

RUSH

Hold Your Fire

(PolyGram)

Rush '87 bears little resemblance to the sci-fi hard rock outfit of yesteryear, having continued to evolve into the light, airy prog-pop band they are today. The musicianship is still top-notch, especially Geddy Lee's spidery basswork (and his nasal voice is less shrill) and Alex Lifeson's chiming guitar. A little too slick and aimless for me, but *Hold Your Fire* will please their devoted fan base. Good cuts include "Turn The Page," "Force Ten," and the Oriental-flavored "Tai Shan."

—Greg Fasolino

Geddy Lee

The paradox of Rush

BY BOB MACK & LISA LAMPUGNALE

In concert, Rush vocalist Geddy Lee is a bit intimidating. Singing in an eerily androgynous, netherworldly style, he complements the band's complex, larger-than-life arrangements. The resulting tumult can frighten the uninitiated.

But, in person, kicking back in Manhattan's Carlyle Hotel, Geddy's voice is nearly a whisper. He is as softspoken as he is outspoken. The same kind of contrast applies to his physical appearance. Concert and promo photos always have portrayed him as a severe visage, with a lantern jaw and prominent nose. Face to face, however, the sharp angles are smoothed, and his most talked-about feature is actually in proper proportion to the rest of his mug.

After speaking to Geddy for more than an hour about the band and their new album, *Hold Your Fire*, we began to realize that these seemingly contradictory aspects of his personality and appearance are really just two sides of the same coin. Geddy Lee is truly the Teddy Roosevelt of rock — he may speak softly, but he carries an awfully big stick.

In fact, paradoxes surround and sustain Rush. The band's turf is that never-never land that lies between extremes. As a

result, Lee, even at his most opinionated, is careful to provide qualifiers to put his statements in context. For example, when he laments the current state of rock and says that "there's a particular blandness that really bothers me," he's quick to add that "I don't want to sit here and say, 'nobody's doing anything good by me.' I don't want to sound like Robert Smith [the well-known ultra-depressing lead singer of the Cure]."

"Even a few years ago, bands, like Frankie Goes to Hollywood at least sounded exciting. There was some spark and some creative flame going on there," Lee says. But, nowadays, Rush's frontman thinks few bands hold their fire, although he does look forward to new LPs from Talk Talk, the Cure and The The. For the most part, however, Geddy "gets more out of listening to a Metallica record than I do out of half the things that are going on." Not surprisingly, the singer is listening to a lot of classical music at the moment, and Vladimir Horowitz is his new hero.

This disappointment with his peers doesn't prevent him from being enthusiastic about his own band's new material. He thinks *Hold Your Fire* is the most solid Rush album

since 1981's *Moving Pictures*. Musically, the group has more restraint than usual and they play with new textures such as the Chinese motif on "Tai Shan." Lee's vocals are startling in their simplicity and catchiness, especially on the choruses in "Lock and Key" and "Turn the Page."

Most importantly, Lee's efforts to make extremism accessible to the masses are being echoed by Rush drummer and lyricist Neil Peart. In the past, Peart's lyrics were often exclusively rational accounts of the external world, but Lee points out that "now I think he's more fascinated with what makes us tick and what makes us relate to each other." Peart's shift in focus from the external to internal world is reflected in the LP's recurring theme — the importance of instinct — as exemplified in *Hold Your Fire*'s strongest track, "Open Secrets": "I find no absolutism/ In my rational point of view/ Maybe some things are instinctive/ But there's one thing you could do/ You could try to understand me/ I could try to understand you."

This search for a golden mean between the objective and the subjective is increasing the already-maniac tension levels of Rush's music. When *Rolling Stone* reviewed their last album, 1985's *Power Windows*, the magazine described it favorably as "the missing link between the Sex Pistols and Yes." *Hold Your Fire* similarly starts off with the scorching "Force Ten," which features raucous verses that work up to a feverish pitch and suddenly break for orchestral-type reggae choruses. Throughout the album, Rush bridges the gap between the headiness of progressive rock and the spontaneity of good pop music. In "Second Nature," for example, there's an instrumental break that Geddy says was inspired by the American classical composer Aaron

Copland. In the same song, there's a singalong chorus Paul McCartney might envy.

Trying to balance progressive and pop elements in one song can get complicated, however. Sometimes one wins out over the other. For Rush, this is made more difficult because, as Geddy says, "most people who like progressive music don't like pop music and vice versa." Most Rush fans are also aspiring musicians — "Neil Peart clones" Geddy calls some of them. They're the army of air drummers and strummers that "know the lyrics better than I do!" he laughs. More often than not, these fans are interested in all the fancy riffing that makes Rush arguably the most technically accomplished band in all of rock.

When it's all said and done, however, Geddy is more interested in making memorable pop melodies. Sure, he's delighted that Pink Floyd, Yes and Jethro Tull all have new albums out, and he'd probably opt for pure progressive over pure pop any day. But the most important thing to him is writing a tune that someone will want to whistle.

This may even mean borrowing from such anti-Rush traditions as country and western music. During the recording of *Hold Your Fire*, the band became fans of the old Chuck Connors series, "The Rifleman." Lee, Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson wore cowboy hats in the studio, said things like "I reckon," and even let some spaghetti western guitar sneak into "Time Stand Still."

Country and western music? Doesn't that constitute heresy for hardcore Rush fanatics? Maybe so, but Geddy Lee doesn't mind. "Maybe that's why I hear a Patsy Cline song and go, 'Woa, that's a great song,' even though five years ago, if I heard myself saying that, I'd probably wash my mouth out with soap!" □

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