

POWERKICK™

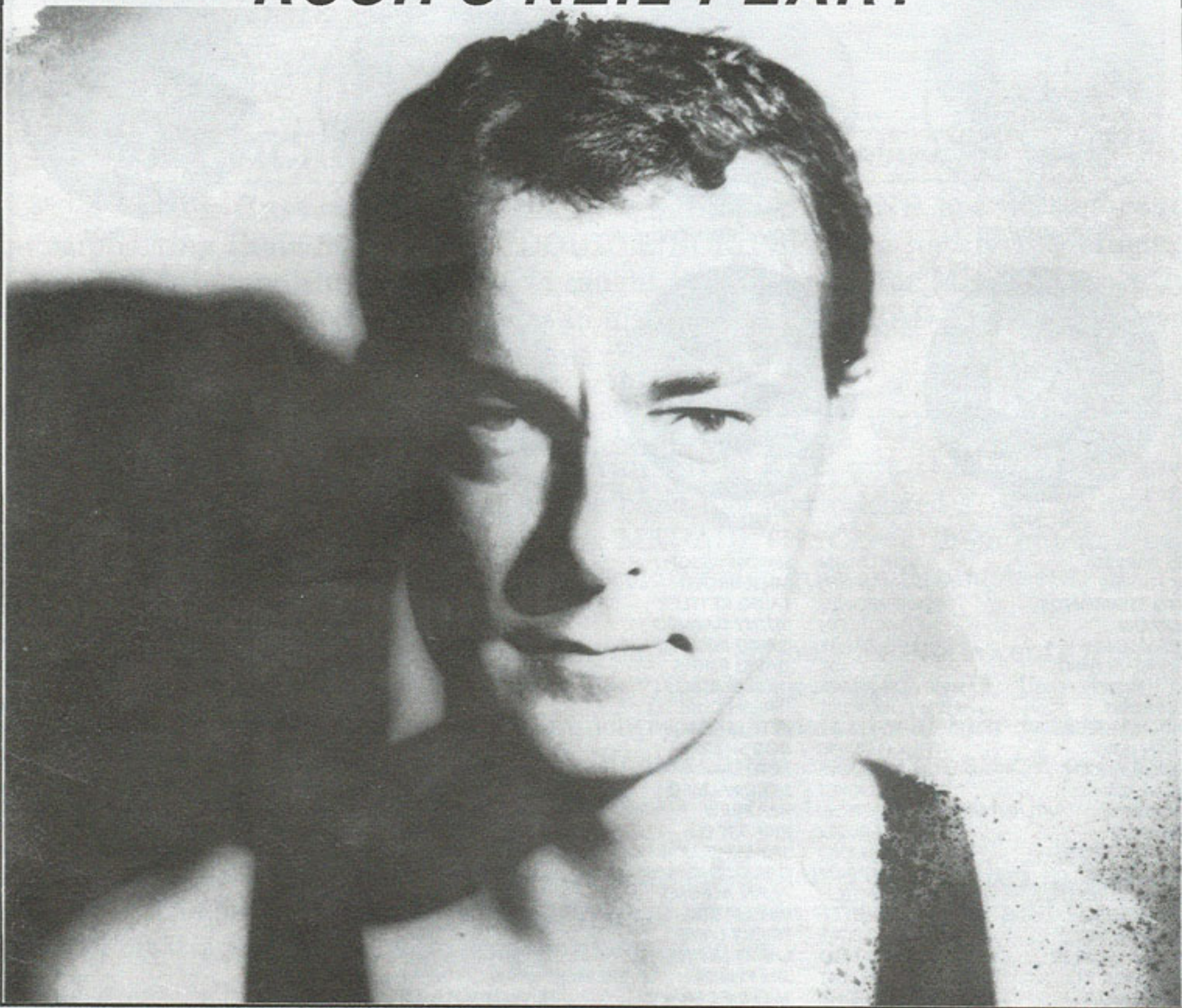
THE ROCK DRUMMER'S QUARTERLY

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 3

FREE

JULY/AUG/SEPT ISSUE '92

RUSH'S NEIL PEART



PLUS EXCLUSIVE FEATURES WITH:

RICK ALLEN and "WILD MICK" BROWN

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATLANTIC RECORDS

RUSH

NEIL PEART

RUSH

Through the 1970's, present, one name is talk to Neil after the the name John the overwhelming wrap up of Rush's Bonham was pretty choice among aspring latest world tour and much synonomous players as their he reflected on the with rock drumming. collective favorite... band, the tour, and But throughout the Neil Peart. We recently how he views the 80's and up till the had the pleasure to music industry today.

POWERKICK: First of all, let me say what a thrill it is to finally get the chance to speak with you...and to say thanks...In '76, at the ripe old age of 13, I bought an album called "2112" that inspired a tremendous love/hate relationship between myself and the drums...(laughs) that continues to this day. I suppose that would be a natural intro for my first question... How does it feel to be respected by fans and musicians alike as the most influential rock player of our time?

Neil Peart : Well...a lot of that is unreal. Its always hard to deal with that because I know from my perspective whats real, but I can't deal with other peoples illusions in any sense. I can't change their minds (laughs), nor can I be expected to bear the weight of their illusions. I think that most of the pressure for me comes from within anyway. I feel a certain sense of responsibility for every show, but again I kind of think its from within. Everynight I go up there I want it to be great and I feel a certain sense of responsibility that yes there is a reputation to keep up for the band. I kind of have those standards about everything I do, that's why I think it's internal and that's why the external stuff doesn't mean that much. When you say stuff like that, it tends to sound ungrateful and it can be difficult for other people to understand so I try to avoid that subject. It's just a complicated thing of keeping goals and challenges in your life. Obviously, other peoples' respect is awfully nice and really important, too. I wouldn't want to demean that by any means, but at the same time you have to set your values... not other people. It's you that has to make yourself feel good, which encompasses doing good work... so no one else can really help you. There is an old fan story that goes, "We made you!" Well, "Where were you when I was practicing?" Nobody makes you and consequently if people appreciate your work it has to

be a two way street. They're getting something out of it, and theoretically so are you.

POWERKICK: With your caliber of musicianship and the bands' continued level of success, I think a lot of fans are surprised at how low-key your profile is... You are often perceived as some sort of quiet, guarded, and mysterious percussion master by a lot of fans. (laughs) How do you view yourself?

NP: It's purely a self defense mechanism. We aren't interested in the glamour side...of course for a lot of musicians their reasons for starting were to become famous and to become known and all that, but for none of us was that the case, you know, it was a separate mission to become good on our instruments. I kind of believed in youthful naivety that everything followed from that. When I started playing drums I thought, "All I have to do is get good." I never thought that I had to have the right haircut or compromise what I knew about music to deliver a hit single or any of that, I didn't know any of those things existed. It seemed so clear to me then. I set my goals and my direction in those innocent and somewhat ignorant days. But at the same time, it served me well. I can't be distracted by other things... and I won't be because none of that means anything but, if it does its usually a negative thing. We never chased it...it wasn't like we were in it and backed away from it. We never asked for it, looked for it, wanted it...(laughs) To us it was just a totally alien part of the music business that had nothing to do with what makes me happy or makes us happy or theoretically what makes a music lover happy, but its part of the factory. It serves a whole industry agenda that has nothing to do with you or me or anybody who really likes music or who likes playing their instrument. We also don't go around trumpeting how we run our business and all of that... we don't.

We leave it to professionals... and to me there is a huge canyon between the two words *music* and *business*. I don't write in the office and I don't expect our manager to come into the recording studio. I don't tell him how to work, and I don't expect him to tell me how to work. He's a professional...and I have every respect for him as a business man...but they are separate worlds.

POWERKICK: Not long ago, you stated in an interview that you were never a confident player until recently. Why do you suppose the confidence didn't exist until then and how did you acquire it?

NP: I think it had to be earned. As with so many good qualities, and even respect, I think they are things to be earned and achieved. I think the confidence came about when I earned it...by becoming consistent from night to night, by being able to handle tempo accurately and even on this tour for instance, I would listen to board tapes and then the next night I'd make tiny adjustments to the tempo of one passage or even one transition and then listen to the next night's tape and hearing the results. Being that much in control of the craft allows confidence to be the result. For me, what made me keep going and striving was a sense of will rather than the confidence of knowing I could do it...it was just the will that I really *wanted* to do it. Having achieved that all, I think the end product is confidence. And that's a big difference because conceit and vanity and all that is unearned confidence. Confidence, as well as pride, has to be earned. It came with the ability to control the instrument that finely and to obtain that consistency night after night...certainly I have some nights better than others but by being able to maintain that has helped me to develop that confidence, but you have to remember it took a little over twenty-five years to earn it. It didn't happen overnight.

POWERKICK: Michael Cartellone (of Damn Yankees) wrote an article for us awhile back and in it he discussed how his band at the time had opened for RUSH and he had an opportunity to watch you night after night. Aside from your precision and chops, he said the most amazing factor was your ability to remain consistent night after night throughout the tour. How do you maintain that show after show?

NP: I think I have to credit a certain amount of experience there that gives you consistency and control and learning things...like when you work with click tracks, sequencers and things for a few years it gives you a heightened sense of time and consequently a heightened accuracy with time. There are so many different factors I think that coalesce over the course of time to bring you to that place. But consistency is important to me...and probably for the reasons I outlined before every show is important to me. I really do judge myself on the last inning pitch. I truly feel that way...and when you really get into the mentality of a tour, that's all that really exists. And if I didn't have a good night the previous night I'm not happy until the next show when I get a chance to redeem myself. And it does feel like redemption to me and then I can walk off stage with an inner feeling of pride and a feeling of triumph. I feel like "Yes! Redeemed!" (laughs) I think taking it that seriously does have its drawbacks, but it does pay off in the long run. That level of application...there's never a beat that doesn't matter to me...there's never a show that doesn't matter to me...there's never a song that doesn't matter to me. I just think all those things add up to it, and working with the people I've worked with gives a sense of well being and happiness that allows you to pursue a larger goal instead of worrying about "What are we going to fight about today or "Do I have to see

those guys again today?". A lot of people get torn apart by that and side tracked by it...and they surrender themselves to the record company and to their manager and then they never feel good about themselves again, you know? I've seen that with a lot with musicians...they've surrendered their values and their own integrity and they may even have success, but it's not going to bring about a true happiness.

POWERKICK: Lately, it appears as if you've developed a...I know you hate this term..."less-is-more" approach in your playing.

NP: You're right... I hate that. (laughs) That term is so often misused by drummers as an excuse for laziness, you know?

of empathy for the music...and more time to spend on it and refine the whole thing.

POWERKICK: I think a beautiful example of that is on the track "Bravado" [Roll The Bones]. It seems so simple, yet so complex at the same time.

NP: I spent days on that drum part. Just over and over again...and that's what I'm saying about time being a luxury in the sense that we finished songwriting and everything early, so I had time to rehearse my drum parts for two weeks after that. I had a demo worked tape that I would play a song over and over until I was burnt out on it, and then I would start on the next one. So I spent a couple of hours everyday on each song for like two weeks. "Bravado" is a great example of that because I



ALEX LIFESON

NEIL PEART

GEDDY LEE

POWERKICK: Well... you know what I mean. You've seemed to tone down the tremendous tom runs and accents that you did maybe ten years ago. Do you agree?

NP: Well...yeah, but again the whole variety of reasons that lead up to that... for one thing, a lot of the things I've done in the past...I've done them...I'm certainly not going to go back. The other thing is a sense of refinement, I think. You just get a better sense of taste...a better sense

orchestrated every section of it so carefully, but I also left a lot of it free. A lot of the key things...a lot of the drum fills for instance... I didn't allow myself to work out. Everytime they came, I just closed my eyes let it happen. I didn't want that to become too big a part of the recording... because you can over rehearse and a part that's played the same way too many times can become stale. I wanted to leave a little bit of it feeling on edge. Over time, I think you learn that you

want both... not just a well worked drum part... and not just spontaniety...but both. I want both... it shoudn't be an either or situation. I want to be both orchestrated and improvised. Its the way I start working on a song. I start with everything more or less. I think of everything that will fit in the song and try it out once and everything that I don't like... gradually I will eliminate. And then sometimes you do end up with less, because ultimately that's what the song requires and thus I'm satisfied by it. "Bravado" for example satifies me to listen to... and to play as well. It's deceptively simple perhaps to someone who is not sitting down and trying to play it. It may sound easy enough but from my point of view on the level of refinement... and the technical level too... it is demanding. To juggle all those different approaches to verses, and keep the tempo smooth, and all those other elements... including sequencers when we play it live, makes it challenging. The consistancy of tempo during something like that becomes critical. So overall, I don't think its a question of "less-is-more"... but "better-is-more". You keep searching for the best way to do it.

POWERKICK: Not only are you admired/respected as a player, but as a lyricist as well ? Is this aspect equally as important in your eyes ?

NP: Well... it takes up much less time out of my life. Its as important while I'm doing it... but what it comes down to is every two years I sit down and write lyrics for two months. I collect pieces of stuff all the time... throughout the tour... and so on, but I just make notes. Later I sit down and try make them into something. For me, if I take the time to write down the thought... that's the inspriation. Compared to drumming, it takes up a smaller part of my life. Like my drumming, it has had a growing process... and I have tried to challenge myself with

it. I write a lot of stuff just as an exercise... whether it gets used or not... it keeps me going. They do relate very closely in the way that I approach them, but drumming is by far the bigger part of my life.

POWERKICK: On the latest tour, you were using a single kick drum in your kit. Was it at all difficult for you to get used to the feel of a double pedal ?

NP: Not really. I guess it depends on your technique. For me, my feet are right off the pedals anyway... so there is no interference with one to the other. I know some people have a problem where the right foot tends to stay down, and consequently when the left foot hits its all sort of dampened. For me that wasn't an issue. In fact it solved a lot of problems for me because I always wanted both bass drums to sound the same and feel the same... and that's almost impossible. So... it was much easier to accomplish that on one... it also freed up a lot of space... and sonically too you get rid of a big reflex cabinet over there. (laughs) Everytime I'd hit the toms above that bass drum, of course it would be resonating. I think it tydies up the sound a bit getting rid of one resonating chamber like that. To me it was just a matter of convenience. Playing wise I find it the same only better.

POWERKICK: I know you enjoy players from a variety of musical styles... reggae, fusion, big band, etc. Have any newer rock drummers impressed you over the last few years ?

NP: Yeah... actually I think rock drumming is excellent right now. I like Mike Bordin of Faith No More. He is a tremendously schooled player... he pays homage to the past and has applied it to playing well. I really like the guy from Soundgarden. I like his playing a lot... he has a lot of room to shine and I enjoy his playing emensely. I

also like the guy from Pearl Jam. He has a great sense of the groove, but also excells at embellishment. I think its been very nice in the early nineties to see a resurgence of real drums. Even these dance bands that use machines are starting to use real drums and drummers in their videos. Its like they woke up and realized a real drummer is much more exciting. I think its partly the legitimacy factor, too. Suddenly, after post-Milli Vanilli (laughs), all things to do with sampling have become *dirty* to the public. In the late 80's, I was really starting to wonder, "What are real drummers doing now ?" (laughs) But fortunately in the 90's, *real* drumming has made a nice return... rock bands are *real* guitar, bass, and drums again. Whether you like them or not, I think Guns 'n Roses do what they like to do, the way they like to do it... and through Metallica and a lot of others, it is so heartening that they are real bands in the sense that I understand them. So during that waiting period of the late 80's... or whatever you want to call it... drummers were ready. They kept the craft moving forward and suddenly in the early 90's when these bands started to become known, the drummers were there. I think there are a lot of really good players out there now... certainly more than I have mentioned. I think overall it is a really positive time for rock drumming

POWERKICK: After nearly twenty years with the band... and seeing the consistant growth and success... what do you feel is left for Geddy , Alex and yourself to accomplish ?

NP: More better stuff ! (laughs) I think we've actually been revitalized in the last year or so... we enjoyed making the last album so much... preparing for the tour... so on. Even though the tour was particularly grueling near the end we still like each other... we're excited about the future.