

Q&A



Robb Shuman

YES

For Chris Squire, life in a progressive-rock giant means perpetual change

A TOTAL OF 16 MUSICIANS HAVE counted themselves members of the rock powerhouse Yes since the group's formation in England more than 40 years ago. At the center of this whirlwind of constant inconstancy has been bass player Chris Squire, who has carried the group's flame through changes in lineup and style, as well as periods of dormancy and uncertainty. "It's a bit of a revolving door," acknowledges Squire with a chuckle. That said, the group has seemingly avoided the bitterness of most rock-band membership shifts—a total of six players have at some point left the group and later returned. "Everyone who's ever been in the band has brought something to it," he says. "There's no

one who's passed through Yes who I wouldn't work with again."

But *Fly From Here*, the group's first studio effort since 2001's *Magnification*, comes with a bitter pill for many band loyalists to swallow: Founding lead singer Jon Anderson is absent from a new Yes album for the only time since 1980's *Drama*. Present are longtime members Squire, guitarist Steve Howe, drummer Alan White and new singer Benoît David (who replaced Anderson in 2008), as well as the return of two *Drama* veterans: *Fly From Here* producer Trevor Horn, who sang on that album, and keyboardist Geoff Downes. "If it ends up sounding like Yes, then it ends up sounding like Yes," figures Squire—and the

new album does, right down to the latest of the group's trademark epic suites, the six-part "Fly From Here." London native Squire spoke with us from Phoenix, Ariz., his home since 2008.

What happened with Jon Anderson?

After the *Magnification* album, we were touring for a couple of years and a bit. Following that Jon became ill with respiratory problems, so we took some downtime while he was figuring that out. Then the next thing we knew it was 2008, and Jon was up for doing this tour that we had planned. We were just about to go into rehearsals when he got really sick again, so we had to cancel that tour. At that time we made the decision

to bring in Benoît David to sing so the band would be able to carry on working. We went out on the road for a couple of years with Benoît, and that brought us up to 2010. Then I said "OK, let's make a new album."

How did Benoît fit in?

We had to go through a period of time of putting him through the paces. It's not an easy job to be lead singer in Yes, so we had to know he was going to stay the course. We wanted to know he was the right choice to carry on to the point of making new music with him. Fortunately it all worked out.

What has he brought to the group?

He's very enthusiastic, and he has a really good voice. He has a lot of energy for stage work, and I'm very happy with his performance on the new album. It was just a question of him getting up to the standard we wanted, and he pulled it off. I've encouraged him to try and start writing music as well, and he wrote a little on the new album.

What was the writing like?

We got together in Phoenix around April 2010 and brought in ideas of songs we had. We hammered out a few things and made demos. Probably about half of what we did ended up on the album. Then I got together with Trevor Horn to ask if he'd be interested in producing the album. We started talking about the track "We Can Fly," that we'd written back in 1980 for the *Drama* album but didn't actually record. That got the ball rolling. We started adding other ideas, embellished the track and made it into a much longer piece of music. We added other bits of music that Trevor and Geoff Downes had written.

Do you write on bass?

When I write on bass it's probably more likely to be riffs. When I'm writing actual songs it's more often on the keyboard or an acoustic guitar.

What basses are on the record?

My old faithful Rickenbacker, which I used a couple of different tones on—a few effects, tremolos and envelope shapers. I dug up an old Dutron pedal from the '70s, which is kind of an envelope shaper. I also used my Tobias four-string bass, which [luthier Michael Tobias] custom-made for me. It goes as low as a five-string. It's tuned B-E-A-D, so it's tuned down a fourth from a normal bass. The neck is really long to get that low B. I also used a Lakland bass on one of the tracks, which is

kind of like a Fender Jazz, and a Martin acoustic bass on a track.

How about amps?

I used the same setup I've used for a long time. I still use a Marshall 100-watt in the studio, and that's all I use. When I play live, I use the same Marshall 100-watt, but I also have an Ampeg backup—a couple of 8x10 cabinets and an Ampeg SVT amp. I run them both so that in case something goes down there's always one still working.

Do you think ahead to how the songs will translate live?

A bit, though I've just realized that in the big suite there is one part where I'm playing the Rickenbacker, then in the next section it's the Tobias and there's no time to change

How has your playing evolved?

My technique has changed slightly. I've developed a way of playing with my right hand where I still use a pick, but a millisecond after the pick hits the string my thumb hits the string as well. That way I get an attack and a smooth release on the note. That's something I've developed over years of playing, the positioning of the pick and my thumb. I've found myself doing that more and more, and now pretty much I do that all the time. It gradually developed.

How has the band endured?

We've obviously gotten into a lot of people's blood somehow, enough to have maintained a foothold in their memories. What's starting to happen now, and has been happening over the last year, is that there's a much



Steve Howe, Alan White, Benoît David, Chris Squire, Geoff Downes

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basses. (laughs) So I'm going to have to figure out that one. I was talking to my tech the other day about getting some kind of stand to put the Tobias bass on.

Do you still practice?

Not really—only inasmuch as I'll sit down at home and be fiddling around with an acoustic guitar or a bass with a general notion in my head of writing something. This year we've been doing shows and making this album, so I've been playing quite a lot anyway. We've had only a very small amount of downtime.

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greater percentage of young fans who now are coming to the shows. Obviously I think it's great that today's teenagers are showing an interest in coming to see a Yes show. That makes me feel good.

—Chris Neal



'We've obviously gotten into a lot of people's blood and maintained a foothold in their memories.'