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# YES

## DINOSAURS

by Roy Trakin

"Yes, we are five individuals. That's what makes it what it is, how good it is and as complicated as it is. Each of us is integral in the eventual outcome. That's why it takes so long. We all have to agree, or at least compromise, on what's happening."

The speaker, ladies and gentlemen, is silver-haired Yes keyboardist Tony Kaye, perched in his luxury suite at Hollywood's glamorous Bel Age Hotel. Welcome to *Lifestyles Of The Rich & Famous*. I'm your host, Robin Leech (sic), here to interview the members of Yes on their first studio album in five years, *Big Generator* (or 90522-1)—and I don't know why...

Yes, I do. Since reforming in 1983 for 90125 and its hit single, "Owner Of A Lonely Heart," these art-rock veterans have undergone a facelift Elizabeth Taylor might envy. Regrouping with original members bassist Chris Squire, keyboardist Kaye, singer Jon Anderson, long-time drummer Alan White and newcomer-guitarist Trevor Rabin, Yes shucked its Roger Dean world of fairies and Ancient Ones for a hard-edged, modern techno-

pop sheen, aiming squarely at a brand-new MTV market.

"We had to let go of the '70s idea that you can make any kind of music you want and be successful," says a tea-sipping Jon Anderson, his hair done up in a series of colorful braids. "We just realized we could reach a lot more people. We've proved we can be commercial while still holding on to our musical ethics."

One forgets that Yes still take pride in their progressive credentials; they see themselves alongside such bands as Genesis, ELP and Pink Floyd. It is a tradition the individual heirs take very seriously.

"If no one bought these last two albums, there would have been fantastic disappointment that we weren't able to perpetuate this music machine," admits Kaye in a rare display of vulnerability. "But we seem to have found a format that not only pushes forward, but uses the past and all its knowledge."

"One of the great things about these last two albums is how we've managed to appeal to a wider age group than ever before," echoes drummer Alan White.

As for the group's own advancing ages,

43-year-old Jon Anderson, for one, is sanguine.

"You don't lose anything getting older and wiser," he counsels. "You can only gain. Age doesn't mean you can't make good music and I think we've proven that with this new album. Like good wine, we get better with age. And there's no question we will improve even more."

Strong talk, but these geezers are actually backing it up. Who would have thought this Yes comeback was even possible just seven-and-a-half short years ago? At the time, Yes—never the most stable of outfits—resembled a scab NFL team more than it did a first-class rock band. Both Jon Anderson and mondo keyboardist Rick Wakeman (arguably the group's most recognizable members) split, leaving Squire and White a rhythm section in search of some frontmen. The frontmen turned out to be Buggles mentors (and fervent Yes fans) Trevor Horn and Geoff Downes. That foursome recorded a single LP, 1980's *Drama*, before it headed, seemingly, to rock's elephant graveyard. But Yes proved resilient. After all, hadn't the band's demise been predicted after first Peter Banks, then Steve



Howe, then Bill Bruford, then Rick Wakeman and finally Jon Anderson left?

Three years later, Chris and Alan formed a group called Cinema, only after an ill-fated experiment called XYZ with Jimmy Page didn't pan out. When Tony Kaye and then Jon Anderson joined up, followed by guitarist Trevor Rabin, the new band felt suspiciously like an old one.

"There wasn't a foregone conclusion at the start that the group would be Yes, which meant we didn't feel as if we had to do things a certain way," recalls a grey-bearded, jovial Chris Squire. "The result was we didn't have to labor under the preconceptions that we were recording a Yes album. Which allowed us to break free."

The result was *90125*, an LP which showed that Yes had been listening to the new synth-dance music and incorporated it into a crisp, fresh approach which appealed to a whole new audience.

"And everyone credited Trevor Horn for it," says Kaye ruefully about the one-time band member who produced the record. "The impetus for that album was Cinema. We wanted to be in the Yes tradition but, for want of a better word, more commercial. We wanted to retain the old

**"I don't think about food too much. Sometimes I feel like vegetables..."**

**—Jon Anderson**

er. "But things go up and down, depending on five very different people's moods. Onstage, though, we can be the hottest thing going."

"There was a time when there wasn't a unified vision within the band," says Jon Anderson enigmatically. "After we did *Close To The Edge*, we wandered into the uncharted territories of *Topographic Oceans*. The group is more of a collective thing now. That's why the last two albums are such strong statements. It has evolved to the point where I'm doing

stronger work in Yes without having to put as much energy into it, because everybody else is putting their energy into it."

It wasn't always like that. Even in Yes' heyday, there were factions in the band. One of those posited beer-drinking meat-eater Rick Wakeman vs. teetotaling vegetarian Jon Anderson.

"Rick couldn't understand that I viewed it as a spiritual cleansing," confirms Jon. "You just go through a period where you learn to control yourself a little more, to get more out of yourself as a human being. That's all it was... self-realization."

In fact, Anderson is no longer a vegetarian.

"I don't think about food too much," he says. "Sometimes I feel like vegetables and sometimes I feel like a burger and a shake. A little bit of what you fancy does you good... and that's the truth."

There were any number of hidden resentments within the band toward the rather flamboyant Wakeman, as Chris Squire reveals when I ask him where the keyboardist is these days.

"I don't give a shit," he says matter-of-factly. "Isn't that the point? Where is he these days? That's the very question

## STILL ROAM THE EARTH

Yes integrity, yet make it a little easier on ourselves. That's what the plan was, long before it got to Trevor Horn."

Turns out Tony doesn't think too much of Trevor's work on the current platter, either, for which he gets a co-producer's credit.

"Legally, he had to get that credit, but in reality, this album was taken out of his hands pretty early on because he wasn't in tune with what we wanted," insists Kaye. "I believe the musicians should be the most important people on a project, not the producer. Trevor Horn just didn't know how to cope with five individuals who had strong ideas about what the music should sound like..."

Who could? This group might as well be a law firm as a rock 'n' roll band. And still, admirers swear by those patented Yes jams, when all five members are wailing away at once, the picture of harmonious synchronicity, yet retaining individual expression.

"The friction isn't anywhere near what it used to be," insists drummer White, who says he wants everybody to feel happy and have good relationships because that means the band will play well togeth-



"If it means getting in CREEM, we'll gladly change our name to 'Yepper.'"



you get when somebody builds themselves up like that in a high-profile way. I've been very wary about that. I have a feeling Rick taught me how that could happen to somebody. To this day, I'm not press-shy, but rather press-cautious . . ."

The Yes image has always been more about music, atmosphere and psychedelic album covers than personalities anyway. It couldn't have been easy for the band to update their storybook mythmaking for the machine-age, especially with Jon Anderson, still a hippie after all these years and proud of it . . . If the old Yes was organic, this version's a bar-coded, sharply-defined product.

"I agree," says Anderson. "To me, *Big Generator* is the planet, the rock business, (arms dealer) Kashoggi. He's the real big generator. He sells arms to kill people then invites rock stars to come sit on his yacht and drink champagne. The guy deals in death and the people are partying with him, man. Bizarre . . ."

The one thing Yes has added for the new album is a political consciousness, as illustrated by the anti-nuke epic, "I'm Running."

"Those Bob Dylan days are over," rues Anderson. "You can't just go out there and tell it like it is, but we subtly stick things in there now and then."

**"I could never figure out how we'd get a small corner in *Rolling Stone's* encyclopedia while Lou Reed rates a whole page."**

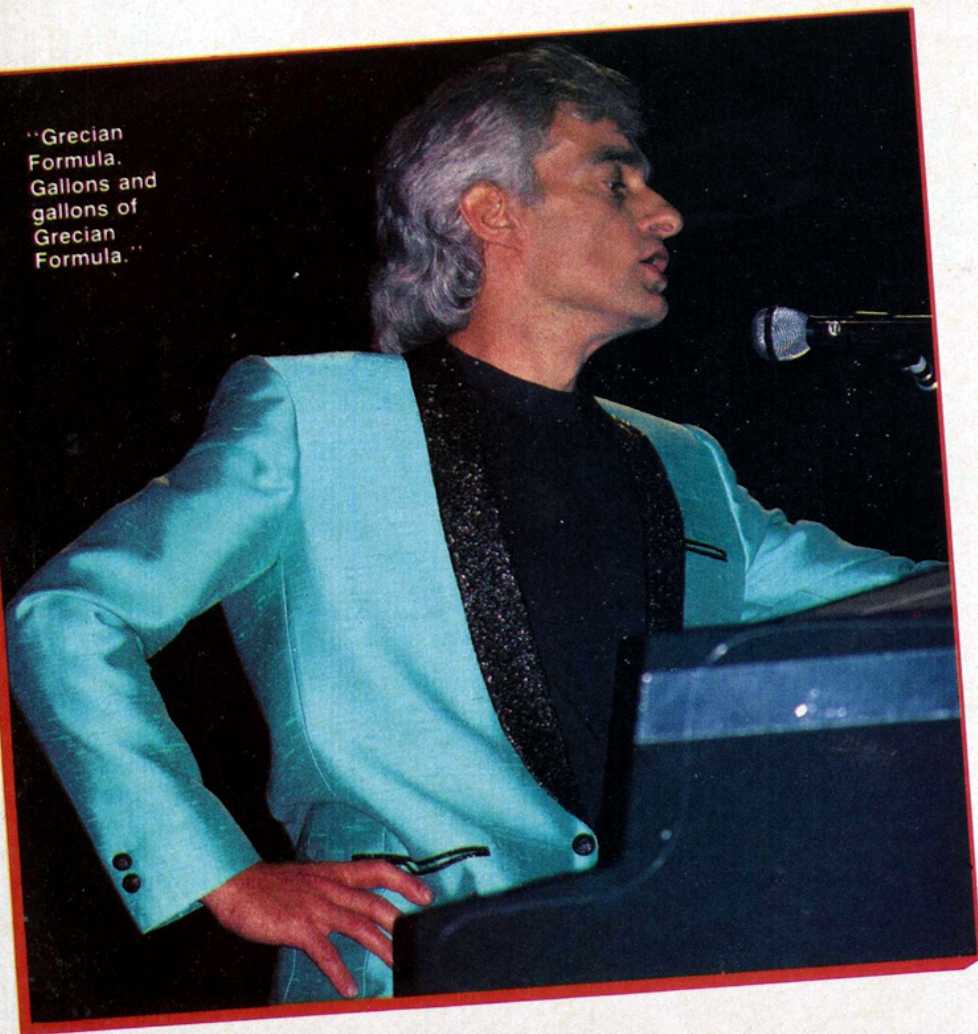
**—Chris Squire**

And what about Anderson's own "Holy Lamb (Song for the Harmonic Convergence)," the final track and one that causes the other band members to roll their eyes heavenward in exasperation?

"What do I care?," says the Celtic mystic with the faint burr of his Scottish heritage. "If I want to sing about the harmonic convergence, that's up to me. And if people want to listen and enjoy it, that's up to them. All I'm doing is letting you know I wrote a song called 'Holy Lamb' which I want to sing onstage to everybody because it is part of what I believe life is all about. The future is a friend of yours and mine. It is nothing to be afraid of. If



**"Grecian Formula. Gallons and gallons of Grecian Formula."**



we try to work in harmony with nature, we will succeed in transforming what we feel as our powerless state into a common thread that goes through every member of this planet . . ."

Sounds like the summer of love, maaan . . .

"You betcha, and I don't see that there's a better way," purrs Anderson. "I believe we need love and that love conquers all. We had to go through that psychedelic period so we could see. If we hadn't experienced that other world, we would think that this is all there is, which is the biggest load of self-indulgent rubbish. It is ignorant to think we are the center of the universe . . ."

"Jon always loses me, too," laughs Chris at his bandmate's tangled but well-meaning metaphysics.

Robin Leech (sic) again. As we bid a hearty adieu to our new-found Yes pals, we are left to ponder these prog-rock pioneers' longevity and two decades of staying power. It certainly hasn't been critical approbation, as Squire notes, "We're definitely a cult band. I know *Rolling Stone* never liked us and that bothers me a little bit because they're like the American Rock Almanac. I could never





and a very structured sound. I started sampling with 'Owner Of A Lonely Heart,' yet I still try to keep it direct. The challenge now is to learn to play the new album live. Our songs sometimes have three, four, five things going on at once that I have to be able to reproduce on the stage."

The reclusive Anderson, who makes his home in Barbados, is also raring to hit the road. "We're gonna go out there, have a good time and make some great music," he boasts.

Even the admittedly unflappable White agrees that the "life's blood of this band is live performance.

"Physically, I feel better now than I did 10 years ago," he says. "I'm pretty much up to anything that can be thrown at me."

It is left to Chris Squire, the only constant in Yes's every-changing constellation, to put his finger on the band's pulse, its *raison d'être*, its *Rosebud*: "While we're onstage playing, we still have that thing of everyone pulling together in one direction . . . There's no way I'd peddle the Yes name as a memory. For me, it's a current thing that is constantly being re-evaluated so it stays up-to-date.

"Yes is still around. We still exist, and the people still think we're fresh, so I guess we made the right move." □

figure out how we'd get a small corner in their encyclopedia while Lou Reed rates a whole page. I think that's a bit unfair. Look at the Dead, though. The critics never liked them and they're the hottest band in America right now. When you're up there on stage, getting that feedback from your audience, it doesn't matter what the critics say . . ."

Of course, that's it. Onstage, in front of the faithful. Precisely where Yes will be later this year when they embark on a global jaunt . . . where the five different sides of the band can coalesce into a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Not even an album can achieve that kind of singular unity and direction, but when it comes to the concert hall, Yes has but one purpose: to please its fans.

"I like simplicity," says Tony Kaye. "I grew up playing rock 'n' roll. I was a fan of American R&B, the blues and, of course, the Beatles. The simple stuff. I spent 19 years learning classical music, but I wouldn't want people to suffer that kind of excess.

"Yes is about layers. It is a group of arrangements where the orchestration is very important. In the beginning, there were only two levels—piano and organ—

