Rush’s Rock Gets Bogged Down
In Band’s Own Aural Quagmire

BY CLIFF RADCLiffe

Rush has never been one to hit the brakes, so it was no surprise when the Canadian trio played at the Civic Coliseum in Cincinnati. The band, known for their high energy and intricate sound, is often compared to Pink Floyd and Genesis. However, this particular show was met with mixed reviews.

Anyone who wonders how much control rock groups have over their audiences should consult Rush. Friday night, approximately 12,000 people hurried to Riverfront Coliseum ostensibly to hear this Canadian trio.

"Omnipotent" appears in the preceding sentence because Rush would have the audience on their hands, singing along to every word. They didn’t want a concert. They wanted a B.T.O.2, "Bring Your Own Fireworks," party, where they could spend the entire evening rocking the arena with the sharp, intense sound of firecrackers and the ominous blast of M-80s.

FOLLOWING AN audience-produced pyrotechnic display during "Lakeside Park," Geddy Lee, Rush’s vocalist and bass-guitarist, made a simple request: "Please do not throw fireworks in the building." Then, the three-man band began "By-Tor and the Snow Dog," the third number in its 101-minute set.

This piece lasted nine minutes. For the first six, the audience honored Lee’s request. On minute number seven, a dry-ice fog crept across the stage. One concertgoer was so moved by this display that he could not contain his joy. So he detonated a cherry bomb. After that, the remainder of Rush’s show was played to the accompaniment of Roman candles falling in the aisles, id-illit, exploding in empty hallways and blazing sparklers thrown toward the stage.

It was too bad Lee’s request was ignored. It was the only thing Rush did all evening that was worth listening to.

Rush was, in a word, awful. Lee sang in a high-pitched squeak. There are two possible explanations for this vocal choice: (1) he had a faulty larynx and in the world’s first transplant of this kind he was the recipient of a Munchkin’s voice box; or (2) he took a very breath of ether before going on stage. In any case, his mouth couldn’t have been produced by his natural voice. Or could it? If it was, a major theological question has been answered. God does have a sense of humor.

THESE CONCERTS will cover the exploits of Lee’s Rush partners, drummer Neil Peart and guitarist Alex Lifeson. Peart’s playing was so muddied it would have led to his dismissal from an elementary school drum and bugle corps. Siopaness is also characterized Lifeson’s ad-libby, aimless meandering up and down the neck of his guitar contributed greatly to thickening the aural sludge Rush has called music.

Rush shucked its paltry musicianship by the crowd, and in the process it was called back for a 20-minute encore, under the cover of a music smoke screen. The overamplified distortion coming from the speakers, the preponderance of whole notes, the absence of any attack, the peddled unison figures, the organ pedals, which Lee played with the surefootedness of a drunken hippopotamus, increased the chance of the group’s sound and clouded the audience’s good judgement. With such objects of obscuration, who needs musicians?

Rush’s instrumentation recalls rock’s premier trio, Cream, and the Jimi Hendrix Experience. End of civilization. Rush is now a trio of virtuosos like Cream. Nor does it possess a captivating music, composer, and personality like Jimi Hendrix. Even a run-of-the-mill trio like ZZ Top stands several runs above Rush. At their best, the two-lead-musician band would not make the nucleus of a $5-a-night bar band.

Cheap, watering-hole bands were the order of the night. Opening act Johnsy Puts and Uriah Heap saw to that. Both bands produced music with identical, lumbering tempos, sickly guitar improvisations and vocals squealing like frightened pigs.

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