

ROCK REVIEW

Rush wows Coliseum crowd

REPRINTED FROM LAST NIGHT'S LATE EDITIONS
By Anastasia Pantalos

Rush is a rock 'n' roll band that has always gotten the bummiest of bum raps from critics. I honestly don't understand why. The Canadian trio is hated by the media worse than any other mainstream, mass popularity rock group, it seems — worse than Styx, Journey, Reo — anyone.

Perhaps it is because the group's music is an off-center, indescribable melding of several strands of rock music that most rock critics deplore: heavy metal, art rock and Journey/Styx-style squish rock. Yet Rush is wholly none of these. The band is original — and isn't that good!

Critics' views have never hampered the public's enthusiasm for Rush and a capacity crowd at the Coliseum last night was vocal in its approval of everything the group did. (Rush will appear again tomorrow.)

Instrumentally, the group has always been a knockout. Its songs are those multipart, highly involved flights harking back to the let's-show-off kind of pieces that were popular in the early 1970s.

In the pop-song-oriented '80s, these can sound ponderous, but if one immerses oneself in Alex Lifeson's sleek guitar playing and Geddy Lee's full sounding keyboards, listening can be as pleasurable as listening to early Yes often was.

Unfortunately, much of the media applies its basic Clash standards to everything. So

naturally, drummer Neil Peart's fascination with science fiction and the future come off hokey and the group's material seems virtuosic and overextended.

By their own standards, the players bring it off beautifully. Over the solid sounding instrumental base (actually four instruments since Lee plays bass and keyboards about equally) came the group's Achilles heel: Geddy Lee's you-gotta-develop-a-taste-for-'em vocals.

But Lee's voice, wonder of wonders, has finally begun to deepen and acquire some resonance. It no longer will attract every dog in five counties. This was startling noticeable on the group's latest album, "Signals," decorated with a fire hydrant — perhaps intended to replace Lee's voice as a dog attraction.

Also-noticeable was the lyrical change. The band has taken a stab at describing some of the experiences that might relate more closely to its teen-aged audience. "Subdivisions" is keenly observed and provocative.

With its recent, earthier album, the group seems to have gotten a new shot of life. Its concert here in May 1981, the last in this area, was wearying for a band that always played its heart out onstage for the people who really count — those who buy the tickets.

This time, the group was lively, mobile and affable. Even the lights were brighter, which added a more extroverted, less distanced feel to the show.

Surprisingly, the group dispensed with most of its more recent heavy AOR favorites early in the show, "Tom Sawyer," "Free Will" and even "Subdivisions." It left its very old and now rather atypical "In the Mood" for the set closer. But the rather odd song order is hardly a big drawback for a group that creates moods through drawn-out instrumental flights rather than through short songs.

Opening act Rory Gallagher also brought back some better memories from the past. The Irish singer / songwriter / guitarist plays a heavily blues-based style that is less prevalent now than it was a decade ago. In the right hands, like Gallagher's, it can still come off with the same steamy urgency it did 10 years ago. Certain pieces, like the set closer, "The Big Guns," flirted with heavy metal, establishing a conduit to the audience. The crowd responded by demanding an encore.



Critics' bum raps have never hampered Rush whose members didn't play like bums at the Coliseum. From left are Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart and Geddy Lee.

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