

Rush's Hour

Film brings us closer to the heart of Canadian rock gods

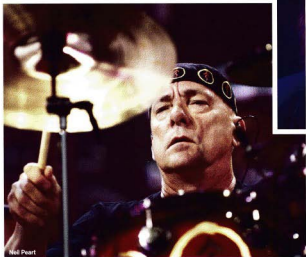
Denis Seguin

► The first time I saw Geddy Lee was in a butcher shop in Toronto's Rosedale neighbourhood. I mention this not to impress you with our mutual taste in quality meats but rather to explain that I've never seen the band live. Further, I've never heard a Rush album. If pressed, I can recall two Rush songs: *Closer to the Heart* and *Tom Sawyer*. So why would I want to watch a documentary about this band?

Because *Rush: Beyond the Lighted Stage* is a great story. Ninety minutes spent with Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart is an exercise in the fist-pumping power of love and the triumph of artistic purity over commercial adversity. Never mind that I still don't really like their music. That's my problem and I'll have to deal with it.

If you are a Rush fan – and you haven't thrown the magazine to the floor in disgust – you can stop reading anyway. You will, you must, see the film. But if you need more convincing, read on.

Directors Sam Dunn and Scott McFayden have divided Rush's story into 14 chapters, identifying moments of



transition that moved the band, for better or for worse, in a new direction. The directing duo have cut a swath of their own in the music doc landscape, with earlier films such as *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey* and a film on Iron Maiden. The new film is solid storytelling, from the cookie-cutter suburbs of Willowdale through thematic shifts (and onstage fashion crimes) to sellout shows in Rio de Janeiro.

Rush started in 1967 as a trio but original drummer, John Rutsey, exited when it was apparent his lifestyle would overwhelm his health – a very un-rock-starry move and a stark contrast to Brian Jones's exit from the Stones and the land of the living. There is surely some faction of Rush fandom devoted to conspiracy theories around the departure of Rutsey,

who died in 2008. The new guy – and to this day Lifeson and Lee refer to Neil Peart as the “new guy” – joined the band in 1974 and transformed Rush almost entirely by unconscious stealth.

Lee and Lifeson, interviewed separately in the film, are like genius contestants in the *Newlywed Game*, their memories and impressions melded over the years. They were united in their doubtful first impressions of Peart. Says Lee, “He wasn't nearly cool enough to be in the band.” But they were knocked to their knees by Peart's monstrous skin-bashing talent. The introverted recruit, a compulsive reader with a vast vocabulary, baffled his bandmates until Lee had a flash of inspiration: “I bet he can write lyrics.”

In this era of geriatric rockers – with Dylan touring hard at 69 and Mick



The early years of the band, as seen in *Rush: Beyond the Lighted Stage*.



Geddy Lee



Alex Lifeson

juggling towards his eighth decade – the boys of Rush still seem comparatively youthful. They've only been together 36 years and they continue to challenge themselves artistically.

What comes across foremost is the decency and mutual respect these three artists share, a collective curiosity that led down the long and winding road of Rush's musical journey. Maybe I'm just getting old and sentimental, but compared to the hissy fits of the Oasis brothers and the obnoxious brooding genius of so many professional rock jerks, Rush feels like a collective exercise in

other commitment to craft. They have a work ethic worthy of their immigrant parents.

The film has the obligatory interviews with generous peers – Gene Simmons of KISS was an early supporter – and obsessive acolytes, including Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails and the scarily passionate Billy Corgan of Smashing Pumpkins fame. Ham actor Jack Black, who is identified as Tenacious D, weighs in with anti-insight: He refers to Rush's "deep reserves of rocket sauce." Lifeson, Lee and Peart are disarming in their humbleness, their self-effacement: They still seem truly happy and amazed to still be doing what they do. Lee told the filmmakers, "You want to waste your time talking to me?"

Among the many interviewees is Geddy's mom, who is proud of her boy but confesses bafflement with his music. "Perry Como is my kind of music," she says. I'm with her: I don't get Rush but I'm damned proud of them.

Someone once said that writing about music is like dancing about architecture. Which is why a music documentary is such good value. You can have all sorts of people make all sorts of statements, but then the needle drops and the music speaks for itself. ■

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ANVIL FORGES COMPELLING STORY

A great companion piece, *Anvil: The Story of Anvil*, is another terrific tribute to Canadian musicianship. Like Rush, the members of Anvil are suburban Ontario kids who dropped out of school to forge the girders of heavy metal. While not quite the success story of Rush, their refusal to give up the dream is every bit as compelling a drama. The director, Sacha Gervasi, is a Hollywood screenwriter who once was a roadie for Anvil.



Anvil band members Rob Reiner, Steve Kudlow and Glenn Fawcett