Progressive Rock:

An annotated bibliography and research guide.

Compiled by Curtis N. Smith
Introduction

Progressive or “prog” rock, like many musical movements, emerged from a perfect storm of artistic, sociological, political, and economic events. Most studies trace the birth and critical mass of progressive rock to Great Britain. Bands like The Beatles, The Moody Blues, Cream, and Procol Harum represented a youthful challenge to the status quo. Amidst psychedelics and social upheavals, musicians and artists experimented with new sounds, technologies, and modes of expressing their counterculture sentiments. This early generation of experimenters influenced those exclusively associated with progressive rock such as King Crimson, Yes, Soft Machine, and Pink Floyd. Historians commonly assume that Britain sent progressive rock to America, Continental Europe, and the world, sparking a creative art rock uprising that culminated in hugely successful bands like Kansas and Rush. However, this is only partly true. In his recent article, “A Many-Headed Beast: Progressive rock as a European Meta-Genre,” Chris Aderton argues that the conditions leading to progressive rock were everywhere during the 1960’s. Elements of progressive rock were brewing in Italy, Germany, and France as well as Britain. Although the British, and subsequently American, progressive rock influence was greater in terms of commercial impact and record exposure, Continental Europe was awash with progressive rock activity that must be studied to understand this movement’s full scope.

Attempting to define progressive rock begs the question, “What made, and makes, progressive rock progressive?” Progressive rock is a mixture of traditional rock instrumentation with an augmented sound palette ranging from orchestras, synthesizers, world instruments, and choirs as well as elaborate stereophonic stagings and productions. An analysis of progressive rock’s stylistics is also necessary to fully define the movement. Its sound incorporates noises,
juxtapositions, and timbral effects of the 19th century Romantic and 20th century Avant Garde Western music tradition. Prog rock’s large crescendos, intimate pianissimos, and massive proportions channel larger than life classical music heroes. Its harmonies stray from twelve bar blues and I, IV, V7 patterns and return to a late/hyper-romantic 19th century vocabulary which is rich with chromaticism, mediant relationships, and neapolitans, as well as large scale harmonic structures like sonata and rondo form. Melodies, like harmonies, are more complex and look to convey the meaning of the text rather than pitch a catchy tune and superficial line. The lyrics turn from mere words to poetry and the subject matter expresses longing for the cosmos, mysticism, and futurist utopias. Prog rock’s rhythms abandon visceral simplicity in exchange for dynamic complexity. Polyrhythm, metric modulation, Eastern influences, and fluid meter changes signal a conscious break from the dance music tradition—prog rock was to be listened to, not danced to. As LP records and FM radio stations were willing to play out its massive ideas, prog rock expanded the overarching structures, sprawling on for ten, twenty, or thirty minutes of interconnected motivic material (Montgomery).

In the mid to late 70’s, prog rock was confronted by a new generation of music—punk and disco (Reynolds). With its back-to-basics mentality, punk rock opened the floodgates for a new generation of simpler, grittier, less “pretentious,” and more “honest” rock. Prog rock all but disappeared but did not die; it went underground (Cateforis). Its influences lived on in commercially successful ventures by bands like Genesis, Yes, Rush, and other pop musicians who incorporated its marketable elements (Albiez). The die-hard fans were always there and a new generation of prog rock, metal, and fusion eventually emerged during the nineties and currently enjoys a healthy following.
Those who were once young prog rock fans are now adults, with no less enthusiasm for the music. Consequently, the last thirty years have been a boom period for progressive rock research. Many fans are now tenured professors and researchers who have the time, resources, and clout to produce serious work on prog rock. It is my aim to bring the best and most helpful of these sources together in one verified and annotated compilation.

This bibliography is a collection of pertinent indexes, scholarly articles, dissertations, theses, books, discographies, and other helpful materials. Most of the sources have been physically verified by the author and those that have not are listed as “unverified.” Some dissertations have been reviewed electronically under the respective universities’ assurance of veracity. It would have been impractical to cover every band, so I’ve focused on including key texts about a few specific bands. I did not do this out of favoritism or ignorance; I chose to include these texts because they contain extensive bibliographies and discographies that serve as references for deeper research into the myriad areas of prog rock. I recommend beginning with the reference sources (and website bibliographies), then moving to the dissertation bibliographies, and finally exploring the books and articles and their respective bibliographies and discographies. My hope is that this bibliography will aid researchers and aficionados alike as they navigate the cosmic journey that is progressive rock.
Verified Reference Sources


This is an A to Z guide to German Progressive and Electronic Rock groups (ca. 1970-1980), featuring complete album listings for all bands and most cover artwork. Included is an index of musicians and, more important, record labels. There is also a brief introduction to German progressive and electronic rock with a bibliography. Asbjørnsen provides a deep yet accessible survey of the oft-neglected German prog rock scene.


This book is an extremely detailed, vastly comprehensive, and well-researched discography of continental Europe progressive rock with chapters dedicated to Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Denmark, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, and Israel. Each chapter is organized alphabetically by band name and each entry gives a discography and a brief abstract. More influential bands receive longer abstracts. Most entries include personnel information and each album includes LP publication information and numbers. This book doubles as a discography and reference material. I consider this part of the progressive rock collectors’ guide triumvirate that includes *Cosmic Dreams at Play* (German Progressive Rock, Asbjørnsen) and *Tapestry of Delights* (British Progressive Rock, Joynson).


An extensive and in-depth survey of German progressive rock. Includes an introduction that is equally thorough on Krautrock and the Kosmische Musik scene. The introduction includes a vital “Krautrock top 100 Albums” discography, a chronologically organized genealogical tree of Krautrock, and several pages devoted to Krautrock lexicon. The encyclopedia is organized alphabetically by band name and each entry includes a discography, current band lineup, personnel history, and a brief biographical abstract. Album entries include LP numbers and publication information. It has an alphabetical index of band names and a cross referenced index for artists who played in multiple bands. The index also specifies guest appearances, non-German bands working within the genre, and artist pseudonyms (with a key for their real names).

Collection of essays dealing with historical context, analytical perspectives, and post-progressive rock legacies. All articles contain well-researched analysis and useful bibliographic information.


An extremely detailed, vastly comprehensive, and well-researched discography of British progressive rock, this book is a guide for collectors that doubles as a discography and reference source. Organized alphabetically by band name. Each entry gives a discography and a brief abstract: more influential bands receive longer abstracts. Most entries include personnel information for the band. Each album includes LP publication information and number. I consider this part of the progressive rock collectors’ guide triumvirate that includes *Cosmic Dreams at Play* (German Progressive Rock) and *Scented Gardens of the Mind* (European Progressive Rock).


Compilation of every major article written for EUROCK magazine between 1973 and 1990. EUROCK magazine was dedicated to “a particular time in the world when the limits of imagination and what was possible sonically were stretched beyond the norm.” Includes limited coverage of interviews and articles from 1990 to 2002. This is a very good resource for locating articles that are otherwise very difficult to find in the original EUROCK print publication. These articles are a particularly valuable resource for locating obscure interviews with artists like Magma, Lars Hollmer (of Sweden’s Zamla), and Edgar Froese (of Tangerine Dream). The introductory article is the famous, and previously unpublished, *Amon Düül: A Science Fiction Rock Spectacle* by Lester Bangs. The organization is chronological by year. Although it lacks an article title index it does include a very helpful artist and band index.


An exhaustive look at progressive rock from 1967 to 1977. Includes in-depth musical, style, and formal analysis of influential works. Devotes considerable time to the early years of progressive rock and the Beatles, and analyses Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys as experimentalists. Along with the usual progressive rock history, Pirenne devotes time to the iconographic nature of progressive rock art. Very scholarly, objective, and thorough approach to the subject of progressive rock. The bibliography is thorough and the alphabetical index is organized by artists, group name, and titles, making it very easy for anyone, no matter what language they speak, to use as a reference source.

This is a year-by-year chronological and up-to-date survey on progressive rock from 1967 to 1979. Covers the main bands and dedicates research to Italian progressive rock, German krautrock, and jazz fusion from a contemporary standpoint as opposed to many of the guides compiled in the late nineties. Includes an index style that lists the essential prog rock songs.


A record guide that covers the gamut of progressive music from 1960 to 1990, with a 20 page, introduction and history of progressive rock. It is organized by band or artist name and each band’s albums are subsequently listed chronologically. Intended as “an arbiter of taste” this record guide provides a well researched top 100 progressive recordings, top 30 space rock recordings, and top 30 best sounding recordings. Also has additional recommended titles, and a chapter attempting to define five styles of progressive rock (classical formalist, impressionist, surrealist, dada/absurdist, and postmodernist). Contains an extensive list of record dealers and their mail order/contact information. A very helpful collectors guide and resource for a broad sampling of progressive rock.

**Relevant Sources - Verified (95 total)**


Progressive rock historical critique that questions the validity of the UK-centric view of progressive rock origins. Explains how market situations led to a prominence in British progressive genres while leaving much of Europe unrepresented, both financially and as a part of the history. Aderton then examines progressive rock as a “European meta-genre,” taking into account the various artistic scenes besides the UK that account for the rich musical history and language of progressive rock. Includes a thorough set of notes, selective discography, and exhaustive bibliography. Very important article for those interested in progressive rock in continental Europe.


Addresses the commonly-held prog/punk dialectic through a focus on John Lydon’s creative work with the Sex Pistols and PiL. Shows that progressive rock music, while seemingly killed by punk rock, actually had much in common with the creative motivations of punk artists, namely the counter-culture ideals of “discomfort with music
as industry, a belief in absolute individualism, and a sense of music’s potential as a utopian cultural force.” Research draws on sociological studies in youth counterculture, punk rock, and prog rock. Includes short discography and filmography.


This article, which is in English, addresses the rise of experimental or progressive electronic music of the 70’s and 80’s. Cites progressive rock musician Brian Eno’s influential role in the development of experimental rock and pop music from 1970 to present. Also is a very important text for understanding Krautrock and the key bands of that movement: Kraftwerk, Cluster, Harmonia, La Düsseldorf, Neu!, and others. Includes a helpful bibliography and discography.


An aesthetic analysis of compositional methods and forms in progressive rock music from Jimi Hendrix to the height of the progressive rock era. Includes detailed musical analysis of works by Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, Genesis, ELP, New Trolls, and King Crimson. Includes discography and bibliography.


Addresses the commonly-held belief that progressive rock is British by birth. Argues that progressive rock developed across continental Europe at the same time as Britain. Cites the flowering of Italian progressive rock as the example of progressive rock as a pan-European musical movement. Includes bibliography and discography.


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Review of early prog magazine practices and their revival from the 90’s to the present. Important in understanding the bulk of lay research being conducted, promoted, and disseminated. Explains how dedicated fans resurrect the genre, and the lack of financial impetus behind their ventures. Hermeneutic view of the research and promotion of progressive rock. Cites heavily from researcher Simon Frith.


Bangs addresses the musical scene in the United States and in Germany leading up to the formation of the influential German band Amon Düül. He also reviews the influential albums *Yeti* and *Dance of the Lemmings*. A very solid introduction to Krautrock and its roots by a very influential progressive rock writer and editor.


Album guide to the music of ELP, Genesis, Jethro Tull, The Moody Blues, Pink Floyd, and Yes. Each entry contains all pertinent release information: dates, number of releases, chart positions, and a very good abstract that explains historical circumstances and the music scene at the time of the release. The author also includes special information about rare editions. Includes an alphabetical song index.


Historical study of Frank Zappa’s connection to 20th century concert music. Cites his admiration of Stravinsky and Varèse and traces their, and similar 20th century influences, in his music. Presents a view of Zappa’s genius that is often overshadowed by his bombastic persona. Detailed musical exempts from “Oh No” and “Orange County Lumber Truck.”

Cultural/historical analysis of Rush’s individualism through the lens of their three works; “2112,” “Xanadu,” and “Cygnus X-1.” Addresses the issues of genre and cultural hierarchy in progressive rock from 1967-1974. Includes a detailed structural analysis of “2112” as well as other musical excerpts from “Xanadu” and “Cygnus X-1.” Includes detailed notes that cover all citation sources.


Historical and Stylistic analysis of the progressive rock band Rush from their beginnings in the early 1970’s to 2002. Traces their development and musical appeal to a broad, post-counterculture, working-class demographic. Includes a musical analysis of major works including “Working Man,” “Anthem,” “2112 Overture,” “Xanadu,”“Free Will” “Tom Sawyer” “YYZ” and many more. Includes appendices of Billboard chart peaks, primary and secondary concert cities, fan surveys (which illuminate fan demographics, tastes, ages, etc.), a list of professional musicians who are “interested in Rush’s music,” Neil Peart’s extensive personal reading list, discography with in-depth track information (studio mix levels and instrumentation), and exhaustive bibliography.


First known Hebrew book on progressive rock. Covers the general history and development of prog rock as well a chapter devoted to the local Israeli movement. Attempts to define what progressive rock is, what the musicological parameters are for the genre, and what caused it to flourish, die, and be reborn.


Historical analysis of progressive rock in the early 90’s and its parallel, alternative rock. Cateforis confronts the myth that all alternative music was in opposition to the progressive music of the early 90’s by noting the convergent similarities between underground and indie alternative scenes and prog rock aesthetics, his main focus being math rock. Includes an introductory history, musical examples, analysis, and detailed endnotes about math rock. Lacks a discography of math rock.