

Jon Anderson's normally composed features clouded, as the mouthpiece for Yes, rock's foremost progressive quintet, recalled with a shudder his first case of critical cold-shoulder. "After so few of the writers who came to see us perform *Tales from the Topographic Ocean* seemed to really grasp the scale of the concept, it was natural for us to question our musical direction a bit," he told a British reporter, trying to pin down their predicament. Starship troopers with seven albums behind them, Yes face a unique dilemma: having expanded the limits of popularly acceptable yet futuristic "orchestral" rock, can the band survive yet another personnel change and come up with an album that will restore their critical credibility?

While Patrick Moraz soon replaced the incomparable Rick Wakeman to begin work on Yes' forthcoming epic suite on war and peace, their newest album was simply a compilation of the best tracks from their first two LPs, entitled *Yesterdays* (on Atlantic). Can Yes end one era and successfully begin another? The problem has been the break-up of more than one super-group like Cream or the Beatles. In tracing their history, Yes teaches us how the

living concept of a band can survive even the most serious shake-ups.

Their four-sided "story of life," as guitarist Howe put it, had failed to communicate clearly how far Yes had traveled since their epochal three record live *Yessongs*, which preceded *Tales* (1974) and crowned Yes' first era of achievement. "I started panicking on my own little trip," Anderson admitted, visibly shaken by his memory of the morning-after notices the in-concert *Tales* had prompted. "There is the danger," he went on to explain, "that you can get so high on what you are doing and get so involved in it, that you can forget the wealth of music that had helped you get where you are, and the wealth of music there is to learn from."

**Shifting strata:** A "Wealth of music" is what the richly-endowed Yes-men have always struggled to express. Inter-personal arguments and attitudes have brought new members to shape the changing course of their music, since *The Yes Album* (1971), actually their third, established them as internationally popular painters of dazzling musical visions. Originally conceived around the songwriting nucleus of Anderson and bassist Chris Squire, the first edition of Yes had benefited from the

talents of radical axeman Peter Banks and pioneer percussionist Bill Bruford. Tony Kaye filled out Yes' brightly harmonized yet instrumentally powerful arrangements with a surge of awesome organ.

Banks was the first to go, even before the turning point reached with *The Yes Album*. "He was a little more into his clothes than he was into playing with Yes," commented a surviving member dryly. Banks put together a new band, but although Flash, as he called them, came close to duplicating Yes' sparkling sense of space and time, their live performances were a pale reflection of a true Yes concert, with its crystal clear sound and brilliant lighting.

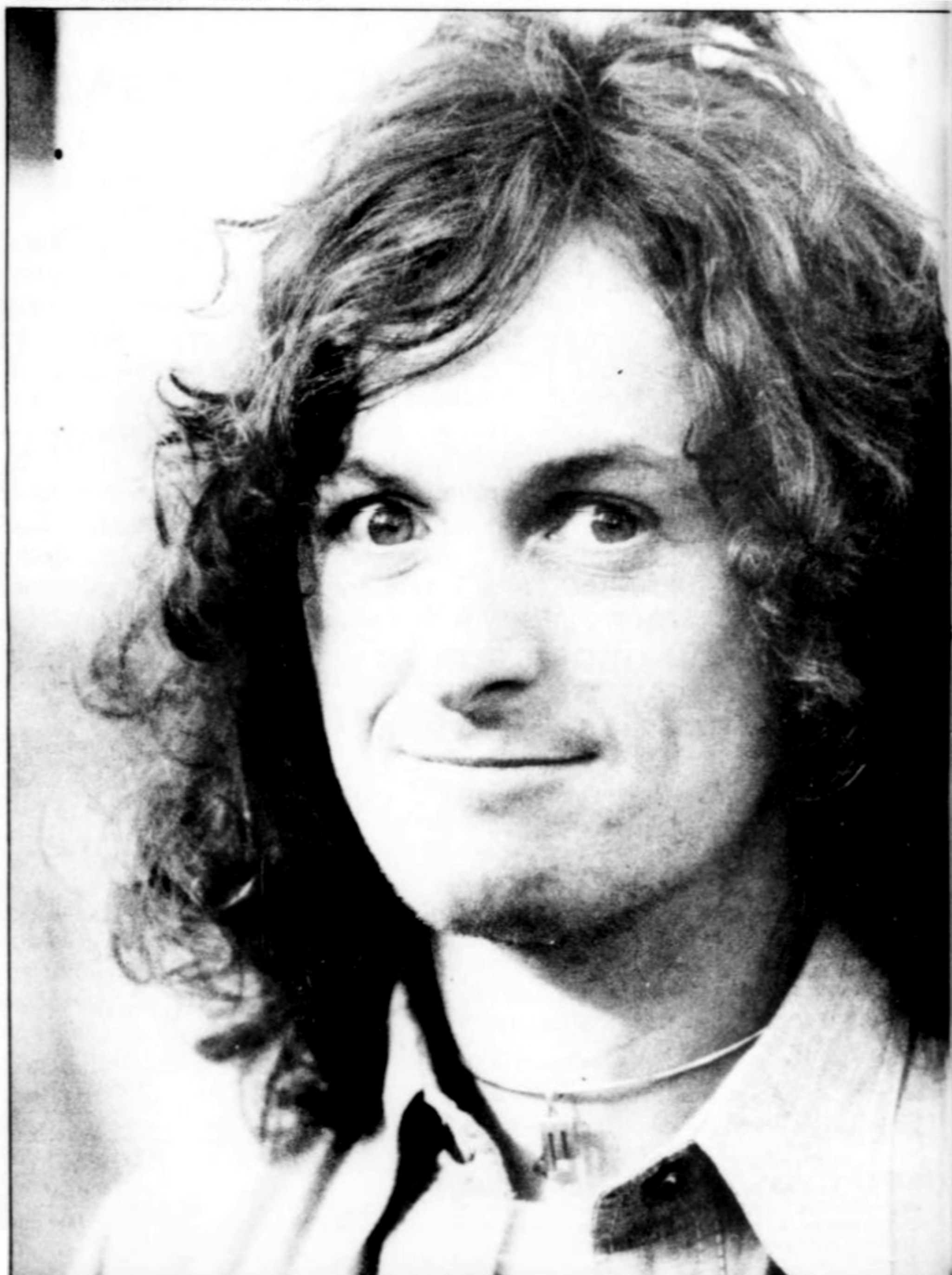
Into the breach came Steve Howe, classically attuned and an electronic experimenter. His lead guitar lines blended fire and finesse, and Howe was introduced to Yes' growing public by his acoustic solo spot, "The Clap," a marvellously witty little piece that offered a refreshing change of pace

**Jon Anderson:** Commenting on the new album release he culled from the first two years of the band's existence, 'It was very enjoyable listening to it all again.'

## A Rearranged Yes Says 'No' To Standing Still

One of the first and most artistically reputable avant-garde rock bands, Yes has consistently re-shaped its lineup throughout the early seventies. Can a constantly evolving progressive band hold its audience as it stretches for the 1980s?

by Ron Ross





**Patrick Moraz:** The Swiss keyboardist recently completed his 29th film score. One of his works, 'Middle Of The World,' was selected for the New York Film Festival.

**Yes:** Their next LP of original material was started last June before Rick Wakeman departed the group, developed while the band only had four members, and polished off with their brand new musician.



**Chris Squire:** The bassist formed the songwriting nucleus of the original edition of Yes with Jon Anderson.



**Steve Howe:** When the guitarist replaced Tony Banks in 1971, he became the first non-charter member in the group.





from sensuous masterworks like "Perpetual Change." Howe figured importantly in the crucial Yes tour of America (1971) that saw them overwhelm by their sheer virtuosity and verve audiences who had come to see Grand Funk and Black Sabbath.

When Tony Kaye shied away from Yes' imminent stardom to explore more quietly his funkier roots, the power of positive thinking brought them Rick Wakeman, now a solo favorite in his own right. Wakeman has defined the style, sounds, and possibilities of all the keyboard instruments as much as any other ace of the ivories, including Keith Emerson. Playing everything from Moog to Mellotron, Hammond organ to electric harpsichord, Wakeman's long blond tresses and wizardly way with a costume became a highlight of Yes' colorful image.

**Wakeman integrated:** Rick's rapport with Steve Howe lead Yes down golden sunlit paths on *Fragile* (1972) and through steely urban panoramas on *Close to the Edge* (1973). Wakeman was quick to give Yes their due for bringing out his musical best: "It's their whole attitude toward music," he exclaimed, "that instills a belief in what you are doing. It's their precision and integrity that counts." Wakeman was also able to define the Yes sound succinctly: "I can only describe it as 'orchestral rock.' You've had the heavy bands such as Cream and the Who, and now we are trying to move on one step further into something more complicated and musically refined."

Yes' obvious musical merits won them polls and gold records throughout 1972. Bill Bruford, however, the band's off-beat but distinctive drummer, felt that Yes were confining themselves within an abstract philosophy of life that had little to do with music. Even the affable Wakeman was hard pressed to conform to the strange dietary rituals adopted by vegetarians Chris, Jon, and Steve. While Squire, Anderson, and Howe were growing to enjoy brown rice and decaffeinated coffee, Wakeman wolfed down beef and beer. Bruford became impatient for the spiritual Anderson and the analytical Squire

to merge their energies, and when Bill left Yes to join King Crimson, Alan White was promoted from session drumming for John Lennon to full-time funkmaster for one of the world's most musically advanced rock groups.

Alan White helped Yes to recover their basic rock and roll immediacy and impact, thus freeing Anderson and Squire to concentrate on the next plateau of Yes' potential. They first recorded the live *Yessongs* to prove to one and all that they were capable of spontaneous improvisation and not just studio wonders. Then, in the midst of yet another exhausting tour, Anderson flashed on the entire concept that would become *Tales from the Topographic Ocean*. "Each of the four long songs," Howe, Jon's co-composer, explained patiently to CIRCUS Magazine, is a different angle on life. It's good to do these big songs. We enjoy playing them immensely, and with Alan playing the drums, we keep our feet on the ground, so to speak."

**Moraz joins the army:** At last Yes' constant fight to grow yet remain intact seemed to resolve itself. "With all of us writing," Howe suggested, "we felt that one record wasn't good enough anymore. It's just too short. There's an awful lot of music floating around in Yes." Perhaps too much music for any one band to handle, for after several tours and three gold albums with Yes, Wakeman decided to express his medieval leanings with his solo album, *The Six Wives of Henry VIII*. "When you are playing with Yes," Wakeman contended, "you are playing Yes music and gradually you do have ideas that you want to use for yourself. They build up and in the end, you get such a collection of them that it's a frustration if you don't get them out."

So unexpectedly successful was Wakeman's first rather esoteric effort that a more easily grasped story-teller of a solo session followed that became the chart-busting *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. With no hard feelings, but an inevitable sense of pressure, Yes let Wakeman leave for good while they were still in the process of planning their follow-up to *Tales*, a forthcoming

studio album that is probably the most important they will ever make.

Although Yes had decided to carry on as a four-piece unit during the initial sessions for their projected suite on "war and peace," they began to audition keyboard replacements. "When Patrick Moraz decided to leave Refugee to join us," enthused Anderson, now optimistic about Yes' future, "it was like a light being switched on." Aged 26, Moraz is Swiss and a composer of classically oriented film scores, as well as a versatile performer on as many as fifteen different keyboards. Moraz is also familiar with the violin and alpine horn, but doesn't confine himself to musical explorations. At various times, it's rumored, he's also concerned himself with skin diving and Persian carpet salesmanship.

Patrick is an avid concert-goer who first got knocked out by Yes and turned on to rock in 1969 when he saw them play in Montreux. "To me it was a new form of music, and that was the kind of music I wanted to play," he recently told the British press. "I didn't know what rock music was at the time and I was so overwhelmed that I organized a party for them in a villa there." But though he's now professionally associated with the men who spurred his musical direction, Moraz has no illusions about Yes being an easy route to success and stardom. "Some people tell me it's like joining the army to work for Yes. The music is disciplined, but it's also so objective and precise. The main problem will be relating the melodic and rhythmic concepts smoothly."

Out already is the first chapter of the Yes story reissued as *Yesterdays*, a compilation of the best tracks from their first two albums that includes a terrific, previously unavailable, version of Paul Simon's "America." Then there will be Yes' next sonic statement from the studio. Although their past has been as stormy as it has been inspiring for those who wish to see the limits of rock extended, Yes have an ideal balance of mental and musical power in the triangle comprised by Anderson, Squire, and Howe. White continues to be an asset for keeping their rhythms fundamental as well as sophisticated. And Moraz seems to be a fine successor to the great keyboard tradition begun with Kaye and exploited by Wakeman.

Moraz' description of the band is a fitting last word, avoiding both ego and social values: "In a way, Yes is like a big movie," Moraz opined, "and Jon is like a film director. He's got pictures in his mind and he describes the scene and translates it into music. But there's no self indulgence at all."