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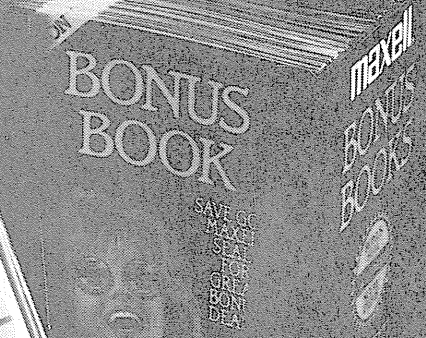
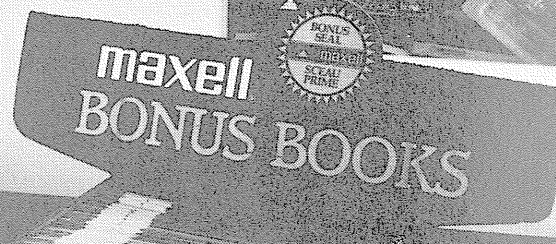
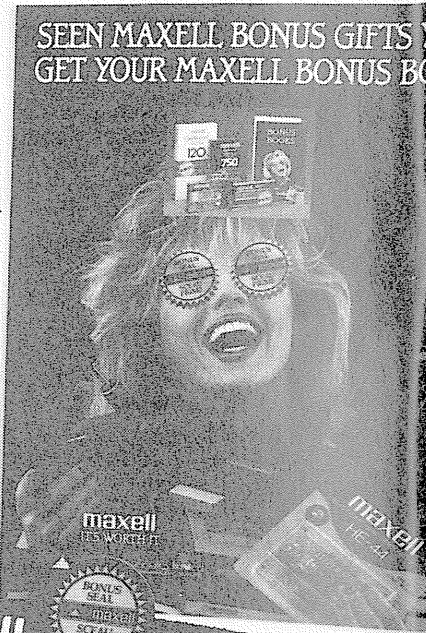
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ALEX LIFESON
CHINA CRISIS
HOWARD JONES



ALEX LIFESON

By Andrew MacNaughtan

With the release of *Grace Under Pressure*, Rush prepares to embark on a 1984 World Tour. Rush's first concert venue of the tour was Albuquerque, New Mexico, where Free Music caught up with Alex Lifeson by telephone.

Free Music It's been a while since we've last talked to each other. I think the last I spoke to you was in New York, when you guys did the three nighter at Radio City Music Hall.
Lifeson Yeah, that's right.

F.M. I thought we could talk a bit about your new album and then a bit about yourself.
Lifeson Sure.

F.M. Would you say that *Grace Under Pressure* is a continuation from your last album *Signals*?

Lifeson I think it's a progression from *Signals*. I feel it's a stronger record than *Signals*.

F.M. As usual with Rush, your sound changes with each album. For instance with this album, several tracks are virtually dance tunes, which is very different for Rush.

Lifeson I don't know, we're more concerned now with rhythms than we are with time, so in that sense I suppose it would be a little more danceable. With this album I'm trying to balance out influences from a lot of directions, a reggaeish feel, a harder feel of the classic hard rock sound, and even a funkier sound, sort of like what the Talking Heads achieve. There are a lot of different types of music that can be incorporated in the sound; really that's what I'm going for.

F.M. On the new album your guitar work is definitely more upfront. Was that done through the production?

Lifeson The emphasis on *Signals* was more on the keyboards. This time around we wanted to bring the emphasis a little more on the guitar. Also, with this album we worked with a different co-producer, Peter Henderson, who had a different approach to recording than what we normally do.

F.M. Would you say that Peter Henderson preferred a bigger guitar sound for Rush?
Lifeson I would say drums and guitar would be more his line. With Peter, he really didn't know our music. He had heard a few things before, and had listened to *Signals* so he would have some background. Because we had been writing for two months, we had in mind exactly what we wanted to do, and with Peter, he would get the sounds to work together on the actual mix. I think it was really a combination of us knowing what we wanted to achieve and having Peter translate those ideas.

F.M. Why did the recording of *Grace Under Pressure* take so long?

Lifeson Well, it's funny, we were so well prepared after spending two months writing and rehearsing that we thought, "right, we'll go into the studio and do everything in weeks and it will be finished and that will be the end of it." But once we got into the studio, things just took a long time. You can't really help it sometimes, no matter how hard you work or how fast you work; there are certain things about recording that just take a long time. You know, you're hunting around for a particular sound and you're not satisfied until you get it and it may take a couple of days. There might be one song that just doesn't seem quite right after working on it for two or three days. You can get hung up on a guitar solo that takes another two or three days because you want to get it right. All these things add up. There were no problems. We weren't bogged down with anything, but it just took a lot longer than we expected.

F.M. Did the guitar solo on Kid Gloves take a great deal of thought to put together?

Lifeson Yes, it did, actually. It was difficult to get a starting point on that one. The way I usually write solos, is I'll throw around different ideas and I'll keep playing until I lock onto something and then I'll keep that and then try something else, and start fitting the bits together and then go back and redo the whole thing. That's basically what happened with that solo. I remember it

taking a very long time. I spent close to two and a half days working on it. It's funny, you know, you can spend hours and hours trying to get just a direction and a starting point. Once you have one, the solo may take ten or twenty minutes. The solo on Kid Gloves ended up taking about 45 minutes once I had locked in on a direction, then everything just fell into place.

F.M. I noticed that you took credit for some synthesizer work.

Lifeson Yeah, I have my own keyboard that is interfaced with my Taurus Pedals.

F.M. Have you added any new equipment to your already elaborate setup?

Lifeson I don't really think so. Everything is pretty much the same; I've just upgraded the equipment. If something comes out on the market that is new or a generation better I might look into it. But at the moment, there's nothing really unique.

F.M. Why did you change from Gibson to Fender guitars?

Lifeson I got the Fender and I found it really difficult to get used to. It took me about two years. Once I got used to it, I didn't like the sound of it, so I started doing some work on it. I put in a new pickup in the back position and changed a few things around, and brought it around closer to a Gibson sound. Yet, it has the clarity and the brilliance that a Fender has. I've gotten away from that mushy sound that Gibson's tend to have sometimes... a brighter, stronger sound which is a cross between the Gibson and the Fender. I got quite used to the neck, so then I got another one. I never thought I would leave Gibson to go to a Fender with the Vibrato arm.

F.M. Who was Afterimage written to?

Lifeson A friend of ours, Robby Waylen, from Le Studio. He was one of the tape operators at the studio. This guy was so together, he was amazing. He really knew everything that was going on there, he was a wonderful person who loved life to the fullest. Unfortunately he was killed in a car

accident a year ago, so it was a song for him.

*Suddenly —
You were gone
From all the lives
You left your mark upon*

Lyrics by Pearl
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F.M. On the album, *Grace Under Pressure*, Neil's lyrics are different. He sounded quite angry and almost political, which in many ways is quite different to how he normally writes.

write about.

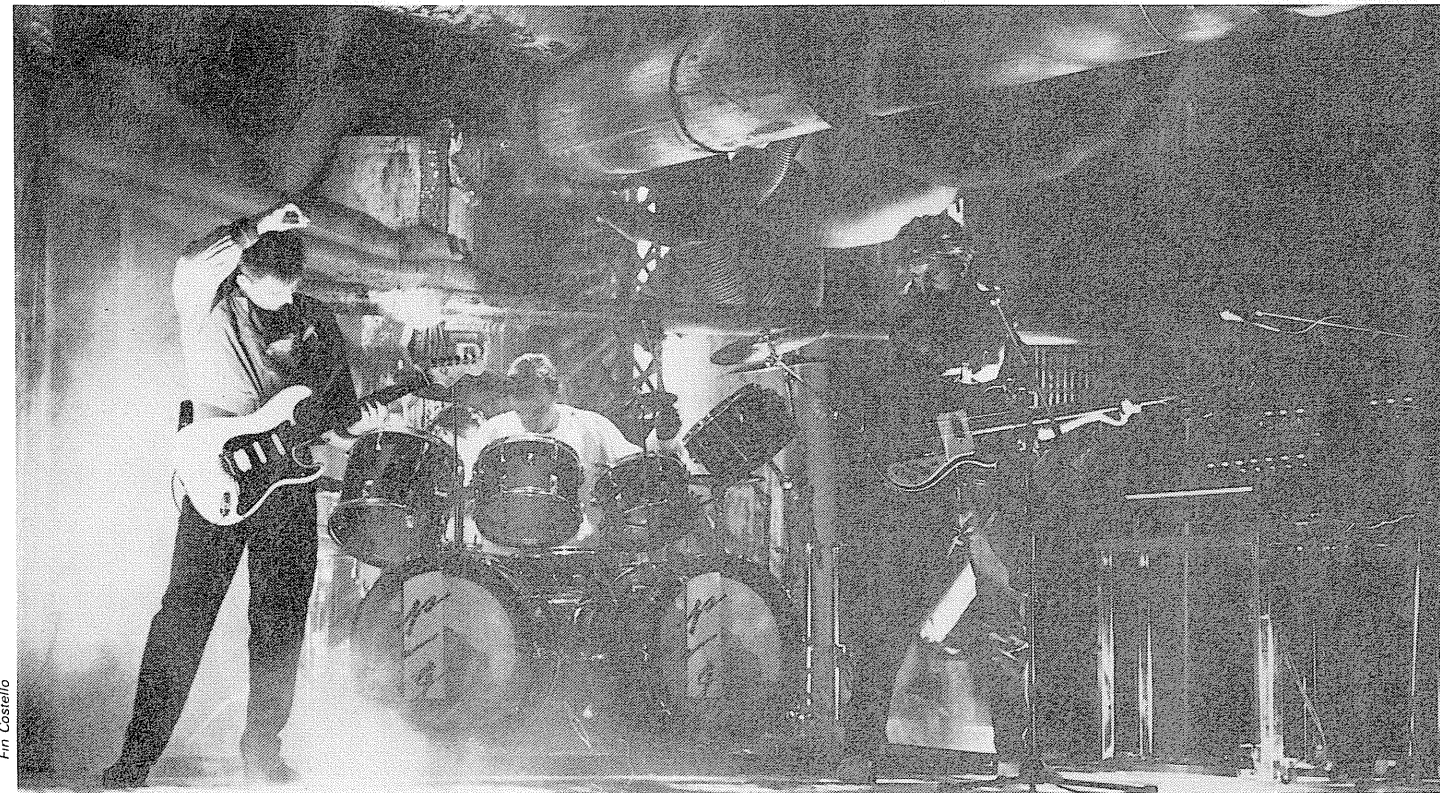
F.M. This album doesn't seem to have any ballads.

Lifeson Yeah, you're right. There's no acoustic guitar on it either. I think it just happened that way. I suppose we were in an angry period, musically and lyrically. We were getting the Globe and Mail delivered at our rehearsal lodge up in Horseshoe Valley every morning. The whole thing with the Korean Airlines happening and the breakdown of the Nuclear Arms talks and you know it was one thing after another. I think it

picture of the band but it was not taken at the best of times. I don't know if it's really as strong as we thought it could be.

F.M. Any thoughts on a solo project?

Lifeson I've been thinking about that for a long time and I've wanted to do one, but I have nothing written, I don't have a direction or anything like that. I just thought it would be a great thing to work with some other musicians I've met along the way. I have a studio at home so I can do some work there; however, it's difficult when you're on the road for eight months and then record for



Fin Costello

Lifeson There is a lot going on right now that you can be angry about, even be concerned about. Songs off *Grace Under Pressure* like Distant Early Warning and Red Sector A, are all things that are very real and happening right now; Neil is just becoming more of an observer. I think his lyrics are asking some very important questions, rather than telling a story. In that way his writing has changed and it's become more condensed. He's getting more value from his words.

F.M. Do you think that music and politics should be combined?

Lifeson Music is a very personal thing. It can be what ever you want it to be. If people accept it, that's great. If they don't, no big deal. If you are lucky to be successful at it in financial terms or material terms, great, but there is other success as well and that's writing a good song. That is what comes first. I don't think that the topic that you write about really matters. If you want to make a political statement, it's your music, go ahead; it always occurs in folk music. But if you want to sing about how brown your carpet is, then that's fine too. I don't think there are many perimeters for what you can

really influenced Neil's writing, in the respect that it came out angry. I think the music mirrors that anger, as Between The Wheels is a very oppressive, strong song. I don't think a ballad had a place on this album.

*We can go from boom to bust
From dreams to a bowl of dust
We can fall from rockets' red glare
Down to "Brother can you spare —"
Another war — another waste land —
And another lost generation*

Lyrics by Pearl
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F.M. Tell me about the album artwork, it's fantastic!

Lifeson Hugh Syme has been doing our album covers for a very long time. Neil let Hugh know what was happening with the lyrics and got an idea of the music from the rough tapes. He went ahead and did a beautiful abstract painting, which I think is the best he's ever done. We left for Karsh's Ottawa studio at six in the morning for a ten o'clock photo session. It's a very honest, real

another six, and still need to find some time to relax and get away from it all. For some people it's not a problem — they can just carry on — but not for me; I wouldn't be happy like that. I think I will wait until I have a good three or four months and then maybe start looking at it seriously, because it's a project that would take a great deal of time and concentration.

F.M. Do you have trouble separating your career from your personal life?

Lifeson No, not at all. When I'm home, I really like to separate this life from that life. I have a family. I hang around with my kids, I play tennis, I keep those sort of things separate from my career. It's important that you do!

F.M. As a final note, name some guitarists that you admire.

Lifeson I admire Andy Summers very much. I think he plays a really good role in that band. The guitar is just where it should be. He has a very good sensitive touch and a sensitive approach to his guitar parts. The Edge from U2, I like his style and I've liked Midge Ure of Ultravox for a very long time.

F.M. Alex, thank you for taking this time out from your busy schedule. The very best of luck on your new tour and I look forward to see you guys back home here soon. □

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