Rush on a lucky roll, band's lyricist says

BY CLIFF Radel
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In the caustic line of life, fate deals the cards, but we play the hand. So ends today’s philosophy lesson from Professor Neil Peart, drummer, lyricist and resident deep thinker for Canadian rock trio Rush.

“Fortune favors the bold,” wonderings if life depends on the lack of the draw and considering whether to roll the dice or cash in the chips are the themes of Rush’s latest album, Rude. The band.

To roll or not to roll, that is the question. The answer, Professor Peart says, is, “Roll ‘em. Go for it.”

Lack plays a part

Speaking by telephone from his makeshift classroom — “an office in the basement of an office in Hamilton, Ontario,” where Rush is rehearsing before playing a string of dates — Peart delivers a part.

“I have always espoused the power of imagination and the strength of the individual,” Peart says. “But in my own instance, luck has played a part.”

“Regardless of the strength of my will or how hard I practiced my drums, I am still lucky to be in Rush.”

How so? “Let’s accept what some people say, luck is defined as when preparation meets opportunity,” Peart says. “And I was engaged in my opportunity. Certainly, I was prepared when my opportunity came. But, I couldn’t say that Geddy (Lee), Rush’s bassist and lead singer, Alex Lifeson, the band’s guitarist) and I was meeting and getting along great and staying together for 17 years and...”

“Because the good philosopher...”

Claire Radel
On the record

His new album, Too Late To Quit, has sold 15 million copies.

“Too Late To Quit is the making of a man, and it’s the making of a band,” Peart says. “So, we were there for a full year.”

“Musically, it’s a step forward. It’s a step in the right direction.”

Rap star heavy on preaching

One week after the hills of Oakland, Calif., went up in flames, M.C. Hammer emerges from the ashes.

But has he emerged as a modern-day prophet? Or just another turkey? Either way, the Oakland native is still filling in the afterglow of his biggest-selling rap album, “Let’s Go Girls,” which has sold 15 million copies. So what? No. Big deal. Hammer didn’t need the M.C. anyway. He can call himself Hammer. He can even go by his given name, Stanley Kirk Burrell. It doesn’t matter.

What matters is if he changes his tune. Hammer has on Too Late To Quit and that change is not for the better.

It’s hard to find fault with a rapper whose songs promote the virtues of brotherhood (“Why Can’t We Live Together”) and hard work (“Good To Go”) while decrying drug abuse (“Drug Store Robbery”) and the self-inflicted genocide practiced in America’s black ghettos (“Bombin’”).

Hammer is clearly a hate-monster Public Enemy or gutter-minded Live Crew member.

On the other hand, he is also not James Brown or Marvin Gaye, two artists he emulates on Too Late To Quit. Hammer’s songs cannot sustain Brown’s drive. He can quote Brown’s soul screams on “This Is The Way We Roll.” He can even say, “Sometimes I feel like the Godfather.”

But, try as he might, Hammer is not the Godfather of Soul, the Hardest-Working Man in Show Business, No way, no how. Too bad. Hammer tries to be Gaye with“Brothers Hang On.” He makes his point with a melody not unlike Gaye’s “What’s Going On” and “Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology).” Then he restates it. Again... And again. And again.

“Too Late To Quit” lasts 90 minutes. It makes its point in half the time. Of its 17 tracks, only two, “Find Yourself A Friend” and “Addams Groove,” from the upcoming Addams Family film, are less than four minutes. Both last three minutes and 56 seconds. Why the long songs? Does Hammer have this much to say? He thinks he does. But not necessarily as a rapper. He’s a musician now, an artist, a composer of big tunes with big choruses.

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