

Rush gives fans same rush

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It has been five years since Rush has come to town, and they proved they're one band who can vanish from sight for half a decade and return without missing a beat.

The long-time Canadian rock trio played Riverbend Sunday before a crowd filling the pavilion plus taking up a good chunk of the lawn. Rush delivered more than 2 1/2 hours of music in two sets that featured old hits alongside songs from their new album *Vapor Trails*.

The crowd just seemed happy to have Rush back on the road. Fans aware of what the band has been through since its last album was released (1996's *Test For Echo*) might have been somewhat amazed that Rush has returned at all. Neil Peart, the band's drummer and lyricist, lost his teen daughter in a car accident in 1997 and his wife to cancer less than a year later.

Mr. Peart has sighted various literary sources — not his personal tragedies — as influences for the new songs' lyrics, so the show's content didn't seem related to his losses. However, when bassist and vocalist Geddy Lee sang "Roll The Bones," an upbeat tune about giving in to fate written by Mr. Peart and recorded long before the deaths ("Why does it happen? Because it happens, roll the bones"), the song took on an ironic tone the band probably wasn't looking to capture.

Rush has always been more about music than words, about the hard-edged prog-rock the band (rounded out by guitarist Alex Lifeson) whips up. And whether the songs were good ("YYZ," "Working Man"), great ("Tom Sawyer," "New World Man"), or fairly derivative of their '70s and '80s glory-days material (like most of the new stuff), no other band sounds like these guys. And their return, especially the return of Geddy Lee's cartoonish whine, is welcome in an era when the rock-rap hybrid has overtaken good old hard rock.

It was tough for the band to maintain the intensity of "Tom Sawyer," the opening number, over the course of its entire 65-minute first set. The second set, at an hour-and-35-minutes long, did the opposite — starting slowly and building momentum. It was highlighted along the way by block that included a drum solo by Mr. Peart that was both playful and intense, an "unplugged" rendering of "Resist" by Mr. Lee and Mr. Lifeson, and rounded out by a version of what may have been the crowd's favorite tune, "2112."