CHAPTER FIVE

"Exiles in Madison Square Garden"[1]: Critical Reception and Journalistic Narratives of Progressive Rock in *Melody Maker* Magazine, 1971–1976

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> [Rock fans] feel deserted. Millionaire rock stars are no longer part of the brotherly rock fraternity which helped create them in the first place. Rock was meant to be a joyous celebration; the inability to see the stars, or to play the music of those you can see is making a whole generation of rock fans feel depressingly inadequate… The Pistols are playing the music they want to hear. They are the tip of an iceberg (Coon 1976a: 24).

> It has been argued that punk bands… are to be admired and congratulated for the rebellious stance they are assuming against the increasing and prevalent technological sophistication of the cosmic wonders like E.L.P, Yes and the Pink Floyd, and those once illustrious figures of the Sixties like the Stones, Who, Elton John and Rod Stewart… Honestly, if either Patti Smith or Johnny Rotten represents the future of

[1] Quote taken from Idris Waters (1975: 18).

> rock – and I don't think they do – then I'm off with the old lady to the air raid shelter until it all blows over (Jones 1976: 25).

These quotes come from the British music paper *Melody Maker*, regarded as a standard-bearer for progressive rock music from the late 1960s through to the mid-1970s, and demonstrate a polarization of views regarding punk rock in its "Year Zero" (MacDonald 2003: 200) of 1976—a polarization that is at the heart of this chapter. In the early 1970s the paper, launched in 1926 and initially aimed at jazz and dance band performers, was targeting the late teens/early twenties market including college and university students and both amateur and professional musicians (Jasper 1972: 45). It was widely regarded as both a "thinking fans paper" (Anderton and Atton 2020: 12) and a "musician's paper" (Barnes 2020: 364), and would include discussions about a broad range of musical styles, together with gig listings, instrument reviews, artist interviews, opinion pieces, features, and reviews of singles, albums and concerts. It built "a community of fans" (and artists) for progressive music and established "a critical framework within which all subsequent discussion" would occur (Atton 2001: 31). This discussion tended to emphasize "musicianship" and "the idea of artistry linked to LPs" (Whiteley 1992: 38), hence promoted the notion that rock music could have artistic worth (Dowd et al. 2019: 5). Progressive rock music was also featured in two other weekly music papers, *Sounds* (launched in 1970) and *New Musical Express* (launched in 1946), though to a lesser extent than *Melody Maker* (Anderton and Atton 2020: 15–16). Across these three papers in the early 1970s, but most especially in *Melody Maker*, we see the valorization of rock musicians who seek to "develop and improve their playing technique" and to increase the "complexity of the music (whether musicological, technological, or ideological)", while audiences are characterized as embracing "the pleasures of listening rather than dancing" (Anderton and Atton 2020: 11).

In this chapter, I will focus specifically on *Melody Maker* as an archival source to provide direct evidence from the time (feature articles, artist interviews, and readers' letters), since such evidence has only rarely been examined and quoted in artist memoirs and academic or journalistic texts in the past[2]. Where archival evidence has previously been examined, the authors have typically focused on the reception and critique found in the American underground press of *Rolling Stone*, *Creem* or *Zig Zag* (Scott 2016: 56), or the coverage of specific artists in those magazines (Macan 1997, 2006; Sheinbaum 2002). Where British magazine coverage is discussed (Macan 1997; Stump 2010; Barnes 2020) it is, with the exception of Anderton and Atton (2020), rather partial in nature, or once again focused on specific artists. However, by tracking the fortunes of progressive rock in a single, highly influential publication, we are able to trace the development of journalistic and fan narratives regarding progressive rock music in greater detail. This also allows us to look beyond the historical stereotyping that developed in the late 1970s, and in the context of a publication that, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, typically offered positive coverage of the bands we would today classify as progressive rock. For instance, throughout the early 1970s members of bands such as E.L.P. and Yes regularly topped the annual readers' polls for best musicians (Welch 2007: 173). In undertaking this analysis, a more nuanced understanding of this part of British music history may be offered; one that investigates a range of factors raised within *Melody Maker* for the apparent decline in progressive rock's fortunes, hence setting the scene for punk rock's Year Zero and the ongoing perception that "punk killed prog."

Derek Scott refers to a "new breed of pop journalists" that emerged in the UK in the mid-1970s (influenced by the theorists of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies) who acted as a "popular art police" and who described progressive rock music "as a pretentious and elitist betrayal of popular music values" (2016: 58). This is similar to John Sheinbaum's

[2] This is also the case for punk rock (see Street et al. 2018).

research into US criticism, where he argues that progressive rock was lambasted for its lack of authenticity (a divergence from rock's natural and simplistic R'n'B roots), its self-conscious virtuosity and technicality, and its tendency to merge different stylistic elements (2002: 21–28). Punk's emergence in 1976 is regarded as a return to rock's roots, as a death knell for progressive rock—its "other" —and as a musical form that "changed everything… [and following which] basic musical articulacy became thin on the ground" (MacDonald 2003: 201). Yet, as Hegarty and Halliwell note, "What now looks like part of standard rock history has had very grand claims made of it" (2011: 165), and the punk explosion of 1976 didn't immediately have an impact on the major progressive rock acts of the era. For instance, as Chris Squire of Yes has stated: "By the time punk rock was happening… we were playing to 130,000 people in stadiums" (quoted by Robinson 2011: 63). This has, of course, been identified as one of the problems with progressive rock—the gigantism of their live shows making them seem distant from their audience—yet it is by no means relevant to all progressive rock acts during the early 1970s, as will be explored below. In sum, an evaluation based on archival evidence is long overdue, both in the run up to 1976 (as discussed in this chapter) and in the years which followed, as examined by Andy Bennett in this book.

The remainder of the chapter is rooted in a close reading of *Melody Maker* from 1970 to 1976, with attention paid both to journalistic commentary and reviews, and to the views of readers whose letters were published by the paper. Two main narratives are identified, which lead to different understandings regarding the problems that progressive rock faced in the early 1970s. There is a narrative, most closely related to the notion of "punk killed prog" that focuses on the major bands of the era: those that sold millions of albums, toured the world, and have become synonymous with the term progressive rock. These are the bands of the "symphonic orthodoxy" (Anderton 2010), including Yes, Emerson Lake and Palmer, Genesis, Jethro Tull, Pink Floyd and King Crimson. A second narrative relates to the bands that

operated at a national level within the UK during the same era but did not attain the album sales success of the first league bands noted above. I will argue that this is, in part, due to structural issues within the music industry of the time—issues that the premier groups were able to sidestep. I will discuss this two-tier market, and the two broad narratives that relate to them, through three sections that outline arguments appearing in the pages of *Melody Maker* in the early 1970s. First, that the existing rock bands were becoming bland and unimaginative at a time when no new bands of quality or interest were coming through. Second, that the grassroots live sector and BBC radio coverage that had previously supported the development of new rock artists was under threat, with youthful audiences increasingly seeking something other than progressive sounds and styles. And finally, that the rock music industry as a whole had entered an era of stagnation due to a global recession, inflationary pressures and high income tax rates. Punk's Year Zero may be presented as a sudden and sharp rupture with the past, but in this analysis I will show how the conditions for punk rock's emergence had been building for several years beforehand, and how these conditions affected the top tier and grassroots artists of the early 1970s in divergent ways.

"I hope something will come along very soon"[3]

Arguments about the moribund "state of rock" appeared in *Melody Maker* as early as 1971 when Roy Hollingworth's think piece argued that rock had become "too respectable" and was "now an establishment" (1971: 11). His article, together with others that criticize the "rock establishment" (*Melody Maker* 1973: 32–3) over the next four years, refers not to progressive rock as it has become canonized, but to rock music across the board. The blame is laid on the "trendy critic, or personality [who] became the Establishment intellectual groupie, holding

[3] William Mann (critic of *The Times* [London]) quoted by Roy Hollingworth (1971: 11).

back tears, and producing penned dramatics to the noise of Velvet Underground" (Hollingworth 1971: 11). These are the critics who gave validation to "double-decked words, and nauseating musical vocabulary" (ibid.). In the article he interviews television producer Jack Good (famous for series such as *Six-Five Special*, *Oh Boy!* and *Shindig*) who suggests that "the music now produced is done with half an eye to what will be said about it in influential quarters. Musicians began to pretend, to write things that were too long, and downright dismal." This critique extends beyond Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, Jethro Tull and so on to include critics who philosophize about The Who and Van Morrison (Hollingworth 1971: 11). William Mann, the *Times* critic who had praised the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* album in 1967 argued that "some rock is for entertaining and some is for listening… I don't agree that it spoils the whole image if you have to take certain aspects seriously", yet he also notes that: "There's an awful lot to rebel about, and rock certainly isn't doing it" before concluding that he hoped that: "Something will come along very soon. It's about time something outrageous happened… But something else will come along, I'm sure of it" (quoted by Hollingworth 1971: 11). Hollingworth concurred: "For God's sake, somebody please put two fingers up to Society [sic], stick a tongue out – and just be dirty" (1971: 11). His call seems to have gone largely unheeded (at least within the pages of *Melody Maker*), yet he persisted with his theme the following year in a feature article on the then-unsigned New York Dolls:

> These are young New Yorkers, seemingly unimpressed with the switches and swatches of progressive music – as is their growing audience. Not for them any boring, endless singer-songwriter, not for them any polite sobering up in the quality of rock (Hollingworth 1972: 17).

Hollingworth argued further that the New York Dolls and bands like them in New York offered “the rebellion needed to crush the languid cloud of nothingness that rolls out from the rock establishment” (ibid.).

By 1973, it would seem that the staff writers at *Melody Maker* were coming around to this opinion, with features praising the grassroots glam rock and pub rock bands that were emerging in the UK at that time, while also offering negative reviews of new albums and concerts by the rock establishment—and not just from progressive groups such as Yes, E.L.P. and Jethro Tull. Indeed *Melody Maker*’s 1973 “Rock Report” also includes: Humble Pie, Uriah Heep, Wishbone Ash, T. Rex, Led Zeppelin, The Who, the Rolling Stones, Ten Years After, Black Sabbath, Slade, Traffic, Strawbs, Faces, Free, Soft Machine, and the Moody Blues (1973: 32–3). All of these bands receive criticism, either for performing well in the US and neglecting their British fans (such as Humble Pie, Uriah Heep, Black Sabbath, The Who, Traffic and Wishbone Ash), or for losing their musical direction. Yet, they are also given grudging respect for their sales success. Examples include these entries for Jethro Tull and E.L.P:

> Opinions on albums like “Thick As A Brick” [by Jethro Tull] range from claims for outstanding genius to dismissals for being tediously unimaginative. The available evidence is mostly on the side of the latter… [yet they remain] a money-making machine which shows no signs of slowing down (*Melody Maker* 1973: 33).

> It’s probably too late for them [E.L.P.] to develop a sense of taste or any emotional depth, but as kings of flashy superficiality (of the best kind) they’ll take a lot of beating (ibid: 32).

The Moody Blues are described as “repetitive and hollow”, while Soft Machine are lauded for having three excellent composers in the band but criticized for having a poor image and suffering from “joylessness” (ibid: 33). Even Pink Floyd, whose recently released *Dark Side of the Moon* album would stay in the album chart for years to come, was not immune to criticism: “It’s hard to believe that their hearts are entirely in the Music of the Spheres, and their major enemy may prove to be boredom” (ibid). There is an acknowledgement that “breaking America” is key to significant success, with T. Rex criticized for their failure to do so, and both Strawbs and Slade described as needing to do so in order to move on to the next level.

The readers’ letters that appeared in response to the 1973 “Rock Report” confirm a growing sense of dissatisfaction among British fans, though again this is not solely directed at those bands we now classify as progressive rock. For instance, one reader argues that the top acts are “bored, uninspired and lazy” with specific reference to Rod Stewart (Faces), Pete Townshend (The Who) and Jimmy Page (Led Zeppelin) (Hotwell 1973: 64). Another letter refers to “the lack of enthusiasm and inventiveness shown by these bands. No new and original groups seem to be emerging either, with the possible exception of Roxy Music” (Warner 1973: 64). For this reader, the problem is that the existing stars are “retiring to a life of stagnation in the country estate or immigration to foreign parts, only producing an annual uninspired LP and making the occasional live appearance” (ibid.). Similarly, a third letter bemoans that “British progressive groups are growing up and being lured by big money. Everyone says “the potential is there.” Not to progress music though—that’s unimportant now—but to make the cash” (Kestral 1973: 64). Later that year journalist Michael Watts argues that the contemporary scene is “the establishment and big business. Half the bands in

Christendom are now backed by merchant banks. That's not pop's fault[4]; it was only trying to grow up" (1973: 13). As with Roy Hollingworth in 1972, Watts highlights the New York Dolls as a "great kick in the ass to the corpus of rock and roll… they're provocative and divide an audience so sharply" (Watts 1973: 13). The division is demonstrated by a reader's letter included on the same page which refers to the band's performance on the *Old Grey Whistle Test*[5]: "I have never, at any level, seen such an amateurish performance or heard such an unmoving, meaningless row" (Moxon 1973: 13).

Six months later, in June 1974, journalist Allan Jones wrote a think piece about the stagnation of the album chart (discussed further below) in which he referred to: "Redundant music for redundant love children" (1974a: 23)[6]. For Jones, "Rock's inherent aggression has been sucked into a state of impotency" (ibid.), thus extending the line of argument that had begun to grow over the previous three years, though the "progressive" bands are now specifically targeted. Pink Floyd, the Moody Blues and Yes are named, though E.L.P. and the

[4] In *Melody Maker* during the late 1960s and early 1970s it was not unusual to find the terms "rock" and "pop" used synonymously, hence there are references to "progressive pop", the "pop scene" and so on, which in context are clearly referring to the album-focused bands that we now classify as rock (see also Anderton and Atton 2020).

[5] The *Old Grey Whistle Test* was a long running BBC television show (1971–1988) that focused on albums rather than singles.

[6] Jones was hired by *Melody Maker* editor Ray Coleman in April 1974 after the latter had advertised in *Time Out* magazine for new, young writers that were "highly opinionated" (Jones 2017: 1). It appeared to be a response to the paper's main rival *NME*, which had recruited writers from the 'underground' press such as Nick Kent and Charles Shaar Murray in 1972. Their irreverent and acerbic style made *Melody Maker* appear "regrettably stuffy, sober and staid" in comparison (Jones 2017: 2).

Mahavishnu Orchestra are also alluded to. Of Yes (who had released the critically reviled *Tales from Topographic Oceans* double album in December 1973) he said: "however sincere Anderson's belief in God and Love as a divine healer of our problems, he's just unable to transpose those higher thoughts to a convincing rock 'n' roll concept" (ibid.). Furthermore, he regards Yes and similar bands as "just the tip of an iceberg threatening to freeze rock to death in some wasteland of sterility… with one foot in heaven and both hands around a suitcase full of used dollar bills" (ibid.). Jones's deliberately provocative journalism sparked rebuttals from *Melody Maker*'s readership. For instance, Phil Harding wrote that:

> I didn't pay £3 odd for an album like "Topographic Oceans" because it's so "meaningful." I bought it and listen to it because I like the way it sounds. And I think this applies to most other people too…[7] What's wrong with rock musicians being openly intelligent, intellectual even, about their music? Are they any less important or relevant to rock because they take care in the composition and presentation of their music, exploit the full range of instrumental sounds and textures available to them and don't bellow obscenities at the audience when they get on the stage? (Harding 1974: 19)

The latter was a dig at Allan Jones's validation of Iggy Pop as the way forward for rock—another American back-to-basics rock performer. As another letter states, "Jones' type of thinking could only result in a total uniformity of the music scene in which everyone would sound like Iggy" (White and Holoway 1974: 19). Two years later, the development of British

[7] *Tales from Topographic Oceans* was Yes' first #1 album in the UK chart, with *Close to the Edge* (1972) and *Relayer* (1974) both achieving #4 position. The only other Yes album to top the UK album chart was *Going for the One*, released in 1977.

punk rock would, of course, push things in that very direction. However, at this stage, the paper is still treading the fine line between catering to the record companies that provide the advertising revenue it relies on (and who are pushing the top tier artists of the time), and a readership which seems to be fracturing between those fans who continue to support the work of those artists (consistently voting for them in annual polls run by the paper), and those who are craving something new. As I will explore later, this reflects a peri-generational split between fans who had grown up with the rock music of the late 1960s and were now in their mid- to late twenties (as were many of the band members), and fans in their mid- to late teens who had not[8].

"All that Woodstock bit is over… Audiences are younger now"[9]

In the late 1960s there was a vibrant live music scene in the UK, made up of city-based clubs, the Students Union ("college") circuit and a large number of cinemas and halls, yet few large scale venues capable of hosting the top tier artists that had emerged at this time (Frith et al. 2019: 51–5). As in the US, one solution had been to host outdoor festivals, but high profile failures in both the US and the UK in the early 1970s made both promoters and local authorities wary, with the festival circuit largely collapsing in the US and fragmenting in the UK (Arnold 2018; Anderton 2019). In the US, the ballroom circuit that had sustained the development of rock was replaced by an arena circuit that successful British bands soon became accustomed to. As touring was principally aimed at promoting record sales (with the latter often subsidizing loss-making tours), the US became an especially important market due

[8] The prefix peri- is used to denote this closeness in age in contrast to the usual definition of a generation, which is typically a gap of around 20 years.

[9] Eric Faulkner of the Bay City Rollers quoted by Jones (1974b: 3).

to its size, hence the potential to sell large numbers of albums. By 1968, *Melody Maker* journalist Chris Welch was lamenting that “our progressive groups have deserted these shores for the US” (1968: 11). This was to continue in the early 1970s, with fellow *Melody Maker* journalist Dave Hewson referring to it as “Atlantic Syndrome” (1970: 20). During 1970 and 1971 the paper reports that live music clubs have closed down because the top tier bands (or their representatives) are asking for too much money. The college circuit was initially able to afford the top bands of the time as they could operate as a relatively “low-risk business” due to financial subsidies from other Union activities (Long 2011: 130), but the increasing success and technical requirements of bands in the early 1970s posed insurmountable problems. It also made it difficult for newly launched bands to meet the higher production values that audiences for existing bands had become used to, making it hard for them to compete. As Rod Argent noted in 1974, a band “needs five or six grand before it can start. If they haven’t got the same sound as the big groups, then the kids won’t listen” (*Melody Maker* 1974a: 49). Nevertheless, the college circuit remained important for up-and-coming bands, particularly the “progressive” groups due to the musical preferences of the Students Union social secretaries of the time (Jasper 1972: 38).

The emphasis on progressive groups—those for listening, not dancing (Anderton and Atton 2020: 11)—was not universally welcomed, and during 1970 and 1971 reports appeared in *Melody Maker* that the college circuit was booking artists such as Shakin’ Stevens and the Sunsets, and the Wild Angels, whose music was mainstream rock ‘n’ roll. In addition, there was a rise in the provision of discotheques (in both college and club venues) that provided cheaper entertainment, and a chance to hear “the hits” rather than the original music of the rock bands. Universities and colleges with a disproportionate ratio of males to females (such as Aston University in Birmingham and Strathclyde University in Glasgow) also reported that it was difficult to persuade “students to accept music that involves listening and not

athleticism on the dance floor" and that progressive music was not attracting enough women to the concerts—a major reason for attending such social events (Watts 1971: 20). As the growth of the static and mobile discotheques sector grew[10], so did the polarization of the live music market between the top tier bands who played only occasionally in the UK and the up-and-coming bands of the club circuit who found opportunities to play becoming increasingly restricted and little better paid than they had been ten years earlier (Henshaw 1974: 63). Roy Williams, a booker working for Sound Entertainment, is quoted in the paper arguing that:

> The demand for mobile discos increases as that for groups decreases! And most public venues now operate discos. The only work for groups is at private dances – rugger, soccer, cricket functions, etc. – and the colleges. During the summer vacation, when the colleges are closed, you are dead (quoted by Henshaw 1974: 63).

Barry Dickins of MAM concurred, stating that:

> Five years ago there were hundreds of clubs; now there's nothing like that… This is the only thing you've got left – the colleges. And you've got a million groups trying to get into the colleges (quoted by Henshaw 1974: 63).

As the potential live circuit for lower tier rock bands contracted in the early 1970s, so did the promotional opportunities for them to gain national radio airplay. BBC Radio 1 had been

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[10] By 1974 there were an estimated "7,000 regular set ups and about 20,000 – 25,000 mobile" discotheques in the UK (Henshaw 1974: 63).

created in 1967 to meet the growing demand for "underground" rock music[11], and to compete with the pirate radio stations of the time which had a more liberal programming regime (Pirenne 2005). In the early 1970s Radio 1's *Sounds of the Seventies* programs became particularly important, as these daily shows featured album-based rock music and were broadcast in stereo (Wall and Dubber 2009: 34). In order to meet the stringent "needle time" requirements placed on the BBC by the Musicians' Union (Barnes 2020: 372), these shows not only featured the broadcast of album tracks, but also many in-studio live recordings by up-and-coming bands, thus giving many artists much-needed promotion in the early stages of their careers. By 1974, the BBC's support had waned, with severe financial cuts leading to reduced programming for *Sounds of the Seventies* (*Melody Maker* 1974b: 4). According to *Melody Maker* this was to "pull Radio One towards the pop and easy listening format" (ibid.). It was a move heavily criticized by the paper at the time, and by those working in the rock music field. For instance, concert promoter Harvey Goldsmith lamented that "the music Radio One is playing has no relation to the current live trends. Absolutely zero" (quoted by Partridge 1974a: 8).

Yet it did reflect changes in the singles market and in particular the emergence of the "New Pop" as Robert Partridge called it (1974b: 30). In his article, Partridge noted how singles had often been used merely as trailers for upcoming albums, but by 1973 had become a profitable market in their own right, with record label Bell releasing 64 singles in 1973 with a "hit ratio" of one in three (ibid.). The artists listed included glam rock performers such as Gary Glitter, Slade and the Sweet alongside the bubblegum pop of the Osmonds, Dawn and David Cassidy. A couple of months later Allan Jones, in an article about groups such as Suzi Quatro, Mud and the Rubettes, interviewed Eric Faulkner of the Bay City Rollers:

[11] In the late 1960s press, terms such as "underground", "progressive" and "heavy" were used interchangeably (Anderton and Atton 2020).

> All that Woodstock bit is over… Audiences are younger now. And that's where we come in. We're about the same age as the kids who come to see us. We know how to entertain them. So many of the people written about in the music papers are nearly thirty. They've grown away from the kids (quoted by Jones 1974b: 3).

The suggestion that rock had grown up and left a younger audience behind had been raised in the paper since at least 1972 when Roy Hollingworth's article on the New York Dolls argued that "rock music must be young", and that the Dolls were both "very young" and "crawling out of the shadows cast by their elders" (1972: 17). By 1974 the perception of a youth market no longer interested in rock has become commonplace, with Greg Lake (of E.L.P.) arguing that "the 12, 13, 14 year olds are not so deeply into music as we were. There's no commitment to a revolutionary thing… Just being in a rock and roll band won't make it anymore. Those days are over" (quoted by *Melody Maker* 1974a: 8). Similarly, concert promoter Harvey Goldsmith, musing on the lack of young talent coming through the rock field stated that the "age where everybody rushed and bought a guitar or whatever instead of a record player seems to be over" (quoted by Henshaw 1974: 63).

There is a growing sense by 1974 that rock music is the music of the late 1960s, made by musicians from that era, and that its time was coming to an end as younger fans sought new sounds. This cannot be classed as an inter-generational issue, since there is only ten years or so difference in age; as a result, I refer to this as a peri-generational conflict, with younger siblings (too young to have seen the major bands performing on the club circuit, and too young to attend college shows[12]) looking for music that they could call their own, and a social

[12] College shows were limited to students with NUS (National Union of Students) identification, so younger fans would be unable to attend. The general public would also be

movement that was not connected to the cultural upheavals of the late 1960s. Glam rock, pub rock, US punk rock, and the New Pop were all championed in the pages of the *Melody Maker* as potential routes forward, but none caught on as significantly as punk rock was to do. In 1975, the peri-generational conflict turns to criticism of older musicians and their lack of understanding of the youth of the day. In Idris Walters' think piece from April 1975, he writes:

> Who are the record-breaking globetrotters, the earthsphere electric ambassadors that the critics like to knock, the exiles in Madison Square Garden?[13] [They are the] "rock 'n' roll gentry… the talented over-30s… [who] threaten the concept of live music by putting on shows grand enough to match the music on their million selling albums (1975: 18).

By 1976 Caroline Coon, whose articles for the *Melody Maker* crystallized and promoted the emergent punk rock scene of the time, would argue that the "trouble is, in the last five years, the rock stars have become "adults", they have forgotten that crucial to their appeal was their rebellious stance" (1976a: 24). Of particular interest here is the list of acts that she criticizes, because it has returned once more to rock music in general, not just to those artists we now identify as progressive rock. For instance, Mick Jagger, The Who and the Byrds are all mentioned as are the Beatles who she refers to as "the fastest expanding nostalgia industry yet conceived" (ibid.). In the article she separates out the "psychedelic bands" such as Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, Soft Machine and Pink Floyd from "Progressive Rock", which

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unable to attend (unless they knew a student who could get them in as a guest), so the audience for up-and-coming rock (progressive or otherwise) was constricted yet further.

[13] The most successful touring bands of the era would regularly sell out the Madison Square Garden venue in New York for several nights in a row.

includes Queen and Roxy Music alongside E.L.P., Jethro Tull, Yes, Rick Wakeman and Genesis. All of these bands, psychedelic or progressive, are referred to as "middle-class, affluent or university academics" —they are "gentleman rockers and their music can only be played by people with similar academic temperaments" (ibid.).[14] The article is notable, therefore, not only for being one of the first on UK punk rock in a national music paper, but for delineating, canonizing and stereotyping psychedelic and progressive rock along both musical and class lines: stereotypes that would cling to progressive rock and be extended upon for many years to come.

"We've already got Yes, why should we want another?"[15]

In 1974 *Melody Maker* asked a range of rock musicians and business people the following question: "British rock: are we facing disaster?" (1974a: 8). In addition to the already discussed views about rock music losing steam and becoming creatively moribund, the contributors discussed the economics of the music business, and the problems facing Britain in relation to the ongoing economic recession, though musician Rory Gallagher noted that the recession was not yet hitting the US to the same extent. This no doubt contributed to the top tier bands focusing their attention on the US at this time, to the detriment of the UK audience.

[14] Hegarty and Halliwell (2011: 166) note that many bands outside of the top tier were by no means wealthy, while Barnes (2020), Walker (2008) and others have countered the assertion that progressive rock's musicians were predominantly middle-class. Furthermore, the bands of the "symphonic orthodoxy" typically showed excellent technical skills as performers, but many other bands within the broader "progressive rock" category did not rely on this for their success (Anderton 2010).

[15] Dave Dee (A&R for Atlantic Records) quoted by Robert Partridge (1974b: 9).

Alongside this article was another written by journalist Robert Partridge who analyzed the album chart and found that it had become largely static, with the same albums (from Pink Floyd, Paul McCartney, Mike Oldfield, and the Carpenters) remaining in the Top Ten for months on end. While recognizing that album sales had continued to rise during 1973 and into the first half of 1974, he warned that vinyl was now in short supply and paper costs were rising[16]. This, he says, had led the record companies to talk of "cutting their artist rosters and release schedules to accommodate demand for their big selling records" (Partridge 1974: 8). While most of those interviewed blamed the "lack of new talent" coming through or the failure of the BBC to promote quality bands rather than pop, Dave Dee (A&R for Atlantic) argued that the bands that were coming through sounded too much like existing ones: "We've already got Yes, why should we want another?" (quoted by Partridge 1974: 9). In an era of economic recession, it was clearly better to promote successful artists with a consistent track record than to invest in new and untried artists—particularly at a time when journalists and industry personnel were concerned about the future of rock. Any new and progressive bands hoping to emulate the success achieved by the top tier groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s faced difficulties across the board in the mid-1970s, with opportunities to play live and build a following more restricted than ever before and the promotional outlet of national radio shrinking in significance. Add to that the financial issues faced by the record companies and a press nervous about what would or would not sell in the future, and it is little wonder that the grassroots of progressive rock dwindled during this era.

Robert Fripp (of King Crimson) (1992) has argued that the "amateurism surrounding the rock business had professionalized by about 1974", and this can be related not only to the record companies but to the top tier bands of the time for whom global success was seemingly

[16] This was due, in part, to the effects of an OPEC oil embargo, which led to the imposition of a three-day working week and severe restrictions on the use of electricity in the UK.

assured. For instance, in 1975, Idris Walters suggested that such artists were now "executives of their own label[s]', and gave examples such as Led Zeppelin's Swan Song Records and Deep Purple's Purple Records, though he might also have added E.L.P.'s Manticore Records and many more (1975: 18). It is a theme revisited by Caroline Coon in 1976 when she referred to Led Zeppelin and Bad Company as having "become multi-national corporations, casualties of the business ethic" (1976a: 25). She extends this to a neo-Marxist critique by arguing that rock music of the 1960s was "anti-elitist", a voice "from and of the people", hence rock's maturity in the mid-1970s was a betrayal of the true meaning of rock. Such sentiments resonated with some, though not all readers. One argued that "There are no social pressures on these superstars. They can escape; they have their money", before lamenting that the rock stars of the day were complaining about UK tax laws: "Robert Plant doesn't have to scrounge for fags on a Tuesday after getting paid before the weekend" (Greenwood 1976: 48)[17]. Others were less convinced by Coon's analysis: "Vitality and energy are, of course, the foundations of rock music, but what's wrong with intelligence and skill?" (Burns 1976: 48). As many other authors have noted, it is the neo-Marxist critique that continued to grow during 1976 and 1977 as the distinction between the top tier artists and those at the grassroots continued to extend, and the Do-It-Yourself movement took hold. As one fan attending the Punk Rock Festival at the 100 Club in London said to Coon: "We've got another underground at last… I've waited seven years for this" (1976b: 27)—a comment which reinforces the peri-generational split discussed earlier. A number of articles published by the *Melody Maker* had, since 1971, been calling for something new to arrive in the world of rock music, but it took the peri-generational conflict of the mid-1970s before it would reach fruition. And even then,

[17] The top rate of income tax was raised to 83% in 1974, leading many rock and pop musicians to go into "tax exile" by moving abroad, thereby avoiding the need to pay it (Stump 2010: 166–7).

as Andy Bennett's chapter in this book shows, it wasn't a complete victory over the progressive musicians that had achieved success in the 1970s—at least, not over those in the top tier of the business.

Conclusion

This chapter has used *Melody Maker* as an archival source to gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors that led to the decline of the grassroots progressive rock scene of the early 1970s, while the top tier groups found global success in the album charts and on world tours. Punk rock's Year Zero may be regarded as the culmination of economic, business, and cultural factors that had been developing since at least 1971, including a peri-generational split that saw younger music fans seeking a new music and scene to call their own. The paper shows this conflict through the divergent views expressed by journalists and readers of the time, views that were centered on rock music as a whole, not just on those bands that Caroline Coon would later canonize as progressive rock. A detailed examination of the other music papers of the time might demonstrate an alternative narrative; yet, by focusing on *Melody Maker* in particular, we can see that the dissatisfaction felt by some journalists and readers dates back to before the height of the progressive rock bands' commercial success. This is evidenced through the growth of the discotheque sector, the revival of the singles charts, and the failure of the underground live music clubs and college circuit. At the same time, economic conditions led the record companies to focus on the top tier of acts to the detriment of supporting up-and-coming acts. Thus, we see two narratives emerging. The first focuses on the well-rehearsed "punk vs. prog" argument that the top tier acts (actually, rock bands in general, not just those we now call "progressive") had lost direction and were out of touch with the interests of the fans (even though many went on to find continued success in a

changing musical and business landscape—see Andy Bennett's chapter in this book). The second focuses on the grassroots of music making, where bands who sought to follow in the footsteps of the top tier "progressive" groups, found their opportunities for promotion, live performance, and record company support fading away.

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