

SELECT OBSERVATIONS FROM THIS YEAR'S FABULOUS FLOATING FESTIVAL

A CRUISE TO THE EDGE SAMPLER

BY NICK TATE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JENNIFER FISHER



Four days. Thirty artists. Fifty-plus concerts and performances. Dozens of Q&A sessions, meet-and-greet events and after-hours gatherings. By sheer numbers, the fourth-annual Cruise to the Edge (sailing this year from Tampa, Fla.) Feb. 7–11 was a massive musical smorgasbord, overwhelming in scope and variety. Consequently, taking in the seafaring progressive music festival was like trying to sip from a firehose.

The biggest challenge for any fan (or reviewer) attending such an event is recognizing that it must be sampled and savored in small bites, buffet-style, rather than consumed whole. The fact is, you just can't take it all in; too many things are happening at once on various stages across the ship. This is no small challenge for the serious prog aficionado: How can one possibly choose between Patrick Moraz and Yes, Haken and Tony Levin's Stick Men, Anglagard and Steve Hackett, or among honorary host Mike Portnoy's multiple ensemble incarnations?

You have to do both and neither, by alternating between stages and events without lingering for entire shows or gatherings. It is the blessing and curse this extravaganza poses.

With that in mind, what follows is one reviewer's take on standout performances and noteworthy moments from Cruise to the Edge 2017 (with apologies to artists whose presentations were short-changed because of time and scheduling conflicts).

SPIRITS OF EMERSON, LAKE AND WETTON SET THE TONE

You almost could say the real headliners of this year's floating festival never actually made it aboard as genre icons John Wetton, Greg Lake and Keith Emerson all passed away months prior (both Emerson and Wetton were scheduled to appear). Their musical contributions were duly acknowledged, though, in various performances, tributes and artist Q&A sessions.

Certainly, Royal Caribbean liner *Brilliance of the Seas* was no ghost ship haunted by nostalgia acts and requiems. If anything, the deaths of keyboard maestro Emerson and singer/bassist Lake, and Wetton (as well as Yes legends Chris Squire and Peter Banks in

2015) lent vibrancy to the proceedings. As a result, this festival—a bucket-list event for prog-rock devotees—was more an affirmation of the genre's staying power than epitaph for past glories.

Famed King Crimson/Peter Gabriel bassist Tony Levin might have said it best in suggesting Cruise to the Edge 2017 marked not only the losses of some legendary first-wave pioneers, but also passing of the proverbial torch from old guard to new in progressive



music. "It's a great loss to the music community and particularly progressive music," Levin told *Progression*. "For a musician like me who moved into the world of progressive bass playing, particularly Chris Squire, John Wetton and Greg Lake—they're the stars in the sky. They continue to influence what we all play to this day."

Throughout the cruise, artists delivered homages in ways big and small.

Dave Kerzner Band: Opening night, Dave Kerzner assembled a last-minute show featuring more than a dozen musicians who spoke and sang heartfelt tributes. Among classics performed by the assemblage: "From

the Beginning," "21st Century Schizoid Man" and "In the Court of the Crimson King." The show's emotional centerpiece was a poignant performance of Emerson, Lake & Palmer standard "Still ... You Turn Me On" by bassist/vocalist Billy Sherwood, who replaced Squire in Yes and was a friend of Emerson's.

District 97: District 97 was scheduled to perform a 13-song set of U.K., Asia and Crimson songs as Wetton's backing band on this cruise. But his death just seven days earlier prompted, instead, a tribute performance including several Wetton covers. "The titans are falling," bassist Tim Seisser told *Progression*. "And the best thing we can do as one of the younger bands is to keep carrying the torch."

Yes: Guitarist Steve Howe dedicated encores of Yes's two shows to Wetton, with an amped-up version of Asia's "Heat of the Moment." Joining him were keyboardist Geoff Downes (who co-founded the 1980s supergroup with Howe, Wetton, and Carl Palmer); Billy Sherwood (Asia's new front man); Jay Schellen (drummer with John Payne-era Asia); and singer Jon Davison. Howe later acknowledged "all the people who brought things to Yes, particularly two people we've lost along the way—Peter Banks and Chris Squire."

Patrick Moraz: Swiss keyboard maestro Patrick Moraz called the deaths of Emerson, Lake and Wetton a "great loss" for music. He also told *Progression* he considered collaborating with Wetton as part of his new group iNow, with bassist Bernard "Bunny" Brunel and drummer Virgil Donati. "The band was going to include John," he said. "We discussed the possibility of working together on a new album. But now you can only wonder what might have been."

Steve Hackett: Ex-Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett dedicated the encores of his two shows to Wetton with a retreat of Genesis ballad "Afterglow," which the two had played on-stage together: "I'd like to dedicate this one to a guy who makes it feel like it's a much smaller ship without him—that's Mr. John Wetton."

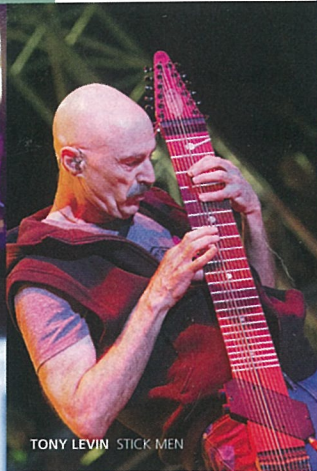
FATHER TIME: UNCREDITED CONTRIBUTOR

Age and time have taken an obvious toll on '70s-era first-wave progressive acts that played this cruise. Yes, Kansas, Focus, Curved Air, John Lodge's neo-Moody Blues band and

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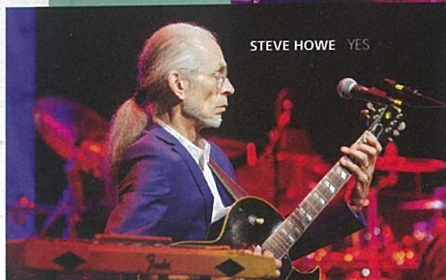
DAVE KERZNER



TONY LEVIN STICK MEN



ANLAGARD



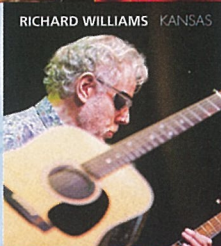
STEVE HOWE YES



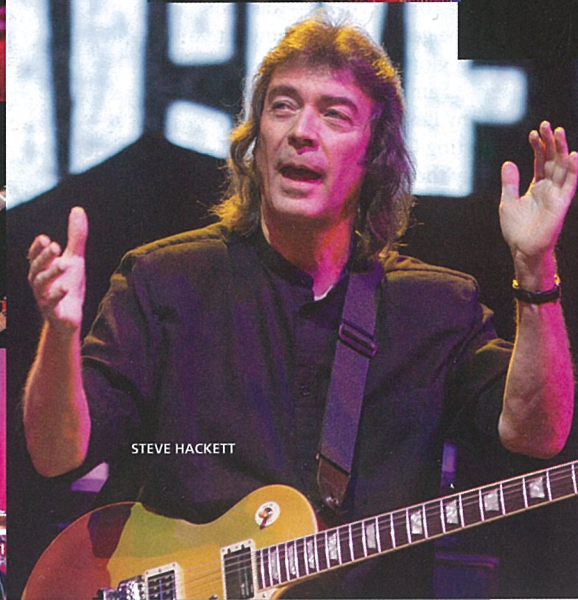
THUS VAN LEER FOCUS



SONJA KRISTINA CURVED AIR



RICHARD WILLIAMS KANSAS



STEVE HACKETT



PATRICK MORAZ



LESLIE HUNT DISTRICT 97



JOHN LODGE
10,000 LIGHT YEARS BAND

Steve Hackett's "Genesis Revisited" crew now feature only one or two founding or classic-lineup members, the others retired, ailing, or gone. But, the music marches on. Some of the acts' newer additions are as talented and capable as originals they replaced, bringing freshness and excitement to live performances.

Yes's two shows provided the best example of new complementing old. Steve Howe, while still technically excellent, seemed detached and self-absorbed as were Geoff Downes behind his keyboards and drummer Alan White. By contrast, the new guys—vocalist Jon Davison, bassist/singer Billy Sherwood and drummer Jay Schellen (who spelled an ailing White for most of the performances)—had an obvious three-way connection. The trio shared great chemistry playing off of one another while taking liberties with the vocal, bass, and drum parts in ways lending the old classics new sparkle.

The same old-meets-new dynamic also worked well for Focus, Curved Air, Steve Hackett, Kansas, and John Lodge's 10,000 Light Years Band—as well as Anlagard and Spock's Beard, which both have seen lineup changes since emerging in the early 1990s.

STEVE HACKETT: IT'S (WAY PAST) 1 P.M. AND TIME FOR LUNCH!

It is impossible to pick a single highpoint of this festival. But Steve Hackett's lunchtime show the last day of the cruise certainly would be a contender. The ex-Genesis guitar legend walked out to a roaring ovation and immediately acknowledged the odd 1:15 p.m. start. "You guys giving up lunch for this?" he quipped to a raucous ovation.

That set the tone for the cruise's feel-good concert, as Hackett delivered Genesis classics and selections from his 40-year solo career, including songs off new album *The Night Siren*. Two of the new tracks—"Behind the Smoke," inspired by the Syrian refugee crisis and the haunting "In the Skeleton Gallery"—stand beside his best works.

As always, Hackett was an entertainingly engaging front man, interacting freely with the crowd and his crack band including singer Nad Sylvan, bassist Nick Beggs, keyboardist Roger King, woodwinds player Rob Townsend and drummer Gary O'Toole.

Hackett's distinctive sustain-on-steroids fretwork always has been the bridge between his solo material and work with Genesis. In fact, Hackett (like former Genesis mate Peter

Gabriel) is among the few first-wave artists remaining true to their roots while also pushing the creative envelope.

At the end of this performance, something truly remarkable happened: Hackett and band left the stage to a thunderous standing ovation that continued even after house lights came up and stagehands began breaking down the equipment. Ushers implored the audience to leave and for 11 minutes it went on, until Hackett and friends returned to the stage.

"I guess you guys really do want another one?" Steve joked. "OK, we're going to do you one." He then led the band through an epic "11th Earl of Mar" from 1977 Genesis album *Wind and Wuthering*, ending his stellar performance with a rousingly satisfying musical exclamation point.

PATRICK MORAZ: 'UNBELIEVABLE!'

Swiss keyboard wiz Patrick Moraz might have delivered the best solo show of the cruise. The former Yes and Moody Blues keyboardist drew a capacity crowd for his storyteller-style presentation at grand piano, providing an inspiring, eclectic insider's view of his nearly 60 years in music.

Moraz opened his 90-minute performance with two John Gage pieces from the mid-1960s, which he described as precursors to progressive rock. He then hammered his way through selections from *Flags*, a collaborative album recorded with drummer Bill Bruford; his landmark 1976 work *The Story of i*; 1979's *Future Memories*; his fiery *Molecular Symphony*; and a rocked-up version of Duke Ellington's "Caravan."

But the highlight was his performance of snippets from 1974 Yes album *Relayer*—"To Be Over," "Sound Chaser," and the ascendant "Soon" segment from "The Gates of Delerium."

Throughout, the 68-year-old Moraz exhibited energy belying his years, exhorting the audience to shout "Unbelievable!" in response to his tales from the annals of prog history. Pat's chops also remain quite impressive, his fingers moving fluidly between introspective arpeggios and aggressively percussive accents. He even accentuated rock-centric fare with open-handed drumming on the piano top.

The performance reminded all of Moraz's reputation as one of progressive music's unique innovators. Keith Emerson drew from modern classical composers, Rick Wakeman

embraced the Elizabethans, Tony Banks was moved by opera modalities and Kerry Minnear borrowed from early and medieval British music, while Pat's particular brand of prog always encompassed jazz and avant-garde idioms. You can't help but wonder why Yes engaged his services for just one album.

ANGLAGARD: (BARELY) OBSCURED BY CLOUDS


Marking its 26th year, Swedish progressive favorite Anglagard satisfied devoted fans and probably gained new followers with two sets of melodic-symphonic pastoral music bearing edgy blasts of discordant mayhem. Anglagard's music is difficult to describe, but weather conditions during the group's first-night outdoor poolside concert provided complementary atmosphere.

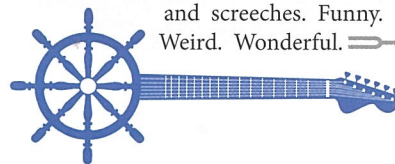
For the first two songs—an idyllic "Hostsejd" (Rites of Fall) and melancholy "Sorg Mantell" (Mourning Shroud)—the cloudless sky provided a lovely aerial canopy for the band's flute/guitar/mellotron sonorities. But amidst third song "Dagsmeja" (Lazy Days) a storm suddenly blew in out of nowhere with howling winds and driving rain. This provided a perfectly dramatic backdrop

for Anglagard's furiously dissonant maneuverings until everyone finally was forced to seek shelter.

Anglagard's second-day set (again on the outdoor pool deck) occurred under fair skies and proved a festival highpoint. The band completed a full six-song set before a packed crowd; included were dark ballad "Langtans Klocka" (Longing Clock), Euro folk-prog opus "Jordrok" (Earthsmoke) and the classically inspired "Kung Bore" (Jack Frost). While uncompromisingly complex, Anglagard's music is by turns romantic, aggressive, expansive and strangely beautiful.

The group also has an endearingly wacky sense of humor. After Anglagard's first rained-out performance, guitarist Jonas Engdegard told *Progression*: "We played so beautifully, the heavens cried tears of joy." The band handed out balloons before both of its shows. Then, during a break in "Dagsmeja," woodwinds player Anna Holmgren and guitarist Tord Lindman instructed the audience to inflate them and release air slowly by pinching the balloons' necks, rendering a cacophony of squeals and screeches. Funny.

Weird. Wonderful. 



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