RUSH’N AROUND

Peter Douglas brings the equipment roll up to date . . . and all without waking up the boys

By now everyone knows about Rush, so we can probably skip the preliminaries, except to say that their second British tour sold out as completely as the first did last summer. The release of "A Farewell To Kings" increased and strengthened their already fanatical following. It brought from them a gentler and more lyrical side than their previous albums had displayed, and although their live performance is as decisively heavy as ever, it does at least indicate the direction which the music is now taking.

As Geddy Lee and Neil Peart entered Alex Lifeson’s hotel room, still visibly suffering from the after-effects of a late-night visit from Lizzy’s Brian Robertson, the best method was obvious to pounce straight away before they all assumed a horizontal posture and started snoring. Geddy, however, was quite happy to talk, though whether he was actually asleep behind his large dark-tint glasses is a matter for conjecture.

For the information of those who still don’t know, Geddy plays bass and sings in a high, eerie voice, quite belied by his normal speaking voice. In addition he has a set of Moog Taurus bass pedals and a Mini-Moog. Rush as a band seem to load themselves with work: on stage they all play several instruments, and when they’re not on stage they are travelling to the next gig or recovering from the last. Wouldn’t it at least be easier musically if they recruited a fourth member to handle keyboards?

"Well yeah," said Geddy, "but we have fun with just the three of us and we really like the way we work together. We don't want anybody else. It’s a question of music too. What’s going to happen? Is our music going to continue growing as a three-piece or shall we get another member? We say No, let’s try to pull it off ourselves, try to bring these extra textures in somehow, as well as bettering ourselves as musicians. We’re just hoping to create a more original trio sound."

And so to the Taurus pedals. How do they fit in? "Those bass pedals are great — they've got four pre-set bass sounds and one variable high-end synthesizer sound, which is great for a bass-player. You can play bass run and you can coordinate a high-end run to go along with it. It’s like having another person." Although he doesn’t class himself as a proper keyboard player — yet — he has recently acquired an Oberheim 8-voice polyphonic synthesizer. It isn’t being used on stage so far, but Geddy sets it up in a side-room at every gig and finds time to practice on it for a couple of hours every day.

"I was going to pick up a Polymoog, but there were certain things about it I didn’t like. First of all it feels very percussive. I think it’s made more for a real keyboard player that the keys are pressure-sensitive, which is not really necessary for me because I’m not piano-trained. And although you have an unlimited amount of notes that you can play on, eight notes is fine for me. And there’s the fact that on the Oberheim each voice, each note, goes to its own module, its own oscillator. It has a really rich sound, and I didn’t think the Polymoog could compare in the richness of tone. I’ve had nightmares with my Mini-Moog, keeping it in tune, stabilizing it on the road, and I thought wow! if I get this Polymoog and it starts doing the same thing I’ll go crazy! So far I’ve had this Oberheim in three different countries and I barely ever have to tune it . . .

"But the number one feature of the Oberheim is the computer memory. You can pre-set sixteen sounds in the programme, and at the touch of a button you can recall that sound. I’m busy working on some really bizarre noises. There are all kinds of things you can add to it. There’s a cassette you can interface with it, or you can programme the complete sixteen-oscillator sound into the cassette and play it back through the machine."

He has also been busy on the bass guitar front — in particular a new weapon to swell his armory of Rickenbackers.

"It’s a new model of the Ricky bass they’ve just put out this year called the 4002. I don’t know if it’s available in England, but it’s like their competition with the new wave of basses (I told you not to mention the new wave in this issue . . . Ed.). It’s got an ebony fretboard, a natural wood finish, low impedance pick-ups differently positioned, and an added input: it’s got one normal socket, one for the Rick-O-Sound, plus one for putting the bridge pick-up straight through. It’s their expensive model. It does sound
It was time for Geddy to retire gracefully and to slap Alex into wakefulness in preparation for more ax-related questions. A strong cup of black coffee later he began to explain why he has changed from Marshall to Hiwatt, though as before with a stack of four 100 watt heads.

"It's more controllable. That's mainly what I like about it. I tried using the Hiwatt heads with the Marshall cabinets but it wasn't a very good match, I didn't think, so I went over to the Hiwatt cabinets, and it's a much richer, fatter, thicker sound than the Marshalls. Anyway I find that the tonal response on the Hiwatt is a little more accurate than it is on the Marshall. On the Marshall some of the things didn't work: from volume 1 to 9 nothing happened, then when you got to 10 it kicked out. And the bass wasn't there. It may have been the heads that I had — and I did have them for a long time. But the difference between the two is radical."

Alex has also ditched most of his effects units since we last spoke to him; he's only got a Roland Chorus and a Roland Space Echo now. I got rid of the Electric Mistress. It was too noisy, too unreliable, and I got rid of the MXR analogue delay that I had . . . I just got rid of all that little stuff. I find that you can be fairly versatile with the Chorus. You can get a nice combination of sounds. With the two Echoes and the Maestro unit and all the other stuff on the floor there was so much hiss and so much noise that I got really bugged by it. I thought that if I was getting new amplification I may as well get rid of those things. The Roland Echo is much cleaner than the Echoplex and there's no power loss. It does have one thing that I don't like: the motor goes in and out when you turn it on and off. And you get a uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu