



BEING FLASH WITH PETE BANKS

There can be nothing quite like the feeling of seeing a band drive straight on to success the moment you leave it. Either you spend the rest of your time in constant regret or you become even more determined to make it in your own way. Pete Banks fits in the second category.

NO REGRETS

During his interview with *Beat Instrumental* Banks showed no signs of regretting his move to leave Yes. He was keener on extolling the virtues of his new band, Flash. At the time, *Fragile* was riding high in the album charts both here and in the U.S. with the American press hailing Yes as the biggest thing since the Beatles. In contrast, Flash had just played a gig at Letchworth Youth Club in Hertfordshire where a handful of kids wandered around drinking coke and coffee while Banks went

through the motions worthy of great stadiums.

'There's nothing better for knocking a band into shape,' said Banks when I reminded him of the Letchworth gig. 'We've played a pretty good cross-section already in our eight gigs!' He's no newcomer to the hard times of rock though. In fact he went through pretty much the same trial when Yes were first formed. 'We started well below the breadline when we began,' he recalled. 'We were probably earning £5 a week and were lucky to get two gigs a week. The music we were playing wasn't exactly popular in those days. It was the day of the twelve bar!'

REMINDERS

The walls of Banks' basement flat form a reminder of those days with Yes. Photographs, an album sleeve and a poster hang there in memoriam, but strangely enough there were no Yes albums

to be seen laying around. He claims that he left Yes because they had become a formula band: 'We'd go on knowing we'd go down well,' he said. 'It was for that reason I decided to make a move, after giving it a lot of thought of course. Luckily Yes were strong enough to get a new guitarist, rehearse and get it back on the road.' Banks said that things with Yes got to the point where he and Bill Bruford would pretend to clock in before they took to the stage and then clock out after the performance: 'My playing was getting like that as well,' he said.

After saying 'no' to Yes, Banks was unemployed for three months. 'I used to get drunk every night down at the Speakeasy. I was glad to get a rest to be honest. I'd been on the road for two years without a break. Then along came Blodwyn Pig... which was a disaster.' Summing up his brief stay with Blodwyn he said: 'I think

they wanted another Mick Abrams but I was trying to introduce arrangements. After I left them I decided not to rush into another band. I didn't form my own band at that time because I didn't want to be a leader.'

SESSION WORK

Out of work again, Banks took part in some session work but wrote no songs. 'If I'm writing a song,' he said. 'I like to know who I'm writing for.' Eventually he reached the conclusion that if he wanted to join a band he would have to form one. 'I made four attempts at forming a band before I found a financial backer. It's the only way to start a band off today - it's like any other product - you need the finance to start.'

The final line-up began to formulate when Colin Carter turned up on Banks' doorstep - literally - and played some tapes of his previous

band. Banks was impressed and invited him in to his latest idea — Flash. One hundred drummers were then auditioned and were finally reduced down to Mickey Hough who'd been gigging with Jeff Rowens at the Empire, Leicester Square. Ray Bennett, who'd previously been working in the States was brought in on bass leaving only an organist to be found.

RELIEF

'We wasted about two months on organists,' said Banks, 'and then Tony Kaye stepped in at very short notice. He played on the album doing remarkably well and then decided to join the band, which was a relief to us.' Unfortunately, because of Tony's previous contractual agreements with Yes he was not allowed to play live with Flash. Because of this Pete had to work out the organ arrangements on guitar in a very short time so that they'd be able to perform the numbers recorded

on the album. Intense rehearsals took place daily at the Lyceum. 'We're now used to working as a four piece,' said Banks, 'but we still hope to add keyboards at some later date.'

YES COMPARISONS

Of course, Flash have immediately picked up the burden of being likened to Yes. 'Unfortunately we'll get compared to Yes,' he said, obviously expecting the question to be asked. 'I can see people comparing the album with Yes although we haven't the same instrumental line up as they have. When the album was recorded Flash consisted of two-fifths of Yes!'

MORE GUTS

'I think we've got more guts than Yes — more balls. Yes have always gone for technique approach whereas we go for feel. Yes tend to lack feel. Sometimes it's good to make mistakes to show you're human and that it's not being made by a

machine. I don't think *Fragile* was human. You couldn't fault it in any other way though.'

Banks' biggest criticism of Yes is that they are a machine-like band and this, he said, was the reason he split. This is not to say that he has forsaken arrangements though. 'I think the arrangements are as important as the song. Vanilla Fudge were, the ace band for arrangements — Vanilla Fudge were the original Yes. The problem comes when you let the arrangements bog you down and you forget that you're playing to an audience. You've got to avoid being obsessed by making everything so precise. You've got to combine . . . you've got to hit the tricky bridge between technique and feel. Personally I like to take something difficult and make it seem easy rather than to take something easy and make it sound difficult.'

Pete's own musical taste is anything that's done well. 'I even like bad music,' he said. 'There's nothing like a dose of bad music! It's great

to put a really bad album on and just sit back and listen. I hate all those comparison things you see in the letter pages of some music papers. You know — Enid Blyton's better than Eric Clapton.' Presumably his taste for bad music won't infiltrate Flash!

CONCERTS

When Banks spoke to *Beat Instrumental* he mentioned his eight gigs. By now he will have doubled or trebled that number and possibly Flash will have done their first concert. 'Concerts — that's what we want to do,' he had said at the time. 'I think the general move is towards concerts. This is mainly because most bands have too much equipment for clubs. I don't think rock itself has changed much over the past few years — it's still very basic. It's got a long way to go.'

Two days later Flash were to make their first appearance at the Marquee club. 'It's my seventh debut at the Marquee,' laughed Pete. 'That must be some kind of record!'



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