Despite releasing sixteen albums in as many years, Canada's most prolific musical export, hard-rock trio Rush are still relatively unknown to the majority of British record buyers. Too often dismissed as another pompous heavy metal band, Rush have quietly assumed the mantle of the most durable and progressive rock act in the world over the past decade. Popular amongst a loyal, almost cult-like following, the trio could easily have been more successful if weren't for a series of near-misses on the singles chart. Hardly the development they would have expected when starting out as a basic hard rock power trio in Toronto...

Formed in 1969 by school-friends Alex Lifeson and John Rutsey on guitar and drums respectively, the trio was completed when Geddy Lee finally secured the vacant spot on bass and vocals after months of lending his amp to the others. The young band tried the familiar local boards of parties, dances, hockey arenas and high schools before the drinking age in Ontario was dropped to 18, allowing them to hit the more lucrative but often disheartening bar-room circuit. Unlike many young Canadian bands who were forced to quit and find 'real' jobs, Rush survived their apprenticeship through sheer determination to record their first LP. The visit to a recording studio, produced a sought after Rush collector's item - a double A-sided single coupling the rock standard "Not Fade Away" with their own composition, "You Can't Fight It". Having failed to attract any record company interest, the band and their management funded the release themselves, issuing the 45 on their own Moon Records' label for home consumption only.

The group now rarely acknowledge this debut release, and since neither track featured on their debut or any subsequent album, it is the most prized possession of any Rush fan. Prices obviously vary but it is unlikely that a Mint condition copy could be picked up for anything less than £100.

By early 1974, the trio were ready to return to the studio. Still woefully short of money, recording experience and record company interest, they were once again forced to finance the sessions themselves. This situation led to a fateful predicament whereby the band would go into the studio overnight to get cheaper rates, often straight from a live performance earlier in the evening. These sessions proved so disappointing that most of the work needed re-recording under the supervision of local producer Terry Brown, who would continue to co-produce their albums for the next eight years.

Most of the material on the debut LP had featured in Rush's live shows for three years or more, and owed more than a hint of debt to their idols Cream and Led Zeppelin. The LP, simply titled "Rush", was released on Moon Records in Canada, and eventually brought them a major deal with Mercury south of the border. With the U.S. release of the LP, the time was right for the band's first American tour.

At this time, Rush's career reached a major turning point. Literally days before the tour was to commence, John Rutsey left the band, citing his consistent ill-health as the main reason. He is now a body-building

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The impeccably groomed Geddy Lee (left), together with drummer Neal Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson. The Canadian trio have been somewhat quieter in recent years, although they continue to attract a large, committed following to their unique brand of rock.

The album was welcomed by critics and fans alike, and became the band's first ever gold record in the States. The following tour featured a healthy proportion of sell-out dates, including a triumphant home-coming three-night stand at Toronto's Massey Hall. The shows were recorded and released as a double live LP, "All The World's A Stage", in September 1976. Initial Canadian copies featured a triple fold-out sleeve, and now fetches upwards of £15 in Mint condition.

At around this time, British rock fans were becoming increasingly aware of Rush, with import copies of the last two LPs notching up regular sales. This situation led to their British release and eventually a brief tour, which was a huge success. While in the U.K., the trio discovered Rockfield Studios in the picturesque countryside of Wales — the perfect setting to record their next album. Almost 16 months after "2112", the band came up with "A Farewell To Kings", introducing keyboards for the first time and including more lengthy epics in "Xanadu" and another sci-fi saga, "Cygnus X-1".

The LP was released in September 1977 and promoted with a North American tour followed by a virtual sell-out 14-date British trek in February 1978. To coincide, "Closer To The Heart" was issued as the band's first U.K. single. Available in both 7" and 12" formats, Mercury saw the release as a useful promotional device and added a selection of old tracks to the B-sides. The 12" also came in a picture sleeve featuring a brief biography of the band members. The single sold respectably well in England, dipped by punk fever, reaching No. 36 in the charts, and the band's live shows were the highlight of many a rocker's year.

Rush's victorious second visit to U.K. shores was not without controversy. A now infamous interview in "NME" in March 1978 branded the trio neo-Nazi fascists. Concentrating purely on Pearl's brief fascination with right-wing author Ayn Rand, whose work inspired "2112", the article paid no attention to the band's music or live performances. A flood of letters both for and against the group appeared the following week, while the Rush drummer was forced to ponder a hard but valuable lesson about talking to the media.

Despite NME's efforts to the contrary, Rush contrived to stay in the U.K. and Rockfield to record a new LP. "Hemispheres" was released in November, and with only one track under four minutes long, there were unsurprisingly no singles released. In Canada, the LP was available in two limited edition formats: a picture disc and red vinyl version were both released on Anthem Records and have become increasingly rare over the last few years — either would now be worth around £20.

HIGHLIGHTS

While the band were recording the album, Mercury encouraged their emerging following to grab copies of the first three LPs by releasing them as a triple album set under the title "Archives", clumsily packaged in a double LP sleeve. Meanwhile, their Dutch counterparts released a compilation of the band's highlights to date under the title "Rush Through Time". Initially available in picture disc, this is a popular collector's item, carrying a value of about £30. The LP was reissued in 1981 (not in picture disc), with so many copies readily available in the U.K. that it could almost be classified as a legitimate British release.

After the now obligatory U.K. tour in mid-1979, the band opted to record their next LP in Canada, at Le Studio in Montreal. "Permanent Waves" was released on the first day of the new decade, and marked a dramatic change in the band's style. Gone were the lengthy sci-fi/fantasy stories, replaced by more concise tunes with contemporary lyrics — Rush had moved into the real world. They walked straight into controversy with the album's sleeve design, however, with the Chicago Tribunes banning them from using their erroneous front-page splash "Dewey Defeats Truman" from the 1948 presidential election, while Coca-Cola also objected to their logo appearing in the background. Both were removed, but some copies featuring the original artwork did apparently filter through and are obviously much sought-after.

Despite the cover problems, "Permanent Waves" stormed into the chart on both sides of the Atlantic, becoming the trio's most successful LP to date. The opening track, "Spirit Of Radio", also proved a popular single release, giving the band their first real British hit, peaking at No. 13 in February 1980. Since the band had not made a video, Rush fans were faced with the indignity of a "Top Of The Pops" airing to the dancing of Pan's People! The single was available in 7" and 12" formats, each featuring previously released album tracks on the flip-side.

To consolidate their record successes, the band's next move was to record a second live LP on their sell-out British tour of June 1980. However, despite recording a number of dates, they felt the creative juices were flowing to such a degree that a new studio LP would be a better idea. During the summer pre-production period, they joined forces with fellow Canadians and friends Max Webster, to record the track "Battlescar". The two bands had long held each other in high esteem, the Websters having just supported Rush in tour, and their unification in Toronto's Phase One studios on July 25th was extraordinary. The two groups recorded the track live, a cracking rocker with thunderous anti-establishment sentiments, finally living up to their nicknames of "Maple Leaf mayhem merchants".

Not exactly prime-time radio listening, the single bombed. It shouldn't be too difficult to pick up, however, either as a single (Mercury ME 59) or on Max Webster's "Universal Juveniles" LP, and is well worth the search. The track might well have featured on Rush's next studio LP, as the original plan had been for them to record it alone. Once the duo idea came into play, it was agreed that
in a shot at the Xmas market. Backed with another live cut from the album, the single 'I only' failed miserably.

After a winter break, the band returned to Montreal in the spring of 1982 to record their ninth studio LP, "Signals", eventually released in September. Owing an even greater debt to their new-found British influences (including the Police, U2 and Weather Report, and a huge success on radio stations throughout America, the record company chose to release "Vital Signs", a choppy ska-style rocker with a nod towards the Police's brand of reggae. Disappointingly, it peaked at No. 41, one place away from the all-important Top 40, and associated radio playlists. This was to prove all too regular an occurrence for Rush single releases. Once again, the "7" and "12" featured a clutch of oldies on their B-sides, while a one-sided promo version of the single became a fairly common sight at record fairs.

ACOUSTIC

Rush recorded a number of shows at the Montreal Forum on the Moving Pictures tour, and during the summer of 1981. Terry Brown sat through them along with the 1980 British tapes to put together the double live LP, "Live In Jakarta", also released in October 1981. The album featured one previously unreleased track, a short acoustic instrumental by Alex called "Brook's Bay", dedicated to the band's producer. Rush toured the UK to promote the live LP with a corresponding single, "Tom Sawyer" finally getting the UK release after a long wait. This was the live version, however, and gave the band their second excursion into the British charts, peaking at No. 25. This time, the "Top Of The Pops" appearance showed a clip from the live video, also recorded in Toronto. The other tracks on the "Tom Sawyer" release were also from the live LP.

The album (again Top 10), single and sell-out tour wrapped up the most successful year in the band's history, reflected in their clean-up of reader's polls throughout the UK and America. In an attempt to cash in, Mercury released the Scottish-recorded and Glaser/Beck-assisted "Closer To The Heart".

Surprisingly, the limited edition 10" vinyl version is far easier to find than the regular 12", which disappeared almost immediately and has become one of the band's rarest UK releases. One of the new album's most popular tracks was "Red Sector A", released as single in the U.S.A. and accompanied by a DJ-only 7" and 12" in red vinyl - soon surfacing at record fairs, and now worth £20.

The ensuing tour omitted Europe in favour of Rush's 1981 Japanese dates, which included a sell-out appearance at the much revered Budoikan in Tokyo. The Oriental shows drew new series of tapes to the band's Japanese single releases, which have gone on to become some of the rarest. There are only four, all in typically extravagant sleeves with lyric sheets, and they are "Closer To The Heart" (1976), "Afterimage" (1984), and "The Big Money" and "Mystic Rhythms" (1985).

IMPORTANT

An important element of the Grace Under Pressure tour was the choice of British rock guitarist Gary Moore and his band as the support act. The two groups got on famously and Moore recommended his producer Peter Collins as a possible contender for the next Rush LP. When the band returned to the studios (in Montserrat, Oxford and London) in the spring of 1985, Collins was with them. After all but producing the last album themselves, the latest studio experience was much easier and more enjoyable, with Collins offering much more input on song arrangement. He even encouraged the band to try out new ideas and over-produce material rather than limit themselves by live reproduction considerations.

This new approach led to the use of a 30-piece string section and 25-voice choir.
featuring on two of the album’s most memorable tracks, “Manhattan Project” and “Marathon”. ‘Power Windows’ was released in November 1985, again reaching the Top 10 in the U.K., and later followed by a picture disc version aimed at the yuletide shopper.

The only single from the LP in Britain, “The Big Money”, again failed to make the grade, despite being made available in four separate formats. Of these, a 7” double-pack featured an extra single coupling “Closer To The Heart” with “Spirit Of Radio”, while the more enjoyable release was a gatefold 7” with window cover. None of these featured new material, but the 12” had a live version of “Red Sector A” taken from the-as-yet unreleased video, “Grace Under Pressure Tour”, recorded in Toronto in September 1984.

SOJOURN

The following tour to promote ‘Power Windows’ was again a big success, but disappointingly failed to reach Europe despite claims to the contrary by Alex Lifeson on a brief U.K. TV appearance on “Whistle Test”. The tour ended in California in May 1986 and Rush began their usual summer sojourn, during which time Neil Peart recorded an incredible percussion instrumental for inclusion as a flexi-disc freeloader with ‘Make the Drummer’. The track, ‘Pieces Of Eight’, is a thoroughly entertaining four-and-a-half minutes of frippery, featuring electronic sampling and acoustic drums. The track (May 187) was originally available in many U.K. retail outlets and should still be obtainable from the same sources. This release is the only time any member of the band has appeared solo, though they have all contributed to tracks by other artists and bands at various times.

The band re-appeared in September to begin work on the new LP, with Peter Collins still keen for them to further develop any modest success they had achieved. This again resulted in the appearance of an orchestra, but it also meant a female voice on the album — “Til Tuesday’s Aimee Mann guesting on the album’s killer track, “Time Stand Still”. With a gentle melody and basic human emotional subject (a plea to ‘freeze this moment, a little longer please’), this looked like a surefire hit as the first single, released with the album “Hold Your Fire” in November 1987. An over-the-top marketing

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RADIO (double-pack, 10/85)

Vertigo RUSH D1212
THE BIG MONEY/TERRITORIES/RED SECTOR A (live) (12, 10/85)

Vertigo RUSH D13
TIME STAND STILL/FORCE TEN (10/87, No. 42)

Vertigo RUSH P1312
TIME STAND STILL/FORCE TEN/THE ENEMY WITHIN (live)/WITCH HUNT
(five) (12, 10/87)

Vertigo RUSH CD14
SPIRIT OF RADIO/O.C.SER OF THE HEART (reissue 3/85)

Vertigo RUSH CD1412
PRIME MOVER/TAI SHAN (3/85, No. 43)

Vertigo RUSH CD14
PRIME MOVER/TAI SHAN/OPEN SECRETS (12, 3/85)

Vertigo RUSH CD14
PRIME MOVER/TAI SHAN/DISTANT EARLY WARNING (live)/NEW
WORLD MAN (live) (12, 3/85, CD, 330)

LPs

Mercury 9100 011
RUSH (2/75)

Mercury 9100 013
FLY BY NIGHT (4/75)

Mercury 9100 018
CARESS OF STEEL (3/75)

Mercury 9100 029
2112 (6/76)

Mercury 5272 015
ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE (live) (3/77)

Mercury 9100 052
FAREWELL TO KINGS (9/77, No. 22)

Mercury 6541 779
ARCHIVES (live) (LP compilation, 1978)

Mercury 9100 071
PERMANENT WAVES (17/76, No. 14)

Mercury 5273 167
MOVING PICTURES (6/78, No. 23)

Mercury 5273 153
EXIT...STAGE LEFT (9/81, No. 5)

Mercury 5273 153
PRIME MOVER/DISTANT EARLY WARNING (live) (white vinyl, 3/84)

Mercury 5273 153
RUSH (reissue, 9/83)

Mercury 5273 153
FLY BY NIGHT (reissue, 9/83)

Mercury 5273 153
CARESS OF STEEL (reissue, 9/83)

Mercury 5273 153
GRACE UNDER PRESSURE (4/84)

Mercury 5273 153
POWER WINDOWS (picture disc, 12/84)

Mercury 5273 153
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