

Leading Question...

Alan White

Interview by Lorna Read

It had to happen. For as long it seemed like Rick Wakeman was straining at the leash, dying to be up and out of Yes and free to follow his own solo writing, recording and performing career. Even while playing with Yes it was as if he had taken on the role of a superior and was something remote and apart from the rest of the group.

When the break finally occurred it was more of a relief to the rest of the band than a cue for great lamentation. Naturally, the strain of the past few months took its toll — on the health of Rick as he tried to follow into careers at once, and on the general morale of the band.

But now, with ex-Refugee Patrick Moraz at their new keyboard wizard, Yes are embarking on a new stage in their career which looks as if it's leading them in an entirely new musical direction. Alan White stole some time from his busy recording schedule to talk about what's happening in the band.

I hear you are in the middle of recording your new album. At what stage did Patrick join the band?

We've been working full time on it for about three months now. It's very rewarding, although none of us have had time to do anything else. Patrick joined when we practically had it all together in a tentative form. It took him a few weeks to get into the idea of the way the band thinks and the speed it travels at because, when we are working on music, we really go all out. He just couldn't believe the speed we were working at and he had to catch up really quickly.

Moraz himself has a very impressive musical background. Do you think it will be easy for him to fit himself into the context of a band? Can you see any more 'Superstar' problems arising?

No, because I don't think he does anything he really doesn't like doing with Yes. If he says he doesn't like something or other everyone will help run the problem out and we'll all arrive at a compromise. But he's a fantastic worker.

Was Patrick already into the band and familiar with the numbers before he joined?

He really liked the band but we didn't want him to play any of the old numbers when he first joined. However, he's been listening to them all every night in bed for about four weeks now, in preparation for rehearsing them.

Did you, in fact, deliberately choose a keyboard player who didn't sound anything like Rick?

Yes. One guy came to audition for us and he played a number exactly like Rick would have played it. It was weird. We didn't want that because we wanted someone who'd add something different to the band, not just play the same as Rick. What Patrick's done is take it into another dimension so that even the old numbers won't sound the same as they used to.

Will Patrick's different keyboard style, then, make a great deal of difference to the band's music?

Oh yes. Patrick's a very strong player in all fields, it's just playing for Yes that's a difficult task as it demands so much from the keyboards. But there is a big difference in their styles. In fact, I doubt whether you'd recognise Yes music now. Of course, we haven't played in Britain since *Tales From Topographic Oceans*, but everyone knows Rick wasn't into that particular piece of music.

Do you think Rick was unfair in the things he said about it?

I think he was a bit. He had his solo thing on his shoulders as well, which got a bit out of hand. It just all overtook him and he couldn't handle it. He's doing his American tour right now and everyone in the band thinks he shouldn't do it because he had a heart attack six or seven weeks before he went away, but he's not going to work for a long time after the tour, at least a year or a year and a half.

You say you doubt if I'd recognise Yes music now. In what ways has it changed?

Topographic Oceans sounded to me like there were four people in the band plus a keyboard player. Now, with Patrick, it sounds like five people playing music together, a whole unit. It's fantastic.

Is the new album another concept album?

Yes. Basically it's to do with anything that's opposite, like black and white and war and peace, but the words are pretty much towards the whole thing of violence and war and showing the opposite. We haven't agreed on a title yet. You'll really find this album different from anything Yes has ever done before. It's a lot more human. It's very easy to listen to and very funky, and there are lots of really nice sections in it, good moments where you really get high on the music. As yet, we're still at the stage of getting lyrics across, but as far as I can see there are lots of good



times there and good lyrics. The first whole six or seven minutes of side one is the basic concept part. The whole of side one is one track, but this first six or seven minutes is all a long song which sets out what is happening.

What do you think is the best album Yes has ever made?

This one, definitely. Yes has got an individualistic thing within the band that everybody keeps to, like Steve plays all kinds of inverted chords and shapes that I'll probably never learn in my life and I can play rhythms he'll probably never know. This thing is evident on all the records, you can hear it. It's just the way the whole thing forms as one that has changed on this album. I'm really excited about it, as you can probably tell.

Does Patrick play exactly the same keyboard instruments as Rick did?

Not exactly. He uses a Fender piano whereas Rick would never use a Fender. He's got a Clavinet - Rick didn't have one of those, either. Patrick has two Mini Moogs, a mellotron and a string machine and he does a lot with a thing called a Synthi which you put your instrument through. He has his own sound man who's been getting some fantastic noises out of the instruments. Some are really horrific. One sequence on the new album includes a sound which is like a monster walking right through the record. We also do a tremendous battle sequence between the two of us.

Are there more electronic sound effects on this album than on any of the others?

No, I think as much as, but not more. We always try to use them subtly. But as I said, there's this part of the record where Patrick and I have this whole argument, but that's an understatement. It's a charge which drops into a battle sequence. It's a terrific sound.

Do you have a hand in writing, particularly percussive sections like this?

I haven't actually written this bit, although I have written other parts of the album. Everybody has played a big part in writing things on the album this time, which has been good. I will probably conceive what the sequence contains later, but the whole band is playing as a rhythm section underneath this battle sequence and Chris wrote the basic rhythm while the sections in between were something that came about while we were rehearsing.

When is the album due for release?

I'm not quite sure. We have to finish it in two or three weeks because we have a lot of heavy things coming up like another American tour on 8th November. We wait at least ten days off to prepare for that and rehearse the old numbers with Patrick.

Are there any plans for gigs in Britain?

Yes. We planned out our next year about two or three weeks ago and we're going to do about five concerts at the end of February.

Surely it doesn't pay you to play in Britain, now. Have you ever thought of taking up residence in the States?

It doesn't pay anyone to play here, any more. It's a drag. You can't find places big enough to make you enough money to pay for the perfect music you want to put over. It costs us money to play because we have to fly our PA system over from the States because there isn't one here which is good enough and big enough to use in the largest places here. Everybody's asking us about whether we'll go and live in the States. We have talked about it, the idea's been flung around but we haven't made any decision. Jon would like to spend a couple of years in Jamaica to get over his an problems.

How is the morale in the band now?

Really good, especially with the new album. It's going to sound fantastic on stage. It's the perfect sort of music to be played on stage and we're working on a new stage set at the moment, with new scenery. Our positions on stage have changed, now. Patrick and I are at the back of the stage and the other guys are at the front.

Was there any feeling towards the end of Rick's time with Yes that the band was getting stale and needed some new blood?

Not really. The trouble the band had then was coping with the whole problem of Rick. For three or four months before he left the band there was a bad feeling amongst us every time we played music. We could never talk sensibly about something. It would get a bit crazy because we'd say something and Rick wouldn't do it, and you'd ring Rick up and he always had the Amaphone on. You'd leave a message and he'd never ring you back. It was Rick himself. The band wanted to get on with it and get things done but I think Rick was finding it a bit hard.

Was there real animosity between you?

Not really. We were more worried about him than anything else.

Did you ever think the band might have to split?

Well, I don't of felt it a few minutes before we did that something was going to happen. If he had stayed with the band a few people would have had to bend a lot in different directions because he was definitely into



what he was doing and it was getting crazier and crazier all the time. It was just a tax on his mind at the end and he didn't play well on the last American tour.

What musical direction do you see the band taking now?

We've definitely got funkier on this album. You can actually dance to some parts of it.

Is this the influence of America?

No, I think it's just where the band's trying to meet that kind of feel, 50-50 from what it was into for so long before, and I think this album has broadened our music out that little bit more.

Do you think you might lose any of the die-hard Yes fans through doing this?

Well, it's the same with every album, you lose a few, you gain a few.

Have you incorporated any new instruments into your drum set-up since *Tales From Topographic Oceans* days?

Yes. Jon and I went to a junkyard about the time we started making this album. We were on the way to his place and we stopped off for about an hour at this junkyard, in Slough somewhere, and spent the time finding pieces of metal, looking for new percussive sounds. We found a lot of interesting things, like the wheels of forklift trucks, and I've added them all to my kit. I've got pieces of metal that sound like gongs, but they only cost me about a quid. Now they call Jon and I Steptoe and Son! You can hear some of the sounds on this album.

You, as the drummer, really have the most high-energy job in the band. Can you see a time coming when you'll just feel too old and unable to put out that amount of energy any more?

I hope not, but with drummers, yes, it's very hard. I don't like to think about things like that. I think I'm into a good thing right now and so I live for the present. I could be doing a million things by that time, but I don't think you'll see me speculating on the property market or anything like that.

Do you ever feel now that Yes has nothing more to aim for because you've conquered the world?

There's always something to aim for. If Yes had reached what they were after, there would be no point in the band continuing, because everybody would be satisfied.

What are you aiming at, then?

We don't know what we're after so that makes it all the more interesting. You just keep bettering yourself all the time.