



## Tales from problematic emotions

**YES 2009: From left – Alan White, Chris Squire, Benoit David, Steve Howe, Oliver Wakeman**

FANS of progressive rock legends Yes have a treat in store this November as the current line-up of the band undertake a six-date tour of the UK.

Over the past 40 years, the band has continued to redefine the boundaries of rock music, and are set to carry the torch into the foreseeable future.

But key figures are missing: legendary keyboardist Rick Wakeman (whose place is now occupied by his son, Oliver) and singer Jon Anderson (more contentiously replaced, because of his recent health scare, by Canadian Benoit David).

Jon is now fully restored to health, and actually undertook a small British tour in August. He had advised the band that he was well and available for this tour, but they decided to keep Benoit in the line-up.

Drummer Alan White said: "We felt it was unfair to Benoit after his performance on the American tour.

"We waited for Jon for three years to get well, but in the end Steve (Howe, guitarist), Chris (Squire, bassist) and myself were all

Jon Anderson could sing again with Yes ... but not yet, as drummer Alan White tells MARTIN HUTCHINSON

ready to go out and play again."

But it may not be the end of Jon's involvement, White says: "I don't see us not playing together. It may possibly happen next year, it's up to Jon and the rest of the band."

The "replacement" members of the band have shaped up well.

"Oliver's great," says White. "He's just like his father. He even sounds like him."

Many people have commented on the similarity between Benoit's and Jon's voices. White says: "He has his own slant on things, but he's uncannily like Jon."

"People really like Benoit, we've been getting some good reviews in the States."

● **The 2009 version of Yes will be appearing at Manchester's Apollo Theatre at 7.30pm on Sunday 22nd November. Tickets are £33.50.**

Two years ago, The Magic Numbers stepped off the exhausting treadmill they'd been on since their debut album became a hit and disappeared. Now they're back, rested and rejuvenated, with a new album in the pipeline. Frontman Romeo told JUDITH DORNAN how they rediscovered their magic

MAGIC Numbers frontman Romeo Stodart clearly remembers the day they realised they had to step away from the band they loved. Despite being family – Romeo's sister Michelle plays bass while drummer Sean Gannon and melodica player Angela Gannon are also siblings – they were at the end of their tether.

Romeo recalls: "We were in Australia and it was quite a mad day actually because, myself and Michelle, and our mum back in London weren't well."

"Then, on top of that, Sean had injured his hand and had to play some shows with a broken hand."

"It was abysmal and it was the first time ... we were loving the gigs still but we were like, 'We've got to end it.' And it turned into two years. Almost three years really."

It was their first break since the success of haunting single, Forever Lost, and the follow up, Love Me Like You, took their self-titled debut album to number seven in the UK.

It all began when Romeo had become friends with Sean and began to make music with him when the Stodarts arrived in London as teenagers after growing up in Trinidad and New York.

Yet they struggled to complete the line-up, auditioning numerous musicians – until the day their little sisters joined in – and they realised, to their horror, that no-one else sounded this right.

But having gone without ceasing from touring the first album straight into the follow-up, Those the Brokes, on that day in Australia they finally admitted they were falling apart.

Romeo recalls: "We'd done three-and-a-half years straight on the road. We were loving it but, at some point... someone was waiting for someone else to go, 'Yeah, let's just jump off for a bit.'"

"Our relationships had become really fraught and we were sitting in the room together and not saying anything because we had exhausted the friendship."

"And myself and my sister, ugh, our brother and sister relationship had gone out of the window. I would just solely talk to her about the band and music."

"I was never able to stop and say, 'How you doing, you know, how are you coping with all this?' So we were just fighting a lot and we said, 'We have to stop now.'"

Once home, Romeo fell apart. He remembers: "I must have slept for three days! I just conked out. It was kinda weird."

"Then I went through my phone and there were so many people in there, you know, like, Tracey, Birmingham. You just meet people. "And I was like, hang on, I'm home now. Who am I going to call if I



**FAMILY AND FRIENDS AGAIN: The Magic Numbers have regrouped stronger and better than ever**

# The Magic touch is back

**This time around, having the time and our own place, we have made something so far from what we've done before, it's amazing. It's a new beginning**

want to go out for a drink?" Once he'd recovered physically and mentally, he began to work on a dream he'd had since the band's first album – building their own studio.

He says: "My whole intention was to buy a desk and Pro Tools and loads of gear and mics so we took time out and accumulated everything that we thought we needed."

"And then we hired a place and had that as a haven where all of us could turn up and just record every day and write. "It's been amazing. If there's any-

thing I've learnt throughout the whole time, it's that that's actually what we need. We don't work in the best way when the clock's ticking and the engineer is saying, 'I've got to go at 12.' We're night owls! "This time around, having the time and our own place, we have made something so far from what we've done before, it's amazing. It's a new beginning."

He also took time out to play guitar on tour with his hero, 1960s songwriter Jimmy Webb, responsible for classics like Wichita Lineman and Macarthur Park.

Growing up in Trinidad, his earliest memories are of his opera singer mother singing Webb's songs – and Romeo grabbed the opportunity to introduce his starstruck mum.

He giggles: "My mum was just really cute, she was like, 'Hi, I used to sing your songs!' And he was like, 'Oh, thank you very much.'"

"I just remember hearing all his songs, like By The Time I Get to Phoenix, which is the most beautiful song ever."

"And I got to play the solo! And every time it came up, he'd go, 'And Romeo on guitar!' I was like, this is just too cool!"

Before he was famous, he once sneaked his mum backstage at the Albert Hall to meet another hero, Burt Bacharach.

He recalls: "My mum was like, 'Romeo, we're going to get arrest-

ed!' And I was like, 'No no, it'll be cool!'"

"I leave mum for 30 seconds to see if we could maybe get a drink or something and I hear her laughing. And she's there chatting away to Dionne Warwick, just like they're old pals!"

With a new album, a new song, Hurts So Good, out on download and a track, All I Believe In, recorded with Malian superstars Amadou and Mariam on the movie soundtrack for The Twilight saga: New Moon, Romeo says he and Michelle are closer than ever.

He says: "My sister helped me a lot with the lyrics which has not happened before. I was in a vulnerable state with a lot of the songs and I'd get it to almost be finished."

"Then she would talk to me about what she thought the song meant or

ask me things and then we'd work on finishing it. That's been cool, that's been a first." They're so desperate to play, they can't wait for the album in February. Their mini-tour arrives at 53 Degrees in Preston on Monday and Romeo says: "It's like, we've got to get out there and play these songs to everyone."

"We're itching to get back on the road! I need an escape from my life! It's gone to the complete other side now. Are we in a frickin' band or what?!"

● **The Magic Numbers play Preston's 53 Degrees on Monday November 23. Tickets are £10 advance from Students Union reception on 01772 893000, from Action Records, Church Street, Preston, on 01772 258809 or online at www.lancashiretickets.com**

## From Genesis to jazz, Steve's a heck of an eclectic guitarist

STEVE Hackett is a happy chap at the moment, not only has the litigation over his latest album been settled in his favour, he is also about to undertake a UK tour.

"There was an injunction stopping me from releasing the album, but it was settled last week and it'll be out next week," he says.

After two weeks on the continent, he's very upbeat about touring:

"It's been very good and I still feel fresh. I must be the lack of smoking and drinking. I sleep better these days with just a cup of tea."

Steve came to prominence in the early 70s as the guitarist with Genesis, but left in 1977.

From that moment on, Steve released album after album and has never been tied to one particular style.

"I like experimentation," He says simply. He has covered blues, classical, rock and jazz amongst his 29 solo albums, but some people say that his 1979 album Spectral Mornings takes some beating.

"We still play a few things off that album," he says. "It really has stood the test of time."

The new album is called Out of the Tunnel's Mouth and is available exclusively on his website [www.hackettsongs.com](http://www.hackettsongs.com) and contains just eight tracks.

"There's lots of styles (on the album) because I feel that music has to be an adven-

turous journey, and using one style is limiting yourself unnecessarily."

He warms to his theme: "There's Turkish influences and Spanish music has been an influence ever since I first picked up a nylon string guitar," continued the 59-year-old Londoner.

"Still Waters is a blues number. It's really an excuse to play blues guitar."

The music has a spirit, an unremitting pulse and audiences get excited by it."

Also in the mix is a bit of jazz with Ghost In The Glass.

With the new album just being released, you might be forgiven for thinking that it will be heavily featured in the concerts, but Steve quickly points out that that is not the case.

"We'll play a mixture of things really. Obviously we'll pay a fair

amount of the new album, but I don't ram it down people's throats." I enjoy playing the early tunes and there'll be some old things of mine and some Genesis moments that I instigated. We do Blood On The Rooftops from the Wind And Wuthering album that Genesis never did live, and with the improvement in technology we can do the whole of Firth Of Fifth."

MARTIN HUTCHINSON

● **Steve Hackett and his band will be appearing at The Lowry, Salford on tomorrow at 7.30pm. Tickets are £22.00 from the Box Office on 0870 787 5780 or online at [www.thelowry.com](http://www.thelowry.com). Subject to a booking fee.**



**VARIED: Steve Hackett**

