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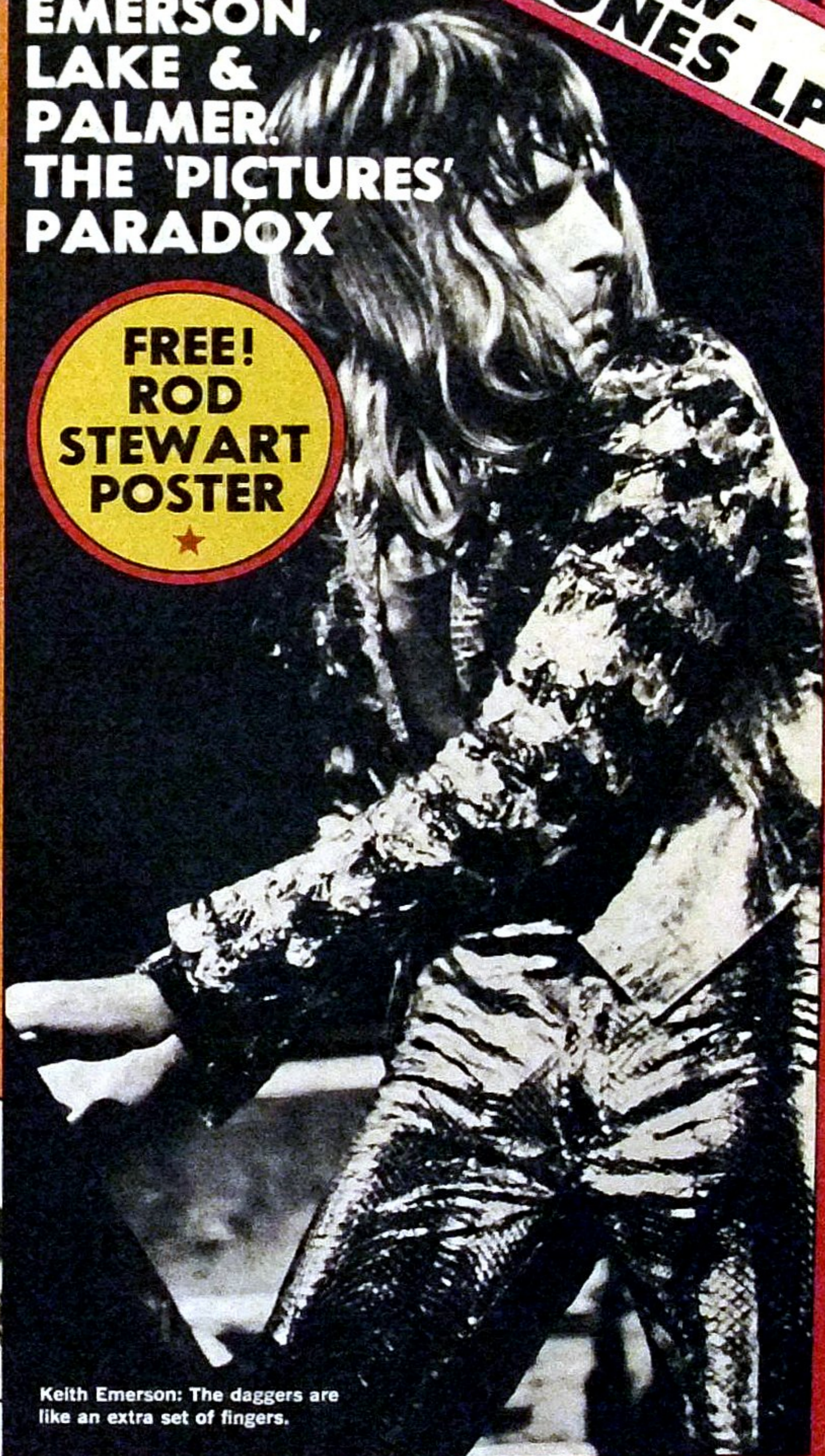
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## **Yes Shake-Up Shapes 4th Disk**

LONDON — Yes was bogged down in the midst of its new album, **FRAGILE**, when a sudden upheaval wrenched it from a musical impasse. "We were working on 'Heart of the Sunrise' . . . and it just wasn't working out," says guitarist Steve Howe. Then a founding member of the group was abruptly thrown out, and blond, rangey Rick Wakeman popped up in his place. . . . page 20



Yes: Trying to bring complexity to rock.



Keith Emerson: The daggers are like an extra set of fingers.



# Yes: Weaving The Fragile Web

The upheavals that changed the course of Yes' fourth album.

Photos by Chuck Puhh

Midway through the studio sessions destined to produce the new album *Fragile* (Atlantic), Yes was hit by an upheaval violent enough to shake all other news off the front page of Britain's biggest music paper. Tony Kaye, the group's organist and one of its founding members, had been asked to leave. At the same time, rangy blond organist Rick Wakeman had been wrenched out of a well-known folk-rock group called the Strawbs and suddenly placed in Yes's vacant keyboard slot.

**American ferment:** Behind the sudden shakeup in the group was an upheaval of a different kind. After two years on the stony road to nowhere, Yes had finally kindled the enthusiasm of the public. *The Yes Album* had risen to the number one slot in the British charts for over four weeks, then continued to hover near the top for another half year.

Perhaps that, in itself, would not have been enough to shake the group. But eventually *The Yes Album* began to break a market five times the size of England—the United States. And when Yes toured the States with Jethro Tull last summer, they realized just how great the potential for success was.

Yes had always been a hard-working group, but the possibility of conquering the American public made them even more ambitious. After gigs, Chris Squire, Steve Howe and Jon Anderson would ignore the groupies and go back to their hotel, where they'd spend the night working up fresh numbers. Tony Kaye couldn't take it. "I like to go out and meet people after a gig," he says.

**Heart of the Sunrise:** Kaye's attitude began to drag the group down when they went into the studio to record *Fragile*. They began searching for what one member called "a more colorful sound;" and Tony Kaye wasn't helping them find it. "They wanted me to play Moog and Mellotron," complained Kaye, who referred to "plonk chords on his organ" (as Yes' embittered drummer put it).

But the impatient mood of the group was just right for Rick Wakeman, who entered the studio anxious to play organ, Moog, and Mellotron, plus the electric piano. "We

were working on 'Heart of the Sunrise' with Tony Kaye and it just wasn't working out," says guitarist Steve Howe, "but when we got Rick in, we finished it in about three days."

When "Heart of the Sunrise" was completed Steve Howe was ecstatic. It was, he says, the best attempt at a complex structure the band had ever made. Even superior to "Yours Is No Disgrace." Knit together in its intricate framework were answering dialogues, inner conversations between drums, organ, bass and lead guitar, and sharp changes of mood which ranged from the frantic movement of spiralling chords to the smooth, satiny feel of a church choir floating over the other instruments.

Rick Wakeman was even more impressed. He felt that Yes was helping create an entirely new musical form. "We are moving into what I can only describe as orchestral rock," he says. "You've had the heavy bands such as Cream and The Who. Now we are trying to move on one stage further."

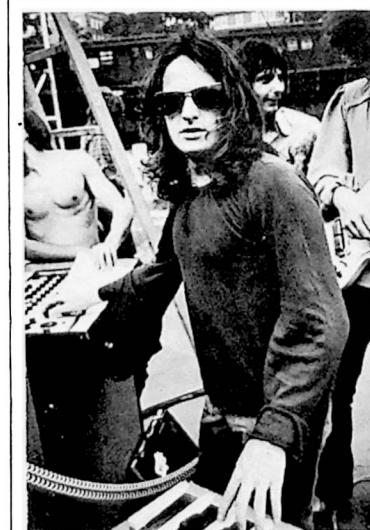
What's the difference between orchestral rock and heavy rock? For one thing, adrenaline bursts of on-the-spot improvisation are replaced by musical blueprints drawn in advance. "Every bar is thought out when the song is formulated," explains Rick. "Once the whole thing is together, you can play it as you feel it, but there is a solid backbone and arrangement to work from." The result, says Wakeman, can be awe-inspiring. The musical power generated when one player gets a solo now comes from five men at once: "You know, Steve (Howe) will get a really fast riff, and instead of just the guitar taking it, we're putting it out together. It's frighteningly impossible."

Back to '68: Wakeman may not realize it, but the group he's just joined has been rebelling against heavy rock and groping toward a more "orchestral" sound ever since its beginnings. In 1968, Jon Anderson and Chris Squire bumped into each other in a London bar. In many ways, the two were very different. Jon was short, with a friendly, open flat face and the accent of a Lancashire working man. Chris was tall, with the slightly non-descript face common to so many

Englishmen, and the sophisticated accent of a native Londoner. But both were self-taught musicians, both were into rock and roll, both had a leaning toward classical music, and before long, both were working together to organize a five-member group.

According to Bill Bruford, who got a phone call to join the group after he'd advertised his drumming abilities in one of the music papers. "We got together in a basement. Jon Anderson organized it basically. He said, 'If we're ever going to get out of this basement, we've got to do something different,' and I thought 'right on,' 'yeah!'"

The "something different" was a rebellion against undiluted heavy rock. "There's definitely two kinds of music," explained Chris Squire



Jon Anderson: He writes the words, but can he tell you what they mean?

one morning over a breakfast of bacon and eggs. "There's body music and mind music, and we wanted to combine the two."

The blend: "It was a hard road to follow. People wanted Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young with light backing. Or they wanted Grand Funk Railroad with little melody. They weren't ready for the best of both at once."

Ironically, the new group got a boost from the heaviest of the heavies it was rebelling against—Cream. Yes was only a few months old when they were invited to join Clapton, Bruce and Baker on their farewell tour of England.

But despite the exposure brought by that first tour, Yes had a lot of climbing to do before it could get to



Chris Squire: "There's body music and mind music. We wanted to combine the two."

the top. Their first album was poorly produced, so it went nowhere. Then came a barrage of management hassles.

It was a grim time to do a second LP. Jon Anderson was miserable and uncertain about the future of the group, so he retreated to his house and wrote songs while sitting alone with a tape recorder. "We just sort of came along and recorded them," says Chris Squire. The result, as you can imagine, was none too thrilling.

Borrowing from ELP: When the time came for *The Yes Album*, the group was at last able to latch on to a producer who could understand what they were trying to do—Eddie Offord, the producer engineer behind ELP. The album was the first to reflect the kind of music that Yes

come and go in the band. It never ceases to amaze me that we are still here and we're all playing at the same time and that some of us have been for three and a half years."

**Weirdness:** As for Yes's sound, Bill Bruford can't figure out what makes it so unique. "We are different, and I can't understand why. We use basically the same instruments and the same sort of amplification, but when the five of us play, it doesn't sound like Humble Pie, for example, in any respect. We sound strange. We even overhear lighting men, stage hands and managers saying it's strange—and I love that."

The strangeness comes partly from the group's infatuation with classical music. Jon Anderson may be from "very solid working class"



Yes: They were trying to weave the complexities of a classical symphony into their album when the pressures put a crack in the group.

had been doing live.

Then came a tour in England and Europe with Iron Butterfly, and that, according to Bill Bruford, "really kicked the album off in England."

And finally, while *The Yes Album* was still soaring on the British and American charts, the group went into the studio to do a fourth LP, only to run into the hassle of having to eject Tony Kaye and adopt Rick Wakeman.

The name of the album that emerged—*Fragile*—was like a monument erected to remind the group of how frail and easily broken a musical partnership can be. "It came," says Bill Bruford, "out of talking at a rehearsal one day about Tony and the people that

folks, and he may have dropped out of school at the age of fifteen, but his conversation is still peppered with the names of classical composers like Sibelius, Tchaikovsky, and Stravinsky.

Chris, too, has long been into the classical bag. "I was in the St. Paul's choir in London," he explains, "and I took up the bass because the bass line in Bach always fascinated me. You know Jack Bruce is really into Bach."

In classical music the themes—the melody lines—are always there, but you have to search to find them. Threads of notes snake to the surface, then seemingly disappear, only to be found weaving their way through some other melodic pattern while waiting for a

chance to reappear again. Often they return to the surface dressed in strange disguises, with their instrumentation changed, their timing warped, and even entire strings of notes turned around and played in reverse.

**Eight minute symphonies:** "When I first listened to Stravinsky," Jon Anderson admits in his working man's brogue, "I just couldn't make head or tail of where he was going." But apparently Jon glued his mind to the music until he could follow it, and found the effort rewarding.

"Most of the music, you've got to really get involved in," Jon emphasizes. "You've got to listen to it so many times before you grab all of

work is dominated by one theme that is taken apart, rebuilt, and reshaped from the time it appears until the end.

**The white queen:** The classical structure would be enough to make Yes's music different from the music of Humble Pie, but the words Jon Anderson writes do even more

to give the songs a surrealistically strange effect. Jon tantalizes you with a seemingly straight-forward, albeit poetic, line like "Take a straighter, stronger course to the corner of your life." He follows that with an image which seems as if it, too, could make sense ("Make the white queen run so fast she hasn't



Bill Bruford: A tour with Iron Butterfly kicked *The Yes Album* off.

the meaning." Once you've succeeded, though, "there is so much more emotion, it can take you so much further, and there is so much more to get into."

Jon is trying to weave music so rich in texture that his audiences are forced to listen as closely as they would to a symphony. And he'd ultimately like to be doing pieces of symphonic length.

But for the moment, Yes's love of classical music is showing up in eight-minute pieces instead of hour-and-a-half long tracks. "Long Distance Runaround," the flip side of the single from *Fragile*, is a good example. Though the arrangement seems almost stripped down, the



Steve Howe: It's sometimes frustrating to realize that Jon Anderson is an architect, and the others just interior designers.

got time to make you a wife"). Then he totally throws you off the track with a set of lines that are close to nonsense ("Cause his time is time in time with your time And his news is captured for the queen to use").

"They're totally personal . . . and just a little bit far out," says Steve Howe with a twinkle in his eye when he tells you why Jon's lyrics are perfect for the group. But Steve doesn't explain why the lyrics are so puzzling. For that explanation, you have to turn to mad scientist Jon Anderson himself.

What does it mean: When he's talking about his words, Jon is just as elusive as the lyrics themselves. "I just write the words to sound

and will admit there is some sense to his songs. "Perpetual Change," one of the most involved cuts on *The Yes Album*, turns out to be something he wrote "when we were in Devon rehearsing *The Yes Album*." It also turns out to be a song with a serious message. "Nature was all around us, and it was amazing. It was a very beautiful valley, and the thing that sparked the song was the moon walking and all that kind of thing. And at the same time there was the Pakistani disaster—the floods—remember the floods?"

Save the planet: "I was relating to the fact that we zoom up to the moon and start thinking about Mars and the rest of the planets when our own environment is get-

*Saying we have the whole world in our hand*

*When will you see*

*Deep inside the world's controlling you and me?*

Jon is completely sincere when he says, "I don't think of myself as a poet," but he's also completely wrong—he is a poet.

Zen moondog: "We Have Heaven," the cut which follows "Roundabout" on the new album, is filled with enough meaning to satisfy a student of Zen. The basic words, says Jon, are "Tell the moon dog, tell the marcher 'We have heaven,'" and the last line is "Be like heaven." As Jon was overdubbing the many layers of vocal tracks, he "started adding things I'd had in mind for a long time. Like 'Tell the man to look around/ He is here/ Here is here.'" This is no randomly thrown together nonsense. The idea, admits Jon, is "that heaven is in your body. You're in your vehicle."

What can you expect from Yes in the future? The flying webs of harmony and teeming images should get even more complex, even longer, and even more intricately structured.

Right now Yes's songs are like a house built by one man, but decorated by each of the musicians who live in it. Jon writes the lyrics and the framework of the songs, then the other members of the group throw in extra verses, bridges, introductions and instrumental passages. The group has found that this is the best way to put everyone's creativity together in one unit; but the fact that Jon is the architect and the others just interior designers is sometimes frustrating. "Everyone, even Rick Wakeman, goes home and writes lyrics in secret," says Steve Howe.

The next album: To get the solo itch out of their systems, Yes included a "special goodie" from each of the group members on *Fragile*. Rick Wakeman, for example, presented a little spoof on the ornate majesty of Brahms by playing orchestral lines on five keyboards at 'once. (He doesn't actually play them simultaneously—he achieves the effect by overdubbing.) And Chris Squire contributed a musical picture of a fish undulating through water.

But that experiment is over: Yes expects its next album to be a group effort all the way through. And if they keep moving toward their goals, they may succeed in teaching those of us who get our musical kicks from the gut-rhythm of hard rock how to follow the airy undulations of a restless melodic theme. •

by Anne Tan and Howard Bloom

New member Rick Wakeman: Burst into the group burning with Brahms fever.



Former member Tony Kaye: They wanted him to play Mellotron and Moog, but he preferred to "plonk chords on his organ."

good," he says, trying to give you the idea that he doesn't really have a meaning in mind when he writes.

Then he continues to imply that his words are just elaborate nonsense by telling you a story. It seems a reporter on the Coast came up and asked him about "Your Move," the song about the white queen on the chess board. "Do you play chess," asked the newsman, to which Jon answered, "No, actually I play checkers." The result—the reporter went off shaking his head, his concept of Jon Anderson, serious chess player shot to pieces.

It's only when you've talked to Anderson for a long time that he'll stop pulling the wool over your eyes

ting so fouled up anyway that it seems obvious that we should relate more to the planet we're on and develop it better. Like, the one thing that sparked me off was the fact that when they'd been to the moon the first thing they did was send something back to blow it up to see how thick it was, which is all very scientific, I suppose; but okay, you knock the moon off its axis and you're going to mess up the world."

*And there you are  
Saying we have the moon  
So now the stars  
When all you see  
Is near disaster  
Gazing down at you and me  
And there you're standing*