

# RAW

No.12

FEBRUARY 8-21

£1



## HOUSE OF LORDS



## SCORPIONS



## ANTHRAX



RUSH'S NEIL PEART  
TOP OF THE PROFS

PLUS: THE GREAT YES DEBATE  
BOTH SIDES SPEAK



# CLOSER TO THE PEART

**In the wake of recent 'Rush to split!' rumours, drummer and lyricist NEIL PEART reflects on the band's art and plots their journey into the future...**

WHAT IS there to say about Rush which hasn't already been said? Most rock bands are fairly unsophisticated entities, and the interview procedure a pretty mundane affair designed to fill in the blanks at album release time before the hacks move on to next week's would-be big boys. Rush is something different, though; one of the few rock bands around to exhibit signs of blatant intelligence, the trio of guitarist Alex Lifeson, bassist/keyboard player Geddy Lee and drummer Neil Peart seem to challenge writers to don their thinking caps and embroider the basic role-playing of rock 'n' roll with whys and wherefores which set the band permanently apart from the masses. With most groups what you see/hear is what you get, but with Rush there's a whole body of knowledge both around and about the trio, elicited over the years by journalists inspired to try that little bit harder.

Thus, when yours truly got the news that Neil Peart was looming ahead, the quivering started. Rush in general — and Neil in particular — have been probed every which way, so what the hell is there left to ask that won't reduce the guy to sleep? It's not very often that you develop much of an interview strategy, you just tend to ask a few questions about the new album and then see where they lead, but this called for something special. Start with the standard stuff, but try and get into something worthwhile before the man begins to nod off and answer on automatic.

So did I manage it? Does the following story cast any new light on Neil Peart and Rush? Well, I tried guys, I tried to add a few new brushstrokes to the picture... and in the process, enjoyed this interview much more than most. Peart may be highly erudite and sharp as a tack, but he's also an amiable and open character, with the feared aloofness nowhere in evidence. The truth would appear to be that Rush may be a very special musical entity, but don't make the mistake of taking them for gods.

There was a nice piece of stupidity to break the ice with, anyway; in December last year a major radio station in San Francisco — which ought to have known better — broadcast the news that Rush had split up and that Peart had joined The Who!

"No, I've not heard that one before," admitted Neil with a laugh. "All I've been hearing is that this ('A Show Of Hands') is our last album, but then again I've heard that about the last four albums!"

Okay, time to get down. Certain questions are inevitable under given

circumstances, and their inevitability can only become tedious for the person being asked. But you, dear readers, would hardly let me off the hook *without* asking, so... why yet another double live album? (And I'm sorry I had to ask such a boring, non-innovative, predictable question.)

"No, it's a valid question — it's the reason why I like doing interviews, it keeps you on your toes finding new ways to answer... and of course *valid* ways too.

"Basically, it's a case of third time lucky. We weren't happy with our last two efforts to create a live atmosphere on record ('All The World's A Stage' and 'Exit... Stage Left'). It's gone to both extremes; the first was too raw and lacked the fidelity we wanted, and the second was too far towards the other extreme. That one we polished too much, practically eliminating the ambience of playing in a hall to an audience. So this time we had both of those efforts in mind, and went into it with the idea of making it, hopefully, the definitive Rush live record."

The three have certainly become one of the most sophisticated performing outfits around, using a vast array of expensive toys to strive towards consistency of reproduction. Live albums tend to be a 'warts 'n' all' concept unless you're blatantly cheating (q.v. W.A.S.P.), so how did Rush go about trying to make a *truly* live LP which met both their standards and the definition of a live recording?

"Technology certainly has an amount to do with it, at the recording level and definitely for mixing. Ever since our last live album there have been advances in technology which actually make it possible to sound more *natural* — it's going full circle towards capturing what you used to get with one microphone and a four-track studio. So that's how we avoided the pitfalls of the second album, where we did *too* much cleaning up and repair work, and lost sight of trying to make a live album. We were trying to make a perfect live album, and in some ways that's a contradiction in terms.

"This time we were able to fix up the most jarring things — a broken string, a shriek of feedback — and sampling let us replace a single guitar chord or a single note of a vocal from another night, whereas previously you had to live with this horrible thing or else re-do the whole guitar or vocal track in the studio. This time we were able to preserve live performances as they went on to tape on the night — there was no sense of working on a travesty; we joked at the time about calling 'Exit... Stage Left' 'Live-ish', so determined were we not to have it as raw as the first one!"

ONE THING which has always characterised Rush has been the way the band's material develops and evolves in live performance; is this the result of

varying degrees of crowd feedback, or the erratic spark of collective inspiration?

"I think as a band we tend to go through peaks and valleys, and occasionally the tapes happen to be running on one of those rare and magic nights with *everything* flowing effortlessly. It's important though that we're not aware and self-conscious about the tape rolling because then we start to look inward more and concentrate on technique, and that defeats the purpose of trying to get us to express ourselves.

"You'll notice that a lot of the tracks on the new album come from the Birmingham NEC show. We were filming at the same time, and that whole level of chaos was distracting enough for us to forget that the tapes were rolling, which really made a difference in the way we performed that night..."

But given the evolutionary process of Rush development, and the spark of inspiration which fires the evolutionary changes — what *is* the definitive version of any Rush composition, and does 'A Show Of Hands' contain any? Is the special quality contained in the original creation as originally envisaged and recorded, or is it in the tune which it becomes as its basic format and attitude inspires the band to take it further onstage, their ever-widening horizons drawing new aspects out of something which most bands would simply leave alone? If Rush were to chart their development on vinyl, would the path be marked by the *original* studio recordings, or the different creations they frequently turned into *onstage*?

"Most often I think the studio recording is the definitive version of the tune. Onstage it's what we're trying to live up to. When I'm rehearsing on my own I'll play along with the studio track and try to make sure that I've still got the spirit of the song in my mind; and through the course of a tour the songs can change, so I try to listen to live tapes and make sure that they're still true to the spirit of the song as we recorded it.

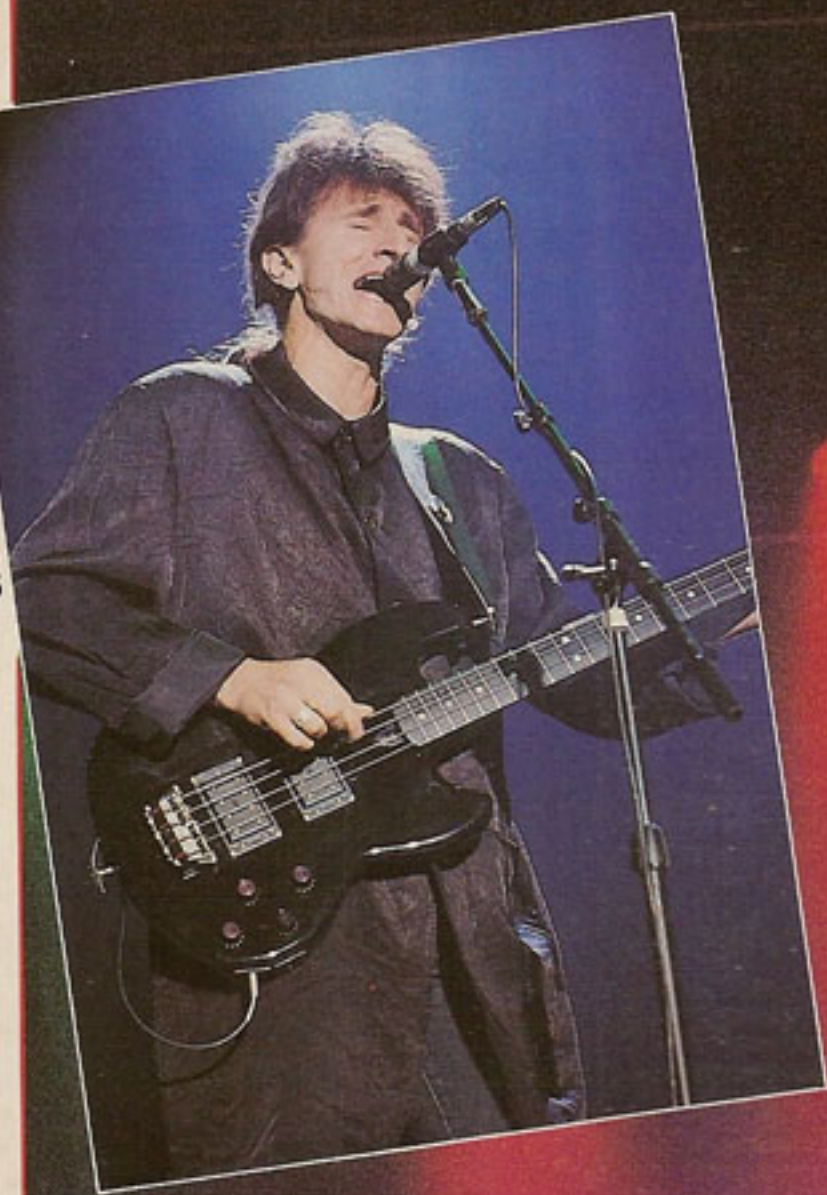
"Some songs don't change that much, though. If something is really difficult to play, like 'Tom Sawyer' for example, then it only changes in small, subtle ways because we were satisfied with the way it stood, and because it's so difficult to get right it never becomes easy and lends itself to changing around. Some numbers we wanted to keep playing but they'd become stale for us, so we had to find some way to revitalise them.

"In the studio you can always work a little over your head — some tracks have been really hard for me to learn! Sometimes things happen spontaneously whilst you're recording, and for a while my mind will refuse to think about things the right way, and it becomes impossible to reproduce what I did. But it's like a

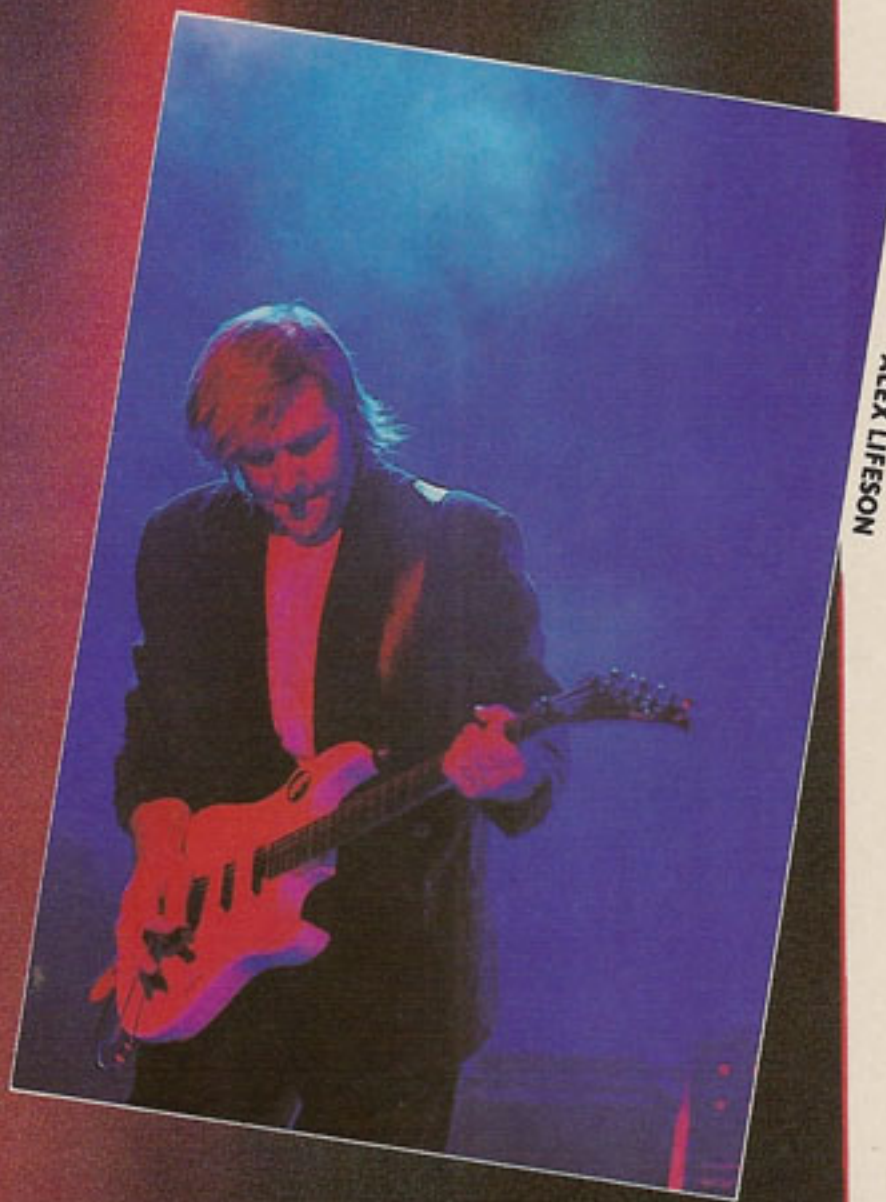


# RUSH

GEDDY LEE



ALEX LIFESON



NEIL PEART





puzzle, or a knotty mathematical problem — you solve one element and it all slots into place. Drumming's all co-ordination of hands and feet, and if you assign the wrong job to the wrong limb none of it will ever work. Then you switch to your left hand what you *thought* your right hand was doing, and it all becomes clear. In the studio you know you can stop and start again, so you take chances — I try and arrange everything beforehand, but I'll inevitably leave a little part free for that magic to happen.

"One motivation for us in doing a live album is actually to avoid retrospectives, the 'best of' releases which don't offer anything new to the fans. Live albums *do* mean something to them, so it's preferable for us to do a live album rather than have the label put out a retrospective. It's how we maintain control, plus it lets us define a period of time for ourselves, an excuse maybe to re-evaluate everything we do and see if there are any changes we want to make."

**THE INCREASINGLY** rare phenomenon of a Rush tour is an inarguably special event — or series of events. During a band's early years touring is a grinding necessity, the seemingly endless performances being a vital part of the equation for stardom. But as stardom is achieved — as it undoubtedly has been in the case of Rush — these public performances seem to take on a new aspect for the performers themselves, with other factors starting to weigh on them as they contemplate months of tedium on coaches, in hotels and dragging themselves to and from shows every night. Does the limited touring schedule of Rush these days mean that they don't actually want to do it any more?

"Well, I have to admit that it's lost some of its freshness, year after year of it. It's a matter of temperament too, and I'm a very solitary, reserved kind of person, so for me the favourite part of Rush is the couple of months when we go away and work on new material, just the three of us in a fairly intense kind of creative atmosphere, without anything detracting from the work.

"But everything else is a part of it too. Months in the studio is part of the price, and playing live as well. Playing live does have a beneficial effect on your playing, but on the other hand there's the restlessness and the rootlessness of always being on the move. There's so much wasted time on the road too, which you can't spend constructively — the whole day is sacrificed for the sake of two hours onstage. In some ways it's a fair exchange, but you start to realise how finite your life is and how many ambitions you still have, and kind of resent that time which could be spent doing so much more. After eight months away you ask yourself what you achieved over that time and it's, 'Well, I played a bunch of concerts . . .'. Your playing gets incrementally better, but eight months of practice would have garnered you just as much."

The good news for Neil — and Rush fans everywhere, given the rumours of no more records — is that by the time you read this the trio will be sequestered somewhere in the midst of the creative process, working up a new studio album. Sure enough, 'A Show Of Hands' marked the end of another Rush era — authors would provide special bookends, Rush give you double live albums — and the new LP will reveal a fresh perspective.

And a new producer.

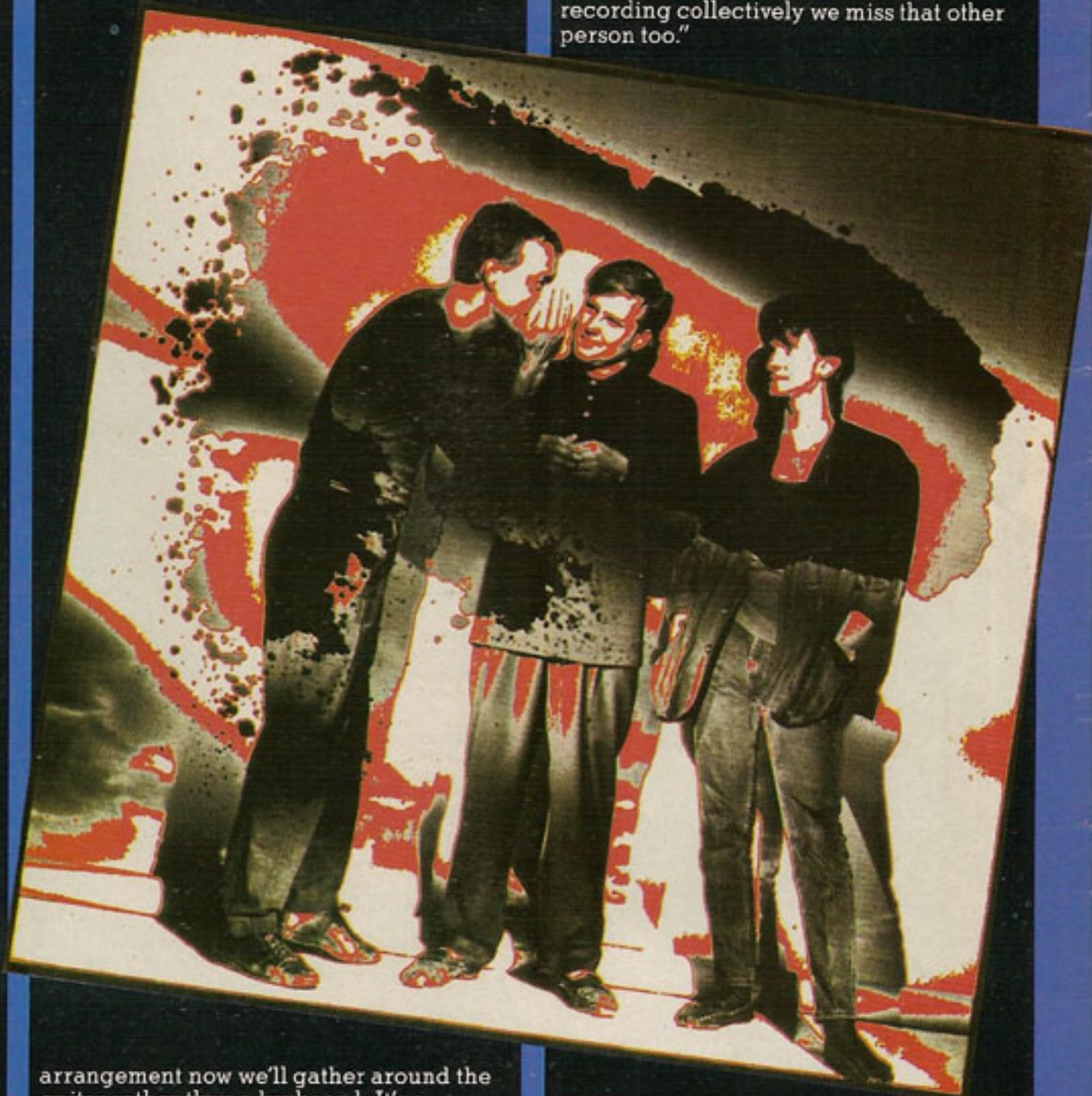
"With the live album just out the excitement level's up again, so it's a good time for us. All of a sudden we're focussed back on Rush after having a few months with the luxury of it not being the centre of our lives. It's good for us now to be talking about the past and gearing ourselves up to move into the future.

"Since we've only talked in general terms so far I have to be a little vague, but I think the era we've just closed with the live album was one of massive keyboard technology — synthesisers, sequencing and sampling, all digital — which was enormously valuable to us, but took up a lot of our creative time. So now we're ready to back off and maybe go back to the foundations — write with just guitar, bass and drums. It's not a reaction away from keyboards, I'm sure we'll still use lots of them, but I think that to work out an

him. He prefers to work in London with a lot of new bands rather than spending six months making a Rush record. We're regretful of course, but we remain friends; it's a good spark for us to have to go out and find someone new."

Jeez guys, surely you could do it yourselves by now???

"Technically yes, but it's an irreplaceable asset having someone you respect who'll come in and listen to the material after you've written it and be objective. Peter was great, he never got involved in the technical side of the recording — he sat away from the console and gave comments in the context of the *whole* song, which is exactly what we need. We can capture our sounds well enough, but when it comes to the song or the arrangement, all the little tools of building a tune, that's where we love having someone to bounce off. Writing alone I miss Alex and Geddy, and recording collectively we miss that other person too."



arrangement now we'll gather around the guitar rather than a keyboard. It's a fundamental thing which might not be audible to the listener, but it's certainly going to change our approach. When you write with keyboards there's a greater sense of relaxation, whereas guitar is more immediate and more rhythmic."

And then there's the other change too, the split with producer Peter Collins (he worked on Rush's last studio LP, 'Hold Your Fire'), which will put a new face into the control room. The longstanding Rush/Terry Brown partnership foundered when it got too 'comfortable' — what happened this time?

"We only just found out ourselves! Apparently Peter went through a crisis of conscience, because he'd enjoyed working with us, but it's a career move for

**RUSH STAND** alone in so many respects when you pause to consider the entire arena of rock. Most bands remain fairly true to themselves in a very obvious way, but they don't change. Rush, however, as they now stand are poles apart from the power-trio which came together 21 years ago (although their self-titled debut album dates back a mere 15 years), but nevertheless they continue to actually consolidate their position with each new twist, rather than subverting what they have achieved to that point, and one is forced to wonder whether the band has become blasé about the continuing solidity of their fan base . . .

"I'm genuinely surprised — and obviously grateful too," responds Neil,



"we've gotten away with a lot! We've always done what we wanted, made some radical shifts in direction — and as we've challenged ourselves we've challenged our audiences too, but we've always supplanted the lost ones with other areas of taste. It's a constantly overlapping process of evolution, and we've been very fortunate with it. There's been a fairly steady number of people who've liked at least one of our incarnations."

... Which only serves to reaffirm that Rush are not a 'lowest denominator' kind of band, who establish a niche and then service it faithfully. The generous way of looking at such a typical stance is to credit the band in question in unerringly giving their fans what they want, and the cynical way of looking at Rush is to imply that they're creating solely for their own pleasure and ignoring the fans who reward them for making music which has given them, the audiences, pleasure. But on the other hand, doesn't a band have the right to make the music which pleases *them* most and then project it towards whichever like-minded record buyers there are out there? Does the process of achieving fame place an obligation on a band to give up personal satisfaction in favour of stagnation?

"I'd say we're fringe-dwellers. We're certainly not in the mainstream making music for mass-consumption, and by design we certainly set out to make music which interests us — but we like to feel that by definition that will interest a certain number of other people as well. So it's not entirely a case of being self-serving; we're hoping and really wanting to communicate something. We're not playing in a basement just for ourselves, we want to communicate with people, but we accept the fact that it won't be the majority. It's a great situation that we've always had a big enough minority to keep us going, and it's something I wish more bands would aspire to, rather than giving up their originality so easily. Their audiences might be a little smaller, but their 'life' would be proportionately longer and certainly more interesting."

So the bottom line is that Rush write and record any damn thing they want. But has there been anything you've ultimately vetoed as being just too far left-field?

"Perhaps to our demerit — NO! If we've ever believed in it long enough to record it we've followed through and put it out, and it's true that our body of work *is* uneven, with things that have been more or less successful than others. But we look at that as the justifiable price we pay."

Hmmm, seems pretty cerebral and thoroughly distanced from the spirit of rock 'n' roll. What about all that youthful rebellion and intensity which must surely have been a spark in the Rush spectrum at one time at least?

"Oh, it's still there. And nothing motivates me more, particularly as a lyricist, than anger or frustration, especially outrage. If I get outraged about something it's more inspirational than anything, and I feel that's a fundamental part of rock. It's the same thing with my drumming too — I'm trying to control something, but essentially I just want to let go. Pop can be soothing, but rock *shouldn't* be. It should be tense and angry ... or maybe sad; I like a sad song once in a while."

Okay, so your lyrics may be expressing some inner anger or tension, but when it gets down to the bottom line do they make a difference? Or is that feeling merely the

fuel for the fire which makes the song itself what it is, and what it couldn't be without that spark of intent?

"I think you have to accept it as sufficient that you made the point, that you felt something and were able to articulate it. You can't — you *daren't* — think that you're going to change anything; you would have to change the behaviour of so many people to affect a *real* change that it just gets into the realms of the fantastic. People may *recognise* the thoughts you're expressing, and whilst you may not get change there *is* affirmation. That's where I get pleasure out of reading books — not so much a case of learning something as affirmation of something I've thought about but couldn't articulate."

A very realistic acceptance of music's role today, and one that a few characters high on drive and motivation but short on sheer commonsense might care to chew on. But these people are the ones who are also frequently at the forefront of those who are prepared to apply themselves to useful efforts too, such as the number of quasi-political artists who plyed their wares for the benefit of various charitable causes over the last few years ...

"Actually, we always have done charity work," says Neil, "but in a quiet way; and we're also involved as individuals in a lot of things, we just don't like to make a big fuss about it. When we play Toronto, for example, the proceeds of at least one night go to United Way, and we talk the crew and the stagehands into donating their wages for the night too, so the *entire* proceeds of the show go to charity."

"I just don't like the grandstanding. Privately, I'm very contributive to things I believe in, particularly environmental issues, but I don't need to see my name in the headlines. I don't feel comfortable with that; some of the high-profile contributors may have motives that are entirely pure, but I prefer to do it anonymously."

**RUSH HAVE** certainly come a long way since casting their first stone into the rock 'n' roll pond, initially with drummer John Rutsey before his faltering health and diverging musical inclinations thrust Peart into the limelight. He had two weeks to learn the contents of the first album before the band launched into their debut US tour, which didn't give him a great deal of time to reflect on what he was getting himself into. One wonders if he had any concept of where things might lead.

"Good grief, NO! I've always been one to not look too far ahead; I set my goals in reachable stages so at that time I was just thinking, 'Here's a band with a record deal and they're paying a salary'. That was novelty and ambition enough for me at the time — how much more of a dreamland could I need? To go from playing bars and High Schools to an American tour? I didn't have to dream beyond that."

"And it's always been at the same level for me since then — I set my goals one step away so that they're reachable, an attainable dream, not a fantasy."

Talking of early Rush still, there was more than a tad of blues-based Zeppelin flair to the work of the band in those days. As music goes full circle — except for Rush, of course! — and the likes of Condom King ply their very Zeppelinistic wares, how does one who's already been there and moved on look at this repetition in history?

"Well, it's a hard thing to really weigh up. My next-door neighbour's son is a bass player, and being a neighbour I can't help but hear his band rehearsing, and it shocks me to hear them going over the same songs which I learned by. It's kind of a sad commentary; by principle I resent anything which is backward-looking, and it kind of bothers me when there are so many frontiers in rock music alone which are unexplored and undeveloped. It doesn't make sense that we should have to go back to the beginning to take stock before moving forward."

So does this attitude take you as far as wanting to do something about it, huh? Alex and Geddy have both produced outside bands in non-Rush space, so what's the prospect of Neil Peart taking time out to nurture a group in the creative process?

"Temperamentally, it really doesn't appeal to me that much. I like quick gratification and I get impatient, so I wouldn't be the one to take on the role of being a *true* producer with a *true* commitment to every facet of that role. Both of them (Alex and Geddy) are much more suited to that role than I am."

Okay, production's out — but what about the ever-present rumours that Neil Peart is thinking about writing a book? It would be a natural transition for such a highly developed lyricist, after all ...

"I'm always *thinking* about that, and I'll probably continue to think about it for a long time. I'm quite content for now to learn about the art of writing and to practice it ... and one day put it into practice."

**OKAY, DUMB** question time — what do David Lee Roth and Neil Peart have in common? Astonishingly enough there *is* an answer beyond two arms, two legs, etc., for DLR isn't the only one with a predilection for sloping off into the wilds to get away from it all. Whilst Roth seems to like mountains and jungles, Peart's one for Africa and China, and in fact his current round of dutiful interviews finds him just back from cycling in Africa ...

"Oh yeah, I love travelling, and bicycling is such a wonderful way to travel — I've been to several places across the world that way, and I enjoy it more all the time."

"Basically I heard about this trip, just five people going to Cameroon, and it had only been done once before so it was thoroughly adventurous. They don't have any tourist infrastructure out there, so it was a great insight into knowing what the world is — I can include a lot more now in my picture of what Africa *truly* is."

Very creditable of course, but the cynic has to enquire whether we have a quasi-Luddite here, opting for the backwoods of the world simply because that's what they are? Are you exploring beyond civilisation to learn more, or to escape the rigours and demands of modern civilisation?

"Both true. I love going there for its own sake, but I also like leaving here and leaving the circumstances of my life behind. When I go on a trip I'm completely anonymous, the people I'm with usually have no idea what I do, and that's perfect because the whole framework of my life is removed. No support, no ego-buffers, no people protecting and supporting me — all that's left is my ability to interact with others."

PAUL SUTER