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RUSH

Redefined

YOU CAN TELL FROM the banter that the guys are feeling good: “PRS, that’s a *guitar*?”

“No, Ged, women have that.” “Oh, I thought it was that Penis Reduction System you use.”

“Well, Ged, I tried it, but it didn’t work.” ¶ As we cluster around a table in the manage-

ment’s Toronto office, I can’t help but notice how relaxed and downright healthy the two

bandmates look. It’s obvious that Alex—tan and buff in a yellow muscle shirt—has been

working out. Geddy, his hair cascading below his shoulders, is looking *très* cool and col-

BY ANDY WIDDERS-ELLIS

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW McNAUGHTAN

lected in a pair of Lennon shades. Despite

having already endured several >>>

hours of local media interviews, the musicians seem mellow and eager to talk. They've just completed their new album, *Roll The Bones*, and the experience is fresh in their minds. ¶ Even offstage, the guitarist and bassist work together, bouncing ideas back and forth and often completing each other's thoughts. Above all, they don't take themselves too seriously. Wow—still frisky after all these years. . . .

New Grooves, New Sounds

Roll The Bones *hits me a lot lower than most of your previous records.*

Geddy: Gut level?

Precisely.

Geddy: Oh, I like that. That's a positive reaction.

What did you do differently to punch the music down?

Alex: We planned the direction before we started writing. We wanted to bring the guitars up a bit more, compared to previous albums.

Geddy: It's a combination of things: Number one is how we write these days. This began with *Presto*, our last record. Alex and I start the songs together—just guitar, bass, and vocals—the way we used to long ago. It's a more organic approach. And Rupert [*Hine*, *Presto* and *Roll The Bones* producer] has helped us get a slightly looser feel. Also, on this record I made a conscious decision to depart from my normal tone. I play with a little less top end and more bottom. I think all these things contribute to your response.

What caused you to change your bass tone?

Geddy: I got a new Wal bass, a red one. When I ordered it, I didn't expect it to sound any different than my black one. The difference is fairly subtle, but it *is* warmer. This may be because it has a slightly bigger horn. It's a hornier bass . . . it's a red, *horny* bass.

Hmm. Now that you mention it. . . .

Geddy: Deeper. [To Alex] There's an undertone to this interview. It started with the intestinal thing. Now we're into biology!

Are the tempos a bit slower? The backbeats seem more pronounced.

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Alex: My son pointed out the same thing: There are no fast songs on this record.

Geddy: It *is* more mid-tempo. That's intentional.

Are the keys any different? Your vocals seem a bit lower.

Geddy: I think most of these songs are in A or E. Slightly lower on the neck from a bass perspective.

Alex: It's funny, we sort of lock ourselves into a particular key for an album. Each record is a little different.

On songs like "Dreamline" and "Bravado" you get a pretty tough, chunky sound when you settle into those eighth-note grooves, Geddy. Are you using a pick?

Geddy: I always use my fingers, but sometimes I grow my nails. Primarily this one [shows right-hand middle finger]. As a child, I was fortunate to have it almost chopped off.

Whoa!

Geddy: When the nail grew back, it was extraordinarily tough. It doesn't break if I use it as a pick.

The guitars sound more transparent—lots of bright, sparkling parts with only an occasional fat solo. The audio spread's wider.

Geddy: That's right. Again, deciding to move the bass down a little closer to the bass drum range actually freed up some space. I usually play with a lot of midrange twank. With that gone, or decreased, there's more room for guitar.

Alex: Downplaying the keyboards also opens up space for the guitars and vocals.

Geddy: Stephen Tayler, our engineer, has a great ear for slotting frequencies. Everything has its area. He hears if a keyboard is going to mask something. Now we realize something that we didn't a few records ago: Just 'cause you can overdub a thousand great ideas doesn't mean you *should*. It's a question of developing taste and having the confidence to say, "If these ideas are clouding up the fundamental parts, pull 'em out. Let's just keep the ones that serve the song best." There will be plenty of room in another song for an idea. And there's always another idea, so don't worry about it.

They're not precious.

Geddy: Yeah . . . that "not precious" philosophy really helps.

When does this weeding out occur?

Geddy: We make a lot of decisions in . . .

Alex: The writing stage.

Geddy: The guitar parts are far more developed in the writing stage than they used to be when there were lots of keyboards.

Alex: To be fair to me [laughs], with a couple of those records—*Power Windows* and *Hold Your Fire*, for example—the keyboards went on *before* the guitars. They were just piled on there, and it was very difficult to weave guitar parts around them.

Geddy: In response, to be fair to the keyboards [more laughter], Alex didn't have his parts together at that stage. Now when we write a song, his parts are *very* defined. It's like, "We don't need to put a bunch of stuff here because the guitar has priority." The keyboards take a textural role, whereas before there was kind of an ambiguity as to who would take the lead. That's where the guitar suffered.

Songwriting Summer Camp

Where do you write?

Geddy: In a studio outside Toronto—kind of a farm. It's a great location because we can go home on the weekends.

You live there? Like going to camp?

Geddy: During the week. We stayed there about two-and-a-half months.

Alex: Everyone's up around 9:00, 9:30. Breakfast, watch the war for a bit. About elevenish . . .

Geddy: We get to work. At least *I'd* start. Alex would have to finish lifting weights. I'd get half the stuff written before he came in [laughs]. We write on and off all day, break for dinner, and go back in the evening. Usually that's when Neil gets involved. He'll offer opinions on what we've done during the day.

As band lyricist, does he write lyrics in response to the tracks you've recorded or does he already have them in the can?

Geddy: Both. We often write with finished lyrics in front of us. I prefer that when I'm writing vocal melodies, because there's a certain feeling to a lyric that you try to emulate musically. Sometimes Alex and I are dying to write in a particular style. If Neil likes what we've come up with, he'll take a tape and write lyrics to suit that.

Alex: Lyrically, if things don't feel right, Ged will change the order of bridges or choruses. There's a lot of movement in the lyrics.

Geddy: Alex and I act as editors for Neil, and he edits us. We produce each other at this stage. I'm really happy at how well this





process has worked for the last couple of records. There are very few changes between the demo and the record. This time, in fact, so little changed in the fundamental arrangements that we were able to use our demos as guide tracks for the final recordings. We'd just transfer them to 24-track and redo each part as we went along. Having our egos properly in place—being able to take criticism from each other and not view it as an attack—results from our long-term relationship. Alex and I have a lot of fun during pre-production—it's a special time. We get off on experimenting, writing, and arguing. You know, all those things that make a great partnership.

Alex: We don't argue nearly as much as we used to.

Geddy: No? I don't agree.

Describe the writing process.

Geddy: We start by jamming—just the two of us—with a cassette running. When we hit a great little moment, it's on tape. The first stages are very spontaneous. It's exciting: A vocal line will pop out while we're jamming and it [*snaps fingers*] suddenly leads to something else. The next thing you know, you've got this momentum, and the whole song comes together in what seems like a short period of time.

You then make a demo?

Alex: Right. I've got a Tascam 388, an integrated mixer and 8-track reel-to-reel. . . .

Geddy: That's synced to my sequencer.

Alex: All the keyboards and MIDI stuff run off SMPTE. That leaves seven tracks for guitar, bass, and vocals.

Geddy: I assemble the arrangements with a basic drum pattern on my computer.

While Alex is lifting weights?

Geddy: Actually, when he finishes lifting, he comes in for 10 minutes and then has to go watch his soap operas while I'm pulling my hair out with the assembling.

Alex: He's going, "Shit. Stupid computer."

Geddy: Once we get a basic melody, we start adding instruments. We spend a lot of time working on the arrangement, trying to make it more interesting and achieve some progression.

What computer and sequencing software are you using?

Geddy: For *Roll The Bones*, I used C-Lab Notator software. It came with an Atari computer. Previously, I was using [*Mark Of The Unicorn's*] Performer and a Mac. I like the Notator software better, but I prefer to work on a Mac. The Atari is a real pain in the ass.

Alex: They've updated Performer; it's great now.

Soon Performer will offer direct-to-hard-disk digital audio recording as well as MIDI sequencing.

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Geddy: That's definitely the direction we're headed in. Our next writing session will be digital.

Alex: Yeah, I've already got the computer upgraded.

What guitars do you take to camp?

Alex: I primarily use a Tele.

Geddy: But he brings about 18 guitars.

Alex: Yeah. I love recording with my PRS, but the active pickups require batteries [*see*

Alex Talks Tech, page 40], so I can't leave it plugged in when I'm not around. The Tele is a comfortable guitar to play all day long.

Roll The Tape

Okay. At camp, you produce a complete demo for each song. What happens when you go into the studio to cut the real thing?

Geddy: We transfer the 8-track demo to 24-track. This gives Neil a guide version of the song. He plays to a click track while listening to the other instruments. He rehearses so well before he goes in that he knows *exactly* what he's gonna play. On this album, nine times out of ten it took only one pass for him to nail it.

The drums sound phenomenal.

Geddy: Neil's parts are complex, too. Listen to the end of "Bravado." There's an example of limb independence that rivals any drummer, anywhere. The fact that he nailed

THE ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE

You play with an open right-hand picking grip rather than a closed fist. Does this help you stay relaxed?

Yeah. It's a habit I developed from playing Gibsons so long. On my ES guitars, the ring around the bridge pickup was high enough that I could anchor a couple of fingers against it. This was a very relaxed position. As guitars changed and that profile dropped, my picking hand naturally evolved into the position I use now. I couldn't imagine playing with a closed hand, it feels so odd.

You hold the pick between your extended forefinger and thumb—the scalpel technique.

That's right, the pick is just an extension of my finger. I generally pick with a fairly light action. I like to pull-off quite a bit—I'm not much of a back and forth stroker. Mostly downstrokes with pulls.

Do you sweep at all?

Not a great deal. The most important thing for me is to keep a light tension on the pick, unless I'm going for something tough.

And if you're hitting right-hand harmonics?

I just roll over onto the edge of the pick so I catch the string with the side of my thumb.

Do you let the whammy bar swing free, or do you keep it fixed?

On my PRS guitars, the vibrato arm does not interfere with my picking the way the Floyd did, so now I can position the bar and leave it. I rest my baby finger on it while playing. The tremolo springs are set fairly tight, so as long as I maintain a light contact, I don't have to worry about going flat.

—AW-E

RUSH

that in one take blows my mind. In only four days, Neil and I had all the drums and bass parts down. When your record that quickly, you wonder if maybe some ugliness will rear its head two weeks down the road. There were only a couple of little moments that sounded a tad unsteady over all that work; we're able to live with them. Alex did almost all the guitars in about eight days.

Alex: In the past, it took three to five weeks.

When do the bass and guitars go down?

Alex: After Neil has done a few songs, Ged goes in to give him a break. Ged does some basses, then Neil goes back in. As Ged said, the guide tracks are on there, so there are vocal and keyboards when I go in.

Geddy: [To Alex] To a large degree your parts are worked out, because you've done all that pre-production and rehearsal. With the exception of some subtleties, the parts are cemented in your head. It's just a matter of getting a good performance. You have confidence in your part, you've lived with it. Now when you record, you're just looking for a groove. That really helped this time. Speaking as a bass player, having a solid drum track to play over and having confidence in my parts made all the difference. I could just lock in.

When did you work out your guitar parts?

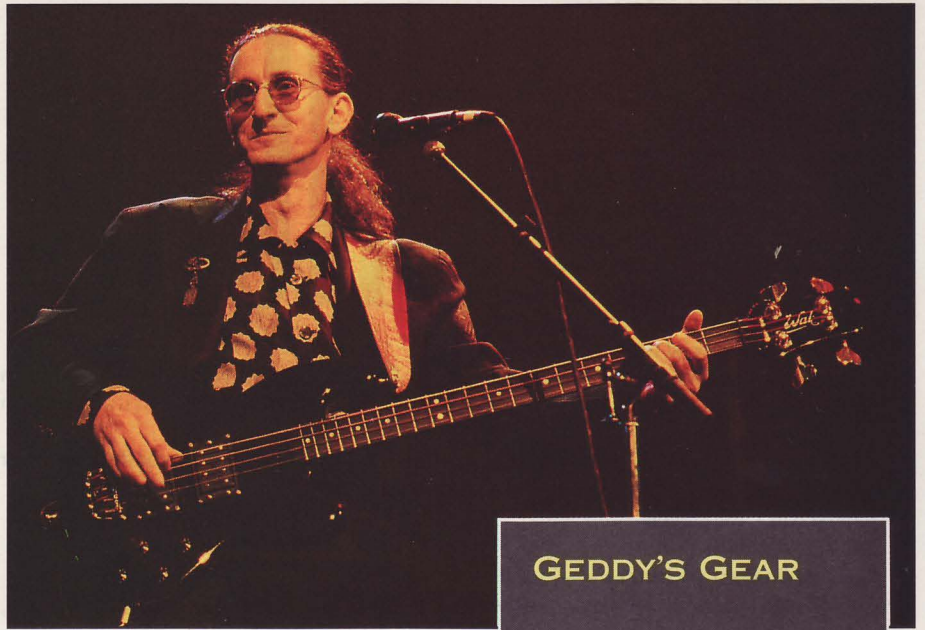
Alex: I would take a stereo 1/4" mix of the final drum and bass tracks—plus the guide keyboards and stuff—and bounce it to my 8-track. This would leave me six tracks to experiment with ideas and sounds. With Neil and Ged knocking off four tracks a day, I really had to cram. I'd work till 1:00 in the morning, building things up, double- and triple-tracking. I'd work out some solo things, too.

Did the others get involved?

Alex: I'd play my demo for Rupert. Ged is always in the control room as well, so we all know what the guitar is gonna do and can approach the final recording logically.

How do you determine which guitar parts to put down first?

Alex: I usually put the strongest part down first—anything that provides basic re-



GEDDY'S GEAR

GEDDY GETS HIS MASSIVE concert sound by combining signals from a direct P.A. feed and an onstage mike: "My stage setup is basically a monitor system. The D.I. provides 75% of what people hear out front. I mike the amp a little to add some grunge." The bass whiz likes the sound of 15" Electro-Voice speakers, which he's used for years.

In the studio, however, the setup changes. "I use a small Gallien-Krueger bass amp for recording. We take a D.I., too. Surprisingly, we use the amp for the bottom end, to get a bit of air movement so the bass doesn't sound too sterile." Geddy strings his Wal basses with Rotosound Funkmaster strings; he changes sets every two or three shows. "They're very light gauge," he says, "especially the G string. I like to pull the strings, twang 'em." —AW-E

inforcing power. I'll do the more articulated sounds afterwards, usually with the single-coil PRS or maybe the Tele.

Your acoustic and electric guitars are very integrated. On some songs it's hard to tell where one starts and the other leaves off.

Alex: Those active single-coil pickups produce such a clear electric sound. They almost sound acoustic, like an Ovation that's miked rather than plugged in.

Geddy: Yeah, I like that light electric sound a lot.

Alex: My goal is to create one big guitar sound. To achieve that, I often double-track the same phrase with a slightly different sound or different instrument.

The opening guitar riff in "Ghost Of A Chance" is very twangy—almost rockabilly.

Geddy: Yeah, the spy part.

Alex: I used my PRS for that.

Geddy: I think you strengthened the riffs. Originally it was a straight double-track. You went back and put on a third, slightly heavier track.

I hear a whiff of funk in "Roll The Bones" and "Where's My Thing."

Alex: I've never been an accomplished funk player; I've never felt it. I tried a little bit on *Presto*. I wanted to get better at it, so I took a chance with this record.

What amps did you record with?

Alex: For probably 80% of my parts, I used a Gallien-Krueger setup [see page 40]. I also used a couple of Marshall 100-watt 2x12 combos, and a Marshall 100-watt 4x12 half-stack.

You've used GK for a long time.

Alex: Six years now.

RUSH

ALEX TALKS TECH

FOR YEARS ALEX PLAYED CANADIAN-built Signature guitars. These days, however, he's into his two Paul Reed Smiths. "They're bolt-ons," says Lifeson, "medium-priced models. One has Evans active single-coil pickups. The other has a pair of standard PRS humbuckers and a three-way switch. The instruments feel fantastic." Lifeson plays Dean Markley strings—gauged .009, .011, .014, .028, .038, and .048—with medium-light nylon picks.

He's not fussy about tuners. "It doesn't really matter," shrugs Alex. "Once I get my A, I prefer to tune manually—it's much quicker. Also, the guitar is funny: Certain things need to be a little sharp or flat, and tuners don't compensate for such idiosyncrasies. You never get the intonation absolutely perfect, although you can get pretty close with the PRS." When tuning manually, Lifeson matches harmonics at the 5th and 7th frets.

Alex favors Gallien-Krueger preamps. "I'm still using the GK 2000GPL into a Crown Macro-series power amp," he details. "This drives two 2x12 GK cabinets with 75-watt G12M70 Celestion speakers. And I'm fiddling around with the 100MPL, their newest preamp. It's super flexible." Alex estimates that it will take him a week or so just to get a handle on the

People into tube mythology claim you can't get righteous tone from solid-state gear such as GK. Do you buy this?

Alex: Solid-state has come so far from when it was first introduced in the late '60s. Some people are purists, but it doesn't matter to me. The sound is what counts. Tube or transistor, who cares?

Geddy: There are two definite schools. In America there's a real tendency to hold the natural ap-

proach—tube amps with minimal processing—in very high esteem. Conversely, the English seem quite ready to grab gobs of EQ. They don't care what you do, as long as you get the sound. We're more aligned with the second school.

MIDI functions.

Lifeson owns several acoustics: a Gibson Dove, which he's had for about 15 years, a Washburn, and a Gibson J-55. "I have the J-55 in a Nashville tuning," he explains [*strings three through six are tuned up an octave and gauged accordingly*]. "It has a big, loud, crazy sound, but the Nashville tuning gives an almost 12-string effect. It adds that extra sparkle on the top end." To produce the rich, ringing rhythm tracks on *Roll The Bones*, Alex layered the J-55 over the Washburn. "That's my basic acoustic sound," he discloses.

Alex plays through a stereo rig: "I've got four cabinets behind me—an A and a B system. On the last tour, I ran my 2000GPL into the Crown. We'd split the signal with a Rane mixer; the sound went to the 'doghouse' iso cabinets and to my top two onstage cabinets. My Roland GP-16 would feed the bottom onstage cabinets and the two other doghouse enclosures. Again I split my signal with a Rane. From the pedalboard, I could switch to the B system to beef up the sound or to introduce a particular effect." Doghouse mikes are Sennheiser 421s.

The guitarist's effects are all rack mounted. "I have a Bradshaw switching system," enthuses Alex. "Man, that stuff is so well built. Everything is beautifully



laid out inside the controller. He must be backlogged 15 years, his work is so spectacular." Alex's rack contains T.C. Electronic TC2290s and TC1210s and an old Roland Dimension D. "The 1210 is a spatial expander; I use it for a beautiful, broad chorus," he states. "The T.C. stuff is excellent—really quiet, very well made." The Dimension D serves as a secondary chorus unit. "It's pretty cool. Even today people hunt around for them."

On the new record, Alex uses a Digi-Tech IPS-33B for pitch-shifting. "In the third verse of 'You Bet Your Life,' for example, I tap chords at different harmonic points. You can hear a bit of the 33B's 12-string program mixed into that." He also uses the unit in the middle section of "Face Up" for the "little atmospheric movements." Lifeson prefers to keep home recording simple: "I have a 24-track studio that is a bunch of garbage. All you need is a good little 8-track Tascam." —AW-E

RUSH

Alex: A lot of people feel the same way about guitars. "Oh, my '52 blah blah blah is the only guitar I can play 'cause it's got the greatest sound." I've heard a lot of crappy old guitars [makes fart mouth noises], and I've played some new guitars that are just brilliant—absolutely quiet. I own some older instruments that I cherish, but when it comes down to playing, I much prefer my PRS guitars.

Are those Marshalls tube or solid-state?

Alex: Tube. I used the combos about 10 years ago on a couple of tours. The half-stack is a rental. We were going for a big, loud Marshall sound; the older the amp and cabinet, the more fun it is.

The Magic Of The Moment

Do you assemble composite solos from various takes?

Alex: The solos in "Ghost Of A Chance," "Bravado," and "Roll The Bones" are basically one- or two-take solos played all the way through. When we're developing the arrangement in the writing stages, I toss a solo on tape so we have something to listen to. It's late at night, the lights are down low, and I'm by myself. These were supposed to be throwaway solos, but when it was time to do the "real" solos, Neil had already adjusted his parts to fit what I'd played. So it came down to me trying to recreate everything—which doesn't work. You might improve the sound, but even if you play *exactly* the same notes you'll never capture that magic feel. The solos in "Ghost Of A Chance" and "Bravado" are certainly my favorites on the record, if not among my favorite solos ever. When I listen to them, I hear the way I felt at that time. That's really the key.

"Bravado" sounds very spontaneous.

Alex: I think it was a first take. I played my Tele through the GK preamp direct to tape. The solo has a particular character and personality that's uncommon for me. If I'd erased that and gone with something else, then it would have been just another solo I put together in the studio, rather than something that happened at a special moment.

The Lifeson Sound

What's the secret to getting a big guitar sound in a three-piece group?

Alex: I've tried to develop a style that combines broad arpeggios and suspended chords. They've been my two main target areas. Suspensions have been my little trick for many, many years.

Are effects critical to your sound?

Alex: I've always been interested in outboard gear, and I've tried to be on the leading

edge of whatever is new. When chorus became available, I was the first on my block to have one. I overdid it, I think, for a lot of years. It wasn't until fairly recently that I got into pure guitar tone again. I didn't find it very appealing for some reason. Now I love the power of straight sound. You know, a little pull on the neck here and there when you're double-tracking gives you a slightly shimmering, random sort of chorus that I find more appealing than a constant *whoosh*.

Is that why you like bolt-ons—because the necks are easier to yank?

Alex: I just think a bolt-on sounds better.



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The sustain works differently, the low end is different. I've tried a couple of straight-through necks, but they didn't sound particularly good or feel comfortable. Again, it's what you're used to. I'm sure if I was forced at gunpoint to use those guitars, I would grow to like them.

In the early days you played semi-hollow ES-series Gibsons: a 335, 345, and 355.

Alex: Yeah, all three. It was a different sound, and I liked the idea of using a hollowbody when everyone was using Les Pauls or Strats. There were problems with the bodies resonating like crazy. We filled them up with cotton and did all sorts of things to keep the feedback down. I really enjoyed playing those guitars during that period, but I found I wanted to get a little more clarity without going to a complete Fender setup. That's when I stuck a couple of humbuckers on a Strat. Though it felt alien, the guitar sounded really good: It had the warmth of my Gibsons with a Strat top end. Plus I still had a Strat pickup in the middle for any arpeggios or clean stuff.

Was that when you started to integrate the whammy bar into your playing?

Alex: Actually, I had a vibrato arm on the 355. It was effective, but it would *not* stay in tune. I started using it around *A Farewell To Kings*, but it was so unreliable I was afraid of it. The Floyd Rose came out around the same time I got that Strat happening, so I put one of those on.

But you weren't locking your nut.

Alex: Right. On the modified Strats, I'd occasionally put some graphite or WD-40 in the nut; that was enough. If a string went out of tune, I'd just give it a little pull. I wasn't locking nuts until I started using Signature guitars. Locking nuts are *such* a headache. It always bugged me to feel all that metal down there when I was playing in a lower position. Visually, it bothered me too. Now that I'm playing PRS guitars there's no need for that anymore. The strings go straight up the headstock; they stay in tune just fine, though I don't do dive bombing or anything.

On the new album you do some chunky muting along with Geddy's bass. Do you find the PRS bridge more accommodating than a

Floyd for this?

Alex: Yeah. I have the tailpiece set up flat. You don't have all that fine-tuning hardware, so it is a lot easier to get your hand down. Also, I can manipulate the whole tailpiece with my palm to get a little vibrato. On my Signatures there was a lot more floating action in the tailpiece. They were very funny guitars to set up, and I was never really happy. They required continual alignment and maintenance, something I don't need to worry about with the PRS guitars.

So you're using a combination of finger vibrato, whammy bar, palm/bridge manipula-

tion, and neck pulling. Whew.

Alex: I only move the neck around in the studio, unless I'm playing with a fairly long delay. You need to be working against a straight version of what you're playing. If you play a chord with a long echo and then move the neck around, you'll get that random shifting. In the studio it's easy to do when you're overdubbing.

Despite all this pitch shifting, your intonation is always dead accurate.

Alex: It drives me crazy when something is out of tune—it's like a curse. Unfortunately, I don't hear my vocals the same way [*laughs*].

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But I can really hear the instruments. In the studio Ged is always asking, "Is this perfectly in tune here?"

Occasionally we do things that are slightly out just to give a particular character to the music. On "Heresy" [*Bones*] I'm playing my acoustics in the chorus—especially the second chorus—to get a 12-string, Byrds kind of sound. We wanted to create the effect of a bunch of guys sitting around playing who aren't quite in tune. You can hear it in the acoustic—particularly the [*Gibson*] J-55, which has a Nashville tuning. Of course you're gonna get that kind of fluctuation anyway

when you're playing high up the neck, because the strings are so light.

Do you have perfect pitch, or are you simply very discriminating?

Alex: Discriminating. When you zero in on the frequencies and how they move, it's easy to tell when something's not in tune.

Do you add effects to your guitar during remix, or do you print them to tape when tracking?

Alex: I much prefer to print to tape. On "Scars" [*Presto*], for instance, I got free rein on all atmospheric guitar stuff. Some producers we worked with in the past would have said,

RUSH

"No, let's print your guitar perfectly clean and experiment later," but it's never the same. I say do it and live with it.

In "You Bet Your Life" the delay is synced to the tempo. Did you or the engineer do that?

Alex: I did it originally, then Stephen added a little bit more DDL to one of the other cleaner guitars to give it more energy. The song seemed quite samey as we went through different sections—something was lacking. We wanted to get the first verse seesawing a little more. Edge, from U2, is a pro at that.

Rush In Concert

Do you play loud onstage?

Geddy: Neil is probably the loudest.

Alex: I gauge my volume so I can hear myself slightly over the drums.

Geddy: I don't play very loud—just enough to feel it. Alex doesn't *think* he plays very loud, but when I walk in front of his amps it's like somebody took a hammer and whacked me on the side of the head.

Alex: Well, the top end moves out, so you're just hearing the highs as they sail by. I tend to stand midstage, so I get a much broader sound spectrum.

Geddy: I would guess that our onstage level is significantly lower than most hard rock or heavy metal bands. It's pretty much in control. We use a lot of sidefill monitors to feed us different things; I don't think we could be very subtle with those if our level was much higher. We've toned down a little onstage over the years.

To protect your hearing?

Geddy: Our stage level went down at the request of our house mixer. It has really helped control the upfront sound.

Are you concerned about hearing loss?

Alex: [Yells] What?!

Geddy: I have experienced some loss. My doctor tells me that my hearing is perfect except for a little dip around 4kHz. I blame that on a particular monitor guy I had for a couple of years. One too many feedback bursts.

Alex: It's no Pete Townshend thing, that's for sure.

Featured GIT Instructor

Keith Wyatt

Controlled Bends



Keith is department head and a top instructor at GIT. He has toured and performed with Ginger Baker, Tim Bogert, Albert Collins, Jack Bruce and many others."

I spend hours every week playing blues with students and I usually find that phrasing, not technique, is the real stumbling block. Good phrasing is the art of making the guitar sing: of turning scales and licks into melodies. Here are the things I stress:

- Sing along with everything you play.
- Better rhythm skills make better solos.
- Play with attitude.

This phrase gets four notes out of one string bend. Bend continuously from C (2nd string, 13th fret) to E, stopping at each half step along the way; then release the string a half step at a time back to C#. Watch your intonation and make it sing; Blues is simple, but that doesn't mean it's easy.



Finger: 1

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Musicians Institute
1655 McCadden Place, Box 668
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Geddy: I know a lot of musicians who have been playing for 20 years or more, and their hearing is fine.

The band's sound seems to have clarified over the years.

Alex: P.A. systems have come a long way. On the last tour, we had a spectacular house mixer, Robert Scovill. It was his idea to do the "doghouses," these big lead-lined plywood isolation boxes that we keep offstage. Each one contains a 2x12 cabinet and a mike. It makes the guitar sound so clear—no leakage from the bass and drums. My on-stage cabinets are simply monitors; I don't

mike them.

Geddy: [To Alex] Psst—we're probably giving away a major trade secret.

Alex: Uh . . . but they don't work. They were in a fire. Remember? And then the lava from the volcano . . .

Geddy: Swept them into the river. Terrible, you should never use one. *Bad* idea.

Aural Gratification

What do you listen to for enjoyment?

Geddy: Alex likes Zamfir a lot.

RUSH

Alex: I get most of my influences from Zamfir [starts whistling]. I think Eric Johnson's *Ah Via Musicom* is a great record. Normally I'm not big on solo guitar records. They're showcases for someone's playing ability—interesting to hear once or twice. But I really love Eric's style and songwriting.

Geddy: I listen to a lot of things—Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, even old country music—that have little to do with what I play. I don't analyze the snare or guitar sounds, I just enjoy the singing and songwriting. In terms of contemporary bands, I listen to the Cure, Simple Minds, and I'm really into Talk Talk's remix CD—what a good compilation. I listen to Metallica from time to time, just to crank it up. A lot of ethnic music, too, stuff on Peter Gabriel's label [Real World]. I put the discs on and let it soak in. I recently got a compilation of Haitian music assembled by [film director] Jonathan Demme [*Konbit! Burning Rhythms Of Haiti*, A&M]. That's a great, *great* record.

When you're not recording or touring, do you practice instruments or harmony?

Geddy: At home I play for diversion. I'll tinkle on the keyboards. Every once in a while I'll find a sound that really inspires me and put something on tape, but it's usually an accident. Maybe once a week I'll pick up the bass just to goof around a bit.

Alex: I don't play very much at all, not nearly as much as I used to. Back then our schedule was quite different; we didn't have much time off and there was always a guitar around. Now when I come home, especially after an intense period of recording, I like to get away from it completely. I have other interests. I'm trying to recapture the athletic youth that I missed.

Geddy: Likewise.

Alex: I love playing tennis or golf or throwing a baseball around. I like to swim—I train three days a week. I wish I'd taken it up when I was younger, but it didn't suit me. I try to make up for it now. I live out in the country; I garden and do things around the property.

Geddy: In our break times—especially before a tour and after an album—music takes a back seat to the other things. I think that's healthy. It may not be the musician's creed,

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but when you've been in the same band for so many years, you have to develop different rules, rules that suit your lifestyle. Our work periods are *so* intense, so concentrated. To keep it fresh, you have to explore other interests.

Alex: I might not play guitar for a couple of months. Five or ten years ago, I never went beyond a couple of days. But when I know we're going to start rehearsals, I'll start preparing six weeks in advance. For a couple of weeks, I'll spend three hours a day playing in my studio—eyes closed, lots of reverb, lights down low. I *love* it. Once we've established the set list, three to four weeks before the rehearsals start, I try to practice six to eight hours a day. I make a commitment to getting back into shape. By the time we're rehearsing, it's part of my life again.

Geddy: It's a function of the kind of band we're in. If we were freelance musicians, our regimen would be entirely different. We'd be practicing. You have to stay fresh, because you never know when you're gonna get a call. It's a combination of necessity and desire that drives you to practice. And I bet for most musicians, rehearsal is more necessity than desire.

What would you tell a young player who's

considering a career in music?

Geddy: Number one, it's not easy. Be prepared for a lot of work. Number two, be determined and stick to your vision. Stay optimistic.

Team Players

At times you two sound like one big instrument. You've been playing together how long now?

Alex: About 24 years. We played together for a year before the band started.

Geddy: We know each other as players. We're comfortable saying just about anything to each other and pushing ourselves in any direction. The main drawback is the fear of short-changing your education by staying with the same people. I guess that's the reason we keep switching producers every couple of years. The three of us don't want to change, because we enjoy working together and still have a lot of surprisingly common musical goals. It's such a satisfying musical situation that, whenever push comes to shove, we always count our blessings. It's something you appreciate more the older you get.

Alex: Occasionally I'll get an opportunity

to work with other people. I'll do a session for a couple of days, a few songs for a friend on the same label. That's fun; it's enough to satisfy those outside interests.

Like the Grateful Dead, you have a core group of followers who've been into your music all along, and neither you nor the Dead seems particularly concerned about Top-40 radio. Pursuing your own vision has allowed you to survive all these years.

Geddy: That's a good comparison. We've always considered Rush our *career*. Maybe when we were teenagers we said, "Yeah, start a band, get rich and famous." But when you realize you're not getting any chicks and you're not making a lot of money, you re-examine your motives. I remember saying, "Look at Alfred Hitchcock. He had a long career, made about 80 films. Some were real popular, others not, but he kept going. He had enough confidence in his ability to know that he was not going to disappear overnight. He saw it as a long-term thing, which allowed him to experiment. Whether or not a project was accepted by the masses, he always had a core following." It's a weird analogy, but it's always made sense to me.

Alex: But Ged, where is he today?

Geddy: Scary thought. ■

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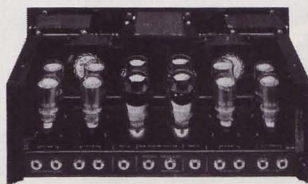
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