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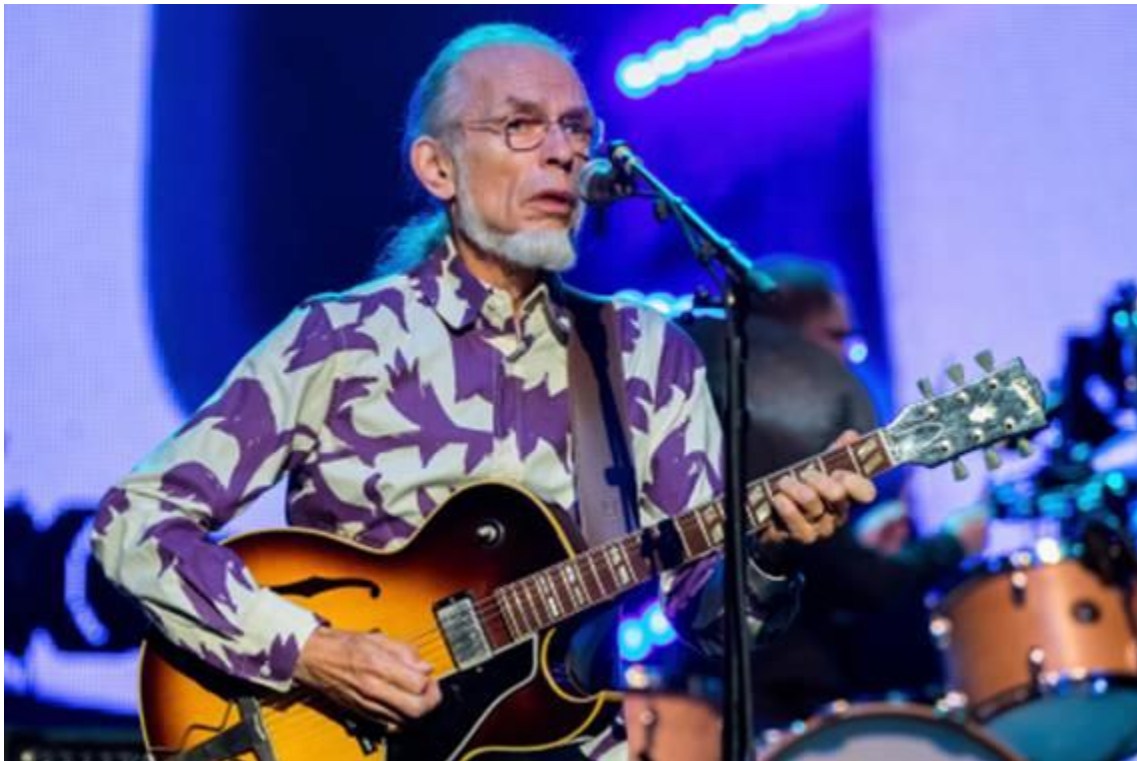
ROLLING STONE (7/20)

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Steve Howe on 10 Songs Recorded Without Yes, From Queen to Frankie Goes to Hollywood

The guitarist breaks down his work on Asia's "Heat of the Moment," Queen's "Innuendo," his new solo song "Love Is a River," and more

By [ANDY GREENE](#)



Yes guitarist Steve Howe breaks down 10 tunes he played on outside of Yes, including ones by Queen and Frankie Goes to Hollywood.
Scott Legato/Getty Images

[Steve Howe](#) will go down in rock history as the guitarist who helped [Yes](#) craft their most ambitious works in the Seventies before leading them through very difficult years in the Nineties and 2000s as critical members either died or were sidelined due to health issues or persistent personality clashes. He's the sole member of the early-Seventies lineup that produced *Fragile* and *Close to the Edge* who's still in the group, which remains his primary creative outlet and touring act.

But during all that time, he's also managed to find time for 13 solo albums and other side projects like [Asia](#), GTR, and the Steve Howe Trio along with guest spots on albums by [Queen](#), [Lou Reed](#), the Bee Gees, and even Frankie Goes to Hollywood. To commemorate the release of his new solo LP *Love Is* — out July 31st — we spoke to Howe about 10 songs he created outside of Yes, even if a certain *Star Trek* captain erased all of his work from one of them.



The Syndicats, “Maybelline” (1964)

I formed that group with the bass player, Kevin Driscoll. His mother was very bullheaded and determined. She went up to [producer] Joe Meek's office in Holloway, London, where I was born, and said, “I want you to see my son's band.”

For some reason, he did. We'd been on the circuit playing pubs. We had “Maybelline” and we played loads of other Chuck Berry songs. We passed the audition and went back there a couple of weeks later. It was my first ever recording session. I didn't know what to expect, but we stylized the arrangement with lots of bass drum and low end. We

kept the track without the guitar break and then overdubbed that on later. We put lots of spins on it. There's a bit of Chet Atkins on there, but with Chuck's general approach.

We got on really well with Joe, maybe a bit too well at times. He used to come onto me. He was more trouble on the follow-up records that were licensed to EMI. And, of course, he never paid anybody. Nobody ever got royalties. I guess he thought he was the genius of the thing and he'd keep all the royalties. Of course, we were supposed to get paid. I don't think we ever did, hence EMI returned the tapes to me, being the only real long-term performer in that group. But that song was a big moment for me. First recording. I was 17.



Lou Reed, "Ride Into the Sun" (1972)

I remember very, very little about this. Yes was recording at Morgan Studios at the time. It was a brand new 24-track studio and, of course, it was always a hubbub of activity since there were other studios. Rick [Wakeman] and I just got invited to go play. I must say, from memory, what happened is we walked just to see and Lou was like, "We're going to play you these three or four songs and then we're going to go play them. Alright?"

They were clear enough demos to grasp the structure and things. Basically, we went out there and it was the old recording method where everybody played at once. My guitars were across the road, so I plugged in and it was an interesting day's work. It didn't have any follow-up. It was just a one-off, which was great. Lou was quite charming and he knew what he was doing.



Steve Howe, "Doors of Sleep" (1975)

This is from my first solo album, *Beginnings*, and I was excited to be in full control. Singing lead was fairly scary, though. I took it on. Some of it is good. Some of it is not so good and a lot is mixed. Over the years, I've learned a lot more about my range and in the Eighties I learned to sing properly.

That song epitomizes the whole album. I was taking on a lot, including the bass playing as well, which I loved. Part of it was taken from a poem by Alice Meynell. She wrote the middle eight, the "Doors of Sleep" part. Because I wanted to call it that, they wanted most of the songwriting. I should have changed the title. [Laughs] She didn't write any of the music or any of the other lyrics, but the publisher was very hard-nosed and I had to part with a considerable amount of the songwriting just because I used the title and that part of the middle eight. I'm not one to regret things, but you wonder sometimes.



Asia, “Heat of the Moment” (1982)

I introduced [King Crimson bassist-singer] John [Wetton] to [Buggles and Yes keyboardist] Geoff [Downes] back when we started Asia. I said that we needed Geoff in the band, but [ELP drummer] Carl [Palmer] and John were quite adamant that we were a guitar trio. I made it happen, though. Anyway, Geoff and John teamed up well as songwriters. Basically, they came in one day and said, “We have a song here.” All the other songs for the record were done by that point.

We listened to it and went, “Well, this is good. This is really hot.” It gave us renewed enthusiasm since we had new material right near the end of our work that elevated our feelings and beliefs about where we were going. This was cited as the first single. It was immediately obvious that it was a decent song and had a good attitude about it. I tracked up all these guitars through different amps while I was doing it, so there’s masses of guitars overlaid on the power chord stuff. That was a Gibson Les Paul, but in the choruses I’m playing a Telecaster.

Basically, I got a nice chance to do some things there that I hadn’t really done before. This was a power rock song. Everything I did that wasn’t like Yes, I was more sure it was the right thing to do. I had 10 years of doing Yes. I didn’t want Asia to be too much like Yes, and this was obviously not Yes. [Laughs] But I was happy with that.

But oddly enough, it became like Yes. [Laughs] It was part of the style that Yes took when they made “Owner of a Lonely Heart,” which was quite different than what Yes is known for.



Frankie Goes to Hollywood, “Welcome to the Pleasuredome” (1984)

It’s always nice when you have a relationship with people. Even if it doesn’t go on and on and on, you find other ways of working together. That happened with Trevor Horn [who briefly fronted Yes in 1980 for the *Drama* album and tour]. I became one of his “call to get a guitar” guys. He’d call me up and be like, “Steve, would you fancy playing on this?” Basically, doing that track on the Frankie album was just an afternoon. I brought the dobro and it kind of worked. I was really just a bit of color, some extra texture that wasn’t expected on a Frankie record.

What a great album. Trevor put so much into those recordings. I did go on later to play on their second record, *Liverpool*, as well. So I was the go-to guitarist at times for Trevor and I was delighted to do that. There was such a nice vibe around doing things with Trevor and his team. It was all very high-tech.

I was making the GTR record at the time and I took a lot of reference from where Trevor was going. It wasn’t anywhere Geoff [Downes] was going [when he produced the GTR record]. They were two different places. GTR was going very stadium rock, but Trevor was picking up on the new Eighties sound, which he helped develop and I was hot to trot on. For me, it was a piece of frivolous fun.



GTR, "When the Heart Rules the Mind" (1986)

I don't like exaggeration, but I think [former Genesis guitarist] Steve [Hackett] and I spent six months writing the GTR record together. At the least, it was many, many months. We wrote the album and also formed the band towards the end of that period. We got all the material. It was rehearsed. People knew what they were doing. We had a pretty good band. There was a lot of fun going on. There were some riotous moments of good-spirited humor in the studio. Obviously, [singer] Max [Bacon] and [bassist] Phil [Spalding] were a rambunctious couple of guys who were always good for a laugh.

Steve was a little more serious. He had been used to running his own band with a bit more of a tight fist. I'd been used to being in a band where everyone was kind of on the same level. That may have caused later problems, but at that point we were flying with it.

When we recorded "When the Heart Rules the Mind," we thought it was going to be the main song. We could sense it with the structures and choruses. The production got quite elaborate. There's backwards guitars and different moods in the song. There's an awful lot of the Roland synth guitar and a lot of color on the track and singing and choruses. It's like we were building a track that had everything.

We had a lot on offer though. In my ears, though, it was over-produced. It had way too much. Strangely enough, when we presented it to Arista ... [*uncontrollable, wheezing laughter*] they actually wanted more reverb. I'm getting slightly hysterical here because it was so funny. When I heard that on this track and that track they want more reverb, I don't think I was happy. It was ridiculous. There were about 10 reverb units on every song. [*Laughs*] Every instrument was assigned to different reverb. It had tons of reverb.

But that was a joyous time. At that point, GTR were feeling a bit Asia-esque. We were confident and it seemed to be a match made in ... at least somewhere near heaven. It was a very powerful time.



Queen, "Innuendo" (1991)

I was moving around Switzerland at the time, doing some recording. I had some days off and I went to Montreux because of the memories of [the Yes album] *Going for the One* being made there. I was in a restaurant that was slightly below the ground. A guy walks by that goes, "Steve!" And I look up and it was a Queen crew member that used to be a Yes crew member. I think his name was Martin. He said, "Do the guys know you're here? Can you come down to say hello?"

I finished my lunch and went down there and it was a setup job. I walked in and we chatted a bit and they said, "We want to play you the album." I was like, "I've got loads of time. Play me the album."

They play the album, but they save "Innuendo" for last. When it finishes they go, "Do you think you could add some guitar to that?" I said, "I don't think you need any. There are some great parts there." They said, "No, no, no. We want something more." I said, "I'll give it a run."

They had a Gibson Chet Atkins guitar, which was a solid Spanish guitar. That is what Brian [May] had used on it. I used one of his and over a couple of hours in the late afternoon, we took a few takes, took a break, took another take. It really was just improvisation. That's what they wanted. They didn't want any structural type of functions that I could do.

They were just like, “Play anything.” That has always been something I’ve been able to do. I don’t know how or why, but thank God because it’s something that I love to do. Very good things happen in that process before a producer can wear you out by saying, “Can you do another take?” “Well I’ve done 10! What do you want out of me? Blood?”

The guys were really cool. They wrote me a letter to thank me for doing it and gave me a credit. That was it. It was a wonderful time to meet the guys, before we lost Freddie. I found that, particularly Roger [Taylor] Brian and Freddie, they were really kind. That was really a band. They were so tight. They sat together; they agreed. They were so similar. It was a beautiful thing.



[William Shatner](#), “Planet Earth” (2011)

Get lost! Absolutely get lost! And you can print that! I played some really good things on that and they aren’t on the recording. There is none of me there at all. There is some guy playing what everybody else could have played. I said, “Look, I’m not going to play the part that everybody knows is part of that song. That’s easy. You can’t make anything of it.” And so I did some single-line stuff. God knows what happened. But when the record came out, I put it on and there was none of me on there at all.

As much as I think that William Shatner is fun and all that — I know he’s good friend of [Yes bassist] Billy Sherwood — but that is rude. To credit me and not have me on there is just about the nastiest you can do. It’s not a good thing to do.



Jon Anderson, “Now and Again” (2019)

Jon contacted me and was like, “Want to play on this song?” I said, “Yeah, yeah. Send it to me.” He did. There were some spaces on it where I decided to play. I did some Spanish guitar. That’s the guitar I use when I want to stand out, but not go through the wall. It cuts through in a totally different way. I didn’t hear that for about 11 months. I was promised I’d hear the mix. And then I got a lovely communication from Jon that said he really liked what I did, and so much so that he’d sung along with it. [Laughs] I thought, “Oh, my goodness. How could you sing with that?” But he had done it. He was inspired to join me, if you like, and sang along with me.

That’s all I can really say. I heard it differently because I had all these spaces and that’s where I performed. But it’s Jon’s record and he can do what he likes with it. He has that freedom and that’s what he decided to do.

Steve Howe, “Love Is a River” (2020)

I loved doing this record, *Love Is*, but I’ve enjoyed all my solo albums. Half the songs are instrumentals and finding that balance really pleased me. [Current Yes singer] Jon Davison sings harmonies and plays bass on it. He’s very talented and has a lovely voice.

I started the album in 2015 and “Love Is a River” was kind of floating around in there. I’d been holding onto this song for a little while and developing it, and I started seeing it as the pivotal, main song on this album.

It takes me on my own sort of journey. It’s sort of like pointing towards the ebb and flow of the unsuspecting complications, but also pleasures of love. If you tried to put in one

sentence, "What is love?" you couldn't really do that. It's a combination of emotions. It doesn't have a place.

You can say that love is in the mind or it spreads all through the body, but I think that love is a process of beauty and appreciation of nature. There is nothing more interesting than approaching somebody else who is part of that nature and part of that beauty. I guess that's what it is, really. It's an emblem or flag for the natural beauty of love for the world. It's all connected together.