

The Yes Decade

Rick Wakeman Looks Back 10 Years for the Roots of Their Latest LP

by Kurt Loder

To those who dote on progressive rock, Yes represents the state of the art—seamless harmonies, tons of technique, and a penchant for the ineffable that would make cult poet Kahlil Gibran seem hard-nosed by comparison.

The group's detractors, on the other hand, tend to see them as the most insufferably puffed-up English art-rock outfit of the '70s, seed for such home-grown chaff as Kansas and Starcastle.

Over the years, Rick Wakeman, Yes's classically trained, beer-drinking keyboards player, has been of both minds. When he joined the group in 1971 (replacing original organist Tony Kaye), his years of private tutoring and piano study at London's Royal Academy of Music enabled him to scale new heights in prog-rock virtuosity with the group. But by the time of *Tales from Topographic Oceans* in 1973, their increasingly bombastic approach (and teetotaling vegetarianism) had become too much even for Wakeman, who quit to go solo.

Times change, though, and when Wakeman returned to the Yes fold last year to record the million-selling *Going for the One*, he found vocalist Jon Anderson, bassist Chris Squire, drummer Alan White and guitarist Steve Howe to be a much looser group. And now, with *Tormato* (Atlantic), their tenth-anniversary album, he's convinced things are better than ever.

"I think everybody's cracked a little bit, I really do," Wakeman chuckles cheerfully. "It's pure insanity now. I think because it's our tenth birthday, we wanted almost to turn a full circle. The early Yes music was like 90-percent vocals, good vocals, built around melodies and lines—which gradually got less and less and less, into really introvert pieces of music. And then it sort of came back out again through like *Going for the One*, and I think it's now turned a 10-year cycle."

Tormato is the group's eleventh album—and the first one since 1970 on which no track runs longer than eight minutes.

"It was basically a double album that could come out in two parts," Wakeman explains. "It's very strange for a Yes album. It's gone one stage farther back than *Going for the One*—it's gone back to *Fragile/Yes Album* days.

"For example, Chris came along with a sort of Bo Diddley song, and Jon wrote the words to it, because one morning we were readin' all about the slaughter of all the whales, and that hit us all pretty hard—unnecessary slaughter of animals, I think, is a little over the top. So I started makin' a few funny noises on the Moog, like the whale bein' hit by the harpoon up its rear end, things like that. And then Alan started doin' the Bo Diddley rhythm—and the next thing you know, we were into the song. It was amazing."

That song, "Whales," is but one of several surprises on the album. There's also an out-and-out rock & raver called "Release, Release," a hint of jazz in "On Silent Wings of Freedom," and, with "Onward," the first fully orchestrated Yes track in eight years.

"I think what's gonna happen is, at first it'll be such a shock for a lot of people that they might almost be turned against it," Wakeman worries. "But

then, if they listen again, they'll hear all the Yes, all the normal things there. All that's changed is the rhythmical ideas, and perhaps the length of the pieces of music."

If Yes has gone through some changes (they actually have an occasional drink now, and—with the exception of Steve Howe—they're no longer fanatical health-food nuts), so has Wakeman. A hard-partier since his scuffling youth (he once showed up drunk for a Royal College clarinet lesson, played three notes and passed out), the 29-year-old keyboardist has slowed down somewhat since he suffered a much-hushed-up heart attack after leaving Yes in the summer of '74 (he had

(continued overleaf)

Rick Wakeman at the keys: home in England he has a warehouse filled with more than 80 different instruments.

Still goin' for the one after a decade together: Anderson (left), Wakeman, drummer Alan White.



Lynn Goldsmith

Lynn Goldsmith

stayed up five days straight preparing for a mammoth London solo concert, and required a morphine injection for a painful wrist injury before going on stage).

"I have been known to over-boogaloo on occasions," he allows. "I think it's the country air that affects me when I come into the big city—I hate and loathe cities. I used to be a right old rock & roller, but I'm too old for that now."

Not everyone agrees that his rejoining the band was a good move, however—in fact, it almost didn't happen. In October 1976, he quietly started rehearsing with original Yes drummer Bill Bruford and ex-Roxy Music bassist John Wetton. But what could've been the supergroup of the '70s never came off—Bruford and Wetton went on to form U.K., and Rick soon returned to his Yes slot.

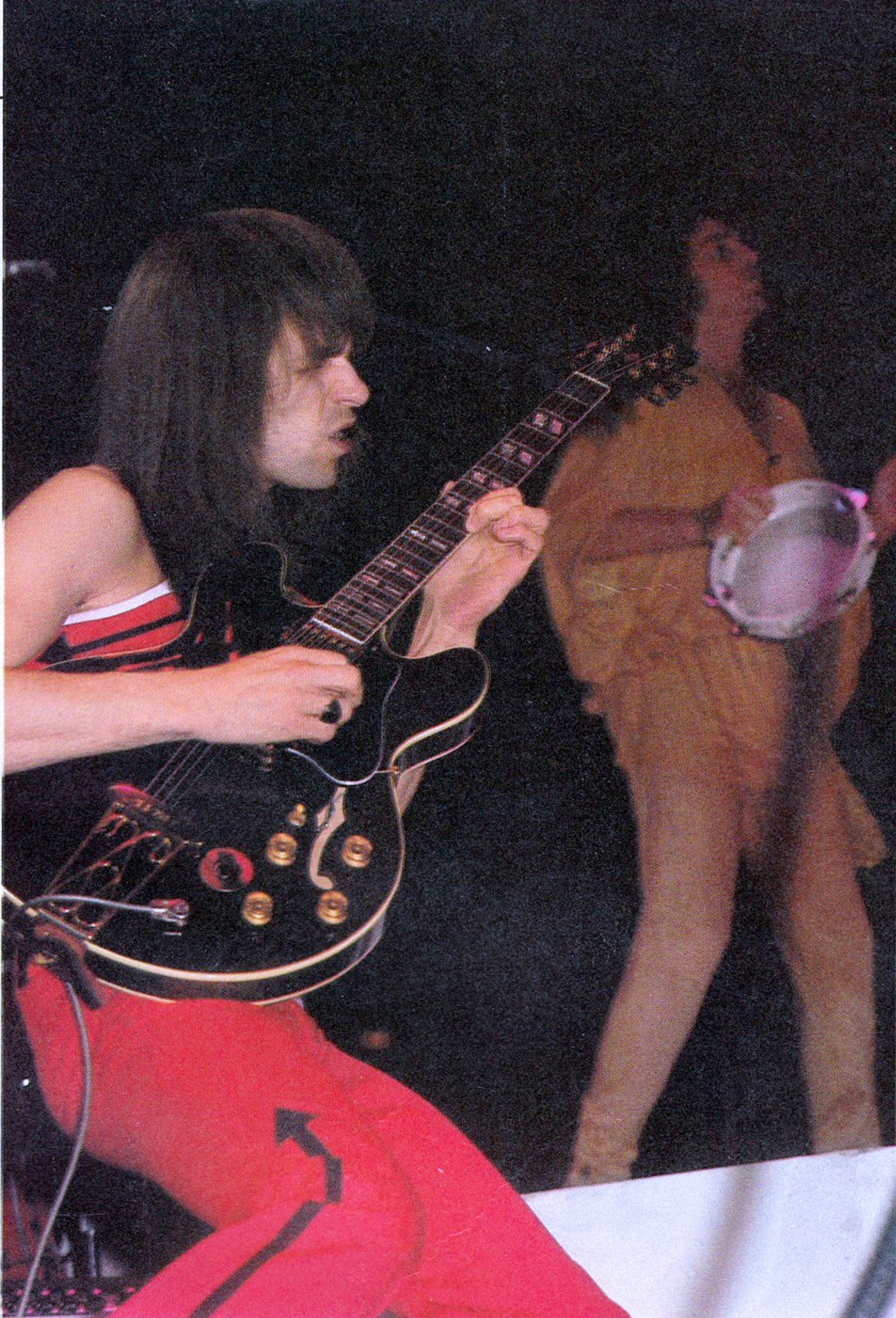
"I've never seen Rick play anything like as good as he could play," says the otherwise admiring Bruford. "I had no intention of playing the kind of music that he wanted to play."

Wakeman's not worried, though. Life is mellow on the farm where he lives outside of London, he's got a warehouse packed with more than 80 different electronic keyboards to play with, and he's currently working on the score for a pre-World War I spy film.

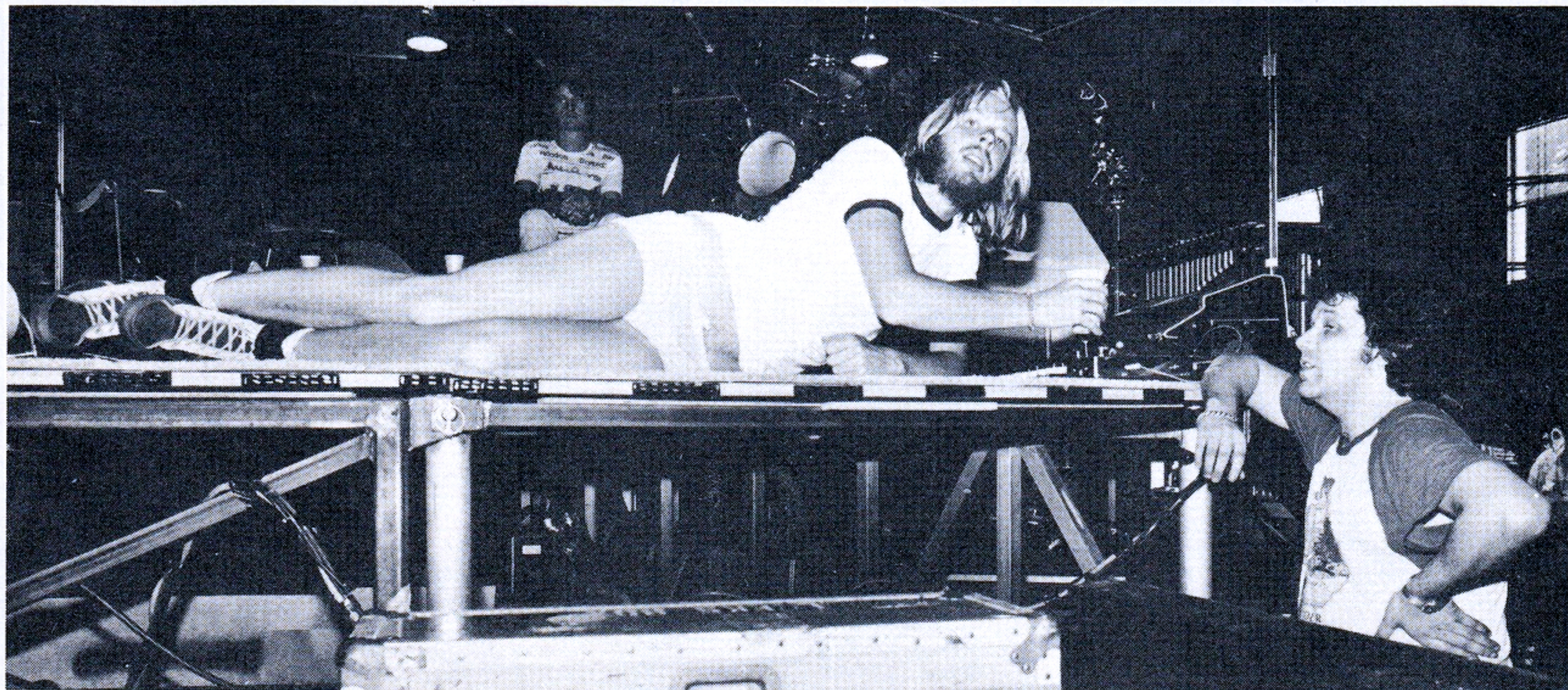
"Tormato is still very Yes—it's *incredibly* Yes—but rhythmically, the band's gone a long way backwards to become totally more adventurous than it's ever been before." Rick shifts his big boots up on a table and takes a long contented hit off his stubby cigarillo. "I truly love it." ●

"I think everybody's cracked a little bit," says Wakeman of the 10-year-old Yes. What could have given him that idea?

Glenn Brown



Steve Howe burns up the frets as Jon Anderson looks on: The redoubtable guitarist is Yes' last health-food freak.



Lisa Tanner