

MUSIC 262: Art/Prog Rock

[Brian Ward demonstrates a tune on piano]

[Brian Ward]: So around this time in rock and roll we really start to see a lot of fragmentation going on, and that's reflected in this course. The way we have this designed is so that we can go in different directions with the music, and that's what the music did all sort of at the same time. One of the directions is what we now call art rock and also progressive rock. Now art rock and progressive rock are terms that are used loosely. A good way to describe it is art rock is rock and roll that is influenced by classical music while progressive rock is more influenced by jazz, so- but you have different elements in varying degrees of influence and in different ways.

A good illustration of that is one of the first bands that I want to talk about is The Who. Now The Who were definitely a straight down the line rock and roll band, and they started like a lot of these other British bands: imitating the blues and rhythm and blues music from the United States, but The Who were very unique. They had probably the most four individualized members of any band of all time. All four members of the band, Pete Townshend, Roger Daltrey, John Entwistle, and Keith Moon, were all very, very different people coming from different backgrounds, and that reflected in their music, and they used that to their advantage quite a bit. But with The Who I think rock star first becoming an art form in the sense that they had longer forms and they used many structures that eventually became mini-operas and they eventually made a rock opera called "Tommy." Now when they started out they were more on the cutting edge of hard rock.

A lot of their appeal was more visual as well. You had this drummer, Keith Moon, who would throw his sticks in the air; you have Pete Townshend doing this windmill with the guitar, smashing his guitars; Roger Daltrey would swing his microphone around on his chord; it was just real wild antics that they would do, and they would do this on TV shows, and it was, at the time, it was a very new thing to act out in this way. Now John Entwistle, the bass player, would just sit there and play the bass and act like he was unconcerned with the whole- all these other antics that were going on.

But like I said, they started out as a British R&B band and- but they were more influenced by a lot of different things. They were influenced by these garage bands coming out of the United States: The Wailers, The Kingsmen. They were influenced by surf music, especially Keith Moon, he was a surf rock drummer originally. They were also influenced a lot by James Brown, Jackie Wilson, these soul singers. And then so early on they had a string of hits: "I Can't Explain," "My Generation" right around 1965.

But there was something different and unique about this group. The one funny story is how John- excuse me, Pete Townshend started breaking his guitars. He was in a nightclub, and there was a low ceiling, and at one point he accidentally put his guitar through the ceiling at this nightclub, and he got frustrated and just proceeded to destroy his guitar by smashing it. That became part of

the act. There was a film crew there and they said, "This is visually great, you guys got to keep this up," and so that was part of the act of The Who was smashing guitars.

Another thing that sort of happened as an accident is this whole idea of operas and bringing rock and roll into more of an art form, and that is when Pete Townshend was asked to write a longer song by the manager of the group. He didn't really know how to. He knew how to write songs that were three, four minutes long, so what he did was he came up with a very short storyline, and he put together four of these songs in a row that tell this story, and that became what they call a mini-opera that was called, "A Quick One While He's Away." That was on their record Happy Jack in 1967. Well then they got the idea to make a full blown opera, and that was "Tommy." Now "Tommy" was very influential throughout rock history. "Tommy" was a record and eventually a movie that they made that was a full blown rock opera. Now an opera is a piece of music that tells a story but there's no dialogue. It's all through the songs and that's what this was. This was a full album of songs that tells a story of a young, deaf, dumb, and blind kid who can play pinball really well, and there may be arguments on how great the story is but certainly the music was great, and so that put The Who into a whole other category of art rock and taking a form like opera from classical music and adding it to rock and roll.

So there are some other bands that also blended classical music with rock and roll. One of these bands was The Moody Blues. Now The Moody Blues started out, again, like an R&B, blues, and rock band, but they soon got the idea to add classical music, and what they did was they created this album, Days of Future Passed. Now this came out in 1967, and there was first off a bunch of concept albums that they had, and what consisted on this album was an orchestra and there would be orchestral interludes and there would be poetry. In fact, there is incredibly art work on the cover of their album, so just a different package. And then there's also these great songs that come in the middle of these orchestral interludes played by the London Symphonic Orchestra. One of those songs was "Knights in White Satin," and so they took these classical elements and added them to rock and roll in a very, very, new way and created these concept records. In fact, the concept of this record is the day in the life of a person who starts in the morning and then goes on until night. This was very what they call "programmatic music" in classical music; it's a very romantic idea in classical music that they bring to the rock and roll genre.

Another experimental band from that time period was Pink Floyd. Now Pink Floyd was more maybe on the progressive side of things. They used odd time signatures. They used things called concrete music, which is a classical idea where you bring in sounds from the regular world, so if you listen to the Pink Floyd song, "Money," they use rhythmically the sound of a cash register, and they did that quite a bit. In fact, when they first started out it was a very experimental group, and Syd Barrett was their founding member who's an important member of the group. He had all these ideas about bringing all these psychedelic elements and experimental elements into rock and roll, and so when they created their first record, The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, that was their first record, it was highly influenced by Syd Barrett. It's considered to be one of the most influential rock albums of all time. It's very kind of whimsical, there's a pop-psychedelic nature

to it, and there's themes of space travel, so at the beginning there's really- Pink Floyd was really a space rock sort of man. Later on in 1973 they made their probably greatest work, which was Dark Side of the Moon. Dark Side of the Moon is very interesting album in the fact that it kind of coincides with Syd Barrett's declining mental state. He was slowly going insane clinically, and so as the album progresses, you get this feeling of dementia, and it really follows his decline mentally with this album. This became one of the biggest selling albums of all time; a huge hit in the United States, and the state of the art production, every note, every piece of the music was painstakingly produced on this record.

Another great progressive rock guy and also art rock guy was from the United States, and this was Frank Zappa. Now Frank Zappa is a very highly-regarded musician, a great guitar player, an excellent composer. In fact, he's really a classical composer who decided early on in the 60's that he needed a rock band to get his music out there, and so that's kind of the idea, but there's other elements to Frank Zappa. He would mix his 20th century composer type music with 50's doo-wop. He used a lot of social satire, he used free jazz, avant-garde jazz, and also really guitar heavy rock and roll, R&B elements; it was really a collage of many different styles. Above all though Frank Zappa was a satirist, and he had a wicked sense of humor. One of his albums, Joe's Garage, features a song on there, "Why Does It Hurt When I Pee?" That's just one example of Frank Zappa's wit and his satirical type of humor. Frank Zappa was also very influential when he was fighting censorship. There was a time when there was a group led by Tipper Gore, Al Gore's wife, and they wanted to put labels on records warning parents of explicit content, and Frank Zappa among others was one of the most vocal opponents of this and when on to testify in Congress and really fought hard against censorship in the music industry.