Music

Rush popular with the fans, if not the critics

A couple of weeks ago, during an interview with Neil Peart of Rush, the talk turned to the Canadian rock trio's reputation—a reputation as a band thud, as Peart put it, "the press was always dumping on us. Though I don't know why people think that," he added with some puzzlement, going on to say that the group has gotten good reviews over the years as well as rotten ones.

Nevertheless, it's not hard to see why few people would figure Rush to be critics' darling. For one thing, the band's power-trio format, forged by the early 1970s, has not been fashionable for some time. In a time when short, snappy, danceable tunes are in vogue, Rush goes on for a lot of lengthy, esoteric philosophical numbers. Even so, the lyrics matter far less than their musical approach, which tends to alternate between hard rock—that bludgeons the listener into a stupor—and spacey dirges.

That there is still a surprisingly large market for what Rush offers, however, is equally evident. Thursday night's show at the International Amphitheater, where the band is playing through Sunday, was sold out, and no one was willing to be consumed with Rush-heat. Little wonder that they are unwilling to all patience while a hapless opening act does its stuff, or rather tries to.

At any rate, there can be fault found for not delivering in terms of quantity. Thursday's show ran more than two hours, during which drummer Peart, guitarist Alex Lifeson, and bassist Geddy Lee reprogrammed their earlier albums to their new "Permanent Waves," which thanks to the Top of the charts, "The Spirit of Radio," is their most successful effort to date.

That song, like "Farewell," "Natural Science," and a number of others in Rush's repertoire, is concerned with the band's concepts of technology, ideas that are heartfelt though typically stated as "art" as expression, not market campaigns. Another theme is science fiction, with the band making occasional use of film to accompany such songs as "Cygnus X-1," which has to do with black holes in space.

A couple of firecrackers, fog effects, and special lighting effects also figured in the evening's entertainment. Meanwhile, offstage, there was a distressing display of fireworks launched at random by idiots in the audience, and others turned gigantic lighters into perpetual torches to indicate their approval of everything the band did.

What Rush is doing, however, is nothing all that special. There is nothing all that overwhelming about their music or their performance. Nevertheless, at their best, which is when they are going the hardest, Rush is appealing enough in their own way. Despite their length, they are a pretty linear, a few bits really stand out, the rest going dragged.

NOTES: Rob Trower and Working Star have been booked for a show at the Grinnell Theater April 12, the same night Graham Nash headlines at the Auditorium. Joe Smith, formerly of Arrows, brings his new band, the Joe Perry Project, to Park West on April 19.

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