



With only one charter member left, Yes still sells out stadiums on the strength of its timeless sound.

A brave new world for Yes

by Jim Farber

They couldn't have picked a more difficult place for a New York debut. Here at Madison Square Garden (four dates into their 1980 Fall U.S. tour), in front

of 20,000 fans and a pack of suspicious reporters, there was a new, unproved Yes. The band was minus founding member/figurehead Jon Anderson and popular keyboardist Rick Wakeman,

replaced by two foreign objects previously known only as Buggles (a two member studio band involving singer Trevor Horn and keyboardist Geoff Downes). A vague announcement of the



changes had been made just four months earlier, with no real explanations given. Understandably, the band seemed a bit on the petrified side. In the second number, "Yours Is No Disgrace," new singer Trevor Horn strained awkwardly for Anderson's high notes.

At this point in the show it seemed it would take a while for Yes to settle into

their new form. After all, hadn't they already gone through enough changes in an incredibly short time? Just one year ago, Yes hardly existed as a band at all. Back in September of '79 (following a U.S. spring-summer tour which Jon Anderson now describes as one of the artistic highpoints of the band's twelve-year history), Yes migrated to Paris to work with producer Roy Thom-

as Baker on some material for a new album to follow up '78's *Tormato*.

Problems set in immediately. The band didn't feel Baker's approach was appropriate to the band and disagreements arose over which members would write the material. "The straw that broke the camel's back was that Alan White broke his foot, so we *had* to stop the sessions," explains guitarist Steve



(Clockwise from l.) Bassist Chris Squire has anchored Yes' beat since 1968; newest members are keyboardist Geoff Downes and singer Trevor Horn.



Alan White (l.) plays on a rotating black drum riser that spins like a fairground tilt-a-whirl. (r.) Siney axester Steve Howe says of the recent band changes: "We were ready to take on anything."

Howe. "Otherwise we might have gone on *trying* to make things work." As it stood, the band decided to cool off by splitting for a while, agreeing to reconvene after Christmas.

It was in the follow-up sessions during January and February of 1980 that things really began to fall apart. "I'd written quite a lot of songs with Rick," explains ex-Yes vocalist Jon Anderson, reached in the south of France, where he is concentrating on his solo career. "I felt the songs were valid, but there was some question by the other members as to whether they were."

According to Howe, one reason Yes rejected Jon Anderson's songs was because they felt he was treating the band as a mere backup group. "Jon was using the group as a vehicle for his own songs," Howe explains. "We fought that. We felt the way to get the best out of the group was to have as many co-compositions as possible. Also, we considered Jon's songs too folk-oriented."

The band felt *Tormato*, in particular, suffered from Anderson dominating the material. On the band's new Atlantic

album, *Drama*, all the songs are credited uniformly.

"I just happened to be very prolific," says Anderson in defense. "Whether it's good or bad is a judgment in itself. I tend to want to write a lot of music and the other members hadn't that intensity for themselves. They wanted to write as a group. But Yes never did write together. Things change."

It got to the point where Anderson and Wakeman were the only ones who still felt the band could survive in its usual form. Anderson still wishes the old band had stuck it out together. "I felt if we had had a break of three or six months, just to be able to sit back and reflect on whether we wanted to stay with each other, then we could have carried on together," explains Jon.

Still, Howe felt taking time off was "the worst thing we could do. You might as well have written us down as an ex-group if that happened. We *had* to tour. We tried taking time off to sit in the sun and record albums in hot countries. That's a load of

junk. We wanted to work in England. The old band had a geographic problem. We couldn't find anyone. Jon was always in the south of France. It wasn't a group. We wanted more communication."

Howe believes Anderson's assertion that the band's disagreements could have been reconciled by time is a "total fantasy view. That's like being hit by a car and waking up the next day and thinking you can get out of the way of the car. It's a nice idea, but there *were* no solutions."

In the meantime Anderson and Wakeman took off on holiday and the three remaining members (with only Chris Squire as a 12-year founding veteran) continued laying backing tracks, not being sure how the band would fill out. At this time, according to Anderson, the band's manager Brian Lane tried to put pressure on the group to stay together by booking the giant U.S. tour the new Yes has just fulfilled. "Basically the management side of it is a law unto itself at times," Jon says. "Sometimes they apply pressure; that's

a manager's job...I believe Yes, as a group over the last two or three years, has had nothing *but* pressure. That's why there was a need for time off. We were getting on each other's nerves."

Once the split was final Anderson gave the other members no heat about continuing with the name Yes (he could have, since he was a founding member). But the remaining threesome took another month or so (till March) before fully committing to join with the Buggles. According to new singer Trevor Horn, when he brought a song of his own ("Fly from Here") to Yes back in February, he was under the impression Jon Anderson was still in the band. The two groups knew each other through common manager Brian Lane, but Lane wasn't for the union idea in the beginning. (It took the bands several weeks of trying each other out before they themselves decided).

For outsiders, it did seem like an odd alliance. The Buggles, known mostly for their big British hit "Video Killed the Radio Star," were a cynically witty studio band (who will continue to record

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records outside of Yes to fulfill their contract). Surely this smiley button pop band would be out of place joining a group who view the study of topographic oceans as a profound statement on humankind. According to Trevor, though, the image of the cutesy Buggles was far removed from the truth. "Image has to do with the marketplace and not your thinking as a person," he asserts. "So many things about the Buggles annoyed me intensely. It was fun in the studio, but the record company forced us to live this 'plastic pop for the eighties' image. It was a huge joke. I was dressed up for these kiddie pop shows where we just mimed to the records."

Though Horn now calls Yes "a far more serious band than the Buggles," he still says he'd put the lyrics of "Video Killed the Radio Star" against anything Jon Anderson ever wrote. But, when Squire, Howe and White saw that the Buggles could work well as a part of Yes, and suggested they join, Horn says, "my initial reaction was one of horror. I'd been a Yes fan for so long. It was such a wild idea, but Chris was very persuasive."

Similarly, the English press were

shocked. As Trevor explains: "In the British music papers everyone wrote in saying, 'How can that turd with the glasses ever hope to replace Jon "God" Anderson?' But by the time this happened, work on the album was going great, so we figured people would get used to the idea."

Still, this leaves several questions unanswered. The way the Buggles settled into the Yes mold so easily for the new *Drama* album brings up possible accusations that Trevor and keyboardist Geoff Downes are just well-skilled musicians filling in pre-set roles. To a die-hard Yes fan, the sound on *Drama* is not that different from what he's heard before. "We've got three of the same musicians in the band and a lot of the elements are still there," Horn admits. "It'll take until the next album to find the areas where we can change the band. The ghost of Jon Anderson has got to walk occasionally."

The new Yes have generally found it advantageous to stress links with the past. First they brought back a Roger Dean cover ("I was the most unhappy that he ever left us," says Howe). And also to re-establish their old trademarks there's a song on *Drama* which includes a vocal reading of the band's name, sounding uncannily like the commercial for Yes Washing Detergent.

Even with this help, the new Yes were taking on an awfully big job, putting together a band and album in six months and then immediately touring America's largest halls. The pressure was particularly high for Trevor, not only because he had to fill Anderson's shoes during the five old numbers the group played live, but also because Horn is basically a studio person, unused to singing live, particularly not in gargantuan halls. "It was alarming the first night, to stand up in front of 12-13,000 people," he admits.

In front of Madison Square Garden's 20,000 (the first in a three-night stand here), Horn still seemed a bit stiff onstage even as the show progressed. But the audience didn't seem to care, simply taking in all the old elements they liked from Yes and (as Horn admits), perhaps even projecting Anderson onto the new high-pitched singer. In any case, by the time the closing "Roundabout" came around, everyone was on his feet and enjoying it. Steve Howe claims he was never that worried about the audience accepting the augmented Yes. "The whole idea of Yes has always been a confidence movement," he says with the bravado of a trouper who's lived through more than one shake-up. This time the trauma is definitely behind him. ●



Lisa Tanner

Jon Anderson now rings his own bell. Too much sun in the south of France? He says no, but Yes got the last word.

Jon Anderson wishes, waits

The most frustrating thing is that inside I'm still in Yes. I'm part of Yes and that's all it'll ever be." So says Jon Anderson about his unhappy split from the band he began with Chris Square right out of school back in 1968. These days Anderson is hardly sitting idly by hoping for the new band to fall apart. He has his own Atlantic solo album out, called *Song of Seven*, which he began work on back in February, right after Yes took off in a different direction.

Anderson has also recorded a Polydor LP with Greek keyboardist Vangelis, but his biggest concern is solidifying a touring band of his own for a worldwide show that will come to the U.S. in the spring of '81. On Anderson's tour, the singer promises at least half an hour of old Yes songs. Beyond this, Anderson suprisingly admits that he believes an eventual Yes reunion may take place. "It will obviously take a little while for that to come about," he says. "Eventually we'll meet somewhere." ●