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Jon Anderson – Watching The Flags That Fly



By Gary Hill

Overall Review

Another disc of demos from Jon Anderson, these songs were originally written to be used on the second Anderson Bruford Wakeman and Howe album. Most of them wound up shelved, but have now been released on *Watching The Flags That Fly*. Since these are demos it pretty much goes without saying that at times the recording quality leaves a bit to be desired. It also seems a foregone conclusion that much of the music feels a bit less than complete. The thing is, so much of this material is quite strong. That really leaves you wishing it had been fully worked out and released in proper form. Even in this configuration the disc is well worth having.

Track by Track Review

Hold You in My Arms: This has a bit of a 1950's feel to it to me. The way Anderson delivers the vocals calls to mind the *Song of Seven* album. I've always loved his style during that period. I guess I'd explain it as long stretching lines of lyrics that seem to run together. It's not the most "pop single" approach, but it's also very powerful. This song goes through a number of changes and alterations as it carries forward, but truly the vocal delivery is what steals the show here. The instrumental section on this is very cool, too. I really like this one a lot, but it has some issues in terms of recording quality. What do you expect from a demo, right?

Take the Water to the Mountain: This track made it to Yes' *Union* album. Here it comes in with an odd funky texture. This is stripped down and quite different from where the song would eventually wind up. Once again the vocals really steal the show. Interestingly

enough, I'd say that this song (at least in the configuration presented here) is not as strong as "Hold You in My Arms." That really makes me wonder what the whole band would have done with that track. The recording quality on this is better than on the opener.

After the Storm: Starting with acoustic guitar, this moves out into a prog ballad sort of approach. This has more of a "finished" feel to it than some of the other stuff on show here. It's a very pretty piece.

Watching the Flags That Fly: I swear that the introduction to this one, a pretty keyboard based sound, was used on something else. I just can't place what it is. The song proper feels like a folk music ballad that might have shown up in the 1970's, but done as a progressive rock track. This is one of my favorite pieces on the disc. It's another that feels more complete than some of the other songs. It also has a better recording quality than some of its competitors.

Touch Me Heaven: Here we get a bouncing sort of rock and roll jam. As it grows and changes some of the musical arrangements remind me a lot of the first Anderson Bruford Wakeman and Howe album. This started off a bit lackluster, but very quickly gathers the steam to turn into a killer piece of music.

We Make Believe: The riff that drives this one is quite cool. In fact, this whole song just plain rocks! It's a shame that it's one of the worst in terms of recording quality because this could well be one of the most effective pieces of music on the whole album. It's powerful and includes a cool dissonant section.

To the Stars: The demo nature of this one is starkly obvious as the rather cheesy keyboard sound leads it off. The piano that comes over the top is far better, though. The melody is great to this actually. It's a pretty and powerful song, just presented in a "not so powerful" motif.

Instrumental 1: As you might guess, this is an instrumental. It's a very pretty keyboard based piece that actually at points feels a bit like it could have come from Rick Wakeman himself. It's dominated by a piano melody that turns rather chaotic and dissonant at times. This has a definite classical music feel to it. Other elements besides the piano are used for the angry sort of musical accompaniment. This moves to a fast paced little journey later that, while missing some of the drama of the opening section, is much more catchy. Then both parts seem to be joined to create an incredibly potent piece of music before this ends.

Is It Love?: This is pretty and gentle. It becomes more powerful as the arrangement is filled out by more instrumentation. Essentially a turbocharged ballad this is another that feels quite complete and whole.

Axis of Love: Starting on piano, other keyboard lines seem to skirt across the top in a playful nature. Then Anderson's voice enters and the track begins to move through. This feels a bit like some of the more wispy music from *Tormato* or some of the more recent Yes releases. It turns more dramatic and classically inspired after a while, but shifts back to the song proper from there. The instrumental section later in the number is especially dramatic and powerful.

Instrumental 2: Classical music meets a Rick Wakeman like arrangement with some jazz-like tones and fanfare sort of approaches on this number. It's another that really feels, with a bit of reworking, like it would have been quite at home on the first ABWH disc. I would guess it goes without saying that this is another instrumental – oh no, there, I've said it.

Santa Barbara: Gentle melodies begin this in a ballad-like fashion. Anderson's vocals

come in across this backdrop as the track begins to gradually build up. It turns into a bouncy little ditty, but I'm not really crazy about this one.

Tall Buildings: The percussion that leads this off feels like something from an '80's pop song. The keyboards that join, while running through a fairly cool riff, lend to that sort of feeling. This is another that doesn't really work all that well. Anderson's vocal delivery and the great lyrics are pretty much the only real redeeming quality here. There are two strange bridges on this track, but they seem a little too weird for my tastes.

Looking for the Words: This is a bouncing and rather dramatic cut that feels a lot like something from Anderson's brilliant *Animation* disc. I like this quite a bit.

Try It Again: Pretty piano (again feeling a bit like Wakeman) starts things off here. This works through in passionate ways with a texture that feels like a combination of classical and old-world European sounds. Eventually this turns quite dramatic and powerful. At less than two minutes in length this instrumental is short, but very strong. It's a great way to end things here.



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