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Romanticism Redux: The Triumph of the Allman Brothers Band

The band just let itself go wherever the music would take us.
Gregg Allman

Surveying Romanticism's impact on the aesthetics of music, Andrew Bowie identifies a perennial challenge facing musicians who aim to infuse their music with the values of Romanticism: it is the problem of "how to maintain forms of order which allow music to communicate with a wider public without the music then becoming merely conventional and repetitive" (Bowie 2009, p. 254). A focus on musical organization is the norm for musicology, yet that focus is largely absent from scholarship that relates Romanticism to rock music. Generally, these studies say little about musical organization, and Romanticism is more or less equated with typical thematic material, a Dionysian outlook, and an investment in the display of subcultural identity.[1] Little is said about the *music* beyond the hoary question of how it borrows from African and African-American sources.[2] In contrast, my goal is to locate Romanticism's presence in *musical form* in the rock era. Since the musical forms that shape most rock music *are* generally conventional and repetitive, Bowie's caution about the challenge facing Romanticism in music is especially relevant here. I agree that a distinctively *musical* instantiation of Romantic values is uncommon in mainstream rock music, and it is all but absent from the music of many rock musicians identified with Romanticism. Therefore, from a musical perspective, it makes little sense to "read rock and roll through the lens of Romanticism" (Meisel 1999, p. 8).[3] However, Ro-

[1] See, for example, the essays assembled in Rovira (2018b).
[2] Two books are paradigmatic in their concentration on these sources, and with their treatment of Romanticism as, primarily, a literary phenomenon: Pattison (1987) and Meisel (1999). I embrace Adorno's (1999, p. 106) warning that we misunderstand musical Romanticism if we link it too closely to literature and painting. A more useful approach treats it as a movement organized by its opposition to capitalism (e.g., Rovira 2018a).
[3] Although this approach affords a certain amount of fun, a strong challenge to it in relation to rock is Gracyk (1996, chap. 7).

manticism's limitations as a general account of rock music does not mean that Romanticism is absent from all of it. In other words, although it is a mistake to over-generalize and to think Romanticism informs all or even most rock music, it is also a mistake to think that it does not inform any of it.[4] The goal of this essay is to show that, musically, one of the neglected paradigms of Romanticism in rock music is the Allman Brothers Band.[5]

I. Background on Romanticism and Art

We might, with G.W.F. Hegel and Theodor Adorno, approach Romanticism as a specific stage in the larger trajectory of art and culture– one which, if still at work in the twenty-first century, is present in much the way that a mummified Egyptian pharaoh is present in our day, as an ossified relic. On the assumption that art history *has* a trajectory, the presence of Romanticism in rock music and its attendant culture is merely, as Adorno warns, a pretense of art and progressive values, where in truth it can only be repackaging of "the dregs of musical history" (Adorno 1976, p. 29). Against this teleological model of art history, I reject any commitment to an overarching historical narrative that divides the past into successive phases of progressive development. Instead, cultural histories are chronologies of events, and music history chronicles an accumulation of innovations and influences: some are retained, some are modified, some are discarded. In the chronological model, there was nothing inevitable about the appearance of Romanticism in European cultures. Furthermore, it remains an open question whether or to what degree Romanticism remains an important aspect of contemporary musical culture. This question cannot be answered by gazing into a philosophical crystal ball. It can only be answered by looking at material facts, with philosophers helping to clarify which facts are most salient.

[4] The value of approaching Romanticism in relation to the restricted topic of expression of emotion is exemplified by Robinson (2005). Yet I would not go so far as Keightley (2001) in saying that rock can be understood as a battle between two competing approaches to artistic authenticity, Romanticism and modernism.

[5] My case study focuses on the period from their founding in early 1969 until the release of the 1975 album *Win, Lose, or Draw*. Unhappily, although a great deal of good music followed their 1979 reunion, their remaining years display various degrees of capitulation to the standard practices of the music industry. Furthermore, I should be clear that I am not claiming that ABB is a unique case of Romanticism in rock. A strong case can be made for the Grateful Dead, and the beginnings of such an argument appears in Silverman (2010, pp. 220-5) and Zimmerman (2008, ch. 4). My analysis of Romanticism might extend to the Dead's late 1960s excursions into "Dark Star" and "The Other One"; see the analyses of their improvisations on these pieces in Malvinni (2013). Cf. Maurizi (2019, pp. 134-8) on early Pink Floyd.

Rejection of a teleological reading of cultural history is nonetheless compatible with valuing Hegel's lectures on art as a resource on key aspects of Romanticism. After all, he was a nearer observer to its flowering than we are. If we want a compressed description of the core of Romanticism, we can do far worse than adopt Hegel's view that it emerges when "classical" form dissolves and "the spiritual element steps forth as spiritual."[6] This transition is most notable in music, where the material means of performance are less an object of audience focus than are the abstract musical forms: with music, "sound, so to speak, liberates the ideal content from its immersion in matter." This idealization of the sensuous places music at "the centre of the romantic arts," permitting it to express, in tones, the "whole gamut of feelings and passions" (Hegel 1997, p. 125). In another sets of notes from his lectures on art, Hegel is reported as saying that music is "the art of deepest feelings," for it seems to emanate from within the listener and so "lays claim to ultimate inwardness."[7] This last insight has been reiterated so many times by so many writers that we can adopt it as central to Romanticism without also embracing either Hegel's teleological model of three great eras of art or his conclusion that we are now at the end of art's historical journey. The latter has the unfortunate implication that vestiges of Romanticism in popular music have outlived their time, which implies that we should not find these traces to be meritorious or artistically interesting.

Consequently, a sympathetic approach to Romanticism in popular music will draw on other sources in the early philosophical accounts of Romanticism in music. So let us examine one of Hegel's key sources on music and Romanticism, F.W.J. Schelling's account of Romantic genius. As Adorno remarks, Hegel's criticism of Romanticism is self-directed: he "bears the Romantic consciousness" because it has entered his work through the influence of Schelling (Adorno 1999, p. 110). Unlike Hegel, Schelling does not associate Romanticism with the end of art, so he serves as an antidote to the idea that Romanticism in twentieth and twenty-first century music is an act of necromancy rather than the continuation of a living tradition.

[6] This paraphrase of Hegel is from Guyer (2014, pp. 130-1). While I recommend Guyer's history, those interested in a primary source will find the core ideas of Hegel's lectures on philosophy of art excerpted in Hegel (1997). Those who want a clear overview of Romantiicsm and music in the nineteenth century should consult Pederson (2016).

[7] Hegel (2014, p. 401). See also Guyer (2014, p. 138). Conjoined to his claims about musical expression, Hegel's discussion of our tendency to abstract from the material source of the music has strong affinities with Scruton's view that music's expressive power is due to the way that musical sounds cease to be material sounds for the attuned listener (1997, pp. 93, 344).

Where Hegel's philosophy of art concentrates on the interplay of the sensuous and the ideal, Schelling's central insight is that all successful art proceeds from, and unifies, tensions that otherwise hold between the realms of conscious and unconscious thought (Schelling 1989, p. 222).[8] In this respect, Schelling gives a reinterpretation to the familiar view that music is the art of emotion par excellence. Romanticism reformulated the priority of expression as a reflection of self-expression, so that a skillful representation of emotion is replaced with personal externalization of the artist's own emotions and inner life. More urgently, it was connected to a new interest in art as the externalization of unconscious processes, and this connection is the cornerstone of Schelling's philosophy of art.[9] Great art "is consciously brought about; and [as a] product of nature, … unconsciously brought about" (as quoted in Guyer 2014, p. 45).[10] The conscious impulse is normally realized in relation to mimetic intentions, but it is the spontaneous unconscious force which gives music its "metaphysical significance."[11] We need not pursue the details, but Schelling holds that the arts, especially music, are thereby "an emanation of the absolute" (Schelling 1989, p. 19). However, Schelling's thesis about the artistic process–that the absolute cannot be introduced through a conscious, conceptually-determinate process and that it therefore depends on a contribution of unconscious sources–does not mean that the artist simply operates on autopilot or that the musician plays by virtue of ingrained motor reflexes. It means that the artist must not predetermine the content and form of the artwork. Instead, a good artist (or, in the language of that time, the "genius") consciously monitors and directs material that emerges from the unconscious. To put it crudely, the conscious mind of the artist can tidy up the messy outpourings of the unconscious, aiming for an artistic presentation that eliminates the originating inner tensions. But the artist can also allow the audience a glimpse of the truth of the artistic process, which is that the artwork is not really a harmonious or perfect thing.[12] In the former case, Schelling proposes, we have beautiful art, In the latter case, we have sublime art, or at the very least an art in which wild elements are neither fully constrained nor integrated. And the latter case is the norm for Romantic art.[13]

[8] Although I cannot pursue it in this context, Schelling's philosophy of music is also noteworthy for his strong interest in rhythm as the foundation of all music.
[9] A concise introduction to this development and its influence on Schelling is Bonds (2020, pp. 38-43).
[10] I recommend Guyer's explanation of Schelling on genius. I suspect that Schelling is in the background of Adorno's remark that "Artworks are images as *apparition*, as appearance, and not as a copy" (Adorno 2013, p. 116).
[11] See Bonds (1997, pp. 404-5).
[12] See Guyer (2014, p. 48).
[13] For a brief introduction on this point and the implication that it prohibited the development of a unified "Romantic style," see Vaughan (1978, pp. 11-7).

To extrapolate from Schelling, it seems to follow that a musical *performance* is not Romantic if it merely (mechanically?) instantiates a musical composition. Ironically, Schelling did not draw this conclusion. As with so many of the Romantic idealists, he focused on the *composer* as the locus of any genius that made its way into music. However, I view performers as artists in their own right, and if we add that premise to Shelling's philosophy of music, we can draw the inference that there is no genuine artistry in a musician's attempt to re-create musical forms by faithfully executing the piece as presented in a musical score, nor (given that scores lack the same authority in popular music) by closely replicating the arrangements of other musicians. Schelling's model invites the conclusion there is no point in performing music if the performer is simply trying to channel someone else's vision of the music. A technically polished performance is not great art if it lacks spontaneity.[14] The aim of all artistic activity is to embark consciously on the execution of some plan or idea *as a means* of allowing unconscious thought to emerge and permeate the object generated for the audience, viewer, or reader. And what is generated for a musical audience is, paradigmatically, a musical performance. Consequently, the activity of performing a particular piece of music is pointless or trivial if the performance is not open to an eruption of unconscious interventions that will be shaped and controlled either more or less harmoniously for the audience. In permitting the unconscious to enter as a major contributor to the artistic process, artists offer the audience a glimpse of "the infinity of the world" that is ordinarily hidden from us.[15] The result is beauty comingled with the sublime.

I have summarized Schelling's description of Romantic artistry and its implications for performance because this way of understanding the contrast between beauty and sublimity can illuminate contrasting approaches to what is valuable in musical performance. It suggests that *every* musical performance should be an occasion for musical spontaneity, a goal suppressed when our dominant performance practices pursue a polished, harmonious, and notationally "correct" performance. Performance practice must not be overlooked as the site where music satisfies Adorno's description of Romantic music as a project in which "inherited formal conventions" give way to "forms [that are] partly constituted in the course of a conflict with an untrammeled subjectivity" (Adorno 1999, p. 110).

[14] See Hammermeister (2002, p. 71).
[15] This paraphrase of Schelling is from Hammermeister (2002, pp. 74-5). For those interested in more on Schelling, I recommend the entirety of Hammermeister (2002, chap. 4).

These points provide a context for appreciating the musical arrangements and the performance practices of the Allman Brothers Band (henceforth ABB). However, the music is intertwined with thematic concerns that often serve as markers of Romanticism, and the next section offers a sketch of those elements of their musical project.

II. Interlude: Thematic Affinities and Multiple Criteria

Before examining the strictly musical features that align ABB with Romanticism, let us survey other relevant features of ABB that reflect a Romantic aesthetic. Christopher Partridge is one of the very few scholars to provide an informed, sympathetic, and detailed case that Romanticism is an important *positive* influence on rock music. Unfortunately, his analysis is based on a limited number of broad criteria. As is typical, he emphasizes themes in song lyrics and the genre's general capacity to "create its own world … other than the everyday" (Partridge 2014, p. 118). I think this approach is inconclusive. Under these criteria, either all music is Romantic (which is basically Hegel's view) or it becomes Romantic through any association with themes relating to pantheism, paganism, or nostalgia for an agrarian past.[16] Partridge says little about musical forms or performance practices. For example, he classifies John Zorn's free jazz/grindcore music with the band Naked City as Romantic because of non-musical influences, with no attempt to show that the *music* reflects those influences. So what of Zorn's explicitly Jewish side, in the Masada project, where different influences are in play? Is Zorn a Romantic on Wednesday night, playing a gig with Naked City, and not a Romantic on Thursday night, performing with the Masada Quartet?

To sharpen my point, let us consider two contrasting examples. Is John Coltrane a Romantic? Would it be because his music is intended to be a spiritual exploration for both artist and audience?[17] That seems insufficient: J.S. Bach had parallel aims, but is not a Romantic. Similarly, we do not associate a Hindi musician such as Ravi Shankar with Romanticism, no matter how seriously we take the spiritual side of his music. And that

[16] Partridge's discussion of the relative autonomy of music seems to endorse the Hegelian view (2014, p. 119), but he obscures this line of thought by frequently quoting song lyrics. As E.T.A. Hoffman (1917) understood, lyrics and voices have a tendency to undercut musical autonomy. Hence, my emphasis on instrumental music in the next section, which is more in keeping with the tenets of Romanticism.

[17] Coltrane's spiritual quest is detailed by Howison (2012, pp. 179-80), who warns that the labels of "mysticism" and "Romanticism" fail to identify the specificity of Coltrane's message.

is because, philosophically and musically, his spirituality is rooted in a different, non-European tradition. By extension, because George Harrison's relationship to Hindi music and spirituality is (largely) through Shankar, there is no reason to think that Harrison belongs in a discussion of Romanticism in popular music.[18] We need a more robust characterization of Romanticism before we identify one musician, or one thread of a musician's career, as a continuation of the Romantic movement.

The limitations that I find in Partridge's work confirm my doubts that analysis of lyrics or that appeal to a musician's awareness of the right philosophical heritage are sufficient to identify a rock musician as a Romantic. My point of difference with Partridge and most other writers is that I think we need more specificity about the *role* of distinctive markers of Romanticism than has so far been advanced in any discussion of Romanticism in popular music. Consequently, I am going to amend the standard approach.

My approach is complex but not original. As with Hegel, early writers who grappled with the definition of Romanticism allowed that it signaled an opposition to classicism. However, many other early writers warned that there is no set of necessary and sufficient conditions that constitute an essence of Romanticism, or which can be used to sort poems, music compositions, and other artworks into distinct groups of Romantic and non-Romantic art.[19] Artists are members of the Romantic movement by virtue of relationships of influence and family resemblance.[20] Consequently, we should approach key criteria for Romanticism as coalescing into a historically-assembled cluster concept, where the presence of a notable subset of an otherwise disparate group of relevant features must be present in order to satisfy the "membership" criteria.[21] However, none of the criteria are necessary for satisfying the concept, and none of them are individually sufficient. In the case of Romantic artists and artworks, the relevant cluster concept involves a series of contrasts that were widely recognized in the heyday of the movement. As Adorno observes, Classicism and Romanticism remain "mutually intertwined" (Adorno 1999, p. 111). Consequently, the contrasts are not simple oppositions, but rather

[18] This point about Harrison is made against Partridge (2014, p. 41).
[19] Ferber (2010, chap. 1). See also Ferber (2005, pp. 5-8). Unfortunately, Ferber all but ignores music as Romantic art, and what is there should be approached with caution.
[20] For those who do not know the philosophical idea of family resemblance, its application to Romanticism is explained by Ferber (2005, p. 6).
[21] Consequently, I am reluctant to bring the bands XTC and Sister Sledge into the orbit of Romanticism based on one album and one song, respectively, as Partridge does. For those who desire more background on cluster concepts, see Gaut (2000).

two ends of a continuum, and so different works may exemplify any of the criteria in different degrees. In the following list, the first item in each pair is aligned with the classical or neoclassical aesthetics and the second is aligned with Romanticism:[22]

– Aims to satisfy universal standards of taste – Satisfies historically localized standards of taste

– Restrained or clearly organized – Wild, unbalanced, excessive, or fragmented

– Composed – Spontaneous/Improvised

– Constrained by established artistic patterns and forms – Novelty in formal design

– Rule-bound – Rule-breaking

– Ideologically aligned with dominant social formations – Resistive of prevailing social norms

– Traditional subject matter: generally religious or historical – Autobiographical and confessional

– Literary and religious classics serve as source material – Folk sources as source material

– Conceptually determinate subject matter – Shows or gestures toward what is unsayable

– Formal religion and dogma as of spiritual comfort and insight – Nature as a source of these

– Orientation toward empirical phenomena (e.g., realism) – Flight from the empirically real via imagination and dreams[23]

Looking back to Schelling, most of these contrasts can be viewed as manifestations of his basic contrast between beautiful art and sublime art, which is to say, between expressive art in which artistry smooths out fundamental psychic tensions and art where those tensions make their presence known.

In short, self-revelatory emotional expression is insufficient, *today*, for Romanticism in art.[24] In order to make the case that any contemporary artist or cultural phenomenon is Romantic, a significant subset of the indicators in the list should be consistently present in a high degree. For, otherwise, we may instead have an artist who is merely putting on a temporary Romantic personae–as happens on various occasions with non-

[22] This list is drawn from my own reading of key source texts, but it also reflects elements of Honour (2008, pp. 24-5), Ferber (2005, pp. 6-7), Vaughan (1978), and Bowie (2009, p. 245). Because it seems to play no role in the case of ABB, I ignore the abandonment of universalism in favor of a spirit of nationalism found in the work of many Romantics. On this tendency, see Leerssen (2014).

[23] This final point is emphasized by Kravitt (1992).

[24] This narrower offshoot of Romanticism is the topic of Robinson (2005).

Romantic, postmodern performers such as David Bowie. My next step, therefore, is to give a short defense of the proposal that ABB strongly satisfies the cluster concept model of Romanticism.

Let us dispense quickly with one of the most obvious echoes of Romanticism in ABB, which is that of the impoverished artist dying young, before their genius is appreciated. All but the most casual observer will know that two of the founding members of ABB died from injuries received in two traffic accidents–guitarist Duane Allman (October 1971) and bassist Raymond "Berry" Oakley (November 1972)–just as ABB was on the cusp of popular and critical success. We are reminded of the early deaths of the poets Chatterton, Keats, Shelley, and Byron. With the latter pair, at least, their deaths were indirectly due to their rejection of social conventions and their reckless willingness to assume risk. The same can be said of Allman and Oakley. The point of connection is not the time or circumstances of their deaths, but rather that such deaths are a symptom of a more generalized pattern of unconventional attitudes and behaviors. Coupled with other criteria in the Romantic cluster, we have an indicator of Romanticism (and not merely, say, a reflection of class status and oppressive social circumstances).

The more telling connection, related to a general scorn for prevailing social norms, is that ABB was uncompromising in their art and were willing to live in relative poverty rather than conform to the pressures of the musical industry. They were repeatedly advised to relocate from rural Georgia to one of the country's coastal music hubs, where they would have better access to industry connections. They refused out of preference for the freedom to develop their music privately, collectively, and on their own schedule. They were fully aware that their refusal to make musical concessions for the marketplace was undercutting the funds they needed to continue to work together.[25] After his death, Duane Allman's mother recalled his explicit fear that the popularity of a hit record would threaten his musical independence. Geraldine Allman quoted him as saying, "I never want a hit record. I do not want that wherever I go, I have to play the same song. I want to do whatever I want to do; I want to be free" (Nolan 1976, p. 7). [26] In retrospect, the question is how a desire for both personal and musical freedom informs their musical structures–the topic I address in the next section of his essay.

[25] See Betts, quoted in Paul (2014, p. 95).

[26] It is noteworthy that over the course of any six months, ABB performances would typically repeat the same songs in the same order; they *did* play the same few songs almost every night, but they did so in the absence of having to do so to meet fan expectations.

The founding members of ABB had varying levels of education, and I would be surprised to learn that any member of the band ever consulted William Wordsworth for advice. However, their decision to locate in Macon, Georgia, will remind those well-versed in Romanticism of Wordsworth's association with the Lake District, as well as his conviction that "low and rustic life" and proximity to "beautiful and permanent forms of nature" constitute "a better soil" to nourish the soul and the emotions–better, that is, than the bustling and booming cities (Wordsworth 2013, p. 97). And ABB's early collective allegiance to rural life informs any number of song lyrics, including their first distinctive achievement, "Dreams," in which the protagonist retreats "up on the mountain" as a refuge from the blues of modern life.[27] In "Ain't Wastin' Time No More," the remedy for despair is a Whitmanesque "look up at the stars above." The same album, *Eat a Peach*, continues the theme in a Betts song recorded before Duane Allman's death. "Blue Sky" is a country-tinged ode to the rustic life, where happiness is epitomized by blues skies and a walk along the river. Fans who followed their career could hardly miss the connection to the striking photograph inside the gatefold sleeve of their debut record: the band members, naked, immerse themselves in a river, an image of the band as both natural and in touch with nature.

Most telling, in my view, is the song they selected for as the melodic basis of some their lengthiest and most compelling improvisations. Known as "Mountain Jam" in their collective improvisations, the musical core is the quasi-folk song "There Is a Mountain," written by Scottish singer Donovan Leitch. A concert recording dominates two sides of vinyl of their two-record release *Eat a Peach* (1972). It runs for more than thirty minutes–and even longer in the live performance recorded in Cincinnati on April 11, 1970. Although ABB always performed it as an instrumental, it is noteworthy that they selected a song whose words treat nature as the focal point of spiritual reflection.

To the above, add the fact that the members of ABB consciously understood their musical performances as a spiritual endeavor. Betts once said that their performance "philosophy" was "keeping music honest and fun and trying to make it a transcendental experience for the audience" (Paul 2014, p. 123). ABB drummer Jaimoe Johanson reported having just such an experience during successful performances: "I was so at peace with what I was playing, my spirit left my body, right on stage. This is a fact" (No-

[27] Much like W.B. Yeats composing ""The Lake Isle of Innisfree" while homesick in London, Gregg Allman wrote "Dreams" while struggling to succeed in the music business in Southern California.

lan 1976, p. 47). But the ABB community was not restricted to the band members: their "family" extended to their supporting crew, too. Hence, the recollections of crew members can be as insightful about their intentions as reports from the band members. One of them, Red Dog Campbell, reports that Duane Allman came to worry about his reliance on narcotics and talked, shortly before his death, of the need to ween himself from heroin in order to concentrate on the music: "This is a religion" (Paul 2014, p. 155). Red Dog, whose financial contributions did much to keep the band solvent in their first year, amplified this report with his own general assessment of the band's music making and communal process: "The combination of all this was religious–very spiritual and very deep" (Paul 2014, p. 44).

Another obvious connection to Romanticism is a preference for, or rootedness in, "folk" sources–a term that must always be applied with caution.[28] I have already noted their use of the "folk" song "There is a Mountain," but even more telling is that the "Mountain Jam" incorporated other material, too, as heard to good effect in the version released on *Eat a Peach* (recorded 1971, released 1972), which includes the traditional Southern hymn "Will the Circle be Unbroken." However, the more significant source for much of their music is African-American blues music (where, it is interesting to note, all of their sources were working commercial musicians). There is a grain of truth in Robert Pattison's complaint that "rock's vulgar transformation of the blues" is the foundation for rock's immersion in Romanticism (Pattison 1987, p. 60). Yet, with Partridge, Pattison says very little about the music. In the case of ABB, the lyrics of the blues songs they covered are taken over almost intact from recordings, but the music is almost always given a radical makeover. As documented by Christopher Reali (2018), ABB eschewed standard blues forms. Where standard blues changes involve a strophic repetition of a fixed chord progression, ABB altered the familiar form into non-standard, asymmetrical vehicles for improvisation.[29] Even when they reference feeling the blues in their own lyrics, as in "Dreams," the song is not a standard blues. Gregg Allman's compositions generally reference and recall the basic I–IV–V blues progression, but the band always rearranged them into non-standard variants and generally introduced contrasting material to break up the strophic form.[30] (By way of contrast, Schubert's *Lieder* are rigidly mechanical compared to the average ABB song.) In its prime, ABB was never content to play standardized musical forms, a point of emphasis in my next section.

[28] See Gelbart (2007).
[29] Reali notes that they reworked Muddy Waters' "Trouble No More" into a 15-bar blues by introducing a metrical irregularity (2018, p. 108).
[30] See Reali (2018, pp. 111-2).

Finally, the supernatural is a standard theme in Romanticism, especially in relation to an awareness of mortality. This topic is occasionally explicit in ABB lyrics, and comes out most strongly in "Melissa" and then in songs composed after Duane Allman's death, especially Gregg Allman's "Ain't Wastin' Time No More." (The opening word, "crossroads," invokes the Robert Johnson song and the related legend of dealing with the devil at the crossroads.) Famously, some members of ABB used Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon as a location for practicing and composing music, and the instrumental "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed" references a grave marker in that cemetery. The same appears to have been the case with "Little Martha," Duane Allman's only solo composition.[31]

Unfortunately, most of the foregoing is independent of whether there are criteria for identifying Romanticism in *music*, that is, whether there are characteristics (rather than necessary conditions) associated with musical style embodying the aesthetics of Romanticism. For example, I think it would be a category mistake to label blues legends Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters as "Romantic" popular musicians,[32] yet most of the criteria that I have just aligned with ABB are satisfied by many of their compositions. My next goal, therefore, is to highlight distinctive features of their *music* that supplement the *thematic* criteria that are commonly used to align Romanticism with specific rock genres, much less the general artistic values of "distinction, individualism and genius [and] the need to create lasting artworks" (Atherton 2010, p. 431 n16) linking progressive rock with European Romanticism.[33] I would be surprised to learn that Johnson and Waters were looking to "create lasting artworks," but, otherwise, we certainly praise them for their distinction, individualism, and genius. Yet, again, that is insufficient for classifying them as Romantic artists. Adorno observes that "romanticism imagined that through reflection and thematic content it could grasp art's ether" (Adorno 2013, p. 115). However, I do not propose that the requisite difference between ABB and blues musicians resides in self-reflection on

[31] In this case, the tombstone is that of Martha Ellis, who died at twelve. See Paul (2014, pp. 145-6).

[32] In Johnson's case, we would begin by emphasizing "Cross Road Blues" and the two final verses of "Hellhound on my Trail." With Waters, we might begin with "My Home is in the Delta" and "Gypsy Woman."

[33] Reali observes that, in many important respects, ABB should be considered a progressive rock band (2018, pp. 106, 118-9), traces of which continue to appear after their peak period, as when the transitional passage the begins four and half minutes into "Pegasus" (on Enlightened Rouges, 1979) sounds surprising like early Yes, followed by a new rhythmic figure that sounds like classic Santana. However, in their early years the audience and the band routinely fell back on the term "jazz" to describe the non-formulaic aspects of their arrangements and performances (Reali 2018, pp. 114-5).

art-making or in self-conscious identification with the project or heritage of Romanticism. It must be possible for musicians to participate in a larger cultural movement without conscious reflection or a conscious intention to do so. (Otherwise, new cultural movements would be almost impossible to launch.) We need additional evidence, which, added to the various thematic and artistic properties, will give us a reason to align ABB with Romanticism. For this purpose, we must attend more closely to their music, especially their music in live performance.

III. The Music: Improvisation and Musical Fantasy

In Section I, I noted that early Romantic aesthetics emphasizes the composer's genius while underestimating the creative contribution of performers. This lapse is also, I suggest, one of the great failings of the discussions of music in Schelling and Hegel, as well as of Adorno's dismissal of popular music or, in the lingo of his formative years, "jazz." Ironically, the term "jazz" was used routinely by members of ABB and rock critics to describe the instrumental excursions and the non-standard exploratory playing of ABB. Within popular culture of that period, there were few other ways to talk about these things in the context of American vernacular music. Furthermore, their affinities with progressive rock were overlooked due to their obvious debt to the blues. Yet it is undeniable that the founding musicians of ABB took direct inspiration from jazz practice and specific records they studied. Jaimoe reported that Duane Allman "listened to Miles [Davis] and [John] Coltrane" before the band was formed, and "His two favorite songs were Coltrane's version of 'My Favorite Things' and Mile's [sic] 'All Blues.' Those two songs were the source of a lot of our modal jamming" (Paul 2014, p. 61). Betts says that "Jessica" was guided by a conscious decision to emulate Django Reinhardt, using "just two finger on my fretting hand" (Paul 2014, p. 202).[34] Collectively, ABB existed as a platform for improvisational performance, as summarized by drummer C.H. "Butch" Trucks: "It was just magic. It's always been that the greatest music we played was from out of nowhere, that it wasn't practiced, planned, or discussed" (Paul 2014, p. 53).

[34] Keeping in mind that founding members of ABB remained in the band in all its incarnations, it is interesting to note that jazz improvisation inspired the band up until and including it final lineup. Guitarist Warren Haynes described their late-period performances as similar to "the Miles Davis Quintet with Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Toney Williams, and Ron Carter," where a player solos and "as soon as they take a breath, someone plays something really cool in the hole and that changes everything. The next thing that came from the soloist would be based upon what that person has played in the pause. It wouldn't be preconceived." Quoted in Paul (2014, p. 364).

ABB's commitment to musical spontaneity is significant in three distinct ways. On the simplest level, the "jazz" element can be read as an externalization of their personal hostility to the "pop" machine that had suppressed their creativity in pre-ABB work. Second, the *manner* in which they integrated jazz into their stew of influences is their most tangible echo of Romanticism's musical big bang. Third, their performance dynamic models a communal alternative to cultural uniformity. I concentrate on the second of these points in the remainder of this section, and then expand on the third point in my closing section.

The fundamental thing to notice about ABB is that their musicianship should not be reduced to the improvisational prowess of the front-line players: guitarists Allman and Betts and bass guitarist Oakley (and, after Duane Allman's and Oakley's deaths, pianist Chuck Leavell, Lamar Williams, and Betts). The significant point, as Reali observes, is that *every* member engaged in improvisational interplay with the rest: "Each instrumentalist, and Duane, Betts, and Oakley in particular, was an accomplished soloist, capable of shaping the direction of an extended jam" (Reali 2018, p. 115). Offstage, in private, this collective "shaping" process generated the complex, asymmetrical arrangements of the basic repertoire that served as their "standards" for the live improvisations. ABB jammed together incessantly, collectively developing multi-part arrangements to augment familiar song forms. Consequently, ABB was unusual (for a rock band) for composing and performing a repertoire of non-standard instrumental compositions. At least one instrumental appears on each of their albums in the time period discussed here: "Don't Want You No More," "Hot 'Lanta," "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed," "Mountain Jam," "Les Brers in A Minor," "Jessica," and "High Falls." The formal plans of these instrumentals grew more sophisticated following their initial rearrangement of the Spencer Davis Group's "Don't Want You No More" for their debut album and early shows. These pieces, coupled with the themes explored in their song lyrics and lifestyle, cement ABB's claim to being a paradigm of Romanticism in the classic rock era.

The instrumentals–including the instrumental sequences in the song arrangements–are significant because they so clearly fit the category of the musical fantasy as developed and understood during the nineteenth-century transition from Classical to Romantic music. As such, they are Romantic pieces *par excellence*. Here, I defer to the history of that musical development as outlined by Mark Evan Bonds. Pursuing self-expression, Romantic musicians favored instrumental music: purely musical designs shorn of the conceptually-freighted distractions of words. As such, musical improvisation emerged as the paradigm of musical expres-

sivity. Although E.T.A. Hoffman famously champions Beethoven's fifth symphony as the paradigmatic Romantic composition, Bonds argues that "the deepest roots of self-expression lie in the genre of the fantasia, both as an extemporaneous free improvisation … and as a notated approximation" (Bonds 2020, p. 58). Bonds identifies four characteristics of musical fantasia, all of which impart a sense of spontaneity and freedom. Simplifying them somewhat, they are:

(1) sequencing of musical ideas in violation of prevailing norms for large-scale musical forms;

(2) inclusion of musical elements that have clear relation to other parts;

(3) metrical and rhythmic freedom, including abandonment of sense of meter; and

(4) "unconventional harmonies and harmonic progressions."

These elements, Bonds notes, frequently coexist with "conventional forms, well-rounded themes, developed ideas, a clear sense of meter, and conventional harmonies and harmonic progressions" (Bonds 2020, pp. 58-9). And, significantly, there is an attendant valorization of the composer-performer: a composer who cannot improvise freely is, in Romantic terms, a fake. The glue that holds the fantasia together is the spontaneous self-revelation of the performer, rather that the logic of the standard musical composition.

My point is simple, and I will not belabor it. From "Don't Want You No More" through "High Falls," every ABB instrumental fully satisfies all aspects of Bonds' description of the musical fantasy. It is not merely that, as critic Tony Glover said early on, ABB performances included "long extended instrumental jams that shift through all kinds of moods" (Nolan 1976, p. 32). An additional detail is supplied by Miller Francis' early report: "The Allman Brothers know … music must develop its own power, *its own forms, its own patterns of relationship*" (Beatty 2018, p. 330). Superficially, "Don't Want You No More" sounds like two statements of a theme and then improvisation, but Reali demonstrates that even its simplest incarnation, on the debut album, combines the 8-measure melody with six other distinctive, original segments. It also shifts between two distinct rhythm patterns. On the same album, the seemingly simple song "Ain't My Cross to Bear" combines three musical elements–verse, chorus, and refrain–with nine other distinctive musical parts (some with contrasting tempo and rhythms), plus a tenth segment that subjects the refrain to a tempo modification.[35] A basic song is refashioned into a complex instrumental. After the first album, the bulk of the instrumentals

[35] See Reali (2018, p. 12).

identify Betts as composer, yet what he describes as his carefully designed "architecture" and "meticulously constructed" themes were, in practice, amended and shaped by group jamming after he brought them to the band (Paul 2014, pp. 206-7).[36] Live, the extended improvisations used a complex musical architectonic as the basis for free playing. Summarizing a live performance he witnessed, Eric Clapton reports being impressed that, even in the improvised passages, the music was "thought out–and not left too much to chance" (Beatty 2018, p. 321). Clapton may well be describing a performance of "In Memory of Elizabeth Reed," where an opening structure of 51 measures incorporating multiple themes and rhythms (and two time signatures) is a prelude to extended improvisation, followed by further planned sequences that wind toward a coda and resolution. As Reali says, the piece combines "precise arrangement, complex form, opposing melodic themes, and long-range harmonic movement" (Reali 2018, p. 20).

ABB's sophisticated combination of complex arrangement and improvisation is fully consistent with Romantic practice, where a fantasy might be a free improvisation, but it might also include an arrangement worked out in advance while leaving room for improvisation. It might even incorporate a song. Most famously, Beethoven's Choral Fantasy (Op. 80) comes down to us fully notated, yet at the 1808 premiere the opening segment was improvised by Beethoven at the keyboard until arriving at a composed theme (a variation of what become the "Ode to Joy" theme), followed by an (obviously scored) interplay of piano and orchestra. He subsequently scored his piano part so that the piano meanders in seeming spontaneity until the "Ode" theme emerges, followed by improvisatory-sounding variations, ultimately leading to the choral finale.[37]

For our purposes, it is important to emphasize that Romantic "fantasizing" is compatible with both composed elements and passages of song. If my earlier classification of "Ain't My Cross to Bear" as fantasy seems to violate the rule that fantasies are instrumental works, the Choral Fantasy shows that they need not be purely instrumental. In this respect, many ABB songs were given arrangements that qualify as fantasies, and doubly so when those arrangements were "fantasized" in performance. In terms of compositional method, the Choral Fantasy is not unlike the origins of ABB's "Les Brers." As composer Betts relates, the source of the core theme of "Les Brers" puzzled him for a number of years because

[36] Famously, "Jessica" is credited to Betts alone, but both Les Dudek and Chuck Leavell appear to have contributed significantly to its final shape.
[37] For more discussion of this work, see Bonds (2020, pp. 65-7).

"everyone [in the band] kept saying they had heard it before, but no one could figure out where, including me." Then, "years later," tapes of old shows revealed that the basic "lick" had been improvised by Betts while performing "Whipping Post" (Paul 2014, p. 168). The only real deviation from Romantic practice is that, as Bonds says, the Romantic composer specified the fixed elements in a notated score. In the performance practice of 1970s rock, there was no score. The precise, complex arrangements of the "composed" parts of their music were developed in jamming and then memorized.

Someone might object that I am neglecting an important disanalogy. As Bonds observes, the fantasy was primarily a genre of keyboard improvisation and composition, and its expressivity was interpreted as autobiography rendered in music. ABB excelled at collective improvisation (both in performance and as the source of their complex, non-standard musical constructs), so we do not receive the instrumental interplay as autobiographical. One might then conclude that the basic songs of Betts and Gregg Allman are Romantic contributions to ABB, for they are elements that are expressive and autobiographical. However, this would be to impose a weak standard that is fulfilled by virtually every singer-songwriter of the past 60 years. Worse yet, it deflects attention away from the distinction between conventional and unconventional musical design. However, I argued at the outset that no one criterion was either necessary or sufficient to count as a Romantic, and therefore I am not bothered that ABB does not conform to the normal expectation of a single artist, *a* genius, speaking to us in the music. Instead, we should consider what supplements autobiographical expression when the Romantic fantasy is a collective production. I explore that possibility in the next section.

IV. Implications

Beyond celebrating a band that has received limited scholarly scrutiny, what can we take away from these reflections on ABB? The *wrong* conclusion is that ABB's forays into Romantic fantasizing demonstrates that they produced "art" in the thick sense of that term.[38] But there is no good reason to suppose that the Romantic framework under which a group of traditional crafts coalesced into the cultural institution of (relatively autonomous) fine art applies to popular music. Nor should we evaluate ABB's music in terms of their dialectical or dialogical exchange with

[38] See Gracyk (2007, chap. 1).

"serious" or art music. Instead, ABB should be evaluated in terms of its divergences from–and consequent dialectical engagement with–standard practices in their own "artworld" milieu, which was commercial popular music in the rock era.

I quoted Adorno on the dregs of our musical history, which is one plank of his argument that popular music is ineffectual and trivial because it is not genuine art. Against this view, I have argued that, relative to their context, ABB explored the genre of musical fantasy in a way that was refreshingly unconventional. Their milieu is popular music, and it is a mistake to measure them against all of musical history. Their collective pursuit of musical fantasy was at odds with music industry norms and standardization. We should contextualize them in relation to the amount of musical history that was known to their contemporaneous audience, which was typically minimal. Their ability to hold audiences spellbound in the Fillmore East and Fillmore West would have been much like Beethoven's capacity to move his bourgeois and aristocratic audience during his peak performance years. Thus, against Adorno's view that all popular music advances the pervasive, pernicious effects of the commercial culture industry, I see ABB as a resistive collective project. They profited from, but did not conform to, music industry standardization. As Fumi Okiji says of blues-based jazz, ABB made music out of "reformations, deformations, interruptions," and produced "a celebration of aberration" (Okiji 2018, p. 29). ABB functioned in a context where songs are repetitive and formulaic. Although relatively simple songs serve as a framework for most of their material, those songs never remained simple in ABB performance.

Finally, let us return to a point that impressed so many listeners in the early years: they functioned as cohesive ensemble. The harmonizing, interweaving guitars of the original ABB were one important aspect, but so was the ongoing interplay between the dual-drum rhythm section and the front line. After Duane Allman's death, ABB recruited pianist Chuck Leavell in order to avoid placing Dicky Betts alone at center stage. ABB was consistently about the ensemble, implicitly criticizing valorization of the heroic, lone artist that is, admittedly, identified with Romanticism. Indeed, for those who identify Romanticism with the solitary heroic figure of Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, ABB's ensemble approach seems contra-standard for Romanticism. However, avoidance of simple, strict criteria led me, earlier, to a cluster concept account of Romanticism: one countervailing element does not cancel the preponderance of evidence accumulated through other criteria. And let us not forget that Friedrich frequently celebrates community, as in *Moonrise Over the Sea*.

Proper attention to ABB's commitment to *collective spontaneity* provides us with a final response to the criticism that popular music's recycling of established musical conventions is a sign of its ideological capitulation to totalizing "reason" and capitalism. Celebration of the individual musician or individual improviser (e.g., to mistakenly think that Duane Allman *was* ABB) is a dangerous concession to Adorno, Okiji warns, for this celebration "fabricates reconciliation between the individual and society in an attempt to conceal mass atomization" and its attendant ills, and so Adorno can dismiss the heroic solo "as propaganda in the service of society's repressive forces" (Okiji 2018, pp. 19-20). Against Adorno, we want to identify musical interplay that is organized as a "gathering in difference," especially as communally expressed in "unfettered interpretation … in performance" (Okiji 2019, pp. 27-9).[39] Which, of course, is what ABB achieved in almost every performance until their first disbanding, in 1975. Autonomous works of art were never the point, and so to subject them to the standards of such art is simply to beg the question.

To summarize, I have advanced two arguments. First, in rejecting a teleological model of music's history, we can grant that Romantic strategies retain their power and relevance so long as the receiving public is not overly exposed or weary of them. Second, the improvisational project that was the ABB combined well-established Romantic tropes with the quintessential Romantic musical genre, the fantasy. They are paradigms of Romanticism in rock, a musical context in which musical fantasy was surprising pursuit.

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[39] Okiji's argument has the added dimension of emphasizing the relationship of blues and jazz to their African American context. ABB was, of course, an interracial band, but I am not depending on that aspect of her argument in my treatment of ABB.

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Romanticism Redux: The Triumph of the Allman Brothers Band

The Allman Brothers Band is surprisingly neglected in academic scholarship. In this essay I argue that the band was, from 1969 to 1975, a paradigm case of Romanticism in rock. To this end I advance three arguments. First, by rejecting a teleological model of music's history, we can defuse Adorno's criticism that their deployment of Romantic musical strategies is merely a recycling of earlier achievements. By emphasizing their improvisatory performance practice, we can defuse the idea that they set out to create autonomous art. Second, classification as twentieth-century Romantics does not involve an appeal to necessary or sufficient conditions for Romanticism. Instead, it is established by reference to a cluster concept analysis of Romanticism. Third, the improvisational project that was the Allman Brothers Band combined well-established Romantic tropes with the quintessential Romantic musical genre, the fantasy, in which conventional musical elements can contribute to unconventional music. Although rooted in simple and familiar material, Allman Brothers improvisations retained a spontaneous expressivity, especially for an audience unfamiliar with their historical precedents. Together, these features result in musical performances that were, like most jazz, resistive to musical convention in a manner that communicated resistance to prevailing social norms.

KEYWORDS: Allman Brothers Band, Romanticism, improvisation, popular music, aesthetics