

Progressive Rock Reconsidered

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“Let Them All Make Their Own Music”

Individualism, Rush, and the
Progressive/Hard Rock Alloy,
1976–77

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I think. . . . Everything I do has Howard Roark
[Ayn Rand’s fictional individualist architect] in it,
you know, as much as anything. The person I
write for is Howard Roark.

—Rush’s Neil Peart, interview
in *Creem*, 1981

Neil Peart’s rugged individualism makes
Metallica’s James Hetfield seem like a Commie
by comparison.

—Bob Mack,
“Confessions of a Rush Fan”

This chapter discusses the emergence of progressive rock in the half decade following the late 1960s counter-culture (1969–74), in part engaging with issues of genre designation and cultural hierarchy. It then explores Rush’s “21 12,” “Xanadu,” and “Cygnus X-1” (all from 1976 or ’77) as case studies of the band’s peculiar, late 1970s brand of individualism. These three extended compositions use not only lyrics but also varied stylistic features, alternating textures, specific musical gestures, and contrasting tonal areas to inscribe a skeptical point of view concerning the possibility of individual agency, both within an existing society and even in the absence of such a structure.

Progressive Rock and the Postcounterculture Era

In the late 1960s, the term *progressive rock* first appeared, referring to numerous coexisting aspects of diversity and eclecticism within rock music. This music combined roots in “British Invasion” manifestations of rhythm and blues (R and B) and eclectic pop with psychedelic, avant-garde, and/or “classical” tendencies. Examples of these stylistic currents include much of the late-60s music of the Beatles, the Moody Blues, and Procol Harum.

As Edward Macan has argued, aspects of residual spiritualism and mysticism from the late-60s counterculture provided certain elements of much early progressive rock music.¹ However, the communalism central to the counterculture—including unprecedented racial, gender, and class integration among antiestablishment activists, student protesters, and rock music fans—was beginning to fracture into separate agendas, including the black power and women’s movements, by 1969. At precisely the same historical moment, a new genre of rock music emerged: progressive rock or “art rock.” Its overwhelmingly white, predominantly male subculture became increasingly negative about the attempted sociopolitical “revolution” of the late 1960s. Furthermore, although certain features of late-60s rock music continued into the 1970s (including the extemporizations of blues-rock guitar solos and the hedonistic excesses of psychedelic rock), many rock musicians found it more appropriate to counter these residual elements by including in their music large-scale formal design, metrical complexities, virtuosity, and similar elements from art music. Thus, I find it difficult to agree with Macan’s central premise that British progressive rock was primarily an extension of the counterculture’s spiritualism and mysticism.

Indeed, in addition to its formal musical aspects (virtuosity, etc.) and in substantial contrast to the psychedelic rock aesthetic of the late 1960s (centered in the San Francisco Bay Area in the U.S.), the new progressive rock style of the early 1970s consisted almost entirely of British bands. In its most memorable work, it involved science-fiction narratives and technological/sociopolitical themes rather than spiritual/mystical ones.

In addition, early-70s progressive rock often prominently featured highly virtuosic, “over-the-top” keyboard playing (including piano and

synthesizer) instead of the more integrated, timbre- and texture-oriented keyboard (especially organ) contributions of much late-60s rock.² Progressive rock keyboardists include notoriously “flashy” players, such as Emerson Lake and Palmer’s Keith Emerson and Yes’s Rick Wakeman, both of whom had studied and performed classical music before pursuing rock music, and whose aesthetic arguably derived from the flamboyant style of Franz Liszt over a century earlier. The excess of such performers has, for better or worse, marked progressive rock as being obsessed with art music to the virtual exclusion of all else. In fact, the bourgeois origins and formal “classical” proclivities of progressive rock were (and are) considerably overstated. With a few notable exceptions (the members of Genesis, for example) most progressive rock musicians came from the same small town and working-class British origins where hard rock and heavy metal originated. Furthermore, improvisational skills from other forms of popular music were an essential component of progressive rock, but generally only up until a piece of music began to resemble its permanent formal design.

The dominance in rock music of blues-based electric guitars was also challenged in progressive rock by a more eclectic aesthetic, so that blues-rock guitar heroes such as Eric Clapton were joined by much more “technical” players, such as King Crimson’s Robert Fripp and Yes’s Steve Howe. Thus, the continuing electric guitar style of the 1960s counterculture—emotive, blues-rock stylings (either virtuosic or slow and sustained, as in Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix)—was joined by a more eccentric, “busy,” compositionally intricate style inspired largely by jazz and classical chamber music.

Important progressive rock bands to release debut albums in 1969 or ’70 included Genesis, Yes, King Crimson, and Emerson Lake and Palmer (ELP). Within two or three years, these groups were among the top-selling album-oriented rock (AOR) bands in North America and the U.K.³ This was partly due to the fact that numerous leading artists of the late 1960s—including the Beatles, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, and the Doors—had ceased to create music (some for more obvious reasons than others) by 1970 or ’71. In addition, a number of the surviving 60s-era rock groups consciously reorganized as progressive rock ensembles in order to continue commercially into the 1970s. For example, the Moody Blues and Procol Harum somewhat abandoned their lushly

orchestrated, post-R and B psychedelic/classical fusion in favor of guitar-based, heavier-sounding, progressive rock music. Pink Floyd remained the hugely successful exception to the progressive rock rule by continuing its nonvirtuosic, psychedelic, spacey, mystical, emotive, and sustained sound into the 1970s and beyond.⁴ Clearly, though, the late-60s fascination with psychedelic music was declining, at least for mainstream rock musicians and fans.

Progressive rock drummer Bill Bruford (of Yes, King Crimson, and other groups) said, "Psychedelia? I couldn't have given a monkey's about it. I'm sure I went to Kensington Market and bought my purple flared trousers but all I was interested in was being [jazz drummer] Elvin Jones, like Mitch Mitchell was [in the Jimi Hendrix Experience]. I wanted to be Elvin Jones with Yes."⁵ Jazz also influenced progressive rock in the flute playing of British band Jethro Tull's frontman Ian Anderson, which was clearly modeled after that of the American jazz wind player Roland Kirk.⁶

Although progressive rock "purists" would like to believe that all true fans of the genre understood its references to art music, in fact the vast majority of such references (with the notable exception of certain famous examples by ELP) went largely undetected—or at least underappreciated—by fans. As I know from experience, those of us (young, white, North American suburban males) who became enthusiastic about early-70s British progressive rock in the early 1980s associated the genre more with our own growing inclinations toward mathematics, science, computers, and structure. (Indeed, a number of my closest friends from that period are now professionals in fields such as computer programming, astrophysics, and architecture.)

For us, progressive rock functioned as a kind of escapist art-music *substitute*, and some progressive rock musicians had already voiced this assessment about a decade earlier. For example, Yes's lead singer Jon Anderson said, in 1971, "We are beginning to think in terms of whole sides of albums and not just tracks, and making music with more depth. We're not trying to get *into* classical music, but get what classical music *does* to you."⁷

Anderson means that progressive rock translated the formal complexities (extended constructions and "depth") of European art music into a rock music context, but he certainly also implies that actual

"classical" music *itself* was much less important than the stylistic fusion. John Covach argues that "these musicians [he lists members of Yes, ELP, King Crimson, and Genesis] set new performance standards on their respective instruments while incorporating some aspect of 'classical' playing into their personal styles."⁸ Certainly there are many art music elements in progressive rock, but there are probably *more* elements from other styles (jazz, psychedelia, blues-rock, pop, R and B, soul, hard rock, and heavy metal) and a wide variety of ideological and musical factors (even among Yes bandmates Bruford and Anderson).

Music theorists such as Covach, Walter Everett, and Lori Burns tend not to incorporate historical/interpretive arguments directly into their analyses, preferring to start with brief examples of the former as prologues to long examples of the latter. Thus, progressive rock "engag[es] . . . art music practices . . . [and] grappl[es] . . . with the problems of form, harmonic and melodic language, contrapuntal textures, instrumentation, and virtuosity." Such statements are then "proven" in the analyses that follow. This strategy has led to an emphasis on early-70s progressive rock and on younger, underground (i.e., relatively obscure or "cult") progressive rock bands that emerged after the 1970s and self-consciously modeled themselves after the earlier bands.⁹

Jon Anderson says that Yes only "*sometimes* emulate[d] the structural form [of classical music]," reminding us that this did not happen all of the time.¹⁰ Covach, after quoting Anderson on this point, goes on to say that "borrowings [from] baroque-era counterpoint, romantic-era virtuosity, and modernist rhythmic syncopations and sectional juxtaposition [are] of the same kind: 'classical.'" He may not mean that broadly understood elements of "classical" music do not appear in other kinds of popular music, but he certainly does imply it.¹¹ In any case, an emphasis on "classical" music, music theory, and limited historical/interpretive arguments provides a fairly direct method for arguing that other music—progressive hard rock, progressive heavy metal, and so on—is not really progressive rock. In fact, progressive rock—whatever its boundaries—is at least as eclectic as any other subgenre of rock music, and even Yes's "Close to the Edge" includes numerous stylistic features that have nothing to do with "classical" music.¹²

In addition to the "seriousness" of its lyrics (which also include adventure-fantasy and science-fiction narratives), the considerable

visual spectacle often involved in its live shows (e.g., lasers, films, and flashpots), and the elaborate design of much of its album art, progressive rock often involved a specific type of musical-social collaboration involving several musicians, each of whom, including the drummer and bass player, made substantial, individual contributions to the whole.¹³ This is not terribly different from the activities of hard rock and heavy metal artists, and, in fact, the existence of a large, overlapping “hard/metal/prog” audience was already recognized by the early 1970s through the creation of specialized rock music record labels such as Harvest and Charisma. The audience still overlapped during my early teen years (1979–81) and was only theorized otherwise (as distinct) in the 1990s.

Of course, there are some differences among the three “genres.” Hard rock mainly features an ambivalence between control and freedom, elements of volume and power (through amplification), and is riff-based, rhythmically regularized (especially when compared to the early Delta blues riffs of Robert Johnson, for example), and blues-influenced (although specific instances, including songs by Johnson, often went uncredited). It was initially exemplified, around 1966–68, by British bands such as the Yardbirds, Cream, and the Jeff Beck Group, by the American rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix (active 1967–70), and then, around 1969–72, by their slightly younger British colleagues Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, and Deep Purple. These latter three groups (which also featured acoustic music, vestigial “psychedelia,” and, in the case of Deep Purple, prominent keyboards) also produced—in certain distorted/overdriven guitar-based songs—the basic sound of early heavy metal. Hard rock—which also included, by 1973–74, groups such as Bad Company and the American bands Aerosmith and Kiss—also featured powerful, high-tenor lead vocalists (Robert Plant, Ian Gillan, Paul Rodgers, et al.) who often extended their contributions well into the falsetto range.

Progressive rock music (although this is often conveniently overlooked today) was actually highly eclectic and included pop, avant-garde, folk, and even pedal-steel and other country music elements. Early-70s progressive rock was arguably *more* eclectic than either hard rock or heavy metal and, depending on the artist and the period, incorporated elements of both of those genres. On the other hand, progres-

sive rock musicians were certainly also interested in the possibility of extended forms (derived from European art music), and this is what differentiates the borrowed aesthetic of art music in progressive rock from the specific gestural appropriations of art music by hard rock and heavy metal guitarists (Ritchie Blackmore, Eddie Van Halen, et al.).¹⁴

A small amount of twentieth-century art music has explored metrical complexities and/or musical-social collaborations of the type that progressive rock would later explore. Although some 1970s progressive rock *musicians* were familiar with twentieth-century art music, such music would have been largely unknown among progressive rock *listeners*.

For many rural, small-town, and suburban working-class and lower middle-class young men born at the end of the baby boom (1955–65), progressive rock was fanciful, escapist music, especially in its formal complexities, its virtuosity, and its elaborate instrumentation and stage shows. For the same audience, a shift in ideology away from New Left communalism at the end of the 1960s made it possible for the emerging genre of “progressive” rock to avoid being revolutionary (or even political) in a Marxist kind of way.¹⁵ Instead, in the aftermath of the counterculture (around 1969–71), individualism and libertarianism emerged as ideological options and came to be aligned with progressive rock and hard rock so that even comparatively cynical, individual-squelched-by-society songs from the early 1990s by the eclectic American hard rock and heavy metal band Metallica—such as “The Unforgiven” and “My Friend of Misery”—are consistently dark and defeatist within each song compared to the elaborate, multisectional “individual struggle, defeated” narratives of certain Rush songs from the late 1970s.¹⁶

Rush’s Style in Relation to Hard Rock and Progressive Rock

On the whole, Rush’s music is best termed “progressive hard rock.” More specifically, the trajectory from the band’s first album (recorded in late 1973 and early 1974) to its fourth and fifth studio albums (1976–77) demonstrates that the band no longer desired to pursue solely the riff-oriented, blues-rock, “Led Zeppelin Lite” tendencies of its origins (1968–74). Instead, it turned to extended structures, com-

plex rhythms, and other features of progressive rock. (In some cases, the earlier Rush style is still used, but as an important delineator within extended narrative structures.) Rush's mid-70s style included a number of softer, commercially oriented rock songs (such as "Fly By Night," "Lakeside Park," and "Closer To The Heart") as well as early examples of "progressive heavy metal" (such as "Anthem," "Bastille Day," and "Something For Nothing"). However, it also included a number of extended works that were clearly inspired by early-70s British progressive rock (including "By-Tor and the Snow Dog," "The Necromancer," "The Fountain Of Lamneth," and, especially, "2112," "Xanadu," and "Cygnus X-1").

"Progressive hard rock" also evokes the second incarnation (ca. 1973–74) of the British rock band King Crimson, with drummer-percussionist Bill Bruford, bassist-singer John Wetton, and (sometimes) violinist David Cross joining founder-guitarist Robert Fripp.¹⁷ A progressive/hard genre mixing is especially true of King Crimson's 1973–74 studio albums *Larks' Tongues In Aspic*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *Red*, each of which—like certain Rush songs from 1976–77—contains a number of extended instrumental passages comprising timbrally distorted and rhythmically complex music. For example, King Crimson songs such as "Fracture," "Red," "One More Red Nightmare," and "Starless" explore the harder side of progressive rock.¹⁸ Indeed, shortly after King Crimson's *Starless* and *Red* period (featuring the jazz-influenced, former Yes drummer, Bill Bruford), Neil Peart (who was also influenced by jazz and by Bruford) replaced Rush's original, blues-rock drummer, John Rutsey. Peart, who was also from southern Ontario, joined his fellow Canadians, bassist/singer Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson, and became the catalyst for what Rush (and many of its fans) considered a more complex kind of music than seemed possible after the band's first album. Peart also began a new career as a lyricist upon joining the band in the late summer of 1974, and he took the band into an ideologically individualist, libertarian, and semiobjectivist direction for several years.

Rush's genre and ideology experiments after 1974 made it possible for the band to establish a constantly regenerating audience numbering in the millions while, at the same time, being despised by nearly every rock critic. In 1976, Alex Lifeson explained that "We don't want to

change what people think about rock and roll. We just want to show them what we think about it."¹⁹ Similarly, in explaining the band's attitude toward its music and fans in 1977, Rush's bassist-singer Geddy Lee said, "We took a risk. . . individualism, concepts of thought and morality are causes that we believe in. We've tried to transcend [attitudes of only being in it for the money] by having something for everyone. We don't ask that everyone believe in what we do. Let them take our stuff on any level they want."²⁰

However, despite the band's self-effacing openness to interpretation, most rock critics found it very difficult to explain the appeal of Rush's style or of its strongly stated individualism. For example, journalist Roy MacGregor suggested that Rush, "held no kindred love for the social conscience of a Bob Dylan . . . not even [for] the street justice of a Mick Jagger. They found themselves speaking for a large group of young rockers without spokesmen—a group who, despite their love of loud, violent music, were themselves nonrevolutionary [and] certainly self-centred."²¹ Actually, MacGregor's statement pigeonholes Bob Dylan and Mick Jagger at least as much as it pigeonholes Rush, because—even in the 1960s—Bob Dylan was certainly not always socially conscious and Mick Jagger (of the Rolling Stones) only sometimes called for street justice.

In any case, for certain rock fans in the postcounterculture of the 1970s and '80s, these artists seemed musically and ideologically old-fashioned and thus were no longer considered suitable role models. Indeed, the "large group of young rockers without spokesmen" was—in addition to being large and young—also specifically white, suburban, and male, and it *did* have spokespersons, including Rush's unique fusion of hard rock, progressive rock, and individualist/libertarian ideology.

"2112" (from *2112*, 1976)

Rush first began to advance a libertarian social critique in certain songs from 1975, including "Anthem" and "Bastille Day." However, the band then took up issues of individualism much more fully—and in a science-fiction context—in the title work of its 1976 album *2112*. The LP-side-length suite "2112" pursues a proindividualist/antiauthoritar-

ian subject matter, but many rock critics nonetheless associated Rush with fascism in the years following the album's release. This has partly to do with Rush's affinity for the objectivist political philosophy and (related to this) highly individualist literary characters of the Russian-born American writer Ayn Rand (1905–82). Rush's 1975 song "Anthem"—in its title and in certain elements of its lyrics (especially selfishness as a virtue)—had already evoked Rand's early novella *Anthem* (1938) to a certain degree. However, it is in "2112" that the band makes its most extensive use of her ideas, "transliterating" them for the postcounterculture rock generation. The influence is most obvious in drummer/lyricist Neil Peart's lyrics, but it is also true of the music *itself*, which follows a large-scale, progressive rock narrative.

Ayn Rand detested rock music, but she only wrote about it in relation to the counterculture (the late 1960s), a time when collectivist ideas were highly visible in mainstream society. It is impossible to know what she would have thought of Rush's very sympathetic applications of her ideas in rock music a decade later. Rand's ideas have been called a "revers[al of] the traditional Judeo-Christian aesthetic," espousing "laissez-faire capitalism [as] most congenial to the exercise of talent," and "deeply conservative."²² The traditional western concepts of "brotherly love" and "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" are anathema to Rand's work and she certainly favors laissez-faire capitalism, but to call this "deeply conservative" necessarily posits a revisionist reading of what it means to be conservative.

Conservatism originally had to do with community and tradition, and—at the turn of the twentieth century—it was *liberalism* that espoused free trade along with individual rights and freedoms. Howard Roark—the central character of Rand's later novel *The Fountainhead* (1943)—has been called a "highly romanticized architect-hero, a superior individual whose egoism and genius prevail over timid traditionalism and social conformism."²³ This would otherwise appear to be a perfect definition of nineteenth-century romantic social liberalism, and thus if it is "deeply conservative," one would have to include Beethoven and most of his legions of followers in the same category.

The problem with Rand is that her ideas first circulated on the periphery of the mainstream (especially among college students) during the decade—the late 1950s through the late 1960s—when civil

rights, social progress, and Americanist/technological pride (through NASA, etc.) all began to transform the Western definition of "liberalism." By the mid-1980s the transition was complete, and anyone who favored individualism, laissez-faire capitalism, and smaller government (or at least a lesser amount of government interference in the lives of individuals) was considered "conservative." It made no difference if such a person—like me—was also against capital punishment, abhorred censorship, favored gun control and abortion rights, and supported increased immigration and the rights of homosexuals and other minorities. Anyone, like Neil Peart, who wrote lyrics espousing individualism was considered conservative, when, in fact, "libertarian" would seem the more suitable term. Scott Bullock tells us that in reality, Neil Peart considers himself to be a "left-wing libertarian," noting that he could never be a conservative due to the right's intolerance and support of censorship. Moreover, the rise of religious fundamentalism in America and throughout the globe 'terrifies' him. But he also sees rising intolerance coming from the left, exemplified by a Toronto law 'forbidding smoking in any bar, restaurant, coffee shop, doughnut shop, anywhere.' Thus, though he believes that economic freedom is generally increasing, Peart also observes that 'socially it seems to be the opposite—there is actually more oppression.'²⁴

Like Rand's, Peart's views do not fit with generally accepted definitions of "conservative" or "liberal." Like literary critics and philosophers (who are generally embarrassed by Rand's "contributions" to their areas of study), nearly all rock critics and many musicians have assigned convenient and easy labels to Rush's music, largely in order to justify their ridiculing or ignoring it.

On the other hand, Rand's strongly stated principles of rational self-interest were out of step (and interpreted by some as dogmatic, cultist, or even fascist) in the context of civil rights and other social movements of the 1960s and '70s, whereas Rush made numerous modifications in its lyrics and musical style (especially in the 1980s and '90s) in recognition of the contributions of others, and certainly also quickly tempered its emphasis on Randian individualism. Moreover, quite apart from Rand's influence, the hazy reception of Rush's "2112" also resulted from the band's inversion of the conventional Western metanarrative (as often seen in normative sonata form in classical

music) in which a hero establishes order, undergoes some kind of conflict with a disturbing force, and then emphatically reestablishes the initial order.

In “2112,” Rush establishes an administrative priest “collective” as the antihero of a futuristic totalitarian world called Syrinx. However, the work actually begins with an instrumental “Overture” (0:00–4:32), similar to an operatic overture, that presents four or five important later themes. The overture also incorporates a brief quotation from Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* (1869) and—as in the Tchaikovsky—the sounds of explosions, as though a battle is underway.²⁵ Out of the din of the end of the overture comes Geddy Lee’s natural voice (around Middle C, at 4:25) on the only words in the otherwise instrumental section: the strangely Christian-overtone, although probably intended as ironic (considering the chant-like nature of the melody and the narrative’s eventual outcome), “and the meek shall inherit the earth” (see fig. 9.1).

In the following section, “The Temples of Syrinx” (4:32–6:43), the band uses heavy metal (largely in B minor) and Lee’s shrieking vocal style to portray the undesirable collective of authoritarian priests. Lee sings extremely high and tensely in this section—near the top of the treble clef—and the listener is thereby to infer that the priests are unnatural, dogmatic, and perhaps even insane.²⁶ Indeed, the narrative effect of Lee’s vocal style in this section lies somewhere between heightened shouting and shrill, irrational “preaching” (see fig. 9.2).

The limited pitch range and nearly continuous nature of the first eight measures (the verse section) evoke the priests’ pride in themselves for some of the things that they control: literature, music, and art. The rhythmic anticipations and shorter phrases of the latter eight measures (the chorus section) further suggest a swaggering pride in their “accomplishments.” The priests here are akin to the controlling forces in

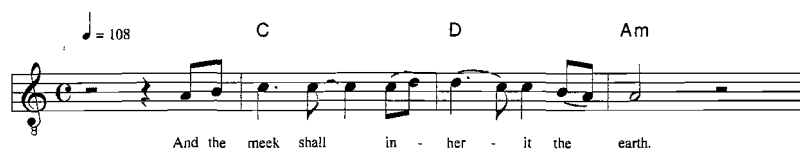


Fig. 9.1. Excerpt from “2112—Overture,” 4:25–4:32.

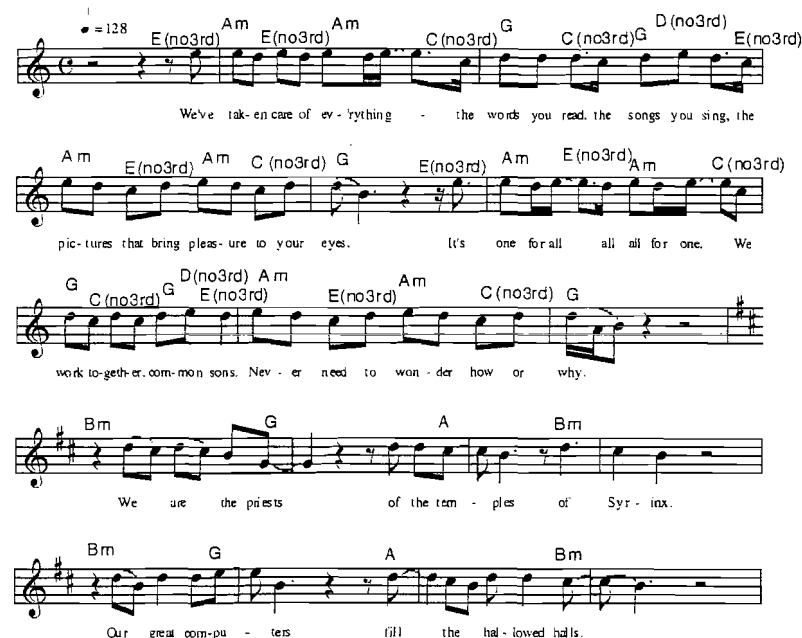


Fig. 9.2. Excerpt from “2112—The Temples of Syrinx,” at 4:48.

various episodes of the original *Star Trek* television series (1966–69) and in the mid-70s science fiction film *Logan's Run*.²⁷

A section entitled “Discovery” (6:43–10:15) then follows. In it, the actual hero of the narrative—an individual man—explores his musically creative side, something that is not allowed under the restrictions of his totalitarian society. However, the accompanying music for this section is rather tentative and gentle, thus subverting the expectation that a main hero’s music should be forceful and determined. This “protagonist”—if that is not too strong a word in such a narrative inversion—parallels Ayn Rand’s discover-hero (“Unity 5–3000”) in her antiauthoritarian novella *Anthem* (1938). Rand’s book is about a man who rediscovers the principles of electric light and the idea of individual identity, but ends up battling a totalitarian state that will have none of it.²⁸ In “2112,” Rush more firmly transplants the same ideological viewpoint.

In the "Discovery" section, the hero rediscovers not the electric light, but the electric *guitar*, and he similarly "threatens" society with his individualist predilections. By means of controlled and "scientific" experimentation, he learns how to tune the guitar (including the voicing of string harmonics) and eventually to play it, the latter by means of increasingly rhythmic and metrical sequential figurations. Indeed, he finds his way from open strings to D major and its relative minor and, finally, to its dominant, A major. Essentially, on a distant planet, the protagonist (rediscovers the sum total of Western major-minor tonality in about thirty seconds. Also, in order to differentiate this individualist hero from the authoritarian priests, Lee sings in a much more "normal," high-baritone vocal range when portraying him. The music is also gentler and more reflective, especially compared to the onslaught we have just encountered in the "voices" of the priests. The lyrics refer to a "strange device [that] gives forth sound" (the guitar) and to how the hero "can't wait to share his new wonder" so that others will be able to "make their own music."

In the following section, "Presentation" (10:15–13:57), the hero attempts to convince the priests of the merits of his discovery ("an ancient miracle") by presenting his argument in a kind of jazz-inflected R and B style.²⁹ However, precisely as in the rejection of Unity 5–3000s rediscovery in Ayn Rand's *Anthem*, the priests here chastise the well-meaning protagonist for obviously wishing to incite an individualist social revolution with his new "toy" (as they call it), the electric guitar. They inform him that the device is "just a waste of time, [a] silly whim [that] doesn't fit the plan." To add to their argument, the priests' violent, B-minor, heavy metal music (from the "Temples of Syrinx" section) reappears (at 13:00), but at a much faster tempo and in a guitar solo that frenetically elaborates or "develops" the earlier music. The effect is one of a insistent, impenetrable worldview, one in which the individual's counterarguments will not be tolerated (see table 9.1).

The narrative here is subtly different from the typical counter-culture scenario of radicals marching, protesting, or otherwise going up against the establishment. In fact, the hero of "2112" is not interested in *dropping out* of society (living communally, experimenting with drugs, etc.) but instead wishes to find a way to contribute to the

improvement of society. This is very similar to the idealistic concerns about social and moral contributions expressed by Victoria Anne Steinitz and Ellen Rachel Solomon's early-70s informants in *Starting Out: Class and Community in the Lives of Working-Class Youth*.³⁰

Table 9.1. Large-Scale Structure of "2112."

1. Overture (0:00)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduces 4–5 later themes and all subsequent tonal areas except the last • tonal areas: A minor, D, B minor, A, B, and E • ends with battle explosions, then the texture dissipates with Geddy Lee entering on "and the meek shall inherit the earth" (natural voice, at 4:25)
2. The Temples of Syrinx (4:32)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "theme 1," introduces the authoritarian antihero priests • uses A minor and B minor in verse-chorus form and violent heavy metal • creates a B minor refrain from material also in the overture • ends with a dissipating texture for guitar only (B minor)
3. Discovery (6:43)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "theme 2," introduces the individual hero "protagonist" • he discovers and explores an "ancient wonder": an electric guitar • he modulates from D major/B minor to A major (his subsequent tonal area) • gentle and tentative music, but gradually becomes rhythmic and recalls music from later sections of the overture
4. Presentation (10:15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the hero attempts to convince the priests of the merits of his discovery (in a pleasant, jazzy, pop/R and B kind of style, A major) • they dismiss his arguments and explode into a violent, B minor guitar solo (at 13:00)
5. Oracle: The Dream (13:57)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the hero dreams of exiled individualists on a distant planet • gentle "dream" music at first, then recalls more animated (and previously unrecalled) overture material; B minor, D, A minor, B minor "frame"
6. Soliloquy (15:58)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the hero despairs about his "cold and empty" life, D/esp. A minor; ends on E
7. Grand Finale (18:18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violent, progressive heavy metal style, recalls especially part 2, then material from the end of the overture (including explosions); control "announcement," E/B modes/F-sharp major (at 19:58)

In the fifth section, "Oracle: The Dream" (13:57–15:58), the protagonist-hero dreams of a "strange and wondrous land," a planet of exiled individualists, the works of whose "gifted hands" are actually fostered, encouraged, and allowed to contribute to society. The initial waking moment after the dream, called "Soliloquy" (15:58–18:18), centers mainly around D major, then A minor, tonalities. Its intensity rises in a loud, three-part section (16:54–18:18) that brings closure to the hero's portion of the "2112" narrative, first as he verbally recognizes the "cold and empty life" of his totalitarian planet and then as his despair deepens in Alex Lifeson's angry, frustrated blues-rock guitar solo in A minor. This newly established stylistic mode (blues rock) and tonality (A minor) completely subverts the hero's initial "jazzy" optimism and A major tonality of the earlier "Discovery" and "Presentation" sections. However, this "Soliloquy" section actually ends in E major, the dominant of the hero's resigned A minor. The individual is not allowed to have the final word. (This also continues the strategy of tonal segues between major sections of the work.)

The composition is not yet over, however. Indeed, the seventh (and final) section, "Grand Finale" (18:18–20:32), further subverts the conventional heroism metanarrative, in part by reprising the totalitarian/priest-associated heavy metal style of several earlier sections. The music becomes ever more violent, including chaotic and densely layered ("collective") guitar melodies. This music largely reprises B major, B minor, and B-based modal themes that have not been heard since the latter parts of the overture. The close proximity of these different "shades" of B serves to emphasize the irrational, collective nature of the priests. The work then ends extremely forcefully in an unanticipated tonality, F-sharp major (at 19:58), the dominant of the priests' B-based thematic material. This surprising tonal shift—and an initial unison rhythmic insistence in all instruments (evoking Morse Code for V/Victory: short-short-short-long)—would be quite sufficient to establish the hegemony of the priests and of totalitarianism within the narrative. Certainly, the protagonist-hero's D major, A major, and A minor—as well as his gentler, exploratory, "lighter" music—are no longer allowed, or even possible. However, the battle explosions of the end of the overture are also reprised, and a spoken voice—"Attention all planets of the solar federation . . . We have assumed control" (each phrase repeated

twice and treated by studio effects to sound disembodied and "multiple")—joins the din, drastically contrasting the ironically textured individual voice that had briefly presented a very thin musical texture (about the "meek") at the end of the overture.

The layered guitar elements in the penultimate section of the finale, the simultaneous rhythmic insistence (in all instruments) on the resultant, dominant tonality of the priests, and the multiple voice (plural) of the final proclamation—"We have assumed control"—all definitively establish that the antiauthoritarian point of view, once explored by the individual guitar-discovering hero, has been defeated for all time.

As a whole, "2112" reflects the postcounterculture view of a young person wishing to contribute to society despite considerable obstacles. However, numerous critical commentators have apparently assumed that Rush support the authoritarian victors of this narrative. For example, J. Kordosh—in his postinterview article on Rush's drummer-lyricist Neil Peart—wishes to connect Peart's identification with Ayn Rand's individualist architect character Howard Roark (from the novel *The Fountainhead*, 1943) with fascism. However, without explaining why individualism is fascism, Kordosh simply states: "I don't want to add that many people consider Ayn Rand to be *prima facie* fascist, but I will anyway."

The "many people" believed by Kordosh to consider Rand a fascist are probably the "new liberals" of the 1960s and '70s, who—because of their communalist, civil rights, and otherwise left-wing emphases were unable to reconcile extreme individualism with anything but extreme authoritarianism. In any case, Kordosh himself does not elaborate and, instead, lets the reader read between the lines that Rush is therefore also fascist. Of course, he also fails to elaborate on Peart's statement—several sentences later—against the political Right (and, by extension, against fascism): "I can't stand the whole concept of law-and-order and authority and everything, which is obviously the precept of right-wingism. . . ."³¹ Individualism is not fascism unless an individual or group attempts to control society without democratic process. It certainly does not *equal* fascism, and just because the controlling priests win at the end of "2112" does not mean that Rush favors this. In fact, the band has carefully argued (although perhaps not carefully enough)

quite the opposite. The difficulty here may be that “2112” is under-coded, where listeners receive only a “general sense of ‘understanding’” and do not interpret the specific meanings that may or may not have been intended by the composers.³²

Neil Peart’s comments, in the context of Kordosh’s very harsh interview, on the similarity between Rand’s *Anthem* and Rush’s “2112” suggest that this may have been accidental: “The inspiration behind [the “2112” story] was. . . . It’s difficult always to trace those lines because so many things tend to coalesce, and in fact it ended up being quite similar to a book called *Anthem* by the writer Ayn Rand. But I didn’t realize that while I was working on it, and then eventually as the story came together, the parallels became obvious to me and I thought, ‘Oh gee, I don’t want to be a plagiarist here.’ So I did give credit to her writings in the liner notes.”³³ Peart refers to the addition of “With acknowledgement to the genius of Ayn Rand” to the liner notes of the 1976 album, but it is clear that by the time of the 1981 Kordosh interview he was mainly interested in deflecting the accusation—by one of the band’s harshest critics—of any direct influence in “2112.”

Reebee Garofalo, in his widely read textbook *Rockin’ Out: Popular Music in the USA*, mentions Rush twice, once to suggest that the band “made a . . . considered nod toward fascism . . . with 2112,” a statement that replicates the conventional wisdom about Rush derived from the accounts of rock critics such as Kordosh.³⁴ However, even Rush fans—whom one would otherwise expect to be sympathetic toward the band’s intended statements—are likely to interpret “2112” in such a way that Rush identifies with the theocracy of the Syrinx priests. Deena Weinstein, in her book *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*, reports that her informal survey of ticket-line Rush fans (some of whom knew all the lyrics to “2112”) saw more than 70 percent of them under the impression that Rush was siding with the priests. However, unlike Kordosh’s desperate attempt at lambasting Peart, the confusion in “2112” for fans stems from Rush’s use of energetic heavy metal to depict the totalitarian priests and comparatively gentle music to depict the individualist hero. Revealingly, Weinstein—who has often used “2112” as a case study in her course on social theory—stopped making a recording available to her students (reverting to lyrics only) once this confusion became apparent.³⁵

In musicological terms, Rush entered an ideologically problematic territory by making use of classical-type structural conventions—such as recurring thematic material and interrelated tonal areas—while simultaneously subverting the master narrative upon which such music is predicated. (A hero is supposed to win in the end despite all obstacles.) Narratively, the violent music at the end of “2112” defeats all other points of view; it is not the hero’s music at all, but that of the story’s antiheroes. In more general terms, then, “2112” expands the libertarian-individualist agenda already touched upon—lyrically and musically—in earlier Rush songs such as “Anthem” (from the album *Fly By Night*, 1975) and “Bastille Day” (from the album *Caress Of Steel*, also 1975), but now in a more negative light.³⁶ The work also establishes Rush’s fusion of power and violence from the traditions of hard rock and heavy metal with elements such as structural complexity and large-scale cyclical construction from the tradition of progressive rock.

“Xanadu” (from *A Farewell To Kings*, 1977)

“Xanadu” is an extended work, the second track from Rush’s sixth album, *A Farewell To Kings* (1977).³⁷ However, unlike Rush’s earlier extended works (including “2112”), “Xanadu” is not formally subdivided into named subsections in the liner notes of the album.³⁸ The song also includes several introductory instrumental sections, comprising nearly half of its eleven-minute duration.³⁹ In other words, the song is rather unique, even for Rush.⁴⁰

Lyricist Neil Peart based the song on Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem *Kubla Khan: Or, A Vision in a Dream* (1816), with its images of a mysterious, lost paradise that—despite its incomparable beauty and its enveloping immortality—also ensnares its discoverer in an inescapable prison of madness, thus producing a lonely and bitter triumph for its occupant.⁴¹ Indeed, the final words of Rush’s song reflect this ambivalence, by transforming the previously optimistic phrase “Oh, paradise” into “Oh, *is it* paradise?” However, this particular ambivalence is not found in the original poem, so that Rush’s version ends far more ambivalently than Coleridge’s. The trajectory toward ambivalence is also heightened by the song’s extremely long instrumental introduction and its sense of “achieving” paradise by battling nature.

The poem involves, in part, a vision of a damsel with a dulcimer. However, the Rush song entirely eschews such an element: the male protagonist is completely alone in his endeavors and evidently prefers it that way—this despite his eventual ambivalence regarding the narrative's outcome. This kind of solitary, entirely male narrative evokes the "excriptions" (i.e., intentional omitting) of the female in 1980s heavy metal, as discussed by Robert Walser in *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (1993). However, Rush's vision of this in "Xanadu" (and in "2112") is much closer to the celebration of male elements—power, mobility, "the road," and so on—in the music of the British heavy metal band Judas Priest (especially around 1978–84) than to the tendency, in later American heavy metal bands, to inscribe male hegemonic control over women (as in W.A.S.P.) or else depictions of a "threatening" *femme fatale* (as in Dokken, 1982–87).⁴²

In the introduction of the song, Lifeson's diatonic, major-key electric guitar figurations (over an E pedal) and their accompaniment—based partly on the sounds of birds and rushing streams and partly on the use of wind chimes and temple blocks—initially evoke nature, the elements, and a "searching" quality. Indeed, the rhythmically free guitar figurations of this first introductory section (0:00–1:49) also explore the tonal area's dominant and subdominant (B major and A major), as well as occasional, hesitant "nonchord" tones. The second instrumental section (1:49–2:52) then establishes a 7/8 meter for the constructed, regularized, and insistent E-based guitar melody that appears throughout this section.

This guitar part is initially faded in, suggesting that the protagonist is "approaching." Middleton refers to "positional implications" as one of a number of "secondary significations" in a musical work. He suggests that a fade-out at the end of a song means "unendingness" or "continuous activity." In Rush's "Xanadu," there are several levels of fade-ins toward the beginning of the work, and they certainly also mean "unendingness" and "continuous activity."⁴³

The insistence of the seven-note melody (and its 7/8 rhythm) is countered by interjections in the drum and bass that attempt to pull away from it, what Middleton calls an "interplay of voices."⁴⁴ Among other elements, these weaken the guitar's attempted diatonicism by

mixing in G, D, and A (for example) as important secondary pitch elements. This modal mixing suggests the irony of paradise (Xanadu) being located so near to the violent, icy mountains that must be scaled in order to get there. Indeed, the repeated 7/8 guitar gesture represents the obstinance of the traveler, and the increasingly frenetic drums and the tonally thwarting bass chords represent struggles in the protagonist's narrative. Drummer-lyricist Neil Peart argues that these elements represent the "violent imagery" at the beginning of Coleridge's poem (see fig. 9.3).⁴⁵

The third section of the introduction (2:52–3:34), in a rollicking, syncopated 4/4 meter, now features the bass and drums as coparticipants and outlines E mixolydian (with its flattened seventh scale degree, D natural). The protagonist's obstinance is now reduced to the barest minimum: a stubbornly repeated E major chord. The traveler finally arrives in Xanadu in the fourth introductory section (3:34–4:23), where Lifeson breaks through unambiguously on a joyous, diatonic guitar riff in 7/8. Although he is still playing in E major, Lifeson is now supported (rather than contradicted) by Geddy Lee's bass and Neil Peart's percussion. (A monophonic, diatonic synthesizer melody also participates in this.)

The fifth section of the introduction (4:23–4:59) reflects the grandeur and exoticism of Xanadu itself. It accomplishes this with a more moderate tempo, numerous extended chords, Eastern- or exotic-sounding gong strikes in the percussion, a pair of gently syncopated adjacent chords, and, after the lyrics begin (4:59–5:15), a carefully controlled balance in the rising versus falling arrangement of the vocal melodies. The instruments sound the pitch B in all four chords in this expository vocal section (verse 1), thus reflecting a fulfillment in Xanadu of the "dominant" obsession (paradise) that was present in the guitarist-protagonist's initial, instrumental exposition, centered on E ("2112" expresses a similar tonic-dominant motion, but on a larger



Fig. 9.3. The 7/8 guitar riff of the introduction of "Xanadu," fading in at 1:49.⁴⁶

scale). The transition (5:15–5:21) to the following section, the chorus, involves modal mixing, with F major presented as a Phrygian clue (i.e., a chord based on the flattened second scale degree as an alternative view of E major) that Xanadu is not necessarily the paradise that it appears to be on the surface.

The chorus (5:21–5:53)—in a much faster rock beat—incorporates not only a rather tempestuous metrical and rhythmic sense, but also the modal mixing (especially E major, G major, and A major) that had earlier attempted to thwart the traveler's arrival in paradise:

Chorus 1 (fast, hard rock; E major, G major, A major), 5:21–5:53

I had heard the whispered tales of immortality, the deepest mystery.
From an ancient book I took a clue.
I scaled the frozen mountain tops of eastern lands unknown.
Time and Man alone, searching for the lost—Xanadu.
(synthesizer bridge, 5:53–6:15)

Verse 2 (softer, reflective rock; D with B-flat—flat-VI), 6:15–6:58

To stand within The Pleasure Dome decreed by Kubla Khan.
To taste anew the fruits of life the last immortal man.
To find the sacred river Alph. To walk the caves of ice.
Oh, I will dine on honeydew and drink the milk of Paradise.

The lyrics are much more unsettled and ambivalent in this part of the song, where mystery, immortality, and the pursuit of paradise (recalled in past perfect, then past tense), and—in verse 2—a sense of being frozen in time in Xanadu (now in present infinitives then future tense) are articulated.⁴⁷ Lee sings this in a comparatively high falsetto, the tempo is quite fast, and the rhythms are frantic and confused sounding. This may be compared with Lee's use of his more natural (lower) vocal range for the earlier, less ambivalent, paradise-oriented exposition, which also features gently rolling rhythms (verse 1, 6:15–6:58).

The central ideological conflict of the song—of Xanadu being simultaneously a paradise and a “trap”—is explored most fully in the moderate-tempo, instrumental bridge (with its plaintively “crying out” synthesizer solo, 5:53–6:15 and 8:08–8:31) that falls between the fast chorus and the slower verse. In this section, the tonal center shifts to D,

but without a voiced third in the tonic chord. A B-flat major chord (based on the flattened sixth scale degree in D) used prominently, thus signifying its characteristic, romantic-era meaning of “illusory hope.”⁴⁸ The paradise seemingly embodied in Xanadu is therefore an illusion, for, once there, one cannot choose to leave it. As with the pitch B in the earlier, positive-sounding vocal exposition, the pitch D is sounded in every chord in this section (partly through an extended chord on C major). This suggests that the prior obsession on a dominant pitch, B (within E major), was unfounded. Indeed, the lyrics of chorus 1 (especially “Time and Man alone”) and verse 2—which is set to the D/B-flat, “illusory hope” music—begin to convey ambivalence about the protagonist being the “last immortal man” and imply that the society of which he was once a part is now irrelevant.

However, before the chorus/verse pair repeats (with new lyrics), the third portion of the instrumental introduction reappears (6:58–7:39), thus recalling its rollicking, syncopated idiom. However, its tonal center (E mixolydian) and its faster tempo are now used as a means to return to the faster, angry-sounding E major chorus. This time it bypasses the “achievement oriented” portions of the instrumental introduction and plunges directly into the modally mixed hard rock chorus (7:39–8:08) and the subsequent “crying synthesizer” bridge (8:08–8:31) and “illusory hope” verse sections. These modifications have the effect of increasing the listener's understanding of the ambivalence experienced by the protagonist. Indeed, verse 2's “To stand within the Pleasure Dome decreed by Kubla Khan” and “To taste anew the fruits of life the last immortal man” become, in verse 3 (8:31–9:08), “*Held* within the Pleasure Dome decreed by Kubla Khan” and “To taste my bitter triumph as a *mad* immortal man.” Moreover, at the end of verse 3 (his last words in the song, nearing the top of the treble clef—as in “2112”), Lee adds the ambivalent phrase, “Whoa, *is it* paradise?” (see fig. 9.4).

The song then ends instrumentally, with a repeat of the B-obsessed fifth introductory section (9:08–9:32), but this time countered by a very obtrusive synthesizer sound on a series of octave descents on the pitch E. This descending gesture parallels the deepening of the protagonist's insanity, but the simultaneous reprise of specific earlier music also reminds us of his previous obsession. Lifeson then plays a frustration-imbued solo (9:32–10:10) over the chord changes of the vocal

$\text{♩} = 128$

D(no3rd) B \flat Cadd/D D(no3rd) B \flat

Held with in the Pleasure Dome de-creed by Ku-bla

Cadd/D G D(no3rd) B \flat Cadd/D G

Khan. To taste my bit-ter tri-umph as a

D(no3rd) B \flat Cadd/D G D(no3rd) B \flat

mad im-mor-tal man. Nev-er more shall

Cadd/D G D(no3rd) B \flat Cadd/D G

I re-turn, es-cape these caves of ice, for

D(no3rd) B \flat Cadd/D G D(no3rd) B \flat

I have dined on hon-ey-dew and drunk the milk of

Cadd/D G D(no3rd) B \flat

Par a dise.

Cadd/D G D(no3rd)

Whoa, is it Par a dise?

Fig. 9.4. Verse 3 (i.e., vocal ending) of “Xanadu,” 8:31–9:08.

exposition, ending, as before, with an unsettled, Phrygian (F major chord, based on the flattened second scale degree) approach to E major (10:10–10:14). This recontextualizes the alternate (frustrating) view of Xanadu as a prison that was hinted at in the original vocal exposition.⁴⁹ It then gives way to a brief reprise (at 10:14–10:27) of the introductory 7/8 section (see fig. 9.3). This section had initially signified the

traveler’s obstinate desire—despite all obstacles—to arrive in Xanadu. However, in this new “paradise as prison” context, the protagonist now obsesses about leaving Xanadu, but cannot; he, like the unchanging heavens above him, is “frozen in an everlasting view.”

The coda (10:27–11:04) includes descending intervals of a perfect fourth on the guitar (on the pitches E and B, in several octaves) that seem to solidify further the protagonist’s descent into insanity. The band also reprises the E mixolydian modality of the third introductory section, but slows it progressively down, with chime timbres participating in the song’s mixed modality “moral” that paradise is illusory.⁵⁰ The song ends with a final E-major flourish that recalls the aggressive insistence on F-sharp major at the end of “2112.” However, this time we witness the anger of the protagonist himself, who realizes that he has no choice but to make the best of it.

“Cygnus X-1” (from *A Farewell to Kings*, 1977)

“Cygnus X-1: Book One—The Voyage,” the concluding track on *A Farewell to Kings* (1977), is generally referred to as “Cygnus X-1.”⁵¹ It is also one of the band’s most “progressive-oriented” songs, especially in terms of its frequent metrical complexities and its rather overt science-fiction subject matter. Cygnus X-1—an actual X-ray source in the constellation Cygnus—is believed to be a black hole. In the song, it is initially described in the prologue (0:00–5:01), where Rush’s then producer Terry Brown provides a spoken-word passage—in his ominous British accent—that is substantially masked and altered by studio effects.⁵² This includes an inordinate amount of hissing (sibilance), as though the star that is undergoing a physical transformation is also distorting the narrator’s voice (0:31–0:59):

In the constellation of Cygnus, there lurks a mysterious,
invisible force: the black hole of Cygnus X-1.
Six stars of the Northern Cross in mourning for their sister’s loss
in a final flash of glory, nevermore to grace the night.

After the star has been physically transformed into a black hole, bell-like sounds—at 1:15, clearly voicing an open fifth (E and B)—rep-

resent the newly established state of the star.⁵³ A repeated, ascending, rhythmic (although initially rather sporadic) bass guitar line—suggesting E minor as a tonal center—then fades in (at 1:24) as if from a vast distance (courtesy of a recording studio mixing console). The drums (at 2:12) then guitar and drums (2:24) eventually join the bass guitar on essentially the same pattern, but organized into a regular metrical alternation between 6/4 and 7/4, then 6/4 and two measures of 4/4. This rhythmic solidification—along with the original bass guitar fade-in and the addition of drums and guitar—has the effect of making the pattern’s “approach” seem more concrete. Although we are not yet aware of what is approaching, we eventually find out that it is a solitary, male traveler approaching in a space ship in order to explore (as in the guitar in “2112”) and/or discover (as in “Xanadu”) the black hole.

As in the long introduction to “Xanadu,” several more instrumental sections follow. The first (2:56–3:06) oscillates between octave As and Cs (in extremely regular 4/4 time), as if to parallel the paradoxical space-time stasis (and resultant X-ray source) of the black hole. The following section (3:06–3:21) elaborates this A/C motion with a group of three chromatically descending three-chord sequences, of which the third chord in each case makes possible either D major (via an extended F-sharp major chord) or C major (via a B-based substitute dominant chord). These pattern repetitions are also interspersed with elaborate drum fills. The cycle as a whole (stated twice) ends on C major, via an extended A chord. Thus, this section elaborates the previous alternation between A and C octaves, but now at a much more complete level, as though we are witnessing the complexities of the black hole in more detail.

The second time through, the three-part cycle bypasses the extended A chord and goes directly from C major to C-sharp minor instead. This sets up an extremely fast, chaotic, 12/8 instrumental section (3:21–3:31). (The tempo is 176 dotted quarter-notes per minute, with eighth notes consequently moving at 528 beats per minute.) This section explores further paradoxes: specifically, the G-natural versus G-sharp cross-relation inherent to C-sharp minor and E minor, and, involving the same pitches, the harsh juxtaposition of adjacent G major and G-sharp major chords. However, the band aborts this section after only two times through the pattern. The “escape” from this features a

series of much slower, ascending, unison semitones (3:31–3:36), which reiterates all of the semitones voiced in the preceding chords (i.e., G to G-sharp, B to C, and D to D-sharp), plus F-sharp to G as an implied secondary dominant to the following section (see fig. 9.5).⁵⁴

The following, rather long, half-tempo section in C minor (3:36–5:01) presents additive meters alternating between 11/8 and 12/8. It also expresses a crossrelational tonal paradox similar to the one in the previous section, but now a semitone lower. This section also repeatedly moves from C minor to F-sharp major and ends on a repeated F-sharp major chord, thus recalling the tonally similar ending of “2112,” but with F-sharp in an irrational, tritonal context instead of a diatonic, dominant one (see fig. 9.6).

Geddy Lee’s voice finally enters (at 5:01, or about halfway through the ten-and-a-half minute song), and we realize, as the lyrics unfold, that the individual is a futuristic astronaut-scientist searching for the black hole, Cygnus X-1. The first several vocal sections reprise much of the music of the preceding instrumental sections, including a simple

The musical score for Figure 9.5 is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as 176. The score consists of five systems of music. The first four systems each contain three measures of chords, with the following labels above them: C#min, Emin, and G# (first system); C#min, Emin, and G (second system); C#min, Emin, and G# (third system); and C#min, Emin, and G (fourth system). The fifth system contains a single measure labeled [drum fill]. The chords are represented by groups of eighth notes on a single staff.

Fig. 9.5. Excerpt from “Cygnus X-1—Prologue,” 3:21–3:36.



Fig. 9.6. Excerpt from "Cygnus X-1—Prologue," 3:36–5:01.

melody (over the pitches A and C, 5:01–5:14) sung using a mysterious (although natural in range) vocal quality. This is then elaborated in a hard-rock style, a piercing high-vocal timbre, and cross-relations/third relations between A major and C major (5:14–5:23).

The earlier three-part section (with all of its previous complexities, but now also with a sung text, 5:23–5:46) then presents the central ambivalence of the song, as Lee considers whether the black hole will result in his annihilation or else some kind of "astral door" to an undiscovered dimension (as in the monolith in Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*). However, this time the underlying pattern continues to its A-based chord (instead of using C major as a pivot to C-sharp minor as before), then shifts directly to a G major chord in order to set the words "to soar." These words are "treated" artificially (via studio techniques) so as to ascend by semitone up a perfect fifth. The hero's optimistic view point at this point in the song is that the black hole *will* provide a portal to another dimension. Thus, the protagonist is undertaking a kind of "calculated risk" (see fig. 9.7).

G major—having just been elaborated by this chromatic ascent—then functions as the dominant of C major, in yet another tonal segue, to the following straightforward hard-rock narrative (5:46–7:12) of the traveler's decision to travel (on his ship, the *Rocinante*) into the "mystery" of the black hole.

In Greek mythology, *Rocinante* is the name of Zeus's horse. It is also the name of Don Quixote's horse and of the motor home in John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charlie*. Thus, the traditional mode of transportation



Fig. 9.7. Excerpt from "Cygnus X-1—Part I," 5:32–5:46.

for individual gods and mortals—the horse—is recontextualized (via Steinbeck's *wanderlust* and motor home) in a science-fiction context. Indeed, the brightness of C major in this part of the song underscores the hero's optimism as well as his desire for exploration and conquest and is completely consistent with that of his *Rocinante* precursors.

A shift to the parallel minor (C minor) at 6:28–6:45 then occurs as the lyrics refer to X-rays acting as the black hole's "siren song" and to Cygnus X-1 taking control:

The x-ray is her siren song. My ship cannot resist her long.
Nearer to my deadly goal, until the black hole gains control.

This section is extremely fatalistic, taking the sinister squashing of individualism of the end of "2112" and the unintended "frozenness" of the end of "Xanadu" one step further, implicating the hero *himself* in his eventual downfall. The final words here—"until the black hole takes control"—are much slower than the three phrases that precede, and are set to the multiple semitone, unison ascent of the end of one of the earlier instrumental sections. Indeed, the ascending nature of this line and the breathless anxiety of Lee's vocal style provide a sense of urgency.

The desperation continues instrumentally, first with a guitar solo (6:45–7:12) on a repeat of the chord changes of the immediately preceding C minor (“siren song”) section. The mysterious octaves of the post-implosion section of the prologue then return (7:12–7:53), but C and A are replaced with C, A-flat, and B. As in the D/B-flat (flattened sixth) despair eventually present in “Xanadu,” the A-flat here evokes “illusory hope.” Despite the hero’s initial optimism (as was also the case in “Xanadu”), he now recognizes the black hole as the trap that we already know it to be. Further instrumental complexities then follow and drive the negativism home (7:53–8:34). These features include bitonality, a chromatic descent to a new tonal area (E), alternations among measures of 4/4 and 3/4 time signatures, and a transposition of all of this up a tone (to F-sharp). The very fast, C-sharp minor, 12/8 section of the prologue (see fig. 9.5) then reappears (8:34–9:40), but this time it ends on C major and alternates with brief vocal utterances on the same music. Lee sings in an extremely high tessitura in this section—reaching as high as the A above the treble clef—as the protagonist-hero is sucked into the “unending, spiral sea” of the black hole and as his “every nerve is torn apart.”

Like the priests in “2112” and paradise itself in “Xanadu,” the black hole Cygnus X-1 is given the final word in this song. Ultimately, this is provided through a mysterious, soft, reflective, chord progression that reconciles C minor, E-flat minor, and two E minor chords, one with an added F-sharp (G-flat) (9:40–10:21; see fig. 9.8).

This chord progression reprises some of the ambiguity of the pitch clusters of the early parts of the song’s introduction (including the pitches E, F-sharp, and A-sharp/B-flat), but also the open fifth of the star’s new physical state (E/B) and several of the cross-relations (and other semitones) encountered earlier in the song (including G/G-

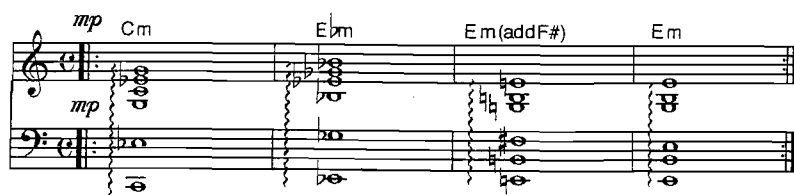


Fig. 9.8. Excerpt from “Cygnus X-1—Part I,” 9:40–10:41.

sharp). This time the hero has only himself to blame, because the complexity and probable danger of the black hole were already indicated well in advance. As the pattern fades out, the hero presumably fades with it.⁵⁵ However, as unlikely as it seems, the liner notes at the end of the lyrics for this song suggest that this narrative is “to be continued.”

Summary

Rush tentatively experimented with an individualist ideology and with progressive rock elements around 1974–75, including its songs “Anthem” and “Bastille Day.”⁵⁶ However, it was not until the albums *2112* (1976) and *A Farewell To Kings* (1977) that the band definitively established a synthesis of its progressive hard rock style—including large-scale cyclicism and metrical constructedness—with an overtly individualist ideology and science fiction and fantasy narratives. The songs “2112,” “Xanadu,” and “Cygnus X-1” are perhaps extreme examples considering that the same two albums also contain a number of less complex and/or less individualistic songs, including the prodig “A Passage to Bangkok,” the “work ethic” anthem “(You Don’t Get) Something for Nothing,” the truth- and wisdom-oriented “A Farewell to Kings,” and the anthem of diversity, “Closer to the Heart.”⁵⁷ However, although casual fans are more likely to be familiar with such shorter, early Rush songs, the longer, cyclical works discussed in this article are quintessential for understanding the band’s ideology, and that of its fans.

Although Rush gradually moved away from extended composition and overt libertarian individualism over its next several albums (1978–81), its later social critiques—which are considerably more succinct—were nonetheless grounded in the band’s ongoing “signature” of insisting on elements of structural (especially metrical) complexity and instrumental virtuosity. These elements remained largely present, regardless of the stylistic features with which the band otherwise experimented, including mainstream hard rock, new wave and pop reggae, synth-pop, hard alternative rock, and progressive heavy metal. Furthermore, the ideological ambivalence so often expressed in Rush’s extended instrumental sections of the late 1970s still functioned in the band’s later music, although often in substantially moderated treatments. These included Rush’s final extended work of this type,

"Hemispheres" (1978), several entirely instrumental narratives (1978 and 1981), and especially the more general social critiques posited in various shorter songs from 1978 to 1996.

Notes

1. See Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 6, 12–13, 16.
2. The late-60s style had tended toward homogeneously distributed (thus, arguably more "psychedelic" and communalist) expressions across a number of instruments (as in "Light My Fire" by the Doors and "In-A-Gadda-da-Vida" by Iron Butterfly), whereas the emerging progressive style often heterogeneously distributed its soloists, giving each player one or more featured "moments." On the other hand, whereas some progressive rock bands—for example, Emerson Lake and Palmer (ELP) and Yes—often featured individual virtuosity in separate instrumental sections, other progressive rock bands—especially Genesis—preferred to explore textures of semivirtuosic ensemble playing.
3. Sales of rock albums surpassed sales of pop singles in 1969. Statistic cited in Paul Stump, *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock* (London: Quartet, 1998), 73.
4. Thus, I prefer to consider Pink Floyd—on the basis of its total output—a "psychedelic progressive" rock band.
5. From an interview with Bill Bruford (ca. 1996) by Paul Stump, quoted in Stump's *All That Matters*, 49.
6. My thanks to Daniel Goldmark for bringing this to my attention.
7. Jon Anderson, quoted in Jerry Lucky, *The Progressive Rock Files*, 4th ed. (Burlington, Ontario: Collector's Guide Publishing, 1998), 37; emphasis added.
8. John Covach, "Progressive Rock, 'Close to the Edge,' and the Boundaries of Style" in John Covach and Graeme M. Boone, eds., *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.
9. *Ibid.*, 6.
10. Jon Anderson, quoted in *ibid.*, 7.
11. For example, Robert Walser demonstrates that elements of art music are also sometimes borrowed by heavy metal musicians. See chapter 3, "Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity," in Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 57–107.
12. Covach's more recent work suggests that he is interested in broadening the definition of progressive rock to include elements of jazz-rock fusion. See John Covach, "Jazz-Rock? Rock-Jazz? Stylistic Crossover in Late-1970s

American Progressive Rock," in Walter Everett, ed., *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 113–34.

13. Along these lines, I have already discussed Rush's compositional "division of labor" in chapter 1 of my Ph.D. dissertation, "Permanent Change: Individualism, Rock Sub-Genres, and the Music of Rush," University of California, Los Angeles, 2001.
14. These appropriations are discussed by Robert Walser in chapter 3 ("Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity") of his *Running With The Devil*.
15. Individualism and progressive rock might never have emerged if the counterculture itself had not itself begun to fracture by 1968 or '69. Indeed, if the Beatles had not disbanded by 1970 and Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison (of the Doors) had not died in 1970 and '71, respectively, politically charged hard rock music (e.g., Jefferson Airplane and John Lennon) might have been much more prominent in the 1970s, and the genre of progressive rock might not have achieved the level of commercial success it attained in North America and the United Kingdom around 1972–78. Also, punk rock might have been interpreted as an extension of the late-1960s rather than as a reaction against progressive rock.
The larger genre map of rock music from 1969 to 1994 would also have looked very different if the 1960s psychedelic aesthetic had continued more prominently into the 1970s. For example, Pink Floyd would have found itself competing with a larger number of psychedelic bands and might never have been as popular as it was; punk, new wave, and post-punk rock (which flourished in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the music of the Sex Pistols, the Ramones, Talking Heads, the Smiths, and other groups) might never have emerged at all; and "alternative" rock (which flourished in the early 1990s after the success of Nirvana's album *Nevermind* and Pearl Jam's album *Ten*, both 1991) would have had a much closer connection to the 1970s and '80s, with R.E.M. (1981–) becoming popular (and influential) much sooner than its mainstream breakthrough with the album *Document* (1987).
16. Libertarianism advocates individual rights, freedoms, and differences over and above political control and "sameness." The "minimal state" (or less government interference) is preferred.
17. By contrast, much of King's Crimson's early music (especially the albums *Lizard*, 1971, and *Islands*, 1972) can be seen as "psychedelic progressive rock," even though the band foregrounded virtuosity and modern jazz influences to a much greater extent than Pink Floyd did in the same period. The mid-70s incarnation of King Crimson ended in 1974 (with a live album released posthumously in 1975) and a new version of the band did not emerge until 1981, so one is left to surmise as to what influences a

continuing King Crimson might have had upon late-70s North American rock music. Certainly, the sporadic output of the group (compared to Rush's twenty-three releases over twenty-five years) has not boded well for a substantial following among fans of similar music. Indeed, my 1996 Rush fan survey suggests that King Crimson is hardly even known among Rush fans.

18. King Crimson's heavier music of the 1973–74 period actually alternates with Robert Fripp's gentler, electric guitar experiments (including music somewhat prescient of what he would later call his "Frippertronics") and with somewhat more psychedelic (and semiacoustic) music.
19. Alex Lifeson, quoted in "Music Will Not Exist In 2112," *Circus*, April 27, 1976, reprinted on the National Midnight Star website, formerly at <http://syrinx.yyz.com>.
20. Geddy Lee, quoted in Darcy Diamond, "Rush to Judgement," *Creem*, June 1977, 25.
21. Roy MacGregor, "To Hell with Bob Dylan: Meet Rush. They're In It for the Money," *Maclean's*, January 23, 1978, 26–27.
22. See <http://www.eb.com>.
23. Ibid.
24. Scott Bullock, article-interview with Neil Peart, "A Rebel and a Drummer," *Liberty*, September 1997. Quoted on the National Midnight Star website, formerly at <http://syrinx.yyz.com>.
25. However, the eventual outcome of this particular battle is unknown until the very end of the composition, nearly twenty minutes later.
26. Lee sings in an actual soprano tessitura, and these barely attainable pitch levels (for a male singer), combined with the important tonal inter-relationships among the work's seven sections, necessitated, among other things, transposing the entire twenty-one-minute work down a whole tone in recent live performances (and resultant recordings).
27. Bart Testa's scathing review of this album makes the connection to *Logan's Run* explicit. See *Crawdaddy*, December 1976, 73.
28. Rush's 1975 song "Anthem" refers to "wonders in the world" and "eyes gone blind."
29. This music is related to the A major music that emerged at the end of the "Discovery" section during the hero's recent excitement about sharing his discovery with others.
30. Victoria Anne Steinitz and Ellen Rachel Solomon, *Starting Out: Class and Community in the Lives of Working-Class Youth* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).
31. J. Kordosh, "Rush: But Why Are They in Such a Hurry?" *Creem*, June 1981, 62.
32. Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 173.
33. J. Kordosh, "Rush: But Why Are They in Such a Hurry?" 62.

34. Reebee Garofalo, *Rockin' Out: Popular Music in the USA* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 292. A reference earlier in the book suggests that Rush "had begun by playing Cream and Iron Butterfly covers in 1974" (289), but the band actually began in 1968, played mostly original songs by 1971–73, and recorded its first original album in 1973.
35. Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* (New York: Lexington Books, 1991), 124–25, 295. Elsewhere in the book (263), she relates the priests' argument against individual expression to the cautions about music that are explained in Plato's *Republic*.
36. Of the five short songs on the second half of *2112*, "A Passage to Bangkok" espouses access to recreational drugs in exotic lands in Latin America, the Caribbean, and the east, "The Twilight Zone" is about Rod Serling—the creator of the classic science fiction television show who had recently died of cancer; Lifeson's "Lessons" is a Led Zeppelin-like, snappy-acoustic song about growing up (but with heavy metal power chords in the chorus); Lee's "Tears" is a mellow, semisweet song about allowing oneself to fall in love (and featuring the distinctive, sustained, late-60s keyboard instrument the mellotron); and the closing song, "Something For Nothing," is a succinct, hard rock anthem in favor of a strong work ethic.
37. Rush's fifth album, the live *All The World's A Stage*, was released in the fall of 1976.
38. Other earlier extended works by Rush include "By-Tor and The Snow Dog" (from the album *Fly By Night*, 1975) as well as "The Necromancer" and "The Fountain of Lamneth" (both from the album *Caress Of Steel*, also 1975). These works are also subdivided into sections.
39. Rush did not create an entirely instrumental narrative until "La Villa Strangiato" (on 1978's *Hemispheres*).
40. Of course, the song is also quite different from the band's earliest cover songs, its relationship-oriented hard rock songs (1974), its hard rock anthem "Working Man" (1971/74), its progressive-influenced, pseudohistorical song "Bastille Day" (1975), and its more mainstream, radio-friendly songs (e.g., "Fly By Night" and "Lakeside Park," both 1975).
41. The division of labor of Peart being credited with Rush's lyrics and Lee and Lifeson being credited with the band's music began with this album.
42. See Walser, *Running With The Devil*, especially 114–20.
43. Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 232.
44. Ibid., 238.
45. Interview with Neil Peart, Rush Backstage Club newsletter, October 1991.
46. As with the 7/8 introduction of "Anthem," most of the introduction of "Xanadu" is not provided in the published transcription.
47. This is similar to the grammatical trajectory from future to present to past tense in Rush's earlier song "Bastille Day" (from the album *Caress Of Steel*, 1975).
48. For example, musicologist Susan McClary discusses the idea of "illusory" or

- "false" hope in relation to "flat-six" chords (especially in Schubert's Impromptu in C Minor, Op. 90, no. 1 and in the slow movement of Beethoven's String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 127) in her article "Pitches, Expression, Ideology: An Exercise in Mediation," *Enclitic*, Spring 1983, 76-86.
49. In Orson Welles's 1941 film *Citizen Kane*, Charles Foster Kane builds a magnificent palace for himself and his second wife. He names it Xanadu and subsequently undergoes an "ambivalence entrapment" not at all unlike the one in Rush's later narrative.
 50. This is similar to the slow, ambivalent, instrumental ending of Rush's earlier song "Bastille Day" (from the album *Caress Of Steel*, 1975).
 51. "Cygnus X-1 Book II—Hemispheres," the side-long title suite (a.k.a. "Hemispheres") of Rush's subsequent album, *Hemispheres* (1978), enters a rather more psychological domain than the science fiction subject matter of "Cygnus X-1" and, in fact, concerns left-brain versus right-brain thought processes. These are "anthropomorphized" in Neil Peart's lyrics about Apollonian versus Dionysian cults and the arrival of balance through a god named Cygnus.
 52. Terry Brown was generally referred to as "Broon" because of the way he pronounced his own surname. Ominous narrators with British accents abound in the history of cinema, including U.S. films.
 53. The underlying music of the preceding prologue features electronically generated, complex, bell-like tones and relatively arrhythmic presentations of indistinct pitch clusters in a rather restrained middle-frequency range, (E, F-sharp, G-sharp, and A-sharp), thus depicting the normal state of the star before its transformation into a black hole. However, this eventually "progresses" as sporadic lower and higher G-sharps and C-sharps anticipate a change to the sounds of explosions that quickly take over the texture. These changes coincide with the spoken "final flash of glory" of the star becoming a black hole. This process involves such an extreme shift in density that the star disappears entirely from the visual spectrum.
 54. Segues such as this one recall the similar transitions between sections in "2112" and "Xanadu."
 55. This may be contrasted with the similarly themed, though much more psychedelic and narratively straightforward, Pink Floyd song "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" (originally from *A Saucerful of Secrets*, 1968).
 56. In the same period, the band experimented with multisectional and/or relatively long works, including "By-Tor and the Snow Dog," "The Necromancer," and "The Fountain of Lamneth."
 57. Lee's "Cinderella Man" (based on Frank Capra's 1936 film *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, starring Gary Cooper) and Peart's "Madrigal" seem like filler material compared to the other four songs.