

RUSH

Roll The Bones
(Atlantic - 82293)

EXCELLENT

90

RUSH were already looking to the '90s while most people were still coming to grips with the RUSH of the 1980s. The Canadian trio challenge, inspire and baffle, and the past ten years haven't been an easy ride for some followers. To be honest I've lost count of the number of whingers who dumped the band after 1981's "Moving Pictures", a move prompted more by Alex Lifeson's haircut and

the band's stoic refusal to stay locked in an outdated Prog-Rock groove, than by any musical shortcomings.

The heavy, Techno-Rock of "Power Windows" and "Hold Your Fire" finally gave way in 1989 to an altogether more accessible RUSH pioneered by the curious "Presto" album. It was a record that spearheaded a return to the bass, drums, guitar approach of early RUSH, but which fell flat due to a dull approach and an overall dearth of great material... Enter "Roll The Bones".

After "Presto"s experimental dabblings, this album finds RUSH diving headlong into new and largely uncharted waters. Space is of the essence here and the stark, uncluttered approach of songs such as "Dreamline" and the stirring "Bravado" herald a welcome shift in emphasis away from the keyboard heavy RUSH of old.

The title track itself, already the subject of some speculation due to a Rap section, is the album's tour-de-force, merging jagged, funky rhythms with an evocative Lifeson guitar solo. The 'Rapping' in question is hardly ICE-T, but rather a slick dialogue which complements the flow of the song. *Canadians with attitude* RUSH move with the times on this one!

The doodling "Where's My Thing?" is a '90s sequel to "XYZ" and a clever bastard Jazz-Funk affair with tongue firmly wedged in cheek, but it sits a little uncomfortably alongside the Poppier fare of "Face Up" and "The Big Wheel", while "Ghost Of A Chance" is powerful and emotive AOR offset by a typically jarring Lifeson riff and some of Neil Pearts's most poignant lyrics.

If you've stuck with them for this long, "Roll The Bones" should justify your faith. For those who drifted away it might just be the album to rekindle your interest. Either way it's another well-crafted chapter in the history of a band who have yet to run out of steam. RUSH, it seems, will go on forever.

MARK BLAKE

Shake, Rattle & Roll!

In the Rock world, the power trio has always held a significant position. CREAM, THE JIMI HENDRIX EXPERIENCE, MOTÖRHEAD and BUDGIE (well, perhaps we can forget that last one!) have all staked a well deserved claim for a place in the annals of Rock history.

But one particular power trio has always held a place close to my heart, and that has been the Canadian trio RUSH. Now whilst CREAM are noted for ERIC CLAPTON and some fine heavy Blues, HENDRIX for his guitar wizardry, MOTÖRHEAD for their awesome power and BUDGIE for..... well, nothing really (although Mark Blake claims to have once bought "Budgie's Greatest Hits"), RUSH have been one of the most consistent Heavy Metal/Hard Rock acts throughout the Seventies, Eighties and now the Nineties. At least as far as I'm concerned.

Of course they steered a path through the Seventies with epic albums like the awesome "2112", "A Farewell To Kings" and "Hemispheres", which had many proclaiming them one of decade's finest outfits. The Eighties brought with it a wave of technological change, and RUSH responded with a series of albums that moved away from earlier themes but still had them standing head and shoulders above their nearest competitors.

"Moving Pictures" (Lee's personal favourite, along with "Permanent Waves" and a bit of "Hold Your Fire") is regarded as one of the band's finest works, and whilst albums like my personal fave "Signals", "Grace Under Pressure" and "Power Windows" lent heavily

"OUR FUTURE WAS DEFINITELY UP IN THE AIR" GEDDY LEE TELLS JERRY EWING. BUT NOW WITH A NEW ALBUM AND A HEAVIER APPROACH, THE EVER PIONEERING RUSH ARE BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

in favour of Geddy Lee's favoured keyboards, current works like "Hold Your Fire" and 1989's "Presto" have seen the return of Alex Lifeson's crashing power-chords as the prime driving force behind the band's music.

Of course Metal fans, being what they are, have often griped about RUSH's constant pursuit of new sounds, frequently claiming the band have wimped out, or sacrilegiously ditched their Heavy roots. None more so than when the Reggae-inspired "New World

Man" appeared as the single for the heavily keyboard influenced "Signals".

But the fact remains, that for all those who've laid the boring old fart tag upon the heads of Messrs. Lee, Lifeson and Peart, there are multitudes who enjoy the band's music, and indeed they remain one of the most highly regarded Hard Rock bands of the age and one who's influence can be heard within the music of DREAM THEATER, VOI VOD and WATCHTOWER to name but a few.

And now it's time for another chap-

ter in the life of RUSH. Their latest offering, "Roll The Bones" is yet another fine release, echoing the classy workmanship and superb musicianship the band have displayed over the 17 albums (including the three live ones) they've released since their eponymous debut back in 1974!

Yet more sophisticated Hard Rock, again fired on by Lifeson's guitar (check out first US single "Dreamline"), continued exploration of other musical styles (the title track) and even a return to their favoured instrumentals in the shape of "Where's My Thing". In short, another splendid album that bodes the question: just how do they do it?

"I've no idea," laughs bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee, when I quiz him on the band's ability to consistently deliver the goods. "I guess we're just lucky," he muses.

"Roll The Bones" is yet another step away from the experimentation of albums like "Signals" and "Grace Under Pressure", still pioneering, but instilled with a heavier feeling a little more in

keeping with something like "Red Barchetta", "Freewill" or even, going way back, "Anthem".

"Absolutely," agrees Lee. "Before 'Presto' we were kind of going through this rebellion, using all this gargantuan computer technology. I remember sitting in a rehearsal room with Alex for 'Presto' and looking at all this stuff and just heaving a sigh and suggesting we just started writing using our guitars. Really it was an important breakthrough in a way, ignoring that stuff. 'Presto' was written far more organically, and we decided that the main thrust of our writing would be guitar and vocals. It was more fun being guitar based. If we need keyboards then we write them in afterwards.

"We used the same process this time around, so basically what started as a reaction to a process is now the process we use!"

Once more the band have used producer Rupert Hine, who worked with them on "Presto". Obviously it's a happy relationship.



GEDDY LEE

"Yes," begins Lee. "We've used Rupert and the engineer Stephen Taylor, they're a great team to work with in terms of being very easy going, having great personalities and great experience. Rupert's very talented as a songwriter and performer, and remains very objective in helping us in what we're doing. He's also very subtle in his involvement. Rather than insist in changing things he's quite happy to let it go with the flow. When there's a job to do he gets involved, when there isn't he takes a back seat."

"His sense of groove is also very important to us as a band too," he continues. "I think he's helped us come up with looser and more exciting performances."

Has the whole process of making records changed for RUSH over the years?

"Well we're very self-sufficient and usually have most of the songs done before a producer even comes in. In terms of being responsible and together the material is already there. Basically we like to get away to write, and we rent a farm/studio kind of thing so we can be isolated to do our work."

"What is different today is that we'll spend a lot more time writing the material. This time we spent some nine/ten weeks just writing and rehearsing and then just eight weeks recording, so in effect we spent more time on pre-production than anything else. We've come to respect that time before you enter the studio."

"In terms of working together and the internal set-up of the band it's still very much the same. Alex and I work on the music during the day whilst Neil will work on the lyrics and then in the evenings we try and put it all together."

Now whilst the band have often been known to delve into different musical areas, "Roll The Bones" is the first RUSH album to utilise Rap music.

"We basically wanted to have some fun with that song," Geddy explains. "We wanted to use as many musical forms as we could in that song. In its demo stage the styles were so drastically different that it didn't make any sense at all, not that RUSH songs make much sense anyway (ha ha)."

"Anyway the verse sections were different to the chorus and that was different to the bridge; basically it sounded like tuning a dial on a radio and still picking up the same song, but in different styles. As the recording went on it all seemed to plain out a bit apart from the spoken word section so we decided to play around with it. Eventually we got that rhythmic Rapping bit going on."

After 17 albums and some 22 years in the business, does Geddy still get excited about the prospect of a new RUSH album. It would appear so.

"Oh yes, very much so," he states. "My favourite thing about being in RUSH is writing. To me that's the seed, the thing that makes everything else worthwhile. So I do get very excited and I think that's the thing that keeps us going, the whole creative process."

Geddy agrees that the whole post-album process is something of an anti-climax ("It always feels like that," he exclaims), frequently firing the band onto new goals. But equally mind-numb-

ing can be the whole interview process, especially for a band as private and unique as RUSH. One is immediately drawn back to a 1978 NME interview with then scribe Miles which lambasted interviewee Neil Peart, and the rest of the band as a bunch of crypto-fascists following the works of extreme right-wing Russian authoress Ayn Rand, and even suggesting that the band's performances were dangerous on a political level!

"I'd say there is a bit of reluctance," he admits. "But I'd say that there isn't any one of us who'd object to a good conversation about what we do. The problems about the whole interview circuit is the fact that you're always afraid of giving the same interview to five different people, and after a while you find it difficult to spend four or five weeks talking about yourself. I don't think any normal person could deal with that comfortably. Is what I have to say that interesting? It seems like an abnormal psychological experiment."

"Nobody minds doing it because we all believe in what we do and there are a lot of interesting people out there to talk to, but at the end of the day you try to make sure you're not just rambling on and that every conversation is interesting to the readers."

I recall interviews following the release of "Presto" in which the band suggested the end of the road might be in sight for RUSH, and that they'd be winding down band activities. It worried me, so I hate to think what it would have done to the hordes of rabid RUSH fans.

"I'm not sure," muses Lee. "I think we approached the 'Presto' tour with some fears. Touring is a difficult thing for us to come to terms with. We've gone from being a band that loved touring, needed to tour and spent so much time on the road that I think we went through a massive burn out. It got to the point where you'd mention a tour and it'd be 'Ugh!'."

"I think that before 'Presto' there were definite fears that we wouldn't be able to get through it all. Our future was definitely up in the air, but I have to say that the resultant tour and the work on the new album, well, everyone was really surprised at the optimism and the vigour with which we approached everything."

"The 'Presto' tour was a shorter one and was very well paced; in the end we left the tour wanting more. I think the fact that we felt like that was very positive. At the moment there is a lot of optimism for the future."

That initial feeling didn't help when it came to British dates on the "Presto" tour (which had included "Xanadu" in its entirety!). There weren't any!

"Well there was a feeling that we weren't sure how much touring was in us!" admits Lee. "We wanted to take it one step at a time. Even though we went out on the road we still didn't cover North America, but we felt that we'd promoted the album correctly and played really well. The quality of the show was really high and nobody was suffering those ill effects from touring. It was like, 'Let's get out now so when we come to touring next time it'll be easier'. It seems to have done the trick."

So what about this time?

"Well we're starting to plan the tour now and once more we're being careful," Lee announces. "We'll do it very much like we did the last one and tour North America first, up until the end of the year, and that's when Europe and those other things come into play. I hope everything will still be positive and we'll be able to do everything we want to."

Finger's crossed then, everyone!

RUSH have, since the wave of epic like albums such as "2112" and "A Farewell To Kings" ("We look back at those albums and smile. It's like old photographs," Lee admitted later. "Kind of like, 'Oh God, look at those trousers, or look at that robe. Did I really wear that?'" through latter day more technological outings, constantly been hailed as one of Metal's pioneering outfits. Does this crown fit comfortably?

"I guess so, to a certain degree," admits Lee honestly. "It's very hard to think about that kind of thing in any kind of real perspective without warping your outlook. We try to think about things very naturally, to get together and start writing and see what happens. In that way it remains honest and also very therapeutic. You never know what you're going to end up with. It's very important to remain natural."

That's something I personally doubt RUSH will ever veer away from. Aside from being intellectual in both outlook and output, RUSH provoke thought as well as providing the listener with quality music that remains always detached from the norm.

"Roll The Bones", for all its in your



face impact, never once loses that classic RUSH feel. Not once sounding like older material; pushing their own boundaries further, it's another great album. Peart's lyricism takes another, more obvious twist. Take for example the fate-driven "Roll The Bones" itself. "Why are we here, Because we're here, Roll the Bones, Why does it happen, Because it happens, Roll the Bones". A far cry from the esoteric twisting and turning of "Power Windows".

Another year, another RUSH album. Hopefully another tour! For a band to consistently please over 17 very different albums is a remarkable achievement indeed. Yet RUSH are a remarkable band. Get ready to throw the dice, take your chance and roll the bones. You won't be disappointed. ■