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## Las Vegas SUN

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# Review: On Saturday night, Las Vegas was Rush, Nevada

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LAS VEGAS SUN

If the much-ballyhooed success of neo-garage acts Strokes, White Stripes and Vines truly signals the end of arena rock, apparently nobody bothered to inform Rush and its horde of devoted followers.

Touring for the first time in five years, the Canadian power trio thrilled a wildly enthusiastic MGM Grand Garden Arena crowd Saturday night to three hours of high-energy rock, complete with enough pyrotechnics, lasers and big-screen psychedelics to satisfy any 1980s throwback.

Back from the longest hiatus in its 34-year career, Rush showed no signs of rust in its Las Vegas return, playing to a venue packed near capacity, apart from a few empty uppermost rows.

Bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neil Peart lived up to their reputation for stop-on-a-dime tightness, sounding as though they share a single brain and a solitary sense of timing.

Lee, in particular, was in fine form throughout, shaking the building's foundation with booming bass work and punctuating the band's dense sound with his signature high-pitched vocals.

Looking like a 1974-era John Lennon with shoulder-length hair, small round sunglasses and a "New York City" tank top, Lee bristled with energy all night, high-stepping around the stage and providing plenty of body language to go with his music.

Although Lee has been Rush's most-recognizable figure, there is little doubt Peart is still the driving force. Lee and Lifeson put the band on indefinite hold after the deaths of Peart's daughter and wife in 1997 and 1998, and it was clear Saturday night why the band's two founding members never harbored any illusions about continuing on without him.

With barely more than his head -- covered in a skullcap -- protruding above a massive array of drums, cymbals and related equipment, the 50-year-old Peart showed locals why many consider him the world's greatest living rock drummer.

Over the course of two intense sets, he nimbly maneuvered the trio through the twists and turns of its complex material, at all times keeping the band's energy moving forward.

Lifeson, generally underrated as both a guitarist and a songwriter, has spent his career being overshadowed by Lee and Peart. That was the case again on this night, as the black-clad guitarist --

reportedly nursing a cold -- struggled to be heard over the din created by his two bandmates.

That inequity was rectified in large part for the second set, with an improved mix benefiting both Lifeson's guitar and Lee's vocals. Lifeson also appeared to gain strength as the evening wore on, roaming the stage and feeding off the roar of the crowd during his soaring solos.

The crowd was treated to a carefully constructed setlist, including cuts from 15 of the band's 17 studio albums (only 1975's "Caress of Steel" and 1987's "Hold Your Fire" were not represented).

The first set featured a flurry of FM-radio staples: "Tom Sawyer," "Distant Early Warning," and "New World Man" in a row to open, along with "Big Money" and "Freewill." Only "New World Man" missed its mark, with a couple of awkward moments signaling a few of the show's only significant miscues.

Rush played just one track, "Earthshine," from its May release "Vapor Trails" during the first set, which was somewhat surprising. So too was the last-minute inclusion of "The Trees," the band's 1978 anthem about oppression and still one of its biggest crowd-pleasers.

"Natural Science," the final number of the first set, hinted at the fun to come after intermission, as the trio moved fluidly through the song's many changes.

A fire-breathing dragon on the venue's three giant screens signaled the start of the second set, as real flames danced behind Peart during "One Little Victory," the first single off the new album.

Two more tracks from "Vapor Trails" -- "Ghost Rider" and "Secret Touch" -- soon followed, and then Rush put its latest release to bed for the night, gaining momentum as it charged down the backstretch.

The instrumental "Leave That Thing Alone" gave the trio a chance to roam a bit, and then gave way to the evening's main event: "The Rhythm Method."

Eight-minute drum solos may be a thing of the past for most bands or an excuse to head for the restrooms for most fans, but not when Peart is doing the drumming.

Sounding more like two or three musicians than a single one, Peart worked his arms and legs into a blur of motion. Yet even as he rained down thunderous beats from the stage, he maintained his usual stoic countenance, barely even breaking a sweat.

Afterward, as Peart took a breather offstage, Lee and Lifeson sat for a soulful, acoustic rendition of "Resist," disputing the notion that Rush is simply a collection of technical wizards, an oft-heard criticism over the years.

Perhaps to drive that point home further, the band downplayed the use of keyboards all evening, with Lee and his bass generally untethered from his synthesizer. That came as a welcome sight to fans for whom Rush's reliance on synthesizers during the 1980s became a bone of contention.

The full band kicked back into gear with "2112 Overture /Temples of Syrinx" from 1976's "2112," then closed strong with classic radio hits "Limelight" and "The Spirit of Radio" and "La Villa Strangiato," an instrumental showcasing Lifeson's talents.

For its encore, Rush went way back, performing two songs from its first two albums, along with 1977's "Cygnus X-1." Fun as it may have been to see Lee try to keep a straight face while singing "By-Tor and

the Snow Dog," though, the "By-Tor/ Cygnus" combo ultimately came across sounding rather dated.

The capper, "Working Man," however, sounds as fresh in 2002 as it must have when it was released on 1975's self-titled debut. A theme song for working stiffs everywhere, the tune also provided an appropriate finale for a band that has steadfastly refused to add musicians to its live shows to ease its tremendous workload.

Instead, Lee, Lifeson and Peart toil away night after night, proving that their brand of rock 'n' roll still has a time and a place, and plenty of people eager to take it all in.

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