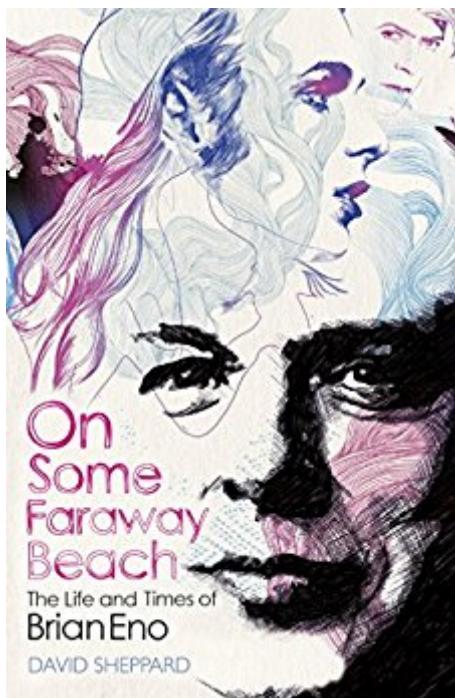


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# On Some Faraway Beach: The Life And Times Of Brian Eno



## **Synopsis**

Authorised biography of Brian Eno - the 'Father of Ambient Music' A sonic alchemist to the stars, Brian Eno's address book is a veritable who's who of rock and pop. Tellingly, his involvement with Roxy Music, David Bowie, Talking Heads and U2 has coincided with these artists producing their most challenging and critically revered work. *ON SOME FARAWAY BEACH* is the first serious, critical examination of the life and times of Brian Eno, from an idiosyncratic childhood to 1960s art school and the sharp end of pop charts around the world.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I'm a long-time Eno fan and this book helped me to understand him much better. It explains how he became one of the most respected avantgarde musicians and producers, starting from an initial interest in plastic arts. It describes his creative process (sometimes song by song) and really makes you curious to listen to his music again. My only complaint is that the rhythm suddenly changes from 1983/84 onwards. Mysteriously, the author mentions this work and collaborations in a very superficial way, even though he was in charge of producing U2's greatest albums (Unforgettable

Fire, Joshua Tree, Achtung Baby and Zooropa), besides other important releases. I guess the author was more interested in the 70's and early 80's Eno, but there was so much more to tell about the years after... In a few words, it starts fantastically, and in the last pages you realized that something's missing. I agree that Eno was more productive in the 70's, but it doesn't justify why some albums (Talking Heads) deserve detailed explanations and some others (U2, James) so few text.

This is heady stuff. Be sure to keep a Thesaurus near by. Personally, I think the vocabulary could have been simplified for the average reader but such is life. This is an extensive biography that chronicles Eno's life from the cradle to present day. There are great stories relating Eno's contributions from Roxy Music to David Bowie to Talking Heads and everything in between, from music to artwork. Of particular interest is the insight into how Brian's mind work when creating and producing, including the successes and the missteps.

If you are already a fan of the work of Brian Eno, this well-written and well-documented work is essential to understand the wide sweep of his musical and artistic origins in Suffolk, his musical evolution, and his contributions to contemporary music. I was first introduced to Eno by a friend in 1977, who made the provocative prediction that Eno would be regarded as one of the most important composers of the 20th century. I found this be incredible at the time, but now I am not so sure. His prodigious musical output, record production (Devo, The Talking Heads, David Bowie, U2), his adventurous collaborations with the likes of Robert Fripp and numerous others, along with his own visual and video art projects have made him incredibly influential. Highly recommended.

This is the definitive biography (so far) of Brian Eno--founding member of Roxy Music, experimental musician and composer, occasional essayist/lecturer, producer, visual artist, and for some of us one of the most interesting people alive. David Sheppard begins by recounting a teenager's precocious interest in art and tape recorders, and his excited response to 1950s musical genres such as doo-wop. One of Eno's defining moments came during his late teens, dutifully recorded by Mr. Sheppard (p. 45): the mother of his then-girlfriend wondered why someone as bright as he was wanted to be an artist. He would say later: "[I]t set a question going in my mind that has always stayed with me, and motivated a lot of what I've done: what does art do for people, why do people do it, why don't we only do rational things, like design better engines? And because it came from someone I very much respected, that was the foundation of my intellectual life." And what a life! Eno

thrived at Ipswich, whose eclectic faculty was devoted to upsetting everybody's preconceptions. He became familiar with the works of John Cage, LaMonte Young, Steve Reich, Cornelius Cardew, and other leading lights of the musical avant garde. He participated in Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, this being his first appearance on vinyl. He would join Gavin Bryar's colorful Portsmouth Sinfonia, which combined virtuosos with folks who had never before touched their instrument (Eno played clarinet!!!!). And he would encounter cutting-edge rock groups such as the Velvet Underground, whose third album he considered a masterpiece. Sheppard recounts how Eno ended up--literally by chance--in Bryan Ferry's Roxy Music. He encountered sax/oboe player Andy Mackay on a train and learned of the band's need for someone who could record their demos. When the members of the band heard the sounds he produced on a synthesizer he found in the studio one day, they invited him to join. Sheppard does not spare us from what some would consider Eno's shadier side--his cross-dressing, for example, or his having his way with Roxy's many groupies, during a period when Eno frankly stated that his main interests were music and sex. Eventually he and Ferry butted heads, and he was out of the band. Eno had been feeling the need to stretch beyond the confines of Roxy; he had recorded tape-loop experiments with Robert Fripp (also feeling confined by the demands of being King Crimson's frontman) that were released as *No Pussyfooting*. Eno would release four albums loosely categorizable as "rock": *Here Come the Warm Jets*, *Taking Tiger Mtn.* (by *Strategy*), *Another Green World* (which many of us consider his finest achievement!), and *Before and After Science*. Sheppard recounts the insights, experiments, and sometimes struggles that went into these--Eno did experience periods of sleeplessness, anxiety and self-doubt, especially as he felt the pressure to duplicate the success he'd achieved with the magnificent *Another Green World*. But he emerged triumphant. He recorded another Fripp collaboration (*Evening Star*, which I consider superior to *No Pussyfooting*). He produced (and performed on) ex-Velvet singer Nico's melancholy solo album *The End*. He worked with Fripp and Bowie on the latter's infamous trilogy (*Low*, *Heroes* and *Lodger*). He produced Talking Heads, eventually recording *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* with David Byrne--easily the most influential release of that year (1981) with its use of samples instead of vocals and building rhythmic sound-sculptures around them. He produced Devo's quirky debut *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo!* (although the results there were mixed at best). Right around this time he also became a hero to the New York City avant-punk underground by producing the controversial *No New York*, featuring four of that scene's most adventurous bands (The Contortions, Teenage Jesus, Mars and DNA). Eno was nothing if not versatile. Beginning with the quiet and unobtrusive *Discreet Music*, Eno forged "ambient music" from its origins in avant garde composers into something almost commercially viable--*Music for Airports*,

for example. His interest was not so much in fixed composition as in creating an environment with sound, incorporating random elements wherever possible. To enhance this process, in the mid-1970s he and artist Peter Schmidt had constructed a special deck of cards entitled *Oblique Strategies*. Each card bore a written instruction. When at an impasse, one could pick a card and then do what the card said. The most famous of these was, "Honor thy error as a hidden intention." Another read: "Make a list of everything you might do and then do the last thing on the list." Another: "Emphasize the flaws." Still another: "Remove specifics and convert to ambiguities." Eno plucked other "ambient" artists from obscurity and got them on the map. Harold Budd is an example. Eno produced Budd's *Plateaux of Mirror* for his *Obscure* series which released *Discreet Music* and collaborated with him on *The Pearl*. Eno would also promote the career of avant-garde trumpet player Jon Hassell, collaborating on the latter's *Fourth World Vol. One Possible Musics* among others. Later Eno would produce Laurie Anderson, James, and especially (after a period of hesitation) the Irish super group U2. U2 developed a trademark depth and resonance. Eno probably deserves the credit for this. Eventually he and Bryan Ferry would mend their differences; the two would co-compose several tracks on recent Ferry solo releases. While producing U2 and others, or collaborating with the German group Cluster (*Cluster & Eno, After the Heat*), Michael Brook (*Hybrid*), John Cale (*Wrong Way Up*), Jah Wobble (*Spinner*), or Peter Schwalm (*Drawn From Life*), Eno began forging his own creation: "generative music" which made use of the possibilities of computers to yield pieces that would never sound the same twice. *Generative Music 1* came out of this; also *The Shutov Assembly* and *The Drop*. Eno also set up visual art installations such as *I Dormienti*, *White Cube*, *The Quiet Room*, and several others. The purpose of these was to create a total environment of light and sound which would enhance the viewer/listener's experience of time--by suggesting that one is experiencing only a small and temporary slice of something that had always been going on and would continue indefinitely into the future. Segments of music from each of these, and others besides, were released as a special series by Eno's company Opal. These are hard to find (I was able to purchase several on eBay for in some cases fairly hefty sums). Of course, the CDs miss an important point--it is not the music that is the star of the show but the environment which includes the music as one not quite separable component and places "equal value" on all its components. Eno overcame this limitation by releasing the entrancing *77 Million Paintings*, software which when installed on your computer brings Eno's visual art directly into your study in constantly shifting, nonrepeating patterns set to "Quiet Room" generative music. Unlike many artists Eno has always been comfortable around technology. He's a systems thinker--perhaps the only such thinker who has consciously employed systems theory to create art and music with an eye to accessibility

to a large audience and acceptability within large public-access venues (airports are an example). Even early in his career, he was fascinated by the possibilities of self-regulating systems and how an experimental musical composition consisting of a few instructions could come to regulate itself given its environment (see his essay "Generating and Organizing Variety in the Arts"). Eno's recreational reading included authors such as Stafford Beer (Brain of the Firm, Designing Freedom and other books and essays which apply cybernetics to management). Eno remained fascinated with the media in which he worked. He was the first to release a CD consisting of 61 minutes of unbroken trancelike music--Thursday Afternoon. There is an accompanying video version approximately 20 minutes longer. New technology made this possible. What emerges from David Sheppard's detailed and engaging account is a portrait of a man whose intellect engaged the world around him on multiple levels--the world of people, of music and the arts, of technology and its possibilities, and of "big ideas" of culture. "Culture," says Eno, is "everything you don't have to do"). We have to eat, so that isn't culture, it is part of being human (or, more precisely, being part of a biological system). We don't have to eat caviar, or sushi. So that's culture. At times we get the impression Brian Eno is curious about nearly everything. His diary from 1995--A Year With Swollen Appendices--is a fascinating account of his day-to-day observations, thoughts, and doings, which includes lengthy correspondences with Stewart Brand (of Whole Earth Catalog fame). Eno avoids the usual fixed premises or preconditions, but instead adopts a methodology of: "Establish your parameters, set things in motion, see what happens." His methodology avoids fixed rules but instead adopts a sense of what James P. Carse calls "infinite gamesmanship" (cf. Carse's Finite and Infinite Games). Instead of aiming for a definite outcome with winner and loser, we set about to continue the play. Although his compositions and methods may seem whimsical, Eno clearly cares very much where this world is going; hence his participation in the West Coast based Long Now Foundation ([...] - see his essay "The Long Now") and his opposition to the U.S.-led war of aggression against Iraq (see articles "How to Lie About Iraq" and "The Missionary Position"). The latter culminated in one of his rare live appearances on the Stop the War Benefit Concert DVD. There you have it. Brian Eno, now 60 years old and still going strong, a life worth celebrating. This review may have seemed to be more about him than David Sheppard's book. So let me just say: that this book belongs in every Enophile's library. If you've no knowledge of Eno, you might wonder what is the point of so detailed a biography of an artist/composer. But if you've found his music, his interviews, and his current activities at all interesting and stimulating, you'll find this book to be "unputdownable." If you're new to Eno, I'd get Another Green World first, and perhaps a few more CDs like Music for Films, or Another Day On Earth which features his recent return to

standard, accessible songs and lyrics. Google his name and read some of his essays and interviews online. Then realize that these offer but mere glimpses into the thought processes behind the music. Sheppard's book fleshes everything out and gives us a complete and well-rounded portrait of one of the most significant artists, composers and cultural commentators of our time.

## EVRYTHING YOU WANTED AND NOT FROM ONE OF THE MOST INOVATIVE MUSIC MINDS OF THE LAST 50 YEARS...

It doesn't hurt having such an interesting subject, but Sheppard does a really good job of peeling away the layers of Eno-ism. For that he can be forgiven for his frequent forays into rock journo speak. Should be required reading for anyone taking modern music seriously....

I enjoyed this book as much as I hoped. The detail and insight was excellent, filling in and illuminating the man that produced my favorite albums. It also provided names to additional albums I missed; bonus.Frank

A must read for any Eno fan!

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