

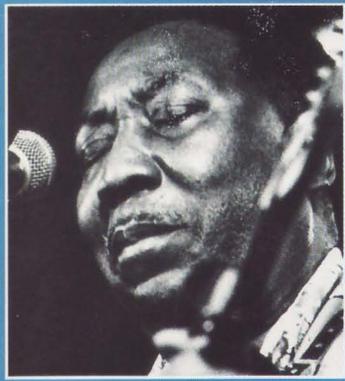
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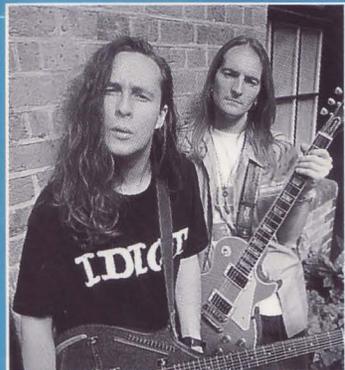
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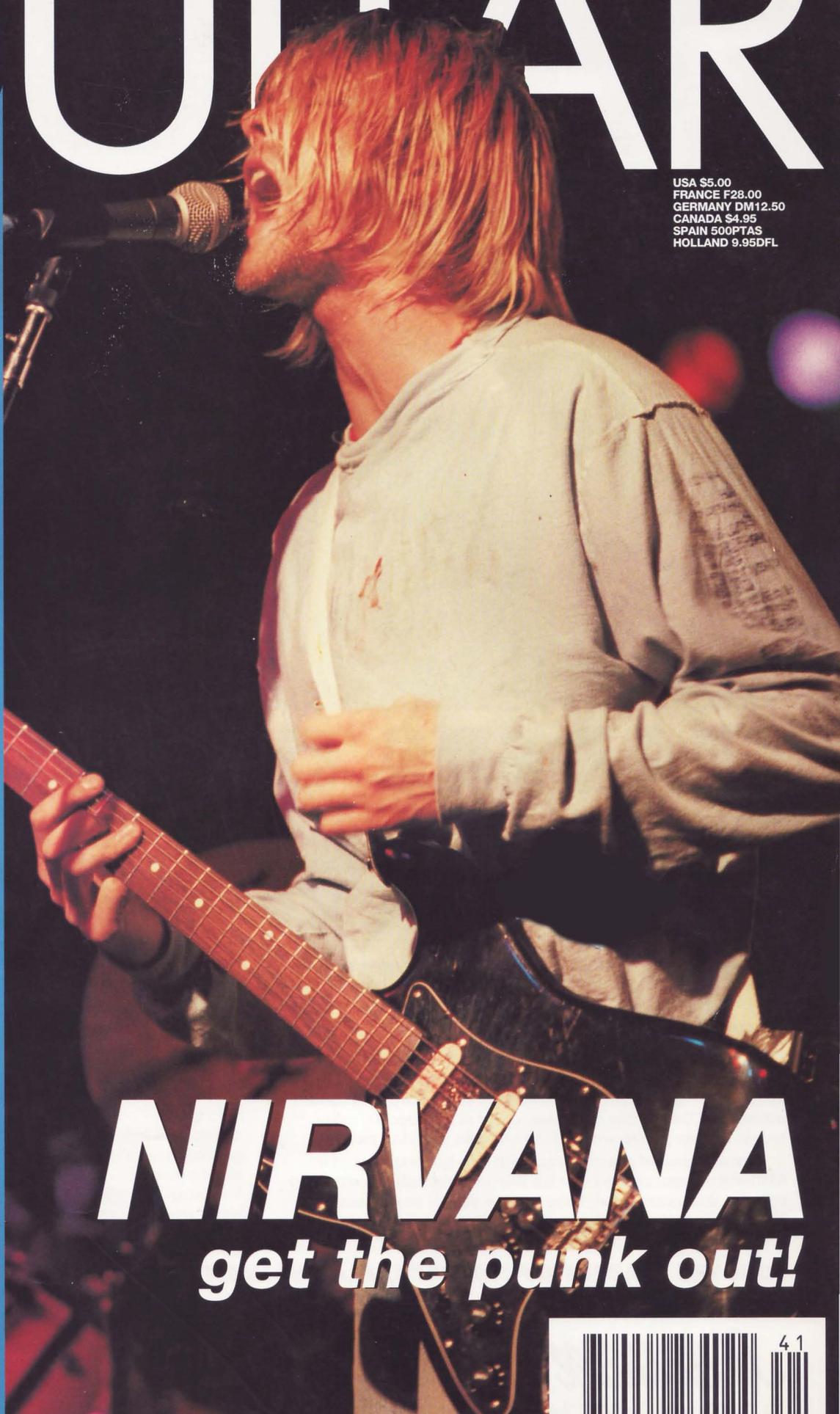


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With *Counterparts* their 19th album in as many years, Canadian rockers Rush show no sign of slowing down. TGM's Douglas J Noble talks to bassist and vocalist Geddy Lee about the band's constant evolution, his view of contemporary bands and hears about the recording of a Rush classic, *Xanadu*...

In April '92, Alex Lifeson told *The Guitar Magazine* that Rush planned to have a new album written, rehearsed and recorded for September '93 release – such is Rush's professionalism that Alex was only one month out. As bassist and singer Geddy Lee explains, Rush's new album sees the Canadian trio returning to a rawer sound.

'*Counterparts* is partly a rejection of the more complicated aspects of our sound, with a return to more guitar and fewer keyboards. We wanted to have a more explosive sound again – more streamlined and a little more organic. That was our intention before we started the album although we were thinking in sonic terms rather than stylistically – I mean, we didn't know what we were going to end up writing and what style of music would come out of it. We wanted to capture a more raw side of the band's sound – that's an area I thought we had short-changed ourselves on for the last couple of records.'

In the past, Rush's musical development was often seen in three, four or five album stages – often separated by a live album – although Geddy doesn't see it like that now.

'I just see it from one project to the next. It's hard for me to say if we've plateaued or arrived at a new stage or if we're in the middle of a stage. I see them all as different! This live album thing that we do every four records or so is based largely on practicality – it buys us time and gives us a break from the 18-month record, 18-month tour schedule. It provides a breathing space and we're able to update our live sound.

'For the writing of *Counterparts* we rented this farm studio outside our home town of Toronto and for two months we holed up there from Monday to Friday, taking the weekends off to visit our families. Alex and I have a room where we write together – actually, we spend most of the time laughing or arguing! Neil (Peart) is at the other end of the house hammering out lyrics or staring out the window waiting for something to happen. We then spend a lot of time rehearsing – more and more with each album – so that when we get into the studio we don't have to worry about anything other than getting a great sound and a spontaneous performance. I think we perfected that technique whilst working with Rupert Hine.

'We chose Peter Collins as producer

because he's a good friend whose work we have a high regard for and he's someone we had worked with before (on *Power Windows* from '85 and *Hold Your Fire* from '87) but wanted to work with again. We made a deal with ourselves that every couple of records we would change production team to keep the sound of the band evolving. We talked to a lot of younger producers but we thought we could intimidate them too easily!'

Rush are one of the few bands at the heavier end of the musical spectrum who have thoughtful and carefully-crafted lyrics, penned by drummer Neil Peart.

'I respond to Neil's lyrics very much as a fan does. Some lyrics are self-explanatory but if I don't understand them then we have to talk about it 'cause I must have a strong empathy for the lyric before I can get into singing it. Neil's very professional – he takes criticism well and gives criticism well. He's also very accommodating these days if I think something needs to be refined to give me more breathing space. I like to sing rather than recite!

'A couple of people have said I'm singing in a lower range on this record but I don't think the range is particularly different from *Hold Your Fire* and onwards. I think the album was recorded a little drier and I think I'm getting better at writing melodies and harmonies.

'Neil's count-in at the beginning of the record before *Animate* seemed like a good way to start the album – you know, the "human touch". He rarely counts in songs so it was good to capture his voice – he's screaming into the mic so we know where "one" is! *Animate* is probably my favourite track 'cause I love the sound and the rhythm of it. Plus, the bass is really loud – and that always makes me happy!

'Alex wrote the *Stick It Out* riff whilst he was fooling around – he's a great one for coming up with riffs! I really dug it so we stretched it out a bit, added a few more things and it became that song. *Between Sun And Moon* is a very un-Alex Lifeson sound – the guitar is quite Stones-y. We were just jamming one day and he started playing the riff. It was kinda cool to see him playing in that style – he does it pretty well!

'Peter Collins has worked with Michael Kamen a number of times and it was Peter's idea to put strings on *Nobody's Hero*. Michael was working on *Last Action Hero* and we weren't sure of his availability

so I started putting together some string-like ideas that ended up being incorporated into the arrangement.

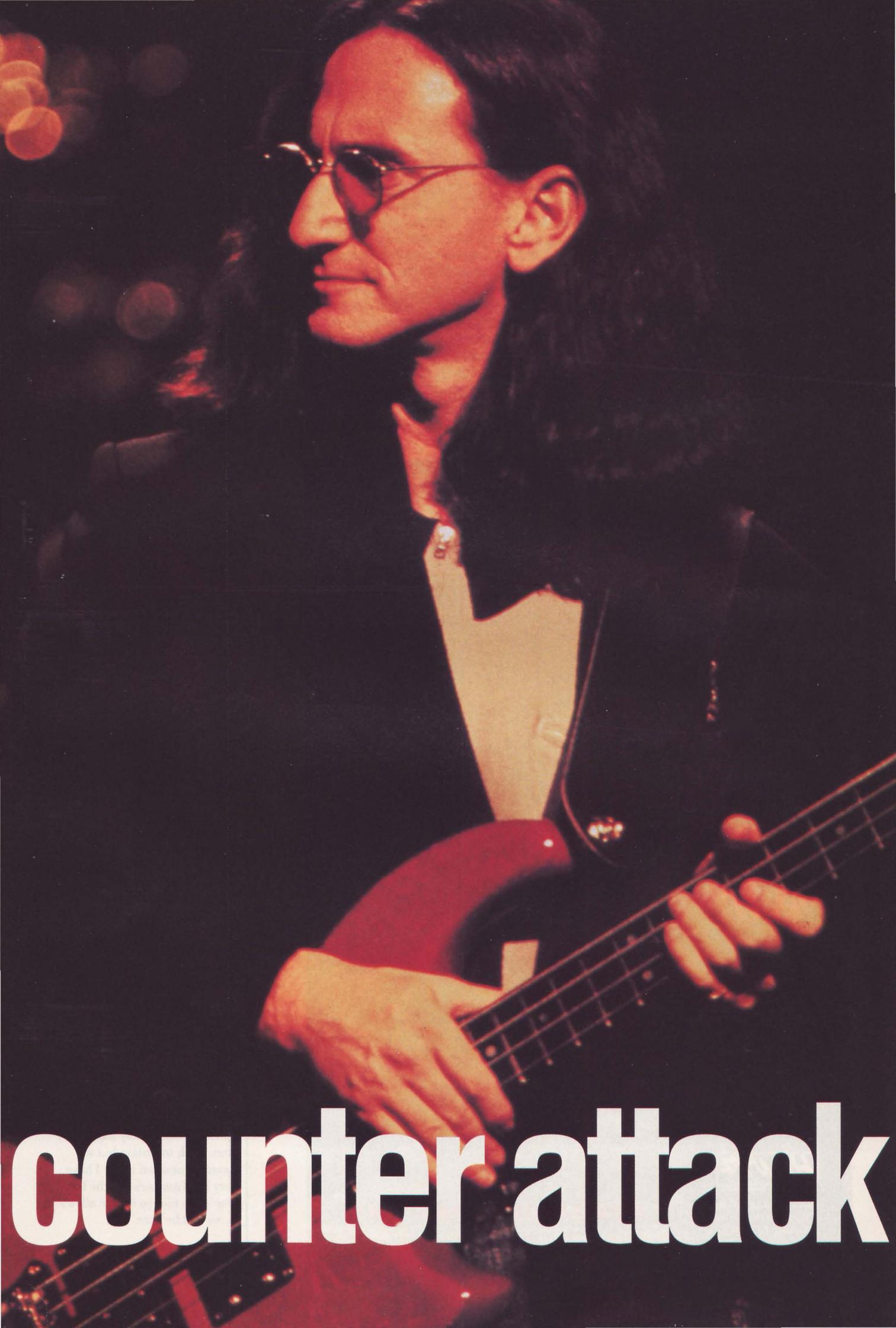
'It was a retro record in terms of equipment for Alex and me – I used my mid '60s Fender Jazz bass that I hadn't really used since *Signals* and Alex used a Les Paul a lot plus his Fenders and Paul Reed Smith. I used Trace Elliot cabinets and our engineer found this old Ampeg tube amp which I used in conjunction with a direct line through a Palmer speaker simulator. Alex used Marshall and Peavey amps and bypassed most of his effects, if not all of them; that was a great relief to most of us in the control room! For the next tour I think Alex is going to take out Marshall stacks which will be quite a change for him. I'm not sure what I'm going to use live but I'll probably use a Trace Elliot valve amp.

'I wear discrete monitors in my ears when we're playing live – they enable me to listen to what's going on better. Neil wears high frequency filters but I've never worn ear plugs. I've got a slight hearing loss which seems to be about the same frequency that my monitors squeal at – maybe I've had a few too many monitor squeals in my life! But both ears are exactly the same so it could be a genetic thing. I always crank the top end when I listen to records at home to compensate!

'We're a very well-rehearsed band and we put a lot of effort into preparation – it's very important to us to be able to attain a high level of performance. We fall short every so often but that's only natural. If a performance isn't spirited, then at least it will be correct. Of course, you're always looking for those spirited performances but we're our own worst critics – performances that satisfy us are few and far between but what's more important is what the audience thinks. I like to think we have a pretty high success rate.'

In 1994 Rush will celebrate 20 years together, with a lot of that time spent touring. Does Geddy have any favourite gigs from past years on the road?

'I remember a lot of exceptional gigs over the years. Our first Hammersmith Odeon gig (June '77) is one of my fondest memories. We played great and the crowd was so into it – amazing! I also remember a gig at the LA Forum that was one of those perfect nights. But these things can be so subjective – you can have a night that you think was great then the sound guy can

A man with long dark hair and glasses is shown in profile, looking to the left. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is playing a red electric guitar. The background is dark with some bokeh light effects. The text "counter attack" is overlaid at the bottom in a large, white, sans-serif font.

counter attack

track record – xanadu

Recorded on the '77 album *A Farewell To Kings*, Xanadu is an 11 minute epic which was lyrically inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Kubla Khan*.

'Xanadu was pretty well rehearsed before we went into the studio. We had played it live in Britain before we went into Rockfield Studios in Wales to record the album. We actually recorded it straight through in one go rather than recording it in sections... It couldn't have been too many takes otherwise I would remember it – La Villa Strangiato was a

nightmare to record and I remember that very well!'

The guitar riff at 1:49 to 2:44 after the atmospheric intro is based on the E major scale but Geddy's bass line uses G natural and D natural rather than G sharp and D sharp from the E major scale.

'Yeah – it's all instinct! I wasn't aware of that when I came up with that bass part 'cause I wasn't thinking in those terms. When Alex and I are writing, the bottom line is does the music suit the

counter attack

come back and say, "Well, yes, you were spot-on – but a little vibrateless out there, guys." Aside from touring I guess my favourite Rush album is probably *Moving Pictures* but I think my favourite Rush bass parts are probably found on the *Hemispheres* record – the *Prelude* of the track *Hemispheres*.'

Rush had a great deal of difficulty finding acceptance in the music business in their early days but the recent success of Metallica and Nirvana has helped many heavier and 'alternative' bands. 'At the moment it's pretty healthy 'cause the record companies are signing anything that's vaguely alternative which is always good. It's a happy accident when that sometimes happens – most record company people don't know what the hell they're doing. They don't know who to sign so they follow like sheep. When a band like Nirvana is successful suddenly you sign everything that's vaguely reminiscent of Nirvana and accidentally some great bands get signed. But overall I don't think things change very much and I think it will die again. The industry goes through these dead periods, like four or five years ago when it was really sad and nothing happened!'

'As far as contemporary bands go, I like the Tragically Hip a lot – a Canadian band. I also like Curve, Sting, some stuff by the Red Hot Chili Peppers and some Soundgarden. I like U2's stuff from the last couple of years – I liked early U2, then I went off them, now I like them again. I try to avoid going to concerts – I spend a lot of time backstage on my own so I really don't have much desire to go see other bands when I'm not touring. The last band I saw was U2 on the *Zoo TV* tour – mainly because Primus were opening the show and they are friends of mine. I thought it was fantastic!'

Rush begin a world tour in early '94 with possible UK dates. 'I would really like to come back to Britain but we haven't discussed it yet. I have very fond memories of the last European tour so if time allows it, we will be here.'

Douglas J Noble

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lyrics. If we're working without lyrics, then the bottom line is whether or not we get off on it. If we get a strong vibe from the music then we take it from there.

'The album before A Farewell To Kings was a live one (All The World's A Stage) so we had time to get to know our instruments better. I had started playing synthesizer, Taurus bass pedals and a Rickenbacker double neck (the 4080-12, comprising 4-string bass and 12-string guitar). I had used the Rickenbacker and bass pedals before Xanadu for when we played A Passage To Bangkok live - I used to play rhythm guitar and bass pedals during Alex's solo.

'We were always working on A Farewell To Kings well into the early wee hours and there

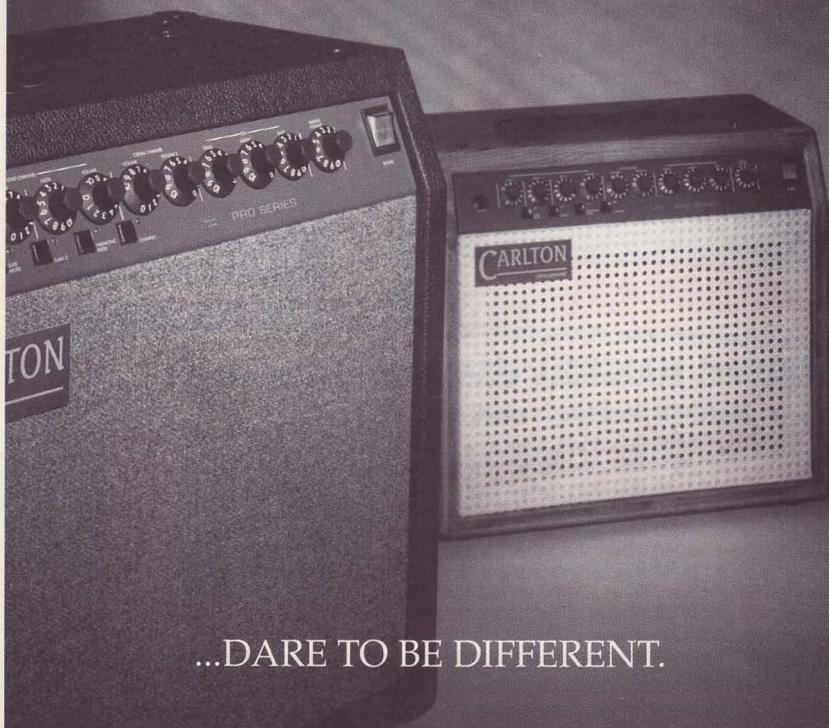
were always birds tweeting in the courtyard. So, I think we recorded them for the intro of Xanadu - there weren't any samplers in those days and sound effect tapes were usually too noisy to use.

'I don't think I've heard the live version of Xanadu on Exit Stage Left since it was released in '81 but overall I think we tried to make that album too perfect. We dampened the audience mics and as a result it sounds too sterile and not very live. We had to redo bits in the studio 'cause we had a lot of trouble with out-of-tune guitars. We brought Xanadu back into the live set on the Presto tour and I was surprised how well it went down. It was one of those forgotten songs that was fun to play again so I think we'll keep it around for a while - recycle it!'

Rush's Roll The Bones tour saw the band playing a medley comprising excerpts from 2112, Finding My Way, La Villa Strangiato, Anthem, Red Barchetta and The Spirit Of Radio as well as an imaginative musical coupling of Xanadu with Superconductor. 'We always try to balance our sets. People come to see us for a variety of reasons - some of our fans are trapped in the '70s!'

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