Rush: conquering the world with 'Hemispheres'

by Len Sassenal

No longer the target of critics jeers that made
unlike, remarks concerning the group's Canadian
heritage, Toronto-based Rush have developed into
one of rock music's main attractions. With a string
of highly successful albums and the prestigious Juno
award (presented yearly to the top Canadian musical
Group) under their belt, Geddy
Lee, Alex Lifeson, and Neil Peart
are currently on the road once
again, pushing Hemispheres their
seven Mercury LP.

But Rush hasn't always been
filling concert halls and selling al-
bums. Their first five years were
spent playing the bar circuit of
northern Ontario, doing mainly top
forties copy, while occasionally
slipping in a few original tunes.
During studio time, the group
put together their first album, en-

When none of the major record
companies would back them, the
band decided to release the LP in-
dependently, a risky move for the
fledgling trio. As luck would have
it, radio station WMMS in Cle-
veland gave their disc a listen. The Cle-
veld area soon became hooked on
the band's hard rock sound, de-
veloping a cult following that led
to Rush's signing on with Mercury
records, and the band's first Ameri-
can tour.

Added time to prepare for their sixth release, last fall's
highly acclaimed A Farewell To Kings.

Recorded in England, A Farewell To Kings out-
paced any of the band's previous studio releases,
proving itself as a logical successor to 2112. Just when
many people were wondering where Rush could
possibly go following the popularity of their two pre-
vious albums, the answers were provided in the forms
of "Xanadu," "A Farewell To Kings," "Cygnus X-1,"
and the lovely "Closer to the Heart." Combining
"to be continued," which brings them to Hemis-
pheres, the seventh and latest release from Rush.

Produced by longtime associate Terry Brown,
Hemispheres opens with the side-long conclusion to
"Cygnus X-1." Entitled "Back two-Hemispheres," the
album takes off where "Cygnus X-1" ended. After
falling into the black hole, the other side is revealed
in book two as Alex Lifeson rips out a series of power
chords intertwined with harmonic picking and neat
percussion pieces by Peart.

Geddy Lee bass playing is stronger
than ever, as are his vocals. In play-
ing a series of characters Lee un-
folds a variety of vocal changes.
Some he has shown on earlier Rush
recordings, while others are refresh-
ingly unique to Hemispheres.

In some ways book two is
strikingly familiar to Caress of
Steel's "Fountains of Lammeth," in
that it lays out an interesting gui-
tar/drum attack that is repeated in-
termittently in the song. A matur-
ity of style, however, raises this ef-
fort above any of Rush's previous
recordings, as the band displays se-
veral varied uses of the flashback
technique. Neil Peart's precise
percussion parts and drum rolls
move smoothly along throughout
the song, mixing with Lee's bass to
provide a solid background for Lif-
eson to work his articulate guitar
playing around.

As the song suddenly shifts
back to the closing passages from
book one, an eerie feeling of sus-

Neil Peart, percussion — his love for the epic novel transformed Rush into rock's foremost
storytellers.
But even before the group had played a note in the United States, an apparent disaster struck them when drummer John Rutsey parted company with bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson. Mustachioed Neil Peart came to the rescue, more than filling Rutsey's shoes as the present Rush lineup toured the Americas together. His contributions, both as a musician and lyricist, have enabled Rush to emerge from the rock sludge of their first album had headed them for. The group's next effort, 1976's Fly By Night spawned the title cut as the band's first single, as well as unveiling "By Tor and the Snow Dog," an epic rock tale that prefigured the good things to come from the rapidly rising trio.

By the time their third long player, Caress of Steel hit the racks in the same year, a definitive Rush style had been developed. Combining blistering rock and rollers like "Bastille Day," and "Think I'm Going Bald," with expanded pages "The Necromancer," and "Fountains of Larneth," Rush had established themselves as the storytelling rock and rollers who delved into the J.R.R. Tolkien/Anne Ried School of epic fantasy. With Alex Lifeson's powerhouse, Geddy Lee's chameleon-like vocals, and Neil Peart's mystifying lyrics, Rush soared onward into their fourth album, the classic 2112.

Renowned as a true rock masterpiece, the side long "2112" tells the story of a brave individual and his fight for freedom in a future world dominated by the all-powerful Solar Federation. With this album, Rush truly placed themselves in a class all alone. The following year the group released a double live set All The World's A Stage, the album that first achieved commercial success for Rush, selling well in excess of one million copies.

Capturing the group's intense in-concert excitement, Stage contained live renditions of such favorites as "2112," "Fly By Night," and "In The End." It also enabled the group to continue extensive touring throughout North America, as well as giving them Moog Synthesizer and bass pedals with their already proven rock formula, Rush appeared as a mind-dazzling trio weaving beautiful lyrics and instrumentation with hard driving bass and spacey synthesized passages.

The album's last cut, "Cygnus X-1, book one, The Voyage" featured yet another chapter in the annals of Rush, concluding its lyrics with the words "You may think that I am..."

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[Billboard Magazine] These excerpts from Billboard Magazine show the success of HEMISPHERES, as well as the recent Rush concert tour. Note the rapid rise of 60 places in the albums list, book one, an eerie feeling of suspense is generated through the use of synthesizer mixed with a pair of instrumental fade-ins containing familiar segments of the previous epic. Once again peering the synthesizer into focus, the group quickly returns back into a guitar/drum attack fronted by Lee's soaring vocals. With victory now attained the song blasts to a pseudo climax with an acoustic guitar and militarizing vocals putting the finishing touches on the two part tale.

Similar to many of the past Rush epics, the vocals must be thoroughly studied in order to gain a full appreciation of the music. In the case of book two, both segments must be digested if the listener is to obtain an adequate understanding of what Rush is attempting to present.

"The Sphere" opens side two in characteristic Rush rock and roll style, with Lee bellowing above hard hitting guitar and drums. Midway through the song, Lifeson and Peart combine for a pleasant guitar-bell interlude that crashes back into the closing verse. "The Trees" offers an interesting contrast to the rest of the album, as does "La Ville Stranigiate." Hemispheres' nine minute plus instrumental ending.

Running through flamenco, power riffs, and phase shifted guitars, combined with bass, drums, and an occasional synthesizer, the song offers each of the band members an opportunity to show off his wares in minute solo spots. Crisp drum and hi-hat beats accentuate Lifeson's only true guitar lead of the album, the lack of which could be termed Hemispheres only grave weakness.

As the three push full bore into the LP's concluding minutes, a new found air of maturity is present. Once condemned as "three chord Rush," Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, and Neil Peart have certainly come a long way from their days of rock obscurity.