

**“Retrospective Consecration Beyond the Mainstream:
The Creation of a Progressive Rock Canon”**

[DRAFT]

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Dear Members of the Tulane Culture Workshop:

I’m taking seriously the opportunity you graciously offered for the “woodshedding” of this in-progress paper. My collaborators and I have faced the challenge of dealing with both the general literature(s), on the one hand, and the specifics of progressive rock (the latter is not widely known), on the other. You’ll see how we handled this by moving back and forth from general to specific. I’ll be very interested in hearing your response to this strategy.

Another point: This draft only provides the front end of the paper (theory/lit review/hypotheses). That’s because the findings themselves are just now getting done. I look forward to sharing some of those with you on Monday. The team of collaborators have compiled an amazing dataset that allows us to test all the hypotheses that you’ll read below.

Look forward to seeing you soon!

All my best,
Tim

Introduction

Music scholars have long been concerned with documenting and extolling the “canon”—those classic works and creators that they deemed to have defined, if not altered, the arc of music history (e.g., Grout 1973). A more recent stream of scholarship interrogates the process by which canonical greats attain this status (e.g., Bromberg & Fine 2002; DeNora 1991). Indeed, scholars investigating “retrospective consecration” provide but one example of this recent stream: they seek to demonstrate empirically how contemporaneous reception of various creative works and creators shapes which of these are celebrated decades or centuries later and which ones are forgotten (Schmutz 2005).

A methodological challenge lies at the heart of retrospective consecration scholarship focusing on music, literature and the arts: forgotten works and creators, by definition, are difficult to find. This complicates any effort to compare systematically which ones are consecrated years later and which ones are not. Scholars have handled this challenge in various ways. Some have conducted case studies of creative works or creators who were once deemed to be mundane yet were later celebrated as canonically great (Corse & Griffin, 1997; Santoro 2002). Others have created post-hoc samples of works that enjoyed at least a modicum of contemporaneous success during a given time period, thereby comparing the slightly successful to the highly successful in terms of the likelihood of being canonized later (Allen & Lincoln 2004; Schmutz & Faupel 2010). Still, others track groups of creators who constitute a cohort of some sort, so as to compare how and why members of that cohort face divergent trajectories in terms of their posthumous reputation (Braden 2009; Dubois & François 2017).

This article takes a slightly different approach to those mentioned above: we rely on the efforts of an online community that has attempted to document encyclopedically all but the most recent albums recorded in the progressive rock genre. These albums range from those that enjoyed no success whatsoever (i.e., the forgotten) to those few that went on to sell millions of copies around the world. Focusing on a population of albums (rather than a sample), we examine the following research question: which of the 29,000 or so studio albums that constitute this genre will actually be retrospectively consecrated by various periodicals as the “greatest” progressive rock albums of all time?

We draw upon two related, yet distinct, literatures when addressing our research question. First, progressive rock can be thought of as a “field of cultural production” (Bourdieu 1993). Several constituencies play evaluative roles in such fields. Hence, whenever a progressive rock album was released, it prompted a response of some type from critics, fellow musicians and the public at large. These contemporaneous responses can range from complete neglect to enthusiastic embrace. And, of course, the initial responses of these three constituencies can shape how a given progressive rock album is evaluated years down the road (Schmutz 2005). Second, progressive rock can also be thought of as a “genre” (DiMaggio 1987). Musical genres have a trajectory; they are evolving rather than static. Among other things, they diffuse longitudinally and geographically from their points of origin, and for some genres, they are kept alive in their later stages not by large corporations but by a coterie of musicians, fans, and entrepreneurs (i.e., a “scene;” Lena & Peterson 2008). Progressive rock albums that are located at the heart of that evolution should have a greater likelihood of consecration than those on the fringes—with the former including older albums and albums from key

nations that anchored this evolution, as well as those albums preferred by scene insiders (Dowd et al. 2016).

This article both replicates and innovates by drawing on these two sociological literatures. First, like many studies, we assess how the contemporaneous reception of these albums matters for their later consecration. Most notably, we heed the legitimating effects of audience purchases, critical acclaim and professional recognition. Second, and unlike most studies, we interrogate how these three types of legitimacy may combine in different fashion within a musical scene that is more underground than mainstream. In the underground scene of progressive rock, for example, critical legitimacy may not come from well-positioned critics based at corporate-owned media outlets (i.e., the “mainstream”) but rather from critics based at small-scale periodicals and websites (i.e., the “underground;” see Bennett 2002; Dowd et al. 2016). In other words, the specific legitimacy that comes from within the scene may matter for more which progressive rock albums later become consecrated than does the general legitimacy that flows from *Rolling Stone* critics and others who operate in the mainstream (see Johnson et al. 2006).

Retrospective Consecration and Fields of Cultural Production

Consecration is an act that divides the world into two: those few creators and works deemed worthy of celebration are set apart from the majority that are not (Allen & Lincoln 2004). It occurs when actors designate creators and/or creative works as belonging to a pantheon of sorts—such as when they are designated for inclusion in university textbooks (Braden 2009), halls of fame (Allen and Parsons 2006), or formal listings of the all-time greats (Schmutz & Faupel 2010). Of course, aesthetic quality plays

a role in this act, but quality alone is not sufficient for consecration, as studies of once-unappreciated works have shown (Corse & Griffin 1987; Lopes 2002; Peterson 2003; Santoro 2002). Instead, others must recognize that quality, particularly those with a widely acknowledged standing. To that end, Bourdieu (1993) famously identified three well-positioned groups in fields of cultural production that are involved in the evaluation of aesthetic quality. These “fields” are the social spaces in which the creation of music and other creative works occurs; they are spaces that ties together individuals, organizations and industries who are collectively devoted to that creative endeavour yet who are also competing for resources and standing (Dowd et al. 2009).

Each group identified by Bourdieu (1993) operates and evaluates by its own principles, and as a result, provides its own distinctive legitimating stamp of approval. Creators themselves, both individually and collectively, offer an important evaluation of their peers and their peers' respective works. Their standing stems from the fact that they are well acquainted with the creative process, in general, and can appreciate advances in their own field (Becker 1982; Leschziner 2007; Ocejo 2017). Hence, when creators offer awards to their compatriots (e.g., Oscars, Grammys), that recognition can sometimes (but not always) have notable impact on the career trajectories and reputations of the award recipients (Anand & Watson 2004; Anheier et al. 1995; Rossman & Schilke 20014). Yet, as DiMaggio (1987) notes, creators have a vested interest in their positioning in the field, and in turn, may not always display a cool objectivity when evaluating others (see also Giuffre 2009).

Critics likewise provide another type of evaluation. Their standing stems from their studied familiarity of the cultural production field at hand, including knowledge of

how works and creators in that field fit into a broader historical arc (Baumann 2007; Chong 2013; Van Venrooij & Schmutz 2010). Acting as intermediaries between creators and their audiences, critics supposedly stand apart from the creative fray and offer evaluations that can be described as “detached” and “disinterested”—evaluations that offer an account, a story, as to why a given creator / creative work is or is not worthy of esteem (Glynn & Lounsbury 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2006). Not surprisingly, then, positive critical reviews and critical awards (e.g., Michelin stars; Turner Prizes) can likewise benefit (but not always) those creators and creative works that are targeted for praise (Lane 2013; Pénet & Lee 2014; Shrum 1991). That is not to say, however, that critics cannot be biased, ill informed, constrained, etc. (see Chong 2011; Griswold 1987; Janssen 1997, 1998).

While two of the groups identified by Bourdieu (1993) rely upon expertise gained through participation (creators) or observation (critics), the remaining group supposedly relies upon “taste” when evaluating aesthetic content, such as stressing the basic appeal of the works and creators. Their standing for evaluation rests upon their collective voice—as demonstrated by such things as attendance, purchases and downloads (Dowd 2004b; Peterson & Anand 2004). Whereas a bounty of professional and critical praise typically carries no stigma, when creators and creative works secure of an excessively large audience, they sometimes risk being charged as “selling out” (Oware 2014). Bourdieu’s arguments help us make sense of that charge. On the one hand, he labels the pursuit (and attainment) of large audiences as antagonistic to the logic of making art for art's sake—the very logic that is supposedly upheld by many creators and critics (Bourdieu 1993). On the other hand, while acknowledging that a portion of consumers

have refined and cerebral tastes, Bourdieu (1984) also notes that many consumers have tastes that tend towards the merely entertaining, stirring their metabolisms more than their brains (see also Holt 1997; Jamerson 2009). Excessively large audiences, by definition, would include those seeking entertaining fare. Hence, according to Bourdieu (1984, 1993), the legitimation of creators and creative works that flows from large audiences is of a different character than the legitimation that flows from either professional recognition or critical praise.

Retrospective consecration scholars have drawn upon the legitimation flowing from these three groups, seeing how the contemporaneous response of creators, critics and audiences can combine to shape which creators or creative works are deemed as especially worthy years down the road (Allen & Lincoln 2004; Schmutz 2005; Schmutz and Faupel 2010). In doing so, they have joined a broader group of scholars who have shown complex relations (rather than a clear and sharp divide) between the legitimation offered by audiences versus that offered by peers and critics (see below). We suggest that this complexity can be understood, in part, by attending to the size of the creative field in question, following up on Bourdieu's (1993) distinction between fields of "restricted" production versus "large-scale" production.

In some small fields of cultural production (e.g., those occurring in specific cities with limited numbers of creators), well-positioned and well-regarded creators can simultaneously enjoy acclaim from fellow creators, critics *and* audiences (see Anheier et al. 1995; Craig & Dubois 2010; Dowd & Pinheiro 2013; Uzzi & Spiro 2005). In such fields, there is a ceiling to how large the audience can get geographically (e.g., you have to be in NYC to attend a Broadway musical). There is also a ceiling because, apart from

geography, the audiences for these small fields (e.g., jazz, literature, modern art and poetry) tend to be limited in numbers but also highly educated (Berghman & van Eijck 2009; DiMaggio & Mukhtar 2004; Griswold & Wright 2004; Pénet & Lee 2014; Southerton et al. 2012). Hence, securing what passes for a “large” audience in these fields is not typically stigmatizing for creators and creative works, especially given the sophistication of that audience (see Baumann 2001 on the comparison of mass versus educated audiences). In fact, French poets who are published by major publishers (and, hence, are able to reach wider audiences than other poets) enjoy both stable careers and an increased likelihood of eventual consecration by peers, critics and academics (Dubois & François 2013, 2017). In small fields of cultural production, then, the three groups identified by Bourdieu can (and often do) converge in terms of principles of aesthetic evaluation. As Bergesen (1984) would describe it, those fields are marked by high solidarity and widely shared aesthetic codes.

Meanwhile, in some large fields of cultural production (e.g., US cinema, popular music and television), critical, professional and popular legitimacy can diverge from each other, as when high sales do not necessarily co-occur with critical and professional acclaim. In these large fields, the ceiling for audience size is raised substantially by the geography at play (i.e., one drawn from the nation as a whole, as well as beyond, rather than particular cities) and/or by the broad appeal of the creative works. Regarding the latter, popular music, motion pictures and television each draw audiences from across the educational spectrum, yet they also draw pockets of highly educated audiences with particular interests in eclectic fare—showing a divide within the audience (Goldberg et al. 2016; Lizardo & Skiles 2009, 2015). Also within these fields are creative workers and

entrepreneurs who, while not eschewing large audiences, are driven more by an artistic mission and reaching that pocket of discerning audience members. That tension of art versus commerce is captured by the long-recognized divide between “indie” versus “major” in all three fields, which pits small-scale efforts on the part of creators and entrepreneurs (and small audiences) against the blockbuster efforts of creators and conglomerates (and gigantic audiences; Bielby et al. 2005; Dowd 2004a; Zuckerman & Kim 2003).

These aspects of large fields of creative production (divided audiences and divided creators) are why the stigma of commercial success more quickly raises its head there rather than in poetry or literature. Not surprisingly, then, what overwhelmingly matters for the retrospective consecration in national fields of film and rock music is *not* legitimation by the audience via sales, but rather, legitimation by critics and professionals (Allen & Lincoln 2004; Schmutz 2005; Schmutz & Faupel 2010). In such large fields, then, solidarity across the three groups is low, thereby making difficult shared notions of aesthetic quality (see Bergesen 1948).

The cultural production field we examine has elements of both small and large fields. For one thing, the progressive rock field is geographically large: from 1970 to 2015, it emanated from six continents (see below). This transnational field is small in terms of the number of participants and in fiscal terms. More “do-it-yourself” (DIY) than corporate, progressive rock is now marked by easy flow of information and communication among the musicians, entrepreneurs and fans (Anderton 2009; Bennett 2002; Dowd 2014a). While there is no representative survey data on progressive rock fans as a whole, qualitative studies find that they simultaneously enjoy the stimulation

that the sonic aspects of the music provide (i.e., the corporal), as well as the intricacies of the music itself and how that music fits into a broader evolution of the genre (i.e., the cerebral; Ahlkvist 2011; Atton 2001; Bennett 2002; Dowd 2014b). In that regards, progressive rock fans resemble the opera fans detailed by Benzecry (2009). Moreover, prog fans and prog critics somewhat (but not completely) overlap in terms of how they map the boundaries of the genre (Dowd et al. 2016). Put simply, this geographically expansive field of progressive rock is nonetheless marked by moderate to high solidarity (Bergesen 1984). We thus expect that the three types of legitimacy will work in concert rather than in contradiction.

Hypothesis 1: Progressive rock albums that initially received professional legitimation via *professional awards* will have an increased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

Hypothesis 2: Progressive rock albums that initially receiving critical legitimation via *positive reviews* will have an increased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

Hypothesis 3: Progressive rock albums that initially received audience legitimacy via *high sales* will have an increased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

Retrospective consecration scholars frequently find that not all creative personnel are evaluated in similar fashion. Implicit (and explicit) biases may penalize creators of certain genders, ethno-racial categories or nationalities: their contributions and achievements may be ignored or they may be framed in a very different fashion than those with “favoured” attributes (Braden 2009; Chong 2011; Schmutz & Faupel 2010). Given that progressive rock is so male-dominated, and that there are only a handful of women soloists and women bands (Kate Bush of the UK and Ars Nova of Japan notwithstanding), it is difficult for us to capture any gender biases in this study. Meanwhile, biases associated with ethno-racial categories will be difficult to assess given

our global focus, with nations employing sometimes strikingly different racial-ethnic classification categories (see Berkers 2009, for example). Hence, we will only be able to attend to nationality as the biases that result from it with regards to retrospective consecration, a hypothesis we motivate in the next section.

Genre Trajectory and Retrospective Consecration

Genre Origins

A musical genre lies at the heart of the field of progressive rock, and that genre's trajectory (i.e., origins and evolution) can have an impact on retrospective consecration. We can abstractly define "genre" as follows: it refers to a "... 'kind' or 'type' of [cultural product]. The notion of genre presumes that some *aggregation principle* enables observers to support cultural products [e.g., music, film, books] into categories" (DiMaggio 1987: 441; emphasis added). In other words, a musical genre has classificatory meaning and relevance when others acknowledge that certain creators and creations cohere into a group of some type. As DiMaggio (1987) notes, the aggregation principle can involve similarity in terms of the content (e.g., music in a given genre shares similar properties and conventions), the creators (e.g., music in a given genre flows from creators who are like-minded and inter-connected), or the consumers (e.g., music in a given genre shares a similar audience base).

We next need to tie that abstract definition to the concrete aspects of a given genre. The establishment of a genre's aggregation principle is more a process than a one-time occurrence. Indeed, the classification of a given genre often emerges *after* vestiges of that genre have already been in place, with the new classification occurring as

observers identify once-overlooked (or emergent) similarities (see Rosen 1998; Roy 2002, 2004; Santoro 2002). As a result, genres do not self-identify, but rather, they have to be identified. Once that occurs, specialists and others familiar with a given genre attempt to locate its origins, both in terms of time and place (Lena 2012; Regev 2013).

While sometimes more mythic than factual (Bennett 2002; Grazian 2004), these origins anchor the genre by helping people make sense of its past and subsequent development (Becker 1982; Ennis 1992; Lena 2012). Indeed, creators and creative works tied closely to these origins can have a privileged status in retrospective consecration. On the one hand, older works are more likely to be consecrated years later than newer works because they have demonstrated the ability to stand the test of time (Schmutz 2005; Schmutz & Faupel 2010). On the other hand, creators and creative works from a genre's geographical cradle are often consecrated given their purported authenticity (Braden 2009; Cheyne & Binder 2010).

Attempts to define progressive rock are complicated by the following: by the time progressive rock had been recognized as a genre, it had already spawned several subgenres containing notably different musical approaches. For instance, what would eventually be called "symphonic prog" emerged in England and elsewhere in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Anderton 2009, 2010; Dowd 2013; Schmidt and Holder 2010). Bands such as Emerson Lake & Palmer (ELP), Genesis, and Yes mixed the raw power of rock music with orchestral music's extended compositional development and intricacy, as well as its elaborate instrumentation and virtuosity (Covach 1997; Holm-Hudson 2002b; Josephson 1991). Meanwhile, another subgenre—unfortunately labelled "Krautrock" by the British press—emerged in Germany at a similar time. Rather than the soaring

arrangements of symphonic prog, this subgenre was marked by extended improvisation (rather than detailed arrangements); repetition and ostinato (rather than statement and recapitulation of various themes); avant-garde minimalism (rather than a virtuosic flurry of notes); and the influence of musique concrète of contemporary composers (e.g., Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen) who emphasized acoustic and electronic sounds (or “noise” to some) as part of music (Anderton 2010; Hollings 2010; Stubbs 2010). These early Krautrock bands included Amon Düül II, Can, Faust, Kraftwerk and Tangerine Dream. Other subgenres that followed would emphasize the fusion of rock and jazz (Bennett 2002), the fusion of rock, folk and opera (Parentin 2012); the fusion of metal and baroque elements (Walser 1993), the fusion of rock and the avant garde (Holm-Hudson 2003), and so on.

Given this complication of subgenres, some of those who specialize in progressive rock (e.g., academics, critics, documentarians, musicians) tend to define this genre abstractly not in terms of its musical elements but rather its musical *intention*: it is a genre whose musicians (and fans) aspired for the creation of timeless art by combining rock music with other forms of music—such as fusing rock with elements of classical music, jazz and/or indigenous musics (Dowd et al. 2016). The abstract definition thus attempts to capture the full range of the genre. Hence, Anderton (2010: 421) notes,

...definition of progressive rock has widened ever further, with the result that artists who sound almost completely different from each other may be discussed under the same umbrella term. Hence bands that compose and perform largely acoustic, pastoral or folk-based music may be discussed alongside others which draw upon the hard-edged musical legacy of Scandinavian death metal.

This abstract definition also makes sense when considering the concrete context: In the wake of political unrest of the 1960s that spurred and accompanied the rise of a

youth counterculture, certain musicians and fans sought a type of rock music that would offer artistic statements worthy of the time and that would speak in some way to the seismic shifts occurring socially and politically (Anderton 2009; Atton 2001; Bennett 2009; Covach 2000). Initially, the label “progressive rock” was invoked to describe such rock music with artistic leanings rather than a specific genre (Bowman 2002). Those initially exemplifying this artistic turn—according to Anderton (2009), Covach (2000), Macan (1997)—included The Beatles (especially in the wake of *Sgt. Peppers*), the Beach Boys (particularly songwriter Brian Wilson’s efforts on *Pet Sounds* and beyond), Procul Harum (in light of their Bach-influenced “Whiter Shade of Pale”), The Moody Blues (given their concept album, *Days of Future Past*, which prominently featured an orchestral score) and Frank Zappa (who easily moved between do-wop, blues, jazz, rock and avant-garde music inspired by Edgard Varèse).

Progressive rock specialists both agree and disagree about the timing of progressive rock’s emergence. For example, some view the Beatles and others mentioned above as forerunners to progressive rock, with Macan (1997) labelling those musicians as “proto-prog.” However, others treat some of these early musicians as squarely in the genre—particularly, the late-period Beatles, The Moody Blues, and Zappa (e.g., Anderton 2010; Covach 2000; Hegarty and Halliwell 2011). This disagreement over timing is understandable because what are now seen as early examples of progressive rock were not labelled as such at the time (Keister and Smith 2008; Stump 1997). Instead, the genre label was applied post hoc to early bands and musicians—sometimes to their dissatisfaction (e.g., Holm-Hudson 2003). Yet, all the specialists do agree that progressive rock arose and flourished from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s.

Progressive rock enthusiasts (not just specialists) are especially attuned to albums from this early time period. Not only do they serve as treasures for musical exploration, they also serve as musical yardsticks by which to compare subsequent progressive rock albums (Bennett 2002, 2009; Dowd 2014b; Dowd et al. 2016).

The geographic origins of progressive rock are more clear-cut than its chronological origins. To be sure, Macan (1997) notably stands apart in claiming that progressive rock is a distinctly English genre. Most other specialists, however, agree that England and its United Kingdom served as the seedbed of progressive rock, with the genre spreading quickly to other nations (Anderton 2009, 2010; Covach 2000; Schmidt & Holder 2012). Decades later, the United Kingdom continues to have an outsized impact in terms of the number of progressive rock bands it produces, the global circulation of those bands, and the critical attention they receive from within and beyond the UK (Dowd et al. 2016). We thus expect that the reputational advantages associated with the genre's origins will translate into advantages for retrospective consecration:

Hypothesis 4: Progressive rock albums released in the early years of the genre, compared to those released thereafter, will have an increased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

Hypothesis 5: Progressive rock albums released by musicians from the United Kingdom, versus those musicians from elsewhere, will have an increased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

There is a flip side to “authenticity:” those creators from places not typically associated with a given genre often risk the charge of offering a pale imitation of that genre (see Cheyne & Binder 2011; Grazian 2004). That is why things such as jazz from Scandinavia and hip hop from Greece can (initially) may be stigmatized by some and, in turn, require much work from the associated creators to overcome that stigma, requiring

them to demonstrate their worthiness, their “authenticity” (see Elafros 2013; Phillips 2013). Progressive rock as a genre is far-flung, yet surveys of the genre focus mainly on that occurring in Europe and North America—mostly or completely ignoring the healthy number of progressive rock musicians in Latin America and Oceania (e.g., Hegarty & Halliwell 2011; Macan 1997; Stump 1997). If that inattention is as common as we suspect, then it should translate into the following disadvantage regarding retrospective consecration:

Hypothesis 6: Progressive rock albums released by musicians from (a) Latin America and (b) Oceania, versus those musicians from elsewhere, will have a decreased likelihood of retrospective consecration.

Genre Expansion

Even when a given genre classification becomes commonplace (i.e., the aggregation principle is generally known and accepted), the genre itself morphs over time, making the genre a moving target rather than a fixed entity (Lena & Peterson 2008; Roy and Dowd 2010). The evolution of genres is driven, in part, by those creators who intentionally or unintentionally subvert the distinguishing elements of the genre, and in turn redefine it (Becker 1982). It is also driven by generational shifts among competing creators, with those established ones and their acolytes seeking to uphold the status quo and the challengers seeking to topple it (Bourdieu 1993).

Amidst this on-going struggle between subversion and preservation, a few creators innovate works that signal new ways of moving forward aesthetically—those very works are often (but not always) consecrated years later. Galenson (2001, 2004) famously argued that those creators tend to be in the early stages of their careers (what he

calls “conceptual” innovators) or at the end of their careers (“experimental innovators”). Moreover, he argues, as a genre matures, there is a general decline in the ages of innovators across generations, as demands for innovation grow markedly. Accominotti (2009) offers a compelling empirical critique that treats innovation as not simply an individual attribute (i.e., the age of the creator) but a collective one: among other things, young innovators tend to be aligned with new creative movements, while older creators tend to be separate from new movements.

Progressive rock displayed an incredible dynamism following its origins. Their viability was partly due to the fact that a notable portion of it was what Lena & Peterson (2008) call “industry-based”—whereby it benefitted from the financial and organizational muscles of the recording industry and the attention of other corporate entities in radio, retail and journalism. Amidst a flurry of emerging progressive rock bands, the “Big Six” notably thrived during that period by securing fan bases that were both large and international: Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Genesis, Jethro Tull, King Crimson, Pink Floyd & Yes (Dowd 2014a, 2014b). While there are claims that punk rock killed progressive rock, the genre continued to expand in the 1980s. More bands and performers emerged, and more subgenres unfolded. Indeed, Genesis, Pink Floyd and Yes all had their greatest financial successes *after* punk’s emergence (albeit, success with musical approaches that were far less “symphonic” than their early days). If we think of subgenres as a type of artistic movement, then this sustained growth of musicians and subgenres allows us to assess the competing arguments of Galenson and Accominotti (2009):

Hypothesis 7: Progressive rock musicians at either the (a) early stages or (b) late stages of their careers will be more likely to produce those innovative works that are subsequently consecrated years later.

Hypothesis 8: Progressive rock musicians who are either (a) at the early stages of both their careers *and* early stages of their subgenre or (b) at the later stages of the careers *and* later stages of their subgenre will be more likely to produce those innovative works that are subsequently consecrated years later.

Genre and the Underground

Genres do not expand forever; in fact, some of them die off, while others go underground to be nurtured and supported by small scenes (Lena & Peterson 2008). A “music scene” is an amalgamation of musicians, fans, critics and entrepreneurs centered around a particular genre—emerging from grass-roots efforts rather than from corporate strategy (Bennett & Peterson 2004; Crossley 2009). While certain scenes serve as eager seedbeds for the mainstream, providing new musics and creators to broader audiences, other scenes take a deliberate, oppositional stance by championing what they claim the large corporations ignore—such as artistic advancement rather than commercial success (Dowd et al. 2004; Hesmondhalgh 1997; Oware 2013).

Regardless of how they are positioned, music scenes are marked by much talk about their respective genres—talk that unfolds in a variety of settings (e.g., fanzines, online groups, social gatherings; see Bennett & Peterson 2004). A good portion of this talk involves the policing of the genre’s “symbolic boundaries” (see Schmutz 2009). Scene members vigorously debate what music belongs to their genre and what music does not, what of their genre’s music is good and what is not, and what of that good music is the genre’s greatest of all time (Ahlkvist 2011). For scenes that are oppositional, this policing also involves a critical view of what “outsiders” think the genre entails, particularly those at mainstream corporations (Hesmondhalgh 1997).

The progressive rock scene largely emerged after the genre's early heyday. Whereas mainstream corporations once dealt happily in progressive rock, their investment and support dried up quickly as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s. In fact, the building and expansion of this scene was especially motivated by enthusiasts frustrated by the lack of prog rock bands found (a) on mainstream labels and airwaves, (b) in mainstream periodicals, and (c) at mainstream retailers and concert venues (Atton 2001; Bennett 2002, 2009; Covach 1997; Dowd 2014a). Scene members would eventually construct their own infrastructure of small record labels and small shops, print and online publications, online forums, concert festivals, and of critics specializing in this genre (Dowd et al. 2016), with the number of bands now more numerous from the 1990s onward than in the earlier heyday. This infrastructure—which spans the Americas, Europe and parts of Asia and Oceania and draws upon relatively few enthusiasts—is now located in the “underground” far from the mainstream, and it has facilitated the easy flow of talk among scene members—including talk of the all time greatest in progressive rock. Given the oppositional nature of this scene, and given the solidarity of this scene mentioned above, we expect the following:

Hypothesis 9: Progressive rock albums favored by scene critics will have a greater likelihood of retrospective consecration than do those favored by mainstream critics.

I will start here on Monday for the presentation. With results fresh off the press!

Citations

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