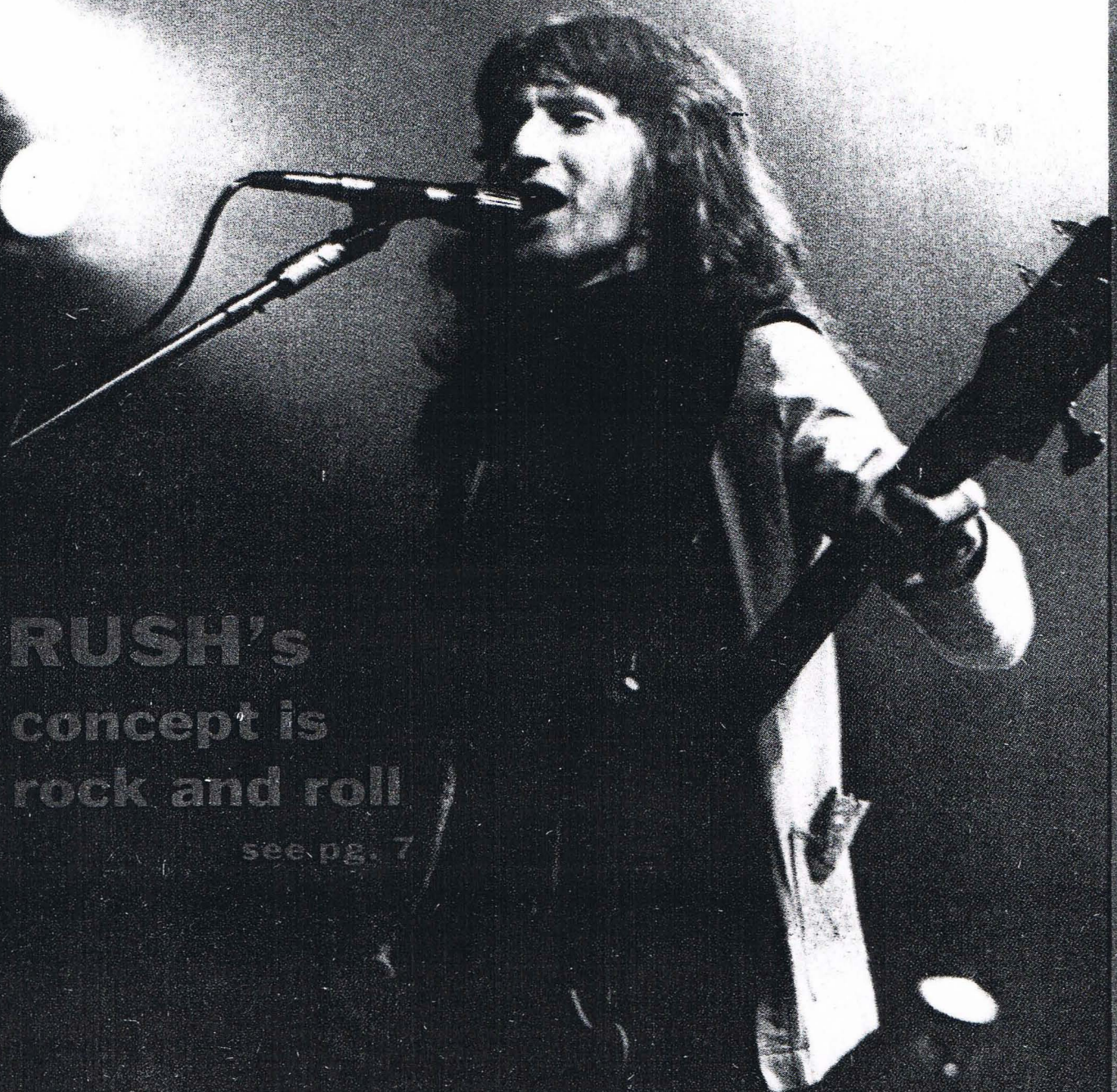


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concept is
rock and roll**

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Geddy Lee

Rush's "concept" is rock and roll

by Nick Shofar

Canada may be the land of snow shoes, Dudley Doright and American expatriates, but a rock and roll paradise it is not. Primarily, this is because the lack of FM stations in the country offers little exposure for new bands. Thus Canadian bands, for all intents and purposes, imitate American rock and roll.

In the early seventies, Rush was no exception. The band—consisting of Geddy Lee on bass guitar and vocals, Alex Lifeson on lead guitar, and Neil Peart (who replaced John Rutsey after their first album) on drums—grew up with the sounds of Grand Funk Railroad and Led Zeppelin ringing in their ears. Between Lifeson's heavy duty ramblings and Lee's shrill, high-pitched, Robert Plant-like vocals, the influence in their music was obvious.

In 1973, Rush recorded their debut album, RUSH, which brought them to America's attention as one of the last of the classic power trios. A subsequent tour had many critics dismissing them with a wave of their hand as just another shakethehouse-down threesome.

Now, three years and three albums later, a changing, matured Rush is beginning to emerge from its chrysalis of simple rock and roll. Unfortunately, like the veritable alb-tross in Coleridge's RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER, Rush still has a Grand Funk / Led Zeppelin label hung around its neck, an injustice to their blossoming talents.

On stage, lead vocalist Geddy Lee's piercing, unwavering voice had left me wondering if he might have been born a guitar in a past life, but away from the limelight he appeared a surprisingly mellow and soft-spoken person. The band was in the process of making a sound check for their recent Allen Theatre appearance, and between a background of pounding drums and the constant, obnoxious ringing of a telephone, I attempted to hold a quiet conversation with the bassist / singer.

"We've tried to get away from the stigma of Led Zeppelin," he said. "We think we've done it this time. We thought so with CARESS OF STEEL, but now we've carried it further. Hopefully people will start recognizing us as us. I think it's just a matter of every band having influences in their earlier days. Our influences then were a little obvious, but now they're much broader and you can't pin them down as easily."

The pathway to self-identity to which Lee was referring is their newest release, entitled 2112. The first side of the LP is conceptual in its structure; that is, it's a story with the songs revolving around a single theme.

However, 2112 was not their first conceptual piece, but rather a next step from the previous

album, CARESS OF STEEL. Lee pointed out that that album had a subtle, universal theme, but wasn't constructed as a conceptual piece.

"We didn't really stress the fact that it was a concept and we didn't put it together as one piece, but as six separate songs," he explained. "After we did that, we decided that we liked working with concepts, but only if the right story came up, and this time we wouldn't pull any punches; we'd just do an out and out concept."

The "right story" turned out to be an idea inspired by the objectivist writings of Ayn Rand, whose novel, ANGELA, was read by all the band members. From this, Neil Peart wrote a story line similar to the novel's theme, and used it to write the lyrics and prose passages found on the cover of 2112.



Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee

The basic plot is set in the future (around 2062) when an intergalactic war forces many of the planets into joining a federation, called the Red Star. By 2112, computers (called Temples) regulate all aspects of life, including the arts.

One day, someone discovers a guitar in some ruins, and begins playing his own music. This results in the instrument being banned because it doesn't fit in with the rules of the computers. The man becomes depressed and eventually commits suicide, followed by another intergalactic holocaust.

Due to its objectivist flavoring, 2112 does not have an actual solution. Its double ending is left open, which is rare among concept albums.

"The solution is more or less that we would like to present the germ of an idea to stimulate someone into thinking of a solution," said Lee, leaning forward in his chair in a confidential manner. "Now, 'Somethin' For Nothing,' on the second side, is sort of a wrap-up of how we feel.

It's not specifically part of the concept, but many songs on side two relate to the general theme. As for 2112 (side one), we say only what could happen but hopefully will not happen, and leave it up to the intelligence of the listener."

Concept albums usually bring to mind long, moody passages such as those inherent in the music of groups like Pink Floyd and Nektar. Unlike either one, 2112 is expressed solely through straightforward rock. In a sense, this is a flaw because it limits the potential capacity for expression. But in another sense, it's also a test of the band's abilities to expand and upgrade heavy metal rock.

"Well, I don't know if rock is more effective," Lee said. "Other people have other ways of doing it. The ideal sound for us is to be able to attack a piece like 2112—a conceptual thing, a 20-minute thing that normally a band wouldn't do unless they had synthesizers or mellotrons—and break that down into three pieces so that it still sounds like us, only a little more complex."

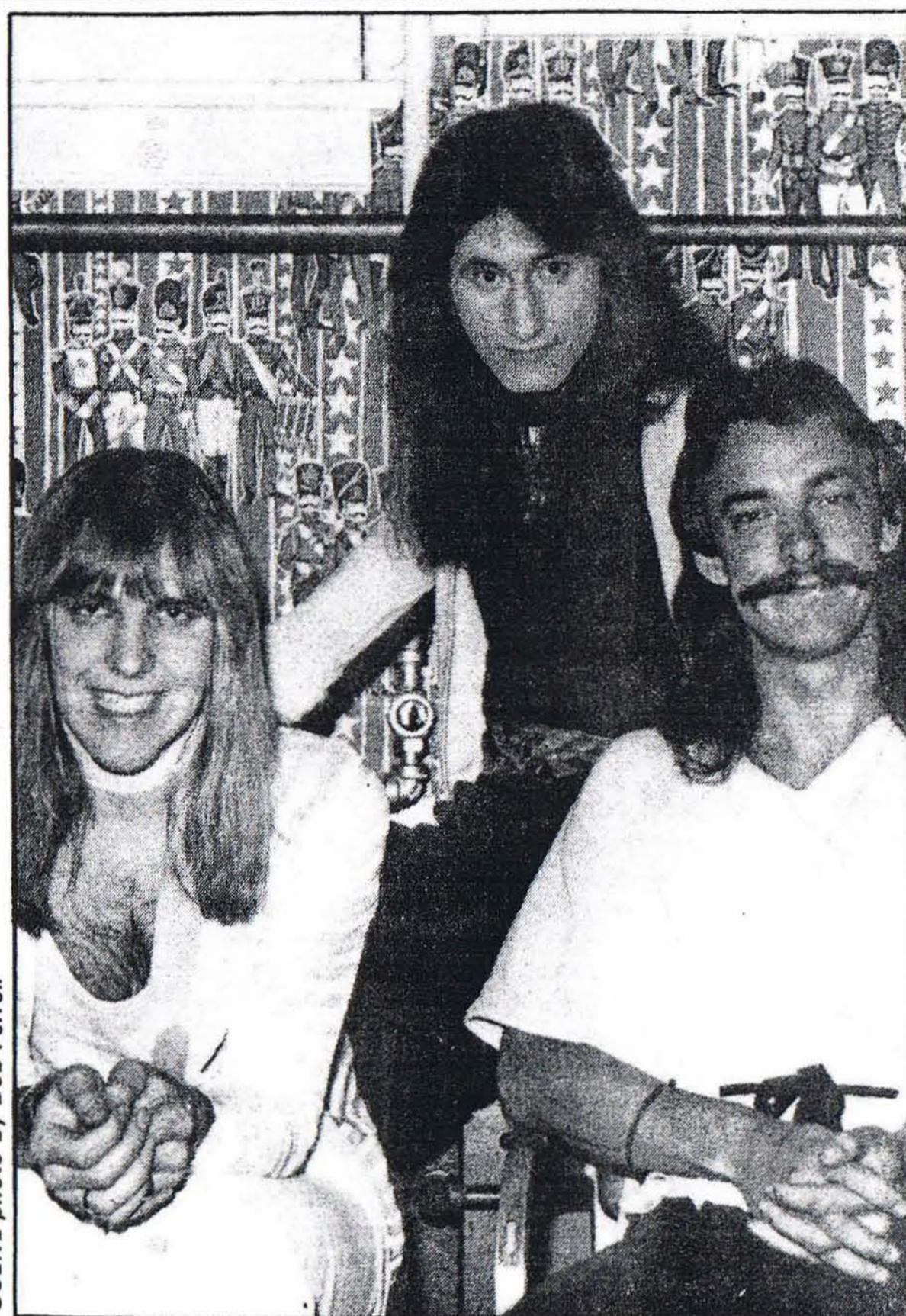
On being asked if they ever planned to bring a new member into the band, Lee shook his head emphatically. "We toyed with the idea, but it really wouldn't be us. We are going to bring other instruments into the band, but only instruments we would play ourselves."

In concert, Rush performs only a condensed version of the first side of 2112, preferring to balance their set with more conventional rock songs from their earlier accomplishments. In this way, they are able to satisfy the majority of Rush fans who are there to see them on the strength of their earlier albums, and are also still able to break new ground. About the only difference between their past and present stage shows (besides the band's increased tightness) is the use of visuals in the form of a small movie screen backdrop. That may be nothing extraordinary for a band in 1976, but it is a subtle indication of the direction in which they hope to eventually evolve.

"Visuals intrigue us, but only visuals that center around the band and not in the band," Lee said. "I mean, we'd never get into wearing make-up and things like that. We'd like to get into film and video things, you know, but it's still very new to us and we're still learning."

In the short time it's been out, 2112 has already become Rush's biggest seller, in America as well as Canada. This positive response towards the album has given Rush the confidence and incentive to explore higher levels of rock.

"I have an idea we'll be working with fantasy in the future. We're going to bring different textures into our sound and hopefully try to refine ourselves," Lee said, and then quickly added, "but basically, it will always be rock and roll."



SCENE photo by Bob Ferrell

Rush (l. to r.): Alex Lifeson, Geddy Lee and Neil Peart