

# RUSH

## LIKE MAGIC



By Richard Hedges

Rush has had the kind of career most bands dream about. With over a dozen albums released since their 1974 self-titled debut, the Canadian trio has never stuck to formulas, choosing instead to explore new territories of rock with each album. *Presto*, their latest LP, has all the makings of a Rush classic, and their current tour, during which the band (drummer Neil Peart, guitarist Alex Lifeson and vocalist/bassist Geddy Lee) performs nearly half-a-dozen tracks from the new album mixed in with a heavy dose of vintage tunes, proves that Rush is prepared to take their progressive sound into the '90s. Alex Lifeson spoke with METAL about the tour and the band.

**METAL: Do you still enjoy touring?**

ALEX: I've really enjoyed this tour. It's been paced really well. We've been in good parts of the country at good times of the year. The album's doing really well, so everybody's really enthusiastic and up. Everything compounded has made it pretty enjoyable so far.

**How much of *Presto* are you doing live?**

We're doing about five songs from *Presto*. We decided with this that we wouldn't do what we normally do, and that's to play just about the whole album whenever we release one. We mixed up some of the older songs, dropped a few and brought in other ones. We wanted to keep the set under two hours, but that's been kind of difficult with the number of songs we have, so we're a little bit over two hours.

**Do certain songs take on a life of their own when you start playing them live?**

They basically remain the same, but I think they do develop on the road. They become so much more natural. I think we've found that with most of our material. When it's written and recorded, it's really in its earliest stages. Once you get out on the road and start playing it and you stop thinking about it—whereas you're concentrating so much in the studio, on the road you don't really think about it. You're much more relaxed about playing the material, and it does develop somewhat. But we've always been a band that's kind of tried to reproduce what we did in the studio quite accurately, and there's really not a lot of room for im-

Photo by Kim Settle



provisation or major arrangement changes.

**How has your songwriting relationship with Geddy developed over the years?**

We're both quite different in our approaches to songwriting. Geddy takes his time. He works through arrangements very diligently. He likes to go through every possible different direction in a particular place before he's satisfied that what he's got is the right direction, whereas I'm much more spontaneous, so it works really well together. We're sort of at different ends of the pole, and the combination of the two puts us right about in the middle.

**A lot of Rush's material goes beyond the normal boundaries of rock. Was that always the band's intention?**

Yeah, I think that was the motivation over all the years, over every record. We wanted to stretch out on each record. I think *Power Windows* is a very different album from, say, *Signals*. Each record, we wanted to try different things. We wanted to push the boundaries. Sometimes it's worked and other times it's been a little less than successful, but in terms of what it leads to on the follow-up, I think it's important that we do make those kinds of expeditions into other realms. I don't think *Presto* could have come out the way it did if we hadn't done *Power Windows* and *Hold Your Fire*. We needed to get that out of our systems, that whole keyboard approach and really produced approach. Now it's gone back to a little more basic approach, and it's very satisfying and very different, I think.

**Do those changes help the band keep things fresh and creative?**

Well, we took seven months off before we went into the studio to write. I think that was a really important move. It was the first time ever that we'd taken a good chunk of time off to really divorce ourselves from the whole music scene—away from the band, away from the office, away from everything—and just kind of hang out and really relax. Consequently, when we went into the studio to write, we were really enthusiastic and really fired up, and that more than anything I think led to the creative success of writing *Presto*.

**Were you working on new songs at all during that time?**

I worked a little bit on some stuff.

I started working a couple of months before we went into the studio. I have a studio at home, and I was fiddling around with some ideas. I spoke to Neil a couple of times. He set up some first drafts of lyrics, and I kind of worked to those a bit. I was prepared a little before we went in, and Geddy had a couple of ideas and Neil had quite a few things happening. It wasn't really until we got into the studio that it all came together, though. But generally I just relaxed. I just hung out, spent time with my family, just some of the things I don't get to do.

**Got into a different mode, huh?**

Yeah. It's a whole different frame of mind, and I think it was really important. I don't know if we'd be out on the road right now if we hadn't taken that time off. Actually, I doubt that we would have been.

**Has there ever been a point where the band thought of calling it quits?**

Yeah, prior to that seven month break! (laughs)

**What led to that, just the constant album-tour-album-tour thing?**

Yeah, exactly. The *Hold Your Fire*

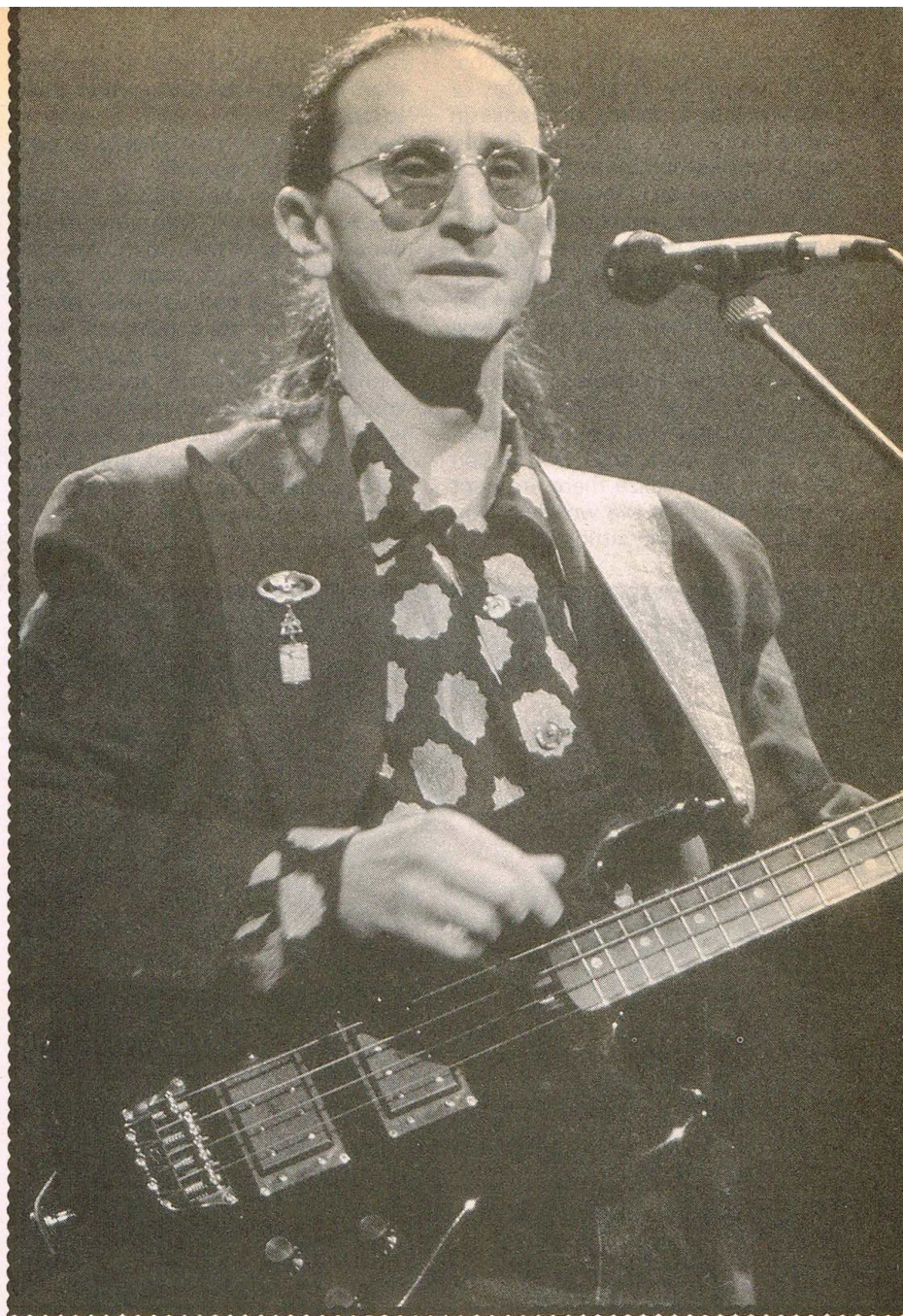


Photo by Ken Sente



tour started in September or October of '87 and didn't finish until May of '88. We had a couple of breaks in there, but it was a long tour. Geddy had a lot of problems with his voice and he was quite ill through most of the tour. It just wasn't really a satisfying tour. We felt very tired, and we questioned whether we wanted to keep doing this at this stage, in our thirties, when there were other things available to us to pursue. I mean, it's fine when you're younger. It's a new thing and it's exciting and you pour all your energy into it and it's great. It's a dream come true. But as you get older you realize there are a lot of other things in the world for you to see and do, and sitting in a hotel

room or on a bus or in a dressing room is maybe not the greatest route to take.

**So what made you decide to put out another record?**

Well, we finished mixing the live album. We weren't even going to talk about touring at that point. We said "Okay, let's just go home for about seven months and not think about anything, and then let's talk later about getting into the studio, and then maybe we'll talk about the T word." We didn't even mention the T word until we were just about finished mixing the record, and finally Neil brought it up. I remember we were in a restaurant in London. We mixed in London. And he mention-

ed, "I guess we should start thinking about touring and planning all this." That was really the first time in about a year that we even talked about touring.

**When Rush was formed, did you ever think you'd still be doing this in 1990?**

No, absolutely not. I don't think any of us did. It's really gone a long time. In the early days, you feel lucky to be able to make one record. I remember thinking that if we got to do four or five albums, that would really be a great career! *(laughs)* And here we are at 17 or 100 or something, I don't know.

**Is the general attitude within the group now one day at a time?**

Yeah. We try not to plan too far ahead. We'd done that for years, that album-tour-album-tour kind of mode. But right now we've got this tour, and then we'll take some time off and think about doing the next record, and it'll continue like that. But we're not making any concrete plans. We'll definitely do another album. I'm sure, providing our health holds up, we'll do a few more records. We really enjoy recording, and the whole creative process of writing is very enjoyable too. I don't think we'd ever get tired of that. The only thing you get tired of really is the boredom of being on the road. Playing is great. Getting out there and playing is always an exciting thing, but all the waiting around you do wears on you. To tell the truth, it sounds like I'm complaining a lot, but it's all in how you pace it and what you make of your time. Geddy and I play tennis a lot. Neil is an avid cyclist. He goes out cycling every day. He also works on these travel journals. On the time off he takes trips around the world and works on that. You try to go to some art galleries or a museum, or a play if you're lucky enough to get out to one, or some movies—whatever use you make of your time. We're learning to do that a lot better now.

**Do you ever find the rock format constraining at all?**

No, not at all. Each album you do, you think "Well, that's it. I don't know what I can come up with next. There are only so many notes, only so many chords." But you always end up coming up with something else. And I think we've developed a better sensitivity to mood and emotion and translating that into music. There's no limitations at all. ★

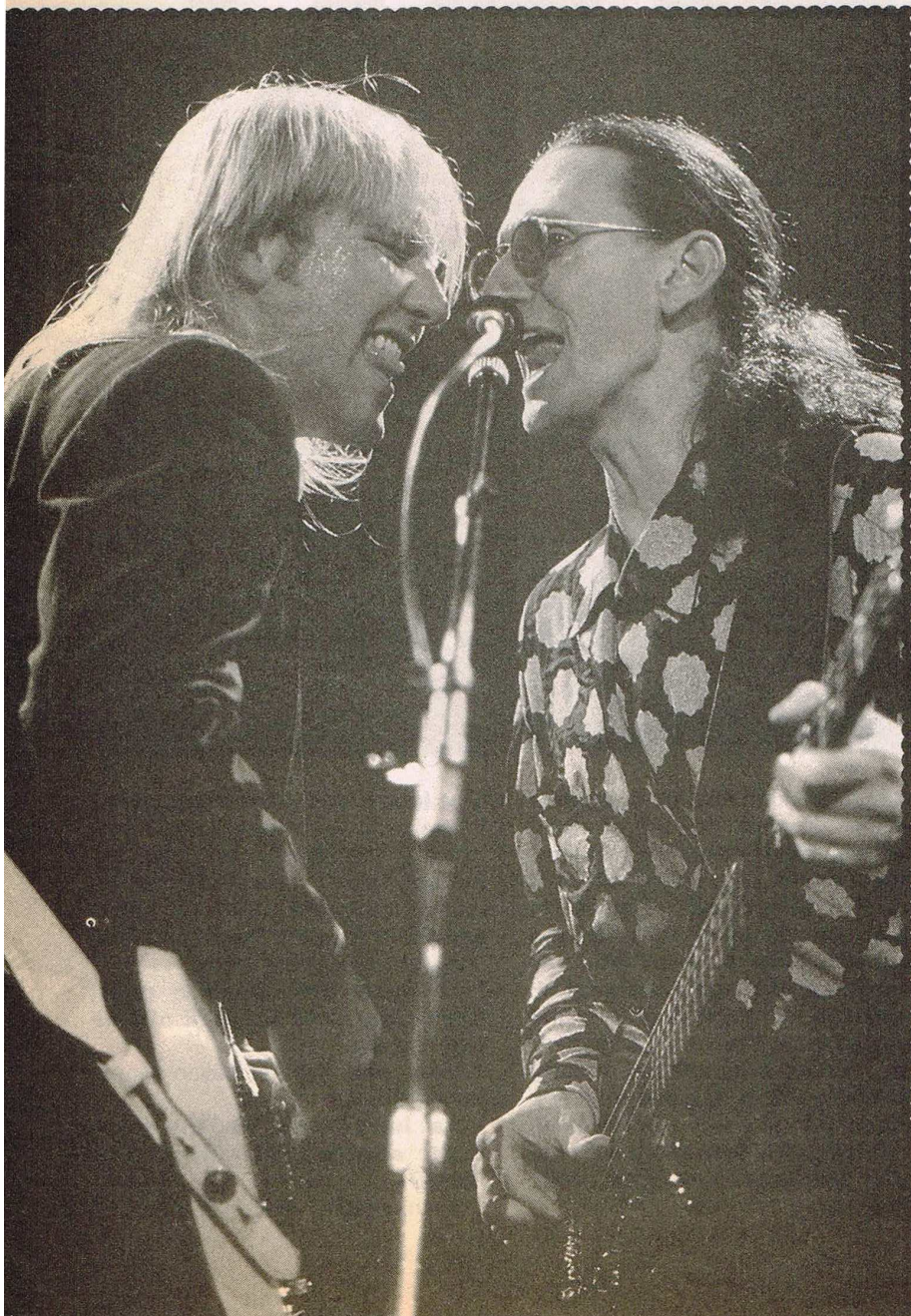


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