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Exclusive interviews
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2112
The story of prog's maddest sci-fi epic

Moving Pictures
Inside their 80s masterpiece

Neil Peart
The ultimate tribute

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CLASSIC ROCK PROG

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Roughly 40 years into their career, a weird thing happened to Rush: they became cool. After decades of being ridiculed as sci-fi-fixated nerds making impenetrable prog rock for geeks everywhere, they finally found themselves hailed as one of the greatest bands in history. Everyone from Dave Grohl and members of Rage Against The Machine to Robert Downey Jr and the creators of South Park outed themselves as fans, while Rush themselves were deservedly - if belatedly – inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2013.

Of course, if you're reading this, you don't need some Hollywood A-lister or faceless panel of cultural gatekeepers to tell you how brilliant the Canadian trio are. You've spent a lifetime immersing yourself in the records they made, from their Led Zeppelin-indebted debut album through to their glorious swansong *Clockwork Angels*. You've air-drummed for hours on end along to *Overture* from *2112* and *Tom Sawyer*, tried to work out just how many different time signatures there are in *La Villa Strangiato* and marvelled at the late, great Neil Peart's dazzling, erudite lyrics. You might have even tried to make a case that *Hold Your Fire* is actually an insanely under-rated record (well, if you're me you have).

You're the person we've put together this very special magazine dedicated to Rush for. Inside, you'll find the very best articles and exclusive interviews from the archives of *Classic Rock* and *Prog* magazines, from the stories behind such landmark albums as *2112*, *A Farewell To Kings*, *Moving Pictures*, *Signals* and *Clockwork Angels* to in-depth interviews with Messrs Lee, Lifeson and Peart. Factor in a rundown of the 40 greatest Rush songs as chosen by the stars plus a full Rush Buyer's Guide, and you've got the ultimate tribute to Toronto's finest.

So crank up *Xanadu*, bust out the honey dew and milk of paradise, and get ready to immerse yourself in the career of a band like no other.

.



Dave Everley - Editor

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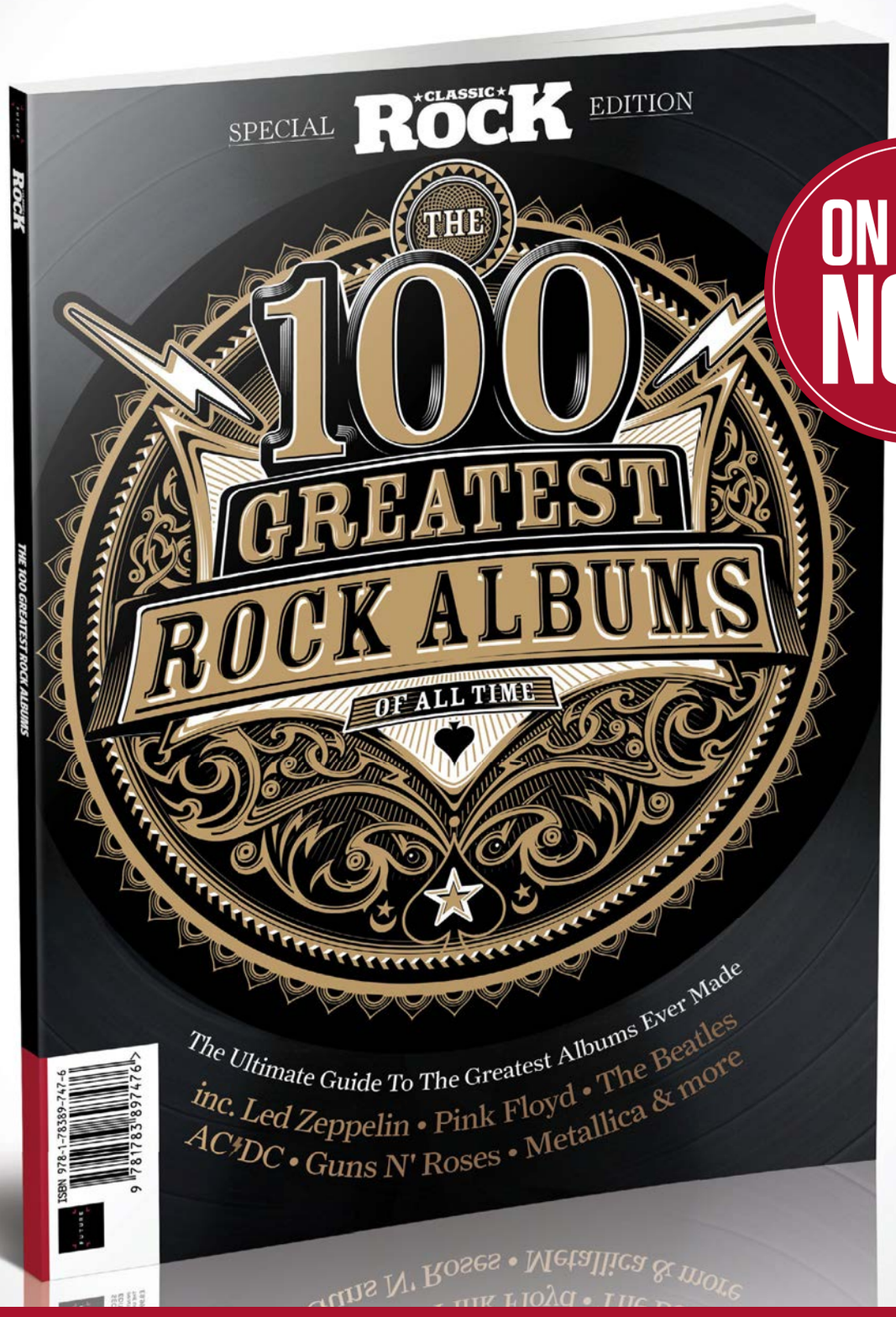
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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE GREATEST ALBUMS EVER MADE

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RUSH



The 1970s

Kings, hemispheres and *2112*: how a bar band from Canada became prog rock royalty. Plus: an epic interview with Geddy Lee.

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE



Toronto, Canada, the late 1960s: three kids are about to take their first steps on a path that would eventually lead to superstardom. This is the story of the birth of **Rush**, by Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson.

Words: Paul Elliott **Picture:** MMMedia/IconicPix

All great things have to begin somewhere. For Rush, that somewhere was Willowdale, a suburb of the Canadian city of Toronto. That was where Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee met as schoolkids - the start of an enduring friendship and musical partnership.

In this exclusive interview, the pair tell the story of the band's formative years: their school days and early adventures in music, the struggle to make it, the difficult birth of the first Rush album, the tough decision to fire original drummer John Rutsey, and how the subsequent arrival of Neil Peart — drummer and lyricist — completed the classic Rush line-up that survives to this day.

Alex Lifeson: I met Geddy when were thirteen years old, in our first year in junior high school. We were aliens in a class of conformity, and we became best friends.

Geddy Lee: At school we had a blast together — we cracked each other up. And we understood where each other came from, culturally. We were sons of Eastern European immigrants who had left Europe after the Second World War to start a new life in Canada. So we were, both of us, a little bit different.

Alex: I'm first generation Canadian. Both my parents were Serbian, so of course my birth name was Serbian — Aleksandar Živojinovi. My parents actually met in Canada after the war. They had come over as refugees. My father had been married before, to a Serbian woman. They had married in Italy, and my sister was born there. They tried to get into the States, but they were denied and then sent to Canada.

Geddy: My parents were Polish Jews, survivors of the Holocaust. They met when they were thirteen at a work camp and they were both in Auschwitz for a time. My mom had such a strong Jewish accent, which is how I ended up being known as Geddy instead of Gary, my real name And basically, it stuck. Eventually my family was calling me Geddy. So a little later, when I turned sixteen, I legally changed my name to Geddy, because so many people were calling me that anyway.

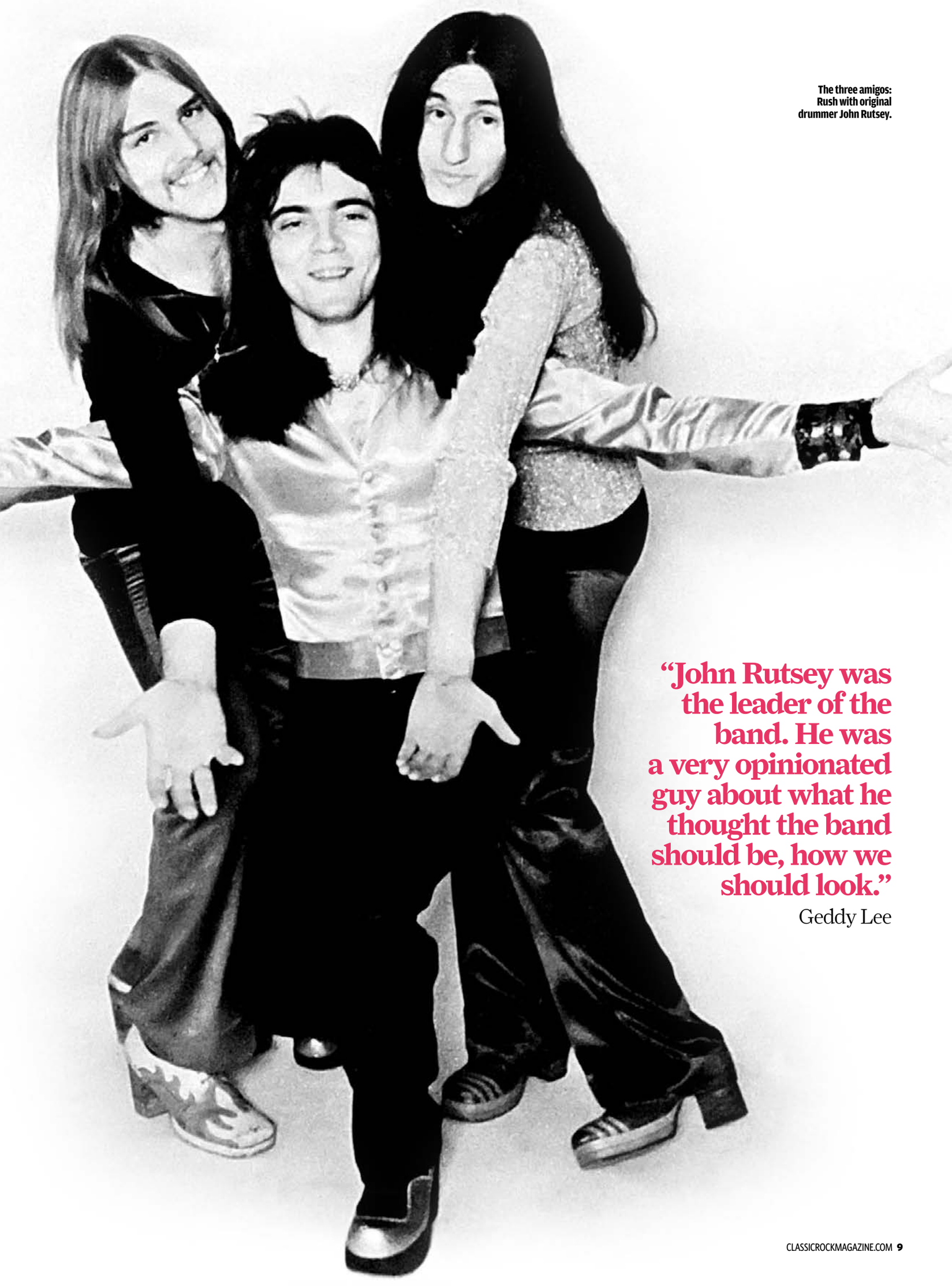
Alex: It was at junior high, in that 'getting to know you' stage, that Geddy and I got heavily into music.

Geddy: We wanted to be rebellious, to break away from our families, like all kids want to do. And we both had a really deep passion for music and wanting to play it. Almost every day we'd go to his parents' place after school and we'd jam for two hours.

Alex: For a long time we were in different bands, but we always jammed together. We loved to learn all those great Cream songs, play along to the record player, and play them better and better and better. It was really a lot of fun. It was just the two of us — no drummer. We'd either play along with the record, or we would both plug into Ged's amp and just play, him on bass, me on guitar. We were beginning to look at music more seriously and really trying to figure out what the musicians were playing, how the bands worked. And we loved to play. We just couldn't get away from it.

Geddy: The first time I ever got high was with Alex. He was just a terrific pothead, and a terrible influence on me. We went to the local public school grounds to smoke some pot. At that time I was playing in another band, and after I got high with Al, I went over to the guy in my band's house for rehearsal. But I was a little too high to be very functional, and this guy was really mad at me. He was very straight and he was really upset with me. He was threatening to tell my mother that I was high. That was a bummer!

Alex: I had a friend named John Rutsey who played drums, and we had a little



The three amigos: Rush with original drummer John Rutsey.

"John Rutsey was the leader of the band. He was a very opinionated guy about what he thought the band should be, how we should look."

Geddy Lee



Lounge act: Lifeson, Lee and Peart enjoying the luxuries of a tour bus.

basement band called The Projection. The guy that lived next door to me, Gary Cooper, was the bass player. Gary didn't stick around for long. But out of The Projection came the first gig as Rush. John's brother Bill had said, 'You need a better name for the band – how about Rush?' And we liked it. We were offered this gig at a drop-in centre, so I called this guy I'd been jamming with, Jeff Jones, who played bass and sang. We did that gig. Twenty people showed up. The following week we were offered another gig at the same place, but Jeff said he couldn't do it – he was already in another band at the time. So that's when I called Geddy.

Geddy: I was a pretty shy kid. I didn't really want to be a frontman. I was just the one with the best voice – or the most appropriate voice! So stepping out in front was not a natural thing for me. John was the leader of the band, to all intents and purposes. He was a very opinionated guy – about music, about what he thought the band should be, how we should look.

Alex: For a couple of years we just needed to learn our trade. At that time you played maybe three times a month if you were really lucky, at high school dances and drop-in centres. After a year playing clubs, the shows were packed. We were making a thousand dollars a week. Back then, that was good money.

Geddy: The problem was that when it came to making an album, nobody had even the slightest interest in signing us. There was no big rock label in Canada. Really, there were just distributor outposts for the American companies. And nobody cared anything about Canadian music.

Alex: We made a single, a cover of *Not Fade Away* – based more on the Stones' version than the Buddy Holly original. The feeling from management was: let's do something that people will get as an introduction. I think that was bad advice. Playing that song live was great. We played it quite heavy. It sounded really good. But the recorded version was terrible.

Geddy: I was so excited about doing a record and having our name on the disc, the whole deal. But to be honest, I was embarrassed by how it came out. It was so… dinky.

Alex: We were a hard rock band. We had some powerful songs – *Working Man*, *What You're Doing*. But that record sounded so tame.

Geddy: It was so disappointing. But our manager Ray Danniels put up the money for us to make an album. We had to do it cheap, recording late at night, after hours. The problem was that our producer, David Stock, was just not that great. So we had to record that album twice. The first version had Not Fade Away on it, and the whole thing sounded as tinny and shitty as the single did. So we had to redo the entire album, and that's when Terry Brown came in as producer.

"The first time I ever got high was with Alex. He was just a terrific pothead, and a terrible influence on me." Geddy Lee

Alex: Terry had a studio, Toronto Sound. And once we got in there with him, I think we spent another three days recording, so that whole album was done in about a week.

Geddy: It was pretty straightforward – it was only eight-track recording. And at the time, we were playing these songs a million times over and over, so it wasn't a big deal to go in and re-record them. Terry really fixed that record. It sounded great. We were very proud of it.

Alex: The album came out on Moon Records, the label that our manager set up. The big turning point was when *Working Man* got picked up on a radio station in Cleveland, Ohio – WMMS. That was a time, 1974, when FM radio was still based on the DJs' tastes.

Geddy: It was a very different time, before the consultants took over American radio. So you hear a song like *Working Man*, seven minutes long, on the radio. And that led to us singing with Mercury Records. Whether that deal would have come some other way, who knows? But certainly that was the breakout.

Alex: We knew early on that John had problems with his health. He had diabetes, and he was very concerned about whether it would be manageable for him on the road. In 1974, John got ill and missed out a few months of gigs. We used another drummer, Jerry Fielding, and then John came back for a month of club shows. But that was it for John. We had to fire him.

Geddy: That was hard. It was clear that there was going to be a break with John sooner or later. What he wanted to do as a musician and what we wanted to do as musicians was not the same, and eventually that would have caused the band to break. We were guilt-ridden at first, but we realised that it's just the way it had to be. He wasn't happy and we weren't happy. He had personal issues. It was a complicated time. We were discussing a future and not knowing what that meant. The rehearsals were becoming not much fun. There were definitely two different views in the band.

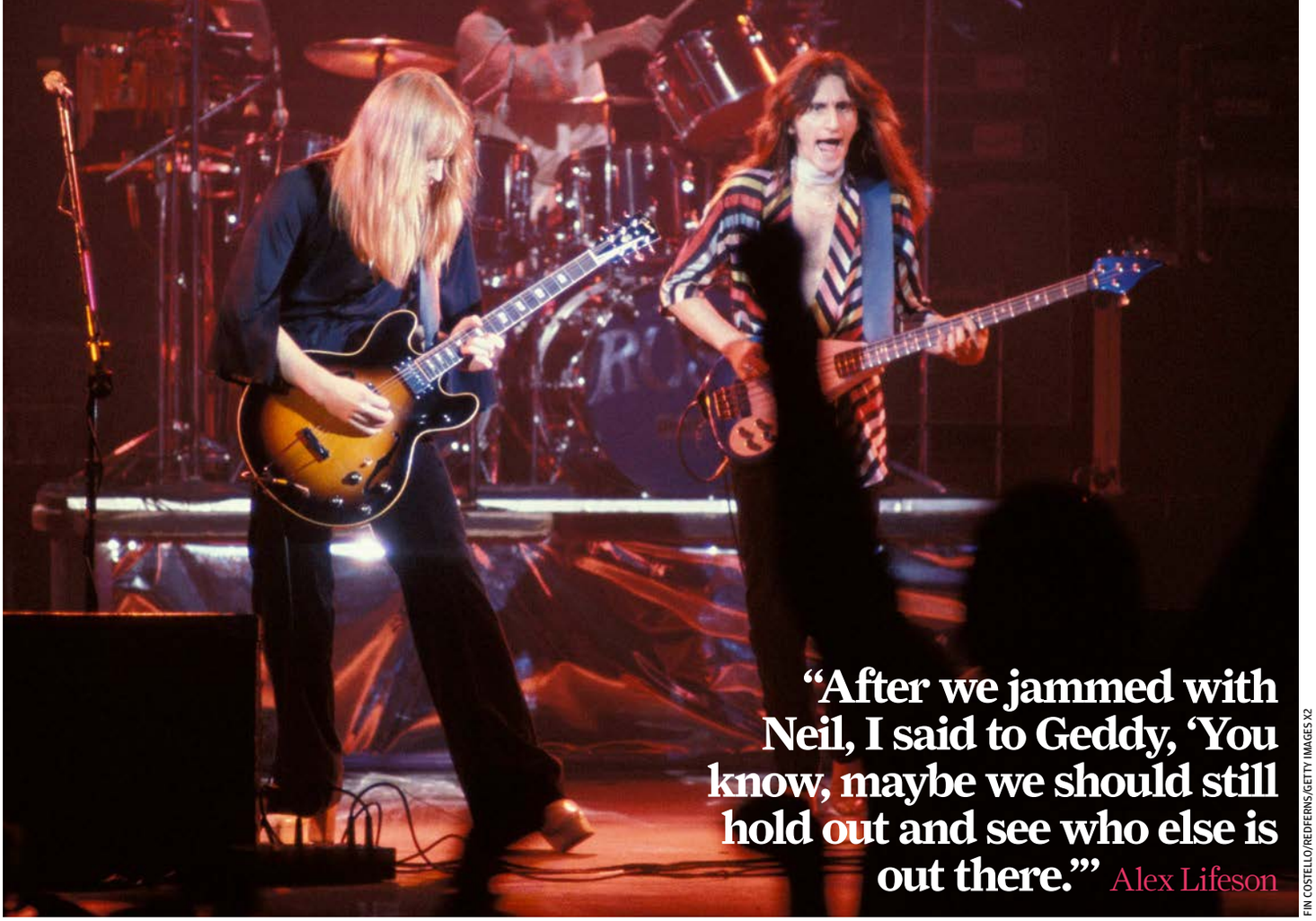
Alex: Ged and I were listening to more progressive music – Yes and Pink Floyd. We wanted to work that into our music. John was more of a straight rocker. So we were kind of relieved that John was gone, but it felt weird without him there as we started auditioning new drummers.

Geddy: On the day that Neil (Peart) auditioned, we had five guys in – three before Neil and one after. The last



Have guitars, will travel: Alex Lifeson shows off his six-string collection.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES X2



"After we jammed with Neil, I said to Geddy, 'You know, maybe we should still hold out and see who else is out there.'" Alex Lifeson

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES X2

guy had come a long way, a two-hour drive, and it was a very uncomfortable situation having him audition after Neil, because Neil was so fucking good. This poor guy had written charts and was playing our songs to charts. We were going through the motions. It was really awkward. I'm looking at Alex and Alex is looking at me. We were embarrassed for this guy because we were both so excited by Neil's playing. There was no denying that Neil was the man.

Alex: We were so blown away by Neil's playing. It was very Keith Moon-like, very active, and he hit his drums so hard. And then after we'd jammed, we chatted and he was so bright. We connected on many levels. I have to admit that on that first day I said to Geddy, 'You know, maybe we should still hold out and see who else is out there.' But when we talked again we were convinced he was the right guy.

Geddy: The first thing that we jammed with Neil in his audition was *Anthem*. That song was written, for the most part, while John was still in the band. It was very different to any of the songs on the first album — more complex. There were a lot of things that John was unhappy about, and one of them was the direction that Alex and I wanted to go in. And I think with that little bit of *Anthem*, our musical differences were sort of brought to the fore.

Alex: As soon as Neil was in the band, we started writing new material. We worked on most of the songs together in those days. But we were touring all the time back then, so we didn't have any time to go anywhere and write. We were writing on the road, in the backs of cars, going to gigs, dressing rooms. And it was still experimental for us. We were still feeling each other out.

Geddy: We were still an opening act at that time, and the one beautiful thing about being an opening act is you just have thirty five minutes to play. You don't need a show. It's all about your chops and trying to impress in thirty-five minutes. And when you're done, you have plenty of time to jam and to write.

Alex: What we needed was somebody to write lyrics…

Geddy: We kind of pushed Neil into writing lyrics. A lot of the songs on the first album, John had written the lyrics. But when we were on the road, we saw Neil reading books all the time. We thought, this guy is pretty smart. And the bottom line was, Alex and I didn't want to write lyrics. So we gently encouraged Neil to do it. And what he wrote was so cool, so different to the kind of stuff that John had written.

Alex: In many ways, the second album (1975's *Fly By Night*) felt like a new start for the band.

Working men: Rush in their element onstage in the 70s.

Geddy: *Anthem* was a holdover. Pretty much everything else on that album was written fresh. With a lot of the songs on that record, the music came first. But sometimes, Neil would have a lyric and Alex and I would put the music to it. One song that happened like that was *Beneath, Between & Behind*, which was the first lyric that Neil wrote for the band. There was also a lot of diversity on *Fly By Night*, much more than on the first album. We had the heavy songs like *Anthem*, but we also had that really long quiet song *Rivendell*, which was our first attempt at showing the lighter, ballad-y side of Rush. We liked having a bunch of different styles on that record, and that diversity was something that carried on through every album. We wanted each song to show another side to the band.

Alex: We had some cool songs on that record. *Anthem* was really powerful. And of course there was *By-Tor & The Snow Dog*, which became a really big song in the development of the band.

Geddy: The lyrics that Neil wrote for *By-Tor & The Snow Dog* were very tongue-in-cheek. There was a kind of comic lexicon that we had on the road — a bunch of stuff that we would joke about. And that's where *By-Tor & The Snow Dog* came from. It was a joke that got out of control. Our manager Ray had two dogs, and Howard Ungerleider, our lighting guy, called them Biter

and Snow Dog. So Neil took these two names and created fictional characters and we turned it into a song.

Alex: *By-Tor & The Snow Dog* was the first time that we tried to do a whole multi-parted piece of music. It was a pivotal song for the band. And as we developed there were bigger concepts and more space to play.

Geddy: Suddenly, it was a very different band. Once we had Neil with us, so much changed in the way we wrote music and the way we presented it. And from that point on, it felt like we could do anything…

Alex: When we finished [1975's] *Caress Of Steel* we were so proud of it. We really felt like we were taking some chances and growing and going somewhere. We were experimenting.

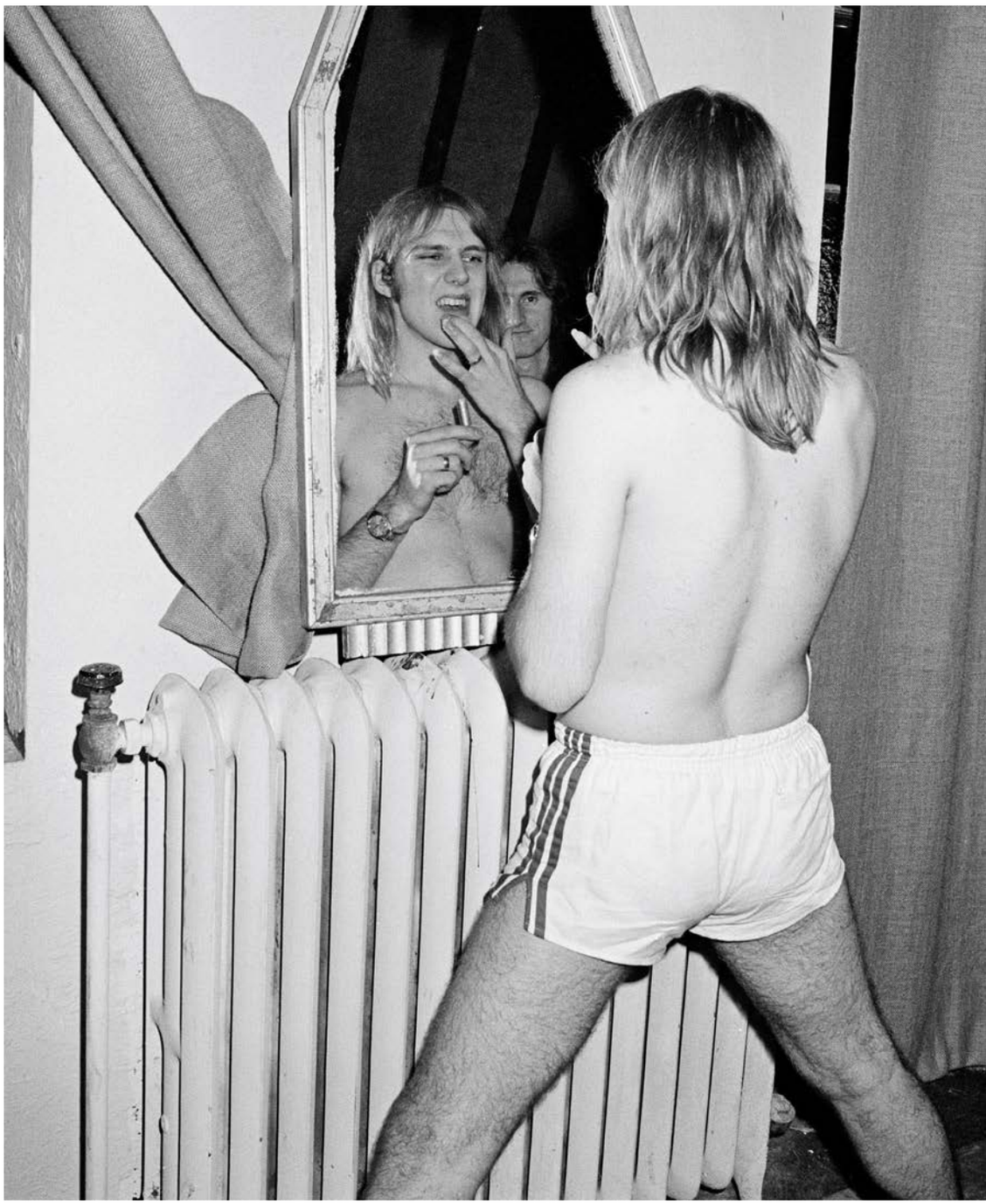
Geddy: The problem was that nobody really understood what the hell we were doing with that record. And I can't say we really knew what the hell we were up to either. These long songs we had — *The Necromancer* and *The Fountain Of Lamneth* — they were very complex and dark. On *The Fountain Of Lamneth* were talking about Didacts And Narpets. It was kind of hard for people to understand.

Alex: The intent was always pure. Maybe the execution was not. But the last time I listened to *Caress Of Steel*, it reminded me of how important that record was to us at that time. We really loved that record. That's why it was really painful for us to go on the road and see that there wasn't any interest.

Geddy: It was very disappointing. At that point, we didn't possess the requisite objectivity to know how much was wrong with *Caress Of Steel*. We didn't understand why it had failed so badly. That really shakes your confidence.

Alex: We called it the Down The Tube tour. Everybody was in a state of panic.

Geddy: When you're in a band and you insulate yourself from reality through your sense of humour and your camaraderie. You prop each other up and say, 'Yeah, we're probably going down the tube.' But really, we were so confused and disheartened.



The body electric? Alex Lifeson winds down post-show.

Alex: At least we had fun touring with Kiss. I remember Gene (Simmons) telling a funny story about that tour. Gene never took drugs, but one night in Detroit he was hanging out with us, and he accidentally he ate a hash cookie. He ended up so hungry, he had to go eat. He told me later, 'We walked in a restaurant and my head felt like it was the size of a billiard ball and my voice was the loudest thing in the room as I was asking for a sandwich…'

Geddy: After *Caress Of Steel* flopped, the record company made it very clear to us that we were disappointing them — that we were not delivering on our promise as an up and coming band. But at least we still had a contract, so we knew we would get one more album that they had to release before we went down the pan completely. We figured we'd be dropped if the next record didn't do well. Deep down, I think we were all convinced that our careers were over and we would have to get 'real' jobs. So *2112* saved our career. There's no question about that.

"Nobody understood what the hell we were doing with Caress Of Steel. And I can't say we really knew what the hell we were up to either."

Geddy Lee

WE HAVE ASSUMED CONTROL

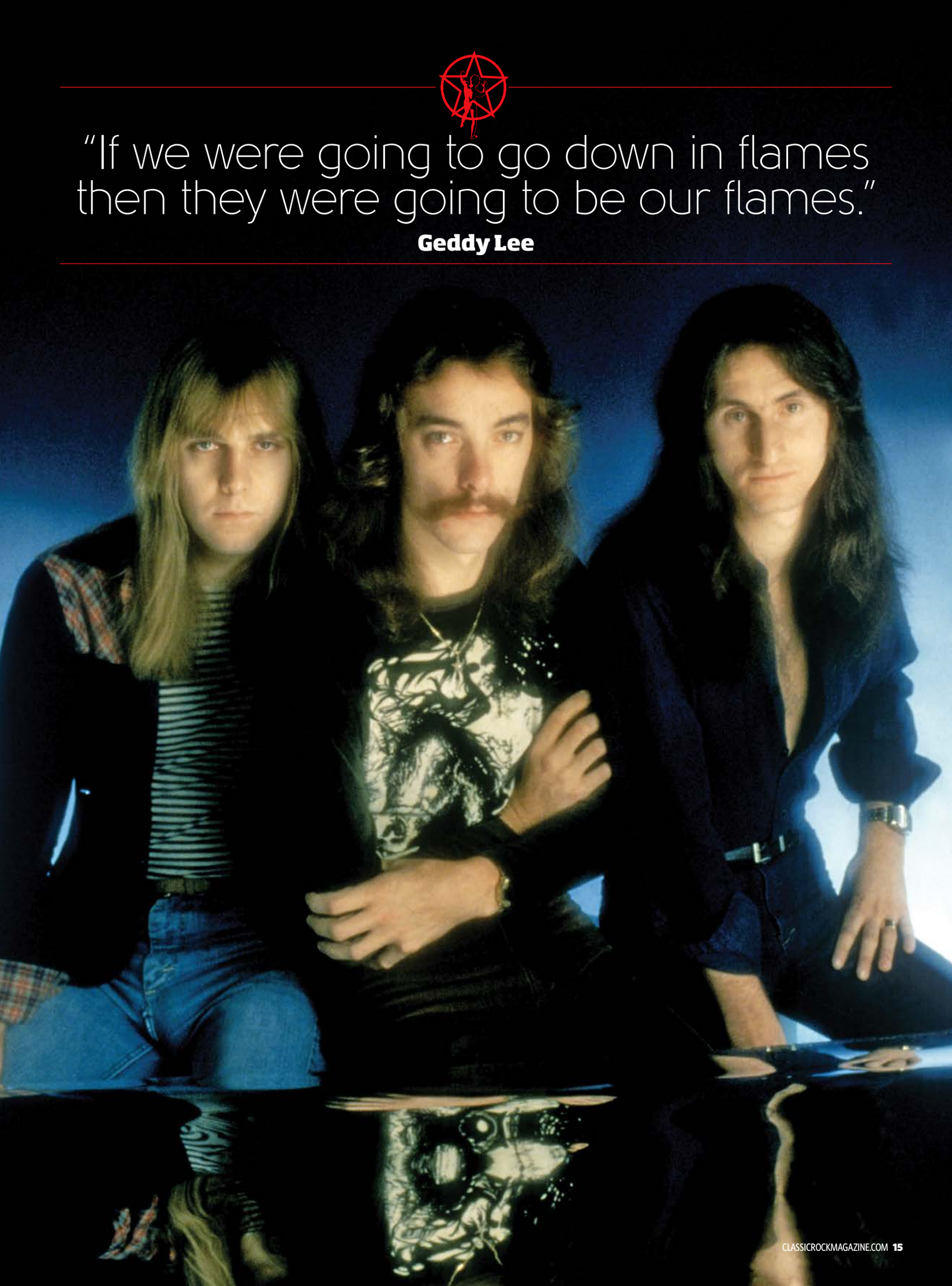


2112 turned **Rush** into superstars – but it could just have easily destroyed their career. **Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson** and **Neil Peart** talk us through the creation of their first masterpiece.

Words: Philip Wilding **Images:** Barry Levine/Photoshot

"If we were going to go down in flames then they were going to be our flames."

Geddy Lee



"I think it's fair to say we didn't feel defiant doing it. We just figured it was going to be our last hurrah, the one last time Rush got to make an album."

Geddy Lee is sitting in the Milestone Hotel overlooking the swish Kensington Court in West London. It's Autumn 2015, and he's here to talk about the band's latest concert DVD, *Rush: R40 Live*, amid rumours of his band's demise and on the day when drummer Neil Peart appears to have dropped a bombshell via an essay for *Drumhead* magazine that suggests he's finally retired from the band.

Lee's been batting away break-up rumours all afternoon when *Prog* sits down with him to talk about a time within Rush when it wasn't their fans or the media who thought they were calling it day, but the band themselves — though not by choice.

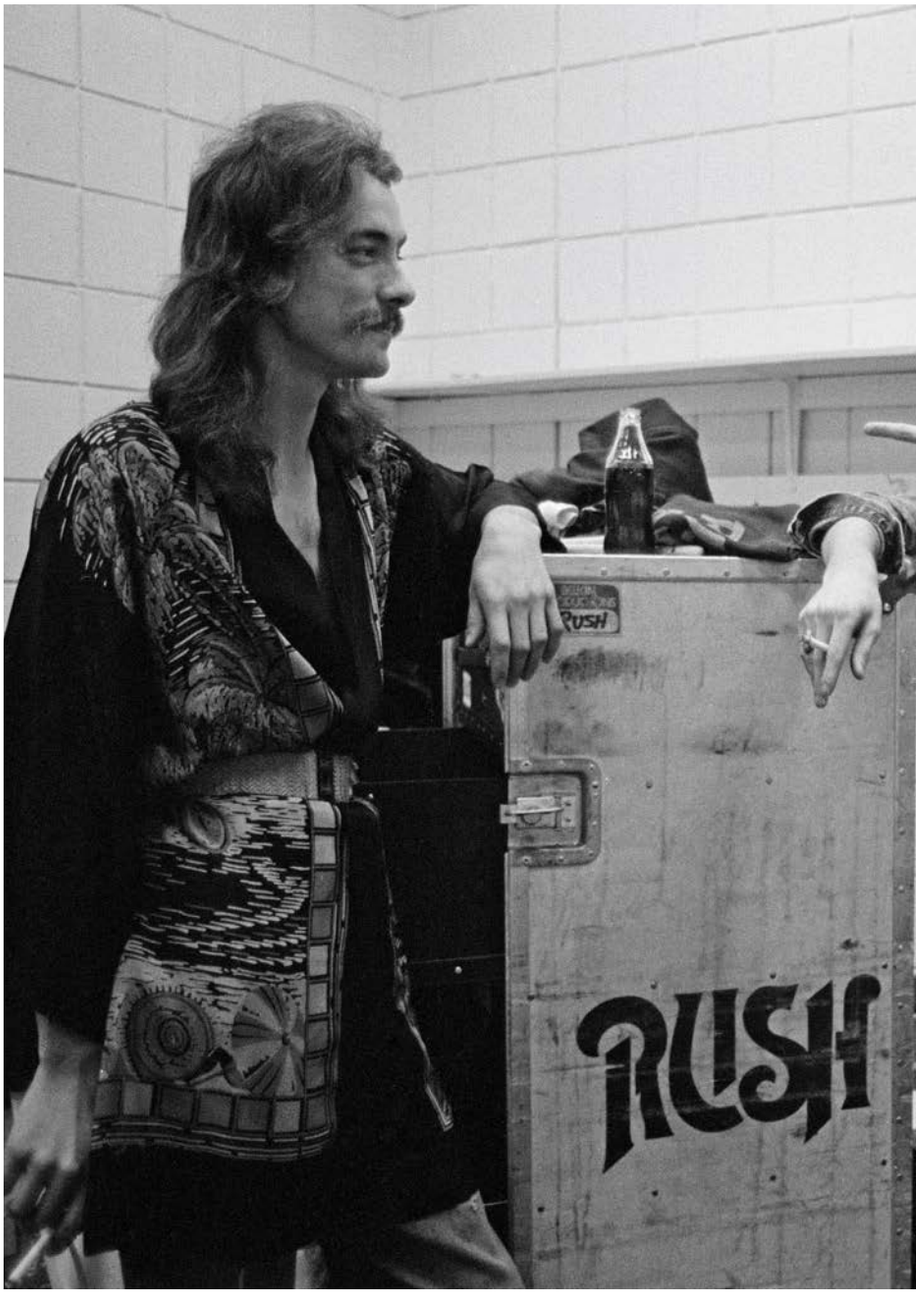
Between March 1974 and April 1976, Rush had released four studio albums and in doing so had careered between bluesy bar band and theatre headliners, at least in some parts of Canada and the US. Gene Simmons and Kiss had taken Rush under their wing, and they'd lost one drummer only to gain another who, as Geddy remembers, "knew a lot of fancy words". And in 1975's *Fly By Night*, they had not only created a Juno Award-winning, platinum-selling record, but also found themselves in the elevated position of the next Canadian band 'most likely to…'

But Rush, not least Lee and guitarist Alex Lifeson, were becoming constrained by the more pointed — some might say inhibited — writing that populated their debut and were keen to push the creative envelope with the weighty, atmospheric battle of the underworld also known as *By-Tor & The Snow Dog*. In retrospect, it was Rush's creative tipping point. In not much more than a year, they'd gone from writing a blue-collar anthem like *Working Man* to crafting a trippy tale of Hades to close out side one of their second album.

Then again, given that it was a teenage Lee and Lifeson who had camped out overnight to see Yes play live at Massey Hall in Toronto some years before, no one can have been that surprised when they started trying to emulate some of their prog heroes.

Caress Of Steel, recorded in either two or three weeks — Lee and Lifeson can't seem to agree on this — was released in September 1975. *Fly By Night* had appeared in stores in February of the same year, and while *Caress…* was clearly an extension of the work they'd begun to do on *Fly By Night*, it was met by a critical response akin to angry villagers spotting Frankenstein's monster on a nearby hill, rather than with a considered critique of their music. It went gold in Canada, compared to *Fly By Night*'s platinum status, but it alienated not only their audience but their record label too. Side one ended with the florid, 12-minute *The Necromancer*, while all of side two was given over to the conceptual *The Fountain Of Lamneth*.

Kimonos on tour: Rush backstage in Springfield, Massachusetts, 1976.



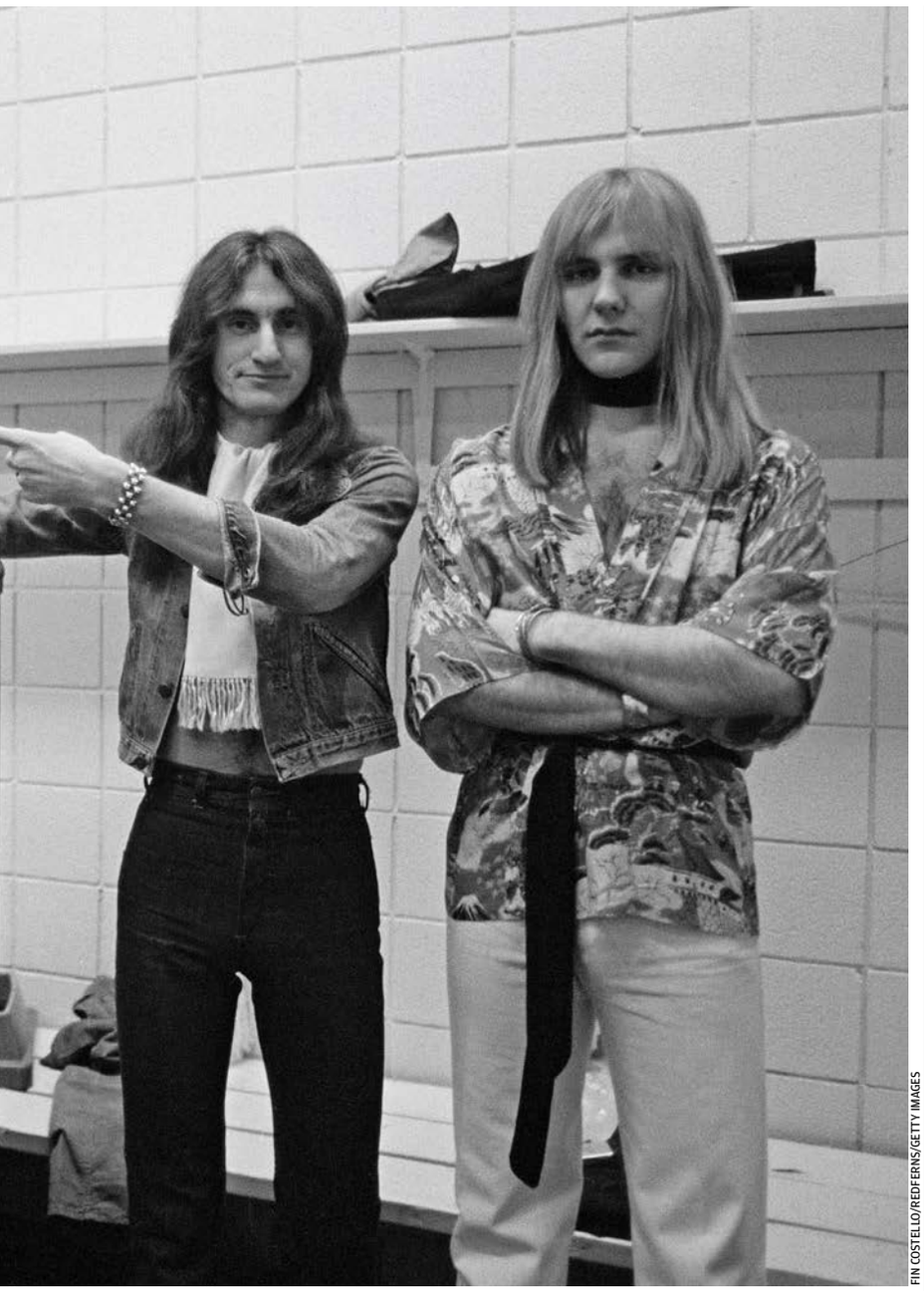
"We'd seen a list of the label's financial estimates and predictions for the following year," says Lee, "and we weren't even on it."

The band were so broke they were unable to pay their crew, audiences thinned and Rush dubbed the subsequent live dates as the 'Down The Tubes' tour. Their label were haranguing them for snappier and more radio-friendly material akin to some of the songs they'd recorded for *Fly By Night*. "But if we were going to go down in flames," says Lee, "then they were going to be our flames."

Retrospectively, it's now easy to see how the experimentation highlighted on the band's second and third albums helped create Rush's defining record (well, their defining record until *Moving Pictures* came along).

"We'd never have made *2112* unless we'd made *Caress Of Steel*," Neil Peart told *Prog* over lunch in Laurel Canyon as the band were mixing down their last studio album (and one that embraced their conceptual bent with glee), 2012's *Clockwork Angels*. "You only have to listen to that and then go listen to *2112* to see what we were trying to do and then how we did it — that seems so obvious to me."

Less so to their label, who were anything but thrilled to find that the band had opted for another side-long conceptual piece inspired by author Ayn Rand (who had also been the spark for the song *Anthem* that opened *Fly*



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

By Night). It followed the travails of a young hero cast adrift in a futuristic dystopian society ruled by a hierarchy of priests. Music is banned, but he finds a lost guitar that ultimately leads to civilisation's emancipation, and his own death. Imagine pitching that idea to a record company executive who was hoping for *Making Memories* part two.

Listening to *2112*'s bombast now, it's easy to forget that it was mostly written on two acoustic guitars, usually in a hotel room or on the road between shows.

"Yeah, that was pretty much how we wrote it," says Lee. "It's a handy thing, the acoustic guitar – you didn't need an amp, you could do it in our Holiday Inn room, you could write in the back of the station wagon we were travelling around in. As long as you're strumming the acoustic hard, it sounds heavy, so if you write the part on it, you can imagine what it's going to sound like through electric guitars and amps. So, it's not a big stretch really to write that way. We went back and wrote [2007's] *Snakes & Arrows* that way too.

"The strange thing with *2112*, it just kind of flowed; one song came out of the other. I remember that Alex and I had some very definite ideas of the kind of music we wanted to write, even before we saw the lyrics, the overblown intro, the pacing, the movements that were involved. And then Neil had written these lyrics and it was almost magical how well they worked. We didn't really change any of them – they just inspired us to put the music together even more. It just started to happen."

The cards fell kindly for Rush on *2112*. Long-time artistic director Hugh Syme created the now famous Starman logo (as well as contributing keyboard and mellotron parts to the album) with the simplest of briefs from drummer Neil Peart.

"The evolution of the star and the man was my first true collaboration with Neil," Syme says now. "He simply described the Red Star Of The Solar Federation as being all that is contrary to free thought and creativity, and the man as our hero. I simply combined the two. Never was this intended to be the band's brand or logo, with such a strong and enduring association with all things Rush."

A few years later, Alex Lifeson shared his thoughts on why he thought the Starman logo had endured so well, and what the secret to its longevity and association with Rush might have been. "The naked bum and the fist, I think," he said without blinking. "That's it, the bum and the fist."

And while the cover and inner artwork were heavy on symbolism, the back sleeve was given over to a rather po-faced Rush dressed in what could only be described as kimonos.

"Ah, the kimonos, that's what they were," says Lee with a laugh. "Didn't you think they were swish?

"You know, people and our management kept saying to us, 'You need a new image.' And it's true – we weren't very image-orientated. So I remember we were in San Francisco and we're staying at the Miyako Hotel, which is in the Japanese part of town, and we said, 'Okay, let's go buy some stage clothes and get an image happening.' We just walked around the Chinese area and we found

"The best thing about *2112*'s success is that because the label were so against it, when it did take off, they could never tell us what to do again."

Neil Peart

these kinds of colourful robes and said, 'Okay, let's try this,' and that's what we did. I mean, some people liked it..."

He regards *Prog* evenly over his round glasses. "But that straw fedora Al's wearing on the inside sleeve, nobody told Alex to bring that hat with him. That was all his idea."

And then he's laughing again.

The band went into Toronto Sound Studios with producer Terry Brown in February 1976 for the longest stint they'd ever spent on an album up until then – a remarkably scant four weeks. Lee says, "It was almost four weeks that we had, as I recall, but that felt pretty expansive to us considering how we'd worked up to that point."

Even though they had to capture the grandiosity of side one's epic story, they also took the time to create a handful of staples that were peppered across the second side of the album, some of which would stay in their live set for years to come, such as *Something For Nothing* and *A Passage To Bangkok*. And for a band that spent their working lives on the road, a bonus was that they got to go home each night.

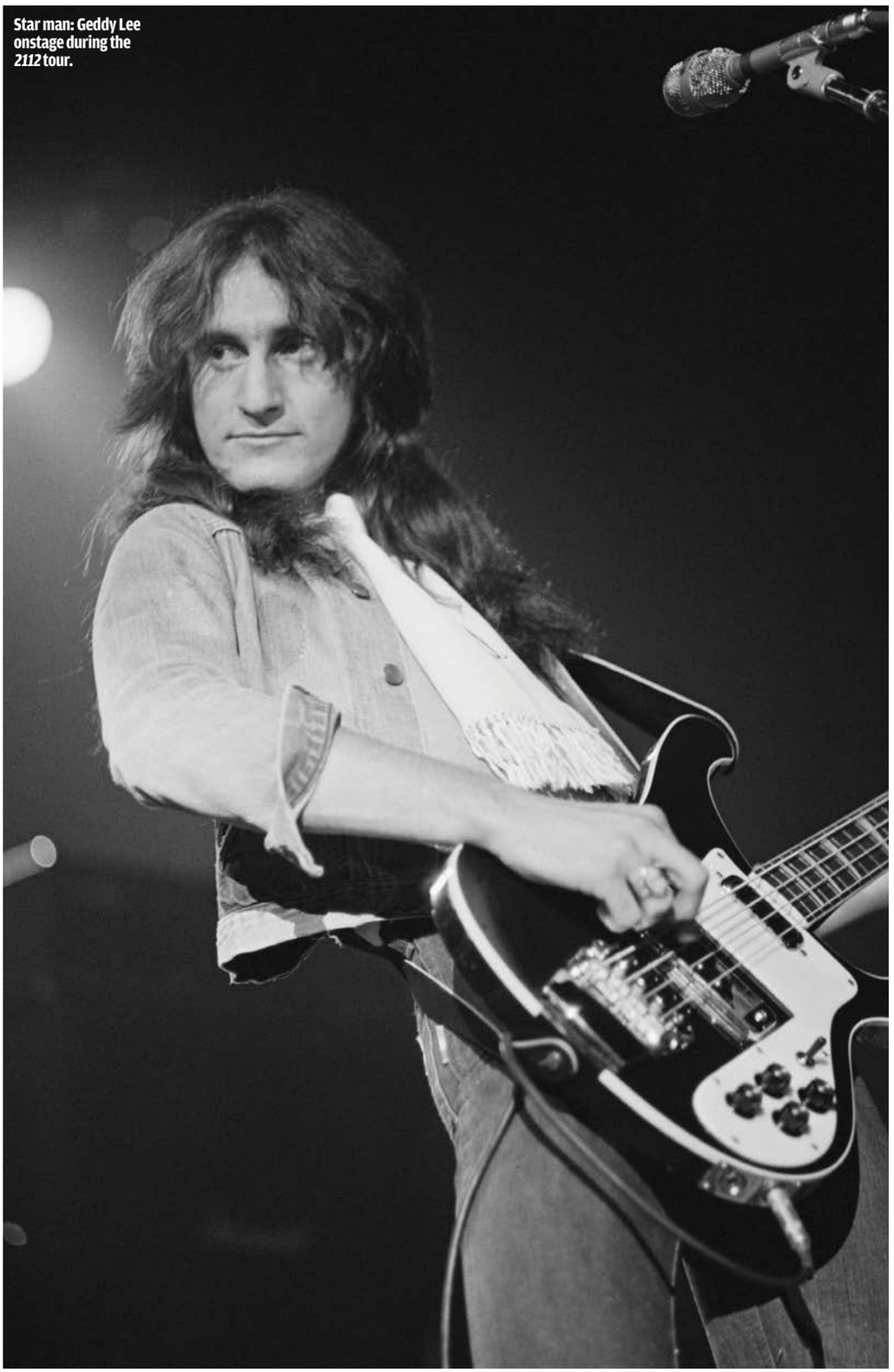
"I know it might sound like it when you listen back to it now, but it wasn't really difficult to record," Lee says. "It just kind of happened, that record. I don't remember it being much of a struggle at all. In fact, I remember it being a pretty positive experience all round. *Permanent Waves* was like that too – it was a kind of record that just happened, just flew out. Sometimes albums just come crashing out of the psyche. It's amazing, you just never know."

"The best thing about *2112*'s success," says Neil Peart, "is that because the label were so against it, when it did take off, they could never tell us what to do again."

"It's true," says Lee, "and I think it's also fair to say it saved our careers. But it's not even like we really had any instinctive sense that it would do any better than *Caress Of Steel* had done before it. We liked *Caress Of Steel*! Of course, every record you make you think is better than the one before, but you're easily fooled by yourself because you can't really be that objective. But I think we had a feeling it was a good record and we were proud we were going out on a good record; that if this was us saying goodbye then it was a good way to go. But we had no idea it would connect with people the way it did."

And like a bat making contact with a well-weighted baseball, connect it did. Sales may have started slowly, but it would go on to reach multi-platinum status in both Canada and the USA.

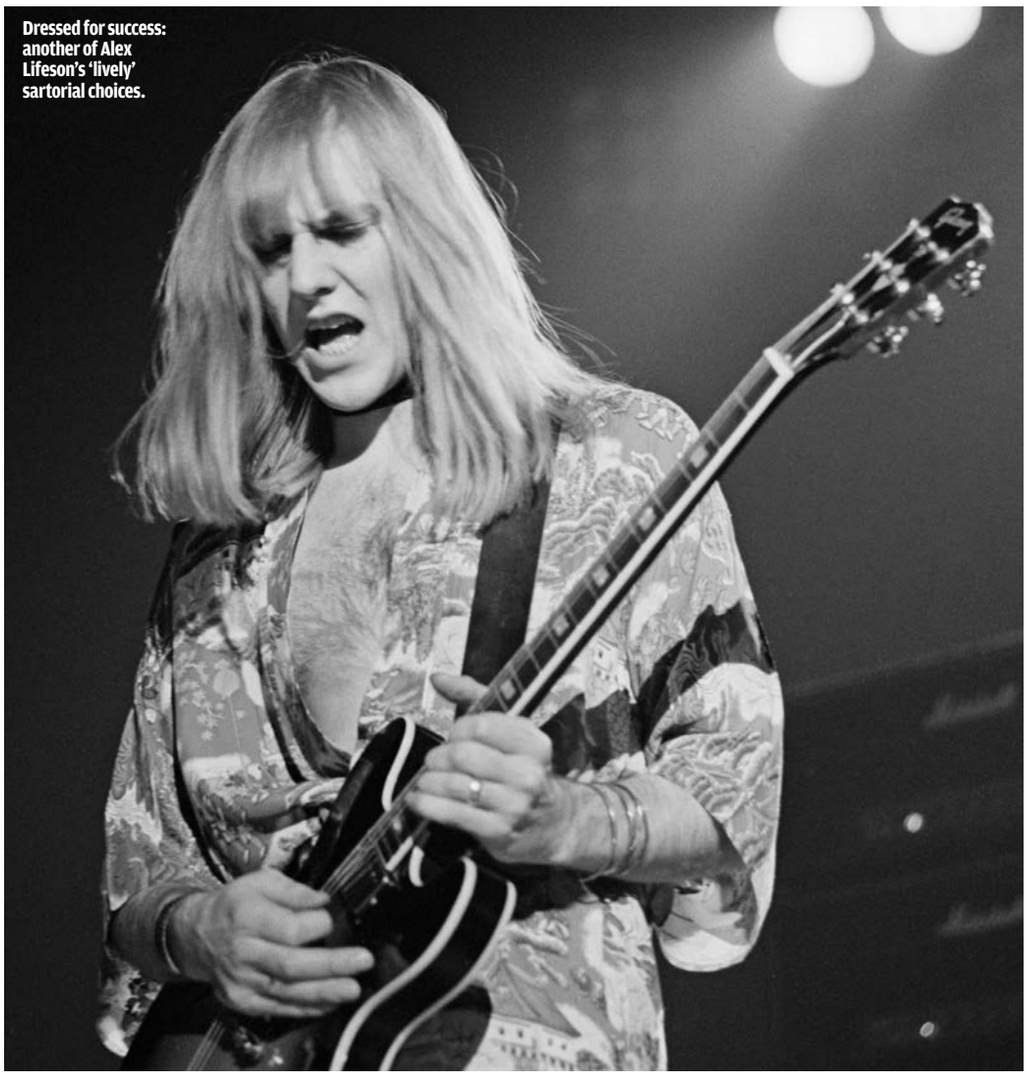
"Oh yeah, it did well, but we were still way in debt," says Lee with



Star man: Geddy Lee onstage during the *2112* tour.

"That straw fedora Al's wearing on the inside sleeve, nobody told Alex to bring that hat with him. That was all his idea."

Geddy Lee



Dressed for success: another of Alex Lifeson's 'lively' sartorial choices.

a grin. "But we were paying it off and *2112* was helping us pay it off. It took a while, but there was a buzz as soon as the album came out. It didn't sell a lot immediately, but it was steady and it kept building. As we toured it, it kept building and building, and over the next three years it never really slowed down."

It also paved the way for something that would become another Rush staple: the double live album. *All The World's A Stage* (only Rush, or perhaps Peart, would filch the title of their live album from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) was released in September that year to capitalise on the band's new-found success — not that making a live album had even occurred to the band.

"We hadn't really thought about it that much at all," says Lee. "The thing is that management and the record company wanted us to exploit the success of *2112* and keep it going, and live albums were kind of the thing du jour, do you know what I mean? Like a Humble Pie live album had come out and it had done really well, and you know, Kiss were doing a live album.

"All these people started dropping live albums, so they said, 'You guys have to do a live album as well.' We hadn't really thought about it until that point, and then because we were playing three nights at Massey Hall, based on the success of *2112*, we thought, 'Okay, that makes sense — let's record our homecoming,' so to speak."

2112 was an unlikely platform from which to launch a career — they wouldn't even get to play side one in its entirety until the *Test For Echo* tour, some 20 years after the album's release (Lee might announce on *All The World's A Stage*, 'We'd like to play for you side one of our latest album,' but the band would omit *Discovery* and *Oracle: The Dream*).

However, it afforded them the sort of artistic latitude most artists can only dream of, even as Rush moved away from more progressive and expansive pieces and into a more moderate approach to their songwriting (less Moog and bass pedals, more hit singles). That's until they came to something approaching full circle with the conceptual *Clockwork Angels* album.

Fans still want to hear the story of the Priests Of The Temples Of Syrinx, and people still place *2112* at the top of fan and critics' polls alike. Did Lee know the effect the album might have when they sent it out into the world?

"No," he says with an emphatic shake of the head. "I mean, it's hard to really know because you can't be on both sides of the thing. I've had a lot of people, you know, some *really* accomplished musicians come up to me many times since then and say, 'That record really reached me — there was something that was so different about it.'

"But my sense is that there was a lot of passion in that record, a lot of ferocity in that record, and it cut through, and it had a sound that was really pretty different from anything else going on at that time. I think it just cut through. You know, cut through the static of all the music that was out there, and it reached people."

And some 40 years later, it's still reaching people.



Neil Peart: "We'd never have made *2112* if we hadn't made *Caress Of Steel*."

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"We were all up for the adventure..."

Rush's fifth album *A Farewell To Kings* was the second in the trilogy of hardcore prog epics the band released in the late 70s. Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and producer Terry Brown recall recording al fresco, the literature and films that inspired the album's creation, Minimoogs, double-neck guitars and the one-take wonder that is *Xanadu*.

Words: Philip Wilding
Images: Fin Costello/Getty



It's a rare day of sunshine in the Welsh countryside. Since the band had arrived it had been slabs of grey skies and low clouds over the green hills.

Seen from above, the residential Rockfield Studios in Monmouthshire is a block of buildings – the old stables, filled with glass sheets, act as a real echo chamber – set as a quadrangle around the main courtyard.

Spotting a rare interlude in among the constant drizzle, drummer Neil Peart is quickly out on the cobbles, toying with some percussion blocks, their repercussive zing bouncing sharply off the surrounding bricks.

"It was quiet at Rockfield, to be sure – very conducive for working, except for the constant bleating of sheep..."

Alex Lifeson

Somewhere above the collective heads of Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and producer Terry Brown, a light bulb sparks into life.

Brown brings a stereo mic out to the centre of the courtyard and wires it up as Lifeson looks on, strumming his acoustic guitar. It's quiet, birds chirrup, and in the distance, a nonplussed herd of sheep stand at the fence. "Those knocking sounds at the beginning of *Xanadu*," says Lee, rapping on the oak table between us for effect, "that's the sound of the courtyard, the natural sound of that square. We got such a nice reflection off the buildings, we knew we could use them in some way.

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Rush in 1977, L-R: Alex Lifeson, Geddy Lee, Neil Peart.

"The guitar at the start of *A Farewell To Kings*, the title song, was recorded outside too. The acoustic was recorded out there to get that really crisp sound and I remember Alex was walking around this mic that Terry had set up while he was playing. He was just like a troubadour – he was playing as he walked around and, naturally, every troubadour has his guy trailing behind him playing a Minimoog!

"So I'm playing the Minimoog outside and Neil's hitting the twinklies or whatever he was hitting off the front of that – he was always hitting something – and Alex is walking around this mic recording the opening to *A Farewell To Kings*, so it was quite fun. You can hear the Welsh birds singing in the background, unless they flew in from somewhere else – they could be accidentals, as they're called in the trade.

"*Farewell*... was quite a different piece for us, because of the way the intro's structured, and then it comes in with a bang and there's this weird time signature going on. It's a tough song to play."

"We set up on the cobblestone courtyard with a pair of mics and created our own stereo spread," says Lifeson. "I do recall walking back and forth, trying to concentrate on my playing while not crashing into Neil.

"*Xanadu* was one of the greatest live songs we've ever done: it was a tour de force, it was a moment for the lights, it was a moment for the double-neck guitars. It was a big moment!"

Geddy Lee

It was a complex song to write. In many ways, it's simple and direct, but we could never accept that, so dropping a note here or inserting a weird note there made things more interesting for us and for the listener. Odd time signatures were a great way to keep the listeners scratching their heads and counting on all fingers.

"I liked the organic nature of that recording and it was one of the few days that it didn't rain... though I think it did start again later."

It had been a tumultuous ride up to *A Farewell To Kings*. Rush were following the acclaimed *2112* album, which they had released after the poorly received *Caress Of Steel* and the threat of being dropped by their label. The success of *2112* had given them their creative freedom, and the quickly assembled live album *All The World's A Stage* was their stopgap. Lee reveals: "...*Stage* was definitely something we used to buy us more time."

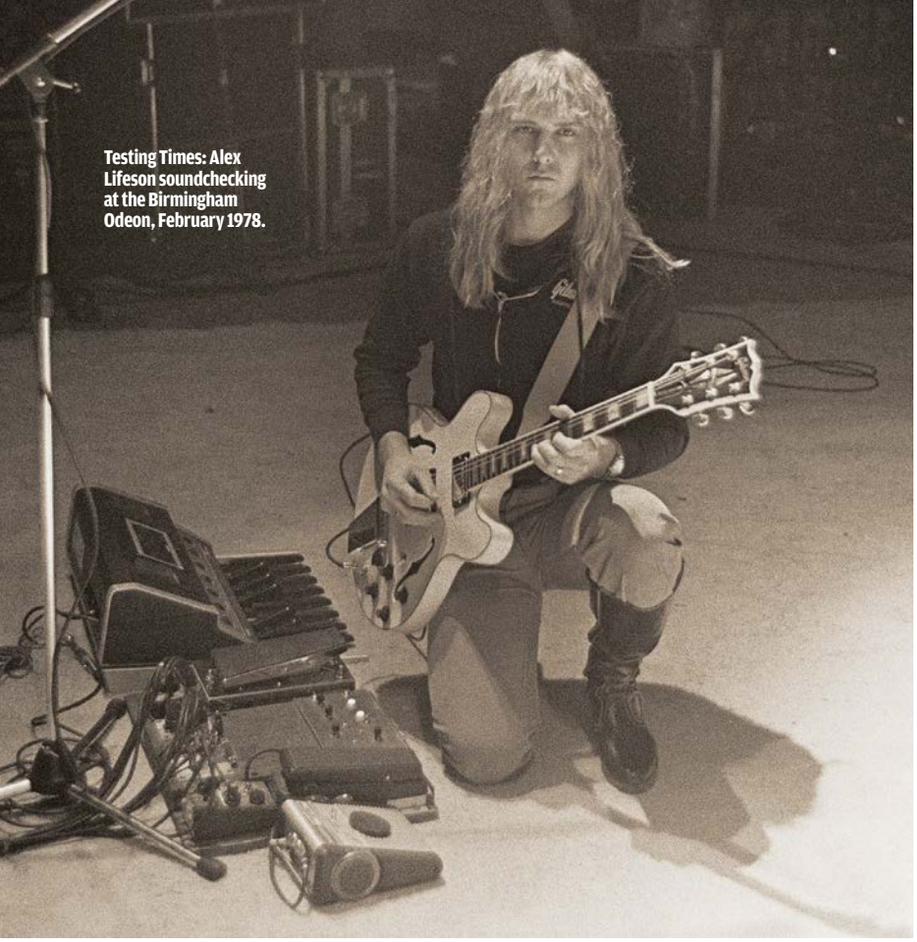
Though ...*Kings* was to be their fifth studio album, the band members were still barely in their mid-20s.

So how do you follow a concept album about a dystopian future where music is banned, civilisation is domineered by a hierarchy of priests and the lead protagonist commits suicide in order to free society? Good question. For Rush, you create a record informed by socialist polemic, the movies *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* and *Citizen Kane*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poetry, a nod to *Don Quixote* and what passed for a fiery death in the heart of a black hole. And in *Madrigal*, they even wrote a love song, albeit one that referenced dragons. It was a Rush album, after all.

It was springtime in Toronto and Rush were wondering what to do next. The band were toying with going back into work at Terry Brown's Toronto Sound Studios (where they'd recorded their four previous albums), but



Twice the fun: Lifeson and Lee bust out the double neck guitars.



Testing Times: Alex Lifeson soundchecking at the Birmingham Odeon, February 1978.



"Odd time signatures were a great way to keep the listeners scratching their heads and counting on all fingers."

Alex Lifeson

as the band's success escalated, so did demands on their time.

"We were doing well in Canada," says Lee, "and things were getting more hectic. Frankly, we wanted to go somewhere where there were less distractions. Rockfield was our first residential record — we'd never done that sort of thing before — so Terry suggested: why don't we look for a place where we could stay and work. We were all up for the adventure."

For his part, Lifeson is a little more circumspect: "Did I mention the rain? I mean, all the time. That said, it was exciting to be in another country for an extended period and focus on making the record. I don't think we took any days off, but we never really wanted to. Living together, working together, it's what you dream of when you're young and starting out with a band. It was so much fun."

"You have to remember, we were these dazzling urbanites at the time!" says Lee, laughing so hard he almost spills his glass of Riesling. "And here we are on the farm in Wales. It was… how do I put this? It was quite different. I remember when we first arrived, we had a bunch of our crew guys helping us load in, and one of the guys who worked for us at the time, his nickname was Lurch — he was 6'11.

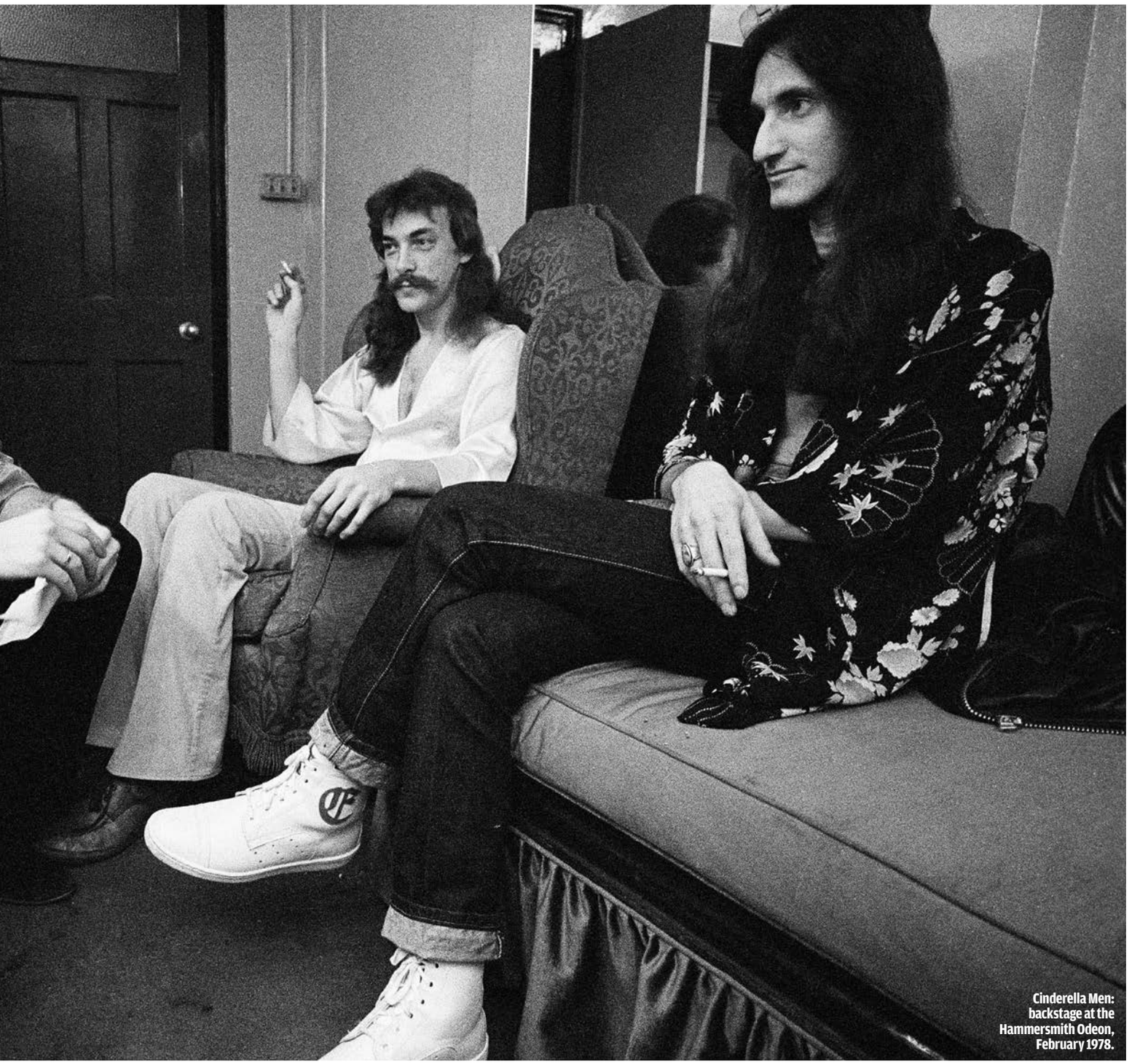
"The weather was warm, wet but warm, but road crew tends to wear shorts whether it's warm or not. Anyway, some of our guys went to town with Lurch and you know, maybe it's changed, but back then you didn't see a lot of men wearing short pants, just children usually. Grown-ups didn't wear short pants a lot. So they're walking down the street with this guy who was a tough-looking character, is nearly seven feet tall and wearing short pants, and every time they passed someone, people would turn and giggle and laugh and point.

"So it was a bit of a culture shock for us. It was June, but you'd never know it was summer — it was Wales. I think we had three sunny days the entire time. It was perpetually grey, and the schedule started fairly normally: we'd start at midday and then we'd work, we'd take our meals together and they cooked for you and that was our first experience of anything like that… it was an adjustment.

"After about three weeks, we were working later and later into the night and sleeping later and later until eventually we got our schedule completely back to front, where we were having breakfast at supper time and working all night long and crashing after the 'baa, baa' [he offers a full-throated and pretty convincing impression of a sheep] was happening in the morning. The birds and the baas! That was bedtime for us. That's why you hear so many birds when we recorded outside. I'm amazed there aren't any sheep on the album."

Lifeson adds: "It was quiet at Rockfield, to be sure — very conducive for working, except for the constant bleating of sheep…"

As a band that averaged around 250 shows a year, Rush, as was the case with their three previous albums, had



Cinderella Men: backstage at the Hammersmith Odeon, February 1978.

very little material worked up before they went into the studio. Lee says: "You get 10 years to write your first album, 10 days to make every one after that. It's the same for every band."

That said, they had road-tested a few of the songs before going into the studio, including one that would become the record's cornerstone and a live staple for the rest of their careers — and it was recorded in one remarkable take.

"We had played *Xanadu* before we recorded it," says Lee dryly. "You know, the easy songs an audience can take in and appreciate without knowing what the hell they are. We certainly had the parts of that and I think *Closer To The Heart* might have been written. Not much else beside that — the rest of it was done on the spot. It was sort of how we were working back then, because we didn't have time — you're on the road all the time, so you have to write as you're moving."

"*Xanadu* was well rehearsed before going to Rockfield, I remember that," adds Lifeson. "On the day we recorded it, Pat Moran, the resident engineer, set all the mics up and we ran the song down, partially to get balances and tones. Because it was a long song, we didn't need to complete that test run.

"We then played it a second time from top to bottom and that's what you hear on the album. Needless to say, Pat was shocked that we ran an 11-minute song down in one complete take. Practice doesn't always make perfect, but it sure helps!"

Did they realise how magical and inventive *Xanadu* was?

"*Xanadu* was too difficult to play to feel magical at the time!" Lifeson says. "But it did feel like we were moving on into another direction and this whole other level of performance."

"I don't think we ever think of our music in that way — maybe later," says Lee. "You have an idea and you have a soundscape you're trying to create. With *Xanadu*, I'm not sure people realise this, but even though it's loosely based on Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, it's

also very influenced by *Citizen Kane*.

"If you look at the opening of the newsreel of *Citizen Kane,* they quote that poem: [he adopts the opening tone of the original voiceover] *'In Xanadu the pleasure dome did decree…'* and that whole sort of animated opening to that, so I kept that in mind when we created the soundscape to the opening of that song. I always had that visual in my brain as we were making the music, I always had a connection to that whole thing. They're intertwined for me.

"*Xanadu* was also one of the greatest live songs we've ever done, it was tour de force, it was a moment for the lights, it was a moment for the double-neck guitars. It was a big moment! Though not so much for my poor back."

Those double-necks took on a life of their own: on the *R40* tour, there was a sort of happy pandemonium as the band strapped them on.

"Frankly, we've never lived those guitars down," says Lee. "Can't get past it, mate! And you're right, when we brought them back on the last tour, people lost their minds — the double-necks, they're back, alert the media!

"But form follows function, right? We had those double-necks for a reason, because it was always imperative for us to be able to reproduce our records as accurately as we could. And we were doing more overdubs and experimenting with sounds, so we needed more strings on stage, we needed more flexibility. Alex plays a six-string and a 12-string in *Xanadu*, so he needed that guitar."

"That's certainly where it began in earnest," says Lifeson, "but I'd been incorporating 12-string since the first album, and to have the flexibility to switch between the 12- and six-string opened other doors to our sound and songwriting. It's funny because we didn't use them much, yet they became these iconic images for the band. I probably see at least as many double-neck photos of us as regular ones."

Orson Welles' iconic *Citizen Kane* wasn't the only cinematic note to be introduced into the *A Farewell To Kings* mix. In terms of songwriting credits, *Closer To The Heart* was co-written with poet Peter Talbot, while Lee brought in the lyrics for *Cinderella Man*.

"That was inspired by one of my favourite movies, the original *Mr Deeds Goes To Town*, where he's referred to as a Cinderella man. I was a big film guy as a teenager, and as a young man, I was really a film buff — I watched films all the time. I studied directors because I sort of secretly wanted to be a film director. It was just one of those dreams for when I grow up. And when I realised that most directors have to be part megalomaniac, I think I sort of went off that idea. But I loved film, I still do. The old films, my wife and I used to watch them all the time together, and so the Capra movies were big with me — lot of heart, lot of soul, lot of showing the best and worst of America and its people.





SILVER SCREEN COLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES X2

Movie Magic: the two films that inspired the album, *Mr Deeds Goes To Town* and *Citizen Kane*.

"So that song is really just about that movie and the kind of themes that movie resonated with. It was my thing that I brought in and Neil helped me clean it up a bit. One thing in Rush is that we've always allowed ourselves to go where we want to go as individuals and see it how flies. We all have to be behind it to use it. But there were no real boundaries in our band."

Much later, the band would record their albums in shifts, Lee during the daytime and Peart and Lifeson late into the evening, Lifeson cracking open his Tupperware box of weed and going to work on his guitar parts. In the 70s, though, all three members would crowd into the studio to study the others' work and throw ideas around, producer Terry Brown keeping a watchful eye through the glass.

"Back then it was all for one and one for all," says Lee. "We were always in the room at the same time, we were always leaning over each other and making comments and it was very congenial and we were super involved. Whereas 30 years later you want more space and you're less nervous about leaving Alex alone to do his guitars! It was fun. In later and more recent years, we each have our own hours we like to work, like I don't like to work in the evenings, but Alex does because he can smoke a joint and get lost in the underworld!"

"Ged and I generally worked together during the days but I always enjoyed the quiet of the evenings on my own to catch up on tracking and exploring other layers for what we had written," says Lifeson. "Over the years, we've developed a great deal of respect and trust in each other's strong points during our writing sessions. We give each other space to initiate and develop our individual ideas within the partnership and that's rare. You'll hear of the petty arguments and jealousies that can tear bands apart, but we were never those guys. It takes a level of maturity and confidence to rise above that and accept a partner's ideas and how to improve them for the good of the song. And we were always about what was good for the song."

And *A Farewell To Kings* had them in spades. It would be their first gold album in the US and would give them their first hit single, in the shape of *Closer To The Heart*, the polar opposite of *Xanadu* in scale, scope and structure, but destined to become as much a part of their live show as the Coleridge-inspired epic.

"I remember when we had to bring it back into the set for the Rio shows, as there was such a demand to hear it and we'd stopped playing it for a while," says Lee. "It's always resonated with people for some reason, and it was a hit as far as we've ever had a hit. It got us on the radio, the kinds of radio that would never normally associate with us, so it was as close as we ever came to a pop song, especially at that point. Over here in the UK it had that effect, and in the US too.

"It has that folk protest song vibe too. That's the first time Neil had collaborated with another writer, Peter Talbot, so it was pretty pivotal in all sorts of ways. I don't recall how we met Peter — he lived on Vashon Island in the Pacific North West, and he had a real West Coast, hippie lifestyle. He was married with a little kid and we'd go visit them on the island and watch them smoke dope with their kid, and I thought that was really strange, being high with a young kid. That just seemed

different somehow…

"Neil and Peter got real close: they became real pals, they had lots of things in common," Lee continues, "they thought about a lot of things in the same way. He gave some poems to Neil and Neil took them away with him and one of them he eventually hammered into *Closer To The Heart*. So really, *Closer To The Heart* was inspired by that guy."

The album also saw the band's ever-escalating interest in synthesisers and Minimoogs bearing fruit. Electronic instrumentation was adding colour and textures to the band's songwriting.

"That's true, and it was liberating and exciting to hear more sounds and textures coming from the band," says Lifeson. "That grew to become a monster in the ensuing years, especially when we played live and Ged would be stuck at his keyboards at some points in the show, but it was always satisfying to come off stage knowing you worked extra hard to create that wall of sound and hear the appreciation from the audience."

"We were in the embryonic stage with the synths at that point," says Lee, refilling our glasses of wine, swirling his gently, taking a sniff and then a gulp. "There's definitely more Minimoog on *…Kings*, but it's mostly bass pedals, synths and some white noise, not a whole lot of string sounds by this time. We did attempt a couple of things in some of those songs, but not much. So it's pretty Minimoog-y. That's a technical term, right?

"The bass pedals opened up the possibility of a second guitar at times, which is what happened in *Xanadu* — there were definitely more colours going on and it opened up Alex to play single lines a bit more, melodic lines, because I could fill in the background with guitar or bass pedals. So that was a big sort of change in the way we thought and the way we approached our songs and the way we wrote.

"That's partly why I think *Farewell* was an important album for us. We did go into new territory with that record and it was a big step down a road, sonically, that we didn't really ever let go of. Two albums later we'd make *Permanent Waves*!

"When you open that door of the synthesiser and the keyboard world, that was a Pandora's box for us, and after we'd opened it, all kinds of stuff came out over the next few years, but that's what made it glorious as a guy who was in the middle of it all.

"I learned a lot; I was learning a lot," Lee continues. "I was always challenged and I was very stimulated and the end result was *A Farewell To Kings*, so I guess it was a pivotal record in that regard."

It was also the only time in the band's career that the lead-out track would act as the introduction for the record that would follow it (though the By-Tor character that had appeared on *Fly By Night* did reappear on the follow-up *Caress Of Steel* album). Ask Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee now if they had any idea that *Cygnus X-1* would be the spark that fanned the flames for the *Hemispheres* record and you'll get a bewildered shrug.

"No, we didn't know it was going there," says Lee. "Neil may have had that in the back of his mind, this bigger thing brewing, but at the time it was just what came along."

Listening back to it now, it's still a dazzling, complex affair that appears to end in disarray, with the Rocinante spaceship perishing at the heart of a black hole.

To describe the arrangement as dense would be to undersell

> "You get 10 years to write your first album, 10 days to make every one after that. It's the same for every band."
>
> **Geddy Lee**

KINGS QUESTIONS

Production maestro Terry Brown looks back at the creation of *…Kings*.

Producer Terry Brown, or Broon as the band would later dub him, worked with Rush, remixing their debut album and then producing all of the band's subsequent releases through to 1982's *Signals*. His résumé also includes production stints with everyone from Voivod to Cutting Crew, Fates Warning and Blurred Vision.



Rush with Terry 'Broon' Brown, second from right.

Farewell… was the first studio album after *2112*. Did that add any extra pressure on the band and you given its breakthrough success?
If there was pressure, I wasn't aware of it. I always had confidence that the boys would write a new batch of killer material – and, of course, they did!

It was your first residential studio experience as a band/producer, and it took you all the way to Wales!
The residential thing was excellent – other than the pub, there really wasn't anything else to do in the village, so we worked all night and slept most of the day.

The band recorded the title track and some other tracks outside in the quadrangle because of the crisp, ambient sound…
Yes, the weather was beautiful so we switched it up to daytime recording in the quadrangle for the title track and the intro for *Closer To The Heart* – Alex wandering around like a travelling minstrel with his acoustic guitar slung over his shoulder.

It was the first Rush album that really started exploring the Moog and synth sounds (and bass pedals). Do you remember that switch in the way they were doing things, or was it just a natural evolution?
We had dabbled in keys on *2112* with Hugh Syme on the intro, but this was the first time we had different keys to choose from during the whole recording. We were able to colour things in the high end, highlight the fat pedal notes and add leads. It opened up a whole new world for us.

The band work in a more solitary way in the studio now, but back then they were all for one, one for all. What do you remember of those recording sessions and the camaraderie in the studio?
It didn't take long before our hours of working were 7pm to 5am and it proved to be very productive – no distractions from staff or the office. The camaraderie was always on point. We started our 'day' (night) by convening for dinner at 5pm in the dining room – meals full of banter and great home-cooked food. Great memories.

Did they have much material coming in?
As I remember, most of the material was in pretty good shape, but certainly the seeds were there – not least of all lyrically from the Professor [Peart].

The album ends with the very ambitious *Cygnus X-1*…
I remember putting together the complex tape delay loops that gave the space sections the depth and sci-fi quality. It was done using at least eight tracks fed into each other with control of feedback, level, EQ and panning.

Do you think of it as a pivotal album for the band, not least sonically?
Farewell… was another major progression for the boys – really, that never stopped. They were always pushing the envelope of musicianship and playing ability, pulling it off in spades. **PW**



Festive *Farewell*: Geddy Lee live at the Public Auditorium in Cleveland, Ohio, on December 17, 1977.

it somewhat. It's a grandstanding example of archetypal middle-stage Rush — music that's sublime, histrionic, fantastical and musically daunting, but still, strangely, very listenable, and almost impossible to play. It's also a prime example of why you still see so few Rush cover bands — imagine trying to jam through that track in a rehearsal space! That, though, is exactly what Rush did.

"That was something we jammed out," confirms Lee casually, as if he's talking about a 12-bar blues riff the band might have worked up, "I think that grew from all three of us sitting in a room together, trying to work it out. I had an idea for the opening and Neil started playing the drum part and then, just as any band does, and perhaps that's the organic nature of a band like Rush, you figure out the part and you put it together.

"Neil had this story in his mind and we loved it — it was really expressive for us. That whole idea of using sci-fi stuff really worked for Rush because there are no boundaries, there are no limitations, you can use all your goofy, weird sounds because that's what's happening out in space. Didn't you know that?! There are all kinds of echoplexes out in space — they're dotted around like star systems. There are always Marshall stacks and Serbian guitarists making noises through echo machines in space."

"It was an intense jam," reveals Lifeson, "and I loved the heaviness and dynamics of the track as it came together. I also remember being very high while we put the intro atmospherics together and, let's be honest, it wasn't for the first or last time!"

"Those things are always fun to do," says Lee. "You do have that serious side that wants it to be right — like, 'How do you know that weird sound is better than that weird sound?' You have to have a modicum [of restraint] — this is my serious face — you have to do that, otherwise it's just chaos. You have to have parameters to an extent, because technology is the tool and it can be the thing that destroys you. You have to wrestle with it, and I think artists of every stripe have had to do that since the beginning of time.

"Painters, your paints are your technology, your brushes, so you have to work out a way to use those things to express what you want to express, so it's easy to go over the top, but you don't know you're going over the top until you've got there! It's like anything — when you're trying to get your idea down, you can't edit at the same time, you have to put it down and let it be overblown and then take a step back and see if it is or isn't.



From Xanadu To Birmingham: Rush on their UK tour, February 12, 1978.

"And you have to remember, it wasn't a brutal record to make, it was fun, things came together relatively quickly. We ended it up by going into Advision Studios in London to mix it and I was so excited because that's where all those great Yes records were made, and those ELP records. It was well respected and a well-used place by a lot of the guys that we admired, so that was a thrill for us, and it was nice to get out of the country and into London for a few weeks."

Given the mix of songs on the record, the epically long and overblown juxtaposed with shorter and more succinct material meant that balancing two sides of vinyl was something of a challenge: the grandiose abutting the understated, but also making the whole thing fit and flow.

"But that's the thing I really miss," says Lee. "Back then, one of the great pleasures, and one of the toughest things, was sequencing. That was an art back then — you had two sides, you had two chances, you had a beginning and an end twice, and so that was cool because you had 15 to 20 minutes to work with and you had this whole feel, and then you could change this feel in the second half if you wanted to. And we were the kind of band who revelled in that way of expressing things. I think that really came to bear on *Farewell...*, the way it sits together as an album."

As much as the band and Terry Brown played their part, long-time collaborator and cover artist Hugh Syme's depiction of the clown king, lost and alone in the urban wasteland, gave the whole album an unsettling undercurrent.

"That worked for us because there's a subtle theme that goes through part of the album that's all about loss," says Lee. "We have this thing: where are the next people we want to look up to going to come from? Which is not an uncommon theme in Rush music — it's something that comes and goes with us. It's like everybody needs people to look up to, everybody needs people to emulate or be inspired by, and they're hard to find. And so it's that whole 'trying to find the positive point of view when all around is not so positive', shall we say?"

He sits back, one more swirl of the glass, a final gulp.

"The whole concept of the album is disintegrating right now, but they're very much time capsules — where you were at musically, socially and what kind of things you were talking about. They're frozen in time, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't have said what you said — you can't take that back. There were protest songs on there, sociopolitical comment, songs about space!"

The following summer they'd be back at Rockfield to try to recapture the magic of *A Farewell To Kings* on *Hemispheres*, their last album of the 1970s, and what would become a real turning point in their music and how they made it. 1980's *Permanent Waves* sounded like a band renewed, but its seeds had been sown with *A Farewell To Kings*. Geddy recalls their return trip to Wales as they tried to capture that elusive magic one more time.

"We enjoyed our time there a lot, so much so that we went back, like idiots. Never go back. You can't do that — history doesn't repeat itself..."

"There were protest songs on the album, sociopolitical comment, songs about space!"
Geddy Lee

THE CLASSIC ROCK INTERVIEW

GEDDY LEE

For almost 50 years, all the world really was a stage for **Geddy Lee**. Away from the spotlight he's a family man, a baseball fanatic, a wine connoisseur and an author. In 2019, *Classic Rock* caught up with Rush's renaissance man.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Mick Hutson**



GETTY





Rush playing Springfield, Massachusetts, December 1976.



Yes bassist Chris Squire, one of Lee's major musical heroes.

GETTY X 3

CUT OUT: FUTURE

Le Studio, in the Laurentian mountains in Quebec, Canada, where Rush recorded some of their biggest-selling albums – everything from 1980's *Permanent Waves* through to *Counterparts* some 13 years later – has long gone. In some small part though, it lives on. Take the curve of metal stairs down to Geddy Lee's basement studio (where he and Alex Lifeson wrote and demoed the bulk of the band's final few albums), and there hanging on the wall among an array of guitars and basses, some box-fresh, others looking somewhat trashed, hangs a Fender Jazz bass that has small gouges in the pale body and looks like it was pieced together from different bits of wood. Lee takes it down off the wall and points to the 'Le Studio' imprinted into the headstock. A lot of the guitars in this room have stories, and this one is no different.

"About six months ago, Scully [Lee's bass tech] called me up and told me to get Alex [Lifeson] to the house, and turned up with these two guitar cases. We open them, and there's this bass, and a Telecaster for Al," Lee says, plucking absent-mindedly at the strings.

"A guy called Mike Bump and the Fender Custom Shop put them together for us. He'd heard from an old studio employee about these pieces of wood that came from the door to the sound room in Le Studio, and he took it upon himself to fashion these guitars out of the old doors for us, and he did a pair of drumsticks for Neil [Peart] too. It was a very emotional thing. We were really surprised, and all these memories of recording in that studio came flooding back. Alex used the Telecaster for a session he did recently for John Mayall [a song called *Evil And Here To Stay*], my bass was the last guitar to make my book [more on that later], I snuck it in there at the last minute."



It's been three years since Rush walked off stage at the LA Forum in Inglewood. That afternoon, rumours had circulated around the London Hotel in Hollywood that for the first time Rush drummer Neil Peart had asked that his live drums be shipped back home after the show, as opposed to the band's storage space in Nashville. That night as Peart stepped off his drum riser at the end of the show and snuck up on his unsuspecting bandmates and hugged them, as opposed to fleeing into the wings, there was more than a little suggestion that the band's time was up.

These days Peart is enjoying some kind of splendid isolation at home in California, where he's said to be working on a book of his own. Guitarist Alex Lifeson, who isn't sitting comfortably unless he has a guitar in his hands, has guested on numerous projects ("Alex is a cheap drunk, he'll play with anyone. I'm not so cheap," Lee says with a grin).

In the past few years Lee has been working on the expansive *Geddy Lee's Big Beautiful Book Of Bass*. A hefty (drop it on your foot and you'll know about it), lavishly illustrated and beautifully photographed book about the idea of collecting, the history of the bass guitar, and interviews with some of Lee's musical heroes. But it's so much more than that. The instruments he writes about echo Lee's musical journey; mention a certain model and he's transported away to a studio or tour that inspired him, or a store front where a guitar once hung and the young Lee stood staring through the window, determined that one day it would be his. Look around his basement studio now and you realise that he must have stared into quite a few music-shop windows in his time.



Remarkably, you've only been collecting bass guitars since 2012, but you've always collected, haven't you?

All my life: wine, baseballs, art, stamps! For me, these things, these obsessions are windows into time and culture that goes beyond the thing you're holding in your hands, a guitar can tell you a little something about the history of California in the 1950s, or what were The Beatles doing in Hamburg when they walked into a guitar store and saw a certain model on the wall and changed the world. I look at wine and baseball and art and music and craftsmanship as things that have an aura about them that resonates more than the thing itself, and I think that's what I've always found fascinating.

Talking of guitar shopping, you picked up one of your most enduring and familiar basses in a pawn shop.

My Fender Jazz bass, my main one, yeah. I got it in a pawn shop in Kalamazoo, Michigan in the middle seventies. I never owned a Jazz bass before that, and I wasn't a pawn-shop guy. My tech at the time, Skip, had a day off. We walked into this one pawn shop, and there was the bass hanging on the wall, a cigarette mark on it, two hundred dollars, no case. The guy threw in a cardboard case and I walked away with this Jazz bass, which, all these years later, has been my main man for quite a long time after my Rickenbacker period.

When people think of Geddy Lee, a lot of them think of the Rickenbacker bass – and usually a twin-neck.

Ha! That said, the first real bass I bought was a 1968 Fender Precision. That was the bass I made the first Rush record with, and that was the bass I played in all the bars. Whenever you see those

"The cover songs were always more popular than our badly written originals."



Rush making their acceptance speech at the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame Induction Ceremony in LA, April 18, 2013.

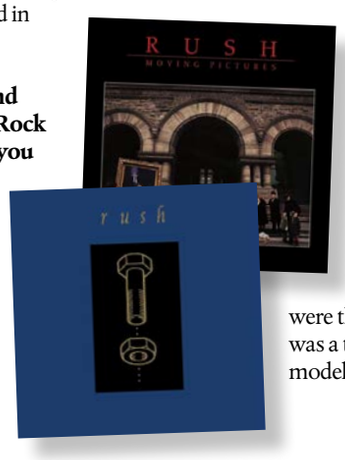
"Chris Squire and Yes were so important to me... John Paul Jones is a profoundly important bass player in my life."

old, prehistoric pictures of me, you know, waistcoat, no shirt, that's the bass I'm holding. That did me until Alex and I got our first ever advance money. That was on *Fly By Night* ['75] We went straight down to the big music store here in Toronto and I bought a Rickenbacker, literally the first day I could buy one.

You broke quite a few hearts when you stopped playing those.
I still love their sound. But they were tools back then, and I was having problems on *Moving Pictures* getting the sound I wanted out of one of my Rickenbackers – it was for *Tom Sawyer*, actually – so I pulled out a Jazz bass that I'd bought and never used. And a light bulb went off, so I ended up using it for a couple of songs: *Tom Sawyer* and *Vital Signs*. Rush were always looking to stretch our sound. I was the same. Until I went back to Fender on *Counterparts* I was dabbling with Wal basses, Steinberger basses, the headless ones, though that went when my mullet went!

The Rickenbacker was a nod to one of your musical heroes: Chris Squire of Yes.
Certainly was. The only band I ever camped out overnight to get tickets to see – and in Canadian weather!

And years later, in 2017, you and Alex get to induct Yes into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, where you played bass with them on *Roundabout*. What a thrill.
Absolutely. And it was the first time I'd been on stage since R40 [Rush's final tour, in 2015]. That's very primal stuff there. Chris Squire and Yes were so important to me, just like The Who, and to be asked to play this pinnacle song, one of the songs that changed my life, I had to do it. And I had to practise to do it too, to make sure I didn't fuck it up. It's not an easy song to play. But it was a great memory for me and a personal tribute to Chris Squire and Yes.



You mentioned The Who and Yes, but there was another British band who were very important in your musical evolution: Cream.
For me they were really the first band of extraordinary musicians that came together, they were the first group of pure virtuosity. I mean, they were the first supergroup to me, and it was a three-piece too – the perfect model. And in our early days ➢



"Rush kind of fashioned ourselves after Cream, really."

Cream (l-r: Jack Bruce, Ginger Baker and Eric Clapton) playing their farewell show at London's Royal Albert Hall, November 26, 1968.

GETTY x4 CUT OUTS: FUTURE

playing in the coffee houses and drop-in centres we would feast on Cream songs for days because of the playing, it was all about that. The songs were great, but they always had moments of jamming. A song like *Spoonful*, you could jam on that for days. There wouldn't be a *Working Man* without *Spoonful*. You take songs like that and albums like *Who's Next*, with John Entwistle's playing. That is one of the most important records to me in my life.

We kind of fashioned ourselves after Cream, really. We were fans of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and that whole English scene, so we did the same thing, taking old blues standards like *Born Under A Bad Sign*. We were just imitating our peers and, of course, the cover songs were always more popular than our badly written originals.

How did Rush go down live in those days?

We were not well received! Canadians are largely apathetic, so we would be playing and they wouldn't boo or anything, but they wouldn't applaud either, which is sort of odd. We just figured it was another gig, another pay day.

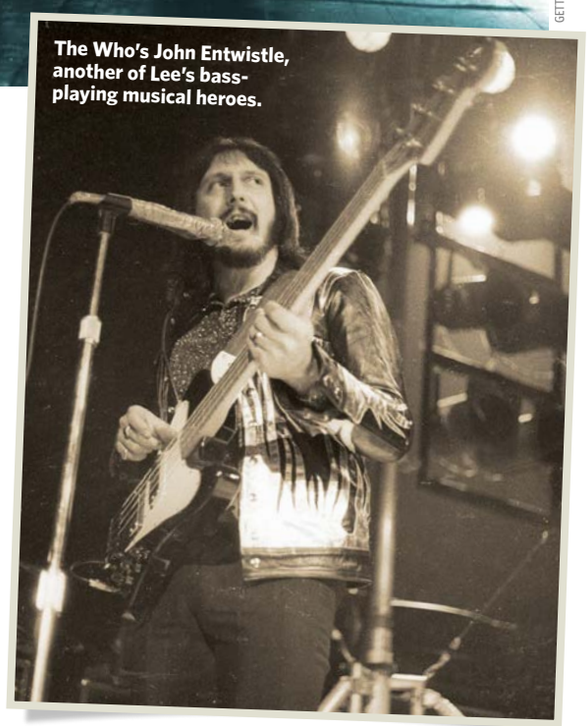
Did it pay much?

It paid for our gas and enough money to get a meal.

Did you eventually have to ditch the covers to get accepted as a 'real' band?

Quite the opposite, we had to increase the covers to get hired into bars, and that was kind of a life or death thing otherwise we couldn't go forward. And at that point none of us was paying attention to school any longer, so you put all your chips in. We used to do like a twenty-minute version of *Roadrunner*, the old Motown standard. Alex would show off as usual, all the histrionics, and it was one of his early Echoplex solos *à la* Jimmy Page. I think we played *Suffragette City* by Bowie and that became a big closer for us. So we dotted the set with enough covers to keep the bar owners hiring us, and in between we would slot our inferior, original blues-rock tunes, and that's how we lived for a couple of years.





The Who's John Entwistle, another of Lee's bass-playing musical heroes.

As a teenager you saw Cream at Massey Hall, the venue where, over three nights on the 2112 tour, Rush would eventually record *All The World's A Stage*.

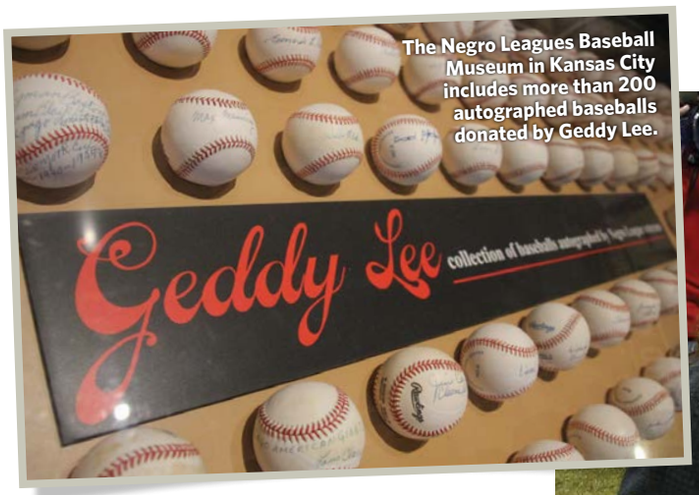
I went alone, too. None of my friends wanted to see them, can you believe that? I remember saying to them: "I'm going; you guys are idiots!"

Sadly, the book came too late to interview Cream bassist Jack Bruce or John Entwistle.

Any of those heroes, Jack Bruce, John Entwistle, Chris Squire. That said, I don't know why I never reached out to Jack Cassady [Jefferson Airplane/Starship], because he would have been a fascinating interview and he was one of my earliest heroes and I feel like I didn't do him justice in the book.

When you were talking to people for the book, how did it feel being on the other side of the interview?

I really wish that I had allowed for more of those interviews, because they were the most fun part for me, but I ran out of time and pages. I was fortunate enough to get away with 408 pages on bass guitars! But I do wish I'd done more of them.



The Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City includes more than 200 autographed baseballs donated by Geddy Lee.



Lee talking to Toronto Blue Jays manager John Gibbons at Rogers Centre in Toronto, April 2, 2013.

You asked people to bring basses to the interview. Why was that?

I would reach out to people with a specific thing in mind. Like I knew that John Paul Jones is a profoundly important bass player in my life, but he's also a pre-eminent example of the '62 Jazz bass playing. Listen to all those early Zep records. He said to me when he arrived for the interview that he didn't still have his first bass, but he found one that was identical and he brought it. And that's what I was after with these guys. I wanted to know about where they started, but I also wanted to know what they were passionate about now.

I loved their stories. I loved listening to Bill Wyman tell me about when he was a kid and his sister would take him to these dances, and she would be dancing and he would sit there and listen to the band. Or John Paul Jones talking about the first time he heard the bass in some seaside town, and it was booming out of some speakers. Or someone just gawking in the window of a store looking at a Fender bass and wishing one day they would be able to buy one – just like I did.

That said, your first guitar wasn't even a bass.

It was an acoustic guitar with palm trees on. I was very young, and I talked my mother into letting me buy it from my neighbour. The first song I learnt how to play on it was *For Your Love* by The Yardbirds. And then I figured out *Pretty Woman* – great guitar part. But I wanted to be in a band. The band of morons that I was hanging out with at the time, the bass player's mum wouldn't let him hang out with us, so we lost him and they all voted me in. I begged my mum to loan me thirty dollars so I could get this thirty-five dollar bass at the local store. It was a Canora model, Japanese made, sort of a cheap copy of a Fender bass; I guess the die was cast.

Let's talk about one of your other loves, baseball. Your collection takes up about as much room at home as the basses and bottles of wine you collect. When did you first pick up a baseball and think: "I need another four hundred of these."

Ha! I was a manic baseball fan, but it never entered my mind to collect. I had a friend who worked in the clubhouse for the Toronto Blue Jays, and every year he would give me a set of the American league teams. They all come through and they sign for the club staff, and he would stash these balls and every year I would get a set. This started in the late seventies. Then I thought it'd be cool to get a [1920s/30s baseball legend] Babe Ruth-signed baseball, because he was this icon in my mind. So I called up this collector that I'd met and asked if I could buy a Babe Ruth ball, and I was like: "Wow, it's that much money?! I don't know about that." Eventually I did buy the baseball, and then you start thinking what are the other great players it would be cool to have. and that's how it starts. And forty years later you have a room full of baseballs.

Not least your cabinet filled with baseballs signed by presidents and world leaders.

I have four baseballs that were signed by JFK. There was a baseball up at auction from the opening game of 1961. The US president shows up, they sit in the stand, and they would toss a ball out on to the field. The player would catch it, go to the president, the president would sign it, and in this case Lyndon Johnson signed it too and the player signed it. And it was up for auction. And I thought, what a cool, American memento, so I bought it.

Then, fast-forward thirty years, and I see one going for auction, and I'm like, wait a second, I have that, how can it be?! So I read up on the game. And him being the true Democrat that he was, he didn't feel it was right to throw out a ball to just one team, he threw one out to a member of both teams, so there were actually two opening day pitches. Of course, I had to have it! So I bought it.

In moments like that, do you ever hate your 'collector's gene'?

Yeah! Collecting isn't always easy. I say this to people: once you get past the point of dabbling and admit that you're a collector; then the collection must be fed! Otherwise, what is it? It's just a bunch of stuff! Pick a particular thing and make that a valid use of your time and resources. Listen to me… [trails off, laughing helplessly].

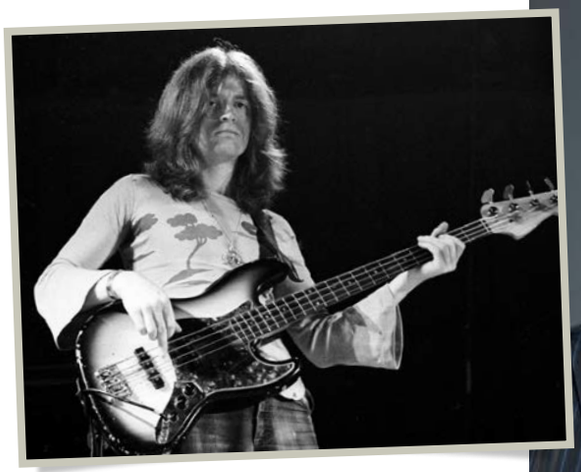
Talking about first pitches, you once threw out the first ball for your beloved Blue Jays.

I practised for that more than you will ever know. In 1993 I got asked to sing the anthem at the all-star game in Baltimore at Camden Yards, so I did that. It was a nerve-racking experience, eighty million viewers. According to Alex I sang the slowest rendition of the Canadian national anthem ever to be publicly performed. As I said to him, I was trying to get the most out of my screen time, dude.

Then around 2000, Rush were on tour and the Texas Rangers asked me to throw the first pitch. Alex came with me, and I threw out the pitch and Alex was the catcher. So here we are, a crowd of Texans just starting to get into the stadium, and there are these two long-haired guys on the field, you know, what the hell are they doing there? So when Alex catches the ball, he jumps up like it's the final out of the World Series, and he runs at me and he tackles me on the mound. All these good old boys from Texas are sitting there going: 'What the hell's going down on the field there?! "I'm surprised they didn't run us out of town. ➢



"I've collected all my life: wine, baseballs, art, stamps! I have four baseballs that were signed by JFK."





Do meet your heroes. Lee with John Paul Jones at the Classic Rock Awards in November 2010. Inset: Jones with Led Zeppelin at the LA Forum in 1973.

MICK HUTSON INSET: GETTY. RIGHT: KEVIN NIXON/FUTURE

"I still love music and I think I still have something to say, but I won't know that until I start banging away."

So I'd done that and lived, but I'd never done it for a home game before. I used to throw three innings' worth of pitches backstage every night before a show. That was until I got a sore arm and I couldn't play bass. So when the Blue Jays asked me, I was thrilled, but I was more nervous than I ever get before a show.

I went out, did my thing, threw a curveball, got a strike and I was really, really pleased about that. I've been asked to do it since, but no way. What do you want from me?! My major-league career says I threw a strike!

And what about wine? We've got £50 to spend. Which one bottle of wine should we buy – not to collect, but to drink – and why?
Well, that's a good question, and of course it depends on your taste. But for a red wine, and for my tastes, I would try and purchase a good Beaujolais Cru from Lapierre or Foillard. Great, food-friendly wines and reasonable. For a white wine I would look for a nice Sancerre from Francois Cotat.

Going back to the day job, what's next for you and your music?
I'm going to start going down to the studio and start using all those basses that are staring me in the face and see what happens. I'm not going to promise that I'm going to do a record, this is the way I look at life right now. I kept my family waiting for me for forty-two years, and I'm not doing anything ever again that keeps them waiting. I owe it to my beautiful, fantastic wife to be with her when she can stand me being with her, and I owe it to my grandson to be around and my mother now that she's older, and my kids. So that's my first priority right now. But I still love music and I think I still have something to say, but I won't know that until I start banging away downstairs. If I start banging away and it feels like I have something valid to put out there, then I'll go ahead and follow that dream. Well, with my family's permission.



How has the time since the R40 tour ended been for you? When did you admit to yourself that Rush was over?
The first few months afterwards, you're just sort of basking in the post-tour glory; it was a great tour, it was a fantastic memory and the last gig was quite emotional. I would say I was a little emotionally bruised for a few months. But of course I had the comfort of my fabulous wife, and we just set off doing what we do: travelling, walking, me enjoying the family. I don't know when it came to me that we wouldn't return. I sort of suspected when we finished that we were really finished. I guess I held out some hope that maybe that wasn't so, but I think over time I just got used to the idea, and over time I started to understand that for Neil to leave was the right decision for him. Since then we've remained friends and we talk all the time. But the first few months I think were difficult, and now it's not difficult. I still have moments.

I think the book was a fantastically stupid idea for me, it was a ridiculous project. But my life has been ridiculous, and there are so many things about the way I live that are extreme, and yet at the same time I'm a pretty down-to-earth person. But I have these manias and these obsessions, and in many, many ways doing a book was a kind of obsession therapy for me. I mean that in a good way, I think.

On the upside, *Clockwork Angels* was a great album to end on.
But I didn't think it was the end!

And finally, when were you happiest in Rush?
I've never thought it like that before, but I can tell you that ever since we came back after Neil's terrible tragedy with his family, and having had those five dark years we were away, every tour I did with Rush I savoured. I would say that period from coming back after Neil's tragedy to the very end were really the golden years for me. I felt like I appreciated every gig, every note that we played. The camaraderie that the three of us had, I never took it for granted, not one day. So I would say that was my happiest time in Rush.



Hard-working man: Lee with Rush at London's O2 Arena in 2013.

An Exercise In Self-Indulgence...

Rush's sixth album, *Hemispheres*, was notorious as the most challenging record the band ever made, but its stunning 36 minutes remain a clear indication of the band's incredible chemistry. **Geddy Lee** remembers its creation, and ponders its legacy...

Words: Dom Lawson **Portraits:** Fin Costello/Getty Images

"When you've been a band for as long as we've been around, almost every day at this time of year, it's an anniversary of *something*..."

Poor old Geddy Lee. Just as the legendary bassist thought he was at least temporarily relieved of the task of talking about Rush, another gargantuan anniversary loomed over the horizon. Forty years have passed since the release of *Hemispheres*: not just one of Rush's most widely beloved records, but arguably the one that most thrillingly encapsulates the progressive abandon of the Canadians' first decade together. Recently reissued in ultra-lavish, multi-format form, *Hemispheres* certainly deserves a louder commemorative cheer than most, even though Lee remains sceptical about the need to mark every possible milestone.

"We always tried to release our records before Christmas or just after Christmas, if we could, so this time of year is flooded with memories of release dates for me," he notes. "It's a bit crazy at times. I saw somebody posted a celebration of the 33rd anniversary of *Mystic Rhythms* [from 1985's *Power Windows*] today, on some internet site. Well, thank you very much! [Laughs] This guy was doing a rendition of *Mystic Rhythms,* which was actually quite beautiful and it was nice to hear it played on just acoustic guitar and voice. He did a great job, but do you celebrate the 33rd anniversary of *anything*? It's a bit mental."

When it comes to *Hemispheres*, Lee is more than happy to regale *Prog* with the inside story. One of the most vociferously debated and lauded albums in Rush's vast catalogue, these 36 minutes of explosive, pioneering prog are notorious for having pushed the three musicians to the limit of their abilities. In fact, *Hemispheres* is often cited as the album that nearly broke Rush for good. In truth, as Lee explains, as they arrived in the spring of 1978 after finishing a gruelling world tour in support of the hugely successful *A Farewell To Kings*, Rush were too full of ideas to contemplate taking a rest.

ILLUSTRATION COMPOSITE: MAGICTORCH, SHUTTTETERSTOCK AND GETTY IMAGES



"I remember writing *La Villa Strangiato* was great fun because the whole inspiration was these crazy dreams that Alex used to foist upon us every morning at breakfast. He'd start, 'You'll never guess what I dreamed last night...' and the groaning would begin."



"I think we were tired after the touring but at the same time we were also feeling pretty good," he says. "Our range was expanding and we were feeling pretty ambitious at that time, which is evidenced in the crazy record that we made in Wales! We'd had a good experience working at Rockfield Studios before and that left a good taste about the whole idea of recording in Britain again. When we arrived in Wales we were psyched, we were excited, but at the same time we were not super well prepared. Although we had a lot of ideas, we hadn't really hammered them out, so we found ourselves in a new situation, in a house not far from Rockfield. We'd planned to be there for a short time and it turned into a much longer time, as *everything* to do with that album did. I'd say we were excited and a little bit nervous about the lack of preparation, but we were ready to dig in."

Hemispheres' reputation as a difficult album to make is arguably well-founded. With nothing concrete to lay down on tape, Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neil Peart were under considerable pressure to conjure an album's worth of material within a few short weeks. It is perhaps indicative of exactly how potent the chemistry was between the trio at this time, that being woefully underprepared seems to have pushed them to unexpected new heights. Not surprisingly, the bulk of the songwriting sessions were spent working on *Hemispheres*' grandiloquent opener, *Cygnus X-1 Book II: Hemispheres*, the sequel to *A Farewell To Kings*' grand, conceptual closer, *Cygnus X-1 Book I: The Voyage*.

"Once the lyrics started coming together and we saw that Neil had this strong conceptual piece in his head, that sort of helped us to form a plan of action and so I think it was quite an exciting way to work," states Lee. "In the past, we'd usually save one song on any album to write while we were in the studio, just off-the-cuff. Usually those songs would point us in a different direction for the next record, songs like *The Twilight Zone* [from *2112*, 1976], *Vital Signs* [from *Moving Pictures*, 1981] and *New World Man* [from *Signals*, 1982], for example. But *this* was a lot more than just 'Let's write a short, five-minute tune.'

"We'd get together in this room in the house where our gear was set up and we'd just wrestle with the lyrics and put together melodies," he continues. "We'd do all of that sitting around with each other, not necessarily plugged in, with Alex on an acoustic guitar, perhaps, and me on my bass, or sometimes we'd both write on acoustics. Then, with Neil, we'd hammer out a loose structure and then we'd take it to the next step, get behind the machinery and start playing it out until we were able to form the song. It was very much a three-way street in terms of coming up with the final version of the song."



Rush in May 1979. Recording *Hemispheres* the previous year had pushed them to their limit.

"*The Trees* song was one of the most fun that we were working on at that time, for sure. We were surrounded by all that nature at Rockfield and it just made sense."

One familiar apocryphal tale about the making of *Hemispheres* posits that Neil Peart was struggling with the job of writing lyrics and felt under immense pressure to deliver something special. Not so, according to Lee, who notes that continuing the *Cygnus* saga was fundamental to defining the new music's direction.

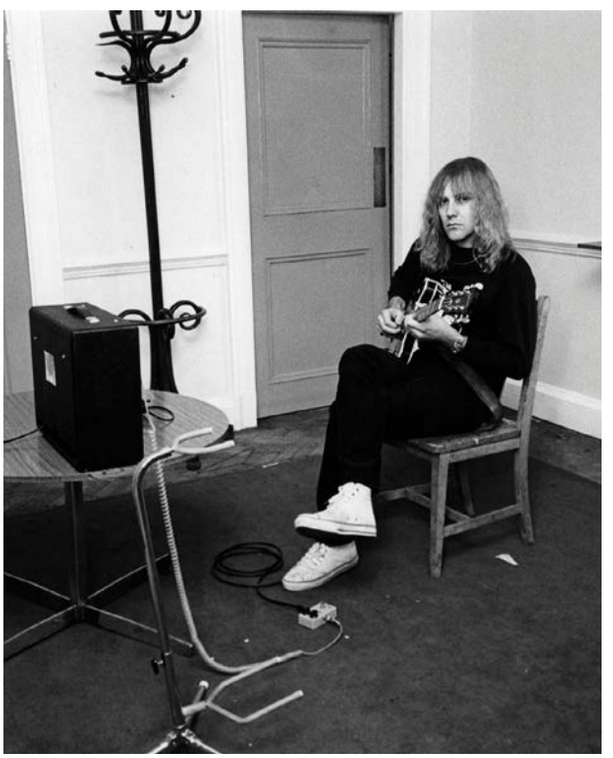
"I think [writing a sequel] made it *easier* for him, to be honest. I think he'd been thinking about this for a while and I think he knew where he wanted to go. It was just a matter of fleshing it





Screen Time: the guys chilling backstage at the Gaumont, Southampton on May 13, 1979.

Alex Lifeson on the first UK date of Hemispheres tour.



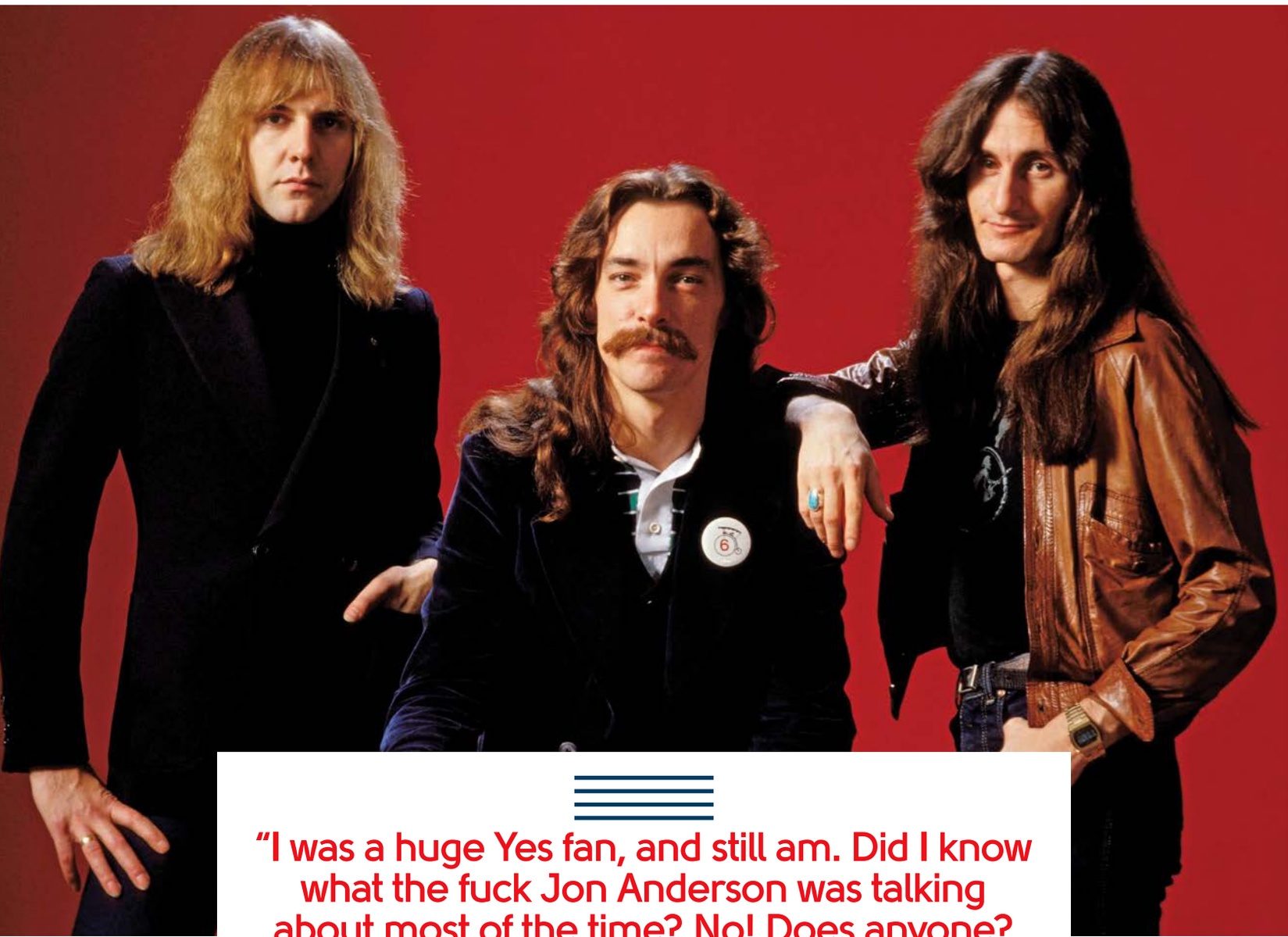
out. He was probably more prepared lyrically than we were musically. Alex and I were really playing catch-up."

Hemispheres is best known for its two magnicient bookends: the sprawling, joyously intricate title track and the instrumental, showboating blitzkrieg of *La Villa Strangiato*. But at a time when Rush were significant figures in the rock world and increasingly in demand on US rock radio, *Hemispheres* also managed to conjure two of the band's most succinct and enduring songs. The sub-four-minute splendour of *Circumstances*, in particular, hinted strongly at another possible direction for these young masters to pursue, while giving them a much-needed break from the arduous longform songwriting process.

"Yeah, that song was a bit of a holiday for us at that time, like, 'Let's do something short…!'" Lee laughs. "The truth is, we don't write more than we can use. If, along the way, a song doesn't cut it, we just kick it out. We famously have no hidden tracks because every song took maximum effort and we didn't see the point in putting in maximum effort for a song we had doubts about. So we decided that we needed one more song for *Hemispheres*, Neil had these *Circumstances* lyrics, and it became a great opportunity to do something different. Working on a side-long piece is so draining on many levels, you feel like you're a slave to this concept, so anything that's *not* like that feels way more fun!"

Strangely, the song that became one of Rush's biggest ever hits, both on the radio and within their enormous fan base, was *Hemispheres*' skewed, side-two curio *The Trees*. A deceptively spiky tale, this disquieting fantasy about oaks and maples competing for the sunlight is an unlikely anthem, particularly given its rather unpleasant denouement. (Spoiler alert: the oaks get chopped down to size.)

"That song was one of the most fun that we were working on at that time, for sure," Lee says. "We were surrounded by all that nature at Rockfield and it just made sense. I remember mixing it at Trident Studios, and the engineer was a lovely guy. He was new to our music and I remember him, after one run-through of the mix, saying, 'This is a nasty little tune, isn't it?' I said, 'Well, maybe a *little*…' But yeah, it was great fun to do that song. I loved the textures and the changes. It just turned into one of our classic songs, I think. Surprisingly, I still hear it a lot travelling around America. I remember reading, when it first came out, that it was a big radio song on some big FM station in Texas, and I thought, 'Wow, that's weird…' It *is*



> "I was a huge Yes fan, and still am. Did I know what the fuck Jon Anderson was talking about most of the time? No! Does anyone? Does Jon?"

kind of odd, but it's sort of become one of our iconic songs."

There remains something wonderfully subversive about the thought of hearing *The Trees* nestling alongside *More Than A Feeling* and *The Joker* on US rock radio rotation, but Lee attributes the song's enduring success to Neil Peart's unerring ability to leave room for manoeuvre in Rush's lyrical world.

"Well, one thing that was always important to me, as a songwriter and regardless of what Neil was talking about, was I always felt the audience needed to have a choice," Lee avows. "You need to have the option of what *you* get out of the song, whether it's just a musical thing or if it's the sound of the lyrics or whatever, that's fine. You don't have to understand it the way *I* understand it. And I don't always understand it the way *Neil* understood it. I'm the first interpreter in that chain and the audience are the next set of interpreters. That's the beauty of art, it's what makes it so alive. It should be communal and international in a way. It should be open to interpretation."

Above: Rush looking dapper in 1978.

Is that another one of the benefits of playing progressive rock? It's a genre that deals in so many ideas and concepts that the unexpected is almost expected...

"That's true. You can't really write a rootsy country song about an egg-sucking dog [he's referring to Johnny Cash's *Dirty Old Egg Sucking Dog*] and keep any kind of mystery about what it's about! I hate having things so explained to me sometimes. I was a huge Yes fan, and still am. Did I know what the fuck Jon Anderson was talking about most of the time? No! Does *anyone*? Does *Jon*? [Laughs] He had an idea and only really he knows what he was trying to get across. I have my own takeaway from those songs and I think it's important to have that in music."

Take a quick straw poll of any random gaggle of Rush fans and it seems safe to say that *La Villa Strangiato* would come out on top of any list of favourite songs from *Hemispheres* (although, it has to be said, there are only four songs on it in the first place). Perhaps the ultimate showcase for the mind-bending musical chemistry between Lee, Lifeson and Peart, it has weathered 40 years impeccably and still sounds like what it truly is: the sound of three young, preternaturally gifted musicians showing off and being insanely, joyfully inventive in the process. Thinking back to Rockfield, Lee notes that the sense of utmost urgency we hear on *Hemispheres*' closing track is the result of a lot of blood, sweat, tears and insanity.

"I don't really remember how the writing came together but I do

remember rehearsing the *hell* out of it beforehand. We really wanted to record it all in one go. It's about 10 minutes long and we wanted to do it in one shot. I remember writing it was great fun because the whole inspiration was, of course, these crazy dreams that Alex used to foist upon us every morning at breakfast. He'd start, 'You'll never guess what I dreamed last night…' and the groaning would begin! But it was a really fun, visual and musical exercise, constructing a soundtrack to an insane person's dreams! [Laughs]"

More than any other Rush song, *La Villa Strangiato* captures the wild energy that drove the band in their early days. You can almost hear them grinning as they switch moods and tempos on the head of a pin.

"Doing something like that gave us licence to change as often as we wanted, to make the music as complicated as we wanted, to stylistically shift gears every 30 seconds. All of that is *free* and open to you. That's the beauty of doing that kind of instrumental. You can make it up as you go along, you can decide what the script should be and it doesn't have to bear any relation to anybody's idea of what an instrumental song should be. So it was super fun to do and it's *still* super fun to play live. It's one of my favourite songs to play."

Legend has it that they recorded more than 40 takes of *La Villa Strangiato* before nailing the final version. Is that close to the truth?

"I don't remember how many takes it took but I do know that we never got it in one go!" Lee chuckles. "We'd set out to get it in one 10-minute go, but again, our ideas were more solid than our ability to play them! So we settled for doing it in four pieces. We divided it into four, focused on those and then used the good old magic of editing tape to stick them together into one cohesive piece. Those were the days before click tracks and that digital, metronomic attitude towards putting music together. So it was very much down to how you felt in the moment. Sometimes you'd get excited and you'd speed up, and sometimes that's the way it should be. That's why it feels so *live*."

Originally planned as a four-week excursion to Rockfield, the *Hemispheres* sessions steadily turned into a much lengthier mission for all concerned. Due to both the complex nature of the music and the efforts required to perform it properly *and* to various technical problems that slowed the recording process, Rush and co-producer Terry Brown found themselves running out of time, working around the clock to somehow piece this preposterous magnum opus together.

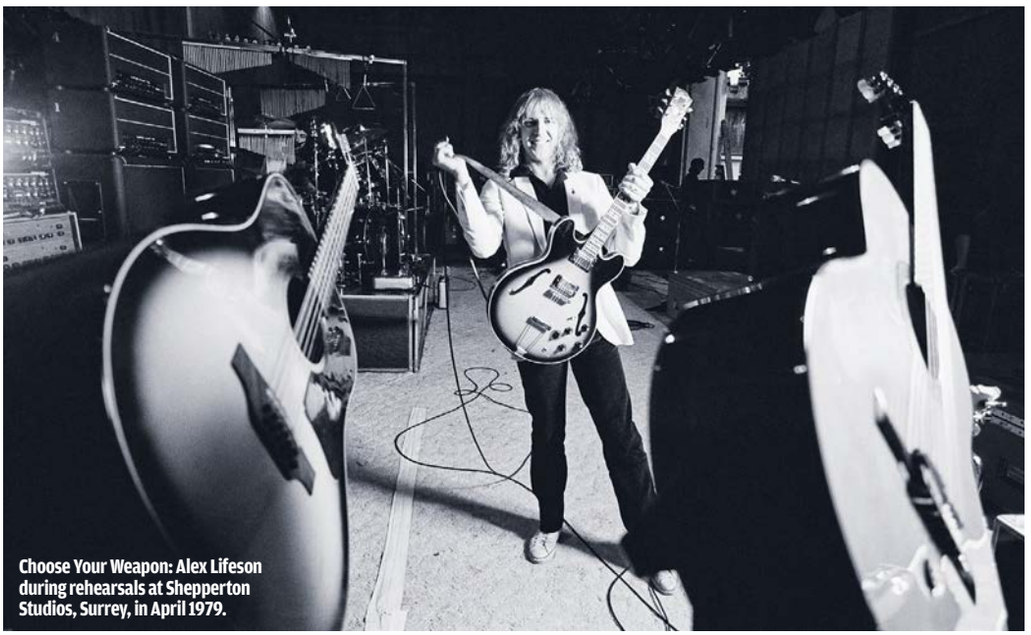






"At this time we'd developed this crazy foot pedal system, kind of a version of MIDI before that existed, and it arrived in time for the writing sessions in Wales but it didn't work," Lee recalls. "We were so upset about that and we spent way too many hours trying to make it work. We got some semblance of it working, certainly enough to be able to record. We really had a lot of fun working there, but the hours were getting later and later. We were sleeping until four in the afternoon and having breakfast at supper time, and then before you know it we were up until six in the morning again, going to sleep as the birds were tweeting and the sheep were baa-ing,

Three Kings: *Hemispheres* was three incredibly gifted young musicians showing off and being wildly inventive.



Choose Your Weapon: Alex Lifeson during rehearsals at Shepperton Studios, Surrey, in April 1979.



Above: Neil Peart behind his beloved kit during soundcheck at the Gaumont in 1979.

you know? It was a crazy schedule and we ran out of time there. They had other people coming in, so we had to high-tail it, so we didn't use the time we had set aside for mixing at Advision [Studio]. We used that to record vocals."

Famously, Neil Peart introduced a gong into his percussive arsenal on *Hemispheres*. Meanwhile, Lee was experimenting with new effects pedals. Added to the intricacy of the songs themselves, is it any wonder that Rush struggled to get everything done in time?

"I think basically what we wanted was to record everything live on the floor. We wanted to record the songs in long pieces. *Cygnus Book II* was an adventurous piece of music to play and it was much more difficult than we expected, so in a way our skill set wasn't as polished as our ideas were. What's the expression, 'Our reach exceeded our grasp?' So it was difficult. We had to raise our game and that's really what that album was all about, raising our game."

Another well-worn snippet of Rush mythology concludes that the band struggled during the *Hemispheres* sessions because they were deeply unhappy about the state of their living conditions at Rockfield. Again, Lee dismisses the idea, noting that they had been there before — to record *A Farewell To Kings* — and were more than aware of what to expect.

"Oh, it was fine. I mean, you need *something* to complain about, right? Otherwise you start picking on each other. But I think we were okay there. We were happy there. I mean, we were there for far too long and after doing two projects in a row, we didn't really want to go back there again! I think we set a record for the number of grey-skied days we spent in Wales, but at that time of year, it's fairly typical for Great Britain, right? At *any* time of year, in fact… But we really liked the people at Rockfield, they took great care of us. We have very fond memories of Kingsley [Ward], who ran the place, and Otto [Garms], their in-house tech who was desperately trying to help me to fix my technical issues."

With the four new songs committed to tape, Rush abandoned their Rockfield hideaway and headed for Advision Studios in London to add Lee's final vocals. By this point, the band were perilously over-schedule and while they still felt hugely positive about the music they were making, the atmosphere in the studio was undeniably tense: not the ideal environment for hitting some of the highest notes that the frontman has ever attempted.

"It was getting later and later and people were getting a bit gnarly about the record and when it would be finished," says Lee. "I was certainly a bit gnarly when I was doing the vocals. The difficult thing was that as we'd sketched these songs out, sitting around in a casual manner and humming the melodies — I hadn't really sung them out against recorded, heavy tracks. When I came to record the vocals, of course, it was all in a very difficult key and it really pushed my range. That made me a very unhappy puppy! Unfortunately, I gave our producer Terry Brown a very rough time while I was recording, because I was so frustrated. I was in that vocal booth at Advision trying to hit those notes over and over again, trying to make them as perfect as I could, and it was tough. It was really up there!"

Forty years on, those absurdly high notes have simply become a recognised part of Geddy Lee's vocal repertoire. Looking back, however, he cites those sessions as an extremely educational moment in the band's evolution as songwriters and album-makers.

"Oh, it was a *major* lesson learned. It was a major faux pas," he admits. "I think part of it was that I was angry at Terry, in a way, because I thought, 'This is what producers are supposed to do, isn't it?' You know? Shouldn't he have come in and said, 'Do you think that's in the right key?' but that was something that almost never happened with Terry. Whatever we wrote, he made sure we recorded. He would, of course, question arrangements and make suggestions on structure, but I don't think he ever suggested I try something in another key. It wasn't until I started working with Peter Collins [on *Power Windows*, 1985] that it became a matter of course and you did that with every song. He'd say, 'Let's try this song in different keys!', 'Let's see where your voice goes!' or 'Let's see what works best!' Those were things I was still learning when we made *Hemispheres*, so yes, lesson learned on that one!"

Can you still hit those notes, 40 years later?

"For short periods of time? Absolutely. When we went out on the R40 tour, we realised we were going to play some oldies, like *Lakeside Park*, which is another song that's way up in the stratosphere. I kept wanting to transpose the song down and Alex kept saying, 'No, you can do it!' We tried different transpositions and he



Hugh Syme's artwork was heavily inspired by Neil Peart's lyrics.

A surprising critical success, *Hemispheres* did not take off in quite the way that Rush's record label bosses may have wanted, but its initial, solid performance in charts worldwide – including reaching number 14 in the UK – confirmed that the band were still heading onwards and upwards. For Lee, Lifeson and Peart, it was a case of sitting back and waiting for the fans' responses to start trickling down to them. As far as they were concerned, they had made a great, if challenging, new record, but there was no guarantee that everyone else would agree…

"No, I had absolutely no idea how people would take it," says Lee. "I just thought people would think it was way too weird! We had no idea. I knew it would be a tough sell to radio, because these pieces were so long. But you can't worry about that stuff when you're doing it. I saw this interview with Robert Redford the other day and he quoted TS Eliot, and Eliot said that it's all about the *trying*, and what happens after that is none of our business. I'd say that sums up how we felt after making *Hemispheres*."

"It's a weird cover. It freaked people out. The brains were not received well by all, but it's definitely very proggy."

was like, 'They don't sound good, Ged, come on…' So when we got into doing it at rehearsals, yeah, I could hit those notes and I managed to do it for the whole tour, so I can do it if I rehearse properly and take care of my voice. But I couldn't do it night after night."

Hemispheres was released on October 29, 1978, resplendent in its none-more-prog artwork, courtesy of regular Rush collaborator Hugh Syme. Artfully capturing the album's lyrical preoccupation with duelling sides of mind and spirit, the cover's giant floating brains added an extra layer of intrigue and eccentricity to what was already the band's most ambitious and thought-provoking record to date.

"Yes, the artwork definitely helped," Lee grins. "Hugh was very much wanting to express the ideas that came out of Neil's lyrics. He was really into that whole thing, what the songs were trying to say and how that should be expressed somehow in the artwork. Neil and Hugh went to town, they'd run it by Alex and I and we'd give them our opinion. I think both of the chaps on the cover are Hugh's pals. One was a ballet dancer and the other guy, I think, was a bank robber! I'm not sure if I've remember that correctly. But it's a weird cover. It freaked people out. The brains were not received well by all, but it's definitely very proggy."


Above: Geddy Lee at a studio in Shepperton, December 2, 1978. He's playing a small Moog synthesiser with his foot… because he can.

Were you surprised by how well received it eventually was?

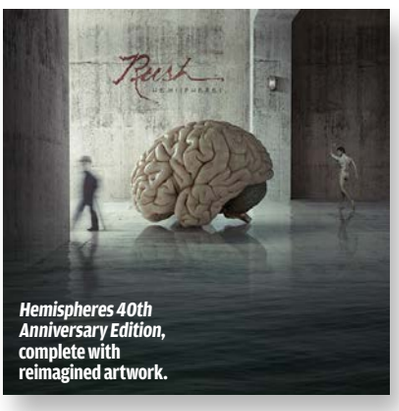
"Yes, yes I was. It wasn't initially *super* successful, it was a slow burn. But what surprises me to this day is that I have so many fans come up to me and say that they think it's the ultimate Rush album. *That* surprises me! Les Claypool is among them, that's *his* Rush album. So it has become iconic in a way, for our band, as a representation of our most complex period."

A mere 15 months after the release of *Hemispheres*, Rush would casually redefine their entire sound, ushering in a new decade with the timely sheen of *Permanent Waves*. But while history may remember *Hemispheres* as a moment of transition, wherein Rush began to fully embrace music's limitless potential, Geddy Lee remembers the album as an exhausting, if momentous, full-stop at the end of Rush's rise to prominence.

"It didn't feel like a transitional record. It felt like the end of an era for me," he concludes. "I felt that the side-long thing was getting predictable for me as a writer and I wanted to bust out of that. In a sense, it felt like saying goodbye to that period. I had ideas of where I wanted us to go. Songs like *The Trees* and *Circumstances* pointed in that direction. I wanted to tell stories but I didn't want to be weighed down by themes that had to keep repeating over a 25-minute period. I wanted to be able to accomplish many more musical ideas over 25 minutes, you know?"

Nonetheless, for many, *Hemispheres* remains the ultimate Rush album: 36 minutes of jaw-dropping, no-holds-barred prog rock, conjured from nowhere and delivered with ageless, life-affirming enthusiasm. And that's worth an exuberant anniversary in anyone's book.

"I don't know if I can ever possess the necessary objectivity to be able to see and hear what people see and hear in *Hemispheres*," Lee concludes. "But I like to think that it's the ambitiousness in the effort we put in. There's something truly prog about that record and I think that fans of that genre really appreciate that."



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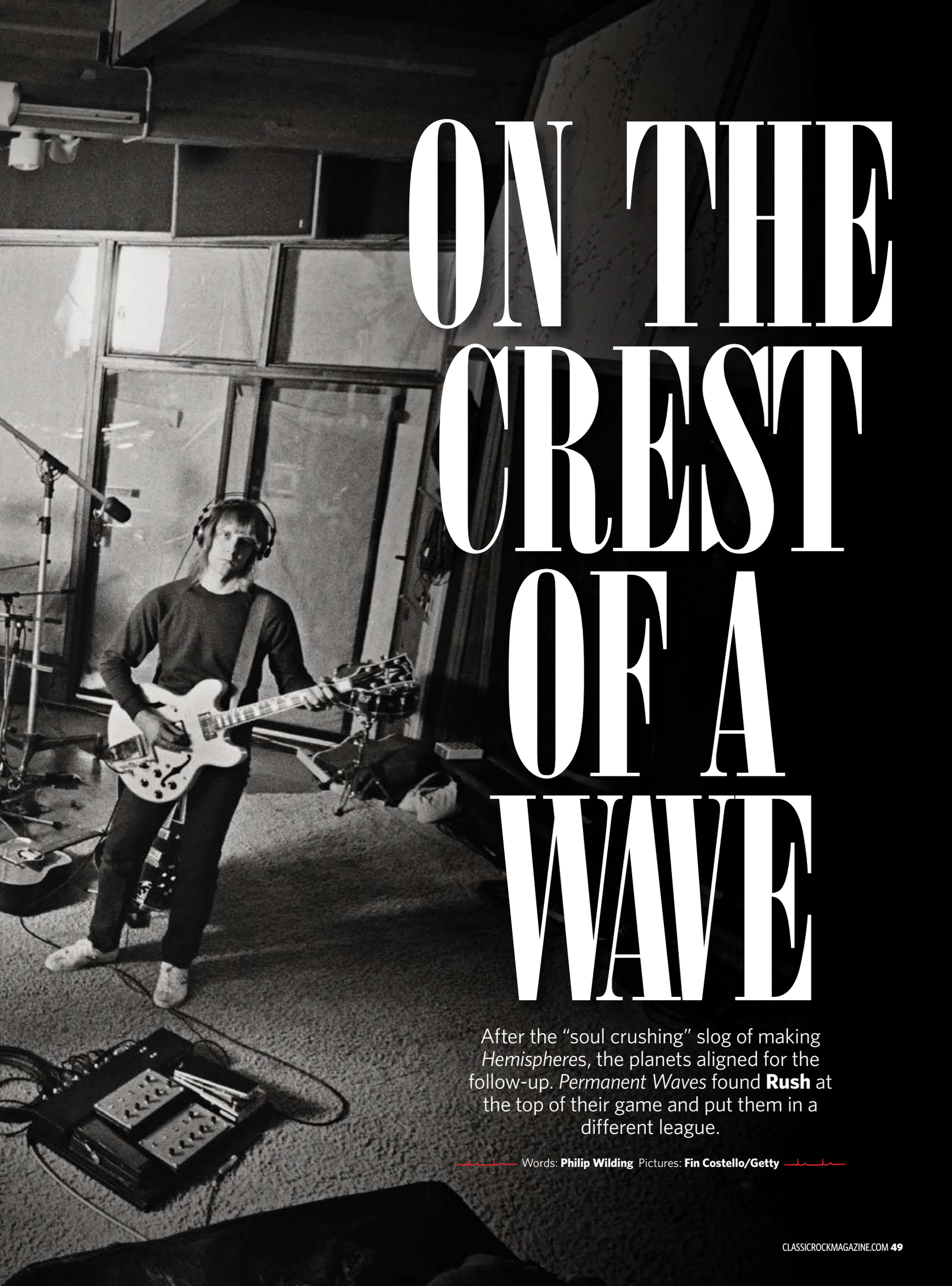
The 1980s

Prog epics out, keyboards and hit singles in. Diving into the most adventurous period of Rush's career. Plus: Neil Peart speaks!

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY



Rush recording *Permanent Waves* at Le Studio in Canada, October 1979.



ON THE CREST OF A WAVE

After the "soul crushing" slog of making *Hemispheres*, the planets aligned for the follow-up. *Permanent Waves* found **Rush** at the top of their game and put them in a different league.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Pictures: **Fin Costello/Getty**



If you take the spiral staircase down to Geddy Lee's basement studio in his Toronto home, you enter a veritable Aladdin's cave with guitars and basses hanging from every available space on the tartan-covered walls. Classic and obscure models in every conceivable colour make up a lacquered rainbow of instruments in a room where musical history has been made more than once. At the far corner of the room hangs a hand-tooled bass that holds almost as much history as this entire home studio: a pale Fender Jazz model with a Le Studio logo imprinted into its headstock.

Geddy takes it down from the wall and starts plucking abstractedly at its strings. "This was gifted to me from a guy called Mike Bump and the Fender Custom Shop people," he says. "The wood came from the door to the sound room at Le Studio. Alex [Lifeson] got a Telecaster and Neil [Peart] got a pair of drumsticks. I guess one of the ex-employees had contacted Fender and told them that this wood existed, and he took it upon himself to have it sent to Mike. We knew nothing about it, and so it was a very emotional thing when they arrived because all these memories of recording in that studio came flooding back."

Le Studio, set on Lake Perry and in the foothills of the spectacular Laurentian Mountains ("It was truly a part of the great Canadian landscape," says Geddy), not only marked a new decade and studio for Rush, but also an era when they would change the way they worked, how they wrote songs and, not to overstate things, their place in the world.

To understand how Rush were moving forward in 1980, you first have to go back to the tail end of the 1970s. After the relative ease of the recording of *A Farewell To Kings*, Rush returned to Rockfield Studios in Wales in the summer of 1978 – and hit a wall. Songs came



Giving it some big bottom: Geddy Lee at Le Studio, October 1979.


Searching for inspiration: (l-r) Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart and Geddy Lee

"During *Hemispheres* we stopped shaving, and turned into these grotesque prog creatures. *Permanent Waves* was quite the opposite."

Geddy Lee

slowly, creative energy was sapped, day became night, their working habits inverted.

"During *Hemispheres* we were like these monks," says Lee. "At one point during that album we stopped shaving, we sort of turned into these fucking grotesque prog creatures in this farmhouse making this record, working all night, sleeping all day. *Permanent Waves* was quite the opposite.

"You have to remember that *Hemispheres* was the record that wouldn't end. Everything about making that was exceedingly difficult. We were in Wales for far too long. I don't remember more than three moments where we actually left the farm in over three months. We were very happy with the record, but it felt like we lost a chunk of ourselves in it.

"The other realisation I had was that I felt that we were becoming formulaic – these long, epic, side-long pieces were becoming inadvertently down pat; overture, theme here, repeat theme here… In and of itself, it was complex, but in actuality we were repeating ourselves, and I didn't want to do that. So we concertedly tried to shift direction. You know: can we work in a seven-minute time frame? Can we put that limit on what we're doing and see if we can make that more tuneful, more interesting and still complex? That was our goal."

Ready to write in earnest for the next album, which would become *Permanent Waves*, Rush headed to the quiet solitude of northern Ontario (a regular thing for the band when getting ready to record a new album), this time settling into a cottage at a place called Windermere in the Muskokas. They fleshed out some new ideas, tempered by the notion of bringing some brevity to their songwriting. "That's the thing about Rush music though," Lee says with a laugh, "five minutes feels like twenty."

Lifeson, Lee and Peart set up home, with all the equipment they had brought with them filling the basement. Throughout the day, Lee and Lifeson would sit at either end of the sofa, the two of them trading riffs and ideas on acoustic guitars.

"We'd write all day," recalls Lifeson, "and record our ideas on a cassette player while Neil worked on lyrics in his room. After dinner we would get together in the basement, with Neil's drums taking up most of the space, and we would work on the arrangements as a band. Although [producer] Terry Brown didn't move in with us, he did join us from time to time as the arrangements began to blossom."

"I spent a few days up at Windermere with the boys doing pre-production," Terry Brown tells *Classic Rock*. "That was time well spent. The guys might correct me on this, but I don't think we did any writing in the studio, it had gone that well up the cottage. We would still be fine-tuning and making adjustments until we captured a take for the album, but most of that was happening in Le Studio."

"We were very well-rehearsed and well-prepared. The songs were there," says Lee. "We'd had really good writing sessions tucked away in that cottage. I have very strong memories of writing *Spirit Of Radio* and songs like that there, the two of us in the living room, hammering away at our acoustic guitars, and Neil appearing intermittently with his sheets of lyrics."

"*Spirit*… stands out for me too," says Lifeson. "But *Freewill* and *Jacob's Ladder* do too, and that's just side one. I think we were very pleased that our writing was moving in multiple directions yet carried the sonic stamp of us as players."

"The strength of the songs and Alex starting his fascination with remote-control airplanes," says Lee. "Those are my enduring memories of the cottage. As soon as we got a break from writing, he would go out and try to fly these planes. And of ➢





"Gotta hang up, we're on." Backstage on the 1980 *Permanent Waves* tour.

course they'd eventually get lost and we'd have to send out a search party for the plane! He carried his fanatical love of model aeroplanes to Le Studio, and we lost a few there too."

Neil Peart visited the now near-derelict Le Studio in 2014 (a fire would destroy the site a few years later) and stood among the remains to reflect on the memories of his time there.

"It's sad that's it's gone, and it's especially sad that no rock band will enjoy that retreat," he told George Stroumboulopoulos. "What it meant artistically and personally together, to work in the studio all day then go play volleyball at night. Those experiences, artistically and as a collaborative unit."

Whatever magic was falling through the Canadian sky in the autumn of 1979 was turning into creative pay dirt for Rush. Each day unearthed some new gem. With all six songs already almost fully formed (this was Rush, so there was always going to be some tinkering), the band fine-tuned each one until it shone brilliantly.

"*Freewill* stands out the most for me," says Lifeson. "It was such a challenging song to play for all of us, but I remember being so excited on the day we recorded it. I can still remember clearly sitting on the tall stool directly behind [engineer] Paul Northfield, with Terry at the console to my right smoking Gitanes. I'm sure we did *Spirit Of Radio* in the control room too, because that's how we worked: on a stool, sitting behind Paul, with Terry there giving Paul a kick in the back of his chair every so often when he drifted away!"

Look back now at the photographs taken during those sessions, they show a band brimming with energy, each member laughing and at ease. Compared with the Herculean, energy-sapping task that was the making of *Hemispheres*, a band working in the dark and sleeping all day, making *Permanent Waves* was a relative breeze.

"It was the little things," Lee recalls fondly. "We were more connected to our families – they were just hours away, not across the ocean – and we were in this beautiful, natural environment. The house we lived in was walking distance to the studio, through the forest every day. We were in this beautiful, natural environment. It was a more invigorating vibe. It was more spontaneous, and the album does reflect that energy."

"At times, *Hemispheres* was soul crushing," says Lifeson. "On the other hand, *Permanent Waves* was so positive and fun. We had come some way as a touring band, playing to larger and more supportive audiences, and all the touring made us better players. Individually we were all in a good space, and it showed in the way we treated each other and those around us. Life was fun and exciting."

"*Permanent Waves* was so positive and fun. And all the touring made us better players. Life was fun and exciting."

Alex Lifeson

No doubt in part due to their preparation, the band ended up recording *Permanent Waves* relatively quickly. "Within six weeks we had the record sort of in the can," remembers Lee. "Then we went to mix it in Trident, as that had been such a joy to work in even on the *Hemispheres* album. So we went back to London, and it was a magical mixing room and even the mix went very quickly. You never know what you get when got to make a record – you don't know if it's going to be a slog or if it's going to be a treat. And *Permanent Waves* was a treat."

The band started the sessions with what would become the album's opener and surprise hit record, *The Spirit Of Radio*. Lee talks fondly of how quickly it came together as a song up at the cottage, and as an opening track it's so very Rush – a brilliant pealing guitar riff, a complex arrangement, a drum pattern you'd be hard-pushed to follow, and a reggae nod on the outro over a lyric railing against the commercialisation of modern-day radio.

If those sentences were about any other band, you'd be left scratching your head. Frame it as a reference to a Rush song, however, and it makes total sense. Because sometimes Rush really make no sense at all. Somehow they make the unworkable work. And never more so than on *Permanent Waves*.

"I think if you look through our history internationally," says Lee, "*Tom Sawyer* probably has the most resonance and has garnered the most attention, followed by *Spirit…*, and then *Closer To The Heart*. Those are probably our three biggest individual songs."

"I think we kicked off the sessions with *The Spirit Of Radio*, which excited me," says Terry Brown. "It was something quite different and was fairly challenging, but as we zeroed in on the final performances it was obvious that it was something very special. I wouldn't say any of our sessions were easy – the boys had a knack of challenging themselves on every record. Certainly *The Spirit of Radio* is a very challenging track to play and yet they make it sound so simple."

"That song felt and sounded so positive," says Lifeson. "It was one of those songs that seems to capture a moment in time. Not that we had any idea we were doing any capturing! But the response was strong, and we were happily surprised. You think: *Spirit…* was really a statement of where radio was going, where it had been.

"Growing up in the early 70s, FM radio was such a free forum for music. You'd have DJs who would play stuff for an hour. They'd just talk about the songs, there were no commercials or anything. Free-form, really – a platform for expanding music at the time. And then it was moving more towards a format, and away from that freedom. It was becoming more regulated, more about selling air time. It speaks about that, really.

"We wanted to give it something that gave it a sense of static – radio waves bouncing around, very electric. We had that sequence going underneath, and it was just really to try and get something that was sitting on top of it, that gave it that movement."

The Spirit Of Radio charted on both sides of the Atlantic, and set the tone, for sales at least, for *Permanent Waves* and the commercial peak that was to come.

"We're always surprised when we have a hit anywhere," Lifeson says with a laugh. "We've never really been a radio band. But, ironically, it made sense." ➢





With *Permanent Waves,* it wasn't just the band's music that was being reshaped and reappraised. Who could forget the *Hemispheres* album cover: a naked man floating on a human brain, staring down a bowler-hatted figure lifted from a Magritte painting, as they both bobbed gently through time and space?

"When it came to the models for that cover," says Hugh Syme, Rush's long-standing art director and Neil Peart's collaborative foil, "the Magritte man in bowler hat was my old friend Bobby King, also from the Niagara region where Neil and I both hailed from. The other figure was a dancer we found who was studying at the Toronto Ballet School.

"For my entire experience with Rush, never did they 'pitch' me," Syme continues. "Take *Hemispheres,* for example. I hadn't even heard any music by then, as they were in Wales [at Rockfield Studios] for the album. Things got a little easier after that, when they started recording at Le Studio. I could fly or drive up to see the boys working, and that was much more convenient. I'd usually stay for about a week, and sometimes get invited to play on their records, something that had started on *2112* when I'd added some colour to *Overture* and Ged's *Tears.*"

It was at one of those extended stays at Le Studio that Syme was invited to play piano on *Different Strings,* another new curve ball in Rush's canon. With lyrics by Lee, it was plaintive yet rich. and examined the way in which the listener, or critic, consumed art and music. So far, so very Rush. Its inclusion on the record hinted even more at the way the band were now willing to play with form and the sort of music people might yet expect from them.

I tell Geddy that I had always assumed *Different Strings* was a simple love song coming from a very sincere place.

"No it's not, actually," he says. "That song was



"Another good review. We could be on to something." Neil Peart during the recording of *Permanent Waves*.

really born out of the idea that: here we were, this band that had been together for quite a long time and we had this ability to polarise people, our music did that. And in writing that song I was addressing that, about what we do and about art. And it really is about that individual way one reacts to it. Whether it's music or visual or whatever, it's an emotional response. It's about our differences. It's like *Entre Nous* and *Different Strings* are sort of two parts of the same concept. They are sister and brother."

Different Strings aside, Hugh Syme wasn't at Le Studio just to sample the charismatic sunsets and watch the light at play on the lake.



"Ooh, I *very* nearly hit that high note. Let me try it again."

"We'd write all day, and record our ideas on a cassette player while Neil worked on lyrics in his room."

Alex Lifeson

"Neil and Hugh used to deal with the cover designs," says Lee. "I think Hugh used to take his cue from what he heard and read, and he would get bits of music and lyric sheets and he would take his image fix from that. And it was clear that we had turned a page. Remember, this was a period where everyone was talking about new wave; there was a new wave of pop and rock. In a way, the title of that album is a comment and a play on the words. There's all those different wave images on the cover, and it was about the permanence of music.

"Not to sound pompous, but we really wanted to say that this new movement and new wave is exciting and everything, but rock'n'roll is here to stay, and there will be different waves and there will be different styles of it but it can never really be washed away."

"Me and Neil spoke all evening about Rush growing up," says Syme, "and how we were going to do these ECG [electrocardiogram] readers of each member as they were recording. So *Permanent Waves* was going to be a technical statement, and we were going to treat that with red and gold foil and do a nice study in design, as opposed to a photographic thing. Then – and I'm still not sure why –I said: 'Let's try something with a [model] walking out of a tidal wave situation.' Neil gave me this blank look and said: 'Get out of here.' But the following day he asked me to consider doing just that."

Syme ran riot. Against a background shot of the Galveston Seawall in Texas during Hurricane Carla in 1961, he superimposed Canadian model Paula Turnbull flashing her knickers and sporting a permanent-wave hairdo that looked like it could weather any storm. Hugh gave himself a walk-on part – waving happily in the distance. The band's surnames were referenced on a rain-lashed signpost. When the *Chicago Daily Tribune* railed against their newspaper being blown about in the foreground with the infamous front page from 1948 (when the paper wrongly reported the result of the US presidential election as 'Dewey Defeats Truman'), the threat of legal action resulted in the headline being obscured on all but the earliest pressings of the album. All things considered, it was a long way from the brains and buttocks that made up the central image of Rush's previous album.

You only have to look at the structure and form of the six songs that make up *Permanent Waves* to realise this latest journey the band were on. Much like Syme having some fun with the album's cover, Rush were determined to break out of some of their own, self-imposed, shackles.

"That's exactly what we wanted to do," says Lee. "We wanted to do something different. Even the longer songs – and there are a couple of profoundly important longer songs in our history. But songs like *Natural Science* and *Jacob's Ladder* are on there too, right? So those two are both indicative of what I'm taking about. They're quite different, and again they're long concepts, but contained in a ten-minute time frame, as opposed to dragging this concept over a side-long thing. We didn't feel that *Jacob's Ladder* was profound enough to be a one-side thing, you know? And over the years our affection for that song has grown, largely because of how much affection our fans have shown it."

Are you saying you weren't originally a fan of *Jacob's Ladder*? That's like hearing that Stephen King doesn't like books about horror. ➢



In England on the *Permanent Waves* tour, June 1980.

"Ha! I guess it was hard for us to tell how different it was at that time," Lee says. "We played it initially on the first couple of tours and then we stopped playing it for a while. We lost interest in it. But it was constantly one of the top five requested songs from fans for us to bring back into the live show. We resisted that until the last R40 tour when we did bring it back. I was really not thrilled with the idea of playing it. The other guys were up for it, and I wasn't until we were in rehearsals, where I went: okay, now I remember what I liked about this song. So I got back into that head space for it. And then during the last tour I enjoyed the hell out of playing it. We all did. It was clearly a highlight of the show. It's got those great, relentless signature moments that Rush fans love so much!"

The album and the single *Spirit…* propelled Rush up the charts. It was their biggest-selling record to date, and would be surpassed only by the album that followed, *Moving Pictures.*

"I think the decision to stop the concept album thing was big," Lee says. "To put a pause on the whole concept, and to look at writing as a series of individual concepts – a series of smaller movies, in a way, which is what led to *Moving Pictures.* The energy of *Permanent Waves* bled into *Moving Pictures* for a number of reasons. And the fact that *Permanent Waves* was received so well was really a huge boost to us, from a confidence point of view… Every time in life you try something different and it's well received, that's about the greatest reward you can have."

Lifeson agrees with Lee about the domino effect that *Permanent Waves* had on the band and their subsequent career: "That is true," he says. "It was very much like that. *Moving Pictures* is the cute, sweet, happy offspring [of *Permanent Waves*]. We learned a lot about writing and how we work best to accomplish our goals, so that an ambitious album such as *Moving Pictures* could be made without wanting to kill ourselves."

Such was the band's momentum that they canned the idea of releasing a live album off the back of what had become their most successful tour, and headed into the Canadian countryside and back to Le Studio, a place they'd call home, off and on, for more than a decade.

"That's the thing about Rush music though: five minutes feels like twenty."

Geddy Lee

"We were scheduled to do this big live album after *Permanent Waves* [it would eventually appear as *Exit Stage Left,* after *Moving Pictures* was released] and at the last minute we said: 'You know what? Fuck this, we're not going to do a live album, we're going to go back into the studio and do our next album'," recalls Lee. "And that's how *Moving Pictures* came to be. It rode the wave of exuberance that we found through making *Permanent Waves.* And it turned out to be the most important decision of our careers. Or the second most important decision. The first one being *2112,* because without *2112* there would be no Rush.

"If you look at our zig-zag history, we sort of started as a heavy rock band, and then with the addition of Neil and *Fly By Night* [1975] we realised we finally had a third member that had progressive thinking, that confirmed our progressive tendencies. And that's why you see what began on *Fly By Night* reach its apogee on *2112,* and we developed that once we had found our style. That style worked itself to the end of *Hemispheres,* and then it was time to change. In a way it [*Permanent Waves*] was really the beginning of our third period. The second period was once we had established who we were, and created our own voice."

Alex Lifeson and I are reminiscing just before our conversation ends. I once got to stand on stage with Rush as they played *The Spirit Of Radio,* a song I vividly remember buying as a single all those years before as a teenage boy, and both those events still thrill me to this day.

"Isn't it great, it still moves you now?" he says "That's the thing, I have such fond memories of that time, so hearing those songs transports me to then. Isn't that the amazing thing about music and how it marks different stages in one's life? To be moved and reminded of a time forty years ago and to smile as I am now is a great blessing."















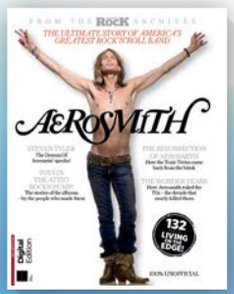


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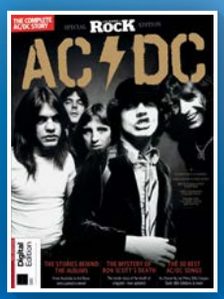


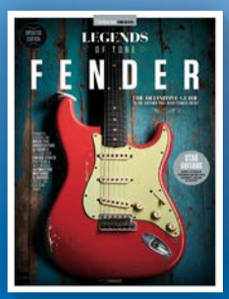














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Living In The Limelight

Flush from the success of *The Spirit Of Radio* and *Permanent Waves*, Rush fully embraced the 80s with their next album, *Moving Pictures*. The result would be the highpoint of their entire career – but with it came unwanted attention.

Words: Paul Elliott **Images:** Fin Costello/Getty

It was the biggest album of their career, a multi-million selling masterpiece that elevated Rush from cult heroes to one of the world's premier rock acts. As guitarist Alex Lifeson said of *Moving Pictures*: "That record changed our lives." And yet, for this band, nothing was ever simple.

"It's always hard to make records," Lifeson said. "It's an enormous drain emotionally." In the making of *Moving Pictures*, they had to dig deep – so much so that immediately after the recording was completed, bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee harboured serious doubts about what they had created.

"It took us so long to make the record," he said. "By the time we left the studio it was the dead of winter. I had to drive home through this horrible snowstorm. Then, without any sleep, I took a flight to the Caribbean for a holiday with my wife. And when I listened to the record out there, I was so burnt out that it sounded all wrong."

But it was Neil Peart who felt most conflicted. For the drummer and lyricist, fame was not a blessing but a curse. "I didn't want to be famous," he once said. "I wanted to be good! It's a whole other thing." And in one song from *Moving Pictures*, he made his feelings explicit. Lifeson described *Limelight* as "a straightforward rock song", but in the words written by Peart were complex emotions and a blunt message to fans: *"I can't pretend a stranger is a long awaited friend"*.

At the very point the band was making music that would connect with a vast audience, Neil Peart was already counting the cost of that success.

In the summer of 1980, when the three members of Rush began writing for Moving Pictures at a rural retreat in Stony Lake, Ontario, their confidence was high. Their most recent album, *Permanent Waves*, released in January of that year, had been a significant breakthrough, both artistically and commercially. With the onus shifted, as Lifeson explained it, to "shorter, punchier songs", *Permanent Waves* was the big leap forward with which Rush defined a new sound for the new decade – a sound most perfectly illustrated in *The Spirit Of Radio*, the complex yet tightly focused and euphoric anthem in which the band's virtuoso musicianship was distilled into five minutes, resulting in their first hit single. With this transition complete, the stage was set for *Moving Pictures*.

"We were originally going to do a live album," Lee said. "But then a friend of ours suggested that, as we were changing our style so fast, we should really think about delaying the live album and go into the studio again. We thought about it, and this made sense."

On July 28, shortly before they left for Stony Lake, Rush had joined up with fellow Canadian band Max Webster to record the song *Battle Scar*. An epic jam, cut live, with both bands going at it full tilt, *Battle Scar* would be the centrepiece of Max Webster's album *Universal Juveniles*. It was while the two bands were together that day, at Phase One Studios, that Pye Dubois, a poet and lyricist who worked with Max Webster, presented a new song to his friends in Rush – "humbly suggesting," as Peart recalled, "that it might be suitable for us."

Dubois wasn't wrong. The idea he had, in embryonic form, would be developed into a statement piece for Rush. It would become the opening track on *Moving Pictures*, and, ultimately, the most famous of all Rush songs – *Tom Sawyer*.

"We were aware it was time to get away from the fantasy and sci-fi elements that had always been part of what we were about." **Geddy Lee**



On arrival in Stony Lake, the rough outline of *Tom Sawyer* was all they had to work with. "We had nothing at all written for the album at the time," Lee said. "It was a case of starting it all from scratch." Their gear was set up in the barn adjacent to the house they had rented, and there they worked standard business hours. "Monday to Friday," Lee said. "And then we went home for the weekend. That's how we tended to do things in those days."

In this relaxed environment, new songs came together quickly. As Lifeson explained: "Most of that record was written by all of us at the same time, in the room jamming with an idea and everybody going from there." By Lee's recollection, the first song completed was *The Camera Eye*. At more than ten minutes in length, this was something of an anomaly in the context of where the band was headed, more of a throwback to the band's 70s work, as Lee would later admit. "*The Camera Eye* was the last really epic song we wrote," he said. "And at the time I thought it was too long, and it sounded derivative – kind of a Genesis wannabe. It didn't feel legit to me."

Once the ball was rolling, however, four more songs took shape, all of them more compact. *Tom Sawyer*, with its measured, deep groove, and the faster *Red Barchetta* were big on melody, anthemic in feel, even if both lacked a defined chorus. *Limelight* was based around a simple guitar riff but moved through subtle mood shifts – "some beautiful ups and downs", as Lifeson put it. And in *YYZ* there was an instrumental as dramatic as the *Overture* from *2112*.

The latter was mostly the work of Lee and Peart. "One day, Alex wasn't around," Lee said. "So Neil and I just went out to the barn and we started putting *YYZ* together as a bass and drum jam extravaganza. And then Al came in and added his licks, and before you knew it the song was finished."

As Peart explained of the song's title and percussive intro: "YYZ is the identity code used by Toronto International Airport, and the intro is taken from the Morse code which is sent out by the beacon there." In the riff there was a sense of the energy of a buzzing big city airport. In the keyboard-driven mid-section, a sense of the emotions carried in passengers saying their hellos and goodbyes. And in Lifeson's solo, what Peart described as an "Eastern mode", a sound to evoke "the exotic nature of travel."

YYZ was a brilliant construction, a story without words. But for Rush, more than any other rock band, lyrics were always as important as the music. It had been that way ever since Peart first joined the band in 1974; certainly, since he had taken inspiration from Ayn Rand to create the dystopian sci-fi tale of *2112*. And so it continued in the songs they wrote at Stony Lake.

From Pye Dubois' original idea, and from Mark Twain's classic 1876 novel *The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer*, Peart created a powerful declaration of independence. As *Rolling Stone* writer David Fricke saw it, Peart was "reimagining Mark Twain's tearaway as a contemporary rogue with no fixed politics but a hunger for wonder". And as Peart later revealed, this was in part autobiographical. The lyrics he took from Dubois were, he said: "A portrait of a modern day rebel, a free-spirited individualist striding through the world wide-eyed and purposeful." Peart then put his own spin on it. "I



Three against the world: Geddy Lee, Neil Peart and Alex Lifeson circa *Moving Pictures*.



All the world's a stage and they are just its players: Lifeson and Lee in Rotterdam, November 1981.

LEFT: FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY

ROB VERHORST/REDFERNS/GETTY

added the themes of reconciling the boy and man in myself," he said. "And the difference between what people are and what others perceive them to be – namely me, I guess."

These core principles – liberty, individualism, anti-authoritarianism – were also at the heart of *Red Barchetta*, for which Peart took inspiration from a short story by Richard S. Foster, titled *A Nice Morning Drive*. In Peart's tale, set in a future where cars are outlawed, a defiant hero gets his kicks burning rubber in a vintage machine, a Ferrari 166, or Barchetta. There was, in this, an echo of *2112* – the hero in that story playing music banned by the rulers of a totalitarian regime. There was also a little personal detail in *Red Barchetta*. Peart loved fast cars, and this was a favourite model of his.

But if, in *Tom Sawyer*, he was making oblique reference to his own life, in *Limelight* he let it all out there. A sharp rise in the band's profile had, for Peart, brought with it unwanted attention. Away from the stage, he remained protective of his private life. Faced with overzealous fans, he recoiled. As he remembered: "People chasing us around, coming to my house… I was shocked."

Lines he wrote in *Limelight* – *"One must put up barriers to keep oneself intact"* – were reminiscent of what

> "Most of that record was written by all of us in the room jamming with an idea and everybody going from there." **Alex Lifeson**

Roger Waters expressed in Pink Floyd's *The Wall*, an album that resonated deeply with Peart. "*The Wall* is my life story, too," he said. "The alienation factor – all of us, as touring musicians, lived that. I once heard a DJ play a track from *Wish You Were Here*, one of the alienation songs that preceded *The Wall*. And the DJ said: 'If you're a songwriter and you write about what's near to you, if you become alienated you're going to write about being alienated.' I totally understood that."

Lee and Lifeson also understood where Peart was coming from. Lifeson said of the solo he played to fit the mood in *Limelight*: "It sounded haunting and very lonely." And when Lee talked about this song, many years down the line, he explained the differences in personality that made him able to deal with fame in a way that Peart could not.

"*Limelight* came at a time when Neil was struggling, working out how to deal with it," Lee said. "We all were going through it in our own way. Alex and I seemed to be able to block those things out. But Neil couldn't. It was not in his nature to do that. When Neil wrote that lyric, we were getting more popular, it was a different level of fame, and Neil was being confronted with things on a regular basis that were making him really uncomfortable. So he wrote that lyric: 'I can't pretend a stranger is a long awaited friend.' That song was Neil's way of trying to sort it out. As frontman, you developed more armour: I was more ready to make a fool of myself on a nightly basis. Neil was a guy playing drums, so he was kind of protected. He had that battery around him. Like, he's hiding behind there. They can't find him."

On August 31, the band returned to Toronto and to Phase One Studios to work with producer Terry Brown on demos of these five tracks, plus a first draft of work-in-progress, provisionally titled *Witch Hunt*. By Lee's recollection, only one song written at this time was discarded, and while he could not recall why this song missed the cut for the album, its title – *Sir Gawain And The Green Knight* – was perhaps a little passé, a little

"We always have one song on every album that doesn't quite click. And we thought that *Tom Sawyer* was going to be the one." **Geddy Lee**

too 1977 and *A Farewell To Kings*.

A short tour followed, just 16 shows around the Eastern US. Then, in October, they headed to Le Studio, in the small town of Morin Heights, up in the mountains outside of Quebec, to begin recording the album.

Le Studio was where they had made *Permanent Waves*, and as with Stony Lake, the remote and peaceful location was very much to their liking. "What a beautiful setting," Lee said. "We all lived in a house a short walk from the studio, which was by a lake, and went there through the woods every day. It was very inspirational. Some people might wonder how such a tranquil setting could be a good thing when you're making a hard rock album, but it worked for us." Even so, he admitted: "We went back to Le Studio because we'd had such a great time making *Permanent Waves*, but *Moving Pictures* was a much more intense experience. It took quite a bit longer to make that record. For sure, it was not as easy as we would have liked."

As Lee remembered it, Red Barchetta was the easiest song to get down on tape. "It was such a great thing to play live, off the floor," he said. But other songs proved more problematic, the right feel more elusive: none more so than *Tom Sawyer*. "That was such a hard song to get right," Lifeson said. "I remember spending a lot of time on that song. A lot of time…"

Some of that time was spent, as Lee recalled, "experimenting to get the right sounds" – first, for the bass pedal synthesizer in the intro, with what he called "that big, growling low-end". But as he said: "The hardest thing of all was getting the right guitar sound in the solo section. We wanted that section to be played pretty much as a three-piece, not a whole lot of overdubs, but with a sound that filled up the stereo spectrum and didn't sound empty. So the guitar sound for Alex's solo was really critical. It wasn't drowning in echo. That was the old trick we used in the past. If you want to fill the space, put an Echoplex on Alex and the repeats will fill up the space. But we didn't want to do that. We were going for this dry sound with that unique tone, and for it not to feel empty, that was kind of hard. And even mixing that song was difficult."

At one point, they almost gave up on it. "We always have one song, on every album, that doesn't quite click," Lee said. "And we thought that Tom Sawyer was going to be the one. Which just goes to show you we don't know what we're talking about!"

In the end, what Rush delivered in *Tom Sawyer* was a brilliant ensemble performance: the tension in Peart's taut beats and explosive fills, the expressiveness in Lifeson's solos, the heavy propulsion in Lee's bass, and the nuances in his voice, singing high and low to dramatic effect. As Lee said: "After a lot of struggling, we nailed it, and it was so powerful. We were going, 'Shit, where did that come from?' That song was a late bloomer, but when we finally nailed it, we were so happy."

There was less of a struggle with two songs that would be placed at the end of the album, *Witch Hunt* and *Vital Signs*. Lifeson said of *Witch Hunt*: "It's kind of an oddball, but very dynamic." Lee called it "an attempt at being cinematic, boldly illustrating a theme."

Certainly it was the darkest and strangest song on the album, with an enigmatic subtitle – *Part III of 'Fear'*. "It's part of a cycle of songs," Lee explained – a cycle that would be completed, albeit in muddled order, by *The Weapon (Part II)* on the 1982 album *Signals*, *The Enemy Within (Part I)* on 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*, and *Freeze (Part IV)* on 2002's *Vapor Trails*. The subject of *Witch Hunt* was heavy. As Lee described it: "The effect that fear can have on a crowd or a mob." But he remembered the fun they had in creating the song. "It involved some stupid stuff," he said. "Recording the mob shouts, the three of us went out into the studio parking lot in the freezing cold of winter."

Vital Signs, what became the final track on the album, was also the last to be written, and with surprising ease. "We needed one more song for the record," Lee said, "and we wrote and recorded *Vital Signs* in one day. It was one of those happy, spontaneous things." In this song there was a flavour of new wave and, in the verses, the influence of The Police in a reggae rhythm – first utilized by Rush in *The Spirit Of Radio*, and later expanded into songs such as *Digital Man* and *Distant Early Warning*.

"With *Vital Signs*," Lee said, "we felt that we needed something really different, something that was up-tempo and that had a more modern pop/rock vibe to it. It was kind of a nice way to end the record too."



Geddy and Alex, exiting stage left on the *Moving Pictures* tour.

As Lifeson put it: "You'd think, looking at the songs, that something big like *The Camera Eye* would be the closer. But we went out on a different note with *Vital Signs*. It was an interesting way to finish."

With that last song in the can, all that remained was the mixing. But if the writing and recording of *Vital Signs* seemed all too easy, this final process proved once again that for Rush, nothing was ever simple.

"During the mixing stage, things started to go wrong," Lee said. "We were getting stuff happening that wasn't supposed to be there. Terry Brown told us that the only thing we



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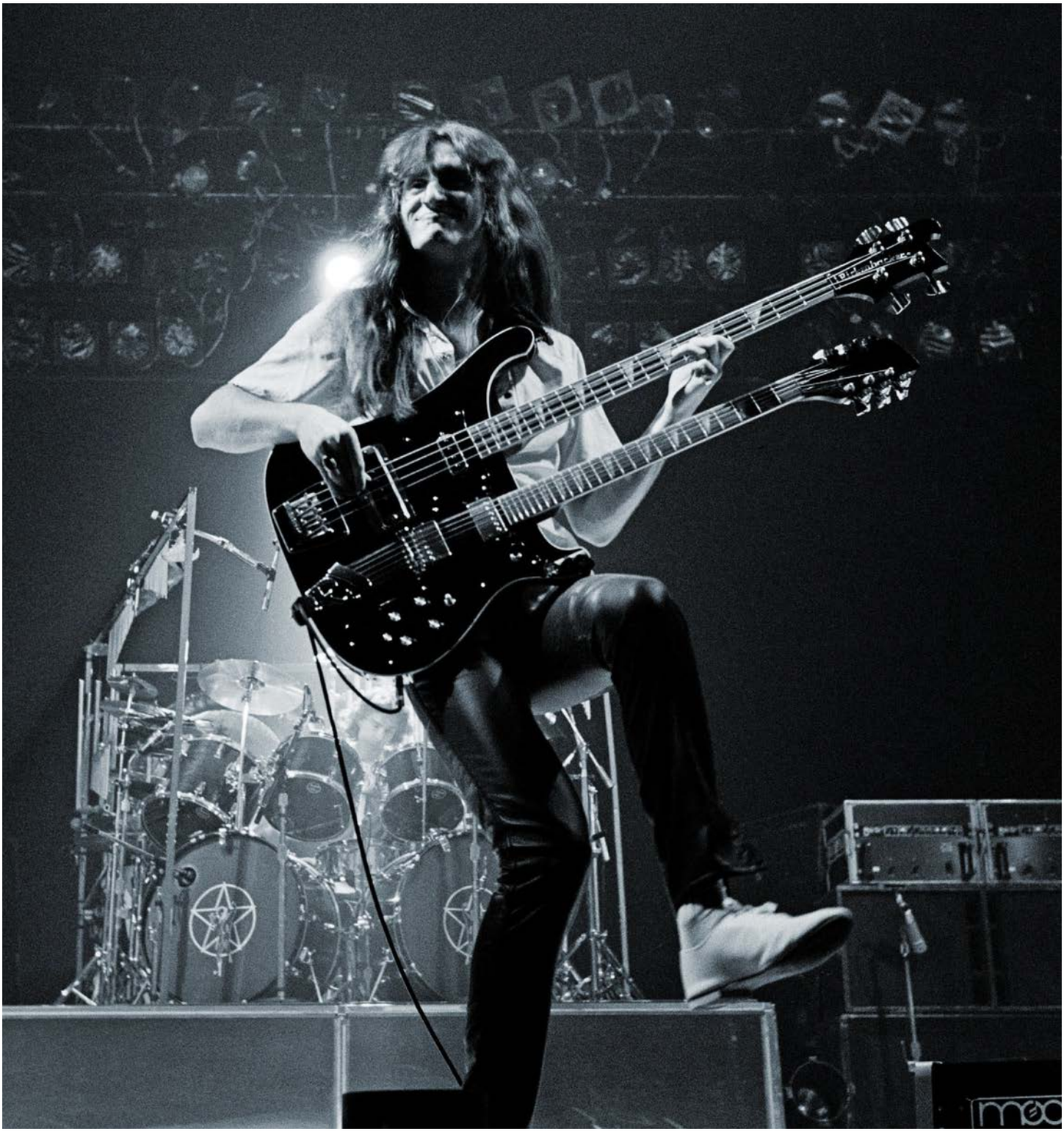
could do was shut the thing down, and get someone to fly over from England to fix it. The problem was traced to a faulty wire, and there was too much moisture in the earth, and it was giving us spikes in the mix."

The mood within the camp turned from frustration to sadness on the night of December 8, as they were attempting to mix *Witch Hunt*. As Lee recalled: "This horrible news came over the wire, the news that John Lennon had been shot. We were sitting around the TV in shock. We were all so sad. That is something I will never forget."

But as the days ticked down towards Christmas, the gloom eventually lifted. As Lee explained: "We did some of the mix in the old-fashioned way, manually. There were four pairs of hands on the desk, trying to get things done, because all of us were actively involved in all of the production. And it made it a lot more exciting. Using a computer was a little more distant. We loved getting our hands dirty."

And while Lee would suffer a crisis of confidence once he got out of the studio and sat brooding over the album in the heat of the Caribbean, the doubts in his mind soon cleared. "After a good couple of weeks away from it," he said, "I could listen to it and go, okay, it sounds pretty good!"

Moving Pictures was released on March 12, 1981, preceded by the first single, *Tom Sawyer*, on February 28. "At the time it was just another album in Rush's history," Lee said. "But this was the point at which we made a real transition musically and lyrically. People might say it was the birth of the modern Rush. I think it was a more gradual process than that. But this album was a very important one for us." As Peart said, "We just made a record that we liked. That's what we did all the time. But suddenly all of the stars were aligned."



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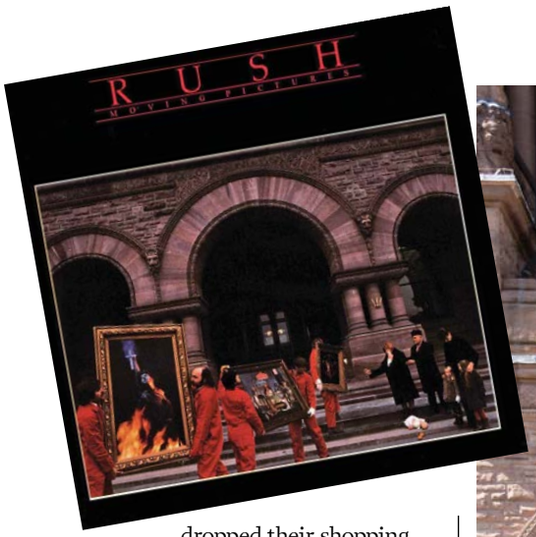
Double trouble: Geddy Lee in full bass monster mode.

According to Lee, it was Peart who named the album while they were recording at Le Studio. "We always had the album title in our minds," Lee said. "We wanted the whole vibe to be very cinematic. That was the concept. To have the music also telling the story of the lyrics."

And from this came Peart's idea for the album cover, for which Hugh Syme once again served as art director. "Neil certainly had a major input into the album sleeve," Lee said. "He showed Hugh Syme, some early lyrics, so he'd get the feel for where we were coming from. Then Hugh came up with some ideas and showed these to Neil. When the two of them were happy, they brought it to Alex and me, so we also had a say."

The image that Syme had created for the cover of *Permanent Waves*, featuring model Paula Turnbull, was in stark contrast to the heavy symbolism in his designs for previous Rush albums. Lee explained: "We were very aware that it was time to get away from the fantasy and science fiction elements that had always been part of what we were about. And as that musical side of things changed, so did our feelings of the way our album artwork should look."

As with *Permanent Waves*, its cover filled with visual puns on the album's title, so it was with *Moving Pictures* and Syme's artfully staged photograph, shot at the entrance to the Ontario Legislative Building at Queen's Park, Toronto. "I like the triple play on the sleeve with the words moving pictures," Lee said "You've got the pictures literally being moved out of the building, then the old couple who were moved to tears because they'd





ROBERTO MACHADO NOA/GETTY

The Ontario Legislative Building in Toronto: backdrop for the *Moving Pictures* cover.

dropped their shopping bag, and finally the film crew on the back cover, making a moving picture. It's all to do with our sense of humour."

Within a month of its release, *Moving Pictures* topped the Canadian chart and reached number three in the UK and also in the US, where it was beaten out of the top spot by two soft rock juggernauts, REO Speedwagon's *Hi Infidelity* and Styx's Paradise *Theatre. The success of Moving Pictures* also put new life into the band's back catalogue, with *2112* and the live double *All The World's A Stage* going platinum in its wake. At this juncture Rush reached a major career milestone, with more than ten million records sold worldwide.

Tom Sawyer was not a huge hit, peaking at number 24 on the Canadian chart, and number 44 in the US. Although a video for the track had been filmed at Le Studio – the bluish snowbound landscape visible through the windows as the band played – MTV was not launched until August 1 of that year. But what really mattered, back then, was rock radio. And for that, Tom Sawyer was a perfect fit. In the words of Cliff Burnstein, who worked with Rush at Mercury Records before co-managing bands such as Def Leppard and Metallica: "*Tom Sawyer* became the anthemic track that Rush needed to become more than the biggest cult band in America. To become a band of mass cultural acceptance." In the words of Tom Sawyer there was so much that free thinkers could relate to: *"His mind is not for rent to any god or government"*. But there were two key lines – *"The world is, the world is/Love and life are deep"* – that made this song, for Burnstein and others like him, "a quintessential stoner anthem".

"My ability to express myself has evolved. But I still mean every word of *Limelight*, however crudely it might have been expressed." **Neil Peart**

Moving Pictures defined Rush in the '80s as powerfully as *2112* had done in the '70s. If *2112* was the apogee of the band's progressive rock era, *Moving Pictures* crystalized the modern Rush – in the clean lines and lean power of songs such as *Tom Sawyer* and *Red Barchetta*. But there was enough to carry long-term fans with them – echoes of the past in the grand scale of *The Camera Eye*, and the concept of *Witch Hunt* as part of a thematic song cycle. And there was in *YYZ* a perfect example of what Cliff Burnstein described as "pure Rush as musicians".

"There are a lot of songs that just reached a standard on that record," Lifeson said. "I think it's some of our strongest, most enduring material. The songs were good, and they connected with a bigger audience. But there was also something about the sound of that record that resonated with people."

Moving Pictures stands tall as the biggest and arguably the best Rush album. "That level of success was like nothing we had ever experienced before," Lee said. "It was such a huge record for us. And the years have been very generous to it."

Tom Sawyer, for all the difficulty in its creation, became the band's signature song. As Foo Fighters drummer and Rush fan Taylor Hawkins said: "It's their *Hotel California*. Their *Bohemian Rhapsody*." This, for Peart, was astonishing. "It's a wonderful thing," he said, "that such a bizarre song could be so popular."

And as for *Limelight*, the song in which he signaled his retreat from fame, the message was not lost on Rush fans. They respected the honesty in those lyrics, and in turn respected his privacy in all the years that followed.

In 2011, before a concert in Birmingham, England, during the band's Time Machine tour – on which they celebrated the 30th anniversary of *Moving Pictures* by performing the album in its entirety – Peart sat smoking in his backstage practice room and described the kind of encounter with fans that made him uncomfortable. "If you meet someone at the launderette and they go: 'Oh, this is the greatest moment of my life!'" Laughing, he added: "I like the motto: 'never complain, never explain'. But I can never resist trying to explain."

Perhaps he had explained enough in *Limelight*, and as he said during that conversation in Birmingham, moments before he would go out and play that song again: "When I listen to early songs, I might cringe technically, but never psychologically or emotionally. My ability to express myself has grown and evolved. But I still mean every word of *Limelight*, however crudely it might have been expressed."

Rush

Tom Sawyer

How the band's signature song was born from the unlikely coming together of a piece of classic American literature and a nutty Canadian poet.

Words:
Paul Elliott
Photograph:
Larry Hulst/Getty

Within Rush's 37-year recording career there are a number of landmark songs: *Working Man* was their first track to get key radio airplay outside of their native Canada, and led to a worldwide deal with Mercury Records; *2112* secured the band's future when that Mercury contract hung in the balance; *The Spirit Of Radio* gave them the unlikely distinction of a UK Top 20 hit. But of all the songs in the Rush catalogue, the most famous is *Tom Sawyer*, the opening track from 1981's *Moving Pictures*, the band's greatest and biggest-selling album.

"*Tom Sawyer* is a real trademark song for us," says Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson. "Musically it's very powerful, and lyrically it has a spirit that resonates with a lot of people. It's kind of an anthem."

Rush had arrived at a crossroads when they came to write *Tom Sawyer*. In the 70s they had become the undisputed masters of progressive hard rock, famed for their epic conceptual pieces that played out over entire sides of vinyl. But with their first album of the 1980s – *Permanent Waves* – came a significant change.

"We began writing in a tighter, more economical form," says Lifeson. The result was that hit single, *The Spirit Of Radio*: a virtuoso-rock *tour de force* compacted into less than five minutes. And the song's lyrics fit neatly with this more direct approach. Bookish drummer Neil Peart, the author of all Rush lyrics since 1975, had previously found inspiration in ancient mythology and science fiction, but for *Permanent Waves* his writing was simpler, his subject matter more worldly.

Tom Sawyer was the crystallisation of this new, modern Rush: a powerful, finely crafted hard rock song with a punchy yet deeply philosophical message. But it was also a song for which Rush were indebted not only to a giant of American literature, Mark Twain, but also to a rather peculiar Canadian named Pye Dubois.

A poet and lyricist, Dubois worked with the band Max Webster, who were based in Sarnia, Ontario, in the same province as Rush's hometown of Toronto. The two bands were close, recording a song together, *Battle Scar*, that featured on Max Webster's 1980 album *Universal Juveniles*. "Those guys were big friends of ours," Lifeson recalls. "But Pye was a little mysterious – kind of a strange fellow! He was very quirky, a bit of a nut, but he did write great lyrics. And around 1980 he sent a poem to Neil with an idea to collaborate on a song. The original draft was called *Louie The Warrior*."

The poem was based on Twain's 1876 novel *The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer*, which all three members of Rush had studied in school. Peart in particular identified with the book's central themes of rebellion and independence. From *2112* through to *Freewill* on *Permanent Waves*, individuality was a recurring subject in Peart's lyrics. What Dubois created in *Louie The Warrior* was, in Peart's words, "a portrait of a modern-day rebel". Says Lifeson: "Neil took that idea and massaged it, took out some of Pye's lines and added his thing to it." Peart chose the simpler title of *Tom Sawyer* and completed the lyrics with an element of autobiography. As he put it, "Reconciling the boy and man in myself."

The music for *Tom Sawyer* was also a departure for Rush. Says Lifeson: "Structurally, the way the song develops is very interesting, going from that first verse into a bridge into a chorus and into the solo and then repeating. It wasn't a typical kind of structure for us at the time." Likewise, the music was written in an unorthodox fashion – for Rush, at least. "*Moving Pictures* was different for us in that it was more of a jam sort of thing," Lifeson explains. "A lot of the material for that record was written off the floor. That was certainly the case with *Tom Sawyer*. We were rehearsing in a little farm outside of Toronto. Half the barn was a garage and half was a small rehearsal space. We would typically just go in and jam and develop songs that way."

It was high summer when Rush wrote the songs for *Moving Pictures*. But by the time they began recording the album at Le Studio in Morin Heights, Quebec – the mountain retreat where the band had cut *Permanent Waves* – a mean Canadian winter had set in. "It was the coldest I've ever been in my life, that's for sure!" Lifeson laughs. "We were living in a house beside a lake, and the studio was on the other end of the lake. If we were brave enough, we walked through the woods. It was really beautiful, but it was minus 40 out there! I'm serious!" The promotional video for *Tom Sawyer*, shot at Le Studio, begins with a view of this snowbound landscape and ends with a pan out across the frozen lake.

Lifeson says of the recording: "On *Tom Sawyer*, the synthesiser is such a key part of that song. There was a good integration between the three of us and the keyboards. We still had that trio feel. Plus, we always felt that we had to replicate each song as faithfully as possible when we played it live, so *Tom Sawyer* was written in that way. There's no rhythm guitar under the guitar solo or anything like that."

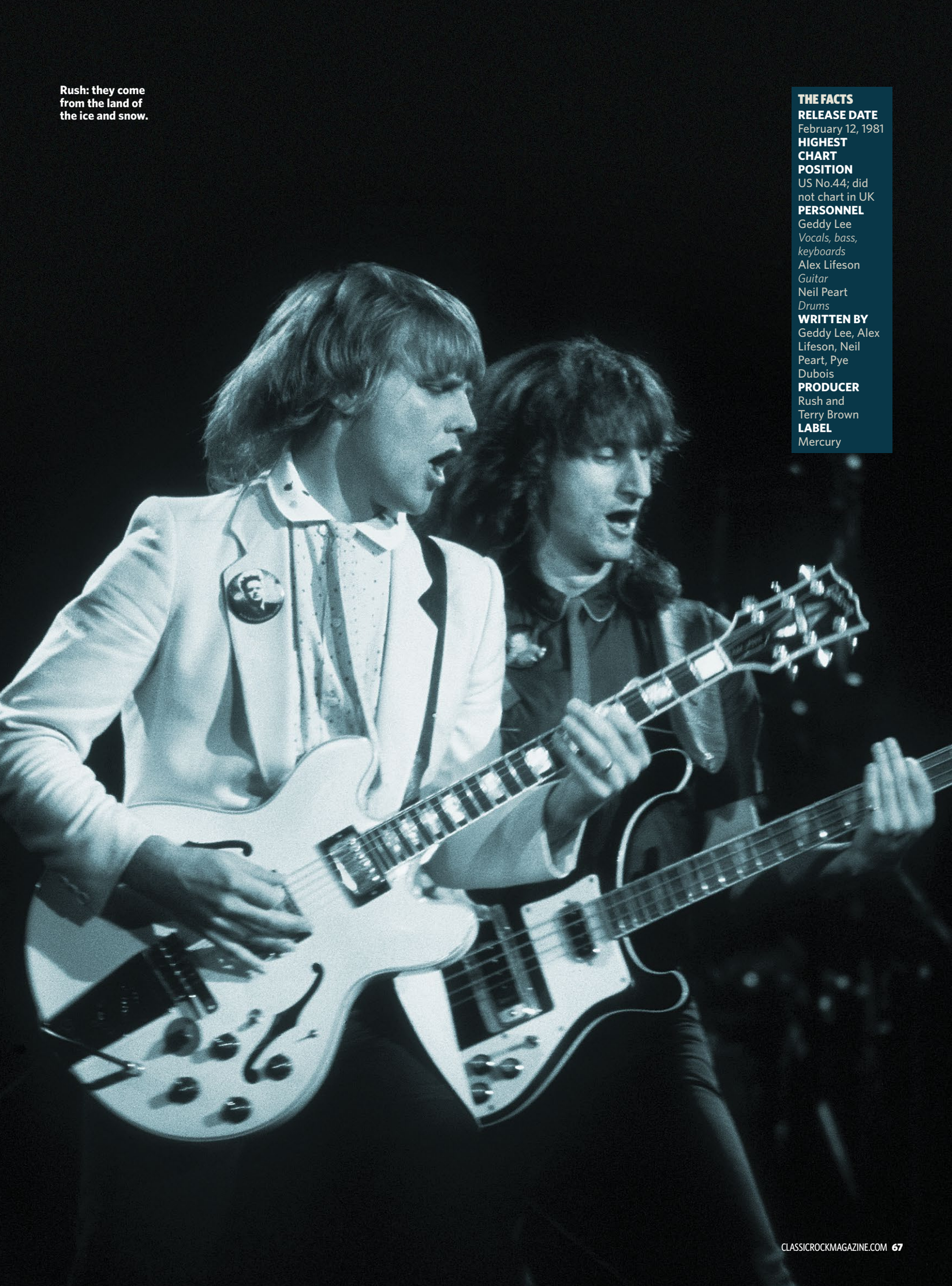
"There's something in the lyric that people have always related to very strongly – the spirit of independence."

It's a song that proved pivotal to the band's development. Geddy Lee has called it the "defining piece of music" from Rush in the early 80s. For much of that decade, keyboards took an increasingly important role in the band's sound. And all of three decades on, the power of this song, and its message, has not diminished. "There's a freshness about that sound that still stands out," Lifeson says proudly. "And there's something in the lyric that people have always related to very strongly – the spirit of independence and adventure. It's just one of those special songs."



SOUTH PARK DOES TOM SAWYER

Rush drummer Neil Peart has long been viewed as a serious academic type, but it was his idea to have a comedy version of *Tom Sawyer* performed by the cast of *South Park*. Peart enlisted his friend Matt Stone, co-creator of *South Park*, to make a skit in which his cartoon characters are billed as Lil' Rush. Their performance quickly unravels when singer Eric Cartman fluffs his lines and rival Kyle Broflovski exclaims: "Those aren't the right lyrics, fat-ass!" Cartman snapped back: "I am Geddy Lee, and I will sing whatever lyrics I want!"
The skit was screened at Rush gigs before the real band played *Tom Sawyer*. Says guitarist Alex Lifeson: "Matt did such a great job with it. We all had a great laugh. And the fans loved it!"



Rush: they come from the land of the ice and snow.

THE FACTS

RELEASE DATE
February 12, 1981

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
US No.44; did not chart in UK

PERSONNEL
Geddy Lee
Vocals, bass, keyboards
Alex Lifeson
Guitar
Neil Peart
Drums

WRITTEN BY
Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart, Pye Dubois

PRODUCER
Rush and Terry Brown

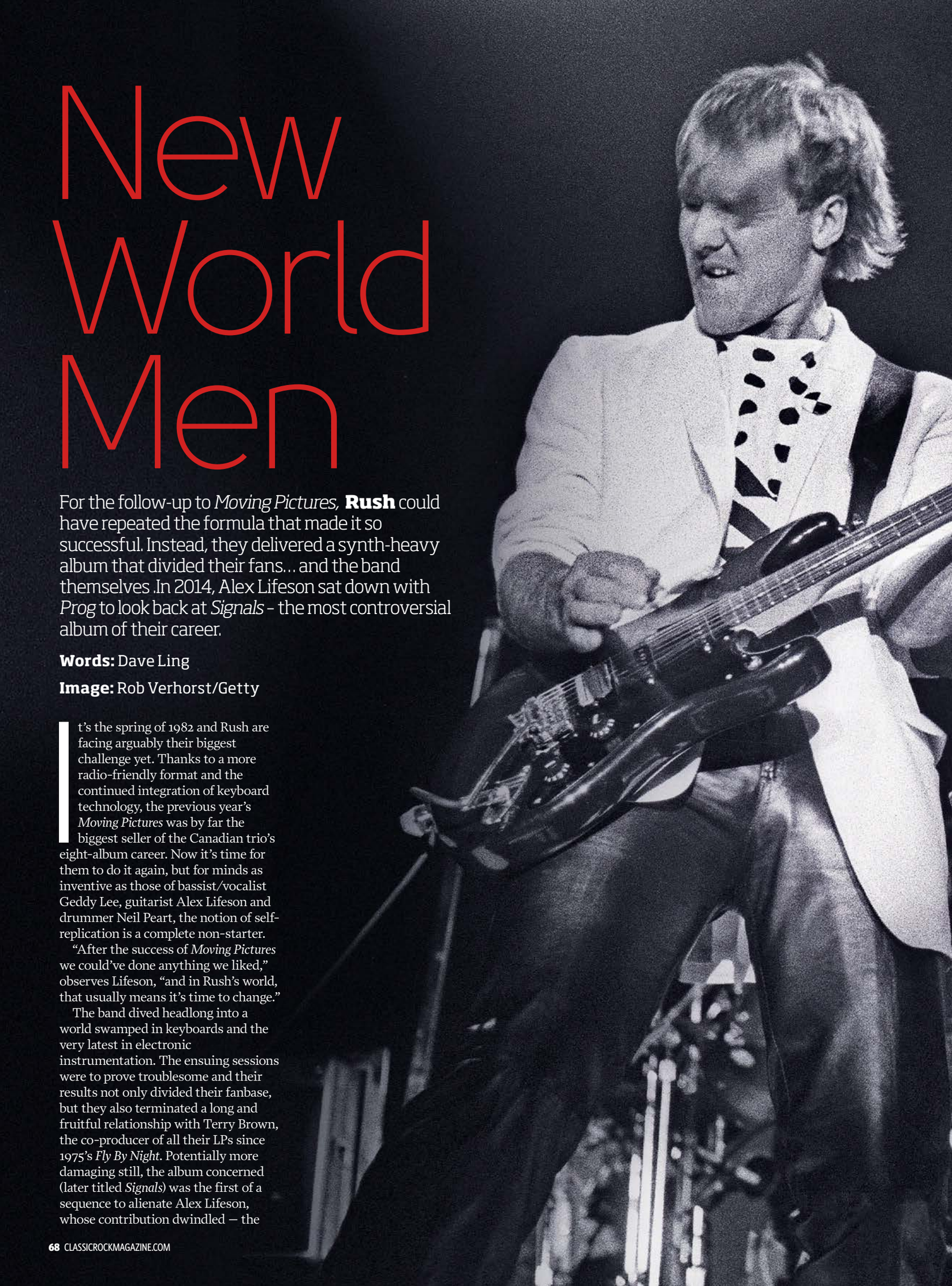
LABEL
Mercury

New World Men

For the follow-up to *Moving Pictures,* **Rush** could have repeated the formula that made it so successful. Instead, they delivered a synth-heavy album that divided their fans… and the band themselves .In 2014, Alex Lifeson sat down with *Prog* to look back at *Signals* – the most controversial album of their career.

Words: Dave Ling

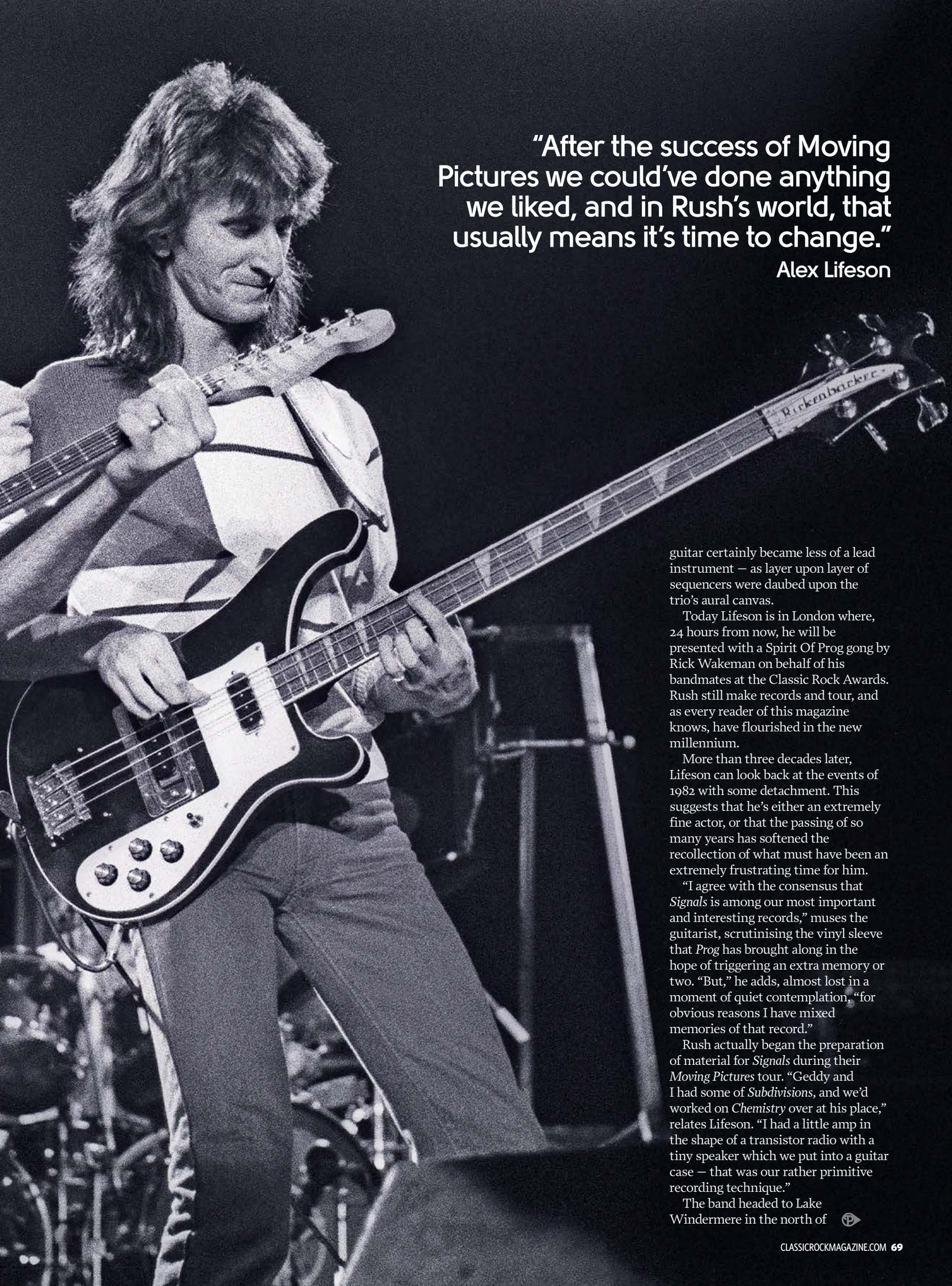
Image: Rob Verhorst/Getty



It's the spring of 1982 and Rush are facing arguably their biggest challenge yet. Thanks to a more radio-friendly format and the continued integration of keyboard technology, the previous year's *Moving Pictures* was by far the biggest seller of the Canadian trio's eight-album career. Now it's time for them to do it again, but for minds as inventive as those of bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee, guitarist Alex Lifeson and drummer Neil Peart, the notion of self-replication is a complete non-starter.

"After the success of *Moving Pictures* we could've done anything we liked," observes Lifeson, "and in Rush's world, that usually means it's time to change."

The band dived headlong into a world swamped in keyboards and the very latest in electronic instrumentation. The ensuing sessions were to prove troublesome and their results not only divided their fanbase, but they also terminated a long and fruitful relationship with Terry Brown, the co-producer of all their LPs since 1975's *Fly By Night*. Potentially more damaging still, the album concerned (later titled *Signals*) was the first of a sequence to alienate Alex Lifeson, whose contribution dwindled — the



"After the success of Moving Pictures we could've done anything we liked, and in Rush's world, that usually means it's time to change."
Alex Lifeson

guitar certainly became less of a lead instrument — as layer upon layer of sequencers were daubed upon the trio's aural canvas.

Today Lifeson is in London where, 24 hours from now, he will be presented with a Spirit Of Prog gong by Rick Wakeman on behalf of his bandmates at the Classic Rock Awards. Rush still make records and tour, and as every reader of this magazine knows, have flourished in the new millennium.

More than three decades later, Lifeson can look back at the events of 1982 with some detachment. This suggests that he's either an extremely fine actor, or that the passing of so many years has softened the recollection of what must have been an extremely frustrating time for him.

"I agree with the consensus that *Signals* is among our most important and interesting records," muses the guitarist, scrutinising the vinyl sleeve that *Prog* has brought along in the hope of triggering an extra memory or two. "But," he adds, almost lost in a moment of quiet contemplation, "for obvious reasons I have mixed memories of that record."

Rush actually began the preparation of material for *Signals* during their *Moving Pictures* tour. "Geddy and I had some of *Subdivisions*, and we'd worked on *Chemistry* over at his place," relates Lifeson. "I had a little amp in the shape of a transistor radio with a tiny speaker which we put into a guitar case — that was our rather primitive recording technique."

The band headed to Lake Windermere in the north of



Giving off the right signals: on tour at Wembley in 1983.

PETER STILL/REDFERNS/GETTY

Ontario to fine-tune their ideas. Lifeson remembers with a shiver: "It was a very cold, snowy winter. The snow was piled up everywhere and we ended up staying in this deserted summer lodge."

When we suggest that it all sounds a little like Stanley Kubrick's iconic celluloid edition of the Stephen King novel *The Shining*, Lifeson beams in agreement. "That's exactly how it was. There was one room that we converted into a studio/rehearsal area, and we began working on the material we'd brought with us."

However, in contrast to *The Shining*, none of the group encountered any ghosts, lost the plot or began wielding axes and whacking them into doors. "I remember it as a very enjoyable time," smiles Alex, before volunteering: "It was only when we began recording the songs that things became a little more difficult. That was the start of our wanderlust. It dawned on us that we wanted to try new ideas; maybe work with different people. It was an unsettling time."

In April 1982, Rush, Brown and engineer Paul Northfield decamped to Le Studio at Morin-Heights for a four-month stay. John Wetton once told this writer that Asia suffered a near-fatal case of cabin fever while recording their *Alpha* album there the following year — the place is getting on for 60 miles outside Montreal, after all — but Rush relished the facility's remoteness. "We're Canadians — we're not afraid of snow!" Lifeson exclaims. "We loved being at Morin-Heights. Twice or three times a week we'd drive to a small town down the road and have dinner together. We'd put up a net and play volleyball after the sessions, and of course there was lots and lots of lubrication."





Above: a full page advert for the album showing off its sales. Below: the iconic *Signals* sleeve.

From the snappier approach of *New World Man*, which became their biggest US hit single, to the more audacious *The Weapon (Part II Of Fear)*, the material the band had accrued was rich in variety and quality.

"*Subdivisions* was such a strong song — a real marker for us," Lifeson says. "We brought back *Analog Kid* on our last tour and the mix of guitar and keyboards makes it great fun to play live. I love the chordal progression of *Chemistry*, but with retrospect it's a little disjointed, and getting *Digital Man* to sound the way it did was like pulling teeth."

Perhaps surprisingly, Geddy Lee dismissed *Countdown* as "a pretty poor song" in 1992. "I love that one, actually," responds Lifeson, "but I know what he's saying: we could've spent more time on it."

Lee later expressed the viewpoint that *Signals* was "a difficult album to make, and it spelled the end of our relationship with Terry Brown", a statement Lifeson echoes. "With the possible exception of *Moving Pictures*, which almost fell into place, they're all difficult to make," he says with a laugh, "but if I told you the creation of *Signals* was completely smooth then I would be lying."

But the straw that broke the camel's back was the reggae-ish section of *Digital Man*, which, so the story goes, Terry Brown hated so much that he at first refused to record it. "You know what? I don't remember that being the case," responds Lifeson diplomatically. "But Terry was definitely afraid that we were moving away from being a rock band, taking too much influence from other bands like The Police. And he really wasn't keen on Neil's use of electronic drums."

Rush, for their part, were keen to experiment with all of the new hardware that was becoming available. "All three of us we were unanimous in that desire," clarifies Lifeson. "That's what Rush is — we're always looking to try something different, or to head in a new direction."

The problem with *Signals*, from Lifeson's viewpoint at least, lay not with the songs but in an irregular production. "In a couple of key places there was too much emphasis placed on the keyboards," the guitarist explains. "The mix of *Subdivisions* has always been a disappointment for me. I recall leaning over to push up the faders [to increase the guitar levels in the mix] and Terry would smile and push them back down again."

Lifeson tolerated this situation for a while, 'taking one for the team' in today's parlance — though Lee later related how the normally placid Lifeson returned to the studio with fresh perspective following a few days away, storming into the control room with the statement: "There's not enough guitar on this record for Chrissakes!"

"The language was probably more colourful than that," guffaws Lifeson at the memory. "But look, a band operates on consensus. Everybody else felt we were going in the right direction. To my way of thinking there was an imbalance, but I have no regrets.

"The song *Digital Man*, for instance... there's no problem with that," he continues. "But we had so much trouble getting the feel right. The direction was lacking, and that's when you need a strong producer."

Geddy Lee once observed: "We were bored of doing things the same old way. We should probably have changed producers instead of changing the internal balance of the band."

"That's what it all boils down to," agrees Lifeson now. "We were not getting the kind of direction and guidance that we needed."

The split with Brown was amicable (indeed, the credits of the band's next, self-produced album, *Grace Under Pressure*, included the tribute: "Et toujours notre bon vieil ami — Broon"), but Lifeson admits it was a wrench.

"For sure," he nods enthusiastically. "Terry had been a big part of this



PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

band. Besides the actual production, he was there for all of the writing sessions and the arrangements, so his exit left a big hole. Deep down inside, though, it was time."

Released in September 1982, *Signals* topped the charts and went platinum in the band's homeland, though sales didn't match the stellar performance of *Moving Pictures*. Its more user-friendly contents served to polarise the opinions of diehard Rush fans. "Some people love it, others hate it," nods Lifeson in agreement. "That's inevitable."

Lifeson is now able to sit and listen to *Signals* from start to finish without feeling pangs of disappointment. Would the same statement have applied when the album was fresh from the printing press?

"It's a good question," he smiles, "and there were times when I might've felt [reservations] at certain points back then, but now I'm very proud of it."

As *New World Man* became a surprise hit, the band's facelift rubbed off on other groups, many of whom suddenly began adding keyboards to their sound. Formed three years later, the keys-dominated Dream Theater have never been shy of admitting the influence of Rush. The prominence of keyboards only escalated over Rush's next few records as their productions became ever more slick and pristine, until a Rupert Hine-helmed return to basics with *Presto* in 1989. It could be claimed that *Signals* and the records Rush made with Peter Collins (1985's *Power Windows*, and *Hold Your Fire* in '87) helped to pioneer the way that progressive hard rock would develop over the next decade.

Digital man: Neil Peart's use of electronic drums put off longtime producer Terry Brown.

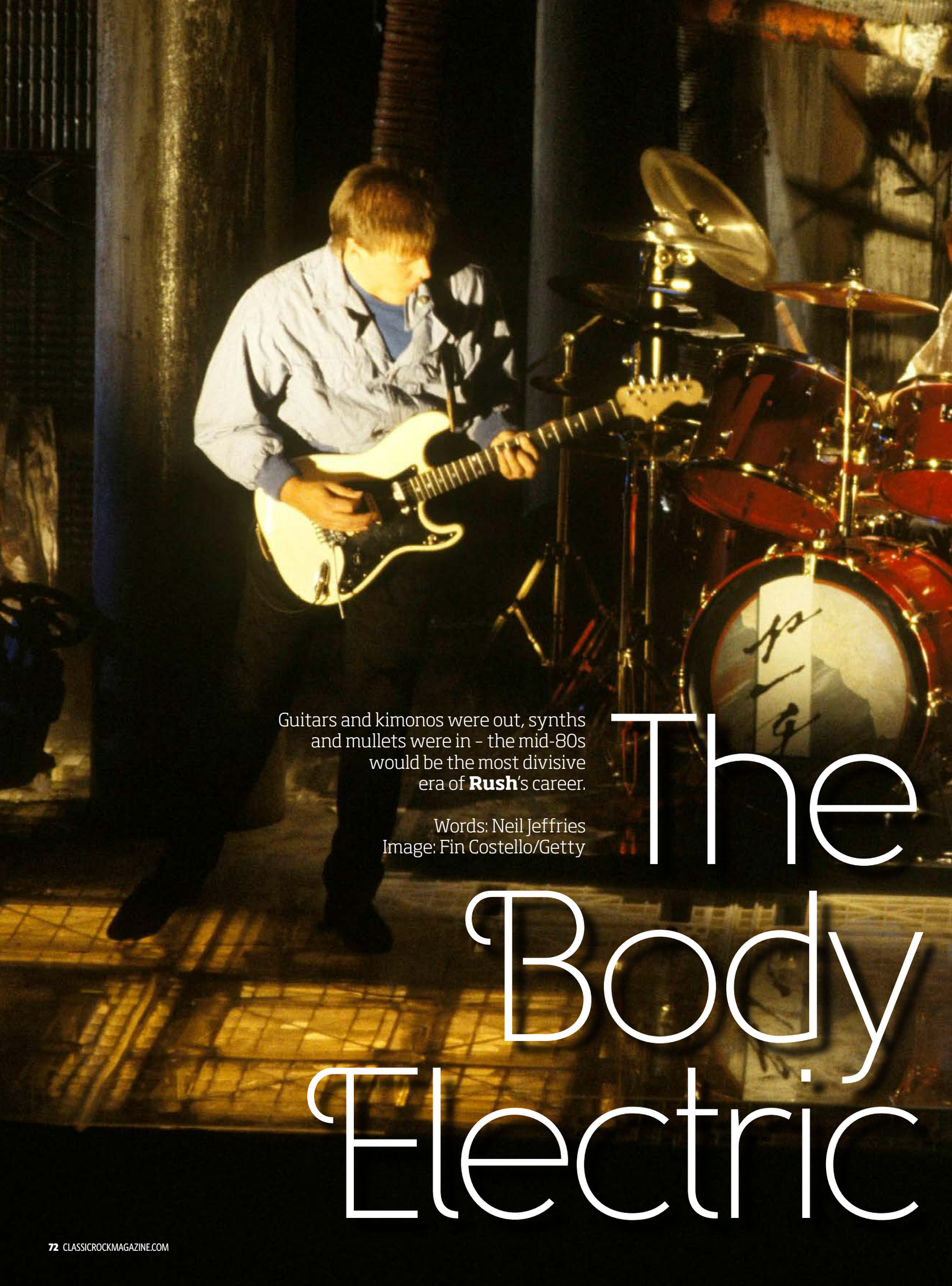
"That's flattering to hear but we've always tried to move on quickly to the next thing," beams Lifeson, adding with his usual tact: "When another band follows in your footsteps, it's always an incredible compliment."

As stated, material from *Signals* and its keyboard-cloaked successors figured highly in Rush's 2013 setlist, as documented on the *Clockwork Angels Tour* DVD. Acknowledging the fact that this decision wasn't universally popular among some of their fans, the guitarist can offer no explanation for the fact. "It just seemed like a good idea at the time," he smirks. "We're contrary like that."

Talking of which, expect Rush to adopt a low profile in 2014 — despite the fact it marks the 40th anniversary of their existence as a band.

"So we'll celebrate the 41st anniversary in 2015 instead," Lifeson responds casually. "For the last dozen years we've really burned the candle at both ends. It's hard to play for three hours, travel and do 80 shows, plus interviews and stuff. We're really going to try not to work for the entire year in 2014. We need and deserve a rest."

> "It dawned on us that we wanted to try new ideas; maybe work with different people. It was an unsettling time."
>
> Alex Lifeson



Guitars and kimonos were out, synths and mullets were in – the mid-80s would be the most divisive era of **Rush**'s career.

Words: Neil Jeffries
Image: Fin Costello/Getty

The Body Electric



Rush's sound had evolved and transformed over the course of the eight albums they made between their self-titled debut and *Moving Pictures*. But 1982's *Signals* was a clean break with the past, pivoting away from the great guitar epics of the 70s towards a state-of-the-art keyboard-oriented sound – to the chagrin of some of their hardcore fans.

Not that Rush themselves were concerned. Rather than retreat to familiar ground, the trio instead opted to double down on their controversial new approach and fully embrace new sounds and technologies. Beginning with 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*, their journey through the rest of the decade would take them far from their roots – something not every band member was comfortable with.

Signals was a pivotal album for Rush in many respects. As well as kicking off the third chapter of their career, it marked the point where they parted company with longtime producer and mentor Terry Brown. "We had to start right from the ground up in making things as different as we could," said Neil Peart of the decision.

To find a new producer for the follow-up to *Signals*, Rush began scouring the credits of albums they liked, drawing up a list of potential candidates. With studio time booked for November 1983 at Le Studio in Quebec, the band found themselves demoing new material and searching for a new producer simultaneously.

"Our method was to talk in general ways to each of the 'candidates' until we began to feel a bit more comfortable with each other, and then at some point play all of these songs – and expect them to offer intelligent criticism and suggestions," said Peart of their recruitment modus operandi.

One person they considered was Steve Lillywhite, who had made his name working with Peter Gabriel and U2. Lillywhite signed up to produce, only to back shortly before work was due to begin. The band then tapped up Trevor Horn, who had helped Yes radically reinvent themselves on their *90125* album. That didn't pan out either.

Eventually, someone did agree to produce the record: the British-born Peter Henderson, best known for his work with Supertramp. He found a band knee deep in new gadgets. Neil Peart had begun using Simmons drums – the hexagonal-shaped electronic kits made famous by Spandau Ballet and – while Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson spent more time than ever playing keyboards.

But Henderson proved to be a poor fit for Rush, and sessions stretched on for four months through a harsh Canadian winter into March 1984 – longer than on any previous album. The arduous process partly inspired the album's title: *Grace Under Pressure*. "Not only was it relevant to so many of the songs, but it was also rather fitting to the way this album was going," said Peart.

The finished product dialled back *Signals*' synthesised sheen a little, making more space for Alex Lifeson's guitar. Songs such as *Red Sector A* and *Distant Early Warning* became staples of the band's set throughout the 80s, but *Grace Under Pressure* ultimately wasn't the album Rush wanted it to be.

"It was a pretty low time," Geddy Lee later said. "We weren't sure of the kind of band we wanted to be. There was a lot of experimenting. We ended up pretty much producing that record on our own, and it was hard."

The difficult nature of *Grace Under Pressure*'s creation prompted a change in approach for the follow-up, *Power Windows*. Henderson was not re-hired and the process of interviewing producers began again, albeit with new determination. "We want someone that has some sort of arrangement or musical input, someone who can give us a nudge and a push in directions that we haven't gone in before," said Lifeson at the time.

Having considered several options, they settled on another Englishman, Peter Collins, as co-producer. Other than one album by the heavy metal band Tygers Of Pan Tang, Collins' CV showed focussed largely on pop acts such as Tracey Ullman and Nik Kershaw. But together with Australian engineer "Jimbo" Barton he proved a better fit for the band than his predecessor.

Pre-production on *Power Windows* began in February 1985, with a sojourn at a residential farmhouse studio in Ontario, utilising its 24-track desk to demo new songs. With eight tracks in hand, the band then decamped to the centuries-old setting of Oxfordshire's Manor Studios to begin tracking.

In the *Power Windows* tourbook Peart noted: "The method of recording which Peter and Jimbo use allows us to record the basic tracks very quickly, and capture a lot of early, more

➢



"And this is a 'guitar'. We might want to use it on one of our albums..."

JONATHAN POSTAL/PHOTOSHOT

spontaneous performances. We have the basic tracks finished in a couple of weeks, and are ready for a world of overdubs."

Those overdubs would take place in Air Studios in Montserrat and at Sarm East, London. By moving around, the band were already making an album in a different way to its predecessor, opening themselves up to yet more innovation – such as recording a string section orchestra at Abbey Road and a 25-piece choir (for the end of *Marathon*) at Angel Studios. They engaged another Brit, Andy Richards – best known for his work with Frankie Goes To Hollywood – to help programme synthesisers and add keyboard textures alongside Lee.

Released in October 1985, *Power Windows* reached the UK and US Top 10s, though it is much more loved than its two immediate predecessors by fans and band alike. Lee now rates *Power Windows* as "the best from the keyboard period began with *Signals*". Yet as Rush's sound expanded, the role of Lifeson's guitar still often marginalised. "We were covering the tracks with sound," said Lee, "and then Alex had to sort of fight his way in."

Lifeson, ever the team player, wasn't complaining: "Keyboards were the new thing, so there was this attitude: Let's just push them up, they sound big and they sound cool."

That ethos carried over into their next album, 1987's *Hold Your Fire*, for which Rush re-hired Collins and engineer Barton and repeated the formula of using multiple residential studio settings. When Peart visited Lee in September 1986 to discuss the forthcoming sessions, he discovered that the bassist had been working on a new keyboard set-up entirely on an Apple Mac computer.

"It was an amazing thing," said the drummer at the time, of what now seems like everyday technology. "After working out what he wanted to play in the conventional way, he could programme it all into the Mac and assign different parts to any number of separate keyboards. This proved very valuable to us."

At the beginning of October, in the rural setting of Elora Sound, Ontario, Lifeson brought along a tape of experimental work he had been working on at home, while Lee had sorted recordings of the year's batch of soundcheck jams into a sonic reference library of "potential verses, bridges, choruses and instrumental bits".

With technology not only informing the creative process directly, it also had an indirect impact. The emerging CD format had many advantages over vinyl, not least its increased running time. Rush took advantage of that, recording 10 songs and 50 minutes of music rather than seven or eight songs over 40 or 45 minutes, as they had previously

For some, that increased length was too much of an average thing. Released in September 1987, *Hold Your Fire* is generally perceived as the weakest of the run of Rush's post-*Signals* albums. The song *Tai Shan*, inspired by a visit Neil Peart paid to the 'holy mountain' Mount Tai in Shandong province during a bicycle trip to China, has been dismissed as the worst song Rush ever recorded by both Lee and Lifeson, with the latter claiming that hearing it made him want to "vomit".

But it had a handful of stellar tracks too, not least first single *Time Stand Still*, which featured haunting guest vocals from singer Aimee Mann of Canadian alt-popsters 'Til Tuesday (the band had considered both Cyndi Lauper and Chrissie Hynde for the role).

Hold Your Fire was a relative commercial disappointment, becoming the first Rush album not to make the US Top 10 or the Top 5 in their native Canada since 1978's *Hemispheres*. A now-customary live album, *A Show Of Hands*, marked the end of the latest four-album chapter of their career and their longstanding record deal with Mercury/Phonogram, after which the band took time off to take stock.

"We found ourselves free of deadlines and obligations – for the first time in fifteen years,"



Mullet over: Lee, Lifeson and Peart in their 80s finery.

MMMEDIA/ICONICPIX

said Neil Peart. "We decided to make the most of that. We got to know ourselves and our families once again, and generally just backed away from the infectious machinery."

When they did reconvene to make their next album, *Presto*, it would be with a renewed sense of purpose. Peter Collins had been replaced as producer by Rupert Hine, who had previously worked with The Fixx, Howard Jones and, most notably, Tina Turner (Hine had been on Rush's list to produce *Grace Under Pressure*, but was tied up working on Turner's *Private Dancer*). It quickly became evident that Hine was a fast worker.

"He came over with 10 days set aside for pre-production, figuring about a song a day," recalled Alex Lifeson. "But after a day-and-a-half everything was done."

Hine wasn't afraid to speak his mind either. "The first thing I did was ask Geddy to lower his voice by an octave," the producer later recalled. "It was just too shrill. He looked at me in shock. But he gave it a try, which impressed me."

Hine's presence in the producer's chair wasn't the only noticeable change. The synths and electronics that had dominated their sound earlier in the decade began to take a backseat. "I was getting sick of technology," admitted Lee, "and wanted a return to a more basic approach."

"When Geddy and I started writing this album, we started asking ourselves what was the real core of the band?" added Lifeson. "Where should all the emotion and the energy be coming from? We decided that it should really be the guitar. So we wrote with that in mind straight from the start, just bass and guitars like the old days. It was just more direct, we just added keyboards for colour."

Released in November 1989, Presto was accompanied by a North American tour that found the band relying less on keyboards and sounding more like a power trio once more. Visually, too, they appeared to be stripping away the trappings of the 80s, ditching the mullets (Lee), hair gel (Lifeson) and shoulder-padded suits (both of them).

> "Keyboards were the new thing, so there was this attitude: Let's just push them up, they sound big and they sound cool." **Alex Lifeson**

This journey back to basics was consolidated two years later with the follow-up album, 1991's *Roll The Bones*, again produced by Rupert Hine.

"When we got back into the studio to start writing for *Roll The Bones*," said Lee, "there was still a very optimistic atmosphere which had carried over from the *Presto* tour. I think we were much more of a band than we'd been in maybe seven to 10 years."

Like *Presto*, *Roll The Bones* was ultimately completed ahead of time – two months, to be precise. But that still allowed one member of the band to scrutinise his own playing. "On the day we began setting up for the writing stage," said Peart, "I stood in the little studio and watched Larry [Allen, longtime drum tech] putting my drums together. It occurred to me that I'd been using the same basic set-up for years, and maybe it was time for a rethink. Just putting the drums in different places might alter my approach to them, push me in some new directions."

Conspicuously, he switched to a single bass drum with two pedals. For the others, too, everything just clicked into place. "We were really feeling very positive about the whole idea of the band,' reflected Lifeson. "A lot of it had to do with Presto and how well we worked together. We realised that we really have a lot of fun playing in a band – which we'd maybe lost touch with. We sort of re-learned how to do it."

Geddy Lee would later express reservations that the production on *Roll The Bones* could have "sounded bigger and bolder" but was proud of the material.

"There were some good songs on *Presto* – *The Pass* is absolutely one of the best things we've ever written," he said. "But the songwriting was so much stronger on *Roll The Bones*. I think what really makes the record is the quality of the songs."

The commercial reception backed him up. *Roll The Bones* peaked at Number 3 in the US, giving Rush their highest chart position since *Signals* and restoring Rush to Platinum-selling status.

In subsequent years, the band looked back on their musical adventures during with mixed feelings. While Neil Peart and Geddy Lee viewed them as a necessary part of the band's ongoing evolution, Alex Lifeson remained less happy with what the band had produced – particularly with regard to his own role within the musical framework.

"There were a couple of records that I'll admit weren't really that satisfying for me," he said. "My heart wasn't really in there. Those were interesting records that we made, and I like the songs on there and the sound and everything, but to me, I like to hear the guitar more upfront. I think the guitar is a very important instrument, not only because I play the guitar, I think it's the instrument that carries all the passion, and if it's gotta struggle to be heard, that just doesn't seem right to me."

Lee admitted that he hadn't realised until much later how painful the period had been for his bandmate. "We've made a lot of mistakes on record," he said, "but we've been able to learn from them and move forward. We've aged well because we've been able to apply the things we've learned. It's all part of evolution."

Neil Peart might be known for his lyrical wordplay, but not for opening up to the interviewer. However, back in 1988 he proved himself to be a receptive and amiable host. In an article originally published in the very first issue of *Prog*, we look back on a meeting of two smoke-shrouded minds.

Words: Tim Ponting **Image:** Fin Costello/Getty Images

At the tender age of 22, I encountered for the first time a human being who smoked faster than me.

He also played drums faster than me, and by all accounts better than me, and everyone else. In *Modern Drummer* Magazine's influential yearly poll, he won 'Best Rock Drummer' in 1980, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984 and 1985, and then in 1986 they invented the 'Honor Roll' to make him ineligible for the annual award and ensure he didn't win it every year until 2112.

As a young journalist on *Rhythm* Magazine, to me Neil Peart was God. I met him in person once only, in a cavernous room at the Mayfair hotel on a damp Friday in April 1988, the morning after Rush's first gig at Wembley Arena since the New World Tour of '83.

A nervous PR seemed slightly taken aback at my dishevelled state (I had failed dismally to sleep on a friend's floor in Streatham after the gig) as Neil shook my hand and then lit a cigarette, a procedure he repeated every four and a half minutes for the next hour and a half. He smoked for Canada.

I remember I mumbled something about enjoying the concert while setting up the tape.

"Last night was a good one, you don't always feel good about it afterwards. But last night was... comfortable." Puff. Draw. Pause. I fumbled with the cassette. "All of us were comfortable and relaxed." The aforementioned PR frowned as trembling, I lit my own cigarette, a poncey St Moritz

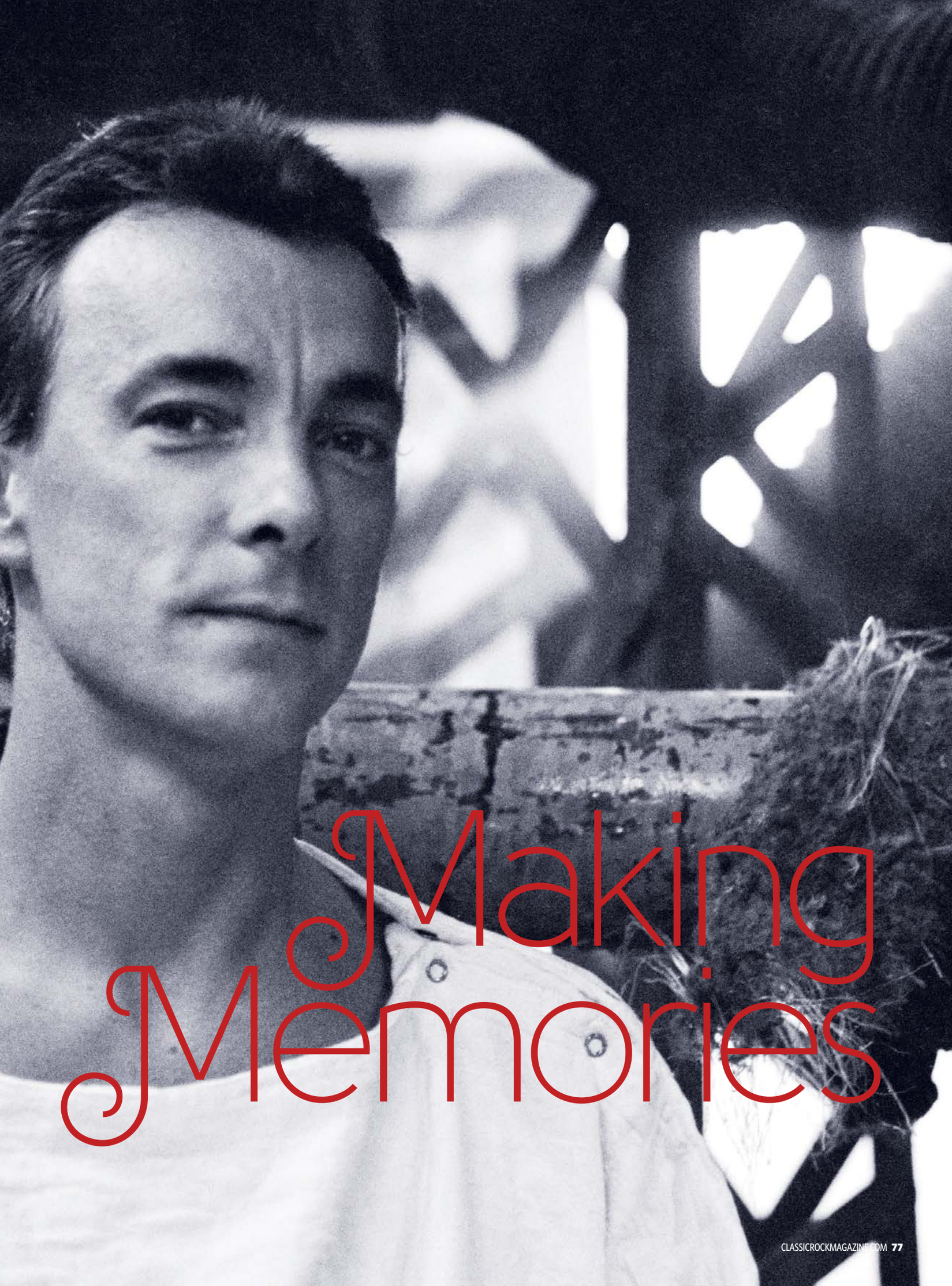
> "A lot of the early bands I was in played R&B. Around Toronto, 'blue-eyed soul' was the most popular music."
>
> **Neil Peart**

with a gold band. We proceeded to puff together like a Commonwealth all-star synchronised chain-smoking team.

"We go home from here and start sifting through the performances, looking for a live collection," he explained. "The nature of it we're not quite sure yet: it depends on what we find when we start listening back. It's something that can encompass three tours and thus could form quite a nice anthology. We also filmed two of the shows up in Birmingham, and I know the second of those two we also recorded a really good performance – perhaps something will come out of that."

The original feature, as seen in the very first issue of *Prog*.





Making Memories

It did. More than half of 1989's *A Show Of Hands'* live set was taken from that one concert in Birmingham, including Neil's first drum solo to be allocated its own track: *The Rhythm Method*, a clattering tour of his musical influences.

I dropped what I thought was an insightful bomb to kick-start the interview. That Rush were a bunch of funk musicians stuck inside a progressive rock band.

"The 'progressive rock' genre. Yes." Peart curled his fingers in quotation marks, clearly irritated. I let out an involuntary bit of wee and lit another cigarette as the other lay smouldering in the ashtray.

"A lot of the early bands I was in played R&B music. At that particular time, around Toronto in general, 'blue-eyed soul' was the most popular music, so all these white bands were playing the music of James Brown and Wilson Pickett. Do you want a cigarette? Oh, you've got two already."



TIM PONTING/PRESS

A treasured postcard from The Prof.

We talked about other influences. His musical journey may have started in funk bands, but the young Peart made a beeline for Britain in 1970 in search of something more. I asked him why he didn't stay.

A long pause. Draw. "It was humbling. Because I had the common syndrome, 'big fish in a small pond'. I was living in a small city, I was in the prominent band, was the prominent drummer, and I don't think I was egotistical as such but I had an over-inflated sense of how good I was, in a naïve way. Coming here and doing the audition circuit, especially at that time at the turn of the 70s when 'progressive' music was starting to become respectable... I went home tremendously humbled, obviously. I thought: 'I'm nothing and nobody and I'll never get anywhere.' My time in London was much more important to me as a person, a character, to be thrown out into the world for the first time to learn the harsh realities."

While in the UK, Peart got more into King Crimson and Michael Giles. "It was the turning point, because prior to that, I'd only been attracted to the excited, emotional side of playing, like Keith Moon. He was like the Jackson Pollock of drumming, where you'd just throw the paint at the canvas! That undisciplined style was the only kind of music that excited me up to that point. Michael combined the technical discipline with an emotional, physical abandon that taught me you could go for both. You could take the jazz ethos of technique and the wild abandon of rock and make them co-exist."

Of course, Peart returned to Canada with a newfound sense of purpose, a realisation he had to practise — a lot — and the rest has become Rush history. I told him I was an outcast among Rush fans, because I loved *Signals*, and felt it was a turning point for the band where all their influences collided. In the awkward silence, the PR interrupted to warn of a clearly far more important impending interview as my cigarette sent a smoke stack into dead space, like some Native American warning of inbound pillagers. Peart dismissed her from the room and leaned towards me conspiratorially.

> "*Signals* strikes people as a weak album. It was weak only in the sense that it was exploratory. Explorations have to be schizophrenic."
>
> **Neil Peart**

"Your intuition is very accurate, and like you say it's a minority viewpoint, because *Signals* strikes most people as a weak album. It was weak only in the sense that it was exploratory and a lot of times our explorations naturally have to be a little schizophrenic. Stylistically, we tried for the first time to truly juxtapose things that were seemingly unmatchable, like *Digital Man*, where we took ska, hard rock and electropop — and the song remains patchy. It also took us into explorations of each other as musicians and forced us into difference roles. The whole album certainly does lack cohesiveness but it didn't lack sincerity.

"Each song eventually led us to something else. *Countdown* — I'm not totally satisfied with what it ended up being, but it took us to a song like *Manhattan Project*, it taught us how to write a documentary track. We had grown out of science fiction, so we dealt with science fact. We were finally able to present a factual thing within an emotional rock framework."

As time passed, Peart grew increasingly enthusiastic and excited. He talked about how close the band had become after so long playing together — "With Geddy, there's something truly telepathic between us" — and the elemental intensity of the Rush live experience: "You can't go onstage with barriers. You have to be wide open up there and very vulnerable. I've never been comfortable with the idea of pacing yourself. It's ten-tenths from the first beat. You can only aim to be as good as the recorded performance, which of course is perfection. It's unattainable in one sense but it deserves to be chased.

"But occasionally I can 'get into the channel', and my awareness expands to the other guys, then beyond the stage to the audience, and I may catch a face in passing... your senses are so sharp, almost like a low grade fever where everything's a little bit brighter, a little bit louder and a little bit sharper.

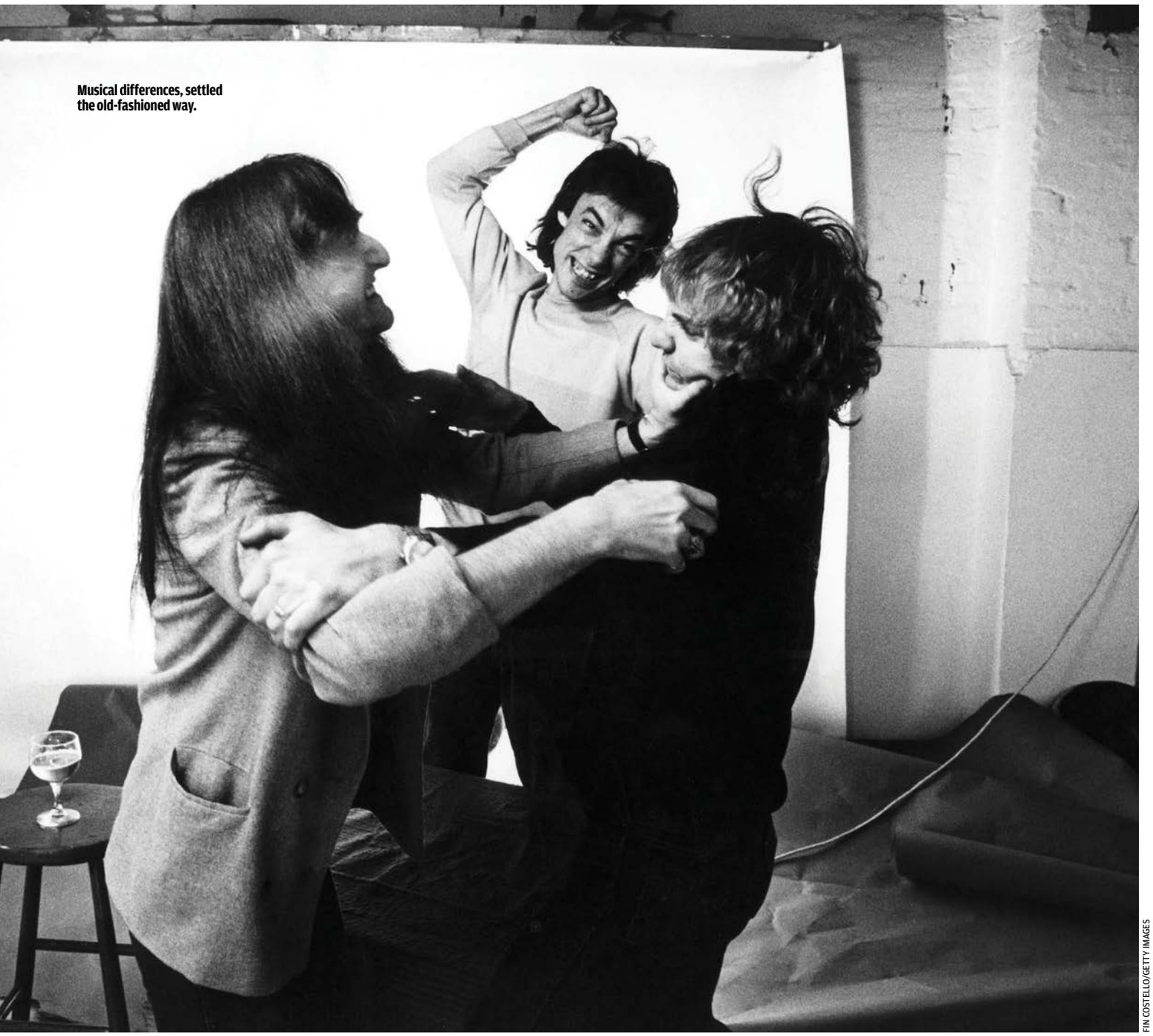
"But then again, if the three of us are having the kind of relaxed show we had last night, we can joke with each other, we have little lines that we can mouth to each other and laugh. The audience doesn't need to know what we're laughing about but they sense it. The same as at the end of the show, when we throw all the discipline away and during the encore we gradually melt down and by the end of it it's just a lark! The audience senses the release of tension and they sense the invitation, they're invited to relax with us now, it's fun time."

Peart had got into his stride. Words tumbled out faster and faster. The ashtray piled high with butts, he punctuated each new subject with fresh smoke as discussion darted chaotically around subjects.

"I have no equanimity with mechanical and electronic things," he explained after we discussed his use of cutting-edge electronics on stage. "It's like Woody Allen said: 'He's at two with nature.' I'm at two with mechanics and electronics."

On the other hand, Peart was clearly very comfortable in his creative world, a world he discussed with almost academic fervour. We talk about his visit to the Van Gogh museum in Amsterdam, about Picasso and creative simplicty. "It seems to me that someone always thinks





Musical differences, settled the old-fashioned way.

FIN COSTELLO/GETTY IMAGES

there's an easy way. There isn't. To get to the simple, you have to go through the complex. But to get to the sublime, you must first experience the ridiculous."

The intensity of the conversation was almost unsettling. I recall suggesting that perhaps musicians took themselves too seriously, and we ended up talking about Frank Zappa and the integrity of his strange mixture of humour and music, simplicity and complexity.

"He's so admirable. He was such a good example. In the early days when we were arguing with our record company, about why we didn't need a hit single, and why we didn't need to compromise, and why we just needed to tour and 'blah blah blah', going through all that bullshit, we had very few people to quote, and very few other examples to say, 'Look, it can be done.' But when you had people like Zappa, and like Pink Floyd, we could say: 'Look, they had long, successful careers, just because of their freedom from these kinds of constraints.' But it doesn't matter, and still our own example to our own record company, it's not taught them a thing, you know…"

Peart sighed. "I grow to despair sometimes. All it took was for them to wait two years for us to get it together, and put out a few albums that would drift along until we found our voice. And that kind of investment needs to be made in any artist." He smacks his lips. "It's hard to make them see that."

The doorbell rings repeatedly, the PR having given up hovering in favour of direct action. The interview is over.

As a codicil, I had to send Peart a package of magazines shortly afterwards. With it, I enclosed a brief note explaining how kind he had been to spend so much time talking to me, and inviting him to escape the pressures of being the world's best drummer by coming and staying at our gaff, a grubby house I shared with another penniless journo and a goth. I'm not sure really what I thought he'd make of the invitation or why I invited him. Maybe I had some dream of sitting on Hampstead Heath lacing daisies into each other's hair, discussing philosophy or paradiddles, or both. In the event, I had a nice postcard from Neil politely saying I'd done a nice job of the interview. Hey, so Neil Peart never crashed at my house, but it was the next best thing.



R4

What better way, we thought, to celebrate **Rush**, than by asking 40 famous fans for their favourite song by the Canadian icons? So that's exactly what we did...

Words: Malcom Dome
Portrait: Fin Costello/Getty

CLAUDIO SIMONETTI
GOBLIN

"I always listen to Rush with great pleasure. I always liked them because, in some way, I think they are very similar to Yes, one of my favourite bands. But they are a bit darker than Yes, as you can hear in songs like *Red Barchetta*, one of their most representative pieces, where you can hear a harder sound, thanks to the vigorous drums of Neil Peart, and keyboards aren't used to soften their sound.

"I would compare Alex Lifeson to Andy Summers of The Police. Neither are great guitar virtuosos but they have certainly helped to create their respective bands' unique sound."

SEAN REINERT
CYNIC

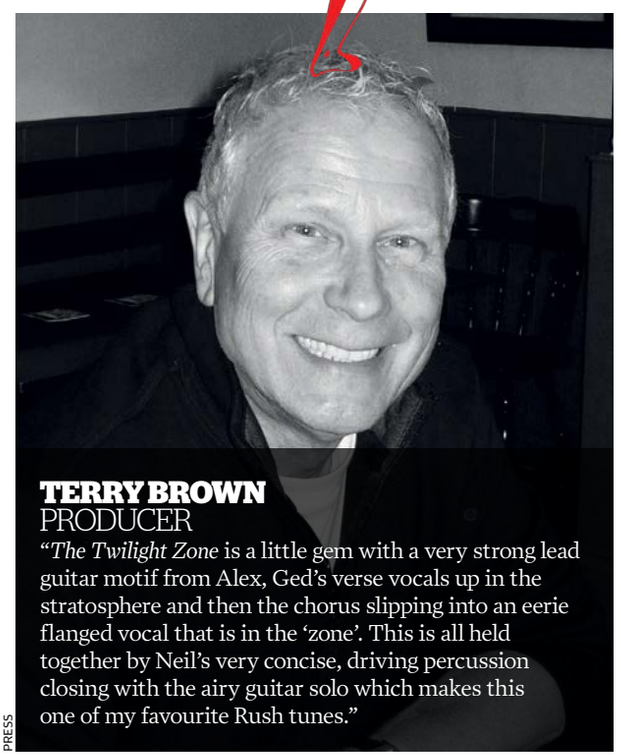
"My favourite Rush song would have to be *Jacob's Ladder* from the *Permanent Waves* album. From the start of the tune in 11/8 (5/8-6/8), with the vocals coming in in 4/4, how could a musician not love this tune? Without sacrificing originality Rush have always had the uncanny ability to make odd time/odd meter into a catchy, radio-friendly experience. Take a big hit... put your headphones on and remember what 1980 sounded like."

DOUG OTT
ENCHANT

"I choose *Freewill*! I love this song for so many reasons. It's inspired by Ayn Rand, who shaped my life with books such as *The Fountainhead*, *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged*. The statement that the song makes speaks for the individual as opposed to the masses.

"It's got great bass and guitar counterpoint; I love it when Alex breaks away from Geddy playing the main riff and starts playing chords.

"It has one of the best solos on the *Permanent Waves* album. I don't think I've ever heard Alex play so fast. The cool thing is, he plays chords in the solo as well as shreds! I still haven't mastered that solo; on my bucket list for sure!"



PRESS

TERRY BROWN
PRODUCER

"*The Twilight Zone* is a little gem with a very strong lead guitar motif from Alex, Ged's verse vocals up in the stratosphere and then the chorus slipping into an eerie flanged vocal that is in the 'zone'. This is all held together by Neil's very concise, driving percussion closing with the airy guitar solo which makes this one of my favourite Rush tunes."

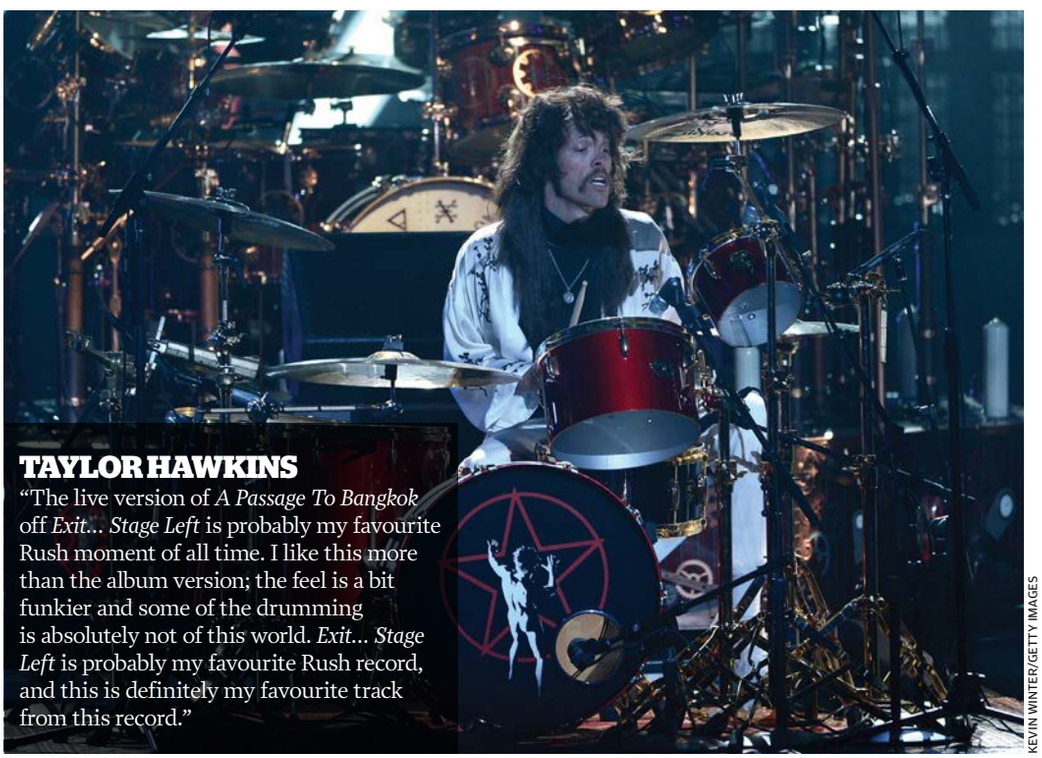
MATT YOUNG
HEKZ

"My favourite Rush track would have to be *Headlong Flight* from *Clockwork Angels*, which is almost certainly my favourite Rush album. The track rocks right from the start with its huge chorus and superb instrumental, where each member receives their moment in the spotlight.

"As with the rest of the album, the song shows that Rush remain very much at the cutting edge of the genre, while keeping in touch with their roots. It's the perfect balance of past and present."

JAMES MONTEITH
TESSERACT

"For me it's *Caravan* from *Clockwork Angels*. It has some captivating, technical bass work from Lee, and riffs galore from Lifeson, which makes this a classic I return to regularly. Not to mention the insane solo/jam combination... Absolute genius!"



KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

TAYLOR HAWKINS

"The live version of *A Passage To Bangkok* off *Exit... Stage Left* is probably my favourite Rush moment of all time. I like this more than the album version; the feel is a bit funkier and some of the drumming is absolutely not of this world. *Exit... Stage Left* is probably my favourite Rush record, and this is definitely my favourite track from this record."

JOHN MIDDLETON
SYLOSIS

"*Circumstances* is my choice. I really love the complexity of the *Hemispheres* album and the various lengthy twists and turns within the first track, but *Circumstances* is more of a hard-hitting classic rock song. The main thing that stood out to me was the riff leading into the chorus, which really reminded me of Tool – one of my favourite bands growing up. They were responsible for name dropping bands like Rush and King Crimson, which led me to really exploring the 70s classic prog stuff."

FRANK VAN BOGAERT
FISH ON FRIDAY

"I'd choose *The Trees* from *Hemispheres*. This track has a gorgeous build-up, starting with a nylon guitar. Although one might expect this to evolve into a folky song, it twists into a fierce rock performance.

"I especially like the synth bass sound in the breakdown part. Also, as a youngster I was quite intrigued and wanted to know what instrument this was… turned out to be the mighty Taurus pedal. Also the lyrics in this song are quite engaging, as a statement in favour of equal rights for everyone."

JAIME GOMEZ ARELLANO
EX-MESSENGER/PRODUCER

"It's very hard to choose one Rush song above all others, but I think I'd go for *Working Man*. The intro riff is probably one of the finest in music history. And Neil Peart, although not on this, remains one of my biggest influences as a drummer."

STEVE ROTHERY

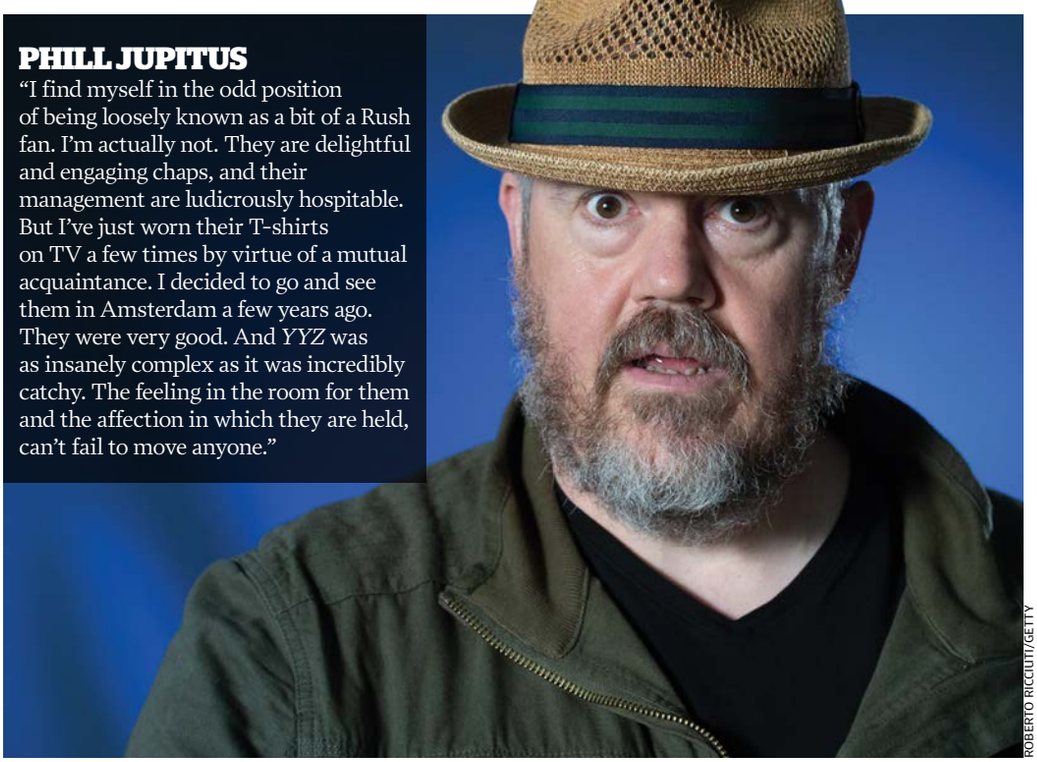
"*Tom Sawyer* is probably my favourite Rush track of all time. It has all the elements that makes them such a great band. With a great groove, several hooky riffs and a strong and anthemic vocal. The *Moving Pictures* album is by far an away my favourite album of theirs. And this is the prime cut from it."



KEVIN NIXON

PHILL JUPITUS

"I find myself in the odd position of being loosely known as a bit of a Rush fan. I'm actually not. They are delightful and engaging chaps, and their management are ludicrously hospitable. But I've just worn their T-shirts on TV a few times by virtue of a mutual acquaintance. I decided to go and see them in Amsterdam a few years ago. They were very good. And *YYZ* was as insanely complex as it was incredibly catchy. The feeling in the room for them and the affection in which they are held, can't fail to move anyone."



ROBERTO RICCIUTI/GETTY

JOHN WESLEY

"I had some friends introduce me to Rush via *All The World's A Stage* in middle school. Right about that time I was trying to find a musical path. I had recently bought my first Les Paul for 300 bucks – it was a Cherry Sunburst Deluxe – and I was really getting into the live Rush record.

"Around that time, *A Farewell to Kings* came out… I was blown away… but the track that captured me was *Xanadu*. It was the first Rush track I tried to learn from beginning to end. I wasn't very good at learning off of albums then; my turntable was not the kind you could slow down. But I got it close enough. I dragged that Les Paul and that LP everywhere.

"One day, a few years later, I had a chance to audition for a band, they knew *Xanadu*… and so did I! I got the gig… and 35 years later, I still play with that same drummer, Mark Prator. *Xanadu* was a huge turning point for me as a player, and Rush a lifelong musical influence."

KIM SEVIOUR
TOUCHSTONE

"I really like *Closer To The Heart*. I love the simplicity of this song, and the overall feeling that runs through it. The lyrics – '*I will draw the chart, sailing into destiny*' – are beautiful, and signify an empowering optimism that I'm really drawn to."

MATT STEVENS

"I found *Moving Pictures* among a charity shop haul, and *YYZ* always stood out to me. It's a rare thing, a great rock instrumental. The opening riff sounds like the mighty Voivod five years early. It also has a great solo. I think Lifeson is a very underrated guitar player, he's like the prog Johnny Marr with loads of ideas and textures."

ALAN STRAWBRIDGE
SCHNAUSER

"My choice is *The Analog Kid*. On the *Signals* album, Rush demonstrated how they'd developed the ability to write concise pop songs – with *The Analog Kid* being a fine example. Propelled by a breakneck ear-worm riff reminiscent of current prog-pop genii White Denim, and lyrically a lot more uplifting and emotional than their earlier albums, this track still retains the fresh power trio sound.

"This is alongside the last vestiges of the chunky production which made *Moving Pictures* and *Permanent Waves* such essential albums. They developed this songwriting style over their consecutive albums, but with diminishing returns often due to the production typical of the late 80s and 90s which never did them any favours."



SHIRLAINE FORREST/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

GRANT NICHOLAS
FEEDER

"I first discovered Rush when I was around 11 years old, after hearing *The Spirit Of Radio* coming through the wall of my older brother's bedroom. I was instantly drawn to the phasing guitar riff and drum fills. This is a classic Rush track taken from a great album, *Permanent Waves*. The musicianship on this album is so good, and Rush are still a great live band. This track is a flashback to my youth growing up in South Wales, listening to albums with my mates."



STEVEN WILSON

"I'd go for *The Camera Eye* from *Moving Pictures*. For me, this is Rush continuing in the tradition of their incredible 70s epics, but achieving something more structured and lyrically mature. As with the whole of the *Moving Pictures* album, it strikes a perfect balance between the power trio format of the 70s and the more layered keyboard-dominated sounds to come. It's also got one of the great Alex Lifeson guitar solos — among so many!"

MIKE WEATHERLEY, MP

"It's *Something For Nothing* from the album *2112*. Not only is this song on the album that defined Rush, and not only is the track a fantastic head-banging, air-guitar monster bit of metal/rock, the track also has the ultimate lyrics to live your life by. Rush have always been masters of a meaning in many songs, but this one really shakes things up with a huge message: basically, 'Don't just sit on your arse dreaming and waiting for things to happen — you have to go out and make things happen. Life is in your own hands…' I had the lyrics posted up above my desk for many years. An anthem played to a backdrop of screaming guitars. Love it."

NICKY WIRE
MANIC STREET PREACHERS

"*A Farewell To Kings* is my favourite Rush album, along with *Moving Pictures*. *Xanadu* is one of the greatest instrumental sections of all time. The drumming's phenomenal and the bass playing is as funky and cool as anything. Geddy's got the strongest fingers. It sounds like he's whacking the shit out of that Rickenbacker, the hardest bass to play."



JOHN MITCHELL

"The one Rush song I really, really like is *La Villa Strangiato*. And the version I particularly like is the one off the live album *Exit… Stage Left*.

"The second half of the song, where Alex Lifeson starts playing the atmospheric guitar solo on the front pickup of the Les Paul in A minor, is both beautiful and evocative. I remember learning to play the whole thing with my school friends Phil and James Hearley in their parents' attic when I was 16 years old.

"Of course the intro deserves a special mention as well, with the spooky guitar swells followed by what can only be described as a Spanish assault on the senses. The complex instrumental breakdown at the end displays the band's technical virtuosity, and particularly why Geddy always won Best Bassist year in year out in the rock mag polls. I sort of had Rush foisted on me as a youth by the brothers, but while a lot of their catalogue passed me by, this track stuck for all the right reasons."

LAWRENCE GOWAN
STYX

"For 14 years, I was under the same management company as Rush, and therefore was aware of their musical development at relatively close range. Their song *Limelight* caught me immediately, and still does to this day. It's so well crafted and at the time it stood apart melodically from their earlier work. To my interpretation, the lyric expresses something profound on the delicate subject of trying

to balance fame with 'real life'. That's a tricky topic to put into perspective and still remain entertaining."

DAVE BROCK
HAWKWIND

"I'd go for *Between The Wheels* from *Grace Under Pressure*. It has a powerful synth-bass presence, and some fantastic lead guitar playing from Alex Lifeson. This is a good, heavy piece, with interesting lyrics. Overall, a great prog rock number, from one of their best albums. Hawkwind toured with Rush in the States during the 70s – jolly fun was had by all of us."

DAVE KERZNER

"My favourite Rush song is *Losing It* from my favourite Rush album *Signals*. It's one of the most emotionally charged Rush songs and the guest electric violin playing from Ben Mink is incredible! Peart's lyrics are moving and the song is very melodic. Also, being a keyboard player, this whole album has the most early analogue keys of any Rush album and that really appeals to me."

STUART NICHOLSON
GALAHAD

"I'm a big Rush fan, and my favourite track is probably *Marathon* from *Power Windows* which, for me, was their last truly great album. We actually used to play that song in local pubs in the early days of Galahad, which raised an eyebrow or two as it was such a big sound, especially for the time."

DANNY CAVANAGH
ANATHEMA

"When I was about 12 years old, and beginning to discover music and exactly how much it meant to me, one of the bands most adored by the circle of music lovers in my class was Rush. I went along to a friend's house one weekend and heard *The Spirit Of Radio* and I was very moved by it. There was a lyric in this song which still makes my hair stand on end to this day: '*Emotional feedback/on a timeless wavelength*'. Just beautiful."

JACK BLADES
NIGHT RANGER

"*Tom Sawyer* shows the absolute ability of those musicians to be completely restrained when they want to be, and over-the-top unleashed when they want to be. It's clever, it's brilliant, it's everything a song should be coming from great musicians."

ROSS JENNINGS
HAKEN

"*The Camera Eye* is my pick. It contains everything you want to hear in a Rush song. Their infectious use of synth

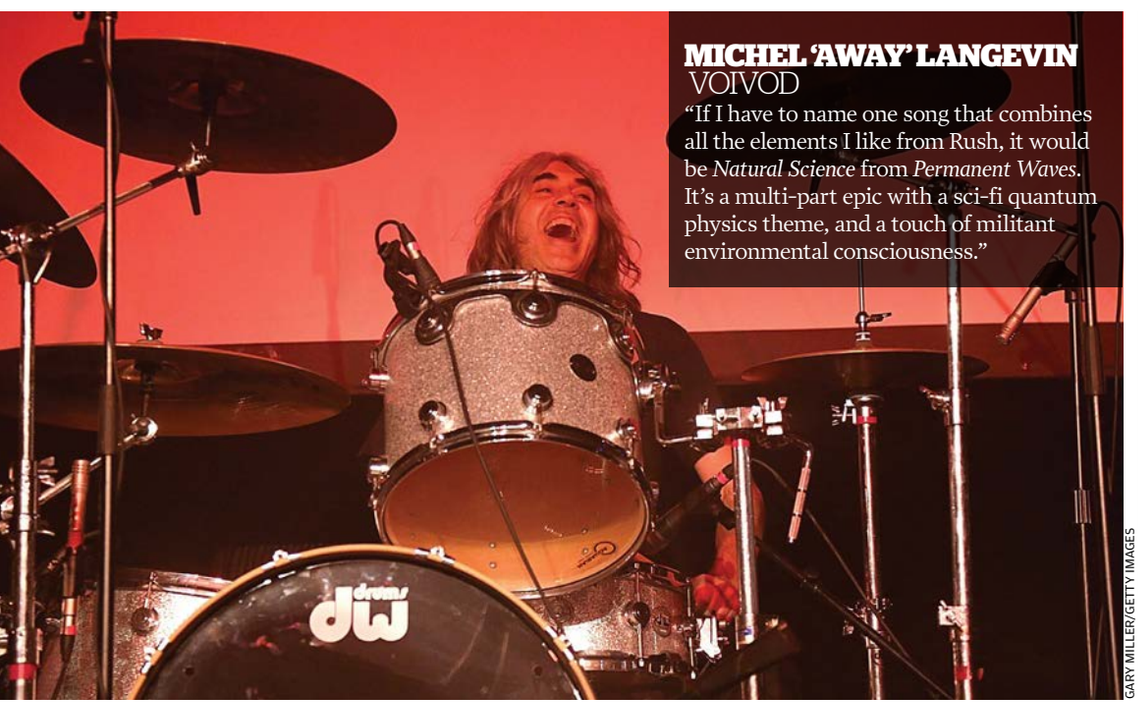
MIKE PORTNOY

"If I had to pick the quintessential Rush song, it would have to be *La Villa Strangiato*. When I was a teenager in the early 80s and in the heat of my deepest Rush influence, that was *the* benchmark for instrumental prowess. Not only for us drummers, but also for fellow bass players – that quick bass and drum breakdown – and guitarists – perhaps still Alex Lifeson's greatest recorded solo.

"As I also stated in the *Beyond The Lighted Stage* film, to us blossoming musicians at the time, *La Villa...* was the ultimate musical challenge to learn, as no other instrumental song in rock history had that level of technical precision."



WILL IRELAND



GARY MILLER/GETTY IMAGES

MICHEL 'AWAY' LANGEVIN
VOIVOD

"If I have to name one song that combines all the elements I like from Rush, it would be *Natural Science* from *Permanent Waves*. It's a multi-part epic with a sci-fi quantum physics theme, and a touch of militant environmental consciousness."

integrated into their signature riff-driven sound — and what a riff that is! — embellished with Neil Peart's percussion wizardry, this is their last great prog epic.

"Its pacing and rhythm are catchy as hell. Yet it has an intense energy, and is lyrically captivating. To me, it's their defining moment, and I'm also so thrilled it featured on their *Time Machine* tour."

ARJEN LUCASSEN

"I got heavily into Rush as a teenager back in the early 70s — yes, I'm that old — mainly listening to and being inspired by *2112* and *Hemispheres*. But in hindsight, my favourite album has to be *Permanent Waves* because, in my humble opinion, it simply has the best tunes.

"Their late-80s 'synthesizer period' was not my cup of tea, but for me, *Counterparts* was an excellent return to form. In fact, the song *Nobody's Hero* from *Counterparts* is probably my most treasured Rush song overall. I love the chord structure and the catchy melodies, coupled with Geddy's great soothing vocals and Neal Peart's thought-provoking lyrics about homosexuality and AIDS."

BARNEY GREENWAY
NAPALM DEATH

"I'd go for *2112*, despite its length. The track's so catchy and has some very heavy moments. There's a riff in there that's really powerful."

MIKE HOLMES
IQ

"*YYZ* sounded great when it first came out in the early 80s, and sounds even better when they do it live now. On the 2012 *Clockwork Angels* tour when they used the live strings it sounded massive. For me, this was the beginning of prog metal, and became a blueprint for a whole genre. Neil Peart is all over this track — he absolutely nailed it and really set a standard for others to aspire to."

ROBERT REED

"*Power Windows* is my favourite Rush album by far. The production is amazing and the use of keyboards is really tasty.

"The songs are so melodic. *Marathon* has all the best examples of this. It's a great song and the middle section solo just blows me away. A huge keyboard part drops in after a brilliant solo, and it's spine tingling. The drumming is amazing. Rush peaked with *Power Windows*."

MATT HALPERN
PERIPHERY

"I remember hearing *La Villa Strangiato* by Rush, and it was the longest song I had ever heard at the time. I didn't even know bands were allowed to write songs that long at the time! I'd like to think *La Villa Strangiato* has inspired me to be open minded about letting songs grow, and breathe when writing songs with Periphery."



PAT CASH

"For whatever reason unknown to me, *Hemispheres* is not regarded as a classic Rush album by many. But I can't disagree more. For me, it's the ultimate Rush album, and the first real prog rock record I ever got into. Sure, I knew about Pink Floyd and Genesis, but Rush were almost unknown in Australia, and that was kinda cool.

"*Cygnus-X1 Book II: Hemispheres*, the first side of the album, is quite extraordinary. It really has everything a prog rock album should have. It's all about mystery of the gods. What ultimately blew me away was the huge sound for a three-piece band. Geddy Lee's voice, of course, is something very unusual. The first side is officially one song swerving back and forth with changes and atmosphere. The first 12 minutes, with its twists and turns, leads to a spooky three minutes before they stomp back again into what is my favourite piece of Rush music, bar none.

"It made a huge impact on me as a teenager, and to this day still does. The song finishes with beautifully sweet lyrics showing all the sides of Rush that we love. Neil Peart really is a poet, and has the talent of making lyrics timeless. They seem as poignant now as they would have been when the gods were creating the universe."

KEVIN NIXON



JOE ELLIOTT
DEF LEPPARD

"I saw Rush play *Xanadu* live at their first ever UK gig. This was at the Sheffield City Hall back in 1977. It was the solitary new song they played on that tour, and as I already had the live album *All The World's A Stage*, which is pretty much what they played, the only thing I wasn't familiar with. But it stood out as an epic piece. It's 11 minutes long and musically meandering from quiet to very loud all the way through… Amazing stuff."

JORDI VIDAL/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

MIKKO VON HERTZEN

"I went to this music-oriented high school back in the day called Sibelius High. *Moving Pictures* was a big thing for us. There, we had band with my elder brother Kie, which was called Venus Flytrap, a prog band with time signatures that would throw off even ourselves occasionally. Inspired by the Morse code of *YYZ*, we started our gigs with this awkward instrumental piece of music which in fact was the Morse code of our band's name. We thought it was cool. I don't think many people agreed."

NIALL MATHEWSON
PALLAS

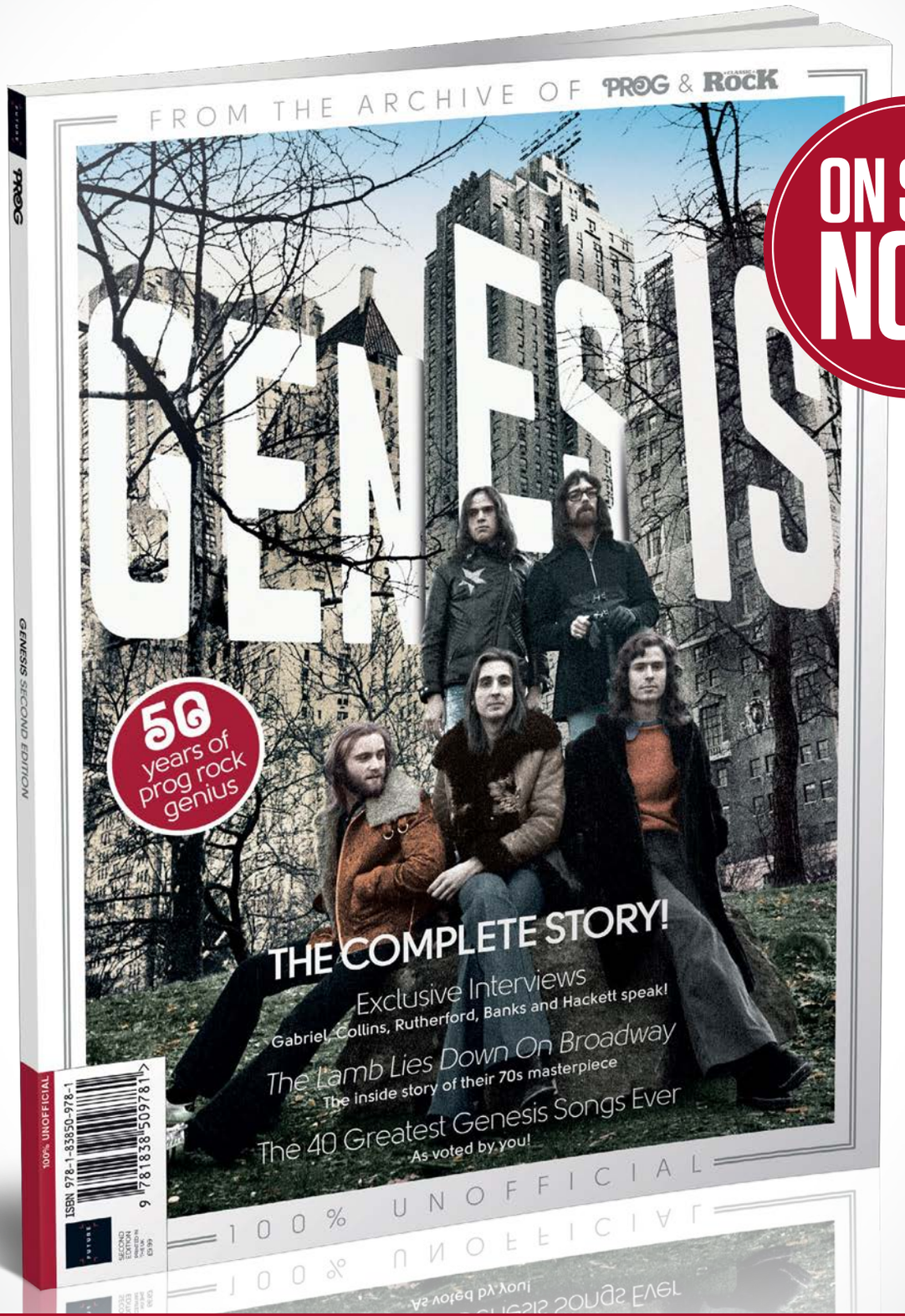
"There are two Rush tracks that had a big influence on me as a songwriter. *The Big Money* — I love the premise and drive of this track. *Manhattan Project* — this track was so powerful live and, for me, the imagery that goes with it is just brilliant. And scary."

GRUTLE KJELLSON
ENSLAVED

"I've picked a Rush fave for this that has little to do with the classics. Today, my Rush song is one of the hits of my youth; one of the legendary songs on the *Hear 'n Aid* [famine relief] album. You know, when heavy guys used to care: *Distant Early Warning*. Not necessarily the best Rush song, but the best of the 80s."

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RUSH



The 1990s & 2000s

From triumph to tragedy and back again: how Rush survived their darkest period. Plus: up close and personal with Alex Lifeson.

BIG JOHN

Grace Under Pressure

The 1990s brought new focus and stability for Rush – and a return to the sound fans wanted to hear. But a series of unimaginable tragedies would threaten the very future of the band.

Words: Dave Everley **Image:** IconicPix

June 28, 2002, was one of the most emotional nights in Rush's long and illustrious history. The band were kicking off the tour in support of their 17th studio album, *Vapor Trails*, at the Meadows Music Centre in Hartford, Connecticut. Vapor Trails was the Canadians' first since 1996's *Test For Echo*; this show was their first live appearance in over five years.

The build-up of emotion was intrinsically tied to the reasons for their lengthy absence. On August 10, 1997, drummer Neil Peart's teenage daughter, Selena Taylor, had been killed in a car crash. Less than a year later, on June 20, 1998, his wife Jackie succumbed to cancer. Devastated by this double tragedy, Peart effectively quit music. "Consider me retired," he told Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson. He underlined his point by embarking on an 14-month, 60,000-mile North American solo road trip on his BMW R1100GS motorbike.

"As the years went by, both Geddy and I thought it was unlikely that we would be working together as Rush," admitted Alex Lifeson in 2002. "I felt that we had a terrific run, this wonderful experience that's very unique even in the rock world, and if that's the way it's going to end, then I have to accept it and move on."

Yet here Rush were once again. Peart's re-emergence from solitude and grief had sparked the band's own resurrection. And it wasn't just onstage that emotions ran high. Some members of the audience were in tears before the show had even started, while an ovation greeted the mere unveiling of Peart's mammoth drumkit.

The 29-song setlist that night mixed up classics – *Tom Sawyer*, *The Spirit Of Radio*, *Distant Early Warning*, *By-Tor And The Snow Dog* – with more recent tracks, including several from *Vapor Trails*. To add to the poignancy of the occasion, their 1993 song *Between Sun & Moon* was dedicated to The Who bassist John Entwhistle, one of Geddy Lee's idols, who had died the previous day.









As grand finale *Working Men* crashed to a close, several thousand people found themselves caught up in the significance of the moment. "I remember looking out at the audience and there were people crying," Alex Lifeson told Vinay Menon, author of *Rush: An Oral History*. "It was so emotional. I guess it was their chance to purge some of their emotions."

However the audience felt, it was nothing compared to what was going through the minds of the three men up onstage. For Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson and Neil Peart, this was more than just a comeback gig – it was an act of healing. The rebirth of Rush was truly underway.

Rush hit the 1990s with renewed intent. The 'keyboard phase' that had alienated many of their older fans during the past decade was receding in the rear view mirror. If 1991's *Roll The Bones* was hardly a return to the grandiose prog epics of old, it at least presented Rush as something approaching the power trio they were at heart.

Still, *Roll The Bones* hadn't been an unalloyed triumph in the eyes of the band that made it. "[The songs] sounded much tougher live than in the studio," Alex Lifeson told M.E.A.T magazine in 1993.

Rush's gradual drift back to basics mirrored that of the broader music scene. The grunge movement that exploded at the start of the decade had flipped the superficial gloss of the 80s for grit and intensity. Lee, Lifeson and Peart weren't unaware of the changes happening.

"We were loving that whole energy from Seattle and the Northwest," Lee told Vinay Menon. "That pushed us in a different direction. That made us want to be a rock band again."

After two albums with producer Rupert Hine, the band brought back Peter Collins to work on what would become *Counterparts* – ironic, given that the Englishman had been involved on 1985's synthesiser-heavy *Power Windows* and the equally slick *Hold Your Fire* two years later. But Rush were determined to dial the electronics right back this time irrespective of who was sitting at the studio console.

"When Alex and I started writing this record, we kind of looked at these mountains of synthesizers that were being brought into the writing room, and we kinda had this reaction; it was almost like an allergic reaction: 'I think it's time maybe we stepped back from this stuff,'" said Geddy Lee in 1993. "So, we went back to a more simpler, basic way of writing, which meant just guitar, bass, vocals, and drums."

Counterparts was released on October 19, 1993. While it wasn't a 'grunge' record, it was certainly a creditable modern rock record, one that acknowledged the new musical landscape without embarrassing itself trying by to pretend it was something it wasn't. Even longtime art director Hugh Syme's cover image - a seemingly simple diagram of a nut and bolt set in a wide blue frame – was pared down in comparison to some of the heavy duty symbolism of previous works.

The approach worked. *Counterparts* hit No. 2 in the US, the band's highest-ever chart position (only Pearl Jam's record-breaking second album, *Vs*, released the same week, sold more). They even notched up their very first No.1 song with *Stick It Out*, which reached the top spot on the Billboard Album Rock Tracks chart.

The band carried the stripped down approach of *Counterparts* into their 16th album, *Test For Echo*, released three years later. Geddy Lee had used the interim period to spend time with his newborn daughter, Alex Lifeson released a solo album, *Victor*, which doubled down on the more direct, rock-orientated approach of *Counterparts*, and Neil Peart published a book, *The Masked Rider*, about a bicycle trip he took around Africa in 1988, and spent a few years re-learning how to play the drums in completely different manner, taking lessons from jazz great Freddie Gruber.

"I had no reason to carry on. I had no interest in life, work or the world beyond."
Neil Peart



The power of three: Rush in 1996, a year before the first of two tragedies struck Neil Peart's family.



BRIAN RASIC/GETTY

Friends reunited; Rush at London's Wembley Arena on 2004's R30 tour.

For all that, *Test For Echo* was a relative letdown. Lyrically, it was as watertight and conceptually thought-provoking as any past Rush album. "It's about the numbing process that happens when we are exposed to great tragedies and then we're exposed to moments of hilarity," said Geddy Lee of the record's over-arching theme. "I feel that that's the condition of contemporary man now – when we read the paper or when we watch TV, we're not sure if we're supposed to laugh."

But musically, it was the sound of a band on simmer rather than bubbling away at full heat. "*Test for Echo* was a strange record in a sense," Lee later told Vinay Menon. "It doesn't really have a defined direction. I kind of felt like we were a bit burnt creatively. It was a creative low time for us."

Still, *Test For Echo* was another commercial success. The accompanying tour lasted nine months, and even found the band playing the song *2112* in its entirety mid-set for the first and last time in their career. They may have dropped the pace a notch or two since the heady days of the 70s and 80s, but their path remained as steady and straight as it ever was. And then tragedy struck, and suddenly the lights went out on Rush's future.

On the morning of August 10, 1997, just a few weeks after the *Test For Echo* tour ended, Neil Peart saw a police car pulling into the driveway of his house in rural Quebec. The officers were there to deliver some terrible news to the drummer and his wife, Jackie Taylor. Their 19-year-old daughter, Selena, had been killed in a single-car traffic accident while driving back to college in Toronto.

Their daughter's death hit Peart and especially Jackie hard. Their friends rallied around them. "I just felt so hollow," Alex Lifeson later recalled. "Neil's daughter was 19 when she was killed and it just broke everybody's heart to such an extent that nothing seemed beautiful anymore."

The loss inevitably impacted on those in Rush's inner circle: Alex Lifeson later said he didn't pick up a guitar for a year. But there was more tragedy to come. In January 1998, during an extended stay in London, Jackie was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She died on June 20 that year. "I had no reason to carry on," wrote Peart in his cathartic 2002 memoir *Ghost Rider: Travels On The Healing Road*. "I had no interest in life, work or the world beyond."

He told Lee and Lifeson that he was done with Rush, and with music. Lost and grieving, he had no idea what he would do. Then he remembered something his wife had told him while she was ill: "Oh, you'll just go travelling on your motorcycle." So that's what Neil Peart did.

For 14 months, he rode the length and breadth of North and Central America on his BMW motorbike, from chilly Alaska to blazing Mexico, "lost in my own sorrows." He travelled alone, stopping off at diners and gas stations, observing the people he encountered yet largely unrecognised by them. Music – his own and other people's – was the last thing on his mind.

He met up with his bandmates occasionally, though mostly he stayed in touch via postcard. Lee and Lifeson knew him well enough to give him space. Neither had any expectations that Rush would reconvene. "The longer it went, the more I believed that we would not get back together," Lee told the Mercury News in 2002. "I just thought it was a place that he was not going to be able to go back to emotionally. Neil obviously was not quite the man he used to be."

It was Rush's longtime photographer, Andrew MacNaughton, who played a key role in nudging Peart back onto the road to



happiness and, ultimately, reuniting Rush

"Andrew was determined to find a 'match' for this crusty old widower," wrote Peart on his blog in 2012, shortly after MacNaughton's death at the age of 47. The photographer sent the drummer Polaroids of a photo assistant he had been working with named Carrie Nuttall. "I was reluctant, gruffly telling him, 'Not interested.'" recalled Peart.

But something about the "pretty, dark-haired girl" hooked Peart's attention. When he next visited Los Angeles on his motorbike, MacNaughton arranged a double date so the pair could meet. They hit it off. By the end of 1999, Peart and Nuttall had embarked on a relationship. Within a year, they were married.

Lee and Lifeson were elated that their friend had found happiness once more. "He fell in love and saw that there was beauty in the world," Lifeson told *The Costa Times*. "He started to rebuild his life based on that."

It was Nuttall, too, who steered Peart back towards music. "She didn't know anything about the band," Lifeson told *Rush: An Oral History* author Vinay Menon. "But one day she said to Neil, 'It's my understanding that you are a really good drummer and you had this long career and you're about to throw that away at a time when you need that more than anything."

> **"I believed we would not get back together. I thought Rush was a place Neil was not going to be able to go back to emotionally."** Geddy Lee

Something shifted in Peart. He contacted his bandmates. As Alex Lifeson put it: "He came to us and said, 'I'd like to try it. I don't know if I can do it, but I'd like to try.'"

Work began in January 2001 on the album that even Rush themselves weren't sure would ever happen. Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson hadn't been idle during the latter part of their band's enforced absence. The pair contributed a rock version of Canadian national anthem *O Canada* to the 1999 movie *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut*, while Lee released a solo album, 2000's *My Favourite Headache*, and Lifeson composed music for TV ads and collaborated with hard rockers 3 Doors Down on three tracks from their second album, *Away From The Sun*.

But this reunion was something else entirely. Not only was it freighted with heavy emotion, but the three men at the centre of it had to recalibrate their relationship as musician after so many years of not playing together.

"It was a very delicate beginning for all of us," Lifeson told *The Costa Times* in 2002. "We kind of needed to find our place, our positions. The first couple of weeks we spent really just talking, hanging out and getting to know each other again. But once we did, it settled in, in a way that was far beyond anything that we'd done in the past."

Still, Rush resisted the urge to plunge headlong into the creative process, preferring tentative steps. The seeds of the songs emerged from Lee and Lifeson jams, which they passed on to Peart to work out his drum parts. It was time consuming and laborious, but then it had to be.

"The first two months I don't think we wrote anything that we were really crazy about," said Lifeson. "We took a break for a week, then came back in and had sudden clarity. We knew what was working and what wasn't. From that moment on, things started to come together. The record really took on a life of its own at that point."

The writing and recording process took 14 months – significantly longer than any previous Rush album. This was a decision made out of both choice and necessity. "It required patience," said Lee. "I felt that I didn't want to come back after all that and put out something that wasn't as strong as it could possibly be. I thought it was time for us to be as intimate as we could be with our music, just go with our guts."

Despite the lengthy gap, *Vapor Trails* continued the musical trajectory that began with *Counterparts* and *Test For Echo*. Where those albums pared back the keyboards that had defined Rush's sound during the 80s, this time they dispensed with them completely.

"Leaving the keyboards off this record was very important to me, and Geddy was open to that because he knew that I'd often worried about their presence in the band," said Alex Lifeson, who had felt notably sidelined at points during the late 1980s.

Vapor Trails was released on May 14, 2002. Taken as a whole, it was a good Rush album but not a truly great one, partly let down by an uncharacteristically flat mix from the band and co-producer Paul Northfield. Still, *One Little Victory*, *Earthshine* and the moving *Ghost Rider* sat comfortably in the top tier of late-period Rush songs, the latter finding Peart detailing his literal and emotional journey in the wake of the tragedies of the previous decade.

Yet, it was easily the most significant album Rush had made since *2112* – if only because that brought these friends back together as a unit, healing their pain through music. Tellingly, at 13 tracks and 67 minutes, *Vapor Trails* was their longest album to date. It was as if a dam had burst and all the emotion and music that had built up over the past few years had been released.

That the album opened with a brief but instantly recognisable Neil Peart drum barrage wasn't accidental. This was notice, as if anyone needed it, that The Professor was back where he belonged. And with him, so were Rush.

The *Vapor Trails* tour which began with that night of high emotion in Hartford, Connecticut lasted five months - moderate by previous epic standards, but wholly understandable given the circumstances leading up to it. It concluded with three huge shows in South America – the first time Rush had visited the continent. Equally notably, it featured a trio of industrial-sized Maytag washing machines onstage behind the band, which a roadie periodically fed with Canadian dollars.

The washing machines were more than just an amusing and surreal stage prop. They showed that the events of recent years hadn't dented Rush's sense of humour or joy in the music they made.

That joy was never more evident than in their next project, 2004's Feedback covers EP. This was Rush saluting the legends who had inspired them when they were starting out all those years ago: The Who, Cream, The Yardbirds, Buffalo Springfield, Love.

"It was short and sweet and it came up quickly," Geddy Lee told *Classic Rock*. "We've always talked about throwing cover songs into our shows for fun, but we've never really followed through on it. Then a friend of mine suggested that if we weren't going to do a [proper, all-new studio] album then maybe this was a good way we could pay tribute to our past."

After the trials of the late 90s and the careful labours involved in making *Vapor Trails*, *Feedback* felt like a sigh of relief. The darkest period in Rush's career was over. Now it was time to turn the page and begin the final chapter.

“Neil looked as though he was going to explode...”

...so revealed Geddy Lee as the members of **Rush** gathered to talk *Classic Rock* through 2007's *Snakes And Arrows*, the album that would pave the way for their final act.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Image: **Larry Busacca/Getty**

Neil Peart's expansive circle of drums is lit up like it's on display or part of a TV set. In apple red and gleaming chrome, and set on a circular riser, it dominates the dark, cavernous rehearsal room. For some inexplicable reason, its grandeur makes you want to whisper. Neil's in Toronto to rehearse for Rush's next world tour. Although he now has homes in Quebec and California, he's returned east to help construct the nearly three-hour set that the band will be performing throughout this year. This leg, and there may be others judging by the positive reaction to their latest album, will take them to a final show in Helsinki at the end of October.

Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson are rehearsing at their respective homes in the city, emails darting back and forth between the three over what songs to keep and what songs to drop from the show. A band with a 34-year history has a lot of material to draw upon, tricky as that is, then add to the equation their desire to also play material from their latest album, *Snakes & Arrows*. Of its 13 songs, they'd like to play, they hazard, maybe eight. Rush songs aren't short either, even the contemporary ones.

"Without a doubt, the best experience I've had making an album, ever," Peart says about Rush's residency at the end of last year at the expansive Allaire Studios set atop a mountain in the Catskills in upstate New York. Peart's enthusiasm for the band's nineteenth studio album is emphatic, Lifeson thinks it might be their best album yet, the more considered Lee puts it somewhere in their top three and mentions how much it reminds him of *Permanent Waves*.

Peart, with his bottle of water, rolling papers and tobacco propped up on a scuffed and battered Rush drum flight case (you can tell its vintage by the original Rush logo spray painted on its side), originally coerced the band into going there. Geddy and Alex tried to bribe him so that they could stay and work in Toronto as they did for *Vapor Trails*. "We were up to 20 dollars at one point," laughs Geddy. "'Come on Neil, let us record in Toronto', but he doesn't respond to money."

Neil had recorded an instructional drum DVD in and around the grounds of Allaire and had been moved by its quiet beauty and the sound he got from its main room (like Henry VIII's banqueting hall in style and scope by all accounts) that he persuaded the band to let him record his parts there.

"Allaire's just beautiful: high ceilings, big windows and a great view and I need that," says Neil. "It wasn't really up to me to stay because I'd already stamped my feet and demanded we record my drums there. But the first couple of days we were having raging jam sessions after we'd finished up, the kind of stuff that doesn't happen when you're going home but we had nowhere to go but upstairs. I was so surprised because I'd left when we had planned to leave and I went and took care of some things, and when I came back the atmosphere was still so convivial and they were still working on things like vocals at 11 at night. The vocals are the hardest…"

"We were on the plane down there, Alex and I," recalls Geddy. "I said to Alex, 'OK, Neil really wants to do drums here', and he knew what that place was all about, but we'd just heard 'residential'. We were like: 'Can't we do it in Toronto, please?'"

Back in Toronto, at the band's management offices, Geddy's recalling their decision to move into Allaire. His hair pulled back into an austere ponytail, thinly streaked with lines of grey.

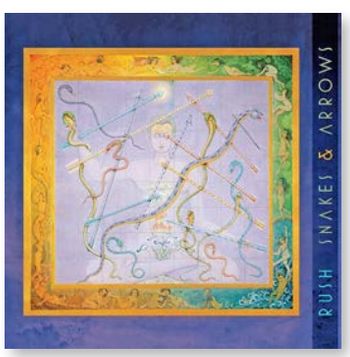
"So on the way down, I said 'We'll do the drums, maybe a few bass tracks and we'll get back to the city'. I was really not happy about the idea of staying; it's not my thing. I'm a curmudgeon in my old age, I like to have dinner with my family and I don't like to work at night. Alex's different, he can go all night long."

"Oh, I wanted to stay there from the second morning," laughs Alex. He's sitting in the front of a bay window of his home in one of the older Toronto neighbourhoods, the window ledge covered with awards; I spot at least two Junos [the Canadian equivalent of the Grammys]. His welcome mat at the front door says 'Go Away' in black capitals.

"Ged had it all worked out, we weren't staying. Then that first night, Neil got his initial track done and then we hung out in the control room until the wee small hours, just drinking and smoking and talking and laughing, listening to some music and just getting the vibe. It just had such a fantastic energy about it, it just felt so right, all of us commented on it. The next day, somebody threw out the idea that maybe we should just stay here for the whole recording and everyone turned around and said, 'Yeah, let's really think about that'."

"It was Nick's [Raskulinecz, producer] idea," says Geddy. "I was not happy about that, I went away,, thought about it and you know, he was right. So I said 'Okay, why not?' And it was really a smart idea…"

Some of Rush's most respected albums have come from extended stays at residential studios, Rockfield in South Wales in the 70s for *A Farewell To Kings* and *Hemispheres*, Le Studio in Montreal in the 80s gave us *Permanent Waves* and *Moving Pictures*. Though, as Peart recalls, even if the results were exemplary, you can understand why Lee might have had reservations about entertaining the idea of recording yet another album in a remote, residential studio. ➢







"In the most beautiful sense, Alex doesn't know what he's doing": Lifeson and Lee on 2007's *Snakes And Arrows* tour.

JOHN MEDINA/GETTY

"I think back to our foolish young days, *Hemispheres* we would have a month, come off the road, write the songs, rehearse the songs, arrange them, record them…" Peart recalls with a sigh.

"Pete Collins [*Test For Echo, Counterparts*] was the first one to get us to work from noon until 10pm and then stop. I can remember being at Rockfield and at eight in the morning walking out into a foggy day, body aching from slamming song after song all night long. We didn't know to say no."

Peart shakes his head, pulls at his cigarette. "I guess *Permanent Waves* was the one that we first went away to write before we went to the studio. It seems elemental, but that's an example of two things; our work ethic, we just wouldn't say no to anything and also the nature of the business. With our success no one was going to say, maybe you should take a week off. The lowest part of our whole lives, with other exceptions in my case, was the *Hemispheres* era, just feeling so bad and so drained."

The "other exceptions" to which Peart alludes are the devastating loss of both his daughter and wife – his 19-year old daughter was killed in a car accident in 1997, and her mother succumbed to cancer a mere 10 months later. Understandably, it's not a topic he likes to address, and is the primary reason he shies away from the media spotlight.

Snakes & Arrows was completed months ahead of schedule. The studio's very remoteness, a realised sense of harmony – which included producer Nick Raskulinecz and engineer Richard Chycki – spurred on the band to new creative heights. Echoing albums like *2112* and *Farewell…*, Alex and Geddy reverted to writing on acoustic guitar.

Feedback, the covers album they'd recorded to celebrate the R30 tour, had given Geddy cause to reconsider the simple components of songwriting.

"We'd become very good at layering and density and intricacy, but we'd forgotten the wide open rock feel that is a joy to play and write. Covering songs by artists like Cream and The Yardbirds reminded me of that," he says. "And Alex really wanted to write on acoustic this time because if a song is lame it sounds really lame on acoustic guitar. On electric you can fool yourself because you've got distortion, you've got power, this whole edginess and this technology that can lull you into a sense of false satisfaction."

Alex and Geddy spent the spring of 2006 in Geddy's studio ("It's got a Scottish bordello vibe to it and a great view of my back yard"), thumbing through Neil's lyrics. In the last decade, Peart's become a travel writer. His book, *The Masked Rider: Cycling In West Africa* detailed his adventures on that continent. One night, haunted by a dysentery dream in the back room of a shack in a tiny African village, he dreamt of a song called *The Larger Bowl*.

"But it was like a sort of Todd Rungren song in the dream and there was of course no such song," explains Peart. "But I thought that one day I'd write a song with that title and I did, but that was in 1991 and I never even handed them to the other guys. But this time when I was going through stuff I took them and thought, 'Why not?'"

Peart later upgraded his bicycle to a red BMW motorbike and still tours separately from the rest of the band, fleeing the venue post show to his own bus. He then spends the following day touring on his BMW before the next night's show. *Classic Rock* saw the band rehearsing in Nashville for the R30 tour; Neil had driven his motorbike there from California. The ID photo on his laminate pass was one of him in his crash helmet. These days he's as likely to have written an article for a bike magazine as he is a drumming one.

As *The Larger Bowl* was conjured up by past dreams, *Workin' Them Angels* was built around snatches of lyrics that Peart had written as chapter headings for his memoir, *Traveling Music: The Soundtrack To My Life And Times*. The collected pieces, pulled together, make up the poem *Traveling Music* that appears at the front of the book. It's the kind of song he could never have written if he'd been sitting at the back of a tour bus, shuttling from one venue's backstage area to another.

"I would not have had the exposure to the real world and real life if I were not on the back roads of America, Canada and Europe, watching people talk to each other at the gas station. All these moments of watching people, encounters in diners and restaurants, it's an observation post of sorts and a wide ranging one at that. I travelled 21,000 miles on the R30 tour. Things I saw and experienced like the evangelical part of the southern States; that went directly into a song like *Armor And Sword*.

Hey, Mr Producer

How a young hotshot took on Rush.

If you could produce any band, then who would it be? Nick Raskulinecz answered immediately: "Rush. That would be my dream album to make. Nobody plays like those guys any more."

Raskulinecz's credits as producer include work for Ash, Stone Sour, Velvet Revolver and the Foo Fighters, but his determination to work with a band whose members are old enough to be his father meant that as soon as he heard rumours of a new Rush album, he had his showreel sent to them. When he heard that the band wanted to meet him, he paid for his own flight from California to Canada just to spend a few hours with Alex and Geddy. "He started humming and thrashing around as soon as we played him our demos," recalls Geddy. "I remember looking at Geddy and thinking who let the punter in?" laughs Alex, "Everything was 'awesome' and 'dude', he was very American and we'd never worked with an American producer before."

"But you could tell he was passionate about the music that he made, that he played us," says Geddy. "And I said to Alex, 'Being around this cannot be bad for us at all'. We just knew."

It's speculated that Raskulinecz will produce Coheed And Cambria's next album. That's the Coheed And Cambria who perform with twin neck guitars and once recorded a song called *2113*. Who knows? He might have some ideas they can use...



Neil Peart: drummer, lyricist, author, biker, exotic hat afficiando.

MATT KENT/GETTY

> "I never see myself as a celebrity. I'm just a guy riding around, worried about my motorbike…"
>
> **Neil Peart**

"I was at a café in Alaska where I met some people and the anonymity I was afforded there, it's totally precious to me. This was Haines, Alaska, a bunch of us were waiting for the ferry to go down to Vancouver and somebody asked a question that someone else knew the answer to and then boom, boom, boom we were all talking. It was so beautiful to be a part of it. I never think of myself as a celebrity so sometimes I'm astonished when I get that because I'm just a guy riding around, worried about the bike, about getting gas, where am I going to sleep tonight…"

Indication of the creative, um, rush the band were on with *Snakes & Arrows* is that the album contains not one instrumental but three. By their own admission, Rush begin each album with the idea of recording an instrumental track very much at the forefront of their minds. But through necessity – a chorus here, a bridge there – the instrumentals are often depleted, broken down for parts like a stolen car in a body shop.

Malignant Narcissism (with its title taken from the movie *Team America: World Police*) is furious and short-lived, Peart playing his parts on a miniscule four-piece drum kit, but somehow he still manages to sound like an octopus wielding a toolbox. *Hope* – Lifeson's plaintive acoustic piece – is the interval at the heart of the album, dividing its two halves. And it's there at Geddy's insistence.

"That's the thing with Al, he's so spontaneous that if you walk in and he's playing something you have to run and hit record, ," chuckles Geddy. "Three minutes later you'll ask him what he just played and he'll be: 'I played what?' That's the story of my entire relationship with him: 'What was that Al?' 'What was what?' He did *Hope* live, we let him have a go at it twice, I actually thought the first take was good enough. I was standing in the booth going, 'That's it!'

"When I'm up at the desk editing or doing my vocals you can hear him in the background either noodling away on his acoustic guitar or asleep on the couch. I've got the demos that we did for this album and you can hear him in the background on them either playing or snoring."

Neil echoes those same sentiments, "Alex can just pick up the guitar and not even be paying attention and Geddy will be like: 'What's that you just played?' And Alex goes: 'I don't know.' In the most beautiful sense, Alex doesn't know what he's doing."

Pleasingly, the most inventive and intriguing instrumental on the album is the most absurd. *The … Main Monkey Business* (and we must thank Geddy's mum for the title) makes *YYZ* sound like a folk song.

"Neil says I spent more hours on arranging *Monkey Business* than any other song on the album," says Geddy. "I couldn't help myself, partly because I was having so much fun with it and partly because it's so weird and I was trying to see how weird I could make it. It got to a point where I succeeded in making it too weird; I was giving the guys a headache when I played it to them."

If there's one thing that unites Lee, Lifeson and Peart when they talk about *Snakes & Arrows* then it's the presence of their latest producer, Nick Raskulinecz. Peart may have been dismayed to find that even Nick's mum was younger than he was, but his enthusiasm (he air drums, air guitars and air vocals with some élan, apparently) in the studio was obviously infectious. He even got them to start using bass pedals again. (Neil: "He was like: 'No one else uses them anymore!' And we laughed about it behind our hands for a bit, but it was totally the right thing to do."). He was the first to suggest they stay at Allaire, remember, and proved invaluable when it came to arranging songs – *Spindrift* and *The Larger Bowl* both sprang to life in his hands – and he even managed to coerce Peart into giving some of the best performances of his career.

"His phrase was, 'I'd be curious to hear…'," says Geddy. "You knew then that you were going back into the studio. We were working on *The Way The Wind Blows* and we're very close to nailing it and I come in the room and Neil's playing the part and I see Nick's face and it's almost like he's stroking his chin, you know? So he asked Neil to come in and he said to him, 'I'd be curious to hear you play…' and he describes what he wants, and Neil says: 'So you're asking me to completely rewrite both verses?'

"Neil had a look on his face like he was going to explode, but he wasn't, he knew that Nick was right. He trusted Nick's ideas, he wasn't threatened by them, he was a little pissed off because his hands were killing him, but he says 'I'm going back in there' and on his way back in he was like, 'Oh fuck, what am I going to pull off here?' Then he realised that he had this part that might work, so he threw that in and you should have seen the room. It just lit up; I was just dancing, yes! He transformed the song, totally. Nick had this big grin on his face and he brought Neil in to hear it afterwards and Neil went: 'Well, when you're right, you're right.'"

THE PROG INTERVIEW

ALEX LIFESON

In 2015, after the emotional rollercoaster of Rush's farewell tour, *Prog* sat down for an up-close-and-personal interview with **Alex Lifeson**. The guitarist opened up about everything from his health and the pleasures of pot to making new music and being on the fairway to heaven. And then there was the big question: was it really, *really* the end of Rush?

Words: Philip Wilding **Portrait:** Gavin Roberts

The last time *Prog* chatted with Alex Lifeson was on August 1 at the LA Forum. The hugely successful R40 tour had finally come to an end and the third-floor bar of the Forum thrummed with family and friends celebrating what might be Rush's last show. Standing among his musical and artistic peers — Chad Smith, Taylor Hawkins, Matt Stone, Jack Black and Stewart Copeland, to name a few — he grinned happily, waving a drink around, making sure our glass was charged before disappearing in the happy throng.

That week we'd watched him hold court at the Canadian Consulate with his bandmates at the behest of Consul General of Canada James Villeneuve and his family. He was, as he often is, the cause of riotous laughter out by the pool. We'd then seen him a few days later still, out under the dome of stars of the Irvine Amphitheatre, an outdoor venue carved into the side of a hill two hours south of Hollywood. He was grinning like a banshee as Rush barrelled backwards through time with a set that marched almost without pause from *Clockwork Angels* all the way back to *Working Man*.

For a man who's supposed to be suffering the travails of aging and arthritis, his playing was as fluid and mellifluous as it ever was, from the broad, chiming sweeps of their last album to the choppy riffs of their first, not a note missed. He didn't even wince when he had to strap on his twin-necked guitar for *Xanadu*.

Lifeson is the perpetual smiling face at the heart of Rush. You only have to watch the outtakes of the band's 2010 documentary *Beyond The Lighted Stage* and witness his gags tying Neil Peart up in knots, to the point where asphyxiation looks like his only option, to understand how pervasive and unrelenting his good nature and humour really are. Geddy Lee calls him "the funniest man I know". He's also, perhaps, the most welcoming. He once brought *Prog* a very good bottle of Scotch and then helped us drink more than half of it.

Spend an evening with Lifeson and it stretches out into dope smoke-suffused storytelling, and there's never a guitar far from his hand. He plays naturally and unthinkingly. Golf, admittedly, he has to work a little harder at, but it brings him joy the way good whiskey, complex buds of weed or a well-tuned guitar do. He's a pleasure to be around.



Flare play: Lifeson (left) and Geddy Lee (right) on the All The World's A Stage tour.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

MAIN: TOTAL GUITAR MAGAZINE

> I write stuff all the time. I have a whole library of bits and pieces and complete songs that I've written at home and in the studio.

That being said, *Prog* caught up with him at home a few weeks after the tour's end, planning a trip to Greece with his extended family. He'd literally been packing his bags when we called. R40's dazzling highs had settled into something altogether lower since the band had gathered up all their things and headed home to Toronto.

How do you decompress after a tour like that?

I went out to our house in the country to spend a few days by myself. I played a little golf and watched TV, played guitar in the evening, just kicked back and tried to clear my head.

Earlier in the tour you told *Rolling Stone*: "I don't think that we're having much difficulty thinking of it as possibly the last [tour]." Do you still feel that way?

I don't know if I do still feel that way now. I thought the tour was great. I thought we played really well, the turnout was fantastic, I thought the set was great, the songs we chose were right.



There was so much about it that was so positive and I think going into it there was the thought that this is the last one, a nice way to go out on top. But once we were in the middle of it or even towards the end of it, it seemed like it was just too short.

At the Canadian Consulate reception, you said you wouldn't mind extending the run of shows a bit longer...

That's the thing, the human thing. It's the three of us and we've always made decisions that way. It has to be unanimous and if it isn't then you work hard to try and make it so. If not then you defer to the one outside. And in this case I think it's pretty obvious that Neil doesn't want to tour any more and that's fine and I understand. He's got some really good reasons: it's painful, it's hard, it's not joyful for him, it's difficult and it hurts his body and it hurts his brain and I totally get it. I'm fine with that.

I just wish we'd been able to do another 20 shows or so and it's too bad that we're going to miss the UK particularly. It just feels a little shy of a true finish, a complete resolution. But if that's the way it is then we'll adjust to it. I think we need to have a little space, a little time off to regroup and think about what we want to do in the future. If and when we want to record another record and if there's a possibility of us doing something in the future, I don't know. The ball is in Neil's court, clearly.

Talking of aches and pains, how are you physically?

I'm hurting a little but it doesn't bother me – everybody has aches and pains. I think if it was really slowing me down and quite critical in my playing then it would be a different story. My hand is sore after a show like it never was before, but it's okay, it's not a big deal – take a couple of Tylenols and power through it! I still have some gas in this tank and I feel quite healthy and good.

And the same for Ged. Boy, I've been listening to some of these mixes from Toronto for the DVD and his playing is out there; it's over the top. I can't believe he's playing some of the stuff he's playing when he's singing. I've known this for 40 years, 47 years, but when you listen to how intricate and how solid and tight he is while he's singing, it's remarkable.

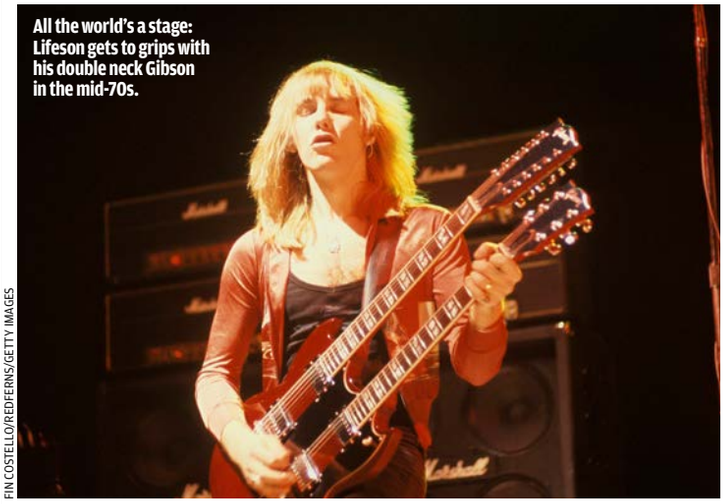
It must have been a terrible shock as a guitarist to get arthritis in your hands.

I wasn't really surprised. Arthritis runs through our family – I knew I was going to be a candidate eventually. I'll be honest, it's been a little bit more of a struggle, but only a little bit, so I can absolutely live with it – it doesn't debilitate me in any way.

You were recently quoted as saying dope was "a creative agent". I couldn't tell if you were being playful or not.

I clearly think it's a creative agent. Smoking a bit of pot and sitting down and creating or playing music is a lot of fun. Speaking personally, I come up with riffs and I love different alternate tunings when I'm a little bit high, and I find I can play for ever and ever when I've had a smoke.

In terms of application, it's probably a bit of a detriment. I think you want to have your wits about you and have a clear



All the world's a stage: Lifeson gets to grips with his double neck Gibson in the mid-70s.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



Alex Lifeson: the perpetual smiling face at the heart of Rush.

GAVIN ROBERTS/FUTURE

> I just wish we'd been able to do another 20 shows or so and it's too bad that we're going to miss the UK particularly. It just feels a little shy of a true finish, a complete resolution.

head when you're performing in the studio certainly, and I couldn't imagine it in a million years before playing a live show. I wouldn't even have a beer before a show – you really do have to be aware then. It's a recreational thing – it's fun to do once in a while when you're playing. It would be very terrifying to do a live Rush show on dope.

Though people do bring you medicinal dope on tour.
It's mostly from acquaintances and friends that I've made over the years. It's not stuff that's thrown up on stage or anything. And also there are three states in the US where it's legal, plus most states have a medicinal marijuana program and these gifts come in packages that are sealed and stamped and obviously professionally manufactured, so it's not a big deal. They're little presents. You used to get a bottle of wine or chocolates or a baseball, now it's pot.

And golf's still a vice too?
Ha! I play a lot on the road. This year I felt much healthier than I have in quite a few years. I have lots of energy and I went out and played almost every day, including show days, which





I never did on the last couple of tours. And for me, it's really therapeutic. It gets me out of my hotel room, which I just can't stand being in — even on show days, it drives me nuts.

So to get out for five or six hours is a real treat and it's an impossible game to get good at, always a challenge. You're always working to get better. It's always one step forward, two steps back, but I thoroughly enjoy it. I invested in a club which I'm no longer an owner of, but I'm a member there and I love my days on the golf course.

Does it help with your insomnia?
Nothing does, really. I sleep less lately, but I'm usually up between six and seven most mornings, regardless of what time I go to bed. I can go for a week sleeping four or five hours a night and then I catch up on the seventh or eight day for eight or nine hours. On the seventh day I rest…

Let's go back a bit. Neil and Geddy have gone on record as saying their lowest point with Rush, professionally speaking, was around the record and tour for *Hemispheres* in 1978, but for you it didn't come until nine years later.
You mean post-*Hold Your Fire*? Yes, that was the lowest ebb for me. I don't think I'd ever consciously thought of leaving the band, but I was feeling a bit lost. We'd just been through Europe and the UK and then we'd come back from Britain and I think we'd recorded the show in Manchester. We had a week off after what had been a very long tour and then it was back into the studio for the mixing of the live DVD, *Show Of Hands*.

The three of us were sitting there at the back of the mixing room with these black circles under our eyes, barely speaking to each other at that point, and then I remember we were talking about taking seven months off for the first time ever.

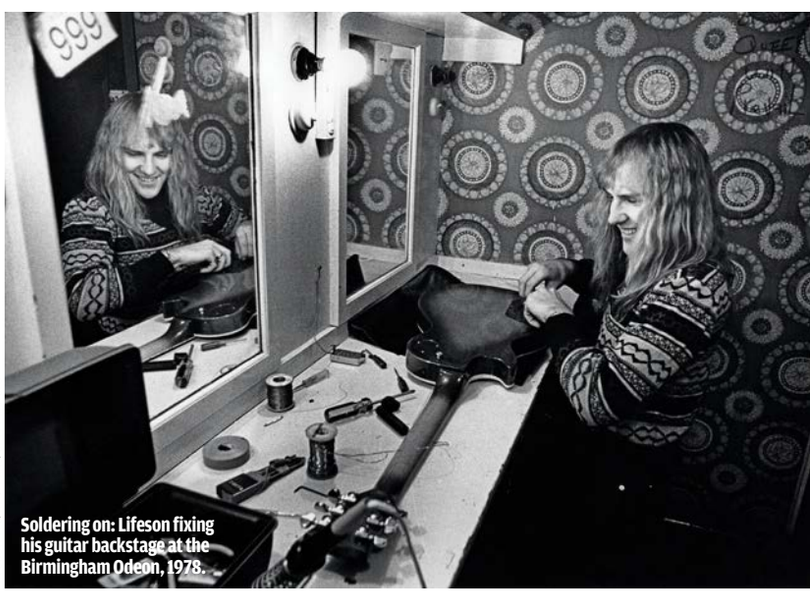
Thinking back on it now, we were selling ourselves short! But it was clear to all three of us, I think, that if we didn't take that break then we'd have to stop. We were completely exhausted. It was a very rigorous tour, very long, and it was when we were using a lot of new technology onstage too. Geddy was really tied to his stuff — singing, playing, the pedals, the keyboards. He had to focus very hard all set; we all did.

That's still a real issue when we plan sets now — Geddy doesn't want to be tied to one place on stage. He needs to roam!

What kind of band do you think you would have been if you hadn't taken the enforced hiatus after Neil lost his family?
Who can tell? It was four years and we certainly didn't stop. I produced and did TV stuff. It was just that playing in Rush at that point wasn't an option. Then when we did reconvene for *Vapor Trails*, it became this most emotional and powerful record. That's why it was so great to finally go back and rework it [for 2013's *Vapor Trails Remixed* album]. We think very highly of that record, but there were things wrong with the original recording, the way it sounded.

We would have done things in a different way at the time, but I suppose we weren't thinking straight… no, not that. It was just very raw, very visceral, you know?

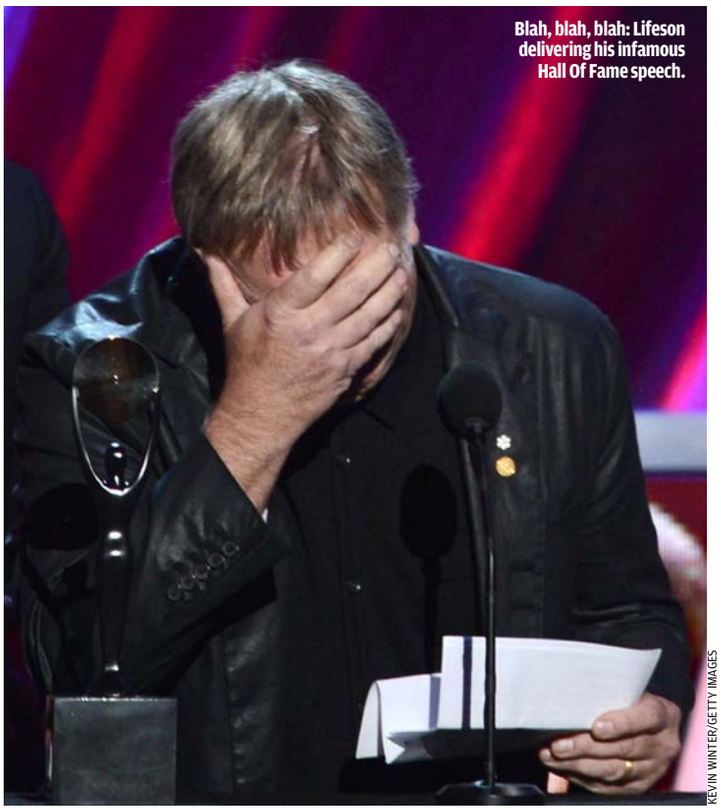
Rush were inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2013 and even though the Foo Fighters came on and performed as you on stage, the only thing people really talked about was your now infamous 'blah blah blah' acceptance speech. We can still see Geddy and Neil's mortified faces…
I had a speech written and I was rehearsing it on the way to the venue and I kept thinking, "My memory is so bad now, I can't remember anything, I might as



FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Soldering on: Lifeson fixing his guitar backstage at the Birmingham Odeon, 1978.





Blah, blah, blah: Lifeson delivering his infamous Hall Of Fame speech.

KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES

well just get up there and go 'blah blah blah'." And then I thought about it and I wasn't sure I would do it until we were walking up to the stage, and then I decided it was the way to go. I knew it was either going to be horrible or it could be a little funny. It was probably a bit of both.

Also, acceptance speeches – how many do you have to hear? They're all the same, so let's mix it up a bit. It's the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, for Christ's sake – be irrelevant, irreverent! Be relevant, but be irreverent!

Geddy showed me a painting you did of you two from a photograph taken in a Parisian restaurant. I don't think it's overstating things to say it was excellent.
Thank you. I experiment with that sort of stuff. As a kid I drew a lot, as kids do. I painted and then I got to high school and was in an arts program there, but I don't have any training per se.

The stuff that I do is to auction and help raise money for the kidney foundation I'm involved with, and it has made me look at painting a little more in detail and explore it a little more. I'm sort of developing a style, I guess.

Have you always been good with your hands?
Yes. In my teens I had cars that I worked on. I had an MG that constantly needed some kind of work [laughs] and then I had a Jag after that that needed even more work, but I've always been handy with my hands and enjoy doing stuff with them.

> It would be very terrifying to do a live Rush show on dope.

You used to go to work with your dad, as a plumber. Can you still fix a leaky pipe in the dead of night?
I could solder some pipes at 3am on a cold Canadian morning, easily. It's all about gravity [laughs]. I'll send the bill for that advice. Expect an invoice.

Your *Victor* album was well-received. If Rush doesn't pan out, can we expect more solo work?
Sure – I write stuff all the time. I have a whole library of bits and pieces and complete songs that I've written at home and in the studio. I think if it looks unlikely that we're going to do much in the near future then I will definitely get into something like that next spring. What sort of project it turns out to be I'm not quite sure, but it will be a musical project. I can't sit around and I just love doing it so much.

***Victor* was a very dark record that came out of a dark time in your life. What would a new album say about you and your surroundings?**
It certainly wouldn't be as dark as that album. There was a lot going on around me when I made that record, personal stuff, a lot of friends who were going through changes in their lives. Just from observation of what everyone was going through, that's kind of what that record came to be. It started out with a much lighter intention when I first started working on it.

I didn't intend it to be that way, but I liked the variety on it – it goes from folk to industrial. But I think the next thing would be much more textural and pleasing to the ear, a more instrumental and mood-enhancing piece.

So it will be more reflective of you the player then?
That's the seed of it, I think. That's what I like about it. I don't think about it, I just play, so it's just capturing all of those bits and putting them into some sort of format.

You ended up in a scuffle at the Ritz-Carlton on New Year's Eve in 2003, and later filed a lawsuit against the deputies that arrested you. What happened next?
I never got any satisfaction. It was a lot of angst and misery for a number of years and then when it was over, I came to realise that when you're in a situation like that, the small guy never wins. Especially against a big corporation and a very powerful law firm who do a real great job for their clients at the expense of everyone else's life, and create so many problems that are obstacles to the path of resolution and justice. And in the end you never feel like you got it, and I didn't.

And what's next for you?
I'll keep playing for sure. I think Ged and I will get together this fall, in fact. I was over at his place last night for dinner and we just chatted very briefly and said, 'Whenever we feel like it then let's get together, do whatever we can and get it going, and then include Neil, see if he's ready for it and then take it from there.'

But if for some reason that doesn't happen then I'll definitely work on some stuff this fall, probably even sooner.

WHEN THE MANIC STREET PREACHERS MET RUSH



When **Rush** returned to the UK in 2007 to tour in support of their latest album, *Snakes & Arrows*, *Classic Rock* asked long-time fans the **Manic Street Preachers** if they'd like to interview their heroes. This is what happened...

WORDS: PHILIP WILDING PICTURES: ROSS HALFIN

By his own admission, Nicky Wire is more nervous than when he met Fidel Castro. Rush are on stage sound-checking for the first of two shows at Wembley Arena. The Manic Street Preachers – James Dean Bradfield, Nicky Wire and Sean Moore – are walking into the auditorium when the long black drapes at the rear of hall part momentarily to reveal Geddy Lee hunched over his keyboard.

"Christ," mutters Wire, "Geddy Lee."

As someone once said, music makes teenagers of us all. And as Nicky and James sit down to interview Rush for *Classic Rock*, both Manics look very fresh-faced indeed. James has his questions scrawled on the back of a newspaper; Wire has pages of A4 neatly anointed with questions and notes. James says that Wire has four obsessions in life: sport, certain painters, stationery and Rush.

Given the Manics' famously dogmatic stance you might imagine that they have more in common with The Clash than Canada's favourite sons. Strange to relate, but Rush have a following in Wales that borders on the hysterical and not even the Manics (who hail from Wales, natch) are immune to it. This journo has known Nicky for a number of years and the last time we spoke we argued for ages about whether *Moving Pictures* or *A Farewell To Kings* was the greater album. Here's what happened when the Manics grilled their heroes.

Nicky Wire: *Far Cry* [the first track on *Snakes & Arrows*] sounds like such a classic Rush record – especially those musical stabs. It just transported me back in time. When you went in to record it, was it your intention to make a classic-sounding Rush album?

Geddy Lee: I don't think we really know how to make a 'classic' Rush album. I don't think it's something we're capable of doing. Just like when you guys get together, you try to do something you like, that tickles your fancy in some way…

James Dean Bradfield: But with *Far Cry*, you must have heard echoes of what people call classic Rush?

GL: We intentionally threw in that chord at the end of it from *Hemispheres*; that was one of those obvious nods to ourselves because we knew it was something a lot of our fans would be into. It was like an inside joke for them.

Alex Lifeson: Nick Raskulinecz [the album's producer] brought this whole idea to us that we should look at our past and see what we can draw from it and not always try to run away from it. Sometimes you forget that those are your strengths. I think he opened our eyes a little bit to that…

JDB: We've stolen quite a bit from your music [laughter]. *Synchronicity* by The Police has a massive Rush influence, and there's a song on the new Biffy Clyro album that's just *2112*. Does it ever annoy you when people lift your stuff? It annoys me.

GL: Really [laughs].

AL: I never think of it in those terms, but ➢



Maple Leafs vs Manics: (l to r) Geddy Lee, James Dean Bradfield, Nicky Wire and Alex Lifeson.



The question about Neil Peart's gong-bashing techniques flummoxed both Geddy and Alex.



"Cymru am byth, you Canuck prog merchants!"

you know you can be subtly influenced by something you hear.I think we go through the same thing…
GL: I think we've written a couple of things that Jimi Hendrix did…
NW: I'm really influenced by Neil as a lyricist, when he joined did you realise that he wrote words?
AL: We hoped he did [laughter].
GL: We didn't find out until we were with him on that first tour. Originally, our old drummer [John Rutsey] was the lyricist. He wrote all the lyrics and he had this breakdown when we were recording. He decided that he hated all the lyrics and he tore them up the day before we were supposed to start the vocals, so I had to quickly write all those lyrics out right off the top of my head. So then when Neil joined the band, we didn't know he was as literate as he is, or that he had an interest in doing that, and when we were on tour together Alex and I were like: "He reads a *lot*…"
AL: "He's always got one of those things – what is it,a *book?*"
GL: So we said: "Neil, have you ever thought about writing lyrics?" He said, no, but he'd love to try, and we were like: "Whew, great." Because we did not want to do that job…
NW: You recorded in Rockfield studios in Wales.I was wondering if you had any memories of it? We recorded there, and were constantly saying things like: "*Closer To The Heart* was recorded on this desk…"
GL: We went there for *A Farewell To Kings* and then went back for *Hemispheres*. We were there for months.
AL: It was a long, long, long, long time…
GL: With *Hemispheres*, we went early to Monmouth and rented a house. We wrote the whole album there, then we moved into the studio and we used up all our time. We still weren't done, and then we had to go to London. We actually used our mixing time in London to finish all the vocals and everything, so we were way behind on that album…That was painful.
JDB: People we knew in the Valleys would go and try to find Rockfield just because you'd been there.
GL: Really? They were great people there, it was our first residential experience and our first experience of British television. In those days there was like, three-and-a-half channels…?
AL: *Open University* every morning when we were just going to bed.
GL: And waking up to the sound of cows mooing and sheep baa-ing outside.
NW: I think they've still got the same furniture there.
AL: I hope so.
NW: Getting technical, Geddy, how do you manage to play double-neck guitar, Moog, bass pedals and sing lead vocals at the same time?
JDB: We tried to use bass pedals and it was fucking impossible [laughter].
GL: Even now the thing I have to practice most before a tour is that choreography between the pedals and vocals and bass. That is the hardest part without question. If I could just play bass that would be a treat!
NW: Growing up, our view of the three Rush personalities was that Alex was the missing link, a renegade…
GL: Well, he's a Serbian, so it is like the missing link, isn't it?
NW: Geddy was organised, but a kind of rock, and Neil is an absolute mystery. Is there any accuracy in what we used to talk about in our bedrooms?
GL: Alex is certainly the most emotional and spontaneous of all of us. Neil's not a mystery to us, we just see him as the big goof he really is [laughter]. And he's very disciplined, he's a total pro.
NW: He's not a bad drummer either, is he?
GL: He's getting pretty good.
AL: He's getting better.
GL: I suppose to fans, because he removes himself from the public eye, he does have that enigma thing going on. I can see that.
NW: I remember watching the video for *Tom Sawyer* on *Top Of The Pops*. Did you realise with *Moving Pictures* that you'd gone overground, as it were?
AL: It was a turning point, definitely.
NW: Was it easy to make or was it quite painful?
GL: *Permanent Waves* was easy to make, and that was just before. Then we started having problems late in the *Moving Pictures* session because we were working on one of the first computerised consoles in Canada



"Me mam sewed that one on, Ged."

NICKY WIRE Q&A

When did you first become awareof Rush?
My brother passed the beauty of *Closer To The Heart* down to me.

What's your favourite Rush album and why?
A Farewell To Kings, my first glimpse into the secret society of Rush.

And your least favourite and why?
The first album – no lyrics from Neil.

First Rush album you bought?
All the albums on vinyl, all owned by my brother.

Ever have a Rush patch/badge on your jacket?
Loads of patches sewn on by my mum.

In a perfect world you pick their show set-list. What three songs would you include?
Xanadu, Limelight, Fly By Night.

Can you play any of their songs?
Pretty impossible, but I can play bits of *Fly By Night* and *Closer To The Heart.*

Alex, Geddy or Neil?
Neil.

JAMES DEAN BRADFIELD Q&A

When did you first become aware of Rush?
They first made an impact on me when their name started appearing on people's jackets at our school and Nicky always went on about them.

What's your favourite Rush album and why?
Moving Pictures, just for those first four songs. The perfect start to any album.

And your least favourite and why?
Grace Under Pressure. I didn't understand the production and I never liked Dali – and the cover reminded me of his stuff.

When did you first see them and how were they?
The *R30* show at Wembley, they played *Xanadu* and that was unbelievable, I got home and wanted to play my guitar and that never happens after a gig.

First Rush album you bought?
Moving Pictures on cassette.

What's the best Rush song to air drum to?
La Villa Strangiato – cos of the hi-hats.

In a perfect world you pick their show set-list. What three songs would you include?
Fly By Night, Limelight and *Xanadu*.

Can you play any of their songs?
I know *Limelight, The Spirit Of Radio* and *Closer To The Heart*, I don't have the patience to learn *2112*.

Alex, Geddy or Neil?
Alex.



"Is that the milk of paradise you're quaffing, Geddy old son?"

"Alex is certainly the most emotional and spontaneous of all of us. Neil [Peart] isn't a mystery, we just see him as a big goof." – Geddy Lee

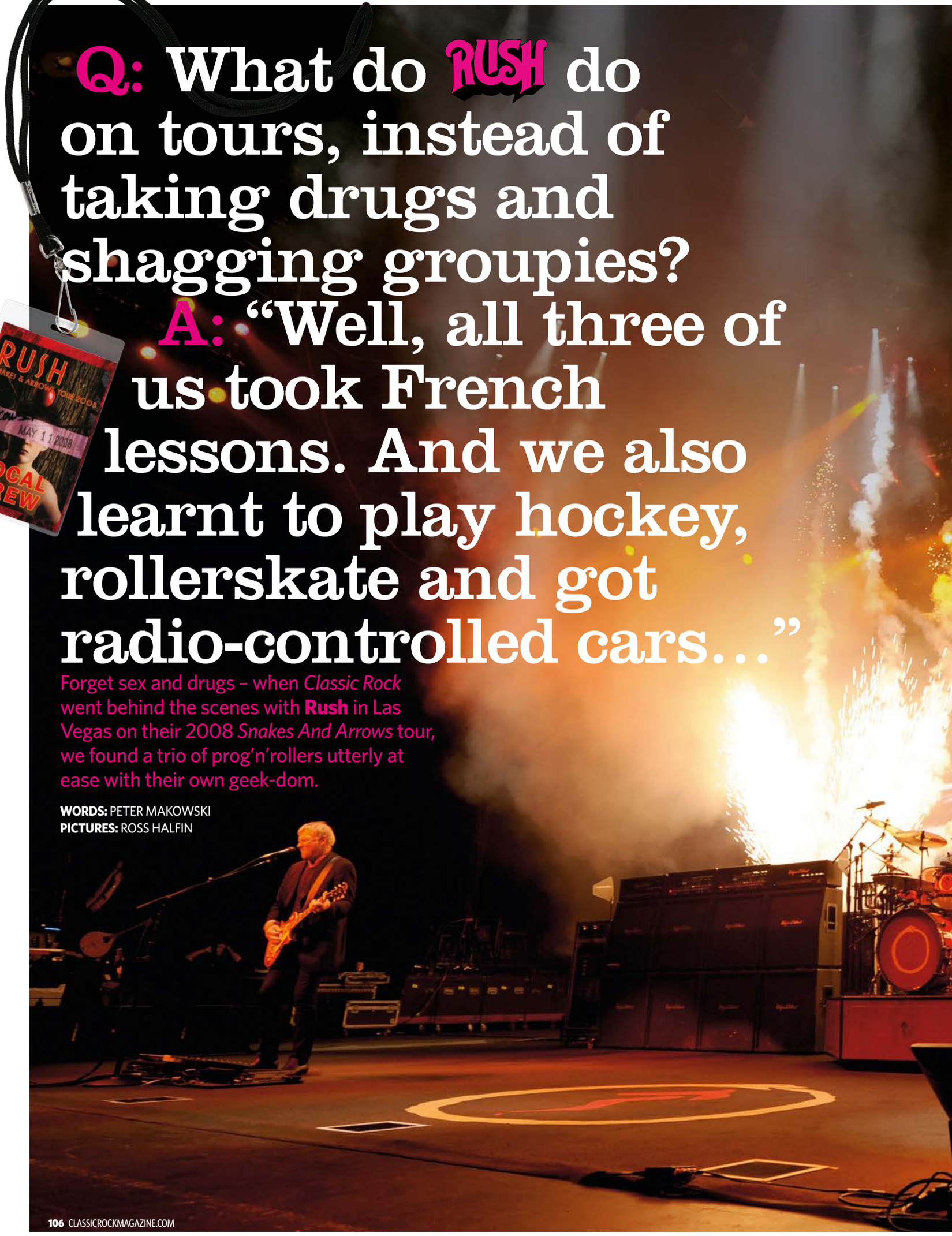
and it was starting to freak out. We had to shut down the mixing session for a while and they had to send someone from England to recalibrate the console.
AL: My recollection is of it being enjoyable. We had a lot of fun moments. I remember *Witch Hunt*, when we were outside in the freezing cold recording the mob scene for the intro…
GL: And that was the night John Lennon was shot. I remember that's where we were, because we camein after recording that whole intro and it was all over the television.
NW: I've got a real soft spot for *Grace Under Pressure*.
AL: That was a very difficult record to make.
NW: I think I can hear the misery on there, that's why I like it.
GL: That was also the first record we made without Terry Brown.
NW: I wanted to ask you about Terry, he seemed like a real part of your family in a way.
GL: He was our mentor, for sure. He taught us a lot. He taught us everything about making records back then, but after *Signals* I think we just felt we needed to learn somebody else's way of doing things. We were able to guess what he would say before he would say it. When that happens, you need to move on.
AL: Yeah, we'd finished school. It was time to go.
NW: As someone who's had bad experiences with producers, have you ever had any?
AL: We've had some difficult times with producers cause they didn't happen to be a producer… [laughter]
GL: We worked with one producer on an album that I will not mention and the whole making of it was very difficult because we found out that the guy couldn't really make a decision. That's a hard thing to deal with when you have a producer and you go: "How was it?" And they go: "I don't know, what did you think?" I'm in here, you're out there – you tell me!
JDB: Geddy, you're one of the only singers I've met who's in a similar position to me in that you're mostly singing someone else's lyrics. Did you have a complex at the start about doing it?
GL: It's never just a natural experience. Once in a while there's a lyric that comes along from Neil that I just agree with 100 per cent and I wish I'd written it, and then that song is never a problem for me to sing. But sometimes there are lyrics that are not exactly in sync with the way I think about things, and that's where I have an issue. But Neil gives me such incredible latitude with his lyrics. Like, he'll give me three or four songs he's written and if there's only a line or two that I love in that, then I'll go back in and tell him that these lines really speak to me and he'll say: "Great." And he'll write that song around it.
JDB: I know that sometimes Nick or Richey [Edwards, original Manics guitarist] will have given me a lyric that I found hard to perform. One lyric I couldn't have sung, even on a basic emotional level…
GL: I have to believe in what Neil's saying and as long as my impression is strong and I feel like I can sing it with conviction, that's fine. But if I can't sing it with conviction then it doesn't matter, I can't do it.
NW: In the *Rock In Rio* DVD there's that most amazing scene where the crowd sing *YYZ* back at you.
GL: *Natural Science*, too. Now other audiences do it. We've noticed in the UK a lot of the crowds doing those same parts when we play those songs; it's very sweet to see that.
NW: I think Rush are one of the few bands to never compromise. You've always seemed to have complete control of your destiny – with the new record, too.I think you've always kept your integrity…
GL: That means a lot, because for many years we failed in doing what we wanted to do. Then one day we succeeded. It felt so good and bought us some freedom. In the early days we got a lot of pressure from the record company. Then we made *2112* and thought, "Well, we'd rather die trying," you know…
AL: And look where the record companies are now [laughter]…
GL: Kick a dog when it's down, right?

Q: What do RUSH do on tours, instead of taking drugs and shagging groupies?

A: "Well, all three of us took French lessons. And we also learnt to play hockey, rollerskate and got radio-controlled cars…"

Forget sex and drugs – when *Classic Rock* went behind the scenes with **Rush** in Las Vegas on their 2008 *Snakes And Arrows* tour, we found a trio of prog'n'rollers utterly at ease with their own geek-dom.

WORDS: PETER MAKOWSKI
PICTURES: ROSS HALFIN



In the casinos of Las Vegas you will find a small but prominently displayed leaflet that explains quite clearly why the odds are against you when you put your hard-earned dollars into the greedy slots of the one-armed bandits that cover the city, lurking at petrol pumps and airport check-ins like greedy, jangling chrome- plated muggers.

Tellingly entitled 'The House Advantage', the pamphlet explains that no ritual, lucky charm or superstition can influence the outcome of any casino game. The results, they say, are "random and always favour the house… This is a form of entertainment at a price to you and should not be considered a way to make money".

Like the equally stark warnings on a cigarette packet, this informative and accurate piece of literature has absolutely zero effect on the millions of people who invade this surreal, glorified excuse for a legal shebeen in Nevada, to make their fortune, get smashed and hopefully indulge in every other form of excess and pulchritude available – on and off the menu. When it comes to self-gratification no one is interested in checking the Health & Safety manual.

But no matter how slim your chances are of returning from Vegas with the jackpot, it's nowhere near as risky as being in a band trying to survive in a precarious business that is on the verge of a new millennium meltdown. You would think that being in a 'prog rock' outfit hailing from the Jurassic ages, your chances of getting through the current great depression would be even slimmer, but somehow Rush have defied all the odds and seem to be doing better than ever.

Their latest studio album – *Snakes & Arrows* – saw the band enjoy their highest chart entry in years and they have been touring almost constantly for the last six years. So it seems appropriate that *Classic Rock* should join them on the road in the rarefied atmosphere of the gambling capital of the US, where they were playing a show at the vast and impressive Mandalay Bay Center – a venue which is usually home to hockey, boxing and other more testosterone-led activities.

"Our progress has been has been evolutionary," Neil Peart is telling us. "Stylistically, so many bands did not survive the 70s, 80s and 90s because they couldn't adapt and for us it was a case of adapt or perish."

They may be derided by the popular media, ignored by MTV and criminally blanked by the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame, but Rush's recent success provides a great business model for up and coming acts. The multitude of management teams, who are currently struggling to keep afloat should set fire to their graphs, sack their ineffective A&R teams and spend a week with these hard working Canucks to discover how to survive the slings (or should that be snakes?) and arrows of this merciless industry and garner a fiercely loyal following.

For this lot, it's all about the fans and the music. And as boring and uncontroversial as that may be for more scandal hungry media, it has kept them afloat and flourishing for well over 30 years. Look at any one of the plethora of fan websites and you will find a highly complex underground network where you can glean every piece of Rush information available and up-to-the-minute gig reports. And if that doesn't satisfy your voracious, trainspotting appetite, then the band also reciprocates with a variety of websites including one where you can ponder over drummer Neil Peart's tour diary as he travails the rugged terrain between shows on his trusty chopper.

"We're pretty transparent and that's intentional because we don't want that mystique of rock stars," Peart explains prior to the show. "I travel through people's ordinary lives every day and if they want to hold on to the fantasy of an athlete or a musician, fine – but I also want them to know what my life is really like. I try to demystify as much as possible and say, 'Look – this is a real life I have and if I'm hurting, that's the way it is'."

Hurt is an emotion Peart is more than familiar with having endured the loss of his daughter and wife within a matter of months, and even though he has remarried and rebuilt his life, there are areas of his life that remain out of bounds.

"There's a clear line to me what's personal," he says. "On my website I don't show pictures of my wife or things like that. I talk about my life in action. So there's a fine line there with privacy and I don't like that being invaded."

It could be the mantra of the whole band. Rush may have an 'open door policy' once you have passed the initial tests (*What's the magazine? What's your agenda? etc*) but they also have firm boundaries which are underlined by the management team prior to my interviews with all three members. It's stipulated in a most diplomatic but equally firm manner that *CR* should not probe into the group's



Rush, May 10 2008, Las Vegas Mandalay Bay Events Center.

personal lives (obviously referring to Peart and also guitarist Alex Lifeson's brush with the police, and the ongoing lawsuits, after a drunken fracas at a friend's wedding party).

We had no intentions of doing so, but the reality is that Peart's personal life unavoidably comes up when talking about Rush today. If Peart himself didn't mention it, the other two members do: the repercussions of the double tragedy that still resonate today and are without a doubt partially responsible for the dramatic rebirth of the band as a recording and touring unit.

Peart documented the tragedies that changed his life – and how he survived them – in his book *Ghost Rider*. On August 10, 1997, he wrote, "my wife Jackie and I had kissed and hugged our nineteen-year-old daughter, Selena, as she set out to drive back to Toronto, ready to start university…" Later that night, instead of getting a phone call from Selena to let them know she had gotten home safe, Peart and his wife opened their front door to face the local chief of police. He had in his hands a fax from the Ontario police force and "we tried to read the black lines on the paper, tried to make sense of the incomprehensible, to believe the unacceptable. My mind was reeling in a hopeless struggle to absorb those words. 'Single car accident', 'apparently lost control,' 'dead at the scene'."

Moments before the chief of police had arrived, Peart remembered, he had been watching a TV documentary about the Mormon trek west in 1847: "It quoted a woman who had survived the ordeal about the terrible hardships they had endured, and the last words I remember were, 'The only reason I am alive is because I could not die'. That terrible phrase would come back to haunt me in the months that followed. It soon became apparent that Jackie's world was completely shattered forever; she had fallen to pieces, and she never came back together again."

As the couple tried to recover from their loss months later in London, Jackie "began to suffer from severe back pain and nocturnal coughing… On the eve of our departure, Jackie was diagnosed with terminal cancer (the doctors called it cancer, but of course it was a broken heart), and a second nightmare began."

She died just 10 months after his daughter, in June of 1998.

By then Peart had long since given up on his day job. "After my first terrible loss," he wrote, "I felt no urge to work with the band anymore, and the day of Selena's funeral I had told my partners in Rush, Geddy and Alex (all of us in tears), that they should 'consider me retired'… Certainly I had no interest in playing drums or writing lyrics for rock songs."

Instead, he took to the road on his motorcycle for 14 months, criss-crossing the continent in an effort to both escape and find some meaning: "Throughout that dark time of grief, sorrow, desolation, and complete despair, something in me seemed determined to carry on. Something would come up.

"Or maybe it was more like the Mormon woman's statement: 'The only reason I am alive is because I could not die'."

The Mandalay Bay Events Center is housed in a massive complex that includes the venue, hotel, shopping malls, restaurants and an infinite amount of casinos. It's a sleazy Center Parcs for alcoholics, gamblers and party animals, populated by hostesses who look sadder than 1970s Eastern European hookers and truss themselves up like Victorian poultry, so much so that their bulging bosoms seem to arrive a few nano seconds before their overflowing trays of complimentary beverages, designed to induce a spree of reckless gambling.

Vegas is a letdown for anyone expecting it to be cooler than the cut of Sinatra's suit, slicker than Dean Martin's oiled pompadour and populated with dangerous Mediterranean types with equally menacing monikers. Instead you get rows of emaciated old biddies stooped over a bewildering array of fruit machines, submerged in toxic clouds of acrid smoke, desperately dispensing coins from what look like cereal bowls overflowing with small change. The place has the sad, empty feeling of a holiday camp bingo hall – with prostitutes. There are no svelte George Clooney look-alikes wandering around looking seductively aloof, planning their next heist. You're more likely to find George and Mildred clutching a two-for-one voucher in search of a Nandos.

But one thing that Vegas does admirably is cater to the needs of the new breed of middle-aged rock fans. The walls are colourfully decorated with posters advertising forthcoming shows which include Journey, Prince, The Police and the Sex Pistols. This is the ideal location for the über fan who has settled down and can no longer justify abandoning his wife and kids to follow his favourite bands and pursue drunken oblivion. *CR* finds Ron, an ardent Rush acolyte from Washington State who has seen the band over 30 times ("first gig 1978"), with his ear pressed against the venue entrance door, listening to the sound check.

"It's great that they're playing Vegas," he beams. "It means I can take my wife and kids under the pretence of going on holiday and go and see my favourite band and get wasted." Plus, he says, "Rush shows are a safe place to take your kids too. There's not too much drug taking and it's not too crazy."

Backstage it's apparent that Rush's 'crazy' period is long gone. In fact it's doubtful that there ever was one. I certainly never witnessed any tantrums, tiaras or deviant peccadilloes on my last encounter with the band in 1982. Apart from a mildly debauched midnight rendezvous with Lifeson, the only other memorable moments of that assignment was an hour long interview with the then incredibly erudite and intense Peart, that left me with a lingering, painful migraine (fortunately the great man has mellowed out since then) and the fact that Geddy Lee won a bet against Geoff Barton (then *Sounds* Editor, now *CR*'s Editor At Large) who was convinced that the normally reticent and camera shy bassist wouldn't allow photographer Ross Halfin to take his picture for the cover of *Sounds*. (He did and can be seen beaming on the cover, right, holding up a plate with the words 'Barton You Lose', scrawled in felt tip by yours truly.) But there were no demolished hotel rooms, tramlines of cocaine or mud sharks.

As Geddy pointed out at the time: "I like to think that we try to maintain a realistic, well-balanced outlook in this business. We've avoided burning out so far, because there's been too many bad, sad examples around us – people who've lost contact with reality. It's scary watching that. The three of us have a desire to keep it alive; we try and avoid these things where we all become complacent. I think complacency is the biggest fear we all have."

So what do Rush do to pass the time on tours, instead of the usual rounds of substance-inspired interior-decoration and defiling of groupies?

"Well for two tours all three of us took French lessons from Berlitz, because we were working in Quebec for a lot of the time," explains Peart. "We also learnt to play hockey, rollerskate and got radio controlled cars. All these were attempts to make more of a life.

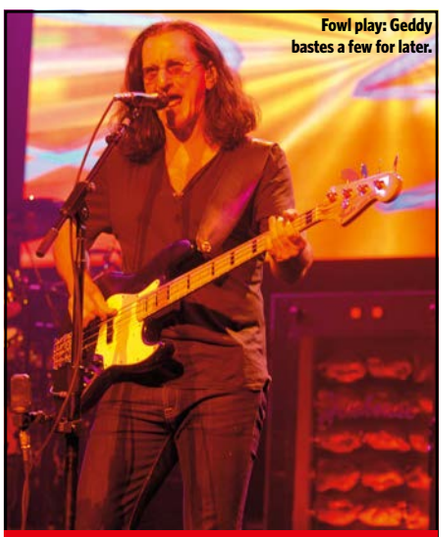
"I don't really like touring but it makes me a better musician," he admits between deep drags on a pre-show cigarette. "I love rehearsing, and I love preparing for the tour and also the first few shows. But then after that it's like all these months of my life are spent basically doing the same thing. That's why I got into bicycling and motorcycles – I needed more out of life. I just did an interview with someone and I was saying that touring isn't any kind of life and he asked when did I start feeling that way, thinking I had become all cynical. I said, '1974 – within a month of the first tour'."

It could be the 'road fatigue' talking. Neil admits that the band is 'all worn down'. "Look," he laughs, "my sunglasses are being held together with tape and I have a callous on my finger that I'm treating with Super Glue."

The fact is that these days it's necessary to take your music to the people and it's the reason Rush are still thriving. They have always been a highly efficient, well-oiled touring unit, unaffected by outside forces and although the band are beginning to feel the effects of constant touring, they still seem fired up by the fact that there is an audience out there that wants to see them.

"We're doing more gigs than we've done for a long time," explained a tired but surprisingly exuberant Lee. "It's due to the way that *Snakes & Arrows* is being received and the fact that we're really enjoying playing it. We've also gone back to a lot of places that we haven't played in about 20 years."

The audience is also getting younger which was apparent at the show later in the evening. There's a generation out there discovering classic rock bands through their parents' record collections and the recent spate of proactive computer games like *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero*.



Fowl play: Geddy bastes a few for later.

Geddy Lee Spit Roast

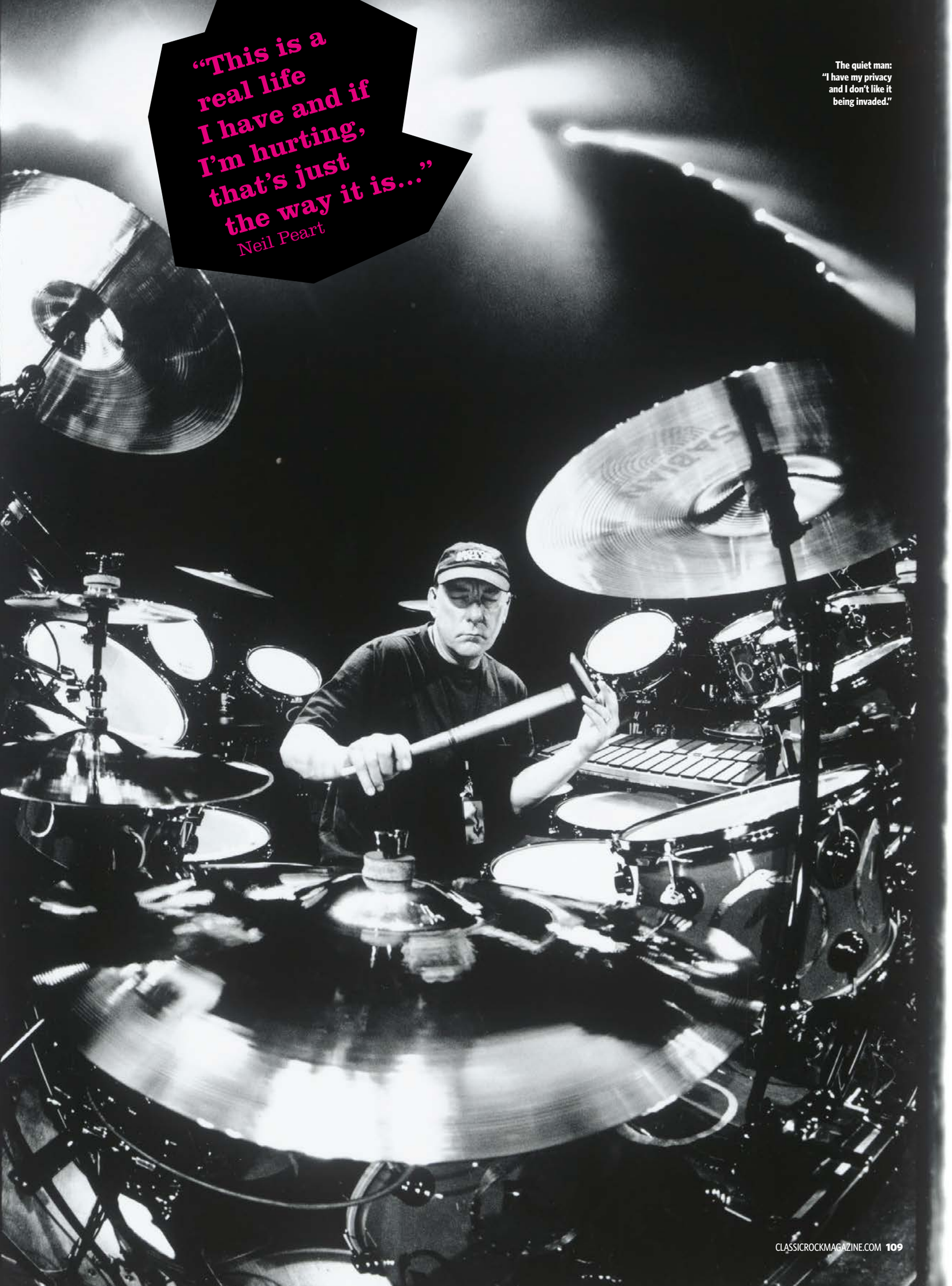
Buck-buck-buckcock!

Only the visually impaired or severely stoned Rush fans could fail to notice Geddy Lee's bizarre selection of backline equipment. On previous tours his bass has been powered by amplifiers disguised as fully functioning Maytag washing machines. This time round there's two ovens full of chickens on revolving spit roasts, which are basted at regular intervals throughout the show.

***Classic Rock* asked Geddy to explain this bizarre choice of sound equipment**

"Well, I love chicken and so do most of the road crew, so it seemed like a good fit. Before that we had the laundry because it's always important to have clean clothes on the road. That stuff catches up with you after a while, so we tried to make it convenient for the crew to get their clothes done. Jack Black made an appearance and threw all his clothes into the laundry. Everyone is welcome on stage left, whether you need to do your laundry or baste some chicken.

"It's hard to say what we'll incorporate in the next tour, it depends on the need."



“This is a real life I have and if I’m hurting, that’s just the way it is…”
Neil Peart

The quiet man: “I have my privacy and I don’t like it being invaded.”



A show of hands: "Historically there weren't any women at a Rush show..."



The last time Makowski & Halfin did a Rush cover story.

Geddy: "What's great is that we get these young kids coming to our shows and they don't respond to the older material in the first half. But once we get to the second set, which features songs from the new album, they come to life and that's really cool. It validates hanging around this long."

There's also another new phenomenon appearing at the shows, as Alex revealed with a sly grin. "Recently there have been a lot of women. Historically there usually aren't *any* women at a Rush show!"

The fact is that the band have got a strong and loyal fan base, apparently immune to fickle musical trends and economic insecurities. When I toured with them 26 years ago, the US was in the grips of a crippling recession and America had discovered punk, new wave and disco simultaneously, resulting in a mass culling of other genres. Yet Rush were headlining massive sold out tours and selling crate loads of then latest album *Signals*. 26 years on, it's like things haven't changed. Recession? Check. Charts ruled by punk, new wave and dance music? Check. Rush forging ahead regardless? Check.

In both my interviews I asked Geddy how Rush would cope if they had only just formed in such an unpredictable climate, and got almost identical answers:

a) "If Rush appeared now, we wouldn't have a snowball's chance in hell of getting a deal. And you know what's the worst situation nowadays? There are some albums that have been recorded that will never see the light of day because, after all the effort, the company decides that the product has no commercial potential. That really scares me."

b) "Well, we wouldn't have got signed. There's not many record labels that are in any kind of shape to sign anybody. We would probably have to do what we did back then and that's make our reputation as a live band."

Which quote came first? Answers on a postcard please, to the usual address*. In fact a lot of the answers to my questions were strikingly similar in both interviews, which makes Rush either incredibly boring and predictable or totally functional and consistent.

One would guess it's the latter that inspires the loyalty of the fans and brings the audience in droves. In these hedonistic times of the overnight Shooting (Up) Star, where you can't guarantee that wasted talents like Amy Winehouse will make it to the toilet, let alone actually make it onto a stage to perform, it's comforting to know that Neil, Geddy and Alex will always be there with their baffling lyrics, complex time signatures and, of course, solos.

Rush are the product of a bygone era when a group's importance lay in their album-selling potential and bands were given time to grow and develop. The days of acts like Led Zeppelin, Yes, Black Sabbath and Rush are well and truly over.

"You can say what you want about major record companies," says Lifeson, "but the fact is, if we didn't sign to one that wasn't committed to five records then we would have never had the opportunity to develop and grow. The deal with us was 'Let the band learn their stuff in the first two or three albums and then on record four or five they're going to hit it and everybody's going to be happy'. That doesn't happen anymore – everything's on speculation."

"The era of the big record companies is definitely over and it's a kind of free-for-all," Geddy agrees. "This is a good and bad thing for a young band. It's harder now to get a big financial push behind you, but it's easier to do your individual thing like signing with an indie label or getting on the internet. We're living in interesting times," he laughs.

Interesting times, indeed. Do the band find this new technical revolution an exciting or scary proposition?

"It doesn't scare me," is Geddy's firm response. "A lot of bands were nervous of the downloading thing when it first came, but now it's played itself out. A band like us has nothing to fear from that because we have an audience. What I worry about is young bands and will they be able to get out of their internet world and move beyond that? That's down to quality: if they're good then they'll probably have a shot."

In a bid to adapt and improve with modern times, in recent years Rush have released a prolific number of live albums and have been criticised for doing by their most stalwart supporters. Back in the 80s the band expressed their discomfort with the whole concept of live albums, despite having released two high-profile ones at that point. (Geddy was quite vocal about it: "Doing a live album is a really boring experience. Live albums are sort of historical; they're painful to do because there's nothing really creative about them…")

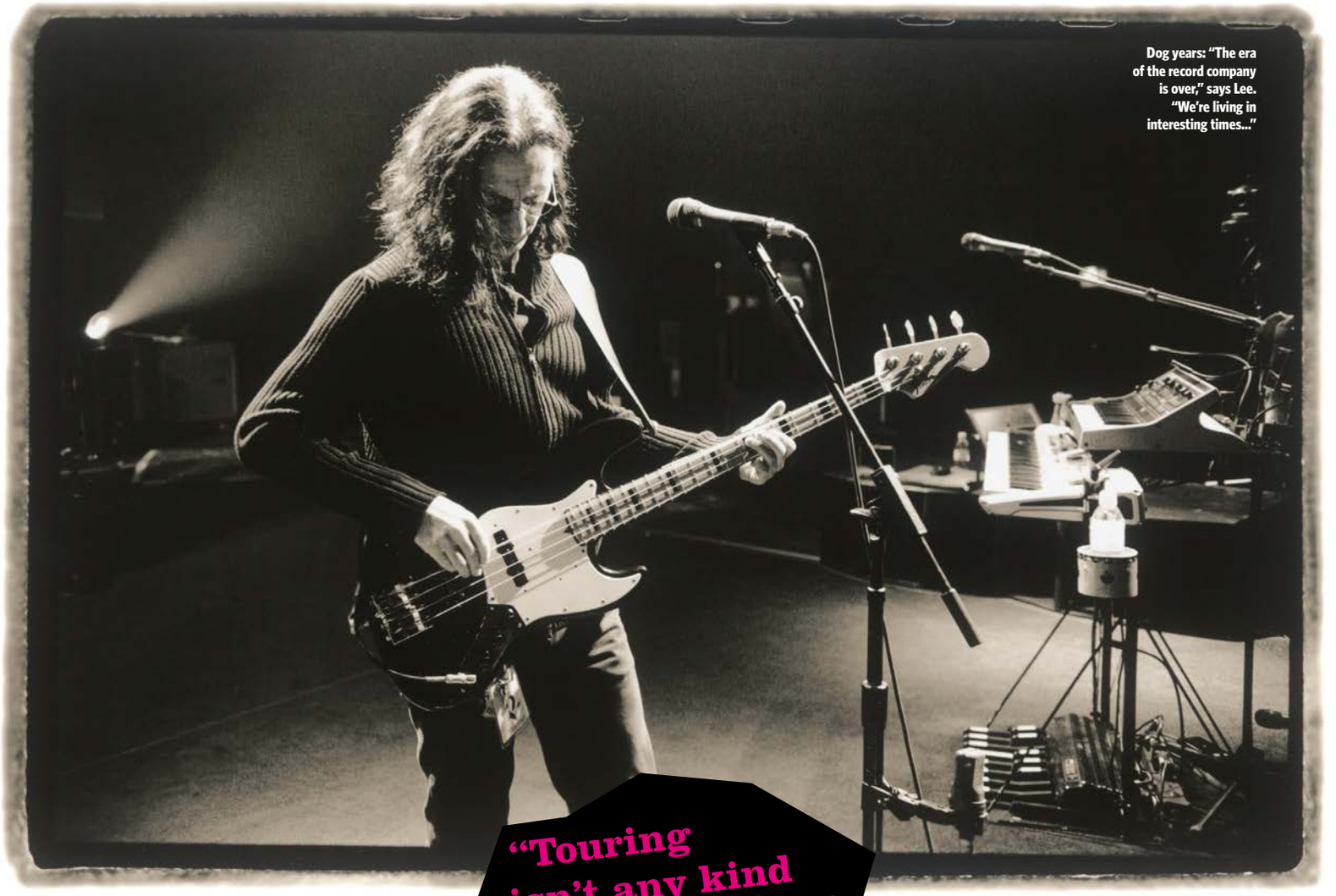
So what prompted the change of heart (apart from the fact that they are a phenomenal source of revenue)? "Well, if you look at what's happening now with technology," says Geddy, "more and more bands are releasing live material as the fans are leaving the venue. We're not into doing that, but we can recognise the fact that if a band can record their show and sell it to their crowd as they are leaving the venue, then it certainly warrants picking a really good show and releasing it as souvenir from that tour. I think that DVD is the perfect medium for a live concert band and I think we'll do one with every tour from now on."

One thing the band won't stop doing is producing and recording new material. It's a vital component of the engine that keeps them moving forward, as Geddy explains: "To consider yourself a band, to be valid, you have to keep on writing and keep creating. We don't do records to promote live tours. We do records because we love making them and want to write music. If it was just down to being a band that toured on our past we wouldn't do it, we couldn't do it. The creative process is as important now as it ever was."

Although the way they actually release their new material may change in the future, as Alex revealed: "We really need to sit down and decide what we want to do with our next record. Whether we do an album or whether we just write songs over a period of time and release them as we go along. That's kind of attractive to me."

While other bands put together package tours to pull in the punters, Rush's current tour features no support bands – it's a three hour show, in two halves, covering a substantial chunk of their career. There are the standards like *Limelight, Red Barchetta, Trees, Subdivisions, 2112, Tom Sawyer* and, of course, *The Spirit Of Radio*, the song that introduced reggae to the head-banging masses and has the veterans in their washed-out original T-shirts frothing with delight. And then there's the new stuff, which is met with head banging approval by the young bloods who respond enthusiastically while the elders sit back and digest their hot dogs and brewskis in anticipation of the next multi-layered epic.

"We have a gazillion songs for you," announces a chirpy Lee, looking like a hybrid of Bono and Sean Penn, dressed in the same clothes he's been wearing all



Dog years: "The era of the record company is over," says Lee. "We're living in interesting times..."

day. When not trapped behind his keyboards and banks of foot pedals, Geddy manages to muster the odd jig across the stage, but the group's focus is primarily on the music – stage presence is not their forte. They are the ultimate über nerds who spent their formative years practising and jamming in their bedrooms to the latest prog rock masterpiece – and now create the music that will have the *next* generation of nerds practising and jamming in *their* bedrooms.

> **"Touring isn't any kind of life. I realised that back in 1974..."**
> Neil Peart

They may be unable to resist a time change – it's like a musical form of tourettes which can sometimes bury the potential of some great tunes – but overall they avoid the worst excesses of their predecessors (Yes, ELP etc) and have a commercial sensibility that ensures the crowd stays engaged throughout. There is also a spectacular light show and back projections which alternate between the cinematic, dramatic and humorous with the inclusion of South Park characters.

This along with with Geddy's customised backline, which is a fully functioning chicken roaster, add a bit of levity to the proceedings.

Peart agrees: "I love the comedy aspect we put in the show and I would love to do more. It's always been a part of our repertoire. With growing confidence we're less afraid to look foolish."

And, yes, there was an incredible turn out of female fans. It is quite overpowering to watch a gaggle of girls, dressed as if they are about to embark on a hen night, playing air cymbals to *Digital Man*. In fact Rush fans win hands down when it comes to miming, and if you really want to see an enthusiastic if not clinically insane audience, check out the *Live In Rio* DVD to witness a crowd singing along, karaoke style, to *YYZ*.

The Rush show is more of an extravaganza than just a 'gig', and sits comfortably alongside the other grandiose, eccentric spectacles on offer in Vegas – a heavy rock Cirque du Soleil enhanced by raucous grebo audience participation.

"We entertain the audience and they entertain us," announces a triumphant Peart backstage, still coming down from the night's performance. "We do things musically because we really like them and we hope other people will like them too. Our fans can trust us not to cheat."

"The fans are ferociously loyal," agrees Geddy, "and that's due to some connection that they've made with our songs. I don't think it's because of any individual in the band. I think it's a collective thing they get out of the music."

As the glide into the twilight of their career the band seem recharged and more focussed, partly due to age and maturity, but also because after Neil's tragedy they had to sit around for almost five years and contemplate the future without Rush.

"Neil's tragedy was the lowest point," Alex reveals solemnly. "The band ended on that day. I don't think that I even played my guitar for about a year. It just shattered all our lives."

While the remaining members kept themselves occupied by recording solo albums and doing TV, they were absolutely adamant that the band would not continue without Peart.

Geddy: "We might have carried on writing music in some configuration, but Rush has always been the three of us. I couldn't imagine doing it without one of us."

Ask Geddy and Alex to name the highlight of their career and the answer is unanimous.

"It has to be playing the first show when Neil came back," says the guitarist, It was a really, really moving night. At one point we were huddled together at the kit, just feeding off each other. I definitely had a lump in my throat."

At every point over the last 30-plus years, Rush seem to have handled all the pivotal events in their career with a civilised dignity that has kept them out of the spotlight and made PRs redundant. Their pursuit of anonymity and privacy away from the spotlight is probably one of the major factors that has kept them under the media radar and deprived them of the glory and awards. It's also helped them avoid the obvious pitfalls that come with celebrity and allowed them to grow old gracefully.

Somebody should start a petition to get Rush inducted into the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame or at least get them a prestigious Classic Rock Living Legend Award. The gauntlet has been laid – now, dear reader, it's up to you.

The reality is that Alex, Geddy and Neil probably don't give a toss whether they are honoured or not as they are getting enough adulation from their fans, and are also imbued with the old-school values. It's all about the music, maaan.

"We've never made a decision that wasn't genuinely devoted to the music we like," concludes Neil. "That's the way it was when I was a naïve 18-year-old. That's the way I thought it worked – people made music that they liked and played it for other people. That's what we do."

* The answer is: a) 1982 b) 2008



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RUSH



The 2010s

From *Clockwork Angels* to the very last gig: the final chapter in the Book Of Rush. Plus: the ultimate tribute to Neil Peart.

A CRAZY INVENTOR, A SAUSAGE MAKER AND AN IRISHMAN WALK INTO A BAR...

No, it's not the start of a bad joke – it's the 'inner selves' of **Rush**. On the eve of 2012's *Clockwork Angels* album, Messrs Lee, Lifeson and Peart sat down to reveal the secret of their longevity.

Words: **Philip Wilding** Portrait: **Robert Knight Archive/Getty**

The ultra-swish Beverley Hills restaurant is either an extreme exercise in discretion or Los Angeles has undergone some sort of power cut. The room's so dark that the waiters carry small torches, like ushers in a cinema, just so patrons can read the menu more easily. In the half-light, Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee of Rush, various members of the band's management and label, and the man from *Classic Rock* pull back chairs and peer across at each other in the gloom. Waiting staff hover close by, their hands lit up by small points of light, as if the restaurant's home to a family of slow-moving fireflies.

Lifeson and Lee have moved into the hotel across the road while they're finishing the mix of Rush's new album, *Clockwork Angels*, at Henson Studios, a 20-minute drive to West Hollywood from here. As delighted as they are by the way their 20th studio album is turning out, after two months spent recording at Revolution Studio in Toronto, the initial mixing sessions in Los Angeles were brought to an abrupt halt by the death of the band's long-standing photographer and friend, Andrew MacNaughtan, from a heart attack at the age of 47. The band had done a photo session with him the day before his death.

"I remember getting back to Toronto after that first mixing session – we just packed up and went home, you know?" says Geddy, "Andrew had passed and I couldn't sleep and so I got up and was nursing a Macallans, flicking through the channels and I saw that [Rush's 2000 documentary] *Beyond The Lighted Stage* was on. I don't know why, but I just started watching it."

Alex Lifeson leans in to listen, nodding intermittently.

"I started seeing things in it that I hadn't noticed the first time," says Geddy, "listening to things a little differently, because when I saw it the first time I really didn't want to – it was hard to watch. Watching yourself talk about your life, it's not for me. But, my god, how strange to see your life up there on a television show in the middle of the night and I thought about all the different people that can't sleep and are having the same experience I am, but they're watching about *my life*. It's just so bizarre.

"Billy Corgan, he blew my mind. The things he was saying about his relationship with his mother and what *Entre Nous* meant to him, and even Trent Reznor – those things meant a lot to me. You don't start doing this for any other reasons but your own and, of course, 40 years later, you never expected that you'd still be doing it. And then to hear other people describe your work in such a serious light just makes you feel like you've lived a life and that's such a nice feeling."

"That," says Alex with a grin, "and getting over the shock that a filmmaker made us interesting.

"We've had so many comments, like, 'It's a great film,'" he continues. "'I love the fact that they're sweet guys who grew up together and had this dream and they're funny and they're family guys.' It's interesting the things that they latched onto and relate to in terms of their own relationships and struggles."

Geddy looks up from poring over the extensive wine list. "There's been a huge shift in perception of us," he says. "But just because we're nice doesn't mean you should like our music."

There's a pause as he glances around the room. "Though it does mean we get into restaurants a little easier now."

Alex stabs his fork at the gargantuan starter – a crown of seafood that ↦

"BECAUSE WE'RE CLOSE, WE BALANCE EACH OTHER. NO ONE GETS AWAY WITH ANY OF THAT SHIT." NEIL PEART







MIKE COPPOLA/GETTY IMAGES

Heston Blumenthal might have built, dry ice billowing from its centre. The restaurant has comped the table.

"You spoke to Neil today, right?" asks Alex, eyebrows raised. "Did he stop for breath at any point?"

The Inn Of The Seventh Ray restaurant sits somewhere near the top of Topanga Canyon and is today alive with a thrumming new-age version of *Greensleeves* and the sound of a babbling brook. Topanaga's been home to the musical great and the good for decades – an affluent, hillside bohemia that's welcomed everyone from the Doors to Tool into its neighbourhoods.

It's not hard to see the attraction on a sparkling spring afternoon. The tight corners leading up the canyon are worth it to get to the leafy plateau of a secluded main street. That the restaurant has its own bookshop filled with volumes on self-help and enlightenment comes as no surprise. That the soup on the menu is 'created through the vibrations of each day' seems perfectly plausible, especially after the first glass of Californian white and with the sunshine dappling through the trees.

"I thought," says Neil Peart happily, "that we could do yoga instead of an interview."

Just as *CR* is dreading the flourish of a yoga mat and an instruction to do the downward dog, Peart's lays his sunglasses on the table, keen to begin talking.

It's hard to underestimate the impact of Andrew MacNaughtan's death on Rush, not least on Peart. It was his decision to first use the photographer, and it was Andrew who first introduced Neil to Carrie, his second wife. They were, in every sense, firm friends.

"We were very close to him, Carrie and I, to him and his partner, Alex," says Peart. "It was devastating, but more disbelief really. Shocked. It's still setting in. Anyone who's lost someone will know that you keep seeing them. 'Wait, there's Andrew,' you know? I remember he and I attended the South Park Halloween party. This was back in '98. He was an SAS officer and I was Mandy, the English biker chick, a leather-clad, foam-enhanced drag queen. I stood seven-feet tall under a gigantic blonde bouffant. It's weird, I just passed the store the other day. We went to get foam at this place at the bottom of La Brea. Andrew and I went there to buy the padding, then up to Hollywood to get the wig."

Since 2007's *Snakes & Arrows*, Rush have drifted, with a reassuring lack of guile on their part, towards the mainstream. An appearance on the *The Colbert Report* angered some diehard Rush fans when Stephen Colbert 'accidentally' walked on set as the band were in the middle of *Tom Sawyer* (Lee: "Some fans were really offended by that. They've made such a bond emotionally to the music that it's hard for them to take lightly. It was funny, but to them it was sacrilege. Lighten up, would you? We're just having some fun."). Then there was a glowing revival piece in *Rolling Stone*, a series of sell-out tours, a cameo in Judd Apatow's *I Love You Man* and the acclaimed and award-winning *Beyond The Lighted Stage*, which have all contributed to their ascension in the public's eye.

Lifeson and Lee: "To hear other people describe your work in such a serious light just makes you feel like you've lived a life."

Peart's place at the heart of that film is pivotal to the journey it takes the viewer on. Whether it's on screen talking about the double tragedy of losing his daughter and then his wife, or his elongated trek across the American continent as the ghost rider trying to outrun his pain.

"It was such a delicate subject matter," says Sam Dunn now, one half of the production and direction team behind *Lighted Stage*. "We didn't want them to think we were prying, but the fact of the matter is that what happened to Neil did affect the band. They thought it was over."

Sam and his partner Scot McFadyen spent hours with the band and while both recognised the adversity Rush had struggled with, the pair were delighted to discover the band's underlying sense of humour, not least about themselves.

"We had Geddy and Alex in the edit and we said, 'Do you have any feedback?'" says McFadyen. "And they say, 'Yeah, we like it… but could we have just a bit less of us?' There's the Rush humour in a nutshell. They make this serious, cerebral music, but there's rarely a serious moment."

Not least in the drunken dinner that the three attended at an old hunting lodge. It's worth picking up the second disc of the DVD edition of *Lighted Stage* for the extended highlights of that meal alone. By the end of it, Peart has laughed for so hard and so long that the drummer's the colour of an aubergine. "That was funny," says McFadyen. "It was so hard to get the essence in the film credits because we were with them for three hours and they kept getting drunker and forgot the cameras were there. That's how they are together: they're goofballs with each other. And they love their red wine!"

Even the man who's never watched that film is glad people got to see that dinner scene and, in a sense, the band's inner self. "It's good people saw that because it's real," says Peart. "That dinner was incredible. These three guys have been together all this time, but its warm and friendly as can be. Because we're close, we balance each other, no one gets away with any of that shit, that's the difference. When bands start to separate then each wedge can do whatever it wants and no one can say anything.

"If you're going to stay friends then you're going to say something if someone's out of line in any way and we've kept egos in check all the way because of that. You can get an elevated opinion of yourself, but you can't be friends and get away with doing that. If you're going to be close then you have to stay level.

"Will I watch the film? I probably won't, no. I'm not interested in it. I like reading my stories over, I listen to our music from time to time, but I never watch DVDs. I don't look at myself – I'm not that kind of narcissist. And I know everything about it – my parents have seen it and everybody's told me everything about it. I've lived it."

It's a day later and the band are at Henson Studios with irrepressibly upbeat producer Nick Raskulinecz who, admirably, is recording the Deftones in the morning and mixing *Clockwork Angels* in the afternoon. Out in the sunlit courtyard, Lee had stopped to show *CR* Charlie Chaplin's footsteps embedded in the concrete. Chaplin first owned these Hollywood Studios and made both *The Gold Rush* and *The Great Dictator* here. Later, when it was A&M Studios, America's answer to *Feed The World*, *We Are The World*, was recorded and filmed in the main studio here.

These days, since Jim Henson bought the place, a giant Kermit the Frog hangs out of one of the exterior walls and smaller, twin Kermits stand atop the gates as you enter the complex. Alice In Chains's Jerry Cantrell (who sometimes plays golf with Lifeson) is working in a studio down the hall. In the back room, Lifeson and Peart are hovering about as the final song on the album, *The Garden*, is being mixed. As the song reveals itself, each band member ribs the other as original parts of the song they recorded have been dropped down in the mix or removed altogether.

"Oh, Neil, didn't you come in earlier than that?" says Geddy happily.

In the small anteroom swathed with red and yellow drapes, the band are either sitting around or drifting in and out. Neil's just recorded a voiceover for one of the shorter segues on the album while everyone stood around grinning. The mood – after a long mix and the worst possible interruption with Andrew's death – is almost carefree. It feels like the last day of school. Earlier, when *CR* was interviewing Lifeson, Neil had appeared at the glass wall dividing the studios with a handwritten sign that said: "Stop Talking Now!" When *CR* brings it up later, he gives a look of mock-seriousness: "I was obviously talking to Alex," he says.

"Nobody takes the piss out of themselves to the extremes that we do," says Geddy. It's early evening and conversation has turned to the film shorts that are regular highlights of the band's live show. Lifeson, who has something of a minor acting sideline going on – watch out for him soon as Dr Figg opposite Billy Boyd in the adaptation of Irvine Welsh's *Ecstasy* – is, everyone agrees, very keen to get in front of the camera.

"I don't care what else he acts in," says Geddy, "he always acts best in our films. I always think of the most ridiculous get-ups for him. 'Al, how about you be a real fat guy?' He really takes to it. Those three characters that appeared in the films from the Time Machine tour are the three essential character aspects of us.

"When we designed those characters, I wanted them to represent the inner us: inside Big Al is this big, fat, crazy inventor, who loves to eat – that's Al. And Neil's got the furrowed-brow Irishman with the Waspy background and I'm this crazy sausage maker! The wigs are very good too.

"I think it's fun, and sometimes it's funny to watch the audience, especially somewhere like Helsinki – some things don't cross the language barrier. You look out and it's this sea of perplexed faces, an audience of bewilderment. We're going to continue to make them. I hope people like them! The first time I saw Jethro Tull was on the *Thick As A Brick* tour and they were so good playing-wise, but their production was so much fun – they had a sense of humour that kept occurring and it really stayed with me as what a lovely bonus to give an audience that's sitting there for three hours listening to this intense music – and our music is a little on the bombastic side, so I think it's nice to give some candy. It's nice to see them smiling."

"It's always been that way – Geddy handles the visual stuff, I'm our *de facto* graphic art editor," says Neil, who is, incidentally, studying the album artwork on his laptop. "And Alex, he's the musical scientist. We all have our roles in there. Plus, Alex looks dazzling when he's all dressed up."

Nick Raskulinecz first worked with Rush on *Snakes & Arrows*. As a long-term fan, he pushed for the co-producer's role. He remembers them then as a band who were trying to redefine themselves and find where they fitted in.

"I feel like they kind of lost their path a little bit," he says. "They didn't really know where to go and what to do and what to sound like because music had changed dramatically from *Test For Echo* to *Vapor Trails*, and then from that to *Snakes & Arrows*, music had changed again. There are five-year gaps between all those albums and things were really different, so it was, do we try and sound like music now or do we try and sound like us? Are we making songs for the radio? How do we make Rush be Rush in three and a half minutes? That's the standard – how do we keep people's attention? Do we go for new fans or do we please our old fans?"

As history bears out, Raskulinecz managed to help the band embrace the new, but not be afraid to give a nod to their past – the ringing guitar chord from *Hemispheres* reappeared as a motif in *Far Cry* and, even more remarkably, bass pedals were back in the mix.

"To be fair," says Raskulinecz, "they didn't resist any of it. The hardest part about the bass pedals was finding a set because they didn't have them any more. We called a company in Toronto and rented these bass pedals and had them shipped to the studio. Geddy's sitting ↦

MOVING PICTURES

Alex Lifeson's alternative career



Obviously not content with just playing guitar in one of the world's most successful bands, in recent years, Alex Lifeson has ventured into the acting world. After playing the coveted role of, er, Cop 2 in *Trailer Park Boys: The Movie* in 2006, Lifeson expanded his repertoire by appearing in *Suck* (alongside other rock folks like IggyPop, Alice Cooper and Henry Rollins), and then as Undercover Prostitute #1 – complete with blonde wig and lipstick! – in *Trailer Park Boys: Countdown To Liquor Day*. His biggest role to date though, is as Dr Figg in the current adaptation of Irvine Welsh's *Ecstasy*. Alex reveals how it happened.

In Irvine Welsh's *Ecstasy*, you play the shrink who commits Billy, how did that role come about?
Director Rob Heydon is a friend of a friend and we'd met some years ago at a social event. He asked if I would be interested in playing a role. Geddy and I were working on the new album at the time but I had a few days free. I played opposite Billy Boyd, who is a great guy and extremely talented actor and musician. I was very nervous and even though I knew my lines well, felt terribly self-conscious. In addition, I had to deliver my lines in a Scottish accent when I could barely speak English.

You keep up a stream of steady, small roles, what does it give you that being a rock star doesn't?
Most of the roles I've played were casual, comedic moments and they have been fun and comfortable partly because they were light and improvisational. I feel quite comfortable being a bit of a clown. I do feel out of my comfort zone with roles, although rare for me, that require a more serious approach. After our scene in *Ecstacy,* Billy told me every scene can be terrifying for every actor so take a deep breath and don't let fear get in the way.



Would you like to take the lead in something?
No, not a lead role but a supporting role in a Second World War film might be cool. I do like a uniform and they had some great ones.

"IF YOU'RE GOING TO STAY FRIENDS, THEN YOU HAVE TO SAY SOMETHING IF SOMEONE'S OUT OF LINE. WE'VE KEPT EGOS IN CHECK ALL THE WAY BECAUSE OF THAT." ***NEIL PEART***



Who are you?: with The Who guitarist and longtime Rush idol Pete Townshend in 2012.

GEORGE PIMENTEL/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

"NOBODY TAKES THE PISS OUT OF THEMSELVES TO THE EXTREMES THAT WE DO." GEDDY LEE

there, we take the lid off and he's like, 'Whoa, these are the ones we used on the *Permanent Waves* tour and then sold!' I was like, 'You got rid of these? Are you kidding me?'"

Which brings us another five years later to *Clockwork Angels*. A complete concept album – the band's first – centred, in part, around a young man's quest set against a world of steampunk, clockwork and alchemy (Lee: "A concept album – I know, that's what we've been joking about all this time! We kept saying, 'It's *Caress of Steel* all over again. Get ready for the Down The Tubes tour part two!'"). Peart's borrowed from sources as diverse as Daphne Du Maurier, Joseph Conrad and Voltaire's *Candide* to move the story along.

Long-term fans of the band will find much to love: the thundering *Headlong Flight* recalls, in part, *Bastille Day*, while the expansive, multi-layered and intricate title track is as good as anything the band has ever recorded.

Peart says he hopes that song will be in their live show forever. "What was it that Oscar Wilde said: self-plagiarism is style?" says Peart. "We certainly do a few tongue-in-cheek nods to *Bastille Day* in *Headlong Flight* – that's deliberate.

"I got to reference my teacher and friend Freddie Gruber, who died last year, in there too. He gave me that line from the song, '*I wish I could do it all again*', because there he is, 84, he grew up in New York in the 40s, worked out through Chicago and Vegas in the 50s, LA in the 60s and since then his path has crossed with everybody. His response to it all was, 'I've had quite a ride – I wish I could do it all again.' So I got to make it personal, but universal too, you know?

"The starting point with the concept was the steampunk idea. I love how it's a direct counterpoint to cyberpunk – it's like a different vision of the future. So I was enthralled by that theme and my character's journey through this world. I also had in mind Voltaire's *Candide* too, that was a germ of it. Plus there was so much stuff I'd been reading about the circus stuff, which became *Carnies*, from Robertson Davies' novels. And I'd read a lot of history from the south-western part of the US and that figured into the story of the explorer Coronado, who kept going out into the desert to find the fabled cities of gold. And *The Wreckers* was actually from Daphne Du Maurier – that's been in my mind for 30 years. I guess it's an episode in *Jamaica Inn*. So all of that coalesced into the character and the history of the story, the whole concept."

Almost 40 years into their career, Rush are changing the way they get things done. The *Time Machine* tour saw them improvising, for the first time, live on stage. Each night, *Working Man* became an exercise in pushing things as far as they could go. That transferred to this latest album. For the first time ever, Peart didn't prepare his drum parts but just came in and played them live: 75 per cent of his playing on *Clockwork Angels* is improvised and was done in one take.

Lifeson says as he's 58 now, he couldn't give a shit about how people perceive him or the way the band works. His attitude, happily, appears to be spreading to the rest of his bandmates. "Certainly, a lot of it is confidence too – we feel very confident in our playing and where we are and where we're going," he says. "I've got nothing to prove – I'm just going to do what I'm going to do and let it go. And that's what happened. Ged and I were getting these drum tracks back from Neil and were like, 'My god, that's amazing – he never plays like this!' There are so many parts and so many cool things and consequently, that gets you all fired up and you try a bunch of different things.

"Hence Ged and I swapping instruments on *The Wreckers*. We were on a break



C FLANIGAN/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

"Wherever we play, that's our show": Rush on the *Clockwork Angels* tour.

"I'VE GOT NOTHING TO PROVE – I'M JUST GOING TO DO WHAT I'M GOING TO DO." ALEX LIFESON

and Ged picked up one of my guitars and he started messing around, and I remember he got up and came back with some lyrics. Then he sat in the corner playing the melody for the verses and I thought, 'Wow, this sounds great.' He just wanted to put it down very quickly and I grabbed his bass and we ended up recording the demo with him playing guitar and me playing bass – it was great! He played on the record, but it's my bass part, which is really cool. When we swap instruments, we sound like Barenaked Ladies, which was a surprise. We had to Rush-ify the song."

Lee says they've never played better live than on this last tour. Also, because of the live jams on the Time Machine tour, they've gone back to writing and working as a band the way they did when they were starting to make their mark on the world.

"I don't know why we took so long to get back to that place," says Lee. "You have ways of writing and sometimes you ignore the obvious. And the obvious always comes back to what you are as a band and we're players first, always. But somewhere along the way we missed that connection on how that playing informs the writing.

"We forgot that's how we used to write in the old days – that's how we wrote *Spirit Of Radio*, that's how *Tom Sawyer* was written, all of us together in a room jamming. So without realising it, our playing was informing our writing right from the get go and then we went away from that. We separated that from what I guess is essentially Rush."

After this record they'll be without a deal, which doesn't bother the band at all. They admit the live shows might be stripped back at some point as the long tours are finally taking their toll, but, in Alex's words, they're going to make records until they die. At one point during the mix in LA, they posit that the next few years would see the band finally playing some festival shows too.

"We were such control freaks for so many years," says Lee, "we didn't want to go anywhere where we couldn't control the environment, so we're learning that wherever we play, that's our show. And at the end of the day, it's about the playing and the songs and it'll be fine."

It's a very long way from the band's management offices in Toronto in the spring of 2002. *Vapor Trails* was just about to be released after the band's protracted and enforced sabbatical after the death of Peart's daughter and then his wife. At the time, Lee had told *CR* that: "I don't think about making more Rush albums really. I want to enjoy my life as much as possible. I know I can't really get on without writing, but I don't know whether it necessarily has to be with Rush any more.

"We did an album and it worked out. Hopefully the tour will be something we won't regret three months from now. I get tired of waking up with no throat and this is the most ambitious tour we've embarked on in 15 years and I hope that's not a mistake. Maybe it'll be the last big tour we do. Don't get me wrong, *Vapor Trails* is, in some ways, the most successful journey that the three of us have been on together so it's very possible that we'll repeat that experience, but I don't want to take anything for granted any more. After all that's happened, how can we?"

Time, as the saying goes, is a great healer. Ten years later, the three members of Rush are re-energised, goofy, having the time of their lives. They still complain about the long tours and talk about cutting the shows back, but never do (Lifeson: "We've been saying that for 20 years – still hasn't happened"), and these are the kind of stories Geddy Lee gets to tell now:

"When we were living at the London Hotel here, while we're mixing the first time around before Andrew passed, right around two or three in the morning I'd be just drifting off to sleep and I'd hear this acoustic guitar playing and I'd be, 'I know that sound.' And Big Al would be out on his balcony, which was right underneath mine – he'd had some refreshment, apparently – and he'd be just playing to LA. He plays all the time.

"And I would just lie there in the darkness and look up at the ceiling with this huge smile on my face every night even if he had just woken me up. I knew the headspace he was in and I knew what he was doing – he was being Al and he was playing to LA. Those moments are forever – so sweet, so funny."



The Rhythm Method

Thinker, theorist, introvert, well-travelled, well-read, "bleeding-heart libertarian"... there was more to Rush drummer **Neil Peart** than just paradiddles, polyrhythms and labyrinthine lyrics, as *Classic Rock* discovered in this 2013 interview.

Words: **Paul Elliott** Portrait: **Clayton Call/Getty**

Neil Peart rarely gives interviews. Rush's drummer has spent 39 of his 60 years in one of the world's biggest rock bands, and as the group's lyricist, he is as much the voice of the band as the man who sings his words, Geddy Lee.

But Peart, nicknamed The Professor, has never been comfortable as a public figure. Outside Rush he has remained a very private man. And in the late 90s he retreated still further, following the death of his daughter Selena in a car crash and the loss of his wife Jacqueline to cancer. At that time, he informed Lee and Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson that he had retired.

Since then Peart has rebuilt his life and career. In 2000 he married photographer Carrie Nuttall, and the couple have a daughter, Olivia. And after Peart returned to Rush in 2001, the band have once again become a major force.

When Peart talks to *Classic Rock*, it's on the understanding that he will not be questioned about his private life. But he talks openly and expansively about his work, his beliefs and his code for living. He is quietly intense, but with a wry, self-aware humour. Highly intelligent and honest to a fault, Neil Peart is a most unusual rock musician. "It's been a very interesting journey for me," he says.

Growing up in rural Canada, you began playing drums as a teenager. How did music change you as a person?

I was very academic until I discovered drums. Then I was a monomaniac about drumming. I was physically awkward. My ankles were weak, so I couldn't play any sports. I couldn't skate and I couldn't play hockey, which in Canada is like football is in the UK. And that makes you a pariah as a boy.

You wrote about that aspect of teenage life in the Rush song *Subdivisions* – the pressure to *'be cool or be cast out'*. Was that song autobiographical?

Extremely! How we turn out as adults has a lot to do with the way others saw us in high school. Consider yourself as a teenager – whether you were treated as a geek, or as a scholar, or a jock, or a good-looking lothario or whatever. However you were treated by others has a lot to do with how you turn out.

Would you describe yourself as an introvert?

Yes. And extroverts don't ever understand introverts. You know that from your school days. Shy people were seen as stuck up. They were seen as conceited because they kept to themselves.

↔




RUSH



Geddy Lee, Neil Peart and Alex Lifeson are honoured on the Hollywood Guitar Center's RockWalk in 2012.

PAUL ARCHULETA/FILMMAGIC/GETTY

> "There's a quote that I use: 'Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.'"
> **NEIL PEART**

That was a subject you addressed in the 1981 song *Limelight*: *'I can't pretend a stranger is a long-awaited friend.'* Are you still the same person who wrote that lyric?
Entirely so. And, honesty, I've never had to retract it. My ability to express myself has grown and evolved over the years. And when I listen to early songs, I might cringe technically, but never psychologically or emotionally. I still mean every word of *Limelight*, however crudely it might have been expressed.

What kind of encounter makes you feel uncomfortable?
If you meet someone at the launderette and they go: "Oh, this is the greatest moment of my life!" I like the motto: 'never complain, never explain'. But I can never resist trying to explain.

There are echoes of Pink Floyd's *The Wall* in *Limelight*. Did that album resonate with you?
Enormously. I totally understood it. Many years ago a DJ played a track from [Floyd's] *Wish You Were Here*, one of the alienation songs that preceded *The Wall*. And he said: "If you're a songwriter and you write about what's near to you, if you become alienated you're going to write about being alienated."

Is that what fame means to you – alienation?
Another line from *Limelight* that grew in resonance over the years is: *'One must put up barriers to keep oneself intact.'* But there is a corollary that I try to explain. Every day when I'm on tour and travelling between cities on my motorcycle, I have half-a-dozen pleasant encounters with people. I've spent a lot of time in truck stops and diners and cafes, very casual, low-grade places, and those are the encounters I have: stranger to stranger, I guess you could say. I love the anonymity of my travels.

And when you're touring on a motorcycle, you must see a lot more of the world.
I avoid motorways whenever possible. The roads I want are the ones that people don't travel unless they live on them.

Do you ride alone?
In America I usually go by myself, but in Europe I have a riding partner who spends months on the road with me. And it's a hugely planned effort to see everything we can.

Is there an affinity between travellers?
People are smiling and friendly because you're kin: hikers, cross-country skiers, bicyclists, motorcyclists. And when you're somewhere remote, other travellers immediately know that you're one of them – that you're cool, because you're there! I've experienced this in the Arctic, in Africa…

And Britain?
I've really noticed how outdoorsy British people are. I lived in Britain as a teenager for a couple of years, and what I learned was: nothing is contingent on the weather. And I've carried that with me all my life. I've ridden across the Yorkshire moors when it was cold and raining; I was suffering. But people were out there because they'd decided to do it.

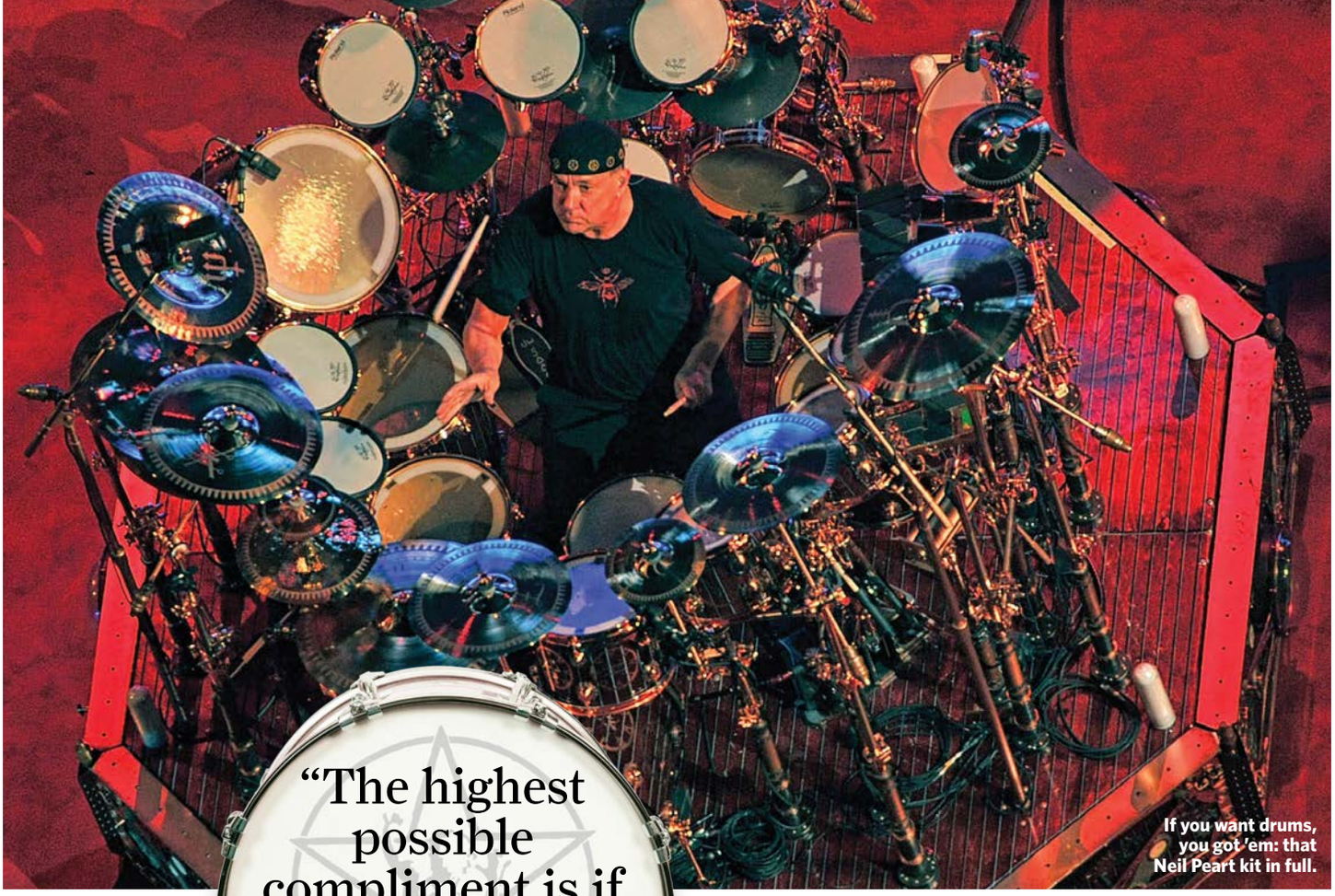
Touring also keeps you from your family.
Honestly, people don't realise the sacrifice you make as a touring musician. Being away when children are growing up and when your partner needs you around, it's wrenching. Your family and friends, their lives continue and you're not part of them. People don't place enough value on family life. It's too easy to get caught up in the tedious day-to-day stuff and miss the miracle that's unfolding before you.

Do you consider touring a necessary evil?
Some years ago I met a wise man, Elliot Mintz, who was the PR guy for Bob Dylan and John Lennon. I told him I didn't really like touring but felt that I had to. And he said: "You have to do it because you can." I thought about that phrase for the longest time. I mentioned it to Geddy one night when he was with a friend, and his friend said: "Well, it seems you have a pretty good life." I said: "It is a good life, but it has a price." That's the reality. I love my job and I love the people that I work with. I am very grateful for that. But I also love my home and family.

Do you feel misunderstood?
I don't like to puncture illusions. I know I represent some kind of fantasy to a lot of people. But there is no fantasy. There's a quote that I use: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle." Most human life is made up of some mixture of happiness and misery.

You were never more misunderstood than in 1977, when the *NME* portrayed you as a borderline fascist for basing the Rush song *2112* on the work of right-wing philosopher Ayn Rand. How did that affect you?
I recall that *NME* interview very well because the conversation was great. And we all felt totally betrayed after, because we had a lovely time with the guy. I remember him being so courteous. It was so amicable. As far as I was concerned, we were just having an intellectual conversation. But these things are wide open to misinterpretation, and that was a classic case.

Where do you stand politically – left or right?
I know where I fall politically. And I define it



FREDERICK BREEDON/GETTY IMAGES

If you want drums, you got 'em: that Neil Peart kit in full.

> "The highest possible compliment is if someone that you admire respects your work."
> **NEIL PEART**

better now: I'm a libertarian, but a bleeding-heart libertarian.

Meaning what, exactly?
I believe in taxation and health care that is outside the usual libertarian mandate, because I don't want people to have to suffer. It's as simple as that. If people are suffering and I can help, I want to. But here's the difference between being an idealist and a realist. Idealistically, I believe that we should help people. But realistically, do I think that government will do that? No.

How do you define 'libertarianism'?
It's enlightened self-interest. Free will. I've lived in the US for the last 10 years, and I wanted there to be a health care system. The little bit that there is, it's a wonderful thing. So that's an example of what I consider enlightened self-interest. That's why I'm a bleeding-heart libertarian. Paul Theroux said: "A cynic is a disappointed idealist." But I'm not a cynic. I'm not disappointed. I've just broadened my idealism.

Most people become more cynical with age.
I must say I've come to grips with that. There are enough good people in the world, enough good books, enough good music. And again, it's about learning from people. In my book *Traveling Music*, I wrote about all the music that had meant so much to me. In Bob Dylan's term: "What music should do is inspire you." But, of course, I had to have some bile in there – for all the stuff that I hated. And my editor said: "Don't bother. Concentrate on the excellence." So I cut it. And he was right. I needed to write it, to vent my spleen, but I didn't need to share that.

On the song *Afterimage*, from 1984's *Grace Under Pressure*, you wrote movingly about the death of a friend.
Afterimage is based on the idea that when someone goes, there are a number of lives they left their mark upon. The death of Frank Zappa was sad to me because the world needed people like Frank Zappa. And the same is true of a guy named Bernie, who I met when he was leading bird-watching tours in a national park. He had so much knowledge, but he's not long for this world, and all that knowledge is going to be lost. That's the tragedy. When some people go, I feel that kind of wrench. That's why I wrote in that song: *'I try to believe…'* But you can't believe in that kind of stuff.

You can't believe in what – God?
No. And I'm well-documented on that subject. In all my songs and in my prose. I was called a faith-basher recently and it went to my heart. I don't want to be an anything-basher. I don't like to make enemies.

What gives you the most satisfaction as an artist?
When I found out that Jeff Buckley was aware of our work… to have been a part of the inspiration for a talent like that! I refer back to that Bob Dylan quote. As an artist, what else can you do for people but inspire them? That is the absolute highest goal.

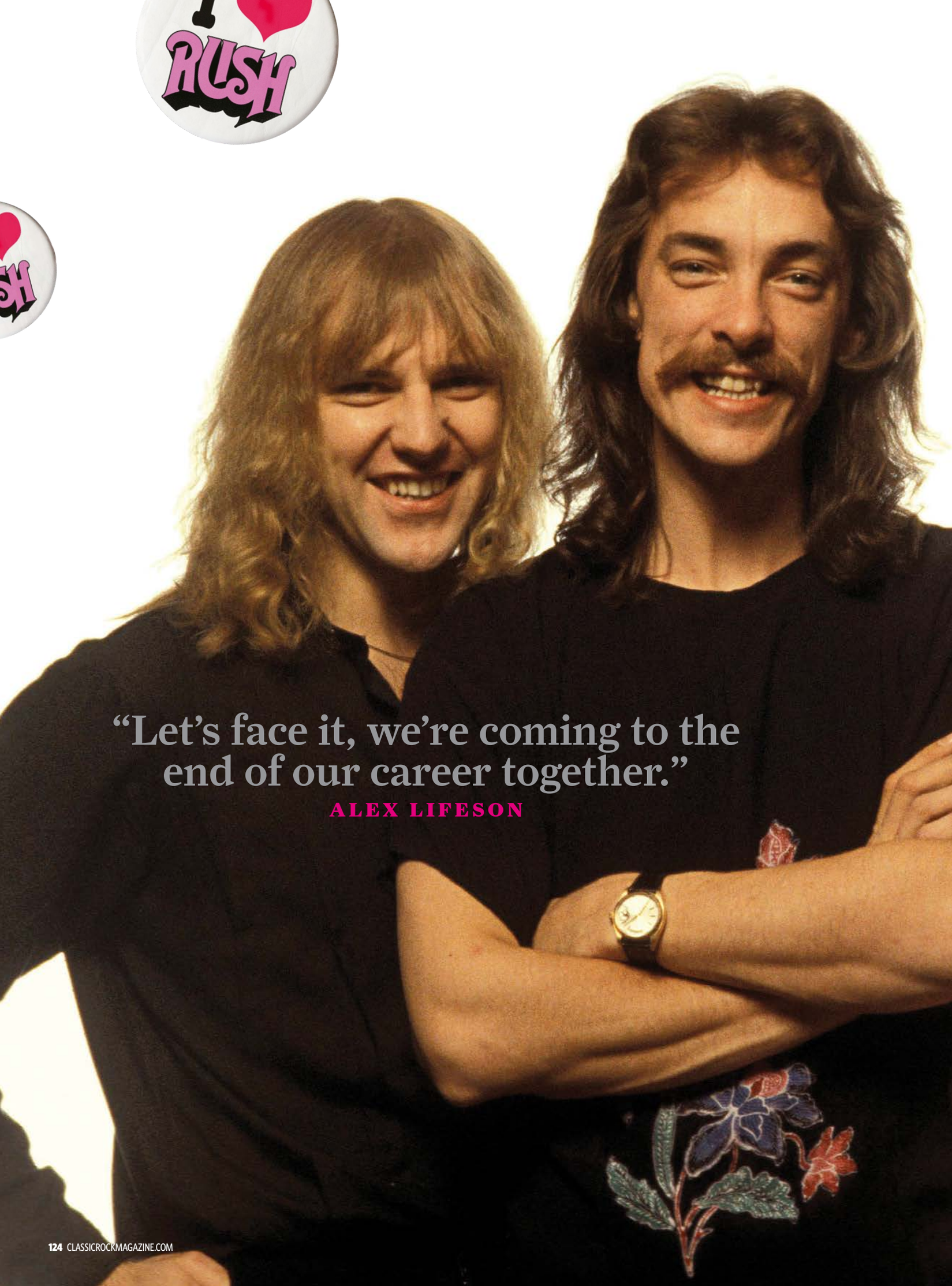
You've inspired a whole generation of rock drummers, of course, not least Dave Grohl and Taylor Hawkins of the Foo Fighters, who recently inducted Rush into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.
The highest possible compliment is if someone that you admire respects your work. To those that have said I inspired them to start drumming, the first thing I say is: "I apologise to your parents.' But it's wonderful just to be a little part of someone's life like that.

Dave Grohl says you are rock's greatest living drummer. But in the mid-90s you took instruction from jazz drummer Freddie Gruber. Why?
After 40, 45 years of playing, I wanted to push myself and open up this whole new frontier. I've been able to do that as a lyricist and as a prose writer, and now as a drummer. You have to challenge your own limitations and your own expectations of yourself.

Is that the secret to the longevity of Rush – the desire to keep pushing forward?
That's the way we've always operated as a band. Always doing what we believe in and believing in what we do, writing songs that we still like 30 years on and can still play with conviction.

Perhaps most important of all, you, Geddy and Alex have remained friends. This much is clearly evident in the documentary *Rush: Beyond The Lighted Stage*, in the scene when you're having dinner in a restaurant and you're all giggling drunk.
I haven't watched the documentary, but I know that in the dinner scene I was choking and crying all the way through it, because of the things Alex was saying. A guy I know told me: "You are Alex's best audience." And I said: "Yeah, I'm helpless around him. He's the funniest man in the world."

And after all these years, is it the ability to laugh at each other, and at yourselves, that has kept you sane?
Yes. The three of us really balance each other out. We're still the same suburban goofballs that we always were. And we're so fortunate to have a relationship like that.



"Let's face it, we're coming to the end of our career together."

ALEX LIFESON

Everyone Loves Rush

In 2013, after decades as the uncoolest band on the planet, everyone from Dave Grohl to Hollywood A-listers suddenly loved the Canadian prog-rock visionaries. So why were they thinking about retiring?

Words: **Paul Elliott** Portrait: **Fin Costello/Getty**



It's in the last couple of years that he's noticed it happening: he's been a famous rock star for decades, but in these past two years he's found himself being recognised in public more frequently. Now it's a little easier, he says, to get a table in a fancy restaurant. Even so, Alex Lifeson is not entirely sure he likes this new level of fame: "It is a little uncomfortable for me."

As the guitarist in Rush, Lifeson is part of one of the most successful rock bands of all time. Since their formation in Toronto in 1968 they've sold more than 40 million albums. And yet, for much of the band's career, they have existed, as Lifeson puts it, "under the radar".

The three members of Rush – Lifeson, bassist/vocalist Geddy Lee and drummer/lyricist Neil Peart – have been playing together for 41 years now. Their brand of progressive hard rock and virtuoso musicianship – defined on breakthrough 1976 album *2112* and modernised on 1981 best-seller *Moving Pictures* – earned them a devoted following that has sustained them through the passing of punk rock and grunge and all that has followed. For many years, Rush have been known as The Biggest Cult Band In The World. Then the strangest thing happened: they got bigger. Rush were always a big band, but they are now bigger in a broader cultural context.

It started with the 2009 movie *I Love You, Man*, Lifeson says. In this "bromantic comedy" there's a ↩



A farewell to kings? Geddy Lee ponders Rush's potential retirement.

JASON SQUIRE/WIREIMAGE/IMAGE

RIGHT: FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY

scene in which its leading characters are seen rocking out at a Rush show and embarrassing a girlfriend with their word-perfect lip-synching and air drumming: so very Rush and their fans. Then in 2010 came the band's documentary *Beyond The Lighted Stage*, in which a cast of modern rock heroes such as Billy Corgan and Trent Reznor revealed themselves as Rush nerds.

And then, in 2013, came the induction of Rush into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame – at which their live performance was prefaced by the Foo Fighters playing the *2112 Overture* in wigs and the kind of white satin robes that their heroes wore back in '76. And for Alex Lifeson, that was the clincher. "The Hall Of Fame changed things," he says. "It's really given us a much higher profile."

The irony in all of this is that Rush have become more famous at the very point at which their career is in the first stages of winding down. The band's 2012 album *Clockwork Angels* was a huge success: No.1 in Canada, No.2 in the US, and widely acclaimed as a late-career masterpiece. This month, Rush head out on a 30-date US tour. But Peart has repeatedly stated that he is no longer willing to tour on a regular basis. He has a young daughter, and his priority is his family. He is also suffering from tendonitis. And he's not alone in feeling the wear and tear of age; Lifeson has arthritis. He says simply: "Let's face it, we're coming to the end of our career together."

On the eve of the US tour, it's Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee who speak to *Classic Rock* about the present, the past and the future of Rush.

Neil Peart is unavailable for interview. He has rarely spoken publicly in the past 20 years, and the reason for this is well documented. In the late 90s, Peart's daughter Selena was killed in a road accident, and his first wife Jacqueline succumbed to cancer. In the aftermath, the band remained on hiatus for five years. Peart returned to Rush for the 2002 album *Vapor Trails* after he had remarried, but relinquished his role as the band's chief spokesman in order to protect his privacy.

Lifeson and Lee have a small window in which to talk. After four weeks of rehearsals in Los Angeles, where Peart now lives, Lifeson and Lee are at their homes in Toronto ahead of a week of full production rehearsals back in LA.

Lifeson speaks first, and for the most part he is in typically upbeat mood. He is a frank and funny interviewee. Speaking to *Classic Rock* in 2014, he revealed that he had used ecstasy during the 90s, and he is similarly candid when discussing the complex dynamic within Rush in 2015. He admits that in recent months he has considered leaving the band, but when he talks about this US tour he's buzzing. "The ticket sales went crazy from the start," he says. "Some dates sold out in minutes. It sent a message to us that something's going on."

Could this tour be the last for Rush?

We'll see. Right now the tour is what it is. Whether we add more dates, I think it all boils down to Neil, really. It's a very athletic endeavour for him to go on tour. He's sixty-two years old. Physically it's difficult. And it's the same for me.

Your arthritis – how bad is it?

I've had it for ten years, and this is the first time I'm really feeling it in my hands and my feet. That's the

way it goes. But it's a lot harder for Neil. He's got tendonitis in his arm. To be honest, I don't know how he gets through playing the way he does, being in that sort of discomfort and pain. But he's a very stoic guy. He never complains.

But there's more to it than that. Neil has said many times that his first priority is his family, his young daughter.
I don't think that's something he even needs to talk about. I don't know if sometimes he says these things because he doesn't know how to come out and say it face-to-face to us that he doesn't want to do it any more, that he's tired of it, that he feels after forty years that's a pretty good run and that he shouldn't have to feel bad about not wanting to do it any more. He wants to spend more time at home and with his family. I get it. He's never been keen about touring. It's always a difficult thing for him.

Is Neil unhappy about doing this tour?
He was resistant to it until he started prepping and realised: hey, I can still play my drums pretty good! And then getting into rehearsals with us, there's that whole camaraderie that he really adores. So when he's back into the stream, he loves the swim.

Do you have similarly conflicting feelings?
The *Clockwork Angels* tour was pretty gruelling, as they're all becoming more gruelling as we're getting older. And then we had a year-and-a-half off. Having the time at home and disconnecting from being in a band, just being Al, hanging out with my grandkids, seeing my friends, all the things that people take for granted, it got me thinking: am I ready now to give it up? Can I be happy being away from it? And it really felt like I could be. Until we started to zero in on a tour. Once the machine got rolling I got swept up in it.

Where does Geddy stand on this?
Now, more than ever, Geddy wants to play. Whereas Neil probably would have quit years ago, if he didn't feel that he owed something to us.

What do you mean by that?
I think Neil knows that we're not ready for the end, and he doesn't want to ruin that for us. Keep in mind: we're like brothers. And we went through a terrible period with him inhis life and supported him and he'll never forget that. I think he feels, as I would too, an obligation to us for having stood by him. So he's not willing to let that go. Maybe now he is. And I get it. It's not like, what a jerk, he doesn't want to do this any more? I get it.

All three of you seem very reluctant to have an official farewell tour. Why?
Partly because it's a cheesy thing to do, but also it puts you behind the eight ball if you decide that you've made a mistake and you want to go back on the road. We don't feel like this is really a farewell. I'd love to make another record. It's such a fun experience.

You feel confident there is another album in you?
Yeah, I think there is. I'm sure if we start coming up with some stuff, Neil would be right in there. He'd love that.

Going back to the very beginning, when you listen to the first Rush album what do you hear?
I hear so much promise, so much excitement. I remember those sessions vividly. I hear Led Zeppelin in it – who we adored. And I hear so much hope for the opportunity to do what we'd dreamt about doing for so many years.

When did you first feel like you'd made it?
We opened for the New York Dolls at the Victory Theater in Toronto in seventy-four. It was an old burlesque theatre, pretty run down and crappy, but to us it might as well have been Wembley.

Rush and the New York Dolls seems such a mismatch.
It was. That crowd was excited to see the New York Dolls; not so much a local heavy metal band. But it was exciting being around the Dolls. Watching them backstage it was all what you would expect.

"I'm as fit as a fiddle. But for Alex, his arthritis is not a small thing."

GEDDY LEE







They were all drunk before they got on stage. They had girls back there. It was a whole rock'n'roll scene. We were typically Canadian and shy and stayed out of their way. I do recall after that gig I was hitch-hiking home with a friend of mine, I had my guitar with me. This couple picked me up, and we were chatting, and they said they'd been to the Dolls show at the Victory and they said yeah, they were great, but the opening act, God, they sucked. The guy's girlfriend turned back and saw the guitar and saw me and her face just kind of froze. It was silent in the car, and I felt so crestfallen I said: "We'll get out at the next block, please." I got out of the car and I wanted to throw my guitar away. That was the first really bad review that we got [laughs].

Was Rush always a competitive band?
Maybe in the early days, when you were so full of piss and vinegar and so excited to play. You played with so many different bands on these two- or three-acts shows. Quite often it was competitive. You wanted to blow the other guy off the stage and be that much better. I remember we played with Heart once. This was very early, maybe 1975. It was at the Stanley Warner Theatre in Pittsburgh. There was so much talk about Heart and the Wilson sisters. We were really looking forward to meeting them. We were backstage, and Roger Fisher said to me: "We're gonna blow you guys off the stage tonight, you just watch." And I thought, wow, what a weird thing to say. But I think I played that much harder that night.

And Roger Fisher didn't win that battle?
I guess, in the long run, no.

Are there Rush albums that you look back at and are embarrassed by?
Often people ask me that about *Caress Of Steel*. But I listened to it not too long ago and I felt proud of that record. It sounds to me like a bunch of twenty-two-year-olds trying to make a big statement. And 'Caress Of Steel' is such a great title.

I thought so. Around 1980 I had 'Caress Of Steel' written on my school bag. People laughed at me.
People laughed at us, too. You were in good company.

Are there particular songs you wish you'd never recorded?
Tai Shan was a little corny. We wanted to do something different, but maybe we had too much of a pseudo-Asian flavour to it. Maybe I should listen to it again. I don't think I've listened to it since we recorded it [laughs].

A pseudo-Asian flavour like the borderline racist intro to A Passage To Bangkok*?*
Well, *A Passage To Bangkok* had a bit more of a middle-Eastern, *Kashmir* bent to it. *Tai Shan* was specifically about an experience that Neil had in China, whereas *Bangkok* talks about an experience we had all over the place.



KISS "& Us!"

In the 70s, Rush embarked on an eye-opening tour with the gods of thunder.

In 1975, Rush hit the road in the US for their first major US tour, as the opening act for Kiss. There was a marked contrast between the two bands: Kiss with their larger-than-life cartoon superhero image and 'rock-and-roll-all-nite' party-rock anthems; Rush with their intellectual prog-metal and serious muso chops. Also, Kiss were bullish New Yorkers, while the guys in Rush were relatively genteel Canadians.

"We were close with those guys on that tour," says Alex Lifeson. "It was their first tour, our first tour."

Yet there was a cultural divide between them that became evident as the tour went on.

"We were so green," recalls Geddy Lee. "Really, you can't imagine how green we were. Being on this rock'n'roll tour, it was like our own personal circus. Watching the guys from Kiss, it was all so funny to us."

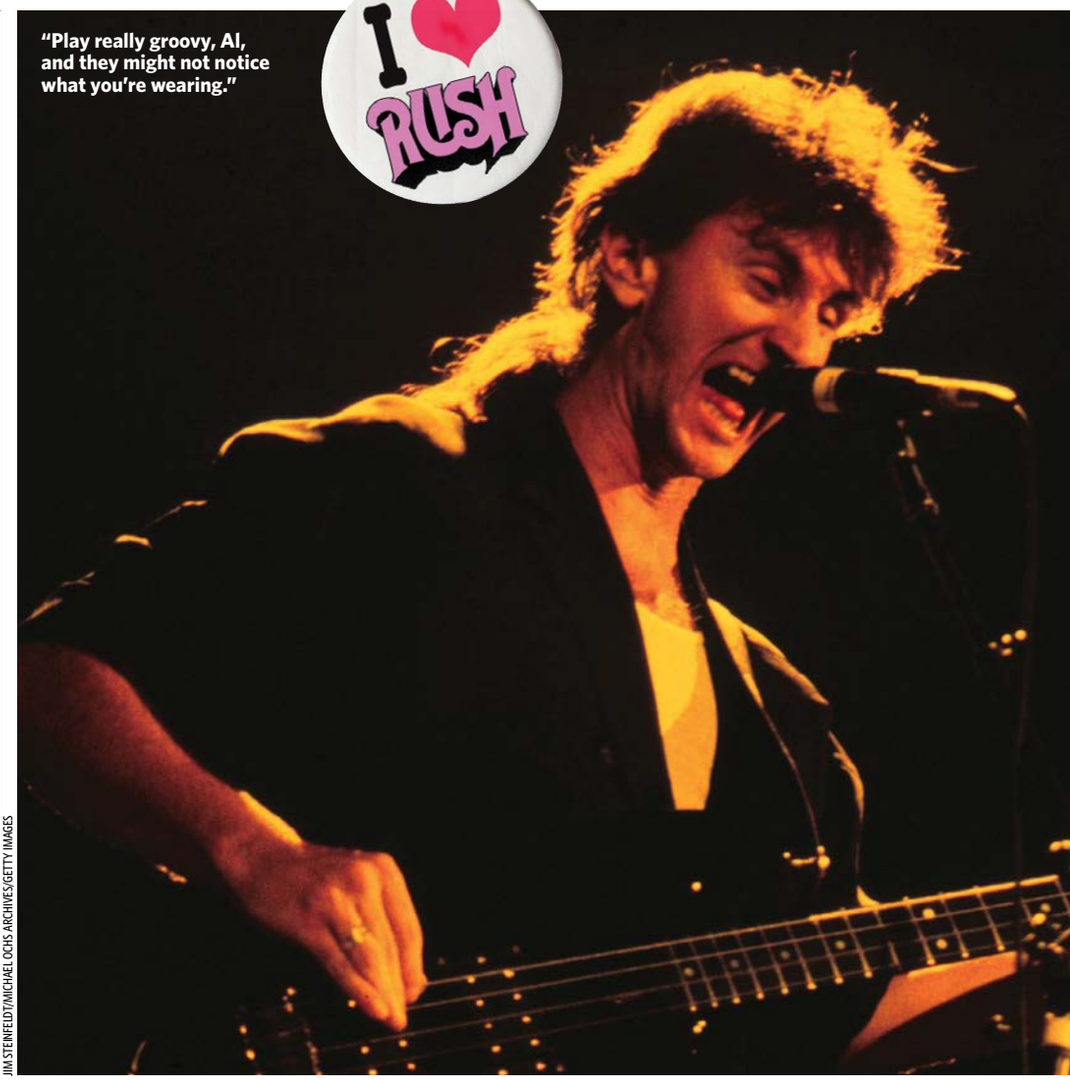
Both Lee and Lifeson have fond memories the times spent hanging out with Kiss guitarist Ace Frehley. "Ace has the best laugh on planet earth," Lee says. "So we spent most of our time trying to entertain him. We'd all go to Ace's room and get high and get silly and it was fun. Ace wasn't bothered about anything other than having a good time and drinking too much. He was the most personable of all those guys."

But there was less of a connection between Rush and the two leading figures in Kiss – Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons. And it was the latter's obsession with sex – specifically, banging as many groupies as possible – which Lee and Lifeson found difficult to relate to.

Lifeson also says that in the years that followed, the camaraderie of that first tour together was lost. "With Paul and Gene there was always a distance," he says, "and that distance grew very quickly as they became more popular. There were times when we tried to reconnect with them, and they really weren't interested and had moved on. But that was a very long time ago."



PRESS



"Play really groovy, Al, and they might not notice what you're wearing."

JIM STENFELDT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

You mean smoking pot?
That certainly influenced those early records. Less so as the years went on, but it was never completely out of the picture. We always made sure the tour bus was well-stocked with potato chips and cakes and things [laughs].

It sounds as if you were smoking a lot up to and including **Hemispheres.**
Yes, right through to *Hemispheres* and a little bit beyond… maybe *Clockwork Angels.*

Really?
Oh, sure. But Geddy gave up all of that a long time ago. He's one of those really militant non-smokers. He leads a very clean lifestyle, although he does love his wine.

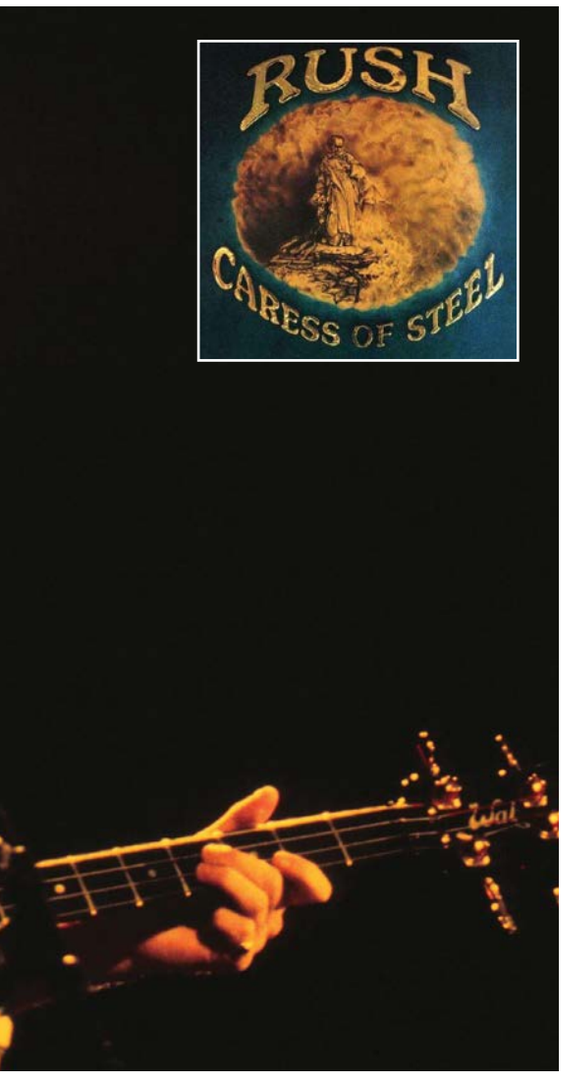
Unlike you, who got into ecstasy in the nineties. Did you tell Geddy and Neil they should try it?
I think Neil may have had one or two experiences with it, but I don't think he liked that particular feeling.

What about cocaine?
It's been so long now. There was a period in the late seventies and early eighties when we all sort of dabbled in that thing. But it's such an alienating drug. I remember every time I ever did it I hated it. I loved it for that moment, and then hated everything else about it. It wasn't good for conversation, friendship, anything.

And now you're just a smoker?
I'm a pretty regular smoker of a very small quantity, for therapeutic purposes. I find it helps with inflammation and pain. I have my medical card for my prescription here in Canada, where medical marijuana is legal. And if we get rid of the Conservative government and get the Liberals back in, they have a whole policy about the legalisation of marijuana that is realistic and makes sense.

Might the problem with legalising marijuana be that much of Canada would slow down to the pace of the first Black Sabbath album?
Ha ha. Yeah. But is that such a bad thing?

You've always been characterised as the joker in Rush. How would you describe Geddy and Neil?
They're both very funny guys, clever and smart. Geddy loves to learn about things, whether it's baseball or wine or vintage bass guitars. He loves to get inside a particular subject. And Neil is a strange cat. He's very bright, obviously, and thoughtful. But he's also very private and inward, very shy. You'd be surprised at how easily embarrassed he becomes in social scenes. He can be great at a dinner party, but in a larger group he'll be very, very, very uncomfortable, and he'll be in a corner, nursing his Scotch, waiting to get out of there.



Was Neil always so withdrawn, even before the events of the late nineties?
In the early years he probably did more interviews than Geddy and I did. In many ways he was the band's spokesman. Since that tragedy, he definitely did become much more private. He carries a lot of deep, deep scars from the things that have happened in his life. Most people who know what happened to him can't even process it. But I think in general our fans do respect his privacy and know where it's coming from. In this day and age, where nothing is private, it is a miracle that he has any privacy at all. A tragedy like that makes him more of a target.

In the late nineties, Neil said he was done with Rush. It was only in 2002 that you reunited and made the Vapor Trails *album.*
There's so much emotion in that record. That took a big chunk out of our lives – that was a year of, oh, so many difficult things. Every time I listen to that record it takes me back to when we were recording it and how Neil was doing, and how poorly he was playing when he first came in the studio, and how he rose from those ashes – we all did. We were all so tentative and hurting. That album, more than any other album, has left a mark on the three of us individually.

If the band had ended in the late nineties, what would you have done with your life?
It's so hard to speculate. I love art. Maybe I would have become a painter. Only last year I thought about taking a course at the Ontario College Of Art. It's been fantastic to play in this band my whole life, but there is so much more out there.

Had the band ever come close to breaking up before then?
Yes. In 1989 we'd done a long tour and were mixing the live record, *A Show Of Hands*. We were so deeply exhausted that it just wasn't fun any more. We wanted – all of us – to go our separate ways. It was nothing personal, just the pressure of work. Really, the stress and tension was tearing us apart. Fortunately we took a long break, and we came back renewed.

Being in this band for so long, what has it cost you on a personal level?
We were doing two hundred and fifty shows a year when my kids were young and when I should have been home with them. That's a sacrifice that we've all made. But now my kids are grown up and they're happy and content and proud of their dad. It's worked out okay.

Looking back at your career, what are you most proud of?
I'm going to be sixty-two this year, and I've been playing with these same two guys longer than just about any other band in the world. That's quite an accomplishment.

If you had to choose three albums to sum up the band's career, which ones would they be?
2112, *Moving Pictures* and *Clockwork Angels*. I think that would cap what we're about from beginning to end. Boy, that's two concept records.

Well, Kirk Hammett from Metallica did call you "the high priest of conceptual metal".
He was right! I knew he was a smart kid.

But, joking aside, when the end finally comes, how would you want Rush to be remembered?
Boy, how do you answer that without sounding kind of corny? I guess I want the legacy to be: they did it their way, and they were true to what they believed. We earned our independence from the music industry early on with *2112*, and we've been free to do what we want. We were true to our art. I want to be remembered for that.

"Neil would probably have quit years ago if he didn't feel he owed something to us."
ALEX LIFESON



For Geddy Lee, being at home in Toronto for a few days between rehearsals is an opportunity to spend time with his family, and in particular his infant granddaughter. "Being grandparents is a new experience for my wife and I," he says. "It took us a month or so to get our heads around that fact. We were sort of in denial."

Currently, he divides his free time between Toronto and London, where he also has a home. When in Toronto, he and Lifeson are in frequent contact even when they're not working. Around once a week, Lee says, they get together for dinner, just the two of them. Lee, a connoisseur, always chooses the wine. In the past they used to play tennis together, but not so much since Lifeson developed arthritis.

It was in Toronto that Lee and Lifeson attended school together. Peart met them for the first time in 1974, when he auditioned for Rush as they sought to replace original drummer John Rutsey. In a sense, Peart has always been the odd man out. After joining Rush, he lived in Toronto for a few years but later moved out to the country. When he relocated to Los Angeles it had little impact on his relationship with Lee and Lifeson.

"Neil was never really accessible," Lee explains. "So the fact that he's in California now is not a huge thing to overcome. When we need to talk, we talk."

These days it's Lee who is driving Rush forward. He wants to tour more. If he gets his way, the band will return to the UK and mainland Europe in 2016. Whatever happens next, he says, will be dependent on how the other two guys are feeling after the US tour: "If everyone's really digging it, the way I think we will, then we might carry on."

Right now, how are you feeling about the future of Rush?
I prefer to take the optimistic view. That's my nature. But there are a lot of factors that are concerning the band at the moment. I would say that the three of us are in a different head-space about that.

Where do you stand on this?
I feel great about where the band's at. I love playing and I don't have any reason not to continue. Neil has a different view, due to his young daughter and what he has to put his body though in order to do a three-hour show. And Alex also has issues that he's wrestling with. I would say it's an ongoing conversation, about what the future will bring. Obviously there's an elephant in the room. But the elephant is sitting politely in the corner. Sooner or later we'll deal with that elephant head-on [laughs]. I don't like to think of the end. I don't see any reason for us to end until a point where we no longer can play well. But it's clear that the concept of Rush as a massive touring band is fading.

Alex is struggling with arthritis, Neil with tendonitis. How are you holding up?
I'm fit as a fiddle. But for Alex the arthritis is not a small thing. Frankly, I'm a little surprised he ➔

talked to you about it. And really, if anything is going to mean that we can't tour any more like we used to, it's more than likely going to be the arthritis. Because that's something that will directly affect his ability to play. And if I was going out on stage and I could not play the way I want to play, or the way I have played in the past, there is no way I would want to do it; I would not want to go out there and be a shadow of my former self.

This is clearly something that worries you as much as it does him.
You know, it kind of hurts me to see him when he's having a bad day, physically. He's one of my oldest and dearest friends. And when he's been at rehearsal and he's not playing his best, it's not nice to see your friend suffer like that. This thing is in the back of his mind, and he's afraid of it.

Neil is more vocal about his reluctance to tour.
Well, Neil has a more complicated life than Alex and I do, let's face it. Our kids are grown up, it's much easier for us to tour. When my kids were the age that Neil's daughter is it was a much more difficult decision every time you walked out that door. What you also have to remember is what Neil has been through in the past. He's been to hell and back. And now he's got a second family that he's trying to do the right thing by. There's no one on earth that could blame him for that. It's a matter of him being able to juggle what he can do with the band, and what his family can deal with, and how he feels in his heart about all that. I completely understand that.

How do you deal with such a delicate issue?
It's an ongoing conversation; a difficult conversation, and one that we kept putting off before we got together for this tour. I think it's hard for Neil to bring up some of this stuff, because he knows that no matter what happens he doesn't want to feel like the guy who's pulling the plug. It's hard for him. And I accept that. But decisions have to be made. We have to get on with our lives. So that conversation was tough. But in the end we decided we would do a tour, and Neil was fine with that. Once he made that decision he was a hundred per cent there. There's one thing I want to make really clear: there is no bad guy in this scenario.

If Clockwork Angels turns out to be the last Rush album, could you live with that?
Oh yeah. I'm very proud of that record. It's certainly among our top three pieces of work.

How confident are you that you could make another?
Do I feel like we have the mojo to do more records? Absolutely. But I can't tell you that the other guys agree. I'm not a hundred per cent sure that Neil agrees, I'm pretty sure Alex agrees.

He does. You should ask him – I did.
Ha ha. Okay. What did he say?

He said he would love to make a new album. So there you go – I've helped you with that one.
Thanks, Paul!

It seems that everyone loves Rush now. Is that a strange feeling?
First of all, it's great. But yes, it is odd. The fact that more fans want to see us, and younger people are getting turned on to our music, that's a very cool thing. It's nice that people like us and feel okay about saying that out loud [laughs]. There's really no negative in this whole new acceptance of us.



All the world's still a stage in 2002.

TIM MOSENFELDER/GETTY IMAGES

Do you have any idea why this has happened?
It's hard to understand. Obviously longevity pays off. And I guess there's an amount of passion and authenticity that we bring to our brand of music that must also mean something in this day and age.

It's not just about the music. The documentary Beyond The Lighted Stage humanised the band.
That's true. The documentary is what Rush is: it's a story about three friends. By making that movie, by allowing people in, it's shown a side of our personality that is appealing. The fact that we do get along so well, we do have a lot of fun and we love what we do, that has become kind of 'a thing', for lack of a better descriptor [laughs].

> "Some of our early stuff makes me cringe a little. Like, 'What the f**k were we doing?'"
>
> **GEDDY LEE**



There are the caricatures of Rush: Alex as the joker, you the uber-nerd, Neil the professorial type.
There is certainly truth in all of that. The caricatures are a start.

And on a deep level?
I'd say that Alex is hot-blooded. If I put him in the context of Rush, he's the raw emotion in the band. He's the guy who's going to freak out first, the guy who's going to lose his temper. He's also very sweet and lovable. He's the guy in the band you want to hug most. He's so funny and so considerate, but he can also be very irrational.

And Neil?
Neil is surprisingly goofy. This is the thing most people don't realise about him. He's this big, unwieldy guy, and when he gets in his goofy mood, it's hilarious. The first day he pulled up for his audition, Alex and I thought he was the goofiest guy. We had no idea that lurking behind that goofiness was this professorial, serious man. We're all more than what we appear, obviously. Or less [laughs].

You stopped doing drugs a long time ago. Those two guys did not. Are you comfortable being around them when they're stoned?
If you hang around so long with people that love their weed, you get used to it. I'm just amazed at how good people are at functioning on that stuff.

You couldn't handle that shit?
That's why I stopped – because I became completely dysfunctional when I was high. I just couldn't stop talking. I couldn't stop pretending I was Woody Allen, or trying to take my pants off over my head. I kept trying to make people laugh, and it is easy and hard to make stoned people laugh. You'll say something and they'll laugh, and you'll say something else and the room gets really quiet and it's like, "Okay…"

Classic drug paranoia.
I was always okay when I was with the guys. What was hard for me was I'd go to my bunk on the bus and my brain would be going six hundred miles an hour. My problem is I can't stop over-thinking everything. It doesn't help me to have a stimulant

like that. It aids my over-thinking. I prefer a glass of wine or two, that helps chill me out. That puts me in my happy place. I don't need to be high. I feel like I've been blessed with a natural sort of high-ness.

So when Alex told you about trying ecstasy you didn't feel like you were missing out?
Oh my God, I'm way beyond that. And I wouldn't want to be a witness to it. I don't want to be anywhere around that guy in that condition. The thought of it fills me with dread!

Are you embarrassed by any of the music that Rush have made?
Some of the early stuff makes me cringe a little. I hear a song and think: That was so Genesis-influenced. Like, what the fuck were we thinking? It's so derivative. And the long instrumental things that we were doing back in the seventies, some of it seems so pretentious.

Long, instrumental, pretentious songs – that's what I call 'proper Rush'.
Okay [laughs]. I can see that. I have friends, musician guys, who say to me all the time that after *Hemispheres* there was nothing else of interest to them. So when you make that statement it makes total sense to me. In their minds that was proper Rush. And you saw that kind of thing in our documentary. I loved the fact that Trent Reznor got more interested in us post-keyboards, yet Tim Commerford hated anything post-keyboards. That kind of says it all.

***The pretentiousness in those early songs has a lot to do with the lyrics that Neil wrote. Perhaps most pretentious of all was* Xanadu*, its lyrics inspired by the Coleridge poem* Kubla Khan.**
'I have dined on honeydew' [laughs]. Try singing that! Try singing about Kubla Khan, for Christ's sake.

You pulled it off.
Oh yeah. I loved it! I was into it. But after a certain time, I guess you could say I became a little more objective about lyrics.

Were there lyrics of Neil's that you rejected outright?
Oh yeah, absolutely. Sometimes it just doesn't work, and I can't get behind it.

Did that cause problems between you and him?
In the early days it was harder. We were just becoming songwriting partners, and that was a rapport and a trust that took years to develop. But he's a remarkable songwriting partner, in the sense that he does not have the requisite ego that comes with the work.

In later years Neil has written some beautiful lyrics about the human condition, for songs such as* Afterimage *and* The Pass*. Is there a song that speaks to you more than any other on that deep level?
I like *The Pass* as well. It's one of my favourite lyrics. And I find *The Garden*, from *Clockwork Angels*, one of the most beautiful things he has written.

It's now forty-one years since the first Rush album was released. Back then, how big were you dreaming? Did you think you were going to be the new Led Zeppelin, or were you aiming a little lower – the next Budgie, perhaps?
Ha ha. Well, who dreams small? Nobody does that. Especially when you're young, you dream big. You wanna be the next big thing. You want to be the next Deep Purple. But really, you don't ever equate your meagre talent with your favourite bands. Especially with us being Canadians. We're far too modest for that leap of faith.

In all the years since then, have you ever thought about leaving the band?
No. Never. I can honestly say I have not one day ever thought about quitting.

You've dedicated your entire adult life to this band. Any regrets?
I wish I had not been so obsessed with the band when my son was young. I wish I had been more in the moment for him. So yeah, I do have regrets about the early part of his life. But my son and I are very close now. And when my daughter came around, fourteen years after my son was born, I made myself way more available to her. You live and learn, you know?

And if the band was to end soon – for all the reasons we've talked about – could you accept it with a sense of gratitude for what it has given you?
I'll be honest. I don't like the idea of it ending. But obviously the conversations of the last year have forced me to come to terms with mortality – mortality in the sense of the band. If there is a time when we become a non-functional creative unit, then it will be hard to move on to other things, but move on I will.

August 1, 2015 is the date on which Rush conclude their US tour, at the Forum in Los Angeles. Beyond that, the band's future remains undecided. During this tour the difficult conversations between the three band members will be continued. For now, only this much is certain: they have not yet reached the end of the road, but the end is in sight.

Geddy Lee says it is in his nature to be optimistic. Even so, he remains pragmatic. "Right now," he says, "I'm just trying to enjoy the ride. Can we go on forever? Clearly not. We don't know if this is the end. And if it is the end, it's going to happen in bits and pieces. If we can't go out and do a massive tour in the future because everyone can't agree on that, there's nothing to say we can't do another record or one-off shows here and there. That's the best way I can describe it."

And for Alex Lifeson, there are mixed emotions. After a lifetime spent on the road, Lifeson, like Neil Peart, wishes to devote more time to his family. But he is acutely aware that if the band is going to go out on a high, it has to happen soon.

"I want to know I can play as good as I always have, or at least close to that," he says. "I love it when people say: 'You've got to see these guys, they can really play.' That's a legacy that I'd like to keep intact. That's what the essence of Rush is. It's these three guys that have always loved playing together. I know that we're coming close to the end, but I still have so much fun playing with those two guys. When time comes, it's going to be hard letting that go."



Thin Lizzy "& Us!"

Rush on touring with Phil Lynott and co.

Out of all the bands that Rush gigged with in the 70s, they had the most fun with Thin Lizzy and UFO. At least that's how they remember it. As Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee admit, it's hard to remember everything that happened out on the road, when most nights ended in a big piss-up.

Lifeson describes UFO as the hardest-drinking band he has ever known. "Their drinking was a lot more chronic than anything we were doing," he says. "We would never drink before a show, and they were already plastered by soundcheck. That's just the way they operated."

When Rush first toured with Thin Lizzy, in 1976, both bands were just breaking big: Rush with the *2112* album, Lizzy with *Jailbreak*. They bonded over a whisky-drinking contest instigated by Lizzy's Scottish guitarist Brian Robertson – a challenge that 'Robbo' lost, along with the contents of his stomach.

"Brian was such a nut," Lifeson says. "But we connected on a deep level. It wasn't just about drinking and partying and being crazy. There were a lot of discussions about literature and lyrics and music. Brian had the biggest heart. We loved to play and we loved to laugh. We were like brothers, Brian and I."

As for Thin Lizzy's leader, Phil Lynott, it was a rather different story. Geddy Lee remembers Lynott as "an isolated, solitary dude". Lifeson adds: "Phil was a very sensitive soul, very bright, but there was a mysterious side to him." It was in 1986, 10 years after Thin Lizzy and Rush toured together, that Lynott died from multiple organ failure caused by heroin addiction.

"It was sad to see Phil go," Lee says. "To be honest, I had no idea that he was into what he was into. Maybe I'm naïve. I've had people that worked for me that had bad problems over the years, and I always felt like I was the last guy to know. But I find that with so many of those tragic figures. There's not enough people that are aware of how bad off they really are. Otherwise there would be an intervention. And those people that are into drugs so heavily are very good at fooling everyone."


EXIT
STAGE LEFT?



Neil Peart has had enough, Alex Lifeson is suffering from arthritis and Geddy Lee wants to carry on regardless. *Classic Rock* joins **Rush** in Los Angeles on August 1, 2015 as they play what will turn out to be their last ever show.

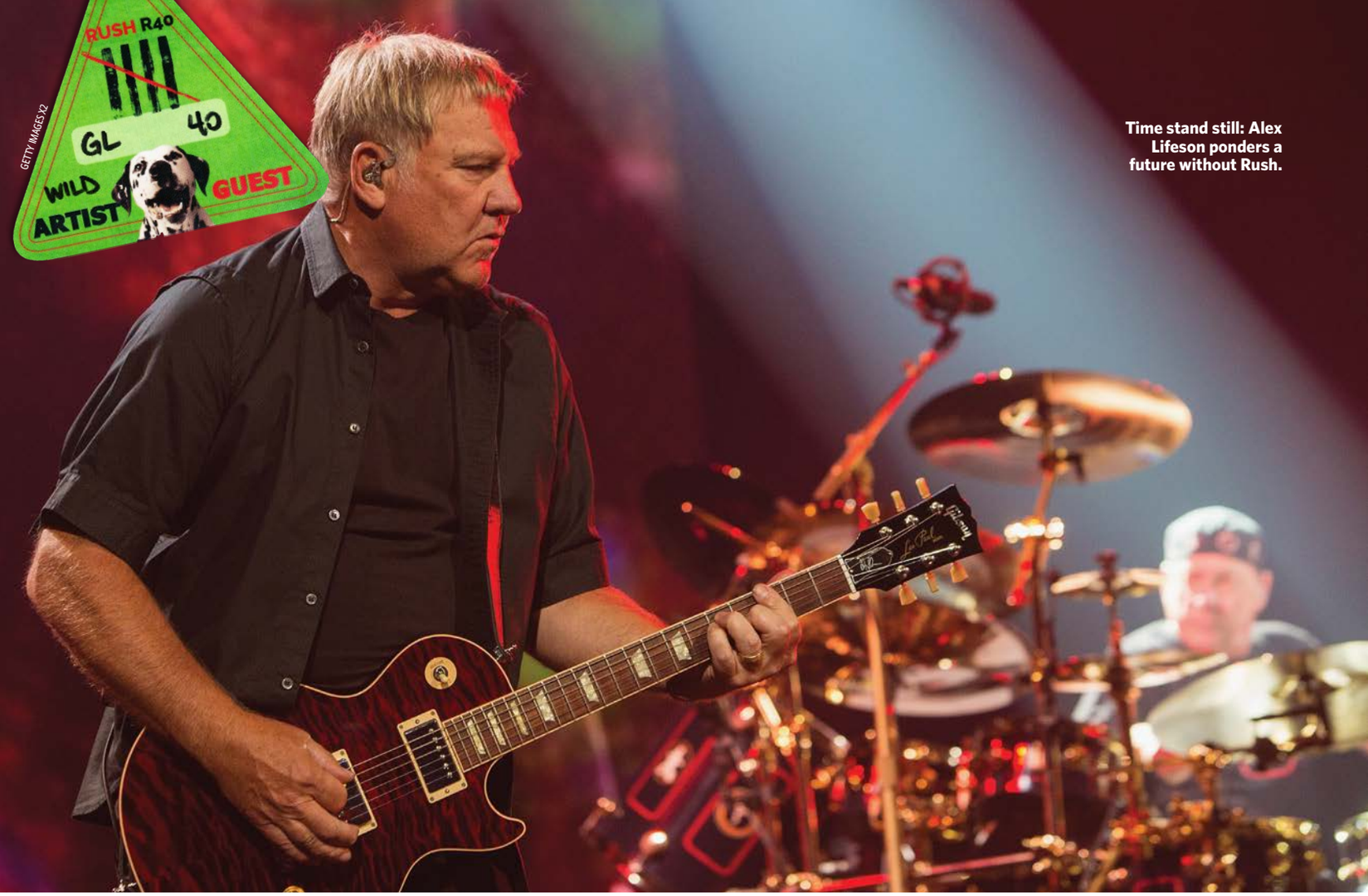
Words: Philip Wilding
Pictures: Mat Hayward/Getty

It's a balmy Saturday night in Los Angeles, and Row 9 on the floor of the LA Forum is drummer heaven – or maybe drummer hell, depending on your viewpoint. Chad Smith of the Red Hot Chili Peppers stands next to the Foo Fighters' Taylor Hawkins. A few seats along, Tool's Danny Carey is engaged in conversation with current Queens Of The Stone Age man Jon Theodore.

Like the 17,000 other people in attendance, they're here to see Rush bring their sold-out R40 'anniversary' tour to a close (in typically perverse Rush style, it's actually 41 years since they released their debut album). But there's one particular thing onstage that has them rapt, eyes front and centre: Neil Peart. As Peart thunders into *Overture* from the Canadian trio's breakthrough album *2112*, the gaze of all four drummers instantly snaps stagewards, like dogs who have spotted a biscuit. The object of their attention rattles across his seemingly endless parade of tom-toms as the band segue into *Temples Of Syrinx*, and 17,000 pairs of air-drumming arms shoot ceiling-ward. None are more animated or as on the beat as Smith, Hawkins, Carey and Theodore.

A couple of hours later, Smith is enjoying the hospitality at the post-show end-of-tour party and recalling his indoctrination into the Cult Of Rush as a teenager. "I spent my sophomore year of high school in the parking lot, smoking weed and listening to *2112*," he says. "That's when my Rush education began. I do believe it's a prerequisite for all rock drummers to go through a Neil Peart phase."

It's not just a drummer thing. Matt Stone, the co-creator of *South Park* and a close friend of Peart, is equally effusive. "Totally amazing show!" he says, waving his drink around for emphasis. "I invited a couple of friends of mine that I grew up with in Denver. We saw Rush in 1985 at McNichols Arena, and it was really cool to



GETTY IMAGES X2

Time stand still: Alex Lifeson ponders a future without Rush.

bring it full circle here in 2015."

There's a lot of talk about things coming full circle tonight. If recent proclamations by certain band members are anything to go by, then this tour – and specifically this show – represents the end of Rush as a touring entity, if not the end of Rush full-stop. Peart has made it clear that he's tired of the physical and mental toll that playing live night after night takes. There are no more shows scheduled following the LA gig, either in the US or Europe. Asked recently whether this would be Rush's swansong tour, guitarist Alex Lifeson replied: "I don't think we'd have much difficulty thinking about it as possibly the last."

Remind Geddy Lee of this today and he laughs. "That's not true," says the bassist and singer. "I'm having great difficulty thinking like that. Alex is not speaking for me, and I don't think he's really speaking for himself either. I think he has mixed feelings. I don't want to speak for him. You can ask him. He can tell you his own lies."

It's three days before what may or may not be Rush's final show, and Lee, Lifeson and Peart are moving in slightly more rarefied circles. The three of them have convened at the Canadian consulate in LA, where a reception is being thrown in their honour. The Consulate is bestowing its very first Honoree For Canadian Excellence award on the band, thanks in part to the fact that they have played Los Angeles 36 times over the years (it also happens to be Lee's 62nd birthday).

In the landscaped gardens at the rear of thewell-appointed house, half a dozen tables have been set up for a dinner. The band members all sport the Order Of Canada pins they were awarded in 1997. Their families are here, as is their long-time manager, Ray Danniels, *South Park*'s Matt Stone and actor Jack Black, the latter of whom spends the evening glad-handing other guests and demanding to know, technically speaking, whether we're in Los Angeles or Canada. As the band are introduced by genial Consul General James Villeneuve ("Ray Danniels tells me the R40 cake I made contravenes some kind of copyright"), the assorted guests laugh good-naturedly. Glasses are raised and toasts are made, before Lifeson steps up to speak. "I'd just like to say, 'Blah, blah, blah…'" he begins, a knowing nod back to his infamous Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame speech.

There's some irony to this, at least when it comes to Neil Peart. The drummer, who has lived in California with his second wife, Carrie, for the better part of 15 years, was recently granted American citizenship. "Why did I take it?" he says, as we top up our glasses at the makeshift bar. "I found out that if you're an American citizen, they can't deport you." He does an exaggerated double take at his lapel. "Though at any moment now, I'm expecting to be thrown to the floor and have my Order Of Canada ripped from me."

He's in high spirits, though that's hardly surprising. Of the three members of Rush, he's the one who seems most relieved that this journey might be coming to an end. Later in the evening, he'll tell Jack Black that it's over for him, as Black's eyes get wider and his jaw slackens with disbelief.

Ray Danniels has mixed feelings about it all. He started out booking the band into bars, high schools and drop-in centres in and around Toronto in the early 70s, before going on to become their manager.

"I don't think they should end," he says, sipping white wine at the pool's edge, when the inevitable question of whether this is the end of the road for Rush is broached. "They are playing as well as they ever have. Shorter tours, longer breaks, more days between shows, shorter sets, opening acts or just one last hurrah would be my vote. A lot of people wanted to see them that didn't get a chance to. That said, I know you can't perform this at this level of intensity indefinitely, but I would explore ways to make it work for a little while longer while it's this good. It matters to a lot of people. That's my honest feelings."

Danniels looks across the still pool of blue water where his band are laughing it up some twenty feet away.

"But then I'm not the one on stage feeling any pain or the ravages of time. I'm in the house loving it with 14,000 other people most nights."

"How am I feeling? Sad. I'd just like to keep going."

Geddy Lee



"It is a prerequisite for all drummers to go through a Neil Peart phase," says Red Hot Chili Peppers' Chad Smith.

Irvine is a two-hour-plus drive from Hollywood to the Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre down Route 101, one of Southern California's most congested highways. Even in the assigned car pool lane, the flow of traffic is sluggish. Outside our SUV, everything looks bleached in the bright Californian light. Inside, the only sound is the steady thrum of the AC set to stun. Geddy Lee is keeping an eye on the score in the game between his beloved baseball team the Toronto Blue Jays and the Kansas City Royals. Tonight's gig is the penultimate date of the tour. In two days' time, Rush will take their bows at the Los Angeles Forum. Whether that's for good or not, not even Lee can say.

"How am I feeling? Sad, sad," he says, his voice hoarse with the vestiges of a cold he's been fighting off for the last few weeks. "The tour's gone so well. I'm really proud of it – we're playing really well. I love the way the show has lived up to my expectations and I'd just like to keep going.

"I think a lot of the fear before the tour was that Alex's arthritis would interfere with his playing and he wouldn't be able to deliver. Rehearsals were a little shaky, but once we got past the first leg, I think he hit his stride and he's ripping every night. That makes you feel, 'Yeah, I can do this.'"

Lifeson's arthritis is one of the main factors in Rush's future, or potential lack of it. Earlier this year, he told *Classic Rock* that he has suffered from arthritis for the last 10 years.

"I am hurting a little, but it doesn't bother me – everybody has aches and pains," the ever-buoyant guitarist says today. "I think that if it was really slowing me down and quite critical in my playing then it would be a different story. My hand is sore after a show, like it never was before, but it's not a big deal. Take a couple of Tylenols and power through it."

It's soundcheck time at Irvine Meadows and the two of us are standing in the wings of the stage, trying not to overheat. Crew sporting T-shirts emblazoned with the legend 'Blah Blah Blah' in the same typeface as the logo from Rush's self-titled debut album busy themselves as only roadies can. Neil Peart sits behind one of the two kits in the centre of the stage – he plays a different set in each half of the show: one his current *Clockwork Angels* drumkit, the other a replica retro kit. He throws drumsticks distractedly into the air, catching them as they fall.

Lee's side of the stage is home to a bewildering array of bass guitars, many of them collector's items. He'll change instruments 25 times during the three-hour show. At soundcheck alone, his tech, Scully, hands him three different guitars. They run through *Subdivisions*, its washes of sound bouncing around the empty arena. Its followed by 1978's *Jacob's Ladder*, still sounding eerie in the arid heat of the day. As it shudders to a halt, Peart happily exclaims, "Shut up!" and the three of them wander off for what might one of the last dinners they have together as a band.

As this tour draws to its close, the crew are handed end-of-tour gifts: beautifully boxed Tag Heuer watches with the band's logo and signatures etched onto the wristband. (To give you an idea of the scale of the operations, the R40 tour includes two carpenters just to accommodate Lee's ever-changing backline of popcorn makers and washing machines.)

It's a cliché, but there's a sense of family to it all, which is down to the fact that many of these people have grown up together over the decades. Take Howard Ungerleider, the man responsible for the band's spectacularly inventive light shows. He first began working with the group way back in 1974 in a multitude of different roles: tour



And it's goodnight from them: Rush bow out on the R40 tour.

"I am hurting a little, but it doesn't bother me. Everyone has aches and pains."

Alex Lifeson

manager, lighting director and accountant.

"I'd been around, collecting money, making sure the band got paid, making deals, you know," says the amiable yet gruff-sounding Ungerleider, who was working for the American Talent International agency in New York – who represented Savoy Brown and Fleetwood Mac, among others – when Ray Danniels signed his band with them in 1974.

"When I met them, they were in-between drummers and they had zero experience of touring. They sent me in there to take them out and make sure they knew the ropes. But when I first saw them in rehearsal, they had a power, and you could see it connect with the audiences almost instantly. I always felt they were going to be successful. I actually told Geddy's mother that off the first tour. But that successful? No one expected that. When it came, it was so unbelievable."

As well as Geddy Lee's birthday, the night at the Canadian embassy marked another, no less crucial anniversary: the 41st anniversary of the day the band hired Neil Peart. Ironically, given Peart's role in the band's subsequent development, it nearly didn't happen.

"We tried to poach Max Webster's drummer and he said yes, and then a few days later he said no," says Lee. "So that's why we had the auditions. Neil was the third guy to come in and I felt for the fourth guy having to follow Neil: who'd want to be that guy? I felt so bad for him because he had written charts of the first album and he was sitting there playing while reading the charts and he was very polite and we had just experienced this whirlwind that was Neil…"

A week later, the newly reconfigured Rush were opening for Manfred Mann and Uriah Heep in Pittsburgh. "That was our introduction to touring," says Lee. "It was the end of Uriah Heep's tour so we were seeing all kinds of shenanigans backstage on the last gig. They had flocks of groupies hanging around, they were all throwing cream pies at each other on stage. We were like, 'This rock'n'roll thing is cool.' There was women and pie. I don't know what we were more excited about."

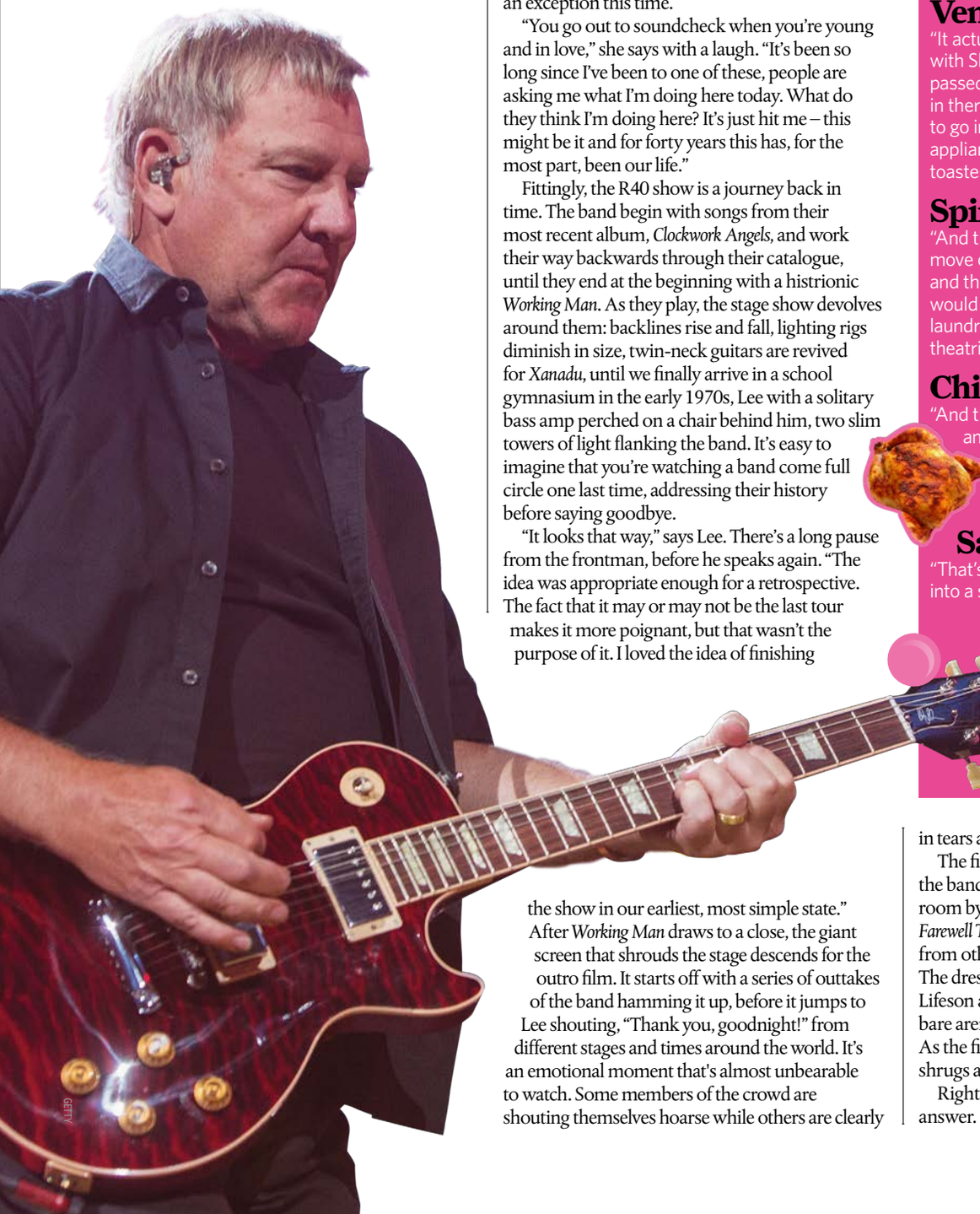
They played a ragtag mixture of tours and gigs after that, frequently opening one-off shows with what the bassist calls "strange, terrible combinations". One of these was Sha Na Na, the New York rock'n'roll revivalists best known as the band who played at Woodstock just before Jimi Hendrix. "We did 30 minutes

and got booed for pretty much all of that," says Lee with a laugh. "Probably the worst thing we did in terms of the response we got."

Almost as memorable for the wrong reasons was the band's return to Pittsburgh. This time they were opening for Blue Öyster Cult. "The gear got there late for some reason, so they cut our set back to 10 minutes. We played *Finding My Way* and *Working Man*, then 'Thank you, goodnight!'"

Lee says there were "rumblings" last summer that this could be Rush's last tour. But Peart's reluctance to commit threw things into doubt.

"I just shelved everything because I didn't think the tour was going to happen. And when we did finally get together in November, after Alex had his surgery [the guitarist had been hospitalised for anaemia from bleeding ulcers, and suffered breathing problems after it was discovered his stomach had drifted upwards and settled behind his heart], Alex said he wasn't sure about how he would recover and he was not feeling at the top of his game. He expressed the feeling that if we were going to do it, then he'd rather tour sooner than later. He was worried about how his arthritis would be in two years. Neil said, 'That's the one request I can't say no to. If Al wants to do it now, then let's do it."


GETTY

Two days later and the R40 tour – and maybe Rush themselves – is drawing to a close. The trio first played the LA Forum in 1976, in support of *2112*. Tonight will be the 25th time they've played here. The load-in ramp to this cavernous venue made a cameo appearance in the Cameron Crowe movie *Almost Famous* when Kate Hudson's character, Penny Lane, strides onto the screen and out into the Forum's vast car park.

In the backstage area – a warren of seemingly endless corridors and boxy rooms – the mood is less celebratory than it was at Irvine two nights ago. Geddy Lee is quietly affable, but Neil Peart is stone-faced and mute in the band's dressing room.

Lee's wife, Nancy Young, is here as well. Nancy hasn't been to a band soundcheck in some twenty years, maybe longer, but she's making an exception this time.

"You go out to soundcheck when you're young and in love," she says with a laugh. "It's been so long since I've been to one of these, people are asking me what I'm doing here today. What do they think I'm doing here? It's just hit me – this might be it and for forty years this has, for the most part, been our life."

Fittingly, the R40 show is a journey back in time. The band begin with songs from their most recent album, *Clockwork Angels*, and work their way backwards through their catalogue, until they end at the beginning with a histrionic *Working Man*. As they play, the stage show devolves around them: backlines rise and fall, lighting rigs diminish in size, twin-neck guitars are revived for *Xanadu*, until we finally arrive in a school gymnasium in the early 1970s, Lee with a solitary bass amp perched on a chair behind him, two slim towers of light flanking the band. It's easy to imagine that you're watching a band come full circle one last time, addressing their history before saying goodbye.

"It looks that way," says Lee. There's a long pause from the frontman, before he speaks again. "The idea was appropriate enough for a retrospective. The fact that it may or may not be the last tour makes it more poignant, but that wasn't the purpose of it. I loved the idea of finishing the show in our earliest, most simple state."

After *Working Man* draws to a close, the giant screen that shrouds the stage descends for the outro film. It starts off with a series of outtakes of the band hamming it up, before it jumps to Lee shouting, "Thank you, goodnight!" from different stages and times around the world. It's an emotional moment that's almost unbearable to watch. Some members of the crowd are shouting themselves hoarse while others are clearly in tears and unembarrassed to show it.

The film plays out with one last gag that involves the band being barred from their own dressing room by the puppet from the cover of 1977's *A Farewell To Kings* album, while various characters from other album sleeves party behind him. The dressing room door shuts hard, leaving Lee, Lifeson and Peart to walk dejectedly down the bare arena corridor and into the long shadows. As the film ends, Lifeson turns to his bandmates, shrugs and asks: "What now?"

Right now, it's a question that none of them can answer.

"Sausage machine? It was a shit machine"

A brief history of Geddy Lee's novelty backline.

The Fridge

"I used to keep drinks in there – it always got a cheer when I took one out – and then Neil would go on his travels and pick up fridge magnets from every city he stopped at and by the end of the tour the thing was covered in magnets."

Vending Machine

"It actually worked too. I used to go shopping with Shelley [Nott, Rush's publicist who passed away in 2008] for stupid things to put in there. Bands would give us toys and things to go in there too. And then I started adding appliances on stage, a low shelf full of old toasters and shit like that."

Spin Dryers

"And then the next year we went to the big move of the dryers. We'd take out the T-shirts and throw them into the audience and people would come on during the show and do their laundry. It was the first foray into the theatrical for us; the stupid dryers."



Chicken Rotisserie

"And then the chickens. They looked like amps in a way. The knobs turned, the doors opened. You know, you basted them in Birmingham. It's important – all the details have to be right."

Sausage Maker

"That's when we were slowly morphing into a steampunk world and I built the very elaborate machine that spewed out those horrible-looking sausages that really wasn't very successful. They looked wrong, they looked like poo. In the end I made a shit machine."

LEFT: GARY MILLER/GETTY IMAGES. CUT OUT: MAT HAYWARD/GETTY

A Farewell To The King

On January 7, 2020, the man whose fills, rolls and lyrics mesmerised Rush fans and inspired generations of musicians passed away. Soon afterwards, *Prog* magazine readers voted **Neil Peart** the greatest musician ever. We celebrate the life and music of The Professor.

Words: Philip Wilding **Images:** Fin Costello/Getty



He would have hated this,of course. Accolades and adulation hung on Neil Peart like a bad suit. One only has to listen to *Limelight* to understand the consternation being the focus of attention brought him. He'd have run an eye along this list, brow furrowing incrementally as he looked down at the great and the good of prog and realised that he was standing on the shoulders of giants. A small smile, though, at numbers four and nine; wait until the guys hear about this.

It's been less than a year since we lost Neil Peart. Some days it feels like he's been gone forever and others, when, out of context, you hear a familiar fill from *Xanadu* or a line from *Losing It*, you can forget he's gone at all. And then in that brief flicker of memory and heartbreak you remember, and the clouds roll in again. He'd have just turned 68 and would probably have been tooling around in his man cave: a generous garage attached to his Californian home that was filled with his collection of Aston Martins, gleaming a burnished silver in the overhead lights.

He once gave me a ride in one of those cars, a series of tight Californian hill-turns screaming down towards the Pacific; he drove like he played drums, with real intent. We were as close to the road as I've ever been in a car — it felt like we were sitting on the floor, the endless Californian sky a blur of intermittent blue above. He was about to turn 60 and life was coming at him fast, but he was wide open to it, tuned into the universe. *Clockwork Angels* was at the mixing stage and sounded so fresh and full of promise. He was already in training to go out on tour. He was brimming with happiness, ready for the next thing.

"How do I feel about turning 60? I feel proud as hell," he said as we passed another car that may as well have been parked given how effortlessly he went by it. "I'm at the height of my powers in one sense, but also I can't help feeling the empathy for someone like Keith Moon: he never got to be 59. Dennis Wilson, neither. John Bonham… These are cautionary tales in a sense, but they break my heart: they had children, they had loved ones, they never got there, they never got *this*. This kind of career."

No one knew that *Clockwork Angels* was to be Rush's last album, that, much like his characters in *Losing It*, Neil would feel a disconnect between himself and his playing, that he felt he wasn't at his physical apex anymore. That was all to come, but on that balmy Hollywood afternoon, Neil Peart was still growing into himself. He'd relearnt how he approached playing his drums: think about that for a moment. Imagine playing at that

> "I'm at the height of my powers in one sense, but also I can't help feeling the empathy for someone like Keith Moon."
> **Neil Peart**



The Professor in his element: sticks in the air, lost in the music.

extraordinary level all your life and then thinking there were still things you could do better, that you could improve on, so you go back to the drawing board. It's like Monet stepping back from his easel one day and saying, "Bloody waterlilies! What was I thinking?"

His approach in the studio had gone happily out of the window, too. Not least in part to producer Nick Raskulinecz. Neil had gone from preparing his parts, writing his fills, charting all those bells and whistles, to simply going with the song. His inherent metronomic rattle was still intact, but now he was flying off at tangents in songs like the appropriately titled *Headlong Flight*, Nick standing before him, a drumstick in hand, conducting Neil as the sound booth filled with the rattle and hum of his drumming. I once sat looking through the glass with Geddy in the production studio, talking, as I remember it, in hushed tones, as if Neil might hear us. "Look," said Ged, as Neil hit his snare with the intensity of a 20-year-old. "Look at him."

Later, sitting out in the LA sunshine in the shadow of the Henson Studios, Neil was thrilled. "Nick goofs around, but the enthusiasm and the energy is fantastic." He recalled: "The first time we worked together he asked me to play something, and would mimic it and sing the parts, and it would be so over the top, just extraordinary, I'd be ashamed to throw a fill like that in myself. But I'd be like, okay and then I'd pull it off and he'd be, 'That's great!' It's like the *Caravan* drum fill that I laid out, we went back into the booth to listen and Ged looked over his glasses at me and said, 'Oh, he wants to make you famous.'

"This time, it was more immediate. He was in the room with me, not listening to playbacks – he was right there, so that every time we stopped, we'd be conversing over the parts. He was playing along with me; I didn't have to learn the arrangements."

Neil was always evolving, always in that headlong flight, which is what, I imagine, some of you who voted for him saw. That he was a musician in the most progressive way; he had itchy feet, whether it was travelling independently from his band when they toured, making the transition from bicycle to motorbike (even though motorbikes scared him at first) for those long journeys or finessing his playing or pushing at his limits. Hiking, cross-country skiing, his role as a writer – musical as well as non-fiction; his tales of travel; always there in pursuit of excellence or the higher ground at least. Finding new ways of doing things or simply doing them better. Some of us pretend we're on

> "I would say that period from coming back after Neil's tragedy to the very end were really the golden years for me."
> **Geddy Lee**

life's highway, chasing after the next thing – but Neil *was*, almost daily.

The sun was shining over Topanga Canyon, lunch was long over, but neither of us were moving. Neil, the impish Neil that people missed when they assumed that the stone-faced drummer on stage was all there was, looked conspiratorially around and ordered more drinks. We were talking about that new-found freedom in his playing on the band's last *Time Machine* tour, which had found its way in to the *Clockwork Angels* sessions.

"There was no plan, that was all unknowing," he said. "I started that a few years ago when I studied with Peter Erskine [Weather Report, Kate Bush]; part of what he taught me was with the metronome and hi-hat only, and I came out of that with a sense of time. I can listen to two things now and go somewhere really far outside and still draw back and drop in, so there's so much more stuff that I can get away with."

Two things still strike me about that: in some way Neil Peart must have somehow felt that he lacked a sense of time (this from the man whose drum solos were so entrancing that even Ged and Alex would sometimes stop to watch them from stage side), and how excited he was by the idea that his playing was evolving, that it still had somewhere to go.

Neil Peart played drums every day of the year apart from Christmas Day. He used to play for an hour before he went on stage. "He plays to play," Geddy told me once with an affectionate roll of his eyes, as Neil half-destroyed his practice kit in the adjoining room. And then when he lost both his daughter and then wife in the space of less than a year, he put down his sticks and really didn't pick them up again for two years. He lost that part of himself. The story's well told: he got on his motorbike and disappeared into the sky, no one knew where he was or where he was going, or as Alex said some years later, "We didn't even know if he'd come back."

When he did, Peart started from scratch again. After the sessions for the album that would become *Vapor Trails* were done for the day, Geddy would head home and Alex and Neil would stay late into the night and work on Neil's chops, so that he might become the drummer he once was, to play the way he wanted to play again. Music binding them tight. It's strange to now think that Neil wasn't even the



Peart's drum set up was a law unto itself and an inspiration to many who followed.



Surveying his audience like a king from a throne.

GARY MILLER/FILMMAGIC/GETTY IMAGES MAIN: FIN COSTELLO/GETTY



drummer Rush wanted after John Rutsey left the band.

"We had this other guy who played with friends of ours, Max Webster," said Geddy. "And we tried to poach their drummer and he said yes and then a few days later he said no. So that's why we had the auditions and Neil was the third guy to come in. We auditioned four and I felt for the fourth guy having to follow Neil, who'd want to be that guy? I felt so bad for him because he had written charts of the first album and he was sitting there playing while reading the charts and he was very polite and we had just experienced this whirlwind that was Neil. We were just being polite, playing out the string, as they say."

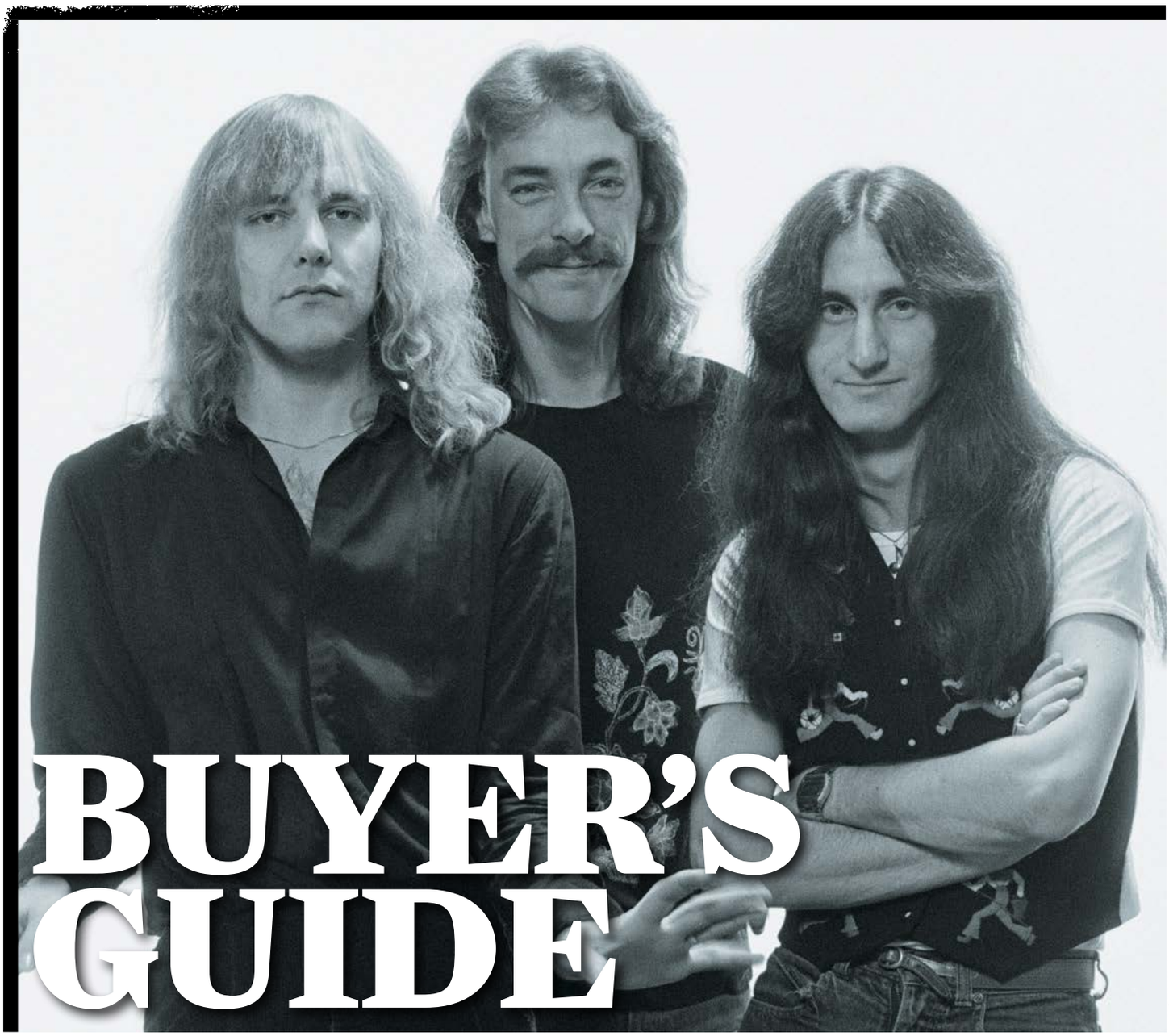
Happier days, long ago, before Rush had even begun to forge their legend. Once, it might have been Hollywood or Nashville, it could have been a damp Toronto, Alex and I talking about Wales and the recording of *A Farewell To Kings* at Rockfield Studios.

"For the title track, we set up on the cobblestone courtyard outside with a pair of mics and created our own stereo spread. I do recall walking back and forth, trying to concentrate on my playing while not crashing into Neil. It was quite surreal — Neil there with his full studio setup, with one eye on the sky waiting for it to rain. They're good memories, the way the three of us made that record, the organic nature of it."

Strange to think now that at one time all we hoped for was a Rush reunion and now all we can wish for is that Neil had stayed in any capacity at all, there in that great garage of his, a book in one hand, a good malt in the other. The music still lives, though, and no one can take that away from us, each ringing note enduring down the years, a grin sitting behind that stony face etched with concentration, a whirl of life as he rattles around his kit for one last time. The wave of the hand from the lip of the stage and then gone.

I'll leave you with this comment from Geddy. He was at home in his library, and I still don't know why I asked, but I did: when was he at his happiest in Rush?

"I've never thought like that before," he said, "but I can tell you that ever since we came back after Neil's terrible tragedy with his family, and having had those five years, those five dark years we were away, every tour I did with Rush I savoured. I would say that period from coming back after Neil's tragedy to the very end were really the golden years for me. I appreciated every gig, every note that we played. The camaraderie that the three of us had, I never took if for granted, not one day. So I would say that was my happiest time in Rush."



BUYER'S GUIDE

FIN COSTELLO/GETTY

From Zep-indebted blues rockers to prog epicists to art-rock visionaries to beloved elder statesmen, Rush's 45-year musical journey was like no other. Here are the albums that made them the legends they are.

When Rush emerged with their self-titled debut in 1974, many looked upon them as Led Zeppelin clones. Indeed, when music director and DJ Donna Halper and her team dropped the needle on Working Man on Cleveland radio station WMMS, the station's switchboard was inundated with calls asking if this was a new track by Plant, Page, Jones and Bonham.

Now, more than 40 years later and after 19 studio albums, 11 live records and an acclaimed career which saw the band inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in 2013, it's harder to judge which is more unlikely: (a) that they lasted so long or (b) that they did so on the strength of hiring drummer/lyricist Neil Peart to replace John Rutsey.

Rush's existence was always a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside the enigma that was the famously fan/limelight-avoiding and well-read Peart. Yet Rush are a three-piece band of equal parts, and similar attention is long overdue for Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson.

Although derided for his occasional choice of high-register singing, Lee has a fine, folky voice; he's no slouch on a synth, either. Moreover, as his solo album *My Favourite Headache* (2000) proves, much of Rush's often overlooked mastery of melody is down to him. And all that before the best bass playing you'll find this side of Jack Bruce. Lifeson, too, is an underappreciated player, and deserves to be ranked alongside David Gilmour for his fluid soloing, and Jimmy Page for otherworldly riffs.

Lee and Lifeson's qualities added to Peart's prodigious talents for rhythms usually found outside the rock sphere have inspired a collective ambition to improve and expand their abilities, and to make music that is always evolving, never safe.

Rush's first 25 years can be viewed in three (unplanned) cycles, each comprised of four studio albums then a double-live set which seemed to herald a change in direction. From 1974-76 they rocked like bastards while peddling sword, sorcery and sci-fi – often on side-long epics. From 1977-81 they entered a purple patch when they discovered synth bass pedals, keyboards, and songs lasting less than 10 minutes. Cycle three, 1982-89, began with more of the same, but is typified by an initially unsettling penchant for reggae-style rhythms. They also fully embraced the 80s vogue for electronica.

After the third double live album, the cycles ended and studio output became sporadic – just six albums, one set of covers, and two more live sets for good measure. Over these they steadily stripped away the trimmings and went back to basics.

Clockwork Angels, released in 2012, proved to be their final studio album, and they played their last show three years later. Fans never believed Rush were done – and in truth neither did Geddy Lee or Alex Lifeson – but Neil Peart's death in January 2020 marked a definite full stop on their career.

For those of us who grew up with Rush, their later albums are friends we've chosen, but the older ones are like family members. Some are harder to love, but we remain loyal to all.

Essential Classics



2112

MERCURY, 1976

Rush did epics before *2112* (successfully with the nine-minute *By-Tor And The Snow Dog* on *Fly By Night*, and painfully with *The Fountain Of Lamneth* on *Caress Of Steel*), but with *2112*'s title track they hit pay dirt. It's 21 minutes of brilliance which runs the full musical gamut from acoustic picking (as the hero discovers the 'ancient miracle' of a six-string) to electric metal fury (the priests of the Temples Of Syrinx smash it, as an apocalyptic battle rages).

The second, non-conceptual half pales in comparison, but the drug-themed *A Passage to Bangkok* and *Something For Nothing* are cracking tunes, too.



A Farewell To Kings

MERCURY, 1977

Power-trio stylings were eclipsed on Rush's fifth album as Neil Peart added a plethora of bells and percussion to his drum kit, Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson used pedal synths and the singer also took charge of a Minimoog.

Recorded in Wales, much of it had an almost medieval feel, with tales of ancient tyrants (the title track) and everyman wanderers (*Closer To The Heart, Cinderella Man* and *Madrigal*), but it was dominated by lengthier takes on Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* poem (*Xanadu*) and a space flight into a black hole (*Cygnus X-1*).



Permanent Waves

MERCURY, 1980

The new decade brought a new, more concise approach – and the sound of Geddy Lee properly exploring vocal ranges that didn't scare dogs.

Hit single *The Spirit Of Radio*, introduced Rush to by non-fans – many of them attracted by its Police-like reggae break. For fans, *Free Will* and the brooding *Jacob's Ladder* reminded us of the old Rush of complex sci-fi epics, while a pair of beautiful love songs – *Entre Nous* and *Different Strings* – hint at a more romantic future. But rather than getting soppy, the album closed with a three-parter, *Natural Science*, that is both big *and* clever.



Moving Pictures

MERCURY, 1981

The benchmark Rush album, and one that sounds as fresh today as when, after five months of often fraught work, the band sat in a playback at Quebec's Le Studios and declared it was finished.

Side one of the original vinyl featuring *Tom Sawyer, Red Barchetta*, the instrumental *YYZ* and *Limelight* is faultless. The flipside presents a newly mature Rush – each aged 27 or 28 at the time – reining in the epic *The Camera Eye* (inspired by a John Dos Passos novel) to 11 exhilarating minutes, terrifying us with *Witch Hunt*, then setting our techno pulses racing with *Vital Signs*. A band at the top of their game.

Superior Reputation cementing



Rush

RUSH, 1974

"This was us trying to find a sound," said Geddy Lee of Rush's self-titled debut. "Thinking we wanted to be a hard rock band and emulating those bands we thought were cool."

He isn't wrong. The sole album to feature drummer John Rutsey owed a huge debt to Led Zeppelin and other early 70s blues rockers. But *Rush* has a charm and energy that they never replicated, not least on the classic *Working Man*, which resonated with blue collar workers everywhere – as well as radio DJs who realised it was long enough for them to take a toilet break, turning it into an unexpected breakthrough hit.



Fly By Night

MERCURY, 1975

Exit John Rutsey and blues rock knock-offs, enter Neil Peart and a fresh and defiantly forward-looking sound. While *Best I Can* and the breezy *Making Memories* still bore the imprint of Led Zeppelin et al, it was mixed up with a new progressive rock mentality – something evident on eight-minute fan favourite *By-Tor And The Snow Dog*, a song that drew up the template for the epic blow-outs that followed.

At heart Rush were still a rock'n'roll band, albeit one with brains as well as brawn. But with *Fly By Night*, they were beginning to transform into something else.



Hemispheres

MERCURY, 1978

After promising to continue the storyline of *Cygnus X-1*, Neil Peart based *Hemispheres*' 18-minute title track on classical philosophy and the intellectual battle between the heart and mind, romance and intellect, reason and emotion. It was bonkers, but we loved it.

For light relief they added a pair of indicators to a simpler future – *Circumstances* and *The Trees* (wrongly assumed by some to be a comment on the Canadian separatist movement) – plus the stunning techno-rock instrumental *La Villa Strangiato*. But for Rush, it was a tipping point: no more side-long numbers.



Signals

MERCURY, 1982

Rush followed the landmark *Moving Pictures* with an album that added more keyboards. *Lots* more. *Subdivisions* and *The Analog Kid* were awash with them, but never drowned.

More radical changes to the Rush soundscape, though, are in evidence on *Chemistry* and *Digital Man*, both of which further explore Police-style techno-reggae (this a full year ahead of The Police's *Synchronicity*), and *The Weapon*, built on a dance music drum pattern. Then after a brilliant guest solo by electric violinist Ben Mink, Rush reach for the stars with *Countdown*, based on watching a shuttle launch as VIP guests of NASA.



Grace Under Pressure

MERCURY, 1984

Signals split the fan vote, with many hating its brave new world of synthesised sounds and dialled-down guitars. Admirably, Rush refused to retreat to safe ground with the follow up, recruiting pop producer Peter Henderson to take the place of Terry Brown.

While the result wasn't on a par with *Signals*, the likes of *Distant Early Warning*, *Red Sector A* and the heart-wrenching *Afterimage* stand among the finest songs the band recorded in any of their various sonic incarnations, while its chilling themes of Cold War angst and dystopian alienation perfectly embody those paranoid times.

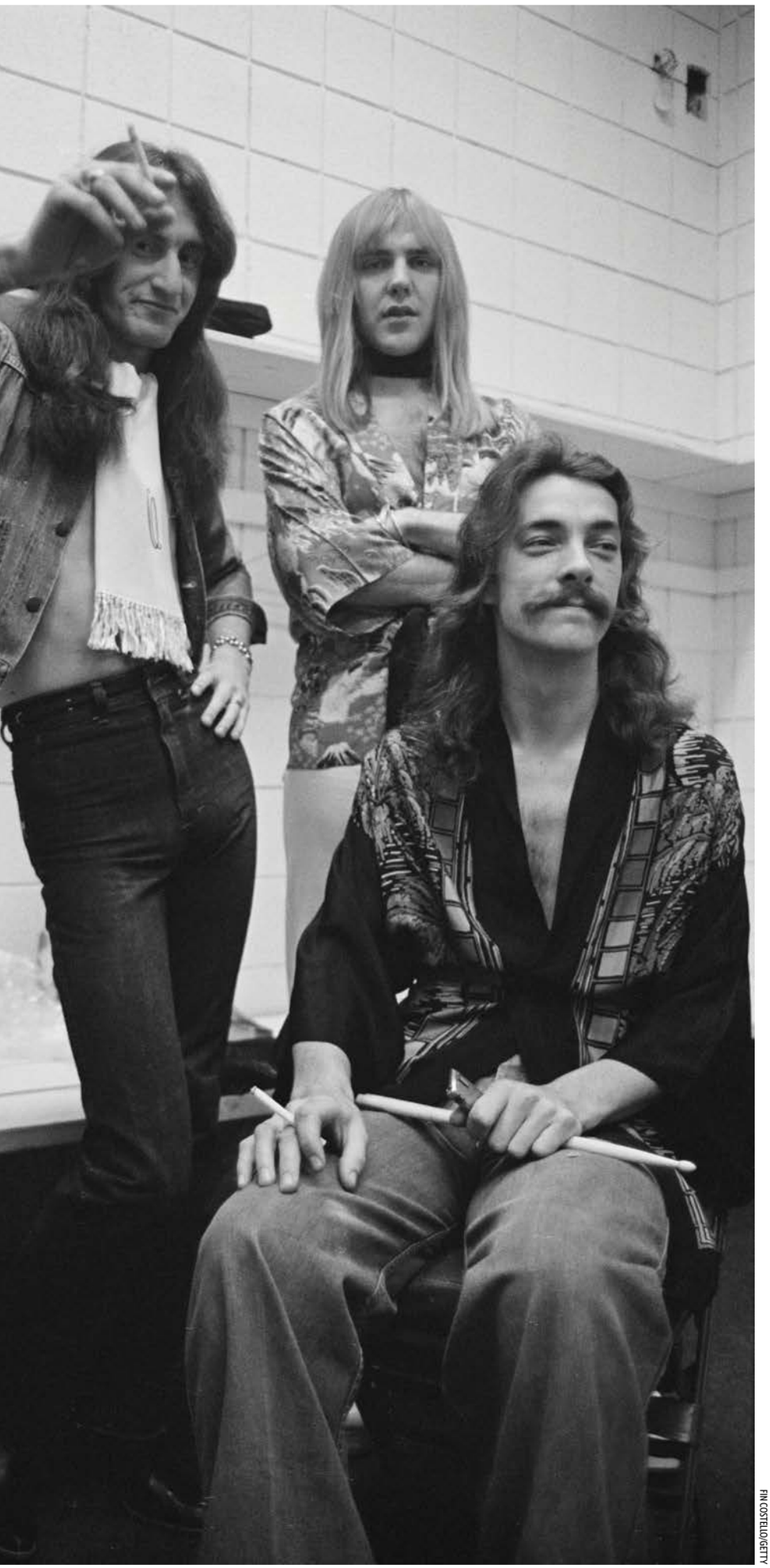


Power Windows

MERCURY, 1985

Older fans may dismiss Rush's 80s albums because they lack the drama of their 70s predecessors, but the playing is unquestionably tighter and the arrangements more concise. Where Alex Lifeson also played synthesisers on *Grace Under Pressure*, he sticks to playing guitar on this follow-up – and the result is better for it.

Every song is a group effort, of course, but it's impossible not to name the guitarist as the star of *Big Money*. Likewise, *Manhattan Project* seems to be Peart's showcase and *Marathon* Lee's. Then they all come together on *Middletown Dreams* and the fabulously sparse and hypnotic *Mystic Rhythms*.



FIN COSTELLO/GETTY

Superior (continued)



Roll The Bones

ATLANTIC, 1991

Rush switched to Howard Jones/Tina Turner producer Rupert Hine for 1989's *Presto*. That combination worked better on this second collaboration, as if to prove the theory that Rush are best when the album title ends in an 'S'.

Like an old friend walking out of fog, *Roll The Bones* emerges crisper and sharper. Synthesisers slip into the background; big choruses empower *Dreamline* and *Ghost Of A Chance*; *The Big Wheel* is so stripped bare that it has an almost 60s feel. Geddy even gets away with a rap on the title track, though he thankfully didn't make a habit of it.



Counterparts

ATLANTIC, 1993

Presto and *Roll The Bones* had been touted as back-to-basics album, but *Counterparts* was the point where Rush truly reconnected with the rock band they once were.

Geddy Lee acknowledged Rush were fans of groups such as Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, and while *Counterparts* hardly went 'full grunge', *Animate* and *Stick It Out* were more stripped down than anything they'd recorded in years.

Of course, 'stripped down' is all relative – *Counterparts* was still a complex, cerebral listen by anyone's standards. But it successfully repositioned Rush for the coming decade.



Snakes And Arrows

ATLANTIC, 2007

Meet the new Rush, as good as the old Rush. The band cited co-producer Nick Raskulinecz (Foo Fighters) for making the recording process more enjoyable than any in memory – and it shows.

Far Cry and *Angels* and *Spindrift* rock like you've wished Rush would for years. It's brilliantly paced and sequenced, mixing irresistible choruses (*The Larger Bowl, The Way The Wind Blows*) with instrumental brilliance (*The Main Monkey Business*) and arena-filling guitar, and when the riff to *Armor And Sword* kicks in we're back in *Moving Pictures* territory.



Clockwork Angels

ROADRUNNER, 2012

When *Clockwork Angels* was released in 2012, few suspected it would turn out to be the band's swansong. But what an album to close out a remarkable career, laced with stone-cold classics, including the one-two punch of *Caravan* and *BU2B*, and the soaring, seven-minute title track.

However, it's closer *The Garden* which resonates most. Spine-tingling strings and a subtle bass line, before Lifeson sweeps in with an acoustic flourish. The lyrics deal with our inevitable onward journey towards death – a subject are even more poignant since Neil Peart's untimely passing in January 2020.

Good Worth exploring



Caress Of Steel

MERCURY, 1975

The difficult third album. *Caress Of Steel* was the first truly 'prog' Rush album, as showcased on the 12-minute *The Necromancer* and the side-long *The Fountain Of Lamneth*. But it wasn't all tricky time changes and Tolkein-esque storylines – *Bastille Day* packed a hard rock punch and reflective *Lakeside Park* wallowed in delicate nostalgia (the less said about I *Think I'm Going Bald*, the better).

Caress Of Steel was far from perfect - it had an oddly downbeat, murky atmosphere, and it stiffed upon release, casting it as the runt in the pack of their 70s albums. But for all its flaws, it remains an essential if enigmatic Rush album.



Hold Your Fire

MERCURY, 1987

History hasn't been kind to *Hold Your Fire* album. Its slick production muscled out the quirkiness that edged *Signals* and *Grace Under Pressure*, while Neil Peart's faux-oriental *Tai Shan* is loathed to this day by Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson..

Yet it deserves re-evaluation. For one, it contains *Time Stand Still*, arguably the greatest Rush song of the 80s. Add in propulsive opener *Force Ten* and the stark *Mission*, and its tarnished reputation begins to regain some lustre.

It's still a long way from great – too many bland, forgettable songs – but neither is it the nadir the haters claim it to be.



Presto

ATLANTIC, 1989

Presto is held up as the point where Rush moved on from their "keyboard phase", even if still sounds like an utterly 1980s proposition. Produced by Rupert Hine, it boasts echoing drum sonics and a glistening sheen, while the rhythms of *Scars* could almost be ABC or Frankie Goes To Hollywood.

Still, it's strong on actual songs, with *Chain Lightning* and *The Pass* sounding like accidental power-pop, and *War Paint*, with its rousing, anthemic refrain of *'Boys and girls together/Paint the mirror black'* coming on like a futuristic Sweet. A better Rush album than most Rush fans realise.



Test For Echo

ATLANTIC, 1996

A minor disappointment after *Counterparts*, Rush's 16th studio album was sturdy rather than sparkling. "It doesn't really have a defined direction," admitted Geddy Lee in 2002. "I kind of felt like we were a bit burnt creatively."

Still, even a workmanlike Rush record has its moments. It's certainly proggier than its predecessor, with *Limbo* and the elasticated *Resist* twisting and turning like the band used to back in the good old days. The problem is that few of the songs stick their heads above the parapet melodically or hook-wise. *Test For Echo* doesn't take long to fade from the memory when it's over.



Vapor Trails

ATLANTIC, 2002

Vapor Trails was the most important album Rush had made since 2112, mainly because they never expected to make it in the first place. It marked Neil Peart's return from a wilderness of grief after the death of his wife and daughter – and it's no coincidence that the album opens with the sound of his drums.

But while it was an emotional triumph, musically it was less so. *One Little Victory* and *Ghost Rider* are as good as anything they'd recorded during the previous 15 year, but many of the songs – constructed out of jams – are unmemorable, while a flat mix takes off any remaining shine. Still, it was great to have them back.



Feedback

ATLANTIC, 2004

Simply Rush's way of paying tribute to the bands that inspired them in the first place, this album is nonetheless the sound of a band marking time by stepping back in it.

The songs the band chose to cover may surprise many veteran Rush fans – The Who's *The Seeker*, Love's *Seven And Seven Is* and The Yardbirds' *Heart Full Of Soul* and *Shapes Of Things* all sound a world away from Rush's own work – and the it plays like a guilty pleasure. Lee's vocals add unique cadence to each classic, but fans of the originals who aren't Rush fans will deem them heretical. Fun, but hardly essential.



LARRY MARANO/GETTY

Live & Solo

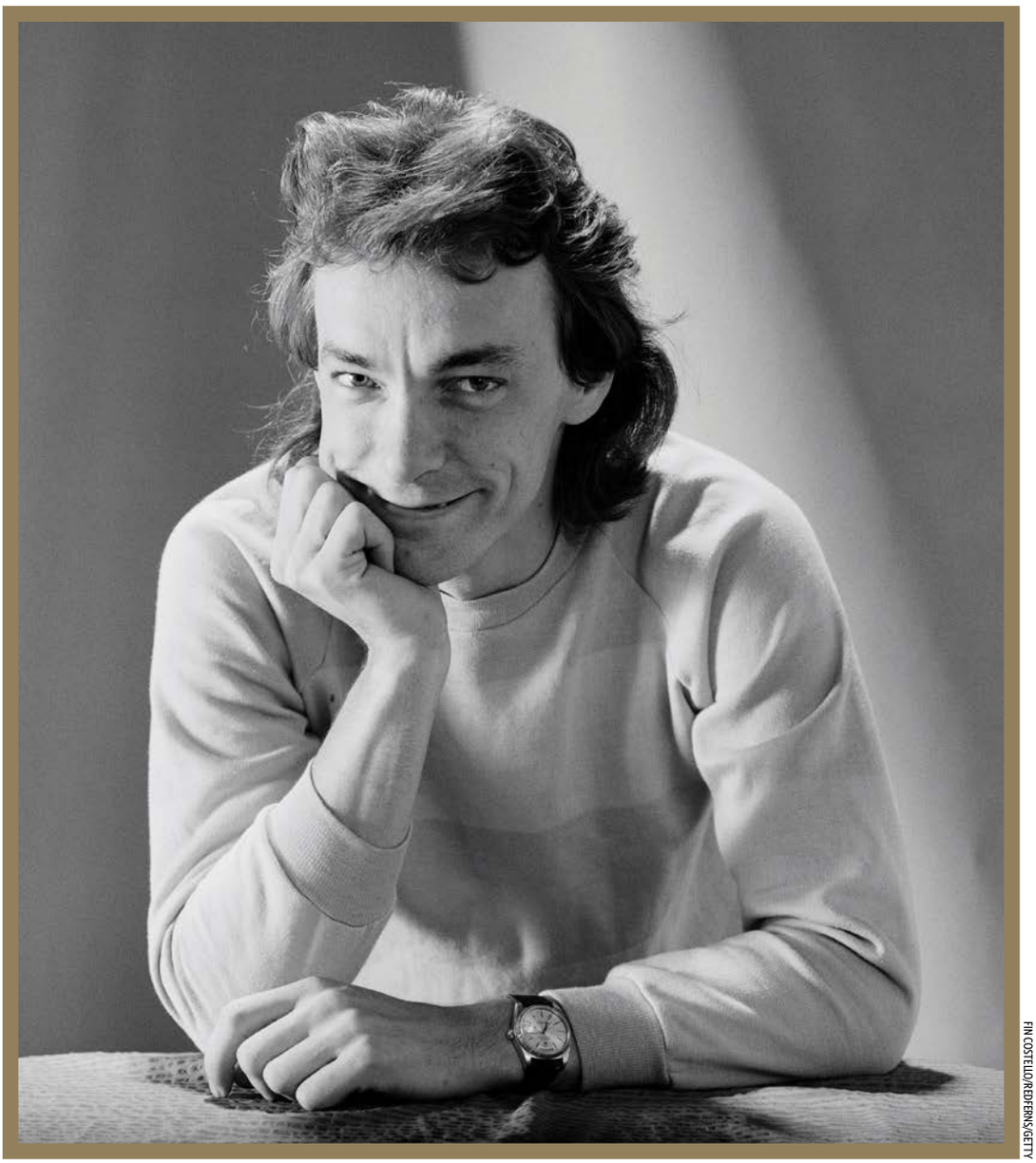
The live album was a fixture in the arsenal of any self-respecting 70s rock band – part greatest hits, part victory lap. But Rush used them not just as a representation of their concerts, but as a marker for the end of each phase of their career.

All The World's A Stage *(MERCURY, 1975)* – covering the first four studio albums, up to and including *2112* – showed the band at their rawest and remains an essential document of their formative years. By contrast, *Exit... Stage Left* *(MERCURY, 1981)* is a little airtight, the band replicating the studio versions of their late 70s epics too closely. How you feel about *A Show Of Hands* *(MERCURY, 1988)* depends on what you feel about their mid-80s 'synth phase', though it does breathe life into their occasionally sterile studio counterparts.

Rush abandoned the four-studio-one-live-album pattern in the 90s. The second half of their career was punctuated by a steady stream of live albums and DVDs, some more essential than others. The powerful *Rush In Rio* *(ATLANTIC, 2003)* is a genuine must-hear, recorded on their triumphant South American debut in 2002, *Snakes & Arrows Live* *(ATLANTIC, 2008)* and *Clockwork Angels Tour* *(ROADRUNNER, 2013)* capture the band on fire in their later years, and *R40 Live* *(ANTHEM, 2015)* is a fine nostalgia-tinged farewell.

Completists will want to own *Different Stages* *(ATLANTIC, 1998)*, *R30: 30th Anniversary World Tour* *(MERCURY, 2005)*, *Grace Under Pressure Tour* *(MERCURY, 2006)*, *Time Machine 2011: Live In Cleveland* *(ROADRUNNER, 2011)*, though none truly add much to the band's mythology.

Rush were such a tight-knit unit that there was no reason for them to embark on extra-curricular activities during their heyday. But Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee flexed their muscles with 1996's hard-rocking *Victor* *(ATLANTIC, 1996)* and 2000's melodically savvy *My Favourite Headache* *(ATLANTIC, 2000)* respectively. Mention must also be made of *Battle Scar*, a 1980 track by fellow Canadian rockers Max Webster which features guest appearances from all three members of Rush – a true curio in the annals of the band's history.



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