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All good Yes fans turn their heads toward 2 new DVDs

“The Other Side of Rick Wakeman” (MVD Visual)

“Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe: An Evening of Yes Music Plus” (MVD Visual)

Relax, Yes fans. Although the cover art and promotional material for “Other Side” would seem to suggest that quintessential keyboardist Rick Wakeman is dealing with some sort of midlife crisis by embarking on a new career as a standup comedian, that’s hardly the case.

He hasn’t abandoned his axe. He’s just sharpened it a bit with some heretofore uncharacteristic stage banter consisting of homey stories about his private and professional life, some of which even may be true.

The result is more “VH1 Storytellers” or “MTV Unplugged” than “Evening at the Improv.” Recorded in an intimate studio setting — the stage is a slightly raised platform just big enough to accommodate his Yamaha grand piano and a table for his notes and props, with the audience of a few dozen seated on folding chairs just a couple feet away — “Other Side” is foremost an exploration of Wakeman’s music’s roots.

“Everything’s on the piano,” he tells the crowd. “A lot of it is taking the music back to as it was in its original form, and how I wrote it in the first place.” He covers a lot of ground in the disc’s 110 minutes, from his first public performance (“See a Monkey on a Stick”) as a 5-year-old at a piano recital, to his earliest professional endeavors with the British bluegrass-turned-progressive quintet the Strawbs (“A Glimpse of Heaven”), to his session work with David Bowie (“Life on Mars?”) and Cat Stevens (“Morning Has Broken”) to his extensive body of solo work and his now-famous interpretations of the Beatles’ catalog.

And, yes, of course, Yes. One of the more fascinating story segments is about a recently rediscovered tape of some 20 different chord progressions commissioned by bandmate Jon Anderson for “And You And I.” Wakeman tells his audience that, upon listening to the tape again after a quarter century or so, he heard one progression that he particularly liked, but which had not been used in the final arrangement. So he worked up an alternate version of the song with the new progression, and the results might make you wonder why Yes didn’t use it in the first place.

But if it’s the original arrangement you’re looking for, “Yes Music Plus” is a great place to begin the search. In fact, just about all of the essential songs by the 1970s prog kings are here in all their live glory, with four of the five principals from the band’s best (and best-known) lineup on hand to perform them. Only bassist Chris Squire, who was touring with original Yes keyboardist Tony Kaye when this set was recorded in 1989, is missing.

But you don’t notice Squire’s absence so much, first because American jazz maestro Jeff Berlin is there to fill in, but mostly because the bass frequently is almost non-existent in the mix.

It’s a minor quibble, though, because Yes songs always have been more about Anderson’s soaring falsetto and oblique lyrics, Wakeman’s otherworldly synthesis and Steve Howe’s spider-like guitar playing, which weaved a web around the band’s ambitious, sprawling and sometimes divergent musical themes and somehow tied them all together.

Anderson, Howe and Wakeman all have solo time in the spotlight before they get on with the Yes catalog, while percussionist Bill Bruford’s finest moment comes during a drum solo that caps a riveting version of “Your Move/I’ve Seen All Good People.” “Yes Music Plus” is not for the casual fan. Anyone who pops this disc in the DVD player with the intention of sticking it out to the end is in for a long night.

But the “Roundabout” just before the “Super Trouper” encore is worth the wait all by itself.

(Dave Fennessy)