

YES' "ROUNDAABOUT"

by Tim Morse

Anyone who has listened to "classic rock" radio will be familiar with the dramatic backward piano chord that opens the FM staple "Roundabout." The song introduced the masses to the British band Yes and their singular brand of progressive rock. Progressive rock was spearheaded in the early 1970s by such

able to find the groove. Steve Howe (guitars) would play his bold and inventive guitar passages over this unique backing. He was known for his ability to perform in many different styles of music (classical, jazz, country, ragtime, rock), as well as being able to synthesize these different elements into a cohesive whole. Keyboardist Rick Wakeman was from the Royal Academy of Music and brought his classical influence to Yes. His classical technique came through in his elegant piano lines and Mellotron string harmonies, yet he could also play a burning

and Squire. They discovered they had a mutual vision for a rock band that would be strong both vocally and instrumentally, and set about putting the first lineup of Yes together. Peter Banks (guitar), Tony Kaye (keyboards) and Bruford were enlisted to join them playing some truly



Yes, circa 1972 (clockwise from bottom left): Rick Wakeman, Bill Bruford, Chris Squire, Steve Howe and Jon Anderson

bands as Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Jethro Tull, Genesis and Yes, all of whom proved that a band could be different from the mainstream and still enjoy commercial success. "Roundabout" was not only a hit single for the band, but it also brilliantly captured Yes without compromising their artistic integrity (a rare thing indeed).

Although the band was made up of genuine virtuosos, they never played just for the sake of technique. Every member of the group performed an important role in the construction of their music. The rhythm section of Bill Bruford (drums) and Chris Squire (bass) were hardly content to just slip in to 4/4 groove and coast. Instead they would utilize different time signatures, emphasize precise off-beats and still be

Hammond organ solo, as he does in "Roundabout." Then over this tapestry of sound, vocalist Jon Anderson would add his high-pitched vocals, usually on relatively simple melodies. This was important because it was the hook that the average listener could grab onto, not the complex musicianship that surrounded it. Anderson's abstract, non-specific lyrics were another reason for the band's popularity, because they invited listeners to interpret them however they pleased, thereby making them seem more personal to the audience. "Roundabout" showcases Yes in their prime with all of these elements on display in a sprawling eight-minute odyssey.

Yes was born in 1968 in London by a chance meeting between Anderson

that continues to this day) and was replaced by the multitalented Howe.

The first record with Howe, *The Yes Album*, changed the group's fortunes completely. The success of that album led to their being invited to tour America as an opening act for Jethro Tull. They returned from the U.S. enthusiastic and energized, realizing that indeed there was a large audience for their style of music. But before they entered the studio again, they dismissed Tony Kaye and recruited ex-Strawbs member Wakeman as their new keyboardist.

The song "Roundabout" began its life as a guitar instrumental suite that Howe had written during a tour of Scotland in 1970. He showed the structure of the song to Anderson, and they came up with the majority of the

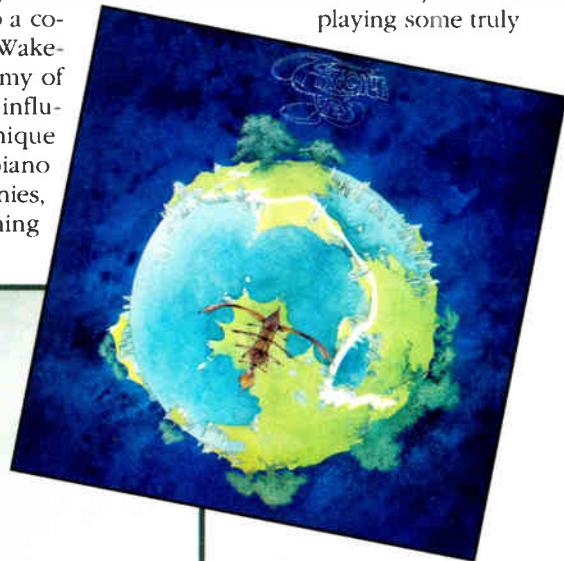


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awful gigs in the hopes that something would materialize from it all. The hard work did finally pay off—they slowly built a faithful audience and, on the strength of some good press notices, were able to secure a contract with Atlantic Records. Their first two albums, *Yes* and *Time and a Word* revealed a group that was still searching for its sound, and neither was very successful commercially. Banks was fired (beginning a trend of constant personnel changes

lyrics and melodies to it on their long bus ride back to London—many of the sights from that bus ride, such as Loch Ness, are included in the words. Even at the time, they felt that they might have written a timeless rock song, and when they brought it to rehearsals for the next album sessions, the other bandmembers gave their own input into the complex arrangement. When they were finished with rehearsals, Yes moved into London's Advision Studios with producer Eddy Offord for what would prove to be an intense month of recording. Advision was so named because it was primarily used

for recording commercials and jingles, but rock bands such as Emerson, Lake & Palmer (whom Offord also produced) were known to record there as well. It had the distinction of being one of the first independent studios in London.

Although Yes had extensively rehearsed "Roundabout," it was in some ways unfinished when the studio sessions began. Offord explains, "The band would write skeletons of songs in rehearsal and they were just skeletons. When we got into the studio, we would record every song in minute or a minute-and-a-half sections with just

drums, bass and maybe a scratch guitar. On the 24-track tape there was a splice every minute or so, and when you rewound it to the beginning of a song you'd hear the edits go by—swish...swish. We'd be in a song a little bit and someone would say, 'Let's try to put an acoustic section here, let's try this here...'. It was all very experimental, but we kind of built it up as we went along."

Bruford recalls, "We were well-served in all of this by having the ability to tape-edit—and having Eddy Offord, who would slash a 2-inch master tape without thinking about it and just glue another bit onto it. Tape editing was fundamental to this band creating this music at all. Because we couldn't play any of it through until we'd learned it." The 24-track and 2-track mastering deck were both Scullys. The console in the studio was custom-made by Advision, as were the monitor speakers (though they were created from JBL components). Offord reports that the speakers weren't very accurate in reproducing the music's low end, so this had to be taken into account as the track was recorded and mixed.

One of the most distinctive elements on "Roundabout" is Squire's dynamic bass guitar sound. Squire played his Rickenbacker 4001 through a Marshall bass amplifier on the basic track and then doubled his parts with one of Howe's big hollow-body jazz guitars (miked acoustically) to give the bass such a bright presence. Bruford played his Ludwig kit (with Paiste cymbals), and his famous snare sound was achieved by hitting rim shots on his metal snare drum miked with a Neumann U64. He also remembers playing milk bottles during the heavy bass ostinato portion of the song to create a different percussive effect. Howe used his beloved Martin 00-18 for the dramatic intro (his use of harmonics is said to have inspired The Edge of U2), and for all of the electric guitar parts he played a Gibson ES5 Switchmaster through a Fender Dual Showman amplifier. The guitars were recorded with an old AKG C28. Wakeman created his original Hammond organ sound by using a phaser and flanger simultaneously. Wakeman describes the settings for the flanger as "just slightly bubbling—set on the verge of getting the non-tonal type of sounds. The phasing had a really heavy sweep to it, and the Leslie was being turned on and off constantly." He also used his then-new Mini-

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