

# 'Yes' Bassist CHRIS SQUIRE

by Leonard Ferris

Chris Squire is a giant. Not just physically (he's well over six feet), but musically. His innovative, original and powerful bass playing is the core of the brilliant English group, Yes. And no matter how exceptional singer Jon Anderson, guitarist Steve Howe and keyboard player Rick Wakeman are, without Chris Squire they'd probably be just another band—a marvelous one, certainly, but not a Yes.

Squire is a very soft-spoken and, at times, seriously introspective, man. Music has been his major love since he was a teenager, and his devotion to it and to Yes is virtually all-consuming.

Though his parents had no musical background, Chris studied music theory in a London suburb school, even singing in the Gilford Cathedral Choir. At sixteen he and some friends decided to form a band, and since Squire was the biggest and could best hold the bass, he was elected. But during this time Squire was "into school rebellion" and was expelled. "But my parents were quite good about it, actually. They never hassled me about music at all," he says.

The band continued on an informal basis, playing weddings and the like, and mostly copying Beatles and Chuck Berry tunes.

In 1965 Chris and the group's organist split to join a better known local band, Syn. For two years they worked casuals all over the country and played frequently in London's Marquee Club. Syn's guitarist was Peter Banks who was to later be Yes' lead player through the group's first LP when he was replaced by Steve Howe.

Syn lasted into 1967, but disbanded because some of the members according to Chris, didn't want to make music their careers. "But the seeds of Yes were there," he says.

Then followed a nine-month period in his Kensington flat, sitting at home studying and practicing his bass. For a few months he played with "a freaky band in UFO-type clubs." The group, an experimental trio, was called Mabel Greer's Toy Shop, and Chris still cracks up when thinking about the strangeness of it all.

In 1968 Squire met singer Jon Anderson in London. Together, on 300 borrowed pounds, they formed Yes with Banks on guitar, drummer Bill Buford (later replaced by Alan White) and organist Tony Kaye who would give way to Rick Wakeman in 1971. For nine months they rehearsed, tried out and worked on getting the group to unite. Then when Sly and the Family Stone cancelled a London club date at the last



Photo by Neal Preston

minute, Yes was called on. The overwhelming reception they received that night hasn't died down yet, and Yes continues to be one of the most popular and critically acclaimed bands to emerge from Britain.

A Futurama bass, "Probably made in Italy and exported to England," was Squire's first instrument. At the time he joined Syn, Chris was also working at Boozey and Hawkes' organ store on Regent Street in London as the shop assistant and salesman. The company also had a shop in Picadilly which sold electric guitars. As an employee, the bassist took advantage of available discounts to get a 2-pickup Rickenbacker which he later converted to stereo. It's still his primary instrument, though the Rickenbacker company recently custom-made a six-string bass for him.

"I didn't like their amps, though," Squire recalls, "so when I was with Syn I got a Vox AC-30 head with two Vox speaker cabinets. It had a treble-boosting circuit on it. In the studio it's one of the best amps. I still use it."

When Yes was being formed, Chris turned to a Marshall 100-watt amp, but a year after the band started going on the road he switched to two Fender Dual Showmans with four Fender speaker cabinets. He says, "I was used to that size of a unit, but not to the 15" speaker sound. I wanted something like them, though, so I decided on Sunn cabinets with two six-by-twelves in each one."

He was still using Fender amps, though, when Yes planned its first U. S. tour, but was told there'd be plenty of American equipment available. He was given a Sunn amp with four-by-twelve cabinets, but didn't like the bass sound. As a result, he played the first tour using the lead guitar amp.

"When we returned to London," Chris says, "I went to Sound City to order a Sunn. They said Sunn had given one like I wanted to Eric Clapton and he had sold it to Sound City. It was the Coliseum lead amp. So I bought it right then. It's the one I still use."

Squire also utilizes a Cry Baby Wah and a Maestro Brassmaster. "The Maestro is the best fuzz that's made for bass. It gives me the amount of fuzz I want, plus the perfect blend of fuzz and straight tone." He also uses an un-named bass pedal, similar to what organists play with their feet. It was found in a kit form in Europe by the Yes equipment manager who put it together. It's tuned to the deepest organ tones "for extra depth," and had a sustain switch built in. There is also a graphic equalizer to boost various frequencies in order to com-

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pensate for differences in halls the band plays.

Additionally, Squire uses a Herco pick (though he occasionally plays with his fingers) and prefers RotoSound strings which he says "are great for one night, so I change them before each show."

When Yes goes into the studio for an album Chris Squire hauls in nine different basses, including the Rickenbacker, a Fender, a Guild and a Dan Electro 6-string. "I like to try them all out on the different songs, just to see what sounds best," he says.

About the only thing he ever does the same in the studio is refuse to plug directly into the board, preferring to mike his amp. "The board takes all the

character out of your sound," he claims. "It rules out all that you've previously done to get your own sound."

Squire is a very precise musician, especially when it comes to his equipment and amp settings, feeling that, "My sound is a combination of the amp controls, the guitar's controls and the volume we're playing at." The settings on the Sunn, which Chris states without hesitation, are 6 on the volume knob, 4 on the low frequency control, 3 on the high frequency, 5 on the mid frequency and 10 on the treble. The volume and tone controls on the treble pickup are both run wide open. The volume on the bass pickup is near full and the tone knob sits at 4.

Traditionally the function of the bass has been to lay down a steady beat, to be the anchor for the rest of the band. Squire is changing all that, preferring, instead, "to be an integral part of the band, to be as equally important as the other instruments." In this, he is, philosophically at least, akin to such bassists as John Entwistle, Jack Bruce and Felix Pappalardi, among others who are altering the instrument's entire future. "The bass," Squire feels, "is just as much a solo and melodic instrument as the guitar or even organ. It just depends how you want to play it." ■

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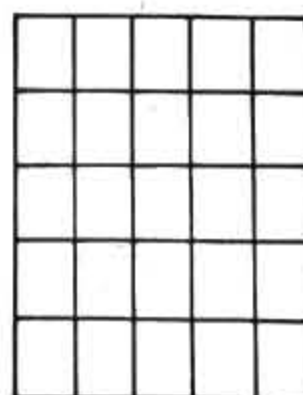
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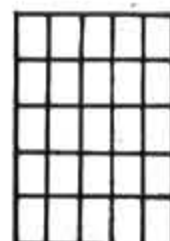
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