

Good Times

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Geddy Lee of Rush: 20 Years of Pushing The Envelope

I could bet my life savings that when I take a trip to the city for an in-person interview, it will rain. It's starting to feel like a state law to me. But it's okay, really, for one moment I'm on the street in the driving rain and the next I'm sitting in an opulent room at the Royal Carlton, kicking back with a walkman and listening to the new Rush album, *Counterparts*.

By John Blenn

It's a strange mixture of feelings, the pulsating rhythms of the music racing the heart, and, just beyond the headphones, a tranquil room of white interrupted only by a pitcher of orange juice on a desk. It feels almost unearthly, like a dream sequence, a different state of existence, it looks like an almost euphoric picture of the waiting room at heaven's gate that you see in all those ethereal movies. It's time to cut to the chase.

Meanwhile, back here in real life, real time, most of us are desperately searching for reasons, logic, self-peace in the stormy seas of the world. It is a set of problems, along with the ideals we hold as truth, that Rush has been addressing throughout almost two decades of musical life. The door to the room suddenly opens after what has seemed like an eternity of

strong points are, we've had twenty years to refine it." So now you're all extensions of each other? "To an extent," says Lee slowly, "but there are differences as well. It is in those differences that our strengths lie. As players, we still surprise each other and that makes it exciting."

Lee maintains that the intricacies of Rush's music still comes about in the old-fashioned way: jamming. "We don't actively write out parts for the songs as the musicianship goes," offers Lee, "changes, bridges, fills just come



quiet and Geddy Lee, Rush's bassist/vocalist/ frontman, walks into the room unassumingly. He is as quiet and laid-back as the surroundings. His eyes are cautious, measuring me with careful attention as he prepares to talk about the group's new Atlantic release, *Counterparts*. He has a sensitivity that can be felt much like a gentle tapping on the shoulder. It'll take a little while for both of us to get comfortable.

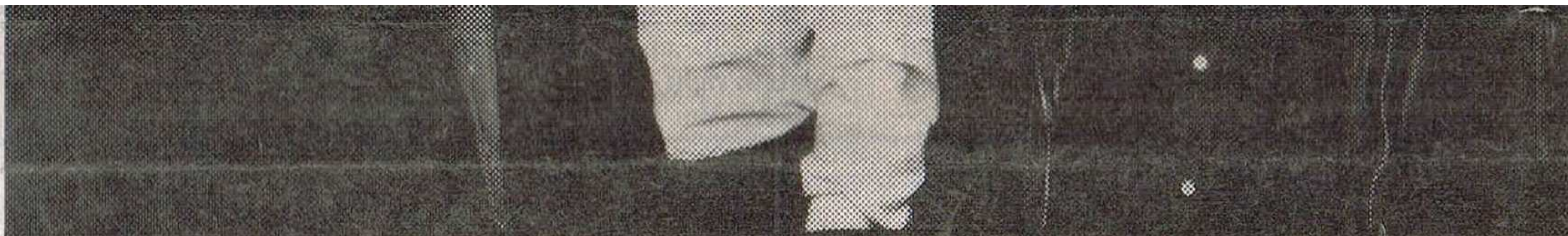
"I don't feel that this album is as much a continuation of the last one (*Roll The Bones*)," begins Lee in response to my statement that I see it as the next step in spirit from Rush's last one, "as it is a progression. We never know where we're going next from album to album, it is more of a growing process, musically, lyrically, an expanding self-awareness. We could never write about things we do not grasp...we can't write for what we think the audience is waiting to hear. If we had followed that approach, we wouldn't be here right now. We wouldn't be happy and the audience can tell when you're faking it. They can always sense that."

It is fascinating that Lee has been the voice conveying so many messages of great importance to the rock community through the years. Where many of their peers have dwelled on the negatives, Rush has bordered on the spiritual without wandering into hokey or preachy. Where as Neil Peart, their drummer, carves out the lyrics, Lee has always been the mouthpiece, the messenger. I ask how the connection works so effectively. "Neil knows me," says Lee flashing his first smile, "as well as one man can know another. And I understand him. I've worked very hard on my singing through the years, long and hard refining it, improving it any way I can. It is an instrument to me, if you're going to use the instrument, you should work to master it. Neil knows what I can sing, what my

about as we're playing the songs through. We don't consciously feel that we have to create complex parts, everything comes about naturally in playing together. It's all about instincts. The most important thing is that the music is interesting to us. We're not trying to create things to impress people with our musicianship, we're putting together things that we'll find a challenge to play, that we will still enjoy playing night after night after we've been on tour for months. We also want to be able to go back to the album after a period of time and still be able to listen to it."

I mention to Lee that Rush has been a lot of things through the years, first a straight-forward metal band, followed by their "science fiction" period of *2112*, *Farewell To Kings* and *Hemispheres* and now, progressing gracefully to world philosophers and multi-faceted music makers. He nods in agreement. I ask if it's hard to listen to earlier stages. "They're are some things that are hard to listen to now," smiles Lee, "we don't feel we've done anything embarrassing though. Some things are, well, a little uncomfortable, but it's part of the maturation process. I do feel that everything we've done was an accurate display of how we were, how we felt at the time. Priorities change, inspirations change, time shapes you. We've never done anything that we didn't believe in and we did the best we could at the time. You always wish you knew a little more than you did at anytime, but why worry about it? The future is always what counts. We feel we can see progression from album to album our entire career and that's what's most important to us."

It's been 20 years of progression, or, at least in '94 it will be. Though it's not the 20th Anniversary of the band (they're passed it), it has been 20



years since Neil Peart replaced John Rutsey on drums (Rutsey played on the first album but elected not to tour) and as the trio sees it, that's the most important anniversary. When they begin their U.S. tour in January, they will be doing a very special live show. "We'll do a few songs from the new album," says Lee, "but we're going to concentrate on doing at least one song from every album as a celebration of 20 years. We're in the process of figuring out what to play, some choices are obvious, songs that have been successful that we know the audience expects. The harder part is settling on what we'll play that's more obscure, at least for our live shows the last ten years, we're still finding out what we feel we'd enjoy doing. There will be a lot of surprises."

Speaking in terms of the live show, we move on to the subject of the spectacle of a Rush performance. I mention that a fan of the band has come to expect an eye-popping adventure and Lee nods in agreement. "I grew up seeing people like Led Zeppelin and their shows were always bigger than life. We all feel that's very important, that a concert should be something very special. We're trying to figure out what to do this year, we're trying to plan out staging and it's hard. We don't want to repeat ourselves but we don't want to leave anything out. These days, it's very special. We're trying to figure out what to do this year, we're trying to plan out staging and it's hard. We don't want to repeat ourselves but we don't want to leave anything out. These days, it's very fashionable to go out and limit your visual show. We're not that kind of a band, we feel compelled to give our fans a memo-

orable event."

As the conversation is winding down, Lee takes a moment out to further expound on the fans. "The fans," says Lee with a warm smile, "have been unbelievable to us. It took us awhile to find our niche here in the states, but once they started coming out and buying the albums, they've been phenomenally loyal. They've stayed with us through a lot of changes, given us encouragement to progress. It amazes me still, you don't expect it." But you always knew that you would be a musician? "Yes," he responds directly, "you can make up your mind that no matter what, you'll find a way to be a musician, but you can't plan on the audience being there. We've been very fortunate because we've found our way to ears that appreciate what we do, but you can't plan on that."

Lee shakes hands as he rises, his interviews for the day complete and a trip to France looming for the following day. I conclude by saying now nice it is that they've sent such a positive message through the years and how wonderful it must feel to have influenced a generation of musicians. "There's too much negativism," says Lee wistfully, "it wouldn't be our way to write anyhow. We're writing what is in our hearts, Neil has become very good at cutting to the chase and expressing himself and it's almost always the way we all feel. If that's influenced people in a positive way...well, that's what it's all about." The quiet man filters back out the door leaving the tranquil vision of white undisturbed. But, somehow, the white feels a little softer then it did before.