

PROGRESSIONS OF POWER

The newly resurrected YES are light years ahead of the old, claims a starstruck LAURA CANYON

“THINK once we get over this idiotic season of man where we’re going around screwing each other, literally, then we can really start moving in the direction which we’re ready to go in – which is space. We’ve got to move into space. I mean, why do we keep making ‘Star Wars’ movies? We’re going to go

there. I just know. It has to happen and we’ll all live to see it, all of us will, because you don’t die . . . It’s now getting too cosmic.”

See. An admission. Straight from the mouth of well-known singer and soothsayer Jon Anderson.

The head of an American organisation has been claiming for months that aliens from outer space have infiltrated the Western World and are among us even as we speak, barely distinguishable from the rest of us earthlings; and the small,

pensive bloke with the soft Lancashire accent and the softly piercing eyes is as good as agreeing that somewhere along the line alien superbeings with magnificent minds came down from outer space and took over the bodies of Yes.

How else do you explain a resurrection after so long with music that’s advanced light years from Yeggles and previous band incarnations? How else do you explain the remarkable ‘Owner Of A Lonely Heart’, a song that’s amazingly appealed to intellectual progressive-rockers and dance fans alike? How else do you explain a live show that’s gone from self-indulgent theatrical ninnyness to something as sleek and streamlined and powerful as a rocket ship – crystalline sound, flawless harmonies, virtuoso musicianship that sends your heart soaring into outer space, heavy, classy, glorious stuff, practically all the new songs and the best of the old songs and not a through-the-past-dorkly moment among them?

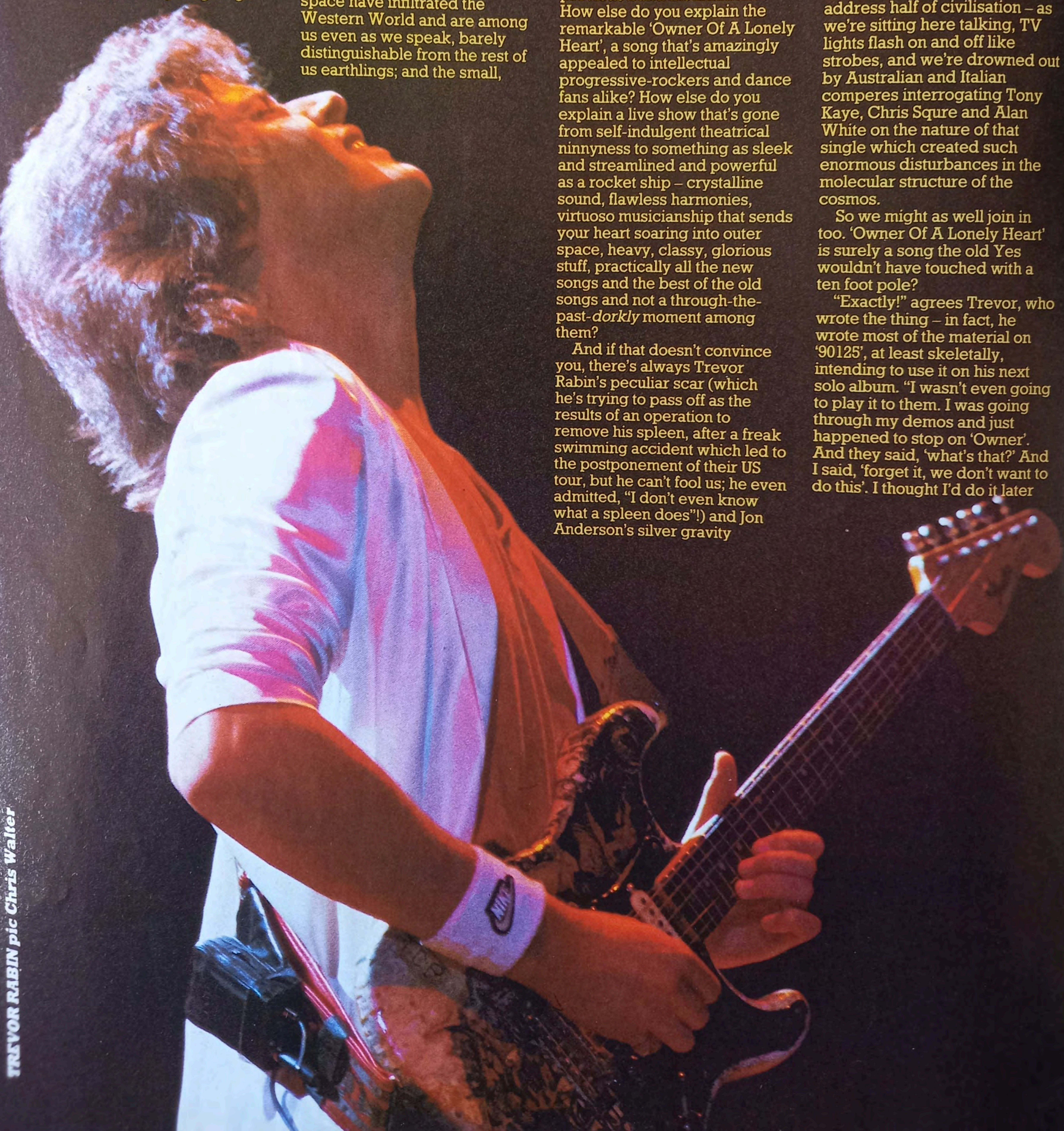
And if that doesn’t convince you, there’s always Trevor Rabin’s peculiar scar (which he’s trying to pass off as the results of an operation to remove his spleen, after a freak swimming accident which led to the postponement of their US tour, but he can’t fool us; he even admitted, “I don’t even know what a spleen does”!) and Jon Anderson’s silver gravity

plimsolls and Mork From Ork stage outfit.

I’m talking to them in a room at the massive Los Angeles Forum at soundcheck time, where almost 40,000 people will be getting to see them over the next couple of nights. The place is busier than Oxford Street during rush hour, with radio and TV people buzzing around, grabbing a Yes member here and a Yes member there to address half of civilisation – as we’re sitting here talking, TV lights flash on and off like strobes, and we’re drowned out by Australian and Italian comperes interrogating Tony Kaye, Chris Squire and Alan White on the nature of that single which created such enormous disturbances in the molecular structure of the cosmos.

So we might as well join in too. ‘Owner Of A Lonely Heart’ is surely a song the old Yes wouldn’t have touched with a ten foot pole?

“Exactly!” agrees Trevor, who wrote the thing – in fact, he wrote most of the material on ‘90125’, at least skeletally, intending to use it on his next solo album. “I wasn’t even going to play it to them. I was going through my demos and just happened to stop on ‘Owner’. And they said, ‘what’s that?’ And I said, ‘forget it, we don’t want to do this’. I thought I’d do it later



TREVOR RABIN pic Chris Walter

on a solo record. But they said, 'play it back, let's look into it'. And we did it. Thank God for that!

"I didn't think it was right for the album – this was before we had gone into the concept of what the album was going to be. We had this broad thing of what we wanted to do – something new, using modern technology. We decided not to consider anything that's being done at the moment, like the new English bands or the new wave or whatever you want to call it, or anything that's been done in the past. Obviously, there's going to be traces of where the roots are – some of it still sounds like old Yes, Seventies music in parts – but I think that the combination of that and what we tried to do has worked."

THE band's present line-up is being billed as the 'Original Yes', but that of course depends on your definition. Bill Bruford was drummer before Alan White came along, and though Tony Kaye was Yes' first keyboard player, Rick Wakeman is best known in a list that includes Patrick Moraz, Geoff Downes and, most recently, for five minutes or so, Eddie Jobson. Peter Banks was the first guitarist, but Steve Howe's got to be the one everyone associates with the band. And Buggie Trevor Horn, who took over Jon Anderson's singing spot until December '80 at Hammersmith Odeon, the last Yes were seen on planet Earth until now, is currently the band's producer. Only Chris Squire, bass player supreme, has stayed constant.

Back in early '82, Chris and Alan started working together. They called up Trevor Rabin – who'd been recommended by producer 'Mutt' Lange and was working on a solo album at the time – then Tony Kaye and, finally, Jon Anderson. The band was going to be called Cinema but, as soon as the newspapers printed the story, a dozen obscure bands from America, apparently called Cinema too, called up and threatened to sue, so Yes it was.

Not everyone thought it was a good idea. Steve Howe, to name but one, said the immortal word "Ugh" when first told of Yes' reformation.

"If he wants to say that, fine," reasons Jon. "In the heat of the moment you tend to say things that sometimes later on you regret – your mouth keeps opening and things come out and you can't help it. Steve's a nice guy. I've worked with him a lot, for years, and I've got to know him. We became a bit unhappy with each other, though, so you get these little bits of frustration."

But why did they want to go back to Yes, something that had had its golden age, something that's over? Is Yes something out



Pic Chris Walter

YES OFFSTAGE: "getting on really well"

there that's bigger than all its various individual members?

"For me it is, because it means something," says Jon. "I don't know what it means, I just think that it means something – I don't know, you can be in my dream if I can be in yours – I always thought that was a beautiful sentiment! So I'm dreaming my dream, I'm just enjoying being in Yes, because it's an incredible focus point for my physical being."

"I don't go onstage and think, hey look at me, I'm in Yes; I don't do that. All I want to do is get in touch with something, and I do. I don't know what it is, but I'm there with everybody else, and it's just the crowd and the band and this music, and all of a sudden there it is and you're there, you're elevated into this thing. It's really just *music*; music is the magical substance."

CERTAINLY, Yes seems to hold a magnetic attraction for Sensible Trevor. What with being asked by Asia to join them at one point, and planning a collaboration with Rick Wakeman and Carl Palmer a while back, the man seems fated to have something to do with some aspect of the band.

"That's right. When this came up I thought, well it's got to be fate. I was about to sign a solo contract, I didn't want to rush into anything. But at the last minute I joined the band."

Why Yes and not Asia?

"Because they're better. I think Alan is a much better drummer and Chris is very good."

But, at least before '90125' came out, a lot of people might have said they were interchangeable bands?

"Before the record possibly, but hopefully we're totally different. Because what attracted me to this band was that they wanted to do something new, and that's what I wanted to do."

'STEVE HOWE, PLEASE CALL THE SYSTEMS OPERATOR', a voice suddenly booms over the loudspeaker like a message from God.

"It's not the same one," Trevor chortles. I tell you, this cosmic stuff really gets to you!

Okay. The truth. Was Trevor – all of ten years old when the band first started – ever a Yes fan? (The others have dubbed him "Young Trev".)

"I've always been very critical of any band," answers Trevor tentatively. "I've never liked everything *anyone's* ever done. I love 'Fragile', 'Time And A Word', 'Close To The Edge', the 'Yes' album. When I first heard 'Fragile' I thought, God, what is this? So yes, I was a fan. When they did 'Topographic Oceans' and 'Tormato' and things like that, though, it was all very good but I thought they were going a bit above some people's heads, not very accessible."

What about Anderson – a

Rabin fan?

"I didn't know who Trevor Rabin was. See, I'm not a real rock and roll fanatic, I don't listen to every album like some people do in bands. Trevor's a real great listener, he listens to so much music. I'm more tied up in other things. Yesterday, for instance, I was listening to one of the old Tony Hancock tapes, 'The Reunion Party'. You've got to have a laugh sometimes."

A sense of humour is probably the last thing you'd associate with Yes. Mention the name, and most people come up with words like grandiose, pompous, progressive, pretentious . . . sounds so interlaced that they've knit themselves into a massive scarf and strangled themselves with the thing.

"I think," ponders Jon, "there's half a dozen bands that started this whole trend and we were one of them – King Crimson, ELP, Genesis, Yes, and one or two others. Basically, it came down to a desire to give more to the audience than what they're paying for. The idea was, hey, we're successful, but let's plough the money *back in* and do a great stage show, let's talk theatre, let's try to do something other than a going on in jeans sort of trip."

"In them days you didn't have video or lasers or anything like that. So, during the Seventies, we developed this sort of trend. And we were really amateurs at the game, and sometimes it became *too* gross. But sometimes it was incredibly beautiful and these things will never be seen again."

"In some ways, anyone who says Yes were all kind of techno-flasho-grandioso dinosaurs should look at the work that went into doing it. I don't think there's any harm in doing it. I think probably financially we were suffering all along the line, because we really didn't know how much we were spending. But we felt we were doing something to improve the artistic development of what one would say is rock and roll."

"I DON'T think we play rock and roll, it's just a word. Like a girl said to me yesterday – she didn't know who I was – 'hey, a rockstar would like wearing shoes like that.' He points at his silver shiny plimsolls. "And I said, 'yeah, I suppose you're right'. So I'm still in rock and roll, even though I don't remember writing a good rock and roll song; I can happily leave that to a lot better qualified people. I just make music of another sort of stuff, and it kind of rolls into rock and roll."

"I take everything I do very seriously – you have to; you can't just say, well, I don't care about this, really. To grow up with the

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Beatles, which I did, and the Stones and the Beach Boys and the Who and Zappa and all the great music of the Sixties, to move into the Seventies you couldn't really be an extension of them because they were so great. So you had to be something different, and that's what Yes was. And, luckily, we became successful by being different. I don't think Yes has done one album that's the same as the next, because art is chance and good chance is jazz music, clear spontaneous happenings sort of thing.

"You could say, 'what a load of s**t that is, he takes himself too seriously' – but I do take it seriously and I love doing it. It's a profession, and I feel proud to be in this profession. It's better than being a waiter – and I did want to be a waiter in the South of France once. I was 14. I think it was something to do with the women – I'd seen a few bikinis."

"The funny thing is," says Trevor, "Tony, the manager, got a call from some black promoters saying, 'this new band, Yes, is happening man! Do you want to do some soul shows?' It's amazing," and a nice fat finger in the direction of Trevor's native South Africa, which he originally left in protest against their disgusting *apartheid* policy. "Yes have always been known as a band with a lot of technical ability, but no feel – cold, calculated music. And here we are, playing soul music! And you can't have music with any more feel than that!"

So the old men have got a bit of life in them yet. Funnily enough, last time I talked to Trevor – when he was working with Manfred Mann,

collaborating with Jack Bruce and getting produced by Ray Davies – he confessed that older men were probably his biggest vice (make that his only one; this respectable guitar hero learnt to play while miming to Cliff Richard records!).

"Yes, here we go," says Trevor. "It seems to creep up on me all the time."

Does he only like more mature musicians, what with his own virtuoso reputation?

"I think so. I like playing with guys who are really, really proficient virtuosos. A lot of times, with musicians who haven't really studied their instrument, they don't even think of what's out there, they just think of what they can do. And there's a whole world of things to do, and if you're not capable of playing it then you're not capable of creating it and it just narrows your horizons."

"With guys like Chris and Jack and Alan and Jon vocally – he's got an incredible ear for picking up things – there's no frustrations musically. I've never been into the punk thing. I'm one of those completely unfashionable people who hate the Clash; I think they're awful, and a lot of people think they're fantastic – Roger Daltrey says they're one of his favourite bands! So I go against the grain sometimes. I don't like following fashion, because to me fashion is so unfashionable; how long is it going to last? My music, I think, is like a pair of *Levis* – it's never in and it's never out."

AND THE band aren't treating touring as a painful obligation . . .

"I thought," says Trevor, "when we get on the road it's

just going to be like a job for them, and I thought, well, I'm really looking forward to it, I love playing live more than anything so I hope they're going to enjoy it. And everyone's having such a good time. They don't come across as old men."

"If that was the case we'd do this tour and go to Europe and that would be it; but we're coming back here, we want to go to the Orient, and we're trying to push the management into setting up dates in Turkey, Greece, Israel, everywhere. We're going to be touring the whole year."

"I said to the guys," says Jon, "okay, we're going to be Yes, let's get out on the road and prove that we're a damn good band; if the album makes it, great, that's just another feather in our cap, but let's go back on the road and prove the cynics wrong, that Yes was not a dinosaur band and that it didn't drop dead. Yes was screwed by the business and that's why the band split up, a badly-organised cock-up."

They're all thrilled with the audiences they're getting (half first generation Yes fans and half a mixture of their offspring and the new pop set) and grateful for another shot at stardom.

"Everybody in the band's different; we all have different thoughts on what's happening now," says Jon. "I'm quietly amused and quietly amazed. When you're hot you're hot, when you're not, forget it!"

Trevor, of course, has already had his share of pop adulation, having led the South African teen band Rabbit, a kind of Boer City Rollers, before going solo in a less commercial, more

musically enterprising direction.

"But it's my first time in a market like this," he says. "I've been trying to do this for 10 years. I'd be lying if I said anything other than it's great."

It didn't bother him, handing over his songs for the rest of Yes' contributions, or sublimating his ego for the sake of the band, he swears. Being solo was getting a bit of a headache anyway, what with the record companies putting pressure on him, saying, "you've been called an HM god, you've got to make a Heavy Metal record", and the whole thing turning out "not as satisfying as this".

And Anderson, who'd done various things like his successful projects with Vangelis, a ballet performed by the Scottish ballet company and his solo albums, adds, "I enjoy being in a group. I don't like being a solo artist because everything was just a little bit too much up to me to make too many decisions. Happily, now I can work with Yes and still have parallel commitments."

IS YES going to grow? Is this line-up a long term one or will it fall apart as quickly as it began?

"Your guess is as good as mine," shrugs Jon. "I don't know. I'd love it to last forever and I think if we pace it properly it will work."

"We're definitely going to do another album and another tour," says Trevor, "and at the moment we're getting on really well. But who knows? I had a spleen and I lost it eight weeks ago in an accident, know what I'm saying?"

YES ONSTAGE: "no self-indulgent theatrical ninnyness."

