

After 20 years, Rush gets a rush performing

By KIRA L. BILLIK Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The cover of Rush's latest album, "Counterparts," shows things that can't exist alone, such as a nut and bolt.

The CD itself showcases three other things that haven't existed apart for the past 20 years: drummer-lyricist Neal Peart, guitarist Alex Lifeson, and bassist-singer Geddy Lee.

Peart attributes the Canadian band's longevity to a combination of Lifeson's spontaneity, Lee's "melodic instinct" and "meticulous passion," and his own "obsessive drive."

"We root each other and we uproot each other," said Peart.

Rush has been pushing the envelope of progressive rock since its first self-titled album in 1974, combining sonic power and intricacy with lyrical integrity and intelligence. Lee's bass playing has influenced countless musicians to take the instrument out of its strictly rhythmic role and into a melodic one.

They've done everything from concept albums ("2112") to live albums ("All the World's a Stage," "Exit... Stage Left," "A Show of Hands"). Their classic, "Tom Sawyer," from 1981's "Moving Pictures," is still one of the most requested songs on rock radio. Rush has done 18 records, including a double disc anthology in 1990, "Chronicles."

The band's 19th effort is pared down, less dependent on technology and more reliant on the natural sound of guitar, bass and percussion. The band brought back Peter Collins, who had done their more heavily produced records, "Power Windows" (1985) and "Hold Your Fire" (1987), but this time, they wanted simplicity.

The formula seems to have worked — "Counterparts" debuted at No. 2 on Billboard's album charts, the band's highest debuting album ever.

Peart is Rush's wordsmith, and he is fascinated with the concept of yin (the passive and negative female force) and yang (the active and positive male force). He can use a nature metaphor one minute, a technical one the next.

He's also a disciplined writer who favors restraint as opposed to what he calls "unabashed emotionalism."

"Here's a lovely example: people always think, 'Oh, it must be so healthy psychologically to be a drummer because you can just smash things all the time,'" Peart said. "Well, you can't. You have to control yourself. You have to smash them at the right time with the right intensity and a sense of flow. ... I never feel released when I'm playing drums — I just feel tremendously disciplined."

"Counterparts" deals with personal issues: the nature of love ("The Speed of Love," "Cold Fire"); ambition ("Cut to the Chase"); and Carl Jung's concept of the masculine animus and the feminine anima ("Animate").

But Peart says it's not conventionally introspective, but more a combination of personal experience and imagined situations.

"That's really a style of lyricism that I congenially dislike," he said with a laugh. "I'm not really fond of self-revelation in lyrics because I think it's a bit indulgent."

Peart's mind works as deftly as his drum patterns. He speaks of Jung, T.S. Eliot, politics, history, his fascination with Chinese and African culture and his love of cycling in rapid succession.

"These songs grow out of reading and conversations and thinking and driving and collecting phrases," he said.

He keeps a journal while traveling and says he has years worth of material gathered. And he finds certain themes repeating themselves.

"That little gateway between innocence and experience I find I'm always coming back to readdress," he said. "The nature of ambition, for instance, gets examined in some way or another on probably nearly every record."

Critics call Rush stuffy and pompous, and they tend to be a band people either love or can't stand. But their seriousness often masks their humor.

On the "Roll the Bones" tour, two huge inflatable rabbits (echoing the cover of their 1989 album, "Presto") arose from the sides of the stage and bobbed along in time to "Tom Sawyer." And the title of their live album, "Exit... Stage Left," was in deference to the cartoon character Snagglepuss.

Peart admits that 20 years of touring has taken its toll, and the band has discussed giving it up.

"I always tend to push for continuing to tour because I think it's so important a part of a vital band," he said. "I think for the risk-taking aspect, for the discipline of playing at a hundred percent night after night, playing live takes you to a level that you would never willingly drive yourself to."

Garfunkel still enjoys sharing his soothing sounds

By JANCEE DUNN Rolling Stone magazine

Most Art Garfunkel clichés are true — he's intelligent, intense and painfully sensitive. Some aren't — anyone would look 6-foot-7 next to Paul Simon.

At 50, Garfunkel seems eerily unchanged, a Phillies cap perched on top of his explosion of blond hair. But the quiet half of S&G is, in fact, weathering major changes these days — he's cutting his first studio album in nearly six years, "Up til Now"; chasing after his 2-year-old son, James; and touring with Paul Simon as part of the Concert Event of a Lifetime, Simon's career retrospective.

Over coffee in New York City, Garfunkel talks.

Q: Would you describe your album as a retrospective?

A: It's a grab bag. The album is half new stuff — I did a wonderful James Taylor duet, "Crying in the Rain." But a lot of it is underproduced. There are a bunch of one-offs, as the English would say, on the album. I found a first take of the song.

Q: What do you think of Conan O'Brien?

A: Well, every time I tune in, I feel for the guy. He's still a bit nervous. Why?



Art Garfunkel

A: I find it interesting. One can go 50-50 on Conan. I like him, yeah. I root for him to make it. Because he's a live, vulnerable human being.

Q: What prompted the inclusion of "The Breakup" (S&G's mock announcement of their breakup) on the album?

A: I did it one day some years ago when I wandered into the studio where Paul was working and I was in a Nicholson mood. I'm so tired of hearing about Simon and Garfunkel friction and trouble. And the truth is, we go so far back to-

gether that we're in a life bond here. It's corny to talk about the sweet side, but there's an enormous amount of love in this old friendship. We're sort of old Jewish souls.

Q: How has it felt to be onstage with Paul once again?

A: I longed to do this for quite a while. And thanks to the "Unplugged" age — and Paul's openness to two voices and one guitar — we can finally play less-is-more, the way I love it. I love to produce that sound with him — timeless; nothing changes.

Q: How do you summon the emotion after singing the same song a thousand times?

A: When they applaud the opening of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," I'm standing back receiving the applause, but I'm thinking, "I'm about to talk about when we're down. And don't I know about down? Don't I have my hurt? Doesn't everybody in the audience have serious hurts?" It's all quite real.

And if I can give them a soothing sound and, with the luck of wind, through my soul create a visceral moment as a singer, why can't I again and again say, if we feel this, "Let me, through the luck of the gods, be just a comfort for one song." And that's what goes

through my mind.

Q: You're freaking me out a bit here, Art.

A: I'm not part of the cynical age. Does precious have to be a sentimental word? Does that have to be a bad thing? Let's actually be, think; let's entertain; let's touch each other; let's be as real as we can, just for fun. Want more coffee?

Q: Thanks. What's going on with you on the acting front?

A: I'm torn between wanting to do it again, because I've had fun acting, and I have a feel for it, and being a bit of an elitist as to what's out there. I'm reading a script now, and they said Harvey Keitel looks like he's gonna do it. So we'll see where that goes.

Q: Any dream roles?

A: J.D. Salinger wrote a collection of unpublished short stories that came into my hands. One is magnificent. It's about a young man who loses his way in his male-female relationships as he ages. And there's something so sympathetic about this guy, and the dichotomy between his worthiness and his lossiness touches me to the max.

Q: A little-known fact about you is that you've been walking across the U.S. in 100-mile increments.

A: There's so many little-known facts. My mom, she's 81. She's fall-

en in love with a younger man, six years after my father died. People don't know these things.

Paul Simon's birthday is coming up. I'm very proud of the gift I have for him. It's a magic wand with little stars in it, and a tiny, tiny little Elvis in gold lame is in there, and you have to find Elvis.

Q: You know he won't get duplicates of that. So back to walking.

A: Years ago, I hatched the notion of walking across the U.S. So before I knew it, I had the New Balance sneakers on, left my apartment, and eight days later I was in Pennsylvania. I'm almost up to Butte, Mont., now. I've made about 20 legs on my trip over seven or eight years.

Q: Don't you have a master's degree in architecture from Columbia?

A: No, I did years of architecture at Columbia because I never could pick a major. I went on to graduate school in mathematics and got a master's in that. I love numbers, and I play with percentages all the time.

Q: For instance?

A: Well, if Lenny Dykstra is batting .428, but he gets one more out, I can calculate quickly how much his batting average is going to drop.

Q: So it's useful.

A: Absolutely.

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