

Synth Pop – BTEC Music Coursework

Introduction To Synthpop

Synthpop is a genre of music that first became noticeable in the 1980's, this was when the synthesizer was the dominant musical instrument. This style of music became very popular in Japan and the United Kingdom during the post-punk era and became a part of the "New Wave" movement of the late 1970's to the mid 1980's. Some of the first synthpop musicians included Japanese group Yellow Magic Orchestra and British bands Ultravox and the Human League. These groups largely used monophonic synthesizers to produce music a simple and unique but exciting sound.

What Is Synthpop?

Synthpop is a unique genre of music like no other due to its futuristic and electronic sound. It uses synthesizers as its main and sometimes only instrument. Artists such as Kraftwerk and Depeche Mode are some of the more well known groups to produce synthpop music. Many synthpop musicians had limited musical skills, relying on the technology to produce or reproduce the music. The result was often songs that were simple repeated riffs repeating themselves. Themes that were often used when writing a synthpop song were isolation, urban anomie, and feelings of being emotionally cold and hollow.

Lets Go Back To When It All Started

Electronic musical synthesizers that could be used in a recording studio became available in the mid 1960 and it was around the same time that rock music began to emerge as a musical genre. The Mellotron was a electronic, sample-playback keyboard but was overtaken by the Moog synthesizer and created by Robert Moog in

1964. This produced completely electronically generated sounds. The portable Mini-moog, which allowed much easier use, particularly in live performance was widely used by progressive rock musicians such as Pink Floyd and Rick Wakeman. Instrumental rock was particularly popular in Europe, allowing synthpop bands like Kraftwerk to break the language barrier and allow people from all over the world enjoy their music without foreign languages putting them off. In 1971 a British movie called A Clockwork Orange was released with a synth soundtrack by Wendy Carlos. It was the first time many people in the United Kingdom had heard electronic music.

Synthpop Success

The emergence of synthpop was described as most significant event in music. In the 1980's 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 became much simpler. Synth music was dominating the pop music charts of the early 1980's.

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, having top ten hits. In early 1982 synthesizers were so dominant that the Musicians Union attempted to limit the use of them. The large amounts of fully synth bands and artists led to an anti-synth backlash, with groups including Spandau Ballet, Human League and Soft Cell incorporating more conventional influences and instruments into their songs.

Its Downhill From Now On

Synthpop continued into the late 1980's, with a style that moved closer to dance music, including the work of bands and artists such as the Pet Shop Boys, Erasure and The Communards. The Communards major hits were covers of disco classics "Don't Leave Me This Way" and "Never Can Say Goodbye". After adding other elements to their songs, and with the help of a new audience, several synthpop acts had success on the US dance charts. Among these were American artists Information Society, Anything Box, and Red Flag. By 1991, in the United States synthpop was losing its popularity publically and commercially as alternative radio stations were responding to the popularity of grunge rock.

Influence On Other Things

By the mid 1980's, synthpop had helped establish the synthesizer as a primary instrument in mainstream pop music. It was a major influence on house music, which came from the post disco dance club culture of the early 1980's as some DJs attempted to make the less pop-oriented music that also incorporated influences from Latin soul, dub reggae, rap music, and jazz. The continued influence of 1980's synthpop could be seen in many variations of 1990's dance music.