

# CHAPTER NINE:

## ENO'S PROGRESSIVE ROCK: THE MUSIC

The pieces on Eno's four solo progressive rock albums are of five basic types. Prominent in the early albums are "assaultive" songs that bowl over the listener with a hard rock attack – distorted electric guitars, a hard, driving beat, an almost saturated acoustical space, and a strident, shouted vocal quality – and with lyrics that feature aggressive, futuristic, sexual, bizarre or surrealistic imagery. The second type of song, never dominating but always present in each of these albums, is best described as "pop," involving lighter textures, less distorted timbres, a more relaxed vocal delivery used in conjunction with suaver melodies – in a word, a more Top 40 sound. To view these pieces merely as pop songs, however, would be misleading, for Eno's intent is frequently ironic: by combining light music with ambiguous or sarcastic lyrics, he achieves a peculiar clash of contexts.

A third class of songs, embracing a considerable variety of musical approaches, is the "strange." These are songs in which Eno allows his imagination free reign to play with the elements of rock, pop, and jazz, resulting in unique combinations of textures and timbral qualities, frequently in conjunction with dark, irrational verbal imagery. Some such songs evoke our sense of the weird, the demonic, the grotesque or frightful, others are wistful, vaguely menacing, or dreamlike. The quality of "strangeness" in other songs hinges on a clash of contexts, for instance a puzzling, enigmatic text over a deceptively carefree (though not exactly "pop") musical accompaniment.

The fourth type of song is characterized by simple, slow vocal melodies, and broad, diatonic, harmonic textures played on synthesizers programmed to sound like church organs or string sections, I call this type "hymn-like." The aesthetic of these songs points forward to the non-vocal ambient style Eno was working on from the time of his collaboration with Robert Fripp on the 1973 album *No Pussyfooting*; it also refers back to the player piano hymns of Eno's childhood.

The final type of piece is the instrumental. More a generic than a stylistic category, Eno's instrumentals on these albums may be classed as pop, strange, and ambient. These pieces are forerunners of Eno's systematic explorations of non-vocal musical textures found on later albums like *On Land* and *Apollo*.

In Chart 1 (see following pages) the pieces on each album are listed by type, and thus the overall character of each record can be seen at a glance. Particularly striking are the preponderance of assaultive songs on the first two records, the total absence of such songs on *Another Green World*, and the tendency to close out each album with hymn-like songs and instrumental pieces: Eno was evidently seeking something of an "Amen" effect for each of the four cycles.