

LES CLAYPOOL + GEDDY LEE

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—Geddy Lee

BY ALAN DI PERNA

GUITAR WORLD: What was the first Rush concert you ever attended, Les?

LES CLAYPOOL: The *Hemispheres* tour [1978]. I was about 14. I drank three beers and threw up.

GEDDY LEE: The finest way to enjoy a Rush concert! So you were the guy.

CLAYPOOL: It was amazing. It really got me practicing.

GW: Rush and Primus are bands where the bass player plays a very central role.

LEE: Yeah. In Les' band it has kind of a dominant role. [laughter] More so than in Rush.

GW: Did you develop your respective bass styles out of a need to fill up space in a trio?

LEE: I think it was the drugs...

CLAYPOOL: I've always liked three-piece bands. A huge part of the reason for that is because I was the

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biggest Rush fan. My whole high school career was just Rush—I had Rush T-shirts, I went to every show, had every record. So I've always liked trios, and I've always been a pretty aggressive player. I've been in bigger bands, but I tend to write chordy stuff for the bass that fills up a lot of space. I'd step on a lot of toes if Primus was a bigger band.

LEE: I think that when Rush started, the lack of a rhythm guitar put pressure on me to fill in. My goal was to come up with a sound

that was broader than just a thumping low end. All the bass players I liked had aggressive, obnoxious sounds. Bands with real bottomy, soft-sounding bass players always reminded me of lounge acts. I was into people like Jack Bruce and John Entwistle, both of whom were basically in trios.

GW: Both of you are bass guitar role models.

LEE: How does it feel to be a role model, Les?

CLAYPOOL: Weird. I don't feel that way. There are some incredible bass players coming out of the woodwork—guys like Flea—who are really putting the bass at the forefront. When I started playing, nobody wanted to play bass—everybody wanted to be Van Halen or Jimmy Page. But now a lot of kids want to play bass.

LEE: That's how I got my first gig as a bass

player. I was playing guitar in a band, the bass player quit, and nobody wanted take his place.

CLAYPOOL: I think it keeps the sperm count higher, too. Those low frequencies.

GW: What was the first song you learned to play, Geddy?

LEE: The Yardbirds' "For Your Love," on acoustic guitar. Classic. And the opening part of that Roy Orbison song. [*Sings the riff to "Oh, Pretty Woman."*] If you could figure that out, you were cool. I can't remember the first song I learned on bass, although I do remember that there was this old Rolling Stones song—I think it was called "2120 South Michigan Ave." [*from 12x5, ABKCO, 1964*]. If you were a bass player way back then and could play that song, you were all right. It was one of those watersheds.

CLAYPOOL: I think the watershed for me was the main line from [*Yes*'] "Roundabout."

GW: Geddy, under what conditions did you make your first recording?

LEE: Like most first albums, it wasn't recorded under very advantageous conditions. We were playing bars, and we'd go in after a gig and record all night. It's a horrible way to make a record.

CLAYPOOL: How did the first record do? Did it bust open doors for you?

LEE: It was a real slow build. We were rejected by everyone. They kept talking to us about doing singles deals but we wanted to make an album. So the record came out in Canada on our own label. We had a local following in Toronto, and all our fans bought it. They'd also call the radio station and request it incessantly. The program director loved it and started playing it on the air. And as soon as they played it, they got all these phone-ins—and it all started from there.

CLAYPOOL: Was "Working Man" the big single?

LEE: Yeah. It got us a gig in Cleveland. We opened up for ZZ Top purely on the strength of our import being played on that radio station. There was no American release at that point. We were completely freaked about doing the show—the crowd recognized the songs and we couldn't believe it! Even though Cleveland's not very far from Toronto, it might as well have been 2,000 miles away, for what it represented to us: a gig in the States.

GW: How did you guys get your deal, Les?

CLAYPOOL: Basically, it took a lot of blow jobs on our part. Actually, what we did was very similar to what Geddy described. We talked to labels, but they all wanted to "develop" us. We had kind of a cult following and a demo called "Sausage" that was doing really well. Basically, [*guitarist*] Larry [*Lalonde*] and Herb [*a.k.a. Tim Alexander, Primus' drummer*] had just joined the band, and I decided we needed to put out some vinyl, so we recorded a live album [*Suck On This, Caroline, 1990*]. I think it's our best-sounding record.

LEE: You gotta do it yourself if you don't want to do what everybody else is doing. ●

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