



A Canadian Chart Rush

By Jon Sutherland

Rush is a Canadian three piece that has travelled many a long tour and endured the harrassment of commercial success. Their individual talents are unquestioned. Each member is a magnificent musician in the progressive hard rock sense. Neil "the immaculate" Peart is as timely and interesting a drummer now playing. He is a part of a triangle that includes Alex Lifeson on all imaginable guitar creations and Geddy Lee on bass, lead vocals, synthesizers and many effects. Through eight albums their sound has grown and matured to the pinnacle of their profession. *Permanent Waves* is by far the band's most successful album to date. Arguably it is their best but many a Rush fan can tell you how good *2112*, *A Farewell To Kings*, and *Hemispheres* are. Geddy Lee spoke openly to **Record Review** about the principles of Rush's foundation, their recording history, and future plans.

How's the tour going?

Fine.

A lot of one nighters?

Yeah.

In the past few albums Rush has used a particular story line or the familiar concept album technique. Why switch in *Permanent Waves*?

You can only go so long before you have

to do something else. There comes a point when you find yourself falling into a certain pattern and it becomes time to shake your head loose and do something else. As far as the 'conceptual album' we've done that. We've taken it to its logical limit and it's time for us to do something else. We may return to it again if the time is right.

Quite frequently conceptual albums, especially a series of them, tend to become compared to themselves. It adds some pressure.

The pressure is not the important thing. The important thing is to keep improving. We've tried a few long pieces and once we'd done it properly we thought what's the sense of doing another one right now. It's like walking on a treadmill.

One thing I have noticed in the evolution of Rush is the tremendous improvement and range developed by all three players.

Our first priority has always been as musicians and we've tried to get better every year and with each album. That's the whole reason for a band. The better a musician you become the more you can apply that to your songwriting. Those are pretty simple goals.

I have thought it would be a tremendous advantage for you and Alex to have a drummer that writes, does a lot of lyrics, and it is such a brilliant player like Neil Peart.

Yes it is. When you have three people

thinking along the same musical lines it makes the number three a nice number of people to work with.

What kind of music do you listen to? I can't remember Rush ever speaking of any influences.

We've had a lot of influences during stages of our career. Very early on it was obviously Led Zeppelin, Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, that was definitely our beginning influences. Then as British music progressed like Yes and Genesis, people of that ilk were more in the forefront. To pin down any influences I would say basically progressive British rock music.

Rush has never ever done covers. Every song on every album has been original.

Yes.

You would never consider doing that would you.

I don't know if we would. We've never even talked about it. I imagine if a songwriter came up with an interesting song that we felt very, very strongly about then maybe we'd do it.

It's never occurred to the band?

No because we enjoy writing ourselves.

Sometimes that can make it a problem to establish yourself commercially. It takes time to develop an identity in a crowded arena such as hard rock. Rush came up the hard way, touring, maintaining originality, and sticking to the goals it made for itself.

I don't know that that is the hard way.

Rush (from left): Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart, Geddy Lee

It's not necessarily a bad way to do it though. You don't have to compromise. And the longer it takes and the slower it takes the more you learn on the way. It's the trip that you're into not the getting there.

What's up for Rush in the future? You'll finish the tour...

It's a long tour. We'll do the U.S. and Canada up until about June then we're going to Europe again.

Back to the three-piece questions. Do you ever find being a three-piece a limitation? All of the embellishments and special arrangements; does that ever make you want to add musicians for the tour?

No. We've managed so far. It's a lot of running around and I've got a complicated set-up. I have a couple of synthesizers that I trigger with my feet. It's a crazy set-up and it keeps it interesting and on your toes.

Have you added much to the show visually?

It's basically the same presentation but every year it expands with more visual effects.

Is there a special formula that the band uses in songwriting? Do you all write together? How does a Rush album get put together?

There is no real normal way. They've all been different.

How about *Permanent Waves*?

Permanent Waves was put together in the most traditional Boy Scout way. There was a lot of preparation involved. It was the first time that we were this prepared. Everything except "Natural Science" was written before we went into the studio. We wrote that while we were recording.

We went out to this farm during the summer after we'd had a month's holiday and we wrote all of the tunes together. Then we did a short tour of about three weeks and we went into the studio.

Did you have a chance to do anything from *Permanent Waves* on the tour in getting ready for the studio?

We played a couple of them. We did the tour with the specific idea of doing the songs and working the bugs out of them and see how they would go over.

The vocals on *Permanent Waves* are more toned down, more accessible. You came down from some of the higher ranges and changed the style. Why did you do that?

My voice is an instrument. It definitely fits the bill for what we are doing. The material on this album required a different sort of style which I sort of got into. It is very difficult to sing very high.

Like on *2112* I would think the vocals would be very difficult to perform live.

Yeah it was and it taught me a lot of things about my voice. But as far as the vocal styling on this album it was nice to bring it down a notch and sing in a speaking tone; it was a pleasant change for me.

I would think it would really help open up Rush to a lot more people. On

***Permanent Waves* there is one curious little endeavor. The reggae flash.**

The song it's from represents the radio and we wanted to do several different styles. The reggae part is a part of music now and the little riff is something we have been trying to figure out how to sneak in for a long time. (laughs) The tune seemed to be the right opportunity for that.

***Permanent Waves* is another Rush statement where long instrumental passages can wander but the melody will still remain coherent. A lot of bands when they play hard and fast can really lose it.**

Well the key to a successful piece of music is its melodic line. That is something we've been continually working on. I don't



'The studio is a really strange animal'

— — Lee

think it's something you perfect, I think it is something you keep getting better at that's honing down a sense of melody. It's just a matter of how complex you allow a piece of music to get. There has to be a strong melody to tie it together like a thread running through a piece of music to keep the interest there.

Let's trace Rush's history a little if we could. The first three albums settle pretty nicely into the heavy metal bracket. *2112* was the door opener in America for you.

Yeah it was our first successful album and piece of music that was longer than ten minutes as well. It was a very important and passionate album for us. It was a very important album for us to do at the time. Because at the time we were under a lot of pressure to write hit singles. That album was a way of saying "leave us alone."

***Farewell To Kings* to me was when your bass guitar took on a greater prominence. It became more of a lead instrument and focal point.**

Yeah that was the first album where I attained the bass sound in the direction of the sound I wanted. In the studio we controlled the environment instead of it controlling us.

You produced that with Terry Brown didn't you?

Yeah. The studio is a really strange animal. You can go in so and the studio will dictate what it's going to sound like. In *Farewell To Kings* it was the first time we had gone away to record. It was a real nice setting, outdoors for some of it. We had the opportunity to say 'this is the kind of sound we want to get.' That was the first album where the production was in the ballpark as to the way we wanted to sound like.

It made sense looking back now that hanging out that long without compromising you would eventually win.

Yeah (laughs). That's what everyone likes to think.

There was more exploring on *Hemispheres*, more keyboards, additional instruments...

It was a very ambitious album actually. We wrote that whole album in the studio. It took us about eleven weeks to finish it and it was a monumental effort on our part. Because of the complexity it was something we learned a hell of a lot from but it took a lot out of us too. By the time we finished that album we felt that a part of our brain and heart was on the cover of the album. (laughs)

We did learn an incredible amount about sound and what we could do like using the studio to achieve the sound you really want. Some of the things on our albums that end up being songs started out as experiments.

The fact that we wrote it in the studio meant we had to write it, rehearse it and record it in a very short period of time. We had to sound like we'd been playing it for three months where in actuality we'd only been playing it for a few days. *Permanent Waves* was a reaction to that. We took time off before we wrote, we did everything slowly and carefully and it's a much more pleasant way to record.

Are you going to take *Permanent Waves* to Japan? I think the climate would really be ripe for Rush to tour there.

There's talk about going at the end of the year. I would like to go.

What happens after the tour?

At some point of the English tour we're going to record for another live album. We'll probably do most of the material we've done since our last live album.

Recording and playing live is going to be pretty consuming. You guys are pretty ambitious buggers.

It's a good way to be 'ey. (laughs)

Are you surprised about how well *Permanent Waves* is doing now?

Oh yeah. I really don't understand the charts and the nature of that animal. We had pretty much given up on that aspect a long time ago but it is pleasant. It's something you can't really put too much credence in. It's better to keep your priorities straight and do what we do because we intend to be making albums for a long time to come. If one happens to be a hit and another doesn't that's great it's still not going to stop us from making the next one.