

The story of Yes is a chronicle of achievement that owes little to the hype of this superstar era.

The group was created three years ago and consisted of Chris Squire, Bill Bruford, Jon Anderson, Peter Banks and Tony Kay. Their idea was to put together some of their musical ideas and see what would transpire. The result was the first Yes album, followed soon afterwards by *Time And A Word*.

They weren't smash-hit albums, but they were enough to bring to the attention of the more aware rock audience the fact that here was an *original* band.

People had started to listen. They went to see the group in the club and concert venues of the 'progressive' circuits — and they realised that Yes, unlike some of the other 'thinking' bands of that period, were much more than just a studio band.

Their following grew rapidly; Peter Banks left and was replaced by Steve Howe. They kept writing and developing their own ideas; they went into the studios again to record their third album.

The result was *The Yes Album*. It was released just over a year ago and was an immediate success. Record sales took it to the top levels of the album charts, and more than one music paper voted it the best album of 1971.

But it takes more than one top-selling album to confirm success and maturity in the world of pop. Many bands have emerged on the strength of one album, only to flounder again in the ever-changing maelstrom of public taste. They've either 'gone commercial' in order to maintain their sales, or they've carried on playing their music — developing their own ideas along directions where few of their audience have been prepared to follow.

Yes have continued to play their own music — and they've conceded little to the tastes of the record-buying

YES-A QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

Steve Howe, who replaced Peter Banks.





public. But rather than develop away from their following, they've taken their audience with them.

They've also made one further change of personnel; Rick Wakeman has replaced Tony Kay on keyboards. He makes his debut on the band's new album, *Fragile*.

'Rick has added a lot to our sound,' said drummer Bill Bruford. 'The keyboard parts are now much more definite. He has output – and that's excellent. It's vital that every instrument should say something when played, and be silent when not. Everything should be there for a purpose.'

MANY MISTAKES

'Rick knows how to get that kind of economy. He tends to know the right way to get from A to B. We might want to move from one key to another in so many bars. Rick can tell us how to get there.'

Bruford, as one of the three original members of the group, has watched them develop and change as time has passed.

'When I listen to our early stuff,' he said, 'I realise how many mistakes there were. But that's something I'm only aware of now.'

'I'm not embarrassed by our early material. It's important because it's what we were doing then.'

Bruford's conversation reflects the maturity that is apparent throughout Yes' work. It's a maturity that reflects the integration of five musically-active personalities along one common path – one respect in which Yes have been notably successful.

Bruford explains the means by which Yes have overcome the very basic problem of 'getting it all together':

'We work on the basis of give and take,' he said. 'It's the operation of a kind of "democratic vote". We start with the basic idea – on *Heart Of The Sunrise*, for

example, the basic idea began with ten seconds of music... a melody contributed by Jon. We all make suggestions, which are accepted or rejected by the others – and the music grows.'

'Sometimes it seems to come very slowly, but when it flows, it flows well.'

'In theory we are totally equal – Yes have no leader as such – but, in practise, it's the guy with the strongest idea and personality at that moment who wins through. Sometimes it can be a little battleground at rehearsals.'

'You are in a group, I suppose, because you are individually insufficient. You learn from what everyone else is doing. You form directions by what you want to do. As long as that coincides with everyone else, then it's O.K.'

He recognises the dangers of complacency – and finds it necessary to qualify his position:

'Sooner or later there comes a point where satisfaction can only be found outside the context of the group. When that happens to one or more of us, then Yes will presumably split.'

Such a situation can only be, at the moment, a matter for speculation. Yes are more concerned with the present – and the paths they have to follow.

'We are now in the position where we can choose exactly what we do,' Bruford explained. 'We've just turned down a tour of Japan and Australia. It was an excellent offer – but we had to choose between the advantages and disadvantages that it would entail.'

'Touring pays, you see, but you can't do any writing. Touring is maybe best for a spontaneous band.'

'There's a very important time-lapse in anything we do. A band might start recording an album around the beginning of the year and it will be about Summer when it comes out. They'll tour for four or five months after that – playing material from the album. It means that they'll be playing the same stuff up to twelve months after the initial idea.'

'We will be on a tour of the States in February and March. We've got two albums in the charts out there and we could make a fortune just touring around. But I'm concerned for our music. We don't want it to suffer — you can't go on flogging a dead horse. It's all down to the question of money or music.'

'You can't kill the goose that lays the golden egg. It costs to sit around — there's always money to be paid out on equipment, the roadies, the van . . . but touring costs in terms of music. That's the essential paradox. You need time and directions.'

If touring suits spontaneous bands, then Yes will be the last to benefit. They are not, Bruford explained, a spontaneous outfit.

'Improvisation is very complex,' he said. 'It's a process of spontaneous composition. To compose as you play is very, very difficult. It has been done, but the truth is that rock musicians, I'm afraid to say, have been appalling.'

THINKING BAND

'We don't believe in leaving things to chance. We work on the basis of pre-planning and pre-thought. It would be nice sometime to rehearse in front of an audience — then they could see exactly what we go through.'

But although Yes are a 'thinking' band, they are still aware of the relevance of the audience to their performances.

'I think we need an audience as a kind of catalyst,' Bruford explained. 'We always run through a sound check before the audience comes in — and we always play badly. The actual gig is always better.'

'I don't know exactly what it proves, except that the audience are, in some way, important. Essentially, though, the audience is not essential to the music we play.'

One aspect of the enigma of Yes is that, while they are often cited as having one of

the most dynamic stage acts of any band on the English rock circuit, they themselves do not set out to be a visual band.

'There's no strong visual element,' Bruford said. 'But I like watching musicians move — like the way Steve plays. I think I'm maybe visual . . . I like watching movement.'

'Exploding, jumping . . . we don't. There's just the physical involvement of playing.'

With sales of the new album rapidly growing — and that tour of the States set up — it seems without question that Yes are poised to become one of the most important bands on the international rock scene — a position that is not, some would say, without 'responsibility'.

But Yes have no pretensions about what they want to do. They're not out to change the face of music — just to improve themselves and their writing. But they still admit to some personal ideas.

'For myself,' Bruford said, 'I'd like to get back to the start. I'd like to get back to the basic relationship of the band, the audience, and the music.'

Audiences seem to come to gigs these days with a lot of preconceptions — you get the feeling that when they applaud, they're applauding themselves. You realise suddenly that you've missed something and nobody's noticed. There's something more than music there . . . lights, preconceptions, notions, groupies — and all in the name of music.

Audiences are in a way better in the States. They're more idiotic. They couldn't care less who you are — they'll still make a lot of noise. They're more spontaneous . . . they don't treat musicians as anyone special. That's good. They react more.

'If only we could all get back to day one . . .'

JOHN BAGNALL

*Chris Squires (top) and
vocalist/lyricist Jon
Anderson*

