



Rush members (from left) Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart and Geddy Lee.

Rush on a lucky roll, band's lyricist says

BY CLIFF RADEL
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In the casino of life, fate deals the cards, but we play the hand. So ends today's philosophy lesson from Professor Neil Peart, drummer, lyricist and resident deep thinker for Canadian rock trio Rush.

Pondering fate's odds, wondering if life depends on the luck of the draw and considering whether to roll the dice or cash in the chips are the themes of Rush's latest album, *Roll The Bones*.

To roll or not to roll, that is the question.

The answer, Professor Peart says, is: "Roll 'em. Go for it."

Luck plays a part

Speaking by telephone from his makeshift classroom — "an office in the bottom of an arena in Hamilton, Ontario," where Rush is rehearsing before playing Riverfront Coliseum Tuesday night — Peart uses his learned tones to relate his life to the contents of *Roll The Bones*.

"I have always espoused the power of imagination and the strength of the individual," Peart says. "But in my own instance, luck has played a part."

"Regardless of the strength of my will or how hard I practiced my drums, I am still lucky to be in Rush."

How so? "Let's accept what some people say, luck is defined as when preparation meets opportunity. Certainly, I was prepared when my opportunity came, but I couldn't say that Geddy (Lee, Rush's bassist and lead singer), Alex (Lifeson, the band's guitarist) and I would meet and get along great and stay together for 17 years and..."

Because the good philosopher

doesn't care to over-toot his own horn, he fails to mention the results of Rush's good fortune. The trio has created 18 albums with combined sales worldwide of 31 million copies since the band replaced John Rutsey with Peart after releasing its first major-label recording in 1974.

Seventeen years later, Rush stood at a point in its career and in Peart's life — he turned 39 on Sept. 12 — where "it was time to ask the big question — Why are we here?"

World events conspired to force that question to be asked. While Peart wrote the lyrics to *Roll The Bones*, communism died in Eastern Europe and the world went to war with Iraq.

This started Peart wondering "about a random universe and then I asked, is all of this futile? I had to address the futility of life."

Found his answer

So, he lamented choices born to die of starvation in "Roll The Bones." In "Heresey" he cheered the death of communism while mourning lives "wasted for somebody's bad idea." Just when things looked their bleakest, Peart turned to his "Bravado." The song stresses that to live, risks must be taken and "we will pay the price, but we will not count the cost."

As he finished writing *Roll The Bones*, Peart realized he had found the answer to the big question.

"It's the wrong question," he says. "It's not: Why are we here? It's: What can we do about it?"

Rush plays Riverfront Coliseum Tuesday night. Eric Johnson opens the show at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$19.50 at all Select-A-Seat outlets, or call 721-1000 or 800-232-9900.

Hammer nails the evils of society

Rap star heavy on preaching

One week after the hills of Oakland, Calif., went up in flames, M.C. Hammer emerges from the ashes.

But has he emerged as a modern-day phoenix? Or just another turkey?

Either way, the Oakland native — still bathing in the afterglow of history's biggest-selling rap album, the 15-million seller *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* — is back with...

■ A new album. *Too Legit To Quit* hits stores Tuesday.

■ A new name. He's dropped the M.C. Now, he's just plain Hammer. Not Claw Hammer or Ball-Peen Hammer. Just Hammer.

■ A new image. Remember the catchy phrases and dance riffs on his *Please Hammer Don't Hurt 'Em* hit, "U Can't Touch This"? Forget them. This time around he's into preaching, not dancing.

Hammer, Too Legit To Quit, Capitol. **

Please Hammer, don't preach.

When you leave the dance floor for a pulpit, you lose your cool. You start to sound like Barry White, that fat old fool.

Your preaching gets heavy.

Your voice gets deep. Stop acting like that worn-out creep.

When a man sells 15 million records — as Hammer did with *Please...* — and that album is No. 1 in America for 21 weeks and it



becomes rap's biggest-selling disc as it puts the music into America's mainstream, he's entitled to make some changes in his life.

He can change his name. John Mellencamp did. So what. No big deal. Hammer didn't need the M.C. anyway. He can call himself Hammer. He can even go by his given name, Stanley Kirk Burrell. It doesn't matter.

What does matter is if he changes his tune. Hammer has on *Too Legit To Quit* and that change is not for the better.

It's hard to find fault with a rapper whose songs promote the virtues of brotherhood ("Why Can't We Live Together"), prayer ("Do Not Pass Me By") and hard work ("Good To Go") while decrying drug abuse ("Street Soldiers") and the self-inflicted genocide practiced in America's black ghettos ("Brothers Hang On").

Hammer is clearly no hate-mongering Public Enemy or gutter-minded 2 Live Crew.

On the other hand, he is also no James Brown or Marvin Gaye. Two artists he emulates on *Too Legit To Quit*.

Hammer's songs cannot sustain Brown's drive. He can quote Brown's soul scream on "This Is The Way We Roll." He can even



say, "Sometimes I feel like the Godfather." But, try as he might, Hammer is not the Godfather of Soul, the Hardest-Working Man in Show Business. No way. No how.

Hammer tries to be Gaye with "Brothers Hang On." He makes his point with a melody not unlike Gaye's "What's Going On" and "Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)." Then he restates it. Again. And again. And again. This goes on for seven minutes and 10 seconds. The song could have been cut in half and still been too long.

Too Legit To Quit lasts 90 minutes. It makes its points in half the time. Of its 17 tracks, only two, "Find Yourself A Friend" and "Addams Groove," from the upcoming *Addams Family* film, are less than four minutes. Both last three minutes and 56 seconds.

Why the long songs? Does Hammer have this much to say?

He thinks he does. But not necessarily as a rapper. He's a musician now, an artist, a composer of big tunes with big choruses.

big instrumentations (real horns, not synthesizers) and arrangements as lush as a virgin stand of timber in a tropical rain forest.

He is no lowly rapper, talking to a drum machine and sampling other artists' wares. *Too Legit To Quit* is legit in that it is sampling-free. What you hear is Hammer. When you hear him, but that's not that often. On many of the tracks, his raps take a back seat to the music. He doesn't rap so much as make wise comments and dispense sage advice.

Oh, I get it. Hammer time is up. Now, it's Confucius time. Ah so.

Warren Zevon, Mr. Bad Example, Giant. ***

He sets a bad example and he's proud of it. Warren Zevon — alias Mr. Bad Example — is as glib as ever as he declares "I like to have a good time and I don't care who gets hurt." That includes the entire city of Denver. Zevon does his best to offend the Mile High town with his how-to guide, "Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead."

In case you think Mr. Bad Example is rotten to the core, hear him do "Heartache Spoken Here." On this flat-out country moaner, Zevon takes the part of the man wise in the ways of the world of heartbreak while Dwight Yoakam harmonizes as his conscience. It's so good, it's enough to make Mr. Bad Example change his name.

Cliff Radel is pop music critic for The Enquirer.

***Excellent **Very Good **Good *Fair *Poor

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