

Probably the most notable accomplishment in Rush's ongoing trophy case is the one stamped "endurance." After 16 years as a recording group and 17 releases, with *Presto* being their latest, Rush is in the enviable position of having their cake and still being of sound enough mind and body to eat it. Like their song "Marathon" says, "You can do a lot in a lifetime/If you don't burn out too fast." Well, Rush has managed to keep their heads above the shifting sands of music trends and successfully avoided labels like "has-beens" or "boring old farts."

Rush was formed in Toronto, Canada, in September 1968 by childhood friends Geddy Lee (born Levy) and Alex Lifeson, both 15 at the time, and drummer John Rutsey and keyboardist/guitarist John Lindsey, who departed after a brief while. The band's first vinyl was released in Canada on their own Moon Records label, and the group quickly acquired a reputation for being Led Zeppelin imitators. After selling remarkably well in the U.S. as an import, the band was signed to a worldwide recording contract and made a significant lineup change prior to their second album. The group parted ways with Rutsey and added Neil Peart, a tall, lean drummer from Hamilton, Ontario, who had once played in a semipro band with Lifeson. In addition to becoming one of the most respected percussionists in contemporary music, Peart armed Rush with socially conscious and imaginative lyrics. Peart quickly became known for his cool, calm and collected intellect, which shined through like a beacon in our

recent phone interview with him. Talking from Kansas City, Peart helped shed some light on the past, present and future of Rush.

RIP: Going to your shows, I still notice a lot of 2112 jackets and remnants of Rush's past. I wonder if you'd ever—here's the ugly words—go back to the



style of music that helped make the band popular. Do you ever see the band saying, "Hey, let's write a 12-minute song like we used to?"

NEIL PEART: God, I hope not. In fact, I know not. There are a lot of reasons for that kind of retrospective attitude in fans, and a lot of it has to do with identifying the music with a particular period of their lives. They hear a particular song, and they associate something with it and, tragic as it seems, sometimes that represents the best time of your life, so you want to come back. That's a sad thing, and it's certainly not a thing that I think should be pandered to. Also, different factions of our audience divide other ways too. I hear from people who only have heard the last two or three albums; that's their era of Rush. And then there are people who've been with us the whole time and have grown up with us, in the literal sense, as we've grown up and matured. Our ideas have spread out, and so have theirs; their tastes have grown. They've stayed with us through high school and college, and now they're out there in the world as professionals. They're set designers, and they're professional writers, and they're scientists and all these things, and they have shared that whole life with our music. That's the whole ideal, I guess, because our music has always been, if nothing else, an honest reflection of ourselves as we've grown up. It can't go back any more than we can without becoming one of the legion of fakers that the rock charts are full of right now. That's what "Superconductor" is partly about—all the fakery; pretending to be a rebel and pretending to be an outlaw when, really, the record company is in the studio, telling you what song to record and how to record them. It's worse than an irony; it's a travesty that that should be and that people are fooled by it. It runs the danger of elitism to say this, but it's something a musician can recognize and a fan can't. I can tell who's a faker and who isn't, whereas, from a listener's point of view, it's hard to tell a really good imitation from the real thing.

RIP: How can you tell who's a "faker"?

N.P.: Well, a musician knows. I mean....

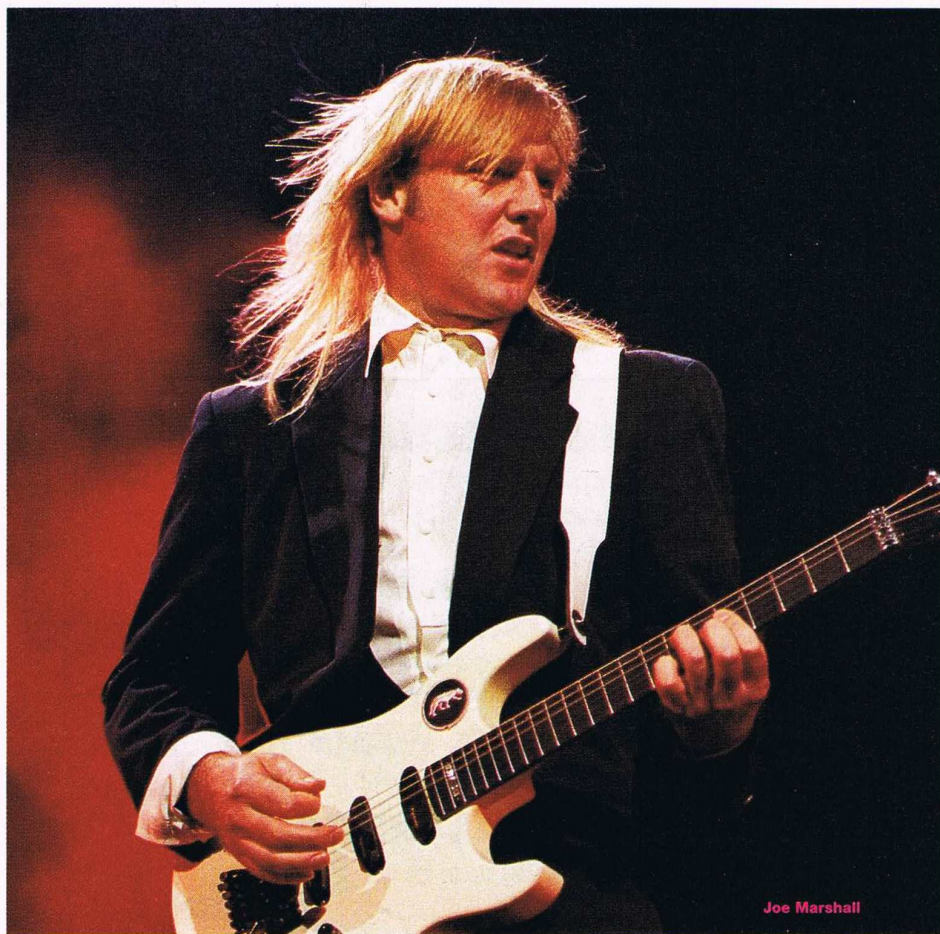
RIP: I'm not necessarily talking musically. You were talking about the kind of pomp image. I'm assuming you were referring to the outlaw image, which doesn't necessarily entail a musical stance.

N.P.: Well, no, it's not a musical stance; it's an image thing. That's what "Superconductor" is about—the triumph of image over content. In one sense it's foolishness—in the sense that deception becomes entertainment. In another sense it's the victims too. There are some people who are strong enough as characters to carry off that deception, to portray someone who isn't themselves successfully and also survive it. That's true in music, and in film as well. There have

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RUSH

PRESTO CHANGE-O!



Joe Marshall

BY TOM FARRELL

been a lot of film stars who have gone down through substance abuse or through complete personality collapse because they were not able to be both an image and a real person at the same time. As a band coming up as an opening act, we witnessed a lot of that firsthand, bands that were playing that role, and soon they were becoming that role in a sense. Of course, no one ever can be that larger-than-life thing, because of the simple laws of physics: You can't be any bigger or more perfect than you are. But they were pretending to be, and then they

thought they were, and then they got hopelessly lost in the swamp between those two things. It's a dangerous thing for the people involved, so I call them the "victims." But from the audience point of view, it's just a cheat. That's all it is. Fans are believing that these people are rebels standing up for them, and that they're the voice of their own teenage rebellion, and these records are made in such a contrived way that they're almost market researched—and, in fact, are market researched. The band goes in and records a dozen songs and then invites in a panel

of commentators to decide which songs should be on the album and what should be the first single and all that. It's all so wrong. It's totally, totally wrong from a musician's point of view, but it's also pretty sad from a fan's point of view.

RIP: So do you think the "rebel" or "bad boy" image is harmful?

N.P.: Not if it's real. From time to time it's actually real.

RIP: Don't you think the real stuff is actually scarier?

N.P.: Give me an example.

RIP: The Guns N' Roses incident on the American Music Awards. A lot of people thought they should have "behaved." My personal thought was, "To thine own self

be true." For them to put on a facade would have been fakery; to adapt to a suit-and-tie ceremony and all of a sudden become nice guys just to accept the award.

N.P.: Well, there's where cause and effect comes into it. I don't think they were born drunken louts. That's the kind of thing that killed Jimi Hendrix and Keith Moon and John Bonham. They weren't born that way, and I think when the bands were formed, they weren't those kind of people. A lot of time just being forced into the machinery forces that radical kind of escape. It's not reality. No person is that person; they *become* that person. That's another thing the song "Superconductor"

argues—that cause and effect. I'm sure those aren't the people they wanted to be. I don't think that when they were young, wide-eyed boys, they dreamed of being drunken boozers, spewing on the stage in front of millions of people. Cause and effect sometimes makes that occur, and that makes them a victim, not a hero.

RIP: What has kept Rush from being eaten alive by the big machine?

N.P.: Partly each other, I think, because we've remained friends. We've also remained supportive, as well as a being able to give a good nudge in the ribs if somebody is getting out of hand. Not to be pretentious about it, but I think there's sincerity in knowing that we've always been doing what we've wanted to do, so we didn't get lost. Other bands that make the records other people want—the manager or the record company wants—if it fails, then they're totally at sea. They've lost themselves; they've sold themselves. Who else do they have? When we've had records that haven't done that well, or if we've been under pressure from the business community, as it were, essentially we've always had faith in what we're doing, and we've had that to fall back on. At least it was *our* fault, not somebody else making mistakes for us. They were ours, and we were free to correct them. It's a tremendously important thing that we always had the sense that we were in control. As far as our mental stability, that's always been a big factor; the feeling that you are in control of your own destiny, no matter how poorly it's going.

RIP: Do you see factions like the PMRC as a legitimate concern?

N.P.: I think it's meaningless.

RIP: In what respect?

N.P.: In every respect. I don't know...I don't think about it.

RIP: I remember years ago, people were pointing a finger at Rush for covers like 2112, saying things like, "Oh, they're using a five-pointed star," and, "You can see the outline of the devil on the guy's back," etc.

N.P.: Any idiot that thinks that the five-pointed star, the same as the one on the American flag, is a pentagram, deserves to be [pauses]...laboring under that misconception.

RIP: What was Rush trying to say with that? And what would you say to all these people who were pointing an accusing finger at you?

N.P.: I would say, "Shut up." I might add a few other things. In the true sense, the theme of the man in the star represents man against the state, and what could be a simpler and more endearing theme than that? There was no troll drawn into his back; there was no pentagram there. That only existed in people's minds. If people go digging in the gutter, that's what they'll find.

RIP: Lastly, any messages for Rush fans throughout the world?

N.P.: Hello! †

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