



Tales of mysticism and imagination

THROUGHOUT THE SEVENTIES, Roger Dean's fantastic, Tolkien-inspired paintings of mist-shrouded peaks and waterfalls adorned countless bedsits and student halls of residence. Whether they took the form of a poster or a record sleeve, they were immediately identifiable with Yes, one of the most successful 'progressive rock' bands of the decade. What the album



sleeves promised, the music delivered: mysticism, romantic grandeur and a sense of significance. Jon Anderson's ethereal voice, Rick Wakeman's sweeping Mellotron and Steve Howe's eclectic guitar playing sustained some of the most ambitious pieces in rock. And if the scope and solemnity of their work was reminiscent of classical music, their clean-living image further removed them from rock tradition.

The original line-up of Yes came together in the summer of 1968; each of those involved had some previous experience of



the music scene. Jon Anderson (born 25 October 1944), who came from Accrington in Lancashire, had sung in his brother Tony's group, the Warriors; their one unsuccessful single later cropped up on a Decca compilation, *Hard-Up Heroes*, in 1975. Bassist Chris Squire (born 4 March 1948) came from North London and was educated at Haberdashers' Aske public school. His first band was the Selfs; with the addition of guitarist Pete Banks (born Peter Brockbanks on 7 July 1947 in Barnet), they became the Syn, releasing two unsuccessful singles on Deram. The Syn in turn became Mabel Greer's Toyshop; young jazz drummer Bill Bruford (born 17 May 1950) and keyboard-player Tony Kaye (born Anthony John Selridge on 11 January 1946 in Leicester) completed the line-up, and the name was changed to Yes.

Affirmative vibes

The newly-christened Yes played their first gig at East Mersea Youth Camp in Essex on 4 August 1968, and made their debut at the Marquee Club the following night. They rehearsed intensively in a basement below the Lucky Horseshoe cafe in Shaftesbury Avenue, working on a mixture of cover versions and original songs by Anderson and Squire. An important early influence was the Nice, whose flashy grandeur was already winning over enormous audiences, although US bands like the Beach Boys, Moby Grape, the Doors and the Fifth Dimension also left their mark on the developing group. Of particular importance was Vanilla Fudge's treatment of the Supremes' hit 'You Keep Me Hangin' On', which demonstrated how a pop song could be transformed into an extended dramatic production. Yes aimed for a full, rich sound, occasionally verging on the orchestral.

In September 1968, Yes were called upon to stand in at short notice for Sly and the Family Stone at Blaise's, then one of London's most prestigious clubs. Roy Flynn, who was in charge of the club, agreed to manage the budding group, and began to hustle them some dates. Unfortunately, Bruford was about to depart for Leeds University; the rush replacement was Tony O'Riley, who never fitted in either musically or socially.

Later that year, Yes toured the UK as support to a variety of headline bands. One date was at Leeds University; Bill Bruford was in the audience, and was persuaded to rejoin the band for their forthcoming appearance supporting Cream at their farewell Albert Hall concert – easily Yes's biggest break to date. With the help of the Albert Hall showcase, a weekly residency at the Marquee and a host of less glamorous engagements, Yes began to make a name for themselves in the UK, and Bruford was persuaded to remain with the group.

Yes in the early Seventies. From left: Howe, Kaye, Squire, Anderson and Bruford.

Roy Flynn negotiated a record contract with Atlantic, and the band's debut LP *Yes* appeared in the UK in August 1969. The material ranged from heavily-harmonised originals like 'Harold Land' and 'Survival' through Anderson's acoustically-based songs such as 'Yesterday And Today' to ambitious arrangements of the Beatles' 'Every Little Thing' and the Byrds' 'I See You'. Recorded in-between a punishing schedule of gigs, however, the album did not come up to the band's expectations, although reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic marked them as a combo to note. The group's first single, a track called 'Sweetness', was taken from the album but made no impression on the charts, setting the pattern for the future: despite the occasional singles success, Yes were to remain an album band throughout their career.

Undeterred, Yes were already planning their next LP. To create a 'bigger' sound, the services of a small orchestra were engaged. *Time And A Word*, released in July 1970, stuck to much the same formula as its predecessor, with original songs side-by-side with Yes versions of Ritchie Havens' 'No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed' and Steve Stills' 'Everydays'. The use of other people's songs betrayed a lack of confidence on the part of the group, and the use of an orchestra was hardly original – all kinds of bands, from the Nice to Deep Purple, were doing the same thing at the time. But the LP was nevertheless a marked improvement on its predecessor, suggesting the band's true capabilities. The engineer was Eddie Offord, who was to work on nearly all their subsequent albums. Offord came to influence the band in other respects too, interesting them in health foods and vegetarianism.

Howe's tricks

Time And A Word still did not satisfy the group; shortly after its release, Pete Banks was asked to leave Yes because, in Anderson's words, 'he didn't fit in'. Banks went on to form his own group Flash, and Steve Howe (born 8 April 1947 in Holloway, North London) was brought in to replace him. Howe was a veteran of psychedelic bands like the In Crowd and Tomorrow, who had had a hit in 1967 with 'My White Bicycle'.

While the new line-up were writing and rehearsing at a cottage in Devon, their financial situation deteriorated and relations with Atlantic became strained. Brian Lane was called in to replace Roy Flynn as manager. Yes also signed to actor David Hemmings' Hemdale production company, for which Lane was working. With their immediate future now assured, Yes strengthened their position still further with the release of *The Yes Album* in March 1971. Co-produced by the band and Eddie Offord, the album at last represented the band's strength on vinyl, and provided them with the backbone of their live act for years to come.



Every cut was an original composition; 'Yours Is No Disgrace', 'I've Seen All Good People', 'Starship Trooper' and Steve Howe's stage favourite 'Clap' stood out. Heavy touring provided the basis for the album's initial popularity in the UK and, following a spot on 'Top Of The Pops', *The Yes Album* reached the top of the album charts. Yes then toured Europe with Iron Butterfly, and in the summer of 1971 started a US tour as support to Jethro Tull, gaining a precarious foothold on the American market. On the band's return to the UK, Tony Kaye left to form his own band Badger.

Close to the edge

Following a series of meetings and record company wranglings, Yes announced the appointment of former Strawbs keyboard whizz-kid Rick Wakeman (born 18 May 1949 in West London) to the vacant position. With his massive bank of keyboards – including Hammond organ, Moog synthesiser, Rhodes piano and Mellotron – his long, blonde hair and flowing cape, Wakeman was a distinctive figure, arguably the most famous rock keyboard player of the Seventies. His arrival completed what remains, for most fans, the definitive Yes line-up, combining Anderson's mystic vision with an instrumental virtuosity capable of realising it. The line-up was soon in the studio recording a new album. *Fragile* (1971) marked the first appearance of a record sleeve by Roger Dean and featured the strong group compositions 'Heart Of The Sunrise', 'Roundabout' and 'Long Distance Runaround', as well as one track by each individual member. Grueling touring in the UK, Europe and the US bolstered *Fragile's* chart position on both sides of the Atlantic.

After the intensive touring to promote *Fragile*, Yes embarked immediately on writing and rehearsing the next album's worth of material. This surfaced in September 1972 as *Close To The Edge* and

Yes in the late Seventies (opposite). They tried to revive their act with a circular stage (inset opposite), but Anderson and Wakeman quit in 1980. Pop duo the Buggles – singer Trevor Horn and keyboard player Geoff Downes – replaced them (above).

remains, arguably, the group's finest recorded moment. The title track, which occupied the whole of the first side, was a complex piece divided into four sections; the second side was taken up with 'And You And I' and 'Siberian Khatru'.

The three hard months which *Close To The Edge* took to record on account of Chris Squire's fanatical perfectionism – he would spend hours tuning his bass – proved the final straw for drummer Bill Bruford. Just as the album was being released, he announced his intention of taking up an offer from Robert Fripp to join King Crimson. Alan White (born 14 June 1949 in Durham) was selected as a replacement; his varied career had included sessions with Alan Price and Joe Cocker, as well as a live appearance in Toronto in 1969 with John Lennon, Yoko Ono and Eric Clapton in the Plastic Ono Band.

Alan White was thrown in the deep end when Yes embarked immediately on a series of US tours as headline band. A live triple LP, *Yessongs* (1973), featured material from the group's three previous studio albums, together with some excerpts from Rick Wakeman's recently-released solo debut *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII*. Despite the band's reputation for being primarily a studio group, *Yessongs* displayed their powerful live sound and was successful both in Britain and the US.

Over the top

Jon Anderson had long been preoccupied with all things mystical, and his reading included such authors as Herman Hesse. The title track of *Close To The Edge* had been his most ambitious attempt to ex-

press these interests in music, and its success encouraged him to go further. During the US tours of 1973, Anderson and Howe began making tapes for a new project inspired by a book called *Autobiography Of A Yogi* by Paramhansa Yogananda. The book set forth a philosophy of life in four parts, and *Tales From Topographic Oceans* was an attempt to translate this idea onto four sides of a double album.

Although Anderson seriously believed that he could convert the world to this philosophy through the medium of a best-selling album, the rest of the band remained sceptical; Rick Wakeman walked out of the room when Howe and Anderson first explained the idea. Their record company Atlantic was also bemused by the project, but agreed to stand by it, and the album appeared in November 1973. Live dates were undertaken to preview the album before its release – unwisely, perhaps, since the unsuspecting fans did not take to this massive chunk of unfamiliar music. The reviews in the music press were hostile, further fuelling Rick Wakeman's dissatisfaction.

When Yes took the work on tour round the US, they employed the latest sound, lighting and stage effects; there was even a huge hot-air balloon emblazoned with the Yes logo. The audiences remained bemused, however, and the work was gradually trimmed down to make room for the old Yes numbers the fans wanted to hear. Wakeman, however, was still dissatisfied playing sections of a work with which he had little sympathy; in addition to his disagreements about the music, Wakeman's beer-drinking, meat-eating lifestyle left him socially alienated in a group of teetotal vegetarians. Encouraged by the success of his second solo project *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* (1974), Wakeman left Yes to pursue a solo career.

Vangelis Papathanassiou, a Greek keyboard virtuoso whose work with the band Aphrodite's Child Anderson had admired, was called in as a replacement, but he proved too individual a musician to fit in with the group. Instead, Yes chose Patrick Moraz (born 24 June 1948 in Switzerland), who had been playing in a band called Refugee with ex-Nice members Lee Jackson and Brian Davison. Moraz joined Yes as they were recording their next album, *Relayer*. Released in November 1974, it presented a much harsher side of the band's music. After extensive touring to promote the album, each member of Yes took a year off to produce a solo album, while Atlantic took advantage of the lull to release *Yesterdays* (1975), a selection from the first two LPs plus a version of 'America' previously released on a sampler.

The five solo albums, all released between late 1975 and the middle of 1976, included *Beginnings*, a set of Steve Howe guitar explorations, *Fish Out Of Water*, an impressive set from bassman Squire, the keyboard pyrotechnics of Moraz on 'i', Alan White's more relaxed *Ramshackled*, and Anderson's tour de force *Olias Of Sun-*



hollow. All the records made a respectable – if unspectacular – showing in the charts. 1975 also saw the long-delayed release of the film *Yessongs* which featured the band live at London's Rainbow Theatre in 1972.

Back in the fold

Late in 1976, Yes assembled in Switzerland to start laying down tracks for a new LP. Moraz, ironically on his home ground, found musical differences an insurmountable obstacle and left the group. In a somewhat astonishing turnabout, the replacement was none other than Rick Wakeman, whose health and bank account had both suffered in the period since he had left Yes due to a series of exhausting and ill-judged projects. The LP which resulted from this reunion was *Going For The One* (1977), a return to rock dynamism after the convolutions of the preceding works. 'Wonderous Stories' from the album provided Yes with a Top Ten hit in the UK. For the first time since *The Yes Album* there was no Roger Dean cover and Eddie Offord was absent from the mixing desk.

Still riding high on this new burst of creative energy, Yes were hard at work on a new LP by the beginning of 1978, and in September of that year they released *Tormato*. The album was unusual among Yes LPs in that it contained as many as eight tracks, including the powerful 'Release, Release' and the overt social comment of 'Don't Kill The Whale', which was a minor UK hit single. Their tours employed a circular stage with the audience all around, an idea meant to bring band and audience closer together.

This closeness did not extend to the members of Yes, however. 1979 saw them confused about future directions and by

Five faces of a megaband. Right: Steve Howe poses in front of a landscape by Roger Dean, whose work appeared on many Yes album covers. Below, from left: Rick Wakeman (keyboards), Alan White (drums), Chris Squire (bass) and Jon Anderson (vocals).





the beginning of 1980 both Anderson and Wakeman had left the group. Anderson had already made one LP, *Short Stories* (1979) with Vangelis; they followed this up with *Song Of Seven* (1980), also writing disco star Donna Summer's 1982 hit 'State Of Independence'. In another of the mildly astonishing moves for which Yes were becoming famous, Trevor Horn and Geoff Downes of popsters Buggles – whose 'Video Killed The Radio Star' was a hit in 1979 – were invited to replace Anderson and Wakeman respectively. An LP entitled *Drama* (1980) served mainly to emphasise the contradictions inherent in the line-up, and the group ceased to exist soon afterwards as Steve Howe and Geoff Downes joined Asia and Trevor Horn became an acclaimed producer. A further live set, *Yesshows*, was released late in 1980.

The end of Yes was unspectacular, even anticlimactic; without the driving vision of Anderson – who was often a hard taskmaster – this once-great progressive rock band fizzled out. In their day, however, they provided a welcome antidote to the endless soloing of much early-Seventies rock, providing melodies and arrangements which broadened the scope of contemporary music.

PETER CLARK

YES
Discography

Singles
 Sweetness/Something's Coming (Atlantic 584280, 1969); Sweet Dreams/Dear Father (Atlantic 2091 004, 1970); Wonderous Stories/Parallels (Atlantic K 10999, 1977); Going For The One/Awaken (Atlantic K 11047, 1977); Don't Kill The Whale/Abeline (Atlantic K 11184, 1978).

Albums
 Yes (Atlantic K40034, 1969); *Time And A Word* (Atlantic K40085, 1970); *The Yes Album* (Atlantic K40106, 1971); *Fragile* (Atlantic K50009, 1971); *Close To The Edge* (Atlantic K50012, 1972); *Yessongs* (Atlantic K60045, 1973); *Tales From Topographic Oceans* (Atlantic K80001, 1973); *Relayer* (Atlantic K50096, 1974); *Yesterdays* (Atlantic K50048, 1975); *Going For The One* (Atlantic K50379, 1977); *Tormato* (Atlantic K50518, 1978); *Drama* (Atlantic K50736, 1980); *Yesshows* (Atlantic K60142, 1980); *Classic Yes* (Atlantic K50842, 1981).

