Subject: Yes / Asia Concert
Posted by Wayne Parham on Sat, 18 Jul 2009 21:26:54 GMT
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I went to see Yes and Asia in concert on Thursday, and I was stunned. Now then, the talent of these guys isn't what stunned me, they've been favorites of mine since the mid-seventies, truly when I first started seriously listening to music as a teenager and into my early adult years. Yes was my first favorite band, leading me to find Genesis, Gentle Giant, King Crimson and the Moody Blues. What stunned me was more internal, more the fact that these guys have been such a big part of my life for over 30 years and just how strong their performance still was. It was like looking at history, right there on stage. Music history as well as personal history, sort of, in that all my life has been with these songs etched into my mind, singing them in the background to everything I've done.
Asia / Yes 2009 Tour Photos, courtesy of Steve ParhamThe band members make up a sort of who's who of progressive rock in the 1960's and 1970's. Check this out: The evening began with Asia, formed with former members of other supergroups. Steve Howe (Yes), Carl Palmer (Emerson, Lake and Palmer), John Wetten (King Crimson) and Geoff Downes (The Buggles). Each of these guys is a giant in his own right, and when you look at each of their histories, you'll see there's only about one degree of separation between them and all the other progressive rock superheroes (like Robert Fripp, Steve Hackett, Keith Emerson, Robert Palmer, etc.)

They did most of their best songs and even did a song from each of the members former bands, including "Court of the Crimson King" (King Crimson), "Fanfare for the Common Man" (Emerson, Lake and Palmer) and "Video Killed the Radio Star" (The Buggles).

That last song always threw me for a loop, in fact, I've seen Yes three times now, once in the late seventies and once in 1980 when they did the Buggles/Yes morph thing. To tell the truth, I hated that. But as years have passed, I mellowed and also realized that Geoff Downes is a great musician that has earned his place with the others. Before playing "Video Killed the Radio Star" they reminded the audience that this song was the first ever played on MTV. Seems like just yesterday, but it's distant history now.

Talk about energy. You'd have thought these guys were all still in their 20's. No kidding. Watching Palmer do his drum solo (and realizing he'll be 60 years old next year) is sort of like watching Jack Lalanne in the 1970s. Damn impressive. You know the guy is 60 but you're pretty sure he is as fit as any 30 year old and could outrun most of them.

When Asia was done, all the band members exited the stage for a brief intermission and set change. In a few minutes, out came Yes (Steve Howe, of course, played in both Asia and Yes). It was awesome, just like I remembered them, everything was there but the pot smoke. Well, there were two other things missing, Jon Anderson and Rick Wakeman. But I'll get to that in a minute.

For some reason, the kids these days aren't smoking pot at the concerts, so you didn't have that familiar bittersweet smell. Probably because you can't smoke cigarettes, so there's no way to smoke anything without it being obvious. Except for that, you'd sware you were time warped back

to 1974. Maybe 1983, because they did a few of the songs from Drama and 90125, but most of the music was pre-Relayer, sort of the music that is staples of Yes fans: The Yes Album, Time and a Word, Fragile and Close to the Edge. They did an excellent job with "Astral Traveller", a song I hadn't heard them do live at any other show.

When you have Steve Howe and Chris Squire together, you sort of have two-thirds of the Yes core, but without Jon Anderson, you might expect the show to be really lacking. To tell the truth, I did. I walked in expecting to enjoy myself but for it to be a whole different deal, missing Jon would make this decidedly "not Yes". Sort of like some of the other supergroup spinoff bands, good but different. I was wrong.

Jon Anderson has suffered from respiratory problems for the last couple years. Like I said, most real Yes fans would say losing Jon was a deal breaker. He is unique, a tenor that hits the high notes with authority and without falsetto. He has these waifish, sort of feminine, mannerisms that if you didn't know he wasn't gay you'd be sure he was a Boy George or something. (Sorry, Jon) It makes for an intersting chemistry onstage, with Squire being a huge hulk of a man, grinding the bass guitar and exhuding testosterone and Anderson frolicking around the stage with Howe calming playing, standing still, like Einstein giving a disertation on relativity or something. Missing Anderson would seem to be insurmountable.

But somehow, they found "this guy" in Canada, Benoît David, who is a member of a Yes tribute band called Close to the Edge. He's really good, having copied Jon's mannerisms and sound. When Jon Anderson is ready to sing again on the Yes tour, I'm sure it will be hard for everyone because they'll all have conflicting emotions. It is definitely Jon's rightful place and he'll have to take the spot back, but Benoît has done a very good job.

Yes has had a few drummers over the years, and they've also had a few different keyboard players. But I think most consider the current drummer, Alan White to be "the" Yes drummer. Like most of the other musicians onstage, the list of other famous artists Alan has performed with reads like a who's who of the 1970's music scene.

Same could be said of Rick Wakeman, as keyboardist for Yes. There are a couple other notable keyboardists that played with Yes (Patrick Moraz and Geoff Downes), but the one most of us associate with Yes is Rick Wakeman. His "office" is a circle of keyboards, none of which are "props" for effect, he uses them all often and most skillfully. I think he is probably the most talented rock keyboard player since rock and roll began. It's close with Keith Emerson, but I don't think there are any others that are as talented in both the traditional skills as well as the newer technical skills brought with synthesizers. Rick Wakeman is a classical pianist, one that is as skilled as the great composers through history, in my opinion. Not only that, but he mastered synthesizers at a time when they required some technical skill, one had to understand voltage controlled oscillators, how different waveshapes sounded (i.e. harmonic content of sine verses square or triangle wave), voltage controlled filters, envelope generators, etc. Now this is a guy that really can't be replaced. But he wasn't there.

Yet they found another impossible replacement: His son, Oliver Wakeman. And this young man is good. Not only did it work on a musical level, but he also looks the part. Oliver has that same long flowing hair his father did (which he flips the same way), the same style clothing and a "mostly serious" demeanor, just like his dad. It was kind of touching to know that Rick Wakeman

had sort of passed the torch to his son. Oliver has a brother, Adam Wakeman, who plays for Black Sabbath and who also works with his dad. Neat to see them carrying on with the family business.