

RUSH

BACKSTAGE CLUB

DECEMBER 1981

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

FOR WHOM THE BUS ROLLS

(A Journal of the Road)

Your Correspondent: Neil Peart

This journal covers the launching of a tour, the Rush "Moving Pictures" tour of 1981, from rehearsals through to the view of a very real world, a day-to-day existence for thirty regular people, who just happen to set up and deliver a rock show for a living! (It may not be a "real job", but it's certainly a real world.)

There is no doubt that it is a strange life; we work, and then drive away through the night, while the rest of the world sleeps; we look out the window at a different place every day, rootless and unprotected by normality. Certainly there is a special state of mind, as I can't even imagine the "on the road" feeling, when I'm comfortable nestled at home. The reverse is also true, as I write this from a hotel room, I am hard-pressed to remember what I feel like at home. (maybe I'll just run home and check!)

Monday, February 9. Toronto. Wait a minute! Are you sure we had a holiday? Oh. Anyway, it's back to work. For the past couple of weeks the anticipation has been building; practising, planning, answering the phone, interviews, preparing the program, answering the phone, packing, decisions, the phone, et cetera.

Here at the rehearsal studio, we will get sore fingers and stiff muscles, polishing up both the new and old songs, and putting together a well-paced set. To be fair to ourselves, the audience, and our crew, it's desirable to keep the show to around two hours, but the eight albums of material to choose from, we must be ruthless!

The crew work like elves all around us; hammering, drilling, painting, and soldering our gear into shape. Some of it is maintenance, some is modification, and some are attempted miracles! Our road manager, Howard, has set up a portable office nearby, and is on the phone to all of America: promoters, hotels, drivers, sound company, lighting company, other crew members, rigging company, the President. "What do you mean I can't have a nuclear light show?" Et cetera.

As Geddy put it so well: "The first day we sound like nothing, the second day we sound like someone imitating us; the third day we start to sound like a band". Well, almost.

Watching Geddy juggling his bass, synthesizers, pedals, and also the vocals; and Alex co-ordinating his settings, echoes, effects, syn-

thesizers, and guitar changes, I am inwardly grateful once again that my instrument requires only to be hit by a stick!

By the end of the week we are working our way through the two hour show in less than four hours. (!) The next step is "Wings Stadium", in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where we have hired the hall for four days prior to our first show there. We will be doing extensive sound checks, and full production rehearsals.

Tuesday, February 17. Kalamazoo. 3:00 A.M. The bus has stopped moving, and as usual, I sense arrival and wake up. Having slept since we crossed the border, I am disoriented at first. Peering out the window of my bunk into a foggy oblivion, I can only see the familiar green neon of the "Holiday Inn" sign. Sigh!

Sleepily, I struggle into coat and shoes, and stumble off of the bus, and into the lobby. We meet up with some of the crew who had't been at rehearsals, and it's like a family re-union. We collect our keys and rooming lists; and then it's open house, doors and suitcases flung open wide, and everyone is wandering the halls, visiting from room to identical room. Many of the guys have been working over at the hall all night, and are just getting back. Everyone looks beat, but glad to be back on the road. Amen!

(later that same day) Awake again, and reaching for the phone with the reflex of long habit. Order breakfast, shower, and wait for the rattle of glassware that will announce the arrival of the soggy eggs, damp toast, and coffee-miraculously weak for its bitterness! Et cetera. No surprises.

These reflections are vaporized by the ringing telephone. I generally answer the phone with a certain trepidation, but thankfully it's Rhonda from the office, who is always nice to talk with, even when she bears unwelcome requests; (last-minute interviews, persistent photographers, messages from people on other planets, et cetera). We can usually deal with five minutes of business in as little as twenty minutes!

"Wings Stadium" is conveniently next-door to our hotel, a typical medium-sized hockey arena, with typical medium-sized hockey arena acoustics. This is perfectly suitable for our purposes, as most of our shows will be in such places. It is interesting that during this century the old vaudeville type of theatres, to the modern "War-Memorial-Civic-Convention-Stadium-Centre-Arena". I guess it is

the democratic preference, but you wouldn't think it would be so difficult to build on that sounded good too! But in common with our audiences: "We pays our money, and we takes our choice."

Kevin, our personal-ah, -shreve (?), assistant everything, valet, factotum, secretary, aide-de-camp, butler, et al), gives the "crew knock" at the door, and informs me that my drum riser is in the process of revision by a welder(!), and they won't care to discuss some interviews. I cleverly distract him by changing the subject.

Through the everlasting fog outside my window, the illuminated "Wings Stadium" sign informs me that a local FM station "brings" Rush and Max Webster on February 20 at 8:00 p.m.. Now, really! What this really means is that in return for the "prestige" of "presenting" a concert, the station has exchanged certain promotional favours! (Now don't get all cynical already, the tour's just beginning!)



It's 4:30, I can sit around no longer, I'm going to walk over to the hall. The mist is still thick to the ground, a line of slowly melting snowbanks smoulder eerily, the steam pouring off like smoke. The roar of the nearby interstate is muffled and distant. It's a fine, dramatic day.

Inside the building, which we have played at many times, I find my way to the familiar dressing room, have my stae-pass photo taken, then walk out into the dark cavern of the arena. The house lights are off, so that the stage lights can be focussed. At stage left I meet up with the guys from the sound crew, who I hadn't run into last night, and I perceptively notice that my drums are still scattered about the stage like wounded soldiers. I can only be in the way here so I went out into the audience area, to check out our new sound and lighting set-ups.

We set out to streamline our stage somewhat this tour, and it looks terrific. Everything is very uncluttered and symmetrical, and the sound system has been re-distributed above and beside the stage. Howard's new lights look great; three round multi-lamp fixtures, one above each of us on stage, and a different, cleaner arrangements on the front and rear of the stage. All told, something like 400 sweltering sun-lamps for me to sweat under every night! About this I have mixed feelings, but it will certainly look amazing.

I learn from our stage manager, Michael, that between "flying" (hanging from the roof) part of the P.A., the projection screen, as well as the lights, we now use a total of 22 rigging points. I guess that's good!

Our co-producers, "Broon", is out with us for a while to work with engineer Jon on the refinement of our live sound. They supervise a harrassed looking Joe, the chief sound technician. With soldering gun in hand, and furrowed brow, he probes the bowels of the mixing board; mind awchirl with millivolts, dBs, op-amps, and circuits.

His counterpart on the lighting crew, the cigarette-chewing Nick Kotos, is similarly doing battle in teh "Pit of Doom", the heart of the

lighting system, at stage right. His is a private Inferno; banks of dimmers, mountainous coils of serpentine cables, colored gels, and clouds of smoke perpetually rising from machines and Marlboros.

The great social event of the touring day is Crew Meal. This is catered at six, after sound check and before the doors are opened, so most people are "off-duty" for a while. The building is usually quiet, the food is usually good, and we are always ravenous, so it makes an enjoyable interlude in the day.

Larry has my drums back together, Laim has Alex's amps and effects working, Skip has Geddy's amps and basses ready, Tony has tuned the guitars and synthesizers, Greg has the monitors set; everyone has done everything, now it's our turn.

We start to work our way through the set, but there are many stops; to adjust this, tune that, and fix the other. The night passes slowly, finally finishing about 2:00 A.M., and I am exhausted.

It is nice to put on my coat, and just walk out into the quiet night. The fog is still a soft shroud over everything, and a bright nebula surrounds the streetlights and the "Wings Stadium" sign.

I am struck by the contrast to what often accompanies my walking out of a stage door after work. As ever, the smell of diesel smoke hangs in the air, but it's so peaceful! I am tired, alone, and left so. It feels nice.

Wednesday, February 18. Kalamazoo. O Father, I have sinned! It seems I have overslept the magical hour of 11:30, and can no longer be served anything resembling breakfast. Sigh.

The lifeless, nasal voice on the phone is "only following orders", and can not be tempted to stretch the rules even so far as a grilled cheese sandwich. "Then we'd have to do it for everybody", she wittily rejoins, and I am successfully put in my place. No surprises.

Despite a momentarily humorous vision 200 guest simulataneously demanding their contraband grilled cheeses, I vent my frustration at "rules in the customary way, by smashing the offending reciever into the guilty phone. In independent tests conducted all over the western world, this reporter has found the modern telephone to be virtually indestructible.

The television is the usual afternoon wasteland; only the networks here, and they each offer simultaneous game shows, followed by simultaneous soap operas. Click! This is freedom of choice? At least most cities have active PBS stations, which can sometimes offer interesting diversion on a dull afternoon. Sometimes when I'm doing something else, it's nice to leave the picture on with no sound, just to make the room seem a little bigger!



I turn to answering a pile of neglected mail, and to putting my notebook in order for a new tour's crop of images ideas. One of the good points of an itinerant lifestyle, is the magnitude of input, constantly changing and forming Paralles, providing new points of view and observations. But of course, it is also one of the bad points, sometimes the input is too overwhelming, and some peace and

quiet would be much nicer! It just goes to prove; even when you have everything, it's never the right amount.

Meanwhile, back at the hall, we start off with the new songs, which begin to sound and feel good. After dinner, we run through (walk through?) the whole show once again, still pausing often to correct difficulties, adjust monitors, or just for a break!

Things are definitely coming together. Sometimes I feel that brief flash of exultation as the music flows out effortlessly, the three of us playing perfectly; as one. The flash is soon gone, however as a difficult change, or a tricky part demands my earnest concentration.

On the way back through the still shrouded parking lot, Alex and Geddy paused to enact a scene from an imaginary Ingmar Bergman film. Under the visionary direction of G. Lee, Alex plays the stoic, heroic "Bjorn".

LONG SHOT. WIDE ANGLE. It is night. Fog. The streetlights are phantoms, ghostly mirages in the thick whiteness of the air. Wisps of steam rise smokily from the bizarre shapes of melting snowbanks. Bjorn stands alone. The lightest of Nordic breezes ruffles the hair at his noble brow. His chin is raised in defiance of unspeakable sorrow he looks heroic, and yet tragic. Leaning into the breeze, yet somehow beaten down by it. Bjorn stands. Alone. **FADE TO GREY**

"Surely a moving, sensitive portrayal of a very human, very symbolic metaphor, evoking a certain abstract-ARRRGGGHH!!!" Thank you, good night.



Friday, February 20. Kalamazoo. A satisfying pile of answered mail has been growing on my desk, much of it in ultra-elegant "Holiday Inn Kalamazoo" envelopes. I can never get any mail answered at home, or when we're in the studio, but some afternoons on the road are perfect for it. I also find that it's the only way I can comfortably communicate with a fan, and it feels good to send off a letter knowing it will bring happiness to the recipient.

I have a long conversation with Ray, our friend and manager, who is in high spirits indeed. The album is doing very well, and the tour is selling out all over. The novelty and meaning of chart numbers, sales figures, ticket sales, and gilded awards has worn away for me, but to a creative businessman like Ray they are the measure of his art. What they do all add up to, is a sense of people appreciating one's work, which I'm sure no-one ever disdained! Well, except maybe embezzlers and assassins. Okay, spies and professional-alright, alright! No more sweeping generalities, I promise!

Two of our truck drivers, Mac and Number 9, have just planted 9's rig right in front of my window, changing my view from white fog, to White Kenworth and trailer. I lean out the window, to profane their ancestors, as they disappear into Whitey's room next door. Via the window!

Kevin is here for the luggage, as we will be driving straight on to Dubuque after the show. I'm feeling a rare twinge of nervousness, and will be glad when this first one is behind us.

It's 3:30, and we're not scheduled to go over until 4:00, but I'm just pacing aimlessly around, so I think I'll wander over now. Maybe the guys from Max Webster have arrived. . .

At 7:00 the doors are opened, and a complete change comes over the building. Music plays on the P.S.; the air is charged with the energy and anticipation of some five or six thousand people. It's more than a crowd, more than a concert; it's a ritual and a celebration. The electricity in the atmosphere is almost tangible.

Max Webster open the show, going on at 8. It's my first hearing of this new line-up, and I am impressed; they played superbly and very powerfully. The audience response is also strong, and they are brought back for an encore. Perhaps they have finally arrived at the right balance of personnel and material to capture the ears of America.

It has long been an inscrutable mystery to us why Max haven't caught on down here, as we are fans as well as friends, but this is a promising new beginning. Chicago will be the real test for them, as for any opening band. They can be a very unforgiving audience.

Around 9:00, I slip unnoticed between the cases back of the stage, and up under the "tent" which covers my drums before the show. It's nice to get settled in a bit early, and avoid the panic of running on when the house lights go down.

The lights are down, the intro tape starts, and there is an incredible roar from the audience. Larry and Dave pull the cloth back, as Alex and Geddy come running on, plugging in their guitars as they move over to centre stage, standing in front of me to count in the beginning of "2112". We share a "here goes!" look, 2-3-4- and we're away!



The pace of this set is furious; it's a good thing I'm in good shape this year! We're about five songs into it, and I'm soaking, before I even have a second to grab a quick gulp of "Canada Dry", let alone wiping my dripping face and hands with a towel. I can feel that we are playing well, and the audience roars it's warm approval. Alex has a colourful new wardrobe in the best of bad taste, and is dancing magnificently.

Perception becomes snail-like when I'm playing; peeking out for a moment when the going is smooth, then instantly retreating back inside to concentrate in difficult areas. Images are fragmentary and diverse; a face, the roof, a wierd hat, stage right crew, Geddy's tapping foot, someone singing along, Alex dancing, et cetera. These are all punctuated by the oblivious, inner space of drums, cymbals, hands, feet, tempo; and is this drumstick going to break in the middle of this roll? (They always do.)

Back in the dressing room there's a beautiful array of seafood; oysters, crabmeat, and smoked salmon. It looks delicious, but I never develop an appetite until an hour or two after the show, when there will only be sandwiches and peanuts on the bus. More fool me!

There is nothing so fine as champagne after a show, and tonight we really have something to celebrate. The first show is behind us, and it went very well. Broon says it sounded great, like we had been out for a week. I feel utterly drained, too tired to get excited, but satisfied.



A few minutes spent signing autographs, and I am on the bus. This is one of my favourite parts of a working day. It's like coming home, the day's work done. Sit back, relax, maybe put some music on. Sometimes company drops over from the crew bus, or one of the drivers will stop by. I don't know how bands that fly everywhere can stand it.

When everybody else is aboard, we set off for Dubuque, Iowa, a distance of about 300 miles; or six hours.

It takes a long time to wind down after a show. Going to sleep immediately would be both difficult and very boring, so there is always some diversion on the bus. There are movies on video, video games, music, conversation, and-uh-; did I say movies already?

I rode up front with our driver, Whitey, for awhile, talking about sailing, and watching the fog-shrouded highway pass under us. By around 3:00 I am tired enough to sleep, and make my way back down the bus to my bunk.

We arrive at 8:00, and I find myself standing at the T.V. in my hotel room, writing in this notebook, while I wait for the luggage. Strange person.

The view outside is so incredibly typical, that it bears recounting: parking lot, small plaza, secondary highway, large plaza, Chevrolet dealership, billboards, car wash, motel, and a church spire rising in the distance. The number of times in six years on the road that I have looked out the window at this view is truly frightening! This could be anywhere from New Jersey to California. Only the license plates and the vegetation change.

Never mind this, I'm going back to sleep!

Saturday, February 21, Dubuque, Iowa. I awake at 1:30, dreading to pick up the phone, and the daily challenge of breakfast. To my pleasant surprise, with only a minor skirmish, I am able to have an omelette. This could turn out to be a nice day!

Last night Alex and I were talking about sailing around the world which has become one of my "Great Fantasies". (Perhaps I could write to Ricardo Montalban?). What a dream it would be, it is surely one of the few great adventures left on earth. Just imagine it; I'll get a big sailboat, plenty of provisions, take about two years, and I'll- Oh, sure. I'll put it on the list with Concorde pilot, Formula 1 driver, Wimbledon champion, respected author, astronaut, noted architect, fireman-et cetera. Sigh.

It's 3:45, and I'm all packed and ready to go, but it's unusual not to hear from Kevin by now. I feel a sinking sensation, as I suspect the cruel truth. If we passed through a time zone last night, it just

could be only 2:45. No!

I know that it's true, even as I hope it isn't. What to do?

This is the type of situation where a book can be a saviour. Waiting time is not at all the same as free time, and there are limited ways of filling it. Especially when the suitcases are all packed!

Reading is perhaps even more flexible than thinking in some cases, such as in the middle of a roomful of people, to whom you do not wish to speak. An open book has the power of a crucifix against vampires. (Unfortunately, it seems to have no effect on werewolves, who are without shame, and would interrupt anything!)

Amid the backstage circus of hangers-on, record and radio "personalities," favour-seekers, and people just looking for someone to talk about themselves to; I need a barrier and an escape, and books do provide them.

Just spoke to Geddy on the phone. Yes folks, there is a time change. Sigh. Pick up the book. . .

Alex has been out flying with the promoter's assistant, so we don't see him until sound check. He's trying to build up the hours on his newly-acquired pilot's license.

It's another arena; all structural steel and concrete blocks. Everybody looks tired today, it's hard to get back into the timetable of the road; you have to move the peak of your day to about midnight. On our bus, I was the only virtuous bore to get any sleep, the others were playing video games until our arrival at 8:00. Hard core road life.

The longest day of all is that of the lighting crew. Along with the stage manager and rigger, they are the first to arrive at 8 or 9 in the morning, and don't get away until 2 or 3 in the morning. Hence their boastful T-shirts: "First to come, last to pull out!" Like I said, hard core.

Despite the dismal acoustics, Max sound really good from the side of the stage. This certainly the hottest version of the band; excellent new bass player, and Steve's slide guitar work is really tasty. "Stixy" is leaning more forward in his drumming, more authority and aggression are the cause and/or effect. Great stuff!

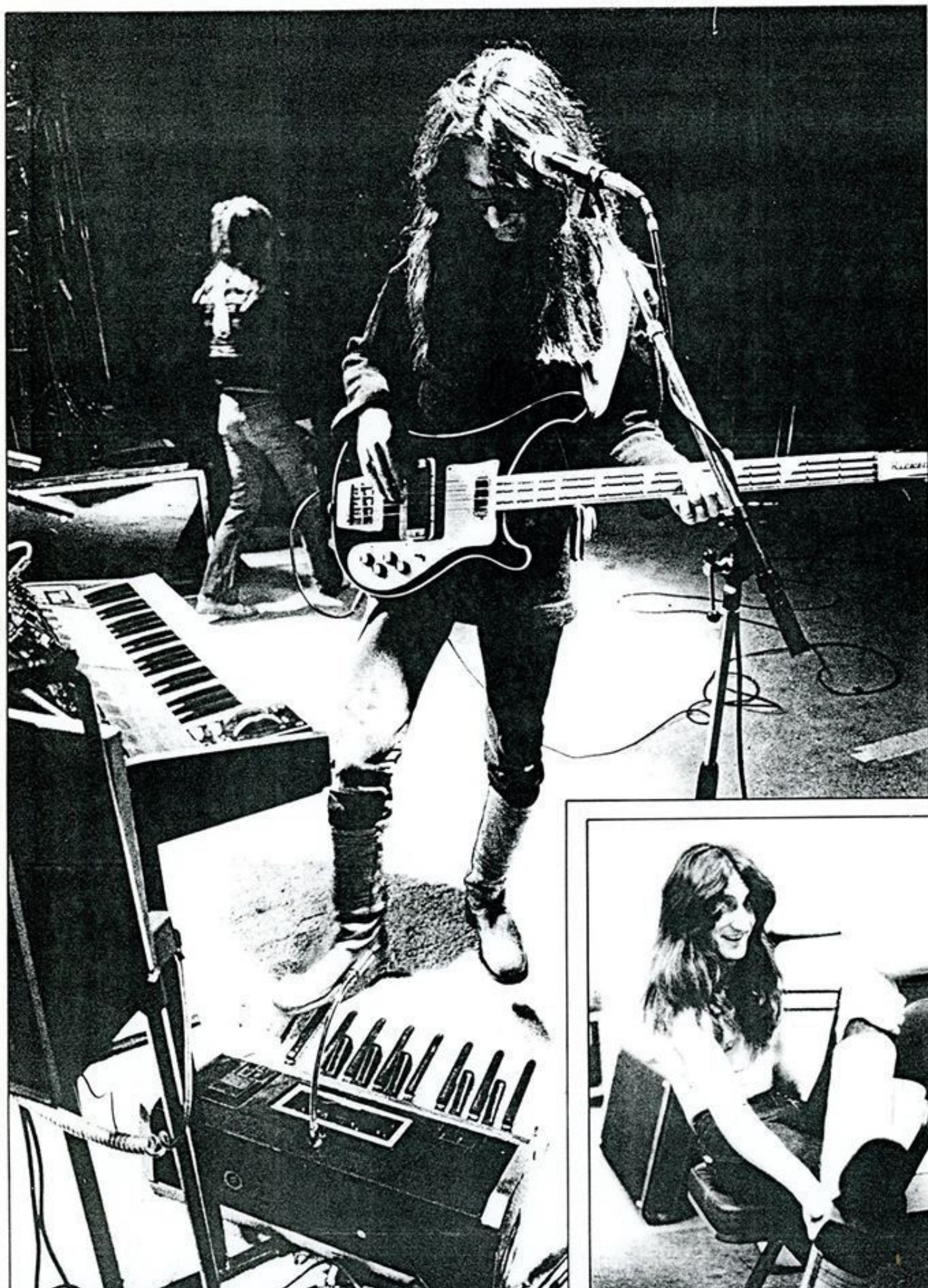
Our own show goes much more smoothly tonight, and I enjoy myself tremendously. Unfortunately, Alex suffered string trouble, breaking three in the course of the show, and Geddy also has a few spots of trouble, but generally it's a good one. The audience is enthusiastic and enjoyable; excepting a few firecracker morons.

I particularly can't help noticing two young guys, obviously aspiring musicians, who respond with such joy and satisfaction to each change we play, that it's inspiring. This is in direct contrast to the "phantom guitar" type of exhibitionist, as they seldom pay any attention to what we're doing!

After the show, I have an interview with a journalist from Japan. The conversation is conducted back and forth through an interpreter, which is a novel experience for me. The questions are thoughtful and well-researched, and I have a fine time shooting off my mouth. Often after a show, the combination of relaxation, and the mental high following extreme concentration, allows the thoughts to flow in a lucid and articulate manner. The interview goes well, although it takes much longer than usual as everything is said twice!

Back on the bus, we're driving to Davenport tonight, a relatively short drive. The video "golf" game is the latest rage, and Howard, Kevin, Geddy and Broon are engrossed in that.

Alex and I listen to some music, and drift in and out of conversation. Sitting back, tired and relaxed, I recognize that at this moment I am truly content. Life is actually good! These moments are rare for any of us, and I savour it.





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6. What sort of door prizes would you want to win? _____