

History of Rock
Chapter 16
Art Rock

As a result of theme, or concept, albums and as a result of the development FM radio which made it possible for longer works to be played, many rock artists turned to more artistic approaches to their music. Specifically, these artists began to find ways to bring classical ideas into rock music. Several new styles grew out of this approach, begun largely by British rock artists. The name given to these styles was *art rock*, but it was also sometimes referred to by some as *progressive rock*. This music excluded jazz-rock which might also be called progressive by some listeners. The simplest form of art rock used instruments usually associated with symphony orchestras in addition to standard rock instrumentation. This was an extension of what had been done earlier by Phil Spector and George Martin. A more complex style was created by performers who wrote multi-movement works, similar to those common in classical music. Sometimes, these performers even *covered* familiar classical compositions. Finally, some rock musicians experimented with avante-garde concepts that had also been explored by classical musicians.

Art Rock Combining Rock and Classical Instrumentation

Formed in Birmingham, England in 1964, members of the Moody Blue had previously played in blues and R&B bands. By the end of 1967, the Moody Blues had changed some of their personnel and changed their sound by incorporating the London festival Orchestra, conducted by Peter Knight. *Nights in White Satin* was among their most popular recording. Originally recorded in 1967, it was re-released in the US in 1972.

Nights in White Satin was originally part of a larger work, written in classical style. It was a concept album, *Days of Future Past*.

Listen to the Moody Blues---Days of Future Past---Nights in White Satin with Epilogue (1:1)

Listen to the Moody Blues---Days of Future Past---Overture (1:2)

As one might imagine, it is very difficult and expensive to always travel and record with a symphony orchestra. The Moody blues found the answer to that dilemma by using a *mellotron* (early synthesizer) to imitate an orchestra. While the Moody Blues did work from time to time with a symphony orchestra, they never again included them among their regular personnel.

The mellotron began to be used by many groups that wanted to add orchestral effects to their rock sound. Among those groups was Genesis. Genesis was formed in 1966 by singer/flutist Peter Gabriel, keyboardist Tony Banks, bassist/guitarist Mike Rutherford, and guitarist Anthony Phillips. They finally included Phil Collins as drummer in 1970. In the early 70's Genesis created multi-movement works. By that time, elaborate stage acts were becoming popular and Genesis used their music to create a surrealistic fantasy

world which they portrayed on stage. Many other performers were also concentrating on elaborate stage shows along with the use of orchestral effects. As far as the music was concerned, little separated art rock from the glitter groups of the same time. The glitter groups celebrated androgynous sexuality but the art rock groups did not.

Peter Gabriel left the group in 1975 and was replaced by Phil Collins, who also continued to be the group's drummer. Over time, Genesis turned to a more commercial sound. They achieved several top 10 hits, including this title track from their album, *Invisible Touch* (1986).

***Listen to Genesis---Invisible Touch* (1:3)**

Another group to perform with orchestral instruments was Procol Harum. Formed in 1966, they gained international success with their recording of *A Whiter Shade of Pale*.

***Listen to Procol Harum---A Whiter Shade of Pale* (1:4)**

Procol Harum normally played several instruments in the studio and overdubbed onto a studio orchestra. After several albums, they determined that orchestral musicians played best in live situations. To capture the brilliance of a live performance, they recorded *Procol Harum Live: In Concert with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra* (1971). The project proved to be a success. *Conquistador*, originally released in 1967, had been ignored when initially released. When included with this album, however, it became an international hit.

***Listen to Procol Harum with the Edmonton Sym. Orchestra---Conquistador* (1:5)**

The John Evan Band, a blues revival band, included singer/flutist/saxophonist/guitarist/singer Ian Anderson. When that band broke up, Anderson determined to form his own group, Jethro Tull. (Jethro Tull was the author of an 18th century book on agriculture.) Initially, the new group was rooted in blues and jazz. But, evidence of their art rock leanings appeared on their second album when Anderson played the *Bourrée* From J.S. Bach's Suite in E minor for lute. Anderson used a distinct style of playing that humming and/or fluttering his tongue while blowing into the flute. This technique of flutter-tonguing and singing into the instrument was nothing new. It had been used by avante-garde composers wishing to explore new sounds on traditional instruments.

***Listen to Jethro Tull---Bourrée* (1:6)**

Anderson also used his music to make social and political statements. The album *Aqualung* (1972) was critical of organized religion. Later he spoke against nuclear power and drug abuse, among other things.

***Listen to Jethro Tull---Flute Solo* (1:7)**

Art Rock by Classically Trained Performers

The rock music that added orchestral orchestration to what was a rock band set-up was extremely popular, but it did not require a lot of classical training. Musicians who had extensive classical training, on the other hand, developed a still different kind of art rock. These musicians composed their own works based on classical structures and they also recorded their own versions of classical pieces. They were not writing classical music. They were rock musicians playing for a rock audience, but adding a rock rhythm section to what was based on a classical work or their own work set in a classically influenced form.

One of the first, and longest lasting, of the art-rock supergroups was Yes, formed in 1968. The group was interested in creating classically structured music that included full-group vocal harmonies. Early on, Yes used the synthesizer to add new instrumental sounds to its music. Over time, however, they began to rely on the expertise of their members rather than rely on synthesized sound. All their members were accomplished soloists and they shared solo duties on their albums. The group's high level of musicianship is apparent in their recording of *Roundabout*, from their album, *Fragile* (1971).

***Listen to Yes---Roundabout* (1:8)**

Albums that followed *Fragile* used the classical multi-movement form called a suite. The term actually referred to a collection of instrumental dances in the 18th century. They dances were so-called *stylized dances*, meaning that they really weren't intended to be danced to, but did take on the general characteristics of those dance forms. They were given titles such as *gigue, saraband, bouree, etc.*

The original Yes had essentially broken up by the early 80's. It was then reformed by some of the members. That version of Yes recorded *Owner of a Lonely Heart* in 1983. This recording gave them a number one hit single.

***Listen to Yes---Owner of a Lonely Heart* (1:9)**

Many British art-rock groups recorded works from standard classical literature. But, few recorded as many as the group, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. In addition to rearranging classical works, keyboardist, Keith Emerson wrote his own multi-movement compositions that followed the classical format.

When they traveled, they carried 36 tons of equipment, including a quadraphonic sound system and a revolving percussion setup that required an elevator platform to enable Carl Palmer to reach all of it. The musical effects were highlighted with lights, lasers, and explosions. While Emerson, Lake, and Palmer were known for their long, elaborate works, their intimate ballads were the most popular.

***Listen to Emerson, Lake, and Palmer---From the Beginning* (1:10)**

Following are examples of Emerson, Lake and Palmer's renditions of classical standards.

Listen to Copland---Fanfare for the Common Man (1:11)

Listen to Emerson, Lake, and Palmer---Fanfare for the Common Man (1:12)

Listen to Mussorgsky---Pictures at an Exhibition, excerpts (1:13-15)

Listen to Emerson, Lake, and Palmer---Pictures at an Exhibition (1:16)

Art Rock Influenced by Avant-Garde Trends

Many groups made use of the mellotron as well as other techniques and devices in order to play elaborate classical compositions, adding a rock feel to them. Another approach to merging rock with classical music was the use of avant-garde techniques. The most popular techniques tended to be those of minimalism and the use of non-musical sounds.

Minimalism was also sometimes called systematic music. When using this technique, musicians would repeat a very small amount of musical material. The frequent repetition would usually involve some sort of variation along with the repetitions. The style became popular through the work of composers such as Steve Reich and Philip Glass.

Listen to Steve Reich---Six Marimbas (2:1)

Edgar Varese was an important leader in the use of non-musical sounds. He was incorporating non-musical sounds into musical compositions as early as the 1930's. The music he created included bells, sirens, and whistles along with traditional percussion instruments to create what he called *organized sound*. Later he included these sounds along with electronically produced sounds in his masterwork, *Poème Électronique*, composed for the Brussels World's Fair in 1958.

Among the groups to use both minimalism and non-musical sounds effectively was Pink Floyd. Syd Barrett joined with friends from a London architectural school to form the Pink Floyd Sound in 1965. The name was a tribute to two blues musicians from the Carolinas, Pink Anderson and Floyd Council. Initially, their music consisted primarily of traditional blues. As Barrett became more involved with psychedelic drugs, their music began to reflect the music of the psychedelic culture. The group shortened their name and released their first album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, in 1967. On that album, Barrett included some of his most creative experiments with sound effects. His desire to be creative along with his use of LSD caused many problems. He became undependable and refused to lip-sync to songs on television appearances. The result was that the group eventually fired Barrett, hiring another guitarist, David Gilmour. In his place, Roger Waters and Richard Wright shared the songwriting duties.

Play Pink Floyd---Interstellar Overdrive from *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (2:2)

Pink Floyd continued to include extended psychedelic improvisations with repeated electronic sound effects and soon attracted the attention of British movie producers and

classical composers who were interested in electronics. After the release of their album in 1970, *Atom Heart Mother*, Pink Floyd became the first rock group to be invited to perform at the Montreaux Classical Music Festival.

Many classical composers and rock musicians had become interested in creating a sound collage with randomly gathered material. George Martin had done this with the Beatles' recording, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Pink Floyd took this idea further with their recording of *Echoes*, from their *Meddle* album in 1971. The piece was recorded with each member of the group going into the studio and recording whatever came to them at the time. All the material was then spliced together.

***Listen to Pink Floyd---Echoes* excerpts (2:3)**

Roger Waters became the principle writer for the group and was instrumental in creating one of their most successful albums, *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973). One track from the album was *Money*. This piece included the non-musical sounds of ringing cash registers. More interesting was the use of 7-beat patterns in the piece.

***Listen to Pink Floyd---Money*--Edited (2:4)**

Waters portrayed human beings as animals when he wrote songs for the album *Animals* (1977). *Animals* included songs such as *Pigs (Three Different Ones)*, *Sheep*, and *Dogs*. In performance, a giant inflated pig floated above the band and became a symbol the group used again later.

The Wall was produced in 1979 and served as a personal view in the psyche of Roger Waters. He was pessimistic about every aspect of life in modern society and found no solace in his relationships with his mother or wife. He viewed formal education as confining and inhibiting freedom of thought. In general, *The Wall* was about a young man who acted out his feelings of alienation by building a wall around himself, only to find that he was susceptible to decay from within and that no meaningful hope for the future existed.

***Listen to Pink Floyd---We Don't Need No Education* from *The Wall* (2:5)**

For the most part, art rock was a British phenomenon. There were some American groups who became involved, but most of their work was more appreciated by the critics than by fans. The one American whose work paralleled the British in terms of experimentation was Frank Zappa (1940-1993). Zappa played R&B guitar, but became interested in the effects possible through electronic sound effects. While he was influenced by many different kinds of music, Zappa became a spokesperson for freedom of expression. Many of his views regarding individual freedom were similar to those of the Beats.

His band, the Mothers of Invention, had a constantly changing membership. With them, Zappa aimed attacks at American ideas regarding respectability in songs such as *Plastic*

People. He took a stab at the tastes of some of his own fans by mocking the Beatles with an album called *We're Only In It for the Money* (1967). Roles and attitudes he felt lacked substance were among his targets for criticism.

Because he spoke in favor of freedom of expression, Zappa opposed any kind of censorship. In his 1979 album, *Joe's Garage, Acts 1, 2, and 3* Zappa created a mythical world in which music was declared to be illegal. In his 1986 album, *Frank Zappa Meets the Mothers of Prevention*, a *Warning/Guarantee* label was included that suggested anyone who would curtail freedom of speech was dangerous to society.

Because of some of the language used in his songs, many of them were kept off the radio, but his albums continued to sell well. He created his own record company when he went too far for his label. He still used Mercury Records to distribute his albums. When they refused to distribute his song, *I Don't Wanna Get Drafted*, which criticized President Carter's reinstatement of the draft, he began to accept mail orders from fans who wanted the album.

Zappa used many different styles when recording his work. This included blues and jazz, but he also included traditional symphony orchestras and he used experimental sounds. The song, *Valley Girl* was his only top 40 single and it represents his, and his daughter's, Moon Unit, sense of humor in making a political statement.

Listen to Frank Zappa---Valley Girl (2:6)

Zappa was respected by musicians in the classical world and he was called on to compose for classical groups. His 1987 recording, *Jazz from Hell* won him a Grammy in 1988 for Best Rock Instrumental. Zappa died of prostate cancer in 1993.

Kraftwerk was a German group made up of instrumentalists who put down their flute and piano in order to play all electronic instruments. They used preprogrammed tapes, synthesizers, oscillators, sequencers, and drum machines along with computer-produced vocals as well as natural vocals. Their recordings were very popular in Europe and their fourth album, *Autobahn* (1974), was popular in the United States.

Listen to Kraftwerk---Computer World excerpts (2:7)

Laurie Anderson produced art films, videos, and music that appealed to the rock audience. Her works were closely tied to her art, so it is not possible to get the full effect of her music without also seeing the art. Also, her works would not be performed in stadiums or concert halls. Rather, she would be heard in art museums and at art shows. Her greatest commercial success came from her recording of *Oh Superman* from her *Big Science* album (1982).

Listen to Laurie Anderson---Oh Superman (2:8)