

RICK WAKEMAN - "NO EARTHLY CONNECTION"

RICK WAKEMAN's new album "No Earthly Connection" (AMLK 64583) is, basically, a musical autobiography. It is, he says, partly fictional - but also partly non-fictional, based upon various unexplained phenomena.

"It deals with why life exists, what life there may be under the sea, and evolution - even the existence of flying saucers. And, whether you believe in them or not, you can't discard 50,000 sightings a year."

He goes on: "It concerns all the things we know about, but can't explain.

"One of the few things that does grow, expand and develop, is music. So I took the human soul as my theme, and explained it in musical terms.

"When a musician dies, his soul, which is a musical soul, is reincarnated into another person. Everyone, when they're born, regardless of status, would be credited with a musical soul.

"Although the figure in my story is fictitious - it's a form of autobiography. It doesn't matter what walk of life you're born into; your environment, and how you're brought up, affects how your musical soul develops."

Taken from an interview with CHRIS WELCH,
in Melody Maker, March 6, 1976

RICK WAKEMAN: MUSICALLY BRILLIANT, WITH A VIVID IMAGINATION

In Rio de Janeiro last year, Rick Wakeman met Great Train Robber Ronald Biggs. They went drinking together, played football, and talked horse-racing. And, before they parted, like soccer stars after a game, they swapped shirts. Biggsy gave Rick a red one he allegedly wore at the robbery; and received, in return, the one worn by Wakeman on his wedding day!

Inevitably, of course, Biggs boasted about his part in the "crime of the century", and even went as far as to hint that the real truth about the hold-up had still to be told. In fact, he proposes to make his own film of the robbery, and suggested that Rick might like to write the soundtrack music.

Obviously, the idea fired Wakeman's vivid imagination, and has been filed away for consideration as a possibility for another of his extraordinary musical excursions.

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Rick Wakeman, of course, has a propensity for presenting his music in a grandiose style. His interpretation of Jules Verne's "Journey To The Centre Of The Earth" was recorded live in concert, and then performed in the open air in London in 1974, with huge inflatable prehistoric monsters leaping out of a lake. And for his extravaganza in 1975, he hired Wembley Empire Pool and staged "The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table" as a three-day ice pageant! For both ventures, he used huge orchestras and choirs, fused with his own English Rock Ensemble backing band.

Rick is, as one critic described him: "A brilliant musician with the imagination of a crazed Cecil B. De Mille."

However, in spite of criticism levelled at him for his indulgence, Rick Wakeman does sell a lot of records. And he's a rock superstar in America, Australia, Japan and Brazil, as well as his own country. "King Arthur" and "Journey", plus "The Six Wives Of Henry VIII" - his first solo work in 1973 - are all certified Gold Discs in these territories. And at his own special gala at the MIDEM music festival in Cannes, France in January, Rick and the English Rock Ensemble received a standing ovation from the international audience.

While Rick was away from Britain in 1975, on a mammoth three-month tour of the Americas (when he visited Brazil), another venture in which he was involved - the controversial Ken Russell movie "Lisztomania" - was unleashed upon the public.

Rick had adapted the music of Franz Liszt for the soundtrack; and, although the movie received a severe mauling from reviewers, the album itself fared quite favourably.

'SOMETHING FOR THE EYES, AS WELL AS THE EARS'

Rick Wakeman's works have all been milestones on his journey towards becoming a musical legend himself. He is perhaps the finest exponent of keyboard music in the business. And, as a composer, he has incredible vision and scope, plus the technical skills to weave rock, classical and avant garde themes and ideas into a meaningful fabric.

"I've always believed that if you provide something for the eyes as well as the ears, there's more chance of getting people to pay attention to the music", he says.

"Some concerts can get boring unless there is something else going on. Rock shows are usually very badly presented. If there's nothing to look at apart from a group onstage, people start looking around to see if Elton John, or whoever, is there."

He's insistent, therefore, that his concerts should be special occasions. "Your first show with a new work should not be a throw-away ... it should be an absolute riot. You should give it your all!"

Rick (27) does, in fact, give his all in everything. To such an extent, that he suffered a minor heart attack in 1974, shortly after staging "Journey" at London's Crystal Palace.

It was the culmination of a hectic career which has included numerous tours of America (last year was his 14th), as part of bands like the Strawbs and Yes, as well as in his own right.

SACKED FROM ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Rick's first musical influence was his father, himself a reputable pianist, who played in British big bands. Later, after arduous practice, and winning numerous competitions, Rick became confident enough to apply to enter the Royal College of Music.

"I really wanted to be a concert pianist. However, once I started at the College, I was really brought down to earth. Everyone else there was at least as good as me; and a lot of them much better!"

Gradually, he began missing music lectures to do recording sessions. And ultimately, he was dismissed, without gaining a degree.

He joined the Strawbs, and then spent three years with superstar band, Yes, leaving in the Spring of 1974. Hidden away behind a battery of synthesizers, mellotrons, and organs, mixing rock, classical and jazz influences, he had become a cult figure.

Inevitably, he figures annually in most of the musical polls - for both his product and personal prowess. In 1975, he was voted world No. 1 keyboards star for the third consecutive year by "Melody Maker". This year he's already won that category in both "Sounds" and "New Musical Express".

PROFESSIONALLY, A PERFECTIONIST. SOCIALLY, EVERYONE'S FRIEND

Professionally, Rick Wakeman is a perfectionist; scrupulous in all his work, right down to the finest detail. Socially, he's generally accepted by fellow musicians and media folk alike, as one of the more genial, co-operative and unprepossessing rock superstars around.

He's a great family man (wife Ros; sons Oliver 4 and Adam 2) and lives in a comfortable mansion in Buckinghamshire (where the attic has been converted into a bar/games room). Rick and Ros also have a family home in Devon, where they keep two donkeys; while a racehorse called "Tropical Saint" is stabled near Oxford.

Rick is also the head of a business empire. He has 11 companies, including a firm making rock instruments, one making packing cases for other groups, a recording studio - and, by no means least of all, a car hire company which runs his beloved collection of Rolls Royces (eight at the last count!)

He's also a football fanatic; as a player and supporter (Fourth Division Brentford). In September 1975, he sponsored a fund-raising charity match and persuaded international stars like Alan Hudson, Peter Shilton, Peter Osgood and Frank Worthington to turn out for him.

After "King Arthur" at Wembley last May, Rick Wakeman subsequently revealed he would stage fewer rock spectaculars with full orchestra and choir, etc. And, as a result, he re-organised his English Rock Ensemble backing band, augmenting it with brass, for the three-month American tour upon which he embarked in October 1975.

The new line-up now comprises: Ashley Holt (vocals), Roger Newell (bass), and newcomers John Dunsterville (guitars), Tony Fernandez (drums), plus brass players Reg Brooks (trombone) and Martyn Shields (trumpet).

RICK WAKEMAN'S SURGE TO WORK HARDER

Wakeman decided, at 16, to become a concert pianist, and he went to the Royal College of Music for 18 months to further that ambition. He studied piano and clarinet and was exposed to various other keyboard instruments. After leaving, he taught music awhile, at the same time working on recording sessions for people like Cat Stevens, T. Rex and David Bowie. Rick was gigging in a pub when he met Strawbs' leader Dave Cousins. His first tour with them was also his honeymoon with his wife, Ros. Rick played with the Strawbs for 15 months and appeared on two albums - "Just A Collection Of Antiques And Curios" and "From The Witchwood", then quit and resumed his lucrative session work.

It wasn't long before he was invited to join Yes, where he worked for three years, quitting in the summer of 1974.

His desire for strictly individual expression, on top of his effort at group interaction, was the product not only of his breadth of musical vision, but also of his great ambition,

"All my life I have strived to create music I believed wholeheartedly in. In the course of doing that, and winning the respect of audiences, I wanted to sell a lot of records and make a lot of money. The big aim was to make myself safe and secure by doing something I believed in. This will sound very egotistical, but when you succeed it's an incredible feeling, but you don't think: 'Right, I've done it. I'll pack it in now.' You get a great surge to work harder and to create better music. It's exhilarating."

Rick Wakeman is undoubtedly the finest rock organist to emerge in recent years. Even at his most explosive, his style remains focused, his approach direct.

Wakeman's gift is that his virtuosity can either interact cleverly within the group context ... or easily produce an entrancing solo.

THE OTHER WORKS OF RICK WAKEMAN

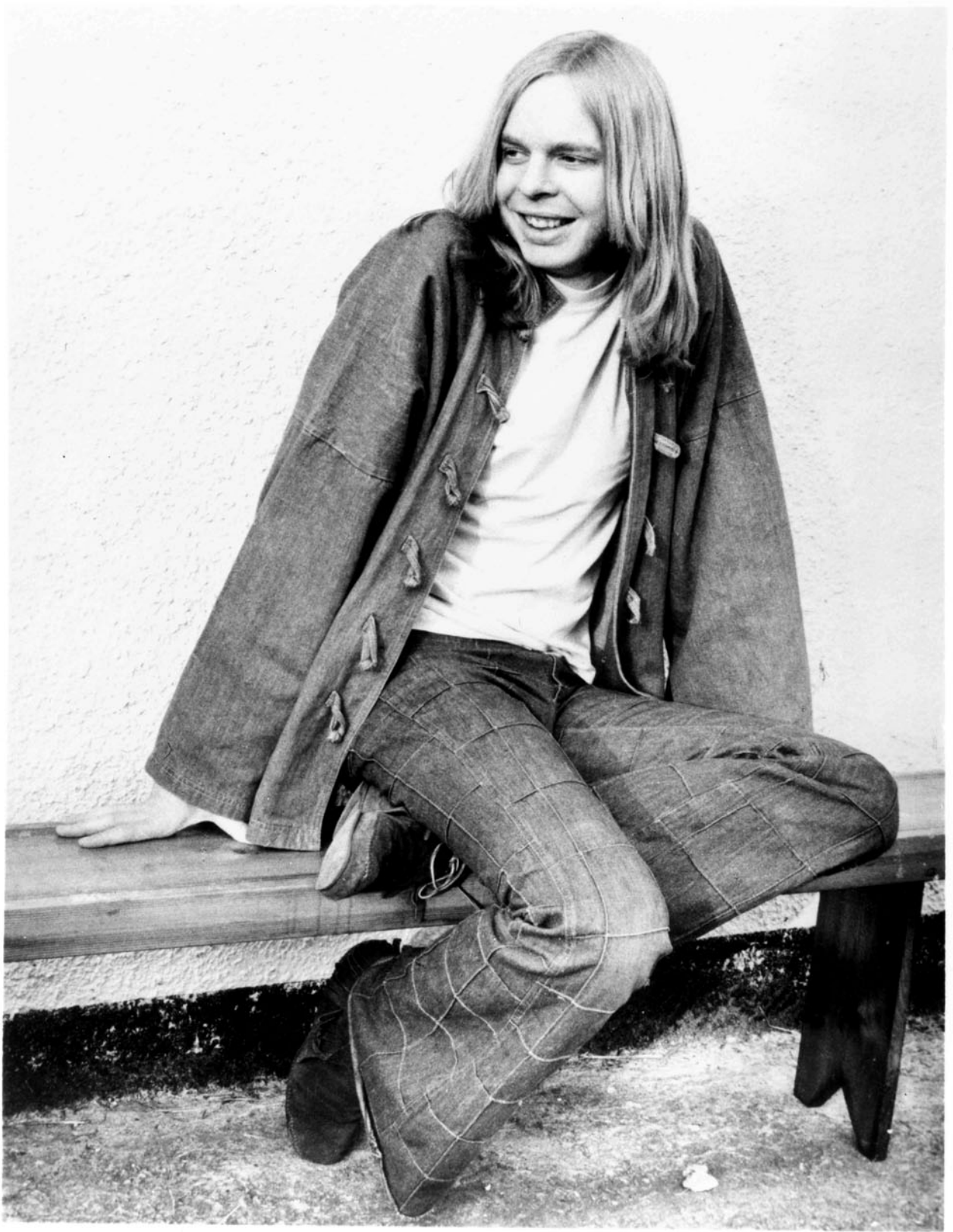
"The Six Wives Of Henry VIII" (AMLH 64361): Rick's inventive solo album debut. His awesome virtuosity, as displayed on Yes albums and tours, combined to give his solo career great popular impetus and substantial critical recognition. "Time" listed "Henry VIII" as one of the best recordings of 1973. While, Wakeman himself was rated No. 1 keyboard player in both British and American polls. A position he was to repeat on successive years.

"Journey To The Centre Of The Earth" (AMLH 63621): Recorded "live" at London's Royal Festival Hall in January 1974, and performed again at a Crystal Palace "Garden Party" in July. The album went to No. 1 in the UK and No. 3 in the US. The "Melody Maker" described the work as "entertaining, fresh and disarmingly unpretentious."

"The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table" (AMLH 64515): Rick's third solo album work; with the regular rhythm group, a 45-piece session orchestra, the 48-piece English Chamber Choir, and an eight-piece male voice choir. It is based on the life of King Arthur, his knights and the magician Merlin. And it was presented as a musical pageant on ice at Wembley Empire Pool in May 1975. The LP also went to No. 1 in Britain. Rick was again the "Melody Maker's" top keyboard star, for the third year.

"Lisztomania" (AMLH 64546): Rick's score for Ken Russell's controversial movie, on the life of Franz Liszt, starring Roger Daltrey. Drawn from the works of Liszt and Wagner, it is rated magisterial in the most grandiose sense.

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