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MAGAZINE

THE

WINE

ISSUE

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AND OENOPHILES
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ANDY SUMMERS

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GRAPES *Under* PRESSURE

DURING THEIR FIVE DECADES IN RUSH, **GEDDY LEE** AND **ALEX LIFESON** HAVEN'T JUST SHARED A LOT OF GREAT MUSIC—THEY'VE ALSO SPLIT SOME AMAZING BOTTLES.

BY CHRIS GILL • ILLUSTRATION BY ANTONY HARE

GEDDY LEE AND Alex Lifeson recall in vivid detail the night of November 12, 1974, when a bottle of wine changed their lives. While Rush were on tour opening shows for Rory Gallagher, promoter Randy McElrath invited the up-and-coming band out to dinner at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee. During the meal, McElrath ordered bottles of Château Margaux and Château Latour Bordeaux and shared them with Lee and Lifeson. Instantly, he turned them into wine connoisseurs.

"It was the first time we'd had wine of that caliber," Lee recalls. "We both were stunned by the wine's texture, complexity, and flavors."

"I was amazed how the wine developed in the glass over the course of the meal," Lifeson adds. "There were so many layers and nuances. After I got home from the tour I bought whatever good wines I could afford."

Lee became a serious collector about

10 years after Lifeson, and their shared passion for wine has helped the pair maintain a strong, lasting friendship, one that goes back to their childhoods. Though they've enjoyed many experiences during their time in one of the world's most successful bands, the ones they treasure most involve memorable bottles of wine savored during their travel adventures and on each other's birthday.

This autumn, *Guitar Aficionado* caught up with Lee and Lifeson in Toronto, one week before Rush were to start recording their latest album, *Clockwork Angels*, scheduled for release in early 2012. The two men were only too happy to share with us their recent and most rewarding wine experiences and explain the important role wine has played in their lives and music.

What is the current focus of your wine collections?

GEDDY LEE I'm trying to limit my collecting to regions I love most. Burgundy is my favorite, although that pursuit is not without its pitfalls. A lot of bad Bur-

gundy is made. It can be the most frustrating search, but every once in a while you get that bottle that just blows your mind. The Rhône Valley can give you that same experience, like some great old Rayas from the Seventies or early Eighties or Grand Cru Hermitage from Jaboulet and JL Chave. Guigal's Northern Rhône wines are also spectacular.

Right now I'm obsessed with German and Austrian white wines. Producers like Peter Keller are doing great things with dry Riesling as opposed to the über-sweet Rieslings people usually think of. The Grosses Gewächs classification for dry Riesling is refreshing. The success of Austrian Rieslings has put some pressure on the German Riesling market. Trimbach makes great Riesling in Alsace, especially their Clos Ste. Hune. Recently we did a Riesling tasting at a local oyster house, and the Domaine Ostertag from Alsace showed beautifully. Those wines are so food friendly and fun to drink.

I'm also a big fan of Northern Italian wines like Barolo and Barbaresco,

and I like what's happening in Friuli at the moment. A lot of interesting white wines are being made there, like Tocai Friulano and the combinations using Riesling Italico and other various blends. The food culture in Friuli, which also uses interesting blends, is starting to make its way across the world.

ALEX LIFESON My cellar is pretty broad. If I were limited to one region to drink it would be Rhône. Rhône wines have always been well priced for the drinking experience they offer, although today everything is expensive. Côtes du Rhône and Côte-Rôtie wines are my favorites, particularly Guigal. I have his three top wines—La Mouline, La Turque, and La Landonne—in my collection, with vintages dating back to the late Seventies. When Geddy and I drink on his birthday I usually pull out one of those. Geddy also likes Châteauneuf-du-Pape, which I also adore. We've shared a couple of beautiful Rayas over the years as well as some Beaucastel, which is my favorite Châteauneuf-du-Pape. I've collected a few bottles of Rayas and Beaucastel reaching back into the Seventies.

I have a selection of Italian wines and a nice collection of Penfolds Grange. I'm not a super-big fan of Australian wines, but I've always loved Grange and was an early collector of that. I stopped buying it in the early Nineties when it became too pricy for my preferences. The same thing happened in California when wines like Harlan and Screaming Eagle became outrageously expensive. I can't justify spending that kind of money because I just want to drink the stuff! I'm not keeping these wines for decades with the intention of making a killing on the market. I want to enjoy my wines. I don't want them to go bad, and I'm not going to leave them to my kids.

What are you buying now?

LIFESON I just got some JL Chave Hermitage Rouge and Blanc, which is probably my favorite white wine. I'm trying to collect as much Chave as I can get, but it's very limited. I got four bottles of the 2008 vintage on my last shipment. The same goes for Roumier Burgundy. It's hard to get, but it's well worth it. I've been collecting Querciabella Batar, which is a lovely white Italian wine much like a French Bâtard-Montrachet. It's pretty unyielding when it's young. You really have to give it some time. I buy that every year through Rogers & Company here in Toronto.

LEE I'm buying 2009 Burgundy. It's a very good vintage. This morning I found some older vintages and picked up a couple of gems, including some 1999 Jadot, which I think was



Lifeson and Lee at a Grapes for Humanity charity event

"I'M NOT KEEPING THESE WINES FOR DECADES WITH THE INTENTION OF MAKING A KILLING ON THE MARKET. I WANT TO ENJOY MY WINES."

—ALEX LIFESON

one of their best vintages, and some 1997 Dugat-Py, which I've loved for quite some time, although the wines take forever to come around. I remember drinking the '97s out of barrel and hearing the winemakers describe it as a "charming" vintage. When they use that epithet it usually means that the wines won't last, but here we are in 2011 and the 1997 Grands Crus are still really lovely to drink, especially from a winemaker like Dugat-Py, where you see such great extraction. They're dense wines that are built for the long haul.

What have you been drinking recently?

LEE It's not all expensive wines; I'm not just a wine snob. At home I drink a lot of Cru Beaujo-

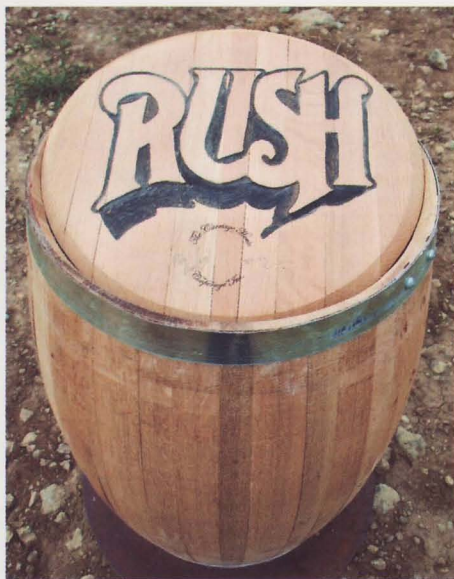
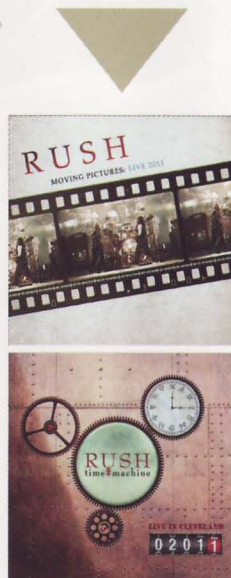
lais. Last year we lost Marcel Lapierre, who was a master of Beaujolais. I was fortunate to get a couple of cases of his 2009 Morgon, which is a beautiful vintage. My favorite wine of the week is the 2010 Domaine Huet Vouvray Le Haut-Lieu Sec, which is a great food wine. It's only \$33 a bottle in Canada. I've become quite a big fan of Loire wines recently. There are some tremendous producers in Sancerre, like François Cotat.

LIFESON I'm drinking mostly white wine. I just tried a lovely Sauvignon Blanc by Sineann, which is this winery located just outside of Portland. It's quite inexpensive, and it's crisp and delicious. My wife and I love Gewürztraminer, particularly Trimbach and Hugel. We also like Huet Vouvray Moelleux, which has a similar sweetness of fruit to Gewürztraminer, although it's not as crisp. I have several bottles in my collection that I didn't have much interest in drinking, and when I popped open a bottle I was surprised by how delicious it was. I'm also drinking some Rhônes and a smattering of Italian reds. I bought a bunch of Sandrone years ago, with vintages going back into the Nineties. I'm going through them

CLEVELAND ROCKS

RUSH RELEASE TWO NEW LIVE ALBUMS.

As they mention in this interview, Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee often like to celebrate after a good show by sharing a nice bottle of wine during their post-gig meal. One can only imagine what delightful vintages were consumed after the shows captured for the band's two excellent new live releases, *Time Machine 2011: Live in Cleveland* and *Moving Pictures: Live 2011*. Both albums, which will be available on vinyl and in a variety of digital formats, were recorded on the band's extensive Time Machine World Tour. On *Time Machine 2011*, Rush serve up new, live renditions of their greatest hits, while *Moving Pictures: Live 2011* presents a front-to-back rendition of the group's 1981 megahit album. Both albums are a must for the Rush completist and a great entry point for the novice, as well.



and they're drinking perfect right now. I have some Vietti Barolo and Barbaresco wines that I bought a little more recently. Those vintages go back to 2003 and 2004, so I don't think they're quite ready, but I like to open a bottle now and again to see what's happening.

What are some of your most memorable bottles?

LEE While traveling through France in the early Nineties I drank a beautiful bottle of 1978 Musigny from Comte Georges de Vogüé, which was one of my most profound wine-drinking experiences because I didn't know much about Burgundy at that time. I was in this little out-of-the-way restaurant en route to visit another winemaker when I had this spectacular bottle of Burgundy with a friend of mine. That turned me on to Burgundy, and I haven't looked back.

I can also remember the first time I tried 1961 La Chapelle Hermitage from Jaboulet. A friend of mine had a magnum of spectacular 1971 Romanée-Saint-Vivant that he brought over one Christmas to share. I can still taste it. A 1978 Chateau Rayas was another fantastic memory, as was a 1985 Richebourg from Henri Mayer, which I tried in Paris the first time I ate at Alain Ducasse au Plaza Athénée. What a combo! One of my favorite Bordeaux experiences was a 1959 Latour. That is a sensational, gorgeous wine.

LIFESON I went to work at Joseph Phelps Vineyards in 1990, and I would get up every morning at 5:30 and work until 7:00 that evening. Towards the end, Joe had a dinner for some of his best supporters in the industry. There were probably about 60 people there. I was invited to sit beside Joe and his wine-

maker, Craig Williamson. I brought a bottle of 1941 Sebastiani as a gift for Joe. There was a fire at the Sebastiani winery in 1942 and they lost all of the records. They released this wine in 1944, so they didn't really know the history of that wine and where the grapes came from.

Joe was amazed when I presented it to him. He went, "Wow! Where did you get this? We're going to have to drink this!" I told him it was a gift for his collection, and he said that this was a bottle that you have to drink with people, experience, and talk about what happened since this wine was made. We opened the bottle and shared it with everyone, which meant that everyone got just a little sip. It was fabulous. It was all we talked about the whole night. It led to a conversation about the whole history of winemaking in California and what inspires people like Joseph Phelps who come from other areas of commerce and industry to become winemakers, get their hands dirty, and become just a few notches above farmers. I can still see the room, table, and lighting, and the glow in my face when he tried the wine and gave it a huge thumbs up.

LEE I've been to some great tastings over the years and made some great friends who have invited me to their tastings. I've tasted some very rare wines, and those experiences have stayed with me. I have a great friend in St. Louis named John Nash who has a shop called the Wine Merchant. We've shared some great bottles, and he's really educated me when I've been in town. Wine people are really gregarious and always willing to share. Just like pot smokers like to pass around a joint, wine lovers love to share a bottle. We don't do much on our days off any more because we're pretty exhausted from the show, so I look for a good bottle and a good meal to enjoy on my day off. That's my guilty pleasure.

LIFESON We've experienced some great wines together on tour. We always bring some bottles from home, and we'll pick up a few bottles on the road. There's always something that we want to share. If we're not running after the show, we'll sit down and have a great bottle of wine. We'll talk all day about what we're going to drink, and we'll get Frenchie, our chef, to cook something accordingly. Then it's just the two of us sitting there in our underwear after the show enjoying a glass of wine and a meal in the quiet of the dressing room. It's really lovely, because Geddy and I are very close friends and we share this love of wine. It's our little reward at the end of the night after a hard day's work. It's one of my favorite times. **GA**