ROBERT FRIPP

FROM CRIMSON KING TO CRAFTY MASTER

by Eric Tamm

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments

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Preface

This book is not a biography of Robert Fripp. I know next to nothing about the man's personal life, and even if I did would not be particularly inclined to write about it. This is a book about music and ideas. It is a book about how a certain definition of music and a certain approach to the making of music have in recent years crystallized around the public figure of a certain individual guitarist.

To put this in a different way, this is book more about art than about the artist. The late Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, curator of Indian art at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, criticized the modern sensibility: "Our conception of art as essentially the expression of a personality, our whole view of genius, our impertinent curiosities about the artist's private life, all these things are the products of a perverted individualism and prevent our understanding of the nature of ... art." As for "genius," a term which, as we shall see, Fripp has idiosyncratically incorporated into his own systematic writings on the act of music, Coomaraswamy wrote: "No man, considered as So-and-so, can *be* a genius: but all men *have* a genius, to be served or disobeyed at their own peril." *(Coomaraswamy, 38-9)*

In the current artistic climate we are obsessed with the artist's personality. The artist, let alone the pop star, is not an ordinary human being or humble craftsman, but a living myth. We have an insatiable appetite for the dirt dished out on our gods and heroes by the media. Supermarket tabloids are only the most colorful and obvious examples of a point of view that reaches even into academic musicology, as enterprising scholars publish posthumous psychoanalyses of famous composers. What sort of affair did Andrew Wyeth really have with Helga? What is Elizabeth Taylor's latest diet? Where does Madonna get her hair waxed, and exactly what parts of her body does she submit to the treatment? The reader should not expect to find out in these pages whether Robert Fripp gets his hair waxed, and from exactly what parts of his body. Such few indiscretions as may exist herein come from previously published interviews with Fripp himself, who tends to use them as comic relief from his otherwise rather serious (if not solemn) agenda.

I must ultimately beg the question of how much, or in what ways, our appreciation of music is governed by the "facts of life" surrounding its creation, creators, and sensitive participants. Coomaraswamy represents an austere, lofty view, but even he did not believe art could be understood in a vacuum – that is, in ignorance of the circumstances and culture that surrounded the making of works of art; on the contrary, he took it as his mission to educate the museum-going public to the point where they could have some inkling of the cosmic, archetypal forces which motivated medieval and Oriental artisans to produce the artifacts they did.

In this book I attempt to construct a conceptual and historical context for the understanding of Robert Fripp's music. There is no way this book, in and of itself, will enable the reader to understand *the music itself*. To understand the music you have to hear it (preferably live), experience it firsthand; you have to learn how to listen to it, and this can take time – a lot of time. Perhaps my words can take the reader to the brink of musical understanding but no further: they can't make you take the actual leap, as you poise yourself over the Kierkegaardian abyss. You have to jump yourself.

While less than eager to discuss his private life publicly, over the years Fripp himself has made known his thoughts on music and other topics in a variety of written media; I have drawn on these sources extensively in my research. In addition to the many interviews that have

appeared in the rock press, he has supplied informative if elusive liner notes for a number of his records (notably *The Young Person's Guide to King Crimson*, *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners*, *Frippertronics/Let the Power Fall*, and *The League of Crafty Guitarists Live!*). In the early 1980s Fripp worked as a contributing editor for "Musician, Player and Listener" magazine, writing an extended series of essays on music, the music industry, and aspects of his own work. In more recent years he has begun to publish a series of "Guitar Craft Monographs" which relate to his current teaching practices, this material is echoed in his current column in "Guitar Player."

What I offer in this book is an (I think) objective summary and exposition of Fripp's major ideas as culled from the above sources; a critical and occasionally analytical account of his recorded music (conditioned, certainly, by the totality of my own musical experience and education, as well as by my individual taste); a representative sampling of the published commentary on Fripp by other critics; a personal account of my experience as one of Fripp's Guitar Craft students; and an evaluation of the meaning of the body of his work from such perspective as I have on music history as an historian and on music as a musician.

I first heard Robert Fripp's music in 1969, when I was fourteen and attending boarding school at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. As I recall, I bought King Crimson's first record, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, because of its cover: anything with a sleeve that bizarre, I figured, had to be heavy. And, strangely enough, it was: even through my tiny, tinny plastic/leatherette monaural record player, "21st Century Schizoid Man" screamed like a banshee, "Epitaph" echoed like a funeral dirge to a whole technological way of life. Parts of "Moonchild" on Side B I could have done without, and in fact I usually only played the album's A side, but in this music I felt I had made a deep discovery – a discovery poignantly heightened by the fact that none of my friends seemed to grasp what the big deal about King Crimson was. I taught myself "Epitaph" by ear, and remember playing and singing it solemnly and mournfully at the piano in my parents' house in Rhode Island.

Somehow (those were scattered days) I missed out completely on Crimson's second album, *In the Wake of Poseidon*. I ordered their third, *Lizard*, through a record club, and even though by now I had an actual stereo system, the music sounded strangely disjointed to me, like an odd attempt at a fusion of styles that I could not quite make to gel in my mind. I was irritated by most of it, enthralled by brief moments. At the age of sixteen, my musical horizons were broad enough, ranging from be-bop to Beatles and from Beethoven symphonies to *Switched-on Bach*, but of *Lizard* I could make neither head nor tail, though I uneasily suspected the fault was at least partially my own.

I then forgot about King Crimson for several years. The next time the band's unusual appellation came up in my life was around 1978, when my best friend in college, Chris Roberts, a bass player and composer, turned out to have a passion for Fripp and Crimson. To my astonishment, Chris could play with facility all kinds of torturously difficult Crimson guitar and bass licks, and to my chagrin, he was always trying to get me to listen to the trilogy the group put out before disbanding in 1974: *Larks' Tongues in Aspic*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *Red*. Although at the time I was enthusiastically jamming and occasionally playing gigs with a coterie of Los Angeles new wave musicians, my interests were basically elsewhere: in the twentieth-century classical tradition of Mahler, Debussy, Stravinsky, and Bartok, which I was studying in school as part of my training to be a composer, naively – I saw little connection between such pursuits and Fripp.

By 1985 I had worked my way into candidacy for the Ph.D. in musicology at the University of California, Berkeley, and it gradually began to dawn on me that I had to write this monster thing called a doctoral dissertation, and that I had to come up with something to write about. Traditional subjects such as the history of the sixteenth-century motet or analysis of Beethoven's sketchbooks failed to galvanize my attention. I loved the classical tradition but still had a visceral passion for rock and roll. Casting about for topics, I zeroed in on the "progressive rock" of the 1970s, a music in which the head of classical sophistication was grafted Frankenstein-like onto the erotic body of rock. My nervous advisers said the topic of progressive rock as a whole was too broad and that I should pick a single group. From my vantage point at that instant in time, it seemed that King Crimson was an ideal choice: there had always been something challengingly different about their style – a rough-hewn, almost nasty quality that belied the obvious intelligence and musical awareness with which the music was put together and dispatched.

So I set about researching Fripp and Crimson, getting all the albums, finding and reading all the reviews and interviews, immersing myself in the music. It became clear that although it would not be precisely true to say that Fripp "was" King Crimson or that King Crimson "was" Fripp, he was nevertheless the sole common denominator throughout the band's many incarnations, and had been involved in a variety of projects having nothing to do with King Crimson per se. Fripp himself – not King Crimson – became the focal point of my research.

The more I studied, the more information I amassed, the more ideal my choice of topic seemed to be. Here was a guy – Robert Fripp – who was not only undeniably a guitar virtuoso and a creator of new, hybrid, innovative musical languages, but who had incisive, brilliant things to say about the music-making process, who cut through all the absurd hype of the music industry and set forth his own defiant yet coherent program for bringing sanity and art – existentially, not historically defined – into the rock marketplace.

I wrote up a fifty-four page "Dissertation Prospectus" for my U.C. Berkeley committee; they gave me a tentative go-ahead. I had learned that Fripp was currently conducting a series of residential guitar seminars in West Virginia under the evocative but enigmatic title "Guitar Craft." On October 20, 1985, I wrote him a formal letter to tell him about my dissertation project, and to ask whether I could interview him at some point. On November 1, he called me at seven in the morning (California time) to inform me that he had deep reservations about my project: for instance, he wished to distance himself as far as possible from the movement known as "progressive rock." He said, "If you want to know what I do, come to a Guitar Craft seminar."

So I did. I attended Guitar Craft XII at Claymont Court near Charles Town, West Virginia, between February 17 and February 22, 1986. My experience at the seminar is documented more fully in Chapter 10 of this book. In brief, it was the most stimulating week of my musical life, and Fripp turned out to be the most effective teacher with whom I have ever had the privilege of studying music. Fripp and his team presented ideas – not just vague theoretical concepts, but physical, practical, concrete principles and exercises – that four years later are still presenting challenges and inspiration to me in my own musical practice. Guitar Craft – which, prior to experiencing the discipline for myself had meant little to me other than an interesting concept glimpsed through a couple of scattered references – seemed to be an obvious and logical yet simultaneously unexpected and wondrous development in the saga of Robert Fripp. In spite of the riches he had contributed to the development of the practice of music and to musical vocabulary before 1985, his previous work seemed to pale in comparison with what the man was now putting forward – not merely a distinctive rock guitar style or an abstract philosophy of dealing with the music industry, but a whole approach to music's very essence, a style of life.

Fripp, however, never warmed to the idea of my writing about him or his work. In several conversations during the course of the Guitar Craft seminar he gently but firmly endeavored to dissuade me from carrying out my project. Reading over today the prospectus I showed him then, I am struck by how dry and analytically vacuous parts of it sound; I was, after all, trying hard to make the whole thing acceptable to my advisors at Berkeley – bastion of traditional musicology – and probably went somewhat overboard in the direction of formality and irrelevant minutiae. My impression at the time was that Fripp based his disinclination to being written about by a budding musicologist on a number of factors, including: a general mistrust of the written word (which is related to his mistrust of music notation); his strong feeling that what he has to offer is best presented in person, and perhaps can only be presented in person; the fact that I had not been there with him throughout his career; and the fact that writers in the popular music press have often said small, totally uncomprehending things about him and his music. Fripp seemed to want total control over what he and Guitar Craft were putting out to the world – a control which extended to a measure of actual secrecy concerning specific guitar exercises and such things as his "new standard tuning" (which he has since publicly revealed). *(Drozdowski 1989, 34)* I also got the feeling, which may or may not have been a product of my imagination, that Fripp was deliberately setting a stumbling block in my path, the way a Zen master might ask a student to perform some incomprehensible action with a hidden lesson.

Fripp must have intuited a strong sense of my dilemma, for in one conversation he suggested to me an alternative course of action: that I research and write about Brian Eno instead. At the Guitar Craft seminar itself, I vacillated and told Fripp I would write him a letter. Back in Berkeley, after a week or two of deliberation, I gave up on the idea of writing about Fripp, wrote to him of my decision, and set about tackling Eno. (The results of that study may be seen in my book *Brian Eno: His Music and the Vertical Color of Sound.*) On seeing the state I was in because Fripp had refused to "cooperate," my primary dissertation adviser, Professor Philip Brett, said, "Well, Eric, that's one of the advantages of doing *historical* musicology; it's much easier to wait until they're dead."

But I never forgot about Fripp. He called me graciously a month or two later to ask how I was doing on my Eno research; synchronistically, the moment the phone rang I was engaged in an analysis of one of his recorded collaborations with Eno, *No Pussyfooting*. We exchanged a few letters. I got my doctorate in May, 1987 and carried on, teaching music at Bay Area universities. My half-done Fripp research sat idle around the house in neatly organized filing cabinet drawers and three-by-five index card boxes. The idea of writing a book about his work gnawed at me. In spite of his hesitancy, I felt that what Fripp represented – a certain way of approaching music, a way that through my experience teaching and studying in music departments of established universities I have seen to be neglected if not completely undreamed-of – was important and vital enough to addressed in the form of a book. On attending a performance by the League of Crafty Guitarists in San Francisco in January 1989, my vacillation was transformed into determination: here was music that really kicked ass, in such a polite way! It demanded to be chronicled. A little voice spake into mine ear, saying, "Go ahead, *write* the dang thing! If you don't do this, someone else will sooner or later, and chances are it'll be someone less sensitive to the subject, less versed in the critical issues involved."

Hence the book that you hold in your hands now. Since in the end I wrote this as a book (not as a dissertation), I have been able to make it a more personal statement, unconstrained by the demands of academic musicological style. Furthermore, I ultimately concluded that if Fripp approved of the book beforehand, it probably wouldn't be worth writing. There is always something suspicious about an "authorized" biography (even though this is not a biography).

Fripp's own words and thoughts are available to all who would seek them out – in the existing interviews, liner notes, articles, and Guitar Craft monographs. Perhaps he feels it would have been unseemly for him to collaborate actively on an outsider's book about his work.

As will become clear in the following pages, there are areas of music on which Fripp and I cannot see eye-to-eye – for instance, the real meaning of the Western classical written music tradition. Like any two contemporary musicians, we each have different spheres of musical experience: when any two musicians meet, there will be areas of recognizance, affirmation, and agreement, just as surely as there will be areas of xenophobia, negative judgement, and disagreement.

I am all too aware of the element of subjectivity. Perhaps the reader may take this as a forewarning: ultimately – as if it needed to be stressed – I speak not for Robert Fripp but for myself.

Note

In critiquing the music of Fripp's albums (both King Crimson and non- King Crimson) I have adopted a variety of formats. I treat some albums on a song-by-song basis. Others I discuss in more general terms, with special attention to chosen pieces deemed particularly representative. Still others, such as the 1980s King Crimson trilogy *Discipline/Beat/Three of a Perfect Pair*, seemed to call for an approach acknowledging their essential stylistic unity. It is my hope that the reader will not be distracted by this pluralism of critical methods, but rather will be able to accept what is offered herein as the residue of one writer's prolonged struggle to come to terms with a plurality of musical styles – and as an indication of his considered disinclination to artificially systematize a personal encounter with a body of work – Fripp's – so remarkable for its very variety.

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Chapter One: The Man, the Musician

Who knows where the time goes?

– *Sandy Denny*

Robert Fripp the Person(s)

Robert Fripp (b. May 1946, Dorset, England) – band leader, recording artist, rock star, virtuoso electric and acoustic guitarist, producer, writer, composer, and, currently, music educator – has been a fixture on the contemporary music scene since 1969. On July 5 of that year, Fripp's first commercially successful group, King Crimson, catapulted themselves to the forefront of public awareness by playing in front of 650,000 people at the Rolling Stones' free Hyde Park concert.

For all his public exposure in the twenty-one years since then, Fripp has remained something of an enigma. Since the drift of what he does tends to be determined by experiences of inner upheaval, it has always been impossible to predict his next move, though in retrospect the logic of the development may seem clear enough. With almost every new venture he has startled his audience and opened up new doors of perception and music.

The music press has had a great time with Fripp. He has been called "the world's most rational rock star," "the Mr. Spock of rock," "the owlish one," a "persnickety plectrist" and a "plectral purist." He has been characterized as a "nouveau conceptualist," a "tin woodsman with a microtonal heart," and as "a riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a guitarist."

One writer described him as having "the air of an old-fashioned, straight-laced and hidebound European professor." That's not the way he came across to me at Guitar Craft XII; well, there was an "element" of the learned professor, perhaps – even of the streetwise priest – but more striking was how genuinely funny he could be, able to make great fun of himself. Fripp possesses a bitingly pointed sense of irony. The liner notes to *God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners*, for instance, are hysterical if you read them in the right spirit; if you read them somberly or defensively, they sound like the most god-awful pomp. (Years ago I noticed a similar phenomenon when reading the manifestoes of the nineteenth-century Danish Christian existentialist Søren Kierkegaard.) Fripp isn't above ordinary, earthy bathroom humor, either. *Rolling Stone* writer Fred Schruers describes an encounter with Fripp and his tour party in the men's room at Boston's WBCN: "What does one do? Walk over to meet this ferocious intellectual composer guitarist as he lines up at the urinal? As I lurk uncomfortably, the investigator of archetypes addresses his companions: 'I don't see how you can piss without waggin' your willies afterward.'"

Fripp is robust, poised, and physically nimble; he moves gracefully. A peculiar thing about the man is that he must be one of the world's most unphotogenic people. Having seen dozens of photographs of him from every stage in his career, I can attest to the fact that almost none of them look anything like he does in person. Fripp's face, which in pictures can look muggish, leering, or frozen (sorry, Robert!), is in reality a constant dance of expression, handsome and fascinating (that's better). Although he is moderately small in stature, Fripp's presence has a way of filling up the room. He is indeed one of the most *present* people I have ever met: present to those he is with, acutely sensitive to the situation of the moment, capable of exceptionally keen concentration.

Fripp does have something of a reputation in the press for keeping his emotions carefully under wraps, for being cool and considered, for being something of a mechanical marvel. An interviewer from *Creem* relates: "He asks me how many words I will need for my article, mentally calculates how much talking he will have to do to provide them, and stops at that point." For his part, Fripp laments: "One of the disadvantages of having the particular stereotype I do is that I tend to get serious interviewers. When I have a serious interviewer coming in my heart sinks. But what can you do? Either refuse to answer his questions, or speak to the serious young intellectuals in the vocabulary serious young intellectuals understand."

Jungian theory postulates four basic psychological functions – thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition – any of which may dominate the others in a given individual personality. Fripp rejects the notion that he is primarily a rational thinking type: "I'm instinctive [intuitive, in Jungian terms] by nature ... I analyze and rationalize *after* the event in order to persuade people of something I think to be right." Nevertheless he presents the image of a man to whom self-control is a cardinal virtue, who is aware of his lower nature but struggles to keep it in check. Fripp will instantly retract a remark that in the next moment he considers "flippant" or "inconsidered."

Fripp's studied objectivity about himself has disconcerted some and charmed others. He indulges in the habit, frequently to comical effect, of referring to himself in the third person, as "This Fripp ..." But indeed this detachment from the multiplicity of inner selves gives rise to the question: where, or who, is the real Robert Fripp? He is a self-conscious role player, moving in and out of entirely convincing personas seemingly at will. In Guitar Craft seminars he adopts the role of the Teacher and sits as it were enthroned smack at the middle of the head dining table, surrounded by a Da Vincian phalanx of subordinate teachers; but the moment the seminar is officially declared over, he deserts his central position and carries his breakfast tray to a side table, mingling among his students. When a student now asks a question he deems inappropriately deferential, Fripp brushes it off with an exasperated twinkle in his eye, saying, "Do you want me to go back and sit over there?" motioning with his hand to the head table.

David Bowie once remarked that being a person is like maintaining a car: you can alter parts of your personality just like you might decide one day to change the oil or install a new carburetor. Laurie Anderson has said, "I operate my body the way most people drive their cars." While Fripp refrains from the automotive analogy, he has expressed a similar idea: "One has to see that one's personality is not what one is. It's an organ through which I experience life. So, how can one come to see that? Years of observation, years of discipline ... Not long after I was born – I think I was between about three and six months old – I had a clear moment of, I suppose you'd say, waking up in my body. Here was a little Fripp baby in a pram, and I saw quite clearly that this was the animal that I inhabited ... Then, in March 1976, when I was in retreat in England, as I was wheeling a wheelbarrow of compost in the garden, in a flash I saw quite clearly that Robert Fripp did not exist ... Robert Fripp consists of a collection of impressions and experiences over a period of years that seem to have some coherence, but the level of coherence is very, very fragile."

If one thing is clear, it is that Fripp is a person of concentrated self-discipline. He likes to keep regular habits and daily routines, beginning each day with a relaxation exercise before breakfast. (Although he has not divulged much publicly in terms of other specific personal exercises or disciplines, the general nature of his work in this realm will be considered more fully in Chapter 7 and 10. Certainly guitar practice itself has been a major discipline for Fripp. In 1979 he described himself as having "a very modest lifestyle, one that some people would call 'mean.'

I don't have a string of fast cars or fast women, and I don't take any drugs at all, not even aspirin." He does, however, go for a good strong cup of coffee, or a beer or two at the local pub.

Fripp is known as an avid reader with an extensive personal library containing volumes on religion and philosophy, politics, psychological theory, and economics. In the articles he wrote for *Musician, Player, and Listener* magazine in the early 1980s, he quoted freely from Plato, Shakespeare, Jacques Ellul, E.F. Schumacher, T.S. Elliot, Stafford Beer, Proudhon, and other writers. As the "world's most rational rock star" has said, "Me and a book is a party. Me and a book and a cup of coffee is an orgy." *(Freff 1984, 106)*

Fripp the Professional Musician: Career Overview

In the chapters to follow we shall come back and look at the music of each phase of Fripp's career in greater detail; for now let us trace the development in broadest outline.

Chart 1: A Concise Fripp Chronology

to 1969:	Early practice, Giles, Giles & Fripp
1969:	King Crimson I
1970-2:	King Crimson II
1973-4:	King Crimson III
1974-7:	Retreat
1978-81:	The Drive to 1981: Frippertronics, League of Gentlemen
1981-4:	The Incline to 1984: King Crimson IV, Andy Summers
1985-90:	Retreat, Guitar Craft, League of Crafty Guitarists, Sunday All Over the World

(The designations "King Crimson I, II, III, IV" are my own, they represent clear stages in the evolution of the band, and correspond not only to significant personnel changes but to notable shifts in the band's musical style and the impact it had on the public. Fripp has been the only member of King Crimson to participate in all of the group's configurations.)

The original King Crimson comprised Fripp (guitar), Ian McDonald (reeds, woodwind, vibes, keyboards, mellotron, vocals), Greg Lake (bass guitar, lead vocals), Michael Giles (drums, percussion, vocals), and Peter Sinfield (lyrics). This band began rehearsing on January 13, 1969, and made their debut at the London Speakeasy on April 9.

King Crimson was "a way of doing things." In all its manifestations, King Crimson represented, at least in Fripp's eyes, a certain approach to music-making and a certain approach to the relationship between the performers and the audience. The exact nature of these approaches was never defined explicitly, at least not for public consumption: King Crimson was, for Fripp, a powerfully motivating if deliberately nebulous concept. The following extract is taken from a "Rolling Stone" interview conducted in 1973 by Cameron Crowe:

Crowe: You often say that you feel King Crimson is a way of doing things.

Fripp: I gave that to you as your key. That's your key to the core of the band. King Crimson, you see, is a magical act.

Crowe: In what way?

Fripp: Every act or thought is a magical act.

Crowe: You seem to tell many interviewers that King Crimson is a way of doing things ... what?

Fripp: Being.

Crowe: Then why don't you simply say that King Crimson is a way of being?

Fripp: It's that as well. I'm not interested in being pegged down with narrow definitions ... As soon as one defines, one limits. I don't want to define what King Crimson is. I'd rather let *you* do the thinking.

King Crimson I released their first album, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, on October 10, 1969. Each song on the record was different from the others: some had the melancholy "classical" sound of the Moody Blues and Procol Harum, others featured glittering, painstaking arrangements reminiscent of the Beatles, still others offered the raw rock and roll energy of the Rolling Stones, but jazzified, kicked into overdrive. Some writers in the rock press proposed King Crimson as heir to the throne of the Beatles, who were at the time in the process of abdicating.

King Crimson I, however, fell apart immediately following a U.S. tour in the late fall of 1969. 1970-1972 represents what Fripp has called an "interim" period for the group; King Crimson II, as I shall call it, was a sort of concept band with an almost revolving-door policy in terms of the musicians who comprised the group at any given moment. Among King Crimson II's participants new were Mel Collins, Gordon Haskell, Boz Burrell, Andy McCulloch, and Ian Wallace; Greg Lake and Michael Giles contributed to studio sessions.

Four albums were released during this period: *In the Wake of Poseidon, Lizard, Islands, and the live Earthbound*. It was a time of enthusiastic if sometimes injudicious musical experimentation, with often dubious results. Some of King Crimson II's songs were hard rock, some were jazz-tinged, several were classicized, overly precious ballads. The music was astringently dissonant one moment and vacuously airy the next. Many of the rhythms were either skittish and jumpy or obvious and foursquare. The attempt at a grand fusion of styles was difficult to bring off; Sinfield's lyrics, originally so evocative and in tune with the late-1960s *Zeitgeist*, seemed increasingly improbable and contrived. Critics in the press began to be put off and confused, and Fripp himself was later to voice grave doubts about the validity of his music of this period.

King Crimson II broke up definitively in April 1972, following the *Earthbound* U.S. tour; it had been a long time coming. In July, Fripp was introduced to a new interactive tape technology by his friend Brian Eno: whatever the human performer played – typically one or two notes on electric guitar – would be heard again, at a slightly lower volume level, several seconds later. Several seconds after this, the sound would be heard again, slightly softer; in the meantime, the performer could add more notes, which then began their cycles of gradual repetition and decay. In September Fripp and Eno recorded "The Heavenly Music Corporation" in Eno's home studio, a piece that was to become Side One of their first collaborative album, "No Pussyfooting." The simplicity and novelty of the signal loop and layer technique must have been refreshing to the Crimsoned-out Fripp, who was later to refine the technique and call it, for his own performance and recording purposes, "Frippertronics."

Also in July 1972, Fripp assembled the all-new lineup that would constitute, more or less, King Crimson III: David Cross (violin, viola, mellotron), John Wetton (bass and vocals), Bill Bruford (drums), and Jamie Muir (percussion). Taken as a trilogy, the three King Crimson III

albums (*Larks' Tongues in Aspic*, *Starless and Bible Black*, and *Red*, released between 1973 and 1974), present a more muscular sound than most earlier Crimson efforts; by the time "Red" was recorded, the group had been pared down to the basic power trio of Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford.

Wetton was capable of playing bass lines that fused harmonic backing with gritty melodic interest; Bruford's drumming was more rock-oriented than previous Crimson drummers, with less emphasis on trebly cymbal and snare drum colors, yet with a unique straightforward attack; Fripp's guitar work had developed a new emphasis on big power chords, without sacrificing its original melodic intensity; violinist Cross proved more than equal to the task of blending into the Crimsoid alchemy, contributing many sensitive melodies and counterpoints; and it is to Muir's percussion that *Larks' Tongues* owes many of its most exquisitely surreal passages. The King Crimson of 1973-4 played, in effect, artistic heavy metal, in what was one of the most convincing syntheses of hard rock, instrumental virtuosity, and compositional artifice to come out of the period.

A live album, *USA*, was released in April 1975; it was more consistent and well recorded than the previous live album, *Earthbound*.

By July 1974, an accumulation of doubts and powerful personal experiences had led Fripp to a position where he felt compelled to disband King Crimson III unilaterally: "I felt I had to stop performing in the rock circus because the reciprocal relationship between audience and performer dropped markedly, to a point were it was just antithetical to what I wanted to do ... Everything deteriorated through 1970 and 1971, and it was very much a struggle to try to find the spirit that had interested me in 1969. The tremendous burst of energy that kicked off King Crimson became steadily refined and sophisticated, to the point that for me, absolutely nothing was happening. When Crimson finished in 1974, it was the last possible moment for anything to have stopped."

Between September 1974 and August 1977, Fripp retreated from the music industry for three years, a period he has described as having three phases: preparation (winding up his affairs), withdrawal (attending a ten-month course at J.G. Bennett's Academy for the Harmonious Development of Man at Sherborne), and recovery (slowly readapting to reality, and easing his way back into the musical scene).

Fripp's first step out of self-imposed retirement was occasioned by an invitation from Peter Gabriel in September 1976 to work on the latter's first solo album in Toronto. In June, Fripp began working intensively with the tape-loop system Eno had shown him five years before. During this period he worked with David Bowie and Brian Eno on *Heroes* in Berlin, produced Daryl Hall's solo album *Sacred Songs,* and played and recorded with the novelty/new wave band Blondie and the quirky acoustic feminist trio of sisters, the Roches. As early as November 1977 Fripp was at work on his own first solo album, *Exposure*, which was not to be finished and released until 1979. *Exposure* was an oddly masterful piece of vinyl, as clearly influenced by the New York new wave aesthetic as it was to have a marked influence on that same genre. *Exposure* represents a diverse stylistic spread, from punk to electric urban blues, from gentle emotional ballad to apocalyptic epic, from *musique concrete* to Frippertronics: all in all, a conceptual collage representing the artist's diverse interests at the time, which seemed uncannily congruent with the interests of the contemporary musical public.

On September 11, 1978, Fripp launched what he called "The Drive to 1981," whose philosophy involved a sound rejection of ingrained music industry values of seeking greater and greater profit through the mindless and greedy promotion a few selected, almost prefabricated groups based on the lowest common denominator theory of public taste and sensibility. Fripp

railed against what he called the music industry's "dinosaurs" – cold-blooded, reptilian corporate entities of immense size and dangerously little intelligence. As an alternative way of presenting music to the public, he proposed the "small, mobile intelligent unit" – a phrase which became the Frippism *par excellence* of the late 1970s. In order to demonstrate his concept of the small, mobile, intelligent unit in action, Fripp undertook a solo world Frippertronics tour (April-August 1979); he released records of Frippertronics and Discotronics (*God Save the Queen/Under Heavy Manners* [1980], featuring vocals by David Byrne of Talking Heads, and *Let the Power Fall* [1981]); and he formed the League of Gentlemen, a sort of new wave dance band that toured England and America from April to November 1980 and released one album.

In the spring of 1981, Fripp began practicing with one of the recently available Roland guitar synthesizers, and began rehearsing a new group, originally called Discipline, with bassist/stick player Tony Levin, guitarist/vocalist Adrian Belew, and drummer Bill Bruford. This was to become King Crimson IV. In a number of statements to the press, Fripp attempted to explain that the new band had not consciously decided to use the King Crimson name for commercial purposes, but that at a certain point it simply became evident that they "were" King Crimson. King Crimson had always been a way of doing things, and indeed with the new band the historical King Crimson pattern played itself out once more: a short period of intense collective creativity resulting in a dynamic, new musical style, followed by a decline into somewhat mannered refinements and repetitions of the original insights and a fragmentation of group identity due to the individual creative leanings of the musicians.

King Crimson IV toured and released three albums between 1981 and 1984: *Discipline*, *Beat*, and *Three of a Perfect Pair*. The style typically involved complex meters, polymeter, short note values, precisely controlled instrumental textures, ambiguous tonality, and driving percussion. The incredible complexity of the rhythms obtained from the interaction of high-speed guitar and stick ostinatos was offset by Belew's quirky vocals and Bruford's admirably precise and restrained drumming. The music of King Crimson IV was an intelligent and impeccably crafted synthesis of several of the musical trends animating the early 1980s: new wave, synthesizer rock, and minimalism.

Apart from Fripp's work with King Crimson, his most significant collaborations to come out of the 1981-1984 period were two albums with Police guitarist Andy Summers, *I Advance Masked* (1982), and *Bewitched* (1984). The first album was a virtual catalog of techniques and tone color possibilities available to the guitarist of the early 1980s. The pieces, all instrumental, ranged from structured improvisation over a disco-like beat to soft-edged fantasy soundscapes. Best were those passages in which Summers' and Fripp's guitars discernibly talked to each other; the music then took on the character of abstract conversation, of a communion of spirits. Side One of *Bewitched* consists of three long dance-oriented tracks – perhaps "dance-oriented art music" in the manner of Bach's keyboard, violin, cello, and orchestral suites. Side Two contained seven electronically-based soundscapes more or less in the vein of *I Advance Masked*, but with somewhat more distinctively shaped formal, harmonic, and textural outlines.

Other session guitar work Fripp has done over the years includes work on Brian Eno's solo albums *Here Come the Warm Jets*, *Another Green World*, *Before and After Science*, and *Music for Films*; with David Bowie on *Scary Monsters*; with David Sylvian on *Alchemy – An Index of Possibilities*; and with the Flying Lizards on *Fourth Wall*.

In the liner notes to the 1985 album The League of Gentlemen/God Save the King (a record containing revised versions of previous releases from the Drive to 1981 period), Fripp summed up the position at which he had arrived: "The period 1977 to 1984 was one of intense activity for me, following a three year retreat from the music industry. This intentional work in

the market place was presented as the Drive to 1981 and the Incline to 1984." (The Incline to 1984 was never so formally defined as the Drive to 1981; my understanding is that it was a sort of self-parodying running joke in the manner of the late Beatles, "And here's another clue for you all / the walrus was Paul."). Fripp continued: "When the seven year commitment completed once again I went into retreat, to allow the future to present itself. Currently I am conducting a series of residential guitar seminars in West Virginia for players of all levels of experience."

This rather innocuous-sounding announcement portended the launching of an entirely new type of enterprise, one for which Fripp had been preparing himself for at least a decade. Guitar Craft is not simply the title of a school of music or a particular method of learning to apply oneself to the technique of playing the acoustic guitar; it is not in itself a performance ensemble, a musical style, or a repertoire; it is neither merely a set of finger exercises nor a set of relaxation exercises. Guitar Craft is all of these things, but perhaps most significantly, it is a virtual style of life – one embraced by Fripp himself, and by a number of the more than six hundred students who have attended courses since in the United States, England, Germany, and other countries around the world.

My own stimulating encounter with Guitar Craft will be discussed in Chapter 10. For now, suffice it so say that Guitar Craft represents, or represented for me, a systematic debunking of many popular myths surrounding the creative process, and the replacement of such myths with a novel and eminently practical approach to music in general and to the guitar specifically. The Level One student (there are seven Levels in Guitar Craft – everyone, regardless of expertise, starts at the bottom, is invited to disorient himself at the outset by tuning his guitar in a new way; he is then enjoined to sit in a particular way, become aware of his body in a particular way, hold the pick in a particular way, utilize the left hand on the fretboard in a particular way, and memorize a set of exercises by rote. The pedagogical technique of Guitar Craft involves daily group and individual guitar lessons, morning relaxation sessions, classes in the Alexander technique, classes in rhythm, instruction in concentration and attention, communal meals, and as much practice during "free time" as one can possibly fit into a nineteen-hour day.

King Crimson was a way of doing things that seemed to work for short periods of time and then fall apart. With Guitar Craft as a style of life, Fripp seems to be succeeding in training young musicians to exercise a certain quality of attention in the practice and execution of music: in the pedestrian sense, he is training professional performers. The next step – and it is a tall order, an enterprise of a qualitatively different nature – would involve training the audience. One of Guitar Craft's current projects is the establishment of a more or less fixed performance ensemble. To this point, the League of Crafty Guitarists has been an ad hoc affair – any number of Fripp's students (including myself) have performed together in public in different circumstances. One early configuration of the League – which Fripp visualizes metaphorically or metaphysically as one guitarist in many bodies – recorded an album, *The League of Crafty Guitarists – Live!* in December 1985. The album gives some sense of the style and atmosphere of the ever-growing Guitar Craft repertoire, but ultimately, and probably inevitably, fails to capture the spirit of the music itself, which, it can be convincingly argued, can only be experienced live by an attentive audience.

Over the last year or two, Fripp has performed with Sunday All Over the World, a band consisting of Fripp, his wife rock chanteuse Toyah Wilcox, Crafty Guitarist Trey Gunn, and drummer Paul Beavis. Since the group has neither, as of this writing, appeared in the United States, released any recordings, nor generated a great deal of press, I have little information to go on. In 1989 Gunn reportedly said that Sunday All Over the World was the result of Fripp's "trying to find the right way to work with Toyah ... So far it's all built around the vocals, but

everyone's contributing pretty much equally. We're not looking to be a heavy soloing band, but it's sure there when we need it." *(Drozdowski 1989)*

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Chapter Two: The Guitarist and the Practice of Music

Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does, the better.

– *Andre Gide*

Fripp The Guitarist

Robert Fripp said in 1986, "Music so wishes to be heard that it sometimes calls on unlikely characters to give it voice." Fripp was – and is – the opposite of a musician like Mozart, whose seemingly divine, God-given talent enabled him, under his father's tutelage, to be playing the harpsichord with facility by the age of five and composing sonatas and symphonies by the age of eight. Of his own natural aptitude, or rather lack thereof, Fripp has often said, "At fifteen, I was tone deaf with no sense of rhythm, sweating away with a guitar." *(Fricke 1979, 26)* He contrasts his situation with that of the supreme guitar hero of his generation: "One might have a very direct, very innate and natural sense of what music is, like Hendrix, or be like me, a guitar player who began music tone deaf and with no sense of rhythm, completely out of touch with it. For Hendrix the problem was how to refine his particular capacity for expressing what he knew. For me it's how to get in touch with something that I know is there but also I'm out of touch with." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)*

Little is known publicly about music in the Fripp household and extended family, though he has spoken admiringly of a certain great aunt, Violet Griffiths, a piano and music teacher: "As a young girl she practiced nine hours a day, five on scales alone." Mrs. Griffiths has been highly successful in inspiring her students; she "regularly has the highest examination results for her pupils." She attributed her success to "pushing": "Aim for 100%, not 50%," *(Fripp 1981B, 44)* Fripp quotes her as saying. A similar work ethic permeates Fripp's own approach to the guitar: what he has been able to accomplish, he feels, has nothing to do with talent, but has been the result of sheer effort. He has practiced guitar with varying degrees of intensity over the years, the most being "twelve hours a day for three days running," and sometimes six to eight hours a day over fairly long stretches. Such a level of commitment has been necessary to attain the goal: "It's a question of developing technical facility so that at any moment one can do what one wishes ... Guitar playing, in one sense, can be a way of uniting the body with the personality, with the soul and the spirit." *(Rosen 1974, 37-8)*

Fripp took up guitar at the age of eleven, playing with difficulty on an acoustic Manguin Frere. Fripp is naturally left-handed, but for some reason decided to go at the guitar in the normal right-handed position, with the left hand doing the fretting and the right hand doing the picking – unlike other famous southpaws like Jimi Hendrix and Paul McCartney, who turned their guitars upside down so they could play them "normally."

After struggling on his own for some three months, Fripp took lessons for about a year at the School of Music in Corse Mellon, a village a couple of miles from Wimborne, his home town. His instructor was Kathleen Gartell, a piano teacher who was not a guitarist but who did give him some useful music theory background. The man Fripp has singled out as his most important guitar teacher was Don Strike, whom he called, "a very good player in the Thirties style." Fripp's lessons with Strike lasted about two years, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen. Strike laid the foundation for what was to become one of Fripp's specialties, a rapid cross-picking technique. A few years later, when Fripp was eighteen, he ran into Strike again; the older guitarist, on hearing Fripp play, shook his hand and acknowledged him the better player. Today Fripp recalls this acknowledgement as an important milestone in his life.

During his teenage years Fripp also experimented briefly with flamenco guitar styles and took lessons from Tony Alton, a Bournemouth guitarist. All such experiences were doubtless helpful in channeling the young Fripp's musical urges, but he did not feel entirely comfortable with any particular guitar style or discipline: in 1974 he said, "I don't ... feel myself to be a jazz guitarist, a classical guitarist, or a rock guitarist. I don't feel capable of playing in any of these idioms, which is why I felt it necessary to create, if you like, my own idiom." necessary to create, if you like, my own idiom." *(Rosen 1974, 18)*

Fripp's first electric guitar, purchased when he was about fourteen, was a Hofner President, which he played through a six-watt amplifier with an eight-inch speaker. He has also used Fender Stratocasters, a J-45 acoustic, a Yamaha acoustic, a Milner pre-war acoustic, and a Gibson tenor guitar. The main instrument with which he was associated in the 1970s was the Gibson Les Paul, a guitar he found ideal for his characteristic single-string work. In the 1980s he used Roland synthesizer guitars (notably with King Crimson IV and in his collaborations with Andy Summers). Recently, with Guitar Craft, he has championed the Ovation Legend 1867 super-shallow-bodied acoustic. (Technically inclined readers who are interested in more details on Robert Fripp's equipment – amplifiers, picks, strings, devices, and so on – are urged to consult Rosen 1974, 32; Mulhern 1986, 90; Drozdowski 1989, 32; and the liner notes to several of the albums.)

Almost from the very beginning of his guitar playing, Fripp realized that "the plectrum guitar [guitar played with a pick] is a hybrid system" for which no one had ever developed an adequate pedagogical method. Left-hand position and fretting technique, at least for the nylon-stringed guitar, had been established to a high degree of sophistication by classical guitarists, but right-hand position and plectrum technique had no comparable tradition. The use of a pick is derived from the playing of banjos and subsequently guitars in the jazz of the 1920s and 1930s, but every player essentially developed his or her own method; and since in the jazz context "the main function of the right hand was to enable the guitar to be heard above ten other pieces in a dance band," the results generally lacked for subtlety. "So there I was at twelve in 1958 and it was so obvious that there was no codified approach for the right hand for the plectrum method. So I had to begin to figure it out ... It was very difficult because the only authority I could ever offer was my own." Beginning then, Fripp devoted nearly thirty years to the development of the picking method he now teaches to his Guitar Craft students. Part of the development took place on a conscious level, but much of it was a sort of unconscious accretion of physical knowledge gained through constant practicing. Fripp says that when he came to consolidate the approach for Guitar Craft, "There was a knowing in the hand through doing it for years which I consulted. It's interesting. My body knew what was involved, but I didn't know about it." *(All quotations in this paragraph from Drozdowski 1989, 30).*

Fripp's view is that educating oneself musically is a never-ending process. From a technical point of view, his approach seems to involve systematically attacking theoretical entities like scales through the physical and mental discipline of learning to play them fluently. In rock music, he points out, only three or four scales are in common use – Major, Minor, Pentatonic (Blues), and slight variants of these. But in fact, any number of other scale formations are available to the creative musician, ranging from the old Church Modes through the so-called synthetic scales (which have exotic names like Super Locrian, Oriental, Double Harmonic, Hungarian Minor, Overtone, Enigmatic, Eight-Tone Spanish, and so on, and on into symmetrical scales (what twentieth-century French composer and teacher Olivier Messiaen called the "Modes of Limited Transposition") such as Whole Tone, Chromatic, and Octatonic/Diminished.

All of these can be learnt in various transpositions, that is, starting the scale on a different note (C Major, C# Major, D Major ... B Major). In addition, most of these scales can be used as the source of other formations by changing the tonic note while retaining the pitch-set itself. Such was the basis of Western European medieval and Renaissance modal theory – a theory in which one basic scale (the diatonic scale, corresponding to the white notes of the keyboard) ultimately served as the basis of seven different modes, each of which was felt to have its own unique psychological and symbolic character:

Chart 2: The Church Modes	
Ionian Mode (Major)	C D E F G A B
Dorian Mode	D E F G A B C
Phyrgian Mode	E F G A B C D
Lydian Mode	F G A B C D E
Mixolydian Mode	G A B C D E F
Aeolian Mode (Minor)	A B C D E F G
Locrian Mode	B C D E F G A

Today's enterprising musician may likewise construct "modes" based on some exotic (non-diatonic) scale, yielding still more inflections or tonal dialects, still more musical variety. For instance, the modes based on the Hungarian Minor scale would begin like this:

Chart 3: Modes of the Hungarian Minor Scale	
Hungarian Minor	C D Eb F# G Ab B
2nd mode	D Eb F# G Ab B C
3rd mode	Eb F# G Ab B C D
4th mode	F# G Ab ... (etc.)
(etc.)	

A further avenue of scalar exploration, which, so far as I know, Fripp has never mentioned in print nor worked with himself, is the raga system of India, with its rigorously logical array of seventy-two parent scales. The point of all this is that each individual scale carries with it certain musical characteristics, certain expressive possibilities, certain objective sound-qualities available to all who master them. Western classical music got along quite nicely for some two hundred years (let's say 1650-1850, using essentially only two scale forms, major and minor; much twentieth-century art music has concentrated on a single form, the chromatic or twelve-tone scale. Fripp has been eager to move into new territory: specific sources of unusual scales he has cited as having been useful to him include Bartok string quartets, Vincent Persichetti's staid but readable textbook compendium of contemporary musical language, *Twentieth-Century Harmony*, the eccentric yet influential *Joseph Schillinger System of Musical Composition*, and jazz-rock groups of the 1970s such as the Mahavishnu Orchestra and Weather Report. *(Fripp 1982A, 102)* Fripp sums up: "The possibilities for extending [musical, scale] vocabulary are ... quite immense. Since it takes three or four years to be able to work within any one scale fluently and utterly, there's more than enough work for a lifetime." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)*

Paradoxes of Process and Performance

From the foregoing discussion, the reader might get the impression that the technical side of music is all-consuming for Fripp. To the contrary, it is eminently clear that he views the discipline of guitar technique, scales, and so on, not as an end in itself but merely as a means to an end. The end, to put it simply, is to make contact with music. And to make contact with music involves work on the whole personality, a process which has social, cultural, and political ramifications; art and life cannot be separated. Although Fripp's most developed ideas on the subject of making contact with music have been expressed in terms of his Guitar Craft teaching, and are best discussed in that context, here I might attempt a brief summary of the concept of "music" that has motivated Fripp since before the earliest days of King Crimson.

In talking, thinking, writing, and reading about music as an ultimate quality – for "Music," as Fripp has written, "is a quality organized in sound" *(GC Monograph One [A], VI: see note in hard copy for actual genesis of this quotation)* – it must of course always be borne in mind that we are attempting to deal with the ineffable through the medium of language, with all its limitations. Prose has its own laws and grammars, having evolved, one might say, not in order to describe or explain the ineffable, but rather to convey information of a more mundane nature. Music, conversely, has evolved as a subtle language of the emotions – or, if you prefer (and Fripp probably would), a language of the spirit. Poetry recited aloud, with its quasi-musical cadences, meter, rhythm, pitch, and vocal tone colors, is somewhere in between. The point is that words can never convey the meaning of music; often enough, verbal formulations of the ineffable bog down in paradox, antinomy, self-contradiction. This will happen in this book, and it has happened to Fripp from time to time.

In 1973 Fripp said, "I'm not really interested in music. Music is just a means of creating a magical state." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* What he meant (I think) by this was that the outer forms of music, its styles, history, structure, even aesthetics – the stuff of the academic approach to music – were not the point for him. The point was the "magical state" that the practice of music could put one in. Seen from this vantage point, the actual notes and rhythms, the timbral surface, the sounds in themselves, hardly make any difference; it is the attitude and receptivity of the participants that matter. The focus is not on the object, but on the subject – not the sound, but the listener.

Not the knowledge, but the knowing. Paradoxically, of course, it is precisely the sounds you hear, whether you are the musician or the audience, that will enable you to draw your attention to the quality of the knowing: the sounds become the knowledge, but it is the knowing rather than the knowledge that is vital.

In 1974, Fripp told an interviewer: "When I was twenty-one I realized that I'd never really listened to music or been interested in it particularly. I began to take an interest in it, as opposed to being a guitar player who worked in certain situations. I've gotten to the point now where I see music as being something other than what most people see. I would say that the crux of my life is the creation of harmony, and music you take to be one of the components of that harmony." *(Rosen 1974, 38)*

This statement seems related to the earlier one, but here the word "music" is used in a different sense. Here "music" signifies that intuitively grasped quality, organized in sound, which constitutes the "knowing" of the true musical experience. What Fripp is saying here (I think) is that he had been a guitarist for about ten years before realizing that there was a sense behind the sounds he had been producing. Previously, he had worked on music purely as a craft, as a

physical skill on a mechanical level, like a typist whose fingers fly about the keyboard without any recognition of the meaning or import of what's being typed, or like a conservatory music student who practices for hours a day, never paying attention with his ears to the *music* there. And, in a sense, music *isn't* there if no one is listening to it as such; there may be organized sound, but not a *quality* organized *in* sound. In this quotation, Fripp uses the visual analogy: "I see music as being something other than what most people see." Not the seen, but the seeing.

Particularly during the Frippertronics tour, Fripp would invite his audiences to become part of the creative process by engaging in active listening. When the audience expects the performer to do everything for them, the result is passive entertainment, diversion, escapism. When the audience participates sensitively in the creation of the music – for the real music is not "out there" somewhere, existing as an object, but "in here," in the quality of attention brought to the mere sounds – then the result is art. At a Boston concert, Fripp told the audience, "You have every bit of the responsibility that I have. Because life is ironical, I get paid for it and you don't." *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

The central paradox, or quandary, of Fripp's entire career has revolved around the difference between, on the one hand, making art-objects for a product-hungry yet passive audience, and, on the other hand, actually *making art with* an audience on the basis of a vision of a shared creative goal. Like making love, to make art you need equal partners; otherwise one or the other of the partners becomes a mere art, or sex -object for the other. Fripp may have had such thoughts on his mind when, in 1982, he remarked bittersweetly that in swinging London in 1969, "I began to see how much hookers, strippers and musicians have in common: they sell something very close to themselves to the public." *(Fripp 1982A, 42)* Once one has tasted real love (or real art), mere sex (or mere entertainment) may satisfy on a certain primitive level, but a deeper longing remains frustrated.

Fripp saw King Crimson as a way of doing things, and though he never defined very precisely what he meant, I imagine one thing he had in mind was this idea of making music with fellow musicians on the basis of a shared intuitive experience of music as a quality organized in sound – and then taking that experience to the public in hopes of expanding the circle of sharing in the creation of art. King Crimson, Fripp always stressed, was primarily a live band, not a recording unit. Ultimately, Fripp has concluded that recordings cannot convey a quality experience of music, and for this reason has very mixed feelings about his entire recorded output. An interviewer asked him recently, "Do you still think of making records as a bother and a burden?" Fripp answered: "Sure ... Because it has very little to do with music. See, the end to music is a process. The end to recording is also a process. But a record is a product. Because of the restrictions and constrictions, the way of recording ... it's very difficult for that process to be reflected in the product." *(Drozdowski 1989, 37)*

Nearly a decade earlier, Fripp had expressed the same frustration, in the context of producing an album for the Roches. "Translating from performance to record," he wrote, is something like trying to put "Goethe into English or Shakespeare into German" and trying to express "the implicit rather than the literal sense." *(Fripp 1980A, 26)*

Using a variety of images and metaphors, some of them religious, many musicians, irrespective of genre, have said that the key to creativity lies, in effect, in getting the ego out of the way and allowing a greater force to play through them. Felix Cavaliere: "We are like beacons from another source ... I feel some of us as human beings are tuners to this vibration that comes through us." Lamont Dozier: "I can't take credit for this stuff. I'm only human and these things are the makings of God. Everything I do that's good, at least, is a reflection of His hand." Judy Collins: "Everybody's a channeler. Every artist who walked down the street and whistled a tune

is a channeler. We don't do it. It comes through us. It's not ours." Raffi: "I find the process of where these songs come from mysterious, because ... I feel that, sure, I can take credit for these songs, but they come from another place." *(Song Talk 1989)*

Robert Fripp's formulation of the principle goes like this: "The creative musician ... is ... the radio receiver, not the broadcasting station. His personal discipline is to improve the quality of the components, the transistors, the speakers, the alloys in the receiver itself, but never to concern himself overmuch with putting out the program. The program is there; all he has to do is receive it as far as possible." *(Garbarini 1979, 31-2)*

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Chapter Three: Fripp the Listener

When I was fourteen years old there was rock'n'roll – Fats Domino and Bill Haley – but frankly I thought it was stupid. I didn't like rock'n'roll. I was a snob and I still am. I think rock n roll is interesting and some of it is more interesting than it used to be in the fifties. Yet basically it's not something that means very much to me. If the whole history of rock'n'roll disappeared tomorrow morning, I wouldn't care. I'm delighted that I've influenced rock'n'roll musicians. I'm pleased that David Bowie has said nice things about me and so has Brian Eno. Outside of [their] being complimentary, the only thing I admire about rock'n'roll [musicians] is how much money they make.

– Steve Reich (Vorda 1989, 16)

One of the ideas that was important to me was that you could be a rock musician without censoring your intelligence. Rock music has a very anti-intellectual stance, and I didn't see why I should act dumb in order to be a rock musician. Rock is the most malleable musical form we have. Within the rock framework you can play jazz, classical, trance music, Urubu drumming. Anything you like can come under the banner of rock. It's a remarkable musical form ...

– Robert Fripp (Grabel 1982, 22)

The Agony of Rock

The war of words over rock goes on – telling us, if nothing else, that music is still alive, and that people (some people, anyway) care deeply enough about it to take a stand one way or the other.

Critics have often contended that Robert Fripp's guitar concepts of the late 1970s and 1980s – you can hear them in Frippertronics as well as the League of Gentlemen, King Crimson IV, and Guitar Craft – owe a debt to the minimalist tradition of Steve Reich, Philip Glass, La Monte Young, and Terry Riley – a tradition that began in the 1960s as a rebellion against the academic serial music of the 1940s and 1950s. From its beginnings, minimalism seemed to have something in common with rock: a steady pulse, plenty of repetition, a grounding in simple tonality. Furthermore, the audiences for both types of music overlapped to a considerable extent. Albums like Riley's *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (1969) were packaged psychedelically and marketed to the rock public; many of Philip Glass's early performances took place not in classical concert halls but in downtown New York rock clubs.

The 1970s saw a parting of the ways, however. The music of the best minimalist composers grew more complex, more difficult – in a sense, more classical and less minimal. With a few notable exceptions, such as Brian Eno, rock musicians, after some flirtations with minimalism's intellectual base, drew back into mainstream rock styles.

Fripp himself has denied that Reich had any direct influence on his work; when he made *No Pussyfooting* with Brian Eno in 1972, an album often cited as one of the crucial minimalism-rock connections, Fripp had heard neither the music of Reich nor of Glass (though Eno had). Later, Fripp got to know Reich's work and said he enjoyed it, but only to a degree: "It takes me to a point at which something really interesting could happen, but doesn't quite make that jump. Because it is preconceived and orchestrated. What I should personally like to do is to add the random factor, the factor of hazard, to what he's doing, to walk on stage unexpectedly during one of his performances and having become familiar with the tonal center, improvise over the top of it." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

The "factor of hazard" is to Fripp an important criterion for judging the effectiveness of music. In the previous chapter we discussed his dissatisfaction with making records: the human factor of interaction between musicians and audience, the creative process, the "way of doing things," the factor of hazard, are difficult if not impossible to capture on recordings. For similar reasons, he has repeatedly remarked that he is "not really a record listener." *(Watts 1980, 22)* Fripp says, "For me, music is the performance of music," while allowing that "of course, if you

don't go to Bulgaria very much, the best way for you to hear a Bulgarian women's choir is on record." *(Drozdowski 1989, 36)*

Pundits have debated for years the difference between popular music and art music. Fripp doesn't use the word "art" much, but he has voiced a down-to-earth distinction between what he calls "popular culture" and "mass culture": "Popular culture is when it's very, very good and everyone knows it and goes 'yeah!' Mass culture is when it's very, very bad and we all know it and we go 'yeah!' Mass culture works on like and dislike, and popular culture addresses the creature we aspire to be. Examples of popular culture: Beatles, Dylan, Hendrix." Although critical of mass culture from what might be called an aesthetic point of view, Fripp does not dismiss it entirely. He feels that under certain circumstances mass culture can be used for the good, citing the Live Aid concert in England – an event which awakened in people a genuine spirit of caring and generosity, regardless of cynical questions that were raised regarding how well the money was used and how much help the fund-raising actually did. *(Drozdowski 1989, 34)*

As noted in this chapter's epigraph, Fripp sees rock music as "the most malleable musical form we have." In my book on Brian Eno I defined rock as a specific set of musical style norms (involving certain song forms and rhythmic patterns, certain types of instrumentation and vocal delivery, and so on), in order to show how some rock musicians have gone "beyond rock" into other, new, hybrid musical genres of their own creation. While viewing rock as a musical style complex is interesting enough as an exercise in analytical musicology, in the real world rock is more a spirit than a style, more an audience than a specific type of music. For the sociologist, rock is a demographic bulge; for the record industry, rock is a marketing category, a publicity strategy. Fripp has said, "One can, under the general banner of rock music, play in fact any kind of music whatsoever." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)* I would add only that rock seems to move in cycles – periods of creative diversity followed by periods of stagnation, and that one problem for many musicians is getting their creative music accepted as "rock" by the music industry during periods of industry stagnation.

For Fripp, rock is a democratic music. Although a masterful guitar technician himself, and although he pushes his students to develop their musicianship to the utmost, he acknowledges that in rock, ideas count more than musical competence, sincerity more than virtuosity: virtually anybody who feels the urge can make a musical statement in the language and context of rock, regardless of how well, in classical terms, they can play or sing. The voices of Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, coarse and "untrained" enough to send classical purists into fits of derision, became the voices of whole generations. Eno, though perhaps an extreme case, was so unskilled at playing guitar and keyboard that he called himself a "non-musician." For Fripp, "rock is an immediate expression of something very direct. Rock and roll is therapy on the street, it's available to everyone. Rock and roll is street poetry. It can also be more sophisticated, but it needn't be." *(Garbarini 1979, 33)* For Fripp, "a rock'n'roll audience is always far, far better than any, because they're instinctive, they're on their feet, and they can cut through the pretensions of the performer very quickly." *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)*

As for stylistic qualities, the rhythm or beat of rock – its most salient and consistent musical characteristic, the thing that rock's initiates ecstatically extol while its detractors daintily denigrate – represents to Fripp positive sexual energy, "energy from the waist down." By contrast, developmental harmony – a musical development peculiar to the Western world, and a self-conscious feature of its music really only since the Renaissance – represents to Fripp an intellectual process belonging to the province of the mind. *(Watts 1980, 22)* Since his earliest music with King Crimson, Fripp has been interested in combining these two sources of energy,

the physical and the mental, rhythm and harmony – making, as well as speaking out on behalf of, rock music that could "appeal to the head as well as the foot." *(Garbarini 1979, 31)*

Fripp came to believe, however, that many of the progressive rock groups of the early 1970s were not so much intrigued with the intangible spirit of King Crimson – that special way of listening, of doing things, of making music – as they were intent on aping Crimson's outer musical vocabulary: the virtuosic musicianship, the epic, extended forms, the exotic harmonies, the quasi-mystical, mythological lyrics, the wide variety of instrumental sound colors. Full-blown Gothic rock was a genre for which Fripp had absolutely no use. Declared a majestically scornful Fripp to John Rockwell of the *New York Times* in 1978: "I don't wish to listen to the philosophical meanderings of some English half-wit who is circumnavigating some inessential point of experience in his life." *(Rockwell 1978, 16)* Fripp's rhetorical attack on the movement he'd helped create continued in his own column in *Musician, Player, and Listener* in the early 1980s, ridiculing "enthusiastic art-rock space cadets whose sudden success seemed to validate pretensions on all levels; they huddled in unholy quorum with pliant engineers to generate excess everywhere." *(Fripp 1980A, 26)*

Fripp's critique of 1970s rock extended to jabs at the stars who had let themselves get fat: in his view, they "became more interested in country houses and riding in limousines, expensive personal habits and all that. The rock musicians who were public figures in the 70's copped out, and now we have cynicism towards our public figures that is wholly justified." *(Grabel 1982, 58)*

Fripp related a story in 1979 that indicated the depths of his disillusionment with the rock fantasy. In August 1975, when King Crimson III had been defunct for a year, Fripp having broken it up at least in part because of the impossible contradictions he had been trying to reconcile between his concept of music and the conditions imposed by rock industry realities, he went to hear a rock show at the Reading Festival: "We'd been waiting an hour and a half while their laser show was being set up. I went out to the front. It began to rain. I was standing in six inches of mud. It was drizzling. A man over here on my right began to vomit. A man over here to my left pulled open his flies and began to urinate over my leg. Behind me there were some 50,000 people who maybe for two or three evenings a week, for amusement, for recreation, would participate in this imaginary world of rock'n'roll. Then I looked at the group on stage – their lasers shooting off ineffectually into the night, locked into this same dream. Except *they're* in it for twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for the rest of their lives." *(Jones 1979A, 20)*

Robert Fripp has felt the agonizing paradox of rock: on the one hand, the possibility of a real magic synthesis, the merging of body/soul/rhythm and mind/spirit/harmony, the seemingly infinite malleability of the basic forms, the potential for direct communication between artists who are passionately committed to ideas and an audience that cuts through artistic pretension and snobbery; on the other hand, the reality of rock as escapist entertainment, the greed, the homogenization of taste through the corporate structure of the recording and radio industries, the tendency to aim for the lowest common denominator of mass culture, the meaningless repetition of formulas, the very unhealthiness of the typical rock lifestyle itself: the star syndrome, the drugs, the pointlessness of wasted talents and lives.

Both punk/new wave and disco, those musical explosions of the mid-1970s that so many felt to be diametrically opposed to each other, Fripp felt as a breath of fresh air. Both seemed to him to be music of the people, to return music to the people, throwing the dinosaurs of the music industry off track, however temporarily. The raw energy of punk had been prefigured by the aggressive intellectual heavy metal sound of King Crimson III – and even earlier by the intense negative energy and profound frustration that bursts through King Crimson I songs like "21st Century Schizoid Man." Fripp said, "When I heard punk I thought, I've been waiting six years

for this." *(Grabel 1979, 32)* As for disco, Fripp called it "a political movement that votes with its feet. It started out as the expression of two disadvantaged communities – the gays and the blacks." As a vital form of social expression, Fripp viewed disco as "nihilistic, but passively nihilistic," a movement that simply ignored the traditional social framework outside its boundaries. *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

Robert Fripp believes that one can learn just as much by listening to music one dislikes as by listening to music one likes – in other words, that there can be an educational purpose served by music beyond that of satisfying mere subjective taste. "I go and see people who I don't like because I get something from it which is worth far more than having been entertained." *(Watts 1980, 22)* Rock writer Michael Watts characterizes this view as "puritanical"; puritanical or not, it is consistent with Fripp's view that the quality of attention one brings to the experience of music is more decisive than the quality of the musical sounds in themselves. Not the sounds, but the listening.

Many of the musicians Fripp has mentioned in interviews over the years are jazz or jazz-rock players – Ornette Coleman, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Tony Williams, Frank Zappa. One name that pops up repeatedly is Jimi Hendrix, whom Fripp cites as an example of pure embodiment of the spirit of music. The intensity of the musical current flowing through Hendrix is what killed him in the end, according to Fripp. Hendrix's guitar technique itself, however, "was inefficient and, as an example, misled many young guitarists." *(Fripp 1975)*

It seems Fripp has never been able to muster much enthusiasm for listening to guitarists for the sake of listening to guitarists. He has peevishly and somewhat inscrutably characterized his chosen tool as "a pretty feeble instrument." Post-Mayall-Bluesbreakers Eric Clapton he found "quite banal," while Jeff Beck he could "appreciate as good fun." *(Rosen 1974, 18)* Of the entire 1970s and 1980s crop of rock guitarists, Fripp has said little; indeed he hasn't appeared particularly interested. The whole rush to synthesizer guitars, MIDI, and digital signal processing in the 1980s left Fripp unimpressed. He did use the technology for his own purposes in King Crimson IV and with Andy Summers, even deigning to endorse the GR-300 synthesizer guitar in Roland advertisements in 1982. But he is not especially thrilled with new sounds for the sake of new sounds, particularly if the new sounds are merely poor imitations of old sounds: "Why would a world-class guitar player [playing a guitar synthesizer] settle for sounding like a third-rate saxophone player, and then a trumpet player and then a synthesizer player?" *(Drozdowski 1989, 36)*

Taking on the Classics

Some of Fripp's most perplexing comments on other music concern the Western art music tradition. On the one hand, the music of some of that tradition's masters has figured prominently in Fripp's own musical self-education. He has often acknowledged his debt to Bartok, particularly the Bartok of the String Quartets, many of whose movements sound positively Frippian, with their intense linear counterpoint, percussive rhythms, odd metrical schemes, extended tonality, exotic scales, and piquant dissonances. Stravinsky's name comes up from time to time, as when Fripp mentioned the Russian in a discussion of tuning, temperament, and enharmonic pitch notation *(Mulhern 1986, 99)*; on another occasion he called early Stravinsky "really hot stuff." *(Garbarini 1979, 32*) Fripp expressed admiration for Handel, Bach, Mozart, and Verdi in a 1980 essay, but he was not focussing on their music so much as he was making the

point that these composers had had to teach themselves how to thrive creatively while working in "very difficult political and economic conditions ... Surely the most surprising point is how much inspired work had prosaic origins." *(Fripp 1980G, 30)*

On the other hand, Fripp's assessment of the classical tradition as a living, functional organism is not particularly generous. His collaborator Eno has been blunt about it: "Classical music is a dead fish." *(Doerschuk 1989, 95)* Fripp is more restrained, but has expressed major reservations about the classical orchestra's viability as a source of a quality musical experience for the musicians – and hence for the audience. As a form of musical organization, Fripp has called the classical orchestra a "dinosaur" – gigantic, lumbering, possessing little discerning intelligence, and overdue for extinction. Although he can respect the discipline of orchestra life and musicianship, Fripp himself "would find it very frustrating" to be an orchestral player: "How awful that the only person who is expressing himself is the composer, with the conductor as the chief of police and the musicians as sequencers ... It's *stuck.* There is a cap on how far it can go. There is a cap on what it can *do.*" And then Fripp moves on to his own agenda: "Within the league of crafty guitarists ... the aim is not to follow any one person but to be sensitive to the group as a whole and respond to the group as a whole." *(Mulhern 1986, 96)*

According to Fripp, Beethoven was undoubtedly one of the "Great Masters," with direct access to music at its creative source. But listening to Beethoven's music today, "transcribed through two hundred years of interpretation and analysis and a sixty piece orchestra with an intelligent conductor", is for Fripp an indirect, incomplete experience. He would much rather have been present to hear Beethoven improvise at the piano in person. "My personal reaction listening to the [Beethoven] String Quartets is not the sense of passion that was obviously present at the moment when it came through. Rather I feel a sense of how remarkably intelligent it is, but I don't get that direct touch that I'm sure Beethoven had, which I've had from the rock band Television." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

The Guitar Craft repertoire is by and large learned by rote and performed from memory. One afternoon in February 1986 Fripp and a bunch of his students were standing around the coffee urn during a Guitar Craft seminar discussing the pros and cons of notated music. Fripp's final word on the topic was, "I'd much rather have a date with my girlfriend than get a letter from her." It appears he won't budge from his basic position, which is that the process of playing from notation inevitably takes music "further and further away from the original moment of conception." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

This position is congruent with Fripp's professed mistrust of written media and recorded sound – perhaps strange for someone who has put out so many records and published so many articles, and is consistent with his insistence that the highest form of musical experience can take place only in a situation of direct human contact. To musicians who have tasted the rewards of a close, devoted study of masters like Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart – through live performances, keyboard score-reading, recorded media, and the process of intuitive analysis – this is a tough pill to swallow.

A parallel might be drawn between reading a Bach score and reading the Bible. Moses' or Jesus' impact was undoubtedly most intensely felt in person – just as to hear Bach improvise a fugue on the organ or harpsichord must have been an awe-inspiring experience, at least to those present with the ears to hear and the musical preparation to understand what was happening. Yet without notation, Bach's fugues, which through writing out he was able to refine to high levels of perfection, would be lost to history. I for one am glad to have the Bible and the *Well-Tempered Clavier* on my shelf.

Of course, whenever you have spiritual or musical masters around whom a written tradition accrues, you inevitably have latter-day disciples of all colors and stripes who battle among themselves to claim the "true" interpretation, or, worse, believe that salvation lies somehow in the written documents themselves rather than in direct personal contact with the source. Perhaps, like a modern musical Martin Luther, Fripp is saying that we can all have direct contact with music through faith and effort, that to speak directly with God we don't need all the accumulated ritual, regulation, and written tradition, that arguing for the inherent superiority of the written art music canon is something like arguing in the manner of contemporary Christian fundamentalists in favor of the doctrine of Biblical inerrancy at the expense of unmediated personal faith.

Classical musicians play notes that are written and fixed on paper. Guitar Craft performances consist of music that appears to be carefully composed and tightly disciplined, as if the musicians are simply doing their best to execute some sort of pre-conceived composition. But in theory, or in the ideal, there is an element of improvisation in both classical and Guitar Craft performances: according to Fripp, the guitarists "can play any note they like provided it's the right one". *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)* It seems to me that in any kind of musical performance situation there will always be a danger of the musician falling into unconsciousness, relying on technique alone, and becoming in effect a sound-producing automaton.

In order to place Fripp's approach in perspective, perhaps a bit of historical background would be helpful. The Western art music tradition has a rich history of performers taking all kinds of liberties with the written score, in many instances in effect completely re-composing it, whether in actual notation or in the heat of an inspired performance. Many composers have also been improvisers, able to develop and transform themes into new creations on the spot. It was really only with the rise of positivist musicology in the twentieth century that this sort of thing went out of favor and that improvisation, in the art-music world, became a lost art. Nowadays, indeed, the original composer's "intentions" are widely held to be primary and inviolable, and the best performances are commonly deemed to be those most closely in accord with those sacrosanct intentions.

In the twentieth century, positivist musicologists have industriously cleaned up the music of the masters, assiduously sweeping out all the editorial additions that had crept in through the nineteenth century, getting back to the composers' manuscripts and first published editions in order to take a new, refreshed look at the music in its original form (though often enough, with composers' revisions, discrepancies between sources, and so on, reconstructing the "original" score can be a bit of a headache, to the point that doubt may be cast on the very concept of a single "original score" or *Urtext*). This cleaning-up was a first step; the second stage, now in full swing, is the movement toward faithful reproduction of historically authentic performance practices involving the use of period instruments, original scores, and all the knowledge of style, ornamentation, improvisation, and so on, that musicology can manage to dig up.

In the contemporary historical performance scene, opportunities for whole new ranges of use and abuse of knowledge have opened up. On the one hand, the educated musician can respond to the situation by contacting the spirit behind the music and – not slavishly but with considered knowledge – playing with a range of embellishments and other expressive elements (tempo, dynamics, phrasing, and so on) not literally specified by the raw notes in the score but called for by the spirit of the music, internalized in the sensitive performer through study and practice. On the other hand, the historical performance movement is all too full of musicians and

academic authorities squabbling over obscure details of musical praxis, not unlike scholastic medieval theologians squabbling over the "correct" interpretation of a verse of Scripture.

The music of every historical period calls for different kinds of interpretation, and it is probably true that there is more freedom in interpreting the music of the eighteenth century and earlier than nineteenth- and twentieth-century music, since in recent times composers have become more and more meticulous in notating their intentions with regard to every last nuance of expression. Be this as it may, surely one can speak of a range of possible interpretations of a given piece of classical music; when all that is played is the notes, with no hint of internalization of the style, of the *music* – such playing is (and has always been, I suppose) the bane of music departments and performance spaces around the world. But assuming cultivated sensitivity and intuitive musicality on the classical player's part, performance of the traditional repertoire can surely approach Fripp's ideal of a music where one can play any note one likes "provided it's the right one."

One thorny problem for classical musicians is that it's just so awfully difficult to "improve" on what Bach, Mozart, and the lot wrote down on paper. To anyone who has not fully fathomed such composers' consummate mastery nor directly felt the complex yet elegant system of emotional and structural checks and balances built into the interrelationships among even the smallest details in such music, this is probably impossible to explain.

With the possible exception of free-form avant-garde jazz, all music that I know of has a "program" of some sort, that is, a tacit or explicit set of conventions and directions to be followed; the paradox is that the sensitivity and meaningfulness of the performance increases in proportion to the degree the musician surrenders the ego to the will of the music itself. This is as true of the King Crimson or Guitar Craft repertoire as it is of the classical. And it is no different even in most forms of "free" improvisation – the musician is not starting in a vacuum but, with the technique at his or her disposal, is drawing on his or her total knowledge of music (scales, theory, harmony, sense of rhythm, sense of continuity, principles of unity and contrast, and so on). Music plays *through* the performer, conditioned in a sense by the performer's individual knowledge, experience, taste, and talent, but (in those rare moments) transcending such limitations and manifesting itself as Music in a pure state.

We have already noted Fripp's lament, "How awful that the only person who is expressing himself [in classical orchestral music] is the composer." Fripp has also said, "Whenever a musician is interested in self-expression you know it's gonna suck." *(Drozdowski 1989, 30)* Does anyone except myself sense yet another paradox lurking shadow-like in these two statements? Chew them over for a while; we will return to them in the final chapter.

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Chapter Four: King Crimson I

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit upon the mount of the congregation, in the far north:

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the depths of the pit.

– *Isaiah 14:12-15*

Beginnings: Working Up a Red Head of Steam

Fripp was born in Wimbourne, a village ten miles outside Bournemouth. We know little about the young Bob Fripp's life; occasional tidbits filter down through the press, such as that his favorite subjects in school were English and English literature. *(Dery 1985, 51)* Only very rarely has Fripp exposed anything about his childhood in interviews. One such instance was in 1980, when he talked about the double binds he found himself in as a boy, and which he later managed to work through in transactional analysis: "My parents made me crazy. My father didn't want children and I'd say 'Mum, Father's irritable' and she'd say 'no he's not!' and there's my father boxing me round the ears. So how can you process that information and experience?" *(Recorder Three, 1980, n.p.)*

From the age of eleven, when his parents had bought him his first guitar on December 24, 1957, Fripp had known that music was to be his life. From the age of fourteen, he had various miscellaneous performing experiences, playing guitar in hotels and restaurants and backing up singers. He soaked up influences: first American rockers like Scotty Moore, Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry; a bit later, Django Reinhardt and modern jazz.

A turning point was reached at the age of seventeen; as Fripp describes it, "I went to stay with my sister on holiday in Jersey. And I took my guitar. I had lots of opportunities to practice there, which I found quite wonderful. It was there that I established a deeper relationship with the instrument. And upon returning home to England, I announced to my mother, 'I am going to become a professional guitar player.' My mother didn't try to dissuade me. She simply burst into tears. I took her reaction to heart and my decision was delayed until I was twenty." *(Milkowski 1984, 29-30)*

Fripp's steadiest gig, beginning at age eighteen, was a three-year stint at the Majestic Hotel, in the band hired to entertain the Hebrew Fraternity of Bournemouth. If it is difficult to imagine Robert Fripp meekly chiming in on twists, foxtrots, tangos, waltzes, the Jewish National Anthem, Hava Nagilah, and "Happy Birthday Sweet Sixteen," consider that he got the job when the young Andy Summers (later guitarist for the Police) vacated the post to go to London. *(Garbarini 1984, 39)*

In the meantime, Fripp was being groomed by his father to take over the latter's small real estate firm; having worked for his father for three years, Fripp felt that to educate himself further in the business he should get away from the office. He studied for a year and a half at Bournemouth College, taking A-levels in economics, economic history, and political history; the idea was to go to London and pursue a degree in estate management.

But at the age of twenty Fripp decided, in his own words, that he "could no longer be a dutiful son" *(Drozdowski 1989, 31)* and resolved to have a go at the music business. He felt that "becoming a professional musician would enable me to do all the things in my life that I wanted,"

(Rosen 1974, 18) that it would provide him with the best possible education. He proceeded to form what he has referred to as an "incredibly bad semi-pro band" called Cremation. *(Rosen 1983, 19)* Cremation did land a few gigs, but Fripp ended up canceling most of them – the group was so awful he was afraid of jeopardizing what local musical reputation he had been able to earn.

Nineteen sixty-seven was perhaps the high-water mark of the rock explosion of the 1960s; anything could happen in music, and there was a sense that, for once, the groups that were the best in a creative sense could also be – indeed, often were – the most popular. In provincial Bournemouth, Fripp was catching whiffs of this exhilarating spirit: "I remember driving over to the hotel one night and on the radio I heard *Sgt. Pepper's* for the first time. I tuned in after they'd introduced the album. I didn't know who it was at first, and it terrified me – 'A Day in the Life,' the huge build-up at the end. At about the same time I was listening to Hendrix, Clapton with John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, the Bartok string quartets, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, Dvorak's *New World Symphony* ... they all spoke to me in the same way. It was all music. Perhaps different dialects, but it was all the same language. At that point, it was a call which I could not resist ... From that point to this very day [1984], my interest is in how to take the energy and spirit of rock music and extend it to the music drawing on my background as part of the European tonal harmonic tradition. In other words, what would Hendrix sound like playing Bartok?" *(Milkowski 1984, 30)*

Giles, Giles and Fripp

In Bournemouth in the spring of 1967, Fripp auditioned for a position in a band being formed by drummer Michael Giles and bassist Peter Giles. The trio rehearsed and moved to London that fall to work a gig accompanying a singer in an Italian restaurant. The gig fell through after a week, but Giles, Giles and Fripp persevered through 1968, managing to appear on a couple of television shows and to record and release two singles ("One in a Million" / "Newlyweds") and "Thursday Morning" / "Elephant Song") and an album, *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp.*

For those whose exposure to Fripp's music begins with King Crimson, the music of *Cheerful Insanity*, now something of a collector's item, might come as a shock. For one thing, it's not in the least heavy – it's a collection of frothy little absurdist ditties. The tunes on Side One are interspersed with Fripp's spoken recital of a sort of tongue-in-cheek morality poem he called "The Saga of Rodney Toady," a fat, ugly lad who is the butt of cruel jokes. We are all familiar with McCartney music-hall nonsense verse along the lines of "Maxwell's Silver Hammer"; a lot of *Cheerful Insanity* is kind of like that – light, whimsical, gently satirical – except that the orchestration is even sillier.

Fripp's playing is accomplished enough, but to hear the Crimson king of Marshall-stacks distortion mildly riffing along in best cocktail-lounge-jazz fashion is a bit of a revelation. Even here, Fripp couldn't resist showing off his chops a little, however; his "Suite No. 1" features him ripping along playing a continuous melody in sixteenth notes at a quarter note of 148 beats per minute. Only two other songs – "The Cruckster," with its jagged, dissonant guitar effects and primitive reverb, and "Erudite Eyes," which sounds at least partially improvised – give any indication of musical paths Fripp was later to follow.

Cheerful Insanity is a very English record. The Hungarian Bartok hadn't quite yet made the acquaintance of the American Hendrix; the album sounds like a collaboration between Monty

Python and the Moody Blues in one of their less pompous moods. After Giles, Giles and Fripp, Fripp's sense of humor may have remained intact in his day-to-day life, but it went decidedly below the surface in his music.

The Genesis of King Crimson I

According to Fripp, on November 15, 1968, King Crimson was "formed in outline between Fripp and Michael Giles in the kitchen following a fruitless session of Giles, Giles and Fripp at Decca." *(YPG, 1)* Fripp summed up the demise of Giles, Giles and Fripp as follows: "The dissolution of Giles, Giles and Fripp followed some 15 months of failure and struggle. We were unable to find even one gig. World sales of the album within the first year were under 600. My first royalty statement showed sales in Canada of 40 and Sweden of 1. Peter Giles left to become a computer operator and finally a solicitor's clerk although played on sessions for a while, notably 'Poseidon' and McDonald and Giles." *(YPG, 1)* (*McDonald and Giles*, released in 1971, was another relatively lightweight affair, though not so bubbly as *The Cheerful Insanity of Giles, Giles and Fripp*; it was ample proof of the divergent directions Fripp and his early collaborators were taking after King Crimson I broke up.)

Drummer Michael Giles, born near Bournemouth in 1942, was the oldest of the members of the original King Crimson lineup. He began playing drums at the age of twelve, and played in jazz and skiffle groups in the 1950s, then in rock bands in the 1960s. When Fripp and Giles decided to form a new group, Fripp's first move was to enlist the services of another Bournemouth native, Greg Lake, a singing guitarist with the group Shame who subsequently switched to bass during his stint with the Gods.

Giles and Fripp then sought out a songwriting team, which turned out to be lyricist Peter Sinfield along with composer and multi-instrumentalist Ian McDonald, who could play various reeds and woodwinds as well as vibraphone, guitar, and keyboards. Some of McDonald's early influences were Louis Belson, Les Paul, and Earl Bostic, plus classical composers like Stravinsky and Richard Strauss; during a five-year hitch as an Army bandsman, he had studied traditional orchestration and music theory, and by the time he joined King Crimson he had played in dance bands, rock groups, and classical orchestras.

Both McDonald and Lake were more than competent guitarists; upon joining King Crimson Lake played only bass, and McDonald performed duties on reeds, woodwinds, vibes, and keyboards, leaving Fripp as the sole guitarist. This appears to have been a gesture of deference if not quite a sign of intimidation: as one of the early King Crimson musicians reportedly put it, "When Bob Fripp is in your band, you just don't play guitar." Fripp, in fact, would not actively collaborate with other guitarists until he enlisted the services of Adrian Belew in the 1980s version of King Crimson.

Sinfield had been working as a computer operator when he left the job to found the group Infinity; McDonald was Infinity's guitarist, and after the band's demise (Sinfield later called it "the worst group in the world"), McDonald and Sinfield stayed together in order to keep writing. Sinfield became an "invisible" member of King Crimson, providing words for the songs, acting as road manager and lighting director, and evidently serving as a sort of conduit between the hip London culture and the provincial members of King Crimson, telling them where they should go to buy the right kind of clothes, and so on. Sinfield's role was also that of musical consultant, an in-studio audience off of whom Fripp could bounce ideas. *(Williams 1971, 24)* Although he never performed with Crimson on stage, he was very much part of the evolving group dynamics of the

band until his departure in late 1971. It is to Sinfield that the world owes the Mephistophelean moniker "King Crimson": Fripp relates that "Pete Sinfield was trying to invent a synonym for Beelzebub." *(Schruers 1979, 16)* Beelzebub, prince of demons, the Devil – for Milton in *Paradise Lost* Beelzebub was the fallen angel who ranked just below Satan.

Fripp has told some amusing anecdotes about band and bar life in swinging London in 1969 – for instance, how Greg Lake, with whom he shared a small apartment for a time, regarded him as "inept" in picking up girls, and "took it on himself to give me some help in strategy and maneuvers." *(Fripp 1982A, 35-6)*

On January 13 1969, the first official King Crimson rehearsal took place in the basement of the Fulham Palace Cafe in London – the space that was to become their rehearsal room for the next two and a half years. It would have been fascinating to be a fly on the wall of the basement during the first few months of 1969 – to observe and try to understand how four musicians (and one lyricist) come together and fuse into a single organism. In point of fact, it became a custom for King Crimson to invite an audience of friends to their basement rehearsals, and reports of a powerful new sound began to leak out. Fripp has written of this period: "Following several years of failure we regarded King Crimson as a last attempt at playing something we believed in. Creative frustration was a main reason for the group's desperate energy. We set ourselves impossibly high standards but worked to realize them and with a history of unemployment, palais and army bands, everyone was staggered by the favorable reactions from visitors ... With the fervor of those months I could write for a publicity handout: 'The fundamental aim of King Crimson is to organize anarchy, to utilize the latent power of chaos and to allow the varying influences to interact and find their own equilibrium. The music therefore naturally evolves rather than develops along predetermined lines. The widely differing repertoire has a common theme in that it represents the changing moods of the same five people.'" *(YPG, 2)*

Most of the pieces the group rehearsed were newly composed, but one or two came out of the Giles, Giles and Fripp repertoire, such as "I Talk to the Wind." The group also played through versions of the Beatles' "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" and Joni Mitchell's "Michael from Mountains," which Judy Collins had recorded in an arrangement by Joshua Rifkin on her *Wildflowers* album of 1967. The "feminine," soft-focus yet tightly orchestrated ballad was a feature of most early King Crimson albums; one reporter relates how the group would listen to Judy Collins records to unwind after difficult, tense rehearsals.

At this stage in the evolution of the band, compositional duties tended to be spread over the whole ensemble; for many pieces, it wasn't a matter of one songwriter coming in with a chart and everyone following his directions. Rather, the group played, fought, improvised, ran through numbers, trying to catch the good ideas as they flew by. Curious to find out more about this process, I asked Fripp about it in 1986. What was the genesis of "21st Century Schizoid Man," for instance? Fripp's memory was crystal-clear, and he answered very methodically, "Well, the first few notes – Daaa-da-da-daa-daa-daaaa – were by Greg Lake, the rest of the introduction was Ian McDonald's idea, I came up with the riff at the beginning of the instrumental section, and Michael Giles suggested we all play in unison in the very fast section toward the end of the instrumental." I thought it would be fascinating to know how a number of different King Crimson songs were stitched together like this, but Fripp declined further explication; he didn't think it very interesting or particularly valuable. Perhaps he deemed King Crimson's group identity – its "way of doing things" – more important and relevant than the specific contributions of individual members.

On other occasions, with other writers, Fripp has been a bit more forthcoming with regard to King Crimson's compositional process. He admired and wanted King Crimson to emulate the

Beatles' proclivity for packing many strands of meaning into a song, so that a record could stand up to repeated listenings: "The Beatles achieve probably better than anyone the ability to make you tap your foot first time round, dig the words sixth time round, and get into the guitar slowly panning the twentieth time." Fripp wished Crimson could "achieve entertainment on as many levels as that." Most of King Crimson's recorded music appears to be tightly structured, but in fact the forms have a certain amount of flexibility built in. While architecturally important lead lines that connect the music together are fixed, other elements are variable in live performance, such as the drum patterns, the choice of octave for the melodic parts, and even the harmonies. A great deal depended on the inspiration of the moment: "If you're feeling particularly happy you can even forget the lead line." *(Williams 1971, 24)* In fact, the King Crimson approach appears to be identical in this respect to the Guitar Craft approach mentioned earlier: any note is possible, provided it's the right one.

Time and again, Fripp has called 1969 a "magic" year in his musical development and in the life of the nebulous collective entity known as King Crimson. The experience was intensely powerful, yet heartbreakingly evanescent. When it was over, that is, when King Crimson I effectively broke up at the end of the year, Fripp was faced with trying to understand what had happened. In 1984 he said, "It was a question of: magic has just flown by, how does one find conditions in which magic flies by? I'd experienced it – I knew it was real. So where had it gone, how could one entice it back? That's been the process from then till now." *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Sinfield said it was as though the band had "a Good Fairy. We can't do anything wrong." *(Fripp quoting Sinfield in Milkowski 1985, 61)* Again, Fripp put it this way: "Amazing things would happen – I mean, telepathy, qualities of energy, things that I had never experienced before with music. My own sense of it was that music reached over and played this group of four uptight young men who didn't really know what they were doing." *(Milkowski 1985, 61)*

In the Court of the Crimson King

The residue of this year of magic – the cultural artifact left behind, the spirit of those days frozen into stone (make that vinyl) the enduring physical product resulting from the process – is a long-playing record, released on October 10, 1969, *In the Court of the Crimson King: An Observation by King Crimson*. A great paradox, a sense of doubt, uncertainty's edge, surrounds this album and virtually all of Robert Fripp's recorded music. He will tell you that "If you record or film an event, you spoil it. A live event has a life of its own, it has a quality that you can never capture on record or video. It's like this: If you're making love with your girlfriend, the video of the event might bring back nice memories. But the event was something infinitely more." *(Milano 1985, 34)* (John Lennon said somewhere, "Talking about music is like talking about fucking. I mean, who wants to talk about it? I suppose some people do want to talk about it ...") Fripp will even go so far as to say that "some of the most amazing gigs I've known weren't 'musically' very good. Just listening to tapes afterward ... I mean, there's a real *turkey* happening. It wasn't down to notes, it was down to an energy in the room, between the band and the people and the music." *(Fripp 1982B, 58)*

What does one make of this? On the one hand, as a musician I too have felt that ineffable energy of really cooking – the music, the musicians, the audience, all in it together, all one – and listening to the tape later, indeed, have had cause to wonder puzzledly what the big deal was really all about: it was there, somewhere, but evidently, manifestly, it wasn't really in the notes themselves. On the other hand, on the negative side if you will, Fripp's attitude could be seen as a cop-out of sorts: if the residue, the product left behind by the process, is not up to snuff, it's all

too easy to say "My best work has never been recorded and released," as Fripp frequently does. It's a clash of philosophies of music we're dealing with here. Fripp says the music is not in the notes, but rather "music is a quality organized in sound." *(GC Monograph?)* That *quality* may be there even if the actual (played, sounding) *music* isn't anything special from a compositional point of view. Indeed, that quality may be present in a single note, or in silence itself. In the Western tradition of musical composition, these ideas don't quite make it: at the core of the Western tradition is an accumulation of acknowledged masterpieces, musical scores – testaments, epistles, prophecies – in which it is deemed the hidden knowledge of music resides, to be sought and found and brought to life by the initiate with the right stuff to feel and understand what is really going on there.

Philosophy aside, here we have this piece of plastic, *In the Court of the Crimson King*, which, in some sense or other, contains the music of the group's magical year, 1969. The response in the rock press could have been predicted: some writers enthusiastically proclaimed it the music of the future (that is, of the 1970s); macho types endorsed the metal screech of "Schizoid Man" while dismissing "I Talk to the Wind" as weak and derivative; comparisons were drawn with the Beatles, Pink Floyd, the Moody Blues, and Procol Harum. Some found the album pretentious, others awe-inspiring. It is a delight to read the incorrigible Lester Bangs grappling with Crimson's "myth, mystification, and mellotrons," subsuming the band's titanic efforts under his own peculiarly American way of seeing things: "King Crimson would like you to think that they're strange, but they're not. What they are is a semi-eclectic British band with a penchant for fantasy and self-indulgence whose banally imagistic lyrics are only matched by the programmatic imagery of their music." *(Bangs 1972, 58)*

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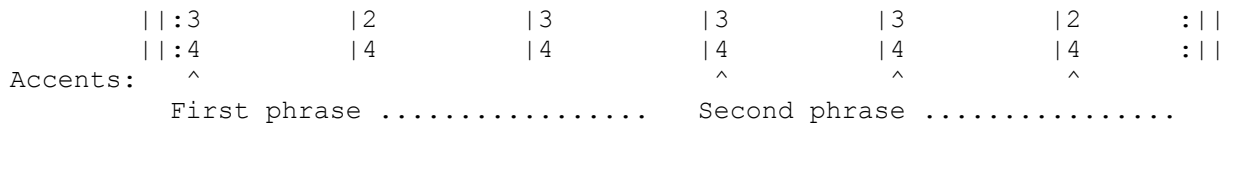
21ST CENTURY SCHIZOID MAN (by Fripp, McDonald, Lake, Giles, and Sinfield). Ominous night sounds. An in-your-face metal phrase. Lake screaming the lyrics, voice electronically fuzzed. "Cat's foot iron claw / Neuro-surgeons scream for more / At paranoia's poison door / Twenty-first century schizoid man." Long blisteringly fast instrumental solo section, then unisons at unreal tempo. Grinding downshift to metal lick, final verse, free noise, and out. What can be said about "Schizoid Man" after all these years? It instantly became Crimson's signature, their anthem, their opener, their war-horse, their sine qua non – a mixed blessing, like Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," since for years afterward, it was all many people came to hear Crimson for. It set up expectations, it put the band in a box: "Why can't you do more stuff like 'Schizoid Man'?" Perhaps the song succeeded in giving Fripp's public iconic persona a certain authority – it established his masculinity, it made a man out of him. Thereafter he knew you knew he could stand in and thrash with the heavies; having proved that, he could go on and tackle other worlds.

Consider the meter. Count out the number of beats in the opening metal phrase: sixteen. But good luck feeling the music in terms of four bars of 4/4: the accents are all off. To write it out, the best way might be with measures of three, two, three, three, three, and two beats. This way at least the two sub-phrases begin on downbeats:



Fine and good. But now go ahead and try counting the whole thing as four measures of 4/4: if you succeed, and simultaneously feel the accents of the music itself (which are not for the most part coinciding with your counting) you are *ipso facto* in the realm of Frippian polymeter, revealed here in the very first King Crimson song.

Composition in broad gestures (bold, angular melodic profiles, striking textural contrasts, clear-cut formal schemes, sharply differentiated contrapuntal planes); overpowering intensity of conception and execution; meter and tempo changes, metrical modulation within a single piece; the fuzzy, sustained-note-type guitar lead, along with a tendency to use either very many or very few notes; *concrete* sound sources (the night sounds at the beginning); a passion for frenetic group sound/noise layers (at the end) ... it is remarkable how many stylistic traits we would later come to recognize as characteristically Frippian are packed into this germinal piece.

So ... is this what Hendrix would sound like playing Bartok?

"Schizoid Man" floors you (the metal riff), terrifies you (the sung verses), tries as hard as it can to dazzle and impress you (the fast instrumental section), does it all again, and then blows itself to smithereens ... and leads without a break into "I Talk to the Wind" ...

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King Crimson I Live

King Crimson played seventy-eight official gigs in 1969, beginning with a show at London's Speakeasy on April 9. The group played fifty-eight additional British gigs from April to October; Crimson's first American tour took place in November and December. During this tour they shared the bill with many of the leading groups of the day: Al Kooper, Iron Butterfly, Poco, the Band, Jefferson Airplane, Joe Cocker, Fleetwood Mac, the Voices of East Harlem, the Chambers Brothers, the Rolling Stones, Johnny Winter, Country Joe and the Fish, Janis Joplin, Sly and the Family Stone, Spirit, Grand Funk Railroad, Pacific Gas and Electric, the Nice, and others. By many accounts, King Crimson out-heavied them all.

Robert Fripp would always contend that King Crimson, in all of its incarnations, was a live band first and a recording-studio band only secondarily. He has never expressed unqualified endorsement of any King Crimson record, insisting, like Bob Dylan, that the whole point for him has been making contact with a real audience in real time. Early on, in 1971, Fripp stressed the importance of crowd feedback, of "a feeling of involvement with the audience." *(Williams 1971, 24)* Paradoxically, audience members at Crimson concerts have often felt Fripp to be distant, removed, unresponsive – locked in a world of his own, making few efforts to engage them directly. This perception was reinforced by his practice, adopted after only the first eight gigs in 1969, of sitting on a stool onstage while performing. When interviewers would ask him, "Why do you sit down on stage?," Fripp would respond, "Because you can't play guitar standing up. At least I can't." He felt it wasn't his "job to stand up and look moody. My job was to play, and I couldn't play standing up." *(Rosen 1974, 18)* It was a matter of concentration: "There are some things that are far easier to play standing up, and if it's a very physical thing that's required, you don't want to be anchored too much, whereas if it's something which requires a fair amount of concentration and technique you can sit down and just concentrate on it." *(Williams 1971, 23-4)* But it was also a matter of Fripp's rejecting what he called the "show biz thing," the specter of empty gestures in the name of entertainment that forever haunts rock performances. He said wryly, "I can see the beauty of Emerson, ligging about the organ, but I could never do it and make it work satisfactorily. It'd look false, because that's not the kind of bloke I am." *(Williams 1971, 23)* Consider something John Lennon said in 1970: "The Beatles deliberately didn't move

like Elvis, that was our policy, because we found it stupid and bullshit. And then Mick Jagger came out and resurrected bullshit movement, you know, wiggling your arse and that. So then people began to say, 'Well, the Beatles are passe because they don't move.' But we did it as a conscious thing." *("Lennon Remembers," 34)*

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I TALK TO THE WIND. According to the album credits this is not a Fripp piece; it was written by Ian McDonald and Pete Sinfield. I always had trouble with this song: it seemed to take a long time (five minutes and forty seconds) to say not much of anything. There is some beautiful linear counterpoint – that is to say, the harmonies result from the directional leading of individual melodic lines – and the gentle clash of major and minor modes is poignant enough. But in the final analysis the value of "I Talk to the Wind" has more to do with its formal function on Side A of the record than with any intrinsic musical merit: you've got to have *something* soft and seductive between "Schizoid Man" and "Epitaph." An idyllic interlude between the rape and the prophecy. I'm just not sure it had to be this long. "I Talk to the Wind" leads without a break into "Epitaph" ...

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Judging from concert reviews of the 1969 British and American tours, King Crimson had a way of flattening audiences and upstaging the acts it was supposed to be supporting. (Fripp reports that the Moody Blues refused to undertake a joint tour with King Crimson: he says Graham Edge of the Moodies felt that King Crimson "were simply too strong." *[YPG, 2]*) The music was loud, it was powerful, it was gut-wrenching, it was an unbelievable wall of sound. *Melody Maker* writer Alan Lewis reported on the concert King Crimson did with the Nice at Fairfield Hall in Croyden on October 17: Crimson played "21st Century Schizoid Man," "Epitaph," "Trees" (never recorded), the "incredibly heavy" "Court of the Crimson King," and closed with "Mars" from Holst's *Planets* suite, "hammering out the menacing riff over an eerie wail from Ian McDonald's mellotron. Together with Peter Sinfield's brilliant lights, they created an almost overpowering atmosphere of power and evil." *(Lewis 1969, 6)* In Lewis's view, the classical/rock menagerie of the Nice was no match for Crimson's aggressive presence. In the nascent world of progressive rock, perhaps Keith Emerson was the movement's McCartney, Robert Fripp its Lennon – the Lennon of the primal scream.

Similarly, Chris Albertson, reviewing for *Down Beat* a Fillmore East (New York) concert in November where King Crimson opened for Fleetwood Mac and Joe Cocker, judged that Crimson was "clearly the superior group and all that followed was anti-climactic." Albertson noted the quality of the group's material, the extraordinarily high level of musicianship, the collective improvisation, and the jazz influence, concluding, "King Crimson has majestically arrived, proving that neither the Beatles nor Stones were the last word from England." *(Albertson 1970, 20-21)* Only a few months after their formation, King Crimson were being placed in fairly heady company. E. Ochs sketched his impressions of KC I live at the Fillmore East for *Billboard* readers: "King Crimson, royal relative and fellow heavy to Deep Purple, outweighed Joe Cocker and Reprise's Fleetwood Mac 10 tons to two ... when the new Atlantic group clashed ear-splitting volume with well-integrated jazz, yielding a symphonic explosion that made listening compulsory, if not hazardous ... King Crimson can only be described as a monumental heavy with all the majesty – and tragedy – of Hell ... King Crimson drove home the point of their musical philosophy with the volume turned up so high on their amplifiers that, had they been electric blankets, they would have all broiled to death. Not to mention third-degree burns in the

audience. The group's immense, towering force field, electrified by the energy of their almost frightening intensity, either pinned down patrons or drove them out." *(Ochs 1969, 22)*

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EPITAPH including MARCH FOR NO REASON and TOMORROW AND TOMORROW (by Fripp, McDonald, Lake, Giles, and Sinfield). The Gothic rock ballad is born. Slow gloomy minor key mellotron-rich. Sinfield's text meditates pessimistically on the failure of old truths to bring meaning into contemporary existence ("The wall on which the prophets wrote / is cracking at the seams"), on the threat posed by the proliferation of technological means unchecked by a guiding moral vision ("Knowledge is a deadly friend / when no one sets the rules"), and on the bleak prospects the future holds (in the words of the refrain, "Confusion will be my epitaph / as I crawl a cracked and broken path / If we make it we can all sit back and laugh / But I fear tomorrow I'll be crying").

It gets down to what you can say in a slow (positive: deliberate, stately, majestic ... negative: plodding, interminable, insufferable) rock song. Fripp has always contended that rock is our most malleable contemporary musical media: that you can say anything with it. Crimson was obviously going for the Big Statement here. Maybe Sinfield bit off more than he could chew; some of his metaphors are on the labored side, in danger of collapsing under their own weight: "... the seeds of time were sown / and watered by the deeds of those / who know and who are known." It may not be Shakespeare, but the lyrics are really no more grandiose than the music, and in 1969 there was still an innocence about efforts like this to combine classical gigantism with rock, romantic lyric poetry with repetitive rock melodic types.

Consider the long fade-out: the progression VI-v in the key of E minor repeated eighteen times to gloomy vocalizations and clanging electric guitar dissonances. The harmonic domain is thus modal – in effect, B-Phrygian. Whether or not it was Fripp who contributed this modal chord progression, he was increasingly to draw on modal vocabulary in subsequent works, as an alternative to traditional major/minor tonality.

Fripp's guitar work: electric guitar is used at selected points of emphasis, but the primary guitar sound is acoustic strumming and arpeggiation: like virtually all of Fripp's "rhythm" guitar work, it never falls into incessantly repeated strumming patterns, but rather is animated by a highly imaginative textural instinct.

Consider, too, the minor tonality. Minor. Minor. It has to be minor. All the songs on *In the Court of the Crimson King* are in minor, except "I Talk to the Wind," which is *sort of* in minor, but veers major at cadence points. Minor: traditionally the mode of sadness, regret, the dark side of life, despair, anger, sorrow, angst, depression, uncertainty, pathos, bathos, bittersweetness, ending, finality, death.

For all its minorishness, "Epitaph" is completely conventional harmonically, and sounds indeed harmonically rather than linearly conceived. I don't know if it was Fripp who came up with the chord progression. But as his development progressed, he became less attached to traditional functional harmony; his textures became increasingly contrapuntal (with complex figurations of a harmonically implicative rather than declamatory nature replacing homophonically-conceived chord progressions); and in general rhythm, melody, texture, and timbre took precedence over harmony as the most significant purveyors of musical meaning.

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For Fripp, Lake, McDonald, Giles, and Sinfield, touring had its hazards. At the focal point of the tremendous energies being unleashed, the band, according to *Melody Maker* reporter B.P.

Fallon, would "admit to being physically and mentally shattered" at the end of a performance. *(Fallon 1969, 7)* Giles wrote a column for the same British magazine, describing the rigors of playing America's large venues, meetings with other musicians, and the endless waiting that accompanies road life; there is an undertone of despair in his prose, even as he describes future projects King Crimson was discussing, such as writing, performing, and possibly recording a "modern symphony" for twelve or so "leaders in modern musical attitudes." *(Giles 1969, 23)* The impression is that even on the road, the members of the group at times had access to a furious white-hot creative maelstrom. On the other hand, the primary challenge seems to have been simply to avoid boredom and stay in touch with the music. Fripp indicated there was only one way he could keep himself together: "My answer to American hotel life was to put the TV on and practice for eight hours a day." *(Williams 1971, 24)*

It was perhaps inevitable that the strains would rip the group apart. By the end of December, Mike Giles and Ian McDonald had officially announced their departure from King Crimson. Giles was quoted as saying: "I felt that sitting in a van, an aeroplane and hotel rooms was a waste of time even if you are getting a great deal of money for it. Ian and I feel that we'd rather have less money and do more creative, interesting and fulfilling things with all the travelling time. The main thing is for Ian and I to write and record using musicians of similar attitude with the accent on good music – really doing what we feel we should be doing with a lot of emphasis on production. Part of the reason for the split was that I didn't feel I could do this within King Crimson and they need the freedom to follow through what they need to do." *(Eldridge 1970, 13)* Sinfield thought the split had to do with personalities: Lake and Fripp were by nature "strong, very forceful, almost pushy," while McDonald and Giles were "very, very receptive." Sinfield, who felt his personality was somewhere in the middle, said that the combination of the five "could and did work to a degree but the pressure got too much for Ian and Mike." *(Eldridge 1970, 13)* For his part, McDonald expressed dissatisfaction with the overall tone of the music as it had developed. The gloom-and-doom aspect, he had decided, was not him: "I want to make music that says good things instead of evil things." *(Nick Logan, "Replacements,"* NME *(Jan. 24 1979), quoted in YPG, 7)*

On December 7th, after four dates on consecutive nights at Hollywood's Whisky A Go Go, McDonald and Giles told Fripp of their decision to leave. Fripp's reaction appears to have been shock: "My stomach disappeared. King Crimson was everything to me. To keep the band together I offered to leave instead but Ian said that the band was more me than them." *(YPG, 6)* Fripp's view was that King Crimson had taken on an autonomous life of its own; it was an idea, a concept, a way of doing things, a channel, a living organism; music had spoken through it. He put it simply: "King Crimson was too important to let die." *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

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MOONCHILD including THE DREAM and THE ILLUSION (by McDonald and Sinfield). Twelve minutes and nine seconds. You see, the thing is, I've been in jams like this. The feeling is totally there among the musicians (and whoever else happens to be sitting around, whether they've paid for it or not, probably, and preferably, not). You are close to silence, Silence with a capital S. You are in tune with silence, the deepest sound of them all. Every sound, therefore, that you make, make with intention, sensitivity, and awareness, has a meaning, an ineffability, a significance. You are listening, Listening with a capital L. You hear what everyone else is doing; you do whatever is necessary, which is usually as little as possible. It has nothing to do with self-expression: it has to do with a group mind. And yes, it is possible to become a group mind, to feel that sense of immersion in something so immeasurably greater and lighter and more sensitive and more conscious than your own paltry, complex-ridden, neurotic, solipsistic, pathetic

self. And no, such moments cannot really be anticipated and *made* to happen (although one can gain a certain expertise at setting up the conditions for them to happen). And yes, when those moments do happen it is all enough, the music, the sense of the music happening as it were of its own will and to its own purposes – you are in tune with the vibration of nature itself, you are its instrument – it is playing you and you are merely the rapt spectator of this spectacular play of sound in all its parameters which seem so lucidly *there*, so transparent, so available, all you have to do is stretch out your hand to feel its warmth, its fullness, its loving and terrifying infinity, there is nothing else you need or ever will need. BUT – but: ... the bitch of it all is that you put some of this stuff on tape and it just sounds like the most unbelievably aimless doodling, like the random toning of the wind chimes blowing on your front porch, or traffic noises outside your window. THEN you are faced with a philosophical bugaboo. Because, you see, music, in its very essence, is too great, too vast, too intangibly infinitesimal, too subtle for human conception. You are stuck with the sense that you might as well contemplate the sound of that wind chime on your porch, or listen to the screen door's periodic groans and slams, or listen to the sound of your own breathing, or the silent sound of your own thoughts as they careen through the blank void of your pathetic awareness – you might as well do that as listen to this horrid tape you have made or to the residue of some 1969 studio session by five horrid British rock musicians called King Crimson. And well you might.

As it happens, a few of "classical music"'s twentieth-century pantheon of composers were already hip to all this, and endeavored to enlighten recalcitrant audiences through their outrageous acts, pieces, ideas, concepts, noodlings, doodlings, and explications.

One was the American John Cage, (whose final position was, and is, that "everything we do is music") whose "silent" piece, *4'33"* enraged some and entranced others as far back as 1952 (the unavoidable implication of *4'33"* was that the sounds heard when attempting to listen to nothing were just as interesting as any Beethoven masterpiece), who devised methods of composing by chance so the "composer" could get his pathetic personality out of the way and let the perhaps ordered, perhaps random laws of nature speak for themselves – just like the wind chimes.

Another was the German Karlheinz Stockhausen, who took a more psychological, more practical approach, for instance in his 1968 "composition," *Aus den sieben Tagen* (*From the Seven Days*). This is a set of prose instructions for musicians (or I suppose anyone) to follow in order to have a quality musical experience. Among the fifteen "pieces" in *Aus den sieben Tagen*, perhaps the most extreme is "Gold Dust," which reads as follows: "Live completely alone for four days / without food / in complete silence / without much movement / sleep as little as necessary / think as little as possible //after four days, late at night / without conversation beforehand / play single sounds // WITHOUT THINKING which you are playing /// close your eyes / just listen." *(Stockhausen,* 7 Tagen*, ?)* But perhaps more pertinent to our discussion of King Crimson 1969 is "It," the piece just before "Gold Dust" in "Aus den sieben Tagen." The instructions for "It" read: "Think NOTHING / wait until it is absolutely still within you / when you have attained this / begin to play // as soon as you start to think, stop / and try to re-attain the state of NON-THINKING / then continue playing."

What would such music sound like? You do not have to guess. "It" was recorded by Deutsche Grammophon in 1968 and you can hear it for yourself. But in case you don't have access to old German pressings (though the record is readily available in most university music department record libraries), it doesn't matter much. It sounds much the same as King Crimson's "Moonchild."

THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING including THE RETURN OF THE FIRE WITCH and THE DANCE OF THE PUPPETS (by McDonald and Sinfield). Along with "Epitaph," this is the album's other mellotron epic. The title track. Hence theme song/anthem for the laddies in the group's early stages, though decidedly nothing like "Here We Come, We're the Monkees." Because it is not a Fripp composition, I will pass it over rather quickly here, except to note: the rather foursquare phraseology, which it would take Fripp a while to get away from; the ubiquitous minor modality; the false (major) ending, as in "I Talk to the Wind"; the odd circus-music woodwind/organ break after the false ending – one of those stark, unreasonable textural/associative contrasts which Fripp was to employ so effectively in later efforts; the Gothic heaviness of it all; and finally the abrupt ending – after having built up a whole album's worth of momentum, a melodramatic climax is avoided in favor of a sort of *musicus interruptus.*

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In retrospect, whatever one felt about this music, the seminal nature of the album cannot be denied: the variegated yet cohesive *In the Court of the Crimson King* helped launch, for better or for worse, not one but several musical movements, among them heavy metal, jazz-rock fusion, and progressive rock. As the *Rolling Stone Record Guide* was to put it some years later, the album "helped shape a set of baroque standards for art-rock." *(RS Record Guide, 1st ed., 204)*

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Chapter Five: King Crimson II

To repeat excessively is to enter into loss; this we term the zero of the signified.

– *Roland Barthes*

After the breakup of King Crimson I in December 1969 a period of some two and a half years ensued during which Fripp struggled to keep Crimson alive and in some sense intact as a recording band, performing outfit, and concept. To make the almost continual personnel changes of this and the following period easier to visualize, I have concocted the chart which appears on page 40.

Looking at the period 1970 to early 1972 – King Crimson II as we are calling it – at a distance of nearly two decades, this writer has rather violently mixed feelings about it. It didn't take Fripp long to figure out that somehow the music had lost its course. As early as 1973 he was talking about King Crimson II like this: "The time was spent preparing for the present, I suppose. This band [King Crimson III] is right for the present, just as the first band was right for its own time. The interim period was something I wouldn't want to undergo again." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* And in 1978 he admitted being "embarrassed" by KC II: "I went into catatonia for three weeks on a tour with that incarnation of the band. It was one of the most horrible periods of my life." *(Farber 1978, 27)*

Chart 4							
King Crimson I-III Personnel							
	GUITAR	LYRICS	REEDS, etc.	BASS/VOX	DRUMS		
KING CRIMSON I							
CCK British tour '69 American tour '69	Fripp	Sinfield	McDonald	Lake	M. Giles		
KING CRIMSON II							
						PIANO	BASS
only gig in 1970	Fripp	Sinfield		Lake	M. Giles	Tippet	P. Giles
Poseidon May '70	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Lake - Haskell	M. Giles	Tippet	P. Giles
Lizard Dec. '70	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Haskell	McCulloch		
Islands Dec. '71 British tour '71 America tour '71	Fripp	Sinfield	Collins	Boz	Wallace		
Earthbound American tour '72	Fripp		Collins	Boz	Wallace		
KING CRIMSON III							
						VIOLIN	PERCUSSION
British tour '72 *Larks' Tongues* Feb. '73	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford	Cross	Muir
European tour '73 American tour '73 *Starless* Feb. '74 More tours '74	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford	Cross	
Red July '74	Fripp			Wetton	Bruford		

During the period itself, with musicians entering and exiting the Court at a rapid pace, with ideas flying by, attempts being made to catch them, improvisational situations being tried out, albums being made, Fripp did his best to put the best face on it. In 1971 he said, "The beauty of the set-up in Crimson is that it can handle having a flexible personnel around a "core" of more or less permanent members" – the core, getting right down to it, being Fripp and Sinfield, and ultimately Fripp alone. *(Williams 1971, 24)* At the least, Fripp was able to indulge his perennial fascination with "the way musicians work together as a unit. You see, I view King Crimson as the microcosm of the macrocosm." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* By which one feels he meant that being in an evolving, complex, unpredictable, perilous yet potential-laden musical situation like King Crimson was verily analogous to being alive on planet Earth, or like being in some alchemical laboratory (the microcosm) for the purpose of investigating life itself (the macrocosm). Fripp would also issue elliptical, contradictory, unfathomable statements concerning his exact role in King Crimson. On the one hand, it was obvious by the end of 1972 that he was the only person who had been in all of the band's incarnations, that in some sense King Crimson was Robert Fripp plus whoever, that it was *his* band. Yet he seemed to shrink from assuming unambiguously the mantle of authority, which he felt belonged not to him but to King Crimson itself, the concept, the idea, the force, the music, not to one or several particular merely human personalities. In 1973 he would say things like, "I form bands, but I'm not a leader. There are far more subtle ways of influencing people and getting things done than being a band leader. Although I *can* be a band leader, it's not a function I cherish. Who needs it?" *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

In the Wake of Poseidon and *Lizard*

In January 1970, after the departure of McDonald and Giles, King Crimson was temporarily a trio consisting of Fripp, Lake, and Sinfield. (McDonald and Giles went on to make their self-titled duo album, released in 1971; McDonald was subsequently one of the founding members of Foreigner in 1976.) The trio cancelled future gigs and set about composing, rehearsing, and looking for new members to fill out the group, with vague plans to resume live performances. In order to sustain public interest in the band, King Crimson released the single "Cat Food / Groon" on March 13.

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CAT FOOD (by Fripp-Sinfield-McDonald). Well. I guess this is what Bartok would sound like if asked to write music for a Garfield movie – or Hendrix playing Disneyland – or something. On one level it's just a joke: Schizoid Man meets Felix the Cat at a Thelonious Monk concert: perhaps Fripp had to let it be known that there really was a jester dancing or at least lurking somewhere 'round the shadowy halls and dark pillars of the Court of the Crimson King. Because one wouldn't have known from the first album that anyone in the band had anything remotely approaching a sense of humor: the music embodied humorless dread and melancholy. So "Cat Food" – it may have been black humor, studied humor, sick humor, but it defied anyone to take it too seriously. Jazz pianist Keith Tippett, McDonald, and Fripp all have delightful moments of playing. Michael Giles (drums) and Peter Giles (bass) are the skittish rhythm section; Greg Lake sang it.

GROON (by Fripp) is a different sort of number entirely, performed solely by Giles, Giles, and Fripp on bass, drums, and guitar. This is more the kind of music Fripp would later become firmly identified with – "Groon" is almost a precursor of King Crimson III, moments on *Exposure*, even (to stretch it a bit) the League of Gentlemen. "Groon" is also a rather "pure"

specimen of jazz-rock – being a kind of latter-day electrified be-bop. Fast, frenetic guitar and drum work. Practically atonal. That peculiar quality of improvisational abandon simultaneous with strict planning and coordinated execution.

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King Crimson's only gig in 1970 was an appearance on BBC TV's "Top of the Pops" program on March 25, performing "Cat Food" with the lineup listed in the chart on page 40. By the end of the month Crimson had auditioned several drummers with the intent of finding a permanent replacement for Michael Giles but had succeeded only in enlisting the services of Circus's flute and reed player Mel Collins. In early April, bassist/vocalist Greg Lake decided to leave the Court and form a band with the Nice's Keith Emerson: this was, of course, the nucleus of the mighty Emerson, Lake, and Palmer. In the meantime, Fripp and the whole motley crew mentioned in the last couple of pages, in various combinations, had been busy recording *In the Wake of Poseidon*, King Crimson's second album, which was released in May.

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IN THE WAKE OF POSEIDON

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, & devices

• Greg Lake: vocals

• Michael Giles: drums

• Peter Giles: bass

• Keith Tippet: piano

• Mel Collins: saxes and flute

• Gordon Haskell: vocal on "Cadence and Cascade"

• Peter Sinfield: words

It was palpably evident that *Poseidon*'s musical models were those of *In the Court of the Crimson King.* With the exception of Side Two's "The Devil's Triangle," *Poseidon* didn't seem to break any new ground, although some critics saw it as a refinement over the first album. The overall form of *Poseidon*'s Side One almost exactly paralleled that of the first record: fierce blowout, soft ballad, mellotron epic – with the gentle vocal introduction of "Peace" here in place of the night-sounds-cum-prelude to "Schizoid Man." (In itself there's nothing the matter, of course, with using the same form more than once – in Beethoven's nine symphonies, thirty-two piano sonatas, sixteen string quartets, and many other pieces, the Viennese master almost invariably resorted to sonata form.)

The modal plea for "Peace" recurs as a guitar instrumental at the beginning of Side Two, and crops up with Greg Lake singing it once more at the very end. The recurring "Peace" theme serves to unify the album conceptually as well as musically – a nod to Bartok's multi-movement arch forms as well as to *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.* The problem is, it's very difficult to make a Beatles-type album (which, at some level, in some manner, Fripp was explicitly trying to do) without the melodic gift of a Paul McCartney, who, for all the petulant criticism foisted on him through the years, always brought to Lennon's existential sermons and rock'n'rootsy authenticity a kind of effortless grace and sheer joyful musicality. Fripp has never quite found his McCartney/counterpart, and hence has had to construct his music on Herculean

effort alone, pure force of will, mind over recalcitrant musical matter. (And no, I'm not saying King Crimson should have tried to sound more like the Beatles.)

Poseidon's expansive, fold-out cover featured a painting by Tammo de Jongh called "12 Archetypes" – trickster, anima, child, magician, and so on – and was perhaps an indication of an interest on Fripp's part in Jungian psychology (Carl Jung, like Fripp, was concerned with forging some fusion of magic and reason, intellect and intuition, inner and outer, art and science). As on the jacket of *In the Court of the Crimson King*, Sinfield's lyrics were printed in their entirety, though (at least on my copy) the silver ink and semi-glossy background made them onerously difficult to read.

Side One

PEACE-A BEGINNING (by Fripp and Sinfield). Medieval chant-like. Lake's voice grows out of deep reverb into clear focus until suddenly (let's hope you haven't turned up your stereo too high, the better to hear the delicate harmonics resound – how many times have I done that in soft King Crimson passages, only to be rudely, deeply, profoundly shocked and irritated) you are slammed over the head with ...

PICTURES OF A CITY including 42ND AT TREADMILL (by Fripp and Sinfield). Lurching jazz rock blues instrumental introduction/ritornello, two verses of urban/diabolical Sinfieldisms spat out by Lake, frenetic instrumental (Bartok plays the blues), a soft cozmik blues section, crescendo to final sung verse (final line "lost soul lost trace lost in hell," viz., the realm of Beelzebub, the Devil, a.k.a. King Crimson), final atonal freakout a la "Schizoid Man," leads directly without a break into ...

CADENCE AND CASCADE (by Fripp and Sinfield). Gentle acoustic guitar caresses in .. unambiguously ... *E Major*!! First King Crimson song really in major. Hence into the realm of light (but not for long). Tasteful flute embellishments by Mel Collins ...

IN THE WAKE OF POSEIDON including LIBRA'S THEME (by Fripp and Sinfield). Mellotron minor epic. Verse chord progression almost identical to counterpart on *CCK*, "Epitaph." Harlequins, queens, Mother Earth, bishops, hags, slaves, heroes, Magi, Plato, and Jesus Christ himself populate Sinfield's imaginary landscape. I don't know. The images are extremely evocative, but it does seem to me that you have to do more than *mention* all these figures – you have to *contend* with them. As it is, it seems a bit like name-dropping, redeemed if at all only by the weight and majesty of the music and by the frightening contemporary implication: "Whilst all around our mother earth – waits balanced on the scales." Also – I've gone back and forth about this so many times – the *sound*, the "production values," the overall impression ... well, Fripp and Sinfield self-produced this record (*CCK* was "Produced by King Crimson") ... and I'm not sure they fully brought out the potential grandeur of a song like "In the Wake of Poseidon." Something thin about it, not enough bottom, not enough reverberation. It's not as though I wanted King Crimson to sound like Pink Floyd or the Moody Blues, but you have to admit that a real production pro like Jimmy Page gave Led Zeppelin's records a *sound* that made Cream's records pale by comparison, even if Cream was arguably the more talented group. Very, very few bands have ever had the perspective, the knowledge, the ears, the experience, to produce themselves in the recording studio; it's not like it's a diminution of your musicianship to be produced by someone else – look at the Beatles with George Martin. (BUT ... *take* those late Beatle albums, and listen to what John Lennon had to say about them in December 1970: "But ... but they're always dead, you know. They'd gotten to that sort of dead Beatles sound, or dead recorded sound.") *(Lennon Remembers, 21)* Fripp was walking a tightrope: not wanting to *over*-produce, wanting to capture some of the spontaneity of a live performance; but simultaneously

wanting to present a perfected product on the par of *Revolver* or almost any of the mid-to-late Beatle albums. A lot of it, I am convinced, has to do with the bass player, the bass line, the kind of overall resonance that the bottom end brings to the music: McCartney almost always got it just right for the Beatles; Peter Giles and Greg Lake never had the exact touch necessary for what I would pompously call the "ideal" King Crimson sound – Fripp was to find that touch later, albeit with quite a different kind of music, with John Wetton, and still later with Tony Levin in the 1980s – but there is something about the bass in KC I and KC II that vitiates the primal energy and expansiveness of the music. BUT ... paradoxically (ever dealing in paradoxes when you deal with King Crimson), it is precisely that lack of a firmly, manly produced/dispatched bass on *Poseidon* that makes the album more listenable today, less dated-sounding, than so many other "progressive rock" artifacts of the period, ELP and Procol Harum being prime examples. It is as if Fripp was consciously or unconsciously stripping the production job down to a minimum, relying on music rather than sound, emphasizing structure over color, meaning over expression. One more thing: harmony. *Poseidon*'s title track is so conventional harmonically that it makes one doubt Fripp's expressed conviction about mingling Afro-American sound ideals with Western tonal/harmonic developments as exemplified in Bartok: once was enough, made the point ("Epitaph"); twice ("In the Wake of Poseidon") was too much; it was redundant from a harmonic point of view. Fripp was soon to break out of this harmonic straitjacket, however.

Side Two

PEACE-A THEME (by Fripp and Sinfield). For acoustic guitars, same germinal melodies as at beginning of Side One.

CAT FOOD (by Fripp, Sinfield, McDonald). Longer than single version (the jam stretches out at the end).

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE (by Fripp). "Bolero" rhythm – *in 5*. Fripp's penchant for odd meters like 5 and 7 begins here. In all, the four sections of "The Devil's Triangle" represent Fripp's most ambitious and adventurous composition to this point in his career. The most original, the most idiosyncratic, the strangest, the purest. And from a harmonic point of view, the most advanced, almost completely dispensing with the concept of conventional chord progressions in favor of an unpredictable yet fresh and interesting, if ominous and disturbing, series of dissonances. "The Devil's Triangle" relies on *musical ideas* rather than simply raw energy, athletic musicianship, or sound color.

Including:

MERDAY MORN (by Fripp and McDonald). More bolero, working toward a climax.

HAND OF SCEIRON (by Fripp). Windstorm.

GARDEN OF WORM (by Fripp). Metronome clicks. Bolero rhythm returns, faster, more intense. Leads into deranged circus music with overlapping metric planes. Works into a metric free noise section, lots of thrashing by all the players. Reminiscence of "In the Court of the Crimson King" filters into the chaos. Flute calls reverberate, lead into...

PEACE-AN END (by Fripp and Sinfield). Voice and guitar combined: how symmetrical, how elemental, how developmental. At the final end, Lake's voice goes back into reverb from whence, at the beginning of the album, it came. Strangely unresolved harmony.

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There's no rest for the wicked, or so the saying goes, and indeed no sooner was *Poseidon* in the can and released than Robert Fripp buckled down to work on King Crimson's next LP,

Lizard – the first Crimson album whose music was entirely written by Fripp (actually there has been only one other, the following *Islands*). The core lineup of the studio group remained Fripp, Sinfield, Collins, and Haskell (who took over full bass and vocal duties); Andy McCulloch, who like Haskell hailed from Fripp's part of the country, was added on drums, and various other musicians worked as sidemen. Fripp was by now referring to King Crimson as a "pool" of contributors, *(YPG, 9)* or as "a way of getting people together to play music and a way of thinking about things." *(YPG, 10)* Sinfield described Crimson as "a pyramid or cone with Bob Fripp and me sitting on the top. Underneath are various musicians and friends upon whom we can call, who form a very solid foundation." *(YPG, 10)* Rumors of possible touring circulated, but on the eve of *Lizard*'s release on December 11, 1970, Haskell and McCulloch quit the band, and Crimson was left *sans* bassist, vocalist, and drummer. Said Fripp: "I suppose Crimson is a way of life. It's a very intense thing and I think Gordon [Haskell] realized that." *(MM 1970B, 45)* During the latter stages of *Lizard*'s production Fripp was also rehearsing and performing with Keith Tippett's fifty-piece band, Centipede.

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LIZARD

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, electric keyboards and devices

• Mel Collins: flute and saxes

• Gordon Haskell: bass guitar and vocals

• Andy McCulloch: drums

• Peter Sinfield: words and pictures

with:

• Robin Miller: oboe and cor anglais

• Mark Charig: cornet

• Nick Evans: trombone

• Keith Tippet: piano and electric piano

• Jon Anderson of Yes: vocals on "Prince Rupert Awakes"

What kind of music "is" this, what genre, what type – what the hell are we actually listening to here? Are we supposed to draw any connecting lines between this music and Jim Morrison and the Doors ("Celebration of the Lizard," "I am the lizard king – I can do anything") ... lizard king, Crimson King, Morrison's book *The Lords and the New Creatures*, etc., ... between this music and Freud?

The multiplicity of levels evident in Beatles music continued to be an ideal that haunted Fripp in composing *Lizard*, even if he wasn't interested in copying the Beatles' style per se. "The only thing that worries me," he said, "is that perhaps it [*Lizard*] won't be given enough of a chance. We've made it so that the 24th time things'll really begin to go Zap. At the same time, when the album starts it should really hit you, so that you'll think perhaps there's something worth getting into." *(Williams 1971, 24)* The problem here – I said something like this already – is that the Beatles managed to make their music likeable and infectious and seductive and entrancing on the *first* hearing; by the twenty-fourth hearing you were into the subtleties, but you listened to it twenty-four times because you *wanted* to. Fewer listeners, it is probably safe to say,

were (or are today) willing to listen twenty-four times to an LP's worth of what is often, on "Lizard," an unfamiliar, unappealing, unattractive, high-strung, neurotic, almost perversely difficult sounding surface, in order to get to that magic place of cognizance where the zapping fun begins. And yet ... *does Lizard* begin to make sense after twenty-four hearings? I'm probably only up to about fifteen or twenty, but in my experience, the answer would have to be yes. It becomes a question, however, of how much you are going to demand of your listening audience, and in this matter Fripp tends to opt for a "no pain, no gain" approach. Jung had said, after all, "There is no birth of consciousness without pain," *(Jung MDR?)* and if so in life, then why should it be otherwise in art?

At this point, though, yet another meta-musical quandary rears its beguiling head. As Brian Eno once put it, "Almost any arbitrary collision of events listened to enough times comes to seem very meaningful. (There's an interesting and useful bit of information for a composer, I can tell you.)" *(Eno 1983, 56)* This morning, not thinking about writing this, not thinking about *Lizard*, not thinking about anything in particular, I woke up at about six. It was dark and stormy outside and I was unaccountably sucked over to my sequencer for some mysterious reason – I wanted to hear some tones. I punched in a few random diatonic notes, which repeated every ten seconds or so. My seven-year-old daughter Lilia, coming into the living room, was perplexed that there should be this ethereal music with no one playing the synthesizer. I showed her that the tape recorders weren't running, and told her it was ghosts. She didn't believe it. "There must be some trick," she said. So I showed her what the trick was, and she wanted to try it. She played the opening phrase of Handel's Christmas carol "Joy to the World," a descending octave scale, which proceeded to repeat in a loop. About five minutes later I stumbled over and punched in a few more tones, which turned out to be not the ones I wanted, but I let them stand. This "music" went on and on and on, through breakfast and watering the plants and the rest of it, and by half an hour later the sound had come to seem endowed with a shimmering depth of significance.

The sound of King Crimson grew yet more astringent and dissonant on *Lizard*, and rock critics, who generally agreed that if nothing else, this must be the work of a genius, began to be confused and put off. The issue was becoming one of, How much of that *kind* of genius do we need or *want* in rock and roll, roots music, the music of the people? *Lizard* lacked even a real git-down potboiler like "Schizoid Man", how far could the limits of rock be stretched without its preciously nasty essence being irretrievably lost?

Side One

CIRKUS including ENTRY OF THE CHAMELEONS; INDOOR GAMES; HAPPY FAMILY. Three nervous, sputtering fantasy songs (with remnants of the *Court of the Crimson King* mellotron epic on the first) led off the album. The textures were incredibly complex, the rhythms were skittish and jumpy, and the dissonances resulting from a seemingly random intersection of contrapuntal planes were grating. The whole effect owed as much to avant-garde jazz as to rock. Sinfield came up with some snarlingly suggestive imagery in "Indoor Games" ("Dusting plastic garlic plants / They snigger in the draught"), while "Happy Family" is a rollicking if intentionally awkward pain of a paean on the breakup of the Beatles (who also appear imaginatively portrayed in one of the many panels on the album's immaculately beautiful cover painting by Gini Barris, painstakingly executed in the style of medieval manuscript illuminations).

LADY OF THE DANCING WATERS. Fripp at his most lyrical – the vocal line is a bona fide *tune*, and really quite affecting, embellished by Collins' fluttering flute arabesques. Yes, beauty, sheer beauty, classical grace, romantic yearning, were part of the whole King Crimson formula, and here those qualities are given almost completely unambiguous, non-ironic

embodiment – Nick Evans' subtle trombone slides being the one stinger in an otherwise straightforward and sincere pastorale.

Side Two (the "Lizard" Suite proper)

PRINCE RUPERT AWAKES. Sinfield's diffuse and inscrutable lyrics are miraculously redeemed by Jon Anderson's highly polished, professional, and lovely vocal, and by another genuinely melodic strain from Fripp's imagination (in a way it was becoming a question of how long Fripp was going to continue to be constrained by Sinfield's precious, raucous, sometimes preciously raucous or raucously precious poetics). "Prince Rupert Awakes" contains the only instance I can call to mind of a minor chord with a major seventh in the rock repertory (maybe Stevie Wonder or Peter Gabriel threw one in somewhere). Leads without a break into ...

BOLERO-THE PEACOCK'S TALE. A structured improvisation which leads from bolero classical-style to bolero big-band style and back again, making effective contrasts between major and minor modes at climactic points of formal articulation.

THE BATTLE OF GLASS TEARS

Including

DAWN SONG. Vocal prelude setting up a medieval/mythological battle scene, which unfolds in ...

LAST SKIRMISH. Mellotrons, horns, flutes, bass, guitar, and drums clash and pulsate in pugilistic cacophony in one of Fripp's several musical Armageddons of the period.

PRINCE RUPERT'S LAMENT. This I presume is the section of ominously repeated bass notes over which Fripp engages in one of his patented (or soon to be patented) fuzz-sustained guitar workouts, sounding here somewhat like a rock and roll bagpipe.

BIG TOP. No, your record player's speed control isn't on the blink – that's Robert Fripp playing with his mellotron's pitch. This brief interlude (which turns out to be the album's coda) is one of many instances (refer back to *Lizard*'s opening track, "Cirkus," for example) of early Crimson probing the depths of that stock situation of B-movie or "Twilight Zone" fame: a happy family circus, nice on the surface but, as it develops, with something very WEIRD, very EVIL going on behind the scenes. A grand overreaching metaphor for the sterile-surface-covering-sadistic-subconscious-Western-society idea?

(I have assumed that Robert Fripp basically wrote *Lizard*'s music, and Peter Sinfield the words. In actual fact, of course, everyone who played on the record had some part in the music's creation, since so far as I know Fripp did not, Zappa-like, write out every last note and nuance of expression, but rather strove to elicit from given players the type of semi-improvised passages he deemed fitting for a given piece. Furthermore, Sinfield had a significant musical role as well, at least in theory: he was quoted as saying, "It's got to the stage where nothing on 'Lizard' was passed without my approval." Fripp described to me the making of *Lizard* as a "power struggle" between him and Sinfield. With the personal and creative relationship between them deteriorating, Fripp was finding it increasingly difficult to write music to Sinfield's words. This tension, which Fripp feels comes through much of the music on *Lizard*, would soon come to a head.) *(YPG 11, Jan. 2 1971)*

Islands and *Earthbound*

The period immediately after the release of *Lizard* was what Fripp has called "a time of desperation." *(YPG 11, Dec. 19 1970)* King Crimson was looking for bassists and singers, and considered Bryan Ferry, among many others. After Fripp had auditioned some thirty bass players, Boz Burrell was chosen in February 1971. Or rather, it appears that having been selected as King Crimson's singer, Boz (who was not a bassist) was one day noodling around on a bass and Fripp decided it would be possible to teach him to play the instrument, more or less from scratch. With the lineup of Fripp, Sinfield, Collins, Boz, and Ian Wallace (drums), King Crimson rehearsed through March and by April were ready to start performing, it had been almost a year and a half since the end of the American tour in December 1969, when King Crimson I broke up, and Fripp was nervous but exceeding eager.

After four April dates at the Zoom Club in Frankfurt, the band began a long and grueling tour schedule (1971 – Britain: May, fourteen gigs; June and July, two gigs; August, seven gigs; September, six gigs; October, eighteen gigs. Canada and U.S.A.: November, twelve gigs; December, six gigs. 1972 – U.S.A.: February, twelve gigs; March, nineteen gigs; April, one gig). The touring band drew on King Crimson's by now fairly substantial repertoire.

(Historical footnote on the pecking order among British progressive rock bands in late 1971: at two concerts at the Academy of Music in New York on November 24 and 25, Yes opened, King Crimson played second, and the headliner was Procol Harum. The *Variety* reviewer, who noted the undue time necessary for equipment changes between sets by the three quasi-symphonic behemoths, allowed that Procol Harum was "in fine form" but "was put to the test by having to follow strong sets by Yes and the overpowering King Crimson," who, he felt, "should headline next time out." When King Crimson returned to the Academy of Music on February 12, 1972, they were indeed the headliners – supported by Redbone and the Flying Burrito Brothers.)

In the meantime, work was in progress on the studio album *Islands*, which was completed by October and released on December 3, 1971, almost exactly a year after "Lizard." All of the album's six pieces were by Fripp or by Fripp and Sinfield. Fripp used the contributions of nine musicians to get the sound he wanted, but if King Crimson was a way of doing things, for *Islands* that way involved following Fripp's instructions to the letter. As drummer Wallace has testified, "Fripp was in one of his weird periods. You had to play everything the way he did it. There was no room to stretch out." *(Rosen 1983, 21)*

As for Sinfield's lyrics – well, let me let another writer carry out the execution. Don Heckman, reviewing *Islands* in *Stereo Review*: "What is there to say, after all, about lyrics that go 'Time's grey hand won't catch me while the sun shine down / Untie and unlatch me while the stars shine,' or 'Love's web is spun, cats prowl, mice run / Wreathe snatch-hand briars where owls know my eyes'? ... With Yeats and Thomas and Keats and Lord knows how many other superb English poets available to me, I bloody well don't intend to waste my time with absurdities like this." *(Heckman 1972, 101)*

One of the strangest "rock" albums ever released, *Islands* presents stark, unreasonable contrasts: the three excessively precious and poetic ballad-type songs "Formentera Lady," "The Letters," and "Islands" (all of which nevertheless continue to use highly imaginative textures); the fantastic raunchy profundity of the guitar showcase instrumental "Sailor's Tale"; the X-rated "Ladies of the Road"; the pure if not puerile classicism of "Prelude: Song of the Gulls"; and the

oceanic spaciousness of the title track, "Islands." Of all of Fripp's albums, this is probably the hardest to understand, the easiest to ridicule, the most difficult to be generous to. And yet ...

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ISLANDS

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, Peter's Pedal Harmonium, and sundry implements

• Mel Collins: flute, bass flute, saxes, and vocals

• Boz: bass guitar, lead vocals, and choreography

• Ian Wallace: drums, percussion, and vocals

• Peter Sinfield: words, sounds, and visions

Featured players:

• Keith Tippet: piano

• Paulina Lucas: soprano

• Robin Miller: oboe

• Mark Charig: cornet

• Harry Miller: string bass

Side One

FORMANTERA LADY (by Fripp and Sinfield). Begins with bass solo, then flute, piano, and tinkling percussion enter. Boz delivers the first two verses of foursquare melody in deadpan foursquare style. (Why couldn't Fripp ever hire singers who knew something about phrasing?) The minimalistic B section/refrain/long instrumental closeout is little more than a beat with flaccid soloing, spineless scatting by Boz and rustling clinking percussive noises in the background. Soprano Paulina Lucas comes in with some long-tone vocalizing. Debussy's "Sirens" it ain't; Lennon's "Mother" it ain't. But *Islands* has a bit of both. Lennon (with Phil Spector) had risked a minimalistic approach to production with *Plastic Ono Band*, released in late 1970. It's tempting to see an influence on Fripp here. "Formantera Lady" leads directly into ...

SAILOR'S TALE (by Fripp). Ostinato. Some nice blowing by Mel Collins. Again the minor/major contrast. Then the beat slows and we get one of the tastiest guitar passages Fripp has ever committed to record. Faced with playing like this, one has to wonder why Fripp didn't shut up his vocalists more and just play his guitar. Then the fast beat comes back, with mellotrons galore. The ending – guitar downshifting decellerando, leaving only low, long sounds: a nice compositional gesture.

THE LETTERS (by Fripp and Sinfield). This priceless artifact of mannered progressive rock seems to embody the dissolution of King Crimson II in a nutshell. Mr. Bangs to the witness stand: "'The Letter' [sic] is just an old-fashioned soap opera set to lumbering, churning vats of musical tar, with lyrics worth quoting if not much else: 'With quill and silver knife / She carved a poison pen / Wrote to her lover's wife / "Your husband's seed has fed my flesh."' And then the poor cuckoldette commits suicide. What is all this quasi-Victorian/Shakespearean doggerel, anyway? Are the British trying to get back to their roots? Irritating as I find it, the music is good." *(Bangs 1972, 60)*

Side Two

LADIES OF THE ROAD (by Fripp and Sinfield). Obscene lyrics with music to match, but all in good fun. (In 1990 Fripp summed up his feelings about the lyrics of "Formantera Lady" to me: "What a load of crap." "Ladies of the Road," however, he endorsed: "That was *real*.") The critics loved this song because at least it had the sex (and plenty of it too) if not the drugs nor exactly the rock and roll. And it reminded listeners that Fripp and company did have a sense of humor, even if it didn't come out too often – and when it did was on the blue side.

PRELUDE: SONG OF THE GULLS (by Fripp). A Fripp exercise in unadorned "classical" music for strings and oboe. Bittersweet major key. Lovely in its way, it shows a different side of Fripp's background – but, to rephrase Don Heckman's tirade reported above, with Beethoven and Mozart and Bach and Lord knows how many other superb classical composers available to me, I'm not sure how much heavy analysis should be lavished on amateurish orchestrational efforts like this.

ISLANDS (by Fripp and Sinfield). Gorgeous melodic vocal writing. Long instrumental ending section over long harmonium tones; Fripp left in all the fluffed piano and cornet notes, a fact for which I admire him greatly, though I'm not exactly sure why – I suppose it's for having the courage to preserve the feeling of an interactive live performance.

The last thing we hear on *Islands*, after a lengthy silent interlude following the final song, is the chamber group used for "Prelude: Song of the Gulls" tuning up and the soft yet persuasive voice of Robert Fripp telling them they're going to do it twice more, once with the oboe and once without, then call it a day. He counts off the beat, one-two-three two-two-three, and ... silence: *Islands* is finished. I suppose you can read into this whatever you want, but to me it seems as if Fripp is telling us (the audience), Look, this is music, and music is made by people, and people have to tune up and practice and rehearse, and there is so much more behind music than the sound, more than ever can be told.

For all its impenetrability, its self-conscious artistic excess, its woefully labored attempts to capture innocence, there is a certain quality in *Islands* making the sum much greater than its parts, even if this sum does not quite tally up to musical greatness. The strange thing is, I listened to the album today for the first time in a couple of years, and I found, almost against my will (since I've been telling people for some time that *Islands* is the absolute worst King Crimson record ever put out) – I found that I actually *liked* it. As an overall musical gesture. The whole album has that sort of *fin-de-siecle* manneristic feeling, like the over-refined music of the late fourteenth century, the twilight of the middle ages – a sense of worlds falling apart, new ones as yet unborn, grand heartbreaking nostalgia for what can no longer be, rough beasts slouching toward Bethlehem to be born.

In the composition of *Islands*, Fripp was learning to subtract, to take things away, to let the black backdrop of silence show through the music, to heed the oft-repeated but ill-practiced axiom that less is more. To borrow a phrase from Eno (who in turn derived it from filmmaker Luis Bunuel): "Every note obscures another." *(Grant 1982, 29)*

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As had King Crimson's American tour in late 1969, their American tour in November and December of 1971 produced many moments of tension and even hostility among the band's members. Sinfield – who on tour played VCS3 synthesizer and worked the group's lighting and sound – in particular found the turmoil and pressures of being on the road in America difficult to cope with, and made up his mind that he wouldn't return to the States again with the band "unless

specific conditions were fulfilled, and I didn't expect them to be." *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* It wasn't long before Sinfield and Fripp had reached a point where it became clear that they were moving in irreconcilably different directions. On New Year's Day 1972, the *New Musical Express (YPG 17)* reported that Sinfield had left King Crimson, and a week later Fripp explained his view on the matter: "I suppose that the thing to say is that I felt the creative relationship between us had finished. I'd ceased to believe in Pete ... It got to the point where I didn't feel that by working together we'd improve on anything we'd already done." *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* As usual with Fripp, his dealings with the outer world were intimately bound up with his inner development. Eight years after the split with Sinfield, Fripp explained to an interviewer that he came to the decision to make the break on the same day he changed the name he was known by from "Bob" to "Robert": "I felt I'd made my first adult decision." *(Watts 1980, 22)*

Sinfield had had increasing difficulties dealing with his position in King Crimson, especially on tour. Fripp said that "the band often found the lights distracting", *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* he himself had grown suspicious of the visual "trickery" associated with the British tour of 1971, "however fine it may have been. I'm thinking of the lights, and the general blood and thunder." *(YPG 18-19, quoting MM, Jan. 15 1972)* In other words, Fripp wanted the band to be judged on its purely musical merits – again the suspicion of the "show biz" aspect of rock and roll performance. For his part, Sinfield, who had nevertheless expressed a desire to let his work grow in directions other than those offered by the King Crimson format, regarded the decision for him to quit the group as "entirely on Bob's side": "Bob rang me up and said 'I can't work with you.'" *(YPG 18, quoting Williams, MM, Jan. 8 1972)* Fripp was at pains to present the split to the British press in the most rancorless possible terms, and was disturbed by the sensationalist manner in which the *New Music Express* handled it. *(YPG 18, Jan. 8 1972)* The many instances of press distortion involving King Crimson constituted one reason why, later in the 1970s, Fripp would undertake a one-man campaign to reject and re-write the ground rules of the whole music industry complex.

In the opening months of 1972 the remaining members of King Crimson – Fripp, Collins, Boz, and Wallace – were not exactly congealing into what one would describe as a happy family. Yet, as reports of inner dissent came out in the press, the band was booked for one more American tour. As Fripp was later to write, the "Earthbound" tour "was conducted in the knowledge that the group would disband afterwards." *(Fripp 1980F, 38)*

While in America on KC II's final tour (February-April 1972), drummer Ian Wallace bought a portable Ampex stereo cassette deck which the group plugged into the mixing board during live performances. Many performances were taped this way, and Fripp subsequently took the cassettes home and edited them down to a live album, *Earthbound*, released in England on June 9, 1972. Crimson's American distributor, Atlantic, declined to put out the record, saying the sound quality wasn't good enough. (My copy is a later Italian version on the Philips/Polydor label, featuring liner notes by a certain Daniele Caroli titled "Robert Fripp: musica psichedelica dal vivo negli USA" ["live psychedelic music in the USA"] and incongruously sporting a cover collage utilizing the photos from King Crimson's 1974 album *Red*: Fripp, John Wetton, and Bill Bruford., Sound quality or no sound quality, *Earthbound* is an unusual cultural document, the sole officially released record of KC II live, music somehow emerging from the wreckage of a dream.

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EARTHBOUND

• Fripp: guitar, mellotron, synthesizer

• Boz Burrell: bass and vocals

• Mel Collins: saxes and flutes, mellotron

• Ian Wallace: drums and percussion

21ST CENTURY SCHIZOID MAN. The group romps ably through a version of the old war-horse that clocks in at eleven minutes and forty-five seconds. Fripp delivers an insane monster of a distorted guitar solo over Boz and Wallace's spirited thumping, then cuts out to let Collins' sax have a go. Delirious abandon, even – dare I say it – joy.

PEORIA (by Fripp, Collins, Burrell, and Wallace). Ah yes, the old two-chord (I-IV) jam. I think you had to be there. Collins is cooking, though – recipe drawn from the post-Coltrane sheets-of-sound cookbook. Then who's that scat-singing? Must be Boz, how about a B minus for effort and go back and study your Louis Armstrong records ... a lot. Fripp gets in a few tasty rhythm licks before the fade-out.

THE SAILOR'S TALE. Ably dispatched.

EARTHBOUND (Fripp, Collins, Burrell, and Wallace). The old one-chord (I) jam. More scatting. Maybe I was unkind with the Louis Armstrong bit; Boz is clearly more comfortable – and compelling – with this kind of hollering than he was running through Sinfield's poetics *sotto voce* in the studio. In a couple of years Boz would be playing riffy blues rock in Bad Company, and that direction is all too evident in takes like this. Fripp turns in what is, by now, one of his patented angular, dissonant electric guitar solos.

GROON. The group negotiates its way through a highly extended version of "Cat Food"'s B side, a composition which, when you think about it, is no piece of cake. Here the song serves as a vehicle for some ecstatic wailing and shrieking by saxman Collins, with Fripp comping along in the middleground. There's a moment when the music dies down a bit and you can hear ... *somebody just screaming their head off.* The second half of "Groon"'s fifteen-plus minutes' duration is devoted to a roiling drum solo by Wallace, the latter part of which is fed through a VCS3 synthesizer to produce all manner of sonic swoops, phases, and filtered friezes in motion. At the time (1972) this procedure was something of an innovation, at least in rock; and today, after two decades during which synthesizers have come to epitomize all that is sterile and lifeless in pop music, it's refreshing to hear a vintage machine being employed with such Dionysian glee.

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The contrast between *Islands* and *Earthbound* is extreme to a degree, a bit like mentioning Judy Collins and Patti Smith in the same breath. The split between studio Crimson and live Crimson had grown virtually to the point of schizophrenia: there was Fripp the painfully self-conscious composer of delicate neo-romantic refinements, refined almost to a point of transparently pellucid non-entity; and there was Fripp the jagged metal warrior, brazenly brandishing his electric guitar as a weapon, band of sonic renegade vagabonds in tow. Great musicians often have some such split musical personality – Beethoven can pat you lovingly on the cheek one minute, and wheel you around and kick you in the butt the next.

King Crimson II: a period of intensive searching by Robert Fripp, who managed, in trying circumstances, some of which were surely of his own (if unconscious) making – to put out four

albums of some of the most experimental, eclectic, interesting, difficult, challenging, beautiful, ugly, and at times profoundly irritating music ever to come out of the rock orbit.

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Chapter Six: King Crimson III and Brian Eno

Traditionally aggression is symbolized by the sky and earth radiating red fire ... In the hell realm we throw out flames and radiations which are continually coming back to us. There is no room at all in which to experience any spaciousness or openness.

– *Chogyam Trungpa*

The Formation of King Crimson III

King Crimson II disbanded after the "Earthbound" tour, whose last gig was in Birmingham, Alabama, on April 1, 1972. Fripp was looking for something new. In November he was to say of the *Earthbound* period, "Having discovered what everybody [in the band] wanted to do, I found I didn't want to do it." *(YPG 21, quoting from* Sounds*, Nov. 4 1972)* On the following page is a condensed chronology of activities taking us from this point to the end of the King Crimson III period.

Chart 5	
Condensed Chronology of King Crimson III	
1972	
July 22:	New KC lineup announced: Fripp, Bruford, Wetton, Cross, Muir
Sept. 4:	KC III rehearsals begin
Sept. 8:	"The Heavenly Music Corp." recorded by Fripp and Eno at Eno's London home studio
Oct. 13 Dec. 15:	KC III British tour (beginning in Germany)
1973	
Jan. Feb.:	*Larks' Tongues in Aspic* recorded at Command Studios, London
Feb. 10:	Muir injures himself onstage and leaves King Crimson
Feb. 10 Apr. 9:	British and European tours
Apr. 18 July 2:	American tour
Aug. 4-5:	"Swastika Girls" recorded with Eno at Command Studios, London
Sept. 19 Nov. 29:	American, European tours
1974	
Jan.:	*Starless and Bible Black* produced at AIR Studios, London
Mar. 19 July 1:	European, American tours
June:	*U.S.A.* recorded live in New York City by the Record Plant
July Aug.:	*Red* produced at Olympic Sound Studios, London, by Fripp, Bruford, and Wetton
Sept. 28:	Breakup of King Crimson III announced
1975	
Sept.:	Fripp compiles *Young Persons' Guide to King Crimson*, London

Immediately following the Earthbound tour, in May 1972, Fripp set about forming a new King Crimson. This time, you can practically hear the man muttering under his breath, it's no more Mr. Nice Guy. In point of fact, Fripp was determined to make a break from the chaos and instability of KC II as well as from some of the musical styles of that "interim" period, to get back somehow to the intangible spirit of King Crimson that was continuing to haunt him like a demon. Perhaps as a symbol of the changes to be made, Fripp cut his long frizzy hair around this time and sprouted a neat little beard – changing his visual appearance from latter-day hippie to fastidiously groomed young intellectual musician.

A man like Fripp does not believe that things happen by accident, but rather looks for synchronistically significant signs, reading the screen of his perceptions as a metaphorical psychic tableau. In the late spring of 1972 a number of such signs seemed to present themselves in an auspicious constellation, and Fripp's confidence was high.

To begin with, there was the matter of enlisting the talents of experimental percussionist and notorious mystical crazy man Jamie Muir, whose list of avant-garde credits included work with saxophonist Evan Parker, guitarist Derek Bailey, the Battered Ornaments and Boris. Muir's name had been crossing the screen of Fripp's awareness for several years. Fripp had felt it inevitable that some day they would work together. He told an interviewer in 1973, "When I finally phoned him up, we talked as if we'd known each other for a long time. He expected to be in King Crimson and had been waiting for my call." *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

Then there was the matter of bassist/singer John Wetton, who, like Muir, had been on Fripp's mind for some time. Wetton was, like Fripp, Greg Lake, and several other musicians in the King Crimson circle, from the Bournemouth area – Fripp and Wetton had known each other in college – and had worked his way up in local bands before joining the eclectic progressive rock group Family in 1970. Wetton left Family to briefly join Mogul Thrash, and when that band fell apart in early 1971, Wetton, looking for work, called Fripp up in late January, a week after Fripp had concluded his torturous and lengthy auditioning of bass players by choosing Boz. By October 1971, Fripp had a proposition for King Crimson II members Collins, Boz, and Wallace, as well as for Wetton: Wetton would join the band, freeing Boz to concentrate more on his vocal duties. The band members rejected the idea; they wanted Boz to continue on bass. For his part, Wetton declined; he later said, "I didn't think I'd get on with that band at all. Fripp was just using me then as an ally. Saying 'Listen, I'm outnumbered; there are three people who want to play this kind of music and only me who wants to play *this* kind of music. Help.' I didn't think that was a very good pretext for joining the band so I said no." *(Rosen 1983, 22)* Score one for Wetton's strength and independence; so far so bad for Fripp's designs on Wetton's talents. But when KC II finally came apart, the time was ripe: what had been out of sync now fell together, and Fripp and Wetton finally seemed to need each other at the same time. Wetton later said the idea was to rebuild the band from the ground up: "We totally re-designed the band, we updated it. I felt that the band before ours, the *Islands* band, was a little dated. They were trying to play pseudo kind of pop funk and it just didn't gel. So we put it back on the rails again and headed it in a progressive direction with *Larks' Tongues in Aspic.*" *(Rosen 1983, 22)* Wetton, who after KC III was to play with Uriah Heep and Asia, had a vigorous, muscular touch with the bass and was known for his habit of breaking strings.

Then there was the business of Yes drummer Bill Bruford, who had also been filtering in and out of Fripp's line of vision ever since March 1970, when Yes had asked Fripp to join the band to replace guitarist Peter Banks. Fripp had declined, intent on pursuing his musical goals within the framework of King Crimson (even though King Crimson at that point in time was rather in disarray). From then to the spring of 1972, Yes went on to do what many, myself

included, feel was their best work, culminating in the epic rock sonata "Close to the Edge." Around May or June 1972, Fripp, guitar and amplifier in tow, joined Bruford for dinner at the latter's house one evening. After the repast they played a bit of music together at Fripp's suggestion, and before you could say "incredible drummer – obvious choice," Bruford had accepted a post in King Crimson.

Thus was born a musical collaboration which in a sense endured for over a decade, since Bruford was back when King Crimson was born again, mark IV, in the 1980s. Perhaps more than most of the musicians who have played in King Crimson, Bruford bought into the Frippian philosophy ever hovering somewhere amid the shadowy columns of the Court – a philosophy for which Fripp, of course, refused to take direct credit (or in a sense responsibility), preferring to reserve that honor for the mythical entity of "King Crimson" itself. When KC IV broke out in 1981, for instance, Bruford, simultaneously endorsing and distancing himself from the philosophy, would say that despite the endless personnel changes over the years, "basically this thing, King Crimson, continues, because there was a spirit about it and an attractive way of thinking about music, some ground rules, which continue. Robert will talk endlessly about icons and things, but to us plain Englishmen it just seems a very good idea for a group and we've re-harnessed this, we've kind of gone back into it." *(Dallas 1981, 27)*

There were those in the music press who wondered aloud why Bruford would choose to quit Yes, a group that precisely then was sitting on top of the pinnacle of commercial and artistic success, to join King Crimson, a somewhat suspect band, not quite on the same rank from a sales viewpoint – a band which had by this time become almost a joke in terms of its perpetual instability and volatility, and whose music was perceived as uneven, risky, and of dubious commercial value. But for his part, Bruford felt he had learned all he could musically from the Yes lineup; an artistic adventure with Fripp and company held out potentially greater personal rewards than continuing to beat time for one of progressive rock's unquestioned supergroups. He was also eager to work with percussionist Muir, who appeared to Bruford as a direct link with "the world of free jazz and inspiration," as he put it. *(Crowe 1973, 22)*

Fripp, as part of his overall effort to banish immediate musical memories and habits, to rejuvenate his imagination, decided against using a reed player, saxophone had been a big part of the whole King Crimson sound right from the beginning, one reason why the group was so strongly associated with jazz-rock. Fripp instead opted for a violin and viola player who could complement his own melodic guitar work with a new range of tone color, and who could also double on mellotron and other keyboards in certain situations. That player was David Cross, a musician with a classical background who had floated around the music scene and had worked with a pop-rock singer named P.J. Proby and folk-rock band the Ring. Cross described his recruitment casually: "Yeah, Robert came down and we got it together and had a couple of blows." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)* Like Bruford, Cross found the prospect, and then the reality, of working with percussionist Muir exciting; in 1973, he was to say, "We all learned an incredible amount from Jamie. He really was a catalyst of this band in the beginning and he opened up new areas for Bill to look into as well as affecting the rest of us." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)*

By July 1972 King Crimson III – Fripp, Muir, Wetton, Bruford, and Cross – was complete. Rehearsals commenced on September 4.

The following year, Fripp would tell *Rolling Stone* writer Cameron Crowe: "I'm not really interested in music; music is just a means of creating a magical state ... One employs magic every day. Every thought is a magical act. You don't sit down and work spells and all that hokey stuff. It's simply experimentation with different states of consciousness and mind control." *(Crowe 1973, 22)* This from a man who had made (and to this day still makes) a deliberate

practice, even a personal crusade, of not using drugs – from a musician some have perceived as the world's most rational rock star.

Robert Fripp viewed King Crimson as something outside himself, an entity, a being, a presence, which he could respond to, whose instrument he could become, but which was somehow intrinsically beyond him, not of his own creation, and over which, in spite of his dogged efforts to serve, he could ultimately exercise no real control. Fripp could say King Crimson was "too important to let die," and devote the better part of his life energy to keeping it alive, but in the final analysis he acknowledged it had a life and will of its own. Struggling mightily with this force, a force perceived to be *other*, outside the realm of the personal ego, making journeys into the realm of the magical, the unknown, the unconscious, Fripp repeatedly persevered and brought back fragments of the world lying below or beyond everyday awareness. King Crimson, a name coined to stand for Beelzebub, the devil, prince of demons, was a power that Fripp felt called to contend with.

Fripp was, in the latter half of the 1980s, to formulate and officially promulgate the image of a more benevolent presence to whose call he had responded: he would call it simply "music." But in mid-1972, music's alter ego, or shadow, or compellingly seductive twin, or bastard offspring, or fallen angel, still commanded the twenty-six-year-old Fripp's imagination: he called it "King Crimson."

Fripp and Eno

Throughout his tenure with King Crimson in the 1970s, Fripp found time to do session work with other musicians. He guested on Van der Graaf Generator's *H to He Who Am the Only One* (1970) and *Pawn Hearts* (1971), as well as on Peter Hammill's solo 1972 album *Fool's Mate.* As a producer, Fripp's credits included Centipede's *Septober Energy* (1971), Matching Mole's *Little Red Record* (1972), and Keith Tippett's *Blueprint* (1971) and *Ovary Lodge* (1972). Fripp met many musicians in his travels; one planned collaboration that didn't pan out was to have been an album with former Procol Harum guitarist Robin Trower, a project Fripp mentioned in a 1974 interview. *(Dove 1974, 14)*

One evening in September 1972, around the same time as KC III was commencing rehearsals, Brian Eno invited Fripp over to his home studio and showed him a system of producing music by using two tape recorders set up so that when a single sound was played, it was heard several seconds later at a lower volume level, then again several seconds later at a still lower level, and so on. The system permitted adjustments of various kinds, having to do with volume levels and length of delay; further, the live signal could be disconnected from the loop, so that the already-recorded sounds would repeat indefinitely while a live "solo" line could be played over the top. With this simple set-up, the two musicians set gleefully to work, and within forty-five minutes had produced a long (20'53") piece they called "The Heavenly Music Corporation," which was to become Side One of their *No Pussyfooting* album, released the following year.

Fripp had the highest respect for Eno, in spite of the fact that the latter's instrumental skills were minimal. Fripp said in 1979, "Eno is one of the very few musicians I've worked with who actually listens to what he's doing. He's my favorite synthesizer player because instead of using his fingers he uses his ears." *(Garbarini 1979, 32)*

With its drony opening, its rhapsodic modal guitar melodizing, its hypnotically returning cycles of phrases, and its sheer duration, "The Heavenly Music Corporation" could be called a

classic mixture of raga, minimalism, and rock, were it not for the fact that Fripp wasn't using Indian scales in any systematic way, nor had he yet had much exposure to the American minimalists. A guitarist's and technician's *tour de force*, the piece rewards close listening with its slow changes of color, emphasis, and tonality. For once, Fripp did shut out all distractions, remove all superfluous musical elements, and just play his guitar.

No Pussyfooting was a major point of departure for both musicians, and Fripp seemed to recognize it instantly as such. So much did Fripp like "The Heavenly Music Corporation" that when King Crimson went on the road in the fall of 1972, he would play the tape before the band came onstage and after they left. Fripp and Eno would continue to collaborate throughout the 1970s: 1975 saw the release of their joint ambient album *Evening Star*, Fripp's first major release following the demise of King Crimson III, and Fripp guested on Eno's solo albums *Here Come the Warm Jets* (1973), *Another Green World* (1975), *Before and After Science* (1977), and *Music for Films* (1978). A number of brilliantly inspired Fripp guitar solos are stashed away in these albums, notably on the songs "Baby's On Fire" (*Here Come the Warm Jets*) and "St Elmo's Fire" (*Another Green World*).

The "Larks' Tongues" Period

With scarcely a month of rehearsals behind them, King Crimson III played four gigs in October at Frankfurt's Zoom Club, followed by one at the Redcar Jazz Club. Between November 10 and December 15 they toured Britain, playing twenty-seven gigs. There was a renewed emphasis on improvisation in live performance in King Crimson's music of this period – but not the kind of improvisation common in jazz and rock, where one soloist at a time takes center stage and riffs and rhapsodizes, running through his chops while the rest of the band lays back and comps along with set rhythm and chord changes. In its best moments, King Crimson improvisation during this period was a group affair, a kind of music-making process in which every member of the band was capable of making creative contributions at every moment. Mindless individual soloing was frowned upon; rather, everyone had to be *listening* to everyone else at every moment, to be able to react intelligently and creatively to the group sound. This was a period when Fripp stressed the "magic" metaphor time and again; for to him, when group improvisation of this sort really clicked, it was nothing short of bona fide white magic.

Violinist/keyboardist David Cross described the process this way: "We're so different from each other that one night someone in the band will play something that the rest of us have never heard before and you just have to listen for a second. Then you react to his statement, usually in a different way than they would expect. It's the improvisation that makes the group amazing for me. You know, taking chances. There is no format really in which we fall into. We discover things while improvising and if they're really basically good ideas we try and work them in as new numbers, all the while keeping the improvisation thing alive and continually expanding." *(Corbett 1973)* Bruford stressed the group participation in improvisation, using the image of "a kind of fantastic musical sparring match." *(YPG 22, Sounds, Nov. 18 1972)*

Other than in the memories of those who went to King Crimson concerts in the *Larks' Tongues* period, in the published reviews, and in bootleg tapes of the music, there is no record of what was by most accounts a musical phenomenon that had to be experienced to be believed. Bill Bruford, for one, was surprised by the positive reaction to the group's playing: "After all, we walk on stage and play an hour and a quarter of music which isn't on record and they haven't heard before, often with no tonal or rhythmic centre." *(YPG 23, MM, Dec. 2 1972)*

Following the first KC III British tour (which concluded on December 15), in January and February of 1973 King Crimson went into Command Studios in London to make the album that would become known as *Larks' Tongues in Aspic.* It was Muir who came up with the title. When the group was playing back a tape of an instrumental piece they had just made, Muir was asked what it reminded him of; he said without hesitation, "Why, larks' tongues in aspic, what else?" *(Crowe 1973, 22)* (Aspic is defined as a jelly used to garnish or make a mold of meat or vegetables, or a lavender yielding a volatile oil. Take your pick.) The degree to which the music of *Larks' Tongues* reflects King Crimson's live playing of the period is open to debate, yet it seems that the two collectively-composed instrumental pieces, "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part One," and "The Talking Drum," contain, even in their studio versions, significant elements of group improvisation. The other instrumental, "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part Two," is listed as a Fripp composition, and the remaining three pieces are more or less carefully worked-out songs with lyrics by Richard Palmer-James. However well *Larks' Tongues* represents or does not represent the live Crimson sound, though, at least the album was made in what Fripp considered to be the proper organic sequence: *first* you go out and make live music and get the audience's feedback, *then* you go into a studio to record the music you have created in a live situation – rather than first composing and recording an album in sterile conditions and then going on the road to "promote" it.

Furthermore, with *Larks' Tongues* King Crimson was decisively back in a situation of collective authorship; the music of the previous two studio albums, *Islands* and *Lizard*, had been entirely by Fripp (even the composition of *Poseidon* had been mostly Fripp's affair). Cross put it this way: "We all did contribute equally to the 'Larks' Tongues in Aspic' album, although Robert was definitely the unifying force behind it." *(Corbett 1973, n.p.)* The album's cover sported a symbolic tantric design of the moon and sun embedded in each other – a union of masculine and feminine principles.

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LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC

• David Cross: violin, viola, mellotron

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron and devices

• John Wetton: bass and vocals

• Bill Bruford: drums

• Jamie Muir: percussion and allsorts

Side One

LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC, PART ONE (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Muir). Opens with Muir rapidly stroking a thumb piano. Bells/cymbals and a high flute enter. Crescendo of cymbal trill, descrescendo of thumb piano. Repeated notes on violin; fuzz guitar careens through diminished harmonic areas; Bruford warms up on drums, then whole band slams in. Shall I go on? In essence, what follows is an impressive and somewhat scarifying display of group togetherness, in a number of sections set off by contrasting instrumentation, textures, harmonic premises, dynamics, and mood. Conflict and contrast continue to be dominant issues in King Crimson music, in this piece there is everything from solo fiddle to crashing fusion band and quasi-oriental unison lines. (I don't believe it – I just played the whole thing at 45 RPM while writing this – daughter Lilia was playing speeded-up *Switched-on Bach* this morning, as is her wont. So it *wasn't* just that cup of dark French roast – I *thought* "Larks' Tongues, Part I" was

longer than that. Actually sounded pretty good, though – the structure was more evident than I've ever heard it before.)

BOOK OF SATURDAY (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). An evocative, melancholy minor ballad. Not like earlier Crimson ballads however: more energy, movement, pluck, and a few little twisty harmonic and rhythmic complications to take it out of the 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 phraseology that dragged down some earlier songs.

EXILES (by Cross, Fripp, and Palmer-James). Strange burblings and percussives lead into another moody song, sung verses alternating with freer pulseless sections. The sung bridge contains some remarkable (for rock) modulations – Wetton taking a tip or two from the Brahms/Procol Harum harmonic cookbook. One thing one notices is how Bruford is able, and here willing, to keep himself out of the way more than previous KC drummers – more the Ringo Starr school of percussion, which in a song like "Exiles" is entirely appropriate.

Side Two

EASY MONEY (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Funny thing, having the accompaniment in 4 and the vocal in 7. Makes you feel like there's a fifth wheel on the cart somewhere. But clearly, metrical complications do not in themselves music make. In spite of valiant "funny sounds" efforts by Muir, the long instrumental portions never really take off.

THE TALKING DRUM (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Muir). Sound effects move to tritone bass ostinato over softly percolating percussion and drums, Cross and Fripp come in with modal soloing (and a funny mode indeed it be) tonic of A, scale A-B*b*-C-C#-D#-E-F-G#, with other notes from time to time), gradual crescendo, suddenly broken off *molto appassionato* by horrific squeals, which launch directly into ...

LARKS' TONGUES IN ASPIC, PART TWO (by Fripp). On the one hand, an intellectual metrical exercise (O.K. fellows, can you count this?) and an arcane study in whole-tone, tritone, and other exotic chord root relationships, and on the other hand a stingingly original and strangely rousing piece of instrumental rock and roll. Yeah, you can say that the rhythmic organization is "studied," "labored," "unnatural," and so forth. But for Fripp music like this offers the opportunity for players and audiences to concentrate, to concentrate in that peculiar way only difficult music can make us. Try playing it at 45 (turning up the bass to compensate for lost low frequencies) – I just did (intentionally this time), and it sounds much more "musical."

Dynamic contrast is of the essence in the music of *Larks' Tongues*. There *is* a psychological difference between loud and soft, after all, and in an age when compressors and limiters have squashed the dynamic range of recorded popular music down to the point where a delicately plucked acoustic guitar note or sensitively crooned vocal phrase comes out of your speakers at the same actual volume level as the whole damned synthesized band when it's blowing away at top intensity, listening to *Larks' Tongues'* startling contrasts of dynamics is a tonic for the ears. It's more real, it's more true. Y'know what I mean?

The "Starless" Period

King Crimson played two gigs at London's Marquee on February 10 and 11, 1973 – dates booked, according to Bruford, for "pure enjoyment and relaxation" to take some of the pressure off the band during the period of the intense *Larks' Tongues* recording sessions. *(Crowe 1973, 22)* At the first gig, Muir dropped a gong on his foot, causing an injury of sufficient seriousness to prevent him from playing the following night. Bruford, who viewed Muir's presence as

fundamental to King Crimson, assumed that they would have to cancel the gig, but the other members convinced him that they should carry on as a quartet. (Although Muir occasionally sat down behind a trap set to augment Bruford's drumming, his primary role seems to have been to provide dynamism with his animated stage presence and to gloss the music with an assortment of unusual sounds from a wide variety of percussion instruments, chimes, bells, mbiras, a musical saw, shakers, rattles, and miscellaneous drums.)

King Crimson, minus Muir, went ahead and did the Marquee date, and shortly thereafter Muir left the group permanently, to pursue other – shall we say perhaps related – interests: he became a monk in a monastery in Scotland.

When the recording of *Larks' Tongues* was finished, King Crimson – Fripp, Bruford, Wetton, and Cross – embarked on an extensive series of tours: Britain (nine gigs, March 16 - 25); Europe (nine gigs, March 30 - April 9); America (forty-four gigs, April 18 - July 2). Back in London, Fripp took time out from King Crimson to record "Swastika Girls" (Side Two of *No Pussyfooting*) with Eno at Command Studios on August 4 and 5. King Crimson rehearsals in August laid the foundations of four new pieces, "Lament," "The Night Watch," "The Great Deceiver," and "Fracture," all of which were to appear on the 1974 album *Starless and Bible Black.*

Soon Crimson was back on the road again, with tours of America (nineteen gigs, September 19 - October 15), Britain (six gigs, October 23 - 29), and Europe (eighteen gigs, November 2 - 29). The live band continued to astound audiences and critics with their virtuosity, the scope and power of their music, and their unique outlook. Fripp, King Crimson's acknowledged leader, puzzled many and delighted others with his inscrutable attitude and onstage banter. He reportedly told a Milwaukee audience on September 28, "We're not to be enjoyed – we're an intellectual band." (Commenting on this remark and the sarcastic reaction it elicited from a Milwaukee critic, Fripp wrote in the *Young Persons' Guide to King Crimson*, "We were surprised that so many people took everything we did so seriously.") *(YPG 27-28, Milwaukee Sentinel, Sept. 29 1973)* The funny thing about Fripp, though, was that he could be so funny when he was *on* and when the audience was tuned into his peculiarly pontifical sense of humor. At the April 28 concert at New York's Academy of Music, for instance, a *Variety* writer reported that Fripp delivered "a short comic rap plugging their new album" (*Larks' Tongues*) that was "uproarious." *(Kirb 1973A, 245)* When King Crimson returned to the Academy of Music on September 22, things weren't so jolly: a breakdown in their complicated sound system caused a delay of more than two hours as a new system was hastily procured and set up. *(Kirb 1973B, 272)*

The exhaustion of touring, the technical problems, the surreal conditions of road life, the ever-questionable band-audience relationship, and the problematic nature of making music under such circumstances were beginning to take their toll on Fripp. It was a pair of gigs at Italian sports arenas on November 12 and 13 that he was later to call the "turning point" for him in terms of his ability to "put up with the nonsense" that goes along with putting on a rock show. In one of his 1981 articles for *Musician, Player, and Listener* Fripp described the Felliniesque insanity that surrounded those two days in Turin and Rome: Maoists protesting for free admittance to the first show and crashing through a glass wall; Cross and Bruford getting drunk at an expensive dinner, throwing open wine bottles through the air and insulting the promoter's homosexual partner; concert ticket collectors stuffing their own pockets with cash receipts; backstage machine-gun-toting security police; a stoned hippie who in full view of the audience was beat bloody by the promoter's gun-carrying right-hand man for wandering onstage; and a desperate attempt at an encore almost scotched because members of the audience had pulled out the power cables.

Fripp's account of the whole fiasco is a miniature classic of rock tragicomedy, but the moral for us here is that the Italian gigs were the real beginning of the end for King Crimson. As Fripp concludes his story, "A few months later King Crimson 'ceased to exist' and I began to talk a lot about small, mobile and intelligent units." *(Fripp 1981B, 48)*

The frantic tours of 1973 concluded, King Crimson retired to London's AIR Studios in January 1974 to produce their next album, *Starless and Bible Black.* (The title is a phrase borrowed from Dylan Thomas. By way of injecting some levity into a band situation that tended toward gravity, Bruford was fond of renaming Crimson albums; this one he called "Braless and Slightly Slack.") *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Although edited and mixed in the studio, all but the first two pieces on *Starless* were recorded live at King Crimson gigs in the fall of 1973. The essentially live nature of *Starless* received little if any attention in the press, who treated it as a studio album; the recording quality is superb, and all audience noise save a stray distant shout here and there has been skillfully deleted. Perhaps no one knew this was a live album until Fripp spilled the beans in the fine print of the *Young Persons' Guide.*

Chart 6	
Studio/live origins of songs on *Starless*	
Side One	
"The Great Deceiver"	recorded at AIR Studios, London, January 1974
"Lament"	recorded at AIR studios, London, January 1974
"We'll Let You Know"	recorded at the Apollo, Glasgow, Oct. 23 1973
"The Night Watch"	beginning section recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"Trio"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"The Mincer"	recorded at Parc des Exposition, Zurich, Nov. 15 1973
Side Two	
"Starless and Bible Black"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973
"Fracture"	recorded at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Nov. 23, 1973

Starless was the first King Crimson album other than the live *Earthbound* not to provide the lyrics on the cover or inner sleeve – perhaps intentionally to de-emphasize the verbal content?

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STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK

• David Cross: violin, viola, keyboards

• Robert Fripp: guitar, mellotron, devices

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

Side One

THE GREAT DECEIVER (by Wetton, Fripp, and Palmer-James). Studio recording. Slams off with a bluesy riff at hyperspeed. Sectional song contrasting instrumentals and vocals.

Oblique references to the Devil. "The Great Deceiver" contains the only lyrics ever penned by Fripp for a King Crimson song: "Cigarettes, ice cream, figurines of the Virgin Mary" – a comment, he explained in 1980, on the woeful commercialization of Vatican City, which he'd visited on a Crimson tour in 1973. *(Watts 1980, 22)* For some reason I am reminded of a passage from the autobiography of spiritual teacher J.G. Bennett, who was to become a major influence on Fripp in 1974: "I can see how necessary it is to establish a new understanding of the Incarnation. The Church is equally astray in its conservative and in its modernist wings, nor is the centre any better. The Catholic Church is the custodian of a mystery that it does not understand; but the sacraments and their operation are no less real for that." *(Bennett, Witness, p. 354)*

LAMENT (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Studio recording. Slow Beatlish ballad that breaks out into rather more manic territory as the song progresses ... a la Lennon in the *White Album* period. The Beatles never had a coda that jammed out for a few bars in seven, however.

WE'LL LET YOU KNOW (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. Instrumental. Gradually coalesces, as so many King Crimson pieces do, out of sensitively random, intentionally chaotic points of noise, into motives, rhythms, melodies: into music ... of a sort.

THE NIGHT WATCH (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). Introduction/beginning, live recording. Deftly spliced to the studio-recorded body of the song. Classic King Crimson minor ballad. Effectively understated ending.

TRIO (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. Peaceful, contemplative, tonal, somewhat out of character for a King Crimson III improvisation. Although Bruford does not play on "Trio," he is listed as one of the co-composers. Fripp later wrote in admiration of his drummer's restraint in this instance, explaining that Bruford was awarded joint authorship on the basis of his having "contributed silence." *(Fripp 1981B)* The same role – the conscious embodiment of the presence of silence – would later occasionally be assigned to a particular member of the League of Crafty Guitarists in their live performances.

THE MINCER (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Palmer-James). Live recording, with a few overdubs. Another example of what Crimson III was liable to sound like in the throes of improvisation. The song ends unaccountably in the middle – it sounds like the tape ran out.

Side Two

STARLESS AND BIBLE BLACK (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). Live recording. More gradual coalescence out of chaos. The piece recalls the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." A lot of the high melodic stuff you hear is not Fripp but David Cross cranking up the distortion on his electric violin. Fripp ruminates meanwhile on his mellotron. Tonal center? – you tell me. Pieces like this can sound totally improvised until, miraculously, everyone slams into a downbeat at precisely the same moment. You never know with King Crimson. As Bruford said, "What we're really trying to do is to abolish the distinction between formal writing and improvising. Some of our most formal passages sound improvised and vice versa." *(Rosen 1983, 23)*

FRACTURE (by Fripp). Live recording. Fripp lays down a typically edgy angular ostinato. There's a lot of whole-tone-scale action going on in here. One of the most extensively worked-out pieces of the KC III period, "Fracture" places severe demands on technique. "One of the reasons I wrote 'Fracture' in the manner which I wrote it," said Fripp, "was to put myself

(and the band) in a certain situation where I had to practice every day because it's so difficult." *(Rosen 1983, 23)*

The "Red" Period and the Dissolution of King Crimson III

Inspiration continued to pay calls from time to time, but improvisation in the latter stages of King Crimson III grew increasingly frustrating. In February 1974, for instance, David Cross was reportedly having reservations: "It sometimes worries me, what we do – we stretch so far and our music is often a frightening expression of certain aspects of the world and people. It is important to have songs as well, written material, to counter-balance that so that they're not actually driven insane ... We've only had one moment of true peace in improvisation with this band, which was a thing we did with just violin, bass and guitar at a concert in Amsterdam. Most of the time our improvisation comes out of horror and panic." *(YPG 29, Sounds, Feb. 9 1974)* (The "moment of peace" Cross refers to is probably "Trio" as heard on *Starless*; he got mixed up as to the instrumentation, which is actually violin, flute-mellotron, and guitar.)

In an interview published in May, Fripp went public with his own reservations. The group was still trying out improvisational formats in live situations, Fripp explained: "What we do live is maybe just say, 'Bill, you just start playing, and we'll follow you.' But since this band isn't very sensitive or interested in listening to everyone playing, the improvisation in the band at the moment is extremely limited and more concerned with individuals showing off than in developing any kind of community improvisation ... I find it most frustrating that I can't make the other players in the band take as much interest in my playing as I do in theirs." *(Rosen 1974, 35)* With what was, from his perspective, one of King Crimson's primary *raisons d'etre* having stalled, it is not surprising that Fripp was beginning to lose interest in keeping the band alive. But there were other reasons too, as we shall shortly see.

Although not even Fripp was fully aware of the fact, King Crimson III after the *Starless* studio sessions in January 1974 was on its last legs. The band undertook three more road trips: Europe (eleven gigs, March 19-April 2); America (seventeen gigs, April 11-May 5); and a final U.S. tour (twenty-one gigs, June 4-July 1). The live album *USA*, released around April 1975, was recorded toward the end of this final U.S. tour: the song "Asbury Park" at the Asbury Park (New Jersey) Casino on June 28, and the rest two days later at the Palace Theatre in Providence, Rhode Island.

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USA

• David Cross: violin and keyboards

• Robert Fripp: guitar and mellotron

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

USA clearly shows that in terms of *sound*, at any rate, there was little or no difference between live and studio King Crimson of this period: as the band runs through "Larks' Tongues in Aspic, Part II," "Lament," "Exiles," and "Easy Money," there are few discernible musical differences between these and the previously recorded studio versions. Very slightly choppy around certain edges, less dynamic range, not quite so beautifully recorded as the studio tracks,

USA nevertheless demonstrates that very late KC III was eminently capable of delivering the goods live.

The one new track, "Asbury Park," represents King Crimson improvising straight ahead in 4/4 with Fripp and Cross getting in some vintage licks over Wetton's razor-sharp melodic bass lines and Bruford's crisp drumming – but one does sense a certain lack of group consciousness: for long sections it's four individual virtuoso musicians, each blowing his own horn.

The crowd's rowdy shouting through the soft introduction to "Exiles" gives some indication of one predicament Fripp was finding himself in, namely, how to break their expectations down sufficiently to get them to shut up and listen.

USA closes with a rendition of "Schizoid Man." Since the album was actually released after "Red," one has the feeling that Fripp was seeking something of a framing effect for King Crimson's total recorded output, which had begun six years earlier with the same song. In small print at the bottom of *USA*'s back cover are the letters: "R.I.P."

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King Crimson live was indeed finished with the "USA" tour, but no one recognized it at the time, not even Fripp, who said of the final gig, in New York's Central Park on July 1 1974, "For me it was the most powerful since 1969." *(YPG 30, July 1)* A week later the band – minus David Cross – was back in a London studio, at work on the album that was to become *Red. Red* would not be released, however, until after Robert Fripp had unilaterally disbanded King Crimson and talked to the press, offering three reasons why the King had to die: "The first is that it represents a change in the world. Second, whereas I once considered being part of a band like Crimson to be the best liberal education a young man could receive, I now know that isn't so. And third, the energies involved in the particular lifestyle of the band and in the music are no longer of value to the way I live." *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)*

At the cosmic level – the level of the changing world situation – Fripp spoke of a radical transition from the old world to the new. The old world was characterized by "dinosaur" institutions, social organizations, corporations, rock bands – as Fripp put it, "large and unwieldy, without much intelligence." *(Ibid.)* Looking to the future, Fripp foresaw "a decade of considerable panic in the 1990s – collapse on a colossal scale. The wind-down has already started ... It's no doomy thing – for the new world to flourish the old has to die. But the depression era of the Thirties will look like a Sunday outing compared to this apocalypse. I shall be blowing a bugle loudly from the sidelines." *(Dove 1974, 14)*

On the level of the music industry, Fripp had developed grave reservations: a dinosaur itself, "the rock & roll business is constructed on wholly false values, impermanent and mainly pernicious, although not in an obvious way." *(Dove 1974, 14)* Later, toward the end of the 1970s, Fripp would develop a systematic critique of music industry practices, write it up, and publish it in *Musician, Player, and Listener* magazine. For now he simply knew that he had had enough, and was looking to a future of "small, independent, mobile and intelligent units" to replace the lumbering Mesozoic automaton behemoths that passed for rock acts in 1974. *(SMALL, INDEPENDENT, MOBILE, AND INTELLIGENT UNIT became the Frippism* par excellence *of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Its first appearance in print is apparently YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974.)*

On the level of the role he himself was playing in the rock and roll circus, Fripp had long felt frustration. At gigs like the ones in Italy already discussed, for instance, in which, as Fripp put it, "the performance itself went quite well," King Crimson's artistic method had itself become

brutal: “We battered the crowd with sound for forty minutes to make enough room for ten minutes of experimenting. Then, as attention wandered, we built up another level of pounding for twenty or thirty minutes, so a pulped crowd would feel it had its money’s value and go home happy.” *(Fripp 1981B, 114)* Elsewhere Fripp spoke with despair of his perception that the marijuana and LSD of the sixties had been gradually replaced by the cocaine, speed, and alcohol of the seventies, and that along with that shift went a corresponding change in audience demeanor.

This is art? This is magic? This is music? Beating the audience back, an audience either in a blind stupor or artificially stimulated, fighting the collective aggression of five thousand people, having to use your own limited energy to do it, night after night – this was accomplished, as Fripp expressed it, only “at the expense of creating something of a higher nature.” *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)*

At the personal level, there was the matter of continuing his own “education”, as he later described his predicament, he felt he had to disband King Crimson “because I could not see how it was possible to be a musician and a human being simultaneously.” *(Kozak 1981, 10)* But there was a deeper, and perhaps decisive reason why King Crimson had to be put to rest – an overwhelmingly powerful personal experience which so far as I know Fripp did not venture to disclose publicly until some five years after the fact, probably because it took him that long to understand what had actually happened. When he did talk to *Melody Maker* writer Allan Jones about it in 1979, he said that in the interviews done immediately following the Crimson break-up, he hadn’t known how to explain it.

> *I had a glimpse of something... The top of my head blew off.* That’s the easiest way of describing it. And for a period of three to six months it was impossible for me to function ... My ego went. I lost my ego for three months. We were recording “Red” and Bill Bruford would say, “Bob, what do you think?” And I’d say, “Well-” and *inside* I’d be thinking, how can *I* know *anything*? Who am *I* to express an opinion? And I’d say, “Whatever you think, Bill. Yes, whatever *you* like.”... It took me three to six months before a particular kind of Fripp personality grew back to the degree that I could participate in the normal day-to-day business of hustling ... *(Jones 1979A, 19)*

Given the pressure-cooker atmosphere into which commitment to the ever intangible yet fervently embraced idea of King Crimson had plunged him for five years – the surging and dashed hopes, the sensitive perception of false values all around, the perpetual instability of the band, the press filled with acclamation and denigration by turns, the uncertainties about his own accomplishments, aims/ends, and means of attaining them – it would perhaps not be difficult to explain away Fripp’s loss of ego in banal psychological terms. But to do so would be to miss and trivialize the fundamental point, which is that Fripp, to put it simply, had a revelation. The proverbial straw was reading the text of a lecture by J.G. Bennett the night before the *Red* recording sessions were to begin; the “Second Inaugural Address” to Bennett’s International Academy for Continuous Education in Sherborne. The Text was printed in the appendix to Bennett’s book *Is There Life on Earth?* This was the first time Fripp had come into contact with the teaching of Bennett, who had been a disciple of the infamous George Gurdjieff and had met many of the twentieth century’s leading mystical seekers. *(REPORTEDLY THE FIRST TIME Schruers 1979, 16)* Bennett and Gurdjieff taught that people ordinarily go through their lives in a state of relative unconsciousness; some of the methods Bennett and Gurdjieff used to “wake up” their students will be discussed in the next chapter. Fripp’s first encounter with Bennett’s ideas was electrifying, precipitating a major change of direction in his life.

Wetton and Bruford were both to express regrets with regard to Fripp's unilateral decision to break up the band. Bruford, who had quit the highly successful Yes to join King Crimson, and who had viewed Crimson as a unique opportunity to expand his horizons as a musician, did his best to be philosophical: while pointing out that Crimson's enviable position in the music world was the result of years of hard work by musicians, management, and devoted road crew, and that to have all that dashed at a stroke was "mildly irritating," Bruford said nevertheless he could cope with his irritation since it ultimately represented a "false adherence to [materialistic] things." *(YPG 32, Sounds, Oct. 12 1974)* Below his stoic surface, however, Bruford was profoundly disappointed.

By his own estimation, Wetton had not made the kind of commitment to King Crimson that Bruford had, and had not had to give up so much to join the group. But in retrospect, he admitted being "pretty pissed when it broke up. I didn't admit it at the time ... Robert called up and explained why he couldn't go on in the manner that we had been. He felt the world was going to come to an end and he wanted to prepare for it. And I said, 'Yeah, sure, OK, but let's get a good tour in first.'" *(Rosen 1983, 23)* (There had been, in fact, plans for another King Crimson tour, with founding King Crimson member Ian McDonald back in the band. Rehearsals had already begun when Fripp pulled the plug.)

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RED

• Robert Fripp: guitar and mellotron

• John Wetton: bass and voice

• William Bruford: percussives

With thanks to:

• David Cross: violin

• Mel Collins: soprano saxophone

• Ian McDonald: alto saxophone

• Robin Miller: oboe

• Marc Charig: cornet

Backtrack to July 1974. Fripp had had the top of his head blown off, and in an ego-less state carried on, with Bill Bruford and John Wetton, with the studio production of *Red.* A number of previous King Crimson members (David Cross, Mel Collins, Ian McDonald) and sidemen (Robin Miller, Marc Charig) made contributions to the album. *Red* is a peculiarly retrospective album: glancing through the song titles ("Red," "Fallen Angel," "One More Red Nightmare," "Providence," "Starless") one is struck as if by the facets of a diamond with the King Crimson myth/metaphor smoldering at its core. The striking black-and-white cover photograph of Wetton, Bruford, and Fripp (first ever cover photo of band members on a King Crimson record) in lighting that casts half of their faces into shadow harks back, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to the cover of *Meet the Beatles*, in 1964 an image indelibly stamped into the minds of a generation. (According to Fripp, the photo of the band was Mark Fenwick's idea; Fenwick was one of the three directors of EG Management. Fripp didn't want the musician's faces on the jacket; it reminded him less of *Meet the Beatles* than an album by Grand Funk

Railroad.) On *Red*'s back cover is a stark photograph of a gauge with the needle pointing into the red (danger, overload) zone. *Red* was released in early October.

Side One

RED (by Fripp). A divinely lurching, infernally flowing instrumental that exploits Fripp's by-now entrenched penchant for odd metrical schemes and whole-tone-scale root relationships and melodic turns. In the recurring main theme, the predominant interval between guitar (soprano) and bass is the tritone – also the sonority that ends the composition. In traditional tonal music theory, the tritone – so named because it spans three whole steps or tones, in this case the thematic example being the interval E to A# – is classed among the most dissonant of the thirteen fundamental intervals in music: if you turn in your college harmony assignment and have idiotically included a tritone in the final chord, you'll get it back marked in red. Because of its searingly harsh, problematic sound, the tritone was called the *diabolus in musica* ("the devil in music") by medieval theorists, and some forbade its use entirely. The King Crimson metaphor – it goes deeper than one might think.

FALLEN ANGEL (by Fripp, Wetton, and Palmer-James). You think it's going to be just a genteel McCartneyesque ballad; then the distorted guitar comes careening in, in a middle section utilizing the fifth mode of the harmonic minor scale; transition back to the ballad theme; harmonic minor fade-out.

ONE MORE RED NIGHTMARE (by Fripp and Wetton). That darned tritone outline again, those gnarly whole tones, those insane metrical changes, those fabulous fills by Bruford, hammering on a piece of sheet metal. It seems almost impossible that this was the same Fripp who had made the delicate *Islands* a few short years previously – a record that one of KC II's members had reportedly called "an airy-fairy piece of shit": this music has real muscle. *(Malamut 1974, 69)*

Side Two

PROVIDENCE (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, and Bruford). This was recorded live at the Providence, Rhode Island Palace Theatre on June 30, 1974 – the gig at which most of *USA* was taped, the day before King Crimson III's final performance in New York City. It begins with a delicate violin solo and goes into free-form improvisation, recalling the spaciness of "Moonchild" – but "Providence" has a ballsiness and level of aggression or even evil that "Moonchild," in its benighted innocence, seemed to lack.

STARLESS (by Cross, Fripp, Wetton, Bruford, and Palmer-James). More retrospection, and not merely on account of the song's title: at the outset, the mellotron's minor tones and the stately drumming recall "Epitaph." But "Starless" turns out to be more than just another gloomy minor mellotron epic, although clocking in at over twelve minutes it has the requisite duration. "Starless" is a grand synthesis, in one unified (if collectively authored) composition, of several of the styles Fripp and his various cohorts had cultivated since 1969: slow, melancholy minor-key epic/ballad; medium-tempo, abrasive riff-based linear counterpoint; extremely fast, frenetic group playing; and improvisational and compositional elements bound together in such a way that the seams are exceeding difficult to detect. "Starless" is more than all that, though: in my opinion it is simply the best composition King Crimson ever committed to record. It is also the only King Crimson piece that has ever made me weep – those tears that tend to issue out of a direct confrontation with what we feebly call "artistic greatness" but is really a portentous and rarely glimpsed secret locked away at the heart of human experience.

It is the curse of the scholar/writer/musician to be driven to rip apart that which he loves, dissecting and disemboweling, in a vain and perhaps pointless attempt to reduce the primal musical experience to words, formulas, theories, charts, diagrams, numbers, and so on – an exercise pleasing enough to the intellect and yet somehow painful for the heart. What follows, therefore, is not for the faint of heart, and if the reader does not give a hoot about formal musical analysis, she or he would probably do just as well to skip it. On the other hand, lest I paint myself into a corner of total futility, let me affirm my belief that at its best, analysis can be a valid form of translation – from the language of the heart into the language of the head. And inasmuch as head and heart are generally not so much in the habit of conversing amicably with each other as they could be, the translator's enterprise is perhaps not entirely meaningless. From listening to the music itself you can tell something about what the musicians are feeling, and open a door into that world of feeling within yourself; through analyzing the music seriously you can get some inkling of how the musicians think (and believe me, think they do, and think they must, in order to produce as coherent a piece as "Starless"), and in that process allow your intellect to go into sympathetic resonance with the intellects of those who are making the music.

Head and heart. Fripp would later develop a system of musical practice based on "hands, head, and heart," where the "hands" represent the physical contact with the instrument and indeed with the physical world of sensation itself. We can address the head and the heart when we write a book like this, I'm not so sure about the hands, that is, about addressing the very physical presence of music in a live situation. I incline to suppose that the most we can do along those lines is to be aware of, or at least try to avoid completely losing touch with, our body as we are writing and reading.

"Starless" is a long (12'18") sectional composition in a form that breaks down into essentially three parts; though "Starless" is not exactly a textbook example of classical sonata form, an analogy with sonata form's three part structure (exposition, development, recapitulation) is tempting:

Song – Exposition

Structured Instrumental Crescendo – Development

Free Recapitulation of Song (without vocal)

As in classical sonata form, the opening section of "Starless" sets out a number of musical ideas (themes); the structured instrumental crescendo has something of the free, fantasia, associative, spinning-out, through-composed, quasi-improvisational nature of a development section; and the recapitulation contains both themes of the exposition material in a new, transformed aspect. The opening "song" section remains in a single key (instead of containing a modulating bridge to a second key as in sonata form); and the structured instrumental section does not develop ideas from the opening song (as a sonata development ordinarily develops themes from the exposition), but rather stands on its own, with entirely new material. But these facts do not disqualify "Starless" from being considered a sonata form in the large sense; Mozart's sonata forms were one thing, Beethoven's another, Schoenberg's something else again, Bartok's a different species too. As music history went on, sonata form became something quite malleable indeed. Nor do I think it particularly relevant whether or not Fripp and his co-authors set out to compose a sonata form, nor whether some of them even knew what a sonata form was (Fripp and Cross probably did – the others may not have). When I met Brian Eno in 1988 and he was scanning through my book on his music, his eyes lit on one of the analytical passages and he said with a chuckle, "I didn't know that piece of mine was in the Dorian mode." But it was, and he was pleased to know about it with his head, though he had composed it entirely with his ears.

The sonata analogy can perhaps enable those who are familiar with the sonata form process in music history to *hear* "Starless" in a more thorough, integrated fashion.

A more detailed formal outline of "Starless" is shown in Chart 7.

Chart 7
Formal Outline of "Starless"

SONG EXPOSITION (4'17")
4/4 quarter=63

1.) 1st theme: instrumental (guitar melody) -- G minor.
2.) 2nd theme: 2 sung verses, each with refrain G minor.
3.) 1st theme: instrumental (guitar melody) G minor.
4.) 2nd theme: 3rd sung verse, with refrain G minor.

STRUCTURED INSTRUMENTAL CRESCENDO DEVELOPMENT (4'37")
bass in 13/8 eighth=114

5.) Bass ostinato, electric guitar repeated-note motive creeps ever higher, drums and percussion enter bit by bit C minor, with a prominent tritone (C-F#, in the bass ostinato and dissonant, chromatic notes in guitar motive.
6.) Short transitional episode (3/8, dotted quarter=116).

FREE RECAPITULATION (3'02")

7.) New, full band texture with saxophone improvisation prominent, bass ostinato (13/8, eighth=320, and guitar repeated notes related to the "crescendo" section C minor.
8.) 2nd theme: saxophone restatement of "verse" and "refrain" melodies from the exposition, bass pedal point replaces harmonic changes, tempo much accelerated over original version (4/4, quarter=160, melody in G minor, bass pedal point on C.
9.) Full texture as in section 7.
10.) Hugely effective modulation back to original key of G minor, 1st theme: saxophone restatement of instrumental guitar melody, with hard rock rather than fantasy ballad timbres, louder and faster (4/4, quarter=80).

"Starless" as a whole can be seen as a carefully graded swell of energy: by the end of the instrumental crescendo, things have reached such a desperate peak that you think there's nowhere else to go – but as happens so often in Beethoven codas, for instance, you are seized at that peak moment and hurtled into hyperspace. The recapitulation integrates and transforms the materials of the exposition and the crescendo, forcibly kicking them onto an entirely new level of intensity by means of dynamics, tempo, and orchestration.

The strange melancholy expressed initially in the words of the song ("Old friend charity / cruel twisted smile / and the smile signals emptiness for me / starless and bible black") is deepened and purified in the recapitulation, when the words are left behind. The restatement of the instrumental first theme and the final minor ending carry the weight of tragedy.

In its dark intensity, in the singularity of its formal conception, in its emphasis on extreme contrasts within a single piece, in its drive to associate specific musical gestures with states, qualities, gradations, and degrees of psychic energy, and – perhaps above all – in the blinding power of its execution, "Starless" is a fulfillment of tendencies in Fripp's music manifest from the beginning. With the final, hair-raising cadence of "Starless," the door slams shut on King Crimson's first period of activity, and, one could say, on the early era of progressive rock as a whole. When Fripp would emerge in the late 1970s with his solo projects, and in the early 1980s with a new, exceptionally streamlined King Crimson, the musical scene would have changed dramatically.

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Chapter Seven: Sabbatical

A life entangled with Fortune is like a torrent. It is turbulent and muddy; hard to pass and masterful of mood: noisy and of brief continuance.

– attributed to Epictetus

King Crimson can be seen as an experimental laboratory for the combining and recombining of living musical strains – for the production of "recombinant do-re-mi," to borrow a phrase from the title of a recent book by Billy Bergman and Richard Horn. Fripp reminds me a bit of Miles Davis in this respect: a subtly energetic electromagnet into whose force-field any number of leading musicians have found themselves drawn, only to have their musical genes reshuffled and to be ejected back out into the world with a different perspective. Several Crimson graduates went on to perhaps less experimental yet more lucrative pastures: Greg Lake (Emerson, Lake and Palmer), Ian McDonald (Foreigner), Boz Burrell (Bad Company), John Wetton (Asia), and Bill Bruford (who toured with Genesis in 1976). KC graduates also made solo albums: McDonald and Giles (*McDonald and Giles*, 1971), Gordon Haskell (*It Is and It Isn't*, 1971), Pete Sinfield (*Still*, 1973), and Bruford (four albums between 1978 and 1981).

British rock, particularly British progressive rock (whatever "progressive" may mean or not mean), is like a club or select society: the more you find out about it, the more you realize that practically everybody in the club has played in practically everyone else's group at one time or another. You can start almost anywhere you want and trace any number of interconnections, for instance: Cream to Blind Faith to Traffic, whose Dave Mason coproduced Family's debut album; Family's John Wetton was Roxy Music's bassist for a spell, Roxy Music's first synth player was Brian Eno, who used Phil Collins as a session drummer, who was Genesis' drummer behind Peter Gabriel, who worked with Fripp, whose later band the League of Gentlemen featured former XTC keyboardist Barry Andrews and whose bassist Sara Lee went on to play with Gang of Four. And so on.

It would be silly to say that Fripp, or anyone other single person, was at *the* center of this tangled mass of perpetually mutating strands of double-helical do-re-mi. Yet the Crimson King was inarguably one of the ribosomal focal points of creative synthesis, touching, in his eccentric way, all the musicians he worked with, and leaving his decisive stamp on the history of rock in the early 1970s and beyond.

Of the classic heavyweight progressive rockers, who had laid down a more convincing legacy than King Crimson? By 1974 Yes had lost themselves in grandiosity beyond all reasonable bounds (though continuing to play to huge popular acclaim); Emerson, Lake and Palmer were grandstanding with thirty-six tons of equipment and labored flashes of lasers and psychedelic music-hall brilliance; Procol Harum were drifting into repetition and stagnation with *Exotic Birds and Fruit*, less than a mere shadow of their one-time life and soul. Faced with such examples of dinosaur burnout, and listening to the records of all these groups today, I come away with a feeling that King Crimson's music of the period sounds infinitely less dated – Fripp, though he may have faltered from time to time, never completely lost sight of the goal. He was clearly in it for the music. It might be remarked that Fripp, in disbanding King Crimson in 1974, simply knew when to quit; like the Beatles in 1970, he knew when the dream was over, when to continue following the accustomed path meant certain creative death. But then, one of the marks of the superior creative talent is precisely knowing when to quit, when to seek out a new vision.

As hinted at in the previous chapter, particularly grating to Fripp was the commercial/music-industry aspect of the whole progressive rock spectacle. In the October 1974

Melody Maker interview where he explained his reasons for disbanding King Crimson, Fripp said that successful rock bands often "originally start out to service a need but you now have a situation where, being creative, they have to create needs in order that they may continue to exist. In other words, they've become vampiric." *(YPG 31, MM, Oct. 5 1974)* On the subject of the music itself, in 1987 Fripp dismissed early progressive/art-rock music as "a badly cobbled pastiche of a number of badly digested and ill-understood music forms." *(Diliberto 1987)*

A sense of no new worlds left to conquer, of the exhaustion of a particular set of possibilities. For an artist, to stay in the same place is to go backwards, to stop growing is to die.

As for Robert Fripp – who disbanded King Crimson in the face of what seemed to him insurmountable cosmic, business, and personal obstacles, and who effectively erased himself from the musical scene – for the moment, late 1974, he was indeed gone, top of head blown off, wandering around without a sense of ego. The Faustian pact was over, just like Lennon's dream. Music itself had stymied him, the presentation of meaningful music no longer seemed a real possibility.

Fripp wanted to wrap up his unfinished business, however, and did so in a number of projects, among them putting together *The Young Person's Guide to King Crimson*, a double-album "greatest hits" package which pointedly omitted "Schizoid Man." The album included a detailed chronology of King Crimson I-III compiled by Fripp from record and concert reviews, conversations with musicians, and Fripp's own journal entries. This was also the period when Fripp worked on preparing *USA* for release, recorded *Evening Star* with Eno, and appeared with Eno in a few small-scale European concerts.

On the break-up of King Crimson III, Fripp calculated that he had enough money to pay his bills for three years. *(Dove 1974, 14)* And indeed, even in his disoriented frame of mind, he was hatching a personal three-year plan consisting of preparation, withdrawal, and recovery. His activities of the first year – winding up his affairs – would prepare him for a decisive withdrawal from the music industry – and effectively from the outside world – at J.G. Bennett's International Society for Continuous Education at Sherborne House, following which he would survey the inner and outer landscapes and decide what to do next.

It is quite possible that Fripp's transformational experience at Sherborne – which is, if obliquely, the subject of this chapter – cannot be understood by anyone who has not undergone something similar. It is just possible, however, that some inkling of what was involved may be got by reviewing the historical backdrop of his experience. Since Fripp's subsequent music and public posture was deeply affected by his encounter with the Gurdjieff/Bennett tradition, and since only the most superficial information on that tradition was dispensed by the music press in the course of reviewing Fripp's work, I offer here a somewhat more substantial summary for the interested reader.

In recent years Fripp has publicly distanced himself from the Gurdjieff/Bennett tradition, preferring to claim only that he speaks for his own school, Guitar Craft. It was not so long ago, however, that he was splicing Bennett tapes into his albums and quoting Gurdjieff in his articles. It may in part have been the rock press's open hostility and ridicule of Fripp's apparent conversion to a "mystical cult" – though as far as I can make out, the Gurdjieff work is neither mystical nor a cult – that led him to his present position of reserve.

Gurdjieff

Who was George Ivanovich Gurdjieff? It appears that, even when he was alive – he died in 1949, his date of birth is uncertain, probably 1877 – if one asked ten people who knew him, one would receive ten different answers. Bennett wrote a biography of Gurdjieff, and his ultimate assessment of the man was that he was "more than a Teacher and less than a Prophet. He was a man with a true mission and he devoted his entire life to it. He needed people who could understand his message and yet he was compelled to make the message obscure and hard to understand. Therefore, he had to look for those who could acquire the required perspicacity and also the singleness of purpose to carry his work forward. Today [1973], twenty-four years after his death, there are thirty or forty people in different parts of the world who are capable of transmitting the teaching, but there are very few who can look beyond the man to his message." *(Bennett, Witness, 379)*

Since Gurdjieff's death, work with his methods has continued in formally and informally organized groups scattered across many countries. Any attempt to penetrate the real meaning of Gurdjieff's work leads to the inescapable conclusion that such meaning can be grasped only through sustained personal effort over a period of months and years – through self-observation, certain exercises carried out under the instruction of a qualified teacher, and a commitment to work on oneself in the context of a supportive community of fellow-seekers. Gurdjieff taught not so much a doctrine or creed as a method or a way, and it was a way whose transmission through mere books was deemed impossible.

Nevertheless he wrote a number of books himself, and a fair number of his followers, often after considerable gnashing of teeth and soul-searching – given the admittedly ineffable nature of the subject-matter – have over the years committed their thoughts on Gurdjieff, his ideas, and his methods to the printed page. In 1985 J. Walter Driscoll, in collaboration with the Gurdjieff Foundation of California, published *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography*, a remarkable listing of over 1,700 books, articles, reviews, unpublished manuscripts, and other items in English, French, and other languages. Through this source one can gain some considerable insight into the identity of this enigmatic figure and the profound impact he had on any soul so fortunate or unfortunate as to grapple with him.

Gurdjieff was born in the Armenian town of Alexandropol. With a Greek father and an Armenian mother, he had what one might call a flexible Middle Eastern appearance – one he would learn to shift, chameleon-like, at will, impersonating one or another race according to the demands of the moment. (With shaved head and groomed moustache, in his youth he looked perhaps not unlike the majestic Tony Levin.)

Gurdjieff's father was a successful, even rich, cattle herder until his animals were wiped out by a pestilence; after the loss of all his wealth he worked as a carpenter and at other jobs. Most important to Gurdjieff, however, was his father's avocation as an *asokh*, or story-telling bard, for which he was widely known, having at his command hundreds of songs, poems, legends, and folk-tales. From him Gurdjieff inherited not only treasures of ancient wisdom from a rapidly vanishing oral tradition, but a tendency to view the world in allegorical terms, as a surpassingly rich drama with elements both tragic and comic.

Gurdjieff was trained privately in medicine and Orthodox religion, but at some point around the age of twenty, driven by a need to seek answers to life's ultimate questions, he left his home environment and embarked on a lengthy series of travels around the Middle East, Central

Asia, Tibet, India, and Egypt, at times alone and at times in the company of a number of other singularly committed individuals who called themselves "The Seekers of Truth."

Tales of Gurdjieff's many expeditions and wanderings over this twenty-odd year period are told in his autobiography, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. The modern Western reader is bound to find much in this spiritual travelogue astonishing and almost literally unbelievable. Miracles, prodigious psychic feats, exotic customs, and a faraway fairy-tale or medieval atmosphere pervade the book. Gurdjieff portrays a fluid, teeming life at the mythical center of the world, the cradle of civilization – a life in which currents of the great organized world religions mix with esoteric teachings, in which traditional Asian cultures run up against the forces of modernization – a world in which contemporary Europeans are viewed almost universally as soulless fools, a world in which Western dividing lines between body and spirit, matter and psyche, the mundane and the paranormal blur and vanish under the searchlight of the seeker's unremitting will to know.

Enduring the harshest physical hardships, learning to be a trader, carpet dealer, businessman, fix-it man, con man, and consummate actor, drawing on his knowledge of some sixteen languages and dialects, Gurdjieff spent these years studying himself and the world, accumulating convincing evidence for the existence of higher powers, and meeting many, as he put it, "remarkable men" – gurus, yogis, fakirs, story-tellers, teachers, holy men, healers, monks – some situated in fantastically remote areas, hidden in monasteries unknown to the world and completely inaccessible to Westerners, where esoteric teachings had been transmitted orally for centuries, even millennia.

In 1912, convinced that he had discovered and mastered a certain knowledge whose core of truth is found in all genuine religious traditions, and whose lineage went back to pre-Babylonian ages, Gurdjieff went to Moscow, where he began the teaching efforts he would pursue the remainder of his life. One of his students was P.D. Ouspensky, with whom he would split in the 1920s, but who wrote a systematic account of Gurdjieff's early ideas and methods, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*, a book which Gurdjieff approved and cleared for publication shortly after Ouspensky's death in 1947.

The practical philosophy that Fripp was developing during his three-year retreat from the music industry, which he would put into practice in his musical work of the late 1970s and early 1980s, and which would turn up in full bloom in his Guitar Craft courses after 1985, owes much to Gurdjieffian ideas that Ouspensky relates in *In Search of the Miraculous.* The overarching theme of the book is the idea that in our normal state we human beings are asleep, unconscious, running on automatic. Our ideals, morals, ideologies, religion, art, and lofty philosophizing are all a sham, the product of instinctual groping in the dark, automatic mental associations, wishful thinking, bloated egotism, laziness, shallow romanticism. "It is possible to think for a thousand years," said Gurdjieff. "It is possible to write whole libraries of books, to create theories by the million, and all this in sleep, without any possibility of awakening. On the contrary, these books and these theories, written and created in sleep, will merely send other people to sleep, and so on." *(Ouspensky, 144)*

The individual human organism is merely an animal, according to Gurdjieff, a self-deluded machine, following the course of least resistance, slipping unconscious day by day to its ultimately inevitable death. Occultist students would ask Gurdjieff about life after death, reincarnation, and so on, and he would reply that for most people, death is indeed the ultimate end, you go out like a light and that is it. Only for those who had persistently labored to develop a soul, a real, permanent, unchangeable "I," was there any possibility that some essential quality of their being would survive the death of the physical body.

Fripp in his teaching does not speculate on the afterlife, but he shares the Gurdjieff/Ouspensky insistence on man in his normal state as a dozy automaton. It is a paradoxical doctrine, echoed through the ages in many teachings, including the Calvinist doctrine of predestination: we have no free will, development of one's freedom can begin only with a clear-headed recognition of one's absolute slavery to circumstance, mental associations, emotion, instinct, genetics, biochemistry, the laws of nature. Ouspensky quotes Gurdjieff as saying, "Every grown-up man consists wholly of habits, although he is often unaware of it and even denies having any habits at all ... The struggle with small habits is very difficult and boring, but without it self-observation is impossible." *(Ouspensky, 111-112)* From Fripp's *Guitar Craft Monograph III: Aphorisms*: "It is difficult to exaggerate the power of habit."

The Danish philosopher and religious thinker Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), regarded as the fountainhead of twentieth-century secular and religious existentialism, maintained that the average person, going about his or her daily routines automatically, is as incapable of sin as he or she is of repentance. Kierkegaard, who spent his life as a writer championing conscious subjectivity as the sine qua non of authentic existence, and who wanted the words "The Individual" inscribed on his tombstone, was wont to find, as was Gurdjieff, confirmation of his own views in the words of Socrates: "Know thyself." Gurdjieff put it like this: "Individuality, a single and permanent I, consciousness, will, the *ability to do*, a state of inner freedom, all these are qualities which ordinary man does not possess. To the same category belongs the idea of good and evil, the very existence of which is connected with a *permanent* aim, with a *permanent* direction and a *permanent* center of gravity ... Permanent truth and permanent falsehood can exist only for a permanent man. If a man himself continually changes, then for him truth and falsehood will also continually change." *(Ouspensky, 159)*

Sometimes Gurdjieff would refer to his methods as the "Fourth Way." The first three ways were the way of the fakir, the way of the monk, and the way of the yogi. The fakir struggles with the physical body, devoting himself to mastering incredibly difficult physical exercises and postures. The way of the monk represents the way of faith, the cultivation of religious feelings, and self-sacrifice. The yogi's approach is through knowledge and the mind. Gurdjieff said of his Fourth Way that it combined work simultaneously on the body, emotions, and mind, and that it could be followed by ordinary people in everyday life – that it required no retirement into the desert. The Fourth Way did involve whole-hearted acceptance of certain conditions imposed by a teacher; it also involved supreme effort to devote oneself continuously to inner work, even though one's outward worldly roles might not change that much. In spite of his insistence that work without a teacher was impossible, Gurdjieff stressed each individual's responsibility:

> The fourth way differs from the other ways in that the principal demand made upon a man is the demand for understanding. A man must do nothing that he does not understand, except as an experiment under the supervision and direction of his teacher. The more a man understands what he is doing, the greater will be the results of his efforts. This is a fundamental principle of the fourth way. The results of work are in proportion to the consciousness of the work. No "faith" is required on the fourth way; on the contrary, faith of any kind is opposed to the fourth way. On the fourth way a man must satisfy himself of the truth of what he is told. And until he is satisfied he must do nothing. *(Ouspensky, 49)*

In the 1988 pamphlet "An Introduction to Guitar Craft," Fripp, who has explicitly called himself a follower of the Fourth Way, wrote, "In Guitar Craft there is nothing compulsory. One is not asked to violate cherished beliefs or accept any of the ideas presented. Rather, a healthy skepticism is encouraged." *(GC Phamplet I)*

By its very nature, the Fourth Way is not for everyone. Knowledge is not deliberately hidden, Gurdjieff would say, but most people simply are not interested. The former leader of a Gurdjieff group in Boston, Meggan Moorehead, told me of Gurdjieff's "five of twenty of twenty." Only twenty per cent of all people ever think seriously about higher realities; of these, only twenty per cent ever decide to do anything about it; and of these, only five per cent ever actually get anywhere.

What then is this "work"? Those in the Gurdjieff school write of "work on oneself," and often capitalize the concept, as in "The Work." Gurdjieff time and again insisted on the importance of direct transmission of knowledge from teacher to student, and emphatically warned of the grave dangers of attempting to learn exercises from a book or cramming one's head full of abstract spiritual notions on one's own. Those who have met an authentic teacher know the sense of *presence* so important to the whole process, the teacher is an *embodiment* of the knowledge of which he or she speaks, and in a sense what he or she *says* is of little importance compared with the student's opportunity to observe what he or she *is*. Descriptions of Gurdjieff by those who worked with him are filled with references to his effortless bearing, his economy of movement, his feline grace, his almost overwhelming physical presence as well as his spontaneity and earthy sense of humor. A student in Gurdjieff's Moscow circle described his first meeting with the teacher: "He looked at me, and I had the distinct impression that he took me in the palm of his hand and weighed me." *(Views from the Real World, 12)*

Although knowledge is not hoarded secretively, there are inevitable difficulties and pitfalls in efforts to share it with outsiders. Jesus called this "casting pearls before swine." Gurdjieff said students of his methods would find themselves "*unable* to transmit correctly what is said in the groups. [Students] very soon begin to learn *from their own personal experience* how much effort, how much time, and how much explaining is necessary in order to grasp what is said in groups. It becomes clear to them that they are unable to give their friends a right idea of what they have learned themselves." *(Ouspensky 223-224)* Ouspensky relates that in the early work with Gurdjieff in Moscow and St. Petersburg, it was strictly forbidden for students to write down, much less publish, anything at all connected with Gurdjieff and his ideas; somewhat later, Gurdjieff relaxed this rule, accepting as students many who subsequently published accounts of their experiences in the work.

Having, I think, caveated the whole matter sufficiently into the dust, I offer here a brief outsider's summary of what was involved in the work of Gurdjieff's groups.

Relaxation. Many of Gurdjieff's exercises involved or began with some sort of gradual relaxation of the muscles, starting with the muscles of the face and working downward through the body. Fripp has said that we can do nothing when not relaxed, and since his time at Sherborne has practiced a regular routine of relaxation in the morning before breakfast; such a ritual, led by a qualified instructor, has been worked into the Guitar Craft seminars. Along with relaxation goes a type of exercise for sensing the different parts of the body "from the inside." For Gurdjieff's groups, this might have involved, for instance, lying on one's back and concentrating all of one's awareness first on one's nose, then on one's right foot, and so on.

Other Exercises; The Movements. Ouspensky relates a series of what he found to be "unbelievably difficult" physical/mental exercises that Gurdjieff had picked up in various esoteric schools during his travels. *(Ouspensky, 358)* In general, these involved some precise and exact combination of counting, breathing, sensing of body parts, and movements, to be done in some coordinated sequence. The famous "movements," often done to music Gurdjieff had composed himself, were dances based on those Gurdjieff had observed and participated in, notably among sufis and dervishes, and in ancient hidden monasteries. Gurdjieff taught that the movements were

not merely calisthenics, exercises in concentration, and displays of bodily coordination and aesthetic sensibility: on the contrary, in the movements was embedded real, concrete knowledge, passed from generation to generation of initiates – each posture and gesture representing some cosmic truth that the informed observer could read like a book.

Division of Attention. Gurdjieff encouraged his students to cultivate the ability to divide their attention, that is, the ability to remain fully focussed on two or more things at the same time. One might, for instance, let half of one's attention dwell in one's little finger, while the other half is devoted to an intellectual discussion. In the division of attention, it is not a matter of going back and forth between one thing and another, but experiencing them both fully simultaneously. Beyond the division of attention lies "remembering oneself" – a frame of mind, permanent in the hypothetical perfected person, fleeting and temporary in the rest of us, in which we see what is seen without ever losing sight of *ourselves seeing.* Ordinarily, when concentrating on something, we lose our sense of "I," although we may as it were passively react to the stimulus we are concentrating on. In self-remembering the "I" is not lost, and only when we maintain that sense of "I," according to Gurdjieff, are we really awake. Like mastery on a musical instrument, such forms of heightened self-awareness can be developed only with years of practice.

Hands, Head, and Heart. With many variations and complications over the years, Gurdjieff's theoretical picture of the human organism boils down to a tripartite model consisting of three "centers": the moving, the emotional, and the thinking. Becoming a genuine person involves coordinating the three centers and becoming capable of conscious labor and intentional suffering.

Abstract Symbolism. Gurdjieff was fond of elaborate theorizing – the construction of intricate symbolic systems embodying or representing the relationships between phenomena at all levels of existence from the atom to the universe. Ouspensky devotes pages and pages to Gurdjieff's concept of "octaves" – the musical scale do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do taken as a sort of universal yardstick for determining the measurements and proportions of all of nature's parts. (The theory of octaves had a tremendous impact on pianist Keith Jarrett, who read about them in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, Gurdjieff's longest, most allegorical, and most difficult book.) Some Gurdjieff students and groups gloss over the octaves or dispense with them entirely. My own feeling is that the theory of octaves has a lot in common with medieval Western musical theorists' preoccupation with theo-numerological speculation based on interval integer ratios and their symbolic significance. In point of fact, Gurdjieff had studied the medieval alchemists and on occasion was prone to speak of the human organism as a sort of alchemical factory for the transformation of various material and psychic substances. *(Ouspensky, 179-180)*

It seems that where there is music, and where there are people who philosophize about it, there will be some form of numerology and arcane quasi-mathematics. Since both musical pitch and musical rhythm are readily represented in numerical forms, the urge to find primal mathematical significance in music is almost impossible to resist. A contemporary example of this perennially seductive train of thought is Peter Michael Hamel's book *Through Music to the Self.*

Another symbolic thought-form Gurdjieff worked with was the enneagram, a circle with nine points around its circumference. Said Gurdjieff, "The enneagram is a *universal symbol.* All knowledge can be included in the enneagram and with the help of the enneagram it can be interpreted ... A man may be quite alone in the desert and he can trace the enneagram in the sand and in it read the eternal laws of the universe. And every time he can learn something new, something he did not know before." *(Ouspensky, 294)*

Through the elaboration of the law of octaves and the meaning of the enneagram, Gurdjieff offered his students alternative means of conceptualizing the world and their place in it. When I say "alternative," I am suggesting that Gurdjieff sought alternatives to rational, linear, language-oriented exposition and rhetoric (though he was by all accounts also a spellbinding speaker). In other words, Gurdjieff's ideas could be only partially expounded in ordinary words and sentences; to go beyond language he drew on music (he played several instruments and Bennett tells of him improvising unearthly melodies on a small organ late at night), dance, and visual symbols such as the enneagram.

Furthermore, it is my impression that Gurdjieff was happy to talk theoretically with students who were theoretically inclined, but that the theory itself is not an indispensable part of his overall teaching. Or, to put it slightly differently, Gurdjieff used, for instance, the complicated machinery of the law of octaves in order to teach his students to think. And in some respects the process of thinking was more important than the theoretical content of what was thought.

Conditions. Gurdjieff laid emphasis on the idea that the seeker must conduct his or her own search – and that the teacher cannot do the student's work for the student, but is more of a guide on the path to self-discovery. As a teacher, Gurdjieff specialized in creating conditions for students – conditions in which growth was possible, in which efficient progress could be made by the willing. To find oneself in a set of conditions a gifted teacher has arranged has another benefit. As Gurdjieff put it, "You must realize that each man has a definite repertoire of roles which he plays in ordinary circumstances ... but put him into even only slightly different circumstances and he is unable to find a suitable role and *for a short time he becomes himself.*" *(Ouspensky, 239)*

In 1918 the turmoil of the Russian revolution forced Gurdjieff and a small group of devoted followers out of Moscow to Essentuki in the Caucasus. For the next four years the core group moved from place to place, from Tiflis in Georgia to Constantinople to Germany. In 1922 Gurdjieff finally managed to establish a more or less stable base of operations, which he dubbed the "Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man," at the Chateau de Prieure in Fontainbleau, near Paris. The Institute's varied activities attracted many new people to Gurdjieff's ideas, and in 1924 he went on a short visit to America where he stirred up much interest and started a group in New York. He returned to France. At this moment of the beginnings of success on a larger scale, Gurdjieff was nearly killed in an automobile accident. During his long recuperation his teaching activities came to an almost complete halt, but from this time to 1935 he did manage to write his three primary works, *Beelzebub's Tales*, *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, and *Life Is Real Only Then, When "I Am."*

If *Beelzebub's Tales* is an elaborate modern mythological tapestry and *Meetings* is a spiritual travelogue, then *Life Is Real Only Then* is a portrait of the creative process in fluid motion. Gurdjieff's most self-revealing book, it takes the reader into Gurdjieff's own associative thought-processes, for instance in those passages where he writes about writing itself, the trains of thought that led him, when still a young man, to renounce all use of his exceptional psychic powers, the somewhat brutal methods he used to whip his New York followers into shape, and his superhuman, insomniacal efforts to keep his Institute functioning and together on a sound financial footing in the Fontainbleau days. *Life Is Real* was never finished – it ends poignantly with a colon.

In the 1930s and 1940s Gurdjieff worked with small groups in Paris, where he lived, and New York. Gurdjieff himself was ultimately an enigma to Westerners, even to those who knew

him best. It is doubtful that we will ever know the "person" behind the tremendous force of personality he exerted upon all who worked with him. In times of the greatest personal crisis, he would withdraw into the circle of his family. He placed extreme demands on his students, but seemed to demand infinitely more of himself. Teacher or prophet, rogue or saint, wily man or gracious servant of God, Gurdjieff today is gone, and among some of his followers there lingers an eschatological atmosphere, a memory-afterglow of a not-so-distant time past when the infinite was concretely embodied in time.

Bennett

John G. Bennett, an on-and-off student of Gurdjieff's, was another kettle of fish altogether – Western, modern, more recognizably human. To Bennett's autobiography, *Witness: The Story of a Search*, Fripp contributed a back-cover blurb which reads: "If a stiff Englishman like Mr. B. could do it, there's hope for the rest of us. In our time and culture we had a teacher who went through all the steps himself, took the leap, and came back to explain how we could do the same. When I found him, the top of my head blew off."

Bennett did not disguise himself the way Gurdjieff did, with layers of acting, multiple personas, irony, sarcasm, ambiguity – with rumors of scandalous personal conduct intentionally encouraged, nor with a misty, shadowy, mythologized, fairy-tale past. Bennett's autobiography reveals sincerity, openness, doubt, curiosity, and compassion from beginning to end. But like Gurdjieff, Bennett traveled widely, had at his command numerous languages, educated himself in religion, underwent many profound inner experiences, and led groups of students to unlock their own human potential. As he tells the story in his autobiography, although various spiritual leaders had urged him at various points in his life to strike out on his own path, it was not until near the end of his years that he felt fully confident to assume the mantle of the teacher. Bennett relates how Gurdjieff had told him in 1923 that one day Bennett would "follow in his footsteps and take up the work he had started at Fontainebleau." *(Bennett, Witness, p. 372)* In 1970, following the promptings of a still, small voice from within that said, "You are to found a school," Bennett organized the International Academy for Continuous Education. The name was chosen "to indicate on the one hand its Platonic inspiration and on the other to emphasize that it was to offer a teaching for the whole life of the men and women who came to it." *(Bennett, Witness, 374)*

Bennett writes of his inner transformative experiences with clinical accuracy, in a measured, matter-of-fact tone that is sufficient to throw the skeptical off guard. His first significant brush with unseen realities came in 1918, at the age of twenty, when he was blown off his motorcycle by an exploding shell in France during the first World War. Taken to a military hospital, operated upon, and remaining, to all outward appearances, in a coma for six days, Bennett recalls that some part of his awareness was not completely gone, he saw his body from the outside, he could feel the other injured men in the room, he heard voices from time to time. Hanging between death and life, "It was perfectly clear to me that being dead is quite unlike being very ill or very weak or helpless. So far as I was concerned, there was no fear at all. And yet I have never been a brave man and was certainly still afraid of heavy gun fire. I was cognizant of my complete indifference toward my own body." *(Bennett, Witness, 3-4)* This experience set his life on a new course – he describes the return to normal existence as the return to a body that was now in some sense a stranger.

Bennett developed a passion for the Turkish language and got a job in the British Intelligence Service in Istanbul. He was to become gradually convinced that his soul had come

from somewhere in the East, and was puzzled as to why he should have been born in England. (Hasan Shushud was much later to explain to him, "The wind can blow the seed across continents. The wind is blowing towards England now. That is why you were born here." *[Bennett, 376]*) But even as a young man, he was fascinated by the rich Asiatic tumult of life in Istanbul, and by the very different structure of the language, which seemed to indicate a whole way of thinking, a mode of being quite foreign to Europeans. Contact with Islam, with dervishes, with many clashing cultures, forced Bennett to certain practical conclusions: "All day long I was dealing with different races: English, French, Italian, Greek, Armenian, Turkish, Kurdish, Russian, Arab, Jews and people so mixed up as to be no race at all. Each and every one was convinced of the superiority of his own people. How could everyone be right and all the rest wrong? It was nonsense." *(Bennett, 36)*

Studying Persian and Turkish literature, Bennett soon met a certain Prince Sabaheddin, who in the course of many philosophical conversations introduced him to a wide range of religious and occultist ideas, including Theosophy and Anthroposophy. At this time a pattern in Bennett's life began to develop: he was, on the one hand, engaged in strenuous professional activity that required a great deal of his energy – on the other hand he felt determined to pursue the search for a deeper reality. It was a struggle between two worlds that he carried out nearly his entire life.

It was through Sabaheddin that Bennett met Gurdjieff – a meeting he called "the second decisive event of my life." *(Bennett, 51)* Gurdjieff was in Istanbul en route from Tiflis to Europe, working with students, giving lectures and demonstrations. Ouspensky was in town at the same time – Bennett met him also, and was later to become his student – but working more or less independently from Gurdjieff. Bennett's reaction to meeting Gurdjieff was typical. Impressed from the outset by "the strangest eyes I have ever seen," Bennett spoke about his experiments in hypnotism. Gurdjieff listened attentively, and Bennett "felt that he was not so much following my words as participating directly in the experience. I had never before had the same feeling of being understood better than I understood myself." *(Bennett, 56)* After Gurdjieff responded with a lengthy, masterful spoken dissertation on the theory and practice of hypnotism, Bennett, spellbound, felt "acutely aware of my own inadequacy. I was sure that he could answer my questions – but I did not know what questions to ask." *(Bennett, 57)*

Bennett was an accomplished mathematician, and the conversation turned to a theory of the fifth dimension he had recently developed as the result of a vision. Gurdjieff again listened seriously. Finally he responded, "Your guess is right. There are higher dimensions or higher worlds where the higher faculties of man have free play. But what is the use of studying these worlds theoretically? Suppose that you could prove mathematically that the fifth dimension really does exist, what use would that be to you so long as you remain here? ... Change ... will not come about through study ... It is like a man who knows all about money and the laws of banking, but has no money of his own in the bank. What does all his knowledge do for him?" *(Bennett, 58-59)*

Although deeply moved by Gurdjieff's words, and the manner in which they were spoken, at this stage Bennett still found outer life "too full and too interesting to leave place for so exacting a discipline as Gurdjieff was likely to demand." *(Bennett, 61)*

It is impossible in these pages to recount Bennett's material and spiritual pilgrimage in full detail. In 1923, on Ouspensky's advice, he stayed at Gurdjieff's Institute at Fontainebleau for several weeks, and in his autobiography recounts the atmosphere of feverish activity, the difficult physical labor, the psychological exercises, the work on movements, Gurdjieff's taunting, goading, and kindliness. Bennett – enthusiastic, receptive, overworked, and physically ill – was

inspired at Fontainbleau to grand numinous insights the likes of which it would be presumptuous and foolhardy of me to attempt to condense into a few phrases.

Gurdjieff, who led Bennett at every step, ultimately invited him to stay for a period of two years, after which, he said, it would be possible for Bennett to continue to work alone. Bennett felt he could not accept the offer – he was not yet ready. He returned to England. For the next twenty-five years Bennett pursued his double life: man of affairs, coal researcher, industrial advisor; and writer of spiritualist/theoretical tomes, student of Ouspensky, seeker, reluctant leader of his own discussion groups.

In 1948 Bennett returned for the last time to Gurdjieff, who was living and taking students in small lodgings in Paris. Gurdjieff astonished him by picking up his education precisely where it had been left off at the Institute two and a half decades before. Gurdjieff's diagnosis of Bennett's state was much the same: "Now you have much knowledge, but in Being you are a nullity ... You think too much." *(Bennett, 239)* Once more Bennett plunged into exercises, readings, the work.

Shortly after Bennett's arrival in Paris, Gurdjieff suffered another terrible car accident. Refusing all medical help, he slowly nursed himself back to seemingly almost-normal health, but it appears that his recovery this time was not complete. By mid-1949, at which time Bennett was regularly going back and forth across the English Channel between his worldly commitments and his apprenticeship with Gurdjieff, Gurdjieff's health was rapidly failing. On October 28, by Bennett's account, Gurdjieff's American doctor finally "took the situation in hand, and moved him to the American Hospital. He tapped his dropsy. Gurdjieff watched, smoking a cigarette, cracking jokes and saying 'Bravo America.' He lay down, and never rose again. He passed into a peaceful sleep, and his breathing gradually died away. At eleven a.m. on Saturday morning, 29th October, he was dead. The autopsy showed that most of his internal organs were so degenerated that no doctor could understand how he had lived so long." *(Bennett, 271)*

Gurdjieff's death left Bennett in confusion. He felt he had not yet undergone the complete, conscious death and rebirth spoken of in traditional sacred doctrines and conceived by Gurdjieff as true liberation. He continued to work in groups, but felt that it was going nowhere. Clearly distinguished among his friends and fellow seekers as especially gifted, he continued to waver: "I was increasingly aware of the limits of my strength, and even more of my wisdom. I could never dare to take the risk with the inner world of others that Gurdjieff was prepared to take." *(Bennett, 285)*

Subsequent travels to the Holy Lands and Persia brought Bennett into renewed contact with living sources of religious traditions in all their timeless mystery. In the late 1950s he was attracted to the Subud phenomenon, whose central experience was the *latithan*, a sort of intense guided meditation that led to immediately and radically altered states of consciousness. From the descriptions Bennett gives, it appears that the *latithan* may have been somewhat similar to the methods used by the likes of the Guru Maharaji, the Indian boy-teacher who swept through the West in the early 1970s (and cleaned out the minds of several of my friends in the process) – dramatic, instantaneous psychological results of somewhat dubious significance.

After extensive work with the *latithan*, Bennett concluded that he "had ceased to work on myself and had relied on the *latithan* to do what I should be doing by my own effort." *(Bennett, 350)* In 1960 he abandoned Subud and resumed the disciplines Gurdjieff had taught him. After long inner deliberations he joined the Catholic Church, which, as I have already mentioned in this book, he regarded as "the custodian of a mystery that it does not understand." *(Bennett, 354)* He met the one-hundred-and thirty-six-year-old Shivapuri Baba in Nepal.

Bennett, who had lived a full personal and professional life, subjected himself to a wide variety of disciplines, met and studied under different teachers, and worked on himself seriously since the 1920s, gradually came to trust the promptings of his own inner voice. In 1962 he was sixty-five, and, as he put it, "For the first time, I was daring to be myself." He organized seminars and guided students with a new confidence. Throughout the 1960s he devoted much thought to modern education, and began to seek out alternatives. Hasan Shushud, a Sufi from Bosphorus, eventually managed to convince Bennett that he should take the leap, exert his independence from all existing groups, and follow his own path.

The final chapter of Bennett's autobiography concerns the steps he took to found his International Society for Continuous Education, and the philosophy behind it. With regard to the modern world at large, Bennett was a pessimist in the short run and an optimist in the long run. Like his New Testament namesake, John of Patmos, author of the Book of Revelation, Bennett believed in imminent apocalypse: in 1973 he wrote that "we are in the early stages of the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ which heralds the end of the present world." *(Bennett, iii)* The old world would disintegrate before the end of the twentieth century. But Bennett did not prophesy outright doom and destruction; rather, he called on men and women to work to create a counter-movement that would lay the foundations for the new world.

Bennett pointed to familiar threatening signs: morally unchecked acceleration of technology – with "knowledge" (that is, largely uninterpreted *information*) doubling every ten years or less, and visionary leadership able to interpret this information ever more scarce; proliferation of nuclear weapons; population explosion and unstable food supplies; growing scientific evidence of global climatic changes; gigantic government and corporate structures unable to control the chain of events. Bennett foresaw a time of panic and breakdown, during which faith in traditional institutions and governments would be irrevocably lost. After a transitional period of thirty or forty years, a new social order would arise: "It will be neither capitalist nor communist, neither national nor international but consist of largely self-supporting experimental settlements learning to help one another to survive. The big cities will slowly be depopulated and fall into decay. National governments will be replaced by agencies, whose main function will be to maintain the distribution of vital supplies. Life will simplify." *(Bennett, iv)*

Bennett saw his Society for Continuous Education as a place where people who were already to some degree aware of the world's coming cataclysmic changes could be "trained to perceive, to understand, and to withstand the strains of the world process." *(Bennett, v)* His long life's search had led him to the conclusion that some version of Gurdjieff's methods, supplemented by techniques from other sources, could provide the requisite training. Aside from cultivating productive transformation in its participants' consciousness, the Society and similar experimental communities would stand as beacons of light, for all to see, and perchance to imitate, in a world inexorably slipping into a global dark night of the soul.

In 1971 Bennett bought Sherborne House, a huge, stately old building surrounded by gardens and meadows, which had served as a boy's school, in the Cotswold Hills of Gloucestershire. (According to Fripp, the school had been the model for the boarding school in the movie *If.*) On a lecture tour of colleges in the United States he rounded up some ninety candidates for his training. With the help of his wife and several assistants, Bennett inaugurated the Academy on October 15, 1971. The derelict state of Sherborne House provided plenty of work for the trainees: cooking, washing, and heating facilities were inadequate, and much had to be improvised. Students who had fancied themselves in for a few months of utopian dalliance in agreeable countryside surroundings were rudely awakened. Uncomfortable conditions, hard physical work, lectures, the Gurdjieff movements, discussions, psychological exercises, and

conflict were the order of the day. The First Course lasted some ten months; Bennett graduated his first "class," whom he encouraged to return home and share what they had learned with small groups.

Bennett administered a Second Course for new students in 1972-1973, and a Third in 1973-1974. He planned to give five such courses and then, in 1976-1977, "to invite [back] those who have shown themselves capable of transmitting what they have learned and are ready to make a step forward." *(Bennett, 378)* The Fourth Course, beginning in October 1974, was to be Bennett's last. He had been seeking a place in America where he might found a community and school along the Sherborne lines, and in October purchased Claymont Court, a farm and mansion on nearly four hundred acres of scenic property in the Shenandoah Valley of West Virginia. Pierre Elliot, a boyhood friend of Bennett's, who had worked with both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, was chosen to head the American Society for Continuous Education.

Bennett, who had worked unceasingly on these projects for several years, died on December 13, 1974. As his wife, Elizabeth, put it, "His control over his physical organism was such that very few people at Sherborne knew that so short a time was left to him." *(Bennett, Epilogue, n.p.)*

Gurdjieff spoke of the awakening of the individual; Bennett took this message and gave it a global political meaning. Gurdjieff concentrated on shocking people into awareness; Bennett spoke openly of co-operation, selflessness, humility, preservation, and love.

Fripp at Sherborne

To Fripp, Bennett was "living proof that if a creepy, uptight Englishman, with severe emotional problems, could become a human being through dint of effort, so could I." *(Watts 1980, 22)* However, in recent years Fripp has been at pains to point out that he is "not an advocate of Mr. Bennett's ideas. I recommend Mr. Bennett's ideas to virtually no one. I'm an advocate of Guitar Craft, I speak for Guitar Craft. But Mr. Bennett would be inappropriate for nearly everyone I know. Not for me. But I'm not an advocate for Mr. Bennett at all." *(Drozdowski 1989, 32)*

Fripp attended the Fifth Course at Sherborne, beginning in October 1975 and lasting for ten months. It must have been an emotional time for all concerned, with the great teacher recently deceased, and with his widow – who had been one of Gurdjieff's several female assistants in Paris – in charge of the proceedings.

Fripp gave one of his accounts of his Sherborne year when Stephe Pritchard, during the 1981 *Recorder Three* interview, asked him, "In what ways do you think Gurdjieff has influenced you?" Fripp answered, "Well, I probably wouldn't be here now, certainly not in this form, if I hadn't come across that." Fripp described how, during the ten-month course at Sherborne, students were allowed to leave the premises only one day every three weeks. "We lost three people to the asylum in my year and overall twenty per cent [of the students] left ... It was very, very hard work; it was the difference between working on the inside and the outside, that if you're feeling a bit pissed off you can go to the pictures or watch television or get drunk or do whatever. But in Sherborne you had to sit there and find a way of dealing with it – the expression would be working with it – not easy. The woman I was living with left me while I was there which was awful for me – I was pretty suicidal – it was not easy. But, on the other hand, that was certainly the beginning of my life, if you like." Fripp went on to describe the day's regimen, which began with rising at six in the morning (at four-thirty if one had kitchen duty). Morning

psychological exercises were conducted at quarter to seven, followed by breakfast at seven thirty. At eight-thirty began the day's work with practical skills, including metal work, stonemasonry, carpentry, and so on. "In addition to practical work we had cosmological lectures, there were remarkable Gurdjieff movements, sacred kinesis; but essentially it was very practical, the school wasn't primarily theoretical." Many issues that came up during the year "confounded the mind," proving unamenable to rational analysis. The living quarters were cold, uncomfortable, and lacked privacy (Fripp shared a dorm room with five other men). Psychologically provocative situations constantly arose among the residents. And to top it off, Fripp even came to believe the house was haunted. *(Recorder Three, n.p.)*

Because of the manifold opportunities thus offered to confront himself, Fripp later looked back on his year at Sherborne with gratitude. He has spoken of the profound value of having one's grandiose self-image mercilessly deflated by harsh physical and psychological conditions. As he tells it, most of the hundred or so people who attended the course came there with some more or less definite feeling that they had been specially selected by God to save the world. Fripp's own fantasy, rudely shattered by Sherborne's regimen and realism, was that he was to become an ordained minister, perhaps to carry on as rock star and man of the cloth simultaneously. *(Jones 1979A, 20)* As it turned out, by the time he left, although he felt he had been given an inkling of life's inner purpose and significance, and a more explicit sense of the dynamics of his own individual psychic economy, he had no plans other than to allow the future to present itself.

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Chapter Eight: Out of Retirement – The Drive to 1981

Small is beautiful.

– E.F. Schumacher

During his period of retreat, Robert Fripp had had no concrete plans for returning to music; before breaking up King Crimson III in 1974, he had concluded that being a rock star was no longer conducive to his continuing self-education, that it was, in fact, counter-productive to his aims. With the self-imposed retreat drawing to an end, Fripp did not thus return to the music world with a loud splash, making his presence known to one and all in a grandiose gesture. Rather, he stuck his toe in the water bit by bit, carefully considering whether the world of the professional musician was a suitable arena for his activities.

Fripp loves to formulate little paradigmatic lists, and in 1982 he was to formalize what he called the "four criteria for work": work should earn a living, be educational, be fun, and be socially useful. As he leaked out of retirement in 1977 and 1978, Fripp was gradually able to acknowledge that for him, working in the music industry could be all of the above. Although in some respects Fripp seems a solitary introvert, living in a world of his own, on a plane of symbolic structures of his own devising which very few others are able to understand, let alone accept whole-heartedly, he was to receive much encouragement from friends old and new during this period, and was to succeed in carrying his musical odyssey through the next several island links in the archipelago of his life's work. In retreat he had reached the point of realizing he could choose what he wanted to do, so now, he could choose music freely – spontaneously after reflection, to paraphrase Kierkegaard.

With Peter Gabriel

The first step out of retirement came in response to a call from Peter Gabriel, who in early 1977 was in Toronto making his first solo album *Peter Gabriel* (for Atco), having left Genesis in 1975. Genesis, one of the prototypical progressive rock bands of the early 1970s, was known for its elaborate stage shows and psychodramatic pyrotechnics sparked in large part by Gabriel's magnetic stage presence, vocal abilities, and wonderfully imaginative songwriting; the zenith of Genesis' early period of activity was their 1974 rock opera, *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway.* Fripp had ambivalent feelings about returning to active involvement in music, and hence felt obliged to stipulate to Gabriel that he would be free to withdraw after three days if his presence turned out not to be "appropriate." In the studio sessions themselves, although he got along well enough with producer Bob Ezrin, Fripp felt constricted musically, unable to express himself fluently. He found himself caught on the horns of a dilemma: "After three days, having discovered it *wasn't* appropriate, I didn't *want* to leave. I didn't want to leave my friends to be *ravaged.*"

Fripp's contributions to Gabriel's first album are minimal: discreet touches here and there on electric guitar, classical guitar, and banjo. The following year, Gabriel invited Fripp to produce his second album (also titled *Peter Gabriel*, but on the Atlantic label). Comparing the two albums side by side reveals vastly different production values. With Ezrin Gabriel had cultivated a wide-open approach: huge orchestral textures, ample synthesizer padding, cavernous drum fills, exotic percussion, luscious reverb and echo on the vocal tracks, a sense of limitless expansive spaces, of gigantism and melodrama. If *Peter Gabriel* 1977 sounds like it was recorded

in a heavenly cathedral, *Peter Gabriel* 1978 sounds like it comes out of a dingy garage: Fripp persuaded Gabriel to cut back drastically on the electronically-induced spaciousness and instead opt for the close, tight, dry, realistic "live"-type sound King Crimson's recorded music had nearly always had – the production strategy Fripp was later to call *audio verite.*

Perhaps Fripp succeeded (however temporarily) in bringing the sound of Gabriel's music closer to "reality" – out of the inflatedly progressive early 1970s into the stripped-down late 1970s. But in the long view, I'm not sure Fripp in his role as producer, in his zeal for sonic sobriety and acoustical honesty, fully appreciated the nature of Gabriel's talents – Gabriel the superb harmonist, the luxuriant-dream-weaver, the transcendental vocalist, the peerless timbralist and rock song-texture-crafter. It might not be stretching it too much to say that Fripp has essentially never accepted the making of records as a valid artistic medium in its own right, but rather views the whole studio process as a necessary evil whose sole purpose is to produce inevitably second-rate reproductions of the real thing, live music. *Peter Gabriel* 1978 shows us a very Frippicized Gabriel, as though Fripp was doing his utmost to incorporate Gabriel into his own scheme of things. In the long view, I think we should be thankful he didn't succeed.

In addition to producing the album, Fripp played on many of the pieces; he shines particularly brightly in the angular electric guitar solo on "White Shadow" and in the cascading, foreboding Frippertronics of "Exposure," a song he co-wrote with Gabriel.

Living in New York City

After the 1976 sessions with Gabriel, Fripp returned to England to work on editing taped Bennett lectures and preparing them for publication. Even after what he called the "very demoralizing and depressing experience" of working on *Peter Gabriel I* in Canada, Fripp agreed to do some shows with Gabriel in America in February 1977. At the beginning Fripp, not quite ready for full exposure, sat offstage and played guitar hidden from the audience's view; by the end of the tour he was performing onstage with the rest of the band. Immediately before the tour, Fripp had moved to New York City, which would remain, as he put it, his "center of gravity" for the next several years.

The downtown Manhattan arts and music scene seems to thrive and stagnate in cycles. In the late 1970s it was thriving on a peculiar constellation of elements – ideas about art and cross-pollination between the arts – as well as a rich crop of talent: Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and Glenn Branca's music mixing classicism and minimalism, sophistication and rawness; the futuristic tongue-in-cheek moral fables of multi-media artist Laurie Anderson; the strange otherworldly theatrical warblings of Meredith Monk; the stage productions of Robert Wilson. And then there was the punk explosion. Though musical and spiritual precursors of punk can be seen in the Beatles' riotous early Hamburg performances, in 1960s American garage/garbage rock, in the Velvet Underground, the New York Dolls, MC5, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, Lennon's Plastic Ono Band, and even King Crimson ("Schizoid Man" and much of KC III), punk rock proper (and the lighter, more melodic and danceable new wave) came down like an avalanche in 1975-1977 and the following years with Patti Smith, the Ramones, Talking Heads, and Television leading the way in New York City. Fripp's friend Brian Eno was in New York a great deal from 1978 to 1980, producing Talking Heads, Devo, and compiling the punk anthology *No New York.*

Without rehashing the millions of words that have been written on the meaning of the punk movement in the U.S.A. and the U.K., I might say here simply that punk was, among many

other things, a repudiation of the values, styles, and tastes of the corporate music industry: punk was putting music back in the hands of the people, at least in the movement's early stages. The early punk and new wave bands were intent on slaying the establishment-corporation-Goliath-dinosaur; and to Robert Fripp, the prototypical punk band seemed to represent something close to the "small, mobile, independent, intelligent unit" he had prophesied in 1974.

Downtown New York around 1977 was in artistic/musical ferment characterized by a fluid mixing of genres, forms, and media, as yet mostly untainted by the commercial cynicism and big-bucks mentality that had toppled many musicians of rock's first three generations (1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s). Fripp was drawn to this center of activity as a hunk of red iron ore to a magnet. He was determined, moreover, not to play the role of one of the grand old men of rock, not to entertain any illusions of self-importance, not to indulge in any of the trappings of the star's lifestyle. To ground himself firmly in reality, he drew up three personal rules for living in New York: he would use only public transportation, do his own laundry, and do his own grocery shopping.

Settling into a loft in the Bowery, two blocks away from CBGB, Fripp surveyed the cultural jungle scenery as a prelude to beginning a new phase of work, although it would still be a while before he would officially come out of retirement. Although little is known about his day-to-day movements in New York in 1977, it was during June of that year that what Fripp has called his "own work" with the tape-loop-delay system, or Frippertronics, began. Fripp formally defined Frippertronics in 1980 as "that musical experience resulting at the interstice of Robert Fripp and a small, mobile and appropriate level of technology, vis. his guitar, Frippelboard [effects pedal board] and two Revoxes [reel-to-reel tape recorders]."

The musical uses to which Frippertronics were put will be noted and elaborated on in due course, but for the moment the image to dwell upon is that of Robert Fripp experimenting with and fine-tuning the Frippertronics process in the summer of 1977, in his New York loft and occasionally in actual studios. It was around this time that he began saving particular Frippertronics improvisations on tape that would pop up later on his solo album, *Exposure* – for instance "Water Music II," recorded in July 1977 at the House of Music in New Jersey.

With David Bowie

On numerous occasions Fripp has told with relish the story of how, in late July 1977, David Bowie and Brian Eno coaxed him out of quiescence. One version goes like this: "I was in New York and I got a phone call one Saturday night: 'Hello, it's Brian. I'm here in Berlin with David. Hold on, I'll hand you over.' So Mr. B. came on the line and said, 'We tried playing guitars ourselves; it's not working. Do you think you can come in and play some burning rock'n'roll guitar?' I said, 'Well, I haven't really played guitar for three years ... but I'll have a go!'" *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)*

At Bowie's "*Heroes*" sessions in Berlin, Fripp was able to open up musically once more. He enjoyed the freedom Bowie gave him: Bowie would roll a tape he'd been working on, and Fripp would simply ad lib straight over the top, with little or no premeditation or planning. The first song Fripp played on was "Beauty and the Beast," the album's opener; Fripp describes his contribution as "a creative high spot" for him – "I had an opportunity to be what I was with a guitar." *(DeCurtis 1984, 22)* Run through Eno's "sky saw" treatments, which lend them a sort of digital-age wah-wah sonority, Fripp's guitar lines seethe with educated rock primitivism – too bad they weren't mixed louder. A different, magisterially restrained Fripp appears on the title track, "Heroes": here the guitarist makes maximum use of a minimalistic handful of notes,

providing a melancholy ostinato against which Bowie's vocal posturings unfold in all their desperate glory.

"*Heroes*" occupies a special place in David Bowie's musical development: the album's B side in particular shows the chameleon-like poseur at the height of his experimental musical tendencies – the instrumental pieces "Sense of Doubt," "Moss Garden," and "Neukoln" being among the most *compositionally* interesting pieces he has ever produced. Rock music is only partly about musical composition, of course, and in subsequent work Bowie was to lapse back into more familiar musical territory. Fripp later contributed guitar parts to Bowie's "Scary Monsters" and "Fashion." In 1987 Fripp said, "The solo on Bowie's 'Fashion' happened at 10:30 in the morning after a long drive back from Leeds gigging with The League of Gentlemen. There's nothing you feel less like in the world than turning out a burning solo – fiery rock and roll at 10:30 in the morning – just out of a truck. But it doesn't matter much how you feel, you just get on with it." *(Diliberto 1987, 50)*

In Allan Jones's entertaining *Melody Maker* interview from 1979, Fripp expounded on what he perceived as the similarities between himself, Bowie, and Eno. This trio of rock renegades, according to Fripp, were of similar age and "more or less working-class backgrounds." They were all keen self-promoters. But at the same time, "each of us finds it difficult to accept the responsibility of having feelings. So we tend to work toward cerebration and bodily involvement rather than the exposure of one's feelings." *(Jones 1979, 60)*

With Daryl Hall

Immediately after his work with Bowie and Eno in Berlin, Fripp deepened his involvement in the music industry by undertaking to produce a solo album for Daryl Hall of Hall and Oates, the pop/rock/R&B duo that in the mid-1970s helped define the "Philadelphia sound." In 1976 Hall and Oates had a string of hits with "She's Gone," "Sara Smile," and "Rich Girl." David Bowie, of course, had flirted with the Philadelphia phenomenon, having recorded the double live album *David Live* in Philly in 1974, and having cut 1975's *Young Americans* in that city's Sigma Sound Studios. "Fame," from *Young Americans*, was Bowie's first number one hit in the States – co-written by Bowie, John Lennon, and guitarist Carlos Alomar, the song stood for years as a paradigm of white disco music.

Sacred Songs, the 1977 Hall/Fripp collaboration, however, represented a major departure from the commercial white soul style for the Philadelphia-born Hall. So different from the Hall & Oates sound was it that RCA records and Hall's personal manager decided against putting it out. Fripp proceeded to wage a protracted battle for the album's release, distributing tapes to industry contacts and urging people to write letters to the president of RCA. *Sacred Songs* eventually came out in 1979 – a bittersweet triumph for Fripp, who had originally conceived the album as part of a grand trilogy, the other parts being the Peter Gabriel's Fripp-produced second solo album and Fripp's own "Exposure." In 1979, Fripp opined that "Had *Sacred Songs* been released when it was made, it would have put Daryl in a different category, with the Bowies and the Enos. Coming out now, it couldn't have the same impact." *(Holden 1980, 20)* (There will be more to say on Fripp's planned triology in the section on *Exposure* below.)

Hall and Fripp had met in Toronto in September 1974. In spite of their very different musical backgrounds, they hit it off personally and admired each others' approach to music; from the beginning of their relationship they discussed the possibility of working together. In August 1977 Hall called Fripp from New York's Hit Factory studios to ask if he would come in and put

down some guitar lines. Fresh from the Bowie/Eno sessions in Berlin, Fripp warmed to the task with such enthusiasm that he was immediately made producer.

Both Hall and Fripp recall the sessions fondly. Fripp called the situation "a beautiful working experience," *(Jones 1979A, 20)* and waxed on the quality and honesty of Hall's songs. He also offered a typically Frippian compliment, saying "Hall is the first singer I've met who can sing anything at all the way I ask him." *(Holden 1980, 20)* For Hall it was a refreshing experience: "I have never made music as easily as I did with Robert." Commenting on what had come to seem to him the "cold and sterile" Philadelphia veneer of Hall and Oates's studio efforts, Hall stressed the artistic freedom he felt in the *Sacred Songs* sessions, saying that Fripp and he were able to "achieve a very spontaneous sound." *(Orme 1977, 29)*

According to Hall, *Sacred Songs* "is mostly me and Robert. We did the basic rhythm tracks, me on piano and Robert on guitar, and then Caleb [Quaye, guitar], Roger [Pope, drums] and Kenny [Passarelli, bass] came along and played." *(Orme 1977, 29)* The album contains moments of gentle tenderness, for instance the inexpressibly melancholy electric piano/Frippertronics duet in "The Farther Away I Am." Other song types include soulful, economically scored ballads and straight-ahead rock and roll. Fripp's *audio verite* approach to production values continued: little or no artificial reverb on the vocals, drums that sound like real drums, true-to-life dynamic range and stereo balance, and an overall band sound that's brilliant if not quite brittle, dry if not quite parched.

A full critical appraisal of *Sacred Songs* would have to take into detailed account the lyrics, the different song types, Hall's prodigious if mannered vocal gymnastics and other factors. While passing on such an appraisal, I would point out that the album's most significant musical innovation is its integration of Frippertronics into an assortment of rock styles. At the time of its making, *Sacred Songs* represented the first recorded use of Frippertronics, and the eerie, haunting results can make one's hair stand on end, notably on Side One's suite, "Babs and Babs – Urban Landscape – NYCNY." Hall put it aptly when he said, "When he plays it sounds like the universe crying." *(Orme 1977, 29)*

With his work on Hall's *Sacred Songs* album in late 1977, Fripp's involvement with the music industry picked up momentum, and it was only a matter of time before he would officially acknowledge that he had come out of retirement. In November, he laid down a track for the song "Exposure" at Relight Studios. Between January 1978 and January 1979 he worked on the recording and mixing of the album *Exposure* at New York's Hit Factory.

At the Kitchen

On Sunday, February 5, 1978, Fripp made his first official solo appearance in over three years, at the Kitchen in Soho: this was also the first time he used the name "Frippertronics" for his tape-delay system. The concert came about almost by accident: originally Fripp and Joanna Walton had intended to give an intimate performance for invited friends in Walton's apartment; evidently they feared it might get too noisy, and moved the event to the Kitchen. *(Liner notes to* GSQ/UHM*)*

The concert was written up in the *Village Voice* by John Piccarella, who describes the atmosphere of anticipation, long lines of people waiting to get in wrapped around the block in the cold. Fripp, perhaps wishing to defuse some of his own anxiety as well as to brace the audience for some very un-King-Crimsonish music, began by comparing his new music to intimate "salon" music; he reportedly "reserved the right to be boring and unintelligent." *(Piccarella 1978, 54)*

The sound, if not the ineffable presence and ambiance, of this event has been preserved on a two-LP bootleg, *Pleasures in Pieces*. This curious artifact contains five Frippertronics pieces, starkly titled "The First," "The Second," "The Third," "The Fourth," and "The Fifth," as well as a text-music piece by Walton, Fripp, and others, which functioned as an interlude between two Frippertronic sets. Piccarella described Walton's piece as follows: "A taped series of quotations from linguistic philosophers was rendered both sensible and ridiculous by a series of silent physical performances. 'Oblique Strategies,' the set of directional cards written by Eno and Peter Schmidt, were circulated among several performers whose movements were, presumably, improvised according to the cards presented. One woman wrote on a large screen what appeared to be transcriptions, literal or otherwise, of the words on the cards ..." *(Piccarella 1978, 56)*

The Frippertronics improvisations from this concert are among the very finest I have heard, quite outstripping similar efforts on *Let the Power Fall* and other records. Particularly noteworthy are the almost constant changes of texture, from drone-based to melodic/motivic to harmonic, so that the overall mass of sound, though formed out of almost endless repetition of fragments, tends to develop significantly from one minute to the next. Fripp's potential for seemingly unending flights of melodic imagination is nowhere more evident. From a musician's point of view, I find Fripp's control of mode and key in these pieces masterful. "The First," for instance, begins with staccato points outlining the F-major triad; a short melodic riff C-D*b*-E*b* introduces a menace of F-minor modality; before long, the note G*b* darkly plays against the prevailing F tonic; A and A*b* make explicit the tension between major and minor; eventually, after many ambiguities and modal excursions, the music slides effortlessly into B*b* major, and later into G*b* major.

Reading through certain pieces in Bach's late monument to strict polyphony, *The Art of the Fugue*, at the keyboard, I have a vision that the Baroque master was in effect thinking in several keys at once, that the nominal tonic of D minor is expanded to embrace a whole system or complex of closely-related keys – A minor, F major, E minor, G, C, and so on – which magically cohere to form one unified super-key or super-mode through which Bach leads his lines with effortless grace. Something similar happens in Frippertronics from time to time, Frippertronics, like fugue, being an art-form of (technological) imitative polyphony. In less technical language (though what is music theory if not a language of the spirit?), Piccarella summed up Fripp's Kitchen soloing as "dazzling, wandering up and down scales like John Coltrane, bending and screaming atonalities like Schoenberg gone punk. He warps notes into imaginary territory the way television spills electrons into an image." *(Piccarella 1978, 56)*

The Drive to 1981

By September 11, 1978, Fripp considered himself prepared to launch a new phase of his career. On that date he began what he dubbed "The Drive to 1981," which he was to describe as "A campaign on three levels: firstly, in the marketplace but not governed by the values of the marketplace; secondly, as a means of examining and presenting a number of ideas which are close to my heart; thirdly, as a personal discipline." *(Liner notes to* God Save the Queen*)* The end of the Drive to 1981 was timed to coincide with an event of astrological significance, an alignment of the planets to take place on September 11, 1981, at which time, Fripp evidently believed, mankind was in for an awakening of apocalyptic import. *(Schruers 1979, 16)*

In concrete terms, the three-year Drive to 1981 spanned a number of projects: *Exposure*; the 1979 Frippertronics tour and the Frippertronic recordings *Let the Power Fall* and *God Save*

the Queen/Under Heavy Manners ("Discotronics"); the League of Gentlemen tours (1980) and *The League of Gentlemen* album; the formation of King Crimson IV (Spring 1981); an extensive series of articles written by Fripp for *Musician, Player and Listener* (later simply *Musician*) magazine, beginning in January 1980; and miscellaneous session and production work, including producing "The Roches" 1978 debut album (Fripp also performed live with the Roches from time to time and produced their 1982 album *Keep On Doing*) and sessions with the Screamers, Blondie, violinist Walter Steding, and Janis Ian. Not bad for three years of work.

Exposure

Exposure's extensive liner notes begin with Fripp's comment, "This album was originally conceived as the third part of an MOR trilogy with Daryl Hall's solo album 'Sacred Songs' and Peter Gabriel II both of which I produced and to which I contributed. With the non-release of 'Sacred Songs' and the delay by dinosaurs of this album it is impossible to convey the sense which I had intended." Fripp goes on to say that the original trilogy will be replaced by a new one all by him: "Exposure," "Frippertronics," and "Discotronics."

Having pondered for some years what Fripp's original "intent" might have been with the Hall-Gabriel-*Exposure* trilogy, I would guess that it had something to do with a concept of a fluid collective music-making situation: three musicians working on each others' albums, sharing songwriting and arrangement duties, the result being three different yet recognizably parallel musical statements – in short, something similar to the King Crimson idea as it had evolved in 1969 and the early 1970s, though without the obligation of presenting the collective to the public as an actual band.

Fripp offered another angle on his intent: "What I was trying to do in the original trilogy was to investigate the 'pop song' as a means of expression ... I think it's a supreme discipline to know that you have three to four minutes to get together all your lost emotions and find words of one syllable or less to put forward all your ideas. It's a discipline of form that I don't think is cheap or shoddy." *(Jones 1979A, 60)*

As we have seen, a couple of *Exposure*'s tracks go back to 1977, but real work on the album began at the Hit Factory in New York in January 1978. By August Fripp had effectively finished the album; Daryl Hall had sung on most of the songs. In September, while already in the process of mastering the record, Fripp was confronted with contractual problems that prevented Hall from appearing on *Exposure* in such a prominent role. Hall would be allowed to sing on only two tracks, and this meant that much of *Exposure* would have to be re-made. Fripp recalls, "I was thoroughly demoralized and depressed. My life was completely knocked askew." *(Jones 1979A, 60)*

Fripp responded to the crisis by calling up his old friend Peter Hammill, who agreed to fly to New York and sing for *Exposure*; Hammill appears on "You Burn Me Up I'm a Cigarette," "Disengage," and "Chicago." Plans to have Blondie's Deborah Harry sing a version of Donna Summers' "I Feel Love" were nixed by Chrysalis Records. But by hook or by crook, Fripp managed to finish the revamped *Exposure* by January 1979, and the album was released later that year. Fripp's original title for *Exposure* had been *The Last of the Great New York Heart-Throbs*, and he had gone so far as to have himself photographed for the album cover with the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall. On the album that was eventually released, we see a serious and dapper Fripp, looking tight-lipped and intensely straight at the camera, clean-shaven and under a head of hair cut sharply new-wave style by Mary Lou Green (in whose New York salon Fripp would

sometimes set up his tape decks and engage customers in "Barbertronics.") Into the disc itself was impressed the inscription "1981 is the Year of the Fripp."

• • •

EXPOSURE

• Robert Fripp: guitar and Frippertronics

• Barry Andrews (formerly of XTC): keyboards

• Phil Collins: drums

• Peter Hammill: vocals

• Daryl Hall: vocals

• Peter Gabriel: vocals and piano

• Brian Eno: synthesizer

• Tony Levin: bass

• Terre Roche: vocals

• Jerry Marotta: drums

• Sid McGinness: guitar

• Narada Michael Walden: drums

Exposure has eight tracks on Side One and nine on Side Two – decidedly a gesture against the Crimsoid/progressive rock tendency toward musical statements of interminably epic proportions. But taken as a whole, *Exposure* has the effect of a collage illuminating Fripp's diverse musical and non-musical preoccupations in 1978: it is, as Fripp himself said in 1979, "a psychological autobiography about what caused me to leave the music business and what happened while I was out of it and coming back into it amid total confusion." *(Fricke 1979, 25)* The collage-effect is heightened by the frequent splicing-in of bits of conversation, radio broadcasts, neighbors' arguments, lectures by spiritual leaders, *concrete* sounds, breathing noises, even an interview Fripp conducted with his mother Mrs. Edith Fripp on the subject of his toilet training.

Exposure is a synthesis of styles and ideas, and a concept album to boot. Fripp himself was proud of and pleased with his achievement: in 1979 he said *Exposure* "continues to surprise me in the sense that it's so good ... it works so *completely*." Whether history will endorse Fripp's assessment that *Exposure* was, in 1979, "in terms of its genre, conceivably the best record in the past five years, perhaps longer," we should probably let history itself decide. *(Jones 1979A, 60)* We can acknowledge the brilliance of the record's execution and the spirit of innovation that pervades the work; but one problem with calling it the best record in its genre lies in its very uniqueness. When something creates a category for itself, does it belong to any "genre"? And *Exposure* is, if anything, impossible to classify – perhaps we could call it Fripp's *Sergeant Pepper* ...

Side One

1. PREFACE (Fripp). Like *Sergeant Pepper*, *Exposure* begins with a bit of *musique concrete*, that is, sounds taken from real life. In the midst of muted conversations at a Greenwich Village falafel restaurant, we hear an earnest Brian Eno saying, "Uh – can I play you – um –