

YES (from left): Alan White, Chris Squire, Tony Kaye, Jon Anderson, Trevor Rabin



YES: OK, FINE!

With latest album 'Big Generator' proving a worthy successor to 1984's hi-tech comeback LP '90125', YES – in existence in various forms for almost 20 years! – continue to go from strength to strength. As the band prepare to take to the road in the US, CHRIS WELCH tracks 'em down in Los Angeles and gets the tale of the tape(s) from guitarist TREVOR RABIN. Vocalist JON ANDERSON, meanwhile, is found sunbathing, drinking brandy and rabbiting on about 'Harmonic Convergence' . . .

THE INCREDIBLE saga of Yes, the band whose music epitomises rock at its classiest, has reached a climax with the success of their new album 'Big Generator'. The last one, '90125', proved the biggest seller in the band's 20-year history, and the new one has already sold over a million.

With one major hit, 'Love Will Find A Way', on the boil, Yes are keyed up with excitement as they start the first leg of their first American tour in over two years. Soon the roaring sound of new Yes songs like 'Big Generator', 'Rhythm Of Love', 'Shoot High Aim Low' and 'I'm Running' will be matched with earlier classics like 'Roundabout' for a fresh generation of fans to hear.

After a period of traumatic splits and bust ups Yes have stabilised with guitarist Trevor Rabin bringing new power and authority to their music, and original singer Jon Anderson ensuring the spirit of the band keeps flowing (*spiritual* spirits, that is, and not just brandy, which Jon imbibes purely for medicinal purposes).

I spoke to Jon and Trevor via a phone link to LA just as Yes were finishing production rehearsals, and they explained why it took so long to finish 'Big Generator'. First Jon came on the line, sounding very happy and laid back, as if he had been undergoing a course of transcendental meditation.

"I'm living and working in Los Angeles, experiencing the American dream," said Jon dreamily. "As well as doing the Yes album I've been recording my own album with some musicians here in LA. And I've been writing with some Navaho Indians – very fine people who have been teaching me about the ancient wisdoms and knowledge, which very surprisingly relate to our modern times. They have a theory called the Harmonic Convergence, which has just started, and is all about the American Indian and the

ancient peoples of the world resurfacing with their energy. It's quite extraordinary, very exciting and spiritual."

Jon's song 'Holy Lamb' on 'Big Generator' is all about this mysterious Harmonic Convergence and the powers of the planet which we ignore at our peril.

"Governments seem to be playing a dangerous game with nuclear power. What I have found out from the ancient wisdoms is that nature is trying to warn us that Mother Earth is still in charge of things and we should stop trying to destroy our world. We should hold on to the earth and the energy that comes from this incredible planet. But the future is a friend, and we should look forward to it. That is what the song is all about. By living in LA I've found out where all the energy comes from . . . hold on, there's someone banging at the door. Oh, it's the guy who's come to fix the washing machine!"

AS JON coped with this unexpected source of ancient wisdom, I wondered how I might tactfully broach the subject of 'Big Generator'.

Jon returned to the phone and cheerfully confirmed that he was very excited about the success of the album.

"I can't believe how it has done so extraordinarily well. I've gotta say it was an arduous album to put together and we had some tricky moments with Trevor Horn (producer). We moved on from him to Paul DeVilliers, who helped get us organised. Trevor Rabin really finished the job. We had come to America to really get it together. We've been through a big change, you know."

How was that?
"Well, we always thought we were an English band and London based, but our management was here and it seemed sensible to move here. A lot of people in London will say we are here to make our fortunes and all that rubbish. And it is rubbish because wherever you work, you only try to do your musical best. As I

say, we went through a lot of changes, and so did the album. We're thankful we got it finished, and we're really looking forward to going on tour because I think that's what Yes is really all about.

"We've always been a touring band, and we don't make lots of hit singles."

They seem to have done pretty well with 'Love Will Find A Way' . . . and 'Rhythm Of Love' also sounds like a hit.

"Well yes, they FEEL good."

"The idea was a third of the album should be for radio, a third for stage, and the rest would be what we wanted to do in terms of doing songs that really excited us individually. 'Cos I can't see 'I'm Running' getting on the radio, y'know?"

That track sounds especially like early, 1968-style Yes, I thought.

"It is!" exclaimed Jon. "I'd thought we would go back to those times and re-invent a little bit of that kind of Yes style. It seemed to work, and I love that Latin groove."

Was it an awesome task to follow up '90125'?

"Yes, because that album happened very heavily all over the world. Not so much in England but certainly in America and the rest of the world. We just did another album and thought, 'What will be, will be'. It turned out a very heavy album with a lot of guitar work. Trevor Rabin has a lot to do with its success. He's done some terrific playing on it and he is fantastic live. We've just been rehearsing and it is very exciting. He wrote 'Love Will Find A Way' and did the string arrangement at the beginning. That reminded me of 'Time And A Word' a bit."

"Maybe we've started another 20-year cycle. In three months time it will be the 20th anniversary of the band. It was on February 22, 1968 that me and Chris Squire first met and decided to form a band."

"Getting a big album in the chart now has made us realise we've still got it, and that we are still a big band . . . there's not many of us left!"

WAS THE song 'Big Generator' about the music business they had grown to love/hate?

"It's about two things. It's about the Earth which is a really big generator of energy. We are all part of the Big Generator, if you like. It's also about saying things like 'We're only in it for the money' – the kind of rubbish that critics talk about. We got a big guitar and drum sound on that one which Trevor got as he mixed the whole album. We left him to it. Nobody else wanted the job! No – that's not true."

There was a time at the end of the '70s when Yes ground to a halt, riven by dissent and bitterness. Now all seems stable and happy. Have they finally got through that bad patch?

"Yes," said Jon thoughtfully. "But nothing is written in stone. You never know what is going to happen," he added mysteriously. "At the moment we are very happy together and we're getting ready to tour the East Coast of America. My throat has gone already from rehearsing. So it's back to the honey, lemon and brandy. Plenty of brandy."

The band may be coming to play Britain in the Summer of '88, although nothing is confirmed yet. Yes are still unsure how they will be treated by the media and still feel resentment at being ignored and abused during the period when they most needed help. The fact that they managed to reorganise and come back with vital, valid new music is a source of joy for Yes, but there is still a bitter aftertaste.

"We are still very attached to dear old England, but the radio there won't play us, and if you don't get a single in the charts, the album doesn't make it. It's the same old story. If people don't get a chance to hear about us, they certainly won't get to hear our records. We've done videos. They're OK, but we're not a great video band. We are better live."

Jon says their tour will feature much the same stage show as last time, in 1984/5.

"The stage show we designed

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OK, FINE!

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

last time was really different and modern and we want to keep it. There will be a few new magical ideas, and it's gonna look good. I've been getting myself ready for touring by eating less and exercising... and sunbathing. It's a great life! We have worked hard for years and we deserve it. I feel we are only in the middle of our career.

"At the end of the '70s we were trying to reappraise our position in the business and in the musical world, and I think we've come through with flying colours. The main thing is we are still a 'live' group who can put on a show, and, as I said before, there aren't too many left who carry it off. Yes did get a bit stale and we've got our second wind I suppose. I'm very excited about the future. You can bet your bottom dollar there is more to come."

TREVOR RABIN, the brilliant guitarist and composer whose presence has been so important to the resurgence of Yes, sees the band from a different perspective. After producing his own solo albums for Chrysalis he was called in by Chris Squire to form a new band when the original Yes ground to a halt in 1981.

Over the years I have charted the careers of all the various members of the band, Jon, Chris, Tony Kaye, Peter Banks, Bill Bruford, Rick Wakeman, Alan White, Patrick Moraz, Steve Howe, Geoff Downes and

Trevor Horn... but I'd never had the opportunity of talking to 'new boy' Trevor.

He moved out of London in 1981 to live in LA and set up his musical base. I wondered how he had set about approaching the creation of 'Big Generator.'

"On the previous album we used a lot of new production techniques to put the music across with more power. This time the idea was to use all the modern technology but to make it still sound as natural as possible. We didn't want the samples to sound too contrived."

"It took a long time to produce the album... far too long. One of the problems was because of the success of the last album there was a feeling within the record company and management that we should continue with the same team, which isn't necessarily the right thing to do. We started off with Trevor Horn which didn't work out. We were pulling in different directions and taking a long time not to go very far."

"After ages spent working together I thought the best thing would be to down tools, come back to LA from Europe and work at my home studio where I could assess things. We got together with a friend of mine who also does the band's live sound, Paul DeVilliers, and he got involved in working with the band. I did a multitude of overdubs, and we were close to starting the album all over again! That's one of the reasons it took so long - about 19 months."

Trevor had the daunting task of mixing over 100 24-track tapes. He had to select the best performances and solos from all of them to end up with two

24-track tapes. Trevor added his own guitar over-dubs.

"It was a bit of a nightmare, but at least I got it done."

On Trevor's stand-out song, 'Love Will Find A Way', one of the lines, 'I eat at Chez Nous', seems to jump out of the track.

"Yeah, as the Americans would say, it's a curved ball. It's really a straightforward and honest love song with a hint of regret in the chorus. It's a big hit here, in fact I'm getting tired of hearing it on the radio. The next single will be 'Rhythm Of Love'."

"The last album, '90125', was the biggest album Yes ever had. Which was great for me, because it was then my only album with Yes! But this one is already performing better than the last so we are very happy with that."

Had Trevor been a Yes fan before he joined the group?

"I was a huge Beatles and Led Zeppelin fan, but I loved a lot of the things Yes and Genesis did. To be quite honest there was some Yes stuff I didn't get into, but other things were brilliant. 'Topographic Oceans' and 'Tormato' kind of lost me a bit."

DID TREVOR experience problems joining a band that had been together so long?

"Not really, because one lucky thing about it was I didn't actually JOIN Yes! What happened was Chris Squire (bass) called me up and said he wanted a singer, songwriter and guitar player."

"I went to his studio in London and played for a couple of hours. It really felt great. The sound was good, but businesswise everything was in a bit of a mess. We struggled

along with the idea for a new band with me, Chris and Alan White (drums), and then Tony Kaye (keyboards) got involved. We based it on a bunch of songs I had for an upcoming solo album which became the '90125' album - which, I may add, was turned down by many record companies... four-fifths of the companies I took it to. Originally the four of us went into the studio under the name of Cinema."

"Just as the album was about to be mixed Chris happened to see Jon at a party and played him some stuff which Jon really liked. We invited him to come in and sing on a track. Thereafter we invited him to join the band, which he did, and re-sang most of the stuff. To cut a long story short we decided that as legitimate members of the band it would be kinda silly not to call it Yes, for many reasons, money not being the least."

Trevor, like Jon, is keen to do a solo album.

"I've got all the material and I'm really excited about it, but the Yes project took so long, I haven't been able to do anything about it."

Full of energy and ideas, Trevor is as keen on painting video storyboards as he is arranging string sections and planning solo tours. But his first love is the guitar.

"It's the easiest thing in the world to play fast," he proclaimed. "I do use that side of playing if necessary, but I don't feel it should be used all the time. Primarily I see myself as a guitar player and the only reason I became a producer really was because I didn't like the way people were recording my guitar."

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