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Prototype for Alternative Hard Rock

Posted by: cosmic on Monday, November 10, 2003 - 10:41 PM



RUSH -- The Prototype For Alternative Hard Rock
By Maurice Doubleday

The days of Alternative rock being exclusively punk oriented died when Jane's Addiction came out of LA's urethra in the late 80s. With spacious arrangements and fairy like vocals, it was American art rock 15 years late.

But American art rock already existed. In Canada. Rush, a power trio formed in 1968 by Junior High chums Alex Lifeson(guitar)and Geddy Lee (bass, vocals), really arrived artistically and commercially with the album 2112(1976). It was a breakthrough album in hard rock -- as it included a 20 minute suite a la British art rock. From there, the band began to expand their instrumentation and lyrical content on its successors A FAREWELL TO KINGS

(1977) and HEMISPHERES(1978) -- incorporating Black Sabbath grunge with Genesis' penchant for odd time signatures, these albums are like a mint for what ensued in the 1990s. As the band got older they strayed from the harder material in favor of synthesizer experimentation. But albums like PERMANENT WAVES (1980) and SIGNALS (1982) still have moments of rhythmic and melodic experimentation that should be played for Tool fans. Critic Bob Mack wrote that "in suburbia in 1987 Rush were alternative in a world of hair-metal." Poor Rush though -- they never seemed to get the credit they deserve. Some glimmer of hope included their inclusion in the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard in 1993 as Musicians of the Millennium. That's a millennium that included Mozart. And in numerous interviews by young musicians born in the late 60s and early 70s, Rush were continually being cited as a musical influence. From Primus to The Smashing Pumpkins, Rush fans were suddenly dominating the college airwaves -- leaving to rest the hip hatred for the band with the high pitched singer. But as 1999 approached, the year Rush reached eligibility for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, it was apparent that they wouldn't be on the ballot. Granted, it would be difficult to watch the band jam with Bruce Springsteen and Paul Schafer, but they have contributed significantly to rock music and deserve it as much as fellow Canadians The Guess Who and Bachman-Turner Overdrive. A listen to alternative rock radio demands it. (...more)



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Of course, Rush is no island and have been influenced by everyone from Led Zeppelin to Devo over their 20 albums. To really pick a representative song is a difficult task. The album PERMANENT WAVES(1980) presents two astonishing compositions -- "Jacob's Ladder" and "Natural Science". Two concise examples of the bands virtuosity and heart. "Jacob's Ladder" is a segmented tone-poem about an approaching thunderstorm and its eventual dissipation as the sun shoots through the parting clouds. This image is presented lyrically and musically with a meshing of symphonic guitar solos to gentle synth explorations as Geddy Lee's voice is passed through slight chorus and delay. "Natural Science" is a short suite (9 minutes) about the band's favorite topic, musical integrity. It builds up like a staccato "Stairway to Heaven", an acoustic intro that shakes the foundation to an arpeggiated chorused guitar to an almost punk exploration in 7/4. And that's just the first three minutes. I was riding in my wife's car and was playing radio tag when I heard the chords to "Natural Science" on WBCN -- but it wasn't Rush, it was Tool's "Eulogy" (AENIMA, 1996). It was eerie. I later bought the album and have since found a ton of other Rush-like moments that I'll spare the reader. Tool isn't alone in pilfering the Rush format. Jane's Addiction stunned many fanzine cynics with epic songs like "Three Days" and "Then She Did" from 1990's glorious RITUAL DE LO HABITUAL. These 2 compositions testify to the influence art rock has had on the band -- and with their chops finely tuned more than one critic began to compare the most important band in alternative rock(with Nirvana) to Rush -- the suburban nerd band that punks and girls hated as part of their DNA.

Alex Lifeson (who was the only member of Rush not abused by CREEM's J. Kordosh in a 1981 interview that severed the relationship between the band and the magazine for years), a unique guitarist since his recorded debut on Rush's first self-titled album (RUSH, 1974), has bled into the indie scene by way of alt-rock's more adventurous guitarists. The "Lifeson sound", a combination of big open chords and textural solos going through delays and phasers is a trademark to the enlightened. The Smith's Johnny Marr to The Smashing Pumpkins' Billy Corgan have all explored this region of Rush aesthetics. Geddy Lee, considered to be amongst Paul McCartney and John Entwistle in the rock bass world, is a gifted composer as well. His bass lines warrant a textbook -- throughout their 30+ year career he has maintained a love and curiosity for the instrument that shows well on live albums like EXIT...STAGE LEFT (1981) and DIFFERENT STAGES (1998). Drummer Neil Peart, noted in concert for his long solos is actually much more interesting within the context of a song. A bizarre mix of Keith Moon and Bill Bruford, Neil can stop on a dime and go into 11/8 like nobody's business. He joined the band on its first tour and made his recording debut on the 2nd album FLY BY NIGHT (1975). His drumming and Tolkien lyrics gave the band a different direction and the rest is history. As his artistic ambitions grew so did Rush. There would be no Rush without Neil Peart. In that light, Neil has influenced the drumming of the 90s to a near sickening degree. The man who launched a thousand drummers or something.

Neil Peart's lyrics are as much of a band facet as his drumming. The aforementioned PERMANENT WAVES (1980) and SIGNALS (1982) are truly his best poetry. "The Weapon" from SIGNALS is an excellent observation of the cold war (which was at its peak in

Reagan's 80s). Citing the FDR maxim "we have nothing to fear but fear itself", Neil explores the new realities that Roosevelt may never have imagined. These lyrics, none with the word "baby" and barely a love song amongst them have influenced the sincerity in grunge. Pearl Jam and Soundgarden owe a great debt to Neil's dour perception of the world. Starting his lyrical career as an Ayn Rand fan -- he had all but dropped her by SIGNALS. In fact SIGNALS wasn't even dedicated to her memory -- he had graduated to the early left-wing writings of John Dos Passos and 50s era science fiction. He was concerned about the world and his family, things that Rand never addressed in her sterile cubicle. Rage Against the Machine are also indebted to the mix of political poetry and hard rock that Rush presented so well on GRACE UNDER PRESSURE (1984) and POWER WINDOWS (1985). Neil has also written two books that have accepted excellent criticism. A real survivor, he managed to emerge from the deaths of his wife and daughter within a year of each other as an even more creative artist. Rush will never be on a Lollapalooza tour -- but their spirit lingers in serious rockers like Alice in Chains and Tool.

Rush's artistic redemption began in the early 90s when hip bands were suddenly acknowledging the William Shatner of rock bands. Everyone from Fishbone to Beck was talking about their love for this much-maligned trio. As the decade progressed, Rush fans suddenly came out of the closet. It was a great time to be alive if you were a Rush fan. Chicks were suddenly going to shows with you -- the guy beside you was wearing a Cure t-shirt. It wasn't a pariah anymore. This jump start kept Rush in the modern rock scene and songs like "Test for Echo"(TEST FOR ECHO, 1996) and "Dreamline"(ROLL THE BONES, 1991) pump out of rock radio despite the fact that the band is 30 years old.

Consciously or not, alternative hard rock is a direct descendent of Rush. In the early 80s Rush were revered like the Pope in the suburbs where the members of Live and Bush lived. In 1983, I knew a 34 year old man that had the Man and Star logo so familiar to Rush fans painted on his garage door. While Eddie Vedder may not know he's a new Neil Peart, it sure sounds like Rush to me.



DISCOGRAPHY

RUSH – 1974 FLY BY NIGHT – 1975

CARESS OF STEEL – 1975 2112 – 1976 ALL
 THE WORLD'S A STAGE – 1976 A
 FAREWELL TO KINGS – 1977
 HEMISPHERES – 1978 PERMANENT
 WAVES – 1980 MOVING PICTURES – 1981
 EXIT...STAGE LEFT – 1981 SIGNALS – 1982
 GRACE UNDER PRESSURE – 1984 POWER
 WINDOWS – 1985 HOLD YOUR FIRE – 1987
 A SHOW OF HANDS – 1989 PRESTO – 1989
 ROLL THE BONES – 1991 COUNTERPARTS
 – 1993 TEST FOR ECHO – 1996
 DIFFERENT STAGES – 1998 VAPOR
 TRAILS – 2002

Solo Albums:

GEDDY LEE

MY FAVORITE HEADACHE – 2000

ALEX LIFESON

VICTOR – 1995

NEIL PEART

BURNING FOR BUDDY – 1995 BURNING
FOR BUDDY VOL.II – 1998

BOOKS BY NEIL PEART:

THE MASKED RIDER - 1996 GHOST RIDER
– 2002

<http://www.rush.com/>

<http://www.2112.net/>

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Re: Prototype for Alternative Hard Rock (Score: 0)

by Anonymous on Nov 11, 2003 - 07:18 AM

Alex Lifeson influenced Johnny Marr?
Not arguing. Just an interesting theory.

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