By Eddie Trunk

or almost 30 years, Geddy Lee has been the incredibly identifiable voice of Rush, one of rock's best loved and longest lasting trios. Equally loved for his bass playing as well as vocal and keyboard work, Lee has just released his first-ever solo work, My Favorite Headache. It's been three years since Test For Echo, the last Rush studio release, and in that time there has only been the triple-live Different Stages CD to hold fans over. It's a hiatus due largely to the break Rush drummer and chief lyricist Neil Peart needed after the mind-boggling tragedy of losing his wife and daughter in the same year. Needless to say, music was the last thing on the mind of Peart following their deaths.

Sympathetic to their partner's well being, Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson agreed to a much needed break. It was during this time that the idea for Lee's solo debut was born.

Lee called on old friend Ben Mink for the bulk of the collaboration, a relatively unknown artist in the U.S. who was part of a fairly successful Canadian band called FM. It was Mink and Lee who created the majority of My Favorite Headache, co-producing and co-writing the entire release. Also guesting on the album are Soundgarden/Pearl Jam drummer Matt Cameron, and Our Lady Peace drummer Jeremy Taggart, who appears on one track. We spoke with Geddy Lee at his home in Canada, just after completing a whirlwind bi-coastal promotional tour, something the rather private musician is not really used to shouldering on his own.

METAL EDGE: I understand you're back from a rather grueling promo schedule. How did it feel to have to do that alone for the first time in over three decades, without the support of Rush?

GEDDY LEE: It was really quite interesting for me. It took me a few days to get comfortable. Certainly, I'm used to sharing the duties of promo with my other two partners, so having to deal with the whole schedule on my own was something different, for sure.

ME: Was the idea for a solo album born out of knowing there was going to be a lengthy hiatus for Rush?

GL: Well, I knew I was looking at a long layoff ahead of me with Rush and wasn't going to be doing any writing, and I can't go that long without writing. For me, writing is essential. It's almost like breathing to me. I had always wanted to work with Ben [Mink]—we had been friends since the early '80s, when he played in a Canadian synth/progressive rock band called FM—so it was an opportunity to combine both my desire to write, and work with Ben.

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find a window in his schedule for him to record. He was really happy to play on the record and really enthusiastic. That was really a big bonus because we really liked what he had to contribute on many levels. Jeremy Taggart is a really great young drummer I really like who plays in a Canadian band Our Lady Peace. Matt had to leave for a Pearl Jam tour, so we were thrilled to have Jeremy step in for one track “Home On The Strange”, which was the last track recorded for the album. As a bass player, I’ve been really fortunate to work with some great drummers over the years.

ME: What are some of the biggest differences you hear between this album and a Rush album? Although I can hear some different subtle stuff, to me it’s always going to sounds like Rush when I hear your voice.

GL: Well, it’s hard to avoid the similarities, and I stopped worrying about it. For me, there’s a different attitude rhythmically that exists on this record. Also, the way the tracks are layered melodically are things that are quite different than I would do with Rush—not to have work within a band sound and in the same context as I have for so many years was very liberating. Ben and I were really able to shape some new sounds and textures that maybe would not have occurred in the context of Rush. Don’t get me wrong. Rush is a really flexible outlet for music—I think we experiment all the time and we have on anything goes attitude—but when you sit down with somebody else, it starts going in different ways. We were able to do what the songs needed in a solo context, as opposed to what the band would want to accomplish.

ME: Lyrical there’s big difference on the album, since Neil writes almost all the Rush lyrics. How did you find it approaching lyrics after not having written them for so long?

GL: That was actually a really interesting part of the whole project for me, exploring that side of me which I had a tendency to get a little lazy about. It was really good to force myself to dig down deep and get some lyrics done. Not having written lyrics for a long time, I kind of missed how beneficial that can be for a person, to not have a verbal outlet. Music has always been fun for me to write, and I got a great satisfaction out of it and have never really been frustrated by it, but I underestimated the benefits of writing lyrics and to getting things out of my system. It’s really been, for me, one of the most interesting aspects of doing a solo project.

ME: It seems as if many of the tracks are written from a third person perspective. How much of the lyrics are you talking, as opposed to a character?

GL: In the case of the title track, it’s a character. That song’s almost like a black comedy—the guy’s relationship with his life is having some problems, and he has this kind of hideaway attitude. I have had some times in my life—as most people have—where you look at the world as kind of a dark place, so I was able to get into this character’s head because I’ve also had those feelings where you just don’t want to go out and deal with the world.

ME: How about some of the other tracks on the CD—“Runaway Train” is one that hit me right away as one that could be a single.

GL: Yeah, that track is really about doing it yourself. You can blame circumstances all you want, but nobody is going to get you out of it but yourself. It’s kind of a song about the human condition.

ME: How about “The Angels Share”? I found that to be real different for you.

GL: That song is really about just thinking out loud and spiritual relationships. It started out kind of tongue in cheek. The whole song is really just about how life is up to us. We can think about what’s going on up above, and it makes us feel better to think there’s something going on up there, but at the end of the day it’s up to us.

ME: “Grace To Grace” sounds like a very emotional track…

GL: Yes, very personal—that song was inspired by my mother and her life. She was a Holocaust survivor that came to Canada after the war with my father. It’s really about the grace and intelligence of her, and people like her, who have carried on their lives after tough circumstances—People who have every right to be bitter, but they’re not, and have continued life with an elegance which I find very admirable.

ME: Looking back now that the record is done, how did you like creating music outside of Rush for the first time?

GL: Well, I think I really backed into the whole experi-
in his life now. He's looking forward to going back to work and has been priiming himself up for it. We're going to get together in February and do some writing and see how it goes. Hopefully we'll have a new album out late 2001/early 2002.

**ME:** What has Alex been up to during the break from Rush?
**GL:** He's been doing some writing for television, and wrote the theme for a new Gene Roddenberry show called Andromeda. He's really been getting into television writing. He's also been producing a couple bands and has really been keeping busy as well.

**ME:** I fully understand a bands need to grow and change, and I'm not saying any Rush album sounds like Celine Dion [laughing], but my favorite period was definitely Moving Pictures. Is there a chance we could get something that heavy again?
**GL:** Oh yeah. I mean, we never throw options out the window. If we get back in the studio and everybody feels like getting their ya-yas out, it's going to happen. We don't try and contrive anything we do, we try and let it be a natural expression of whatever place we happen to be at musically. I think it's important to us to stay interested in what we do. I think if we had tried to stick to a formula, we wouldn't still be around.

**ME:** Since we're talking about the very early days of Rush—So many people are not aware that Neil Peart is not the band's original drummer and didn't play on the first album. What ever happened to John Rutsey?
**GL:** It's so funny, because I've been asked that question a lot lately. I haven't talked to him for about eight years, but last I knew of him, he was a body builder and doing very well. He went in a whole different direction from music.

**ME:** As a longtime Rush fan, I must admit, I was much more a fan of some of the heavier, crunchy guitar-based stuff you guys did in the '70s and very early '80s, more than some of the synth-heavy sounds of the later records.
**GL:** So it's kind of like Woody Allen for you—You liked his earlier, funnier stuff better [laughing]...

**ME:** Well, of the more recent records, the track that comes closest to what I'm talking about would be something like "Stick It Out" from Counterparts. I know everybody needs to grow and evolve, and I'm not saying to rewrite "By Tor And The Snow Dog," but could you ever see Rush making a really heavy record again?
**GL:** It's really hard to say. Every time we go into the studio to write a record we go in without any preconceptions and try and make it interesting. One thing we're not in favor of is trying to ever repeat ourselves, because that's just plain boring for us. So we try subtle shifts in texture, subtle shifts in sounds, adding different instruments, melodies and harmonies, rhythmic approaches, but I don't think we ever rule out the whole rock aspect. We do still enjoy rocking, and the guitar presence is always going to be there, Alex wouldn't have it any other way.

**ME:** What can you tell us about the current state of Rush? How is Neil feeling these days?
**GL:** I actually was just on the West coast and had dinner with Neil, and he's really in a much more positive direction...