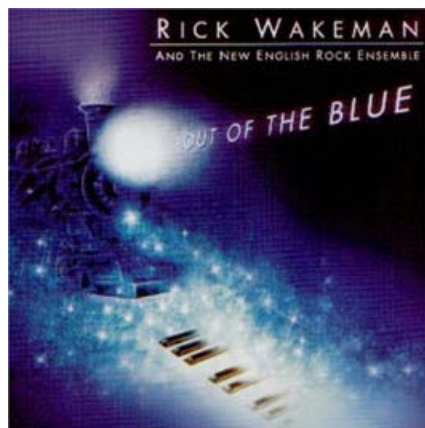




## MUSIC STREET JOURNAL

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### Rick Wakeman – Out of the Blue



By Gary Hill

### Overall Review

This live album from the most recent incarnation of Wakeman's band – The New English Rock Ensemble is a killer. While the sound might possibly be just below that of *Almost Live in Europe* – and that's iffy – I'd have to say that I like the setlist here better. We get a nearly complete "Journey to the Centre of the Earth" followed up by "Buried Alive" from the sequel disc. A killer "Jane Seymour" is included, as is "Catherine Parr." This disc showcases Wakeman's solo music at its best in a live performance. It's definitely one of a couple of his best live showings on CD. I'd recommend it to all Wakeman fans.

### Track by Track Review

**Journey to the Centre of the Earth:** While this is listed as "Journey to the Centre of the Earth," a quick look at the time will make it clear that it is not in fact the whole album performed here. Still, at nearly seventeen minutes, we do get a very sizable chunk. This leads off with a hard rocking motif and the group work through like this for a time before they launch out into the familiar main theme of the album. It is a triumphant sort of musical journey and gives way to several side trips along its path. Wakeman's keys take control later and guide us to the first vocal section of this epic. The story is begun with some theatric vocals delivered over pretty, melodic instrumental backing. The sung narration is punctuated by more full arrangements – at times with other non-lyrical vocals. After a run of this verse pattern we get a killer harder rocking excursion over which Wakeman solos with controlled fury. Then it works out into more melodic territory as they carry on. After this resolves, synthesizer with a decidedly harpsichord-like texture rises up to take over. A series of changes and alterations ensue and they launch out into another hard rocking motif. The vocals come in over this, this time in a rocking mode. They turn out into an extended chorus and then Wakeman leads the way through an instrumental section. The cut becomes still more hard

rocking with the next verse. This eventually gives way to the “praise God” chorus. They work some variances on this mode and then another Wakeman solo dominated instrumental section takes it. This one is extremely cool. A segment based on “Hall of the Mountain King” takes it for a while and then they turn this out into the final iteration of the main themes to close it out.

**Buried Alive:** This track was on the sequel to *Journey... Return to the Centre of the Earth*. As presented here it's a hard rocking cut that has a bit of Uriah Heep texture to it. The studio version of this has vocals by Ozzy Osbourne. Needless to say that makes for a heck of a difference here. This works through a number of changes turning more towards traditional prog at times, but overall this thing really scorches.

**Jane Seymour:** The keys that open this up here call to mind “The Phantom of the Opera.” It quickly launches into the brilliant neo-classical intro we've come to know and love. This grows as it carries forward. Performed purely on keyboards, this is quite faithful to the original and just plain awesome.

**No Earthly Connection/The Prisoner:** Essentially a medley of music from the *No Earthly Connection* album, this opens with a powerhouse instrumental excursion. After this works through it drops down to mellower and more stripped down music for the vocals. As they power it out later it takes on a motif that actually feels a bit like modern epic metal – mind you with less of a guitar presence. This is extremely powerful and works through a couple changes in its course before Wakeman steers the ship through more instrumental work. It gives way to another verse section that moves the story forward. It drops down to a balladic motif for the dramatic and evocative “The Prisoner” section. This is wonderful. After a time it powers out through the “you shall hang” portion of the track. Wakeman solos and they come back into this harder rocking motif. Then an instrumental section pulls it back down the more ballad-like structures. They work back up to a reprise of the “you shall hang” section. The connecting segment from last time comes back. This time it's a lot more intense and stays around longer. When it does end we get a drop down even further for the next set of vocals. Then they power back out into another inspired instrumental section. More vocals come after this. The cut is continued by revisiting the various movements. This is extremely powerful.

**Catherine Parr:** Bounding in with a melodic, powerful progressive rock arrangement, they work through for a time like this. Then it crescendos and gives way to a new journey. This one holds the piece for a while. Then they drop it back to a new segment over which Wakeman solos. This solo changes gear here and there and creates a number of different directions and textures. However, it never fails to captivate. Eventually this gives way to a more complete group arrangement with a triumphant soaring sort of sound. Then they take this through several variations. The guitar takes a tasty and extended solo later. It returns to earlier motifs after a while bringing it all back around in nice fashion. Taking it through in an intensified fashion this really scorches.

**Visit/Return of the Phantom:** A harder rocking number, this one has a strong, more general song-based character. We get some smoking guitar soloing in a blues rock meets rock opera sort of motif. It turns out to a more progressive rock oriented version of itself later as Wakeman solos. Then the guitar gets another chance to show off – in a very tasty manner. Wakeman responds to this call to action with another solo of his own. Then the two instruments travel together until they pull it back to the chorus segment. We get another screaming instrumental jam complete with extended guitar solo after this. This segment eventually ends it.

**Starship Trooper/Wurm:** While not listed in the title, they actually lead this off with the introduction to “Heart of the Sunrise.” As it winds down you really expect Yes to launch into the rest of the track. Instead Wakeman and company set off on another Yes course – “Starship Trooper.” After running through a good chunk of the track they launch out into an instrumental journey that, while seeming to touch at times on the “...Trooper” music, feels far different. This gives way to a reprise of the chorus. It should be noted that while the vocals on this performance are far different than Jon Anderson's the work really well. They stay closer to the original composition from

here, making their way through the various sections. At around the five minute mark, though, a screaming guitar solo takes it, leading into the “loneliness...” section. The journey continues through the next portions of the song. The “Wurm” segment comes in with suitable power and drama. They definitely bring a modern tone to this portion of the piece. As one would expect we get some killer soloing through here. As opposed to the version on *Fields of Green*, this one is not nearly as keyboard heavy. It has more of a life of its own and, in fact, blows that one (good as it is) out of the water. That’s because this monstrous beast is incredibly powerful. After it runs its course they close the disc in fine fashion with this, leaving you ready to hit “play” and start it all over again.



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