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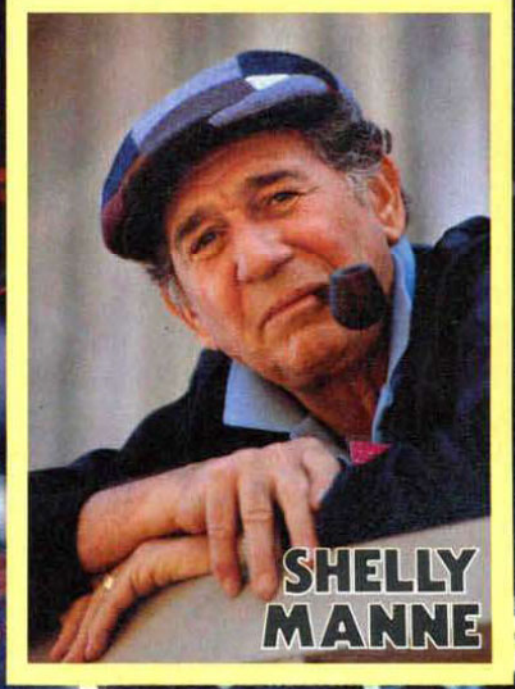
Alan White



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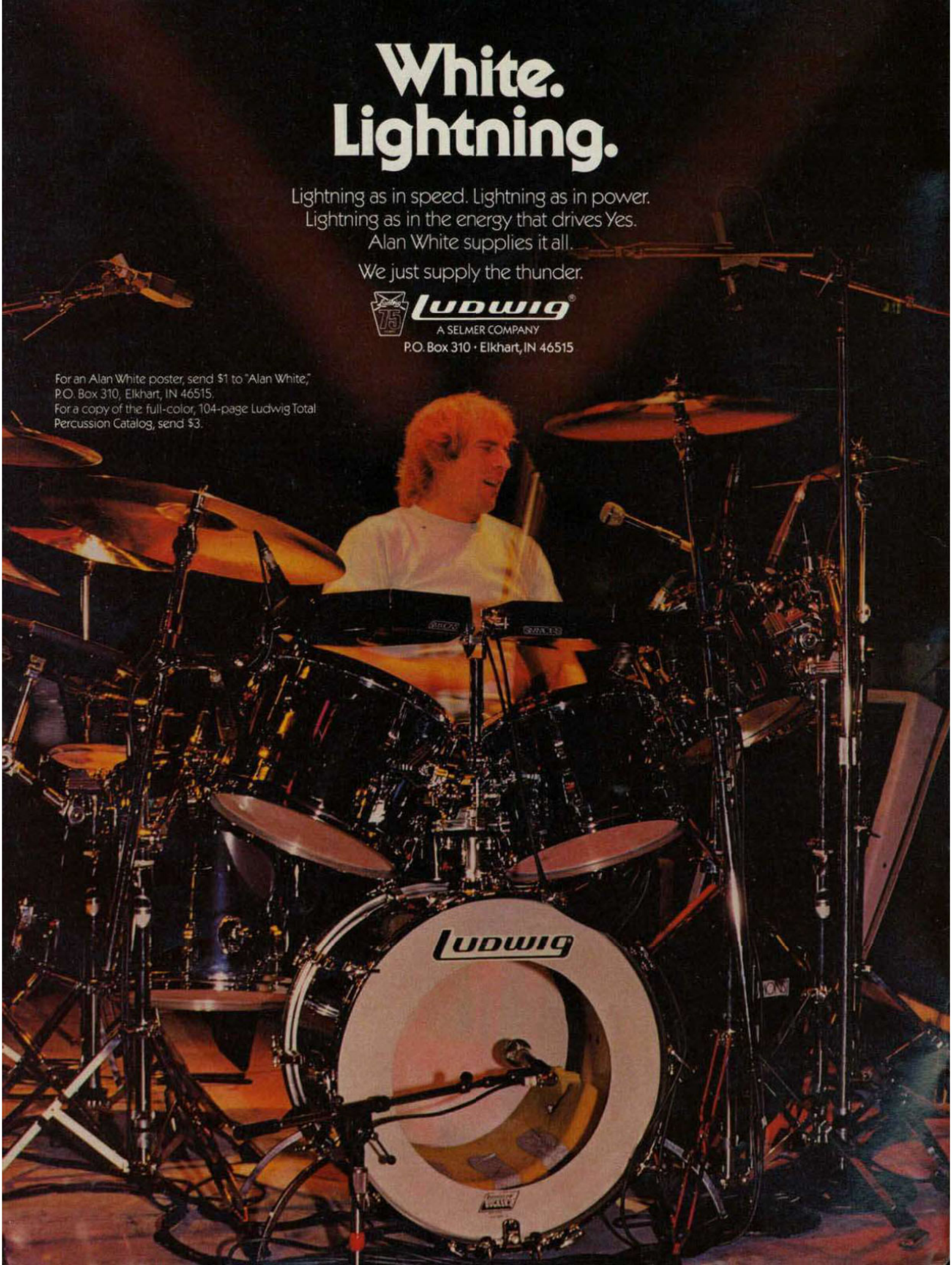
White.
Lightning.
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Alan White supplies it all.
We just supply the thunder.
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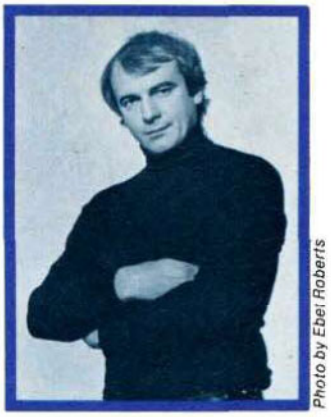
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ALAN WHITE

by Robert Santelli

You can't blame Alan White of Yes for smiling. It's a lazy sort of grin, to be sure. It's the kind that hardly takes an effort to rouse. But it's also a supremely confident, "I told you so" sort of smile. And White, who has just awoken to blaring police sirens and cabby horns wailing below his hotel room in Manhattan, is indeed doing just that.

To understand what this is all about, one has lo go back to 1979 and 1980, and also to Drama, *the Yes album that, for all practical purposes, sounded like the last one the group would ever record. The tracks on the LP were woefully thin and uninspired. Yes desperately lacked direction and it showed. Drama bombed with the critics, and the record-buying public to boot. The group's problems, however, weren't just found in* Drama. *It was no secret that more and more people were paying less and less attention to bands like Yes. The '70s—Yes's '70s—were history. It was the dawn of a new decade. The '80s were here and so was the beginning of a new British invasion of America. Progressive rock? Never heard of it.*

But despite all this, Alan White was telling himself and founding band member/bassist Chris Squire that this couldn't spell the end for Yes. Perhaps the name of the group should be buried along with the '70s-styled concept of the group. But White was convinced that, regardless of what had happened with Drama, *there was more music—good music—left in them and their outfit.*

What was needed was a way to bring that music out—to focus it with such clarity and precision that the sound of the band couldn't help but be modern, exciting, and right in sync with what other groups were doing within the realm of rock 'n' roll. Be it the reappearance on the scene of vocalist Jon Anderson and keyboardist Tony Kaye, or the timely addition of guitarist Trevor Rabin, or the never-say-die attitude expressed by White and Squire, or all *of the above, incredibly, Yes pulled it all together. What resulted, of course, was* 90125. *A superb album by any standards, the LP launched an amazing comeback by a band that had been, well, left for dead. But none of this surprised Alan White that much. He knew it was possible all along. Alan White told you so.*

What I can tell you about Alan White is that he's a fairly quiet gent who seems to prefer speaking only when spoken to. There's a pleasant, even cheery demeanor about him, but you have to search it out. Aside from being an excellent drummer and keeping the beat for Yes ever since Bill Bruford left the band in the early '70s, White is also a proficient keyboards player and one who enjoys the challenge of songwriting.

I caught up with Alan White in the midst of the American leg of the 90125 *tour. He seemed a bit fatigued by all the commotion Yes was causing, in addition, of course, to the rigors of the road. Nevertheless, he found a few hours to spare and spoke to me about Yes, his experiences with John Lennon and Ginger Baker, plus the technicalities of his drumming and even a tiny peek into his personal life.*

RS: To me, Alan White is about as fine an example I know of the perfectionist rock drummer. Do you see yourself that way?

AW: In a way I do, yes. I'd like to think that what you said is true. I mean, I certainly don't want to be typecast as just another drummer. Actually, though, I don't think any drummer does.

RS: You also play piano. Do you have the same attitude in your approach to the piano as you do the drums?

AW: To a certain extent. I've played piano since I was six years old.

RS: How has your proficiency on the keyboards helped your drumming over the years?

AW: Well, because I've played the piano since I was a kid, I've developed a melodic sense in my drum playing. And where it's helped me and Yes, I think, is in songwriting. I'm not any good when it comes to lyrics, but I can contribute a bit when it comes to the instrumental part of a song. I've always been interested in complex rhythms and I think it shows in the way I play drums. For example, there's a song on *90125* called "Changes," and I wrote the beginning to that song. I enjoy becoming involved in the songwriting process. I think more and more drummers are beginning to feel the same way. So many are contributing bits and pieces to songs and assuming a greater responsibility within the band. That's really good, I think. Drummers are finally done with just being drummers.

RS: How much do you contribute to the arrangement of a typical Yes song?

AW: We all spent about seven months arranging and reconstructing tunes. A lot of the stuff you hear on *90125* was completely arranged and ready to record before we even stepped foot into the studio. We were basically getting a new band together. Different producers would also come in and present their ideas, you know. We spent eight hours a day, six days a week working on those songs. In fact, the material you hear on the record is only about half the material we wrote. We picked from that. But there's a lot of other great stuff that was left off the record simply because there wasn't enough room to include it.

RS: Is it possible that some of the unused material might wind up on the follow-up to 90/25?

AW: I think some of it will, but not all of it. Yes has never had a history or tradition of going back to older material to make a new record. We've always preferred to write new stuff. But there are a few songs that I definitely wouldn't mind hearing on the next record.

RS: You said you began playing the piano when you were six years old. How and when did you get involved with the drums?

AW: From age six to, I guess, twelve, I learned all the rudiments of music on the piano. But my uncle was a drummer, you see, and he noticed I had a pretty strong percussive way of hitting the keys. So he got my parents to buy me a drumkit just to see how well I'd do with it. Within three months of getting the drums, I was playing the instrument on stage. I was still taking piano lessons, but my interest in piano kind of tapered off over the next two years as I became more and more interested in the drums. My uncle kept giving me incentives to get better and better behind the kit.

RS: It sounds as if he was your first big musical influence.

AW: Oh yes, he very definitely was.

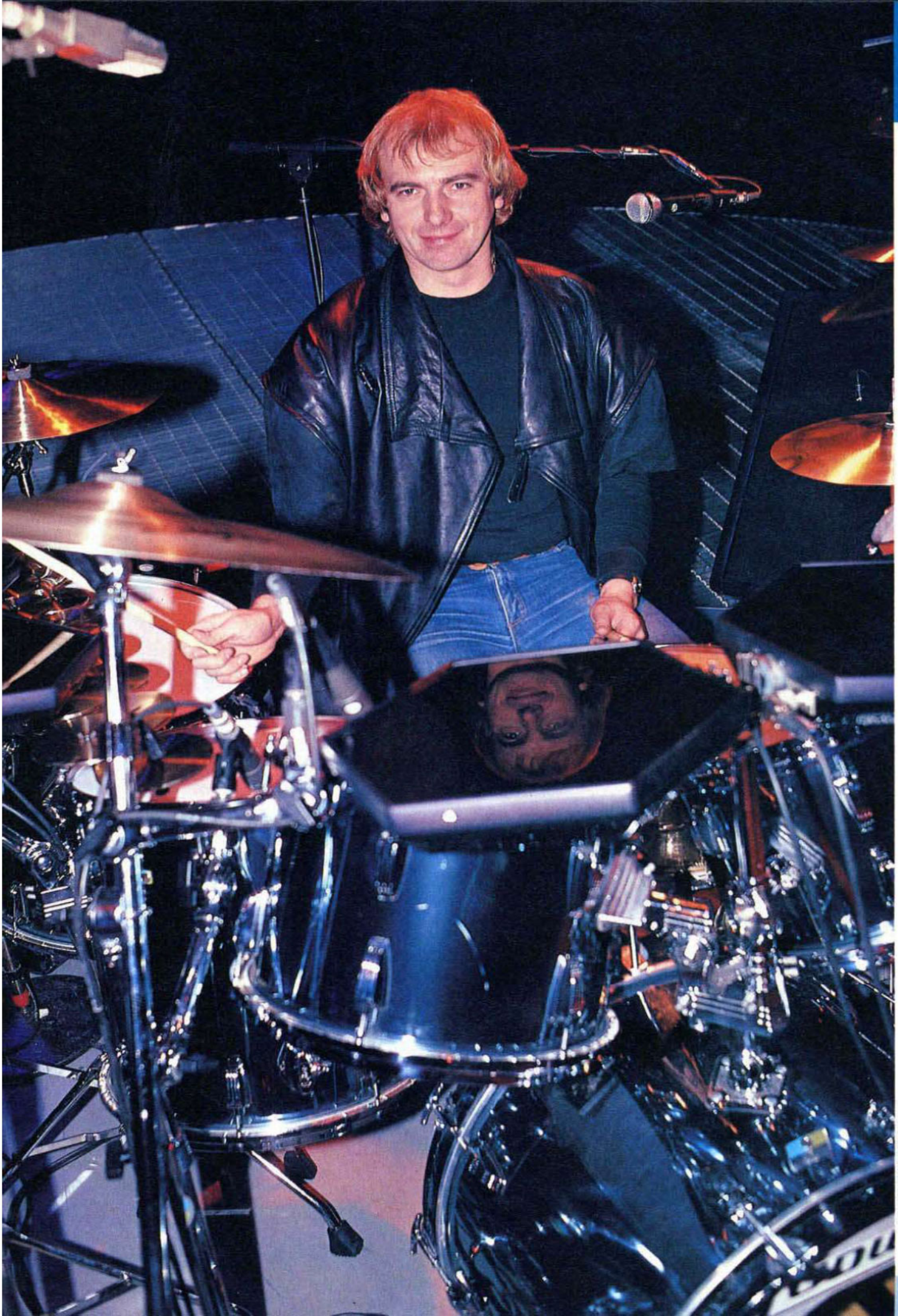
RS: What kind of drummer was he?

AW: He was principally a dance band drummer. He used to play with an 18-piece dance band. He was pretty good, too, but I was really too young at the time to understand just how good he was. Nevertheless, he left his mark on me, and occasionally I can really notice it when I listen to some of the things I've recorded with Yes.

RS: Speaking of Yes, with the gigantic success *of 90125,* the band has managed to pull off one of the great comebacks in the history of rock.

AW: It's funny because we always knew we had more music left in us, despite what others might have thought. So we kept at it. But until Jon [Anderson] came along and rejoined the group, we were going to call ourselves something other than Yes. Of course, when Jon rejoined, we really couldn't call the band anything but Yes because Jon's voice, I think, will always be a trademark of the band. But to answer your question—how did the success of the album and the band come to be—I think it had to do with the tremendous enthusiasm that we all had and the modern approach we took, especially with the arrival of Trevor Rabin. His joining the band gave Yes a big boost and a big burst of energy. This new, modern energy and enthusiasm is actually what people listen to when they put the album on. With our success, its the New Beginning. We very much feel like a band of the '80s.

RS: What specifically has been your contribution to Yes's renaissance, if you will?



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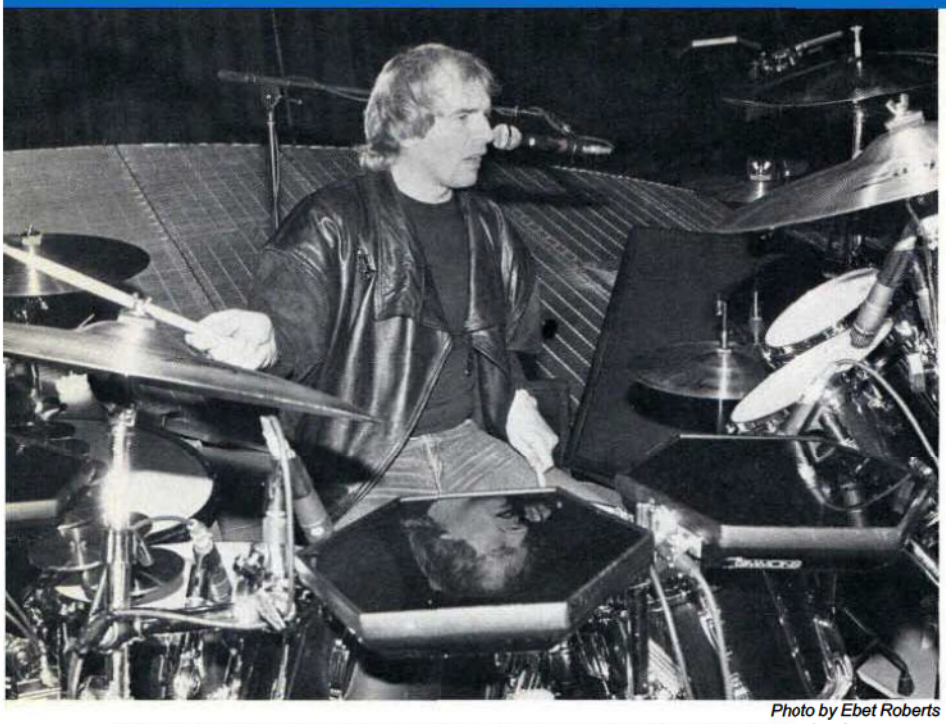

Photo by Ebet Roberts

AW: Chris [Squire] and I never stopped playing together. We kept playing even after Yes kind of stopped breathing for a while in the late '70s. Then, like I said, Trevor got involved, and Chris called Tony [Kaye]. We worked for about eight months, basically tearing apart and putting back together again with a new focus the songs that everyone had written. We spent many, many hours doing this—eight hours a day, at the very least. And everyone had as much input as anyone else. We really worked quite hard, I must say. As for me personally, I'd work at taking a rhythm that I'd hear on someone's demo tape and try to make it a lot more interesting.

RS: And how would you do that?

AW: Well, the way Chris and I work together, we both strive for the same things in a rhythm. We just have a special working relationship that, I guess, encourages the two of us to come up with some pretty solid rhythms and things. The interesting thing is that it took Chris and I a long time to learn how to play together. But once we locked into each other's style and ideas, we became a very good team. A lot of the things we come up with are actually very spontaneous. It's really great when a drummer can work with the same bass player for a couple of years. You can work things out a lot easier and then you begin to bounce ideas off each other with very positive results.

RS: You've played with other bass players besides Chris in the past ten years. How do you switch gears, so to speak, when you're playing with someone other than Chris?

AW: Sometimes it's difficult to do; other times it's quite easy, actually. Sometimes you get lucky and hit it off right away. I like to play games in situations like that. I'll pretend I'm going to hit a certain beat, and then don't hit it. It forces me and whoever's playing bass to focus in on each other very quickly. But I usually know the bass players I play with other than Chris. If it's someone brand new, well, there's a musical language that we can use to communicate. We're essentially talking to each other through our instruments.

RS: Have you done much playing outside Yes in the past couple of years?

AW: I haven't had time to do any, to tell you the truth. It's been like I crawled into an egg or something. Being inside a shell and making Yes a truly modern band of the '80s has left me with very little time to do anything else. There's been a lot to do within the confines of the group.

RS: Go back to your early years with Yes, in the days just after you replaced Bill Bruford. How has your drumming style matured or perhaps changed?

AW: When I first joined the band, it was quite a nerve-racking experience. I had to learn all Yes's material in about three days in order to play in front of 10,000 people for my first gig with the band. It was like a crash course on how to become the drummer in Yes in only three days, [laughs] It wasn't the easiest job in the world. I can tell you that. Fortunately, it came out alright. But I don't think my basic ideas have changed that much as far as the role of the drums in the band and my basic feelings about the instrument are concerned. Playing complex rhythms and making them swing and sound funky at the same time, and adding a little bit of jazz to it all, is really what my drumming is all about. I've been fairly successful at it, and because of this I've gained much more confidence as a drummer than when I first started with Yes. If anything, my drumming ideas have gotten somewhat slicker and easier to incorporate into the group.

RS: The complexity of your drum style is obvious, and yet you still manage to keep the beat. You rarely seem to get sidetracked or thrown off balance in the process of coming across complex. How do you accomplish this?

AW: I think the drummer's main role in any band is always to be the backbone of the band. I'm not a great fan of drummers who leap into the spotlight and, in effect, say, "Hey, this is my thing!" I like to be a part of the band. That's the only way I can do my job. A drummer has to make the band swing, even if they do get into complex rhythms. I like playing different time signatures, especially when the rest of the band stays in one signature. I'll deliberately go into a different time signature on occasion. But at the same time as I'm playing another signature, I'm listening to the basic beat of the song. It's like trying to detach your mind from the music; often it's quite difficult to do properly. This is something I've been working on a lot, however. I'm very interested in removing myself from the rhythm and playing an entirely different rhythm than what's called for, or should I say, than what's expected. At the same time, though, I'm making sure the song swings in its normal rhythm. It's kind of difficult to explain actually without sounding weird, but what I do is certainly fun and extremely challenging.

RS: If you could select one track from 90725 that defines your best effort behind the drumkit, what

might that song be?

AW: "Our Song" is a pretty good indication of the kind of bouncing off the rhythm I set out to do. I just like to do things that are different, yet appear normal. I guess that's as good a way as any to describe what 1 do on that tune. It's like the average person on the street can listen to the song and know that the drummer's role is being fulfilled. Yet, a drummer could listen and say, "Well, that's pretty clever because it's something different, but it's still in time."

RS: You've been a member of Yes for over a decade now. That adds up to many tours, I'm sure. How do you feel about touring and the life-style that goes with it?

AW: There have been times when I've hated the thought of going out on the road, I guess. But most of the time the highlight of my day is when I go on stage to play. The trouble that goes along with traveling and living in hotels and things like that does wear you down, though. It's that which causes you to think negatively of touring, not the playing. I know, for instance, that everyone in Yes always seems to muster up the energy to perform, no matter how tired they are from being on the road. Of course, different things affect you and the way you feel. For example, the different halls you play in always affect the way your monitor sounds, and you have to deal with that every night. But in general, I just know that every time I get behind my drums the audience will make me rise to the occasion, no matter how I'm feeling backstage or back at the hotel room.

RS: During the 90125 tour, Yes played to many second-generation fans of the band, as well as original fans from the days of "Roundabout." How did that make you feel?

AW: It was strange; it really was. At a lot of the gigs we did in the States, the first 30 rows or so were taken up primarily by kids who only know the band by what they heard on *90125*. But then you'd see older people walking around who obviously go back much farther than the new album. One writer who reviewed one of our shows wrote that there were 35-year-old hippies sitting next to 15-year-old kids. The album has simply attracted a wide variety of people, and true, it has spanned two generations. That's pretty exciting, I think.

RS: Let's talk a bit about some technical elements of your drums and the way you play them. Do you have a particular approach to tuning your drums when you're in the studio that contrasts to the way you tune them for live performances?

AW: Well, I like to have a live situation in the studio as much as I possibly can. So I basically tune for recording sessions the same way as I'd tune my drums if I were playing live. The only time this would not be true is when I have to tune my drums differently for a special song or something. But in general, I want the studio engineer to re-create in the studio the exact sound I hear on stage. It's really a question of miking. Using different types of mic's and setting up the drums in different locations affect the ambience and tightness of your drum sound.

RS: How close do you work with the engineer in the studio?

AW: On *90125* I worked extremely close with him. Sometimes we'd spend days trying to come up with the right drum sound for a particular track. We recorded in about seven different studios, so there are almost seven different drum sounds that you hear. The engineer and I would actually spend days on just the snare drum sound. We paid an awful lot of attention to the drum sound on *90125*. The engineer and I talked a lot about it and got to know what each of us wanted to hear on the record. Sometimes it got to be a drawn-out process. But in the end, we definitely achieved what we wanted.

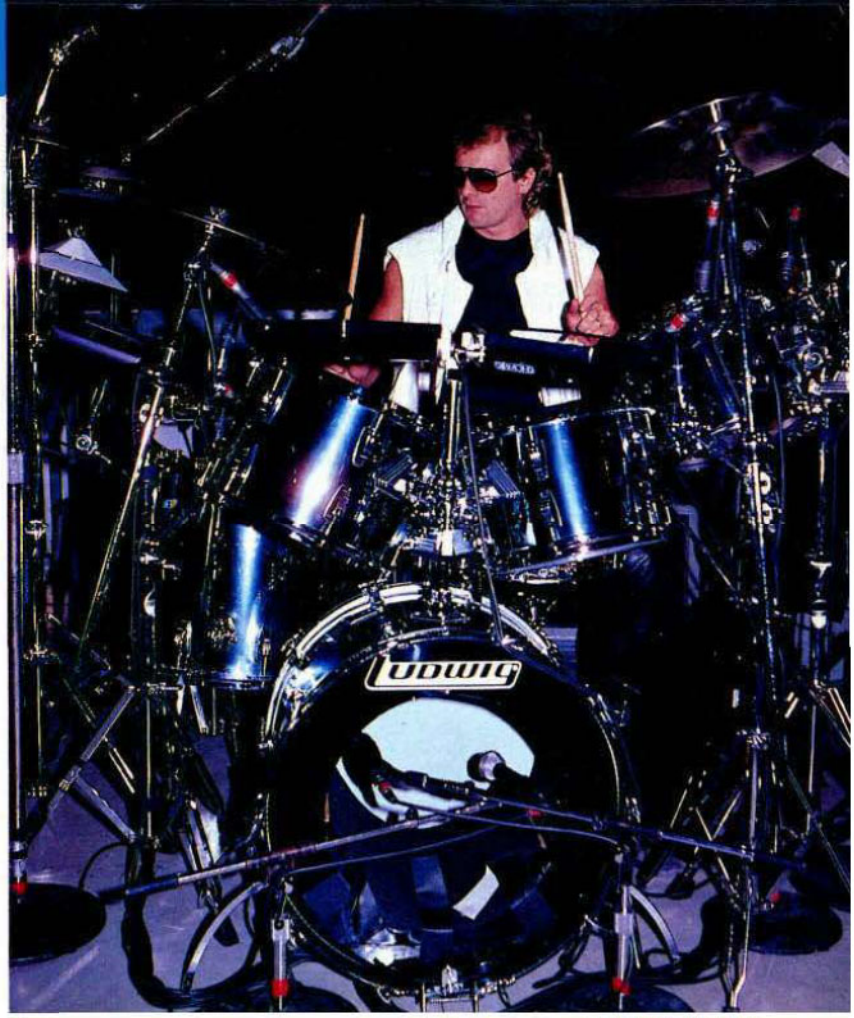

Photo by Fred Carneau

RS: Do you use a different kit in the studio than you use on stage?

AW: No, I use the same kit. Actually, I have about eight different kits. I have, for instance, a great jazz kit. I also have the original kit my parents bought me when I was a kid. It's a little, old Ludwig kit; it's more like a museum kit than anything else. It's still got a fantastic sounding bass drum, although I don't think I'd ever really use it again. Like I said, it's a bit antiquated. Ludwig and the other drum companies tend to make better fittings and stuff nowadays.

RS: Could you give me a basic rundown of the kit you're presently using on tour?

AW: I use a six-ply Ludwig set. I'm playing 8", 10", 13", 14", 16" and 18" toms. I recently got a new snare from Ludwig which I've begun to use. It's excellent—a 61/2". It takes all the overtones and other nasty things out of my snare sound now. I also use a 22" bass drum, and I have four Simmons toms mounted right in front of me and to the side. Actually, they're mounted directly above the other toms. I also have a Simmons bass drum that I use as an electronic double bass drum with my kit. My snare, I should mention, is miked through the Simmons. I have a set of buttons by my feet that I switch these things in and out with.

"I'M NOT A GREAT FAN OF DRUMMERS WHO LEAP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT ... I LIKE TO BE A PART OF THE BAND."

As for cymbals, I'm playing a set of Zildjian 15" hi-hats right now. Then I have a 20" Chinese on my left, a 16" crash, a 22" medium ride, another 16" crash, then two inverted *China Boys* on my right, and an orchestral suspended cymbal right behind me, which is good for finishing up on because it has a "gongy" type effect.

My toms go through an echo unit that I can punch in at any time, which also has a sound-on-sound loop in it. It's all digital. I can keep the toms in a loop and play along with myself if I want. It's really very interesting to

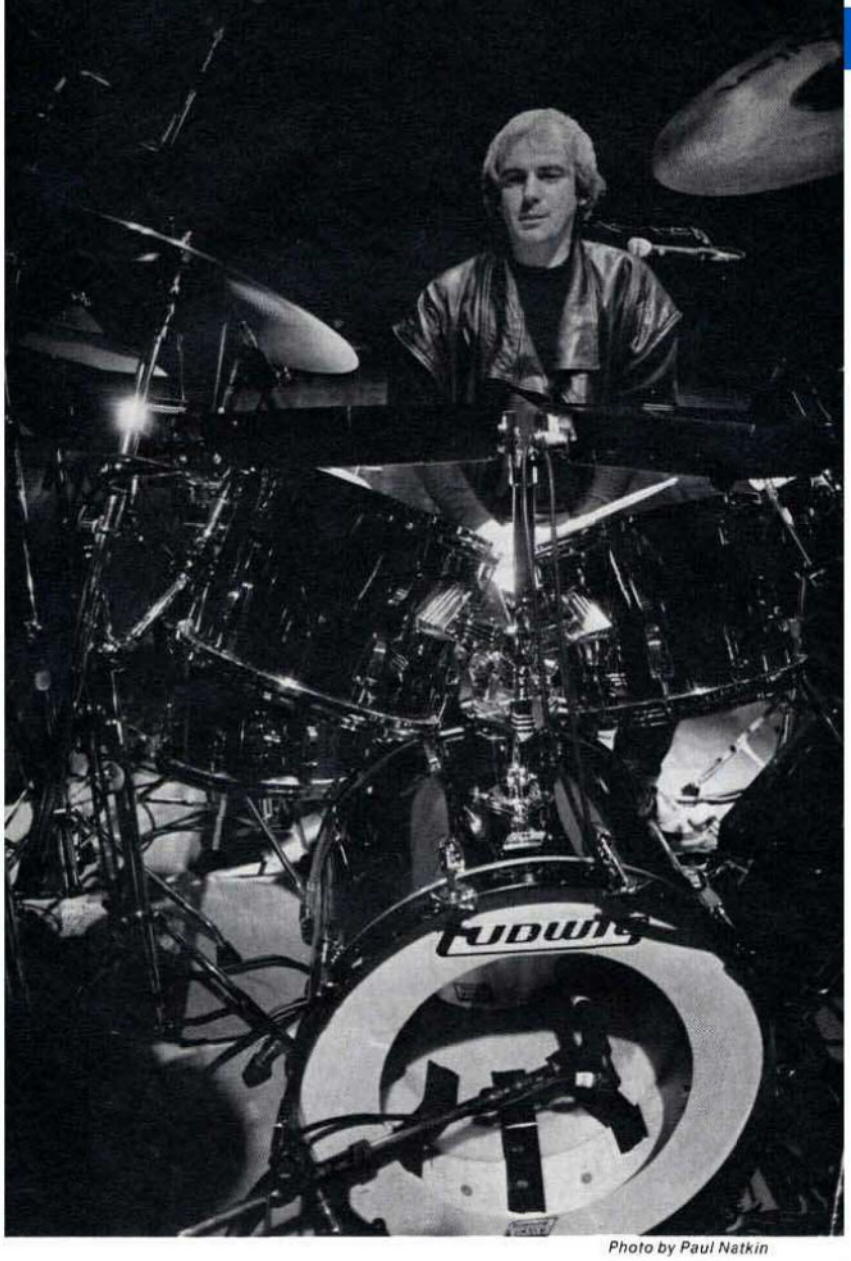

Photo by Paul Natkin

do some licks when the band is not expecting it. Just sticking everything into the echo really makes for interesting rhythms sometimes. I have a digital delay that my snare goes through so I can make it fat or small—any size I want. In fact, I change the setting on it for practically every number the band does. It all sounds a bit complicated, I'm sure. But when you get into it and learn its capabilities, the set is really fun to play, if you know what I mean.

RS: How, exactly, do you integrate the Simmons bass drum into your drum sound?

AW: There's one song we do called "City Of Love" in which I play identically with my right foot and left foot. It's a balanced sound, but a heavy sound. It often seems as if my bass drum dropped a few whole tones. It just has that weight to it. I also use the Simmons bass drum on the song "It Could Happen," and that's all done with my left foot. So it's more of an effect-type thing than anything else. I like the role of the Simmons in my kit. Basically, it's my idea of where electronic drums should be—just extend the sound of the kit and make the dynamics leap out. I wouldn't like to use it all of the time. But I do like to use it in appropriate places: places where my sound needs to jump out of the speakers. And in the process, it creates a whole wealth of dynamics. I really think that's the proper role of electronic drums. I don't like to play them just by themselves. They're very limited, actually. I have a problem with the feel of electronic drums. For myself, there's nothing like playing an acoustic set of drums. The new Simmons, however, has rubber instead of plastic on top, which, to me, makes a big difference in feel and stick response. If you listen very carefully to *90125,* I could have used electronic drums all over the place, but I didn't.

RS: Do you think electronic drums are more valuable to a drummer on stage than they are in the studio?

AW: Yes, very definitely. When you use them in a big, 10,000-seat hall, you get a real weighty sound. They also come through with lots of dynamics. They sound much better in that situation than if they were going directly through a board. You can get much more out of electronic drums live.

RS: Before, we talked a little about songwriting. It seems as if more and more drummers are beginning to explore the possibilities of writing tunes. As a songwriter and drummer, you must feel pretty good about this.

AW: Oh yeah. I think it's fantastic that more and more drummers are beginning to compose. For too long, drummers have had the reputation of just sitting back and letting the others in the band do the songwriting. It's much more interesting for a drummer to get involved in the music because that's where you come up with different and exciting rhythms. I think all drummers should at least try their hand at writing. I'm not the greatest lyricist in the world, but I can write pieces of music that make Yes do very interesting things. It's a great thing for rock 'n' roll that, these days, drummers are contributing not just rhythmically, but melodically as well. You can put the two together for a whole new role for drummers in music. The drummer's perspective is a refreshing one, and as a result of it, you can begin to hear how music is becoming more rhythmic than in the past.

RS: Some time ago, you did a solo album, *Ramshackle,* which was, I imagine, a big step towards defining yourself as more than just a drummer.

AW: That's right. I was doing a European tour with Joe Cocker at the time, but prior to that I had done

Photos by Michael S. Jachles

lots of sessions in the studio. I had my own band made up of a group of guys who were all living in the countryside. I was playing more complex music with them than what I was actually playing with Cocker. I'd tour back in those days, then do a few studio sessions to make some more money, and then I'd go back to this house in the country and play jazz and all kinds of stuff just to have that musical outlet. That was my period for really doing something different—different rhythms and things like that—which made me quite prepared for when I joined Yes. When it came around to where everyone was saying, "Hey, I'm doing a solo album," I said, "Well, yes, I'll do one, too." So I got the guys I'd been playing with in the country to go into the studio with me, and we reconstructed some of the things we'd been playing, but with more modern versions. It took me about three months to do this, but at the end of those three months we had an album, which was kind of exciting.

RS: Have you ever considered doing another solo album?

AW: Oh yeah. I hope to get some free time in the next couple of years so I can give it another go. It's a very satisfying experience, and I learned a lot about the studio, sounds, EQ, and cutting a record. They were all things I'd always been interested in. I'd watch people do it all the time, but I never did it myself.

RS: Wasn't it during this time—the years before you joined Yes—that you played with John Lennon & The Plastic Ono Band?

AW: Yes, in 1969. That was really great, you know.

RS: How did you get to play with Lennon?

AW: I was in a band that was playing the clubs in London, and I guess he must have seen me play somewhere. I also knew a guy who worked for George Harrison at Apple Records. Anyway, Lennon called me up one night and said, "Do you want to do a gig?" I mean, this was John Lennon calling *me* up and asking if I wanted to do a gig! [laughs] I couldn't believe it. I said, "Yeah!" "Well, it's in Toronto," he said. That was great. I didn't care where the gig was. I was really young then and the phone call was very much like a dream. So I called the guys in the band I was playing with, told them what had happened, and they said, "But you've got a gig with us." I said, "You've got to be joking!" [laughs] What happened next was that I got another phone call about two hours after the first one. This time I was told that everything was all off. You can imagine how I felt. I was up, then I was down. But later that evening I got a third phone call with news that everything was on again. A limousine came to pick me up. I had never been in a limousine before that. It took me to the airport and the VIP lounge, and all of a sudden I was sitting with John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Eric Clapton and Klaus Voorman. I finally got the nerve to ask them where we were going to rehearse. John looked at me and said, "On the plane. Here's a pair of sticks. Do you know Carl Perkins' version of 'Blue Suede Shoes'? It's the one with the pause in it." I said, "Yeah, I think so." So John smiled and said, "Well, we're doing that song and some others." There were two guitars on the plane and we ran through the whole set while flying to Toronto. We got to Canada and I think we played in front of 25,000 people. I mean, we went on stage and never did a real rehearsal. I don't think

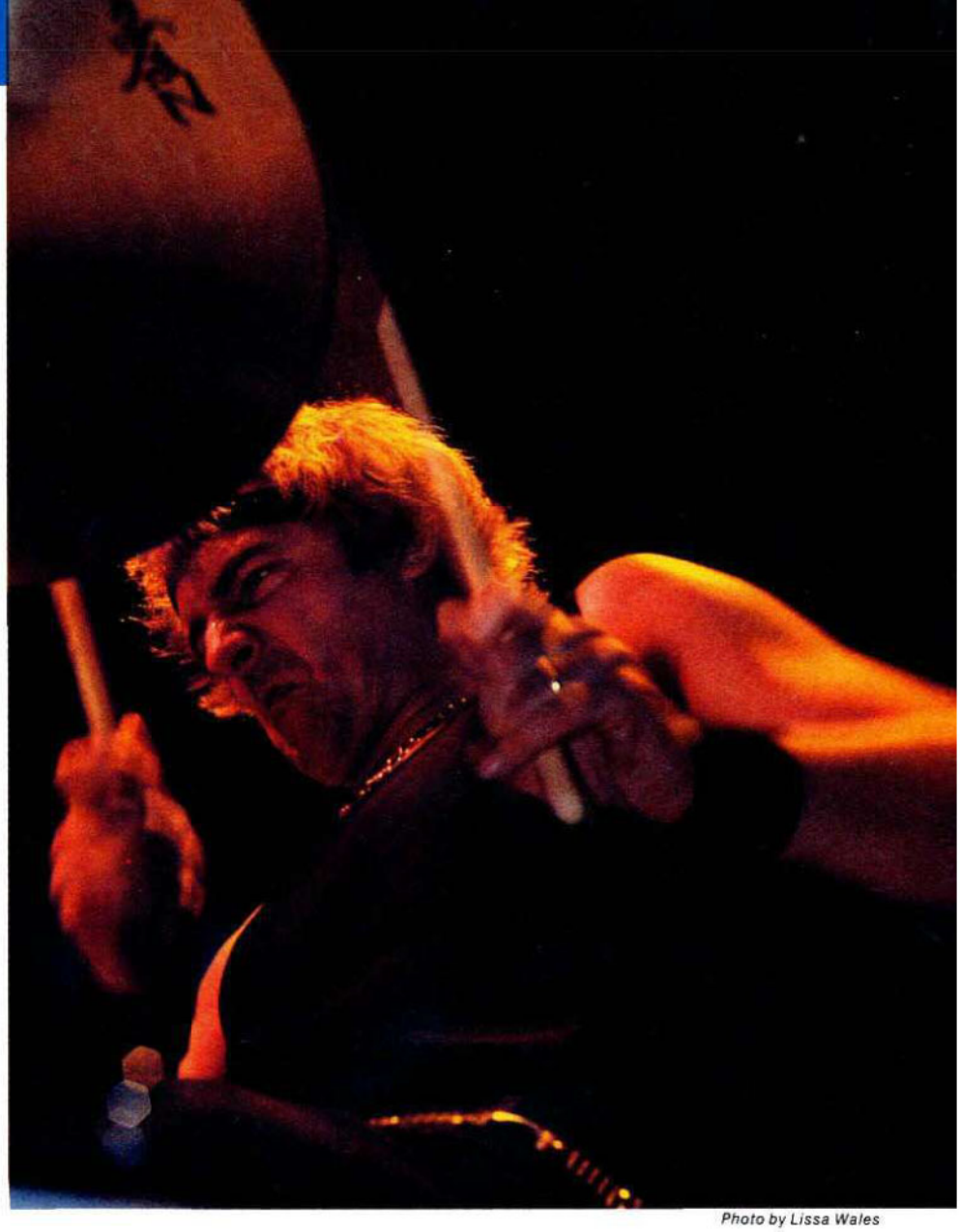

Photo by Lissa Wales

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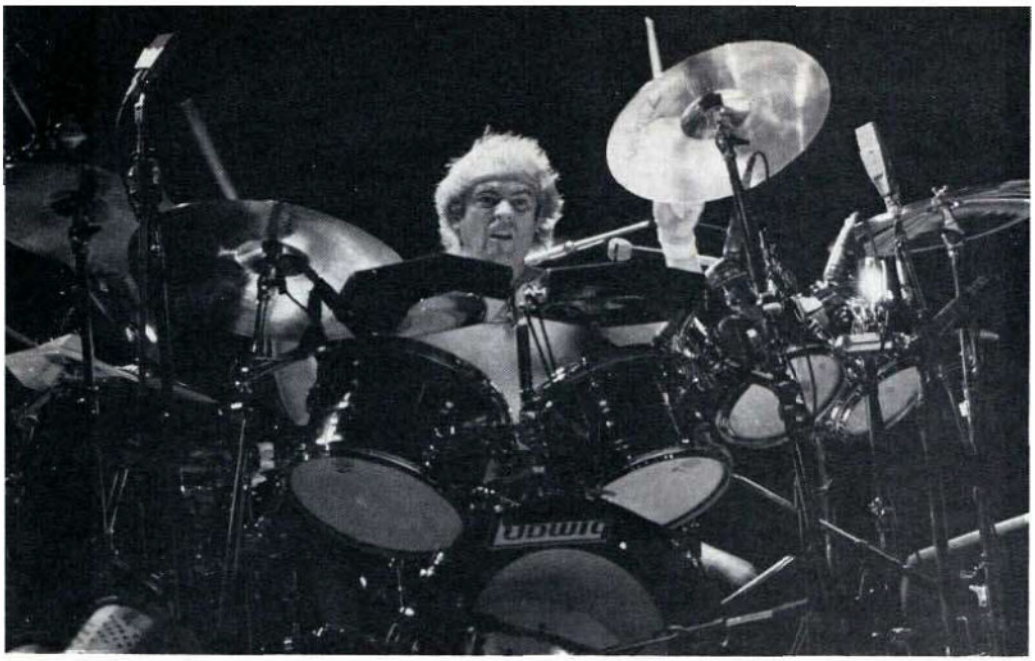

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anyone had even played with each other before the plane ride over. We just went through the whole set, and it was recorded live. Amazing.

RS: That's a great story—the kind you tell your grandchildren.

AW: Yeah, it is. But that really was the big turning point in my career.

RS: In what way?

AW: Well, I'd just spent the last six months of my life believing in the music I was playing and living on baked beans. Then suddenly, literally overnight, here I was playing with John Lennon and Eric Clapton. It opened up my whole career. I went on to play on *Imagine,* spent a whole week at John's house, and did a whole bunch of sessions because my name became known. I also did a bunch of other sessions with John. We had a good working relationship.

RS: You must have worked with Phil Spector, then.

AW: Yes, I did. That was a real experience. I also played on George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass* album. It was really weird at some of those sessions because *I'd* be playing drums and Ringo would be playing tambourine. But because of all this, I learned an awful lot and really grew up very quickly in the music industry. Over the next three-year period, I think I played on between 40 and 60 albums with different artists and different bands. I can hardly remember half of them. The majority of sessions were with bands that sort of came and went. But I got all this experience in the studio that was invaluable.

RS: Did you want to be a session drummer at the time?

AW: I like playing with lots of different people. I was also playing with Terry Reid then. We'd do, oh, three or four gigs a week. So I'd go around doing gigs with him, and fit in the recording gigs whenever I could. I was constantly busy. I'm a Gemini and I naturally like playing with different people and different bands. But after finishing up with Joe Cocker in Europe—I was with him for six weeks playing along with another drummer—I got the call from Yes. So I've been with the group since 1972. I think I was always looking for a band I could stay with, rather than going from group to group and session to session. Yes was the perfect band to do that with.

RS: Was there any other band or artist of note that you played with before settling into Yes?

AW: Well, let's see. I played with Ginger Baker's Air Force for a bit. It was absolute lunacy, that was. I played more than just drums in the band, too. I played piano on about three or four numbers, drums on another three, plus African log drums and tubular bells on other numbers. It was *crazy.* Some of the stages we played on were so small that I'd have to crawl under the piano to get to the drums or the tubular bells. [laughs]

RS: How big was the band?

AW: I think it was something like 15 pieces.

RS: Was Steve Winwood in the group at the time you played in it?

AW: No, he wasn't. Graham Bond played keyboards and sax. Rick Grech played bass. See, Winwood played only two or three gigs with Baker after the breakup of Blind Faith. I came in after he had played in the band and then gone back to re-form Traffic. I'd been working at the time with Denny Laine and Trevor Burton. We made a couple of pretty good singles, but we never played a gig. It was one of those bands.

RS: The art of rock drumming is reaching into areas today that, back in the early

'70s, were unheard of. I don't think any instrument has progressed further and with more significance than the drums. Where do you see rock drumming going in the rest of the '80s?

AW: For me, I want my drum style to go beyond what I accomplished on *90125*. Generally speaking, I'd like to see drummers and drums take on a more melodic slant than ever before. I have lots of different ideas and things I'd like to do in the future when it comes to drums.

RS: Like what? Could you be more specific?

AW: Well, I'd like to have a whole track of just drums, for starters. Take an album track and have just drums on it. I'd also like to put backing tracks down in which all of it is drums, so you can play actual bass licks like steel drums, but use ordinary drums and time them so perfectly that you can actually get whole sections in different harmonies and play lead lines with drums. I have quite a few different ideas like that, but maybe they're not Yes-oriented ideas. Maybe they're for a solo album. However, I might try to fit some of these things into a Yes song sometime in the near future. We used to do a track from *Topographic Oceans* in which everybody in the band played drums. I love interesting things like that, and hopefully, somewhere we'll use drums like that instead of just putting a click track down and playing with it. One thing is for certain: Drums are going to continue to expand and redefine their role in music. I think that can't help but happen.

RS: What drummers are you especially fond of today who might play important roles in the continued progression of the drums tomorrow?

AW: I really don't get a chance to listen to that many drummers, to be quite honest. I like certain drummers for certain things they've done. I think that what Terry Bozzio from Missing Persons has done is really good. He takes drums in a nice, interesting direction. Of course, Phil Collins is doing some incredible things. Over the years, some of my favorite drummers have been people like Lenny White, especially when he played with Return To Forever. I'm a big fan of his. In fact, he used to come to our gigs all the time. It was really nerve-racking with him standing on the edge of the stage.

RS: How about specific influences on your drum style? Earlier in the interview you mentioned your uncle. Were there any other drummers you listened to and admired in your early days?

AW: Sure. Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa. They did an album together and I used to listen to that all the time. I also listened to Ringo Starr. The first night I got the double bass drum beat down it was incredible. I said to myself, "Wow, I can do it just like Ringo!" [laughs] Ringo has taken so many knocks over the years as a less-than-good drummer. What Ringo played on drums was all the Beatles ever needed. He also got better as the Beatles progressed. He did some really nice things on *Sgt. Pepper.* I think Ringo's very proud of the stuff he's played on. I know I would be if I were Ringo. It's weird because on the 90/25 tour I was doing some radio interviews and a couple of times the question would be raised: Did Alan White play on Beatles' tracks? People just naturally figured that, since I played with Lennon, I also played on Beatles' songs. But that never happened. I think Ringo played everything.

RS: Perhaps you were being confused with Andy White, who very early on, played, I believe, on one or two Beatles' tracks.

AW: Yeah, that was it probably, although this thing has come up in the past, too.

RS: How much time do you spend with your drums when you're not in the studio or out on the road? I know you're married and have a family now. Do you play for pleasure while you're at home?

AW: I got married two-and-a-half years ago. Before that, I didn't have the time to settle down, really. But the break in Yes a couple of years ago gave me time to do that. Now I have a young son who's almost two years old, and my wife is about to give birth again. So I didn't waste much time. It's always been a difficult thing in the music business to make a relationship work with a human being and still have your relationship with your instrument. They both demand so much. It's really a question of balance. At home I have a portable eight-track studio which I fool around in. But I don't play at home as much as one might think. I believe there's a time and a place for playing. I would much rather play with other musicians than sit by myself and try to get some licks down. You learn so much more when you play with other musicians, anyway. As a matter of fact, I'd love to write a book that dealt with the topic of how to play with other musicians. That's my interest.

RS: You once called yourself a true workaholic. Do you still consider yourself in that vein?

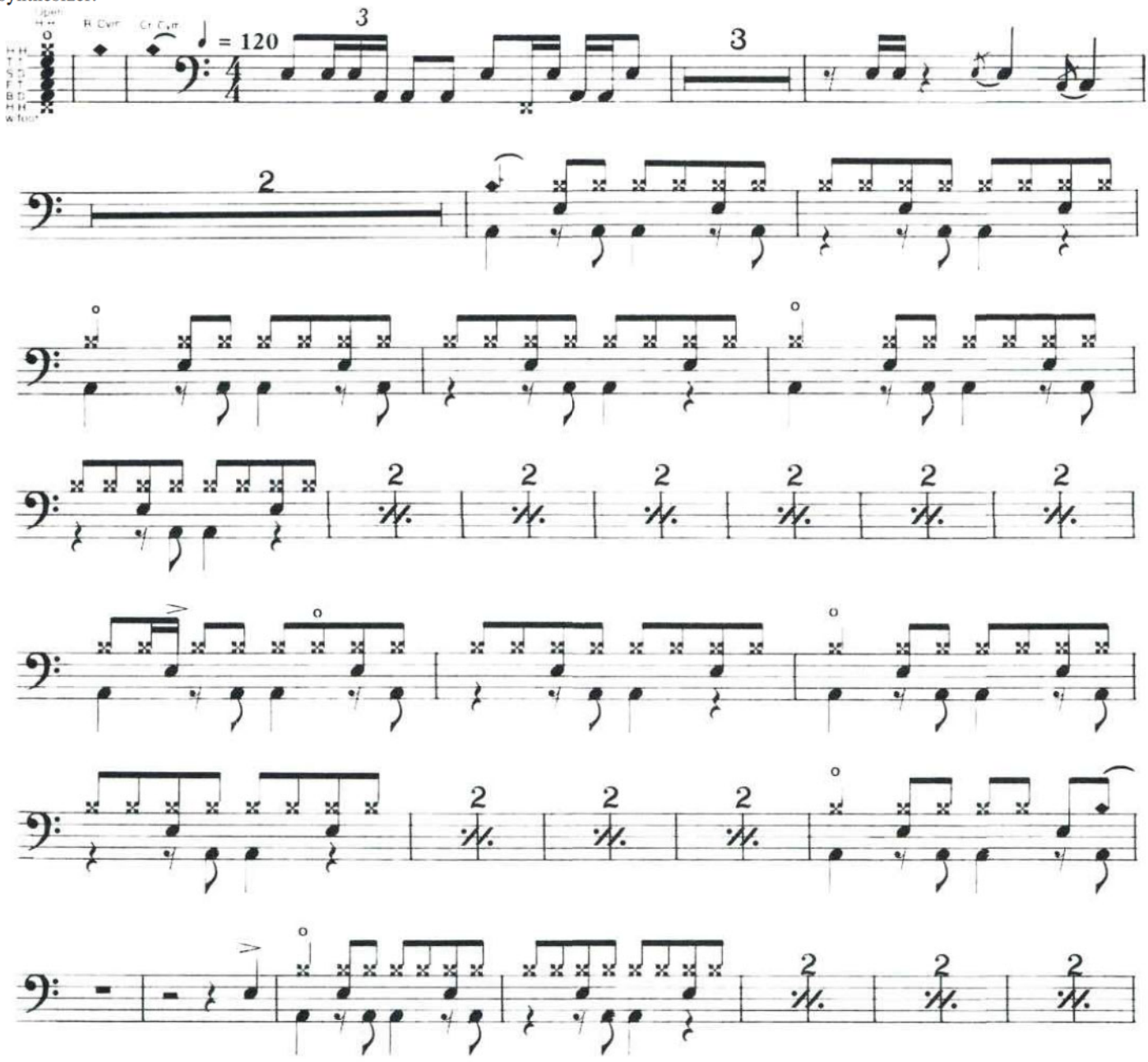
AW: Yes, but not as intensely as before. I love to work; I really do. But I realize now that you can't beat yourself around too much. You've got to have some space between yourself and your work. Actually, I enjoy staying away from the drums for a month or so at a time, because so many fresh, new ideas pop into my head that way. Before we went on the *90125* tour, I think I didn't play my drums for two months. Then I went on tour, and I was doing all these new licks and things. I hate playing the same thing every night. What I really enjoy is playing something new during a show and having a band member turn around with a look on his face that essentially says, "Well, that's different, isn't it?" That's enough to make my whole night.

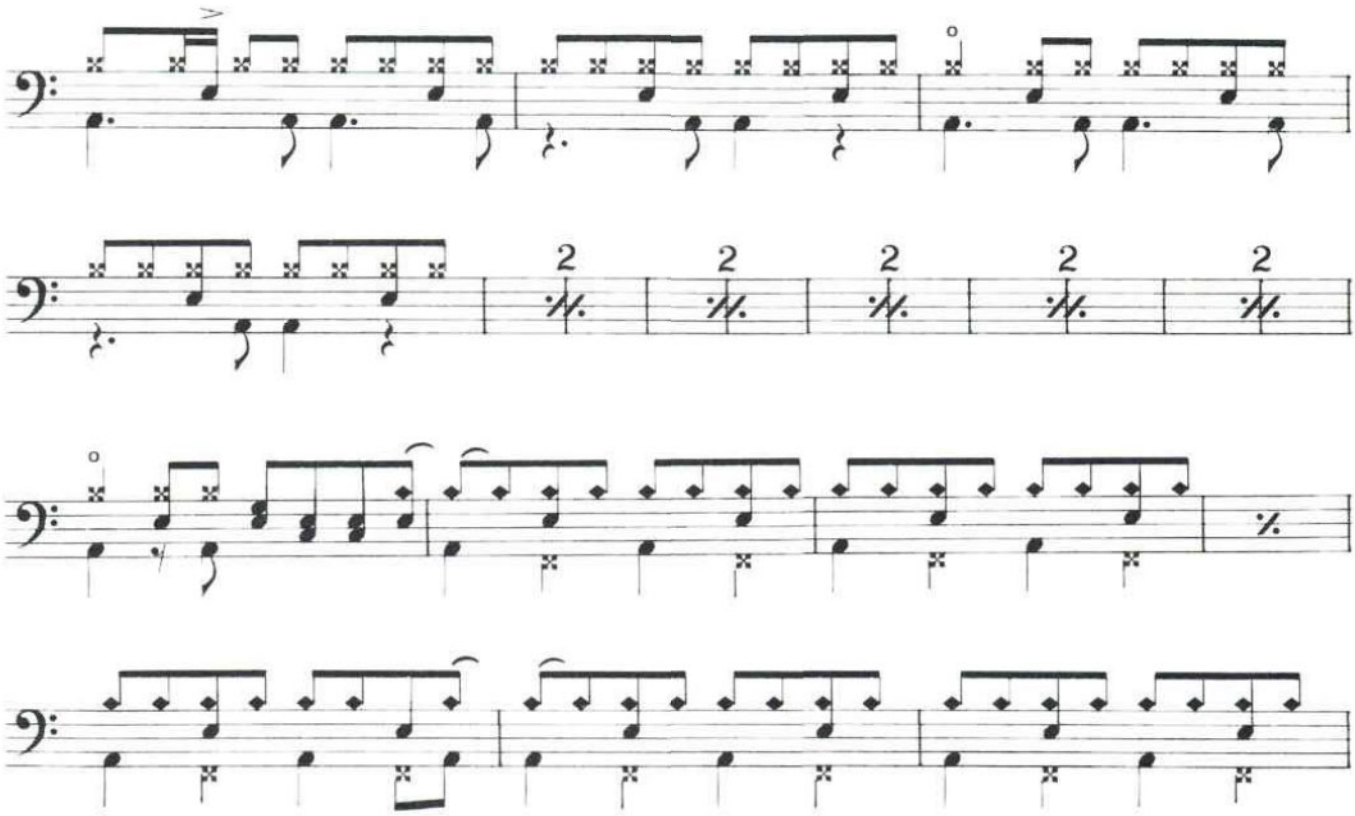
Photo by Ebet Roberts

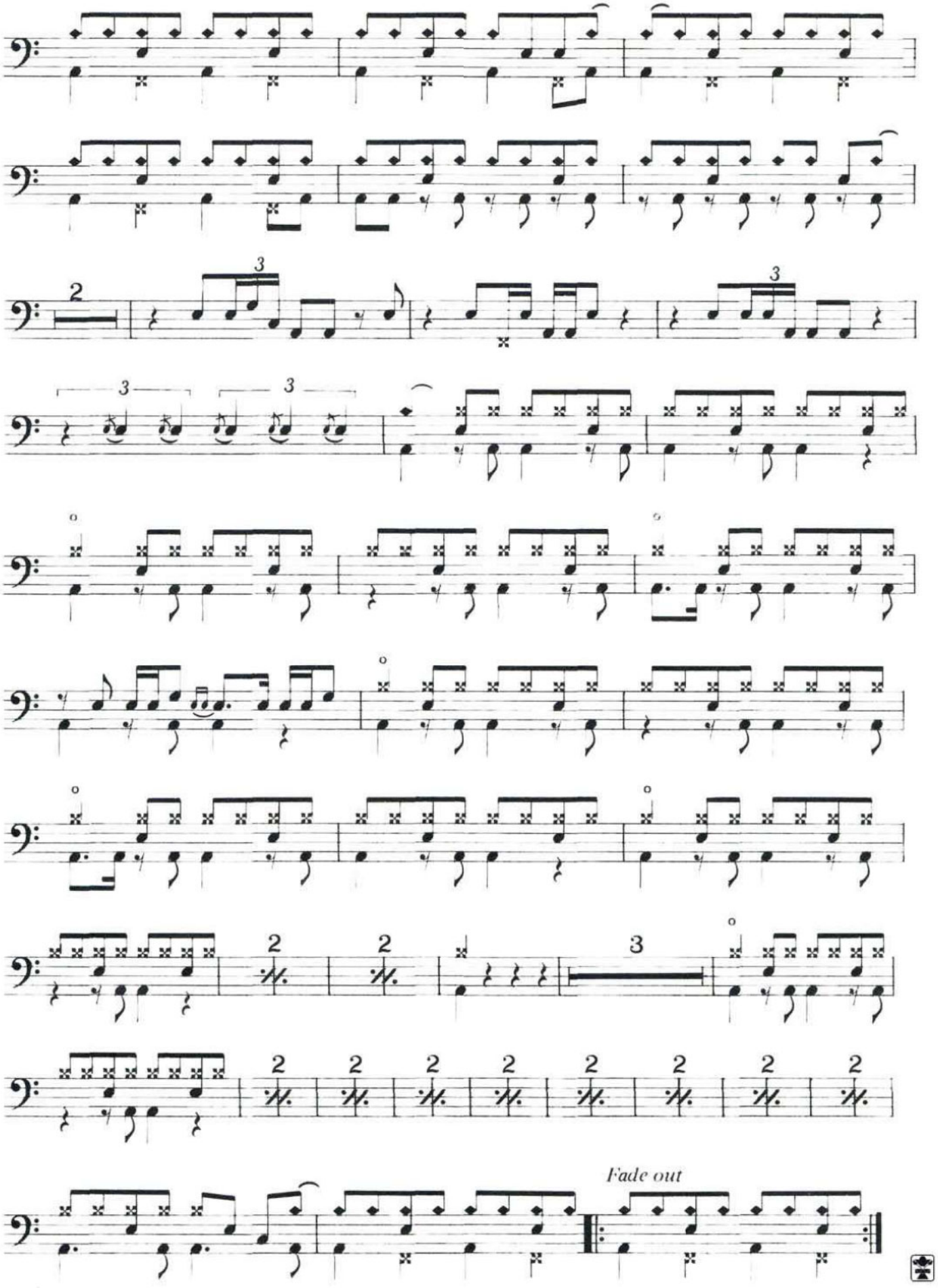
Transcribed by Mike Myers

Alan White: "Owner Of A Lonely Heart"

This month's *Rock Charts* features Alan White with Yes on one of their biggest hits, "Owner Of A Lonely Heart." Their album *90125* (Atco 90125), which was released in 1983, is a recording that proves White's abilities as a premier rock drummer. This particular cut demonstrates his tasteful approach; he plays a straight rock pattern which complements the guitar part, yet White adds slight embellishments to keep things interesting. The drum sounds heard in the intro of the tune, and again in the middle, were created on the album by a Fairlight CMI, EQ'd and digitally recorded. For live performance, Alan plays the pattern on the drums, while Tony Kaye doubles it on synthesizer.



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