

WHAT TO DO
GO
GUIDE

PROG-ROCK marches on

For Yes and
Dream Theater,
the idea
is still to
break the rules

PAGE 3

THE MORNING CALL

THURSDAY,
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GO MOVIES

Reese Witherspoon is luminous
in epic 'Vanity Fair'

PAGE 10

GO PICK

Hamburgers and garlic
are cause for celebration

PAGE 21

GO INSIDE

CALENDAR	21	FAMILY FUN	23
CLUBS	19	SCREEN TIMES	12
CONCERTS	25	STAGE	24

Prog-rock founding father, standard bearer to create an Allentown state of mind

By Len Righi
Of The Morning Call

Although separated by a generation, Rick Wakeman of Yes and Mike Portnoy of Dream Theater are in agreement on one thing: In the 21st century, progressive rock is more a state of mind than a musical genre.

"Prog-rock now has more than just one meaning," says Wakeman, 55, whose majestic keyboard passages are part of its storied history.

"In the 1960s and '70s the name was thrown at half a dozen bands — Yes, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, King Crimson, even the Moody Blues, which were on the orchestral side of art rock," Wakeman explains during a conversation from his Montreal hotel room.

And, Wakeman notes, while modern-day prog-rock bands may not sound much like any of the founding fathers, "they have embraced the idea of prog-rock — which is, take the rules and break them.

"In that sense," he adds, "Dream Theater are very much an extension of what the music was in the '70s."

In an interview a few days later from his hotel room in Cleveland, Ohio, Portnoy concurs. "Prog-rock has always been about stretching the music and the performance to its furthest and fullest capabilities," says the 37-year-old drummer who helped found Dream Theater in the late

1980s. "Progressive music itself has always been eclectic and diverse. Surely that's what Dream Theater is about — metal, jazz, classical, with a lot of emphasis on instrumental passages and longer songs."

Prog-rock's initial ascendance happened at a unique moment in history, in the heady days of the late 1960s, when sonic experiments were encouraged. Says Wakeman: "As a musician you were left free to make your own music, and it was played on the radio. Deejays had a great deal of choice then, and record shops stocked everything. Then [in the mid-'70s] it all stopped. Advertising spoiled everything. Consultants started telling program directors what [people] wanted, and that's what they got."

"Progressive music," says Portnoy, "was incredibly acceptable in the 1970s. Radio was album-oriented, and willing to take a chance. But once disco and punk came along, that killed that. ... In the late 1980s, [Dream Theater's] goal wasn't to become Guns N' Roses. We were out to make music. Otherwise our career would have ended when theirs did 10 years ago.

"Dream Theater, like Yes, always was built on the individual musicians, acclaimed or established musicians in their own right," continues Portnoy, who has won 22 Modern Drummer awards and last year became the youngest percussionist ever inducted into the Mod-

THE DETAILS

YES
with
DREAM THEATER

- **When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday
- **Where:** Allentown Fair Grandstand, 17th and Liberty streets, Allentown
- **Tickets:** \$36, \$39
- **Info:** 610-433-7541, www.allentownfairpa.org

ern Drummer Hall of Fame. "We've always had the attitude — and Yes was an inspiration — that a Dream Theater show is almost like watching a five-ring circus every night."

And like a circus, musicians entered and departed Yes' big top with great regularity over the years, including Wakeman, who has done three separate tours of duty with the band (he signed on again most recently in 2001).

By the time Wakeman first joined Yes, the British band was three years old and already had recorded three albums, including the breakthrough effort "The Yes Album," which was released in April 1971 and included the classic tracks "I've Seen All Good People" and "Yours Is No Disgrace."

Wakeman had just left an up-and-coming British folk-rock outfit called The Strawbs. "Basically I decided to leave the Strawbs because they started to go down the pop route and that wasn't the road I wanted to go," he says. "Yes had started sessions on a new album ['Close to the Edge,' with its epic 18½-minute title track] when I got a call from [bassist] Chris Squire in July 1971. He said they had decided they wanted to move the band in a more orchestral area."

Even though the orchestral idea appealed to the classically trained Wakeman, he declined the offer, because that same day he had been asked by David Bowie, then on the cusp of his Ziggy Stardust period, to join the Spiders From Mars. (Wakeman had done session work on two Bowie albums, 1969's "Space Oddity" — that's his mellotron solo on the title



RICK WAKEMAN, Yes keyboardist, says sonic experiments were encouraged in the late '60s. 'As a musician you were left free to make your own music, and it was played on the radio. ... Then [in the mid-'70s] it all stopped. Advertising spoiled everything.'

Contributed photo

track — and 1970's "Hunky Dory.")

But as a courtesy Wakeman agreed to participate in a Yes rehearsal. "I thought I'd stay for a half-hour and be off," he says.

Instead he jammed with his future band mates for the better part of a day. After rehearsal, as Wakeman was dropping off guitarist Steve Howe at his home, Howe asked Wakeman if he could rehearse again the next day. "I said, 'OK,'" Wakeman recalls, "and as I drive off, I suddenly realized I had joined Yes."

Wakeman said Bowie agreed with his decision to join Yes. "David, who is one of rock's greatest writers and an absolute genius, and [guitarist] Mick Ronson would have given me a lot of freedom, but there still would have been a ceiling. I wanted to be part of the writing."

And what about the man Wakeman replaced, Tony Kaye? Were there any hard feelings?

"No," says Wakeman, "because Tony didn't want to go down that orchestral route. He formed Badger, and Badger supported Yes on the first tour I played with Yes. ... When a band evolves one way, somebody goes or somebody leaves."

Which is why Wakeman left after recording 1974's "Tales of Topographic Oceans," a controversial double-album with four sidelong tracks. "I didn't understand where we were going as

a band," he says. "We adapted the music to fit four sides of an album. It didn't naturally evolve. There are some great things, but an awful lot of padding. If the CD format was around then, it would have been a different album."

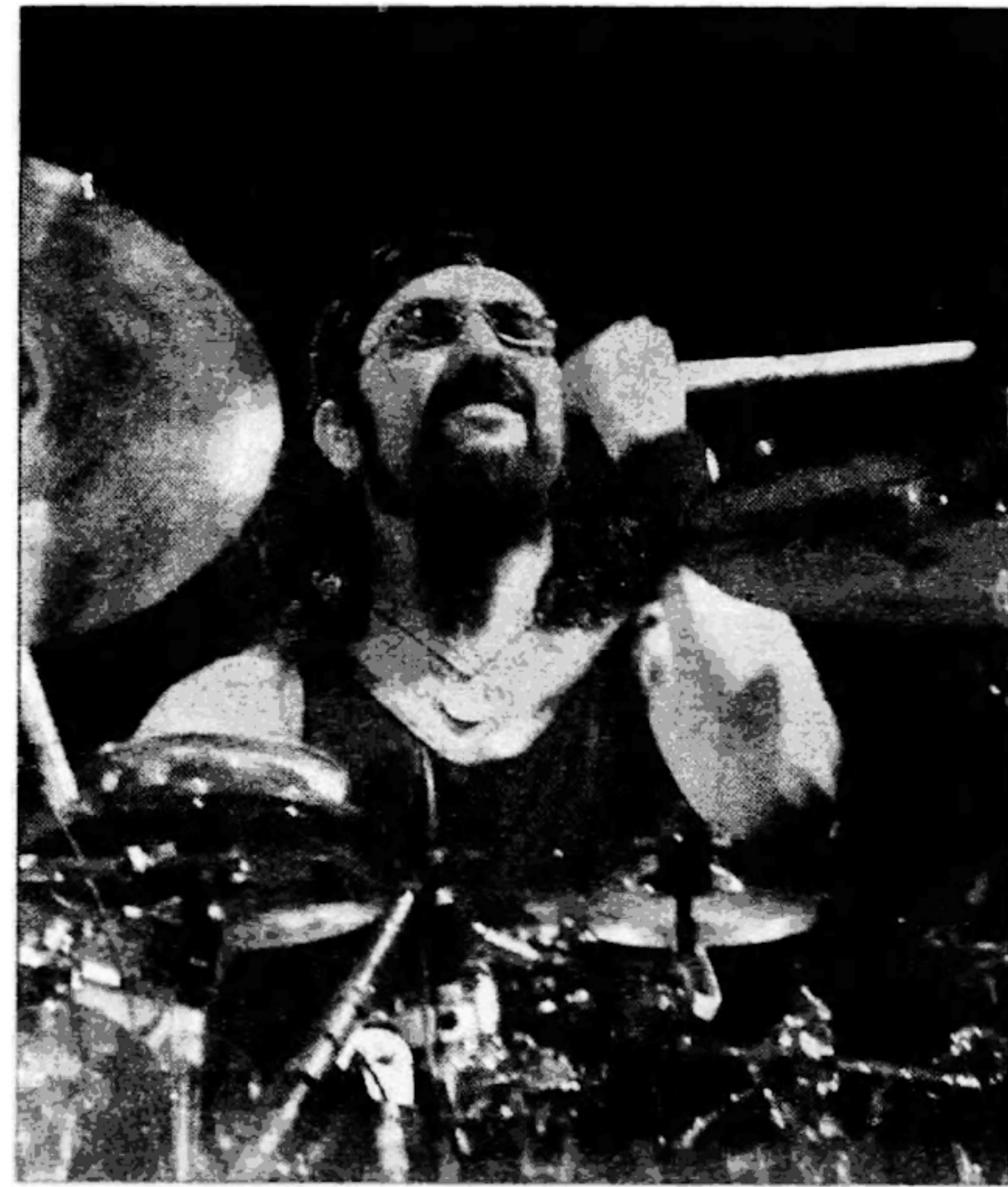
Compared to Yes, Dream Theater's lineup has been a model of stability, despite having shuffled vocalists and keyboardists. The three Long Islanders who formed the band in 1988 at Boston's Berklee College of Music — Portnoy, who last year moved to the Allentown area, guitarist John Petrucci and bassist John Myung — are still in the lineup, which includes Canadian vocalist Kevin James La Brie, on board since 1991, and keyboard player Jordan Rudess, the latest addition, who joined in 1999.

As a youngster Portnoy started out playing piano, "but that wasn't cool enough for me." He switched to drums after seeing Keith Moon. "He was such a showman, and I wanted to be like that," Portnoy says. "Once I got into playing, when I was 11, I wanted to learn as much as I could and get as good as I could get. Rush, Yes, and Frank Zappa really developed me as a musician."

When Portnoy met Petrucci and Myung at Berklee, "the three of us felt a real chemistry in terms of writing and common influences."

DREAM THEATER'S drummer Mike Portnoy says his band's 1992 MTV hit 'Pull Me Under,' was almost the kiss of death because our record company thought we could be a radio band.'

Contributed photo



YES

FROM PAGE 3

After some growing pains, Dream Theater had an unlikely MTV hit in 1992 with "Pull Me Under," from its second album, "Images And Words." "It was one of those freaks of nature, but it was almost the kiss of death," says Portnoy, "because our record company thought we could be a radio band."

The constant struggle to write another hit single almost broke up the band. "Finally we went to our management and label and said that unless we regained our artistic freedom and got rid of this pressure, we were done. Everybody backed up and got out of our way."

Since then Dream Theater has produced 1999's "Scenes from a Memory," "a concept album about reincarnation and past life and a murder mystery in the vein of 'The Wall' or 'Tommy'"; 2002's "Six Degrees of Inner Turbulence," a two-CD set that includes a 42-minute track which Portnoy describes as "the ultimate in over-the-top excess ... combining Metallica with Radiohead," and 2003's "Train of Thought," "a conscious effort to be concise and heavy, a huge, powerfully heavy dark album modeled after our favorites, Metallica, Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden, and the furthest away from classic prog as we ever have been."

So which current bands does Wakeman think will further the cause prog-rock?

Wakeman's first choice, surprisingly, is the British pop trio Muse. "They are absolutely sensational on stage, and even though they don't sound anything like [Yes], they have the potential to be today's Yes."

"And [alt-metal band] Incubus, the way they use the orchestra, they could be the new Moody Blues."

He also speaks highly of the French electronica duo Air, alt-metal band Tool and The Mars Volta, whose records blend neo-psychedelia, hardcore punk and free jazz.

"The music is off the wall, and the first time I heard it, I thought, 'What the hell is this?'" Wakeman says of the latter. "On the third hearing, however, I thought, 'This is clever stuff. If they can transfer what they do on record to stage, it could be amazing.'"

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