



Exit... Stage Left

Rush

Mercury

★★½

By Jon Pareles

RUSH HAVE BEEN UNfairly maligned as just another barnstorming heavy-metal act, fit only to vibrate arena walls. Actually, the group is a lot more interesting than cock-rockers like Van Halen or AC/DC, and far less compromised than Journey or Styx. "We didn't change, everybody else did!" proclaim the liner notes to their second live set, *Exit... Stage Left*, and, in a way, they're right. Rush represent the last profitable gasp of high-minded "progressive" rock, the province of virtuosic, storytelling, philosophizing bands that attracted huge audiences in the early Seventies.

Now that Yes have been shaken up, Genesis have gotten hep and even Kansas are in limbo, Rush have the underground-FM, "oh, wow"-profound market to themselves. True, Rush are a comedown from the early Yes they ravage, but at least they never mush out like Genesis. Their power-trio lineup keeps them hard-edged, despite the occasional synthesizer whoosh. And they're more single-mindedly propulsive than their forebears. Rush's ingenuity is channeled into complicated riffs below triumphant major chords, with Alec Lifeson's guitar serving largely as reinforcement for Geddy Lee's

mammoth bass tones. Both live and in the studio, Rush's mixes make everything above the midrange sound like an afterthought — and that's just as well. Though Lee's falsetto isn't a shriek anymore, drummer Neil Peart's lyrics can still irritate. Taking individualism to Ayn Rand-inspired extremes, Peart's most pessimistic screeds suggest that in the upcoming apocalypse, every-man-for-himself will turn into stomp-the-other-guy.

There's not much propaganda on *Exit... Stage Left* — only "The Trees" (the maples unionize and, in the name of equality, destroy the taller oaks), "Free Will" (the group is for it) and "Tom Sawyer" (hardly the fun-loving guy Mark Twain invented). The rest of the record includes pessimistic fables ("Red Barchetta"), travelogues ("A Passage to Bangkok"), hippieisms ("The Spirit of Radio") and instrumentals ("YYZ" and "La Villa Strangiato," minus its original subtitle). Except for a sing-along in "Closer to the Heart" and a jokey intro to "Jacob's Ladder," the versions here are virtually identical to the studio renditions, so Rush fans may find the set redundant. Others might get a kick out of the big, surging E chords the band keeps pumping out and perhaps appreciate Peart's fine-tuned percussion, but one Rush album (preferably *Moving Pictures*) should be enough for almost anybody.

Just about everything Rush do can be found, more compactly, in Yes' "Roundabout," with the remainder in Genesis' "Watcher of the Skies." Everything except the philosophy — and stage left is, of course, to the audience's far right. □

The Discovery of Scat

Long before Dizzy,
high up on the tower at Babel

a bearded carpenter turned
to a stonemason

(barely able to see him
through the vapor of clouds)

turned to ask for a wooden
nail

and came out with something
that sounded like
bob ah doolyah bop.

—BILLY COLLINS

Faceless bands

These groups may dominate the charts, but there's not a true superstar among them.

"FOUR MAJOR ROCK & ROLL bands shocked the music industry last week when, without warning, they started acting like baseball teams. Early in the week, REO Speedwagon traded bassist Bruce Hall to Foreigner in exchange for Rick Wills and a studio percussionist to be named later; the next day, Styx sent drummer John Panozzo to Journey for Steve Smith and a first-round garage-band draft choice."—*Billboard*, April 9th, 1982

By Steve Pond

LOS ANGELES

Okay, so this is all hypothetical. Foreigner and REO Speedwagon didn't swap bass players, and Styx is not about to deal its drummer to Journey. But assume, for a minute, that such a scenario is possible. What effect would such a wholesale reorganization have on the fans who've made those four bands so popular?

None. None at all.

Those bands—along with their platinum colleague Rush and dozens of contenders such as Loverboy, Triumph and Red Rider—would be singularly unaffected by baseball-style trades, simply because they're part of a movement that sells more records than any of the newer waves: faceless bands.

Between them, the five top groups in this category—REO, Journey, Foreigner, Styx and Rush—captured three of the four top slots in *ROLLING STONE'S* year-end album chart; Foreigner and Journey, the two bands that didn't place as high in the twelve-month roundup, both recently spent some time at Number One. But while their fans undoubtedly know the names and faces of front men like

REO's Kevin Cronin, Rush's Geddy Lee and Journey's Steve Perry, there's not a true rock superstar in the bunch.

"Do you think a kid would act the same way if he ran into Mick Jagger and Lou Gramm on his street on two different days?" asked one industry veteran. "Forget it. And yet Foreigner's new album is outselling the Stones."

The groups, for the most part, seem aware of this. "To us, the records speak for the band," said Foreigner's Rick Wills. "Mainly, we're just not image conscious." Added drummer Dennis Elliott:

Who's who?

Pictured are the members of REO Speedwagon, Journey, Foreigner, Rush and Styx. Can you match their faces with their names? We bet you can't. The answers are on the next page.

REO SPEEDWAGON:
Kevin Cronin, vocals
Gary Richrath, guitar
Neal Doughty, keyboards
Alan Gratzer, drums
Bruce Hall, bass

FOREIGNER:
Lou Gramm, vocals
Mick Jones, guitar
Rick Wills, bass
Dennis Elliott, drums

JOURNEY:
Steve Perry, vocals

Neal Schon, guitar
Ross Valory, bass
Steve Smith, drums
Jonathan Cain, keyboards

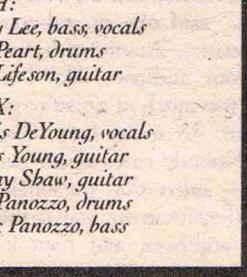
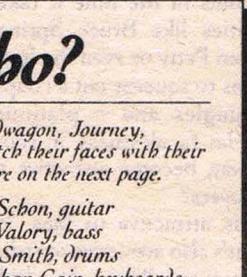
RUSH:
Geddy Lee, bass, vocals
Neal Peart, drums
Alex Lifeson, guitar

STYX:
Dennis DeYoung, vocals
James Young, guitar
Tommy Shaw, guitar
John Panozzo, drums
Chuck Panozzo, bass

"Face it—we're just ugly."

But most of the group members blame their facelessness not on something as simple as ugliness but on a lack of old-style glamour. "We're not glamorous enough for kids to be star-struck," said Styx bassist Chuck Panozzo, and guitarist James Young agreed. "We're not a Rod Stewart-type group," he said, "and we're not in a position like Talking Heads, where whoever in New York is in charge of setting trends in the rock press likes us. We're all down to earth, and nobody in the group is terribly into drugs or sex or violence or crazy acts with dogs and forks. We're not trying to inject glamour into it, and that's nice, because we have a certain degree of privacy."

Still, the hard-core audience for these groups knows [Cont. on 38]



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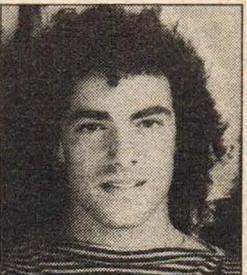
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The faceless rock bands

[Cont. from 37] who the band members are; in return, the acts have a pretty good idea just who makes up that crowd. "Young male musicians," said Geddy Lee of Rush's bread-and-butter audience. Styx manager Derek Sutton said that his band's fans, while more evenly divided among males and females, is similarly young: "Our concert audience has a median age of sixteen," he said. "They're between twelve and twenty."

Though the typical concertgoer (and heavy record buyer) may be a sixteen-year-old male with long hair, there's another broader and less fanatical crowd that also listens. "We have about 2 million fans who buy all our records but don't come to the concerts," said Sutton. "We're not sure exactly who they are, but we know that they're older than the teens at our concerts."

But however big the crowds can get, many bands can maintain their

facelessness through their own marketing techniques. The process can be as simple and foolproof as not putting the musicians' photos on album covers. It's a ploy that has long been used by camera-shy bands — i.e., Pink Floyd, one of the original faceless bands, though its powerful mystique takes the place of identifiable mugs; Chicago, with rock's most identifiable logo (guitarist Donnie Dacus, who seemed a lot more willing to put his face in the spotlight than the other members, didn't last long in this group); and lately, Christopher Cross, who put a flamingo on the cover of his spectacularly successful debut album and admitted openly that he doesn't look at all like a rocker is supposed to look.

Not one of the latest albums by Styx, REO, Journey, Rush and Foreigner contains a band photograph on the front cover, and only REO's *Hi-Infidelity* pictures the group on the inner sleeve. "We wanted album graphics that encouraged point-of-purchase sales, that create an image and identify the product as Journey without having to use the band's name," said Herbie Herbert, Journey's manager.

And how has Journey achieved that for the past several years? Not by spotlighting the band's faces, but by using a series of album covers depicting, apparently, a scarab opening up in outer space. Stick a picture of bassist Ross Valory on a Journey album and chances are that many fans would draw a blank; put on an illustration of that scarab busting out of a big, glowing ball and you've got an instant Journey record.

Styx was even more drastic in its radio commercials for the last tour, a venture planned around the concept of the *Paradise Theater* album. The initial advertisements talked about the state of American rock — "How much fog and how many flash pots must it hide behind?" — and introduced the *Paradise Theater* theme. Styx wasn't even mentioned.

Yet these bands get away with it, racking up strings of triple-platinum albums in the time it takes personalities like Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty or even the Rolling Stones to squeeze out a couple of hit singles and a platinum album. Has facelessness, in some bizarre way, become attractive to record buyers?

If it is attractive to fans, it's because it's also attractive to radio. "Radio stations all have their little target audiences, and they zero in on them," said one record-company executive. "Anything that polarizes your audience, like *New Wave*, is too much of a risk to put on the air. To radio, faces don't matter. Nobody cares about personality — unless that personality can be offensive in any way to part of your audience, and then it'll work against you. It's funny — ten years ago, controversy was real good. Now it's real, real bad unless it's traditional, Ted Nugent-style controversy that doesn't threaten anybody. But *New Wave* bands that are telling the kids about different ways of living — that's too dangerous. Not only does radio's institutionalized format guard against anything different, but it guards against anything with much personality.

"Album-oriented-rock [AOR] stations will only play hard rock," the executive continued, "and they'll welcome all the faceless hard-rock bands. Those bands have an instant base of acceptance on AOR. At the same time, Top Forty is getting softer and softer: the Stones' *Waiting on a Friend* will get on more stations than *'Start Me Up'* just because it isn't

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"Whether or not a band is faceless has nothing to do with our decision to play its music," said Jack Snyder, music director of KMET-FM, Los Angeles' leading AOR station. "Personally, I'd rather listen to a band with a strong personality than one of the faceless groups, say a Foreigner or a Journey. But we make decisions based on two things: whether it's good music, and whether the kids are into it. If the kids are into something that's faceless, it makes no difference to us."

Cliff Burnstein of the Leber-Krebs management firm feels that image makes no difference to record buyers, that records are purchased solely because of the music. "Record buyers depend totally on the music, and I think it's only a coincidence that most of the biggest bands today are faceless," he said. "The only factor I can think of to explain their facelessness is the media, which have always been responsible for building artists' images. If the pop music of this time is the likes of REO Speedwagon, Styx and Journey, you're dealing with music that the press

Court ruling a blow to T-shirt bootleggers

T-SHIRT BOOTLEGGERS were dealt a major blow in mid-December when a U.S. district-court judge awarded more than \$1 million in damages, costs and fees to Winterland Productions, promoter Bill Graham's San Francisco-based merchandising operation. Most legitimate rock&roll merchandisers around the country hailed the decision as an important first step toward curbing bootlegging.

"This is only the tip of the iceberg, but it's a very good start," said John Coulter, vice-president of Road Runner Tour Merchandising, which includes Kim Carnes and Kenny Rogers among its clients. "I think we've shown these guys that we really mean business."

In its case, Winterland charged that the defendants — Creative Screen Design Ltd. and its president and secretary-treasurer, Arnold and Allan Goldzweig — had sold 103,662 silk-screen T-shirts of performers who had leased their merchandising rights exclusively

to the Graham operation and its clients. Judge Hubert L. Will of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois awarded Winterland \$825,612 in damages, even though the company had claimed that actual damages amounted to \$275,204. Winterland attorney Eric Wurst called the decision "extremely significant" because "the trebled damages awarded will act as a deterrent."

Previously, most legal action taken against bootleggers amounted only to temporarily shutting them down with injunctions and restraining orders. But as merchandising revenues have become increasingly important in the economics of touring (see RS 356), merchandisers have stepped up their efforts to put bootleggers out of business. Dell Furano, president of Winterland, said his company currently has "eight to ten major lawsuits" in progress. Road Runner and Styx manager Derek Sutton are also pursuing bootleggers in court. —MARK HICKLING

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has always hated. They never wanted to write about those artists, to build up any images or show any faces, and now that those artists are big, the bands don't feel inclined to participate with the press. If the press had been behind Journey from the start, maybe we'd see a lot of articles about how Steve Perry sounds like Sam Cooke, but the press was not interested in writing about Journey's image. So now, Journey's not interested."

Styx' Derek Sutton bears out this last assessment. "Rush has never received critical acclaim. REO Speedwagon has never received critical acclaim. Styx has never received critical acclaim. These are the three biggest touring bands in the country, the journeymen performers the kids want to see. But the press has played no part in their success — they have always missed the point, and they have tried everything they can do to say these bands are rubbish. I now prefer just to ignore the press."

Bob Regehr, vice-president of artist development and publicity at Warner Bros., agrees that the press is generally uninterested in today's biggest bands, but he also feels the bands themselves may lack the potential to develop superstar frontmen. "Most of the music of today is pretty much hand-me-down music," he said. "Bands like Foreigner put out well-made, well-crafted records — they can't be faulted on those grounds. But there's nothing new musically. It's the same kind of music that has been passed down for more than ten years. Maybe in cloning it over those years, they've finally cloned out the star structure." □