

## The World Remains Their Stage

Rush are known in some circles as a thinking person's band, and in retrospect, the group's reputation for smarts appears to extend beyond its musical and lyrical complexity. Through the years, the timing of Rush's concert collections has tended to coincide with peaks or turning points in the Canadian trio's career, therefore suggesting that they were released after much thought rather than at random. That seemingly was the case with 1976's *All the World's a Stage*, 1981's *Exit . . . Stage Left*, 1988's *A Show of Hands* and 1998's *Different Stages/Live*; only time will tell if the same holds true for the group's upcoming DVD, which will focus on a concert recorded in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, this past Nov. 23 -- the final date of Rush's most recent tour.

The path that Rush traveled in the five or so years prior to the jaunt was by no means easy. Drummer-lyricist Neil Peart was musically inactive following the deaths of his 19-year-old daughter in 1997 and wife Jackie in 1998. Peart, bassist-vocalist Geddy Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson finally reconvened in early 2001 to begin work on a new studio album.

According to Peart, the band worked for more than a year on *Vapor Trails*, which debuted at No. 6 on the *Billboard* 200 in the magazine's June 1, 2002, issue. First single "One Little Victory" spent 13 weeks on the *Billboard* Mainstream Rock Tracks chart, peaking at No. 10 in May, while "Secret Touch" lasted nine weeks, topping out at No. 25 in August. The band supported *Trails* with a lengthy jaunt that ran from late June to late November.

Rush have spent part of their post-tour downtime putting together the as-yet-untitled DVD, which is expected out in the spring. On Feb. 27, Rush were inducted into the Canadian Music Industry Hall of Fame, an honor that rarely has been bestowed on music artists. Beyond that, the trio has no immediate plans to tour or record. To help tide the time until the next Rush release, fans may want to check out *The Spirit of Radio: Greatest Hits (1974-1987)*, a 16-track CD covering the band's years on the Mercury label that hit shelves Feb. 11.

Lee recently sat down with us to discuss the new compilation, the recent tour, the upcoming DVD and the future of the band.

## Best We Can

**Geddy Lee:** [*The Spirit of Radio: Greatest Hits (1974-1987)* is] one of those things that's in your contract after you leave a label, [which has] the right to release compilations and you can either cooperate or not cooperate. And our attitude is that it's only going to serve our fans' interests if we cooperate and try to make it as good a package as we can. So, [Mercury] wanted to release the most radio-friendly songs we've had over that particular period of time. So, we just got involved and made sure it was good packaging and everything sounded good. That's the extent of our involvement . . . I think this is kind of a collection of songs that were kind of the more popular songs from their given albums

during the time they were released. I would like, at some point, to get a little more involved in a more unusual collection of songs that we could release in different packages.

### Stuck It Out

[*Caress of Steel*, the only one of Rush's first 12 albums not represented on the new compilation], weirded people out -- record-company people, I think. I know when we did that album, it was not very well-received by the record company and, of course, it wasn't very successful commercially. But there's some great weird material on that album that real hard-core fans love, like 'Necromancer' and 'I Think I'm Going Bald' and 'Bastille Day' . . . It was a tough time for us as a band because the record didn't go over very well. We were really struggling to stay alive when we were touring that record. We were kind of climbing up with the first album and *Fly by Night*, and with that record, we started going [backward] and playing small clubs. It was really a tough tour and a tough time to stick with it. I think we even thought about calling it quits during that time, but we decided that if we're going to go down, we'll go down fighting. Our next [studio] record was *2112*, and sure enough, that was the best thing that ever happened to us.

### How It Is

Rush albums don't please all Rush fans. There's a certain core of our fans [who] are happy to have a new release and are excited by what we do, but there's also a percentage of our fans that come and go, depending on the style of every given record. We don't seem to be able to stay with the same style very long; we're just naturally nomadic in our musical aspirations. We wander around a little bit. But the core's always there. Obviously, my voice is fairly identifiable, so that's an attribute you can count on. Sometimes I sing in a lower register, which not all fans are pleased about. The complexity of our arrangements is kind of a signature of our band. [Lifeson's] guitar sound is quite unique. So I guess the instrumentation, the level of musicianship, remains the same. But the style of songwriting shifts from record to record.

### Chemistry

People always ask me, 'What's the key to longevity?' From the inside looking out, longevity is possible if you have a willingness to experiment and move. If you just do the same thing over and over and over, you're going to get bored and you're going to sound insincere, and pretty soon your audience will pick up on that. I think our fans know us well enough to know that we're going to experiment, and we're not afraid. Some of those experiments aren't successful. You have to be willing to fail in public to move forward or to learn from it. I've always maintained that you learn a lot more from your failed experiments than your successful ones. Of course, the other keys to that mean that you have to have an audience in the first place, and an audience that's curious enough to allow that of you. We're fortunate to have such a supportive fan base. It gives us confidence to push forward.

### Emotional Detector

[The *Vapor Trails* tour definitely] was the best tour we've done, from my point of

view, in terms of level of energy, consistency of performance quality and sheer enjoyment exchange between audience and band. We had a great time playing, and the crowd was so amazing and so positive that I think we were really pleased to be back, and I think we appreciated the opportunity to play again . . . We worked really hard up until the day of the first show. The first show was quite an emotional moment for the three of us, especially for [Peart]. It had been a long road back for him. I don't think that was fully accomplished until we did our first show with human beings out there watching. The show that we did was in Hartford [Conn.], I believe, and it was a really special night for us. I think it may have been the only time the three of us hugged each other after a gig and said, 'Wow.' That was just an amazing experience.

### One Little DVD

We're pushing ahead and mixing the sound and editing picture [for the DVD], so when that's all put together, it'll be quite a cool package. There's going to be a lot of extra things we're going to include. It should be really neat . . . It was [Rush's] first time in Brazil. I don't know why, but we just didn't realize that we had so many fans. Thousands upon thousands of people showed up for all these shows. We did three shows there -- in Porto Alegre, in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro. Rio was the last show and we filmed that. We had about 40-45,000 people at that show . . . It was quite an amazing event. The crowd was simply amazing . . . So vociferous. They were having so much fun; they were singing every word of every song. Even songs that were instrumental, they would sing along with them and write their own parts for them. It was like a combination rock & roll/soccer crowd.

[The DVD will feature] a three-hour show [and] a documentary . . . on the whole trip to Brazil. There was a videographer with us the whole time. There's going to be some special-camera-angles things, stuff from the past. We're still working out a lot of the details.

### Time and Motion

I think [there's a future for the band] . . . We're still bathing a little in the afterglow of the [*Vapor Trails*] tour. I wish we could have gone to more cities, and I know we neglected our fans in Europe this time again. That doesn't really sit well with me, but after seven months of touring and another two months of rehearsal before that, we were pooped. We had to stop. It bodes well for the future. It'll be interesting to get back together after a nice, long break and see if we have anything left to do it again with.

### Interview by **Sal Cirrincione**