

# Inside Rush's New Sci-Fi Rock Opera

The prog gods return with heavy concept album, monster fall tour

RUSH ENTERED THE prog-rock pantheon with 1976's *2112*, a rock opera about a man fighting a dystopian regime that has banned individual thought. Now, 36 years later, the band has released another concept album set many years from now – but *Clockwork Angels* is no sequel. “This is a much different future than *2112*,” says drummer and lyricist Neil Peart. “It’s much more nuanced in what it has to say.”

*Clockwork Angels* tells the story of a young man who explores lost cities, fights pirates and battles the evil Watchmaker, who is trying to control society. While it takes place in the distant future, the imagery draws on 19th-century visionaries like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. “There was no electricity,” Peart says, “so everything is this beautiful copper, polished wood, and elaborate steam and clockwork devices. All of that was very appealing to me.”

Peart wrote the lyrics at his Los Angeles home, regularly e-mailing drafts to bassist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson, who live in Canada. “Ged might pull out a phrase and say to Neil, ‘This really speaks to me. Can we just rebuild the song around this?’” Lifeson says. “Then me and Ged jam for hours and hours,



LIMELIGHT  
Lifeson (left)  
and Lee on last  
year's smash  
world tour

and we’ll catalog the few bits we think are strong enough to develop into songs.”

They wound up with a much more straightforward rock sound than their last album, 2007's *Snakes and Arrows*. “Listening back, that was a re-

**“We showed you can do things your way and still succeed,” says Neil Peart.**

ally dense record,” says Lifeson. “It was layered with lots of acoustics and electronics. We really did the opposite on this record – it’s very stripped

down. There’s more space for everything.”

Over the decades, Rush learned to accept and even embrace their reputation as the ultimate dorky band. “Not only were we vilified, but our fans were too,” says Peart. “In the schoolyard you’d hear, ‘Oh, what do you know? You’re a Rush fan.’” But the band has made an unexpected leap into mainstream pop culture in the past four years – including a much-buzzed-about 2008 appearance on *The Colbert Report* and a genuinely hilarious cameo in 2009’s Paul Rudd-Jason Segel comedy *I Love You, Man*. The PR boost has helped Rush sell out venues around the

U.S. “It feels like vindication,” Peart says. “We set a good example by showing people you can do things your way and still succeed.”

Now they can’t wait to get back on the road this fall, even though they just wrapped their biggest tour ever – playing 1981’s *Moving Pictures* in its entirety – last fall. “It was a beautiful transition,” says Peart. “We were saying, ‘That was then, this is now.’”

Their 44-date tour launches on September 7th in Manchester, New Hampshire. “We’re always going to play those handful of songs that

we’ve had the most commercial success with, but we’ll mix it up with other material that we haven’t played in a very long time,” Lifeson says. “It’s shaping up to be a pretty great set.”

Rush’s most rabid fans have loudly protested the group’s absence from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but the bandmates aren’t complaining. “Honestly, we don’t really care about that,” says Lifeson. “They can have whomever they want.” If they ever get inducted, though, they wouldn’t dream of boycotting the ceremony à la Axl Rose. “We’re Canadians,” Lifeson adds. “We find it difficult to be rude, even when we’d really like to.”

ANDY GREENE

## TRIBUTE

### The Platters' Herb Reed, Early Rock & Roll Singer, 83

THE PLATTERS' Herb Reed, whose bass vocals helped anchor some of the early rock era's most enduring smashes, died of lung disease on June 4th in Danvers, Massachusetts. He was 83.

Reed formed the Platters in Los Angeles in 1953 with his friends Joe Jefferson, Alex



wop-fueled singles including 1955's “The Great Pretender” and 1958's “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,” both of which reached Number One.

Hodge and Cornell Gunter.

Shortly after signing with Mercury in 1955, they hit the Top 10 with “Only You” – kicking off a run of all-time-great doo-

“We never thought about breaking new ground or anything like that,” Reed told *ROLLING STONE* in 2007. “We were just trying to get from point A to point B.”

The Platters dissolved in 1969 amid declining record sales, but a year later, Reed reformed the group and began touring regularly. Over the last two decades, he found himself competing with several impostor acts billing themselves

under his group's name, and launched a flurry of lawsuits. Last year, a Nevada judge finally ruled that the name rightfully belonged to him.

“Herb was a pivotal figure,” says Sha Na Na's Jon “Bowzer” Bauman, who shared stages with the group for decades. “The Platters created a completely different style of music – a transition from the Ink Spots to a real street-corner doo-wop sound.”

A.G.