INDIE
ORIGINS & INFLUENCES

Is ‘Indie' really a genre of music?

Indie music is not strictly a genre of music but is often used as an umbrella term covering a wide range of artists and styles, connected by some degree of allegiance to the values of underground culture. Genres or subgenres often associated with indie rock include lo-fi, post-rock, shoegazer, garage punk, emo, slowcore, c86, twee pop, and math rock, to list but a few; other related (and sometimes overlapping) categories include alternative rock and indie pop.

‘Indie' is often used to refer specifically to various genres or sounds in a realm of music that runs parallel to more commercial music. During the 1980s, indie was synonymous in Great Britain with jangly guitar pop of the C-86 movement (see below). During the 1990s indie music became more expansive and established as a growing number of musicians and fans began seeking alternatives to the mainstream music establishment. More recently, the word indie is sometimes used as a synonym for all "underground" music. Of course, such usages of the word "indie" are inaccurate for various reasons. Most notably, stylistic qualities of many indie bands are often unrelated to commercial independence or adherence to indie principles (this is particularly true when a sound becomes popular, its leading bands are signed by major labels and more success-oriented bands and production teams attempt to imitate the style; this results in commercially driven artists sporting the same stylistic traits the "indie" artists of a year ago had).
**The Birth Of Indie**

The ‘punk philosophy’ of ‘have a go’ and ‘don’t care what anyone thinks’ led to the formation of the first ‘indie’ bands and record labels. Although punk’s popularity declined in the late 70s, there was an increase in the number of small record labels that sprung up, with the sole purpose of putting out the kind of records that they wanted to hear. This was a direct snub against the major record labels. These smaller labels were focused around the northern cities, and there was a definite move away from London as far as their representative artists were concerned. The three most important groups from this early period of ‘indie’ were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Fall</td>
<td>Music characterized by a challenging, almost shambolic sound, and cryptic, laconic lyrics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joy Division</td>
<td>Music characterized by a dark, stripped down sound compared to music of its time, with melodic bass lines. Their music can be seen to have ‘kick started’ the Goth movement (after splitting in 1980 the remaining members went on to form New Order).</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Smiths</td>
<td>Music characterized by Morrissey’s unusual, witty, and controversial lyrics, and Johnny Marr’s music, which helped return guitar-based music to popularity after it had fallen out of favour in the UK charts.</td>
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The C86 Cassette Tape

The C86 released by NME Cassette was a follow up to C81, a more diverse collection of new bands, released in 1981. C86 was similarly designed to reflect the new music scene of the. (NME journalists of the period now agree that C86 was a typical example of NME's "hip hop wars" between enthusiasts of the contemporary progressive black music such as Public Enemy and Mantronix and the fans of traditional white rock).

NME writer Andrew Collins summed up C86 by dubbing it "the most indie thing to have ever existed". Bob Stanley; a Melody Maker journalist in the late 1980s and band member of Saint Etienne similarly claimed in a 2006 interview that C86 represented the

"beginning of indie music...It's hard to remember how underground guitar music and fanzines were in the mid 80s; DIY ethics and any residual punk attitudes were in isolated pockets around the country and the C86 compilation and gigs brought them together in an explosion of new groups".

Over time the term C86 became a musical genre in its own right; a shorthand for a movement within the British indie scene, often derided for its twee or "cuteness", jangly guitars, the bowl haircuts of its singers and asexual looks of its followers. This was applied to bands whether they had been on the tape or not.

Indie in the 90s

Helped by the release of C86, the UK Indie scene gradually followed an increasingly retrospective direction, drawing on influences from the 60s psychadelia and funk. Arguably the most important movements that were born out of the indie philosophy were 'Madchester' and 'Britpop'
The term Madchester was coined for an alternative music scene that developed in Manchester, England, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. The scene mixed indie rock and dance music. The bands associated with the scene included The Stone Roses, the Happy Mondays, the Inspiral Carpets, 808 State, James and A Guy Called Gerald.

The music scene in Manchester immediately before the Madchester era had been dominated by indie bands such as The Smiths. These bands were to become a major influence on the Madchester scene, but just as important was the Haçienda nightclub. For the first few years of its life the club played predominantly indie music, but gradually began featuring more disco, hip-hop and electro. In 1986, it became the first club outside the US to take house music seriously. In 1988 Acid House became popular throughout the UK, another influence on the club culture building in Manchester.

**The Stone Roses**
Music characterized by a blend of melodic, jangly psychedelia sung with a northern accent.

**Happy Mondays**
Music influenced by the emerging house and acid house scene. Many of their songs incorporated the work of other artists.

**Primal Scream**
Music characterized again by a mix of indie and dance.
BRITPOP

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Britpop emerged from the indie scene of the early 1990s and was characterised by bands influenced by British guitar pop music of the 1960s and 1970s (British Invasion groups like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Kinks, and The Small Faces, and glam rock artists such as David Bowie and T. Rex, and punk rock bands like the Sex Pistols). Blur and Oasis drew from the Kinks and the Beatles, respectively.

The movement developed as a reaction against various musical and cultural trends in the late 1980s and early 1990s, particularly the grunge phenomenon from the United States. In the wake of the grunge invasion led by bands like Nirvana, many bands positioned themselves as opposing musical forces, referencing British guitar music of the past and writing about uniquely British topics and concerns.

Although Britpop bands did not on the whole have a single unifying sound they were grouped together by the media first as a ‘scene’ and later as a national cultural movement. Blur, Oasis and Pulp are generally considered the scene’s most prominent acts. Other major bands associated with Britpop at various stages included Suede, Elastica, Ocean Colour Scene, Supergrass, and The Verve. These bands brought British alternative rock into the mainstream and formed the backbone of a larger British cultural movement called "Cool Britannia". Although its more popular bands were able to spread their commercial success overseas and even to America, Britpop fell apart by the end of the decade.
STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

Stylistically, Britpop bands relied on catchy hooks and wrote lyrics that were meant to be relevant to British young people of their own generation. Britpop bands conversely denounced shoegazing and grunge as irrelevant and having nothing to say about their lives. Damon Albarn of Blur summed up the attitude in 1993 when after being asked if Blur was an "anti-grunge band" he said, "Well, that’s good. If punk was about getting rid of hippies, then I’m getting rid of grunge”.

The imagery associated with Britpop was equally British and working class. Suede’s lyrics and videos dealt with the seedy side of suburban and sink estate life. Blur (at the time of the Modern Life Is Rubbish LP). Blur’s promotion of Modern Life Is Rubbish also prefigured the rise in male working class values within the media, with the band in press photos straining to control a pitbull terrier, and the words "British image no 1" graffitied on a wall behind them. This rise of unabashed maleness, exemplified by Loaded magazine and lad culture in general, would be very much part of the Britpop era. The Union Jack also became a prominent symbol of the movement.
ON THE CD

The birth of ‘indie’

1. Wrote For Luck (1989) Happy Mondays
2. She’s Lost Control (1979) Joy Division

“Madchester”


Britpop