

8 Technique vs Virtuosity in the Instrumental Gesture: From Classical to Rock and from Rock to Contemporary Creation

PHILIPPE GONIN

Introduction

In *The Segovia Technique*,¹ Vladimir Bobri describes what the guitarist's gesture should be in order to reach virtuosity. This search for perfection in the "classical" gesture was, however, questioned by another type of virtuosity: that of rock music. "The success and continuation of the electric guitar come from the innovative musical language it birthed," André Duchossoir underlines while specifying that an electric guitar "is not just an amplified acoustic guitar with the help of electricity. Its specific characteristics in the fields of sonority, power, and sustain or even left-hand and right-hand play make it an instrument of its own kind."² We can then better understand that a classical guitarist such as Andrés Segovia, who could be considered a traditionalist, has castigated this new instrument, dubbing it "an abomination, underlining, in a contemptible manner, the great difference existing between the various types of six-string 'boxes.'"³ The feeling, expressed by Segovia as quoted by Duchossoir, is in line with that of Bobri, who sees in the classical guitar a "handmade thing of beauty" versus "the morass of folksy twanging, sentimental balladeering, and brutality of the electrified horned monsters."⁴

It is a fact: through its specific properties, the electric guitar has afforded new technical gestures and new ways of playing. Robert Springer reiterates:

The evolution of rural blues and city blues toward a true urban form happened under the effect of the electrification of the main instruments, especially the guitar, which radically changed the way of playing and the musical thought. At the end of the 1930s, certain jazz and blues guitarists such as Charlie Christian and T-Bone Walker had begun the transition . . . the repercussions were significant. The piano, then, had to confine itself to a background role calling upon its percussive possibilities rather than its melodic possibilities.⁵

Mainstream or scholarly, the twentieth century had a great number of guitar "genres" rub shoulders with one another:

A vast range of styles and techniques make up guitar music. These include the . . . blues, rock and *avant-garde* virtuosity of Jimi Hendrix, the heavy metal playing

of Eddie Van Halen, the anti-virtuosity of “indie-guitar” and punk, the classically oriented music of John Williams and Julian Bream, the *flamenco*-based improvisations of Paco de Lucia, the jazz, jazz-rock and Indian music explorations of John McLaughlin, “world music” productions by Ry Cooder, Ali Farka Toure, and Pat Metheny, and performances by Vishwa Mohan Bhatt and Debashish Bhattacharya in the field of Indian classical music.⁶

The “classical” gesture does not, however, completely vanish from the rock scene. Not to fall into the cliché of categorizing genres, it might be in 1970s prog rock that “classical standards”—both in virtuosity and in the actual gesture—are more obviously observed. Either in Genesis (with Steve Hackett) or in Yes (with Steve Howe), we encounter some of the most compelling examples of classical writing in rock albums. Two tracks, in particular, seem to represent this movement: “Mood For A Day” (Yes, 1971) and “Blood On The Rooftops” (Genesis, 1976).⁷ Howe and Hackett use nylon strings on these tracks instead of an electric guitar or a steel-string acoustic guitar, reminding us even more of the “classical” sound and gesture.

Even if certain rock musicians adopted a “classical” gesture with a “rock” sound, others continued to break the rules of this idealized gesture. This transformation can also be explained by the technical innovations that came alongside the electric guitar’s evolution: the use of distortion, feedback, and various effects allowed the electric guitar to produce new sounds.

In return, contemporary music captured the rock “gesture” and these new sounds. In this regard, the examples of *Vampyr!* by Tristan Murail (1984), *La Cité des Saules* by Hugues Dufourt (1997), *Zap’Init* by Claude Ledoux (2008), and, in some way—because responding to other questions—Gonin’s *A Floyd Chamber Concerto* (2014) are good examples. My experience of arranging and conducting a version of *In C* by Terry Riley (Dijon, Atheneum (2004) and Paris, Philharmonie (2016)) played entirely on the electric guitar, an interpretation centered around tone—what tone to choose and how to combine tones to give the piece a nonuniform dimension? What effects to put into place?—shows that the porosity of popular and art music genres today, and the interaction of the “gestures” associated with them, has become an established phenomenon.

The ambition of this chapter is to synthesize a reflection aimed at putting the instrumental gesture at the center of musical creation. It does not deny or hide all it owes to the works of Steve Waksman⁸ or Robert Walser,⁹ or the works accomplished during the international conference *Quand la guitare [s]’électrise* held at the Philharmonie de Paris in 2016, whose proceedings can now be accessed.¹⁰ In the first part of the chapter, this study briefly covers the electrification of the guitar and its

consequences for guitar manufacturing and development of the effects dedicated to guitar playing. I will then focus on the possible range of crossbreeding the classically inspired instrumental gesture before addressing Eddie Van Halen's contribution. Finally, I will consider the influence that the rock virtuosos' legacies, from Jimi Hendrix to Van Halen, brought to the instrumental gesture and the tones used by composers of contemporary repertoire, whose knowing use of technique has furthered the hybridization of genres.

A New Gesture to Serve a New Virtuosity, and the Influence of Lutherie

In *The Art and Times of the Guitar*, Frederic Grunfeld states that before Hendrix, Charlie Christian had already profoundly changed the status of the electric guitar. "There is the guitar before Christian and the guitar after Christian," Grunfeld writes.¹¹ Waksman adds: "The electric guitar was a different instrument, offering sonic possibilities that allowed the guitar to break away from its standard role in the jazz rhythm section . . . Christian's achievement lay in tapping into the electric guitar's potential, not simply to make his playing more audible, but to expand the instrument's vocabulary."¹²

But electricity is not the only reason that led to a change in the instrumental gesture. The actual changes in guitar manufacturing are significant factors. The disappearance of the sound box led to the creation of the solid-body guitar (Gibson Les Paul, Fender Telecaster, or Stratocaster, to name only the most iconic ones) and modifications to the body itself, with simple or double cutaways that allowed the player to reach the frets closest to the base of the neck on electric models, a feature later incorporated on certain acoustic models. The whammy bar was also added on some electric models, such as the Bigsby or Floyd Rose models, whose influence on technical gestures and virtuosity is fundamental. "Electric guitarists have been notable for the attention they have devoted to the quality and the character of the sounds they produce, and for the creative use of electric technologies in the making of popular music," writes Waksman.¹³ Within the evolution of a gesture linked both to evolution in technique and guitar manufacturing, Jimi Hendrix undoubtedly played a major role. Kevin Dawe and Andy Bennett note: "In 1966, African-American guitarist Jimi Hendrix arrived in Britain and took electric blues playing to an altogether different level, single-handedly pioneering a new style. Superlative manual dexterity was combined with a skillful manipulation of volume and electronic effects units such as the wah-wah pedal, the fuzz tone, and the univibe."¹⁴

The video of Hendrix playing the Troggs' "Wild Thing" at Monterey Pop Festival in 1967¹⁵ is significant here. Hendrix utilizes his guitar as a sound generator: using the distortion and feedback in these few introductory minutes, he only plays with volume and the whammy bar.

"Classical" perfection requires an elaborated technical gesture that must meet certain requirements and postures, aiming at making the gesture efficient. The ideal position of the body is thus presented; Bobri underlines with details: "The instrument is supported at four points: the right thigh, the left thigh, the underside of the right arm, and the chest. The incurved bout of the guitar rests on the left thigh. The right upper arm rests on the broadest part of the guitar body, leaving the forearm hanging completely free."¹⁶ This ideal position changes with the so-called folk guitar. Its larger sound box requires rebalancing the gesture (in the sitting position). However, Bobri presents the "bad habits to be avoided"¹⁷ with drawings that show cross-legged guitarists resting their guitar on their right leg (and not on the left). These drawings remind us of one of the only pictures we have of Robert Johnson, sitting in a suit and wearing a hat, his right leg holding his guitar over his left leg (Figure 8.1).

Another noteworthy example is the position that the thumb is supposed to hold on the neck. When Bobri, while translating the thinking of



Figure 8.1 Robert Johnson (©Jean-Baptiste Gonin)

Segovia, writes, “one will never acquire a good technique by squeezing the neck between the thumb and the index finger [; this gesture] immediately shows a mediocre guitarist,”¹⁸ I cannot help but think about the “mediocrity” of a guitarist such as Jimi Hendrix who notably barred the neck with the help of his thumb. This gesture allowed him to create bass lines with his thumb and give his other fingers greater freedom of movement (Figure 8.2), as demonstrated in Hendrix’s “Purple Haze” (1967), “The Wind Cries Mary” (1967), or “Little Wing” (1967).¹⁹

We could also mention Robert Smith’s habit when he reaches the highest notes on his guitar, contradicting once again the “purity” of the technical gesture advocated by Segovia. In this position, reaching close to the body of the guitar, we observe that when Segovia reaches for the 12th to 19th frets “without contortions,” he leaves his thumb on “the edge of the neck.”²⁰ On the contrary, Smith, especially when he plays on his Fender Bass VI, moves his thumb under the neck; it is then not held by the pinch created by the thumb and other fingers; it simply rests on the base of the thumb itself (Figures 8.3 and 8.4) (see, for example, the live performances of “Picture of You”).²¹

Not to be forgotten, the right hand also led to questioning the ideal posture: the use of the pick, of course, but also, and most importantly, the presence of the whammy bar and the possibility of reaching volume and tone knobs. Jimi Hendrix is significant here once again, but one of the most

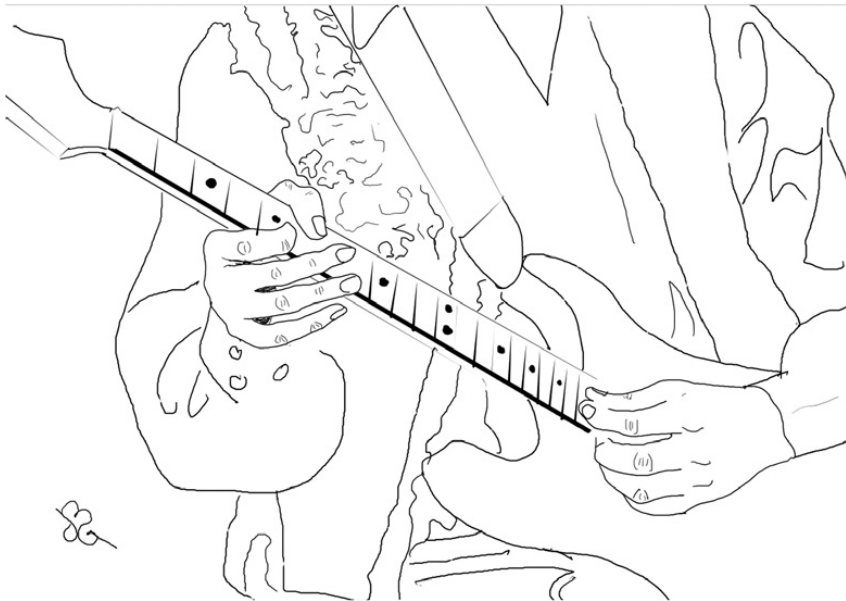


Figure 8.2 Jimi Hendrix’s right hand (©Jean-Baptiste Gonin)



Figure 8.3 Segovia's left hand (adapted from Bobri, *The Segovia Technique*, p. 70 ©Jean-Baptiste Gonin)



Figure 8.4 Robert Smith's (The Cure) left hand (©Jean-Baptiste Gonin)

striking cases is Jeff Beck.²² His gesture is reminiscent of “classical” finger-picking, and the presence of the whammy bar and volume knobs induces a slight modification of this position. Let me illustrate: the thumb, index finger, and middle finger are used to pinch strings, and the ring finger (and sometimes the middle finger) handle the whammy bar, while the pinkie handles the volume knobs and tone.²³

Guitarists adjusted their hand position not only due to a lack of proper training but out of the pursuit of distinctive and desirable tones. The effort to obtain a pure sound was the goal of one of the most famous inventors in the history of the electric guitar: Les Paul. Steve Waksman writes:

The solid-body electric, as conceived by Les Paul, was intended primarily as a means of regulating the musical production of noise and ensuring that melodic or tonal purity would not be overtaken by perceived sonic disorder. Through Paul's efforts and influence, the electric guitar achieved new levels of standardization and uniformity of performance, and the clean, sustaining tone produced by his innovation would become a key component of the "new sound" he created with his wife and performing partner, singer Mary Ford.²⁴

However, the use of distortion and its integration into rock music is one of the biggest sonic paradoxes to have existed since the invention of recording, as Greg Milner notes:

At the exact moment that high fidelity was ramping up, a new music was developing around an aesthetic that valued low fidelity. While the world was thrilling to the possibility of a recording that was so "correct" it was indistinguishable from that which it recorded, a new generation, out of either choice of necessity – and usually both – was learning how to record things "wrong."²⁵

To put it in other words, instead of trying to obtain the purest sound possible, the idea was rather to "soil" the electric guitar tone, to make it harsher, more bitter, less smooth, and to play with it to create, beyond new sounds, new technical gestures.

Virtuosity, Bach, and Heavy Metal – or the Electric Technique to Serve a Classical-Writing-Inspired Music

What impact do these distinctive gestures and guitar manufacturing techniques have on the virtuosity of the instrument's players?²⁶ They can be measured in different ways. They sometimes have no actual impact on the virtuosity, so to speak (as exemplified by Robert Smith), but the inherent specificities of the electric guitar (lutherie, emission of sound through amplification) will induce new gestures that might, in turn, have an impact through a subtle back and forth influence on the instrumental gesture, integrated by contemporary composers.

The most obvious example might be tapping—mostly two-handed tapping—a groundbreaking technique, albeit not entirely new. Eddie Van Halen developed and popularized this playing mode with "Eruption" (1978), although its roots are relatively old. Prior to Van Halen, one can find this technique used by other rock guitarists, although less systematically, such as: Randy Resnick in the late 1960s; Kiss's Ace Frehley, notably at the end of his solo for the song "Shock Me" on their 1977 tour;²⁷ and Steve Hackett, who used it sporadically in "The Musical Box" (Genesis, 1971) and "Dancing with the Moonlit Knight"²⁸

(Genesis, 1973). One cannot ignore the close links this playing has with classical composition. Eddie Van Halen, Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, or Yngwie Malmsteen—to cite only these four virtuosos (all being heavy metal guitarists)—all have classical influences in their playing. Robert Walser reminds us: “From the very beginnings of heavy metal in the late 1960s, guitar players had experimented with the musical materials of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European composers.”²⁹ Mentioning the renowned virtuoso Yngwie Malmsteen, Walser even underlines: “In the liner notes for his 1988 album *Odyssey*, heavy metal guitarist Yngwie J. Malmsteen claimed a musical genealogy that confounds the stability of conventional categorizations of music into classical and popular spheres.”³⁰

In these liner notes, Malmsteen acknowledges he owes a debt to J.S. Bach, Nicolo Paganini, Antonio Vivaldi, and Ludwig Van Beethoven, admitting that he soaks in their influence, inspires himself with their compositions, and “tries to reproduce their melodic essence,” but that he “never learned any of their compositions by heart.”³¹ It is impossible for Malmsteen to play Paganini’s *24 Caprices* for violin on a guitar because he says, “you can reach a phenomenal velocity with a bow, far beyond anything you can achieve with a guitar.”³²

Let us remember that this musician—just like Clapton, Gilmour, Andy Summers, and Mark Knopfler, among others—was honored with his own Stratocaster signature model by Fender. Among other technicalities, this model has a conchoidal touch, a curved neck close to that of the Indian sitar. “With a curved touch . . . the contact with the strings is far better, the sound richer and the possible velocity, much faster.”³³ Malmsteen does not, however, use this guitar’s specificity to change his way of executing bendings by pressing on the string, for instance, rather than pushing it upwards or pulling it downwards, explaining: “I always pull my strings the Clapton way! When I do, that is . . . [s]ince it is a technique I use rather rarely.”³⁴

Van Halen’s “Eruption” and the Creation of an Archetype

“Where would we be as guitarists if Eddie Van Halen had not existed?” asks Matt Blackett in the *Guitar Player* special tribute issue following Van Halen’s passing.³⁵ If one can say there is a way to conceive electric guitar playing before and after Jimi Hendrix,³⁶ one cannot deny the crucial importance of another musician: Eddie Van Halen. There is, undeniably, in the world of rock music in general and in that of heavy metal in particular, a time before and after Van Halen. “Eruption,” the second

track on their self-titled debut album (*Van Halen*, 1978), held people's attention to the point that it became almost a paragon, the reference for heavy metal solos. The track almost did not make it on the album, according to Eddie Van Halen himself: "*Eruption* wasn't really planned to be on the record . . . I was warming up, you know, practicing my solo and Ted [Templeman, the album's producer] walks in. He goes, 'Hey, what's that?' I go, 'That's a little solo thing I do live.' He goes, 'Hey, it's great. Put it on the record.'"³⁷ Elected Best New Talent by the readership of *Guitar Player* in a 1978 poll, Van Halen (who won Best Rock Guitarist for five straight years between 1979 to 1983) had an enormous impact on rock guitar playing.³⁸ He further developed the two-handed tapping technique, a technique he did not create but brought to an unprecedented level of sophistication.

If lutherie is paramount in this evolution, let us not forget about electronics, especially in the crafting of pickups. Guitar journalist Matt Blackett underlines once more: "Ask yourself this: What if Eddie Van Halen hadn't been around to put a PAF in the bridge position of his Strat?"³⁹ Blackett refers to the pickup type called "humbucker," placed by Gibson on their guitars in the late 1950s, and whose acronym is PAF (Patent Applied For), as the label under these pickups stated. The PAF model has since become a myth relying on those first models, pending industrial certification. In number 66 of *Guitare et Claviers*, Eddie Van Halen explains how he loved the sound of a Gibson Les Paul but that its shape did not fit his body and style of playing. This is why he mounted a PAF pickup on a 1961 Stratocaster, in order to obtain "a sound that has nothing to do with a Fender."⁴⁰ Van Halen then used a Stratocaster replication by Charvel on which he mounted "an old Gibson PAF that was recoiled [his] own way and placed very, very close to the bridge to get a high-pitched sound."⁴¹ He had also changed the frets to have large Gibson ones.

Regarding guitar manufacturing, one of the main differences between electric and acoustic guitar is the integration of a whammy bar (vibrato) on certain electric guitar models. The first tremolo bars date back to the 1930s. Their use became a crucial element in some guitarists' playing: Jeff Beck, Jimi Hendrix, David Gilmour—what would a David Gilmour solo be without double bends and the use of vibrato?—and Eddie Van Halen. There are several models of whammy bars: the Bigsby or the one found on the Stratocaster (the renowned "synchronized tremolo") or Jazzmaster (the "floating tremolo"). As a reminder, here is a short definition of a tremolo: a "tremolo system" refers to all components of the tremolo unit, which can include the tailpiece, the bridge, the nut, and the tremolo bar. And it helps to know that the terms "tremolo bar," "vibrato bar," and

“whammy bar” are all used interchangeably, as are the terms “bar” and “arm.”⁴²

Eddie Van Halen was one of the first guitarists to try out a model of a tremolo system which was destined to have great success with guitar players, especially in heavy metal: the Floyd Rose model. Invented by Floyd Rose in 1977 from Fender’s “synchronized tremolo,” the Floyd Rose Locking Tremolo, simply known nowadays as the Floyd Rose, is another type of “synchronized unit.”

Van Halen recalls: “[Floyd Rose] would arrange to come meet and show [me] a thing that seemed as secret as a new atomic weapon . . . He told me it was a vibrato locking system.”⁴³ The problem with this new system was that the guitar would go out of tune too often. Eddie Van Halen recommended to Rose that he adapt his invention to a system already existing on violins (which Van Halen played as a child), an instrument that could be tuned “with a finger while still playing [thanks to fine tuners placed behind the bridge, see Figure 8.5] . . . Once he understood what I needed, he patented it and I never saw him again.”⁴⁴

Moreover, and here’s an important point: Van Halen not only advanced virtuoso techniques but also innovated sonically by integrating effects, especially at the beginning of his career with MXR pedals, experimenting particularly with phaser and flanger effects:

I use two Echoplex. I use a flanger, just for little subtle touches . . . And I use a phase shifter, a Phase 90 – MXR, I think. It doesn’t really phase; it just kind of gives you treble boost, which I like . . . I use a Univox echo box, and I had a different motor put in it so it will go real low and delay much slower.⁴⁵



Figure 8.5 Fine-tuning system on the tailpiece of a violin. Photo ©Philippe Gonin

Van Halen goes on about the end of “Eruption”: “All that noise? That’s a Univox echo box, which I put in the bomb. Did you see that thing?”⁴⁶

Guitar manufacturing, electronics, and effects all have a considerable impact on the way guitar players “create” their own sounds and their own gestures. These gestures and this new virtuosity then (sometimes) become models for others to follow. Van Halen’s influence, through his gesture and his sound, on guitarists such as Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert, or Nuno Bettencourt and, more widely, on the whole generation of “shredders” who appeared in the 1990s, is indisputable.⁴⁷

Contemporary Music and the Electric Guitar: A Shift Toward Hybridization?

The use of the electric guitar in contemporary (art) music has been common for some time. Pierre-Albert Castanet⁴⁸ notices it in works as diverse as Francis Miroglio’s *Tremplins* (1968), Hugues Dufourt’s *Saturne* (1968–1969), and Philippe Manoury’s opera *60ème Parallèle* (1997). “These composers let Jimi Hendrix’s instrument ring and resonate with the most striking effects,”⁴⁹ overusing feedback (Ledoux, Murail, for example) as a gesture that is now an integral part of the instrument’s technical vocabulary. We can add to this list *La Cité des Saules, pour guitare électrique et transformation du son* by Hugues Dufourt (1997), or, of course, *Vampyr!* by Tristan Murail (1984).

This last piece could undoubtedly be considered one of the founders of a hybridization between contemporary writing and instrumental “gestures” originating from rock music, particularly metal. We are, in fact, witnessing a sort of pendular swinging that, from metal guitarists’ classical inspiration—but not necessarily guitaristic—shifts back into the world of art music by integrating new stylistic elements crafted into a rock-writing searching for new tones, gestures, and textures.

In this way, the interpretation by Flavio Virzi of Murail’s *Vampyr!* is visually unsettling. Albeit equipped with a pedal board (BOSS GT-10) and an electric guitar with a vibrato (in this case, an Ibanez, a brand often played by “shredders”) playing a constantly distorted sound with a pick, Virzi chooses a body position that is usually seen with classical guitarists (the guitar is resting on the left leg, same neck inclination, etc.).⁵⁰

Another example is Claude Ledoux’s 2008 *Zap’s Init*. One can clearly see in the YouTube video⁵¹ of the interpretation of the piece by Hughes Kolp (to whom it is dedicated) that the musician’s gesture is directly inspired by rock music and very far removed from the “classical” archetypes—most notably the position of the thumb but also the right hand.

From a technical point of view, the website of the publishers of the score clearly specifies which types of instruments and effects are necessary to interpret this piece of work, as stated below:

A “rock” type electric guitar, equipped with a vibrato bar, potentially with a sustain effect. Use a guitar pick (certain passages *can*, others *must* be played without a pick)

An octavation pedal (octavator to be programmed to add the inferior octave)

A Dunlop-Crybaby type pedal (or similar pedal)

A WR3-Guyaton type pedal (or Boss autotuner, or similar pedal)

An expression pedal plugged into distortion (or possibility to adjust the distortion via the volume button of the guitar)

BASE SOUND:

Sound with distortion + compressor + light delay or reverb.

SPATIALIZATION:

Stereophonic diffusion preferred. A mono sound can be used with a flanger stereo for a light dephasing effect for the spatialization.⁵²

If *Zap's Init* can still be considered a guitar piece in the pure sense of the word, such is not the case with *La Cité des Saules* by Hugues Dufourt (1997). In order to interpret this piece,⁵³ Yaron Deutsch uses a Roland FC 300 MIDI controller plugged into an ADA MIDI Tube Guitar pre-amplifier, a TC Electronic multi-effects device, and two Marshall amplifiers (stereo output). The words “Dufourt la cité des saules” can be seen on the TC Electronic multieffects unit, confirming that the guitarist pre-programmed effects loops before recording the interpretation. Ultimately, the guitar is just an excuse, a sonic source meant to be transformed to the point that the instrument itself is barely noticeable. These two brief examples show two types of virtuosity: one (Dufourt) is essentially connected to the sound (let us remember that Hugues Dufourt belongs to the spectral movement), and the other (Ledoux) is linked more to the “virtuoso” gesture in a common sense of the word: speed of execution, complex technical gesture, but also sound transformation.

My own musical composition, *A Floyd Chamber Concerto*,⁵⁴ commissioned by the Orchestre Régional de Normandie (France) and written in 2014, is a typical case of hybridization. The goal of this piece was to attempt to explain some of the big themes of the second half of the twentieth century, which are addressed in Pink Floyd's songs. The work is thus presented as a succession of four movements referencing Pink Floyd's music but played by a relatively reduced classical ensemble: one flute, one oboe, one clarinet, one bassoon, one French horn, three violins I, three violins II, two violas, two cellos, one double bass, and an electric guitar. The idea was to make this ensemble “sound” like a rock band and to rediscover, through the musical gesture, the energy of rock music: in other

words, “soil” the sound, as I asked the string section to do for the beginning of the fourth movement. As the whole creative process was analyzed and presented at the IRCAM conference in January 2019,⁵⁵ I will not go any further here. But let us take a moment to look at the guitar writing, which aims to “rediscover” certain characteristic features of the Gilmourian gesture, all the while keeping (at least, I hope) its own identity. The writing evokes Gilmour through the use of bends, paying more attention to sound rather than pure virtuosity, and a moderate use of distortion in a number of sequences. Even if the third movement owes more to Rick Wright (*Sisyphus*, 1969) than to Gilmour, the *Floyd Chamber Concerto* presents itself as an “intertextual” piece of work whose influences go beyond Floyd’s music alone: there are also traces of Maurice Ravel (beginning of the first movement), Philip Glass (at the end of the fourth movement), Stravinsky (at the beginning of the fourth and also in the second movement), etc. This intertextuality is, however, more linked to the sound (to the sonic texture, to the tone) than to the actual instrumental “technique.”

Conclusion

I am aware that this overview, focusing only on a few examples, deserves to be developed further. I have, for example, chosen to put aside the question of the legacy of the flamenco guitar in pop music, an aesthetic that dominates such obvious tracks as “Spanish Caravan” (The Doors, 1968), “A Spanish Piece” (Pink Floyd, 1969), “Spanish Fly” (Van Halen, 1979), and “Innuendo” (Queen, 1991), the “classical” and flamenco gestures sometimes intertwining.⁵⁶ I have also left out the question of virtuosity with its classical links to jazz. My contribution shows that the twentieth century, while giving rise to the newly manufactured electric guitar and new popular genres of rock and its sub-categories (psychedelic, prog, metal, etc.), witnessed the integration of new sounds—the use of effects aiming to transform the tone of the instrument—to create a specific language and an instrumental gesture that freed itself from classical constraints, all the while paying homage to its musical ancestors. Conversely, the world of the “classical” guitar, despite some old school musicians’ hesitation (led by Segovia and Bobri), managed to integrate the technical progress born in the rock world and maybe even renew its own language and writing gestures through the use of its own equipment—the electric guitar.

If I cannot deny that a correct gesture is a prerequisite to any virtuosity (whatever its complexity), this contribution suggests that Segovia and Bobri are on the wrong track. By remaining stuck on techniques that

concern only one type of repertoire, rejecting with force any progress linked to technology, they ignore a whole repertoire, including that intended for the “classical” guitar.

I have shown that the “classical” gesture is not the only way to achieve virtuosity. Rock musicians demonstrated that new gestures could be created and developed, helped by the possibilities offered by the guitar’s electrification, and that a new “technical” gesture can renew well-trodden forms of virtuosity.

Notes

This text was translated from French to English by Anthony Ghilas and Jacqueline Ortiz.

1. Vladimir Bobri, *The Segovia Technique* (The Macmillan Company, 1972).
2. André Duchossoir, “Naissance de la guitare électrique: entre progrès technologiques majeurs et quête d’un nouvel idiome musical,” in *Quand la guitare [s]’électrise*, edited by Benoît Navarret, Marc Battier, Philippe Bruguère, and Philippe Gonin (Sorbonne Université Presses, 2022), p. 28 (translated by Ghilas and Ortiz). Available at <https://sup.sorbonne-universite.fr/catalogue/arts-et-esthetique/musiques/quand-la-guitare-selectrise> (accessed October 28, 2022).
3. Segovia in Duchossoir, “Naissance de la guitare électrique,” p. 28.
4. Bobri, *Segovia Technique*, p. 76.
5. Robert Springer, *Le Blues Authentique* (Fillipacchi, 1985), p. 188 (translated by Ghilas and Ortiz).
6. Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe, “Introduction: Guitars, Cultures, People and Places,” in *Guitar Cultures*, edited by Andy Bennett and Kevin Dawe (Berg, 2001), p. 4.
7. Isolated guitar of the track at “Behind the Multitrack, ‘Genesis – Blood on the Rooftops,’” YouTube (2022). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oWYnwtUKDY&ab_channel=BehindtheMultitrack (accessed October 28, 2022).
8. Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1999).
9. Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993).
10. Navarret et al., *Quand la guitare [s]’électrise*.
11. Frederic Grunfeld, *The Art of Times of the Guitar: An Illustrated History* (Collier Books, 1969), p. 261.
12. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, pp. 34–35.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
14. Bennett and Dawe, “Introduction,” p. 3.
15. Tuco Ugly, “Jimi Hendrix Wild Thing, Live at Monterey Pop Festival, 1967,” YouTube (2021). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4I-7qfWZPE&ab_channel=TucoUgly (accessed October 28, 2022).
16. Bobri, *Segovia Technique*, p. 33.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
19. Philippe Gonin, “Jimi Hendrix: L’explorateur de sons,” *Tempus Perfectum* 3 (2007): 12.
20. Bobri, *Segovia Technique*, p. 70.
21. Sydney Opera House, “The Cure – ‘Pictures Of You’ | Live at Sydney Opera House,” YouTube (2019). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=pjb4EyEjdoY&ab_channel=SydneyOperaHouse (May 2, 2023).
22. Philippe Gonin, *Jeff Beck: You Had It Coming* (Canop, 2021). Available at www.reseau-canop.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/Projets/Jeff_Beck/Jeff_Beck_DocsEnLigne_BAT.pdf (accessed October 28, 2022).
23. See *ibid.*
24. Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, p. 53.

25. Greg Milner, *Perfecting Sound Forever: The Story of Recorded Music* (Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 147.
26. This part of our contribution owes a lot to the third chapter, “Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity” in Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Wesleyan University Press, 1993), pp. 57–107.
27. At 4:47 in: LordOfTheThighs62, “Ace Frehley Solo Tokyo Japan 1977,” YouTube (2006). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsvtJ2npPiA&ab_channel=LordOfTheThighs62 (accessed October 28, 2022).
28. Steve Hackett is also an avid enthusiast of ‘*violining*,’ a technique specifically made for the electric guitar since it involves cutting the start of the sound with either a volume pedal or a volume button from the guitar. This technique is used by Hackett in various Genesis songs, but I would refer to “Hairless Heart” (extract from *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, 1974).
29. Walser, *Running with the Devil*, p. 57.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
31. Michel Sigwalt, “Y.J Malmsteen: L’Étoile du Nord,” *Guitare et Claviers* 87 (1988): 90.
32. *Ibid.*, 90.
33. *Ibid.*, 88.
34. *Ibid.*, 88
35. Matt Blackett, “World without Ed,” in *Guitar Player Special Tribute Issue – Eddie Van Halen: A Celebration of His Life and Legend* (2020), p. 27.
36. Gonin, *Jimi Hendrix*.
37. Jas Obrecht, “Birth of a Legend: Eddie Van Halen,” in *Guitar Player Special Issue – Eddie Van Halen: A Celebration of His Life and Legend* (2020 [1978]), p. 52.
38. Walser, *Running with the Devil*, p. 68.
39. Blackett, “World without Ed,” p. 27.
40. G.P., “Edward Van Halen,” *Guitare et Claviers* 66/9 (1986): 79–83 and 180 (translated by Ghilas and Ortiz).
41. *Ibid.*
42. Interestingly, it was pioneering guitarist Lonnie Mack’s 1963 instrumental hit “Wham!” that gave us the term ‘whammy bar.’ Adam Houghtaling, “Pitch Control: A Tremolo Primer,” Fender (n.d.). Available at www.fender.com/articles/tech-talk/pitch-control-a-tremolo-primer (accessed October 17, 2022).
43. Olivier Portnoi, “Van Halen, les secrets d’une légende,” *Guitar Part* 267/6 (2016): 36–45.
44. Concerning the role that Eddie Van Halen truly played in the conception of Floyd Rose, and more particularly in the adaptation of fine tuners—which were already present on the violins—to the guitar, there is a debate that leads to rather strong exchanges in the literature. I will not get into that debate here.
45. Obrecht, “Birth of a Legend,” p. 54.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Even though this point is not discussed here, it must be stressed that virtuosity is not the ultimate goal of all rock guitarists. See Steve Waksman, “Contesting Virtuosity: Rock Guitar since 1976,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, edited by Victor Anand Coelho (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 122–132.
48. Pierre-Albert Castanet, “Du rock dans la musique contemporaine savant,” in *Focus sur le Rock en France: Analyser les musiques actuelles*, edited by Philippe Gonin (Delatour, 2014), pp. 77–89.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
50. HighSCOREnmc, “Tristan Murail, ‘Vampyr!’,” YouTube (2011). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kshdU2hD8&ab_channel=highSCOREnmc (accessed October 28, 2022).
51. It is clearly visible in this video that the musician’s gesture is directly inspired from rock music and is very far from the “classical” archetypes (particularly the position of his thumb, as well as his right hand).
52. Claude Ledoux, “Zap’s Init,” Babel Scores (2008). Available at www.babelscores.com/catalogs/instrumental/zap-s-init (accessed May 2, 2023) (translated by Ghilas and Ortiz).
53. Yaron Deutsch, “Hugues Dufourt – La Cite Des Saules,” YouTube (2021). Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=udy3vgTEZD4&ab_channel=YaronDeutsch (accessed October 28, 2022).
54. Philippe Gonin, *A Floyd Chamber Concerto*, Bandcamp (2017). Available at <https://philippegonin.bandcamp.com/album/a-floyd-chamber-concerto> (accessed May 2, 2023).

55. IRCAM, “Philippe Gonin: Une expérience pop? Un décryptage du processus de composition du Floyd Chamber Concerto” (2019). Available at <https://medias.ircam.fr/x9c765a> (accessed October 28, 2022).
56. On the flamenco guitar, see Peter Manuel, “Flamenco Guitar: History, Style, Status,” in Coelho, *Cambridge Companion to the Guitar*, pp. 13–32.

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