

The Lost Generation

How UK post-rock fell in love with the moon, and a bunch of bands nobody listened to defined the 1990s

by Nitsuh Abebe

This decade's indie-kid rhetoric is all about excitement, all about fun, all about fierce. The season's buzz tour pairs M.I.A. with LCD Soundsystem, scrappy globo-pop with the kind of rock disco that tries awfully hard to blow fuses. The venues they don't hit will play host to a new wave of stylish guitar bands, playing stylish uptempo pop, decamping to stylish afterparties. Bloggers will chatter about glittery chart hits, rock kids will buy vintage metal t-shirts and act like heshers, eggheads will rave about the latest in spazzed-out noise, and everyone will keep talking about dancing, right down to the punks. Yeah, there are more exceptions than there are examples—when *aren't* there, dude?—but the vibe is all there: We keep talking like we want action, like we want something explosive.

The overriding vibe of the 1990s—serene, cerebral, dreamy—was anything but explosive. Blame grunge for that one. Just a few years into the decade, and all that muddy rock attitude and fuzzy alterna-sound had bubbled up into the mainstream, flooding the scene with new kids, young kids, even (gasp!) fratboys. Big kids in flannel, freshly enamored of rock's "aggression" and "rebellion"—they were rock jocks, they tried to start mosh pits at Liz Phair shows. So where was a refined little smarty-pants indie snob to turn?

Well: Why not something spacey and elegant? Why not sit comfortably home, stoned or non-stoned, dropping out into a dreamier little world of sound? It had been a few years since My Bloody Valentine released *Loveless*, and there were plenty of similarly floaty shoegazer bands to catch up on. There was Intelligent Dance Music—"intelligent!"—a whole subgenre of otherworldly electronics, built from the start for tripped-out home listening. (Would the kids at the rock shows appreciate an Aphex Twin album, or go to a show to watch Mouse on Mars bob over a tableful of machines?) There was trip-hop, sleepy and sensual and alien; there were reissues of exotic lounge albums and Moog records, quaint new scenery for your daydreams. Stereolab would conjure playful new worlds of pop drone, Tortoise would turn your house into an instrumental aquarium, Air would chill you out with French horn melodies, and everyone would be moony and polite and use words like "soundscape." Superchunk, a pretty good indie barometer, would start the decade shouting about bad jobs and end it crooning over the obligatory vibraphone; Yo La Tengo, another good yardstick, would do something pretty similar as well.

And this whole project took off so successfully that most people never really noticed the first wave of bands to lay the groundwork—the "lost generation" of airy, moon-obsessed English acts that got the ball rolling on the dreamy, *avant* 90s.

"They were an indie band that didn't want to be an indie band": That's how Paul Cox, co-founder of the Too Pure label, described Seefeel, one of his acts. That one sentence might be the single best summary of the post-rock project—a crew of underground guitar bands who suddenly got the idea that they could play much more than rock, and spent the next few years trying to break free into whatever that "much more" might turn out to be.

"Indie bands that didn't want to be indie bands," though—it's kind of a mouthful of a genre name, and the critic Simon Reynolds quickly stepped in with something more concise. His first use of the term "post-rock" came in a review of a Bark Psychosis record; the one that counted came in a 1994 issue of *The Wire*. One album does not a genre make, and in that '94 article, Reynolds went about lassoing together the bands that made the scene: Disco Inferno, Seefeel, Stereolab, Pram, Moonshake, and others.

What united these acts? For Reynolds, it was something conceptual, something fundamental in their approach to making "rock" music. Traditional rock, he said—citing no less a

rock dude than Joe Carducci—was about one central act: Bass, drums, and guitar, coming together in one space to create some hot, organic energy, with the recorded album serving only as an attempt to capture the live “real thing.” British indie, as of the late 1980s, may not have been very “rock’n’roll,” but it certainly fit that mold; the jangly guitar-pop at its core had made such an act of sounding natural that some bands didn’t even seem to be trying very hard. And what was grunge but good old hard rock, reborn in new clothes?

The post-rock bands, many of whom set themselves up as enemies of grunge, wanted to get past that model. In them, Reynolds saw more affinity with people like Brian Eno and Phil Spector—people who saw the recording studio as a place to create new worlds of sound, imagined arrangements having nothing in particular to do with the “real” world. More importantly, many of these acts had been inspired by the progress of genres well outside of rock: The sample sorcery of hip-hop, the inorganic motion of techno, the remarkable space and texture of dub reggae—studio music. That enthusiasm bleeds straight through the band profiles in Reynolds’ article, sounding kind of adorably of-the-moment. The artists, ready for revolution, talk about things like the death of the rock gig; Reynolds, speculating happily, talks about bands “evolving into cyber-rock, becoming virtual.”

The trick, though—looking back on these records—is how much they seem defined by the moments when those things *failed* to happen. The indie-electronic sound of Seefeel, for instance, doesn’t particularly signal an era; it feels like one logical point on a line stretching from Eno and techno to latter-day acts like Flowchart and Ulrich Schnauss. No, these bands sound most incomparable when they’re most in touch with their rock backgrounds; you can actually hear them thrilling and straining as they break through, and Reynolds, at the close of his article, seems to hint at just that. What sets the lost generation apart isn’t the sound of *The Bands that Weren’t Indie*. It’s something closer to Cox’s formulation: The sound of *Some Bands Trying Not to Be Indie*—and stumbling, in the process, into something new, something post-rock.

It’s the Essex band Disco Inferno that puts the “lost” in lost generation; their records struggled to find homes even when the band was a going concern, and they’ve since been championed mostly by a small, enthusiastic bunch of critics, collectors, obscurists, and geeks. This despite their music being some of the most excitingly singular stuff of the era—and offering one of the best models for how the post-rock impulse works.

They shared a rock background with the bulk of their peers, and their earliest work draws hard on the sound of Manchester’s Factory Records: The sparse, dark feel of Joy Division, the slow, spacious rock of Crispy Ambulance, and the recordings of the Durutti Column’s Vini Reilly, who backed his dreamy guitar compositions with all manner of samples and tape loops. In the beginning, Disco Inferno didn’t sound like they planned or expected to move much beyond those tones. But something, right around the turn of the 90s, gave them the jolt they needed—some inspirational combination of the Young Gods, Public Enemy, and techno.

The link between all three: Sampling. If there’s anything the post-rock set learned from other genres, it was how to manipulate the arrangement of texture and space in a piece of music—a studio-music trick most rock bands had entirely forgotten about. D.I.’s Ian Crause picked this up mostly by way of Public Enemy and the Bomb Squad, whose productions offered a strikingly new method for making music move: Instead of changing chords or keys, their tracks shifted through different combinations of sampled sound, each block occupying a different position in the music’s landscape. Crause realized he had the technology to apply those concepts to the way a guitar band operated. MIDI sampling meant the group could use their instruments to “play” whatever sounds they wanted, in a room, in real time.

What’s most amazing about Disco Inferno, though, isn’t just technical innovation—it’s the fact that they learned so quickly how to make actual new music out of those tricks. Through 1993 and ’94, they released a series of four EPs, gradually developing a sound as shockingly new as anything else from the period. Something about the EP format seemed

to suit the process: It was like an announcement that what they were attempting was hard and rare, slow and studious going. By the time they released an LP, *D.I. Go Pop*, they'd managed to develop a songcraft that was intimately linked with their methods. The songs on *D.I. Go Pop* start with Crause's new approach to sampling: Its cycling, alien backdrops are built from the sounds of water, bits of jazz records, children's voices. Around that, the band organizes just enough elements of traditional rock to create the outlines of song—sudden, solid bass lines emerge from nowhere, fluid guitar parts sneak through the noise, acoustic guitars sketch faraway chord patterns. It all teeters between the concrete and the abstract, right down to Crause's half-spoken chants. If the results bear resemblance to anything at all, it's the spiciest tracks on My Bloody Valentine's *Isn't Anything*—both otherworldly and thoroughly concrete, both tripped-out pretty and rooted in reality, both dreamlike and secretly grim, a handful of moving parts implying something much larger and more surprising.

A more conventional document of English post-rock comes from Bark Psychosis, a teenage hardcore band that mellowed out into the sort of avant-garde the whole family can enjoy. In 1990, they brought on keyboard player Daniel Gish, one of the founders of Disco Inferno; by the next year, they were dabbling in technology. By 1992, their sound had gotten so spacious that they were recording improvisations in actual cathedrals, and by the end of the decade they were collaborating with a former member of the art-pop band Talk Talk, one of frontman Graham Sutton's favorites.

If the sound of their best album, 1993's *Hex*, feels instantly familiar, you can take that as a testament to both the broadness of their influence and the prescient good taste of their influences. The record is warm, comfortable, and surprisingly easy to access. Songs stretch out to eight-minute lengths, casually conjuring up space and weaving together rich, human sounds: Splashes of live drums, fluid dub bass, barbiturate vocals, wisps of guitar and piano and strings. The feel is both pastoral and impressively concrete—a little like dub reggae might have sounded if it had developed in the English countryside. Those same building, chiming tones echo in bands on either side of the Atlantic, with U.K. groups like Hood and Movietone, and U.S. groups like South, Zelig, and the American Analog Set.

What keeps *Hex* up at the top of the pile, though, is that surprising lack of delicacy, glitter, or gloss. Those things would imply that they were doing this all on purpose, headed here from the beginning. *Hex*, like Disco Inferno's work, sounds better than that; it sounds fresh, unpremeditated, just-discovered. It's here that another one of post-rock's major influences comes through, in the work of German acts like Faust, Neu!, and Can—bands that offered a model for how to trip out in real time, gathered together in real space and coaxing out new patterns of sound. For both Bark Psychosis and Disco Inferno, there are shades of "rock music" in that Carducci-style band-in-a-room sense—only the band's playing something more abstract, cerebral, otherworldly, and fluid than rock usually manages to be.

The *avant* side of the 90s, though, wasn't all about softness and dream. One of the biggest differences between British post-rock and its American counterpart, in fact, was the former's freedom to trade in hard grind—an impulse best located in the London duo Main. This group's background lay as much in industrial and experimental sound as it did in rock and pop, and their earliest releases had a dark, scrappy feel that's anything but serene.

One of the biggest inspirations for the first wave of post-rockers was techno music, which was just then perfecting the massively popular British strain that would fuel its progress over the next decade. Along with that came the development of "ambient techno," the more abstract, less danceable genre associated with the earliest releases on Warp Records. Main's industrialist grind turned out to be a perfect match for ambience, and around 1992 they merged the two into one, letting metallic guitar textures spread out over sparse, percussive beats. Two years later, and they saw the big payoff: A massive set of tracks called *Motion Pool*, where drums disappear almost entirely, leaving only deep, dark patterns of noise and drone and mumble. This is post-rock in one of its most "difficult" and obviously experimental modes, more Neubauten than My Bloody Valentine—but turn the volume up high enough,

and it's easy to hear and feel the draw to it. Like plenty of modern-day techno and modern-day drone, all the action is in its texture and its size: Grim, bottomless, even disorienting. Two years after that, the group collected a series of EPs as *Hz*, leaping even further out into the void.

Closer to the line between comfort and fright was *Insides*, a half-electronic duo that started its career on the influential art-pop label 4AD. The space and simplicity of their music fell somewhere on a line between synth-pop and trip-hop, with a few chilly guitar tones circling through the mix—smooth, lulling stuff. The full effect of their songs, on the other hand, is a little too haunting to ever leave you comfortable; singer Kirsty Yates may sing with coy Euro cool, but her lyrics push at the bad side of human relations like its just another sore tooth.

By and large, though, English post-rock offered up some of the decade's sweetest, dreamiest sound, following straight up on another one of its biggest influences—the late-80s art-pop of the Cocteau Twins, A.R. Kane, Talk Talk, and 4AD. Seefeel, for instance, followed another combination of guitar background and techno impulse, bringing all that floaty art-pop and shoegazer delicacy into the world of beats—and casting themselves as central figures in the first wave of indie kids to go electronic. From today's viewpoint, their method of combining the two things seems blindingly obvious: Wisps of shoegazer guitar and vocal, drifting and floating over the slow roll of breakbeats, something not entirely unlike Andy Weatherall's groundbreaking dance remix of My Bloody Valentine's "Soon". This was the original indie band that didn't want to be an indie band—if anything, they wanted to be Aphex Twin, and just happened to bring their indie sensibilities with them.

Seefeel's career was all about straddling those two worlds, making bridges between them. They started releasing records on the rock label Too Pure, but wound up moving over to electronic labels like Warp and Aphex Twin's own Rephlex imprint. If, along the way, they developed a reputation as the techno act it was okay for rock kids to listen to, they also managed to inspire just as many people exploring the outskirts of techno itself: When then quirky German act Mouse on Mars sent their first set of demos to Too Pure, they enclosed a note thanking the label for releasing Seefeel's early work. As time passed, and Seefeel merged more completely with the techno world, it began to seem more and more like their original form of indie-electronica was a pretty useful addition to the musical landscape. *Quique*, their defining LP, is just one landmark in a subgenre that's spread pretty wide—straight to current-day labels like Darla and Morr Music, whose acts offer updated combinations of indie aesthetics and computer-music trends.

Morr Music, in fact, makes one of the clearest connections from the early 90s to today. In 2002, they released *Blue Skied an' Clear* a compilation of electronic acts covering songs by the shoegazer band Slowdive. If you need any more obvious connection between the two things, it's easily found in Slowdive's last album, *Pygmalion*—on which frontman Neil Halstead pushed the rest of the band to the sidelines and set out to make something every bit as abstracted as the post-rock set. The result, at its best, is one of the lightest, blisniest dreams of the era: "Blue Skied an' Clear," its standout track, is equal parts Cocteau Twins and Disco Inferno, a studio daydream firmly rooted in pop. The 90s, much more than this decade, produced hour upon hour of ethereal falling-asleep music—and post-rock acts of every stripe offered some of the best of it.

If there was any such thing as a home for post-rock, it was the Too Pure label, whose roster of releases includes loads of lost-generation bands (Stereolab, Laika, Pram, Moonshake, Seefeel), closely-allied artists (Mouse on Mars, Long Fin Killie, Th' Faith Healers), current-day followers (Electrelane), and the odd good-taste extra (PJ Harvey's first recordings). Most of the bands on the label kept at least one foot in more conventional forms of rock and pop, but the animating spirit behind it was all post-rock—and the imprint's 1997 compilation, *Slow Death in the Metronome Factory*, was likely some Americans' first group introduction to the English scene.

Stereolab aside, the most fascinating of Too Pure's lost-generation acts was Laika, a project that roped members of the label's other acts into one studio entity. Their first full-length was 1995's *Silver Apples of the Moon*, an album whose title alone seems to say a lot about the post-rock project. There's the obvious nod to Morton Subotnick's early electronic-music landmark of the same name, but there's also something subtler. From Moonshake to countless Stereolab songs to here, these early post-rock bands were constantly talking about the moon, with all of its usual connotations: Weightlessness, futurism, blank space, and serenity; dreamy, cerebral moods; and of course the beeps and hums of the old technology that first got people there.

Laika named themselves after the dog the Soviets launched into outer space (and never recovered); they named their second album *Sounds of the Satellites*; if there was anything to justify comparing them with Stereolab, it was that retro-futuristic Sputnik fetish. Their actual sounds, though, sit pretty far apart. *Silver Apples* layers head-nodding breakbeats into a druggy haze that has a lot in common with Tricky's early trip-hop. On a track like "Marimba Song," which folds in a swirl of jazzy sounds, it's not so very from *Maxinquaye*; elsewhere they drop out into stiff beats, dub bass, and steely-eyed cooing, leaving them sounding a bit like the electronic duo Lamb.

If anyone on the label sounded much like Stereolab, it was Pram, who shared the same fetish for electronic contraptions and pop formatting. Pram's records, like plenty of Stereolab releases, feel like they're trying to imagine some imaginary new form of traditional pop—only Pram throw in just about every new sound they can find, from a full exhibit of organs to a mass of toy instruments. The results are anything but cute; most of the time, it's eerie, darkside psychedelia, carnivalesque and almost threatening. Stereolab shot for the moon; Pram found the closest thing on Earth, naming one album *North Pole Radio Station*.

Other Too Pure acts brought post-rock swinging right back into the rock world that had birthed it. The closest to the lost-generation center was Moonshake, whose first moon references came from a Can song. Their first full-length, *Eva Luna* (moon alert!) worked a bit like Laika, the band to which two of their members would depart—only the rush of breakbeats here supports tense guitar scrawl and open-ended rock atmosphere. The Scottish band Long Fin Killie fell even closer to the spike and buzz of rock, with a soaring, romantic blend of sweeping sound, Krautrock influence, and post-punk edge—something from the same realm that gave us Prolapse and the Delgados. And Th' Faith Healers, one of the earliest bands on the label, sounded midway between an American indie band (Pavement, Dinosaur Jr.) and a shoegazer act, a combination that left them plenty of room to move; "Don't Jones Me," their best-remembered single, sounds a bit like PJ Harvey in psych mode.

Th' Faith Healers' first drummer, in fact, is something like post-rock personified—or maybe the entire English indie 90s. Joe Dilworth took the photo of My Bloody Valentine that appears on the cover of *Isn't Anything*; he played drums in the earliest incarnation of Stereolab; he even gets namechecked in Saint Etienne's "Mario's Cafe". It's not hard to find connections like those running all through the decade, and all through these bands—a whole cadre of people trading ideas, trading skills, and gradually pushing indie rock well beyond the narrow scope of the guitar band. These days—now that every third indie record manages to squeeze in some ProTools and a glockenspiel solo—that sounds like an obvious proposition: What's so strange about rock bands trying new sounds? And yet somehow, at the beginning of the 90s, things weren't quite like that; even a rock band with a violin or piano player might get accused of gimmickry. If things have changed, these are some of the people we have to thank.

As of the early 1990s, the biggest English influence on American indie bands was the viral effect of shoegazing, which infected plenty of minor US acts. Only a few among them leaped beyond that into post-rock territory. Boston's Swirlies, in between their swooning, helium guitar moves, occasionally pushed their technology into new space. Closer still was the D.C. band Lorelei, now almost completely forgotten. Their 1994 LP, *Everyone Must Touch the*

Stove draws plenty of its moves straight from the American-shoegazer playbook, but other selections practically look into the future: You'd think the tricky time signatures and deep, fleet bass on some of these tracks came around much longer after Tortoise got popular, and it's the slightest bit sad that the liner of an album this good would modestly thank "our three fans." At the same time, plenty of other bands slowed down into something just as studious and weightless as the second English wave, including the Virginian drones of Labradford and South, and the delicate dream-pop of Atlanta's Seely.

But the real American post-rock came from elsewhere. When I moved to Chicago, in 1995, the city's music scene was just winding down on a long alterna-rock lovefest: Flick on the rock station Q101, or stop by the Cabaret Metro, and you'd hear fizzy, radio-friendly locals like Veruca Salt, Urge Overkill, and Material Issue. Across town, though, something else was moving toward the limelight. Months later, I finally got around to buying a Tortoise record called *Millions Now Living Will Never Die*, having heard that it'd trump any of the "experiments" I'd been getting from Stereolab or FSOL. It did: This was an astonishing set of underwater Krautrock groove, a submarine pulse that left you wondering why in the world rock bands always played "rock." It certainly didn't bother anyone that some bits just sounded like Neu!; it wasn't like Veruca Salt were about to try that, was it? The first time I listened to it, I fell asleep—something that, as of the mid-90s, could work as a compliment.

I wasn't the only one to turn on to the *Millions* vibe. Not too long after that, the whole tenor of the Chicago scene seemed to have changed: Suddenly the local record stores had long, well-stocked bins labeled "Tortoise et al" or "Post-Rock," with the discs inside carefully stickered—"produced by John McEntire of Tortoise," or "featuring Jim O'Rourke." Those Urge Overkill records went down in the discount bin; up top, you were more likely to find Gastr Del Sol and the Sea and Cake, or Mouse on Mars and Spring Heel Jack. By the time Stereolab released 1997's *Dots and Loops*—an album that had them collaborating with McEntire and Mouse on Mars—the whole thing had gathered up, gone pop, and shouldered its way pretty close to the center of the indie universe.

If American post-rock was more successful than its English counterpart, part of the issue was timing. Most of it, though, was a vast difference in sound and influence, something along the lines of independent invention. Chicagoan Jim O'Rourke's career in experimental music had had brought him into contact with plenty of those U.K. bands—he'd even done a remix for Main—but he and his peers didn't seem to be cribbing much of anything from London.

For the American set, one major starting point was the Louisville, Kentucky band Slint, whose much-loved 1991 album *Spiderland*, served as a heavy American-rock analog to *Hex*—the rock album that ditched speed and pop patterns and crawled studiously into the dark, exploring every possible variation of guitar texture and soft-loud, stop-start dynamics. On the other end, America's post-rockers drew on genres stretching much farther back into history. Plenty of the Chicago mainstays had backgrounds in the Louisville rock scene—but plenty of their associates had more formal training, in jazz or experimental music. Just as many were rooted in sounds like bossa nova, folk music, and seventies singer/songwriters; albums like Gastr del Sol's *Camofleur* (1998) and the Sea and Cake's *The Fawn* (1997) sounded less post-rock and more post-pop, acoustic tunes abstracted and arranged in a dubby glitter of electronics, strings, horns, and percussion. The Tortoise record collection stretched into film scores like Ennio Morricone's and instrumental "exotica" albums like Martin Denny's, and the band brought out the vibraphones and marimbas to prove it. The English kids sounded like rockers trying hard, working without a net, pushing from shoegazing and art-rock into chilly, moony sound. The Americans were less moon and more rainforest: Their records have a rich, immaculate sound and sheen, one that's constantly reminding you just how much they know exactly what they're doing.

By the end of the decade, though, most of the indie world had long turned its back on this stuff: For plenty of people it seemed boring, noodly, and pretentious. When the staffs of the Wicker Park cafes starting putting the White Stripes' *De Stijl* on constant rotation, it was hard to tell how much people loved it and how much it just seemed like a breath

of fresh, raw, vocorder-free air. In 2003, I had to leave town, and as I packed up my boxes, I heard the same thing I always did: The band that practiced in the basement next door, consisting of drums, bass, and second-hand vibraphone. A day later, and I was unpacking the same boxes in New York City, spiritual home of the current ethos: Straight-up action, post-Strokes, post-Fischerspooner, post-DFA, where indie kids no longer bulk up their mix-tape credibility with some Autechre or Squarepusher on side two, and the new daydream alternative to rock attitude comes mostly from German electronics. I'm awake now, yeah. But I'll be just as curious to see what happens next time the rock world drops out and tries to hit the moon.

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

1. The Lost Generation

Disco Inferno | *D.I. Go Pop*

One Little Indian, 1994

Elegant, ultra-cerebral, sample-bathed English rock and pop; see "New Clothes for the New World" and "Even the Sea Sides Against Us". Good for fans of the Durutti Column, *Isn't Anything*, Piano Magic, and the Boo Radleys' *Everything's Alright Forever*.

Bark Psychosis | *Hex*

Caroline, 1994

Pastoral full-band post-rock, the dub of the English countryside; see "A Street Scene". Good for fans of Faust, Talk Talk, *Music for Airports*, Hood, Movietone, and Labradford.

Main | *Motion Pool*

Beggars Banquet, 1994

Droning guitar texture, as grim as it is abstract; see "Spectra Delay". Good for fans of Einsturzende Neubaten, Fennesz, This Heat, and *Metal Machine Music*.

Insides | *Euphoria*

4AD, 1993

Streamlined electronic pop with a dark, human presence; see "Darling Effect". Good for fans of This Mortal Coil, Portishead, Kate Bush, and goths.

Seefeel | *Quique*

Too Pure, 1993

Dreamy shoegazer dance music and indie-electronica; see "Polyfusion". Good for fans of Flowchart, Guitar, Orbital, Aphex Twin's *Selected Ambient Works, 85-92*, and Andy Weatherall's remix of My Bloody Valentine's "Soon."

Slowdive | *Pygmalion*

Creation, 1995

Astral folk and post-shoegazer sleepy-dream; see "Blue Skied an' Clear". Good for fans of the Cocteau Twins, the Durutti Column, and Mojave 3.

Laika | *Silver Apples of the Moon*

Too Pure, 1995

Atmospherically dark, kinda-jazzy and kinda-sexy; see "Marimba Son". Good for fans of Tricky, Massive Attack, and Lamb.

Pram | *Helium*

Too Pure, 1995

Imaginary pop in a world of found sound; see "Nightwatch". Good for fans of Stereolab, the United States of America, and Can.

2. American Post-Rock

Slint | *Spiderland*

Touch & Go, 1991

Source of the beautiful, creeping, off-kilter guitar sound that influences everyone and his cousin over the following years; see “Breadcrumb Trail”. Good for fans of Mogwai, Low, Don Caballero, every math-rock band ever, everyone, everyone’s cousin.

Tortoise | *Millions Now Living will Never Die*

Thrill Jockey, 1996

Chicago post-rock kingpins turn Krautrock pulse into underwater scenery; see the epic, multi-part “Djed”. Good for fans of Neu!, Faust, Stereolab, Martin Denny, and Ennio Morricone, though those last two come more to the forefront on TNT.

The Sea and Cake | *The Fawn*

Thrill Jockey, 1997

Ultra-sophisticated crooning gets arranged in a lull of glittery electronics, flickery percussion editing, and bossa nova elegance; see “The Sporting Life”. Good for fans of Sam Prekop, Bark Psychosis, Stereolab, and Joao and Astrud Gilberto.

Gastr del Sol | *Upgrade and Afterlife*

Drag City, 1996

Folk and avant-garde abstract each other into something warm, minimal, and slanted; see “Rebecca Sylvester”, and for something more lush and accessible, look to 1998’s *Camofleur*. Good for fans of John Fahey, Sea and Cake, Derek Bailey, and the group’s constituent members, Jim O’Rourke and David Grubbs.

3. Followers and Fellow Travelers

Mouse on Mars | *Autoditacker*

Too Pure, 1997

Quirky German electronics, too lush and bouncy for “techno,” too rhythmic for “IDM”; see “Sui Shop”. Good for fans of Aphex Twin, Cluster, Boards of Canada, Spring Heel Jack, the Orb, Stereolab, and Bergheim 34.

Hood | *Cold House*

Aesthetics, 2001

Living-room English project alternates between pastoral space and machine possibilities; see “You Show No Emotion at All”. Good for fans of Bark Psychosis, Disco Inferno, Clinic, Radiohead.

Movietone | *The Blossom-Filled Streets*

Drag City, 2000

Slow-moving beauty, and one of the most natural sounds of the new decade, with all manner of stringed acoustic implements weaving around a soft, narcotic voice; see “Hydra”. Good for fans of Bark Psychosis and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Devendra Banhart and Cat Power, Beth Gibbons and Broadcast.

Crescent | *Collected Songs*

Roomtone, 2000

A round-up of late-90s work by an eerie band in an eerie room, full of slow-moving guitar grind and spooky organs and raw mumbling; see “Shadow”. Good for fans of Flying Saucer Attack and Bark Psychosis.

South | *South*

Jagjaguwar, 1999

Not the u.k. South, but the American one—slowed-down glacial sound and vibraphone echo; see “Walk”. Good for fans of Labradford and Low.

Long Fin Killie | *Houdini*

Too Pure, 1995

Swooning post-shoegazer rock; see “The Lambertton Lamplighter”. Good for fans of Prolapse, the Delgados, and the Fall.

Th’ Faith Healers | *Imaginary Friend*

Too Pure, 1994

American indie-rock meets post-rock spirit; see “See-Saw”. Good for fans of Medicine, early PJ Harvey, and Madder Rose.

The Swirlies | *They Spent their Wild, Youthful Days in the Glittering World of the Salons*

Taang!, 1996

Massively forward-thinking American shoegazers; see “San Cristobal de las Casas”. Good for fans of My Bloody Valentine, Lilys, the Boo Radleys, and the Microphones.

Lorelei | *Everyone Must Touch the Stove*

Slumberland, 1995

Not the other Lorelei—American shoegazers turning on to post-rock rhythm and sound; see “Stop What You’re Doing”. Good for fans of My Bloody Valentine, Black Tambourine, the Swirlies, Tortoise, and the Cure.