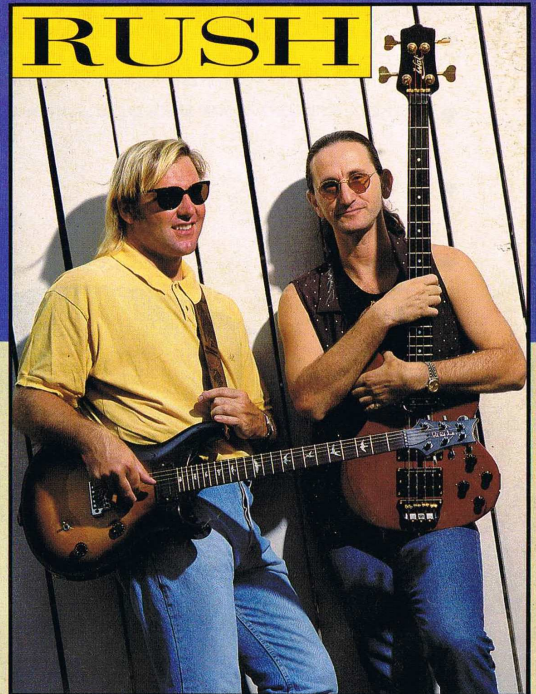
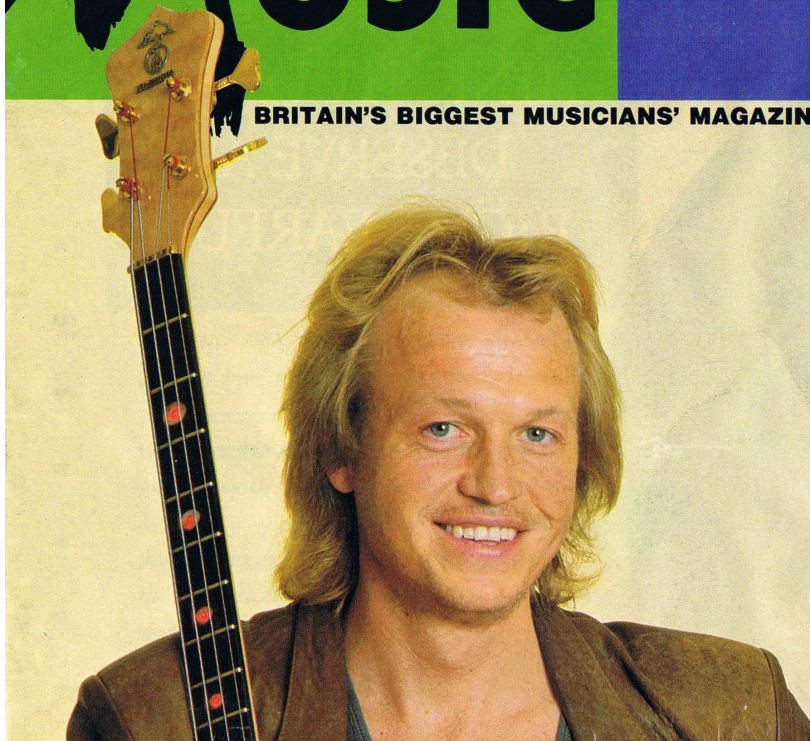


MAKING MUSIC

BRITAIN'S BIGGEST MUSICIANS' MAGAZINE



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In 1974, just after the release of their first album, "Rush", Rutsey quit, and was replaced by Neil Peart. In addition to his powerful drumming, Peart's literary prowess (he read a lot of books) meant he was soon entrusted with the job of lyric-writing. His rather right-wing reading material (Ayn Rand's Anthem, for example), coupled with the band's growing musical indulgences, led to some rather dodgy mid-Seventies concept/fantasy albums:

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By the mid-1980s the band found that their growing reliance on keyboards had assumed stifling proportions, and concentrated on stripping back both their sound and their arrangements to their present guitar-based, slightly quirky, adult rock.

Never exactly superstars, Rush remain one of rock's biggest cult bands, and they turn up consistently in our annual Readers' Poll of top musicians. Now with their 17th album, "Roll The Bones" in the UK top ten, Rush are back on the road. Paul Colbert spoke with Geddy Lee; Paul Quinn with Alex Lifeson.

RUSH

and revolution

FOR FIVE years, up until the last Rush tour, Alex Lifeson played guitars made by Signature, a small Canadian company with which he worked closely, designing inexpensive, quality instruments. But "financial problems" forced the Signature company to close, and it wasn't long before Alex settled on a replacement.

"I played a Paul Reed Smith and I couldn't believe how good a guitar it was. The pricing is quite different between a Signature and a Paul Reed Smith - but I thought, if this is what you get... I had my Paul Reed Smiths custom made, with single coil pickups, much like the Signatures; they're great, I love them.

"I've still got the Strat (a '62), and my Tele. I like using those guitars in the studio, especially the Tele. Then

not so addicted to chorus now], plus a Dimension D. I have a couple of tc 2290 DDLs, which are wonderful; a Roland DEP-5, a Roland GP16, which I was using as pre-amp for my second stereo system on the last tour - and a Digitech Smartshift harmoniser.

"I really like playing with atmospherics - and fortunately in our music there's quite often a middle section that kind of goes very spacey (laughs), and it gives me room to mess around. On "Presto", for instance, on 'The Pass', after the first chorus, there's a really nice ethereal passage, and it's all guitars with volume pedal and reverb and repeats - that's the kind of stuff I really have fun with."

Any favourite parts on the new

album? "There are a couple of solos that I think are probably among the best that I've played - in 'Bravado' and 'Ghost Of A Chance'. Oddly enough, these were solos that were done in one take on our 8-track demos and we just flew them in to the 24-track. The solo from 'Roll The Bones' has been flown in, too, and some vocal lines.

CRUNCHED UP

"We get good mileage out of my old Tascam 8-track, which we do all our demos on. There's a particular sound on that unit that's really nice - maybe it's because it's direct, and it gets crunched through the electronics as well as the tape compression.

"We'll transfer all our 8-track stuff, done to a basic click, up to the

24-track, and then Neil [Peart] will start working on his drum parts, with no-one around to bother him. I usually work with him from a technical end - I enjoy engineering, so I do that with him. Neil likes to do about three or four levels of arrangements: he works through one way, and then comes back and changes a few things and carries on like that.

"I work back at the house on guitar parts, just to keep my fingers in shape, and do final arrangements before going into the studio. When I'm off the road I don't play much at all - I used to feel very guilty about it, but to tell you the truth, I think it's good. I have other interests now - it doesn't bother me like it used to."

SO WHAT KIND of bass player are you Geddy? "Er...oh... gee, I don't know, that's a real hard question." Geddy Lee has a right to give the question some thought considering how often Rush swap on stage-tasks to get the job done. Lee splits himself between his Wal, bass-pedals, keyboards, and vocals.

"It's a challenge, it's kind of like Heaven and Hell. When I'm in the heat of the set, going from one song to the next, and remembering all the cues and where I'm supposed to be...you dread it and it's really daunting, but at the end of the night you feel so great because you pulled it off."

Across their history Rush have produced multi-layer concept albums, orchestral and choir-aided songs, simple rock LPs, fast ones, slow ones. But Lee insists they never know what direction they'll take next until they get into the studio "and really not until the album's about 3/4 written.

"At present there seems to be a kind of counter revolution...ha, ha...against the technology-based style of writing we've developed over the years. We were starting to rebel against computer screens and sequencers. And we have a strong enough sense of confidence in our writing to say, do I really need anything else here, or are the rhythm and melody on their own enough?"

THE FOURTH MAN

So why, with all their studio invention, had Rush never added a fourth member on

I have what I call my Hentor (named, jokingly, after Peter Henderson, producer of Rush's 1984 "Grace Under Pressure" LP), which is actually a modified Strat that I've had for years - it has a Bill Lawrence L500 pickup on it, it's quite thick sounding, good for certain jobs in the studio. I probably used the Paul Reed Smith and the Tele as my main combination of guitars, and the Hentor to give that heavier sound.

"I like to set up about six amps in the studio, so they're always on-line and you just call them up when you want them - it makes things a little more efficient. For the last tour we made these large cases with lead lining, with a couple of mikes inside and one GK twin 12 cabinet. The boxes isolate the guitar sound from the general stage sound, but primarily from the drums - the drums tend to bleed a lot into the mikes, and it just waters down the guitar-sound.

AMP ANALYSIS

"This gives a really nice tight stage sound, so what I did in the studio was use the boxes with the lids off; then I had a second system of just open Gallien Kruegers on stands; I had a Marshall 4x12, a really old 100 watt amp, and two of my old Marshall 100 watt twin 12 combos. I use a direct from the GK 2000CPL pre-amp, and I also had a G K 100MPL, one of their new pre-amps. So I had really quite a few different selections - everything very flexible.

"I dropped the Mesa Boogie on the last tour and started using the Macro series Crowns. The Mesa Boogie was great, but I fried a lot of tubes in that amp. And I just found that, in terms of consistency, the amp was not sounding the same from gig to gig. I wanted something a little cleaner, so I went to the Crown amps - they provide tons of power and a nice clear sound.

"I use a tc electronics 1210 for all my chorus [though he admits he's

"We felt maybe our fans would rather see us struggle with technology than actually have another human being on stage."



huge temptation and we did address it quite seriously before the "Presto" tour," Lee reveals. "In the end we decided it would almost be an intrusion into this club we had on stage for the three of us, and we felt maybe our fans would rather see us struggle with technology..ha, ha.. than actually have another human being."

Lee's first priority on stage is the vocals: "obviously the other instruments are important, but there's more emotion connected with a vocal delivery and that has to be right." If the bass line is complicated it could just be a matter of a simple shift in feel to make singing and playing easier. Bass pedals now trigger chord passages, samples and keyboard parts but not sequences - timing, feel and the performance still rely on Lee's feet. "We were trying to do this back in 1977, working with Moog Taurus pedals, Oberheim equipment and more - attempting to invent MIDI, I guess - but the technology wasn't ready. There were some REAL clunky switches involved."

So how about that first question? "I find myself on this record using a slightly deeper sound, and more rhythmic. On stage it's still Furman PQ-3 pre-amps, BGW 750 power amps and 15in Tiel cabinets. In the studio I basically go direct and use a little GK amp to get an extra bit of bottom end going. In the old days I used to mike the top end of my bass, now I mike the bottom...I guess I've mellowed..." **EW**