

Do You Know These Six Under-the-Radar Indie Music Genres?

Posted by Karma Bennett April 29, 2015 at 10:44 am



This is part III of a three-part series on getting to know the Alibris.com authors. Today's post will introduce author Karma Bennett.

People think because I have a music blog that I'm obsessed with music. Truly I'm not. I love all the arts equally. It's just that music is the people's art. Some people go to the ballet or art museums, some people read fiction and poetry, but almost all people listen to music, even if it's only humming along with the radio on their daily commutes.

I am probably a little obsessed, but it's not with the music itself. My obsession is with a certain phrase I started hearing in the early oughties.

"They Just Don't Make Good Music These Days"

I first heard this phrase from a friend who worked in a hat shop, explaining why the shop played the same four CDs day in and day out, with songs that are more than twenty years old. It wasn't that she didn't like music, in fact she loved it. She'd just given up hope on finding any new bands to love. After this conversation, I began to hear the phrase everywhere. "They just don't make good music these days" was often accompanied by "everything on the radio is crap."

There's truth to the latter (even what's great is often ruined by overplay), which is why I had given up corporate radio in favor of radio streaming, where you seldom hear the same band (let alone the same song) twice in a day. I'd reached a point where I was completely overwhelmed by the sheer number of new bands to fall in love with. I knew that "they just don't make good music these days" is the wrongest of wrongly-wrong. I started a music blog to send this phrase back to the stone age where it belongs.

In fact, there is so much good music out there that I'm not even going to list a bunch of bands in this post. Instead I'm going to go broader, by introducing you to a bunch of indie genres you may not be familiar with. The Internet is a rabbit hole where you can get lost for days on a single subject, and music is no exception. If you are intrigued by just one of the genres below, you'll find many hours of listening pleasure.

Indie Music Genres You May Not Have Heard Of

"Indie rock" has, like "alternative" before it, become less a label attribution and more of a genre. And like alternative, many indie rock bands are finding widespread commercial success, blurring the very boundaries of what it means to be independent. There are legions of terrific indie rock bands that aren't getting radio play, but check out these other genres for something a little different.

Indie Pop

Now that anyone with a Casio and a tambourine can start recording tunes, lovers of slick, catchy music have forged their own paths. In particular there are some great acts out of Sweden, some even achieving worldwide success like *Tove Lo*, *Mike Snow* and *Icona Pop* (remember Peter, Bjorn and John?). In fact, much of what is considered indie pop isn't indie at all, but are big stars in their home countries. British pop stars like *Little Boots*, and Lily Allen or the Brazilian band *Canses de Ser Sexy*, or the French star *Stromae* or Canada's *Dragonette* are still unknown in other parts of the world. But there are also American indie pop bands still flying under the radar, like *Jhameel*, *The Noisettes* (edit: actually the Noisettes are from London... thanks to SuperFlowerly for catching that) and *Glass Candy*. So if you're still hungry for pop but you've been overtaken by Katy Perry and Taylor Swift welcome to the smorgasbord of indie pop.

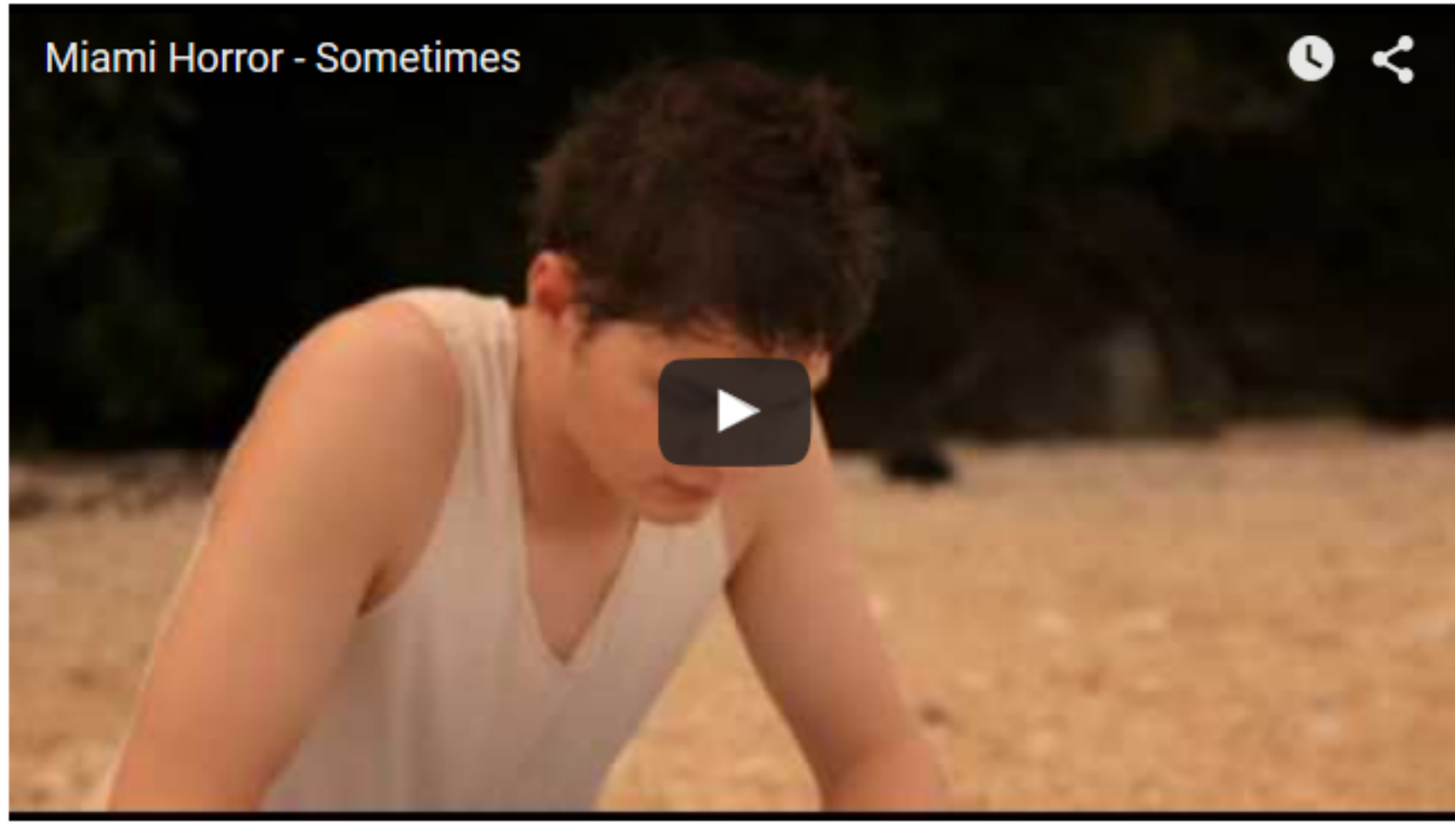
East London's Chew Lips is Yet Another Indie Pop Band (Chew Lips - Salt Air)



Dreamwave

Fans of electronic dance music (EDM) have for many years been drawn to electronic tunes that are more for chilling than for shimmying. Meanwhile, the sound of EDM has gotten more sophisticated as bedroom producers build tracks with more and more layers. Dreamwave is serene electronic music that is heavily layered to create songs that are fun, but also build in complexity as they reach climax. It's the raver version of relaxed music for the beach. If you're a fan of synth bands of the eighties (e.g. New Order, Tangerine Dream, OMD, Simple Minds) this is a genre for you. Typical bands include *Miami Horror*, *Toro y Moi*, *Com Truise*, and *Chvrches*.

Miami Horror is Ready for the Beach with Lush Track "Sometimes"



8-Bit

If *Super Mario Brothers*, *The Legend of Zelda* or *Sonic the Hedgehog* fill you with a warm rush of nostalgia, then you're bound to enjoy 8-bit (also called chiptunes). This genre encompasses any music that is in part constructed out of hacked 8-bit video game consoles. Rather than experimenting with new song structures, 8-bit innovates by making instruments out of objects that are not designed for music. 8-bit is usually bright sounding pop music that often has a lo-fi aesthetic. Without a doubt the leader of the genre is *Anamanaguchi* but if you prefer a more dark, edgy sound check out *Crystal Castles*. Other notable 8-bit acts include *8-bit Weapon*, *I Fight Dragons* and *Squarepusher*.

Try a Little 8-bit with Anamanaguchi - Endless Fantasy



Indie Folk

You may already be a fan of indie folk and not know it. Of all the genres listed here, it is experiencing the most mainstream popularity. Bands like *Mumford and Sons*, *Of Monsters and Men* and the *Lumineers* have all had big hits in the past few years but few know what to call this genre of music. You can think of indie folk (sometimes called alt folk) as bluegrass light. Bands use the same instruments as old-timey Americana songs but with a little less twang and softer, prettier vocals. *Laura Marling* is my personal favorite of the indie folk genre. Also check out *Ray LaMontagne*, *Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros*, *The Head and the Heart*, *The Tallest Man on Earth*, or *Father John Misty*.

Indie Folk Artist Laura Marling: "My Manic and I"



Electroswing / Swinghouse

I've been a fan of big band music since my teen heart swooned over *Swing Kids* in 1993. I yearned for the next swing revival to hit, and now that it has I'm delighted with surprise by its originality. Electroswing (sometimes called swinghouse) is electronic dance music (EDM) that is built out of pieces of old swing songs, or newly-recorded EDM songs with vocals and instruments reminiscent of the WWII era. This is music you can swing dance to in one minute and twerk to in the next. Probably the biggest names in electroswing are *Parovoz Stelar* and *Caravan Palace*, and if you like them, there are a variety of fun electroswing compilation albums to give you a wider sample of the genre.

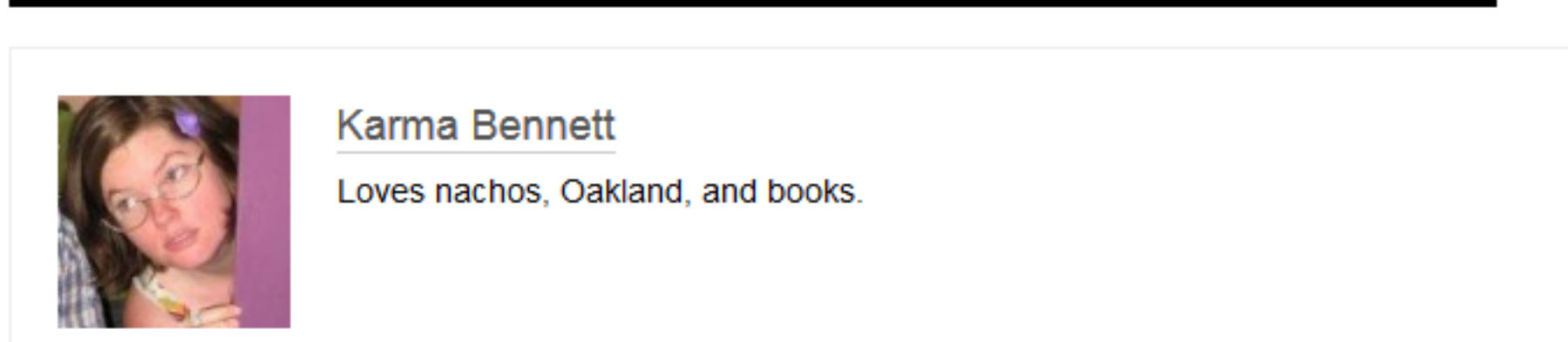
Get to Know Electroswing with Parov Stelar - Demon Dance



Electro

I saved my favorite for last. I suspect electro is a word you'll hear more and more often but it may simply be that I am always seeking it out. Certainly a few terrific bands have found commercial success (and at least in my area, tiresome overplay), such as *Phoenix*, *Passion Pit* and *M83*. Some may claim there is crossover between electro and indie pop, but to me it only counts as electro if it is dance music you can rock out to. Electro is the new new wave—all those kids of the eighties who bathed in the glowing synth of bands like *Blonde*, *New Order* and the *Cure* are all grown up now with keytars of their own. Electro is pop with a punk edge. The vocals are rougher than in pop music; there will be synth but also guitar. There are so many electro bands I want to tell you about. Every song off of *Does It Offend You, Yeah?* is a first album is a winner and the *Presets* sound like *Depeche Mode* with a better beat. But there are so many others! *YACHT*, *Diamond Rings* (AKA *GobbieGobbie*), *Is Tropical*, *Joywave*, *The Long Blondes* and *Sir Sly* are a few I love.

The Limousines - Very Busy People Epitomizes What I Love About Electro (and My Lazy Life)



Karma Bennett
Loves nachos, Oakland, and baths.

Tags: 8-bit alt folk chillwave chiptunes dreamhouse dreamwave electro electroswing independent label music indie folk indie music indie music genres indie pop music swinghouse

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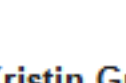


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Steve Cianfichi · 5 months ago
In the 1933 movie *Flying Down to Rio* Ginger Rogers sings the line, "Some folks call it music, my folks call it noise." Times never change! Love the Swing music myself!

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Karma Bennett · 5 months ago
I've long had brewing in me a post on this topic. Sometimes the noise is the point too! Sometimes what we love about a song is its imperfections.

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Kristin Graff · 5 months ago
long live indie music! great write up!

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SuperFlowerly · 5 months ago
Aren't The Noisettes a UK band?

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Karma Bennett · 5 months ago
I didn't want to use a cover to represent the example for a genre, but I simply must share this electroswing cover of Macklemore's *Thrift Shop*.



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