

AT 34, Alex Lifeson's rounded, boyish features and easygoing nature betray his 13 years as a famed and successful rock guitarist.

As Rush grew from a hungover, stock power trio through the flamboyance of the '70s into today's streamlined, individual, quality modern rock act, Alex must have seen most everything there is to see in the rock 'n' roll life – its traps and temptations, highs and lows.

Yet he's not become either jaded or egocentric as could have been expected.

'Hold Your Fire', the twelfth all-new Rush release, pulses with freshness and vitality, a vivid reflection of the group's lasting enthusiasm. In recent years, the three have eased up a bit on a punishing workrate that might have dulled their sharp, restless edge.

Rush are still excited about their future, and proud of their past. They're very much the band that got it right.

IN HIS London hotel, over coffee, croissants and the occasional clattering of dropped cutlery, Alex explains that, even after all this time, Rush still eats up a very big



very much but she bugs the hell outta me sometimes!" he laughs. "And it's the same with us."

Patience must wear pretty thin in a recording studio.

"Twenty four hours a day for six months. Yeah, very easily. And it's usually such a stressful

the concentration up, and to keep excited about it. No matter how excited you were, it's still a long time.

"As an example, with 'Grace Under Pressure', we went into Le Studio (Quebec) in autumn, and we left just as the spring was starting!"

more candid and emotive, qualities heightened by their best set of tunes yet. 'Time Stand Still', for which Aimee Mann provides additional vocals, would make a great single.

"I think something like 'Power Windows' required

"There always were. Because we started the band when we'd just turned 15, friends were going on trips – I remember one time there was a trip to Europe for about three weeks but we had a couple of gigs and there was no way to do it. But if it's what you love

part of his life.

"It's a full-time commitment even when the band's not working together but, increasingly, we're trying to take more time off, take longer breaks. Part of the reason we haven't come to Britain in a long time is that we're pacing our tours a little differently. We're trying to take more time off the road while the commitment to making records has become greater than ever. We worked very quickly on the new record and it still took eight months to finish!"

All of Rush are married, and despite his devotion to the band, Alex isn't a stranger to his kids.

"It's not too bad now. All our families have grown up having Dad going out and coming back for a couple of days every month, so they're quite used to it. I think it's harder on us than on them. When you do have only a short time off you try to make the most of it.

"I became a father when I was very young," he adds in afterthought. "My son has his driving licence now and it's a whole different world."

Do you and Geddy (Lee, bass/keyboards/vocals) and Neil (Peart, drums) still surprise each other after all these years?

"Yeah, I think so. We have on this record, as we do with each record. Maybe 'surprise' is too strong a word – we sorta expect more from each other I guess. But it is surprising to be able to continue making records for a long time, hopefully being innovative and different with each one. Keeping up the enthusiasm over 12 or 13 records is a surprise in itself."

And annoy each other?

"Oh yeah. We're *people*! Everybody is like that, in any relationship. I love my wife

situation to begin with."

'Hold Your Fire' was put together in a rich variety of locations. Recording took place in southern England, Paris, Montserrat and in their Canadian hometown, Toronto.

"It makes it easier for us. In the past, we would make all our records in the one studio. That'd be five months in one place working on one thing. And it was difficult just to keep

PICKING UP after the grand design of '85's 'Power Windows', 'Hold Your Fire' is Rush's most immediate record to date.

Without lacking in depth, it has as much directness and clarity as the band have allowed themselves since their plain, if stodgy, debut.

As it has matured, Rush's music has become increasingly

more listening to. This album requires a few listens at least but there's an immediacy about it too.

"We felt great when we recorded it, we had fun. Usually it's quite hard work, but we really enjoyed ourselves. It was a very smooth record to make, and I think it shows in its feel, it feels really positive."

Are there still sacrifices that you have to make for Rush?

doing, those kinda sacrifices don't mean anything. Right now I don't think I'm giving up anything."

If Rush did split up, and of course that's an inevitability, could you enjoy the freedom and the excitement of new challenges, or do you think that the nostalgia might get to you?

"No, I don't think so. It's been too long. Maybe if it was after a five year lifespan it would be a

THE FIRING SQUAD

RUSH certainly don't live up to their name because it's taken the group 13 years to make their best album to date. Guitarist ALEX LIFESON counts the cost of commitment to PAUL ELLIOTT. Photo by GREG FREEMAN

little difficult but after 19 years in the band and 13 years the way it is now, I'm quite satisfied that I've done a lot, and that we've got our own

laughing – and that was the whole idea of being in a group, to have fun.”

So has the band ever come close to breaking up?

didn't get paid for months, and we got pissed off.”

As Alex's expression tenses at the memory, it's clear that those old wounds cut deep

certainly bring it up that I was not happy. If there's something really bothering somebody in the band then of course it'd be discussed. We've always worked like that.

“No matter how passionately somebody feels about one thing, it's always discussed and an absolutely democratic decision is reached. Sometimes you don't get all of what you're working for, but the end result is that everyone's at least a little happy.”

Is three ever a crowd?

He mumbles, grimaces and looks at his plate.

Or would four be?

“Four would be, for us. I don't think three has ever been, but four would be because of the closeness between us. I always think how weird it'd be to look over and see somebody else on stage.”

Somewhat paradoxically, Neil is renowned for shunning publicity and for fiercely guarded his private life. Is it possible to retain any kind of anonymity in Canada?

“For me it's not too bad. I live outside of the city, although in Toronto I think people have come to respect our privacy. There's been the odd occasion when somebody pops over and they want an autograph or something and you explain to them that, if you don't mind, this is my home and I'd like to keep it private and separate from my work. And almost always they understand.

“Geddy has more difficulty. He's obviously a little more recognisable, being the singer.

alone! Not to be rude or anything, but this is the way he has to be to survive happily.

“Even on the road he's quite a private person. As a lyricist he obviously has something to say, but he regards himself as just a drummer in a band, and that's all he wants to do. Even when it comes to doing videos he's not too keen really.”

Would you agree that Neil reveals more about himself with each set of lyrics he writes?

“Yes, especially on this record. There was a lot of anger on ‘Grace Under Pressure’. I remember when we first read the lyrics; we thought, Jesus, he's really pissed off! And I think it comes across like that.

“He doesn't preach to people in his lyrics. He'd rather discuss and argue something than incite people to go out and burn down the corporate factories that are causing pollution.”

Maybe there's no room for anything that provocative in Rush's music?

“Not to that extent, no. We try to take an intelligent approach to something. Weigh it from the heart and the head.”

THAT LAST sentence reflects an attitude that speaks volumes about Rush. They set their own standards and match them step by step, measure by measure, stretching but taking care not to overreach.

In fact, the only danger of that lies with Geddy, who these days does seem to be

position in the history of rock.

"I'm proud of that, and if it ended I'd move on to something else. *What* I'm not sure, I've had no need to really think about it."

So Rush isn't like a marriage? It doesn't grow harder to give up the longer you continue?

"In some ways it's more than a marriage, it's a very close relationship. And splitting up the band won't affect the relationship that the three of us have. We'll always be very good friends. We spend a vast majority of our time together

Alex pours another coffee and thinks it over.

"There was a period after 'Caress Of Steel' (1975) when I think we came close to splitting up. It was a pivotal album for us, but it was not a commercial success at a time when it was important to have a record that at least did a little better than the last one.

"Our management were worried, the record company thought we were going down the tubes, and the tour was very rough. We weren't making any money at all, we

"We got angry and we fought back with '2112'. And after '2112' became a success, there was a lot of, uh, backslapping." He grins wryly and adopts the old patronising, bullshit tone. "Yes, we knew you'd pull through!"

YOU SEEM satisfied with the band's progress at present, but were you unhappy, could you bring yourself to suggest a split even if the other two were full of enthusiasm?

"I'm sure I would. I'd

He had a house in the city and there were people there every single day, knocking on his door, yelling over his backyard fence and things. And he ended up moving from a house that he really loved.

"You expect it and accept it on the road. It's all part of the job. Neil, I think, draws a very distinct line between work and his private life, which he guards strenuously."

And successfully?

"Yeah, usually. He's not compromising in his stance. He sticks to his guns; leave me

attempting to take on just a touch too much.

Alex laughs in agreement.

"Sometimes I don't know how Geddy does it. He's whacking notes with one hand on his bass, he's singing, he's got another hand on the keyboard, he's playing one set of bass pedals and he's triggering something else with his other foot. He's got everything going! There's not much – well, maybe one thing left that he can use!"

Sounds fascinating! But how would they ever follow that?