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# The Sunhallow Saga

## Jon Anderson Delivers Fourth Yes Solo Album

Peter Crescenti

*Through the mist of a million years of high energy three riders skimmed the surface of the plain of Tallowcross and raced towards a dream.*

*Olias was to build the ship the Moorglade Mover/Ranyart was to guide the moments begotten light/ Qoquaq a leader, a fashioner of peoples of Sunhallow.*

**W**ho are these cosmic travelers? Are they bit characters from Tolkein's whimsical Hobbit world, or maybe a new team of super-heroes in the ever-expanding universe of Marvel Comics?

In reality, Olias, Ranyart, and Qoquaq are the stars of Jon Anderson's musical fairytale, *Olias of Sunhallow* (Atlantic). The Yes vocalist's

first solo album chronicles the mission of the super-trio to Sunhallow to rescue that world's four tribes before their planet explodes into interstellar debris. If the poetics seemed drenched in Tolkeinesque hues and the concept seems Marvel-esque in its imagery and scope, it's because both were influential forces in Anderson's conception of his saga.



Anderson readily admits, "Tolkein's strongly influenced so many people over the years with the idea of fantasy and reality being a good kind of balance."

As long as a decade ago, Jon was immersing himself in the Marvel creations of author Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby. About five years ago, he devoted much of his leisure time to digesting scores of science fiction and fantasy novels and stories, becoming particularly enveloped in the adventurous worlds created by J.R.R. Tolkein in his "Lord of the Rings" trilogy. The most immediate inspiration for *Sunhallow*, Anderson says, is the Vera Stanley Alder novel, "The Initiation of the World."

The particular vibe that triggered *Sunhallow*, though, struck the singer back in 1972, when Yes recorded their fourth and probably finest record, *Fragile*. The front cover painting of that LP, wonderously illustrated by Roger Dean, depicted a kind of space ark approaching a seemingly healthy and tranquil planet. The back cover, shockingly, portrayed the world discarding chunks of itself into space, as the ark (Anderson has christened it the "Moorglade Mover") hovered away from the chaos, presumably filled with the rescued inhabitants of that ill-fated sphere. From these illustrations, Anderson drew the basic skeleton plot of *Olias of Sunhallow*.

**FOUR-CORNERED PLOT:** The planet's four tribes, the Nagrunium, Asatranium, Oractaniom, and Nordranious, are each represented by a different aspect of music in the story. "There were four definite places in the studio where everything fit," Jon recalls. "In one corner, I'd have drums. The range of drums was from Moroccan, Jamaican, American Indian, tabla, English brass band bass drum, and various other kinds of Asian drums, and a couple of zebra-skinned African drums. In another corner I had a Koto, a sitar, a Greek guitar . . . . Then I had a keyboard set-up. I always wanted to get into a situation where I could actually play three or four keyboards. I had a set of five keyboards." A fourth corner jangled with Anderson's collection of international bells. The story finally ends with the "Moorglade Mover" nestling on Asguard to dispatch its passengers, while the three super-beings climb to that world's highest peak and merge with the Universe.

The tale with such godly ramifications was not an overnight creation, nor was it done in seven days; Anderson labored six long months over his fantasy. "At times I'd spend a full day playing the same piece of music," he unabashedly admits, "trying to put down the first track well. One of the tracks, called 'Qoquaq en Transic,' is a very free thing. I'd already recorded it about six months

earlier on a very simple tape, and found a certain kind of feeling in it. I liked the recording I had, but quality-wise it wasn't good enough for the album. So I had to reproduce that feeling, and when I tried to reproduce it I had to go back to that point in time when it was first presented. It took me a long time, but in the end, when I sat back and listened to the playback, I just couldn't stop laughing because it was *there*."

**MOOG REFLECTIONS:** Another reason the production took half a year stems from Anderson's very definite philosophy concerning the potentialities of the moog synthesizer. Jon believes that the very sounds you coax out of a moog are 'you,' so he worked feverishly to make sure the machine accurately reflected his musical personality.

"Basically it was a question of working on the moog, because it's a very open-ended instrument. You can root and root and you'll find virtually any sound your ear wants to hear."

*Olias of Sunhallow* wafts along like the soundtrack of an ether-induced stupor, never punctuated by a solo or even a lone instrument playing. The record is a gluttonous orgy of overdubs and lost sounds, with much of the symphonic-like blanket textures produced by Anderson's collection of moogs, mellotrons, and other keyboards. Ambitiously, Anderson also used scores of other instruments to create his dream-like, papier-mache wall of sound—exotic things like a Koto, a Chinese stringed instrument, and a huge collection of bells.

"I had a couple of dreams of what sound the album was going to be. Dreams are very strange things. It's so logical that you're alive. You sleep, so you're alive. You dream you're alive. Understand?"

"I started collecting instruments to use on the album about a year and a half before I actually started recording it," continues Anderson, who recorded at his home 24 track studio. "I started picking up bells here, a guitar there, a mandolin, sitar, Koto, numerous flutes and things, which I haven't really worked that well on yet. I'm still learning. At the moment, I carry a Chinese bamboo flute around with me, which is fantastic for learning how to breathe."

Still, for Anderson, the most important instrument of all was his own voice, which he used not only for shaping lyrics, but also purely for its naked sound. Jon first began exploring that basic aspect of the voice on the *Fragile* LP, in his "We Have Heaven," which weaves layers and layers of vocals into intricate choral passages.

**SHIFTING VOCAL PATTERNS:** "That was my first attempt to work with vocal patterns. I'm interested because (my voice) has been my main instrument, and having never

really felt that I was such a good singer, I've used the idea of the voice in a different way at times, and tried to formulate the energy in a different way.

"My voice has developed over the years, and I do look forward now to finding opposites—so I'll sing very clearly at times, and then very intricately with a lot of other vocals and sounds. I think I'm gonna try to get both ends of the scale, driving my energies towards working out some sequences of vocals."

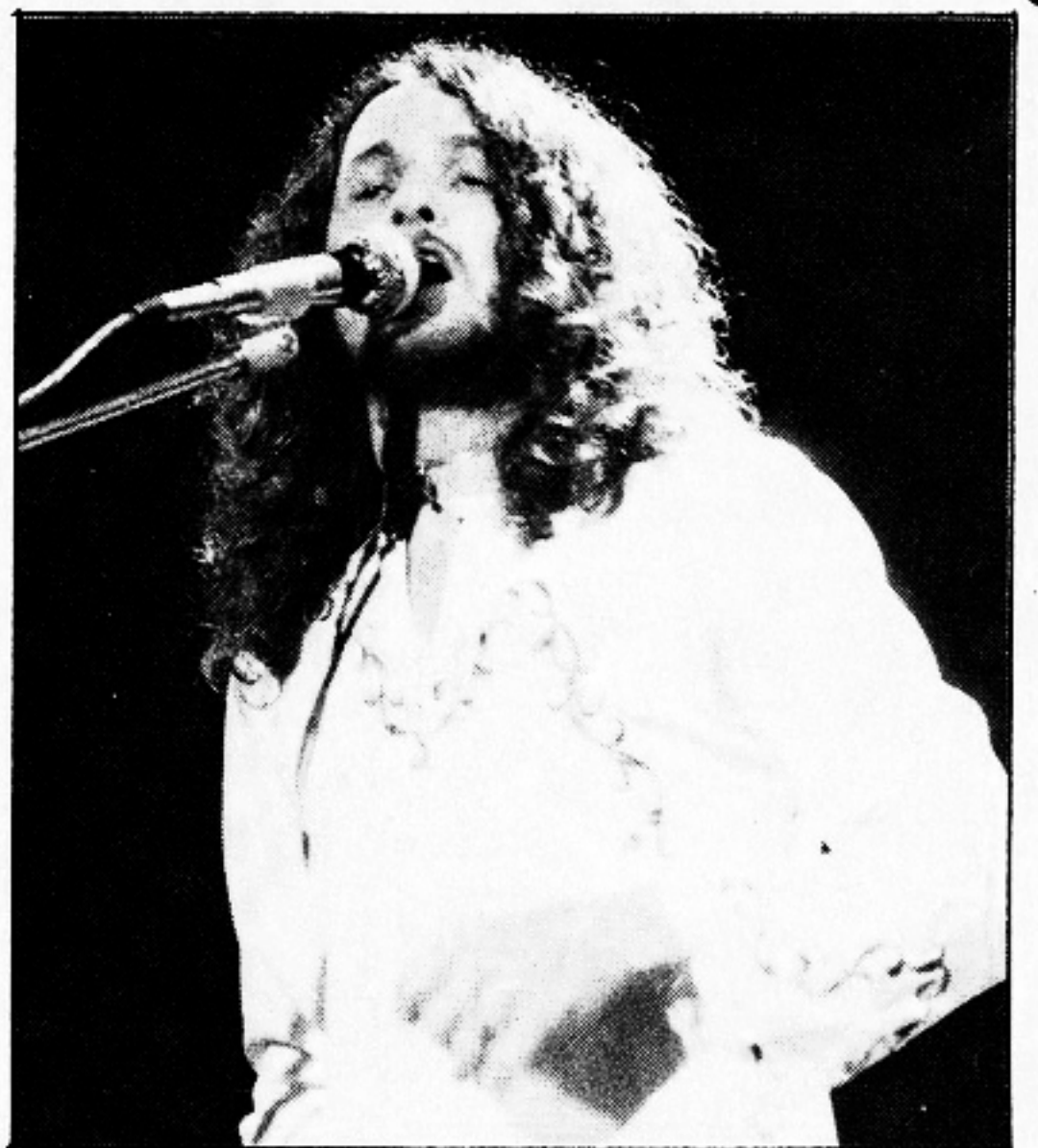
Anderson hopes to continue incorporating his ever-evolving vocal style into Yes' music, and although he has become proficient on several instruments, he has decided to submerge that new aspect of his musical personality in favor of group unity.

"My role in Yes is more as a kind of director," Jon explains. "I don't feel I'm in any position, at the moment, to take a solo with the band playing. I've always been the singer and that's my solo."

Anderson doesn't figure to record another solo record for a couple of years, and he hopes that by then his musical and technical knowledge will have increased enough so that he can avoid spending an exorbitant amount of time hidden in the studio. In so doing, he will also avoid creating potential conflicts among Yes' members.

"When I was involved in the album, I was wondering if it was ever gonna come out. When you still haven't finished after four months you think, 'Why isn't this piece of music coming to me,' and it can get on top of you. You have to say, 'I don't want to let anybody down.' I didn't want to waste the band's time."

"I finished my album just a bit later than everybody else. It didn't upset the routine of the band so much, but it did put a bit of pressure on. In a sense, I tend to lead in what's going on, and when I came out of doing my *Sunhallow* album, I realized how important my position in the band is—as everybody else's position is—and that I shouldn't forget that."



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