

Alex Harvey and “The Tomahawk Kid”: Mode and Interpretation

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Abstract: Alex Harvey and the Sensational Alex Harvey Band achieved only marginal popularity during Harvey's lifetime. Yet an examination of Harvey's “The Tomahawk Kid,” based on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, shows an idiosyncratic musical style that combines rock and Scottish Celtic influences, subtle textual interpretation, unique compositional choices, and modal tonalities.

Introduction

The academic study of popular music oscillates between two preoccupations. On one hand, the dogmas of sub-cultural theory still influence popular music discourse and general cultural theory to a great degree. On the other hand, this discourse cannot escape the parameters of its label—*popular*. In essence, the two poles may be staked as cultural theory versus popular appreciation; but in a way difficult to describe, the application of critical theory has begun to seem more like an attempt to avoid an aesthetic conundrum—a kind of elevation of the demotic artefact to a height it cannot bear. Ever resourceful, the practitioners of popular music studies have wriggled out of this quandary and into the at least temporarily secure embrace of post-feminist studies, world pop, and the ethnography of locale; in other words, into areas where inquiry is either of self-evident importance, exotic, or comfortably esoteric. Even if the locale is no more exotic than Glasgow, Scotland or Montgomery, Alabama, or the object mundane, the conceit of the critical stance has proven sufficient. Things change, canons crumble, time has done its work. The difficult “aesthetics” of popular music studies, the indeterminate nature of its aims, is a nagging problem.

In an earlier presentation, I introduced my subject, the Scottish rocker Alex Harvey, with a question that now strikes me as both naïve and self-consciously modernist: “What is the true narrative of rock music history?” To answer that question would also be to find Harvey's place in that history. If the aesthetic and history of rock are notated in receipts, money, and the moth-like illuminations of fame (or as Jacques Attali might put it, in the sonic articulations of civilizing agencies), then the premise of the present essay would be that the music and experience of otherwise neglected or idiosyncratic performers (which might describe Harvey) might tell us an alternative story with new potentials for musical analysis and history where popular music studies are concerned.¹ But by analyzing a “lesser known” or “obscure” figure, I have already shackled any foreseeable observations to the rubrics, arguments, and preoccupations of subcultural theory (i.e. authenticity, arguments concerned with the origins of rock and the real blues, alienation and commodification).

Fortunately, Alex Harvey was neither truly obscure nor particularly well known, at least in North America. If one chose to argue that musically he “broke new ground” in rock music, a claim contemporary journalists certainly made on his behalf, that ground was promptly turned

¹“That Attali has fallen out of critical favour in recent years does not diminish, for me, the elegant simplicity of his analysis of *the power to silence*.” Robert Wright. 2000. “‘I’d sell you suicide’: Pop Music and Moral Panic in the Age of Marilyn Manson,” *Popular Music* (Cambridge) 19, 3: 365.

back over and re-sod. Furthermore, one could not argue any of those points that might make him meaningful to rock history as it is presently practiced. Outside of his native Scotland, perhaps only a few thousand fans and enthusiasts of arcane pop trivia remember the charismatic Alex Harvey and the Sensational Alex Harvey Band. Whether that is as it should be remains to be seen but this much is certain—he was interesting.

Alex Harvey Remembered

Harvey's relatively premature death in 1982 did nothing to enhance his modest celebrity. By then, his stake in the pantheon of pop stardom had fallen from "momentarily was" to "never heard of," or from a theatre headline to a club act. At the time of his heart attack, the day before his 47th birthday, he was waiting for the ferry in Zeebrugge, Belgium, at the conclusion of a four-week tour of small houses and clubs. In one apocryphal account, he simply clutched his chest and announced, "This is it, boys," and collapsed. But friends and acquaintances afterward agreed that his death was simply the inevitable conclusion of a downward spiral into disappointment and alcoholism, neither of which could be said to have come first.² Certainly, in recent general musical and cultural histories of the period 1967-87, he is seldom mentioned.

But Harvey's posthumous obscurity is somewhat misleading and not a true reflection of the status he attained as a performer. Between 1973 and 1977, the Sensational Alex Harvey Band was regularly featured in the pages of *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*, and *Circus*, with notices as well in the major trades *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, and *Variety* (which published a brief obituary on his demise). Journalists Charles Shaar Murray and Allan Jones, in particular, were devotees. Furthermore, the *Encyclopædia Britannica: Book of the Year* for 1976 records that, along with the pre-fabricated "teeny-bopper" favourites, the Bay City Rollers, Harvey was certainly newsworthy. In a style that affected the language of Harvey's promotional materials, the encyclopedist Benny Green wrote, "Several of the year's rock stars came from Glasgow, most notably the Sensational Alex Harvey Band...In the fall of 1972, Alex, a musician since the 1950s, had taken over the Scottish band Tear Gas, and the vivid, violent stage act they developed conquered audiences everywhere."³ Indeed, the vogue for Scottish rock is corroborated for posterity in Nick Johnstone's *Melody Maker History of 20th Century Popular Music*, which includes four passing references to Harvey, none of which are sufficient enough in depth to reflect his popularity or the enthusiasm of his fans.

He has fared better, for obvious reasons, in Scottish pop history. In Brian Hogg's BBC series and subsequent book-length study *The History of Scottish Rock and Pop: All that Ever Mattered*, Harvey serves as a kind of central spirit—if not exactly the animating force behind Scots R&B, rock 'n' roll, rock, and pop, then at least a leading figure. In the preface, Hogg confesses, "[I]ts early draft closed with the death of Alex Harvey, but reactions from publishers generally fell into two camps. Scottish publishers were, at that time, wary of pop, while others were equally shy of anything Scottish."⁴ The title page of Martin C. Strong's *The Great Scots Musicography*, as well, features a caricature of Harvey in his signature banded shirt complete

² John Neil Munro, *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band* (London: Firefly, 2002), 193.

³ Benny Green, "Music—Popular," *Britannica Book of the Year 1976*. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1977, 244.

⁴ Brian Hogg, *The History of Scottish Rock and Pop* (London: Guinness Publishing, 1993), 8.

with the exclamation “Vambo Rool” written as he did it himself during his shows—as graffiti on a cheap backdrop.⁵ The caricaturist was also astute enough to capture enough of the details in the performer’s appearance for an accurate portrayal. At the height of his fame, Harvey was 42 years old. Years of touring, personal tragedy, and hard drinking had etched deep lines into his face. In stature, he was small, rough, and haggard. In photographs, on stage and off, he looks like a man who had worked hard.

Indeed, Harvey’s life had all of the ingredients of the classic rock biography: from one end of the arc, the determined, inexorable rise to stardom (albeit minor), to the other, the poignant, self-destructive plunge into obscurity (albeit relative). The appearance of a biography was only a matter of time. It may be a consolation to Harvey fans that John Neil Munro, a Glaswegian, undertook the task with at least a shared cultural history. However, in his introduction to *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band*, Munro admits that he neither saw Harvey perform, nor met the man, and that he was not a big fan (“too busy being duped by dodgy progressive rock bands”).⁶ For the most part, Munro seldom rises above the limitations delineated by rock biography. But given his admission, one might otherwise have expected an objective account of Harvey’s career. Yet Munro is instead swept up in the enthusiasms and regret of those interviewed in the course of his research. Said one, “[I]t was very difficult to know him and not get attached to him. He’s like many characters that attract people. No matter what level you were at, if you met Alex Harvey you remembered him. Because not many people have that aura.”⁷ Similarly, obituary notices by contemporaries such as Jones and Murray are also strong testaments both to his virtues as a performer and the force of his personality. Wrote Murray, “Alex Harvey was my sergeant, I never met anyone quite like him and I never will again.”⁸

Early career

Harvey’s career unfolded in a series of re-arrivals. Born on February 5, 1935, he spent at least some of his childhood in the Gorbals district of Glasgow, the only ghetto in the United Kingdom at that time which might have rivalled those in New York, Chicago, or Detroit in terms of squalor and violence. Harvey routinely hammed up the Gorbals angle for the music press in the 1970s; but as Munro reveals, it was in earnest and in equal parts as much reality as romanticizing. Harvey *did* experience the kind of poverty he liked to describe and, what’s more, he *could* remember the exacerbation of that poverty during the war. Though indeed poor, the family was literate, left leaning, and on his father’s side, conscientious objectors to any British

⁵ Harvey explained the character and the graffiti to *Hit Parader*: “In Glasgow there’s graffiti like New York, and they invent new words, and the gangs stamp out their territories, write something like YOUNG CARDEE STOMP, EVEN HITLER AFRAID OF YOUNG GOVEN TEAM, OK. And they spell everything as simple as it can be, and I think the English language should be like that—like it in Amercia you get ‘tonite’—it makes it easier to understand. So Vambo came out of that. I wanted this kind of superhero that wasn’t a vandal.... I’ve been in gangs—the one thing I learned about violence is nobody ever wins.” John Ingham, “The Sensational Alex Harvey Band,” *Hit Parader*, Feb. 76, 22.

⁶ Munro, *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band*, 10.

⁷ Munro, *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band*, 198. Interview with Eddie Tobin.

⁸ Charles Shaar Murray, “The Faith Healer, Alex Harvey 1935-1982,” *New Music Express*, Feb. 13, 1982.

cause. As Harvey told Allan Jones in 1976, recalling the blitz, “I couldn’t have cared less if the fuckin’ Germans had come and taken the Gorbals.... They were welcome to it.”⁹

Before settling on a career as a musician, Harvey claimed to have held no fewer than thirty-six jobs, none much better than day-labourer; but, a gifted raconteur, he was as likely to describe for journalists the circumstances under which he trained for a time as a lion-tamer as the days he posted bills for William Fehilly, his future promoter. Harvey first took up the trumpet, playing for weddings and sitting regularly with a Dixieland jazz band. But perhaps realizing his limitations as an instrumentalist, and no doubt disinclined towards disciplined practice, he picked up the guitar and took to singing. By 1955, he was a dance-hall circuit veteran with a following of musicians and a growing reputation as a performer. He was a natural entertainer. Bill Patrick, an early band-mate recalled, “I’d never heard a guitar played the way Alex did—and he shouted more than he sang. The result was very, very exciting.”¹⁰

From the late 1950s on, Harvey pursued his career in various ensembles, from larger dance bands with American-sounding names, to three-piece combos playing hillbilly, race, R&B, and early skiffle. As in Liverpool, Scottish teens were among the first in the U.K. to experience the American records passing through the Glasgow docks, and Harvey bands were named, as the venue required, according to the current craze. His Kansas City Jazz Band was a larger trad jazz ensemble with a vaguely swing instrumental line-up. They performed in gold lamé blazers behind bandstands though few of the players could actually read music. The name was easily changed to the “Kansas City Skiffle Group” following the surprise success of fellow-Glaswegian Lonnie Donegan’s “Rock Island Line.” With the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll and riotous U.K. screenings of films such as *Blackboard Jungle* and *Rock Around the Clock* featuring Bill Haley and other American performers, the “Kansas City Skiffle Group” was shortened to a suitably rock ‘n’ roll-inflected “Kansas City Counts.” But Harvey soon took top billing. Solo acts such as Tommy Steele and Cliff Richards were being marketed as home-grown competition for Elvis Presley in the U.K., and Harvey was both the main attraction and usually the bandleader. Pretense was dropped in favour of the simpler “Alex Harvey Band.” Local success spawned imitators. Harvey later bragged that on a given Saturday night several “Alex Harvey Bands” might be enjoyed in dance halls throughout the Scottish countryside while the genuine article, Harvey himself was performing elsewhere, pretending to be an American. Alan Clayson observes that in 1958 Harvey was the first artist in the U.K. to use the word “Soul” in a band name, as either “Alex Harvey Soul Band” or later as “Alex Harvey and his Soul Band”.¹¹

In 1957 Harvey entered and won—rather incongruously—a newspaper promotional search for “Scotland’s Own Tommy Steele.” Standing only five-foot-three inches tall, and not teen-idol material by any stretch of the imagination, at twenty-years of age he was already a little old for the part. Early records also reveal that even as a young man, Harvey’s singing was brusque and idiosyncratic, not the mellifluous crooning of an Anthony Newley. Harvey

⁹ Allan Jones, “Alex in Wonderland,” *Melody Maker*, Oct. 11, 1975, 33.

¹⁰ Hogg, *The History of Scottish Rock and Pop*, 19.

¹¹ “Chicago blues from the likes of Muddy Waters and Bo Diddley—obscure even in the States—filtered through Harvey’s Scottish vocal cords as early as 1958 with the formation of his Soul Band—also the first outfit to work the word “soul” into its name. Too early to have been inspired by Tamla Motown, it had come from a feature in *Crescendo*, a U.S. magazine, that wrote of “Soul Jazz” in reference to pianist Horace Silver.” Alan Clayson, *Hamburg: Cradle of British Rock* (London: Sanctuary Publishing, 1997), 35.

triumphed, it seems, by sheer force of personality and upon winning the contest took Steele out for a Glasgow pub-crawl which ended in a card game on board a ship at the docks. Bill Patrick recalled, "Alex was a screaming Blues singer where Tommy was polite, but they were photographed shaking hands as a publicity stunt."¹² Harvey memorialized the experience in 1973 with the three-part "Last of the Teenage Idols."

Harvey's career stalled at the local level until 1963, when he followed other English and Scottish acts to Hamburg. The Alex Harvey Soul Band was recruited by Iain Hines, also a Glaswegian, who was then working as a scout for house-band fodder for *The Star* and *Top Ten Club*. Harvey maintained his showmanship despite the gruelling conditions bands would later mythologize. True to form, his band performed in silver lamé suits with silver bow ties and high-heeled boots, while Harvey himself built upon his reputation as a blues shouter with an uncanny instinct for handling difficult audiences. Tony Sheridan recalled; "People were afraid of Glaswegians. Alex Harvey was a feared man. There was a table that ran from the stage down the length of the hall, and he once charged down it, kicking heads as he went."¹³ Saxophonist Ricky Barnes remembered:

The Top Ten Club was a great place for young musicians. It made them three times, four times better than when they came in. Alex Harvey came across because there wasn't enough work for him in Scotland. He was way ahead of the competition, both as an experienced player and for his feel for the blues. None of the Liverpool groups had it—and I mean none of them—they were more like showbands. Alex built an atmosphere, it was a driving, swinging thing, and you could see the excitement on the faces of the crowd.¹⁴

Harvey cut his first acetate recordings while at the Top Ten Club studio as a Polydor recording artist in that year. *Alex Harvey and His Soul Band*, recorded in just twelve hours, was the first Scottish rock LP, but it was not a recording of the Soul Band line-up Harvey had spent several years grooming on the Glasgow circuit. Hogg surmises that for contractual reasons the band for the recording was composed of members from the Kingsize Taylor and the Dominoes outfit, musicians already signed to Polydor and already under contract. The album, though to a degree representative of Harvey's years as a bluesman, includes covers of classic songs like "I Just Wanna Make Love to You," "Let the Good Times Roll" and Lieber and Stoller's "Framed," which either were or became permanent fixtures of his repertoire. Released in March 1964 the album failed to chart, as did two singles released in January and June respectively. It may have seemed for a short time that things were about to happen for Harvey; but when the follow-up LP *The Blues*, released in March 1965, also flopped, Polydor did not renew his contract.

The Beatles, harbingers of a new era of pop music marketed almost exclusively to youth, had brought the old era to a close. Although Harvey had re-cast his band around his younger brother Les Harvey, he finally abandoned the "Soul" concept to explore a growing interest in folk music and the revival movement. It seemed the choice for most Scottish R&B outfits was clear: adopt the Merseyside conceit, quit, or retire to limited engagements in what remained of the dance-hall circuit back home. Interestingly enough, back in September 1963, Harvey had

¹² Clayson, *Hamburg*, 31.

¹³ Clayson, *Hamburg*, 116.

¹⁴ Hogg, *The History of Scottish Rock and*, 27.

prophetically recorded a novelty-skiffle side, “The Liverpool Scene,” during his first session with Polydor in Hamburg. Never released during his lifetime, it begins with automobile sounds and a little dialogue between Harvey and a band-mate identified only as “scouser.” Harvey seems to improvise the lyric:

*We came from Scotland, we must've been fools
We happened 'pon a scene down in Liverpool
Funny stories go'in round
About this crazy Mersey sound¹⁵*

In 1965 and 1966, Harvey released two 7-inch discs as a solo act, releasing two more in 1967 while fronting Giant Moth, a short-lived psychedelic band. He then worked with his brother Les on *The Rock Workshop*, a CBS production and concept, which yielded an LP in 1970, with Harvey featured on four tracks. *Roman Wall Blues* (1969), another solo album of idiosyncratic originals and favourite covers, also featuring Les, was released by the less than prestigious Fontana label. It also did nothing.

During this period, Harvey worked as a rhythm guitarist and singer in the London production of Galt MacDermott's *Hair* at the Shaftesbury Theatre. Harvey acted as a kind of featured performer in post-show parties and occasional performances of the “Hairband” at the Marquee Club. But as the Age of Aquarius wound down in London, Harvey must have felt his age keenly. He was married with two children, working only sporadically, and what reputation he did have was fading fast. He had missed out on the British Invasion, and the end of his career must have seemed imminent.

The Sensational Alex Harvey Band

Alex Harvey was rescued one last time by Bill Fehilly, a Scottish music promoter and successful businessman. Harvey had posted bills for Fehilly when down on his luck in Glasgow (one of his famous 36 jobs). Having performed in his club, Harvey held Fehilly in high esteem. With little prior knowledge or experience, Fehilly had decided to try his hand at recording, founding Mountain Records on proceeds earned by his company Mountain Management, which handled everything from house painting to bingo halls, racehorses to promotions. He and Derek Nicol formed the record company when a label could not be found for the Nazareth, another Scottish band, whom they jointly managed. Harvey was to be added to the roster if a suitable band could be recruited.

Meanwhile, Harvey's life was in disarray. In May 1972, during an outdoor performance at Swansea University, his brother Les Harvey, by then a rising star with Maggie Bell and Stone the Crows, was fatally electrocuted—a tragic accident attributed to faulty stage wiring and an ungrounded microphone. “He put his hand on the mike, and he was gone, it was just as quick as that,” Bell remembered.¹⁶ Whether or not it was a reaction to the event, Harvey disbanded

¹⁵In retrospect, it is interesting that he also slammed through a creditable version of the Isley Brothers' “Shout” in the same session. See Alex Harvey, “The Liverpool Scene,” *Alex Harvey and His Soul Band* (Hambergen, Germany: Bear Family Records, 1999) for a compilation of early Harvey recordings.

¹⁶ Munro, *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band*, 70.

the trio he was working with and began looking for a new band, preferably tough and Scottish. At this juncture all accounts are apocryphal. Nicol and Fehilly introduced Harvey to Tear Gas, a hard rock outfit from Coatbridge, Scotland with two LPs to its credit (*Piggy Go Getter*, 1970; *Tear Gas*, 1971) but otherwise on the verge of collapse. On average fifteen years younger than Harvey and aware of his reputation, they were collectively unenthusiastic at the prospect of supporting a fading rocker. They nonetheless agreed to a meeting and rehearsal at Fehilly's request. But Harvey liked the idea. He had heard the band and liked their sound and energy. A positive jam session sealed the deal. Zal Cleminson (gtr), Chris Glen (bass), cousins Hugh and Ted McKenna (kb, dr) dropped the name Tear Gas and accepted the audacious Sensational Alex Harvey Band as well as a modest but steady paycheck.

Harvey's years with the Sensational Alex Harvey Band (SAHB) were certainly his most successful. The musical result, however, is difficult to categorize. With little effort, it could be argued that Harvey represented the intersection of various musical and stage traditions. Harvey was larger than life, a veteran with a wealth of experience, a performer before the dawn of rock 'n' roll. He drew upon not only the sound and feel of American rhythm and blues but also its sense of style and showmanship. His stage persona was manically avuncular, while his sense of repertoire was still dimly hued by variety and music hall (i.e. anything in the name of entertainment). With the Sensational Alex Harvey Band, he toured the American stadium circuit with acts such as The Who and Jethro Tull. By 1974, the SAHB emerged in the U.K. as a marquee band, peaking in popularity in 1976, just as exhaustion was getting the better of Harvey and the rest of the band, and things were falling apart. In rock 'n' roll terms, when Vertigo paid for full-page spreads publicizing Harvey's fortieth birthday in 1975, it was a little like George Burns celebrating his 100th a few years before the event—just in case. Harvey was forty, but a forty-year-old rock star was a novelty. Yet when Harvey died in 1982, three years before his fiftieth birthday, the publicity seemed retrospectively to be an apt gesture made by an industry otherwise obsessed and blinded to anything but the manipulation and anticipation of teen desire. In his final incarnation as a rock artist, there is in musical terms a sense of historical entitlement (a notion critical theory is uncomfortable with) and worse yet, a sense of destiny, foreboding, and sheer force of will. As one commentator aptly observed, it was as if "he finally found his moment and grabbed on tight for the ride."¹⁷

"The Tomahawk Kid"

"The Tomahawk Kid," with lyrics based on Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, was written in 1974 for the Sensational Alex Harvey Band's third studio album, *The Impossible Dream* (Sept. 1974). It was also released as a 7-inch single B-side with "Sergeant Fury" in that September. The first 7-inch pressing of "Sergeant Fury," with the salacious "Gang Bang" as the B-side, had been released just a month earlier. Munro describes "Fury" as "an engaging, amusing mix of 1930s dance band and Vaudevillian jump rhythm," with a vague feel of the continental hotel orchestra. It failed to chart with "The Tomahawk Kid" as well.¹⁸ In fact, altogether, the SAHB released five singles in 1974, including two from the previous *Next LP*

¹⁷ Jeff Pike, *The Death of Rock 'n' Roll: Untimely Demises, Morbid Preoccupations, and Premature Forecasts of Doom in Pop Music* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1993), 78.

¹⁸ Harvey was no doubt rather proud of "Sergeant Fury," but it was the kind of commercial failure typical of mid-seventies rock. The American band Sparks, for example, after strong showings in the U.K. with rockers like "This Town Ain't Big Enough (For the Both of Us)" and "Hasta Manana, Monsieur" in 1974, with *Indiscreet* (1975) released an entire LP of idiosyncratic orchestra arrangements and novelty songs.

(Nov. 1973), none of which made a showing on the charts. *The Impossible Dream* LP, however, was Harvey's strongest career showing to date. It charted when released and climbed to the sixteenth spot in the U.K. Despite the fact that the band was earning favourable notices with supporting performances at Knebworth (the first Knebworth festival, where the SAHB was second from the bottom on the bill), at Reading (where Harvey topped a Friday night bill), in Germany, and in a 13-date tour of the U.K., the album skidded off the charts in four short weeks. Mountain was no doubt hopeful that even if the ambitious "Sergeant Fury" continued to be ignored, "The Tomahawk Kid," a comparably straight rocker, might find an audience—and it eventually did.

"The Tomahawk Kid" was released again on *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band "Live,"* recorded at the Hammersmith Odeon on May 24, 1975, when Harvey was at his peak in terms of exposure and popularity.¹⁹ "Live" entered the charts in the U.K at twenty-six and made it to position fourteen. It touched the U.S. with an appearance at number 100 but disappeared almost immediately. Despite Mountain's sincere effort and Harvey's claim in a BBC Top of the Pops, *Rockspeak!* interview that "things are beginning to happen for us there," substantial U.S. sales eluded Harvey.²⁰ The label had spent significant amounts of time and money touring Harvey in the U.S., supporting touring marquee acts, one-offs in support of big draws such as Frank Zappa, and the occasional headlining gig. The U.S. chart appearance was, in a way, an accomplishment; but the strength of the album would only be revealed in long-term sales. A "committed" effort, in Munro's estimation, much of the SAHB's posthumous reputation is invested in "Live." Critics agreed that as an album it captured Harvey's manic energy in a way a studio recording never could. The SAHB played 19 dates in May 1975. The Hammersmith date was the second to last of the tour and the fifth consecutive performance in as many days with previous shows at Leicester, Watford, Cardiff, and Bristol. The band was certainly in strong form. It is perhaps primarily for this reason that the LP has remained a catalogue seller and was re-released on in 1985 by Sahara (and later by Samurai) in the compact disc format relatively early in the digital era.

The analysis of "The Tomahawk Kid" presented here rests in part on comments made by Robert Walser and Richard Middleton about the identification and interpretation of popular styles in rock. Firstly, in *Running With the Devil*, Walser notes:

A basic component of any song's affect is the set of pitch relationships it establishes, which is often referred to as a musical mode. Scholars seldom examine the operation of mode in popular music, but discussions of mode are common in professional and semiprofessional guitarist's magazines.... Academics usually think of mode as but a technical, descriptive category, while rock journalists are likely to regard any discussion of mode as academic obfuscation.... To say that a piece is in a particular mode is to suggest quite a bit about how that piece works, for a mode is a scale that also implies a set of functional syntactic relationships and affective potentials.²¹

¹⁹ Munro, *The Sensational Alex Harvey Band*, 214.

²⁰ The Sensational Alex Harvey Band, *The Gospel According to Harvey*. Compilation of Bootleg Live Performances (London: Pilot, 1998 Pilot 45), BBC Interview, Top of the Pops RockSpeak! [1975].

²¹ Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press; University Press of New England, 1993), 46.

Secondly, Middleton has suggested that much of popular music's power to communicate lies in its articulation of the song as a sequence of musical structures. He argues:

Musical structure, no less than lyrics, can be seen as involving an interplay of "voices"—indeed, this takes place polyphonically as well as sequentially.... And, just as some words, especially pronouns, can act as "shifters," so musical elements can be heard as representing particular social actors, whose identity can vary according to genre and social context.²²

"The Tomahawk Kid" conforms unremarkably to standard song formats, with an introduction, two verses (each with refrain), a middle-eight (or bridge), followed by a closing verse. As Middleton suggests, however, each discrete structure within the composite corresponds to a specific episode, central to Harvey's interpretation of *Treasure Island*—the dramatization of the moment in which Jim (or the Tomahawk Kid) outmanoeuvres Long John Silver.

For an audience, previous knowledge of the plot, while helpful, was not essential to appreciating a performance of the song. Harvey created a *mise en scène*, as it were, to act as a literary guide through the tale and introduced the song accordingly: "This song was inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson." Since Harvey shows were well rehearsed, it seems likely that the introduction was a consistent part of the show (certainly, enough live recordings of the SAHB are available on which to base this kind of assertion). If any doubt remained regarding the source of the story, it is foregrounded in the opening verse:

Well, the tomahawk kid, well you know what he did
On a trip from Treasure Island?
Sixteen men on a dead man's chest
Didn't know where to find 'im.

A few nautical expressions underscore the setting and mood; but otherwise it is difficult to determine an explicit narrative moment until the bridge, immediately preceding the solo/duet and subsequent to a refrain of "yo ho ho" (a chorus of pirates?). At this point a third voice is insinuated into the narrative, enacting the exact moment when Jim convinces Silver to abandon the pirates in favour of an altogether different intrigue:

Let's be bold, my captain,
And I'll hold your hairy hand;
Let's forget the treasure;
We can skip across the sand.

The interjection of a curiously homoerotic element into the tale, while perhaps implicit in the boyhood fantasy, is nonetheless Harvey's own rather ingenious addition to the classic tale. When the narrator asks at the conclusion of the tale, "The Tomahawk Kid, do you know what he did?" Harvey invites the conclusion that Jim, as the Kid, a character not in the novel, seduced his mercenary companion by appealing less to his avarice and more to his sexual desire. In short, if "The Tomahawk Kid" could be said to accomplish anything, it is in part a reconfiguring

²² Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 238.

of *Treasure Island* from a Victorian serial to a tale of homoerotic manipulation, a redirection of audience expectation and energy, and a unique subversion of the otherwise heterosexual pretensions of mid-seventies hard rock.

It is interesting to note in this context that Harvey, though not formally educated, was nonetheless reasonably well-read, an enthusiast of comic books, pulp fiction and boyhood serial literature; and when time permitted, he seems to have read widely enough to appreciate the mechanics of a good story. In some ways, his taste, given his choice of subjects, might be described as eclectic mainstream. Two of three album jackets featured comic-book style graphics (*The Impossible Dream*, *Tomorrow Belongs to Me*); and in the Vambo Marble Eye character featured on the *Next* ("Vambo Marble Eye") and *The Impossible Dream* ("The Hot City Symphony") albums, Harvey succeeded in creating a kind of postmodern Robin Hood character whom he further popularized in his stage act. Fans knew his Vambo. Moreover, there are discernible parallels between a figure such as Harvey and the American Jonathan Richman, characterized by John Alberti as a *faux naïf* who utilized qualities inherent in the pop medium and thereby demonstrated "to what extent rock 'n' roll an operates as a music of cultural and political resistance, a site for anti-hegemonic practice."²³ It is interesting, however, that Alberti explores Richman's performative strategy in order to position and valorize that artist as part of the America's pre-punk vanguard. The same might also be argued on Harvey's behalf though to a lesser extent. Munro and Charles Shaar Murray, for example, have at least implicitly laid similar groundwork for such a re-evaluation of Harvey's place in rock. Insightful though such a pursuit may prove, it proceeds along dangerously erroneous lines and against musical fact. Alberti concludes, "[T]he operation of the faux naïf in Richman's work...does open a new line of analysis for the consideration of alternative rock as antihegemonic practice." But that much is self-evident. Yet, perhaps more instructive is his final summation:

...this focus on imitation functions as the basic strategy central to all antihegemonic cultural practice: exposing and thus making available for possible intervention the means of production, thus potentially transforming consumers into producers. For listeners to Jonathan Richman, this is one possible outcome of simply asking with him, as a child would say, "How in the world are they makin' that sound?"²⁴

This is precisely the question that could be asked of Harvey. Much of the effect of "The Tomahawk Kid," whatever that may be, is indebted to the adaptation and exploitation of musical structures and traditions.

Mode, Character, and Structure

Harvey co-wrote much of his material with keyboardist Hugh McKenna, cousin of drummer Ted McKenna.²⁵ Possessed of a certain degree of formal—if limited—instrumental

²³ John Alberti, "I Have Come Out to Play" Jonathan Richman and the Politics of the Faux Naïf," chap. in *Reading Rock and Roll: Authenticity, Appropriation, Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 174.

²⁴ Alberti, "I Have Come Out to Play," 188.

²⁵ McKenna later complained he saw nothing of the royalty earnings. He was chagrined to learn that £6000 was owed to him when Mountain later entered receivership, and it was too late to recoup all but a fraction of the amount.

training, McKenna was capable of filling in Harvey's more intuitive musical aspirations. For the keyboardist, it was a difficult relationship; and he later admitted that the two nervous breakdowns suffered during his years with Harvey were largely a result of the collaboration.

The live version of "The Tomahawk Kid" does not stray significantly from the studio recording. This alone, it might be argued, reveals a degree of respect for the musical structure and the compositional choices McKenna and Harvey originally determined. The only substantial change was the omission of a few overdubbed guitar lines, but their absence permits a few insights. Firstly, they are not missed. Secondly, the removal of these parts, seemingly for the sake of expedience, clarifies both the musical structure of the song and the relevance of that structure to Harvey's interpretation of *Treasure Island*. It is also important to note that in post-production, the missing lines might just as easily have been re-recorded and overdubbed back into the live mix. Certainly, inexplicably strong vocal choruses not only in "The Tomahawk Kid" but throughout the album—accurately pitched and polished to a degree it is unlikely such a small ensemble could attain in a hectic performance environment—indicate a measure of studio tampering. The quotation marks around the title, it seems, were intended to be appreciated with some irony by the listener with an experienced ear: as is the case with many recordings, not all of "Live" was live. Given the realities of post-production, the strength of "Live" and "The Tomahawk Kid" seems to be the revelation of the essential elements of the songs and performances in and of themselves. What remains and what was added were determined by Harvey, the band, and producer David Batchelor to have worked best.

The keyboard introduction, again essentially an unchanged note-for-note rendition of the original studio version, provides the musical material that thereafter serves as the basis for the song. By omitting the third, McKenna initially suspends common practice diatonicism in favour of the open fifth, further reinforced by the implied parallelism at the phrase ending which is smoothed over by voice leading, i.e., suspension and omission in the inner voice and appoggiatura in the upper.

Example 1. "The Tomahawk Kid," (Harvey, McKenna, Batchelor): Introduction.



From the set of pitches outlined in this introduction, notable for the absence of functional thirds, it is possible to derive a modal analysis of the entire song which also corresponds meaningfully to the episode of *Treasure Island* Harvey has reconfigured. Only a modal determination of the scale is possible here, i.e. B-B' Dorian, judging from the cadence and the raised sixth degree of the scale. There remains some doubt, however, as the second degree of the mode, C#, is not stated. What is obvious, to the ear if not the eye, is the resonance and emphasis of the open fifth. Ambiguity of mode is what binds the narrative and music; and as the song unfolds, what becomes increasingly evident is that the oscillation between modal pitch choices (self-

consciously rustic or traditional/folk) and diatonic western tonality (harmony vertically defined by the presence of the third as either major minor) provides much of the narrative tension.

The piano introduction also provides the foundation of the song and serves this functions in at least two ways. First, it introduces the musical theme (riff, motive, or cadential tag), which recurs throughout the song at various points; and secondly, by failing to establish a diatonic frame of reference, it places a greater emphasis on the sound and feel of the open fifth and octave. The bass voice, McKenna's left hand, highlights this quality by doubling the fifth (E), which emphasizes the fifth and not the potential root of the chord and passes through the third degree of B-Dorian (D), before settling, subsequent to doubled-accented passing notes in the upper and lower voices, on the final (B). The pitch relations of the cadence are far from clear, but that is the intention. Harvey probably intended for the introduction to draw the listener into the story as much as his spoken introduction. Wearing a period waistcoat to signify the pirate theme, Harvey introduced the number while turning the pages of a leather-bound folio.

The scene established, the ensuing verses are reasonably diatonic in nature, following a (I-vi-iii-IV) pattern in G (stated twice) in which the B of the introduction becomes the mediant. The ensuing double refrain, so described because it is a two-part pattern (i-IV-i-IV and i-V-i-V), is in the natural minor (E), which nevertheless is a rather simple elongation of a standard i-IV-v formula. Each of these patterns is related in some way to the scale of the introduction; however, they do not give priority to a key or even a pitch centre, which might surpass that established in the first two measures (B). Each pattern instead serves a different voice or function within the narrative. The diatonic stanzas are spoken (or sung) by a narrator who knows the full story, or at least wants his audience to believe so—Jim, who tells his own story in Stevenson's novel. Rhetorically speaking, the diatonic major (G) is used to open the story and establish the narrative framework (I-vi-iii-IV), while the sustained transition to the minor refrain sets the scene ('When we set sail across the seven seas'), and the second half of the refrain serves as a kind of pirate chorus ("Yo ho ho"). All expectations met, a repetition of the complete cycle can move the audience further into the narrative and establish the central conflict:

Full fathom five, the Kid was alive,
And the crew was climbin' up the rigging,
Washed on land, on the silver sand,
We got no time for digging.

While the tempo does not pick up substantially, the dynamic intensity of the performance, best described as terraced, has been building from section to section. It reaches a climax in the full pirate chorus ("Yo-ho-ho") just before the bridge at the same moment the last related mode (G) is introduced.

A shift from Dorian to G Mixolydian at this point, midway in the song at the moment of narrative crisis, is perhaps the most refined structural detail. It is also at this juncture that a third voice is clearly introduced—the Tomahawk Kid. Harvey sings:

Let's be bold, my captain,
And I'll hold your hairy hand;
Let's forget the treasure;
We can skip across the sand.

The Tomahawk Kid, who is not a figure in Stevenson's original tale, is Jim's stand-in at the moment when Silver is undermined. It is not Jim, he suggests, but an alter ego who tricks Long John Silver by gamely offering to become his lover in exchange for the freedom of the rest of the crew. In short, in Harvey's version, Silver abandons the treasure only when he is seduced by the younger man, which makes explicit a sexual tension arguably inherent in the original tale.

This interpretation is not as specious as it may at first appear. Richard Middleton suggests:

An instrumental or vocal solo will usually be heard as an "I" (singular or collective), but which "I" will depend on received connotations attaching to the genre; on the solo's structural position within the piece (is it highly idiosyncratic in style or not? is it taken up and repeated or varied by other "voices" or not? is it relatively active (dominant) in the texture or relatively passive (subservient)? is it rhythmically, or harmonically, at odds, or in congruence, with its accompaniment? and so on); on the performance situation (where? when? with what function? after what, before what?); and on who is listening.²⁶

The details for which Middleton argues are very much present in this corresponding example. And furthermore, it is here that musical nuances suggest that degree of compositional sophistication both Middleton and Walser argue for in rock song-writing. The ensuing section of "The Tomahawk Kid" is both a duet and a dance, with clear primary and secondary voices:

²⁶ Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 238.

Example 2. 'The Tomahawk Kid,' (Harvey, McKenna, Batchelor).

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a guitar staff and a synth staff. The guitar parts are marked with chords F and G. The synth parts are marked with a lowered third (B-) in the fourth system. The score is written in treble clef with a common time signature (C).

The harmony is static, with the entire sixteen-measure duet accompanied by a syncopated bass figure that is little more than a pedal G, thereby reinforcing the Mixolydian feel of the passage. The guitarist (Zal Cleminson) takes on the role of "first voice," stating the theme introduced in the opening measures of the song. When repeated, an analog synthesizer (Hugh McKenna), or "second voice" (a mini-moog, if photographs of the band from these years are to be trusted), joins and decorates the theme. It is also significant that the synthesizer introduces the lowered third (B=) to the scale, which the guitar then takes up in the penultimate measure. With the lowered third, the Mixolydian mode has been modified, without seeming wholly diatonic. At the completion of the duet, it is a blues scale with both the lowered third (B=) and the lowered seventh (F) already present in the Mixolydian mode.

The duet is a remarkable demonstration of Harvey's ability not only to recast a story but also to combine that ability with musical wit and subtlety. Walser has in the past complained that many academics are quick to assume that rock harmony is simple, even "primitive," and that such a misconception fails to explain the function of harmony in rock. Indeed, others have

called into question the validity of such analysis, which is viewed as appealing restrictively to the rationality and cultural values of European notation. However, the harmonic structure of "Tomahawk Kid," deceptively simple, yields a tight web of pitch relationships and a sense of organization that is not diatonic but modal in conception. Harvey borrows from traditional musical sources and blended them with the modular structures of the popular rock format. While it is not wholly possible to demonstrate that the introduction is clearly in the Dorian mode, or intended to be appreciated as such, it is clear that the bridge and solo section are Mixolydian; and that only a non-diatonic understanding of their function within the structure of the song and the narrative will render the fullest explication and interpretation of the song. The sexual inference of the lyrics is brought into clearer relief in such analysis.

A few relevant points remain. First, Harvey never strayed far from his Celtic and Scottish heritage. While he often talked of his love of popular American entertainers and recording stars such as Al Jolson or Hank Williams, the timbres and forms of Scottish traditional music remained close to his imagination. He told Henry Doherty:

I went through a long period of tryin' to sing like Ray Charles. When I heard Ray Charles I went berserk. I couldn't believe there was such a thing possible. It was like the answer to my life and I tried to sing like that for a long time. People said it was great. It was soul singing but it wasn't really soul singing. That was his soul singing. For me, real soul singing would be to sing a Scottish ballad.²⁷

A Scottish nationalist, he appealed to Scottish symbols and sentimentality in his later shows. When times were good, two pipers were taken on tour principally for use in the song "Anthem." In the show, as fog rolled in around Harvey and the band, the pipers entered from the each side of the stage, in slow march accompanied by traditional snare drum work.²⁸ It is worth noting as well that "Anthem," the final track of *The Impossible Dream*, was preceded by "The Tomahawk Kid," and that the musical language of the songs is very similar.

²⁷ Harry Doherty, "Harvey's History Lesson," *Melody Maker*, Aug. 7, 1976, 14.

²⁸ Jones described the show in *Melody Maker*:

And then it's all down to "Anthem."

One of the most amazing moments you could hope to hear at the end of a rock 'n' roll concert. After the sustained violence of the moments preceding it, 'Anthem' comes as a colossal release.

It's a really chilling moment. Vikki Silva [vocalist] takes over from Alex for the choral section. Her beautiful voice drifting over the two pipers, and the dry ice shrouding the stage.

Alex climbs onto the monitor to strike one of those amusingly dramatic poses to conduct the audience in the Vambo sway, and the whole place goes berserk.

The two pipers, especially Sandy, who has travelled with the band for the whole tour, are becoming stars in their own right by now. Alex calls them back, for the whole routine to be repeated. And it still ain't over. The chants start up as soon as the band leave the stage... "ALEX HARRRVEY...ALEX HARRRVEY...ALEX HARRRVEY."

The structure of the building must have been severely strained during those minutes before the band reappeared.

Allan Jones, "The Wild Ones: Allan Jones reports from Glasgow on the return Home of the Sensational Alex Harvey Band," *Melody Maker*, Oct. 19, 1974, 55.

What is implicit in “The Tomahawk Kid” is made explicit in “Anthem,” which also relies heavily on the open sound of the fifth and, of course, the scale of the bagpipe. The Scottish highland bagpipe has a scale of nine notes: G A B C# D E F# G’ and A, with the fourth (C#) and seventh (F#) sounding flattened, i.e., the scale used explicitly in the bridge and solo (duet) instrumental section (see above). Often described as Mixolydian, beginning on A, there are two tenor drones, each on A, and a bass drone also on A (depending on repertoire, a tenor drone can be tuned to the fifth). The ambiguity and tension between modes and western diatonicism is therefore an inherent feature. For example, in the repertoire of the pibroch (traditional highland bagpipe), Francis Collinson observes, “Final cadences on the fifth of the mode are almost common place, particularly in Gaelic songs.” This trait is observable in the piano introduction of the “The Tomahawk Kid” which also concludes the song. Collinson adds, “some lowland song tunes are characterized by a dual modality, where the melody apparently begins in one mode and finishes in another.” Moreover, the presence of the “double-tonic” in Harvey’s music suggests a modal analysis. In Collinson’s estimation, “the construction of two short passages based on two major triads a tone apart...a characteristic particularly of highland dance music,... is perhaps the very essence of lighter bagpipe music.” In “The Tomahawk Kid,” the double-tonic corresponds to the musical structure of the duet, enacted between parallel F and G major triads, with a dance rhythm supplied by the drum kit and bass. “Although it is cliché,” Collinson remarks, “it curiously never loses its wild effect when played on the instrument to which it belongs.”²⁹

Collinson also has cautioned that to the classically trained ear, the bagpipes sound like a natural (aeolian) scale that is simply out of tune:

It must be remembered however that the notes of the bagpipes are never intended to be *sounded together in harmony*, as are wind instruments in an orchestra. The bagpipe is a *solo*, or at least a *unison melodic* instrument which is only required to harmonize to the sound of its own drones. It is therefore not fundamentally necessary that the intervals should be of the standard sizes of tone and semitone, which match and combine with each other in concert.³⁰

“Classical ideas of harmony have little to do with bagpipe music,” writes Roderick Cannon, “nor is it at all clear that the older modes—‘Ionian’, ‘Dorian’, ‘Mixolydian’ and so on—have directly influenced bagpipers.” What remains true, he argues, is that the repertoire of Scottish music is fundamentally pentatonic:

...many tunes, and not only the oldest ones, confine themselves entirely to this scale, while many more are not so strict but still have a strong pentatonic flavour which is an essential part of their ‘Scottishness.’ From the notes of the pipe chanter we can extract selections which correspond to parts of the pentatonic scale, transposed to different pitches.³¹

²⁹ Francis Collinson, “Scotland II, Folk Music,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Stanley Sadie ed., (Macmillan, 1982), 71.

³⁰ Francis Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 164.

³¹ Roderick Cannon, *The Highland Bagpipe and Its Music* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1988), 37.

This analysis of “The Tomahawk Kid” suggests that Harvey succeeded in creating a music that was at once both rock and traditionally Scottish for an audience which, it seems, was drawn by instinct to that sound.

A mature man in his early forties when the song was composed, Harvey seems to have understood exactly how direct the correspondences were between the musical language of Scotland and the traditional music of the new world—the pentatonicism of the American blues. As Edward Jones learned, an interview with Harvey could also be a lecture on rock history with a Scot bias:

“A lot of Scotsmen went over to America after Bonnie Prince Charlie’s rebellion in 1745, when the bagpipes were banned in Scotland. The Scots clans had an amazing affinity with the Red Indians, there were even some who became chiefs of the Indiana tribes, like Alexander McGillivray and Willie McIntosh—they actually became blood chiefs of the Creek tribe,” says Harvey....

“The main thing they took musically was the violin, which was the substitute for the pipes after they were banned. And right now that’s why American country music has a lot of Celtic in it—a lot of the melodies are exactly the same, using the same five-tone mode.

“You know that everybody says jazz and blues and all that are black? It’s not true! If it was black, it would be in Africa. But there’s no jazz in Africa. It was the two cultures meeting headlong that created jazz: the Dahomeys from western Africa tried to sing the Episcopalian hymns, but they flattened some of the pitch to minor and that was blues.

“And the cowboys meeting guys from Scotland and all over the world, that made a mixture which came out as rock and roll.”³²

The duet/solo section at once exemplifies all of these features. In the repeat, McKenna insinuates the B \flat on the analog synthesizer while decorating the original theme. Also, during the unison section with Cleminson at the beginning of the phrase, he slightly detunes his instrument (with the rotary pitch-bend of the moog); taken together, the resulting timbre sounds remarkably like that of the bagpipe. It was no accident. Zal Cleminson commented that in the band “we don’t have too many solos, the act is all pointed to the audience,” and claimed that at least 85 percent of the show, from beginning to end, was painstakingly rehearsed. Since nothing in “The Tomahawk Kid” was left to improvisation, Cleminson’s remarks support the notion that the section was composed thematically with the thrust of Harvey’s narrative in mind. The duet-unison-solo was also a favoured compositional technique worked out between guitarist and keyboardist. “A lot of the riffs we play, like Zal and I play together, and the combination of the way he plays and kind of sound I use,” McKenna explained in interview, “with the instruments I’ve got is very different...combined with Zal that sound can cut straight into your brain.”

Conclusion

Harvey was a musician of his time—not ahead of it. He produced a respectable number of albums, kept a band together for as long as health and stamina allowed, and put on a good show. At present, we have a lot of rock and pop histories to choose from, none of which include Harvey, but all of which circumscribe an arc of twentieth-century pop music from a peculiar

³² Edward Jones, “Scotch on the Rock!” *Melody Maker*, Mar. 15, 1975, 8.

vantage: rock as “history.” As such, it is something abstract, distant, vast, expansive, and culturally relevant. It might be instructive, however, to take a figure like Harvey and suggest the opposite. Instead, we might think of rock as to some extent *ahistorical*—insofar as any attempt at casting a historical perspective would produce a set of distortions, which have a tendency to eclipse all but the mainstream or the alternative (or what used to be called the “counter-cultural”).

With Harvey, we won’t be fooled again. He was neither of those things. Moreover, rock is not an abstract but a concrete and concise musical language with a discernible grammar and rhetoric. These elements are *historical* in that they are traceable in musical traditions. It follows then that in rock music, nuances and meanings of musical gesture are culturally specific and therefore can be read. Finally, rock music is mundane, demotic, and immediate. Rock, said Harvey, “is direct communication.” We might also accept the notion that rock is ephemeral—but in so doing we might add that it shares this quality with all manifestations of late-twentieth century cultural production (an admission, perhaps, that Adorno hid from himself behind a tightly controlled edifice of bourgeois social and aesthetic theory). Finally, we could admit that the rock period, if not quite over, was otherwise relatively brief—in fact, it was/is less than fifty years in length. Harvey participated in at least the first half.

If rock is *ahistoric*, then Harvey is only as dead or insignificant as rock decides. He is/was a recording artist, and it is the nature of the medium that the recording exists in a unique relationship to the temporal. He has this in common with all recording artists of the twentieth century (and that, paradoxically, is quite historical). Also, Harvey worked simultaneously with several musical languages and traditions with a measure of self-awareness. This, too, is not *unique*. *Rock is at its most monolithic, progressive, and modernist when it is most synthetic. It fragments and becomes post-modern in the act of analysis.*

Seventies rock has been inadequately treated in popular music studies. In part, this is largely the result of the first generation of academic rock writers cutting their teeth on punk—and Dick Hebdige. But perhaps the Marxist-sociologists who not so long ago created the edifice of musico-sociology should be excused for mistaking the nostalgias of postmodernism for evolutionary nineteenth-century modernism. If rock is *ahistorical*, then the application of critical theory has seemed apropos. It is certainly true that the aesthetic of progressive rock in particular is oddly situated. Gradually co-opted by corporate concerns, the music foundered and its artists grew increasingly cynical. However, it is important to remember that the discursive framework isolating the progressive aesthetic was constructed after the establishment of punk signifiers in 1976. The unflattering terminology now kept in reserve for progressive rock, much like that for white jazz age bandleaders, is in all respects retrospective and usually derisive; the damage done, hugely successful LPs like Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (1972) can only be discussed with a few qualifications. Alex Harvey need not be discussed at all.

Of the few writers to broach the subject of rock in the seventies without either apology or condemnation, Allan Moore has argued for stylistic determinations made upon musical grounds and attempted to erect a theoretical model for the purpose. Progressive rock, he argues, rather than being a single style, is instead, a nexus of divergent styles:

[progressive rock’s] attitude(s) to tradition is not monolithic, and a truly detailed stylistic analysis would find a band taking different stances in different areas of their work.... What such a stylistic analysis suggests most forcefully of course is

that a stylistic history of rock would not be linear history, but a history full of eddies, backwaters and tidal waves.³³

Moore also distinguishes between the various dramatic, or “non-musical” sources of the progressive. For progressive rock, predominant between 1971 and 1976, “fantasy is the style’s only non-musical source,” while concerning “glam” rock, which emerged fully in 1972 in the figures of Marc Bolan and David Bowie, he remarks (citing Frith) that the image of the rock star became part of the musician’s creative effort, “a way of exploring a projected image.”³⁴ However, these stylistic qualities, particularly those which were either non-musical or those musical qualities which are less determinant of any conclusions, were for the most part the ephemera of the age. In essence, Harvey’s musical and cultural language was no different than that of his contemporaries if viewed through the oft-contested apparatus of conscientious musical analyses. Instead, rock historians tempt their readership to experience difference (Was Bowie’s eye shadow different from Sinatra’s? or Rick Wakeman’s cape different from Liberace’s?). Seldom are we invited to reflect, as Moore’s theoretical model might otherwise suggest, that the musical elements at work in rock, whatever they may be, are essentially the same, or that the nuances of mode, harmony, and rhythm, however minute or fleetingly experienced, might reveal the truth of the matter.³⁵ Though it would be odd to conclude Harvey was a progressive rock performer, in his assertions about progressive rock Moore could be writing as much about Harvey as any of his contemporaries.

³³ Moore, *Rock*, 60.

³⁴ “Indeed, the stylistic differences between David Bowie and Roxy Music, Lou Reed and the New York Dolls, and even ‘glitter rockers’ like Slade, Marc Boland, Gary Glitter and the Sweet, were far more pronounced than the similarities.” Moore, *Rock*, 110.

³⁵ Moore divides his “sound sources” into four layers; the rhythmic, bass voicing, melody, and harmony.