



## ALEX LIFESON

---



### **Interview with Alex Lifeson, 17 October 2003**

Rush burst out of Canada in the mid seventies recording a number of progressively sophisticated albums until the late nineties when Neil Peart suffered a devastating personal tragedy. His wife and daughter both died within a short space of time. It was to be five years before Peart re-joined Alex Lifeson and Geddy Lee to record another Rush album.

Vapour Trails was released in 2002 and the band set out on a tour to promote the album. Demand for Rush was such that many extra dates had to be added. The tour finished in South America and the final date at the Maracana stadium in Rio de Janeiro was filmed and is due to be released on DVD as Rush in Rio. Jon Kirkman caught up with guitarist Alex Lifeson in Toronto to talk about the forthcoming DVD and CD and what lies ahead for Rush.

Jon Kirkman: The DVD (Rush in Rio) was filmed in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the Vapour Trails tour. What was the motivation to go to Brazil because it was the band's first trip to Brazil?

Alex Lifeson *Right. We've long had offers to go to Rio to play at 'Rock in Rio' and we've always avoided it because we're not really comfortable playing in that kind of pop festival format. We're really about our own show and representing ourselves that way. Record sales don't give you a true indication of your popularity in places like that. Our record sales are modest you know, nothing to go crazy about but this opportunity came up to do more than one show, to do a few shows. The promoters made it worth our while to come down because it's a very expensive trip; to get all the gear down there, all our lighting you know, it's heavy stuff.*

JK: I guess you would want to give the fans the full show and not skimp on anything?

AL *Absolutely the full show, it has to be. So it's quite a costly procedure to get everything down there and do these things. So anyway the opportunity came up. Now we had planned on shooting the DVD on one of the last American dates in upstate New York and we had*

*some problems at the venue and decided to pull it on that last day. So really our only other choices were the shows in South America and we thought Rio would be the best choice. A lot of videos have been done in Rio, it's a great audience and we could see from our ticket sales that it was going to be a really good enthusiastic crowd. We never expected them to be the way they were. They were just mind blowing.*

JK: I take it you were very surprised then at the reaction?

*AL Oh yeah! We were completely surprised by it. We had 60,000 people in Sao Paolo and 44,000 in Rio. Those are the biggest audiences we have ever played to in a headline situation and the fact that in Rio we had all these Brazilians who don't speak very much English sing every word to every song and even sing through the instrumentals, it just blew our minds. It's such an amazing thing to watch.*

JK: If you look at the DVD this must have been pretty emotional for you guys on stage because in front of you you've got thousands of people who know every nuance and every word. They don't particularly speak English that well and yet they know all the words to your songs so that must have been pretty emotional for you as well as the fans.

*AL Well for me, well for all of us but for me the first set was difficult. We knew we were shooting this video; we were also recording. The gear got in late. We didn't actually get on stage until ten thirty that night. There was no sound check, no line check, and no video line check. We went on dead cold. We got up on stage; we hadn't even had a chance to see what the stage was like because we had forty cameras. There were cables everywhere; there were lights everywhere (laughs) that weren't where they were before. So what was our very comfortable environment up there, suddenly was transformed into this very hectic and tense place so I had to really, really concentrate in the first set but there were moments where I just had a lump in my throat. Seeing the audience singing and hearing even through my in-ear monitors how loudly they were singing.*

JK: Do you think sometimes in a situation like that, which is a real seat of the pants job, that it gives the band the impetus to raise their game just that little bit more?

*AL Sure, it always does. Everything was on the line. This was the last show of the tour, if it didn't happen, if there was some big catastrophe or problem or if we just played poorly that would be it. Either we would live with that or not release it. So it put everything on the line. You know our crew, it was so unbelievable how hard they worked to get the show together, to get everything running and we raised our game as well I think. It was that much more intense on stage and I think it's reflected in our playing.*

JK: I'm sure most Rush fans will know that Neil suffered a terrible personal tragedy a few years ago which took the band off the road and obviously Neil had to reconsider a lot of things in his life. But when a band comes back after an extended lay off you obviously want to promote the new album but how do you decide which of the older material you will perform? For instance there was a big response to Closer to the Heart on the DVD.

*AL Yeah, Closer to the Heart was not included in the North American tour. We've played that I think every tour since 1977-1978 so it was a bit of a relief for us not to play it and slot*

*some other things in that we hadn't played before. In South America we've heard that it was a very popular song, one of our most popular songs down there so we thought we should really include it in the set and I think that was a smart thing for us to do. It's always so difficult for us to get a set list together. I think we probably had about four and half hours of material that we whittled down to three hours (laughs) and Geddy and I sat down and went through all the albums and we listened to just about everything. Certainly there were songs that we would never plan to do live.*

JK: But surely that's the case with every band. A band will record an album and certain tracks become popular and people want to hear them and then there are other tracks that will never get played live.

AL *Yeah! That's right.*

JK: Looking at the set list on this tour and DVD, it's a very broad cross section of your career.

AL *Yeah, we really tried to do that. We tried to include something from all the records. You know, Moving Pictures is a very popular record of ours and it's popular with our whole fan base going back to the early fans and the more recent ones. Tom Sawyer, YYZ, Red Barchetta, those are songs that along with Limelight; we have to include them and that takes up a lot but Vapour Trails on this tour, we would have loved to have played the whole album. We were so inside that record and it was so important to us you know. The culmination of those four or five years of all the difficulties we had gone through.*

JK: I suppose it must have been like a release.

AL *Oh absolutely it was.*

JK: Well the DVD and CD will be in the shops shortly and I have to ask this as the rumours are doing the rounds that this is the last thing Rush will do. So do you get fed up with hearing the rumours or do you just get on with things and not get caught up in that and do what you do?

AL *Well that's exactly right. (Laughs) We've always just done what we do. I think the way we feel right now; there's certainly more music in us. There's certainly more tours. We really enjoyed the last tour. It was the first time we had done a summer tour. So it was much brighter and happier and fun and I think we'd like to do that again. We'd like to play a summer tour and in fact we're talking about possibly going back on the road next year without a new release and doing a thirtieth anniversary tour and this would also afford us the opportunity of coming to Britain and Europe.*

JK: I've been waiting to hear that for a few years.

AL *Well it's always been a very difficult thing because as we get older our touring schedule shrinks and of course we had the five years away and that compounded the problem and we haven't been back in eleven years I think now and honestly we know that and we know we have an audience there and we have fans that would love to see us and we feel very guilty about not coming over. We had honest intentions, sincere intentions of coming over on the*

*last tour. But once things started to get put together we weren't sure how it was going to go for us; we'd been out of the loop for a while.*

*There were a lot of questions. Neil had committed to a fifty, actually I think it was more like thirty eight dates in his original request and we ended up doing sixty seven shows so it just kept building and building and building and when we finally could squeeze in going overseas it was too late. The window of opportunity was gone. Hall availability had completely dried up until February of this year and this was in the summer we were looking at it. So this time around and I know Geddy of all of us is the most adamant that we come over and play. I don't think he even wants to tour unless we come there and do a tour. This time we're going to work it in so we absolutely will come because I think it would be great to bring this whole show. I know it would be different from the Vapour Trails tour but that would be the starting point for the new show. It would be great to bring that over and particularly for fans in Britain to see it.*

JK: Well I think I can speak for most Rush fans and say we'd love to see you.

*AL Yeah and I think that'll what we will do. We haven't really confirmed that yet. Geddy's away for a couple of weeks. He's on a trip with his wife in Vietnam. So when he gets back from 'Nam (laughs) we'll sit down and finalise all this stuff but it really looks like we're leaning that way and I'm glad of that. I think it would really be a lot of fun to go back out and do another tour especially a thirtieth anniversary of the band and stuff.*

JK: I think it's probably just as important for the band as well as the fans that you celebrate and mark that because it is a very important landmark.

*AL It is, I never thought we would be here thirty years ago. I was hoping for maybe five years at that point. If we could tour for five years and make four or five records, boy, what a great career that would have been.*

JK: I think a lot of bands think that and say, "Let's see if we can stick around for five years and make a few records," and before you know it you're looking back on ten years.

*AL Yeah, well when you're a nineteen, twenty year old kid playing in bars six days a week, boy! Your vision beyond that isn't that deep. (Laughs)*

JK: Well the Rush in Rio DVD is superb and is a must for any Rush fan or any real rock fan come to think of it and it's great to hear that you guys are going to continue making more music and I can't wait to see you in the UK. Thanks for talking to me today.

*AL Thank you Jon.*

© 2003 Jon Kirkman, Rock Ahead. All rights reserved.

---



[WELCOME](#) | [NEWS](#) | [REVIEWS](#) | [INTERVIEWS](#) | [FEEDBACK](#)