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THE RISE OF THE ROCK STAR

By  
DERIK SIBIT

A RECITAL PAPER

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Music in Commercial Music  
in the School of Music  
of the College of Music and Performing Arts  
Belmont University

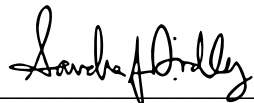
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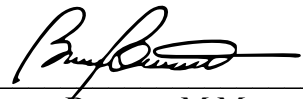
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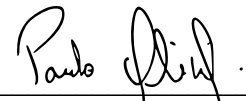
Submitted by Derik Sibit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Commercial Music.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to graciously thank my committee members, Bruce Bennett and Paulo Oliveira, for their dedication and tireless work that helped to make this paper possible and for always supporting me and helping me along the way during my entire academic stay at Belmont.

To Henry Smiley and Jamie Wigginton, thank you both so much for your invaluable knowledge and teachings during my first four years of study at Belmont. You both helped me to grow and discover my potential as a singer and your support along the way never wavered. I wouldn't be where I am today without the both of you.

I would like to give an enormous and sincere thank you to my major mentor and voice teacher for the past two years, Sandra Dudley. You have helped me grow so much, Sandra, not just as a singer, but also as a performer, a student, and a person. Most importantly, you helped me find my voice as an artist and have given me tools and knowledge that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I don't know what I would have done without you the past couple of years and all the support and encouragement you have put forth, being there with me through all of the ups and downs. You're a great person, an amazing teacher, and an even better friend. My sincerest thank you and appreciation to you.

I would also like to thank Kip Winger as well for being my greatest inspiration, igniting my passion for pursuing a life and career in music, and for always helping me and guiding me along the way as I try to navigate my path to success, whatever that may

look like. I also would never have gone to Belmont and had the opportunities that I've had if it wasn't for you and your guidance. Thank you for all you've done and helped me with since I met you nearly a decade ago in a little bar in Akron, OH. Rock on.

A special thanks to my two best friends since I moved to Nashville, Kat and Ally. You know what you've done without me even having to say anything. I wouldn't be the person I am today without you two and I don't know what I would do without either of you. No matter where we are or wherever life may take us I will always cherish our friendship.

Most importantly, to my mom, Jennifer, my dad, Darrin, my grandmother, Patricia (G-Pat), and my late grandparents Roy and Jeanie (Papaw and Granny), thank you for being the best parents and grandparents someone could ever ask for. You have always supported me and my endeavors since the day I could talk and no matter how wild my dreams may have been, from being the Hulk to Garth Brooks to a cowboy to a police officer to an astronaut to a pro tennis player and even a doctor, you've always been there to encourage me and support me and love me along the way. You've taught me so many things over the years and even more importantly showed me what it means to be a good person. My time spent and all of my experiences the last six years at Belmont would not have been possible if it wasn't for your immense sacrifices that have allowed me this amazing opportunity to pursue my passions. I don't know what I would ever do without you guys. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. I love you.

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Program of Recital

“Blind Revolution Mad” (1993) – Kip Winger, Reb Beach

“No Man’s Land” (1993) – Winger, Beach

“Rainbow in the Rose” (1990) – Winger, Beach

“Ptolemy” (1989) – John Sykes

“Remember My Name” (1990) – Nick Graham, Bob Mitchell

“Animal” (1987) – Joe Elliot, Phil Collen, Steve Clark, Rick Savage, Mutt Lange

“I’ll Be Alright Without You” (1986) – Steve Perry, Jonathan Cain, Neal Schon

“Mr. Rainmaker” (1990) – Jani Lane

“Judgement Day” (1989) – David Coverdale, Adrian Vandenberg

“High Enough” (1990) – Jack Blades, Ted Nugent, Tommy Shaw

“Poundcake” (1991) – Eddie Van Halen, Michael Anthony,

Sammy Hagar, Alex Van Halen

## Introduction

The decade of the 1980s in many aspects of life was all about bigger, louder, faster. It was a time period of full excess, especially in the music scene and business. Bands of the day loved to party. The lifestyle was predicated on fast living and fast times. The motto of sex, drugs, and rock and roll was not coined during the 1980s, (some scholars and historians point to the year 1969 and a LIFE magazine article that read, “The counterculture has its sacraments in sex, drugs, and rock”). but it was certainly exemplified to the fullest and is the most appropriate way to describe some of the artists and people that lived and enjoyed success during this time (Cross 2016). Movies were full of action: near-death escapes, big explosions, extreme stunts. The music of the day was no different. Within the genre of hard rock, every band, every singer, every guitar player was constantly searching for new ways to push their music and their artistry to the extreme. These bands wanted to be able to sing extraordinarily high, play fast, play loud, and have an epic pyrotechnical stage show. “[Def Leppard] relied less on blues references and instead took a harder, faster approach” (Trunk 2011, 63). Music was, in many ways, being pushed to its limits in terms of the technical abilities of the players, and the excessive nature of many of these artist’s lifestyles were reflected in their music, both aurally and visually. 1980s hard rock and metal was a lot like an action movie; you wanted to see who could be the wildest, the most daring, the most explosive, the one who could get right to the edge of the cliff without crashing and burning. That is where Music Television, better known as MTV, came into play.



The first all-music-video channel, debuting on August 1, 1981, was an outlet that allowed many of these bands to reach their audience in ways that had not been possible before in the 1960s and 1970s without excessive touring (Barnett 2017, 275-76). Every time a video played it was like a concert, a soap opera, a nickelodeon sketch, an action flick, all wrapped up into one. These videos allowed these bands and artists, for about three-and-a-half to four minutes, to be not just rock stars, but movie stars. Image became almost as important, if not more so, than the sound of the music itself by the latter years of the decade. “Beyond the music itself, videos and artists influenced everything from fashion to dance to popular lingo to body language” (Barnett 2017, 276). In a sense, the image of these bands reflected the sound of their music in many ways. The big hair, the make-up, the tight pants, the puffy shirts, every aspect was important to selling records and establishing the band’s commercial presence and viability. Good looks did not hurt either. It was great if a singer could scream and belt out the song with perfect pitch and clarity be easy on the eyes while doing so. A guitar player could flawlessly deliver a Phrygian dominant-based solo and at the same time his/her hair would be coifed to perfection.

The videos sold the songs for these rock acts in the 1980s just as much as the records themselves. In areas around the country where MTV was aired and had a considerable reach, record stores were able to sell music by bands that were not getting much, if any, airplay on local radio but were mostly getting played on MTV (Barnett 2017, 276). In that sense, whoever had the biggest, catchiest riffs and hooks, the biggest wall of sound, razor-like guitars, god or goddess-level vocals, could in turn have some of the best, most captivating videos to sell their lavish musical product. Ultimately, if you

wanted to make it in the music industry in the 1980s, sounding good was not enough. You had to have the complete package. You had to sell it, on the airwaves of the FM and AM dial and of the broadcast networks. A band like Van Halen sold more than 20 million copies of their groundbreaking record *MCMLXXXIV* thanks in large part to three popular music videos played in heavy rotation on MTV: “Jump,” “Panama,” and “Hot for Teacher” (Barnett 2017, 302).

In this paper, I will explore the aural and aesthetic characteristics of the commercial peak of success of hard rock and heavy metal music during the height of MTV and its presence throughout the 1980s. I will identify, briefly, the influence of bands like The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, and Black Sabbath up through the end of the decade of the 1980s and into the early 1990s with bands like Van Halen, Def Leppard, and Journey when hard rock and heavy metal music was at its most relevant in terms of pop culture and at the height of its commercial success. I will look at connecting the influences from artists and musicians from the early years to the artists of the 1980s while identifying and analyzing the evolution of the vocal and guitar sound and style in this genre of music throughout this era. Furthermore, the research I have compiled will consider several encyclopedias, peer-reviewed journals, documentaries, interviews, and YouTube videos of songs of both performances and music videos.

I will examine the discographies and members of bands throughout the years while compiling my research as well. Additionally, I will compile a list of artists and songs I feel are most relevant and influential during this period of study. These songs and artists will showcase the different elements, characteristics, and conventions that define

the sound and style of this era and genre of music. I will analyze these musical elements as I break down the important individual components of 1980s hard rock and heavy metal and how they may be achieved as well as what allows a musician to achieve these elements when creating and performing music in this style.

Diving even further into the music of this era, I will identify and discuss how these rock and metal artists performed some of the most decadent music from arguably the most decadent decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These singers had the technical ability to execute soaring vocal acrobatics and multi-octave melodies. The songs I will be presenting in this paper have all been performed and sung by myself in a full-length graduate recital. My aspiration is that this research into the vocal and instrumental stylings of the bands I will be discussing, as well as certain songwriting, performance, and production conventions of theirs, can help me to accurately and justifiably display and perform these songs. By taking all of these factors and elements into consideration, I will be able to perform my set list of songs in an accurate and authentic manner to the era and bands that spawned them.

Although known for his world class vocal ability as a rock and metal singer, Ronnie James Dio claimed that his background in trumpet playing gave him endurance and proper breathing techniques and allowed him to turn his voice into one of the most powerful and distinctive voices in the rock and metal genre (Trunk 2011, 69). Rob Halford of Judas Priest had a vocal style that inspired many to try and emulate his approach and follow in his footsteps throughout the 1980s, with radio personality Eddie Trunk calling him the “Pavarotti of heavy metal,” possessing a devastating vocal range and powerful falsetto (Trunk 2011, 96). These singers along with many others possessed

distinct tones and styles that was very unique and identifiable to this era of rock. Guitar players took a lot of what they were influenced by in the 1960s and 1970s and brought it to the next level, playing virtuosic neo-classical-inspired phrases with otherworldly effects and distortion that had never been done before.

The production values and styles along with studio engineering techniques and technological advancements also lent to this new and evolving sound of music in the 1980s (Barnett 2017, 273). The videos on MTV were another important vehicle that aided these bands in their success and their ascent to prominence and stardom (Barnett 2017, 276). It was the last decade of this brand of rock being successful, being in the forefront of pop culture, in the mainstream before a new wave of music and generation known as “alternative rock” and “Generation X” would take up the mantle of popular rock music in the 1990s (Barnett 2017, 363-64). It was the last time that playing rock and roll music was generally viewed in a favorable manner by the general public. It was just before the fall. It was the rise of the rock star.

## Chapter 1: The Birth of a Genre

Before the hard rock and heavy metal genre dominated the airwaves and television sets throughout much of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, we must not forget the musical seeds that were planted a decade and even two decades earlier. Therefore, we must first consider and examine the music of the two decades that preceded hard rock's biggest era: the 1960s and 1970s. The early 1960s saw the debut of The Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show and the rock landscape would never be the same after that (Berman 2008, 68). Other bands around this time were also greatly influential to the rise of rock and its foothold into the mainstream.

Further exploring the music from Great Britain, we can study bands such as Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple. Each of these bands emerged from England's blues and R&B scene in the late 1960s and were both integral in establishing a new, heavier, unique sound from the styles that influenced them (Barnett 2017, 216-17, 221-22). Both bands featured powerhouse vocalists in Robert Plant and Ian Gillan. These singers were masters of the heavy, throaty belt vocal style and possessed seemingly seamless vocal ranges from their lowest registers to their highest, singing well into the tenor range and even into an alto range at times. Plant and Gillan are just two examples of a plethora of virtuosic vocalists that would emerge from this time and both singers would be very influential on countless vocalists of their era and the eras that would succeed them.

A song like Led Zeppelin's "Whole Lotta Love" (1969) epitomizes the bluesy guitar driven approach that would lay the foundation for heavy metal music throughout the 1970s (Barnett 2017, 217). This heavily distorted sound along with a prominently accented riff on the downbeats can also be heard in later songs like "Judgement Day" (1989), "Poundcake" (1991), and "Blind Revolution Mad" (1993). In each of these songs, heavy, chugging guitars with high soaring vocals over top can be heard. Robert Plant was one of the first singers to add this vocal style into this type of heavy, blues-oriented music. The Led Zeppelin song "Kashmir" (1975) is also another great example of this vocal and musical style from their album *Physical Graffiti*. In this particular song we hear an Eastern-influenced orchestral rock sound, with a very exotic, progressive, and somewhat psychedelic flavor in the guitars and drums due to phasing effects (Barnett 2017, 219).

I performed Whitesnake's "Judgment Day" (1989) in my recital. In this instance, much like in Zeppelin's "Kashmir," listeners could observe the exotic sounding clean guitar parts that prevail in the verse sections, with a bright and percussive, sitar-like timbre to them. This main feature is accompanied by a bluesy vocal with some ornamentation utilizing flat-3, flat-6, and flat-7 scale degrees from the Aeolian modal scale. While performing this vocal, it will also be imperative to control the amount of glottal compression and tension in the sound, which is important in this style of rock. Similar to Plant in the Led Zeppelin songs discussed previously this chapter, David Coverdale, the singer of this particular song, displays lower-to-mid-range husky blues vocal runs paired with soaring sustained belted notes in the upper tenor range, sometimes clearly sung and sometimes distorted to match the sound of the guitars. Being selective

with the amount of vocal grit and distortion is key to a singer's longevity in a set full of these songs. One must implement a good open-throat technique with minimal jaw, tongue, and throat/neck tension while performing this music over a prolonged setlist. Proper low breathing must also be implemented in order to anchor the sound and to support the high end of the male register. Furthermore, one must be conscious of how much they are compressing their sound and using a heavy glottal attack and approach to their vocal production, wearing down and rubbing their vocal cords in order to add vocal distortion.

Listen for clear belts on a B5 in "Judgment Day" with a very open throat and vocal tract of an "a:" vowel on the line "...and the lord above." This type of line and belt is similar to those heard at the beginning of the choruses in "Whole Lotta Love" where Plant can be heard wailing on an open "o:" vowel. Proper breath support and breathing will need to take place leading up to this moment in order to fully support and sustain this phrase as well. Additionally, the line "When you hear the thunder, in your darkest night" is heard later on. This line is sung very aggressively and emotively in context of the song. Here, I would try to use more of a glottal attack and glottal compression in order to distort and "dirty" up my tone a bit, much like Plant and Coverdale would, so as to appropriately convey the aggression and power of these lines along with the heavy guitars and drums that are accompanying them.

In terms of Ian Gillan and Deep Purple, their overall sound was very similar to Zeppelin's in that it implemented heavy guitar and drum sounds and a bluesy tenor vocal with high belted, sometimes forced-falsetto, vocal lines and notes that blended both a clearer and edgier vocal tone. One difference of Deep Purple was the heavy use of organ

and keyboards provided by the late, great Jon Lord (1941-2012) (Barnett 2017, 221). Another distinction from Zeppelin vocally was the high-pitched, scratchy falsetto screams that Gillan would do on certain words, typically at the ends of phrases, a signature element of the band's sound (Trunk 2011, 58). For example, Gillan took a mid-ranged vocal melody in songs like "Highway Star" (1972) and "Space Truckin'" (1972), two of the band's most influential tracks of the decade, and adds his signature falsetto scream in key moments of each song, adding a level of energy and excitement to each instance (Barnett 2017, 221). Gillan screams at the very beginning of the song on top of heavy chugging guitars and distorted organ as well as on the lines "I love it, I need it, I bleed it." In "Space Truckin'" we hear a similar vocal sound on the lines "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah the freaks said..." and "They got music in their solar system."

This type of gritty, edgy, reinforced falsetto sound is a key element in many rock vocals. It also utilizes some glottal compressed air and rubbing of the vocal cords as well as very forward masked placement in the resonance in order to get a full ringing sound out of this part of the voice. Breath support is also always key when singing any of these high and heavier vocal styles. Listen for these kinds of falsetto screamed notes and lines in Winger's "Blind Revolution Mad" (1993). The intro is similar to that of "Highway Star" in that it has a swelled and slowly scooped scream on the line "Have it your way." Listen for how long the word "way" is being held out, fully and forcefully from start to finish, for about three and a half measures at a slow and dragging eighty-four beats per minute. This takes a tremendous amount of breath support and full control and stability of air flow from the diaphragm to the cords in order to effectively and convincingly pull this off. Listen for a similar falsetto sound that breaks and swells downward for a similar



duration right before the guitar solo on the line “I’ve already gone crazy.” Both of these instances top out a formidable E-flat 5 for many vocalists.

In Van Halen’s “Poundcake” (1991), the listener can also hear lead singer Sammy Hagar implement a similar distorted screaming sound, much like Gillan. In the first line of the song, Hagar starts low and then bends up into his false cords on the word “Yeah!” The same sound can be heard on the words “...simple...wrapped up...” in the first verse. Later on in the song, we hear what sounds like a mix of heavier chest resonance blended into a scratchy screaming sound utilizing the false folds on the phrase “I’ve been out there, tried a little bit of everything / It’s all sex without love.” Sammy takes these screams to another level through the fact that he can add whistle-like overtones to them. Listen for these higher overtones in the falsetto-sung parts throughout the song, especially in the scream on an “a:” vowel going into the guitar solo. This particular scream serves as a seamless transition of focus to higher frequencies as the vocal hands off the spotlight to Eddie Van Halen and his guitar.

The sound that emerged from the late 1960s and into the early 1970s was undoubtedly a guitar-driven sound. To obtain a fuller and greater understanding of this sound and how it was achieved, we must also look at important guitar players of this time, such as Jimmy Page and Tony Iommi. Both of these guitarists were virtuosic players in their own right and revolutionized the guitar in each of their own ways. In the case of Page, the amount of distortion and fuzz added to his tone was quite rare and not something you would have heard on mainstream radio at the time. He even implemented unusual methods into his playing at times to achieve different otherworldly sounds, such as using a bow to vibrate the strings on his guitar (Loy 2013, 128-29). This particular

playing convention can be heard in the Led Zeppelin song “Dazed and Confused” (1969), as well as several of his live featured guitar solos during the band’s concerts of that period.

Iommi, on the other hand, is more responsible for taking the traditional R&B sound of the British music scene in the 1960s and completely turning it on its head. After losing his fingertips to a piece of machinery in an accident at a factory where he worked, he thought he may never be able to play guitar again. However, through a combination of adjustments and retooling how he approached the guitar, he was able to continue pursuing his dream as a musician. Loosening the string tension on his guitars made it easier for him to push the strings down with his now more sensitive and weaker fingers (Iommi 2015). Further, he found that if he boiled down a sponge, he could mold pieces of it around the ends of his fingers to further help him with the sensitivity and strength issue in his fingertips (Iommi 2015).

Consequently, the sound and style of his playing also completely changed. The overall sound of the music was much darker and heavier due to the lower tuned strings (Trunk 2011, 32-33). The riffs Iommi was creating were highly innovative because he was now limited in the way he could move his fret hand and fingers around the fretboard. Subsequently, this sound of his playing and his band Black Sabbath’s music reflected the dreary and metallic landscape of war-torn industrial England in the 1950s and 1960s, ultimately giving birth to a new subgenre of rock: heavy metal (Trunk 2011, 33). Discussing the origins of Sabbath’s dark, bleak, and heavy sound, Iommi stated in an interview, “...from where we came from is the background of our music...the industrial side of it...” (Iommi 2015).

The last aspect of this era I would like to examine is the drum sound and groove that emerged during this time, and some of the most important players. The most influential drummer and arguably the greatest to emerge from this time was yet again another member of Led Zeppelin, John Bonham (1948-1980) (Barnett 2017, 217). Bonham was and still is known today for his heavy-hitting style and booming drum sound. His snare sound at times resembled the tone and resonance of a rack tom drum and several drummers throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s, including and maybe most famously Alex Van Halen, would try and mimic that huge, reverberant, full-bodied drum sound for which Bonham had laid the groundwork nearly a decade earlier (Wurster 2012, 52).

Explore a song like “When the Levee Breaks” (1971) by Led Zeppelin for example. The drum sound from John Bonham is huge on this track, with low-tuned drumheads and massive reverberation, especially on the snare (Barnett 2017, 218). Alex Van Halen implemented this same sound and forcefulness in his drumming and his drums. Similar to “When the Levee Breaks,” the Van Halen song “Poundcake” (1991) has an equally thunderous and heavy groove in the drums. This sound is largely achieved from the tuning of Alex’s toms and especially his snare. He would tune his snare down to sound almost like a tom, giving his playing that thunderous gut-punch for which this brand of rock and roll drumming would become known (Beato 2019). The sixteenth note drum fill on the snare in the intro of “Poundcake” as well as the booming snare hits on beats two and four throughout exemplify that larger-than-life drum sound that Alex always seemed to capture in his playing thanks to the influence of John Bonham (Beato 2019). The powerful lines sung by Sammy Hagar in the choruses accent Alex’s snare hits

on beat 4 of the measures with the lyric “down home,” with the word “down” belted with full force and heavy chest resonance on a C# 5.

Another signature characteristic of Bonham’s drum style that would become widely imitated and used throughout the 1970s and 1980s was his syncopated drum grooves. His feel and pocket are arguably unmatched by any drummer before or since and his use of rhythmic pushes and pulls was a crucial part of both his and his band’s sound. Placing the downbeat on the eighth or sixteenth note before or after the ‘one’ of the beat was a large part of this style. Additionally, accenting and emphasizing the upbeats of certain measures and beats instead of the downbeats was also common in his playing. This style of playing would become very prevalent throughout pop, hard rock, and heavy metal throughout the 1980s and was implemented by several bands including Van Halen, Boston, Def Leppard, Journey, and countless others (Traut 2005, 66, 68, 74).

A great example of these syncopated “up-beat” drum grooves can be heard in Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir” (1975), Van Halen’s “Panama” (1984), and Whitesnake’s “Judgement Day” (1989), the latter of which very closely resembles the tempo and musical style of the former. Whereas the string parts are in 3/4 time against a 4/4 drum pattern in “Kashmir,” the strings and drums both follow a 4/4 metrical pulse in “Judgement Day.” In both instances, the strings and orchestration paired with traditional rock instrumentation gives these songs a strong neo-classical feel. This Whitesnake song demonstrates sixteenth-note triplet and sixteenth-note snare roll drum fills starting on upbeats in the intro. Here, the drums are completely exposed before any other instrumentation is added. A straightforward “Kashmir”-esque drum pattern persists throughout much of the song with heavy accents on beats two and four. However,

sixteenth-note triplet drum fills return at the end of the first refrain right after the line “on the road to judgement day.” More syncopated triplets can be heard during the second vocal refrain, this time sung an octave higher and with the pattern being played on the kick drum instead of the snare. This syncopation acts as a brief feeling of hesitation before being propelled into what is arguably the climax of the song from an instrumentation and energy standpoint, with busier kick and snare patterns and even an uncharacteristic snare accent on the second half of beat three towards the end of this epic interlude. As we can see here from this song and many others, this prevalent drum style can be found in music spanning a decade and a half, and for all intents and purposes was an integral part of the rock music sound for over twenty years.

## Chapter 2: The Sights and Sounds of MTV

In the 1980s, we begin to see a considerable shift in the sound and evolution of the guitar, mainly its sound and the way it is being used. While the distortion on guitars was increasing more and more, the overall timbre and quality of guitars in the hard rock and metal genre were simultaneously becoming more defined, refined, and pristine in many ways. This all stems from advancements in studio equipment and technology and ever-evolving recording techniques. Furthermore, we start to see a more polished sound and production as we move our way through the decade of the 1980s. Many producers, including most famously Mutt Lange, were pioneers of production and engineering, layering multiple tracks of the same instrument in order to build a texture and tone that one instrument alone could not achieve.

Beau Hill and Bob Rock were two exceptional producers of the era as well. Both of them are noteworthy for having worked on some of the most successful, multi-platinum-selling albums of the decade for bands such as Ratt, Warrant, Winger (Hill) and Metallica, Bon Jovi, Aerosmith (Rock) (Mawson 1989; LeBlanc 1992, 42). In the case of Hill, his work on the song “Mr. Rainmaker” (1990) by Warrant demonstrates his use of layering in clean acoustic sounding guitars under the heavier, more distorted guitar riffs in order to paint a broad textured landscape within the song. This particular aspect can especially be heard in the melodic sixteen-bar guitar solo section of the song. Vocal harmonies, particularly high harmonies a minor third to a fourth above the melody can be heard throughout as well and the big moment in the song vocally, a sustained falsetto

high note just before the guitar solo, even has a double of the same note sung with it. This is an example of stacking vocals, both within harmony as well as lead vocal parts. Layers within the melodic instruments are key when creating this sound of rock.

In the instance of Bob Rock, he produced the album *Blue Murder* by the band of the same name in 1989 (LeBlanc 1992, 42). Their song “Ptolemy” from this album also features a heavy layered production with thick, lush-sounding synth parts padding the busier and lower frequency riffs of lead guitarist and lead singer John Sykes. Three-part harmonies that ascend into the fifth octave on the tagline of the vocals makes for an exhilarating, and accelerating, hook to this song. In this genre and era of hard rock production, one can equate a lot of the recording and production style to that of making a cake; its construction is all about the layers.

The goal of this style of production and engineering was to achieve a larger-than-life, arena-ready sound without having to actually attend a live rock concert; drop the needle and you are there. Several different techniques were used in order to achieve these lush textures and arena-sized sounds. For example, on the records “Pyromania” and “Hysteria,” Mutt Lange would track individual drum hits one at a time. He would do the same with individual guitar strings and notes of a riff. After tracking these notes and hits one at a time he would then go back and piece the song together note by note, hit by hit (Demasi 2017, 70). This gave the songs unparalleled clarity and definition, allowing guitar and drum parts to be “played” in ways that were extremely clean and precise (Trunk 2011, 64). Without this method and approach these results would not be achievable through traditional playing and recording mechanisms (Trunk 2011, 64).

The technology by which Lange and other producers were recording was rapidly evolving as well. Computers were coming into the mix, and while this was still long before innovative recording software such as Pro Tools, it allowed for sharper and cleaner editing which further lent itself to that polished pop production mentioned earlier, but in the world of hard rock and heavy metal (Barnett 2017, 273). This new technology allowed producers and engineers to accomplish some of the editing and effects processing digitally (using computers and digital software to record, capture, and manipulate sounds through a signal and series of 1's and 0's) as opposed to strictly analogue (using sound boards and tape machines to capture and alter audio in a wide-ranging signal through a series of a continuous variable [more than just data points replicated by 1's and 0's]), which even allowed in some cases for the savviest producers and engineers to create a composite vocal and instrumental take more precisely and efficiently and even somewhat tune the vocals before Auto-Tune was in existence (Tamplin December 2020).

Mutt Lange was very creative in terms of getting sounds out of equipment and technology which would traditionally not have been used to achieve such sounds. A great example of this is his and Def Leppard's use of the Rockman headphone guitar amplifier on the 1987 album "Hysteria." The Rockman had been created by Boston's Tom Scholz initially to allow for easy light-weight guitar practice on-the-go or wherever a player may find themselves with his/her guitar (Johnson 1990, 7). However, in this case Lange and the band used this piece of equipment in order to achieve a certain kind of jangly clean guitar tone the band wanted for the sound on their album that blurred the lines between rock and contemporary pop of the time (Demasi 2017, 70-71). This certain brand of clean



guitar tone would be widely copied and imitated by bands after this album's release and massive success and would be viewed as the standard for clean guitar tones for years to come (Gold 2017, 24). It is still held as the gold standard by many in the genre today.

Another feature of this era that is pertinent to examine is the music video. The aesthetic, in many ways, was just as important as the sound during the 1980s MTV era. A band could have a great sounding album, but did they have the look and the image to match? What separated the successful bands of this time from the highly successful bands was a marketable look (big hair, flashy tight clothes, charismatic and good-looking players with just the right amount of make-up) and successful music videos played in heavy rotation on MTV that accompanied the band's single(s). The more videos a band could release and the more airplay these videos received often directly correlated to the band's success along with the success of the corresponding album and its singles. These productions, often worth in excess of 100,000 U.S. dollars and full of glitz and glam, good looking women, huge stages with lights and pyrotechnics, and in some cases exotic, movie-like sets, allowed these bands to reach audiences and parts of the world in a span of weeks that otherwise would take years of live concerts and arduous touring (Spheeris 1988). In some cases, a band could become a multi-platinum sensation overnight with just one good single and video (Spheeris 1988).

Def Leppard's song "Animal" (1987) is a great piece to study in terms of my research and discussion in this chapter. Produced by Mutt Lange, it has all the characteristics of that quintessential polished 1980s production. There are several layers of guitar tones on display, from heavier distortion to bright ambient cleans. The drums sound huge due to individual drum hit tracking as well as the use of triggers on certain

drums. The vocals are larger than life and several different voices were layered in as well along with layers of whisper tracks in addition to the sung tracks that can make the listener feel as if they are immersed in a 20,000-seat arena with the vocals being sung by a rock and roll choir through large house speakers.

The accompanying music video depicts the band playing in a carnival setting surrounded by circus animals and acrobats and was played heavily on MTV throughout 1987 and 1988. The success of this single, as well as several others on the album and their accompanying music videos, propelled the single of “Animal” to the top 20 on the Billboard charts and the album to number one, selling more than 25,000,000 copies worldwide (Edwards 2006, 130; Barnett 2017, 341).

### Chapter 3: Vocal Considerations

In examining the defining elements of the hard rock and metal genre, a big, heavy, chest-register-driven vocal style was an important and common characteristic of bands of these styles throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and this vocal style persisted throughout the decade of the 1980s as well. Many singers of this era, such as David Coverdale, Brad Delp, Lou Gramm, Steve Perry, had big, open-throated, highly resonant and naturally reverberant deliveries. There was a bell-like quality and clarity to this tone and resonance. They also pushed their chest voice up as high as it could, or would, go in many cases. Certain singers like Coverdale and Gramm had the ability to flip up into a head or falsetto register while still keeping body and weight in the sound by pulling back on their air flow while still keeping their vocal placement forward and vocal cords coordinating (touching). Distortion and gravel could be added to the vocal delivery selectively by using a glottal attack when initiating the sound as well as compressing their resonance with their glottis (glottal compression) in order to convey emotion or aggression. These singers could also add color to the lyric of the song in this way by expressing different textures and timbres through their voice from moment to moment, section to section.

In the realm of the hard rock and heavy metal genre and styles of singing, screaming via the utilization of false vocal folds was prevalent and necessary in order to achieve that strident, piercing, “Metal God” sound. This technique involved a reinforced falsetto sound, which some pedagogical studies have found to be a type of phonation with

a shortening of the vocal tract as well as open vowel production and a higher contact quotient of vocal fold contact during each phonation cycle (Guzman, Macarena, Espinoza, et. al. 2014, 184-85). Singers like Coverdale, Kip Winger, or Joe Elliot would add more distortion and grit to this sound than others. Vocalists that sang in more of a straight up rock or blues-influenced style tended to utilize a harsher, more distorted scream, whereas more traditional metal vocalists such as Rob Halford or Bruce Dickinson tended to produce a purer, bell-like tone that could be almost operatic at times.

Some vocalists of this genre impart a more melismatic vocal delivery, consisting of large quantities of vocal inflections. These include practices such as dips, scoops, fall-offs, and melodic ornamentation (vocal runs where the singer goes off the melody, adding a string of embellishments and flourishes to the melody, in order to decorate a chosen line as well as showcase their vocal prowess and dexterity). Other singers, however, implement a more straight-ahead pop delivery, using less inflection and ornamentation in their voice, save for some vibrato for color and texture. They will typically sing the melody note-for-note without changing up the phrasing too much throughout the song, even on repeated sections. The greatest and most virtuosic singers, in my estimation, were masters at being able to do both and control when their delivery was simple and accessible (pop) and when they went into more melismas and inflections and performed runs (blues). Singers such as David Coverdale of Whitesnake, Kip Winger of Winger, and Steve Perry of Journey are all great examples of this kind of agile singer that possess tremendous control and dexterity in their voice.

If we listen to Whitesnake's song "Judgement Day" (1989), the vocal, originally performed by Coverdale, can be heard throughout the piece utilizing blues-influenced

inflections from a lower, husky part of the voice all the way up into the highest parts of a typical male chest register. In the first pre-refrain of the song, long sustained notes combined with pentatonic and blues licks are main features of the vocal delivery, as the flat-3 and flat-7 scale degrees are featured prominently throughout, giving the melody a yearning and dramatic quality that the blues tends to provide. During the musical and dynamic peaks of the song, such as the second main refrain of the song just before the guitar solo, we hear the vocal melody increase in range even further, implementing the use of false-vocal folds being mixed with a heftier chest resonance in order to produce gut-wrenching, shrill screams, akin to Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, with glottal distortion being applied for dramatic, emotional effect.

“Blind Revolution Mad” (1993) and “No Man’s Land” (1993), both by Winger, and “I’ll Be Alright Without You” (1986) by Journey are three songs that can be heard in my recital and provide the listener with great examples of a full-chested vocal style in the tenor to upper-tenor ranges as well as a mix between a simple pop vocal delivery and a soulful blues-oriented delivery. I have achieved these vocal sounds and deliveries through proper low abdominal breathing that anchors and supports the bigger belted notes in my chest voice, while maintaining consistent and steady airflow and taking proper breaths well in advance of certain vocal sections to prepare to sing these properly and efficiently. The placement of my sound will remain relatively forward (in the mask) and I will keep my throat open and always in some variant of an “a:” vowel vocal tract shape. I will keep a relatively relaxed neck, tongue, and jaw, while letting my abdominal and intercostal muscles (ribcage) handle the brunt of the load in carrying the weight of the delivery and execution.

In the case of Winger, the vocal delivery is very similar to that of what can be observed in “Judgement Day” in that it spans a range from low husky tones to big-belted high C’s and C#’s while delivering strident, piercing screams full of grit and distortion; an even more virtuosic delivery and performance can be heard in the Winger songs when delivered efficiently and effectively. In each of these songs, the lead vocals demonstrate tremendous dexterity and athleticism within the voice, hitting a note in one part of the vocal register and seamlessly ascending into a different part of the register. In the example of “Blind...,” a sustained note is sung in a gravelly mix of head (reinforced falsetto) and chest voice before sliding into an even higher, more strident and screamed sustained pitch before the phrase is ended. A similar concept can be heard in “No Man’s Land,” where you can hear a heavily belted out “whoa...” in chest voice before flipping up into the same piercing scream utilizing false chords but without any hitch or noticeable vocal break in the process. This is done in fluid manner with a seamless transition by way of gradually mixing head voice into the chest sound as the vocal ascends up to the highest note, being completely in falsetto by the time that point is reached. We can further observe the stylistic delivery used in each song. Both contain bluesier passages mixed with straighter, more evenly sung sections. “Blind...” could be viewed as a heavy pop vocal in the verses with a blues-inflected vocal in the choruses while “No Man’s Land” has inflections and blues stylings throughout except for the pre-choruses where we hear a much straighter melody that has more of a pop-rock sensibility to it.

In the case of Journey and Perry, there are no big screams as those that can be heard in Whitesnake and Winger. However, this is a perfect example of clear and open

belting without tension, allowing the natural ring within the mouth and throat to carry the sound, volume, and tone of the vocals. In “I’ll Be Alright…” we can hear husky timbres in the voice along with added rasp to the delivery at certain moments, selectively, in order to convey emotion to the listener on lines such as “[I believed] you were there,” “I’ll keep holding on but I’ll try,” “Love don’t leave me lonely, “All I wanted was to hold you,” “There’ll be someone else, I keep telling myself, “Loves an empty face I’ve got to replace” (just before the bridge), and the very last line of “I’ll be alright.” The vocal inflections at the ends of phrases are also very soulful and hint more so to R&B and Motown influences, akin to singers such as Sam Cook, rather than singing melismas and runs in the manner of the other vocal styles being discussed in the Whitesnake and Winger songs (Tamplin April 2020). However, we can still hear the utilization of the flat-3 and flat-7 scale degree in the vocal melody, two very important notes in the blues and minor pentatonic scale, similar to the melodies we hear being sung in “Judgement Day” and the two Winger songs that were just discussed.

## Chapter 4, Part I: Grinding the Axe

One cannot fully discuss the music of the 1980s and its sound without mentioning and examining the guitar work of the era. The 1980s were filled with powerhouse virtuosic guitar shredders across the board. One of the most important guitar heroes to emerge in the late 1970s and change the game of guitar playing forever was Eddie Van Halen. He changed the way people played guitar, from his unique tapping style that allowed him to play faster and more notes than was ever before thought possible to the effects and sounds he was able to achieve with his guitar:

Eddie Van Halen expanded the sound possibilities and raised the level of virtuosity on his instrument more than any performer in any genre – classical, jazz, rock or country – since the diabolical nineteenth-century violinist Niccolò Paganini or his pianist counterpart Franz List. (Barnett 2017, 231-232)

Discussing Eddie’s revolutionary guitar playing in his article “California Noise,” David Waksman describes Eddie’s playing on the Van Halen track “Eruption” (1978):

Punctuated by tremolo bar-induced growls, staccato picking, and delivered with a reverb-soaked, heavy crunch of distortion, “Eruption” was designed to signify ‘state-of-the-art’ rock guitar, and it became the measure of a new model of hard rock virtuosity that exerted considerable influence throughout the next decade. (Waksman 2004, 682)

Eddie wrote the blueprint for 1980s hard rock and heavy metal “shred” guitar and every guitar player of the genre, and even some outside of the genre, tried to capture the same magic that Eddie did and do their best to imitate his signature style and sounds (Barnett 2017, 231-32). Some people may even refer to these guitar shredders of the 1980s as



“EVH disciples”: virtuosic guitarists who were greatly influenced and inspired by the playing of Van Halen.

Eddie also used some revolutionary effects in his guitar playing for that period of time in the late 1970s. His use of flanger (mixing two identical audio signals together with one signal delayed by small and gradually varying increments, usually less than 20 milliseconds) and phaser (electronic sound processor used to filter a signal by creating a series of peaks and valleys throughout the frequency spectrum) effects along with immense amounts of tape delay, plate reverb, and tape manipulation that pitched his guitars slightly out of tune left people scratching their heads trying to figure out how he was producing some of these sounds (Obrecht 2020, 52). He also revolutionized the guitar itself, especially in the rock world, with the types of electronics and pick-up specifications he used (Obrecht 2020, 49).

Another important figure of the guitar landscape in the late 1970s that revolutionized the role of the guitar and the way people approached guitar playing was Tom Scholz, who became well known for his time spent in the band Boston. As an engineer who graduated from MIT, he invented several guitar pedals and pieces of outboard guitar gear that allowed him to create sounds with the guitar that were never before achievable (Molenda 2003, 24). This is evident on the first Boston LP from 1976. On songs like “Peace of Mind” from that debut album the electric guitars are drenched in a smooth delay, especially on lead lines and during the solos (*Guitar Player* Summer 2011, 60). As I discussed earlier when examining the works of Def Leppard and their work with producer Mutt Lange, these guitar tones and effects completely revolutionized the sound of guitars and the way they could be utilized and recorded throughout the

1980s, perfect for bands like the aforementioned Def Leppard to achieve that “wall of sound” and drive the band’s big choruses hooks (Demasi 2017, 70).

Along with Scholz, Van Halen brought the guitar even more into the spotlight than it had been before even in the 1960s and 1970s with players such as Page, Hendrix, and Clapton (Barnett 2017, 232). The guitar was now like another voice in the band, very melodic and doing things musically that a singer would typically do. It could scream, it could cry, it could talk, it could laugh. In this way, the guitarists of the 1980s pushed the vocalists to have to sing more efficiently and even higher in many instances in order to keep up with what the guitar was doing musically and the melodic landscape it was covering. You can even observe in this era’s music somewhat of a competition and rivalry going on between fellow guitar players and singers to see who could play the fastest, who could have the widest vibrato, who could sing the highest. It was a fun and (mostly) friendly competition taking place within the music and the music and songs only benefited from this push towards the pinnacle of musical ability, not suffered from it.

## Chapter 4, Part II: Six Strings, Two Vocal Cords

My recital featured songs that showcased these conventions in guitar playing, such as “Poundcake” (1991) by Van Halen, “Remember My Name” (1990) by House of Lords, “Rainbow In the Rose” by Winger (1990), and “High Enough” (1990) by Damn Yankees. These songs all demonstrate 1980s hard rock and metal guitar playing conventions as well as how the guitar plays an integral part in the bigger picture of the arrangement and its interaction with the other instruments involved, especially the voice. In “Poundcake,” for example, a Makita power drill is heard in the very beginning of the song before any music actually begins. This achieves a certain resonance from the guitar in this section and during part of the solo that is extremely unique and not heard in many other hard rock songs, let alone any kind of mainstream song in the world of chart-topping music. Additionally, the vocals, originally sung by Sammy Hagar, wail and howl throughout, almost mimicking the cries and shouts that are also heard in the guitar; we see the two instruments fighting for positioning on the sonic battleground of the song, and, as a vocalist and fan of this band and their music, it could not be more exciting to listen to.

In “Remember My Name” and “Rainbow in the Rose,” we hear two songs with massive orchestration including string and, in the instance of “Rainbow...,” wind instruments. For the purposes of my recital, I have used synth sounds along with prerecorded tracks to emulate the sound of these originally recorded orchestral instruments. In this context the guitar is, at times, acting as another member of the string

section in the “orchestra.” “Remember My Name” is an epic ballad, defining of the times, with swiping sounds of violin, cello, and double bass arrangements that allow the guitar to be heard clearly and distinctly over top of them, soaring with the support and propulsion of their warm, vibrant timbre. The string sounds are especially prominent in the intro and verses with rich, full string pads being played alongside synthesizers to give the song a very ambient, dreamy, almost fantasy-like feel. The guitar plays trebly single note lead lines, utilizing natural and artificial harmonics that weave in and out of the droning string and pads. The overall timbre has some shrill qualities but works perfectly in accenting changes in the chords that the synths/strings are playing as well as adding overtones to the other string sounds that give this an even fuller and intriguing sound. The guitars, synths, and string tracks all play somewhat staccato eighth notes in the pre-chorus sections that propel the song into a big, lavish chorus full of sweeping strings pads, several electric guitars, and even the introduction of an additional acoustic guitar part which blends quite nicely with the other string and string-mimicking instruments. In an interlude between the first chorus and second verse we can hear more string pads being played and more single note lead lines in the guitar with overtone harmonics. In this instance, the guitar is somewhat mimicking what the string pads are playing and an additional clean/acoustic-sounding guitar can be heard playing eighth-note strums and providing an additional texture of brightness and a percussiveness in an otherwise padded droning section. During the guitar solo, the pads of strings and synths prop up the guitar lines, giving it the feeling of almost soaring over top everything else as the high-fretted notes cut through the dense textures underneath.

“Rainbow in the Rose” also features string sounds as well as a horn section, with brass instruments such as trumpet and flute prominent, especially in the outro of the song. Strings tracks and synths accent a powerful intro section that features a dramatic guitar solo, originally performed by Reb Beach. Staccato string/synth stabs (single staccato notes or chords adding dramatic punctuation) are heard in the bridge of the song along with horn tracks playing the same rhythmic stabs that lead into the main solo section. These staccato stabs continue to occur more subtly along with heavy distorted guitars during the guitar solo. A solo reminiscent of an Arabian melody on a violin or other bowed stringed instrument is featured here on guitar. This is due to the fact that the scale being used for this solo is the Arabic guitar scale, also known as the Phrygian modal scale (Guitar Command 2016). This scale has the characteristic semitone interval between the one and flat-two scale degrees, along with a flat-six but an unaltered seventh scale degree, giving this grouping of notes a rather exotic, Middle Eastern flare (Guitar Command 2016). One could easily imagine a vocalist in the Hindi or even Islamic tradition melismatically singing the melody that the guitarist plays when listening to this solo. Again, it is the guitar’s melodic behavior, acting as voice and therefore providing another instrument that the listener can sing along to that makes the 1980s guitar style exceptionally unique and special. The outro contains lush string and brass horn pads as well as secondary melody lines being played on horn pads and also a flute pad melody line that occurs near the ends of phrases before they repeat. This all accompanies another guitar solo, played by both guitarists, trading off phrases of equal duration, this time utilizing variations of minor and major pentatonic scales in the keys of A minor and E minor.

“High Enough” by Damn Yankees once again displays rich string pads and prerecorded orchestration, this time with an introduction and outro played completely by strings, by themselves. In these sections, a sweeping melody in the key of A (intro) and D (outro) is played via tracks of string sounds, triggered by the drummer with a drum pad. In the case of the intro, these string sounds lead into the start of the song with main instrumentation and a solo vocal and an acoustic twelve-string guitar, both performed by myself, playing an Asus2 chord along with the first line of the verse to kick things off. The string tracks and pads enter once again in the second verse, playing mainly whole notes under the acoustic guitars, while the vocals add a second voice, singing in two-part harmony, stacked mainly in thirds, as they will continue to be for most of the song. Melody lines in the strings can be heard in the pre-choruses and choruses supporting distorted diamonds (sustained notes and/or chords) played on electric guitar by two guitar players while the chorus vocals are now sung in three-part harmony with the addition of yet another, even higher, voice part. Subtle sixteenth note phrases are introduced and can be heard in the string tracks during the third verse while the two-part harmony/duet in the lead vocal persists. Sixteenth notes are also featured in the string sounds during the bridge and are doubled by an electric guitar playing the same single-note line. Also in this section, “oh’s” are sung by the background vocals in three-part harmony and outlining the root, third, and fifth of the instrumental harmony while additionally supporting an independently sung lead vocal line for the duration of this section. Much like the songs previously discussed in the section, the string parts support a soaring guitar solo during the solo section. Here, the piece modulates from Bm in the previous section to E for the

solo. The strings can be heard being doubled by a distorted rhythm guitar as well during this time.

## Conclusion

As I have related in this paper, the hard rock and metal styles are not comprised of one element or characteristic that defines them, or even a few. The rock music that emerged from the 1980s and topped the charts during this time is a complex structure made up of several different colors, textures, and interplay and complementation by and between several different instruments. While the voice and guitar are seemingly the two most important elements of this musical style, we cannot forget the significance of the distinct syncopated rhythms provided by the great rock and roll drummers such as John Bonham and Alex Van Halen, or the immense wall-of-sound productions pioneered by Phil Spector and the Beatles which was refined and perfected by Mutt Lange in the 1980s (Kubernik 2002, 14). All of these elements in conjunction with one another is what gives an audience the 1980s hard rock and heavy metal musical experience. Without any one of these elements the foundation of the genre is lost. The music may be “eighties” or rock or metal, but without the synthesis of features just mentioned it is not the genre that took an entire decade by storm, defining an entire generation of music, musicians, and fans.

From rock’s humble beginnings in the 1960s and 1970s to introduction of new technology and innovative playing styles, we can observe the trajectory and evolution of this genre into what it became during its pinnacle years. This style of music would define and would be defined by amazing, one-of-a-kind vocalists such as Robert Plant, Brad Delp, Steve Perry, David Coverdale, and Sammy Hagar. This music would also come to be defined by some of the greatest guitar players to ever live, not to mention a musician



from a family of Dutch immigrants in Pasadena that would go on to change the way people use and play guitar as well as play and think about music forever: Eddie Van Halen.

A great way to analyze this style of music is approaching it with the mindset of “you have to look back to move forward.” Although this genre of music (rock in general seems to be dying out these days) is not prominent any longer or in the forefront of pop culture like it once was three or four decades ago, it is still an extremely influential and important genre to reflect on and be aware of if nothing else. The level of musicianship paired with creativity is unmatched from the artists of the 1970s and especially the 1980s. Virtuosity went hand in hand with songwriting for so many great musicians of this era. The vocalists had some of the best pure vocal tones along with outstanding agility and diversity in their voices. They could sing all the licks and runs at will and hit all the high notes, but they did it selectively and at their own discretion when they felt the music called for it, not just to serve themselves and their egos (although sometimes they did do those things as well). Guitar players of this day possessed all the virtuosity in the world and could play a multitude of notes per second, but they knew when to take a step back and play something soulful and melodic. Producers were getting to the point with recording capabilities that they could throw everything they wanted plus the kitchen sink in a song if they wanted to, but they were also skilled enough and wise enough to understand what to put in and what to leave in order to build a truly special and memorable song.

It is this wisdom that many of the members of this genre and era possess that I believe many musicians are lacking today. A lot can be gleaned from musicians of the

1980s and especially ones of the hard rock and metal style. I intend to establish some of the teachings of this genre in terms of its style and technical attributes, especially in terms of the voice and vocal performance, through my recital and subsequent demonstration of 1980s rock vocal performance conventions. It was my goal to deliver to the audience the attitude this type of singer possesses; flashy at times but simultaneously understated and workman-like, while always displaying a fair amount of charisma. Additionally, I want to provide examples of accurate, genre-appropriate performances in terms of tone, texture, and inflection in the voice. I conveyed these elements through proper low breathing, utilizing the diaphragm and having exceptional control over the abdominal and inner-ribcage (intercostal) muscles in order to provide and sustain proper breath support for the high range and duration of notes as well as prolonged high register singing. Furthermore, it is my goal to communicate the sound of clear belting and healthy chest resonance, properly supported without any neck, jaw or tongue tension. Using the tongue properly to shape vowels and syllables while singing high in the vocal register is key. Keeping a slightly raised soft palate and somewhat rounded and open vocal tract is also essential as the foundation for shaping all vowels and syllables in this often demanding singing style.

Demonstrating the difference between chest, mixed voice, and pharyngeal reinforced falsetto will also be important in and key aspects of my performance through the use of heavy belting in chest voice, brighter, more focused singing in a mixed register, as well as high, strident, and somewhat distorted notes on display in my pharyngeal falsetto vocal cord coordination. Never letting the sound fall back too far into the throat and always keeping the resonance relatively forward and towards the mask of the vocal tract is also essential to this 1980s hard rock sound and something I hope to

accurately exhibit through the vocal performance of my recital. Understanding how and when to use glottal compression and distortion to alter the vocal tone for emotional or dramatic effect is crucial for longevity of the voice in an extended set and especially singing night after night. Ultimately, it is this wisdom of a somewhat forgotten style of music and a generation of audience members and musicians alike that I hope to impart on my audience both through this discussion and analysis and my performance recital in tandem with one another.

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