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America's Only Rock 'n' Roll Magazine

Sex & the single pianist

tori amos
opens up
to ben edmonds

counter PARTS

RUSH's
GEDDY LEE
connects with
PRIMUS'
LES CLAYPOOL

this ain't no
FOOLIN'
AROUND
CBGB's
20th
anniversary

DAS
EFX
freakin'
the **FAT**
beats

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Their guitarists have sheepish smiles, their singers have big noses, but Rush and Primus have more in common than good looks. Both trios mix complex rhythmic structures, streaming guitars, and literate lyrics, and all six members are big Three Stooges fans—as immortalized both in the new Primus tune, "Poetry and Prose," recorded for The Beavis & Butt-head Experience (Geffen) and the liner notes of Rush's new album Counterparts (Anthem/Atlantic). But beyond that, beyond the mutual respect, friendship, and the endless jams we'll never hear, are the completely opposite misconceptions they both suffer:

CRASH COURSE in BASS Surgery

Rush's Geddy Lee and his Primus counterpart Les Claypool laugh like a pair of Stooges.

Primus are thought of as a bunch of cartoonish meatballs, while Rush is considered to be a group of mind-blowing instrumental perfectionists, when both could be said of either band. Similarly, Primus' Les Claypool is one of the most unusual and original bassists ever—he could eventually be as influential a bassist as Rush's percussion master Neil Peart is a drummer—yet Rush's recent shows have included giant dancing rabbits. So what happens when you get Les Claypool and his Rush counterpart Geddy Lee together? You don't want to know.



**Intro and interview
transcription
by Paul Semel**

CHARACTER MANIPULATIONS BY JIM CARROLL
LES CLAYPOOL PHOTO BY ANNELE ADOLFSSON

LES: So what do you think of us? When we came to do your tour, the last time, I would assume you got demo tapes and had to pick through a few different things, and all of a sudden here come three guys... [laughs] I mean, there are a lot of parallels between us and you guys, and a lot of differences. Did you ever think we were ripping you off or anything? [laughs]

GEDDY: No, no...

LES: When you heard the "YYZ" intro to *Suck on This*, it didn't...

GEDDY: I thought it was great. There aren't too many bands that have thrown bits of our stuff into their songs. Whether it's for musical purposes or humorous purposes you're never quite sure.

Someone at the record company had sent us a copy of *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* [Interscope], and when I first heard it, there was something that reminded me of this band from Canada called Max Webster, something in the combination of musicianship and zaniness. There was this zany quality, but also a sense that these guys are players; they can play and they want to play.

LES: We sure fooled you. [laughs]

GEDDY: Right on. [both laugh]

But it's quite a different sound live to me, a much heavier sound. There's a hypnotic appeal to a lot of the rhythmic stuff that you do on stage that didn't come through to me on that record. When you first started playing with us, I was impressed with the quality of the musicianship and certainly your approach to playing bass, which I think is unique, very individual. I don't think there's a lot of guys playing like you play, the whole rhythmic approach to bass playing is very hypnotic. I also thought the complexity and just the texture of a lot of your arrangements was really interesting.

LES: I think a lot of hypnotic quality could be attributed to the abundance of pot smoke that was floating through the air of the auditorium. [both laugh] As far as us being heavier live, I think that's due to us not being very good producers quite yet. [laughs] We're still trying, you know.

So, has your son ventured out to rock shows on his own?

GEDDY: No, not yet. He's express interest in some bands, and actually he's been listening to *Pink Soda* a lot lately.

LES: Better get him to some therapy real quick.

GEDDY: It's probably putting him off rock music forever. [both laugh]

LES: The Rush show was actually my first, aside from going to dances and seeing Top 40 or whatever. I had to call my dad at work and say, "Friends of mine are going to a show tonight, and I want to go," and we actually got a ticket from a scalper, but it was like, "Who's driving? Who's doing this?"

GEDDY: At least he asked those questions. It's amazing how many kids come up to me and tell me that we were the first rock show they saw. It still happens, which is amazing, since—being around this long—you'd think most people in the audience would be 40 years old, but they're not. There's a lot of young guys that, for some reason, cut their teeth on our shows or something.

LES: Well, I think this new album will open a lot of young people up to it as well. Right now it's a time for a lot of new albums from a lot of heavy bands—Nirvana and Pearl Jam—so we've been getting these CDs in and listening to them, and it's like, this Rush album is definitely a big, fat thing.

GEDDY: That's what we were after. The main thing we decided when we started planning this record out was that we wanted to go away from the sound we had on the last couple albums; we wanted a less polite, more aggressive, larger sound. We wanted the bottom-end-of-the-band thump again.

We were a little disappointed in the last album [*Roll the Bones* (Atlantic)] from a so-called point of view, because

there were a couple of songs we wanted to rock out more, but when it came time to mixing, it just wasn't there to be had. Through the last tour, when we were playing some of the stuff from the last album, to me it just sounded better live. It was like, lights go on and go, "We're doing something wrong; we're not capturing a sound that should be gotten on stage."

LES: Well, definitely the new album, as I told you when we were hanging out up in your zone, has the huge, fat Geddy Lee signature tone of my youth.

GEDDY: Oh, that one.

LES: So maybe you can tell all the people what you told me as far as how you got that sucker. Unless you don't want to spill your secrets.

GEDDY: No, no secrets. Ancient Chinese secrets. Basically it all started with the desire to be less polite on this record, and a comment that our producer made to me, Peter Collins, when we started talking about this record. It was also a comment that our sound guy had made a couple times on the last tour that maybe

my sound was getting a little tame, a little polite. So I thought about it and I thought, "Okay, I can unpolite my sound, no problem." We did a lot of A/B-ing with different records and our own records; we were really quite determined to get that down.

LES: We do a lot of A/B-ing when we're in the studio with different records, and one of the records that we A/B always is *Moving Pictures*. It's just got the big, fat sound. You can A/B ours with *Seas of*

Cheese to find what you don't want it to sound like. [both laugh]

GEDDY: You can drive yourself crazy with production. The main thing is if the material is there and the performance is vibing. You can twiddle forever. There's the whole Mutt Lange school of making records where you just twiddle for four years...

LES: Who's that?

GEDDY: Mutt Lange—he produces Def Leppard, Bryan Adams, so on and so forth. You can spend a couple or four years making a record, and every hair is in place and everything is sonically correct, but I don't know that a band like ours or a band like yours, that enjoy playing and have a degree of spontaneity, I don't think either of us could serve that style of production. There has to be a way in between so you're not stale by the time you go to play.

I know to Neil it's increasingly more important to him to have someone who can capture the sound of his drums so he can just get in there and start wailing.

LES: Is he pretty particular?

GEDDY: It's funny, he's particular about everything he plays, and he practices two solid weeks before he goes in to do his drums, and he has everything orchestrated to a "T," and he's very particular on how his drums sound—he tunes them impeccably—but he doesn't like to bang those drums for days to get that sound. Fortunately, the last two engineers we've worked with have been very good, and the guy who recorded Neil's drums on this album, I think, has done the best job of recording his sound of anybody. He did 11 tracks in two-and-a-half days, which is insanely fast for this kind of a rock record. I think you have to have a pretty together team for that to happen; all the planets have to be aligned and all that stuff. [laughs]

LES: I'm finding that the more I'm familiar with the equipment and can actually get in there hands-on, the better off things are. The same with Larry [LaLonde—Primos' guitarist, AKA "Ler"] and Herb [Tim Alexander, AKA Herb—Primos' drummer]; Herb has so many drums, and he knows what he wants to hear, and I see him get so frustrated when he can't hear the subtlety of a certain drum.

GEDDY: Alex [Lifeson—Rush's guitarist]

"You'd think most people in the audience would be 40 years old, but they're not. There's a lot of young guys that, for some reason, cut their teeth on our shows or something."
—Geddy Lee

takes that approach: he likes to be very hands-on, he engineers all our demos. Whenever he and I write together he runs the machines—which is the exact opposite of me, because I don't want to know how anything operates, I just want it to work. I got an idea, I want to get it on tape, I don't want to sit there and analyze whether it should have this EQ or that EQ. To me, the ideas are precious, and the spontaneity in the writing process is something I really feel is very valuable, so I like to have the least confusion between what I hear in my head and what I want to play. I always keep a tape recorder running, because sometimes while you're diddling, you lose that spark somewhere.

LES: Well, my experience with Alex in his studio was pretty a...we were just drunk out of our minds. I couldn't even figure out how to play the bass.

GEDDY: You're saying it wasn't a musical experience but a visceral experience.

LES: It was a scary experience. It was the first time I'd ever picked up my bass and just couldn't do anything, and he was exactly the same on his guitar.

"As far as us being heavier live, I think that's due to us not being very good producers quite yet. [laughs] We're still trying, you know."
—Les Claypool

completely new.

A lot of it comes from just jamming, mostly me and Herb. We'll come up with a riff or a groove and try like hell to remember it, and then Ler will generally put some

GEDDY: Listening to you describe how you write is so similar to how we write in a lot of ways. At one point in our career, maybe eight or ten years ago, so many of our songs were written out of jams—they still are to a certain degree—but we used to jam every sound check. It was the best part of the day. We used to have a standing rule that the sound guy would have to record every jam. And then I'd get home from the tour and have these hours of...crap. [laughs]

LES: That you thought was the greatest thing at the time. [laughs]

GEDDY: That's right. And after hours of isolating and editing and editing, you wind up with 45 minutes of snippets.

But sometimes great ideas come out of that.

GEDDY: You gotta watch out for Big Al. [both laugh]

LES: Big Al was in full force, and whatever I was, I was slurring Les. And Ler was just comatose somewhere. Slur and Ler [both laugh, again]. What is this, *Beavis & Butt-head*?—Ed.]

GEDDY: When you guys write, do you write all together?

LES: It depends. The thing about us is that, because the band had been around for four years before Larry and Herb had even gotten in the band, we had a ton of tunes, so there were a lot of tunes just to do already, and Larry and Herb interpreted them as they would. It hasn't been until these past couple records that we've been able to write, and *Park Soda* is really the only record where most of the record has been

textural thing over it.

GEDDY: And do you then write lyrics and put a melody to the music you've already written?

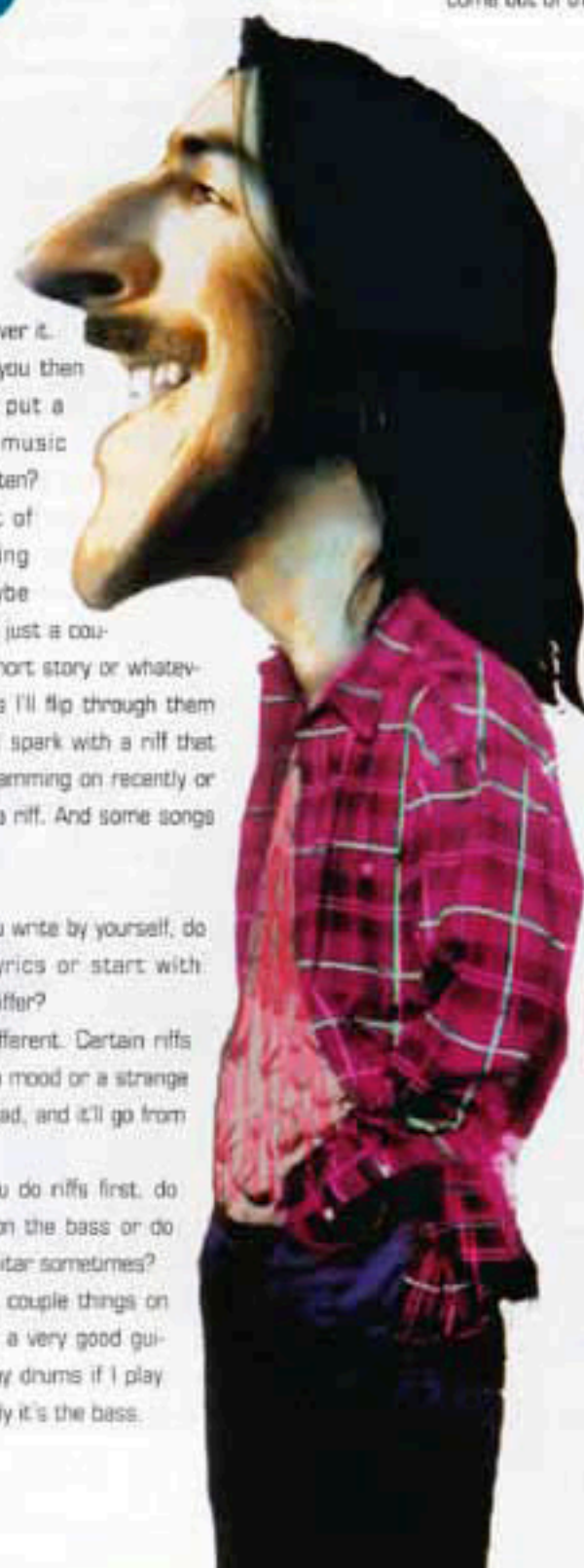
LES: I have a lot of notebooks lying around with maybe just a sentence or just a couple of word or a short story or whatever, and sometimes I'll flip through them and something will spark with a riff that we happen to be jamming on recently or a lyric will inspire a riff. And some songs I just write and arrange myself.

GEDDY: When you write by yourself, do you start with lyrics or start with music, or does it differ?

LES: It's always different. Certain riffs will spark a certain mood or a strange little ditty in my head, and it'll go from there.

GEDDY: When you do riffs first, do you always write on the bass or do you write on the guitar sometimes?

LES: I've written a couple things on guitar, but I'm not a very good guitarist; I mostly play drums if I play anything. But mainly it's the bass.



LES: I've found that, with Larry and Herb, our best material is spontaneous and it's stuff that I go into without much of a preconceived idea as to what it should sound like. But there's a lot of stuff that will never make it to Primus records, which is one reason why Prawn Song [his indie label] is so good a thing for me, because I can make these weird things and put them out and have them not be Primus. Those two are such characters, as people and playing-wise as well. I think they shine the best when I'm not trying to get them to do something that isn't natural for them. There's definitely a "Herb riff," that's what Herb really enjoys playing, this certain driving rhythm. Just as with me there's some certain driving funk-type rhythms that I enjoy playing, which isn't necessarily right for Primus. I've been playing with a lot of jazz and R&B musicians lately, which is great for my chops. I'm always finding that playing with other people makes my chops that much better, and when we come together as Primus, it can be Primus, and not a yearning for something new.

GEDDY: I think that's one thing, for all the benefits of being in one band for so 20 years and dedicating ourselves to this one musical idea, but we've become a little insular in the sense that we haven't had enough access to other musical scenes. In one sense it's been a saving grace for our band. It's kept our sound pure and sincere, but on the other side, there's a lot of opportunities to work with other people that would be good on some point. We could say, "Rush isn't going away, we can take a year out and do other things." It might be coming to that time.

LES: Have you been approached by anyone?

GEDDY: I've been approached by many people over the years, but it's always, "I'm in the middle of a Rush tour," or, "I'm about to start a Rush album," or "I've just finished a Rush tour; do I want to spend my precious few months off going straight into a studio with somebody else?" It's difficult enough finding time to have a life.



Greg Graffin

lead singer for **Bad Religion**

The band recently came off the road and has just released a third single off their seventh album, Recipe For Hate.

This is actually a welcome opportunity to give credit to people who are influences and people we thought should be more renowned but aren't. As far as bands go, I'd choose a band who were our contemporaries in the early '80s and who I thought were a great band. Really, they were our contemporaries as well as great friends who didn't achieve as much as I thought they should have. They were called The Adolescents. They were extremely popular for a time in Southern California and we played numerous shows together. Of course, extremely popular in those days is nothing like what the alternative bands today enjoy. But they had everything that I like about this type of music: it was melodic, they had creative arrangements. There were actually a lot of parallels between our bands. For one thing, they also came from the suburbs. I'm sure their suburbs were different from ours, though. We were out in the San Fernando Valley and they were from Orange County. Those are the two great wastelands in Southern California. And so I think there was a lot of similarity to our music. Also, they had a lot of background vocals, which was rare for those days. They influenced us and I'm sure we influenced them a little, as well.

There are also two books I'd like to strongly recommend. One of them I think should at least have become more popular among academicians, people who were in institutions of higher learning. It's called *The Antecedents of Man*. It was written by a man named W.E. Legros Clark. He's a famous anthropologist. The book is one of the most comprehensive outlines of human biological history, 'cause it starts about 65 million years ago. It's a good book for people to read in order to put man in its proper context.

The other book is called *White Noise* by Don DeLillo. Even though it won the National Book Award and was very highly acclaimed by the critics and the literary establishment, it never reached the number of readers that, say, a Jackie Collins novel does. It's a shame, too, because I think the literary climate would be better if more people bought and read books like *White Noise*. I caught onto them and I still use 'em today.



Who among us doesn't enjoy that warm, toasty feeling that comes with turning someone on to a great band, a stellar recording, a good read, or a neat movie. It's one of the true but often overlooked joys in life, ranking right up there with eating Chinese food in someone else's bed, writing your name in the snow, and making fun of people who are more successful than you are. We asked the artists below to list some things they feel fell through the cracks or simply never got the attention they deserved.



Richie Sambora

Guitarist/vocalist, solo artist, and member of **Bon Jovi**

Charles Bukowski is an amazing author that a lot of people still don't seem to be aware of, for some reason. His poetry definitely captures the essence of man. His poetry can be a bit obtuse but I really enjoy his writing. I would recommend reading *Love is a Dog from Hell*. He has written a number of books as well as the screenplay for *Barfly*.

As for musicians, Buddy Guy has yet to receive the notoriety he deserves. Buddy is an amazing guitar player and one of my favorites. He has a very aggressive playing style. I had the opportunity to jam with him and Eric Clapton in Los Angeles not too long ago. I can't pinpoint one particular album that I prefer because I love everything he plays.