



It is typically chilly but brilliantly sunny for a late November day as I fly past St. Patrick's Cathedral and up Fifth Avenue. I am running right on time for my interview with Geddy Lee of Rush, and my feet ain't failing me now. Volume on maximum, my Walkman blares "Scars," what I think of as the Canadian trio's "dance track," and it moves me past the Christmas-shopping tourists and bailed-out-for-lunchhour businessmen. I screech to a halt in front of the bank of elevators at Geddy's midtown hotel. End — Side 1.

"We know each other," Geddy Lee tells Atlantic Records' p.r. person as we enter his suite, cutting her introductions short. It dawns on me that I have interviewed Geddy every winter for the past four on his yearly publicity jaunts to New York City. This time, as for our first meeting, he is not staying at Rush's hotel-of-choice, The Carlyle, but at the more centrally located Omni-Berkshire "where the record company can find us." Geddy laughs and I laugh too, at the record company's naivete. There is one thing that every Rush fan — and especially the members of

Rush — absolutely know for sure. Rush can never, ever be found in the same place you left them.

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"I don't look at this record as moving forward," Rush's softspoken singer says. "It's kind of moving sideways."

Geddy Lee is talking confidently about Rush's new release, *Presto*, but he'll be damned if he'll run down his band's last two studio LPs. 1985's *Power Windows* and 1987's *Hold Your Fire* still make him proud. But Geddy will be the first to admit that *Presto*'s Rush is a changed Rush. While the two previous albums were keyboard-written-and-dominant, *Presto* is power-trio rock through and through. No study in keyboard texturing, *Presto* is guitar-bass-guitar-drums-and-more-guitar with Geddy Lee's keyboard parts serving as a sort of backdrop. And vocally, the album is far and away the best of Rush's 17 albums to date, thanks in part to producer Rupert Hine, a British chap they've been trying to nail down since 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*. Add to that, a new record company, and a good, solid three months of writing time, and *Presto!*

It's a whole new Rush.

"The writing of *Presto* was really much as it always is for us, except for two prerequisites we set for ourselves this time," says Geddy, settling into his side of the sofa. "Stay away from writing on keyboards and rely more on stringed instruments. And there was a definite desire to serve the voice, to make it a much more vocal record than what we had been doing. The result was a focus on us as a trio."

But even trios — especially this together-for-16-years trio — have differences within. Rush has always been the melding of three egos, three individuals, and three keenly developed sets of musical sensibilities. But always doesn't necessarily mean forever, especially when the three individuals involved have three very different personal agendas, priorities and iron wills. So drummer Neil Peart's words in his latest making-of-the-album treatise are no surprise to the acutely tuned-in Rush fan.

"At the end of the *Hold Your Fire* tour we put together the live album, *A Show of Hands*, and we found ourselves free of

deadlines and obligations — for the first time in 15 years. We generally backed away from the infectious machinery of Rush — I mean Rush. It was one of the few times in our history when the future was in doubt."

Amid the uncertainty, Geddy broke away from the music business for five months. In fact, he swore off everything music. No music writing, listening, performing, producing, making — no nothing — except for his in-home piano lessons. Then came the meeting at Peart's house with Neil and guitarist Alex Lifeson, the meeting at which they would decide Rush's future.

"Well, I don't think it was uncertain that we make another album, but that's only part of being in a band," Geddy explains. "I don't know how sure we were that we wanted to do things like touring and promotion. But I think we realized that if you drop those other things, all you're doing is being unfair to the work that you spent so long and hard making good. I think Neil put it best — the idea of *not* touring bothered him more than the idea of touring."

That choice made, the members of Rush got down to it. As for all their recent records, they rented a house in the Canadian countryside, complete with a studio for music-writers Alex and Geddy, and a desk for lyricist Peart. Almost instantly, the trio knew that the decision to continue being a real band had been the right one.

"This record has a kind of a different feeling to it, and I think maybe it was related to the fact that there was uncertainty before it started," Geddy says. "You always have these doubts, thinking 'What am I doing? Do we still have something to say? Can we still be a rock band? Is there

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sincerity in what we do? Are we just going through the motions?' And I think as we were writing more and more, we were moving towards, 'Yeah, we're still into it. We still do good work together. We shouldn't stop.' So, here I am!"

And there he goes. I may be Geddy Lee's final interview in his week of *Presto* press, but he's still got this touring thing to contend with. While he'll never tire of playing with Alex and Neil ("If I have to be tied to a situation, it's not a bad one to be in — they're great players and groovy guys"), Geddy is nearing the long trek across the land with ambivalence.

"Touring is a complete upheaval in your life," he explains. "You always pay for it when you try to blend yourself back into the real world. And it just takes so long to get to the stage from one town to the next. Sometimes you forget you're up there to *play*. But that's why you do it. Because you love it." ■