

# PRESTO; CHANGO! It's GEDDY LEE!

Interview by Beth Nussbaum

**H**ot on the heels of their sell-out arena tour, *Rock Scene* sat down with Rush's ever-illusive and somewhat reclusive bassist/metaphysical gargler, Geddy Lee, who turned out to be all I perceived and then some. No false pretenses here!

**ROCK SCENE:** You've done so much recording in the past. Did you do anything differently this time around with *Presto*?

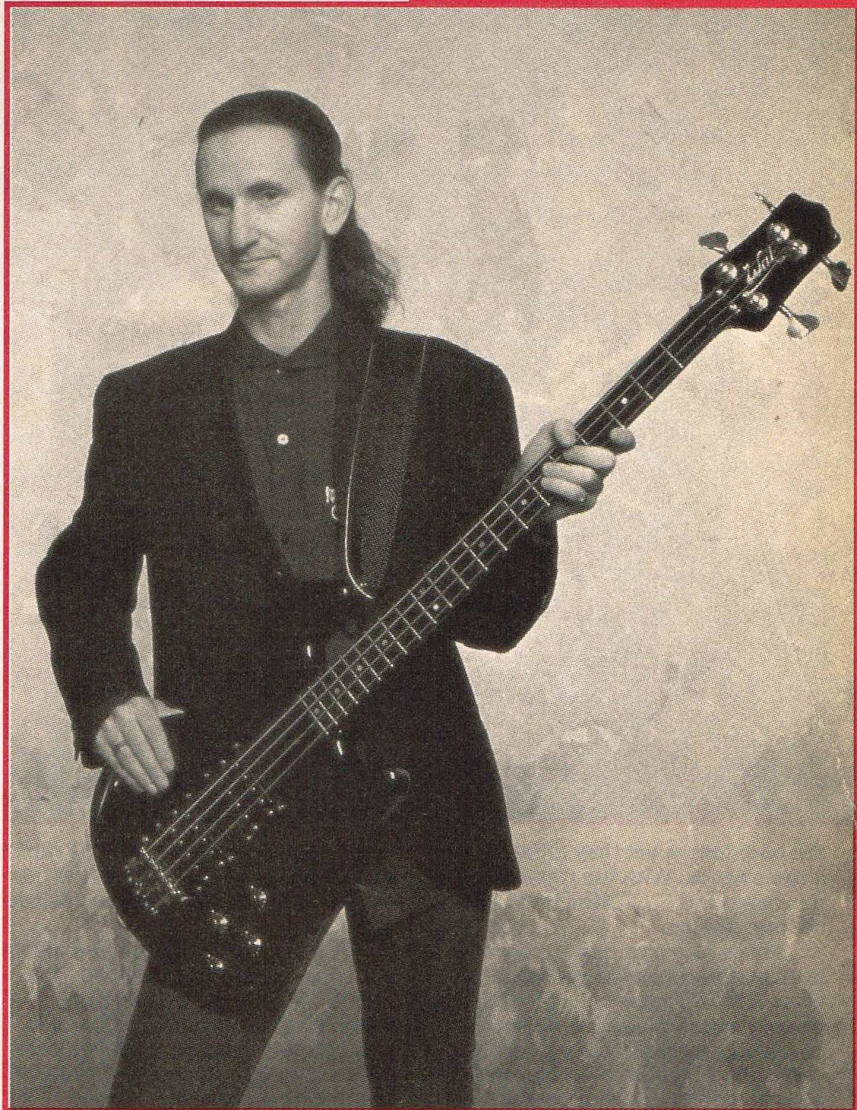
**GEDDY LEE:** I probably spent a little more time in pre-production this time around working on the material. Prepping it, rehearsing it. A little more focused on certain things like vocal melodies and kind of more of a trio attitude that we wanted to take on this record. Aside from that, the actual recording was pretty much standard except for the fact that it seemed to go much quicker because of the amount of preparatory work that we had done.

**RS:** What kind of statement is this album going to make, or do you want it to make?

**GL:** I don't know. You tell me. I think it's supposed to make any kind of statement you want it to make. One thing I'm really starting to dislike is explaining what we meant, or what—it just doesn't seem to be that important. It seems to be more important what the person seems to get out of it. So, if anything, we intended with this album to make a more direct, more organic sounding, focused rock album. That was our intention and maybe that's our statement, I don't know. It's fairly open to personal interpretation I think.

**RS:** How would you say Rush has evolved and changed over the years?

**GL:** That's a pretty big question. I mean we've changed in a million different ways, but I think the essence of our sound has always been somewhat the same. Our approach has changed. You learn new things. You work with different people. You know, you get influenced by different things and that affects your music. I think we just sort of reflect what's going on around us at the time and I don't think there's two albums really that sound alike from us but there's something similar in all of them, so it's kind of a hard thing to sort of put in a paragraph: how we've changed and evolved.



**RS:** Perhaps you could cite some different records where you went through different vibes.

**GL:** Well, *2112* was kind of a turning point for us way back when—when that record was made. Because it was the first time we kind of blended the

conceptual thing, I think successfully with the kind of hard-edged approach that we had. And *Moving Pictures* again was kind of a turning point record because it was the first time we started experimenting with sort of defusing the 3-piece focus; making it





more of an orchestrated thing, for instance sequences and synthesizers, that kind of thing. And all the last few records I think have all been a little different because of that. Working with different people and different producers have kind of inspired a slightly different sound each time around. Although this time I think a different sound was really more blown out of our decision making and our kind of commitment to a particular sound production team who went along with that and agreed with that which was kind of a positive thing in itself.

**RS:** Which producer, if you had to cite one or two, do you think really came in and—knew what you guys were all about?

**GL:** Again, I think every producer's had a good sense of what we're about. And we haven't worked with that many of them, and they're all a little different and you use a producer because of the fact they can bring something new to what you are doing and not just agree with where you are. For me the idea is to work

with somebody who's responsible and who has musical opinions and ideas and a sense of being able to identify when we're at our best and when we're not at our best. I think both

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Rupert Hein and Peter Collins, producers that we've worked with lately have both had all those things going for them, so they've been equally as good producers for our band, they just have slightly different styles.

**RS:** To what do you attribute your longevity?

**GL:** I think it's a lot of different things that go into making a band stick around as long as we have. One of them is a combination of personalities that obviously mesh the right way when it comes to work and you know, we have a tremendous amount of fun doing what we do, and as I was saying to someone earlier today: 'It's surprising for as serious as most people think our songs are, they are often put together in a pretty hilarious way.' So, we have a lot of fun doing it, and I think that's one of the most important keys, and we also have like a unified direction musically.

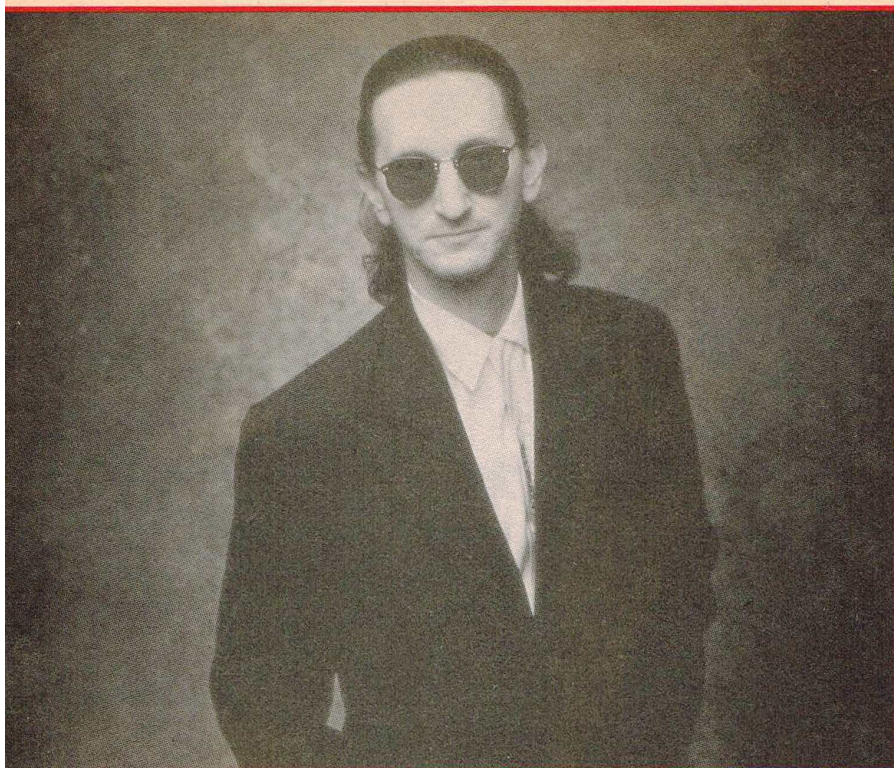
**RS:** When you first started out as a group, did you ever expect this?

**GL:** No.

**RS:** What were your greatest expectations at that point?

**GL:** We just wanted to get on a tour. You know they change. First you want to get on a record label. Then you want to get on a tour. Then you want to be a special guest and not an opening act. And then you want to be a headliner. And then you want to





have a gold record. You know, that's pretty typical.

**RS:** What influences you lyrically and musically?

**GL:** I don't know. Anything that impresses me really. Whether it's music, film or in a bookstore or people. Conversations. Whatever. Well, influences are very hard to pin down for me because in the early days it was really easy to pin down your influences because they were all other bands and musicians. But I don't think it's always the case anymore. I think you're influenced by different kinds of things now and have feelings of different kinds of things. There are so many things that impress you in the course of a year. So many things you think about from the different things that impress you and all those things influence you a little bit. I don't know how that affects what comes out in the music. More and more I listen to less and less rock music by other people so that influences me less.

**RS:** How does Rush typically write a song and plan for an album?

**GL:** Well, for this album, which is pretty typical, we took two and a half months set aside at a farm studio outside of the city where we live in Toronto, and basically moved in there from Monday to Friday and Neil works on lyrics while Alex and I work on music. We sort of work as a sounding board for each other and, you know, bounce our ideas off each

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other. We all have our sort of specialized little things that we work on writing-wise. We put them together and eventually we put them on an 8-track demo, and eventually up to a 24-track demo and really work everything out before we start recording.

**RS:** Which album would you say is your finest masterpiece to date?

**GL:** Oh gee, I don't know. Masterpiece is a pretty big word. I'm always happiest with the one we've just finished. So, the new thing is the one I like.

**RS:** What do you think of today's music scene and business, and what do you think are the most obvious and subtle changes you've seen occur?

**GL:** Oh boy. What do I think of today's music scene? Well, I think it's pretty bland at the moment. I think it's very early sixties-like. There seems to be a lot of sort of pop people that have good hair and teen appeal but, it seems harder and harder

for me anyway to find records that get me excited and I get interested in. I don't know if that's more a comment about me or a comment about the music scene, but that's sort of the way I feel about it. I find it difficult to find records to get excited about.

**RS:** Is there anything that you HAVE liked lately?

**GL:** Well, I've been listening to a lot of Billie Holiday lately, but it's not very new. Ha, ha. I like that Neil Young record that he has out at the moment. I think it's really good. And I like what Tears for Fears do although the song they've had out recently is—I guess it's kind of an obvious nod to the Beatles, but I thought it was great. Artfully done. And I like The Cure a lot. Always sort of liked their records. Those are the main things. I like the Gypsy Kings.

**RS:** There's so many styles of music that are popular today. Which ones do you dislike and why?

**GL:** Well, I don't like a lot of jazz. I don't mind old jazz. There's something about old jazz that's kind of like an old movie to me and I kind of like the mood that it puts me in. I don't like much fusion. (Jazz-rock.) Most of it to me is—really leaves me cold. Very emotionless. Can't stand new age music.

**RS:** How about rap?

**GL:** Some of it I like. Some of it's fun. Some of it I do like.

**RS:** Thrash?

**GL:** Again, some of it I like a lot. Some of it is just junk, but I think that's true in every form of music. Some rap is junk and some jazz is junk. But I like—Metallica is pretty good. Megadeth is pretty good.

**RS:** It's funny because there's a lot of thrash bands that I've interviewed that have cited Rush as a major influence.

**GL:** I can understand that. Yeah, that makes sense. Thrash is kind of what we were doing in a way a long time ago. They didn't call it thrash. Ha, ha. They called it just about everything else!

**RS:** You've always, from the beginning, seemed to be pegged as progressive rock. Did that title ever bother you. Is it accurate or inaccurate?

**GL:** I think at one point it was accurate. We were trying to figure out—it's funny our producer Rupert was trying to figure out what we are now, and it was really hard to put a label to it. He seemed to like the word post—progressive rock, but I think more because if you use the initials it comes out PP Rock. Ha, ha, ha. So I don't know what we are. Just some strange outgrowth of hard rock music! □