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8 RUSH

Fast becoming Canada's most popular
rock band — an interview with Geddy Lee.

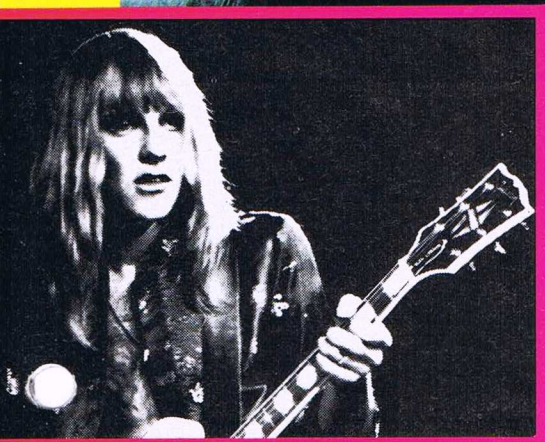


RUSH: CANADIAN ROCK 'N'ROLL SUCCESS STORY

by Kirk LaPointe

Above all, we wanted to succeed on our own terms. We wanted to run our own show. We didn't want to play it safe. So everyday we took chances, stuck our necks out, put ourselves on the line."

As his four felines frolick on his furniture with reckless Randian individual will, soft-spoken Geddy Lee relaxes in his east-end Toronto home. Here, among the cats, we are worlds away from the performing



stage, atmospheric miles apart from the fanfare and the first power-chords to Anthem.

These days, the Willowdale-raised film buff doesn't see much of home. The cycle of touring, rehearsing and recording away from home is seemingly endless. It's rock 'n' roll's odd form of justice — rewarding years of hard work with yet more years of hard work. Still, no one is complaining.

Seven albums, ten years and almost a million travelling miles later, the perserverance of shrewd management, coupled with the endurance required for one-night stands and



photos by Peter Nabile

all-night driving has manifested itself in the present-day Canadian rock 'n' roll success story.

Now, armed with several Canadian platinum albums and three American gold ones, as well as the Juno Award as the undisputed Group of the Year, **Rush** can carve their own trail.

"I remember when we literally couldn't give our album away to Canadian record companies," Geddy says. "The whole scene up here was, and still is, tremendously conservative. I don't know of another country that consistently discourages and frustrates its talented musicians more than Canada. When they refused to release our album, we said 'to hell with you, we'll do it ourselves.' The companies up here make buckets of money. But, to a person, they lack the balls to take some chances."

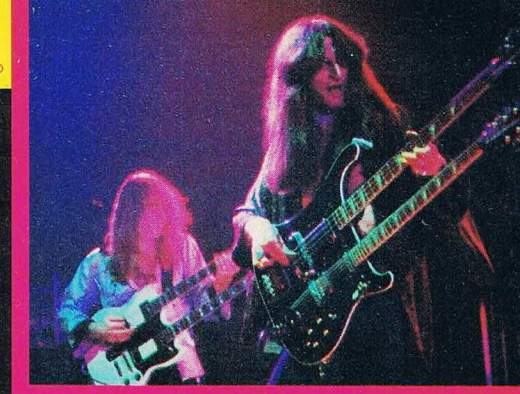
Years later, record executives everywhere are wishing they'd paid proper attention. "You can't be bitter about it," Geddy insists. "Toronto has treated us so well. The fans have been so good to us. It was funny, though, when we won the Juno last year, because the same people who had insisted all along that we'd never make it, now had to admit we had."

George, Geddy's Himalayan cat, sharpens his nails on the cream-coloured sofa. "When I am home, I don't want to do anything" Geddy says. "At least once a day, someone knocks on the door, just to stand there and gawk at me. Attention is nice, and there was a time when I would have given anything to be recognized, but home life is the only time I don't want to be in the public eye. It's the only holiday I get. But some people just don't understand that." His address is kept secret, his telephone number practically unattainable—yet another price of success.

And that success isn't likely to recede for quite some time. On their most recent album, **Hemispheres**, the band explores more new ground. It's the third in a string of successive conceptual works. But while Geddy says the group is not bored with theme-oriented albums, he indicates that the next disc will be a radical departure. "We've had long pieces of music on three straight studio albums. **Hemispheres** is well-paced, a little more bouncy than **A Farewell To Kings**. Certainly we're satisfied with it. But I miss writing tunes. Next album I think we'll revert to writing shorter pieces of music. Our last albums have been weighty works to digest, but they've been necessary in our evolution as a progressive rock outfit. Still, I miss singing songs."

Renowned as a member of a band exuding phenomenal amounts of harnessed energy onstage, in the comfort of his home, Geddy Lee admits it all may be catching up with him physically. "This short layoff before going on tour was absolutely necessary," he says. "After recording **Hemispheres** we all felt so drained and sapped of our energy. The album required a lot more attention than we have ever given to recording. The title song was a dense piece of music. With the exception of **Xanadu** (on **A Farewell To Kings**), it was the first time we tried to layer the sound on our albums." At the time of writing, the band was about to embark on a nine-month cross-continent tour.

"We still feel as if we have plenty to prove, particularly to the American audiences," Geddy says. "When we first went down there to play they said, 'if you're from Canada, you must be big lumberjack-types like **BTO**, or folkies like **Lightfoot** or **Neil Young**.' We surprised them. Lately, though, I can see our audience changing.



There are more young girls coming to our shows. They seem more interested in the technical aspects of rock 'n' roll. There aren't as many groupie-types either."

From its inception, **Rush** has had to shake off its critically-imposed image of a "junior **Led Zeppelin**." "The press hasn't always been totally objective when they criticize our music. It has been so easy to compare us with bands that are around, like **Led Zeppelin**. It's like Woody Allen trying to make this new serious motion picture in the same vein as Ingmar Bergman. Because Bergman's work is still around, Allen is being called a 'cheap Bergman imitator.' We've had to shake off comparisons to this day."

But how does life-on-the-road affect Geddy Lee? "These days, I'm pretty schizoid," he says. "There are days when I'm on the road and I feel like I'm a million miles away from my audience's head space. They seem so distant, so detached from me. And it worries me."

"But then there are days," he concludes, "when I can play and seem at one with the crowd. There are times when I can sit down with people and realize that nothing has changed but the time and the place." ★

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photo by Peter Noble