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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!

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## File Attachments

1) [Yes\\_20190721.jpg](#), downloaded 433 times

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair

Posted by [Rusty](#) on Fri, 26 Jul 2019 14:48:46 GMT

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Great write up from a dedicated fan. I know the geezer band circuit can be expensive to go see, but at 4 hours worth of great music. I reckon you all got more than your money's worth. Very gratifying. And the key seems to be that they haven't lost their mojo over the years. Sometimes an artist will go on beyond their useful prowess and command, as I witnessed with BB King, (very sad). But most of em know when to bow out. I got in on a few prominent world wide acts in my formative years. My bulk of music venues were of lesser known musicians in the blues and r&r genres. It is good to get out among'st them now and again. The live experience can't be equaled any other way.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair

Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Fri, 26 Jul 2019 20:19:22 GMT

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It was an amazing show. I think they really wanted to show off, to show they could still be more than relevant. I think they wanted to show that they could still be the best.

Steve Howe is always incredible, and so I kind of expected him to still be that way. But I guess I

should remember that the guy is 72 years old, so my expectation of him is taking him for granted, in a way. I mean, I've seen him so many times, and he has always been so "on" that I take for granted he always will be. But we're all wound in the same mortal coil, and so for someone to still have nimble fingers at 72 is as amazing as someone that can still play football at an advanced age. We all lose the gift of physical agility at some point. Except Steve Howe, I suppose, 'cause that guy has it.

And Carl Palmer too. He has escaped Father Time as well. He's almost 70, and can beat those drums like a 20-year-old. Seriously. He played for two hours straight - through the ELP and Asia sets. What voodoo magic does a 70-year-old guy possess to maintain the stamina to rapidly and precisely execute the drums with the zeal of a teenager for two hours straight?

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [Barryso](#) on Sat, 27 Jul 2019 11:37:44 GMT  
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Great write up. It got me to their website to look up tour dates but there's nothing even moderately close to home yet. Hopefully that will change.

The Yes discs you played at the Dallas show had them in great form. The only way to tell it was a fairly recent recording was their age - because their playing was just flawless. There were tons of bands in my youth that couldn't do justice to their studio recordings when they played live, yet these folks absolutely nailed it decades after the fact. It's impressive.

Regarding Carl Palmer: a friend in high school that went to a ton of live shows always said Carl Palmer was the best drummer he'd ever seen. Nice to hear he's still going strong.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [Rusty](#) on Sat, 27 Jul 2019 13:43:49 GMT  
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Like Carl Palmer, there are people out there that defy and push the envelope what can be accomplished in the golden years. Like Charles Allie too. At 71 he can circle a 400 meter track in 57 seconds. Ever run 400 meters flat out? Going under a minute is outstanding for any average twenty somethings. You make a great point. Them Yes men still have the chops, and the pride of performing at a level most mortals never attain.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Sat, 27 Jul 2019 16:03:52 GMT  
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Barryso wrote on Sat, 27 July 2019 06:37 Regarding Carl Palmer: a friend in high school that went

to a ton of live shows always said Carl Palmer was the best drummer he'd ever seen. Nice to hear he's still going strong.

He was powerful. And precise too. Think of Chester Thompson playing "Afterglow" on the Seconds Out live album. Palmer was like that.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [musicluvr](#) on Wed, 07 Aug 2019 22:58:49 GMT  
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Thanks for the detailed write up, though I suppose I'm a bit late in responding. I never got over the changes to Yes and just sort of dropped out as a fan. It sounds like I missed out. Both Asia and The Moody Blues have been favorites of mine too. It's like a wonderful event, no wonder you enjoyed it.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [Strum Drum](#) on Tue, 13 Aug 2019 16:42:24 GMT  
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That's a long concert and it sounds like the performers really went all out. You got your money's worth. My parents would've loved to see it as they're fans of Yes.

My parents took me and my siblings to England one year for vacation. We were shopping in London when my dad thought he recognized Geoff Downes (my mom didn't think it was him) and my dad hollered at him. It turns out that the keyboardist is actually really nice. He signed his autograph, shook my dad's hand, and chatted for a minute, but once he started to draw a crowd he got out of there. I wish we had a picture, but this was before smartphones and we didn't have our disposable cameras with us as we were only meant to be shopping. My parents still talk about it to this day. It was very nice of Downes to be so kind when he was just trying to do his own shopping and got rudely interrupted by us. It meant a lot to my dad especially.

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Subject: Re: Yes - The Royal Affair  
Posted by [Wayne Parham](#) on Tue, 13 Aug 2019 17:19:25 GMT  
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What a wonderful experience. I could see that in Geoff Downes. He doesn't come across as an arrogant person. You can almost pick up a sense of some musicians - Maybe their personalities come across a little bit. You can definitely spot the alphas in a group.

I must admit that I was pretty impressed with Geoff Downes at this concert.

As I said earlier, I watched him perform onstage in the Drama tour, which was right after the

Buggles / Yes infusion. It was hard to watch after having seen Wakeman play with Yes. Downes played with one finger, if he played at all. Of course, this kept him humble. You could see it in his stage persona. He played with his back to the audience most of the time, seemingly almost ashamed. But man, he had some big shoes to fill, so I sort of can understand that in hindsight.

And Geoff Downes has grown immensely as a keyboard player. At the Royal Affair concert, he did all the music from Yes that's really complicated, and he didn't simplify the note progressions at all. He played every note of every song and he did so perfectly.

And he still seemed as modest as he was when he first joined the band.