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[An Interview With Rick Wakeman](#)

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Rick Wakeman has had a fascinating career that has spanned 4 decades and shows little sign of slowing up anytime soon. Perhaps he is best known as the master of the Moog synthesizer for the bands The Strawbs and Yes, but he is also a very, very accomplished solo musician. Over the past couple of months he has released two DVD's, while widely divergent in intention they are both delightful, and should be part of everyone's collection. I had the opportunity to chat with Rick recently, and what an engaging guy he is. Oh, and Rick, my address is on its way for that Christmas card!

I loved the concept of “[Amazing Grace](#)”, take some well known Hymn tunes and rearrange them for the grand piano. How did this project come about? Where did the inspiration come from?

It started quite a few years ago when someone was talking to me about ‘The day thou gavest’ which I had used on the end of Anne Boleyn on the [Six Wives](#) album. They asked me why I had used the hymn. I explained that the music was not the hymn, but simply a tune that church ministers used, amongst many others, to fit the stanzas of the hymns that had been written by various writers. No tunes were actually written at that time with the specific purpose of use for a specific hymn. Amazing Grace is a classic example. The words by John Newton must have had at least 20 tunes used before the excellent tune we all know today came along.

It is ironic that it was used in the William Wilberforce film called Amazing Grace, as it had not even been written at the time... Oh well... that's ignorant film makers for you!

Anyway, I just thought it would be nice to take some of the more well known tunes that had been used for hymns and had become synonymous with them and literally perform them as instrumental variations

I first did this with a CD called '[Morning has Broken](#)' and when that ceased to be available I thought it would be a nice idea to re-mix, add new hymns. And make visuals to go with the music, and so Amazing Grace was born.

Your daughter sings on the title track, and a very fine musician she is. Do you plan on working with her more in the future?

We've done a few things together. She sang on both my retro albums, and has a band of her own. She's a beautiful piano player too... I'd love to do more with all the kids... they're all great players in their own right. But I don't think I can afford them anymore!

The videography on the DVD is nothing short of stunning. The use of time lapse captures the mood of the music so well. Can you tell us a little about where the ideas behind that came from, and what your involvement was?

I have to be totally honest here and own up that all of the visuals were the brainchild of Robert Garofalo. I left that side of things to him because of his expertise. I am absolutely thrilled with what he did. Choices of footage I would never dreamed of, such as the Pan Am disaster.

I must say that I was delighted that you included "All things bright and Beautiful", it was my late fathers favorite hymn, and your version I know would have pleased him greatly. Do you have any personal favorites in this collection?

To be honest the hymn you mention is a personal favorite because it's probably the first hymn I ever learned as a young kid. It is indeed bright and beautiful and timeless too. I really do love hymn tunes as they are in general so melodic and so adaptable.

You have had an outstanding career spanning 4 decades, and I know that in my collection I still have ‘Antiques and Curios’, which I believe was one of your first recordings. Looking back at the many, many projects you have worked on, is there a pet one?



Political answer here.. There isn't a favorite to be honest. They all mean something to me, although admittedly some more than others. Some of the more obscure I am fond of too, such as [A Suite Of Gods](#) which I did with the operatic tenor Ramon Redios, Classical Variations on the President label was fun too. [Return To The Centre Of The Earth](#) was a milestone for me, as were the early albums from the 70's.

Following on the heels of ‘Amazing Grace’ you released The Other Side Of, which I think is very entertaining. Was it a hard decision to try the comedy format?

I've been doing it for such a long time now, since the 70's really, but the comedy side of things really took off in the 80's when I appeared on the Danny Baker Show and told a few anecdotes. The national press gave the show rave reviews and my double life started! I'm a comedy freak and just love laughter, and so I combine the two wherever possible. Hosting 8 years of The Comedy Show Live at Jongleurs didn't do any harm either! I am also part of a huge TV series here called [Grumpy Old Men](#). I'm as well known in the UK for being a TV comic as I am a musician these days!

The stories came across as very unscripted, and in my opinion that was part of the charm. Were they as ‘off the cuff’ as they appeared?

Oh very much so. When I tell them on other occasions they are never the same, I always seem to go off on tangents.

‘Amazing Grace’ and ‘[The Other Side Of](#)’ are certainly a far cry from the world of Progressive Rock, but I was wondering if you still keep in touch with that genre. I reviewed a couple of DVD's recently by, Neo and [Pendragon](#), they share the same keyboardist [Clive Nolan](#),

not only does he look like the Rick Wakeman of the 70's and 80's he plays like him! Have you seen any of his work?

Bits and pieces, as he worked with my eldest son [Oliver](#) on a couple of projects. I still keep the Prog Rock flame alive with concerts with the English Rock Ensemble (ERE) here and there. This year we have played Norway and Canada very successfully, and the last two albums have been very much Prog Rock ([Retro](#) and [Retro 2](#)).

A question just for fun. Who is the better Moog player, you or Keith Emerson?

That's like asking if a football player is better than a baseball player, we are so totally different. Keith does stuff I couldn't do and I think the same applies the other way round. I have the utmost respect for Keith in all he has done and all he is doing.

I understand that you have recently completed the music score for a movie about Aleister Crowley, can you give us some clues about the soundtrack, when will we in North America be hearing it?

It is very much a soundtrack where musically I try to follow the film and the story.. and an amazing story it is too. Very fascinating how evil one man can be. The film is called Aleister Crowley – In Search Of The Great Beast 666. The official movie site is: www.aleister-crowley-666.com

What other projects are you working on?

I'm currently involved in a stage musical, two other films and a stage juggling show! I'm doing a lot of television as well, and have a short tour starting in the UK in October called Rick Wakeman's Grumpy Old Picture Show, and I'm pleased to report that tickets are flying out of the box office. It's a very busy period, and already I am booked for Brazil next August to perform King Arthur with a symphony orchestra and choir.

Postscript: I have enjoyed Rick Wakeman's music for almost 40 years. Everyone knows him as the guy that played keyboards for Yes, but there is a whole lot more to Rick than that. Take Rick out for a test drive, his web site is <http://www.rwcc.com/> For more information about Prog Rock, try

Katowice, Poland, [Metal Mind Productions](#) it is the heart beat these days. Neo, Pendragon and Oliver Wakeman can be found there. I have searched high and low for a link to Jemma Wakeman, who has a superb voice and sings the title track on Amazing Grace, but I can not find one. So Jemma, email me and I will edit the article and put the link in.

Simon Barrett