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Remembering Chris Squire

by [Howard Whitman](#) on June 29, 2015 at 5:58 pm

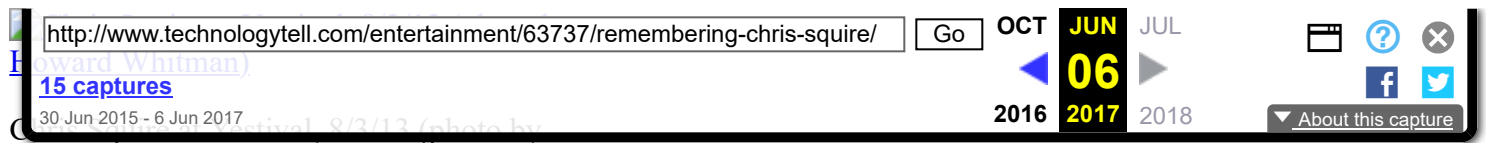
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Howard Whitman)

The first word that comes to mind when I think of Chris Squire is *big*.

Not just for his physical size, even though he stood tall at a reported 6'5" (or more, depending on whom you ask) and had these *huge hands*—handy for playing bass, no doubt.

Beyond those obvious attributes, he was also a man who put out a **big** sound. He unquestionably redefined the role of bass guitar in rock music. Paul McCartney, Jack Bruce and John Entwistle (among others, to be sure) certainly paved the way for bass as a melodic instrument within the context of a rock band, but in his work with Yes since 1968, Squire took this idea to a whole other level.

 [Chris Squire at Yestival, 8/3/13 \(photo by Howard Whitman\)](#)

Chris Squire at Yestival, 8/3/13 (photo by Howard Whitman)

Bass guitar was typically relegated to a background role in early rock music—it was supportive, an anchor, a vital link between music and rhythm.

But in Squire's (massive) hands, the bass became a lead instrument. Right out of the gate, on the eponymous 1969 *Yes* LP, Squire's playing signaled that this band was *different*. Bass is the first thing you hear on the first track of the first album "Beyond & Before" (written by Squire with Clive Bayley). And as Yes progressed (pun intended) through classic albums such as *The Yes Album* (1971), *Fragile* (also 1971) and what's often considered the band's masterpiece, *Close to the Edge* (1972), Squire's bass was a vital and prominent component in the mix. And in a band where you're playing with virtuosos such as Steve Howe, Rick Wakeman and Bill Bruford, it's no small feat to not only hold your own as an original instrumental voice, but be a significant driving force in some increasingly complex, brilliant music.

 [Chris Squire at Yestival, 8/3/13 \(photo by Howard Whitman\)](#)

Chris Squire at Yestival, 8/3/13 (photo by Howard Whitman)

Chris Squire did this, album after album, throughout the band's career (he was the only member to be on every Yes album and in every Yes live lineup since the band's inception). And he made it look effortless.

Squire passed away on the evening of June 27 at his home in Phoenix, Arizona. A little over a month before, on May 19, it was announced that he was diagnosed with acute erythroid leukemia, and would be sitting out the band's upcoming co-headlining summer U.S. tour with Toto to receive treatment.

He was age 67 when he died, and he spent nearly 50 years as the figurehead of Yes. Not only was his bass playing a vital, driving component of the band's music; his singing was also a significant part of the band's sound. His harmonies and backgrounds, careening around the high tones of founding vocalist Jon Anderson, were as unique as his instrumental work. He was able to explore his vocal side further on his work outside of Yes; his debut solo album, *Fish Out of Water* (1975) is a superb showcase for his talents as a lead vocalist and solo songwriter. Working with Yes vets Bill Bruford and Patrick Moraz among others, it's Yes-like but something different as well. Heavily orchestrated in parts, with barely any guitar at all (just a few parts played by Squire deep down in the mix), the bass swoops and soars on this record, doing solos throughout. It's masterful, and moving, and it rocks. If

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albums with 1997-2000 Yes guitarist/vocalist Billy Sherwood (more on him later) under the Conspiracy name; the second CD, [The Unknown](#) (2003) is a powerful album with lyrical themes about 9-11 and the political climate of the time. A guest appearance by former Genesis guitarist Steve Hackett on Squire's holiday-themed CD [Chris Squire's Swiss Choir](#) (2007) led to Squackett, a full-on collaboration between Squire and Hackett that produced a superb album, [Life Within A Day](#) (2012), which showed how musically compatible the two prog-rock legends were.

But of course, we know Chris Squire best as the bass giant of Yes. And a giant he was. Bass players of all stripes and genres have been commenting on his legacy and influence all over social media since news of his passing was announced, and rightly so. He changed bass for everybody. Squire pioneered the use of effects on bass guitar, which was radical for its time. Sure, guitar players could stomp any pedal they could get their hands on and it would be cool; and keyboardists could pull from an ever-expanding palette of sounds. But a bass player? Bass sounded like bass and that was it. Not so with Squire. Like Entwistle before him, Squire used distortion on his Rickenbacker bass (his main instrument throughout his career) but he also introduced new sounds and textures never before heard from bass players. His solo piece on *Fragile*, "[The Fish \(Schindleria Praemeturus\)](#)" was built up with multiple overdubs of bass guitar playing parts that may have sounded like guitar or keyboards at first. Nope, it was all bass. Prime Squire.

I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to speak with Squire for this site, on March 28, 2014. Now, I've had the good fortune to speak to many of my musical idols—Greg Lake of ELP, Bobby Lamm of Chicago, Don Felder of The Eagles, Joey Molland of Badfinger, both Joe Perry and Brad Whitford of Aerosmith, even classic Yes vocalist Jon Anderson.

But this was **Chris Squire**. As a bass player in a prog rock band, I can tell you that Chris Squire's playing is, to put it mildly, a major influence on every note I play there. Just the fact that he not only made it cool to play bass with a pick (a practice not held in high regard by some bass players)—he made it a virtual requirement for prog music—well, for that alone, I and many fellow proggers owed him a huge debt.

So I was going to talk to Chris Squire. Keep in mind, this was on the level of interviewing a Beatle for me. I've done a decent amount of these interviews before and I'm usually pretty relaxed approaching these appointments, but this was the Chris Squire. The guy who wrote the template for progressive rock bass. The bass player's bass player. The legend of the four-string.

I shouldn't have worried. He couldn't have been cooler to me. When I first called his hotel room, he asked if I could call back in an hour to give him time for a nap.

When I did so an hour later, he thanked me for calling him back. Chris Squire thanked me?

We had a nice chat (read the results [here](#)). He was very cordial and open to my questions, even though he had done a million interviews and had probably heard every question under the sun countless times. He was a true gentleman to me, and put me at ease right away, even if my brain was constantly firing on the thought, "THIS IS CHRIS SQUIRE YOU'RE TALKING TO."

My next close encounter with Chris was literally a close encounter—of proximity. I reviewed the first-ever [Yestival](#)—a Yes-driven kind of Lollapalooza festival for prog rock fans—and got a photo pass. This pass meant I could hang in the photo pit directly in front of the stage with other press people and photographers during the start of each band's set. For the Yes set, we were told we could take photos during the first two songs, but when the first song turned out to be the side-long, almost-20-minute epic title suite of *Close to the Edge*, we were told to leave halfway through the piece. But for a good 10 minutes I was able to hang next to the stage. When I stood by Chris Squire, he was literally inches away—I could have reached out and touched his boot. He truly was bigger than life, even though it was real life happening directly in front of me. His sound was big, too—while Steve Howe had a single guitar amp on a chair on stage right, Chris had some monster stacks putting out ungodly volume from the

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And now, just over a month after announcing his diagnosis to the world, the big man is gone. Tributes have been pouring in from past and present Yes members as well as people you wouldn't necessarily think would be Yes or Squire fans—rockers like Tom Morrello, Gene Simmons, Duff McKagan and many others have been singing his praises. It seems like anyone touched by music has been touched by the songs of Chris Squire and Yes.

One thing that's not getting much attention right now is: What's next? When Yes announced Squire would be sitting out the summer tour, the news released stated that former member (and Squire's Conspiracy partner) Billy Sherwood would be filling in on bass and vocals for the tour with Toto and the foreseeable future.

So what happens now? Does Yes do the Led Zeppelin thing and shut down the band after the loss of a pivotal member? Or do they do a Who/Rolling Stones and keep going with replacement players? Sherwood is a natural for the Squire role—he's an excellent bassist who copped a Squire-like tone for his work with World Trade and CIRCA:, as well as on multiple solo albums. And I'm sure he can hit the vocal parts.

But will it be Yes without Chris Squire? Reportedly, Squire himself asked Sherwood to fill in for him, so this is happening with his blessing, and it indicates he wanted Yes to go on, even a Yes without Chris Squire on stage.

But will the band's legion of fans accept that? Yes caught a lot of flack in recent years due to the absence of Jon Anderson. The band's founding vocalist has been out of the band since 2008, when he was sidelined by acute respiratory failure. He's since been replaced twice, first by Canadian Yes tribute band singer Benoit David, and from 2012 on by Jon Davison.

That didn't sit well with some Yes fans. And some will not be agreeable to a Yes with Sherwood on bass. But Squire himself commented in a [2012 interview](#) that he envisioned Yes carrying on even without the present members: "Yes to me now is evolving like a sports team or an orchestra. It's not beyond the possibility that there still could be a Yes in 200 years time... of course with different members, unless the medical profession comes up with something extraordinary."

Unfortunately, the medical profession wasn't able to save Chris Squire.



And time will tell if Squire's vision of a never-ending Yes comes to fruition. If I had to guess, I'd predict that Yes will carry on. Billy Sherwood was born to take on this role. It's a crappy way to get the job, but he'll do it justice and retain the classic Yes sound. It won't be the same, of course, but Yes has always been about perpetual change.

For now, we mourn, we get out our Yes records, and let's be thankful that we had this man, this music, in our lives—and that the music will outlive us all.

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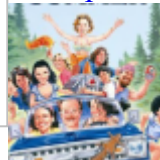
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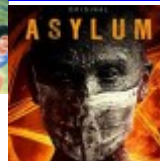
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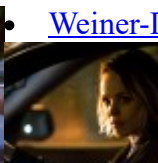
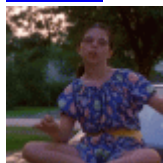


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