

## **An Evening Of Yes Music Plus**

### **Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe**

Voiceprint / MVD, 2008

REVIEW BY: [Jason Warburg](#)

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED: **02/20/2008**

The story of Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe could fill up a season of reality TV all by itself. Since there's already way too much of that going on for my tastes, I'll try to keep this brief...

In 1988, lead vocalist Jon Anderson left the 1980s Trevor Rabin-dominated version of Yes and gathered up four-fifths of the band's *Fragile / Close To The Edge* "Classic Yes" lineup, minus bassist-harmony vocalist/co-founder Chris Squire, who stayed with the Rabin edition of the band and kept the rights to the name "Yes."

Denied use of the Yes name, the quartet (plus supporting musicians) issued an eponymous studio album, toured, and were preparing a second album when the two camps managed to patch things up, launching the *Union* album and eight-man "mega-Yes" tour of 1991.

The 1989-90 ABWH tour shows were advertised as "An Evening of Yes Music Plus," which naturally became the title of the live album documenting that tour, initially released in 1993, and re-released by MVD this week. My first reaction to the album – like, one assumes, that of the fans who went to see these shows – is "Cool! A fresh twist on Classic Yes with most of the key players on board!"

And make no mistake, this album has its moments. Guitarist Steve Howe is rock solid as always, Anderson sounds energized and enthused, and the pure talent of keyboardist Rick Wakeman and drummer Bill Bruford is ever-present and undeniable.

The thing is, the ABWH lineup had two essential thrusts driving it. The obvious one was a desire to bring back the classic, progressive Yes sound. The undercurrent was to prove they didn't need the man who actually had rights to the name "Yes" in order to make Yes music. And really, how much could you miss one guy -- Squire -- who to that point had never sung a lead vocal or played a lead instrument on a single Yes song, and who was at best the third-most prolific songwriter in the group?

Ironically, in trying to bolster their argument, Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe managed only to prove its opposite. *An Evening Of Yes Music Plus* is a very listenable album, but it's clearly not Yes.

Take "Close To The Edge," a Yes classic worthy of the label, the band's first and still best epic-length opus. The opening instrumental section sounds as brilliant and frenetic as ever -- and then the first slower section kicks in and as Anderson's vocal leads the way it all suddenly sounds hollow and one-dimensional. What's missing? Only the contributions of the MVHVR -- Most Valuable Harmony Vocalist in Rock. Without Squire's vocals supporting, echoing and counter-pointing Anderson's, the ABWH rendition of "Close To The Edge" sounds like the work of a gifted cover band rather than the real thing.

It doesn't help that Wakeman and especially Bruford fell victim to the worst musical trend of the 1980s -- an emphasis on heavily processed electronic tones over natural acoustic drums and old-school Hammond and Moog keyboard sounds. The normally gorgeous late middle instrumental section of "Close To The Edge" (around 15:00 to 17:00) is a perfect example -- Wakeman's keyboards are cold and trebly, while Bruford's electronic drums sound like they were borrowed from a Wham! video.

Squire's vocals are sorely missed on every Yes tune here, from "And You And I" and "I've Seen All Good People" to "Roundabout" and "Starship Trooper." Howe tries to fill in by taking some of Squire's old parts, but his efforts only serve to cement the importance of Squire's voice to the Yes sound. And while the group delivers strong versions of the best songs from the *ABWH* album, especially "Themes" and "Brother Of Mine," placed in the context of an evening of Yes music, the musical differences jump out at you. The ABWH tunes are often bold and complex, but the rhythmic drive is muted and the two and three-part vocal harmonies that have always given Yes that extra power and beauty are missing in action.

This album in fact seems almost cursed. Never mind trying to replace the Squire's irreplaceable harmony vocals, how would you like to stand in for the playing of one of the world's most renowned bassists? You'd have to be a world-class player to even attempt it, which is why Bruford et al recruited former King Crimson anchorman Tony Levin for the *ABWH* album and tour. Except, Levin fell ill and missed a couple of shows at the end of the tour, including the night they recorded this album. So on this disc, you get the best efforts of last-minute-fill-in-for-the-fill-in Jeff Berlin, who is both clearly talented and clearly overmatched by the task before him. The band's solution is to keep the bass lower in the mix here than it's ever been on any Yes recording -- but the more they try to hide Berlin, the more keenly Squire's absence is felt. I feel terrible for Berlin, who obviously did the best he could in an impossible situation.

The other bad news is the series of solo spots that opened these shows -- eight minutes or so each for Anderson, Howe and Wakeman, plus an interminable Bruford drumpad monstrosity that hijacks the end of the following "Long Distance Runaround" and renders it almost unlistenable. These guys' egos seem to demand solos for each, and yet they add nothing to the show. We KNOW they're incredibly talented; that's why we want to hear them all play TOGETHER. Other than the fun of hearing the crowd clap along to Howe's "Clap," I could easily skip all the way to track seven every time I listen to this album.

#### *An Evening Of Yes Music Plus*

is, in essence, a curiosity, a sincere if slightly misguided effort to recapture a revered sound while missing one its most vital components. It's an entertaining disc for any prog fan, and a must-have for any Yes fan. But is it Yes?

In a word, no.

**Rating: B-**

User Rating: Not Yet Rated

[Login](#) to submit a rating for this album.

---

## Comments

[Login](#) to post a comment.

© 2008 Jason Warburg and The Daily Vault. All rights reserved. Review or any portion may not be reproduced without written permission. Cover art is the intellectual property of Voiceprint / MVD, and is used for informational purposes only.