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Rush

Valdy

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Bachman

Making a Demo

Summer Festivals

Drummer's Choice

Contents

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Features

- Rush** by Mad Stone 15
A "special combination of writing, recording, and performing" has made Rush successful hard rock musicians.
- Valdy** by Richard Flohil 18
An insight into one of Canada's top singer-songwriters
- Randy Bachman** by Bob Mackowycz 20
"Not punk, not new wave, not old wave - permanent wave"
- Making a Demo** by Mona Coxson 23
Canadian Musician talks to Michael Godin, a & r director for A & M Records
- Summer Festivals** by Richard Flohil 25
A guide to outdoor folk activities across Canada
- Drummer's Choice** by Kathy Whitney 27
Selected setups from several of Toronto's most discriminating drummers
-

Departments

- Feedback** 6
- Notes** 8
- On Tour** 10
- Books** 11
- Records** 12
- Profile** 13
- Marketplace** 49
- Product News** 50
-

Columns

- Guitar** by Bobby Edwards — *The Studio Guitarist* 34
- Keyboards** by Brian Harris — *Sight Reading* 35
- Percussion** by Paul Robson — *What Drum Head Do I Choose?* 36
- Bass** by Tom Szczesniak — *Attack and Release* 38
- Brass** by Don Johnson — *Realistic Thoughts on the Art of Practicing* 39
- Woodwinds** by Paul Brodie — *The 6th World Saxophone Congress* 40
- Synthesizers** by John Mills-Cockell — *On Stage and in the Studio* 41
- Vocal Technique** by Rosemary Burns — *Open Your Mouth and say AAAAAAAAAA-H* 42
- Arranging** by Jim Pirie — *The String Section* 43
- Recording** by Paul Zaza — *The Rhythm Section* 44
- Audio** by Paul Denyes — *A Buyer's Checklist* 45
- Taking Care of Business** by Mona Coxson — *Living on a Variable Income* 46

RUSH RUSH RUSH

MAD STONE



FIN COSTELLO

In the 10 years that *Rush* has been a band, it has been considered fashionable in certain musical circles to ridicule Geddy Lee's screeching vocals, laugh at the simplicity of Neil Peart's lyrics or sneer at the pomposity of Alex Lifeson's music. But the one thing that absolutely no one can knock is the band's enormous success. And when you get right down to it, what else really matters?

For years, *Rush* has been the unpopular, popular band. Their albums, which frequently contain long, involved epics, do not lend themselves well to airplay and much of the music media have made no secret of the fact that they consider the band a musical lightweight. Even so,

A "special combination of writing, recording, and performing" has made Rush successful hard rock musicians

the band has nine gold albums to their credit (6 Canadian, three American) and two platinum ones.

Rush concerts are packed with raunchy, but enthusiastic fans and their tours often

are sold out months in advance. As far as the musical status quo is concerned, *Rush* has definitely made it. And their worst enemies and best friends all want to know how.

Guitarist Alex Lifeson says their secret is hard work. Tour till you drop and then record. Then tour again. Spend years on the road criss-crossing North America until you have the following you need and the exposure that is so essential to record sales. It's mentally and physically exhausting but it gets results.

"I'd rather do it this way than any other way," Alex said in an interview following a sold-out concert in Rochester, N.Y., early in April.

"It's nice for a band like *Boston* to come out with a big hit album or any of those type of bands and become successful like that, but it's not nearly as satisfying as knowing that the people are there and they've been with you for four or five years.

"You get tired of touring, but you get tired of anything really. Once you have a little time off to get yourself together, it's all right."

Rush kicked off their latest tour October 14 in Kingston, Ont. In the intervening months, they have crossed Canada and the States and now are on their way to England and Europe. Before the year is out, they will have written and recorded their seventh studio album and probably will have gotten a head start on their next concert tour.

They are now promoting their latest effort, *Hemispheres*, recorded on the Anthem label, which was written and recorded last summer at Rockfield Studios in Wales. Judging from sales, the album needs little promotion.

It shipped gold in Canada and quickly turned platinum. In the States, it turned gold early and is now heading for the platinum mark. The number of Canadian rock bands that have achieved even vaguely similar success can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

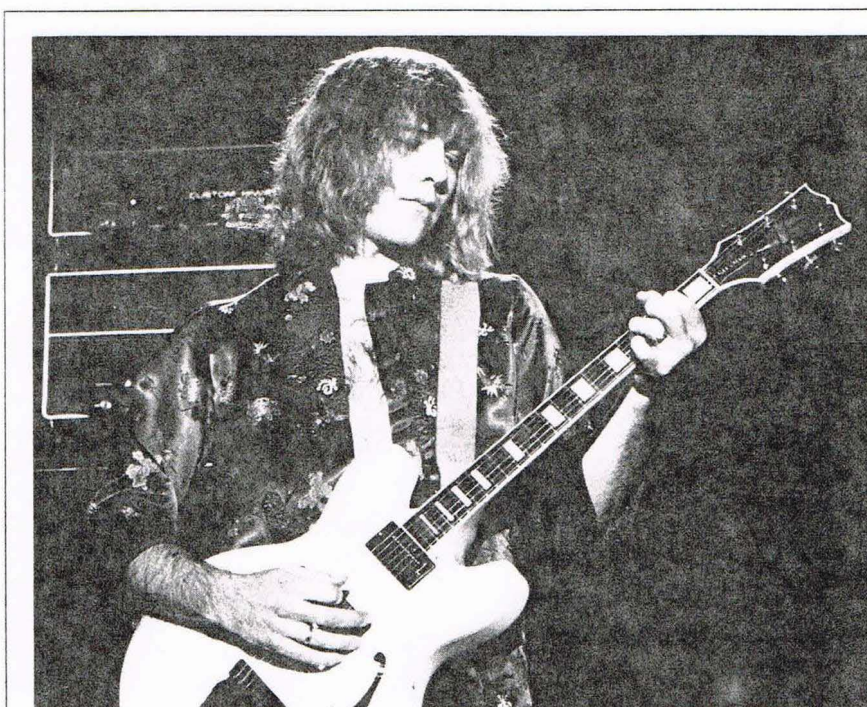
Geddy Lee, the band's bassist and erstwhile synthesizer player, says it is impossible to analyze what makes *Rush*, or any band, successful. "I'd like to think it's because we play good music and it's interesting and relatively different, and the combination of styles make it interesting to a broader spectrum of people. But who knows?"

"You can analyse it forever and you can look at it from 100 different viewpoints, but how do you know what's right? I'm sure each fan comes to see us for a little different reason. Maybe that's the answer."

After being in the audience for a *Rush* concert, it's sometimes difficult to say just what the fans are there for. Some obviously came to throw firecrackers and try to outdo the band at what they do best -- produce loud volume. Others were content just to be there. Still others tried to attract the band's attention by throwing stuff on stage. It was definitely the wrong approach.

"I think it's the most rude and discourteous thing someone can do to a performer," says Geddy. "Even if they hate what's going on onstage, it's simple courtesy. Obviously the people in Rochester tonight didn't hate what we were doing - they were just rude. I got hit in the head with a hat and it's very distracting."

Lifeson agrees that the crowds do get a little boisterous at times, but he says other bands have it worse. "It's commonplace at a concert now and we don't get it as bad as some people. Aerosmith



DENNIS KRISTOS

had a couple of accidents with M80s, which are very large firecrackers they sell in the States. They had to go off tour for a few months. Kiss had some problems as well.

"When it gets to a certain point, you say something to the audience and you can usually tell if it is going to do any good. We have walked off on occasion. But it's sad to see stuff like that."

Despite the crowds' extroverted behaviour, both Lee and Lifeson believe their music is being listened to and appreciated by them. Alex says that in the early 1970s, when the band was still struggling to make a name for itself by fronting for better-known groups, there were indeed some hostile audiences. But with the band's success came larger, more appreciative audiences.

Rush has also improved musically, says Lifeson, whose musical background before the band was non-existent. "We've become more aware of ourselves as musicians and we spend more time at it."

He says that to fill the extra hours on the road he now practises guitar for an hour each day. "I can see improvement and it sort of spurs me on to keep practising." Alex also listens to classical music, which helps him to relax and sometimes supplies ideas for musical bits.

Geddy's musical tastes are diverse. He says some of his favorite music includes Brand X, Bill Bruford and a group from Holland called Solution. "I've also been getting into Big Band music a little lately. A friend of mine turned me on to that. I also like Amazing Blondel, some English Renaissance-type music and I've been trying to get into jazz-rock."

"I'm making a conscious effort because there are great things happening in jazz-

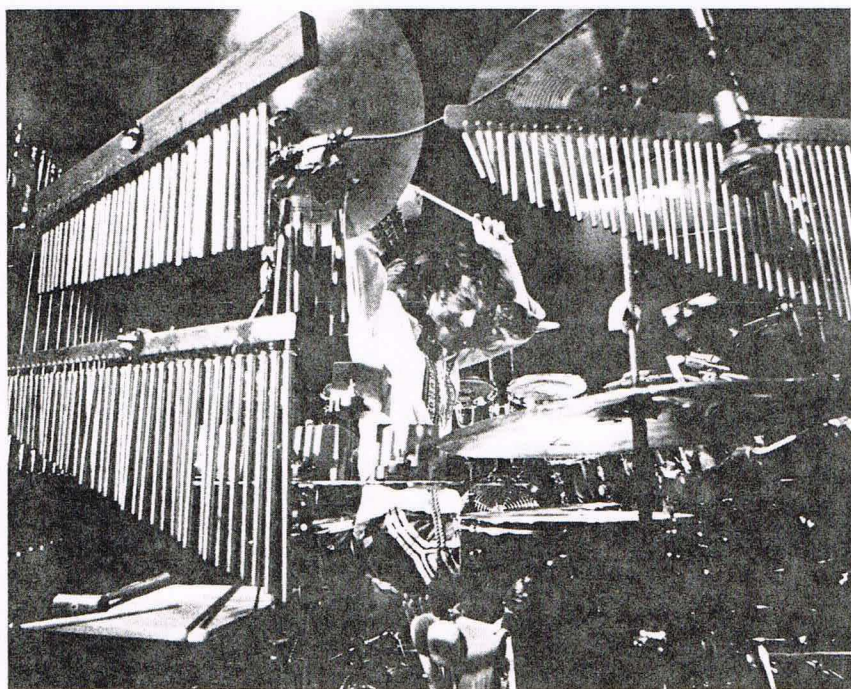
rock. For me, it's just weeding out the things that don't suit my taste. I've listened to Return to Forever and they don't do anything for me and then I listen to Weather Report and they blow me away. So it's just finding the bands that are suited to my taste."

Geddy's taste plays a large part in the direction the band has taken and is taking. His vocals, which are high and forceful, have given the band a unique sound that is easily identifiable. But this unusual sound has sometimes worked against the band.

"Looking at it from a DJ's point of view or a program director's point of view, Geddy has a high, screeching voice that is sometimes hard to get used to," says Alex. "It's very hard rock and we've got sort of a bad reputation for that, so we never relied on radio for anything. We just went out and we worked. We've always been a touring band."

And they intend to keep it that way. As far as the future goes, the plans of both Alex and Geddy centre on the band. They finish their current tour in June and they'll have five weeks' holiday before they are off to England to record. Between the end of the tour and the start of the album they'll write little bits of music but most of their time will be spent getting to know their wives and families again. All three have permanent relationships which they say are surviving despite the long absences.

Lifeson says he doesn't regret the touring, but he knows it can be hard on his wife and family. "If that's what you want to do then that's what you're going to do. And the people around you are going to have to accept that. There are some hard times.



when they're available.

But most of the time they're busy playing his Rickenbacker 4001 bass, his main instrument in concert. Now and then he switches to a double-necked Rickenbacker that contains a 4001 and a 12-string guitar. The 12-string is played through a Fender Twin Reverb. The bass part of his system is run stereo through two BGW 750-B amplifiers via two Ashley Audio pre-amplifiers. The high end goes through two Theile Line cabinets with Electro-Voice EVM 15-inch speakers. The low end is run through two Ampeg V4-B cabinets with four JBL 140 speakers.

The synthesizer and a second set of Moog pedals located near his mike, are run through a monitor system that he had designed. "Most of the system is new to this tour. My other set-up wasn't giving me enough of what I wanted. This equipment delivers more fine tuning and a cleaner sound. My amplifiers work less and are more efficient."

Lifeson uses mainly Gibson guitars and Hi Watt amplification. He says he found Gibson early on and stayed with it. "I've got an ES 355, a 345 and a 335 that I've used for a long time. But the 355 is my primary guitar. It was custom made while the 345 is just stock."

"I also use a Gibson double-neck, an Epiphone classical, a B45-12 which is an acoustic 12 and a Roland guitar synthesizer. I used that in *Hemispheres*. Both Geddy and I use Moog pedals."

Alex says he has other guitars but uses the Gibsons most. A guitar he had made by the Pyramid Company in Detroit is used in the studio when he wants a strong, accenting sound. "I used to use it on stage, but it didn't mix properly with the sound I had set up for the Gibsons. So I use it mainly in the studio. I also have a Fender Stratocaster I use occasionally in the studio."

Lifeson says the group has an artists' discount with the Norlin Corp., a conglomerate that includes Moog, Gibson, Sennheiser and Maestro.

"You don't get the equipment for free but you get it at a certain price. All they ask is that they can use your picture on promotion and stuff like that. It's a very open deal, so you can do all kinds of endorsements with other companies if you want."

On stage, all three are kept busy with the variety of instruments they play. Peart is completely surrounded by a complex percussion set-up that includes everything from tubular bells to a triangle. Lifeson and Lee do double time, playing with their hands and feet. But they don't mind. Lifeson says that at one point they considered adding an extra member and even had some people in mind, but the idea was dropped.

"I think it would disrupt the chemistry

Continued on page 30

"For me, for instance, I have two kids and I don't get back to see them as much as I would like to. Still, I'm happy doing what I'm doing, and when we are together we make the most of our time."

Geddy says his personal life doesn't suffer at all. "My home life was constructed around my touring so that's all part of it. When I go home, I assume my home life. Both my wife and I would like me to be home more but I'm not. It's cut and dry."

"My wife has her own life she is leading and I have mine. I don't complain about hers (she's a fashion student in Toronto) and she doesn't complain about mine. We whine a bit once in a while, that sort of gets it out of your system."

One thing Geddy does complain about frequently is his lack of privacy. "Fame is really a curse in most respects. It is a very glamorous thing that I thought I'd love and then you get there and it can drive you crazy."

"Recognition drives you crazy. Pressure drives you crazy. I mean unless you maintain the same sort of mental attitude about yourself that you've always had, people will tear you apart. Whether it be physically or mentally, everyone wants a piece of you. Everyone wants your time and no one has any respect for the fact that you are a person and require some privacy."

Geddy says he doesn't mind being recognized when he is working or touring, that's part of the price he pays for having his face plastered all over. But when he's home it's a different story. If he is bothered in his private lair, it infuriates him. "I think it's pretty insensitive on the fan's part. But I'm refusing to give in. I don't want to move."

He suffers from a lack of privacy much more than the other members because he is the only one living in Toronto. Alex has a house in Richmond Hill, just north of Toronto and Neil lives outside St. Catharines with his wife. Their homes, although certainly not extravagant, are a symbol of their success. How many other musicians in their mid-20s can afford their own home?

"In a financial way, success has changed my life because I don't have to worry about some of the things I used to, like paying rent and making sure I had enough to see me through," says Alex. "There have been some really slow points in the band. We didn't get paid for two months at one point. But we don't have to worry about that sort of thing anymore."

Their financial success also allows the band the freedom to entertain themselves on the road. Because they travel by bus they don't have a lot of spare time, says Alex.

But when they find themselves with some extra hours on their hands they often rent an ice rink and have a hockey match with the road crew or use the empty concert halls for rollerskating. In the southern states they got their frustrations out by racing Formula V cars on tracks that could be rented after hours.

The money has also enabled them to buy whatever equipment strikes their fancy, and there's much that has. Perhaps the flashiest testament to fancy on stage is Geddy's Oberheim polyphonic synthesizer. The eight-voiced keyboard, which he jokingly refers to as his "giant monster" is interfaced with a set of Moog Taurus pedals which he plays with his feet. This gives him the option of triggering the Oberheim with his feet or with his hands

RUSH

Continued from page 17

of the band. And we decided that we would take it upon ourselves to fill the spots that a fourth member would cover. It's a lot of fun, you know, keeps things interesting. After you've played the same song for four or five years you get a little tired of it. If you can make it as interesting as possible, then all the better."

Geddy says a fourth member would ruin the rapport between players. "It's as close to perfect as it could possibly be and I wouldn't disturb it for anything. Because of that restriction we placed upon ourselves, I think a more interesting style has developed."

On only one song has *Rush* used an outside musician. He was their album cover designer, Hugh Syme, who also plays keyboards with the Ian Thomas Band. Lifeson says they knew when they were recording that song (*Tears on 2112*) that the band wasn't going to play it live so they went a little overboard on the production.

Perhaps the best person to fit the slot of fourth member is the band's producer, Terry Brown, a British ex-patriot who lives in Toronto. Alex says Terry is with the band from the start of a new work,

unless it was written on the road.

"He gives advice, makes suggestions for arrangements of songs and says which parts don't make it. He's really the objective ear for us. And production - we all produce together."

Very little is written on the road or separately, he says. The bulk of the writing for the upcoming album will be done in a two-week period sometime this summer after which the band will do a few live dates, maybe test out the new material on the fans before going to Trident Studios in England.

Geddy says the album will not be conceptual. Lifeson agrees. "I think we've taken the idea of doing a concept as far as we can. We started with *Caress of Steel*, which was a loosely, put-together concept. And then with *2112* it was more of an outright concept."

Following the next album, the band will probably take a short break before returning to their endless tour. "It's kind of weird because we know where we are going to be until next Christmas," says Alex. "That's pretty far in advance. I guess that's as far as we can look right now. We're hoping to make the schedule a little easier, work a little less and having more days off."

"The future? I can't conceive of what I am going to be doing in 10 years. I would like to stay in music after the band."

Lee says he can't see any end in sight

for the band. "The future is still too far away for me to tell. If the band is still successful and the people still want to hear us, then I'm sure we'll still be touring."

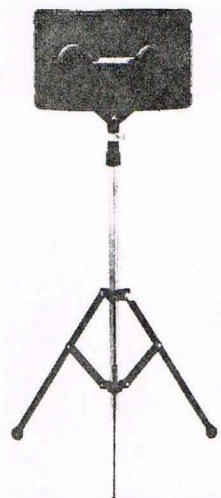
"As long as we can keep doing it, we will."

What exactly "it" is, Geddy doesn't say, but he leaves the impression that it is more than just getting up on stage and performing. "It" is that special combination of writing, recording and performing that - against all odds - has made the members of *Rush* successful, Canadian, hard-rock musicians; a very rare breed indeed. **cm**

A Rush Discography

Rush
ANTHEM ANR-1-1001
 Fly by Night
ANTHEM ANR-1-1002
 Caress of Steel
ANTHEM ANR-1-1003
 2112
ANTHEM ANR-1-1004
 All the World's a Stage
ANTHEM ANR-2-1005
 A Farewell to Kings
ANTHEM ANR-1-1010
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