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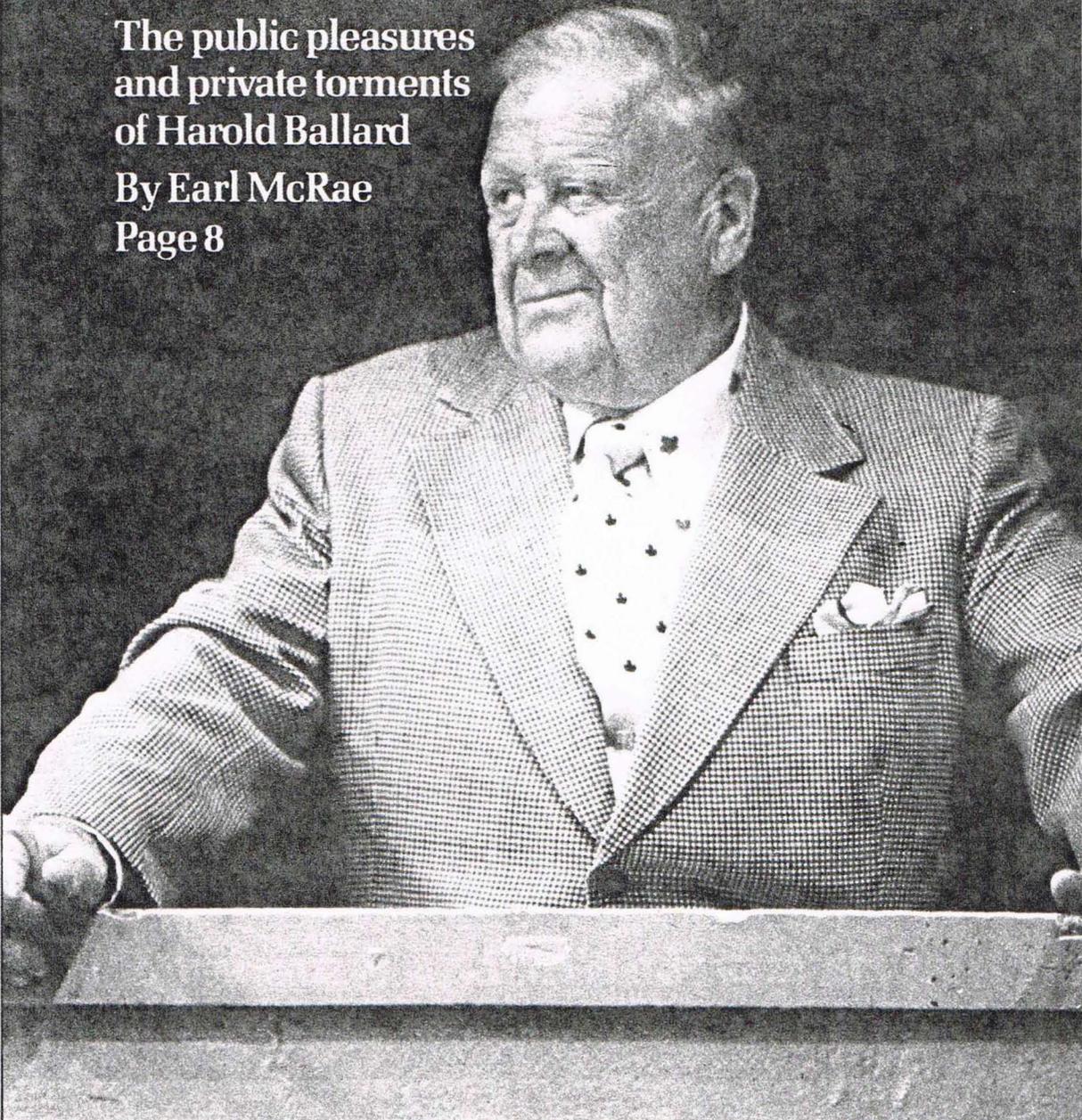
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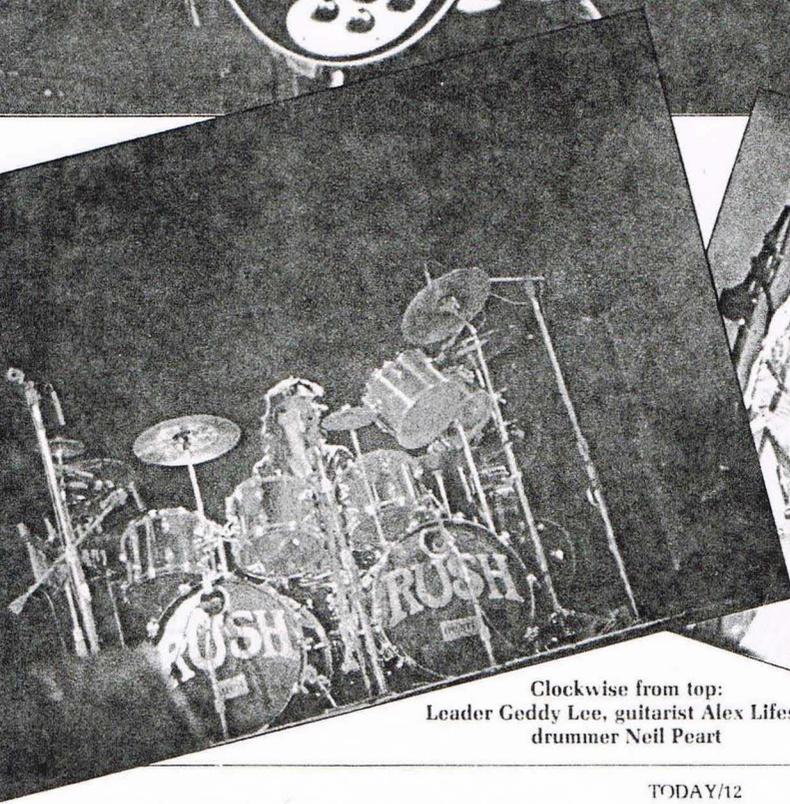
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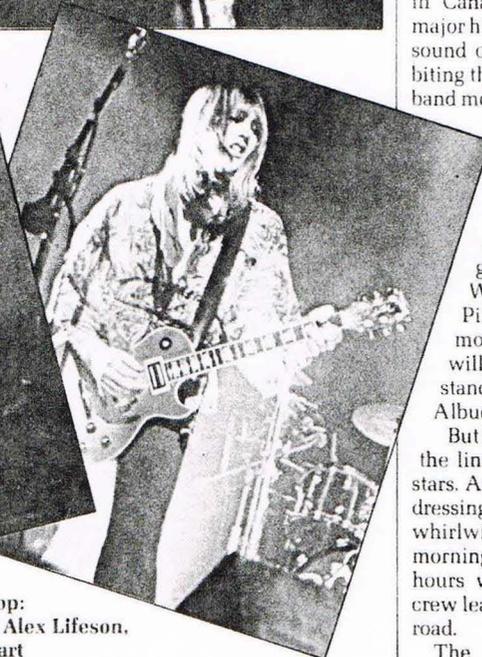


RUSH!

Three young rock millionaires
edge closer to superstardom By Dick Flohil



Clockwise from top:
Leader Geddy Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson,
drummer Neil Peart



Canada's biggest rock 'n' roll stars are sitting in a shabby dressing room in a rodeo arena in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Beyond the doors, you can hear the steady roar — *Rush! Rush! Rush!* — from the throats of 8,000 teenagers.

Back here it's almost peaceful. These three guys don't look like rock stars. Apart from a case of beer, some half-eaten sandwiches and a warm bottle of Dom Perignon, there are no signs of a bacchanalian feast. There are no drugs, apart from the Anacins that Neil Peart, the drummer, has just handed to one of the road crew. And there are no groupies.

Alex Lifeson, the guitarist, has his feet up on a chair and is smiling like a cherubic choirboy at nothing in particular. Geddy Lee, the bass player, horn-rims perched on his prominent nose, is reading *Playboy*, noting without much enthusiasm that Peart has shown up on the lower reaches of the new issue's jazz and pop poll. "Behind Karen Carpenter, and you know what a good drummer *she* is," he mutters. Peart himself, wearing the bicycle clips that prevent his baggy pants from tangling with the bass pedals of his \$15,000 drum kit, is totally immersed in yet another science fiction novel.

These three men, all in their mid-20s, are Rush — and if you're much older than they are, the chances are that you've never heard of them. So far this year, they've grossed close to \$2 million from their concert appearances in 75 American and Canadian cities. At the end of this month they'll leave for Britain, where they will record their ninth album and play 20 more concerts before continuing their tour in Holland and Germany.

In addition to concert revenues, the three have earned another \$3 million so far this year in record royalties. Their latest album, *Permanent Waves*, has sold a million copies in the United States in two months and nearly another million in Canada and elsewhere. Their first major hit single, *The Spirit of Radio* ("the sound of salesmen," scoff the lyrics), is biting the hand that feeds it, winning the band more radio play than it has ever had before.

All that doesn't make Rush the biggest rock band in the world, although it has made three hardworking young men millionaires. The biggest British groups — the Rolling Stones, the Who, Led Zeppelin, Supertramp, Pink Floyd — still make more money in record royalties than Rush will make in two years of one-night stands in arenas like the one in Albuquerque.

But Rush, right now, is edging close to the line that divides stars from superstars. And while they sit quietly in their dressing room, they are the centre of a whirlwind of activity that began in the morning at 10 and will end in the small hours when the band and its 25-man crew leave for the next concert down the road.

The whirlwind, if that's what you

want to call it, is building to a peak. Michael Hirsh, the stage manager, puts his head around the door, quietly says, "Ready in five," and vanishes. Another roadie pops in and grabs a beer. The three musicians, without a word, get to their feet. Only Peart, putting down his book and massaging his knuckles so hard that they crack, shows any sign of tension.

As the three move into the arena, the lights go down and the roar of the audience turns into cheers. An eerie sound of howling space wind screams from the bank of synthesizers on stage, and a voice yells into the darkness, "Ladies and gentlemen. From Canada — welcome RUSH!" With a stunning crash of noise, the band hits the first note as the lights, perfectly synchronized, flood the stage with bright, white daylight.

The volume, bone-crushingly loud, builds as the band pounds into the first number of a show that will last, without pause, for exactly two hours and eight minutes. Geddy Lee, dancing now, hurtles toward a microphone and shrieks, "Hiya, Albuquerque! How're ya doin'?" A magnesium flare cracks off with the sound of a thunderclap and a flash that singes the eyeballs.

And the fans, all 8,000 of them, are on their chairs now, punching their arms into the air with every beat. Security guards pull a young girl from the crush in front of the stage; she shakes her head, gathers her strength, and runs out under the stage and into the audience again.

Lee, with a voice that sounds as if it had been scraped with used razor blades, is howling:

We are the priests of the Temples of
Syrinx
Our great computers fill the hallowed
halls...
Look around this world we've
made...*

"You know what this is?" one of the stagehands yells to a visitor. "It's a giant, mobile, crazy circus. It's Barnum and Bailey, except it's more work — and a hell of a sight more fun."

The Albuquerque radio station has for three weeks been calling this "the first international rock 'n' roll tour of the '80s," because it started in January in the Maritimes and will end up in Europe in July.

This mobile circus certainly comes equipped. It requires three 60-foot Kenworth tractor-trailers, which carry some 60 tons of equipment: 200 lamps (24 of them identical to the landing lights on a Boeing 707 jet), a \$50,000 sound mixing console, 64 speakers and a rear screen projector to flash images of spaceships and trees and floating figures on the backdrop as the band performs.

The Rush brand of rock 'n' roll — unsubtle but perfectly timed and utterly precise — demands high technology. It also demands volume: a Rush concert generates 120 decibels of sound — slightly less than the noise of a jet taking off.

Every travelling circus has its crew, and this one has 25 people to set up the show every day, tear it down afterward and move it to the next town. These are the roadies: tough, rowdy and thoroughly competent. They know their jobs inside out; they know that without them — the riggers, the stagehands, the sound technicians, the lighting men, the drivers — Rush has no show at all.

The audience has paid a total of \$72,000 to see this show in Albuquerque. And yet, little of that will wind up in the pockets of the three musicians.

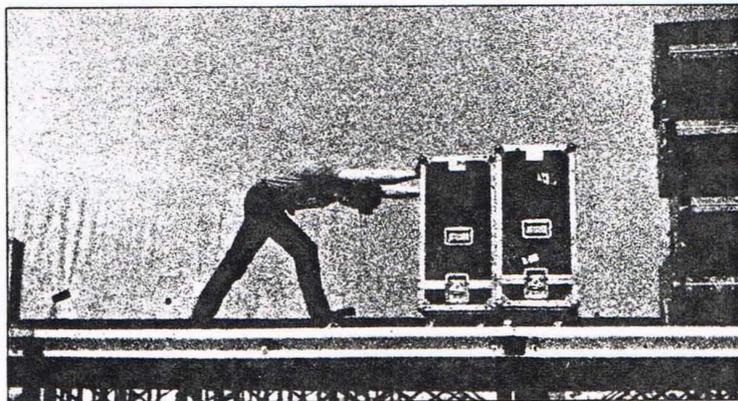
The costs of the hall and the publicity and advertising have to be paid, and the rental of the massive stage the band uses. The sound system that travels with Rush is rented, nightly, from National Sound in Arlington, Virginia, and the lighting is rented from See Factor in New York.

Each of the six drivers who work with

up to the standards of a good French restaurant.

Rush earns a flat fee that ranges between \$25,000 and \$50,000 for each concert, depending on the size of the hall. The band also earns a percentage of the profits once the promoters have paid all their bills. "The game," said Ungerleider, as he went off to count the take in Albuquerque, "is to make sure the promoters don't pad their costs. They'll try every trick in the book, but I've been doing this for six years now and they don't get much past me anymore."

From its fee, Rush must pay its agent (10%), its management company (20%), and the daily \$12,500 bill for crew, sound, lights, transportation and hotels. Each member of the band gets \$1,000 per concert. Back in Toronto, Ray Danniels, one of the group's two managers, explains, "People figure that if the band



Load-out: Every travelling circus needs an efficient crew. Rush employs 25 "roadies" — riggers, stagehands, sound technicians, lighting men and drivers

Rush and each of the riggers who set up the lighting earns nearly \$1,000 a week. Salaries for the rest of the crew range between \$300 and \$800 a week — plus retainers for the five months of the year when the band is not touring. It's a massive overhead. Rush's management firm in Toronto figures it costs \$12,500 every day to keep the band on the road.

The circus road boss is Howard Ungerleider, a tough, friendly New Yorker with pale blue eyes and curly hair; he deals with everything from hassles among the crew to settling up with the promoter after the show.

His "guidebook" is the contract for the services of Rush, which every promoter must sign. This remarkable document covers everything from electrical power requirements to the number of towels and bars of soap (Dial and Irish Spring, please) to be provided for the road crew. Two pages refer specifically to the band's catering requirements, and there was a problem in Albuquerque. The Sunday dinner was not fresh roast turkey with stuffing, cranberry sauce and buttered green beans that the contract specified — and several members of the road crew were quite unhappy about it, although the band ate its barely cooked beef without complaint. Ungerleider agreed with the promoter, and meals down the road in Tucson and Phoenix were almost

makes \$60,000 a night, they keep \$60,000 a night. That's like saying if you buy a Chevy for \$6,000, General Motors gets to put \$6,000 in the bank."

So if Lee, Lifeson and Peart aren't getting rich going on the road, what makes them millionaires? And why are they spending seven months a year endlessly crisscrossing North America, giving four or five shows every week?

The answer is record sales. Concerts and their publicity generate radio play, and radio play generates record sales. Each Rush album has a retail list price of \$8.98, and between \$1.25 and \$1.50 per album sold finds its way, eventually, to the band. And so far, Rush has sold, worldwide, nearly 8 million records.

The money hasn't made a lot of difference. Offstage, Lee, Lifeson and Peart are quiet, relaxed, completely straight and deeply involved with their families (Lee's first child is due in July, when the band will be on vacation).

They have been together since Lee met Lifeson in high school in 1968. The band played coffee houses, graduating to school dances and pubs. Ray Danniels, then a small-time agent, began to manage the band, and he and his partner, Vic Wilson, sunk their life savings into the first Rush album in 1973. A radio station in Cleveland pushed the record — and more copies were sold in that city than in

all of Canada. A U.S. record label signed the band the next year, and since then the three — Peart joined them in time for the first tour after the band's initial drummer dropped out — have been playing an average of 200 concerts a year.

Hardworking and disciplined, Rush is definitely not the sort of party band that gossip columnists thrive on. Groupies, who have no chance for anything more than a smile or an autograph from the band members, save their fleeting affections for the road crew. Two nights after Albuquerque, members of the road crew were entertained to a sad strip show staged on a table backstage by a young lady known throughout the rock 'n' roll world as the Porcelain Princess. The band had already left.

The crew welcomes groupies as a break from the back-breaking work, long hours and incessant travel, but they understand the band's aversion to them. "They're really nice guys," explained one of the crew with real affection. "The fact is, though, they're really boring."

Every year the band takes three months to prepare and record its annual album. *Permanent Waves* was recorded in rural Quebec. Two previous albums were recorded in Wales, and the next will be done during concerts at London's Hammersmith Odeon in June.

Like every other rock band, Rush lives with the fact that however successful it becomes its days are numbered. Some critics have long written off the band's music as overblown, humorless and pretentious. Robert Hilburn, in the *Los Angeles Times*, likened Rush to "a hapless but successful TV situation comedy.... They employ enough familiar rock elements to be diverting — but most of those ingredients have long been exhausted, and Rush does little to revitalize them."

Never mind that. For the moment, Rush is taking on the world — and winning — with 60 tons of high technology and songs that talk about kings past and present, dragons and black holes. And the band's musical philosophy, part Ayn Rand and part hobbit-land, hammers out an old-fashioned virtue: hard work has its own rewards.

Albuquerque's over now. The kids, high and exhausted and ear-numbed, have all gone home. Ungerleider has settled with the promoter and, with his briefcase full of cash, has left on the band bus for the next stop: Tucson, Arizona.

In the lighting crew bus — the "animal house" of the Rush entourage — everything is quiet tonight. There will be time to party in Phoenix, and maybe they can persuade a couple of girls to join them on the next leg of the tour. "You know what," says one of the men, bone tired and pulling on a beer, "if the next record goes as well as this one, this band'll be the Led Zeppelin of the '80s."

The bus pulls onto the interstate and the driver accelerates. There's a pause, then someone replies, "Well, no one'll be able to say we didn't deserve it."

Circus folk, everyone knows, stick together. ■

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