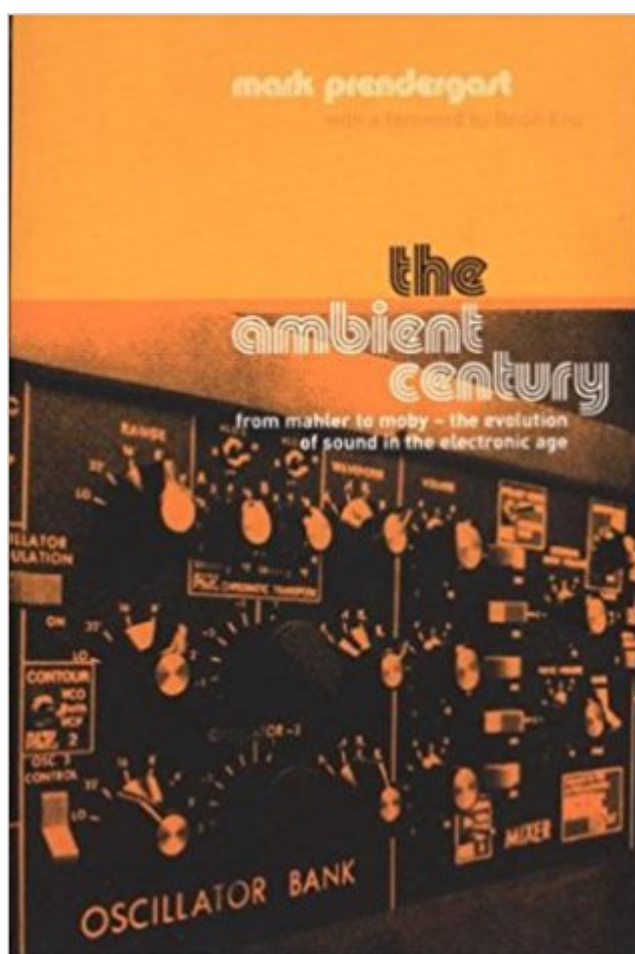


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# The Ambient Century: From Mahler To Moby--The Evolution Of Sound In The Electronic Age



## Synopsis

The Ambient Century is the definitive chronicle of a century of musical change. Encyclopedic, yet with a strong narrative, Mark Prendergast covers such diverse artists as Gustav Mahler, Philip Glass, New Order, and Moby. Lively, compelling, and authoritative-and boasting an unmatched discography-The Ambient Century is a treat for music lovers of all kinds. With an introduction by electronic music pioneer Brian Eno.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The Ambient Century does what the best music books should do: It makes you hungry to hear the notes again." -Boston Globe  
"A wealth of detailed information and cogent observations ... Prendergast has an astonishing grasp of the global scene in popular music and writes with authority and conviction." -Library Journal  
"Prendergast's highly stimulating book courses across the last century, criss-crossing happily between classical, jazz, rock, and its subdivisions, charting the myriad ways composers, musicians, and galloping technology have expanded our sonic horizons." -The Times (London)  
"A vast and cogent treatment of the sound that changed the way we experience music...An exceptional piece of music history." -Kirkus Reviews  
"The Ambient Century does what the best music books should do: It makes you hungry to hear the notes again." (Boston Globe)  
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Mark Prendergast has written about ambient and electronica for newspapers, journals, and magazines worldwide. He lives in London.

This book gave more information than I could have asked for from an unbiased view. Details include analysis for the motives of each artist and his contributions. This book even goes beyond the rocker spectrum to provide details for the inventions, their cultural diffusion, and how they influenced most genres we know today - All starting from what most would consider before the beginning as not to leave out any details. The author's descriptions are factual, yet insightful at the same time. The large index allows for you to put the information in your own order. Though not much detail is presented about the electronic inventions from a scientific angle, suggested listening and stories for each artist encourage extension of learning about the music of the twentieth century. If you want to learn about electronic music's hearth and spread across our world, I would recommend you *The Ambient Century*.

looking at the 20th century as the ambient century is right on the spot. none the less the book focuses too much on individual artists and not enough on the general development and background.

(This is my 3/27/01 review of the original hardcover edition, which is available used for a lot less than this out-of-print paperback edition. For some reason the paperback is listed separately, which I only just now realized.) Your evaluation of *THE AMBIENT CENTURY* will depend on what you're looking for. I expected serious analysis, and by that criteria would give it 1 star. If what you're interested in, though, is an eclectic encyclopedia of interesting 20th century musicians, loosely grouped by the theme of "ambience," which is never defined, then you might think this is great. (I can't comment on the fact-checking criticism, but to me it's a secondary point.) Prendergast moves from "high art" composers including Debussy and Stockhausen, to "minimalism," to rock, broken into categories such as psychedelic, krautrock and synthesizer music, to the '90s techno/house/drum&bass/ambient trend. However, his definition of "ambient" involves "music being deconstructed" by Mahler and Debussy (sounds really "postmodern," but what does it mean?), and developments in technology/electronics, along with an "interest in pure sound." He pronounces: "[T]he bleeding heart of electronic progress had by its very nature rendered all recorded music, by definition, Ambient." (4) Given this sort of cosmic perspective Prendergast could have included all music, and what he does include seems to be more or less "cool stuff that I like." Harsh, I know, but

does Bob Dylan's "Knocking on Heaven's Door," by any stretch of the conceptual imagination, belong on a list of the Essential 100 Recordings of 20th Century Ambient Music? If so, our author fails to offer any explanation. How about Led Zeppelin IV (ie, ZOSO)? I'm at a loss. If the book was appropriately titled, I would have much less to criticize. But when you title a book "The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age," you lead the reader to expect some sort of theoretical analysis -- what sort of evolution? In what direction? What mechanisms are involved? But there is "no there there" if what is happening is just technological progress, and "an interest in pure sound" may characterize Cage's famous \*4'33"\* (the silent composition), but there is not even an attempt here to argue that it is the direction of 20th century music. If Prendergast really means to emphasize the use of music as background, where is his discussion of Muzak, and music in advertising? He doesn't develop his embryonic theme(s), but rather rushes headlong into profiles of musicians, which are strung together with little connecting analysis. Caveat emptor -- if you're looking for serious analysis, look elsewhere, but if you want a breezy journalistic encyclopedia of non-mainstream music circa 2000 (that was seen as cool by *The Wire* magazine) you might find this a useful reference work. (For a model of analysis of cutting edge music, check out Å Nyman's EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC. It also has a foreward by Brian Eno!)(verified library loan)

When I first came across *The Ambient Century* in 2000, I was just out of music school with a confused and fragmented musical mind constantly questioning the value of academic vs. pop, high art vs. low art, complexity vs. simplicity, etc. Really and truly, this is the book that helped me start putting the pieces back together. As its backbone, *The Ambient Century* discusses how a HUGE range of artists used expanded sonic possibilities (20th century technology) in their own idiosyncratic way to form their own signature style. (This is instructive without being pedantic; what makes "that" band sound like "that" band?) And, unlike elitist music professors and students, rather than putting so-called "classical" artists and "pop" artists on different planes, Prendergast gives them all a refreshing degree of equality. I most enjoyed the sections on Erik Satie, Philip Glass, Vangelis, the Grateful Dead, Jean Michel Jarre, The Cocteau Twins and The Stone Roses. While other readers will find their own favorites, one thing is certain: this book will remind you of (and even reintroduce you to) artists and albums you've sort-of forgotten about. And then the book will lend you fresh ears with which to hear them again! (The author also provides an excellent annotated listening list of recommended titles at the end of each article.) You won't need to look hard at other reviews on this page to see that this book has its detractors. Some have even suggested that more "academic" books are superior... But in a book "about music," isn't this to be expected? When

people are writing things such as, why isn't "this" or "that" artist included? or "How come the author didn't mention "their" awesome concert in San Francisco in 1971?" they miss the point. NO book about music is perfect. The question is, "Is this book perfect for you?" For me it is. But even if you don't think so, I'm convinced anyone picking up this book will find reason to celebrate; a treasure trove of old (musical) friends and new ones to be discovered will be surrounding you.--Andrew S.

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