



Eno transports you to another dimension.

BRAVE NEW ENO

by Mitchell Schneider

BEFORE AND AFTER SCIENCE

Brian Eno
Island (ILPS 9478)

Brian Eno is an agent from some other time and some other place who seems to know something that we don't but should. Judging by his compelling electronic music textures, existential nursery rhymes and pre-occupation with irony, one can safely assume that Eno's principal mission on this planet Earth is to alter and expand our senses—not to butcher them, as the Saints intend; not to desensitize them, as Kraftwerk triumphantly do; and not to merely sedate them, as Tangerine Dream a.k.a. Coma Toast purposelessly do. Like Jonathan Swift, Eno is obsessed with detail, texture, atmosphere, and, most of all, perspective. Majestically, *Before and After Science* stands as the *Gulliver's Travels* of art-rock. Implicit throughout is an amazing sense of discovery and the element of surprise (both of which, incidentally, were largely missing from *Another Green World*). On side one especially, Eno has created a small-vs.-large contrast in which various elements—synthesizer noises, bass runs, percussion, vocals—move randomly in and out of the background. And, if the new record isn't quite as fun to listen to as the lovably dizzy *Here Come the Warm Jets*—to my mind, Eno's other masterpiece—it's more focused, fascinating, and challenging.

Tape loops, metallics, Moog, AKS synthesizer, CS80, synthesized percussion—those are the brave-new-world tools with which Eno brilliantly (and uniformly, too) actualizes his grand intentions. Since he displays such unbridled passion for the machines, it really wouldn't surprise me if they fell in love with Eno and tried to sabotage his romance with anyone else (which actually was the story of one *Twilight Zone* episode). What automatically prevents Eno's conceptualism from coming across as coldly experimental—at times the case with the two

David Bowie/Eno collaborations, *Low* and "Heroes"—is the manner in which Eno's frivolous lyrics, movingly sonorous vocals and music perfectly coalesce to launch Science's themes of (in no particular order, of course) disorder, order, escape and transcendence.

In "Spider and I," whose synthesizer-quilt sounds simultaneously weightless and dense, Eno and his buddy "sleep in the morning" and "dream of the ship that sails away." Somehow, the song is beautiful and grotesque, transcendent and morbid. You don't know whether to shed a tear or recoil in horror, and the fact that you *don't know what to do* and actually feel compassion for a disgusting little insect heroically demonstrates Eno's ability to transport you to another dimension, a place that Patti Smith can only sing *about*. What's engagingly puzzling about "Julie With," which describes two lovers sailing languorously on the sea, is its bizarre evocation of fear, uncertainty and serenity. Against the uneasy, if gentle instrumentation, Eno resonantly sings, like some eerie Burl Ives, "Julie with her open blouse/Is staring up into the empty sky," while "the radio is silent and so are we." Although the lovers would seem to be doomed—"The still sea is darker than before," we learn—there's something very peaceful and romantic about their entrapment.

And there's more. "No One Receiving" miraculously combines militaristic control with randomness: underneath a rigid disco robot-hop beat and a voice endlessly reciting "In these metal waves" (or *something* like that), Phil Collins' drums unexpectedly explode like firecrackers in a manhole, and synthesizer bleeps come out of nowhere, stop for tea, and quickly vanish like Agnes Moorehead did weekly on *Bewitched*. What at first sounds annoying becomes totally enveloping—Eno affectionately teaches us to respond differently, and soon you'll be able to luxuriate in the technocratic mau-mau music of "Kurt's Rejoinder," the perfect lopsidedness of "King's Lead Hat" and the frightening subliminal noises of "Energy Fools the Magician" and "Through Hollow Lands," a poignant instrumental about, I'll lay odds, Pittsburgh.

Similarly radiant are the two tunes which cleverly bring Eno's music right into the mainstream without cheapening it—the brassy "Backwater" and "Here He Comes," a melodically shimmering mid-'60s-style ballad in which Eno, singing as though he's in suspended animation, finally unveils himself:

*Here he comes
The boy who tried to vanish
To another time
Is no longer here
With his sad blue eyes*

I can't remember the last time a record took such a hold of me—and gave such an extreme case of vertigo, too. ■