



Rick Wakeman with Yes: Onstage, Rick giggled and played on as flames licked the innards of his organ and electric piano. But offstage, Rick's only concern was his first album on his own.

Yes's First Stepson — A Solo LP

Some say Rick Wakeman is Yes's secret weapon
in the war for rock supremacy.
But Wakeman has a secret weapon of his own
— his new solo album.

by Janis Schacht

It had been raining torrents all day. Now a thick fog hung over Millersville, a small town in Pennsylvania-Dutch land. Back in the State University's dressing room Yes were changing into their street clothes after a concert. This had been the first gig of a new tour, and what with the rain and a "minor" bomb scare, the concert had run over an hour and a half behind. In the corner, a vision of yellow pulled on his jeans. Yellow hair, yellow sweat shirt, yellow underpants, yellow socks, from behind a curtain of beige-blondness, Rick Wakeman smiled across the room. Offstage, the young keyboard man seemed incredibly innocent, strangely vulnerable, so unlike the demonic power that drives Yes's intricate sound onstage.

Buckling his belt and sitting down to tie the shoelaces on his sneakers, Rick laughed out loud and began to talk about the night's solo: "Oh, it was so bad, my instruments were on fire down there. It was unbelievable. One Moog and one mellotron were in flames. I couldn't believe it. I'm looking at a guy who I'm paying about four hundred dollars a week to look after my equipment, and all he can

say is 'you're on fire.' I couldn't believe how you could pay a guy so much money to come over so many weeks in advance to check that you're all working and the day you walk onstage everything you've got catches fire!"

Wakeman's incredible brilliance at the keyboard covered the disaster beautifully. When he opened with a long piano solo (one he used to play with the Strawbs) and eventually broke into a long and complicated moog/mellotron improvisation, the crowd never noticed anything was wrong. Yet through it all Rick stood onstage giggling and shaking his head slowly back and forth in idle disbelief.

Solo Wakeman: One and a half years after Wakeman's entrance into the hallowed halls of Yes-dom, he is presenting his fans with his first solo effort. All those who attend Yes concerts for the sheer joy of listening to Wakeman's solos—with or without the flames—will now have two full sides of Wakeman keyboard music built around the theme *The Six Wives Of Henry VIII* (on A&M Records).

Back at the hotel, Rick settles back

on his double bed and yawns; it's three in the morning and tomorrow the group moves on to another gig in Detroit. Now, however, that the rest of Yes are tucked away in their own rooms, Rick's major concern is his solo album. The success or failure of the work is becoming a consuming fear. "I'm pleased with it," Rick admits, smiling sheepishly, "I just can't believe that anyone else is going to like it." The album took eight months to record, "I kept coming home from American tours, listening to what I'd done and throwing it away, then start-

Born in Perivale, Middlesex, twenty-three years ago, he grew up listening to the English bands of the early sixties and studying music. At fourteen, he started playing in semi-professional bands; but sooner or later the desire to learn the how-to's of music hit him, and he went on to study theory at the Royal College Of Music. On leaving school, Rick went on to do one and a half years of concentrated session work, and this was probably the most important time in his career.

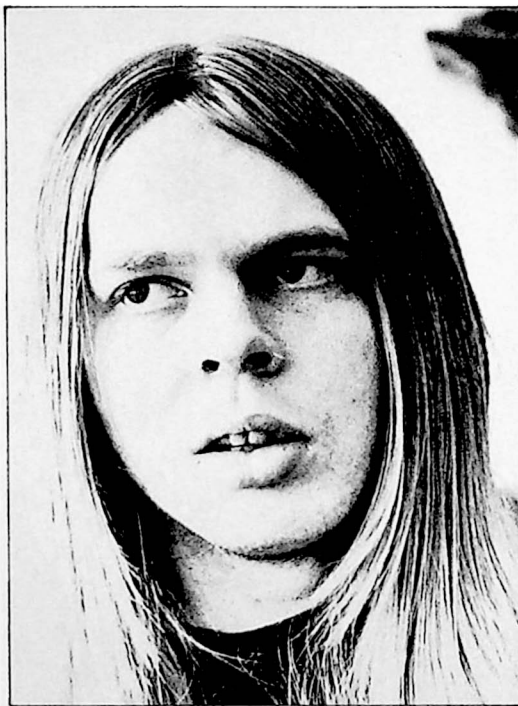
"I was part of a publishing company called Writer's Workshop, which

Cousins of the Strawbs. His first sessions with Bowie were in early 1969: he played mellotron and harpsichord on the *Space Oddity* (RCA) album.

"When 'Space Oddity' was a hit," Rick remembers smiling fondly, "I was so proud, I was very proud of David. I thought 'that's it, he's going to be a star,' and I was really chuffed. But when it didn't happen I could understand why. He didn't have any gigs, and he had very bad management."

The last time Rick worked with Bowie was on the *Hunky Dory* (RCA) album. "It was very strange,"

Rick Wakeman: Rick and David Bowie were incredibly close . . . until Wakeman refused to join the Spiders From Mars.



Photos: Neil Preston

ing over again. I know I'll never make a penny out of it because it cost a bleeding fortune to make, but I hope people will like it."

Before he joined Yes, no one in America seemed to pay very much attention to the talents of Rick Wakeman. This seems rather strange, because around the recording studios in England he's probably one of the best known musicians around. He's played for everyone from Cat Stevens to David Bowie to Lou Reed and T. Rex.

Munching burgers with Bolan:

was a division of a little record label called Regal Zonophone. We were all broke and used to pool our money to buy Wimpeys (hamburgers) and chips from the end of the street. It was Tony Visconti (who now produces T. Rex) plus Marc Bolan, Joe Cocker and Denny Cordell. They were the only people in the company.

An early bash with Bowie: It's because of Rick's affiliation with Regal Zonophone and Rick's early friendship with Tony Visconti that he was first introduced to David Bowie and eventually introduced to Dave

Rick continues, "at one time there were very few people who could get anywhere near David, and I used to pride myself on being one of the few. I was almost his best friend, we were very close, but when he asked me to join his band (The Spiders From Mars) and I wouldn't it all died. I can't get anywhere near him now at all."

It was April, 1970, when Rick joined the line-up of a little Kentish folk-band called The Strawbs. "The Strawbs are a very special band with a special style of music that allowed

me a lot of room, I learned a lot," Rick explains.

Fifteen months later, in August, 1971, Rick left the Strawbs and comparative anonymity behind to join Yes. Now, lauded as wizard of the keyboards, he's breaking free from yet another apron string, not permanently, just for long enough to exert his own rather exceptional identity. "I'm lucky to have my own outlet outside of Yes," he continues "because there are things I cannot do within the band."

Emerson's anti-Christ: It is astonishing that all the magic, all the

tables. "I hate it and I loathe everything he does onstage. I think he's terrible, but I do enjoy listening to his albums. I think all four are good. I'm not very keen on *Pictures At An Exhibition*, but the other three albums are a gas." Whenever Rick is talking about his hatred of theatrics and overstated images he raises his voice, looks completely disconcerted and exclaims, "it's got damned little to do with music."

Onstage, Wakeman stands quite still, letting his fingers do the dancing; his concession to glamor is a rather long

album. "On my first American tour with Yes—last year, before we had our own plane—we had to fly on the commercial airlines. I got very bored. I'd pick up a few books at the airport, and one I got hold of was about the private life of Henry VIII.

"While reading it," Rick continues, "it occurred to me that Anne Boleyn's life-style reminded me of a short eight-bar piece I'd written and I thought it would be a good idea to write a piece for all six wives."

Apart from choral backings, the piece is completely instrumental. The "players" include Steve Howe, Chris Squire, Alan White and Bill Bruford, plus Dave Lambert and Dave Cousins from the Strawbs, but mostly it's selected English session musicians and a very large dose of Rick Wakeman.

"I used the Yes people only on one track, because it might make people think it's another Yes album." Then, Rick adds modestly, "I had to make it instrumental, because my lyrics are appalling. And though I can sing in tune, my voice isn't that good."

The sound of the six compositions changes with Rick's interpretations of the individual ladies' characters. "Anne Boleyn" and "Katherine Of Aragon" are highly orchestrated. "Catherine Parr" and "Anne Of Cleves" are rock and roll. "Jane Seymour" has a delicate, ethereal quality. And because Rick found Catharine Howard's personality unfathomable, her piece is impossible to classify.

The Yes blessing: Rick's eyes are beginning to shut, but as he drifts off, he's still talking about his pride and joy and most precious fear. "One track's got an 1100-year-old, 22-foot pipe organ, and on the same track I've over-dubbed a Moog and bass and drums. It's really strange."

He concludes: "The album will sell a certain amount thanks to Yes. All I can hope is that the people who buy it because of the Yes thing will get into the album and won't just stick it away with the rest of the albums that they buy. This album means a lot more to me than people just buying it and sticking it away."

In the morning, out in the parking lot, Rick's eyes are half-shut. He's still wearing his same yellow sweat shirt, jeans and sneakers as he helps carry a synthesizer a fan built for him out to the waiting limousine. Rick Wakeman: a very human, very likeable entry in the plasticity of this rock and roll world. He's putting his soul on the line with this album of his, and all he asks in return is that you open your ears and take the time to listen.



Rick Wakeman: In the early days he sat around a second-rate publishing company nibbling hamburgers with unknowns like Marc Bolan, Joe Cocker and Denny Cordell.



exotic excitement that is Rick Wakeman as a musician seems to float away when he's offstage. Suddenly the tall, haughtily sexual demi-god becomes a totally unassuming, rather disarming type with a little-boy lost quality. His consuming hatred is theatrics on and offstage. Keith Emerson drives him mad when he cavorts back and forth, jumping over his organ. "What he does onstage annoys me—annoys me intensely—and I loathe it," Rick admits wriggling his nose and making a face much like a little child being offered a plate full of green vege-

black cape with a moon and stars in silk on the back. Rick insists his only reason for wearing it is because he's comfortable in it. The effect, whether he likes it or not, is that of a mad scientist surrounded by machines. Occasionally when he tosses his head, his long blond hair shimmers in the spotlights. But never does he do headstands on his organ or violently accost his mellotron.

Headless queens: As the hour approaches four A.M., Rick curls up under the covers. Only then is he relaxed enough to even think about his solo