

Who are Wire?

Loosely, a music group, but more specifically, Bruce Gilbert, Robert Gotobed, Graham Lewis and Colin Newman. Wire formed in 1976 because that's what one did after leaving Art School. At any rate, Wire produced three classic and highly influential albums in the late seventies, while returning from hibernation in the mid-eighties for another round of sonic exploration. During their career Wire had the unique idiom of not repeating themselves, which their massive success can surely be attributed to.

How may have one heard of Wire without actually ever hearing Wire?

Wire were always more of a bands' band; and thus were not a staggering commercial success. R.E.M covered "Strange" on their 1987 Document album. "Alone", a Lewis/Newman song from Colin's A to Zed album, was used in a scene from "A Silence Of The Lambs." That song, along with another Newman solo piece, "Not Me", were covered by 4ad stalwarts This Mortal Coil. Wire have also been recorded by Minor Threat, Big Black, Henry Rollins, Band Of Susans, FIREHOSE, Antenna, Carter USM, Lush, The New Bomb Turks, Kustomized, Flying Saucer Attack, and Therapy, to name a few. In addition, WMO compiled the 21 track Whore Various Artists Play Wire CD and the 14 track Dugga Dugga Dugga Various Artists Play Drill CD. As for Elastica's "Connection", we have to figure everything between the bands has always been more sincere than reported, as photographs of Bruce and Justine in bed have been circulated.

What was their first period, 1977-1980?

Wire produced three classic – in every sense of the word - albums during their first incarnation. Having no clue on how to play an instrument proved an asset in 1976 and Wire quickly were absorbed into the "punk" scene in London. Two tracks recorded live at the Roxy in January 1977 landed them a recording contract with EMI. Wire's debut album, Pink Flag, was released in November 1977. Short, concise, and brutal, punk was the ethos, but not it's psyche. Pretty much everyone who has ever heard it says it changed their perception of music. Wire's second album, Chairs Missing, followed in 1978, although it was not initially released in the US. Wire jettisoned any "punk" trappings on this album for a more psychedelic approach. Wire were learning to play while their writing was more capable. Tours followed including supporting The Tubes and Roxy Music and appeared on German TV. By 1979, the art rock epic 154 had broke all previous barriers, due in part to the increased role of producer Mike Thorne. Yet by 1980 their situation with EMI had deteriorated and Wire were put on hold.



figure (1) Wire press photo for Pink Flag

Released by Rough Trade, Document and Eyewitness documents the band live during 1979 and 1980. Its highlight is Wire's deconstruction evident in their final performance at the Electric Ballroom in February 1980. From this incarnation there are also three posthumous releases. Behind The Curtain, released in the UK only by EMI in 1994, features demos and early recordings from 1977-1978. The Peel Sessions captures the three sessions that Wire performed for the BBC, the last of which featured the epic "Crazy About Love." The Peel Sessions was also reissued in 1996 with new liner notes from Kevin S. Eden. Turns And Strokes, released in 1996 by WMO, wraps up the post-154 era with the remaining unreleased bits including live tracks Wire recorded at the Star Club. Not really. But it does recover to CD "Second Length" b/w "Catapult 30" from that rare Rough Trade 12" and live tracks that Wire would later record individually. Restless Records is reportedly compiling the definitive Wire Box Set from this era.



What was their second period, 1985-1990?

This was when they got back together in the 80's because they probably didn't have anything better to do. Wire's first release was the classic Snakedrill EP which provided two tracks, "A Serious Of Snakes" and "Drill" that confirmed that Wire were back with something to say. The Ideal Copy, released in 1987 on Mute, was the first full album from the band, it proved an equally capable and updated were Wire back and charting new territory again. Wire toured the US that summer backed by The Ex- Lion Tamers who performed their tribute to Pink Flag, relieving Wire of any such duties. In 1988, Wire released A Bell is A Cup Until It is Struck. While similar to its predecessor, it was received with mixed results. A Peel session was recorded in 1988. On their ensuing US tour, Wire were supported by the Band Of Susans. An appearance was made on the "Late Show" featured the band performing "Drill" with Bruce on video camera to an unbemused Suzanne Sommers.

figure (2) Wire promotional photo for Manscape

Using live tracks from this tour and dates in Europe, Wire entered the studio and constructed Its Beginning To And Back Again, released in 1989. Another vastly underrated album, it contains the hit singles "Eardrum Buzz" and "In Vivo". It is commonly referred to as IBTABA. The Drill was recorded quickly in 1989 yet didn't see a release until the following year. It features many remixes of "Drill", Wire's anti-anthem of the Beat Combo era, taking the angle to a natural conclusion. Manscape, recorded and released in 1990, was probably not their best album. It took a euro-disco spin more typically found with other Mute bands at the time, and perhaps due, in part, to David Allen in the producer's chair. Then Robert Gotobed left, feeling technology had made him redundant. The remaining three did perform a handful of dates in 1990 as Wire. Four tracks ended up as a companion CD single to Exploded Views by Alessandra Libutti. One of those Italian books with bad spelling. Unfortunately this era of Wire's career has been under-rated especially when compared to others careers of the same period. In 1993 Mute released The A List, a compilation of previously released tracks from this period. WMO have culled the decidedly more interesting overview, Coatings, with unreleased or unavailable material from the same period, including the 1988 John Peel Session and the 1990 "Ambitious" remix for the ballet "Middle Sex Gorge", by Gilbert/Lewis/Kendall.

What was Wir?

This was after Robert Gotobed left in 1990. They dropped the "E" to acknowledge his loss. Nice guys. One album, the highly underrated The First Letter, was released by Mute in 1991. In 1992, two tracks were recorded in Vienna at ORF radio station. This was part of the "I Saw You" performance. The Hafler Trio subsequently mangled these tracks for the 1995 12", "The First Last Letter", released by Touch. Wir also remixed a track for Erasure that same year. Touch/Ash International are releasing the two ORF tracks as a CD single in 1997 under the title WirVien.

Are Wir(e) still together?

Wire, including Robert Gotobed on drums, were last seen performing in May 1996 to celebrate Bruce Gilbert's 50th Birthday. They played "Drill" for about 15-20 minutes at which time their arms failed them. Of the British music press reporting on the gig, exactly zero knew it was "Drill". Paul Smith of Mute/Blast First organized the event at then new permanent Disobey space. Construction appropriately began after Wire's performance. Lots of names were there and even a tank. The event was recorded by Mute. A video was reported airing on MTV Europe.

What about their solo works? What are Wire doing now?

Colin Newman

Following Wire's hiatus in 1980, Colin Newman recorded his first solo album, A-Z, released on Beggars Banquet. This was followed by Provisionally Entitled the Singing Fish in 1981 and Not To in 1982, both on 4ad. The first and third are rather Wire-like and include contributions from Robert Gotobed, Desmond Simmons and Mike Thorne. The Singing Fish, on the other hand, is an album of instrumental vignettes. Newman then retreated to India for a period of eighteen months, returning to London and Wire in 1985. Serendipitously, he landed a job producing Minimal Compact, prompt a move and marriage to bassist Malka Spigel. Colin recorded two more solo albums for Crammed while living in Belgium: Commercial Suicide and It Seems. Both reflect a more continental approach to rock, and unfortunately, are currently out of print. Don't expect this situation to be rectified anytime soon.

In the early 90's, Colin, Malka and son Ben returned to London to start their own Swim~. Influenced by the electronic culutre they recorded Oracle album Tree with Samy Birnbach (also of Minimal Compact Fame) and Malka's debut solo album Rosh Ballata. Immersion also released Oscillating and a series of remixes under the title Full Immersion. Other artists on Swim~ include Lobe, G-man (Gez Varley of LFO legend), Cusp (Mark Gage aka Vapourspace), Pablo's Eye, Ronnie & Clyde and Japanense artist dol-op. Water Communication is a great 2CD compilation of Swim's early "electronic dance" period.

By the mid 90s they had developed a "post-everything" aesthetic. Colin released his well-titled Bastard in 1997 while Malka's My Pet Fish appeared in late 1998. Both show the pair's affection for the "song format", the former, however, an instrumental affair. Pablo's Eye Everything She Wears Grows Blue and the debut from Silo Instar also present this new attitude for Swim~. Not to miss is Colin's remix of "Masters Of The Universe" for a Hawkwind compilation. A second compilation from Sim~ entitled Post-Everything Bullocks is due summer 1999.



figure (4) Bruce Gilbert, below. figure (3) Colin Newman, above



Bruce Gilbert

During the mid eighties, Bruce recorded four albums of "dance" and commissioned music starting with This Way in 1984 and The Shivering Man in 1986. Both were later packaged (incompletely) as This Way To The Shivering Man. He released both Insiding and Music For Fruit in 1987. All were released on Mute Records. In the 1989 Bruce worked with Angela Conway on the ethereal A.C. Marias album, One Of Our Girls Is Missing. After a two year stint in the early nineties as the resident DJ for Disobey in London, Bruce has returned to recording with a plethora of projects in the pipeline. His first solo album, Ab Ovo, was released in March 1996 followed in November 1997 with the particularly noisy In Esse, both on Mute Records. That Year also saw Bruce's contribution to the WMO label with the spoken word object d'art, The Haring (WMO 5CD). An album for Table Of The Elements (bromine 35) was scrubbed, while archival material from 1974 on Finland's Sahko label appeared on vinyl in early 1999 as Frequency Variation. Of the three ex-Wire members, Gilbert is the only active performing artist – often appearing from inside a garden shed. A live performance with members of Band Of

Susans recorded in 1996 is due for release WMO as Gilbertposstenger. Bruce is currently working on his next album for Mute.



Graham Lewis

Graham recorded under the He Said banner, releasing two albums as such (both on Mute): Hail! in 1986 and Take Care in 1988. WMO released pre>HE, an album of his archival material, as the title implies, from 1983. Presently living in Sweden, Graham recorded the quasi-industrial H.A.L.O Immanent album for MNW Zone in 1995. In recent collaborations with Omala, Graham has released the He Said Omala Catch Supposes album for the Sweden based Origin label, complete with video "Post Code Orange" as seen on MTV Europe. A remix of the album, entitled Matching Crosses was released in 1998. Graham's new projects include the 'disco remix project' Ocsid with Carl Von Hauswolff and Mr. Huhta, and a new constellation, Hox, recorded with Andreas Karperyd, one half of Omala. Both are due in early 1999 from Origin. Please visit the Origin web site for further information.

figure (5) Omala, with E. Graham Lewis, right

Gilbert/Lewis or is that Lewis/Gilbert

In 1980, Graham Lewis and Bruce Gilbert immediately set up shop collaborating together. From 1980 to 1983, they produced four albums under the infamous Dome banner. These were paired up in 1991 for a pair of releases for The Grey Area of Mute. Dome was also a record label and issued two albums, Desmond Simmons' Alone On Penguin Island (reissued on WMO) and the self-titled Michael O'Shea. As Lewis/Gilbert and Cupol, they recorded for 4ad; a complete compilation exists in 8-Time. Lewis & Gilbert also recorded a Peel Session around this time that WMO included on Pacific/Specific. Amongst their collaborations with other artists in the early eighties, MZUI featured illustrator Russell Mills, while the Duet Emmo album, Or So It Seems, was recorded with Daniel Miller of Mute Records fame. In 1984, Lewis and Gilbert went their separate ways. The final project at that time was the P'o album Whilst Climbing Thieves Vie For Attention, whose reissue status on CD finally occurred in late 1998. Recently Graham and Bruce have recorded new Dome material for a WMO release, TBA. Also due for reissue is the MZUI Waterloo Gallery originally issued on Cherry Red.



I want to know more about Wire.

Then you should read Kevin S. Eden's book, Everybody Loves A History, published in the UK by SAF in 1991. It is the definitive history of Wire from their biographer. From Wire's beginnings through the Manscape album and the transformation to Wir, it is all in the book. Kevin also publishes the updated Wire discography, which is available on the web site.

figure (6) Cover of KS Eden book

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