

Rush MANCHESTER

I AM ON THE TRAIN, sat uncomfortably among a load of moderately hairy, strangely excited, spotty young kids. They are wearing pre-faded denims, Levi jackets and tatty pumps, and I'm thinking that I must have accidentally jumped into a carriage containing some sort of school trip — until the train stops and all the kids herd onto the platform.

I see T-shirts and garishly coloured embroidery on the backs of the Levi jackets, exclaiming Ted Nugent! Kiss! Blue Oyster Cult! And, most noticeably, Rush! Christ, they're going the same place I'm going — to see Rush.

Rush have fans! I thought the only other people in the Free Trade Hall would be a few reluctant or curious fellow hacks. But of course Rush have fans. It's just that it's a bit of a surprise, is all. Quite unnoticed by anyone, it seems, maybe even Rush's followers themselves, the band has zoomed from obscurity through cult status to hover around superstardom. A phenomenon.

The Free Trade Hall had sold out, apparently surprising even the promoters.

So what's it all about? I donned my investigative mac and trilby, swam merrily through the Free Trade Hall bar, and did my best to uncover . . . why.

Most of the fans I talked to seemed unimpressed at my disbelief, seemed unimpressed moreover that Rush could fill the hall so effortlessly. "Could have played two night, I reckon," said one guy. My knees buckled slightly.

There was a good number, too, who claimed that they'd discovered Rush way back in 1974 (which is a long time ago in terms of this audience — it was overwhelmingly school aged) by, apparently, listening to the radio or just "knowing by the cover of the album that they were a good rock band." A few remembered *The Old Grey Whistle Test* playing a Rush track, and took it from there.

Everywhere it was blatantly apparent that there is a rare fanaticism for Rush, and an insatiable appetite for any imported flash heavy metal. I must be mixing with the wrong people, because really this was all a revelation to me. I dug deeper, asking a number of milder looking fans why they actually liked Rush.

So, why? "Because they're good . . . It's really good music and it hits the brain . . . They seem to get better with each album . . . They're Canada's best rock group . . . People want to go to live shows and hear really heavy stuff that's gonna freak them out . . . I don't think you give them enough coverage . . . Are you Max Bell? . . . Their words are nice, they really get a lot of things across . . . Power and intelligence . . . They're different from Ted and Sabbath and all that lot . . . Because I want to . . ."

Reeling from all this, and from the remarks of one guy who who put me firmly in my place when I asked: "Aren't they similar to Led Zep?" — he sternly replied, "Ah, but Led Zep are a quartet and this lot are a trio" — I found my seat.

It was a tense and crude atmosphere, obvious what was imminent — a rush to the stage as soon as Rush appeared onstage. Unfortunately I missed the no doubt almighty welcome for Rush because minutes before the big moment I was thrown out of the hall for assaulting its manager. But when I sneaked back in everyone was standing in the stalls, arms outstretched, plenty of V-signs, the odd Rush banner, and even a fairly large Canadian flag right at the front.

It was no way a perfunctory response. The kids around where I was stood knew every note and lyric of each song. There were even odd attempts at lighting matches, a la American audiences.

Rush played absolutely amazingly — no sloppiness, total control, all the flash licks, sharp riffs, jerk-off guitar solos brilliantly executed, carefully placed breaks, classy pinnacle vocals that the crowd was thirsting for. Their light show was maybe the best I've ever seen.

It was loud, but very very clean. The band looked like puppets — they could play *The Royal Variety Show* and probably offend no one.

So what is it about Rush?

Paul Morley

RUSH

Pic: CHALKIE DAVIES



THE RUSH PHENOMENON

This band has fans. Lots of them. They sold out the Free Trade Hall and surprised even the promoter.

PAUL MORLEY asks why,
PAUL RAMBALI tries to answer.

MAYBE IT'S SOMETHING to do with the cathartic effect of a big noise. Unlike other turn-of-the-decade phenomena, such as glitter and the introspective singer songwriter, heavy metal refuses to die the death.

It isn't just a question of dinosaurs still being extant either — new heroes emerge with increasing regularity. Last year it was Ted Nugent and this year Judas Priest and, no two ways about it, Rush.

They thunder into the opening number with all the power and subtlety of an earthquake, and the crowd roar in approval as Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee roam around the stage in an endless series of guitar superhero postures and power-chord dynamics.

This staunch observer was almost converted as the first three numbers (especially "Bastille Day") sledgehammered into the audience. But Rush failed to deliver the killer punch I had half-hoped was coming — instead it was heads down for the first of their long Science Fantasy epics and, after that, epic after epic.

As far as I could tell, there was little point to them. They were no more than a lot of riffs, mostly derived from Sabbath, Purple and Zeppelin, and loosely thrown together around various concepts. Titles like "By-Tor And The Snow Dog" and "The Fountain Of Lamneth" give a fair indication of what to expect — the fairytale castles of Yes meet Sabbath's headbanger.

But never mind the content, just feel the

dynamics. Each successive riff ploughed new depths of heavy metal dynamism, and the only unusual thing was Geddy Lee's strangled banshee vocals, which sounded like someone trying to sing like Robert Plant after an unfortunate accident. Alex Lifeson played elementary power chords and gimmick-laden solos, and Neil Peart's drums were exemplary heavy metal thunder.

However, Rush's ability in their chosen field is unquestionable. No matter how overworked the basic idea may be, they attack it with enough ferocious zest and almost obsessive dedication that the results really did sound alive and, to the crowd at least, fresh.

The degree of technological sophistication involved in Rush's stage show simply reflects the single-mindedness with which they approach their music.

The epics were full of dramatic lighting (their own, specially flown in) and Lifeson was surrounded by echo units, phase shifters, digital delay and harmonizers — very expensive stuff that enabled him to seemingly double-track his guitar on stage.

The PA (their own again) used digital delay to spread the sound out over the stereo columns, and the sound mixer knew exactly when to boost the volume — they didn't miss a trick, visually or aurally.

Rush's dedication to their cause is about to pay off, the opinions of those who see it as some kind of sophisticated torture notwithstanding.

Paul Rambali