

## CARRYING THE PROG-ROCK TORCH

# RUSH

By LISA LAMPUGNALE

**T**he members of Rush can afford to be proud. Hell, Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart can even be downright pompous if they choose. For the past 15 years, the Canadian supergroup has been carrying the progressive-rock torch without so much as a sellout album or a commercial Top 40-gear single. Rush has stayed true to its roots with one entertaining and insightful prog-rock LP after another from their self-titled first album in 1974 to their latest offering, *Power Windows*.

Yes, Rush has every right to be stand-off-ish, conceited, egotistical or any of the other adjectives commonly used to describe your average, everyday rock star. But today, less than 24 hours after the release of Rush's 14th LP, the band's manager, Val Azzoli, is on bended knee—literally—apologizing for Geddy Lee's lateness for an interview. Geddy, who is a full 10 minutes late, is shyly and quietly offering his own "I'm sorry"'s as well.

It seems that the singer/bassist got caught up staring at New York's tall buildings and in bookstore windows on the way back from a radio interview. That walk was Geddy's only chance to be in the outside sunshine for the entire day, so who could blame him? In a business where the average interview subject is a half-hour late, Geddy's plethora of apologies seem unnecessary. But then again, that's not unusual for one of the nicest guys in rock'n'roll.

Geddy Lee's demeanor is no doubt helped by the fulfilling recording experience that yielded *Power Windows*. It was a much more sullen Lee who, during the group's last tour in support of *Grace Under Pressure*, told a reporter that the group was together on an album-to-album basis and could break up at any moment.

"Well, today is a brighter day than it was a year ago and the future looks brighter now," Geddy says regarding his mid-tour comments. "I said those things because we'd been together for a long

time and we'd just finished recording a record that was very difficult to make. We were also in the middle of a tour that was taking its toll on us from a nerves point of view. At a time like that, you start asking yourself, 'How long can I keep doing this? Is this fun anymore?' Those were questions on everybody's minds last year and, had this been a negative recording experience, it would have been time to evaluate whether we should stay together.

"But we've just come off a very good experience and that certainly helped refresh everybody."

Geddy is clearly happy with *Power Windows*. In fact, the LP is the first he's been totally enthusiastic about since the release of *Moving Pictures* nearly five years back. The two studio albums released between that LP and *Power Windows* (*Signals* and *Grace Under Pressure*) didn't quite do it for Geddy. The recording sessions were tough and the results they yielded weren't, according to the singer, up to scratch.

"I've had very mixed feelings about the last few records we've done," he explains. "That made them frustrating experiences to an extent. For example, *Grace Under Pressure* was a very difficult record to make and, in the end, I was not happy with it. It's always frustrating to work so hard on something and not feel great about it.

"We go through transitory states and it's difficult to be satisfied with something you did in a transitional stage. It's asking the impossible to be happy with yourself during one of those periods. *Signals* and *Grace Under Pressure* were both transitional records, whereas *Moving Pictures* and this record are arrivals at a point. So it makes sense that I'm happy with this record."

So Geddy's happy, Alex and Neil are happy—so says Geddy—and the record company will be happy if the fans are happy. Judging by the assortment of richly textured, musically varied numbers on *Power Windows*, the LP has the potential

to outsell its predecessor and become Rush's sixth consecutive top 10 album. But it's not likely that Geddy, Alex and Neil will be anxiously wishing *Power Windows* up the charts. According to Geddy, they did their best in the studio. The rest is in the public's hands.

"You really don't have much control over whether an album sells or not. All we can do is put forward our best effort," Geddy says. "Our band isn't a really contrived thing. We don't know what we're going to write until it comes out of us. When it starts coming out, we start writing it and pushing it in the direction it's going in. All we can do is be true to our musical values and make sure there's quality in every department.

"It's really hard to judge how a Rush album's going to do because they don't fit into the category of blatantly commercial, but they're still accessible. We know that as long as we are true to ourselves and the record isn't a sellout, that it's an honest effort. And we know there are Rush fans out there who are gonna follow along with us."

True, for more than a dozen years, the members of Rush have kept their heads on straight, staying loyal to the cause of progressive-rock music. But they've never been content to rest on past laurels or stick with the same old formula album after album. With *Power Windows*, for example, some bold new chances were taken and new Rush ground was broken.

First of all, Rush worked with a left-field choice of a producer, Peter Collins. Lee liked Collins' work with Gary Moore, and convinced his handmates to give the relatively little-known producer a shot. The partnership proved a success. Then there was the guest keyboard player, the string section and the choir—all firsts for Rush. Before *Power Windows*, the three were content to record as a trio, but their desire to make an album with more variety that would update and stretch their production prompted them to call in recruits from outside.

"After I got over the initial shock of having other people on our tracks, I started to realize it was a really positive thing," Geddy says. "We started to see how far we could possibly take the songs. We were attempting to exploit moments and sounds that deserved it, to bring out a part of a song that deserved to be developed musically. It was also fun to do. Hey, we've never had a string section and we'd always wanted to. The opportunity was there. Why not do it?"

Geddy squints as if picturing the scene in the recording studio. "We wanted to check it out. We wanted to see what it would be like to see all these symphony guys playing our music. It was great sitting there watching them, people from all walks of life.

"And," he adds with a contented sigh, "they were singing and playing something we conceived in a little farmhouse in Ontario." ■