

to catch up, to take command of the future and command of its technology ... His work is predicated not on the immediacy of the revolution, as Lissitzky's was, but rather ... on the revolution's inevitability, the real presence of a new world. The drift of history is on his side, awaiting only that New Man to come to seize the possibilities knowledge and technology offer and wield them into a rational society. Eno, as a socially responsible artist, has two basic tasks: to engage our hearing in novel ways, and to provide objects for our new world. He does both, splendidly.<sup>30</sup>

## Short Ambient Pieces

Between 1976 and 1983, Eno released four albums containing mostly shorter pieces in the ambient style. The first of these was *Music for Films*, originally released in 1976 in a limited edition of 500 copies, it was reissued in 1978 as a single album, and then again turned up in the ten-album retrospective boxed set *Working Backwards, 1983-1973*, in a version Eno said was "identical in content to the first edition released in 1978 but rearranged into what I consider a more satisfactory track sequence."<sup>31</sup> With *Music for Films* Eno was in a sense advertising his music for use by filmmakers, the album included an address to which interested parties could write for synchronization licences. The fact that he would take the trouble to rearrange the pieces to make a better sounding whole, however, indicates that he simultaneously viewed the album as an artistic product in its own right – as a conceptual album of music for imaginary films. Some of the music, he wrote, "was made specifically for use as soundtrack material, some of it was made for other reasons but found its way into films, most of it is previously unissued in any form."<sup>32</sup> All compositions on *Music for Films* are by Eno, though two were "arranged" with the help of bassist Percy Jones and guitarist Fred Frith. Ten musicians, mostly veterans of progressive rock album sessions with Eno, contributed guitar, bass, percussion, viola, electric piano, and trumpet parts.

There are eighteen pieces on *Music for Films*, nine per side, Eno is the sole musician on eleven of them. In some respects the sound-world is very similar to that of *Discreet Music*: few events, very quiet dynamics, diatonicism, repetition, gentle washes of synthesizer colors, merging of foreground and background, frequent lack of definite pulse, a sense of timelessness. Here, however, the actual duration of each piece is reduced, often to aphoristic proportions of less than two minutes. The effect, then, is to evoke a series of miniature worlds, each with a set of characteristics involving tone color and melodic and harmonic procedures.

*Music for Films* was largely ignored in the music press, which, one feels, was running out of things to say about Eno's increasingly subtle approach: without any words or performances to write about, and faced with a new musical language that would be inappropriate to describe in

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<sup>30</sup> Hull, Tom, "Eno Races Toward the New World," *Village Voice* 21 (12 Apr. 1976), 87.

<sup>31</sup> Liner notes to *Music for Films*, boxed set version, Editions EG EGBS2, 1983. It is on this version that I base my comments.

<sup>32</sup> Liner notes to *Music for Films*.