
Subject: Yes - The Royal Affair

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Tue, 23 Jul 2019 23:08:36 GMT

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I went and saw a fantastic concert on Sunday: Yes - The Royal Affair.

There were actually several acts, any of which was worthy of seeing alone.

First up was Carl Palmer of Emerson, Lake and Palmer. Palmer honored the memory of his fellow ELP members Keith Emerson and Greg Lake, both of whom died in 2016. As a fitting entrance, the show started off with ELP's, "Karn Evil 9" - Welcome Back My Friends to the Show that never Ends. During that set, Arthur Brown occasionally did vocals, including his 1968 hit, "Fire."

Next was John Lodge of the Moody Blues. John Lodge's set paid tribute to the band's recently departed member Ray Thomas. It included six songs Lodge wrote for the Moody Blues, including "I'm Just a Singer (In a Rock and Roll Band)" and "Ride My See-Saw." He also played "Saved by the Music," which was found on 1975's Blue Jays, an album Lodge made with singer Justin Hayward. I'm a big Moodies fan, so this set was as thrilling for me as the headliner.

And then Carl Palmer came back to perform Asia songs, along with Geoff Downes. Asia played the hits from their self-titled 1982 album, paying tribute to their late founding member John Wetton. In his stead was Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal, who started off the set. Some of their 1982 hit songs included "Sole Survivor," "Heat of the Moment" and "Only Time Will Tell." Then about halfway through the set, Steve Howe came on stage.

By the time the Asia set was over, we had been treated to about two hours of music. I would have been satisfied, even if it had ended there. I can't think of any other concert I've ever been to that the leading acts were anywhere close to being as good as the headliner. But this concert was definitely an exception.

It was kind of funny, in that the lights went out, the roadies started to move equipment offstage and people in the audience started to leave. I think some were just going out for a break, but I think many people probably thought the show was over. I even thought maybe that was all there was. And again, if it had been over, I would have been satisfied.

But about ten minutes later, the stage was reset with Yes graphics and lighting, and a new drum kit with the famous Yes logo on the bass drum head. The familiar opening excerpt from "Firebird Suite" whispered from the speakers, growing louder as the lights slowly came up and the band entered the stage.

It took me about four notes of the intro to know Yes was coming. That intro is like an old familiar lullaby to me.

But rather than breaking into "Siberian Khatru," they opened with "No Opportunity Necessary, No

Experience Needed," the Richie Havens song from "Time and a Word." They also played "Going for the One" and "Onward," which was a tribute to Chris Squire, who wrote it. Then they played "America" and - get this - Relayer's 30-minute song "The Gates of Delirium." I might add they did that flawlessly, just like they were in the studio. Absolutely amazing. I was further touched by Howes' acoustic solo, "Clap" which he wrote to celebrate the birth of his son, Dylan, in 1969. They also played "Starship Trooper" and "I've Seen All Good People."

Those guys treated us to another two hours of the best live music I've ever heard.

I've seen Yes five times, and all but one was fantastic. But this time, I'd have to say, might have been the best Yes show ever. I wince as I say that, because neither Chris Squire or Rick Wakeman were there, and those two are a big part of the Yes equation. Sadly, Chris Squire passed away in 2015. Rick Wakeman has been with Yes on and off for years, but he wasn't there for this tour.

As an aside, I've seen Yes once with Rick Wakeman's son Oliver at the keyboards. He was awesome too. Another Wakeman son, Adam, is also a talented keyboard player. It must be in their blood.

The only time I saw Yes and was underwhelmed was in 1980 during the Drama tour. I was just too shocked by the Buggles injection back then. How do you merge the guys that played "Video Killed the Radio Star" with the guys that played "Yours is No Disgrace?" It completely took me by surprise to see Geoff Downes skipping around his Apple II computer as it directed his synthesizers to play for him. I was comparing him with Rick Wakeman, who would have been an incredibly (impossibly) hard act to follow. It just seemed to me that the Buggles would have been a better fit to merge with the Cars or Devo than with Yes. But nobody asked me.

And in fairness, the Drama album was actually pretty good. But I digress. Set the wayback machine forward, back to the present. And in the present - during the Royal Affair tour - Geoff Downes is on the keyboard. And he is good. I was payin' attention. Anyone would have a hard time playing what he had to play. But he did it. No Apple II needed.

I think what may have made this Royal Affair tour so special is all the performers may have tried extra hard to overcompensate for the missing band members. That and they brought their friends that I mentioned earlier: Carl Palmer from ELP, John Lodge from the Moody Blues and others. It was incredible.

Steven Howe is always good. He is a perfectionist, and he hasn't changed bit over the past 50 years. He looks different but his mannerisms and his style are the same. So he couldn't have "overcompensated" because he is always "on." But as I said above, Geoff Downes is a new man. He has definitely improved with age. Jon Davison is the lead singer, and he does a great job in that role. The original singer Jon Anderson is a unique fellow with a unique voice, so it's hard to put in another front man that "fits." But Davison does a great job in that role.

Another new recruit - Billy Sherwood - was particularly impressive to me. Chris Squire was always an "alpha" role, a very powerful bass player. He had his own unique mannerisms and hard-driving style. And Yes songs often have a complicated lead bass line, so the bass player must be up to the task. No semi-percussive background bass players need apply here. Billy

Sherwood handled the challenge, and almost seemed to "channel the ghost" of Squire at times. He dresses the same, moves the same and sounds nearly the same. He even has a similar build and carries himself the same way as Chris Squire. No wonder Squire hand-picked him as his own replacement.

Jay Schellen was the drummer for most of the performance, although he stepped down for Alan White - an original Yes drummer - to take the sticks for a while. Alan White is pretty much wheelchair bound, but he did a pretty good job on the drums. It was a nice touch to have him on the drums for a few songs.

If all that wasn't enough to completely overwhelm a Yes fan, Roger Dean was also there in a booth selling his artwork. To me, Roger Dean is almost at the level of another band member or a producer or something. Roger Dean is responsible for that fantastic artwork on almost every Yes album since "Fragile."

The show lasted four hours. Absolutely incredible!

File Attachments

1) [Yes_20190721.jpg](#), downloaded 419 times
