

ON THE EVE OF THEIR FIRST BRITISH TOUR FOR FOUR YEARS RUSH'S ALEX LIFESON EXPLAINS WHY THESE CANADIAN TECHNO ROCKERS HAVE NO INTENTION OF RESTING ON THEIR PAST LAURELS AND WHY THEY'RE STILL ROLLING OUT MUSIC THAT INSPIRES CHANGE. IS DIE HARD RUSH FANATIC CHRIS COLLINGWOOD CONVINCED THOUGH?

Few bands have undergone so many different recording phases as RUSH. From the naive but charming first few albums, to the powerful and lyrically thought provoking '2112' and 'A Farewell To Kings' to the sheer class of 'Moving Pictures', they could do no (well, very little) wrong. The band rode the accusations of fascism prompted by 'The Trees' and '2112', stating they, or rather lyricist/drummer Neil Peart, were expressing... "Freedom of choice, freedom for the individual. We're not advocating anything remotely right wing." They rode the derision they received for writing songs that lasted for over twenty minutes. They even got over snipes about the robes, such as kimonos, that they used to wear off stage (Would you trust a band who only wear dressing gowns in each others company?).

However, for many years the worst accusation that has been laid at the band, this ground breakin', pomp rockin', heavy riffin' power trio with a singer with a bucket of ice down his trousers (come on, to make him sing like that!) is that they have since 'Moving Pictures' eleven years ago...lost it! Become boring. Keyboard based, nice, safe songs with nothing remarkable about them. Whither power riff of 'In The End'? Where is guitar solo from 'La Villa Strangiato'? What about the bit in 'Xanadu' that goes 'bom-boom-boom-bom'? All gone, to be replaced with blandness. What was once an essential band, and for several years maybe the best Rock band on the planet, are now just sad old corporate rockers. Whereas a new RUSH album used to be an essential purchase, one to look forward to for days, weeks even, now their albums just appear on the shelves, and you're left thinking 'ooh, a new RUSH album. I'll listen to that if someone has a copy'.

Oddly enough, guitarist Alex Lifeson doesn't see it like that.

"I think we've locked into something, especially on the last two albums. All our albums are a natural progression. It all comes very easily, we don't set out to do something different just for the sake of it."

The new 'Roll The Bones' LP is, although basically a good album, quite safe, yet the title track says 'roll the bones, take chances'. Are they a band that take chances any more?

"Um, I think that we do. That is a good question...I think we could afford to take a few more. I think we always have, but maybe less now than we used to when it was a matter of survival. I think we're all very restless right now. I listen to the stuff that's coming out of Seattle like PEARL JAM and NIRVANA. I think the next album's going to be a lot rawer."

Would he agree there was a shift of fans when 'Signals' was released?

"There was a shift but I think the biggest shift was after 'Hemispheres' (1978). We abandoned that whole Sword and Sorcery period then."

Neil Peart also said that early RUSH albums were by a different band. This caused many fans to take umbrage because, well, he was slagging off a band they liked! What has been the reason for these changes in direction? Is it just the band growing up?

"Yes," agrees Alex who, although a very easy going and mild mannered type, now sounds a tad tetchy. "We're talking about eighteen years of development here! It's only natural. I do think we went through a

ON TO THE NEXT GREEN?

period where we experimented heavily with keyboards, from 'Power Windows' to 'Hold Your Fire'. Then we scaled it back, stripped the keyboards, and we'll probably go more in that direction. In some ways we're almost going in a circle."

How do you feel looking back on those early albums. Was it a different band or were they necessary to your development?

"Absolutely. I'm very proud of what we did back then - although I can't listen to 'Caress Of Steel', that sounds so naive...that was a learning period. I think it's the same for anyone, an actor or a writer... That first shoe or book seems would seem so...childish."

The band are currently on a massive world tour, playing Enormodomes throughout the hemispheres, so there's no suggestion that they have lost popularity.

"I think our audience has matured with us. There's a lot of bald heads out there! I think we're playing better on this tour than we have in a long time. We're enjoying it, we feel rejuvenated, enthusiastic. I don't think we're playing enough, and you'd never have heard me saying that in the last ten years. Our audience is also aware that we fool around on stage a lot, they share in the fun we have now rather than seeing us as just being serious the whole time."

So how have you kept the creative juices flowing? Has there never been the temptation to pack it all in?

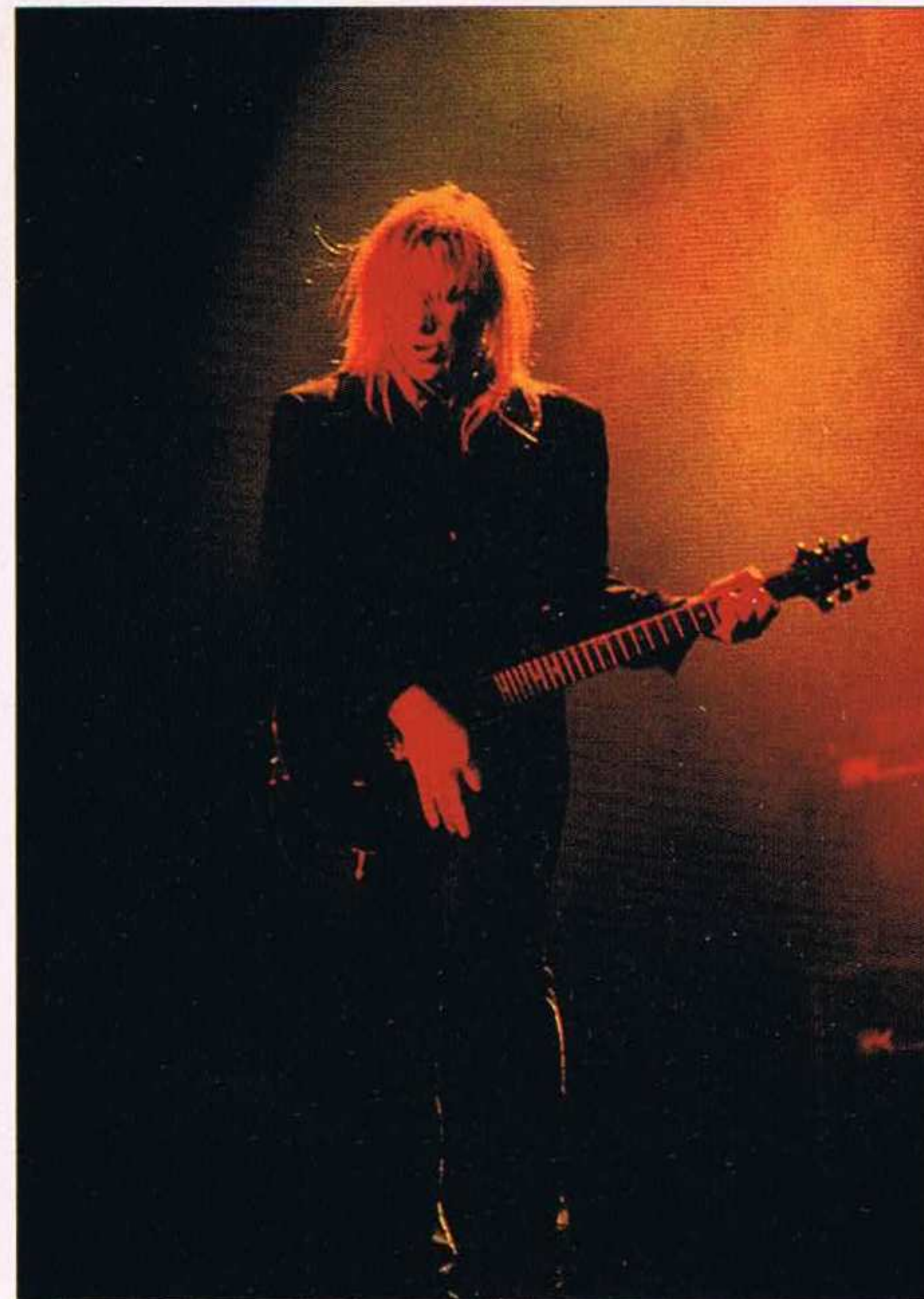
"You get days like that sure. There was a period after the 'Hold Your Fire' tour, which was really long, and we had one week off before we went back in the studio, there was a lot of illness. Geddy lost his voice, we didn't know whether we were coming or going. We took seven months off, and after that we realised we were fresh enough to make that connection with each other again. When we write there's a great amount of energy, we really get off on the creative process together."

Neil Peart always writes lyrics and Geddy and Alex always write the tunes. Since the three of them have been together Alex has only written one lyric, 'Lessons' from '2112' which was by no means standard Rock fodder. Is there a reason for this?

"I really have no desire to write lyrics, neither has Geddy. Also with Neil it becomes a complete band involvement. He'll make criticisms and suggestions about the music, and we'll do the same with the lyrics."



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RUSH

Do you still think it's important for you to develop as a musician?

"Certainly. I think you do tend to lose track of that from time to time. ERIC JOHNSON was opening for us at the beginning of this tour and I used to watch him just about every night. I was really inspired to practice more, to experiment."

Is music still your main driving force?

"Well, certainly the band has been one of the most important things," he states. "But, I can't really say that it is. In some ways it's less important than it was, I have a family now. It's what I've done since I was thirteen years old."

Is there any part of it he'd have changed

"Well, I'd have probably gotten into sports earlier... tennis and golf. I've become a golf addict. As far as the band is concerned, I don't think so. I think that everything we've done has been what we wanted to do. It hasn't always been easy and perhaps we've made a couple of mistakes here and there, but we can sleep at night knowing that we're responsible for whatever has worked out for the band. The grass is always greener on the other side, but it's worked out fairly well."

RUSH always seem to have kept the same core of people around them, right from management to fans, and some have become almost as famous as the band members to fans, such as road manager and lighting director Howard Ungerleider.

"Howard's gone, actually," interjects Alex. "He left this tour. He decided he wanted to move on, work with some other bands. He felt we weren't going to be touring as much as we have in the past. He's working with TESLA and QUEENSRYCHE. It's unfortunate, we were all very broken up. It came as real shock."

Ok, so up to now has it been important to keep the same core of people?

"Yeah. We've always felt like a bit of a family. We like to stay close to the crew and we always have. We played softball the other day in Austin, we had a mini golf tournament yesterday. It's a lot of fun and that's really important. We keep hearing that people really like getting on this tour, truck drivers and riggers (a lot of these roadies are hired from town to town, or on a short contract basis, as opposed to being full-time RUSH crew members. This goes for most other tours) because it's that way. The band aren't untouchable. We get to the gig about four o'clock and stay there for the night."

As opposed to many bands who arrive five minutes before then go on stage and bugger off even before the houselights are up.

Another criticism of RUSH has been that they perform the same set every night. With such a large repertoire of songs to draw from, surely some variation is called for, especially from a band that have a fair few fans who follow them round. I know this to be true. Don't talk to me

about sleeping on the platform of Leicester station....

This is apparently still the case, although they're "leaving a bit of room to mess around during the set." They have also given scant regard to the aforementioned back catalogue, ignoring requests for 'B-Tor And The Snow Dog' and 'Discovery' from '2112'. Which means we can't see how some geezer picks up a guitar, which is something he's never seen before, and within a minute he's playing it perfectly.

"Well, this time the set is a pretty good cross-section. We go way back to the first record, we have a medley of a lot of songs we play a few minutes of. We've resurrected 'Beneath, Between and Behind' again as well."

What about the (long running) rumour that RUSH were going to tour playing full versions of their earlier stuff, such as 'Xanadu'?

"No, we wouldn't do that. We couldn't. It's like we've been asked to do festivals over in England, particularly Donington in the past. Very financially lucrative offers too, but it's just not right. It's not a nice atmosphere, people standing around in the mud. I've been to Pop festivals, mainly when I was younger, and I had a horrible time. It's just not the right environment."

RUSH seem to exist outside of the music scene. Alex agrees they have no real contemporaries, and knows they're in "a unique position" where they can experiment with their music and still have a loyal fan base, dropping some here, picking up some there. They are under no pressure to do something if they don't want to, they write for themselves, and have learnt how to have a good time throughout. If what Alex says about a rawer feel on the next album is true, they could even become relevant again. 'Sadder still to watch it die than never to have known it...'

CHRIS COLLINGWOOD

COMPETITION

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'RUSH' Competition, RIFF RAFF

