

Krzysztof Skórski

John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

ORCID: 0000-0003-4782-8780

The Ever-Evolving Maze – The Analysis of Metal Genres

Most scholars define metal music as a genre of rock music that separated from the mother genre in the early 1970s (Weinstein: 11). In the book *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Subculture*, Deena Weinstein also states that both rock and roll and rock are “far too broad to be considered genres themselves [...] Neither rock and roll nor rock have a standard definition. Each is a bricolage that can only be defined or totalized from one of its aspects” (Weinstein: 11). Therefore heavy metal is a genre within a greater musical current, not a subgenre of rock music. However, this kind of music turned out to be particularly prolific and gave birth to numerous genres, subgenres, and fusion genres on its own. Therefore, modern metal music may be treated as a meta-genre since it encompasses many distinct genres that evolved from a common stem – heavy metal of the 1970s. In this article, I intend to explore and describe metal music and its internal subdivision to demonstrate that despite its harsh façade it is, in fact, an intricate, eclectic, and ever-evolving genre. But first, it is necessary to define the key features of metal.

What constitutes metal?

As far as the sonic structure of metal music is concerned, probably the quintessential elements are its volume and power that should overwhelm the listeners and immerse them into the music (Weinstein: 24). The leading musical instrument in metal is the electric guitar that can produce a wide range of sounds, which is then distorted, amplified, and altered by peripheral equipment. Heavy metal guitarists must possess high proficiency in the art of playing guitar, as their lines are usually much more elaborate and complex than those in other rock genres. Guitar solos are another crucial element of heavy metal music; they are part of the song when the vocalist remains silent, and the lead guitar takes over his/her role. The solo is the moment when metal guitarists can genuinely shine and demonstrate their virtuosity. Most of the metal bands have at least two guitarists: a lead guitarist, who plays melodic lines and solos, and a rhythm guitarist who creates the rhythmic background for the former by providing riffs and other rhythmic techniques.

The next metal-defining instrument is a set of drums that is usually far more developed than drum kits for other forms of rock music to offer a wider range of sound. The primary task of percussion is to establish the rhythmic tempo of the song, yet the sound of drums is far more prominent and audible than in other music genres. Metal drummers always play with both arms and legs – the bass (kick) drum is the essential component of metal music. Percussion is supported by another instrument, namely a bass guitar. Despite amplification, the bass lines are often overshadowed by other instruments and indistinguishable for many listeners. Nonetheless, the bass guitar plays a vital role in metal music. According to Deena Weinstein, “its contribution to the instrumental mix is what makes heavy metal ‘heavy’” (Weinstein: 24). Apparently, a heavy metal song deprived of the bass line lacks the richness and depth of sound. The emphasis on lower sounds gives metal music tactile dimension and enables music to be felt, not only heard (Weinstein: 25).

Although the electric guitar, drums, and bass guitar are the standard instruments in metal music, other musical instruments are also present in its various genres. In mainstream heavy metal, especially in its early stages, among the bands such as Deep Purple, Rainbow, or Dio, the most popular instrumental

addition were keyboards which are also quite a common feature of the modern metal scene (e.g. Rammstein, Dream Theater, Stratovarius). Furthermore, some more “eccentric” musical instruments are also present in metal music, especially when blended with other musical styles. A perfect example of such fusion is the genre of folk metal, which often utilizes various instruments such as violin, wind instruments, accordion, or ethnic instruments (e.g. Arkona, Eluveitie, Korpiklaani).

The vocal is the final element of the sonic structure of metal music; it considerably varies depending on the metal genre and a band’s individual style ranging from screaming and death growl through melodic recitation, rapping, and typical rock vocals to the operatic soprano. The primary aim of metal vocals is to display emotionality explicitly and authentically, which can be achieved by the application of vocal techniques. For instance, screaming may be interwoven into clean vocals to create the atmosphere of an internal struggle. The expression is always powerful; there is no place for softness, subtlety, or irony. This emphasis on authenticity has its origins in the 1960s counterculture (Weinstein: 26–27). Another significant feature of metal music is the fact that vocals are not the privileged element of the musical composition but its part. They challenge the guitar and *vice versa*, creating “rivalry” between the vocalist and guitarist, yet one should not be eclipsed by another (Weinstein: 25–27).

Early days of heavy metal

To fully understand the complexity and diversity of heavy metal, it is necessary to explore the history of its origins and evolution. There is a consensus that it originated in the late 1960s in the industrial Midlands of England (Christe: 20; Cope: 7). The void, created by the absence of the Love Generation, was filled with new countercultures disillusioned with utopian and pacifist ideas that were replaced by a negative approach towards the authorities and a pessimistic worldview. “Heavy metal was born amidst the ashes of the failed youth revolution” (Weinstein: 13). However, defining heavy metal’s specific date of birth is not an easy task. In its wake, the borders between metal and other genres within rock music were hardly distinguishable and clarified only in the mid-1970s (Weinstein: 14).

The uncertainty about the “birth date” of metal arises from the fact that the music of numerous bands possessed certain features of heavy metal but never combined them into metal in a strict sense. The most prominent traits of metal, such as guitar distortion and sheer volume, were derived from rock music. The “heaviness,” was present in earlier songs, for instance, in the music of The Beatles (e.g. *Helter Skelter*) or Jimi Hendrix (e.g. *Purple Haze*). Metal music was greatly influenced by borrowing blues and blues-rock riff-based structure (Weinstein: 16) and inspired by its melancholic and expressive vocals. In the first episode of *Metal Evolution*, Kirk Hammet, the lead guitarist of Metallica, says: “Like in heavy metal, blues is also just dark in nature. [...] The real blues of Robert Johnson and Howlin’ Wolf – it sounded dark, it sounded dirty, it sounded evil. These all blues guys, they had a growl to their voice” (“Pre Metal”). The artists playing the transitional form between blues, rock, and heavy metal (e.g. The Yardbirds, Jimi Hendrix, and Cream), heralded the arrival of the first bands whose music can be labelled as “heavy metal” (Christe: 24).

Among heavy metal ancestors, jazz may be an unexpected one. Superficially, it has nothing in common with heavy metal. Yet, jazz musicians are often virtuosos of their instruments and demonstrate their skills by playing extended and elaborate solos. Moreover, jazz raised the prominence of percussion – Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa were jazz drummers whose extreme techniques influenced and inspired the drummers of the “Unholy Trinity” of the British hard rock and heavy metal: Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and Black Sabbath (Dicker, Eder, Kevin). The final component of the amalgam that turned to be heavy metal was psychedelic/acid rock. This genre was heavily inspired by altered states of consciousness achieved through drug intake. It is based on the repetition of simple phrases that create a complex whole when combined. To emulate the state of mind affected by LSD, its live performances were accompanied by vivid colors and lightning (thus the name “acid rock”). The purpose of psychedelic rock was not to dance but to immerse in it and lose oneself in music (Weinstein: 16–17). Among those psychedelic progenitors of metal are Cream, The Amboy Dukes, Pink Floyd, Blue Cheer, Uriah Heep, and Judas Priest (the last one later became “true” metal).

The phrase “heavy metal” initially conveyed three meanings, yet none referred to music. Heavy metals are chemical elements characterized by high

molecular density (e.g. iron, lead, uranium) as opposed to light metals (lithium, sodium, calcium) (Chodkowski: 321–322). The other meaning, already used in the 19th century, described large guns possessing massive firepower. The final one was a figurative description of a person of great power, either physical or mental (Walser: 1). The band most often credited for coining the term “heavy metal” is Steppenwolf, an American hard rock/proto-metal group who, in their 1968 motorcycle anthem *Born to Be Wild*, sang about “heavy metal thunder.” However, the term does not refer to musical genre, but the roaring blare of iconic Harley-Davidson chopper motorcycle. Despite that fact, the phrase was catchy, so the term “heavy metal” was applied in the early 1970s to describe the music of bands like Deep Purple, Black Sabbath, and Led Zeppelin (Weinstein: 18–20).

These three bands are the “Unholy Trinity” of heavy metal – the pioneers of the genre, credited for its emergence. They created the sound that became the core of heavy metal in the albums *Led Zeppelin II* (1969), *Black Sabbath* (1970), and *Deep Purple in Rock* (1970). Their music was more powerful and darker than anything in the past. Led Zeppelin’s blues-inspired style was characterized by heavily distorted guitar, complexity, unpredictable music’s dynamic, and the vocals of Robert Plant. Deep Purple’s music was quite similar, but a bit more rhythmic and revolving around the guitar and organ solos (Walser: 10). Still, both of groups possessed features of hard rock and blues-rock, while Black Sabbath’s eponymous debut album is arguably the first one that can be ultimately considered heavy metal (Huey). *Black Sabbath* is filled with mystic and occult references that further emphasize its already obscure and gloomy mood. That shadowy vibe became another metal-defining quality, as aptly explained by Andrew L. Cope: “[t]his concept, of combining dark lyrics with dark sounds, became a main feature of Black Sabbath’s output and ultimately of heavy metal too and is represented in the work of subsequent bands such as Judas Priest, Venom, Metallica, Slayer, Immortal, Arch Enemy, Decide and Lamb of God” (Cope: 33). Out of the Trinity, Black Sabbath was probably the most influential band. In his book, *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*, Cope establishes the concept of the Black Sabbath/Led Zeppelin dichotomy to represent the contrast between heavy metal (Sabbath) and hard rock (Zeppelin). Cope states that Led Zeppelin influenced the hard rock musicians,

while Black Sabbath evolved a new and original form of music that became the inspiration for the forthcoming metal bands (Cope: 43).

Heavy metal elements sprawled from England and spread across Europe, the United States, and even Australia over the early 1970s. Many bands (e.g. AC/DC, Aerosmith, Rainbow, Kiss, Alice Cooper, or Scorpions) incorporated metal into their music and invented features that became part of the metal culture. For instance, Kiss popularized corpse paint (a form of black and white stage make-up), while Alice Cooper can be credited for introducing horror aesthetics to the genre (Weinstein: 21). Heavy metal live performances started to be accompanied by light shows, pyrotechnics, and other special effects (Walser: 10). However, the definition of the newly emerged genre was still somewhat erratic; the aforementioned bands played a mixture of hard rock and heavy metal. The situation changed when Judas Priest appeared on the early heavy metal scene. The band that used to play blues covers and psychedelic/hard rock set its goal to “achieve the definition of heavy metal” (Walser: 6). In March 1976, they released their second studio album entitled *Sad Wings of Destiny* which crystallized the quintessence of heavy metal, finally establishing it as an undisputed, standalone genre (Weinstein: 17; Christie: 36).

Lyrical themes of metal

The complexity of the verbal dimension of metal is comparable to the complexity of its sound. Almost everything bears some meaning: band names, titles of albums and songs, and lyrics. In heavy metal, band names rarely promote the individual – they rather stand for the egalitarian nature of this music that does not privilege the vocalist (as always, few exceptions like Dio or Marilyn Manson may be found). Those names usually evoke power in multiple ways. Some demonstrate it by reference to electric or mechanic power (AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, Motörhead), dangerous people, animals, or objects (Slayer, Scorpions, Iron Maiden). Others bring up the fear of death (Megadeth, Venom, Anthrax) or strong emotions (Rage Against the Machine). A large number of bands associate their names with mysticism, paganism, and occult (Judas Priest, Arkona, Týr, Black Sabbath) or works of fiction, fantasy, and folklore (Paradise Lost, Amon Amarth, Finntroll). Finally, some bands’ names refer to

the genre itself (Metallica). Certain bands transgress this convention by using utterly anti-power names (Kiss, Nightwish, Rhapsody, Cinderella).¹ The titles of both heavy metal albums and songs reflect similar themes and provide the context for songs' lyrics which, due to the importance of expression mentioned in the first section, are meant to be heard rather than read (Weinstein: 33–34). No theme dominates the genre as a whole, but some, such as "Broadway-musical optimism," are excluded (Weinstein: 35). Deena Weinstein groups major themes of heavy metal in two categories that compose binary opposition: Dionysian (from Dionysus, the Greek god of wine) and chaotic (from Greek primordial deity, Chaos) (Weinstein: 35).

Dionysian themes tend to focus on the decadence characteristic for both rock 'n' roll and rock music, encapsulated in the infamous hedonistic hendiatriis – "wine, women, and song" (or rather its post-modernist incarnation: "sex, drugs, and rock and roll"). Romantic love is rarely visible and is replaced by lust and pleasure arising from sex, which is often primitive and animalistic. Lyrics usually adopt the perspective of a heterosexual male. Women are rarely named, their role is reduced to satisfying sexual desires, and their beauty is generally of less importance (Weinstein: 36). Drugs are seldom present in metal lyrics, even though numerous musicians were/are addicted to them (Weinstein: 36–37). Metal songs usually critically approach the topic of narcotics, yet some are in favor of them. The drug that appears to be the most popular motif in metal is the one excessively used by Dionysus himself. Alcohol and getting drunk is the theme of both old and new songs, rising in prominence, especially among folk and power metal bands. The "rock and roll" part of the motto is undeniably the most cherished by the Dionysian side of heavy metal. Although the musicians usually refer to their music with terms such as "rock" or "rock and roll," they do not mean those particular progenitors of metal, but their music, being the quintessence of rock (Weinstein: 37). Those rock/metal anthems tend to unleash energy during live performance (Straw: 113).

Chaos is the second thematic group within heavy metal. It is allured by the darkness of blues and has nothing to do with Dionysian hedonism; it is grim, pessimistic, disillusioned, and often angry. It expresses disorder, conflict,

¹ This classification is inspired by Robert Walser's typology of bands in his book (1993).

contradiction, and opposition (Weinstein: 38–39). The primary source of heavy metal “rhetoric of chaos” lies in Judeo-Christian tradition. Featuring the motif of the conflict between good and evil, it is often a metaphorical basis for conveying the meaning that relates to ordinary reality. “The songwriter is sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, and sometimes just describing the excitement, profundity, or tragedy of the struggle” (Weinstein: 40). Subjects related to religion (not necessarily Christianity) such as mythology, death, and afterlife, occult, mysticism, or the devil also appear in heavy metal and can be perceived as chaotic. Literature, poetry (mainly gothic), and fantasy are other sources of chaotic themes. Finally, chaotic songs often find inspiration in external tragedies (violence, crime, war, or injustice) and internal problems of the individual (addiction, insanity, fear, or evil within a human being). Despite its seriousness, the imagery of chaos may be used as an opportunity to play. In such cases, it should be interpreted as a Dionysian celebration of vitality (Weinstein: 42).

The ever-evolving metal maze: the diversification begins

The internal taxonomy within the meta-genre of metal is fairly complex – the borderlines between its genres often are blurred by fusion genres and the fact that the style of a particular band may be assigned to multiple categories. According to the theory established by Roland Byrnside in “Formation of a Musical Style,” a popular music genre undergoes phases of formation, crystallization, and exhaustion. Then it becomes a predecessor of a new genre (quoted in Weinstein: 44). However, heavy metal opposed this trajectory, and it persisted, evolved, and spawned new (sub)genres.

The second half of the 1970s was marked by the musical phenomenon known as the “New Wave of British Heavy Metal” (often abbreviated to NWoBHM). It was not a new metal genre, but rather an internal movement or the next stage of its evolution. Each “New Wave” band had a slightly different musical style – the common feature was that those groups consisted mostly of inexperienced underground musicians whose music was to some extent influenced by freshly-emerged punk (Christe: 54). Among numerous bands within the NWoBHM, Iron Maiden and Def Leppard became iconic superstars

(Weinstein: 44), while Motörhead and Saxon also achieved considerable success. Others such as Venom, Diamond Head, or Raven were less popular but created their musical niches that contributed to the further evolution of heavy metal (Christe: 57, 64; Weinstein: 44). The new wave of British heavy metal as a trend led to diversification within heavy metal; NWoBHM bands became the progenitors, if not the creators of many metal genres, including speed metal, thrash metal, black metal, and (to some extent) glam metal.

The glamorous beast

Glam metal, also known as hair metal, pop metal, or lite metal, emerged in the late 1970s in the United States. It balances on the borderline between hard rock and heavy metal, as it fused the visual style of glam rock and heavy metal music. According to Deena Weinstein, it has “just enough metal sound (the bass) to be heard as metal, but not so much [...] that they will be detested by those turned off by traditional heavy metal music” (Weinstein: 46–47). As its name suggests, glam metal is attractive, glamorous – entirely depleted of screams and growls. The sanitized image of “pretty boys” appealed to girls – it contributed to the popularity of the genre and its undisputed commercial success throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (Christe: 218, 224). Its lyrics are predominantly concerned with lust and love, borrowing pop music’s convention of mentioning girls names, and often addressing a song to one of them (Weinstein: 47). The lyrics, combined with the androgynous scene appearance (stage make-up, long hair, unmasculine attire), challenged the established gender roles and adopted the ideas of the 1960s sexual revolution (Christe: 220). The decline in glam metal’s popularity began in the 1990s with the emergence of grunge and alt-metal. Moreover, some of the “heavier” bands started to produce more music for the wider audience (the prime example would be Metallica with its eponymous album from 1991). The albums that may be labelled as glam metal include *Girls, Girls, Girls* (Mötley Crüe), *Look What the Cat Dragged In* (Poison), and *Dancing Undercover* (Ratt).

Metal machine accelerates

Thrash metal is an utter reversal of mainstream-focused glam metal. The musicians of this genre denounced the glamorous and outlandish stage appearance. Instead, they focused on emphasizing authenticity and reducing the distance between artists and the audience (Weinstein: 49–50). Thrash emerged in the early 1980s in California as the initiative of young musicians influenced by both punk and the new wave of British heavy metal groups such as Iron Maiden, Motörhead, Diamond Head, and Venom (Walser: 14; Weinstein: 48–49). Its most notable characteristics are significantly increased aggressive tempo and usually harsh or even growling vocals, which Weinstein compares to “gargling with hydrochloric acid” (Weinstein: 51). Objection to glam metal is also perceivable in the lyrical layer of thrash metal; it is not interested in Dionysian hedonism but focuses on conveying a message – thrash songs feature chaotic themes: social injustice, war, environmental destruction, alienation, gore, or evil. The exemplary thrash metal albums are *Ride the Lightning* (Metallica), *Show No Mercy* (Slayer), *Bonded by Blood* (Exodus), and *Game Over* (Nuclear Assault). Thrash metal also spawned its slower and syncopated yet powerful and aggressive version known as groove metal, represented by such albums as *Vulgar Display of Power* (Pantera), *The Way of the Fist* (Five Finger Death Punch), or *Resolution* (Lamb of God).

A genre that is closely related to thrash is speed metal.² It is a sort of a bridge between classic heavy metal and thrash – due to this, it is often classified as the ancestor of the latter. As the name suggests, it also brings music tempo to its extreme, but it usually features vocals typical for early heavy metal, and its melody is cleaner and more intricate (Christe: 195–197). It is embodied in such albums as *Walls of Jericho* (Helloween), *Persecution Mania* (Sodom), and *Forged in Fire* (Anvil).

Another offshoot of early heavy metal is power metal. According to Ian Christe, the term was initially broadly used to describe everything radical in metal: “Two times the speed, two times the spikes – power metal had double everything” (Christe: 138). However, as time had passed, power metal bands

² Some scholars, such as Deena Weinstein, use those terms interchangeably, referring to the same genre.

forged the sound that diverged them from other, more extreme genres. Power metal is defined by melodic, epic style, frequent addition of keyboards, and strong, usually high-pitched vocals (Boward). The “epicness” is present in the lyrical layer of power metal as well; it deals with fantasy, mythology, metaphysical topics, self-celebration, and camaraderie (Boward; Christe: 138). Another prevalent theme is warfare that, unlike in most metal genres, is often perceived as an opportunity to perform heroic deeds or defend one’s ideals. Power metal is represented by the albums like *Somewhere Far Beyond* (Blind Guardian), *The Triumph of Steel* (Manowar), *Dawn of Victory* (Rhapsody of Fire), or *Blessed & Possessed* (Powerwolf).

Hell is the limit

The defiance of established boundaries by thrash and speed metal led to the birth of metal genres collectively labelled with an umbrella term “extreme metal” used to describe the music defined by sonic, thematic, or visual transgression (Schaap, Berkers, 2014). Extreme metal generally features harsh sound; guitars are usually down-tuned and heavily distorted, while the music tends to be less melodic, with reduced, or omitted, guitar solos. The tempo is arguably the most transgressive component of extreme metal. Most extreme metal styles favor fast pace, often exceeding 200 BPM (sometimes reaching 400 BPM). On the other side of the spectrum, doom metal transgresses tempo limits regarding its slowness. Vocals in extreme metal are usually deprived of melody and altered (growled or screamed) in a way that deciphering the lyrics is impossible. (Kahn-Harris: 31–33). Its lyrics use chaotic themes – they often explicitly refer to death, war, mental instability, or the occult. The genres that fall into the category of extreme metal include both thrash and speed metal, black metal, death metal, doom metal, and their various subgenres and fusion genres (e.g. melodic death metal, metalcore).

Now I will very briefly describe the unique traits of each major genre of extreme metal, starting with the most controversial of them – black metal. The term was coined with the release of Venom’s album entitled *Black Metal*

(1982) which was characterized by a strong anti-Christian message³. The sound of black metal was determined by Bathory – their music was distorted and cacophonous, deliberately recorded in low-fidelity with the vocals employed screaming or barking⁴ (Moynihan, Søderlind: 18–22). Lyrical themes of black metal usually involve Satanism, paganism, and misanthropy. Distinctive examples of black metal recordings include *Bathory* (Bathory), *Anthems to the Welkin at Dusk* (Emperor), *The Mysteriis Dom Sathanas* (Emperor), or *Hvis Lyset Tår Oss* (Burzum).

A genre that is closely related to black metal is death metal – a musical style that brought the elements of thrash to its extremes. Death metal is characterized by extraordinarily fast and aggressive tempo, chaotic yet complex rhythm, down-tuned and heavily distorted guitars, and deep stomach-churning vocals (Christe: 329–330). The lyrical themes fit the heaviness and aggression of the music; they usually tell of everything morbid: death, rape, murder, or torture (Moynihan, Søderlind: 27). At times death metal deals with more thought-provoking matters: existentialism, mental issues, or even ecology. Exemplary death metal albums include *Tomb of the Mutilated* (Cannibal Corpse), *Blessed Are the Sick* (Morbid Angel), *Leprosy* (Death).

Doom metal, being an antithesis of speed, thrash, and death metal is a somewhat odd member of the extreme metal family. This genre is transgressive in terms of extreme slowness. It evolved straight from the source of heavy metal – the music of Black Sabbath⁵ (Christe: 475). Doom metal's sound is also heavily distorted, composed of long, complex structures that sometimes intermingle “heavier” and “lighter” parts. Some vocalists use extreme vocal techniques (mainly growling), while others keep vocals melodic or mix clean and unclean lines. Lyrics are melancholic and depressing, they tell about the inevitability of mortality and decay (Kahn-Harris: 33, 36) or refer to gothic horror, mysticism, and the occult. Doom metal was defined in the 1980s by albums such as *Saint Vitus* (Saint Vitus), *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus* (Candlemass), or

³ Lyrics aside, Venom's *Black Metal* ought to be classified rather as thrash/speed metal.

⁴ Some black metal vocalists use melodic vocals instead (Kahn-Harris: 33).

⁵ Certain Black Sabbath songs may be classified as (proto-)doom metal, e.g. “Black Sabbath” from the album *Black Sabbath* (1970).

Psalm 9 (Trouble). Its more contemporary representatives involve, for example, *Medusa* (Paradise Lost) and *The Ghost of Orion* (My Dying Bride).

Metallic syncretism

In the 1990s, thanks to combining its traditional components with influences borrowed from other genres (also those not belonging to the rock family), heavy metal became even more eclectic and spawned a fusion genre known as alternative metal (Christe: 306) that is perfectly encapsulated by Armenian-American band System of a Down. Their musical compositions are characterized by abrupt changes in tempo, mixing clean vocals with rapping and growling, and a broad spectrum of instruments. Alt-metal's most successful derivative form is nu metal, a subgenre built on funk metal⁶ combined with rap, dance music, and death metal (Christe: 448; Kahn-Harris: 1). Interestingly, many nu metal groups deliberately distanced themselves from both the metal scene and history, thereby arousing resentment among "true metal" fans (who deem nu metal to be "impure") and preventing the growth of subculture centered around this style (Kahn-Harris: 136–137). A sort of bridge between nu metal and the rest of the genre was established by Slipknot that enriched their music with more features derived from death metal (Christe: 447). Examples of alt-metal and nu metal recordings include: *Toxicity* (System of a Down), *Iowa* (Slipknot), *Meteora* (Linkin Park), and *Life Is Peachy* (Korn).

Metal artists did not limit themselves to assimilating the elements of popular music. They experimented with both sacred and profane genres – classical and folk music. Symphonic metal draws inspiration from power metal, already renowned for possessing some orchestral qualities. The most distinctive difference between these two genres is the substitution of the guitar's leading role with keyboards. Additionally, symphonic metal vocals are operatic, usually sung by a female. The credit for the invention of symphonic metal is ascribed to the Swedish band Therion (Wagner: 17), followed by the bands such as Epica, Nightwish, and Within Temptation. Exemplary symphonic metal recordings

⁶ Another alt-metal derivative.

include *Vovin* (Therion), *Century Child* (Nightwish), and *The Phantom Agony* (Epica).

Though the term “folk metal” may evoke positive, familiar connotations, its stylistic roots lie within the darkness of black metal. In the 1990s, Norwegian black metal artists preoccupied with Norse mythology and nationality began to incorporate folk elements into their music (Kahn-Harris: 133). This trend soon started to live its own life – a growing number of metal bands⁷ incorporated ethnic instruments and local melodic patterns into their music. It resulted in the emergence of an incredibly diversified and regionalized genre of metal. The list of folk metal albums contains, among others: *A Celtic Legacy* (Cruachan), *Slania* (Eluveitie), *Nifelvind* (Finntroll), *Manala* (Korpiklaani), and *Goi, Rode, Goi!* (Arkona).

Conclusions

A definition of a genre of rock music that is characterized by distorted guitars, the vital importance of both bass and drums, and a wide range of vocals that are not privileged but equal to the instruments, furnished an entry point for the analysis of various genres of metal. To analyze the major metal genres, including power metal, glam metal, thrash, and some of their derivatives or fusion genres, I have also described the origins and early days of heavy metal and the musical components it has derived from such genres as rock, blues, and jazz. Yet, the taxonomy of heavy metal provided in this article scratches only the surface of the genre’s complexity; it is impossible to do justice to this discussion in such a short paper. While my approach in this article was taxonomic, I intended to demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief, metal is an intricate, ever-evolving (meta-)genre of music which, despite its harsh façade, is indeed quite eclectic.

⁷ Metal bands in general; not only associated with the Scandinavian black metal scene.

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The Ever-Evolving Maze – The Analysis of Metal Genres

Summary

Heavy metal music is often perceived as crude and simplistic by people who are not acquainted with its complexity. In this article, I would like to explore and analyze the (meta-)genre of heavy metal music and its elaborate internal subdivision. Firstly, it is crucial to define metal music and distinguish it from other styles within the larger family of rock music. This section will be followed by a brief presentation of the history of heavy metal and the dominant dichotomy of chaotic and Dionysian themes present in the lyrics of metal songs. Ultimately, I intend to unravel the complex web of metal genres

by describing the most crucial ones, demonstrating the “kinship” between particular styles, and providing examples of the representatives of each discussed subgenre.

Keywords: music, genre, taxonomy of music, heavy metal, extreme metal

Słowa kluczowe: muzyka, gatunki muzyczne, systematyka muzyki, heavy metal, extreme metal