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A FULL-ON RUSH!

Veteran Can-rockers Vapor-ize the crowd with high-energy show at the ACC

By JANE STEVENSON

Rush rolled back into town last night and right into the hearts of some 12,000 fans at the Air Canada Centre.

And that's saying something considering it was actually the second hometown visit in 2002 by the veteran Toronto prog-rock band, as part of their first tour in five years.

Singer-bassist-keyboardist Geddy Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neil Peart earlier played a sold-out date at the Molson Amphitheatre in mid-July.

Unlike their summer performance, however, when they had only been on the road for two weeks after a lengthy break, the three musicians were a well-oiled and muscled machine last night from the opening song, Tom Sawyer, to the last note of their two-hour-and-45-minute performance.

This is, after all, the second leg of their North American tour. (Actually they kick-started their latest trek by playing their first ever date south of the U.S. border in Mexico City on Oct. 5.)

Last night, it was wildly apparent fan support continues for Peart, in particular, who lost his daughter to a car accident and his wife to cancer soon after.

The tragic events caused the band to go on a long hiatus and put their future into serious doubt.

Instead, Rush released one of their strongest albums in years, Vapor Trails, in May.

The biggest roar of approval last night came during Peart's mind-bending drum solo that saw his platform rotate while he tackled two different kits.

Curiously, the group brought along those three coin dryers from their last appearance in Toronto, which spun white, red, and black clothes throughout the concert.

Thankfully, their rumbling -- each had their own microphone -- was drowned out by Peart's thundering drums.

Other enhancements included trippy, psychedelic imagery and animation displayed on a large video screen behind the band, green laser lights and an impressively big lighting rig.

But the real stars -- as always -- were the virtuoso playing of Lee, Lifeson and Peart.

Last night's show, like the amphitheatre concert, was similarly broken into two sets with a 20-minute intermission.

Not always a great idea for a rock show, but with a noticeably beefier second set it worked for Rush.

The later proceedings got a major kick-start from the flames-accompanied Vapor Trails single, One Little Victory, followed by Driven -- featuring a monster bass solo by Lee -- and the aforementioned drum display by Peart.

Otherwise, Lee and Lifeson took it down a notch for a two acoustic guitar version of Resist before plugging back in again for Limelight and The Spirit Of Radio. (The latter produced the first clap-along of the evening, which by then, had almost reached the three hours mark.)

Highlights of the first set, meanwhile, were Tom Sawyer, New World Man, Roll The Bones and The Pass.

RUSH

'What a Rush!'

-- JANE STEVENSON

Air Canada Centre

Sun Rating: 4 out of 5