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## DVD &amp; Blu-ray Video Reviews

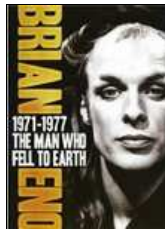
## Brian Eno 1971-77, The Man Who Fell to Earth (2011)

*Though made without Eno's OK, this autobiographical documentary of the unique rock star/musician/composer/producer/music theorist/singer/visual artist is one of the best.*

Published on April 28, 2011



### Brian Eno 1971-77, The Man Who Fell to Earth (2011)



**Documentary on the early part of the eclectic career of the musician**

**Studio: Sexy Intellectual SIDVD564 [5/17/11] (Distr. by MVD)**

**Video: 1.33:1 color & B&W**

**Audio: English PCM stereo**

**Extras: Extended interviews, digital biographies, more**

**Length: 154 minutes**

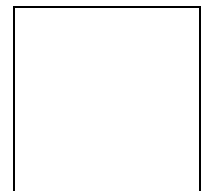
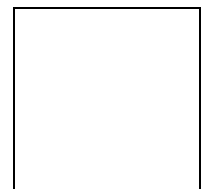
**Rating: \*\*\*\*\***

This documentary, whose maker is not featured on the box, was made without the participation or approval of Eno himself, but I don't know why the distinctive rock star musician/composer/producer/music theorist/singer and visual artist wouldn't find it completely fair and very well done. Especially as it's the first and only one on him. (However, that fifth star above would apply primarily to Eno fans.)

Let's start with his real name: Brian Peter George St. John le Baptiste de la Salle Eno. No wonder he started out during his years with Roxy Music using just plain Eno. Some view the years covered by this film to be Eno's golden years - during which he moved from being a super-flamboyant feather-adorned member of Roxy Music to becoming one of the principal innovators of ambient music, while dressing and acting more normal.

One of the prime talking heads in the film is Eno's biographer, who describes his appearance in Roxy Music as even more flamboyant than David Bowie (with whom he forged a close production relationship later on). The author mentions the glam-rock ethos of Eno at that point, and how - unlike other keyboard-centered rock stars like Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson - he came from art school - not music school - and really didn't have any musical chops. Eno preferred to muck about with the tapes, early synthesizers and electronics in general, adding weird sounds to Roxy Music's efforts. He pioneered in the use of the VCS3 synthesizer, and as one of the talking heads observes: "if the music had wobbly and weird effects, it probably meant Eno was nearby."

After he left Roxy Music Eno re-created himself as a solo act, using electronics of all sorts and working with other similar-minded musicians. He made connections in the classical new music area, where both John Cage and Steve Reich were major influences on him. Later in the 70s he convinced Island Records to set him up with his own label,



Obscure Records, which he devoted to some of the first recordings of alternative new music composers such as John Adams, Gavin Bryars, Michael Nyman, Harold Budd and the Penguin Cafe Orchestra. As his visionary development continued, he established another label even more his own - Discreet Music - and eventually came up with the first true ambient album - *Music for Airports*. He also spent time with "Krautrock" musicians in Germany, and recorded with the duo Cluster - Rodelius and others.

His 1975 album *Another Green World* is considered by many critics his best album ever for the way it blended rock, ambient, new music, avant-garde and other influences into a perfect assembly of tracks. It was created from start to finish entirely in the studio - part of Eno's evolving idea of having no written music or plans when first going into the studio, and just letting things fall into place there. The album started out badly, as four days passed at £500 a day, without any useable tracks resulting. Then things jelled with some new performers, and the album was underway. Together with another artist, Eno created the *Oblique Strategy* cards (under John Cage's influence), which you are to pull out at random when you get stuck in any creative process, and do whatever a card you pull says to do.

The history of what has become ambient music is explored in the documentary. Erik Satie was a forerunner with his "furniture music," John Cage also dabbled in the area, and Eno took it even further with a slowly evolving music which you could either pay attention to or ignore entirely, depending on your mood and activity. One critic points out a sense of "melancholy melody" in nearly all of Eno's later work - a welcome alternative to the atonal anti-melodic slant of much modern jazz and serial new music.

While the film has plenty of talking head footage it also has the usual standards of documentary film - historical footage, clips of TV performances, still photos, various audio clips, shots of some of the epoch-making LP albums by Eno. The visuals that accompany some of Eno's music are especially fitting and fine; I don't know if most were especially shot for the documentary or came from stock shots. One uses the scenes of the spaceman and his family on their alien planet - really David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, but musically Eno better fits that nomenclature, as suggested by the film's subtitle.

-- John Sunier

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