BLUE BROTHERS
Masters Of Reality: Their Botanic Majesties Request...
Rush
Zed Yago
Skid Row
Dark Angel
After Hours
Holly Knight
... a notepad, some crayons, and a roll of sticky-backed plastic: to construct your very own RUSH feature. A decent tape recorder wouldn't go amiss either as NEIL JEFFRIES found out when he tried to interview the band's drummer NEIL PEART about the band's latest release, 'A Show Of Hands', on LP, cassette, CD, video, video-disc, old cotton-reels, empty washing-up liquid bottles, etc etc.

"I hate rapid communications and tend to frown on telephone and faxes, but the point about that stuff is that it's for real." - Neil Peart talking to Chris Wane, Kerrang! 128.

"Hiss-crackle-hiss-diss-buzz-hiss-crackle" - Neil Peart talking back from my Maxell 620 via a transatlantic telephone line for Kerrang! 124.

THE IRONY is not lost on me. For years now, ever since I returned.

KONTINUEZ OVER
I have harboured an almost insatiable interest in the thoughts of Chairman Peart. In his lyrics and his interviews he has always been to me an oasis in the desert of Great Thinkers In Rock.

I don’t get me wrong, I also love to read interviews with Ozzy Osbourne or Slash, and I’ll play Motorheads’ No Sleep At All as often as I’ll put on Rush’s new ‘A Show Of Hands’ double-album – but I’ve always wanted to talk to Neil Peart, to hear his own words before they reached the printed page or lyric sheet, to capture a little of that rare magic.

Well I just did. But the world of rapid communications and the microcosm of a telephone bug conspired to make the recorded evidence a lot less real than the conversation itself. Life’s a bitch and I’ve got the tape to prove it.

Neil Peart, on the other hand, is a gentleman of the highest order, and one who next time, I will interview face-to-face. He had actually asked his record company to fly in European journalists to speak to him in Toronto but Phonogram had said no.

Their refusal probably stemmed from the fact that Rush’s deal with the company has just expired and the band are moving on, but a little more on that later.

Faced with this stonewalling, Neil had done his best to ensure an uninterrupted phone by requesting that Phonogram line up one of their US correspondents; seems he didn’t trust transatlantic phone lines. (No problem there this time, Neil, but I will be selling my shares in the firm that made the phone-bug.)

So it was that at nine o’clock one evening last week he placed a call to Don Kaye. “Hello there, is that Don Kaye?”

“Yeah it is, who’s calling?”

“It’s Neil Peart.”

“Er... hi Neil, what can I do for you?”

Neil laughed at the memory as he related the episode to me. Don had volunteered for a bit of left-field work as a contrast to all things Rush but nobody from the US side of Rush’s (former) record company had contacted him to give him time to prepare for the call.

Much earlier, Howard Johnson had requested the same interview and – given assurances from a nameless (and now jobless?) Phonogram US person that she would “save her reputation” on the interview happening or not time our Next Issue Trailer writer brazenly lined it up for the cover of issue 223...

Neil “Oh really? I didn’t know about that, nobody said anything to me. I was up in my log cabin in the mountains writing some lyrics for the next album and I don’t answer the phone while I’m up there working.”

You’d thank someone at his record company would have known that, wouldn’t you? In the end, I eagerly stepped into the breach, given just six hours notice by Paul, a rapidly greying Phonogram UK press officer who had been speaking to me almost daily for the past three weeks complaining that he still hadn’t heard anything from ‘over there’.

You could say that this whole story was star-crossed and fated from the off... you could do, but that would go against the tenets of Neil’s lyrics to Free Will! Ha! I wish I mentioned that in the time. Hee-hee-hee.

So anyway, what follows is less than I would have hoped, less than you deserve, and less than Neil warrants. But a deadline is a deadline and given what had happened to date, rescheduling could have delayed this until the next Rush album...

‘Big money make a million dreams: Big money spin big deals: Big money make a mighty head: Big money spin big wheels!’ (‘Big Money’ from ‘Power Windows’ and a A Show Of Hands.)

I began by asking how it would feel to leave Phonogram after 14 albums with them (if you counted the ‘Archived’ re-package of the first three). Wouldn’t it be a bit of a wrench after all this time? “Yes it would, but we like to be courageous and adventurous, we like a challenge.”

He doesn’t know anything about any pending future deals, dismissing the question with polite disinterest. “I don’t expect our manager to write lyrics and he doesn’t expect me to get involved in the business side of things. It works best that way, all the band feels the same.”

One of the benefits that the band are engaged in, however, is the hunt for a new co-producer. Peter Collins having decided not to work with the band again.

Neil: “It was a difficult decision for him, but he has decided he doesn’t want to spend six months working on another Rush album and will...”
They needn't have worried. Rush are extremely pleased with the video — filmed entirely in Birmingham — and eight of the 14 tracks on the album were recorded at the Midlands arena. A producing visit... Neil considers this very fortunate.

"We set ourselves high standards that a perfect show is impossible. We operate amidst chaos on stage, trying to keep everything running smoothly. The presence of these extra microphones recording our performance means we normally just freeze up when the tapes start to roll. We end up playing for the tape and not for the audience.

"But at Birmingham, the film crew forced us to ignore the microphones and play to the audience as we should do, as we normally do. So we got that certain feeling that the film crew actually gave us more than they took away.

"It was great, we normally only get see, show events, now that, that.'"

Oh to have been in Birmingham then, I'm hard to believe it could've been better than the way... Rush, you know. And as I singular to Neil, I'm surprised to hear that they needed so many tapes; did they vary so much?

"At the time I see Rush I'm always startled by the apparent perfection of their performances... "Apparent" is the key word there, I'm afraid. Nevertheless, it still sounds almost too good to be true, so I ask, is it any of it on tape?

"All musical parts are produced by a stage, stage, stage, stage. But sound effects, in the manner of say Pink Floyd, we feel quite happy with in pre-recorded fashion — things like the introduction to 2112 and so forth, but we would never use offstage keyboard players!

"Some music is produced by sequencers... "(Black boxes' connected to synths etc) can pre-recorded keyboard notes be programmed for pitch, tempo and tone that are operated by the touch of a button. Normally used for simple, or repetitive backing tracks but actually performed by the band).... and that is treading a very fine line ethically. It's a tough moral issue but we consider it to be just as skilful, it requires the same degree of concentration and puts us under equal pressure to deliver the music and ignore all other considerations. Hence that verse in 'Prime Mover': 'Alternating current/Force a show of hands/Rational responses/Force a change of plans... any thing can happen.'"

"It's the test of ultimate Will/Heartbreak climb uphill/Got to pick up the pace if you want to stage it alone.'" (Marathon from 'Power Windows' and 'A Show Of Hands').

PR toward the primitive, gaining a thrill from simply being the first white face to be seen by many he has visited.

Cycling itself, "is perfect for me. It provides all those things I enjoy most about life: solitude, privacy and the opportunity to think, a constant rhythm and the chance to travel as an anonymous observer."

"Travel these days is his biggest inspiration but it comes to lyric writing. But he still reads much and often; to help him with his craft, to keep him stimulated.

I have been very much influenced by 20th century American prose. My lyrics used to be very profligate and imagery but I have learned to strip them down now. I think much more about the structure, and about how they will sound when sung by someone else. I try to take great care about the placement of vowels and consonants..."

"To end he is "dabbling" in the classical poetic style."

"Rush's Rushes Elliot, I find he has a very lyrical style and the power of his refrains really relates to rock."

"I very often don't understand his words yet he can use the passion and emotion."

"He also says he regularly disciplines himself to read Shakespeare although tends not to be too scrutinizing a theatre as much."

"The spectacle, I can appreciate but, as I think John Updike once said, it is hard for me. Believe in the lines, delivered on stage because I know the actors have already delivered them so many times."

On the printed page, although they may not have been written, at least represent the author's single and definitive performance."

"His words trail off. Seizing on the opening, I tumble around for a parallel between what he has just said about 'Shakerés plays and his own lyrics on record' inner bag and on the concert stage. He laughs."

"Everything on stage becomes consumed by the whole. But words act as a touchstone, a point of reference for those in the audience. Not on stage, not in the audience, but there you can sing along."

"Whereas on record, if you choose, they can be a focal point... A single definitive performance?"

"Yes," he laughs. "I think we did it, we managed to contrive your smile! A bit forced, perhaps, but managed it." 45 minutes had never passed so quickly on a telephone, nor passed so irrevocably into an unattainable has on a cassette...

"If anyone else was bugging that conversation, please send me the tape...

But until then... that's a wrap.