

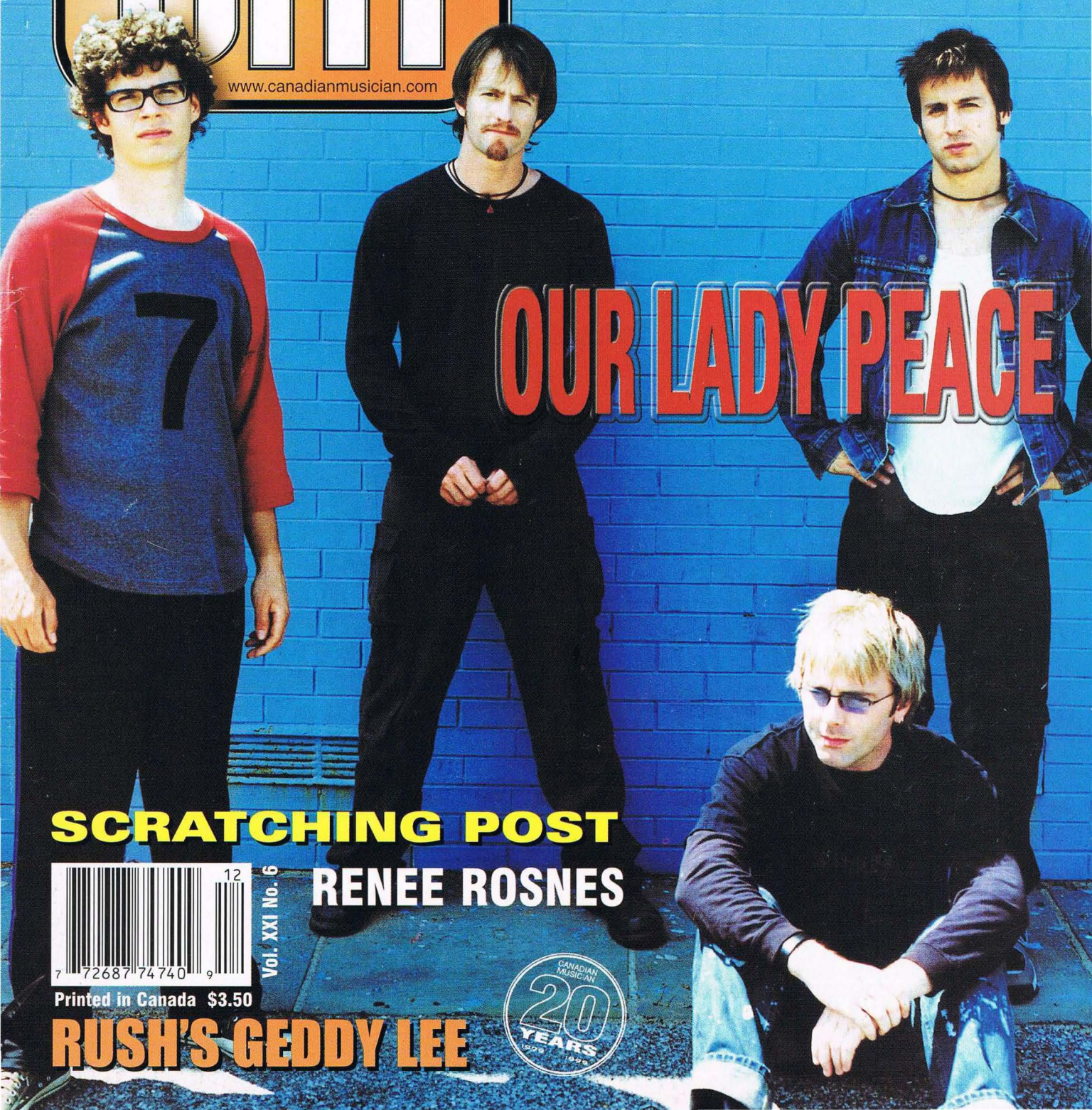
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FOCUS ON PERCUSSION

Secrets Every Drummer
Should Know!



OUR LADY PEACE

SCRATCHING POST

RENEE ROSNES



Vol. XXI No. 6

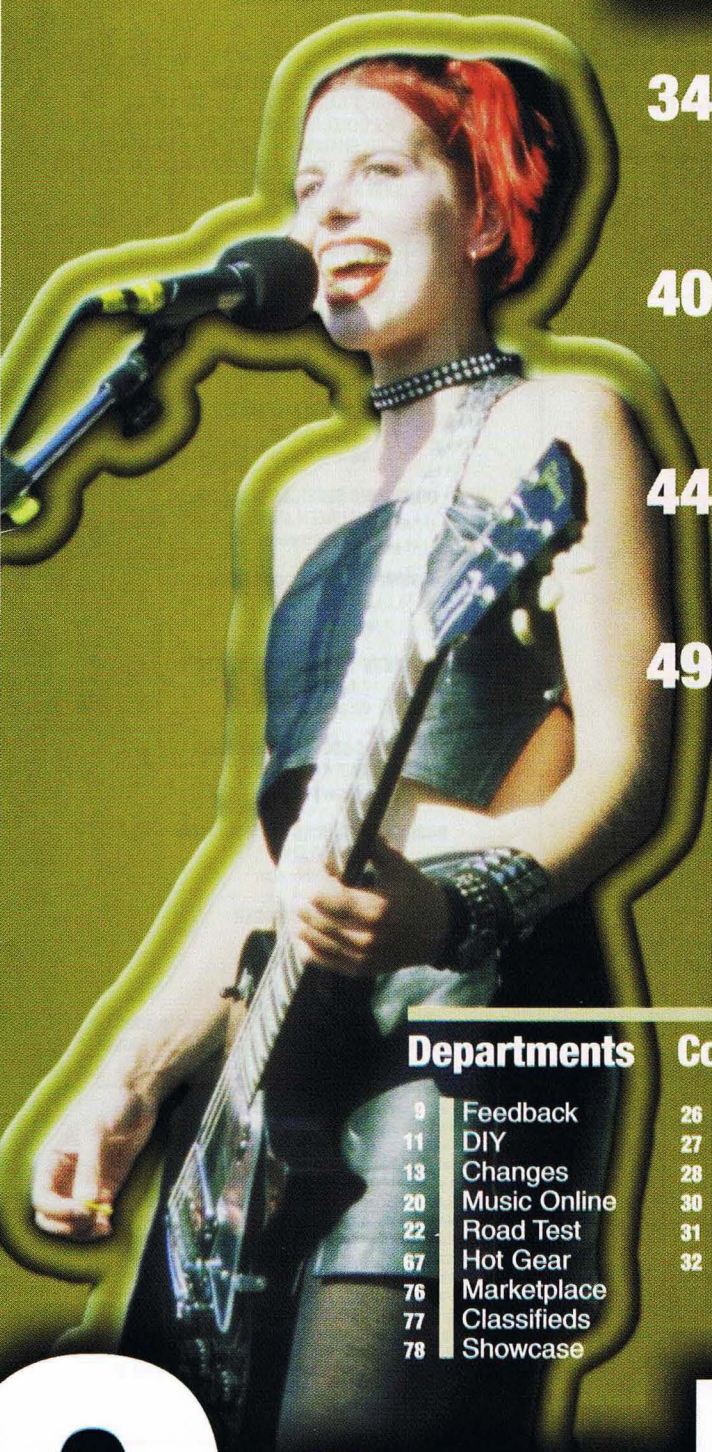
Printed in Canada \$3.50

RUSH'S GEDDY LEE



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Cover photo by Nitin Valdulkul
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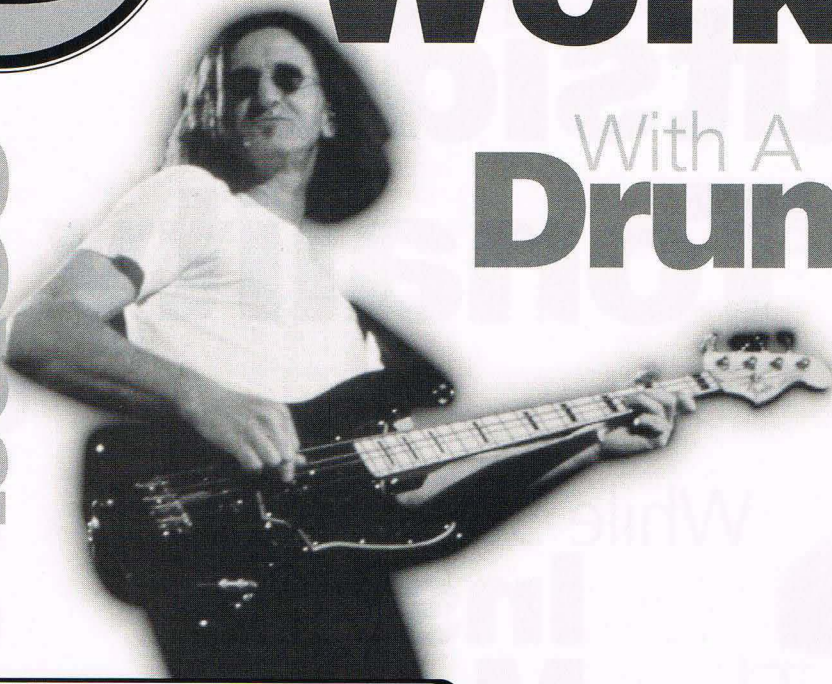
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bass

Working

With A Drummer...



by Geddy Lee

Interviewed by Jeff MacKay

CM picks up where we left off last issue, with part II of our Geddy Lee, bassist for Rush, interview.

Canadian Musician: So with working with a drummer, in terms of groove, with writing parts, how do you do that? Does Neil [Peart] give you parts, or do you give him a part and you just match the groove, do you guys jam? Explain your process...

Geddy Lee: Well, it used to be in the old days, before we got sophisticated, that we would just sit in a room together and we would work out the parts – we would kind of push each other. He would have an idea, or I would have an idea, and we would try to make that suit whatever the direction of the song was going. Sometimes we'd even write a song on – like a song like "YYZ", for example – Neil and I wrote that completely on bass and drums in a rehearsal environment. We just sat down together – I think maybe Alex was on the phone or something – and we just started grooving on that riff, and we ended up just putting the whole thing together. So in the old days, that was very common, and it was very direct and immediate communication. But as we got more sophisticated, the process got stupider, in a way, because Alex and I would write a song, and Neil would be working on lyrics, so he would have no rhythmic input in the early stages of the song. So we would do what we would call a demo, you know, or like a 16-track guide of the song. We'd use a drum machine or something just to keep a

rudimentary rhythm. Then Neil would listen to the song, and if he loved it, then we would copy that song onto a tape for him, minus the electronic drums. The song would just have the click track so he could know the metre of the song. I would have a bass part already on there, but it would be very fundamental. Neil would then put his parts together and work them out, and we would have a little discussion on that back and forth. When he had a part that he was pleased with, I would then sit in and I would redo my bass part to see how much of my bass part needed to accommodate whatever new drums had happened. So part of what he would construct, he would construct from the bass part that existed. Part of it would be just a rhythmic arrangement that he felt suited the song best. Then we would try to get in synch, and I would redevelop the bass pattern to suit the new rhythm pattern that is on the song. Sometimes that means readjusting guitar patterns too, to accommodate a new rhythmic attitude.

CM: What do you listen to the most when Neil's playing to keep the rhythm section going?

GL: Bass drum. Neil and I have always had a lot of fun trying to lock in on bass drum in the early days. Even when we jam, we try to read each other's minds. Often before a sound check, we'll spend some time jamming. It's amazing, after all the years we've played together, that we can kind of

sense when each other is going to go into a fill or, you know, there's just this kind of kinetic communication that we have.

CM: How do you find the right time to switch solos when live? Do you just feel it, you just know?

GL: Well, if you're jamming, if you're improvising, it's just a feel thing. But of course, we're creatures of structure, and we work everything out – almost everything out beforehand. We do allow a couple of moments in the show where we just kind of go off a little bit, but it's very hard for us to break away from our structural habits. I've noticed that even the parts of our live show that we leave open for improv, by the end of the tour they're not improv anymore. We've kind of subconsciously turned them into structured parts, and they turn into orchestration as opposed to improv. It's just our nature to do that, so, you can't fight your nature.

CM: So do you, like, soloing and that live, that's all basically written out or do you cut loose a little?

GL: Well, we cut loose, like I say, we start off as an improv thing, with solos, but by the end of the tour they've grown into parts. It's just our ridiculous nature.

CM: Playing live, since that's when you do the vocals and bass together the most, what's going through your mind? So you said, the bass part is completely...

How To Sound Best

Your

CM: For a young bass player who's just picking up the instrument, what's the best advice could you share? What are the most important things?

GL: For me, it's finding bass players that just blow you away, and imitating them, mimicking them, and playing around with what they do. You just take a phrase, or something that you think is impossible to play by a bass player that you love, and keep playing it until it's not impossible, and that makes you realize the potential that you have. Really, most bass players – most musicians, I think, start out like that. They've got that fire in their belly and want to play as well as the guy that they're listening to. There's no better way than starting on that road of imitating them. Eventually you'll realize that even though I can play this part this guy plays, it doesn't quite sound the same, because your fingering is different, because every human being's fingers are different, and that's the first inkling that you have of what a musician's style really is. The sound that a musician makes is uniquely his own and comes from his fingers – it's the way he holds the guitar, it's the way he bends the strings, it's his choice of notes, his thought patterns. It's a nice technical exercise to copy a guy that you love.

CM: But writing something that good is the big step.

GL: Yeah. Well, that comes in time, and that comes with confidence and experimentation, but even me playing a part by Jack Bruce didn't really sound like Jack Bruce because Jack Bruce is the only guy that can sound that way, because his sound comes from his hands. I really believe that that's true, and I think with most musicians, it just takes them a while to find themselves and to totally identify and develop their own style of play.

CM: Who did you used to imitate?

GL: Well, I imitated Jack Bruce, I imitated John Entwistle, I imitated Jack Cassidy from the Jefferson Airplane who was a great unheralded bass player. Later on I imitated Chris Squire, I imitated Jeff Berlin, you know, people like that.

CM: You keep mentioning Jack Bruce. Was he the standout player for you?

GL: When I first started, absolutely. He was the man.

CM: Any modern players? Or maybe I shouldn't say modern, but any newer players that you've heard that have caught your attention?

GL: Les Claypool is a very unique player, plays great. The bass player of Curve, he's a really interesting melodic player. I like what he writes. I think what you find as a bass player, when you first start, it's all about chops, and how well or how fast a guy can play. As I got older, I was more interested in the melodies that bass players wrote and how they enhanced the music. So that's two aspects that I would encourage a young bass player to study, not only bass as a riffing instrument, but bass as kind of a subsonic melodic instrument that can contribute really quite a lot of mood. Your choice of notes affects the mood dramatically, so you can have these melodies that are just kind of weaving under the surface of a song, and they can make a tremendous difference. Paul McCartney was, in my mind, never a great player, but he wrote great parts for the context of the music that he played. My ears have always been drawn to that. The old Motown guys wrote wonderful melodic and infectious melodies too that you couldn't get out of your head – "My Girl" and those old Motown classics. They're great bass patterns and they have in some ways become almost

the most integral part of why people remember the songs. I think it's important to be inspired to play well, to play fast, to learn your chops, but the more melody you study, the more your taste improves, and the more you can take your skills and apply them in the different contexts of the different styles of music.

CM: What would be a good exercise for somebody to try, something good for chops? Do you have any favourite exercises that helped you develop a certain style or a certain way of playing?

GL: Not really any one particular exercise. Like I say, in the early days I would just take a lick by a bass player I admired and play it to death, and then as I got older I would write a part. I would write a part that was really complicated and really used a different part of the neck. For example, I would listen to something that Jeff Berlin would play, and it would be very obviously jazz-influenced, but it was also modal. When you learn by playing only rock or blues, you stay in a particular mode. When you start listening to other guys, some of the jazz guys, they slide from one mode into another, and suddenly the character or the flavour of the bass part is changed. When you twig on that, it opens up a whole other level of play for you. Suddenly you're able to take your rock chops and slide out of them into a whole different flavour. That comes in time. So I would do that. I would listen to a guy that was in a different style than me, and I would try to learn from him, in terms of where he would take the melody, and then I would apply it to my rock context, and it would sound fresher or more unusual.

Jeff MacKay is Assistant Editor for Canadian Musician.