

With the hit “Der Mussolini”, DAF provide the blueprint for a significant part of this direction, which later becomes unified under the acronym EBM: based on pounding rhythms, step-sequencer basslines, and barracks-style vocal delivery.

Emerging from the ashes of the punk band Male, **Die Krupps** is founded in Düsseldorf to create something distinct and unique. The music is initially influenced by avant-garde and free improvisational elements, emulating the daily life of a steel factory worker and laying the foundation for industrial music. Already on their second album, “Volle Kraft Voraus!”, the rhythm-machine aspect (synthesiser sequences) dominates, combined with agitated vocals. What DAF created with “Der Mussolini”, **Die Krupps** builds on with this album, particularly with the single “Wahre Arbeit – Wahrer Lohn”, which significantly influenced the birth of Electronic Body Music.

Insekt live 1993 in Rome, Italy
Photo: Paul Toohilla



While things are stirring in Düsseldorf, **Einstürzende Neubauten** (Collapsing New Buildings) forms in West Berlin. The group led by Blixa Bargeld becomes a cultural influence of immense proportions in the 1980s and 1990s. Through their innovative sound sculptures, they open up entirely new expressive possibilities and continue to shape subsequent genres to this day. With an arsenal of jackhammers, drills, chainsaws, metal debris percussion sculptures, tape loops, and guitar noise, they create their own musical apocalypse.

In November 1981, **Einstürzende Neubauten** challenge conventional listening habits with the release of their debut album “Kollaps”. They manifest a sound monster that serves as an antidote for the frightened, paralysed, and media-sedated masses. Bargeld’s bone-chilling screams and the apocalyptic-themed lyrics give this monster a voice that roars across the republic and far beyond. This non-conformist mixture lays the foundation for an entirely new musical understanding, which later influences countless bands like **Depeche Mode**, **Nine Inch Nails**, **Marilyn Manson**, or **Rammstein**.

DAF and **Die Krupps**’ hard sequencer sound with pounding rhythms also conquers Belgium in 1981, leading to the rapid formation of some influential bands.

Daniel Bressanutti (formerly of Prothese) and Dirk Bergen found **Front 242** in Brussels., and in October 1981, release their first single “Principles/Body To Body”. By the following year, the duo has now become a quartet, now



DAF live 2018 at Flat And Boots Festival,
Leipzig, Germany
Photo: Uwe Rudolph

comprising of Jean-Luc De Meyer, Patrick Codenys, Daniel Bressanutti, and Richard 23. The debut album “Geography”, featuring the single “U.Men/Ethics”, occasionally ventures into experimental territories, combining clinically stiff synth sounds à la Kraftwerk and Cabaret Voltaire with hard electronic beats and spoken word elements.

Over time, **Front 242** refines their sound, and with the 1984 album “No Comment” their sound becomes more aggressive, featuring staccato sequences and samples. Around this time, they also begin using the term Electronic Body Music, which later becomes synonymous with the entire genre.

Roughly 60km away from Brussels, in the city of Charleroi, **à;GRUMH...** comes to life in 1981. The band with the distinctive yet unpronounceable name does everything in the 1980s to become a cult object within the innovative Belgian EBM scene.



à;GRUMH... live 1989 in
Hamburg, Germany
Photo: Dirk Hoffmann



Click Click 1982
Photo: Steve Marriott

DAF, Die Krupps, Front 242, and Nitzer Ebb can be seen as the central key figures of the first generation of EBM, at least in Europe. They continue to be the most frequently imitated, quoted, or even copied by later bands. However, in the 1980s, many other bands established themselves in Europe, including à;GRUMH..., A Split-Second, Borghesia, Click Click, Clock DVA, Liaisons Dangereuses, Portion Control, The Invincible Spirit and Vomito Negro.

Some of these bands have a closer connection to EBM than others. The prevailing EBM hotspots in Europe were primarily West Germany (Ruhr area and Frankfurt) and Belgium. Additionally, during this time (the second half of the 1980s), the term EBM was not yet widely used as a typical genre label.

Instead, this music was categorised as techno, serving as an overarching term for purely electronic dance music.

This label was mainly attributed to the Frankfurt scene, especially the Dorian Gray club located at the airport, which became a scene meeting point of significant renown. Video clips from this club label **Front 242** as a techno band, and many consider **Nitzer Ebb's** concert there in 1989 to be legendary.

Concerts by other significant EBM bands also took place there. Many renowned DJs, who would later move away from EBM musically, performed there, including Sven Väth and Talla 2XLC (Andreas Tomalla).

Parallel to events in Europe, Detroit techno and Chicago house had developed in North America, followed by a musical exchange leading to acid house, deep house, and garage. Both of these styles broke with the more stringent sounds and performance ideologies common in Europe, instead combining these elements in a more cross-cultural manner by incorporating other genres, primarily soul and funk. Nevertheless, mutual inspiration with European EBM cannot be denied; sequences in both cases were usually repetitive. Conversely, Nitzer Ebb, in particular, were clearly inspired by funk.

In North America, **Front Line Assembly** (abbreviated as **FLA**) was founded in 1986 by Bill Leeb, born in Austria but raised in Vancouver, who had briefly been a keyboardist and bassist for **Skinny Puppy**. FLA's first albums, "The Initial Command" (1987), "State Of Mind" (1988), and "Gashed Senses & Cross-

fire” (1989), were clearly influenced by **Portion Control** and European EBM, and their use of electronic drum sounds and samplers also echoed **Front 242**.

Leeb also founded the commercially more successful side project **Delerium** and later, along with various **Front Line Assembly** colleagues, especially Rhys Fulber, engaged in many other projects such as **Intermix**, **Synæsthesia** and **Noise Unit**.

Alongside **Skinny Puppy**, **Front Line Assembly** significantly shaped North American EBM, which deviated significantly from European EBM, which was more complex and intricate.

Similar sound concepts are also found in the debut album “**Pretty Hate Machine**” by **Nine Inch Nails**, a solo project for Trent Reznor in 1988 in Cleveland, USA, which displays clear influences from both European and North American EBM. For live performances, Reznor added more musicians, creating a band dynamic.

However, contrary to typical EBM chanted or shouted vocals, Trent Reznor used harmonies. The lyrical content also featured emotions different from typical EBM themes. This made the music more accessible to listeners, as identification with the messages was more universally understandable and less encoded.

Instrumentally, the similarity isn’t surprising due to the artists using similar equipment due to the limited amount of affordable yet popular synthesisers on the market.

Only with their second album in 1994 did the **Nine Inch Nails** project move away from its original influences. For a less knowledgeable listener, distinguishing some instrumental tracks from **Front 242**, **Front Line Assembly**, or **Nine Inch Nails** would be difficult.

In 1988, the influential Belgian label Play It Again Sam released the landmark compilation “**This Is Electronic Body Music**”. While not necessarily featuring the most famous bands, the compilation emphasises that EBM is not easily defined. Alongside **Front 242**, **Click Click**, **GRUMH...**, **A Split-Second**,



Front Line Assembly live 2017
Photo: Krichan Wahlborg

This flame, which was quickly extinguished by fashion and pop culture, burned only briefly but it hit dry wood, especially in Düsseldorf. After all, the Ratinger Hof hosted and was frequented by artists of all stripes, partly due to its proximity to the art academy, and the architects of EBM were among the visitors.

In this environment, Gabi Delgado-López worked as a Dadaistic poet. He and Robert Görl would later form the influential duo **Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF)** in 1978 in Wuppertal but were closely tied to the ideological spirit of the Ratinger Hof. Founding members also included Kurt Dahlke (later with **Der Plan**, **Fehlfarben**, **A Certain Frank**), Michael Kemner (**Fehlfarben**, **Mau Mau**), and Wolfgang Spelmanns (**Mau Mau**). Chrislo Haas, who went on to co-found **Liaisons Dangereuses**, temporarily replaced Kurt Dahlke.

During this brief period and at this place, a variety of genres were born, each with bands that are now considered pioneers. In Düsseldorf and within the vicinity of the Ratinger Hof, Jürgen Engler was active as the lead singer of **Male**, considered to be the first German punk band. In 1980, he co-founded **Die Krupps** with **Male** bassist Bernward Malaka and was soon joined by Ralf Dörper, who would later achieve international pop music success with **Propaganda**.

The first album, “Stahlwerksynfonie”, contained what would be a recurring theme in EBM: the working class. The typical life of a working-class person

was reflected sonically in this work by means of industrial sound constructs. Themes often revolved around “muscles, sweat, and labour” and occasionally around “blood”, which was a recurring motif in **Die Krupps’** work.

“ EBM started for me with DAF and Liaisons Dangereuses in the early 80s and from then on I saw and experienced almost all the great EBM bands in the 80s. All this also got into my blood and influenced my musical path extremely. There are many bands and names, but for me the energy was always the most important! This has flowed into all my music until today and will accompany me until the end.

Thomas P. Heckmann

DAF also explored these ideas in their early albums, likely based on their own observations and experiences. After all, art draws from itself, and the self represents a social construct. Additionally, art must simplify its self-perception and methodology to be decipherable by a broader audience.

The limited availability of synthesizers and the simplicity of sequencers made electronic music minimalist and more accessible. This stood in direct contrast to the increasing complexity of the world. Simple chant-like vocals, as repeatedly used in EBM, also contributed to this pursuit.

The visitors and participants at the Ratinger Hof, along with their musical and ideological descendants, had a distinct commonality: **Kraftwerk’s**