RECORD COLLECTOR PRESENTS

RUSH

NEIL PEART: "A BRILLIANT AND THOUGHTFUL MAN"

ALEX! GEDDY! ANIKA!

ATTENTION ALL PLANETS OF THE SOLAR FEDERATION:

RUSH HAVE REASSUMED CONTROL

INTRODUCED BY MELISSA AUF DER MAUR

PLUS: DONNA HALPER ★ TERRY BROWN ★ HUGH SYME ★ ANTHEM RECORDS ★ KEVIN J ANDERSON ★ RUSHCON ★ ALBUM PROFILES ★ SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY ★ RARITIES COLLECTORS ★ CROSSWORD ★ NEIL PEART MEMORIAL SCULPTURE ★ AND MORE!

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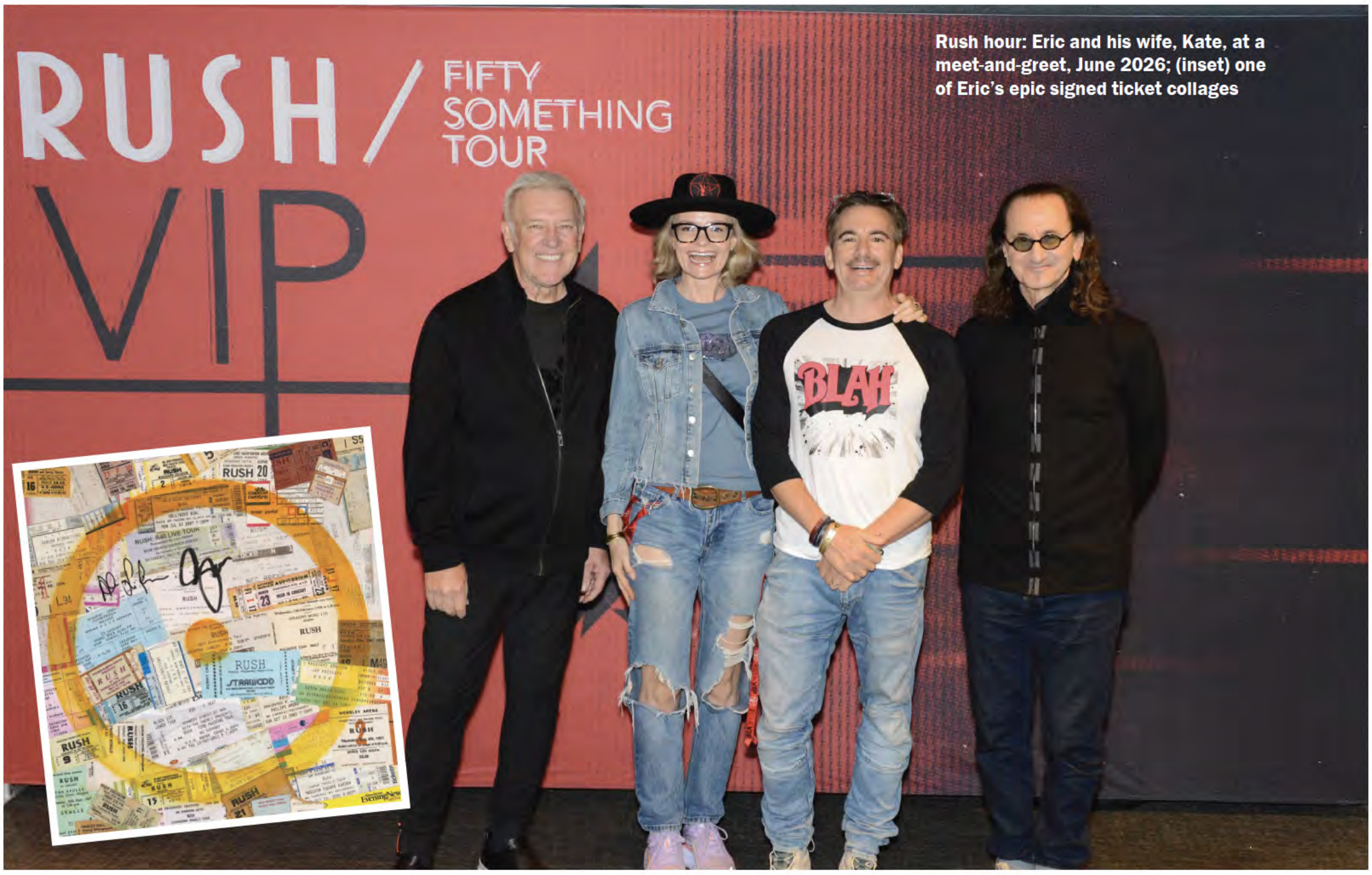
Photo: Getty

CLOSER TO THE ART

Eric Merola is the artist and collector following Rush around the world with a unique project for his meet-and-greet tour memories.



Rush hour: Eric and his wife, Kate, at a meet-and-greet, June 2026; (inset) one of Eric's epic signed ticket collages

Tell us a little about yourself.
I'm Eric, a 54-year-old artist and documentarian living in Los Angeles. I moved to New York City after college to pursue fine art and even had a productive meeting with the legendary Leo Castelli [highly influential Italian-American art dealer] about my work. To make a living, I was pulled into Madison Avenue advertising as an art director and commercial director, later running a small animation company and working as an animation director. In 2009, I became an award-winning documentary filmmaker. During COVID, I returned to fine art full-time.

How did you become a Rush fan?
I grew up in suburban Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and was always obsessed with music. When I was 13 or 14, a friend, Brian Siskind, turned me on to Rush; there was immediately something different about them. Their music felt intelligent, inspiring, cinematic and strangely personal. It spoke to the part of me that wanted something bigger than the world I was living in.

My first Rush concert was the *Power Windows* tour in 1986. Once you experience Rush live at that age, especially when you are already wired for music and art, it becomes part of your DNA.

What was your first purchase?
My first Rush album purchase, and my first ever compact disc purchase, was *All The World's A Stage*. I adored that album. It felt massive – not just a live record, but a doorway into an entire universe.

We've noticed that you used to do a fanzine, *The Necromancer*…
Bear in mind, I was only 14 or 15 years old. This was before the internet, and before most people had computers. I always had an entrepreneurial spirit, so a friend and I decided, "Wouldn't it be cool to publish a Rush fanzine?" We called it *The Necromancer*, because of course we loved that song too. Before we knew it, the fanzine was in record stores across the country, and we even had a small ad in *Rolling Stone*. It somehow caught the attention of one of Rush's promoters, who bought a copy and showed it to the band. They understandably hated it – especially Neil, since the writing was, well, the writing of children. But looking back, I love that we did it. It was pure teenage passion.

How did you become an artist, and how did Rush inspire your art?
I've always been an artist at heart. Even when I was working in advertising, animation or documentary film, the impulse was the same: make something visual, tell a story, build a world. Rush inspired that because they were never just making songs. Their work had architecture, philosophy, mythology, design, literature, humour and humanity woven through it. They also gave me permission to be ambitious. They were deeply themselves, and that's inspiring when you're an artist.

Explain your current project, following Rush around the globe with your art.
When a friend told me Rush were going back on tour, my first reaction was, "I love this band too much – I'm not going unless I can get front row." I managed to get third row for opening night in Los Angeles, and front row for the other LA shows. Then I realised the tickets included a meet-and-greet and a signed item. I could have had them sign an album, a ticket stub, or an old photo of me with them from when I once accosted them at LAX baggage claim – but that felt too predictable. That's when the idea hit me: what if I created original Rush-inspired artworks for them to sign instead? What started as a few shows has become a 34-piece art series and documentary film. The first four works are two concert ticket collages and two backstage pass collages, but the

Pass master: (clockwise from top left) Eric in the front row; a backstage pass collage; back issues of *The Necromancer*, Eric's Rush fanzine

completed series will go much further – original takes on *2112*, *Permanent Waves*, *A Farewell To Kings*, *Signals* and other Rush worlds, using collage, watercolour, oil, sculptural elements and one-of-a-kind giclée prints.

Each city also matters. The piece signed in that city will either feel connected to that place or have a direct relationship to it. For example, I have something special planned for Glasgow, since much of *Exit... Stage Left* was recorded there.

The deeper idea connects to an artistic direction I had already been exploring before this project came along, which I call "Destructive Preservation": taking rare and valuable objects – in this case, Rush artifacts such as vintage tickets, backstage passes, older signed pieces and other physical fragments of the band's history – and giving them a second life inside a new work of art.

I thought: imagine looking at a work that contains more than 40 years of rare Rush history, sometimes even decades-old signatures from Geddy, Alex and the late Neil Peart on tickets, tour books or albums, all transformed into one new piece

"What started as a few shows has become a 34-piece art series and documentary film"

– and then having Geddy and Alex sign it again during this tour.

The result is part shrine, part time capsule, part reinvention: preservation, fandom, authorship and obsession fused into one object. I don't know of anything quite like this having been done before: a city-by-city fine-art series, collector archive, pilgrimage and documentary, with each signed work built from original art, rare artifacts and decades of history. Once that idea took hold, I couldn't put it down.

What's been the highlight in your love of Rush so far?

This new tour has been the biggest highlight. It has brought out my inner child again – that free-spirited teenage feeling of "I've got nothing to lose."

I'm 54 now, not a broke teenager anymore, and somehow I get to follow my favourite band, a band I thought I would never see again, from Los Angeles to Finland. Even better, I get to experience it with my wife, Kate, whom I turned into a Rush fan. Meeting Geddy and Alex has also been extraordinary. They are kind, gentle, funny, generous guys. Meeting your heroes can be dangerous, but in this case it has only made me love them more.

What are you looking forward to next with your journey?

As an artist, I don't really believe a work of art is ever completely finished. Nor should this journey be. I'm looking forward to the accidents, surprises, cities, conversations, artworks and moments I can't predict yet. That's what makes the project alive. Neil Peart once wrote, "The point of the journey is not to arrive." With this project, I'm trying to live inside that idea.

Find out more at ericmerola.gallery and follow Eric on instagram @ericmerolaartist and on YouTube @ericmerolaartist

Photos: Eric Merola; Brett Briskin