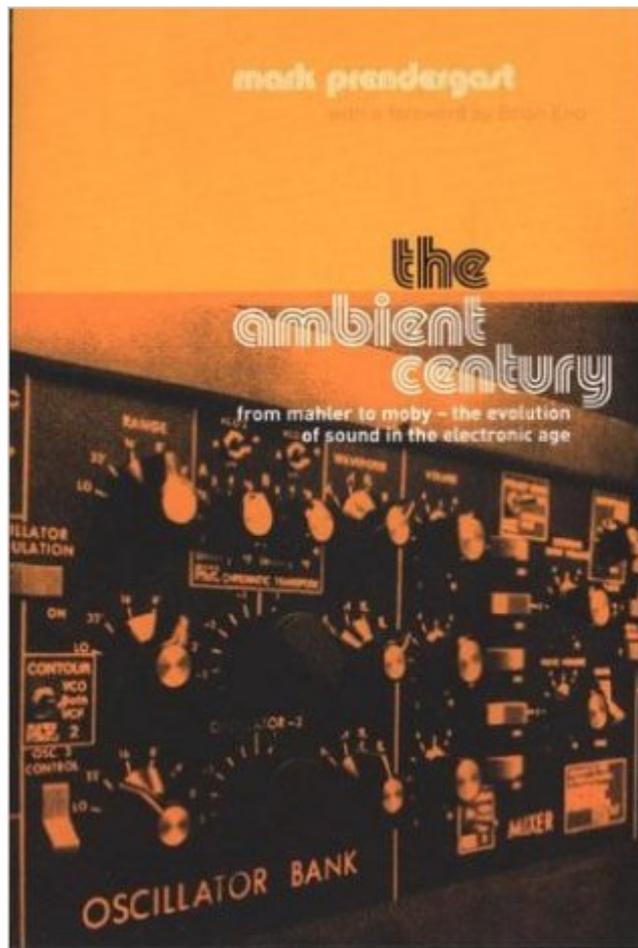


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The Ambient Century: From Mahler To Moby--The Evolution Of Sound In The Electronic Age



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

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.

(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?

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