

Rush Descend Into Hades, Get Laundry Done At New York Show
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Rush's Geddy Lee
Photo: Brooke Ismach/WireImage

WANTAGH, New York — From the opening notes of "Tom Sawyer" and throughout their nearly three-hour set Monday night, Rush made it clear they're a band on a mission.

Not a mission to recruit converts to their cause, but to prove to themselves that they still have the determination, chops and chemistry to rock convincingly as they individually approach half a century in age (see "Rush Return From Tragic Hiatus Sounding More Like Tool"). Judging by the audience response at the Jones Beach Theater, they have nothing to worry about.

Imbued with a renewed sense of purpose after surviving more than their share of turmoil in recent years, Rush looked especially alive as they performed in front of a projection screen that switched between shots from the concert and computer-generated imagery.

Singer/bassist Geddy Lee wore khakis, sunglasses and a gray short-sleeved, collared shirt, while guitarist Alex Lifeson sported a gray-and-silver collared shirt, black slacks and a gray goatee and changed guitars almost every song. Because Rush's material is so technical, the bandmembers were glued to their mics, effect pedals and keyboards for most of the show, but their lack of motion detracted little from the experience. The trio filled out their already full sound by triggering keyboard passages and sound effects as they performed.

The droney, riff-heavy "Earthshine" came early in the show, but most of the material from their new Vapor Trails was reserved for the second set. Instead, Rush reacquainted fans with a cross-section of songs recorded after 1980's Permanent Waves. The selections drew from all sides of Rush's eclectic sound, including hard rock, prog rock, galactic computer rock, digital synth rock, even space reggae.

During Signals' "New World Man," Lifeson sang backup vocals, which he has rarely done in the past, and for "Distant Early Warning," from Grace Under Pressure, he and Lee both broke away from their perches to maneuver the stage as they vamped between verses. Other highlights included the rarely played "The Pass," "The Big Money," "YYZ," "Vital Signs" and "Natural Science."

As if to thumb their noses at those who've said they lack a sense of humor, Rush colored their show with wry humor. At the right of the stage, three dryers churned loads of laundry. For Vapor Trails' "One Little Victory," the video screen projected animated images of a dragon lighting a cigar with his breath. As it blew flames at the screen, a wall of fire erupted behind the band.

Lee and Lifeson also contributed to the jovial vibe. During an unplugged version of "Resist," the bassist introduced the guitarist as his "friend from south of the border," and during an instrumental passage in "La Villa Strangiato" Lifeson adopted a foreign accent and told a bizarre story about combing the beach with a metal detector and meeting Jimmy Hoffa. It was the only moment in the show that drummer Neil Peart cracked a smile.

Peart, who didn't touch his kit for several years after his recent family tragedies (see "Rush's Return Is Personal For Drummer Peart"), played with as much agility, precision and groove as ever, surrounded by a massive kit armed with enough cymbals to fill a music shop.

Rush's second set featured four songs from Vapor Trails, including the haunting "Ghost Rider." The new single "One Little Victory" roared with inflammatory fervor, and before Grace Under Pressure's "Red Sector A," Peart's kit rotated to reveal a set of electronic drums, which he battered with power and

authority. The drummer's obligatory solo came after "Leave That Thing Alone," and he strutted his stuff by adding xylophone patterns and triggering keyboard chords.

For many old-school fans, the highlight of the set came in the final 30 minutes, when Rush reached into the vault and dragged out gems like "2112 Overture/The Temples of Syrinx," "Limelight" and "La Villa Strangiato." Rush closed with the "friendly voice" of the fiery, shimmering "Spirit of Radio."

When they returned for their encore, Rush opened the dryers, removed piles of T-shirts and tossed them into the crowd. "And now it's time to descend into the tomes of Hades," Lee announced as the band dove into the gurgling, apocalyptic tones of "By-Tor and the Snowdog" from 1975's *Fly by Night*. Then came the start-stop riffs and explosive vortex of "Cygnus X-1."

Rush ended the evening with the final track from their 1974 self-titled debut, "Working Man" — a simple, primitive number that demonstrated just how far the little Canadian power trio have come since their meager beginnings.