

ON THE ROAD

WITH YES IN AMERICA

Thirty-five people and close to 18 tons of equipment are crammed into a squat, low-roofed, uninspiring building called The Syrian Lebanese Recreation Hall off Miami's fashionable Coral Way. Five musicians are rehearsing, oblivious to all the activity going on around them. Hydraulic lighting towers shoot up and down, white-masked workers aim aerosol paint sprays at strangely-shaped pieces of fibre glass scenery and a sound engineer grapples with a complex quadrophonic mixer.

Everybody seems to be shouting instructions to somebody else, but still the music pours out from the four speaker stacks – the unmistakable sound of Yes in full flight shakes the walls and outside the building, passers by stop to gawp at the endless comings and goings as more people and equipment arrive.

Quite simply, it's chaotic. 'No it isn't', growls manager

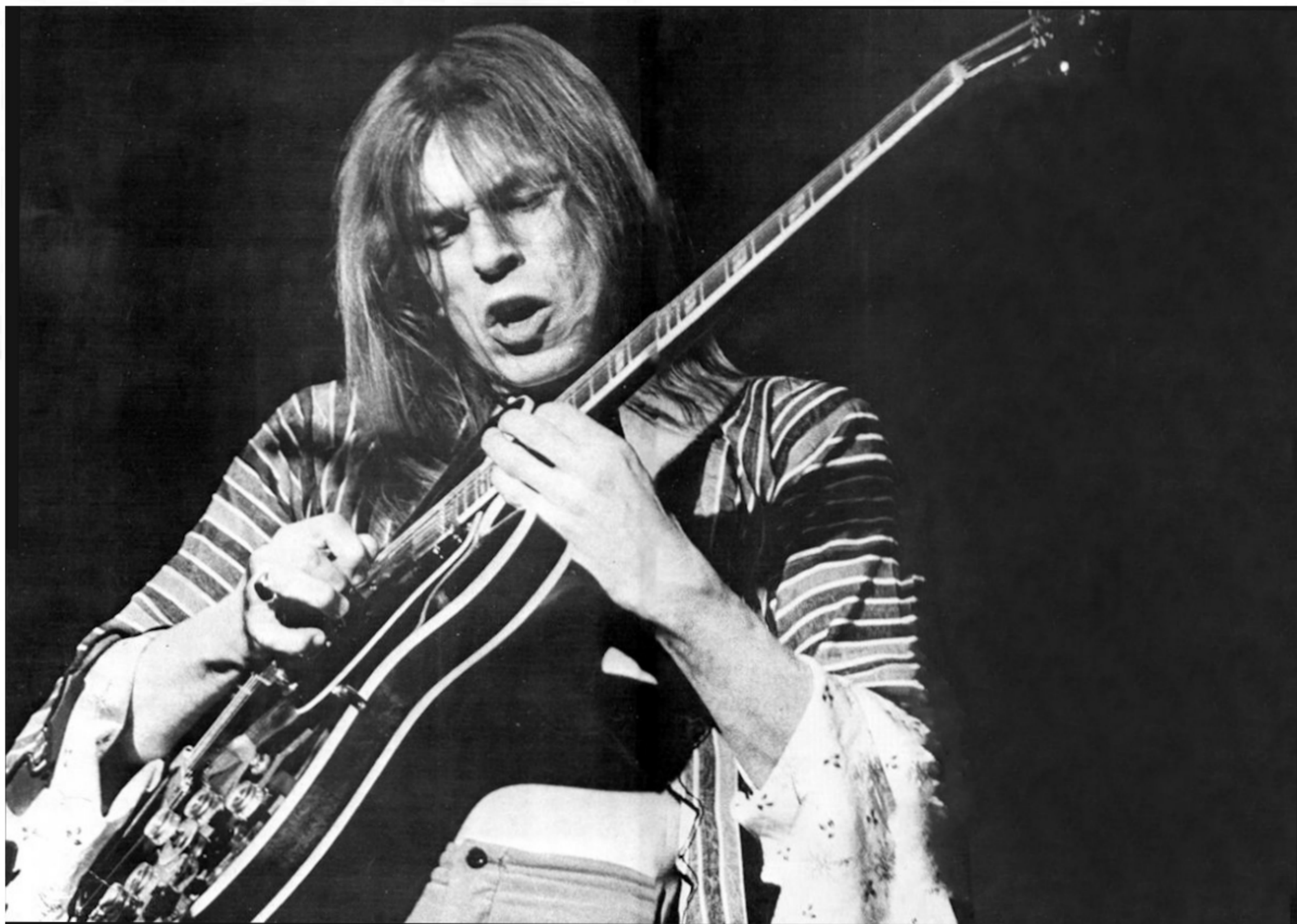
Brian Lane. 'It's insane – totally insane. Look at all this.' He waves his arm in the direction of a little blonde chick who is patiently cutting up yard upon yard of coloured wool. 'What's all that about? Christ knows what she's doing. I don't even know who she is!'

He stops a passing stage hand. 'What's the wool thing all about?' he inquires. The only answer is a bemused shrug and advice to ask somebody else. This time it's Lane's turn to shrug. He turns and stares intently at the blonde chick, who continues to snip happily at her wool. 'The scenery people asked me to do it,' she volunteers, 'but I don't know what it's for.'

ARMY

Lane doesn't bother to continue the conversation. Hell, if somebody wants yards of wool cut up, then leave them in peace to get on with it.'

'You know, when we first started touring America, we



had just 12 people on the road – five musicians, four road crew, a manager, publicist and sound engineer. That was only three years ago. Now we have 35. We used to think of ourselves as a tight little family unit – now it's more like a bloody great army.

MINI-BUSTS

I don't seem to know half the people. All day, people keep rushing up and asking for money to buy carpets and all sorts of weird things. We even inherited a couple of bits of crap sculpture this morning,' said Lane, pointing towards mini-busts of Beethoven and Mozart perched crazily on top of Rick Wakeman's Moog.

'Seriously, the strain of getting this sort of show on the road is terrible,' continued Lane. 'But in the long run, it's worth all the time and trouble. Audiences have grown to expect a lot from Yes. They expect the act – the music as well as the presentation – to be different every tour.

'This is a band that doesn't believe in cutting corners, financially or any other way. They believe in their music – and they also believe that time spent putting together a tight, professional stage show (that means lights, scenery, special effects props and, of course, a sound system next to none) is more than justified. Out of this insanity will come a great show – and that's what really matters.'

GOOD SHAPE

Yes are in Miami for five days of intensive rehearsals before kicking off a seven-week coast-to-coast American tour – the longest-ever US itinerary ever undertaken by the band. They play arenas with an average seating capacity of 17,000, presenting a near-three-hour that includes all four movements from the 80-minute *Tales from Topographic Oceans* suite, all the material from *Close To The Edge* and a handful of established favourites from previous albums.

Miami's sun has helped put the band in good mental



and physical shape, but beneath the surface smiles and easy-going attitudes, you can sense the gradual build-up of tension as opening night approaches. Seven weeks is a long time out on the road, and the band radiate a growing awareness that the tour will be a strain not just on their musical creativity but also a severe test of physical stamina.

'We did this stage show on a British tour late last year, but it'll be much more elaborate here,' Jon Anderson told me during a short break in rehearsals. 'For a start, we'll be using much more scenery and props. The set has been rebuilt and there's all sorts of extra things. We have a new lighting plot, too, and for the first time, we're using a quadrophonic sound system on live gigs. We cut things a bit fine back home, and there really wasn't time to get everything together.

'It's quite a massive project really, but I know everything's going to work out here. It has to. I mean, we've been building up to this for

a number of years, and now that we've finally got it together, we have to ensure that nothing goes wrong.'

The band has been off the road since mid-December last year – Jon and Steve Howe have used the time to move into new houses, Chris Squire and Alan White have relaxed on Jamaican holidays and Rick Wakeman has devoted most of his energies towards his second solo album.

'I thought we'd be a bit rusty when we got back together, but it hasn't been like that at all,' claimed Steve. 'At the first run-through, we really worked well and the rehearsal developed into a glorious blowing session.

'*Topographic Oceans* is a hefty thing to remember, especially as we've only

played it "live" perhaps a dozen or so times. But I think we all feel comfortable with it now. A couple more hours' rehearsal and I reckon we're ready to go.'

Despite attaining the No. 1 position in the charts, *Tales from Topographic Oceans* wasn't too well received by the Press in Britain. Not so here in America, where the reviews have been nothing short of ecstatic. The album is already high in the charts, and further proof of the band's colossal popularity throughout the United States is the fact that the tour is a complete sell-out.

All the more reason for us to go on the road with a really together show,' opines Anderson. 'I know it looks

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pretty chaotic in here' – he waves his arms at the mountain of lights, scaffolding, electronic gadgetry and miles of wiring – 'but it's not as untogether as it looks. Mickie Tate has got his lights all worked out, and Edward (sound mixer Eddie Offord) is now completely at home with his new quadrophonic mixer.

'Sure, there are bound to be problems. We're sure to hit some place where we can't get any dry ice, and maybe all the tapes will fall out of the mellotron again. But we've been through all that sort of thing before. You learn to expect hang-ups on the road, and there's always a way round them.'

MIXING

Offord's Mavis 30-track mixer is a formidable machine. It's completely portable and can be used both on the road and within the confines of a normal studio. Offord has spent the past two months perfecting his knowledge of 'live' quadrophonic mixing techniques, and currently works closely with Roy Clair, bossman of Clair Brothers, who have supplied Yes with sound systems all over the world for the last three years.

Clair knows just about every major concert arena in the States, and is able to advise Offord of all acoustic problems well in advance of each gig.

Back to Brian Lane. 'In a way, we're still a family unit – except that it's a bigger family. The band like to feel

comfortable on the road, and that's why we like to surround ourselves with familiar faces . . . people who have worked with the band for a long time like Eddie, Roy, Mickie Tate and Keith here (he indicates publicist Keith Goodwin).

So . . . consider this as Part Two of my report on Yes in Miami, written just a few hours after the completion of their show at Miami Stadium. Fifteen thousand people crammed themselves into the stands of the ball park for one of the finest shows ever seen in the city. And, just as everybody told me, the whole thing went like clockwork.

There was dry ice cascading over the stage during *Close To The Edge*, massive Pan-like pipes behind Wakeman's array of keyboards that flashed flaming red; an incredible drum rostrum with wings that opened out like a slow-motion flower in bloom; and, to cap it all, an amazing lightning plot that added drama to virtually every note played.

The current Yes stage act is a whole new trip, a fresh, dramatic approach to rock music. It incorporates the best elements of theatre without having to resort to the usage of excessive glamour and glitter simply for the sake of effect.

In short, it's an act that has taste. Musically, it's an unbelievable experience, and there can be no doubt in anyone's mind that this, their eighth American concert tour, will be a high point in the already spectacular career of Yes.