



Introduction to the Special Issue on Progressive Rock

Chris Anderton

The past decade has seen the growth of a number of academic research clusters and networks dedicated to studying specific genres, including punk, reggae, heavy metal, electronic dance music, and jazz. This perhaps recognizes the maturity of the broad field of Popular Music Studies as formally represented by the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) (founded in 1981). To this proliferation of genre-specific research groupings, we can add the *Progect* network, dedicated to the study of progressive rock in all of its forms. The *Progect* was given its initial impetus by a series of round robin emails sent by Professor Allan Moore in 2010 (Moore, “Forward”). A number of conferences have subsequently been held in Dijon (2014), Edinburgh (2016), and Lund (2018), with a fourth planned for Ottawa (in 2020). Philippe Gonin directed the publication of a book, *Prog Rock in Europe. Overview of a Persistent Musical Style* (2016), which acted as a proceedings for the first *Progect* conference, while Allan Moore and Sarah Hill are, at the time of writing, preparing a second edited collection – the *Oxford Companion to Progressive Rock* – which draws primarily on papers presented at the Edinburgh conference or contributions from other *Progect* participants. This current special issue of *Rock Music Studies* includes articles first presented at the Edinburgh and Lund conferences, though all have been subsequently reworked and extended for publication.

Moore describes the *Progect* network as an “experiment in sustainable academic organization” which operates with an evolving steering group (“Forward” 6). Each conference and publication has emerged from ongoing discussions within the network, with the overarching intentions of fostering research into progressive rock, and challenging assumptions that have been made about this type of music by academics, journalists, and fans. Examples of such assumptions include the view of progressive rock as essentially a British musical development historically situated in the early- to mid-1970s, and dominated by a small number of commercially successful bands (the canon typically comprises Emerson Lake and Palmer, Yes, Genesis, Pink Floyd, Jethro Tull, and King Crimson), and consumed primarily in the United States (Moore, “Forward” 5; see also Anderton, “Many-headed” on the “symphonic orthodoxy” of academic and journalistic work on progressive rock). Such an understanding of progressive rock underpins the earliest book-length publications on the history of this music, such as those by Edward Macan, Bill Martin, and Paul Stump, though later books, edited collections and articles have begun to extend the scope of analysis beyond the historical era of the 1970s, the British and American geo-historical contexts of production and reception, and the music of the major bands listed above (for instance, Anderton, “Full-

Grown”; Covach, “Jazz-Rock”; Dowd; Gonin; Hegarty and Halliwell; Holm-Hudson, “Apocalyptic,” *Progressive*; Moore, “Shreds”; Moore and Hill; Moore and Ibrahim; Salueña). Indeed, the extension of such analysis is a guiding precept of the *Project* as originally conceived by Allan Moore and discussed in the preparations for the first conference in Dijon (“Forward”). Another might be to explore progressive rock through new methodological approaches that illuminate the history, breadth and experience of the music in different ways.

Bill Martin delineates the period of 1968–1978 as the “time of progressive rock,” while Christophe Pirenne suggests 1967–1977 and Edward Macan suggests 1966–1976 (*Rocking*). The parameters differ slightly, yet all agree that the early- to mid-1970s saw significant commercial success for the canonic bands and a seemingly continuous forward motion in terms of aesthetic and musical development. They also agree that by the late 1970s the major record companies, broadcasters, and press that had previously supported progressive rock had begun to shift their musical interests towards punk rock, disco, and the emergent styles of stadium rock and synth pop (amongst others). New progressive rock groups found it difficult to gain financial and media support, while some of the older groups attempted (with variable success) to alter their musical styles in order to retain relevance and find new fans (Moore and Martin). For instance, Yes, Genesis, and Jethro Tull made the transition well and were probably more commercially successful in the 1980s than they had been in the 1970s. The 1980s and 1990s saw a slight revival of interest and success for new bands such as Marillion in the UK and Echolyn in the US, both of which received major label deals (Anderton, “Fire”, “Clutching”; Covach, “Echolyn”). However, groups working in similar musical styles typically operated on an “underground” basis, with self-financed and privately released albums in the 1980s and the emergence of several small independent labels, specialist mail order companies and fanzines in the 1990s (Anderton, “Clutching”; Atton; Covach, “Echolyn”; Romano, *Prog*). In the later 1990s the benefits of the internet for marketing and distribution, together with the falling costs of studio recording equipment, led to a considerable expansion in the progressive rock market and a burgeoning growth in new or reactivated bands and in audiences for both new and old music. The latter was targeted by record companies capitalizing on a growing nostalgia market by reissuing back catalogue albums on CD, and then subsequently releasing remastered and extended versions, plus box sets, archive releases, and official bootlegs – of both canonic groups and lesser known acts. We can see this as part of a more general shift towards rock and pop music nostalgia, with *Classic Rock* magazine launching in 1991, and the commissioning of numerous television documentaries and series since that time which tell the histories of rock bands, eras, recordings, and festivals (such as *Sounds of the Sixties*, *Sounds of the Seventies*, *Rock Family Trees*, *Classic Albums* and the various *Britannia* specials, including *Prog Rock Britannia* in 2009). There are also many non-academic publications charting and celebrating progressive rock (for instance Ewing; Lambe; Romano, *Mountains; Prog*), as well as encyclopedia-style publications detailing progressive rock releases (Asbjørnsen; Lucky; Snider). In the twenty-first century, progressive rock is once again a viable commercial proposition, reaching a taste public through the internet and supported by multiple record companies, magazines such as *PROG* (launched in 2009 as an offshoot of *Classic Rock*), and an international circuit of over thirty genre-specific music festivals (Dowd).

This broad historical trajectory for progressive rock is found in numerous academic and fan publications (Anderton, “Many-headed”), but relates principally to the development of British progressive rock. The story of progressive rock in other countries differs, though there is still a broadly discernible pattern emphasizing the emergence of progressive groups in the late 1960s/early 1970s, a slump in productions (in quantity and/or quality) in the 1980s, and renewed growth in the later 1990s and beyond. For example, see the books (written from a fan perspective) of Andrea Parentin and Paolo Barotto about the history of Italian progressive rock, or John Covach’s work on American progressive rock (“Echolyn,” “Hippie”).

Arguably, the growing academic interest in progressive rock parallels the revived consumer, media, and record company interest seen since the late 1990s, as seen in the expanding number of edited collections, journal articles, and book chapters that examine various aspects of the “meta-genre” of progressive rock (Anderton, “Many-headed”) through historiography, musicology, literary analysis, sociology, philosophy, and other approaches (examples include Ahlqvist; Bennett; Covach, “Progressive”; Dowd et al.; Hill; Holm-Hudson, *Genesis*, “Come Sail”; Josephson; Keister and Smith; McDonald; Moore, “Jethro Tull,” “Signifying”; Palmer; Spicer; Zak). This current publication adds to the growth of this emergent field of “progressive rock studies” by addressing some of the assumptions commonly made about progressive rock through the presentation of six articles. The first, by Chris Anderton and Chris Atton, investigates the origins and use of the term “progressive” in the British music press of the late 1960s and early 1970s. They find an “absent presence” within the three main weekly music papers of the time, in which the canonic bands noted above are discussed regularly but without reference to them as “progressive rock” bands. Instead, they are, by 1974, referred to as part of Britain’s “rock establishment,” while the word “progressive” is used to refer to a much broader range of music than is typically denoted by the term in later academic and journalistic discussions of the era. Their findings suggest that later classifications, and the boundary policing related to it, may be a form of historical revisionism that serves to narrow the scope of what may be counted as “progressive rock,” with a particular focus on music that draws on classical music influences.

The next two articles explore the history and experience of progressive rock in Eastern Europe. Andrei Sora looks at the development of the Romanian band Transsylvania Phoenix which, unlike the canonic British bands, did not draw on classical music for inspiration, but looked to the ethnic folk music of Romania. The paper discusses why the choice of folk music references was important within the context of Communist censorship during the 1970s, thus demonstrating the potential for progressive rock to be politically charged, even subversive. To do so, Sora offers close musicological readings of the music and lyrics of Phoenix, and situates these within the broader political and social contexts of the music’s creation and performance. He shows how progressive rock music may be feared by a repressive government regime, and how increasing censorship led to the band fleeing Romania for West Germany in 1977. The second article to focus on an Eastern European context is by Jan Blüml, who looks at the important role played by the British musician Chris Cutler (known for his work with Henry Cow and Art Bears) in Czechoslovakia during the early 1980s. Cutler was not only a musician but an ideologist who coined the term Rock

in Opposition (which he sees as a form of progressive music that is politically engaged) and who wrote a manifesto in support of it. Cutler's manifesto was highly influential within the Czechoslovak independent music scene, with Cutler himself having an almost cult status there. Blüml examines a range of documentary evidence to discuss the activities of the Jazz Section, which organized the Prague Jazz Days festivals to which Cutler and related bands were invited to play in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He also explores how the government employed censorship measures against the activities of the Jazz Section, leading to the cancellation of the Prague Jazz Days in 1982 and criminal charges against key participants in its organization.

Following these two papers on Eastern Europe come two articles focused on Spain during the 1970s, which question both national and regional identity. Eduardo García Salueña studies the emergence and development of regional variations of Spanish progressive rock, especially following the death of the fascist dictator General Franco in 1975. He examines the constraints that had been placed on music-making during Franco's regime, and demonstrates how lyrics, rhythms, native instrumentation, and cover art were used to assert the cultural specificity of four regions within Spain. Folkloric and geographical references are shown to be particularly important, including the retelling of regional myths and legends, and the use of local dialects for band names and lyrics. He also notes how the musical repertoires of the Spanish Renaissance and Middle Ages were adopted by some bands as cultural resources to assert a national rather than regional identity. Diego García Peinazo also focuses on questions of Spanish national identity, but this time by examining the reception of the music, lyrics, and performance of the band Carmen – an Anglo-American group that made use of musical and dance traditions drawn from the Spanish flamenco tradition. At the same time in the early 1970s there were native Spanish groups such as Triana who were also developing a flamenco-rock crossover identified as rock andaluz, and Spanish journalists were particularly critical of the band Carmen, mobilizing arguments about ethnicity to suggest that the group was inauthentic in its use of Spanish musical and cultural traditions. The article examines the “battle” for Spanish music at that time, and the ways in which both Carmen and the Spanish journalists made use of exoticism and the politicization of otherness in making their claims for authenticity.

The final article in this special issue on progressive rock comes from Kimberley Anderson, and returns once more to the British context. She uses a novel methodology (autoethnography) to explore how we may listen to and understand the meanings of a specific record: in this case, Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973). Rather than seeking universal meanings within the text of the record, she draws on her personal response to the music through a detailed and reflexive analysis, demonstrating how our personal backgrounds affect the meanings that we draw from or give to progressive rock. For Anderson, progressive rock, and *The Dark Side of the Moon* in particular, offers the possibility of cultural re-enchantment, numinous experience and the potential for transformative utopian experience.

All six articles here address the key areas noted earlier, questioning our accepted understandings of what progressive rock is, and exploring the production and reception of progressive rock in a variety of geographical, historical, and methodological contexts. In so doing, the collection continues to develop our knowledge and scholarship of progressive rock, and to assert the importance of studying this type of music – one that

has historically been regarded as escapist or elitist within popular music journalism and academia, and thus ignored in favor of what are seen as more radical or subculturally important forms.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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