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## Edge of Insanity

*Tony MacAlpine and Black Virtuosity*

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**ABSTRACT** In this essay, I mean to re-examine the notion of virtuosity, which has been characterized as a Romantic reaction to bourgeois rationalism that mobilizes virtuoso musical technique in the service of critiquing bourgeois understandings of art. Furthermore, most critics accuse virtuosos of providing vulgar spectacle in place of sober execution linked to questionable ethics. Pace those assessments, I mean to argue that virtuosity represents, at least in the hands of a black American guitarist such as MacAlpine, a liberatory strategy, that despite being rooted in Romantic notions of autonomous art, challenges a critical stance which views black artistry as merely expressive. I argue that MacAlpine does not simply seek the discursive legitimacy that performing classical music (or in a “classical” style) can give a heavy metal musician but, as a black American guitarist, uses the kind of virtuosity that is linked to the European concert tradition as a means for transcending the stereotypes of black musicians as intuitive talents who draw on reserves of emotional excess, rather than as thoughtful musicians whose abilities have been trained and crafted by diligent study and practice.

**KEYWORDS:** popular music, race and ethnicity studies, virtuosity

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“I would define [my music] as a mix of metal and instrumental aggression, mixed with jazz, mixed with some, you know, fire. That’s really what it is. It’s just a blend of fusion but really with a metal edge.” —TONY MACALPINE<sup>1</sup>

“Heavy metal musicians erupted across the Great Divide between ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ music, between ‘art’ and ‘entertainment,’ and found that the gap was not as wide as we have been led to believe . . . It should come as no surprise that such an eruption, propelled by the social desires and tensions of patriarchy and capitalism, reinscribes familiar constructions of masculinity and individuality, even as the new meritocracy of guitar technique opens doors to female and African-American musicians.” —ROBERT WALSER<sup>2</sup>

In 1986, African American guitarist Tony MacAlpine released his debut recording, *Edge of Insanity*, on Shrapnel Records. A blistering showcase of virtuosic electric guitar technique, the recording established MacAlpine as one of the premiere guitarists of an emerging

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1. “Tony MacAlpine interview part 1.” Interview with French journalist for guitars-attitude.com. Video posted on Julyshredder.com, “Tony MacAlpine Interview Highlights – Moscow”: <http://www.julyshredder.com/2012/04/25/tony-macalpine-interview-highlights-moscow/>.

2. Walser 2014, 107.

subgenre of heavy metal music that observers would call neoclassical fusion or, more commonly, shred guitar.<sup>3</sup> Unlike many of his peers, however, MacAlpine also was a formally trained pianist, performing Chopin's *Prelude 16, Opus 28* on the acoustic piano for *Edge of Insanity*. MacAlpine has included at least one track of a classical music composition on all of his recordings as a leader, performing the piece either as intended (as a solo piano piece, for example) or as arranged by him (usually for keyboard synthesizers and electric guitar).<sup>4</sup> Emerging as an early star of the neoclassical fusion movement, MacAlpine's appearances in trade journals focus on his performance abilities and the complexities of his compositions, citing his formal training and familiarity with classical music forms, such as the sonata, as templates for his original work.

His exemplary guitar and keyboard work feature on largely instrumental recordings, although he has attempted to gain a mass audience with mainstream hard rock recordings. He also has appeared as a sideman on countless recordings, both in and out of the metal/rock genre. For instance, MacAlpine was a showcased performer in French pop singer Michel Polnareff's 2007 comeback tour as well as a founding member of M.A.R.S., a short-lived, heavy-metal all-star band in the mid-1980s with vocalist Rob Rock. His third studio recording as a leader, *Eyes of the World* (Polygram, 1990), targeted a mass hard-rock audience, eschewing the neoclassical fusion of his first two recordings for a more mainstream rock approach with Alan Sehorn on vocals. In the early 2000s, he performed progressive metal instrumentals as a key member of the band, Planet X. In 2000, MacAlpine co-founded CAB, a jazz-rock fusion group, with drummer Dennis Chambers and bassist Bunny Brunel, whose last names form the acronym for the band's name<sup>5</sup>, and that presented a revolving cast of musicians, such as pianist/keyboardist Patrice Rushen sitting in on recordings and live concerts. While his participation with these bands has largely ended, his core oeuvre remains virtuosic instrumental rock that incorporates both his classical piano training and an improvisational expressivity emerging from several sources, including Romantic-era classical music, jazz, and heavy metal.<sup>6</sup>

This essay re-examines the notion of virtuosity, which critics have slighted as a Romantic reaction pitting personal expression against bourgeois rationalism by mobilizing virtuoso musical technique to challenge bourgeois understandings of autonomous art. In addition, most critics accuse virtuosos of providing vulgar spectacle in place of sober execution; excessive emotion instead of objective interpretation; and a misplaced attention to physicality in lieu of

3. MacAlpine's instructional video is titled *Shred Guitar*, originally released in 1992 on VHS videotape. It was re-released as a DVD in 2009.

4. I will be using the term "classical music" interchangeably with "European art music" (the "correct" term) and "European concert music/tradition," rather than to indicate a particular period within the European concert tradition, i.e., the classical period between approximately 1730 and 1820 and exemplified by the works of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

5. According to Sean McKenzie's article, "'C.A.B.' With Bunny Brunel and Tony MacAlpine Live at the Baked Potato," on the *All About Jazz* website, when the group's first record label, Center Tone Records, asked for a band name, Brunel mistakenly thought MacAlpine's name was simply Alpine and suggested the acronym.

6. MacAlpine has seemingly given up on any mainstream or mass audience hit to focus instead on his unique blend of classical music technical skills and a heavy metal approach to sound and form.

disembodied, disinterested contemplation — all linked to a questionable ethics even though, as Jane O’Dea points out in *Virtue or Virtuosity? Explorations in the Ethics of Musical Performance*, virtuoso is closely related etymologically to virtue.<sup>7</sup> *Pace* those assessments, I assert that virtuosity represents, at least for MacAlpine, a liberatory strategy that despite being rooted in a Romantic valorization of individual expression challenges the view that black artistry is merely expressive. MacAlpine’s performances embody improvisatory and notated virtuosity along with decorum, control, and self-discipline. In his recordings and performances, he effectively counters primitivist notions of blackness and dismissive attitudes toward virtuosity while performing heavy metal music, a genre characterized more by its visceral appeal and sonic aggression than conventional musical values, such as melodicism.<sup>8</sup>

MacAlpine does not simply seek the discursive legitimacy that performing classical music or employing a classical style can give a heavy metal musician. Rather, as a black American guitarist, he displays a virtuosity in the European concert tradition to transcend the stereotypes of black musicians as intuitive talents who draw on emotional excess as opposed to thoughtful musicians whose abilities are the product of training, diligent study and practice. Pointedly, MacAlpine has never spoken publicly about his racial background. Born and raised in Springfield, Massachusetts, he began piano studies with Marion Jensen at the age of five, continuing for twelve years under her tutelage. He then attended the Hartt School at the University of Hartford, Connecticut, as a piano student of Raymond Hanson. MacAlpine began to play guitar at the age of twelve but never studied it formally; he composes at the piano. Discovered by record label entrepreneur and heavy metal fan Mike Varney through the pages of *Guitar Player* magazine in 1984, MacAlpine’s debut, *Edge of Insanity*, was released two years later. He also performed on guitarist Vinnie Moore’s 1986 recording, *Mind’s Eye*, as a keyboardist, ably showcasing his multi-instrumental prowess across the two recordings.

Yet, by keying in on virtuosity in both metal and classical music, MacAlpine asserts a black creativity with deep historical roots reaching back to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African American composers and performers such as Will Marion Cook, James Reese Europe, Scott Joplin, and William Grant Still, whose formal training, artistic ambitions, and musical talents reached beyond the limits of minstrelsy, coon songs, ragtime, and syncopated dance music. These musical idioms confined their efforts and yet became the catalyst that enabled them to expand their alleged aesthetic limits in ways that foreshadow MacAlpine’s work in a music idiom that high cultural gatekeepers deemed even less legitimate than mainstream popular music. Though MacAlpine has downplayed his racial background in public, it

7. Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990); Edward A. Lippman, *The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Music* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997); and Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008). Note that the term, music, for the most part means “European art music” for these scholars; heavy metal and popular music are largely ignored.

8. For more on the way instrumental virtuosity was viewed in Late Romantic and Early Modern considerations of musical virtuosity and its correlation to bourgeois notions of self-discipline and control, see Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Jim Drobnick, *Aural Cultures* (Toronto, Canada: YYZ Books, 2004).

is noteworthy that he named his music publishing company *Eyes On the Prize*, a phrase that invokes the US Civil Rights movement and black liberation in general.<sup>9</sup>

Another example, the cover of *Edge of Insanity* shows an image of two shackled feet in a padded room with an arm grabbing the chain mid-length, which can be read as MacAlpine's presence in the "peculiar institution," rather than an insane asylum.<sup>10</sup> Like antebellum slaves, MacAlpine seeks to break the chains that bind him, choosing neoclassical metal as the vehicle for his liberation. As the Walser epigraph suggests, the "new meritocracy of guitar technique" allows MacAlpine to do more than simply break free of racist assumptions regarding black creativity and musical aesthetics. It serves to announce his ability to range freely across genres and traditions deemed inaccessible, even inappropriate, for black musicians. As his debut recording's title intimates, MacAlpine is not insane but merely brought to the edge, struggling to maintain his sanity even as he is heard as "insane" for challenging generic norms.

Moreover, despite his generic shackles, MacAlpine performs "black joy," an expressive and performative articulation of the capacity black individuals have to inhabit "a real and imagined site of utopian possibility," even while living under the direst social conditions, to borrow a phrase from Javon Johnson.<sup>11</sup> Johnson continues, "More than a method to endure, however, black joy allows us the space to stretch our imaginations beyond what we previously thought possible and allows us to theorize a world in which white supremacy does not dictate our everyday lives."<sup>12</sup> Johnson evokes house parties and backyard cookouts as spaces where black joy can emerge as "black bodies gather in celebration," worlds apart from the symphony hall, heavy metal stage, or modern recording studio. MacAlpine expands a vision of black artistry (and, by extension, black life) beyond the strictures of white supremacy through his virtuosic performances of white-identified genres rather than in those musical traditions deemed "black." Thus he exposes the misguided assumptions behind the racialization of black musicians (distinct from music genres) as well as a celebratory display of musical pleasure.

MacAlpine insists he performs two sorts of virtuosity: on one hand, he is apt to mention his classical piano training from the age of five or his daily classical piano routine as signs of his methodical approach to music making. He describes inspiration from classical music in terms of form and compositional development; the effect of formal training on his disciplined approach to practice and rehearsals; and the impact of classical music on his aesthetic sensibilities. (For example, he favors instrumental over vocal music as a replay of the opposition of "absolute music" against "less serious" types of music). On the other hand, MacAlpine insists equally that his guitar performances signify improvisatory play; a ludic engagement of the technical skills honed on the piano; and the sounding out of a sonic space in which his music can be expansive, spontaneous and out of control. His

9. I interviewed MacAlpine and he pointedly dismissed any discussion of race, choosing instead to remain focused on "the music itself." Additionally, I have not read any published interviews in which he was asked about race or in which he brought the topic up himself.

10. I would like to thank the anonymous reader for suggesting this reading of the cover.

11. Javon Johnson, "Black Joy in the Time of Ferguson," *QED: A Journal in GLBTZ Worldmaking* 2, no. 2 (2015): 180.

12. *Ibid*

musical performances and recordings showcase an extraordinary guitar virtuosity that he insists are “musical play,” but they can be heard as embodied performances of black joy despite their immersion in white-identified musical traditions.

In fact, contrary to the title of MacAlpine’s debut album *Edge of Insanity* (which inspired the title of this essay), the music on it sounds anything but insane. It is too “in control,” too rational, too technical. But when I shared the title track with ethnomusicologist Christopher Washburne—one of the most open-eared music scholars I know though not a metal fan—he emailed a succinct assessment: “Chops galore but [he] drove me crazy after thirty seconds!” Turning the title of the album on its head from music as an expression of insanity into a description of its affective power — indeed, of black joy — might help us get at the set of contradictions this essay explores.

#### TRACK 11, KV467 NO. 21, OR, COVERING MOZART

For reasons of space, I will put aside a rehashing of the long historical racialization of rock and heavy metal, in particular, as a white musical genre.<sup>13</sup> But I will keep MacAlpine’s black racial status as a backdrop to my thinking about virtuosity as a means of expressing artistic aspirations and countering stereotypes regarding black creativity. The title to this section refers to the eleventh track on MacAlpine’s 1995 release, *Evolution*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s famous *Piano Concerto No. 21* from which MacAlpine arranged the well-known *Andante* for synthesizer and electric guitar. What sort of aesthetic statement might he be asserting with his updating of Mozart’s warhorse? “Eruptions,” the chapter in Robert Walser’s study of heavy metal in which he focuses on the relationship of classical music to heavy metal remains a cogent investigation of the ways in which heavy metal musicians, and guitarists in particular, use classical music to define virtuosity within their genre. Like Walser, I am uninterested in making an argument for the legitimization of heavy metal in terms amenable to the European concert tradition.

Whereas Walser unravels the complex rationales used by white heavy metal guitarists in their pursuit of (high) cultural capital, he acknowledges that the “first truly virtuosic hard rock guitarist was Jimi Hendrix.”<sup>14</sup> With the legacy of Hendrix in mind, this essay tackles virtuosity as a means for MacAlpine to challenge the racialization of genre and, by doing so, the specific kinds of stereotyping he encounters as a black musician. As Salim

13. For more on the racialization of heavy metal, see Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture*, revised ed. (New York, NY: Da Capo, 2000 [1991]); Robert Walser, *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH, and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1993); Glenn T. Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006); and Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford, UK, and NY: Berg, 2007).

For recent work that contests the racialization of heavy metal as an exclusively white genre, see Kevin Fellezs, “Heavy Metal Soul Music: Stone Vengeance and the Aesthetics of Race in Heavy Metal” in *Heavy Metal: Controversies and Countercultures*, Titus Hjelm, Keith Kahn-Harris and Mark LeVine, eds. (Sheffield, UK and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013); *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music Around the World*, Jeremy Wallach, Harris M. Berger, Paul D. Greene, eds. (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Laina Dawes, *What Are You Doing Here? A Black Woman’s Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal* (NY: Bazillion Points, 2012).

14. Robert Walser *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 77

Washington notes, “The notion that black artistry relies more heavily upon intuition and emotion than intellect is a corollary to racist ideas about the intellectual capacities of Africans dating as far back as the European Enlightenment.”<sup>15</sup> Underlining Washington’s assertion, Immanuel Kant, whose aesthetic theories formed the basis for Enlightenment conceptualizations of art and artistry, linked blackness and intellectual degeneracy in *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*: “It might be that there was something in [his remarks] which perhaps deserved to be considered; but in short, this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.”<sup>16</sup>

Although mainstream North American audiences might pat themselves on the back for moving beyond such racist attitudes, they continue to separate musical sounds and practices based at least partially on notions that correlate certain genres and sounds in terms of race, contradicting the generous spirit of equality with which they congratulate themselves. Just as significantly, black musicians often feel they must either acquiesce to normative conceptions of blackness by performing styles of music identified with blacks or struggle to negotiate a space for themselves within genres that the music industry and fans view as incompatible with their black skins and assumed black perspectives.

Historically, black musicians have found various strategies helpful in negotiating this quagmire. One strategy is to work within a black-identified genre “against the grain.” For example, Parliament-Funkadelic borrowed from the psychedelic rock bands of the late 1960s to expand notions of funk music beyond dance-oriented party music. As George Clinton of Parliament-Funkadelic fame admitted, “The Beatles are my all-time favorites” and he admired Detroit hard rock band, the MC5, in addition to progressive rock bands, such as Yes and Emerson, Lake and Palmer.<sup>17</sup> Yet, while their music reflected an interest in rock music and white audiences eventually got the funk, P-Funk was marketed as a black funk band to black audiences rather than as a funk-rock band capable of appealing to crossover audiences. The same was true of later white bands they influenced, such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers — a band name inspired by the early jazz ensemble, the Red Hot Peppers, which serves as an ironic reminder of early jazz musician and Peppers bandleader Jelly Roll Morton’s proud insistence on his abilities to perform classical music. Ultimately, P-Funk’s efforts did little to push the racial markings of genre aside.<sup>18</sup>

Another successful strategy is to “simply” become one of the best practitioners of a given musical genre or idiom. This works at the individual level but does little to move, let alone eradicate, the racial goal posts. Jimi Hendrix, for all of his acknowledged virtuosity by white fans and critics, did little to change the way the music industry and fans viewed hard rock in terms of race, partially due to his embodying many of the tropes of primitivist, emotionally laden black musicality. There is no heavy metal guitarist of note, for example,

15. Salim Washington, “The Avenging Angel of Creation/Destruction: Black Music and the Afro-technological in the Science Fiction of Henry Dumas and Samuel R. Delany,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2, no. 2 (2008): 235.

16. Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. Patrick Frierson and Paul Guyer, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1764]): 61.

17. Greg Tate, *Flyboy in the Buttermilk: Essays on Contemporary America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 39.

18. We can see this in the fact that the Red Hot Chili Peppers enjoy a visibility that Fishbone, an African American band the Peppers point to as their influence and predecessors in merging rock and funk, have yet to achieve.

who publicly name checks Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Memphis Minnie, Elizabeth Cotton or current female guitarists, such as Jennifer Batten, Bibi McGill, Orianthi, Mia Coldheart or Malina Moye, as an influence. While I acknowledge my own complicity in maintaining the gendered notion of the “guitar hero” (never heroine) in this study, I offer in my defense that my interest lies in the ways in which MacAlpine expresses his virtuosity uniquely as *both* a heavy metal guitarist and a European art music pianist. He explicitly aligns both idioms — a contested correspondence with its flagrant disregard for high and low cultural distinctions — while contrasting complementary and oppositional aesthetic approaches.

## VIRTUOSOS AND MERE MUSICIANS

Marc Pincherle’s perspective provides an example of the combative discursive space in which virtuosos reside:

A distinctive feature of present-day musical life is the almost continuous controversy stirred up by virtuosity. The public, on one hand, favors it wholeheartedly; a considerable number of writers, critics, and composers, on the other, seem to see in it a kind of growing malady that has slowly crept on us, induced by Romanticism and inevitably resulting in debasement of taste. Virtuosos and mere musicians glare at each other like enemy brothers, each victory for the one involving a new humiliation for the other.<sup>19</sup>

The pervasive sense of virtuosity as a detriment to rather than as an enhancement of musicality attempts to maintain an indistinct border. When does musical skill cross the line into “empty” virtuosity?

Lawrence Kramer centers his discussion of virtuosity on Franz Liszt, who “became the first performing musician to command the adoration of a mass public, and therefore to establish music as a popular entertainment medium — a problematical development because many musicians, paradoxically including Liszt himself, were simultaneously trying to establish music as a fine art.”<sup>20</sup> As Kramer further notes, the “virtuoso is riddled with ambivalence . . . identified equally well with the extremes of transcendental expressiveness and cheap, flashy display.”<sup>21</sup> Virtuositic ambivalence intensifies when virtuosos perform in a critically maligned idiom, such as heavy metal, as it invests the discredited musicians and their musical endeavors with extraordinary technical capacities, threatening the critical consensus regarding genre hierarchies. Disparagement, then, becomes more a matter of interested personal taste than of dispassionate objective evaluation — an arguable rather than unassailable perspective that effectively locates the denigration of virtuosity as a particular, rather than universal, aesthetic investment.

While Pincherle and Kramer were interested in musicians performing within the European art music tradition, Walser focused metal guitarists’ use of their interest in classical music as a way to gain cultural capital, legitimation, and authority in mostly vain attempts to escape metal music’s critical denigration. Art music scholars, critics, and audiences con-

19. Marc Pincherle, “Virtuosity,” *The Music Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1949): 226.

20. Lawrence Kramer, *Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2002), 69.

21. *Ibid*

tinue to ignore or dismiss heavy metal guitarists' real accomplishments despite their mobilizations of classical music performance practices and compositional techniques.

Metal music scholar Glenn Pillsbury argues against the formalist analyses of much academic music scholarship, writing, "Musical complexity must be understood as more than simply formal complexity. It needs to be approached via the interlocking complexities contributed by broader cultural forces, and to ignore the avenues of inquiry enabled by considerations of such things as race and gender reduces the study of musical complexity to ahistorical formalism."<sup>22</sup> Pillsbury views the critical attention on the purely musical as a willful attempt to ignore race in any consideration of metal musicians' pursuit of musical complexity. While Pillsbury admits that Metallica's lyrics champion the individual against corporate, governmental, religious and educational institutions, the band's avoidance of explicit political and social commentary speaks to the same erasure. Pillsbury notes, moreover, that Metallica's "thinking man's metal" uses musical complexity to underline "an ideal type of white masculinity" that enjoys the support of "a powerful conception of invisible normalcy."<sup>23</sup>

Pillsbury makes an important point about Metallica's approach to mobilizing conceptions of white masculinity, particularly through heroic or, perhaps better, anti-heroic resistance to musical complexity. Moreover, he provides a key insight into the ways whiteness operates in heavy metal by noting the critical reception of Metallica in the 1980s, when critics "[celebrated] the band in such a way as to deny any connection to the blues," distancing the band from any strong links to rock's debt to black music.<sup>24</sup> This was not a move restricted to rock critics in the 1980s. As *Rolling Stone* Editor Ralph Gleason opined in May 1968, "One of the most encouraging things about the whole hippie scene and rock music in San Francisco which grew out of it is that no one is really trying to be anything other than what he is. The white sons of middle class America who are in this thing are not ashamed of being white. They are the first American musicians, aside from the country and western players, who are not trying to sound black."<sup>25</sup> Even guitarist Eric Clapton, who publicly acknowledged his debt to black musicians, such as Robert Johnson and B.B. King, stated unequivocally more than four decades ago, "My whole attitude has changed. I listen to the same sounds and records but with a different ear. I'm no longer trying to play anything but like a white man."<sup>26</sup>

In addition to racial difference, a significant distinction between the artists Walser and Pillsbury analyzed — Edward Van Halen, Yngwie Malmsteen, Randy Rhoads, Ritchie Blackmore, the members of Metallica — and MacAlpine is that the latter has recorded

22. Glenn Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (NY and Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2006), 59–60.

23. Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 97.

24. *Ibid*

25. Ralph Gleason, "Stop This Shuck Mike Bloomfield," *Rolling Stone* May 11, 1968), 10.

26. John Pidgeon, *Eric Clapton* (London: Panther, 1976), 65. Clapton is an especially problematic figure as his infamous remarks at a 1976 Birmingham concert demonstrate in which he said, "Keep Britain White," while calling for "wogs" to leave England. Clapton's remarks were the impetus for the formation of the Rock Against Racism movement in the same year.



a number of classical music pieces as classical pieces, meaning, in the manner of a bona fide professional classical musician. Not restricted to flights of electric fancy or extemporaneous variations on a theme based on a baroque model (though he does that, too) — MacAlpine simply sits down at the piano and performs Chopin's *Prelude 16, Opus 28*. He does not merely appropriate classical music's prestige but performs it in a way that challenges metal's low cultural status even more forcefully than the purely referential uses that Walser explicates for metal guitarists.

Steve Waksman offers the most cogent analysis of rock guitar virtuosity, contrasting the “learn three chords and start a band” aesthetic of punk with the proto-“shred” technical virtuosity of Eddie Van Halen and the guitarist's reintroduction of virtuosity in hard rock at the beginning of the punk era.<sup>27</sup> Heard as a reaction to punk's mandate of instrumental non-expertise, Van Halen's technique borrowed not only from his hard rock forebears, such as Jimi Hendrix, or his avowed influence, Eric Clapton, but also from classical guitar performance practices and progressive rock guitarist Allan Holdsworth, known for his adaptation of violin techniques, including phenomenal finger-stretching voicings, to the electric guitar. Combining some of these elements in “Eruption,” a bravura display of his compositional and performance abilities on his band's debut recording, Van Halen set a new bar for guitarists in mainstream rock.

Van Halen's influence cannot be underestimated. Hugely popular among mainstream hard rock fans from the release of his debut album in 1978, Van Halen would become a household name in contrast to Holdsworth and other “guitarist's guitarists,” such as Steve Vai (despite Vai's professional debut in Frank Zappa's band as a seventeen-year old *Wunderkind*). Van Halen's virtuosity not only influenced mainstream hard rock like Hendrix before him but also popularized techniques borrowed from classical guitarists, such as the tap-on and the use of harmonics as a solo line. The technique became the trailhead for a generation of guitarists who would follow his path into the heady heights of virtuosic space, eventually shaping a style called “shred guitar.” Musicians such as Yngwie Malmsteen, Vinnie Moore, Paul Gilbert, Alex Skolnick, Vivian Campbell, Greg Howe, Jason Becker, Marty Friedman, and George Lynch became renowned for their incredible speed, variety of picking and strumming techniques, and their calculated borrowings from Baroque- and Romantic-era European concert music. Shred guitarists often cite fusion and progressive rock guitarists, such as Al Di Meola and Allan Holdsworth as influences, while others include classical guitarists, such as Julian Bream. Guitarists such as Yngwie Malmsteen explicitly modeled themselves after Franz Liszt or Nicolo Paganini as opposed to Jimi Hendrix in performance style as well as sartorial and hirsute excess though, arguably, Hendrix's lacy French cuffs and velvet paisley jackets drew from a similar fashion sensibility.

While clearly accomplished technicians, shred guitarists were accused of the sins of virtuosity levied against Liszt and Chopin—talented purveyors (or victims) of self-indulgent, vacuous expression. Nate Jackson's “Sound of the City” *Village Voice* column

27. Van Halen's debut recording was released in 1978, a year after the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here the Sex Pistols* (Virgin) and the Clash's release of their first single, “White Riot” (CBS).

from 2013 with the headline, “Top 10 Douchiest Guitarists of All Time,” can serve as an anecdotal, though hardly singular, dismissal of heavy metal guitarists. Jackson begins by saying, “Hey, we can all appreciate a quality rock god. Any fan of music knows the joy of watching their favorite axe man/woman go on a tear and destroy the crowd with their fast-fingered prowess, signature style and lush mane of flowing hair” drawing on the same set of embodied signs of excess that Kramer cites in the critical swipes against Liszt in his prime.<sup>28</sup> A large part of the critical distaste toward virtuosity begins, in fact, with a marked aversion toward such performers’ extravagant display. The spectacle of the longhaired virtuoso, tossing his head back so that his hair would whirl in a physical exhibition of the performer’s emotional and expressive profligacy was first leveled at Liszt — metal musicians’ lengthy locks are merely contemporary forms of a virtuoso’s embodied excess.<sup>29</sup>

Of the ten guitarists on the list, six of them fit the category of heavy metal or hard rock guitarists, listed here in the order of least to most “douchiest”: Yngwie Malmsteen, C.C. DeVille, Joe Satriani, Michael Angelo Batio, Eddie Van Halen, and Steve Vai.<sup>30</sup> More importantly, the column echoes the charges that Pincherle and Kramer delineate: self-indulgence and technical brilliance at the expense of an undefined musicality, a dismissive characteristic that is more the result of the postmodern times we live in than these guitarists’ aspirations, namely, laughable pretension lacking any sense of irony; and an obliviousness to the notion that we no longer live in an age of earnest, let alone sincere, expression.

Simon Frith goes further:

Musicians may be criticized for selfishness or egocentricity, [but] bad musicians are musicians who forget or deny that good music is a collective practice; they use a performance to show off their own virtuosity or character, to dominate the microphone or sound mix, to play too long or loudly. Such musicians don’t listen to their performing colleagues, and the resulting music is bad because it is ‘unbalanced.’ Musicians may also be criticized for emptiness; bad musicians indulge in form at the expense of content, make music that ‘has nothing to say’ but says it elaborately anyway. Their music is not made for any reason except as a display of technical skill.<sup>31</sup>

Fittingly, Jackson accused Michael Angelo Batio (number three on his douchebag list), a guitarist notorious for his penchant to perform simultaneously on double- and four-necked guitars to provide lead, rhythm, and his own contrapuntal accompaniment, of basing “an entire career on being a selfish prick who didn’t want a rhythm guitarist stealing his spotlight.”<sup>32</sup> Not merely self-indulgent, these musicians, these virtuosos, exhibit moral or ethical failings by elevating individualist accomplishment above collective meanings for music.

28. Nate Jackson, “Sounds of the City: Top 10 Douchiest Guitarists of All Time,” *Village Voice*, February 6 2013, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2013/02/06/top-10-douchiest-guitarists-of-all-time/>

29. Lawrence Kramer’s *Musical Meaning* uses as its cover image an 1873 cartoon by János Jánko depicting Liszt’s flagrant in-performance hair-tossing. Jánko did not intend for the likeness to be complimentary.

30. Nate Jackson, “Sounds of the City”

31. Simon Frith, “What is Bad Music?” In Simon Frith, ed., *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays* (Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 325.

32. Nate Jackson, “Sounds of the City”

But is such an assessment entirely correct? Does Eddie Van Halen “not listen” to his bandmates? Did Steve Vai fail to connect with the virtuosic rhythm sections in Frank Zappa’s various bands (e.g., drummer Terry Bozzio, bassist Patrick O’Hearn)? Batio aside, it is difficult to think of a single professional virtuoso who fails to engage with the other members of his ensemble. Perhaps we might consider semi-pro and amateur musicians, in which case the term virtuoso is difficult to apply. Virtuosos are almost *de facto* professional musicians, while the opposite holds true of non-professionals, those “mere musicians” who perform more for love than glory and for the camaraderie between musicians, rather than scaling the heights of technical achievement as heroic soloists.

To return to my earlier question: Why are metal guitarists heard as self-indulgent, bad-faith musicians — in a word, douchebags? Is it that metal musicians, more than other popular music artists appear to aspire to positions beyond their proper place in the cultural hierarchy through currently unfashionable and contradictory traits, such as technical acuity, transcendent mastery, accessible sublimity, and virtuosity? Are they over-achieving *arrivistes* to the high cultural party? If we remove legitimacy from the table — particularly in the eyes of cultural elites —then metal musicians’ aspirations sound less like self-absorbed pretension and more like a democratizing impulse. For one, they do not underestimate their audiences’ engagement and enjoyment of highly technical, even rococo, musical forms, sounds, and aesthetics.

This raises an additional question: With whom are solo virtuosos supposed to connect? One can argue that the virtuoso performers connect with the composer through their interpretation of the written score to convey (or connect) its meanings to an audience, but what of music produced in oral traditions or through a form of aural, “non-literate” culture, such as recordings? Are such traditions incapable of producing virtuosos due to their lack of literate transmission or legacies of legitimating discourse? Guitarists Paco de Lucia or Gabby Pahinui might stand as representatives of an oral tradition producing a virtuoso (*flamenco* and *kī hōʻalu*, respectively). Both professional musicians of the twentieth century who were trained through oral pedagogical practices, their instruction took place within a larger context of mass mediation and various technological interventions. (Certainly, their professional careers unfolded within industrialized music production and distribution). Jazz musicians, often learning through recordings as well as informal sessions with more experienced performers, present another case. Still, the question remains. When does technical accomplishment shade into meaningless displays of technical skill rather than articulating authentic musical expression, meaning, and value?

Three excerpts from Wolf Marshall’s “Music Appreciation” column in the 1988 issue of *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*, nominally a critical review of MacAlpine’s then-current release, *Maximum Security*, can serve to highlight the relationship between heavy metal and classical music and suggest possible answers to the questions I raise:

The inclusion of Frederic Chopin’s Etude No. 4, op. 10, for solo piano between the heavy rock outro of “Sacred Wonder” and the thundering 16<sup>th</sup> note metal groove of “The Vision” provides an unexpected and refreshing textural and timbral change of pace. Here Tony reveals another facet of his musical personality. The finesse and high level of performance is testimony to his formidable conservatory piano training and

experience and signifies a life-long commitment to music beyond the trends and dictates of 1987 . . .

Another aspect of the keyboard influence on *Maximum Security* can be found in “Porcelain Doll,” which borrows its grandiose theme from Chopin’s Third Sonata, op. 58 (large [*sic*] movement) and adapts the paraphrase to a rock band setting. The melancholy emotional rendering of the melody is given a vocalesque subdued treatment, gradually gathering momentum toward a restrained and elegant cantabile guitar solo. This is dramatically enhanced by Tony’s smooth sustaining violinistic guitar tone and phrasing which breathe new life into the classic Chopin melody . . .

Through the skillful use of formal structure, strong identifiable motives and arrangement techniques, he has transcended the normal, somewhat inaccessible plane of purely instrumental music. “Hundreds of Thousands,” “Tears of Sahara,” “Key to City,” “The Time and the Test,” “The King’s Cup,” “Sacred Wonder,” “The Vision” and “Dreamstate” use an arrangement plan in which the recap (recapitulation; the return to the theme) is the recall of the second theme (normally serving a chorus function) or a recomposed version of the first theme (verse, as in “Hundreds of Thousands”). This is a particularly effective scheme in that it creates an implicit feeling of chorus repetition which translates into musical unity.<sup>33</sup>

Marshall rallies all the rhetorical moves of a dated style of classical music interpretation and criticism to position MacAlpine — and by extension, shred guitarists — as achieving legitimate aesthetic worth. The specialized language — 16<sup>th</sup> notes, recapitulation, motive, theme—enables readers to share in the heightened imprimatur of western music theory and serves to reinforce their understanding of heavy metal music as compatible with the values expressed in high art culture. Marshall ends his essay, which includes a detailed transcription of MacAlpine’s solo on “Tears of Sahara,” by noting MacAlpine’s place on a historical continuum of hard rock guitarists who have engaged classical music in various ways: “Tony MacAlpine firmly caps an evolution of neo-classic/rock fusion begun by Richie [*sic*] Blackmoore [*sic*] and Uli Roth, and developed through the efforts of Michael Schenker, Gary Moore, Randy Rhoads and Yngwie Malmsteen.”<sup>34</sup> This effort to create a lineage of rock guitar virtuosos is another way in which heavy metal critics have attempted to provide a substantive historical context for positioning metal musicians as artists rather than as the embodiment of heavy metal’s worst stereotypes — plodding incomprehensibility, naïve self-importance, and bellicose posturing.

Arguing against racist assumptions about musical creativity, black musicians have historically proven their musical worth by performing the types of repertoire that demonstrated the craft of their artistry through performances of western art music. The strategy often had the unfortunate side effect of tacitly supporting notions of the superiority of western art music while maintaining a jaundiced view of black musical traditions. This should not imply that black musicians did not enjoy performing the European concert repertoire. In fact, this not only indicates the broad appeal of music racialized as white (i.e., non-black) for black

33. Wolf Marshall, “Maximum Security,” *Guitar for the Practicing Musician*, 1988, 111.

34. Wolf Marshall, “Maximum Security,” 112.

performers and audiences but also denotes the abilities of black musicians to reach beyond the music to which the culture restricted them. One consequence of debating the relative value of schooled versus unschooled musicianship in large part motivated jazz musicians to sacralize their music to correspond to the norms of European art music aesthetics.

In addition, as Waksman astutely observes in his analysis of Van Halen's use of so-called "power chords" within his virtuosic showcase pieces, such as "Eruption" and "Spanish Fly," the "power chord was reset within a context where 'power' and virtuosity were closely bound" (2003, 124). In harnessing and highlighting his virtuosity, MacAlpine assumes a position of power rather than subordination, musically flipping the historical script.

Finally, the accusation of abusing cheap visual effects, such as tossing one's hair, closing one's eyes, and grimacing with concentrated effort, is lodged against metal musicians much like the criticisms levied at Liszt, Chopin, and Sergei Rachmaninoff. Who do these exhibitionists think they are? The oversized physicality of the virtuoso not only demeans the sublime intentions of the composer, but also offends the audience member who must somehow see past all the "look at me!" rhetorical energies of the overly dramatic, even ham-fisted, antics of the technically brilliant performer.

MacAlpine, however, unlike many of his peers, evinces little physical movement in his performances, preferring to stand still much of the time, focusing on his instrument, which can be read as an inverse of the exhibitionistic virtuoso — an artist unconcerned with the rest of world, enthralled by the technical brilliance of his own music making. One can also read MacAlpine's lack of demonstrative display as another way of countering the emotionalism attached to conventional notions of black musicians. Through his immobile silhouette, MacAlpine's embodiment of discipline, rigor, and an intellectualism that belies racist assumptions effectively displaces whiteness as the unmarked standard for serious music making, furthering the impact of his virtuosic "non-display." Never one to engage in the "hair whipping" popular among long-haired metal and hard rock musicians, especially since shorn of his lengthy coiffure of the 1980s when he first appeared, MacAlpine is even less of a conspicuous figure onstage today.

Still, in contrast to Waksman and Kramer, while it is mostly true that "with the virtuoso, the sound of music becomes inseparable from the spectacle of the performer, whose technical flamboyance disrupts any effort to perceive music as a self-contained structure" (Waksman 1999, 243), MacAlpine attempts to define himself as the studious craftsman, intensely engaged within an individualistic interiority. The musical "spectacle" is contained within the "music itself" through the sounds emanating from the instruments MacAlpine plays. His fingers articulate an emotional expression — what musicians call "touch" — the physical manipulation of an instrument converted into evocative, meaningful sound. In contrast, contemporary classical pianists such as Lang Lang exhibit far more emotional excess than MacAlpine. On the one hand, while classical pianists such as Yuja Wang and Khatia Buniatshvili are often criticized by a small cohort of observers for their clothing choices as a variant of suspect spectacularity (and the gender politics of public presentation), their music making is uniformly evaluated, even celebrated, as achieving the highest standards. On the other hand, MacAlpine, with his unassuming clothes and stage

demeanor, does little to embody the emotional drive his music articulates, yet his work is little recognized beyond the insular world of shred guitarists and their fans.

In contrast to Hendrix, MacAlpine eschews the type of phallocentric display for which the 1960s rock icon became (in)famous. As Waksman convincingly argues, Hendrix's sexualized performance style both reinforced (signifying) as well as repudiated (Signifyin[g]) stereotypes of black hyper-masculinity and hyper-sexuality. Toward the end of his life, Hendrix was unable to use his virtuosity to transcend those stereotypes, feeling constricted by the expectations the stereotypes engendered, and, as Miles Davis suggests in his autobiography, he began looking to non-hard rock music. This was an attempt to break free of the legacy of blackface minstrelsy with its underlying white fear and fascination of black masculinity as well as the limits of a blues-based rock aesthetic. Unfortunately, we will never know. MacAlpine, however, offers an example of a possibility that Hendrix, had he lived, might have explored.

### THE DEDICATION

As mentioned, MacAlpine has included a solo piano piece on every recording as a solo guitarist-leader from his debut, *Edge of Insanity*, in which he performed Chopin's *Prelude 16, Opus 28*.<sup>35</sup> On 1994's *Premonition* (Shrapnel Records), he includes three classical piano tracks, beginning with Chopin's *Opus 28, No. 18*, continuing with J.S. Bach's *Rondeau Partita No. 2*, and ending with Chopin's *Opus 28, No. 3*. As he has asserted in interviews, he realizes that his core audience may be impressed by his classical piano chops —and commend themselves for their interest in classical music to some degree — but that they probably lack the patience for an extended acoustic piano piece. While he maintains a fervent desire to record a piano concerto, his professional interests, especially given his view of his core audience's tastes, have so far precluded a strictly acoustic classical piano music recording.

Similar to most shred guitarists, MacAlpine's recordings showcase compositions that highlight complex meters, synchronized unison runs among the instrumentation, fast tempos, and energetic themes and solo lines. Against those compositions, the classical pieces feel like sonic tonics, ear-clearing interludes that allow a listener to take a short breather from the largely relentless metal guitar pyrotechnics. On his second attempt at providing a largely vocal endeavor, MacAlpine ends *Master of Paradise*, his ninth studio recording, with an accomplished reading of Liszt's virtuosic showpiece, "Au bord d'une source." "Au bord" is a piece that requires a constant crossing of hands that, when performed well, hides the technical difficulties beneath its unrelenting arpeggiation, which imparts a serene, almost wistful air. The piece is a fitting ending to a recording on which MacAlpine performs standard hard rock songs. Although the musicianship is exemplary throughout the recording, only the final two tracks are instrumentals. The penultimate tune, "Final Hour," returns us to more familiar MacAlpine territory with its melodic leads that also generate emotional heat while riding over an aggressive rhythm section. But it is the Liszt piece where MacAlpine displays the remarkable set of musical skills he can deploy on his first instrument, the acoustic piano.

35. I am using the titles MacAlpine uses on his recording liner notes.

MacAlpine's 2011 self-titled recording concludes with an arrangement for electric guitar and synthesizer keyboards of one of Robert Schumann's most well-known *Lieder*, "The Dedication (*Widmung*).<sup>35</sup> MacAlpine turns Schumann's love song to his bride, Clara Wieck, into a solemn hymn. From a meditative opening, the track builds into an emotional guitar solo of deep longing that also manages to express a lack of fulfillment despite its climactic velocity, ending with a dramatic return to the quietly melancholic air of the introduction. The biting tone of MacAlpine's lead guitar aptly captures Schumann's declarative theme while illuminating its emotional scope. Clearly, MacAlpine shares an affective relationship to Schumann's composition, sonically articulating the *Lieder's* sense of bittersweet longing. The cover image of the guitarist in a simple, white T-shirt and blue jeans, with his guitar cradled on his right hip and held out with his right hand, sunglasses deflecting a direct stare at the viewer, reinforces the idea that while his guitar and music reach out to audiences, MacAlpine is keeping himself at arm's length.

In the end, it is notable that his live performances rarely highlight his piano abilities. The undiluted classical piano repertoire that is clearly meaningful to him remains external to his normal concert fare. There are YouTube videos of him performing informally at NAMM exhibitor booths, for instance, but his live performances consist entirely of his electric guitar and keyboard synthesizer repertoire.

#### BLACK (METAL) JOY

A remarkable scene in Botswana with its black African metal fans in leather Hollywood cowboy gear and black African metal bands such as Wrust, whose debut album was released in 2007, proves there may be more metal music being played in Africa than previous discourse disavowing non-white interest in metal might have indicated. A 2013 film documentary, *Death Metal Angola*, has raised the visibility of the Angolan extreme metal scene. Another recent film documentary on the proto-punk/metal band, *A Band Called Death* (2012), sheds light on the interest in hard rock and heavy metal by black American rock musicians and, significantly, places it in an earlier time than previously realized by most rock observers. The better-known Washington, DC, punk-reggae band, Bad Brains, seemed to appear out of nowhere in the late 1970s after beginning life as a jazz fusion unit. In addition, lesser-known psychedelic hard rock bands, such as Maximillian, and celebrated ones, such as Arthur Lee's Love from the late 1960s, demonstrate a long history of black participation in hard rock. Works such as those contained in the anthology, *Metal Rules the Globe*, reveal an interest in metal music that has long traveled beyond stereotypical notions of containment within white working-class masculine spaces.

Yet despite the optimism Black American writer Trey Ellis announced in his triumphant 1989 essay, "The New Black Aesthetic" — "I now know that I'm not the only black person who sees the black aesthetic as more than just Africa and jazz" — the notion of a new black aesthetic that embraces metal music remains a dream deferred.<sup>36</sup> Ellis ends his essay with a brief encounter with guitarist Vernon Reid passing out newly minted Black

36. Trey Ellis "The New Black Aesthetic." *Callaloo* 38 (1989): 234.

Rock Coalition manifestos backstage at a Living Colour concert, which read, in part, “For white artists, working under the rubric ‘rock’ has long meant the freedom to pimp any style of black music—funk, reggae, soul, jazz, gospel ad infinitum . . . We too claim that same right . . . The members of the BRC are neither novelty acts, nor carbon copies of the white bands who work America’s Apartheid Oriented Rock circuit . . . We are individuals and will accept no less than full respect for our right to be conceptually independent.”<sup>37</sup> Ellis, was, as he put it, “blown away.”<sup>38</sup> Sadly, his optimism has proven premature.

Walser is similarly optimistic that “heavy metal musicians’ appropriations from classical music have already changed popular music; they may yet change classical music and perhaps even our understanding of how the cultural labor of popular musicians can blur the distance between the two. This perspective defies the division that has been such a crucial determinant of musical life in the twentieth century” although I remain less convinced given the continuation of heavy metal’s dire reception by most critics of note and popular music fans.<sup>39</sup> To return to the theme of this section — black joy sounded out in metal music — it may be that MacAlpine has chosen to raise the visibility of his classical music training and interests as a way to downplay the racial dynamics of genre, musical ability, and its potential effects on audiences. Aesthetic divisions, in MacAlpine’s case, do not simply denigrate his creative work, they also serve to mask racial difference. But might MacAlpine’s mix of metal guitar and classical piano also signal black joy?

Philosopher Cornel West parses pleasure from joy, asserting that “pleasure, under commodified conditions, tends to be inward. You take it with you, and it’s a highly individuated unit . . . But joy tries to cut across that. Joy tries to get at those non-market values — love, care, kindness, service, solidarity, the struggle for justice — values that provide the possibility of bringing people together.”<sup>40</sup> West’s rendering of joy as a social affect that aligns an internal emotional state with “values that provide the possibility of bringing people together” positions MacAlpine’s playing as resonant with “the struggles for justice” through his placing of “white” genres over those deemed “black” or, more importantly, the fencing off of “white” genres from black musicians’ participation.

Moreover, MacAlpine’s classical piano tracks express black joy by “bringing together” musical traditions and genres normally thought incompatible— as if classical music did not operate within a music market or heavy metal musicians did not comprehend music theory. For example, MacAlpine’s electric guitar and synthesizer arrangement of Schumann’s *Widmung* is not simply another metal musician’s bid for cultural legitimacy but a reconciliation of his ludic guitar work matched to his love of classical music — black joy that is not merely an unfettered pleasure but is expressive and measured, playful and studied, emotional and intellectual.

37. *Ibid*, 242

38. *Ibid*

39. Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil*, 107.

40. Quoted in Gina Dent, “Black Pleasure, Black Joy: An Introduction.” In Gina Dent, ed., *Black Popular Culture* (NY: New Press, 1983), 1.



Waksman notes in his analysis of Hendrix as the black embodiment of psychedelic utopian longing that the guitarist's vision of "an imagined transformation of the world into an 'electric church' where all differences would submerge beneath a wave of electronic sound," while realizing "that blackness stood to separate people from one another . . . a tragic lesson, as one can only imagine, for someone who seemed to live through his music."<sup>41</sup> MacAlpine offers a similar vision through virtuosity that merges one of popular music's most denigrated genres, heavy metal, with European art music. MacAlpine's mixture of high and low music makes visible the arbitrariness of the distinctions between high and low culture in purely aesthetic terms. In other words, his music highlights — and challenges — the social and discursive contexts in which those judgments reside and responds to them through a musically hybrid articulation of black joy.

As black feminist scholar Gina Dent argues, black joy moves blackness beyond its "mythic construction" of abjection and rejection toward a critical consciousness that "will bring us closer to the collective domain of joy, where more of us will find what we need and where some of us will find less of what we are accustomed to," including artistic validation.<sup>42</sup> Virtuosity in the hands of black musicians, such as MacAlpine or fellow African American shred guitarist Greg Howe, serve to point up their spontaneous, improvisatory, and studied, even measured, creativity while embodying black joy in a musical genre "less accustomed" to black artists. MacAlpine and his peers, such as Howe, Tosin Abasi, and Mike Coffey, among many others, manifest the ways in which heavy metal music's promise of individual empowerment can be a space of liberating possibilities for black musicians. These musicians sound out black joy, enraptured and enabled by the sounds and performance of metal virtuosity despite the challenges that the interlocking ideas about race, genre, and virtuosity continue to impose on musical evaluation. ■

41. Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 206.

42. Gina Dent, "Black Pleasure, Black Joy: An Introduction," 18.

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