

THE NEW YES: THE DRAMA CONTINUES, CHAPTER?

Hit Parader gets behind the lines in the Yes Camp to reveal the death of the Old and the birth of the New.

It looks like Serious Business down at the Yes Camp. Hot and heavy, as they say, since the afternoon rain hasn't cooled things off at all. The battery of big industrial fans blowing hot air toward the ceiling isn't doing much either. Even the flies are sweating bullets in this equipment-cluttered, roadie-festooned former cardboard box factory — Somewhere in Rural Pennsylvania — where Steve Howe is wandering across Yes' half-built circular stage, wrapped around his Gibson as the notes fly.

He peers down at the strings, shakes his head in desperation, then pauses halfway through a random guitar snippet from *And You And I*. "What's that frying sound?" he asks impatiently.

"Keyboards," a member of the crew responds, from somewhere inside the maze of electronic gear underneath the stage.

"It's always something," Mr. Howe sighs wearily. The wife and kids are back in London, over four thousand miles away. He's spent most of the past ten months either preparing for or recording the newest Yes album, *Drama*. There are a couple of pages' worth of American gigs staring him in the face, and he could probably use a few months' sleep. The situation's clearly under control, everything will be ready on time for the first show, but to Steve Howe, at least, rehearsing with the New Yes is no laughing matter.

Steve Howe: "When Jon and Rick finally walked in, everything seemed to go to pieces. We were suddenly playing these airy-fairy bits of music."

Chris Squire, on the other hand, seems ... well, *bemused*, teetering on the edge of a huge hole in the stage in his oversized t-shirt, jeans, and a pair of what appear to be white-rimmed kiddie sunglasses from Woolworth's. He puts down his bass to direct Yes' bespectacled new vocalist, Trevor Horn, through the Andersonian intricacies of *And You And I*. Horn sang himself hoarse during a promotional filming session the previous day. He's having trouble with the high notes, repeating phrases over and over again, then stopping every few bars to refer to his clipboard full of song lyrics, just to make sure he's got it right.

"Another beer for the drummer," Alan White calls from behind his kit. He steps out front to limber up, doing a quick handstand that narrowly misses Squire's head, while a cluster of local townfolk — middle-aged Pennsylvania Dutch-types with tiny kids and a handful of older Yes fans in tow — watch from an open doorway.

by Dan Hedges



The New Yes, from left: Steve Howe, Geoff Downes, Alan White, Chris Squire, Trevor Horn.

Barricaded behind banks of equipment, new keyboard man Geoff Downes, stripped-down to a pair of bright red cut-offs, confers with a battalion of roadies who've been trying to get the gremlins out of his gear. Downes and Horn have been up late, night after night, pouring over old Yes tapes and breaking the old material down song-by-song, chord change-by-chord change, riff-by-riff. The tour won't start for two weeks yet, but they already look as if they're about to fall over.

"They'll be okay," one of the crew members remarks, and if the past twelve years of Yes are anything to go by, he's probably right.

It hasn't been easy. Since their beginning back in 1968, Yes have been going

through changes — the latest (and possibly most critical) being the shock-horror departure of Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman earlier this year. Although Wakeman's somewhat hit-or-miss relationship with the band over the past two years was fairly common knowledge, it was Anderson's exit — Anderson the co-founder — that raised the most eyebrows. After all, as principal lyricist, vocalist, front man, and Director of the Flow, Jon Anderson is Yes in many people's eyes.

"I'll tell you my version of the story," Steve Howe says later in the day. The old factory belongs to Michael Tait, Yes' long-time production manager, and the band is taking a ten minute breather in the joint's wood-paneled and exposed-brick control

room. Chris Squire is standing at one of the huge windows, puffing on a cigarette and gazing down at the equipment strewn stage directly below them. "Steve'll tell you his biased version," he laughs. "Then I'll tell you my biased version."

Evidently, the situation had been coming to a boil since the middle of Yes' 1979 American tour. The band, never all on the same wavelength even at the best of times, were drifting apart. Interests had changed, and so had the musical focus, with Wakeman non-committal, Anderson retreating into lyrical whimsy (a la *Tormato's Circus of Heaven*), and the remaining members collectively veering toward heavier rock and roll. Anderson, Squire and Howe were living in Britain, White had moved to L.A. several years before, and the Swiss-based Wakeman was a tax exile, which meant that the off-the-road Yes were essentially a rock band in name only.

With differing opinions over where they should record the next album, they settled on Paris, as Squire explains, "only because it was halfway between London, Switzerland, and the South of France — though nobody particularly wanted to go there."

According to Steve Howe, Anderson and Wakeman began making themselves scarce right from the start, leaving the remaining trio to work things out in their absence.

"The rhythm section — the continuing three-piece of Alan, Chris, and myself — had a few very happy days in Paris just pissing about," he recalls. "We were playing all sorts of different things for each other. Most of it was very loud, very heavy-duty, very exciting. Then when Jon and Rick finally walked in, everything seemed to go to pieces. We were suddenly playing these airy-fairy bits of music..."

Were Anderson's songs that bad? Or had the rest of the band finally outgrown that style?

"Fifty per cent of both, I think. We'd realized that we were restricted in that direction, and we'd started putting some pretty good things together. But as soon as there was something to hold onto, Jon would fire some criticism like 'We're playing too much rock and roll. It's not subtle enough. Not gentle enough.'"

An attempted collaboration with hot shot American producer Roy Thomas Baker collapsed early in the game, and Yes was reduced to commuting on weekends between their wives and kids in London and the increasingly frustrating rehearsals in France. It was just after Christmas 1979, when the band had opted to move everything back to Britain, that Anderson split for Barbados, ostensibly to work on new song lyrics.

"In the time he was away, we were supposed to get together with Rick," Steve Howe remembers. "He was going to fly in from Switzerland, rehearse with us for a week, then go home again. We were supposed to do the backing tracks separately, and he was going to record his keyboard parts afterwards. Nobody liked the idea very much. It was getting more and more... fake."

When Anderson finally returned, the lyrics under his arm didn't quite mesh with the music Howe, Squire, and White had been working on. "He was really just hanging in," Steve comments. "He was fading into the background. The more nothing happened with him, the more the



Bassist and founding member Chris Squire said Yes' former lead singer, Jon Anderson, wanted a "heavenly approach, which wasn't very current, to say the least."

rest of us carried on working every day."

As Chris Squire adds, "There are *always* outside aggravations. People making stupid decisions, financial problems, and all that. You can always get over them if, musically, you're all going in the same direction. But there are other times... and this was just one of those *other* times."

But did Anderson seem as if he realized what was happening?

"He was aware, but he was oblivious to the possible consequences. Even if it *was* that bad, he still thought we wouldn't go on without him," says Howe.

"It all culminated out of a lack of enthusiasm," Alan White says, by way of

summing up.

Squire agrees. "Yeah. It seemed, at the time, that Jon just wanted to have this void — a sort of *heavenly* approach to everything — which obviously wasn't very current, to say the least."

Although Squire wasn't saying anything, the wheels were beginning to turn, as the situation between Anderson, Wakeman, and the other three Yes members steadily disintegrated.

As Squire explains, "Jon always used the excuse, 'Well, if Rick's not here, we're not all here. So I'll come down when Rick's there.'"

"Rick was there for ten minutes," Alan

White says. "We were there every day for two months."

In the end, Anderson stormed out of a rehearsal after a once-and-for-all verbal fistfight with the rest of the band, and Wakeman was effectively eased out of the picture through manager Brian Lane. The 80's had barely gotten underway, and Yes were down to three.

As the story goes, Yes considered going out as a three-piece, owing to the success

of the Squire-Howe-White tapes made during Jon and Rick's absence. "There was a sense of freedom," Alan White explains. "We were able to experiment more without all this forced pressure."

"It was sounding really good," Squire agrees. "It came down to the point where Brian (Lane) would come in with a different story every day. Well, I know what's going to happen. Chris is going to sing, we're gonna be a three-piece..." And I said,

"Well, I don't know if I can do a whole set, singing, playing, and everything." Squire nods to Trevor and Geoff, who are sitting quietly in opposite corners of the control room. "Then we bumped into these two."

Enter Geoff Downes, classically-trained pianist and former TV/radio jingle writer, and Trevor Horn, former session bass player, record producer, and musical director. Together, they'd written, produced, and recorded **The Age Of Plastic** under the corporate name of the Buggles — an admittedly calculated effort to "become rich and famous overnight," as Trevor explains, which worked better than either of them had expected, spawning a hit single, *Video Killed The Radio Star* en route.

By chance, the Buggles and Yes shared the same manager (the aforementioned Brian Lane), and Trevor's inevitable crossing of paths with Chris Squire led to the beginnings of a friendship. "I'd been a Yes fan ever since **The Yes Album**, Trevor says. "I was amazed when I found out that Chris was really into the Buggles album as well."

In the interest of furthering his fortunes, Trevor offered Chris one of the songs he and Geoff had been working on, with the idea of possibly getting it onto the next Yes album. Squire was impressed, brought the song to Howe and White, and the two newcomers soon found themselves in the studio with Yes, presumably to iron out the kinks in the song so Anderson, Squire, and Co. could record it. "Geoff and I kept looking around and thinking, *Where's Jon Anderson? Where's Rick Wakeman?*," Trevor says.

A few weeks later, the Buggles joined Yes.

"The initial shock of Chris suggesting Trevor and Geoff sank into Steve's head faster than it did into mine," Alan White says. "But it worked. You can tell the minute you start playing together. It's like having a conversation."

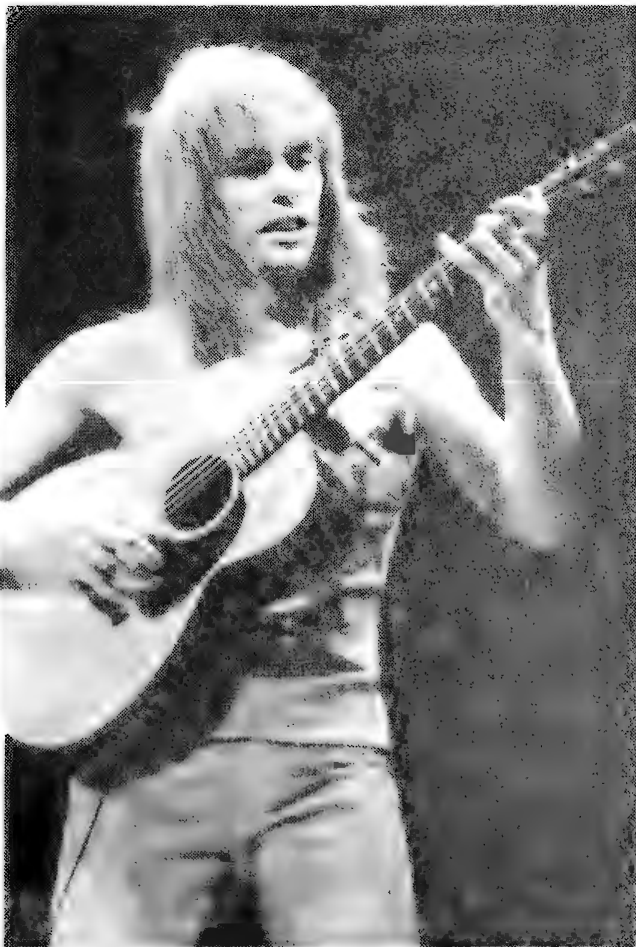
So Yes are back up to full strength, having once again weathered crucial changes in personnel that might have sent many other top bands to the wall. But as Geoff Downes admits, "It's a bit frightening being in the position Trevor and I are in. It's like stepping into a legend. The Buggles thing was nice, and we plan to do more of that, but if anybody'd told us a year ago that we'd be doing *this*..."

By the next afternoon, the old factory has cooled down considerably. The locals are still hanging around; the road crew are still wrestling with equipment in between bottles of beer, as the New Yes take the stage. Alan White tests his drums, Steve Howe straps on his custom-built Gibson, and Chris Squire adjusts his Woolworth's sunglasses. A slightly more rested Geoff Downes positions himself behind his keyboards; a slightly less hoarse Trevor Horn steps up to the microphone at the center of the circular stage.

Squire glances at White, White counts everybody in, and they're off. The New Yes. Blasting through the opening bars of *Roundabout*, and sounding pretty good at that. A few more days' work, a couple of nights on the road, and they'll have it. Right now, the local kids seem to like it, bouncing, and dancing, and singing along the sidelines, as the music booms out through the open doorway, across the parking area, over the railroad tracks, vanishing into the Pennsylvania after-



Alan White: "Another beer for the drummer."



And now Steve Howe will tell you his biased version of the story.