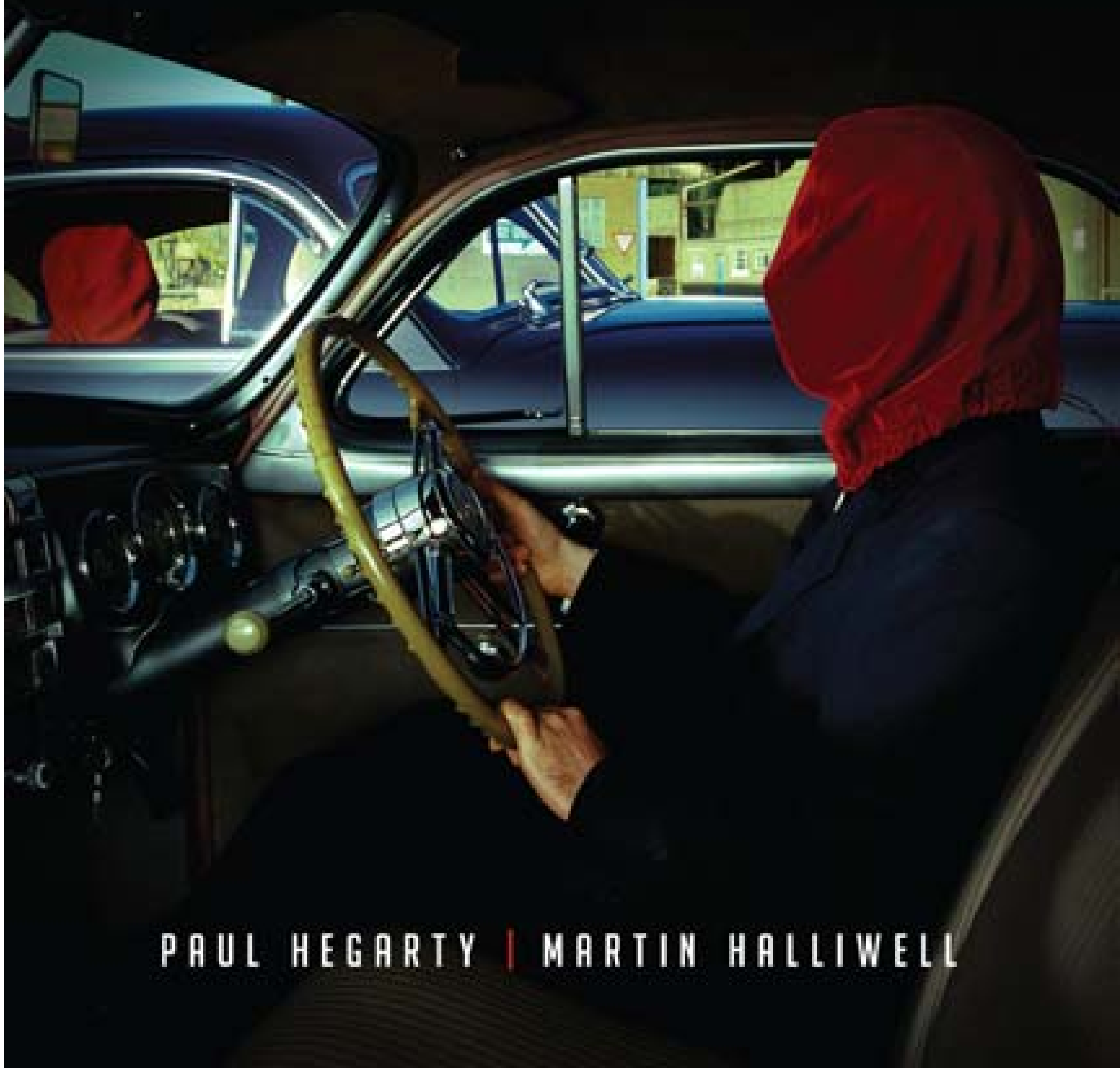
BEYOND AND BEFORE

PROGRESSIVE ROCK SINCE THE 1960s



PAUL HEGARTY | MARTIN HALLIWELL

Beyond and Before

"Examining every aspect of progressive rock – words and music, theatre and politics – Hegarty and Halliwell deftly unpick the tangled threads of tradition and radicalism that make up the genre's tapestry. In addition to shedding vital new light on an often maligned and misunderstood phase in rock's history, this probing and incisive study tracks prog's continued and unexpected reverberations through popular music long after punk had supposedly vanquished and banished it."

Simon Reynolds, author of *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (2011) and *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978–84* (2005)

"*Beyond and Before* is a wonderful account of both the rich legacy and the ongoing story of progressive rock in all its forms. At last, here is a book that gives prog its due respect as a vital part of the history of rock music, without tying it to a simplistic narrative of over-ambition, decadence and decline. The best thing about the book is its comprehensive, nuanced definition of what counts as progressive. In Hegarty and Halliwell's capable hands we journey from such unlikely precursors of the concept album as Frank Sinatra and Duke Ellington, through the 1970s Golden Age of Jethro Tull, Genesis and Pink Floyd to contemporary exponents as various as Spock's Beard, Porcupine Tree and The Decemberists."

Greg Walker, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at the University of Edinburgh

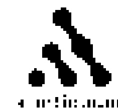
"This is a great book. Hegarty and Halliwell have rescued progressive rock from the condescension of history by crafting a work that is smart, sympathetic, and impressively sweeping in its coverage of a much derided, yet enormously diverse and influential transnational music. Whether your taste is Porcupine Tree or Pink Floyd, Epica or ELP, Mike Oldfield or Midlake, there is plenty to admire and ponder in this ambitious and compelling account. By offering an expanded definition of prog rock in terms of its roots, musical and lyrical characteristics, geographic sources, artwork, performance practices, and legacies, *Beyond and Before* offers an exhilarating read."

Brian Ward, Professor of American Studies at the University of Manchester

Beyond and Before

Progressive Rock since the 1960s

Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell



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Introduction

Progressive Rock since the 1960s

'Ever get the feeling you've been cheated?' asked John Lydon, on stage at Winterland, San Francisco, in January 1978, in his last days as Johnny Rotten. The dream of the Sex Pistols to break free from rock cliché was over, ended in a farce of hype, self-indulgence and musical stasis. Punk was born in 1976 from a fury of destruction and renewal, and its principal target was progressive rock, whose alleged self-indulgence and pretension would be brought to a close by the fresh and angry authenticity of a newly stripped-down version of rock, invigorated through simplicity.

The dominant discourse in music history is that progressive rock was victim to punk's return to basics, albeit a basis that imagined it needed to destroy all that had gone before in order to proclaim a new beginning. In practical terms, nothing of the sort happened. The rock bands that were commercially successful remained so, and some, such as Genesis and Rush, increased in popularity during the late 1970s. Critically speaking, though, progressive rock remained doomed, as a generation of supporters of punk, particularly in Britain and centred on the weekly music paper the *New Musical Express*, moved into academia (with the growth of cultural studies) and into the mainstream press. To this day, a suspicion lingers over anything that recalls the experimentation practised by 1970s progressive rock bands. For example, in 1998, the *Observer* ran an article, 'Oh No, It's Yes: Where Even Irony Fears to Tread', which noted the rise of nostalgia for the 1970s but claimed that progressive rock remains 'utterly unforgiven' in media circles.[1] The article's author, David Thomas, goes on to say that in 1973–4

> many of us huddled against the cold of the power cuts and the three-day week in Afghan sheepskins, earnestly debating the secret meaning of the latest progressive rock concept album and pondering great questions of life like, who was the best bass player, Greg Lake or John Paul Jones?[2]

Although Thomas here recoils from a formative phase of his musical education, the limits of this kind of discourse have been, to our mind, fatally exposed, primarily because since the late 1990s progressive rock has renewed itself as a major cultural force without recourse to the musical vocabulary assumed to be the staple of all progressive styles.[3]

The obvious approach to a new study of progressive rock is to pretend that its hostile reception around the time of punk simply never occurred. Yet this might lead to a wistful or nostalgic view of 1970s progressive rock, cut dead in its prime by the assault of punk or undone from within by the excesses of the rock industry. This book wishes to avoid such nostalgia by pursuing two other aims: we focus on the long and varied musical history of progressive rock, first, to counter recent social histories of 1970s Britain that marginalize its existence as a major musical form, and, second, to problematize the received orthodoxy that punk did away with prog.[4] Such strategies enable us to examine how progressive rock works across its cultural, historical and musical range, rather than attempting to justify or deny a single generation's hostile interpretation of prog.

This is not to resurrect prog at the expense of punk, though. The punk attack on progressive and stadium rock undeniably occurred, and it would be true to say that the inspiration created by punk – to open music up to all, rather than its being the province of musical virtuosos – was significant, creative and powerful. It is also true that the rock criticism emerging as a serious force in the late 1970s had much to say, notably on what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in the mid-1940s called 'the culture industry', which, after World War II, increasingly replaced cultural creativity with standardized products that have only surface attraction or 'style'.[5] For all the virtues of *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock* (1998), Bill Martin is wrong to caricature punk as an example of cynical music for a cynical society that totally rejected the utopianism of the mid-1960s and its bearing on the youth cultures of the 1970s.[6] Above all, though, we cannot write off the historical reception of progressive rock; Martin joins Edward Macan, author of the other major book on progressive rock, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (1997), in acknowledging the power of that critical paradigm. They each do so largely unconsciously, and they effectively accept the characterization of progressive rock offered by its critics. In this book, we realize the need to accept the reality of 'punk criticism', but without believing all of it to be true.

The problem is not that punk-inspired criticism is entirely wrong or misguided. The fault lies in the limited view of what progressive rock actually was – and still is. To this day, mention the words 'progressive rock' and many will conjure images of long solos, overlong albums, fantasy lyrics, grandiose stage sets and costumes, and a dedication to technical skill bordering on the obsessive. A few moments in its history have come to represent the whole, such as the much repeated image of the massive tour buses that Emerson,

Lake and Palmer used to carry around the band's vast array of musical and stage equipment in the mid-1970s, or Led Zeppelin's luxuriously fitted Starship One aeroplane used for the band's 1975 US tour. But these images tend to be a spurious metonymy of convenience. If we move up a notch in 'what was wrong with prog', we still encounter a range of references limited to Yes, Genesis, Jethro Tull, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP). Although these bands have certainly been responsible for melodramatic moments in their histories, even the most virulent opponent could not deny that they were highly popular in the 1970s and, for the most part, experimental in their compositions, albums and performances.

Beyond these nemeses of authentic rock lie the more interesting cases of King Crimson, Soft Machine and Van der Graaf Generator, bands that never received the same amount of vitriol as the aforementioned foursome, with Lydon himself keen on Van der Graaf Generator and its portentous singer Peter Hammill in particular (much to the disgust of Sex Pistols' manager, Malcolm McLaren). What is curious is that Martin and Macan use the same categorization to defend and explicate progressive rock. We will argue throughout this book, in different ways according to the type of progressive rock discussed, that prog is an incredibly varied genre based on fusions of styles, approaches and genres, and that it taps into broader cultural resonances that link to avant-garde art, classical and folk music, performance and the moving image. One of the best ways to define progressive rock is that it is a heterogeneous and troublesome genre – a formulation that becomes clear the moment we leave behind characterizations based only on the most visible bands of the early to mid-1970s. To do this, we need to explore the roots and sources of progressive rock; earlier examples of the concept album and song-cycle; the incredible variety of prog during the 1970s; and its legacies and parallels in rock music since the late 1970s, including neo-progressive and post-progressive revivals in the 1980s and late 1990s and the immense sprawl of metal into progressive methods, styles and forms.

Over the last ten to fifteen years, groups that update progressive rock have been massively successful – think of Radiohead, Tool, Muse, The Mars Volta and Porcupine Tree, among other innovative bands that have helped to resuscitate its long-lost credibility. We could say that the question of credibility no longer applies. In addition to sales, concert attendance and internet activity, the resurgence of interest among fans and practitioners of progressive rock can be seen in the now regular publication of *Classic Rock Presents Prog* magazine, launched in spring 2009: an offshoot of *Classic Rock* that focuses on the history of the genre and the rich diversity of prog across Europe and North America in the present. Other signs of this resurgence can be seen in the mainstream press. An article on contemporary music styles covered by the *Sunday Times* in January 2009 makes the claim that watching and listening to bands such as Radiohead, Muse and The Secret Machines is 'to witness all the mad splendour of prog rock, alive and well three decades

after its heyday (and apparent death at the hands of punk)'.[7] Bemoaning the stereotyping of prog bands and style, the article continues:

> Back in the days before prog and art rock were seen as two separate entities, the best practitioners not only justified their mission – to make music of a greater complexity and inventiveness than the standard rock song format allowed for – with some superb albums, they also pointed the way towards the music of similarly unfettered and adventurous contemporary bands.[8]

Leaving aside the uncritical celebration of 'unfettered and adventurous' music, it is clear that progressive rock has equally complex legacies and genealogies, as explored in a *Guardian* feature in July 2010 that coincided with the inclusion of a dedicated progressive rock stage at that year's High Voltage festival in Victoria Park, London.[9]

As well as expanding on the *what* of progressive rock, we will extend the *when*. As the title of this book suggests, we are interested in the 'before' and 'beyond' of prog, as well as its high phase, from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. This explains the two sections of the book: the first part deals with the 'before' and 'during' of progressive rock, tracing its conceptual and historical roots up to 1976–7, while the second part looks at the 'beyond', including responses to punk, a renegotiation of the legacy of prog, and the renewal of musical possibilities over the last thirty years. Our title, *Beyond and Before*, indicates that time features in many intersecting ways: the temporal reach of progressive rock; its interest in experimental time signatures; and time as a recurring theme in lyrics, song-cycles and concepts, such as Rush's 2010–11 Time Machine tour. In addition, we will expand on the *where* of prog. Bill Martin notes that prog was the first 'world music', because of its synthesizing of non-European elements with the already semi-global European classical music and English rock.[10] We want to make the case that it is literally a global music, spreading rapidly beyond England, crisscrossing the Atlantic and emerging in various European countries including Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden, and building on (but also complicating) the countercultural moves for individual and social freedoms that became visible in so many places in 1968.

This book will argue strongly for a highly diverse and open-ended idea of what progressive rock is, not out of a fashionable belief in political or cultural difference but because openness and extreme diversity (even within a single track) are key characteristics of progressive rock, its sources and its later forms. Nevertheless, a model is needed to avoid arguing that every interesting rock album that produces something new is somehow progressive. It would be accurate to say that any such album is a candidate for being thought of as progressive. Equally, it is important to avoid an overly reductive definition in terms of period or style. Bill Martin in *Music of Yes* (1996) and *Listening to the Future* proposes a set of guidelines for what progressive rock is and how it

works.[11] For us, this model is too reductive if taken as a definitive paradigm; but used in combination with many ideas Martin offers as being of secondary importance, it is a productive way of beginning to think analytically and expansively about progressive rock.

Martin outlines three dominant characteristics of prog, which he then moulds into a four-point model. First, he writes of progressive rock being a true synthesis of different musical forms. Whereas The Beatles, along with many other 1960s bands, included elements of classical music or music from outside European traditions,

> in full-blown progressive rock, the synthesis is much more complete in the following way: when we hear the presence and juxtaposition of harpsichord and sitar [in progressive rock tracks], this sounds much more like something that has been part of the music all along.[12]

This interpretation means that diverse forms are integrated rather than acting as texture or ornamentation. The second key element of a progressive rock genre is musical virtuosity. This is controversially used, as Martin acknowledges, to exclude Pink Floyd, among others, a group that many regard as not only progressive in style but also very keen on musical skill.[13] His point is a subtle one; if we include all bands on this basis, we would have to include many rock records far outside what is usually thought of as progressive rock – a direction this book embraces by tracing the complex roots and multiple directions of the concept album. Third, for Martin, progressive rock is inherently, if not permanently, English in origin: that is, it derives from a particular collision of influences in English culture, such as religious dissenting, class as a determining social factor, a nationalistic sense of heritage, and a critique of social convention. In Martin's model, all progressive bands follow on from these national origins, as progressive rock 'sets sail from England'.[14] We will return to this idea after a quotation that incorporates the three strands of Martin's model:

> As a style of music progressive rock has five specific traits: 1) it is visionary and experimental; 2) it is played, at least in significant part, on instruments typically associated with rock music, by musicians who have a background in rock music, and with the history of rock music itself as background; 3) it is played, in significant part, by musicians who have consummate instrumental and compositional skills; 4) it is a phenomenon, in its 'core', of English culture; 5) relatedly, in significant part, it is expressive of romantic and prophetic aspects of that culture.[15]

These are not quite the same points identified in Martin's earlier list of key elements, but they need to be considered together with them. The first part of the definition is essential: for Martin, progressive rock is a type of utopianism interested in social change, even when it seems furthest from concrete

political concerns (and especially so in the music of Yes). Furthermore, it is the pinnacle of rock 'n' roll's nascent avant-gardism. Martin's model is as much about exclusion as inclusion: music after the 'time of progressive rock', in 1978, could not attain the critical function of its high phase because society had lost its utopianism and had descended into social cynicism linked to a more brutal form of capitalism.[16] Following Edward Macan, another way of describing this moment is the splintering of the late 1960s counterculture into a series of fragmented subcultures, of which punk would be one example. For Martin, punk is merely the most blatant example of cultural cynicism (with the exception of Sex Pistols' 1977 album *Never Mind the Bollocks*, which conveys authentic musicalized anger). Ironically, this attempt to recover a politically progressive music resulted in his adopting a highly conservative position, paralleling the critical views of postmodernism that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

Martin follows a line that characterizes the moment in which he is writing: bemoaning (or half-heartedly praising) the end of the avant-garde in a manner that was common at the time of Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991). Because of an over-emphasis on Jameson's notion of the 'waning of affect' through commodity production, this text is often misread as a blanket condemnation of contemporary aesthetics. Jameson explains the postmodern turn as the endpoint of exhaustion of modernism, cutting across diverse cultural forms:

> This break is most often related to notions of the waning or extinction of the hundred-year-old modern movement [. . .] Thus abstract expressionism in painting, existentialism in philosophy, the final forms of representation in the novel, the films of the great *auteurs*, or the modernist school of poetry . . . all are now seen as the final, extraordinary flowering of a high-modernist impulse which is spent and exhausted with them. The enumeration of what follows, then, at once becomes empirical, chaotic, and heterogeneous: Andy Warhol and pop art, but also photorealism, and beyond it, the 'new expressionism'; the moment, in music, of John Cage, but also the synthesis of classical and 'popular' styles found in composers like Phil Glass and Terry Riley, and also punk and new wave rock.[17]

Here, diversity rather than agonistic cultural trends mark a break from the modernist tradition in the 1960s and 1970s. Just like the 'end of history', which returned in the late 1980s (alongside the apparent end of ideology), the end of the avant-garde through the rejection of modernism is meaningful, but perhaps signals only the end of a particular Hegelian or Marxist notion of progression. If this particular conception is only part of a multi-dimensional progression, as opposed to progress as an inevitable upward or rising movement, then it cannot go away but only change configuration. We would argue that this occurred in what comes 'after' progressive rock in more and increasingly diverse forms. Developing Jameson's point about the diversity

of postmodern cultures, rather than adopting the view of the dominance of a singular musical expression that plugs into a certain historical moment (psychedelic rock in 1967 or punk in 1976), Andreas Huyssen points towards the various competing 'phases and directions' of modernist culture running through the 1960s and 1970s, not all of which were moving in the same direction. The problem for Huyssen is that one version of modernism became 'domesticated in the 1950s'.[18] An 'adversary culture' that had marked earlier twentieth-century modernism still existed after mid-century, but it was overshadowed by a Cold War critical consensus and an academic emphasis on the text divorced from its material mode of production and its circulation in the marketplace. Similarly to Jameson, in *After the Great Divide* (1986) Huyssen suggests an alternative narrative of modernist culture, not as monolithic but as mobile and porous.

These views help us to understand the diversity of progressive rock, but we also need to step backwards to consider popular music before prog and its relation to the avant-garde. Chapter 2 examines the roots of progressive rock in the mid-1960s, but we need to explore whether or how rock relates to different models of the avant-garde in order to complete and broaden our reading of Martin's typology. Can we say with him, for example, that rock 'n' roll had any musical claims to being an avant-garde? If it did, was this more through its social impact or its inspiration for future musical experimentation?

Michael Nyman distinguishes between avant-garde music as that which is programme-based and functions within the orchestra or composer or musical-score genre, and experimental music where the status of music itself is questioned (by John Cage or La Monte Young or the international Fluxus project) or where its seriousness as high art is replaced by the repetitions and non-European influences of minimalism.[19] Although this is a tidy distinction, it differs from the usual understanding of the avant-garde in visual art, where a succession of aesthetic innovations gave rise to an avant-garde in the form of Dadaism, which did precisely what interests Nyman in experimental music, only fifty years earlier: unleashing a succession of early twentieth-century avant-gardes that questioned the basis of art.

Italian theorist Renato Poggioli's 1962 book *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia* (translated as *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1968) historicizes the concept within the framework of modernity, and argues that avant-garde art itself can arise only when the idea of an avant-garde is present. The key seems to be that anything avant-garde cannot be judged on formal grounds alone. This is also true for two subsequent books: Peter Bürger's 1974 study *Theorie der Avantgarde* (translated as *Theory of the Avant-Garde* in 1984) and Rosalind Krauss's *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (1985). For Krauss, the avant-garde artist imagines his or her self to be a new origin for art (which applies equally to modernist conceptions of time and history); having emerged parthenogenetically, the artist can pass on craft, lore or inspiration to the generations that follow. Krauss defines this as the 'myth

of the avant-garde', which postmodernist practitioners attempt to dispose of with their lack of belief in autonomous originality.[20]

For us, progressive rock is both formally and socially avant-gardist, even if the latter becomes harder to see in the mid-1970s and might not be the case for all of its early twenty-first-century versions. In terms of Nyman's instrumentalist distinction between 'avant-garde' and 'experimental', we note that prog does both: it crosses this divide even if its critics might imagine that the grandiose musical ambitions of The Nice or Emerson, Lake and Palmer were to be surpassed by more directly authentic music. Martin's argument about rock 'n' roll being avant-garde from the start targets critics of progressive rock who claim that it is a perversion of rock, and that its authenticity can be restored only through the new simplicity of punk. In this respect, Martin is right to argue against a primal authenticity that validates certain forms of music and denigrates others. But Martin overstates the formal radicalism of rock 'n' roll by claiming that it was always hybrid and always innovative, particularly when formally it simplified blues structures and historically it developed in the 1950s alongside more radical musical forms: the emergence of free jazz, mathematical programme music, and the avant-gardism of the Black Mountain College in North Carolina.[21]

To understand whether this makes progressive rock avant-gardist requires further detail. Formally, although rock 'n' roll might have brought innovations to popular music, it would seem that if it ever thought of avant-garde music, it was to react against it, in a bid to speak to the 'real world' of young Americans. But what if the *audience* was avant-garde? Beyond the negative reception by panicky holders of power in the US in the mid-1950s (repeated slightly later in Britain), open-minded listeners keen on social, cultural and artistic change were successors to the original black audiences for so-called 'race music' in the 1940s or jazz in the pre-World War II period, for whom rock 'n' roll was no bolt from the blue but an organic outcrop of existing musical forms.[22] But this would not necessarily have been a conscious avant-gardism, at least not until the mid-1960s; as Charlie Gillett notes, 'few people in the rock 'n' roll audience deliberately or consciously considered music' intellectually.[23] Much of what white listeners in the 1950s heard as rock 'n' roll would have seemed exotic, but for black listeners its rhythm and blues elements were unremarkable and simply a phase in organic musical development.[24] Furthermore, rock 'n' roll audiences, according to sociologist David Riesman, were often elective communities formed around an awareness of new sounds, clubs, fashions and slang:

> There were still other ways in which the minority may use popular music to polarize itself from the majority group, and thereby from American popular culture generally: a sympathetic attitude or even preference for Negro musicians; an equalitarian attitude toward the roles, in love and work, of the two sexes; a more international outlook [and] a feeling that music is too important to serve as a backdrop for dancing, small talk, studying, and the like; a diffuse resentment of the image of the teen-ager provided by the mass media.[25]

This audience helped to produce the musicians of 1960s and 1970s rock who became self-aware avant-gardists, purposely trying to introduce greater formal innovation into a rock format that still conveyed the excitement, rebellion and creative inspiration of rock 'n' roll. The promise or threat of social change and the formal structure of rock 'n' roll – simple lyrics, vocal mannerisms, and repetitive beats, chords and song structures – were easily and rapidly assimilated by the music industry that would triple its sales in the US between 1954 and 1959. It was precisely the affirmative elements of rock 'n' roll that made it so malleable, and progressive musicians of the 1960s would reintroduce complexity into rock, as a way of maintaining rebellious individuality and group identity alike in the face of massive capitalist and cultural recuperation of youth culture.[26]

The second trait that Martin identifies – that prog contains rock elements – is unarguable, although we will be discussing music that has gone a long way from the 1960s and 1970s rock template. If 'progressive' is to mean anything, it has to include the sense of referring to previous musical styles, whether those are progressive or not. When looking beyond the 1970s, Martin identifies only bands that refer specifically to the narrowly defined progressive rock style of the 1970s, whereas we would see 'progressive' as being meaningful only if it does more than that – although, as we discuss in Chapter 10, 'neo-progressive' music exists as a direct reference to the history of prog, often to the exclusion of other musical reference points. King Crimson's Robert Fripp identified this as a problem with what was termed progressive rock as far back as 1973, but this was part of Fripp's attempt to distance himself from the broader movement of prog. This is one reason we use the term 'prog' interchangeably with 'progressive rock' in this book. Initially, prog was just a shorthand for the progressive rock style, but recent years have seen it become a transferrable adjective, and it suggests a wider palette than that drawn on by the most popular 1970s bands.

The question of virtuosity is a vexed one for those who want progressive rock to be more than the self-indulgence for which prog is criticized. It is undeniable that many progressive rock musicians, especially in the 1970s, were talented, skilful and creative. The question is whether this hindered or helped musical creativity, particularly as progressive bands were interested in different ways of writing and performing as a group and of developing ideas into integrated concept albums, rather than filling out albums and concerts with tracks featuring virtuoso solos. Martin is correct to argue that Yes has always been an astonishingly skilful musical group, with its individuals incredibly inventive in ways that foster communal creativity, often in the form of what seems to be five musicians all playing lead at the same time. King Crimson has the same level of skills in all areas of music-making, but

in very different ways from Yes. However, there are two problems with the use of virtuosity as a defining feature of progressive rock.

First, virtuosity was often praised for its very existence, hence the move to painfully long concert solos in the 1970s as an extension of jazz group practice. The 1970s music media were full of polls for best bass player and who could sustain the longest drum solo, with an increasing sense that personal technique could override band creativity (and often led key figures to release solo albums during sabbaticals from their bands). To balance this view, it is worth noting that Yes pursued virtuosity only for its own sake to a moderate degree on certain concert tours, and King Crimson almost never did. The worst offenders would be rock bands that did not receive the critical derision levelled at prog – bands who had stayed with a more blues-based style, and who were also filling stadia (such as The Who and Led Zeppelin, with John Bonham's 20-minute live drum solos filling out the latter's 1969 track 'Moby Dick').

Second, and more significantly, it is simply not true that progressive rock either required or always had very skilled musicians. More folk-based prog bands would have had little need for it, while still creating records we would recognize as progressive rock (see Chapters 3 and 13). Other bands would work at complex structures made up of simple elements. The music known as *kosmische* or Krautrock would often be highly repetitive. And did Hawkwind ever care about being virtuoso? Bill Martin would exclude space rock, just as he excludes Frank Zappa, funk (he refers to 'progressive soul' in passing), and the raft of 1970s groups that were not technically brilliant, such as the Irish band Horslips.[27] Early neo-prog, the most genre-referential type of prog, was often musically limited when it started out in the wake of punk and heavy metal in late 1970s Britain.

One dimension of Martin's point about the Englishness of progressive rock is uncontroversial in terms of the English poetic tradition in which it can be placed, which includes the Romantic poets, William Blake, John Milton, and traditional folk ballads and tales.[28] Macan echoes these points but takes a more pragmatic line: 'the genre originated in England and achieved its "classic" form at the hands of English bands during the early 1970s; even the neo-progressive revival of the early 1980s began in England'.[29] Once we factor in folk music, progressive folk, psychedelia and neo-progressive bands such as Pallas, then we are talking not about England but about all of Britain and Ireland, so the broader point about progressive rock being essentially English requires further comment. Prog rock emerged in Britain when the music industry was successful to the point it could countenance highly experimental music as a potentially viable commercial proposition, which linked together rock, jazz and folk scenes in which the musical and cultural exchange across regions and national borders was an implicit feature.[30]

The insistence on the Englishness of prog works only in relation to English progressive bands (and the encouragement of prog by English labels,

including early independent labels Charisma and Virgin and the offshoots of major companies such as Harvest, Vertigo and Deram). Other than the largely unexplained inclusion of Magma (Germany) and PFM (Italy), all prog has to be English for Martin. We contend, and will argue later, that as progressive rock emerges from more specific musical trends, moments, locations and social conditions than an amorphous and peculiarly ahistorical Englishness, it cannot be reduced to being inherently English. Its influences in jazz, folk and classical, let alone in, say, Asian music, make this a much more complex picture, although England did produce a larger number of groups in the formative moments of progressive rock. In short, although progressive rock arises in England, it comprises elements that arrive from elsewhere; it is built in a specific historical musical phase; and it very quickly travelled across Europe and the Atlantic and, more recently, to other areas of the world such as China, with the Shanghai band Cold Fairyland influenced equally by Jethro Tull and Chinese folk music.

So much for where progressive rock might arise. Before we return to this question in Chapters 1 and 2, we will adapt one further idea from Bill Martin: that of 'stretching out'. The most well-known characteristic of progressive rock, for fans and detractors alike, is the length of songs, solos, albums and concerts. To a large extent, there is no such thing as progressive rock without extended form, which is the term we will largely use, but 'stretching out' gives the sense of how extended form arises. The stretch is not just of time but also of practice, recombining different genres and bringing in sounds, ideas and styles that would normally be beyond rock: 'though the phrase suggests longer works, the idea has more to do with stretching beyond established boundaries'.[31] This means that in this book we include The Beatles, The Beach Boys, The Doors, The Pretty Things, The Zombies, The Byrds, The Grateful Dead and Pink Floyd not merely as precursors of prog but as essential developments of progressiveness in its early days. Martin delineates two types of stretching out, based on his two exemplars of progressive rock – Yes and King Crimson:

> One form of stretching out is akin to jazz, while the other is more akin to Western classical music. One might think of the way King Crimson, for example, has definite affinities with avant-garde jazz, while Yes has affinities with twentieth-century classical music.[32]

The implications of Martin's perspective need pursuing, and not just into the extended jams of the space rock of Hawkwind, for example. Once we have identified 'stretching out' as a characteristic of prog, we can then extend it backwards; it can be identified in the free jazz of Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane, the sprawl of Karlheinz Stockhausen's electronic music, and Duke Ellington's 1943 concept piece *Black, Brown and Beige* (see Chapter 1). Stretching out connects to the need for prog to reference rock and other

musical styles, and it helps us identify progressive rock as being involved in a process that is properly avant-garde and experimental. From the late 1960s onwards, progressive rock functioned, more often than not, as a self-conscious avant-garde, formally and socially. In so doing, as a musical genre it eludes the 'myth of the avant-garde' that the world has been reborn for the first time, and instead adopts the properly modernist attitude of referencing its precursors in continued innovation. We, as listeners, readers and critics, see a continuum of avant-gardes as if this was how it happened, because now it has always already happened.

The question of rock 'n' roll being avant-garde is relevant only once the question can be posed of post-1965 rock music, because a key part of an avant-garde is to have a movement for which it is the vanguard: rock 'n' roll can be read as a form of avant-garde free from content and devoid of formal complexity and experimentation. This, in turn, propelled the formless fuzz of psychedelia that gradually uncurled jams, solos and the literal stretching of tunes, and gave rise to the first moments of full-blown prog at the very end of the 1960s.[33] Prog did this, according to Macan, as an active response to the total environment and sensual overload of psychedelia, and the tools it used derived from classical music both in the guise of a more narrative version of extension and in terms of structure:

> Progressive rock was able to solve yet another challenge posed by the psychedelic jam – how to create a sense of direction – by drawing on nineteenth-century symphonic music's fondness for building up tension until a shattering climax is reached, abruptly tailing off, and then starting the process anew.[34]

In fact, classical music would be what distinguished prog from other forms of rock, even though Macan admits the multiple influences on and within progressive rock.[35] Not only that, but classical music is used as a means to buttress highly speculative, while notionally empirical, claims about church music in England: namely, that choral Anglican music was important in England over several centuries, and was a key part of the musical backdrop for members of progressive groups in the late 1960s and 1970s, some of whom would have been participants in that scene through their childhood upbringing or their adult practices.[36] There might be some peripheral value here, but Macan is more persuasive when claiming that English composer and collector of folk music Ralph Vaughan Williams was a catalyst for combining classical music forms and a particularly English Romantic sensibility.

Among the various styles of prog, only a handful of groups could be said to be intent on emulating or citing classical music. On *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* (1968), The Nice followed hard on the heels of Procol Harum's borrowing of Johann Sebastian Bach in 'A Whiter Shade of Pale' (1967). The Nice reworked classical pieces and wrote in a classical style, such as pieces in sonata form divided into movements. Keith Emerson pursued this vein in Emerson, Lake

and Palmer during the 1970s, while longer pieces by Yes sought to emulate the sonata form. This classical tradition is to some extent present in many bands, if only through the simulating warmth of the Mellotron, which bands started to use after 1965 as a sample-playback keyboard that gives a layered texture and richness to the recorded sound. But the sonata form is one among many other elements even when actual orchestras were used, such as in Deep Purple's collaboration with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, released as *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* in 1969.

We will develop these formal and historical features of progressive rock in the following chapters. However, in addition to the above elements, there is a further essential component of progressive rock that introduced highly developed form and content: innovations in musical technology, the creative use of the studio, and new recording techniques. As Chapters 1 and 2 discuss with reference to Britain and the United States, this is a stretching out that stretches back to the 1950s, in the shape of a growing understanding of the possibilities of 'the album' and the recording process itself, and crystallized in 1967, with the release of some key albums in the emergence of progressive rock.

Notes

1. David Thomas, 'Oh No, It's Yes: Where Even Irony Fears to Tread', the *Observer*, Review (8 March 1998), 5.
2. Ibid., 5.
3. Thomas notes that the release of Radiohead's *OK Computer* in 1997 might signal 'a triumphant return for all things prog' (5). This view might have been stimulated by the publication of two books on progressive rock: Edward Macan's *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Paul Stump's *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock* (London: Quarter Books, 1997). Stump's book gave rise to a *Guardian* review in defense of prog rock, even while acknowledging that it was sometimes 'bloated and overblown' – Adam Sweeting, 'The Hair's Apparent', the *Guardian* (2 May 1997), 4.
4. Dominic Sandbrook's *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970–1974* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) contains a few references to progressive rock, but Andy Beckett's *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009) has almost none. For a third social history of 1970s Britain in which music is unevenly represented, see Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum, 2008).
5. A similar process had already occurred in the 1960s, observed George Melly in *Revolt into Style: The Pop Arts in Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970).
6. Bill Martin, *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock, 1968–1978* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1998).
7. 'Your Definitive Guide to Today's Music Scene', the *Sunday Times*, Culture (11 January 2009), 26–7.
8. Ibid., 27.
9. 'Prog Rock: The Music that Refused to Die', the *Guardian*, Film and Music (23 July 2010), 4. For other recent appraisals see Greg Walker, 'Grand Masters of Vinyl', *Times Higher*

Education (11 September 2008), 41–4 and Will Romano, *Mountains Come Out of the Sky: The Illustrated History of Prog Rock* (Milwaukee, WI: Backbeat Books, 2010).

10. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 41, 295–6.
11. See Bill Martin, *Music of Yes: Structure and Vision in Progressive Rock* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1996).
12. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 100.
13. Ibid., 102–3.
14. Ibid., 104.
15. Ibid., 121.
16. An example of this can be seen in *Red Riding: In the Year of Our Lord 1974* (2009), the Channel 4 adaptation of David Peace's novel *1974* (1999), in which listening to King Crimson is a symbol of the gloomy cynicism and introspection of the mid-1970s.
17. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 1.
18. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 190.
19. See Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1974] 1999), 1–30.
20. Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968); Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 151–70.
21. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 34–7.
22. This is the argument developed by Jacques Attali in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1977] 1985). Attali's broad argument is that 'noise' is deemed unacceptable by mainstream policed society and its 'guardians' (moral or armed), and that musicians have often been the heralds of social change, demonstrated in the reaction of political and religious authorities to them.
23. Charlie Gillett, *The Sound of the City* (London: Sphere, 1971), 291.
24. Ibid., 42.
25. David Riesman, 'Listening to Popular Music', in *Mass Culture*, ed. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1957), quoted in Gillett, *Sound of the City*, 14.
26. Such a claim is not to resist rock 'n' roll as a style, as it features throughout Gillett's *Sound of the City* and in places in Glenn C. Altschuler's *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Altschuler describes the assimilation of black music as rock 'n' roll increased in popularity: 'For African Americans, rock 'n' roll was a mixed blessing. At times a force for integration and social respect, rock 'n' roll was also an act of theft that in supplanting rhythm and blues deprived blacks of appropriate acknowledgement, rhetorical and financial, of their contributions to American culture' (Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, 34). This appropriation cannot be disputed, but Gillett notes the multiple sources of rock 'n' roll, including country rock and a range of black popular music styles that varied from city to city, so it is perhaps spurious to talk of a singular or homogeneous 'black' culture.
27. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 41.
28. Ibid., 114–21.
29. Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 10.
30. Martin even acknowledges this point, but does not incorporate it into his model (*Listening to the Future*, 137). Gillett goes so far as to claim that Jimi Hendrix is the pivotal figure in the English music scene (*The Sound of the City*, 329).
31. Martin, *Listening to the Future*, 180.
32. Ibid., 74.
33. Macan and Martin agree that King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation* (1969) is the first fully fledged example of a 'mature' progressive rock style.
34. Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 44.
35. Ibid., 30.
36. Ibid., 40, 147–8.

PART 1

Before and During

Chapter 1

Extended Form

Progressive rock needs time: time to arrive, time to develop, time in which specific pieces of its music can work through musical content and form. This is no different to any form of music on one level; music is a sequence of time defined by organized sounds occurring within it. But progressive rock is acutely aware of this status, unlike rock 'n' roll, surf music and pop, with their more or less uniform sense of how long a piece of music should be and predictably structured sequences of verse, chorus, verse, chorus, break or bridge, chorus. The relation of progressive rock to the time and history of popular music is to be its avant-garde, to look to the future even as it looks to the past by mobilizing traditional forms such as folk music. If progressive rock loses this impetus, it becomes a 'style', arguably the exact opposite of 'progressive'. Even here, in this book, we would have to concede that progressive rock had just such a loss of self-awareness for much of the period between the mid- to late 1970s and the mid-1990s, while the spirit of prog rock moved into other musical forms.

Chapter 2 discusses the specific moment of arrival of progressive rock between 1965 and 1970, but this gestation can be seen in the following features: the extension of rock songs into longer pieces; the linking of these pieces into song suites and concept albums; and the increased use of the studio as an integral part of the creative process of music-making, rather than being a mechanical and ancillary part of it. For critics and advocates alike, this combination of elements demonstrated not only the individual maturity of performers such as The Beatles in the mid-1960s but also the maturing of rock as a genre. By the end of the late 1960s, the idea that rock was capable of replicating earlier forms of Western classical music seemed not only feasible but also desirable. Virtuosity and the value accorded to 'classically trained' musicians in the 1970s would seem to support this, and lent credence to the attempts of mid-1970s journalists to retrieve an authenticity that had been lost in rock music. However, while musical authenticity was contested in the mid-1970s when punk aggressively pitted itself against all established forms

of rock music, creativity was at the heart of progressive rock, particularly in the creative use of the studio, extended forms that enhanced the possibilities of 'the album', and aesthetic connections with earlier attempts to develop sustained album-length concepts.

The album goes back further than we might suspect – to 1909, in fact. But in its recognizable form, the term was not much used until the late 1940s. This is principally because the 78 rpm shellac discs that were the industry standard could hold only about 3 minutes of sound. So an album would have to be made of several discs, with a 20-minute sonata needing at least three. Apart from some recordings of classical music, albums were mainly compilations of children's songs and collections of highlights of either several artists, or, less often, one artist. The gradual shift to vinyl records as the norm meant there was a clear distinction between 45 rpm, 7-inch singles, which contained a similar amount of music to 78s, and albums that played at 33 rpm and came in either 10- or 12-inch forms. In between was the 'extended play' 7-inch record, usually featuring four pieces. Rock music discovered in the mid-1960s that an album could be more than a collection of unconnected songs, or songs arranged according to quality (with the singles or better tracks on the A-side of an album), but jazz was already there in the late 1950s, most notably on albums by Duke Ellington, Ornette Coleman and Frank Sinatra.

The use of the studio increasingly became a key part in developing the album through multitracking, inserts, different takes, effects, and recording strategies such as positioning of microphones or players. But of equal material significance was the vinyl form itself, which from 1948 (after a false start in the early 1930s) allowed up to 40 minutes' play, with 20 minutes per side. That records were somehow treated naturalistically prior to The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), often taken to be the first concept album (see Chapter 2), is an interesting but fundamentally flawed myth. Similarly, the idea of 'extended form' was not restricted to classical music or to live performance. Extended form, it should be noted, is not just about length but specifically the extension of form beyond the industry standard. For example, jazz composer Duke Ellington would make a series of thematically linked albums from the late 1950s, but he had already dispensed with the conventional meeting of content and form on the 78 rpm record with his *Reminiscing in Tempo* (1935). This release extended over two 78 records and is 13 minutes long. The title and its music perform a self-referential awareness of time and its constraints enacted through sound recording.[1] Like Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill and other writers of musicals, Ellington thought that music has the power to convey social meaning through experimentation with both content and form, and it could do this through a focusing of lyrical and musical themes in popular or hybrid idioms. This suspicion reached fruition, albeit slowly, in his visionary extended releases *Black, Brown and Beige* (1943) and *New World A-Coming* (1945).

In 1943, Duke Ellington played his musical rendering of the African

American historical experience, *Black, Brown and Beige*, to a not particularly receptive crowd. After a few nights' performance at the Carnegie Hall in Manhattan, it was shelved for fifteen years, although selections were played as part of concerts. In 1958, Ellington revisited the piece, cutting and refocusing it, notably on variations of the theme song 'Come Sunday'. This song alternates with the theme of 'The Work Song' (Sunday being the only time that the people 'imported' from Africa had time to rest and reflect instead of being worked through slavery), and it concludes with a recital of the Christian Psalm 23. The whole is a piece in six numbered parts, three per side of the vinyl album.[2] There is a clear divide between the two sides, with only side two featuring the voice of gospel singer Mahalia Jackson. This movement suggests the coming to being through a Hegelian dialectic awareness of oppression. Hegel's famous master–slave dialectic is rendered material in actual slavery, but the central part of Hegelian thought involves the internal struggle that is a coming to consciousness either of the individual, the group, or humanity as a whole, thereby combining the metaphysical with the material and historical.[3]

Side two of *Black, Brown and Beige* illustrates the transition from victimhood to active freedom (still only aspirational in 1958, even after *Brown versus the Board of Education* in 1954 made segregation unconstitutional) without minimizing the suffering that black people still had to endure (hence the 'and though I walk in the shadow of death' line of Psalm 23). Parts one to three on side one are highly thematic, almost repetitive, whereas side two (parts four to six) offers more direct content, including Mahalia Jackson's two sung sections. But the abstraction of side one plays a formal strategy beyond its harmoniousness, as Ellington moves from a situation where African Americans exist only as abstraction towards tangible being on side two. In a 1957 essay, 'The Race for Space', Ellington argued that the extended jazz form was not just an expression of creative freedom but the key to racial harmony. He asserted that 'music is bigger' than race, skin colour and language, and that the ensemble jazz band functions by combining sounds and harmonies out of 'a polyglot of racial elements'. The extended form finds full expression in this essay, which closes with a universalist clarion call for 'a new sound' to pave the way for 'harmony, brotherly love, common respect and consideration for the dignity and freedom of men'.[4]

In *Black, Brown and Beige*, Ellington produces a clear example of modernist narration, where form becomes expression and content beyond the notes themselves. In between the original performance of 1943 and its appearance on record in 1958, Ellington continued to work on lengthy pieces that paralleled the European symphonic tradition, and in *A Drum is a Woman* (1957) he produced an album that replicated in its form the history of jazz.[5] *A Drum is a Woman* was conceived as a TV special including dance, performance and narration – a multimedia yet populist work. At one level, it tells the story of jazz, but it is how this is enacted that makes it part of conscious avant-gardism; its aim is not to relate but to be 'a tone parallel to the history of jazz'.[6]