


# Flash Flees Yes's Shadow

The kids in the audience turn to each other and whisper, "They're just like Yes." But back in the dressing room sits a girl who helped make Flash's new LP subtly un-Yes-like.





by Peter Jay Philbin and Howard Bloom



The Continental Hyatt House sits like a large, lifted finger in the middle of Hollywood's Sunset Strip. In the downstairs coffee shop Flash's founder, former Yes guitarist Peter Banks, runs a straw through his milkshake and reads a review in the *L.A. Times* which compares his group with Yes. Banks is uncomfortable with the comparison, and you can see a twitch of anger in his nose as he pushes the morning newspaper aside.

**A hail of critical darts:** It is a difficult thing to be the leader of a new British band touring America, especially when you are the brunt of merciless attacks from critics and fans alike. And Peter Banks' illustrious background has brought the attackers flocking to Flash in droves. Last summer, when the strobe lights had stopped stabbing their electric lightning bolts into the corner of a

Toledo, Ohio, stage where Peter had been playing a long and frenzied guitar solo, one member of the audience turned to his neighbor and whispered, "They're just like Yes." A month later, a young rock writer in New York City returned home from an outdoor Flash concert, sat down at his typewriter, and wrote, "The purpose of Flash is to imitate Yes, plain and simple, and they did exactly that." Though Flash had done over 50 dates in two months with the likes of Alice Cooper, Uriah Heep, Black Sabbath and the Kinks, though they had kept their first single ("Small Beginnings") on the charts for over three months, and though they had sold 100,000 copies of their first LP (*Flash*, on Capitol Records) within less than a year of their first rehearsal together, there was no question about it . . . the band was being knocked as a

flimsy imitation of Peter's old group.

**Three-headed monster:** But now the emergence of their new LP, *Flash In The Can* (distributed by Capitol Records), is likely to churn the flurry of accusations into a full-fledged storm. The thick web of bass followed by a high-pitched filigree of guitar which opens *Flash In The Can's* longest piece, "Black and White," smacks heavily of the two-year-old *Yes Album*. And the overdubbed choir of Colin Carter's high, tenor vocals cutting with a harsh, nasal edge echoes the falsetto pattern Jon Anderson established in 1970 when Yes received its first triumphant taste of popularity. Yet, despite all the similarities, there is an undeniable difference between Flash and Yes—a difference no amount of musical analysis could ever quite pin down. It is a difference that comes from the people behind the



Flash: When they whirled through an exhausting 50-city tour of the States last summer, critics attacked them mercilessly.



music.

Peter Banks conceived of Flash late one night in Yes's old Fulham house; and if he'd been foolish enough to set the new band up as a vehicle for his guitar solos, Flash might well have been a cheap copy of what the Yes Group was when Banks was in it. But Flash is far from being a vehicle for Peter's obviously talented guitar work. It is, rather, a band without a leader. Every day for a week Peter Banks, Colin Carter, Ray Bennett and Mike Hough marched into a green brick building in the center of Wembley Stadium's parking lot, threaded their way through the corridors to Studio 3, and sat down intently to record the music for *Flash In The Can*. Seven days and \$8,000 in expenses later, they finally came out with a record that consolidated what the first album had created. But when asked to analyze the new album several months after the sessions, the group's producer-manager Derek Lawrence leaned back in his Los Angeles hotel room and simply said, "You know, there's a lot of Ray Bennett on this one." With the exception of Colin Carter's rocker, "Lifetime," Ray had composed all the songs for *Flash In The Can*. And a close look at the events behind Ray's strongest song shows at least one key reason why Flash is not just Yes in disguise.

**The girl backstage:** Flash's dressing room upstairs at L.A.'s Whiskey A Go Go whirls with figures: photographers, female admirers, fringe entourages, all the frantically fun people who follow the progress of up-and-coming bands. Peter Banks meticulously tunes his newly-purchased, vintage Gibson guitar for the clicking cameras of several underground newspapers. Colin Carter paces about the room answering occasional questions and studying the obvious glances of several young ladies. Only Ray Bennett seems content to watch this free-for-all affair from the sidelines. Quiet and angularly handsome with dark brows and a blond mustache, he sits beside his American-born wife, Clair. A seven-week-old baby girl sleeps on the leather couch beside them. Downstairs a band is playing and the bass notes thump through the floor boards into the infant girl's curious nursery like an intense, electric, human heartbeat.

**Bedroom eyes:** Clair Bennett left her London hospital ten days after Alison was born. A week later she and her new baby boarded the airplane that brought Flash to America. Soon her husband would go out on the road for a tour so grueling that late one night after an Indiana colli-

Colin Carter, vocals: When Colin finished washing dishes in a London restaurant, he went over to Peter Banks' house and introduced himself. By five o'clock that morning they had written "Small Beginnings," improvised a rhythm instrument by putting sugar in a can, and recorded the future hit on a borrowed tape recorder.



Photos: Janis Schacht

seum date his Flashmates would stumble past the drowsy hotel clerk singing a new drinking song—"I Left My Brain In Fort Wayne." And Clair Bennett? Clair and her baby would spend most of that tour waiting at her parents' home in Montrose, New York.

What the group calls "the most satisfying song on the new album" was written in June, when Clair Bennett was seven months pregnant. Clair laughingly admits to being the inspiration for her husband's compositions, and this closing love song is clearly for her.

*Monday morning eyes  
Heavily disguised  
Like a wallpapered gaze.  
Ten o'clock reports.  
A gorgeous girl with bedroom eyes  
Is saying to me  
I feel the breath of life  
Today inside of me.*  
"Monday Morning Eyes"

**Please, no Yes:** No lyrics could be more unlike the space-aged (some say "heartless") surrealism of the group they say Flash imitates . . . the group Peter Banks left because he felt he was becoming like a machine . . . the group of coldly majestic, awesomely impersonal geniuses the world calls Yes. No lyrics could have less in common with Yes' strangely anti-female

*Take a straighter, stronger course  
To the corner of your life  
Make the white queen run so fast  
She hasn't got time  
To make you a wife.*  
"I've Seen All Good People"

Or with Jon Anderson's cosmic cover-up of what he's trying to say in

*A man conceived a moment's  
answer to the dream  
Staying the flowers daily, sensing  
all the themes  
As a foundation left to create  
the spiral him.*  
"And You And I"

But still the slings and arrows of outraged rock critics keep smacking Flash with accusations of Yes-ishness. No wonder that on their recently completed second U.S. tour, when the stage lights went up on Ray Bennett bending over his bass, on Peter Banks jabbing his guitar with gearshift movements, and on Colin Carter leaning back and belting into his microphone, the four of them were more determined than ever to show "That this is Flash music, and nothing to do with Yes."