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An Exploration of the Various Compositional Approaches
to Modern Progressive Metal

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
to the requirements for the degree
of
Masters of Art by Research
at
The University of Huddersfield
by
Daniel Robinson

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1) Introduction

Progressive metal is a genre that has developed since it began in the mid 1980s, with various artists demonstrating different approaches to its composition. This thesis will explore these approaches, through detailed analysis alongside a portfolio of music which demonstrates an understanding of the diversity of the genre, while exploring the possibilities of development in new and interesting ways. The portfolio aims to channel various influences, culminating with a final piece that pushes the boundaries of the genre. The thesis will feature analytical overviews of the genre's development, with particular focus on the artists that influenced my work. This will be followed by outlines of the methodology and analysis used to conduct this research.

Research Questions:

- Is it possible to make the music accessible, while still maintaining the genre's high expectations?
- Have I demonstrated a good understanding of my musical influences and used them effectively to create my own music?
- Was the attempt to try and craft a unique piece of music in an attempt to push the boundaries of the genre successful?
- Have I successfully produced the album to a professional standard to enhance the effectiveness of the music?

What follows is a brief introduction to progressive rock from its origins. The term 'progressive' was first used in a musical context in the mid to late 1960s when the term 'progressive pop' was established. Moore (2004, p. 22) explained how 'musicians acquired the facility to move between styles - the umbilical link between idiolect and style had been broken'. This suggests popular artists were more welcome to experimenting with musical ideas that were previously unheard in mainstream music. The Beatles and the Yardbirds were both 'successful in combining rock 'n' roll with various other musical styles including Indian ragas, oriental melodies, and Gregorian chants', Prown and Newquist (1997).

This is demonstrated particularly in the track '*Love You To*' (The Beatles, 1966, Track 4), which was composed entirely by George Harrison as a reflection of his new-found appreciation for Indian music. As the Beatles continued to grow in popularity, Farrell (1988, p.189) argued that 'it was inevitable that it would unleash an avalanche of such experiments in the pop world'. Experimentation such as this helped define the characteristics of the genre, paving the way for artists to implement such ideas. As this development continued to expand, the progressive rock genre was born.

Early works within the genre displayed influence from the previously discussed artists, particularly the psychedelic sound they also helped to define. Progressive rock band King Crimson were pioneers of both progressive and psychedelic rock, with the two styles being heavily linked in the early stages of the genre. Fuller (2009) describes the band's debut release as 'the masterpiece that essentially launched progressive rock, which was the dominant genre in high-end British pop for the next seven years'. This would help carve a path for future artists, particularly the up and coming Pink Floyd. On Pink Floyd's first meeting with their future manager Peter Jenner in 1966, Miles (2006, p.62) explained how he 'began searching for a band to produce', and how 'he wanted something more challenging but more commercial than the music he had already recorded'. This is exactly what Jenner could go on to expect from Pink Floyd as despite being a progressive rock band, they were a commercial success and went on to become one of the most popular rock bands of all time.

The genre developed further through artists such as these by expanding on the experimentation, utilising long runtimes and complex compositions that would stray from the usual popular song format. The song '*21st Century Schizoid Man*' (King Crimson, 1969, Track 1) is an early example of this, a track which featured on King Crimson's debut album that did not demonstrate a defined song format, opting for occasional recurring sections but mostly featuring long instrumental breaks and solos. This is a dominant characteristic in progressive music and is arguably effective, as it is very different to usual popular music structures which means it can catch the listener off guard.

2) Overview

This next section will explore how the gap was bridged between progressive rock and progressive

metal. Progressive rock would go on to influence sub genres which were later established, such as progressive metal. This was developed through heavy metal artists beginning to incorporate progressive elements into their music, with Wagner (2010, p. 11-14) explaining how Black Sabbath 'began to integrate accentuated progressive influences into pioneering records such as *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* (1973) and *Sabotage* (1975)'. Traditional heavy metal was the blueprint used to develop the progressive metal movement. The genre has always been characterised as loud, and Weinstein (2000, p.23) stated that 'the electric guitar and the sonic power that it projects through amplification has historically been the key element in heavy metal'. Progressive metal took this sound and fused it with the experimental and avant-garde elements of progressive rock. Muscles (2012) claimed that song structures take on 'a more unorthodox approach', and how the use of odd time signatures is 'bringing their art to new levels of intricacy and beauty'.

While Black Sabbath touched on incorporating progressive elements into metal, the band Rush started to develop what would become their signature sound. Wagner (2010, p.21) stated that 'Rush are widely recognised as bridging the gap between the hard rock period, English prog and the purely heavy metal genre'. The move originally proved unsuccessful, with their first 'progressive' release *Caress of Steel* (1975) receiving poor reviews and album sales. Thelen (2001) described this album as a 'tentative step for Rush, one that would lead to their masterpiece in conceptual work'. This understanding demonstrates that progressive music can take time to perfect, due to demand for high technical ability. The album Thelen refers to is *2112* (1976), which includes a twenty minute long suite filling up one side of the disc, and would go on to be hailed as one of the band's greatest releases. This eventually led to the creation of the term 'progressive metal', with American artists Queensryche, Fates Warning and Dream Theater spearheading the initial movement. These artists are 'referred to as the "Big Three" of progressive metal' and 'set the scene for what was to follow in the movement', Karl (2012).

When progressive metal was first established it portrayed a similar feel to progressive rock but with a larger focus on heavier guitars which created a stylistic link to metal. The music is often cerebral and rewards the listener for paying attention to its intricate detail; this is often achieved through elaborate compositions and well-crafted instrumentation. Stump (2010, p.331) talked about how 'the Progressive

Metal field is now taking on dimensions more like those of a prairie: it stretches as far as the eye can see. One is tempted simply to reclassify it as a genre of its own.' This demonstrates how expansive the movement had become, with artists continually challenging and developing the particular genre. This has since led to artists to construct their own unique sound, while maintaining the expectations of progressive metal.

The development continued throughout the 1980s with the formation of the bands Porcupine Tree and Meshuggah. These two bands would go on to be seminal artists within the genre, although they were widely different in direction. Porcupine Tree were formed in 1987 by Steven Wilson, the leading songwriter within the band. Wilson was responsible for the majority of the band's material throughout their career and is often thought to be the driving force of the band, particularly in the early stages in which he provided all of the instrumentation for the band's earlier efforts. The early releases from the band are often described as being heavily influenced by Pink Floyd but as with the majority of the bands that will be discussed, would go on to sculpt their own individual sound. The track '*Radioactive Toy*' (Porcupine Tree, 1991, Track 8) pays great homage to Pink Floyd's sound, featuring a downbeat groove with swirling guitars and soaring guitar solos.

Despite characterising themselves as progressive rock, Porcupine Tree portray a more accessible sound similar to Pink Floyd while still featuring lengthy and varying song structures. They experimented with different sounds throughout their career, including metal. Reesman (2003) explained how 'the term 'progressive' is shunned by many music listeners who think it implies over-indulgent, highly technical rock' and how Porcupine Tree's music 'features longer songs and experimental explorations, but it's all wrapped up in Wilson's keen melodic sensibilities'. This helps outline the reason why Porcupine Tree became such an important progressive rock band, because they adhered closely to the genre's blueprint.

Meshuggah were formed in the same year as Porcupine Tree, but are completely different stylistically. Featuring heavily distorted guitars and screamed vocals, their sound was characterised as thrash metal in their earlier works. Later they incorporated progressive elements which they would go on to develop throughout their career. Their second album *Destroy Erase Improve* (1995) is viewed as the

first album that demonstrated Meshuggah's definitive sound. The critic Popoff (2003, p.342) outlined how the album is the 'first clear demonstration of what would become the quintessential Meshuggah sound', talking about their use of 'stutter gun riffs and upset apple cart time signatures featured alongside bone-breaking percussion', which he explains 'resulted in considerable influence in the development of genres like mathcore and djent'. Their music also features avant-garde elements such as unconventional jazz fusion-esque guitar solos and precise syncopation with some regarding their sound as robotic, with sound design reminiscent of operating machinery. The song '*Stengah*' (Meshuggah, 2002, Track 1) demonstrates this with its raw, mechanical-like guitar riff crunching through expertly syncopated drum parts.

The 1990s saw the beginning of two highly important artists that would go on to become paramount figures in the world of progressive metal. Both formed in 1990, Opeth and Tool offered different sounds that would further propel the movement of the genre. Opeth began as a progressive death metal band with their earlier works due to the use of death growl vocals. The death growl contributes to the dark themes the lyricism of this genre explores; Christie (2003, p.239) explained how 'creatures like Glen Benton of Deicide tore out their larynxes to summon images of decaying corpses and giant catastrophic horrors'. The technique contributes to the listener's immersion, drawing them into the rich and morbid sound.

Opeth also incorporate classic progressive rock elements, varying their complex and lengthy song structures by including acoustic guitar passages alongside their guitar-driven metal sound. This helps to create interesting dynamic shifts within their music and contributes to the idea of their tracks feeling like musical journeys. Incorporating these elements led Opeth to define their own unique sound, as it was a combination previously untested in the progressive metal genre. They have maintained a similar sound throughout their career, albeit moving away from the death metal sound to focus on the softer, melodic side of their music. The main single '*Will O the Wisp*' (Opeth, 2016, Track 4) from their latest release demonstrates a more vintage progressive rock sound with the use of folk-like guitars and flutes. These ideas have been briefly visited throughout Opeth's sprawling compositions, but have now become the focal point of their new direction.

Tool followed a similar pattern to some of the previous bands mentioned, with their earlier efforts drawing closely to their influences before going on to develop their own distinct sound. After their first two studio efforts were categorised as alternative metal with progressive elements, they evolved rapidly with the release of their album *Lateralus* (2001). The band explored unique methods of compositions, particularly their use of the bass guitar as a melodic instrument. The song 'Schism' (2001) is an excellent example of this, with the bass guitar providing the main melody of the song. Bradman and Shiraki (2001) talk about the bass player's use of 'thick midrange tone, guitar-style techniques, and elastic versatility' as being vital to the band's distinctive sound. Tool's heavy use of polyrhythms coupled with this meant that each instrument compliments the other to create a rich and encompassing sound.

The 2000s began to further shape the direction of progressive metal, with bands such as SikTh, Periphery and Gojira all being formed during this decade. Bands such as these would go on to influence the sound that is now associated with progressive metal, with a lot of following artists using ideas first demonstrated by these groups. SikTh were viewed as pioneers of the 'djent' movement alongside Meshuggah. 'Djent' is a term used within progressive metal; Thomson (2011) explained how it is 'onomatopoeic' and is a term for 'the elastic, syncopated guitar riff'. This sound would go on to become popular with future artists and is now a widely recognised term within modern progressive metal. On the contrary, I am aware that some sources disregard it as a musical genre, but I have chosen to include it for the purpose of this thesis due to its relevance. Dieterman (2014) outlined that 'it wasn't intended to describe a genre, but rather a guitar technique which, as it happened, came to define a genre'.

SikTh portrayed this idea within their sound, while also offering different ideas that would set them apart from their counterparts. In his review of their debut release *The Trees Are Dead and Dried out, Wait for Something Wild* (2003), Hocking (2003) talked about how the album is 'so chaotic, so sprawling and yet so full of such startling variation' contrasting from 'wildly convulsive metal to haunting ambience'. This analysis helped demonstrate the diversity of the sound they produced, with their inclusion of the 'djent' sound helping the band define a new approach to the genre, which would influence their successors.

Formed in Washington D.C, Periphery first came onto the scene in 2005. As well as SikTh, they are also categorised as pioneers of the djent movement, despite their arrival to the scene coming a little later. Most believe Periphery's guitarist Misha Mansoor to be the first person to use the term 'djent', but Mansoor (2010) discussed that it was in fact 'Friedrik from Meshuggah came up with it'. Periphery would demonstrate the djent style of guitar playing in a similar manner to SikTh, while continuing to develop it to establish their own individual sound. This is demonstrated in the track 'Scarlet' (2012) which uses Periphery's fusion of the djent sound with a more melodic compositional approach. Periphery's sound would go on to influence a lot of future progressive metal artists.

Gojira are a band originally formed in 1996 under the name Godzilla. They first established themselves as Gojira in 2001 and would channel progressive metal in a different light. The band have been described as a combination of styles such as technical death metal and groove metal, but they also use progressive metal elements such as unusually syncopated rhythms as well as fast triplet-based grooves. Milburn (2006) described in a review how Gojira's work 'showcased a band that successfully blended several styles combined with their own unique twist', hence the band being difficult to pin to one particular genre. The bands discussed in this overview are the main influences that will contribute to this music portfolio, with the aim of using them effectively to create my own sonic signature. Influences from the aforementioned artists will be present throughout the album to demonstrate my research into the artists' compositional approaches, as well to outline my own developments and ideas in an attempt to question the genre's potential to develop.

3) Methodology

In this section I will discuss my compositional approaches, as well as detailing my approach to recording and production. The album consists of six tracks, all displaying different compositional styles that will provide a diverse portfolio and demonstrate my extensive understanding of the genre. This method will aim to prove that I have analysed the majority of approaches to composition of progressive metal, eventually going on to demonstrate the potential for further development within the genre. I will provide an in-depth exploration for each track, outlining important elements of the

compositions while referring back to key tracks that have influenced the individual songs.

- The Great Debacle

The Great Debacle is the opening track for the album and combines various influences throughout the composition. My aim was to use the track to introduce the album, starting off subtly with a dark ambient soundscape in an attempt to instantly immerse the listener. The composition uses a wide dynamic range, which I developed further during the production stage of this track with a careful approach to volume automation. This drew emphasis towards the percussive elements particularly in the introduction, with the sudden dynamic changes influenced by '*The Mark Has Been Made*' (Nine Inch Nails, 1999, Disc 2, Track 4) by Nine Inch Nails. Trent Reznor (leading composer of Nine Inch Nails) has demonstrated this approach throughout his career, with his clever use of dynamics serving as both important parts of the composition and production of his tracks. Huxley (1997, p.165) explained how 'songs such as '*Wish*' (Nine Inch Nails, 1992, Track 2), and '*The Day The World Went Away*' (Nine Inch Nails, 1999, Disc 1, Track 2) exhibit terraced dynamics', which means they abruptly shift dynamics without the use of crescendos or decrescendos.

Compositionally, the introduction is inspired by Tool's unique approach to songwriting as well as their precise use of polyrhythms. I developed a pattern which layered polyrhythmical ideas using two contrasting percussive guitar parts, as well as a melodic guitar section that fits in between the pulsating rhythm. I chose to hard-pan the percussive guitars during the production stage so they would appear more distinguishable, with the melodic part panned down the middle to help the listener recognise each different polyrhythm and fully establish the soundscape I was aiming to produce. The track then gradually progresses into a plethora of progressive metal riffs, further developing the dark tone with a heavier sound. The structure of the track '*Right in Two*' (Tool, 2006, Track 10) served as an important influence for this song, demonstrating the idea of a composition progressing into an explosive climax, as well as the powerful effect of juxtaposing guitar and drum parts with the use of polyrhythms.

The track then takes a form influenced by the 'djent' sound, with Periphery's idea of staccato-based

guitars riffs demonstrated on 'New Groove' (Periphery, 2011, Track 1) serving as a key influence for the remainder of the track. The composition continues in a similar fashion before descending into a Gojira style triplet groove, an idea which is shown on 'The Heaviest Matter of the Universe' (Gojira, 2005, Track 6). This is particularly effective when it is well executed, with the kick drum emphasising each guitar note to emulate the sound of machine gun fire. I wanted to incorporate various influences for this track to introduce the listener, demonstrating several ideas that will be explored further throughout the album.

- Spiralling Down

The aim of this song was to convey a more accessible, alternative metal sound while still incorporating progressive elements. The track 'Laid To Rest' (Lamb of God, 2004, Track 1) serves as a demonstration of this, successfully bridging the gap between alternative and progressive metal by containing technical guitar riffs in a more defined song structure. I aimed to develop this further by incorporating a breadth of various time signatures while still maintaining a more accessible metal sound. I achieved this by integrating a more specific structure for the majority of this track, with the composition containing recurring verse and chorus sections before leading into a prolonged bridge section that would conclude the track. The combination of sections helped to showcase a track that is both progressive and accessible. The band Alter Bridge demonstrated this particular idea throughout their album *Fortress* (2013), with Ouellette (2013) outlining that 'the substance and technicality that they have immersed into their music have elevated them to a whole new level'. This led the album to be Alter Bridge's first release categorised as 'progressive metal' due to tracks either exploring lengthier compositions or containing progressive elements.

A creative decision of my own was to incorporate irregular time signatures in both the verse and choruses to further test how interchangeable these ideas were. Sometimes odd time signatures can sound forced, particularly when there is rigid emphasis on the rhythmical values. This can be intentional, with the track 'March of the Pigs' (Nine Inch Nails, Track 4, 1994) being mostly in 7/8, but emphasising the last beat with a low tom hit to signify the end of a bar to contribute to the robotic feel of industrial rock. It is possible to make irregular time signatures sound natural, rather than forced;

'Money' (Pink Floyd, Track 6, 1973) being a shining example. The majority of the track runs in 7/4 time, but the laid-back nature of the groove helps it to appear more natural to the ear. I adapted this by crafting a straightforward drum beat for the verse of my composition, as well as writing a riff that juxtaposed between 5/4 and 7/4 time. As these two combine to make 12/4 across two bars, it alludes to a natural sound as the two bars conclude in line with the listener's expectations, despite being comprised of two asymmetrical time signatures.

The track also uses math rock style riffs reminiscent of those used on a track such as '*Million Dollar Que\$tion*' (Arcane Roots, 2011, Track 6) and this use of various components helped to further implement the progressive nature of the track. Math rock is linked stylistically to progressive metal because both genres are derivative of progressive rock, both demonstrating the unusual rhythms that are present within this particular style of music. The middle section of the track jumps between various ideas that are previously unexplored in the track, as previously discussed. It contains an atmospheric droning guitar section which is an idea that is commonly used in Gojira's work, particularly in the middle section of the song '*Ocean Planet*' (Gojira, 2005, Track 1). It is an effective idea that works well in progressive metal, as it serves as a break from the relentless guitar riffs in favour of an unsettling and ominous atmosphere. Achieving this sound competently requires enough layers to create this particular soundscape, as it revolves around big chords that contribute to an effective wall of sound. The wall of sound is a technique first practiced by renowned producer Phil Spector. In Buskin's (2007) interview, Spector explains how he was 'looking for a sound, a sound so strong that if the material was not the greatest, the sound would carry the record'. This technique combined with textural dissonant chords helped to create a rich and unsettling middle section of this particular piece.

- Facing the Obscure

The third track is heavily influenced by the band Meshuggah, with the introductory riff constructed while I was experimenting with the tuning of Drop F#. This is a tuning predominantly used by the band with their lowest string tuned to F# on eight string guitars. As I did not have access to an eight string guitar, I used my BOSS GP-10 Guitar Processor in conjunction with the Roland GK Synth pick-up to model this guitar tuning. When working together, the pedal and pickup can digitally process guitar

tunings without the need to retune your guitar. The idea of using a riff at the beginning of a song that does not recur again during the composition is a concept I find interesting, as it helps a piece achieve its progressive title by constantly throwing different ideas at the listener that keeps them guessing. It can be difficult to execute as it requires a crucial focus on transition work so that the composition flows competently. Meshuggah use this idea on the track '*Dancers to a Discordant System*' (Meshuggah, 2008, Track 9), and it works well due to the opening riff serving as the most memorable one of the track, which helps encourage replayability from listeners due to the desire to rehear that particular section. The track also switches from half time to double time after this intro section, and was something I chose to include to help aid the smoothness of the transition while signifying the change in progression of the song.

The track continues through various uniquely syncopated riffs while still remaining in 4/4 time, a feature that is common in Meshuggah's music. In an interview, Angle (2011) asks Fredrik Thordendal (Meshuggah's rhythm guitarist) about odd meters and Thordendal discussed that 'we rarely play in odd meters. I understand why people hear odd meters in our songs, because we group our notes in different ways'. This shows that it is not uncommon for heavily syncopated riffs to provide the misconception of the track switching between time signatures. I experimented with this idea heavily on this track, and it required heavy listening and practice-based research to achieve successfully. This is due to the natural response of the brain being accustomed to playing in common time or on the beat, so it required consistent practice as well as a great understanding of how the artists offset these rhythms to demonstrate it to a professional standard.

There is one section that recurs during the composition, and that is the main riff that follows the introduction. This section appears twice during the composition, and offers a more melodic riff in a similar style to '*A Match Made in Heaven*' (Architects, 2016, Track 7). I feel it is important to include some consonance to vary the overall sound of a composition that is mainly based around dissonant riffs, as it helps contribute to achieving balance within the track. The song conveys an angry tone that is also expressed through the delivery of the vocals as well as the dissonance of the majority of the guitar work. When discussing dissonant chords, Kamien (2008, p.41) explained how 'traditionally they have been considered harsh and have expressed pain, grief and conflict', hence the purpose of using

them extensively to achieve a dark tone. I further developed this idea for the small bridge section before the outro, but using higher pitched chords to establish a better frequency balance throughout the track. This is something Meshuggah also practice but using clean guitars, particularly demonstrated in '*Lethargica*' (Meshuggah, Track 4, 2008). It is used to great effect as it serves as a stark dynamic contrast to maximise the impact of a heavy riff that follows. I used distortion when implementing this section, as it helped contribute further to the unsettling nature of this part, before erupting into arguably the heaviest section of the album.

- Encumbered Soul

Encumbered Soul is a track which developed in a unique way and became heavily inspired by Opeth's compositional approach. The track started with the creation of riffs based around the harmonic minor scale, which is used by the band regularly particularly in the song '*Bleak*' (Opeth, 2001, Track 2). This led me to further analyse the track and drew me to practice one of Opeth's defining approaches of contrasting from heavy guitar-driven riffs to clean, gentler passages that still demonstrate a mystical tone. To achieve this, I mainly used diminished arpeggios to effectively preserve the ominous sound displayed throughout the composition. I decided to make this track instrumental as I felt it had enough musical ideas to stay interesting, while also giving the listener a chance to focus solely on the instrumentation and explore it further in greater detail. The method of working with an undefined structure to achieve constant variation is regularly explored throughout progressive music, and is a particular characteristic of Opeth's songwriting. Reviewing their *Blackwater Park* (2001) album, Rivadavia (2007) described how 'tracks start and finish in seemingly arbitrary fashion, usually traversing ample music terrain'. This kind of musical composition can be further traced back, with Schoenberg (2008) explaining that 'variation almost completely takes the place of repetition' in his compositions. It is an approach that seems important particularly with songs spanning long runtimes, as it helps maintain the listener's interest throughout.

I also went on to use influences from a different source when setting the overall tone for the second part of this song. The idea of bringing in the prominent single note guitar part was something explored on the track '*Survival*' (Muse, Track 5, 2012) and is something I found really effective as the sheer

force of the distorted guitar takes the listener by surprise. That combined with the nature of this part of the song had the ability to develop the unsettling nature of this section with an important focus on eerie note choices. Adding a guitar solo over such an unusual chord progression required an detailed understanding of how to make use of ideas that fit the overall dissonant sound of this section. The song '*Diary of a Madman*' (Osbourne, Track 8, 1981) helped me understand how craft a solo around an unconventional chord progression, and how important it is to understand the chord progression and apply certain arpeggios or scales that fit.

The increasing tension that I created by gradually reintroducing distorted guitars throughout this section helped to slowly increase the dynamics and propel the track into its final section. This section begins with alternating chords that change shape with increasing pitch value that help to further increase the tension before exploding into the final riff of the song. I wanted to take a different approach to writing this particular riff by experimenting with unusual finger movement rather than following common patterns. Keith Emerson talked about how 'progressive [rock] takes a riff, turns it inside out, plays it upside down [and] the other way round, and explores its potential' Macan (1997, p.149). The result of applying this to a riff that mainly centres around chromaticism across two octaves, with a heavy emphasis on string skipping resulted in a chaotic and satisfying climax to this instrumental track. I chose to heavily layer the guitars as well as including a sound pitched an octave lower to achieve a larger frequency spectrum to increase the impact of this powerful riff.

- Sanguine Glimmers

The band Periphery serve as the main influence for the penultimate track on the album. The song is based in a AGCFAD tuning, which can be found on various tracks by Periphery such as '*The Bad Thing*' (Periphery, 2015, Track 2). The feel of this track influenced some of the ideas on this song, particularly in the intro section with the combination of guitar riffs and dissonant high-frequency arpeggios. The alternate tuning is based around Drop C (a whole tone down with the bottom string lowered a further tone) but this tuning requires the usual C string to be lowered even further to an A. I feel alternate tunings have the ability to open up new and unique ideas that would not normally be achievable in a more conventional tuning. The tuning means that the usual power chord shape

sounds octaves, rather than fifths. During the composition of this track, I decided to take ideas that I had already created and tentatively experiment with arranging the rhythms to come up with new ways to syncopate the parts. I chose to do this to explore another approach to composition and it helped me achieve patterns I may not have originally come across if I was just composing the parts on the guitar without taking a more theoretical approach.

As discussed earlier, Periphery are known to feature more melodic based work than some of the other progressive metal bands. I wanted to focus on this while maintaining the driving characteristics of the genre, so I balanced this by establishing a more conventional structure. The song contains two verses and I chose to make these differ from one another to further emphasise the progressive feel of the track. I also drew influence from *'Prayer Position'* (Periphery, 2016, Track 10) by using syncopation in the chord-based sections of the composition. The chorus of this track is centred around chords but these are played offset to the beats of the bar, and it is something I wished to experiment with as I found it interesting to add a progressive twist to the more accessible parts of the music.

This track then further developed by the choice of contrasting between melodic and dissonant compositional ideas, and I felt this worked well and helped create more definitive boundaries between the different sections of the song. This is an idea explored by Periphery on their song *'Masamune'* (Periphery, 2012, Track 14) and is very effective, as it has the ability to surprise the listener with an unexpected switch from a positive to negative mood setting. The choice to produce a subtle, melodic bridge section was to help contribute to the dynamic range of the track, as well as set the listener up to be taken off guard when the thick, dissonant chords introduce the next section. It could also make the track feel psychologically more enticing, due to the change of moods feeling like the listener is taken on an emotional journey.

- Ameliorate

Ameliorate is the final piece of music of the portfolio and is the song that I have experimented with mostly on the album to develop a unique sound, aiming to demonstrate that progressive metal can still continue to expand in different ways. The delayed guitar patterns which serve as the focal points for

the song are not particularly inspired by progressive metal, but more inspired by ideas featured on the track '*End of the Affair*' (Howard, Track 8, 2014). This track uses ambient delay-based guitar playing which has the ability to create a unique and warming atmosphere. When Tesseract released their album *Polaris* (2015), the band included ambient soundscapes within their composition. I wanted to take this idea to new lengths with this idea by including a popular acoustic artist's approach while still maintaining an overall progressive metal feel.

Later on in the track I use an idea that is heavily inspired by a piece called '*Electric Counterpoint*' (Reich, Track 17, 1997). It includes the concept of layering contrasting guitar melodies in order to perfectly complement one another. This was an idea I found to be effective as it helped provide a rich atmosphere while using progressive time signatures to keep with the nature of the genre. These various ideas included in the track were not influenced by progressive metal artists, but this was intentional, as I looked to test the possible expansion of the genre. I then further developed this with the inclusion of a djent-style guitar riff, which is influenced by the idea on the track '*The Way The News Goes*' (Periphery, Track 4, 2016), and is similarly played with a sharp staccato riff bringing in off-beats to contrast from the main part in a polyrhythmic manner. I gradually introduced this section by having the bass guitar play a polyrhythm juxtaposing this rhythmic idea, before bringing in distorted guitars to bridge the gap from this section to the next. I thought the idea was fresh and original, but it was important to focus on creating melodic riffs for this composition to fit with the theme of the song.

I drew a lot of influence for the melodic riffs particularly from *10,000 Days* (2006) by Tool, as their sound on this album balances progressive rhythms with intelligent melodic guitar parts. I wanted to develop my riffs with careful detail to composition so that the melodic elements would evoke emotion from the listener. I feel satisfied with the outcome of the track as I believe it is the strongest compositional work of the album, and merges the various influences convincingly to create a unique sound. It helps demonstrate my progress throughout the portfolio to a point where it shows my development as a composer, and how much I have learned during my research.

4) Results and Analysis

During this section I will discuss my research questions and outline the strengths and weaknesses when trying to address them. Throughout my research, I have developed a thorough understanding of the genre and understand a lot of the pivotal artists' compositional ideas. I have also tried to combine and characterise some of these ideas by bringing them together and testing their ability to merge as compositional ideas. Borthwick and Moy (2004) talked about how 'prog's complexity resulted from its broad appreciation of previous forms – some 'popular', such as psychedelic pop and R&B and some less mainstream, such as jazz, avant-garde, folk and classical. This demonstrates the genre's ability to take on various forms, making it more versatile than other musical forms.

My approach was the result of extensive research, demonstrating an understanding of how all of the instruments are utilised effectively, and in their own unique way. This is a highly important aspect of the music, as it can be the key component to defining the groove and nature of the song. An analysis of the track '*Rational Gaze*' (Meshuggah, 2002, Track 2) outlines how 'the cymbals create a metric superimposition' making the track feel like it runs in different time despite the fact 'the cymbals maintain a consistent quarter-note pulse, complemented by snare drum hits on what would be beat three in 4/4 time. This method helps the drums to impose the groove and timing of the song, with the guitars actually being 'grouped into four repetitions of measures in 25/16, followed by a measure of 28/16' Pieslak (2007). This demonstrates how the drums help to determine the feel of 4/4 time, despite the guitars running in different meters.

- Is it possible to make the music accessible, while still maintaining the genre's high expectations?

This is something that requires careful balance, as leaning too far to either side could prove consequential. Trying too hard to make the music accessible may conclude with it not being progressive enough, whereas making it too technical may jeopardise its accessibility. Progressive 'comes from the basic concept of 'progress', which refers to development and growth by accumulation'

Holm-Hudson (2013). Progressive rock has enjoyed a lot of commercial success and while progressive metal is too developed to reach a similar seized mainstream audience, it does not mean it cannot be accessible. When taking on a more conventional structure, as well as incorporating clean vocals and melodic sections, it still has the ability to reach a balance that could cater it to a wider metal based audience. As previously discussed, I aimed to focus on this particularly with the tracks Spiralling Down and Sanguine Glimmers. These songs both begin with definable structures before using their long runtimes to explore new directions. I chose this direction with the aim to strike a balance between accessible and progressive, and I found this to be successful as I feel the tracks are very listenable while still employing enough progressive elements for them to sit within the genre.

- Have I demonstrated a good understanding of my musical influences and used them effectively to create my own music?

I feel I developed a thorough understanding of the musical influences I used for this research by way of listening as well as practicing. Due to the complex nature of the genre, it was challenging to develop a competent understanding of it enough to be able to translate it to my guitar playing. It is explained that progressive metal requires 'higher level of technical complexity' (Freeborn, p.840). This required vigorous guitar practice and teaching myself how to play in irregular time signatures comfortably, before I could reach a level of technical proficiency I considered sufficient. This was important to my research as it was a necessary approach to developing convincing compositional ideas. In an interview with Wilkening (2011), John Petrucci from Dream Theater discusses how 'we were really big Rush freaks and Yes fans'; Petrucci's obsession with these artists demonstrate how important it is to regularly appreciate your influences to hone the ability to channel them.

- Was the attempt to try and craft a unique piece of music in an attempt to push the boundaries of the genre successful?

Ameroliate is the closing track of the portfolio, and is the composition I discussed I wanted to use as an experiment. The overall aim of this was to create this piece as a unique combination of various

personifications of progressive metal and see if it works, alongside trying to draw influences from other artists outside of the boundaries of the genre. 'Rock and jazz techniques mixed to become prog rock. However, over the past 10 years, this kind of melding of genres has exploded' (Bafford, n.d.). Experimentation is something that is evergrowing, and it is becoming more and more rewarding to attempt it with the chance of becoming innovative. I believe Ameroliate came together successfully, with the careful melding and understanding of how to combine the approaches in a competent manner. It demonstrated some of the ambient approaches progressive metal has touched on, particularly with '*Lune*' (Periphery, Track 11, 2016), but trying to create my own soundscape incorporating influence from an ambient indie folk artist helped develop the unique sound of the composition.

- Have I successfully produced the album to a professional standard to enhance the effectiveness of the music?

The production qualities of this genre are crucial to its overall sound, with a strong focus on making guitars sound as heavy and 'big' as possible. Talking to Meshuggah about recording their latest album live, they discussed how 'the albums in the '80s and early '90s had that I'm talking about – that's what we wanted to recapture' (Blabbermouth, 2016). When tested, I discovered the benefit of this as well, despite recording with programmed drums. I chose to experiment with the quantizing and velocity of these drum parts with the hope of making them sound less digital and more like a human performance, and then recorded the guitars to the drums, rather than a click. This helped contribute to the feel of the music, due to defined groove being one of its main characteristics.

With guitars often heavily down-tuned in the genre, intelligibility becomes understandably difficult due to the lower frequency responses of the guitars. This is due to lower frequencies slightly inaudible due to the frequency spectrum of our ears. Mynett (2016, n. p.) discusses how this issue can be solved by 'the clarity of the sounds, which is mainly provided through transient information'. This meant that it was important to demonstrate a high focus on developing a guitar tone for the down-tuned track which would help provide this clarity from their sound. Another issue in this track were with the bass guitar, which when tuned down to such an extremity, struggle to bear any sort of distinction due to the

extremely low frequencies. Dirks (2013) in an interview with Meshuggah, who are renowned for their heavy detuning and use of eight-string guitars, outlines how the bass uses five strings 'tuned Ab, Eb, Bb, F, Bb'. This is alternative to the tuning Meshuggah use on their guitarists which is an eight string tuned to F, Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Bb, Eb. This means the bass must adapt to playing higher frequencies that would resonate better to coincide with the guitar playing.

Another challenge that could be found while composing in this genre is achieving the distinct, rigid guitar tones that are displayed within the music. This led me to invest in the Horizon Devices Precision Drive guitar pedal, which was designed by Misha Mansoor of Periphery. The Horizon Devices Precision Drive Announcement (Horizon Devices, 2016) showcases Misha discussing his desire to make the pedal, and asks 'where's the modern metal overdrive?', outlining that the overdrive 'wasn't designed to work' for modern metal players. He aimed to make it affordable pricing up at around \$200 and it instantly had a positive effect on my overall metal tone, tightening up my sound and providing that biting palm-muted sound associated with the djent movement. This overall addition helped my guitar tones to feel more appropriate of the genre, which helped provide me with further means to achieve the desired sound.

5) Conclusion

To conclude my research into the development of progressive metal, I have achieved a confident understanding of the genre, whilst exploring its potential to develop. The word progressive is defined as favouring or advocating progress, change, improvement, or reform, which makes it applicable that the genre can continue to keep on expanding its compositions in new and interesting ways. Demasi (2007) outlines Petrucci's view, saying that 'Progressive rock is defined by its very lack of stylistic boundaries' clarifying its freedom to be diverse and experimental. It has less boundaries than most musical genres, with experimentation being key to its development. Martin (2002, p.107) explains how 'progressive rock also represented the maturation of rock as a genre', arguably demonstrating how the genre has been compared to that of classical composers. 'Progressive rock has been described as parallel to the classical music of Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartok' Covach (2000, n.p).

I wanted to take this statement as inspiration for the final piece of the portfolio, influencing me to create a long and progressive work, that showcases an approach reminiscent of classical composers. The inclusion of delayed guitar-based ambient soundscapes is an idea I included after experimenting with various sounds from my guitar processor. Achieving this meant also focusing on including characteristics of progressive metal, and drawing a careful balance between ideas to make the composition flow smoothly. It became a piece of music which I also felt to be unique in sound, including elements from the majority of influences I cited throughout the thesis. Throughout the portfolio, I feel every track presents itself in different ways and demonstrates the diversity that progressive metal has already achieved, while challenging it to be continually developed further.

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Track Listing

1. The Great Debacle
2. Spiralling Down
3. Facing The Obscure
4. Encumbered Soul
5. Sanguine Glimmers