





YEAH, and who said this wasn't work? Parents, that's who, parents who told their sons and daughters to get a real job. Then the sons went out with their instruments and made lots of money playing rock 'n' roll.

It doesn't always pan out like this, but Alex Lifeson, Geddy Lee and Neil Peart — partners in the Toronto trio Rush — wrote the ending to a lot of dreams. Tonight and Monday they will play to 34,000 believers at the Summit.

Musicianship? Critics are not so sure. But the fans count — and so does a lot of work. Why, they even made their best album in years (*Signals*) in their spare time.

"This tour started in August and we took a break in December — I think the 18th was our last date — and we went back in February," begins Lifeson, lead guitarist. "And this run takes us through the beginning of May. And then we go to Europe for a few weeks, then home for a week, and then we're going to go to Japan for about 10 days. Then we'll start writing material for the next album.

"The way we've been doing it for the last couple of years, we work through the fall, then take a Christmas break. There were so many years of really missing out on Christmas. We'd finish the tour on the 23rd — it gives you a day and a half to do your shopping — and then we'd go right back out."

The band won't tour during summer, but then again, that's another job. "Writing in the summer is a nice time. We usually go up to a farm or someplace like that for a month and lock ourselves away and work like that — then go out for a few weeks and then go into the studio. Those few weeks out gives us a chance to run over the material every day, and sound checks, and put a couple of new things in the set — plus it gets everybody back into shape after being 'off' for the summer."

The genesis of Rush goes back to the 1960s when Lifeson met bass guitarist Geddy Lee in school. Drummer Neil Peart was to join in 1974, completing the successful chemistry. "John, the original drummer — we used to live across the street from each other, and we played together with a number of different people," recounts Lifeson. "At one point we were just jamming between the two of us, and we got a bass player — a friend of mine — and we did one gig. On the second gig — it was at the same place, a drop-in center below a church — the bass player called at three o'clock in the afternoon and said, 'I can't make it.' We were sort of shocked, because we had finally gotten some kind of work — every Friday night we could make 20 bucks. So Jeff said, 'No, I can't make it — never.'"

"So I called Geddy up, who I'd also been playing with — we were in the same class in school — and asked him if he was doing anything tonight, and would he mind playing? He said sure. He came over, and we knew about six

songs between us. We ran them down a couple of times, and really, that's the way it started."

It would be surprising to those familiar with the basic heavy metal sound of Rush that the group was experimental in those early days. "We did cover stuff, but we did kind of off-the-wall, obscure things, for the time," says Lifeson. "I mean, at the time, you really had to play more like dance music, or commercial material, and we were playing Cream, John Mayall, things like that. And we started writing our own material in, like, three or four months. Out of our repertoire of 15 songs we had three originals, and it kept building like that until we got to the point a couple of years later where we were doing three-quarters of the set original — and the rest was cover stuff that we liked and re-arranged. We even did a Junior Walker song — *Shotgun* — but we changed it all around. And we did the Buffalo Springfield song, *For What It's Worth*, for about 15 minutes.

"We played continuously in clubs, six days a week. It was great training. You figure you play from 8:30 until one in the morning. Saturdays you play a matinee. And you do that for six days months on end."

In 1974, with Peart aboard, Rush released their self-titled debut album on their own Moon label. Import copies surfaced in America. "It was very difficult to get a deal," says Lifeson about a struggling Canadian band. "So the only way we could release a record is if we went into the studio and paid for the time, paid for the vinyl and paid for the (album) jackets. So what we did do was, with our management we put up the money and we started our own record company and production company. We went in after gigs — we finished playing in the bar at one o'clock, tore down (equipment), got in the studio by two, then worked 'til eight or nine in the morning. After-hours was a lot cheaper. It was an eight-track studio. That first album was done on an eight-track studio."

The album, however local, attracted Stateside interest, principally in the hot rock market of Cleveland, and later that year they signed a major deal with Mercury, which re-released the debut, and then the first of many hotshots, *Fly By Night*.

Top-sellers followed, including *A Farewell To Kings*, *2112*, *All The World's A Stage*, *Hemispheres*, *Permanent Waves* and *Moving Pictures* — all of them heady concepts for a teen-scream popular rock band — but none of

them matches the risk taken on their most recent, *Signals*.

"Writing on the road is virtually impossible because of the way we work in long hauls," explains Lifeson. "You're just not in the right space for it. We've never been a band like that except for the first couple of albums. We like to go away and work on an album. For *Signals* we kept a lot of the jams from our sound checks, where you just sort of goof off for half an hour before sound check, warming up. And we managed to pull out a lot of material — bits and pieces — from those tapes, plus Geddy and I were both doing some homework. We were writing things for supposed solo albums.

"So, when we went away to do *Signals* we pulled all of this solo material out and pieced it all together."

"Are those solo albums on the back burner? Are they going to be realized?"

"I'm sure they'll be realized. It's just a matter of when. I mean, when you tour for four or five months, and you get six weeks off, the last thing you want to do is lock yourself up in the studio working. I think we need to take a good chunk of time off to get really serious about something like that. However, if we work at it piecemeal, I can see a project like that taking a year, two years."

"So it's ironic that you were preparing some of this material for another album and it came together as Rush. Were you not taking a risk releasing such a project?"

"No, I don't feel like we were ever taking a risk. We've always been kind of stubborn in that sense. We've always done what we wanted and what we thought was right, and what we thought was right for us. And our audience has followed us along. We have a kind of — well, I won't say unique, but — special relationship with our audience, in that they do grow with us and they realize that the band is going to take chances and try new things and change. And we're accepted for that. If you don't like it, that's too bad. If I like it and I'm happy with it, that's really basically what counts.

"It's great to have the popularity and fans, but if you're in the studio and you do something that's not really you, and you're doing it just because you want to keep all those fans, it doesn't seem quite right. I think audiences pick up on that very, very quickly, and you can lose a lot of credibility. It's happened to so many bands. You look at a band like (Canadians)

Bachman-Turner Overdrive. When they were touring the United States around 1974, '75, when they first started, they were an enormous band. They were a big deal back home. But a few obvious sellouts, they went from being right at the top to right at the bottom in, like, three weeks. And I think that's something their audience picked up on."

So how does a band survive, regardless of notoriety? Fame, as easily as failure, can unravel a band. After all, the road, where the band earns its keep, is a cruel mistress.

"Playing doesn't tire us out, the music doesn't, but the road does," Lifeson acknowledges. "Really, pacing is the key to it. In the past we'd play three or four nights in a row, take a day off. In the further past it was seven or eight days in a row — which was fine at the time, because that's the way it was. We didn't complain about it."

"And no one is complaining now. It's just that, after so many years, you want to pace it a little different. So now, we're trying to do two or three nights in a row and take a day off, get some other things going — play some tennis, go swimming, go to the movies. Sitting in a hotel room all day and night, watching TV, can drive you crazy. I've had enough years of that. So, to keep up the interest, you find things outside of your normal road routine. And it makes all the difference."

"It's pretty easy to get depressed, or let yourself get depressed, just because you feel like a prisoner, trapped. But once you break out of that, it can be fun all over again."

"You mean there was a point — ?"

"No. It's more like a build-up of stress, and you come to, maybe, a semi-crisis point, where you go, 'Am I really happy doing this?' And you stop, and you look at it, and you decide if you are. If never came to the point of, 'I hate this and I'm going to quit — I'm really seriously thinking of quitting.' It's never really been like that. It's like, 'Maybe I'm missing out on other things in my life that I can go for, or that would be good for me in a growth way.' Then you end up doing those things."

"Once you start questioning yourself, you get the motivation to go out and do other things — that it's not that you're a prisoner in your own hotel room, that you'd rather complain, because complaining is a lot easier than working."