



The Cars

The Cars were an American rock band formed in Boston in 1976. Emerging from the new wave scene in the late 1970s, they consisted of Ric Ocasek (rhythm guitar), Benjamin Orr (bass guitar), Elliot Easton (lead guitar), Greg Hawkes (keyboards), and David Robinson (drums). Ocasek and Orr shared lead vocals, and Ocasek was the band's principal songwriter and leader.

The Cars were at the forefront of the merger of 1970s guitar-oriented rock with the new synthesizer-oriented pop that became popular in the early 1980s. Music critic Robert Palmer, writer for *The New York Times* and *Rolling Stone*, described the Cars' musical style: "They have taken some important but disparate contemporary trends—punk minimalism, the labyrinthine synthesizer and guitar textures of art rock, the '50s rockabilly revival and the melodious terseness of power pop—and mixed them into a personal and appealing blend."^[2]

The Cars were named Best New Artist in the 1978 *Rolling Stone* Readers' Poll. The band's debut album, *The Cars*, sold six million copies and appeared on the *Billboard* 200 album chart for 139 weeks. The Cars had four Top 10 hits: "Shake It Up" (1981), "You Might Think" (1984), "Drive" (1984), and "Tonight She Comes" (1985). The band won Video of the Year for "You Might Think" at the first MTV Video Music Awards in 1984.

The Cars disbanded in 1988.^[3] Orr died in 2000 from pancreatic cancer. In 2007, Easton and Hawkes joined Todd Rundgren and others to form the offshoot band The New Cars. The surviving original members of the Cars reunited in 2010 to record the band's seventh and final album, *Move Like This*, which was released in May 2011.^[4]

The Cars



The Cars, c. 1980. (L–R) Greg Hawkes, Elliot Easton, David Robinson, Ric Ocasek, Benjamin Orr.

Background information

Origin	Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.
Genres	New wave · pop rock · power pop · synth-pop
Years active	1976–1988 · 2000 · 2010–2011 · 2018 ^[1]
Labels	Elektra · Concord
Spinoffs	The New Cars
Past members	<div><div><u>Ric Ocasek</u></div><div><u>Benjamin Orr</u></div><div><u>Elliot Easton</u></div><div><u>Greg Hawkes</u></div><div><u>David Robinson</u></div></div>
Website	<u>thecars.org</u> (<u>http://thecars.org</u>)

Following a short tour in support of *Move Like*

This, the band once again went on hiatus. In April 2018, the Cars were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and reunited to perform at the induction ceremony.^[1] Ocasek died of cardiovascular disease in 2019.^[5]

History

Early years

Before forming the Cars, members of the band performed together in several different groups. Ric Ocasek and Benjamin Orr met in Cleveland, Ohio in the 1960s after Ocasek saw Orr performing with his band the Grasshoppers on the *Big 5 Show*, a local musical variety program. The two were members of various bands in Columbus, Ohio and Ann Arbor, Michigan before moving to Boston in the early 1970s. In Boston, Ocasek and Orr, along with lead guitarist Jas Goodkind, formed a Crosby, Stills and Nash-style folk rock band called Milkwood. In 1972, they released an album titled *How's the Weather* through Paramount Records that failed to chart.

After Milkwood, Ocasek and Orr formed the group Richard and the Rabbits, a name suggested by Jonathan Richman. The band included Greg Hawkes, who had studied at the Berklee School of Music and had played saxophone on Milkwood's album. Hawkes left to tour with Martin Mull and His Fabulous Furniture, a musical comedy act in which Mull played a variety of instruments. Ocasek and Orr then performed as an acoustic duo called Ocasek and Orr at the Idler Coffeehouse in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Some of the songs that they played became early Cars songs.

Ocasek and Orr later teamed with guitarist Elliot Easton (who had also studied at Berklee) in the band Cap'n Swing. The band also featured drummer Glenn Evans, later followed by Kevin Robichaud, and a jazzy bass player, which clashed with Ocasek's preference for a rock-and-roll sound. Orr was the lead vocalist and did not play an instrument. Cap'n Swing soon came to the attention of WBCN disc jockey Maxanne Sartori, who began playing songs from their demo tape on her show.

After being rejected by several record labels, Ocasek fired the bass player, keyboardist and drummer and resolved to form a band that better fit his style of writing. Orr took bass guitar and Robichaud was replaced by David Robinson, best known for his career with the Modern Lovers and DMZ. Robinson, whose sense of fashion exerted a strong influence on the band's image, suggested the band's new name, the Cars. The band was formed in 1976.^[6]

Rise in popularity, *The Cars*, and *Candy-O* (1976–1979)

After a warmup gig in a motel lounge outside of Boston, the Cars played their official first show at Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire a short time later on December 31, 1976.



Ric Ocasek in 2009.

Cap'n Swing's keyboardist Danny Schlifftman (later to join Gov't Mule under the name Danny Louis) played with the Cars for their first several gigs until Greg Hawkes was free to join in February 1977.^[7]

The Cars spent early 1977 playing throughout New England, developing the songs that appeared on their debut album. A nine-song demo tape was recorded in early 1977 and soon "Just What I Needed" was receiving heavy airplay on Boston radio stations WBCN and WCOZ.^[8] The band was offered record deals by Arista Records and Elektra Records and signed with Elektra, a label with comparatively fewer new-wave acts.^[9] The band's debut album The Cars was released in June 1978, reaching No. 18 on the Billboard 200.^[10] "Just What I Needed" was released as the debut single from the album, followed by "My Best Friend's Girl" and "Good Times Roll", all three charting on the Billboard Hot 100. The album featured multiple album tracks that received substantial airplay such as "You're All I've Got Tonight", "Bye Bye Love" and "Moving in Stereo".

The band's second album, Candy-O, was released in June 1979 and eclipsed the success of The Cars, peaking at No. 3 on the Billboard 200 album chart, 15 spots higher than the debut album. Featuring a cover created by the famed Playboy artist Alberto Vargas, the album featured the band's first top-20 single "Let's Go". Singles "It's All I Can Do" and "Double Life" were also released, but with less success.

Change in sound, *Panorama*, and *Shake It Up* (1980–1983)

Following the success of Candy-O, the band's third studio album Panorama was released in 1980. The album was considered more experimental than its predecessors and featured only one top-40 hit, "Touch and Go". Although the album peaked at No. 5 in the U.S., it did not receive the critical praise of The Cars and Candy-O, with Rolling Stone describing the album as "an out-and-out drag."

In 1981, the Cars purchased Intermedia Studios in Boston, renaming it Syncro Sound.^[11] The only Cars album recorded there was the band's fourth album Shake It Up, a more commercial album than Panorama. It was the band's first album to spawn a top-10 single with the title track, and it included another hit in "Since You're Gone". Following their 1982 tour, the Cars took a two-year break and the members worked on solo projects, with Ocasek and Hawkes both releasing debut albums (Beatitude and Niagara Falls, respectively).

***Heartbeat City*, *Door to Door*, superstardom, and first hiatus (1984–1988)**

The Cars reunited and released their most successful album, Heartbeat City, in 1984. The first single, "You Might Think", helped the Cars win Video of the Year at the first MTV Video Music Awards. Other hit singles from the album included "Magic", "Hello Again" and "Why Can't I Have You". "Drive", with Orr on lead vocals, gained notoriety when it was used in a video about the Ethiopian famine shown at the 1985 Live Aid concert at Wembley Stadium in London,^[12] although the Cars performed at the Live Aid concert in Philadelphia. The song became the band's most successful single, reaching No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 100. Actor/director Timothy Hutton directed the song's music video.

The band's 1985 Greatest Hits compilation included another hit single, "Tonight She Comes", which peaked at No. 7 hit on the Billboard Hot 100 and No. 1 on the Billboard Top Rock Tracks chart. The band members again pursued solo projects. Easton and Orr released their debut albums (Change No Change and The Lace, respectively), while Ocasek released his second solo album, This Side of Paradise. In 1987, the

Cars released their sixth album, *Door to Door*. It contained their last major international hit "You Are the Girl", but the album failed to approach the success of their previous albums. The group announced their breakup in February 1988.^[12]



The Cars in a publicity shot, circa 1984

Post breakup, solo careers and death of Orr (1989–2009)



Benjamin Orr (pictured in 1978) died of pancreatic cancer in October 2000. Greg Hawkes played bass on *Move Like This*, while Weezer's Scott Shriner played bass with the band at its Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction.

In the late 1990s, unsubstantiated rumors circulated of a Cars reunion. However, in 1995 Rhino Records released a two-CD set titled *Just What I Needed: The Cars*

Anthology, containing all the group's hits mixed with rarities such as demos and non-album B-sides. The label released *The Cars: Deluxe Edition* in 1999, the band's debut album in a two-CD format, and *Complete Greatest Hits*.

In the mid-1990s, Orr recorded tracks with guitarist John Kalishes for an unreleased follow-up to *The Lace* and performed with three bands: his own band ORR, the Voices of Classic Rock and Big People. Orr appeared with his bandmates from the Cars one final

time in an interview for a documentary about the group before his death from pancreatic cancer at age 53 on October 3, 2000.

Ocasek continued to perform as a solo artist, having released more than seven studio albums. He established a notable career as a music producer working with bands such as Weezer, Hole and No Doubt.^[13] Robinson retired from music and spent most of his time working in his restaurant. In 2005, Easton and Hawkes combined their talents with Todd Rundgren, Prairie Prince (the Tubes, Journey) and Kasim Sulton (Utopia, Meat Loaf) in a revamped lineup, the New Cars, to perform classic Cars songs along with some new original material and selections from Rundgren's career.

In 2008, the band's first album was released for the video game *Rock Band*.^[14]

Reunion, *Move Like This* and second hiatus (2010–2017)

In 2010, the surviving founding members of the Cars suggested a reunion when Ocasek, Easton, Hawkes and Robinson placed a photo of the four members together, taken at Millbrook Sound Studios, on their Facebook page.^[15] On October 13, they also posted a snippet of a new song titled "Blue Tip". A picture of Jacknife Lee in the studio was posted, hinting that he would produce the new album.^[16]

In October, *Billboard* reported that the Cars were recording a new album at veteran engineer Paul Orofino's studio in Millbrook, New York. A music clip of the new song "Sad Song" was added to the band's Facebook page on December 7, 2010. A clip of a song titled "Free" was shared on January 1, 2011. The



In 2005, guitarist Elliot Easton (left, pictured performing with the band) formed the New Cars with Greg Hawkes and added Todd Rundgren, Kasim Sulton and Prairie Prince to the lineup. The supergroup disbanded after one album and one single. The band also performed songs from Rundgren's career.

official debut video for "Blue Tip" was released on February 17. The video features the members of the band and New York-based street artist Joe Iurato. The surviving Cars agreed to not replace Orr, so Hawkes and Lee handled all of the bass parts.^[17]

The new album *Move Like This* was released on May 10 by Hear Music/Concord Music Group, debuting at No. 7 on *Billboard's* album chart. It featured 10 songs in under 40 minutes.^[18] "Sad Song" was released to radio stations on March 1 as the album's first single.^{[19][20]} In May 2011, the Cars embarked on a ten-city tour of the United States and Canada^[21] and also performed at Lollapalooza in Chicago in August. On the tour, Orr's bass parts were performed by Hawkes on keyboard and bass, and the vocals for songs originally sung by Orr ("Just What I Needed", "Let's Go" and "Moving in Stereo") were performed by Ocasek. In an interview, Ocasek was asked whether the band would have reunited if Orr had still been alive, responding: "Ben and I had a real cold war going that lasted about 23 years. I could never really figure out exactly why, but I think there was a lot of jealousy because I wrote the songs and I got a lot of attention. And there was all kinds of weird stuff, like he said, 'My girlfriend writes songs, let's use one of those or two of those.' I said, 'No, that's not the Cars.'"^[22]

The Cars once again became inactive after the tour's conclusion in 2011.

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction and death of Ric Ocasek (2018–2019)

After seven years of inactivity, the group reconvened, along with Weezer's Scott Shriner on bass, to play a four-song set at their 2018 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.^[23] The band played "You Might Think" (which Weezer covered for the *Cars 2* soundtrack), "My Best Friend's Girl", "Moving in Stereo" and "Just What I Needed." They were introduced by Killers frontman Brandon Flowers.

On September 15, 2019, Ocasek was found dead of natural causes at his New York home at the age of 75.^{[5][24]}

Musical style

The Cars' music has been described as new wave,^[25] pop rock^{[26][27][28]} and power pop,^[29] and is influenced by proto-punk, garage rock and bubblegum pop.^[25] They have also used rockabilly in songs such as "My Best Friend's Girl".^[30] Critic Robert Palmer wrote that the Cars "have taken some important

but disparate contemporary trends—punk minimalism, the labyrinthine synthesizer and guitar textures of art rock, the 1950s rockabilly revival and the melodious terseness of power pop—and mixed them into a personal and appealing blend."^[2]

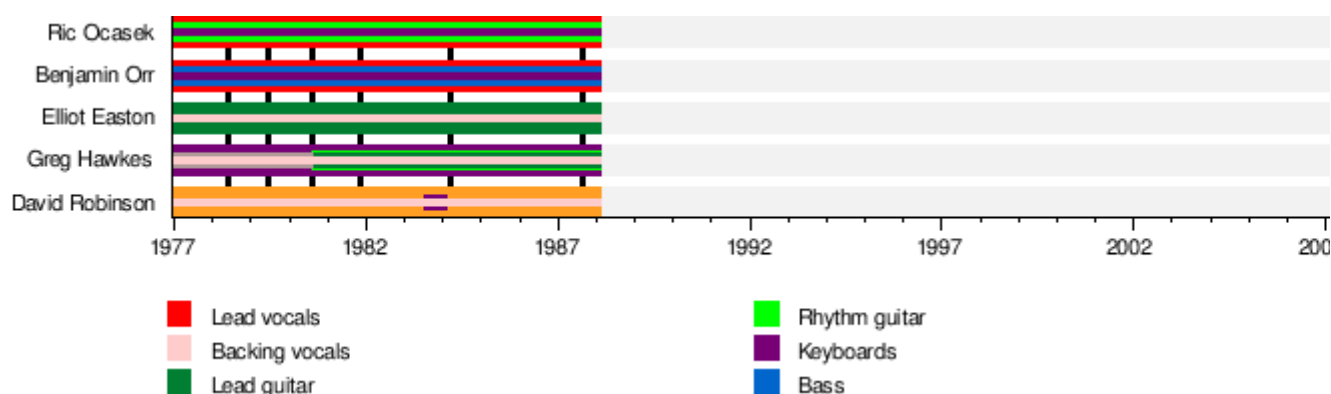
Band members

- Ric Ocasek – lead and backing vocals, rhythm guitar, keyboards (1976–1988, 2000, 2010–2011, 2018; died 2019)
- Elliot Easton – lead guitar, backing vocals (1976–1988, 2000, 2010–2011, 2018)
- Benjamin Orr – lead and backing vocals, bass guitar, keyboards (1976–1988, 2000; died 2000)
- Greg Hawkes – keyboards, guitars, backing vocals (1976–1988, 2000, 2010–2011, 2018), saxophone (1976–1979), bass (2010–2011)
- David Robinson – drums, percussion, backing vocals (1976–1988, 2000, 2010–2011, 2018), keyboards (1983–1984)



In 2018, the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. This would be the band's final performance before Ric Ocasek (pictured in 2009) died the following year.

Timeline



Discography

- *The Cars* (1978)
- *Candy-O* (1979)
- *Panorama* (1980)
- *Shake It Up* (1981)
- *Heartbeat City* (1984)
- *Door to Door* (1987)
- *Move Like This* (2011)

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External links



Rock music portal

- [Official website](http://www.thecars.org/) (<http://www.thecars.org/>) 
- [AllMusic biography](https://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-cars-p3850) (<https://www.allmusic.com/artist/the-cars-p3850>)
- [The Cars](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1275069/) (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1275069/>) at [IMDb](#)

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