

Rock 'n' roll Rush

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to prove it. If you can keep up your energy levels and your enthusiasm, all this work tightens up the music, improves your instrumental techniques, teaches you how to write and rehearse and how to work with an audience.

Early in 1973, *Rush*—with a lineup which consisted of *Geddy Lee* on bass and lead vocals, *Alex Lifeson* on guitar and vocals, and *John Rutsey* on drums—finished an evening's work, and went into Eastern Sound in Toronto right afterwards. Eight hours later the band had part of an album, but after living with it for a while, the band decided they could do better. Clutching the original tapes, the band went back into the studio—this time *Terry Brown's* Toronto Sound—and re-recorded some of the material, and re-mixed the rest. Three days later, they had an album.

Various Canadian record companies heard the tape, and offered the standard "page-one" deals that most "new" Canadian bands are handed. Ray Danniels, the group's manager, decided to pass—and with his partner, Vic Wilson, set up Moon Records (and *Core Music* to publish the material) and put the

album out themselves. Eight cuts (some as long as seven minutes); all the songs written by *Geddy Lee* and *Alex Lifeson*, except one, *In the Mood*, issued as a single and written by *Lee* on his own.

The reviews were sparse, but good. *Playlist* was complimentary, the *Ottawa Citizen* called *Rush* a "still-Canadian group charged with life", and this magazine described the music as "loud, proud and take-it-or-leave-it, played with shrieking energy and some musical skill." Canadian radio stations, by and large, ignored the album and the single.

But an album is an album, and Danniels and Wilson had something to sell at last. In Cleveland, where one radio programmer on an underground FM station loves Canadian music (*Donna Halper* at WMMS), *Rush* became a local phenomenon, and the album, imported into stores from Canada, became a best-seller.

In New York, Danniels and Wilson made a deal with *Ira Blacker*, powerful executive vice-president of *ATI*, a major American booking agency—and *Blacker* moved fast in a way that only New York heavies move when they figure it's worth their while. First of all, his agency signed the band, and then *Blacker* sold the record—for a six figure advance—to *Mercury* in Chicago,

who had made several million dollars with another Canadian group, *Bachman-Turner Overdrive*. (Later, *Blacker* quit the agency, and set up his own management company. *Rush*, needless to say, became one of his first clients).

Rush was ready to invade the United States.

First, however, some changes had to be made. *John Rutsey*, on the brink of the first U.S. tour, left the band. Press releases talked about "musical differences", but in fact *Rutsey* is a diabetic, and his long-time friends knew that his health would simply not stand up to an extended tour.

Neil Peart, an articulate, experienced drummer from *St. Catharines*, Ontario, got the job—and immediately *Lee* and *Lifeson* began to change their approach. *Peart*, simply, was a more flexible drummer, technically more proficient, and able to add a variety of new rhythmic changes to what is, essentially, a rhythm group.

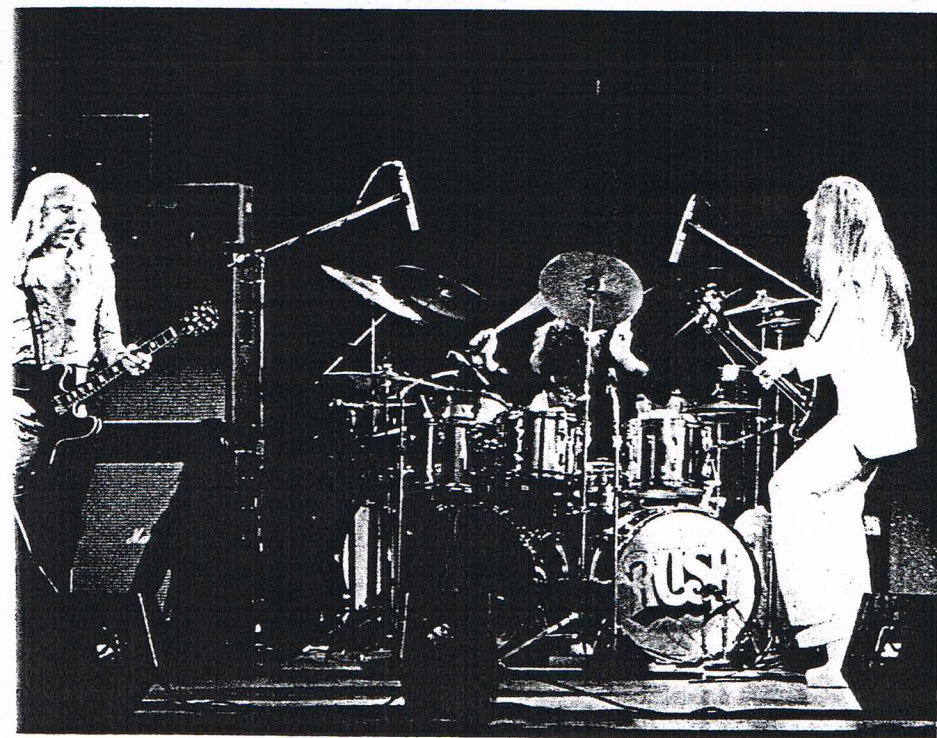
Visas in hand, *Rush* went to America. Second or third (and even, occasionally, fourth) on the bill to every heavy metal rock band touring the States, *Rush* just stood up there and did what it had always done—pounded out the music, got the kids up on their feet, and delivered the goods.

Fortunately, the musicians in *Rush* are young themselves—*Lee* and *Lifeson* are in their early twenties, *Neil Peart* a couple of years older. Frankly, they need to be.

Playing is not the part of being a rock and roll musician that makes it the physically demanding occupation that it is, even when you play with the energy that *Rush* uses. What kills the brain cells and yellows the flesh is the travel—the constant time-warp of new airports, new cities, new rental cars, new hotels (even though most *Holiday Inns* are the same), new places to eat, new college reporters looking for new insights for another new interview, and new fans wanting just a few minutes (or hours) of your time. After that, playing is simple.

Rush has a road manager—an experienced, tough, and cheerful young man called *Howard Ungerleider*—and three roadies to shift all the equipment about, set it up, and tear it down again, but the schedule has been exhausting. In the middle

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Rush on stage at Toronto's Massey Hall