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Rockin' at the Arena

Rocker John Mellencamp returned to Winnipeg Arena last night, playing to about 11,000 excited fans who stayed on their feet throughout much of the Indiana rocker's show. Mellencamp and his band ran through many of his hits in a show that was to last over two hours. See Stephen Ostick's review of the concert in tomorrow's paper.

Jazz family plays hard on gridiron, too

Canadian Press

CALGARY — To explain what it was like growing up in the most eminent family in contemporary jazz, Branford Marsalis tells a story that's set on the gridiron, not in a rehearsal hall.

The children of Ellis and Delores Marsalis include saxophonist Branford, trumpeter Wynton and producer-trumpetist Delfeayo. All three are at the vanguard of contemporary jazz.

Yet father Ellis — himself a jazz pianist and respected music historian — wasn't a conventional motivator, says his eldest son.

"We were playing little-league football against a team much bigger

than us," Marsalis recalled in a telephone interview.

"Our coach didn't show up. My dad was there just to see the game, but he became the coach.

"My dad didn't come out there and say, 'C'mon baby, you can do it.' My dad said, 'We should get our... whipped, but if we do this right we just might win.' And we almost won that game. We lost by one point."

Loves competition

Explains Marsalis: "(Ellis) just loves competition. . . . There is pressure to succeed in my family, but it is not spoken, nor is there the threat of being disowned if you don't succeed. In my family, the best you can do is the only

acceptable scenario."

Branford Marsalis comes across as the most free-spirited member of the performing family.

He is as excited talking about "the great basketball courts" in Calgary as he is about his new recording, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. And he has been more willing than his siblings to apply his talents to non-jazz projects. He was an integral member of Sting's first post-Police band — and this involvement with the pop superstar angered Ellis, Wynton and Delfeayo.

Responds Marsalis: "I don't accept the mainstream on its own terms. As long as the artist I'm working with thinks the same way,

we don't have a problem."

And he's being touted as Doc Severinsen's replacement as band leader on *The Tonight Show* when Jay Leno replaces host Johnny Carson this spring.

"The Tonight Show isn't a certainty because we haven't signed the contracts yet. Everybody assumes it is because Jay (Leno) went on saying, 'He's the guy.'"

"Business is all that's keeping the contract from being signed.

"But if I do take the job, I wouldn't be touring. I won't miss it.

"I have been in it for 12 years in a row. That's longer than I have done anything in my life."

Rush discovers it has a future in music trade

By Jim Abbott
Orlando Sentinel

It has taken them 17 years, but the members of Rush have finally acknowledged that the band has a future in the music business.

"We really have never looked to a long future until now," drummer Neil Peart said by phone from a New Orleans tour stop. "We've always said, 'OK, we'll make the next record' or 'We'll do the next tour,' and that's as far as we ever looked ahead."

"Now we realize that this band is all we need. As individuals, everything that we want to accomplish as musicians or writers we can do within this band."

Peart, singer-bassist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson adopted the new attitude during recording sessions for their 18th album *Roll the Bones*, which focuses on the random nature of the human condition.

Fittingly, Peart said that he got the idea for the album's theme by chance while toying with lyrics about being dealt a wild card.

"It just came out of nowhere, honestly. Suddenly, it struck me. Then I started thinking about it more and realizing how many wild cards there are in each of our lives and how you're faced with a choice — just like in a card game."

Wild card

"You can be dealt the wild card and you can turn it down — or you can jump on it. That's part of the 'roll the bones' aspect, too. When opportunity knocks, do you answer or do you pretend you're asleep? Even when luck comes your way, you have a choice how you respond to it."

But Peart concedes that when a band has existed as long as Rush, there is more involved than luck.

"There's a discipline and a restraint factor that comes into it, so that when you do have disagreements, you handle them in a mature and productive way."

"If you disagree on something, you have to decide in your own mind first. 'Is this worth having a fight about? Is this worth the band breaking up over, or should I find a more positive way to introduce this note of discord?' Those kinds of little decisions that you make on a day-to-day basis really do affect the long-term."

Peart said that it's similar to the compromises that must be made in a romantic relationship — a scenario he addresses in *Ghost of a Chance*, the latest *Roll the Bones* single. Peart is proud that the song goes beyond the cliched idea of starry-eyed romance.

"*Ghost of a Chance* really offers some clues into long-term relationships — not only for mates but also for a band — in the sense that you just make it last. . . ."

"It debunks a lot of the sentimental love songs in saying that love at first

sight is not going to last forever and be made in heaven and all that. People drift together by accident, and if they are attracted to each other, that's the easy part. The hard part is making it last."

It would seem Rush is making it last. The group has enjoyed consistent chart success over the years with such albums as *A Farewell to Kings* (1977), *Hemispheres* (1978), *Permanent Waves* (1980) and *Presto* (1989). Peart credits the band's staying power to the fact that all three members enjoy equal creative input.

No frustrations

"There are no frustrations hanging over," he said. "At the end of a record, there isn't one guy that's left with five of his songs not getting used. With me writing the lyrics and the other two writing music, everybody is involved."

He said that the band also has managed to avoid such pitfalls as over-inflated egos, choosing instead to cultivate a group image.

"Those pressures do play a larger part in tearing bands apart than I think is often admitted or understood by other people," Peart said. "There are those problems of pride and ego — and not even to the extreme sense. I just mean in the small day-to-day sense of anyone in any working situation really, if you feel that you're not really being appreciated, your work isn't being used and somebody else is getting more attention."

Those are common aspects of human nature and human life, I think, that hold more true in a band because it's such a concentrated environment of just a few people trying to work together creatively over a period of time."

In concert, members of Rush have traditionally attempted to duplicate the studio versions of their songs on stage. But this time around, they are loosening up.

"We said it's time to get out of that and take a few chances," Peart said. "So when we were putting this tour together, we started immediately playing with the arrangements of the new songs and putting some spontaneous bits in them."

Learning process

"At this point, we feel that we can really perform a song as well live as it is on the record, so we have to push ourselves beyond that. It's just an on-going learning process and refinement of what you're really supposed to be doing."

While the rigors of the road also can take a toll on a band, Peart, 39, said that Rush has learned how to manage the stress.

"We actually enjoy it a lot more than we did even 10 years ago," he said of touring. "We're much more in control of it now, and we understand what a good balance of work and freedom is."

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