

Another round of . . .

# RUSH 'N' ROULETTE

**The wise old owl of Rush, GEDDY LEE reflects on the band's enigmatic 20-year career with MR SPENCER. Never the critics' favourite, Geddy explains the mysterious secret of their quiet success and why they were once called fascists as they embark on their first UK tour in five years**

**A** CURIOUS phenomenon are Rush, together now for an amazing 20 years, with 15 albums and a massive worldwide following to their name, and yet, to the majority of people, they remain either reviled or totally unknown.

"It's sometimes fun to follow a band that's not well liked," says singer Geddy Lee, who considers Rush to be the biggest underground band in existence.

"It's like a challenge, like swimming upstream. I know that I used to follow a lot of obscure groups when I was young and I took a great pride in that, and as soon as they got too popular it was almost . . . a negative thing.

"You could call it snobbery in a way - You can't like these cos these are my band.

"I think that still goes on and it's healthy, it's natural, it's fine and it's probably what's kept us going in a lot of parts of the world."

**G**EDDY'S IN London, together with his comrades in Rush, fellow Canadians Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart, for their first British tour in five years.

It's not been easy tracking Geddy down. He's a shy, gentle, softly-spoken man, and he makes no bones about his strong dislike of the whole interview process. Exposing your soul to strangers is painful, and besides, after you've been stitched up a few times you start wondering if it's worth the bother.

The funny thing is, the loyalty of Rush fans is such that the band don't actually need to do interviews: it's a whopper of a cliché, but as far as this particular group's faithful legions are concerned it's true - the music speaks for itself.

Rush have never been the critics' choice. From their early days spent bashing out Stones, Who and Hendrix covers, to their discovery of Led Zeppelin and the joys of heavy rock in '69, right through the '70s and their fixation with grandiose, semi-philosophical fantasy rock, and finally into the '80s, easing up on the pomp, flirting with the pop charts and chopping off all their hair. But they stubbornly flourish, regardless.

Both the current single, 'Prime Mover', and the album from which it comes, 'Hold Your Fire', are indicative of Rush's more accessible modern sound - a captivating blend of their older, almost-classical approach and something veering surprisingly close to commercial viability.

They've always had a knack of producing music that makes your

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**- Geddy Lee**

insides somersault in excitement, but nowadays, instead of relying on technical wizardry and class musicianship for its impact, Rush's music relies on technical wizardry, classy musicianship and good tunes.

"We're still not what you'd call a household name," points out Geddy. "I can still proudly say we haven't had a hit single, and I still don't think Rush fit into the scheme of things, we never have done. Somewhere along the line we're providing something that people out there relate to."

You seem to be progressing from dealing with massive, mind-boggling matters to a more personal, human approach; you're even talking about relationships these days.

"We're sounding slightly more 'interior', yeah, I'd say that's true. But there are always big questions that

we're trying to answer, and I think there's a lot of different ways of answering them and a lot of places to look for those answers; I mean, the places where we look are changing as we get older.

"You have a tendency to believe it's all happening outside of you when you're young, but as time goes on you realise it's a little closer to home."

You've yet to write a love song though.

"I think I've written hundreds of love songs," he smiles.

But your romance seems to be with the power of nature rather than one in the conventional sense.

"Well, nature and human nature. You're right to a degree, but we live in a very packaged world, we're all programmed to expect certain things to be in certain ways, and my idea of a love song and yours are two different things. People find great comfort in familiarity; it's like no two people's relationships are the same. I don't even know if two people's ideas of what something should be are ever the same - and thank goodness for that, it'd be a really boring place if they were."

**H**IS BEING responsible for some of the wordiest rock of the last 20 years has led many Rush fans to regard Geddy Lee as something of an intellectual. Likewise, his role in the creation of the band's tremendously strident and uplifting music leads some admirers to treat him as a kind of guru.

Being the quietly intelligent type,

Geddy certainly has more than a trace of the wise old owl about him. Does he find people look to him for salvation?

"Well, I think that's a function of youth. It's so hard to be young because you're always looking for some kind of answer, and I think that's why we all have heroes at that age - that's why we *still* have heroes, because we're still looking for those answers.

"If you're attracted to a song, or a book, or if you've seen a movie that touches a part of you, you have a tendency to conclude that the person who provided you with that feeling can assist you in your search, it's quite natural."

How do you deal with being approached in such a way?

"You can't deal with it, it's totally unreal. You don't look at yourself like that, otherwise you wouldn't be able to get your head inside a room, you know? So you have a tendency to either ignore it or downplay it or pretend it's not happening, because it's embarrassing to be confronted with that kind of situation - and you appreciate it because you've been through it yourself.

"It's inevitable, it comes with the territory, and it's up to your tactical ability to get around it."

What's the most common misapprehension people have about Rush?

"They think we're deadly serious all the time. I think that's really silly and, like we were just saying, some fans have this tendency to attach a sort of mythical, mysterious vibe to us, which





**GEDDY LEE: Once held up to ridicule... only once?**

really is a load of crap.

"Alex Lifeson, for example, I think is the funniest man alive. So that's the basic misapprehension about us, that we're all terribly serious because our songs maybe aren't about average teenage lust or something."

I'm dying to know what you find so funny about Alex Lifeson.

"Everything, he's just a very funny guy, a great sense of humour, really off the wall, and we do spend a lot of our time with each other. In fact, our humour's probably one reason why

we're still a band.

"I mean, I've known Alex for so many years, there's so much history between us, and yet we can still jump into the limo and drive out to Birmingham and goof all the way there."

It's hard to imagine you goofing around in such a way, do you tell each other jokes or what?

"You gotta be there, what can I say? Maybe the humour doesn't always come out in our music, but there are moments when it's certainly present for us. I think, if anything, we're guilty of being too subtle with the humour in our work, because when we do get down to writing and recording it is serious business to us, especially if we're writing about something important.

"I believe in taking what you do very seriously but not taking yourself that seriously; there's a time for both."

**ONE PERSON** who overlooked the lighter side of Rush was the writer from a British rock paper who, in the mid-'70s, threw a sizeable spanner in the band's then accelerating machine by listening to their powerful music, looking at their (then) strongly emblematic, Utopian imagery and concluding the worst: Rush were fascists.

"It was such a bunch of crap," recalls Geddy, who comes from a family of Polish Jews. "I got over that a long time ago, but at the time it really bothered me. The guy who wrote that story was such an asshole, let's face it, he didn't know what the hell he was talking about."

Power can, after all, be a liberating rather than oppressive force.

"It's emotional, and in a sense to play it - yes, it's a very liberating style of music, almost like an exorcism in a way, you can really get a lot of demons out of your body.

"I mean, that kerrang sound, it feels good from where I'm standing," he laughs. "Who knows what it is? Who knows if every time you smash that chord you're just getting back at your mother for yelling at you, you know? And who cares? But I can tell you it's not evil. People are evil, music isn't."

At the time of the controversy you were heavily into the books of right wing authoress, Ayn Rand, whose ideas were rubbing off on some of your writing.

"That's mostly what the whole thing was about and, let's face it, we're talking about a long time ago.

"We were very much into that at the time, but as you grow older you change, you temper your attitude towards certain things and you learn to retain the good things that you've read, and you've got more input, all the time, so your consciousness just grows."

The trouble is, people in the public eye aren't allowed to change.

"That's why I always respected Pete Townshend. He was never afraid to come out strongly about something.

**CONTINUES PAGE 41**



# RUSH

## FROM PAGE 23

and then five years later he'd go, Well, that was five years ago, I've changed. And that's fair enough, that happens, it's only natural."

Did you ever do things which embarrassed you years later?

"Oh, just a couple of hundred things. In a sense every time you get a certain distance from a record it's a little embarrassing; it's funny because you're proud and you're embarrassed. You're proud because you go, Wow, I got it together to do that, you know, 'ten years ago', and at the same time you're cringing because it's like looking at an old high school picture, or looking at the first song you wrote in high school ages ago.

"But you can usually reconcile it and, if you're analytical about it, you can rationalise it as well."

Are there any songs you can no longer bring yourself to perform?

"There probably are, but we haven't played them in so long that doing them now would probably be sort of fun.

"I think that goes for '2112' and a lot of those older numbers. I mean, you can't play them with the same stance you had when you wrote them; it's too long ago and we're totally different musicians now. So you play them, but your attitude is a little more light-hearted, you start to imitate yourself playing them.

"Taking the piss out of yourself I guess you'd call it here."

**G**EDDY, A big fan of Monty Python and "Borscht-belt" comedy, spends his spare time reading, visiting art galleries and supporting his local baseball team, the Toronto Blue Jays. He dreams of playing centre-field for the Blue Jays, and best of all he'd love "... to be able to hit 400, a throwing-over hitter".

When you used to sing about strange new worlds and distant star-systems, I never guessed you'd be a baseball fan. My mental image was always of you travelling from planet to planet, galaxy to galaxy. . .

"Yeah, I think we did on a few evenings!"

Do you ever wince when you're looking at old pictures of Rush?

"Of course. Why, yeah. I mean, don't you?"

But you were actually held up to public ridicule because of your fleecy haircut?

"Well, it's funny now because you can take a look at that haircut and then you look at most of these heavy metal bands - they all have that haircut now, and this is '88, so I guess that says a lot about trends."

Was style more important to you in the '70s than it is now?

"I don't think it was ever really important, we were never a fashionable band, and we weren't that interested in fashion. I think probably we're better dressers now than we were back then, I'm not sure what that means, but. . ."

Can you foresee a day when Rush will finally end?

"I can see it, I can't tell you when it'll be, but I can tell you we're closer to the end than we are to the beginning."

Will it be a sad day?

"It'll be a sad and beautiful day."

You could be right.