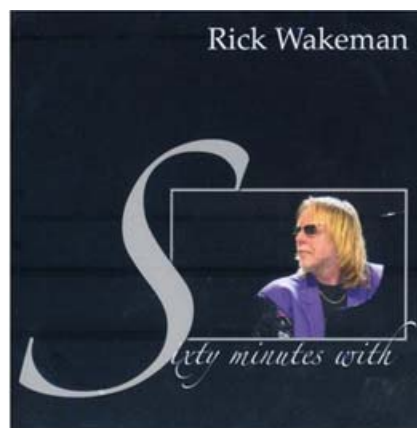




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Rick Wakeman – Sixty Minutes with Rick Wakeman



By Gary Hill

Overall Review

This new compilation of songs from Rick Wakeman includes a nice cross section of his solo career. It's really hard to encapsulate what he's done over the years into one CD minute set, so certainly fans will come up with something they think is missing. Still it will make a great introduction to those who have yet to delve into Mr. Wakeman's solo catalog. I've previously reviewed some of the discs that serve as the source for these tracks. For the sake of consistency, my track by track review of those will be modified from the original review.

Track by Track Review

Jane Seymour: A great neo-classically inspired keyboard solo opens this up. Wakeman works through several variations on the general theme, bringing it to a more and more intense performance with each frantic go around. At about one and a half minutes in this shifts out into a segment that Yes fans should recognize as part of Wakeman's solo on *Yessoongs*. He continues reworking the main themes of this piece in a "Phantom of the Opera" sort of way and other sections that were excerpted on that live Yes disc show up. This has always been an exceptionally cool cut and it is a great choice to begin things here.

1984: A fairly slow, swaying sort of rhythmic structure makes up the core of the first movement here. In fact, while the melody surges and intensifies later, if you listen carefully you'll hear that this base remains unchanged. The track works out after a time (and some chorale vocals) into a dramatic drop back. Then a couple changes ensue and Wakeman throws in some awesome soloing. We get more of those chorale vocals, but the keyboard maestro continues rearranging and soloing through this. After a time this shifts out into a funky approach that has some similarities in terms of the overall motif with Jeff Wayne's *The Music Version of the War of the Worlds*. It moves into an almost honky-tonk little bit after that. This doesn't remain long, though and Wakeman and the group launch out into a killer rocking segment that is amongst the best (and most trademark here). The changes just keep on coming as this modulates into a more melodic and powerful sound and then shifts into some kind of Sousa type sounds. Then we're off to a more pure rock and roll sound. These changes are so rapid-fire that it's pretty hard to keep up. A balladic section takes it and they work it into a powerfully emotional motif to end.

Julia: This ballad features vocals by none other than Chaka Khan. The music on this is predominately based on piano. Khan's vocals are wispy. This is very much in an AOR, classically inspired motif. I really can't say that I'm a big fan of this one, though. It does improve quite a bit when it turns more rock oriented mid-song. Unfortunately that section is short-lived. It does make a return visit near the end, though.

Dancing on Snowflakes: This is much more gentle and sedate. It also has a very evocative approach. Rather ballad-like this is a work of sheer beauty and has some neo-classical elements to it.

Universe of Sound: This is a hard rocking fast paced jam that's quite cool. It's got an almost Zeppelin-like riff, but with a different sort of sound texture. Rather simplistic in terms of song structure, this thing doesn't suffer at all from it. The high pitched vocals on this one might have you listening carefully to discern if it's Jon Anderson or not – it isn't. This is the perfect answer for those who say might say that Wakeman's solo stuff doesn't "rock." One could hear this, in a different motif, as belonging on a Yes album. We do get one major change later in a fast running vocal section. We're also treated to a smoking instrumental movement that features inspired guitar and keyboard solos, delivered in sort of an extended "call and response" mode.

Election/Arthur: This is a reworking of the "Arthur" track from *Myths and Legends...* that was used by the BBC for their election coverage. This is powerful still in this transformed version. Two fully new instrumental themes are woven into the composition for great effect. Overall this is some amazing symphonic prog instrumental music.

Merlin the Magician: Coming from the classic *Myths and Legends...* disc, a beautiful piano solo holds tons of emotion. Wakeman works through this theme for a time and then shifts it, without changing instrumentation, into new directions, and the whole motif feels a lot like a Beethoven piano sonata. He works back into the earlier themes for a time, but then shifts out to a fast moving motif for a new exploration. It eventually moves back into more emotional territory. We get another return to the faster part of the composition after a while.

She's Leaving Home: The final cut on Wakeman's Beatles tribute disc, this is one of my personal favorites from that band represented. It starts suitably sedate and moody. It raises up a bit as it moves into what you could call the "chorus section." This is a very pretty piece.

Starship Trooper/Wurm: Here we get a keyboard heavy version of the Yes classic. The vocals at times really make you wonder if Jon Anderson is here, but alas, it's not him. Wakeman really shows off his keyboard prowess on this medley. I'd have to say that I prefer the original, but this has its charms. Anyone who's ever wished that there had been more Wakeman on "...Trooper" gets their wish here. The closing keyboard jam is incredible.

Catherine Howard: The set is closed in similar fashion to the way it opened, with a song from Wakeman's classic *Six Wives...* album. This one begins with a gentle and evocative piano solo. It quickly shifts out to a more band based arrangement and they run through a fast paced motif for a short time. When it drops back to just Wakeman his piano is joined by other keyboards in a more full arrangement of the original themes. The track works though by alternating between these two general formats. We get some more of Wakeman's *Yessongs* solo on this, then it drops to an acoustic guitar solo. This holds the track for a while. It works through several musical themes, turning rather jazzy at points. At around the three and a half minute mark this explodes out with a synthesizer dominated section that's incredible. The next section of the cut is another that found its way into Wakeman's recorded solo with Yes. After a time it turns delicate and bouncy, a bit like something you'd hear in an old West saloon. This section, in a different format also is included in that aforementioned solo. Several variations and alterations ensue from there. Eventually this gives way to another piano solo, this time with somewhat slight accompaniment. Synthesizer comes in over the top of this and then wrests control and Wakeman turns it more towards dramatic space for a time. This section is very Yes-like and gives way after a while to a reprise of the main musical themes of the composition. Eventually synthesizer enters, playing a gentle form of the central theme to end the track.



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