Artistic Influences on Progressive Rock

Document 1: 
Interview with Steve Hackett, Former Songwriter and Guitarist for the Band Genesis

“When I was in Genesis many years ago, we did an interview and we were all asked to name a particular tune that we thought was a great influence, and four out of five of us, without conferring, chose “MacArthur Park.” So, you’ve got this tune which in many ways was the template for many things that Genesis did subsequently, something that doesn’t really have a clearly defined verse and chorus. It’s got several different verses that all vary from each other, and then a musical workout in the middle, and then a recapitulation at the end. It’s almost this kind of mini opera, and it ended up influencing a lot of people….

“I think what was defining for me was seeing King Crimson in 1969 on stage before they recorded their first album. It seemed I had never before seen a band that were quite so broad based, and they were all fluent music readers. And suddenly it seemed as if that was going to auger in a much more disciplined, more precise era of music. Jazz was certainly welcome, and classical music was welcome, with the epic nature of some of those songs…. That mixture of genres is so important to what we now call progressive, where it’s music without prejudice and music without limits.”

-- Interview with Prog Rocks at the 2012 Prog Awards

Discuss:

• In what ways was “MacArthur Park” a template for Genesis and other Prog bands?
• Why does Hackett believe King Crimson was so influential to Prog Rock?
• What types of music does Prog incorporate?
• What do you think Hackett means when he says Progressive Rock is “music without prejudice and music without limits”?
Document 2:
The Influence of Classical Music on Prog

“The defining features of Progressive Rock, those elements that serve to separate it from other contemporary styles of popular music, are all drawn from the European classical tradition. These hallmarks include the continuous use of tone colors drawn from symphonic or church music, the employment of lengthy sectional forms such as song cycle or the multimovement suite, and the preoccupation with dazzling metrical and instrumental virtuosity.”


(Note: “Tone color” refers to the overall nature or character of sound. Classical and church music are often described as having a “rich” or “full” tone color. “Sectional forms” refers to the use of different sections or movements in a single piece of classical music; different movements or sections often have a very different tempo and/or mood. “Virtuosity” refers to a musician’s level of expertise and skill; classical musicians generally must be highly skilled on their instruments.)

Discuss:
1. Why might Rock and Roll musicians want to borrow from classical music? What might it add to their work?
2. How does a song with different sections or movements differ from a song that maintains the same tempo and mood throughout?
3. If Progressive Rock musicians wanted to be “virtuosos,” what does this suggest about the way they viewed themselves as artists?

Document 3:
The Influence of the Counterculture on Prog

“The heavy reliance on tone colors derived from the Western art music tradition reflects the sense of importance and even ritual that the hippies attached to music, while the consistent use of lengthy forms such as the programmatic song cycle ... and the multimovement suite underscores the hippies’ new, drug-induced conception of time. The intricate metrical and wayward harmonic schemes of the
music, as well as the frequent appeals to instrumental virtuosity, reflect elements of surprise, contradiction, and uncertainty that the counterculture prized so highly.”


**Discuss:**
- How might a song reflect elements of “surprise, contradiction, and uncertainty?” How could having multiple movements or sections within one song help accomplish this?
- According to the author, how did Progressive Rock reflect a new conception of time?

**Document 4:**
**Review of the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band***

“What is most admirable about Sgt. Pepper is the range, both musical and verbal. So very much is there – psychedelia, nostalgia, romance, both real-life (‘She’s Leaving Home’) and comedy-fantasy (‘Lovely Rita’), death, and life-enhancing philosophy….

This album points the way for the development of long-playing pop [albums]. Pop artistes with enough ability to sustain 40 minutes or so can think in terms of telling lengthy musical stories. Recording managers should now be much more prepared to use assorted sound effects and to make [albums]… as artistic productions in their own right rather than as reproductions of concert performances.


**Discuss:**
- What were some of the elements that the author believed made *Sgt. Pepper* such an artistically successful album?
- What does the author suggest would be the influence of Sgt. Pepper on later albums?
Document 5:
The Influence of The Beatles

"[The Beatles] are leading an evolution in which the best of current post-rock sounds are becoming something that pop music has never been before: an art form. 'Serious musicians’ are listening to them and marking their work as a historic departure in the progress of music — any music."

-- “The Messengers,” Time magazine, September 22, 1967

Discuss:
1. What does the article suggest about the way the Beatles influenced how Rock and Roll was perceived by the public?
2. What does the article mean by the term “progress of music” in the last line?
3. Why do you think the music discussed in this lesson came to be known as “Progressive Rock?”