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Nate Shivers: Rush pinball has been announced from Stern. It's an exciting day. We have two episodes of the *Stern Insiders* podcast discussing the game. This one, we'll have Mr. Ed Robertson joining us. Let's go.

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Nate: Welcome to the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. My name is Nate Shivers. I am coming to you not live from the very edge of the flipper, like right at the end of the flipper if you want to hit that shot. That's where we're at. Rush pinball has been announced. It's an exciting one. Ed Robertson is joining us on this show. Ed played a vital role in the development and the integration of Rush into a pinball machine.

This turns out to be a really interesting interview. We talk a lot about the band. We talk a lot about the history and why Rush really makes a great theme. It's a great episode. The game looks amazing. It's exciting. It's a new pinball day. It's the best day. Let's get into it with Ed Robertson.

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Nate: I want to welcome to the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*, Mr. Ed Robertson. How are you, sir?

Ed Robertson: So good to talk to you again, Nate.

Nate: It's been a little while. The world has been a little strange. We haven't gotten to hang out and play pinball, but we can talk pinball here.

Ed: Yes.

Nate: Where are you?

Ed: I am at home in Toronto. We're actually in the middle of a residency of shows at a theater here in town. We're doing 15 shows in our hometown.

Nate: That's a lot of shows. All through December?

Ed: Well, it's more shows than I did the rest of the year. [laughs]

Nate: Anybody listening to this who doesn't know Ed, Ed is the singer, founding member, main songwriter, guitar player, brainchild behind the Barenaked Ladies, Canada's own Barenaked Ladies, inductees into the Canadian Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I think you have a star on a walk somewhere, but that's purely conjecture, but I'm guessing. I don't even--

Ed: No, I actually do.



Nate: I figured. That was a total guess. Ed has been a part of the pinball scene for quite a while. Ed came on my former show a long, long time ago. We've gotten to play pinball together, talk pinball. It's really fun now that I get to talk to Ed from the Stern point of view about a Stern game that Ed had direct involvement with. That, of course, is the game everyone's talking about today is this podcast launches Rush from Stern Pinball. Man, that's a pretty big day and probably a long time coming for you, I'm guessing.

Ed: Yes, it is super cool for me as a massive pinball fan, as a massive Rush fan. My two worlds collided in the most amazing way.

Nate: We were joking about bands and who's a good band for pinball machines and this and that, but you told me years ago, you thought Rush would be a good game. I think at the time, it was before we've seen a huge amount of rock and roll pinball machines come out. It was, I think, in the middle of this, maybe five, six, seven-year run of all these great games. What made you think back then besides them being-- and you told me then, "They're my favorite band, Rush," and you played a lot of their songs in your bands as a youth. Why was Rush going to be a good pinball machine in your mind back then?

Ed: Well, I would say to anyone who's listening, either people agree with me right away and they're part of the cult of Rush already and they think, "Oh, my God, it's about time," or they should go watch an incredible documentary by a filmmaker called Sam Dunn. You'll have to excuse Ali is in the background chirping, making some noise here. Stern's--

Nate: Good looking game.

Ed: Oh, it's a fantastic game. Beat J-pop to all his purple fantasies.

[laughter]

Ed: They should go watch this film by Sam Dunn called *Beyond the Lighted Stage* documentary on the band Rush. You will understand how, on top of selling whatever they've sold, 60 million-plus records and being around for almost 50 years now, the reach this band has globally and the reach they have artistically. If they're not your favorite band, it's pretty likely that they're your favorite band's favorite band or there's someone in your favorite band's favorite band. It's interesting when you take a guy like me who's written pop, rock songs for 30 years, you wouldn't necessarily think heavy, progressive rock, but that's where my roots are. My high school band played 27 Rush songs.

Nate: Wow.

Ed: The first time I ever went to our national awards show in Canada, which are called the Juno Awards, all I cared about was meeting the guys in Rush. I didn't care that we were nominated for a couple of awards. I didn't care that we were performing. I just wanted to meet the guys from Rush.



Nate: When you read things about Rush, and I did some poking around the interwebs today ahead of this interview, people are aggressively fanatic and complimentary towards Rush. They use words that I don't see used for guys in bands very often about heroic, virtues of musicianship of this band. It's funny to a degree, but it proves what you're saying. This is a lot of people's favorite band and it goes beyond just a band. It's a lot bigger than just three guys playing instruments.

Ed: Yes, it is the zeitgeist of dedicated musicianship for so many people. It's an interesting dichotomy, right? Because they understand the three guys are just three guys because they've gone out of their way to present themselves as very down to earth despite being very larger than life. They've always incorporated a ton of humor into their shows, which I think was there to take the edge off of people trying to exalt them to this godlike status. They're constantly poking fun at themselves through these interstitial video bits. It's funny like early in the development, I had to convince Borg how funny Rush was.

Because in his mind, he was so enamored with the band, but they were like concept records and musicianship and serious. All of that is true, but I said, "John, the guys are really funny and they have a great sense of humor and they take the music super seriously, but they don't take themselves seriously at all. It'll be important to them that this game has some humor in it." John was super reluctant at first. I sent him like 20 different videos of the guys just completely hamming it up. Alex in his fat suit and Geddy is the Deli owner and Neil is the drunk Irish cop. [laughs]

Nate: I think you look at the tour where Geddy had-- Alex has this wall of-- I think they were probably Hughes & Kettners, but let's call it Marshall stacks on one side of the stage, and Geddy's got washing machines behind him. I think that's hilarious.

Ed: He's had rotisserie chicken before.

Nate: That's really funny. I love that stuff. I think it's a good point because a lot of their lyrical content and just names of songs that are like volume one, volume two, the prologue, it is the sci-fi side of the world put into rock music. It's that corner of it, but with the wink and the nod that, "Yes, we know. We're up here playing good rock songs too."

Ed: Yes, Geddy told me a funny story once they were opening for Blue Öyster Cult early, mid-'70s in the US. The Blue Öyster Cult guys were at the side of the stage like heckling them all night about their kimonos and their-- "Oh, lads, looking lovely tonight. Wife doesn't mind you borrowing the kimono, eh?"

[laughter]

Nate: It's funny. One of the things about Rush when I look at like, "Okay, we're all pinball people. We're all thinking about themes all the time," you and I were doing it before we started recording. When you think about what other bands work is pinball themes and could make a compelling game and something interesting, Rush to me



works because as someone who's into music and playing music and read guitar magazines and stuff, they were one of the few bands that I can think of where I knew who each guy was.

I knew who Neil Peart was. I knew Neil Peart wrote the lyrics for the band Rush even though he was the drummer. That was just something you knew. It was a talking point. Alex Lifeson and his massive amount of gear and pedals and this and that. Geddy Lee, playing bass like that with this high voice. I don't know. There was a character to all of them. Whereas most of the top bands right now, I couldn't name more than one guy in those bands. I'm into some of those bands.

Ed: It's a front guy and a backing band so many times, but Rush were distinct, revered, iconic musicians. They all brought a virtuosity to their playing, to their position in the band. Yes, it was super interesting to me that Neil was the lyricist. It wasn't the drummer contributed to the lyrics. He wrote every word. After the first record, he joined on *Fly by Night* and wrote every lyric after that. There's a couple of co-writes in there, but Neil wrote almost every lyric and, not to mention, a bunch of novels as well.

Nate: You guys are all very clearly smart people too. You can just tell. You watch their live concerts and what they have to do to recreate their albums live. You can tell there's a lot of thinking and a lot going on there. There's our pitch. Rush is amazing. Rush is this great, this stark rock band. I don't think that is a surprise.

Ed: If you don't think they're great, you're incorrect. This is not one of those subjective opinions. They are simply a great band.

Nate: With that out there, how does Ed Robertson go to Stern with the idea for Rush or how does Stern go to Ed Robertson's idea for Rush? How does this happen? Where's our story here how, "I'm talking to Ed Robertson about the Rush pinball machine today"?

Ed: Well, this is one of my favorite parts about getting involved entirely. I was way up north in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada doing a gig. Middle of nowhere way, way far north.

Nate: Is that by Medicine Hat?

Ed: It's north of Medicine Hat.

Nate: Oh wow, that's really far north.

Ed: By a long, long way. It's where our oil, tar sands operations are way up just under the Northwest Territory. It's like 60th parallel. It's way up there. I get a phone call from Jody Denberg and he says, "Hey, buddy, what's going on?" I go, "Well, I'm up in Fort McMurray." He goes, "What is Fort McMurray?" [laughs] I say, "Well, I'm up here doing this gig." He goes, "Hey, how well do you know the Rush guys?"



I said, "Well, I'm friendly with the guys. I've had the pleasure to play with them. I run into them at award shows and stuff. They know I'm a massive fan, but I'm not like having lunch with Geddy every couple of weeks. I know them, I love them, but yes, I'm more of a fan." He goes, "Well, that's interesting because they want to do a pin with us. We've been pitching them. They want to do it, but they've insisted that you kind of be the creative director on it." I was like, "Excuse me?" [laughs]

It was a really, really interesting call to get. I was super flattered. I reached out to Geddy and Alex and said, "Hey, I just had this really interesting call." Essentially, they said, "We're excited about this, but we don't know anything about pinball and we know that you know everything about pinball, so would you come on board with us and just help us make sure that we're making a cool game and explain to us the things we don't understand about pinball, reasons we have to clear certain things, or can you just be a part of the process?" I was like, "Yes. Yes, I can, Geddy Lee. Thank you for asking."

Nate: That's pretty cool. When you say they knew nothing about pinball, did they like pinball? Are they into pinball? Is the concept of pinball interesting to them?

Ed: Oh, I'm sure they would-- These guys don't have to do anything they don't want to do, right? This is a case of probably Stern approaching the people in charge of their licensing, then floating it to the band, and then go like, "Oh, pinball. Yes, that's cool. We should reach out to Ed and see if he can help us with this." They didn't have a sense of where modern pinball was at. I heard a story about that Led Zeppelin guys were kind of confused why they would even want voices in the game because they're still thinking late '70s pinballs.

Nate: They're thinking chimes and bells.

Ed: Yes, the Rush guys certainly knew it was a lot further along than that. Really, they wanted to make sure it was cool. I think getting me involved in the project allowed me to kind of be the translator from pinball, speak into explaining things to the guys. It ended up being a really fun, collaborative process. One of the first things we did was talk about the songs for the game.

I reached out to Geddy and Alex and I said, "Okay, guys, I want you both to pick 20 songs that you think would be amazing in a pinball machine. Don't think about this like, 'I want to show the depth and breadth of my career.' I want you to think of 20 songs that are bangers that when you walk up and press Start, it doesn't matter which one of these songs plays. People are going to go, 'Oh yes, that song's cool.'" I said, "I'm going to make a list too. I want you to send me a list with 20 bangers from the whole career of the band." We all submitted our list.

[crosstalk]

Nate: I got to know. That's interesting.



Ed: This is the cool part. We had 15 of the same songs on our list. Geddy, Alex, and myself, out of 20 songs, had 15 in common and we were shooting for--

Nate: Out of 150 songs probably, you're thinking?

Ed: Yes.

Nate: That's great.

Ed: We're shooting for 16 total for the game. Then I find myself having a shootout with Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson voting on which of the remaining 8 or 10 songs between our two lists were going to make the final list. That was super surreal and funny, me saying, "No, I think it should be *La Villa Strangiato* over *YYZ* because--" and Geddy's like, "Yes, but *YYZ* is strong." I'm like, "Yes, but *La Villa Strangiato* is the better instrumental. It's got more memorable hooks." That was fun. [laughs]

Nate: That's very cool. Obviously, John Borg designed the game. How much did you talk to John Borg about the game from the beginning like, "Where should we go? What should we do?" John's a guitar player. He's a music fan. I'm sure he was really jazzed to be a part of this. He's been doing rock band pins with a lot of enthusiasm. What was that conversation with Mr. Borg like?

Ed: Well, when I was first brought on board to help shape this game, the first thing I said was it's got to be John Borg because he is one of my favorite designers of all time. I love the speed and the brutality that a John Borg game can be. It's just the way he approaches a layout made. It just clicked with me for Rush. Odd time signatures, difficult passages, it just made sense to me.

John was super in touch with me throughout the whole process. John's an interesting guy. I remember years back, Gary saying to me, "John Borg is the only guy here who if you left him on his own with a box of parts, he could build the whole thing." [laughs] John can design and build the mechs. He can design and program cab, the layout. John's a creative engineer. He does it all and I loved being privy to his process.

He started sending me mech ideas from early on, this double-scoop shootout idea that ended up on the playfield. Before we even got to layout, John was sending me mech designs and ideas and then very, very early sketches of what the layout might be to very early builds. John kept me informed every step of the way. It was super cool as a pinball fan and as a fan of boards to really get an inside look at his process was really cool.

Nate: Were you surprised either how much it changed or how much it started out and ended up similar if either one?

Ed: I think I was surprised at how it went from really simple lines to a very robust layout drawing. I was having trouble even understanding what was happening in the drawing. I had to get him to remove layers so I could understand. I was sent to a full CAD drawing the first one and I had to say, "Okay, can you remove all the underplay



field stuff because I can't make sense of this?" He really helped walk me through what we were looking at and what things would need to be tweaked. Yes, it was super interesting.

Nate: Did the band have opinions on-- There's a lot of imagery with Rush. Rush has these iconic album covers and these stage designs. There's the Starman image, I think, of the owl. There's a lot. The rocks from later on one of their albums, the stacked rocks. Did the band have anything there with like, "Okay, we'd love to see this in the game," or was it more of, "You bring us ideas"?

Ed: Those are called inukshuks by the way.

Nate: Sorry, sorry, sorry, inukshuks.

Ed: Inukshuk, that's an Inuit rock sculpture to-- I think it helps in navigation across the frozen tundras of the North. They would set up an inukshuk on a peak that points toward a hunting ground or points back to a village. Interesting, anyway.

Nate: This is incredibly interesting.

Ed: The band is cool visually. Unlike almost any other band, their logo is different on every single record. Every Rush record has a different font, different logo, different look for the band. Visually, they're all over the map from photorealistic painting to computer 3D renderings to-- they're just all over the place, to photo collages. There's 45 years of album covers and tour art to draw from. The guys were super open to all of it. They were like, "Here's what we have. Show us what you come up with."

Nate: That's cool.

Ed: They really left it to me and Patrick, who does a lot of their licensing stuff. Patrick, at their management company, helped steer the look of the band and what things they want to reference or put forward. He was a great resource. "Maybe this image isn't as iconic as you think. Maybe we could go with something else there." Patrick was a great resource. The guys really left it up to us. Michael had free rein to just draw from that incredible wealth of imagery. I love what he proposed.

We gave him lots of feedback and he was super open to making little tweaks here and there. I gave him some technical feedback. In one of the images, there was a fretboard of a guitar. I said to him, "Okay, but just have a look at a fretboard of a guitar because that's not what it looks like. The spaces are not all the same. They get shorter as it goes up the headstock and here's where the dots should be placed. It's not just every two frets." Silly little things like that, musical nerd stuff.

Nate: In your opinion, I've looked at the song list. I know most of the songs. I will admit. I had to google a couple and learn some new Rush today, which I liked. I see stuff like big hits like *The Big Money*, *Fly By Night*, *Limelight*, these are big hits. Is there anything on there that, I think, you're going to feel that Rush fans are going to be just really pleasantly surprised that's included on this machine?



Ed: Well, it's funny after we made this list. I think there's 16 tracks in the final version. That gets pretty close to two hours of music. That's the crazy part because some of these tracks are 18 minutes long. They're the whole side of the original LP. Geddy and I actually joked about that when we picked the tracks. He said, "Oh, I noticed you picked *Cygnus X-1* too. It's 18 minutes."

I said, "Yes, but it's still one track," because we have to clear it with publishing, right? As far as publishing is concerned, it's one track. It's a single license. [laughs] We did that a couple of times with their songs. Huge concept sides. I think Rush fans are going to be super stoked about that, that we've got all of *Cygnus X-1*. We've got the entire first side of *2112*.

It's a great list that spans the whole career of the band and there's no way to please everybody. I think the Rush fans will see the care that went into it and when they understand that these songs were picked by Geddy and Alex and a little old me, but primarily by Geddy and Alex. We had 15 songs in common with our choices. I think when everybody understands that it's the band that drove this decision, I think they'll get it.

Nate: Absolutely. I've been looking at the photos, looking at the videos. It's colorful. It's beautiful. The artwork is amazing. What's your take on the layout? What do you think of this? You are definitely a student of pinball at this point. You were comparing rulesets with me earlier on other games to different games. What are your thoughts on where this game ended up as far as a pinball machine and something you're going to play?

Ed: Well, first of all, I hate that due to COVID, I haven't been able to just be back and forth in Chicago and flipping this thing. I've never touched this machine. I've been so deeply involved in every single decision and I have yet to put my hands on the game. It's driving me nuts.

Nate: That's really frustrating.

Ed: Oh, super frustrating. As I said, I'm a huge fan of John's designs. I've been shooting this game in my head for over a year now as we finalize the layout and get into artwork. It's like the first time I flip this game, I'm going to be nailing shots because I've been flipping it in my head for a year. I'm super stoked. I think it's going to be fast. There's a lot of chaos in it. I love John's double-scoop exit idea.

I think the more chaos he introduced into a game, I think the more challenging and fun it's going to be. I think this game got a little something for everybody. It's got very makeable ramps, but it's got a lot of chaos. I'm a huge fan of a shot through the pops. Love it, always have. It's one of the first things I said to John, "I want an orbit through the pops, John. I love your orbits through the pops."

Nate: Yes, that's the ultimate risk-reward. I think that certainly come into play more so in the last few years than ever, so that is cool to see.



Ed: What's been really neat for me too is watching Tim Sexton develop a ruleset for this game. He aimed super high and I think there's three wizard modes, six multi-ball modes. He was talking to me really early on about getting super nerdy about some of the scoring, trying to match it up maybe with some of the time-signature ideas in the songs. Tim's a young guy. Right away, he said to me, "Okay, I'm going to need your help understanding the band because I don't know the band."

I was like, "Perfect because I can teach you everything about the band." What I want is like this new-school Tim Sexton, Raymond Davidson, new-school tournament player, a high-level concept for rules because I know we've got the Rush assets to make the game super cool. Now, we need an interesting take on the ruleset. Tim has been keeping me appraised all along of where it's going and I'm super excited about it.

Nate: I think that what's nice about the lad is, yes, there are three dudes with long hair on the game, so it's clear. I think it says rock band, but there are going to be a lot of people who don't know Rush and don't know the music and just aren't that familiar. I'm in my early 40s. I'm into guitar, I'm into music, I'm into rock. I've seen Rush live once and I still don't feel like I'm super familiar with Rush as a lot of people are.

I can only imagine the 20-year-olds, they're going to step up to this game as soon as he's hit the barcades and the different places around the world where there's going to be Rush pinball. What do you think about that? What's that going to be like? Do you think the music sucks them in? Does the game suck them in? Is it just all together? Will this appeal?

Ed: Well, my answer to that is super simple. I answer that as a pinball fan. Iron Maiden and Metallica are two of my favorite pinball machines of all time and they don't even make my top 50 favorite bands. They're not even on my list. Maiden is great music for pinball.

Nate: Fantastic.

Ed: It's high-energy rock music and I think that's what people are going to get from Rush is they probably know *Tom Sawyer*. Maybe they've heard *Spirit of Radio* or *Working Man*.

Nate: They know *Fly by Night*. Everybody knows *Fly by Night*. Come on.

Ed: Maybe, but maybe not. Maybe there's another hour and 45 minutes of music on this thing that they don't know.

Nate: There could be.

Ed: I think people are going to be pleasantly surprised at how super high-energy and rocking this game is going to be. We're just moving into really finessing the light shows to match the energy of the audio on this thing now, but I think people are



going to be really blown away. I think you'll find people that didn't think they were Rush fans becoming Rush fans because of this game.

Nate: I think you're right because I heard the exact same stories on even Led Zeppelin. I was reading people saying, "I didn't even know these songs." I always heard of *Stairway to Heaven*. I didn't know what that was really and we forget that sometimes because that's just in us. We have *Black Dog*. It's part of us. A lot of people, it's just not. I think you'll have the same thing here. How big is Rush in Canada? For a non-Canadian, how big really are they?

Ed: They have the Order of Canada.

Nate: Yes, that's right. They're like [unintelligible 00:34:02] Canadian.

Ed: Kind of, yes. You cannot overstate the significance of this band in Canada. They are philanthropists. They are icons, legends. They are woven into the fabric of this country. Everywhere else, they're a big rock band. They tour all over the world and they're a well-respected, super successful rock band. In Canada, they are legends. They are elder statesmen of Canadian rock and there's no one like them really.

Nate: One thing I've noticed about Canada is Canada loves its own like you guys are proud. When you have somebody who's done well, it's like, "We are proud of our hometown boys, girls groups," whatever. I like that.

Ed: Yes, it doesn't take long for Canadians to start pointing out all the people that other people didn't know were a Canadian.

Nate: This is true.

Ed: Yes.

Nate: You did actual voice recordings with the group in person, correct?

Ed: Yes, we got together--

Nate: Tell me about it.

Ed: It was incredible. I had a ludicrous week. I got back to playing live for the first time in 18 months. Then I was asked to induct a hero of mine, this guy, Kim Mitchell, into the Canadian songwriting hall of fame. Not widely known outside of Canada, but a huge influence on me. He had a band called Max Webster that I grew up on. They actually opened for Rush a ton in the late '70s and early '80s.

People might know his song, *Go for Soda*. It was kind of a big hit in North America in maybe '85 or '86. Anyway, Kim asked me to be a part of his induction into the Canadian songwriting hall of fame. Then at the end of that week, I went into the studio with Geddy and Alex to record the over 800 call-outs for the Rush pinball machine.



Nate: Wow.

Ed: It was so fun. I was there in person with the guys, but Stern was also listening in on a studio feed afterwards. I'll never forget getting on the phone with Jody and Tim afterwards and they were like, "Oh, my God, those guys were incredible. They burned through the lines, having fun, making jokes, bringing so much energy to the session." Jody was like, "I've worked with professional voice actors that are not nailing it as hard as those guys did the whole time."

They were amazing and I have to say, for me, one of the most incredible moments because part of the idea that we had for the script of call-outs was we had Geddy, we had Alex. Of course, sadly, we don't have Neil anymore. We really wanted to use what we were calling in the script, the federation pilot, so Rush nerds will know right away what I'm talking about at the end of side A of *2112*.

There's this voice that comes over, "Attention, all planets of the Solar Federation. Attention, all planets of the Solar Federation," et cetera, et cetera, "We have assumed control. We have assumed control." I said to Geddy and Alex, "Well, we want to have this federation pilot voice. I know that was Neil. What do you guys want to do? Alex, do you want to try and imitate that?"

Geddy said, "Well, you should do it, Ed. You've got a low voice like Neil." I was like, "Ah no, guys, I can't." Alex was like, "You should totally do it. Oh, Neil would love that. You should totally do that." I was kind of like, "Oh no, Rush fans are going to kill me if I do that. If I even think about doing that, they're going to kill me." Then it's not that many lines. I think I recorded 30 lines or something, but I tried really hard to imitate that deep, commanding, barrel-chested voice that Neil used on that recording in 1974, right?

I said to Geddy, "Do you know what kind of effects are on that voice? Because it's highly filtered and affected." Hardcore Rush fans will know it's Neil. A casual listener will just think, "Oh, it's like a voice actor or whatever." I thought, "Well, how are we going to get that?" I said to Ged, "Do you know how they got that sound?" He's like, "Well, they didn't have a lot of options," because it was 1974, "so it's probably this, it might be this."

Kenny Luong, who was engineering the session, he's done a bunch of work with BNL, amazing engineer, he goes, "So Ben from Simple Plan is married to Terry Brown's daughter." Terry Brown produced all those Rush records from *Fly by Night* to maybe *Moving Pictures*, I want to say, if not even after that. He goes, "Well, let me see if I can get in touch with Terry." He texts Ben. 20 minutes later, we have a text back from Terry Brown with the signal chain that he used on Neil's voice on *2112*.

Nate: [laughs] That's awesome.

Ed: Kenny pulls it all up virtually. He's got the exact plugin to simulate it.

Nate: Plugins to simulate the hardware.



Ed: Within 20 minutes, we're hearing this voice back. It just blew my mind.

Nate: Do you remember what the hardware was?

Ed: I don't. I'm sorry.

Nate: That's all I just care. That's super interesting. That's cool.

Ed: I could ask Kenny and I'll let you know afterwards.

Nate: That's really cool. Just the whole thing, being able to do that, the world is so connected. You're basically being the creative director of this pinball machine from not Chicago. You're not there. 20 years ago, this doesn't happen. It's just not possible.

Ed: It was really cool. Here I am in a studio with my literal heroes, the reason I do what I do, the reason I wanted to play guitar. The first concert I ever saw in 1981, my older brother took me to see Rush at Maple Leaf Gardens and it changed the course of my life. It's why I do what I do now. Now, here I am sitting around a studio with these guys, joking around, and doing voice work for a pinball machine. It was surreal, but also those guys are so disarming.

They immediately defuse any notion that they are people to be revered and treated in any kind of special way. They're really, really lovely guys. The session was so fun. I had friends of ours at one of the best restaurants in Canada called Edulis. It was one of the first farm-to-table restaurants in Toronto. They catered the session. They came and made us lunch. It was just an amazing hang, got to hang out with my heroes, got to be super deeply involved in creating this pinball machine, my main passion outside of my music. It was a pretty incredibly special day for me.

Nate: That sounds amazing. That's great. For the Rush fans out there, I know there's been a lot of speculation on if Geddy and Alex will play music together going forward. Do you have any inside scoops on that? Are they going to keep making music together? They seem like such good friends still.

Ed: They are. They're super, super good friends. I have no idea and I don't even dare suggest anything to them. I have too much respect for them and it's got to be a difficult thing to even imagine for them. They did this 100 to 200 times a year with another one of their best friends and he's no longer there anymore. That's got to be difficult. At the same time, I know it's what they love to do.

It's an intrinsic part of who they are and who they've always been. They're high school friends who got to do this thing that is the greatest thing in the world for almost 50 years. Then not by choice, they had to quit cold turkey. I'm sure that was super difficult. I know myself as a performer and as a musician. I don't need it to be sold-out arenas all the time. I just love to pick up a guitar and play.



It would be unfathomable to me that they will never do it again. I think they need a good amount of distance. It would need to be for an extremely compelling reason because they can get together and play anytime they want. Doing it in front of people invites all kinds of opinions that I'm sure they don't even want to have to think about addressing.

Nate: Like I said earlier, with a band like this where these three guys are also singularly very recognizable and have their own persona and then the sum of it was this big thing, I believe them when they say Rush is just they cannot ever be. Rush is done because they lost a part of it and you can't have it anymore. I'm just--

Ed: Well, sure, but I will tell you as a fan, I am so attached to those three guys and all of those records and all of that music and all of those tours, but they happen. I experienced them. I loved them. I would go in a heartbeat to see Geddy and Alex perform with any drummer of their choosing. It wouldn't be the same. It wouldn't be Rush. Nobody's going to try and be Neil Peart. Nobody.

I would go see Geddy and Alex play with Questlove or play with Josh Homme on drums or play with anybody, Vinnie Colaiuta. I would go and I would love it because I'm a Rush fan and I would love to hear those songs live again. It would make me sad and nostalgic about Neil's passing and that he can't be there, but it would also make me overjoyed to see those two guys enjoying themselves on stage. Why would anyone want to take that from them?

Nate: That is a weird thing. I was thinking about that with something else the other day and I can't recall what it was. Oh, you know what it was? I was watching the *Get Back* documentary on The Beatles. I instantly started going to YouTube and searching for instances of McCartney and Ringo Starr playing together just to see it because they went all those years and there's all these feelings. It's such a bittersweet thing for me to watch because it's like, "Man, it's The Beatles." It's the backbone of all of this really when you're talking about music, and to see it so effortlessly happen in front of you but also the strain and the politics and the personal things.

Ed: Also to realize that a lot of the widely accepted mythology was not accurate.

Nate: Is nonsense, not accurate.

Ed: I guarantee you, that's the same with Rush. People have notions about what it is to be those guys. At the heart of it, they just love music and they love performing.

Nate: Exactly. That's what I was thinking like, how strange must it have been for a guy like George. George Harrison became this really weird character for me because he was super sympathetic to me because I can see the guys so terribly wanting to present and offer his contributions that he knew were good and ended up he was right. They were really good. He's getting shut down because you've got Lennon and McCartney.



They're going, "We got this." How weird and hard it is because The Beatles was this bigger thing like Rush is this big thing, that now these individuals were just human beings. They're just living their lives. This is a big part of them. Somehow, I can't go play my songs with my friend in front of people because the people are going to be really upset about me losing my best friend. It's just this weird like mindfuck.

Ed: It doesn't make sense.

Nate: It doesn't make sense, so strange.

Ed: There will be a huge cohort of people saying, "Oh no, they definitely shouldn't, not without Neil." When you remove yourself from your own attachment and preconceptions about what the band quo needs to be when you think, "Oh, these are lifelong friends who built their career writing songs and performing them for people. They probably really enjoy doing that again."

Nate: Exactly.

Ed: [laughs] If you just keep it simple like that and it's not about trying to recreate what they had, it's just about doing what they love. I hope I get to see them live again. It's the long and short of it.

Nate: I hope you do too. I have this feeling that we're going to see people talking about Rush as they discover them through a pinball machine. It's like, "Oh man, I wish I could have been there. I wish I could have seen it." I have that with bands who I discover and it's like, "Maybe somebody is not with us anymore. They broke up a long time ago." I'm like, "Man, why didn't I know about this band?" or "Why wasn't I born earlier--"

Ed: Oh yes.

Nate: It's lots of that.

Ed: Oh yes, it happens all the time for sure. They were literally my first concert. I saw them many times throughout the years. I was lucky to see their final concert tour. Actually, I went to see the San Francisco show, brought Dirty Donny with me. He's a huge Rush fan from back in the day, back in his Ottawa days.

Nate: Did you find someone for Canada? Did you just do what we were joking about earlier?

Ed: [laughs] Yes, I guess I did.

Nate: [laughs] I love it. That's good. That's awesome. Where are you at the end of this? We're not at the end. The game's just coming out, but how do you feel now having gone through this process? Albeit one very close to you and something you really cared about, what are your thoughts on working with Stern, working in pinball? I use work in quotes. You have a full-time gig. You have a very busy schedule that,



hopefully, we can return to with the Barenaked Ladies and with touring and recording. Where are you at with working this intimately, this close to a pinball machine going forward?

Ed: Well, I loved the process. As I said, I came into it as feeling a bit responsible to just make sure that I helped the guys make the best game we could make. What I got was a really in-depth look at every part of the development process. I really enjoyed that as a pinball nerd and as a collector. I obsess about the details of games. To watch every reason for every little angle and every art decision and every sound decision, that was super cool for me as a fan of pinball.

On one hand, it was super exciting to just be involved because it's my favorite band and it was cool. As a pinball nerd, it was even cooler because I got to be on the inside track of the full development process of a game. I will say I had no idea. I had no idea even as close as I've gotten with Stern over the years just because I'm a pinball fan and I'm always posting about it and I tour with machines when I go on the road.

I'm always connected with those guys and I drop by the factory whenever I'm in town. I started to get a little glimpse into the development process sometimes. Sometimes I knew about some things in development, but this time, I was a part of every decision and every step along the way. I really, now, have an even greater appreciation for what it takes to put one of these things out. It is way more in-depth, way more demanding, way more all-consuming than anybody on any form can imagine.

It's really amazing to see the whole process end-to-end and to have that kind of appreciation for every little nuance that ends up in the final game. When you know all the iterations and all of the back-and-forth that went into making that final decision, you would never go, "Oh, they just slapped that thing on there," [laughs] because you would've been a part of the 27 decisions that it took to get that thing there or that piece of artwork or whatever it might be. It was really cool.

I remember, for me, when I started collecting pinball machines, I've said this before, but they were this magical black box, this wondrous contraption that I didn't understand what made them work at all and they fascinated me. Then when I learned how they actually work, I was more amazed by them. [laughs] As I started to understand the electronics and the physics of a machine, they became even more wondrous to me. There's very few things like that in the world like the better you understand them, the more you're amazed by them.

Nate: I think you can tie that into rock and roll pretty easily. I remember going to concerts when I was a kid and it was just lights and sound and smoke and, "Oh, my gosh." Now, I go to concerts and I'm looking at how their pedals are connected and I want to see where the fuzz pedal is versus the overdrive pedal. Then you learn how to write a song and you figure out the guts of all of that and it's like- [crosstalk]



Ed: Right, but that's why when you then go see Rush or U2 or Foo Fighters or any amazing live band and you know what it takes to do a show like that, you are blown away on a whole other level.

Nate: Absolutely.

Ed: [laughs] Because you're like, "Not only did these guys write and produce these songs, they're performing them in a room with 15,000 people right now and it sounds better than the record." There's something truly amazing about that.

Nate: I think it's why pinball and rock bands mix. I think they just go so well together. It's immersive experiences.

Ed: Yes, some people have used the term "world under glass," ad infinitum.

Nate: I've heard that. That's a good one.

Ed: It's an interesting term, right?

Nate: Yes.

Ed: I always say pinball is rock and roll under glass. Even the non-rock games, pinball is rock and roll under glass. It's energy, it's lights, it's sound, it's motion, it's a rock concert. That, I agree. That's why the two go so well together.

[music]

Nate: All right, everyone. I really want to thank Ed Robertson for coming onto the *Stern Insiders Pinball Podcast*. A really great way to end the year. Two shows on the game Rush. It's obviously a passion project for Ed. Looks like it's going to be a really fun game. Lots going on, can't wait. Ed didn't ask for any plugs or any promotion of his own stuff, but I'm going to give it to him anyway.

His band, the Barenaked Ladies, released an album in 2021 called *Detour de Force*. It had one of my favorite songs of the year on it called *New Disaster*. It's cool when someone you know puts out a song that you just really love. Check out Ed's music. Hopefully, the Barenaked Ladies are on the road in 2022. Hopefully, everyone's staying safe out there. Hopefully, you have a great holiday season. I wish you a Happy New Year and all that jazz. Until next time, play more pinball and be good.