

TRAFFIC

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DON HENLEY

Soaring Solo

RUSH

A TRAFFIC Interview with
Neil Peart

LISA ROBINSON

Queen of the Critics

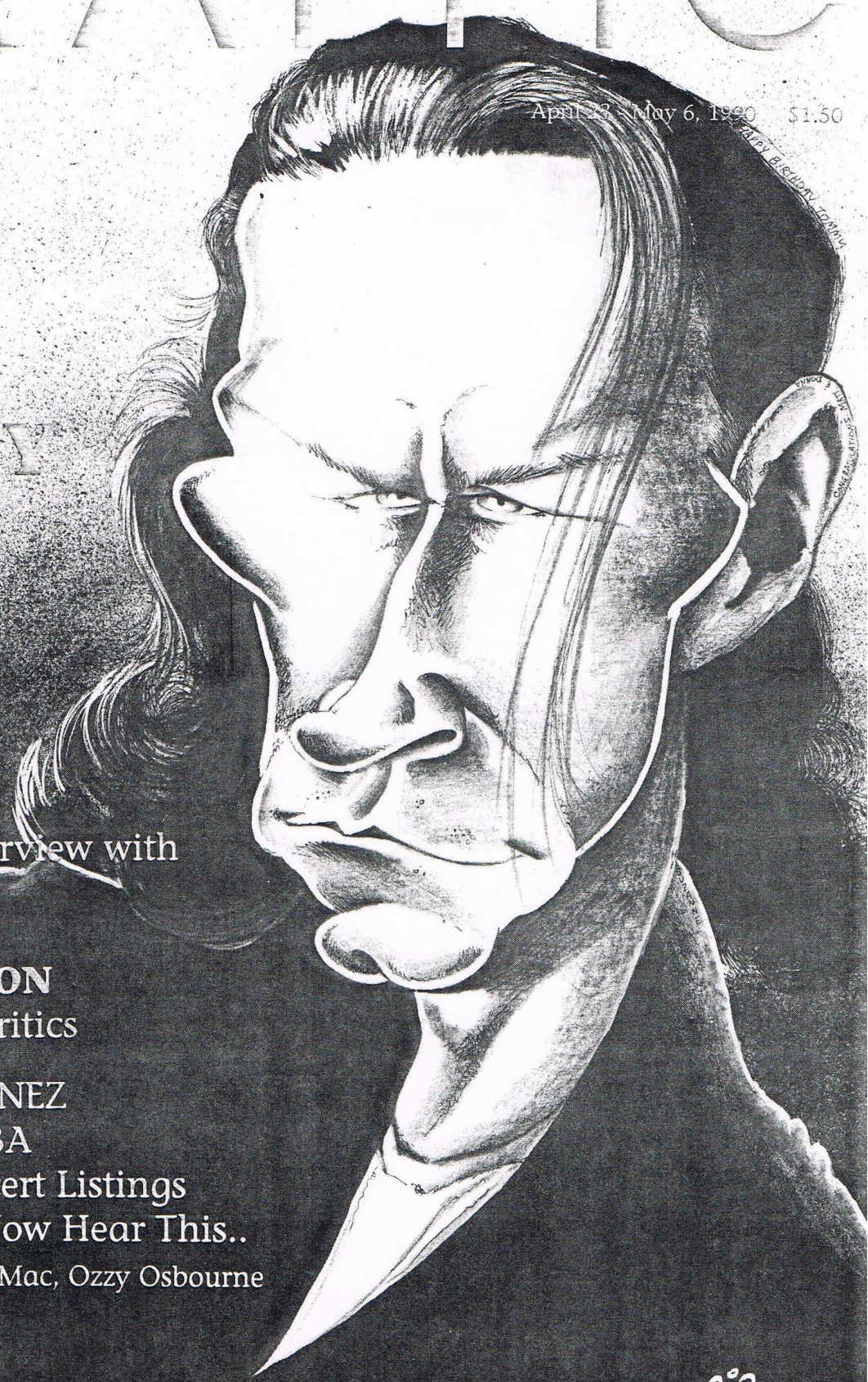
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a

TRAFFIC

interview

by

JIM FAHEY

RUSH

Rush once again performs their own brand of magic with *Presto...* Neil Peart Explains:

Jim Fahey: Now, what would you say makes this album different from any of the other albums you've done?

Neil Peart: Well each one for us is quite different from previous ones, and this one no less so. This one is different in I guess some qualitative ways because working with a different producer for the first time, Rupert Hine, injected a bit of new input. From the songwriting point of view, we followed our usual methodology of Getty and Alex working on the music while I was off in another room working on the lyrics and then we'd get together later in the day and compare notes and see who's got something new to show.

JF: The whole album seems to be very optimistic. Would you agree with that?

NP: Yes, but I think they always are. Sometimes we've been misread as being too dark or sometimes apocalyptic. *Grace Under Pressure* was an album that was perceived as being dark. But it was a transitional album for me, especially as a lyricist, and introduced a whole note, a whole note of real world compassion. Suddenly I was looking around at friends of mine, and strangers too, and seeing their lives, and feeling that my life was fine at the time. A lot of people read these things; oh, he must have been having a rough time then. Quite the contrary. My life was fine, but I was seeing a lot of trouble in my friends' lives and the mid-eighties were tough times economically: people were losing jobs, having trouble getting work, having relationship problems and all that. So those things do go down into your writing and sometimes you feel you have to address them, even if they're not tearing you apart.

JF: The first song on the first side is a song called "Show Don't Tell" it sort of highlights you at the very beginning, as the song is rolling in?

NP: Right.

JF: And then it goes into an incredibly funky lit-

tle, almost fusion. I guess you could call it fusion. I don't know if you would?

NP: Yeah, I guess so. It started as many ideas do, it started in conversation where Alex (Lifeson) and I were just discussing how with modern fidelity in instruments you could take the 60s idea of riff rock and have more versatility because distortion isn't such a terrible enemy anymore and you could mix chord patterns in with riffing, and have it be intelligible. So, experiments were brought in and it was just that little snippet which became a foundation. Basically, it's just a repeating motif throughout the song, and yes, it does owe something to fusion.

JF: You're also the band's lyricist. As you have in the past, you don't really approach the lyrics lightly. Your songs are not about cars and girls and high school

proms.

NP: Well they are, but not just that.

JF: The lyrics I think are clearly more important than in a lot of songs.

NP: The approach to lyrics and taking them seriously is a part that's important in the sense of craft, and partly the upbringing thing of my father saying, if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. And since I was kind of roped into doing the lyrics, I just decided well, if I'm going to do this, I better learn how to do

it and treat it as a job...I don't like to write lyrics about myself and I really don't like confessional lyrics. A tool that I've been working on for a couple of years now is finding a way to find a situation that illustrates what I want, personify myself in that situation, and become an actor in it.

JF: Let's talk about "Red Tide." The line, this is not a false alarm, this is not a test, is pretty scary. Do you have any ideas about what we can do as individuals? Are there things in your life that you do to help deal with this?

NP: Yeah. The first thing is to get educated. I do deal with a lot of environmental organizations directly. I tell them to stop chasing ships around and start teaching people about what to buy or not what to buy. It's



Neil Peart

RUSH



something that's going on in Canada right now. There is tremendous responsibility in consumerism. People are buying biodegradable garbage bags and doing all these little things and making it a part of their lives.

JF: "The Pass" really seems to capture a young person getting ready to face, or in the midst of facing a pretty crazy world.

NP: Certainly. There was a lot I wanted to address in that song. It's probably one of the hardest ones I've ever written. I spent a lot of time on it, refining it, and doing research. There was one song previously, called "Manhattan Project" where I wanted to write about the birth of the nuclear age. Well, easier said than done, especially when you've got a couple of hundred words to say what you want to say... with this song it was the same. I didn't want to use the classic line of life's not so bad, it's worth living. I didn't want one of those cliched patronizing statements. I worked hard to find out true stories. Why do people take that last desperate step? I wanted to demythologize it (suicide); take the nobility out of it. It's a horrible thing when someone takes their own life. Let's not pretend it's a hero's end, it's not an heroic epic, it's a tragedy.

JF: Over the years you guys have released three live albums. Does that make a statement about Rush?

NP: Well, it does in the sense of our values. If at first you don't succeed. We made one live album and didn't like it in retrospect. We made a second one and didn't really like that one either. So, it was another chance to get it right. Also, it's an alternative to compilation albums. It's a way to reevaluate ourselves as live performers. We became known as a touring band and I think it's still fundamental to the way Rush is perceived; a live working band on stage. It's an important part of what we do. We're not a band that just makes records and



Geddy Lee

have all the excitement of working together, the excitement of seeing new things appear. It's a pretty fundamental human reward to make something out of nothing and seeing it right there in front of you.

JF: Do you ever feel somewhat limited by the fact that you've worked with the same two guys over the years?

NP: No, not by that. Let's just say we've been very lucky that all three of us are involved in the songwriting. As far as musical approaches, we all have the same influences,

videos and then goes out and does a token tour every five years. For us it's been a constant cycle of recording and touring and recording and touring. It's been the evolution of the band.

JF: Do you ever see yourself giving up the road, but not the music?

NP: It's possible. The real rewards for me come in the songwriting part of it. Not even the recording, because again that's just the craft. The best is when the three of us go away and work on new things together. You

or if we don't, we're willing to try new ones. If somebody has a particular style of something, whether it's me rhythmically or one of the other guys in terms of sound textures or whatever, we'll find a place for it and we'll make it a part of Rush. As a drummer, there's no style of music that I like to play that I haven't been able to play in Rush. Everything from fusion to reggae has found its place. As a writer or as a drummer, I get to do everything I like. How can I possibly complain?

Alex Lifeson

