

Yes

LAUNCH THEIR TIME MACHINE BACK TO 'YESTERDAYS'

by Joe Bivona

Our first eighteen months were spent getting ourselves known," explained an almost apologetic Chris Squire. "We didn't make it with our first two albums because of naivety. We didn't know how to put across on disc what we were doing in concerts."

Whether one calls it a period of experimentation or chalks it up to the transitions of a band with teething pains, the years 1968-1970 were not good ones for the struggling, young British band known by the terse name of Yes. When two albums—*Yes* and *Time and a Word*—failed to produce more than a cult following, the members of Yes faced an uncertain future. "We didn't know it at the time," recalled the diminutive Jon Anderson, "but the people at our record company were in a meeting deciding whether they should let us do another album."

Close to the edge with their record company, Yes cautiously began their third set of studio sessions, propelled by new members Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman. Out of these sessions came *The Yes Album* which rapidly topped the British pop charts and turned more than a few heads in the colonies as well. It seemed that after three albums, Yes had finally succeeded in breaking through their cloud of obscurity.

The avalanche of praise heaped on *The Yes Album*, however, veiled the band's two earlier efforts; it was a rarity to find either *Yes* or *Time and a Word* on the racks of the local record shop.

Yesterdays, the latest Yes release (on Atlantic Records), was designed to remedy that situation. Made up of tracks culled from both *Yes* and *Time and a*

Word, *Yesterdays* is a chronicle of the high points of the formative years in Yes' history. "Me and Chris," explained Anderson, "knew which cuts would be a good balance for an album for people who hadn't bought the originals."

Fighting the banal: "When Yes was formed, there was a lot of heavy crap happening. Some of the most banal things you've ever heard were going down then." Squire motioned expressively. "We were determined to avoid that

scene." And avoid it they did.

The day after Jon Anderson was introduced to Chris Squire in the La Chasse Club, the two settled down in Jon's London apartment to work out their ideas. "Sweetness," a song that surfaced on Yes' debut album was the result of that first songwriting session.

"We realized," said Squire, "that our songs were not similar to anyone else's. They were mainly melodic."

The addition of Jon as lead vocalist

How they were: Chris Squire, Bill Bruford, Tony Kaye, John Anderson, Steve Howe pose after completing 'The Yes Album.'



to Chris' already established band provided the incentive for the group to begin the tedious process of learning the intricate pieces that sprung from Chris and Jon's songwriting collaboration. "We tried to blend the melodic thing with a nice tight, heavy backing," says Chris of those early attempts. "It was a hard road to follow. At first, people weren't prepared to accept the kind of stuff we were doing. They wanted Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young with a light backing. They weren't ready for the best of both at once."

While deep in the clutches of pulling their first stage act together, the fledgling band came up against their first setback. As Jon recalls it, "the drummer decided to go to France to find his fame and fortune, so we needed another drummer."

Bruford's premiere: An ad in the British pop music paper *Melody Maker* united Squire and Anderson with one Bill Bruford, who slid into the band on something less than an ample musical background.

"We asked him what kind of drum kit he had. In those days, you didn't ask what type of music the person liked; you asked him what type of equipment he had. If the guy had a Ludwig kit, he had to be fantastic. If he had a Premier kit, he must be pretty good. He [Bruford] said he had a Premiere kit even though he had only an Olympic kit, which was like the cheapest on the market, but he painted it black because he knew he had to be playing a Premiere kit to get into the band." Squire and Anderson met Bruford at dinnertime one night, and played their first gig with him only a few hours later.

It would take two more personnel changes before Yes would be ready to record their first album. After recruiting Peter Banks to fill a vacant guitar slot and Tony Kaye for organ, the band set to touring. Playing third bill to Cream on that band's farewell concert tour, Yes picked up some much needed stage experience as well as the opportunity to try out their material on the British record-buying public. Sparked by a torrent of good concert reviews, a high-spirited Yes started work on their first album under the guidance of producer Paul Clay. Their first step into the vinyl jungle was not taken blindly.

Mystic ideology: "The format of the band at the time," says John, "was to entertain and to develop musical direction. At first, it was a question of learning the art of arrangements and the principles of creating, through other people's material and some of our own."

Many trademarks of the present Yes approach to their music had their roots in the musical directions that characterized Yes. Two cuts, "Survival" and

"Looking Around" (both of which appear on *Yesterdays*) are striking examples of these roots.

Chris Squire's innovative base technique—sharp, trebly, and revolutionarily melodic—dominates "Looking Around," adding a crispness that other British bass players at the time could not approach. And while other vocalists sang in all stops pulled, rave-up voices about the trials and tribulations of getting laid, Jon Anderson plaintively extolled the virtues of more spiritual visions:

*Things that I can't see,
I'll touch and I'll feel
then I'll kiss.*

"Survival" is brightened by the energetic, jazz-oriented fills of Peter Banks, who weaves in and out of the melody line with the greatest of ease. The flighty music together with the abstract

Frantic fans scrambling unsuccessfully through record bins sent Yes speeding back on a journey to the center of their past

lyrics created a theme that would reoccur on many future Yes albums. "That theme," said Anderson, "can be summed up as a mystic child of the universe ideology." This, folks, was clearly no blues 'n boogie band.

Simple to symphonic: For any number of reasons, the British public did not pick up on Yes. Unhappy, but undaunted, the five Yes-men did more live work, and tried to figure out where they went wrong. Said an exasperated Jon Anderson, "People were saying that we were the band of 1969 in England. We never made that one. Then they said, the group of 1970. We never quite made that one either."

Returning to the studio, Yes extended the ideas from their first album on *Time and a Word*. Still in the midst of an identity struggle, leaders Squire and Anderson pointed Yes in two entirely different directions. The original compositions that found their way onto *Time and a Word* (represented on *Yesterdays* by the title track, "Sweet Dreams," and

"Astral Traveller") leaned toward simple, uncluttered arrangements that generated energy through multi-tracked layers of instruments. Punctuated by the clear, sharp harmonies of Anderson, Squire, and Banks, (made even sharper by the addition of Tony Colton as producer) these tunes were characteristic of the type of ideas that would be more fully investigated later on *Fragile*.

But in an attempt to diversify his band's sound, Anderson used an orchestra on cuts like "Dear Father" (also included on *Yesterdays*) to add texture that he felt couldn't be evoked from the band's present instrumentation. The effectiveness of the idea was questionable, and the band took a lion's share of criticism for their effort. Critics ripped and pounced on the orchestration as being "insensitive" and "jumping with crazed abandon." One went so far as to say that it was impossible to listen to the album without going "cross-eyed."

Much of the attack, however, was not centered on the Yes-penned songs. The two covers on the album were lambasted as "hopelessly pretentious" and "barely listenable." While the songs in question—Steve Stills' "Everydays" and Richie Havens' "No Opportunity Necessary, No Experience Needed"—were put through a rigid arrangement that sounded nothing like the originals, the songs did take on an interpretive depth that neither Stills nor Havens could impart.

Trading Yes for a Pig: As if the critical attacks weren't enough to contend with, Yes was plagued with another setback. After a dispute about the addition of a string section to a certain piece, Yes guitarist Pete Banks jumped ship and joined Blodwyn Pig, a popular, though not terribly innovative British band.

Fresh from a partly successful gig with the highly regarded psychedelic band, "Tomorrow," however, premiere guitarist Steve Howe stepped into Yes, bringing with him the stellar technique that had made him an underground legend long before Yes was conceived. More than just a dazzlingly fast and amazingly inventive guitarist, Howe also travelled on the same cosmic plane as Anderson and Squire.

"Before Steve joined," recalls Jon, "we needed more conscious unity in the band. We knew what we wanted to get, but at the time, Peter Banks wasn't fully aware what our capabilities and possibilities were."

The cosmic meeting of minds paid off in gold when *The Yes Album*, the first Yes disc with Steve Howe, created a critical and commercial commotion far beyond the band's wildest dreams. And when Rick Wakeman replaced Tony Kaye for the recording of *Fragile*, their



Rick Wakeman: He replaced keyboardman Tony Kaye for the recording of 'Fragile,' Yes's fourth album, stayed through 'Topographic Oceans' and then went forth in search of Camelot.

fourth album, Yes's success was assured.

Looking for America: In the only throwback to the days when Yes did covers of other people's material, the band recorded the Paul Simon tune "America" at about the same time they recorded *Fragile*. Originally, the 10 minute-plus epic represented Yes on *The Age of Atlantic*, a sampler disc issued by Atlantic Records as a promotional gesture.

Being the only Eddie Offord-produced track on the album, "America" stands quite apart from the other cuts on *Yesterdays*. Coupling the distinctive "*Fra-*

gile-period" Yes sound with Simon's tale of American immigrants, the band turns "America" into a showpiece of tasteful interpretation and unparalleled virtuosity.

More than just a compilation of old Yes tracks, *Yesterdays* capsulizes the first era of this ever-evolving band. Rick Wakeman not only brought with him a whole new spectrum of sounds when joining Yes, but also a totally different classical feel to the group as well. As one of the last worthwhile trips into the past, *Yesterdays* is one last look at the forgotten side of the many-faceted Yes. ♥

Chris Squire, "Chris is not a bass player," Rick Wakeman once stated. "Suggest a straight bass line to Chris and you might as well forget about it before you start."

Steve Howe, guitar: "In 20 years time I think our music will still be remembered," explained the dazzling axeman as he flashed on tomorrows to come.



Yes drummer: "The split with Tony [Kaye] was a struggle," the drummer singer remembered. "But we wanted a more colorful sound and Tony was content to groove along, which was nice, but . . ."