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GLENN TIPTON
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GEDDY LEE OF RUSH

GUITAR SHEET MUSIC

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AFTER MIDNIGHT/
ERIC CLAPTON
With BASS LINE

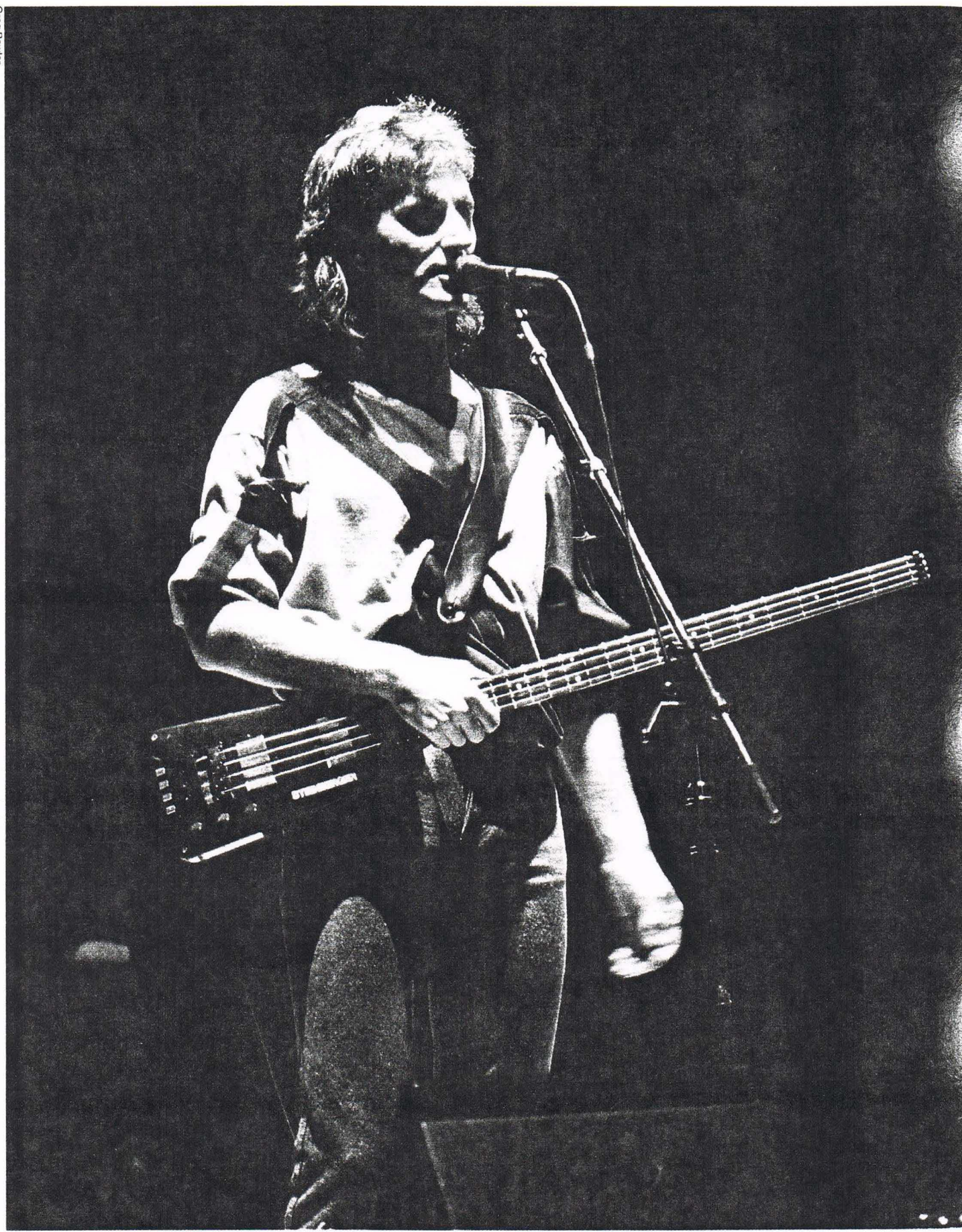
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BASS WARS
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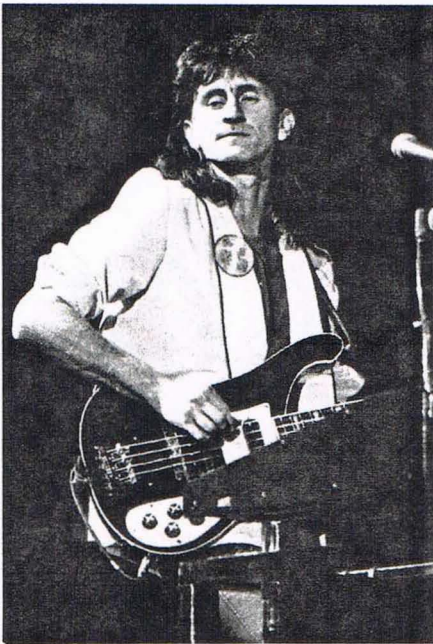


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Singing Bass

GEDDY LEE Is One Of The Reasons Everything Is Coming Up Sevens These Days For Rush



by Zev Katz

In the age of MTV, where pretty faces and good moves are all-important, Rush stands out as a band that doesn't take image more seriously than music. Their career has been characterized by a constant striving to maintain their integrity. As a result, their music seems never to have suffered at the hands of ignorant record executives. Nor have they let their listeners control them. They have been much more concerned with musicianship and innovation than rock star trappings.

As a bassist, Geddy Lee is widely respected in rock circles, but he is really more than that. He is a keyboard player, songwriter and a distinctive vocalist, as

Zev Katz is a studio and performing bass player in New York City.

well as co-producer of Rush's material. Recently he produced an album for Boys Brigade. During Rush's unprecedented five night sold-out stint at New York's Radio City Music Hall, Geddy took time out to talk to **GUITAR** about his career and his music.

GUITAR: Boys Brigade reminds me somewhat of the current English bands, although not quite as synthesizer saturated. Do you listen to much of that music?

GEDDY: Yeah, I listen to a lot of the stuff coming out of England now. I also like Talking Heads and occasionally I listen to some reggae, Bob Marley and Third World in particular.

GUITAR: Has doing the Boys Brigade project affected your view of Rush's direction?

GEDDY: It's affected me as a musician, because it's broadened my scope a bit. It's invariably going to affect what I do in Rush because whatever I am as a musician ends up becoming a part of Rush. I don't know what form it'll take, because our band is a lot like a sponge. Things we get into and listen to we sort of soak up and end up spewing out in our music. I don't think we'll be doing all short dance tunes or anything.

GUITAR: We are confronted daily with a barrage of new technology. Synthesizers, sequencers, electronic drums, and so on. You are using more of it than you used to. How do you feel about it?

GEDDY: I think you have to keep on top of what's happening. Music is changing, and all the tools of our trade are changing so fast that you have to keep up with it. You've got to at least learn and be aware of what's out there and decide whether you can apply it to what you're doing. Maybe you can't and that's fine. But you owe it to yourself to investigate the options. It would be much easier for me to go out on stage and just play bass all night, but it wouldn't be better for our music and I wouldn't be learning as much as I am, doing it this way.

GUITAR: Have you ever considered hiring a keyboard player for Rush so that you can just play the bass?

GEDDY: Well, we talk about having a keyboard player tour with us, but I don't know if we'll ever do that. At present we'd rather do it our-

selves. If we ever do something on a record that we can't possibly reproduce live without another person then we might consider hiring somebody for a tour. But we're making Alex do more on keyboards now, so he's sharing my load a bit, which is helping out. Like on a couple of our old songs, *Spirit of the Radio* and *New World Man*, Alex is handling the sequencers.

GUITAR: It's great the way you go to the synth and Alex picks up on the Taurus pedals and then on the first beat of the bar he plays the bass notes on the pedals and on the second beat you're back on the bass.

GEDDY: That's right. We work those things out. It's like one of those Busby Berkeley dance routines. It's all choreographed pretty well. Some of the new things that we're writing are also using sequencers and he's doing them all now. I was doing it, but now I have too many switches and I'm playing more keyboards, so splitting up the duties is helping quite a bit.

GUITAR: But you'll find other things to do.

GEDDY: That's a problem. Every time I figure, well, I'll just be able to play the bass on this, someone says wouldn't it be nice if we had this or that going on? I think, yeah, that's true. You can't say no, because you know as soon as you start figuring out another part it's going to sound so much nicer. You're going to take the song further. And once you've done that, you can't go back. But I usually find one song on an album where inevitably the bass track will be way too busy. It's way busier than it needs to be, because I'm venting all my frustrations on one track where I'm only on bass and I can go nuts. It's one of those obnoxious bass lines that just won't shut up.

GUITAR: On stage you're using three different basses; the Rickenbacker, the Steinberger, and the Fender Jazz bass. What are the differences between them for you, and why do you need all three?

GEDDY: The Rickenbacker is my mainstay. I feel the most comfortable playing it. It has a particular sound that works with the Rush sound that was developed over a number of years. But as our music changes. . . . I guess where it really started was when I found my Jazz

bass and realized that I could use it in the context of the band, and it still sounded right. It's such a lovely bass to play, and has such a different tonality, that I found it refreshing to use. Then last year somebody came up to me with a Steinberger and said, "Here, try this." Now, I'm pretty closed-minded when it comes to basses, because there are so many around and they all have so many switches and buttons on them. I have enough choices in my life. I don't want to have fourteen choices of sounds on my bass. So I plugged in this Steinberger and it just blew me away. It just felt so nice to play, and I couldn't believe the sustain and the evenness of the notes all the way up and down the neck. Also, there were no dead spots. It's just a great sounding bass, so I've been wanting to use it more. Live it's so practical for me amidst all those keyboards. Since it has a shorter top of the guitar, I'm not banging into microphones or anything. So out of practicality and a real appreciation of the sound of the instrument I'm bringing it into more of the new stuff we're doing. My bass sound, probably for the first time in a few years, will change into more of a Steinberger sound.

GUITAR: About technique, do you play with a light touch, or do you really attack the strings? Or does it vary?

GEDDY: It varies. A lot of the time I play real hard, but I find I can play more fluidly when I lighten my touch. I also use my nails a lot. I always wanted to use a pick because I like the twang, but I hate playing with a pick because it feels so unnatural to me. So I grew my nails and I just use a bit of them to twang. Most of the time I do hit pretty hard, though. It depends on the song. We play a two hour show, so as the set goes on I probably vary my style five or six times. Sometimes I mute the string and pluck with my nail. Like on *New World Man*, half the song is muted and plucked with my nail. Then the other half I'll just bash the hell out of it.

GUITAR: What was the first instrument you played?

GEDDY: I played piano when I was real young and, I think like most kids, I had to go to piano lessons and I hated them. As soon as I found

a good reason not to go anymore I didn't go. But then in school I started getting interested again. I started taking clarinet, then saxophone, then drums, but I didn't really play any of them very well. Then somebody gave me a guitar. It was a beautiful Hawaiian-looking guitar with palm trees on it and I learned *For Your Love*, by the Yardbirds. And that was it. I played that song thousands of times. Then, of course, because I could play one song, me and a bunch of pals started a band. Then our bass player quit and everybody said, "You play bass." I said, OK, and I started playing the bass.

GUITAR: Did you ever study on the guitar or bass, or did you teach yourself?

GEDDY: I just taught myself. I didn't really know what I was playing. It really wasn't until a few years ago that I made any effort to learn the language of what I was doing. I think when you work in a band, with the same people for many years, you don't really have to know the language of it because you invent your own language. But a few years ago I started working with other people and I realized that when you know the language of music it's a lot easier to get to a given point faster. I'm still very slow at it. I can't really read, but I can figure my way around pretty well.

GUITAR: How did you go about teaching yourself the language, once you decided to learn it?

GEDDY: Well, I first figured I'd better learn all of the notes on the bass. I had a friend who made me up a chart of all the modes. I'd go through the different scales; phrygian, lydian and all the rest. It was interesting. I used to listen to different jazz bassists and I would go; "Wow, that blows me away. How do they think of that?" But once I started going through these different scales and modes it took a lot of the mystery away.

GUITAR: Do you look at that as a disappointment, or do you feel that having the knowledge you are now open to do a lot more?

GEDDY: Well, both. I was disappointed to learn that these people who I thought were so amazing were just mortals. You know, when you're a musician you learn in stages. You learn and you reach a plateau where

you're not learning anything, you're applying what you've learned. Then you're hungry and you say to yourself, "How do I get to another step, because I'm tired of playing these patterns and working in the same blocks of music?" You want to fill in those gaps on your fingerboard that seem like alien areas. So playing those scales was a big help in getting me over the hump and expanding my use of the neck. It helped me as a musician.

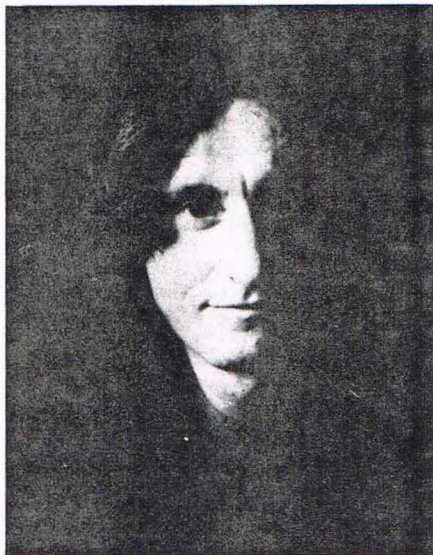
There is one point I'd like to make though. It's that if you have a good ear, and you're a rock musician or if you're playing your own kind of music, you don't have to feel bad for not knowing the language. In time, and in your own way, you'll probably learn it. But just because some guy went to Berklee doesn't mean that you don't have as strong a sense of music as that person does, just because he went and learned the language through a school. It all has to do with musicality. If a person is talented and has musicality he can make music with four notes. But if a person has no sense of music he can know every note on the neck and he can still not create, he's just reading.

GUITAR: But would you agree that if the person who *is* musical can learn the language and how to use it he's thereby increased his potential immeasurably?

GEDDY: Oh yeah. A hundred percent. I'm not saying it's one or the other. I'm saying the important thing is musicality. It's just that when you want to go out and communicate with the big wide world of musicians it really helps to know the language.

GUITAR: You have a much greater sense of space and of melody in your playing than most rock bass players. Did that come from anywhere in particular?

GEDDY: Primarily, I guess, from the influence of people like Chris Squire, who I thought always had that. John Entwistle as well. It's also because I sing. I think the two are always related. It was a bit difficult at first for me to sing and play bass at the same time. So I used to develop bass lines around my vocal lines to make it easier for me to do both at the same time. Then I realized I was getting a more melodic bass line out of it. I think the space came out of



Jeffrey Mayer

the drama of the early songs that we wrote. Big majestic chords and big spaces. Drop that 'A' note, you know? Like a bomb dropping.

GUITAR: There are times when the way you and Neil play together really reminds me of rhythm sections like Jeff Berlin and Bill Bruford, or Anthony Jackson and Steve Gadd. Did you spend much time listening to those guys?

GEDDY: Those are just two pairs we've listened to. There are so many great things being done. Our music is a little perverse in that it's rock music, and it's *hard* rock music, but we try to bring all these things into it. If we've learned something about a style of playing, or if we got into playing in whatever time signature and picked up something from

somebody else, we'll apply it to our hard rock. Hard rock is our medium, and everything we learn we try to bring into that. We always try to keep the hard rock aspect of it there because that's our first music. But anything else that we can learn to help sophisticate that form of music, as far as our own sensibility goes, that's really all we try to do. At the same time, in the last few years we've placed very strong emphasis on feel. It used to be all technical. It was how many riffs we could put together in odd time signatures, one after the other. Our songwriting was more like piecing movements together, whereas now we're more interested in writing good songs, in the classic sense of the word.

GUITAR: Do you and Alex have any particular approach to songwriting?

GEDDY: Not really. It changes all the time. Sometimes it's so easy and so much fun and it just pops out. Other times it's like burning in hell. You go in and say to yourself, "Today I have to write something." Often what we do is try to just pick a starting point. We keep a lot of jam tapes that we do, and if we find a good jam we just work with it to get us going. Sometimes we end up in a place that's miles away from where we started, but we get there.

GUITAR: Almost all of your songs have at least one section that employs odd or changing meters. Where did that influence come from?

GEDDY: Originally it came from people like Genesis. They used to do *Apocalypse in 9/8*. Then we started hearing things from the odd fusion band and we just got clued in to it. For a while all we did was think in odd meters—5's and 7's. We just started experimenting and it was a great tool, because you'd figure out some rock riff and think how abstract it would sound to play it in seven. We fell in love with sevens. It's very hard to find a Rush album that doesn't have sevens on it. They're all over the place, but why not? Most rock albums are in four, so why not use sevens? Over the years you learn how to play real smooth in seven. We're working on something right now that's in 9/8. We found a pattern that really feels nice, so we're going to use it.

I think changing meters is a great thing. Sometimes, if you apply them to the kind of music that I play, it can get a bit abstract. But if you use them right, and in the right context, they're real effective. We're always sort of looking for a place where it'll work. It's nice, and it's different.

GUITAR: Are there any songwriters who you try to emulate?

GEDDY: There are so many. To me, Peter Townshend is one of the great hard rock songwriters. He just writes great *songs*. The most difficult thing is to write a really great song. That's something I never really appreciated until the last couple of years. I think the most important thing is that if you find an idea for your song, that the music and the lyrics both say the same thing. That's what it's supposed to be. Then you're saying, "Yes, of course. There could be no other music for this lyric." It's such a difficult thing to achieve perfection in songwriting. That's why you go on and on and keep trying to do it and keep changing. I know a lot of our fans would much rather we were still playing twenty minute songs with a lot of real complexities in them. I hope they appreciate that we just aren't interested in doing that anymore. We're trying very hard to learn more about what we do and to perfect our craft, and you can't do that by staying in the same place. I know for myself, I listen to bands that I like and I like them in a certain period and want them to always stay *that* band. Then they go on to something else and you resent it a little bit. At the same time they have to do that. They have to go on. We're very much that way. We're a band that wants to be around for a long time, and we look at our existence over the long run, so what we do on this album isn't *it* and *everything*. It's another stage we're going through and another experiment, in a way. Sometimes you just can't help what comes out. If you're writing honestly, and it's an honest expression, you sit down to write and it comes out. This guy may not like it, and in two months you may not like it yourself, but that's the way you felt at the time, that's the thing that came out, and that was your honest expression at the time. It's important to keep that, otherwise it gets pretty contrived. ■