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### *The Hippie Aesthetic: Cultural Positioning and Musical Ambition in Early Progressive Rock*

This study takes its part of departure from two problems that regularly recur in historical accounts of rock music. The first problem consists of a strong tendency among many writers to neglect much mainstream rock from the Seventies, often to focus on the rise of punk and its transformation into new wave in the second half of the decade, or perhaps also to chronicle the emergence of disco and the strong reactions to it. Bands such as Led Zeppelin, the Allman Brothers, Elton John, the Eagles and many others are frequently mentioned only in passing, while highly successful progressive rock bands such as Jethro Tull, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, and Yes are neglected almost entirely.<sup>1</sup> The second problem is that rock music from the 1966-69 period--frequently referred to as "psychedelic" music--is often kept separate from the mainstream Seventies rock that follows. There is even a tendency on the part of some writers to view early Seventies as a period of decline for rock, resulting in a celebration of psychedelia without much consideration of its clear musical affect on the rock that followed.<sup>2</sup> These two tendencies result in unbalanced historical accounts of rock that not only leave out much of the music many listeners today associate with "classic rock," but also miss some of the important larger themes in the development of the style as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

One historical thread that can be traced almost all the way back to rock's earliest days in the mid-Fifties is the theme of musical ambition--the idea that pop can aspire to be "better" or more sophisticated kind of music by employing techniques and approaches often borrowed from other styles (like classical and jazz) to make pop more interesting and original. In the second half of the Sixties, the musical ambition increasingly evident in a series of recordings by Leiber and Stoller, Phil Spector, The Beatles, and the Beach Boys begins to coalesce into an attitude toward music making that I call the "hippie aesthetic." Identifying and delineating this aesthetic attitude helps us to recognize the strong connections between psychedelic rock in the late Sixties and the variety of rock styles that proliferated in the Seventies, suggesting a stylistic arc that extends from about 1966 to at least as far forward as 1980. Consideration of the hippie aesthetic not only helps to unify styles that are often considered in relative isolation from one another, but it also establishes what disco and punk (and new wave) were rejecting at the end of the Seventies, clarifying how these styles created enough stylistic distance from mainstream rock to be considered new and different to listeners at the time. As we shall see, progressive rock turns out to be the Seventies style that most clearly and completely manifests the hippie aesthetic. Placing progressive rock at the center of a historical account of the Seventies is perhaps the most radical interpretive assertion in what follows.

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<sup>1</sup>The two large-scale video documentaries of rock's history, *Rock & Roll* (WGBH Boston and the BBC, 1995) and *The History of Rock 'n' Roll* (Time-Life Video and Television, 1995), could be taken as examples of the way in which Seventies mainstream rock is treated in most historical accounts. Both documentaries run to ten episodes and each devote a full episode to punk, while giving less consideration to Seventies mainstream rock. The Time-Life documentary is better in its treatment of Seventies rock, devoting an entire episode to the Seventies ("Have a Nice Decade"), but even here the treatment is uneven and driven partly by a theme that casts this music as decadent.

<sup>2</sup>The two large-scale documentaries could be used as examples of this second tendency as well. Among rock critics and journalists, there is an overwhelming bias to view the late Sixties in a positive light and Seventies music as an unfortunate decline into commercialism at the expense of musical authenticity.

<sup>3</sup>The American "classic rock" commercial radio format holds Seventies mainstream rock at the center of its playlists, even though it also neglects most progressive rock except the most well-known tracks by the most successful groups. This occurs, at least in part, because tracks over five or six minutes in length do not fit well within the classic-rock format, which--like most commercial radio formats--is concerned with drawing and keeping the biggest possible audience. Long songs increase the possibility that listeners will tune to another station.

Before engaging in a more detailed discussion of these issues, however, it is probably helpful to acknowledge that this paper offers an American perspective on rock's history. An understanding of rock's history from a British, Italian or other perspective may well differ from the one presented here. In Italy, for instance, progressive rock eclipsed many other rock styles in the Seventies, making Peter Gabriel-era Genesis and even Gentle Giant much bigger stars in Italy than they were elsewhere at the same time. And in the UK, Yes regularly won polls and stole headlines in the music newspapers *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* during the early Seventies, garnering praise for the sophistication of their music and arrangements, as well as for the instrumental virtuosity of the band members. The American market remained the key to greatest success for many acts, however, and even there, progressive rock bands did quite well, even if the field of play was arranged in some significantly different ways.<sup>4</sup>

## The Historical Frame

Before considering the attitudes that helped form the culture and aesthetics of late Sixties and early Seventies rock, it will be useful to briefly review the history of these years. In the 1966-69 period, rock music was filled with musically ambitious experimentation and eclecticism. During these years, rock musicians continually experimented with many musical styles and approaches, creating diverse and often surprising musical combinations. In San Francisco, the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead experimented with classical influences, and with long, improvised arrangements influenced by jazz practices (this was especially true in live performances). In Los Angeles, the studio experimentation of Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys that had resulted in *Pet Sounds* and *Good Vibrations* began to give way to the new jazz and country influences in the Byrds' music, as well as the dramatically dark music of Jim Morrison and the Doors. In London, the mainstream went psychedelic under the influence of the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and Cream, significantly affecting American bands, while the more radical and often avant-garde experimentation of Soft Machine, Pink Floyd, Tomorrow remained within the British psychedelic culture.<sup>5</sup>

The Seventies were a period of musical development and expansion for hippie rock. Rock musicians refined some of the stylistic blends from the psychedelic years into a wide variety of specific sub-styles. In progressive rock, British bands such as Yes, ELP, Jethro Tull, Genesis, Gentle Giant, King Crimson, and Henry Cow extended and further explored the use of classical music in rock, often producing concept albums of symphonic scope and filled with classical references and aspirations.<sup>6</sup> Following along stylistic lines explored by Cream's long jams and Miles Davis' fusion of jazz with rock, John McLaughlin and the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Chick Corea's *Return to Forever* brought jazz to rock audiences, while horn bands like Chicago and Blood Sweat & Tears, and song-oriented bands such as Traffic and Steely Dan brought a strong dose of jazz to their music. In the late Sixties, the Byrds and Bob Dylan had both experimented with bringing together country and rock styles, and in the Seventies Crosby, Stills & Nash, the Eagles, and America all refined this approach, blending vocal harmonies and acoustic guitars with a strong pop sensibility. Jim Morrison's theatrical tendencies with the Doors were picked up by Alice Cooper and David Bowie, who each adopted stage personae and were outdone in this

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<sup>4</sup> American critics frequently write—however tacitly and even unintentionally—as if the history of rock in the United States is the history of rock everywhere. Most American writers are aware that there are some differences with the way this history can be viewed in Britain, but perspectives drawn from elsewhere in Europe are far less understood in the US.

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph and the two that follow quickly summarize the more detailed treatment of these years contained in Covach, 2006. For historical accounts of progressive rock, see Macan, 1997; Stump, 1997; Martin, 1998; Christophe Pirene, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> King Crimson and Henry Cow are the exception here in that their engagement with classical music was more oriented toward avant-garde music than toward 19<sup>th</sup>-century symphonic music. According to Chris Cutler, this was practically a point of honor for Henry Cow, and one way that they separated themselves out from the other progressive-rock bands of the time. To a certain extent, however, all of these bands employed techniques derived from 20<sup>th</sup>-century classical music. Cutler's analysis of rock-music's development in the Sixties and Seventies can be found in Cutler, 1993: 106-135.

regard late in the decade only by blood-spewing, flame-spitting stage productions of Kiss. The blues rock tendencies of the Rolling Stones and the Yardbirds were continued by Deep Purple, whose blending of blues and classical would form the foundation for later heavy metal, and Led Zeppelin, whose ambitious *Stairway to Heaven* became one of the decade's most well-known tracks. The earnestness of Sixties singer-songwriters like Bob Dylan and Paul Simon was continued by Elton John, Billy Joel, and (in a career rebirth from her Brill Building days of the early Sixties) Carole King. Far from being a period that is stylistically distinct from the late Sixties, the Seventies are clearly a continuation and extension of psychedelia, different mostly in the separation of late-Sixties stylistic features to form a wide variety of distinct sub-styles.

In the 1977-79 years, punk and disco markedly reject the hippie musical values that can be traced back to the mid Sixties. In the second half of the Seventies, many fans and musicians began to believe that rock had become too professional and polished, and that the music had been compromised by the tremendous growth of the music industry, calling the result "corporate rock." One result of this backlash was punk, which celebrated a back-to-basics simplicity, while another was disco, which celebrated dancing. In the UK, the punk movement was led (if only briefly) by the Sex Pistols, whose scandal-ridden success inspired the Clash, Elvis Costello, and the Police. In the US, the Ramones, Talking Heads, and Blondie had all been active before the Sex Pistols burst onto the scene and enjoyed varying degrees of success after, though the Cars were the first to score hit records and radio play in the wake of the punk tantrum. Because punk quickly developed a trouble-making image that scared off record label and others inside the music industry, "new wave" emerged as a safer alternative, substituting violent social misbehavior with a cool and calculated sense of irony. While punk and new wave had little in common socially with disco—indeed, it would be tough to find stranger bedfellows in the late Seventies—these two musical cultures were united in their rejection of hippie rock and most of what it stood for: both styles defined themselves in part by what they were not, and they definitely were not hippie rock.

### **The "Hippie Aesthetic"**

As mentioned above, much rock music from the early and mid Seventies was driven by a collection of attitudes and practices that can be called the "hippie aesthetic." As we have seen in our brief survey of the 1966-1980 period, the hippie aesthetic grew out of psychedelia and helps explain how many of the distinct styles that emerged in the Seventies share common musical and cultural values. We will now consider the components of this aesthetic attitude in greater detail, and these musical and aesthetic features will be divided into discussions of musical ambition, technology, virtuosity, lyrics, and concept albums. Because I consider progressive rock to most strongly and consistently exemplify these characteristics, I will make particular reference to progressive rock bands and their music in the discussion that follows.

*Musical Ambition.* The first and most dominant characteristic of the hippie aesthetic is the tendency to imbue rock with a sense of seriousness of purpose. From a musical point of view, this often took the form of borrowing from styles that had a high degree of cultural prestige, such as classical music and jazz. Hippie rock also borrowed from folk and blues styles, but drawing on these styles gave the music a sense of earthy groundedness that can often balance the music's higher aspirations. Jazz is mostly invoked through extended soloing, and often soloing employing modal scales within sections in a single key. The uses of classical music can be divided into two types: those which evoke the "great classical tradition" (mostly 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> European century instrumental music), and those that employ techniques and practices more often associated with 20<sup>th</sup>-century modernist and avant-garde music. The use of classical music and techniques, drawn from the "great classical tradition," can be found in Beatles' music, starting with the use of the string quartet in *Yesterday*, for instance, and leading through *Eleanor Rigby* to *She's Leaving*

*Home*.<sup>7</sup> Beginning with The Nice, Keith Emerson developed a reputation for adapting familiar classical pieces for rock band; he continued this practice with Emerson, Lake & Palmer, perhaps most famously with that band's adaptation of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. The recorded sounds of symphonic strings and concert chorus as found on the Mellotron keyboard became central timbres in the music of King Crimson, Genesis, and Yes; the lush string sounds in King Crimson's *Epitaph* or Genesis' *Watchers of the Skies* provide representative examples. The use of harpsichord or classical guitar, perhaps featured most obviously in Yes' *Madrigal*, are clear references to classical music, as are the recorders that can be found in the music of Gentle Giant. In addition to appropriating the timbres and textures from classical music, progressive rock musicians also borrowed ideas of large-scale form, motivic presentation and development, and counterpoint and contrapuntal textures. Perhaps the most obvious use traditional contrapuntal practices may be found in Gentle Giant's *On Reflection*, which is built around a traditional fugal exposition, presented initially in a four-part *a capella* vocal texture, and later repeated using various instrumental combinations.<sup>8</sup>

Avant-garde elements, drawn from the more provocative, experimental areas of classical music, also played a role in the hippie aesthetic. The use of aleatoric procedures can be found in much of the Beatles' music. In *Tomorrow Never Knows*, for instance, tape loops are mixed in real time, while in the two string interludes in *A Day in the Life*, string players were told to start by playing in their low register and move gradually higher at their own discretion, eventually locking into an E-major triad. Members of the Grateful Dead, a markedly improvisational band, "performed" the mix of their 1968 *Anthem of the Sun* album at the mixing console, working with previously recorded music to create each of the sides of the record in real time. Pink Floyd has consistently worked with electronic sounds in the music, especially in the first few years of the band's history. Even a tremendously successful album such as *Dark Side of the Moon* contains such electronic and tape-produced timbres, as can be readily heard in *On The Run*.<sup>9</sup> While most rock musicians do not have traditional compositional training and do not notate their music as part of the composition process, Gentle Giant and Henry Cow are two exceptions, and Henry Cow's music might in some cases cross over the line between rock and modern classical music, making it more "avant-garde chamber rock" than progressive rock in the sense that we have been using that term here.

*Technology*. Ambitious rock made use of the most up-to-date technologies in its quest for greater sophistication, and the development of recording technology and advances in synthesizer technology were central to many hippie rockers. In the period starting roughly in the early Sixties and extending into the early Seventies, recording technology developed from use of 2- and 3-track machines, to 8- and 16-track, and then to 24- and 48-track capabilities. Over this period, musicians increasingly use the recording studio as a kind of composer's sketch pad. Brian Wilson's mid Sixties studio experimentations—which produced *Pet Sounds* and *Good Vibrations*—produced music that was only possible in the studio. The Beatles' retreat from live performance into studio experimentation—and the release of *Strawberry Fields Forever* and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—further accelerated a trend among rock musicians toward studio experimentation. By the early Seventies, short sections of music were typically built up in layers using multi-track recording techniques, with these sections edited together to create long—

<sup>7</sup> The use of classical strings in the sense described here can be traced back at least to the music of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, a songwriting team that also produced some of rock's most important records. The 1959 Drifters track, *There Goes My Baby*, was considered progressive for its day in its use of orchestral instruments in a way that drew a certain amount of attention to these timbres. In a famous and oft-repeated story, Atlantic Records' Jerry Wexler had doubts about the track because he thought it sounded like a radio stuck between a classical station and a rhythm and blues station. Leiber and Stoller's experimental attitude in the studio led directly to the Phil Spector Wall of Sound and the production experimentation of Brian Wilson, which encouraged the Beatles (with the help of George Martin) to experiment even more.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion of the classical-music influences on progressive rock, see Spicer, 2000: 77-112; Kawamoto, 2005: 223-244; Karl, 2002: 121-142; Moore, 2003: 158-172; Covach, 1997: 3-31.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the avant-garde elements in Pink Floyd's music, see Schaffner, 1992 and Cotner, 2002: 65-90.

sometimes very long—album tracks. *Strawberry Fields*, for instance, is actually the product of two recorded versions in different keys that were spliced together using studio technology. Yes' *Close to the Edge* was recorded in short sections and assembled into the final version without the band having performed this version before the editing was completed.<sup>10</sup>

The first music synthesizers were large and by no means usable for live performance, housed mostly in university music departments and used by a new generation of composers who turned to electronic music in the decades following the Second World War. By the late Sixties, however, synthesizers had become more portable and are and began to be used in recording studios. *Switched on Bach*, a recording of J.S. Bach's music on the synthesizer by Walter (later Wendy) Carlos was probably the first well-known recording of synthesizer music. The Beatles used the synthesizer on their last studio album, *Abbey Road*, with George Harrison becoming an early enthusiastic supporter of the synthesizer. When Robert Moog introduced the Mini-Moog, a portable synthesizer that made the instrument practical for live on-stage performance, keyboardists such as Yes' Rick Wakeman and Keith Emerson featured the synthesizer prominently in their shows and recordings, as did Genesis' Tony Banks, playing on an ARP synthesizer.<sup>11</sup> While the synthesizer was closely associated with progressive rock in the Seventies, a wide range of rock musicians made use of it, from Edgar Winter and Stevie Wonder to Joe Walsh and Steve Miller. The synthesizer was also picked up by jazz-rock fusion bands in the Seventies, with Return to Forever's Chick Corea, Weather Report's Joe Zawinol, the Mahavishnu Orchestra's Jan Hammer, and Herbie Hancock all using various Moogs and ARPs.

*Virtuosity.* As the Sixties unfolded, many rock musicians increasingly strove to be the best players they could possibly be. The Beatles and Bob Dylan provided the model for musicians who wrote and performed their own music, always playing on their own records, but it was probably the friendly competition between guitarists Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix in the late Sixties that established the idea that a rock musician could also be a virtuoso musician. And as late Sixties rock listeners turned more toward listening carefully to the music, it became possible for rock musicians to build a reputation based on their instrumental prowess. Rockers interested in developing their technical skills often turned to classical and jazz styles for models of instrumental virtuosity. Under the influence of John Coltrane, The Byrds' Roger McGuinn had quoted the jazz saxophonist's *India* in the band's hit single *Eight Miles High*. Hendrix and Clapton both improvised freely in live performance, blending blues elements with modal jazz. San Francisco bands such as the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane were well known for their extended jams onstage—something the Beatles or the Stones had never really done but that the more improvisatory bands embraced with great enthusiasm, as did their fans. Progressive rockers were also very influenced by jazz, but these musicians also imitated classical-music virtuosity. The classical guitar interludes of Steve Howe of Yes or Steve Hackett of Genesis seemed inspired by the playing of Andres Segovia and Julian Bream, while the grand piano stylings of Keith Emerson and Rick Wakeman left no doubt that they were drawing on classical practices and techniques, with Wakeman throwing some pipe organ into the mix. Following in the footsteps of bassist Paul McCartney and the Who's John Entwistle, who had developed and approach to the electric bass that allowed it to play a more melodic role than it had before, Yes' Chris Squire, Genesis' Michael Rutherford, and Gentle Giant's Ray Shulman further raised the bar for technical command and made the bass into an equal partner with the lead guitar. Drummers Carl Palmer, Yes' Bill Bruford, and Genesis' Phil Collins were among the many who likewise raised the technical standard for percussionists, often adding orchestral percussion instruments to their increasingly drum kits.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of recording and its role in rock music, see Zak, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive historical account of the development of the synthesizer, see Pinch - Trocco, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of virtuosity in progressive rock, see Macan, 1997: 46-51. See also Covach, 2002: 113-134. In his Chapter Two, Macan discusses the musical features of Seventies progressive rock using a different grouping of features than I use, though Macan makes no claims beyond the stylistic boundaries of English progressive rock and so is making a different kind of argument than I am offering here. For a consideration of virtuosity in heavy metal, Walsler, 1993: 57-107.

While the progressive rockers were those most associated with promoting virtuosity, a certain pride in one's level of technical achievement was a relatively consistent attitude among most rock musicians of the first half of the Seventies. Even if the music some played was less overtly ambitious and complicated than progressive rock, most players wanted to be respected as experienced professionals, and nothing would have been worse than to have been considered an amateur or hack. This would change drastically with the arrival of punk and new wave, which reacted strongly against this kind of professionalism. Fans too wanted to think of their favorite bands as skilled players, and many local musicians worked diligently in garages and basements to copy the every lick and nuance of their favorite recording, fueling the sales of magazines and musical equipment that could help them realize that goal. Perhaps no element captures this aspect of the hippie aesthetic quite like the "studio musician"—a player with excellent music-reading and improvisational skills who could walk into a recording session and nail his or her part quickly and efficiently. This level of highly skilled professionalism was widely respected and admired; Jimmy Page and John Paul Jones had been session players before forming Led Zeppelin and Rick Wakeman had played many sessions before joining Yes. Steely Dan was known for their use of the top session players in New York and Los Angeles, as were Paul Simon and Joni Mitchell. The virtuosity and professional conscientiousness of progressive rockers was thus in many ways only the most obvious instance of something that permeated much rock music in the Seventies.

*Lyrics and "big ideas."* As rock became more ambitious—stylistically, technologically, and music-technically—musicians and fans of the style were no longer satisfied with lyrics that focused on sentimental romantic themes. The naïve love songs of rock's first decade began to be replaced by songs with increasingly serious-minded lyrics. With only a few exceptions, lyrics of most rock and roll from the Fifties and early Sixties had dealt with issues of teen life: romance, cars, dancing, parents, etc.<sup>13</sup> Some of Leiber and Stoller's songs for the Coasters engage issues of race and social concern, while others are ambitious in that they attempt to tell a story (borrowing from Broadway musicals). While *Will You Love Me Tomorrow*, a 1960 song penned and produced by Carole King and Gerry Goffin, engages issues of teenage sexuality in a way that was daring in its day, and some of Chuck Berry's songs (*Memphis* especially) betray a new concern for interesting lyrics, most rock lyrics remained fairly tame, even if the performances are often much more provocative.<sup>14</sup> The change in pop lyrics can be traced to the emergence of Bob Dylan in the mid Sixties, and to Dylan's transformation of folk music into the singer-songwriter style. Folk lyrics had often dealt with issues of social and communal concern, but Dylan began to craft lyrics with a more personal, poetic, and philosophical focus, turning the "we" of folk community-building (as his detractors would famously quip) into the "me" of individual expression. If the Beatles influenced Dylan to turn to the electric guitar in 1965, Dylan certainly influenced the Beatles to get more serious about their lyrics and soon John Lennon was confessing his unhappiness in *Help* and Paul McCartney was contemplating alienation in *Eleanor Rigby*. By the 1967 Summer of Love, rock lyrics frequently strove to be "relevant," as *She Loves You* became *All You Need Is Love*.

In some progressive rock of the Seventies, lyrics deal with social, cultural, and political issues, offering sometimes blistering critique of government, institutions, and social practices. Jethro Tull provide some of the most obvious examples in this regard: their 1971 album *Aqualung* offers a sustained attack on the church and its uncomprehending duplicity in the face of poverty and homelessness. *Thick as a Brick* from 1972 continues this critical attitude by focusing on

<sup>13</sup> The pop songs of the American Tin Pan Alley composers from the first half of the twentieth century could also be quite saccharine and innocuous, though there were also some extremely clever and innovative lyrics as well. Most of these songs never seriously engaged the kinds of issues and concerns we will consider with regard to hippie rock, however. For a comprehensive survey of Tin Pan Alley songwriting, see Wilder, 1972.

<sup>14</sup> The widespread practice in the Fifties of covering rhythm and blues hits for a pop audience while changing the sexually suggestive lyrics serves to reinforce the notion that there were limits that pop lyrics could probably not cross. Some lyrics did sneak through, however, such as Little Richard's *Long Tall Sally* or *Good Golly Miss Molly*, and the "one-eyed cat" in Bill Haley's cover of *Shake, Rattle, and Roll*.

provincial values and cultural practices in England. A gentler and perhaps more arcane critique of British culture can be found in Genesis' *Selling England by the Pound*, while *The Musical Box* weaves a dark, mischievous, and surreal tale of Victorian perversity among the British aristocracy. Other progressive-rock lyrics deal with spirituality, though almost never from the point of view of institutional Christianity. Eastern philosophy and the "wisdom of the ancients" are favorite themes, and here Yes' *Close to the Edge* (influenced by Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha*) and *Tales From Topographic Oceans* (influenced by Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*) might serve as representative examples, though Jethro Tull's *A Passion Play* deals with life after death and Genesis' *Supper's Ready* contemplates the apocalypse. Other progressive-rock lyrics deal with fantasy and science-fiction themes, often with social and cultural critiques gently concealed beneath the surface. Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Tarkus* and *Brain Salad Surgery* provide clear instances, the first dealing with a struggle between comic-book-style fantasy beasts, while the second flashes into a dark, computer-controlled future. Dylan made an art of what he called the "finger wagging" song—a song that levels a direct and often unrelenting criticism on some target. This approach is picked up by the Beatles and the Kinks, among many others, and also by The Who's Pete Townshend, whose *Tommy* is an extended indictment of what he takes to be the superficiality of hippie culture. Ian Anderson's lyrics for Jethro Tull are probably the most consistent example of progressive-rock finger wagging, and can at times be quite aggressive and direct, as in *My God*.

Among other styles in Seventies rock that contained ambitious lyrics, the singer-songwriters probably provide the clearest parallels. The music of Paul Simon, James Taylor, Billy Joel, and Elton John, for instance, depend on the poetic power of the lyrics, which are often the focus of the song. And while these kinds of songs often deal with personal feelings and reflections, they can also engage cultural and philosophical issues, as in Neil Young's *Needle and the Damage Done* or Harry Chapin's *Cat's in the Hat*, for instance. The lyrics of rockers like Bruce Springsteen and Bob Seger, or Alice Cooper and David Bowie, are often rich in imagery and ambitious in scope, further reinforcing the idea that the ambitiousness of progressive-rock lyrics is a feature of much other hippie rock.

*Concept albums and conceptual music.* The turn toward serious-minded lyrics, combined with the growth of musical ambitiousness, led to the rise of the concept album in rock music. Many fans and critics think of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as the first important concept album in rock music. While John Lennon denied that any of his songs on that album were written with the Sgt. Pepper "concept" in mind, it is nonetheless true that the album was understood to be a concept album, and soon many other bands and artists were imitating it. The most useful definition of the concept album views it as a collection of songs that somehow tell a story or at least address the same general topic or set of topics—the "concept" of the album. In the case of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the unifying idea is that the Beatles portray the members of this fictional town band, and the album unfolds a make-believe show, beginning with an introductory song in which the audience is welcomed, and leading directly into the number by Billy Shears (Ringo). The concept breaks off at this point, though the introductory number returns at the end to introduce the final track, *A Day in the Life*. Album packaging added a new dimension to concept albums, with cover art and illustrations playing a central role and sometimes providing information that makes the story or unifying themes clearer or more obvious. The elaborate packaging of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* served as a model for later albums such as *Tommy* and *Thick as a Brick*. The distinctive covers of Yes and Pink Floyd albums of the Seventies—designed by Roger Dean and Hipgnosis respectively—were central to the experience of the music they contained.

Progressive rockers warmly embraced the concept album, so much so that a progressive rock album that is not a concept album is probably more the exception than the rule. Among the many that could be listed, Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick*, Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon*, Rick Wakeman's *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*, and

Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Tarkus* are classic examples. But progressive rockers were not the only ones producing concept albums. David Bowie, The Who, Alice Cooper, Meat Loaf, Queen, Heart, Todd Rundgren, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, George Clinton, the Eagles and many others released concept albums during the Seventies.

In many ways, the concept album reinforced psychedelic practice, allowing music to act as a kind of "trip," and so it is thus not surprising that so many groups whose musical roots were in Sixties rock found the concept album idea appealing. Some groups even used their live shows to further extend an album's concept, sometimes with props, lights, and images, but also at times by acting songs out in a theatrical manner. Peter Gabriel, David Bowie, Pink Floyd, and Alice Cooper were perhaps the best known for this, but it was Kiss that took rock theater to its most extravagant point by the end of the decade. Even for those Seventies band and artists who did not release concept albums, the album remained an important aesthetic context for their music. In many ways, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* initiated the era of "album-oriented rock," which celebrated the idea that the album as a whole is more important than any single song on it. Before the overwhelming success of *Sgt. Pepper's*, singles were central to a band's commercial success; after *Sgt. Pepper's*, it was the album that mattered most.

### **The Hippie Aesthetic and Rock's History**

We have now returned to the point from which this discussion began, and to my two central claims for interpreting rock's history: the first of these is that the hippie aesthetic helps us to understand rock music from 1966-1980 as a continuous body of music. From the psychedelic experimentalism and eclecticism of the late Sixties, a wide variety of styles emerged and developed throughout the Seventies, in many cases separating out and refining stylistic characteristics of psychedelic music that had previously coexisted but which now became markers of new and distinct styles within rock. This interpretation differs from most other accounts, which tend to separate late Sixties music off from Seventies rock, celebrating the former while remaining ambiguous at best about the latter. It is the hippie aesthetic that unifies this music, both in terms of the attitudes of musicians and listeners. It also helps us understand how punk, new wave, and disco challenged hippie rock at the end of the Seventies, and provides a context for understanding why rock fans and musicians reacted so strongly against these newer styles, which seemed to negate crucial elements of the hippie aesthetic.

My second claim is more controversial: because progressive rock is that style that most thoroughly and completely embraces the hippie aesthetic, it deserves a central place in discussions of Seventies rock, and it certainly merits a far more central position than most critics and historians have been willing to grant it thus far. In many ways, progressive rock is the clearest heir of Sixties psychedelia, and it is thus crucial in tracing the impact of psychedelia on the music that followed it. Perhaps because it is so clearly a product of its time, progressive rock has resisted the kind of cultural recycling that other styles have experienced in the past couple of decades. Since the mid 1990s and fueled in large part by the development of the Internet, an enthusiastic progressive rock underground scene has produced new bands, magazines, websites, and international festivals. Original Seventies bands such as Yes and Jethro Tull still tour, though they no longer play as many stadiums as they once did. Tribute bands abound worldwide, with Gabriel-era Genesis groups especially playing to packed houses across Europe and North America. Still, progressive rock remains a style too strongly marked by the hippie aesthetic to be appropriated for other uses.

While progressive rock may have gone underground in the period after 1980, elements of the hippie aesthetic have re-emerged in often surprising ways. The clearest continuation of the hippie aesthetic can be found in Eighties heavy metal, where virtuosity, use of classical music, concept albums, and ambitious lyrics remained important. The ambitious nature of concept albums also returned in music videos by high-profile artists and bands such as Michael Jackson, the



Eurythmics, and Madonna, where the concept of the album was replaced by the concept of the video. Serious minded and poetic lyrics remain a feature of much rock music since the Seventies, though less frequently addressing “big” issues in direct ways, perhaps in an attempt to avoid being dubbed “pretentious.” The individual elements of the hippie aesthetic are thus not restricted to music of the 1966-1980 period; indeed, certain of these elements can be found both before and after this era. It is rather the combination of these elements that defines the hippie aesthetic and allows us to posit a relatively unified stylistic period in rock’s history—one with progressive rock at the center.

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