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# METAL HAMMER

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# RUSH &



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It's quarter to ten in an unspecified area of Canada, and Geddy Lee, bassist and vocalist with the Canuck triumvirate of Rush, has eschewed all rock star pretence to pick the phone up himself and dial direct to my hotline. We're talking a.m., not p.m. here too! Geddy ain't got much time for the traditional Rock star recreations, necessitating daytime somnambulism. But anyone who's had even the briefest dalliance with Rush wouldn't find that altogether surprising. The paths of Rush and regular rock parted many moons ago. That's kinda the appeal for me. Rush today is a beast as diverse and different from the pompous circumstance of yore as it's possible to get. 'Roll The Bones', the band's latest (and umpteenth) album, is no exception to the rule of the thumb that started to be bent into shape with the release of 'Signals' back in '82. Its sweeping scope of technorock mixes with a more finely honed perception of top-line melody to produce another typically soulful record that pays no mind to where anybody else's head space is at. Did anyone say sterile? Don't tell Geddy! Do you ever look back on the days of '2112', 'Bye-Tor And The Snow Dog' et al and wonder who the hell the guy staring up from the album sleeve is?!

"I try real hard to keep a handle on the rock element of what we do" he intones in a voice that is calm, thoughtful and yet self-assured. "But I can see what you mean. It's important for me to be a part of a Rock band because I get a real charge from the very energy of creating rock music. I love the aspect of the three of us in a room just going for it, the sense of keeping an essence of what we once started out as. Change has been an important element in Rush and I think we continue to change. My main feeling about the older days is a sense of wonder as to how we actually got through those times. The pace of touring and recording that we kept up in those days was so frantic that it's amazing that I've come out of it relatively sane!"

I wonder about the fans though. Maybe it's

**Rush have an incredibly interesting track record - and that's an understatement. To understand the understated requires the status of a statesman without the need for overstatement as Geddy Lee acknowledges. Howard Johnson rolls the bones and comes up sixes.**

a different scenario in the States and Canada, but the days of the naked '2112' man cowering in the face of the massive red star embroidered on the back of every rocker's denim jacket has given way to a whole new kind of Rush aficionado:

"It's weird" he muses "Because so many things about us have changed there is a real variety of people who come to see the band. Over the years we've had many people who have been either turned on or turned off by what we were doing at that particular time it's kinda like a constantly shifting sea - although there are obviously a good percentage of fans who have stuck with us precisely because they've been intrigued about where we were going."

And it is indeed pretty much through the band's music and their music alone that Rush aficionados have been able to make any kind of subjective judgement on the band. It's not that Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neil Peart have exactly shied away from the press, it's more the case that they haven't actively encouraged it either.

"I think the problem that I've had with press is that I find myself constantly asking the question 'Is what I have to say THAT interesting?' Talking about yourself is kinda boring and when you have a run of thirty or forty interviews... well, let's say it doesn't make me jump for joy!"

But do you ever look at things from the fans'

point of view and worry that they might be starved of information on the band?:

"Sure. I guess it can be frustrating for the fans. I know when I really admire someone I am interested in reading about what makes them tick. But you have to balance that thought against the importance of protecting a bit of your own self and a sense of your own privacy. The funny thing is that the longer we've been around the more we enjoy talking. I mean, no-one in the band objects to a good conversation about music but there's something that's really soul-destroying about sitting with an interviewer who's just doing his job." Which I shan't take as a personal slight.

But seriously, Geddy opens up when we get into serious discussion of 'Roll The Bones'. The man has a passion for his music that transcends the usual hyperbole in its very intensity. Does this make him heinously boring? No. Serious, but not boring. The very nature of Rush's intensity sets them outside the parameters of most workaday rock acts, and if Neil Peart can litter his rhetoric around the album release with such leaden lines as: "We have to remember the oracle's words, from Nike, the Greek goddess of victory" then there's always the balance of the addendum "...and lumpy athletic shoes" to bring things back out of the stellar system. Geddy loves the fact that I genuinely feel that Rush music in 1991 has a beautiful understatement about it. Not that the sum parts aren't complex, they certainly are. But the whole, with an added emphasis on the vocal attributes, never overplays its hand:

"It's the first time that I think we've ever been called 'understated'," he laughs. "Not that I disagree - I think that's pretty perceptive. 'Roll The Bones' isn't that dissociated from our last album 'Presto', it's just a step onwards. What really excites me about this album is that I think we have a stronger sense of melody in the vocals than ever before. I think that with each album we do there tends to be one area that we concentrate on more than any other and with 'Roll The Bones' it

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was definitely the vocal department. I spent a lot of time writing vocal melodies as a primary part of the song, which was a new experience for me. I think I'm enjoying singing more than ever and this record was really interesting and a lot of fun for me." With the more defined sense of melody that

My taste these days is pretty bizarre, I listen to lots of different stuff, from Heavy Metal to Haitian music. I believe that you really only develop your own sound when your influences are so diverse that your own stuff becomes a blend of totally disparate sounds. I do still like a good dose of Hard Rock. I've

the tingle of excitement down your spine and just happen to be great. What is it that sparks off that moment? It was something that we learnt from our producer, Rupert Hine. He taught us to make the most of those moments, to appreciate a certain looseness in performance, to make us aware that there



the likes of 'Dreamline', 'The Big Wheel' and 'Bravado' have to offer, has it ever occurred to you that there is a possibility that this could take Rush up to an even greater level of success? In fact, was this a conscious effort to do that?:

"To be honest, the commercial aspect doesn't come into much consideration. We always sell about the same amount of records anyway - sometimes a few more sometimes a few less. When we're in the studio writing there's really no time to think about that stuff. What I do often wonder is if we were a new band and we were looking for a deal doing the music that we do, whether we would get one or not. It's a really moot point, but I'd like to think that there would be enough independently-minded people out there to give it a shot. I'm sure there will always be people who are prepared to buck the system, both musically and business-wise."

Talk of music leads me to probe about whether Geddy now has any interest in the mainstream Rock market, the 'Hey Rock 'n' Roll' element where Rush originally grew but which they seem to have left behind an eternity ago.

"It's the same as with all kinds of music. Some of it appeals and some of it doesn't.

just been listening to the new Metallica album and I think that's fantastic. There is a new intelligence in the lyrics and the musical approach that I appreciate. That's what we always attempt to put across ourselves, particularly lyrically."

**"My musical taste these days is pretty bizarre, I listen to lots of different stuff, from Heavy Metal to Haitian music."**

Yes, there is a noticeable thematic approach on 'Roll The Bones':

"It's something that Neil picked up on first, and it was something that we all found ourselves developing an interest in. A lot of the songs revolve around the element of chance in different areas of life. 'Roll The Bones' is an adaptation of the old Southern American gamblers' phrase "roll dem bones" meaning the rolling of the dice. Taking a chance. There is an element of chance in the sphere of what we do as musicians, the chance element that comes into your sphere of writing, that point where you stumble across a series of notes that send

could be such a thing as a performance which was too tight and hence a little sterile. I think that 'Roll The Bones' is in many ways one of our most human albums and that's the key to my enjoyment of where we are right now."

Where? In Canada?! But seriously, this does raise the question of whether the band will be returning to Europe in support of the record. We really don't get to see enough of Rush these days:

"Yeah, I know what you mean. To be honest though, we'll be touring at home and in the U.S. first again and we are hoping to get over to Europe in the Spring of next year - which would be fine by me. I can't think of a better time to be over there. It's so beautiful at that time."

And the last time you were here the show was truly spectacular, one of the finest laser displays I've ever seen:

"Well we'll be trying to pull some different rabbits out of the hat this time again. Animation is a real treat to work with and I think that's going to be a big element of what we're gonna do. It's something we want to take a chance on."

Well of course it would be. Roll dem bones and see what happens!!