

# SCENE

NORTHEAST OHIO'S ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY

STILL FREE

Oct. 31-Nov. 6, 1996 • Vol. 27 • No. 44

# R U S H

testing  
for  
echo



jon spencer  
blues  
explosion

claire dane's the heads





# Testing For Echo

## Rush Return After Two Years In Hiding

by Steven Batten

Perhaps the best visual approximation of the Rush saga, 1996, is that of a lone hiker, standing atop a mountain peak and calling out in no particular direction to see if anyone can still hear him. Testing for echo, if you will.

After a solid two-year hiatus from the public eye, that's exactly the situation that the venerable Canadian power trio found itself in. Apparently, however, band members Geddy Lee (Bass, vocals), Alex Lifeson (guitar) and Neil Peart (drums) liked what they heard when they reconvened, because what they came up with is perhaps their strongest effort since 1991's MOVING PICTURES. TEST FOR ECHO, as they've called it, returns to the forefront a band that has long blurred the line between classic and modern, at once progressive AND accessible.

TEST FOR ECHO is no exception to that trademark formula. Lee's vibrant vocals and buoyant, limber basslines, paired with Lifeson's articulate arsenal of guitar riffs and Peart's inimitable rhythmic foundations, further blur the line, establishing TEST FOR ECHO as the best of both worlds. In short, a modern classic.

Currently touring in support of TEST FOR ECHO, the band will be in town this Monday, November 4, for a full evening of Rush at Gund Arena. Lifeson spoke with SCENE about the band's return to form.

Alex Lifeson: Sorry I'm running a little bit late. I just did the stupidest interview I've ever done, in my whole life.

**SCENE: That bad, huh? What happened?**

AL: I don't know. It had nothing to do with the band. This guy went on about the drug scene in America and how musicians are all f---ed up — he just went on and on and on. Finally I just said, "Look, I know you've got some serious feelings about this, but I'm here to talk to you about the record, if you want to talk to me about it. So can we please do that?" It just went on and on. I wanted to smoke a joint, I got so upset. (laughs)

**SCENE: TEST FOR ECHO's a pretty good record, and a pretty good Rush record at that. I was wondering what to expect, since it'd been awhile, but you guys really came through.**

AL: Oh, great, thank you. I love this record. I think it's one

We all went into this project with such a rejuvenated energy level that we couldn't wait to get into it.

Now having said that, the first week was a little bit weird for me. I was feeling a little bit unsettled — I had just finished VICTOR, I had worked really hard on it and I was really on a high, being in control of the whole thing.

The first week, Geddy and I spent just talking about direction, personal direction, things that we wanted to do with our lives. Everything felt kind of same-old, same-old to me.

Once I exorcised those ghosts, the following week we wrote five songs. We dove into it, and it was very, very positive from then on.

**SCENE: What kind of things did you draw from musically this time around?**

AL: It's tough to pinpoint where that is exactly. You kind of sit there and you look at each other and you think, Well, what next? Let's just play. And we'll jam and something will develop that way. Or we'll have some of Neil's lyrics, and we'll get a sense of what mood he's trying to create, whether it's dramatic or neutral or whatever, and write accordingly.

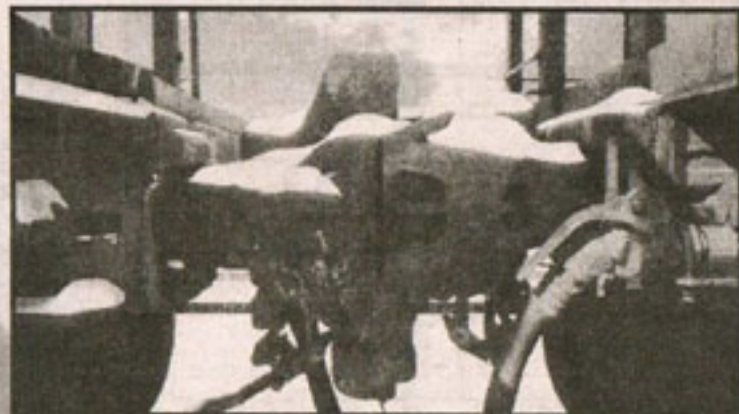
I think Rush has always been cinematic in its approach to the way we develop our songwriting. We try to be quite visual with it, and you just kind of take it from there. With me, it's all the instinctive, spontaneous stuff that I do that I think is the best that I do, and Ged's great at developing things, so we have a really good partnership in that sense.

**SCENE: Since Neil writes the lyrics, do yours and Geddy's ideas ever clash with his idea of what the song is?**

AL: Not really. I don't think he has a preconceived idea of the music. I think for him, it's really exciting that we work on music to his lyrics. He doesn't hear anything until we've developed it to a fairly complete end. And then we play the stuff for him, because it's totally foreign to him.

A number of times, he's commented that he never would've thought that a piece of music would've worked with those lyrics. He might have a rhythmic sense in his

because it was there. It had to have a purpose and a place. There's a great sense of dimension in his mixing.



**SCENE: That worked out remarkably well considering that he came in at the tail end of the project.**

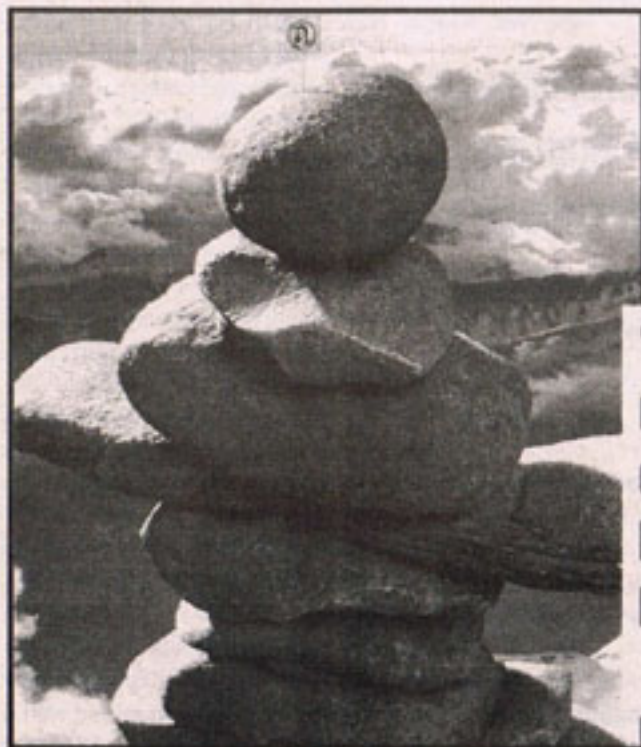
AL: He came in fresh, so it was just a question of his take on it. Consequently, he'd get things to a level where he was ready for us to come in and make comments, and we made a point of not going into the studio until he was at that point. And we'd hear completely different takes on these songs that we'd lived with for six or seven months. It was really exciting to hear how he heard it. There were things that we really wouldn't have thought of, and that was really the whole point of him being there.

**SCENE: Given how well this has worked out with the break between records, do you anticipate doing it that way next time around?**





AL: Oh, great, thank you. I love this record — I think it's one of the best we've done, if not *the* best. I always feel that way after we finish a record, but there's something about this record that's really special. I guess it's 'cos I was there. (laughs) We had such a great time making it. Everyone was in great spirits every day, really looking forward to working every day.



Part of that was due to the break we had — everyone went off and did other things with their time. But there's a quality and a feel to this record that I don't think any of our other records have had.

**SCENE:** That was probably the biggest break that the band has ever taken, but it certainly seems to have worked.

AL: Yeah. Geddy definitely wanted to take the time off because he and his wife had a baby. He wanted to be home for the first year of her life. There was absolutely no problem with that from Neil and me.

We went on and did other things — I did the Victor project, and Neil finished up the BURNING FOR BUDDY tribute that he did, plus all the millions of other things that he likes to do. And that stretched out from 12 months to 18 months.

with those lyrics. He might have a rhythmic sense in his mind, and he will write that way, with a particular rhythm in his head. But quite often, the music is totally unrelated to that kind of preconceived rhythm that he had.

**SCENE:** You've worked with producer Peter Collins in the past, and there seems to be a pretty good relationship there. Soundwise, were you trying for anything different this time around?

AL: We definitely wanted to get more size out of the drum kit. We went to Bearsville in New York to record the drums. They have an enormous studio there that really suited Neil's kit. He changed drums and spent a lot of time selecting the drums that he wanted — the particular tone of the drums, the tunings.

I wanted a little more aggressiveness out of the guitar, a more direct kind of aggressiveness. So, again, we went in

**"I think Rush has always been cinematic in its approach to the way we develop our songwriting. We try to be quite visual with it, and you just kind of take it from there."**

**— Alex Lifeson**

that direction.

Conceptually, I wanted to develop the guitars in such a way that the acoustics played a much more important role in the overall guitar sound. So we developed that aspect of it.

Cliff Norrell did the engineering on the record, and he was terrific to work with. He grew up with our music, and it was an exciting opportunity for him to work with us because he was so familiar with all our material. He had even played in a couple of bands early on that'd played a few of our songs. We worked very closely, and he was aware of our history, so it was his opportunity to kind of develop songs more in a particular direction.

And of course, Andy Wallace coming in and mixing. The guy is just a genius. He was terrific to work with, great to watch, very fast, very knowledgeable, very bright guy. He did everything for a reason. Nothing was in the mix just



AL: I think it's probably inevitable at this point that we will, and that's only because touring is not a priority with us anymore. We will still tour.

This tour won't be as long as some tours in the past, but certainly it will be a decent tour. But to go out and do 120 or 150 dates is just not in us anymore. So I would guess that after this tour we'll take another, not as long as this break was, but probably a fair chunk of time before we start the next project.

That's me saying that now, but it all depends, really, on how excited we are by the end of the tour. We may decide to just take a few months off and clear our heads and then jump into the next record. We already talked about the *next* record while we were doing this one. So there's that in the future, certainly.

**SCENE:** Any future side projects or ideas in the works?

AL: No ideas ... I can't really speak for the other guys, but I know that I would like to do another project *like* Victor was, whether it would be the same as Victor in terms of lineup and the people I worked with, I don't know. But I'd certainly like to work on another solo project.

I'd like to work as a producer as well, work with other bands and musicians. My slate is clean, and it's pretty broad, so ... I just like the whole idea of activity.

**SCENE:** Has the idea of an instrumental solo record ever crossed your mind?

AL: I don't think that I would want to really do anything exclusively instrumental on a record. On a few things, yeah, I kind of would. But a whole record, no.

But I'd love to have the opportunity to work on a soundtrack, which is basically instrumental given a visual cue and source of inspiration. I think that would be really exciting and a lot of fun.