

worked on music projects with Beck sidemen Smokey Hormel and Joey Waronker, and Foo Fighter Dave Grohl.

X Exits. In 1993, X reunited and, on another new label, released *Hey Zeus!*, followed two years later by the acoustic *Unclogged*. The albums were praised by critics but went virtually unnoticed by the public. In mid-1996, after nineteen years, X decided to break up for good.

October, 1997, saw the release of *Beyond and Back: The X Anthology*, a forty-six-song collection spanning X's entire career. It leaned heavily on the early years, with demos, rarities, alternate takes, and live performances as well as comprehensive liner notes and recollections from Cervenkova and Doe. The original lineup of the band reunited momentarily in early 1998 to promote the anthology.

—Tim Bradley

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

■ SINGLES

"Wild Thing," 1984

■ ALBUMS

Los Angeles, 1980

Wild Gift, 1981

Under the Big Black Sun, 1982

More Fun in the New World, 1983

Ain't Love Grand, 1985

See How We Are, 1987

Live at the Whisky a Go-Go on the Fabulous Sunset Strip, 1988

Hey Zeus! 1993

Unclogged, 1995

Beyond and Back: The X Anthology, 1997

SEE ALSO: Black Flag / Henry Rollins; Clash, The; Doors, The; Foo Fighters, The.

XTC

ORIGINAL MEMBERS: Andy Partridge (b. 1953), Colin Moulding (b. 1955), Terry Chambers (b. 1955)

OTHER MEMBERS: Barry Andrews (b. 1956), Dave Gregory (b. 1951)

FIRST ALBUM RELEASE: *White Music*, 1978

MUSICAL STYLE: Alternative, rock and roll, pop

Exploding onto the British music scene at the height of the punk era, XTC forged a new direction with its infusion of humor, charm, and intelligence into the audacious and vigorous punk rock aesthetic. Even at the outset, the social relevance of their music was made all the more compelling by the band's sophisticated combination of intricate melodies, quirky harmonic twists, and well-wrought lyrics. As a result, XTC became one of the most influential and imitated rock bands of their era.

The Early Days. In 1975, vocalist, guitarist, and songwriter Andy Partridge, bassist-songwriter Colin Moulding, and drummer Terry Chambers formed the band Helium Kidz in their hometown of Swindon, in north Wiltshire, England—an industrial town about seventy miles west of London. With the addition of keyboardist Barry Andrews in 1977, the foursome became XTC, releasing its first two albums (*White Music* and *Go 2*) with Virgin Records the following year. In 1979, Andrews left the band and was replaced by guitarist Dave Gregory, another Wiltshire native. Later that year, the new group released the album *Drums and Wires* (which included their first hit single, "Making Plans for Nigel"), followed by *Black Sea* in 1980.

The End of the Tours. Following the release of the more accessible album *English Settlement* in 1982 and after five years of grueling tours, Partridge suffered a severe attack of stage fright in the middle of the band's 1982 tour, which was subsequently cancelled. Partridge has claimed that his condition was the result of an increasing awareness that the impact of XTC's music was most effective in the more intimate club settings and less suitable for large crowds; others have speculated that Partridge suffers from an innate fear of success. The situation was serious enough that Chambers left the group, which became strictly a studio band from that point onward. Rather than find a permanent replacement for Chambers, however, the group decided to enlist a different drummer for each of their subsequent projects.

The following releases, *Mummer* (1983) and the more hard-edged *The Big Express* (1984), included some attractive tunes but were rather un-



For the Record

XTC's hit single "Dear God" was not included on the original U.S. release of *Skylarking*, ostensibly for fear that the contentious subject matter would not be appreciated by American audiences. However, after the unexpected and overwhelming success of the song (which appeared on the B side of the single release of "Grass"), "Dear God" was included on subsequent issues of the album, replacing the innocuous "Mermaid Smiled."

even. During this period, Gregory made the transition from guitarist to keyboardist in an effort to provide balance and add variety to the group's sound. A contentious but fruitful collaboration between the band members and producer Todd Rundgren resulted in *Skylarking* (1986), XTC's first major release in the United States and arguably their strongest album. The hit single from this album, "Dear God," is essentially a diatribe against organized religion, culminating in a pounding climax that gets to the core of Partridge's own philosophy on the subject: "I won't believe in heaven and hell/ No saints, no sinners, no devil as well/ No pearly gates, no thorny crown/ You're always letting us humans down." These controversial lyrics created some commotion in the United States but actually fueled XTC's rise in popularity.

It would be three years before the band followed up on the success of *Skylarking*. Both *Oranges and Lemons* (1989) and *Nonsuch* (1992) continued the group's penchant for clever lyrics and sharp social commentary, but the popular success of these albums was somewhat diminished by the public perception of overt intellectualism. Nonetheless, the albums yielded such hits as "The Mayor of Simpleton" and "The Ballad of Peter Pumpkinhead," the latter of which is a political statement raising the issue of ethics and integrity of governmental and spiritual leaders. The pro-

tagonist is ultimately brought down by his detractors, chillingly described just before the final chorus: "Peter Pumpkinhead was too good/ Had him nailed to a chunk of wood/ He died grinning on live TV/ Hanging there he looked a lot like you/ and an awful lot like me."

Other Projects and Hiatus. Besides their work as XTC, Partridge, Moulding, and Gregory formed an alter-ego band by the name of Dukes of Stratospear in 1985, adopting playfully absurd pseudonyms for themselves as well. This project allowed them the freedom to explore their interest in 1960's psychedelic pop music (especially the Beatles), a significant inspiration for XTC's work that is particularly evident on the *Skylarking* album.

Following the release of *Nonsuch*, the group became entangled in contract renegotiations with Virgin Records and Geffen Records, resulting in the band's refusal to release any more albums. In 1996, after a four-year hiatus, the record labels finally relented, releasing XTC from its contractual obligations in return for two compilation albums: Virgin released the two-compact-disc chronicle *Fossil Fuel* (1997) in the United Kingdom, while Geffen released the more superficial single-disc *Upsy Daisy Assortment* (1997) in the United States.

—Joseph Klein

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

■ ALBUMS

White Music, 1978

Go 2, 1978

Drums and Wires, 1979

Black Sea, 1980

English Settlement, 1982

Waxworks: Some Singles 1977-1982, 1982

Mummer, 1983

The Big Express, 1984

The Compact XTC: The Singles 1978-1985, 1985

Skylarking, 1986

Psonic Pspot, 1987 (as Dukes of Stratospear)

Oranges and Lemons, 1989

Rag and Bone Buffet: Rare Cuts and Leftovers, 1990

Nonsuch, 1992

Fossil Fuel: The XTC Singles 1977-1992, 1997

Upsy Daisy Assortment: The Sweetest Hits, 1997

SEE ALSO: Beatles; Rundgren, Todd.