

# Rush Goes Into Future Shock

## 'Music Will Not Exist In 2112'

by Dan Nooger



Rush: ZZ Top refused to let them encore after they stole the show in Cleveland.

The year is 2112, and all art, all science, all literature, all thought are controlled by the computers of the Solar Federation. The lives of every person living beneath the sign of the Red Sun are ruled by priests of the Temples of Syrinx, where the computers are housed in settings recalling the opulence of an Oriental pasha's harem. One day a nameless Everyman who's known nothing but grey walls and a nine-to-five life, finds a guitar (such things are extinct in 2112) and rediscovers the lost art of music. When he brings his antique axe to the temple he is beaten up and banished by the priests, his guitar smashed. And that night he has a dream about a planet where things aren't quite the same. Maybe it's real, maybe not; nobody's saying.

Sound like a Star Trek re-creation or a Ziggy Stardust reject? Well, call me helium! *2112* (on Mercury) is neither of the above but the sidelong title track of the newest album by Rush, Canada's heavy metal answer to Kiss and Zeppelin. In addition to the usual three-man three-chord rock

highlighted on their first three albums, *2112* features some significant mellotron meanderings and amazingly eccentric lyrics. Pretty deep stuff for an ex-bar band whose prosody has never been much more ambitious than "You're making me crazy the way you roll them eyes" and "Time to boogie, time to get down."

"*2112* is based on a progression of some elements of society today, but projected 150 years into the future," claims drummer Neil Peart, who scripted the epic. "It's a cycle of songs about the rediscovery of music."

The real question—of how to control and humanize an increasingly uncontrollable and proliferating technology when moral values of that attempted humanization are rapidly disintegrating—is left unanswered by *2112*. Likewise, the dilemma of who becomes the master programmer of such absolute power remains unresolved. But Peart does hold out some hope for the future. "The temples aren't destroyed, but things do, uh, change."

**EXTRATERRESTRIALS IN ONTARIO:** Canada has produced origi-

nals like Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, who define their own musical expressions; heavy-duty rock by such as BTO and the Stampede; teen-angst by Montreal's Dudes; and the straight pop sounds of Anne Murray and Terry Jacks. But until Rush stormed out of the frozen wastelands of Ontario, heavy-metal rock was a more or less exclusively Anglo-American preoccupation. Bassist-singer Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson formed Rush as a high-school venture in the tail-end of the Sixties. They acknowledged as their models Cream, Jeff Beck, Led Zeppelin and Grand Funk as they thrashed out the hits and the blues.

"When we were growing up," Geddy recalls, "the big bands were Zeppelin and Beck. We used to do a lot of Zeppelin material before we started writing our own stuff and I used to have to scream to hit the high notes. Now it's all pretty natural." If Geddy's voice was any higher and raspier, his audience would consist exclusively of dogs and extraterrestrials. He screams and howls like a man with his joint caught in a thumbscrew, while he heroically

thumps out bass lines that hold the middle ground between Lifeson's screeching guitar and Peart's manic, high-energy percussion.

Until they decided to make Rush their life's work, the band members worked all sorts of odd jobs to support their musical involvement: Geddy spent time as a plumber, while Alex pumped gas and fixed flat tires. Three years ago they began work on their first album titled simply *Rush*.

"The first stab at that album was done in eight hours following a gig," says Alex. "We cut it at Eastern Sound in Toronto and we were warmed up after the show so most of the songs came in two or three takes. Then we decided we could do it better so we recut the whole thing eight months later at Toronto Sound."

**UNTOUCHABLE LP:** After being rejected by every label in Canada for being too heavy, they released their self-produced album on their own Moon Records. Not much happened with it until their manager brought a few copies over the border in an attempt to stir up some business interest in them. A booking agent heard the album and forwarded a copy to Mercury Records. In one day they had a contract! Three weeks later they embarked on what was to be the first of many American trips.

By the end of the year, aided by strong audience and airplay response in the Midwest, the album no one wanted to touch had become the label's most successful debut product ever, eclipsing even heavy-weight BTO's premier waxing. Rush thinks BTO is great because they opened the door to America for Canadian rockers, but as Alex says, "Our favorite Canadian band is ourselves."

Since getting that foot in the door, Rush have toured with ZZ Top, who refused to let them encore after they stole a show in Cleveland, Blue Oyster Cult, Rory Gallagher, and Kiss.

"Kiss is the only band that's never given us any trouble on the road," says Neil. "Lots of times it's not a band's fault that the opening act gets fucked over, and it's not worth talking about, but it does happen all the time. Kiss impose reasonable restrictions and we get along really well with them as friends and businesswise."

**KISSALIKES:** "At the end of our last tour with Kiss in San Diego we were gonna dress up as them, put on their makeup, and go out and do our set as them, but what finally happened was an onstage pie fight in front of 6,000 screaming kids. They caught us at the end of our set by surprise, and whole stage was covered in shaving cream and whipped cream. Then it was our turn at the end of their set. All their guitars and drums and machines were completely buried in shaving cream, so

their encore sounded just great!"

Their first followup album, *Fly By Night*, was their first with Neil Peart replacing original drummer John Rutsey. Rutsey, according to Rush, quit because (choose 1); he didn't want to travel; his health wouldn't let him travel—at this late date nobody's saying. And last year *Careless of Steel* helped push Rush to headlining status both here and in their native land. Peart, a self-confessed sci-fi buff who's been into writers like Samuel R. Delaney and C. S. Lewis "since I've been into reading," began writing sections of *2112* during the band's most recent American tour. The ideas and scattered lyrics began coalescing as Alex and Geddy added music to Neil's neon nightmare.

**FUTURE SHOCK:** "The mood was set by Neil's lyrics," claims Geddy, "and we wrote music to try and fit into that mood. The way we usually write is to sit in hotel rooms trying to come up with heavy metal on an acoustic guitar, but this was the complete opposite."

Neil takes up the narrative: "*2112* is a cycle of songs based on a development and progression of some things I see in society. We come across a lot of weirdness on the road and it comes out in the music. The cycle begins with an "Overture," then the discovery of the guitar and music. Guitars don't exist in the Solar Federation because the computers

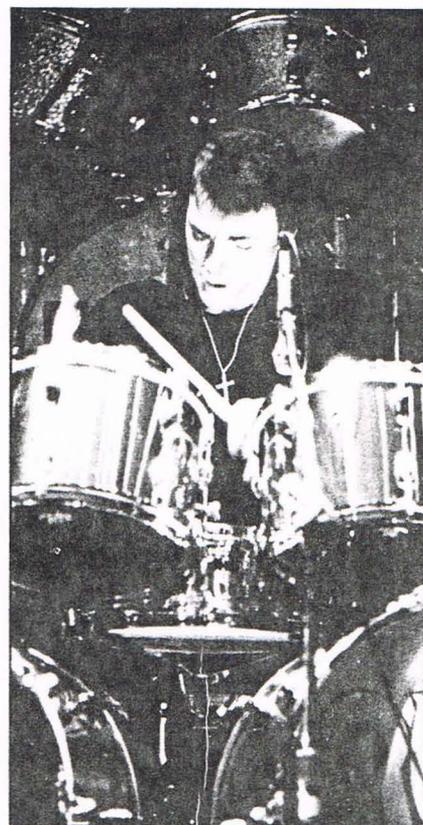
won't allow music—its not logical. Then there's the "Presentation," where the hero brings his guitar to the priests in the temples of Syrinx. But the acolytes smash it up and send him away. And he has a dream about a planet, established simultaneously with the Solar Federation, where all the creative people went. He's never seen anything like it before, this alternative way of life; even the way they build their cities is totally different. And he gets more and more depressed because he realizes that his music is a part of that civilization and he can never be a part of it. But in the end he finds that the planet is real and things do change for him."

Although they're moving toward significance and ambitious artistic statement on *2112*, Rush remain true to their hard rock roots. On the second side of *2112* Rush revert to their basic wall of sound, with guitar, bass, and drums cranked up past the pain threshold, with Geddy's tortured I'm-gonna-sing-this-song-or-die-wailing at the center of attention.

"We don't want to change what people think about rock & roll," Alex states firmly. "We just want to show them what we think about it." And, oh yes, all the boys watch Star Trek, thrilling to the adventures of (Canadian-born) William Shatner and his Enterprising crew "whenever we're anywhere."



Alex Lifeson, guitar: "Our favorite Canadian band is ourselves."



Neil Peart, drums: "Guitars don't exist in the Solar Federation because the computers won't allow music—"