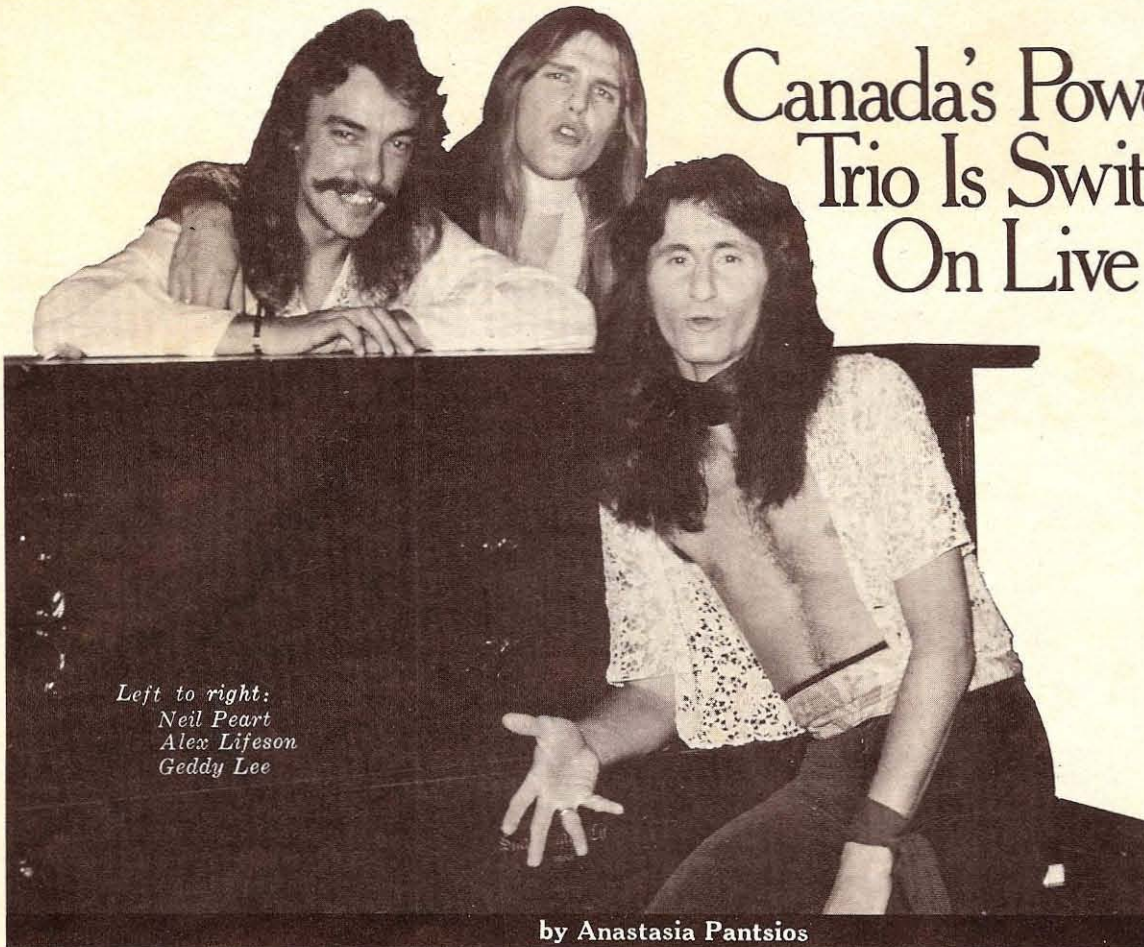


Rush Release

Canada's Power Trio Is Switched On Live



Left to right:
Neil Peart
Alex Lifeson
Geddy Lee

by Anastasia Pantsios

Oooh-yeah!" It's Rush on the rampage, a screaming hard rock band from Canada. Drummer Neil Peart is in back, flailing away in the heavy, ornamental style required of drummers in power trios. Golden-haired Alex Lifeson's guitar whines, and up front, bassist Geddy Lee gives forth with the shrill, screeching vocals that have given Rush its reputation as "Led Zeppelin Junior."

That's a first impression, but have you looked and listened lately? Neil Peart, who's the band's lyricist and is full of articulate, well-conceived explanations for every aspect of Rush's existence, suggests optimistically, "The connection with Led Zeppelin doesn't come so quickly anymore. 'Screaming hard rock band' is a limited assessment of our group."

And indeed it is. But first impressions die hard, and it takes a second look to realize how far the band has come since the release of its first album, *Rush*, back in 1974.

Now, the band is giving everyone an opportunity to see at a glance where it's come from and where it has arrived, via its newly released live set, *All the World's a Stage*, on Mercury. The two-record set presents the band's current hour-and-a-half headlining show in its entirety, a show that comprises material from all four of its Mercury albums—*Rush*, *Fly by Night*, *Caress of Steel*, and *2112*. *All the World's a Stage* was recorded during a three day stand from June 11-13 at Massey Hall in the band's native Toronto.

Why a live album now?

"With *2112*, we felt we had reached a first plateau. We had realized the goals we set for ourselves before the second album [when Peart replaced the band's former

drummer, John Rutsey]. Musically, it looked like a logical place to do a live album. We had four albums' worth of material honed down into a live show. And the record company was hot for a live album."

Peart feels that the live album will help present a more accurate picture of where the band is currently at.

"When we play a piece live, we add all our little quirks to it. It grows; our older material shows a remarkable progression. Some of the old songs have developed until they're superior to the originals. This gives us a chance to bring them up to date. We always felt there was something happening live that didn't come across on record. Now we have the opportunity to capture that essence of the band."

"Also, *All the World's a Stage* presents our material to people who may have heard or liked a couple of our songs, but never got into all our albums. Now they can have those songs together on one album without our having to put out a *Best of Rush* package."

The Canadian trio acquired their sticky label as just another screaming hard rock band back in 1974 when they leapt feet first into recording. That debut album emerged after five years of gigging around high schools and bars in southern Ontario. Finally, Lifeson, Lee and Rutsey decided it was time to move on and they entered a local studio to put down an album. Recording was done late at night and in short spurts due to lack of finances. Rutsey was on the verge of leaving. He had been the band's prime lyricist, and shortly the band was left in the lurch with an album's worth of music without words. Lee leapt into the void, hastily supplying lyrics, a task he didn't take to and which later

"After '2112' we felt we had reached a first plateau."

fell to Peart.

The resulting product was turned down by every record company in Canada and put out independently by the band's management on their own label, Moon Records.

By lucky accident, an import fell into the hands of Cleveland's trend-setting WMMS, where music director Donna Halper was instrumental in bringing the band to the attention of both Mercury Records and their American agency, ATI. Mercury released the Canadian album in the U.S. By that time, Peart had joined the band and the group had, for the first time, defined what it was attempting musically. The album was no longer truly representative of them, yet it was on that album that they first toured the U.S. and got shoved in a pigeon-hole.

Peart explains what happened to Rush at that point: "The first time the three of us got together there seemed to be an understanding. We wanted to achieve the same goals. Up until that time, there wasn't that seriousness. We realized that there are a lot of issues contingent to being a musician, a lot of choices to be made. That was when everything became professional. There was money in five figures involved.

"Most of the material on the first album had existed for five years—the band had played it around bars and high schools in Ontario. But with the second album, we wrote the material specifically for the album."

As the band discussed the territory it wanted to explore musically, the members found that, despite broad musical tastes, they shared an admiration of English progressive music—groups such as Yes, Genesis, Pink Floyd, the Moody Blues, and Supertramp.

"All of us are admirers of the English progressive wave. We looked at the roots we had, which was hard rock music. But we decided that there was a lot more we could do with it. We decided that what we wanted to do was a combination of progressive music and hard rock. I think we finally achieved that with the last album [2112]. The softer things and the harder things seem to have more continuity. *Caress of Steel* and *Fly by Night* were more experimental. So now it's time for us to set new goals."

Which are?

"Well, we've tossed around some formats and concepts. The last two albums have had one side devoted to a theme piece. I think our next album will have more space, giving us more room to spread out.

"We're expanding our individual sounds. Alex just got a double-neck guitar, and Geddy's been experimenting with Moog bass pedals. He's getting a double-neck too. I'll be using keyboard percussion, things like tubular bells."

Peart's lyrics especially show a debt to English cosmic/rock groups, with their sweeping range and grand ambitions. "2112," for instance, is the saga of an individual grasping for freedom in a highly regimented future society.

"I'd never thought seriously about writing lyrics until I joined this band," Peart admits, "and it became a necessity because no one else was doing it. I'm an avid reader though." Among his literary tastes are Tolkien, Ayn Rand, 18th century novelists like Hardy, science fiction, and mysteries. "Actually, I'm a high school dropout, but I've educated myself."

Rush's ability to emulate the musical approach of the keyboard-dominated English cosmic groups without duplicating their sound is one of the advantages Rush finds in remaining a guitar/bass/drums trio, a format that has fallen out of favor in the 70s.

It's a format that Rush is still enthusiastic about, and

Peart's got a handful of good reasons for that too.

"It's a nice extra challenge to us. I don't think we've taken it as far as it can go. It puts more responsibility on each of us. Trios were split in two waves. There were the progressive trios like Hendrix and Cream, and the garbage trios that gave them a bad name. Trios did a lot of beautiful things.

"This band has almost always been a trio. Back before I joined, it had a keyboard player or rhythm guitarist for brief periods. And we're always re-evaluating whether to add a fourth member. But we have such good interpersonal chemistry that we're afraid to upset it. I went from band to band before I joined this group and I've seen a lot of ego problems. This band is blessedly free from that."

Now that the band has defined its goals and, to its mind, achieved them in its blend of progressive sounds and conceptual lyrics with hard rock music, former doubters, the ones who tagged them "heavy metal screamers," have gone to hear them and come out surprised.

But the band isn't that worried about its unjustly shallow reputation. Peart insists sincerely, "The music we're playing is the music we honestly want to play. I like playing hard rock; it gives me a lot of scope. There have been inferior hard rock bands and people have used it to disguise a lack of talent.

"Our strongest point is our mentality, I think. The thing I love about this band is that we're honest. We're not in it purely as a matter of economics. It's fun and enjoyable. We would like to become rich, but that's not our sole objective. We don't see the point of trying to get a hit single by appealing to the lowest common denominator."

But the band considers itself lucky that so far it hasn't had to make any concessions.

"We've justified ourselves in the eyes of the scoffers—the people in the music business who, when we'd outline what we wanted to do, would sigh and roll their eyes toward heaven, taking a "word to the wise" attitude. They encouraged us to repeat what we'd already done. But we've encountered no undue opposition.

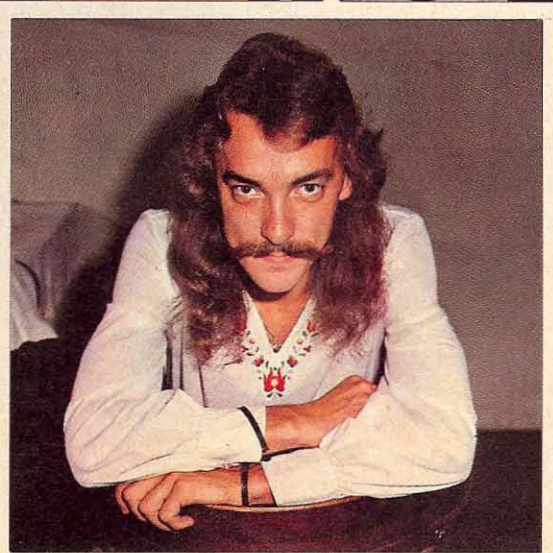
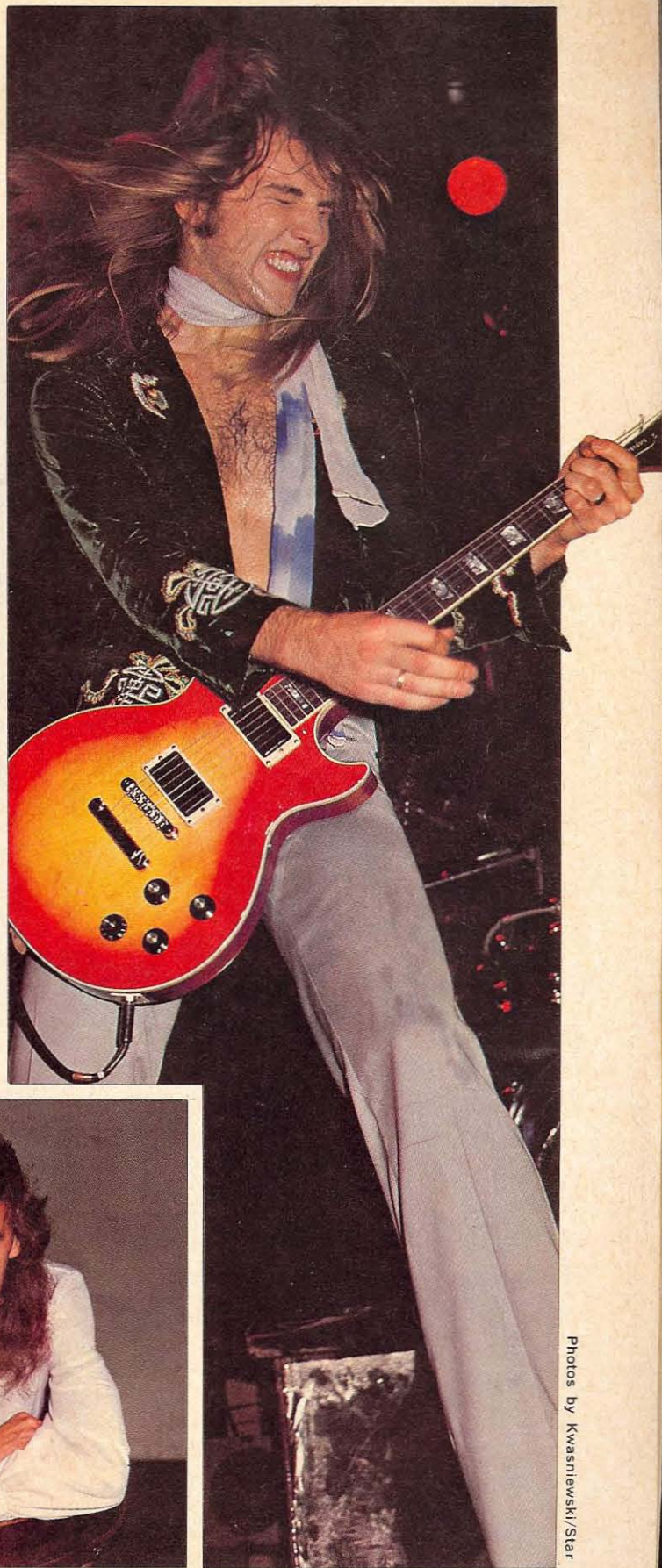
"We thought 2112 was an ambitious project. It's progressive and it takes more than a casual listen to appreciate it. But it outsold the other three albums by twice. The others were way back around the 100,000 mark. So far, 2112 is up to 260,000. Just when it was crucially important, we pulled through."

Touring has been critical to Rush's mounting popularity, so a live album is especially appropriate. "There are only two ways to be successful," Peart feels. "One is to have a hit single or a string of them. The other is to be around so much, to always be touring, so that you'll have to be noticed."

And Rush has been around a lot. In the past 20 months, they have toured around the U.S. almost constantly. A number of acts that took that route to success—Bob Seger, Kiss, Peter Frampton—broke out really big with a live album that showcased what they were best known for. Could the same thing happen to Rush?

"I'm very curious," says Peart. "But that's the record company's problem. We've got honest motives for putting out a live album now."

"I just re-read Ayn Rand's novel 'The Fountainhead' for the first time in years, and I'm relating it to the music business. It deals with corruption of the spirit. A lot of people outside music have no idea how much corruption there is under the shell. I like to feel that we're doing our part to change that through our music. And so far, we've managed to justify our ideals to the people in the music business—and they're the ones that count, because they're the ones in a position to hurt us."



Photos by Kwasniewski/Star

Since Rush plays English cosmic music without keyboards, the spacework falls to guitarist Alex Lifeson (right). Rush's literary lyricist Neil Peart (bottom) was a high school dropout. Opined one writer about the vocal style of bassist Geddy Lee (left, with Lifeson), "If his voice was any higher and raspier, his audience would consist exclusively of dogs and extraterrestrials." Above, the power trio in action.