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You can't say 'no' to latest Yes discs

By Mark Fisher
For the Times West Virginian

Yes?

Despite their legendary status, or perhaps because of it, Yes have become a virtual revolving door of musicians over the years. Shortly before their epic early nineties album "Union" (an album that featured all past and present members of the band together, sans the singer who replaced Jon Anderson for about six months), the former incarnation of the band (known best as the "classic version") made an album together aptly titled "Anderson, Bruford, Wakeman, and Howe" that most longtime fans considered to be more Yes than the version of the band recording under the moniker at that time.

As you may have guessed, the band comprised vocalist Jon Anderson (who was singing for both Yes versions at the same time), drummer Bill Bruford, keyboardist Rick Wakeman and guitarist Steve Howe. Shortly after the release of "Union," the band merged again to simply become Yes, but for a brief moment in time the two versions co-existed.

"An Evening of Yes Music Plus" was recorded during the band's massively successful 1989 tour and features music from the classic Yes albums from the seventies alongside music from the band's one and only album. This double CD features 12 tracks as well as extended medley solos from Jon Anderson, Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman. Anderson and Wakeman's medleys contain most of three songs each, while Howe's contains only two.

The album kicks off with "Benjamin Britten's Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra" and then immediately launches into the solos. It's an awkward start, to be sure. This is a case where I would have found this awesome had I been witnessing it, but it just doesn't translate the same way to audio. After the lengthy opening portion the band takes off with all cylinders firing at once, offering a spectacular version of their mega-hit "Long Distance Runaround." The band sound unstoppable when they finally come together and by the time disc one closes with "I've Seen All Good People," there is no question which members were the true heart of Yes.

Disc two is a better representation of the band simply because it contains them functioning only as a band and feels more like a concert than a competition of showmanship. This disc contains some big hits as well including "Close to the Edge," "Roundabout," and "Starship Trooper," but it's the lesser known "Order of the Universe" that steals the show. The audience is completely enveloped by this song when it hits and the result is a huge sound that makes you feel like you are at a rock 'n roll show.

The band really sounds great on this song in particular and they use it as a launching pad for the duo of classic Yes songs that ends the show. It feels like the fans really needed something more upbeat and straightforward to connect with by this point in the show. I'm plenty baffled as to why they didn't open the show with this song or something of a similar style.

As with most Yes-related albums, I completely enjoyed this. No matter what title it bears, it is most certainly Yes, and any fan of the band will find all the essential elements here. I miss Rick Wakeman's giant keyboard solos, and Jon Anderson has to be one of the best vocalists of all time. Early on this performance is a little more subdued than what you may expect, but once it gets going it becomes a steamroller that even casual fans are likely to enjoy.

Anderson, Bruford, Wakeman, and Howe's "An Evening of Yes Music Plus" is available now at www.musicvideodistributors.com as well as other online outlets and select retail.



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