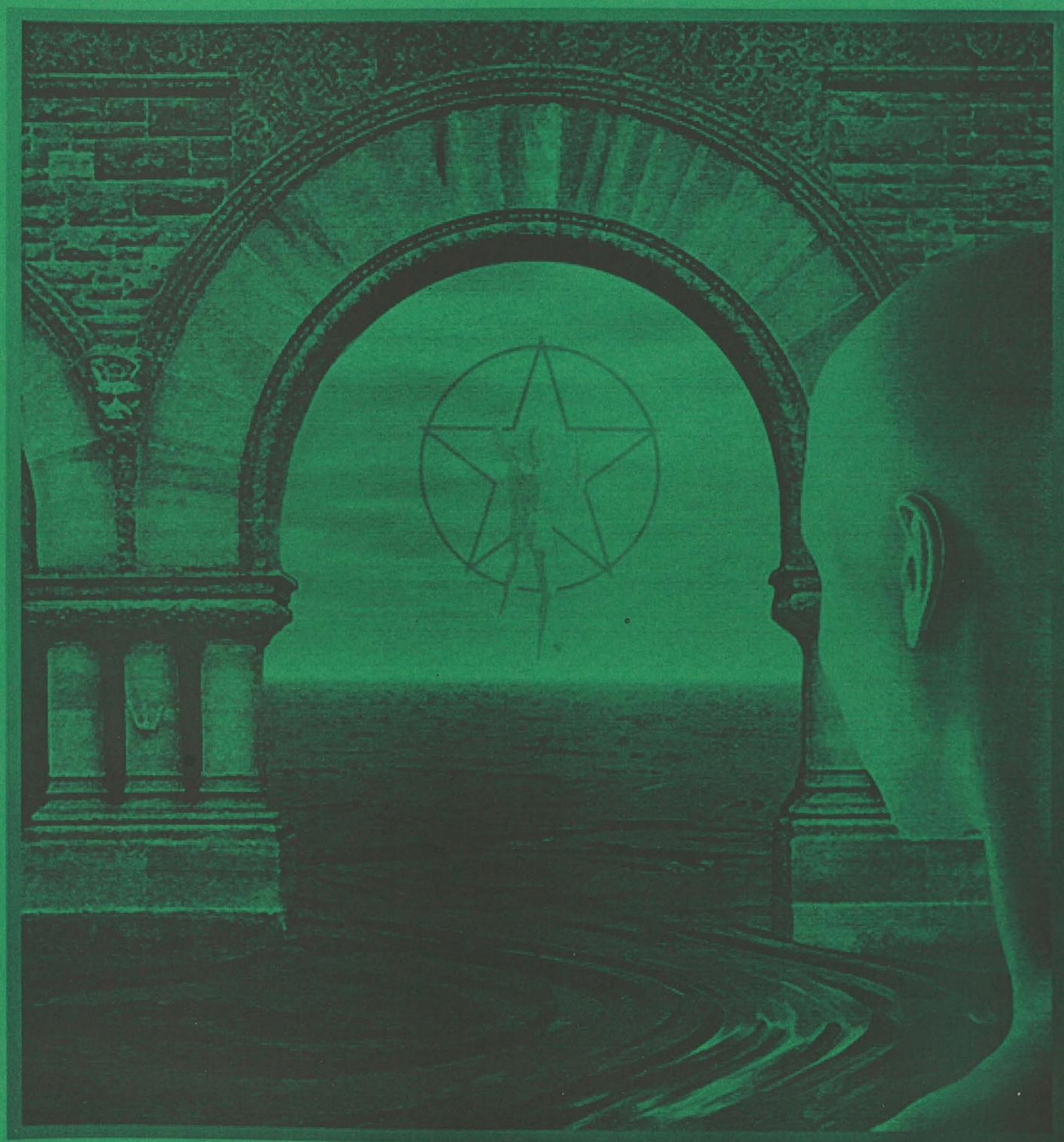


# The Spirit of Rush



Catch the spirit...

ISSUE 52

SUMMER 2000

# The Spirit of E d i t o r i a l

Hi and welcome to yet another instalment of the continuing Spirit Of Rush. Quite a bit of news to get through this time, so without further adu - Geddy has been doing a little charity work for The White Ribbon Campaign, see feature in this issue for more details.

The Different Stages DVD keeps getting put back because the band feels that every time they produce something they can live with and the fans will love, the technology becomes dated so they have to start all over again - it is in the works though. Whether or not it will see the light of day before a new studio album remains to be seen, fingers crossed !!!

The man chosen to produce the new record is rumoured to be Rob Laidlow ( Alannah Miles, Kim Mitchell, Honeymoon Suite). Things do appear to be moving forward anyways.

It is rumoured that Rush have been approached to do the music for the new T.V. series 'Andromeda', a series based on Gene Roddenberry's final space legacy and starring Kevin Sorbo of Hercules fame. We'll keep you posted on that one folks.

A new book on Rush has just been published stateside called - 'A Simple Kind Of Mirror' by Len Roberto, Jr. It's only \$3-00 and can be ordered direct from - [www.mightywords.com](http://www.mightywords.com)

We have yet to see/read it for ourselves yet - we'll let you know what we think of it next ish.

Ray at the Limelight Club tells me that tickets are still going fast for this year's convention on September 9<sup>th</sup>. He has installed air conditioning since last year so we will not roast this time out, along with 2 touch-screen internet browsers. You can send comments directly to the machines for people to read by using the following E-mail address -

[limelightcrewe@yahoo.com](mailto:limelightcrewe@yahoo.com)

Ray has also come up with some Rush cocktails for us all to sample at the convention, more details next issue, which will be out at the end of August just prior to the big day. Why not

check out the Limelight's Web site for news of everything that's happening there -

[www.thelimelightclub.co.uk](http://www.thelimelightclub.co.uk)

Tickets are only £10-00 and are available direct from us here at Spirit (enclose an SAE) or by credit card from the Limelight Club.

Talking of web sites, Craig has been hard at work on our site updating/streamlining things

and you should ALL check it out and pass the address on to anyone who might be interested in Spirit or the convention -

[www.cix.co.uk/~speedboat/](http://www.cix.co.uk/~speedboat/)

Go on have a visit.

YYZ are hard at work honing their set for the upcoming convention by playing several gigs in the next 2 months (see Simon's letter in Signals for more info). Check out a gig or two if you can manage it, you won't be disappointed.

As I mentioned earlier, the next issue of Spirit will be out at the end of August/early September just before the convention. If you have a re-subscription reminder with this issue please use it to re-subscribe ASAP. You are our lifeblood, without you we're nothing.

*Regards,  
Mick*

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# Wine, women and ... Geddy Lee

## The lead singer for Rush has a party for the White Ribbon Campaign

**Anne Kingston**  
**National Post 19 June 2000**

Restaurateur Michael Carlevale, jaunty in a marine-blue bow tie, turquoise vest, and silk jacket, surveys the crowd as he takes a sip of J. Lassalle Blanc de blanc 1988 champagne. "You know," he muses, "20 years ago, people in Toronto had parties, wonderful parties. For no reason other than it was a party. Now people in this town socialize only for charity."

We are standing in a dark-suit crush in rock legend Geddy Lee's lush, massive backyard, deep in the heart of Toronto's Rosedale. We are there, of course, for charity. This evening's event is the "2nd Annual Wine Tasting, Rare Wine Auction & Backyard Barbecue" in aid of the White Ribbon Campaign, which bills itself as the "largest effort in the world of men working to end violence against women."



The campaign was founded in 1991 by Toronto city councillor Jack Layton and author Michael Kaufman to commemorate the weeks leading up to the Dec. 6 anniversary of the Montreal massacre, which, as the group's Web site puts it, "should be a day for men to step back and listen to the voices of women."

Since then, it has evolved into an organization that funds educational kits used in high schools, universities and corporations, and lends support to women's shelters, transition houses and rape crisis centres.

The campaign has amassed an impressive list of corporate sponsors, among them Canadian Tire, which was the subject of controversy a few years back when it kept former chairman of the board Earl Joudrie on after he was accused by his then-wife, Dorothy, of physical abuse. (The claim was made during Dorothy Joudrie's court trial, at which she stood accused of pumping six bullets into her husband. Joudrie was later found not criminally responsible for her actions.)

More than 200 people, mostly Bay Streeters, lawyers, accountants -- the new class of wine connoisseur -- have paid \$125 to sample a wondrous oenological array: Chateau Margaux 1989, Chateau Latour 1989, Chateau Lafitte 1989, Chateau Haut-Brion 1983, Henschke Mount Edelstone Old Vine Shiraz 1995. And then to bid on 43 lots of wine -- most of rare and impressive vintage, much of it donated from private cellars.

Many of the guests are wearing white ribbons, twisted into our cultural icon for causal concern. Now there's red for AIDS, pink for breast cancer, green for the environment, white for violence by men against women and, most recently, blue for Internet copyright pirates defending their freedom to download sheet music. The White Ribbon Campaign does not encourage women to wear the ribbon, even though some do, as it believes "men must take on the task of building the campaign."

The media invitation highlighted the power guests who would be in attendance: criminal lawyers Clayton Ruby, Brian Greenspan and John Rosen; financial wonder boys Steve Hudson, formerly of Newcourt Credit Group, and Steve Kaszas of Nesbitt Burns; restaurateurs Carlevalle and Franco Prevedello.

The star of the night, though, is Lee, bass player and lead singer for Rush, a man whose name is uttered in hushed awe by a generation of Boomer rock wannabes. Lee agreed to host the event last year at the first annual wine tasting, held at the home of Clay Ruby, a neighbour and fellow oenophile. I ask Lee how many people circulating around his estate he knows. "Not many." He pauses and thinks. "Two. I know two people here well." Lee, an unassuming, sweet kind of guy, deflects the label of wine connoisseur. "I prefer wine geek," he says. As for the charity, he nods his head. "It's a fine, fine cause."

Riedel has supplied the crystal. Rodney's Oysters has set up a shucking station. A barbecue grills scallop kebabs and tiny lamb chops. Waiters circulate with stylish hors d'oeuvres. Security is low-key but menacing. One massive specimen munches a Power bar and warily watches over the crowd eager to check out Lee's kitchen.

The sky is grey, heavy with the threat of torrential rain. This afternoon, Ken Murray, Paul Bernardo's former lawyer, was acquitted of obstructing justice by withholding videotapes that showed Bernardo raping and torturing four girls. John Rosen, Bernardo's trial lawyer, stands at a crowded tasting station next to the swimming pool, sampling Bordeaux. "He's really pissed off," someone says. "God, how awful to be a criminal lawyer," murmurs another.

A man I know points out a businessman. "He's on wife number 15, I think." Conversation turns on talk of real estate and deals. "You really have to look at the tax implications," one man tells a woman. "I've put you in a limited partnership -- \$50,000 units."

"Look at Jack," one Bay Street lawyer says, gesturing at Layton meeting and greeting. "It must get tough running the gauntlet between being a socialist and living the high life."

Talk turns to auction-bidding strategies. There's much excitement about a collection of Penfold's Granges from various years. "There are a lot of Type A people here," one man, clearly a beta, says. "They're used to getting what they want. I'm not sure I want to go up against them." A well-known accountant yells over to someone, presumably a client. "Hey, here's something you can do with all of that cash you can't make public." Event coordinator and White Ribbon board member Nancy McRoberts figures the event will bring in \$40,000 to \$65,000, depending on how crazy the bidding gets.

Before the auction, Michael Kaufman talks for a few minutes about the cause. "It's sad that we all have to be here today," he begins. "One out of three women is a victim of violence by a man," Kaufman tells the crowd, which is becoming restless. "Help the women you love," he concludes. "That's the message."

Layton, a seasoned charity-circuit auctioneer, begins the bidding on a 1990 Tignanello. "Do I hear 50? Fifty. Do I hear 100? One hundred." Quickly, waving white auction paddles punctuate the night.

Taken from, [www.nationalpost.com](http://www.nationalpost.com)

# Signals

S.O.R.

Firstly, great design and colour cover for #51, and the issue was very impressive throughout, with a nice mixture of content. Good news about the band and their potential return to the studio in October; let's hope it proves fruitful, and after such a long break, that they come up with something that is new, refreshing and innovative!

The other main piece of great interest was, being an avid collector myself, the 'Caress' tour CD. Finding a tape of this tour has been, as Ray mentioned in his article, 'The Holy Grail.' This has been the scourge of many a collector for decades!

I acquired a copy of this show recently, through a U.S. contact who, informed me that as well as this particular Rockford show, there were rumours that an elite band of American Rush traders had access to, and were trading privately between them, copies of two other additional 'Caress' shows. At least one of these was supposed to be a headlining, and was purported to include segments of 'The Fountain..!' Whether or not any of this information is entirely factual we will only discover if/when these particular shows surface, or not!

Not only is this tape a vast rarity, but also the fact that after so many years, material like this has finally come to light. Over the last 10-20 years nothing other than your bog-standard material, live shows etc. would become available. You never got to see or hear about unreleased songs, demo's etc. until a couple of years ago when for the first time ever, alternate versions of studio tracks came out on the boot CD 'Déjà Vu' – which contained seven alternate versions of 'Counterpart' songs.

Hot on the heels of this now comes the 'Down The Tubes' CD, and due out soon, from the same label that released the 'Déjà Vu' disc, is 'Echo Tests' – studio quality tracks that have less subtle differences than their 'Counterparts' counterparts, but none the less are different and are all the albums eleven tracks!

# Signals

As the band draws nearer to the end of their careers, let us hope that more of this type of rare material becomes available for collectors and fans alike to hear. Perhaps the band themselves will see it fit to scour the archives and finally let out some of this material in a nice multi-disc boxed set somewhere down the line?

**BARRY  
PRESTON**

Dear Mick,  
Please find enclosed my cheque of £10 as renewal of my subscription (*thanks, we need more people like you and not the following – Mick*). It was great news to hear of the possibility of a studio return for Rush in October. This I had found out from a mailing ring which I am sure many of your readers will know about already, called [pwrwindows@yahoo.com](mailto:pwrwindows@yahoo.com) which emails updates and info about websites and band news. Keep up the good work and here's hoping for some great new music soon.

**BRIAN MORRIS  
BATHGATE, WEST LOTHIAN**

P.S. I was very interested to read your review of Dream Theater – I have never heard them but I am just about to order some CDs over the internet, so here goes.... (*Hope you like them Brian – be sure to catch them in Oct. You will not regret it – Mick*).

Dear S.O.R.  
Thanks for a great magazine, but I don't think I will carry on subscribing because the band do not appear to be together anymore, so until they do, I will leave it. Thanks again.

**M KERSLEY  
ALDERSHOT**

Dear S.O.R,  
I recently read of a CD called 'Euphoria' which features Geddy along with Anne Dudley (Art of Noise), Roy Babbington (Soft Machine) and a gospel vocalist called Juliet Roberts.

Can anyone tell me where to get it? Is it any good? *(We haven't heard of this one, can anyone shed any light? – Mick)*. Great fanzine!

**ROB HARDING**  
**WIGSTON, LEICS**

Dear S.O.R,

Please forgive the delay in my renewing my subscription. I appreciate the reminder and as long as I am able to, you will have my continued support *(Many thanks Steve, better late than never – Mick)*.

Why the delay? I think I was still struggling to recover from Rush getting a mention on 'Stars in their Eyes' a few weeks ago. Was I alone in my jumping 2 feet into the air and shouting 'WOO-HOO!?' Only to feel acutely embarrassed and just a mite self-conscious! *(You watch Stars in their Eyes?... sad indeed! – Mick)*.

Tonight Matthew, I'm going to be.....very sad!  
Kind regards,

**STEVE HODGES**

Dear Mick!

Just thought I would drop you a quick line to say I really enjoyed the Spring issue of Spirit of Rush, well done that man! I enjoyed the Queensryche interview, great band, whose music rush fans should check out if they have not already done so. The Dream Theater live piece was also good too. I was at the Manchester and London shows – and I thought they were brilliant. I do not agree with the comments about the guitarist.... for me John is one of the best guitarists on the planet. However, I have to admit I was not convinced about the live medley either, it all sounded a bit too mixed up to my ears. I'm really looking forward to the October tour - that should be amazing.

However, back to the point of writing. Now we have official confirmation that Rush are getting back together for a new album, how about we all (that means you out there) start sending some positive feedback to the band, the record company etc.....that we fans would love to see them play live here in Britain and Europe in 2001. It is nearly eight years since the Bones tour.....there must be some way we can encourage them to come here and play surely??? *(Write to us here at Spirit, we forward the mag to 'Anthem' so perhaps the guys will read all about it! – Mick)*.

Secondly, how about some gentle or not so gentle requests for Different Stages the video/DVD to be released? Anytime this year would be nice. The market is not exactly flooded with Rush videos is it! *(I agree, while the band has had this long layoff it seems the perfect time to fill the gap for us fans by releasing a concert video/DVD – Mick)*.

I enjoyed reading the letters page as always, clearly some guys don't realise just how lucky they are..... Personally, I would have preferred disc 3 of Different Stages to have been from the UK Permanent Waves shows in the Summer of 1980 when Rush played Cygnus X-1 and Hemispheres as complete entities and it sounded fantastic too! Finally, if anyone does find a live version of 'Fountain' please can they let the rest of us know where it can be found!!!

**SIMON DUCKETT**  
**YORK**

P.S. Great cover – front and back!

Mick,

Congrats on No. 50! I was just going through an interview that I did with Neil at Wembley on November 6, 1981 and thought you might like to use the following excerpt. Hope all is well. See ya on the next tour! *(You betcha Bill, you betcha – Mick)*.

**B-Man:** "Last night I notice, as well as the night before, that you lined the kids up after the show and signed autographs for all of them."

**Neil:** "Yeah. It's peculiar to England. There are a lot of reasons for it that are sociological and very difficult to go into. Things are different for people over here; life is smaller here than for American kids, so consequently I think the level of fanaticism towards any band, not exclusively ourselves....but whenever people like a band here, they really like them! In some cases it's the only thing outside a very narrow life that they have to hold onto and relate to. So, we've found that sometimes getting in and out of concert halls was getting to be just crazy riots, with mobs of people grabbing and clutching and screaming -wanting autographs. Of course, when you're in the middle of a riot, you can't sign an autograph very effectively. So we've started something backstage where kids could come in, a few at a time, and get autographs. This enables us to give the fans what they wanted - which was just simply ink on a piece of paper, which is a very simple gesture. When you look at it, it doesn't really mean anything, but it is a gesture, you know? It's some form of a relationship that people can take home with them, It's harmless and it's good, so we provided that. It also gave us the peace of mind of being able to

walk out after work peacefully and sort of get into the car and go home. So, it was a nice way of solving all these problems and doing something nice at the same time."

**BILL BANASIEWICZ  
PHILLY, PA**

Dear Spirit,

Enjoyed reading the latest issue, which was very varied in content, with some interesting material. Not only did we get an issue dedicated to Toronto's finest; with articles covering new and old eras of the band – the piece on 'Caress' was great news to finally know that one exists! We were also treated to pieces relating to some of my other favourite bands, namely Dream Theater and Queensryche! These two certainly are worthy successors to the Rush crown, okay the 'Rych have lost that status over the last couple of albums, but Dream Theater are going from strength to strength.....finally, and I cannot wait for the shows in October.

Also, in 'The Mad Jock Recommends.....' it's good that fans can recommend other bands of the genre that fit the bill and that other Rush fans may well be interested in. For example, I picked up an album recently entitled 'Dreamdance' by a band called U.N.IT – yes, I know it may look a bit worrying judging by their name, but let me assure you they do have some influences in their material that reflects Rush and DT – which was the main reason I purchased it blind....and it certainly is very good and worth looking for.

Another band that I can also recommend worth investing in is a local band to me, Fifth Season from East Anglia. They are currently re-issuing their debut album 'Journey through An Open Mind' on a new label, hopefully to a wider audience and are due to go into the studio later this summer to record the follow up! Again they play a brand of progressive rock/metal that would sit comfortably in most Rush and Dream Theater collections and have in the past supported Iron Maiden! They would be an ideal support act for Dream Theater later this year, and would help keep afloat a generally sagging UK rock scene.

Keep up the good work and keep up the recommendations .....that way other people may come to find some great hidden music out there!

**KEITH  
IPSWICH**

Dear S.O.R,

I was wondering if it would be possible for you to do a piece on Moog Taurus Bass Pedal Synthesiser's and the people who have maintained and customised them for Rush over the years. They seldom get mentioned but were an amazing addition to the bands equipment back in I think 1976.

Being a three piece band is limiting but one of the things that initially drew me to Rush and their music was how full the sound was given the number of band members. Sadly it sounds as though Alex and Geddy no longer use Taurus in favour of midi pedals which give greater flexibility. However, I don't think you can beat the analogue bass sound that was used from " A Farewell To Kings " up to my personal favourite album " Moving Pictures " .

Also I await Geddy's solo album with interest, an un-known quantity.

Hope you keep the mag/fanzine going, it's my only source of Rush info and consider it vital reading. Regards,

**DAVID BRAMWELL  
(E-MAIL)**

*(An interesting idea Dave. Does anyone out there have the knowledge to write such a piece? Get in touch if you would like to give it a go - Mick.)*

Dear Mick,

Thankyou for the latest issue of Spirit. Another top issue (as usual) and a very striking cover. Please find enclosed my subscription for the next 4 issues. I still hope to be able to attend the convention but am waiting to finalise holiday dates *(hope you can make it Keith - Mick)*.

On the subject of the competition in this issue, I have to say I am somewhat sceptical of the fact that there are eight hidden Rush tracks contained within Pieces of Eight. Having spent approx. 2 months visiting every music shop in London in Spring/Summer '87 I managed to get hold of this copy of Modern Drummer and in the article, Neil makes reference to the title by saying "The piece is entitled Pieces of Eight because of all the different time signatures it ended up meandering through." He also goes on to say that it was only recorded in a day. With this in mind, and having listened to the track many times over the last week, I think if anyone discovers all these track references then the least they deserve is the T-shirt. It is also

strange that it has taken 13 years for anybody to make this "find", although since it has taken 25 years for a Caress tour bootleg to surface, I guess nothing is out of the question – any chance of a copy by the way?! (*Check out the convention if you can make it – Mick.*)

On the good news front, I was pleased to read they are hoping to enter the studio in October – I better start saving for the next US/Canadian tour in 2001!

Keep up the good work and hope to see you at the convention.

KEITH NIXON  
MITCHAM, SURREY

*(With ref' to 'Pieces of Eight' – if you listen very closely you will hear Subdivisions, Natural Science, The Camera Eye and Manhattan Project. Anyone who spots the other four gets the T-Shirt, Ok?! Get entries in B4 the next issue at the end of August – just prior to the convention – Mick).*

Hi Mick,

I've been shamefully let down by my normal travelling partners for the convention, so I wondered if there were any Spirit readers who would be interested in travelling to Crewe with me, or could offer me a lift? I live in North Nottinghamshire, so I guess that area, Derbyshire or South Yorks would be best for all concerned, but hey, I'm just after some company!! If this is too late for the next issue, nevermind, I'll be there anyway! My E-mail is [rushstag@aol.com](mailto:rushstag@aol.com) Oh & by the way, I'm quite new to the net, but anyone who is after Rush merchandise should check out the Rush Backstage Club site (if they haven't already -

the address is [www.rushbackstage.com](http://www.rushbackstage.com)) as it has recently been revamped, apparently, & they offer a fine selection of stuff.

I recently ordered 2 T4E shirts, a T4E tourbook & 'The Masked Rider' ..... & the service was excellent. They arrived within a fortnight & the whole lot cost around £35, including shipping. Looking forward to the convention, thanks for your continued efforts with the mag.

RICH GREEN  
MANSFIELD

P.S. Any readers who just want to talk Rush or music in general, feel free to drop me a line!

Hi Mick,

Nice to catch up on things. As promised here are some details of the venues that YYZ will be playing over the next couple of months.

14TH JULY: Half Time Orange - 121 Burn Moor Street Leicester Tel: 0116 2543077 for more details contact Gary.

AUGUST 13<sup>TH</sup>: Robin 1 - Merry Hill, West Midlands - 01384 637747 for more details contact Mike.

8TH JULY: Fin & Firkin, Stirchley Birmingham - 0121 472 0136

28TH JULY: Moses Gate, Bolton - 01204 567278

2ND SEPTEMBER: Bradford Rio, Bradford - 01274 735549

Anyone interested, please contact the venue for confirmation of the gig before travelling.

Cheers.

SIMON FRASER-CLARK  
CRADLEY HEATH, W. MIDLANDS



# Rush FANCAST Transcript – aired November 15, 1998

As Transcribed By TRI-NET Moderator Slynn ([www.r-u-s-h.com](http://www.r-u-s-h.com))

LISA: Hi, I'm Lisa Robinson and we're live at Atlantic Record's New York studios with Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson of Rush and we're bringing you a very special FANCAST presented by Atlantic Records, SonicNet and Transworld. And so for the next hour or so we're going to be taking questions live from the Yahoo chat audience. But first I'm just going to say hello and welcome and how are you guys?

GEDDY: Okay.

ALEX: Good. Great.

GEDDY: Great to be here in this very casual and comfortable living room-like environment.

ALEX: Mm-hmm.

LISA: Yes, we should explain that, I guess, to those tuning in that we were told this would feel like a casual living room environment. (pauses) It's very small. (all laughing) It's very well lit...

GEDDY: Bright lights!

ALEX: No fireplace...

LISA: And it's... it's hot. (all laughing) If you guys want to take your jackets off –

GEDDY: Where's the fondue? (laughing)

LISA: No, but it's great to see you guys. We're going to talk about your triple live CD set, Different Stages, among a lot of other things and one thing I want to know right away is... (to Alex) You trusted him (Geddy) to do this?

ALEX: Oh, yeah.

LISA: He went through all the tracks, all the tapes, mixed everything, all without you and Neil. I mean, that was okay with you?

ALEX: We discussed it together. But, once the work got really hard – (Geddy and Lisa laughing, cutting him off) – and I'd call Ged every day or two and he'd give me an update and everything was going fine. And I went in a few times in the beginning and heard the mixes and it sounded great so... Why sit around the studio? I mean Geddy knows what he's doing or obviously, so...

GEDDY: And he had to play golf. He had important golf games...

LISA: He had something more important to do –

GEDDY: And I wasn't exactly alone. I had Paul Northfield with me and he really did a lot of work.

ALEX: Yeah, he did a terrific job.

GEDDY: He was there more than me.

LISA: How many hours would you say, seriously, of live tapes did you listen to?

GEDDY: Well, we tried to figure it out. I mean, there were about... between 60 and 80 shows and I'm not sure exactly which, some of these were immediately eliminated because of technical glitches and things. But, I guess if you multiply the 60 shows times 3 hours, so... That's a lot of hours.

ALEX: There's probably about 250 hours –

LISA: Oh my God!

ALEX: – of stuff to go through.

GEDDY: And I didn't listen to every minute.

LISA: I was just going to say, didn't you go crazy?

GEDDY: (laughing) Well, I went crazy anyway, but that's another story and we can get into it another time!

LISA: No, let's get into that now! (laughs)

GEDDY: There's a process that narrowed the tapes down. The first level of elimination, as I said was done by technical problems, unusable tapes. The second level of elimination was done by very obvious things, like tuning problems, things like that and they weren't done by myself. Our live sound engineer, Robert Scovill, he did a lot of the primary eliminations. At the same time he took copious notes on every show, so what I ended up with was anywhere from, say 10 to 20 versions of each song, to narrow down through. And Paul and I, Paul Northfield and myself, we listened through all those and had to determine which tapes we'd use. It was confusing at times, but we got through it.

LISA: You said something, I think, about when in doubt you used Chicago.

GEDDY: Yeah.

GEDDY: I remember most of our Chicago shows feel great just because the crowd is so spectacular there. I mean, they're so enthusiastic. But, I don't remember the performance being any more special than a number of other shows. But there was something about the combination of the way the room sounded and the way the crowd responded and the way we were playing to that. But every time we had a doubt between two tracks, we put up Chicago and there was something about it that felt like you were there. So, if I had two or three versions of a song that sounded equal, I'd rather be at the one that made me feel like I was in a venue. So...

LISA: Is it true there's a rumor on the web that Dennis Rodman came to that show, did he?

ALEX: That was an earlier show.

GEDDY: An earlier show, yeah.

ALEX: In the first half of the tour. When we played at the United Arena –

GEDDY: The United Center, he was at the Center.

ALEX: – but that show (meaning the one on DS) was taken from the World Amphitheater.

LISA: Right. Okay, and what were you going to say, something else about Dennis Rodman?

GEDDY: It wasn't his first show, which was really surprising.

LISA: Really? He's a Rush fan?

GEDDY: Well, I don't know, he's been to more than one of our shows. I guess he's interested in something...

ALEX: Or, he gets free tickets.

LISA: He's a big chap in Chicago. I guess he could probably get free tickets and just wanders in... looking for something –

GEDDY: – fourteen guys protecting him.

ALEX: Pretty nice guy actually.

GEDDY: Very nice.

LISA: Do you ever think you've done bad shows? I mean, did you listen to stuff and think that they were bad?

GEDDY: Well, bad is a relative term compared to what we're looking for – we're looking for perfection or as close to it. Don't ask me to define that, I can't, but there were shows that just weren't special to me...to leave out for various reasons. Sometimes it was just the sound of the room that made the performance feel kind of flat. Sometimes it was just the attitude from the musicians that felt, somehow, flat. There were no overtly bad shows. There were a couple of train wrecks from time to time, in the middle of a song where somebody decided to go somewhere else and improvise, but generally they were fairly consistent. But, I was looking for things that leapt out, were outstanding.

LISA: How often does that improvisation and train wrecks and spontaneity happen do you think in a Rush show? Do you avoid it? Do you welcome it?

ALEX: We're pretty disciplined and structured in the way we present the set and how we put the show together and how we play it from night to night. We allow ourselves certain areas to improvise... at the end of this song, or in the middle section of this song. And the first few times you do it, it's (pauses) you go somewhere. But we have a tendency to settle in and just sort of develop whatever that is and it becomes a fairly regular part of that song from night to night.

LISA: Did you ever think about just completely throwing the set list out and doing something crazy? – Not throwing it out, but changing it around?

GEDDY: No, we're creatures of structure for sure.

ALEX: There's so much going on, it would be very difficult to do that.

GEDDY: Yeah, there's a lot of complexity within the songs and within the choreography of the show between presentation, film, so forth and it really doesn't allow much improvisation and we're quite happy with that.

ALEX: Yeah.

LISA: We're going to take some questions. First one is from...

theanalogkid2112 : Geddy and Alex!!! I love you guys!! , I was wondering which one of you 2 composed the chords for the verse of "Spirit of Radio"? and who composed the classical guitar intro to "A Farewell To Kings" and "The Trees"?

ALEX: (pauses) I think I'm the guitar player, (all laugh) so I would guess that I probably did.

LISA: Okay...

ALEX: "Spirit of Radio,"...

GEDDY: We probably did it together.

ALEX: I'm sure we did it together.

LISA: In fact, I mean the way you two write, do you do most of it together?

ALEX: As a matter of fact, that was probably done with acoustic guitar. That was a time when we used to write with acoustic guitars. Geddy and I would sit down... most of the earlier records were written that way. We would have acoustic guitars and we'd write all these songs and just have a very vivid imagination and try to



imagine them through big amps and loud noises. But, it's kind of an interesting point that we would work that way for so many years.

GEDDY: Yeah, it's... you can tell generally in the writing who wrote what. In the extreme examples, when there's obviously a riff, a flagrant guitar riff of some sort, obviously... (gestures to Alex) Or a classical guitar part – that's usually a guitar player's thing, but the verses are almost always one way or another a collaboration between the two of us. The vocal melodies are usually my responsibility. It kind of falls into place pretty obviously.

LISA: Okay, the 2nd question is from...

\_different\_strings\_ : Are there any future plans for making another studio album?

ALEX: Right now we're on a bit of a break. Obviously it's been a tough year for all of us. The live record's out now and that's going to buy us a little bit of time, and then sometime in the not too distant future we can make decisions about that when we're in a better position to.

LISA: The 3rd question is from...

DrewEvangelion : Hey guys, I love the album. My question is - have you EVER considered doing another epic in the vein of 2112 or Cygnus X-1 again, and if not, why?

GEDDY: Well, considered... Considered is an interesting word. Epics like that, I don't know. We went through a period where it was getting a little obvious for us to continue doing side-long pieces. And then we continued to do work in a conceptual vein, except we stopped calling them concept albums and just did them as individual pieces that revolved around kind of a loosely connected theme. And that freed us up to be a little more diverse in our writing. I think the negative thing about side-long pieces is you kind of have to stick to a script, which can be confining. But from time to time, I don't know if Alex thinks about these things, but I do from time to time think about going back to that approach and see if this many years later we could do something else with it.

LISA: (to Alex) Do you?

ALEX: I haven't given it much thought really, but I certainly wouldn't be closed to an idea like that. I think it might actually be fun at this point to approach that kind of song writing structure and see what develops.

LISA: The 5th question is from...

JDlimbo : What does the cover of the new live CD symbolize?

GEDDY: Well JD, that's up to you to decide.

LISA: Okay, the 6th question is...

Y1001001 : Will there be a live video for "Different Stages?"

ALEX: Hmmmm.

GEDDY: I hope so. I have footage logged from a show and we're trying to work out the details of how to best use that. I'm very interested at the moment in DVD technology and what it can allow us to do that would be more than simply a concert. And how we could incorporate some other really interesting things into it. And from what I understand, that area of exploration is becoming more and more possible where you can almost combine some of the benefits of a CD-ROM with a DVD. So, I would say yes, at some point in the future, there would be some sort of visual representation of the Test For Echo tour.

LISA: Question from...

kozmo4us : I am a audiophile and I am into great sound. I find Rush's music to be more dynamic sonically than most. Why does RUSH put so much emphasis on sound? I find it an excellent audio advantage.

GEDDY: Well...

LISA: I guess the question is why do you put so much emphasis on sound.

GEDDY: Well, I guess we grew up in an era where that was really important. It was always extremely important for bands of the 70's and so forth to try to make their records sound better, more interesting and because of the varied influences, classical music as an influence, at one point and so on and so forth. That required kind of a broad sense of sound, a high dynamic sense of sound. In the music of the late 80's and the early 90's, a lot of that has changed, and I think people have become accustomed to records that remain in a rather low budget manner or in a kind of a loose manner and I think that has subsequently changed the way we hear things so that when a record of ours, say from what I guess could be considered the old school of production or a different school of production, maybe seems different in context.

ALEX: Well, heck – it's music! (counting on his fingers as he makes each point) You listen to music, you play music, you want to make good music and you want it to sound good.

LISA: I think that does it.

ALEX: So, there ya go!

LISA: Now how long have you known each other and doing this sort of routine with each other? Really? It's been a long time –

GEDDY: Four hundred –

ALEX: Thirty... Thirty-one –

GEDDY: Hundred years... (Alex laughing)

LISA: So, the band's 25 years old, is that right? I mean, the band's been together for –

GEDDY: We're just on the cusp of our 25th anniversary since Neil joined the band.

LISA: I see...

GEDDY: Which we must consider to be the actual anniversary of the band.

LISA: But prior to that –

GEDDY: Prior to that we hung around each –

ALEX: We played for six years. Rush has been around for 30 years.

LISA: And you still get along?

GEDDY: (quietly) Well...

ALEX: We're really good at pretending we do...

LISA: Well, I don't think –

ALEX: Of course we do! We're beyond friends –

LISA: It's, I mean –

GEDDY: We're idiots! (Lisa laughs) We're beyond friends.

LISA: Obviously there's a family thing that happens when people are in a band for so long, but also do you take breaks from each other? I mean, you must –

ALEX: Yeah, we have our own lives and circle of friends and families and all of that but, whenever we're together, it's like we've never been apart. And I mean even now it feels the same as it did when we were 17 years old.

GEDDY: Yeah.

ALEX: We've experienced something that's very unique and we're well aware of it. And we're constantly amazed at our great fortune to have had this sort of experience and continue to have a very unique experience.

GEDDY: It's probably the most asked question. 'Why are you still together?' 'How do you explain it?' It's hard to explain that kind of thing, but the bottom of it all is that we just like hanging around with each other and we enjoy each other's company. And we think we still can make pretty good music together.

LISA: Do you feel the same excitement for the music as you did when you were 17?

ALEX: It's different –

GEDDY: Different –

ALEX: But the same intensity.

GEDDY: The same passion.

LISA: Question number nine is from Natural Scientist who says – (Geddy and Alex laughing)

NaturalScientist : We really loved the fact that you guys chose to eliminate an opener this tour, when and if you hit the road again, will we get the same 3 1/2 hour privilege?

LISA: ...doing "An Evening With" as opposed to taking an opening act.

ALEX: Well Nat, (laughing) it was a tough decision to make. We've always had a policy where we really supported our support acts. Made sure they had sound checks, got every opportunity as we did coming up because it is tough to get that kind of exposure. But, with the kind of repertoire that we have, it's impossible to get out there and have a really good representation of all the stuff that we've written. So we needed to eliminate that end of it so we could pick up that extra hour of playing time.

GEDDY: In all fairness, we've done so many tours now that we've brought support, we figured that we could be forgiven to indulge ourselves on one tour without support. And maybe in the future, if there's another tour, we could still do the same thing. I would like to do the same thing.

ALEX: Yeah, it is nice.

GEDDY: It's great.

ALEX: It's great to be able to play and get your pacing all together. And with a 3 hour set on the last tour it was less strenuous, I thought, than 2 hours we've played on previous tours.

GEDDY: Absolutely.

ALEX: You could pace the whole set. There were instrumentals to give Ged a break. And then there was a drum solo to give the two of us a break and there would be a guitar thing that would give Neil a break. We had it really paced nicely.

GEDDY: There was also less wear and tear on you physically because there's no opening act and there's only one sound check. And everything starts a little later in the day and it's very calm in the building and it's very peaceful before the show. And we get on an hour earlier, so we're fresher. So, even though we're playing an hour more, we're in better shape to begin with so, it's a lot more fun.

LISA: Question number 10 is from...

tklancer : Geddy, during the album premiere you mentioned that you had a very long potential setlist. Any gems that got cut that we might want to hear in the future? (Middletown dreams, for example?)

GEDDY: Well, that wasn't one of them, but it's one we could cut in the future for him if he wishes...

ALEX: If it ever does make it on a list.

GEDDY: A set list, like choosing the songs for this album, is the single most difficult thing. And if I submitted requests from fans, I would get so many different versions and it's impossible to pick all the songs that

everyone... is their favorite because there's 20 albums worth of material. It's difficult. They're hard decisions. But you have to make a decision sooner or later, so I would say in the future, yeah, probably some songs that weren't on this set would probably appear somewhere else.

ALEX: I think we had 5 hours of material when we started rehearsals for the last tour, just from the three sets that the three of us brought in – songs we wanted to do and we felt were important to do.

GEDDY: And those were the ones we liked! (Geddy and Alex laugh)

LISA: Natural Scientist is back with a question, um, the 11th question...

NaturalScientist : What was the reason for repeating certain songs on DS, i.e. Trees?

LISA: Did you repeat Trees on Different Stages?

GEDDY: What I think what he means is that it's been on previous live albums. It's a good question. To me, I think it was important to present the tour as some kind of representation of the tour, rather than just include songs just because they were newer songs. Although, in the back of my mind, it's the first priority, is to have the newest songs from the best versions of the newest songs. But, if something came along that seemed to me to be an exceptional version of a song that may have already appeared on a live album, it was in the running. And in the end between Paul Northfield and myself, we chose what we considered to be the best versions of the songs available, whether they be new or old.

JoryStiefel : Do you feel your music has changed at all over the years, and if so, why?

ALEX: No. It's the same as it was in 1974. And why? Well, because. (Geddy laughs)

GEDDY: Yeah, of course it's changed. (pauses, then to Alex) Is it my turn to answer this for you? (laughs).

From our point of view, every album is a dramatic change from the previous album, even if it doesn't necessarily seem like that to the casual listener. So with that philosophy not many changes would occur.

LISA: Baba Ghannoush writes the 14th question –

GEDDY: Baba Ghannoush – good name!

Baba\_Ghannoush : Thank you, Rush, for releasing 'Different Stages' and for raising the standards of Rock Music. My question is: were there any bizarre experiences on the 'Test For Echo' tour?

LISA: ...that you would like to share with us? (laughs)

ALEX: We're sort of past our bizarre years.

GEDDY: We're more into weird (laughs) and proud of it!

LISA: What were the bizarre years? Were there bizarre years?

ALEX: Well, there were more bizarre years. You fall into a pattern now, I think at this stage in our touring experience, you learn how to tour a certain way and you try to keep yourself healthy and motivated. We traveled a little differently; this was the first tour we chartered a plane rather than travelling by bus. So, it afforded us a couple of more hours of sleep every night – of undisturbed sleep. And –

GEDDY: – in a vehicle that wasn't rolling down the highway.

ALEX: We got up and we played a lot of golf, a little tiny bit of tennis. But got out and did things. I don't know, I don't think there's much bizarre stuff that goes on.

GEDDY: No, we're pretty boring.

ALEX: Yeah, we're actually... yeah, we are very boring

GEDDY: We do a lot of physical activity. We have wine tastings every night.

ALEX: Right!

GEDDY: That's not the most exciting thing to some people.

ALEX: Well, in the past –

GEDDY: We have pretty spectacular wines after the show.

ALEX: In the past we just drank spectacularly!

GEDDY: We just drank spectacularly. (laughs)

ALEX: But now, we have a fine wine and a little case made up with some really good wine glasses, so that you get the full bouquet and characteristics of the wine. We come off stage and we're all sweaty and (taking on airs) ... "Ahhh, the fine burgundy..."

GEDDY: We're wine geeks now.

LISA: That's one of the perks of rock stardom I would imagine.

ALEX: Well, anyone can do it and there's no –

LISA: Well, no it's not true. Wine – It's expensive –

ALEX: There are some fabulous bargains. Not that I bother with those wines. (Geddy laughs) But, there are some great bargains out there. (laughs)

LISA: Okay, we're gonna go to the next question from Afterimage. The 15th question...

Afterimage\_ : Geddy & Alex: I'm a big fan and your music has really been an inspiration to me. Q: What do you think of albums like Caress of Steel? Do you listen to it and cringe or are you generally happy with it? Personally, I think its absolute genius.

GEDDY: Well, that guy smokes dope. (laughs)

ALEX: I don't think... When's the last time you listened to it?



GEDDY: I haven't listened to it in a long time. I have to say that from time to time I had to review some of these records when we remaster a lot of them. And you have preconceptions about older records in your mind, you think – 'Wow, I hated that record' but you're associating it with not just the music, experiences making it. Various things go into your feelings about your past. But when you listen to them in your headphones and you're checking back the past, it's very interesting, it's very curious to me to see the different layers and stages that we were at. And sometimes we work on things now, where we're trying to write a particular kind of thing and you listen back to something you did 15 years ago and say 'Hey!' We did it then and we weren't even aware of the fact that we knew how to do it. We just kinda naturally did it and then you forget that you know how to do that, so then you try to re-invent yourself. Maybe, I'm not making myself clear. So, it is interesting. You do listen back from time to time. But, I would say it's not a regular habit, but sometimes, it's a pretty surprising one.

ALEX: It was also very... quite an experimental record for us. We needed to try some things out in that longer concept format and without *Caress of Steel*, we wouldn't have made 2112. You know, we wouldn't have learned how to do that in such a way that was cohesive and flowing. So, although perhaps it's not as dear to our hearts, we still recognize it was a very important transitional record in our history.

LISA: I just think it's interesting your first record... we were talking about this earlier... it was basically like one of the first indie records, wasn't it?

GEDDY: Yes, it was.

LISA: I mean 17 years before indie rock, you put out your own album. You guys couldn't get signed?

GEDDY: (Alex shakes his head) No way man! We couldn't even get a tour across Canada. We were playing bars around Toronto and that was about it. And record company people would come down to see us and they would offer us... Well, maybe if you did a couple of singles, we could see what happens, there. But we didn't want to do singles. We wanted to make an album. You know, singles... was kind of ludicrous for us. Couldn't get it to happen.

LISA: Was it hard for you even to play in bars without doing covers or was it not that kind of a cover scene in the bars in Toronto?

ALEX: It was –

GEDDY: Well, it was. We went through a couple of lean periods because we didn't work at all.

ALEX: Not because we didn't want to.

GEDDY: But we didn't want to play other people's material and we finally had to acquiesce and play material by other people. But we tried to find obscure songs.

LISA: Like what?

ALEX: We'd do 20 minute versions of "For What It's Worth." - "Shotgun."

GEDDY: "Spoonful." But that's going way back.

ALEX: Which is a weird song to play in a bar, you know a dance kind of bar. (Lisa laughs) But, we developed a pretty –

GEDDY: "Suffragette City," we used to play –

LISA: Really?! When you were in bars, did you ever think that what was going to happen, was going to happen? I mean were those the dreams?

ALEX: Way too drunk to –

GEDDY: (laughing) You dreamed about getting out of the bars. You dreamed about getting on tour. I'm sure there are lots of musicians out there that know what I'm saying. You can't dream past that; it is just incomprehensible.

LISA: It's amazing to me that you and the Beatles and U2 and many other great rock bands couldn't get a record deal. What does that say about the record industry?

GEDDY: It doesn't say a very good thing about the record industry.

LISA: Alright, we will go to the next question, number 16 –

GEDDY: Scaredy cats! (laughing)

LISA: – I think this is from Eric Lyman from California...

ELYMAN98 : Great album guys! What is the biggest difference in your individual playing that the two of you see from the two different "Stages" and thank you for all the years!

LISA: I guess he's talking about the Hammersmith disc and the Chicago, the '97 stuff.

ALEX: Hammersmith stuff has that youthful energy about it in terms of technique or technical performance. The tempo seems to creep up a bit, we tend to play things a little quicker, a little looser and wilder. Whereas the more current stuff has a maturity and a confidence in the presentation and the playing and the performance.

GEDDY: There's also a simplicity to the architecture of the band. And by that I mean, the parts, even though they're complex, are very easy to see because it's bass, drums, guitar. So, there's a clarity and an ability to see into the music a little easier than the music of today that we're making where there are numerous guitar parts and keyboard parts. You know, there are complexities and layers in our music that didn't exist in '78.

Tardisyrix : After all these years why did you finally decide to play all of 2112 in concert?

ALEX: With that extra hour of playing time, we could play it. When... 2112 came out at a time when we were still special guesting or opening shows. We didn't headline many shows back then. We never really had the opportunity because we had a 40 minute set to play all of it. And even when we got a chance to play it more often, we still couldn't do the whole thing because of time constraints usually. But this afforded us that luxury of being able to play that in its entirety and we didn't really want to short change it this time around.

GEDDY: And really, we're always looking to bring something back on a tour that we haven't played in a while. When we start a tour we say, well, what can we bring back? So, the idea of bringing back something so big was pretty exciting. I mean, at first it was a little ludicrous. We didn't actually think we could play it and mean it. But, we found that to be quite the opposite after we played it a couple of times.

ALEX: It started out more like 2111. (laughing)

GEDDY: Or two one one one. That's it! (laughing)

LISA: Well we've got dozens of questions. Okay, let me go to number 18..

kevinpetty : What do you think about the "death" of "arena rock?" Is it positive/negative, or just cyclical?

LISA: ...or even true?

ALEX: I don't know, did it die?

GEDDY: If it's anything –

LISA: I think it's back –

GEDDY: I don't think hard rock, arena rock, metallic rock, whatever you want to call it, I don't think ever really goes away, it just goes into hibernation for a while. And we seem to have so many avenues of rock music right now, that it makes it very difficult for any one of those avenues to command the stage.

LISA: Okay, number 19 is from mike\_au98 and he says...

mike\_au98 : There is a large period of time between recordings on DS. Do either of you listen to the older music and think you have lost a sound you like or are you happy with your musical progression?

GEDDY: Good question.

ALEX: Mm-hmm.

GEDDY: Yeah, there are elements of the '78 recording that sound great to me and things that don't sound great to me. As we answered in an earlier question – there's a particular simplicity of structure that enables you to appreciate the sound better in '78 and I think that's a sacrifice you make when you bring more textures into your sound. But, yeah, I would say there is a little bit of a yearning for that simplicity.

LISA: Next question is to Alex. It's the 20th question...

gruof : Alex, are you going to do another Victor album or other solo effort soon?

ALEX: Ahh, I wouldn't say soon. But I'd like to do something like that. I had a lot of fun. It was a very satisfying experience for me and rewarding because I did it all by myself. Worked very hard on it and got to play with some other people which was kinda fun. But it seems that it was something that I needed at that time in my life and sort of satisfied that urge that I had. I'd like to do something like, but I have no overwhelming desire right now to get into that kind of a project. It's a very time consuming thing that takes a lot out of you. I'd like to pursue some other things.

LISA: Twenty-first question is from someone who calls him or herself GeddyClaus...

GeddyClaus : First I'd like to tell you guys you have the most talent, creativity and musical ethics in the business and I love you guys for that. My question is -- What is your official stand on bootlegs? Are you adamantly against them or do you view them ambivalently?

GEDDY: I would say... ambivalent.

ALEX: I would definitely agree with that.

LISA: Have you heard any that you like?

GEDDY: You know, I'll tell you one thing that pissed me off – If I can say that over the web...

LISA: You can say anything on the web.

GEDDY: One thing that really pissed me off – I'm working really hard mixing this album and I was at a friend's house – he calls himself a friend! – and he had a fine collection of Rush bootleg live things. And there was one from our last tour. And so imagine, here I am, drowning in tapes and trying to get the material to sound as good as possible and he puts this record on that was taped by someone standing in the audience listening to the songs that I was mixing at that moment... recorded on one little microphone and half way through the song, some guy's talking to his friend and you can hear the guy's conversation. And I'm thinking 'What am I doing?' I'm killing myself to make the best possible sounding record and people are going out and buying these things that sound so awful. But, you know –

ALEX: I don't think a bootleg will ever replace something that we do in the studio though. It becomes a collector's thing more than anything.

GEDDY: Yeah, I think that's true, they like to have it –

LISA: And they still buy the one you do –

GEDDY: They still buy the record, but you can imagine how I felt!

**TO BE CONTINUED.....**

# THE SONGWRITING INTERVIEW

## NEIL PEART

By Bruce Pollock (1986)

Downstairs, in the labyrinthian chambers of the Meadowlands, at two minutes to midnight, is neither the place nor the time one would be expecting to discuss the course of American Literature. "When you look at Herman Melville and Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne - the turn of the century American school of writers - and how writing developed through Sinclair Lewis. Theodore Dreiser and then up to Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, there was a tremendous progression, but at the same time an elimination. That progression of writing was a process of stripping things away and eliminating the inessential, making, in effect, the right word do the job of five approximations." And neither would you expect the drummer of a world-renowned arena-resounding rock band to be conversant with the subtleties of Black Humor. "I love writers like Thomas Pynchon and John Barth and Tom Robbins. To me Robbins is the quintessential modern writer because he's funny, he's profound, he's sexy, he's irreverent, he's dirty, he's hip. He's everything I would like modern writing to be."

If you're talking rock lyrics, you'd have to consider Neil Peart, Rush's resident drummer/lyricist, as today's quintessential songwriter. Unashamedly intellectual in a world of lip-readers, Peart is the thinking man's wordslinger equivalent of Yngwie Malmsteen. What the flashy Swede does with notes and sheer manual dexterity, the loping Canadian accomplishes with words - a verbal drumbeat that is as much a part of Rush's sound as Alex Lifeson's guitar or Geddy Lee's bass. Speaking, in fact, in the same shifting time-signatures that characterize Rush's music, Peart is in total command of his mental resources, analyzing, conceptualizing, pontificating about the lyrics that are near and dear to his heart, and near and dear to the hearts of Rush fans the world over.

"I can take someone like T.S. Eliot, who has influenced me greatly over the last few years, and realize that what he was doing was just throwing so many images at you all the time that you were left dizzy. But at the same time you were left with something. You were left with a sense of unease, a sense of stepping into something mysterious, of almost stepping into another dimension. So I use that idea. On a song like Red Lenses from the Grace Under Pressure album, I tried to construct a series of ongoing images that just came at you. The color red was the theme of it, but I twisted it in so many ways. It was the hardest song I ever wrote, because I was trying not to say anything, and each line was saying something but at the same time it was trying to be so obscure and so oblique about the way that I went around saying it - on purpose. It seems confounding, but in the end you're left with something. T.S. Eliot's poetry is the same way to me. At the end of it I don't really know what I've read, but it comes back to me. When I think of the Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock or The Wasteland I can't quote lines from them, and I can't say I understand everything that was said, but they move me."

With a catalogue of standards that includes Big Money, Tom Sawyer, The Spirit of Radio, Closer to the Heart, New World Man, Vital Signs, Distant Early Warning and Limelight, you'd think Neil Peart would be content to relax atop the shelf of lyrics

he's given his many fans to ponder. But, like the relentless perfectionist he is, Peart is driven to grander vistas of achievement. "For me, prose is where it's at," he says, a rare lapse into the vernacular. "I'd love to throw away the limitations of verse and be able to express myself in a much broader medium. To be able to write in sentences and paragraphs and whole chapters and sub-chapters appeals to me greatly. Someday I would love to turn out just one good short story." So, while we've got him on our turf, working in the medium of the song lyric, we sat Neil down and grilled him extensively about his approach to his craft.

**Were you a student of songs before you started writing them?**

No, but I was a student of words and a student of rhythm. I think as a listener to music, lyrics were strictly tertiary to me. First there was the song and then there was the musicianship, and then, after I already liked the song, there were the lyrics. There's no way I'll ever like the lyrics to a song that I don't like. It's an essential relationship. So I never really paid a lot of attention to lyrics until



after I started writing them, and then it became a craft, like drumming. If I weren't a drummer I don't think I'd spend a lot of time thinking about drumming or drummers. It's something I became aware of as my involvement with words became more and more active and intense. At that point I started to become more aware of the techniques. I learned about rhymes and learned what's a real good rhyme and what's a false rhyme, what's a rhyme for the sake of convenience and what's a carefully constructed one. I have a very rigid set of values in those terms. I'll never rhyme just for the sake of it. I hate semi-rhymes.

**With some of the words you use in your songs, it seems the lyrics must have been written before the music.**

It essentially goes both ways, but I think being a drummer has been very helpful to me. I have a good sense of the music of words and the poetry of words and what makes a nice-sounding and even a nice-looking word.

For instance, Territories as a title appeals to me so much to look at as it does to listen to. I find that the more layers a word or a series of words offers to me, the more satisfied I am. So if I can get a series of words that are rhymerically interesting and maybe have some kind of internal rhyming and rhymeric relationship, plus at least two layers of interpretive ideas in there too, the more pleased I am. I love to sneak little bits of alliteration in - even if it would never be recognized. It *is* recognized. It's like, the more you put in it's always there and even sometimes the more you take out, it's still in. I do like to get away with unusual words, but there are limits. There are some words that are not good to sing. They can sound good and look good and feel right in the context of a piece of verse, but when I go over them with Geddy, he'll complain to me that either I've gone overboard with the alliteration or there are certain vowel-consonant combinations that, from a singer's point of view, are very difficult to deliver because you have to think so much about the elocution of those syllables that you can't possibly deliver them with the necessary emotions. There are things that Geddy suggests to me from a singer's point of view that help me a lot.

**Are you thinking with the drum track in mind when you write lyrics?**

Oh definitely. Being a drummer helps me a lot, because words are a subdivision of time. Sometimes I give my verse to Geddy and he's perplexed by how he's supposed to deliver it and I have to try to express it with my toneless delivery. Things have to be phrased in less obvious ways sometimes, across a bar line, with one syllable stretched and another compacted. In a song like The Manhattan Project where it was essentially a documentary, I wanted the delivery to be like punctuation, and the chorus had to be more passionate and more rhythmically active. It was hard to express exactly how I wanted it. The first time we worked on the music, they had phrased the lyrics in a very slow manner and I had to protest. The phrasing of the line was two short lines and then a long line and two short lines and a long line. There were internal rhymes and internal relationships among the words and within the delivery that had to remain intact for it to make sense at all. It was so carefully crafted that it couldn't be delivered any old way.

**When you come up with lyrics do you have your own melody?**

Yes, but it's purely arbitrary. Sometimes it can be the most childish melody or the most unrealistic one, or sometimes the melody to another song entirely. But it's just a framework: it's a written structure in my mind that allows me to go forward and to have something on which to hang all the rhythms, and it allows me to be adventurous and not be satisfied with the rhythmic basics. Being fairly adventurous rhythmically as a drummer, I'm driven that way lyrically. I like to stretch lines and play with phrasing. The more I became appreciative of singers I understood what phrasing could do for lyrics, how it can make them come alive. The first time I hear words sung is really when they come alive for me. When they're written on a piece of paper, it can be satisfying technically, but whether they work or not really happens when I hear Geddy sing them for the first time.

**You obviously don't turn these songs out in one sitting.**

Definitely not. Sometimes the gist will come at one sitting, but the process of refinement will be very laborious. A lot of times I'll have a basic idea and a layout: usually I like to have a verse/chorus organization before I go to the other guys with it. Geddy, being the singer, has the greatest amount of input lyrically and he might suggest some little key twists that will help.

**Do you have certain parts of the year when you do your writing?**

Yes, but the important thing is to keep those divisions external. They're limitations as opposed to compromises. What I find important are two other things - inspiration and craftsmanship. Those are things you cannot compromise. When an inspiration comes to you, it doesn't matter how

inconvenient it is, you must take advantage of it at the time. So I must take advantage of it at the time. So I keep a notebook all the time and always force myself to write down any cogent thought, however sketchy it might seem, whether it's a title I like or a phrase I like or even just an image that I would like to develop or a theme I would someday like to address. So by the time we reach the writing period, I'm prepared. That's the ironic part of it - you set aside a month or two months and say, ok we're going to write songs now. Obviously, anything creative doesn't work that way. But if you already have that part done, if you've already yielded to the spontaneity and the inspiration at the proper time, and had the discipline to take note of it, then you can literally sit down at a desk on the first Monday morning of the writing period and start sifting through pages and pages.

I keep things forever, and then, as I use them, I cross them out. As a page gets too full of things crossed out, I re-copy the things that haven't been used yet. Some things sit in my notebook for ages and ages, and then sometimes a catalytic idea comes, because it's never just one idea. For me no song is ever written on one idea. It takes probably four or five things and then I have to find the common parallel that will either unite all of those things, or at least give them some kind of linear flow. I think in anyone's experience, your thoughts will tend to follow a pattern and evolve around a nucleus of things that you're sensitive to at a particular time. All those things will collect together automatically. If you write a short story you have the luxury of developing all those things in a very relaxed form. Lyrics are a tremendously demanding form of discipline: it requires precision.

#### **Do you have a special room where you work?**

Yes, but it's been a different one with every album. Basically I just need a table and a chair and my rhyming dictionary. On the last four or five albums we've worked each time in a different place, but in each there's been a room where I can go to have quiet and to be able to think. You need solitude for the amount of concentration that it takes. I try to get to writing as early as possible, before anything else becomes distracting. So I'll generally spend the whole day writing. Geddy and Alex work on the music during the daytime while I work on the lyrics, and we all get together after dinner to work on arranging and rehearsing the songs. So, in essence, days are devoted to individual work and the evenings are devoted to collective work.

#### **Did you all ever work together in a kind of spontaneous atmosphere?**

Not very comfortably, because for me the craftsmanship is important. I'm not happy with spontaneity musically either. I think you take such a chance. It's the same with those ideas you wake up with in the middle of the night. Sometimes you write them down and you wake up in the morning and go, 'What?' And you rip it up and throw it away. Other times you save it. We do, musically speaking, have improvisational periods, during our sound-check or just when we're playing together, and we record them and at the end of the tour we sift through them and look for anything that happened that was magic. And there are ideas that we can mine out of there, taking advantage of the spontaneity of one day's mood. But to go on stage and expect people to indulge you; that doesn't work. I prefer organization. I don't like lyrics that are just thrown together, that were obviously written as you went along, or the song was already written and the guy made up the lyrics in five minutes. I can tell - craftsmanship speaks. It's the same with reading books. I admire writers who have obviously worked and worked over what they've done, to make sure it's clearly presented and as beautifully presented as it can be. And there's nothing like time and careful work to make that happen.

#### **Have you adjusted to your own rhythms of writing?**

For me, the important thing is to do the inspirational part of it when it happens, so I never have to go there with an empty book. At worst, if I'm stumped I can just put the work in progress aside and I have pages and pages of other things to look at. I'll just sit there and leaf through those and hope something will connect, and generally it will. But the important thing is to be enough ahead that it's not scary, because if you get frightened, that's when writer's block will occur. I never want to be in that position. There have been things that I've tried to write that haven't worked out, but I've been able to find out early. You don't have to write 200 pages and then discover you're working at nothing. By the time you've gone through a verse and a chorus and you've shown it to the other guys, you can see if it's not working. It might be a satisfying technical exercise. I can be satisfied that I achieved what I set out to achieve even if the song wasn't used.

#### **So you basically do a verse and a chorus and show it to the others?**

More often than not it's complete. I'll have a series of themes or a series of verses. Sometimes they become reversed. I'm very much in love with middle eights. It's something I really love as a

musical and lyrical departure. So a lot of times I'll have a song that'll have a verse, chorus, verse, middle eight - the classic thing. But then when the other guys get hold of it, it'll be turned around and the middle eight will become the chorus or the verse will become the chorus.

**Someone will come back and say, we need four more lines?**

Or the opposite, where there'll be two lines too many. Or a song just wants to be structured a different way musically. Those things are never negative. They're always a challenge. Sometime it can't be done, and if you have truly done a good job and distilled the lyrics down to their most essential form, there's not much you can do with it. But if the music's demands are stronger, and if the lyrics can be messed around with, that's very exciting to do.

**Do you ever work to a finished melody?**

Very often the guys will have worked on something musically and made a tape of it for which they have nothing particular in mind. Grand Designs, on the last album, was done that way. They had the musical ideas laid out and just made a little tape for me with guitar, keyboards and drum machine, and I had that. So, again, if I'm stumped on something that I've been working on, I pull out that tape and try to close my mind off for a minute and listen to the tape. Chemistry was a true collaboration between the three of us. The other guys had a couple of key phrases they wanted to express, so they gave me the music. That was easy because all the ground-work was done. Playing with words comes so much easier than having to dream up the whole thing.

**Does the concept of each album start with you?**

Usually there isn't a concept. This album was the very first time that I decided from the beginning that I wanted my main theme to be power and I was going to address as many different vignettes of power as I could. In the past there have been themes in each of the albums, but they have been more after the fact. For instance, on Grace Under Pressure, the theme of that title seemed very obvious in each of the songs, but in fact it came after and the songs were each being written about different reactions. The theme of that album, to me, is pathos, and it came about through sometimes third-hand experiences, but most often second hand, observing my friends. That was a period of time when a lot of people were out of work and having difficulties in terms of self esteem. They had reached a point in their lives where they felt they should be established and they weren't. People were having life crises not only in employment, but also in terms of their romances. All of those things came to a head in my perception and I was writing with a great deal of empathy. It wasn't always understood by either listeners or critics, but that was the stem of it all. So, after the fact I realized that the theme of the album illustrated the Grace under pressure concept. That album was made under a great deal of difficult circumstances for us personally too.

**Doesn't it seem to you that sometimes a group is categorized for its music, but its message isn't considered as important as that of an individual singer/songwriter?**

That's ok: as a member of the audience it was that way to me, too. If people don't want to take all the trouble interpreting lyrics that I took in creating them, that doesn't bother me, because I'm a musician first and not just a lyricist. I only spend two months out of every two years doing that and the rest of the time I'm a drummer.

**Do you feel that Rush is the best vehicle for your self-expression - or do you have a goal to express yourself elsewhere too?**

That's complicated, because being a drummer first, the kind of liberality I have in Rush is important to me. Stylistically I never feel limited as a drummer and that will carry over lyrically, too. There's no way I'll ever write anything good that won't be suitable for Rush. On the other hand, I have written things with which I was happy but which didn't fit into the scheme of things at a given time. But I have no trouble putting those away. Those things always lead me on to something else. We have musical ideas all the time that never get fully developed, but at the same time they lead us on to another area. Or even things that do get developed and recorded, from an artistic point of view a lot of times we're not satisfied. At this point we've gone through several periods of different stylistic approaches, different areas of influence and at this moment they might seem indulgent to us or naive, but without that experimentation we couldn't have arrived now at the ability to write a five or six minute song and put everything into it that we do. We can write a song that will have complicated time signatures but it won't be five minutes of that. It'll be two minutes of that. But the point is that now we have such comfort with that type of thing that we can change types of signatures three or four times in a song very comfortably.

I went through periods the same way lyrically of being over-ornamental and spending a lot of time developing an atmosphere lyrically. I don't do that anymore. I want five words to do what I used to



use five lines to do. I'm fairly satisfied with my body of lyric writing over the last four or five years, but prior to that it was strictly kindergarten, strictly groundwork and experimentation. Musically, too, I don't have much use for our stuff prior to 1980. That's not negative. That's the way it should be, because we were honestly experimental. We pushed ourselves over our heads a lot of times and we were grappling for some kind of grip on the technique that we were aiming for.

**Do you feel you have to distil your material to get it played on commercial radio?**

No, I don't. the hardest thing is to have something that's both personal and universal. To me, that's the aim. I try to find something that moves me - a lot of times it's anger, but sometimes it can be pathos or it can be joy. I can be thrilled by the world at large or by nature or by some small experience. Adolescence is a common theme for me. The crossover between innocence and disillusionment is something I have addressed a lot, because I know it's something I can personally relate to and illustrate but at the same time it's universal. I don't want to just be confessional like a Joni Mitchell. That's an area I've tried to avoid; at the same time, that's what gives you personal involvement, and without that impetus sometimes it's hard to get going.

Fortunately, I'm very prone to anger, very prone to outrage in the way people act and the way they treat each others and the world we live in. So all of these things act as an impetus to me, but I couldn't write only about my own areas of outrage. I like to find those and translate them into something that is universal.

**Do you feel that your best lyrics have become your best songs?**

No, not always, It's weird how it goes. There's so much chemistry involved and there's so many intangible things that happen. There are ones where the music has been better than the lyrics or the lyrics better than the music. I think Middletown Dreams is a good marriage of lyrics and music. Mystic Rhythms is another one.

**You said there's a magic moment when you hear a song for the first time. Is there another magic moment when you conceive of a song for the first time - or finish it for the first time?**

That's a good point. I think the joy of creation is very overrated. The irony of it is that the moment goes by so fast. When I'm working on a piece of lyrics and I have the theme of it going and I'm working away, there is that moment when I realize, yes, this is going to work. But then I'm gone. I'm gone into making it work. And then the knots in the brain start to become untied. I'm figuring out, ok, this line goes to that line, this verse to that verse. You can't just sit back and go, oh, I'm great. The moment is great, but you can't just sit back and feel fulfilled by it. To me the most satisfying time of making an album is the writing period. We listen to a demo, and yes, this is exciting, and it's what we wanted it to be and it gets you off. That is the ultimate return that you will get from the song. And then you'll spend another six months recording the basic tracks, doing the overdubs, doing the vocals, doing the mixing. At the end of it all there's no joy of creation: there's no sitting back and going, 'This is finished and wow, I'm so happy,' because you're so tired and drained from all of the mental demands. You don't have anything left to throw a party. In the demo period the rewards are instantaneous.

**Is there another level where you see a song you've worked on and believed in, going over with the audience?**

You picked out a very important thing, because at the end of an album it's impossible for us to judge which songs will truly be popular and which won't. We're inevitably surprised. And then there are songs like Vital Signs, from our Moving Pictures album. At the time it was a very transitional song. Everybody had mixed feelings about it, but at the same time it expressed something essential that I wanted to say. That's a song that has a marriage of vocals and lyrics I'm very happy with. But it took our audience a long time to get it, because it was rhythmically very different for us and it demanded the audience to respond in a different rhythmic way. There was no heavy down beat: it was all counterpoint between upbeat and downbeat, and there was some reflection of reggae influence and a reflection of the more refined areas of new wave music that we had sort of taken under our umbrella and made happen. That song took about three tours to catch on. It was kind of a baby for us. We kept playing it and wouldn't give up. We put it in our encore last tour - putting it in the most exciting part of the set possible - and just demanded that people accept it because we believed in it. I still think that song represents a culmination - the best combination of music, lyrics, rhythm. It opens up so many musical approaches, from being very simplistic and minimal to becoming very overplayed. Everything we wanted in the song is there. So that song was very special to us. But we had to wait. We had to be patient and wait for the audience to understand us.

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Spirit of Radio / Circumstances	`7` Single	76044	1980	USA	£ 8,00
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I hope this is not too late to be included in the pre conference edition. I am travelling by car from Edinburgh to the conference, I'm leaving on The morning of the conference and coming back the next day. If anyone would Like a lift then phone me on 01620 895874 or e-mail me at [nephronic@hotmail.com](mailto:nephronic@hotmail.com).

Another point, I'm looking for people to do some live trades with. Either tape or cd-r, if anyone is interested e-mail me at [nephronic@hotmail.com](mailto:nephronic@hotmail.com) or write to Michael Kerr

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