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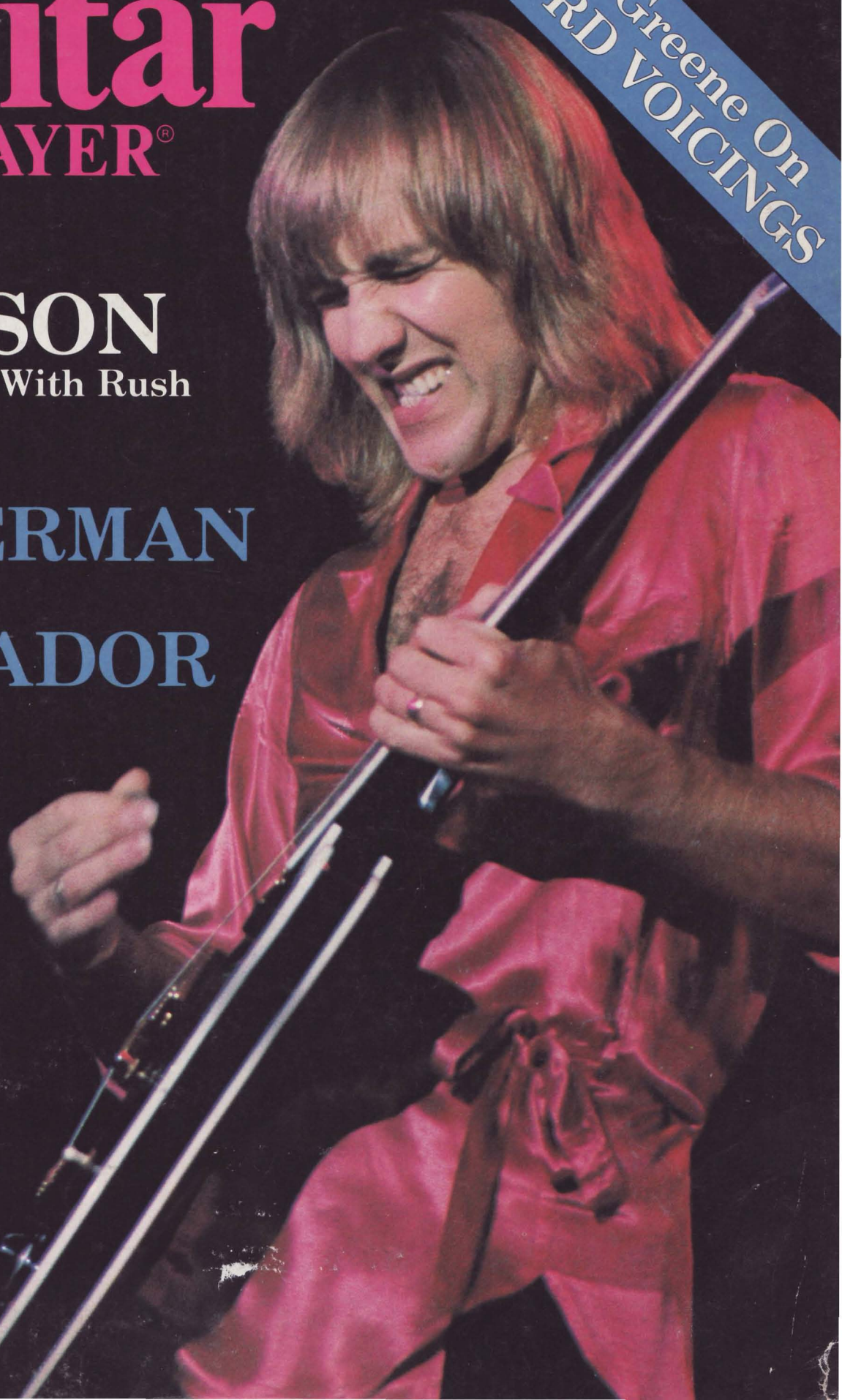
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GEDDY LEE

Hi-Tech Bassist and Synthesist with Rush

By Tom Mulhern

SINCE THE AUTUMN of 1968, Toronto's premier power trio, Rush, has been tirelessly slugging its way up the rock ladder, playing quick, complex, and *loud* material that embraces both progressive and traditional rock styles. The members' persistence has paid off: They are one of today's most popular groups, and their most recent album, *Permanent Waves*, has hovered in the Top 20 almost since its release this spring.

Perhaps the most prominent member of Rush is the 26-year-old son of Polish immigrants, Geddy Lee, the hard-hitting bassist, synthesist, and lead vocalist who's well-known for his peripatetic stage movements—it's dazzling to see so much sheer energy expended without a nervous breakdown. Riffing away almost constantly on his black Rickenbacker 4001 bass, Geddy sets forth low-frequency melodies while loosing his piercing vocals. Additional harmonic work on his Taurus bass pedals further creates the image of a one-man rhythm section which complements Alex Lifeson's nimble guitar work and Neil Peart's intricate drumming. Nevertheless, Geddy's self-taught style goes beyond merely supplying the pulse for the band—it is an indispensable factor in Rush's melodic lifeblood.

* * * *

WHEN DID YOU start getting interested in music?

When I was about 14. I always took music in school; I tried various instruments—drums, trumpet, and clarinet—all for really short periods of time, though. Learning an instrument in school didn't really turn me on, so I took piano on my own when I was very young—rudimentary stuff. It wasn't until I was out of grammar school and listening to rock music that I became interested enough to seriously learn to play.

Was there any particular band's music that inspired you?

Yeah. Cream was actually the first band that really got me interested. From then on, I listened to people like the Who and Jeff Beck [*GP*, Dec. '73]. I was mainly interested in early British progressive rock.

Did you start out on bass?

No, I began with guitar, although I didn't play it very long. I was about 14 then, and I got my first acoustic guitar, a beautiful acoustic that had palm trees painted on it.



JON SIEVERT

Other than that, I have no idea what kind it was. I got a bass about six months after that, a Conora, which was just a big solidbody with two pickups. It had a real big neck—sort of like a Kent. I had a little amp, too, but I can't even remember what kind it was. We used to borrow and rent amps—Ace amps, Sivertone amps—whenever we needed them. The first *real* amp that I got was a Traynor with two 15s; I was almost 16 then. It was just before I joined Rush, acutally.

Did you play along with records?

Yeah. That's how I learned to play bass—emulating Jack Bruce [*GP*, Aug. '75] and people like that. I was always trying to learn riffs to all their songs.

Did you use a pick or your fingers?

I never used a pick. In fact, I can't even play guitar very well with a pick. It's all right for rhythm, but when I write songs, I always just fingerpick. I find a pick very awkward for some reason.

Were you playing in bands or just jamming?

We had little bands floating around, but we didn't actually play gigs, except maybe occasional talent shows at school.

How did you come to join Rush?

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GEDDY LEE

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I knew Alex from school. We were pretty good friends, and we had always wanted to play together, but we never had the opportunity. He used to call me all the time to borrow my amp, though, because in those days, an amp was hard to come by. He would say, "How are you doing?" and I'd say, "Oh, not bad." Then he'd say, "Oh, by the way, can I borrow your amp this weekend? We've got a gig." I used to loan him my amp all the time. Well, I received a call from him about two weeks after he started Rush with our original drummer, John Rutsey. They had an excellent bass player, but he decided to quit the band at the last minute before a gig at a local coffeehouse. That was big stuff back then. So I got this panic call from Alex: "Do you

want to come out and fill in for the gig?" I said, "Sure!" You know, in those days it was typical for a band to rehearse for four hours, get all the songs together, and just go out and do it. I did that one gig, and they asked me to stay in the band. We've been together now for about 12 years.

Once you were in Rush, did you keep the same equipment?

I had the same Traynor amp for years—in those days we couldn't afford very much. I changed basses, though. I got a new Hagstrom, which was a light solidbody shaped kind of like a Gibson SG. It was quite a step up from my Conora. It had a couple of slide switches and really weird-looking black pickups with silver dots. I liked that bass a lot because it had a thin neck which made it easy to play really fast—and it had a really

raunchy sound. I had that bass for quite a while.

Did Rush play primarily in Toronto?

We played all over Ontario, actually. Originally, we played only at this one coffeehouse called the Coff-Inn; it was a local drop-in center in the basement of a church. We used to play there on Friday nights and make perhaps seven bucks each. Then we'd go wild afterwards—go to a restaurant and buy some Cokes and chips. We thought it was great! Other than that, we didn't play many gigs. But then Ray Danniels—sort of a local street-type, hustling kind of a guy—said he wanted to manage us. He started booking us into Ontario high schools, and he's still our manager today.

How did you branch out into other jobs?

I just turned 18 when the law changed lowering the drinking age from 21 to 18, so we could finally play bars. You see, rock bars were the real thing to get into. It was important for local musicians in Toronto to get into those clubs and be seen by more people, older people.

What kind of music were you doing?

We were doing half original and half copy material—mostly in a blues-rock vein. We used to have this running argument with our manager because we were always writing songs. And whether they were good or bad didn't matter to us; it was only important to write, just to get the experience. And just to get work, our manager would say, "Look, you can't just play originals, because people in these bars don't want to hear your original stuff." In those days, we were doing five sets a night, so we agreed to play a couple songs each set of somebody else. But we would pick lesser-known tunes by people like John Mayall and Cream.

When did you start playing music more akin to your present material?

It's funny—there was a sort of a cross-over point, I guess around 1970 or '71, when we started listening to other types of music, such as stuff by Procul Harum. And then Jeff Beck started getting heavier, and Led Zeppelin was happening. They really blew us away. We became real students of that heavy school of rock, for sure.

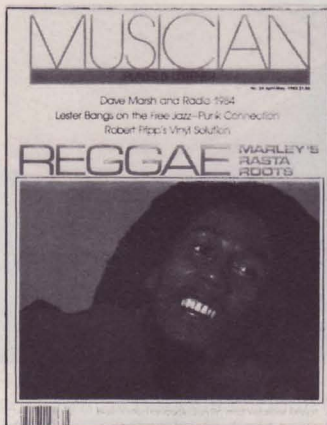
Didn't your reluctance to play Top-40 music make it difficult for you to get work?

Yeah. We once went through a summer with only three gigs because we couldn't get any work. We didn't want to play other kinds of music; we wanted to play mostly ours. And our manager said, "Well, you're just not going to get work." Another problem we had in bars was that we were too loud. We used to get a lot of hassles because it was important that the barmaids could hear the orders from the customers. And we'd get up there and play Led Zeppelinish, screeching, loud music. The bar owners would get really upset, and fire us.

Was Rush just a three-piece group then?

On and off. We had an electric piano player for a while, in our bluesier times, but he left the band. Then we got a rhythm guitarist for a short period, and he also left. We

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always seemed to return to a trio format; it felt most comfortable.

What kind of bass were you using then?

By then I had a 1969 Fender Precision. In fact, before we started playing the bars I traded my Hagstrom for it. I used that Precision for years and years—I still have it.

What kind of strings did you use?

I was using LaBella flat-wounds for a few years. Then around 1972 there was a big turning point for my sound when I discovered Rotosound round-wounds. It was like wow—high end! And at the same time, I got interested in Sunn amplification; John Entwistle [GP, Nov. '75] was using Sunns, and I really loved the sound that he used to get. So I got a 2000-S tube head and two cabinets with two 15s in each. I didn't care for the speakers that were originally included, so I eventually took those out and put SRO speakers in. My Sunn had much better transient response than my Traynor—it was really a live-sounding amp. I had it up until about two years ago.

Was the band becoming more popular?

Yeah. All of a sudden we had a following that would come out to every bar we played. Eventually, our manager started taking notice of the fact that we were attracting quite a following. They were trying to get record people interested in us, and time and time again they'd say, "Well you can do a single or something." And it would always fall through. We'd really get our hopes up and say "Hey, it's going to happen and get us out of the bars," then we'd be disappointed. So around 1972 or '73 we were getting really frustrated because all these record companies were turning us down left and right. And our management was getting frustrated, too, because they started to really believe that the band couldn't make it. So they

talked about forming their own record label—which they did in 1974. It was called Moon Records. And they fronted some money for us to go in and do an album, but we had to record under the worst of conditions.

Were you still playing in bars?

Yes. We'd start playing at nine and finish playing at one in the morning; we played three or four sets a night. Afterwards, we'd take all our gear out of the bar and move it into an 8-track studio. We'd set up, and then record from 2:30 to 8:00 in the morning. In addition, the producer didn't know what he was doing. It was just crazy.

Did any of you have a nervous breakdown?

Very close to it! Fortunately, we were really young. We were so fired up that it was finally happening that we didn't care what hours we had to work. It eventually turned out to be our first album, but it went through a lot of changes along the way. After we finally heard the original mixes, we went, "Wow! There's something wrong with this. It doesn't sound good." You know, it sounded really dinky and wimpy. And we were disappointed. So we figured that the guy in charge of the production just didn't know what he was doing. He was a good engineer, I guess, but he was no producer. So we were freaked out, and our managers were freaked out because we'd spent all this money and it didn't sound right. So one of our managers knew an engineer/producer named Terry Brown who'd come over from England; he had his own studio in Toronto. We took the tapes to him, and after listening to them he couldn't believe how poorly recorded the stuff was. So we made a deal that we'd work 48 hours straight in this studio in

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GEDDY LEE

an effort to fix up the tapes—that's all the money we could afford. So in that 48 hours, we redid three songs from top to bottom, and fixed up all the other tracks as best we could, and then remixed them. It made quite a difference—it's still a real raw-sounding album, but at least it has some balls to it.

Did you plug your Precision right into the mix board, or did you use an amp?

I tried both. At that time I didn't know anything about recording basses; I was still just learning about what kind of sound I wanted to have. Actually, for the first few albums, that was the basic *modus operandi*: just experiment and try to get a half-decent sound on tape.

Did you double-track any bass parts?

No. We mainly did that with guitars. Since we were a trio we had a basic way of recording: Put the rhythm section down, get a meaty guitar sound, and double it. Then we'd stick the lead guitar and the vocal on. Sometimes we doubled the vocals, too. But other than that, it was all really simple, with no fancy production techniques, except an occasional repeating echo. That was as fancy as we could afford to get. And soon after, *Rush* was released in Canada, on Moon Records.

How did you happen to end up on Mercury Records?

Someone sent a copy of the Moon album to a radio station in Cleveland; they played it as an import, and found that they were

getting tremendous response from listeners. We were all freaked out. So we started getting phone calls from record companies then. We got a real nice offer from Mercury, and signed with them. That was really the beginning of our professional phase. We officially became a *concert* band. We said goodbye to bars and started playing local Toronto concerts. Then we got on a tour of the United States, and that was our big chance. But at that time, we were having some problems with our original drummer, John Rutsey, who'd been with us for five years—in the bars and through all the other work. Just when we were getting our first big break, he was becoming disinterested, so we decided to go our separate ways. And we were sitting there a week before our first American tour without a drummer. We were going out of our minds. So we held auditions, and we listened to about six drummers; then Neil Peart walked in and blew us away with his playing. We said, "Okay, you're in; let's go." We rehearsed for a week, and *bing*, we were off to the States. We hardly even knew him, and we were off on our first tour, backing Uriah Heep. We were the first act of a three-act show, and we had exactly 26 minutes to play—it was a little tight.

Were you still using your Precision then?

No. When we got our first advance, the first thing I did was run out and buy a Rick-enbacker 4001. I was a big fan of Chris Squire [*GP*, Oct. '73] back then, and he was using one. He and John Entwistle, to me, had the most innovative bass sounds, although they were very different. I always admired that, so I figured if I wanted to try for the type of sound that Squire had, I'd have to get that kind of bass.

Did you still have your Sunn amp?

Yes. And I decided to go stereo onstage, so I bought an extra bass setup: 2 Ampeg V-4B bottoms, and an SVT head. For my low end, I would run the bass pickup through the Ampegs, and the treble went to the Sunn. I would always keep everything full up on my basses—I still do—and just crank up the treble on the amps. I have my low end directly fed into the PA, while the speakers for my high end are miked.

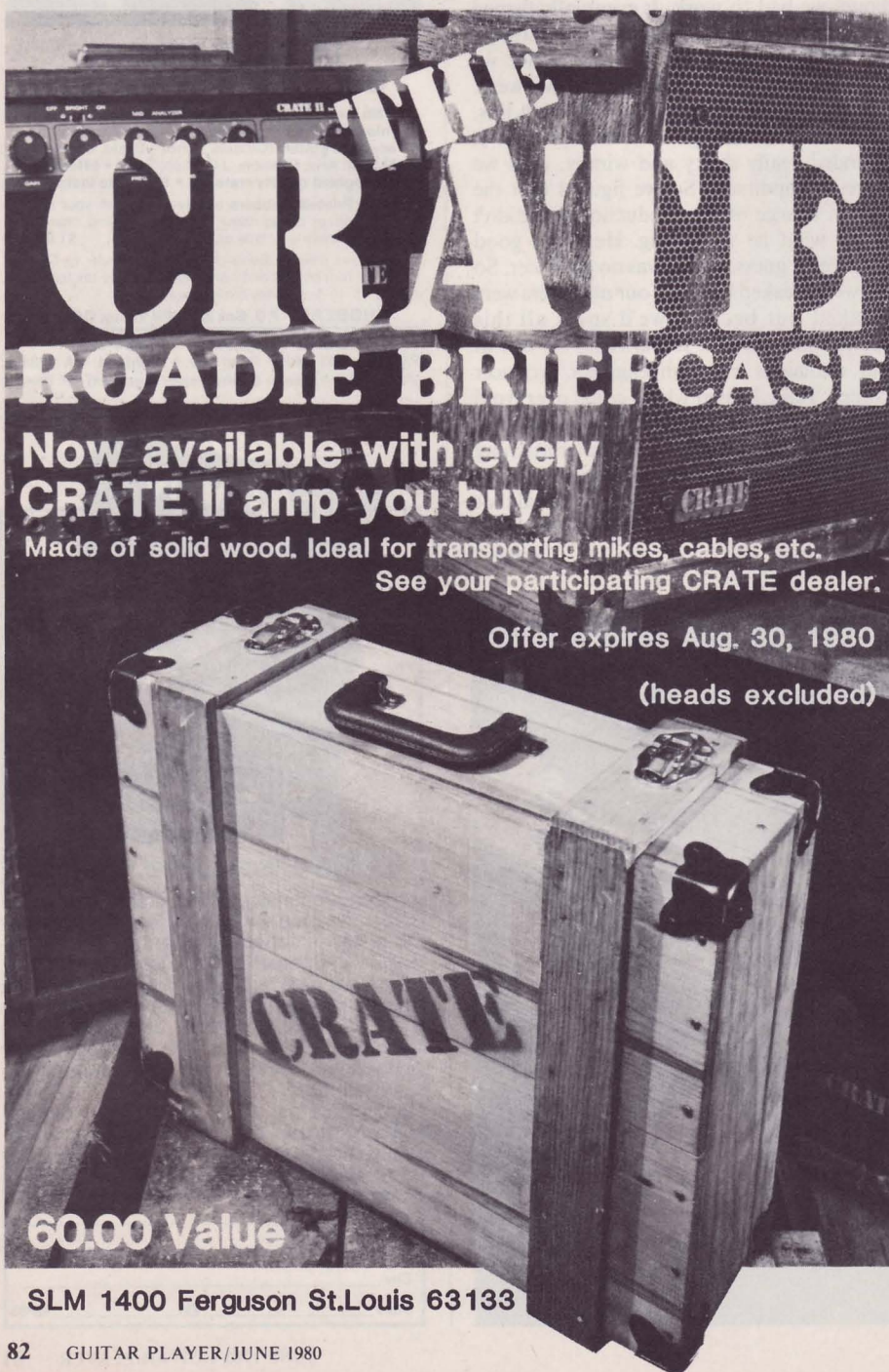
Do you use any effects then at all?

On the first tour I was still using just straight licks. Seeing as we only had a half hour at the most to play onstage, I just wanted to get a good bass sound that I could set up quickly.

As the band's leading vocalist, do you find any problems trying to balance your concentration between singing and playing bass?

Well, I have always been a singer. I just happened to be the only one that could sing in every band I was in, even before Rush. In Rush I became more adept at both singing and playing bass at the same time. And as our material became more complicated, it was naturally a little more difficult for me to get it together. But with practice, it all worked out. On our later albums, we'd start

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writing songs in the studio, and I'd put down the bass tracks and then I'd overdub the vocals afterwards. Then, when it'd come time to rehearse, I'd realize, "Whoa! I've got to do both of these things at the same time." So in rehearsals, I would always stick to the very elementary playing whenever I was singing. But eventually it got to the point where I became very good at adapting. It all balanced out pretty well. I can sort of split my head and think different songs—and it works! It just takes a lot of rehearsing.

Did you record the second album, Fly By Night, immediately after you completed the first tour?

Yeah. We actually started writing material for that album while on tour. It was a real big step up from the first album: We had 16 tracks to record on, we'd already rehearsed the material, and we had a drummer who could really play. We were getting into some different areas of music, too, like different time signatures. It was a real breakthrough for us. And it was the first time we could really zone in on sounds and try to get good tones.

What basses did you use on Fly By Night?

I used the Rickenbacker on every track. On one song called "By-Tor And The Snow Dog," a fantasy tune that featured a character representing evil and a character repre-

senting good, I was given the role of By-Tor—the evil one. And I developed an interesting sound—there's a monster sound that sort of growls around during one really chaotic musical segment. I put my Fender bass through a fuzztone—I can't remember what kind—and then into the board. It was distorted all to shit, so we added phasing, and ultimately put in everything but the kitchen sink. I had all that sound going through a volume pedal, so every time the monster was supposed to growl, I would lean on the volume pedal. When we fit it into the song, it sounded like a real monster!

So did you spend more time on the second album than on the first?

Yeah. We had ten days to do it, but we were working about 19 hours a day. So it was more time, in a better situation. We were working with Terry Brown, who is still our producer today, and it was a lot more controlled. It still wasn't the *ideal* recording situation, but it was miles better than the last one.

After you switched to round-wound strings, did you sometimes have problems with poor intonation?

Yeah. It happens even now. But at that point, the money wasn't really happening yet, so I would be doing stuff like boiling my strings to get them back into shape. Strings cost about 20 bucks or so, which was really expensive back then.

Were you still opening up for other bands on your second tour?

We backed up other people until about two years ago. So, we were constantly touring. We opened for Kiss, Aerosmith, Billy Preston—we opened for everybody! We didn't care; all we cared about was playing and touring. We were working real hard, and were away from home for months at a time, but success was coming very slowly. We just seemed to have a sound that would do great in concert but just didn't seem to have the right kind of push on a record. It just seemed so difficult to get ahead.

Did you ever consider disbanding?

We went through a period after we recorded our third album, *Caress Of Steel*, where our music wasn't well-received at all. It was a pretty naive album in retrospect, but still it was a very important one, because it was the first time we actually had almost four weeks to record. And we did a lot of experimenting with sounds; I used a different bass sound for every song.

What basses did you use on that album?

I was just going back and forth with my Fender and my Rick, trying them with different combinations of direct feeding and miking the amp. That's when I discovered that the best way for me to record my bass was to approach it as if I were playing on-stage: Use the direct bass from the low-end pickup, and mike the amp for the high-end pickup. I've just been refining that ever since.

And despite your efforts, the album was poorly received?

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GEDDY LEE

Right. And there was a time when we thought, "Well, maybe we should just hang it up and go home." I remember we were on an overnight drive to Atlanta, Georgia, and we were all real depressed, saying, "Oh, this is never going to work! What are we doing here?" We were still getting a lot of pressure from people to commercialize our sound. But we always felt that if your music is interesting, people will like it. It's a very simple philosophy. We didn't want to try to aim our music at a lowest common denominator. In fact, we felt compelled to do the opposite: Try to make the music more interesting. And therefore, if it's more interesting, then it will succeed.

So you thought your individuality would be the key to your success?

Yes. We were growing, and we were going through changes, becoming a little more complex. No matter how raw your music is in its original form, it seems only logical for musicians to want to make it better and more interesting. The more we played, the better we got at playing; and the better we got at playing, the better we wanted to become. And that was basically the only way that we figured it was worth having success. And so we sort of said, "Well, fuck everyone else! We don't care if they want to do this. We're just going to do what we want to do! So let's not pack it in; let's keep going." Just after that tour, we went in and we did



Alex (L) and Geddy in a double-neck duet.

our 2112 album, which was our first real success. And the whole theme of the album was based around individualism—it was sort of a passionate statement saying, "Leave us alone, we're okay, we will still get along."

How was 2112 received by the public?

It got more airplay than anything we had ever done—it still wasn't tremendous airplay by a lot of people's standards—and it didn't sell phenomenally well, but it sold well enough to keep us afloat. It gave us the leverage to tell the people who were on our backs to sort of go away. We were able to say, "Okay, look. We know what we're doing.

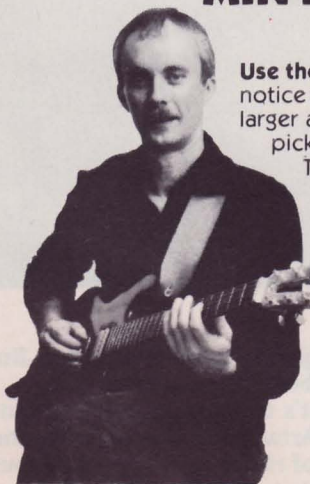
Get off our backs."

Were any of the cuts on 2112 particularly difficult to play?

The whole 2112 suite—side one—was a real challenge for us. Parts of it were in odd time signatures, and were very up-tempo. And it was the first time we ever attempted to play for 20 minutes around one concept, without breaks. That was our first major epic. It was a challenge to play it properly every night, so it was real important for our development as musicians.

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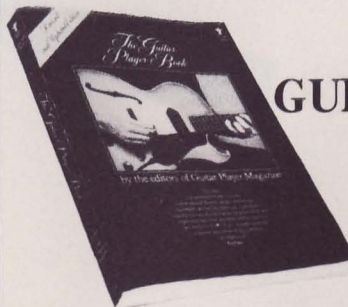
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GEDDY LEE

important albums?

Well, *2112* was the first album that we achieved something that we felt resembled a Rush sound; it was the first album that, while you could still see our influences, you knew there was something else happening there—the beginnings of a sound that said, “This is us.” With so many bands and so many styles of music happening, I guess all you really look for is that little, tiny space—no matter how small it is—so you can say, “Okay, this is us. This isn’t anybody else.” It might have been made up of a sum of all the knowledge that we accumulated from other people, but *2112* was the first time we sort of carved a little niche and said, “Okay, this is a Rush sound, so let’s develop that.” The next album we did was live, so we had 18 months to just play and get to know our instruments even more before we went in to do *A Farewell To Kings*. And when we did that, we brought some other instruments in the band, too. I started playing synthesizer, Taurus bass pedals, and a double-neck Rickenbacker [4-string bass/12-string guitar].

Where do you keep your bass pedals onstage?

Actually, I have two sets. One is right by my mike; the other set is under all my keyboards. Both of them have interface systems built in, enabling them to control my Oberheim 8-voice. This gives me a lot of flexibility.

So now I can step on a switch, and all of a sudden I’ve got 20 oscillators at my control if I want. It’s great! The synthesizer has an Oberheim 16-preset memory bank so that I can log in all the sounds I will need before the show. Then when I need one, all I have to do is push a switch.

Do you have any other keyboards onstage?

Yes. I have a Minimoog and an Oberheim OB-1, which is connected to an Oberheim Sequencer. I use the OB-1 strictly for weird sounds and sequencing parts. And I use the 8-voice primarily to produce string and horn sounds, as well as some natural types of things. The Minimoog is for lead and melody lines.

Isn’t it like a juggling act, playing all those instruments and singing?

It’s really difficult to keep on top of it, and it was especially hard at first because it was a departure from what I’d always been doing. Playing bass and singing was just a matter of practice, and adding the bass pedals was much the same story. So I had to learn to carefully balance the things I was doing onstage. And some nights, things would go wrong until I got the hang of it. But it’s been two years now since we started using all those other instruments, and it’s quite natural. It’s never *easy*, though, and I think that’s what makes it so challenging: I can’t just walk out onstage and just float through the night.

You can’t approach it nonchalantly.

You can’t be high, and you can’t be too *anything*, because you have to know *exactly* where you are at all times. Aside from just the actual physical singing and playing, I now have to coordinate a whole bunch of changes, as far as changing guitars and so forth. I have to set up my Oberheim 8-voice synthesizer for the next song, which means that I have to switch this octave and change these oscillators. . . . So as soon as I finish one tune, I’m already thinking about the next one, and making changes for it. It’s a constant chain of actions and reactions for me to perform and set myself up for the next song.

Did playing the keyboard give you much difficulty?

Well, it was sort of a revelation at that point, because for years I’d been thinking in terms of the fretboard, and all of a sudden I had to deal with a keyboard—all the notes are laid out differently. It was a real education, and my all-around musical sense really had a shot in the arm because I could listen to things and write from a different perspective. So, rather than just write a bass riff, I could think in terms of composing a melody. I’d go over to the synthesizer and work out a melody, transpose that to bass, and have a more interesting bass line to work with. And coordinating my bass work with a foot pedal sound makes the rhythm section a whole lot more complete. So before the guitar even

Continued

Sam Ash

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GEDDY LEE

comes into the song, there's Neil and I, putting down the basic rhythm tracks. And there's all kinds of melody happening, creating sort of an ambience and a subterranean rhythm. It's almost like having another person sometimes. Then when Alex comes in, he can just lay his solo on top of whatever melodies and rhythms are already there; it gives him a much freer hand, especially since we're only a trio.

Do you still have your original Precision?

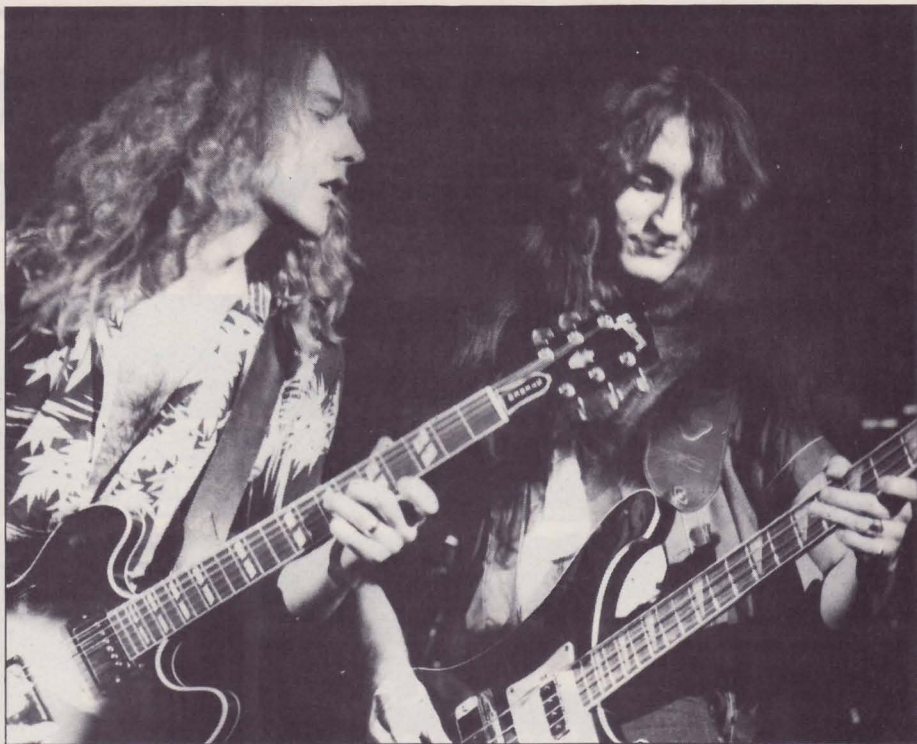
Yes, although it was modified a couple of years ago—cut down into a teardrop shape. It was refinished so that it now looks like a '57 Chevy. It was nicely done, but unfortunately it changed the tone.

Why did you have it trimmed down?

I wasn't using it, and it was very beat-up from all the years that I'd used it. So I figured, "Well, I'm going to do something wild with it." I also had teardrop-shaped inlays put in the fingerboard, and had a Fender Jazz Bass pickup added. So it turned out to be stereo, in order to be used with my stage setup.

Do you still use it in concert?

No. Just my Rickenbacker 4001 and two Rickenbacker double-necks. One has a 6-string guitar and a bass, and the other has a 12-string guitar and a bass. The double-neck's bass has a really nice tone because of the larger body size. There's so much wood that it's got a better low-end response than



Alex (L) on his Gibson ES-345 and Geddy with his Rickenbacker 4001 bass.

the standard 4001. I really like Rickenbackers. But because of the wear and tear I put on them, they must constantly be refinished and rebuilt: I put a lot of miles on all of them.

What other basses do you have besides

your 4001s?

I have a 4002, which has low-impedance pickups and a beautiful ebony fingerboard. It has Schaller tuning pegs on it, and I've had

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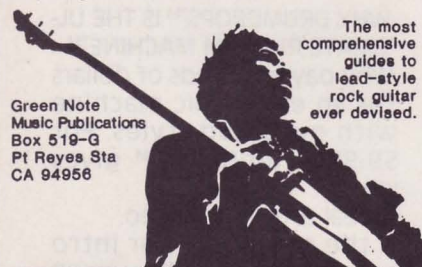
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GEDDY LEE

a Badass bridge installed. I sometimes use the 4002 in the studio. I also have a 3001, which has a single low-impedance pickup and a thick, heavy body. It's got a really meaty sound. I haven't found too much use for it in recording, and I don't use it live, but at home I use it a lot for writing and jamming.

Do you have any Gibson basses?

No, but I recently lucked out and found a '69 or '70 Fender Jazz Bass in a pawnshop for an unbelievably low price of \$200.00. Some Jazz Basses have chunkier necks, but this one is thin and smooth. It was in beautiful shape, and I just love it. In fact, I used it on about half of *Permanent Waves*.

What kind of bass strings do you use?

Rotosound Swing Bass, long-scale. I change them every four dates. This is usually as long as the tone lasts. This tour I had a really weird problem, though. I hadn't broken a string in about two years, and on this tour I broke about six in just the first few weeks. After about three weeks we found out why: the bridge was placed wrong. You see, I had Badass bridges put on all my basses, but they put one on about a half-inch closer to the neck than it should be. The strings were resting on the saddles in the wrong place, placing undue tension on the weaker part of them—the section of the strings with the red fiber covering. Besides causing my strings to break, this was cutting down on my sustain. So I had the bridge moved back to where it

should be, and it's just fine now.

Do you wipe your strings between songs?

No. They're cleaned quite vigorously before each show, and that's enough. I think they use Finger-Ease on them. It takes all the grunge off, and keeps them nice and slippery. And although I usually wait until after four shows to change them, I'll replace them if they sound like they're getting a little too dull. Now, I don't change the strings on my 12-string as often, because I only use it on two songs a night, "Xanadu" and "Passage To Bangkok." They seem to retain their sound a lot longer than bass strings.

Do you have a pedalboard of bass effects?

No. I don't use any effects on my bass, except for a Boss Chorus on perhaps one song in the course of a concert. Sometimes the sound engineers will add a little bit of digital delay or Harmonizer in the mix, too.

Are you still using separate high-end and low-end amps for bass?

Yes, but now I have a whole different bass setup. I have two BGW 750 power amps—one for highs and one for lows. I also have two Ashly [1099 Jay St., Rochester, NY 14611] preamps. And I also have two new high-end cabinets that I believe are based on an Electro-Voice design. It's a pretty simple configuration—just two front-loaded 15s built into each cabinet, with a separation between the two speakers. For the low end, I still use two Ampeg V-48 speaker cabinets. I split them up, though, so that I have a

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high/low setup on my side of the stage, and Alex has an identical setup on his side so that he can hear what I'm playing. I have one of his Hiwatt cabinets on my side so that I can hear him, too.

Do you plug your bass pedals and synthesizers directly into the PA?

They're all direct. I have my own monitors onstage that I use for getting the right tones that I need for the songs.

Do you have a separate amp for your 12-string guitar?

Interestingly enough, the Rickenbacker double-neck has only one set of tone and volume controls that must be shared by the bass and the guitar. So there's an inherent problem: Do I have to use the same amp for the guitar as for the bass? I don't think that the 12-string sounds too good through a bass setup, so I had to have a special relay system built. Whenever I want to use my 12-string, I step on a footswitch, and a relay re-routes my signal to a Fender Deluxe Reverb amp. I then have the Deluxe's tone controls set for the best sound for the 12-string. I use the Boss Chorus with the 12-string all the time, so whenever I want to use the chorus with my bass, I'll be using the Fender amp as well.

When you write songs, do you use primarily bass or guitar?

I use guitar a lot for chordal and melodic things, but if I'm working on a riff to a song, then I will usually choose the bass. And sometimes now I use the keyboards. So it really depends on what I'm looking for. It

feels more natural that I should pick up the bass because I'm obviously more adept at that instrument. If I'm having trouble getting an idea across to Alex, I'll grab my bass. When it comes to guitar, though, I'm just a basic rhythm player, so it takes me a longer time to convey the same idea. Nevertheless, guitar is very helpful for writing verses, choruses, and melodic things.

Do you generally pluck the strings close to the bridge?

I move around. I usually rest my hand towards the back, and place my fingers between the bridge and the treble pickup. Occasionally, I'll work up a bit more toward the neck, depending on what kind of sound I need. Also, I sometimes rest my hand on the E string and pick with my nails. I use them a lot, in fact. My nails extend just over the ends of my fingers, so if I want a pick-like attack, I can get it with my nails, rather than having to use a pick.

Do you put anything on them to keep them from breaking?

No, they're pretty tough after all these years of using them like that. I used to break them all the time, but now they seem much stronger.

When do you play harmonics?

It depends on the tune, but often when Alex is playing acoustic guitar. There's one song on the new album called "Different Strings" in which harmonics become quite an integral part of the piece. The bass part was very simple—a punctuating sort of

rhythm—but in between the notes I popped a couple harmonics on two strings at the 5th fret.

Are chords often employed in your bass playing?

I use a lot of double-stops: roots and thirds, and those kinds of things. Sometimes I will use full chords to fill things out. Outside the band, I've been playing around with a piece of music by [guitarist] John Abercrombie [GP, Feb. '76] called "Timeless" [from *Timeless*, ECM, 1047]. When you figure it out on bass, you find that it's full of interesting chords and intervals. I haven't been able to work that kind of playing into our music yet, but it's something I practice on my own, nonetheless.

Do you do any warm-ups or practice exercises before you go onstage?

It really depends on how I feel at the time. I got into a habit of working out a lot before we went onstage, but I found that because we do such a long show—over two hours—I sometimes started getting aches in my hands about three-quarters of the way through. All together, with my warmups and the show, I was actually playing for three-and-a-half hours. So now I don't warm up before the gig, except in the sound check, which only lasts about 45 minutes. Now I no longer cramp up, and my fingers are a lot fresher and I have more enthusiasm for the show.

Who are your favorite bassists today?

I really like Jeff Berlin—he's about my

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GEDDY LEE

favorite right now. His playing on *Gradually Going Tornado* [by Bruford, Polydor, I-6261] blows me away. I listen to Jaco Pastorius, and Chris Squire is still a big thing for me. I also like Percy Jones, the bass player of Brand X. He's great.

Do you have any favorite jazz bassists?

No, not really. My introduction to jazz is strictly through rock. People like Jeff Berlin, Brand X, and Weather Report sort of dabble in rock and jazz, and fuse the two. It's a real interesting way for me to get into jazz, and it's something I'd like to get into heavier. But my background is strictly rock, so the introduction has to come through rock.

Do you think lessons are a necessity?

I think they're very helpful. I mean, there are lots of things I wish I would have done in terms of learning the language of music. In rock music it's not necessary to know all the terms and theory, but it certainly doesn't hurt. Once again, it all boils down to the language of music. Once you know it, it's a lot easier to talk to another musician and sit down and say, "Let's do something together." Rather than picking up your bass to show what you mean, you could just sit there and explain it. So, it's a time-saving measure, and it's a communication form that I wish I would have learned at one point. It never hurts, but obviously it's been proven time and time again that it's not necessary for everyone.

Can you suggest any shortcuts that might

help a young bass player become successful in the rock field?

That's a difficult question that a lot of young musicians ask me. There's really no formula for success. Everyone's got to find their own speed and realize their abilities. I think that the important thing is to realize what you want to accomplish, set that goal for yourself, and just go for it any way you can. I don't believe that shortcuts are possible without a sacrifice of some of your musical integrity. ■

LETTERS

continued from page 4

I am a young female guitarist and would like to correspond with other women players who are willing to share their experiences.

Kelli Taylor
90 Kimball Hill Rd.
Hudson, NH 03051

I am a lady who plays lead guitar and believe me, I know how hard it is to be accepted into the male-oriented Australian music scene. I recently discovered records of a women's group from the '40s, sometimes called the International Sweethearts of Rhythm. Under the leadership of Rae Lee Jones, these musicians managed to record


some brilliant work. The guitarists—June Rotenburg, Vicki Zimmer, and Mary Osborne—play the most beautiful jazz licks with flowing speed and style. Any information on these players, however small it may seem, would be greatly appreciated.

Dee Desperate
Bowen St.
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Australia

On December 3, 1979, two guitars and some equipment were stolen from my home. Taken were a '78 wine-red Gibson Les Paul Deluxe, serial #00134504, and a 3-pickup, white '79 Gibson SG Custom, serial #73178246. Both guitars had Grover Imperial tuners. Also stolen was a Pignose amp, #36162, an MXR Phase 100, serial #705993, and a DeArmond volume pedal. If anyone can help me locate this equipment, I'd really appreciate it.

Joseph M. Masi
331 St. Lawrence Pl.
Buffalo, NY 14216

I have a problem. I've been incarcerated for almost seven years now, and I'm a guitarist. Because I taught myself from books, I haven't progressed nearly as far as I would like to—I've been at it for 15 years. I want to



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