

Music at Leeds University: 1968

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I had been given a place at Leeds University starting October 1968, so 1968 mostly became a gap year for me. I decided to spend it in the music industry, to find out whether I had what it takes. During the year we formed Yes, and all went well for a bit until we came round to the Autumn, and I explained to the other guys that I had this place at Leeds, I didn't think much of the music industry, and was leaving. They weren't happy, but soldiered on with the ex-drummer from the Koobas, a band whose claim to fame was that they had supported the Beatles.

I was going to enjoy Leeds a lot, although the 'music department' was a pitiful shed with an upright piano in it. My first few weeks were fully occupied trying to engineer an escape from sharing a room in a back-to-back in Eldon Place to the infinitely more glamorous Charles Morris Hall – Charlie Mo', as I believe it was called. This I managed - my only real achievement during my brief stay at the University. Sometime in November, I think, my old team Yes came to play at the Refectory. I sold it hard to my new friends, told them the band was terrific, and turned up to listen to a train wreck.. The drummer was on the sauce, and about a beat behind everybody else - a tricky place to be if you're tackling those fancy arrangements. It was embarrassing. I went backstage, only to find that the problem was heightened by the fact that they had a gig at the Albert Hall for Cream's Farewell Concert in a few days. They couldn't do it with the unreliable new guy - could I see my way through to coming down to London for it?

Even I couldn't say no to that, so I scooted back down south and did the Albert Hall. I finally came back up to Leeds to try to get a year's sabbatical from the course, a proposal curtly declined in a letter from the Registrar which I have kept to this day. I called my parents from the phone box outside Brotherton library to tell them I was leaving. They weren't best pleased. "But what will you do when you're 25?", the perennial cri-de-coeur of mothers about to lose their sons to the mayhem of the music industry. Traditionally, it had five years added to it as the years rolled by; "But what will you do when you're thirty (thirty-five, forty, fifty etc...)?". All I know is I haven't drawn breath since I left Leeds.

I remember being relieved, along with some 8000 other students, of the hefty sum of about £10 for compulsory Union Dues seemingly within minutes of arriving at Leeds. It didn't take much maths to figure out that the Social Secretary, armed with huge sums of money, was the most popular guy on the campus. He was charged with spending lavishly on the best rock bands of the day, and when Yes made its first disastrous visit, I think there were another three major bands to listen to on that night elsewhere on campus.

I'd forgotten this, but I came back to play the Refectory again as a professional musician in February 1971, a year or so later, with a greatly enhanced Yes, on the brink of success. We definitely had the bit between our teeth around then, convinced, in the way young musicians often are, that we could do no wrong. I don't remember much about the Ents team or this visit in particular; it was just another University gig, albeit with a special resonance for me. The University circuit was essential to the

growth of progressive rock, and was a life-line for us weary musicians. Students were very accepting of the weird, the challenging, and the wandering twenty minute epics we foisted on them, and without student support, that stuff would never have got played. The money was notably better at a college than a club, so we just lost a little less when we went to academia. The vast debt we were accumulating was luckily paid off just in time, by the arrival of the hit album 'TheYes Album'.

I never regretted leaving the University, but still hanker after a degree. Maybe I'll come back when I retire, and pick up where I left off!

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