

# SYNTHWAVE

## ROBOT SOUNDS FROM THE PAST

*In the past decade, shows like Stranger Things and movies like Drive and Blade Runner have been popularising a very colourful and interesting genre known as "synthwave". Beginning its journey in the mid 2000s, the genre has taken influences from 80s pop culture including arcade games and popular sci-fi movies. Fast forward to 2010, Kavinsky's album in the movie Drive inspired many artists to explore synthetic melodies and retro atmospheres, broadening the genre and creating sub genres like synth-pop, chill-wave and giving rise to bands like Electric Youth, Anoraak and a more familiar act, Daft Punk.*

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Synthwave uses modern production techniques to bring you sounds from analogue synthesisers, electronic drums and bass lines, and artificial reverb. Oh yes, a lot of reverb. The style has evolved to be soothing, sometimes droning and sometimes just very catchy. But no matter what type of sound you prefer, it will never be boring. The different subgenres like vaporwave, French-house, outrun, all have something to offer to diverse groups of young audience who are getting familiarised with elements of the past.

Perhaps the earliest recollection of synthwave comes from 80s synth artists like Depeche Mode, Duran Duran and New Order who incorporated artificial sounds with more familiar 80s rock instrumentations. As time went on, many artists were influenced to experiment with newer methods of creating atmospheric sounds and distorted beats that slowly turned into what we now know as synthwave. More contemporary bands took note of these early 80s sounds and have cooked up various new genres for us.

A personal favourite, Kavinsky, uses a unique blend of atmospheric sounds and distorted vocals that brings his futuristic yet, reminiscent style to life. The track Nightcall is almost synonymous to the movie Drive, providing an excellent backdrop for the



scenes to come to life as Ryan Gosling drives through the neon lit city. I would strongly suggest listening to the album named outrun if you are looking for something to start with.

Branching out we have acts like Com Truise that works around the chillwave style of music. The songs are usually devoid of any vocals and have a lower tempo added with the same 80s influenced synthetic sounds. I wouldn't describe it as easy listening, but it is definitely more atmospheric in its approach. Other chillwave artists include acts like Neon Indian and Tycho. A particular kind of chillwave

translates into vaporwave. This micro-genre is focused on excessive levels of vocal distortions and heavy reverb. Added with some wholesome bass and techno sounds, this genre celebrates the old daydreams of the future, wrapping them up in cool beats and very relaxed tempos.

But perhaps the most popular sounds to look out for right now come from the subgenre French-house, brought to life by artists like Daft Punk and Mr. Oizo. This style comes is heavily influenced by 80s American pop culture that influenced many European scenes at the time. The rules

here are the same: distorted synthetic sounds, a heavy bass line, and reverb. But what makes it stand out is its upbeat tempo that comes from its House music roots. Popularity of bands like Daft Punk and their collaborations with various pop and R&B artists have brought this genre into the mainstream; their robotic masks, an emblem of their musical style and sensibilities.

Yet what I appreciate the most about this genre is how it has seeped into other genres of music and is breaking boundaries in the way we have thought of pop, R&B or indie sounds. The genre has melted in with other contemporary styles to give us a lot of fresh sounds. Many R&B artists including Kanye West and The Weeknd, have adopted elements of synthwave and incorporated them subtly into their own brand of music. EDM artists like Skrillex, Diplo and Calvin Harris have branched out to give us a more contemporary approach to this style, taking influences from synth music and pop sounds.

Synthwave has grown to be an outlet through which we see into the future from the past, if that makes sense. Paying the perfect homage to the neon lit 80s, the genre continues to be growing in popularity and gaining appreciation from the average listeners and critics alike. If you haven't heard anything from this genre yet, it's time you tried exploring it.

