Rush puts on merely standard act

BY CHRIS VARIAS

Only the most devoted Rush fans know what Geddy Lee is singing about, and the rest don’t care.

For every listener turned off by the band’s Canadian-tinted use of mythological themes, there is another sold on the band’s blend of rock art and hard rock.

Behind all of Rush’s literary and musical heavy-handiness stands Mr. Lee, the bassist and vocalist who doesn’t take himself or his band too seriously. The opening refrain to the band’s Riverfest performance Wednesday night proved that.

Fans’ recent single “Sister” blasted from the PA system and segued into Rush’s cuts from the last album. The cover of the album makes reference to Mr. Lee’s melodic cackle: “What about the voice of Geddy Lee? How did it get so high?” wonders he speak like an ordinary guy.

CONCERT REVIEW

“We’ve got 4 or 5 million songs to play for you tonight,” announced Mr. Lee early in the three-hour show. “I hope you’ve taken your medication.”

“Limelight,” “Spirit of the Radio” and “Tom Sawyer” were just a few of the radio favorites that the band mixed in with newer songs.

During another, “The Trees,” Mr. Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson took the main stage and traded heavy-metal grunts, all the while with tongues in cheeks.

The most striking things about their newer and less-popular material was their accompanying videos projected on a large screen behind the band.

The rapid-fire images set to “Nobody’s Hero” were especially eyebrow-raisers. Flashing an image of Steubenville, Ohio’s favorite son, Dean Martin, during a song called “Nobody’s Hero” could be considered as a riotous act by some Rockyes.

Years of arena-hopping are slowly catching up with Neil Peart, hero to drummers who prefer flash over subtlety. With his expanding music and Van Dyke beard, he’s beginning to take on the look of one of his drumming contemporaries, Cheas- Trick’s Bun E. Carlos.

Mr. Peart plays a great, madly amplified drum set. He tossed a drumstick straight up in the air several times throughout the night and cleanly caught it at about an 80 percent clip. His kit was set up on a rotating platform, so he could spin it around, use each of his numerous drums and never turn his back to his drumsticks.

Many drummers among the crowd of 11,206 yielded in reaction to a grand finale from solo. Most of those yelps were not a stamp of approval for extraordinary playing, but simply programmed responses to recognizing a drum solo.

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