien world. As with techno in general, this ties in nicely with the science fiction aesthetic of the genre.

There are perhaps several reasons why synthesisers lend themselves so well to ambient music: firstly, step sequencers are ideal interfaces for cooking up repetitive, hypnotic melodies such as simple arpeggios; secondly, synthesisers can sustain notes indefinitely, and fade each note in and out much slower than any acoustic instrument; and thirdly, synthesisers are the best instruments at changing their timbre drastically while being played.

Perhaps the main reason, however, is that synthesisers are the most diverse sounding instruments (with the possible exception of the sampler, which can't generate its own sounds but can emulate any other instrument). This is an important consideration when you're making music that's stripped of all but the barest rhythm and melody, relying more on harmony and timbres to invoke emotions.

All in all, ambient techno is a sublime, peaceful genre that evolved into other genres like so-called intelligent dance music before much had been released in its name to begin with. It's for this reason that I have written some music in this style, and I hope that other producers will do the same to revive this often overlooked soundscape.

Recommended listening

As is the case with all genres of music, it's often hard to draw the line between ambient, ambient techno and techno. All of the following albums can safely be said to belong to at least the

ambient or techno genres, with most using elements of both:

Various Artists: File Under Ambient This compilation showcases the best offerings of Apollo Records' artists circa the early nineties, many of whom went on to create even better works. It has sublime offerings from the likes of Aphex Twin, Biosphere and even the founder of techno himself, Model 500. Surprisingly, however, David Morley steals the show, providing two original songs and a remix that, in large part, make this compilation what it is. Regardless of the prestige of the people who contributed to this release, its diversity alone makes it a good example of the various aspects of the genre.

Aphex Twin: Selected Ambient Works 85-92 Pounding drum machines and bleeping synthesisers drenched in delays and reverb play sweet little tunes. A classic of the genre, if not *the* classic of the genre.

B12: Electro-Soma Four-to-the-floor drums subtly hypnotise you as various melodies play off each other. Note the sample from Brian Eno's ambient classic Apollo.

Global Communication: 76:14 Sublime, chilled, dreamy electronic music. Deceptively simple, it's a shining example of just how beautiful music can be.

Pete Namlook and Richie Hawtin: From Within Epic, sprawling tracks featuring playful rhythms and deep sub-bass that captivates you as spaced-out sounds and sequenced melodies gradually fade in and out.

Pete Namlook and Mixmaster Morris: Dreamfish Enchanted underwater music soothes and unsettles you in turns.

