

# Legend Rick still refusing to 'turn that racket down'

Interview by TIM FLETCHER Burton (Staffordshire, England) Mail. September 9, 2011

RICK Wakeman bestrode the 70s as a keyboard-playing prog rock colossus; a member of Yes, solo artist and session musician with some of the greatest names in music.

RICK Wakeman bestrode the 70s as a keyboard-playing prog rock colossus; a member of Yes, solo artist and session musician with some of the greatest names in music.

Still plying his trade after more than 40 years as a professional musician, Wakeman comes to the Midlands next week with a one-man show featuring music and comic anecdotes.



Rick Wakeman

He spoke to Mail reporter TIM FLETCHER about his life in music and how, contrary to popular perception, he claims to have helped to invent punk rock.

IN some quarters, Rick Wakeman is held up as the embodiment of the excess and self-indulgence of 1970s music.

As a member of prog rock legends Yes, he would stretch the musical boundaries with such highly ambitious projects as a concept album based on the legend of King Arthur, memorably performed live - on ice — at the Empire Pool in Wembley.

However, Wakeman bristles at the suggestion that the punk rock explosion of the late 70s was a reaction to such excesses, citing his own little-known role in the birth of that musical genre.

“I sometimes love the ignorance of the media who never seem to properly do their homework on things,” he says.

“Punk really started in America and one of the founders of punk were (San Francisco band) The Tubes.

“If any of those people did their homework they’d find out the person who discovered The Tubes was me. I took them to A&M Records, who signed them, and I was very fond of them.

“If you look at the history of music, every decade or so there’s a mammoth change and it’s nothing to do with a particular kind of music — the whole ‘antidote’ thing is just stupidity on the part of the media.

“History will tell you the first thing anybody has that really belongs to them, as opposed to their parents, is music, and the best thing you can hear as a kid is: ‘Turn that racket down’.

“That’s your creation and what you’re doing is replacing what you’re born into.

The crooners of the 50s were wiped out by the pop bands of the 60s, who were wiped out by prog rock, and so it goes on.

“The interesting thing about today’s music fans is that there are no rules - people just like what they like and they don’t have to put a date stamp on it.”

Wakeman started piano lessons at the age of five and went on to study at the Royal College of Music before leaving to work as a session musician, working with some of the greatest names in music, including Ozzy Osbourne, Elton John and the ‘Thin White Duke’ himself.

"I learned more from David Bowie and his producer, Tony Visconti, than I did from all the other sessions put together," says Wakeman.

"Bowie was the absolute master in that he knew what he wanted and how he wanted to achieve it. He was a wonderful guy to work with."

Wakeman has recently branched out into presenting his own radio show and appearing on television shows such as Countdown and Grumpy Old Men, but music remains his first love and, unlike other artists of his generation, he has never taken time out from the business.

"Since I started music lessons at the age of five there has literally not been a single day in the past 57 years when I've not been involved in music," he says.

"I always said if I got to the stage where I didn't enjoy what I was doing then I would stop, because you can't expect other people to enjoy it if you don't. But every day is different — I've got my radio show, books, TV shows and I still do the great big rock shows abroad — every day is filled with so many different things."

There will be no 'great big rock shows' for UK audiences, Wakeman having opted for a different format in which he delivers a solo performance at the piano of his own music and that of other artists he's worked with, interspersed with humorous anecdotes recounting some of the weird and wonderful situations he's found himself in.

"It's not a tour as such because I don't really do tours any more," he says. "I'd done 40 years of touring solidly and one day I just thought: 'I don't want to do this any more, touring relentlessly and living out of a hotel."

"On a tour you tend to get into a bit of a routine, which is something I wanted to avoid, to do something different instead.

"What I'm doing instead is to do 20 or so shows a year and scatter them about so every show is fresh and almost feels like an opening night, and with a show like this there's room for improvisation, something which you can't do if you're with a band.

"I do have a plan — I don't just walk on stage and think: 'What the bloody hell am I going to do now?' but you can go off on a bit of a tangent."

At 62, and with more than 40 years as a Wakeman has no plans to call it a day.

"Like anyone else I've had good times and bad times but I think I'm old school and if it's in your blood there's nothing you can do about it," he says.

"I can't see me running out of stuff to do and I think it will be a case of me banging on the lid of the coffin and saying: 'I'm not finished yet'."

