Episode 958: The Show That Never Ends: The Rise and Fall of Progressive Rock

Guest: David Weigel

WOODS: All right, I enjoyed reading this, *The Show That Never Ends*, and I learned a lot from these, even about bands that I've loved for years and years and I thought I knew everything. But I learned a lot of really neat stuff in here. And there's an interesting story arc that carries us through the musically tumultuous '70s and the punk era and what happens to progressive rock. It's all in here and it's great. But what's interesting is you are a youngish man, and somehow, you and I are both interested in not only older music, but older music that couldn't possibly be more out of fashion. So first, let me ask you how did that come to be.

WEIGEL: There's a story about it that's not super unique. I was a suburban kid in Wilmington, Delaware, who went online when I was about 15. Luckily this was the old pop-hiss-fizz modem era of the Internet. And I liked metal, kind of knew from word of mouth and school that I liked Metallica and Megadeth and bands like that. But from reading these reviews by this guy Mark Prindle online, I discovered he has my opinions on metal, he has my opinions on Metallica. He also seems to like this band Yes.

So I was intrigued, kind of proto Google, so I didn't do a lot of research. I just went to a record store that had cassettes of Yes albums for about $3 and bought a bunch of them, listened to them back by back, and was blown away. And that was — oh, I want to say that was in 1996 or something. So they still — there was a version a version of Yes that was on tour and everything, but they were way out of the cultural mainstream at that point.

And I kept delving — I lived in England for three years and that helped. I went to college where I had a fast Internet connection and could listen to more things. That helped. But I discovered it as a fan before I saw any of it live, and that was how. But I fell backwards through metal. I remember listening to the opening of "Roundabout" and realizing, Oh man, these bands I like just ripped off the opening of this song. The first notes on Metallica's key albums of the '80s, the harmonic followed by the acoustic guitar followed by the riff, that was this. Yes did that first.

WOODS: Okay, so before we go on, I guess we have to do the perfunctory: how would you define progressive rock? Because there are going to be people listening who are listening out of a spirit of good will or because I badgered them into listening to this episode, and they don't know what on God's green earth we're even talking about.

WEIGEL: Well, it's rock music that's ambitious and sucks in influences from all manner of music that is not rock. It is a bit more European and a bit less influenced by the blues. But it's stuff that builds on rock forms but includes classical music, Eastern music, experimental electronic music. I put it that way, and I keep a pretty narrow definition of what it is but a pretty wide aperture for what bands can be included in it. Because I just copy their own — I took my cues from the way that this was covered in the '60s and '70s by the music industry, by music magazines, and they had a clear definition that was also really expansive.

There are bands like Gryphon that are basically playing Renaissance music, and there are bands like Soft Machine that are basically playing out-of-this-world jazz fusion stuff with heavy keyboards. And both of them would be progressive rock. And Mike Oldfield's smack in the middle of that. So it's a pretty all-encompassing definition. It's easier to think of it in terms of what came around to destroy it, which was punk. Punk was supposed to be DIY and simple and uncomplicated, and progressive rock was very complicated, but in a way that I think is fantastic.

WOODS: Yeah, now, it's so funny that among people I consider good friends, I'm just so different from them. Like Kevin Gutzman is more an Aerosmith type and he thinks that progressive rock is a whole lot of keyboard noodling, and Bob Murphy listens to more conventional pop music, and Michael Malice appreciates punk. And I don't know. I just keep telling these people, I know you think this is a matter of opinion, but this really is a question of right and wrong here, because I feel like your lives would be so enriched if you could just take a minute to appreciate this.

Let me just give a few examples for people. So we'd be talking about bands like Yes, as we said, or Jethro Tull or Genesis in the early days — and to some extent in the later days, but back when they had Peter Gabriel, certainly very progressive. Pink Floyd would be an example too, as would The Moody Blues; Emerson, Lake & Palmer; King Crimson; bands like this. Now, I'm not a fan necessarily of all those bands. In fact, I actually could never quite get into King Crimson, even though everybody told me that I should. It never really quite worked for me.

WEIGEL: Everyone was right, just for the record [laughing].

WOODS: Oh —

WEIGEL: Everybody who told you that's really right [laughing].

WOODS: Oh, okay, all right. Maybe I'll revisit it. I mean, of course I like Bill Bruford and I like the same sort of style. But anyway, let's pick a band at random to pick it apart and talk about what happened. With a lot of these bands, I can't even listen to their first album. Sometimes I can't listen to their first two albums. Like with Yes, for example, I just don't listen to the first couple of albums. Maybe I'm missing something, but I feel like it's like the first season of *The Simpsons*. The characters are all wrong. They haven't gotten in to a groove yet.

But when I picked up the *Rolling Stone* record guide like in the '80s or something and they had their reviews of all these albums and they had star ratings, by the time you

get to 1973, they're giving almost all Yes albums one star, maybe two stars. And I thought that was the best stuff they ever did. But like when I listen to *Close to the Edge*, it's three songs on the whole album. I feel like the live performances are much, much better than the studio ones, which sound like they're from 1972. But nevertheless, there's something about this music, the combination of the amazing ethereal Anderson vocals and this ambitious work. Where do you feel like they peaked? Because of course Rick Wakeman hated the four-song *Tales From Topographic Oceans* as just being too experimental and over the top. What do you think was the best stuff they did?

WEIGEL: I think the best stuff was *Close to the Edge* and *Fragile*. A lot of progressive bands, the most famous and long-lasting music is generally the best. There are gems throughout the catalogue, I find. I really like *Going for the One*, for example. But you really get the essence of what they did once everything was firing on the right cylinders.

You're right about the first couple years for some of these bands. This is why I think King Crimson stands out, because from the first record, they have this extremely forward-thinking sound, especially with the jazzy horn sections coming in in the middle of riff rock songs. They were very progressive right away. Some of these bands started off basically as British beat music a lot like The Who. The bands I guess whose members went on to found Yes, like Tomorrow and The Syn, sound a lot like The Who or The Action and this kind of riff-based, Motown-influenced rock, and it takes them a couple of beats to get on to the next stuff.

But yes, by the time of *Fragile* and *Close to the Edge*, they were writing this music that is multi-sectional, that is hard to predict where it's going to go, which is my favorite part of it. I mean, most songs I can kind of figure out verse-chorus-verse and maybe there'll be a key change at the end. And this music is so divergent inside individual songs. They really get into that kind of songwriting by *Fragile* — by the *Yes* album, but really with *Fragile*.

WOODS: My personal favorite is *Going for the One*, because there's just so many beautiful pieces on that album. It's not as popular as the others. But of course, with *Close to the Edge* — I'm going to make a list, by the way, a must-have list for people. But you have to understand you can't listen to it just once. You have to really, really give it a chance. When you hear these climactic moments from *Close to the Edge* and *You and I*, I don't know, speaking for myself, I'm just taken to another place, especially if I'm at a live performance, which I have indeed been to many times. And it's exciting for me, by the way, that my kids now — I have children who love this music. I have a 14-year-old who went with me to the Anderson, Rabin, Wakeman show last year and had as good a time as I did. And not just trying to make Dad happy; it was genuinely that good.

So all right, I don't want to — I mean, what you and I could easily do is just talk about these bands and it would be extremely inside baseball, but I want to draw out some themes here. One of my favorite bands and in fact the subject of Episode 3 of this show was Jethro Tull, and I talked to Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull. Of course Ian Anderson is playing the flute, which is highly unusual in rock music. Peter Gabriel did

it a bit, but he played it in a more traditional way, whereas Ian is playing it in this very interesting, creative roughhouse kind of way.

WEIGEL: Yeah.

WOODS: But what's interesting about them is — I can't listen to their first album either. Sorry, it's just not my style at all. But by their second and third, they're doing some pretty — Well, the *This Was* album was just *ugh* to me. But *Stand Up*'s got some good stuff, *Aqualung*'s great. But what's amazing to me is that they had two albums in a row that were all one song. The whole album was one song, so very limited radio play, yet they both hit number one in America at all one song. And I asked Ian Anderson, what do you think changed? That would never happen today. What do you think changed? And I was kind of hoping he'd say people got stupider or something provocative, and I don't even remember his answer. What do you think happened?

WEIGEL: He wouldn't say people got stupider, but that's the answer some of these guys would use [laughing].

WOODS: [laughing]

WEIGEL: Especially Greg Lake, who I talked to before he died for the series for *Slate* and then for the book. Blamed it both on kind of public taste moving, but that public taste being shaped by this really what he saw as a venal record industry that just decided to cut bait on experimental music and embrace punk, even though punk never actually sold very well.

And in going through all my research, I did find kind of a market role in how this music declined. It was critics and the industry, in terms of these labels that had progressive bands, they really did cut back in 1977 while punk was rising in this dramatic way. The critics just on a dime flipped from being interested in what these bands were doing to disinterested. And I would notice that the readers were not off the train yet. In the end-of-year polls on what the best album, the best guitarist, the best keyboard player was, those progressive bands still did very well. But it was pretty much driven by this critical community. And I think you can understand some of that. The music had been at that point in the high seat for eight, nine years, which is a pretty good amount of time for any kind of trend in music. But it did seem like there was a, as I say, an assassin you could put your finger on, and it was these critics and these record labels that just said, Eh, enough of this.

WOODS: Well, some of that started for Jethro Tull with the first of the two album-length albums. *Thick as a Brick* just seemed like too much, too far a bridge to cross. But then the follow up, *A Passion Play*, the critics just went berserk over how much they couldn't stand that, and yet, I personally — I know I'm in a distinct minority. I think it's one of the best things they ever did. And when I did get to not only interview Ian Anderson over the Transom here, but also in person I got to talk to him for about 20 minutes. I want to make absolutely — I thought if I accomplish nothing else in this meeting with Ian Anderson, I've got to let him know he's wrong about *A Passion Play*, that it's an incredible piece and I absolutely love it.

I'm just curious — because it's like you're following somebody who — I don't remember if he was consciously doing this, but of course you know that all through *Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd, there's that heartbeat of that person; there's a heartbeat. And *Passion Play* begins with the heartbeat, and then the guy dies. And so this is tracing somebody's journey through the afterlife, borrowing from Dante and all different sources. It's an amazing work, and I'm curious — it's okay if you disagree with me on it, but I am curious of your opinion on it. As a 13-year-old discovering progressive rock on his own, it just blew me away.

WEIGEL: I like the way you put it, because yeah, when I talked to Ian Anderson, I focus a lot on that. Because some of these interviews, I just wanted to dig extremely deep on one story that was not huge in the public record, and his reaction to *Passion Play* was one of them. He just remembered these critics deciding to open up with all guns on it. And I put this in the book: their manager announced that they'd just stop touring. It was a pure publicity stunt, that Jethro Tull was so blown back by this reaction to this album that they would just not perform anymore. Not true. I mean, this is Ian Anderson kind of having a joke with the negative publicity and realized it went too far, and it totally colored the way people viewed that album for ever.

But it is true that after that, they never went back to anything of that scope again. They go to fairly digestible rock songs, "Bungle in the Jungle," *War Child*, things like that. So I twin that with *Tales From Topographic Oceans* by Yes, so these two gigantic lunges by bands that I think are very interesting and there was just enough of a blowback that they decide, Okay, that's where we've gone too far. And reading it as a researcher and then writing about it as a historian for the book, I felt really bad about the turn people decided not to take.

WOODS: Indeed, indeed. Now, I think even when I compare Jethro Tull to bands that I like, like Yes or Genesis even, what amazes me the most about them is how different each album sounds from the previous one. How is the same band producing *Aqualung, Passion Play, War Child, Minstrel in the Gallery, Songs From the Wood, Stormwatch, A, Under Wraps, Roots to Branches*? They sound like a different band every time, and yet I personally love all of it. That's an incredible thing, and I don't think that's all that common. I mean, certainly the Beatles start sounding a little different in the second half of their careers, but the first three, four years, who knows what album any one of those songs is even on?

WEIGEL: No, it's a good point, and there are a couple of creative forces in the band. There's Ian Anderson; there's Martin Barre, too. The common thread that I found with a lot of these bands is they just were not satisfied with what they did before, and they had a climate of both fans and bookers that were really interested in them diverging from album to album. And you have probably less of that now. I think I — there's not a great call for people to do the same thing every time, but there was — I found in the research and one thing I wish I was there for, this kind of very welcoming and accepting culture, welcoming experimentation by fans. You were getting a platter by this band that there was great speculation about. It almost reminded me reading of what people do now on the Internet about great directors they like, imagining what their next movie might be like. It's just a hunger for these bands to do something new. The bands felt it too.

And that did fade in the '70s, and I don't think it ever quite got back. I mean, when some of these groups record — King Crimson's an exception. Not a huge one, but an exception. When some of these bands still record, it's just something to accompany a tour where the music's all going to sound the same. There's a few years where they're trying something new each time and they've got a base of record buyers who want to hear something new.

WOODS: Jethro Tull got beaten up in the press for allegedly doing concept albums. Like Ian Anderson likes to tell the story that *Aqualung* was supposedly a concept album. He said no, it wasn't. But what would be so bad about that? I don't understand the reaction against a concept album. The idea is just that the songs are linked together into some greater work, and that actually seems kind of neat to me.

WEIGEL: No, and some of these bands are more open about it, although one thing I found was that things that approached our time as pretentious or are remembered as pretentious weren't really intended to be that way. Even Mike Oldfield doing *Tubular Bells*, which becomes kind of this token of New Age culture, is done by a guy who's just drinking a lot of Guinness and playing around with instruments.

No, it was just there was an archness about a lot of these concept albums, a lot of this experimentation. I think especially once Todd Rundgren, who makes two progressive albums, really, and starts a band, Utopia, to play progressive music and then dials it back, was just very open about how it was just kind of an interesting lark. It was a muscle, say, that you could stretch. In addition to writing digestible pop songs, he wrote these big, searching pieces with multiple sections and symphonic movements.

And so there's a lot of diversity in what they were trying to do. I think the far end, you've got a band like Magma that are French but they invent their own language and their own cosmos, the planet Kobaïa, where I have never figured out the plot of these things, these records, but their records are meant to kind of craft this fantasy world in a way that the Octavia Butler novels do. And that was like, I guess some could call that pretentious, but they had a lot of fun doing it, and there was a craving by fans for it too. And the music also just is really hard to categorize in a way that I find exciting.

WOODS: I think it's easy for people either to forget or not to realize just how popular actually a lot of this music that was not particularly commercial in the sense of radio play was in those days, when you look at concert tickets and album sales. What can you say about that?

WEIGEL: No, it was enormous. That's one thing I wanted to convey in the book. And obviously if something's popular, it doesn't mean it follows that it's good.

WOODS: No.

WEIGEL: I don't think we agree as a culture that *Avatar* is greater than *The Godfather*, for example, but I think it had been forgotten. Well, sorry. It wasn't forgotten. Part of rock history was that music went into a dangerous cul-de-sac and it was rescued from that by disco and punk — more by punk than anything else, especially if you're talking about rock. What I wanted to convey was that this was first very bold music, very

creative, creative in a way that not a lot of rock is, and created by men in their early 20s. They were not writing dinosaur music; they were writing artistic, wild stuff.

And when it was popular, you've got gigantic festivals, you've got the California Jam, you've got ELP headlining a night at the Isle of Wight Festival. It was some of the most popular rock music there was and invented, in a couple of occasions, stadium rock as we know it. Now, Led Zeppelin was doing it at the same time and the Rolling Stones were doing it, but these giant ELP shows where they were trying to convey the sound around a hockey arena — wasn't built for it [laughing] — and building this quadraphonic system in order to play that, that was radical. The use of electronics in the show, in a rock piece, same thing. And so the staging was bold too, but it was on this gigantic scale that has been lost, and I think really only The Clash at their height were a punk band that got as big as even the middling progressive bands when they were peaking in the '70s.

WOODS: It was interesting to see Roger Waters take The Wall show on the road over the past five or six or maybe even more years, given that in 1980, they only performed it in maybe four cities and it was just a gigantic undertaking and just impossible to imagine who difficult it would be. And we don't have anything other than the occasional bootleg video of what that was like, whereas now — I mean, I got to experience it a couple of times. That show was so over the top theatrically but so amazing to sit through, and he sold out big arenas all over the place performing it all these years later. So there is still some appetite out there for some of these bands, even though Waters doesn't quite have the voice he once did. I wonder why that is so — is it simply for the theatricality that The Wall has maintained that kind of level of interest, whereas when Jethro Tull or now just Ian Anderson, when they tour, these are fairly modest audiences. Same for Yes and some of these other bands. They get little modest audiences. But everybody rushes out to see the performance of The Wall. Is it just the theater?

WEIGEL: I don't think it's just the theater. I mean, I think there was less competition for your entertainment in the 1970s, and that's not a bash on any of this. But one thing in reading all of this and looking at how they put together stages, I kept think was, I guess there weren't really video games yet. There wasn't stuff you could watch easily on your phone. You couldn't put a TV show on whenever you wanted it. For a big communal experience, you had to go to a concert, and for your personal listening experience, it was more rewarding to take a record home and explore everything about it, from the lyrics, the sound closely on headphones, etc. So I think the music got more interesting as people were using it to fill their lives in a way that they just don't right now. Music is just I think in general a lot more incidental than it was in the 1970s.

WOODS: When you were having a chance to interview all these great people, did you feel like the interviews were just confirming what you already knew, or was anything genuinely surprising?

WEIGEL: Yeah, I tried to make sure that when I interviewed somebody, I was getting something new. I'm trying to think of an example. So it was very clear whenever I emailed somebody or called their manager, Look, I'm not just going to do a greatest hits interview or what are your influences, stuff like that. I only called people after I

had read everything I could and watched all the interviews that existed that they'd put out already, and then I would go to them to fill in gaps. So I would go to Steve Hackett, for example, and say, Don't even talk that much about Genesis; you're on the record a lot about it. I want to talk about what you were doing in the period after you leave Genesis and the band is kind of blowing up. So we talked specifically about that. When it came to Todd Rundgren, I only want to talk to you about the couple years of Utopia and initiation in the progressive rock experience and then that's it and let's go for like an hour on that. So they very specific interviews to fill in these knowledge gaps. And mostly fun. They weren't always fun. There were some occasions where I had to talk to somebody only as part of a promotional tour, and I kept trying to wrench it back to what I wanted and it wouldn't always go there.

WOODS: Oh, sure, right, right.

WEIGEL: [laughing] You know what that's like, I'm sure.

WOODS: Yeah. Oh yes, I do. Yes, I do indeed. All right, I have a few more things I want to make sure I get to. First of all, so I can see where the music goes and why it doesn't — you know, Jethro Tull continues to make albums all through the '80s. It's a different style of music, and likewise, Yes is making albums in the '80s and it's not quite what it used to be. They sort of get back to that in the '90s and early 2000s a bit, but it's not quite what it once was. And I know that punk came along and all the critics were savaging progressive rock and all that. But what I'm interested in is progressive rock today, because even though it's not filling stadiums, it's nevertheless very creative and very interesting.

And you, for example, toward the end you talk about one of my personal favorites, Steven Wilson and Porcupine Tree. And if I may just add this little anecdote, he's upset in your book. He says that the decision to tour with Yes was a terrible decision, because he says the Yes fans, all they wanted to hear was music they knew already. They had no interest in hearing new music. But that's where — It was at a Yes show in 2002 or 2003 that I first encountered Porcupine Tree. That was how I became a fan, so it wasn't entirely wasted. But what he's failing to see is, at the time, what album was Porcupine Tree promoting? *In Absentia*, which is an extremely dark exploration of psychopaths and serial killers. So you can imagine what's up on the video screens. That's not what you're expecting to see before you hear Jon Anderson's angelic voice. So yeah, that is going to go over a little flat on a Yes audience. Hello?

But anyway, I think he's fantastic, and I think in some ways, some of these newer bands may even — and I know this is heretical to say — may even be making music that's even better than the original progressive people. So how do they fit into this story?

WEIGEL: Well, they end the story, because I — well, look, the subtitle's always going to be about the fall of the music, because there was a period when it was dominant and it stopped being dominant, so by definition there is a fall.

WOODS: Yeah.

WEIGEL: But Wilson really shapes a lot of my thinking on it, because we had a long interview. I looked at what — his introduction into progressive rock was kind of like mine, except he's an actual musician. He's discovering this, then going and recording these fake pop symphonies on his own — only fake in that he would literally create a fake band that was meant to be playing this at a fake live concert and fake live sounds. So he loved the presentation of the music as it was, but he was not interested in just being something locked in amber that you gazed at and never changed. And I think he was frustrated, it comes out, that once progressive rock fell off as the main creative force, there stopped being experimentation in it. Progressive meant you sounded like Yes, and some of the revivalist bands in the '90s were just long keyboard sections and some drum solos and mystical lyrics, but nothing new. So his argument was the progressive metal was the last not just new thing in progressive music, but in rock, period, which is controversial, but I don't think terribly wrong.

WOODS: That's an interesting thought. And then he himself is notorious for saying, I don't want to repeat myself musically. I don't want to do something I've already done. And I think that's what he probably felt was happening with Porcupine Tree, where the last couple of albums were fine, but they seemed a little bit formulaic and cold. They didn't impress me the way some of the earlier stuff did. Whereas now his solo stuff, it is dramatically different. I don't know what you've heard of his new CD before it's come out yet, but there's dramatically different stuff on it. But of course the trouble with that is sometimes you like what somebody did, and I find some of his solo material absolutely unlistenable, and other stuff I find beautiful and captivating.

Let me ask you, if you had to recommend — of course, first of all, first thing as a guidepost people should do here is get *The Show That Never Ends: The Rise and Fall of Prog Rock* by David Weigel, being linked at TomWoods.com/958 for your convenience. But suppose you wanted to guide people, well-meaning newbies who say, Yes, I want to expand my horizons, but I'm limiting you to five albums you can introduce them to. Choose wisely, Dave Weigel. What would they be?

WEIGEL: So there's two ways to answer it. One is just my five favorites. The other is what would give you a bigger breath of what's possible in the music. So I'll go for the second one, and I'll say still you have to start with *In the Court of the Crimson King*, the first King Crimson album. Again, just amazing for this band being incredibly young, as young as people getting out of college, in some cases younger, coming out with something so fully formed and experimental. So first start with that. I would go with *Moving Pictures* as a Rush album for just the sense of what people were doing with the second wave of progressive rock music. And then in between then, I would say Yes' *Selling England by the Pound* —

WOODS: You mean Genesis' *Selling England* —

WEIGEL: Sorry, sorry, Genesis' *Selling England by the Pound*, Yes's *Close to the Edge*. And then I've got a free one, don't I? So I have to think.

WOODS: Yeah.

WEIGEL: I would say Soft Machine, *Third*, because I just think —

WOODS: I don't even know that one.

WEIGEL: Well, Soft Machine, they were covered as part of the progressive rock movement, and I think it's fair to put them in that. They started absolutely within the form and then became a much more esoteric kind of jazz fusion band. That album in particular is just such a good example of what you could do if you stayed kind of within the rock band format but totally broker away from the norms and the limitations. And it's a bunch of extremely long pieces of music, some of them almost sound collages, and I can imagine somebody not liking that, and if you don't, go to *Thick as a Brick* by Jethro Tull, which is also very good. But in terms of something that breaks the form but you're going to recognize, I really think Soft Machine *Third* holds up, yeah.

WOODS: All right, well, I'll check that out too. And I'll give King Crimson another try. I mean, it's been years and years since I originally did. I do want to say a quick thing about my own concert experiences. Last year I told you I went to — well, they're now called Yes Featuring Anderson, Rabin, Wakeman.

WEIGEL: [laughing] Yes.

WOODS: Nobody's interested in all these name change things. But Jon Anderson as approaching 72 years old I believe that year, so you figure okay, he'll play it safe. He'll come out and do — not that there are that many safe vocal songs from Yes, but he came out and he's singing "Heart of the Sunrise." He's singing the most challenging songs in the catalogue and just blowing the roof off the place. Did you see him on that tour?

WEIGEL: Not on that tour, no. I mean, I've seen recordings more recently, and yeah, it's amazing how good he still is.

WOODS: It is amazing. In his 70s.

WEIGEL: This is something that's too esoteric to get into, but yeah, Yes are now kind of facing that challenge of the Beach Boys and that's been the case for years, which is a band called Yes that includes two guys who were there for most of the key music and a band called Yes that includes different members of the band who were there for key music.

WOODS: Yeah, so that's right, so you want the one featuring — to me, at this point, you've got to have the one featuring Anderson, Rabin, Wakeman, especially since Chris Squire is now gone. But to see him still able to do that when poor Ian Anderson hasn't really had this voice work right since the mid '80s. But for Jon to come out like that. And then what I found really interesting in your book was, of course after 1979, Jon Anderson leaves the band. Just not happy with things, he leaves. They replace him with the guy from The Buggles. If you're my age or maybe even your age, you might remember "Video Killed the Radio Star," by The Buggles.

WEIGEL: Yeah.

WOODS: So Trevor Horn, who was more known as a record producer and indeed a very accomplished one, he becomes the front man. And he's got to sing impossibly difficult songs written for a guy with, let's face it, a freakish amazing. It's an amazing that you could never duplicate. So he's there in the — and the way you put it it, There he is all alone in the middle of this round stage and he's got all eyes on him for a 44-date U.S. tour, and he's basically just a record producer trying to sing the most impossible songs in the world. And the story that I like is they go in — Tell the story. They go in and talk to their manager whom they fire, who tries to give them some advice. Now, what's the advice?

WEIGEL: The advice is you've got to go on your knees and beg Jon Anderson to come back. Like, this band is not quite working. I'm a defender of the album *Drama*. I think it's actually — and Yes —

WOODS: Which was the album that was done without Jon Anderson.

WEIGEL: It is, and Trevor Horn, who was the producer/lead singer for it, ends up being a pretty good imitator of Jon Anderson, but he's the first to admit these are extremely tricky vocal parts he's written for himself. And yeah, that was the advice: just beg Jon Anderson to come back. This is not Yes without Jon Anderson. It's not going to work.

WOODS: Yeah, and ever since I started going to Yes shows that didn't have Jon, like I think that guy's name was Benoît David as the first guy they had and —

WEIGEL: First Benoît David, then Jon Davison —

WOODS: Jon Davison is doing a creditable job, whereas the other one sounded more like Jon, but the trouble was — I mean, really, if you listen to him either on their album — what was the album that they did together?

WEIGEL: *Fly From Here*.

WOODS: *Fly From Here*, right. And then also on YouTube, he sounds — but under the strain of a concert, I kept finding him hitting — he was flat a number of times; his voice cracked a number of times. He didn't have that presence that Jon had. And I remember thinking, Well, it'll be like 80% as good, and I felt like it was only like 30 to 40% as good. I was disappointed in that, so to have Jon triumphantly return now in good form is deeply satisfying.

Well, anyway, I'm glad you did — for selfish reasons, I'm glad you did this, because it really filled in a lot of gaps in my knowledge. But I hope also this will be — especially since you're a young guy. If you were 55, we'd have less chance of getting some of these youngsters to listen to what we're saying, but you still have a chance to reach them. Save yourselves, folks. You don't have to listen to what's being churned out today, unless it's the things we recommend. There are great things being churned out today; you just don't know about them. But I urge people to check out *The Show That Never Ends: The Rise and Fall of Prog Rock* by David Weigel on Amazon or wherever great books are sold and of course linked at TomWoods.com/958. Well, I kept you a

little longer than I said you would, but honestly I want to just keep talking forever, but I can't do that. It's a libertarian show.

WEIGEL: [laughing]

WOODS: Once in a while, my listeners indulge me. They let me do this sort of thing. But thanks so much for your time today.

WEIGEL: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.