



Yes – Open Your Eyes – Eagle Records (1997)/ Sireena Records (2012) double 180-gram vinyl SIR 4018, 74:07 *:**

(Jon Anderson – lead vocals; Steve Howe – guitars, steel guitar, mandolin, banjo, vocals; Billy Sherwood – guitars, keyboards, vocals; Chris Squire – bass guitar, harmonica, vocals; Alan White – drums, percussion, vocals)

At the end of the 1960s, progressive rock was starting to take hold. Groups like The Moody Blues, Genesis, King Crimson and Jethro Tull were pushing the musical boundaries. There was a move toward free-form composition, symphonic context and hybrid genres. Among the most successful of these groups was Yes. Founded in 1969 by bassist Chris Squire and singer Jon Anderson, the band released two albums to modest sales. When guitarist Steve Howe and keyboardist Rick Wakeman came on board, things changed. Subsequent releases like *The Yes Album* (1971), *Fragile* (1971) and *Closer To The Edge* (1972) were very successful and built a strong following for the band. Noted for grueling studio rehearsals, the songs reflected extended, complicated structures that utilized rich aural textures. The band would have personnel changes and reunions over the next four decades, but without the sustained impact of the earlier albums (Note; There is a significant exception. The 1983 album, *90210* was their best seller, and produced a #1 hit, “Owner Of A Lonely Heart”).

After the departure in 1997 of Wakeman, Yes decided to explore material that was part of an outside project involving Squire and Billy Sherwood (guitars and keyboards). *Open Your Eyes*, initially released on CD, has been re-mastered to audiophile vinyl. The result is an ambitious pop-oriented album that is uneven. There is the usual layered instrumentation, but no real musical cohesion. Up-tempo rockers like “New State Of Mind” have all of the elements of Yes progressive rock (Anderson’s high-pitched vocals and Howe’s screeching guitar, tempo brakes) but it doesn’t approximate the chemistry of “Roundabout”, “I’ve Seen All Good People” and “Your Move”. Other hard rocking numbers (“Love Shine” and “Open Your Eyes”) incorporate call and response vocals. The band is attempting to break from their template. There is a lack of keyboard runs (Although Igor Khoroshev spices up “Fortune Teller” with a lively organ solo), but the absence of Wakeman is palpable. On many songs, the transitions are deliberate and perfunctory.

What does work are the acoustic numbers. “Universal Garden” is an organic, fluid blend of Anderson’s scratchy tenor voice and the dual guitars of Howe and Sherwood. The Celtic influence in British folk music has always complemented this group. The exotic, peculiar “Wonderlove” is a welcome change of pace.

Side Four is somewhat of an anomaly. Consisting of “nature” sounds (ocean waves, etc.), vague percussion (mostly triangles) brief snippets of overdubbed vocals and a rock song, the nearly twenty-four minute opus “The Solution” does not fit in with the rest of the album.

There are alleged stories about the contention between Yes and their label on the readiness of *Open Your Eyes*. Apparently, Howe was brought into the project late and had to overdub some parts. The 180-gram vinyl sounds great. The layers of vocals are pristine and Anderson’s high voice is still unique. Also, Howe’s guitar tones are captured with vibrant flair. Unfortunately, the material is flat and even audiophile technology cannot remedy that.

TrackList:

Side One: New State Of Mind; Open Your Eyes; Universal Garden

Side Two: No Way We Can Lose; Fortune Seller; Man In The Moon

Side Three: Wonderlove; From The Balcony; Love Shine; Somehow...Someday

Side Four: The Solution