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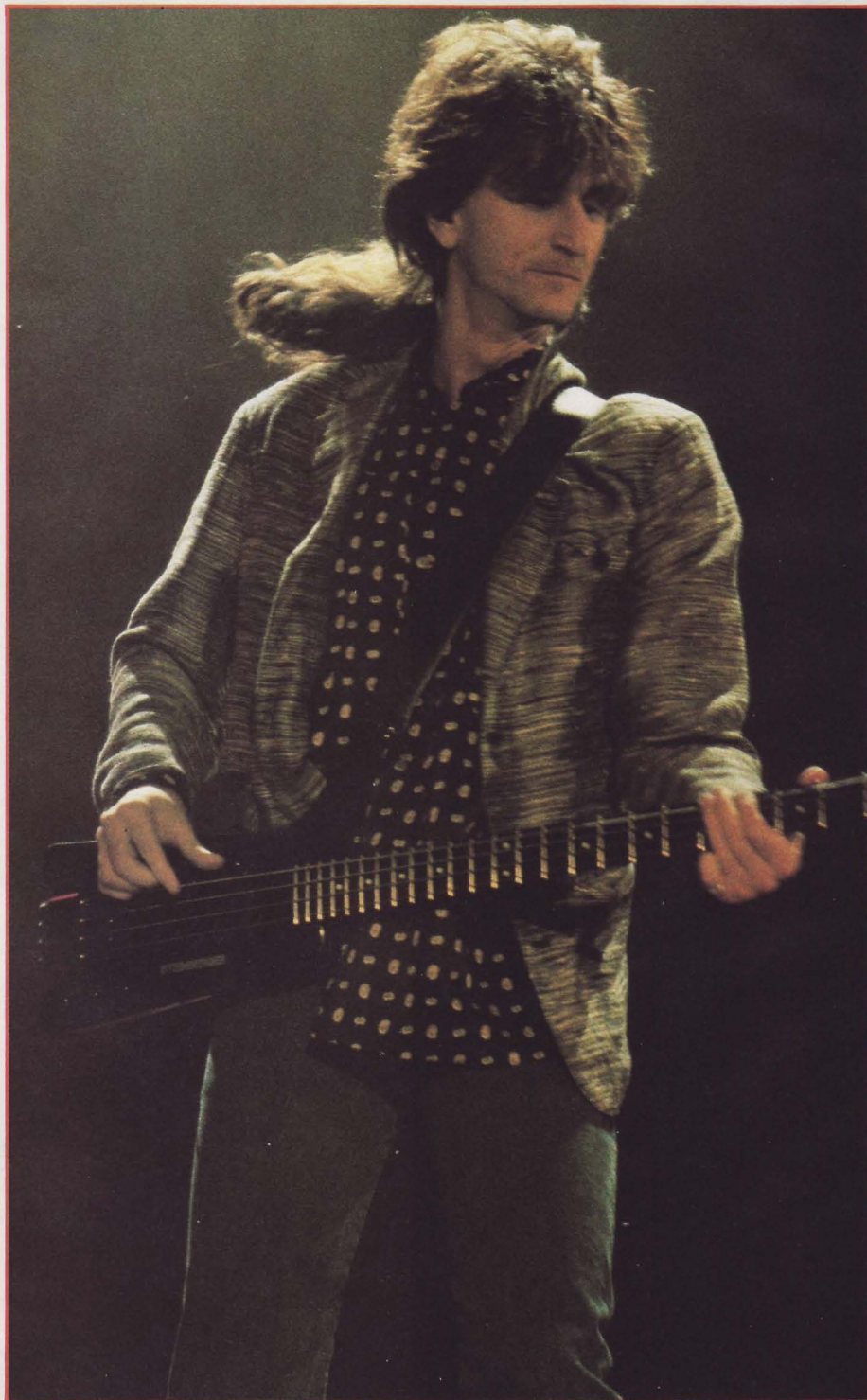
GEDDY LEE OF RUSH

By Tom Mulhern

BOUNCING ACROSS THE stage, plucking furiously on his Steinberger, Geddy Lee appears to be having a great time. For a brief moment, he stands by as Alex Lifeson heads for the solo's climax, and then he leisurely strolls back behind a pile of keyboards to give voice to the next chorus. Moments later, he's centerstage, again deep into his bass lines, singing into yet another mike, adding extra bottom end to Rush's sound with his synthesizer pedals. In the course of nearly two hours, Lee operates like clockwork, playing a verse on bass and a chorus on one of his keyboard synthesizers, or vice versa—juggling his instrumental chores without a hitch.

In his ever more demanding role with the Canadian high-tech power trio Rush, 32-year-old Geddy Lee has become almost as well-known for his synthesizer work as for his biting bass lines (in fact, he was the featured cover artist for the September 1984 issue of *Keyboard* magazine). But no matter how many verses he sings or keyboards and pedals he manipulates, Geddy Lee continues to *love* the bass. His talent and devotion to the instrument have earned him honors in many polls, including *Guitar Player's* Readers Poll for the past five years. So far, the only other bassist to achieve this, and thereby be inducted into the Gallery Of The Greats, is Stanley Clarke. His bandmates have also won numerous polls (Lifeson, profiled on page 94, won as Best Rock Guitarist in *Guitar Player's* 1984 Readers Poll).

Despite the accolades, Geddy is as down-to-earth and softspoken as he was when he was first interviewed for *Guitar Player* six years ago. Since that time, the band has released five albums, gaining sophistication as it gained a larger audience. And except for Neil Peart coming on as the band's drummer in 1974, Rush has remained essentially the same since its inception in 1968. In 18 years, the band has evolved a long way from a hard-working bar band with Geddy's high-pitched vocals belting out covers of Led Zeppelin, Jeff Beck, Cream, and John Mayall tunes. Slowly, the group eased into progressive rock while retaining its heavier edge. Today the band that won a Juno Award (Canada's equivalent of the Grammy) as



JON SIEVERT

Rock's Leading Bassist

1974's Most Promising New Group is fulfilling that promise.

Long known for using a Rickenbacker 4001 bass and a Rickenbacker 4-string bass/12-string guitar doubleneck, Geddy switched to a Steinberger for 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*, then to an English-made Wal for Rush's latest, *Power Windows*. In the following interview, he discusses his new instruments, the complexity of his roles, and how the electronic revolution affects bassists.

* * * *

YOUR PLAYING ON *Power Windows* is more aggressive than on *Grace Under Pressure*.

Yeah, I was definitely getting a little bored with role-playing on *Grace Under Pressure*—having to split my time between keyboards and bass. I'm a bass player, not a keyboard player. I play keyboards in this band, to serve the purpose of the textures needed, but I love my bass. So, I was getting a little frustrated with the role I had sort of locked myself into, and on this record I wanted the bass parts to be more aggressive; I wanted to make more of a bass statement.

Have you ever given any thought to bringing a keyboardist on the road or into the studio to afford you more freedom?

Well, we used a keyboard player in the studio this time—Andy Richards—to help out on a lot of the programming and to play many parts, too. In the end, though, his parts were mostly different interpretations of something that I had come up with. So, we had another opinion this time around, and he added some really nice parts—parts I never would have thought of playing and sounds that I wouldn't have gotten. It was a big help.

Once again, though, it all falls on you onstage.

Yeah! I have to reproduce all of this stuff, but that's okay. With modern technology, it's a lot easier to do that in the keyboard area than it's ever been, because of the PPGs, Emulators, and all this other fancy synthesizer equipment that you can get. But as far as bringing a keyboard player live, we talk about it from time to time, but we just can't bring ourselves to add anybody to our lineup. We get along well, and we communicate as musicians well—the three of us. What we

do is a lot of fun, and we're really afraid of jeopardizing that by adding another member. At the same time, it keeps our two-hour show so challenging [*laughs*] to get through, from a lot of points of view.

Why don't you get a 5- or 6-string bass to cover more of the low end?

I have, actually. The guys at Wal have put together a real nice 5-string that has a low B, and they built one for Percy Jones of Brand X. It looks real nice, and it's a good idea, too. Whenever I thought of a 5- or 6-string bass, I always envisioned the added upper string, which would almost leave the bass range. But I think a lower B makes a lot of sense, especially in the world of footpedals and synthesizer bass. You know, we're using that kind of bottom so much on records—that really low stuff. I'm considering a 5-string now; it might be a good addition.

On Power Windows, your bass tone is different.

Yep. That's a Wal bass. I used one on every track of the album. The scenario went like this: I arrived at the Manor studio in England with a nice selection of basses—some of mine, such as my Rickenbacker and my Steinbergers, and some I borrowed, including nice old Fenders. Peter Collins, our producer, arrived with his Wal. So I put all these basses up and started the first track, which was "The Big Money." And what happened? His Wal sounded more suitable than all those other basses. Not that the basses didn't sound good—they did. But the particular sound we were looking for, to suit the track, was coming from the Wal. So I used it for that track, and then every time we got into a new song, we'd do the comparison; soon, we just stopped comparing and decided to go with the Wal. It sounded right for this album.

It seems to have the Rickenbacker bite, but with more midrange and bottom support.

That's right. The sound on this record is actually a bit of a throwback for me—to when I was using Rickenbackers a long time ago. It's a brighter, livelier tone, but it seems to have some of that "solid-state" punch that the Rickenbacker didn't have. Originally, we started out with a lot less low bottom in the bass sound, but as the album progressed, we EQ'd more in, and opened up the bottom end more. So, we ended up with a warmer sound than we had expected. I was pleased with it.

The main thrust for this album was a lively, more positive sound on all the instruments. That was the direction that our producer, our engineer, and we wanted to go in, and the Wal just fit into the scheme of things. The Steinberger I used on *Grace Under Pressure* sounded good, too, but it's a darker-sounding bass, and it just didn't seem right for the material this time.

It didn't cut through as well as the Wal.

No. *Grace Under Pressure* is a much darker-sounding record; the bottom end is a different shape, and the top end doesn't have such a nice twang. Different sounds for different periods, I guess. After *Power Windows* was finished, I visited the Wal people, and they built me the bass I used in "The Big Money" video. They really build their instruments with a lot of care and take a lot of pride in their work.

Did you want anything special done on the bass?

I just wanted to have it sound close to that bass of Peter Collins'. The only difference was that most of the basses they make are in natural wood finishes, and I'm not a big fan of them. So I asked for a black one. The sound is slightly different because it's a more reflective surface than a natural. But it's only different in a positive way; it's probably a little brighter than the other ones.

Do you generally use both pickups at once, or do you favor the bridge pickup for more treble?

I use both, but I lean a bit more to the treble pickup than the bass pickup; there's a mixing dial instead of a toggle switch for balancing between the two pickups. Everything else is well cranked up. There are all kinds of active electronics in it, too, but I didn't use them very much.

Some of the tones on Power Windows sound as if you used a pick.

I didn't. I still can't use a pick properly; it feels like it's in my way. I do use my nails a lot, though. A lot of times, I use them when I want that pick sound, even if it's for just one moment. I think in the first half of "Middletown Dreams," I used my nails.

"Territories" [Signals] has a clicky sound, too.

Yeah, that's just the EQ, though. I'm not using my nails—in an obvious way. I mean, I have longer nails, so the way I hit the strings affects the top end, anyway. In part of "Terri-

GEDDY LEE

ories," there is a slight mute that gives me a bit of the harder top, especially in the second bridge, where there's a bit of a funky, faster lick.

"Marathon" [Power Windows] has a very snappy sound.

Yeah, that's still playing flat-out. But when I grow my nails, I think it does affect the top end. I get a bit more twang out of it.

Do you tend to pick or pluck closer to the bridge or closer to the neck?

It really varies with the part. It depends on what kind of sound I want to get for a song. A lot of times, it's right over the back pickup for more bite.

Do you change your strings often when you record?

Yeah, pretty well for every track. Fresh, new strings. For this album, I had a different gauge than normal, because the Wal had a set of strings on it that I never used before. They're Superwound Funkmasters. They're much lighter than I was used to, and I thought the G looked like a guitar string. They really suited my style, because they gave me more definition, especially in the upper ranges. And I think the combination of the way I sometimes pluck the strings, plus a lighter gauge, plus the Wal gave me all that different clarity at the top end.

During the Power Windows sessions, did you go directly into the board, or did you use an amp?

Both. I usually keep the amped and direct sounds on two tracks, but we were trying to do this record in a more decisive manner, so once we got a sound that we felt was good, we committed it to one track. We figured that if we were going to have problems down the road, then we'd see what would happen. But nine times out of ten, it worked out fine.

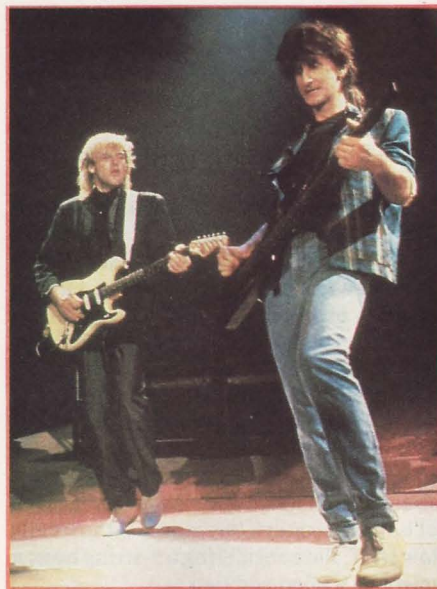
Do you ever lay down just a reference bass track that's recut later in the recording process?

Yeah, sometimes. For instance, this time we recorded the bed tracks in a different manner than we ever have before. In the past, we had been pretty insistent on playing as a trio and trying to get a performance. Even if we ended up redoing the bass or guitar, we tried to get something that felt like a band performance. By doing that, you're sort of at the mercy of circumstance—you're looking for that magical take. Now, how do you define a magical take? It's so hard. It's really subjective. So, invariably you end up doing a lot more takes than you need, and you try to pick the best moments from each one. You start the sessions with high hopes, and at the end, you have a lot of tape, trying to pick those magical moments. So Peter Collins said, "Look, I don't work that way. Let's try a different way and see if it suits you." He suggested that we use one piece of tape. On that, we laid down a click track and coded the click with an SRC (SMPTE reading code) so that we could sync the machine to any kind of sequencer or other electronic device. As long as you're in time with the

click, whatever sequences you decide to add later will always be in time. Then you can put them in at any point in songs; there are codes for the whole song on one track.

What's your next step?

Step two is putting down a rough arrangement, using some very simple sounds, such as a guitar or keyboard, that basically map out the entire structure of the song from beginning to end in real time. At that point, we still don't have any drums, bass, or anything like that. I put down a guide vocal track in the spots where there's supposed to be vocals, and then guide keyboards to fill the sound.



ANDREW MCNAUGHTON

Lee on Rush: "We understand the power of bass, drums, and guitar in a heavy format."

So we end up with a lot of care taken in a very good guide instrument track. Then, once we have the drum sounds we want, all three of us start playing to the guide tracks. And after a few run-throughs, when we're at a stage where we're ready to do a take, Peter is not concerned with the bass and guitar; he's just listening to Neil, making sure that there is a good drum performance. They record the first couple of run-throughs, and we get a good live feel on the drum tracks, plus we have all the other main parts in rough form. So, in effect, Neil's playing to a full track. He responded really well to that kind of recording, and I think he did three or four tracks on the record in one take. That method seems to make you focus; you say, "This is going to be the take, so I won't have to look for that mysterious piece of tape."

This approach takes the heat off the whole band while putting a lot of pressure on Neil.

It does. But at the same time, you also know that if something goes wrong with the bass, guitar, or synthesizers halfway through, you can stop and drop a new part in, instead of worrying about editing takes together. You end up with a lot more spontaneity and positive energy on the track because you can put everything you've got into it.

Doesn't a click track create sort of a tyranny to the beat?

Well, I don't know. Not being a drummer, I couldn't comment on that, because it is really a drummer's domain.

But can you feel the difference?

Yeah. If you're playing to a click track, you know you're playing in time. But there are times when you want to stray from that, and if you want to change the tempo, suddenly change the feel, that's all acceptable, depending on the kind of music you're playing. In the past, like on "Losing It" [Signals], when we hit the middle section, we changed tempo, and it just didn't seem right to play with a click, so we turned it off. And I think during the making of "Marathon" on Power Windows, there were times in the middle section where we were playing in 7/8, and it felt different. It was an intrusion to have the click in. At times like that, we just shut it off. Sometimes you have to say, "Get this thing out of here" [laughs]. If you're trying to play in 8, 4, or whatever to keep a solid tempo, and all of sudden you change it to an odd time, it's madness. It won't work.

How do you make a break from an even tempo—say, 4/4—into an odd one, such as 7 or 13, while making the odd-metered part seem as if it fits?

That's a matter of careful choice in notes, I think, and also a matter of what time signatures you're comfortable playing as a band. We've played in 7 almost as much as we've played in 4/4, you know. So, for us to break into 7 is the most natural thing in the world. It's probably as natural to us as it is for [former Yes/King Crimson drummer] Bill Bruford to play in 5 [laughs]. He can make 5 seem so smooth—the guy can rock-out in 5; it's unbelievable. But it depends on how familiar you are with that particular feel and how much you thought out the music around it, so it doesn't feel herky-jerky. If the music isn't written to exaggerate the rhythm but rather to complement the melody, then if it happens to be in a different time, it's smooth. Many times with rock and jazz-rock, there is a tendency to have the instruments exaggerate the fact that you're playing in odd time. That sort of draws attention to the odd meter. A lot of musicians practically say, "Look at this time we're playing in now." There are times when that is great, though, and it's a lot of fun to do. Like, I think in Genesis' "Apocalypse In 9/8" [A Trick Of The Tail, Atco, SD 38-101], they do that, and it's a tremendous piece. I love it.

On the other hand, "Dance On A Volcano," from the same album, is in 13/8, yet it has the smooth, driving feel of 4/4.

Right. So, there are times when you want to draw attention to it and times when you don't. I think you just want to play in 7 because it feels right for the part, for the moment. It's a nice change for the musician to break out of simpler time, but you always have to look at the overall song from more than just a rhythmic point of view.

When it's time to lay down your final bass tracks, do you go in by yourself?

Yeah, but you see, I already have a guide bass, essentially, because of what's on tape

GEDDY LEE

from a couple of run-throughs that we did with Neil. And I can listen back to see if there's anything spontaneous that I like in the performance. Then I compose my bass part in finer detail. I always have a bass part worked out in advance because we've rehearsed the songs for two months before going into the studio. But I sort of fine-tune them and look at all the little melodies, trying to improve them. Then I lay down my bass parts.

After playing bass through an entire song, have you or the producer ever decided that perhaps synthesizer or bass pedals would be better in sections?

Because we use a lot synth pedals, that's something that gets talked about quite a lot

during the bass parts. Many times, it's the other way around. I already have sections designated as synthesizer, and leave the bass out; then the producer says, "No, we don't want synth bass here—we want you here." And I generally do one or the other because I know if I'm going to be playing keyboards onstage, I can't play bass. So I'm always a bit strange about putting bass parts in that I won't be able to play live: Every night, I'll miss that part. On this record, I did it a couple of times because everyone was saying, "Come on, you can do it." But I'd still rather record it the way I'm going to do it live.

Have you ever considered completely ignoring the live aspect while recording?

We did, to a degree, this time. We did a lot more overdubs and melodic structuring for the keyboard, guitar, and vocal areas

than we ever have before. But with something as fundamental as the bass, I couldn't put a great part on the record that I couldn't do onstage. It would just bum me out too much not to be able to play it. Also, writing in that fashion, I know where my parts are; I know when I have moments where I can do what I want on the bass. I also know where there are moments that I can't, when I have to leave it open to a different texture. And over the years, I've really come to like changes in texture that happen during a song due to the alternation between electric bass and synth. It's a nice sort of built-in dynamic that happens at the bottom of the track.

"Subdivisions" [Signals] has that effect.

That's right. There are a few songs where we've utilized that—"Mystic Rhythms" [*Power Windows*], for example. The bass appears in the middle section and then in the second verse and in the ride-out. The bass is such a nice lift when it comes in there because the bottom end has been set aside until that point. And I like that kind of dynamic. I think it helps the trio sound like more than a trio.

Rush's last two albums have shown a refined, sophisticated sound. But a lot of people still view Rush as a heavy metal band.

I don't really deny it; that's where our roots were—no question about it. We always called ourselves a hard rock band, even way back when heavy metal was first starting, because it just seemed more suitable for what we were doing. We've always been hard to categorize, and people love categorizing bands. We always called ourselves progressive hard rock, but how many progressive hard rock bands can you think of [*laughs*]? That's not a real active label. But now there are so many diverse streams of rock music like never before—heavy metal, new wave, synth pop, techno-pop, jazz-rock—all these different branches, so I don't think very many heavy metal fans would agree if you called us heavy metal. Although there are moments where we can play quite heavy.

For impact?

Yeah. I mean, we understand the power of bass, drums, and guitar in a heavy format, and we use that from time to time. And we like to look at that as one in our arsenal of textures, as opposed to that being our main thrust.

You've done shorter songs, rather than extended pieces, on the last three or four albums.

It's funny. A lot of people ask us why we're playing shorter songs again, but if you look at our history, there are a lot more records from day one that consist of shorter songs. There was only like a three- or four-album period where we were doing long, involved pieces. Before and after that, the songs have all been between four and seven minutes. We still don't write a song under four-and-a-half minutes; we're still asked to shorten our songs, so they can't be *that* short. The quintessential Rush length seems to be between five and six minutes—a good length

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Do you risk losing spontaneity by so much preparation before recording?

On this album we spent almost two months writing, rehearsing, and demoing, trying to look at every aspect, but I find that it's much better to do that than to do it on the spot, and it's more economical. It's better to be prepared and have confidence in the material beforehand. That's what makes the biggest difference. And the more confident you are when the "record" button goes on, the better record you're going to end up with.

Have you ever written as you recorded?

Yeah. *Hemispheres* was done that way. It was a lot of pressure and a lot of strain on the brain. And it took us a long time to achieve what we wanted. In the end, we had a certain confidence that we'd never really be stuck. It's good to do that, I think. It's like on-the-spot training. "Okay, we need one more song. Let's write it." You can do it. You know you can reach back and put something together, but the more time you have to live with the material, the better record you can make.

Why did you record Power Windows in three places?

Well, we recorded the last four or five albums all in one spot. And *Grace Under Pressure* took about four-and-a-half months to make. Towards the end, we got a little claustrophobic. So this time around, we wanted to avoid that: Let's try to put some perks in there for our own interest. We divided the album into three projects, and for the middle we rewarded ourselves with a Caribbean stop. We said, "If we're good boys and get everything done in five or six weeks, we can go to Montserrat and record for three weeks." I tell you, it's really nice to look forward to that. Having worked in only one place [Le Studio in Toronto] for so many years, it was nice to move around. It kept everybody excited and fresh. It gave us an opportunity to listen to material in a different environment every few weeks. All those things helped make the record better.

During the sessions, do you ever listen to rough mixes through a car stereo?

Well, we do rough mixes at various points as we go. We usually don't have our cars around, but we listen on a Sony Walkman or a ghetto blaster—some system that you're used to hearing stuff on.

Since compact discs are becoming more popular, did you intentionally make the album cleaner or more dynamic to take advantage of the digital medium?

No. We usually take the same approach because our albums have been on CDs for years. And I don't think your attitude should be any different whether it's going to become a CD or a record. You always want to make it as clean as you can.

But you can get much more stereo separation with a CD, and therefore any panning is going to be more dramatic.

Yeah, that's true. But I think what is affecting record-making more than CD is the Walkman. We're living in a Walkman gener-

ation. Everybody has them, and it's rejuvenated stereo to a large degree. People are more concerned with doing things that move around in headphones, and playing with stereo perspectives, stereo echoes.

On Power Windows, and in today's music in general, almost every instrument has tons of digital reverb, making things sound wetter and wetter.

I don't know if I would agree with that. I think there is a lot more experimentation with different kinds of echoes and ambiences. A lot of modern records are very dry, but they're electronically dry. It's so rare that someone uses a straight reverb plate anymore. It's usually some very complex reverb or reversed sort of nonlinear reverb or "Let's gate this reverb so it will start out in a roaring Taj Mahal, but then chop it off." A lot of it is

shock value, experiments—playing with echoes. It makes it more interesting, from the overall perspective. You can tamper with the kind of room you're putting instruments in. You're no longer limited to the room where they were recorded. The flexibility is there, and if you're not happy with the sound, the track develops in a different direction. You're not stuck with the same ambience; you can just electronically create a new one.

Do you work in a home studio?

I have some home equipment. I have a Otari 8-track and a few outboard pieces. I prefer to keep them in a very low-tech vibe. And I prefer writing in a simple environment, technically, because I hate getting bogged down when I'm writing. I hate getting hung up on playing with toys when I should be playing with notes. That's my biggest fear in

SOUND VICE

JAN HAMMER

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GEDDY LEE

getting a fancy studio: ending up figuring out how everything works, but not writing. I'd play with a digital echo unit for three hours instead of writing songs or parts. I prefer to have a simple setup, and a lot of times I just use cassette players to record.

Do you ever use a drum machine when you're working out songs?

Yeah, for most of our records, Alex and I use a drum machine to give us a guide rhythm. And sometimes Neil likes and even includes in his parts some of the goofy patterns we come up with. But generally, it's a tool that lets us zone-in on what the tempo should be and what feels good, so we can establish the momentum for the tune.

Have you tried any bass guitar synthesizers?

No, I confess I haven't. I'm so immersed in the world of synthesizers that I've always wanted to keep my bass a bass [laughs]. I think it comes from too much synthy exposure. One of the guys in Steve Morse's band told me a great phrase that came from Pat Metheny; I believe it's called *option anxiety*. I try to avoid that on my bass. I have plenty of option anxieties in the world of synthesizers. I'd like to keep the bass fairly pure.

Back in 1980, you said you weren't using any effects pedals for bass guitar; has that changed?

No. I'm still not using any effects.
Not even a chorus?

No. Well, in the studio I use chorus a little bit. I used to use it a little onstage, and I think our sound mixer up front adds a bit of chorus on the main house mix. But I just go straight into my amp.

When you record your bass parts, do you sit in the control room?

Yeah, I do. And I prefer to do my bass parts at low levels. I don't know if other bass players ever noticed this, but when you're sitting around before you plug into the amp, you think, "God, my fingers feel great today! I can run up and down the neck, play fast, play accurately." And then, when you plug into a loud amp, you suddenly don't feel quite as smooth or as nimble. I find that the louder the amp gets, the farther away you feel from your instrument. So, when I'm recording a bass part in the studio, I like to do it through small speakers at a low level, so that I can feel the response. I play more accurately and I feel looser. It may be just psychological, but I don't think it is.

What made you choose the Steinberger for this tour and the previous one?

Well, number one, I wanted a different sound. I was sort of bored with the same sound I was getting. And number two, I liked the compact feel of the Steinberger. It's small and concise. For me, playing onstage surrounded by so much gear—keyboards, microphones, and stuff—it's a very practical instrument to use. I felt that if I could get a sound out of it that I was happy with, it would make a lot sense to use it because of its

shape. And in the end, I liked the sound I was getting out of it onstage. It's very ballsy-sounding. So the size and sound made it an ideal touring bass for me.

Are you using the Wal onstage at all?

I'm still using the Steinberger onstage. I have the Wal out with me, and it sounds really good live. But until the show gets to a point where I feel comfortable enough to start changing basses from song to song, I'm going to stick with the Steinberger and slowly work the Wal into the show.

Did the lack of a headstock on the Steinberger create any psychological problems?

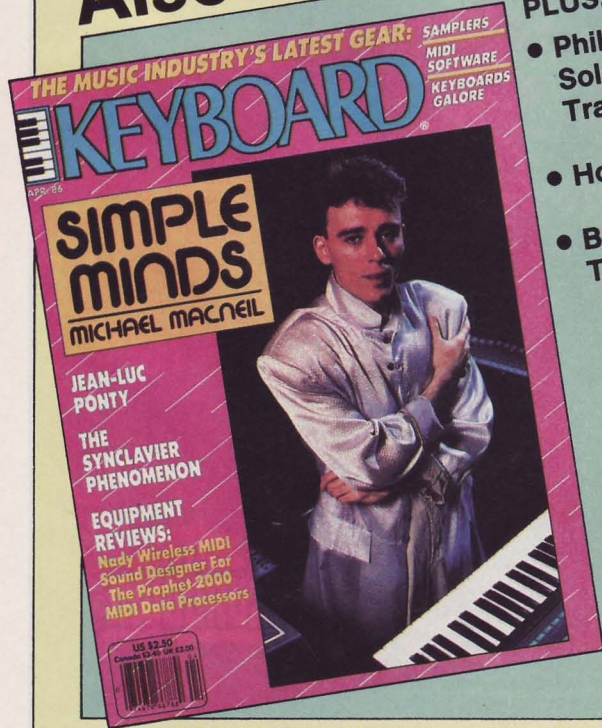
It was a bit odd at first, I must admit. But I got used to it pretty quickly. It's a great size for me. When I was using the Rickenbackers and started piling up all this keyboard gear around me, invariably I was knocking mikes over [laughs], and my corner of the world was getting real clumsy. I started feeling like I was still growing.

Have you ever considered a headset mike?

We've talked about it. And last year, we tried one out, but the engineers weren't happy with the quality of the microphone. I'd really like to eventually do something like that, because I have three different mike setups onstage. [Ed. Note: Two mikes hover over Geddy's keyboards—where he spends about 50% of his time—and one is free-standing near centerstage.]

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I now have Korg MPK-130 MIDI pedals wired into my synthesizers. They work great. I have a totally different keyboard setup this year. It's quite complex, and having these MIDI pedals has really helped.

At one time you had a set of Taurus pedals wired into an Oberheim synthesizer.

Right. That was my version of MIDI [laughs]. I had MIDI years ago. I was able to control all the Oberheim stuff from my Taurus pedals, but I had that system dismantled this year. Now I'm on a total MIDI system for keyboards.

Does something as simple as MIDI make your job much easier?

Oh, yeah. MIDI has really saved me onstage. Because I use so many Emulators on this tour, if I had them all onstage, it would be ridiculous. So I've been able to keep all the Emulators offstage and I'm using Yamaha MIDI controller keyboards, plus everything is computerized and programmed offstage. So, I can control them all from two simple keyboards up front.

What kind of equipment are you using for bass right now?

Pretty much the same as I was five years ago. I'm still using BGW power heads—the same ones, as a matter of fact, and they're still going strong. I've got the same custom cabinets, using 15" speakers. I have a Furman preamp, but I'm using a different EQ after the preamp, an API 550A. It's like an old studio equalizer. It's a real warm-sounding equalizer. I used it in the studio for *Grace*

Under Pressure, and I loved the sounds I was getting out of it. I really like having a very flexible EQ for bass.

A SELECTED LEE & LIFESON DISCOGRAPHY

With Rush (all on Mercury): *Rush*, SRM-1-1011; *Fly By Night*, SRM-1-1023; *Caress Of Steel*, SRM-1-1046; *2112*, SRM-1-1079; *All The World's A Stage*, SRM-2-7058; *A Farewell To Kings*, SRM-1-1184; *Hemispheres*, SRM-1-3743; *Archives* (re-release of *Rush, Fly By Night*, and *Caress Of Steel*), SRM-3-9200; *Permanent Waves*, SRM-1-4001; *Exit, Stage Left*, SRM-2-7001; *Moving Pictures*, SRM-1-4013; *Signals*, SRM-1-4063; *Grace Under Pressure*, 818476-1; *Power Windows*, 826098-1.

Are you using a wireless unit onstage?

Yeah. I'm using a Nady wireless unit. I finally acquiesced. Our stage started getting bigger [laughs], and I thought it would be more fun to run around. I was a big believer in the cord for a long time. Once I realized that the wireless wasn't going to screw up my sound or the feel of what I was playing, then I went along with it. I didn't trust it for the first couple of months; I thought it was going to break down. Old habits die hard.

You don't use your 12-string guitar anymore.

Nope, I haven't played it in years. I hang

onto it for fun, but I haven't played it in a long time. We sort of got into a more contemporary synthy period, and a lot of instruments like the 12-string just haven't come up for use in the studio. Certainly they're there, and they're good-sounding instruments. But the kind of direction we're going in right now doesn't seem to have a spot for them. Of course, so many of those sounds come on floppy disks now [laughs]; it's changed so many things.

Do you find that, as you gain more facility on the keyboards, you're tempted to jettison other instruments?

I think it's a different attitude. On this record, the synthesizers that Andy Richards helped us out with many times started with a sampled guitar sound. He actually changed and shaped them to become a great synthy sound. So, classical guitars and other string instruments are still being used, but in a different way.

There's an excellent sample of a Steinberger bass available for the Synclavier, which can be controlled by a guitar. Would you feel comfortable with a bass guitar synth controller if it tracked the notes the way you wanted?

If it tracked right, I'd give it a whirl; sure—if I had 100% confidence in it. But it's true what you can do with a synthesizer, sampling your own bass sounds. I know when I was getting ready for this tour, a gentleman named Jim Burgess, who is helping me on my keyboard setup, sampled a

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GEDDY LEE

couple of licks off of our album on Emulator just to show me how it would sound. And it sounded *great*. Think about how much time you spend finding one bass sound for each song, and you can stick that into a digital sampler and have it come back at the drop of a hat.

You don't have to worry about the strings going dead or your amp settings being wrong.

Yeah, but I can't use it in the show on the keyboard, because it never feels right playing my bass lines on a keyboard. Sampling isn't perfect enough so that you can make it completely realistic—you still can't get the feel, because digital recording of a sound gives every note pretty well the same value, which

you never do when you're playing a lick. On "Manhattan Project" [*Power Windows*], Andy played sort of a fretless-sounding bass line on a Roland JP-8 keyboard synthesizer. It sounded great, so to do it live, we sampled that JP-8 sound into my Emulators. So it worked, but it didn't work at the same time. I use it live and it sounds okay, but every slide has exactly the same value, which you would never want. When you play a fretless part, you slide into some notes and pass through others at a different rate. You can't really do that with a stored sound, unless you have a complex sampling situation where you sample each note differently. So, it has its drawbacks, fortunately for us bass players [*laughs*].

Will sampling and synthesizers make the bass passé?

You never *know*, but I doubt it. I mean, they said drum machines might make drummers obsolete, and there's a real drummer's revival going on right now. I know in England, producers are sick of working with guys who can't play. Everybody dropped what they were doing and started buying drum machines and composing drum parts. That's great for people who are musically talented anyway. If you're borderline, you're really boxing yourself in.

It must be frustrating for drummers to hear drum machines on so many records.

It's all the synth-pop bands that are taking a different, more computerized route. But I know in a lot of the young bands, most players are going toward heavy metal as an outlet. If you look at the young harder rock bands, there are guys in there really concerned about their playing and trying to do something different. They're working on their stuff.

"Red Lenses" [Grace Under Pressure] has a really different feel for a Rush song, more of a groove. Was it done in a different way?

It's a different kind of song. It was the last thing we wrote for *Grace Under Pressure*. Usually the last track we write on each record is different from everything else. It's probably a reaction against working so hard, and all of a sudden you want to do something different to round-out the record, give it some more variety. I like it a lot because it is different, but it's very indulgent. I'm always surprised when people like those tracks. You can understand if a musician gets into it, but you don't think the general public will.

In "The Weapon" [Signals], there's a short bass solo during the fade-out, and you rarely do solos. Was this an afterthought?

There are a couple of tracks on the last few records where just before the fade-out, I try to put my two cents in [*laughs*]. I did that on "Red Lenses." As it's fading out, I like to get loose—it's almost a reaction to being so structured through the whole song.

Do you plan in advance for songs to fade out?

Sometimes. Sometimes we're not sure, so we ride out for a long time, and then end it. We have the option. Invariably, every time we decide we're going to fade out, we start getting into the fade and everyone loosens up and the track starts getting better. That happened with "Mystic Rhythms" [*Power Windows*]; the fade-out is about a minute long because we liked every little nuance. The end of "Grand Designs" [*Power Windows*] is also like that. There are about seven phrases, and they're all different. None of that was planned; Neil was doing the drum track, and at the end, the sequencers were going and he just kept punching-in and going, basically flailing and hacking through it. Everybody loved it, so we decided to keep it in. Then we had to learn to play it onstage.

How true to the album's lines are your onstage parts?

I invariably start changing them, once I

Continued on page 150



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ash or walnut body, mother-of-pearl position markers, Gotoh tuning machines, a brass nut, and an active/passive electronic system. Other standard items: two volume controls, a tone control, and switches for active/passive modes, gain (12dB bass boost/6dB flat-response gain/12dB treble boost), and standby. The Deluxe has a dovetail neck-to-body heelless design, a rosewood fingerboard, a 3-piece laminated rock maple neck, and EMG pickups, plus chrome-plated hardware and a Schaller bridge. The Elite incorporates neck-through-body construction, an ebony fingerboard, a 5-piece laminated rock maple neck, EMG pickups, a Schaller bridge, and a choice of gold-or chrome-plated hardware. The Elite 5-String Bass has neck-through body construction, caviuna or ziricote fingerboard, specially designed Bartolini J-style pickups, a choice of gold-or chrome-plated hardware, and a Fodera custom locking bridge. Other scale lengths, fretless fingerboards, Kahler tremolos, and hardshell cases or gig bags are offered as options.

TELEX WIRELESS. The FMR-50G wireless guitar system (\$830.00) comprises a transmitter and receiver that operate in the VHF frequency band (between 150MHz and 216MHz). The system is designed to work over distances of 500', and up to seven systems can be operated in a single location simultaneously. The WT-50G belt-pack transmitter plugs directly into any electric guitar and has a gain level control that matches it to the instrument. It is supplied with a 3' cord that doubles as an antenna. The FMR-50G receiver features an adjustable output level control and displays that show the audio and signal levels, plus a power on/off switch. Telex, 9600 Aldrich Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55420.

DR. T'S MUSIC SOFTWARE. Sequencer and librarian software for use with Commodore 64 and Apple II computers is available from Dr. T's Music Software. The Keyboard Controlled Sequencer (\$125.00 for the 64, \$175.00 for the Apple) lets the player record in real time or steps or directly from the computer keyboard. It allows the user to define 35 independent sequences on all 16 MIDI channels. Patch librarians for Yamaha DX synthesizers and Casio CZ synthesizers allow for on-screen display of parameters, editing, naming, printing, and storing patches. Prices range from \$50.00 to \$125.00. Other software is designed for sequence programming and producing echo effects between synthesizers, as well as providing a library of drum and synthesizer patterns. Dr. T's Music Software, 66 Louise Rd., Chestnut Hill, MA 02167.

SILVER EAGLE STRAPS. Heavy Metal Guitar Straps in 2" and 3" widths are available with six continuous rows of studs. The manufacturer states that the studs are

made of a material that makes it virtually impossible to scratch or scar the guitar's surface. Each strap has a Pick Pocket, plus utility pockets at both ends. The leather straps are sewn with heavy-duty nylon thread. Also included in the line are camouflage straps in 2" and 3" widths. Some are made of Nylon Cordura backed with man-made leather, while others are cowhide. Prices range from \$15.00 to \$22.00. Silver Eagle, 6747 Valjean Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91406. 

PEAVEY AMP

Continued from page 122


compensates for any insertion losses in the effects.)

The effects loops can be programmed as part of the presets. Since each effects loop has a single stereo jack instead of two separate jacks for send and return, a Y-cord must be used for connecting external signal processors. Effects loop 1 is pre-EQ, low-level, and not affected by the effects level control, while Loop 2 is post-EQ, high-level, and is affected by the effects level knob. The MIDI Out and MIDI Through DIN jacks are also located on the rear panel.

The amp's graphics consist of white lettering and lines over the black-painted chassis. Each color-coded plastic knob has a white line pointer. The lettering for the control functions is blocked by the knobs, unless you look straight at the vertical front panel.

The Peavey Programax 10 is a very technologically advanced piece of gear for guitarists. Not only does it provide sonic versatility, but it also opens the door for MIDI control, and even complete MIDI-controlled switching and effects systems—all at a reasonable price.

Manufacturer's Response

Peavey guitar and amp clinician Robin Venters says, "We'd like to thank Keith Reinegger for this review. As to the editing functions of the controls, after soliciting the opinions of several top pros, we decided to stay with standard 'live board' editing. To configure the unit as Mr. Reinegger suggests might be confusing. As to the excessive gain compression encountered with the saturation, this only occurs when the pre gain is at or near its maximum setting. Reducing the pre gain control should allow full utilization of the saturation circuitry. Lastly, we are very excited about the possibilities of the Programax 10, particularly when utilized with one or more MIDI-compatible signal processors." 

GEDDY LEE

Continued from page 92

get the confidence to do it. Then I start screwing around with the part, just to keep it interesting. Sometimes I have to slightly vary what I do in a verse, to accommodate singing and playing at the same time, but I really try to do the same thing. It's sort of a challenge

for me. I've been fortunate to pull it off so far [laughs]. Sometimes it's not changing a part so much, but changing the *feel* a little to accommodate the vocal. And just through years of experience, I try to write my bass and vocal lines in sympathy with each other, to a degree, so my brain can follow the same thread.

Six years ago, you said you were working on arrangements of pieces written by musicians in other styles—in particular, John Abercrombie's "Timeless." Do you still work on arrangements like that?

Actually, I haven't in a long time. I do most of my own playing now in my spare time. And I'm going through a period where I haven't been listening to a lot of other people's stuff. There isn't much out there that's getting me off. I've been playing on my own mostly.

Do you ever get to play with anyone besides Rush?

You know, there was a period when we were goofing around with a lot of musicians—when we had some of our friends opening for us a couple years back—but in the last few years, we've gotten a little insular, in that the only people we really jam with are each other. We have some great jams onstage in soundchecks. It seems to be enough, but I would like to do it more often, to tell the truth.


After playing with the same trio for so many years, it must feel strange when you do work with other musicians.

Yeah. Well, the few times I have had the opportunity to play with others—drummers, especially—I really notice it. You notice whether the other musicians are really listening. That's what I find interesting about jamming. It makes the difference between a good jam and a horrible one, especially if you're a bass player. They often relegate the bass player to doing a twelve-bar. Yippee. So then, nobody is listening to you, you can't move, and you can't take the jam in any kind of direction. And by the same token, if you're not listening to anyone else, you can't follow them. It's a lot more interesting if you're playing with musicians who aren't just listening to themselves.

For that reason, do you feel more comfortable in a band context?

I do—out of circumstance. Since I've been in this kind of musical situation for so long, it's become my musical world, and it's become more comfortable than going outside of it. Although it's probably not as *healthy* as going outside of it.

On the other hand, some musicians step outside of their successful bands and fall flat on their faces.

Yeah, well, I don't have a great solo statement to make at this time, although I find it very good for me as a musician to work with other people and to learn other techniques. That's really the only way you can expand. You can only take yourself so far on your own, and then you must communicate with the musicians. You bridge gaps and learn more. 

ALEX LIFESON OF RUSH

By Jas Obrecht

ALLEX LIFESON HAS A SHARP EAR for tones and a talent for editing to essentials. He shrouds Rush's lyrics with biting chords, chorused arpeggios, and striking sonic flourishes. Jagged yet lyrical, his solos are studies in innovation. He's unafraid to venture outside of well-paved blues-rock territories, using thick harmonics, whammy-inflected feedback, legato riffing, and other techniques to create a taut, textural approach that has its closest parallels in U2's The Edge and ex-Policeman Andy Summers.

On the *Power Windows* album and tour, Lifeson proves his strength as an ensemble player, smoothly managing Rush's complex rhythms and time changes. His sophisticated setup enables him to create a huge spectrum of sound. For years, he's played bass pedals in addition to guitar, and when he steps out to solo, it's with the confidence of one who knows he's supported by two of rock's best musicians—bassist/keyboardist Geddy Lee [see page 84] and drummer Neil Peart.

Throughout its 18-year history, Canada's premier power trio has maintained a prominent place on the cutting edge of techno-rock. Its audience is doggedly loyal, consistently packing stadiums and sending albums into the Top 10. In addition, Lifeson has won first or second place in the Rock Guitar category of every *Guitar Player* Readers Poll since 1980. He was the magazine's cover-story artist in Jan. '80, and detailed the making of Rush's acclaimed *Grace Under Pressure* LP for the Oct. '84 issue. Rush was sharing a tour with the Steve Morse Band when the following interview took place.

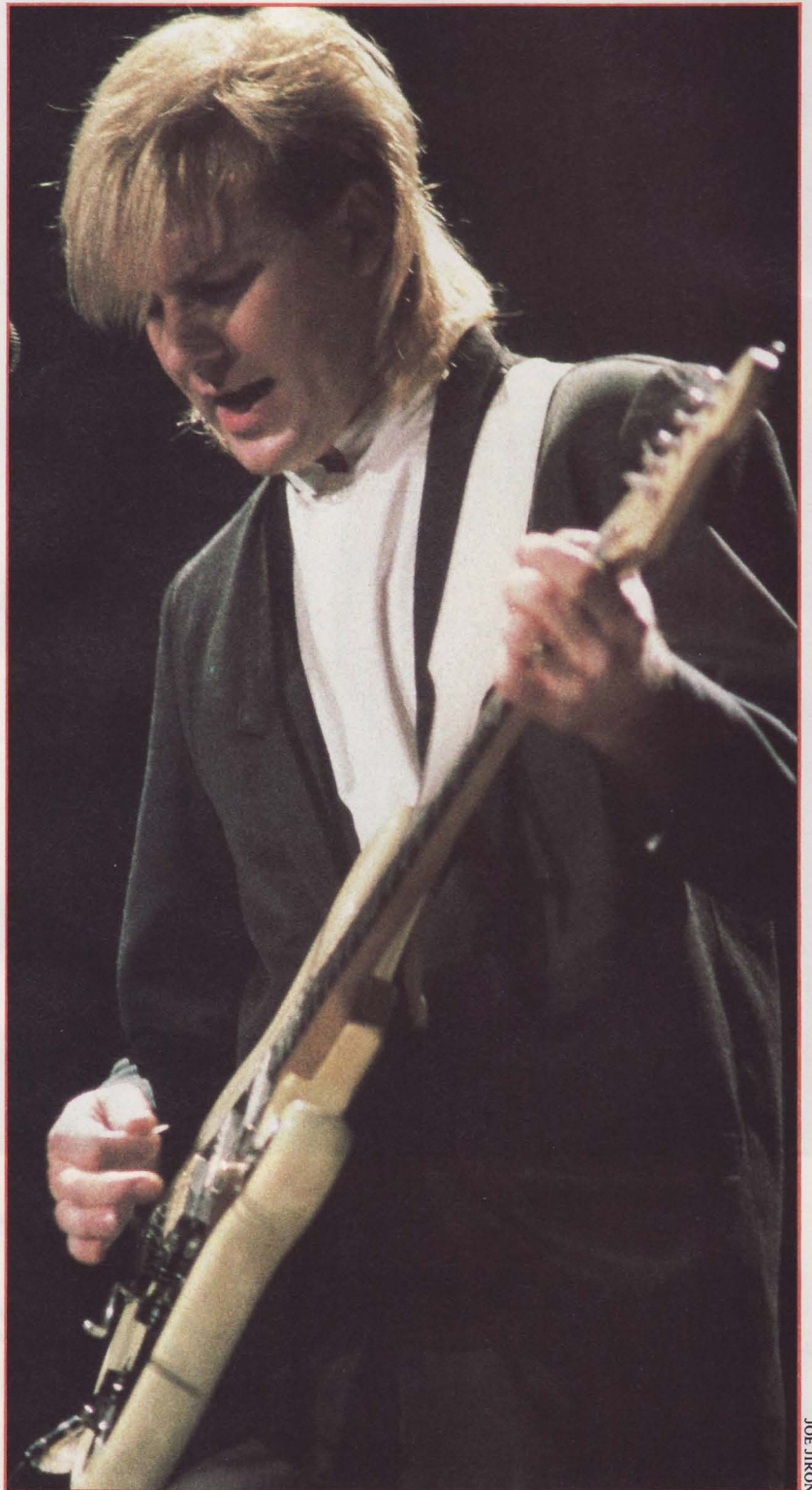
* * * *

HOW HAS YOUR STYLE changed since *Grace Under Pressure*?

For me, it's always been very important to be a cohesive part of the *band*, not to be just one element of it. With *Power Windows*, I finally achieved that. I'm very satisfied with it. I think the sounds that we got were great and quite different for me—much cleaner, crisper sounds than I've ever had before. With the way the songs were written and arranged, I felt much more tied in with the whole band, instead of being a single musical unit. My style has developed more in that way. It's nothing incredibly new or different, but it's probably a little more mature and evolved.

Is your musical development a result of your own evolution, or are portions of it suggested by your bandmates?

It's probably my own evolution. When we're in the studio, we all have ideas about each other's



JOE JIRON

The Evolving Art Of Rock Guitar

parts, and we make suggestions to each other. There were a couple of songs on the new album that required a complete guitar rewrite; once the keyboards were put on, it changed the whole character of the song. "Manhattan Project" was one, and "Middletown Dreams," especially. With that one, the original guitar part was laid down, and then Ged redid his bass. Because he had some time to spend, he changed some of the bass patterns. Then the keyboards came on, and suddenly the mood of the song was totally different. So, it was a bit of experimenting when it came to putting down the basic tracks for the guitar. And that one took a couple of rewrites. I'd do something, come back the next day, and they'd say, "You know, as the night went along, we got a little bit better towards the end there. Why don't we go back to the beginning and look at the guitar part and maybe think about rewriting it?" This was constantly happening.

Did the "Middletown Dreams" solo change?

No. With solos, I normally like to just go in and do them. I don't really pre-prepare for them. But with this album, I had spare time when we were in England doing basic tracks, so I worked something out for "Emotion Detector," "Middletown Dreams," and the middle section of "Mystic Rhythms," where the backwards guitar comes in and repeats the line. So I actually had quite a good idea of what I was going to do solowise for those songs. "Middletown Dreams" was a fairly quick one.

Were any of the Power Windows guitar tracks especially difficult to cut?

It's funny. There's always one song that you're terrified of doing. You think it's going to be really tough, and "Marathon" was the one. We wrote it and thought, "This song is going to be like pulling teeth once we get in the studio." Of course, we get into the studio and it's a breeze. And a song like "Emotion Detector," which we thought would be a breeze, was the killer. It was very, very difficult to get the mood right. I'm still not really sold on that song. It never ended up sounding the way I had hoped it would. But the "Marathon" solo was probably the easiest of all the solos to do.

How do you record solos?

I like to play about eight or ten tracks of solos, and then I get kicked out of the control room [laughs]. Everybody sort of dives in. Geddy likes to really get into doing that. He and the engineer sit down, and Neil makes some suggestions. Of course, the producer is there, too, and they piece together a solo. I come back in after a couple of hours when they have something assembled, and if I like it, then we either stick with it or we keep that as a starting point and go for another whirl

over some of the older tracks.

Were any of the Power Windows solos played in one pass?

I don't think so. Half of "Emotion Detector" was done in one pass. Actually, that song had a whole different solo that took quite a bit of work. We left it, went ahead with some other parts, lived with it for four or five days, and Neil didn't feel quite right about it. He didn't think that it made the proper kind of statement to the song, so we re-examined it and I gave it another whirl. That was tough. It's one thing to rewrite a rhythm guitar part—you've got stuff to lock onto. But it was so hard to divorce what had been in my head as a solo for three months and come up with something that was a totally different feel. But I am satisfied with the results.

Do Geddy and the others ever assemble a solo that's unlike anything you would usually come up with?

Yeah, often. Well, to me it always sounds like I did it, or that it would have just been a matter of time before I'd have gotten around to something like that. But I would have gone through a lot of different directions before getting to it. So I don't ever think it's *that* different. Often, I pick up a lot of neat little parts with this method. Otherwise, it's too hard most times because I'm too engrossed in it, too involved. I'm concentrating so hard on what I'm doing that I can't possibly be objective. So I'm better off if I go crazy on eight tracks, take a break from it, and then come in and listen to what they've assembled.

Do you have to learn the solo for concerts?

Yeah, but that's not a problem. It's usually quite easy.

Was there much experimenting with equipment on the new album?

No. I knew pretty well what I wanted. I was pretty happy with my Marshall amps, and I had the Dean Markley CD-212 with me, as well, plus we had another Dean Markley CD-120 and a Roland Jazz Chorus. Actually, we used the Roland amp for just about all the chorusing effects; the last time I used it was on *A Farewell To Kings*. We mixed amps. On "Middletown Dreams," for instance, we used the Dean Markley CD-212, as well as a Gallien-Krueger driving two Celestion speakers in a Marshall cabinet. I also had a Rockman on the Edge setting, and I just combined the whole bunch.

What were your main guitars on the Power Windows sessions?

I used an Ovation Adamas for "Mystic Rhythms" and all the other acoustic guitar parts, and had pretty good success with it. For a lot of the electric parts, I used a Fender Tele. It appeared

ALEX LIFESON

on a couple of songs on *Grace Under Pressure*—the first section of “Body Electric” and parts of “Red Sector A.” But on this record, I think I used the Tele on just about every song. That guitar is a reissue of one of the early models; it’s about three or four years old. I always disliked Teles, but I had a look at one and thought, “Well, this could come in handy.” I spent a little time with it, and I got to really enjoy it. It’s become invaluable in the studio; for all that clean, arpeggiated stuff, it’s perfect.

Are there any non-guitar sounds on the Power Windows album that listeners might mistake for guitar?

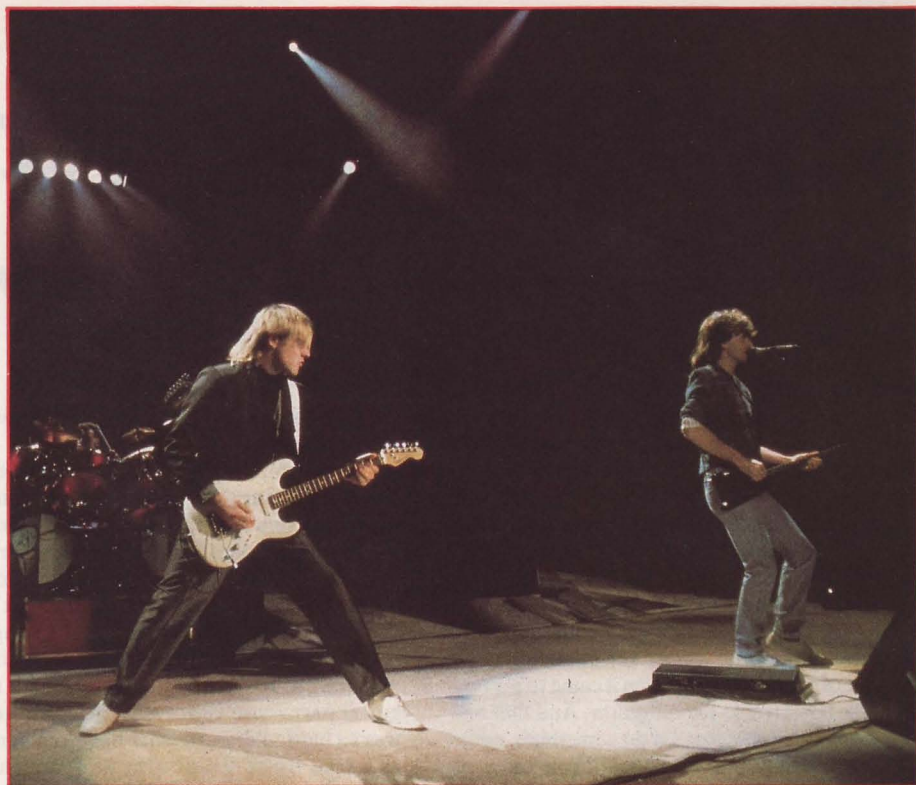
Yeah. There are a couple during the first verse of “Big Money.” It sounds like they’re played with a vibrato arm and a really gritty sort of tone. And that’s actually Geddy playing the PPG synthesizer with a guitar sound sampled into it.

You often have wide pan in the stereo spectrum. The doubled scratch guitars in “Grand Designs” and “Middletown Dreams,” for instance, produce a bigger-than-life effect.

Yeah. I think that’s due to painstaking patience, hard work, and attention to detail in the mixing mode. We always spend a lot of time mixing. Our producer, Peter Collins, thought maybe we’d spend 10 days mixing, and we spent a month. It’s all those little things that everybody gets fired up about—moments that go by that don’t really do anything for the song, but if you listen to it on headphones or in your car, suddenly you notice them. It makes the song that much more special, and those are the sorts of things we always like to get in at the production stage. Peter helped us arrange “Manhattan Project,” and he suggested things that opened up directions that we wouldn’t normally pursue. It was really an eye-opening experience to work with him. He’s much more a musical-type producer rather than an engineer-type producer, and that’s really what we were looking for. He had his own engineer, Jimbo Barton, who is a great guy, as well as a fantastic engineer. He’s got a great approach to doing things, especially when it comes to guitars. He can very quickly translate a guitar sound you have in your mind to the console, so that you can actually hear it. We used four or five amps at the same time, and he set up different balances within that whole group. Then he compressed the sound and brought out those things like harmonics and the little moments and effects that go by.

Do you still record at stage-level volume?

I probably played a little bit louder in the studio than what my stage volume is. It doesn’t hurt to drive your amps a little bit harder, and you may want to crunch them with compression to get the desired effect. Not all the amps were set up exactly the same. The Roland, the Gallien-Krueger, and one of the Marshalls were always very clean, and the Dean Markley was on a tough-but-



DIMO SAFARI

Lifeson and Lee on the job: In addition to playing guitar, Alex uses bass pedals to trigger an Emulator and sequencers.

clean sound. So, we had everything spread out really well.

What’s your setup for clean, chorused sounds?

Right now, as the primary amps, I’m using two Dean Markley CD-212s and two of my Marshall Combos. I switch back and forth between channel A and channel B. Channel A is a very clean setup on the CD-212; the volume is on about 4½ or 5, with about 7 on treble, 5 on midrange, and about 7 on bass. That’s the clean, crisp sound. Channel B is set up a little bit different. It has two gains: a dirty, distorted one, and a clean gain that’s on about a Spinal Tap setting of 11 [laughs]. The distorted gain’s on about 3, with the actual gain for the distortion level on about 7, and then treble’s close to 6, mid’s about 4½, and bass about 6. Master volume is on about 3½, no reverb, and presence is on 7 or 8. And that gives me a good bit of crunch on that channel. I’ve also been using a Roland Dimension D [stereo imager] on this whole tour. I’ve been happy with it, but I’m almost afraid that I’m getting a bit of cancellation somewhere. For solos, there doesn’t seem to be quite enough of the sustain that used to be there. I don’t know if it’s in my head or if it’s because they’re new amps, or what.

Are there many guitar tracks in “Grand Designs”?

I don’t think that there are. Most of “Grand Designs” is one guitar that’s not even doubled. We may have put it through an AMS [digital processor] at about 40 milliseconds and split it left and right. I know we did that with the bouncing echoes in the first verse, where the main guitar is in the middle

and the harmonic line is on the outside. That one’s fairly straightforward, except for the acoustic guitars in the second chorus.

Parts of “Grand Designs” almost sound like slide guitar.

Yeah. It’s whammy. I was very much influenced by Allan Holdsworth a number of years ago, the way he uses the whammy bar to slur notes and move around. That got me interested in using one and trying to develop a style with one. So many people use it now that it’s not that unique, and actually I’ve started to move away from it a bit. I’ve gotten a bit lazy with my natural vibrato since I’ve been relying a lot more on the whammy bar. It’s time for a change.

In your solo near the end of “Emotion Detector,” for instance, are you using a whammy bar or bends and finger vibrato?

It’s mostly the tremolo bar.

As you play, do you palm the bar and rock it gently?

Yeah, that’s exactly what I do. I hold it in the lower section of my fingers at the palm—at the little creases behind the knuckles. The movement is very gentle. Because the whammy bar itself is kind of loose, it absorbs some of the movement from my hand, so I get even less of a movement on the actual assembly. Primarily, I used my black ’78 Fender Strat for whammy. All of my Strats have Floyd Rose tailpieces, but I don’t have locking nuts on any of them. I find I don’t really need them to stay in tune.

One of your Strats says “Hentor” on the headstock.

“Hentor” was the name that we had for Peter Henderson, the producer of *Grace Under Pressure*. When he wrote his name

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ALEX LIFESON

out to leave us his number, it looked like Peter Hentor instead of Peter Henderson, so we nicknamed him Hentor The Barbarian. I got some Letraset and put it on this white Strat that I had. It has a Shark neck—these are unlabeled replacement necks—so I threw “Hentor Sportscaster” on there. Amazing all the mail we used to get over that [laughs]: “Where can I buy a Hentor? How much does a Hentor cost?”

What causes the Far Eastern tone in the opening of “Territories”?

That's just the Ibanez HD-1000 Harmonics/Delay set at an octave above with a little bit of modulation. The harmonics level is set at about 70%, the direct is set at the full 100%, and I was on the middle pickup on the black Strat. I used left-hand finger-pulls. After that, it switches to a much crisper tone, and to do that in concert, I just switch to the back pickup.

How does the Power Windows material come across onstage?

Great. It's no problem. We were a bit apprehensive. I mean, we wanted to stretch out on this record, but we didn't want to go too overboard. We've never been that kind of a group. We've always held the stage show as being very important and as we got into it, Peter suggested going a little bit further and further, adding more tracks to the record. We'd go a little more out on keyboards and sounds and effects. So, when we started preparing for concert rehearsals, Geddy went in with Jim Burgess, a programmer in Toronto that we use for a lot of stuff, and he set it up so that we got a lot of the sequenced parts down on Emulator [sampling digital keyboard]. They're constantly being programmed throughout the evening for the different songs. We put all the old synth sounds from the Oberheims and the Mini-moogs onto the Emulator. We condensed the whole keyboard setup and made it a little more sophisticated. It's really not a problem to get all that stuff back on there. We just put them on a disk and call them up as we go through the song.

Are you playing bass pedals on this tour?

Yeah, I've been playing them for a long time. I think with this tour, Geddy's really got his hands full with a lot of parts. He's always complaining that he doesn't have enough time to play bass anymore, which is really his first instrument. Through the years, he's been forced into playing keyboards, doing that whole end of it.

Have you considered getting a keyboardist for the road?

We talked about that a long time ago and decided that rather than disrupt the chemistry between the three of us, we would just learn other instruments on our own. And the world of synthesizers is very fast-paced; it's constantly changing. It's amazing what you can do with your big toe; you can have incredible string sounds, all kinds of sounds. No limit to it now.

In concert, which songs do you play bass

ALEX LIFESON

pedals on?

“Subdivisions,” “Spirit Of Radio,” “Manhattan Project,” “Marathon,” and “Mystic Rhythms.” I would say on probably 40% or 50% of the songs. But a lot of those times, Geddy’s playing bass pedals at the same time, so it’s not like it’s taking over a bass guitar part in all instances. It sort of restricts where you end up onstage. I have a pretty vast array of things now with the Korg MIDI pedals, the Moog Taurus bass pedals, and my effects devices. It covers just about a fifth of the stage. [Ed. Note: For details on Alex’ equipment, see the diagram on page 101.]

When do you play your best?

[Laughs.] It’s kind of weird. When I’m

hung over, I always have my best nights. It seems like I end up taking it easy all day and conserving my energy, and when I go onstage, I’m fired up. I get my second wind, and often those are the nights I play best. Or if I’ve been getting some exercise and I happen to be in a good, healthy frame of mind, my whole approach to everything is better and I end up playing better and having a good time.

Do you ever take chances onstage and play something that you haven’t tried before?

No. We’re so regimented in all our parts, and we depend on each other for cues for the next parts. If somebody does one thing different, it could screw up somebody else’s part. So we just stay away from that.

Have you ever lost your confidence during a show?

Yeah. There have been a couple of times. I mean, I never have a perfect night. I always make a few mistakes, but they go by so fast and they’re often quite unnoticeable. A lot of times, what’s a big, glaring mistake to you is nothing to the audience. Either they haven’t noticed it, or it just sounded different. Sometimes hitting the wrong note can lead to something that works out, like little slides or sort of jazzy pieces.

What aspects of music theory should young players learn?

That’s hard for me to say because I don’t really have a background in it. I studied classical guitar for about a year-and-a-half, but outside of that I don’t really have any formal training.

What advice could you give guitarists who are locked into playing fast patterns?

So many people play like that now. For a young, aspiring guitarist who looks to other guitarists for inspiration, it’s difficult to find somebody who doesn’t play a million miles an hour. It was different for me. I came up from more of a bluesy background, so I always like playing bluesy little licks, nice vibratos, and hitting those single notes, series of harmonics, and things like that. I would say that to slow down, it takes a change of attitude. For somebody who’s used to playing fast, the best route would be to just experiment with a few notes or developing more of a vibrato or more of a sense of harmony. You can practice little tricks, like sliding down on the *A* string, hitting, say, the *A*, *D*, and *C* notes, and you hit both the *C* and the open *G* string at the same time with a little bit of vibrato, so you get this really nice harmony. It’s no big deal—just a few notes—but it sounds beautiful and it can be a stepping stone to other things. I like to just hit a few notes with a little bit of echo on or maybe a repeat and put in a little bit of whammy. Your eyes start to water; it’s that kind of stuff. It really grabs you, and that’s a good starting point. Then you can combine the two. You can get a nice blend of a fast technique with a slower, really melodic, emotional technique.

How can players avoid repetitious soloing patterns?

There again, it’s really a matter of experimenting with intervals, putting in sharps and flats, using different scales and things. Try to get a sense of what’s happening in a song outside of your role as a soloist. Get a sense of what the mood is, what’s being put across. You can gain a sense of direction. Also work on developing interesting sounds. You can do a lot of stuff with just a couple of basic effects, like a chorus and an echo.

Can you suggest an example of how to get more out of an echo unit?

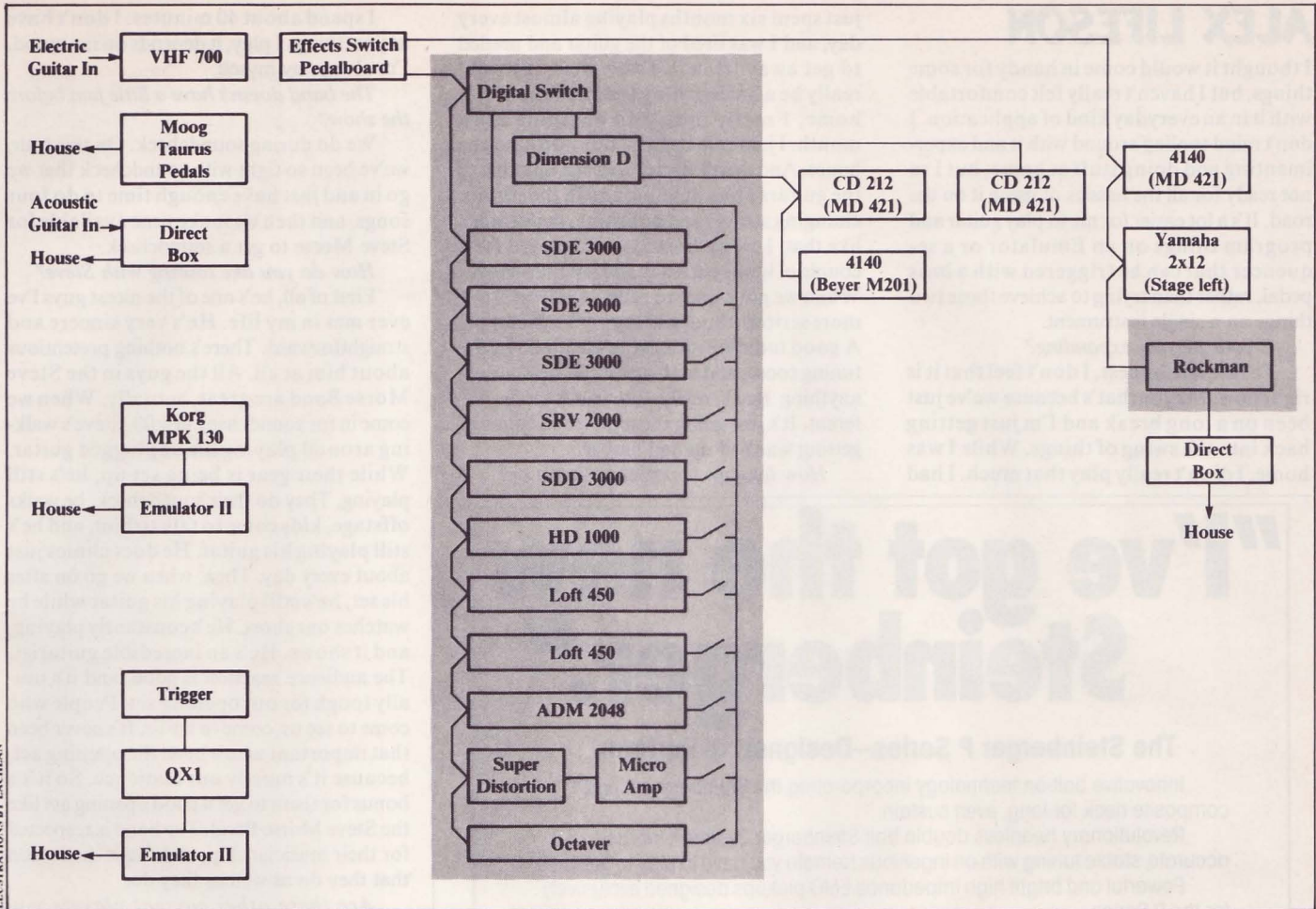
Rather than as a repeat, I’ve always liked using an echo more like a reverb. For years, I played that way because there weren’t any valid reverb units around. Now, of course, there are millions of them, and they all sound great and they’re studio-quality and fairly inexpensive. I used to use two echo units—one set at about 200 milliseconds and the other set at about 325 or 350. The combina-

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Schematic diagram of Lifeson's onstage gear: Alex runs his guitar via a Nady VHF 700 wireless transmitter to an effects switching pedal that either activates or bypasses his effects rack (shown here in the darker boxes). The rack houses three Roland SDE-3000 digital delays, a Roland SRV-2000 digital reverb, a Roland SDD-3000 digital delay, an Ibanez HD-1000 Harmonics/Delay, two Loft 450 digital delays, a DeltaLab ADM-2048 digital delay set up as a flanger, a Boss Super Distortion, a Boss Octaver, an MXR Micro Amp, and a Roland Dimension D stereo imager.

From the rack, Alex' signal routes to a single Dean Markley CD-212 amp or to a CD-212 linked to a Marshall 4140 amp. (Specific

microphones are used with each amp/speaker combination: Sennheiser MD 421s for all but the Marshall 4140, which has a Beyer M 201. The Yamaha extension cabinet has no mike.) When bypassing the rack, Alex activates a 100-watt Marshall 4140 with two 12s and a Yamaha 2 x 12 cabinet—as well as a Scholz Rockman and a direct box that goes out to the house. His Moog Taurus bass pedals control an Emulator II synthesizer, which is sent to the house. A Yamaha QX-1 sequencer controls another Emulator II (which is also connected to the house) and is activated by a trigger footswitch.

tion of the two bouncing around creates a fairly realistic reverb, so it gives the guitar a little more depth and dimension. But once you add something like a chorus—which changes the real character of the guitar—to the echos, you have a big swirling blob of sound.

How do you use digital delays?

I use the delays as timed repeats more than anything else. I use them to set up a particular effect where the bounce is at maybe 150 milliseconds, so it creates a real quick little da-da-da sort of thing. There's a bounce in "Grand Designs." In "Manhattan Project," there's a longer delay of about 700 milliseconds on a couple of notes in the last chorus. I found this really picked up the track and moved it along. I've gotten rid of all my old analog delays, and I'm also using a digital reverb now. So, I'm moving away from bouncing echos a little more.

There have been some amazing advances in guitar technology in the past 10 years.

You don't even have to go back that far. If you could imagine what it was like three or four years ago, where every 14 months something would happen that was new and revolutionary. Now, it's like every three or four months there's something else coming out.

Could you see yourself ever going back to a straight guitar-and-amp setup?

No. I was never like that, really. At a very early age, I got a Fuzz Face distortion. Even before I could really play guitar, I had an effect. But I had my guitar plugged directly into our TV set; I didn't have an amp. That sounded pretty lousy, but with the Fuzz Face, I thought I was hot stuff [laughs]. But I've always liked doing something to the guitar sound, trying to develop a style around that. And I think I have. Now, I'm using effects a little less than I have in the past. I'm starting to lean more towards a cleaner guitar sound. And I learned on this record that that can go a long way for certain things.

With the advent of MIDI and other breakthroughs, do you think the days of the stock electric guitar are numbered?

I don't think so. Not for a long time yet. Roland's been doing guitar synthesizers for several years, and it's developing. It's getting better, but it's not really taking off. There's a company in Victoria called IVL that's building a MIDI pickup that you can install on any guitar. I spent a little time with that, and it's a very delicate, touchy thing. It's got to be set up just right; otherwise it won't work. They're talking about developing a piezo pickup. You'd just take off your bridge and put this bridge on, and it will work much more efficiently. This will be great when they get it together, but right now it's not that much better than the Roland. And with the Roland, you don't have the option of using the guitar of your choice.

Do you own a guitar synthesizer?

I have one of the Rolands. I got it because

Continued

ALEX LIFESON

I thought it would come in handy for some things, but I haven't really felt comfortable with it in an everyday kind of application. I don't mind tooling around with it and experimenting and doing stuff at home, but I'm not ready for all the hassles of using it on the road. It's a lot easier for me to play guitar and program things on an Emulator or a sequencer that can be triggered with a bass pedal, rather than trying to achieve those two things on a single instrument.

Is your playing expanding?

To be quite honest, I don't feel that it is right now. Maybe that's because we've just been on a long break and I'm just getting back into the swing of things. While I was home, I didn't really play that much. I had

just spent six months playing almost every day, and I was tired of the guitar and needed to get away from it. Otherwise, it would really be a boring thing for me. When I got home, I really didn't do anything for a month. I just relaxed and hung around the house. And then I started to clean up some of the guitars I had at home and in the studio, changing strings and polishing, little things like that. I sat in the studio and played for a couple of hours each day and got back into it. When we got closer to rehearsal time, I got more serious about getting back into shape. A good indicator for me is what I do in the tuning room, and at this point, I'm not doing anything that's really too fantastically different. It's just going through the motions of getting warmed up and limber.

How long do you play to warm up?

I spend about 40 minutes. I don't have any set things I play; it depends on my mood. I'm always by myself.

The band doesn't have a little jam before the show?

We do during soundcheck. On this tour, we've been so tight with soundcheck that we go in and just have enough time to do four songs, and then we make time available for Steve Morse to get a soundcheck.

How do you like touring with Steve?

First of all, he's one of the nicest guys I've ever met in my life. He's very sincere and straightforward. There's nothing pretentious about him at all. All the guys in the Steve Morse Band are great, actually. When we come in for soundcheck at 4:00, Steve's walking around playing his unplugged guitar. While their gear is being set up, he's still playing. They do their soundcheck, he walks offstage, kids come to talk to him, and he's still playing his guitar. He does clinics just about every day. Then, when we go on after his set, he's still playing his guitar while he watches our show. He's constantly playing, and it shows. He's an incredible guitarist. The audience reaction is good, and it's usually tough for our opening act. People who come to see us, come to see *us*. It's never been that important who's been the opening act, because it's mostly our audience. So it's a bonus for them to get a good opening act like the Steve Morse Band. The band is respected for their musicianship, and that's the reason that they do as well as they do.

Are there other current players you admire?

Win This Record [Elektra, 60178-1] by David Lindley is a real favorite of mine. I really like listening to that. He's such a happy guitarist.

Could you give some advice on surviving the road with talent and health intact? Some performers tend to get burned out.

I'd say the majority of them; it's so easy to fall into that. The biggest problem I find after 11 years of touring is being bored. Once you get bored, it's easy to depend on something else, whether it's drinking a lot or dope or whatever. It's really easy to fall into those things, and ultimately they go absolutely nowhere. Everybody likes to have a good time, but when it ends up taking over all your time, then that's a real problem. Geddy and I like to get up early and play racquetball or tennis. Exercise wakes you up and makes you feel a little healthier. Maybe you can go down for a swim, work out once or twice a week if the hotel has a gym, or go out to movies. I have watercolors with me, and I get into painting on the road. Neil rides his bike like mad when the weather's good. So, there are all sorts of things to do that keep your mind active and stimulated. I got *Shogun*—not because I wanted to read the book, but because it was long. I thought that it would keep me busy for a few weeks. Unfortunately, I got so into reading it, I'd get three hours of sleep and wake up at 7:00 in the morning to read. I finished it in a week,

Continued on page 154

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LETTERS

Continued from page 6

Will Shine" [out of print]. In 1975, Beck produced and recorded with the band Upp [Upp, Epic, KE 33439]. More recently, he was on *The Secret Policeman's Other Ball* [out of print] and the Honeydrippers' *Volume One* EP [Esperanza, 7 902201-B]; that's Jeff's guitar on the successful "Rockin' At Midnight" single. Lastly, Jeff performs the song "Sleepwalk" on the soundtrack for *Porky's Revenge* [Columbia, JS 39983]. For more avid collectors, there are some radio-station-only copies of the London ARMS concerts and a show at San Francisco's Cow Palace in 1983.

David Terralavoro
Poughkeepsie, NY

In response to Neil Haverstick's *The Art Of Freelance Guitaring* [Jan. '86], I know the struggles artists go through to obtain gigs and get respect since I am an agent or manager for some outstanding musicians. Yet the solution, especially with clubs, is not merely dressing yourself up for their act (that is, preparing for a compromise), but understanding that since owners and producers don't know or care about the music, and since this attitude can prevent an artist from being himself, efforts must be made to bring pressure to change these policies. Unless the status quo changes in order to replace the dollar as the bottom line, music itself will never be better off.

Alexander Lemsky
Denver, CO

I hope younger players take *The Art Of Freelance Guitaring* to heart. It's so important to learn the different playing styles, as well as just plain being prepared for the gig. I've been a working keyboardist for 20 years, but the instrument doesn't matter: The more you keep your head on straight and realize that there's more to the gig than your great four-bar solo, the more gigs you will play.

Ron Mills
Grand Island, NE

Look for more careers articles by Neil Haverstick in upcoming issues.

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Continued from page 102

which is quite fast for me, so I just picked up *Noble House*. It's always a search for something to do. I'm terrified of being bored.

A big-time rock career is often different from what kids imagine.

Oh, definitely! But I don't want to complain. Geddy and I were talking about this just the other night. We talked about what the time at home was like and what we would be doing if we weren't doing this. And we decided that we're really, really lucky. If you're going to have a job, this is a great job to have. It's got some downfalls and some

problems—one being boredom—but it's a great thing. It's not as glamorous or exciting as some people like to believe it is. But it's an illusion that they want to have, so that's fine. Let them have it.

Can too much commercial success endanger artistic skill?

It can, it has, and it always will—depending on the artist. I think a lot of bands that have become very successful like the taste of that stuff. They don't want to do anything to risk losing that, so they become stale and don't do anything that's new or exciting. We try to do it another way. ■

KAZUMI WATANABE

Continued from page 16

tend to change with climate. The Steinberger has a Roland pickup system, enabling me to use it with the Roland GR-700 synthesizer module, or MIDI to another synth.

You've been a consultant for Roland for a number of years. How does their latest guitar synth compare with earlier models?

The first time they made one—the GR-300—I tried to use it, but it didn't work so good. Then they made the GR-500, which was a little easier to play. I have the new GR-700, and it sounds good, but the tracking isn't perfect, which limits its use. I use it, but I am also MIDIing to a Yamaha TX-7 synth; it's a lot of fun because it enables you to do a lot.

Effects are an integral part of your music. How did you come to use them earlier and more extensively than most jazz players?

When I started to play jazz, I was a freak for Jimi Hendrix and how he used the wah-wah pedal, distortion, and the phase-shifting device. I like effects. It can get boring playing the same old chords, and I want my music to be more like a picture. When I play with a saxophonist, I want to have more colors for the background.

What are some of the effects that you use most often, and what amps do you prefer?

My signal chain is constantly changing, and it depends on what guitar I'm using. Basically, my rack includes a Yamaha TX-7 synthesizer, an Akai MD280 digital sampler disk drive, an Akai S612 MIDI digital sampler, a Roland SRV-2000 digital reverb, a Korg Sampling Digital Delay, a Lexicon PCM41 digital delay, a TC Electronic TC1140 parametric equalizer/preamp, and an Ibanez MIDI Effects Controller. I also use a volume pedal, a pitch transposer, and distortion. For stereo sound, I use a pair of Mesa/Boogie Mark-IIIB amps, which have 75 watts and 12" speakers.

Do you foresee using a guitar synth exclusively?

I don't think I'll ever use one all of the time. I'm still a guitar boy. In a small band, you can add a lot of color with a synthesizer; however, if you have a good keyboard player, it's not necessary to use a guitar synth. A big advantage of having a keyboardist is that I can play just guitar, including acoustic. But with a trio, I can hit a couple of chords on the synth, and while they're sustaining, I can

switch to another line with a straight guitar sound.

How did you get the idea to have Dunbar and Shakespeare play on your Mobo albums?

I'm a big fan of Grace Jones—I have a couple of her records that have Sly and Robbie on them, and I thought that I wanted to play with them some day. When I went to New York to record, one of the producers happened to know them very well. I wanted to experiment with having two rhythm sections on one song, so there's the Jamaican side and there's the New York side. When we started to play, I thought the combination was unbelievable. Sometimes, the two basses play in unison, which gives big power, and sometimes they play counter to each other—it's the same with having the two drummers. I also used that idea for *Mobo Club*.

In general, do Japanese players tend to copy American guitarists too much?

Like all guitarists, they copy Larry Carlton too much. You have to work to develop your own way of playing. For instance, once when I was doing a studio gig, the producer wanted me to play like Santana, but I didn't want to do it, so I put my guitar in the case and said good-bye. After that, I stopped doing studio work.

Are there any differences between Japanese and American musicians?

There are very good players on both sides of the Pacific. Japanese musicians have become great over the years. I've been lucky to play with American monsters like Marcus Miller, Michael Brecker, and Mike Mainieri. One difficulty I've had in Japan is in finding a good drummer for my style of music. Ponta Murakami, who's playing with me now, has a very good jazz concept.

What are your impressions of pop music in general?

Some I like, some I don't like. I don't know much about heavy metal. In Japan, there's the group Loudness, but the only thing I can say about them is "good name."

What makes you like a particular song or style of music?

I listen for a story—a music image or picture made up of space and dynamics. I want to hear new ideas—a new point of view beyond the traditional idea that everybody has. I try to tell a story with my music. For the future, I want to tour more in Europe and the U.S., because I want people to listen to my music and like it. ■

A SELECTED KAZUMI WATANABE DISCOGRAPHY

Solo albums (all on Gramavision except where noted): *Mobo Splash*, GR 18-8602-1; *Mobo Club*, GR 18-8506-1; *Mobo II*, GR 8406; *Mobo I*, GR 8404; *To Chi Ka*, Better Days, YX-7265-ND; *Kylyn Live*, Denon, 35C38-7135. **With others:** Lee Ritenour, *Mermaid Boulevard*, Inner City (50 S. Burkout St., Irvington, NY 10533), ICT 10533.