



# Genesis

BY ASHLEY KAHN



If rock bands adjusted their names according to their history, we should be welcoming Regensis into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame this evening. For more than four decades, repeated beginnings – career restarts, musical rethinking – were a Genesis trademark. Theirs has been a musical journey that took the group from innovative, progressive rock to era-defining pop music, from underground adoration to global stardom. They brought forth more than twenty albums that sold an astounding 150 million copies worldwide. They performed on world tours that reached twenty-five million people. They survived downsizing – in fact were *strengthened* by it – as time whittled Genesis from five original members to four, to three, and finally to two.

Genesis overcame challenges that have ended many a rock career, and learned to embrace the unexpected. “I’m a great believer that change, very often not looked for, brings something new and dynamic, which is always good,” says founding member Mike Rutherford. From the time of their own genesis – when five English schoolmates first came together in the sixties to write songs and perform – change and chance have been the driving forces of the Genesis story.

Speaking of band names, “Genesis” was actually the second suggestion (“Gabriel’s Angels” was the first) made by a young music producer as a means of commemorating his own start in the production game. British pop mogul Jonathan King was young and riding high on his breakthrough hit “Everyone’s Gone to the Moon” when he paid a visit in 1967 to his alma mater, the Charterhouse School in Surrey. There he received a demo of original music cut by an unnamed group that included members drawn from two local bands, Anon and Garden Wall. All teenagers, the lineup featured vocalist Peter Gabriel, guitarist Anthony Phillips, pianist Tony Banks, bassist Mike Rutherford, and drummer Chris Stewart.

Enamored of Gabriel’s voice, King contracted Genesis to Decca U.K.; significantly, he signed them as both writers and performers, encouraging them to write their own material. The days of blues and R&B-based bands were rapidly morphing into the era of psychedelic rock;

covers of Chuck Berry and Motown tunes were giving way to songs that were more ambitious, lengthy, and complex – a new kind of “serious” music for serious listeners. This was the time of the Nice, the Moody Blues, and early Pink Floyd – the rise of what would become known as progressive rock (and much later, simply “prog”).

Though King was a pop producer, he understood Genesis was not about writing bright, simple ditties for radio play. His guidance – finding a new drummer, selecting the stronger songs – helped the group develop their sound and record their first album, *From Genesis to Revelation*. Released in

early 1969 to scant attention and weak sales, it was in no way aided by the fact that many retailers placed it in the religious-music section.

Much changed between that freshman effort and their sophomore album, *Trespass*. Genesis left King and Decca, signing with the newly formed Charisma Records, where the group benefited from the faith and boundless energy of label chief Tony Stratton-Smith. Creatively, the group was growing, rapidly expanding its focus from the studio to becoming a full-fledged stage band, transitioning highly original, suitelike compositions into extended, riveting performances. Crowd-pleasing tunes like “The Knife” and “Going Out to Get You” increased the drama, section by section, with songs sometimes lasting twenty minutes.

The emphasis on live performance had an unfortunate consequence: One of the group’s primary songwriters, “Ant” Phillips, developed debilitating stagefright, causing him to quit the band before the summer of 1970 had ended. Genesis soldiered on, choosing to find a replacement guitarist *and* drummer.

Genesis’s archives include a handwritten list of drummers the band was to audition that fall. The fifth name (of twenty-eight) was Phil Collins, a former child actor who had appeared in the Beatles’ *A Hard Day’s Night* and been playing drums since age 5, with all the charisma and cockiness to match. Meanwhile, Gabriel responded to a *Melody Maker* ad that read, “Guitarist/writer seeks receptive musicians determined to strive beyond existing stagnant music forms” – and so Steve Hackett entered the fold.

**Genesis overcame challenges that have ended many a rock career, and learned to embrace the unexpected.**

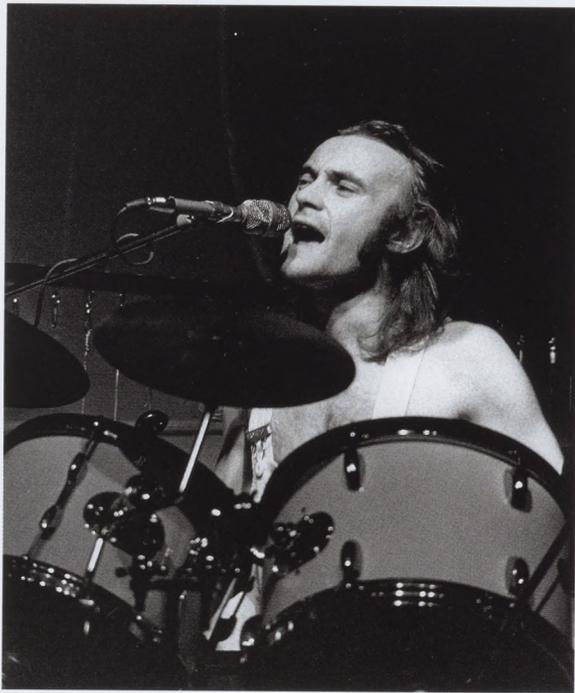
Meet Genesis: Steve Hackett, Tony Banks, Phil Collins, Peter Gabriel, and Mike Rutherford (clockwise from top left)



The classic lineup in 1972



Post-Gabriel: Drummer Bill Bruford (second row, left) joins for one tour, 1976



Hair apparent: Collins takes over vocal duties, 1975

Collins and Hackett – two rockers with respectable chops and a deep love of jazz and other music forms – completed the classic Genesis lineup, raising the band's musicianship to a level that pushed its creative ambitions. Ensuing albums affirmed the group's ability to work with unusual time signatures, complex structures, and harmonic shifts. Genesis's lyrics drew on Victorian fairy tales, medieval poetry, and Greek mythology, while the band's performances began to draw crowds, as well as critical support, placing it only a half step behind the most popular progressive rock groups of the day: King Crimson, Yes, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer.

Like many of those outfits, Genesis landed on Atlantic in the States, with Ahmet Ertegun's enthusiasm for their uncompromising originality: "Here was a group with intelligence and great musical ability, and they were venturesome and more interested in going beyond the edge than sounding like a band that was selling a lot of records." (Before the seventies ended, the irony of that statement would become abundantly apparent.)

In 1971, *Nursery Cryme* – with tracks like "The Musical Box" and "The Return of the Giant Hogweed" – revealed Banks employing an expanding array of keyboard sounds. *Foxtrot*, Genesis's 1972 commercial and critical breakthrough, including such favorites as "Watcher of the Skies" and "Supper's Ready," featured Hackett's powerful lead-guitar work and Rutherford's use of bass pedals. The following year, *Selling England by the Pound* included the epic "The Cinema Show," the synthesizer-driven "Firth of Fifth," and Collins's first credited lead vocal, on "More Fool Me." Record by record, tour by tour, Genesis elevated their profile in the U.K., through Europe (especially Italy), and finally America.

Through the early seventies, the Genesis stage show – despite limited budgets – became increasingly theatrical. The use of special lighting, smoke, projections, and draping predicted the more grandiose rock shows that became standard by the end of the decade. Gabriel began telling stories to fill dead space between songs, and in an unrehearsed moment in late 1972, he took his band mates by surprise, stepping onstage in a fox head and red dress. It was a pivotal moment that kicked off a three-year exploration of unusual and bizarre costumes (a bat-wing headdress, a flower, a naked monster covered in lumps with inflatable genitalia).

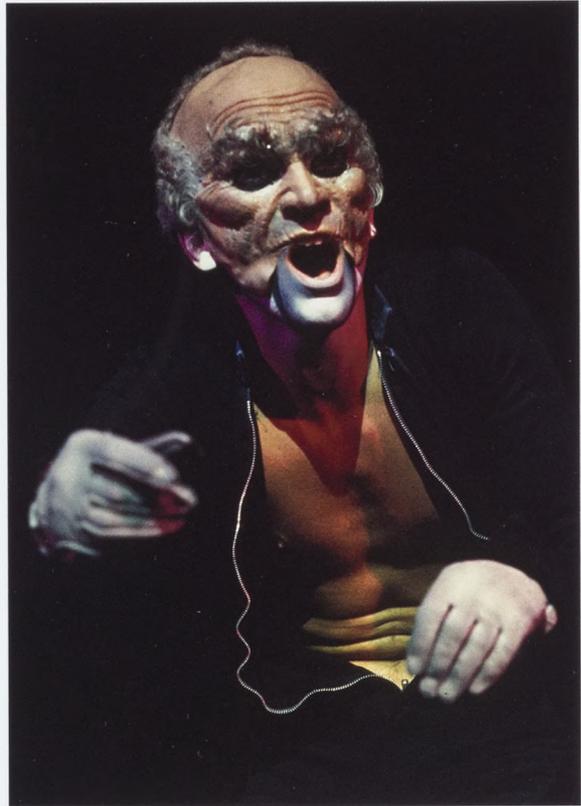
Gabriel's role-playing pushed him into the spotlight, resulting in conflicting reactions, as he later explained: "In this post-MTV world, it's very hard for people to imagine how strong being bombarded with different visual images in parallel with the music was for audiences at the time." Hackett pointed out, "There was no doubt about who the star was. The rest of us were sitting like a pit orchestra, head down, concentrating furiously on our own little areas while Peter cavorted."

As interpersonal pressures mounted in 1974, Genesis embarked on a six-month recording effort that pushed the band to its limits. Composed primarily by Banks, Rutherford, Hackett, and Collins – with Gabriel contributing lyrics – *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* was a double album that told the story of a New York City truant named Rael on a surreal underground journey. Though it earned Genesis its best sales to date, the friction within the band and other distractions convinced Gabriel it was time to depart. When the world tour promoting the album ended in mid-1975, he did just that.

If the news of Gabriel's exit was not enough to leave many critics and fans doubting the future of Genesis, the actions of the band members only added to it. Word had it that Hackett was off recording a solo album, released as *Voyage of the Acolyte*, but whither Genesis? Who would take the microphone? Collins recalled that "my initial reaction was that we'd just carry on as a four-piece without any singing." (Soon Collins was preparing his own side project: the percussion-focused jazz-rock ensemble Brand X.)

From doubt came resolve, as Banks recalls: "I was fed up because everyone was saying, 'Oh, Pete was Genesis' . . . I thought, 'It's not like that. Let's see what we can do, let's prove them wrong.'" With the world watching, the remaining four completed the next album, *A Trick of the Tail*, in the process auditioning nearly 400 singers. Collins's ability to ably handle two disparate vocal numbers convinced Genesis their next singer was already in the band. " 'Squonk' required a screaming sort of voice, and 'Mad Mad Moon' required a sort of distinctive, full voice," explains Banks. "Phil went in and managed both in an incredible way."

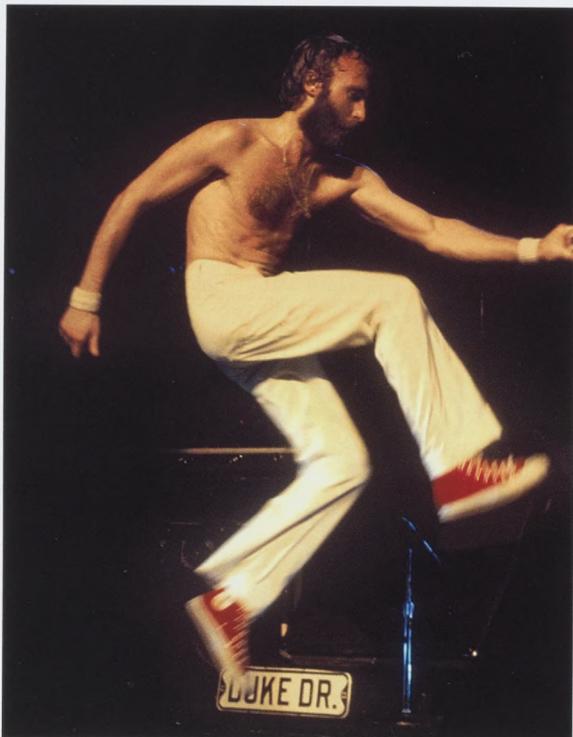
Released in 1976, *Tail* propelled Genesis in a number of new directions. Onstage, Gabriel had affected a more mysterious, aloof presence; Collins was fun, funny, and down-to-earth. On tour, Collins recruited Bill Bruford – formerly of Yes, King Crimson, and most recently Brand X – to help with drumming duties. In the studio, Genesis began working with David Hentschel, an experienced engineer and producer who would shape their next three albums: 1976's *Wind & Wuthering* (with ex-Frank Zappa drummer Chester Thompson



Gabriel in one of many guises: 1974



Gabriel and Genesis in mid-flight, mid-seventies



Nice kicks: Collins does the tarantella, New York, 1980

replacing Bruford), 1978's . . . *And Then There Were Three* . . . (with fusion guitarist Daryl Stuermer taking over for Hackett), and 1980's *Duke*.

This was a brave, new Genesis. They began to replace expansive, concept-driven tracks with shorter, radio-friendly songs. Some argue with such simplification ("We'd made singles for years," Rutherford once explained. "It was just they were

crap"), but Genesis did start to enjoy sales and airplay like never before. "Follow You Follow Me" was a U.S. Top Forty single in 1978, and "Misunderstanding" a Top Twenty in 1980, Collins's first self-written hit.

Genesis entered the eighties primed for the MTV generation and in full embrace of new sounds and technology. In 1981 *Abacab* reached Number One and Number Seven on the U.K. and U.S. album charts, respectively; it was recorded in a studio of the band's design with the help of engineer Hugh Padgham. Padgham and Collins – who by 1981 was conducting a double-pronged assault on the pop charts with Genesis and as a solo artist – created the "gated" drum sound that became one of the most imitated and recognizable studio techniques of the eighties. The *Abacab* tour found Genesis introducing another technical marvel to the world: the dramatic color-changing, self-moving Vari-Lite system, now a rock-industry standard.

More influential music followed. *Genesis* (1983), with a heavy reliance on the drum machine, went Top Ten and yielded the hit single "That's All." In 1986, Genesis reached a career high with *Invisible Touch*; it sold more than fifteen million copies worldwide and was powered by no less than five Top Five singles: "Land of Confusion," "Throwing It All Away," "In Too Deep," "Tonight, Tonight, Tonight," and the chart-topping title track.

Five years passed before Genesis entered the studio again. In 1991, *We Can't Dance* – a U.S. Number Four yielding the Top Ten hit "I Can't Dance" – marked Collins's last studio project with the band. Six years later, Banks and Rutherford recruited vocalist Ray Wilson of the grunge group Stiltskin to be the third and seemingly final singer of Genesis; 1997's *Calling All Stations* achieved modest success.

The telling of the Genesis story would be incomplete without marking the separate prolificacy – and often, commercial triumph – of its members. Since 1977, Peter Gabriel's solo career has constituted a legend of its own. He forged eleven albums that wove together rock, soul, folk, and world-beat influences



Very Vari-Lite: Genesis introduce new lighting, Boston, 1981

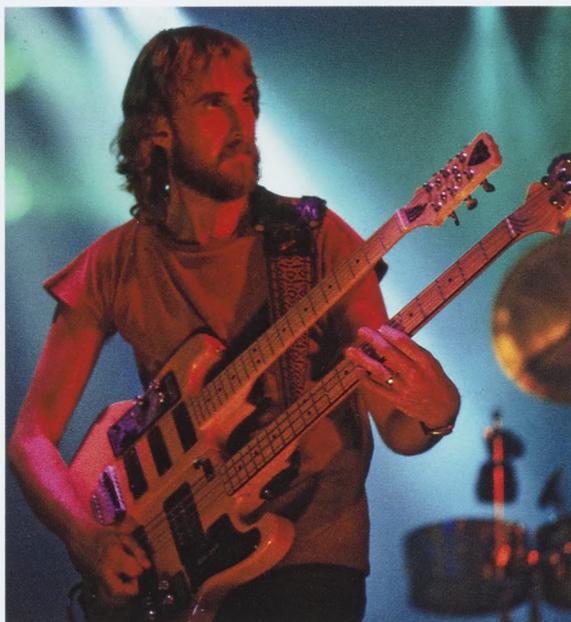
into his own distinctive sound. He created a number of memorable songs ("Solsbury Hill," "Biko," "Sledgehammer," "Steam"), started his own stylistically diverse record label and recording studio (Real World), founded an organization that produces festivals and tours featuring musicians from around the world (WOMAD), and composed evocative film soundtracks (*Birdy*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*).

As the most commercially successful member of the Genesis family, Phil Collins was already 30 when his first solo hit charted. From 1981 through 1990 he boasted a ubiquitous radio presence, notching thirteen hits in a row, including "In the Air Tonight," "I Don't Care Anymore," "You Can't Hurry Love," "Sussudio," "One More Night," "Don't Lose My Number," and "Take Me Home."

The Genesis cornucopia did not stop there. In 1985, Mike Rutherford launched his side project Mike + the Mechanics with two lead singers – the smooth soul of Paul Carrack matching the more rock-flavored Paul Young – and recorded four notable albums during a fifteen-year run. Besides composing an orchestral suite and a number of film scores, Tony Banks has written and recorded five albums since 1979. Since departing the group in 1977, the genre-defying Steve Hackett has recorded more than thirty albums, ranging from pop and rock to classical and Brazilian styles; in 1986 he formed the group GTR with former Yes guitarist Steve Howe.

There have been a few historic Genesis reunions over the years – a 1982 WOMAD fundraiser, the 2007 *Turn It On Again* tour. Only a few years ago, Ahmet Ertegun spoke for many when he said, "I think it would be great one day – when they all have time – to get both Peter Gabriel and Steve Hackett back together with the rest of the group . . . it would be something special for a generation that never saw that particular lineup play live."

Tonight is something special. Somewhere, Ahmet is raising his glass high – along with generations of Genesis fans the world over. 🍷



Double-neck guitar man: Mike Rutherford in 1981



Man on the keys: Tony Banks in Chicago, 1986

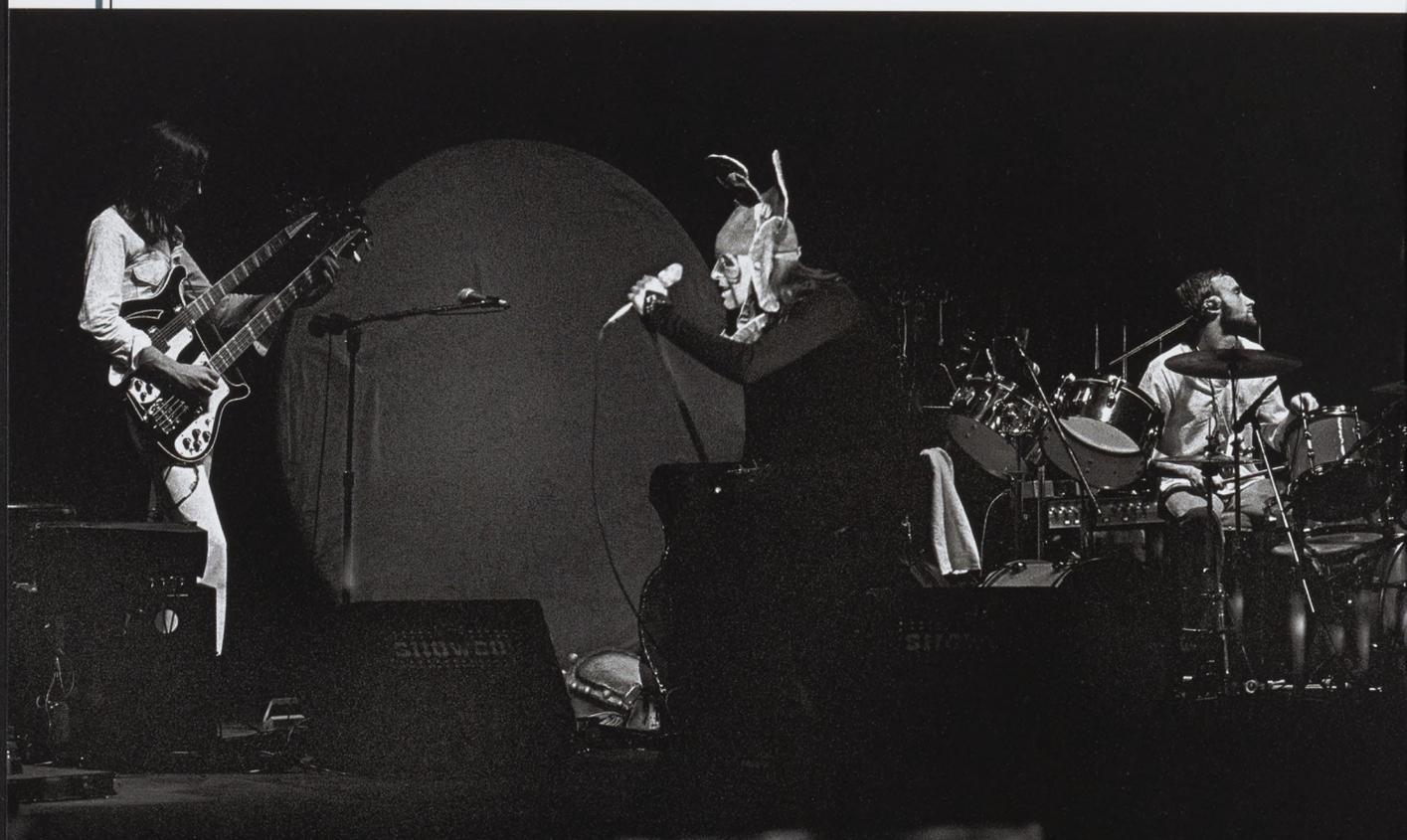


Then there were three (again): Genesis at the close of their 2007 reunion tour, Circo Massimo, Rome

# Progressive Rock: Art, Technology, and Serious Fun

BY STEVE WAKSMAN

*The sound of progressive rock ranges from tonight's inductees Genesis to twenty-first century groups like the Mars Volta.*



**You know that you're listening to progressive rock if:**

1. The songs are broken up into multiple sections or "movements."
2. Song titles include words like *opus* or *rondo* or *khatru*.
3. Each musician gets to play at least one extended solo.
4. The album cover looks like it was taken from a Tolkien-esque fantasy novel.

A lot of the most identifiable aspects of progressive rock are easy to caricature. But those same qualities make progressive rock – or prog rock, as it's often called – one of the most ambitious, artistically challenging styles of rock to have arisen from the tempestuous times of the 1960s and 1970s.

Prog rock is not for people who like to keep it simple. It's not three chords and the truth, not stripped of all excesses. Prog rock is *not* about keeping it real. It's about opening up a world of lyrical fantasy, and exploring musical avenues hitherto uncharted. It's about showcasing virtuosity, not suppressing it. It's about theatricality, turning music performance into drama and spectacle.

Above all, progressive rock is what happened when rock musicians began to make music that could be taken seriously as art and found much of their audience ready to take their music so seriously. Of course, it was still *rock*, so it wasn't all about depth and complexity. Rather, prog rock provided its fans with a unique kind of serious fun.

Part of the fun of prog rock was seeing how far musicians could push at the boundaries of rock without going too far. Prog rock coincided with the rise of the album, rather than the single, as rock's primary medium. Taking advantage of the new possibility for extended forms, progressive rock bands such as Yes, Genesis, King Crimson, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer (ELP) were among the first to routinely create songs that lasted far longer than the usual three-minute format. And



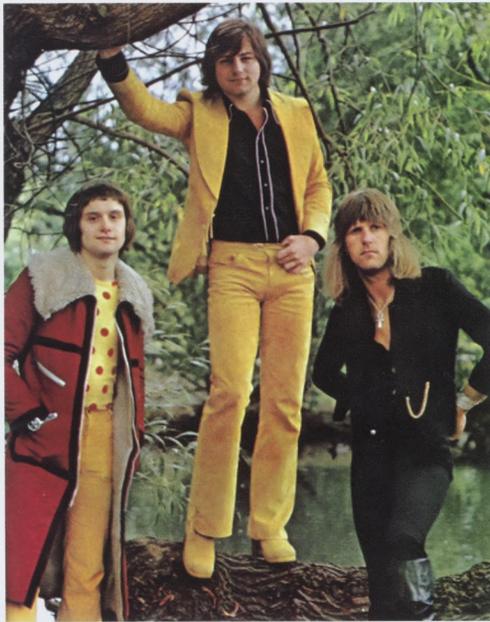
Prog progenitors: The Moody Blues . . .



. . . and King Crimson, early seventies.

**Opposite: Making progress: Genesis in New York City, 1974. Below: America answers the call of prog rock: Styx steps out of the fog, 1978.**





Palmer, Lake, and Emerson (from left): best known as ELP



Jethro Tull's Ian Anderson gets a leg up, 1974.

unlike many of their psychedelic peers, for whom extended song lengths were mainly an occasion for loose jamming, prog-rock performers experimented with song structure, creating multipart songs full of changes in key and time signature that were alternately disorienting and exhilarating.

The concept album was another fruit of prog rock's experimental tendencies. While the Beatles popularized the notion that an album could be more than a collection of unrelated songs with *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in 1967, progressive-rock bands took the concept-album format and made it their own. ELP did it with *Tarkus* and *Brain Salad Surgery*, Jethro Tull with *Thick as a Brick*, Yes with *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, Genesis with *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, Gentle Giant with *Three Friends*, Rush with *2112*. And then, there was Pink Floyd, who made the concept album their preferred medium throughout the 1970s, from the blockbuster *The Dark Side of the Moon* in 1973 to *The Wall* in 1979.

Progressive rock's year zero was 1969. King Crimson's *In the Court of the Crimson King*, one of the most outlandish debut albums in rock history, led the way with its Mellotron flourishes alongside Robert Fripp's cerebral and fiery bursts of guitar brilliance. Yes and Genesis also debuted on record that year, while Deep Purple – soon to emerge as pioneers of another major rock genre, heavy metal – issued their peculiar *Concerto for Group and Orchestra*, marking the growing tendency to merge rock with classical music.

In the beginning, prog rock's leading progenitors were almost uniformly British. The British art school, refuge for many a rock & roll misfit, left a strong imprint on numerous musicians who contributed to prog rock's creation, encouraging them to view their music as both rock *and* art. What resulted was a style of music in which high and low culture, classical and popular music, blended together with little regard for propriety. At times, when the multiple virtuosos who inhabited the likes of Yes or ELP combined their resources, progressive rock came across like chamber music on steroids.

Yet classical music was only one of prog's musical inspirations. Jazz was almost as significant a point of reference, especially among the so-called "Canterbury scene" bands that included Soft Machine, Caravan, Gong, and National Health. Even among more mainstream prog bands, the musical vocabulary that informed prog's great soloists was more indebted to jazz than classical. Guitarist Steve Howe was more apt to sound like Wes Montgomery than Andrés Segovia, keyboardist Keith Emerson as likely to emulate Bud Powell as Vladimir





Deep Purple and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 1969



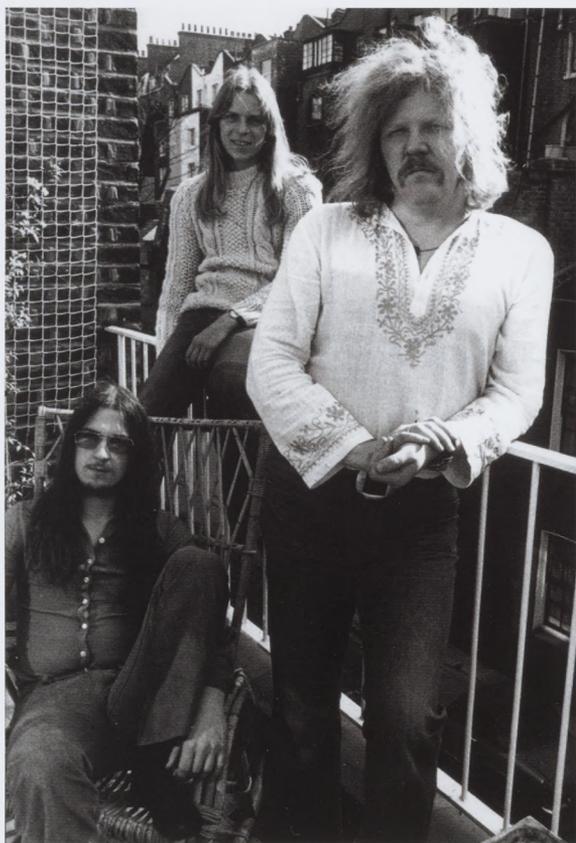
Soft Machine in 1967



Yes recording in London, 1971

Time, Money, and the Dark Side of the Moon: Pink Floyd live in 1975





Masters of synths: Tangerine Dream in 1974

Horowitz. Meanwhile, prog-rock drummers such as Bill Bruford, Phil Collins, and Carl Palmer found inspiration in Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa, Art Blakey and Elvin Jones, figures that had no counterpart in the classical-music world.

Some of the most adventurous music was made on the European continent. In France, Magma's Christian Vander fabricated a whole language (Kobaïan) and cosmology to accompany the group's heavy sonic vision. Dutch group Focus wore their classical influences on their sleeves but also sported a skewed sense of humor evident in their biggest hit, "Hocus Pocus," which mixed hard-rock guitar riffs, off-kilter flute and accordion playing, and yodeling. Germany became a veritable hotbed of prog rock's most far-flung tendencies. The music of preeminent krautrock bands such as Can, Faust, and Amon Düül II was at times almost tribal, full of droning musical textures and big echoey drumbeats. Such primitivism was coupled with a futuristic fascination with music technology best heard in the work of Tangerine Dream, purveyors of some of the most thoroughly electronic music made during the 1970s.

Other prog bands showed a similar proclivity for technology. The synthesizer, largely the preserve of highbrow electronic composers during the 1960s, came to wider attention through its use by the leading prog-rock groups. Keith Emerson's spiraling Moog solo on ELP's "Lucky Man" was an early landmark. Rick Wakeman of Yes treated the synthesizer as a composite harpsichord, fortepiano, and symphonic noise generator. Richard Wright filled Pink Floyd's music with a range of electronic blips and ululating waves that were essential to the band's spacey, atmospheric sound.



Updating prog: Dream Theater in 2003



Kraut prog: Can in the early seventies



Amon Düül II



Prog inheritors: The Mars Volta . . .



. . . and Radiohead

In North America, prog rock followed a different course. The main progressive bands in the U.S. — Kansas, Styx, Boston — used the high-tech gloss and artful tendencies of British and European prog to forge a more accessible style. This heartland prog produced some of the biggest American radio hits of the 1970s, including three potent power-ballad prototypes: “Dust in the Wind,” “Come Sail Away,” and “More Than a Feeling.” From Canada came Rush, arguably the most enduring, consistent, and accomplished North American prog band, who forged a style of heavy-metal progressive rock that grew in finesse and complexity from its early 1970s beginnings to its commercial and artistic peak in the early 1980s.

Prog rock’s golden age was the early 1970s. By mid-decade, many of the genre’s leading bands began to appear played out. The rise of punk in the later 1970s seemed to many to be the final nail in prog rock’s coffin. Everything that punk valued, it seemed, was the opposite of what had set prog apart: punk favored stripped-down musicianship, as opposed to prog’s virtuosic leanings; punk promoted a low-budget, DIY approach to making records, as opposed to prog’s big-budget extravagance. Punk and prog were both varieties of art rock, but punk’s brand of art was meant to shock, while prog’s was meant to elevate.

Like all great rock genres, though, prog rock did not die. It went underground, waiting for the right moment to reemerge. Some groups — notably Yes and Genesis — reinvented themselves in the 1980s and enjoyed some of their greatest successes. Others reassembled themselves, such as the prog veterans that joined to form Asia, whose self-titled debut was the best-selling album of 1982. And still others stayed the course, headed by King Crimson, who re-formed in the early 1980s after a seven-year hiatus and made some of the most inventive music of their long career.

More recently, a host of new-generation bands have made progressive rock the subject of a bona fide revival. In the early 1990s, Dream Theater led the way toward progressive metal, in which Yngwie Malmsteen-style shred guitar was wedded to extended song lengths and unusual structures indebted to Yes and Rush. Radiohead eschewed the classical and jazz references of earlier prog rock but drew heavily upon the conceptual preoccupations of the likes of Pink Floyd and also showed a proglike affinity for advances in music technology. The Mars Volta filters Floyd-like spaciness and Yes-like virtuosity through a postpunk sensibility to create albums that are concept heavy and musically expansive. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, prog has become cool again, its delight in experimentation and odd musical combinations continuing to push fans and musicians to pursue the unknown. ♪