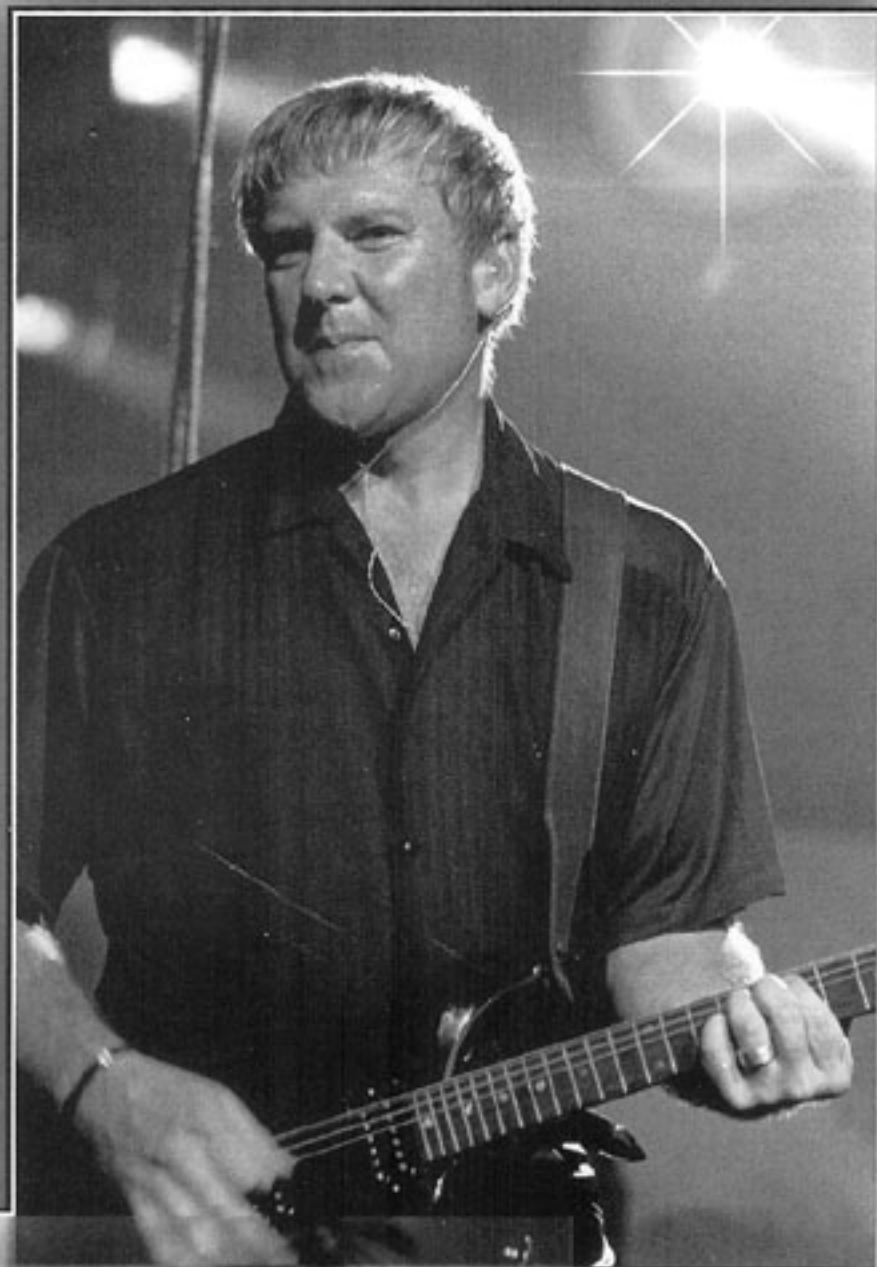
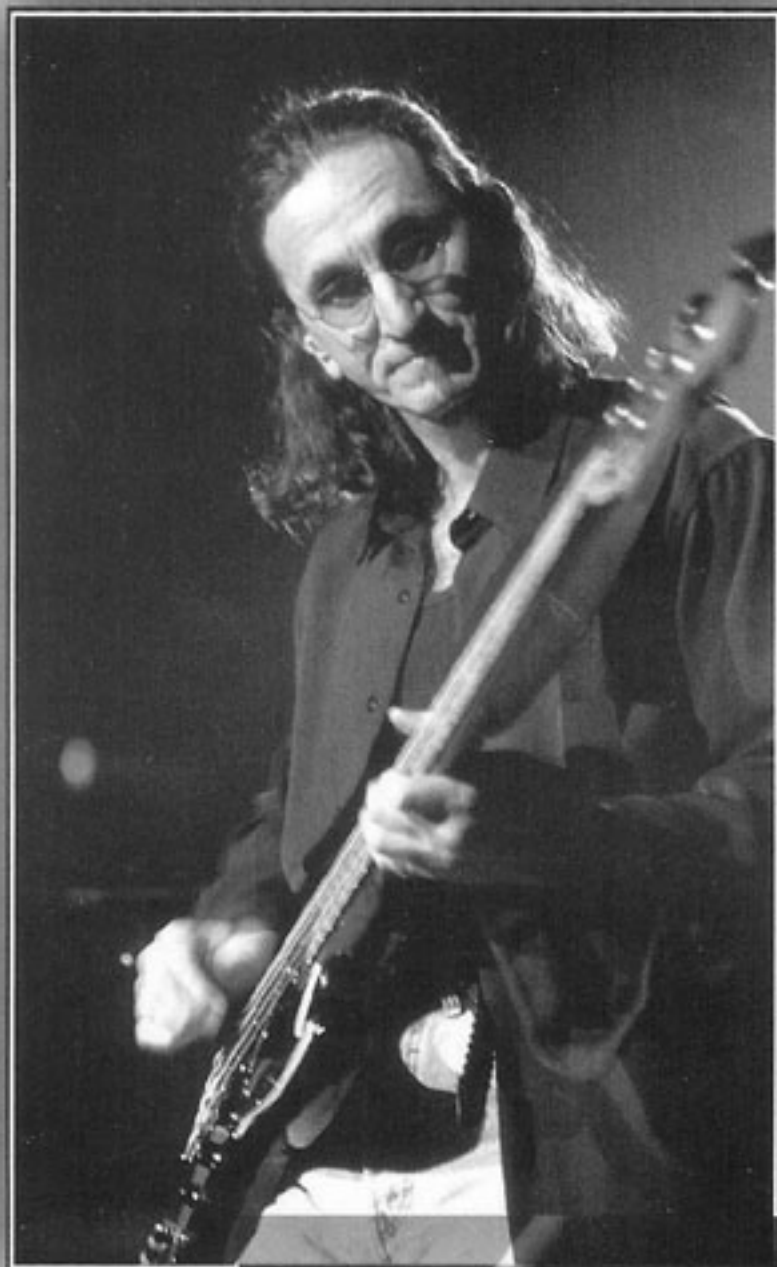


# a show of hands

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# Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!

Interview by Steve Streeter  
Transcribed by Mandy Streeter

Howard "HERNS" Ungerlieder is a name that most Rush fans should be familiar with. He's been with Rush since the beginning. HERNs is the man who conducts the spectacular lights and effects that you've come to love over the years. If you ever have peered back or forward depending on where you're sitting to the mixing board you'll see a man in black you will swear is conducting an orchestra. Well he is. Howard is a friend to many Rush fans.

So often we take the production/lights for granted. But it is immediately apparent that Howard is a very unique and special talent. Simply put: he's one of the very best in the business! We'll be talking to Howard again in the near future. So if you have any specific questions, please send them in.

**Steve:** I want to start by finding out in a nutshell, how you got started with Rush. Was that your first gig?

**Howard:** No, it wasn't. It was actually my fifth. I started in 1970 working for a talent agency called American Talent International, located in New York City. I was an agent there for two years, a booking agent. I was booking all these bands and working out their contracts. I actually started delivering coffees for that company in 1970 and worked my way up through the mail room to talent scout status, an agent. So that's how I started. The first tour I did was Savoy Brown, in '71. I went from there to Bad Finger for awhile. I did the Rod Stewart "Ooo La La Tour" to the Fleetwood Mac "Bare Trees Tour"...

**S:** You weren't doing lighting at the time....

**H:** No, the capacity I was in during that time period was in the contractual end, making sure the bands got paid, looking after the acts I represented, and also tour managing them. I wasn't tour managing Fleetwood Mac although I was Savoy Brown. I was the American tour manager for Bad Finger. I did a lot of work with, it was actually a package tour, with Savoy Brown, Fleetwood Mac and Deep Purple. I did some work with Deep Purple on the MachineHead tour.

**S:** What a show! Interesting...

**H:** Yeah, then in 1974 I did some special effects with The Who for "Tommy" when they did a lot of outdoor shows. I did the choreographed search lights.

**S:** Did you? Was that some of the first lighting experience you had?

**H:** Actually Savoy Brown I was doing lighting on as well. I've always done lighting. I studied it in school and university. I took theatre arts and drama.

**S:** How did Rush come about?

**H:** Well, I was doing Brian Auger's Oblivion Express. I don't

know if you know who Brian Auger was. He's a jazz organ player. He and an old partner of his, named Julie Driscoll wrote a

song called "Season of the Witch" which became very famous. He's a really amazing player. I did a tour with him and he had people like Bobby McIntosh, who was the drummer for The Average White Band. He had Steve Feroni playing with him, another amazing drummer. He had Jack Mills, Barry Dean on guitar. Some really good musicians. He was doing a lot of dates with people like Herbie Hancock. We'd come in and jam with them. He was really into jazz quite a bit. I did a bunch of touring with him and at the end of that tour the agency phoned me up and said they had just signed Rush and wanted me to go to Toronto.

**S:** Oh interesting...okay..

**H:** They sent me up to the office, although they didn't tell the band I was coming... Ha, ha, ha... or Ray Danniels!

**S:** Oh really?....

**H:** So I just sort of showed up and said, "Listen, I'm the tour manager for Rush." And I just came in and did everything.

**S:** And that was in...

**H:** That was in August of '74.

**S:** On the brink of their first tour...

**H:** That was their first tour. I was actually the one who put them on the road and took them out.

**S:** Okay, wow..

**H:** They had just signed a recording contract. So we went out there opening for Uriah Heep.

**S:** Right, which I heard they were one of the loudest bands





**H:** Oh, they were pretty amazing. I used to be their agent so,...

**S:** Oh, were you really?

**H:** Oh yeah, it was really fun. Knowing the bands from being their agent before and now working with them on the road, I knew a lot of the people, so it was really easy to get out there. And because of the people I knew, it really helped the band quite a bit. I knew all the promoters, from being an agent, and they always treated Rush really well.

**S:** So from that tour, and in subsequent years, were you developing different techniques with Rush and other bands...?

**H:** As far as lighting goes?

**S:** Yeah.

**H:** Well, I'm innovative. What I like to do is, I'm one of the few people who use atmosphere as a drawing board. I like using atmosphere, like smoke or air to create imagery. I was one of the last people, I really held out for years, from using automated lighting. When automated lighting first came out I refused to use it because I wanted to explore as much as I could possibly do with theatrical lighting. So by exploring the theatrical lighting and not succumbing to the moving lights right away it made it a lot more interesting down the road when I did venture into the moving lights. Because then that opened up a whole new world for me after I basically exhausted every possibility that I could think of with conventional and theatrical lighting.

**S:** What tour did you start using the moving lights then? Was it 2112 or Farewell To Kings maybe?

**H:** No, way after that. It wasn't until 1988. We didn't use moving lights until, I think, Hold Your Fire.

**S:** Okay, then it must be the illusion of moving lights I recall from previous tours.

**H:** Oh yeah, well I created that with cross-fading lighting. I used to have systems that were upwards of five or six hundred lights. There were a lot of lights. And I would design them so that when you cross-faded them it would create movement, but it was an illusion. I had people thinking I was using lasers before I even had them on stage.

**S:** Well, you had me fooled. I swear I saw lights moving around in the early shows.

**H:** What you were witnessing was chases, multiple chases going on. I've always taxed circuitry in how to use lighting. I was the first person to actually put an aircraft landing light in a can. That was in 1973 when I stumbled across a friend of mine named Tim Pace, who was a lighting designer down in Washington D.C. He's still there actually, doing a lot of video and club work. We went to an auction and picked up these things called marine beacon lights which really are aircraft landing lights. They're a very tight beam and put out a throw for a quarter of a mile but when you're using them on stage from 20-30 feet it never really opens up. It becomes really nice and thin like a pencil beam. They're low voltage, and cheap and they look great. So around '73 we put one inside of a can to see how it would work and it was just phenomenal. So we used them on a few of the Rush dates when Rush was doing some headline shows in '77 and after that everybody else wanted them and it became public domain. Tried to claim the rights to it but

everybody was using it. At that point in time I used to think that aircraft landing lights ran in series cause it was low voltage and they were in groups of eight. Now they're in groups of four. But back then they were in groups of eight and when you put a fader up, all eight lights would come up at the same time. So what I said was, man, it would be really great if I didn't have to use these as groups of eight but I could work it out so I could put them up individually, so I could get ten groups of eight, right, and bring them up as eighty individual lights. So I called up See Factor and said, 'Let's work this out so we can do it'. What we came up with was that we had to put a transformer on each light and then I had a custom board designed to matrix out combinations of these so you could pick and choose whatever you want.

**S:** Wow.

**H:** So that when you were seeing eighty aircraft lights chasing, you're not seeing ten groups of eight, you're seeing eighty individual beams coming down from all different chase patterns that I can assign into these custom boards.

**S:** That sounds like the illusion of a laser.

**H:** Not only a laser, but a moving light. I came up with a lot of innovative circuitry and custom boards. Rush has always had, I've always had customized consoles doing really bizarre things. I've never used the conventional system, ever.

**S:** Right, you had mentioned a story to me previously that I'd like you to relate about Ted Nugent...

**H:** Oh yeah, when Rush was playing...

**S:** Were they opening for Nugent?

**H:** It was like a co-headline, but, yeah, they were more of a special guest than a headliner. Michigan was always their really stronghold. It was in Detroit. Rush had played there with Kiss, opened for them. They did the whole Kiss tour. A lot of their popularity came from that tour. That was '74-'75. Right after Uriah Heep we went into that. Rush also toured with Aerosmith. The tour manager for Aerosmith was kind of a miserable guy. He wouldn't give Rush sound checks and when it came time for lighting he only let me use three faders of lights. Just a miserable guy and we did a whole Aerosmith tour like this. With as well as Rush can play, we never really got to use any of the production because of this road manager guy being really uptight. Well, when we went to work with Ted it was really great. His brother John Nugent was tour managing at the time, and he was a nice guy, but on this one show in Detroit, all the sudden, for some reason, I think it was the same management company, this guy from Aerosmith came in, the guy who was miserable, came in for this leg of the tour. John Nugent was still out there but being Ted's brother he was driving the car with Ted. They had a rental Lincoln at the time. So anyway, I had a friend that worked at the Michigan Palace as a rigger and he was also a rigger for Cobo Hall and I found out that this tour manager was going to be there and I knew that Rush was not going to get any production and it was a really important show because Rush were getting really huge in popularity in that part of the world. So I designed this little light show with a huge white scrim and a bunch of beam projectors and, oh, just all this special effect lighting. I had my friend fly it to the ceiling so it just looked like it was just part of the rigging hanging from ceiling of the



building, right? And he spaced it out for me so that when he brought it in it would cover all of Ted's production and you wouldn't see anything. Ted had a lot of ground support system at the time and genie towers and stuff like that. So of course, that afternoon the tour manager came up to me and told me that I wasn't allowed to use anything but these three faders, just like I expected. I said to him, "Well, you know, I think I'd rather just use spotlights, I won't use anything...." And in order to pull this off my lighting board had to be buried under the stage where no one could see it, so I'd have to run the lights from the side of the stage. We didn't have a long enough cord to get it out further and we didn't want people knowing about it so I just sort of snuck it in there. When Rush came up on stage right before Ted, all the stuff dropped in, you know, and basically looked like a huge production. Everything was pre-focused and we just did the best we could. We rolled down our white carpet and this scrim came in and the band started playing and about into the second or third song I feel I'm being choked. I turn around and it's Ted - strangling me! Like, "Why are you doing this?!" Pretty crazy, but it was alright. (Laughter)

**S:** So he let you do it, huh?

**H:** Yeah, yeah, well he wasn't happy at the time but, you know, after that he was alright.

**S:** (Laughter) That's funny. Are there any other outstanding stories with other bands?

**H:** Oh, there's tons of stories. On the road with Kiss was amazing. We had a pretty good time with those guys. They were always great.

**S:** Well, Kiss they were big fans of Rush as far as I know back then...

**H:** Oh it was great! They were very friendly. Everybody used to tell us horror stories about Kiss, like these guys were miserable, you can't get along. I'll tell you right now, they were great to work with. They were friendly. We had sound checks every day. It was just very, very good.

**S:** It was a good thing for Rush, too...

**H:** Oh yeah, it always was. You know we did some shows with Blue Oyster Cult. We were playing with everyone back then. I mean, we played with Sha Na Na back then. It was amazing.

**S:** Right. Did you go on the Grace Under Pressure tour?

**H:** I did every tour, except for Roll The Bones.

**S:** And it was noticeable. You were missed on Bones.

**H:** Well, thank you. (Laughs)

**S:** A lot of people mentioned it, it came up quite a bit.

**H:** Well the unfortunate thing about that was that I designed the show for Roll The Bones and I hired the lighting director for it because I thought he was a nice guy. Well, he is a nice guy, but what happened here is he changed my design.

**S:** Oooooo...

**H:** Not the structure, the instruments. Right? And never discussed it with me. He took it upon his own cognizance to change it. Well, he changed it and it wasn't quite right. So anyway, I had hired him and he changed the system and I didn't really know what was going on and what was not going on. Things really weren't happening.

**S:** It was apparent to us and a lot of the fans that there was

a problem with the lights. I remember the early shows on the tour that we saw seemed very rusty and didn't seem to have the impact.

**H:** Well the problem that happened there was the fact that when Rush took a pretty long break I took on the Queensryche Empire tour. That tour was supposed to be over right before Rush started but they had that huge hit, "Silent Lucidity". So that tour was extended to sixteen months and they sold almost four million records. I couldn't just walk off the tour. That wouldn't be right. I'm trying to keep some integrity here. It was a very strange situation. I wanted to finish Queensryche and I knew that if I could design Rush and have somebody run it....I didn't think it would be as poor as what people said it was. But some people said it was great. So I guess it's to the eye of the beholder.



**S:** Jumping around a little bit, what brought on the pyrotechnics during Counterparts?

**H:** Well, a long time ago, Rush used to use pyrotechnics quite a bit.

**S:** I believe....

**H:** 2112

**S:** The first tour I saw was Kings...

**H:** Yeah, Farewell To Kings as well, but 2112 we also used it.

**S:** Yep, flashpots.

**H:** Flashpots, yeah. And then one day we had a really serious accident happen that sort of curtailed the use of pyro again for a long, long time. So I never really brought it up. But down the road I mentioned it and my partner Doug, at the time, he's actually my partner now, we're always talking about doing something. He said how about pyro with Rush? I said, 'Aw, it's a sore subject because of this unfortunate thing that happened years ago but we'll give it a shot and mention it to them'. And Neil sort of really loves pyro and he said, 'Yeah, that would be pretty cool'. Everybody was really surprised. Ged said, 'Yeah, let's give it a shot'. The music really called out for it.

**S:** Oh yeah, Double Agent was perfect.

**H:** Yeah, so...See, I like using effects, not because you have them, but to make them integrated with what's going on.

**S:** Fits the music.

**H:** Exactly. A lot of people just use it to use it. I don't do that. I like the element of surprise. I like the dramatics, you know, I'd like to use it more. Like the theatrical effect.

**S:** Yeah, it was a fun effect. I felt the heat!



**H:** (Laughter) Exactly! So that was great. It worked out well. I wanted to give the audience something different. Like bringing back the lasers on this tour. I wanted to do that.

**S:** People were missing those again...

**H:** That's right. People that come to see Rush know. It may be gone on one tour but it'll be back on another but who knows? There's always something else that will be there.

**S:** Yeah, it's part of the show. This past tour you used those big light balls during Natural Science. That was your invention?

**H:** Yeah, Geddy really wanted them originally for Half The World and wanted them to be like the Earth. Geddy's original idea was to have the Earth splitting in half but the more we looked at it, the bigger they had to be cause when you're playing in arenas you have to see what they are. If they're too small, you won't make out that it's the Earth. If you have this huge ball, then it becomes an obstruction that sits over the audience looming all night long and you have to put it in some kind of a shroud so no one sees what it is and then have it pull out....It became quite the conversation piece. I thought maybe it would be better to use the Yin and the Yang on the screen. Geddy's brother did the video. We were going to use his video there, so I thought maybe it would be a happy medium to try to lose that effect. Then we were talking more about it and there was an effect years ago called the porcupine you used to see in dance clubs. Geddy and I went to a club and saw it and it was like an upside down version of the ball and I said it'd be nice to have some of those on stage. But they're disco effects and they fall to pieces and you don't want to travel around with them. So we sort of resurrected that effect with the balls based on that and turned them around.

**S:** It was an appropriate song I thought too.

**H:** Yeah, cause Ged then said, 'Let's use it in Natural Science, that'll be great'. I thought it would work and they sure do.

**S:** Oh yeah, I think that was one of my favorite parts of the show.

**H:** It was sort of subtle.

**S:** Oh, absolutely. Did you have any input over the dreaded rabbits?

**H:** Oh, we all have input. How we design the show is like, Geddy has a lot of ideas for the films and I have a lot of ideas for the stage and lighting and also the films. And we sit down with Norm Stango and have brainstorming sessions. Everybody puts their two cents in and we come up with what we do.

**S:** So Ged's really into it?

**H:** Oh yeah!

**S:** Alex and Neil as well?

**H:** Um, Ged's more hands on. Alex and Neil have input but Ged's the one who actually physically goes down to the work areas where we work, the video house, Spin Productions, where we have our meetings...

**S:** How do you prepare when you're designing a show?

**H:** Everyone is different. One way I design is lyrically. So I like to read the lyrics...

**S:** So you really need to study the music.

**H:** You have to, to get into it really heavily. Once the studio stuff is done and they have their basic rough mixes, they give me

a copy of that and I get to listen to that months before they come out with it. Then I spend months creating what I think will be great. When I design the system I keep a lot of things in mind. I want the people in the back of the audience who can't see the band very well to be able to see other things. So I design the special effects for them. While the people up front...

**S:** That don't see it, up front usually.

**H:** That's right, that don't see that, will see other things that I put in there that I design for them. Then I design in a 270 degree, like, I want the show to look as great from the side as it does from the front. So I have to keep that in consideration as well. And I want it to look modern and unlike other people who are on the road. I create my design based on that.

**S:** You're always trying to put some unique spin on it.

**H:** Yep. Then I do the circuitry so that it's highly unusual. So that when I do tricky things, like in Natural Science, with the lights chasing and things no one has ever seen before.

**S:** Well, you're like a conductor. It's obvious. Well, I never paid attention to the lights really when I was younger but I think every Rush fan now realizes it's so intense. It's one of the best aspects of a Rush show.

**H:** Well, the thing is, I have a really great band to work with. If it wasn't for the band there'd be no show, so it's one of those things where I'm fortunate enough to work with a band like that. Or Queensryche.

**S:** I did see a Queensryche show in Milwaukee. Some of the things were reminiscent of Rush, but then again, that's your benchmark.

**H:** That's right. Well, the thing is, I really have complete creative freedom with Rush as far as lighting goes. No ones really saying to me, 'You can't do this, you must use these colors'. I know when Peter Gabriel's on the road he's strict. You can only use certain colors...

**S:** But you have complete creative freedom.

**H:** Sure. And I like using saturated color. I like using technicolor. I want someone to come to a show a go, 'Wow, look at these colors!'

**S:** Someone brought up actually, here in Rockford, and it was something that I didn't notice at first, but during the reggae break in 'Spirit of Radio', you flood it with the Jamaican flag colors.

**H:** Yes, I did. (Smiling) So someone actually noticed that huh? (Laughter)

**S:** Yes, this was from someone who was at their first Rush show and I heard that and thought, 'Yeah, right!'

**H:** That's pretty funny. I thought I was the only one who caught that. (More laughter)

**S:** That's really neat. I'm sure there's other things if I think about it. Sometimes we'll spend a show really looking at, studying the lights. But yeah, that was picked up.

**H:** Well, that was like the tour that we did when the lyrics were 'you see black and white but I see red, not blue'. Well, if you watched the show when I did that one, it was exactly what he sang.

**S:** Absolutely, that was wonderful.

**H:** Well, that makes me happy cause that means that people are actually watching which is great.



**S:** Oh, definately! That's become something Rush fans look at as well as the band.

**H:** I thought it was a little humorous. You know, keep a little humor in it.

**S:** Yep, uh huh. So are you preparing for the next leg of the tour?

**H:** Yeah, it comes up in April so we're preparing for that.

**S:** Anything new in store?

**H:** I don't know. You'll have to see. It's outdoors so...

**S:** That makes a difference. Do you have to adjust to that?

**H:** Well, a lot of the buildings are smaller, like the stages aren't as big. So we have to see the size of the stage so we can make sure we can fit the system in there.

**S:** So you may have to adjust from show to show.

**H:** Oh, definately! We always do anyway. There's always something you have to adjust. You have to be flexible. And we're very flexible, so that's good.

**S:** Excellent! Oh! Were you at the Phoenix Club show?

**H:** Of course I was.

**S:** Of course you were.

**H:** I was doing lights.(Laughs)

**S:** Dumb question!

**H:** Why wouldn't I be there?

**S:** Of course you were there.

**H:** Did anyone see that?

**S:** Well, we knew a couple people that were there.

**H:** It was a great show actually.

**S:** You obviously had to bring in a shoestring of lights.

**H:** We used fifteen cyber lights, a dozen par 64's with color changers on them, and 24 aircraft landing lights with color changers. That was it.

**S:** That must have been weird.

**H:** And no spotlights.

**S:** Must've been weird.

**H:** It was. It was great. It was fun. Everybody loved it. The band loved it.

**S:** That's good to hear.

And so wrapped up our first formal talk with Howard. We had many other questions to ask which we will get to in the future issues of **ASOF**. Thanks for your time Howard!



## Focus Point **LIMBO**

**Dateline:** October  
26, 1996

**Place:** Rockford  
Metro Center

by Mike Arbisi

Limbo best describes the state of mind I found myself in when Rush finally graced the stage of my hometown Metro Center. Over a year of hardwork and dedication had been put into the petition drive by myself and others – and now, finally, RUSH were here!!

This was the first Rush concert where I was on the floor. I was so fortunate. Fate happened to be on my side that night and I found myself in seat one of the seventh row. What an incredible view! To see up close all the energy Geddy put into his performance was exhilarating. And those faces Alex made! It's an entirely different world from the floor. Neil's drums never looked better.

My "Evening with Rush" started around 4pm. Neil had just arrived and signed a few autographs for some die-hard fans, who, like me, were there to absorb every last moment. When Neil was asked by a fan to sign a shirt, he politely replied, "Nope." We all had a good laugh over that one. Thanks Neil, for being so generous with those items you DID sign!

Alex & Geddy arrived around 4:30 pm via mini-van. The windows were tinted making it almost impossible to see inside. Alex, however, was pressed up against the window and waved to us. It was quite a thrill to see Alex up close like that. We all cheered them on as they drove by and into the backstage garage. During my anxious wait for the show I scouted the area several times. Looking through some (power) windows of the arena I was able to see that we were all in store for one massive light show! My heart began to pound with excitement as I recalled past light

shows at Rush concerts. I had no idea what I was in for!

The sun set, the wind blew high and cold, and a huge gathering of Rush friends were ready for the show of their lives! We could hardly wait until the doors would open and we'd be that much closer to witnessing the greatest concert Rockford would ever know!

As I RUSHED into the building my first order of business was to see the stage. I was shocked to see it was completely uncovered and set up! This was a new sight for me, and a first for Rush too! It was awesome to view the whole set-up like that. I tried to take it all in folks, believe me!

Steve and Mandy were seated several chairs down from me and I had a special request that needed attention. Knowing that Geddy is a huge baseball fan and a collector (as I am), I wanted to give him an autographed copy of "Holy Cow!", written and signed by Hary Caray. I wrote Geddy a separate letter explaining that he and Rush have given me so much over the years, this was my way of giving something back. Once that mission was completed, we made our way back to our seats.

The show was about to begin! As I stood there waiting for the lights to go down I still could not believe that Rush were about to play in my hometown. So much hard work and dedication had gone into bringing the band here. Finally, the lights faded, the crowd roared, and history was being made! It was the best Rush production ever in every way. I was elated through the entire show and there were many surprises!

My Mission had been completed. At long last, the band of my youth and manhood had played my hometown, and I, along with several others, had the personal satisfaction of knowing that we were responsible for bringing Rush to Rockford!

NEVER GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS,  
THEY JUST MAY COME TRUE!!!!

