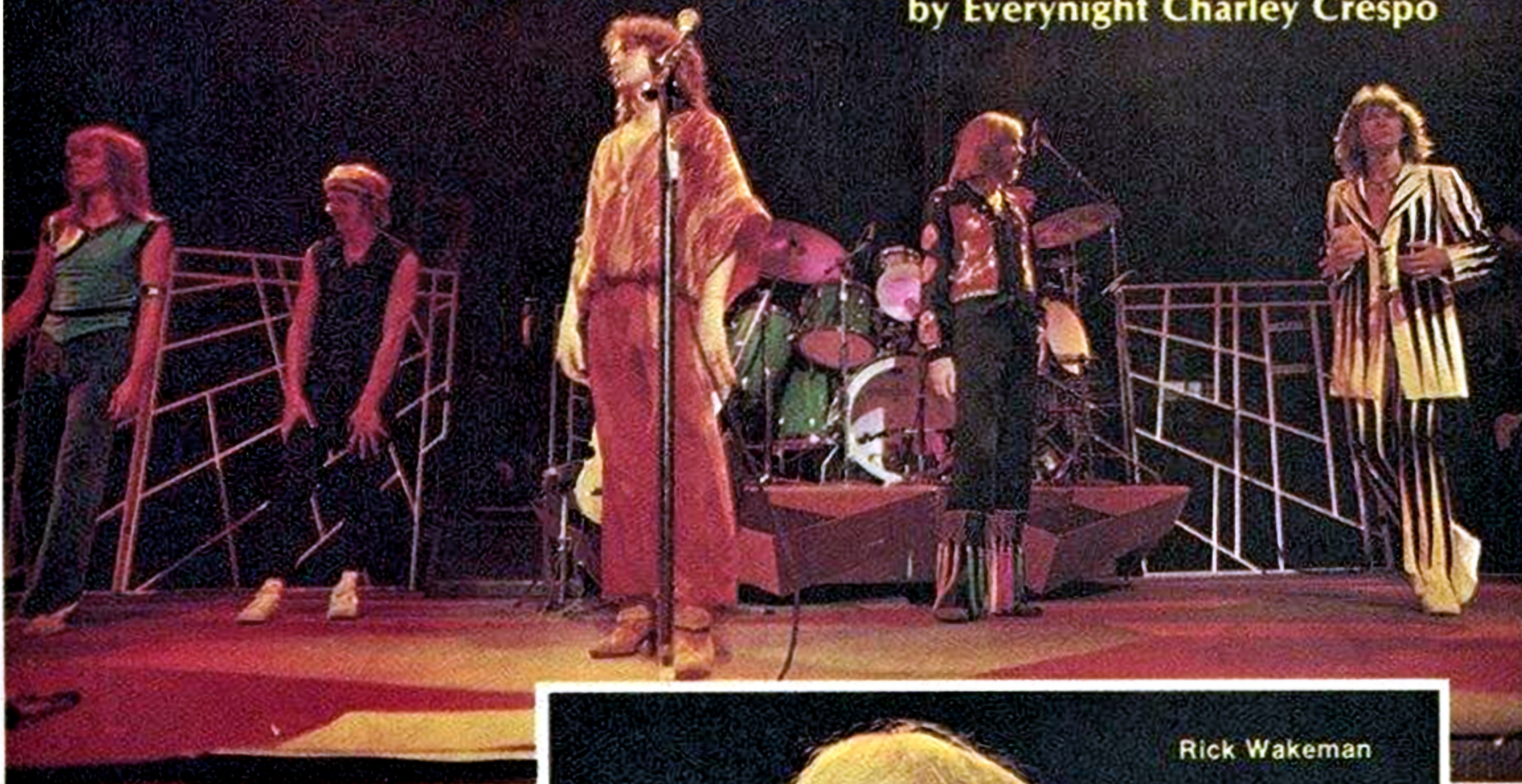


BACKSTAGE WITH YES

by Everynight Charley Crespo



Rick Wakeman

The dressing room at the Spectrum in Philadelphia is decidedly busy minutes before Yes is to take the stage. Rick Wakeman is changing into a shining silver super-hero type ensemble, complete with cape. Jon Anderson is putting on a loose no-detail outfit while his wife, Jan, surveys the health food spread on a table at the far end. Off in the other corners are Chris Squire, Alan White and Steve Howe making last minute adjustments before mirrors. Squire is all set in a penguin tuxedo with tails, Howe in a bright red Robin Hood 2001 outfit showing one bare shoulder and White in his green tank top and shorts. Roadies walk in and out of the room, chit-chatting momentarily with the band about things that are of no consequence to anyone, just to break the apprehensive monotony of waiting for the cue to take the stage.

The houselights go out, manager Brian Lane gives the signal and the five musicians walk through a clearing on the stadium floor that leads to the small circular stage in the center of the hockey arena. The roar of the audience is among the most deafening ever heard. Once aboard the stage, the band waves to the cheers in the darkness. They approach their instruments to begin the first song and the stage begins to revolve slowly. The crowd cheers louder.

For the first time in Yes' ten year career, the group has brought their own custom-designed stage on the road. The stage is a rather simple one, about three feet high and fifteen feet in diameter with



Neal Preston



Michael Putland/RETNA

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a raised center for the vocalist, Anderson. The stage spins throughout the entire concert, with the vocal mike hanging in the center from the sound carriage hung above. Wakeman's elaborate keyboard setup and White's large drum kit face each other at opposing ends, with Squire's bass pedals and Howe's guitars facing each other in between. There is no backstage, there are virtually no props or clutter.

"We've used a lot of decorations in the past," explained Squire, "but now the idea is a more straight forward approach, more of the human element. We talked about the sound system being hung in the round and how the revolving stage would probably be better for people for hearing and seeing, but we really weren't sure until we tried it.

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"The great thing about it is that in some ways the methods can't be criticized too heavily because no one is quite sure what's supposed to happen or how good it *could* be. It was difficult at first, but we were kind of lucky in a way. We fumbled around a bit until we got used to it. People aren't noticing the rough edges. Nobody's used to it either."

This tour celebrates the band's tenth anniversary. A decade ago, Anderson and Squire ran into each other in a London club and within a few hours laid the foundation for an adventurous pop-rock band to be named Yes. What started with humble beginnings, playing in local clubs and trying to get the equipment truck to a rehearsal in time, later led to a series of chart-topping albums, record breaking concert appearances and an impressive line of high-ranking awards from music polls. Today, Yes is one of the most popular bands around. Their popularity exists not because the group has survived, but because throughout the years, Yes has successfully found new territory to cover.

The new album, *Tormato*, picks up where the previous Yes album, *Going For The One*, left off, and firmly plants Yes' ten feet on the ground. No more explorations through topographic oceans or relaying compositions so complex one wondered if the band could ever find its way out. With *Tormato*, there is the return to shorter songs, marking the first time since 1970 that *no* Yes song on one album has exceeded eight minutes in length. The new songs were designed to be more accessible to both the listener and to the radio programmer who generally tries to ignore extended cuts. Though the lyrics to some of the new tracks are still out in Mad Hatterland, several can be followed in a story-like sequence, despite Anderson's insistence on cluttering the passages with \$10 words.

"The longer we live here, the more we learn about language," said Anderson in defense. "There are different ways of writing and you have to choose whether you

want to write moon - June - blue or you can write poetry on very deep levels. Our language grows and more modernized poetry is part of that. You can make a song tough as nails or you can make it clear or vague."

One of the new songs performed on tour this year was Anderson's "Circus of Heaven", in which he described a fantasy-laden parade through a midwestern town. The parade included centaurs, golden chariots and unicorns. At the end of the song, Anderson asked his son, "was that something beautiful, amazing, wonderful, extraordinary, beautiful?"

"Oh, it was okay," replies the voice of his five year old son on a pre-recorded tape, "but there were no clowns, no tigers, lions or bears, candy-floss, toffee apples, no clowns."

"I got the idea from a book by Ray Bradbury I'd read about ten years ago," said Anderson. "When I was writing it, I did it the way I remembered the book. I talked to my son about it and he enjoyed the story."

As the title indicates, "Don't Kill The Whale", the group's current hit single in England, is a wildlife preservation message song, while "Arriving UFO" deals with an individual's preparation for "the coming of outer space."

"That song was a science fiction fantasy," said Anderson. "I like that sort of thing. I saw *Close Encounters* and it reenergized my feeling about UFO's."

Though he says he has not had a close encounter of his own, Anderson is fascinated by what outer space may hold.

"They may be vessels of a totally different impression. We cannot perceive what it may be. We may not even be able to see them. They may not appear in the physical sense as we know it. There are all sorts of exciting possibilities."

There is no song on the album called *Tormato*. The title came about when someone was looking at a map of England and found among the many townships (named "tors" in that country. The lyric sheet with the new album shows what Squire pointed out to me before - hand, that there is a Black Tor and a Row Tor and many others) one place called Yes Tor. The group thought they'd name the album Yes Tor, but when someone began tossing tomatoes, the title somehow became "tormato".

The band is tremendously happy with the new album, although they are not all too happy about the title anymore. Squire said he felt the album had more variety than previous album, while still maintaining the distinctive Yes sound. I asked him if after all these years of playing intricately composed material in large halls, if he ever felt like sneaking into a small club somewhere to play "In The Midnight Hour" or "Johnny B. Goode".

Squire chuckled a bit and replied, "Well, the funny thing is that because we've discovered a new way of performing in the large halls, we're getting off on *that* strong mood (so) that we don't have to feel that at the moment because we're into making *that* work." □



Neal Preston