

RUSH

BACKSTAGE CLUB

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LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

THRICE TOLD TALES yet another Rush history

by Neil Peart

Well let me see. How can I possibly manage to write another history of Rush that's at all different from those many others by so many writers (including myself) who have told it before?

Couldn't I think up some new and imaginative way of presenting those same old facts? Couldn't I bring a fresh and lively perspective to that tired old story?

Ah...., no?

Alright, alright. Here we go.

(Ahem) It all began for the three of us in the summer of 1974. Or; it all began in the early fifties when we were born. Or; it all began in the late sixties when we began to get interested in music and playing in bands.

Let's start there, shall we?

(A phone rings in a house in the suburbs of North Toronto).

"Hello?"

"Hello, can I speak to Geddy please?"

"Just a minute"...

"Hello?"

"Hi, Geddy, it's Alex here!"

"Oh, hi man, how's it going?"

"Great, just great! Listen, ah, my band has a gig tonight at the coffee house, and I was wondering, like, if we could borrow your amp?"

"Oh. Well, okay, I guess so. But be careful of it, okay?"

"Oh, yeah! Of course! Could we pick it up at about six-thirty?"

"Sure. I'm not going anywhere."

"Great, thanks a lot, eh! That's really nice of you."

"Yeah, sure. See ya."

"Okay, 'bye."

(The same phone a few weeks later.)

"Hello?"

"Hello, can I speak to Geddy please?"

"Just a minute"....

"Hello?"

"Hi Geddy, it's Alex here."

"Oh, hi man. How's it going?"

"Great, just great. Listen, ah, my band has a gig at the coffee house tonight, and I was wondering, like, if you could come and play bass?"

"Sure, I'm not going anywhere."

"Great! Pick you up about six-thirty?"

"Yeah, okay. See you then."

"Great! 'Bye!"

So that's how the two of *them* got together. Now, I was just reading over a biography of the band that I did for our "A Farewell to Kings" concert program, and it covers all of this early history pretty well. Rather than try and improve on that, I think I'll just be lazy and quote a long passage from it. (Cheap, huh?)

THE PAST-Rush came to be in a basement in suburban North Toronto during the first wave of progressive hard rock in the late sixties. This was the era of the Who, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Jeff Beck, Led Zeppelin, et cetera, and was the first truly free and creative period of popular music. This was to have a profound effect later on. The origin of the name is now uncertain, but it would seem to express a basic ingredient of the band even then; energy.

It was Alex, Geddy and the original drummer John Rutsey, sometimes augmented by a temporary fourth on rhythm guitar or keyboards, but fundamentally always a trio. They would work in the endless succession of drop-in centres, parties, dances, high schools, hockey arenas, and finally bars, bars, and more bars, which can prove so frustrating to a young band in Canada, (usually spelling disaster in the form of a downward spiral towards security and a "real job".)

(A brief aside) During this period yours truly was engaged in exactly the same endless succession with a variety of small-time bands around the Niagara Peninsula. I eventually took off to live in England for a year and a half when I was eighteen, playing in more small-time bands, and doing a bit of unglamorous session work. It was just as difficult there to get anywhere as it had been at home, so I returned the proverbial sadder-and-wiser man, only to find success unlooked-for in some band I'd never heard of from Toronto- but that's another story!

(Back to the story) In early 1974, the first album, aptly and simply entitled "Rush", was recorded — financed and independently released on Moon Records by the band's long-time manager Ray Daniels and his partner

Vic Wilson. This had to be done because no record company in Canada would take them for free — No Commercial Potential, you see!

The sessions were late at night, often after gigs, and the extreme limitations of Time and Money were ex-cruciating. The material was raw and immature, some of it in the band's repertoire for several years, and the production was a patch-up job, rescued at the last minute by the saving grace of Terry Brown (a.k.a. Broon), who remained our co-producer, Objective Ear, and fourth member in the studio right up to our "Signals" album.

Still, a dream had been realized; there was an album!

During that summer of 1974, many important things occurred which were to alter the whole concept of Rush before the year was out. A radio station in Cleveland began playing the album, resulting in the importation and sales of a few boxes of albums.

There was interest.

An American booking agency (ATI) began discussing the possibility of some American dates for the band, thereby triggering the interest of Mercury Records, who signed them to a lucrative long-term contract.

There was an international release.

Next, Mercury and ATI got together and came up with a promotional tour which would cover much of the United States, and allow the band to play before many thousands of people.

There was an American tour.

Then suddenly, after a long period of fragile health and musical frustration, John announced that he was going to leave the band — only weeks before the album was to be released, and the tour to commence.

There was no drummer.

It is at this point in the story that I cease to speak in the third person, and "they" becomes "we". I joined the band on Geddy's twenty-first birthday, June 29, 1974, with a scant two weeks remaining in which to assemble enough material to hit the road. Somehow we managed it, and played our very first show together in front of some 18,000 people, opening for Uriah Heep at the Pittsburgh Civic Center.

This was the first night of an endless tour, the first of many to be spent on the concert stages of America and Canada, refining and developing our skill, and learning to live with a permanently packed suitcase, and a very brief, very occasional sojourn at home.

During this time we were putting together much of the material which would form our first album together, pooling our creative resources, and exploring each other's attitudes and personalities.

Somehow I found myself writing many of the lyrics (probably because neither Alex nor Geddy were very interested in doing it!), and it seemed to me that it would be fun.

We were getting to know each other better, and the personal chemistry and unity of purpose began to develop, which has sustained and inspired us to this day.

In January of 1975, we went into Toronto Sound to record the album "Fly By Night". We set many standards and directions for ourselves with this album, venturing into a broad thematic and dynamic range, concentrating on composition, musicianship, and more interesting arrangements. (Ambitious, what?)

The album was very well received, earning us a gold record in Canada, very respectable sales in the U.S., as well as the "Juno" award for the most promising new

group in Canada. These things helped to reinforce our belief in what we were trying to accomplish, and we became dedicated to achieving success without compromising our music, for we felt that it would be worthless on any other terms.

Suddenly people began to take us seriously, or at least to recognize our existence — (except for the radio programmers and the press, for if they had heard of us they were keeping it a closely-guarded secret!). We were still touring intensely, as it was the only means of being heard. (Also, of course, we enjoyed it!) There are only two ways open to survival for a band in the music business. One is a quick capitalization on a manufactured or accidental "hit", the other is a slow steady climb accomplished by long hard touring.

So we toured, And toured.

In July of that year, we again entered the familiar other-world of Toronto Sound, to record our third album, to be entitled "Caress of Steel". We went in serene and confident, and emerged with an album that we were tremendously proud of as a major step in our development. We felt that it featured a lot of dynamic variety and at least a bit of true originality. This was also the first album to display the artistic gifts of Hugh Syme, who has since been responsible for all of our covers.

Unfortunately, many things conspired against us, and the album sold poorly. The ensuing tour was half-jokingly referred to as the "Down-the-Tubes Tour", and it was a pretty depressing string of small towns and small clubs, and a lot of unwelcome pressure from certain quarters about making our music more accessible and more "saleable". It was uncertain for a time whether we would fight or fall, but finally we got mad!

We came back, with a vengeance, with "2112", certainly our most powerful and passionate album yet. We were talking about freedom from tyranny, and we *meant it!* This was the first real blend of our diverse and schizophrenic influences, and it was also our first really successful album.

We felt at the time that we had achieved something that was really our own sound, and hopefully established ourselves as a definite entity. The side-long title piece itself became a featured part of our live shows, as much fun for us as for our audiences, and the trend was all upwards from that point on.

"2112" was again recorded at Toronto Sound, during the cold winter of 1976. At last we had learned how to get our sound across on record, and how to strike the balance between what we could do in the studio, and what we could reproduce on stage.

"All the World's a Stage", our first double live album, was recorded in Toronto's venerable Massey Hall from three memorable shows on June 11, 12, and 13th. It is made up of our complete live show at the time, basically an anthology of the high points from the first four albums. To quote from the liner notes, "This album, to us, signifies the end of the beginning, a milestone to mark the close of chapter one, in the annals of Rush."

Which brings us up to 1976 — only seven more years to go! We may be here for awhile!

This brings us to "A Farewell to Kings", an album which has many "firsts" associated with it. We recorded outside of Toronto for the first time, traveling to Rockfield Studios in the pastoral countryside of Wales.

The mixing was done at Advision Studios in London. After the long hiatus which was made possible by the release of the live album, we were able to introduce many new sounds on this record, with Geddy moving onto keyboards, Alex to a greater variety of guitars, and myself into other areas of percussion "bells and whistles". This gave the album a very open and atmospheric feel, almost like a soundtrack, and took us into a greater instrumental emphasis in our work. This would certainly set the stage for the next series of albums. "Hemispheres" was once again recorded at Rockfield, with the mixing being done at Trident Studios this time, which was an historic studio in the heart of London's lurid Soho district and has since closed down. We went straight into the studio at the end of the ridiculously gruelling "Drive till You Die" tour, with none of the material prepared beforehand, and our minds already drained from a relentless several months of constant touring. The nature of the music was very ambitious and complicated, and the intense effort that it took to write, arrange, and play it perfectly in such a short time was very hard on us, leaving scars that I'm sure will never heal! We were learning the pitfalls of overwork. The hard way.

But we learned our lesson! Oh, we still toured for the next eight months, but we stopped doing ten or fourteen consecutive shows with three hundred mile drives in between them! And we actually took six weeks off during that summer of 1979 before we made our next album "Permanent Waves". And, clever lads that we were getting to be, we set aside a month just to write the album, and even had a chance to play quite a few of the new songs live during a short tour prior to entering the studio. "The Semi-Tour of Some-of-the-Hemispheres"; I've always liked that.

We came back to Canada to record this time, to Le Studio in the beautiful Laurentian Mountains of Quebec. The background, the facilities, and the people combined to create a wonderful working environment, and of course we would return many times to this most productive and agreeable place.

The songs were getting a little more concise for the most part, with "The Spirit of Radio" and "Free Will" giving us new standards of both style and substance. I have a lingering fondness for the two longer tracks, "Jacob's Ladder" and "Natural Science", perhaps because they were the definitive and last statements of their kind, but it was more exciting to see what we could accomplish in a tighter and more aggressive style of song.

Which brings us to 1980, for heaven's sake! Time does fly. In the summer of that year, we began working on the material for "Moving Pictures". We followed the same pattern of the previous year; going up to northern Ontario for a month of writing, then a few warm-up shows and into the studio.

Objectively speaking, I think I am justified in saying that this is probably our best album as a whole. It just seems to hang together really well, and it seems to me that the combination of the songs and the quality of the sound is a near-perfect marriage. (But that's just my opinion!) It is certainly true that songs like "Tom Sawyer", "Red Barchetta" and "YYZ" have become standards in our live show, and it seems as if a whole lot of experiments, ideas, developments, and techniques became consolidated into a unified whole on the record. We must have done something right!

And then, it had been another one, two, three... yup-*four* studio albums, and a good time to record another live one. Once again, "Exit...Stage Left" would represent what we felt to be the high-water marks of the previous studio albums, and again serves as an effective milestone to mark and measure our growth. This time the songs were recorded in different halls all over Canada and the U.K., over a period of about two years, and this gave us a wide variety of performances and different sounding halls to choose from.

During the mixing of the live stuff, there was really not a lot for the three of us to do, other than to be there and offer our opinions when necessary, so we began to spend our time working on some new songs. We came up with "Subdivisions" at that time, as well as most of "Digital Man", and it was nice to be writing songs just for the fun of it, with no pressure whatever.

The following March of 1982 found us sequestered in the frozen (very frozen!) North. Once again, it was our month of "Writing, Research and Development", and we would be working on some more material for our "Signals" album. Like "Caress of Steel" and "Hemispheres" before it, "Signals" would be a very experimental, transitional, and somewhat strange sort of record. Along with those records which consolidated a style, like "2112" or "Moving Pictures", it is also necessary for us to explore different areas, try out new styles, and generally enjoy ourselves musically. (At our fans' expense, you may cynically say, but ultimately to their benefit too, I am sure.)

It is interesting to wonder where those experiments will lead us. Some of them we will respond to, and develop further, while others will be left behind and forgotten (at least by us!)

As I write this, we are on the eve of beginning our traditional month of writing, working on material for an album which should be released early in 1984, (an ominous thought). At this point we know *nothing whatever* about that album. No title, no well-defined direction, no idea of style, or substance — just a vague eagerness to get to work, and a determination to make *this* the really great record we keep trying to make.

I'm sure we'll go on trying.

So what else?

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