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COUNTRY CONNECTION

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RED HOT AND SOLO

THE THRILLS
CALIFORNIA ROCK
WITH AN IRISH ACCENT

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TRANSCRIBED!**

#69 **GUITAR WORLD**
Acoustic

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YESS

**STEVE
HOWE**

ON THE
BAND'S
PROG
ROCKIN'
35-YEAR
CAREER

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BOB SEGER
"LIKE A ROCK"

JASON MRAZ
"YOU AND I BOTH"

PHISH "TRAIN SONG"

YES "CLAP"

ACOUSTIC ARRANGEMENT
THE TEMPTATIONS
"MY GIRL"



DISPLAY UNTIL MAY 3, 2004



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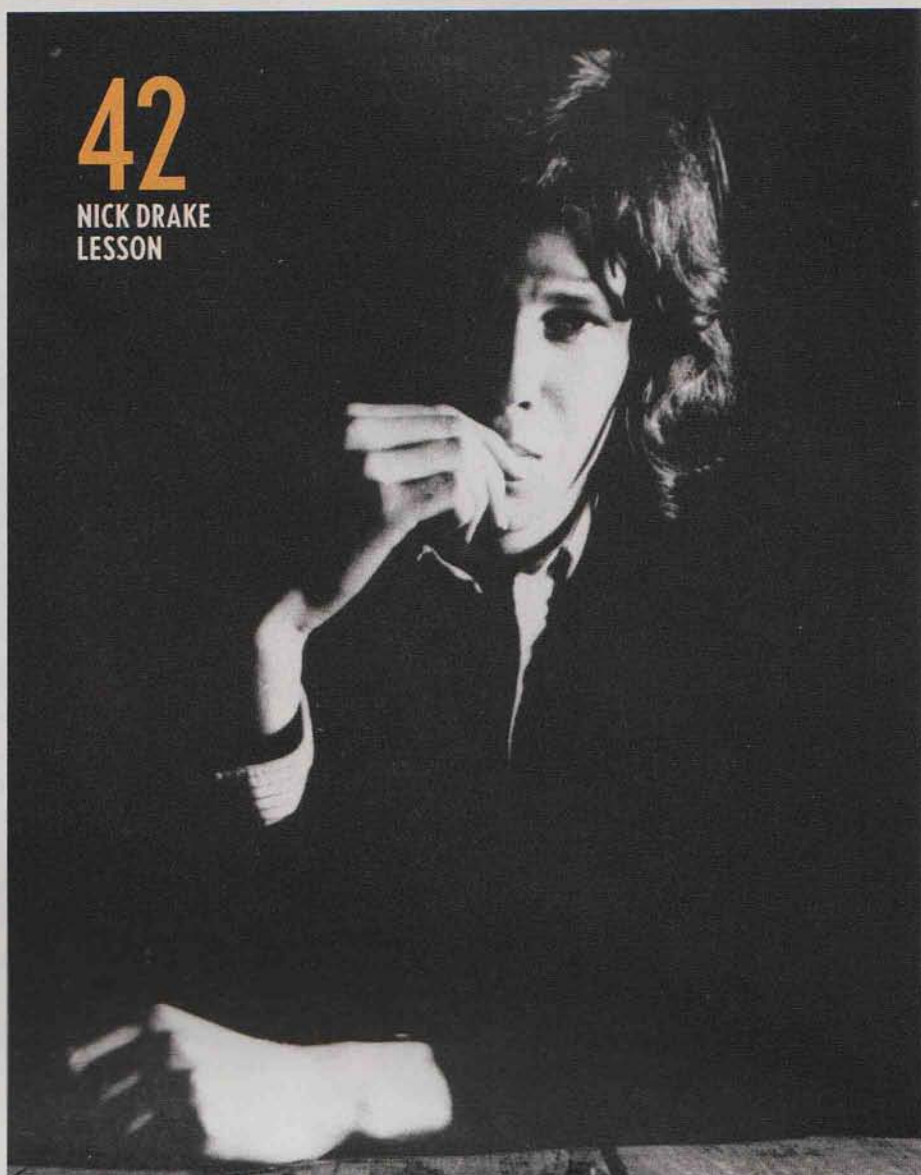
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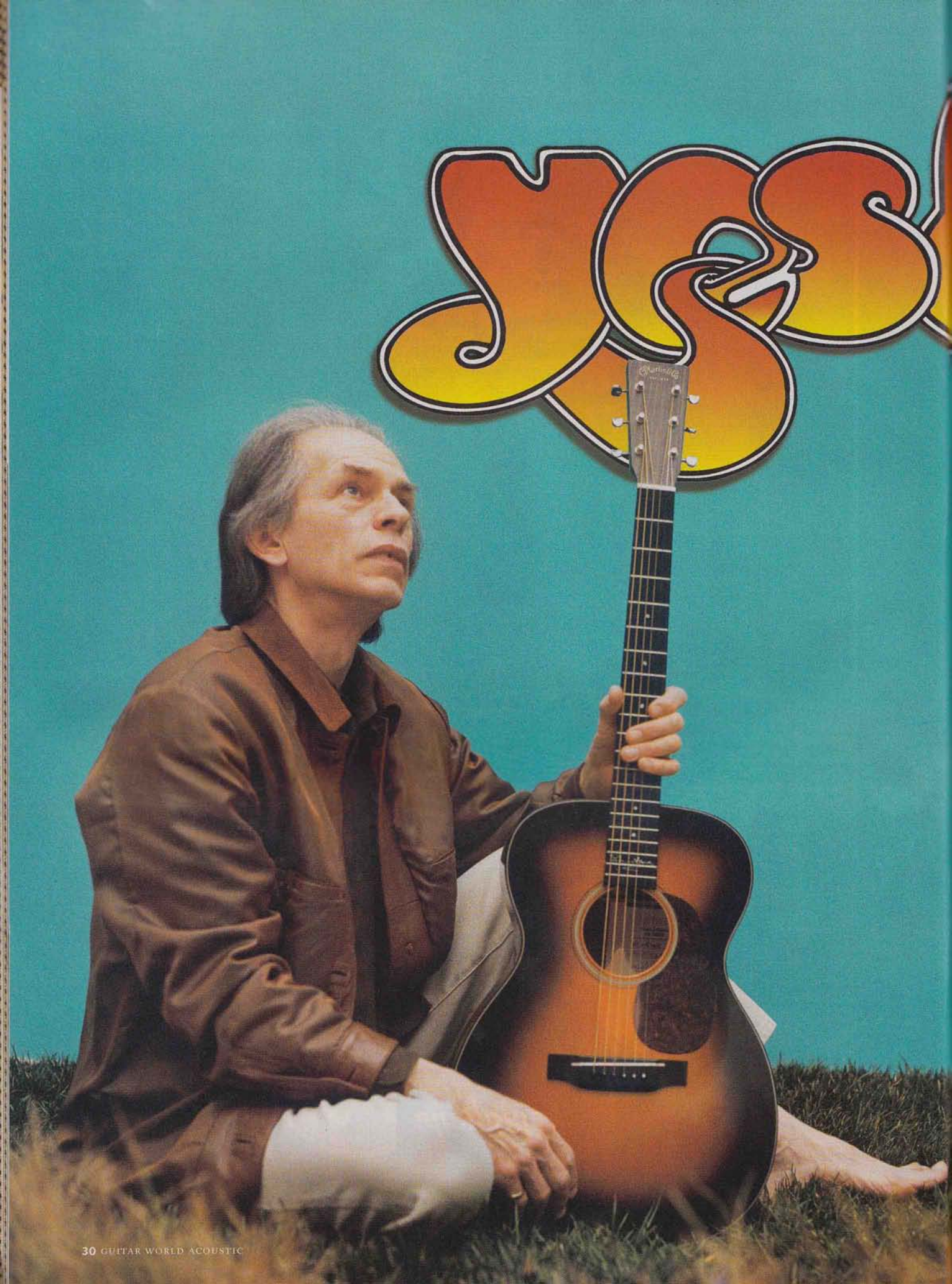
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Cover Photograph by MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA UK



Yesterday

AND

TODAY

IN HONOR OF **YES**' THIRTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY, STEVE HOWE, THE BAND'S LEGENDARY ACOUSTIC AND ELECTRIC GUITARIST, REFLECTS ON HIS STORIED CAREER AND RIFFS ON THE BAND'S NEW DOUBLE-CD RETROSPECTIVE, *THE ULTIMATE YES*.

BY BILL MURPHY
PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVEN STICKLER



Howe and his best pals get together sometime in the 1970's.

White completing the circle, the group's legacy as one of the most freewheeling and symphonically minded rock bands to emerge from the late Sixties London club circuit was virtually assured.

When he first joined Yes in 1970, Howe had already gained some notoriety with the psychedelic art-rock outfit Tomorrow, but his debut on *The Yes Album* marked his real arrival on the guitar scene. He later parlayed his virtuosity into a string of solo albums while still a member of Yes—a creative spate that continued after he left the band in 1981 and formed the supergroup Asia with Carl Palmer (Emerson, Lake & Palmer) and John Wetton (King Crimson, Uriah Heep).

From their earliest days, Yes have gone through their share of personnel changes—even, at one point in the late Eighties, splintering into two distinct groups—but Howe's sound has remained an instantly recognizable constant. Howe returned to Yes in the early Nineties and has played off and on with them ever since.

The recently released *The Ultimate Yes* (Elektra/Rhino) examines the key studio highlights of this prog-rock juggernaut and includes a bonus CD of newly arranged acoustic versions of "Roundabout" and other Yes chestnuts. If that weren't enough, the full-length DVD *Yesspeak* (Classic Pictures Entertainment), narrated by the Who's Roger Daltrey, captures Yes on their 35th anniversary tour of Europe last year and features in-depth spotlights on each of the band's five members.

These days, Howe shares his time between the reunited Yes and his own solo projects, and is constantly exploring new ways to broaden his command of the guitar. At this writing, he was in Los Angeles with Yes in preparation for yet another U.S. tour.



GUITAR WORLD ACOUSTIC Do you ever tire of people asking where prog rock came from?

STEVE HOWE Well, it's interesting because it wasn't called "prog" in the Seventies, even though all these documentaries make it seem like Yes came along and everyone said, "Oh, this is prog rock." That name came about after the fact. To me, prog was just an extension of psychedelia. Tomorrow, my earlier band, was my vehicle for that kind of work, but that wasn't totally a productive improvisational band like Yes became. Tomorrow was spacey, a bit LSD-tinged. It was also a bit egotistical in a way, because it

took a certain egotism for a band to have the courage to do some of the things that we did.

GWA Like the song "My White Bicycle."

HOWE That was almost our hit record—a very catchy song with some great recording techniques. It had backwards hi-hats and backwards guitar, and

BACK IN EARLY 1973, Yes were on the verge of their fourth straight Gold album (the live triple-LP *Yessongs*) when *Rolling Stone* arranged to send a young journalist named Cameron Crowe to Los Angeles to cover the start of the band's third American tour. One snippet of rock lore that made it into Crowe's story was provided by Steve Howe, who regaled the future writer and director of *Almost Famous* with a tale of Yes' previous trip to the States, when their breakthrough album, *Fragile*, had just been released. As Howe recounted it, Yes had run over their allotted time on the first of two New York dates opening for the Kinks, thus prompting Kinks frontman Ray Davies to blow the proverbial gasket.

"First he pulled our plug out," Howe told Crowe with a laugh. "Then he kicked and punched Rick [Wakeman, keyboards] when we got offstage. It was crazy."

Their run-in with Davies notwithstanding, the members of Yes were never known back in the unruly days of Seventies rock for tossing TV sets through hotel windows or riding motorcycles into swimming pools. But they did take one thing very seriously: their ability to interact symbiotically as musicians. Steve Howe, for his part, was both a master of improvisation and a gifted technician capable of playing in many styles. Two of Howe's signature solo

acoustic pieces were the ragtime-inflected "Clap" (from 1971's *The Yes Album*) and the wistfully neoclassical "Mood for a Day" (*Fragile*), while on timeless Yes hits like "Roundabout" and "I've Seen All Good People" his guitar evoked the medieval and Eastern mythologies that so fascinated lead vocalist (and Howe's frequent songwriting collaborator) Jon Anderson. With Wakeman, bassist Chris Squire and drummer Alan

GEAR BOX

GUITARS: 1953 Martin 00-18, 1983 Martin MC-28 (cutaway), late Seventies reissue Martin SOM-45, Scharpach SKD, Martin J-12-65M 12-string, Kohno (Japan) handmade Spanish guitar, Ramirez Spanish guitar

STRINGS: Martin and Ernie Ball Elixir light gauge, LaBella golden and silver 2000 (for Spanish guitars)

it had all these edits in it—actually, it was a complete nightmare [laughs]. We were almost the archetypal psychedelic band because we were wild, crazy, young, we looked the part, we wore “granny-takes-a-trip” clothes, we had stars on our foreheads—we went the whole nine yards with that one.

GWA What has it meant to you and the other members of Yes to put this new collection together?

HOWE I think we're all quite excited this time. It's not exactly the first time we've done this, but it is the first time we've taken a sharply focused look at what Yes is about, you know. *In A Word*, the box set we released last year, was very big and encompassing, but the idea there wasn't to feature the best of Yes, but to show the whole of everything we could do. Considering that this one is a two-CD set—well, it's a tall order to cover 35 years of recording in about two-and-a-half hours, but I think we did a good job of it.

GWA There's also a bonus CD of recently recorded, largely acoustic versions of some Yes classics.

HOWE When we came back from a tour of Japan and Australia we spent four or five days in the studio in L.A. recording those tracks. I thought it was a good idea to keep it strictly acoustic, although there might be a couple of instances where we broke that law a little bit. But there we are, we all made concessions. (continued on page 80)

HOWE GREAT THOU ART

Steve Howe's five greatest acoustic moments



“Clap”

THE YES ALBUM (Atlantic, 1971)
The fact that “Clap” was the second track on Yes' third album is proof enough

that Steve Howe was immediately recognized as a crucial asset to the band when he joined in 1970. This solo piece reveals him to be versatile as well as virtuosic, as he sure-handedly mixes elements of ragtime blues and folk-tinged country in a self-contained instrumental. “Clap” established Howe as one of the great finger-pickers in rock.



“Mood for a Day”

FRAGILE (Atlantic, 1972)
Vaguely reminiscent of Elizabethan court music (all that's

missing are the lutes), and laced with hints of flamenco and even folksy psychedelia in the strummed

chords that open the song, “Mood for a Day” arguably captures Howe at his most lyrical. One of his earliest recorded performances on nylon-string guitar, the instrumental offers a glimpse into the challenging musical areas he would later explore on his solo albums.

“And You and I”

CLOSE TO THE EDGE (Atlantic, 1972)

This phenomenal Yes opus wends its way through at least



six different movements, and Howe's Martin 12-string figures

prominently in each. From the ethereal cascade of harmonics and somber chords that set the initial tone to the jubilant progressions that underscore Anderson's trippy references to “ocean maids” and “colored doors of time,” Howe guides us through a world of multiple soundscapes and emotions.

“Surface Tension”

THE STEVE HOWE ALBUM (Atlantic, 1979)

By the end of the Seventies, Howe had evolved into a master of the Spanish guitar. With its mixed modal and tempo changes, complex chord clusters and simultaneous picking and strumming to create the illusion of two guitars playing at once, “Surface Tension” is a testament to Howe's technical skills as well as his unflappable musical curiosity.

“Intersection Blues”

NATURAL TIMBRE (Spitfire, 2001)

This swinging mélange of Delta and ragtime licks demonstrates that Howe absorbed the lessons he learned listening to Blind Boy Fuller, Big Bill Broonzy and his other country blues heroes. A side of his playing that few Yes fans have been privy to over the years.

—BM



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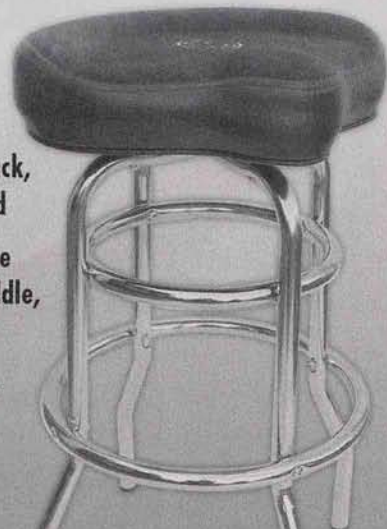
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GWA The most interesting arrangement is "Roundabout," which you play with sort of a shuffle feel that reminds me of Eric Clapton's *MTV Unplugged* version of "Layla." It's completely different from the original. How did you go about transforming what was basically an electric-driven composition into an acoustic song?

HOWE What happened was, one day at rehearsal on the tour I mentioned, Chris and Alan were playing something, and they kind of looked over and said, "This is the idea we were telling you about"—that maybe we could play "Roundabout" with this new feel. We didn't even think at the time that we were really doing "Roundabout"; in fact, when we went about it, I thought that the groove was slightly more like "The Messenger," or something from [*Yes's 1999 release*] *The Ladder*, because it was a funky groove. But it was a great idea, so we put a little bit more work into it.

GWA You also recorded a solo acoustic version of "Australia," from your first solo album, 1976's *Beginnings*, for the compilation.

HOWE I was quite fearful about doing that because the original was a full-blown band composition—you know, bass and drums, electric guitars, as well as acoustic and Spanish guitars. I had just showcased a segment of the tune when we were in Australia, and when I came back I thought, Well, maybe I've got something there. The flat-top acoustic was really the right guitar to play it on because that's what I use to write most of my music. So I went back to the Martin and loved the sound I got.

I've never really hit a guitar on purpose as hard as I did in "Australia" [*laughs*]. And because it's over four minutes long, it gave me a chance to really get into the solo guitar mode. But as I've often said, arranging a song now for solo guitar is really a great challenge, with results that often surprise even me.

GWA Your reinterpretation of some of these older tunes strikes me as a logical progression from your most recent solo album, *Natural Timbre* (Spitfire, 2001), which also features a few acoustic arrangements of Yes songs.

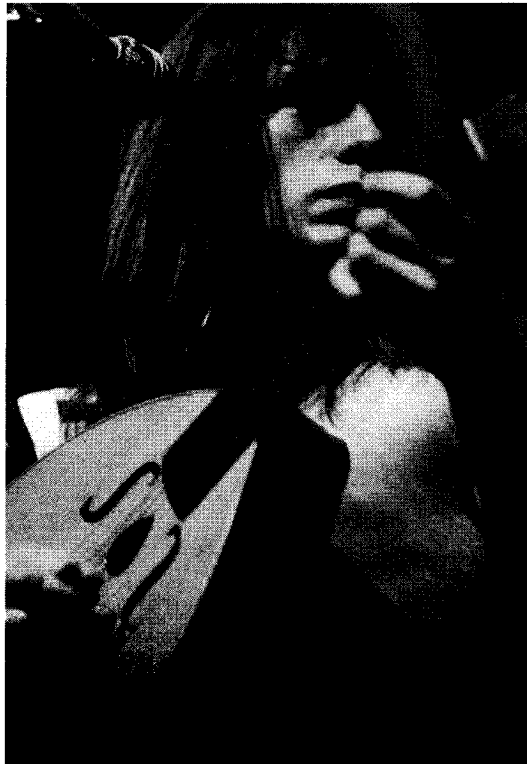
HOWE That's right. I mean, I'm lucky enough to have a repertoire that is quite broad, and at the moment I'm preparing a set list for a tour that I hope to bring to the States in October. The material will all come from my solo albums, so in a sense I'll be establishing an entirely new repertoire, because a lot of that music hasn't been played before on stage—certainly not with a full band, which is what I hope to do.

Doing songs like "Australia" and "To Be Over" [*originally on the 1974 Yes album*

Relayer], which I did for *Natural Timbre* in a solo acoustic format, appealed to me because in both cases I took the song into a new direction. "To Be Over" was really a lot of work, and because it hadn't been played by anybody for 25 years, I felt like I was carrying the flag for Yes there a little bit.

GWA Speaking of new directions, it occurs to me that in your new acoustic arrangement of "Roundabout" you omit the harmonics that introduced the original.

HOWE When I used harmonics there it was because the sound just caught my ear. But in a way I'm not all that proud of what I



"WITH AN ACOUSTIC, YOU'RE IN THE MOMENT—ONCE YOU PLAY IT, THAT'S KIND OF IT, IT'S OUT THERE FOR GOOD."

did there, because I'm actually quite limited in that respect. *I have* tried some of the incredible techniques that people like Chet Atkins and many others have mastered, but I'm not terribly good, so I tend to just do things my own way.

GWA You've often cited Chet Atkins as a major influence on your playing.

HOWE Well, I was just beside myself, really, when I discovered Atkins's *Teensville* [RCA, 1960]. I was about 13 or 14 and I had only just started playing the guitar. I thought he was a phenomenal player—really inspirational, and my favorite all-around guitarist if I had to pick one person. Chet did so much to reinvent a sort of smooth country sound that didn't have sharp edges. He kind of customized this natural sound; he's really the creator of it, and I think there are few people who

would deny that. So in a way Chet became an idol or a mentor of mine, a guru if you like, because what he was doing on the guitar illustrated to me that you don't have to stick to one style.

You have to see Chet on film to understand how gently this guy actually played, and *that* gives you a secret of control, because if you're playing hard on a guitar, then really what you're saying to it is, "I'm not in control, because I'm venting my physical and mental aggression when I play." You have to get *off* the guitar—especially with an acoustic, you have to start out by underplaying; otherwise, you can never realize the dramatics and the dynamics that are possible from an acoustic guitar.

GWA Do you find that most guitarists play too heavy-handedly?

HOWE Actually, when I started playing I did just that. I was pretty heavy-handed. But I listened to myself, and it occurred to me, well, if I played *lighter*...that's my recommendation for all acoustic work—to find your sound by playing lightly, and then you can build the dynamics by playing harder. If you just pummel your guitar as soon as you start playing, you've got a long way to go. The truth is, *all* players have a long way to go, myself included.

GWA From an amplification standpoint, how do you maintain that "natural sound" when playing live with Yes?

HOWE I've been using more or less the same system since about 1989. I bought a Scharpach acoustic guitar (<http://scharpach.com>) that came with a special box, and I liked it so much that I asked Theo Scharpach to incorporate that in my Spanish guitar, my Martin 00-18, my 12-string Martin and a few other guitars. In more recent years I've added Fishman pickups and microphones to other guitars as I got them, and then wired them all up so you could still play them through the same system.

From there the guitar goes through an Applied Acoustics preamp that mixes the microphones with the strip, sometimes with a little bit of reverb, and then I listen to the mix onstage through these incredible miniature speakers from Holland called Sound Projects Master Blasters. The whole setup really gives me one of the best sounds imaginable.

GWA In general, how would you characterize your different approaches to acoustic and electric guitar?

HOWE I've been an exponent of messing around with electric guitar sounds, a sort of manipulation game that you cannot do with an acoustic instrument. With an acoustic, you're in the moment—once you play it, that's kind of it, it's out there for good. The purity of an acoustic instrument is unquestionable, and that's what helps to create a lot of very wonderful pieces of music that can have a real profound influence on what we do, even once the power is turned on. ■

MICHAEL PUTNAM/REINA