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MUSIC

RECOMM

Rush revels in its return

by Brett Milano
 Sunday, July 14, 2002

Rush, at the Tweeter Center in Mansfield, Friday night.

How much has changed since Rush last toured? Everything and nothing. The Canadian power trio is back from its first real hiatus, which was due to personal tragedies that hit drummer/lyricist Neil Peart. He lost his wife and daughter in quick succession, sending him into seclusion and putting the band's future in doubt.

Hitting town Friday for the first time in five years, the band simply picked up where it left off. That meant another epic show that ran three hours with intermission. It meant lots of tricky instrumentals and metaphorical film clips. For those who love this band's odd mix of heavy metal, art-rock and the occasional pop hook, it was as technically dazzling and musically inventive as ever.

Other than a couple of "good to be back" announcements from singer/bassist Geddy Lee, there were no sentimental gestures during the show. But it seemed fitting that Rush dug up many of its weightier songs for the occasion. One was "The Pass," a ballad with an anti-suicide theme, which featured an unusually sensitive vocal from Lee. New songs such as "One Little Victory" (which opened the second set with a few onstage fireballs) dealt with Peart's struggles, and allowed for plenty of heavy riffs by guitarist Alex Lifeson.

The set list held a number of surprises for longtime fans; it spanned the band's whole career - for the record, all but two of its 17 studio albums were represented. Leaving out some of the usual chestnuts (for the first time, no "Closer to the Heart"), it showed how much ground Rush has covered since the '70s. The trio visited its techno period with the ominous "Red Sector A," its Police-inspired era with "New World Man," and its art-rock roots with "La Villa Strangiato," a 10-minute guitar extravaganza.

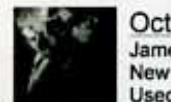
Whatever style the band played, however, came out sounding exactly like Rush.

And you only had to watch the crowd, which managed to play air drums along with Peart's trickiest fills, to realize that this remains a band for the diehard music-heads.

Also evident was the band's quirky sense of humor. It sent up fancy staging by placing three washing machines onstage. And it encored with "By-Tor & the Snow Dog," easily the silliest of its early epics. The band was in on the joke, however: After two and a half hours of serious music-making, this was a chance for both band and audience to revisit their adolescence.



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