ROCK MUSIC AND THE LANGUAGE OF FANTASY: 
The Music Of YES’ *Relayer* 

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THIS ESSAY AND THE COMPOSITIONS
*LOST IN TRANSLATION* AND *STRIPES WITH PLAID*
TOGETHER CONSTITUTE THIS DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

The music of Yes’ *Relayer* (1974) represents one possible end-point of a trend in experimental – or ‘progressive’ – rock in 1970’s Britain: a trend toward musical creations of epic proportions. *Relayer* was Yes’ last album for several years; and it was the last composed solely of large-scale tracks (between 9-1/2 and 22 minutes). Including a number of original transcriptions from the album’s music, this dissertation draws parallels between this music and the rhetoric, themes and forms of popular fantastic literature from the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. The use of tropes from fantasy and science fiction in song lyrics and album art of rock music in these years is well documented. This dissertation further speculates that the correspondence sometimes extends further than direct reference in text or image; it draws parallels between the rhetoric of fantastic literature and the actual musical content. It also suggests that progressive rock, often connected to the techniques and forms of classical music, is actually most closely connected to Western art music at the broader level of the idea that music can be narrative. The intersection of Yes’ language with both narrative rhetoric from fantastic literature and musical techniques from multiple genres create stories that resonate with the post-1960’s world of the 20th-century.

Each chapter of the dissertation considers one track from the album in detail, drawing parallels with various genres and theories of fantastic literature. “The Gates Of Delirium” is associated with J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and the quest fantasy. “Sound Chaser” is compared with themes in science fiction through the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and Arthur C. Clarke’s novel *Rendezvous with Rama*. “To Be Over” is examined in terms of what Farah Mendlesohn calls ‘immersive fantasy,’ and considers how Yes creates fantastical musical worlds using a complex and personal language that swings between multiple genres and uses narrative-like rhetoric.
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INTRODUCTION

‘We tell ourselves stories in order to live,’ writes Joan Didion in the opening of *The White Album*, a set of essays reflecting on her experiences of late 60’s and early 70’s Los Angeles:

We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the “ideas” with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience. … I am talking here about a time when I began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself... I was meant to know the plot, but all I knew was what I saw: flash pictures in variable sequence, images with no “meaning” beyond their temporary arrangement, not a movie but a cutting-room experience... I wanted still to believe in the narrative and in the narrative’s intelligibility, but to know that one could change the sense with every cut was to begin to perceive the experience as rather more electrical than ethical.¹

Across the Atlantic, in January of 1968, ‘Flower Power’ and political protest were at their peak in Britain. Young Brits were borrowing the mantle of revolution from the active civil rights and anti-war movements in the United States; this spirit of change, along with its attendant counterculture, had wafted in from across the sea.² Arguably, these ideals had their greatest effect on the arts. Certainly they had resonance with British rock music – starting with the psychedelic turn of the Beatles in 1966 and continuing into the next decade with groups like Yes.³ Mysterious lyrics, bizarre tape effects and other studio techniques, and kaleidoscopic chord progressions gave music of this time a new, mind-altering character. New technologies and a changing musical culture shifted the focus from short-playing 78’s to the full-length LP, and post-psychedelic experimentation in both live concerts and in the studio led to ideas that didn’t seem to fit in the usually more limited length of popular songs. The lyrical subjects that popular music engaged with also widened. The narratives of rock songs were beginning to be deconstructed, expanded, and rearranged.

**Progressive Rock and Yes**

The music that developed out of these trends became known as ‘progressive’ or sometimes simply ‘experimental’ rock. King Crimson’s 1969 album *In The Court Of The Crimson King* is sometimes seen as the beginning of this musical movement; Yes’ first album *Yes* was released the same year. Much of the writing on this musical period has focused on the ways in which the music of King Crimson, Yes and other progressive bands incorporate classical elements, to the point that this has become conventional wisdom. This gives the music both too much credit, and too little. These musicians were only occasionally classically trained; bands’ members were a motley crew with widely divergent musical and social backgrounds. To take Yes as an example, only their keyboard players had any formalized training at a conservatory. This focus on the presence of classical elements has also fueled accusations of pretentiousness from their critics. Yet there is very little actual ‘classical music’ in the progressive rock of Yes. Their music is, however motivated by the spirit of Western concert music (in particular, 19th century concert music) at the level of a grand idea.

This grand idea is the idea that music can tell stories without words, can be sweeping in scope, and can be intensely individualistic and expressive. The notion that music can be narrative is a major focus of this dissertation. In the close analysis of Yes in the following chapters, one central thread will be the ways in which Yes appropriates the classical idea of music as a narrative structure, while imbuing it with contemporary syntax from other musical trends.

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4 Experimental bands like Pink Floyd are sometimes seen as lying outside the more narrowly defined field of progressive rock. In this dissertation, I use the terms progressive and experimental somewhat interchangeably.

5 See the quotes from rock critic Robert Christgau on page 11 of this Introduction.

There is an enduring romantic mythology surrounding the 1960’s. This is not surprising, given the wide range of musical documents recording its astonishing creative diversity. Young musicians, like many young people, were looking for new narratives to give meaning to their lives. It is important to remember how young many of these musicians were; they were combining adolescent energy with grand philosophical ideals. This was an occasionally awkward combination; but it also created a fundamentally new way of looking at the world. The 1960’s were a charged moment in history, and musicians drew on a number of elements of its Zeitgeist: experimental lifestyles and mind-altering drugs; the revolutionary rhetoric of politics; and new sources of spiritual experience freely adapted from Eastern religions.

The marriage of popular song with the grand ideals of the Sixties resulted in surrealistic, poetic, and often spiritually- or politically-charged lyrics. Bob Dylan undoubtedly took the poetic art of lyric writing to its highest level. The lyrical vistas opened by Dylan were soon sonically matched by the more musically adventurous work of bands that followed in his wake, and in the wake of psychedelia. Bands like Yes also tried with varying degrees of success to broaden the lyrical palette of rock. The Beatles (John Lennon in particular) are probably best known for first picking up the gauntlet thrown down by Dylan, responding to his apparently nonsensical lines with songs like “I Am The Walrus”. Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison of The Doors, and the songwriters of The Byrds and Buffalo Springfield – like David Crosby and Neil Young – all took Dylan as an inspiration for songwriting.

In addition to looking for new narratives through altered states of mind, politically-charged themes, and Eastern mysticism, many songwriters and bands in this period began to draw on the rich literature of the fantastic – fantasy, science fiction, and horror. The prevalence of Science Fiction (SF) and Fantasy themes in the lyrics and album art of the more experimental
‘progressive’ rock of Britain in the late 1960’s and the 1970’s has been well documented by Edward Macan – in the music of bands like King Crimson, Genesis, Pink Floyd, and Yes.\textsuperscript{7} David Bowie also drew heavily on Science Fiction themes. SF and Fantasy – sub-genres of the umbrella of ‘fantastic’ literature – can also be found in American rock from this period. Lewis Carroll’s \textit{Alice in Wonderland} inspired Jefferson Airplane’s “White Rabbit” (1968); the same band drew on SF in “Have You Seen the Saucers?” (1970) and “Hyperdrive” (1974).\textsuperscript{8} The fantastic subgenre of horror and gothic became a wellspring for the genre of heavy metal in Black Sabbath, and later bands like Judas Priest and Iron Maiden.\textsuperscript{9} Fantastic themes have been documented in British post-punk\textsuperscript{10}, and can be found throughout other genres in both Britain and the U.S. – continuing through the 1980’s and into the new millennium, including (to name a few) the music of Metallica, the Police, the Smashing Pumpkins, Soundgarden, Massive Attack, Radiohead, The Flaming Lips, Trans Am, Tortoise, The Mars Volta, and The Decembrists.

The larger question this dissertation raises is whether these connections are always only textually or visually thematic; or if the rhetorical devices, forms and themes of fantastic literature form any parallels with the actual \textit{musical} language of British experimental rock in the late 1960’s and the 1970’s. The music had a clear ambition to tell extended tales. The sprawling length of many of the tracks (sometimes over 20 minutes) and the use of longer-range connections across an entire album’s worth of material, provided a broad musical canvas for groups to play with narrative ideas. As a case study, this dissertation will look at Yes’ 1974 album \textit{Relayer}.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{8} Thanks to Gary Moore for “White Rabbit”. “Hyperdrive” is from the band’s later incarnation as Jefferson Starship.
Relayer (1974) marks one possible end-point in the tendency of progressive and experimental rock from this period to move toward large-scale musical forms grappling with big ideas. The album’s first side is taken up with a single track, the twenty-two minute “Gates of Delirium”. It is the last track of such an ambitious length that Yes ever created, and one of the longest created by any band from this period. This is music that is neither a rock song nor a classical symphony; it is something else. There is no formalized language for talking about this music. It doesn’t have the developed syntax or cultural capital of classical music, nor the hip, sophisticated language of chords and scales found in jazz; yet it is a complex music that needs a complex vocabulary to describe it. The close analysis in the following chapters is both (1) a detailed music-theoretical look at how this music is put together and (2) a speculative enterprise to suggest how it might relate to the rhetorical language and the larger themes of fantastic literature.

From Pop-Song to Something Else

At the beginning we did covers of other people’s songs like the Beatles thing, the Buffalo Springfield thing, a couple of others like [Simon & Garfunkel’s] ‘America’ . . . And we just . . . embellished it and made it more symphonic and more instrumental. Although the first two albums didn’t really reflect what was coming, it was the start of the way we were thinking . . . we were very much concerned with arrangements; they were our trademark. We’d take other people’s numbers and just mess them around. How could you take a Richie Havens number or a Beatles number, stretch it out to fifteen minutes, and make it sound interesting? That’s how we developed a following, by doing all that stuff at the Marquee Club.


To discuss the parallels between fantastic literature and the experimental rock of Yes and other bands from this period, I want to first consider the ways in which psychedelic and post-

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11 Emerson, Lake and Palmer’s “Karn Evil 9” (1973) is almost thirty minutes long. Miles Davis’ “Bitches Brew” (1971) is 27 minutes. Three other tracks around 23 minutes in length are Pink Floyd’s 1971 “Echoes”, Genesis’ 1972 “Supper’s Ready” and Van Der Graaf Generator’s 1971 “A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers”. Yes did record the 16-minute track “Awaken” on 1977’s Going For The One, but the majority of that album is focused on shorter songs, and marks the beginning of a move toward the more pop-oriented tendencies of the late 70’s and 80’s.

12 Tim Morse, Yesstories: Yes in their own words (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996), 9.
psychedelic music extended popular songs into more elaborate structures such as suites, concept albums, or 20-minute long continuous ‘compositions’. By 1968 there were already a number of new directions that bands had taken to expand the length of popular song. The band Cream was performing 15-minute versions of blues songs like Willie Dixon’s “Spoonful”. Led Zeppelin’s half-hour live performances of “Dazed and Confused” added riffs and other fragments of songs between sections of the original. One of the most ambitious and adventurous drawn-out song forms created in the studio can be found on Electric Ladyland (1968) by Jimi Hendrix: the 15-minute “1983...(A Merman I Should Turn To Be) / Moon, Turn The Tides…Gently, Gently” sprawls over two tracks. The creation of epic-length songs, or songs that suggest ‘epic scope’, throughout the 1970’s on both sides of the Atlantic has been well documented by Zak Albin.

Yes also began their career by elaborating – both live, and as part of their first two albums – on existing rock and pop songs, stretching their length by adding or extending instrumental introductions, interludes, and codas. Their first, eponymous album included versions of “I See You” (by Crosby-McGuinn, from The Byrds’ 1966 album Fifth Dimension) and “Every Little Thing” (by Lennon-McCartney, from Beatles For Sale, 1964). On Yes’ second album, Time and a Word, they recorded their own takes on “No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed”

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13 Cream’s live performances are heard on Wheels Of Fire (1968). Led Zeppelin’s “Dazed and Confused” performances originate around 1969, and were recorded on the The Song Remains The Same, 1976.
15 Examples of Yes elaborating on the songs of others are found on their first album Yes, their second album Time And A Word, and the live recordings on The BBC Recordings 1969-1970, as well as an unreleased 10-minute version of Paul Simon’s ‘America’ from the recording sessions for Fragile. In addition to the obvious influence of the Beatles in elaborate experimentation with pop-song forms, some members of Yes apparently cited the song transformations by the psychedelic American group Vanilla Fudge – who borrowed from The Beatles, Curtis Mayfield, Dozier-Lamont, and others – as an inspiration for their working method. See the liner notes to their debut album, Yes (1969). Vanilla Fudge (from Long Island) was active 1966-70.
(by Richie Havens, from his 1968 album *Something Else Again*) and “Everdays” (by Steven Stills, from Buffalo Springfield’s *Again*, 1967). Most of the original versions are 2-3 minutes long. Yes’ versions are twice that length, or more: they range from 5-½ to 8 minutes.

Sessions recorded at the BBC in January of 1969 and March of 1970 captured different live performances of some of these songs, suggesting the ways in which these performances changed from night to night. One of Yes’ more elaborate covers is The Beatles’ “Every Little Thing”. A number of unusual insertions and transformations chip away at the notion of a pop song as a neatly self-contained unit. Yes’ version moves dramatically between minor-mode instrumental sections and the major-mode song sections. Their studio version of the same song includes a passing reference to another Beatles song, “Day Tripper”, while the live BBC performances invoke the melody of The Beatles’ “Norwegian Wood”. One of these BBC versions also bizarrely inserts the opening figure of Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” on guitar during the introduction. It is these elements of whimsy which first point toward the all-embracing epic musical narratives that Yes would later create.

**Epic Rock Narratives**

*When the whole thing started really was in 1968-69, there was a big explosion of musicians entering the so-called rock field at that time, post-Sgt. Pepper. It was felt after Sgt. Pepper anybody could do anything in music. And it seemed the wilder the idea musically the better, but it had just better work. Everything seemed up for grabs.*

– Bill Bruford [Yes’ drummer, 1969-1973]

In his article ‘From “Craft” to “Art”: Formal Structure in the Music of The Beatles’, John Covach outlines the ways in which The Beatles’ songwriting develops from close imitation of

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16 Inserting other, often unrelated melodies, especially live, was a trademark of Yes’ first guitarist Peter Banks.
17 Morse, *Yesstories*, 9.
the models found in 1950’s and early 1960’s American pop songs to much more experimental formal procedures, peaking in June 1967 with the release of the intricate *Sgt. Peppers’ Lonely Hearts Club Band*.\(^1\) The album pointed toward a new direction in rock music that emerged at the end of the 60’s. Blending diverse elements from many sources not typically associated with rock, the album is often identified as a touchstone for the progressive and experimental traditions.\(^2\) The Beatles’ eclecticism continued to find resonance in the music of 1970’s bands: Pink Floyd, King Crimson, Jethro Tull, Genesis, and Yes. This attitude could also be heard in the American music of Jimi Hendrix, the Beach Boys, Frank Zappa, Captain Beefheart, and the popular-influenced concert music of Leonard Bernstein. A spirit of ‘anything goes’ experimentation was in the air.

The film *All My Loving*, aired as a widely-viewed BBC broadcast in 1969, encapsulated this attitude. Drawing parallels between The Beatles and the classics of the concert hall, it suggested that rock music was now the source of new and exciting ‘concert music’. The all-embracing attitude and high aspirations of the bands in this period seem crucial here. They were trying to make sense of the musical world around them, and their points of reference expanded to include everything from high-brow classical to theme songs from Western films and television shows.

One early Yes cover uses the theme from the film “The Big Country”. According to Yes


\(^2\) Although, as Covach points out, Lennon continued to experiment with more adventurous forms on *The White Album*, with songs like “Happiness Is A Warm Gun” and “Glass Onion”, while McCartney was still to be the guiding force behind the elaborate suite on side two of *Abbey Road*.

\(^2\) For more on this subject, see Chapter 1 of Macan, *Rocking the Classics* and the last chapter of Allan F. Moore, *The Beatles: Sgt. Peppers’ Lonely Hearts Club Band* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). A notable book that details the history of this period is Paul Stump, *The Music’s All That Matters* (London: Quartet Books, 1997). There are many close studies of this music, such as those by John Covach, Kevin Holm-Hudson, Edward Macan and Mark Spicer.
drummer Bill Bruford, the opening riff of “Yours Is No Disgrace” grew out of the theme song to the TV show Bonanza. Yes and other experimental bands were constructing narratives, trying to portray their contemporary world in music. Beginning from the self-contained pop song, they combined youth’s enthusiasm with grand ideas – creating something epic and less easy to define.

**Yes’s *Relayer* and the Fantastic**

*What is a fairy-story?* In this case you will turn to the Oxford English Dictionary in vain. It contains no reference to the combination fairy-story, and is unhelpful on the subject of fairies generally. In the Supplement, fairy-tale is recorded since the year 1750, and its leading sense is said to be (a) a tale about fairies, or generally a fairy-legend; with developed senses, (b) an unreal or incredible story, and (c) a falsehood. The last two senses would obviously make my topic hopelessly vast. But the first sense is too narrow [...] to cover actual usage.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-Stories’ (1964)

In the late 1960’s, the best-known author of fantastic literature was undoubtedly J.R.R. Tolkien. His most popular books, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord Of The Rings*, had by then reached the peak of their success, and it was estimated that only the Bible had sold more copies than *The Lord of the Rings.*

*The Lord of the Rings* became, in the words of Dominic Sandbrook, a ‘mystical alternative to modern values’ for ‘students, protesters and romantics’, affirming ‘the value of the individual as opposed to the machine.’

The influence of Tolkien was clearly visible in the larger British culture, in establishments like the hippy-inspired store Gandalf’s Garden and the psychedelic rock club *Middle Earth*, newly opened in 1968. It was in that same year, when Tolkien’s books were all the rage, that Yes first began to develop a following at another, more established rock club in London, *The Marquee Club*, creating their own fantastic reworkings of rock traditions.

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23 *White Heat*, 444.
24 *White Heat*, 417-18. Gandalf was a wizard in Tolkien’s stories, and Middle Earth the name of his fictional world.
What is the fantastic? Tolkien – linguist, medievalist, and fantasist – had a hard time finding a good definition for what he called the fairy-story. “Fantasy” and “the fantastic” are terms that still have a range of either overly broad or overly narrow definitions. In literary theory, Tzvetan Todorov narrowly specified the fantastic as the uncertain space between the “uncanny” – where unusual events are given a clear real-world explanation – and the “marvelous” – where such events are given a supernatural explanation. More broadly, Gary Westfahl notes that the fantastic is “a blanket description of both sf [science fiction] and fantasy works … recently adopted by critics as a general term for all forms of human expression that are not realistic.”

John Clute writes that “fantasy” is a “most porous term, and has been used to mop up vast deposits of story which this culture or that – and this era or that – deems unrealistic. In the late 20th century, however, the term fantastic has more and more frequently been substituted for “fantasy” when modes are being discussed.” More narrowly for Clute, fantasy as a literary form does “designate a structure” but “there is no rigorous critical consensus over the precise definition.”

How do these apparent dialectics of the fantastic – either defined as (1) the narrow space between the uncanny and the marvelous or (2) the broad space of ‘unrealistic’ stories against the ‘realistic’ conventions of mimetic fiction – relate in any concrete way to the music of Yes or other experimental rock? One parallel between Yes’ music and the ‘unreality’ of the fantastic is the way in which their music lives in a ‘liminal’ musical space – at the borders of musical worlds – much like the fantastic exists between the possible and the impossible, or the natural and the supernatural. Todorov’s narrow definition of the fantastic provides a possible metaphor for this, but Clute’s broader definition of ‘fantasy’ may be just as relevant:

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26 Clute, “Fantasy”, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 337.
A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it; when set in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms.  

One aspect of this liminality is Yes’ creation of a ‘symphonic’ sound world through the actions of a five-piece rock band – using synthesizers, tape loops, studio effects, overdubbing, Romantic gestures and textures, and quasi-Wagnerian motivic associations. A second aspect to this is the ways in which Yes moves between genres, or even inhabits genres simultaneously – rock, classical, film and TV music, even elements of jazz.

Another parallel worth considering becomes clearer if we replace the fantastic dialectic of ‘realistic’ versus ‘unrealistic’ with terms more familiar from popular music criticism: ‘authentic’ versus ‘inauthentic’. From the outset, these terms have a much more judgmental affect. Authentic rock music supposedly comes from the very ‘real’ and ‘natural’ wellspring of blues and folk music, or at least the ‘authentic’ proletarian values of the working class. Rock critic Robert Christgau wrote scathingly of Yes’ 1972 Close to the Edge that the members of Yes “segue effortlessly from Bach to harpsichord to bluesy rock and roll and don’t mean to be funny.” In his review of Fragile from earlier in the same year, he closes an ambivalent review with the comment: “But isn't there supposed to be more to art than great contrivance?” According to Christgau and other similar minded critics, inauthentic rock music has cut itself off from the source, broadly either becoming a bland, disposable pop-echo of its true self, or pretentiously aspiring to be something other than what it should be.

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28 For Edward Macan, music critics who invoke such judgments belong to a school he calls ‘blues orthodoxy’. Interestingly Macan invokes authenticity in a different, positive sense in relation to progressive rock. He assigns it as an indicator of originality and individual authorship. He ties it to a much more European, Romantic idea rather than an American rock music ideal of authenticity. See Edward Macan, Endless Enigma, xxxviii.
Writers of the fantastic, such as Tolkien and Ursula K. LeGuin among others, point out that fantasy is often seen as inferior to realistic literature, fit only for children and adolescents. For Tolkien, being labeled with the term ‘unrealistic’ – like ‘inauthentic’ – often has (unfairly) unsavory implications:

That the images [of fantasy] are of things not in the primary world (if that is indeed possible) is a virtue, not a vice. ... Fantasy, of course, starts out with an advantage: arresting strangeness. But that advantage has been turned against it, and has contributed to its disrepute. Many people dislike being “arrested.” They dislike any meddling with the Primary World, or such small glimpses of it as are familiar to them. They, therefore, stupidly and even maliciously confound Fantasy with Dreaming, in which there is no Art; and with mental disorders, in which there is not even control: with delusion and hallucination.\(^{30}\)

Crucially, then, fantasy is a rational contrivance of its author. Its ‘arresting strangeness’ is a conscious virtue. John Clute makes a similar point when discussing a particular formal moment that occurs in the literary work of fantasy, which he calls ‘recognition’:

Stories have a habit of getting tied into knots [...] then the light dawns and the labyrinth becomes a path. For much mimetic or realistic literature, this process – inherent to the telling of Story – proves to be an embarrassment, scandalous admission that fiction is an artifice. [By contrast] the literatures of the fantastic positively glory in the fact that they present and embody Story-shaped worlds. [...] it is at the moment of Recognition that the inherent story at the heart of most full fantasy texts is most visible, most “artificial”, and most revelatory. ... protagonists begin to understand what is happening to them ... They understand, in other words, that they are in a Story; that, properly recognized (which is to say properly told), their lives have the coherence and significance of Story; that, in short, the Story has been telling them.\(^{31}\)

Here, artifice becomes a positive trait – much as in Yes’s music, where the artificially contrived hybridity of their language is celebrated, rather than masked behind a veneer of ‘reality.’

A final parallel between Yes and experimental rock and the concept of fantasy is a distant correspondence with a long-standing tradition in European concert music of instrumental ‘fantasias’. By the late Middle Ages, the term ‘fantasy’ was already associated with any


‘creation’ of the imagination. By at least the sixteenth century, the term ‘fantasia’ began to refer to a type of musical work – always without words, though voices might be used. In England the genre became principally associated with *diversity*. Much like Yes’ later music, English fantasias switch tempo, gesture, and texture at will, sometimes including sections suggestive of dance or popular song.\(^{32}\)

For me, the suggestions of parallels between Yes and the fantastic are rich with possibility. Yes’ creations, even if they are ‘popular music’, are not exactly ‘pop songs’; but neither do they have the refined language of jazz or concert music. Yes drew on pop songs, film and TV music themes, elements of jazz, and the narrative scope of classical music; similarly, writers of the fantastic made use of pulp fiction, fairy tales, and the broad horizons of epic myth. For Yes, classical music arguably takes on the aspect of myth – filtered through the podiums of the concert hall and the increasingly distant European past in a modernized, mechanized world.

Six years after their first live shows, and several personnel changes later, Yes released *Relayer*, the last in a series of increasingly ambitious albums. Though certainly not their last in the literal sense, it was the last for several years (until 1977) and the last of such ambitious scope; it marks a clear end point for the extravagant narrative journeys that became a hallmark of their music.\(^{33}\)

To get to the heart of the musical language of Yes’ *Relayer*, and its parallels with the language of the fantastic, the following chapters examine each track in detail. Chapter 1 examines “Gates of Delirium” in the context of epic fantasy as represented by Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings*. Chapter 2 considers “Sound Chaser” as a musical metaphor for Science Fiction tropes, through the lens of

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\(^{33}\) 1977’s *Going for the One* does contain the 15-minute track “Awaken”, but this feels more like a footnote to their earlier epic work.
Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke’s film *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Clarke’s novel *Rendezvous With Rama*. Chapter 3 looks at the final, more understated track, “To Be Over”, comparing it with the way fantastic literature constructs fully immersive worlds with a unique, elaborate vocabulary. It concludes by considering how the triumphant light of “Gates of Delirium”, the mysterious vistas of “Sound Chaser”, and the more subtle fantasy of “To Be Over” work together to manifest the larger world of the fantastic – speaking a contemporary language born of the vernacular and the mythical, and combining the urge to rock with the desire to slay dragons.
CHAPTER 1: GATES OF DELIRIUM

It’s a war song, a battle scene, but it’s not to explain war or denounce it, really. It’s an emotional description […] There’s a prelude, a charge, a victory tune, and peace at the end, with hope for the future.¹

— Yes singer Jon Anderson

1.1 Overview

“Gates of Delirium” is the first and longest track on Relayer. It is a continuous track – almost 22 minutes long – but it divides clearly into 6 sections. I have assigned these sections informal names based on Jon Anderson’s above commentary: (A) a prelude or “Overture”; (B) “Song 1”, which charges forward into (C) the frenetic and instrumental “Battle” section; (D) the “Victory” tune, which dissolves into (E) an atmospheric “Limbo” section setting up (F) the concluding, hopeful “Song 2” (Figure 1.1).

Yes extravagantly claim Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace as an inspiration for “Gates of Delirium”.² Aside from the general war/peace theme, however, the band has made no concrete references to the relationship between the novel’s text and their musical response to it. The strongest connection seems to be the epic scope of both of these works: Tolstoy’s novel is more than a thousand pages; and Yes’ “song” longer than twenty minutes. But where Tolstoy’s novel uses the backdrop of war to focus on the human nature of his characters, Yes uses war as a sweeping, grand gesture; a metaphor for a musical quest. A closer analogue to Yes’ epic, as suggested in the introduction, is the epic fantasy trilogy of J.R.R. Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings. More broadly, there is a strong parallel between “Gates” and the narrative form of quest fantasy.

¹ Morse, Yesstories, 52. The liner notes to Relayer (Yes, Relayer [2003 re-issue], Rhino/Elektra R2-73792) also quote drummer Alan White: “We decided that the keyboards and the drums would have a very audible battle with one another.”
² Yes, Relayer liner notes: ‘The Gates of Delirium is loosely based on Tolstoy’s War and Peace.’ See also Chris Welch, Close To The Edge: The Story Of Yes, (New York: Omnibus, 2000), 156.
### GATES OF DELIRIUM

**SECTION** | **A. "Overture"** | **B. Song 1 ("Charge")**
---|---|---
**Time** | 0:00 | 2:11
| 1:24 | 3:40 | 4:50 | 5:44 | 6:44 | 7:29 | 7:49 | 7:57
**Key Area(s)** | D major | E dorian | A major? | D mixo. A mixo. D mixo. A mixo. E minor / G major | D dorian | D mixo. D dorian/F major | B major
**Descipt.** | Improv | "Listen" | Fanfare | Vs. 1+2 Bridge Coda | Verse 3 Bridge Coda | Inst. Bridge | "Listen" | Vocal Song Bridge | Trans. | Trans.
**Lead Inst** | Guitar | Voice | Guitar | Voice | Guitar | Voice | Guitar | Guitar | Guitar | Guitar

**SECTION** | **C. "Battle"** | **(C2)** | **(C1')**
---|---|---|---
**Key Area(s)** | A mixo. c#/d oct d#-e oct | A mixo. A mixo. C dorian C dorian E dorian | C major D mixo. F mixo. 1 c#-d# oct (? E major |
**Descipt.** | Intro. "Trading fours" | Mixed meter riffs | Riffs from "Trading fours"
**Lead** | Kbd/Gtr | Kbd/Gtr | Kbd/Gtr | Kbd/Gtr | Kbd/Gtr | Kbd/Bs | Kbd/Bs | Kbd/Bs | Kbd/Bs/Kbd | Drums |

**SECTION** | **D. "Victory"** | **E. "Limbo"** | **F. Song 2, "Soon" ("Peace")**
---|---|---|---
**Key Area(s)** | E mx *** | E mx *** | E mixo G mixo A "sus" | A minor A minor A minor | A minor A minor C major A minor A minor C major | C minor C minor C M/m
**Descipt.** | Melody | Melody | Trans. | Textural | Inst Vs | Verses | Bridge / Inst. | Verse | Inst Vs | Eulsions | Verse | Inst | Tonic | Pedal
**Lead** | Kbd | Gtr | Gtr | Guitar | Voice | Voc/Gtr | Voice | Gtr/Kbd | Voice | Guitar

**Figure 1.1. Overview of "Gates of Delirium"**
- **C** Lydian-dominant scale built on **D**
- **E♭** and **F♭** also heard in harmony
  - (C lydian-dominant, or acoustic scale, is c-d-e-f♯-g-a-b♭)
  - (Trans.=transition; Vs=verse; Inst.=instrumental; Gtr=guitar; Kbd or Kb=keyboard)
- *** **C**-nat sometimes added in bass
Figure 1.2. The outer gatefold sleeve of Relayer, created by Roger Dean, also evokes the quest fantasy, with its sweeping mythical landscape, larger-than-life reptiles, and sword- and bow-carrying adventurers galloping in the distance. Image used by permission of the artist.

Farah Mendlesohn cites *Lord of the Rings* as a quintessential 20th-century quest fantasy, but the beginnings of this genre go much further back:

>The origins of the quest fantasy lie in epic, in the Bible, in the Arthurian romances, and in fairy tales. From the epic, portal and quest fantasies draw a certain unity of action, the sense that we follow characters through their beginning, middle, and end. ... From epic, and from its descendants, the portal-quest fantasies have drawn ideas of sequenced adventures, journeys as transition, and the understanding that there is a destiny to follow.³

Like quest fantasy, “The Gates of Delirium” constructs a sequence of musical adventures with a clear beginning, middle, and end. This sequence creates a journey into the heart of conflict, and a final return to a peaceful and hopeful conclusion. This journey begins with the “Overture”.

1.2 Section A: Overture (0:00-2:11)

Yes guitarist Steve Howe actually assigns the term overture to the opening section of “Gates of Delirium”. This term first appears in European opera, where the overture was a brief instrumental introduction to a dramatic narrative work, its musical material unconnected to what follows. In the 20th-century, musicals appropriated the term, where the overture was most often a sampling of many of the tunes that would be heard throughout the evening in subsequent songs.

In rock music, the term ‘overture’ had already been explicitly used as the title of the opening instrumental track of The Who’s double-album Tommy (1969).

(suggests chord progression of “1921”)

0:33 Gm to GM: i – [: I – IV :]
(chorus riff from “We’re Not Gonna Take It” doubled by horn)

(from “Go To The Mirror” – melody in horn @ 1:11)

(from “Go To The Mirror” – “See me feel me, touch me, heal me” theme)

(from “Go To The Mirror” – chord progression only)

(from “We’re not gonna take it” – 4:40 to end)

(from “Go To The Mirror” – beginning of chord progression only)

3:04 GM: [: I – IV :]
(chorus riff from “We’re Not Gonna Take It” with upward rips/glisses in horn)

(DM: IV – bIII – I)

3:49 (“Pinball Wizard” rhythms, hits, sus4 chord progression falling by step)

Figure 1.3. Outline of chords & keys in the “Overture” of The Who’s Tommy (1969), and the tunes from the album to which they refer. The final arrival in D segues to the song “It’s a boy”.

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4 Steve Howe: “[Jon Anderson] had some music for the beginning… which we turned into an overture.” See page 6 of the liner notes to Yes, Relayer [2003 re-issue], Rhino/Elektra R2-73792.

5 The original vinyl release of The Who’s Tommy begins the start of “It’s a boy” after this arrival on D; the 1996 Polydor reissue places the division between these two tracks several minutes later. The division on the original makes more sense as a division between overture and song.
Tommy was the first work to be advertised as a “rock opera”, and its ‘Overture’ follows the ‘medley’ structure of the musical overture. (Tommy, in fact, was later adapted as a Broadway musical.) The track moves in succession through various songs from the album, using chord progressions or riffs more often than vocal melodies to suggest the songs that follow on the album. There is no clear large-scale structure; keys change frequently, often using a sequential downward pattern by step (the sequenced I – V – IV at 1:02 and 2:59 in Figure 1.3). Drama is suggested most by these sudden key changes, harmonic sequences, and the frequent use of cadential patterns (often vi or IV to I6/4 – V) with long, drawn-out dominants.

That rock music should adapt a common trope from a musical should not be surprising. Since musicals were more popular than rock music during the 1960’s in Britain, it is likely that The Who had some exposure to musicals.6 Yes certainly had, since in 1969 they performed and recorded a cover of “Something’s Coming”, a song from Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim’s musical West Side Story.7 In fact they incorporated elements of a musical overture into their version, adding melodic quotes from the West Side Story songs “America” and “Tonight” into the opening and closing sections.

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7 Keith Emerson, with the Nice, also recorded “America” as a single in May 1968.
Figure 1.4. “Gates of Delirium”, opening of the Overture. A key to drum notation is found in Appendix A. In all figures, guitar sounds an octave below.

Yes’ overture to “Gates Of Delirium” takes a similar approach in some ways – using sudden chord, key, and tempo changes to suggest dramatic action and drawing from material that will be heard again much later on. In other ways, though, the approach is quite different. For one thing, a large proportion of this “Overture” uses material that is never heard again in later sections. Yes
avoids the typical cadential progressions and sequences that popular music inherited from Western art music. Instead, Yes borrows (or reinvents\(^8\)) something more subtle; a careful pacing of harmonic rhythm and the unfolding of motivic material, register, and counterpoint. This Overture is tighter and more directed than the series of tunes heard in musicals and The Who.

Regardless of their actual historical familiarity with the term, the band’s use of the word ‘Overture’ seems appropriate for this introductory section – it is suggestive of its narrative quality, asking the listener to believe that they are listening to a dramatic work, an epic work, despite the fact that there are only five rock musicians playing. It also frames the discourse that continues throughout “Gates of Delirium”, a discourse that ranges between song melodies, quasi-improvisatory gestures, and classical-like associative motives; between voices in dialogue and synchronized balletic figures; between gradual scene changes and sudden cuts; between heaviness and weightlessness.

The Overture opens with a texture that is startling in the context of rock. (Fig. 1.4) It begins \textit{in media res} and throws the listener into an unusually active space. The ‘low end’ often associated with rock – kick drum, low bass, and thick guitar chords – is completely absent; the music has a burbling, bell-like, suspended texture. Fleet electronic tremolos\(^9\) and natural harmonics in guitar and bass create a luminescent sheen over which the guitar takes a lead role with innocently erratic scale gestures in D major. Atypically for rock, there are no triadic chords, and the music freely uses all degrees of the diatonic scale (D major with shifts to D lydian). Although it can

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\(^8\) On progressive rock’s re-invention of the techniques of Western art music, see Gregory Karl “King Crimson’s \textit{Larks’ Tongues in Aspic}: A Case of Convergent Evolution” in \textit{Progressive Rock Reconsidered}, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York : Routledge, 2002), 121-142.

\(^9\) Produced with synthesizers and possibly tape manipulation. A similar ‘rustling’ effect, using a tape loop of recorded sounds of birds and running water, was used at the opening and closing of Yes’ 1972 17-minute epic “Close To The Edge.”
mostly be notated in a 4/4 meter, the guitar and bass riffs move on and off the beat, shifting ahead or behind. Without a drum beat to outline the bars, the music ‘floats’ above the ground. Sometimes, led by the guitar’s lines, the entire band will drop or add an eighth note, like the 5/8 bar in Figure 1.4.

![Figure 1.5. Overture, Intrusions 1 and 2. (after the first catalyst a seen at the end of Figure 1.4)](image)

The almost dispassionate lightness of this opening music alternates with a series of dramatic interruptions that increase in both length and definition, culminating in a full statement of a melody at 1:24. These ‘intrusions’ are preceded in each case by a motive in the guitar and keyboards, labeled in Figures 1.4 and 1.5 as catalyst a. I use the classical term ‘motive’ because it implies something used in a consequent, dramatic context. In addition, motives can be associated with a specific narrative idea or character. This is best known from the Leitmotifs of Wagner’s operas, and is true for Yes’ catalyst a as well. The term ‘catalyst’ is further suggestive
of a transformative association; *catalyst a* appears at key moments in the introduction, moving the music from one section to another. (Figure 1.6)

![Gates of Delirium - "Overture"
](image)

**Figure 1.6. Appearance of catalysts & intrusions in the Overture to “Gates of Delirium”.

The intrusions heralded by each catalyst are strongly marked out from the preceding texture, highlighting their functional nature in the dramatic development of the introduction. The rapid tremolos and repeated riffs of the opening material drop out as an accented hit punctuates the intrusion’s arrival. The music’s register drops; its sudden heaviness and more solid, regular phrasing counterpoint the unpredictable airiness of the opening. Taken together, all of these details – the ritualistic role of the catalyst; the sudden textural and registral changes; the increasing length of each intrusion; and the unpredictable intervals between interruptions – construct a tightly unfolding drama within the Overture.

The third and final intrusion (Figure 1.7) is voiced more fully in keyboard, guitar and bass in parallel fifths, and initiates a complete statement of the melodic material suggested by the intrusions – here heard without words in the voice and guitar – which will be heard later as a vocal melody in Song 1 (at 5:45). This melodic statement is also part of a section of striking counterpoint that takes on a threatening edge, expanding on the forceful rhetoric of the intrusion (bars 6-11 in Figure 1.7). The vocal couplet’s melody, articulated wordlessly in the voice, is accompanied by an unsettled bass ostinato in an ambiguous meter. Above this, *catalyst a* is played in the guitar, here in a cycle of seven beats above the mostly 4/4 of the voice, the
constantly shifting ostinato underneath the voice and guitar first supporting one, then the other. The register of the guitar ascends throughout this passage, underscoring the dramatic impact of this developing threat.

The registral crescendo culminates in more hopeful quasi-unison flourishes in guitar, keyboards, bass and drums (Fig. 1.7, systems 3 & 4). This brings the music back from threatening intrusion with heroic effort, and leads directly to the Overture’s conclusion: an angular, rhythmically off-kilter unison figure, an announcement in a suddenly faster tempo (Fig. 1.7, last system). The
staccato rhythms and brassy keyboard timbres create this fanfare-like quality, combining classical allusion with the rock sensibility of pounding drums and bare open-fifth power chords; a quality that could well have been inspired by the brass fanfares at the end of Bernstein’s overture to West Side Story, where the orchestral forces also allude cross-genre to the music of big band Jazz and Latin American dance. Or, perhaps, it is an unconscious allusion to the bright fanfares that announce the feature films of MGM or 20th-Century Fox.

The use of the term ‘overture’, and the strongly associative quasi-Leitmotivs used here to create drama, also makes one wonder if Yes knew Wagner or Wagnerian-style opera. Speaking in 2007 about his experiences as a member of the early progressive rock group Soft Machine, Robert Wyatt said:

> We could never really make pop records, because I was aware from the classical stuff I’d been to, from Beethoven and the operas, and... and so on, that musical ideas, if they’re extended and developed, you know, that’s where the fun lies, and I could never just contain an idea in that two to three minute format, or at least, very rarely.\(^{10}\) ... It wasn’t the classical training, except the classical training only, sort of, gave us aspirations beyond our technical ability, so whilst we thumped away at local dances our minds were full of Hindemith and Charlie Parker and Debussy and all that stuff.\(^{11}\)

As suggested in the introduction, it is at the level of aspiration and long-range idea, as Wyatt suggests, that experimental rock borrowed from Western classical music. Yes borrowed the idea that music is an art form and not incidental music, and the idea that it can create narrative through sound. Like Wagner and Tolkien, the work of Yes assumes a mythical, larger-than-life grandeur; their alternation of lightness and darkness is an analog to the struggle of good and evil in works like *Lord of the Rings* and the *Ring* cycle.

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\(^{10}\) Rosie Swash, *Robert Wyatt talks to Rosie Swash*, MP3, 41:46, December 5 2008, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/audio/2008/dec/05/robert-wyatt-interview](http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/audio/2008/dec/05/robert-wyatt-interview), 12’14”.

\(^{11}\) Swash, *Robert Wyatt talks to Rosie Swash*, 11’36”.
The intrusions in Yes’ Overture, which culminate in the threatening counterpoint following the Overture’s third intrusion, make a striking musical parallel to the early chapters of Lord of the Rings. The opening first establishes the bucolic peacefulness of the Shire and its inhabitants, the hobbits. The focus then shifts from the land and its traditions to the reluctant hero of the story, Frodo. By chance, Frodo inherits a magic ring; and both he and the reader gradually become aware of how dangerous it is, culminating in the discovery that it is a powerful object made by the evil Sauron. At the same time, rumors of dark forces begin to find their way into the Shire, followed by the arrival of terrifying horsemen dressed in black trying to reclaim the Ring for their master. Frodo must flee from his home and these ‘Black Riders’ in order to protect the Ring from reaching its owner, and becomes involved in the epic struggle to defeat Sauron.

In both Tolkien’s book and “The Gates of Delirium”, these intrusions from the outside become an important rhetorical device used to induce thrill or terror.\textsuperscript{12} This device is central to horror fiction in particular but is also an element of the broader world of the fantastic.\textsuperscript{13} The intrusions in The Lord of the Rings are, in fact, played up to great effect by Peter Jackson in his 2001 film version of the first part of Tolkien’s epic, The Fellowship of the Ring. Jackson began his career making horror films, and must have drawn upon this experience in creating the dramatic opening sequences showing the riders and the evil of the Ring making their way into the heart of the peaceful Shire. These ‘intrusions’ play only a part of the larger ‘quest fantasy’ structure; the transition to Section B returns the focus to the heroic, just as Frodo is propelled by the intrusions into his unwilling role as a hero.

\textsuperscript{12} Intrusion as rhetoric can be found in the fairy tales of Grimm, the plays of Shakespeare, and Gothic literature as early as Horace Walpole’s The Castle of Otranto (1764). See Mendlesohn, Rhetorics of Fantasy, 121-125.

\textsuperscript{13} The defining feature of ‘intrusion’ fantasy literature. Mendlesohn, 114-181.
1.3 Section B: Song 1 (2:11-8:01)\textsuperscript{14}

With both Yes’ “Gates of Delirium” and The Who’s Tommy, the opening instrumental overture is followed by a dissolve into a simpler ‘folk’ or ‘singer-songwriter’ texture – vocals with strummed acoustic guitar. Both frame the agency of an individual – here represented by the ‘character’ of the singer-songwriter with guitar – within the context of the ensemble. In The Who’s “Overture”, this is a purely textural transition to the instrumentation of voice plus guitar; the lyrics of the ensuing song (“It’s A Boy”) introduce the birth of Tommy, the narrative’s main character. In Yes, the arrival at a ‘character’ is more metaphorical, and acquires an additional harmonic dimension through a carefully considered transition into the opening of Section B:

![Figure 1.8. Setup of first verse of “Gates Of Delirium”, 2:01-2:10. (Guitar & bass only.)](image)

The placid smoothness of this modulation, combined with its rhythmically free pan-diatonicism, creates something half-classical and half-Hendrix. In fact it is less directly classical than filmic; in a dream-like pan, the listener’s gaze shifts from the opening musical landscape to the singer-character of Section B’s song form.

Although we can hear elements of traditional song form in Section B’s Song 1 – vocal verses and bridges, a single key center, and more typical rock-song harmonies and orchestration\textsuperscript{15} – Yes

\textsuperscript{14} All lyrics are reprinted from liner notes to Yes, Relayer [2003 re-issue], Rhino/Elektra CD#R2-73792.

\textsuperscript{15} For example, the guitar and keyboard play triads, and the keyboards use organ, a more ‘authentic’ rock instrument; the guitar strums chord patterns in the verse, and plays simple power chords in the bridge.
creates forward momentum that undercuts the cyclical nature of most popular song forms, supporting the progression of a heroic narrative. The narrative momentum can already be felt in the opening chord. Not only is this G (IV) chord not the tonic, it is in its unstable second inversion, ready to charge downhill into a more stable position. In place of the typical vocal chorus there is an instrumental coda. Its martial staccatos and brassy textures again suggest a fanfare, and it closes with strongly directed two-part counterpoint (more on this later). There is a richness of detail here that is not typical for non-notated music. The initial alternation of verses with bridges and instrumental codas gives way to music that is continually in transition, creating variations on song phrases, associative motives, and material from the Overture.

![Figure 1.9. Map of Section B (Song 1).](image)

Rock vocalists usually take center stage – literally and musically – when performing, and it is often their theatrical vocal performance that is the most remarkable element of the song. Thus the
shift of focus to the singer at the beginning of Section B draws on the rock mythos of lead singer as a star, another kind of heroic figure. Rock vocalists shift nimbly to create syncopated across-the-beat patterns above the band’s groove. Yes’ singer Jon Anderson does this too, but sometimes has a different relationship to the underlying rhythm of the band. Anderson’s vocals are not just syncopations; they are metric. We find this in the second bar of the opening verses of “Gates Of Delirium”, where the entire band lands on the next downbeat ‘early’ – shortening the second bar to 3-½ quarter notes (i.e. 7/8):

![Figure 1.10. Melodic and textual accents in the opening vocals of Section B (Song 1).](image)

Shifting the meter by ½-beat in this way, led by the vocal delivery, is very unusual; in fact “Gates of Delirium” may be the only rock music from this period that does this.\(^{16}\) It underlines that the singer acts as a protagonist in this section of the song’s narrative.

The two halves of the song’s vocal phrases rarely have the same music (Fig. 1.11). Almost always open and unstable, they push from one section into the next. This is something atypical for both rock and classical music. Some phrases come close to being symmetrical – if not for the half-beat lost in bar 2 of the opening “Gates Of Delirium” verses, the verse of Song 1 would divide evenly into a 4 bar + 4 bar structure. However, though Yes may have a normative

\(^{16}\) Asymmetric patterns in instrumental sections between vocals are common in more experimental rock, but the meter often ‘corrects’ itself when the vocals enter, as in Led Zeppelin’s “The Ocean” (Houses of the Holy, 1973) or The Allman Brothers Band’s “Whipping Post” (The Allman Brothers Band, 1969). In songs where meter remains asymmetric under vocals, there is usually a repeated instrumental riff. In such cases the voice tends either perform with relative independence, as in Zeppelin’s “The Crunge” (Houses of the Holy); or to more or less imitate the riff, like the 7/4 of Pink Floyd’s “Money” (Dark Side of the Moon, 1973).
structure in the back of their heads, the final result is something that is more open and narrative than the usually poetic structure of song form.

Figure 1.11. “Gates Of Delirium”, 2:11-2:47. First two verses of opening song form. Harmony vocals are shown as smaller notes on the lead vocal staff.
A number of features work together in Section B to create this narrative effect, much closer to *recitativo* than song: uneven rhythmic groupings animate the music’s forward progression; the harmonic changes are often unpredictable, changing from phrase to phrase, and shifting modal progressions generate motion and drama; and, the vocal lyrics themselves create a sense of narrative as well.

Yes’ vocalist Jon Anderson’s diffuse and unfocused lyrics have been criticized for being nonsensical, and there is an element of truth to this. The words certainly do not construct their own narrative; the grammar is impenetrable, and the words are little more than a series of images or ideas. This is an *instrumental* narrative, with words superimposed. The text, which is also low in the overall mix, contributes to the dramatic context by sound and general affect rather than concrete meaning. At most, the words are associative, serving as pointers much like the motivic catalyst found in the Overture.

One hint at the role the words play in Yes’ process of creation can be heard in an early studio run-through of “Gates of Delirium” that is captured on the 2003 Rhino re-issue of *Relayer*. On this take, Anderson still hasn’t worked out the lyrics themselves fully; but he does seem to have more or less settled on the inflections, pitches, and rhythms of his voice. Often it seems to be the sheer sound of the vowels and consonants that are most important. The completed lyrics do, however, provide some support for the epic narrative. Consider the opening phrase ‘Stand and fight, we do consider, reminded of an inner pact between us, and seen as we go.’ In spite of the surface incoherence, the phrase underlines the mood of heroism, as in the phrase ‘stand and fight’. The ‘inner pact between us’ suggests the camaraderie of brothers-in-arms, and ‘seen as we go’ highlights the forward motion of music and narrative. The portrayal of a heroic charge
continues to be prepared throughout Song 1 by further thematic associations of the words: ‘marchers’, ‘glory’, ‘conquer’, ‘freedom’, ‘victorious’, etc.

Figure 1.12. “Gates Of Delirium”, 2:59-3:18. First bridge of opening song form. The organ, not shown, voices the background chords (A major to C major each bar).

In the following bridge sections, the vocals’ rhythms also throw the lengths of measures. The basic unit is a 2-bar structure of 4 beats (4/4) followed by 3-½ beats (7/8), here determined by the instrumental parts. The final two-bar unit, though, is again led by the vocals through shifting meters as it pushes through into the instrumental coda; the last phrase moves from rapid groupings of four sixteenth-notes through groupings of three to groupings of two. (Figure 1.13)

To al-ter via the war that’s seen the fric-tion spans the spir-its wrath asc-end-ing to re-deem
\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
|4 & + & 3 & |4 & + & 3 & |3 & + & 3 & |2 & + & 2 & + & 2 & |2 & |4 & |7 & + & 7 & + & 6 & + & 6 & + & 2 & + & 4
\end{array}
\]

Figure 1.13. Closing of the first bridge. Numbers indicate groupings of sixteenth-notes.
So far I have focused on the agency of the vocals in creating a narrative trajectory, but the other instruments also play a key role in creating forward motion in the music. Chris Squire’s active and carefully composed bass lines take an especially prominent role. In Figure 1.12, the winding bass ascent in the last few bars is vital in leading back to the D major of the instrumental coda. In fact, the rhythm of the vocals and the other instruments pull together here. Supported by the drums, the accelerating rhythms of the voice and the melodic ascent of the bass converge toward the home key of D, the whole band coming together on the last beat of the bridge.

Technical virtuosity is a clear feature of this music, but it is not the same as the elaborate – and heroic – virtuosity of a solo vocalist or lead guitarist; it is the virtuosity of the ensemble that stands out. The give-and-take between different instruments and voices is very important here, as is the tight interlocking of the intricate rhythms, and the general attention to detail. It is a ‘compositional virtuosity’ too. And like the band’s joint performance, the ‘composition’ is also created as a group. Yes drummer Bill Bruford, describing Yes’ compositional method on 1972’s *Close to the Edge*, says “we couldn’t play any of it through until we’d learned it. We’d play a thirty-second segment … stop the tape and write another thirty-second segment. [It was like] climbing Mount Everest.”17 This collective creativity makes a significant contribution to the epic progression of Section B, and as the analogy to scaling Mount Everest suggests, Yes’ collective efforts can be described as nothing less than heroic – a creative process that ties in neatly to the journey through this quest fantasy.

17 In Morse, *Yesstories*, 34-5.
1.3.1 The Fellowship

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the hero Frodo is aided in his quest by eight companions. Sometimes working in concert, and sometimes drawn apart, the fates of the nine members of this ‘Fellowship’ are linked in the epic struggle to defeat evil. Yes drummer Bill Bruford commented on the earlier *Close to the Edge* album:

> [It’s like five guys trying to write a novel at the same time. ... We all sat in the rehearsal room and said, “Let’s have the G after the G#.” And every instrument was up for democratic election, you know and everyone had to run an election campaign on every issue. And it was horrible ... and unbelievably hard work.]

This creative process sounds very different from that of a Richard Wagner or a Claude Debussy. In addition to the ‘internal’ decision-making component, there is also an *external* one; the explicit interplay of musical elements is joined by an implicit interplay of the personalities and decisions of the members of Yes. The process recalls the opening line of “Gates of Delirium”, calling on ‘an inner pact between us’ in their forward charge.

The metaphor of the Fellowship applies not only to the group efforts involved in Yes’ creative process, but also to the rich detail resulting from their collective composition and performance. An excellent example of this interplay of musical detail and musical personalities can be clearly heard in the move from the third verse through the second bridge to the instrumental coda (Figure 1.14). The bass and guitar, especially, shift between quasi-*obbligato* solo roles and supportive harmonic or rhythmic ones. Of particular interest is the expansive polyrhythm in the bass at 4:34, seeming to split the aural image into two simultaneously unfolding scenes. The bass’ slow motion concludes with a rapid flourish, returning the bass to a more supportive role.

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18 Morse, *Yesstories*, 34-5. Note, too, Bruford’s use of a literary analogy for the creative process.
19 The synth fills during the first instrumental coda (3:19-3:39) are another good example of this.
Figure 1.14. Voice, bass & guitar moving from the end of verse 3 through bridge 2 & coda 2.
There is an audible sense of these musicians stretching their limits, and the limits of what is possible in composing by committee. In the transition from the first two verses to the vocal bridge (Figure 1.15) there is a sudden turn to F major (♭III), but the guitar and keyboard disagree about whether the E is flat or natural in the first two bars; the squarely martial keyboard rhythm, outlining an F dominant seventh, pops out strangely above the F lydian mode of the descending guitar figure and ascending bass line. Such moments of disagreement can create a unique kind of complexity (and occasionally, uncomfortable awkwardness). They are a distinct feature of creating such large-scale music within the context of a collective ensemble with equal rights in the decision-making process.

![Figure 1.15. “Gates of Delirium”, 2:48-2:58. Transition from verse to bridge using catalyst b.](image)

In Song 1, the most consciously organized element of Yes’ collective heroism is a motive identified here as catalyst b. It first appears in the guitar at the end of the transition to the first bridge of Song 1. As with the Overture’s catalyst a, catalyst b takes on an associative function. The second appearance of this catalyst mirrors the first and leads into the next bridge section. (Figure 1.16)
The third catalyst b heralds a larger role for the motive. It enters surprisingly, interrupting the consequent phrase of the coda music (at the end of Figure 1.14) and initiating a section based on the song bridge but transformed into something new (Figure 1.17).

Figure 1.17. “Gates Of Delirium”, 4:44-5:44. Guitar and bass only. Catalyst b, leading into two different instrumental versions of the bridge.
The two-chord vamp of the bridge, which might have simply served as the bed for a guitar solo in a more straight-ahead rock song, is treated as the foundation for a more dynamic structure. The uneven 4/4+7/8 lick of the bass is tweaked into a more stable 4/4+4/4 bar unit. The harmonic mode is now purely in minor instead of mixed mixolydian-blues harmonies. Catalyst b in the guitar now takes on two forms – a new form with identical contour and similar pitch content for the tonic A minor, as well as its original form during a quasi-turnaround on the subdominant (iv). What could be an extravagant performative showcase for a rock soloist is turned into a tightly-constructed duo, the guitar alternating between versions of catalyst b and the bass alternating between the modified bridge riff and a polyrhythmic and partially chromatic ascent in the subdominant turnarounds. The ‘solo section’ is transformed into an active part of Yes’ forward-moving epic narrative using collective composition, variation, and intensification.

1.3.2 The Evil Menace

The duo led by catalyst b (Fig. 1.17) initiates a decisive move into new territory. Like in the Overture, where catalyst a culminated in a full statement of the intrusion in counterpoint, the third statement of catalyst b leads to a more immersive version of the Overture’s intrusion in Figure 1.18. These verses magnify the earlier intrusions’ strangeness and threatening invasiveness. The melody uses an E minor pentatonic, but the harmonies are bizarre. The voice, doubled at the octave by vocals and bass, moves in parallel 11th’s with the guitar, which swells with subtle, almost vocal, inflections. Parallel 4th’s are often used in blues and rock to add color to a melodic line – the familiar sound of two neighboring guitar strings played at the same fret. Here that sound is abstracted into a distant spacing, the harmony displaced by an octave into parallel 11th’s. Other notes in the Mellotron create clusters in the G diatonic scale. These non-triadic smears recall the pan-diatonic language of the Overture’s opening, but the effect here is
much more threatening. The melody is ritualistic and mechanical in its regular accents, which hammer home the downbeats. The scale is clear, but the mode is not – is this E minor, or G major? The clusters of notes are unusual, unstable, even unsettling. Ambiguous suspended chords softly percolate, their pattern divorced from the meter of the vocals, pitch barely audible in the fuzzy synthesizer timbre. The space this music creates is otherworldly, un-rooted; it lives outside the usual earthy sensuality of rock.

Figure 1.18. “Listen” Verse 1. The synthesizer transcription comes partly from live recordings, where pitches are clearer and the pattern more regular than the studio recording. (In live recordings the synth does not enter until the second to last bar.)
The unsettled mysteriousness of the first couplet of phrases is answered by a decisive response in the second. This second couplet reworks the mechanistic melody into a much more rock-like texture; an emphatic bVII-I chord progression is punched out over an ostinato rhythm on the tonic in the bass (Figure 1.19). In spite of its clearer, more typical orchestration, the music’s rhythms continue to emphasize the mechanistic; the unpredictable bass ostinato hits and the brutal parallel chords suggest a menace more concrete than the vague threat of the first couplet.

Figure 1.19. “Listen” Verse 2.
In the context of Yes’ generally sunny musical language, this is an aggressive, brutal music; it is a sharp contrast with the bright fanfares and optimistic exhortations to ‘stand and fight’ that opened Song 1. As it did in the Overture, this intrusive music intensifies the musical conflict between darkness and light. The lyrics support this, moving from stanza 1’s questioning “Should we fight forever” and “fear destroys” to the second stanza’s “your friends have been broken” and “kill them”. In *The Lord of the Rings*, a similar intensification occurs in the narrative as the full evil power of the Ring is revealed to Frodo and his companions once they have reached the stronghold of Rivendell. Thinking they have brought the Ring to a safe haven, Frodo and the others soon realize that conflict is inescapable. The Enemy will not rest until he reclaims the Ring and covers the land in darkness, and there is no choice but to fight him.
1.3.3 Transition to Battle

The music that follows may be the most intensely narrative passage in the piece. It brings together many of the threads that the music has used so far; catalyst b returns, and catalyst a from the Overture does as well, suggesting multiple musical characters interacting. A new, pentatonic riff in the bass and keyboard also accompanies catalyst b. Both bass and guitar further augment the dialogue, the guitar with elaborate embellishment of the motives and octave leaps, and the bass with pentatonic and diatonic melodic transitions. Catalyst a even interrupts the final statement of catalyst b (Figure 1.20). The music has begun to move from Section B’s clear alternations between lightness and intrusions of the dark into the more chaotic and ambiguous conflict of Section C (The Battle).

Figure 1.20. “Gates Of Delirium,” 6:44-7:29. Instrumental transition to closing bridge.
Harmonically the music also takes on an unusually narrative aspect. *Catalyst a’s* intervals are transformed for the first time, as the chords direct the music through several inflections of D minor (Fig. 1.20) using both the natural and flat scale degree 6 and the natural and flat 2. The lowered phrygian 2 cadences into the last section of Song 1, intensifying the arrival with its falling half-step. This final section (Fig. 1.21) is a return of the song bridge, transposed up to D; but it feels less like a return than a musical ‘character’ transformed by an intense narrative event.

**Figure 1.21.** Last vocal stanza of Section B, 7:30-7:48, and transition to Section C with final overlapping appearances of catalyst b, 7:49-7:57. Only vocals, guitar, and bass are shown here.
The new effect of this section is heightened by the transposition, since Jon Anderson’s vocals are now placed in the upper extreme of his register. The closing lyric statement of the section is also its most coherent, a clear call-to-arms: ‘The pen won’t stay the demon’s wings, the hour approaches pounding out the Devil’s sermon.’ The guitar plays a much more active role, emphasizing the $b3 / 3$ split in the tonic D chord, playing each note off against the other and embellishing them with expressive, blues-derived bends. This section elides into a final transitional phrase (at 7:49 in Figure 1.21) where catalyst $b$ makes its final cameo. The now firmly associative power of this catalyst accelerates the listener’s journey, as the classically motivic narrative of Sections A and B launches into a more filmic portrayal of the phantasmagoric landscape of Section C’s Battle.

\[\textsuperscript{20}\] The line bears a certain resemblance to the darker moralistic imagery of the closing lyrics of the heavy metal band Black Sabbath’s “War Pigs” (1971): ‘Begging mercy for their [the leaders’] sins, Satan laughing spreads his wings.’ Sabbath’s closing lines also lead to an extended instrumental section, although it functions as a coda rather than the centerpiece of a war epic, as it does in Yes. Where Sabbath’s song passes judgment on the politicians who start the war, Yes’ narrative is more abstract and ambiguous, with war portrayed as an inevitable part of the human condition.
1.4 Section C: Battle (8:02-12:46)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the trilogy of books shifts between the struggles of the main characters and the epic scale of the battles taking place between the forces of good and evil. Yes similarly shifts over the course of Section B from its up-close heroic stance to a more epic and chaotic picture in Section C that seems to be a portrayal of war – a rough inverse of the Overture’s shift from idyllic landscape to hero. In the purely instrumental battle of Section C each member of the band seems to struggle for control of rhythmic subdivisions, harmonic direction, and the right to be heard. Whereas the intrusions of Sections A and B are carefully set-up, gradually building the sense of threat, in Section C the constant intrusion of material becomes sudden and brutal. Disjunction becomes the norm.

![Figure 1.22. Outline of Section C, the “Battle”. Sections are represented roughly in proportion to their length. Each square corresponds to one second.](image-url)
Figure 1.23. Opening of the “Battle”, Section C. Continued on next page.
The “Battle” section emerges out of the B major chord (7:58) at the end of Section B. The heavily processed guitar arpeggios that voice the chord are striking; its shimmering, jittery texture is highlighted as the rest of the band drops out. This B major triad is the most harmonically distant point from the music’s home key of D major so far – heard only once before in the fanfare that ends the Overture. Both here and in the Overture, the B major harmony comes as a moment of transition, pushing sharp as a way to move the music into new territory. In one sense this functions cadentially; but instead of closing a phrase, it opens into a moment of suspension. The music leaps into the air, hanging in slow-motion before plunging back to earth, and into the heart of battle, as the band re-enters.

Such unexpected dramatic twists become the rule in Section C. (Figure 1.24) The instruments trade short, mostly six-bar, units which acerbically shift key center, mode, timbre, and rhythmic emphasis with every exchange. The music makes a virtue out of the disjunctions in character between each phrase. There is a careful avoidance of scales/modes that are closely related – scales shift at least two, often three, and sometimes four or five notes from one unit to the next. Each unit shifts to a new modal color as well\(^{21}\) – mixolydian to octatonic, minor to acoustic\(^{22}\).

\(^{21}\) The two ‘octatonic’ sections use different subsets; the first (c#-d) emphasizing the major/minor third split, the second (d#-e) emphasizing the lowered degree 2 and the raised 4.

\(^{22}\) The acoustic (lydian-dominant) scale has a #4 and a b7. On C, the scale is C D E F# G A B♭.
Figure 1.24. Scale shifts in the "Battle" section (C). Delta (Δ) numbers indicate the number of notes that change between each scale.
The tense rhythmic make-up of section C is also remarkable, and contributes to the disjunct and schizophrenic affect of the music. The changing accents of subdivisions into either two or three sixteenth-notes pull the music back and forth violently. In the opening riff a, the organ and bass establishes the basic rhythmic riff, falling by step in loping eighth-plus-sixteenth rhythms. Against these, the drums play eighth notes, grouped in threes against two dotted-eighths of the organ-bass groove. Soloing above this, the synthesizer (and over later riffs, the guitar) has to navigate the rhythmic landscape of these two pulses. Although these melodies are clearly composed – they repeat with variations each time a section returns – their virtuosic intricacy suggests the more traditional role of a rock soloist. Like the vocalist in Section B, the guitar and synth take on heroic roles as protagonists. Buffeted by turbulence, they struggle to survive amidst the battling waves of harmonic shifts and eighth versus dotted-eighth pulses.

The cuts between sections are strikingly filmic. Instead of smooth voice leading, there are sudden changes of venue – jump cuts between scenes. The medium of recorded tape has clear similarities to the medium of film – both are edited by splicing segments of image/sound that unfold in time. In this section of music, Yes takes full advantage of the disjunctive quality of tape splicing to construct their musical narrative in a film-like way. Whether or not they literally spliced the tape between these sections, this way of working was very much a part of their creative process. Speaking about the album Close to the Edge, Bill Bruford remembers:

_We were well served in all of this by having the ability to tape edit. And having [sound engineer and producer] Eddie Offord, who would slash a two-inch master tape without even thinking about it and just glue another bit onto it. Tape editing was fundamental to this band creating this music at all. Because we couldn’t play any of it through until we’d learned it. We’d play a thirty-second segment and say, “What happens now?” We’d stop the tape and write another thirty-second segment. It would go on like that, [like] climbing Mount Everest._

23 Morse, Yesstories, 35.
Although such cuts can be found in Classical music – alternations of distantly related blocks can be found in Debussy’s music and especially Stravinsky’s – it seems more likely that it arose more from a conscious or unconscious desire to mimic splicing, taking diverse material and juxtaposing it with an eye to creating opposition. The sense here is that of cutting between different combatants, or the opposing sides of a battle. Film-like sound effects are crucial to the impact of this section, too. There are sounds of crashing metal like the clash of weapons; the roars of crowds; and heavily processed guitar noises.

Figure 1.25a. Cycle 3 of Section C1. Continues into C2, shown in the next figure.

In spite of the apparent chaos, Yes still finds ways to project a feeling of forward momentum and a narrative musical thread. The disjunctions have audible degrees of dissonance – the sharpest changes come at the large sectional divides, from C1 to C2, and C2 to C3. (Figure 1.24.) Here
the music shifts *five* scale notes out of seven – almost the only two moments in the entire track where there is this maximal degree of disjunction between seven-note scale sets, effectively setting apart these three sub-sections.\(^{24}\)

\[\text{Figure 1.25b. Opening of Section C2, continuing from Section C1 in 2.28a. The chords in the electric guitar 1 are guesses at the most prominent notes; multiple tracks of guitar and/or piano create percussive clusters that at times are more noise than harmony.}\]

The most dramatic jump cut comes at the beginning of section C2, and even sounds like an obvious tape splice. Its brutal interruption of the final riff of C1 is highlighted by the sudden shift

\(^{24}\) Any two seven-note scales share at least two notes. A maximally distant scale shift can also be found after the move to *riff g* at 10:47, but because the difference only becomes clear with the second bar of the section – in the tight clusters in the keyboard/guitar – the disjunction is not as clear-cut as in the divisions between the larger sections C1 to C2 and C2 to C3.
of tempo, meter, harmony, and timbre. A cacophonous, metallic stab of guitar\textsuperscript{25} punctuates the first downbeat of the new arrival, and the conflicting pulses of C1 collapse into jagged groupings of 2 and 3, forming an 11/16 meter that becomes the lifeline of C2. On each downbeat, this angular groove is punctuated by clusters of notes in guitar and keyboard that grittily suggest harmonic changes. In the background, a sustained electric guitar line groans in its own tempo, expressively glissing between the fifth, fourth, and sixth scale degrees, digging in between each of these notes, a spectral counterpart to the frantic rhythms of bass and drums.

Like the fantastic creatures of pure evil of Mordor against which the heroes battle in Tolkien’s saga, the uneven meter in C2 seems to embody something inhuman or unnatural.\textsuperscript{26} In Section B uneven meters appeared integrated into a natural flow of text and narrative, but here their irregularity is highlighted. Similar to the battling pulses of C1, this “two vs. three” alternation in the metric groupings seems like a microscopic counterpoint to the disjunction of the jump cuts.

The music studio continues to be used in C2 to create film effects: overdubbed guitar and metallic percussion overlay the groove with almost incomprehensible utterances; tape is manipulated, played backwards to produce stabbing effects; and the sounds of cheering audiences lurk in the background. During riff g, the pitched instruments become almost pure percussive hits and sheets of noise; only the linearity of riff g’s bass line remains as a sustaining thread to hold together the music (Fig. 1.26). Like the threatened heroes of Tolkien, the bass pushes resolutely upward, a logical element in an otherwise chaotic space, struggling against a jumble of circular riffs and shrill noise.

\textsuperscript{25} Possibly combined here with the crash of a spring reverb unit.

\textsuperscript{26} Greg Lake, bassist and singer for Emerson, Lake and Palmer, called 5/4 “a frustrating meter” in an interview with New Musical Express on February 29, 1971: “The natural beat is four, so the extra beat […] is unnatural.” In Macan, Endless enigma, 145.
Narrative is also constructed here by the rate of change. The progression through units accelerates throughout Section C, and the soloist-protagonists vanish into a pure battle of rhythmic riffs and harmonic color. During its first cycle (Figure 1.22), the 9 bars of *riff a* are followed by six bars of *riff b* and *riff c* during cycle 1. Cycle 2 continues with five-bar sections in *riff d* and *riff e*. In the third cycle of C1, *riff b* is skipped entirely, *riff c* is cut off after three bars, and *riff e* is shortened by two beats, interrupted on its last beat by the beginning of section C2.²⁷ Like an exhausted hero defending himself from an ever-increasing number of foes, the music jumps more and more rapidly and unpredictably.

²⁷ *Riff d* is actually *lengthened* by 2 beats in cycle 3 of C1 to 5-½ bars in length; perhaps to emphasize the brutal truncation of the following *riff e* by the intrusion of C2’s *riff g*. 
In Section C3, the music plunges back into material from section C1, distorting its harmonic and rhythmic material. (Fig. 1.27) The instruments move rapidly through new modal territory in various permutations of riff a and riff c, then slide into the slippery symmetry of the whole-tone scale, then the chromatic scale, and finally dissolve into sheer noise. Defeated and exhausted, the music slows and collapses.

Section C subsumes the listener in a disjointed and dissonant world. The music combines a complex web of harmonic modes and rhythms with over-the-top rock melodrama; pitting abstracted riffs and blues-like gestures against ascending directed harmonic progressions in the bass, harmonic invention and modal color against sheer noise. In addition to ‘literally’ portraying a battle with its frenetic rhythms and disorienting cuts, the gestural groans and cries that the listener hears in the guitar and tape effects suggest a more internal struggle. It brings the listener to the verge of psychological exhilaration, confusion, and even terror.  

Section C’s combination of waves of dissonance with rock tonality and rhythm equals Jimi Hendrix at his most experimental; and out of this violent collage of sounds, the section also constructs the ambitious thread of an epic, larger-than-life film narrative.

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28 Guitarist Steve Howe described this music as follows: “We were making ferocious, frightening sounds, like the battle in 'Gates of Delirium'. It was all a bit horrible and one of the first big arguments Jon and I ever had was about the explosions on 'Gates of Delirium' and the amount of echo. I was hearing a tight group and Jon [Anderson] wanted to hear explosions of sound.” Quoted in Welch, Close to the Edge, 157.
1.5 Sections D & E: Victory & Limbo (12:47-16:06)

This larger-than-life quality continues after the collapse of Section C into Section D, Yes’ self-identified ‘victory tune’. The bright synthesizer timbre suggests a celebratory brassy quality, and the harmony and rhythm here are relatively stable after the preceding chaos. The melody repeats five times – three times in the synth, twice in the guitar. The eleven-beat rhythmic cycle is slow and even, and the mode alternates between E mixolydian and E dorian, with an occasional lowered degree 6 in the bass line during the melody’s turnaround.

![Figure 1.28. First statement of Section D’s “Victory” melody.](image)

The multiple cycles of literal repetition, the bright timbre combined with the stately pulse of the underlying rhythms, and the stepwise melodic motion – which quickly peaks and gradually descends to scale degree 1 – all support the self-contained, self-congratulatory finality of victory. But there is also something psychedelic about these rhythms. The groove is hypnotic, the spacey,
quasi-minimalist repetition of the bass’s two notes combines with the heavy delay on the guitar to send us on a trip into outer space. The fantasy of myth is dusted off, drugged-out and sexed-up in a very 1970’s way. Elements of rock have been present throughout “Gates of Delirium”, of course, but here the contemporary language of the music is projected right to the front of the scene.

Figure 1.29. Modulation from Section D to Section E.
This dream-like psychedelic state continues into the haze of the transition out of this section, which in spite of its drug-like euphoria is carefully executed as the guitar soars into the stratosphere, fragmenting the melody into a simple three-bar motive. (Figure 1.29) The music modulates smoothly through several keys, finally arriving in a phrygian-inflected A minor. Its closing chords are sus2 chords, neither major nor minor, openly voiced in fifths and fourths. The final cadence of this mode leaves the listener in this suspended universe, floating above a deep drone – the “Limbo” of Section E.

The most striking quality of Section E is what at first seems to be the almost total stillness. The suspended bedrock harmony of stacked 4ths/5ths above the drone is full but static. On closer listen there are other pitches too, quietly filling out the diatonic space. Some of these pitches pulse in and out of the texture, giving it a subtle rhythmic motion, their frequencies vibrating against their neighbors (Figure 1.30).

![Figure 1.30. Overview of Section E, 15:05-16:06.](image)

29 The most prominent stacked pitches are E, B and F#. The F# is quite audible, even if only as a prominent second harmonic (an overtone an octave and a fifth above the fundamental, A) of the organ-like timbre, like a 4’ organ stop. Addition notes that are heard (either physically played or as harmonic partials of the low fundamentals) include C# and G#; only the D (scale degree 4) is absent from the A diatonic collection. Spectral analysis supports this; it also identifies a high natural seventh (G) overtone, which I cannot hear as an independent entity in the texture.
The guitar quietly introduces a new level of pulsation, playing triads augmented with delay or gently swelled from silence. These triads move outside the A diatonic sound world and create a rich polytonal surface. (Fig. 1.30) Some of the chords – F# major and B major – push the sound world toward the sharper key signatures; the guitar’s final C major triad pushes the music toward the flat keys and moves it towards the closing A minor of Section F.

Like the Battle, distant harmonies are used here to great effect; but here they signal continuity rather than disjointedness – fluctuating colors over a unifying drone. This is a very 1960’s, Eastern-tinged, psychedelic language, meditative and magical. Devoid of text, devoid of even the metaphorical action of musical motion, it creates a space for reflection on the previous musical events. It balances out the chaos of the Battle, and tempers the ebullience of the Victory.

The inward turn that the music takes at this point feels psychologically similar to a moment in literary fantasy form identified by John Clute as ‘Recognition’. In this moment both the reader and the protagonist become most aware that they are within the contrivances of a Story, even celebrating the artifice of literature. Clute uses an example from The Lord of the Rings as an archetypal moment of this, when ‘the eagles arrive during the last battle – an act prefigured in The Hobbit – and foreshadow the saving of the day, a foreshadowing recognized by all.’ Even more relevant to this section is the moment of Recognition Clute identifies in Peter S. Beagle’s The Last Unicorn (1968), “the point when the saving transformations still hang in the balance, and the world stills utterly – then moves into renewal.”

30 The ambient stillness of this section recalls the work of Brian Eno and the ‘Kosmiche Rock’ of Tangerine Dream, contemporaries of Yes busy crafting a new pop music of texture and space.

31 Clute, John. “Recognition”, The Encyclopedia of Fantasy, 804. See also the quote from Clute in the Introduction regarding this formal moment.

Beagle’s story the reader/listener is pulled out of the forward directed narrative, and time seems to slow to a stand still, a frozen picture of the world viewed from afar. Here is the passage from Beagle’s story, in the instant before the last unicorn and her companions restore the world by vanquishing King Haggard:

For Molly Grue [one of the unicorn’s companions], the world hung motionless in that glass moment. As though she were standing on a higher tower than King Haggard’s, she looked down on a pale paring of land where a toy man and woman stared with their knitted eyes at a clay bull and a tiny ivory unicorn. Abandoned playthings – there was another doll, too, half-buried; and a sandcastle with a stick king propped up in one tilted turret. The tide would take it all in a moment, and nothing would be left but the flaccid birds of the beach, hopping in circles.  

In a similar vein, Section E of “Gates” hangs suspended after the narrative thrust of the quest in sections B through D, waiting for the healing resolution of a world transformed by Recognition.

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1.6 Section F: Song 2, “Soon” (16:07 to end)

In the wake of the meditative peace of Section E, a simple melody unfolds. It begins faintly, with gentle swells in the electric guitar. It repeats, as harmony and rhythm coalesce around it. The clear division of roles between melody and accompaniment, and the simply strummed acoustic guitar that fades into the foreground, suggest something basic and pre-urban. Its modal character seems to point most toward the idyllic English world of composers like Vaughan Williams or Holst\(^\text{34}\) – the melodic character of its simple pentatonic language is curiously reverential, a self-conscious pastoral mode that uses ‘folk music’ in quotes. The melody evokes nostalgia, and memory – while looking forward with hope to a happier time, it also looks back to an idealized, idyllic past. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* is also rich with such nostalgia; Tolkien idealizes the rural common-sense values of the hobbit protagonists, who represent for him the healthy culture of the English countryside. Technology is largely portrayed as an evil; Ted Sandyman, the

\(^{34}\) The connection with modal English concert music is explored in Edward Lawrence Macan, “‘The spirit of Albion’ in twentieth-century English popular music: Vaughan Williams, Holst and the progressive rock movement,” *The music review* 53, no. 2 (1992): 100-125.
miller’s son, becomes obsessed with modernizing the old-fashioned mill, and becomes embroiled in the machinations of the Enemy to control the heart of the pastoral Shire.

Just as Tolkien evokes nostalgia for the traditional English countryside, Yes in Section F draws heavily on the nostalgia of Romantic music—a music not only from the past, but also one with a rich vocabulary of emotional longing that still carries weight in both concert music and film soundtracks. The traditional Classical relationship between relative major and minor (here C major and A minor) is a central affect here, with each verse cycling between dim melancholy (minor) and bright hope (major).

The ‘Romantic-Classical’ is referenced by the timbres of the music too. There are no drums for most of this section, and the orchestral string textures of the Mellotron, along with harp-like arpeggios in the synthesizer, evoke a symphonic grandness.

The music seems to resonate with church music too—the verse has a hymn-like quality in the regularity of its harmonic change; its squarely balanced phrase lengths of four-plus-four bars; and the monothematic repeat of verse after verse. When the vocals enter on the third statement of the melody, the lyrics are also prayer-like, transcendent and hopeful, evoking a brighter time after darkness. The first line becomes a constantly returning mantra: “Soon, oh soon the light.” The simple melody with its literal repetition invites the audience to participate—even if not literally singing—in a church-like, collective ritual that hopes for a return to a kind of paradise.

35 Traditional major-minor associations are a big part of David Bowie’s music in the seventies, too, in songs like ‘We Are The Dead’ or ‘1984’ from Diamond Dogs (1974), ‘Moonage Daydream’ from the The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars (1972), and his first single, ‘Space Oddity’ (Space Oddity, 1969).

36 There are several authors that suggest the progressive rock was influenced by the Anglican church. Yes’ bassist Chris Squire was, in fact, trained as a choirboy. (Also, of course, a kind of classical training.) Church organ plays a prominent role in Yes’ epics “Close to the Edge” (1972) and “Awaken” (1977). See Macan, “The Spirit of Albion,” 100-125, as well as Macan, Rocking
The most remarkable musical aspect of this song form, though, is the use that Yes makes of harmonic sequences in the middle instrumental statements of the verse, giving a sophisticated forward motion to this otherwise repetitive structure. The entire verse is transposed here, as the

the Classics, 149-150. The connection to the church as an institution was an ambiguous one, however. Singer Jon Anderson, speaking about their epic “Close to the Edge” has said: “[A]t the end of the middle section there's a majestic church organ. We destroy the church organ through the Moog. This leads back to another organ solo rejoicing in the fact that you can turn your back on churches and find it within yourself to be your own church.”
sixth bar of the formerly eight-bar phrase is reframed as the harmonic cadence into a new phrase – the VI from the original A minor is reinterpreted as III of a new key built on the subdominant D minor (Figure 1.32). The music tumbles forward, the new six-bar phrases pushed to a higher register as the melody is transposed up by fourth. This upward sequence is interrupted during the second transposition of the verse up to G minor; from Eb major (the VI of G minor) the music falls directly and dramatically back to the original A minor, wrenched back to earth from its most harmonically distant point, the tritone. The root motion from Eb major to A minor has no ‘syntactical meaning’ – it relies on the listener’s memory of A minor, a powerful musical representation of our nostalgic memory, real or imagined, for a pastoral paradise.

*Figure 1.33. Interjection into the repeated verses of Section F, with foreshadowing of the coda. In the fifth measure (marked ‘*’) the chordal instruments and the bass clash; the organ sustains the A minor (vi) chord, while the guitar may even play another chord, possibly E minor (iii).*

Here, too, Yes uses a technique of motivic/harmonic ‘intrusion’ similar to that heard in the Overture (Fig. 1.33). Here it is more of a foreshadowing, a short interjection after the fourth verse that presages a final transformation: from the song’s circling major-minor poles to a glowing C major coda. This turn from minor to major is even transfigurative, again suggesting some transcendentally Romantic late-nineteenth-century idiom. In this foreshadowing, the vocals
end on a C in the highest part of Anderson’s range, with the phrase “the song will lead us, our reason to be here” referring to the song itself as transcendent, a force leading the listener to something ‘beyond’ the epic struggle that has occupied much of the track.

Figure 1.34. C major coda of Section F. *Regarding this ‘IV’ Chord, see Figure 1.33.

The main chord progression of the following C major coda (Fig. 1.34) could easily be that of a doowop tune from the early 50’s, although its delicate rhythms are more the refined lilt of a 19th-century waltz than an easy shuffle. The wash of reverb and Mellotron strings and the stratospheric register of the guitar continue to suggest something more orchestral, and the gentle wash of C major floats the listener along in its wake. Memory continues to play a role here. The coda is made more poignant by the listener’s memory of the coda’s foreshadowing (Fig. 1.33); more subtly, a transformed version of the “Victory” melody returns as a countermelody in the piano (bar 5 of Figure 1.34). This synthesis supports the clear resolution felt in this conclusion,
and the expanded use of acoustic instruments (piano joining acoustic guitar, along with the Mellotron tape loops of acoustic strings) further intensifies the nostalgic mood.

The twenty-two minute track concludes with a final Romantic-Classical gesture – a shift to the parallel C minor (the final system of Figure 1.34) and an implied dominant-tonic cadence (from the end of Figure 1.34 to the first bar of Figure 1.35).  

Figure 1.35. Closing of “Gates of Delirium”. The percussion plays muted triangle.

The final tonic after the cadence is elaborated with a succession of triads elaborating C harmonic minor (Figure 1.35); and the passage ends with an unexpected shift back to major, along with its classical associations suggesting light and hope after darkness. Underneath this spacious

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37 There is a strong 5 to 1 motion in the bass; the elaborate guitar figuration above the 5 suggests a cadential 6/4, even though it does not resolve, and a bVI intervenes before the tonic’s arrival.
Romantic texture – a texture more evocative of the closing credits to a film than a symphony – a final familiar memory pulses in the bass and percussion (Figure 1.35). It is the same elusive ostinato heard at the crucial culmination of the overture; after the strange arrival of the “Listen” couplets of Song 1; and in the dramatic transition to the final, intense bridge of Song 1. It evokes the strangeness of conflict transformed into distant cultural memory; and, self-consciously, it comments on the perhaps fantastic, but perennial, hope that human beings have for peace.

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings* the frail and very ‘human’ hero Frodo returns victorious and, with his companions, restores peace to his idyllic countryside home. Frodo, too, hopes to find peace, but he comes to realize that his wounds will never be fully healed. Similarly, this persistent ostinato in “Gates” may act as a reminder of the eternal presence of evil. Or, perhaps, it is the soft but insistent intrusion of reality into the epic ideal.

...  

*The Lord of the Rings* is a Romantic work – often idealizing and simplifying war as a clear conflict between good and evil, between idyllic countryside and a mechanized modern society. “The Gates of Delirium” treads a similar path, glorifying a heroic image of war against an unavoidable and imminent threat. ‘Although *The Lord of the Rings* is often seen as a deeply nostalgic book,’ Sandbrook writes, ‘its appeal was also rooted in its modernity. It was a work of fantasy, of course, but it used the genre to face the challenges of the century head-on.’\(^{38}\) Through the genre of quest fantasy, Tolkien reminds us about our own much more real history: the dangers of technology – like the new weapons that made the two World Wars so terrifying – and the ever-present threat of evil, even if its reality is much more banal and subtle in real life. Yes

similarly creates a new language for an old story, viewing the heroic quest through the imperfect lens of the nineteen-seventies.
CHAPTER 2: SOUND CHASER

2.1 Overview

While a strong case can be made for “Gates of Delirium” as a musical equivalent to epic fantasy, the connection to fantastic narratives in the following two tracks is considerably more elusive and subjective. Still, the second track on Relayer – “Sound Chaser” – seems to me to form compelling musical parallels with the themes of science fiction. In this chapter, I will at times draw on SF literature as an analogy for the narrative qualities of this music. More broadly, and less ambiguously, the track can also be heard as an expression of the optimistic 1960’s view of the transformative power of technology.

There was a widespread love for new technology and a “Space Age look” in design in Britain that crested during the mid-Sixties. This trend was soon connected to music, especially music using newer electronic techniques and technologies.1 This ‘space rock’ became closely associated with a number of British acts from the late 1960’s – like Pink Floyd, Hawkwind, David, Bowie, and the British-based American Jimi Hendrix. Although Pink Floyd later tried to escape their association with outer space², their obsessive attention to new music technology and long, wandering textural journeys made the metaphor palpable; and they made this connection

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1 An early inkling of this was The Tornado’s 1962 #1 hit single “Telstar”, named after an American communications satellite. Except for spacey, electronic effects which bookend the track, the music is unremarkable, though the catchy tune – on tremolo-heavy electric organ – has a campy optimism capturing the period’s upbeat image of technology. That a quirky, instrumental single could top the charts underscores the hold that space and technology had on the popular imagination. See Sandbrook, White Heat, 54.

2 Roger Waters: "That was always my big fight in Pink Floyd: to try and drag it, kicking and screaming, back from the borders of space, from the whimsy that Syd [Barrett] was into–as beautiful as it is, into my concerns, which were much more political, and philosophical.” Quoted in John Harris, The Dark Side of the Moon: The Making of the Pink Floyd Masterpiece (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), 85.
explicit in the lyrics and titles of their early songs in the 1960’s like “Astronomy Domine”,
“Interstellar Overdrive”, and “Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun”.

The popular British Science Fiction television series Doctor Who, first broadcast in 1963, opens
with a theme song created in the BBC Radiophonic Workshop (under the leadership of Delia
Derbyshire) using tape loops and oscillators. Its outer-space textures bear a more-than-passing
resemblance to Pink Floyd’s “One Of These Days” (from 1971’s Meddle). In fact the Doctor
Who theme was sometimes quoted during live versions of this song.³ Stanley Kubrick’s film
2001: A Space Odyssey, with its screenplay by noted SF author Arthur C. Clarke, brought
science fiction to a broad audience in 1968, and it had a significant effect on a number of rock
bands.⁴ The song title, the outer-space imagery of its lyrics and the sweeping, space-age sound
effects of David Bowie’s song “Space Oddity” clearly references the movie.⁵ (The song was re-
released as a single to coincide with the 1969 moon landing.) Pink Floyd was especially vocal
about their love for the film. “We all read sci-fi and groove to [Stanley Kubrick’s film] 2001,"
stated Pink Floyd’s guitarist David Gilmour, while bassist Roger Waters enthused that "there's
nothing I'd like to do more than the music for Arthur C. Clarke's next screenplay."⁶

³ Ian Peel, "Doctor Who: a musical force?", The Guardian (London: blog), July 7 2008,
http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2008/jul/07/doctorwhoamusicalforce. Retrieved
Sep 16 2011.
⁴ See Stump, The Music’s All That Matters, 42. In March 1970 the Nice, led by Keith Emerson,
were joined by the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall. Together they
performed a medley of music from the soundtrack of 2001. It was the first live rock performance
to use the Moog synthesizer. See Edward Macan, Endless enigma : a musical biography of
Emerson, Lake and Palmer (Chicago: Open Court, 2006), 46. For more on the influence of
Clarke & Kubrick on ELP see Macan, Endless enigma, 305-310.
⁵ The similarity between the name of 2001’s main character – Dr. David Bowman – and David
Bowie’s stage name is curious but coincidental; Bowie first used the moniker a year before 2001
was released.
⁶ Quoted in Harris, The Dark Side of the Moon, 61.
One of the central pivots of *2001* is a mysterious black obelisk of extraterrestrial origin, responsible for several transformative events in the film. The use of a mysterious artifact of alien origin as a narrative device is common in science fiction; and the mysterious artifact of *2001* certainly resonates with the remarkable graphic imagery of Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973). On this album’s cover, the triangular prism displays its mysteriously magical – even if scientifically explainable – property of fragmenting white light into its component colors. On the inner sleeve, the iconic triangle of the prism is re-envisioned in a stark photo of the Egyptian pyramids. This creative linkage of scientific icon with a near-mythical image from the past gives this musically striking album a powerful visual impact. Along with the visuals and the title of the album, names of songs like “The Great Gig in the Sky” and “Eclipse”, spacey electronic sequences in tracks like “On the Run”, and the manipulation of tape loops and other studio effects created a grand framework for the listener’s experience: the forces of science and technology merged with the force of myth.

Yes, like many progressive and experimental bands, took full advantage of the newest technology. They used state-of-the-art synthesizers and elaborate lighting and other effects in live shows; they worked with talented sound engineers who manipulated tape and effects in the music studio as part of the creative process. Although not to the same extent as Pink Floyd, Yes also displayed some familiarity with sci-fi imagery and language. The cover art for their 1971 album *Fragile* shows the earth from outer space, orbited by a Da Vinci-like winged flying machine. On *The Yes Album* (1970) the lyrics to “Starship Trooper” makes passing use of science fiction imagery, perhaps borrowing its title from the 1959 science fiction novel *Starship*

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8 See Harris, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, 148-152.
Troopers by Robert A. Heinlein. Although Yes does not seem to have had any developed interest in science fiction, modern studio technology was crucial to the creation of Yes’ music. Synthesizers, often prototypes that had yet to enter the commercial market, are also a defining feature of this music, as are other relatively recent twentieth-century technologies – in addition to the ubiquitous electric guitar – like the pedal steel guitar, and the Rhodes electric piano that begins “Sound Chaser”\(^9\). This embrace of new technologies, together with singer Jon Anderson’s New Age outlook, clearly resonates with the optimistic celebration of technology and outer space that made Science Fiction a cultural phenomenon. In the cultural framework of the 1960’s, the transformative sequence that the main character of 2001 experiences after encountering the mysterious monolith could as easily be an LSD trip or a mystical revelation as alien contact.

“Sound Chaser” is Yes’ most elaborate musical metaphor for the power of technology to explore and transform our world. Liner notes to the 1993 re-issue of Relayer comment on this quality explicitly, calling the track ‘Yes in interstellar overdrive, an otherworldly rocker led by [keyboardist] Moraz’s ghostly jazz riff.’\(^{10}\) The invocation of the term “interstellar overdrive” here is almost certainly an unconscious reference to Pink Floyd’s experimental and self-consciously spacey instrumental track from Piper at the Gates of Dawn (1967). The bizarre form and textures of “Sound Chaser” construct a narrative that evokes the alien expanses of the unexplored. It is a narrative that celebrates the technological – reaching towards a world as futuristic as “Gates of Delirium” was idyllic.

\(^9\) Keyboardist George Duke: “The Rhodes could arguably be the most important instrument to come along in the 20th century, because before the synthesizer was actually available and became an active member of the jazz/pop/rock/R&B community, the Rhodes became a standard. It was very important to me, Herbie Hancock, Jan Hammer, Chick Corea, […] it became the hallmark of the fusion movement.” In Vail, Mark. “Harold Rhodes (1910-2000): A Generation of Players Bids Farewell to a Pioneering Inventor” Keyboard, Vol. 27 No. 5 (May 2001): 46-48.

\(^{10}\) Doug and Glenn Gottlieb in Yes, Relayer [2003 re-issue], Rhino/Elektra CD#R2-73792, p. 7.
## Sound Chaser

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<tr>
<td>Lead Inst</td>
<td>Kb/Bs/Pc</td>
<td>Kbd</td>
<td>Vocal chorus</td>
<td></td>
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*Figure 2.1. Overview of "Sound Chaser"*  
  h.m. = harmonic minor; Kb = keyboard; Bs = bass; Pc = percussion; Gtr = guitar
2.2 Section A: Introduction (0:00-1:03)

Farah Mendlesohn has written that “even when proceeding into strangeness [science fiction] is much more likely to begin with strangeness … to force the reader to be a part of that world.”

The opening scenes of 2001 are a good example of this; in a series of wordless images, the evolution into man from ape is jumpstarted by an alien intelligence contained in a mysterious obelisk. Similarly, the beginning moments of “Sound Chaser” throws the listener into a bizarre sonic scenario (Figure 2.2a).

![Sheet Music Image]

Figure 2.2a. “Sound Chaser,” opening of Section A (Introduction).

The angular Rhodes piano arpeggios, combined with the blues/octatonic harmonies, evoke the stylistic codes of jazz-fusion, or even free jazz; in the context of the album, following the

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peaceful and nostalgic conclusion of “Gates of Delirium”, the effect is more than a little disconcerting. There is an audible delay effect on the Rhodes that adds a mysterious sense of space. Its metallic timbre (produced by amplified metal tines struck by a piano-like hammer action) also suggests something modern and machine-like; and its arpeggios are tinged with the unusual resonance of crotales and soft cymbals. This first gesture comes to an abrupt halt – the first of several sharp cuts between events. The rapid, forceful hits and harsh chord clusters of the following gesture magnify the inharmonic buzz of the Rhodes. A third gesture (riff’ a, Figure 2.2a) follows in the bass; its up-down contour and the metallic growl of its distorted low range are a fuzzed-out echo of the opening Rhodes and percussion.

Figure 2.2b. Continuation of Section A (Introduction).
Like the Overture of “Gates”, this minute-long introduction of “Sound Chaser” transitions into a song, but the effect here is purely textural – much more visceral and filmic than the carefully prepared modulation on the previous track. The disconcerting quality that begins the introduction continues as the disjunct collection of key centers dissolve into rapid chromatic keyboard figures (Fig. 2.2b). They are joined by the drums in a free, flurried duet colored by shrill quasi-electronic flute lines played by vocalist Jon Anderson (not shown). With the entry of Mellotron strings the music is led back to a key center (C) briefly before fading out to leave the drums alone (Fig. 2.3).

Figure 2.3. Conclusion of Section A (Introduction): end of free Rhodes/drumset duet, with Mellotron strings re-establishing C tonal center.

The steady 5/4 groove that the drums settle into at this point also evokes a certain alien quality. In progressive rock ‘irregular’ meters – meters that do not fall into a regular duple or triple pattern – sometimes seem to have been associated with Otherness. In Keith Emerson’s work with
the Nice and with Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, for example, 5/4 has been associated with something beyond our everyday experience, such as death in “Azrael, the Angel of Death” (1968) and the hybrid animal-machine imagined on *Tarkus* (1971). Bassist Greg Lake identified the use of 5/4 as being ‘unnatural’. At the time at least, such irregular meters may have sometimes suggested a musical equivalent to the aliens in science fiction, represented as human-like creatures with a different number of fingers or heads or legs.

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**Figure 2.4.** Opening of Section B (Song), introduction of riff b.

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12 Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 48. The association of uneven meters with something ‘unnatural’ may come from the well-known 5/4 ostinato of Holst’s “Mars, the Bringer of War.” King Crimson closed their live shows with an interpretation of this. See Macan, *Endless Enigma*, 82.

13 See footnote 22 in Chapter 1. See also Macan, *Endless Enigma*, 145.

14 Lalo Schifrin’s theme to *Mission: Impossible*, which like “Sound Chaser” uses a syncopated 3+3+2+2 meter in five, may have an origin in the ‘alien’ quality of unusual meters. Shifrin says: "I always say that things are in 2/4 or 4/4 because people dance with two legs...I did it [the *Mission: Impossible* theme] for people from outer space who have five legs." In Dave Karger, "They Shot, He Scored*. *Entertainment Weekly*, June 6 1996, retrieved June 17, 2011, http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,292863,00.html.
2.3 Section B: Song (1:04-2:13)

The initial alien-ness of Section A is followed by music that in a more idiomatic rock context might be strange enough in itself, but here it is not in the least disconcerting (Figure 2.4). The regular, energetic, and modal groove of \( \text{riff } b \) that enters over the drums feels joyous after the unstable opening; the guitar rockets upward through its registers above the bass’s steady cycle. There is something heroic in the guitar’s ascent as the music shoots off into space, downshifting into a 4/4 meter for the first verse (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

The verses of Section B in their bright major mode are positively sunny (Figure 2.5). The frantic joyousness of the drums and the frenetic guitar and keyboard licks almost threaten to overwhelm the vocals. For such bright, shiny music, it is unusually complex, with an excess of detail. These details combine in permutations foreign to any well-defined musical language: rapid country-styled guitar picking collides with quasi-classical keyboard arpeggios and a mixolydian rock \( \text{riff } \) in the bass. Yes is playing with genre expectations, and with their own virtuosity – both the technical limits of their playing, and the limits of what they can fit into the music all at once.

This sense of play extends into the rhythmic domain as well. The vocals, bass, keyboard and guitar roll forward in a typically syncopated 4/4 meter. Atypically, this 4/4 bumps against a 5/4 backbeat in the drums. As these two layers move in and out of alignment, the listener’s perspective is pulled in different directions. The verse’s final vocal phrase, too, is extended by the addition of a 2/4 bar. The slow five feel of this phrase slings the music back into the steady 5/4 of \( \text{riff } b \), reframing the rhythmic pulse.\(^{15}\)

\(^{15}\) The closing phrase’s eighth-note syncopations (3+3+3+3+2+2+4) roughly foreshadow, in half-time, \( \text{riff } b \)’s more rapid sixteenth-note syncopations (3+3+6+3+5).
Figure 2.5. Verse 1 of Section B (continued on next page).
Harmonically, too, the verse twists the listener’s point of view. The middle of this verse is a clever harmonic sequence: the opening I – IV – V progression is followed by I – IV – V built on the b3rd degree (bIII – bVI – bVII). Although the music then briefly moves back to the original key, the verse returns to the flat side and stays there. It closes with a bIII – bVII progression reinterpreted as a IV – I cadence built on bVII, so that the next verse begins down a whole step. The effect is that each successive verse is directed harmonically downward, as if spiraling further out into new territory. The chaotic opening lyrics underline the music’s shifting perspectives and its energetic, optimistic plunge into the unexplored. They evoke speed and the rapid exchange of abstract sonic images (‘faster moment’, ‘counting form through rhythm’); and transformation through sound and technology (‘change within the sound’, ‘electric freedom’).

The shifting perspective of key center and rhythmic patterns of different lengths place the listener in a situation similar to that confronted by the main character of Arthur C. Clarke’s 1973

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science fiction novel *Rendezvous with Rama*. In the book, Captain Bill Norton must take his crew aboard a mysterious alien artifact, dubbed Rama by scientists on Earth. Larger than any object made by men on earth and cylindrical in shape, it projects gravity outward from the center as it rotates. Entering from the flat, circular side of the cylinder, Norton views the object for the first time, the implications of its construction causing him to re-evaluate his assumptions:

> These thoughts might have inspired fear, even terror. Somehow, though, [...] Norton felt a sense of exhilaration, almost of delight [...] he needed a mental map to find his way around it. [...] Safest of all was to imagine that he was at the bowl-shaped bottom of a gigantic well [...] Nevertheless, it had some serious defects. [...] What was quite unacceptable was [...] halfway up the well shaft—a band of water, wrapped completely around it, with no visible means of support. [...] [This] was such an unsettling phenomenon that after a while he began to seek an alternative. That was when his mind switched the scene through ninety degrees. Instantly, the deep well became a long tunnel, capped at each end. [...] He was clinging to the face of a curving, sixteen-kilometer-high cliff, the upper half of which overhung completely until it merged into the arched roof of what was now the sky. [...] [There was] a third image of Rama which he was anxious to avoid at all costs. This was the viewpoint that regarded it once again as a vertical cylinder, or well—but now he was at the top, not the bottom, like a fly crawling upside down on a domed ceiling, with a fifty-kilometer drop immediately below. Every time he found this image creeping up on him, he needed all his will power not to cling to the ladder in mindless panic. 17

Similar to the shifting perspectives Norton experiences in this passage, the multiple layers in “Sound Chaser” create a cubistic sense of wonder that verges on the spiritual. A post-modern experience of the musical Sublime, it confronts us with the idea of something beyond human comprehension that hovers between elation and terror.

### 2.4 Sections C, D & E: Odyssey to a Song transformed (2:14-6:12)

This ‘sense of wonder’ is something I will return to in Section E, where the verse of the Song from Section B returns transformed, forcing another shift in the listener’s perspective. Between the verses of Sections B and E, however, the music takes the listener on an extended journey.

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Figure 2.6. Opening of Section C.
Figure 2.7. Conclusion of Section C, moving into Section D (at 3’01”).
Figure 2.8. Continuation of Section D’s guitar cadenza.

Figure 2.9. Baroque-styled guitar and bass duet in Section D.
The phantasmagoric instrumental landscapes of these two sections continue to push forward into new territory, confronting the listener with strangeness. In Section C, this can be heard in the deeply dissonant growl of muddy guitar chords, and newly juxtaposed rhythmic layers using both *riff b* and *riff a*. (Figure 2.6) Yes continues to play with genre here, too, melting the familiar pop culture of their time into their own less familiar language. The rapid 5/8 of *riff a* in Section C could almost be straight out of a spy film or a detective show, the edgy hi-hat lifted from a chase scene. The bluesy-octatonic language marks this music as a lost relative to the theme songs from *Peter Gunn* or *The Avengers*. Inserted between this, the slower 5/4 of *riff b* seems heroic and measured, and the ear is torn between the two pulses. The contrasting pacing of the two riffs is further highlighted at the end of the section, when the kick drum keeps steady quarter notes as the 5/8 of *riff a* moves on and off of this pulse (Figure 2.7). The riff then fragments into an even shorter 3/8 lick, then crashes to a halt as the guitar begins an extended solo cadenza at Section D.

The pacing slows at Section D, and the music has a moment to breathe. The frantic shifts of mood and genre, however, intensify. Diminished seventh chord tremolos pop up unexpectedly, like the villain in a silent film twirling his moustaches. Supported by Mellotron strings in the keyboard, the image of a film soundtrack becomes even more vivid. Rapid scale runs and the sudden appearance of rapidly strummed nylon string guitar evoke flamenco. (Figure 2.8) As the bass joins with the guitar, the texture turns toward the baroque (Figure 2.9), and then the symphonic, as dramatic timpani hits punctuated the ascending guitar lines (Figure 2.10).

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18 Yes was not the only experimental British band to evoke detective/spy music. A very early (c. 1965) Pink Floyd song called “Double-O-Bo” was described by drummer Nick Mason as ‘Bo Diddley meets 007’, though no recording is available. A passage in Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s epic “Karn Evil 9” (19:13–19:37) plays like a crazed chase-scene, though its goofy character may come as much from Loony Tunes as from the spy-film. Like “Sound Chaser”, it has a precise, mechanical quality in its rapid rhythms.
The journey through sections C and D is crucial to the transformational effect of Section E. It pulls the listener from the opening musical space through a number of different musical worlds, leaving the ear unsettled, breathless, and far from home. There is much more improvisation, or at least quasi-improvisatory virtuosity, in “Sound Chaser” than can be found in “Gates of Delirium”. “Sound Chaser” shows Yes’ debt to the more free-form explorations of the jam bands of the 1960’s, and to the philosophy that music can take us on a transformative spiritual journey by sheer length, noise, and a diversity of material that leaves us lost in an ecstatic flow of sound.

Figure 2.10. Conclusion of Section D (break/cadenza) into Section E (verse 3).
Section E’s phrase structure is very like Section B’s – the melody of E is a variation of B, and the harmonies have some similarities – but the earlier ebullient mood has become introspective and prayer-like. There are some dramatic harmonic differences: the fall by half-step to the vii chord in the first bar, for example; and especially the fact that many of the chords are based on quartal harmonies (sus4 chords), rather than triadic ones. These chords frequently move in parallel underneath the vocals. Distantly evoking medieval counterpoint, the intimate mood is one of human awe in the presence of the ancient, incomprehensible depth and breadth of Creation, across time and space (Fig. 2.10).

This ‘sense of wonder’ is one of the essential characteristics of science fiction. Although SF is defined as a genre by its acceptance of a rational framework (either scientific or historical) for its creation of the fantastic world, the sense of wonder that the genre tries to evoke comes out of a sense of mystery or quasi-spiritual transformation. The *Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction* defines this sense of wonder as “a feeling of awakening or awe triggered by an expansion of one’s awareness of what is possible or by confrontation with the vastness of space and time, as brought on by reading science fiction.” In a similar expression of the connection between SF and the awe-inspiring force of technology, Arthur C. Clarke has said (in what has become known as Clarke’s Third Law): “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

The lyrics, delivered in an innocently boyish, chant-like declamation, support the sense of wonder in clearly spiritual terms: “From the moment I reached out to hold I felt a sound, And what touches our soul slowly moves as touch rebounds, And to know that tempo will continue lost in trance of dances, As rhythm takes another turn, As is my want I only reach, To look in

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19 See Rycenga, “Tales of Change within the Sound” in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*.
your eyes.”  Like the first verses, the phrases here deal with ‘reaching outward’ toward an abstract idealization of ‘sound’, while ‘rhythm’ seems to acquire conscious, transformative agency. As if attempting to comprehend its own sense of awe, the music stretches higher – mirroring the text’s ‘I only reach…’ – and ends up a step on C major (II) instead of down a step on bVII as in previous verses. The listener’s gaze is directed upward instead of outward, opening another new vista onto the Sublime.

Several passages from Clarke’s *Rendezvous with Rama* evoke a similar ‘sense of wonder’ in the presence of the unknown. In one passage, Clarke describes Norton’s first experience inside the alien Rama, comparing it to Norton’s experience visiting the ruins of an Aztec temple “amplified a hundred times […] the same sense of awe and mystery, and the sadness of the irrevocably vanished past.” Later in the novel the parallel between alien artifact and religious temple is described even more elaborately, evoking connections not only to the exotic but also the European past. This passage from Clarke culminates in a comparison with a superhuman cathedral as the character Jimmy explores the most distant reaches of Rama in a solo flight:

*[T]here was an immense central spike […] five kilometers long, extending along the axis. Six smaller ones, half the size, were equally spaced around it; the whole assembly like a group of remarkably symmetrical stalactites, hanging from the roof of a cave; or, inverting the view, the spires of some Cambodian temple, set at the bottom of a crater. Linking these slender, tapering towers, and curving down from them to merge eventually in the cylindrical plain, were flying buttresses that looked massive enough to bear the weight of a world. […] he began to feel more and more like a sparrow flying beneath the

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20 The strange grammar and word choices of Yes’s lyrics parallel SF’s invention of new language in constructing the fantastic. See Susan Mandala’s *Language in Science Fiction and Fantasy: The Question of Style* (2010). The 1970’s French experimental band Magma, led by Christian Zander, invented a language – ‘Kobaian’ – for their extended musical journeys. In the last decade, several bands have replicated this, including the Icelandic band Sigur Ros, as well as the Japanese band Koenjihyakkei, which creates an original homage to Magma’s style.

21 Clarke, *Rendezvous with Rama*, 56.
vaulted roof of some great cathedral—though no cathedral ever built had been even one-hundredth the size of this place.\(^\text{22}\)

The psychological effect of Section E is similar. It evokes both otherness (suspended, quartal harmonies) and European history (quasi-Medieval parallel organum). With the close of its verse, all suggestion of song form is left behind, the voice struck silent with wonder. The remainder of the track, as pure sound, accelerates the listener’s journey into the alien unknown.

2.5 Sections F & G: Transcendence through technology (6:13-7:37).

The title “Sound Chaser” itself suggests the pursuit of an elusive sonic image, a search for perspectives not of this world. The constant shifts of harmony and tempo support this idea. They are a musical metaphor for the shifting perspectives and spiritual transformation brought about by exposure to the unknown. This central narrative thread becomes especially transparent as the music moves from Section F into Section G.

Section F is notable because it is the only section of “Sound Chaser” in which a previous section returns unchanged. The innate strangeness and fragmentary feel of this music, however, retains the sense of Otherness it had in Section A. The return is brief; the harsh chord hits of the second gesture initiate a tempo modulation into Section G, where Yes presents a new version of riff b.

\[\text{Figure 2.11. Riff b in Section G.}\]

\(^{22}\) Clarke, *Rendezvous with Rama*, 137-8.
The quasi-bluesy riff, played on a pedal steel by guitarist Steve Howe, slides through a series of quickening tempos and undergoes a dramatic transformation. Like a car rapidly shifting gears, it begins at \( \textit{q} = 104 \) before speeding to \( \textit{q}=132 \) at 6:52, and then only 9 seconds later (7:01) to \( \textit{q}=148 \), finally returning to a slightly more relaxed version of the original tempo \( \textit{q}=100 \) at 7:14. At each increase in tempo, the instruments also all shift upward in key and registers, mimicking the effect of the recorded medium (i.e., tape) speeding up. The relationship of increased rhythmic rate and raised pitch do not literally reproduce what happens as tape speed increases. Nonetheless this concept would not likely occur to a musician before the existence of tape recording, and it creates a poetic effect that has distinct relevance for music created in the studio with modern technology. The sound seems to detach itself from the ground. As listeners we are liberated in some sense from the heaviness of our bodies, carried by the electric medium of sound, echoing the opening verse’s lyrical image of “electric freedom.”

This acceleration also mirrors the heroic lift-off of the guitar over \textit{riff b} that we first heard in the opening of Section B. Where the guitar ascended over a four-bar phrase in B, here in Section G the idea is writ large, as the entire band rockets upward over the first forty-five seconds. As the music reaches its fastest tempo, Howe’s pedal steel playing blossoms above the riff with softly swelling attacks and expansive delay. Like the studio creations of psychedelic pioneer Jimi Hendrix, this section of “Sound Chaser” moves the rooted quality of the blues into the air. It combines rock with a psychedelic dose of the technological transcendence of science fiction. There is a feeling of immense spaciousness, enabled by the acceleration of technology – optimistically celebrating the transcendence we feel when driving a car at 70 miles down the

\[23\] The pitch goes up a fourth each time (the frequency increasing by a factor of 1.33) while the speed increases by a smaller factor (1.27 the first time, 1.12 the second time)
highway; imagining how we might feel, rocketing toward the stars of outer space; or perhaps, experiencing a mind-altering contact with an alien artifact.

**2.6 Section H: The Artifact (7:37-7:43)**

The black monolith of Clarke and Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* initiates two transformative moments of the film’s narrative. This forbidding alien obelisk is responsible for (1) jump-starting the evolution of man from ape and (2) for a transformative – even psychedelic – journey for the movie’s main character from man to superman. In “Sound Chaser”, the sudden breaks both here at Section H, and later in Section J, play a similarly transformative role. At the end of Section G the riff decelerates again. Coming to a hard stop on its last syncopated hit, a bizarre chorus of vocal sounds breaks in, cutting into the riff’s 5/4 cycle an eighth note before the downbeat (Figure 2.12).

![Figure 2.12. The alien artifact: “Cha-cha-cha”, 7:38-7:45.](image)

Each appearance of the obelisk in *2001* is also accompanied by otherworldly vocal timbres: Ligeti’s densely microtonal choral piece *Lux Aeterna*. The correspondence may be unintentional, but the use of defamiliarized human voices to evoke the alien Other seems a conscious choice in each case. Strange vocal timbres representing the Alien also resonate with other space music from the 1960’s and 70’s. On *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967) the textless track “Pow R Toc H” opens with a bizarre chorus of vocal sounds – swoops, pops, and squeals – that evoke an
exotic landscape. Funkadelic’s music, beamed down from their unearthly Mothership, used sped-up voices to give an outer-space tinge to many of their tracks, like on 1976’s “Tales of a Kidd Funkadelic”, 1978’s “Aqua Boogie”, or 1979’s “Theme from The Black Hole”. The British-French band Gong used spacey, psychedelic vocal sounds on tracks like “Radio Gnome Invisible” on Flying Teapot or “You Never Blow Your Trip Forever” on You (1974).

In “Sound Chaser” the violence of this vocal interruption is heightened by the tone – rough, harsh and smoky. The lower two voices are more spoken than sung, and the texture is thickened by the submerged doublings of each of three parts. The doubled middle voice is slightly out of time; its rhythm slightly between the beats, its pitches ‘between the lines’. The roughness is even more marked in the lowest voice; indefinite in pitch, its low tone begins with a breathy ‘h’, leads to an accented ‘uh’, and falls away as the mouths close into an ‘m’. This moment is identical in rhythm and similar in contour to riff b; but the differences, not the similarities, strike the ear.

This is arguably the strangest moment on Relayer. I remember being utterly floored by this passage when I first heard it: guitar, bass & drum groove cut off, interrupted by a unearthly and unsettling chorus, like nothing I then knew in either classical or rock. The tempo suddenly shifts – by a factor of 3:2 – as the opening dotted-eighths of the voice pick up their tempo from the quarter-note groove that ends Section G. But you don’t hear the new, faster quarter-note pulse, yet.24 Only the syncopated rhythm remains, propelled forward by the sixteenths of the middle voice. Without a pulse to ground it, it leaves the listener floating in the pure fantastic.

24 Arguably the pulse is implied because the syncopated rhythms of riff b are so familiar; but my ear, at least, still needs time to adjust to the new tempo, texture, and contour.
2.7 Section I: Evolution (7:44-8:38)

The sense of suspended expectancy generated in Section H projects the music into yet another evolution of riff b in Section I, stretching the uneven five meter into a more stable 6/4 (Figure 2.13). This ‘evolution’ brought on by the musical artifact of Section H parallels the second transformative event of the film 2001 brought about by the mysterious monoliths. As the sole surviving member of a mission to make contact with an obelisk found in space near Jupiter, Dr. David Bowman is propelled into the heart of the Alien, experienced by the film’s viewer as an extended half-hour long journey of image and sound. The character travels through corridors of lights, above bizarre alien planet surfaces, and is finally confronted by an aging image of himself. Brought face to face again with the monolith at last, he dies of old age, only to be reborn as the ‘Star-Child’, a higher-evolved state of humankind. In “Sound Chaser”, Section I begins a similar journey in sound, transporting the listener onward into an Alien Sublime.
The initial exhilarating launch into Section I soon falls a bit flat, though; in comparison to the rest of the track’s otherworldly atmosphere it seems uninspired. The bulk of the section comes across as a poor homage to funk-fusion. Keyboardist Moraz leads with a well-executed solo, but the music feels wooden and out-of-place. Yes, especially on this bizarre track, revels in juxtaposing the unexpected, and the surprise created by sudden shifts of rhythmic pulse and harmonic direction; this section runs counter to that impulse. The direct, jazz-inflected blues language here is simply too clear and stable, clichéd even; and the instrumental roles are too firmly divided into soloist, rhythm guitar, bass riff, and drums. Still, in spite of its weaknesses, this section fills an important trajectory in the evolutionary narrative, and the music recovers its magic as it moves into Section J.

2.8 Section J: The riff transfigured; the artifact returns (8:39 to end)

Rocketing upward through an accelerating unison riff from the Introduction (catalyst a, shown here in Fig. 2.14, bar 3), the tempo ramps up to an even more frantic version of riff b’s 5/4 ($q=160$). The pitches of the instruments are also pushed even higher, and the sense of the medium of sound itself speeding up is especially intense. Like a machine out of control, it audibly stretches the limits of the possible.
Figure 2.15. Section J: Riff b transfigured, with a new, heroic keyboard melody superimposed.
The gears of this musical engine seem to be on the verge of breaking at any moment; the technique of the performers barely holds the uneven riff together.\(^{25}\) As in “The Gates of Delirium”, the band’s performance itself becomes heroic. The heroic quality of this trembling machine is magnified by the high, brass-like keyboard licks, a triumphant fanfare above a trembling machine racing forward into the unknown.\(^{26}\) The keyboard’s dotted compound martial rhythms attempt to assert themselves against the already almost superhuman speed of the duple riff. Listeners are witnesses to the performers’ superhuman effort to strain against boundaries; this is a liminal music. It recalls another of Arthur C. Clarke’s pithy phrases about science fiction: “the only way of discovering the limits of what is possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.”\(^ {27}\)

![Figure 2.16. Heroic keyboard melody from Figure 2.15 re-barred.](image)

The rhythms of the synthesizer superimpose a new tempo over the riff in a 4:3 relationship – the 5/4 of riff \(b\) \((q=160)\) pitted against the slower \((q=120)\) pulse of the keyboard’s alternating bars of 9/8 and 6/8. In one sense, this is a culmination of the dramatic cuts and shifts between tempo that have been so much a part of ‘Sound Chaser’. There is a certain ‘resolution’ of these juxtapositions here too; not harmonic – the music remains in a static G major/mixolydian – but \textit{rhythmic}. (Figure 2.9.) The final descending C-B-A-A, C-B-A-A-G of the keyboard line slows

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\(^{25}\) Like the out-of-control computer in the narrative at the end of Emerson, Lake & Palmer’s “Karn Evil 9”, when a sequenced Moog speeds up wildly. See Macan, \textit{Endless Enigma}, 301-305.

\(^{26}\) Doubled by a warmer sound, probably Mellotron strings.

\(^{27}\) Prucher, \textit{Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction}, 22.
down; shifts from a triple to a duple meter; and finally aligns with the 5/4 meter of the riff’s rhythm. The alien-ness of 5/4 has become the stable foundation of this musical world, transmuting the strange into the familiar.

From this resolution, the music crashes into the second ‘cha-cha-cha’ vocal break. This time around, the collision into this musical artifact may be less surprising, but the strangeness of its harmony and timbre still embolden the music to make one final leap. The closing guitar-bass riff ends inconclusively on the third of the chord. It rings out loudly above a soft tonic note, and slowly fades: sailing on out further into the unexplored, beyond our horizon and experience.

…

Like the accelerated evolution of man at the end of the film 2001, the music of “Sound Chaser” combines an awe of the frontiers of space and knowledge with an optimistic faith in the future, creating a 1970’s experience of the Sublime. Each of these narratives – science fiction story and musical odyssey – create imaginative constructions of what it might mean to be human in the modern world. Each manifests an idealized belief in the ability of people and the unknown universe to create a paradise on earth, via the transformation of human biology through the wonders of technology.
CHAPTER 3: TO BE OVER

3.1 Overview

“Gates of Delirium” tied in neatly to the quest fantasy, but “Sound Chaser” – although clearly suggesting a narrative journey in its constant forward motion, and broadly suggestive of the often optimistic technological thrust of some of the science fiction of its time – had a less definite connection with the rhetoric of science fiction. One reason for this may be the lack of any suggestion of a science fiction narrative in the lyrics. Another reason may be the different ways in which the genres of quest fantasy and science fiction are prescriptive. The narrow genre of quest fantasy follows a fixed form, as the hero or heroes make their way from beginning to middle to end; science fiction as a whole does not. Science fiction is more premise than form: the premise that the fantastic be built on scientific and historical foundations. Is there a more concrete parallel between the fantastic in fiction, and more elusive musical narratives like “Sound Chaser”?

One interesting point of contact between fantastic literature and the music on Relayer may be the significance of genre. A unique aspect of fantastic literature is that a number of its writers have made a directed effort toward merging different genres of the fantastic, as well as fantastic with mimetic, fiction. Early examples of this can be found in the early 20th-century ‘weird fiction’ of writers like H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft’s stories move between the worlds of myth, horror, and science fiction. The 1960’s TV show “The Wild Wild West” merged Westerns with James Bond. Mervyn Peake, a younger contemporary of Tolkien, created a fantasy world in his Gormenghast trilogy which takes a strange turn into science fiction in the third book (Titus Alone, 1959): the protagonist Titus leaves his isolated kingdom and finds himself in a darkly changed world: a crumbling, future society of deluded scientists and death rays. More recent genre-blurrings
include steampunk – a re-imagination of a Victorian world as it might have developed in an alternative future – and a number of more ambiguous formulations like the “New Weird” or “slipstream” that switch between genre in often bizarre juxtapositions.

The shifts of genre throughout *Relayer* are remarkable, if at times awkward. In “Gates of Delirium”, there are a number of references to classical music, like the fanfares of Sections A and B and the Romantic textures of the closing Section F. There are also references to jazz in the free modal character and suspended harmonies of Section A and even in the ‘trading fours’ feel of the solos in Section C; to religious music in the hymn-like verse of Section F; and of course to rock in the song-like form of Section B and the psychedelic acid rock of Section D. “Sound Chaser” combines jazz-fusion (Sections A and I) with spy music (C) modal ‘space rock’ with avant-garde vocalizations (G into H); moves from quasi-funk grooves to rock riffs with heroic classical trumpet-like lines (Section J); and the timbres of psychedelia with the sound of the pedal steel guitar (Section G), an instrument strongly associated with country music.

Regarding sources of inspiration for their songs, Yes drummer Bill Bruford remembers:

> Jon [Anderson, Yes’s singer] would sit for hours in front of the TV with his guitar [...] His mind was like blotting paper to the point where plagiarism was almost a factor. The classics – Sibelius in particular – there were loads of classical references in Yes, but other things, too. Jon would bring these bits to the rehearsals and go, ‘Play this’ and give us the Bonanza theme – which later turned up as the first riff into ‘Yours Is No Disgrace’ [on The Yes Album]– and someone would go, ‘Hang on, Jon, that sounds a bit like Bonanza.’ He’d go, ‘No, it doesn’t! If you can’t come up with anything better play that!’ And an argument would start. And so we said, ‘Oh all right, we’ll play that then.’

What role might these genre references – intentional or not – play in Yes’ music? As rock and other popular genres built a wider palette of sounds, these could be used as a ‘library’ to draw from, either unconsciously or self-consciously. With music from around the world available in

recorded form – on record, radio, television, and film – it became easy to imitate these sounds through repeated listening, or become exposed to new instruments and new genres. Such genre references can add a crucial layer to the musical narrative. References can be produced through pitch, rhythm, or – a component that is particularly important to genre – timbre. Timbre plays a prominent role in “To Be Over” specifically and Yes’ music in general; more broadly, timbre is crucial throughout popular music. Having a distinctive ‘sound’ is largely what listeners use to quickly identify a performer or band – the fuzzed-out, wah-pedaled guitar of Hendrix; the hoarse richness of Janis Joplin’s voice; or the collective arrangements of The Beatles. Yes too had their own ‘sound’. Rick Wakeman, later the group’s keyboardist, remembers first hearing the band, and the important role that timbre played in their performance:

*In the days when every guitarist sounded like Clapton or Jeff Beck, Steve Howe was totally different. He used a little Fender amp miked up and got his own sound. Chris [Squire] too had his own bass sound which was basically the bass [frequencies] full on, the treble full on and all the middle cut out so it cut through everything. Then on came this diminutive five foot four singer who had a voice like a choir boy!*\(^2\)

In addition to the individual timbres that the members of the band brought to Yes, there were different performative elements too – like Howe’s quasi-country guitar licks and rhythms, Chris Squire’s unusually active bass lines, and the classical and jazz runs of keyboardist Patrick Moraz. Producers and audio engineers also played a crucial role in a band’s ‘sound’. One of the best-known examples is George Martin, who is sometimes anecdotally referred to as ‘the fifth Beatle’ because of his contributions to their arrangements and texture. Yes worked closely with sound engineer and producer Eddie Offord – both in the studio and, later, during live shows in an attempt to recreate their studio sound in concert.

\(^2\) Welch, *The Story Of Yes*, 113-114.
### Figure 3.1. Overview of "To Be Over"

Adum = adumbration in electric sitar; Vs = Verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>A. Introduction</th>
<th>B. Song 1</th>
<th>C. Guitar solo</th>
<th>D. Song 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>0:19</td>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>1:51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Area(s)</strong></td>
<td>E (pentatonic subset, no 3rd)</td>
<td>E mixolydian</td>
<td>D major (F# phrygian)</td>
<td>E major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descrip.</strong></td>
<td>Melody</td>
<td>Counter-melody and bassline. Adum 1 (0:33) Adum 2 (0:51)</td>
<td>Transition, falling scale figure vs. 1</td>
<td>Vs. 2 + coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead Inst</strong></td>
<td>Guitar/Keyboard</td>
<td>Guitar/Keyboard/Electric Sitar</td>
<td>Gtr/Kbd/Sitar</td>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>E. Synth solo</th>
<th>F. Bridge</th>
<th>G. Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>6:39</td>
<td>7:17</td>
<td>7:34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Area(s)</strong></td>
<td>E major</td>
<td>F# minor</td>
<td>E major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descrip.</strong></td>
<td>Keyboard solo, Section D riff</td>
<td><strong>Section A</strong>'s opening melody and sitar Adumbration melody in two rhythmic cycles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lead Inst</strong></td>
<td>Synthesizer</td>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More than just having one ‘sound’ though, Yes’ music is really composed of many different sounds. These sounds often have elements associated with multiple musical genres, and Yes uses them both within and outside of their usual contexts. In “To Be Over” some of the more unusual elements are an electric sitar in Section A, a harp-like glissando in Section B and pedal steel guitar (not unusual in Yes, but certainly in rock in general) in Section C.

The subtlety of genre appropriation in “To Be Over” – in pitch, rhythm, and timbre – resonates with a literary concept common in fantasy: defamiliarization, or ‘making the ordinary strange’. The converse of making the ordinary strange – making the strange ordinary – also acts as a crucial element of the fantastic. Farah Mendlesohn calls this the ‘casualization of the fantastic’, and associates both it and defamiliarization with a sub-genre she names ‘immersive fantasy’. Immersive fantasy is particularly relevant to “To Be Over”. It is relevant to a degree in “Sound Chaser”, too, in which the listener is forced to confront strangeness directly. “To Be Over”, by contrast, seduces the listener to enter its world, beginning from apparent ordinariness and drawing the listener gradually inward. It feels much more subtle and self-contained than the extravagance of the previous two tracks. The tempo is slow and remains more or less constant; phrasing is more balanced, the gestures are understated. There are almost no dramatic jump-cuts between distant harmonies like those in “Gates of Delirium” and “Sound Chaser”. “To Be Over” strikes a careful balance between making the ordinary strange, and the strange ordinary.

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4 Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 75.
Figure 3.2. Section A: Introduction, 0:00-1:50. Note the three sitar ‘adumbrations’
The introduction begins with a melody played on electric guitar and keyboard. There are no chords or drums, and the guitar’s notes swell in above the keyboard’s percussive, organ-like tone. It is an unusual texture, and the E F♯ B C♯ pentatonic subset gives the music an incomplete, suspended quality. The melody’s calm and even phrasing downplays the strangeness of this incompleteness, though; and upon its repeat, the melody is accompanied with a simple bass-line and a short electric guitar motive, quietly filling in the diatonic pitch space.

The Coral electric sitar that answers the melody’s second statement is the most obvious intrusion into the smooth simplicity of this opening. (Similar in appearance to a typical electric guitar, the Coral electric sitar was constructed to imitate the brighter, more pinched sound of the acoustic Indian sitar.) The gradually expanding role of the sitar melody/motive over the course of this introduction uses the same technique of development as heard in the unfolding intrusions in the Overture of “Gates of Delirium”. The sitar intrudes first of all by the ‘Otherness’ of its timbre; Otherness is also manifest in the uneven phrase groupings of eighth notes in the phrase. Uneven groupings are of course common in Yes, but here they stand out by their juxtaposition with the unusually square rhythms of the opening melody. The sitar’s groupings complicate both the meter – by creating, for example, an irregular 3/8 + 3/4 bar in an otherwise 4/4 landscape – and the relationship of accented versus unaccented beats, as the groupings of the melody shift against the strong beats outlined by the bass.

In spite of the change in both rhythmic affect and timbre, the sitar’s entries feel less like an interruption than a foreshadowing of an idea that has not yet been fully realized. For this reason I have labeled these moments as ‘adumbrations’ rather than ‘intrusions’. The fact that the sitar figure remains melodically centered in E major – using notes and a contour identical to the high
guitar counter-motive that precedes it—may largely be what makes it seem more like the other side of a conversation than a dramatic confrontation. Instead of the dramatic rhetoric of intrusion fantasy, then, “To Be Over” uses the more subtle rhetoric of immersive fantasy, ‘casualizing’ the fantastic Otherness of the sitar.\(^5\)

This casualized gesture extends further in *adumbration* 3, leading the music to modulate. The sitar repeats its opening motive transposed down a whole step: emphasizing the b7 (D) of the E major mode while leading the shift to a new scale. This new D major scale emphasizes both the third mode (F# phrygian) in its descending-scale accompaniment, and the second mode (E dorian) in the continued use of the opening melody at its original transposition.\(^6\) The music goes off the rails here; but unlike the harmonic wildness of Sound Chaser, this move towards F# proves to be only a brief tonicization, an exotic coloration of a ii chord. The descending accompaniment makes a final stop on B, suggesting a ii–V progression. This provides a clearly syntactical harmonic close to the exotic excursion of the sitar, as it moves back to the unambiguous E major verse of Section B.

One rhetorical tactic of casualization that Mendlesohn describes in immersive fantasy is “the creation of a vocabulary that claims meaning but reveals itself, if at all, only through context, 

\(^5\) The appropriation of the timbre and techniques of the sitar and drones from Indian classical music was by 1974 a Psychedelic archetype, or stereotype— one publicist coined the term ‘Raga Rock’ for the most elaborate borrowings. See Jonathan Bellman, “Indian Resonances in the British Invasion, 1965-1968,” *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 1 (1997): 116-136. The use of sitar in “To Be Over” is understated, and it does not attempt to evoke the technique of the sitar, although the sitar’s association in the West with mysticism certainly resonates with vocalist Jon Anderson’s often Eastern-tinged lyrics.

\(^6\) There is a strikingly similar use of modal shifts in Debussy’s “Les Collines d’Anacapri” identified in Tymoczko, “Scale Networks In Debussy,” *JMT* 48 no. 2, 244-250.
which builds the sense of story and world behind what we actually see.”⁷ Or in the case of Yes, “hear”. Such a tactic has particular relevance for music – since ‘meaning’ in music is highly contextual, indirect, and hard to pin down. This tactic of building vocabulary of an unrevealed or even inexplicable meaning certainly applies to “To Be Over”. The gradual addition of lines in guitar and bass, along with the directed adumbrations of the sitar, clarify the musical vocabulary over the course of the Introduction; and the modulatory diversion in adumbration 3 sets up the closing cadence of the Introduction much like the catalysts in “Gates of Delirium” set up the closing of that track’s Section B. All of these devices create a musical narrative that ‘feels’ meaningful, even if the rhetoric remains ‘unexplained’ in the end. The introduction’s strangeness is carefully contained by the ordinariness of its closing cadence, by the directed logic of its adumbrations, and by the continuity of its simple melody.

3.3 Section B: Song 1 (1:51-3:08)

The song form set up by the Introduction’s cadence continues this combination of straightforwardness and oddity. Section B’s ‘ordinary’ elements are its simple diatonic melody and a chord progression that is quintessentially rock – I, IV, and V with a brief shift to ♭VII, and a IV–V–IV turnaround; while its strangeness is in rhythmic intricacy. The unusual rhythmic language cleverly plays with the innately continuous cycle of verse-chorus song form and with the constancy of meter. The most obviously unusual rhythmic element of this section is the bass line. Its progress is independent of the rhythm of the rest of the band, moving in units of 3/8 against the 4/4 pulse of the drums, coming into agreement with the duple meter only during the closing bars of the verse. (This is similar to the 5/4 drum beat that shifts against the 4/4 groove of

⁷ Mendlesohn, Rhetorics of Fantasy, 83.
the band in Section B of “Sound Chaser”). The curious combination of nostalgically simple diatonicism\(^8\) with this understated rhythmic intricacy is unique; it animates its simplicity with a magical buoyancy reflected in the vocals’ opening: “We go sailing down the calming streams…”

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\(^8\) And a touch of nostalgic chromaticism in the rising parallel thirds in phrase c.

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Figure 3.3. First verse into the second verse of Section B, ‘To Be Over’, 1:50–2:35.
Even more than the rhythmic independence of the bass against the band’s meter, the vocals themselves embody this subtle elaboration of the strange within the ordinary. Underneath the melody’s smooth, regular surface lie asymmetrical phrase lengths and accents (Figure 3.3). (These are laid-back cousins of the rapid _recitativo_ meter shifts in the vocals of “Gates of Delirium” in Section B.) The most obvious asymmetry is in the first phrase _a_, as the melody accelerates in its second bar (‘down the calming streams’) and the drums drop one quarter-note from their otherwise steady backbeat to accommodate it. The middle 3-bar phrase falls into two sub-phrases (_b’–b”_) that run across the barlines. The final 3-bar phrase _c_ – a ‘mini-chorus’ – has a three part structure (_c’–c”–c’_); the final bar is a repeat of this phrase’s first ‘to be over.’ To my ears, the fact that this second ‘to be over’ does not have a consequent response makes the first bar of the second verse feel like the last bar of the first verse. This irregularity is used rhetorically too, at the end of the second verse in order to create a transition to Section C (first system of Figure 3.4). The transition breaks out of the verse’s overlapping cycle by completing its final unfinished phrase with a closing tag. It is in one sense highly ordinary, a closing half-cadence like the one heard at the end of the Introduction; it normalizes the verse. But within the context of the overlapping chorus-to-verse, it seems like a beautifully foreign utterance, intruding gently into the music’s reverie and initiating a modulation into the next section.

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9 The Beatles were very adept at this too. One of the more complex, even bizarre, examples is John Lennon’s “Happiness Is A Warm Gun” from _The White Album_.

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Figure 3.4. Transition into Section C.
3.4 Section C: Guitar Solo (3:09-4:29)

Entering Section C of “To Be Over” the pedal steel guitar\(^{10}\), which played a quiet accompanying role in Section B, comes to the surface. The pedal steel is most familiar in country music, and could even be considered a defining element of that genre. There are elements of country at the beginning of Section C not only from the timbre but from the mechanics of the instrument too: parallel sixth motion creates shifting triads where simple melodic lines slide smoothly by step. The pedal steel alternates with twangy electric guitar, which plays more blues-inflected but clearly country-styled breaks.

Combined with these elements of country are other, airy textures: synthesizers burble in the background, highlighting the entry of tremolo cymbals; the backbeat of the drums vanishes; and the music floats even higher above the earth, much like the Introduction of “Gates of Delirium”. These textures merge with the lightness of the pedal steel’s timbre and its upward swoops into its high registers, again evoking an unusual weightlessness. Elements of the ‘authentic,’ ‘ordinary,’ and ‘real’ music of country are fused with Yes’ own personalized, fantastic language.

The carefully constructed narrative arc of Sections A to C pulls us ever further into “To Be Over”. In Sections A and B of “Gates of Delirium” the music achieved something similar by following a well-known narrative archetype – the heroic quest – and by the formal use of dramatic quasi-classical, even Wagnerian, motivic associations. The sitar melody of the Introduction of “To Be Over” comes close to the formalized use of motive heard in “Gates of Delirium,” but the language here is a more gently evolving one of timbres, rhythms, and motives. In the drums, there is a shift from silence (Section A) to a spare backbeat of kick and snare only

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\(^{10}\) The pedal steel guitar is a type of electric guitar whose fingerboard lays flat on a stand; pedals and knee levers can be used to adjust the strings’ pitches. Instead of having frets the player uses a metal bar to slide between pitches.
(Section B) to a warm wash of cymbals with no groove at all in Section C. In the bass, there is a move from simple half notes in Section A (Figure 3.2), only occasionally inflected with groupings of 3, into a counter-argument in Section B of constant 3/8 groupings against the duple meter (Figure 3.3). In Section C the bass continues to play groupings of three-eighths against the regular two-bar phrasing of the pedal steel’s melody (Figure 3.4). Here, though, the bass follows a four-bar pattern, course-correcting its across-the-bar groupings with a set of 3+3+2 eighths in the fourth bar – both providing contrast and sustaining continuity with the previous section.

Evolution is felt in Section C’s formal unfolding as well (Figure 3.5). The alternation between melodic 16-bar forms and rhythmically-fluid blues-country breaks in Section C becomes more fuzzy and fluid in the second blues form; the guitar elaborates on the melody, introducing syncopation and blues inflections as it moves toward the final blues-country break. This shift from alternating languages to an evolving, interwoven one is an effective narrative strategy, and is also accompanied by the use of flexibly evolving motives in the guitar’s solo.

The use of flexible motives is particularly crucial in the transitions into and out of Section C as well. Both of these transitional passages use variations of motives heard within Section C. Much like the vocal phrases of Song 1, these instrumental sections shift phrasing and accent to construct a convincing change of scene from one section to another. This is somewhat analogous to the catalysts of “Gates of Delirium”; but the motives in “To Be Over” are not used as a formalized agent of change. These licks are used loosely as a thread to guide the rhetoric of the soloist, more improvised than composed. The transition from Section B (Figure 3.4) uses two licks later played in the following country-blues breaks. Played here on pedal steel, lick a sneaks in on a weak beat (rather than jumping in on a strong one, as during the later breaks). Lick b
shifts meter freely and spills into a second extended version of itself that falls into a measured slide, dissolving into the more balanced melody of Section C.

Figure 3.5. Evolving language of Section C.

The transition into Section D (Figure 3.6) is even more remarkable in the way it actually shifts, mid-phrase, from the opening of the third statement of Section C’s melody into the conclusion of the vocal verse that will be heard in its complete form later in Section D. The opening motive of Section C’s melody (at 3’21” in Figure 3.4) plays a central role in making this believable. It
shifts from a literal statement of this motive at the opening through several guises over the new chords of Section D’s verse, and then turns to paraphrase that verse’s melody. This motivic play adds to the richness and coherence of the transition. It makes the boundaries between C and D fuzzy, too. In fact, Section D has no beginning, *per se*; it comes gradually into being through the interplay of guitar and ensemble. Like the slow shift of a camera’s focus, this interplay makes the elaborate fantastical narrative more believable as Yes moves between musical places; and it deepens the listener’s relationship both to what came before and what comes after.

*Figure 3.6. Transition into Section D.*
This sense of gradual evolution of the musical language resonates with the descriptive richness of immersive fantasy in building a seemingly ‘meaningful’ world. Coupled with this apparently logical evolution, however, is an accumulation of detail that cannot be explained through reductive or teleological analysis. This can be heard in the juxtaposition of electric sitar with the square synthesizer melody in Section A, or Section B’s inclusion of a solitary harp-like glissando. It can be heard, too, in the sudden blues-country break of Section C, or even more sharply in the sudden ‘cha-cha-cha’ breaks of “Sound Chaser”. Yes’ music, like immersive fantasy, is filled with ‘loose ends’. These, too, can function as rhetorical devices. In immersive fantasy, Farah Mendlesohn writes, “the reader is positioned to a great degree in terms of what is not said, and this sense of the not said, can also be formulated as the not explained. It is this that builds the sense of depth.”\textsuperscript{11} Yes’ musical language creates a multivalent world that escapes a ‘logical’ realism by the fantastical elaboration of its musical narrative.

\textsuperscript{11} Mendlesohn, \textit{Rhetorics of Fantasy}, 83.
3.5 Sections D & E: Song 2 and Keyboard Solo (4:30-7:16)

Figure 3.7. First verse of Section D.
The elaboration of narrative in “To Be Over” is strongly paralleled by what Farah Mendlesohn refers to as the ‘baroquing’ of the world in an immersive fantasy:

[Baroquing] relies on the human facility to create meaning out of detail and meaning from sound… a baroqued world is a synesthetic world. ... [It] creates the intimate with artifice ... [like] the cold of Gormenghast (a castle that seems to hibernate but is nonetheless a living character in the tale [of Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast]). Because the detail of the baroque is connected with intimate attention and with the senses... it draws the reader in, narrowing the world to what has been described. It shuts out the distraction of reality with the noise of language ... The fantastic world overwhelms (if only for moments) the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal.12

In other words, by overwhelming us with excess – making image, touch, taste, sound, and the ‘musical’ cadence of language itself rich and florid even beyond the boundaries of what might be called good taste – the reader is enveloped in the fantastic world. Sections D and E seem to reach right into the heart of this technique. Throughout, both sections continue to use motivic transformations like those of Section C, and to develop the evolving textural landscapes heard in earlier sections. The densely layered verses of Section D are also reminiscent of the Baroque in its related, more literally musical, sense; in this case, the layering of musical material in elaborate counterpoint moving at different speeds (as in, say, Bach’s Chorale Fantasies). In the first verse, the vocals are slow, and the three vocal parts articulate complete or incomplete triads; chorale-like, they change on the downbeat of every bar or every two bars. The bass moves still more slowly, playing pedal tones under the vocal harmonies. Even more unusual is the carefully sculpted guitar countermelody that flows along with it, moving more rapidly against the slowly unfolding vocals and glacial bass line.

More than any other music on this album, this section and the following Section E construct the fantasy that we are listening to ‘classical’ music. Most interesting of all is that this section

12 Mendlesohn, Rhetorics of Fantasy, 79-80.
represents an *intersection* between the rock and the classical, where identities are blurred. This can be found in the interplay of rock riff with classical motive, and classical sequence with rock-like verse form. The countermelody in the guitar suggests a classical sequence, but it soon becomes irregular in its rhythmic and harmonic motion. The chords in the vocals could belong to a rock song, but the bass notes create unusual inversions, and the pedal tones of the first verse enrich the harmony in a very un-rock way. Although they do effectively establish a forward narrative, these inversions and pedals do not seem to prolong the tonic or the dominant or anything tonally functional, as they would in classical music. The chords shift modes in a way that is most reminiscent of rock; yet they move unpredictably between B mixolydian, B dorian, and A mixolydian modes in a way that is atypical for either genre. The music is neither here nor there – inhabiting a space between established identities.

Such ‘Otherness’ can be found in the phrasing too. The bars group into twos and sometimes threes, forming larger phrases of an uneven number of bars. The unaccented and accented syllables of the lyrics sometimes support and sometimes contradict the harmonic rhythm of the band, making the phrasing complexly ambiguous, again neither here nor there. This is a more subtle expression of the Otherness foregrounded in the uneven 5/4 meter of “Sound Chaser”.

There is an expansiveness too that spreads out through the music with each shift of focus. The richness of the Mellotron strings, the open vocal harmonies, and the stately drum groove leave room in the music, transporting the listener to a broad, fantastic expanse. In the second verse (Fig. 3.8), the focus shifts again in a manner similar to the move from Section C into D. The bass

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13 The quasi-fugal interplay of motives in the opening of Section A has a similar effect.
switches to doubling the guitar’s countermelody, bringing it to the fore. Although the motive remains the same here, it is clarified by being doubled in octaves, and by the disappearance of the low pedal tones. There is a move from broad harmonies toward tight counterpoint.

![Music notation]

*Figure 3.8. Second verse of Section D. Drums and Mellotron strings omitted from figure.*

This feeling of ‘shifting focus’ continues into Section E (Figure 3.9). Instead of moving toward a more expansive view, however, the music now zooms in: as the guitar countermelody repeats again and fragments, Mellotron strings and open vocal harmonies fade away. This allows each of the four instruments to become closer in the mix – the drums, the simple measure-by-measure bass lines, the regular beat-to-beat motive of the guitar, and the *quasi*-wind-instrument, square-wave heavy synthesizer solo. It feels almost claustrophobic after Section D’s expansiveness, and creates an intimate, small-room, ‘chamber music’ atmosphere.
This could almost be a chamber work, a 20th-century Baroque soloist above an elaborated continuo part in a regular, on-the-beat triple meter; but there are too many elements that estrange the music from this suggestion. There is an active drum part, for one thing; the rapid, almost frantic hi-hat, and heavy triplets on the toms after the first chorus gives the seriousness of this Baroque reference an almost campy affect. The whole band hits offbeat accents and drops a beat from one of its bars before each chorus, upsetting the normality of the meter. The solo keyboard and the guitar’s motive a – a motive taken straight from its countermelody in Section D (in
electric guitar, Figures 3.7 and 3.8) – suggest Baroque figuration through trills, compound-melody lines, and rapid scale passages, but their harmonic choices are wayward.

Like a populist version of Stravinsky’s appropriation of Pulcinella, the instrumentalists incorporate their own voices into an older Baroque framework. The apparent descending 6-5 sequence suggested by the guitar motive is not really harmonic, but a free melodic elaboration. Such elaborations, which often create unusual ‘color tones’ over the basic harmonies, are even more apparent in the keyboard solo.

![Figure 3.10. Second chorus of Section E keyboard solo into Section F Bridge.](image)

The most striking moment is the high C# in the solo’s second chorus (Figure 3.10); led by a rapid scalar ascent, the keyboard hits the C# on a downbeat as an upper neighbor over a G#
minor chord. Moraz plays with this note non-harmonic tone, changing something that could be explained away as an accented upper neighbor into an extravagant gesture. It emphasizes the strangeness of a Baroque combined with elements of 1970’s rock; the high C# digs in and bends slowly downwards over several beats, in a move closer to a stretched-out, bent blues note than an upper neighbor.

Harmonically the music seems to follow the form of verse-chorus songs rather than the forward directed syntax of classical instrumental music; its harmonic pattern cycles back upon itself. Upon repeat however, there are in fact subtle differences. This recalls the idea of elision that was heard in Song 1; but the elisions and insertions in Section E occur in the middle of the progression, creating a more forward directed harmonic narrative that supports the large-scale arc of the keyboard solo. It is rock’s lack of established harmonic syntax that makes this possible; these wayward harmonic elisions create a kind of harmonic narrative not found in classical music (before the 20th century at least).

Figure 3.11. Elisions and insertions in choruses 1 and 2 of the Section E keyboard solo.
Section E draws upon threads that have been developed throughout the narrative of “To Be Over”, building on and magnifying its blend of normality and oddity as it creates a musical world that straddles the line between reality and fantasy. It uses the elisions of Section B, the developing motives that emerge in Section C, and the quasi-Baroque language of Section D. Section E continues enriching the vocabulary of the world of “To Be Over”, constructing new possible meanings and references for its fantastical language.

3.6 Sections F & G: Bridge and Coda (7:17 to end)

The final sections of “To Be Over” continue to enrich the Baroqued intimacy of the music’s language. Section F is brief; it is really a bridge between the claustrophobic intricacy of Section E and the joyously diatonic coda of Section G (Figure 3.12). Section F resumes the big, open, orchestral texture of Section D with the return of Mellotron strings and full vocal harmonies. Yet the grandiosities is undercut by the oddly jarring, spastic guitar rhythms that accompany this
smooth progression, a jaggedness that feels closer to punk than the grandness often associated with progressive rock. The second of the two vocal phrases drops a beat from its last bars and modulates back to the track’s opening key of E major, eliding into Section G.

Example 3.13. Coda (Section G) of “To Be Over.” The words here are incomprehensible, and are not listed in the album’s liner notes.

The rhythmic intricacy suffused within the language of “To Be Over” rises to the surface and blooms in Section G (Figure 3.13). The musical materials from the Introduction return, the main melody and the more exotic sitar lines layered in an intricate round. The square opening melody is heard in the voice, keyboard, and acoustic guitar; and the uneven motive of the electric sitar’s adumbrations returns as a fully developed melody in the electric sitar and electric guitar. This juxtaposition produces beautifully interlocking and shifting phrasing; each entry of the opening
melody’s regular rhythms is offset by an eighth-note, so that with each repetition it begins one eighth-note later against the uneven syncopations of the steady cycle of thirty eighth-notes in the electric sitar phrase.

Within a harmonious sphere of E diatonic major, the two melodies coexist on separate rhythmic planes. There is a clear return to the home key, and also a resolution of the initial contrasting melodies – similar to the resolution of contrasting character and keys in a symphonic recapitulation. In some senses, Yes has appropriated the heroic tradition that was represented by Beethoven’s style and later Romantic developments.\(^\text{15}\) Similar to their rehabilitation of the heroic quest in “Gates of Delirium”, in “To Be Over” Yes appropriates elements of the old-fashioned heroic narrative of Sonata form. Unlike the Classical synthesis of the Enlightenment, though, Yes’ homecoming is a little messier: more pluralistic, more open, and less rationally contained by a syntactical musical language. The opening melody now has words added in the voice, incomprehensible but vaguely hopeful in their chanting brightness. The guitar harmonizes the electric sitar with free diatonic and pentatonic counterpoint, colliding joyfully on minor sevenths and traveling in parallel fifths. In “To Be Over” – similar to the conclusion of “Sound Chaser” – the original character of the Other is perceived to occupy the position of ‘Normal,’ the opening melody shifting against the sitar’s ground. Even more than that, the opening normal melody of Section A – now moving on and off the beat, turned from its regular 4/4 meter – has been forever altered by its experience of the Other. The categories of the Strange and the Ordinary have become blurred and indistinct.

\(^{15}\) See Scott Burnham’s *Beethoven Hero* for a discussion of this heroic style in its cultural and musical context, as well as Edward Macan’s discussion of the heroic and nineteenth-century Romanticism in progressive rock in the context of Emerson, Lake, and Palmer in *Endless Enigma*. 123
Conclusion

There is at times something almost painfully earnest in the grand gestures of Yes’ music; listening to the quasi-eighteenth century rhythms of the Section E keyboard solo of “To Be Over” recalls a scene from the rock mockumentary *Spinal Tap* in which the band quotes the Baroque composer Boccherini during a concert in an awkward attempt at musical sophistication. For some, Section E may be a little too obvious in its Baroque reference; but it draws attention to the fine line that Yes treads between – to turn to *Spinal Tap* again – ‘clever and stupid’. The surface references to trills and sequences combined with flashy hi-hat and drums can bring some to thrill at Yes’ audacity while others may cringe at their earnest absurdity. In the end, where exactly the line is comes down, at least in part, to our personal taste and cultural baggage, and Yes may fall on either side.

I have argued that Yes is at its most effective in incorporating Classical music at the level of the idea; in borrowing its grand narrative scope and glorification of a ‘personal’ language. The quasi-narrative rhetoric that these chapters have outlined may sometimes incorporate Classical surface elements, but when used most effectively such surface references are transformed into Yes’ personal collective language – as is true with Yes’ invocation of everything from TV and film music to country music to acid rock to jazz-fusion.

The main question raised by this dissertation has been whether the fantasy and science fiction imagery in the visuals and lyrics of popular music has any connection to the musical language – the pitches, the rhythms, the textures, and genre. In the case of Yes, the answer has to be…yes. These three chapters suggest significant parallels between this music and epic fantasy form; the broad themes of science fiction; and more subtle rhetorical techniques.
In spite of the obvious connection to the heroic narratives of 19th-century concert music, the music on *Relayer* is very much a product of its time. Yes was a bunch of young musicians trying to make sense of a confusing world – socially, culturally, politically, and musically. Its members took an old musical idea from Western culture and ran with it, picking up a range of musical genres along the way. It mirrored ideas from the popular fantasy and science fiction of the time, combining a nostalgic Romantic idealism with an optimistic faith in the power of technology and progress. Like John Lennon said in “Revolution 1”: “We all want to change the world.” Since the advent of widespread commercial recording, popular music has become an important element of youth expression; and the rock band has always been a symbol of this heroic, transformative power. Yes and other adventurous experimental bands continued this tradition by reframing what was extra-ordinary in rock.

Describing 1971’s *Fragile*, Yes keyboardist Rick Wakeman encapsulated the band’s attitude:

> The thing we had done on Fragile was break a lot of rules. We’d broken a lot of rules [...] with having lots of different moods, tempos, time changes, everything you shouldn’t do on a rock record, we did.\(^{16}\)

The music on *Relayer* continues to break rules, and to take chances. It tries to extend its reach, and sometimes, perhaps, it fails. But when it fails, it fails heroically. There is something of paradox in this music: intricate composition by committee; individuality and collective effort; classical art pretensions and rock n’ roll roots. Its awkwardness highlights the difficulty of understanding the Other – other musical genres, other cultures, or even other members of the band – at the same time that the music celebrates synthesis. The music makes palpable the heroic struggle of the band to transform themselves and their listeners.

\(^{16}\) Morse, *Yesstories*, 35-36.
And the transformative power of this music is real. For many listeners at the time and since – myself included – Yes’ audacious and even uncomfortably absurd juxtapositions across genres have been liberating. This music has been liberating for me as a composer, too. Like many composers of recent generations, I grew up playing in rock bands, jazz groups, and classical ensembles. I still clearly remember, at the age of nineteen, listening to Relayer almost obsessively (and probably driving my roommate and neighbors crazy). That same year, I took a jazz tune I had written in high school, re-arranged it for violin, cello, and piano, and stretched it to twenty minutes in length to create my first notated composition. The connection between my interest in Relayer and my own compositional impulses is probably more than coincidence. Other composers seem to have had related experiences. Guitarist-composer Fred Frith played in the experimental British rock group Henry Cow in the 1970’s. Erkki-Sven Tüür began his composing career by writing for his rock group In Spe, in part inspired by the progressive band King Crimson. Composer and theorist Dmitri Tymoczko became interested in classical music, at least in part, through his exposure to progressive rock. Steve Mackey was a rock electric guitarist before becoming a composer, and his band sometimes played covers of music from Yes’ album Tales from the Topographic Oceans.

At a time when most concert music was still in the grip of modernism – the experimental rock-like ensembles of the likes of Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich being notable exceptions – Yes and other adventurous rock pointed another way forward for the concert music world. It suggested how to make music that was both complex and emotionally direct; music that spoke the language of the second half of the twentieth century while still acknowledging the past; music that used the new modal language of rock to intimate a new kind of rich, narrative tonality.
Progressive and experimental rock, of course, continued to resonate in the popular music world as well. After the militant back-to-roots blip of punk’s Year Zero, bands like Public Image Ltd. (PIL) continued experimenting with new forms and genre mash-ups, albeit with a new set of attitudes and genre references. Before he became PIL’s guitarist, the young Keith Levene was a dedicated Yes fan. There exists an underground progressive movement too, with a dedicated audience, which continues to the present day. What was particularly unusual about Yes and similar British bands in the 1970’s was that their music was not only experimental but immensely popular in the narrow sense of that word, briefly bringing the weird into the mainstream. That albums like Yes’ Tales From The Topographic Oceans and Close To The Edge – with their 20-minute wandering oddyseys – could be number one selling albums, even if only briefly, is a special moment in popular music history.

Yes’ music also continues a broader tradition that has long played a part of being creative in the West (and maybe anywhere, for that matter) – building bridges between the inescapable real and the both compelling and frightening realm of the unknown. Yes foregrounds this in the heroic struggle of lightness and darkness, and in the triumph of the Strange over the Tyranny Of The Ordinary. Part of what draws me to this music is what draws me to fantasy and science fiction, too – the heroic survival of humanity in the face of overwhelming odds, and the transformative power of technology to make us more than our fragile selves. At their core, these works provide an idealized creative space where we can come to terms with, and even celebrate, the strangeness of our world.

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APPENDIX A
A KEY TO DRUM NOTATION IN THE TRANSCRIPTIONS
BIBLIOGRAPHY


LOST IN TRANSLATION
AND
STRIPES WITH PLAID

MICHAEL EARLY

A DISSERTATION
PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY
OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY IN
CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

RECOMMENDED FOR ACCEPTANCE
BY THE PROGRAM IN
MUSIC (COMPOSITION)

ADVISOR: STEVEN MACKEY

JUNE 2013

THESE COMPOSITIONS AND THE ESSAY
ROCK MUSIC AND THE LANGUAGE OF FANTASY:
THE MUSIC OF YES’ RELAYER
TOGETHER CONSTITUTE THIS DISSERTATION
Lost In Translation
for violin and electric guitar

Michael Early
written for X10

dedicated to Angela Early and
to creative misunderstandings

duration: 13'

I composed *Lost In Translation* while in the middle of writing the essay component of my dissertation. I was thinking a lot about music that could construct something 'fantastic' - both 'of-this-world' and 'out-of-this-world'; borrowing from both notated concert music and vernacular non-notated music. The notion of the 'real' or 'authentic' or 'culturally relevant' in any kind of music is a constantly evolving construction, and I've found I feel more comfortable ahead, or behind, or to the sides of that wave, riding less-turbulent currents.

As I composed, I also found myself thinking a lot about the role of the 'composer' in concert music versus the 'composer' of popular music. By the 1960's, performers of popular music began creating their own songs, performing material that they composed. In concert music at around the same time, composers like Steve Reich and Terry Riley began to cross that boundary too, from the other direction. They formed 'bands' to play the new music they were writing.

So I am far from the first to think about these things; but *Lost In Translation* (as well as its sister piece, *Stripes with Plaid*) is my own musical effort to wrestle with these questions. They were the first pieces I wrote for my own 'band', X10; a very small group composed of violin - played by Angela Early - and guitar - played by me.

The choice of the guitar felt appropriate for me, because although I am trained as a pianist, the guitar was an instrument I taught myself while playing in rock bands and writing songs. My relationship with it is more 'instinctive' and more vernacular; I feel able to reach a part of my creative self that sometimes gets buried when I sit down at the piano. It's also more of a challenge for me to translate what I play into notation; forcing me to wrestle with my ideas in a new way. And, it's a lot of fun.

At the guitar, as both performer and composer, I feel more comfortable with contemporary tonality, a language born out of popular music and concert music, out of the past and the present; a hybrid language with many dialects that we are all learning to speak. It is a messy language, rich with possibility; and by carrying this hybridity into the concert hall, it opens up new horizons for both the extended structures of concert music, and the gestures and expressions of vernacular music.
1. glitterweeks

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{Violin} \\
\text{Electric Guitar}
\end{array} \]

\( q = 132 \)

\( \text{in tempo} \)
all downstrokes; mute strings with left hand, moving up and down neck freely to vary overtones
2. honig mond

\[ \frac{q}{138} \]

Hold for 8-12 beats

Repeat until next cell at \( M \) (guitar cues violin at \( M \))

Improvise a sustained texture using these notes; use looping pedal to continue it (softly) throughout piece

Repeat until \( N \) (guitar cues violin at \( N \))

Cell gradually fades out

**Violin**
Hold for 8-12 beats

Repeat until Q

For 18 bars, until S, alternate cells freely, repeating each cell 1-3 times

Hold for 8-12 beats

Sul pont.
Stripes with Plaid
for violin, electric guitar, and orchestra

Michael Early
Some pieces of music are like a concise piece of poetry – a sonnet or a haiku. They speak precisely, like a snapshot of one moment in time. Others are like a novel, with many characters presenting multiple points-of-view. 

*Stripes With Plaid* is more like a novel. Here are some of its back-stories.

**November 2011.** I play my guitar, and jot down ideas for a new piece for violin, electric guitar, and orchestra. I have just finished writing my dissertation, a comparison of rhetoric in fantasy and science fiction literature with the music heard on the 1974 album *Relayer* by the British progressive rock band, Yes. In particular, I am thinking a lot about one of the tracks, “Sound Chaser,” which seems to mix Science Fiction futurism with New Age spirituality in a way that often seems incomprehensible to me; but it fascinates me.

**December 2011.** I come across artist Ellen Gallagher’s collage *Abu Simbel* on display at the Cornell University art museum. A cutout UFO blasts a doctored photogravure of the ancient Nubian monument Abu Simbel with cottony pink rays of death, as dozens of cut-and-pasted heads roll down the monument in comical terror. It is both hilarious and horrifying. Although I feel sure that much of the picture’s cultural reference is beyond my conscious grasp, it resonates with something I am working through in my musical sketches – but I can’t quite put my finger on it.

**January 2012.** I am searching my head for a title for the finished work. Science Fiction seems to be central to the juxtapositions of rhythmic and color shifts that rocket around its musical space. “Maybe a title that ties into astronomy?” I suggest to Aelita. Aelita counters with an apocryphal quote attributed to Einstein, which is making rounds on the Internet: “Once you can accept the universe as being something expanding into an infinite nothing which is something, wearing stripes with plaid is easy.”
Solo Violin: The solo violinist may find it preferable to have a transducer or bridge pickup, sent to an amplifier which (s)he can adjust as needed. This may be especially helpful for sections F through H. A digital delay pedal can also be used during sections G and H as marked, if available, to help match the resonance of the electric guitar in these sections.

Electric Guitar: The guitarist will need the following effects: (1) fuzz/distortion; (2) digital delay; (3) a pitch shifter. These should be used where indicated in the part/score. The pitch shifter (shifting one octave up) is required for section G. If this is not available, the notes can be also be played by bending, if the guitar has enough frets. As a last resort, the unavailable notes may be transposed down an octave.

Instrumentation:

2 Flutes (2. doubling Piccolo)
2 Oboes
2 Clarinets in Bb
2 Bassoons

2 Horns in F
2 Trumpets (in C)
2 Trombones
Tuba
Timpani

Solo Violin
Electric Guitar
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Violoncello
Double Bass
Timpani are required for the part.
Timpani are first tuned to:

with distortion

for Damien Mahiet and the Denison University Orchestra

Stripes with Plaid

Michael Early
increase amplification as needed, to be clearly heard over tutti orchestra (through the end of letter H)
subtle delay may be used during this section as well, if desired