

Rush rocks on by following an old formula

At its inception, no one expected Canadian rock band Rush to last longer than a few years.

Not the record company executives, who figured it was just another hard rock band. Not the disc jockeys, who slowly warmed to the music. Not the critics, who never really have. Not even the band members themselves.



**Gary
Graff
music**

"Back then, if somebody told me I'd be touring in 1986, I'd have thought they were dreaming," admitted Geddy Lee, the group's singer, bassist and keyboard player.

But late last year, Rush turned 15 in a quiet way. The trio — Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neal Peart (who replaced John Rutsey in 1974) — released its 14th album, "Power Windows," and embarked on yet another tour. No hype, no proclamations, no ballyhooing about longevity.

IT FIT the low-key way the trio has maintained its career. Unlike top 40 superstar acts, which often rely on heavy record company promotion for short stays in the limelight, Rush has kept its fans by following the album-rock way of life — offering a consistent musical style, making gradual changes and keeping its stage show state-of-the-art with visual projection, lasers and the most advanced sound and lights.

That's the same path followed by album-rock contemporaries like Aerosmith, Kiss and Ted Nugent, but Lee said there's an additional ingredient that's protected Rush from the commercial ebbs those performers have experienced.

"The fact that the three of us are friends and have never had a major battle or a major disagreement is a big factor," he explained. "There've been a lot of little differences, but our goals have always been pretty much in line."



Guitarist Alex Lifeson has been with Rush since 1971 when the band was formed.

"The fact that we don't do a lot of outside things helps, too," Lee, 32, has done only one outside project: the McKenzie Brothers' "Take Off" comedy song in 1982. "We've always gotten a lot of satisfaction out of the band that keep us from going outside," he said.

And, Lee said, any problems they've had didn't turn into the kind of major blowups that kill bands. "We've had periods of disillusionment where you can tell one guy or another guy is drifting out there," he said. "But there's enough breaks in the way we work to let people think those things through. In the end, the good things the band affords us seems to keep everybody on board."

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*Rush and
Marillion will
perform at
7:30 tonight
at Joe Louis
Arena. Call
567-7425
anytime.*

Rush rocks steadily on

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Musical flexibility is one element Lee credited with keeping the band members loyal. The group hasn't exactly changed its power-rock sound, but it has certainly modified the way it makes that sound; starting as a hard rocking guitar-bass-drums trio, Lee began mixing keyboards on 1977's "A Farewell to Kings" album, starting with a basic synthesizer and getting more sophisticated with each album.

Now he boasts a battery of the most up-to-date instruments and computers.

For "Power Windows," Rush made another jump. A 30-piece symphonic string section was used for a couple of numbers, and a 25-voice choir was added to a song called "Marathon." Not exactly your typical album-rock fare.

"Those ideas have been batted around for years," Lee explained. "Every album it's been brought up, and we usually go, 'Nah, not us.' It just stuck this time, and we said, 'Let's try it this year.'"

"The big discussion has always been 'Do we spend the money?' If we

use it, it's a wonderful thing; if we don't, it's a major extravagance.

"We finally figured it would be worth the experience to hear an orchestra playing something we'd written. And sitting through the session, it was worth the price; we were laughing our heads off the whole time."

SO LEE — who lives near Toronto with his wife and 5½-year-old son — plans to stick with Rush as long as there are good times to be had. Peart and Lifeson feel the same way, as far as Lee can tell, though he won't hazard too many guesses about this group's future.

"It's impossible to answer the question of how much longer we'll be together," he said. "We've slowed down over the years, particularly our touring schedule. We do less cities and have more days off."

"We're just trying to keep ourselves from getting too automatic about the whole thing. We've found that thinking as musicians rather than as guys in a successful rock band keeps it more interesting."

■ **RUSH** has long been considered a leader of the intelligentsia among arena-rock groups, so it figures the Toronto power trio would be the subject of a nationwide educational campaign. A learning kit titled "RUSH to Creativity" has been given to 18,000 U.S. public high schools, featuring English lessons tied to lyrics from the band's latest LP, *Power Windows*. Good choice: Those who ought to know say it's the best Rush yet, combining flexible metal thunder and Yes-like concepts with modern pop gimmickry. Rush, don't walk to music class when Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart take roll at 8 tonight at Joe Louis Arena. Marillion opens. Call 567-6000.