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The Next Breakthrough in Music Academia Won't Be in Jazz or Classical; It'll Be Found in
Metal.

In 1959, John Coltrane recorded what would become one of the most respected jazz charts of all time: *Giant Steps*. With 288 quarter notes per minute, and the chord changes cycling through awkward substitutions within 3 separate key signatures, the title song was literally unmatched in its compositional and technical complexity, and is still more or less unmatched in those regards, and it was hellish to play, and is still considered as such to this day, though today, most people are unable to appreciate Coltrane changes and the emotion behind the music. Music culture has shifted away from jazz, as the genre has more or less run its course in the world. Jazz fusion, which came after the traditional big band jazz had died off and was more centered around keyboard, guitar, and electric bass, isn't what it once was either, especially with many of the greats like Allan Holdsworth passing away in recent years. However, music, of course, did not die with Coltrane and with Holdsworth. Music has not been frozen in time; it is still being subject to innovation and development, but in different forms than it once was. Just as jazz reflected the culture and spirits of the oppressed African-American community and sentiments of the white youth, metal (specifically progressive metal and djent) is where we see the new masters of their instruments innovating and experimenting while they reflect the culture of their

generation as well as the generation that's come after them, and it is where we will continue to see these developments.

Culturally, metal represents what jazz once did; a source of freedom, but instead of being for the externally oppressed, it's for the internally oppressed and those who find themselves a little angry with the world. It's no secret that metal vocals are aggressive, but generally speaking, the lyrics are even more aggressive. With [teenagers being diagnosed with depression at increasingly high rates](#), in addition to the stress they endure in high school and college, it's not to be unexpected that they have a rather negative outlook on life, and the music they listen to definitely reflects that. While some songs like [Inadequate](#) by Rings of Saturn (all of their music is in some way about aliens coming to Earth, but this one is about aliens coming to Earth and killing off inadequate DNA) have no real deeper meaning, others like [Don't Ask, Don't Tell](#) by Chelsea Grin (which is allegorically about drug abuse and addiction; speculated to be specifically about heroin addiction) and [Black Mammoth](#) by Fit for an Autopsy (which is about the situation with the Dakota Access Pipeline and the Native Americans who live on the land that big oil wants it to pass through) seek to explore the issues that their audiences are concerned with and are likely dealing with themselves.

Perhaps even more so important to the idea that metal will be home to the next musical breakthrough is the fact that the instrumentalists are already mind-blowing, as they were and are in jazz. Meshuggah, the original djent band--I'll go off on a tangent regarding djent in a moment, but just know that it's a fairly new subgenre of a subgenre for the time being--composed the masterpiece known as *Bleed* on their 2008 album *Obzen*. Though it doesn't vary that much melodically, to a [drummer](#) or a guitarist with poor rhythm and a weak right hand, it's the

equivalent of *Giant Steps* to the student saxophonist who's had far too much to drink. Another one of their most popular songs, [New Millenium Cyanide Christ](#), is almost equally as difficult on guitar and drums, but much more melodically complex (also note that both of those videos were performed live on stage in perfect time; they're commended as a very tight band; also check out the [official music video for New Millenium Cyanide Christ](#)).

Metal includes much more than just angry white men wearing black though, and this subgenre of a subgenre is where virtually all of the academic experimentation is found. Animals as Leaders, perhaps the greatest example of the academic possibilities of djent, came onto the scene in 2009 with their self-titled album containing several masterful compositions. *On Impulse* ([here](#)'s a cover on piano to demonstrate how beautiful this song is) showcased how a composition intended for a solo guitar in a classical setting could be "metal-ified," which is effectively what Misha Mansoor (from Periphery; he and Abasi are good friends) did with the album when he first produced it. [Modern Meat](#) allowed Abasi to showcase his classical guitar chops. In their more recent work, Abasi has developed what he calls "[thumping](#);" it's a technique very similar to [slapping and popping on a bass](#), but instead used on an 8-string guitar.

Abasi, who's been renowned for tying together jazz, classical, and metal into a single genre, and his band represents what a good segment of the djent subgenre and progressive metalheads are turning into and towards for the future. While retaining the aggressiveness of the roots of the music, many bands (including [Periphery, with Lune](#), a laid-back love song heavy on virtual ochestrals, and After the Burial too, with [Laurentian Ghosts](#), where we can find an edited version of a line used in one of their earlier songs written by their guitarist who later committed suicide) and solo artists like [Dan James Griffin](#) have turned the genre into a incredibly versatile

one and made it into something truly beautiful and virtually unrecognizable from their origins in Metallica and Death 30 to 40 years ago and vastly changed from the [real days of Dream Theater](#), now that they've started writing [Disney movies](#). From an academic perspective, these guys make many similar plays on chromaticism (notes situated right next to one another, ex. C, C#, and D; with traditional theory and classical music, it's generally best to stay away from chromatic runs as you're guaranteed to hit a note outside of the key, but metal musicians have found an application for the disgusting harmonies that come of using these) and atonality, with there not necessarily being a key signature, or simply having it there as more of a guideline with no authority, as is the case with a good bit of Abasi's work. [Four Lights](#) by Periphery is nothing but chromatic runs, octaves, and palm muting (a right hand guitar technique in which you muffle the strings by placing the edge of hand on the strings gently; allows you to get the "chugs"). Similarly, Meshuggah had a rather experimental period during late 90's and early to mid 00's in which they spent a lot of time writing rather innovative and complex music also exploring chromaticism to create melodies just as disturbing as their lyrics. They've also been rather technologically innovative, as they were the first prominent metal band to begin using eight string guitars exclusively. The fact that these guys are already exploring their limits of their instruments sonically is a good sign for the case that their genre is going to be home to the next great musical achievement, but at the end of the day, it's possible that djent will not be home to the next breakthrough in music academics. Jazz fusion is another likely, though less so, home for such an event. It's already become the academic music though, and there is perhaps little else to discover and develop in perhaps every aspect of the music and instruments. That being said, the reason it's already held to that expectation that it will be the future home of musical innovation is

because it's already been the home for musical innovation for the past perhaps 30 or so years. Jaco Pastorius, a famous fusion bassist, quite literally changed the role of the instrument from being nothing but a rhythm section instrument, to setting the stage for guys like Victor Wooten to come onto the scene. If Pastorius had not taken bass from the background to the foreground as he did in Weather Report and his solo work, music would not exist as we know it today. I've mentioned him several times already, but Allan Holdsworth is perhaps the most underappreciated musician from this genre as he was incredibly innovative in his music, but also popularized headless and MIDI/ synth guitars. Alex Machacek and the Fabulous Austrian Trio he founded are more than likely going to be the last innovators in the genre, however their music is rather reminiscent of Holdsworth thus with [his passing in 2017](#) I think it's safe to say that jazz fusion has more or less run its course in the world of music academia and uncovering new musical concepts, and that we should look elsewhere.

While many of the same moves that jazz musicians make are simply being reused in djent and modern metal, the stage is set within djent for the next great melodic and/ or rhythmic invention. Players like Thordendal, Hagstrom, and Haake of Meshuggah, Abasi, Reyes, and Garstka of Animals as Leaders, Mansoor, Bowen, and Holcomb of Periphery have set that stage. Like the previous homes to academic musical innovation have had, the presence of young musicians with new technologies at their fingertips is a good sign that they have what they need to innovate; all that the academic world of music needs to do is to accept djent like it once did bebop and jazz, and wait for the next Coltrane to come through.

Mentor Texts

The author whose voice I attempted to emulate was Robert J. Samuelson from the Washington Post. A lot of things he does stylistically were rather challenging to implement into my own paper, simply as they were vaguely incompatible. For one, he doesn't use full paragraphs but rather a couple related sentences (frequently as short as three sentences) separated by space before and after, however I found it unnatural and difficult to write like that on this particular topic, as I like to elaborate a lot on the things I'm passionate about, and simply am not used to that style of writing. I also needed to elaborate and define many things, seeing as most people don't listen to metal and thus know very little about it. He seems to use brief but strong, definitive conclusions pretty frequently, and this was a good thing to take away and copy, and will also make a good habit for the future; this usually takes the form of a single sentence that's more or less just a reworded thesis. He doesn't really make concessions or address the opposition outside of continuing his rant about why they're wrong, but in accordance with the rubric, as well as for the sake of my argument, it was important that I included it. He also regularly makes reference to other articles and makes quotes from them, but as he discusses politics and economics, not music and subjective opinions on culture, that disconnect between topics and goals forced me to rely on examples that I couldn't exactly quote from, but instead make references to while I explain their significance, which is what I tried to do with all the YouTube links.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/is-democrats-swing-left-sound-policy-or-an-economic-pipe-dream/2019/02/24/9c301fea-36e4-11e9-af5b-b51b7ff322e9_story.html?utm_term=.0a5d3d73b5bb

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