Periods in Progressive Rock and the Problem of Authenticity

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Though "largely ignored" by much mainstream popular music scholarship, and "largely despised" by most critics (Macan 1997:3), the genre of "self-consciously complex" rock music usually known as 1970s "progressive" (or "prog") rock was very popular and influential across England and North America in its time (Holm-Hudson 2002:2), and its fan base remains dedicated to this day. Progressive rock exhibits a startling eclecticism and diverse sources of influence, and as such is notoriously difficult to define from a stylistic point of view (Holm-Hudson 2002:2). The label "progressive" instead implies association with the late 1960s counterculture (Macan 1997:13–14, 144–66) and, more directly, an aesthetic of experimentation and artistic freedom at a time when recording technologies were developing rapidly and record companies enjoyed a large degree of financial success (Moore 2001:65). Overall, though, the genre is perhaps "best remembered" for "epic subject matter," "gargantuan stage shows," and "dazzling virtuosity" (Macan 1997:3), and, in the wake of the Beatles' 1967 *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, for developing a rock music that seemed to invite the audience to listen rather than dance (Covach 1997:3).

Of the numerous tropes surrounding progressive rock bands, some of the most pervasive and persistent concern the perception that these groups' music and public personae are indebted to the classical music tradition. Edward Macan argues that "the defining features of progressive rock . . . are all drawn from the European classical tradition," and these range from "orchestral" timbres to extended structural forms to "metrical and instrumental virtuosity" (1997:12–13). In all likelihood fans do not hear these references the way a musicologist would, but the perception of complexity, seriousness, and "depth" in the style does mean that many fans consider the music a sort of rock-based "art-music substitute" (Bowman 2002:184–89; Covach 1997:8). In interviews, Jon Anderson of Yes has talked about "creating music that is around us today in an orchestral way" (quoted in Covach 1997:7), and Carl Palmer of Emerson, Lake, and Palmer (ELP) has somewhat patronizingly stated, "We hope if anything we're encouraging the kids to listen to music that has more quality" (Bangs [1974] 2002:52). While onstage, progressive rockers often move very little so they can concentrate on their individual parts and seem "serious" (Keith Emerson's animated knife stabbing of his keyboard during ELP performances is a notable exception),

Current Musicology, No. 85 (Spring 2008)

and characteristically many bands attempt, like classical musicians adhering to a written score, to recreate the sonic experience of a recorded album (Macan 1997:64; Bangs [1974] 2002:49).

I argue that progressive rock may also evoke the "classical" in the ways these groups changed stylistically at strategic points in their careers to mark their artistic development, akin to the periodizations many find in the work of classical composers, such as the ubiquitous use of "early," "middle," and "late" labels for Beethoven's music. As James Webster has shown in his studies of classical music history, periodizations are shot through with understated but critical value judgments. Webster outlines three chief periodization narratives. An "originary" narrative valorizes the "early" period, an "organic" narrative valorizes the "middle" period, and a "teleological" narrative valorizes the "late" period. The narratives that a given periodization presents can seem so compelling that we may ignore pieces within a given "period" if they do not fit the expected characteristics of that style, and we may marginalize the music of entire periods if our narrative tells us that a different period contains more interesting or important music (Webster 1994, 2001–2).[1]

The specific case explored here concerns the widely acknowledged changes in progressive rock in the early 1980s, when many prominent bands' increasing use of digital signal processing and simpler, more conventional song forms led audiences and critics to identify the beginning of a new period in the genre characterized by commercialized and "inauthentic" releases. As with the example of Beethoven, the notion of a new period largely fits a nexus of observable stylistic changes within the music and biographical shifts for the musicians themselves, all against a background of larger cultural trends and value systems (Webster 1994:1). The conventional historical narrative of progressive rock tends to fit an "organic" model of periodization quite well: a story of rising (the late 1960s), a peak period of artistic maturity (the 1970s), and then an inevitable decline (the 1980s and after).[2] Assumptions that progressive rock flourished during the 1970s are indeed quite common. For Macan "the genre . . . achieved its 'classic' form at the hands of English bands during the early 1970s" (1997:10), and John Covach posits a "rich period from about 1967 to 1977" (1997:4).[3] Bill Martin also links the style to a historical period, asserting that "progressive rock was able to partake of a certain *energy*, that of the late sixties, and to propel itself into the middle and even later seventies" (1998:58).

Meanwhile, the common reaction to a perceived new period that begins around 1980 is one of strong criticism, where the defenders of progressive rock identify the dissolution of the style. As Covach puts it, "by the early 1980s progressive rock was thought to be all but dead as a style, an idea

reinforced by the fact that some of the principal progressive groups had developed a more commercial sound . . . What went out of the music of these now ex-progressive groups when the more commercial sound came in was any significant evocation of art music" (1997:5).[4] For Macan, the same moment "was marked by the fragmentation of the genre into simpler, more commercially mainstream subgenres such as American stadium rock and British symphonic pop, as well as a noticeable decline in the creativity of the major progressive rock bands" (1997:179). And Jennifer Rycenga, who interprets the extended nonstandard structures of progressive rock as "queering the concept of form," laments the fact that "by the end of the 1970s, they abandoned more experimental long forms for traditional song styles" (2006:237). Kevin Holm-Hudson has recently posited a label of "prog lite" for the commercially minded and "conceptually thin" mid-1970s style that was strongly influenced by progressive rock but tailored for heavy radio play, and this designation would presumably apply to the "classic" groups' changes in the early 1980s as well (2005:379).

The music industry at this time was changing to accommodate new digital music technologies and the popularity of cable television's MTV, and the effects of these new forces on this new period in progressive rock cannot be underestimated. Music video quickly became the "preferred method for launching a new act or promoting the release of a major superstar," creating a "new generation" of telegenic musician-celebrities who were supported by heavy doses of contemporary technology such as synthesizers and digitally manipulated samples of sound (Starr and Waterman 2007:383). As Theo Cateforis has recently asserted, "at the time of its greatest popularity in the early 1980s, few paradigms rivaled the growing use of synthesizers associated with the rise of important new wave groups" (2007:207), and the technology was easily matched to the "dizzying mélange of depthless surfaces and signs . . . typical" of the "music video aesthetic" (2007:213). The new and explosively popular postmodern genre of the music video, comprised of "multiple layers of media and . . . authorship," may even have led consumers to qualitatively new modes of collective listening (Dell'Antonio 2004:201).

The same moment also saw the widespread rise of Thatcher- and Reagan-era political, cultural, and economic conservatism, which was felt quite strongly in the music industry by record companies that were increasingly identified as "subdepartments of huge transnational corporations" (Starr and Waterman 2007:384). These new industry demands required progressive rock bands to adapt if they were to continue to enjoy the benefits of active promotion from their labels and to command a large audience. While stylistic experimentation and change were important parts of the progressive rock aesthetic, pressures from corporations to develop slick

products were antagonistic to these bands' expectations of artistic freedom and their tendency toward nonstandard musical constructions. At the same time, fans' expectations of music that sounded and felt like the bands' earlier, defining releases would not rest easily with either imperative.

What was at stake was nothing less than a supposed loss of "progressive rock authenticity." The change toward a commercial sound did indeed lead to continuing platinum album sales and, in the case of Yes's "Owner of a Lonely Heart," discussed below, the band's only number-one single on the Billboard chart. But with these changes came a perception that these bands had turned their backs on the musical style that made them notable in the first place. Timothy Warner, for example, has recently asserted that "Owner of a Lonely Heart" is a "radical departure" (2003:73) and "contrary to the typical work of the band," and its chart success is "inappropriate to the group's musical aspirations" (2003:64); the song is best understood as part of a "trivial" and "ephemeral" pop music rubric as compared to a "serious" and "lasting" category of rock music (2003:4). Critics and scholars of progressive rock, who tend to be faithful not to the musicians but to their perceptions of a particular musical style, instead focus on the "underground" bands who continued to cultivate the traditional sound of progressive rock in the 1980s and beyond. But to call these bands "neo-progressive" (Covach 1997:6) and "post-progressive" (Macan 1997:197–219), as they do, signifies that for them the mainstream of progressive rock had indeed succumbed to a three-stage "organic" narrative.

Instead, I argue that while many progressive rock bands' music did indeed change in the early 1980s, to focus on those changes exclusively ignores the significant connections to the bands' earlier music that remain and overlooks the ways "old" and "new" interact. In the newer music, overt electronic manipulations of sound and more conventional musical forms are often cleverly paired with sophisticated musical devices familiar from these bands' "classic" releases. Paradoxically, the very sonic signifiers that progressive rock bands employed to conform with the demands of mainstream popular music can also be seen as signifiers of progressive stylistic development that follows a familiar narrative from the world of classical music.

The reception of progressive rock in the 1980s intersects in provocative ways with the discourse around the notion of "late style" more generally, especially that centered on Beethoven. Indeed, though recent approaches problematize the very idea of "late style," such a designation and its complex constellation of meanings remain widespread (Painter 2006:5). "Middle period" Beethoven is usually interpreted as exhibiting "a reconciliation of opposites, a *grand* synthesis, at the end, . . . and with it an idea of a better world" (Said 2006:13). Similarly, in Macan's view of "classic" progressive rock,

a "major concern of the genre . . . [was a] symbolic playing out of many of the conflicts that were of great significance to the hippies . . . [in a way that] integrated into a larger whole" (1997:43–44).[5] The conventional sense of Beethoven's "lateness," in contrast, concerns "the weight . . . of originality, his expanded rhetorical vocabulary, his formulation of unprecedented ways of representing states of being that flourish beyond the boundaries of ordinary experience, and his transformations of Classical structural models, preparing the way for their eventual dissolution" (Solomon 2003:2).

Such a description does not sit easily with the view of progressive rockers selling out their ideals for the commercial success of a simpler and more conventional pop-based approach. But Theodor W. Adorno's approach to "late style," perhaps surprisingly, may resonate with the changes in progressive rock in question here. He argues that just as characteristic of "late" music is the pronounced presence of "conventional formulae . . . in unconcealed, untransformed bareness," and that this represents "a peculiarity which is studiously ignored by . . . the accepted view of the late style" (1998:124). As would be expected from Adorno, his conception of "late style" focuses on potentially irreconcilable poles in the music itself, as well as the notion that such a negative dialectic signifies the "concrete historical reality" of a broken modern society "bypassing . . . individual freedom" (Subotnik 1991:17). From this perspective, progressive rock's changes around 1980, rather than only constituting an abandonment of countercultural and related musical concerns, also represented a continuing process, essential to the authentic artistic endeavor, of interacting critically with the changing culture and the music industry that functions within it.

The palpable sense of progressive rock abandoning its earlier ideals and audience resonates with a further aspect of Adorno's late Beethoven; as Edward W. Said paraphrases, the late style is "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it. His late works constitute a form of exile" (2006:8). These echoes are complex and contradictory at best; the notion that Beethovenian "late style is *in*, but oddly *apart* from the present" (Said 2006:24) is in clear distinction to the ways post-1980 progressive rock constructed its sense of "late style" through connections to the musical trends *of* its present. And moving toward the commercial tendencies of that present stands in direct opposition to Adorno's desire for a music that fundamentally resists mass culture.

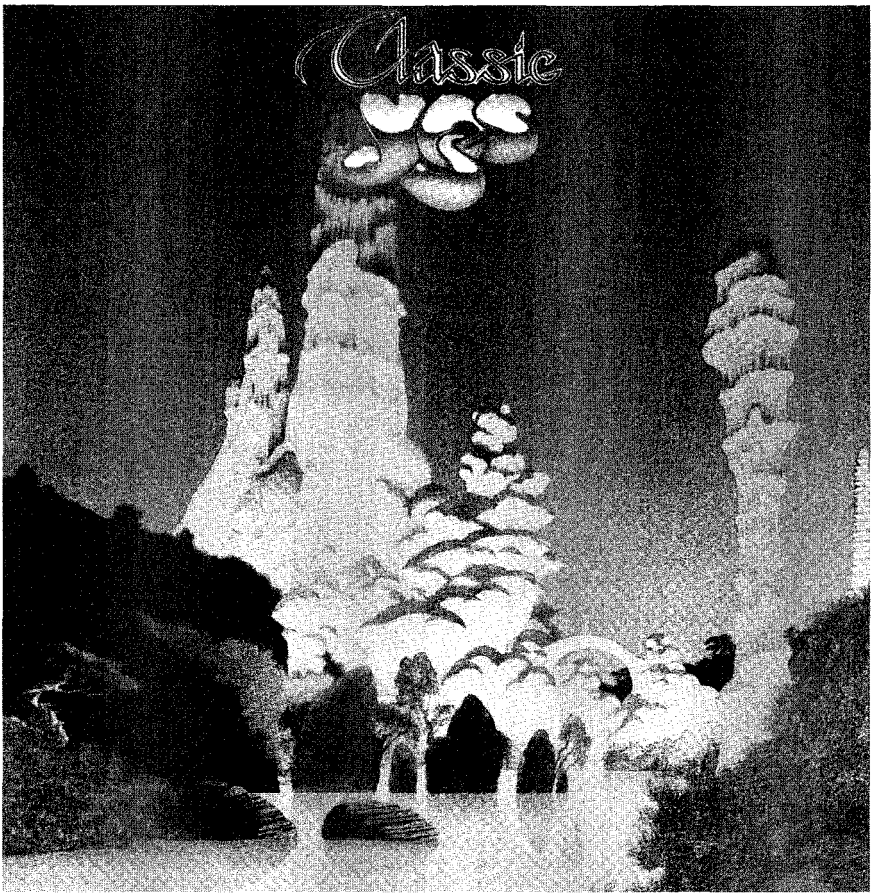
Along these lines, I would like to discuss in some detail two songs that announced such changes in the early 1980s: Yes's "Owner of a Lonely Heart," from their 1983 album *90125*, and Rush's "Subdivisions," from their 1982 album *Signals*. These songs are largely representative of the stylistic

changes—and the notion of style change in general—widely perceived in the music of many progressive rock bands in the early to mid-1980s.[6] Both "Owner" and "Subdivisions" were commercially successful (and were the first "concept videos" produced by these bands for airplay on MTV), and both were flashpoints around the notion of a lost progressive rock authenticity. Yet both songs show essential dialectics between the "simple" and the "complex," and hence between the sense of a new period and the sense of continuity with earlier albums and styles. As Webster states with regard to perceptions of period change in Beethoven, "the prevailing image" centers around "*reception* history," while "the picture that emerges from . . . *compositional* history is quite different" (1994:3–4).

A new identity for Yes in 1983 was practically a foregone conclusion. The group had officially dissolved after their 1980 album *Drama*—the only Yes album without lead singer Jon Anderson—and when the musicians assembled for these sessions, the group planned a release under a different name entirely. Even for a band long known for frequent personnel changes, the Yes lineup for *90125* was notable. Rick Wakeman and Steve Howe, the keyboardist and guitarist who played a large part in defining the "classic Yes" sound, were both gone, replaced by Tony Kaye, the original keyboardist, who returned to the band after more than a decade away, and Trevor Rabin, a South African guitarist with virtuoso chops but a more pop-based sensibility. The only points of stability were in the rhythm section: co-founder and bassist Chris Squire and drummer Alan White, who had been with the band for the better part of a decade. More than anything else, it was Anderson's return midway through the recording process that signaled that this band could—perhaps *should*—be called Yes.

With *90125*, Yes turned away from the nature imagery, musical virtuosity, and complex song structures most fans associated with the band and with progressive rock in general. This announcement of the new began before a single sound was heard. Roger Dean's fantasy-nature landscape cover art, which visually marked most of their 1970s releases, was replaced with a stark computer-generated image. Dean's painting "Green Towers" was the cover of the 1981 greatest-hits collection *Classic Yes*, which was released in the wake of the group's at-the-time breakup, and the collection's title itself does much to construct the sense of a period ending (figure 1). "Green Towers" is representative of the imagery fans had come to expect from the band's album covers. Under Dean's rounded, liquid lowercase "Yes" logo in a deep blue sky with fading light in the far background, serene water stretches from the middleground to the foreground, broken only by grass, trees, hills, and rocks. Out of this landscape, aqua and green towers that look like enormous stalagmites lit brightly from below rise high into the sky. Fans' reactions to these images demonstrate the perceived connections between

Figure 1: Cover of *Classic Yes* (1981), © 1982 Roger Dean www.rogerdean.com. Reprinted with permission.



the band's music, the depth and wonderment of a romanticized natural world, and fantastical but warm elements not of that world. For example, on the website rogerdean.com, one representative comment alongside this painting by a viewer posting under the name of a Greek saint, "Spyridon," reads as follows: "The covers of Roger on the Yes albums become ONE with the music of the band, taking me to all those other worlds that Roger, Yes, and many other people have been. Roger's paintings [have] made our eyes see places that 'exist' since the dawn of mankind, which we have only felt in our hearts."[7]

The cover of *90125* presented a bold contrast.[8] The title itself announced the recording as a commercial product, since "90125" is the album's number in the Atlantic Records catalog and therefore is part of the Universal Price Code (UPC) printed on the back. The background is a monochromatic

gray, and while "Yes" appears in roughly the same position as it does on *Classic Yes*, here the logo is set in plain white capital letters in a nondescript sans-serif font. The center of the cover contains an abstract image of a disc split at sharp angles into synthetic shades of the three primary colors, which are partially encircled by a dark gray border punctuated by thin white lines, open only at the top. The border extends downward at the bottom, and this creates an overall shape that could be seen as a letter "Y." If most earlier Yes albums credited a single artist with a cover painting, this album's artwork is a technological creation "produced" by the graphic designer Garry Mouat, as the liner notes state: "Cover image produced on Robograph 1000 system utilizing Apple IIE 64K RAM micro-computer and Bitstik controller. Plotted same size on HP7580B line plotter at 10 cm/sec courtesy Robocom Ltd. London."

90125—especially the hit single "Owner of a Lonely Heart"—was heard as different and more commercial than Yes's earlier music, and reception focused on the album's uses of technology and its decidedly simpler textures, harmonic progressions, and song structures. J. D. Considine's review in *Rolling Stone* is a case in point:

> "Owner of a Lonely Heart" does not sound like the Yes of old. With its supple, understated dance beat . . . and noticeable lack of pseudo-classical overkill, it seems too hip, too street-smart for a band whose idea of a pop song was once something as rococo as "Round about" . . . The result is a sound that relies on production and arranging tricks instead of instrumental flash . . . and most of the album is surprisingly spritely and poppish. Electronics, especially the new generation of synthesizers, are heavily used . . . [The] emphasis on melodic appeal over instrumental prowess may alienate some of Yes' longtime fans, but if it continues to result in records as listenable as this one, then this may turn out to be one reunion that tops the original. (1984)

A close reading of the song suggests productive tensions between "simple pop" and "complex progressive rock." As example 1 shows, the overall structure is indeed quite conventional for a pop song and quite far from the multisectional extended forms of many of the group's songs from the 1970s. After an introduction that presents the main riff, there is a verse-plus-chorus structure that is repeated, a contrasting bridge section in the parallel major that leads to a guitar solo over the riff, two more choruses, and another bridge section that leads to a fadeout. More to the point is that this song is not formally "simple" so much as it seems to be constructed to highlight its presentation of pop-song simplicity. Instead of contrasting verse and chorus sections, the norm in rock songs (Covach 2005:72)—especially in multisectional progressive rock structures that utilize a repeated chorus—

Example 1: Yes, "Owner of a Lonely Heart" (1983), overall structure.

(0:00–0:24) Introduction
(0:25–0:55) Verse 1
(0:55–1:12) Chorus 1
(1:13–1:43) Verse 2
(1:43–1:56) Chorus 2
(1:57–2:31) Bridge
(2:31–3:17) Guitar solo and "retransition"
(3:18–3:32) Chorus 3
(3:33–3:46) Chorus 4
(3:46–4:27) Bridge 2 to fade

this song uses the same chord progression in both, a particularly simple song form that, coming from a progressive rock band, seems to highlight how repetitive a conventional song may be.[9] In the introduction and the second verse the progression sounds in a distorted electric guitar; during the first verse and the guitar solo it is set in a thinner texture where the riff is easily heard in the bass guitar; and during the chorus sections the bass guitar is often joined by an arpeggiating "clean" guitar sound. But these texture changes, which communicate the section-to-section structure of the song, never conceal the main idea, which is almost always present at its original pitch and rhythm. Meanwhile, the riff's progression of power chords is equally clever in its simplicity. Counting one eighth note for each letter and slash, the riff does little more than move stepwise up the alphabet: A / / B C / D D, occasionally adding a turnaround G G that brings the riff back to the beginning. This simple riff is not painstakingly crafted nor is it the result of creative inspiration; rather, it is a self-consciously "pop" progression. Yes may evoke some of their signature complexity in the texture and phrase rhythms of this song (discussed below), but they have largely traded it for a qualitatively different sort of complexity, a witty play on the "simple" and the "commercial" in rock, and an ironic genre-based complexity somewhat distinct from the formal complexities of the band's "classic" output.

And yet, in tension with this pointedly simpler style are a number of intricacies not unlike those in Yes's earlier music (see example 2). For instance, the song's phrase rhythm is unconventional. The riff's two-bar phrases in the introduction are grouped into six-measure units, not the standard units of four or eight bars. After opening with a one-measure pickup in the drums, the electric guitar presents the riff three times alone, and then, as the rest of the band enters in support, the riff is sounded three more times before the entrance of Jon Anderson's vocals and the first verse. The pattern of six-bar phrases in the introduction results in a mildly ironic

Example 2: Yes, "Owner of a Lonely Heart" (1983), phrase rhythm examples (all within $\frac{4}{4}$ meter).

Introduction

no. of mm.:	1	6	6
texture:	*drum pick-up*	*guitar riff*	*riff + rhythm section*

Choruses

1: 9 mm. (8 + 1; or 7 elided with 2-mm. hold)
2: 7 mm. (elision with Bridge 1)
3: 8 mm. ("model")
4: 7 mm. (elision with Bridge 2)

Bridges

1:	no. of mm.:	6	4 + 4	4
	event:	*parallel major*	*lead vocal*	*lead-in to solo*
2:	no. of mm.:	6	4 + 2	8
	event:	*parallel major*	*lead vocal*	*key change to fade*

situation where the conventional 8 + 8 phrase rhythm of the verses can sound out of the ordinary. Meanwhile, the chorus sections are based on an eight-measure model, but this "normal" version of the chorus appears intact only once, on the section's third presentation (out of four). The ends of the other choruses are elided with other material: the first chorus by a two-bar held sonority (making for a nine-measure first chorus), and the second and fourth choruses after seven measures by the bridge section. The two bridge sections themselves, which are announced by bright A Major brass-like sounds in the synthesizer, also exhibit complex phrase rhythms. The first bridge contains phrases of 6 + 4 + 4 measures plus a four-bar transition to the guitar solo; the second comprises a 6 + 4 + 2 structure plus an eight-bar fadeout at the end of the song.

Most provocatively, while "Owner of a Lonely Heart" is both *in* a pop-song format and *about* the conventions of the pop song, from the beginning the sound and structure threaten to open up beyond those conventions. While the first occurrence of the riff shows off the distorted electric guitar's power by sustaining the concluding D chord with no loss of volume over an entire measure where nothing else happens,[10] the same held sonority after the second occurrence of the riff is overshadowed by an intrusive, heavily processed drum break and a downward slide of the bass guitar on the last beat. After the rest of the group enters for the second half of the introduc-

tion, Yes demonstrates how a well-amplified synthesizer can interrupt even a full rock band: after the second occurrence of the riff in this subsection the texture is dominated by a screaming timbre followed by a lower, fast-paced slithery figure. The first verse and chorus operate on more of an even keel, but during the second verse, while the lyrics describe a "dancing eagle in the sky" and tell the listener to "give your free will a chance," the seemingly straightforward section—sixteen bars long with the too-simple chord progression throughout—is continuously disrupted by further timbral intrusions. These include synthesized trumpet screams, jangling sounds, sustained keyboard atmospheric effects, unpitched sounds of wind and motion, and acoustic guitar.[11] The sonic interruptions even become structural: between the first bridge section and the guitar solo is a four-bar subsection consisting of nothing but such intrusions—all synthesized screams and drum breaks with heavy effects processing. This concludes with a final measure that adds disturbances of pitch and rhythm to the timbral and structural ones, as the screams and drums effect a chromatic rise in quarter-note triplets, a figure heard for the only time in the entire song. The tension is finally released on the next downbeat, as the triplet figure leads to one last scream on A to announce the entrance of the guitar solo.

If the song continually defies its tightly wound structure and seems unable to fully contain itself, the final move breaks free. In the middle of the second bridge section the song leaps from the A tonal center, which has defined the entire structure up to this point, and the lyric "don't deceive your free will at all—just receive it" is set in the distant flat-VI area of F. In the world of Romantic music the flat submediant is a common "Other" tonal area, and within this song F provides a strong contrast, as every other diatonic pitch of A Minor is either part of the main riff (which uses the collection G–A–B–C–D) or is an important note in the melody (the remaining pitch-class E ends half of the verse's twelve subphrases, and E begins each subphrase of the chorus). In a "prog lite" song like Styx's "Come Sail Away" (1977), the flat-VI area notably is also a structural surprise, set with electronic minimalist textures that wouldn't be out of place in a Terry Riley composition, but ultimately the move is little more than a momentary interruption, an interlude between electric guitar riffs reminiscent of the British band The Who and sing-along choruses in the main tonal area (Holm-Hudson 2005:386–88). In contrast, the new tonal area in Yes's supposedly pop-oriented "Owner of a Lonely Heart" is used in an almost radical way: the music never returns to its tonic, and the "sublime" flat-VI is the final destination, from which the song fades out with no contained conclusion.[12]

In contrast to the ever-fluid lineup of Yes, the Canadian group Rush has consisted of the same three members since the mid-1970s; the only person-

nel change occurred between their first and second albums. Yet over their career Rush has been very concerned with periodic *musical* change, which has happened at a steady pace every four studio albums. After their fourth album the group released a live album, titled *All the World's a Stage* (1976b), and the liner notes state "this album to us signifies the end of the beginning, a milestone to mark the close of chapter one, in the annals of Rush." This pattern of four studio albums and capstone live recording was followed for their first sixteen studio albums.[13] Their steady output stands in contrast to the fact that, overall, they operate in a bit of a stylistic no man's land. Durrell S. Bowman suggests a label of "progressive hard rock" (2002:189–91) for Rush, a moniker that crosses at least two genres. And indeed, given the conventional desire for "purely authentic" examples of a given style, Rush is excluded from Macan's discography of progressive rock, and in Robert Walser's study of heavy metal, a subgenre of the hard rock category, it seems that Rush "fails the standards of most metal fans" (1993:7).

Perhaps the most palpable stylistic change for Rush occurred on *Signals* (1982), their ninth studio album. Like Yes's *90125*, Rush's new album used a simpler style and up-to-date technology. Drummer and lyricist Neil Peart has said that "we were determined to get a different sound from the ground up," and that extended to details like where the instruments were placed in the room and what brand of tape was used for the recording (Banasiewicz 1988, chapters 10 and 11). Song titles such as "The Analog Kid" and "Digital Man" highlight the self-conscious linking of technology with periodization and particularly with notions of musical maturity. For the heavier sound of Rush, and in contrast to "pure" progressive rock, the overt use of synthesizers as a lead instrument was a clear sign of a new period for the band. Previously, as on their earlier hit "Tom Sawyer" (1981), if synthesizers were used at all, they were largely employed for sound effects and atmosphere. In Bowman's opinion, Rush's "later music" continues the band's identity, but only in "substantially moderated treatments" within "various shorter songs" (2002:213–14). It is notable that the band members themselves placed a premium on not abandoning their own sense of "authenticity" amidst their increased use of music technology. Peart writes:

> In the '80s, we again discussed bringing in a fourth member, a keyboard player, at least for live shows. But we were . . . proud of what we could do with just the three of us. So we decided to carry on ourselves . . . We used whatever we needed—keyboard samples, background vocal effects, string parts, whatever. The line we drew was that they were all samples of *us*, and every note, every "event," had to be triggered manually (or pedally, as the case might be) by one of us. (2006:75–76)

J. D. Considine also reviewed this album for *Rolling Stone*, and he drives home points about both technology and pop simplicity:

> Although *Signals* is chockablock with state-of-the-studio gadgetry, ranging from the requisite banks of synthesizers to the latest in digital recording and mixing, none of these electronic add-ons enhances the group's music. If anything, Rush emerges from this jungle of wires and gizmos sounding duller than ever . . . Ironically, Rush falls into this technological morass on an album that is otherwise their most poppish yet. By and large, the songs on *Signals* are tuneful and unencumbered by the sort of gratuitous flash that made previous albums seem like clearinghouses for worn-out art-rock licks. (1982)

Like "Owner of a Lonely Heart," Rush's "Subdivisions," the opening song and one of the singles from *Signals*, thematizes tensions between the older "classic" sound of the band, represented by the "complex," and the new period, which focuses on the "everyday." Synthesizers, a staple of early 1980s pop, are used as the lead instrument for almost the entire song, grounding it in the sounds of the here-and-now. The lyrics, about the difficulties of life within a conventional suburban subdivision, further place the song in the routine lives of Rush's main fan base of white, suburban, male teenagers, in strong opposition to the sci-fi and mythological fantasy worlds of previous albums.[14] In effect, the band shifted from the landscapes of the dreamy teenage imagination to the humdrum but harsher ones of suburban reality. The solo sections of the song also exemplify the sense of routine. They are composed and not improvised, which is not uncommon for Rush, but it is notable that the synthesizer solo appears twice, in virtually identical fashion; this does not occur on any other track by the band before or after this album. Further, and also anomalous for Rush, each four-bar phrase in that solo melody largely repeats the material in the other phrases. And much of the song is based around a flat-VI–flat-VII–I chord progression in B Minor, a rock chord progression so common it borders on the mundane.

But Rush's signature and longstanding use of difficult time signatures and mixing meters also comes to the fore in this song. (Example 3 shows the metrical structure for the introduction and first verse.) At some points, as during the opening phrases of the introduction, a time signature like $\frac{7}{8}$ (with eighth notes grouped in a 2 + 2 + 3 pattern) is placed within conventional four-bar units. At other points, as during the verse, conventional $\frac{4}{4}$ bars are placed within complex three- and six-measure groups. These sections, from subphrase to subphrase, move quite freely from complex meters to simple ones and back again, and from simple to complex phrase structures and back again. There are even, at times, metrical changes from one iteration of a section to the next, which brings the moment-to-moment metrical play

Example 3: Rush, "Subdivisions" (1982), phrase rhythm, Introduction and Verse 1.

Introduction (0:00–0:51)

[meter × mm.]:	[$\frac{7}{8}$ × 4]	[$\frac{7}{8}$ × 4 × 4] [$\frac{4}{4}$ × 4 × 6 × 4 × 4]
event:	*synth*	*whole band*

Verse 1 (0:51–1:40)

[$\frac{4}{4}$ × 2]	[$\frac{4}{4}$ × 2] [$\frac{7}{8}$ × 6] [$\frac{4}{4}$ × 3]
band	*lead vocal*

[$\frac{4}{4}$ × 2]	[$\frac{4}{4}$ × 2] [$\frac{7}{8}$ × 6] [$\frac{4}{4}$ × 6]
band	*lead vocal*

to bear on larger structural levels, and perhaps uses the "subdivisions" title as a pun for the musical activity in the song as well as for the song's setting in a conventional suburban neighborhood. For example, while the first verse uses a grouping of six measures in $\frac{7}{8}$ time, the equivalent spot in the second verse alternates between $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{3}{4}$ for those six bars; the total number of eighth notes is the same, but the metrical structure has a different feel. The chorus shows a great confluence of this metrical play. The governing meter is $\frac{3}{4}$, which organizes the vocals, bass, and guitar, and the metrical structure (as can be seen in example 4) partakes of two-, four-, and six-bar groupings. Peart's drumming, meanwhile, creates a pattern of cross rhythms by simultaneously using a duple-meter pattern reminiscent of a conventional $\frac{4}{4}$ rock beat; this is most audible in the snare drum hits every other beat. And if the drum part is considered structural, then the section would use even more surprising groupings of 1.5, 3, and 4.5 bars.

The overall effect is a feeling of constant restlessness. There is a strong connection to progressive rock, especially Rush's hard-rock version of the style. Thick block chords, virtuosic drumming, and edge-of-your-seat metrical play are used to set lyrics concerned with and skeptical of the possibility of individual agency, similar to their earlier space epic "2112" (1976a).[15] But these musical choices are also an effective means of constructing a sound world for this specific song and its turn toward the everyday. Unlike the optimistic breaking free in Yes's "Owner of a Lonely Heart," the bridge of "Subdivisions" posits that "Any escape might help to smooth / The unattractive truth / But the suburbs have no charms to soothe / The restless dreams of youth." The unending pushing and pulling between and within time signatures evokes the imaginary protagonist's struggle, a struggle with which the core of Rush's fans could have easily identified. The use of the synthesizer as the lead instrument for the first time in Rush's music, as opposed to its occasional earlier use for interplanetary sound effects or

Example 4: Rush, "Subdivisions" (1982), phrase rhythm, Chorus 1.

Chorus 1 (1:40–2:04)

mm. of $\frac{3}{4}$ meter (vocal, bass, guitar):	4	6 + 6 + 2
event:	*band*	*lead vocal*
mm. of $\frac{4}{4}$ meter (drums):	3	4.5 + 4.5 + 1.5
event:	*band*	*lead vocal*

momentary melody, dramatizes the trope of synthetic life in MTV-watching suburbia at the end of the twentieth century. The paradox lies in the fact that, while Rush was using this timbre-based style change to connect with fans' day-to-day existence, such a change may have marked this song as a less authentic version of Rush and may have served instead to alienate segments of that very same core audience.

In popular music, "authenticity" may be the "most loaded value term," as Allan F. Moore puts it (2001:199), and often has no single meaning. Lawrence Grossberg, for example, has tied constructions of authenticity to phenomena as widespread as the utterances of a particular subculture, the sexuality of a dancing body, and even postmodernism's reflexive inauthenticity (1993). Moore notes that at times the term can be used for a perception of "intimacy" and "immediacy" between performer and listener; at other times to capture a sense of an artist's "responsibility" to his or her art, audience, background, or self; and at others as a judgment of "integrity" bestowed on performers who seem to lack artifice and pretension (2001:199). In general, a label of "authenticity" is simply a shorthand, or code, used to communicate a positive value judgment. Moore suggests a useful framework for organizing the multifarious uses of the term: a "first-person authenticity, or authenticity of expression," where a performer communicates his or her "real emotion" with an audience in a seemingly unmediated way; a "third-person authenticity, or authenticity of execution," where, as in British blues, performers may appropriate the discourse of authenticity surrounding a preexisting style; and a "second-person authenticity, or authenticity of experience," where a performer "validates" and "represents" listeners' life experiences and cultural situations (2001:200–1, 2002).

In the case of progressive rock, the hallmarks of the genre often contrast what counts as "authentic" in other pop and rock styles. Invitations to bodily movement and sexuality and expressions of everyday experiences are not key elements of the genre's musical style. The expectation of grandiose musical journeys surely does not lend itself to any parallel expectation of intimacy and immediacy. Peart writes that in the mid-1970s Rush was

"urged to be 'more commercial'" and to "write some 'singles,'" and when the band responded with the "contrarian," "ambitious," and "weird" album *2112* (1976a), which featured a "side-long piece about a futuristic dystopia," their sales quadrupled (2006:17). Indeed, from the musicians' point of view, progressive rock's "authenticity" seems directly related to perhaps another sort of authenticity, a "musicianly authenticity" where the performers' job is to create challenging music whether or not it results in a sense of direct communication with most listeners. For Peart,

> There are talented performers who are capable of making really good music, but waste their abilities by contemptuously "dumbing down" their work for a mass audience. When I hear that kind of market-driven music, produced and sold as a mere commodity, like any other, by those who could do better, I feel it in my *skin*, like a physical revulsion. To a discerning listener, such music is tainted by a fundamental dishonesty, a shallow aspiration for fame and riches—at any cost. (2006:90)

And perhaps befitting many fans' and critics' emphasis on connections to classical music in their reception of progressive rock, "authenticity" in progressive rock may also partake of the term's application to classical music, as in the discourse surrounding "historically informed" performances of music from previous centuries on "period instruments" that attempt to follow the "original intentions" of the composer (Beard and Gloag 2005:17–18). Thus the most lauded progressive rock concert experiences are often those by the original recording artists painstakingly reproducing the sounds of decades-old recordings.

The very idea of a "progressive rock authenticity" is ironic in itself, given that, historically speaking, most rock critics have been highly antagonistic toward progressive rock as a most *inauthentic* sort of rock music. In the late 1960s and 1970s, critics conventionally argued that "good" rock was music that would move people to work against the establishment and to effect social change. Thus progressive rock—a style that, in its indebtedness to classical music, was not obviously anti-establishment and was not "pure" rock musically, either—was considered a highly problematic genre (Sheinbaum 2002).[16] The specter of race clearly raises its head as well: many influential critics of the time assumed as axiomatic an "idealization of the blues and of things 'black'" (Moore 2001:66) and an "implicitly anti-European . . . anti–high culture stance" (Macan 1997:172). Though such a perspective stemmed from a politically progressive point of view that championed disadvantaged groups, viewpoints like these also treaded "dangerously" close to implying that "black" music was more authentically "natural" and closer to true "feeling" because people of African descent possessed a lower degree of civilization and "thinking" (Moore 2001:75; Macan 1997:171–73).

The best concise statement I know of this sort of value judgment comes from the infamous rock critic Lester Bangs, who considered progressive rock as representing "the insidious befoulment of all that was gutter pure in rock" ([1974] 2002:50). No wonder that while fans of the genre think of the 1970s as the style's high point, some critics see 1970s progressive rock as the "decline" phase of rock itself in a very different "organic" narrative (Rockwell 1976:322).[17]

Even within the progressive rock subculture, a calcified sense of what counts as "authentic" progressive style has left some bands, and certain long periods of artistic output, for dead. This may come into relief not from focusing exclusively on constructions of "authenticity," which "all are applied from the outside" (Moore 2001:199), but instead from exploring a potentially fundamental tension between the creators and receivers of popular music. A given genre may stem from a "constellation of styles" but takes on a powerful sense of singular identity because it becomes socially based in a network that is connected to a "sense of tradition" (Holt 2007:18). As listeners become dedicated to artists or styles, they can become wedded to particular constructions of what constitutes the "authentic." And such a strong identification with what is considered traditional for the artist or style can result in listeners expecting future iterations to conform to a stereotype. As Mark Mazullo puts it, "popular artists are subject not only to the whims of the market but also to the demands of their fans in terms of what music they make and what messages such music relays" (1999:21). But the artists themselves may have a very different orientation; they, rather, are likely to be "dedicated to expanding the possibilities of their work, demanding of their music the defiantly 'anti-authentic' qualities of versatility, change, indeed aesthetic 'progression'" (Mazullo 1999:179). Thus Johan Fornäs, contemplating the "future of rock," argues against traditional dialectics of "authentic rock" versus "commercial pop," and rather for "pop/rock as one single, continuous genre field rather than as distinct categories," a field that "contains a wide and open range of subgenres, moving within certain similar economical and social frames and circuits" (1995:112).

Instead of assuming that a given style can be defined in a satisfying, tangible way, it may be more useful to focus on the notion of persona, on the subtle and fluid ways bands and their audiences communicate with each other to construct a mutually agreed upon image and musical identity. In all likelihood the original audiences for progressive rock shared age, class, and British cultural backgrounds with the musicians themselves, as well as a physical proximity in the intimate club settings in which most of the bands got their start. And as the genre became popular through the 1970s and attracted arena-size audiences in the US, largely white and male American fans were drawn to the virtuosity and visual spectacle and perhaps to an

"implicit British nationalism" (Macan 1997:151–58). Though it may be a full generation "too late to do a statistically accurate demographic study of progressive rock fans" (Macan 1997:151), "fanzines" of the last two decades provide important audience perspectives. Chris Atton argues that these publications arose at such a temporal remove from the genre's original popularity not only because of flourishing internet culture in the 1990s, but also because mainstream popular music publications such as *Melody Maker* previously did the job of providing "a link between fan and musician" (2001:29–31). On the evidence of fanzines, fans are less interested in the particulars of progressive rock's connections to classical music than in valuing progressive rock as an "authentic . . . type of 'real' rock music. It may be musically sophisticated and technically difficult to play, but these are factors that give it viscerality, not cerebrality, the argument runs" (2001:35–36). At the same time, devoted listeners are indeed attracted to complexities in the music, especially within the parameter of meter, and the ability to recognize such details becomes "a signifier of the progressive rock fan" (2001:34).

For the progressive rock genre around 1980, we may have an example where musicians miscalculated this exchange. Songs like "Owner" and "Subdivisions" are the very first tracks on albums meant to be heard as new territory, and as such are self-conscious manifestos of period-based differences. The irony is that while progressive rockers attempted to develop a classical-like reception around themselves in this way, periodizations are anything but neutral chronologies of musical changes, and often can have unintended consequences on reception. Their efforts to transform—as an important part of a "progressive authenticity"—were instead read as a move away from, rather than a change within, fans' understanding of the style.

A preliminary quantitative analysis of progressive rock fanzines, for example, shows that from fans' points of view a "classical period is clearly distinguishable from the subsequent neo-prog era" (Ahlkvist 2006:2), with the early 1970s British releases treated not only as canonical, but paradigmatic for evaluations of later releases. Fan reviews show that "complexity" and "thematic unity" are taken as the chief signs of musical quality (Ahlkvist 2006:23), while "unadventurous and predictable" features are reasons to "pan" a release (2006:17). Meanwhile, scholars of progressive rock—whose academic training may result in different perspectives from the conventional fan but whose training nonetheless may draw them to progressive rock in the first place (Robison 2002:233)—can surely also be counted as a certain stripe of fan, and their comments about a perceived post-1980 period are equally telling. For Macan, the major musicians' output of this time signals the "wreckage" of the classic bands, the result a "commercial rock" with "musical creativity . . . no longer apparent"; such "bland, pop-radio

friendly" music "signaled" the end of "the dream" (1997:189). Though there is "of course nothing wrong with the new digital sounds per se, . . . the elimination . . . [of the genre's] distinctive tone colors . . . destroy[ed] the soul of progressive rock" (1997:193). As Atton characterizes the resulting paradox, "much of progressive rock fandom is not interested in music that 'progresses' at all" (2001:43).

The problem lies not in progressive rock per se, but in the fact that both the detractors and the defenders of progressive rock assume that there is such a thing as an authentic stylistic purity in the first place. One would never confuse 1970s progressive rock with classical music; the style evokes both "highbrow" and "lowbrow" music, and plays on the tensions between them (Sheinbaum 2002:30–39). Even suggesting that progressive rock itself exhibits a unified "style" is obviously problematic, given the diversity of individual bands' sounds and the diversity across bands commonly grouped under the "prog" umbrella. Similarly, focusing solely on the "commercial" features of the major bands' changes around 1980 masks the extent to which there are also important continuities with the bands' previous music and with "classic" progressive rock in general. These bands were not simply abandoning the tenets of progressive rock; in a complex way they were attempting to continue and develop its ideals by constructing what can be read as a classical-like periodization. As is the case within classical music, such a structure both can help make sense of complex multidimensional phenomena and can result in ideologically based receptions of those phenomena. Such transformations were no mere dissolution of the genre, but instead represented a deliberate new phase of the progressive rock persona within the changing bounds of popular culture.

Notes

An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain chapter of the College Music Society, Denver, 2005. I thank Jay Keister, Becky Sheinbaum, and the readers and editors of the journal for their thoughtful comments.

1. A provocative point, to be explored in a future study, is that in the realm of classical music the most common periodization narratives are the "organic" or "teleological" type, which valorize later music, lean on tropes of maturity, and marginalize so-called "early" music; while in popular styles, where an artist's "authenticity" is often prized, it is precisely the early albums that are often considered the best.

2. What may happen to the "organic" narrative of progressive rock if the style currently enjoys a resurgence, as recently suggested by Pareles (2005), and therefore a full fourth stage, is an open question.

3. Akitsugu Kawamoto (2005) has recently argued, though, that in some cases even 1970s progressive rock can be thought of as representing a Bloomian "misreading" of prog ideals that allowed the style to change in ways that could lead to higher sales. It should be said,

though, that Kawamoto's model still involves conscious periodizations of progressive rock history and still suggests increasing movement toward commercialization.

4. And indeed, when writing recently about the late 1970s, Covach (2003) leaves progressive rock altogether to concentrate on "new wave" bands like The Cars.

5. Though this is not the only way to interpret diverse stylistic strands within 1970s progressive rock; compare Sheinbaum (2002, especially 30–39).

6. Other hit singles in a similar orbit include Genesis's "Abacab," the opening and title track from the band's 1981 studio album; "Heat of the Moment" (1982), the opening track from the self-titled debut album *Asia* by a "supergroup" made up of alumni from Yes, King Crimson, and ELP; and "Touch and Go" (1986) from the only 1980s studio album with the "ELP" label. (ELP's lineup for this album included Cozy Powell, who filled in for Carl Palmer's "P" on drums.)

7. This page can be found at http://www.rogerdean.com/upclose/greentowers.htm (accessed March 19, 2008).

8. For more discussion of the contrast between the *90125* visuals and those on many of Yes's earlier albums, see Warner (2003:64–65).

9. Covach draws a clear distinction between "contrasting verse-chorus form," for which he provides three examples and asserts that "a large number of other songs" use such an organizing principle, and "simple verse-chorus form," where "the harmonic scheme offers no contrast between these sections," and for which the only songs mentioned were released in the 1950s and early 1960s (2005:72–73).

10. For a convincing description of the masculinizing power often accorded to the distorted electric guitar in terms of its perceived volume, addition of frequencies above and below the struck pitches, and electronically enhanced sustain, see Walser (1993:41–44).

11. Even a full quarter-century later, these invasive sounds remain one of the most notable elements of the song. For example, on a recent episode of the animated television series *The Simpsons*, titled "The Debarted" (originally broadcast March 2, 2008), the character Homer Simpson is allowed to drive a dealer-owned vehicle while his own is being repaired. While cruising through town he sings a few bars of "Driver of a Loaner Car" ("Driver of a loaner car / Much better than a / Driver of my normal car"), and for the few seconds this gag appears onscreen the character vocalizes an extended approximation of these sonic disturbances.

12. While Warner is right that it is "not particularly rare in popular music" for a song to modulate to and end in a new key area (2003:68), most often that move is in an upward direction to create a sense of intensity upon (yet another) repetition of the chorus, and such a structure, which is within the stylistic norms of popular music, does not create any important tonal conflict. Warner cleverly suggests that tonal resolution of concluding modulations is indeed achieved, but only, as appropriate to a hit single, when the track is played again. I would instead argue that to some extent Yes creates a quite different effect that highlights the tonal breaking away: this move is down a major third, to the distant area of F, and the very next track on the album, "Hold On," stays there, with F as its home tonic.

13. This long-standing pattern was recently broken. Rush's 2002 studio album of original material, *Vapor Trails*, their seventeenth, was followed by the live album *Rush in Rio* (2003). The timing of these releases, though, has much to do with personal events in the members' lives and less to do with "musical development" per se (Peart 2002).

14. Peart writes, "For reasons I have never understood, our audience has always been predominantly male, 90 percent or more" (2006:100).

15. Bowman (2002) argues that this theme in the lyrics is an essential part of Rush's style at the height of their "progressive" albums in the mid to late 1970s.

16. In Holm-Hudson's study of the Styx hit "Come Sail Away," this reasoning is taken a step further, as he suggests that "prog lite" is "doubly lacking," "an imitation of an imitation" (2005:380).

17. This conventional point of view is problematized in Keister and Smith (2004).

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